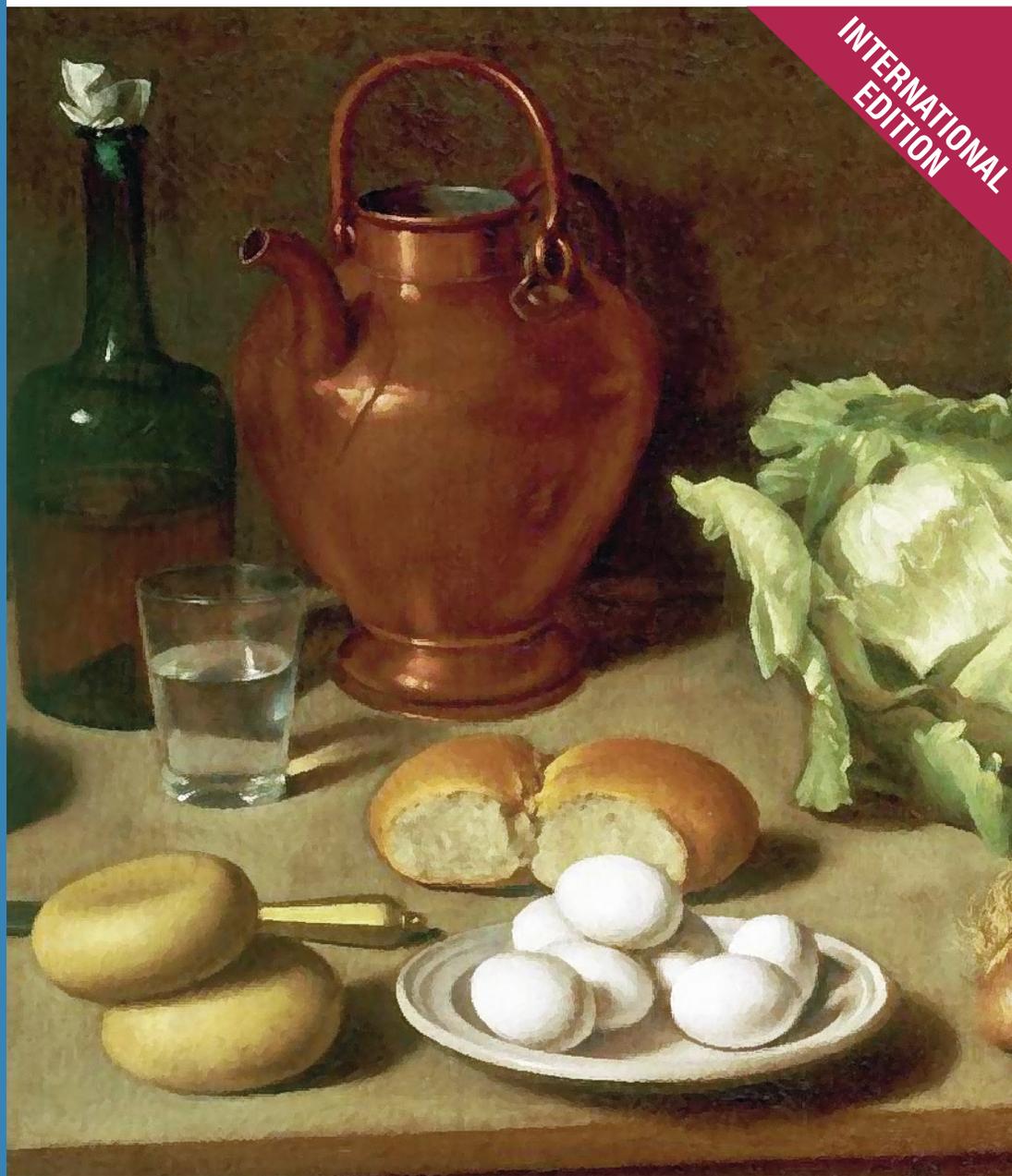


CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

INTERNATIONAL
EDITION



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EDITOR IN CHIEF
GIOVANNI BALLARINI

COPY EDITOR
SILVIA DE LORENZO

LAYOUT
SIMONA MONGIÙ

TRASLATOR
NICOLA LEA FURLAN

THIS ISSUE INCLUDES ARTICLES BY
Nazzareno Acquistucci,
Giovanni Ballarini,
Ruggero Larco, Claudio Novelli,
Paolo Petroni, Luca Piombi.



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



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On the cover: Graphic reproduction of a detail
from "Still Life with Grapes, Cabbage and Candela-
brae" by Carlo Magini (Fano, 1720-1806), on exhi-
bit at the Canesso Gallery in Paris.



The Academy and the new gastronomic discourse

The creation of a new gastronomic discourse must involve the Academy as an institution whose cultural mission is to protect, promote and improve culinary traditions.

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI
President of the Academy

Dar Academicians, throughout the overwhelming and tumultuous change that society, as well as our cuisine and gastronomy, is undergoing, there are mutations and trends that are at the same time worrisome, amazing and sometimes curious.

In spite of this, however, we only occasionally become aware of the profound changes that are taking place in the gastronomic discourse on cuisine in Italy. Gastronomic discourse is an expression that has been in use for quite some time to indicate the vast and complicated complex of phenomena and ideas that have to do with the role and meaning of food. In addition to food the gastronomic discourse must refer to the process of deconstruction that can bring to light specific elements, often expressed unconsciously through a kind of jargon, with which it is possible to reconstruct a discourse of social identity

that varies with time and differs from place to place.

Many modern-day nutritional worries do not directly depend on food, but rather on changes in the gastronomic discourse, in which we no longer have the reassuring knowledge that came from traditions that are in the process of disappearing.

As elsewhere, the gastronomic discourse in Italy is changing. Above all, new paradigms and derivations are emerging that are creating a new discourse. The study and interpretation of the gastronomic discourse is an area of great interest to Academicians because it enables us to deepen the subtle but still tenacious relationship that gastronomy shares with the other human arts.

Within the limited confines of this essay it is helpful to emphasize some of the most important elements that are intervening in the creation of a new Italian gastronomic discourse. Nutrition is a social, and therefore cultural, human activity. Feeding mankind is an agricultural activity, it is said, that points to food and its origins. And without underestimating this dimension, we also tend to forget that nutrition is a social, and therefore cultural activity that is even broader, given all its conscious and unconscious aspects. In this social dimension, nutritional activity plays a variety of roles. Among them, we must include those that are associated with the gastronomic landscape that for several years now has become of interest to the industrial food production industry and that give a new dimension to nutritional characteristics.

Through a bidirectional process, in gastronomic landscapes, nutrition plays an important identifying role through cultural references to food. We must not forget that, also in the case of the European Union, the word landscape refers to a territory as it is perceived by its inhabitants. Its character derives from the actions of human and/or natural forces and their inter-relationships. For this interaction between the environment and the human population as well, the landscape becomes a guarantee of nutrition, which carries the qualitative and cultural identity of the landscape itself. Nutritional transformations and their uses, i.e., cuisine and gastronomy, also are part of the portrait of the landscape itself. We should bear in mind that Italy was the first, and perhaps the only nation to include the protection of this landscape in its Constitution (Art. 9).

Gastronomy is part of the cultural patrimony. This is a relatively recent concept that was born out of *Accademia* and therefore deserves a closer look. Our Academy was founded with the goal of protecting the traditions of Italian cuisine, and traditions are part of our cultural patrimony. This concept was crystal clear to our founders. Led by Orio Vergani, they were truly prophets in a society where consumerism was beginning to spread, with positive economic results. For example, one need only recall the difficulties that were encountered with the opening of European markets. Italy and some other Mediterranean countries tried to maintain and spread the idea to northern European nations where a purely economic view



of prices prevails that food has a cultural value. Similarly, even today there are many problems with an international commerce system that favors industrialized cuisine and gastronomy, especially in terms of production and distribution. Our Academy has played an important role as a participant in the new gastronomic discourse through its mission of spreading awareness of cuisine as a part of culture, as demonstrated by the fact that since 2003 the Italian Academy of Cuisine has been considered a Cultural Institution of the Italian Republic. On the international scene, the International Academy of Gastronomy (to which we belong) has played a leading role in the defense of cuisine and gastronomy as a part of culture. They hel-

ped bring about a March 12, 2014 European Parliament Resolution on European Gastronomic Patrimony: Cultural and Educational Aspects. In this Resolution the Deputies ask that the variety and quality of local and regional European culinary traditions be protected as part of our common cultural patrimony. The new gastronomic discourse that is currently being developed must confront the growing influence by other cuisines. For example, just as in the distant past Arab influence contributed to the creation of a new Italian gastronomic (and linguistic) discourse we should consider the new culinary influences not simply as dangers but rather as instruments for an evolution, and even improvement, of our traditions when they are included

in a gastronomic discourse that is not only lively but most of all coherent and with solid roots in our preceding social experiences.

Our Academy cannot remain indifferent to a new, and at the same time ancient discourse on traditions. An Academy cannot be simply a place of nostalgia for lost customs but it should, in the broadest sense, be a place of critical research and cultural participation in a process that is not only inevitable but also over the centuries if not millennia has led to the construction of the gastronomic landscapes and gastronomic discourses that we identify with tradition: it is a fire to be kept alive and fed, not merely the cold ashes of the past.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI



GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



The foundation date of a restaurant: a lost distinction

It appeared quite often on the exterior sign and was a matter of pride and the guarantee of a traditional cuisine. What matters today in the world is the number of stars the chef has.

BY PAOLO PETRONI

Secretary General of the Academy

Just adjacent to the Academy of the Georgofili in Florence there is an old and celebrated trattoria by the name of “Antico Fattore” (which gave its name to a coveted literary prize). The sign proclaims “Since 1865”, the year when Florence became the capital of Italy. The date signifies that the restaurant has been on that site for many years, the custodial place of Florentine gastronomic traditions. It is just one example of how the foundation date of a restaurant was something to boast about, and if the management belonged to the same family, so much the better. It was a token of security, the reassuring guarantee of good cuisine. I know a trattoria that changes its name every generation: it opened as the trattoria “Carola”, then it became “Nunzia” (the first child), and today is “Luciana”. In a few years it will reappear as “Gaia”. Yet it is the same management that runs it, the same family. A family tradition that should signify a love for the good table. Does the foundation date carry a certain luster? A reason for being? From what we see today, it does not look like it.

The great chefs, the names that are known through the media sparkle like lightning. Someone will recall the “Trigabolo” restaurant in Argenta, a mecca for the gourmets of the 80s. The chef was one of the great pioneers of Italian cuisine, Igles Corelli, who had in kitchen the young Bruno Barbieri and Italo Bassi, the chef of “Pinchiotti”. The temple closed for a number of reasons. Corelli opened the “Locanda della Tamerice” in Ostellato. This restaurant closed as well and moved to Pescia at “Atman”. This too shut its doors and reopened in not too far away Lamporecchio. Other examples: Fabio Baldassarre is said to be leavibg “Unico”,

the Milanese restaurant beloved by VIPs on the top of a skyscraper, to find a new shelter in a hotel. Antonio Guida of “Il Pellicano” seems also heading for Milan. Filippo La Mantia is still looking for a satisfactory venue. Paolo Lopriore has left “Il Canto” in Certosa of Maggiano and even the great Marchesi is about to transfer his kitchen by leaving “L’Albereta”. In sum, the restaurant counts for nothing, what counts is the gallivanting chef.

Genius, we all know, is not easily satisfied. It looks for new life experiences, new stimuli. He who does not find them closes shop; others find them by moving by following stratospheric economic interests that years ago were not imaginable. Today in Italy, but especially around the world (and in the rich emerging countries), the great capitals seek a chef with stars around whom they wish to build a venue. We say this with a certain angst but the reality is that a chef with a Michelin star can command a bill up to 150 euros per person; a chef with two stars can reach up to 250 euros, and a three star chef can exceed 300 euros. This explains why the great hotels in the world are looking for starred chefs, who know that very well and command star prices. When they cannot move, they “sign” their menus and become virtual chefs. Unfortunately, there is a whole world of clients who fall for such glitter. The new place attracts people, it becomes trendy, fashionable, the latest name brand, just like a garment. So much for the foundation date of the restaurant, for tradition and continuity. Other times! We can live with that, but the Academicians have different ways to judge!

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.



Important recognition for gastronomy

The Parliament in Strasbourg has approved a Resolution on European gastronomic patrimony: some cultural and educational aspects.

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI

Vice President, International Academy of Gastronomy



Gastronomy was the subject of a Resolution approved by the European Parliament on March 12, 2014, a document whose legislative journey was supported by the International Academy of Gastronomy, of which the Italian Academy of Cuisine was a co-founder and is an active participant.

The Resolution contained many important affirmations, culminating with those that our Academy has supported and defended since its foundation. The document may be accessed on the European Union's website, under the heading "Gastronomic Patrimony".

As I invite all Academicians to read and consider it, and I would like to point out some of its most important aspects, beginning with the fact that it is the first and only such document that states that gastronomy and gastronomic patrimony are officially protected under European legislation.

The Resolution specifically states that gastronomy is a complex of knowledge, experiences, art and artisanship that enable us to eat in a healthy and pleasant manner. Above all it emphasizes that gastronomy is part of our identity and is an essential element of the European cultural patrimony and that of EU member states. Gastronomy is not only an elite art form that focuses on the careful preparation of food, but it also reflects a recognition of the value of the raw materials that it uses, their high quality and the need to achieve excellence in all phases of food preparation. This concept reflects a respect for animals and nature, and therefore is closely lin-

ked with the agricultural practices of the many European regions and their relative local products.

Regarding gastronomy, the Resolution states that it is important to preserve the rituals and customs associated with local and regional gastronomy, and to encourage the development of European gastronomy insofar as it represents one of mankind's most important cultural manifestations. The term not only exclusively refers to so-called "high level cuisine", but embraces all the culinary expressions of the many regions and social strata, including those of traditional local cuisine.

Among other things, the Resolution affirms that the survival of typical traditional cuisine constitutes a culinary and cultural patrimony that is often threatened by the invasion of standardized foods. The quality, reputation and diversity of European gastronomy calls for a sufficient amount of good quality food to be produced in Europe. Gastronomy is associated with many diverse aspects of nutrition and its three fundamental pillars are health, nutritional habits and pleasure.

In many countries the art of the table also constitutes an important aspect of human relationships and contributes to bringing people together, allowing them to become acquainted with different gastronomic cultures. It is a way to share and exchange ideas and customs, and as such has a positive effect on social and familial relationships.

For this reason, UNESCO's recognition that the Mediterranean Diet (including Italian regional cuisine) is part of our



intangible cultural patrimony is very important. It considers that diet to be made up of a complex of knowledge, skills, practices, rituals, traditions and symbols associated with agricultural cultivation, fishing and animal husbandry, as well as food conservation, transformation and cooking, along with their sharing and consumption.

Gastronomy, along with the eating habits of European populations, constitutes a rich socio-cultural inheritance that must be transferred to future generations. Schools, together with the family, represent the ideal place to acquire such knowledge. In addition, gastronomy is becoming one of the most important aspects of tourism. The interaction between tourism, gastronomy and nutrition exerts a very positive effect on the promotion of tourism: it contributes to the promotion of the regional patrimony and is a rich economic and cultural source for all the regions of the European Union.

The Resolution takes into consideration many educational aspects, but among the cultural ones it emphasizes the

need to spread awareness of the various regions' diversity and quality, from the landscape to the products that constitute European gastronomy. They are all part of the cultural patrimony that are part of a lifestyle that is both unique and internationally recognized. Sometimes



this calls for a respect of local customs, because gastronomy is a useful tool for the creation and development of jobs in many economic

sectors such as the restaurant and tourism industries as well as the agro-nutritional and research sectors.

In addition, gastronomy helps to raise awareness of the importance of protecting nature and the environment, thereby guaranteeing that foods have a more authentic flavor and are less altered by additives and preservatives. It recognizes the role played by qualified and talented cooks in the task of preserving and exporting our gastronomic patrimony and the importance of preserving our culinary competence as essential factors that have both an educational and economic value.

In this context, the Resolution also

emphasizes the role that the Gastronomic Academies, the European federation of nutritional foundations and the International Academy of Gastronomy that is headquartered in Paris and of which the Italian Academy of Cuisine is a member play in the study and diffusion of our gastronomic patrimony.

The Resolution concludes by recognizing that gastronomy and cuisine have become increasingly important expressions of art and culture; that nutrition and the good table are fundamental elements that enhance social and family relationships; and that naturally, is a source of satisfaction during our meals and is indispensable from the sensory and psychic point of view. In sum, that it constitutes a relevant factor in establishing our psychological and emotional wellbeing.

For this reason it is essential that the European Union enact policies aimed at nutritional and gastronomic education. The principal objective of 21st Century education and nutritional culture is that of demonstrating to everyone, large or small, that eating tasty and nutritional food is both possible and necessary.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI

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.



Casatiello and pastiera

The savory ingredients of the first, and the sweet ones of the other, are all inside, just like seeds destined to bloom in the spring when Easter comes.

BY CLAUDIO NOVELLI

Academician, Naples-Capri Delegation

Domenico Rea wrote these lines: “In the opening days of Easter, when one can feel something of summer in the air and a foreboding of the sea, the Neapolitan man goes back to his origins on the farm and to the rural food *par excellence*: grain (...) Wheat becomes his mainstay by virtue of two principal foods, *casatiello* and *pastiera*.” However, in spite of the fact that the sea is rich and full of good fish, throughout the year the Neapolitan does not abandon “rural foods”: bread, pasta and pizza give him comfort and provide him with his daily energy source. At Easter, however, the usual grains take on different connotations, almost sacred, thanks to the *casatiello* and *pastiera*.

With *pastiera*, perhaps the only case in our very rich and varied national cuisine, grain is not martyred, ground or pulverized, but rather celebrated in its perfection and integrity: it is cooked whole, with old fashioned patience and wisdom. It takes hours, over a low flame, to prevent the grains from breaking down and to remain raw inside. The grains are patient since they are kept in water fifteen days while the water is changed. There was a time when the grains, swollen and wet, were used with the fresh buds, braided into a garland, as an ornament of Christ’s sepulcher in the days preceding Easter,

simultaneous symbols of death and resurrection.

And then, mixed with other ingredients and perfumed by orange blossom water, the slow cooking continues, this time in an oven, still with a low flame in order to let the grain absorb the perfumes and the aromas. The dessert must then rest, to be consumed days later thus letting the process reach its perfect completion.

From a strictly historical perspective, the present day *pastiera* is fortunately what Ippolito Cavalcanti produced in *The Grain Pie, known as Neapolitan Pastiera* by Antonio Latini (1692).

Today we eat it sweet, to finish off a meal that started with the crumbs of *casatiello*. *Casatiello* is a Neapolitan word that derives from the Spanish word *queso*, that is the Latin *caseus*, related to the Spanish *quesadilla* that is a pie filled with cheese. Other ingredients, instead of being placed on the sides or on top, are meant to combine with water, wheat and yeast to make a paste that goes on the inside. There is no golden rule: according to the various schools, the hands that prepare it determine the ingredients, the quantity and the way they are assembled inside: it lies on the table and is nibbled at during the meal, flanked by fresh eggs and cottage cheese, of spring-like freshness.

Actually, in both cases the cottage cheese, the pieces of candied citron and pumpkin, the scraps of pork fat, salami and hard boiled eggs are buried inside the dish as if they were seeds destined to blossom in the spring, at Easter time.





Give us our daily bread

*A food that is so simple and essential,
yet undervalued even on restaurants tables.*

BY NAZZARENO ACQUISTUCCI
Delegate, Treviso-Alta Marca



This request is part of the prayer that Christians recite to the Lord and while the reference to bread is only symbolic, there is no doubt that this food has always expressed a sacred value for all religions. Over the course of the centuries, man has succeeded in selecting various grains, such as barley, millet, rye, oat and spelt and utilized them all to make bread by mixing them with water and fat. Bread has always represented the indispensable food necessary to survive. Through successive selections, with spelt and corn, starting with the Romans, a cultivar was created that produced wheat grain to make excellent bread and with many other uses in the kitchen.

Today, in most cases, bread is cooked in electrical ovens through indirect heating, with the source of heat outside the oven. The rare wood burning ovens belong to few remaining bread makers

who still believe in the different quality of their product. It is necessary however to know that much experience is needed to use appropriately the wood-burning oven. The starch is made more digestible because it is degraded by heat into dextrin and sugar.

The calories generated by the burning of wood enhance the taste of bread as well as that of other foods. Of course, this happens if bread undergoes the acid-lactic fermentation through natural yeast or mother yeast.

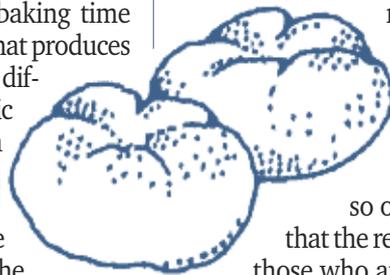
Much has changed in the third millennium, including bread making. Life has become fast and frenzied to the point that bread makers choose the easiest way -- by shortening the baking time by utilizing brewers' yeast that produces alcoholic fermentation. The difference between the alcoholic and acid-lactic fermentation is substantial because the lactic bacteria are able to characterize the taste, the smell, the conservation of the bread and most of all its digestibility insofar as they free compounds that are easily assimilated by the organism. The fermentation with natural yeast, and a valuable wheat known as hard wheat or Manitoba, produced in North America and Canada, requires a long time: on average, 24 hours at a temperature of 18 C (64.4 F). In order to cut

down even further the bread making time, frozen products may be used but, alas, with results that do not yield the right fragrance and taste. When used, the resulting bread crumbles easily and gets stale quite rapidly.

It often happens that the bread on the table of a restaurant does not bring us the best sensations embedded in our memory. We find that it is cold, cut in a rough fashion, crumbles easily and is devoid of any smell. This is unfortunate because when we sit at the table it should stimulate the best appetite of the gourmand and predispose him to enjoy the taste of whatever is offered on the menu.

The bread basket should be the primary business card of a good restaurateur since it encompasses a sacred meaning where the mixing of water and wheat constitutes a symbol of fertility and the renewal of life. It is no accident that

the mother yeast can be maintained indefinitely taking out a part of the daily compound to utilize as yeast on the following day, and so on. It is to be hoped



that the restaurateurs, at least those who appreciate the value of bread, enrich their restaurants with bread worthy of its name, by using bakers who know their trade or by producing it on their premises in the quantity that is required to satisfy their clients. Bread can be associated with all kinds of food with the result of satisfying the appetite in the most complete and gratifying fashion.



Lasagna through the centuries

Once upon a time, lasagna was used as a pastry to house a filling, either sweet or salty. The present day recipe for lasagna has been registered in Bologna at the local Chamber of Commerce.

BY RUGGERO LARCO

Delegate of Valdarno Fiorentino



When the results of an historical or etymological research are gathered, it is logical to start from the past and work one's way to the present. In the case of the special and elegant traditional dish of the Emilia region, and accordingly of Italy, let me proceed with the inverse process: from our time to the times of our predecessors, the Romans and the Greeks. It is superfluous to explain what the lasagna is; it is enough to verify the recipe that was deposited in 2003 at the Chamber of Commerce of Bologna (Green Lasagna Bolognese Style) by the Delegation of Bologna-San Luca. Where did this tasty dish come from, or better what is its origin? The recipe for lasagna, as we conceive of it today, is relatively recent, since it involves the use of tomato as the basic ingredient of the ragout (meat sauce) of the Italian table since the end of the eighteenth century. The recipe also calls for a subtly blended mixture of egg pasta, variously seasoned, with several layers of pastry and filling, prepared with ragout and béchamel, as it appears in the original recipe of the de'Medici family, brought to France by Catherine, the niece of Lorenzo the Magnificent. The present day name goes back to the Sun King's France or the time just after him, in the middle of the seventeenth century. In earlier times, lasagna was used as a pastry to contain or to cover pies and *pasticcios*. Alberto Alvisi, the chef from Emilia who served Cardinal Chiaramonti,

the future Pope Pius VII, provides us with a recipe for a "pudding of lasagna with natural eggs", whose amalgam is poured onto the lasagna laid at the bottom of the mold.

Master Martino da Como, in his book *Libro de Arte Coquinaria*, written at the end of the fifteenth century, wrote this about the "*Maccaroni Romaneschi*" (Roman Macaroons): "take wheat that is beautiful, distemper it and make pasta a little thicker than the lasagna..." He then proceeds to tell us how the lasagna is prepared, explaining the concept without adding specific details. In fact, lasagna had entered the old "literature" as other products and foods, and historical figures such as Boccaccio, Jacopone da Todi and the irreverent Cecco Angiolieri testify to that. If we peek into their epoch, we can see what an anonymous author was suggesting. A free translation from the vulgar Italian goes something like this: "If you wish to make lasagna at Lenten time, make





the lasagna and put it to the fire, get the nougats (or walnuts) that are peeled, pounded and ground, put them inside the lasagna and protect them from smoke; when it goes to the table, pour and cover with sugar.” In this case as well, lasagna is a simple pastry to contain a filling as intended by Alvisi.

Let us now take a look at what Marcus Gavius Apicius was proposing in his *De Re Coquinaria* around 30 AC: *Patinam Apicianam Sic Facies*, “this is how you will make Apicius’ pie.” The ingredients are the sow’s breast, the meat of fish and chicken, fig eaters and thrush. The whole must be cut up “*diligenter*”, that is to say with care. After that, the eggs must be whipped in oil, and pepper and wild fennel must be crushed in a mortar, distempered in *garum* and fermented wine, and cooked with starch to thicken it. On the side, all meats are cooked. Once cooked, they are added to the filling and the layers of pasta, *laganum* and sauce are placed in a pot (*caccàbus*). The content is then covered with another layer of pasta, flavored with pepper and cooked. This is the lasagna as prepared two thousand years ago, even though I believe that our ragout is much more pleasing to the palate of a man of the twenty-first century. Note that that the pastry is placed raw, not pre cooked, in the pot.

Thus, we find out that Apicius calls the pastry *laganum*, literally pancake, and yet it has the same meaning as *tractum* that stands for “sheet of pasta dough.” (see Calonghi Badellino, Latin - Italian Dictionary). The etymologic derivation however is not Latin but Greek and specifically from *lagànon*, a large and thin flat loaf, leading to *elkùein lagànon*, equivalent to the Latin *tractum* (see Rocci, Greek - Italian Vocabulary). I do not share the etymology that some accept from the Greek *lāsana*, Latin *lasànum*, in spite of the strong assonance with our word, because its meaning both in Latin and Greek is that of tripod for the kitchen, that is to say the instrument that is



placed over the fire to hold up the pot, Apicius’ *caccàbus*, not to be confused with the pot itself.

In sum, lasagna, an almost mystical name for gastronomy, a modern, tasty dish known the world over, has an

ancient origin just like many Italian dishes. Its origin is old, important and historically traceable. Let us honor and celebrate such a dish and keep it from being copied.

RUGGERO LARCO

E-mail addresses of Italian Academy of Cuisine



President:

presidente@accademia1953.it

Secretary General:

segretariogenerale@accademia1953.it

National Secretariat:

segreteria@accademia1953.it

Editorial office:

redazione@accademia1953.it



Eating insects

Even though the Food and Agriculture Organization states with authority that eating insects is a good thing, it seems difficult that our gastronomic culture will accept such strange food stuffs. Or will it?

BY LUCIO PIOMBI
Delegate of Bergamo



Mediterranean cuisine, the recipes of the great Artusi, the fifth quarter, sushi, the cuisine of the entire world (Indian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Mexican): are these concepts obsolete? The cuisine of our beloved grandmother with all the specialties of home, from Cortina to Marsala - is it going out of fashion? I surely hope not. The fact is, however, that in the world today restaurants and fast food places are springing up offering solely insects. It is not a novelty and the specialized press has been writing about them. It is hard for us Academicians to accept this kind of novelty. Maybe Orio Vergano, whose favorite dish was the pigeon that he relished at the Trattoria Ballotta, is turning, as they say, in his grave.

At the beginning of last year, the first enthomophagous restaurant opened in Santa Monica, California, and shortly after that London came on line, followed by Berlin and Holland. Now, even the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) states with full authority that eating insects is good for you. It is easy to raise them, they reproduce rapidly and cost little: there are 2,000 species that are comestible. Milan as well is following the trend but it unlikely that our gastronomic culture will accept such strange food stuffs.

It is true, as our President says, that "to understand a society in its unity and entirety we must study the fundamental norms of its thought" and the way that the world feeds itself each day. That said, are we - the custodians of the civilization of the table of the twenty-first century - ready to accept a dinner, from the anti-pasto to the dessert, based just on insects?

It is necessary to investigate the subject starting now and "without wrinkling the nose and mouth."

Going back to the FAO, the U.N. organization states that throughout the world almost two billion people eat insects with the idea of fighting obesity and improving the environment. Starting five years ago, Bergamo's Museum E. Caffi in the upper section of the city has been exhibiting specimens that are insects presented as aperitifs on a stick, seemingly ready to be served in small cups made of fragments of bamboo. Among them, skewers of crickets are normally sold by street food vendors in Northern Asian countries.

It would be interesting to look a little deeper, as a matter of curiosity, into the nutritional aspect of the insects that can provide proteins, fiber, energy and lipids. In addition to being very easy to digest, they apparently have a healthy effect upon human health. They would appear to be nutritive insofar as they associate selective nutritional component with curative properties.

This is not the right venue to elaborate on such concepts, but the question stands as to whether sooner or later reason will prevail over our present logical disgust? Even though famous nutritionists reportedly affirm that eating insects may help combat allergies, microbiological risks, parasites and various toxins, this type of cuisine will be ignored by the large mass of people. It will exist as an exotic panorama and will incur curiosity in spite of the fact that last year, in Modena, in the framework of a two-day symposium devoted to food security, there was talk of recipes based upon coleoptera, caterpillars, grasshoppers, locusts, bees, ants,



crickets and spaghetti with termites. It is true that the highly regarded and sought after Sardinian cheese “manzu” is actually formed by small worms, but it will remain just a curiosity. Notwithstanding, the Alchermes liquor used in the English trifle is colored with extracts of dactylopius coccus (ladybugs). Flying or creeping invertebrates may be right at home in restaurants, besides London and Paris, in Nice and neighboring Switzerland, but our culinary tradition will not be undermined by insects. We will not be the ones to make “a great cultural jump” and overcome the repulsion due to the general conviction that insects are associated with dirt and illness, even though a noted scientist such as Jean Baptiste de Panafien explores such possibility in his book *Les Insects nourrissent-ils la planet?*

Let us not pay heed to the supporters of the insect eating cuisine and limit ourselves to smiling when confronted with recipes of this kind: roulade of *Rhuncopharus ferrugineus* wrapped in potato flour and barbequed; honey-pot ants, large as a grape, that are consumed raw in Australia or toasted like peanuts; giant ant eggs called “insects’ caviar”, that are fried in butter in Mexico; bed bugs, rich in vitamin C, immersed in hot water and served in tacos in Venezuela; fried tarantulas that are sold at the food stands of Cambodia; termites that taste like carrots when fried in oil; caterpillars sautéed in a pan. We could go on and on with dozens of such dishes that make us shiver. Let us leave such “delicacies” to other populations and let us taste the steaming polenta with “strinun” (birds), a good pizza Margherita or a dish of spaghetti with tomato and basil. With all due respect for the cuisine of insects.

LUCIO PIOMBI



SURFING THE WEB WITH THE ACADEMY IS MORE USER FRIENDLY THAN EVER!

The Academy website (www.accademia1953.it) has been completely redone. It is more dynamic and rich in online information that is much easier to access by its users (almost 9,000 visitors each month). The site’s clearer and more modern graphics allow the user immediate access to news about the Academy’s activities both in Italy and abroad, as well as the most recent issues of the magazine. In addition, the images that run across the home page take us to the major areas of interest (the Library, New Delegations) but also to those places where important conferences have taken place.



Thanks to the many menu categories it is possible to access the national recipe database of Italian regional cuisine, and consult the section devoted to restaurants, which includes reviews of 3,000 eating establishments in Italy and abroad, including those from the printed guide *The Good Traditional Table*. And much more space is devoted to Delegation activities, with photos of events, books contributed and publications. There is also a new Delegate’s Area that will allow Delegates to communicate directly with Headquarters in order to streamline communications.

The most recent issues of *The Civilization of the Table* can be downloaded in Italian (with selected articles English), as well as the most important published “Notebooks”.