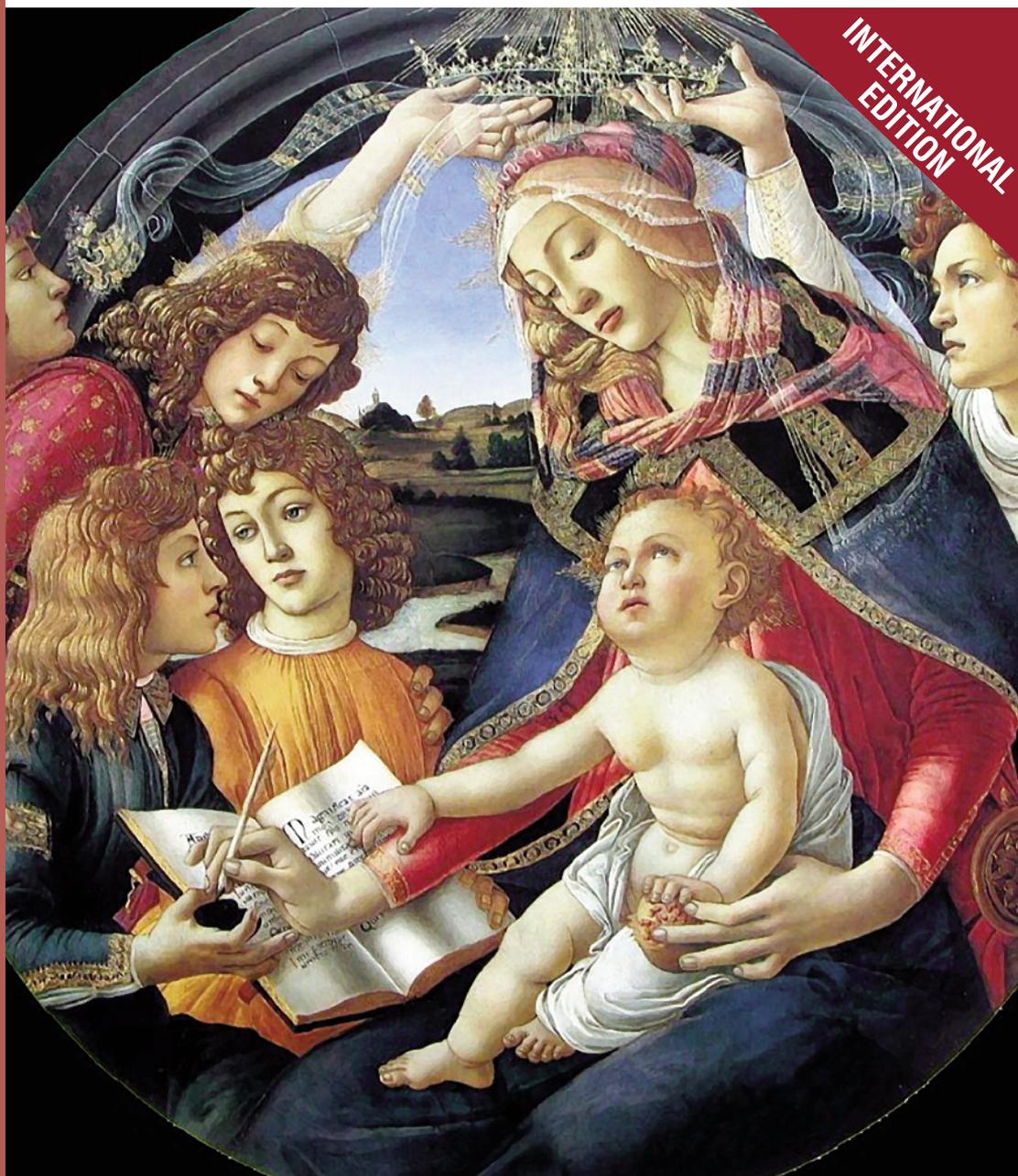


CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



INTERNATIONAL
EDITION

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

www.accademia1953.it





L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

FOUNDED IN 1953 BY ORIO VERGANI
AND LUIGI BERTETT, DINO BUZZATI TRAVERSO,
CESARE CHIODI, GIANNINO CITTERIO,
ERNESTO DONÀ DALLE ROSE, MICHELE GUIDO FRANCI,
GIANNI MAZZOCCHI BASTONI, ARNOLDO MONDADORI,
ATTILIO NAVA, ARTURO ORVIETO, SEVERINO PAGANI,
ALDO PASSANTE, GIANLUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI,
DINO VILLANI, EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA
ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

DECEMBER 2016 / N. 288

EDITOR IN CHIEF
PAOLO PETRONI

COPY EDITOR
SILVIA DE LORENZO

LAYOUT
SIMONA MONGIU

TRANSLATOR
ANTONIA FRASER FUJINAGA

THIS ISSUE INCLUDES ARTICLES BY
Claudio Barba,
Silvia De Lorenzo,
Gianni Fossati,
Antonella Marani,
Paolo Petroni.



PUBLISHER
ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
VIA NAPO TORRIANI 31 - 20124 MILANO
TEL. 02 66987018 - FAX 02 66987008
presidente@accademia1953.it
segreteria@accademia1953.it
redazione@accademia1953.it
www.accademia1953.it



MONTHLY MAGAZINE
REG. N. 4049 - 29-5-1956
TRIBUNALE DI MILANO



Rivista associata
all'Unione Stampa
Periodica Italiana



TABLE OF CONTENTS



FOCUS

2 A wonderful year
(Paolo Petroni)

ACADEMIC COUNCIL

3 The good, the fair
and the beautiful
(Silvia De Lorenzo)

CULTURE AND RESEARCH

5 A press conference
for a prestigious publication
(Gianni Fossati)

6 Christmas dinner in Sicily
(Claudio Barba)

8 Nougat
(Antonella Marani)



On the cover: Graphic elaboration of the painting *The Madonna of the Magnificat* (1481) by Sandro Botticelli, displayed in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.



President Paolo Petroni, the President's Council,
the secretariat in Milan and the magazine's editorial office
wish all Academicians in Italy and worldwide

**a Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year**

The secretariat in Milan and the editorial office in Rome
will be closed from the 24th of December to the 8th of January

A wonderful year

An intense and constructive effort to reach our goals.

BY PAOLO PETRONI
President of the Academy

The “Week of High-Quality Italian Cooking”, organised by Embassies, Consulates and Italian Cultural Institutes with the often crucial support of our Academy’s foreign Delegations, recently came to an end. This project was part of the programme for promoting Italian cuisine initiated by the Italian Foreign Ministry’s Directorate General for Cultural and Economic Promotion and Innovation. Our Delegates and Legates, through numerous events arranged with Italian diplomatic missions, contributed substantially to the success of this felicitous programme, which saw our Ministries of Agriculture, Foreign and Education concretely supporting Italian cuisine abroad for the first time, aided inter alia by the chefs who served as “Ambassadors of Taste” under the guidance of Cristina Bowerman. In addition to the Academy’s brilliant overseas activities, it is worth mentioning the new Delegations and Legations which were opened in the course of this year: Moscow, Tokyo, Jakarta, Stuttgart, Glasgow City, Pittsburgh, and Brisbane. Lastly, in these past few days we inaugurated a Delegation in Jordan in accordance with the wishes of our Ambassador Giovanni Brauzzi, and in early 2017 we will open a Delegation in Astana, Kazakhstan, a project initiated by our Ambassador Stefano Ravagnan.

In the national sphere, not only have we opened the Delegations of Brescia-Terre dei Fontanili and Matera, but we also have the pleasure of reporting our substantial interaction with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Ministry of Culture. They expressed appreciation for our presence at their conferences, including one of considerable importance which took place in

Pietrarsa (near Naples), with the participation of Prime Minister Renzi and the Minister of Culture, Dario Franceschini. Several other conferences were organised by our own Delegations.

The esteemed members of the “Franco Marengi” Study Centre engaged in a particularly interesting dialogue during their meeting at the Gualtiero Marchesi Foundation: this was an important opportunity to discuss the state of Italian cuisine and restaurants and formulate guidelines on the path to be followed by the Academy. Special thanks are due to our Regional Study Centers for their dedication in punctually publishing the valuable volume *The Cuisine of Reuse (La Cucina del riuso)* and for the texts of the new Food Culture Library. This book series, which is a companion to the Academy’s recipe book *Traditions of the Table (La tradizione a tavola)*, will make our work more available to the general public, which will thereby have more opportunities to know what the Academy is and does. This is a decisive and important step in disseminating and raising awareness about our activities. In addition to the past few month’s many events, Academics are experiencing a moment of intense passion, and are eagerly furthering the Academy’s goals: to develop food culture, raise public awareness about the Academy, and participate in the initiatives organised by government bodies which strive to promote Italian cuisine and high-quality Italian food products. It is also a considerable pleasure to meet in friendship during our convivial gatherings. And so we come to the end of 2016: a wonderful year! Let’s all work hard together for a splendid 2017. Warmest greetings!





The good, the fair and the beautiful

*Completed projects, new events, rosy budgets
and the pleasure of good company: this is today's Academy.*

BY SILVIA DE LORENZO



The beautiful is undoubtedly the scene of this autumn's meeting of the Academic Advisory Council. Venice welcomes the Regional Coordinators and Consultants with its timeless charm and stunning weather. The Council's meeting opens with a welcome by President Paolo Petroni, who recounts the Academy's many important and successful activities during this year's final months. He emphasises the increasingly frequent collaboration with the Ministries of Agricultural Policy and Foreign Affairs. For instance, the most recent meeting in Villa Madama finalised the first International Week of Italian Cuisine, of which the Academy is a crucial partner, and the events organised by its Delegations. Petroni also announces the establishment of Legations in Moscow and Tokyo, which, together with the other five already created over the course of the year, demonstrate that 'success breeds success'. Moving on to the fundraising activities for the quake-stricken areas during the Ecumenical Dinner, he announces that a survey has been instituted to identify

the correct recipients who will receive the reconstruction funds during a specially arranged ceremony, and thanks the Academicians who generously answered the call for aid.

The next order of business is the 2017 budget. Roberto Ariani shares with the Delegation Advisory Board members his satisfaction regarding a solid and robustly encouraging budget. With subscriptions on the rise, a strict attention to expenses, a resumption of contributions from the Ministry of Culture, and the loyalty of the Academicians who destined the discretionary 0.5% of their income tax to the Academy, the budget for 2017 looks to be resolutely in the black, allowing membership dues to remain unaltered. Following the report by Gianni Limberti, President of the Board of Auditors, the Advisory Board unanimously approves the budget for 2017. And this is the fair.

President Petroni takes the floor again to discuss the Academy's new publishing ventures. Particularly important, because of its function of spreading awareness about the Academy among a larger pu-



blic and capture the attention of foodies everywhere, is the new *Food Culture Library*, a book series which, thanks to an agreement with the Bolis publishing house, will make the *Cultural Gastronomic Itineraries* books available in a form updated for a new readership, now enriched with images in colour. The first volume, *Sauces and Gravies in Regional Cooking Tradition (Sughi e salse nella cucina della tradizione regionale)*, has already been printed and will be available in bookshops in time for Christmas; this is presented proudly and with evident emotion, and participants receive complimentary copies. The Food Culture Library's volumes will appear semi-annually: in spring an existing volume will be republished, the next being *Sea and Freshwater Fish (I pesci di mare e d'acqua dolce)*; and the book dedicated to the yearly theme will appear in the autumn. Paolo Petroni announces that the theme of the 2017 Ecumenical Dinner, as determined by the Franco Marengi Study Center and approved by the Presidential Council, will be the cuisine of cheese.

The meeting concludes with an announcement of the upcoming Delegates' Forum, an important opportunity to engage in dialogue and discussion on the Academy's ongoing improvement. The meeting will occur from the 21st to the 23rd of April at the Forte Village Resort in Santa Margherita di Pula, near Cagliari (Sardinia). Following the coffee break, the regional coordinators meet. The speakers are many: some encourage a closer liaison between Delegates and Regional Study Center Directors, while others talk about their positive experiences which often give rise to satisfying concrete results. The convivial gatherings

are not merely ancillary to the meeting but constitute an 'event within the event': sophisticated cuisine. The welcome dinner takes place in "Da Fiore", a traditional 'bàcaro' (Venetian 'tapas bar') which was transformed thirty-five years ago into one of the city's most famous restaurants by husband and wife Mara and Maurizio Martin. Today they and their son Damiano continue to dedicate themselves passionately to Venetian culinary traditions, with results which the Academicians were able to appreciate fully. Just a few of the dishes offered are baby octopus in celery salad, Caorle scallops au gratin, whipped salt cod, and fried soft-shell crabs from Burano. The end of the meal brings another surprise, with a different dessert for each guest.

The end of the meeting is marked by a buffet lunch at the Principe Hotel's Sivoli Restaurant, with a wide variety of traditional local appetisers including mussels au gratin with Venetian herbs and sweet and sour sardines (*sarde in saor*), followed by a seafood *risotto*, Vicenza-style salt cod and *tiramisù*.

It is at the gala dinner that the most exalted cuisine is displayed. At the trattoria "Il Gatto Nero" in Burano, everything has retained its simple traditional character. Ruggero Bovo, who has owned it since 1965, speaks of the traditions inherent in the restaurant's cuisine which he has offered to local families from the very beginning in partnership with his irreplaceable wife Lucia

on a constant quest for ancestral flavours. These are all represented on the menu of this delicious dinner, with dishes too numerous to list: prawns in a nest of *polenta*, salt cod with musky octopus, Burano-style *risotto* with gobies, an incredibly light *scampi* and squid fry, and eel stew, all paired with excellent wines. At the end of the dinner, Paolo Petroni expresses his appreciation for what he defines "a representative display of superlative traditional cuisine prepared with passion" - a sentiment which resonates among the guests. He then confers upon Ruggero and Lucia a well-deserved Orio Vergani Medal, an honour reserved for the stewards of Italian cuisine. And all of this is the good.

SILVIA DE LORENZO





A press conference for a prestigious publication

The first volume of the Food Culture Library is presented in Milan.

BY GIANNI FOSSATI
Member of the President's Council



The first volume of the *Food Culture Library* was 'christened' in the evocative setting of Filippo La Mantia's atmospheric and elegant yet functional and conceptually innovative restaurant. The volume represents a journey through Italy's regions through recipes from its local cuisines. The press conference was attended by many journalists from national newspapers and presided over by President Paolo Petroni, Secretary General Roberto Ariani, Study Center President Alfredo Pelle, and Cesare Longhi, President of the Bolis publishing house, as well as myself. Introducing the theme, Paolo Petroni emphasised that *Sauces and Gravies in Regional Cooking Tradition (Sughi e salse nella cucina della tradizione regionale)* is not merely a source of regional recipes but a publication rich

in historical references and anecdotes, the result of years of study and research by the Academy's Regional Study Centers. He also honoured the Academy's founder, Orio Vergani, who allied himself with a group of illustrious representatives of culture, industry and publishing to create an entity with a high cultural profile, which he intentionally identified as an academy in the tradition of the Italian Renaissance and ancient Greece before it. That memory, continues Petroni, has not dissipated but has been developed and spread throughout Italy and the world by thousands of Academicians who have meditated upon this message and intuitively perceived it also as a cultural dimension of food.

This volume represents an important contribution to the protection of regional cuisines and products, which are increasingly threatened by faceless food industries, with a view to preserving Italy's cultural heritage and identity. What we have is a veritable regional mosaic, within which one can rediscover a community's nature, hi-

story, customs and language. Through this book, the Academy stresses the fundamental role and versatility of sauces in creating harmony in a dish: condiments can add even more complexity to dishes which can already stand alone, and also add a creative touch even to the simplest meals. They also contribute to food memory: the recollection of a dish is often associated with a detail which, over time, becomes its main focus.

Seventy recipes present the colours and flavours of the different Italian regions from north to south: from the cheesy or buttery dips typical of northern regions to the game-centric preparations typical of central Italy and finally to the spicier sauces, dominated by tomato and olive oil, found in the cuisine of the Mediterranean areas. Region by region, the book celebrates the distinctive character of spices and other ingredients used in the course of history.

This is a mission of continuous research and creativity, whose beating heart resides in the "Franco Marengli" Study Center whence radiate the pathways of the Academy's cultural activities. Alfredo Pelle, the Study Center's President, points out how the task of investigation and study is manifested locally through the Regional Study Centers, and the distinctive value of these monographs, including the one under discussion, is bound to the history of the land itself. It is no coincidence that the Academy is an active partner in the Foreign and Agricultural Ministries' projects to promote and protect high-quality cuisine.



Christmas dinner in Sicily

The date is immaterial: Christmas begins when relatives gather.

BY CLAUDIO BARBA
Delegate for Agrigento



Sicilian Christmas customs have remained intact, with traditional singing and folk musical drama narrating the stories associated with the holiday.

Of central importance are the *novene*, which are sung by the entire family before the nativity scene, which is given special importance in the island's folk memory of Christmas. At midnight, the image of the baby Jesus is placed in the manger by the youngest member of the family. Christmas is therefore a holy feast but also a feast for the table.

Sicilian families reckon the timing of Christmas not by the Gregorian calendar but by the return of relatives who have moved away. It matters little whether the date of Christmas hasn't arrived yet: the celebrations begin when all the children, siblings, uncles, aunts and cousins assemble around the same festive table. Christmas dinner is a homage to vene-

rable Sicilian traditions, an established institution from which nobody is exempt. The same rituals have been repeated for years and indeed centuries; this is a gastronomic journey with deep roots in the history of Sicilian cuisine inherited from the Greeks, the Spanish, the French and the Arabs. The dishes are rustic, but the table is set with the best tableware and record-breaking servings; the dinner is the indisputable domain of women. While the guests wait, they whet their appetite by snacking on grilled chickpeas, almonds and walnuts accompanied by dried figs. Next are *arancine*, rice dumplings which must contain meat. Popularised throughout the country by the writings of Andrea Camilleri, these 'little oranges' have deep roots in the region's culinary history, through ancestral recipes each with its own secrets to render them especially tantalising and flavoursome. It is thought that these dumplings were brought to Sicily by the Arabs, who habitually accompanied their meals with saffron-infused rice mixed with herbs and meat. The custom of breading these dumplings, instead, is attributed to the court of Frederick II, an innovation to allow this dish to be transported on journeys or hunting expeditions. In Palermo, the 13th of December, the feast of St. Lucy, is another occasion which calls for *arancine*, a tradition which continues today.

The *ouverture* of the Christmas dinner continues with pastries called *ammiscate*, with olives and mortadella (a form of cured luncheon meat) or sausage. Also termed *miscate*, these are among the many gifts bestowed by Sicilians upon the rest of the world, even though not

everyone has been lucky enough to try them. They go by various names, depending on the area of the Agrigento region where they originate: *m'brulate*, *miscatedda*, *n'friolata*. Next there is the salt cod expertly chosen by the women of the house. It is cooked in a variety of ways according to family tradition, but often in the Sicilian style, with no tomato, but instead flavoured with black olives and capers from Pantelleria. The fish, of course, must absolutely be fried.

Then there is the *sfinzione*: a sort of thick pizza dressed with tomato, onion, *caciocavallo* cheese, black olives and salted sardines. There are also the wonderful *cardoons*, artichokes and cauliflower, first boiled and then breaded and fried. The batter varies between homes, but the visual result is always the same: a warm and colourful dish brought to the table amid resounding applause. These are widespread in all Sicilian cookery, and this frying method is of Arab origin, ultimately through those masters of battering and frying: the Chinese. All this is accompanied by copious amounts of strong local red wine, often produced in the family's own vineyard.

Pride of place is given to the *centenaria*, the 'hundred-year' bottle skilfully extracted from a family barrel established by the ancestors, whence a fixed amount is poured every year and replaced with the same amount of new wine, so that the barrel's contents will never run out and will always be ready for holidays or other important occasions. It's a highly alcoholic wine with a fortified flavour which concludes the meal.

Finally, fruit is served: vividly coloured



oranges, tangerines and citrons. The grand finale is a triumph of sweets: *buc-cellati* (Sicilian Christmas biscuits), *mu-stazzoli di vinu cotto* (wine-soaked biscuits), and *cubaita* (Sicilian-style nougat of Arab origin, from the Arabic term *qubbiat*), a skilful blend of almonds, pistachios, honey and chocolate. We return to Camilleri, who describes it thus: “*cubaita* is simple and strong, a warrior’s sweet: it must be left between the palate and the tongue to soften, it must be coaxed almost lovingly to let itself be eaten; it invites meditative pondering”. At the centre of the table, the cassata holds court. Its name is thought to derive from the Arabic *qa’sat* (basin) or from Latin *caseum* (cheese). It is typically Sicilian and as such has been officially recognised and included on the list of Traditional Food Products by the Ministry of Agricultural Policy, following an initiative by the regional government of Sicily.

Cassata dates from Arab rule over Sicily in the 9th to 11th centuries. The Arabs had introduced sugar cane in Palermo,

as well as lemon, citron, bitter orange, tangerines, and almonds. In combination with the fresh ricotta which had been made in Sicily from sheep’s milk since prehistoric times, these formed the basic ingredients of cassata, which originally was no more than a shortcrust shell filled with sugared ricotta and then baked. In the Norman period, ‘royal dough’ or Martorana dough was developed in the Martorana convent in Palermo: this was a paste of almond flour and sugar, dyed green with herbal extracts, which replaced the shortcrust pastry. Hence the baked cassata was replaced by one prepared cold. Chocolate was introduced from Spain, and candied fruit was added in the Baroque period. The addition of an iced sugar coating with candied fruit covering the entire confection like opaque glass could be derived from the English word ‘glass’, whence ‘glassata’ (‘iced’), ‘classata’ and ‘cassata’. Initially, cassata was the domain of Sicilian nuns, who guarded it as part of their sophisticated confectionery tradition and prepared it only for Easter. An official document

from the first synod of Sicilian bishops in Mazara del Vallo, dating from 1575, declares that “one cannot do without cassata during the holidays”. A Sicilian proverb states: “tintu è cu nun mancia a cassata a matina ri Pasqua” (“Woe betide whomever eats no cassata on Easter morning”). The characteristic decoration with *zuccata* (candied pumpkin) was introduced in 1873 (on the occasion of a display in Vienna) by a pastry chef and knight from Palermo, Salvatore Gulì, who developed his creations in Corso Vittorio Emanuele in the centre of Palermo.

At last there is the toast at midnight. When all seems to have come to an end and body and soul appear to have regained their peace and serenity, Sicilians meet again at midnight on the 25th of December, exhausted but not defeated, to polish off the leftovers of the two previous interminable days during which flavours, traditions, and a unique ambience persist and are handed down over the years.

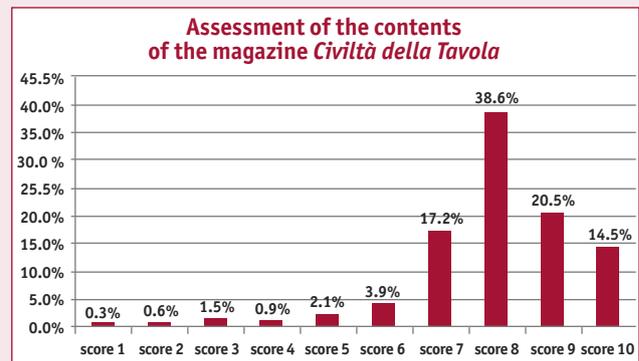
CLAUDIO BARBA

HOW POPULAR IS OUR MAGAZINE

We recently carried out an entirely anonymous CAWI (computer assisted web interview) survey using a random sample of Academicians to learn their opinions about our magazine, *Civiltà della Tavola*.

Respondents were asked to award a score from 1 (minimum) to 10 (maximum) to the contents and the design of the magazine.

332 Academicians answered, of whom 63 were female and 269 were male. These are the results of the survey:



Score	Contents	Design
Scores from 1 to 5	5.4%	5.1%
Scores from 6 to 7	21.1%	31.1%
Scores from 8 to 9	59.0%	53.0%
Score of 10	14.5%	10.8%
AVERAGE SCORE	8.0	7.8

Those who assigned a score from 1 to 6 were asked to explain why. Here are the resulting suggestions: “We suggest a unifying theme for the articles; a column or monthly space dedicated to wine culture; more concise articles; the addition of articles by food professionals; less internal information about the activities of the Delegations; more food education; a move away from overly specialised subject matter which is often uninteresting to those who are not experts; more recipes; and news about events outside the Academy”.



Nougat

This delicious sweet is also interesting because of the symbolism of its ingredients: honey, almonds and eggs.

BY ANTONELLA MARANI
Cortina d'Ampezzo Academician



Nougat, known as *mandorlato* or *mandolato*, is a traditional Christmas sweet of the Veneto region, almost identifiable as a material symbol of that holiday. Writing about it means leaping back in time and retracing a wonderful culinary adventure: more than a century of history and tradition marked by a constant quest for quality which has never abated. This is also an interesting sweet because of the symbolism of its main ingredients: honey, almonds and eggs.

It is well-known that honey was considered a sacred food in many ancient civilisations. Alongside its nutritional and curative properties, it has also always held ritual and cultural value recognised in almost every part of the world. It was always a symbol of sweetness but also the food of sages and philosophers par excellence: it is said that Pythagoras ate nothing but honey.

There is a Greek myth narrating how Jupiter was fed by the bees of Mount Ida. The ancient Romans celebrated the winter solstice by exchanging honey, dates and figs, according to a ritual intended to attract good fortune as expressed by the poet Horace: "sweet be the year that has begun".

In Jewish tradition, the almond is a symbol of life, the first tree to bloom when spring arrives. To crack and eat almonds is symbolic of discovering secrets. The egg too is a symbol of life and rebirth, and a bringer of good fortune in many cultures. Nougat is enveloped in a pure white layer of egg white: sticks of nougat, their rough texture covered in such a delicate coating, bring to mind mountain rocks clothed in snow, tantalising to the eye even before they reach the palate.

If we accept such ancient symbolic values, the offer of nougat is a gesture

expressing the wish of serenity and wisdom for the new year.

The confection's original recipe seems to date to the 13th century, when the Scala family held sway over Verona. More precisely, Professor Mario Visentin, in his books *La meraviglia gastronomica di Cologna Veneta: Il Mandorlato (Nougat: the Gastronomic Marvel of Cologna Veneta)*, published in 2001, and *Il Mandorlato Marani (Marani Nougat)*, printed in 1974, declares that it appeared only in 1852 in Cologna Veneta (Verona). There the pharmacist Antonio Finco, desirous of offering his friends a wholesome sweet, allegedly invented nougat. Later, another pharmacist in the same town, my great-grandfather Italo Marani, perfected the recipe, obtaining the white colour and crunchy texture so loved today. He began producing it in his pharmacy, thereby becoming the creator of the first factory to which his



name would be forever bound. Nougat is prepared with almonds, honey, sugar, egg white and a thin wafer on the underside. It has a characteristic rough upper surface not covered by the wafer, allowing the mosaic of almonds to be clearly visible, immersed in a shiny white substrate.

The difference between *torrone* and nougat is subtle, and resides in the different method of production as well as geographical origin. Preparation methods and ingredients are similar. *Torrone* contains more types of nuts, such as hazelnuts, pistachios, peanuts, almonds, sesame seeds or walnuts; instead, *Cologna Veneta* nougat contains only almonds. Like every piece of culinary heritage, *torrone* and nougat have disputed and imaginative origin myths. It is claimed for instance that *torrone* is of Arab or Samnitic origin. It seems that in Cremona a sweet which came from the East, similar to today's *torrone*, was known even in the Middle Ages. Production was high within a couple of centuries, although its ingredients were not local. The earliest extant reports of the sweet's popularity are contained in documents dating from the 16th century. The Spaniards, then stationed in Lombardy, were great lovers of this confection, and they may be responsible for its modern recipe; its popularity was such that there were proposals to exclude it from the list of foods prohibited by laws intended to curb luxury. From artisanal workshops to modern factories, this popular sweet lacked only the cachet of nobility. And so, the legend: in 1441, to celebrate the wedding of Francesco Sforza and Bianca Maria Visconti, the court confectioner prepared a monumental cake depicting the city's celebrated bell tower, whose memory would be forever enshrined in the sweet's name ('torre' meaning 'tower'; 'torrone' meaning 'great tower'). More plausibly, the name has Spanish origins: *turron*, from the Latin *torreo*, "I grill". Indeed, far from being solely represented in Lombardy, *torrone* is a sweet which is common among all the nations which face the

Mediterranean, where the Asiatic almond found its chosen soil. The delectable union of its fruits, with or without their internal skins, whether toasted or not, with honey, sugar and egg white could originate from an exotic almond and sugar brittle flavoured with rosewater described in an Arabic text translated between the 12th and 13th centuries, this in turn being a variant of *cubbaita* or *giuggiolona*, based on sesame and honey and still common all over the Mediterranean. So we may owe yet another delicacy to the Arabs, though Spain and Sicily made it their own and then disseminated it throughout the Mediterranean through trade and conquest.

Torrone has naturally absorbed regional influences. In Piemonte, the hazelnuts of the Langhe area, lightly toasted, replace almonds. Cremona is famous for its *torrone*, either brittle or soft, with almonds, but also its nougat - *mandorlato* - which is hard and glassy, as the original versions of *torrone* apparently were and as the nougat of *Cologna Veneta* still is. Farther south, in Abruzzo, a specific production method and a different combination of ingredients led in the 19th century to a new chocolate and hazelnut version of *torrone*, with a very soft texture which melts in the mouth like a *gianduia* chocolate. In the Campania region, *torrone* with hazelnuts is typical of the area around Avellino and Benevento, where an ancient artisanal tradition gave rise in the early twentieth century to a vast industry which supplements the 'classic' almond or hazelnut versions of *torrone* with innovations such as miniature *torrone* bites with toasted almonds covered in pearl sugar. Almond is triumphant even farther south. Alongside the *torrone* of Puglia and Calabria, the Sicilian version is notable for its tradition and quality. Almonds and pistachios are embedded in fragrant pastes flavoured with local honey and citrus fruits. In the Sardinian area of Tonara, a form of *torrone* is prepared with Sardinian honey and strictly local hazelnuts or walnuts.

It is also unclear precisely when nougat

was invented. It is said that it was already well-known during the Venetian Republic's era of hegemony: from 1406 to 1797 *Cologna* was included in its 'ducal' territory. An early reference to nougat is contained in a text by Lodovico Dolce dating from 1540. In 1564, a nobleman of *Vicenza* of the *Monza* family wrote in his diary that on the 21st of December he had spent four lira and sixteen pence on four boxes of "*mandorlato*". The aristocratic Venetian writer *Alvise Zorzi* wrote in his book *La vita quotidiana a Venezia nel secolo di Tiziano* (*Daily Life in Venice in the Century of Titian*): "during the sixteenth century there were other customary gifts: flatbread on Easter Sunday, nougat (*mandorlato*) and preserves for Christmas, and chestnuts and quince jelly on Martinmas".

Nougat requires a very specific preparation: crucial are the proportions of the ingredients and their very slow method of cooking, lasting approximately 12 hours. Once cooking is complete, the paste is worked by hand, cut into sticks and immediately wrapped while still warm, to preserve aroma and fragrance. Then the confection is allowed to dry over many hours until its water content falls below 5%, which makes it less perishable in conditions of ordinary heat and humidity. Quality control is paramount, and one must explode the myth whereby nougat is 'fattening': in fact, 100 grammes of nougat provide approximately 400 calories (of which 8% are protein, 43% are fat and 49% are carbohydrate).

This is less calorie-dense than chocolate, which has 900 calories per 100 grammes, because it has a lower fat content. Additionally, the fats in almonds are monounsaturates, which are 'good fats', and this makes nougat more nutritious than other sweets, such as cakes and buns, which are high in saturated fats.

Furthermore, nougat is rich in magnesium, potassium, iron and zinc, which are indispensable to proper nutrition.

ANTONELLA MARANI