

PRELIMINARY INSIGHTS ON BRITISH TRAVELLERS' ACCOUNTS OF SICILIAN ORANGES

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EC-labelled products, identified by PDO, PGI and TSG tags, are linked to a geographical area and to specific growing/manufacturing methods that guarantee quality and sustain local traditions. These features can promote local products by raising tourists' interest not only in local food but also in the place of origin of the same and in its history. This note wants to report ongoing research on a facet of cultural tourism that has not so far been studied: British Grand Tourists' accounts of local quality products. The selected item was the PGI Sicilian orange, whereas the literary evidence was taken from Brydone's travelogue and from Dennis' travel book. The result is a description of a PGI product where specialists from Food Science and English Studies work in team to offer a model to be used in cultural tourism.

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JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

INTRODUCTION

The appeal of tourist locations depends on several strands that define the countryside capital of a place and that concur to shape the travel experience in tourists' eyes. This capital consists of landscape (lakes, mountains, rivers), historic buildings (archaeological sites, churches, villas), local traditions (crafts, customs, folklore, festivals) and local food (Bessière, 1998; Cianflone, 2012; Garrod et al., 2006).



Food products are increasingly being viewed as one important layer of countryside capital. Foodstuffs, in fact, are the expression of local ways of consumption and of local growing or manufacturing praxis linked to the territory and to its history. As a consequence, local food items are considered the markers of a region and an important asset in the promotional activities of a location (Bessière, 1998; Du Rand and Heath, 2006; Tregear et al., 2007; Ridvan Yurtseven and Kaya, 2011) to support the cultural identity of a place (Bowen and De Master, 2011; Mak et al., 2012).

The added value of local food to promote tourism has been acknowledged by the European Community (EC) in two ways. First of all, the EC has made rural tourism the object of specific actions aimed at promoting sustainable development in rural areas (see, for example, EC LEADER+ and EC SPRITE projects); secondly, the EC has fostered the recognition of quality food by awarding Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG) trademarks³.

To redress the role of local food in tourism, this note wants to discuss ongoing research to characterize the historical roots of Sicilian agricultural products and to report allusions to local food items in the travel accounts written by British travellers.

In this note preliminary findings on Sicilian PGI oranges and on evidence from two British travel accounts are reported. Oranges were selected because of the role they play in the economy of the Mediterranean island and because they are one of the iconic landmarks of the Sicilian landscape. The selected travel accounts were Brydone's (1806 Edition) and Dennis' (1864) books. Both works, examined to extrapolate reference to this citrus fruit, were selected because in travel literature they embody the taste and the travel interests of the time (Brilli, 1995). Following the most commonly accepted distinction of travel literature (Pfister, 1996) into travelogues and travel books, Brydone's work, can be considered the typical "travelogue", that is an account where autobiographical descriptions of the countries object of the tour are presented to readers, while Dennis' book can be seen as the typical travel guide since it embodies the answers to the requests of the then emerging mass tourism.

SICILIAN ORANGES

Citrus fruits are extensively grown in Italy, mainly in the Southern part of the country (Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily,

Sardinia). Among the citrus fruit family, four play a leading role in the Sicilian economy: oranges, lemons, clementines and mandarins.

Sicilian oranges [*Citrus sinensis* (L.) Osbek] are classified as red, blond and navel. Red ones, also called blood oranges because of the reddish color of the rind and of the pulp, are a peculiar outcome of the Sicilian climate that intervenes in the production of anthocyanins, water-soluble pigments of the flavonoid family, responsible for the reddish colour.

Orange growing in Sicily contributes, together with vineyards and olive trees, to shape the rural image of the island, where 100.000 hectares are devoted to citrus fruit growing. Within the substantial Sicilian citrus production, oranges occupy the main niche, and play a leading role in the economy of the island as they, harvested from December to mid-June, are widely employed by the manufacturing industry (Caccioni, 2008). Today Sicilian oranges face the competition from other Mediterranean countries. For this reason, Sicilian oranges are object of promotional initiatives such as the awarding of the PGI label and the implementation of European-funded programmes (*Programme of Rural Development 2007-2013*) to enhance the image of the product's international competitiveness and to support the implementation of gastronomic routes such as the "Via dell'Arancia Rossa" [the Blood Orange Road] (Caccioni, 2008).

From a nutritional point of view oranges are rich in antioxidants (ascorbic and hydroxycinnamic acid, flavonoids, esperidin, narirutin and ferulic, cumaric, caffeic and sinapic acids), minerals (calcium, potassium, phosphorus, magnesium, iron and selenium) and vitamins (A, C, B1, B2 and PP). Epidemiological studies have shown how orange consumption boosts health benefits in a low caloric content. The manifold nutritional benefits of fresh orange intake range from the antioxidant to the antianaemic and to the antibacterial action; from the anti-tumoral effect to hypcholesterolizing and hypoglycemic properties.

Some beneficial effects are known in popular culture and orange consumption has long been recommended to stimulate the digestion, while orange intake is recommended to pregnant women for calcium intake and to strengthen hair and nails. The fruit is also employed as a beauty treatment or to extract essential oils used in perfumes.

In the food industry Sicilian oranges are used for the production of squashes and to make liqueurs. In gastronomy they are extensively employed in several recipes, such as salads, sweets and cakes.

SICILIAN ORANGES IN BRITISH TRAVELLERS' ACCOUNTS

The history of travel to Italy has a long tradition. In the middle ages travellers were pilgrims and churchmen *en route* to the Holy Land or to places of worship. In the age of Humanism and of the Renaissance, voyagers were students interested in attending Italian universities in pursue of the new ideas of classic scholarship. After the breach with Rome a different traveller crossed the Alps. He did not travel for religious or cultural matters; he roamed the peninsula to refine his education (Cianflone, 2012).

In the complex web of travelling circuits, Sicily was rarely included in the tour till the second half of the eighteenth century. As a consequence, few Britons headed to this country (Chaney, 1998). The main objection to travelling south of Naples was the lack of convenient means of transport and of lodgings, and the presence of banditti (Chaney, 1998; Towner, 1985). The eighteenth century visitors to the island traced routes and itineraries that were later followed by others. These travellers went south looking for archaeological sites and volcanic eruptions. As a consequence, they were interested in describing Sicilian ancient temples and ancient theatres or the volcanic phenomena of mount Aetna and of mount Stromboli, rather than paying attention to oranges. When direct reference was made, orange orchards were considered part of the landscape and little notice was given to the fruits' description.

In Brydone's travelogue, (1806 edition), a book in the form of letters sent to a friend, for example, the romantic taste of nature is well expressed. In this travel account, archaeological ruins are described in details, together with facts concerning local customs. Oranges were part of the countryside and reference to this fruit added a picturesque note to the scenery, as the quotation on the outskirts of Monreale (near Palermo) clearly shows (Brydone, 1806: 208):

The valley at the foot of the mountain is rich and beautiful. It appears one continued orange-garden for many miles and exhibits an elegant piece of scenery.

From mid-1850, as a result of railway and steam-boat facilities that paved the way to mass-tourism, a different traveller visited Sicily. This traveller did not belong to the *virtuoso/connoisseur* type exemplified by Brydone. He, ancestor of the modern package tourists, wanted to be informed on the main features of a country, namely the geography of the place, archaeological and architectural buildings, and, for the first time in travel literature, the agricultural products. To meet the needs of this novel type of traveller, the travel guide was the right piece of literature.

Therefore, the description given by Dennis (1864: xxviii) exemplifies the new trend in tourism. In this book, in fact, tourists are informed about local geography, about roads, about monuments and buildings, and about agricultural products, such as corn, wines and several fruits, citrus fruits included. In the section dealing with oranges, the fruits are classified according to the different cultivars available on the island, namely Blood or Maltese, as it was currently called in the past, and Seville orange, and reference to the average number of fruits yielded by a single tree and on packaging details.

An interesting information is found in the quotation below (1864: xxviii):

The choice fruits only are exported; these are gathered with great care, wrapped in paper manufactured for the purpose, and packed in light boxes containing each 20 or 30 dozens.

This short paragraph is important to define the historical roots of PGI oranges since it should be seen as the earliest reference to the packaging details that are part of the product specifications and of the notes of transport outlined by European regulations to make PGI-labeled orange identification easier.

CONCLUSION

The data discussed in this note, although of a preliminary type, concur to stress the historical roots of a typical Sicilian fruit: oranges. Findings can be used in cultural and gastronomic tourism to define the history of Sicilian oranges, thus re-calling the collective historical memories of a society (Bessièrè, 1998) in which the British travellers may have their share.

Further studies will extend the information by using a wider corpus, obtained from the match of available travel literature with historical and sociological information, to build a multi-faceted perspective of the Sicilian typical foodstuff.

ENDNOTES

1. This note is based on a poster presented at *ChimAlSi_2012*, the 9th Italian Congress of Food Chemistry, Ischia (Italy), June 03-07, 2012.
2. Although all authors conceived and approved the final paper, G. Di Bella and G. Dugo are responsible for the section entitled

Sicilian Oranges, whereas E. Cianflone is responsible for the remaining sections.

3. PDO labels those items produced, processed and prepared within a particular geographical environment that have characteristics exclusive to the area of production, natural and human factors included; PGI marks those products bearing the name of a particular geographical area, which are produced, processed or prepared in at least one of the different productive stages within that area, and which show certain qualities attributable to the same; TSG refers to the traditional character of a foodstuff or agricultural product by either its composition or by means of its production, rather than to its origin (Council Regulation No 2081/1992 on the Protection of Geographical Indications and Designations of Origin for Agricultural Products and Foodstuffs).

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