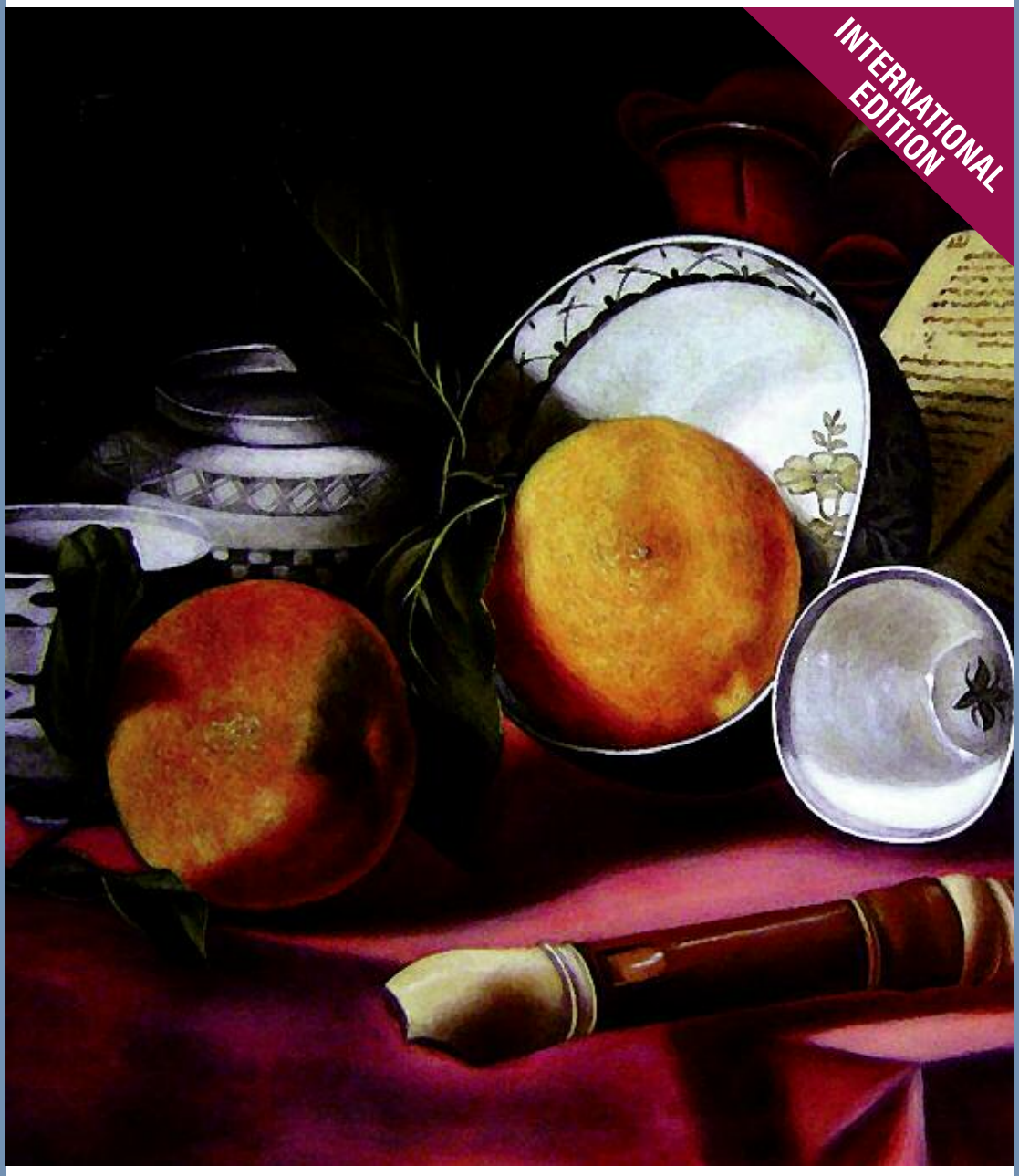
CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

INTERNATIONAL EDITION



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DINOVILLANI, EDOARDO VISCONTIDI MODRONE,
WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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On the cover: *detail of "Still Life with bucchero, china, books and flute" by Cristoforo Munari Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence*

Street cuisine unveiled of its mystery

The mystery of cuisine lies in the fact that there is no mystery. (José Saramago)

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI
President of the Academy

Dear Academicians, when famous chefs are interviewed, too often they are asked to reveal their secrets. The fact is they have no secrets any more than is the case for many skills and professions. In cuisine as elsewhere the secret of quality and success lies in one's knowledge of techniques gained through study and practice, and most of all through a particular sensorial and mental sensibility that, even when it is innate, must be developed through experience over time. It also requires the intellectual humility to recognize one's inevitable errors, to accept and appreciate criticism, and always to remain open to ideas and innovations that may come from other cuisines. And of course one must be able to interpret the needs of society and individuals even in their apparently minor details. Such may be the case with "street cuisine".

Street cuisine is simultaneously very old but always new. Therefore it makes perfect sense to state that among all the food stalls or trucks that one finds along the street that offer low quality food, occasionally one can find one or two that have that certain magic quality that insures success. It is a type of cuisine that has recently returned to the limelight and that is expanding in part because of the current economic situation, with consequences that our Academy cannot ignore. By definition it is a cuisine where many styles overlap and converge and that finds in the sandwich an important point of reference in nutritional anthropology.

The sandwich is probably the oldest form of street food, but at the same time it is difficult to establish a formula for it. It was invented when man created agriculture and thus discovered bread. It is a food that does not require a table and therefore it has always been prevalent in street food. It consists of a chunk of bread cut in half, stuffed with an endless variety of fillings and condiments associated with different things. It can be prepared immediately, and it can rise from a banal preparation to a gastronomic sensation. It only seems mysterious if we do not take into account the balance among the diverse taste and tactile sensations that is reached between the bread and the filling. This is the only explanation for the fame of certain, albeit rare, sandwich artisans (!) or the fact that some kinds of sandwiches can become identifying icons that within certain limits and social conditions have a major influence on a large portion of society. The influence of sandwiches and street food creates an opening through which we can view cuisine as an unconscious expression of a population, a collective, a family or an individual.

It may be an unconscious expression, but it is no mystery. Its measurement can and should be analyzed, investigated, studied, and interpreted by an Academy such as ours. It is not so much a case of examining how we used to eat or how we eat now - however important those aspects may be - but rather of studying and reporting on the vast and complex world of human nutrition in terms of patterns and paradigms, but especially in terms of ways of thinking and mental architecture. Two dimensions that, even in the context of a brief editorial such as this, deserve clarification.

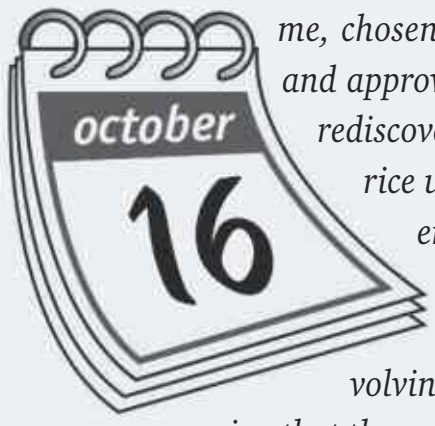
In order to understand a society in its totality (the work of Johan Huizinga is particularly enlightening) one must study its fundamental way of thinking, as well as how it manifests itself in the wisdom of daily life and in common practices such as nutrition. By "mental architecture" I mean a coordinated and socially stable group of convictions shared by a population that in turn is translated into rules, behaviors and judgments. In terms of nutrition, for example, this includes the prohibitions and/or permissibility of individual foods or categories of food, the seasons of their use and their relationship with the territory. Regarding the

latter, the landscape may be seen as an individual and collective interpretation of a territory, and it is one of the most important expressions of one's mental architecture.
Street food, in the broadest definition of the term that means no table is needed (from the traditional bàcari to modern day "Happy Hours") is an area of interest to culinary anthropology, because in this context new tastes are formed and new structures are created that in differing degrees influence and manage to determine the taste of an ever evolving Civilization of the Table.
In this regard we must not forget that bourgeois cuisine, whose decline and possible disappearance we lament, was born from something not unlike street food, with establishments that in misty 18th century Paris offered a cup of hot broth. Indeed, broth purveyors were the forerunners of the contemporary restaurant, as Emmanuelle Jary recently pointed out ("Tout est bon dans la bouillon", Le Figaro, 2012) with reference to the historian Jean-Pierre Poulain (Histoire de la cuisine et des cuisiniers, 2004). In Paris, by the middle of the 18th century establishments known as "bouillons restaurants" had opened. Broth, aimed at "restoring" the customer's strength, was served. Just as today the cocktails served by the bàcari or at "Happy Hour" stimulate one's spirit.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI

2014 ECUMENICAL DINNER

The convivial ecumenical meeting, that brings together all Academicians in Italy and around the world at the virtual table, will take place on October 16 at 8:30 pm, and this year's theme will be The Cuisine of Rice. This theme, chosen by the "Franco Marenghi" Study Center and approved by the President's Council, is aimed at rediscovering the cuisine of the many varieties of rice using traditional recipes that may have been long forgotten and that are part of our regional culinary patrimony. We will also examine some new culinary trends involving rice. Delegates are responsible for insuring that the ecumenical dinner be accompanied by an appropriate cultural presentation that illustrates the importance of the proposed theme, and that a menu devoted to the chosen theme is followed.



The Year of Rice: an opportunity that cannot be lost

A food that cuts down the hunger of half of the world's population; it must be examined by looking not just at the past, but at the evolution of all its varieties and the ways of cooking it.

BY PAOLO PETRONI
Secretary General of the Academy

2014 is the year that the Academy has dedicated to rice. All our Regional Study Centers are working out a schedule to publish the new volume of the Itineraries of Gastronomic Culture for the ecumenical dinner of October 16. Exactly ten years ago, the United Nations proclaimed 2004 as the International Year of Rice. The decision to dedicate an International Year to a single crop, that of rice, was an unprecedented event in the history of the United Nations. Rice is the basic staple for over half of the world's population; in other words, entire populations eat rice for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Rice is intimately tied to the culture and traditions of many countries and is the protagonist of festivals, songs, proverbs and legends. Rice - the symbol of fertility, abundance, good health and genuineness - is a common element in diverse cultures. As the slogan of the International Year states: "Rice is life."

For these reasons, and for the first time, the Study Center of the Academy turns also to its foreign Delegations for the purpose of obtaining contributions about the use of our recipes in various countries but most of all to learn about new culinary trends concerning rice. This research is valid in Italy as well, where the study will focus on the historical aspects of the evolution of the rice culture and on the most appropriate use of the associated varieties of rice. The use of more modern or more fashionable varieties will also be studied in Italy, from black rice to the Thai perfumed rice, from wild rice to the whole grain rice. Even possible outside ethnic influences will be looked at.

Our studies must yield the indispensible support for the knowledge and evaluation of the present situation.

It is certainly easier to read and interpret an old book than to identiry the true and false values of our time, but a good Academician cannot but study the enormous upheavals in our kitchens as a result of globalization and more to the point, of new technologies in the industry and the kitchen. In sum, this must be the time when the Academy turns its attention not just to the past, but observes and analyzes today's cuisine. With many contradictions, for sure, but also with many positive developments.

THE ACADEMY SILVER PLATE

*An elegant silver plated dish engraved with the Academy logo. This symbolic object may be presented to restaurants that display exceptional service, cuisine and hospitality. Delegates may contact the Milan Headquarters (**segreteria@accademia1953.it**) for more information and orders.*

All about bread

By whatever name it is known and wherever it is prepared, one simple fact about bread remains: its fascinating and welcoming aroma fills us with reassuring memories.

BY ALFREDO PELLE
Academician, Apuan Delegation
"F. Marenghi" Study Center

An old proverb states: "the devil lives in the bread box" - that is, when there is no food, when there is hunger, when there is no bread left in the bread box. Therein reside rancor, hate, jealousy and pain. On the other side of the coin, we say a good man is like a "piece of bread", incapable of hurting anyone. Bread itself lies somewhere between these two extremes: it is a commodity whose sacredness, complexity of meaning and symbolism have always accompanied human kind. In spite of the vast differences in its preparation and consumption and social and economic differences associated with it no other food has represented such a cohesive principle in the Mediterranean region as has bread.

More than simply a food, from time to time bread has taken on the role of offering, gift, ex-voto and talisman. It became an element to ward off evil as well as a devotional object. Bread is not merely a daily domestic product but also a symbol, a sign, even has a language unto itself, a vehicle for the exchange of deep social and cultural information. In short, an entire universe of symbols and rites derive from and are associated with bread. Bread was transformed into a way of transmitting messages of good wishes (wedding cakes and breads), of consolidating social relationships (bread for the dead, bread for the poor), of propitiation and protection from natural disasters that could put the availability of food at risk (storms, floods and other calamities). Bread also served as a way of foretelling the future: the ancient Egyptians read prognostications about the future in a handprint left in the dough.

Of course, trying to reconstruct the history of bread is not an easy task: for the ancients and Homer, "eaters of bread" were civilized men, while those who did not eat bread were considered barbarians. Pane, the Italian word for bread, comes from the Greek "Pan", god of nature's fertility and lord of the countryside and rural life.

It is said that fire became instrumental in the preparation of food around 8,000 years before Christ. Initially man probably started by cooking crushed cereal that had been made into a paste. In the so-called "Fertile Crescent" (the stretch of land situated in ancient Mesopotamia in the territory between modern day Iran and Iraq), there were luxurious fields dedicated to the cultivation of wheat, barley and millet. Davide Paolini describes this in detail in his book Bread from A to Z, mentioning the presence of grain biscuits even earlier than 4800 B.C. the date when grain began to be cultivated outside the Fertile Crescent.

At the Louvre in Paris a Mesopotamian bas-relief from the third millennium B.C. shows a man carrying sheaves of wheat, and a sculpture from 2300 B.C. depicts a woman making bread dough. Up to this point all bread was unleavened. Leavened bread first turned up in ancient Egypt, where the production of beer led to the creation of yeast. During the Roman era, the prevalence of bread

grew exponentially: under the reign of Augustus there were approximately 400 working ovens in Rome and there existed precise legislation regarding its manufacture.
The Middle Ages witnessed a notable decline in the use of bread owing to the predominance of feudal lords, the only people allowed to own ovens. Later, the Renaissance focused attention on more refined eating. Indeed, by then the Greek consumption of one kilo of bread a day had fallen to about 150 grams (5 oz.). By then crackers, focaccias, small pizzas and sweet breads had appeared on the scene, but nevertheless the decline in its consumption was marked. However, Tanara, author of L'economia del cittadino in villa (The Economics of Village Life) wrote in 1644: "Those who are in the habit of putting butter, sugar, and other things on their bread do not realize that they are offending the innocence of bread".
Turning to our own times, what kind bread is produced in Italy today? The National Institute of Rural Sociology decided to investigate and came up with 200 different types. It is their intention to present the big picture, rather than a precise measure, given that different names and shapes can refer to the same type of bread.
Their work of determining why certain names have been given to different breads has become a journey through our history and customs. We have the bovolo whose name derives from the snail-like shape that is depicted in a mosaic in St. Marks, or the scafetò that can keep for six months and that owes its name to the fact that country folk bought it infrequently and stored it on a scafetò which is a kind of shelf for storing grain. In Cortina d'Ampezzo there is puccia, which in local dialect means something that came out badly. The bread that is known as micca throughout the Emilia region is known as miseria in the hometown of Giuseppe Verdi. This is a legacy of the recent past when there was nothing to eat but a piece of bread. However what is perplexing is why, if the bread weighs more than half a kilo they call it "gran miseria"! By whatever name it is known and where it is prepared, one simple fact about bread remains: its fascinating and welcoming aroma fills us with reassuring memories. Bread is so good by itself that it needs no accompaniment. As we said earlier, what can you say about a man about whom nothing bad can be said? Simply, "He is as good as a bread". It is no accident that bread symbolizes so much.

ALFREDO PELLE

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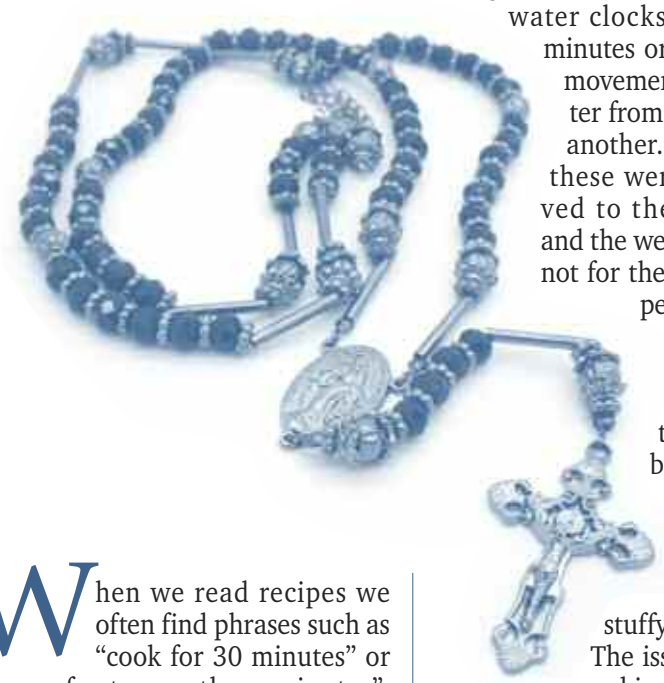
Cooking times... without a clock

Leafing through some old documents from a Romanic church in Tuscany, the author discovered the most common prayers used to determine the cooking time of food.

BY RUGGERO LARCO
Valdarno Fiorentino Delegate



When we read recipes we often find phrases such as "cook for 30 minutes" or "brown for two or three minutes". This is all well and good, but what about back in the days when clocks were a luxury that few people could afford, or even worse, before clocks even existed? We know that "small" timepieces are a relatively recent invention; large mechanical clocks began to appear in the bell towers of late medieval churches in major cities. However several centuries would pass before clocks became household objects. The first pendulum clocks appeared during the second half of the 17th century, and the 18th century gave rise to personal clocks, or "pocket watches".

Before this important invention the passage of time was measured according to the sun (when shining), i.e., using sundials, and hourglasses or water clocks that measured minutes or hours using the movement of sand or water from one container to another. Nonetheless, all these were objects reserved to the upper classes and the well to do, certainly not for the common folk or peasants. And while they might be found in some buildings, certainly such valuable and expensive time pieces as clocks would not be situated in hot and stuffy kitchens.

The issue of measuring cooking times certainly depended on the experience and expertise of the cook, but on something else as well. Human ingenuity and daily life combined to create a system for measuring cooking times that was available to everyone. How? We know how much the Catholic Church influenced the eating habits of the faithful over the centuries. On certain days it was permissible to eat any and everything, but there were also days when that was not allowed and one could only eat lean foods, or even was required to fast. The Church, albeit indirectly, also managed to influence the measurement of cooking times. That is how our ancestors made sure their food was properly cooked. We find one recipe in a famous cookbook by Maestro Martino da Como. He includes this recipe in his book On the Subject of Cooking, written at the end of the 15th century: "Cook for the time it takes to recite two Paternosters". An advantage of the use of prayers to mark cooking times was that the duration was relatively constant. Let's take a look at the prayers that were most often used to determine various cooking times. In the time needed to recite two Gloria Patris (10-12 seconds) liver was cooked. Place it in hot oil with sage - one Gloria for each side. A 15-second Hail Mary measured the cooking time of brigidini. The batter was cooked in the ferratelle, or waffle iron for the duration of one Hail Mary (brigidini are a kind of anise seed waffle typical of Lemporecchio in the province of Pistoia.) The recitation of one Nicene Creed was the time indicated for fried egg. For hard boiled eggs: recite two decades of the Rosary for a normally cooked egg; three decades for a well cooked egg. Bread dough should be allowed to rise well covered for the time it takes to say the entire Rosary (20-25 minutes). And behold the power of faith: in the time needed for a full Mass one could cook a capon to perfection.

Allow me to make a small observation: if for some reason we were unable to consult a clock or a timer in our kitchens how many of us would be able to mark the passing of time in the way described above? Alas, I fear that a lot of food would be either very overcooked or raw.

History and usage of vinegar

"Do not spurn this jar full of vinegar, when it was filled with wine it was worth less" (Valerio Marziale).

BY AMEDEO SANTARELLI
Honorary Academician of Termoli

The origin of vinegar is quite remote. It goes back to pre-historic times when the men of the European Neolithic Age (6000 years ago) were busy sheep rearing and were initiating a stable agriculture and abandoning nomadism. From the plains of the ancestral woods came marshes and streams of black juices of sweet and sour taste that sprang from fruits that had naturally fallen together with edible berries that had been mashed by the elements and caused to ferment and quickly acetify in what became an alcoholic process. Thus vinegar was born and started off on its millennial track up to our time. The holy testaments speak of the vinegar that was used and appreciated in biblical times. Among those who turned their attention to vinegar were Herodotus, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Dioscurides and Galen, in addition to the ever-present Pliny who proclaimed that vinegar had to be "the product of the decomposition of wine". Pliny also wrote that watered vinegar was helpful to Roman legionnaires during their long marches. Ancient Romans were able to obtain good vinegar from the fermentation of sorb apples. Valéry Martial exalted vinegar when he wrote: "Do not spurn this jar full of vinegar, when it was filled with wine it was worth less". He added: "Food is less likable if we take away the bite of vinegar". During the course of many centuries, the preparation of vinegar was a domestic undertaking. Basins filled with wine and other alcoholic liquids were kept in warm and well aired premises, adding to them parts of what was called "the mother of the vinegar", a kind of film containing a bacteria-based concentrate that usually floated in the acetifying liquid. Special attention must be paid in this acetifying process to prevent harmful microbes as they could alter and damage the organoleptic properties of the product.

The production of vinegar as an industry started in the Middle Ages in 1394 at the time that the Corporation of the Vinegar Producers was recognized, thus guaranteeing the quality of vinegar and its usage in a range of recipes. The alchemists of the 18th century knew how to distill vinegar to extract increasingly concentrated solutions of acetic acid. However, they ignored the process of vinegar's formation that was finally discovered when thanks to Lavoisier, alchemy gave way to chemistry. Davy was the first to divulge the chemical equation of the acetifying process. The discovery of the chemical agents in that process was due to the genius of Pasteur. The scientific production of vinegar underwent a large expansion starting in the second half of the 19th century, as world demand for the product grew by leaps and bounds around the world for the conservation and dressing of food. Many centuries before, in France, the prevailing method for acetifying was the one used in Orléans where the best vinegars came from. It must be recalled that vinegar has strong bacterium killing properties incorporating as well harmful bacteria such as typhoid. Speaking of vinegar's lore, there is a funny story about how to make a good salad. Four people are needed: a wise man for the salt, a generous one for the oil, a miser for the vinegar, and a crazy one to stir. The miser in charge of vinegar is bound to be parsimonious in pouring it before salt and pepper are added. There are quite a few celebrated recipes that feature vinegar, starting with the "acetosa of raspberries" by Pellegrino Artusi, a syrup containing vinegar. Another memorable vinegar based recipe is the "scapece" from Vasto. In conclusion, it is almost superfluous to stress that there are several kinds of vinegar with particular characteristics, in some cases quite different from the typical product, all of them recipients of European recognitions, used as unusual condiments and appealing to special tastes. There was a saying about an inept person: "You are good only for making vinegar!". Nothing could be farther from the truth, as now we know what it takes to make a good vinegar.

A day to study Orio Vergani

The Braidense National Library in Milan hosted an important meeting devoted to the Founder of the Italian Academy of Cuisine, combining his biography with an analysis of his particular bent for writing and looking at the world, culture and cuisine.

BY ALDO E. TAMMARO
Academician, Milano Brera Delegation

"Feeding the planet. Energy for life" is the motto for Expo 2015, a commitment that cannot but touch the devotees of eno-gastronomy and cuisine if for no other reason than that Milan's event explicitly refers to the "knowledge of food traditions as cultural and ethnic factors". As a result of this appeal, a new project came into being in Milan under the title "From the Land to the Table, Life in the Kitchen" sponsored by the Braidense National Library, the Superintendence for Archaeological Assets of Lombardy, the State Archives of Milan, the Bibliolavoro Association and ISEC Foundation, and the Italian Academy of Cuisine. In the framework of the activities pertaining to the project and in cooperation with the Scientific Committee of Milan's City Hall ("The Universities and Expo 2015") the Braidense Library called for a study day dedicated to Orio Vergani.

At the opening of the session, the moderator Gianni Fossati stressed that the initiative should not be seen as a commemoration because - he said - Orio Vergani is still among us and talks to us through his multifaceted experience as writer, playwright, journalist (he authored 21,000 articles in 45 professional years) and photographer. Owing to the last two skills, he is considered Europe's first photojournalist.

Prof. Ada Gigli Marchetti of the University of Milan, where she teaches contemporary history and history of mass communications, looked into the main traits of Orio Vergani's biography. He was born in Milan on February 6, 1898, but he always gave 1899 as his year of birth. Was that a put-on or rather the ambition to declare himself a member of the legendary class of "99 boys" who fought in World War I? In 1917 he made his debut as a journalist, as the culture editor for Il Messaggero of Rome. In 1926 he joined the Corriere della Sera under Managing Editor Ugo Ojetti. He spent the rest of his professional life at that newspaper contributing to the prestigious third page, besides writing about politics and sports. He became a member of the Fascist Party and after the war he was subjected to a purge that kept him out for several months. During the war, he worked as a war correspondent detailed to the

Italian Royal Navy. In his comments, the moderator recalled two specific episodes in the life of Orio Vergani. In 1936, he had been sent to cover the civil war in Spain. He was arrested in Barcelona and was freed only after a vigorous intervention by Mussolini who sent two cruisers to the waters of the Spanish city. The second episode concerns his beginnings at Corriere della Sera as a stenographer. In this job, he started beefing up the articles that he received by phone from the various correspondents. Such was his sprucing up that the correspondents themselves expressed their gratitude.

The Academy's President Giovanni Ballarini was next to speak. Vergani - he said - can be celebrated with two symbols: the jar, the emblem of tradition, and the racing bike, the emblem of innovation. In the realm of cuisine, his claim to fame is that he was the first to understand the significance and the dimensions of a real culture by counteracting the conceptions of the time when everybody considered cuisine as a means for survival or, at the most, as a way to satisfy hedonistic tendencies. The only exception, surprisingly, was the "futurist" Francesco Antonio Marinetti. Vergani was fascinated by the idea of creating an organism that could not only enhance the priceless patrimony of Italian cuisine but would promote and protect its unique local features.

An an example, it should not happen that a traveler in the Veneto region would be offered a Milanese cutlet married to a Tuscan wine, unquestionably excellent per se, but alien to the local culture. He decided to establish the Italian Academy of Cuisine, choosing its founders among people who were deeply involved in activities in line with his project. The name "Academy" was chosen because it was thought to be the best identification for the cultural matrix of the organism that was coming into being. It was said then that the academies are like fireflies, they shine only when darkness envelops the land.

Vergani welcomed an idea by one of the founders, Severino Pagani, who suggested the publication of a restaurant guide that would be something different from the Michelin guide listing places to eat, but rather a source of suggestions in order to appreciate cuisines that followed local traditions. The well known journalist Indro Montanelli wrote, tongue in cheek, that Vergani knew all that there was to know about the Tour de France except the name of the winner of the day because instead of being near the arrival line, he was in a local eatery, celebrated for its roast meat and stockfish courses that he described in detail in his article. It should be added that Vergani was a "suiveur", literally a follower as he liked to call himself, since he followed twenty-five Tours de France and an equal number of Giros of Italy.

The third and last presentation was made by Prof. Silvia Morgana, a Crusca Academician from the faculty of History of the Italian Language Department at the University of Milan. She dealt with the writing styles of Orio Vergani, who distinguished himself as a journalist, literary and theater critic, expressing himself in a modern and enjoyable Italian, free from excessive affection. Vergani was a well known disciple of Pirandello, whose Cammino sulle Acque (The Path Over Waters) he staged in 1926. He was influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis and by futurist scenarios. When he embraced sports journalism he forsook his passion for theater. And yet, the strong connection between journalistic and literary writing is always recognizable. His book "Io Povero Negro" (I, the Poor Black Man) written in 1929 can be cited as the synthesis of the linkage between journalistic literature and what was defined at the time as colonial literature. The article that Vergani wrote about the death of the great biking champion Fausto Coppi in January 1960 is symbolic of his writing. He called Coppi the "great heron", a moniker that went down in sports history. Vergani himself passed away just a few months later. Finally, it should be pointed out that Orio Vergani was the founder of the Bagutta Prize that is chronologically the first literary prize in Italy. He was awarded the Viareggio Prize in 1929, the Italian Academy Prize in 1942 and the Marzotto Prize in 1957.

ALDO E. TAMMARO