

The Parthian “Aquatic Bread” and the Iraqi “Water-Bread” (*khébbéz māy*). An Instance of Material Culture Continuity?

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Abstract

This study seeks to clarify some mystifying points, on two dimensions. On the first dimension, Pliny mentioned an appreciated Parthian bread as “aquatic bread”, and we seek to probe into whether the signifier (if not the signified) is continued by Iraq’s still extant “aquatic bread”, being a large, soft flat bread. We conclude that the Iraqi Arabic signifier was perhaps inspired by the compound whose Latin form Pliny preserved, whereas the baked products so named, now and in antiquity, were probably different. The compound itself was retained, translated from Iranic into Arabic, by preserving the semantic motivation. On the second dimension, the Italian compound *pane acquatico* appears in a passage discussing Pliny, in a book by the Armenians published in 1786 under the name of an Armenian banker, Giovanni de Serpos (or Giovanni Serposiana, from Armenian *Serposian*), living in Venice and ennobled in the Papal States; we remark that he commissioned it and saw it to publication, but it had been authored in Italian by a Croatian cleric, Josip Marinović (“del mare”). We begin in Sec. 1 with the lexical type *pizza* / *pitta*, and flat breads; then Sec. 2, “Is the Iraqi ‘water-bread’, a soft flat bread, related to Pliny’s Parthian *panis aquaticus*? Giovanni de Serpos’ 1786 claims of an Armenian conduit for the transmission to Rome of the *pane acquatico* as a luxury bread”, is followed with Sec. 3, “Concerning Giovanni de Serpos and Josip Marinović”, and finally, important insights from the scholarly literature appear in Sec. 4, “Naum Jasny’s insights about Pliny’s *panis aquaticus*, and concluding remarks”.

Keywords: History of bread-making - names for flat breads - *pizza* and *pitta* - Pliny’s Parthian bread - *panis aquaticus* - favism

1. *The lexical type pizza / pitta, and flat breads*

Pizza has become globalised, and for example, Rossella Ceccarini has published in 2011 a book entitled *Pizza and Pizza Chefs in Japan: A Case of Culinary Globalization*. Or then, when one comes across *tlayudas* described as “Mexican pizzas”, the affinity may be typological, rather than by historical development.

Historically for the lexical types *pizza* and *pitta*, the context has been restricted to an area that from Italy and her Tyrrhenian islands in the West, traverses south-eastern Europe and Anatolia, but in antiquity *pitta* for ‘bread’ (in practice, flat bread) was grounded in the Northwest Semitic area. As for flat breads, these are grounded in the prehistory and history of bread-making, and Pasqualone [2018] has shown in a map the spread of flat breads from the Near East to South and Central Asia, to parts of the Mediterranean (including Italy), and to parts of Africa.

In 2007, *Quaderni di Semantica* published an article by Mario Alinei and Ephraim Nissan about the lexical type *pizza* / *pitta* as spread in Italy, the Balcanic Peninsula, Hungary and Romania, as well as Anatolia. *Pitta* as a name for flat bread in Modern Hebrew comes from Balcanic/Aegean Judaeo-Spanish, so the word was imported into a Semitic language (Hebrew), but in fact, Alinei and Nissan pointed out, the earliest occurrence in Greek of the lexical type is in Hesychius, and this appears to be a loanword from Middle Aramaic (namely, from Syriac as a Christian Aramaic lingueme, either the literary language, or Christian vernaculars of Middle Aramaic). Aramaic /pitta/ ‘bread’ in turn is related to Hebrew /patt/ ‘bread’, the base of whose inflected forms is /pitt-/. The history of pronunciation of the Hebrew /p/ phoneme, and of the correspondence of its two allophones (now [p] and [f], but in antiquity [ϕ] and [f]) to Greek letters in transcription (in either the Septuagint in Hellenistic times, or Origen’s Hexapla in late antiquity) is a complex matter, which becomes even more complex (and more uncertain) if more in general, the pronunciation is considered of the phoneme /p/ throughout Northwest Semitic’s multitude of language varieties.

Section 3 in Nissan and Alinei (2013) explained in English:

In southern Italy the forms *pizza* and *pitta* appear alternatively. Contrary to those giving for *pizza* a Germanic origin (which flies in the face of the material culture of eastern and central Mediterranean flat breads), Alinei and Nissan (2007) showed that *pizza* is from *pitta*, actually for the base of the *pizza*; and this is the Byzantine Greek *pitta*, whence sundry names for kinds of flat bread from the Balkanic peninsula and Anatolia, as well as (through Judaeo-Spanish) the Israeli term *pita*, whence in English *pita*, *pitta*, *pita bread*, and (as introduced by supermarket chains) *mini-pitta* or even *mini white pittas* in Britain.

In Israel, one refers as *pita* even to the very large flat breads (widespread in the Arab world [...]) known among Iraqis and Iraqi Jews as *xábəz mǎy* (lit., ‘water bread’, the tender kind that kind be folded) and *gáwrag* (the hard, breakable kind), or then the similar Iranian flat bread [...], and the great variety of Indian flat breads, each kind with its own name (and sold that way in London).

In Italy one finds *pitta* in Calabria, Lucania, and (in Apulia) the Otrantino, for ‘flat bread’ (i.e., standard Italian focaccia), but in Naples one also finds *pettola* and, in the Abruzzo region, *pettola* for ‘sheet of pastry’, whereas in Italy’s north, in Valtellina one finds *peta* ‘rather flat bread’; and in the dialect of Venice and in the Romagna region one finds the form *pinza* for ‘pizza’ (Alinei and Nissan 2007).

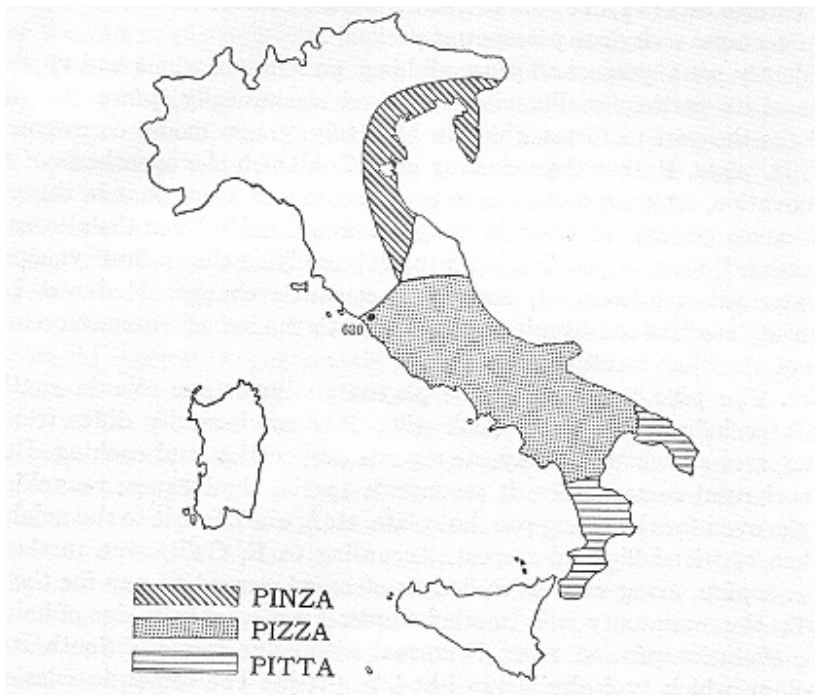
In the present paper, we are interested in a 1786 reference, in Italian, to “pane acquatico”, in a context concerned with Western Asia. In an article (Nissan [2018 (2019)] concerned with some kinds of flat breads as well as with baked products denoted by derivatives or compounds of *pizza* (*pizzarelle* and *pizza di beridde*), Section 14 stated:

Iraqi Jews have brought two kinds of Iraqi flat breads (both of them are known in Israeli Hebrew as *pita irakit*): within the culture, the crisp kind is known as *gáwrág*, whereas the soft kind is known as *khábáz mǎy*, i.e., literally, ‘bread of water’, softness being conveyed through reference to the retained wetness of the texture. And indeed, Pasqualone in the abstract of her 2018 paper points out that the multitude of flat breads “are always relatively thin, ranging from a few millimeters to a few centimeters in thickness. These breads, whose origin is very ancient, fit well into the context of a subsistence economy: i) they can be obtained from cereals other than wheat, such as pseudocereals or legumes, allowing the use of sustainable local productions from marginal lands; ii) they do not necessarily require an oven to be baked; iii) they can serve as a dish and as a spoon/fork; iv) they can be dehydrated by a second baking process, preventing the growth of moulds and extending the shelf life; v) they are transported with little encumbrance”. Arguably, point (iv) is the main rationale for the existence of *gáwrág* as opposed to *khábáz mǎy*.

Antonella Pasqualone has published two overview papers, with colour photographs, about flat breads (Pasqualone [2017 (in Italian); 2018 (in English)]). The English-language overview is entitled “Traditional Flat Breads Spread from the Fertile Crescent: Production Process and History of Baking Systems”. Her main focus in those papers is on kinds of bread¹

¹ Bear in mind that the prominence of bread as a staple has on occasion motivated *mangiapane* (‘bread-eater’) as a *blazon populaire* (Nissan [2007: Sec. 1]). Pellat [1986] stated that among Arabs in the early centuries of Islam, “the expression *ākil al-khubz* ‘bread-eater’ was a laudatory epithet implying considerable affluence (al-Djāhiz, *Bu-khalā*, ed. Hādjiirī, 211)”. Actually, that expression is still used in Arabic in order to refer to industrious people who are successful at earning a living. Besides, in Greek antiquity, Hecataeus referred to the Egyptians as ‘bread-eaters’ (ἄροφάγοι). In fact, bread was quite prominent in ancient Egyptian diet. Giuseppe Nenci [1989: 1257] pointed out that in ancient Greek, more than fifty compounds containing -φάγος are known. Also see Emilio Sereni’s article [1981] “Note di storia dell’alimentazione nel Mezzogiorno. I Napoletani da «mangiafoggia» a «mangiamaccheroni»”.² We are going

in Western and Central Asia (in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uighur culture in China's Xinjiang),² Iran and the Caucasus, the Arabian peninsula, as well as in North Africa (in Egypt and in the Maghreb, including in Berber culture), and Sudan and the Horn of Africa. There is also some brief reference to flat bread from the Indian subcontinent, but very much can be said about Indian flat breads, and these deserve studies for their own sake. Still, Pasqualone [2018] lists (even on a geographical map ranging as far west as the Maghreb) *chapati*, *naan*, *roti*, *pitha*, *kulcha*, *bakhri*, and *dosa*, as being associated with India and Pakistan.



The respective areas of the word forms *pizza*, *pitta*, and *pinza* in Italy
(from Alinei and Nissan 2007)

to deal with Chinese doughy foods in Sec. 4 below. It was only in the early Middle Ages that Han culture (the mainstream culture of China) learned about dough from further west.

² We are going to deal with Chinese doughy foods in Sec. 4 below. It was only in the early Middle Ages that Han culture (the mainstream culture of China) learned about dough from further west.

For Iran, she lists *barbari*, *sangak*, *taftoon*, *lavash*, *khoshk*, and *jow*. As for Italy, the *Spianata di Ozieri* / *Spianata sarda* is enumerated by Pasqualone [2017], along with *pistoccu* and *carasau* (all three from Sardinia; in particular, *carasau* is from the Sardinian verb *carasare*, i.e., ‘to bake/cook until hardened’, in Italian: ‘cuocere fino a indurire’), and Pasqualone [2018] lists in addition *pitta* and *scacciuni* as being associated with Sicily, and — from northern Italy — *testarolo*, *panigaccio*, *neccio*, *piadina*, *crescenta*, and *borlengo*. Pasqualone [2017; 2018] provides a technical discussion, so that a typology emerges, along with the geo-cultural distribution of its types. The criteria of classification are technically important, and provide a framework for further research into the subject of flat breads. Cf. the article “Focaccia: Italian flat fatty bread” (Pasqualone *et al.* [2011]).³ By the way, *pitta breads* in British usage⁴ (supermarkets also have *minipitta*) typically only denotes the small round flat bread that can be cut open and stuffed. Paul Hollywood [2013: 90-93] described preparation, with eight photographs showing steps, with reference to how *pitta* bread is stuffed in Cyprus (*ibid.*: 95). The section entitled “Flatbreads” in that volume is on pp. 86-115. The kind of Iraqi soft flat bread we are going to concern ourselves with in the next section can be described as a wrap, as one can wrap food in it but cannot stuff it inside; but the section on “Wraps” in Hollywood’s book (*ibid.*, pp. 106–109) contains sugar and butter, and is fried in vegetable oil, which not at all the case of the Iraqi flat breads (and if anything, comes close to *kahi*, an Iraqi Jewish sweet baked product for Pentecost,

³ Pasqualone’s main areas of research interest are related to qualitative and nutritional improvement of cereal-based foods (bread, especially flatbreads, pasta, cookies) and of extra virgin olive oil. One of her main current projects is “Bread-making attitude of milling by-products”. Her main research interests fall in the field of cereal science and technology. Another main goal has been to set up innovative DNA-based analytical methods for food allowing food authenticity checks, particularly for the varietal traceability of Protected Designation of Origin foodstuffs.

⁴ Concerning British uses of *pitta* bread, consider the following. *TimeOut London* is a freely distributed weekly, advertising restaurants and events. In the issue of 12–18 March 2018, on p. 18 readers are invited: “Overheard something bizarre? Tweet us!”, under the rubric “Word on the street. The most ridiculous things we’ve overheard in London this week”. The second item was “My mate wiped his arse with a *pitta* bread.” Other entries included, e.g., “I’m so thick sometimes I surprise myself” (an insightful avowal), and “Oh, no! I broke my Theresa May snow globe!” (a gadget motivated by the tribulations of Britain’s beleaguered prime minister, so to speak let out in the cold by both the European Commission and the House of Commons).

but that one is a bit crisp, is dusted with sugar after being baked, and cannot be wrapped).

2. *Is the Iraqi “water-bread”, a soft flat bread, related to Pliny’s Parthian panis aquaticus? Giovanni de Serpos’ 1786 claims of an Armenian conduit for the transmission to Rome of the pane acquatico as a luxury bread*

In the summer of 2017, Antonella Pasqualone contacted Mario Alinei and (as instructed by the latter) Ephraim Nissan, concerning Alinei and Nissan [2007], because of her own research into flat breads. In the email correspondence that developed, an email by Nissan to Pasqualone on 24 August 2017 commented on a paper of hers, and remarked among the other things about the *denotatum* as well as the signifier of the Iraqi Arabic compound *khábəz-ṡāy*, literally ‘bread of water’ (as it is hydrated, water-rich as opposed to the dried, crisp version, called *gáwrəg* instead):

In Irak, del pane piatto largo (che si prepara anche in Israele per via dei tanti ebrei profughi dall’Irak nel 1950/51) la versione molle si chiama *khbiz-may / khubuz-may* — ci vuole la e rovesciata per le prime due vocali, e la emme è enfatica, un po’ mw e un po’ velarizzata — (letteralmente “pane d’acqua”, per via della mollezza), mentre la versione croccante si chiama *gawrag*.

[In Iraq, of the broad flat bread (also prepared in Israel, because of the many Jews who came as refugees in 1950/51), the soft kind is called *khbiz-may / khubuz-may* — one needs the reversed e for the first two vowels, and the m is emphatic: a bit mw and a bit velarised — (literally “bread of water”, because of the softness), whereas the crisp version is called *gawrag*.]

Iraqi Jews have brought to Israel those two kinds of Iraqi flat breads (both of them are known in Israeli Hebrew as *píta irákit*): within the culture, as mentioned, the crisp kind is known as *gáwrəg*, whereas the soft kind is known as *khábəz ṡāy*, i.e., literally, ‘bread of water’, softness being conveyed through reference to the retained wetness of the texture.

Because of that mention, in the email, of the soft kind of flat bread from Iraq being called by a compound that literally means “water-bread”, in a reply email of 24 August 2017 to Nissan, copied to Alinei, among the other things Pasqualone made an important, tantalising suggestion:

Il khibiz-may / khubuz-may / pane d’acqua mi ricorda il pane partico ricco di acqua in cui mi ero imbattuta un po’ di tempo fa, a quanto pare citato da Plinio. Poi non ho approfondito la ricerca perché esulava dallo scopo del lavoro di quel momento. Ne avevo letto al seguente link (Giovanni de Serpos. *Compendio storico di memorie cronologiche concernenti la religione e la morale della nazione armena, suddita dell’Imperio Ottomano*. 1786.) Chissà se c’è una relazione?

[The khibiz-may / khubuz-may / water-bread reminds me of the Parthian bread, which was water-rich, and across which I happened to come some time ago, and that appears to be quoted from Pliny. I did not probe further later, because it was outside the scope of the work I was doing at the time. I read about it at the following link (Giovanni de Serpos. *Compendio storico di memorie cronologiche concernenti la religione e la morale della nazione armena, suddita dell’Imperio Ottomano*. [Historical Compendium of Chronological Memoirs Concerning the Religion and Moral of the Armenian Nation, Subjected to the Ottoman Empire] 1786.) Perhaps this is related?]⁵

It is possible that the semantic motivation from “water of bread” has survived in Mesopotamia from Parthian times to modern times. Mesopotamia was under Iranian rule until the Islamic conquest, and in Roman times the Parthian Arsacid dynasty was succeeded by the Sasanian dynasty. Alexander the Great had overthrown the Achaemenid dynasty that had ruled Western Asia. The conquest of Babylon by Cyrus had been made easy because two generations after the biblical Nebuchadnezzar (i.e., the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II), Babylonians had become disaffected with the ruling dynasty because the king had imposed imported deities and an imported liturgy, and Cyrus had promised the Babylonian clergy that he would restore the traditional cult of the city.

Let us turn to the *Compendio storico* that was “divided into six books and presented to the Sacra Congregazione di Propaganda” by the man who commissioned it and funded its publication (while apparently not being the actual author: see in the next section), namely, the Marquis Giovanni de Serpos, an Armenian banker based in Venice who collaborated professionally with his brother Tommaso in Constantinople.

The passage that is relevant for our present concerns is in Vol. 1, and begins (following a passage quoted from Pliny in Latin concerning the lotus) in the last two lines on p. 40:

Merita pure di essere qui [sic] accennato il pane acquatico, ossia *Partico*, che per la sua delicatezza, e spugnosità faceva le delizie de’ Romani, e *Partico* sì [sic] nominava,

⁵ One can find the book at <https://books.google.it/>

perchè [sic] era pane esclusivamente proprio delli Re Parti, molti de' quali avendo regnato per assai anni nell'Armenia, avevano introdotto il loro lusso nelle mense de' magnati Armeni, e probabilmente da questi ne avranno preso la moda i Romani.

[It is worthwhile to mention here the aquatic or Parthian bread, which owing to its delicacy and spongy texture delighted the [ancient] Romans. It was called Parthian, because it was a kind of bread reserved to the Parthian kings, many of whom, having reigned over a long period in Armenia, introduced their luxury into the cuisine of the Armenian aristocracy, and it probably was from these, that the Romans derived the fashion for that bread.]

The *Compendio storico* involved the Armenians as a conduit, not because it is a cogent conduit (it is possible, yet not decisively cogent), but because this book was about the Armenians. He continued: “e probabilmente da questi ne avranno preso la moda i Romani; giacchè [sic] le più famose loro imprese contro i Parti hanno avuto per teatro l'Armenia, ed inoltre alcuni Re Armeni sono stati per molto tempo, parte ostaggi, e parte ospiti a Roma” (“and it probably was from these, that the Romans derived the fashion for that bread; as their most famous feats against the Parthians had their theatre of war in Armenia, and moreover, some Armenian kings had been for a long time either hostages, or guests in Rome”). Next, the *Compendio storico* turned to citing Pliny in Latin, concerning the *panis... aquaticus*. We are going to come back to Pliny's text in the last section of this article.

LIBRO PRIMO. 41

sia *Partico*, che per la sua delicatezza, e spugnosità faceva le delizie de' Romani, e *Partico* si nominava, perchè era pane esclusivamente proprio delli Re Parti, molti de' quali avendo regnato per assai anni nell' Armenia, avranno introdotto il loro lusso nelle mense de' magnati Armeni, e probabilmente da questi ne avranno presa la moda i Romani; giacchè le più famose loro imprese contro i Parti hanno avuto per teatro l' Armenia, ed inoltre alcuni Re Armeni sono stati per molto tempo, parte ostaggi, e parte ospiti in Roma. Di questo deliziosissimo pane così ne parla il sopralodato Plinio: *Panis ipsius varia genera persequi supervacuum videtur: alias ab obsoniis appellati, ut ostrearii: alias a deliciis, ut artolagani: alias a festinatione, ut speustici: nec non a coquendi ratione, ut furnacei, vel artoptitii, aut in clibanis cocti: Non pridem etiam e Parthis inuesto, quem aquaticum vocant, quoniam aqua trahitur, tenuem, & spongiosam inanitate, alii Parthicum. Summa laus, siliginis bonitate, & cribri tenuitate constat. Quidam & ovis, aut lacte subigunt: butyro vero gentes jam pacatae, ad operis pistorii genera transeunte cura &c. (l. 18. c. 11.)*

Considerando le qualità di questo pane acquatico, o Partico, che vogliam dirlo, non

XII.
Se l' albero frumen-

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sario dell' Armeno scrittore Mosè Corenense sia analogo al Sagou delle Molucche; e se alcune droghe Ar- mene si av- vicinino alle Indiane.

non sono lontano dal credere, che questa si facesse o dal più squisito di tanti generi di fromenti, che produce l' Armenia, o fors' anche dalla farina d' un albero, che Mosè Corenense chiama *frumentario*, e che vegetava al suo tempo ne' dintorni dell' Armenia provincia detta Gugaria, anticamente *Gogarena*, e codesto albero sarà stato probabilmente una spezie del *Sagou* delle Molucche, di cui eccone la descrizione, che si fa dall' autore della storia filosofica, e politica degli stabilimenti dell' Indie ec. (l. I. n. XVII. pag. 184. della edizione di Ginevra 1780 t. I.) „ Cet arbre nommé *Sagou*, „ comun dans les forets de ces isles Molu- „ ques, diffère du cocotier par ses feuilles „ plus longues, par son tronc beaucoup „ moins élevé, par ses fruits plus petits. Sa „ vegetation est d' abord fort lente. Dans les „ commencements c' est un arbrisseau garni „ d' épines, qui rendent son approche diffi- „ cile. Mais dèsque sa tige est formée, elle „ s' élève en peu de tems à la hauteur de „ trente pieds sur environ six de circonfé- „ rence, & perd insensiblement ses épines. „ Son écorce est épaisse d' un pouce; tout „ l' interieur est rempli d' une moëlle, qui se „ réduit en farine. L' arbre, qui semble ne „ croître, que pour les besoins de l' hom- „ me, lui indique cette farine par une pous- „ sière

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„ sière fine, & blanche, dont se couvre la
 „ feuille. C'est une marque certaine de la
 „ maturité du sagou. Les indiens coupent
 „ alors cet arbre par le pied, sans s'emba-
 „ rasser des fruits, dont ils ne font aucun
 „ cas; & il-le dèpechent en tronçons, pour
 „ en tirer la moëlle, ou la farine, qu'ils
 „ renferment. Après, que cette substance à
 „ été delayée dans l'eau, on la coule a tra-
 „ vers une espèce de tamis, qui retient les
 „ parties les plus grossieres. Ce qui a pas-
 „ sé est jetté dans des moules de terre,
 „ où la pâte sèche, & durcit pour des an-
 „ nées entieres. On mange le sagou sim-
 „ plement delayé avec de l'eau, bouilli,
 „ ou converti en pain. L'humanité des In-
 „ diens reserve la fleur de cette farine aux
 „ vieillards, & aux malades. Elle est quel-
 „ que fois réduite en une gelée blanche, &
 „ très delicate. " Io eccito premurosamen-
 te l'industria nazionale degli Armeni a ve-
 rificar l'esistenza di questo prezioso albero
 nelle loro contrade, perchè la sua propaga-
 zione potrebbe molto influire negli oggetti
 della pubblica economia: siccome pure l'ec-
 cito a fissare le sue osservazioni sopra al-
 cune droghe, e spezierie, che giusta la te-
 stimonianza del sopraccitato Mosè Corenen-
 se, e di Lazaro Farfense, altro scrittore
 Armeno del V. secolo, alla loro età ger-
 mi-

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minavano nell' Armenia, e ne' condimenti de' cibi se ne faceva un grande consumo. Anche oggidì gli Armeni raccolgono nella provincia specialmente di Tajca una droga, che con voce Turca essi chiamano *Sumak*, cioè *frutto immaturo*, e credo sia o l'antico amomo, ovvero l'amomide, oppure il cardamomo, ed in codesta opinione mi conferma Plinio, laddove dice: *Nascitur (amomum) & in Armenia parte, quæ vocatur Otene, & in Media, & in Ponto: adulteratur foliis punici, & gummi liquido, ut cohereat, convolvatque se in uvæ modum. Est, & quæ vocatur amomis, minus venosa, atque durior, ac minus odorata; quo apparet, aut aliud esse, aut colligi immaturum. Simile his, & nomine, & frutice cardamomum, semine oblongo; metitur eodem modo & in Arabia. Quatuor ejus genera: viridissimum ac pingue, acutis angulis, contumax fricanti, quod maxime laudatur; proximum e ruffo candicans; tertium brevius, atque nigrius; pejus tamen varium, & facile tritu, odorisque parvi. Quod verum, costo vicinum esse debet: hoc & apud Medos nascitur, pretium optimi in libras X. XII. (l. 12. c. 13.).* Sennonchè leggendo con riflessione gli Armeni scrittori, che sono in maggior riputazione, ed analizzando le loro idee attaccate all' ovvio sen-

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I N V E N E Z I A

NELLA STAMPERIA DI CARLO PALESE

MDCCLXXXVI.

CON PUBBLICA APPROVAZIONE.

3. *Concerning Giovanni de Serpos and Josip Marinović*

The Armenian banker Giovanni de Serpos was based in Venice, and in his profession he collaborated with his brother, Tommaso de Serpos, based in Constantinople. Around the same time, another banker, Sylves-

tre de Serpos, was also active in Turkey. For example, concerning a particular affair, a member of the judiciary of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, Giuseppe Vernaccini relates, in the *Collezione completa delle decisioni dell'auditore Giuseppe Vernaccini* (Vernaccini [1824: V, 190]):

Tanto la cambiale, quanto le polizze di carico furono inviate dal Sig. Litti al Sig. Tommaso De Serpos di Costantinopoli, e da questo al Sig. Marchese Giovanni De Serpos suo fratello in Venezia, il quale con sua lettera de' 20. Marzo 1776. diresse la cambiale al Sig. Domenico Francesco Belletti in Trieste, acciò ne procurasse l'accettazione, ed in difetto l'accettasse egli sotto protesto per onore del giro del Sig. Tommaso De Serpos, e con al[t]ra lettera dello stesso di 20. Marzo 1776. ne rese consapevole il Sig. Cassetti trattario, dandogli nel tempo medesimo distinta notizia delle suddette polizze di carico, che presso lui esistevano.

[Both the bill of exchange, and the bills of lading were sent by Mr. Litti to Mr. Tommaso De Serpos of Constantinople, and by the latter to Mr. the Marquis Giovanni De Serpos, his brother in Venice, who in a letter of his, dated 20 March 1776, forwarded the bill of exchange to Mr. Domenico Francesco Belletti in Trieste, with the purpose that the latter would bring about its acceptance, or failing that, he would accept it himself under protest [for non-acceptance] by honouring the endorsement by Mr. Tommaso De Serpos, and in another letter of that same day, 20 March 1776, he notified Mr. Cassetti, the drawee, giving him at the same time a separate notice of the aforementioned bills of lading, which were in his possession.]

There exists a book by Francesco Anselmi, published in Venice in 1773 at Anselmi's expenses, and dedicated to Giovanni de Serpos: *Il Socrate veneto: opera dedicata al nobile signore Giovanni de Serpos, Patrizio Romano, e Cameriere Segreto ec. della Santità Signore Clemente XIV, Papa felicemente Regnante*. Chapters include: "Dell'Amore", "Del Matrimonio", "Della Gioventù", "Della Vecchiaja", "Delle Stampe, e degli Autori", "Dell'Eloquenza" "Dell'Amore sregolato de' Figli", "Della Nascita illustre, e della moltitudine de' Servi", "Della Musica", "Del Ballo", "Della Speranza", "Della buona opinion di se stesso", "Della Nobiltà", "Dello stato ignobile", "Delle Amicizie", "De' Benefizj", and so forth. (Note that also Simone Luzzatto, a Venetian rabbi, b. 1580, d. 1663, authored a *Socrate* for a non-Jewish Venetian audience. Published in 1651, it was entitled *Socrate ouero Dell'humano sapere esercitio seriogiocoso di Simone Luzzatto hebreo venetiano. Opera nella quale si dimostra quanto sia imbecile l'humano intendimento, mentre non e diretto dalla diuina riuelatione*. On Luzzatto as an author, see a 1999 paper by Ariel Viterbo, and a 1999 paper by Ariella Lang.)

A scanned version of the original volume (Venice 1783) of *Lettere teologico-critico-morali sopra li due dubbi di coscienza concernenti gli Armeni Cattolici sudditi ottomani* about the dilemma faced by Catholic Armenians concerning whether *faut de mieux* they could legitimately receive the sacraments from the Monophysite Armenian clergy — a volume presented to the Sacra Congregazione di Propaganda by Giovanni de Serpos (which also was the case of the *Compendio storico*) — can be perused, page by page, at the Europeana website.⁶

It appears to be the case that the *Compendio storico* published in Venice under Giovanni de Serpos’ name was actually written by an Armenian cleric whose patron de Serpos was. De Serpos had commissioned both the *Lettere* and the *Compendio*. Tentatively, we would suggest that the kind of sources the author relied upon in the *Compendio* testify to his not being an Armenian erudite, but rather an erudite from the Venetian sphere, and in fact he was an ethnic Croatian.

A Croatian⁷ Jesuit from Perast,⁸ Father Josip Marinović, wrote *Dissertazione polemico-critica sopra due dubbi di coscienza concernenti gli armeni cattolici*, in 1783, at the request of a wealthy Armenian banker, Giovanni de Serpos. In the dissertation, Marinović defends Armenian Catholics⁹ in the Ottoman Empire who received the sacraments from the Monophysite Armenian Apostolic Church,¹⁰ which part of the clergy in Rome disapproved. Marinović wrote that Armenians had papal approval for performing rites in monophysite churches, as well as attending an Armenian rite mass, giving to charities, and observing holidays based on the Armenian calendar.

During a theological debate, Marinović wrote a three-volume work with more than 1,600 pages titled *Compendio storico di memorie cronologiche concernenti la religione e la morale della nazione Armena*, which was to be the first modern history of Armenians written in the West. In his work, Marinović wrote about Armenian geography, a review of a political and church history of Armenia, the history of their catholicoi and synods, and a review of Armenian customs and other political and religious matters.

Marinović’s work influenced a final political and ecclesiastical solution to the problem of Armenian Catholics. With help from the Austrian and Russian Empire, the Vatican gained a recognition of Armenian Catholics in the Ottoman Empire and founded

⁶ <https://www.europeana.eu/>

⁷ Quoted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenia%E2%80%93Croatia_relations (which cites a short paper in Croatian by Lupis 2009).

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perast>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Catholic_Church

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Apostolic_Church

their Archeparchy¹¹ in Istanbul in 1830. Marinović's work laid a foundation for modern research of Armenian history.

In further detail, Vinicije Lupis has written (Lupis, n.d., pp. 13–14):

But the most important person associated with the Croatian-Armenian relations was a Jesuit[,] Josip Marinović, born in 1741 in the nearby town of Perast [near Dubrovnik]. He was educated at the Illyrian College in Loretto [*recte* Loreto], and in Rome, and taught at the grammar school in Livorno, Viterbo, and Fermo. After the abolition of the Jesuit order, he resides in his native Perast and then went to his brother's place, a merchant in Venice. Since 1785, he lectures in the Monastery of San Stefano in Venice, and was renowned as a scholar and orator which drew attention to the rich Armenian marquis Giovanni Serposiana (de Serpos), who had been trying to help the Armenian Catholics in their difficult situation in the Ottoman Empire.

Marquis Serpos, in Rome, in vain attempted to protect the Armenian Catholic community, so he asked Marinović to write a theological and legal debate in their defence: the Marquis Serposijan published it at his own expense and under his own name, and he dedicated it to the Roman Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith: A piece titled "Dissertazione polemico-critica di sopra due dubbi coscienza [*recte*: di coscienza] concernenti gli Armeni Cattolica [sic!] [Lupis' ellipsis dots] / A polemical critical discussions [sic] of two cases of conscientious [sic!] Armenian catholics" (Venice, 1783). A copy of the debate, rich leather-bound with gold print, but without graphics with Armenian inscription, which has been torn off, is kept in the archives of the parish of St. Nicholas in Perast; where his portrait is also kept, and there is the complete discussion with the opening graphics in the Archives of the parish of St. Eustace in Dobrota. All his other works are still kept in perast.

Marinovic [sic] proves in his work that the Armenian Catholics could perform the rituals in disunified chu[r]ch, for which they had papal approval, to attend Holy Mass according to the Armenian Rite, give to charity, to celebrate some holidays according to the old Armenian calendar, without having been subjected to the ecclesiastical court. To confirm all presented, [sic] Marinović agve an ample evidence from canon law, theology and papal documents. This work had a very positive response, but also was judged negatively at the University of Siena.

The bishop of Hvar and the Dominican Ivan Dominik Stratico was dragged into this discussion, who writes [sic] the document in defence of the Jesuit Benedetto tetam [sic] in 1786 entitled "Risposta al Signor Abbate Paolo Marcello del Mare" [i.e., Marinović]. During this theological conflict Marinović compiled extensive three-volume work with more than 1,600 pages, also published in 1786 under the name of Se[r]pos called "Compendino [*recte* Compendio] storico di memorie cronologiche concernente la religion e la morale della nazione Armenians [sic!] / Historical Overview of chronological memories on the faith and the morality of the Armenian people".

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Catholic_Archeparchy_of_Istanbul

Note the 18th-century Italian adaptation, *Serposiana*, of the surname whose Armenian form is *Serposian*, but whose more usual Italian and French form was (and still is, for living family members) *de Serpos*. Also note the Italianised form, *del Mare*, of the Croatian surname *Marinović*. The clergyman’s lay name was *Iosip*, but as can be seen from the last paragraph in the quotation, his clerical forenames were different. In the title “Risposta al Signor Abbate Paolo Marcello del Mare”, *abbate* stands not for *abbot*, but rather for *abbé*, as a form of respect for a member of the secular clergy.

Andrea Nicolotti, in his 2014 book *From the Mandylyon of Edessa to the Shroud of Turin: The Metamorphosis and Manipulation of a Legend*, “reconstructs the history and iconography of an ancient image of Christ, the acheiropoieton (‘not made by human hands’) Mandylyon of Edessa. He refutes the theory that the Mandylyon still exists and is known as the Shroud of Turin”, concluded his “Conclusions” by stating, on p. 203: “We can therefore end this analysis by quoting the 1786 opinion of the Marquis Giovanni de Serpos, in regard to the reliability of that ‘sweet illusion’ and the ‘birth of a devout imagination’ in the legend of Abgar: ‘Everything so narrated must be counted as mere fable’”.

In fn. 39 on p. 203, Nicolotti quoted more fully from pp. 155–156 of Vol. 1 of the *Compendio storico*: “It is not, therefore, without regret that I here present you with those reasons, that some believe to be a sweet illusion; and my impartiality wants me to tell you why many critics deem to be a birth of a devout imagination both the abovementioned letters [of Abgar]¹² and all that is said about them by many a writer. They say faithfully that everything so far narrated must be counted as mere fable” (Nicolotti’s English translation, his brackets).¹³

¹² The Christian legend of Abgar has as its protagonist Abgar V. The historical king by that name (see on him https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abgar_V) died around 40 C.E., and had the epithet *Ukamma* (the Black). He was the King of Osroene with his capital at Edessa, i.e., present-day Urfa in Turkey. The Abgar legend is prominent in Armenian culture, and as according to the Armenian historian Moses of Chorene (ca. 410–490s) Abgar V was an Armenian, Abgar V appears on an Armenian 100,000 Dram banknote ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:100,000_Armenian_dram_-_2009_\(obverse\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:100,000_Armenian_dram_-_2009_(obverse).jpg)).

<http://www.jakoblorberbooks.com/e-books/Letters-of-Jesus/Letters-of-Jesus.pdf> contains an English translation from a publication of 1851 by J. Lorber, of “Correspondence between Abgarus Ouchama, King of Edessa, and Jesus of Nazareth”.

¹³ Nicolotti begins his “Conclusions” by recapitulating as follows [2014: 202]: “The legend behind the story of the Mandylyon of Edessa is derived from another, older Syriac legend, which began with an exchange of letter between King Abgar of Edessa

The foregoing enables us to better understand how Marinović was situated in the intellectual scene of the second half of the 18th century, in the Age of Enlightenment and as a Jesuit (at a time when the standing of the Jesuits was far from easy, being challenged in some Catholic polities). In the example at hand, Marinović was surgically removing a colourful yet unnecessary piece of lore, by separating it from doctrine, so as to remove from the latter a vulnerability.¹⁴

and Jesus Christ. Slowly the content of the letter written by Jesus, along with its apotropaic function for the city, were transferred, as from the fifth century, onto an image that is not part of the earliest versions of the story. In the sixth century, the image itself, which was originally a colored picture of the face of Jesus, was transformed, especially in the Byzantine environment, into a miraculous imprint of Jesus' face left on a cloth, but not everyone was aware of this evolution. Several exemplars of the image — perhaps slightly individualized in the features shown — began to compete with one another for preeminence, and countless reproductions of each were produced, all sharing some key elements: the presence of the towel that showed only the face of a living Jesus. The legends that relate the transformation of the painting into an acheiropoieton are comparable, although they differ in some details. One of these Mandyliion was moved to Constantinople in 944, where it remained until the Fourth Crusade. It was then sold to Louis IX of France and disappeared in the chaos of the French Revolution. We can somehow determine the size and the shape of the Constantinopolitan Mandyliion thanks to two copies in Genoa and Rome”.

However (Nicolotti [2014: 198]): “The Eastern legend of the Mandyliion was almost unknown in France and clearly the Veronica legend has become the dominant backstory for the icon. According to the most recent version of the legend, Veronica was a woman from Jerusalem, who, seeing Jesus carrying his cross on his way to the Calvary, gave him a cloth so that he might wipe the drops of agony from his forehead with it. After using the napkin, Jesus handed it back to her with the image of his face miraculously impressed upon it. However, the primitive form of the legend (sixth century) is similar to that of the Mandyliion: the image was not an acheiropoieton but a painting made by Veronica herself, and the story was not set during the Passion”.

¹⁴ Tales not found in Scripture yet concerning characters from Scripture are found in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Jewish community of the Crown of Aragon was forced to take part in the Disputation of Barcelona of 1263 (the main Jewish participant was Moses Nachmanides), to defend Judaism against the charges of a convert from Judaism, Pablo Christiani. The latter accused Judaism because of such tales as found in post-biblical sources, and Nachmanides stated that believing or disbelieving these is optional. “Before the disputation took place, it was already known that Pablo Christiani was going to use, as an argument against Judaism, the presence of legends hard to believe in the extra-biblical Jewish tradition. A diplomatic, yet trenchant letter in Hebrew to Pablo Christiani was authored by Jacob ben Elijah (Jacob de Lattes, Jacob ben Elijah ben Isaac of Carcassonne), a Provençal rabbi, and apparently a relative of the apostate. [...] The family had suffered also because the apostate had taken his chil-

4. *Naum Jasny's insights about Pliny's panis aquaticus, and concluding remarks*

One can see that Giovanni de Serpos, or rather Josip Marinović, took a Pindaric flight from the *pane acquatico* and Armenian cultivation of

dren from his wife, who had remained Jewish: Jacob's epistle mentions this sorry family matter in rhymed prose" (Nissan [2014: 238]). "What makes the epistle extraordinary, for folklore studies, is that Jacob ben Elijah developed a sober, rationalistic argument about why the place of folkloric tales about characters from religion has a tolerable, if not necessarily desirable place in a culture. And this, even when such tales defy reason. He claimed that the common people have a demand for such tales. And yet, he wasn't happy about those who originate such tales, as in fact he states: 'if only they stopped!'. He adopts a practical viewpoint, and claims that a Jew has an incumbent obligation to believe in the Hebrew Bible, and it is indifferent whether that person also believes anything that is not incompatible with it. As an example, he mentions Og, the King of Bashan, who was defeated by Moses. Scripture states the length of Og's iron bed. Were I to say that Og was very tall, this is unproblematic for orthodoxy, unlike if I was to claim that Og was a dwarf. What is fascinating about the epistle, is that Jacob ben Elijah translated into good medieval Hebrew several Christian hagiographic legends, in order to prove to Pablo Christiani that his argument against Judaism could be made quite forcefully against his new faith, too. But the fact stands that because of those circumstances, a collection of such legends appears in medieval Hebrew literature. The Provençal rabbi who translated them left them with no commentary, considering the fabulous nature of the stories themselves quite eloquent, for the purposes of his counterpolemic. Those tales he related in Hebrew were not about articles of faith: those Christian legends, too, do not require the believer to believe in them. In this respect, they are like tales from Jewish homiletics" (Nissan [2014: 238–239]). "The apostate, as could be expected, wasn't persuaded. He was the champion of the Christian side in the disputation that had caused much fear among the Jewish minority. Afterwards, he moved from Spain to Tavormina, i.e., the town of Taormina in Sicily. [...] For the medieval Jewish [Hebrew-language] text that gave the information under discussion, it was quite apt that the place was called *Tavor-mina*, that is to say, in Aramaic, 'Break the heretic' (or *Tevar-mina*, 'Broke the heretic'). In Naples, even at present, somebody boastful may take for himself the nickname *Schiattamuorte* ('he who makes death itself die'). It is less surprising perhaps that it was the place itself (*Tavo-mina*) 'a far schiattare il farabutto' (as one could state in modern Italian), or at any rate this gave some measure of consolation (the kind of consolation of the weak, who can afford little else) for the apostate's former co-religionists. Or was it just one former co-religionist? The one who wrote about the pun, and presumably his medieval readers. They were left with the satisfaction that the apostate who had endangered the Jews of Christendom had had his comeuppance, and that the name of the place, Taormina, testified to that comeuppance: after all, that was the way the place was called even before Pablo Christiani died there" (Nissan [2014: 239–240]).

cereals to the *sagou* (i.e., sago, a starch extracted from the pith of *Metroxylon* palms) from the Moluccas, simply because his attention had shifted: one may be tempted to say that this 18th-century marquis had not resisted the urge to display a cabinet of curiosities. Were it not the case that the author was the erudite cleric Marinović. Nevertheless, his proposal concerning the transmission of Parthian bread to Rome through hostages or guests from the Armenian nobility during the Parthian Wars deserves attention.

The main contribution of the present paper is the tentative proposal that the Iraqi “water bread” (so called because of its softness, as it retained its wetness as opposed to the dry *gawrag*)¹⁵ bears a name that had

¹⁵ In an article entitled “The Westernization of Iranian Culinary Culture”, Chehabi wrote (2003, p. 45): “Bread was the staple everywhere except on the shores of the Caspian Sea, where several varieties of rice were grown”, with fn. 19 stating: “A lower quality round rice was eaten by poorer people, and a long-grained variety by the wealthier” (this is familiar from northern Italy, too, where rice whose grains are below a given ratio between length and width is known by the name *risone*), and with references in fn. 18 for the “the bread/rice dichotomy, which is also present in India and China”. Note however that bread is prominent in Iraq, even though Iraq, with her canals and marshes, is clearly a rice country, with rice being quite prominent in the cuisine (under the Hashemi monarchy, there were riots named after Abultámman, a politician from a landowning family whose surname means “owner of rice [fields]”). In fact, Chehabi also wrote [2003: 52]: “The most important element in Iranians’ (and indeed all Middle Easterners’) diet is bread, of which different varieties exist. Even by the late twentieth century, bread accounted for over half of the average Iranian’s daily dietary intake. [...] The habit of many older Iranians to accompany any dish, even pasta, with bread, or to use a piece of bread held in the left hand to push food onto the spoon may stem from its use as a container and an aid to eating”. Concerning pre-Islamic Mesopotamia and its large Jewish community (its socio-economics was discussed by Beer 1982), there exists a talmudic statement: “Babylonians are fools, as they eat bread with bread” (see below). Traditional Iranian breads are flat breads; see Kouhestani *et al.* [1969]. “After the [Khomeinist] revolution, consumption of bread [in Iran] increased again, as, unlike rice, it is subsidized. While bread is the traditional staple of the Iranian plateau, the generalized consumption of it for breakfast is probably a recent phenomenon” (Chehabi [2003: 53]).

John Cooper writes [1993: 43]: “The Palestinian Jews were contemptuous of the diet of their fellow Jews in Babylonia, particularly the various dishes made from grain; they ridiculed their brethren in Babylonia, who ate porridge with bread, giving rise to a jibe about ‘the foolish Babylonians who eat bread with bread’. R. Hisda claimed that he had once ‘inquired of the fastidious people of Huzal whether it was better to eat the porridge of wheat, with bread of wheat, and that of barley, with bread of barley, or the porridge of wheat with the bread of barley, and vice versa’. [...] Moreover, it appears that when the Palestinian Jews prepared a porridge of grits, they made it in a distinctive

an antecedent in Parthian times in the Western parts of the Arsacid Empire, upon the evidence of a Parthian *panis aquaticus* given by Pliny, and which was considered an exotic luxury bread in early imperial Rome.¹⁶

fashion, seasoning it with oil and garlic (M[ishnah, in tractate] *Nedarim* 6:10; M[ishnah, in tractate] *Tevul Yom* 2:3); and it is probable that the Palestinian [Jewish] community [in imperial Roman times] consumed fewer grain dishes and larger amounts of vegetables, boiled beans, and lentils than the Babylonian Jews did (M. *Tevul Yom* 1:1, 1:2, 2:5; M. *Niddah* 9:7). Nonetheless, gruels such as *puls* and *alica* were popular in the Roman world, which deeply influenced Palestinian [Jewish] culinary trends. There were Talmudic references to a food known as *helka*, a term used to describe individual grains split into two sections and probably eaten in the form of a porridge, for the word may have been related to the well-known dish of *alica* and *halica*, which was a porridge made of wheat".

Ran Zadok (an Iraqi-born Israeli professor, a specialist on ancient Mesopotamia) remarked as follows (Zadok 1978, p. 255), under the headline "On the Talmudic dictum, 'These Babylonians are fools, for eat bread with bread'": "Rabbi Zera (end of the third century and beginning of the fourth century C.E.), himself a Babylonian Amora [i.e., post-200 Sage] who immigrated into Palestine, mocked the Babylonians who eat bread with bread (*nahāmā b'nahāmā*, B[abylonian Talmud, tractate] Beṣ[a] 16^a; *laḥma b'laḥma*, B. Ned[arim] 49^b), i.e., eat farinaceous food, such as barley broth or porridge (*daysā*), together with bread. In fact this culinary practice is recorded in Babylonia as early as the second half of the second millennium B.C.E. In a Middle-Babylonian medical letter (*BE*, 17/I, 33, lines 8–9), a patient suffering from lack of appetite complains that she could not finish a piece of bread (*akalu*) with the porridge (*pappasu*; cf. H. Waschow, *MAOG*, IO/I, 1936, p. 28). The fact that inability to eat bread porridge was a prominent symptom of lack of appetite suggests this combination was indeed common in Babylonia. Eating bread together with porridge (e.g., wheat porridge, Arabic *burghul*) is still common in modern Iraq, as I was informed by Iraqi Jews". Note that *burghul* is the Arabic collective noun denoting broken wheat grain, an alternative to rice (itself a major staple in modern Iraq). The acronyms Zadok used are ones drawn from the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* ((or then, see those acronyms at http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=abbreviations_for_assyriology). In particular, *BE* stands for The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia 1893 ff.). *MAOG* is the acronym for *Mitteilungen der Altorientalischen Gesellschaft*.

¹⁶ In his article "The Daily Bread of the Ancient Greeks and Romans", Naum Jasny explained [1950: 246]: "If all three grades of Pliny's three-grade grindings were mixed together, they would have yielded a flour which (provided the grain were clean and the baking proper) would have produced grey and coarse but welltasting and palatable bread. However, the 3rd grade would now pass only as animal feed not only in the United States but in most of the world. Yet bread was made and used both as animal feed and human food in antiquity even from the coarse bran (*panis furfureus*), obtained in addition to the three grades of 'flour'". Moreover (*ibid.*): "Porridge rather than bread was the principal food of the Romans in their early history. A saying has it that the

By itself, this does not prove that the kind of bread denoted was the same in Parthian/Roman antiquity as in 20th and 21st-century Iraq (and Israel). It may be that it was the same, but it also may be that the same semantic motivation was reapplied to the naming another kind of very pleasantly soft bread. There is a strong possibility that whereas the literal sense of the compound as formed was the same, the kinds of bread denoted were not the same.

Furthermore, we have documented the occurrence in Italian from the late 18th century of a term for an item of material culture that still exists in Iraq and is named similarly (as per the literal sense of the compound). In the Italian context, *pane acquatico* is an instance of “translationese”, the model being a compound found in Pliny, where the words of the compound *panis aquaticus* are not contiguous.

Naum Jasny, who was affiliated with the Food Research Institute at Stanford University, has written [1950: 249-250]:

While better than the [modern peasants'] Yugoslavian breads, those from Galicia [in Poland and Ukraine] also were made from whole meal, coarsely ground in querns, with little or no cleaning. The material was rye, in two or three cases with an admixture of potatoes; in one case with the admixture of barley. The breads were so inadequately fermented that MAURIZIO considered them unleavened. The average specific weight of nine of those breads, ascertained when they were no longer fresh, was 0.59; the weight would probably have been around 0.65, if the breads had been fresh when weighed [...]

The standard breads of antiquity probably were as heavy as, or even heavier than those from Galicia.¹⁷ Classical sources have quite amazing things to report on this score. PLINY (XVIII, 105) said: “It is not so very long since we have bread introduced from Parthia, known as waterbread (*aquaticus*) from a method of kneading it, of drawing out the dough by the aid of water, a process which renders it incomparably light and full of holes, like a sponge. Some call this bread Parthian”.

GALEN (2nd century A.D.) was even more specific, when he wrote of a floating (*plutós*) bread, “which has this name because of its lightness; it does not sink in water but remains on the surface like a cork” [...] This bread was believed by him to have been of little nutritive value, but easily digestible and good for the sick. The present writer has to confess that he unsuccessfully tried to make from wheat flour a bread so

Roman legionnaires conquered the world on porridge. The principal material for porridge in Italy was emmer (a hulled wheat), from which the hull but not the skin was removed”.

¹⁷ Jasny pointed out [1950: 251]: “It must be remembered that the Pompeian breads [unearthed in Pompeii] represented commercial bread — possibly leavened — from wheat in a town close to the capital of the world, while the breads of Galicia were peasant breads made from rye. One can be almost certain that the Pompeian breads were at least twice as heavy as modern wheat bread in Europe”.

heavy that it would sink in water. While the bread was horrible, and certainly seemed uneatable to him, it was moderately lighter than water. Only after he shifted to real corn meal (of course with nothing but water added), he did succeed in obtaining a kind of bread which would just sink.

Jasny further offered [1950: 251]:

The extract from PLINY quoted above shows that he did not have any idea that fermentation, whatever be its cause, produces the holes in the bread. One need not be an expert in baking to realize the gap between the baking practices employed by the Romans in the beginning of the Christian era and the present ones, when one reads in PLINY (XVIII, 106):

Picenum still maintains its ancient reputation for making bread which it was the first to invent, *alica* being the material employed. The *alica* is kept in soak for nine days, and is kneaded on the tenth with raisin juice, in the shape of long rolls, after which it is baked in the oven in earthen pots, till these break. This bread is never eaten until it has been soaked, which is mostly done in milk mixed with honey.

One is tempted to think that the raisin juice and the milk mixed with honey were added to offset the sourness and foulness developed in the dough during the long exposure to the bacilli of the air. Yet Picenum bread is mentioned as a delicacy even by the gourmet Athenaeus.

As appreciated baked product known as "foreign bread" occurs in the history of early medieval China. David Knechtges has written [1997: 233, col. 2]:

The sesame is another foreign food that was very important in the early medieval period. Although Berthold Laufer [in *Sino-Iranica*, p. 290] argued that the home of the sesame was in tropical Africa, it actually may have originated in India. Laufer was convinced that sesame was introduced into China from Iranian regions, but he was not able to determine when this introduction took place. However, we can be sure that the Chinese had sesame as early as the Han dynasty, for it is mentioned in a number of Han-dynasty texts, including the important agricultural treatise *Simin yueling* 四民月令 (Monthly Ordinances for the Four Peoples) which was compiled by Cui Shi 崔寔, who died around A.D. 170. Sesame was important primarily for its seeds, which were crushed to make oil, or used whole or ground as a flavoring for various foods. Beginning in the early medieval period, sesame was used to make a type of baked or steamed bread known as the *hu bing* 胡餅 or "foreign cake".

Whole sesame seeds were sprinkled on top, much like the sesame cake known in modern Chinese as *shao bing* 燒餅. Zhao Qi 趙岐 (ca. 108–201), the famous commentator to the *Mencius*, reputedly made a living as a *hu bing* seller. The baked variety of the *hu bing* was cooked in a special oven called *hu lu* 胡爐 — “foreign stove”. Although we have no description of it, it is tempting to think that this was a type of *tandoor*. The baked sesame cake probably is a smaller type of the Iranian *nan* bread, specimens of which actually have been found in Tang-dynasty tombs.

Doughy foods were apparently only adopted in China in the early Middle Ages (Knechtges [1997: 234]:

The mention of cakes and breads immediately suggests associations with the cooking of Central Asia, India, and especially the Near East. Indeed, it was not until the early medieval period that the Chinese learned how to make the various doughy foods for which Chinese cookery is famous. Although a definite connection is difficult to make, there are a few pieces of evidence that indicate that Chinese contact with western, southern, and central Asian peoples provided Chinese knowledge of foreign breads and other doughy foods. [...]

The Chinese were later than most civilizations in applying the process of fermentation to the making of leavened dough. The Chinese did not begin making dough out of wheat flour until the Warring States or early Han period, probably because the process of flour milling was not widely known in China until then. Berthold Laufer, writing¹⁸ in 1909, claimed in fact that the flour mill, which is found in Han archaeological sites, was an importation from the West. Joseph Needham cautiously speculates that the rotary mill might have originated in the Middle East and reached China around the Han period.

Once they discovered how to make dough from wheat flour, the Chinese quickly became experts at making all manner of doughy concoctions, which included steamed bread, flat bread, stuffed buns, many varieties of filled dumplings, baked sesame breads, boiled dough-strips, and noodles. Already in the Han period such foods were

given the generic name of *bing* 餅, which is a word that in modern Chinese is restricted to flat or round cakes. However, the term *bing* in the medieval period had a broader meaning¹⁹ — it is almost as broad as the original meaning of the Italian *pasta*,

¹⁸ Laufer [1909: 15-35].

¹⁹ Knechtges explained [1997: 234-235]: “The term *bing* is found in a number of Han-dynasty lexical works. As I have shown in an article published in the 1986 *JAOS* issue dedicated to the late Edward Schafer, (see Knechtges [1985: 58-59]), the basic meaning of the word is ‘to blend’ — that is, to blend water and flour to make a dough that can be shaped and cooked in various ways. In medieval Chinese, the word *bing* could include breads, cakes, buns, certain kinds of porridge, thin pancakes, dumplings, ravioli, noodles, even a kind of omelette. Although *bing* were primarily made from

which according to the food historian Toussaint-Samat “means a paste or dough made from flour of any kind mixed with water, whether for porridge, gruel, pancakes or bread, or the types of pasta now regarded as specifically Italian dishes”.

The latter quotation within the quotation is from Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat’s *A History of Food* (1992, p. 187). We still tend to associate some foods with their cultural source. Albert Leonard has pondered [2004: 69, col. 2]):

Food is culture, culture is food. What should we think of the famous dictum of eighteenth century French gastronome J.A. Brillat-Savarin, “Tell me what you eat and I shall tell you who you are”. Was he correct? Both matso and tortillas are flat breads and both are available in a modern supermarket. However, you will rarely find them together in the spacious bakery section, instead they are usually found — culturally segregated from each other — in different sections of the “ethnic foods” aisle where culturally intuitive buyers know exactly where to find them. Could it be that we are not what we eat, but rather that we eat what we are?

Earlier on, on that same page in Leonard [2004], one finds these two paragraphs:

At its most basic, bread begins as a simple, but nourishing gruel consisting of flour / meal, water, and perhaps a little salt. When subsequently kneaded and exposed to heat this simple mixture becomes a kind of flatbread. Inoculation of the thickened gruel with yeast (either naturally or intentionally) will produce a larger, lighter product. The reason that such a simple, almost universal food product appears in a seemingly endless number of variations is that members of each society will add to this basic recipe an

wheat, there were also *bing* made from millet and rice. These Chinese pastas could be boiled, baked, steamed, or deep-fried. Boiling was usually reserved for a particular kind

of pasta which was simply called *tang bing* 湯餅. The word literally means ‘boiled pasta’, but it is the ancient generic name for boiled noodles. The Chinese were eating noodles as early as the Han dynasty. In the Former Han there was a central gov-

ernment office called the *tang guan* 湯官 (literally ‘boiled-food officer’) whose task it was to provide boiled pasta for the emperor and his entourage. Scholars have assumed that this pasta consisted mainly of noodles. Another Han-dynasty source mentions two kinds of boiled noodle which it cautions should not be eaten in the summer months, for in the summer heat, people drank excessive amounts of water, reputedly making the noodles difficult to digest. Noodles were made with unleavened dough. The basic technique was to mix flour and water to make a dough that was kneaded into strips or pulled in the fashion of the modern ‘thrown noodle’. [...].

ingredient or a flourish that is part of their own culture, thereby making it their own. Sometimes the connection is remembered and understood by its modern practitioners; all too often it has been forgotten.

For instance, behind the absence of a leavening agent and the speed with which Hebrew matso dough is mixed, lies the long, collective memory of a people's flight from slavery. This history is incorporated into the making of matso and the food very much becomes a celebration of that heritage. However, if you ask a modern tortilla-maker why he/she adds powdered lime to the masa, you will probably be told that it improves the flavor. Evidently forgotten are Aztec and Mayan efforts — at least as old as the Hebrew Exodus from Egypt — to correct a niacin-poor diet in order to combat pellagra and other dietary deficiencies by cooking lime-rich, wood ash with the corn. This process is known as “nixtamalization” from the Aztec/Nahuatl word *nixtamal*. Today we eat these foods for their taste, often unaware of the centuries of cultural tradition that each possesses. We are not alone in this lack of awareness, nor have we been through the centuries. After the Columbian Exchange, when Europeans brought maize back to the “Old World”, the new product traveled alone, without its cultural baggage. In hindsight the result should have been predictable, when the unnixtamalized maize replaced the grain in polenta, sixteenth century Italians were confronted with the same dietary deficiencies²⁰ that earlier had been all but eliminated among the cultures of the “New World”. One man's matso is definitely not another man's massa.

²⁰ Unawareness of cultural baggage at a geographical remove where a particular item of knowledge is focal, may result (for some consumers) in worse than dietary deficiencies. In 2018, the Asda supermarket chain in London (and the rest of the United Kingdom) modified the recipe of a basic kind bread of its own brand, by mixing in flour of broadbeans. This made the taste worse, and the new ingredient, while indicated in the list of ingredients on the packaging, was not listed among allergens, even though these are listed conspicuously. The manufacturer was evidently blissfully unaware of the danger of *favism* or *fabism*, which may have cataclysmic consequences for some consumers (including, say, a child becoming blind and paralytic). And yet, British newspapers in 2018 had reported more than once about youngsters who died (not of favism) after eating food whose ingredients had not been properly labeled by the respective manufacturers. Moreover, especially London's population is ethnically and genetically quite diverse. Favism, the dangerous allergy to broadbeans (see e.g. Crosby [1956], De Flora *et al.* [1985]), often occurs e.g. among Kurdish Jews, and less frequently among other Iraqi Jews. Among Italians, *favismo* is especially associated with Sardinians (these form a population that is genetically more apart than Italy's other inhabitants). Meloni *et al.* [1992] explain: “Favism is a potentially fatal manifestation of glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficiency, and it is therefore a public health problem in areas where this genetic abnormality is common. In the district of Sassari (northern Sardinia), the frequency of G6PD male hemizygotes is approximately 7.5%, and therefore all newborns since 1971 have been screened for G6PD deficiency”. Favism also occurs in Sicily (Russo *et al.* [1972]), Calabria, and Liguria (Sansone *et al.* [1958a, cf. 1958b]). Because of the risk of favism, the city council of Messina, in north-east Sicily, forbids the cultivation of broadbeans anywhere near primary or secondary schools catering to children up to their early teens, and forbids selling broadbeans or

Let us finish this paper by relating a miracle tale from an Islamic *ḥadīth*, concerning flat breads: it is a multiplication of loaves miracle ascribed to Muḥammad, and of which various versions exist.²¹ It was told upon the authority of Iṣḥāq ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Ṭalḥa, an administrator of estates, who allegedly learned about it from a close associate of Muḥammad, “the conveniently longeval Companion Anas b. Mālīk” (Juynboll [2001: 313, fn. 60]). The tale is alleged to be told in the first person in Anas b. Mālīk’s wording. We quote from Juynboll [2001: 313-314, their brackets]:

[My stepfather] Abū Ṭalḥa said to [his wife, my mother] Umm Sulaym: “I just heard the Prophet’s voice which sounded weak and it occurred to me that he might be hungry. Do you have something to eat?” “Yes”, she answered and produced some flat breads of barley. Then she took a cloth, wrapped the bread in part of it, shoved it under my dress and draped the other part over my head. Then she sent me to the Prophet. I went out and found him sitting in the prayer site amidst a number of people. As I approached him, he asked: “Did Abū Ṭalḥa send you?” “Yes”, I replied. “Because of food?”, he asked. “Yes”, I said. Then he addressed those who were there with him and said: “Stand up”, and he went out, with me walking ahead of them. When I came to Abū Ṭalḥa, I told him what had happened. Abū Ṭalḥa said to his wife: “The Prophet is on his way with a number of people and we do not have enough food to give them!” But she said:

peas other than in sealed packaging, and shops selling these must display signs warning the public that fresh pulses are on sale (Ioli *et al.* [2012, p. 71]). Favism has also been reported from Iran (Daneshbod 1975), and has been studied in Israel (Razin *et al.* [1968]) among other places. Sigerist [1961] described favism in a Greek perspective on the history of medicine. Arguably, it is significant, as far as the geography of the disease is concerned, that there is an Arabic version at the website of the Associazione Italiana Favismo. The latter maintains a bibliography online (Beutler, 2019 when last accessed; Luzzatto, 2019 when accessed). There are types of favism associated with, and named after, Canton and Guadalajara, as well as an African type, and cases from the Iberian Peninsula where among the earliest studied.

²¹ Juynboll [2001] suggests that the original inspiration was from the miracle of loaves from the Gospels, through an Arabic Muslim conduit. Thematic parallels shared by Christian hagiography and other religious traditions are a matter of course in folklore studies (see, e.g., Nissan [2014 (2015); 2013 (2014)]). It even happens that a narrative from some hagiographic tradition, such as a tale about Moses dying while smelling a rose, has a parallel in history: Nissan [2009a] indicated it in the Neapolitan Jacobin Settembrini being led to prison and being offered by a Sanfedist a rose to smell, but it contained a nail with which he was deliberately wounded. Cf. Nissan [2009b]. Another example is bull-riding cultural heroes: the Iranic Afrīdūn / Freydūn / Ferēdūn, as well (in a humorous passage in the Hebrew-language medieval *Life of Ben Sira*) Joshua at the conquest of Jericho (Nissan [2011]).

“God and His Messenger know best [what should be done]”. Abū Ṭalḥa went out to meet the Prophet and thereupon they came inside. The Prophet said: “Umm Sulaym, show us what you have got”. She produced the bread. The Prophet ordered it to be crumbled and she squeezed from a leather sack some clarified butter over it to season it. Next the Prophet uttered some words over it and said: “Invite ten men to come in”. Inside they ate until they were satisfied and then they left. Then he ordered that another group of ten men be let inside. They ate until they were satisfied and then they left too. The Prophet told other groups of ten men to come inside, all of whom ate until they were satisfied. In all, seventy or eighty men were thus fed.

Given the setting in Arabia, the bread was flat bread. It was barley bread, which signals that it was not the very best bread. Nevertheless, barley bread was a common type of bread, because of how widespread barley was in Western Asia.²² However, butter was added: a “bread and butter” issue.

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²² It is interesting to point out that in recent years, because of the demand for gluten-free baked products, substitute flours have been experimented with; see the article “Gluten-free bread-making trials from cassava (*Manihot esculenta* Crantz) flour and sensory evaluation of the final product” by Pasqualone *et al.* [2010].

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