

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
A CULTURAL INSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ITALY
FOUNDED IN 1953 BY ORIO VERGANI

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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

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WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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On the cover: graphic depiction of a detail from
Dish with Cherries by Giovanna Garzoni (Ascoli Pi-
ceno, 1600 - Rome, 1670). On exhibition at the
Palatina Gallery, Pitti Palace, Florence.



The Death (once again) of Cuisine

*Today's culture of excess is killing cuisine,
which has lost its central role in our "fluid" society.*

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI
President of the Academy

Dear Academicians, today a specter is once again lurking around Europe and the entire world. It is not a question of yet another social or political ideology, but rather one of the death of cuisine.

The end, or death, of cuisine has been predicted so many times in the past; however today's death knell seems unlikely considering the pyrotechnical explosion of the multi-form gastronomy that has invaded all forms of mass communication and contaminated any and all artistic expression. This very explosion is signaling the death of something far more worrisome than that which, during the social and economic changes in the post-World War II era, led Orio Vergani to raise the alarm that "Italian cuisine is dying". Postmodern cuisine, which is undergoing some confusing tremors that may lead some to believe the end is

near, has been elevated to a higher status than its predecessors. It is deemed worthy of the same consideration as other human arts, raising mass nutrition to the level of "haute cuisine". In addition, postmodern cuisine has managed not only to elicit, but also express and externalize a vast gamut of social needs, both conscious and unconscious. These undeniable assets and its apparent vitality notwithstanding, today's postmodern cuisine, which has replaced the now-eclipsed modern bourgeois cuisine, may surrender itself in the face of the rapid growth and diffusion of other cultural and gastronomic movements and their equally rapid disappearance.

If we consider only the countries of the western world in which "haute cuisine" is most deeply rooted, during the second half of the 20th century and beginning of the current 21st century, in addition to the well known *nouvelle cuisine* movement we have witnessed the rise and fall of cultural and gastronomic movements that have inspired such "isms" as Perfectionism, Conceptualism, Naturalism, Mediterraneanism and even Techo-Emotionalism. We must not forget or underestimate the influence of Chinese, Japanese and other Asian cultures, along with the development of new Scandinavian gastronomies and, outside of Europe, neo-Latin ones, especially Brazilian.

In Italy we must examine two developing tendencies that are presenting themselves in different ways, in particular the youth inspired alternative cuisines such as *mainstream cuisine*

and the *nutritional craze for everything "retro"*.

Just as today we have the phenomenon of *mainstream music*, a sort of *mainstream cuisine* is developing, based on mass consumption, commercialization, and passing fads according to the changing whims of habits and fashion. This includes culinary genres that have a large youth or youth-oriented following. They are replacing traditional and regional popular cuisine and are gaining a foothold thanks to the media and collective restaurant industry. This trend should not be confused with a "popular cuisine", that is the fruit of an authentic cultural reality that originates with the lower social classes and is not influenced by business schemes or commercial interests, and which is passed along in the form of family traditions.

Today's nutritional nostalgia craze tends to place value on everything that smacks of the past, distant or recent, as in the passion for "vintage" items. This desire for "retro" flavors includes the industrialized foods of the immediate post-war period, but it especially it refers to an interpretation, often rather casual, of traditional foods, dishes, recipes and menus. This is a path that has been followed and encouraged by the agro-nutritional industry and its large scale distribution. This brings us to our current time, when cuisine has never seemed more alive and vibrant. But considering what I have indicated above, that is not the case. There are at least four threats that can be identified in present day



cuisine. The nutritional offerings of *mainstream cuisine* and *haute cuisine* are so broad, and at the same time so mutable, that today's consumer, lacking the practical guidance provided by tradition, is essentially unable to get his culinary bearings in today's world. There is a betrayal hidden behind this nutritional nostalgia craze.

Industrial cuisine eliminates differences; all flavors are standardized, aligned and flattened. Simultaneously, thanks to many different paths and technological developments everyone has come to believe that they can create a new cuisine that is independent from all preceding traditions. It is cuisine born of our fluid culture.

Nutritional and cultural globalization leads to the incorporation of elements that characterize many different cultures. More than simply the infinite types of *fusion* cuisine, this also includes their rapid if not immediate expropriation. This is a different process from the slow and measured one of the past which allowed for the Italian regional cuisines to assimilate such products as the potato and the tomato.

The final, and most deadly threat is the globalization of information. David Byrne wrote in the October 11, 2013

issue of *The Guardian* that "The Internet will soon suck up all the creative content of the world". And the gastronomic fan worship, the culinary theatricality, the exasperating obsession with citations, the communication invasion and the chef population explosion that requires them to constantly modify their dishes makes the emergence of even minimally stable new culinary paradigms increasing difficult. The abundance, or better yet the over abundance of choices that has already annihilated tradition is now killing cuisine. All that remains will be (perhaps) a "fluid" kind of nutrition that is available to all, in a sort of new Cuisine of Babel.

Is there too much of everything available?

At one time we were accustomed to thinking of cuisine as traditions in a process of continual evolution through a process of constant innovation. It was and is the Academy's job to protect the traditions of Italian cuisine as well as to promote and improve them.

Perhaps the cycle of modern and post-modern cuisine has come to an end under the onslaught of new means of communication and transmitting the social and symbolic values of a society.

Cuisine is not dead, but a certain type of centrality is finished.

We grew up in a world in which traditional cuisine was the equivalent of a grand narrative of a society and a time. Recipes and culinary rules explained and interpreted the world, just as did literature, theater, and later the cinema. Now all that is but a distant memory. Back in the days when Italian pizzerias were owned and run by the pizza maker himself there was a close cultural connection with Naples, its cows and its territory. With the arrival of the hamburger in an establishment that no longer is associated with any particular cuisine, we witnessed the beginning of the dismantlement of any and all regional reference or tradition.

We are facing an evolutionary and anthropological leap of immense proportions of which we are not even aware nor do we understand its consequences. We could say that "one" cuisine is finished - that of the last century, and another has begun. Even in nutrition and cuisine history does not go backward. It is the task of the Academy to study, and to the extent possible, interpret the phenomenon of a new cuisine in a "fluid" society.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI



To our Readers,

I would like to inform the Academicians that last July Francesco Ricciardi decided to step down from his position of editor of this magazine in order to devote more time to other activities that required his full attention. It is with regret but also great respect for his choice, that I and the President's Academic Council extend our personal best wishes and thanks to Francesco for the excellent and distinguished work he carried on behalf of this institution and for having helped bring to life this prestigious publication.

Francesco continues to be a member of the Academy, and as a long time Academician he will continue to serve as an example for us, both in terms of his Academic activities as well as his future undertakings.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI

The restaurant's classic menu is in a crisis

Even in Italy, more often than not, a full meal comprising antipasto and dessert is no longer requested. It is up to the chef, however, to fill up a plate.

BY PAOLO PETRONI

Secretary General of the Academy

A letter that came recently to the Academy has raised the persisting problem of how to distribute the courses that come to the table and thereby of how to prepare a menu, both at home and in a restaurant. Anybody who writes a cookbook today starts off with the antipasti, then goes on to the second courses, the side dishes and the dessert. It seems so simple, perhaps too simple. In fact, it is not easy to distinguish between these courses, especially at a time when single dishes are fashionable. There was a time, in the great banquets of the Renaissance, when the distribution was different, as it encompassed dishes (straight from the cupboard) and hot dishes (from the kitchen). Subsequently, in the grand French cuisine, from the outset all dishes were exhibited on the table, and each guest chose them in the order that he or she preferred, not unlike the custom of Chinese cuisine. Eventually, things became a bit more complicated and the menus were compiled by specialists, in a complex fashion that was difficult to understand: *hors d'oeuvres*, *entrées*, *relevés*, *entremets* (hot and cold), *rots*, *salade*, *fromage*, *desserts*. The same subdivision was adopted in Italy, with proper translations.

Artusi adopted a subdivision that was complex to the point of complicating the search for a recipe: soups in broth, pasta and lean meat, sauces, eggs, batter, fried and stuffed foods, stewed and cold meats, vegetables and legumes,

fish courses, roast beef, pastry, pies and spooned desserts, syrups, preserves, and ice creams. Today, things have become simpler but the problems are still there. There are dishes, such as the famous "*cacciucco*", that we cannot classify as a fish soup or a second course. There are other examples of difficult classification: risotto with quails, risotto *ossobuco*, soufflé with giblets, a big plate of raw fish, spaghetti with lobster sauce and so on.

Things are simpler in the United States: the meal starts with a soup or a salad, chosen by the customer (at times this serving is included in the price of the meal). A single dish of meat or fish follows with abundant portions of side dishes. In France as well, lacking pasta, things are easy: the meal is based upon one strong dish. This will explain why in Italy pasta or rice messes up the menu. These days people do not order antipasto, first courses and second courses (by the way, it would be opportune for academic dinners as well to be confined to fewer servings). Notwithstanding, there are academic convivia that feature strong aperitifs, two first courses, two second courses, which entails biblical slowness in the service. Our restaurateurs should understand that a dish must be complete. Serving the side dishes apart in order to spike the bill is a losing policy. The chef is responsible for the correct mix, by following not only good taste but also a few rules of alimentary education.

THE ACADEMY SILVER PLATE



An elegant silver plated dish engraved with the Academy logo.

This symbolic object may be presented to restaurants that display exceptional service, cuisine and hospitality.

Delegates may contact the Milan Headquarters (segreteria@accademia1953.it) for more information and orders.



Getting in touch with our roots

A few notes on the Academy at its origin.



Our Academy was established in 1953 but what did it look like at that time? Sixty years later, it is not easy to find living witnesses. However, we have some letters written by Orio Vergani and most importantly, the booklet with the first roster of 1955, and those of 1958-59 when Vergani was still alive, and more booklets still as those of 1977-79 that cover the first twenty-five years of life of the Academy.

From the first documents that contain the Statute and the By-laws we can obtain precise particulars that allow us to draw interesting details on a few aspects that at times appear odd and other times a source of uncertainty. Leaving aside the structure of the organization, let us look at some elements, starting with the mission of the Academy and then move on to some organizational aspects.

The mission of the Italian Academy of Cuisine - The 1955 Statute (Art. 1) enumerates the following purposes that are still fully current:

- to defend the traditions of Italian cuisine and encourage its improvement;
- to indicate to the public those restaurants and enterprises that offer the guarantee of a good and characteristic Italian cuisine;
- to confer awards to those persons who assist in reaching the purposes set forth by the Academy;
- to undertake and promote those initiatives of all kind that may contribute to increasing the value and

improving Italian cuisine and the good table in general.

The Academic Body - The foundation documents of 1955 spell out that “*the Academic Body is headquartered in Milan, it is national and unitary. It is formed by the Founding Academic members who may admit through co-optation those persons who represent associations, groups or entities and who adhere for personal reasons*”. (Art. 4)

The Academic Body, constituted by the Founding Academicians (13 in all), was the subject of an important clarification in the Statute of 1977-79 (Art. 4) which states: “*The Founding Members belong to it by right and may admit through co-optation individual Academicians up to a maximum of thirty to represent the plenum of the Academic Body*”. During the first decades of life of our Academy, the concept of *Academic Body* was made clear to the point that it still lives on in a large number of national and foreign delegations through a small group of Academicians (from a few dozens to several hundred). In practical terms, the Academic Body, constituted exclusively through co-optation, not by election, was the Academy. The number of thirty members was not that different from what characterizes other academies, including gastronomic ones, of various countries that belong to the *Académie Internationale de la Gastronomie*. This norm does not exclude that from the very beginning, along with the Academic Body, the Delegates may constitute the Assembly.



The Assembly - "The Academic Body joins with the Delegates of the local chapters to constitute the Assembly", as spelled out in Art. 7 of the 1955 Statute. The Assembly nominates the President, the Registrar, the Treasurer, and two counselors (Art. 6).

In the years from 1977 to 1979, the Academic Body, composed of thirty members, met in plenary assembly and nominated the President's Council that at present comprises nine members. In later times, the Assembly was called upon to exercise a larger task by continuing to elect the President and also the elective members of the Academic Council. For its part, the Academic Council elects the members of the President's Council from its membership. In fact, this situation derives from the

fact that the Academic Council has replaced the Academic Body.

Delegations - It can be stated that the Academy is based upon the Delegations, some of them in existence since 1954, while the 1955 Statute (Art. 5) states that "the Academic Body will nominate the Delegates in the various centers". Similarly, Art. 7 calls for the presence of the Delegates to constitute the Assembly. The Delegations are regulated; the 1977-1979 By-laws (Art. 1) spell out that "the Delegations constituted within the Italian Academy of Cuisine in the various centers of the Italian peninsula under the terms of Art. 5 of the Statute, are governed by a Delegate in charge whose term of office is three years - unless determined otherwise by

the President's Council - Such terms may be revoked at any moment and must be confirmed". From the very beginning, the Delegate is subject to the nomination by the President's Council that may be revoked or renewed for a period of three years.

Academicians - Unlike other academies that maintain a distinction between the Academicians of the Academic Body and the correspondent and extraordinary Academicians (outside the realm of ordinary Academicians), our Academy contemplates only one academic category, as evidenced by the 1977-1979 By-laws that stipulate in Art. 1 that "the members of each Delegation should be at least six with the right of being recognized as Academicians".

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.





What's in a name?

The contemporaneity of tradition

Why use the real name of a classic dish if it is interpreted in a personal manner?

BY FIAMMETTA FADDA
Academician, Milan Delegation

This is the point: what right does a dish have to be called “Vegetable Minestrone Milanese style” when it presents itself this way: in the middle of the soup plate the canonical vegetable ensemble, that is to say carrots, potatoes, cabbage, rice, crisp rather than well cooked and shaped into a cylinder; and then, pink tomato water, slightly acidulous and lukewarm, added at the last moment. This dish was served as a first course at the academic dinner of the Milan Delegation at *Daniel* Restaurant in the Brera district, recently opened by Daniel Canzian, who was in charge until a few months ago of Gualtiero Marchesi’s kitchen at *Marchesino* in the square of La Scala. The dish caused

a bit of a stir among the guests. The reason was that according to the academy’s paradigm using the same name for a classic dish that is interpreted in a personal manner is both a theoretical and practical affront. Theoretical in the sense that it is tantamount to lowering a gastronomic flag that had been flying for centuries; practical in that one reads “*minestrone* Milanese style” foretasting its taste and consistency only to find a totally “different” dish. It would appear to be a valid reason to send it back for an intransigent traditionalist. But it would be a pity because it is a very pleasant gastronomic creation; and it would be an injustice as well because the chef has explained the minestrone by defining it as a





“contemporary version”. And that’s not all. Daniel distinguished his restaurant by using the phrase “Contemporary Italian Cuisine”. According to the Academy, there is no “Italian cuisine” but only regional gastronomic dialects that have become quite popular of late simply because after years of rediscoveries and creative cuisine, a new generation of gourmards has decided that the newer tastes are actually the older ones. They are filled with history but never tried in their original version. However, it is true that there are dishes that are part of the national patrimony, sprawling from South to North and vice versa without losing their fragrance and the skill of execution. It can be said that “Italy is united due to language and palate”, as stated by Allan Bay, curator of the *Ponte alle Grazie* series of books of cuisine, in his ponderous volume of 1135 recipes “that make Italy”.

Daniel Canzian accepted the benevolent grievance with Venetian gracefulness and explained the genesis of the recipe: the crispness of the vegetables derives from the acquired rule of not overcooking the vegetables that are handled separately in order to preserve their gustative personality, just like Gualtiero Marchesi has been preaching. The tomato water is instead a suggestion by Michel Troigros, whom Daniel considers his mentor. Troigros’s glorious family inaugurated the *nouvelle cuisine* in its restaurant in Roanne. After all, a French touch in the town where

Napoleon stopped is not entirely out of place.

On the other hand, Daniel Canzian can afford to improvise upon tradition since he knows it by experimenting it to the fullest: his confidence behind the stove started in the restaurant of his parents in Conegliano Veneto and developed at the *Dolada* in Pieve d’Alpago, at *Tivoli* in Cortina and at *Gellius* in Oderzo before landing at the *Albereta* of Gualtiero Marchesi. And now, at only 33 years of age, he is his own master and has matured a personal style.

In fact, the provocative minestrone was preceded by a cup of clear “chicken broth with citrus scent”, a *comfort food* of Lombardy that has become contemporary through the aromatic note of orange peels, and was followed by a “*saltimbocca* of *coregone*”, an esteemed lake fish that was beloved in the area before being dethroned by sea fish. The dish was properly married with a regional wine, Lugana Cadoiera 2013. Then came the “crunchy suckling

pig with savoy cabbage and cooked apples”: to be sure, it was not the reigning cheek cooked at low temperature but a nice chunk of pork roasted on the spot, with crispy savoy and rennets that imparted a welcome acidulous note. The Pinot Noir 2009 from Val-larom was a perfect match.

Everything stood out, from the gray walls without decoration to the description of the dishes, featuring only the sequence of the ingredients in a style that was apparently simple but rich in ideas, to the presence of chefs who were serving in the dining room, to the abundance of excellent wine in the glasses, and to the option of bringing in your own wine and paying for corkage. And finally, a big applause for the dessert, an unusual two colored *panna cotta*, yellow from tarragon and pink from rhubarb, laid out in the plate with a yin/yang design. Sometimes, it is true that “what is beautiful is good”.

FIAMMETTA FADDA

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Meditations on a piedmontese dish

From the classic tuna sauced veal to Chef Cannavacciuolo's veal sauced tuna, this preparation of this dish unleashes the imagination of chefs everywhere.

BY PAOLETTA PICCO
Turin-Lingotto Delegate



People have been talking about *vitello tonnato* for decades - or at least since the celebrated Artusi first raised its status from humble leftovers to noble antipasto. There is some discussion even as to whether it should be served as a cold or hot antipasto. It doesn't seem to matter to the "*vitello tonnato* lovers" that in recent years have literally overwhelmed the blogosphere with recipes, advice, and praise for one of the most talked about dishes in Piedmont.

We are discussing this phenomenon because the Academicians of the Turin-Lingotto Delegation surrendered to the sublime veal from the Fassone breed with tuna sauce served at the *Vicina* restaurant that has been in business since 1908.

Let's start at the beginning: even if the name "*vitel tonné*" may lead us to

believe it is of French origin, the dish is actually Italian; specifically Piedmontese. In Piedmont both Alba and Gressano claim paternity. Born as a humble dish, it was often made with leftover (we dare not say recycled) cuts of meat, covered in a sauce. But people are still divided over its preparation. Over time the recipe has continually evolved: mayonnaise was added

to the sauce, then tuna was added to the mayonnaise. The original tuna sauce did not call for mayonnaise at all, but it is in fact present now. Some prepare the sauce in the style of a mayonnaise, blending in tuna, anchovies, capers and hardboiled egg yolks; others add tuna to the sauce and later dress it with anchovies, capers and a spritz of lemon juice. Still others add some mustard to the sauce and a few use raw egg yolks instead of hard-boiled ones. Then there is chef Davide Scabin of the Rivoli restaurant *Combal.Zero*. He cooks the tuna along with the Fassone veal and purees the cooking liquid to make the sauce. Antonio Cannavacciuolo of *Villa Crespi* in Orta San Giulio discovered *vitello tonnato* when he moved to Piedmont in 1989. He calls his version *tonno vitellato* (tuna sauced veal) and serves it with

mayonnaise. Indeed it is the fish and not the meat that plays the leading role in this dish, while the veal is used to make the sauce.

Thus *vitello tonnato* always has and will continue to unleash the wildest of imaginations. Jamie Oliver, one of England's most famous chefs, serves it not only as an appetizer but also often as a main course. He recommends marinating the veal overnight in white wine, sage and bay leaves and then poaching the meat in the marinade.

In spite of its many variations, there one thing all chefs today agree on. To make a good *vitello tonnato* the veal must not be leftover but must come from an excellent quality noble breed of cattle. This brings us to the *vitello tonnato* prepared with Fassone beef by Claudio and Anna Vicina that the Academicians of the Turin-Lingotto Delegation recently enjoyed. The meat came from a breeder in Cuneo; the tuna sauce was made in accordance with their Grandmother's recipe, which goes back to the beginning of the 1900s and calls for adding tuna to the mayonnaise but uses neither capers nor eggs.

There is also a fundamental difference that you can see just by looking at plate: the fresh, rosy slices of veal sit on top of the sauce, which is not served over the top but rather added to the meat at the moment it is sliced and served. This is the *Vicina* restaurant's approach to a new, contemporary *vitello tonnato* that showcases the excellence and nobility of the Fassone breed of veal. The tuna sauce is merely an accompaniment.



Maccheroni molinara style

The preparation of a dish in the popular tradition of Abruzzo bound to the history of ancient millers and master pasta makers.

BY GIUSEPPE FIORITONI
Delegate of Pescara



Maccarune molinare are one of many examples of the popular cuisine of the Abruzzo region and the expression of ancient techniques and old tastes that are destined to disappear. Bran flour of whole wheat from tender grain, water and salt are the basic ingredients in the mixture of these handmade succulent *maccheroni* that are long, thick and irregular, with a diameter of 7-8 mm (0.27 inches), that elevate simple condiments or tasty sauces such as the ragout of mixed beef or the ragout of pancetta and pork cheek sautéed in a pan with minced onion, sage and parsley, with sauces made out of tomatoes, duck meat, beef and castrated lamb with the addition of capsicum and, for those who desire it, plenty of grated pecorino cheese.

The production is complex and requires experienced hands acting one over the other getting into the well of the flour and water mixture to work in a circular motion in order to make a ring that thins out and lengthens until it reaches the shape of a very long *maccheroni*. The product is then cut according to the desired length of each piece.

The Abruzzo region is a land that boasts ancient pasta and pasta makers and trusts its fame to the use of high quality ingredients, i.e. pure water, selected grains and original artisanal techniques. The origin of the “*molinara*” pasta is a controversial matter that connects to the history of the region as well. According to the historians of Abruzzan gastronomy, the creation of this tasty dish is credited to Bisenti,





an agreeable town in the high valley of the Fino river in the territory of Teramo, ruled from the end of the twelfth century by the Acquaviva family, owner of feudal lands in the northern part of Abruzzo. Around 1340, the Acquaviva lords established mills in the Fino valley. They operated with two millstones, a fixed one and a rotating one, propelled by the hydraulic energy of the river. At the end of the work day, the millers of the area utilized the flour that stuck to the millstones to prepare a simple and genuine meals to recover their energy. In so doing, they invented the “maccherune molinare style”, a cord thick as a finger and long as a hank of wool that was worked exclusively by hand.

In his book *Abruzzo in the Kitchen* (published in 1978 by Costantini in Pescara) Luigi Braccili tells the story of this extraordinary dish that was introduced to the table of Roberto d'Angiò's court by the physician and scientist Bartolomeo from Bisenti, who enjoyed great esteem and consideration by the King and Queen Sancia of Aragon. Along with the tradition of the millers in the Fino valley, there is another belonging to the millers of Paglieta and the Lower Sangro, who milled the wheat with their typical millstones. The popular tradition, handed down through the centuries from one generation to another, recounts that in these territories as well the millers prepared the typical pasta made only with wheat and water by working it delicately into an unending hank. The condiment was invariably garlic, oil and capsicum; alternatively, the sauce was made with fish taken from the mill's channel and, whenever possible, with meat ragout.

There are still testimonies of this ancient technique that is doomed to die out. Nicola DiLallo, a miller and master pasta maker from Paglieta, has learned the art of working grain and wheat from the experience handed down by four generations of “master millers”. He works exclusively with type 0 wheat from tender Bolero grain and is capable



of spinning a long hank of *maccherone* in the *molinara* style into a thin, soft, damp, elastic and porous cord that can stretch dozens of yards with no interruption. The pasta is worked exclusively by hand with a constant circular motion; the cord stretches progressively and thins out until it reaches the diameter of 1 centimeter (0.4 inches); the expert adding of flour prevents the *maccheroni* from massing up while being worked.

Working the pasta is a long and tiring exercise. It can take between 4 and 5 hours to make enough to feed 25 persons. Nicola prepares his hank on a long wood table and serves the resulting pasta on the same table, after dressing it with a very savory sheep sauce. The soft roulades lose the strong and penetrating sheep odor thanks to a long and slow cooking process scented with aromatic herbs and vegetables. The master pasta maker works only at home. He brings home all the necessary utensils including the large pot that is made exclusively with copper. The pasta must cook rapidly and must be strained, dressed and served directly on the wooden plank. Unfortunately,

this antique and original technique is disappearing and Nicola DiLallo is the last practitioner in the Sangro region. In the province of Pescara, the *maccheroni molinara* style can be enjoyed at the restaurant *La Bilancia* situated near Passo Cordone. It is an old restaurant that has been managed for over thirty years by Sergio di Zio and his wife Antonietta, a skilled chef, and is renowned for the old specialties of Abruzzo that are prepared with genuine products extracted from a garden that is cared for by the restaurateurs or acquired through scrupulous research of old and practically out of date vegetables, and finally combined with quality meats and sausages.

Antonietta Marrone is the master pasta maker of this restaurant that employs a mix of wheats, specifically some tender grain and bran flour, worked until they yield an homogenous mass. With her own original technique, Antonietta too starts her work by shaping a well in the mass by using her index finger. The hole must be widened in order to allow the entire hand to fit inside it to start the final manipulation. The process shapes a cord of approximately 8 mm (0.27 inches) that must be worked with the bran flour and elongated as cord with a length of dozens of yards. The pasta cooks in salted water for about 15 minutes and then is dressed and sautéed in a pan with garlic in olive oil with the addition of dry sweet peppers before heating is stopped.

In the same province, the tradition of this particular pasta worked with finers is offered by the local restaurants and the pasta makers of the territory comprised between Elice and Città Sant'Angelo as the “pasta of the miller's wife” (*la molinara*). This captivating dish however is nothing other than a re-interpretation of the ancient recipe of “*maccherune molinara* style” from which it is removed etymologically as well as gastronomically while keeping a few elements of contact with the original antecedent specialty.

GIUSEPPE FIORITONI

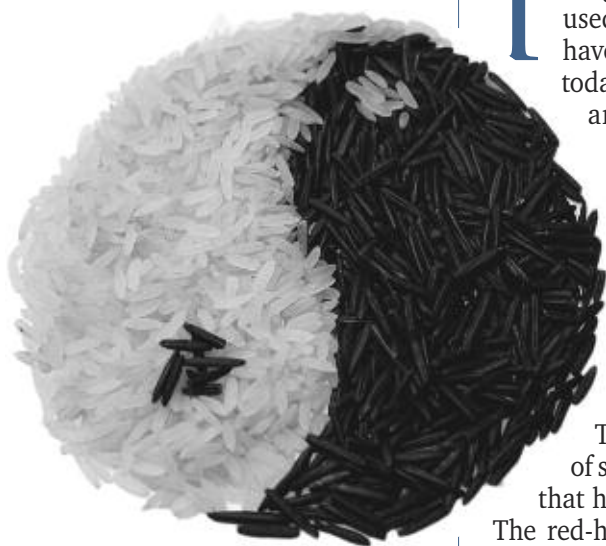


Red, white and black

Can we look forward to enjoying even more colored rice?

DI RENZO PELLATI

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The grains of rice that we have used in cuisine for centuries have always been white, but today we are seeing both red and black grains on our plates. These are not products that have been treated with strange colorants simply to satisfy our desire for novelty: they are ancient grains destined to conquer the palates of an ever increasing number of consumers.

They belong to the category of so-called "functional foods" that have many health benefits.

The red-hued rice is a species that has been in existence for millennia, especially in West Africa. This grain was so widely cultivated that European sailors referred to the region stretching from Senegal to the Ivory Coast as the "Rice Coast". Over a third of the slaves shipped to the New World came from the Rice Coast, and they continued to grow this rice as their favorite food. It was subsequently replaced by the Asian variety of rice because it rendered a greater harvest. It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that botanists were able to demonstrate that the African rice (*Oryza glaberrima*) was a unique species, different from the Asian variety (*Oryza sativa*). The red color of the grain covering is rich in polyphenols that have antioxidant effects similar to those of grapevines. In Italy this red variety is known as "Ermes". It is cultivated in Casalbeltrame in the area around Novara. Thanks to the leavening action of

monascus purpureus, when fermented it also is used to reduce cholesterol.

Black rice has also been around for millennia. In China it was exclusively cultivated for the Emperor and his court because it was reputed to have great nutritional value. It actually has a high mineral content, especially anthocyanin (the pigment that gives the seed capsule its color) which has great antioxidant properties that boost the immune system.

Another characteristic of pigmented rice is the aroma it releases during cooking. The presence of external organic compounds give off a perfume of freshly baked bread. Obviously red and black rice require a different cooking technique from plain white rice, similar to whole grain rice. This results in a longer cooking time.

The best known black rice in Italy is "Venere". It is a recent variety, only developed in 1997. Cultivated in the provinces of Vercelli and Novara, it is a hybrid of an Asian rice (that was unsuited to the Italian climate) with our native variety. The name "Venere" (Venus) is an homage to the planet, the goddess of love, and the legendary Josephine Baker.

There is also a green rice (known as wild rice - *Zizania aquatic*) that originated in Canada and is also grown in the United States. During cooking it releases an intense perfume of tea and aromatic herbs. It is often eaten in soup, and is frequently paired with fish or game. For the time being, it is rather difficult to find in Italy.

Why do we Italians utilize almost exclusively white rice, from the *japonica*



type to the short grained varieties (Carnaroli, Arborio, Baldo, Vialone) while the *indica* varieties such as Basmati, are more typical of the Asian rices?

In addition to our knowledge of algebra, mathematics and philosophy we also are indebted to the Arabs for the gift of rice, because once again we must admit that food and culture often travel together. History tells us that when the Arabs (who thanks to their contact with the Byzantine Empire became important scholars and researchers) arrived in Italy, they introduced the culture of white rice which has persisted until this day. In particular the Arabs became the intermediaries between the East and the Mediterranean lands, and this in turn encouraged the diffusion of cultivation and irrigation techniques.

Rice landed in Spain with the Moors and there is abundant documentation of its arrival also in Sicily and other areas of southern Italy. However, starting in the 15th century, rice cultivation was developed more intensively in northern Europe. The only surviving



rice dishes in the south are the Sicilian *arancine* rice balls and the Neapolitan dish *sartù*. This would seem to indicate that rice is a less popular food in the south. The true Italian *risotti*, so popular among chefs around the world, are still an important part of northern Italian cuisine. The widespread cultivation of rice in the classic provinces of Novara, Vercelli and Pavia following the construction of Camillo Benso di Cavour's canal has made Italy the leading European producer of this grain. Before becoming a staple of the Italian diet, rice was considered a spice (reserved for the privileged classes owing to its high cost). It was also seen as a medication for gastric and intestinal afflictions, and when ground and

blended with almonds it was used to prepare the light dish *bianco mangiare*. Even today many people recall the doctors' prescription for *riso in bianco* (plain boiled white rice) as a remedy for gastro-enterological disturbances. Pediatricians recommend rice because it is easy for children to digest and absorb because of its low cellulose

content. Today they still recommend that during their infant's first three months of life mothers dilute their milk with water in which rice has been boiled rather than plain water because the starch granules are extremely small (about 10 microns) compared to other grains.

While the diffusion of rice is clearly well entrenched today, its level of consumption in Italy is rather low: 5.6 kilograms (12 lbs.) annually per capita. Clearly we have a strong preference for pasta: 28 kilos (62 lbs). In the future the availability of colored rice will allow us to associate the pleasures of the table with a beneficial activity that will help us maintain good health.

RENZO PELLATI

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 Marengi" 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.

