



ONCE UPON A TIME... THE LENTIL OF MORMANNO

by *Nicola Perrelli*



An old and forgotten saying plays: *Cultivation-Culture*.

And this is really true.

Culture is unavoidable; for each community culture is not an optional supplement, but instead is a necessary condition. We couldn't do anything without it.

In these terms, all that concerns nourishment, is a social act that reflects and interprets our environment, economy, people peculiarities and history. Besides this it is always, in one way or another, a story of the things to eat or...a story about their absence..

Think about, for example, the ritual value of a certain food, the tabu regarding a great part of religions and so on, until therapeutic functions. In fact , in a lot of our Calabrian villages rheumatic pains were healed wrapping up the patient in a wool bedclothes covering him up with bread taken out of the oven; contusions were healed by washed lard ointment and crushed parsley, burns healed by oil shaken with water or grated uncooked potatoes, and so on.

At the same time is also true that the economic and social growth of the modern economy put us away from our food traditions and from the cultivation of our places. Long time widespread products employed at a large scale and in daily food have almost disappeared today.

Starting from this fact, with the intention of rediscovering or at least thinking again about the old village cultivation, we asked inhabitants of Mormanno if they remember something about the appreciated lentil of Mormanno, famous 10 years ago.

Little or nothing to tell the truth: people under 65 have only a hazy recollection, the over one something more. They keep still in mind the pulses, because they remember when Esau transferred his right of primogeniture to his brother Jacob just for a dish of lentils, but overall for the quality of the plant, a true rarity they said, and for the tastiness of its seed.

And they didn't make a mistake, "Mormanno quality", named in this way, "Leonessa", "Fucino", "Villalba" and "Ustica" are the main assortments of plants cultivated in Italy. Not for nothing lentils of Mormanno are mentioned in literature together with those of Altamura, Villalba and the D.O.P of Castelluccio d'Umbria.

This cultivation, as confirmed by "Pippinu di puttaneddra", born in 1924, still working as a farmer in Pantano district, was restricted overall in this area, the best one for the production of pulses and secondly in the district of Procitta.

The unchanged cultivation technique was composed by the following steps: ploughing at the beginning of the springtime, sowing between March and may, mowing and harvesting in August.

At the end of harvesting time, lentils were riddled in order to pull them apart from impurities (seeds, corn, pebbles, etc) and therefore cleaned lentils were ready for eating and retailed selling. This type of selling, for those who didn't remember, took place regularly in L.Romano Street in a buzzing of voices and in a bustle of people and...occasional brays.



We haven't to forget that the village market, as well as its economic dimension, thanks to the human relationship had an important social function.

A spur for exploiting our land in its varied aspects is suggesting some remarks that help us to live again or remember our relation with our local and typical products: from the agronomic to the hystorical ones, represented by pulses with usages and customs, to those nutritional and economic products .

The plants too, if properly rediscovered, stimulated, studied and exploited, as an agronomist of Mormanno is doing in collaboration with the University of Bari, could be a launching pad of growth and emancipation. Something like this happened nearly 30 years ago thanks to other traditional products of Mormanno: our delicious "bocconotti" and the appreciated salami with the "tear": Why not this can happen to our lentils too?