

Identity in Perugia: The Half-Invention of Tradition and Anticlerical Bread

Urban Identities in Italy

A city's cloak of identity is cut from the available cloth of tradition. Venice uses the finery of one of its merchant-admirals from its fifteenth-century apogee, though *la Serenissima* dresses more often these days as a carnival-goer. Bologna—true to its triple nicknames of *la dotta*, *la grassa*, and *la rossa*—wears the university gown, the portly chef's apron, and the blue worker's smock. Modern-day Rome likes to recall the togas of the Republic; black frocks and papal purple are part of the Eternal City's apparel as well. What identity does one wear in Perugia?

Perugia, the capital of the central Italian region of Umbria, has created an identity that is a curious blend of the mythical and the historical. The city became a free commune in the Twelfth century and beat the surrounding area into submission with such ferocity that Dante noted the "heavy yoke" of the city's hegemony. Perugia reached its zenith in the Fifteenth century, after which it went into decline, a decline accelerated by concerted papal efforts to limit what had been a wide-ranging autonomy. This autonomy included trial by Perugian magistrates (instead of by judges appointed by the papal legate, as elsewhere in the Papal States), as well as the privilege of buying salt without taxation.

A dispute with Pope Paul III Farnese, nominally about this last point but in reality about the larger issue of papal control over the city, led to the so-called Salt War of 1540. Perugia's defeat by papal forces meant subjection; after 1540, the city became a provincial backwater, went into a precipitous decline, and was "protected" by a Swiss garrison that only left when the Piedmontese arrived in 1860. Italian unification meant the birth of the province of Perugia, which encompassed much more territory than the medieval free commune and its rural hinterland. As Nicholas Harney points out, that although

The boundaries of these regions attempted to mimic some ancient historical territories, they had little meaning for the population encompassed by these new administrative structures. In fact, rivalries and animosities within regions and loyalties to specific municipalities or provinces were more pronounced than feelings of loyalty to this larger governing unit. (48)

In the post-unification era, then, there was a kind of vacuum of identity in

Perugia. The city lacked age-old institutions—such as the maritime success and happy decadence of Venice, or Bologna’s proud title of Europe’s oldest university—around which to reorganize its municipal identity. Anticlericalism, or the invented tradition of it, seems to have been the solution. In 1859 Perugian rebels against the pope had been massacred by Swiss reinforcements from Rome, and this memory was still fresh at the inception of the Kingdom of Italy. Contemporary Perugian historians, most of them fervent nationalists, ignored the three hundred and twenty year period of the local elite’s collaboration with papal legates and, highlighting friction between the papacy and the government of the commune in the pre-1540 period, invented an identity built on the city’s supposed anticlericalism. This identity appears to have been well-accepted, and rather quickly so, as already in 1910 the *New York Times*, reporting on a new history of the city by an English writer, entitled its anonymous review, “A Natural Enemy of the Priesthood.”¹

According to Perugians, their hatred of the pope has been so intense and so constant since 1540 that it even manifests itself in Perugian cuisine. The traditional (and indeed still best-selling) bread in Perugia is locally known as *pane sciapo*,² supposedly a result of the popular protest against the higher taxes on salt imposed on the Perugians in 1540 by Pope Paul III, the reason for the war that ended Perugia’s proud tradition of relative freedom from papal interference in municipal affairs. Perugians take pride in explaining the history of their bread and their fight with the pope to the foreigners who flock to Perugia to study.

There are, however, several other popular explanations (not necessarily limited to Perugia) for this lack of salt, which yields bread quite different from most of the rest of the peninsula’s culinary traditions. This paper will examine these explanations which are often used in central Italy in an attempt to see if they coincide with indications of historical veracity from geographical, literary, and historical sources.

The Geography of Salted Bread

In central Italy there is a large swath of territory in which the traditional local bread is prepared without the addition of salt. To get an idea, however approximate, of the extent of the unsalted bread zone, I called the provincial authorities of twenty-five central Italian provinces and one southern one, and asked whether salted or unsalted bread was sold more in that province.³ Almost all respondents answered with either one or another, though four offices replied that the province was effectively divided in half between the two. Interestingly, the offices in Cesena

and Forlì reported that unsalted bread was only found in the part of the province that was mountainous, while the office in Rieti indicated it was the part of the province towards the north. The Lucca office said that the province had mostly salted bread, but that the region towards the interior ate the bread from Altopascio, which one can see from an examination of the rules regarding its manufacturer is unsalted (Camera di Commercio di Lucca 3).

Figure 1 is an attempt to indicate graphically the “territory of unsalted bread”: the provinces where unsalted bread is more common are shaded, while the “divided provinces” are indicated with alternate shading. As is evident, there is a very large swath of territory where one finds unsalted bread as the principal bread. Unsalted bread is not just found in and around Perugia, nor far from the coast, but throughout Umbria, down towards Rome, east to the Adriatic, and north up to the Apennines that divide Tuscany from Emilia-Romagna.



Oral tradition and popular books (especially cookbooks) offer reasons for which unsalted bread is eaten in one zone or another. The first

reason given by Italians for the origin of unsalted bread is geographic. This popular explanation holds that certain areas of Italy lie far from the sea (the ultimate source of most of Italy's salt) and transport costs supposedly made it prohibitively expensive to ship salt to the interior.

At first glance this seems logical, though there were important inland salt mines in the Po River Valley at Salsomaggiore and Cervia (Kurlansky 93). If distance from the sea correlated inversely with the use of salt in bread, though, we would logically expect to find a swath of territory in which unsalted bread was the rule running down the backbone of the Apennines, a long North-South swath lying at some distance from the two coasts, in addition to two small zones in the interior of the islands of Sardinia and Sicily, something like Figure 2.



Yet another explanation is that given the importance of cured meats and cheeses to the peasant diet, the little salt that they could afford had to be used in these products rather than in bread. This explanation too, does not satisfy historical logic, as many Italian provinces are known for their particular cured meat or autochthonous cheese. Also unconvincing is

the related thesis that given the highly salted cured meats and cheeses in Umbria and Tuscany, the bread would need a correspondingly lower quantity of salt. As with the previous thesis, this one is not able to explain the absence of unsalted bread in other regions with very salty cured meats, like Apulia or Calabria.

As mentioned before, the existence of reasons for unsalted bread are no more limited to Perugia as the unsalted bread itself. Indeed, in Florence a popular legend holds that Tuscan bread is unsalted because of a dispute between the city and the pope (exactly which pope is never specified in written accounts), who blocked salt shipments up the Arno. Salt became so expensive that the Florentines could no longer afford to put it in their bread. This explanation is widely described on blogs and in other popular accounts of the food in Tuscany. This myth does have a basis in reality, though, because as we will see there was a dispute between the pope and the Perugians that had as its cause an increase in the price of salt.

Perugia and “pane sciapo”

Having examined these three theories, which try to explain the existence of a “territory of unsalted bread,” I will now try to apply these to the specific case of Perugia. The city is the capital of Umbria, the only region on the peninsula south of the Po river that does not touch the sea, which lends credibility to the reasoning of the first hypothesis, distance from the sea. The explanation could be that, given the centrality of meat products to the Perugian diet, the peasants used salt for these instead of in bread. A recent cookbook of regional fare describes Umbrian bread like this:

Sciapo, il pane umbro, perché il sale, portato da lontano, era destinato principalmente per la preparazione dei formaggi e dei prosciutti e dei salumi in genere, beni tutti di prima importanza. (Marchesi 16)⁴

There are however several problems with this hypothesis as well. As pointed out above, we would expect a swath of unsalted bread territory down the spine of Italy, equidistant from either coast (Figure 2). Instead we find that the “geography of unsalted bread” (i.e. the area where unsalted bread predominates in local cuisine, represented in Figure 1) does not seem resemble this expected swath at all. In addition, the idea of distance from the sea being a useful correlate of transport costs does not take into account the use of navigable rivers. The early nineteenth-century agricultural economist Johann Heinrich von Thünen, in his book *Isolated*

State, developed the idea that the means of transport and geography around a city would determine how its rural hinterland was arranged.

Von Thünen imagined a city on a perfectly flat plain with no rivers or roads running to it: this “isolated state” would have concentric rings of production of various agricultural products. Close to the city would be the high-value products whose sale would pay the proportionally higher rent near the city (e.g. dairies and market gardens). The outer circles, like ripples, would have lower-value products like coppice wood and cereals. Beyond that grazing land and then wilderness. Important to our discussion is that if the city were set on a navigable river, “the low cost of water transport would distort its rural hinterland, stretching it along the river’s banks in a series of linear strips” (quoted in Steel 71).



We should expect, then, “cones” of easily reachable territory stretched along a navigable river. As both the Tiber and the Arno were navigable up to and indeed beyond Perugia and Florence, we can redraw Figure 2 to reflect zones where the cost would have been lower for transport, and therefore where we would expect to find salted bread if the

fiscal-transport thesis is correct (all the clear area in Figure 3). Note that both Perugia (on the Tiber) and Florence (on the Arno) fall within zones where we would expect cheaper transport, cheaper salt, and therefore salted bread. In reality, however, both cities are in the “unsalted bread” zone of Figure 1.

Having liquidated this first theory, we can proceed to the second, that of cheese and highly-salted meat products. This theory is equally unconvincing given that it cannot explain the absence of unsalted bread in other regions with highly-salted cheeses or meat products, like Apulia. Could papal taxes have been the cause of *pane sciapo* in Perugia? At first glance, it seems unlikely, as because of an agreement with Pope Eugene IV in 1431, the Perugians had no taxes on their salt and were permitted to buy their supplies from sellers outside of the Papal States. Nineteenth-century Perugian historian Luigi Bonazzi relates that the Perugians of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century bought their salt from the Sienese at quite a discount relative to the Papal saltworks (125). This privilege lasted, though, only until 1540, a year that marked the so-called Salt War between Perugia and Pope Paul III—perhaps this is a kernel of historical-culinary truth?

A slightly different take on the motif of “papal taxes” is the most popular local explanation for *pane sciapo* in the Perugian diet, which points to the disastrous Salt War fought between the Comune of Perugia and Pope Paul III (Farnese) in 1540. The volume entitled *Cibi e vini d’Umbria* of a seven-part series of books financed by the Region of Umbria and by the European Union makes a reference to this historical event and its culinary consequences:

Il pane qui è con pochissimo sale, l’Umbria un tempo terra del Papa, vessata da tasse e gabelli rispose così alla tassa imposta sul consumo del sale che nel 1640 scatenò una violenta guerra. (Boini 5)⁵

A book that deals with the Salt War and the consequent construction of a Swiss-garrisoned papal fortress in Perugia is even more explicit:

A Perugia si tentò di aggirare l’ostacolo [della tassa] eliminando addirittura il sale dalla produzione del pane (ancora oggi una delle qualità di pane più diffuse nel Perugino è il cosiddetto “filone sciapo”). (Donella, Brunori, and Ciliani 9-10)⁶

Thus in response to the illegally-levied tax on salt, the Perugians, in a Boston Tea Party-esque act of rebellion, supposedly stopped putting salt

in their bread. That symbolic culinary act reminded them of their lost municipal liberty long after the pope's soldiers had taken the city and built the Rocca Paolina, the papal fortress that kept Perugia under direct papal control until 1860. After a brief summary of the events of the war, I will test this hypothesis against geographic facts, literary clues, archival sources, and materialist logic.

Di oh! Ardoppie le tasse ntol sèle?
Sappi che tuquì c'è pòco da scagliè.
Tu se' l Papa, pol fè come te père,
ma noaltre mpaghèmo per facce ngaullè.
E nn giss'a di 'n gir che sem migragnose,
se c'arvoltem cussi ta i tu' sopruse.

È che nn t'arconoscemo come capo.
Sicché si pe nn datte i noaltre quadrini
d'ora nnantse l pèn l'em da magnè sciapo,
nn pensate che sem cussi tan cretini.
Nfatti, si proprio t'em d'arcontè tutto
s'è deciso de condi più l bregiutto.

You don't say! You're doubling the tax on salt?
Know that here there's not much to get.
You're the Pope, you can do as you like,
but we're not going to pay to be put up against a wall.
And don't go around saying we're cheap,
if this is how we react to your bullying.

We don't recognize you as the boss.
So if that's what it takes to not pay
From now on we'll eat our bread unsalted,
you didn't think we were so foolish.
In fact, if we have to tell you everything
we've decided to put more salt in the prosciutto.

(Mencaroni 100)

The Salt War and "Pane Sciapo" as Protest

Perugia was at the time of the Salt War technically a vassal of the pope but because of prior agreements, enjoyed a type of semi-autonomy. The popes of the time exercised a monopoly on the sale of salt throughout

the Papal States, a territory that consisted of the modern-day Italian regions of Latium, Umbria, Abruzzi, the Marches, and even a swath of territory in Emilia-Romagna that included Bologna and Ravenna. Paul III was pressed not only by the Turks from the East but also from a kind of double-pincer attack by the Lutherans in the North: at the very moment when the pope needed money to fight these heretics, the Lutheran revolt deprived the pope of income in some formerly Catholic territories.

We are fortunate to have eight accounts of the Salt War written by contemporaries in the form of *ricordi*, or narratives written by gentlemen historians, and in addition one massive, multivolume work by Pompeo Pellini, the only formal history of the Salt War, *Dalla historia di Perugia*. Pellini gives an exhaustive account of the lead-up to the war, its events, and its outcomes, establishing his credentials as a Perugian *campanilista* when describing 1540 in this manner:

Egui a questa l'anno MDXL. Anno infelicissimo, e memorabilissimo a Perugini, così per la penuria de' Formanti, perciocché fu sterilissimo, come anco per li molti travagli, che furono nella Città, per l'augumento del sale, che Paolo lo Terzo sommo pontefice impose alle Terre di Santa Chiesa, sotto pretesto delle soverichie spese che occorrevano per difendere la Cattolica fede. (635).⁷

Like many of the chroniclers, Pellini finds the origin of the war in the terrible harvest of 1539, which led to the high price of bread:

Provederono che si facessero delle farine da persone pubbliche, se ne vendessero a minuto, e che se ne facesse continuanete pane con non piccola utilità dei poveri. (618-619).⁸

Another chronicler of the war is Giuglio di Costantino, who explicitly links the inflation in that price to the defeat of Perugia explicitly, saying:

Li pessimi ricchi preseveravano con vendere el grano caro; e quisto penso sia la nostra ruvina. (247)⁹

Unfortunately for the Perugians, it was in this already economically desperate climate that Paul III levied a new tax on salt, doubling the price to six *quattrini* per pound in early 1540. The Perugians should have been exempt from this tax as per the 1431 agreement, but the Pope refused to continue this exemption despite having had ratified it at the beginning of his pontificate. The Perugians responded first by gathering in February

1540 in the city's principal churches and voting against paying the tax. Particularly colorful is the description of the 11 February meetings, where the papal brief ordering the Perugians to accept the tax under pain of interdict and excommunication was read and the assembled citizens decided whether or not to pay:

Fu proposto che chi voliva che se mettesse el sale restasse nel coro, e chi non voliva che se mettesse, se partisse. A un tratto se voitò la chiesa. (Costantino 247)¹⁰

After the pope responded with an interdict and excommunication, they held an election in March 1540 of the "Council of Twenty-Five," which declared independence from the Pope, took the reins of city government, and prepared for war.

Another chronicler is Girolamo di Frollieri, who was a notary working for the Merchant's Guild, and who became a sort of secretary for the Council of Twenty Five. The sole subject of the Frollieri's *ricordi* is the Salt War; his recounting begins in 1536 and ends just after the capture of the city in June 1540. The author describes the response of the Perugians to the papal threats, underlining that "ogni qualità di persona si preparava a la Guerra" and that such bellicose, patriotic fervor swept the city that "i giovani non altro curevano nè erano intenti ad altro che a preparare armi d'ogni sorte (414-415)."¹¹

The Pope decided to respond with force, and early patriotic fervor gave way to religious gatherings as the papal troops neared the city. On 18 April 1540 the Perugians attached a crucifix to the side of the cathedral (it is still known as the "Salt Jesus") and symbolically entrusted the keys of the city to it. Francesco Baldeschi, whom the editor of the volume that collects these *ricordi* describes as belonging to one of the principal families of the time, describes the popular demonstrations in front of the crucifix:

Adi 18 [of April] tutti li mammoli de Perugia a Porta per Porta con loro capitani e insigne fecero le mustre in piazza con inginochiarsi in prima tutti denanti al Crucifisso in capo de la Piazza; del che ne fu fatto molto maraviglia. (13)¹²

Many of the chroniclers depict this scene, as well as a speech made that day by the chancellor Mario Podiani, who exhorted the Perugians to resist the pope in the name of liberty.

This wave of patriotism and liberty regained quickly gave way to resentment against the war and fear of capture. Soon after the placing of

the crucifix (8 April) and Mario Podiani's fiery speech, we see a shift in the mood of the people:

Già per la Città s'incominciava a dubitare, e stare in grandissimo sospetto, per la guerra che si sentiva di continuo preparare... Per il che, i cittadini cominciarono amaramente a contristarsi e dolersi di tal guerra. (Frollieri 432)¹³

The municipal solidarity that united citizens "of every quality" seems to have evaporated with the realization that the papal force would quickly overwhelm Perugia's insufficient defenses.

In late May the papal army arrived: after a few desultory battles, the Council of Twenty-Five began treating for peace. In his *ricordi*, Francesco di Nicolò di Nino recounts the popular reaction to the negotiations for the cessation of hostility:

Li giovani della terra non volevano tale accordo, e non volevano gente armata, e prima volevano morire da valente uomo con l'arme in mano, che tale accord si facesse. (92)¹⁴

Despite these protests, Paul III's son and lieutenant Pier Luigi Farnese entered the city on 6 June 1540. Among his first acts was to raze the palaces belonging to the former lords of Perugia, the Baglioni family, and to begin construction on what would become the massive fortress, the Rocca Paolina. The Rocca became and would remain for centuries a hated symbol of papal control and a reminder of lost municipal liberty.

Geographical, Literary, and Archival Evidence

We can see that the hypothesis of the Salt War as the reason that Perugians eat unsalted bread runs immediately into a geographic problem, that the "zone of unsalted bread" is not limited solely to Perugia and what was its hinterland (*contado*), but rather spans all of central Italy (Figure 1).

While Perugia was the only city to actually make an armed revolt, the Perugians were not alone in their discontent about the new tax. Bonazzi in fact specifically mentions two other cities:

La fiera Ravenna tumultuò, tumultuarono nell'agro romano... Bologna e le altre città minori accortamente protestarono che si sarebbero rimesse a quel che faceva Perugia. (124)¹⁵

We would expect then, if unsalted bread were a result of this papal salt tax and resistance to it, that both Bologna and Ravenna, part of the Papal States in 1540, would also have a tradition of unsalted bread. As Figure 1 makes clear, though, both are solidly outside of the unsalted bread territory. If that were not already enough to disprove this hypothesis, Tuscany, where unsalted bread is served *de rigueur*, was not part of the Papal States in 1540 or thereafter. This is evident from a comparison of the territory of unsalted bread (Figure 1) and the approximate boundaries of the Papal States in 1540 (Figure 4).¹⁶



Given the possible lack of overlap between the modern “zone of unsalted bread” and the zone as it was in 1540, it is necessary to try to reconstruct the geography of unsalted bread in the period immediately before the Salt War. One indication that there was already some sort of clearly recognized “territory of *pane sciapo*” comes from Dante. After his exile in 1302, Dante inserts a scene in the *Paradiso* (the action of which of course occurs in 1300), in which the poet meets another Florentine, Cacciaguیدا, who foreseeing Dante’s imminent exile from Florence, tells the poet

Tu proverai sì come sa di sale
 lo pane altrui, e come è duro calle
 lo scendere e 'l salir per l'altrui scale¹⁷ (XVII 58-60)

This line is obviously open to interpretation; indeed a review of various commentaries on the line reveals a vast variety of opinions on its meaning. Many commentators however insist that “lo pane altrui” that tastes like salt means “the bitter bread of exile.” Only two commentators (Luigi Pietrobono and Robert Hollander) mention the possibility of this being a reference to how bread is made in Tuscany. It is worthwhile to cite the latter at length:

Strangely enough, this verse is much debated. From the beginning, all have agreed that it refers to the bitter taste of bread (or anything else) eaten in bitter conditions. The “unofficial commentary tradition,” that is, ordinary readers, however, senses a reference to the way bread is prepared in Florence (to this day): it is baked without salt. Pietrobono (comm. to vv. 58-60) is the first commentator even to refer to that fact and simply denies its relevance (thus revealing that some discussants had raised this issue), insisting on the larger and obvious meaning. (423)

Interesting in this comment is the fact that Hollander says “from the beginning, all have agreed” and then immediately admits that in fact what is in effect the majority of readers (i.e. ordinary readers) see this as a reference to a culinary fact. I find counterintuitive the idea of the passage referring to “the bitter bread of exile” as the “larger and obvious meaning”: the fact that the majority of readers do *not* agree suggests that this is indeed *not* the obvious meaning. No other commentator that I have seen reads this passage as reference to culinary traditions in early Fourteenth century Tuscany. I believe, however, that the allusion to the presence or absence of salt was a reference to the differences in the bread of Tuscany and Ravenna (where Dante likely finished the *Paradiso*), and that its presence in a literary work is a testament to the diffusion of the *pane sciapo* already in Dante’s time.

Another way to establish the veracity of the thesis “pane sciapo *qua* revolt” could be an examination of the historical primary sources. As I have already mentioned, there are eight memoirs (*ricordi*) of the period in addition to Pellini’s *Historia*. All of these writers were from “illustrious families” (the phrase of the Nineteenth century editors of the accounts), all considered the outcome of the Salt War a disaster for the city, and all made

reference to most if not all of the of the main historical events to which Pellini refers. All speak of the disastrous harvest of 1539 and of its results, that is the elevated price of grain; none of the nine authors mentions this hypothetical initiative to stop putting salt in the bread. This is a historical vacuum, a rather large one, if we are to believe the Salt War is the genesis of unsalted bread.

One could argue that being patricians and having Roman historiography in mind, perhaps the chroniclers did not deign to include a detail as banal as a change in culinary practice in their accounts. This is plausible for the others, but less so for Giulio di Costantino. The scholar who annotated a version of Giulio di Costantino's *ricordi* notes that

Di tutti i cronisti perugini non è chi meriti di essere conosciuto più di Giulio di Costantino, sia per la condizione cui appartiene, sia pel sentimento, di che mostrasi pieno, sia per la conoscenza dei fatti, sia pel modo come li racconta. (Rossi 5)¹⁸

If there was a popular movement to protest the salt tax by leaving salt out of bread, we would be certain that Giulio di Costantino would record it, not only because of his acute observations and popular sympathies (evident in the quote above about the rich profiting from the price of grain) but also because, as the chronicler himself tells us, he was elected in 1532 “cammorlengo infra li altre per l’arte de’ fornare” (126),¹⁹ the head of the baker’s guild. While the editors of the chronicles debate whether Giulio di Costantino was actually himself a baker (being a baker was not a prerequisite for membership in the guild), the more skeptical of the two agrees that the chronicler “niente stima da se alieno, che tocchi la vita civile quindi s’informa di tutto che accade alla giornata” (Fabretti viii).²⁰ The lack of a mention of this legendary protest in Giulio di Costantino’s recounting of the events of the Salt War, and its total absence from all of the other contemporary accounts, strongly suggest that the protest is a myth.

The idea that people would alter their long-held food traditions in response to infrastructural pressures is hardly novel; indeed anthropologist Marvin Harris developed a theory of materialist foodways.²¹ This could theoretically account for the Perugians, under fiscal pressure, giving up their traditional salted bread and turning to unsalted bread; a theory like this would demand, however, that once the fiscal pressure was relieved (i.e. in modern Italy, where salt is cheap and abundant), the Perugians would again turn to salted bread. This has not occurred, and there is no explanation then of why a long-held tradition (salted bread) was changed

in the face of infrastructural pressure in one case but not in another.

The idea that the people of Perugia, and the rural folk outside, were invested enough in the Salt War to give up salt in their bread not only before and during the war but even after its conclusion, when such a symbol of protest would have been pointless if not downright suspect, is simply implausible. Indeed, as Frollieri points out, the decision to revolt is made in February and only two months later people are already questioning the wisdom of it. It would be historically inappropriate to project our present-day *campanilismo* backwards in time and assume that those in Perugia's rural hinterland would have made such a patriotic statement. It is within the realm of imagination that some small group of fanatical Perugians gave up salting their bread—but not enough to change the foodways of the rest of the population.

More historical evidence is necessary to establish whether or not unsalted bread was the norm in Perugia before 1540. The income and expense ledgers, as well as inventories of property, of a hospital in the center of the city, the Ospedale di Santa Maria della Misericordia, provide just such a possible source.²² The hospital was not only a place where the sick went to be cured but also where the old and the poor went to die, and where pilgrims could find lodging after a long walk from other parts of Italy and Europe.

The ledgers of the Ospedale record the minutiae of everyday life including payments made to day laborers, bricks made in the Ospedale's own brickmaking workshop, and its income from various real estate that it owned. Because of the number of people lodging in the hospital at any one time, it had its own bakery to produce all the hospital's bread. It is not clear exactly when the bakery was opened, but we find a reference to it already in 1448 (Pitzurro 63). Looking for entries referring to this bakery, I examined the oldest ledgers available, from 1446-47, just short of one hundred years before the Salt War. I found a number of entries for the purchase of grain with the annotation "per la panetteria" ("for the bakery," see Figure 5)—but no mention of salt being purchased for the bakery (Archivio di Stato di Perugia, 6v and *passim*). In addition to these ledgers, I examined inventories of the hospital made in 1467, 1470, and 1475. Every time there was a new prior of the Ospedale, the prior himself and a notary made an exhaustive list of every room in the Ospedale and its contents. Despite clearly listed rooms for the baking of bread (under headings like *In la camera del pane*, *Nella camera del fornaio*, *Nella stantia del forno*: see Figure 6), there was no mention of salt (Archivio di Stato di Perugia 11v, 31r, 41v, 45v and 47v).

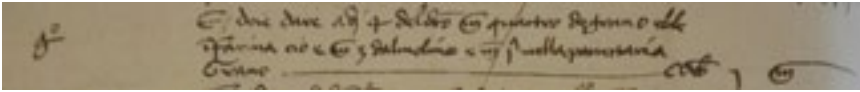


Figure 5

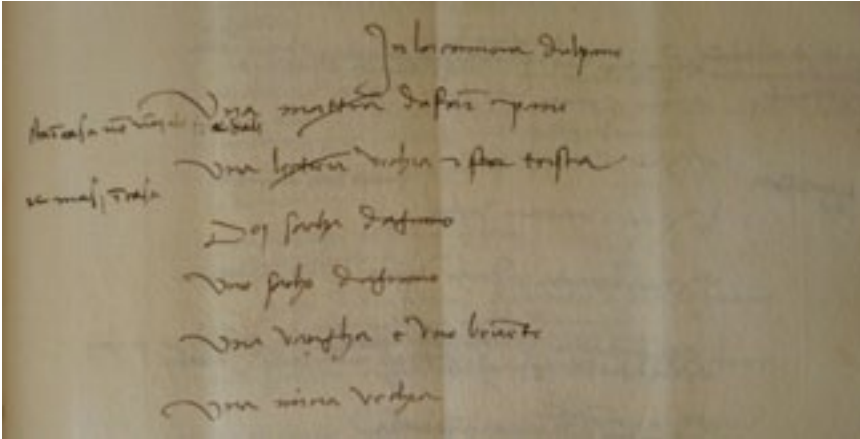


Figure 6

Conclusions

A lack of evidence does not constitute evidence. Given the weight, however, of the missing entries for the purchase of salt, the silence of nine possible written sources on this hypothetical culinary protest, and the reconstruction of the geography of unsalted bread, it is improbable if not extremely implausible that *pane sciapo* is a result of the Salt War, or for that matter any other popular explanation furnished by Perugians.

This essay is only a preliminary investigation, one that leaves much terrain to be explored. More work is needed not only to trace the contemporary borders of unsalted bread, but also those of the past. Certainty about unsalted bread pre-dating the Salt War and not being its result will come only with a more complete review of the Ospedale's records, as well as a comparison with the pre-1540 records of the city's other monasteries and convents. In addition, my attempt at drawing the contemporary geography of salted bread with telephone surveys is hardly a rigorous methodological approach.

Though not definitive, the facts and arguments marshaled in this study suggest, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the tradition of unsalted bread in Perugia had nothing to do with the Salt War of 1540. The real reason for the existence (and persistence) of this zone needs to be sought.

Perhaps a more interesting—and likely more fruitful—line of research would be an examination not of the genesis of unsalted bread but rather the origin of the legend itself, the combination of an invented tradition (Perugian anticlericalism) and an alimentary tradition (unsalted bread). This myth can be best understood as a kind of urban legend. Folklore scholar and international expert on urban legends, Jan Harold Brunvand, wrote in his seminal book, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, that urban legends share “a strong basic story-appeal, a foundation in actual belief, and a meaningful message or “moral” (10). Brunvand suggests that these urban legends propagate especially quickly and are accepted as fact when they respond to a certain sociological need.

In a volume entitled *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento* there is an essay by Adrian Lyttelton that discusses the invention of tradition. Developing a concept originally elaborated by the English historian Eric Hobsbawm, Lyttelton suggests that the Risorgimento, like other nationalist movements, needed to reuse past events. However, she insists that “nationalist writers must choose from a repertoire which has already been shaped by tradition” (28).

The question seems rhetorical, and I cannot help but wonder if the yoking together of the tradition of unsalted bread with a newly invented “tradition” of anticlericalism happened in the immediate post-unification period. Could the massacre that happened in Perugia in 1859, just before Italian unification and the end of the temporal power of the pope over Perugia, have given impetus to the diffusion of this myth, one that was originally oral but now taken as fact in written sources? Or perhaps the myth was even more recent, emerging at the time of the transfer of power to the authorities at the regional level, which occurred in the 1970s. Might this have sparked a renewed sense of regional and municipal pride, one that created a vacuum for invented municipal traditions? For now these are only hypotheses: a review of the histories of Perugia written in the last two hundred years and a better look at recent popular accounts of the Salt War and the Perugian tradition of unsalted bread is needed to establish just when this myth began to be told.

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NOTES

¹ The book reviewed, William Heywood's *History of Perugia*, draws heavily on both the accounts contemporary to the Salt War mentioned below, as well as the post-unification nationalistic historians like Luigi Bonazzi.

² This means literally "bland bread." In other parts of central Italy unsalted bread is called, variously *pane toscano* (Tuscan bread), *pane sciocco* (crazy bread), *pane insipido* (insipid bread), *pane normale* (normal bread), or *pane di Terni* (Terni bread). This paper uses "pane sciapo" and "unsalted bread" interchangeably.

³ I asked an identical question to all of the authorities: "Nella provincia di X, è più venduto il pane con sale o senza?" (In X province, is more bread with or without salt sold?) The offices of Pesaro, Urbino, Cesena, and Forlì were each contacted separately.

⁴ "Umbrian bread is bland because salt, brought from far away, was destined for use on the production of cheese and prosciutto and other cured meats, all important goods."

⁵ "The bread here is made with a tiny amount of salt, as Umbria belonged to the pope, and vexed by taxes the city responded like this to a tax on the consumption of salt which in 1640 [*sic*] set off a war."

⁶ "In Perugia there was an attempt to get around this obstacle [of the tax] eliminating salt from the production of bread (even today one of the most popular kinds of bread in the area around Perugia the so-called "bland [*sciapo*] loaf)."

⁷ "And now the year 1540. A most infelicitous year, most memorable to the Perugians as it was utterly sterile, also because of many great travails, which happened in the City, for the raising of [the price of] salt, which Paul the Third, the *pontifex maximus* imposed on all the lands of the Church, under the pretext of the grave expenses that he had to defend the most Catholic faith."

⁸ "They took care that public persons made flour, and that it was sold in the stores, and that bread was made continuously which was no small help to the poor."

⁹ "The worst of the rich continued to sell grain at a dear price; and this I think was our ruin."

¹⁰ "It was proposed that whoever thought to pay [the tax] for the salt would stay in the [church's] choir, and whoever did not want to would leave. All at once the church emptied."

¹¹ "Every quality of person prepared for war... the young men didn't care about anything else nor were they intent to do anything other than prepare arms of every type."

¹² "On the 18th day [of April 1540] all the members [of religious societies] of Perugia from all the neighborhoods with their captains and their standards made muster in the main square to kneel before the Crucifix at the head of the Square; and there was much marveling."

¹³ "Already in the city people began to doubt, and be very suspicious, for the war which one heard being prepared all the time... For which the citizens began bitterly to become sad and feel pained by that war."

¹⁴ "The young men did not want the treaty [of capitulation], and didn't want armed men [in the city], and wanted to die valiant men with their arms in their hands, rather than sign that treaty."

¹⁵ "Proud Ravenna was in an uproar, there was a tumult in the plains near Rome... Bologna and other small cities shrewdly let it be known that they would do what Perugia did."

¹⁶ A *caveat* is in order, though. It is historically problematic to project current-day food preferences into the history. To take a related alimentary example, Allen Grieco has shown that olive oil production in Italy was anything but stable geographically between the Fifth and the Twentieth century. During Roman republican and imperial eras, the excellent road network throughout the Italian peninsula rendered economically disadvantageous olive cultivation in the areas that were climactically marginal for the *Olea europea* tree. It was

less expensive, in other words, to import olive oil from the areas where the tree grew better (i.e. the South and Center) rather than cultivate the trees in the colder northern parts of the peninsula.

In the aftermath of the barbarian invasions, the general decadence of the road system coupled with the spread of Christianity and the consequent liturgical necessity of olive oil was the impetus behind the spread of olive trees in the Po river valley despite marginal conditions. This situation lasted until the Thirteenth century, when the change in customs from weight-based to value-based again changed the economics of olive tree cultivation in the North. The new system of customs and the climactic downturn popularly known as the “Little Ice Age” contributed to a dramatic decline in cultivation of olive trees north of the Apennines. Recent decades though have seen yet another reversal in this trend. The point of this example is that a wide variety of factors—political, religious, climactic, economic-commercial—can cause gradual yet meaningful changes in the geography of a particular food product or use (297-299 and *passim*).

¹⁷ “You’ll see how it tastes like salt/ the bread elsewhere, and how it’s hard/ going up and down another’s stairs.”

¹⁸ “Of all the Perugian chroniclers no one merits more being renowned than Giulio di Costantino, both because of his position, because of his sentiment, which he demonstrated fully, because of this knowledge of the facts, and because of the way he narrated them.”

¹⁹ “Among them as the head of the Baker’s Guild.”

²⁰ “Nothing was foreign to him, which had to do with everyday life and therefore he found out about everything that happened during the day.”

²¹ This theory is best developed in Harris’ book *Good To Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture*.

²² I am indebted to the archivist and expert on the subject of the hospital, Alberto Maria Sartore, for this line of investigation.

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