



# The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller

*Carlo Ginzburg*

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*The Cheese and the Worms* is an incisive study of popular culture in the sixteenth century as seen through the eyes of one man, the miller known as Menocchio, who was accused of heresy during the Inquisition and sentenced to death. Carlo Ginzburg uses the trial records to illustrate the religious and social conflicts of the society Menocchio lived in.

For a common miller, Menocchio was surprisingly literate. In his trial testimony he made references to more than a dozen books, including the Bible, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Mandeville's *Travels*, and a "mysterious" book that may have been the Koran. And what he read he recast in terms familiar to him, as in his own version of the creation: "All was chaos, that is earth, air, water, and fire were mixed together; and of that bulk a mass formed?just as cheese is made out of milk?and worms appeared in it, and these were the angels."

Ginzburg's influential book has been widely regarded as an early example of the analytic, case-oriented approach known as microhistory. In a thoughtful new preface, Ginzburg offers his own corollary to Menocchio's story as he considers the discrepancy between the intentions of the writer and what gets written. The Italian miller's story and Ginzburg's work continue to resonate with modern readers because they focus on how oral and written culture are inextricably linked. Menocchio's 500-year-old challenge to authority remains evocative and vital today.



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