

# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



INTERNATIONAL  
EDITION

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WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

**CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA**  
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**On the cover:** in *The Visit* (detail, circa 1657) an oil on wood by Pieter de Hooch (1629-1684) four characters are depicted around a table, well positioned within the space and bathed in a ray of sunlight coming through the high window to the left. The intriguing atmosphere seems to imply a chivalrous situation (a recurring theme in such paintings of the Golden Century of Dutch art). Under the attentive gaze of the elegant gentleman in the center, the woman on the left pours white wine into a glass destined to accompany the small but refined refreshments (oysters perhaps?) on the table, while the seated woman seems to willingly accept the attentions of one of the visitors. The painting (from the Havemeyer Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York) is part of *Vermeer - The Golden Century of Dutch Art*, the first Italian exhibition dedicated to Johannes Vermeer (at the Quirinale stables throughout January 2013) and his colleagues. One of the artists, Pieter de Hooch, was a contemporary of and particularly close to the poetics of Vermeer.

# Which Art of Gastronomy?

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI  
President of the Academy

*Gastronomic creations are openly structured cultural entities with a strong link to the flow of history made up of past, present and future interpretations. The logic used to understand and interpret them must also be open.*

Dear Academicians, If you ask an expert on cuisine what constitutes a dish or gastronomic creation, understood as culinary art, he will have a difficult time providing a convincing answer. At the most he can discourse on the difference between high and low level cuisine, or describe some classical preparation; or refer to a technique (“in accordance with the rules of the art”), all the while forgetting that the techniques and rules are constantly evolving. If gastronomy is an art understood in the modern sense, its conditions are common to every other art form: from the moment the very concept of “art” was formed and diffused, the question remained as to what constituted a work of art. Indeed, every time we try to define it there is always some artist or group of artists that will nullify all previous at-

tempts to create a definition. The definitions that have been given, or the attempts to do so, of the art of gastronomy have always proved to be abstract and ineffective. This is in part because of an extraordinary attitude toward the actual variety of works of art that does not take into consideration the cultural diversities and different interpretive sensibility of cuisine. An excellent example is the increasingly common tendency today of Westerners trying to pass judgment on a dish from one of the many and varied cuisines of Asia. In a situation of increased globalization even in the area of gastronomy, should we not perhaps radically modify our conceptual instruments of evaluation? Obviously this must be done without renouncing the values of a tradition that has been acquired over the course of history, which in the case of the great traditional cuisines can be measured in terms of centuries if not millennia.

Artistic gastronomic preparations are unique, and unlike those of traditional cuisine they do not have predetermined structures (structures that, on the other hand, are often results of an earlier gastronomic innovation that became traditions). Unlike the latter, such as the language of the art of gastronomy, through a continuous process of experimentation, gastronomic works of art end up having constantly modifiable cultural structures. Even in gastronomy, what stimulates artistic research forward and modifies it is the experience gained from the constant effort to interpret food and the sensations that derive from the culinary transformation, that are subject to the historical period and social context in which they arose. One example among

many: Lasagne is a dish that has been known since the early Middle Ages. We have a fairly precise description of it that can be attributed to Frederick II, along with a recipe that has always been subject to innumerable interpretations. It makes no sense to apply an ambivalent and Manichaeic standard of “true” and “false” to deem Frederick’s version to be true and every other interpretation or variation false, when we must remember that even that recipe was not “original” and therefore could also be considered “false”. In the same way we must not commit the error of considering that recipe to be the only ideal original while deeming its interpretations, which by nature are the results associated with each execution of the dish, to be base copies if not “betrayals”. According to relativistic logic and a revisionist view of history, all the interpretations of a recipe, including the traditional ones, are “original” by virtue of the fact that they interpret a more or less initial model that has yet to be expressed or only done so only partially. To stick with our example, lasagne federciane (Frederick’s version) is the “true” one also owing to its incorporation meat ragù, tomatoes, and so on. In their entirety, all the interpretations, to greater or lesser degrees, constitute and represent the evolutionary history of a dish. The same holds true for a symphony, a painting, a series of prints or any other human product with an artistic dimension.

We must stipulate and drive home the point that gastronomic preparations are made up not only of the materials from which they are made, but also by the knowledge and awareness of the preparers and the

techniques that have evolved over time, but most of all by the experience of the consumer and user. Gastronomic creations are openly structured cultural entities with a strong link to the flow of history made up of past, present and future interpretations. The logic used to understand and interpret them must also be open. In fact, cuisine, and especially gastronomy, greatly resembles human beings, inextricably influenced by memory and historical narration. What is more, through this perspective we can use the art of gastronomy

to better understand human beings, especially their unconscious and unexpressed feelings. As Claude Lévi Strauss affirmed, "Cuisine is the language through which a society unconsciously reveals its structure."

More than anything else, the art of gastronomy is research, and as such it is a precursor and forerunner of innovation, which in turn can originate and unite in tradition. It is the sort of research that pays close attention to new techniques or new uses of existing technology, and that allows us to think in ways that were previously

unheard of. One needs only look at the example of "low temperature" cooking, for long periods of time and in the absence of oxygen, a technique that was used in Bologna for centuries in the production of a traditional salami: mortadella.

Compensating for the effects of both culture and nature, we can see that over the course of history the art of gastronomy is clearly a product of human culture, but at the same time it is also a productive force for an ever new human nature.

**GIOVANNI BALLARINI**

**FOCUS** DI PAOLO PETRONI

## IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC CRISIS: THE ART OF SHOPPING AND RECYCLING FOOD

**A**fter the long holiday season, usually characterized by overindulging with friends and family, many people start the New Year with lighter meals, if not diets. Up to a few years ago, the print and television media often asked the Academy to suggest some typical regional Christmas and New Year's dishes: the recipes were often opulent, as an outgrowth of times of hunger and poverty when the holidays provided an reason to use more and better ingredients. But starting last year, with a true obsession for the excesses of the previous year, all the requests were for low-cost, economical dishes. That is, how to celebrate Christmas and New Year's on 10 Euros a person. Newspapers and television shows held competitions asking for ideas and advice, and the Academy even issued an official statement and participated in interviews. And so we got on board. But to be totally honest, it was only so much hot air. Nonsense. For centuries, every so often, in recurring cycles, books on leftovers have been published, starting with Olindo Guerrini's historic book *The Art of Cooking with Leftovers*, a well written book that came out in 1918, to the many modern recycling manuals, like Letizia Nucciotti's *Forward People! The Art of Recycling Everything that is Leftover in your Kitchen*. I also remember Master Chef Bruno Barbieri's *Passionate about Meatballs and Cooking without Waste* by Andrea Segrè instructing us on how to utilize potato peels, wilted salad, spinach spines and fish heads. All well and good, but let's

be honest: no one sets a lavish holiday table for 10 Euros a person. We can save money on other days - every day - but not on Christmas and New Year. And we can spend less money today simply by not buying prewashed and chopped salad, sliced salami in plastic packages, take-out food from the gastronomy aisle, or rice that cooks in 3 minutes. Seasonal vegetables really cost very little, poultry is reasonably priced, as are some farm-raised fish. In other words, recycling is important, but not always welcome by diners. What is fundamental is the art of grocery shopping. Modern supermarkets do everything in their power to make consumers overspend; they tempt us with superfluous, convenient and expensive foods. In reality, what we really need does not cost very much. We are the garbage generation: today between 45 and 55 kilos (100 - 120 lbs.) of food per person is thrown away every year, along with 80 (176 lbs.) kilos of paper, plastic and glass. Our shopping carts are filled with unnecessarily bulky packages that should have been minimized by the producers. Once upon a time there was hardly such a thing as garbage: pea pods were used to make a cream soup, cherry pits could be made into a liquor, and coffee grounds made an excellent fertilizer for plants. Even bones were made into soap. Fortunately some things are no longer necessary and we make pea pod soup because it's delicious and makes us happy, not just to avoid generating trash.

# Eating as Nature Intended

BY ALFREDO PELLE

Academician, Apuano Delegation  
F. Marengi Research Center

*Raw fish has a certain appeal, but we not lose sight of the fact that our culture prefers light cooking or marinating in vinegar or lemon.*

Eating raw (*crudo* in Italian) fish is anything but crude. In fact it is just the opposite: it is difficult to find a dish that is more faithful to and respects the essential flavor of the sea. It calls for a total respect for the raw material without any imposition or any attempt to alter what comes to the kitchen straight from the sea in as short a time as possible (which, as we will see, is slightly longer than we are led to believe by the food sanitation norms). The practice of eating foods raw brings us closer to uncorrupted flavors: a swordfish *carpaccio* brings a direct connection with forgotten tastes over which for some time now wise artisans and sensitive cooks have tended to consider a battle over nutritional civilization.

The process of flash freezing instantly preserves the freshness of fish by destroying the dangerous *anisakis* parasite without affecting the texture and fragrance of fresh fish. Thus the flavor of the meat of animals raised without hormones or antibiotics becomes a joy for the palate. With their “natural” taste, tuna *tartare*, marinated anchovies, and shrimp salads have become standard fare in many restaurants, seasoned only with fruit essences or simple vegetables.

Shrimp is perfect when marinated with orange and cuttlefish is wonderful when seasoned with thin slices of onion. It is difficult to find a better blend of flavors than fish *tartare* with pink peppercorns, which are very aromatic but not spicy.

And then there is sushi, that Japanese exaltation of raw fish - recently arrived in Italy and so popular as to have generated numerous sushi restaurant chains, not to mention finding pre-packaged versions in the refrigerated section in supermarkets; an absolute anathema to the Japanese version. The industrial version is a far cry from the original. And of course it would be inconceivable to serve sushi without pickled ginger.

We have to admit, raw fish has a certain appeal. This is because it requires perfection; it must rigorously fresh and cut in the proper matter. It is not “contaminated” by the cooking process. Raw fish tastes of the sea and is seductive all on its own because it has a delicate scent and above all, it does not “taste like fish” (if it does, we should throw it away). Eating raw fish makes us feel healthy and hearty - it is the food of primitive man, and also recalls the aesthetics of Asia. Raw food has the reputation of providing the essential ingredients for making us feel healthy.

Having said this, it is undeniable that there is a trend these days to find tuna or swordfish *tartare* on every menu and a sushi bar on every corner. We have lost all sense of proportion, and we have also forgotten that our culinary style, that of the Mediterranean, has never been one that included raw fish. At most we resort to a very brief cooking and/or marinating in vinegar or lemon juice.

Thus in Calabria we have the tra-

dition of raw anchovy small fry, the rough equivalent of *bianchetti* or *gi-anchetti*. This dish starts with rinsing the baby anchovies in salt water, drying them and seasoning them with an olive oil and lemon juice emulsion. After half an hour in the refrigerator, and the addition of some fresh chopped parsley, the dish is ready, in all its natural freshness.

This was the cuisine of a people who respected the sea, but who in order to combat their hunger and uncertain futures, tended to preserve their fish catches whenever possible. It was the style of a people who cooked their food, and therefore their fish was fried, stewed, roasted, or preserved in salt.

Their recipes were the fruit of popular wisdom accumulated over the centuries.

Raw fish is prepared by those who analyze and choose the product at the market and sharpen their knives just as surgeons do their scalpels. What is missing is the sauce that is simmers, releasing its aroma, or the fragrance that is released when fresh herbs are cooked in the oven.

But there is more: our cuisine calls for gathering around the table with a glass of wine to accompany our food. But in general, wine does not always pair well with a dish that while providing the diner with great pureness of flavor, is a kind of perfection for its own sake, without any manifestation of the talent of the chef.

Therefore let us happily accept this way of eating fish, but without looking at it as the ultimate expression of a chef's talent.

To judge a cook's capability we need to see how he or she works at the stove with their pots and pans or at the grill. He or she must employ their talent, the greatest expression of which can be found on our plate: the unity of ingredients that join together in the harmony of their flavors, the elegance of their texture and the beauty of their presentation. In sum, we must see cuisine as that "grain of salt" that makes everything tastier, intellectually as well as gastronomically.

ALFREDO PELLE

## 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](mailto: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.*

# Macarons

BY **GIANCARLO BURRI**,  
*Academician, Padua Delegation*

*These colorful dome-shaped pastries are very much in vogue today.*

In the display windows of bakeries where *panettoni* and *pandori* have been replaced by the traditional Carnival sweets, an increasing amount of space is being devoted to some graceful little pastries in captivating pastel shades: macarons. They consist of two dome-shaped meringues (*coques*) with a flat base and maximum 4 cm circumference (1.5 inches) made with flour, ground almonds, confectioner's sugar and egg whites, colored and finally filled with a celebrated and creamy *ganache* of various flavors that are reflected in their color. The order of ingredients and preparation may vary, but as with any good pastry confection what matters is the precision, technique and timing of the chef. Starting with the egg whites: they must have no trace of yolk, and absolutely must be "aged" in the re-

frigerator for 2 or 3 days before use. The semi-spherical cookie must have a rounded and smooth surface with a crust as delicate as an eggshell, while the flat base should be characterized by a small rough surface across its entire circumference. Once they have been baked, the macarons should be set aside for 2 days before being sold (the time necessary to achieve the perfect balance between texture and taste). Currently among the trendiest of sweets, macarons were officially recognized in Italy at the inauguration in Milan in 2010 of the exclusive Boutique Ladurée, but their long and interesting history also ties them to that of *amaretti* and meringues. As far as the name itself of the little pastry is concerned, the French take credit for its origin, but from an etymological analysis of the term "*macaron*" the most credible hypothesis holds that it derives from the dialectal Italian term "*macaronone*" (thin pasta?) Some ancestors of *amaretti*, rough but easily stored biscuits made from almonds, egg whites and honey, an Arab creation, seem to have appeared in Italy at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century. And coincidentally, some sources attest that in the same period some Venetian monasteries were in the habit of preparing similar delicate sweets with those same ingredients. The term "*macaron*" used to indicate round preparations, first appeared in chapter 59 of François Rabelais' *Le Quart Livre*. However it is unclear whether the term referred to sweets or to a kind of cheese or meatball. A very credible hypothesis on the debut of *macarons* (in the form of semi-spheres abundantly decorated with colored creams and jams) holds that they were originally made by

Italian pastry chefs and brought to Paris by Catherine de' Medici. Much beloved by the aristocracy, these little almond flavored cakes quickly and successfully spread. So much so that particularly in France, many cities have developed their own particular version, and boast that they were invented there. Historical chronicles refer to a certain Monsieur Adam, a local baker, who on May 8, 1660 offered King Louis XIV a tray of his special almond macarons on the occasion of his wedding. And once again in France, again at Court, it seems that King Louis XVI's consort Marie Antoinette had a real passion for macarons, presumably in the form of pretty and colorful meringues made with ground almonds and served with Chantilly cream. Her pastry chef Gasparini was always happy to fulfill the Queen's every wish in his kitchens at Versailles, and is credited with the invention of the meringue. The idea of joining two semi-spheres of almond flour meringues with a filling of chocolate and cream dates back to 1930, and is attributed to Pierre Desfontaines of the famous French pastry shop Ladurée. Since then, having been "perfected" in a multitude of flavors and colors, the "macarons of Paris" have become a real source of competition among the world's foremost pastry chefs. In addition to the classic sweet flavors like chocolate, hazelnut, strawberry, and raspberry we now find delightful combinations ranging from blackberry violet and lemon basil to some surprising savory varieties such as chocolate and foie gras, wasabi and ginger, and *mortadella* and pistachio. And in Paris (and elsewhere) March 20 has been designated "Macaroon Day".

# Packaging: Yellow and Blue Paper

BY ELISABETTA COCITO  
*Academician, Turin Delegation*

*The story began a long time ago, and deals with paper, colors, pasta and sugar.*

At one time the food products one could buy in shops were sold loose by weight, and wrapped in paper. Initially the paper was crude and unrefined, with many irregularities and blotches. Therefore, in order to disguise its production defects the paper began to be colored with vegetable extracts such as indigo, and later the “Prussian Blue” that conferred an intense blue color. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries this paper, tinted with expensive and rare ingredients, was only used for precious merchandise; sugar in particular. For this reason this paper was commonly referred to as “sugar paper”, a nickname that over time was also associated with its typical blue color. With the progress of technology, the old vegetable dyes gradually disappeared and were replaced by less expensive synthetic products. This allowed for a greater diffusion of the application of wrapping paper for

different products, such as pasta, flour, etc. The loose sale of merchandise was prevalent in Italy until the 1950s: pasta, sugar, and other foods were placed on a scale in the center of a piece of “sugar paper” which was then sealed by folding and scrunching up the edges. The concept of packaging was essentially unknown: shopping was a daily task and food was purchased as needed.

Fast forward to 1950: Upon his return from a trip to the United States where supermarkets and boxed food were already common, pasta industrialist Pietro Barilla perceived the need for innovation and to market his product with packaging and a logo that would enable the consumer to distinguish one product from another and would make it easily identifiable with his company and with his country. To this end he availed himself of the genius of Erberto Carboni, a graduate of the Parma Academy of Fine Arts. He was an illustrator for noted magazines as well as curator of publicity campaigns for several important companies for which he received a great deal of recognition. Carboni started from scratch by recalling two very evocative elements: blue grocers’ paper and the golden color of wheat in his creation of the famous yellow and blue box for different kinds of pasta. Thus from the forward looking vision of an entrepreneur and the skill of a great designer was born a symbol of “Made in Italy” that has contributed to making the Italian food industry world famous. The instantly recognizable blue and yellow box created by Carboni is now a symbol of our day-to-day life, regardless of how the product it contains may be used.

Many years have passed since then,

but Carboni’s colors were still a winning combination in 2012. In March of last year, Luciano Fagnola, graphic designer and owner of *Bottega Fagnola* was called upon to represent Italy in the *Book Cover Collection in the Art of Gastronomy* at the *Gastronomic Cookbook Festival* in Paris. He won first prize. A collaborator of such major artists as Casorati and Nespolo, Fagnola has been active for forty years in the field of artistic bookbinding. He has developed a style that enhances the cover and binding as well as the content of the book. For this competition he worked with the colors used by Carboni for his legendary box, and produced an original cover for Carla Bardi’s book *Spaghetti*, published by Mondadori in 2010. His motif for the book consisted of a cover in the shape of a box in “sugar paper” blue decorated with a cascade of yellow spaghetti: a clear recollection of and homage to Carboni’s “creature”. The outside cover was embellished with original ideas and materials, such as a fork which recalls the table and the gesture of feeding oneself, and the interior bears an image of a girl who is reading while she cooks: an icon of the essential link between food and culture. The book is connected to its cover with magnets to facilitate easy removal and consultation.

The French jury rewarded the artistry and genius expressed in this paean to pasta, a typical Italian product known throughout the world.

Yellow and “sugar paper” blue: the history of two colors that, used in different ways in different eras, contribute to the identification and showcasing on the international scene of two Italian specialties: art and pasta.



# The Timbale: its History and Peculiarities

BY FRANCESCA FERRERI DELL'ANGUILLA  
Catania-East Delegate

*An opulent dish owing to the quantity and refinement of its ingredients, it is as common in noble cuisine as it is in popular cuisine.*

The *timballo*, *pasticcio*, or *sartù* - names of different derivations and dishes of undetectable variations - is the offspring of Renaissance cuisine. The idea of preparing a dish served in a pastry crust shell, filled with pasta seasoned with very rich sauces, usually with pork, poultry or game, was actually born in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. The timbale gets its name from the mold that originally was simply a cylindrical container with a diameter equal to that of its height. This in turn got its inspiration from the semi-spherical shape of the body of musical instruments such as the Indian *tabla*. Thus its name was used to indicate an ancient percussion instrument, like the drum or the *timpano*, over which a membrane was stretched - and analogously a cylindrical mold. The term comes from the French word *timbale*, which in turn derives from the Arabic-inspired Spanish word *atabal*. Indeed, in Sicily Arab influences pervades all aspects of cuisine and the use of meat pies was already common at the time of the Islamic conquests.

With the passing of time the form and the preparation of the timbale changed. Different shapes and heights were added to the classic cylindrical mold, depending on the recipe. The "shell" was also modified and "modern" timbales expanded to include other types of pastry dough or sometimes did without it completely. A layer of seasoned pasta was often used as the external layer, filled with rich sauces and varied ingredients. The timbale was then sealed with a final layer of pasta.

The synonymous *pasticcio* often refers to a sweet version of the timbale, and it has even older origins. In fact the first traces of this type of

preparation go back to ancient Rome. Its principal characteristic is a wrapping of flaky pastry that may have contained meat, crustaceans, fish or fruit. Sometimes even savory fillings were finished with a layer of pastry cream, thus combining the sweet and the savory.

Apart from these classical references, today we understand *pasticcio* to be a blend of various ingredients arranged in layers and baked in the oven.

A dish that is able to satisfy even the most discerning palate, it is characterized by a layer of pasta that wraps around it is and stuffed with cooked foods (pasta, rice, meat, vegetables) and baked in the oven in an appropriate mold. Impressive in its appearance, and opulent owing to the quantity and refinement of its ingredients, it is as common in noble cuisine as it is in popular cuisine. Indeed, the humble folk liked to emulate the aristocratic tables on feast days, special occasions or festivities.

The outer wrapping of this edible container, be it sweet or savory, is made of flaky pie crust or puff pastry often flavored with cinnamon, lemon peel or other essences. The wrapping can be substituted by other foods that have the function of "tying up" the bundle, such as slices of fried eggplant or similar vegetables, crêpes, or even breadcrumbs that adhere to the walls of the mold, forming a consistent external shell.

The sight of a timbale, the decorative nature of which derives from pastry making, understood in the broad sense of the term as the art of sculpting, leads the mind and the palate of the dinner guest on a unique gustatory experience that stimulates and involves all the senses.

The recipes for this dish are infinite and ideas for the filling place no limits on the imagination. The traditional timbale is made with *maccheroni* in various forms and substance: short or long, dried or fresh (i.e., hand made) smooth or scored. *Ziti*, *mezzamaniche*, *fettucine*, *lasagne* can be used, and even rice, that grain of ancient Sicilian tradition, although it has fallen into disuse. The filling came be made with vegetables, meats, including hens containing unhatched eggs, sweetbreads, and giblets. The timbale elevates *maccheroni*, often associated with simple peasant food, to a prestigious level. In fact, beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century its fame crossed the Alps, raising it to a level of nobility and leading it to assume a role of primary importance in French and Italian gastronomic literature. The famous chef Antonin Carême so extolled the *maccheroni* timbale so as to render it a prestigious dish of the Italian *Risorgimento* and Imperial and Restoration France. The exchange between the two gastronomic cultures during the Renaissance witnessed the prevalence of Italian cuisine, particularly that of Tuscany, in France thanks to Catherine de' Medici, who was famous for introducing and popularizing the consumption of elaborate meat *pasticci*. In the 1600s and 1700s the roles were reversed, with the dominance of French cuisine that refined and harmonized the use of ingredients, controlling the amounts of spices used, balancing the contrast between sweet and salty, and introducing new cooking techniques. The superiority of this cuisine contributed to the institution of a specific French jargon that is still present in the everyday Sicilian gastronomic lexicon: *monsù* from *monsieur*, *ragù* from *ragout*, and *gattò* from *gateau*. Sicilian *Sartù*, which is similar to a timbale or *pasticcio*, also etymologically derives from the French word *surtout* which refers to a table centerpiece.

The idea of creating a timbale with pasta is still typical in southern Italy, especially Naples and Sicily. It was actually on that sunny isle at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century that Padre Labat, one of the earliest travelers on the Grand Tour, discovered for the first time a *pasticcio* of *maccheroni*. "I had never seen a *pâtè* of *maccheroni*. The *maccheroni* had been cooked in a broth of almond milk with cinnamon, Corinthian raisins, pistachios from the Levant, lemon peel. The small salamis were delicate and garnished with *genoise* pastry." We are speaking of a period in which European cuisine, having broken its ties with the unrefined gastronomy of the past, was coming into contact with Arab gastronomy via Spain and Sicily. Thus we see the presence of spices such as saffron, pepper, cinnamon, cloves, the scent of rose water, and the use of sugar, vinegar, dried fruit, almonds and citrus.

From the prototype of a timbale that evokes an Arabic and Renaissance legacy, we move on to the most aristocratic and famous one of Italian literature, "a towering timbale of *maccheroni*": Don Fabrizio, the Prince of Salina, served it to his guests to celebrate the importance and solemnity of his first dinner in Donnafugata, the site of his family's fiefdom and holiday retreat. The golden surface of this "triumph of gluttony" represented a prelude to the treasures that were hiding within. First and foremost, the truffle, which although present in the forests of Sicily was not a part of its culinary tradition: perhaps owing to its more modest dimensions that the famous truffles of Piedmont and Umbria, perhaps because of its less intense aroma, or perhaps simply because Sicilian cooks preferred to embellish their dishes with the flavors of the Mediterranean. Demi-glace, that essential brown sauce, is a final exaltation of the professionalism and ability of the *monsù*. The extended cooking

time, variety of meats and vegetables used, and the careful steps performed at regular intervals including skimming, straining and degreasing make it a dish fit for a king. A dish that not all palates are capable of appreciating.

Although the practice of cooking in ovens has been around for centuries and was common even among the Romans, the existing recipes for timbales would appear to be rather recent. We find the early versions, quite different from the modern ones, in the work of Corrado, who suggests a whole gamut of timbales and *sartù* filled with *gnocchi*, *ravioli*, *maccheroni*, stuffed *rigatoni*, and rice: recipes that, not belonging to popular cuisine, have erroneously been forgotten today.

These recipes are drastic in literally decreeing that "the dough for timbales should be puff pastry and quite short, but without sugar." Cavalcanti instead often used short pastry, alternating it with *pâtè brisée* and puff pastry. In the ninth edition of his book he refers to some recipes already in existence, such as raw cooked *maccheroni* and those prepared Sicilian style. He also includes an eggplant timbale, *frittata di scammaro* (a fasting-day eggless spaghetti omelet) and the homonymous timbale, unknown today, but he leaves out the *lasagne* and the timbale with *ragù* that he cited in previous editions.

Timbales have been present in Sicilian cuisine since the time of the Arabs, were main dishes in the Neapolitan cuisine from 1700 to 1800, and were very much in vogue in aristocratic cuisine. Recipes for Neapolitan timbales appear in the works of Vincenzo Corrado and Ippolito Cavalcanti. Following this tradition *sartù* made with rice is still widespread in Naples, while in Palermo a timbale with Sicilian *anelli* pasta and eggplant is typical.

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