

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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INTERNATIONAL
EDITION



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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

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

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On the cover: graphic depiction of a detail from the work *Still Life with Fruit* by Severin Roesen (1815-1872) on exhibit at the New Britain Museum of American Art in New Britain, Connecticut, USA.



Regional cuisine and genetic diversity

The great genetic diversity of the Italian population has contributed to the maintenance of the diversity of local and regional cuisine.

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI
President of the Academy

Dear Academicians, a recent scientific acquisition has shed new light - with an important interpretive impact, on a characteristic of Italian cuisine and its high, and fortunately persistent, level of diversity in confined areas. This unusual situation could even be called micro-diversity.

In spite of the rampant urbanization, unbridled marketing and “massification” of our society, agro-alimentary industrialization, the invasive spread of organized mass distribution and especially the industrialized restaurant business, Italy still remains one of the most nutritionally diverse countries in the world. The persistence of regional and territorial dishes (that may even differ between places that are within a day’s walk of one another) seems nothing short of a miracle of resistance. Our fragile culinary patrimony

has managed to persist and resist even in the face of nutritional globalization. Typically, in the past and still today, the wide variety found in Italian cuisine has been attributed to the great unevenness and heterogeneity of the territory. From the Alps to Sicily there is extraordinary diversity in terms of climate, terrain, ecological zones and landscape. The complex orography of Italy is often used to explain the country’s barriers, physical divisions and fragmentation.

This nearly inexhaustible array of conditions have an influence on the typology and variety of animal and plant life, and therefore on the quality of cuisine, but also on the human processes, both ancient and modern. Italy’s many culinary expressions are a reflection of these variations. While Italy is subdivided into a myriad of biological and cultural niches, it always has been and will continue to be to be a land that has been subject to an incomparable human passage owing to the migratory fluctuations that have resulted in culinary mixing, contaminations and hybridization.

The innumerable expressions of micro-diversity in Italy in terms of language and dialects, agricultural products, and social, artisanal and culinary traditions is usually attributed to a continuous equilibrium between the physical and geographical phenomena of isolation and mixing of cultures. Is this very diversity at risk of being overcome by regional isolation and cultural standardization? How do we still manage to maintain, and even develop, research

on nutritional and culinary biodiversity? These two characteristics that seem to be so typical of Italy have elicited the interest of researchers who are seeking new, and to some degree, far-fetched explanations for them.

Researchers from four Italian universities - Bologna, Cagliari, Pisa and Roma “Sapienza” - posed the question as to whether Italian biological and cultural variability might be based on another factor with deeper roots: its genetic variability that has persisted over time. A recent article by M. Capocasa and several collaborators in the *Journal of Anthropological Sciences* (Volume 92, 2013) suggests that that the answer is not only affirmative, but that the influence is much greater than anticipated. This demonstrates that the level of genetic diversity that is found in the Italian population is higher than anywhere else in Europe. For example, within the population of the Veneto region or of Sardinia, or even from areas less than 50 kilometers apart, there exists a higher genetic diversity than that found in Europe between Portuguese and Hungarians, or Spaniards and Romanians - populations that are located hundreds if not thousands of kilometers apart.

The origin of the high level of micro-diversity in Italy is deemed to be a result of the combination of two factors: human migration up and down the peninsula together with isolation imposed by regional geographic characteristics. The resulting high level of genetic diversity may very well be the source of Italian creativity and adapt-



ability. It also demonstrates a new aspect of the origin and persistence of the regional and local cuisines that are typical of Italy. Indeed, genetic variability impacts on our sensorial appreciation and has resulted in a new area of research: nutritional genetics, which is related to the field of psychodietetics. Although the genetics of taste elicits a great deal of interest and there are still many aspects of nutritional genetics

that need clarification, we do know today that genetic variations in the perception of flavors, and therefore in the formation of taste, are important factors in determining and developing nutritional preferences. Based on our current knowledge, we can state that over time, every individual area of Italy has been formed by a myriad of "islands" where a unique genetic detail correlates to an equally specific characteris-

tic of the foodstuffs and especially the way they are combined and prepared: this is how cuisine is made.

This new way of looking at the hundreds, even thousands of different Italian cuisines can provide a new dimension to gastronomic research, especially as an informational tool in the still young science of Italian nutritional anthropology.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI



GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

Contributions to the magazine by Academicians are not only welcome, they are indispensable. However Academicians need to keep in mind some essential guidelines, so that their effort and passion are rewarded by rapid and thorough publication.

● **Articles:** It is essential that **articles be sent electronically**, in Word format (not pdf) to the following email address: redazione@accademia1953.it

● **Article Length:** To avoid cuts that are irritating for both the writer and editor, articles should be between **4,000 and 6,000 characters** (including spaces). Your computer provides character counts.

● **"From the Delegations" Column:** For ease of reading, **maximum length is limited to 2,500 characters including spaces.**

● **Convivial Dinner forms:** it is equally important that the "notes and comments" section of the rating sheets **respect the 800 character limit** (Maximum 1,000 characters) include spaces, in order to avoid cuts and errors. Rating sheets that arrive at Headquarters more than 30 days after the event will be discarded.

● **Please do not send reports on convivial dinners held outside the territory of your Delegation, or on those held in the homes of Academicians** or places other than restaurants and public settings, as they will not be published.

● By observing these simple guidelines Academicians can be reasonably assured of rapid and accurate publication, thereby avoiding painful cuts.

● Obviously, the Editors reserve the right to edit all articles and publish them according to available space.

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The Margherita pizza: a bitter birthday!

Betrayed by substandard ingredients and untrained pizza makers, the most famous pizza in the world is increasingly less Italian.

BY PAOLO PETRONI

Secretary General of the Academy

During the past month of June, the famous Pizza Margherita celebrated its 125th birthday! A letter dated June 1889, written by the head of the table services of the Royal Palace, summoned the cook of the Brandi Pizzeria to the Capodimonte Palace in Naples to prepare pizza for Her Majesty Queen Margherita. The pizza maker responded by preparing the famous three-color pizza that took the name of the Queen. Even today, it is by far the most popular variety of pizza, along with the “marinara” (only tomato, garlic, oregano) and the “Napoli” that has capers and anchovies in salt. The Neapolitan pizza has been recognized by the European Union in 2010 as a Traditional Guaranteed Specialty (STG) and in 2011 it was introduced by Italy as a candidate for Unesco recognition as an intangible patrimony of humanity.

Forty percent of Italians consider pizza the symbolic dish of Italy. It is the Italian word most known overseas followed by *cappuccino*, *espresso* and *spaghetti*. This seems all well and good. Not really. Our national pizza is less and less Italian and is prepared badly in spite of the rules dictated by associations and the many courses for pizza makers. It is calculated that in Italy alone there are 50,000 pizzerias, a humungous number, turning out pizzas that are almost always disappointing. While it is true that after the hamburger pizza is the most difficult food to prepare (none of the two foods can be accurately reproduced in the home

kitchen), the problems lie both in the ingredients and the preparation technique. The problem of the ingredients is indeed dramatic: we have mozzarellas that are not produced with milk but with semi industrial products from Eastern Europe, Chinese or American tomatoes, olive oil from Tunisia or Spain, not to mention vegetable oil, and French, German or Ukrainian flour. According to the Coldiretti agricultural association, in 2013 alone Italy imported 1,058 million pounds of olive oil and olive residues, 176 million pounds of curd for mozzarella, 231 million pounds of tomato concentrate, of which 127 million came from the United States and 63 from China, plus 7.92 billion pounds of soft wheat, an import that is trending toward a 20 percent increase in the first two months of 2014. Somebody is using all this stuff! In addition, there are preparation problems to consider: electric ovens, unleavened dough, poor quality anchovies, thin mixtures, insufficient cooking time in the haste of serving too many pizzas at the same time. Unfortunately, pizza is a mix that is difficult to digest: if the mozzarella is not good, the dough not properly leavened, the tomatoes acidic, the stomach suffers, especially if a lot of beer is ingested as is customary with pizza. Even though pizza is not a dish that is prepared by a chef in a restaurant, but by a pizza maker in front of the open oven, the Academy raises a loud cry of pain for the slaughter of this symbol of Italy.

HAPPY VACATION!

The offices of the Headquarters in Milan

will be closed for summer vacation from August 11-24.

The Editorial Office in Rome will be closed from August 2-31.

We wish all Academicians a happy vacation!



Learning about our roots

A few notes on the academy from its beginning (part 2).



Let us continue the search for our roots following our foundation in 1953 by asking: who are the Academicians and how does the Academy evolve especially after the original “invention” of the Delegations? What are the academies?

Academies and Accademia

The birth of modern academies is strictly interwoven with the development of Humanism, when scholars created alternative institutions where their model of culture could be fostered. In Italy, such institutions are mostly academies that often comprise few persons (the Academy of Lincei opened with just four academicians) but grow thanks to cooptation. In addition, academies have their own headquarters where the academic activity takes place.

The majority of academies include two or more categories of academicians. Besides the Ordinary Academicians (who are enrolled in ordo, or regulations, and enjoy full elective rights, both active and passive), almost always there is a category of Correspondent Academicians, who may be national or foreign, enrolled up to a certain number with elective rights that may be absent or limited, occasionally required to access the institution.

The existence of the two categories of Ordinary Academicians and Correspondent Academicians is due to the nature of the academic activity that takes place in the framework of the Ordinary Academy, where the letters (or correspondence) sent by the Italian and foreign Academicians are read

and commented on in the academic sessions.

Something similar happens in the *Universitas Studiorum* - i.e. universities and colleges - that have in their teachers' roster the Ordinary Professors as well those called Extraordinary and belonging to other categories such as Associates, Professors in Charge, attached or under contract. The hiring of the professors - those who practice public teaching - is regulated by cooptation or “calling” even though such calling is reserved to those who have won a public competition.

As far as the choice of the designation of Academy is concerned, Dino Villani recounts that Orio Vergani spoke for the first time of such a designation during a trip to Suzzara. They ruled out the name “club” because “in Italy it does not carry the prestige that it enjoys in foreign countries while the designation of academy appears to be lofty or even hyperbolic”. Later, however, the intervention of Ernesto Donà delle Rose during a meeting at Milan's Continental Hotel steered the choice to the very term Academy.

Academicians

In order to answer questions posed above, besides reading the Statutes and By-Laws that were examined in a preceding discussion, attention must be focused on the Bi-Monthly Communication of spring 1945 by President Orio Vergani. It is appropriate to recognize that from the beginning - as we noted earlier - our Academy, just like similar institutions, incorporated three categories of academicians under



the overriding principle of equal rights and duties for all academicians in their participation in the cultural activities.

Our Academy comprises the Academicians of the Academic Body or Counselors, the Delegates and the Academicians who are members of the various delegations. Their right to be called Academicians is spelled out in the By-Laws of the 1977-1979 biennium that points out in Art. 1: "Those enrolled in each Delegation must number at least six. They have the right to be called Academicians".

The principle of academic cooptation was constant then and is constant today. It involves choice from the base up and not vice versa. This is the essence of the Italian academic spirit, a model for the rest of the world, with a true innovation, the birth of the delegations, that must be attributed to Orio Vergani.

Delegations: a winning idea

Just six months after the birth of the Academy, nine delegations had come to life and started their activities, in different territorial jurisdictions that are reflected in their designations, some of them in regions, some in cities that are worth mentioning. Alongside

the regional delegations of Liguria, Abruzzo and Apulia, one must cite the delegation of Romagna, a cultural region that in administrative terms is linked to Emilia, where no delegation exists (later on, Parma would create a delegation). The delegations established in cities include Vicenza, Treviso (extending to Belluno and Cadore), Trieste (connected with Gorizia), Florence and Turin. At the same time, work was started toward establishing the Rome delegation.

It may appear strange that nothing was said about a delegation in Milan, an apparent anomaly that could be explained, at least initially, on the basis of what has been stated about the academies and the Correspondent Academicians. If Milan has to host the headquarters of the Academy, would it be possible to have Delegates comparable to the Correspondent Academicians of other academies? The point is that in Milan there are only Academic Counselors.

How did the idea of delegations come about since no such entity existed in other academies? In fact, only recently some academies (including the Academy of Georgofili) have established delegations. An important detail rises from the bimonthly Communication

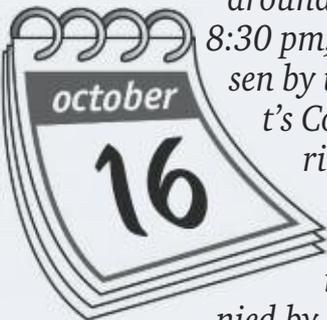
of 1954 that states: "As our first activity we have proceeded to publish the first Guide to Italian Regional Cuisine, carrying 10 - 15 classic regional recipes. The publication will unquestionably meet with success since it has already been requested by the Ministry of Foreign Trade and has been supported by the High Commissioner of Tourism and the Italian National Tourism Agency (ENIT)".

The regional character of Italian cuisine has been the pillar upon which the delegations were built in order to concentrate the cultural activities of the academicians thus bypassing the need for Correspondent Academicians who are present in other academies. In a later stage, the need for cities with their territories, rather than regions, will arise in Italy by the hundred Comuni (Communes).

Likewise, the high territorial differentiation of Italian cuisines has justified the denomination of Italian Academy of Cuisine rather than Academy of Italian Cuisine. Most importantly, has brought about the concept of unlimited Delegate Academicians and Academicians belonging to delegations while keeping a lid on the number of the Academicians who are members of the Academic Body or Counselors.

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.





“Storione” (sturgeon): fish or dessert?

Soft cream in a marzipan shell: another recipe at risk of extinction?

BY LUIGI MARINI

Honorary Delegate, Teramo (Abruzzo)

Beautifully situated on a hillside, Canzano in the Province of Teramo has always been celebrated for its traditional needlework. But it is also noted for some of its typical dishes, such as “turkey Canzano style”, an extremely refined dish that is known even beyond our national borders. An old story recounts that many years ago in the small town of Canzano there was an unfaithful husband who frequently came home very late at night. In response to his poor wife’s repeated questions as to his whereabouts, the man would answer that he went out to eat some fish. One evening, while the man was getting ready to go out again “for some fish”, his wife forestalled him with the following words: “Tonight I made the fish”. And she placed on the table a large “fish” in the shape of a sturgeon - it reality, it was a splendid dessert. Alas, the chroniclers do not

tell us whether this clever stratagem actually succeeded in seducing the faithless husband and keeping him from his nighttime wanderings, but in compensation we still have this wonderful one-of-a-kind dessert whose laborious preparation had rendered it an endangered species. But legends apart, one thing is certain: *storione* is a dessert that originated in Canzano, a town dedicated to the preparation of truly unique and elaborate dishes that are in no way rustic. The people of Canzano so jealously guard their gastronomic secrets that the original recipe for “*Canzano storione*” was kept by a local noblewoman who insisted that the recipe be placed in her coffin with her when she died. Or so her relatives claim. Today the recipe is handed down from mother to daughter “by ear”, and it may only be attempted after watching its preparation by an elder. However it would be more precise to say that this dessert is slowly disappearing in view of the laboriousness of its preparation. Today it is only possible to eat it in the town’s most famous restaurant, *La Tacchinella*, where, upon request, treasured hands will make you this dessert of southern derivation, along with other typical local dishes. The recipe is presented exactly as the owner of the restaurant describes it. Any attempt to describe the flavor and creaminess of the dish is superfluous. This dessert differs from the

traditional pastries of Teramo, which are plain and use simple ingredients. I have tried to track down the origin of this dish that is so anomalous in Abruzzo, but have been unable to find a reliable source. Some attribute its origin to the family of the Dukes of Acquaviva who were allegedly great gourmets based on the many refined dishes that are associated with them. Another unique aspect is that this dessert has never traveled beyond its town of origin: even though the dish is known to the inhabitants of the nearby city of Teramo just a few kilometers away, it can neither be found in its restaurants nor have the local people ever attempted to make it. One more unusual fact: a very similar dish based on almond paste and filled with cream (but not made in the shape of a fish) can be found in the inland town of Isola del Gran Sasso, which is a long distance from the land of the *storione*. What could these two places have in common? Perhaps they met up along the path of 15th century wool trade? And will we Academicians be able to ensure that this dessert remains part of the province of Teramo’s culinary tradition or is it destined to be lost in oblivion?





What are “moeche”?

The space of just a few hours, from molting to the new life cycle, is all it takes to turn a crab into a “moeca”.

BY PIETRO FRACANZANI

Delegate of Eugania - Basso Padovano

They are crustaceans! And in this case, specifically green crabs - grayish-green mollusks with hexagonal upper shells and a cuirass-like under shell and five pairs of legs. When we speak of the arrival of the moeche in the Venice Lagoon, we are not talking about an actual migration. Crabs can be fished year-round and are not migratory, but they go through a series of mutations and periodically shed their shells in preparation for the change of seasons. So the “arrival of the moeche” actually refers to the period of year at the beginning of spring or fall when the crabs shed their shells to adapt to the new season. In the space of just a few hours, from molting to the beginning of the new cycle, the crab becomes a moeca. Stripped of their armor, the crabs are extremely tender, even soft (“molle” in Italian) and in Venetian dialect their name actually means soft. Even the lion of St. Mark, the symbol par excellence of the Venetian Republic, is called “moeca” when it is depicted on a coin with its wings furled.

The fishing of the crabs takes place around Chioggia, Giudecca and Burano. In the lower Po Delta, however the moeche can also be found in the Millecampi valley, a humid zone along the provincial border between Padua and Venice that was a bone of contention during the Chioggia wars. The fisherman or “moecanti” use fixed nets that maintain the biological equilibrium. Once they have been caught, the moeche are placed in jute sacks for transportation back to the barn.

They are a true delicacy, especially when fried. It is a delicate product that is available only for a few weeks each year. Therefore it is registered as a Traditional Agricultural Product. In accordance with a cruel ancestral tradition, sometimes the crabs are cooked alive. There are two primary recipes, but the most common one in Venice requires that the live soft shell crabs be placed in beaten eggs with salt until they have consumed most of the mixture, and then dredged in flour and fried.





Cooked prosciutto from Trieste

Still erroneously called “Prague” ham, it is served, hot and steaming in thick hand cut slices accompanied with mustard and grated horseradish, in the city’s many buffet restaurants.

BY GIULIANO RELJA
Delegate of Trieste

By “cooked ham” we are usually referring to a pork leg with the hoof removed, that has been boned and soaked in brine with herbs and spices. After it has been chopped, blended and briefly smoked, the ham is placed in a metal mold that confers its typical shape and steamed in the oven. It is then pressed, cooled, and packaged for distribution. It is usually sliced with a meat slicer. Much more unusual, however is the preparation and cooking of a whole bone-in ham. This custom based on a Bohemian tradition was brought to the city of Trieste in the 19th century by the many cooks and domestic employees who migrated from central Europe to work for local well-to-do bourgeois families. Originally known

as “Prague Ham” it was quickly adopted and diffused around the city. However, in its land of origin the practice was progressively being abandoned. Today it is well rooted in the gastronomic traditions of Trieste and is still widely served and consumed. It is served daily, piping hot, hand cut into thick slices accompanied with mustard and grated horseradish in the city’s many buffets, the typical exclusive local restaurants. It is an irresistible temptation at all hours, for both locals and tourists. As Giuliana Fabricio and Elisabetta Rosati Rizzi emphasize in their book *Trieste: Tradition at the Table* one of the best examples of Trieste cooked ham can be found in the archives of the oldest buffet in the city, Da Pepi, which dates





back to 1897 and is still in operation. We find a recipe for cooked bone-in ham in the Middle European cookbook *Die Süddeutsche Küche* by Austrian born Katharina Prato, translated into Italian by Ottilia Visconti Aparnik of Trieste in 1892: “Cut off the end of the hock and wash the ham in hot water. Then place it in a kettle and cover with water. To make it tender let it boil for 2 to 4 hours, and let it cool in its own broth.” In another chapter entitled “Method for Carving and Preparing Food” the author provides her own personal advice for how to slice and serve the ham at the table. A very common and beloved variation in Trieste is that of ham cooked in a crust. After boiling the ham, this version calls for wrapping it in bread dough and baking in the oven. When it is sliced open after this final phase of cooking its succulent contents are revealed along with its characteristic aromas and flavors. On holidays, especially Easter, a nice whole *prosciutto* baked in a crust and cut by hand is always a leading player, source of joy and conviviality for everyone gathered around the table. The recipe for this dish also appears in Katharina Prato’s book, which recommends wrapping the ham in black bread dough.

As Giuliana Fabricio reveals in her *Typical Trieste Cuisine*, this is a very old method for cooking ham and it even appeared in Apicius’ *De Re Coquinaria* (*On Matters of Cooking*) that was written in Augustinian Rome. According to the prevailing taste of time, the author recommends boiling the whole ham with lots of figs and laurel after having made small cuts in which honey is inserted. Finally it is wrapped in bread dough and baked in the oven. The local companies that currently produce cooked bone-in ham still use the artisanal methods. Lean fresh pork legs are used, never frozen ones. They are injected with brine and natural herbs and lightly smoked with high quality wood chips such as beech. No artificial additives are used. After

slow cooking the product is delivered, while still hot, to the stores that have ordered it. The meat should be a pinkish color, and the hand cut slices should be tender yet solid.

Although out of old habit some people in Trieste and elsewhere still refer to the dish as “Prague Ham” or “Prague Style Ham”, for many years that term has come to refer only to some boned and pressed cooked hams. The more appropriate appellation today is “cooked Trieste ham”, as it has been correctly called known for some time. The Ministry for Nutritional Agricultural and Forest Policies still uses the “Prague” designation, and has included it on the national register of traditional foods from the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region. And ERSA, the regional agency for rural development put it on the Atlas of Traditional Products for the Province of Trieste. Noting that the “Old Austro-Hungarian tradition that was born 150 years ago, it has disappeared from its place of

origin. Today it is impossible to find it in the Czech Republic, while the artisanal butchers and salami makers of Trieste have maintained intact the methods and rules for its preparation and it is still produced by local industries”. The product is also mentioned in the *Provincial Customs Collection* that has been published by the Trieste Chamber of Commerce since 1956. With assistance from Academician Giuliana Fabricio, several years ago its financial body collected all the documentation necessary to obtain the IGP (Protected Geographical Indication) designation “Trieste Cooked Ham”. Unfortunately, for unknown reasons the bureaucracy has remained stalled in the competent ministry. We can only hope that such a high quality local product steeped in tradition, supported by documentation and that is enjoyed both inside and outside its confines will soon be justly recognized.

GIULIANO RELJA

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Eggs: between myth and reality

*They have symbolized the origin of the world and the continuation of life;
they have been demonized as harmful to the liver.
But in truth eggs are a food with significant nutritional value.*

BY PUBLIO VIOLA
Delegate of Rome Appia

Since ancient times eggs have served as a source of human nutrition, but throughout history the egg has also had many symbolic aspects. It represented not only new life, but also signified the life that continues after death. In all religions and across all populations there are many legends (and beliefs) concerning the egg. Buddhists, for example, believe that Brahma, the creator of the world, emerged from an egg; the same is true of the Oracle of Delphi, according to whom the creation of the world was linked the Mother Goddess, born out of chaos and fertilized by the wind, which after having transformed itself into a serpent, laid an egg that contained the entire universe, which subsequently spread and was diffused everywhere. In some aspects this ver-

sion of the creation of the universe can also be found in Chinese mythology. It maintains that the egg contained the two inseparable principles of every creative impulse in the world (Yin and Yang). We should also recall that many other Pacific peoples believe that the world was created from an egg.

In addition to these historical-mythological references, the egg has held, both in the past and the present, many other social and religious significations. For the Persians, giving the gift of an egg would bring fertility and long life. So much so that the egg was considered to be an auspicious symbol during sacred rites. The Etruscans placed an egg in tombs to represent the continuation of life; the same was true of the ancient Egyptians, for whom the





egg constituted an important element of the funeral banquet. In fact, they not only identified the eggshell with the sarcophagus, but they believed that life itself was contained inside the shell. Therefore an egg was left inside the tomb since it represented the deceased waiting for life beyond the grave. The ancient Greeks believed that death was related to the marriage of the human soul with the divine and all the images associated with this civilization emphasize the importance of the egg as a symbol of eternal life. In Israel the egg was part of the temple sacrifice and it also symbolized the precariousness of human life. For the Christians the egg represented the resurrection of Christ after his death on the cross -so much so that it ultimately became a symbol of Easter, even though today during Holy Week the egg has taken on more of a gastronomic than religious meaning. In Italy today, the actual egg has been replaced by the chocolate version.

As people who were as fond of legends as of the pleasures of life, like the Etruscans the Romans considered the egg to be an important symbol of the afterlife. They were also well aware of its nutritional, and especially gastronomic, value. We have found a great deal of documentation, including the writings of Terenzio Varrone who reminds us in his book *De Re Rustica* that a meal should always begin with a hard boiled egg. Horace clearly agreed, and he typically served egg-based antipasti accompanied by olives and spicy fish at his gastronomic encounters. At any rate, for the Romans eggs not only were served as appetizers, but were part of certain special dishes, as we learned from Gavio Apicius who created the first omelet (which he called *ovemele*) made with eggs, honey, and pepper. A century later Marziale declared *Ab ovo usque ad mala* to reinforce the importance of every part of the banquet, from the first bite to the last, but at the same time confirmed the custom of beginning a meal with an egg, cooked in a

variety of ways. This tradition was well rooted in the Roman people, who habitually preferred hard boiled eggs, as evidenced by egg related artifacts found in many archeological excavations in Meandro and Pompei: they included various metals, some precious. Although their nutritional and gastronomic importance had clearly been established, in more

recent times eggs have been deposed from their high salutary and mystical-religious status because they were deemed harmful to the liver and gall bladder. So much so that people suffering from liver afflictions were advised to avoid any food containing eggs (including egg pasta), and frying eggs was regarded with horror. Later on their cholesterol content led to eggs being considered deleterious to the cardiovascular system.

As far as the liver is concerned, the harmlessness of eggs has been proved; in fact it has been demonstrated that they actually have a protective effect because of their content of phospholipids, methionine and choline, all substances that have a beneficial effect on liver function. In addition, the yolk has a stimulating effect on the bile ducts, although it has been shown that in some people with gallstones the stimulation of the gall bladder can lead to colic.

There is no doubt that people with high cholesterol levels must be careful about their egg consumption, but it should also be recalled that the human body possesses a physiological mechanism to regulate cholesterol. It is known as "bio-feedback": when faced with a higher than normal food intake, the liver reduces its endogenous biosynthesis, which in turn increases



when the food intake decreases because cholesterol is an important element of cell structure and for the synthesis of steroid hormones.

In addition to the information already presented, it should also be emphasized that eggs have a protein composition with a high biological value as well as several vitamins (A, E, B₁₂ exclusively of animal origin), as well as several important anti-oxidant compounds such as lutein and zeaxanthin. The protein level of the egg white should not be underestimated; even though it is slightly lower than that of the yolk, it still constitutes an important source of essential amino acids. There is one precaution: one should assume that cooking eggs destroys the avidin, a substance contained in egg whites that plays a counteractive role in the presence of vitamin B₉ (also known as biotin). However, cooking does not alter the egg's protein composition or its anti-oxidant properties. Therefore the ideal way to consume eggs is not raw, but soft boiled.

In conclusion, we can state with certainty that eggs certainly not only possess a mystical-religion meaning, but they also represent above all a very valuable source of nutrition. However, as with any food, they should not be consumed in excess.

PUBLIO VIOLA



Granita, sorbet and gelato

Information and curiosities about the evolution of this cold dessert freshly made with fruit, and often times, with the genius and imagination of the Italians.

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in 1806 began to export ice from the state of Maine and the Hudson River to Cuba, Martinique and even India. According to one ship's log, of the 180 tons of ice loaded and packed in straw mats an amazing 120 arrived at their destination!

Delving further into the subject, the first thirst quenching cold drink was simply made from chipped ice placed in a cup with fresh seasonal fruit juice, typically citrus. This beverage can thus be considered the pro-

genitor of Roman shaved ice. Before continuing, perhaps it would be opportune to provide some definitions of the various kinds of ice-based treats: *grattachecca*, which should not be confused with *granita* (a granular ice obtained by partially freezing a mixture of water, sugar and fruit juice), or with *cremolata*, which uses fruit pulp instead of juice. Both of these delights are made without the use of an ice cream freezer. True *gelati* are made with ice cream freezers (also used for the production of sorbets) and can be divided into two categories: with and without fat. The "lean" variety do not use milk, while the "fat" variety (ice cream) use whole milk with the addition of fruit, coffee, chocolate etc. The first type is are the oldest, and indeed the lean *gelato* par excellence is actually sorbet, which is made with sugar syrup and fruit juice. Lean *gelati* can subdivided into two

more categories: acidic (lemon, lime, orange, strawberry, sour cherry) and aromatic (chocolate, coffee, almond, hazelnut, pistachio).

The use of milk and sometimes eggs in ice creams instead of fruit juice (*granitas*) or pulp (*cremolatas*) is what distinguishes *gelato* from *sorbet*. In fact, the term sherbet derives from the Arabic word *sharbet*, meaning sweet snow.

Another important family of frozen desserts is the *semifreddi*, in which whipped cream or sponge cake is added to the classic *gelato*. The mix, which is then placed in special containers, can have various names: *spumone*, Neapolitan *cassata* (sour cherry, vanilla, and pistachio), and sicilian *cassata* (chantilly cream). Peach Melba was invented in 1893 by the famous Escoffier, chef of the Savoy in London, in honor of the lyric soprano Helen Porter Mitchell, whose nickname was "Melba" because she was a native of Melbourne, Australia. Another variety is *Zuccotto* (in the shape of the helmet worn by the 16th century Florentine military forces) an ironic name considering that it means "pumpkin head".

The birth of *gelato* can be placed near the end of the 16th century, and the protagonists were all Italian. The most famous was the Florentine architect and theatrical designer Bernardo Buontalenti. He was the builder of the Belvedere fortress, and for its 1595 inauguration he prepared frozen desserts in the shape of statues. (They were world famous and were reproduced in France.) Buontalenti's genius lay in making a fundamental step forward

A little history: the conservation of snow from the cold months to the hot ones dates back to 1100 B.C. An ancient Chinese text describes underground constructions for storing compressed snow protected by layers of straw. This "ice box" system, in several variations would be used right up through the 19th century. Actually the first machines for the production of ice and systems to store it were developed by the German engineer Karl Von Linde (1876), who invented the first "refrigeration machine" that operated by the evaporation and subsequent chilling of liquid ammonia. Subsequently in the 1930s the Swedish company Electrolux produced "industrial refrigerators" that used compressors to produce cold air though the expansion of liquid gas. Again regarding the preservation of natural ice, we must recall the American Fredric Tudor who

for *gelato*: it was no longer simply made with crushed ice and fruit juice or pulp, but with milk and cream which solidified in the cold through an endothermic (heat absorption) process performed by mixing ice and salt which lowers the freezing of the ice by 4-5 degrees (just as spreading salt on the streets in the winter prevents water from freezing). Then there was the Sicilian Francesco dei Coltelli, known as “Procopio”. In 1689 he opened his Café Procope in Paris. It is still in existence today and in addition to coffee, it also serves ice cream. Many others are worthy of mention: Ruggieri of Florence, Tortoni of Naples who made his fortune in Paris, and Giovanni Bosio of Genoa who opened the first *gelateria* in New York in 1770, shortly followed by another Italian, Filippo Lenzi.

Until about 70 years ago, the only equipment for producing sorbet was a hand crank machine with a metal cylinder lined with zinc or tin that had a capacity of 5-6 liters (a gallon and a half). The cylinder was filled with a blend of lemon juice, sugar and water, and was then immersed in a larger insulated container filled with crushed ice and salt. The cylinder was then rotated in the ice for 10-15 minutes. When ready, the lid was removed (reminding us of the ice cream street vendors of several decades ago) and a spatula was used to “scrape” out the mixture that had frozen along the walls of the cylinder. The process was repeated until the mixture became a consistent mass of tasty flakes and granules (similar to Sicilian granita).

An historical curiosity: in 1894 Italian ice cream street vendors (predominantly from Cadore near Belluno) were so well ensconced in Austria that the Viennese authorities, in order to reduce competition with local vendors, refused to grant them a license. So the Bellunese ice cream makers decided to rent small ground floor establishments. The furnished them with tables and benches and illuminated them with “Venetian Lanterns”. And thus the first artisanal *gelaterie* were born. During World War I, the emigrant “*gelatieri*” (ice cream



makers) and “*gelatai*” (ice cream vendors) were forced to abandon their adopted homes. However, they restarted their activities from 1925 on, but with the outbreak of the Second World War our *gelatai* were once again forced to abandon those markets. When they landed in Europe, it would be the American GIs who would bring their version of “ice cream” (lighter because it used only milk and no eggs) back to the Old Continent.

It appears that American “ice cream” was born toward the end of the 19th century. A Baltimore, Maryland milkman named Jacob Fussel found himself with a large quantity of leftover milk. In order to keep it from spoiling he turned it into ice cream, without the addition of eggs. There is still today a statue of Fussel in a Baltimore city square. Just a few decades later, ice cream had become widespread thanks to the invention of refrigeration compressors, which could achieve the low freezing temperatures (from -20 to -40 C; 25 to -40 F) required to produce ice creams made with whole milk, and the use of large machinery that used insufflation of air and continuous mixing necessary to achieve the perfect consistency. Thus, the old artisans who for centuries had produced fruit flavored ice cream had disappeared almost completely by the middle of the last century. Until the day when, thanks to the ingenuity and creativity of the Italians, new small scale machines capable of properly amalgamating even “fatty blends” were developed. The insufflation of 30-40% of air rendered them

smooth and creamy. The first person to build one of these “automatic ice cream makers” was Otello Cattabriga of Bologna in 1927. His brand is still well known today.

Ice cream, or *gelato* is a complete food, balanced, healthy and nutritious. It can be eaten during lunch, or better still, during the afternoon as a snack. A sweet sorbet is preferable after a large meal, and a non-sweet one is used as a palate cleanser between courses. It is important to know that under normal conditions, ice cream “warms up” in our mouths at a temperature between 8-10 degrees C (46-50 degrees F) thus it does not harm the stomach; in fact, it stimulates the production of gastric juices and facilitates digestion.

And in conclusion, we must pay homage to the invention of the classic container for ice cream consumption on the go: the cone. According to an article in the Washington Post of the era, the inventor of a forerunner of the ice cream cone was an Italian immigrant. In 1903 in New York, Italo Marchioni registered the patent for the idea of serving ice cream between two wafers. When it arrived in Milan, this novelty was known as the “Parisian”. When the existing custom of serving ice cream in a paper cone was subsequently improved upon by the use of an edible cone, ice cream “to go” was born, meant to be enjoyed while strolling. The evolution of the ice cream cone towards the current version had to confront two problems. Once again it was an Italian who would solve the first one. In 1959 a man named Spica invented a process for damp-proofing the inside of the wafer, thus preventing its becoming water logged. The second innovation was the invention of a machine for pressing, rather than rolling the cone wafer, and the creation of a fairly robust “shelf” to contain the spatula served ice cream. The next step was the reinforced paper “cup” (which would replace the venerable metal dish) used to hold “scooped” ice cream when outdoor summer temperatures are high.

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