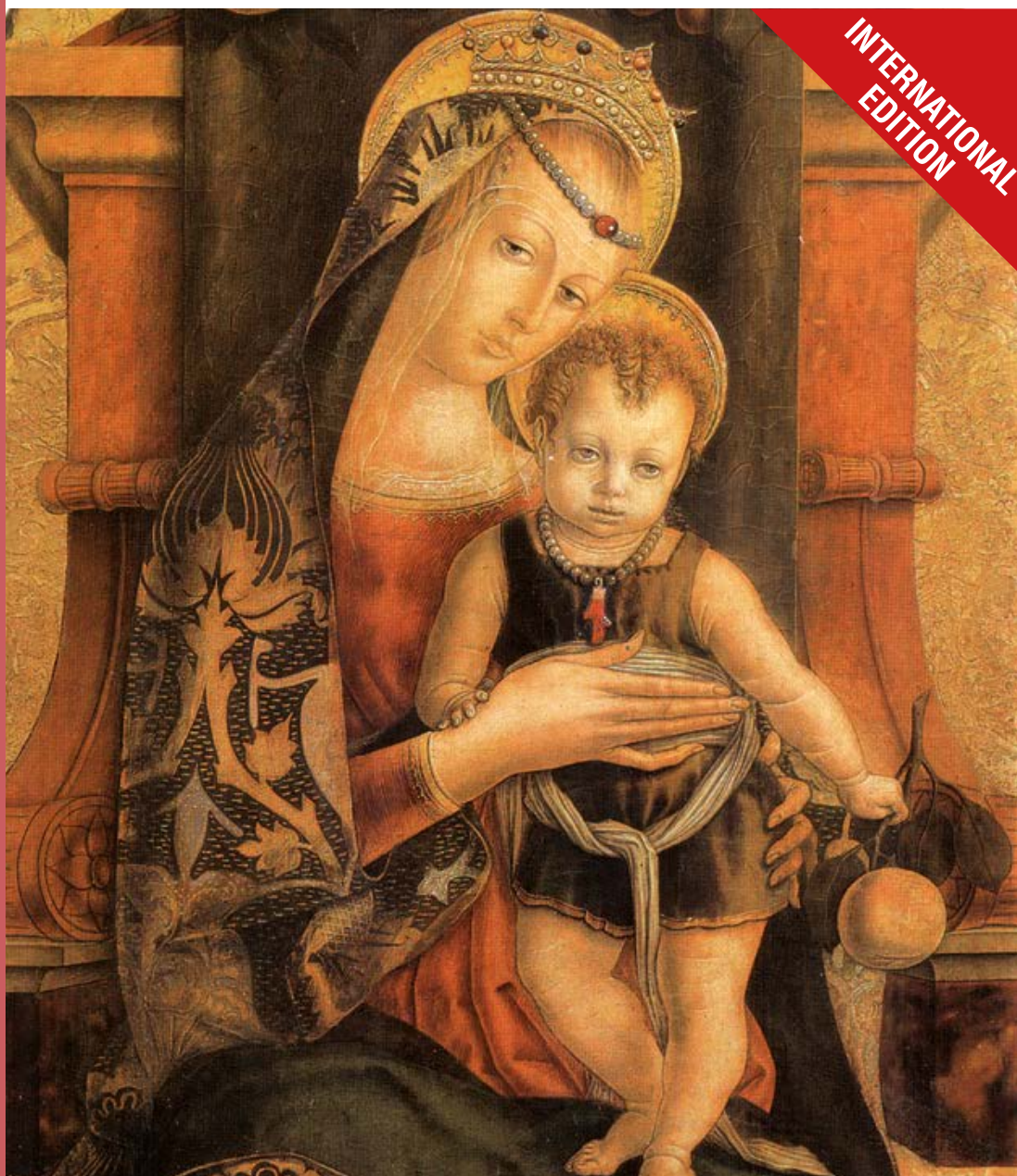


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GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: Detail of *Madonna and Child with Small Praying Franciscan Friar* (1482) by Carlo Crivelli; Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome

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Cautious, not anxious, consumption

Despite alarming past predictions for the 21st century, in truth little has changed.

Year 2022: The Survivors is the Italian title for the renowned 1973 film *Soylent Green*, based on a dystopian novel from 1966. The Earth is devastated by pollution and overpopulation; the natural ecosystem no longer exists and the climate is torrid. Seasons are reduced to a permanent summer with temperatures of at least 30°C. Technological dominion and consumerism have waned because the objects they produced are falling apart for lack of spare parts; electricity is often unavailable; food and water are rationed. Food is indeed humanity's foremost problem. The only common food left is the nutritional wafers called Soylent, which come in various colours including **Soylent Green**, falsely claimed to be made mostly of plankton.

Things are easier and slightly faster, but basically unchanged

Somewhat earlier, in 1959, the singer-songwriter **Bruno Martino** wrote an amusing song called "Nel 2000" ("In the year 2000") which began: "In the year 2000, we'll no longer eat steaks or spaghetti with *ragù*; we'll take four pills, and our hunger will be gone in a jiffy". In the 1960s, the near future, within the next 50 years, was imagined either as very advanced (as in **2001: A Space Odyssey** from 1968) or terribly grim, unnerving and, in current parlance, dystopian, as in **Blade Runner** (a cult film from 1982, set in 2019). In reality, little has changed in 60 years: we ride bikes, motorcycles, cars, trains and planes. Perhaps everything is a little faster and more com-



by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia

fortable, but its general nature is unchanged. Other planets have not been conquered; medicine has not solved its major problems; wars and epidemics are always looming. Food is also essentially the same, but improved. Wines and oils are better; ingredients are generally always good and available; recipes are increasingly refined; restaurants are ever more sophisticated.

The justified fear of losing everything has remained over the years

Nevertheless, the concrete terror that all this could end lurks now as it did all those years ago. Hence our preoccupation with 'sustainability'. That is, we must not overexploit the Earth's bounty; we must ensure that future generations benefit from the same abundance that we currently enjoy. However, **far-sighted large companies are developing so-called Frankenfoods**: transgenic lab-tweaked food; or perfecting 'fake meat', imitating steak and meatballs using vegetable proteins; or elaborating 'clean meat': synthetic or lab-cultivated meat originating from stem cells. Foods based on crickets, ants and larvae are already being sold. **The path is clear**: the world's population recently reached 8 billion and will soon reach 10. In 1975 we were 4 billion; our numbers have doubled in 50 years. The danger is real, and aggravated by climate change. So, let us consume carefully, without waste, but also without wallowing in despair. Readers, fear not: **Soylent Green** is not our fate.

Happy holidays and an excellent new year, dearest Academicians!





The octopus: its intelligence and its carpaccio

by Giovanni Ballarini

Honorary President of the Academy

Its frequent culinary use would suggest farming, which, however, raises ethical problems.

Since antiquity, eating animal flesh has raised problems which we would now consider, in part, ethical, troubling many from the **Pythagoreans** to modern-day vegan philosophers. Fish generally occasion less soul searching, and the octopus, for instance, triggers hardly any qualms at all. But, given **the abundance of octopus on restaurant tables**, is it really so problem-free?

A food website offers forty-four octopus recipes: **from salads and carpaccio to pasta sauces** and more, the octopus has become **one of the most popular**

among the 550 wild animals, from oysters to prawns to salmon and even bluefin tuna, reared in captivity in almost 190 countries, accounting for over half of seafood sales.

Manifold reasons for its culinary success

There are manifold reasons why octopus is a success at the table; one is **the possibility of transforming it while concealing its shape**, making it less obviously seafood and hence more acceptable to vegetarians. There are about **three hundred species** of octopus, of which over a hundred are **caught in various ways**, amounting to a worldwide harvest which had already reached four hundred thousand tonnes fifteen years ago and has increased ever since. **Today Asia accounts for two thirds of the octopus harvest** and its main importers are Japan, Korea, Spain, Greece, Portugal and Italy, with growing demand and inevitably rising prices making it an appealing idea to raise *Octopus vulgaris*, which adapts easily to captivity, grows and reproduces fast, lives only one or two years, thrives on low-cost natural foods and fetches a high market price.

Farming had been mooted as early as 1977

The scope for, and problems of, octopus farming were investigated as early as 1977 by **Roger T. Hanlon** ("Laboratory



rearing of the Atlantic reef octopus, *Octopus briareus* Robson, and its potential for mariculture"; *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting - World Mariculture Society*, March 1977), and studied in 2004 by **Paulo Vaz-Pires** and collaborators ("Aquaculture potential of the common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris* Cuvier, 1797): a review" - *Aquaculture*, 238 (1-4), 2004).

Governments, universities and private companies have recently invested important resources in octopus farming, which is becoming feasible while also **raising questions of a different nature**, concerning the health and well-being of the farmed animals, their nutrition, and the venture's ecological implications. The octopus is predominantly carnivorous, dining on sea urchins and other molluscs, crustaceans, and small fish; raising it has the same effects as other carnivorous aquaculture by increasing, not alleviating, the pressures on wild aquatic animals. The octopus has a feed conversion ratio of approximately three to one (the weight of animals eaten is about three times that of the octopus), which would impoverish global fisheries **without solving the problem of providing adequate food for a growing human population**. Furthermore, **some believe** (and their numbers are growing) that, even if aquaculture scientists discovered a less unsustainable



diet and reduced the venture's ecological burden, **octopus farming would be unethical** and could be downright immoral.

These invertebrates display complex behaviour

It has long been established that the octopus has a **relatively large brain**, a sophisticated nervous system and complex behaviour. **These beings can solve problems by changing colour** to camouflage themselves; they have a **good memory**; they cunningly evade predatory sharks;

they **distinguish between individual humans**; they display **behaviour interpreted as play**; and they hunt in response to cooperative signals sent by fish. Some have therefore hypothesised that **the octopus is a cognitively complex and self-aware sentient being**, and therefore ethically **unsuitable for captivity** and mass rearing.

A very tricky problem bristling with cultural complexities

Octopus farming is currently limited by the difficulty of keeping the animals alive in the early stages of life; however, with additional investment and research, industrial-scale octopus farming should be possible. A Spanish multinational is beginning commercial farming of the common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*) in the Canary Islands, with a projected yield of three thousand tonnes annually.

The future of octopus farming remains unpredictable, as does the debate which could result from this thorny problem bristling with cultural complexities. One could argue that pigs are also intelligent, so what would be the ethical difference between pig and octopus farming? Would it be necessary to tell consumers whether an octopus is farmed or wild? **And who can judge whether eating an octopus is ethical** and morally acceptable?

Giovanni Ballarini





Veronese *pandoro*: the shape of Christmas

by **Morello Pecchioli**

Honorary Academician for Verona

Shaped like an eight-pointed star, pandoro ('golden bread') was named by Domenico Melegatti, who registered its original recipe.

If it had an identity card, it would read thus - name: Pandoro; place and date of birth: Verona, 14 October 1894; profession: Christmas cake; distinguishing features: eight-pointed star shape. Few know - even in Verona itself, where it has prospered for 128 years - that *pandoro*, now a generic word and thus no longer capitalised, **inherited the family profession**, with a grandfather several centuries old, **nadalín**, or *natalino* (from *Natale*, 'Christmas') in standard Italian, and an

older sister, **offella**. *Nadalín* and *offella* are also Veronese purebred Christmas cakes, but without the same national and international success as their celebrated relative. *Pandoro* has overtaken them by miles, transcending the Veronese borders to vie with *panettone* for the title of 'Italy's favourite Christmas cake'. The winsome cake, its golden dome dusted with a snowy sprinkling of icing sugar, has even leapt overseas, competing at the international Yuletide cake level. Besides its grandfather *nadalín*, whose mellow DNA flows in its veins, *pandoro* has a certified father: **Domenico Melegatti**, a baker by trade.

Nadalín has legendary origins

Let us begin from the progenitor of the Pandoro family tree. Like all Veronese specialities - *pastissada de caval*, *pearà*, *ignochi*, Amaron - *nadalín* also has a leg-

endary origin. Veronese gastronomic lore narrates that **it was first baked in 1263** thanks to **Jacopino della Scala**, founder of the Scala dynasty, wishing to celebrate his first Christmas as ruler by having his court baker prepare a sweet bread **with a symbolically stellar shape: *nadalín***, of course. Leaping five centuries onwards, we find the first documented accounts of it in the late 18th century, when it was recorded in patrician Veronese families' Christmas shopping lists. At the dawn of the following century, **Giambattista Conati**, a literature and history teacher in the city's lycaemum and an enthusiast of local traditions, recounted that "so-called Christmas breads, or *natalini*, are made using flour, oil and raisins". In *Verona illustrata a tavola* (*Illustrated Veronese Cookery*), the historian **Andrea Brugnoli** notes that monastery documents from the late 18th century describe a sweet bread, very similar to *nadalín*, made from flour, butter, eggs and sugar, made by the nuns in a Veronese convent for distribution to benefactors - an impressive number thereof, considering the quantities of ingredients enumerated in these records. Contributors to **the *nadalín-pandoro* transformation** included the **Austrian master bakers** brought into Verona by Habsburg occupation troops in the early 19th century. They were experts on *linzertorte*, Viennese *kipferl*, Alsatian *gugelhupf* (similar to a *pandoro* with a central hole) and other buttery leavened creations bulging with eggs, raisins, rum, almonds and vanilla. Through such influences, *nadalín*, a popular mainstay since time immemorial, ceded its throne to its descendants, *offella* and *pandoro*: especially the latter, which bewitched Veronese palates and then, gradually, those of the *foresti*, the outsiders.



Domenico Melegatti

Offella came from convent kitchens and humble country hearths

By right of primogeniture, *offella* - from the Latin *offa*, 'dumpling', plus the diminutive 'ella' - should have gained more fame than *pandoro*. It has the same soft, buttery goodness as its younger brother. A fair number of *offelle* (the plural) sprang from artisanal ovens in the second half of the 19th century, beloved as they were by the Veronese aristocracy and bourgeoisie. But in more ancient times, it emerged from convent kitchens between a *Silent Night* and an *Adeste Fideles*, or lurked under the ash or on the embers of humble country hearths: for Christmas, even the most impoverished peasants allowed themselves the luxury of **adding scant sugar to their simple flour and water dough, shaping it**, before baking, into sacred shapes: the star, the Holy Child, the stable, the angel. It was crucial that **the cake represent the birth of Christ the Saviour**.

Its birthright was thwarted, however. *Pandoro* took off and continues flying with a tail wind. **Offella remains a delightful, but niche, sweetmeat.**

This traditional Veronese cake enjoyed massive success thanks to Domenico Melegatti

Credit for the success of this typical Veronese cake belongs to Domenico Melegatti: **master baker**, entrepreneur with a flair for marketing, and *pater certus* to this king of cakes. Domenico was a businessman ahead of his time. He was not the only purveyor of soft leavened Christmas cakes in Verona, but he was the one who **christened his creation *pandoro*, from *pan de oro*** ('golden bread'), a likeable and suitably Christmas-infused name, and asked the Patent Office to **register its name and recipe**. His request was granted. On 14 October **1894**, that office issued Melegatti with a certification



of his sweet discovery: **only he could boast of having created *pandoro***.

Melegatti reached *pandoro* by way of *nadalìn*. Well-versed in leavened bakery techniques, he eliminated the sugar and pine nut icing that hindered the cake from rising fully; he added eggs and butter to make it softer; and he modified ovens to produce a constant temperature. Such ingenuity gave rise to *pandoro*: tender as the love between Romeo and Juliet, iconic as the Arena of Verona, standing head and shoulders above other cakes just as the Lamberti tower dominates the city. It is also far taller than *nadalìn*, whose star shape it retains because it, too, must recall the birth of Jesus.

A Veronese painter created the characteristic eight-pointed star cake mould

Melegatti, with his idiosyncratic personality, was not quite finished. A cunning market strategist, he also pondered the **cake's design**, entrusting this to the eminent **Angelo Dall'Oca Bianca**, a nationally famous Veronese painter loved by his townsfolk. **Who better to lend the cake its Yuletide form?** The artist invented the characteristic eight-pointed star-shaped cake mould.

Domenico was not yet sated. **He wanted to win big**. Having patented the *pandoro* recipe, to avoid future legal battles with competing bakers, **he challenged them to reproduce the original cake**: whoever could bake a *pandoro* identical to his would be **rewarded with 1000 Lire** forthwith. This was a princely sum: a popular song of the era implored "Mother, give me a hundred Lire so I can go to

America". **Nobody claimed the prize**, and Domenico, whose workshop was in Corso Portoni Borsari facing the romantic church of San Giovanni in Foro, twisted the knife in the wound by proclaiming his victory in dialectal verse: "*El sta de fronte a San Giovanni en Foro/ e l'è 'nventà el pandoro./ I pasticieri da la rabia muti/ i à volùo scimiotarlo tuti*". (He faces San Giovanni in Foro and invented *pandoro*; other bakers, mute with rage, would ape him but failed).

The cake war between Milan and Verona continues

The rivalry that soon erupted between *pandoro* and *panettone* undoubtedly stoked the former's fame. In Italy, such rivalries have always caused a great brouhaha: Bartali vs Coppi, Mazzola vs Rivera, De Gasperi vs Togliatti, Mina vs Milva, Topo Gigio vs Calimero... The cake war between Milan and Verona continues. The late and lamented **Giorgio Gioco**, cook, poet and sculptor, **was the standard-bearer for *pandoro***, which he sliced horizontally, **stuffed with *zabaione*** and served to writers, actors, journalists, singers and artists at the tables of his 12 Apostoli restaurant. **Maria Callas** tasted it before and after her weight loss. **Barbra Streisand** told **Vincenzo Mollica**, who interviewed her in Los Angeles for RAI, that "golden bread with *zabaione*" was one of the three things that made a trip to Italy worthwhile. The other two were the Cinque Terre and Piazza dei Miracoli in Pisa. Gioco recounted how even the unappetising **Indro Montanelli** gushed: "Hurrah for *pandoro* with *zabaione*".

Morello Pecchioli



Italian oyster farming

by **Mario Emilio Bruzzone**
Milano Duomo Academician

A deep dive into the success of Italian oyster farming and oyster parks.

The quintessentially French duo of oysters and Champagne has adopted a new Italian guise in recent years. **Italian oysters and bubbly are conquering hearts and palates.** We produce far fewer oysters than France, but the hard work of our growers and restaurateurs has made the Italian oyster a top-quality food. Oyster farms are mostly found in the Scardovari Lagoon (in the Po river delta), where a French technique transplanted into Italian territories has nourished oysters recognised among the best worldwide; in the Varano Lagoon, Gargano, Puglia; and in San Teodoro (province of Sassari, Sardinia). Other small, prestigious oyster beds are found in the Golfo dei Poeti, La Spezia.

Pink oysters from the Po river delta

These oysters are **pink because of long exposure to sunlight**, and their shells

acquire rosy streaks that make them particularly pretty. **Their best feature, however, is flavour.**

The **pink oyster** bears the mark of a producer, **Alessio Greguoldo**, and of **Florent Tarbouriech**, creator of a suspension system whereby oysters are **attached to ropes** which allow regulation of air and water flow, **simulating tide action.**

This pink mollusc was developed by the Scardovari Consortium (Italy's foremost mollusc-farming organisation), with breeding areas in the Sacca degli Scardovari Lagoon, located in Porto Tolle, within the Po Delta Regional Park, also noted for PDO mussels and Polesine clams. These pink oysters, ranging from 0 to 5 in calibre, have **firm, substantial flesh and a persistent flavour.** **The Tarbouriech method** is innovative because it involves vertical, rope-borne cultivation, rather than horizontal as in Normandy. The tides which allow the oysters to exit and re-enter the water are simulated by raising and lowering the oyster columns out of, and back into, the sea. **Chefs have welcomed the Italian oyster project with open arms**, not only for the cachet of a Made in Italy product, but to differentiate themselves from the French. Indeed our oysters, being lagoon-bred, are more mellow, **sweeter, less aggressive** and crunchy in texture thanks to the emersion system.

How to eat them? Raw, obviously, to enjoy their full flavour; and in the correct manner: open, with the first oyster liquor poured out; once the oyster is in your mouth, press it against your palate with your tongue to extract its flavour, and only then, chew it slowly. Pepper? Lemon? It's better to start natural, and then have fun with whatever combinations the chefs may suggest.

Gargano Oysters





Varano Lagoon



San Teodoro Lagoon

Puglia oysters: firm and sweet

Sweet and firm, Puglia oysters inhabit category A waters and subterranean sweet-water springs in the **Gargano area**; such waters alongside the hot sun in the 'spur of Italy' guarantee a perfect habitat for growth. On the palate, **an immediate iodine rush** swiftly veers towards sweetness and complexity, with vegetable notes **followed by a persistent flavour of dried fruit and minerals**. These oysters undergo an initial pre-fattening phase in lanterns within the lagoon. When reaching their ideal size, **they are attached by hand to ropes hanging from ancient frames** for growing mussels. Being manually lifted out of the water to reproduce the effects of tides, they are exposed to the sun, the moon, the wind and the weather; this makes them hardy and resilient. Spacing and shape are monitored throughout growth to favour the ideal environment for a sumptuous harvest. The shells are hard, lined in flawless mother-of-pearl, with fluted edges occasionally boasting the very rare black nacre. **Why are they named San Michele?** In honour of the Archangel Michael, protector of Gargano, and of the strong link between the sanctuaries of Monte Sant'Angelo (on Mount Gargano) and Mont Saint-Michel in Brittany.

The first oyster farm resulted from an encounter in San Severo between **Armando Tandoi**, from a major company that imported and distributed seafood in Italy, and **Vincenzo Falco**, President of the Ischitella Fishing Consortium. It is in the Varano Lagoon, positioned alongside its 'twin', the Lesina Lagoon, on the northern Gargano coast, where sweet and fresh

water meet on the 'spur of Italy'. Importantly, the Varano Lagoon is notably less salty than the Adriatic Sea. Tandoi is a son of these lands, of a Puglia which has elevated seafood to a collective religion since the remotest antiquity.

Fragrant and savoury: the green oysters from the Poets' Gulf

The so-called **green oysters** grown by the mussel farmers in the Golfo dei Poeti ('Poets' Gulf'; La Spezia) have a **brilliant, translucent hue**. They are exceptionally fragrant to the nose and savoury on the palate.

The history of these bivalves, possibly the first cultivated in Italy, takes us to the early 20th century, when production was interrupted, resuming in 2006. Ligurian fisherfolk proudly maintain that their oysters' green colour is natural, while the French obtain it by placing their shellfish in contact with seaweed. Green oysters, whether concave or flat, **almost exclusively consume local phytoplankton, which imparts green highlights**; from this, the term *marroir*, meaning the Gulf's 'marine terroir', was coined.

In the San Teodoro Lagoon, Sardinia

The Stagno di San Teodoro ('St Theodore's Pond'), **in the province of Sassari**, Sardinia, is a coastal lagoon of extraordinary beauty. It also hosts one of Sardinia's most important oyster beds, characterised by absolute sustainability and maximum respect for the environment. In the foreground, a white sandy beach with emerald-coloured water; in the background, wild mountains; and in between, flamboyantly coloured birds, a flourishing Mediterranean maquis, and stunning granite rocks. The process involves the placement of **juvenile oysters** hatched in human-made structures (therefore without impoverishing the natural stock). They mature after about a year and a half, **growing in sacks and baskets** designed to offer ideal conditions. The entire operation indeed consists of optimising those conditions: water temperature, nutrients, salt level in the water, and so on, in perfect equilibrium between the seawater and the fresh water brought by the mountain streams which end their journey here.

Mario Emilio Bruzzone



San Michele oysters