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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

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E DA LUIGI BERTETT, DINO BUZZATI TRAVERSO,
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GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIO PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: *graphic elaboration of a detail of Still Life with a Plate of Cherries, Plums, a Jug, and Cheese (1760) by Luis Egidio Meléndez; Museo del Prado, Madrid*

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The Academy's Library has a new home

*Strengthening our contribution
to Italian Culinary Culture.*

As many of you will have gathered from my video message included in the most recent Extraordinary Newsletter, the Academy has purchased and restructured a property in Milan's **celebrated Via Gluck**, near the Central Station and the Academy's headquarters, as a home for our Culinary Library.

The cultural value of the Library

It will be officially inaugurated in September, but we have chosen to **introduce it to some of our Council members who personally attended the June session**, dedicated mainly to **approving the Financial Statement for 2025**. You will find a detailed report of the event, by our very own Silvia De Lorenzo, on page 31.

This issue of the magazine is coming out with a small delay precisely because it includes the Academic Council meeting

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia

report. Beyond this important and significant circumstance, I must emphasise our Library's cultural value. **The idea of a dedicated library**, supported by Academicians' donations, first came to then-President **Giuseppe Dell'Osso** in the early 2000s. The books were initially placed on shelves within our Headquarters' conference room. Then, due both to the growing number of books and the wholesale refurbishment of our offices, from 2013 the Library was hosted by the University of Milan - Bicocca. Following a complete restructuring of University buildings, a few months ago we had to leave the space that we had been granted on loan.

*Opening hours and consultation protocols
will soon be determined*

To avoid scattering this treasury and to keep strengthening our contribution to Italian culinary culture, we have chosen to

create **our own private Library**, named after Giuseppe Dell'Osso, **exceeding 6,000 volumes besides our magazines**. The Academy is thus positioning itself as an increasingly important and credible social and scholarly institution. We shall soon be able to determine opening hours and consultation protocols.

Dear Academicians, we now have an available space, personnel to catalogue the collection, and the desire to make our Library increasingly appetising and necessary for students, journalists, scholars, the curious, and culinary enthusiasts.

Come forward! **Donate your most interesting tomes**. From now, the Library is ever more in your hands.





Maria Montessori

on feeding children

by Gabriella Pravato

Roma EUR-Ostiense Academician

The diet suggested by the educator would be considered erroneous nowadays, but it was necessary for schools to include nutritional education.

Maria Montessori was born in Chiaravalle, in the province of Ancona, in 1870. The daughter of a high official in the Ministry of Finances, she first attended a technical school where she was the only girl, and then the Faculty of Medicine. Beautiful and always flawlessly elegant, she succeeded in combining vanity with career. Scholarships and awards allowed her to participate in a study of children with learning disabilities alongside her colleague **Giuseppe**

Montesano, who would later become the father of her only child. **That experience would yield a new pedagogical method**, applicable to all children, which made her famous worldwide and would bear her name. Uniting her educational vision with that of the French-American pedagogue **Séguin** and the ideas of **Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel**, she formulated the theory whereby children can educate themselves by freely manifesting their interests and inclinations.

The first Casa dei Bambini (Children's House), where Maria Montessori succeeded in implementing her educational ideas, was **founded in Rome in 1907 in the working-class San Lorenzo neighbourhood**. When choosing its location, the teacher wrote: "For children born here, we must modify the customary phrase: they are not born into the light of day, but into the darkness, and they grown amidst the darkness and the poisons of the urban huddle". Through her project, she sought to help **society's weakest members, forced to live in poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy**.

Nutrition for school meals

The educator had categorised her children into rich or poor, normal or with problems, and **established food rules for each category**. The Children's House **must provide school meals**, considered indispensable for poor children and recommended for the rich until their wealthy families could learn to **prepare suitable food for their progeny**. **These meals should be rich in fats and**



Maria Montessori, 1910



Montessori School

sugars; food should be finely chopped: soups, purées and meatballs were highly favoured. Soup could be made of bread cooked in water or broth seasoned with oil, or with legumes seasoned with lard. **Suitable meats were those considered 'white'**, namely chicken and veal. Boiled meats must absolutely be avoided. No raw vegetables; the dietary justification for this was not provided. Even cooked vegetables were discouraged, except spinach, in moderation. **The only favoured vegetable was the potato, puréed with abundant butter.**

Bread was considered 'an excellent food' - better brown, more nourishing than white; preferably buttered. The crusty 'loaf-end' was prized; wealthy children could eat *grissini*.

The permitted seasonings, besides various fats, were: **sugar, salt, vinegar and lemon juice.** A few aromatic plants were allowed, such as garlic and rue, for their disinfecting action on the intestine and lungs and for their anthelmintic properties. Forbidden, instead, were pepper, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and mustard. **Milk must be consumed fresh from the cow**, and the eggs while still warm, and without any cooking, which would compromise their nutritional potency.

All cheeses and most milk products were forbidden, though fresh butter

could be introduced between the ages of three and six.

Cream was highly favoured, but only "freshly prepared from the freshest ingredients"; otherwise it was best avoided, as it was not indispensable.

Fruit should also be consumed freshly picked, preferably cooked and served with sugar. Figs, pineapple, dates, melons, cherries, walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts and chestnuts must be avoided.

*Debunking the custom
of letting children
eat ad libitum*

Water, instead, was considered vital, as the educator believed that the growing organism is very rich in water. Poor children must content themselves with spring water; the rich could enjoy slightly alkaline water, such as Sangemini or Claudia, even mixed with syrups, such as *amarena* cherry, if desired.

Alcohol was totally banned, as it arrested development, favouring diseases of the nerves and the digestive and filtering organs. Instead of coffee, children were given toasted barley or chocolate milk. **In the Children's Houses, children could not eat outside set meals.** These were

two: one larger, around noon, and one lighter, around four in the afternoon. Maria Montessori maintained that we must undermine "maternal ignorance, fatal to children", including the belief that to grow properly, children must eat constantly, even if only a crust of bread.

Maria Montessori's childhood nutrition would be frowned upon today, being too rich in fats, which, according to her theory, should constitute a reserve; it was also too rich in sugar, which in her view should stimulate developing tissues. In her defence we can assert that **nutritional knowledge was scarce in her day.**

Vitamin B1, necessary for protecting nervous tissue, would only be synthesised in 1936. Vitamin PP (B3), necessary for the organism's growth, renewal and maintenance, was discovered the following year. Maria **had correctly understood that food can be a messenger of health or disease, and that culinary monotony hinders appetite** and thus health, and therefore **school must teach not only writing and arithmetic but also proper nutrition.** So in schoolrooms there must be cleanliness, order, manners and conversation. These simple rules helped children to grow serenely and happily and become well-adjusted, conscientious adults.

Gabriella Pravato



The tramezzino turns 100

by **Attilio Borda Bossana**
Messina Delegate

*A 'light' snack to enjoy
between meals.*

In **Alfredo Panzini's** dictionary from 1935, the entry '*tramezzino*' reads 'see *Sandwich*', named after the noble British diplomat and admiral, **John Montagu**, the Fourth Earl of Sandwich, who lived from 1718 to 1792: a lover of quick meals at his desk or the gambling table, typically cold beef between two slices of buttered bread. In the Treccani dictionary, *tramezzino* is a masculine noun, diminutive of *tramezzo* - 'intermediate element' - created as an Italian equivalent of the English 'sandwich': a light snack to be enjoyed between meals, consisting of two slices of soft pan loaf, de-crusted, filled and cut rectangularly or triangularly.

*The 'sandwich' was first
mentioned by the
Frenchman Grosley*

The first mention of the sandwich is attributed to the French historian and writer **Pierre Jean Grosley**, noted for his travel diary *Londres* (1770), while the first English sandwich recipes are from the early nineteenth century. These were **also published in Italy**, in 1846, in *Cucina sana, economica ed elegante (Healthy, Affordable and Elegant Cookery)* by **Francesco** (né François) **Chapusot**, cook to **Ralph Abercromby**, the British Ambassador in Turin during the Risorgimento (Italian unification). Even **Pellegrino Artusi**, in his famed manual *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene (Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well; 1891)*, **referred to tramezzi**, often also called *tramezzi* or *piatti di mezzo* ('intermediate meals'), defined as snacks, appetisers or smaller bites offered between main courses.

In the mid-Twenties, the quip "they've made the Turinese eat the leaf" ('eat the leaf' means 'to understand intuitively') circulated in the Piedmontese capital, referring to the activities of the married couple **Angela Demichelis** and **Onorino Nebiolo**, emigrants to the USA where they had managed restaurants and bars before returning to Italy in 1925. **They imported the idea of the American sandwich**, inspired by an iconic sandwich from New Orleans, prepared by a Sicilian immigrant, **Salvatore Lupo** of Central Grocery, Decatur Street, who in 1906 began making *muffuletta* sandwiches from Palermo: round sesame loaves filled with charcuterie, cheese and olives.

*The Nebiolos, returning
to Turin from the States,
sold tramezzini in their café*

In Turin, the Nebiolos, armed with a toaster brought from the States, bought the



Sandwich in San Francisco, 1941



Caffè Mulassano



Sicilian evolution of the tramezzino

Caffè Mulassano, in Piazza Castello, paying the licence of 300,000 Lire, intending to serve snacks between meals or to accompany apéritifs. **It was 1926, so the tramezzino turns 100 this year, as declared by a commemorative plaque** noting that the *buvette* operated until 1938 and reopened, restored to its old splendour, in the Seventies. In the café, a little jewel of Liberty style, a one-handed clock with disarranged numerals still presides behind the counter. The hand is moved electrically by a secret mechanism controlled at the till, and indicates who must pay among a group of friends. This year the *tramezzino* celebrates its Italian heritage, its identity-defining significance and the importance of a year which the Caffè Mulassano welcomes under the gaze of its plaque from 1926. It is prominently displayed in this café where famous figures frolicked over the years, birthplace of the 'legend' whereby **Gabriele D'annunzio** named the *tramezzino* to circumvent the fascist regime's ban on foreign words from July 1923. **As an afternoon snack or elevenses**, enjoyed between breakfast and lunch, the Turinese *tramezzino* started as a small two-bite tea sandwich; then, **between the '50s and '60s, it made landfall in Venice and Mestre, where it assumed its typical triangular shape** and its more portly 'hump' caused by the abundance of mayonnaise and other fillings. It spread throughout the Veneto, accompanying morning and afternoon apéritifs under the name *el tramesin*. **The oldest bacaro (café/bar) in Venice, Cantina do Mori near the Rialto Bridge, serves little**

square tramezzini called francobolli ('postage stamps'). **The title 'father of the Venetian tramezzino' belongs to Giuseppe Cipriani**, who from 1946 began serving *sandwichini* with chicken salad, egg and anchovy, or prawns to accompany apéritifs in Harry's Bar. Yet **credit for spreading them far and wide goes to a baker on dry land: Adriano Anzanello, who developed the crustless bread known as 'tramezzino bread' in the 1960s in Mestre, near Piazza Ferretto.**

Gaining popularity over the years, it has become a classic Italian snack

Gaining popularity over the years, the *tramezzino* has become a classic Italian snack, often enjoyed on such social occasions as **apéritifs** or celebrations, besides being **a convenient option for many other occasions**. It is now **developing new forms** reflecting increased attention to fresh, healthy and creative ingredients; there are also **'fusion tramezzini'** combining ingredients and flavours from different world cuisines. This popularity **has even infected Rome**, where the *tramezzino* has primarily become a quick snack at bars and food counters, featuring thick, processed bread and simple fillings such as mozzarella and tomato, tuna and tomato, ham and lettuce, hot dogs or 'fast-food' ingredients. **At Babington's in Piazza di Spagna, the oldest Italian teahouse, tiny**

'finger sandwiches' are served on silver tiered stands accompanying teapots or, in summer, glasses of refreshing cold-brewed tea.

In July 1936, *La Cucina Italiana*, a food magazine for families and gourmets, published a long article on the very subject of *tramezzini*, with preparation and presentation suggestions, forever enshrining them in the national consciousness.

As we can read, the original *tramezzino* from Turin consists of white sandwich bread, aromatised butter (now mostly replaced by mayonnaise) and other fillings as desired.

The youngest sibling in the century-old family is pre-packed, plastic-sealed and found on long-life supermarket shelves or in vending machines for an affordable, fast, versatile meal (fillings may include vegetables, meat, cheese, fish, pickles and more).

Over time, the *tramezzino* **has spawned innumerable variants. In Sicily it has evolved into a roll of soft sandwich bread containing tuna and tomato, salmon and ground pistachio, or swordfish with sweet-and-sour mayonnaise and caramelised onions, served sliced into roundels.**

The hundredth anniversary of the *tramezzino* demonstrates Italian cuisine's facility for **adapting to times and preferences without losing its identity**, as attested by CNN Travel's recent ranking of the world's 25 best sandwiches, where in the *tramezzino* is the only 'street food' entry.

Attilio Borda Bossana



The 'wrongly' named fruit

by **Morello Pecchioli**

Honorary Academician for Verona

Prickly pears, known as 'Indian figs' in Italian, originated on the Mexican Plateau several millennia ago.

Lucky tourists who summer in the South: they must not miss the **ice cream made from recently plucked prickly pears**, a ripe connubium of freshness and the venerable creamer's art. They must also grasp all the other occasions to enjoy this fruit: **preserves, relishes, syrups, interesting risotti, surprising salads, tagliatelle with speck** (a North-South marriage!), **desserts**.

On Ponza, and island in the Pontine Archipelago, the plant's cladodes (which seem to be leaves but aren't) **are made into parmigiana delle palette**, a traditional recipe wherein these cactus parts are used in place of aubergines. The procedure is identical: lashings of tomato sauce, abundant snowfalls or parmesan cheese, and into the oven. The dish, typical of the island, is **recognised as a Traditional Agrifood Product (PAT)** by the Ministry of Agriculture.

India bears no relation to these honey-sweet fruits

Having placated the palate, let us consider the tongue. In Italian, **Fico d'India can be written in two ways**: as one word, *ficodindia*, or two, *fico d'India*. But India



bears no relation to this honey-sweet fruit (beware of its thorns); nor do figs, though just as sweet. July and August are the months when prickly pears ripen, though an agricultural method called *scuzzulatu* makes them ripen even later.

Riccardo Morbelli, in *Il Boccaffina - ossia il Gastronomo avveduto (Finetongue: Or, the Discerning Gourmet)*, whimsically warned readers: "There are no India Figs in India"; and since in its Mexican homeland it was originally cultivated by the indigenous population sometimes termed *Indios*, he suggested calling the fruit *fico d'indios*.

The history of the 'wrong' name is similar to that of other American foodstuffs brought back by **Cristopher Columbus**: the navigator, convinced of having arrived in the Indies, 'Indianised' all he could, from inhabitants to animals (turkey in Mantova dialect is still called *dindio*; cf. French *dinde*) to crops. Hence 'India figs' rather than the more appropriate 'Mexican figs', reflecting their origin

on the plateau where the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán, now Mexico City, once rose. Fossil seeds denote its presence there several millennia ago.

An Aztec legend associates the foundation of Tenochtitlán with a population who migrated southwards inspired by a divine prophecy telling them to settle where an eagle clutching a snake in its talons perched on a prickly pear cactus. They complied. **Mexico still honours that myth: on its green, white and red flag is the emblem of an eagle on a prickly pear cactus**, grasping a rattlesnake in its talons and beak.

Curious is the destiny of the prickly pear, which offers not only healthy fruits but splendid flowers and vivacity to the panorama. It has an Asian country in its (Italian and Linnaean) name, American DNA, but a Mediterranean vocation. **The place where it thrives most** is between the southern European and **northern African coasts: the Mediterranean basin**, indeed. In those lands, especially on the

islands, it presides like a pope, a prickly prolific pontifex. **Wherever it takes root, it procreates prodigiously.** Though not autochthonous, having arrived in Europe only 500 years ago, and notwithstanding its alien appearance with leaves that are not leaves but spiky flattened branches, the prickly pear is the multicoloured protagonist of the panorama surrounding the Mare Nostrum. It is **the sovereign of the coasts of Calabria, Puglia and the islands**, from Elba to the Aeolians, from Ponza to the Tremiti, from Filicudi to Lampedusa, from Pantelleria to Sardinia. But **the land most favoured by *Opuntia ficus indica*, this being its scientific name, is Sicily.**

In postcards, prickly pears are to Sicily as Mediterranean pines (before parasites massacred them) were to Naples, the wild papyrus at the Fountain of Arethusa to Syracuse, St Peter's dome to Rome, the gondola to Venice and the pin-up to Rimini... They are not mere landscape features. The prickly pear, the dome, the gondola make the landscape: souls and symbols of a city or a region.

*Vittorini called them
'corals on the rocks'*

Elio Vittorini, the Syracusan author of *Conversazione in Sicilia* (*Conversations in Sicily*), called prickly pears 'corals on the rocks'. "They were **as if carved of sky-blue stone, all these prickly pears**, and when we passed a living soul it was a boy who was going or coming, along the tracks, to pick the fruit crowned with thorns that grew, like coral, on the stone". A column of prickly pears adorns the cover of *Magaria* by **Andrea Camilleri** (Mondadori, 2013). The writer was mad about prickly pears: "They are serious business", he said. It was not a Sicilian but the Andalusian **Federico García Lorca** (same Mediterranean heart) whose poem "Chumbera" (Prickly Pear) compares the plant's contortions to those of poor Laocoön, strangled with his sons by serpents sent by Athena for having warned his



Trojan compatriots about the horse offered by the Greeks: "Wild Laocoön. How well you look beneath the half moon! Multiple pelota-player. How well you look threatening the wind! Daphne and Attis know of your pain. Inexplicable."

Without its *ficudinia*, Sicily would lose its colours, flavours and spirit. It would lose history and legends. How can we imagine Trinacria without prickly pears? Yet, five centuries ago, it had none. They were as absent in Sicily as in Morbelli's India.

*The Spaniards, upon
first beholding it, called
it a "botanic monster".*

"Botanic monster", the Spaniards called it when first they saw it; but they soon learned that, **de-thorned, what remained was a sweet pulp and a healthful fruit rich in minerals**, especially phosphorus and calcium, and vitamins A and C.

Prickly pears were introduced into Sicily 'only' in the second half of the sixteenth century, and on that Mediterranean isle it found its most suitable habitat in the world. In some areas of the island they are called *ficurinia* or *ficupala* for their cladodes resembling a *pala* (paddle). Around Ragusa they are called *ficumori*, attributing their introduction to the Moors (Arabs). In Sardinia too: *sa figu morisca*. This is historically untenable, as Arab rule in Sicily ended

four centuries before Columbus. However, there's a reason to involve the Moors. According to **a Sicilian legend**, prickly pears were formerly poisonous, introduced by the Turks to massacre the "baptised flesh" of Christians. However, the Lord not only prevented this, but transformed the venomous pulp into a sweet, juicy, beneficial substance. **Another interesting tale explains the agricultural practice of *scuzzulatu*** ('knocked off') or *bastarduni* ('big bastard'), the prickly pear which fruits late because its early flowers and fruits are *scuzzulati*: knocked off. They say that this originated from a rivalry between two neighbouring farmers. One, envying the other's fruit, *scuzzolò* (knocked off) those fruits to prevent them from growing. Instead - miracle of nature! - the fruits grew anyway, though belatedly, and were even larger, fairer and sweeter.

There are three prickly pear varieties, with yellow, red or white pulp. Besides being eaten fresh, prickly pears are consumed in many ways, including liqueur. They have very few calories and are thus good for dieters. They contain woody seeds which may cause intestinal problems and should be removed. Their juice is an effective folk remedy against coughing. The less prized fruits and paddles are fed to livestock. They are also used for breeding *Dactylopius coccus*, the cochineal insect which produces carminic acid, whence is extracted the red carmine dye used for cloth (as known to the Aztecs), cosmetics and food colouring.

Morello Pecchioli