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EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: Ancient Pompeian fresco depicting a rooster with fruit and pomegranates (79 AD), Pompeii

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Tariffs are driving *the world mad*

Italian exports are of high quality, almost niche, and will always be well received.

My first memory of tariffs on imports dates to the 1960s, when innovative new Japanese motorcycles were entering the market: Honda, Kawasaki, Yamaha. To protect its obsolete home-grown Guzzi, Benelli and Piaggio models, Italy slapped a 30% tariff on imported motorcycles. That was a mistake, because it slammed the brakes on the technological development of Italian models, which ceased being internationally relevant and could only count on their domestic market, insufficient for keeping them competitive. Imported rice was also burdened with a 30% tariff (today European regulations impose low rice tariffs on certain Asian countries).

In the long term, tariffs harm their originators in a global market

We need not be specialists in economic policy to perceive that in the long term, especially in a global market such as ours, tariffs end up harming those that impose them. But meanwhile, **confusion is rampant and we risk losing our heads**. A few hours after the tantrum beamed round the world, in which the President of the United States played world boss while brandishing spurious number tables (20% tariffs for Europe; 10% for the Republic of San Marino), **markets went into meltdown with stocks plunging in 9/11 style**. This shows that the real problem is not so much tariffs increasing



by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia



from 15% to 35% on Parmigiano Reggiano as **the psychological reflexes that govern capital markets**. Italian exports are of high quality, almost niche, and within certain limits, demand for them is stable, as demonstrated when the Obama Administration imposed 30% tariffs in 2009.

Certain major brands have long-standing authorised US branches

Some major brands have long solved this problem by having authorised US branches: **Barilla, for example**, is unscathed, and indeed benefits through its two production plants in the USA; other companies have greatly diversified their exports to many countries. Yet **in agrifood, agreements with importers and local distributors are paramount**. If my product is hit by a 20% tariff, we can **agree on a discount for the importer or distributive marketing strategies** to avoid passing all cost increases to consumers, who may be tempted by local 'Italian-sounding' alternatives. Such tariffs have boomerang effects: price increases and thus inflation and recession. So, don't panic: **Italian products will always be popular**; meanwhile we can make do by selling eggs to the USA, which needs them urgently and will pay their weight in gold. The egg of Columbus never goes out of style!



Easter eggs: *a tradition spanning millennia*

by **Laura Spini**
Milano Duomo Academician

Before they were made of chocolate, for ancient civilisations they represented life, fertility and rebirth.

Long considered an auspicious gift, the egg as an Easter symbol has roots in remote antiquity: indeed, it was already present in pre-Christian civilisations as representative of life, fertility and rebirth. As winter ended, these cultures celebrated the renewal of nature, and the egg was potently symbolic of the springtime awakening. Later, following the advent of Christianity, the egg was interpreted as life emerging from a shell analogously to how the resurrected Christ emerged from the sepulchre; but only in the Middle Ages did

the Church incorporate such symbolism for Easter celebrations, transforming the egg into a central element of the festivities.

In pre-Christian traditions, the egg occupied a central place in many cosmogonic myths

In pre-Christian traditions, the egg occupied a central place in many cosmogonic myths: **in Egyptian mythology**, for





example, the god Ra was born from an egg laid by the god Kneph in the primordial ocean. Thus in that culture, too, the egg symbolised the cyclical renewal of life, and painted eggs were already ritually exchanged during spring festivals.

In ancient Greece, eggs were associated with the **Eleusinian mysteries**, rituals dedicated to Demeter and Persephone celebrating the agricultural cycle and **the rebirth of plants**. During those ceremonies, eggs were consecrated as symbols of renewed life. In turn **the Romans also** associated eggs with spring celebrations during the **Floralia**, festivals dedicated to the goddess Flora held between April and May: painted eggs were part of the fertility rituals. In Roman culture, eggs were also placed in tombs as a symbol of rebirth in the afterlife, a custom substantiated by numerous archaeological finds.

In the Nordic and Germanic world, eggs were connected to the goddess Eostre (or Ostara), a spring and fertility deity: her name is the etymological origin of the word 'Easter', and celebrations in her honour included decorating **eggs which were then buried in fields to guarantee abundant harvests**.

Celtic traditions, instead, incorporated eggs into Beltane rituals. This festival marked the beginning of summer: eggs, representing potency and promise, were used in divination and as talismans.

In Eastern Europe eggs were **decorat-**

ed with solar and lunar symbols or geometric shapes representing the forces of nature through a complex language of motifs tied to natural cycles and cosmic forces. Those designs later evolved into the elaborate geometrical decorations on *pysanky* (painted eggs) bearing Christian symbols applied with wax techniques similar to *batik*.

The transition from pagan to Christian egg symbolism

After the advent of Christianity, the transition from pagan to Christian egg sym-

bolism was not sudden but gradual: the transfer of significance from natural fertility to spiritual resurrection **reflects a thematic continuity despite a change in meaning**.

The earliest Christian communities to introduce eggs into Easter celebrations were **in Mesopotamia and Syria**, where eggs were painted red in remembrance of Christ's blood. As the centuries passed, some ancient customs crystallised, and since eating eggs during Lent was prohibited by the Church, those laid in that period were set aside and, when easter arrived, decorated and gifted as a sign of joy and celebration.

More recently, it is believed that in Ver-



sailles, **Louis XIV** gave his courtiers eggs during Easter festivities and organised treasure hunts in his gardens. He also seems to have been the first person to commission a chocolate Easter egg. Indeed, the earliest ovoid metal moulds, tangible evidence of chocolate egg production, were found in the early 19th century. Memorable, though less delicious, were the egg masterpieces by the goldsmith **Peter Carl Fabergé** initially commissioned by Tsar **Alexander III** as love tokens to his wife **Maria Fëdorovna**.

The birth of chocolate eggs

The diffusion and transformation of Easter eggs into **mass-produced chocolate eggs** was spearheaded by the British companies **J.S. Fry & Sons** and **Cadbury**, which sold eggs with cream and praline fillings in the late 19th century. **Some technological innovations facilitated cocoa processing** by rendering it more malleable and easily moulded: these included the hydraulic press invented by the Dutch chemist **Van Houten** in 1828, which extracted cocoa butter. Industrialisation in the 19th century also favoured **large-scale affordable chocolate egg production**, and the emergence of a middle class with greater purchasing power created a market for decorative, elaborate sweets.

In Italy, the first industrially produced eggs were made by Casa Sartorio, a company from Turin which, in the early 20th century, patented a machine to make hollow chocolate eggs into which gifts could be inserted: an element which has remained characteristic of Italian Easter eggs. Easter eggs now account for a significant slice of the sweet industry, with **over 31,000 tonnes produced yearly**; besides this, gourmets can also choose unique **artisanal Easter eggs** of the highest quality made by pâtissiers and master chocolatiers using the most recherché *grand cru* chocolate with refined contemporary designs or personalised gifts. New trends include eggs made of organic, single-origin



chocolate with cream or praline fillings or enriched with traditional Italian dried fruit or nuts, such as Piedmontese hazelnuts or Sicilian almonds or pistachios. The luxury and fashion industries, which have recently been dabbling in confectionery, now present yearly collections of **limited-edition** eggs made by the world's best chocolate masters using the most selectively chosen *cru* chocolate, sumptuous decorations and sophisticated designs. From elegant logo-bearing **Giorgio Armani** *cru* eggs to **Louis**

Vuitton eggs shaped, this year, like one of the company's iconic bags, the Easter egg is now **also a luxury product**. From a pagan fertility symbol to a Christian resurrection emblem, the Easter egg has evolved into a refined expression of the confectioner's art: its ability to renew itself, adapting to different epochs, guarantees its persistence as a central element of Easter celebrations uniting gastronomic delight with symbolic and spiritual significance.

Laura Spini



Easter gatherings

bridging myth and ritual

by Sergio d'Ippolito
Crotone Delegate

Blending sacred and profane, Christian and pagan, Judaism and Mediterranean faiths.

In Easter rituals, food is continuously interwoven with lore, whether pagan, Christian or Jewish. The lamb sacrifice, for example, traverses all Mediterranean cultures.

From Mesopotamian to Greek, from Christian to Judaic and Phoenician cultures, the blood of the sacrificed animal combines purifying and propitiatory qualities.

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world", exclaimed **John the Baptist**, referring to Jesus as the *Soter*, the saviour, of humanity. Among domestic animals, the lamb was the one which best fit sacrificial canons: gentle, defenceless, without claws or horns, it was considered ideal for votive altars.

The Easter meal: devotional fare par excellence

The Easter meal, a prime example of devotional food, **bridges myth and ritual**, shedding light on the fruitful intertwining of sacred and profane, Christian and pagan, Judaism and Mediterranean religions. Upon reflection, Easter celebrations have all the features of Mediterranean spring festivals, formed and moulded by the drama of death and rebirth inherent in

the laws of Mother Nature. Let us consider the deeply rooted Mediterranean myth of **the god who dies and is reborn**, such as the Anatolian Attis or the Phoenician Adonis: two deities who died violently, from whose spilt blood life will rise again. The similarity with the Christian Easter salvation mythologem is almost uncanny. Indeed, the Jewish festival of Pesach, usually falling on the first full moon after the vernal equinox, is rooted in these ancient agrarian cults. The word 'Pesach' means 'passing over', and one of these 'passages' could be the transition from winter to spring.

Like all rites of passage, Pesach is also

characterised by offerings and sacrifices to the deity, including the immolation of young lambs. This custom was **adopted in the Old Testament and Christianised**. Exodus clearly refers to the sacrifice of a lamb, "a male of the first year", on the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan, thus after the vernal equinox, between March and April. "And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it." Thus spake the Lord unto Moses and Aaron. Since then, those have been ritual foods in the Jewish Passover meal, or Seder. The houses of the Jews were marked



with the blood of the sacrificed lamb, signalling their safety (from the Angel of Death which 'passed over' them, sparing their firstborns while it smote those of the Egyptians) in the land of Egypt.

Speaking of the 'agnus dei' (Lamb of God), the Lord warns us to break none of its bones but roast it whole, "his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof". Never was there a clearer culinary commandment! The tradition of unleavened bread also dates back to ancient pre-Christian agrarian religions. In particular, it is rooted in a Canaanite harvest festival, during which the custom was to eat the unfermented bread from the new crop. Instead, according to the Christianised version, during the flight from Egypt the Jews didn't have enough time to let their bread rise, and they ate it unleavened.

As for bitter herbs, they would come to signify the suffering of the Jewish people during their servitude in Egypt. It must, however, also be remembered that gathering bitter herbs is among the principal and most characteristic Mediterranean spring rituals. Even today, **in some inland areas of Campania, it is customary to begin the Easter luncheon with a soup of wild or field greens.** Furthermore, Easter in southern Italy **requires the presence of sweet or savoury egg-filled pies, such as casatiello, tortano, pizza piena and pastiera.**

The egg is the most ancient symbol of life in human history

The egg, let us remember, is the most ancient symbol of life in human history. "Omne vivum ex ovo", "Everything living starts from an egg", says a Latin proverb with Vedic parallels. For ancient peoples, the egg symbolised fertility and life, and was therefore eaten to celebrate the arrival of spring and the rebirth of the vegetation cycle.

According to the historian of religion **Mircea Eliade, the egg is the archetype of Creation.** Marble eggs, symbolising the rebirth of the deceased, have been found in Roman catacombs.



Christianity came to perceive the egg as a symbol of the divine resurrection itself. Christian Orthodox ritual places particular emphasis on decorating and blessing Easter eggs, preserving their profound sacred significance. The red-painted eggs characteristic of Greek and Russian Orthodox Easter combine propitiatory, auspicious and apotropaic functions inherited from spring rites of remote antiquity. **Strong symbolic value also attaches to the dove,** another element often included in the Christian Easter, usually consumed at the end of the meal in the form of a soft cake.

In pagan antiquity, as recounted by **Alfredo Cattabiani** in his *Volario (Aviary)*, the dove shared attributes of the Great

Mother (Magna Mater): love and fertility. For the Greeks and Romans it also represented peace, pure habits, simplicity and conjugal fidelity. **In the Middle Ages the dove mainly came to symbolise the Holy Spirit,** as foreshadowed in the Gospel of John, which narrates that John the Baptist "saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him" when he baptised Jesus in the River Jordan.

The ritual of the Easter banquet is thus embodied in apparently banal customs unsuspectably woven from very ancient myths and rituals whose origins are lost in the mists of time, between paganism and Christianity, the sacred and the profane.





The roast: ancestral symbol of conviviality

by **Maurizia Debiaggi**

Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia Academician

*A dish which unites
the world's cuisines.*

If there is a dish that unites the world's cuisines, it is undoubtedly the roast. Emerging among Paleolithic hunters when fire became the first cooking instrument, the roast represents food not as 'constructed' **but simply exalted by slow transformation through heat**. A slow-cooked cut of meat seething in its juices and the spices that each culture's

traditions choose to apply is an ancestral symbol of conviviality and belonging. Indeed, if humanity evolved with fire, one can assert that food culture was born from glowing charcoal.

*A food that serves as a bond,
gathering families and
communities around itself*

Not by chance does the roast, **in all its varieties, traverse epochs and latitudes** without losing its profound significance: food as bond, gathering families and communities. In Italy, it has persisted across the cen-

turies, retaining its intact role as **protagonist of the table**. We can begin with the Middle Ages, when meat was roasted slowly on imposing castle hearths... and who can forget Chichibio's famous roast crane in the tale by **Boccaccio**? In the Renaissance, the roast became **the focus of sumptuous aristocratic banquets**, enriched with refined sauces and precious spices: a symbol of wealth and power, because it required large quantities of meat and the capacity to roast it on braziers.

In the twentieth century, instead, it was transformed into a symbol of home cooking and family Sundays. It fills the home with enveloping fragrance, as illustrated by a famous Italian televi-



sion ad for broth cubes which for years broadcast the iconic scene of a woman preparing a roast. **Natalia Ginzburg** also described it in *Lessico Familiare (Family Lexicon)*: "Whenever my mother said 'I must prepare the roast', everyone understood that it signalled the arrival of Sunday, with its calm and its habits".

*Innumerable variants
all around the globe*

Italy, of course, is not a culinary island: the concept of the roast is manifested through innumerable variants all around the globe.

For instance, **roast beef** is a traditional dish from **British cuisine**, famously served on Sundays with Yorkshire pudding and horseradish sauce, but also adopted **in France** as **rosbif** and prepared with mustard and butter in a manner which forms a golden crust enclosing a succulent interior. **In Spain**, **lechón asado** is a celebration of pork, crunchy on the outside and soft within, often prepared on festive occasions or for large banquets. **In Germany**, **Schweinebraten - pork roasted with cumin and beer** - demonstrates how lengthy cooking can transform few ingredients into something extraordinary.

Crossing the Atlantic, we encounter **Texan barbecue**, which ultimately is a roast, though smoked and spiced, with cuts of meat cooked for hours until they are extremely tender. **Argentina** answers with **asado**, a veritable social rite where meat is cooked slowly and with maniacal attention over charcoal.

On the other wide of the world, **China** has **char siu**, the intensely red caramel-flavoured roast pork glazed with honey and spices. **In the Middle East**, **shawarma** is a vertical version of roast, whereby meat is cooked on a rotating spit, thinly sliced and served inside pita with spiced sauces. This is a close relative of **Turkish kebab**, whose cooking technique and serving style it shares. In recent years, kebab and shawarma have become increasingly popular in Italy, commonly available in cities and appre-



ciated for their convenience and rich flavour combinations.

*The slow transformation
of meat, which heat renders
tender and succulent*

So, whether immobile or gyrating, whether served on a silver platter or eaten from carryout containers, **roast is always a hit!**

From this perspective, the roast emerges as **an invisible thread uniting the cuisines of the world in an embrace of traditions and flavours.**

Living **in Singapore**, I have had the opportunity to observe that one of the most popular dishes in Italian restau-

rants, requested by locals and expats alike, is **crispy suckling pig**, which in Sardinia would be called *su purcheddu* and in northern Italy simply **maialino arrosto** ('roast piglet'). Though differing in flavour from Chinese *char siu* and Spanish *lechón asado*, it shares their essence: the expert, slow transformation of meat, which becomes tender and succulent under the influence of heat, gaining a crispy crust which exalts its perfection, and enriched by marinades whose aromas infuse it with unmistakable depth of flavour.

Of course, **all peoples have their particular techniques, flavours and rituals** associated with roasts; however, the result is always the same: **a preparation which is never merely meat**, but also memory, tale, silent union of world cultures.