The Wor(l)ds of Neapolitan Arts and Crafts:

Cultural and Linguistic Perspectives

Edited by
Raffaella Antinucci
Carolina Diglio
Maria Giovanna Petrillo

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-3139-2
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3139-0

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface viii

English Section

Chapter One 2
The Art of Pizza Making in the Neapolitan Tradition:
A Terminological Study
Marina Niceforo

Chapter Two 12
From *Maccaronaro* to Street Food: A Cultural and Linguistic Study
Gabriele Basile

Chapter Three 26
The Figure of the Butcher across Language and Socio-cultural Traditions:
A Focus on the Italian Region of Campania
Antonio Taglialatela

Chapter Four 40
A Contrastive Analysis of Neapolitan *Presepio* Figurines and Their
Construction Phases: From Culture to Language
Vittoria Massaro

Chapter Five 53
Translating Musical Traditions: An Inter-linguistic Analysis of Neapolitan
Lute-making Technical Terminology
Francesco Nacchia

Chapter Six 68
The Old Craft of the Stuccoer and the Italian Stucco Tradition:
Influences on the Language of Art in English and Spanish
Sara Longobardi

Chapter Seven 84
Arts and Crafts of the Mediterranean Sea: The Coral Dealer between Terminology and Culture
Jacopo Varchetta

Chapter Eight..... 93
Pastry Making: Linguistic, Historical and Terminological Considerations
Marilicia Di Paolo

French Section

Abstracts..... 106

Chapter Nine 109
Les metiers sous-marins d'autrefois : pour une étude diachronique des denominations (The terminology of old underwater trades: a diachronic study)
Alessandra Della Penna

Chapter Ten..... 126
La corderie en France et en Italie : analyse d'un art entre lexique et culture (The manufacture of ropes in France and Italy: exploring an art between lexicon and culture)
Micol Forte

Chapter Eleven 144
Le papetier amalfitain et auvergnat : entre lexique et culture (The papermaker trade in Amalfi and the Auvergne region: between lexicon and culture)
Antonella Guarino

Chapter Twelve 160
La vannerie ou l'art de tresser l'osier: nomenclature et étymologie au sein d'un artisanat ancien (Terminology and etymology of the ancient art of basketry)
Sergio Piscopo

Chapter Thirteen..... 170
Les métiers de l'art de la chaussure : analyse contrastive de la terminologie en langue française, italienne et napolitaine (The art of shoemaking: a contrastive terminological analysis in French, Italian and Neapolitan)
Vincenzo Simoniello

Contributors..... 183

CHAPTER THREE

THE FIGURE OF THE BUTCHER ACROSS LANGUAGE AND SOCIO-CULTURAL TRADITIONS: A FOCUS ON THE ITALIAN REGION OF CAMPANIA

ANTONIO TAGLIALATELA

1 Introduction

This study stems from a major project concerning ancient arts and crafts across Italy's Campania region carried out by the Department of Economic and Legal Studies of the University of Naples "Parthenope". It is addressed to all those interested in the history, evolution, and functions of butchery over the centuries, focusing on Italy's Campania region. In particular, the chapter draws from the social relevance that meat-eating has gained since ancient times where examples can be found in Greek society, as proved by the vase painting of the Classical Antiquity (500- 336 BC). At the time, only men could eat meat because only men were socially dominant and had the right to vote (Detienne and Vernant 2014). This tradition has today profoundly changed, and the consumption of meat has come to display the wealth of individuals, regardless of their gender, but also the prosperity of an entire nation (Fracasso 2008)[1].

Society over time has frequently ritualised the role of the butcher as the function associated with it usually implied the "responsibility for death" for the wellness of an entire community, this giving rise all at once to a sense of respectability, fear, and terror (Presutti and Charuty 2013).

[1] Master's dissertation retrievable online: http://tesi.cab.unipd.it/14148/ (accessed November 4, 2017).

In this respect, the chapter explores the history and evolution of butchery from a socio-cultural perspective spanning ancient and modern times. It also investigates how the professional role of the butcher has given rise to the development of other specific field-related crafts and professions with a focus on Italy's Campania region and to a certain extent, on the UK. In this respect, specific Neapolitan terminology is brought to the fore and through a contrastive Neapolitan-English analysis of the term 'butcher', a subtle linguistic connection between these two languages is revealed. Overall, this chapter provides some insight on a topic where research is still scant.

2 History of Butchery

A 'butcher' is commonly known as a person who slaughters animals, dresses their flesh, sells their meat, or takes part in any combination of these three tasks. If, on the one hand, the craft of butchery usually recalls cruelties against animals, and this is one of the reasons why many animal protection associations take issue with the meat industry, on the other hand, scientific evidence demonstrates that butchery started with human evolution millions of years ago.

When our ancestors began to walk upright, one of their earliest practices was to crack stones to obtain an edge so they could leave the shelter of the trees and scavenge meat from lions' kill in the savannah. In 2013 findings in East Africa, which are dated roughly two and a half million years, uncovered broken animal bones that clearly showed cut marks on them (Ghose 2013)[2]. According to researchers, these findings strongly indicate that our human ancestors used sharp stone tools to physically remove meat from animal bones and eat it (Fig. 3-1).

Through the years, other findings across Africa have proved that our human ancestors' tendency of using sharp stone tools to butcher animals goes further back to 3.3 million years ago (Pobiner 2016)[3]. However, the gradual growth of the population over time led to several advancements.

Approximately five thousand years ago, during the Bronze Age, men learned how to smelt naturally-occurring copper and tin together to form the alloy known as bronze and make tools for hunting purposes (Butz 2002). Reasonably, the development of metal cutting tools was one of the foremost innovations in prehistoric butchery, as eating meat may have

[2] https://www.livescience.com/31974-earliest-human-hunters-found.html (accessed October 30, 2017).

[3] https://www.sapiens.org/evolution/homo-sapiens-and-tool-making/ (accessed November 2, 2017).

fuelled big changes and development in *Homo* species from that time onwards[4].

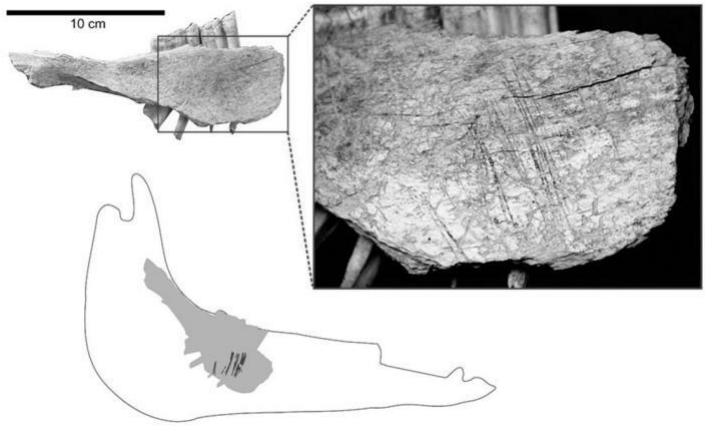

Fig. 3-1. *This horse mandible shows a number of cut marks on the lingual surface*[5].

Butchering increasingly evolved from a function performed for families or small nomadic groups into a service conducted for larger populations. In particular, public slaughterhouses date back to the Roman times. In 400-300 BC, animals were butchered in the open air at the *Forum* in Rome, which was a crucial place in terms of commercial activities and cross-cultural contact with foreign traders. Butchered meat was then sold in the *macellum* (/ma'tʃellum/), an indoor market including small shops (It. 'botteghe') dedicated to the selling of many types of provisions (De Ruyt 1983), depending on local availability (*World Heritage Encyclopedia* n.d.)[6]. The *macellum* was a building located alongside the *Forum*, and the market was arranged inside it (Richardson 1992). The *macellarius* (/matʃe'llarius/)—from which the current Italian term *macellaio* (/matʃe'llaio/) derives—was originally just a salesperson. At a later stage, they began slaughtering animals and finally, the two tasks of slaughtering and selling meat progressively became unified under the same craft. On special occasions,wealthy Romans ate exotic meat as giraffe and tiny mice

[4] See Ghose (2013) for a detailed study of this topic.
[5] Credit: https://www.eurekalert.org/multimedia/pub/130902.php.
[6] http://newspaperslibrary.org/articles/eng/Macellum (accessed November 02, 2017).

stuffed with pine nuts, because the more unusual the food the more impressed the guests of the host would be.

In the Middle Ages, butchers were restricted to certain neighbourhoods in which to ply their trade due to the large amount of animal fluid waste coming from butchered animals. Animals were usually dumped in the middle of the street that served as an open sewer, but the question of hygiene was brought to the forefront, and immediately became paramount to avoid diseases. Therefore, such a practice was slowly abolished. However, there was also a further reason. The need for architectural renewal led to rethinking the *Forum* as a new lively urban centre. Hence, butchers were removed from then onwards, as people considered their task inappropriate as well as disgusting (*Enciclopedia Treccani* n.d.).

3 Evolution of Butchery

That of butcher remains one of the most ancient crafts whose duties date back to the domestication of livestock at a time when meat became a regular part of individuals' diets. In England, butchers took part in the craft guilds[7]—prestigious associations formed to protect and regulate trade and mutual support—that later merged with, or assumed, the role of civic government (The Company of Butchers of the City of York n.d.)[8]. The earliest one, "The Worshipful Company of Butchers Guild", was set up in London as early as 975 AD (Central Vic Meats Blog 2014)[9], followed by that in York in 1272 (Mbengeranwa 2013) and one in Oxford in 1294 (Chance *et al.* 1979)[10].

Over the centuries, the craft of butchery has apparently come to reflect the changes in society. In fact, the consumption of meat could give important information about the living standards of people in one particular area: the more meat was consumed the wealthier the people were (Detienne and Vernant 2014), and England, for example, was one of the countries where the consumption of meat was particularly high, especially under the British Empire when foreign trade remarkably

[7] There were different types of guilds, including the two main categories of merchant and craft guilds, but also the frith guild and the religious guild (see Seligman *et al.* 1887, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2696715, accessed November 3, 2017).

[8] https://web.archive.org/web/20120308184834/http://www.yorkbutchersgild.com/pags/history.html (accessed October 31, 2017).

[9] https://centralvicmeatsblog.wordpress.com/2014/02/03/the-history-of-butchery/ (accessed November 02, 2017).

[10] http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol4/ (accessed November 7, 2017).

increased. However, many countries today continue to show the same trend. For example, figures reveal that consumption of meat in Brazil and China has risen dramatically since they have started developing in terms of finance and economy (Hoffman 2014)[11].

In today's industrialised world, slaughterhouses employ butchers to slaughter animals for food purposes and to perform certain steps repeatedly as specialists on a semi-automated disassembly line. Such steps may include: i) stunning (i.e., rendering the animal incapacitated), ii) exsanguination (i.e., removing blood), iii) skinning (i.e., removing the hide or pelt), iv) scalding and dehairing (in particular, pork), v) evisceration and splitting (Spencer n.d.)[12]. For the purpose of guaranteeing quality butchering, many jurisdictions nowadays provide trade certifications for butchers, and in the UK "some areas expect a three-year apprenticeship followed by the option of becoming a master butcher" (Ghose 2013)[13]. Across Italy, many training courses are currently offered by recognised associations with a view to ensuring future butchers a comprehensive preparation[14].

Careful observation of today's Italian reality helps figure out that the ancient *macellum* has survived over the centuries through modern indoor and outdoor marketplaces. The historic food markets of Ortigia in Syracuse as well as the Central Market in Florence are valuable examples of ancient indoor marketplaces still operating. Even in Naples, the Porta Nolana Market, the Pignasecca Market, and the Torretta Market are further instances of specific places where many different foodstuffs, products and items can be regularly purchased. It is no coincidence that the (informal) Italian term *macello* (/ma'tʃello/) is also used in the sense of 'confusion' of things, people, or mind. It is worth highlighting that today's neighbourhood butcher rarely slaughters animal and that the traditional butcher's livelihood is threatened by the fast cutting pre-packaging skills of the industrial 'mass production army' in so a fast-changing global business. Therefore, the modern butcher has had to develop other skills to survive, concerning, for example, intensive farming, HACCP, cooking methods, marketing and communication, safety and security on the job, veterinary medicine, etc.

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11 https://www.forbes.com/sites/bethhoffman/2014/03/26/how-increased-meat-consumption-in-china-changes-landscapes-across-the-globe/#449061676448 (accessed November 25, 2017).

12 http://www.britishbutcher.co.uk/ (accessed October 30, 2017).

13 See footnote 5.

14 For example, courses are offered by Federcarni, Confesercenti, and Accademia Macelleria Italiana.

The following section looks at the development of the craft of butchery within the Campania region and analyses the terminological evolution of the peculiar Neapolitan variety for butcher, i.e., *chianchiere* (/kiΛŋki'ere/).

4 The 'Butcher' in Campania

The translation of *butcher* and *butcher's shop* into Italian is respectively *macellaio*, which derives from Latin *macellarius*, and *macelleria* (/mΛtʃelleri:Λ/). Today's *macelleria* is very similar to what Campanian inhabitants define as *puteca* (/pu'tekΛ/) (It. *bottega* /bo'ttegΛ/, trans.: small shop), commonly intended as a shop for the sales of cured meats (*Vocabolario Treccani* n.d.). It is worth remembering that the ancient *macellum* was a building including many different small shops ('puteche'), and the Neapolitan *puteca* is currently a retail shop outside of which foodstuffs, including meat, were displayed and sold (Memoli 2016)[15]. Therefore, today's *macelleria*, in the sense of butcher's shop, could derive from Neapolitan *puteca*. Latin dictionaries' translation of *macellum* is "marketplace" (*Vocabolario della Lingua Latina* 2007). Thus, if the Roman *macellum* is the city marketplace, the Italian term *macelleria*, in the sense of butcher's shop, cannot be identified as the ancient *macellum*. As a matter of fact, Latin dictionaries use the terms *laniena* and *carnaria* for "macelleria" (trans.: butcher's shop). On the other hand, the terminological influence from *macellum* can be reasonably attributed to the main business carried out inside of it, i.e., the butchering and selling of meat, among other things.

The Neapolitan regional variety for butcher is *chianchiere*, while *chianca* (/ki'ΛŋkΛ/) is the one for butcher's shop. Its origins are strictly connected with the butcher's duty following the slaughtering phase. In particular, the pieces of meat the butcher cut were once laid and displayed on a wooden counter of variable length and width called *planca* in Latin (trans.: 'plank, table'), which is still a regular practice today in some butcher's shops[16] (Fig. 3-2).

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15 http://www.vesuviolive.it/cultura-napoletana/153034-impariamo-napoletano-puteca-cosa-significa-perche-si-dice-cosi/ (accessed November 12, 2017).

16 This has also been portrayed in several artworks, such as *The Butcher Shop* (1568) by Joachim Beuckelaer displayed at the National Museum of Capodimonte in Naples.

Fig. 3-2. *A picture of three 'chianchieri' in white uniform*[17].

Since languages never stop evolving, the term *planca* phonetically changed into *chianca*, and, due to metonymic reconceptualisation, the person in charge of slaughtering animals, cutting the meat in pieces, and displaying those pieces on a counter to sell them was defined *chianchiere* (Pipitone 2016)[18]. This term is still used only in the Neapolitan dialect of old generations, but well understood by younger generations too.

Progressively, the spread of butcher shops gave rise to other related commercial activities; for example, the so-called *tripperia* (/tripperi:Λ/) designates a shop where tripe and offal were sold instead of being discarded. Tripe is the lining of beef, hog or sheep stomach, although most of what is sold is from beef. Many *tripperie* regularly operate especially in Southern Italy. Some time ago, within the Campania region, merchants of tripe and offal were called *merciajuoli* (/'mertʃiΛi'uoli/), i.e., sellers of *mercia* (/'mertʃiΛ/) (*Dizionario Italiano Ragionato* 1987), the Neapolitan variety for tripe and offal. More specifically, their role was to collect from slaughterhouses what was supposed to be discarded, and then sell it separately, thus creating a profession other than the butcher's. Offal themselves were sold to *carnacuttari* (/kΛrnΛkut'tΛri/) (trans.: those in charge of cooking meat), a craft of ancient origins that literally disgusted

[17] Credit: http://ascm.altervista.org/.

[18] http://www.vesuviolive.it/cultura-napoletana/antichi-mestieri-napoletani-cultura/161975-chianchiere-perche-napoletano-si-dice-cosi/ (accessed November 4, 2017).

aristocracy. In the 17th century, servants who struggled to survive learned to appreciate and eat the pigs' offal that their masters used to discard. Some of these *carnacuttari* also owned small shops where plain tripe was sold, usually on a slice of bread topped with a sauce made from hot peppers (Fedele 2017). Nowadays, well known throughout Campania is the so-called *'o per' e 'o muss'* (/o'per-e-o'mus/), which is traditionally a combination of cut up pork (or beef) jaw, pastern, shank, dewclaw and muzzle that can be purchased from peddlers in the street, particularly during local feasts and celebrations. In the past, *'o per' e 'o muss'* was considered a really rewarding fast food after a long working day (Fig. 3-3).

Fig. 3-3. *"'O per' e o'muss'"*[19].

Campania has a long tradition of crafts related to meat processing. In Naples, and in some surrounding regions of the South, one can even find a connection with folk music and, in particular, with musical instruments such as the *tammorra* and the *putipù*. The former is a traditional Neapolitan percussion instrument consisting of a circular frame with a single membrane stretched across one side of the instrument itself, similar to a tambourine; the latter is a traditional friction drum consisting of a cylindrical sound box closed at the top by a stretched membrane, with a bamboo cane attached at the centre (Fig. 3-4).

[19] Credit: www.napoliflash24.it.

Fig. 3-4. *From the left: 'Putipù' and 'Tammorre'*[20].

Also, a butcher is traditionally present in the Neapolitan representation of the Nativity scene, while there is no evidence of this in the one represented with the Byzantine iconography.

4.1 The English 'butcher' and the Italian 'beccaio'

Beside the term *macelleria*, another word is used across Italy today, even though mostly as a regional variety, i.e., *beccheria* (/bekkeri:Λ/) (*Vocabolario Treccani* n.d.). Once, the term indicated a place where one could purchase the meat of *becchi* (/'bekki/), that is to say 'male goats', which in the Middle Ages was the only type of meat that people were used to eat. Interestingly, while in Italy the term *beccheria* underwent a progressive evolution based on how people were accustomed to have meat, and it was replaced over the centuries with *macelleria*, no alternative to the Italian *beccheria* seems to exist at the moment in British English, to my knowledge. Dictionaries only list the term *flesher*, which is the regional Scottish variety for "butcher". *Butchery* thus appears to be the only standard term in use. Nevertheless, it may be interesting to notice that *butcher* shares the same etymology with the Italian term *beccaio* /be'kkΛio/, which means that such a commonality has probably been influenced by the complex network of commercial and cultural

[20] Credit: www.briganti.info.

exchanges that most countries experienced over the centuries (Curatolo 2014)[21]. Table 3-1 below displays the same Old French etymology between the terms *beccaio* (It) and *butcher* (En), including their modern meaning and usage. The Table also highlights the original meaning shared by these terms:

Italian	English
Beccaio /be'kkaio/: it comes from 'becco' [/'bekko/] (male goat) which derives from French *boucher*—**Old French *bochier*** 'butcher—a person who slaughters animals for food' (*Dizionario Etimologico Online* n.d.).	**Butcher**: c.1300, 'one who slaughters animals for market', from French *boucher*—**Old French *bochier*** 'butcher, executioner' (12c., Modern French *boucher*)—probably literally 'slaughterer of goats', from *bouc* 'male goat', from Frankish **bukk* or some other Germanic source or Celtic **bukkos* 'he-goat' (*Online Etymology Dictionary* n.d.).

Table 3-1. *Etymology of 'beccaio' and 'butcher'.*

The following subsection outlines the metaphor surrounding the term *butcher*, showing how it has contributed to well-rooted sociocultural beliefs.

4.2 The Metaphorical Use of 'Butcher'

In addition to the traditional description of the role, the term *butcher* is normally used worldwide to refer to those committing acts of great cruelty, brutality, and bloodshed against others, as indicated by the *Cambridge Dictionary* (n.d.): a 'butcher' is "a person who murders a lot of people, especially in a cruel way". Such a reference to cruelty has nourished several popular stories over the centuries. One, among the others, regards Pompey, a prominent Roman general and politician of the 1st century BC, who got the Latin nickname *adulescentulus carnifex*, which was translated into "The Teenage Butcher" or "The Butcher Boy", due to the brutality with which he treated his political opponents in the early part of his career; but even further examples from today's crime news could be mentioned.

The term *butcher* has been variously adopted by scholars and researchers[22] to illustrate the sociocultural function of the metaphors on butchers; see, for example, the popular expression "Surgeons are butchers"

[21] http://www.istitutoeuroarabo.it/DM/butchery-boucherie-vucciria-non-siamo-poi-cosi-tanto-diversi/ (accessed November 2, 2017).

[22] See, among others, Cornell Way (2013), Coulson & Davenport (2011), Lakoff (2014), and Ziem (2014).

and vice versa. Cornell Way (2013, 153) particularly highlights how the common perception of butchers cutting flesh "picks out both the butcher's 'carving' and the surgeon's 'operating'", but she also clarifies that this simile may carry a negative connotation depending on the context. The term *butcher* has also influenced British English with the Cockney rhyming slang expression "have (or take) a butcher's hook" meaning "have (or take) a look". This expression dates back to the 19th century and refers to the double-ended hook with which butchers would hang up joints of meat for display outside their shops (*Collins English Dictionary*, n.d.), at least until supermarket chains, that have progressively reduced the number of these shops, began to appear. The examples above bring to the fore the intimate connection between language and culture which has played a crucial role in establishing universal metaphors on (the role of) butchers.

5 Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that the craft of butchery holds a very long tradition and has developed alongside the evolution of humankind. The chapter has then pointed out that over time the role of the butcher has become important in societies due to its influence on popular customs and beliefs and has gone through several changes in terms of the butchers' tasks and competences. The study has finally focused on the butcher in the Italian region of Campania and initiated a discussion on butchery's work-related professions, with their specific terminology, also showcasing a linguistic connection between the Italian *beccaio* and the English *butcher*.

Further research on the subject could be carried out to investigate how the role of the butcher has been evoked in literature or cinema production, given that it has occasionally inspired both fields. There are a few examples of the term *beccaio* throughout the Italian literature, such as in Dante Alighieri's *Purgatory* (1300) "Figliuol fu' io d'un beccaio di Parigi" (XX canto, v.52) (trans."I was born of a Parisian butcher"), and in the more recent Giovanni Verga's *Malavoglia* (1881), where the so-called "Casa del Beccaio" (trans.: "House of Butcher") in chapters V-X is opposed to "Casa del Nespolo" (trans.: "House of Nespolo"). Among the most popular cinema and TV productions, the Italian movie *Il Macellaio* (trans."The Butcher") can be mentioned, as well as the internationally awarded TV series *The Game of Thrones*, where a "Butcher's Ball" takes place (trans.: "La Danza del Beccaio"). Furthermore, to what extent the consumption of meat can represent the power and prosperity of a country would be worth further investigating.

In conclusion, as argued by Dario Cecchini, a leading contemporary

and internationally known Italian butcher, "the work of a butcher could amount to poetry, a combination of knowledge (understanding that you can use every part of the animal) and consciousness (respect for the animal) that can bring people back to the original customs of the tribe, in a world where everything seems to be getting more and more commodified, processed and impersonal"[23].

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