

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

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WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



DEAR ACADEMICIANS...

- 2 Liquid cuisine
in a fluid society
(Giovanni Ballarini)

FOCUS

- 4 The world standings of the
best restaurants punish Italy
(Paolo Petroni)

CULTURE AND RESEARCH

- 5 The bride's *mostacciolo*
fruitcake
(Adriana Liguori Proto)
- 7 The disciples of Pythagoras
(Lejla Mancusi Sorrentino)
- 9 The culinary legacy
of Leonardo: between legend
and history
(Claudio Di Veroli)
- 11 A return to the nutritional fads
of the Seventies
(Claudio Novelli)
- 13 An excellent combination
for appetizers
(Mario Baraldi)



On the cover: Graphic reproduction of the painting "The Lute" (1943) by Henri Matisse. On display at the Stables of the Quirinale in Rome, as part of the exhibition "Matisse Arabesque" through June 21.



Liquid cuisine in a fluid society

The rampant ungoverned cuisine of our current fluid society, without traditions, is a research challenge for our Academy.

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI
President of the Academy

Dear Academicians, we are living in a time of a liquid cuisine. Obviously not a cuisine comprised of broth, infusions, tisanes and various beverages, but a liquid cuisine in the social and anthropological sense in accordance with Zygmunt Bauman's model. Its characteristics take on those of a society in a continuous and rapid state of change. Just like water, which has no shape but assumes that of its container. A liquid cuisine that is a consequence of the dissolution (even this is a term that refers to liquids) of points of reference and coherent and stable supports. Starting with its ancient Renaissance origins, over the course of almost two centuries, bourgeois cuisine created these reference points using native environmental products, reinterpreting local nutritional habits and customs and creating the traditions whose betrayal or abandonment we are lamenting today.

This liquid cuisine is populated by an increasingly diffuse spectacle of cooks who proclaim themselves chefs as they navigate the great media oceans. It leads us to ask the question, in large part a rhetorical one, of whether a great chef makes television appearances, or if the a chef becomes great only because he appears on television.

The enormous global food industry thrives and swims in this liquid cuisine that no longer promotes foods and dishes to be cooked but rather pre-formed, pre-packaged and pre-cooked foods that are easy to prepare and well adapted to the nutritional needs of a fluid society, in which the long term and elaborate traditional precedents are replaced by continuous and ephemeral changes.

Traditions, which modern bourgeois cuisine organized and codified, provided security and above all allowed for the regulation of alimentary consumption. In the liquid cuisine of a fluid society without traditions, nutritional fears and disorders surrounding the use of foods arise and spread. Among these is the gravest human nutritional epidemic on the face of the Earth: overeating and obesity.

In recent times, the common human sentiment of the industrialized nations that have lost sight of the specter of hunger, does not really perceive its passage from need to abundance. The war between hunger and abundance was represented by the Medieval image of the contrast between Lent and Carnival, whereas today the nearly one billion

malnourished people can be contrasted by two billion over-nourished ones. The excess food consumed by the hyper-nourished not only damages the individual and society, but also contributes to food waste which is in many ways superior to production losses.

The modern-day need to confront the Nutritional Issue that the industrialized world, including Italy, is currently facing also involves the work of our Academy, especially in two areas.

The first area of research is that of being aware of what is going on today and how the current situation was created, starting with the near past, and deepening our understanding of the perverse mechanisms that have led us to where we are today.

The second area specifically regards traditions, which our Academy has the mission of protecting, while simultaneously promoting them and fostering their improvement as called for in our Statute.

There are two dimensions to tradition: one vertical and one horizontal. Our traditions are a patrimony that unite one generation to another and at the same time hold a society together, giving it a sense of identity. Its nutritional rituals and norms are fundamental elements.

As history teaches us, traditions are born, die, and evolve. It is the job of our Academy to contribute to their improvement. Ours is not an easy path, but it is a stimulating and exciting one. But what do we mean by "improvement"? Within the constraints of this brief es-



say, and above all taking note of the cultural and health problems caused by the current liquid cuisine, it is necessary to place emphasis on the need for traditions that also constitute good nutritional “rules” as was in the case in the past. It is certainly no accident that the ancient but still current term “gastronomy” means “rules of the stomach” and therefore “rules of nutrition”. The most

famous treatise on human nutrition was written in 1465 by Bartolomeo Sacchi. *De honesta voluptate et valetudine* extols pleasure and health characterized by honesty - a term that derives not from the word “onus” or burden, but rather “honor”.

It is not a burden but an honor that the rules that are intended to simultaneously provide pleasure, joy, and delight

(*voluptas*) and health (*valetudo*) characterize the good traditions that our Academy must protect and promote both in Italy and abroad, starting with their study and the awareness that the current society lacking in organization and stable reference points is increasingly subject to a media dominated and fragmented cultural environment.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI



GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

Academicians' contributions to the magazine are not only welcome, but essential. However Academicians should keep in mind some important guidelines so that their contributions, which are the fruit of their passion and dedication, are expeditiously published.

- **Articles:** it is essential that the **text of articles be sent via email**, in MS Word format (not pdf) to the following address: redazione@accademia1953.it

- **Article length:** it is important that articles are **between 3,500 and 7,000 characters** (including spaces); this is the best way to avoid cuts that are bothersome for both the editors and those submitting the texts. All computers should be able to provide character counts..

- Each issue of the magazine is printed one month ahead of the cover date so that it can be delivered to the Academicians by that date. Those submissions that are time sensitive should be sent in ample time.

- **“From the Delegations” Section:** In order to facilitate reading, please **limit articles to a maximum of 2,500 characters including spaces**.

- Please remember that in the “From the Delegations” section as well as elsewhere, **descriptions of meetings held outside the territory of the Delegation or in the homes of Academicians, unless they are associated with an important event, will not be published**. Also, **please do not include a list of dishes and wines**. Such listing should appear on the appropriate rating form regarding convivial meetings.

- **Rating forms for convivial meetings:** should be sent to the Secretariat (segreteria@accademia1953.it). It is also important to limit remarks in the “notes and comments” section of the form to **800 characters** (maximum 1,000) spaces included in order to avoid cuts. Rating forms that reach the Secretariat more than 30 days after the event will be discarded.

- We also request that you not submit reports on convivial meetings held **outside the territory of the Delegation**, or that take place in the **homes of Academicians**, or are otherwise not held in restaurants or public venues, as they will not be published.

DEAR ACADEMICIANS...	
2	Cuisine and the foodblogger network (Giovanni Ballarini)
FOCUS	
	Heads on TV Kitchen
9	Laying... (Alessandro Fenu)
11	The state of the restaurant business (Alfredo Pelle)
13	The origin of a phenomenon (Teresa Perissinotto and Roberto)

The world standings of the best restaurants punish Italy

The great chefs and gastronomic critics are not enamored of Italian traditional cuisine and reward experimentation and innovation. Yet, the Academy has different criteria and must follow its own mission.

BY PAOLO PETRONI
Secretary General of the Academy

There are foreign magazines that invest a great deal of time in compiling lists of the best chefs in the world. The French magazine *"Le Chef"* has queried 512 professional chefs, all of them recipients of 2 Michelin stars. Not surprisingly, the classification that emerged finds the French dominant at the top. The first Italian mentioned is Massimo Bottura who places 29th on the list. Among the top fifty, one finds Enrico Crippa, Massimiliano Alajmo, Nadia Santini and Enrico Cerea. The English publication *"Restaurant Magazine"* surveyed approximately 900 journalists, critics and experts in the field in 27 different countries. The new classification World's 50 Best Restaurants 2014 places at the top the *"Noma"* in Copenhagen, followed in second place by the Roca brothers of *"El Celler de Can Coca"* in Girona (Spain) while the third position is still occupied by the *"Osteria Franceseana"* in Modena, the fiefdom of Massimo Bottura. The general classifications find *"Piazza Duomo"* of

Enrico Crippa at the 39th position and *"Le Calandre"* of Massimiliano Alajmo at the 46th.

Leaving aside the fact that such classifications are totally arbitrary, it is obvious that the world's gastronomic Reviews do not appreciate Italian cuisine in general and the traditional version in particular. It seems as if a real prejudice exists vis à vis Italian gastronomic culture which is regarded as too attached to tradition, to the cuisine of the grandmother. The world's classifications take into account not just basic food-stuffs and mesmerizing dishes but particularly the capacity to innovate, to research and to experiment. That's fine, everybody does it in his own way. Yet, the Italian Academy of Cuisine has other criteria: we must not follow the path of others, but we must evaluate with honesty and without subjectivity the cuisine that we are served. This is our mission, without sponsors and without being influenced by the celebrity of those who produce new dishes.

The new App of the Restaurant Guide

Our *Restaurant Guide* on line scored a great success with the App for smartphones and tablets to the point that it now has 100,000 users around the world. Its graphics and content have been thoroughly renovated. It is easy to updating it and one's favorite restaurants are quickly memorized.

Searches can be conducted by name, municipality, province, region, country, median price, nearby location and even by the kind of dish that is desired. An absolute novelty that is featured is the ability to leave a comment that can be recorded, albeit under supervision of the Secretariat. Academicians can use a special channel reserved for them, and their comments are separate from those of other users who are not Academicians. Besides a free open comment, a restaurant can be evaluated (by using our little temples that vary from 0 to 4) according to three criteria: hospitality, quality of dishes served, quality-price ratio. The new App, available both on Apple and Android platforms, places our guide at the top in terms of access and wealth of data in the field of restaurant guides. It is the duty of all Academicians to keep it up-to-date, thus making it ever more.

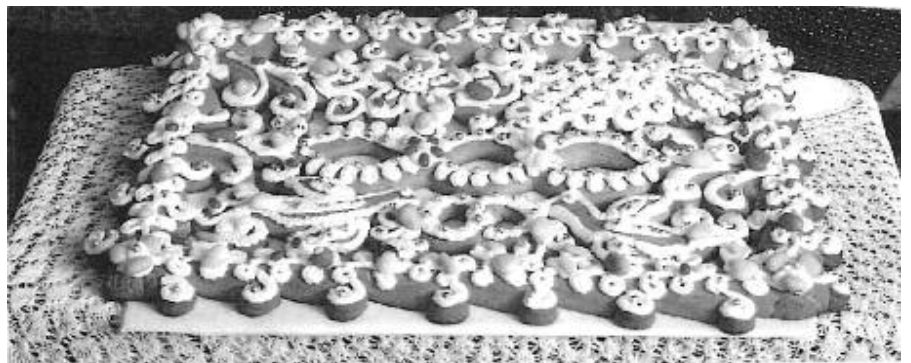




The bride's *mostacciolo* fruitcake

Its preparation is quite elaborate; it takes dancing of the fingers and handwork that only few people can master perfectly.

BY ADRIANA LIGUORI PROTO
Crotone Delegate



Almost all fruitcakes (in vernacular, *mostaccioli*) come from Soriano Calabro, a remote hamlet of the Serre in the province of Vibo Valentia, in woods of beech and chestnut, inhabited by brisk and hard working people. The fruitcakes are placed in clear wood cases that appear in the fairs of many small towns arousing wonder, but also a bit of skepticism, among today's children and moderate nostalgia among those who were once children, now unable to repress some emotion in the face of a spectacle that is so familiar, connected with sweet far away seasons. And yet, even the vendors of "*mostaccioli*" feel that times have changed.

In the enormous consumer revolution that has swept over almost everything, a product that is truly artisanal and genuine such as "*mostacciolo*" seems unable to face the competition of various other snacks. There was a time, especially in the hamlets of Calabria, when one could satisfy his or her gluttony only during the fair and feast of the patron saint that brought the fruitcakes to the people. The beloved cakes appeared in the habitual and unfor-

gotten shapes: hearts, fish, madonnas, newlyweds, palms, horses, the woven basket with the long handle, the Baroque letter "S", all of them in large and small forms embellished by sumptuous thin strips in red, green, gold and silver where the pastry art for the preparation of the sweet marries with the vivacious warm fantasy of the artisan who conceives it.

An historical witness maintains that the appearance of these products of true artistic value is to be attributed to a Dominican friar who brought them to Calabria in 1200. Other sources attribute their origin to the Arabs, even though the name is Latin. No matter what their origin may be, these sweets have represented, from time immemorial, one of the most significant local traditions. The etymological dictionary by Giovan Battista Marzano (1928) illustrates a home made sweet whose name derives from the Latin "*mustaceus*" or "*mustaceum*" as the original term for an old wedding cake cooked over laurel leaves. This historical explanation is supported by the tradition, still upheld in some hamlets of Albanian extraction of the territory, to serve at wedding festivities



the “*mostacciolo* of the bride” - a wedding cake rectangular in shape, adorned with confetti. The pastry cords intertwine in ingenious coils that reproduce bird nests covered by a candid veil of sugar, the symbol of a united family, with further decorations depicting local customs.

At Spezzano Albanese, a small town in the province of Cosenza, the wedding cake is round and the ornaments are

made with the same pastry in the shape of grapes that symbolize abundance; the wedding rings, the peace doves and flowers have a clear significance and as decorations they are quite impressive. At the center of the wedding cake, a very old custom features a grotto that the spouses can place their hands inside, standing in front of each other, while holding the brim of the cake itself. At a signal, they will start pulling

and the cake will break. Legend has it that whoever tears away the largest piece will dominate the conjugal life. The complicity of parents and friends is such that the competition is won by the bride. For the occasion, she wears the old traditional dress of extraordinary beauty with precious crenel and lace woven with the golden and silver threads.

The “*mostacciolo*”, a wonderful if not spectacular sweet, is prepared with simple and wholesome ingredients, such as flour, honey, and cooked must. The preparation itself is quite elaborate: it is a dance of the fingers, a play of the hands that only few people can execute to perfection. In the gastronomic jargon, if it is true that sweets express the feeling of a people, the “*mostacciolo*” - portraying mostly the woman, domestic animals and objects

rooted in a home - is the emblematic, to some extent naïve, expression of the people of Calabria, full of love for the simple and beautiful things in life. In a nutshell, these are the feelings of a stalwart and dignified population, well justified by its history and art, and as a literary emblem to boot that has not been overcome by the passing of time.

ADRIANA LIGUORI PROTO

THE ACADEMY'S SILVER PLATE



Large, elegant and silver plated, with the Academy's logo embossed on the front. This commemorative object is the recommend gift to be presented to those restaurants visited by the Delegations whose cuisine, service, and atmosphere are deemed particularly worthy. For further information and orders, Delegates should contact the Secretariat in Milan. (segreteria@accademia1953.it).



The disciples of Pythagoras

Today it is fashionable to eat in the style of Pythagoras; vegetarians, vegans, raw food eaters and fruit-only eaters maintain practices that are only new in appearance.

DI LEJLA MANCUSI SORRENTINO
*Academician, Naples-Capri Delegation
"The Franco Marengi" Study Center*

In the last ten years the number of vegetarians in the world has increased exponentially. Today ordinary people as well as the more highly educated also have joined the fold. It is a choice motivated by health concerns (given the evidence of a close relationship between the consumption of red meat and the increase in serious pathologies), as well as by a love of animals and respect for their lives. It may also even be an environmental choice, not to mention the many religious principals governing food. Not everyone however is aware that by being a vegetarian they are following in

the footsteps of Pythagoras (6th century B.C.). According to Ovid's first century B.C masterpiece *The Metamorphosis*, Pythagoras with the first to condemn the human consumption of meat for nutritional as evil: "...[Pythagoras] initially denounced the practice of serving meat as shameful: Abstain, you mortals from contaminating your bodies with unholy foods! There are abundant grains, fruit, and ripe grapes on the vines. There are delicious vegetables...milk and honey... The generous Earth will provide all of God's abundant food without our resorting to blood and murder...everything that exists on the Earth changes its form, and thus so do we who are not only flesh but our errant souls may come to reside within wild beasts or inhabit the bodies of domestic animals... who could stand to host within us the souls of our parents or our siblings or any other human being... What an evil custom it is to strike down a young veal and lend a deaf ear to its pathetic cries, damn the soul of he who has the gall to strangle a young goat who wanders like a child... What is to be gained by perpetrating such a crime? Where will this ultimately lead us? We may do away with an animal that is dangerous, but only those. Abstain from eating them and bring to your mouth only peaceful foods." Even fish were banned from Pythagoras's table: In his posthumous (3rd century A.D.) biography Diogenes describes how the great mathematician, philosopher and wonderworker would pay fishermen to throw their catch back into the sea. He left his home on the Isla di Samo when it fell under the tyranny of Poly-crates. He went into voluntary exile in





Crotone where he founded the philosophical School and a religious community with ironclad rules that were based on the principle of *ipse dixit*, i.e., the total and absolute respect for the dogmatic authority of the Master. A pillar of its doctrine was the transmigration of the soul: they believed in metempsychosis, according to which souls, having left the body, could then inhabit other human or animal organisms. This in turn led to the logical prohibition of consuming the meat of any living thing.

Pythagoras's doctrine took on universal relevance and survived the passage of time. Through the capillary divulgation conducted by his many followers who venerated him as a demigod this philosophy spread and had a deep and lasting impact on the civilizations of the era. The influence of his thought appeared in the works of many later writers who continued to cite and refer to him many centuries later. Following his lead, many illustrious thinkers of antiquity embraced vegetarianism: Empedocles, Plato, Seneca, Plutarch, Porphyry and Iamblichus to name just a few.

Some Christian writers described Jesus as a vegetarian and attributed similar behavior to his apostles. In reality, the majority of his followers regularly ate meat, a food permitted in the Bible,

even though the Church was inclined to favor vegetarianism, and considered meat a sinful luxury. In the 12th century Saint Francis of Assisi had the merit of reconciling the Catholic faith with kindness toward animals, but it was Saint Francis di Paolo in the 15th century who truly earned the name "the vegan saint" because for his entire life he renounced eating anything that came from animals.

Leonardo da Vinci was one of the most influential people to adapt a vegetarian philosophy and lifestyle. In a passage from his *Notebooks on Anatomy* (II,14,3) he wrote: "If you really are, as you describe yourself, the king of the animals...then why do you not forsake taking their young to satisfy your palate, for the love of which you are willing to turn your body into a tomb for all animals?...Doesn't Nature produce enough simple food to satisfy your hunger? And if you can't manage to be content with that simple food can you not prepare an infinite variety of foods by mixing those ingredients together"?

During the 18th century in England many prominent personages led the vegetarian campaign, and therefore Great Britain is considered the cradle of modern vegetarianism. There, in the 19th century, the Vegetarian Society was established.



It was the first organization of its kind and was followed by similar associations in other European countries. The Italian Vegetarian Association appeared only in the second half of the 20th century, when the time was ripe also for the creation of an International Vegetarian Union.

There are various categories of vegetarianism today. The most common, lacto-ovo vegetarianism, excludes the meat of land and sea animals but allows those foods indirectly derived from the animal world (milk, dairy products, eggs, honey, etc.). Lacto-vegetarianism excludes eggs and ovo-vegetarianism allows eggs but eliminates milk and dairy products. Veganism prohibits any food that comes from animals or is related to their farming; raw vegans eat only uncooked vegetables, but will eat dried fruits and vegetables that are treated at temperatures not exceeding 40 C (104 F). Finally there is fruitism, a diet which allows only fresh and dried fruit, and includes such products as tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, and similar vegetables.

Eating in the style of Pythagoras is very much in vogue today; so much so that Grimaldi Publishers decided to reprint Vincenzo Corrado's treatise *On the Food of Pythagoras* (1871), inspired by those 18th century movements. The new edition, with an extensive preface and footnoted recipes, is already available in bookstores.

LEJLA MANCUSI SORRENTINO





The culinary legacy of Leonardo: between legend and history

From his inventions to his creative dishes, the artist was always attracted by cuisine, even though the results were sometimes disastrous.

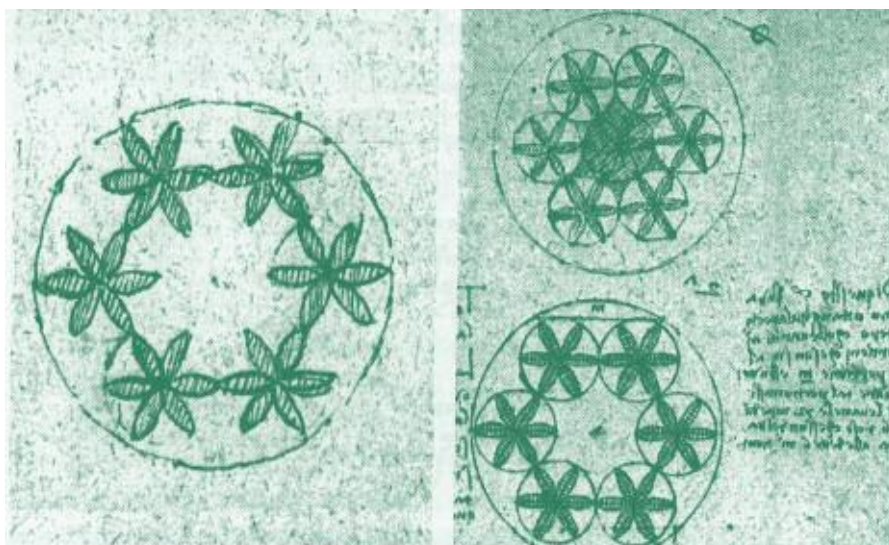
DI CLAUDIO DI VEROLI

Academician, Rome Appia Delegation

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) is remembered as a painter, scientist, engineer and much more. He was also passionate about food and cuisine even though there is scant reference to that art in his recognized writings (collected in the 10 *Codices*). *The Codex Atlanticus*, for example, states that he was well acquainted with herbs and spices, and used them to make original beverages. Over the years he also designed culinary devices that were often mistaken for military weapons. In 1931 a man named Pisapia transcribed some writings that may be those of Leonardo. The originals reside in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (although the museum management denies it). The writings (related in *Culinary Notes of Leonardo da Vinci* - ed. Voland, 2012 in the *Romanoff Codex*) describe projects and improvements that Leonardo created for kitchens and food preparation. His interest in cuisine went

back to his childhood. His mother remarried a baker from Vinci (described as “common, sloppy, and gluttonous”) who in all probability introduced Leonardo to the art of cooking and enhanced his love of food, except for meat, which he did not like (“the dead meat comes back to life when it comes in contact with the stomach.”).

During his apprenticeship in Verrocchio’s studio (1469-1478) it appears that he earned a little money in the evenings by working as a waiter in a tavern called “The Three Snails” near the Ponte Vecchio. After several years he was promoted to kitchen work following the unexplained death of the cook. Leonardo accepted the job in order to make more money, but also because it gave him the power, as a vegetarian, to “refine” the dishes by reducing their size and offering a more delicate type of food arranged attractively and enhanced by small pieces of

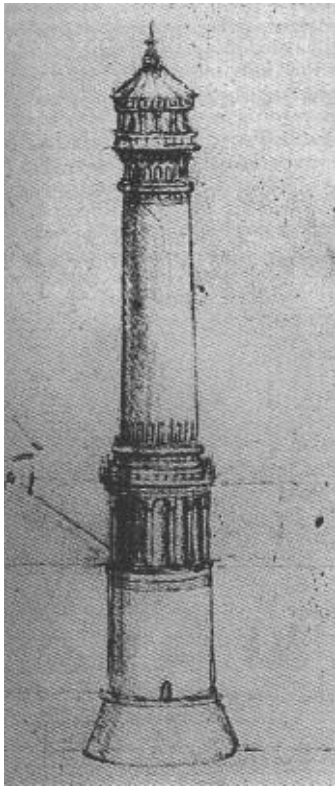




polenta or with decorations made predominantly of vegetables, as well as bread with artistically arranged basil leaves glued together with veal saliva. Today we would call this style of cooking and presenting food “*nouvelle cuisine*”. But in those days it was rejected by the clientele, accustomed as they were to much richer dishes (like generic meat with polenta) to the extent that Leonardo left the job and dedicated himself to his work on the angel in *The Baptism of Christ*. This outcome however, was enough to convince him that preparing food was a waste of time and

so he began to design “work saving” machines such as a meat grinder, a nutcracker, and many others. After the tavern burned down in 1478 Leonardo opened another establishment called “The Three Frogs” with his friend Botticelli. This restaurant was also unsuccessful, perhaps owing to the small number and type of dishes it served even though they were always varied and artfully presented with an eye toward beauty, such as slices of carrot with one or two anchovies. They also offered an “illustrated menu” written from right to left (mirror writing), a copy of which has been preserved at the University of Glasgow.

Several years later he moved to Milan (1482) to work for the Sforza family. He was armed with an introduction from Lorenzo the Magnificent and a letter bearing his signature that highlighted his talents: “He excels at formulating puzzles and inventing knots. And he makes cakes that have no equal”. Ludovico il Moro perceived Leonardo’s unusual aesthetic sense, his good taste and above all his curiosity about the table, food and drink and named him



“Grand Master” for parties and banquets as well as advisor for building fortifications and other responsibilities. Thus he was assigned servants, cooks and a laboratory. At the beginning Ludovico had him play the lute, sing, and create puzzles as after-dinner entertainment. And although he still paid close attention to his sculpting work, he seized the opportunity to organize a party for one of Ludovico’s nieces with a menu that leaned so heavily toward *nouvelle cuisine* that the Duke rejected it and replaced it with a very different one in terms of quality and

quantity. Nevertheless, Ludovico entrusted Leonardo with the expansion and organization of the kitchens. Using his engineering and artistic skills, he initiated projects (described in the *Codex Atlanticus* and in the Vatican Library) with the aim of creating devices not only for washing, slicing, peeling and chopping, but also a continuously lit fire, a basin of boiling water to keep food warm, and a ventilation system for removing odors and smoke from the kitchen while allowing fresh air and music to enter. It is also true that the disorder and mess produced by banquets so bothered him that he created a small tablecloth or napkin for each diner with which they could clean their hands and mouth, and he also designed several ways of folding them (1491). For the inauguration of the new kitchens he was “forced” to oversee the preparation of “traditional” dishes, but he also made delicious sauces and enormous cakes. The meal was to begin with individual beets upon which the face of “my Lord Ludovico” was sculpted. The cooks were in turmoil because none of them was capable of sculpting

and the already chaotic large kitchen became a madhouse with almost 200 people at work, animals and some of Leonardo’s huge machines.

After this episode and on the “advice” of Ludovico, Leonardo decided to devote himself to painting and sculpture. Yet he still managed to arrange processions, acrobats and bizarre masks - his “fantastic jungle” at banquets organized by others. There were many simple vegetarian dishes that he would have liked to prepare for his “Sir Ludovico”, such as broccoli with sturgeon and cream, but the Duke preferred the more pedestrian “meat and bones”.

We can see Leonardo’s interest and love for the pleasures of the table in *The Last Supper*. We note the impressed diners organized in groups of three, apart from Christ himself; we see the folds of a clean embroidered tablecloth; the frugal and balanced disposition with which Leonardo painted the bread and clean plates containing turnip puree or fresh eel and seven half-filled glasses of wine. When the French occupied Milan in 1500 Leonardo began to travel around Italy. In 1516, tired and fed up with what he perceived as his failures in spite of the praise he had received for such masterpieces as the Mona Lisa with its “*natura naturans*” he retired to the castle of Cloux (today Clos-Lucé) in France as the guest of the young King Francis who was also a lover of cuisine. A rivalry sprang up between the two and they spent a good deal of time at the stove experimenting with cooking. The king asked Leonardo many times to show him the contents of a black box that he carried with him but the artist always refused because he feared the king would copy his machine for making “edible string” (*spaghetti*). Leonardo died three years later. In his last will and testament his goods were divided between his faithful cook from his time with the Sforza, Battista de Villanis, and his assistant Salai. His notes and personal effects were left to his student Melzi, whose heirs subsequently squandered them.

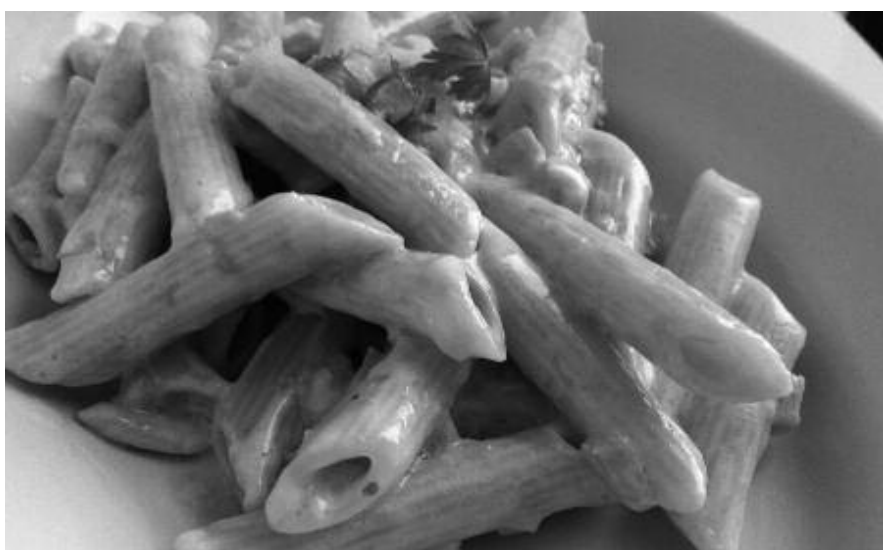
CLAUDIO DI VEROLI



A return to the nutritional fads of the Seventies

The happy housewife declines the help of a multitude of young chefs because she already has all the help she needs: just add cream!

DI CLAUDIO NOVELLI
Academician, Naples-Capri Delegation



In those days cream was very much in fashion. It could be found practically everywhere, from the color of the women's puffy hairstyles and young men's turtlenecks to the living room curtains and luxury automobile interiors. And of course (perhaps in reaction to the communist red of the tomato) it was served on everything one ate. It was impossible to enter a restaurant and not find *ravioli*, *gnocchi* and *fettuccine* served with cream sauce - at best with a touch of vodka, at worst with the addition of some caviar (or to be precise, lumpfish eggs). Who could forget the ignoble bowtie pasta with salmon that came back to haunt wedding banquets menus, and the obscene "*paglia e fieno*" (straw and hay) and pasta "*boscaiola*" style with mushrooms and cream, followed by a perfidious *saltimbocca alla Romana*?

The trend was the sad but real aspect of the provincial rediscovery of French

cuisine: its sauces, be they delicate or heavy, their pale grace and incomparable flavor led to the simplistic rise of an extensive use of cream.

It started at the beginning of a meal, with the antipasti: there were embarrassing quantities of cream in tuna mousse or in vague sauces for roast meats. The height of obscenity was reached with shrimp cocktail in which the usual mayonnaise was replaced with "half a cup of very fresh cream", or drowning innocent sweetbreads in cream. Worst of all was the attempt to convince people that in Andalusia oysters were served with butter and cooked ham, naturally sprinkled with the aforementioned cream. The question became even more serious when it came to first courses, even if we allow for various smooth and creamy soups in vogue. Phony exoticism, as in "spaghetti alla Trianon", risotto with asparagus, peas, or artichokes; unfortunately dredged



up stuffed pastas like *cappelletti* and *tortellini* served “*tout-court*”; and *pappardelli* were also very popular when officially declared “with cream” even when flavored with some sausage and peas. Finally we arrive at the infamous “*tagliolini* with salmon”, overtaken only by “green *tagliatelle* supreme” in which the only “supreme” thing about it was the astonishing quantity of cream used. For 400 grams of *tagliatelle* (about 14 oz) 200 grams of cream and 80 grams of butter were used. The recipe was equaled only by “*filodoro* with bacon and anchovy paste” in which hair-raising amounts of butter, oil, and smoky bacon were added to the cream. “Rice salad with lobster”, in smaller quantities, was also expected.

If only it were a question just of cream and butter: a recipe for a sauce for large *maccheroni* called for butter and a product called “Vallè”, a horrible liquefied margarine to which was added a bouillon cube dissolved in a little water, a few spoonfuls of vodka and cream. And of course handfuls grated *grana padana* cheese was liberally sprinkled over the dish.

Cream was not the only culprit responsible

for the disgusting dishes of the 1970s: it was often matched by the (re)discovery of Worcestershire sauce along with the immoderate use of alcohol in cooking, apart from the constant use of red and white wine. Worcestershire sauce became the protagonist of the appetizers, especially cold ones; cream, as we have stated, reigned supreme over the first courses, while meats were inebriated by large amounts of hard liquor, especially Cognac, often reinforced by Marsala. If you think I am exaggerating, leaf through the 1970-71 cookbook *Cucina italiana*. The fact that we would have such a period of collective idiocy must seem unreal to today’s producers of long shelf-life cream in convenient 250 ml containers. In the 70s good sense and training were replaced by obsolete stereotypical images of luxury and good taste.

Only a few generations later we have the same marvelous opportunity before us that was offered to our grandmothers: cream. The happy housewife declines the help of a multitude of talented young chefs because she already has all the help she needs: from time to time adding some grated lemon zest, or some zucchini, the indispensable in-

gredient that gives a dish the singularity of a star chef is still cream. But when you think about it, at a time when they sell pre-sliced “mozzarella” in sealed plastic bags without regard to the number of victims created by the mere taste of such an opprobrium, any sort of rubbish may appear at the deli counter.

You think preparing broth is expensive and tedious? Persuasive voices and images of tasty meat surrounded by celery, carrots and other herbs fall from the sky, urging us to buy a 1000 ml “tetra-brik” of “exquisite” broth. “Exquisite”? Made from what? If we read the fortunately required content label carefully, we realize with surprise that we have in fact entered a chemistry lab. Instead you “poor traditional fools” have to ask the butcher’s boy for a couple of good bones, and an expensive half kilo of meat and half a chicken that when cooked for a couple of hours practically is reduced to nothing and spreads the smell of a second-class pensione throughout the house.

Resist! Resist! Resist! If we Academicians are not the first to man the barricades, who else will do it?

CLAUDIO NOVELLI

2015 ECUMENICAL DINNER

The convivial ecumenical meeting that brings together all the Academicians in Italy and around the world at the virtual table, will take place on October 15 at 8:30 pm. This year’s theme will be *Condiments: Sauces and Gravies that characterize regional cuisine*. This topic, chosen by the “Franco Marengi” Study Center and approved by the President’s Council, is aimed at recapturing, through cuisine, traditions that are undergoing great changes today owing to our passage from home and family cooking to artisanal and finally industrial foods. And if at one time the use of condiments was determined by neighboring cultures, today the field is a global one and is in a state of constant and rapid change. Delegates are entrusted with ensuring that the ecumenical dinner is accompanied by an appropriate presentation of a cultural character that illustrates this important theme and that the dishes served are relevant to the topic.





An excellent combination for appetizers

Serving parmigiano reggiano and the traditional balsamic vinegar from Modena, creates a combination that is growing more and more popular at the opening of a dinner as a modern ritual at restaurants.

BY MARIO BARALDI

Academician, Modena Delegation

First of all, let us announce, to those who should be unaware, that a marriage has been formally celebrated, or rather, that an excellent relationship has been established between the king of hard cheeses and the king of condiments. Let us explain in a few words. The habit of eating, in their original form, *parmigiano reggiano* and traditional balsamic vinegar, ingested with the intent of opening up the stomach to the dinner, that is as aperitifs, is a rather recent custom in Modena's culinary history. While it is true that the two items have lived for centuries as "individulas", they began to join their destinies only in the past century. It is obvious that by appearing on the same tables they might have touched each

other over the course of time, but such encounters were by and large occasional. For a few years, it just happened that some "scaglia" or shavings of *parmigiano reggiano* on a salad plate dressed with balsamic vinegar led people to believe that in truth parmesan and vinegar did not need salad as a third participant and could stand together alone without the complications inherent in a *ménage à trois*.

Two high caliber subjects could not but aspire to play as protagonists. Where could they be if not at the opening of a meal acting as trail blazers to the entire dinner? In general, food and drinks that are always used as aperitifs with digestive intent derive from preparations or infusions of aromatic plants and herbs that





have properties known as eupeptic. In pharmacological terms, these are products or natural composites that can stimulate appetite, increasing the production of hydrochloric acid and pepsin, either directly by entering the stomach as a small meal rich with proteins and amino acids, or indirectly by stimulating, through bitterish or bittersweet tastes, the gustative papillae, and with them the psychogenic cerebral pathways. By reflex, such pathways regulate the sense of hunger, activating the production of gastric juices by way of a bio-humoral process that oversees the action of the gastric hormone over the gastric glands. An example of direct gastric stimulating action has always been the assumption of the classic meat broth employed to open the stomach to the meal. It is essentially a solution that is protein rich. The example of indirect action is that of the traditional aperitifs, all of them based on extracts of officinal plants with a strong odor and bitter or bittersweet taste.

All of this allows us to reach the easy conclusion that ingesting together shavings of *parmigiano reggiano* and bal-

samic vinegar is rational when utilized as aperitif or eupeptic insofar as the two components integrate perfectly on account of the direct eupeptic action of one and indirect of the other. In today's food business that is often "collective", and in the fast spreading custom of "service by catering", there is no opportunity to serve broths that are "fluctuating, bulky and watery". Many guests also regard broths as "inelegant" since they regard "thin broths" are good for nothing or at best "food for sick people". The result is that broths have been replaced by first courses such pasta dishes, that excellent as they may be are not functional to the desire of opening the stomach to the meal.

If one looks for an explanation to anticipating the meal with the two above mentioned components - i.e. the *parmigiano reggiano* and balsamic vinegar that are now becoming fashionable - it should be clear to all that the function of the former is to replace the broth, insofar that it is able to stimulate the gastric juices, while the balsamic vinegar, owing to its bittersweet taste, produces the local stimulating action upon the gustative papillae.

As part of the rituals of modern restaurant, the shape of the *parmigiano reggiano*, precisely cut into two halves, one of them excavated to create a "valve" that is filled with wedges of the extracted cheese, has taken over the spot traditionally reserved to the old soup tureen. It is common to see the people of Modena, and in general all those of the Emilia region, associate the presence of the cheese shaving container with the pleasure of a healthy antipasto and with the function of an aperitif. The appearance, taste and olfactory sensation merge into an extraordinary synergy. For all of these reasons, *parmigiano reggiano* is one of the great examples of how a modern food product may be defined as "functional food" because of its capacity to stimulate a physiological function of great importance, that is, the digestion and the assimilation of all the foodstuffs that may be eventually ingested. In addition, it is important as

a "healthy food" - that is as a food with strong health effects by virtue of its content of proteins and free amino acids whose strength is directly related to the aging of the cheese. Such components are easily available to the body and are indispensable to favor the muscle development and the regenerative processes that are needed.

It is worthwhile to recall that the Modena's traditional balsamic vinegar, even if taken in small quantities, by virtue of its being a concentrated product has antioxidant effects that slow the aging process. Learning about the scientific base of the healthy properties tied to classic products of our land cannot but add value to the noble character of their origin.

Thus, it is important to enhance traditional foods on account of their nutritional value and their capacity to satisfy the gastronomic expectation. Gastronomy is a term derived from Greek meaning "the law of the stomach".

Those who deal with the preparation of foodstuffs should never forget that the first actor to satisfy and respect is the stomach of their client and their welfare.

The two items that we have been dealing with, *parmigiano reggiano* and Modena's traditional balsamic vinegar, when classified as aperitifs (and only that) certainly display gastronomic properties and healthy properties of absolute excellence, thanks to their capacity to offer pleasure to those who approach them with an open mind and a refined palate.

MARIO BARALDI

