

CIVILTÀ TAVOLA

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On the cover: Graphic reproduction of a detail
from the painting "The Last Supper" (1582) by
Alessandro Allori. At the Palazzo della Ragione in
Bergamo.

The ups and downs of the great actors of cuisine.

The role of a true Academician

Carefully monitoring what happens in the territory and making the right distinction between appearance and substance.

BY PAOLO PETRONI
President of the Academy

More often than in the past, today our gastronomic culture, our traditions and our great cuisine are shunted aside by the search for success at any cost, right away, within the shortest possible time. Thus we are witnessing the birth of commercial initiatives aimed at emphasizing brands that are often linked to the fashion world or the great hotel chains that employ renowned chefs to create a great adventure. This phenomenon is rather different from the one that we discussed in a previous Focus dealing with chefs who open various restaurants under their name. When a great celebrity opens a signature restaurant, the media report on it by spreading the news even before the opening. Following that, they beat the drums at the opening of the restaurant and then, possibly, they reveal its programs and projects. After the opening, unfortunately, the curtains are drawn and silence falls, and nothing more can be learned. Trumpets blare at the opening, but the silence of the tomb surrounds closings and reshufflings. It is the law of information.

Such happenings are common in foreign countries, but there are similar cases in Italy. Of course, nobody likes the idea of closing shop with losses. The investors cry over the money wasted and the chefs lament the missing success and sometimes over-humiliation. In our times, in order to appear in the pages of newspapers or guides, to obtain stars and distinctions, large investments are needed: fabulous locations, cellars with high priced wines, substantial kitchen crews led by highly paid chefs, superb service and top quality ingredients. One chef alone, no matter how wealthy, cannot support the investment: a sponsor is obligatory. Too many times the idea prevailed that name alone could be solution for everything without considering the fact that today's clientele is far better prepared and that substance should be observed along with appearance.

This state of affair also surrounds names that have strong roots in the territory. A recent piece of news brought

attention to the celebrated "Noma", a restaurant that was opened in 2004 in Copenhagen. The chef is Danish, of Albanese extraction, René Redzepi, the recipient of two stars in the Michelin Guide. "Noma" was recognized four times as the best restaurant in the world (it is now the third after the Spanish restaurant "El Celler de Can Roca" and Massimo Bottura's restaurant). The owner has announced that following the gala dinner of December 31, 2016 the restaurant will close and will open an agricultural firm (with greenhouses on the roofs and floating cultivation) with restaurant in the environs of the capital, the area of Christiania. A very ambitious project indeed! Best wishes! It must also be recalled that Ferran Adrià, a Michelin three star and one of the most acclaimed chefs in the world (whose name is associated with molecular gastronomy together with the English chef Heston Blumenthal) ceased his activities at the renowned restaurant "El Bulli" in 2012 and retired to create new dishes at his laboratory in Barcelona.

Other examples also occurred in Italy. Important names may leave their restaurants (Looking for new experience or stimulation? Tired of the routine? Diminishing clientele?) and become consultants, deluxe caterers, providers for Arab weddings, all the while seeking out investors. Very often they migrate to Northern Italy, to Milan, the land of people with "danè" (rolling in dough) as Vecchioni called it, a new illusory Eldorado.

It would be useful and interesting if our Delegations in Italy, and above all in foreign countries, were to monitor such phenomena with attention and an open mind. Italian cuisine today gets space in the media particularly on account of

such initiatives that accordingly merit being handled carefully. The Academician should not be a mere witness to changes, openings and closings, but should work to make it possible for the great values of Italian culinary art to triumph everywhere, in our nation and in the world. *Civiltà della Tavola* will always be beside him.





Spotlight on legumes

The FAO has proclaimed 2016 “The International Year of the Legume” to counter the worldwide decrease in cultivation and consumption of this extremely healthy food.

BY MASSIMO VINCENZINI
*Academician, Empoli Delegation
“Franco Marengli” Study Center*



In a global context where hunger and malnutrition coexist with hyper-caloric diets and food waste, the decision of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) is both sensible and appropriate. As the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon stated on the occasion of its proclamation, “legumes have been an essential part of the human diet for centuries (...), and they can significantly contribute to nutritional security and the fight against hunger, malnutrition and the many challenges to human health and the environment (...). But their nutritional value is not often recognized and is frequently underestimated”. And indeed, we should recall that legume seeds are rich in protein (from 20% to 40% of dried legumes, depending on the variety), soluble fiber, micronutrients and B vitamins, but have moderate nutritional value owing to

their lack of certain essential amino acids. Legumes also possess some anti-nutritional characteristics, but these can be destroyed by heat and therefore eliminated through proper cooking. In any case, their inclusion in our diet is considered healthy because lentils have been shown to be effective in helping to reduce blood cholesterol, fight obesity, prevent chronic illnesses such as type 2 diabetes, coronary problems and colon cancer. Nevertheless, in spite of their indisputable key role in human nutrition and the existence of numerous varieties that are still unexplored (18,000 species have already been identified, but only a few hundred are cultivated and consumed), their worldwide cultivation and consumption have been declining for over a decade. The decrease in their consumption in Italy is also apparent, in spite of the fact that our country can boast of very high quality legume products: several D.O.P. (white beans from Rotonda, cannellini beans from Atina, beans from Cuneo and from Lamon in the Belluno valley, Sarconi and Sorana beans) and I.G.P. (lentils from Castelluccio di Norcia) to which we can add dozens that are present on the lists of Traditional Agro-nutritional Products (PAT) managed by the Ministry for Agricultural and Nutritional Products and Forestry. The consistent presence of PAT-denominated legumes is evidence of their widespread and consolidated use across Italy both in terms their cultural and gastronomic profile: in fact, legumes constitute the key ingredient in many famous local dishes, and therefore are correctly

considered to be an expression of Italy’s cultural patrimony. The indifference of Italian consumers toward legumes is often motivated by an increase in standard of living, which leads people to consume more proteins of animal origin; in addition, their relatively long cooking time clashes with modern day time constraints and there are some unpleasant side effects (intestinal swelling) that result from different cooking methods. As a response to this situation, the development of new or renewed gastronomic preparations that have previously been broken down and/or subjected to processing that facilitates their use and eliminates their counter-nutritional factors, could play an important role in the reversal of the current negative trend. As far as they are concerned, emerging innovative technologies that are not heat-based, such as high pressure hydrostatics and electro-magnetic fields, are the focus of studies and research underway in many technologically advanced countries to positively modify the physical and functional properties of legumes. Other studies based on a more traditional technical-scientific approach are examining the possibility of improving the nutritional properties of legume flours through fermentative processes similar to that of bread making with yeast.

Stimulated by spotlight on them focused by the FAO, legumes may benefit from a revitalization brought about by these or other potential innovations. This is something to which our gastronomic culture can certainly contribute.



Bread soup from Pavia: a dish in exile

A defeated king made it famous and Expo brought it home.

BY GIUSEPPE ROSSETTI
Delegate, Pavia

Sometimes, even in the kitchen, the old saying *Nemo propheta in patria* stands. A typical case is that of the soup of Pavia, a dish that you may find in a restaurant on the opposite side of the world while it is highly unlikely to find it on the menus of restaurants or trattorias of the former Lombard capital or the surrounding territory. And yet, it is a famous soup that over time became popular in France, perhaps because the French restaurants were unaware of when and how it came to be. It happened after a battle that the King of France, François the First, lost to Emperor Charles the Fifth in 1525. That battle changed the European balance of power for centuries in favor of Spain. Had the French remembered that, the *grandeur* would have suffered and Pavia's soup would have been doomed to the *damnatio memoriae*. But we will save the story that shades

off into legend for later. The fact remains that the dish in question, simple and at the same time complex and complete in its structure, never had much luck in the restaurants of the land of its origin, in spite of the fact that it has been celebrating the name of Pavia around the world for almost five hundred years. The Delegation of Pavia has been trying to put an end to this unexplainable exile with an initiative within the framework of the Expo, by calling the attention of local restaurants to the opportunity to include the celebrated dish on their menus at the time of a great exhibition dedicated to foods. A universal exhibition can indeed help in reaching an objective that may appear banal when it definitely is not: the not-so-secret objective and the hope connected to it is that Pavia's soup will remain on the menus even after the closing of the Expo.





To explore not just the origin but the moment when Pavia's soup became famous it behooves us to return briefly to that far away time, the 25th of February 1525, when a terrible battle was fought outside the walls of Pavia between the French and the Spanish who had been fighting a long time to secure control over Italy. Years of war made life miserable for the populations that suffered the coming and going of armies and mercenary troops. At that time, the worn out people were saying "France or Spain, as long as we can eat". Every year Pavia commemorates that epochal clash with the celebration of a special Mass in the church of Mirabello, the locale in the middle of the fighting. The battle itself lasted only two hours but it cost nine thousand dead killed in the fighting or drowned in the Ticino river during the chaotic rout.

To stick with the essential details, in the interest of recalling the history of the soup, the French defeat was attributed, by those well versed in military events, to two fundamental factors: a better strategy on the part of the Spanish by virtue of a surprise attack and a mistake by the King of France who ordered his noble knights in their heavy suits of armor to parade in front of the artillery thus impeding it from shooting against the enemy at a crucial moment of the battle. The outcome was that the French army was routed and François the First was taken prisoner. At this point in time the story of the battle intersects that of the soup. The chronicles narrate that the French king was captured and taken away from the battlefield in bad shape to a farmhouse, named Repentita. Inside it, there was just an old lady who was asked to prepare some food for the weakened pri-

soner. He may have been defeated but he was still the king of France. The old lady proceeded to cook the soup that was typical of Pavia, making use of the scarce ingredients. Most certainly, it was not the first time that she prepared it. She made a vegetable broth with the watercress that can be found in the fields. Then she used a dried up slice of bread, an egg, perhaps some local cheese (possibly grana from Lodi). She toasted the bread, broke the egg over it leaving it intact and pouring it in the boiling broth. The origin of the dish made by poor farmers in the sixteenth century would have ended here, were it not for the fact that François the First, upon his return to France, ordered to be inserted on the menu of his court. So go the ways of the world: the destiny of the dish of poor farmers, once it is eaten by a king...

GIUSEPPE ROSSETTI

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.



Four awards for four Italians

The International Academy of Gastronomy gives awards to Giovanni Ballarini and three more professionals.

BY SILVIA DE LORENZO

The *Académie Internationale de la Gastronomie*, of which Paolo Petroni is Vice President, has the objective of safeguarding and developing the cultures and patrimonies, both national and international, of gastronomy. To this end, it studies all problems linked to nutrition and gastronomy in particular by encouraging and promoting its public and private initiatives and rewarding the scientific research that enhances the specific qualities of foods in the various nations by respecting their traditions. Since nutrition is one of the fundamental factors of quality of life, the AIG, comprising the Academies of Gastronomy in Europe and around the world (Italy is one of the founding members together with Spain, France, Switzerland and Great Britain) carries out constant activity in several international environments. It fosters the teaching of gastronomy in schools and universities in several countries, as it pledges, in collaboration with institu-

tions, to train docents who are able to teach gastronomic sciences. It also works together with the Commission of the European Union to develop the cultural facets of gastronomy and to defend a alimentation based upon safeguarding the health of the consumer without overlooking the pleasure of the table. It must be pointed out that the European Parliament recognized the worthy collaboration of the AIG for the protection of the European gastronomic patrimony and that the Commission of the European Union has asked for the representation of a single interlocutor for the national academies of gastronomy. For this very reason, the *Académie Européenne de la Gastronomie* (AEG) came into being in the last November by grouping together the AIG European Academies (Belgium, Spain, Italy, France, Poland) under the chairmanship of Rafaël Anson.

Among the activities of the AIG, there is one that favors a quality cuisine, based on genuine and authentic products, thus encouraging the utilization of artisanal products that are characteristic of diverse territories, and fighting standardization and mediocrity. The AIG also encourages research in the field of enology since wine, as an integral part of gastronomy, enhances the taste and the flavor of dishes. It is as a

function of such constant monitoring, also within the scope of the restaurant business, that each year AIG announces four Grand Prizes as a recognition, under different titles, of persons or institutions at the international level that operate in the world of gastronomy; in addition, awards are given at the national level, in various sectors of nutrition.

In the current year, the General Assembly of the *Académie Internationale de la Gastronomie* met on February 1 in Paris and presented four awards for Italy: the **Grand Prix of Gastronomic Culture** was given, upon a proposal by Paolo Petroni, to the Honorary President **Giovanni Ballarini**. This is a most important recognition (given in the past to Giovanni Nuvoletti, Massimo Alberini, Luciano Pavarotti, ALMA of Colorno) that goes to Giovanni Ballarini and our Academy.

The other Grand Prix were given to Yannick Alleno of the restaurant *Ledoyen* in Paris (*Grand Prix de l'Art de la Cuisine*); to José M^a Ordovas, a scientist and world expert on nutrition and cardio-vascular diseases (*Grande Prix de la Science de l'Alimentation*); to Eric Baumard of the restaurant *Le V* of the Hôtel George V (*Grand Prix de l'Art de la Salle*).

Finally, Italians received three national awards. The young **Enrico Panero** of Eataly won the award "*Chef de l'avenir*" (Chef of the Future); **Domenico di Clemente** of the Four Seasons received the award "*Chef pâtissier*" (Top Pastry Chef) and **Attilia Giovanna Medda** from Olbia received the prize of *Sommelier of the Year*.





The golden eggs

An elderly woman sells them in the old market of Crotona; she obtains an egg yolk of a particular color, mixing into the chicken feed powdered red, but not spicy, pepper.

BY ADRIANA LIGUORI PROTO
Delegate, Crotona



with folklore and intimately connected in a mysterious way to the great religious event. The egg, together with the lamb and the dove, is the oldest symbol of perfection and continuity: anthropologists have attributed to the egg

the aura of mystery, something of magic, transcendental. *Omne vivum ex ovo*, the Latins wrote; all living beings are born of an egg. This maxim explains the principle according to which life cannot have its origin in nothing.

Looking back, many eggs were found in the *necropoli* of ancient civilizations. A golden egg was found in the tomb of Ur, while painted and decorated ostrich eggs came to light as testimonials of Egyptian culture. In mythology, the egg takes on a large significance. It is always connected to positive symbolisms: according to a very old legend, Eros, the Greek god of love, came from an egg. According to legends of the Incas, the god Irma, the descendant of sun and moon, created a new humanity from three eggs: from the first gold egg the male nobles were born; from the second, the silver egg, the female nobles originated; from the third, the copper one, all the common people. With their perfect and candid shape, eggs always had a propitiatory and well wishing value. Farmers of ancient Rome buried them in their fields to propitiate a good harvest. In the land

of Calabria, following a rather curious belief, if eaten on Good Friday, eggs protect against the evil eye and any negative influence. Moreover, according to another very old popular credence, the barren women should eat seven eggs if they wish to attain the pregnancy they crave. Many customs, beliefs and ancient legends waft around the egg, including the fairy tale of the "chicken that laid the golden eggs" that can stir wonderment and amazement. Coming out of a page in a fairy tale, an elderly woman farmer invites passers-bys in the old market of Crotona to buy the products of her chicken coop, the "golden eggs". The reason for such a precious product is contained in the color of the egg yolk that is similar to gold. It is the result of mixing into the chicken feed powdered red pepper, of the kind that is not spicy. In addition to such curious anecdotes, eggs are a marvelous food, a repository of precious substances that are indispensable for our nutrition and also, one of the most versatile foods in the kitchen. Let us mention a traditional Easter confection of the territory, rich in suggestion: the "cuzzupa", a blend in the shape of a crown or dove, featuring an array of boiled eggs in the crust as if they were jewels, held together in a transept. In such extraordinary embrace between grain and egg one can see the archaic spirit of the feast. The "cuzzupas", covered by a virginal mantle of sugar, are exchanged by the betrothed, as a token of love, on Easter day. In the folk traditions of the people of Calabria these Easter sweets are candid devotional offers.

As an extraordinary blend of human and divine elements, Easter is the greatest and the most ancient holiday of Christianity, already celebrated at the time of Moses. In the archaic conception, it was a pastoral feast, linked to the flowering of nature and the fecundity of the flock. The legend tells us that the Jews, once they settled down in the Promised Land, became farmers. They solemnly celebrated the first harvest in April at a time when the spring moon was full. The sense of universal Easter is thus linked to the stupendous interweaving of human and divine (the resurrection of Christ, the re-flowering of nature, the hope of eternal salvation, and also of new and copious harvests). This amazing feast has never been forgotten and with it, the pagan customs, pregnant



Revisiting Artusi

A reexamination of that fundamental text, in search of food-wine pairings.

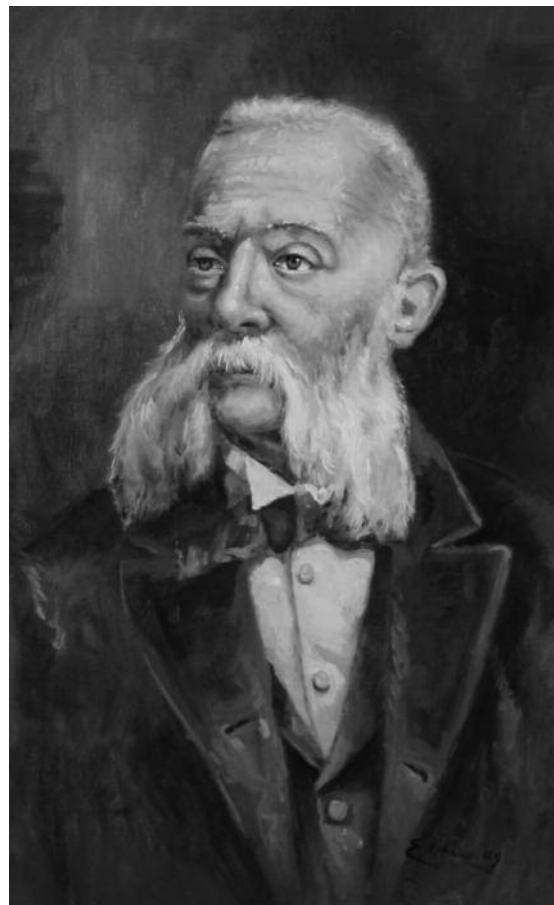
BY LUCIO PIOMBI
Delegate, Bergamo

There is really nothing more to be said on the subject of food-wine pairings, but in my humble opinion it is an important topic. Anyone who organizes a dinner should possess the basic knowledge in order not to penalize a dish with a bad wine pairing or not to ruin an excellent product with an incompatible ingredient. At restaurants of a certain level the maître d' or the sommelier who is "in charge" should understand the composition of

the dishes offered on the menu and that the kitchen staff prepares. He (or she) is the one who politely and wisely recommends which wine pairs well with the dish ordered, offering the customer not only the "wine list" but also the choices available in oils, mineral waters and liquors.

Therefore, I took another look at Artusi's fundamental "culinary dictionary" to find out if the great master ever discussed pairings, particularly those of food and wine. I found very few, even though I am certain that manual is basic to our cuisine. I let my imagination run through the book, with its recipes from almost every region of Italy at a time (the late 1800s) when such a complete volume was almost nonexistent.

Apart from Artusi's advice to drink wine only in the evenings and never to become intoxicated, one could infer that "our man" not only was opposed to excess but could almost be mistakenly identified as a teetotaler. I base this observation on some of his basic suggestions, such as, for example: "I believe that the most appropriate wine for weak stomachs is a highly regarded dry white because it is very digestible. An Orvieto that can also be served with dessert just like vin santo or a sparkling wine from Asti or Malaga". Another observation - out of date today - is that meat must be paired with a dry and mature red wine. Today there notoriously exist many complex and barrique aged white wines that stand up well to many types of meat. I have allowed myself one more observation: Artusi's insistence that "those who





drink little wine and eat little meat will not have red cheeks, which is a sign of good health. And that “one’s flesh will be flabby rather than hard” is nothing more than a pleasant and amenable way of expressing himself. From a close examination of his recipes we can deduce that, among other things, he rarely refers to wine even for use as a culinary ingredient for some dishes. He confesses: “I do not particularly care for wine as a condiment. But some bottled wines pair exceptionally well with foods of a special character. There are so many flavors that indeed, what pleases one person may not be agreeable to another”. The bottled wine reference indicates that evidently most wine served two hundred years ago was jug wine.

One of the wines that Artusi did appreciate was Marsala, which can be added when cooking beef loin, chicken, suckling veal with sage, roasted capon with truffles and game birds in salmì. A dry red wine is also worthwhile when paired with roast eel, while grappas are acceptable only in the preparation of castrated animal haunch, having allowed the alcohol to burn off.

Therefore it is really incorrect to think of Artusi as a teetotaler, because a close examination of his recipes shows him to be a consumer of good wine and well schooled in the judicious use of wine as a culinary ingredient.

Let us briefly review the now famous rules of food-wine pairing, and then discuss olive oils and liquors, since the goal of such pairings is that of eliciting harmonious gustatory-olfactory sensations, so that we may ensure that eating is not merely a necessity but also a pleasure for the senses.

There are several general principles that impact these rules, including tradition, folklore, seasonal nature and the organoleptic properties of foods and beverages. There are also two distinct systems for pairing that are based on other criteria: that of opposition and that of concordance.

A delicate dish requires a simple, light bodied wine. A strong aromatic dish

calls for a complex wine with a warm taste, preferable aged in barriques.

And what about olive oil? Fresh and delicate salads, light soups or foods served with mayonnaise should be paired with an oil from Iseo or Lake Garda. Grilled meat, dishes with legumes or tomato purees require Tuscan oil. Seafood antipasti and grilled fish call for Sicilian oil, which has vegetable overtones and good fluidity.

Finally, let us take a look at distilled liquors. A full bodied, intensely perfumed Cognac with herbal or aromatic overtones stands up well to chocolates that have a high cacao content or desserts that contain fruit or pistachios. A mild, aromatic white grappa can be served with cookies made with almonds or hazelnuts, and low in cacao.

A warm aromatic dry whiskey, perhaps peat produced, pairs well with chocolate that is not overly rich, or with toasted almonds. An aged rum nicely accompanies chocolate with a high cacao content - and maybe a good cigar.

We will leave a discussion of bread and mineral water pairings for another time.

LUCIO PIOMBI

ECUMENICAL DINNER 2016

The Ecumenical Convivial Dinner that finds all Academicians in Italy and around the world gathered around the same virtual table will be held on October 20, 2016 at 8:30 pm, with the theme “The cuisine of Reuse. Against Waste, the Family Tradition Offers Leftovers with Gusto and Imagination”.



This theme was chosen by the “Franco Marengi” Study Center and approved by the President’s Council, with the purpose of retrieving, within the traditional cuisine, those preparations that while originating from partially used foodstuff go on to create new recipes and diverse tastes.

The Delegates will take great care that the Ecumenical Dinner will be accompanied by an appropriate report of cultural character to illustrate the important theme of the convivial whose menu will offer and honor the chosen food.