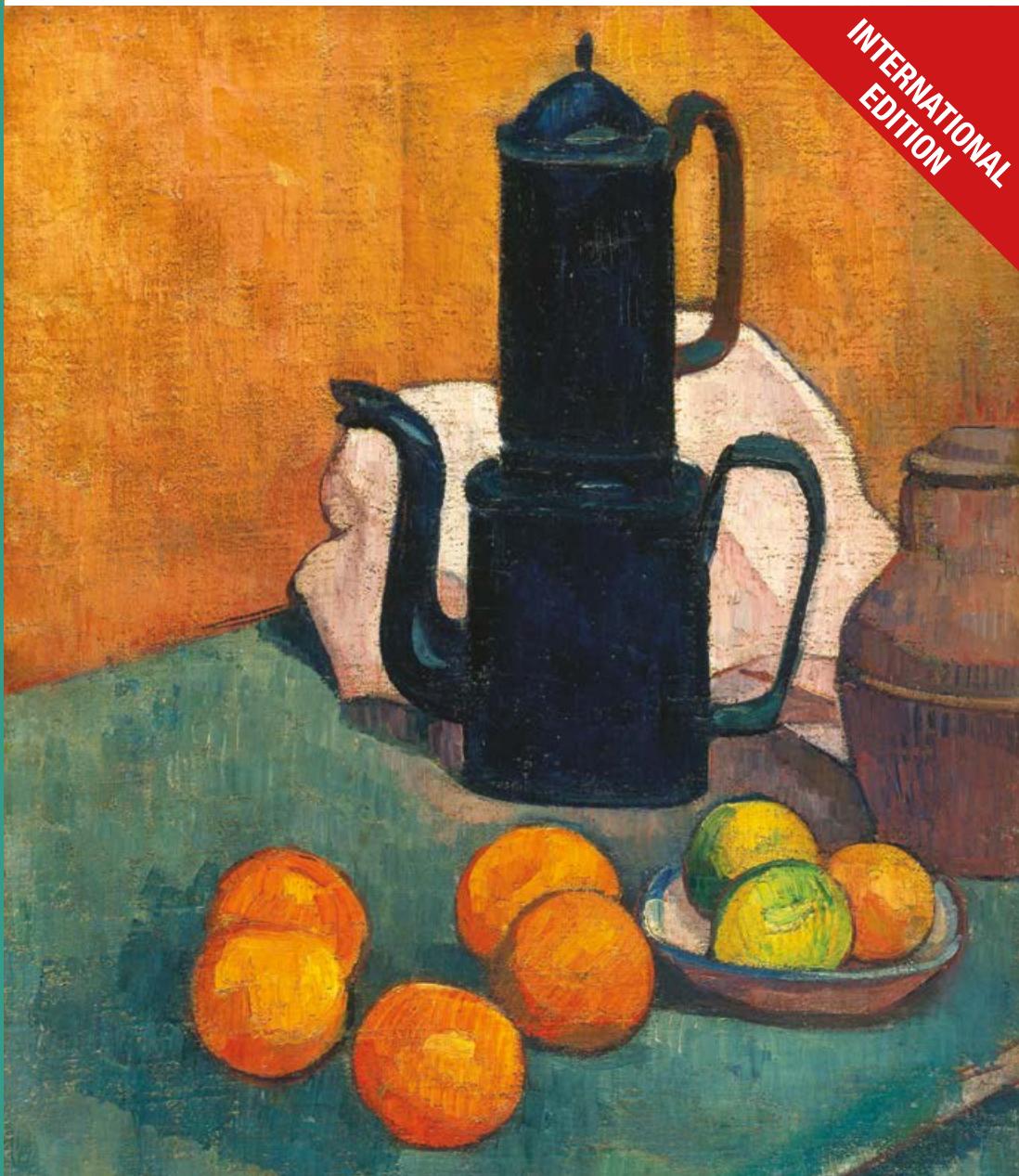


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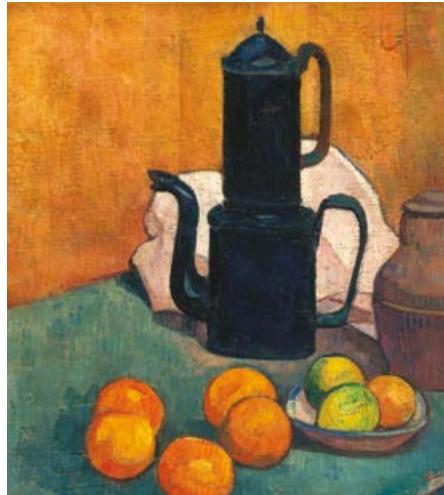


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On the cover: graphic elaboration of *The Blue Coffee Pot* by Émile Bernard; Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen



# An extraordinary convivial ecumenical gathering

*To celebrate the success of Italian cuisine, whose tradition runs in families.*

In our last FOCUS, we announced the prestigious recognition granted by UNESCO to Italian cuisine, recognising the main architects of this result. Having issued the requisite thanks and rendered unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, it is time to clarify some aspects of this accolade. First and foremost I would like to confirm that there will be an **extraordinary convivial ecumenical gathering on Thursday 19 March 2026**, in which I hope very many Academicians can participate.

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*This recognition honours who we are and our identity*

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This will be a chance for us to gather in celebration of this recognition, which honours what we are and our identity, because cuisine is not only food or a corpus of recipes, but also culture, tradition, work, wealth.

*"It is a record that can only make us proud, giving us a formidable tool to further enhance our products and protect them more effectively from imitations and unfair competition"*, Prime Minister **Giorgia Meloni** has declared.

**According to UNESCO, Italian cuisine is not only a collection of famous recipes, but a true lifestyle**, rooted in sharing, respect for ingredients and **abilities inherited generationally**.



by **Paolo Petroni**

President of the Accademia



Having said and recognised that, I wish to clarify the various roles played throughout the long preparation for candidature. For the sake of truth I must specify that cooks, whether starred or not, other associations or public figures, and influencers had no part in the presentation and the very lengthy procedure which began in 2023.

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### *UNESCO's motivation*

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In this regard, it should be clear that this recognition, according to UNESCO, has been granted to **"Italian cuisine as a set of skills that are not only culinary but also convivial and social, transmitted from one generation to the next throughout the national territory. Italian cuisine thus develops both domestically, transmitted informally within families through traditional recipes continuously transformed by the affectionate interaction of different generations"**, and in a more structured manner, thanks to such figures as cooks and gastronomists.

So, essentially, this is **traditional home cooking**, not fine dining as some are bandying about.

**What changes for the Academy? Nothing! What does it signify for the Academy? A great deal!**

This recognition certifies that what we have been doing for over 70 years is the right way to strengthen our food culture and social life.

**Success should spur us to keep doing more and doing better.**



# UNESCO recognition, the best ingredient for teamwork

by Giancarlo Saran

Treviso Academician

*Many local enterprises collaborating over their territory can contribute, through their history and expertise, to increasing the value of the whole.*

**O**ur Italian Cuisine's recent UNESCO Intangible Heritage recognition is a well-deserved milestone which in fact represents a starting point towards new horizons wherein the identity of our *Bel Paese*, already holder of the greatest number of UNESCO sites in their various categories, including Natural and Cultural Sites and Landscapes, finds a worthy

**setting at the table.** As President Paolo Petroni has noted, this recognition justly acknowledges the "manifold local traditions which, collectively, form our culinary mosaic". Because, if it is true that pasta with tomato, pizza, tiramisù, Prosecco and so forth are indubitably ambassadors of delicious 'Made in Italy', potential magnets attracting curious tourists to discover their origins, when they arrive in the homeland of these delights, a mosaic, again, of myriad other curiosities opens before them. **Italy has not so much or only a national or regional cuisine**, but indeed **nuances whose dizzying variety subtly morphs from one church steeple to the next** – as long as we safeguard origins and traditions against the risk of being trivialised by a homogenising and passive globalisation. **This gives rise to another cultural alliance** which only awaits the support that it deserves.

*UNESCO MAB sites also have the mission to safeguard each territory's typical products and processing techniques*



**Italy has 21 UNESCO MAB sites** (Man and Biodiversity) aiming to **safeguard the balance between humans and environment in very different situations**. Each of them has, among several missions, that of defending products, agriculture and processing techniques typical of their area. Some years ago, an original competition, **UpVivium**, was founded, allowing *trattorie* (traditional restaurants) and local agritourism sites to use ingredients of strictly local provenance in **recipes which may range from traditional to judiciously innovative**. For example, the Veneto has two **UNESCO MAB sites** at Monte Grappa (including the provinces of Treviso, Vicenza and Belluno) and **Colli Euganei**, near Padua, and also shares the **Po River Delta** site with Emilia Romagna. Each site **bears witness to deeply rooted local recipes** which deserve to be honoured and, **above all, known by forthcoming generations**, who no longer grow up with the flavours and fragrances of their mothers' and grandmothers' home cooking except in some lucky exceptional cases. Thus, **through an ideal team effort** creating networks over the territory, **various Delegations can play a pivotal role, providing a cultural and authoritative weight which cannot be overridden by the exigencies of profit or large-scale tourism, however justified**. The positive aspects to bear in mind also truly **convey an added value which makes**

exploration of our culinary 'mosaic' a unique, irreplaceable experience for those who come to discover it. For example, **despite the threat of counterfeit 'Italian-sounding' food** such as 'parmesan' and 'jambon de Parme', not to mention the sparkling piracy of 'calissecco', **from 2010 to 2025 'Made in Italy' agrifood export value has risen from 28 to 70 billion euros**. Who knows if it is a coincidence that **the Mediterranean Diet gained UNESCO heritage status in 2010**: another interesting facet of December's heady triumph in New Delhi.

### *The curious (and hungry) tourist explores the smaller enterprises surrounding big cities*

**Pier Luigi Petrillo**, coordinator for Italian projects at UNESCO and lecturer at La Sapienza University in Rome, has launched a study to **monitor tourist flow between 2023 and 2024** in various areas. The result: while sites unrecognised by UNESCO suffered a 3.3% loss in tourist flow, **UNESCO sites enjoyed an increase of 7.4%**. Furthermore, a projection by **Fiapet Confesercenti** predicts that "Italian Cuisine as Intangible Heritage could translate into an increase of 6-8% in foreign arrivals in the first two years", for a total of approximately 18 million additional tourists. This is **niche tourism**, also defined as '**experience tourism**' as aptly noted by **Mara Manente**, who for years directed CISET (the International Centre for Economic and Tourism Studies), a sort of joint venture between Cà Foscari University in Venice and Confindustria Veneto, given that the Veneto is the most highly 'touristed' Italian region. But let us linger longer by the warm, cosy cooker to receive more data. **TasteAtlas**, an independent international agency that monitors tourists' food experiences in the cities they visit, has found that the top four cities for gastrotourism are Naples, Milan, Bologna and Florence. Of course, they are major cities; but it is also true

that, **if adequately motivated, the curious (and hungry) tourist can use larger cities as bases whence to explore their smaller surrounding towns**. Thus the gastro-compass directs us also to those only apparently minor destinations represented, for instance, by UNESCO's MAB sites. The present author has also had the pleasure on multiple occasions of serving on the jury of the **UpVivium** contest in **Monte Grappa**. During this intriguing and fun experience, one could feel the tangible enthusiasm and passion of the producers, growers, innkeepers and restaurateurs who bore witness to the wonders of their territories.

### *Many first-rate products are scattered throughout the valleys of Monte Grappa*

**Monte Grappa is best known to most Italians for being 'Sacred to the Nation'** as the site where Italy repulsed the Austro-Hungarians during the Great War. Once it was also a site for **traditional black truffle harvesting**, which followed the season for other mushrooms: a source of revenue for many families. Deforestation during the construction of trenches made these traditions disappear. However, after the economic boom, several thriving woodworking businesses sprang up along the Valsugana, leading to reforestation. As if by a miracle, mushroom hunters using sniffer dogs to find honey fungus unexpectedly (re)discovered black truffles. It so happens that just in these past weeks, **Pieve del Grappa has been included among the Italian Truffle Towns**, with Alba as their natural capital. **Alba** is also, **alongside Bergamo and Parma, one of Italy's three UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy**, though equally qualified cities abound along the Italian boot. A journey where wonders never cease! Grappa is firmly associated with **morlacco**, a cheese with a history: its name recalls ancient Balkan cheesemaking techniques brought by the un governa-



ble nomadic shepherds called Morlachs, whom the Most Serene Venetian Republic sent up Mount Grappa to mind the pastures.

**Honey** deserves its own discussion. **Aso-  
lo**, the 'City of a Hundred Horizons', is part of another circuit: the forty **Cities of Honey**. Its roots lie elsewhere. **There was a time** when, before the forced conversion to prosecco, **local autochthonous vines**, for example the *recan-  
tina*, needed their growth and ripening defended from the assaults of parasites, especially after fierce summer hailstorms. **What better guardian than bees?** They are the first creatures to launch themselves on to the bruised grapes, drying them out and preventing attacks from other insects or the need for pesticides. Thanks to the intuition of **Roberto Canal**, from Crespano del Grappa, **a still extant beekeeping school was founded in the early 20th century**. It recruited a priest from Turin, **don Giacomo Angeleri**, a pioneer of modern beekeeping whose motto was very simple: "the beekeeper is none other than a shepherd of bees"; also because "bee-keeping only appears to be simple; in reality it requires a greater dose of nous and good sense than other types of agriculture". Many other such tales pepper the valleys around Monte Grappa. **This is how collaboration** between local experts in their fields and **our Delegations, motivated to work in their territorial jurisdictions**, can ensure justified respect for **our Italian cuisine, the first in the world** to be recognised as a whole by UNESCO.

**Giancarlo Saran**



# Scapece

by Giancarlo Burri

Padua Academician

*A historic marinaded masterpiece fragrant with memories.*

When the Mediterranean coastal watchtowers would signal, as Brancaleone from the film series would say, "the black scourge that comes from the sea", meaning possible invasions by Saracen pirates, the fishermen's wives would weather the food

scarcity caused by persistent warfare by creating food with a long shelf life, using an abundant ingredient, fish, and a natural preserving agent, vinegar. When the ingenious marinade was no longer a matter of necessity but a matter of taste, scapece was born.

## *Theories on the origin of its name*

A questionable pseudo-etymology traces the term from the Latin *esca Apicuī* (food of Apicius) for the presence in his *Dere coquinaria* of a recipe "Ut pisces fricti diu durent" ('to make fried fish last longer'), wherein the author suggests removing fried fish from the pan and soaking them in hot vinegar. Though this may appear to be a simplified scapece

recipe, the term *scapece* seems to derive from the Spanish *escabeche*, used, by now, in various parts of the world for a vinegar marinading technique in turn originating from the Persian-derived Arab dish *al-sikbaja*, made of fried meat marinated in a sweet-and-sour sauce generally containing vinegar and honey or date molasses, often also used for flavouring fish.

The 13<sup>th</sup>- or 14<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript *Liber de coquina* includes a refined recipe for "*schabetia*", whereby fried fish was doused in a mixture of wine and vinegar aromatised with a fried concoction of onions, raisins, jujubes and plums, thickened with minced almonds and flavoured with saffron and spices. The *Anonimo Meridionale* (*Southern Anonymous*), a manuscript from the late 14<sup>th</sup> or early 15<sup>th</sup> century, has these instructions to prepare *pesce in schibeze*: "If you wish





to make fish in the *schibese* style, fry it and also fry onions well, then take some of the selfsame fish and grind it well and remove the bones and add some bread, and temper it with good white wine and good strong vinegar, and add boiled almonds and good spices, marasca cherries and Alexandrian dates."

### *Scapece gallipolina: a dish with deep, ancient roots*

Both recipes include cooking procedures and ingredients characterising a dish with deep, ancient roots, intertwined with the history of Gallipoli, the seafaring heart of Salento: *scapece gallipolina* (Gallipoli-style scapece), recognised as a **Traditional Agrifood Product** (PAT), for its methods of cooking, preservation and ageing practised uniformly according to traditional rules maintained over time. It should be specified that **there are several variants** of *scapece gallipolina*, according to **which fish is used**: thus, oily fish, generally young boces, picarels, anchovies or sardines, are caught 'fasted', at dawn before they have eaten, because they are not gutted and their bones will

be softened and rendered edible through marination in vinegar. They are fried in abundant peanut oil (though extra-virgin olive oil is always preferable), drained, salted and peppered and left to cool. In a terrine, saffron is dissolved in white wine vinegar and then aromatic herbs (origano, mint, sage, parsley, coriander) are added.

**Then there is the delicate operation of *arringatura***, which means arranging the fish in orderly rows alternated with layers of coarse breadcrumbs moistened using the seasoned vinegar, but not made into a paste. The bread used is the typical Salento durum wheat bun; with crusts removed, it is cut, then carefully dried and grated on a specific tool called *crattacasa*: a large grater with numerous holes.

**The container for marination must be, strictly and exclusively, the so-called *caletta*: a distinctive tub** of chestnut wood, shaped like a barrel, initially left open to display the inviting top layer of golden yellow breadcrumbs. It is kept in a cool place; after several days, depending on the size of the fish employed, the *scapece* will be perfectly marinated (this can be ascertained by how soft the bones are). It can then be eaten imme-

diately, but if kept cool it can remain unaltered for many days.

### *Other regional specialities have also been ennobled by PAT status*

Other regional specialities involving fish marinated in vinegar have also been ennobled by PAT status, including **scabecchio from Liguria** (anchovies and surmullet), **scapece from Molise** (ray and smooth-hound), **Sardinian scabecciu** (eel and flat-head grey mullet), **scapece from Abruzzo** (ray and smooth-hound) and **Tuscan scaveccio** (eel).

**Neapolitan culinary creativity** has brought us a **reinterpretation of scapece** whose main ingredient is humble and abundant: **courgettes. Courgette scapece** (*cocozzelli alla scapece*) is a simple, flavoursome dish prepared by frying 3-millimetre courgette rounds and seasoning them with white wine vinegar (infused with garlic) and fresh mint leaves.

The journalist and writer **Maria Orsini Natale** versifies about them: "Little coins browned in oil, round golden suns that lurk in vinegar pulsing with garlic and mint"

**Giancarlo Burri**



# Two onions, two Italies: gold from Voghera, red from Tropea

by Sandro Borruto

Delegate for Area dello Stretto-Costa Viola

*When North and South  
meet through land  
and flavour.*

**F**ew garden vegetables tell the story of Italy as onions do. Widespread for centuries throughout the peninsula, they **change in colour, fragrance and consistency according to climate and soil**, thus reflecting our geographical and cultural diversity. Among the most representative varieties, two stand out for their excellence: **the golden onion from Voghera**, which thrives in the Po River Valley in Lombardy, and **the red onion of Tropea**, pearl of the Tyrrhenian coast of Calabria. Differing in appearance and vocation, these two onions admirably embody how North and South complement each other: the first, solid and persistent; the second, sweet and luminous.

*Golden Voghera onions: history and identity of the Po Valley*

The golden Voghera onion is **one of northern Italy's oldest historical varieties**.

The earliest documented references to it are from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it was cited in agrarian registers and markets in Pavia and Milan as "Voghera yellow onion", **particularly appreciated for its long shelf life**. However, its origins are far older: already in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this onion was included in **crop rotations** in the countryside near Pavia south of the Po River, alternated with grains and legumes to maintain the balance of nutrients in the soil.

**The area's temperate climate and silty clay soil** have created the ideal conditions for an onion with a **compact bulb**, a **golden tunic** and a **firm, flavoursome pulp**. After the summer harvest, farmers traditionally braided the onions together and hung them under archways or in haylofts, where they lasted until the following spring. **These were the 'home' onions**, which never ran out, always ready for soups, risotto, mirepoix and stews.

Over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their cultivation was reduced, but in recent decades **their original seeds have been recovered** thanks to the efforts of local growers and Lombard research associations which have rediscovered their value for both cuisine and identity.

Today, Voghera golden onions are again the stars of a **high-quality micro-supply chain**, appreciated in markets and restaurants for their aroma and resilience during cooking.





### *Tropea red onion: a daughter of the sea and the light*

The Tropea red onion is, instead, **the fruit of millennia of Mediterranean history**. According to historical sources and local traditions, **the Phoenicians introduced it into Calabria** by bringing seeds from the Levant into southern Italy. The Greeks and later the Romans disseminated its cultivation, appreciating its nutritional qualities and its ease of preservation during long sea voyages. Over the centuries, the area between **Pizzo, Tropea and Capo Vaticano**, on the Tyrrhenian coast of Calabria, has offered an ideal habitat for this crop: **sandy soil, solar exposure and iodine-rich breezes**, which have contributed to creating a **sweet onion with hardly any pungency**. Already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Bourbon chronicles described it as a prized vegetable and a daily staple for locals. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century,

with the opening of maritime commerce, the Tropea onion became an export commodity, loaded in the port of Pizzo destined for France and Britain, where it was **coveted for its sweetness and brilliant colour**.

In 2008 it obtained **PGI** (Protected Geographical Indication) status under the name 'PGI Red Tropea Onion from Calabria', aiding protection of its distinctiveness and its supply chain involving three provinces in Calabria (Vibo Valentia, Cosenza and Catanzaro).

Today it is one of southern cuisine's representative products, an ambassador of Calabrian flavour throughout the world.

### *A sensory and culinary comparison*

The **golden Voghiera onion**, with its compact structure and balanced flavour, is perfect for **lengthy cooking** which requires heat and patience: mirepoix for risotto,

stews, sauces, soups and braised meats. The **red Tropea onion**, instead, best expresses itself **raw or only briefly cooked**: in summer salads, on pizza, in sandwiches, but also in **sweet-and-sour preserves** that exalt its natural sweetness. The two onions thus embody two complementary culinary concepts: the **robust and structured** northern one and the **luminous and fresh** southern one.

### *Their cultural and symbolic value*

From a humble daily staple, through its local variants the onion becomes **a symbol of belonging and territorial identity**. The golden Voghiera onion represents the cuisine of continuity, which prizes patience, time and memories of home; the red Tropea onion is the voice of Mediterranean conviviality, immediate pleasure and vivacious meals.

Each in its own way, both tell the same truth: taste is always rooted in the land, and behind each flavour is a history of toil, climate and culture.

Neither is merely an onion; they are two **edible icons of agricultural Italy**. The first was born where the fog envelops the landscape and food is cooked slowly; the second grows where the sparkling sea reflects the sun and the food smells of light.

Two territories, two seasons, two traditions united by the same idea: cuisine, from simple beginnings, can become narrative and memory.

**Sandro Borruto**

CHARACTERISTIC	VOGHERA GOLD	TROPEA RED
COLOUR	Brilliant golden yellow	Purple-red with white pulp
SHAPE	Spherical or slightly flattened	Elongated or oval
FLAVOUR	Bold, aromatic, faintly pungent	Sweet, delicate, with almost no pungency
TEXTURE	Firm; tolerates long cooking	Tender and juicy
PRINCIPAL USE	Mirepoix, risotto, stew, soup	Salads, relishes, fish dishes