

# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



**ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA**  
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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA  
È STATA FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI  
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GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI,  
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,  
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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*On the cover:* graphic elaboration of a detail of *Interior of a Restaurant* (1887) by Vincent Van Gogh (Otterlo, The Netherlands; Kröller-Müller Museum). On display as part of the exhibition *Van Gogh - Tra il grano e il cielo* (*Van Gogh - Between wheat fields and sky*) in the Basilica Palladiana, Vicenza, 7 October 2017 - 8 April 2018.

# The Academy must be responsive to current issues

*We must address the challenges facing cuisine today without indulging in excessive retrospective analysis.*

BY PAOLO PETRONI

*President of the Academy*

Most Academies dating from the Renaissance onwards were founded in Italy, especially those dedicated to literature, philosophy and the arts, and later the sciences as well. They further developed from the second half of the eighteenth century in response to Enlightenment ideas, often in opposition to rigid and pompous university rules. Alongside prestigious and influential Academies, bizarre ones appeared as well, such as the Academies of the Abandoned, of the Indifferent, of the Cauldron and so on. Today most Academies have disappeared, with only a few survivors (Lincei, Crusca, Georgofili, the National Academy of Agriculture), partly because many were formed as little more than pranks, but especially because their goals were superseded by events, by discoveries, by science, by the diffusion of culture to the greater populace. To survive, an Institution must always adapt to the present, interpreting current needs and providing suitable answers. The Italian Academy of Cuisine, by now 64 years old, resulted from a felicitous intuition by Orio Vergani and its other founders in response to the problem of Italian cuisine's decadence, but has proven to be a lively and crucial concept for transmitting the values of culinary culture down the generations. Today, unlike many other associations, our

Academy covers a vital function in bolstering food culture both in Italy and abroad. In other words, it has succeeded in adapting itself to the new challenges which modern society generates daily. Indeed one must always act innovatively, avoiding the comforting refuge of hackneyed and frequently tedious analyses of the past. Historical studies may be interesting, but they often pave the way to habitual self-reference. One cannot walk with one's gaze constantly fixed backwards. However essential and indispensable it is to know our past, we must realise that almost everything has already been said, and instances of concretely valuable discovery are exceedingly rare. We must not be simply custodians of knowledge, mere archivists. Given that it has the capacity to do so, the Academy must have the courage to respond to modern-day consumers' anxieties. Cutting-edge issues are numerous and important: from forgery to manufactured legends, from cuisine as entertainment to the loss of identity, from changing food habits to the demands of the young, from the food industry's technologies to the homogenisation of restaurant menus, from the perils of globalisation to the opportunities arising from newly available ingredients, not to mention health-related problems. The Academy must face up to the new.



"The School of Athens" by Raphael



# A very close-knit group

*The annual meeting of Regional Study Centre Directors (RSCD) showcases the Regional Study Centres' cohesiveness and their Directors' important role in the Academy's cultural activities.*

BY SILVIA DE LORENZO



*The contribution of Carla Pasculli, RSCD for Northern Puglia*

*President Petroni presents the preview of *The Use of Cheeses in Regional Cooking Tradition**



It is they who create the books through which the Academy has been presented to the general public for over two years (the Academy's Cookbook was published in 2015) and the Directors' invaluable contribution, as President Petroni notes in opening the meeting, provides ample grounds for satisfaction. Even though there are some 'chronic' absentees from the annual meetings, everyone's participation in assembling the new publications destined for bookshops is always prompt and competent. In his welcoming remarks, Sergio Corbino, President of the "Franco Marengi" Study Centre, likewise emphasises the crucial contribution of the Regional Study Centres' members. Paolo Petroni swiftly cuts to the chase by confirming the twice-yearly issue of the *Food Culture Library's* volumes, published by Bolis. Following the two ini-

tial publications, *Sauces and Gravies* (October 2016) and *Sea and Freshwater Fish* (April 2017), created through a re-working of texts from the *Cultural Gastronomic Itineraries*, the publication schedule will assume its definitive form: in April, the publication of a reworked past volume, and in October, a work on the annual theme - speaking of which the President presents a publication preview of *The Use of Cheeses in Regional Cooking Tradition*, much appreciated by the attendees. It will be distributed among Academicians on the occasion of the Ecumenical Dinner with a soft cover, whereas it will be in hard-cover format in bookshops. The subsequent publication in the series (April 2018) will be *Gifts of the Garden*: the Directors receive memory sticks containing the texts from 2007 to be updated for this purpose (much has changed in the in-

tervening ten years) and submit to the Editorial Office by the 30<sup>th</sup> of November. The comfortable multifunctional room (a portion dedicated to the meeting and the remainder set up for the ensuing meal) of the beautiful and intensely atmospheric Milanese restaurant "Filippo La Mantia, Oste e Cuoco" hosts the succession of contributions by the Directors, who express favourable opinions regarding the book series (Norberto Lombardi, for instance, points out the judicious balance between cultural requirements and the exigencies of a wider target audience), discuss working methods (Carla Pasculli and Gettina Voza describe how they would like the Regional Coordinators to be involved), and suggest ways to improve dissemination of these works through, inter alia, events in local bookshops (Roberto Robazza, Piergiulio Giordani Pavanelli).



From the top: Andrea Nicola, RSCD for Valle d'Aosta, and Roberto Robazza, RSCD for Veneto; Cettina Voza, RSCD for Eastern Sicily; in the foreground, Giorgio Viel, RSCD for Friuli - Venezia Giulia, and Andrea Cesari de Maria, RSCD for Western Lombardy



previously published issues thereof. Though it remains difficult to identify the precise target audience and the number of copies sold, the President emphasises the success of the main goal, namely to disseminate the Academy's culturally relevant publications even to 'outsiders' by means of eye-catching books likely to intrigue potential readers.

The next subject is the annual theme for 2018, identified by the Franco Marengi Study Centre and approved by the President's Council: *Sweet and Savoury Pastry in Regional Cooking Tradition*. The assembly of this new volume now awaits the input of the RSCDs, who will submit its materials by the 28<sup>th</sup> of February of next year, following the precise guidelines to be issued.

The discussion then turns to the Cookbook, some of whose recipes the Directors are invited

to verify, especially those for the various regions' most iconic preparations which readers will certainly consult, and to make any changes needed to ensure traditional authenticity, taking into account some necessary updates (for instance the replacement of *cartella*, which is beef diaphragm and virtually unknown today, with ground beef in the classic Bolognese meat sauce). The meeting draws to a close with a touching tribute to Alfredo Pelle, who chose to leave his collection of 4,500 books on culinary topics to the La Vigna International Library in Vicenza, for which he was a scientific consultant. To honour the memory of the former President of the "Franco Marengi" Study Centre, the Academy has donated 3,000 Euros for the purpose of reserving an entire floor of the La Vigna Library to this impressive collection. President Petroni will be in Vicenza on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October to attend the inauguration of the section of that library reserved exclusively for Alfredo Pelle's private collection of books.

The restaurant awaits on the other side of the same large meeting hall, where different domains blend seamlessly into each other. Attendees immersed throughout the meeting in the distinctive atmosphere created by the Sicilian reed panels, or *canniccio*, decorating the walls, a construction which creates shade without completely obstructing light, are now treated to the smells and flavours of Sicily as well. The aperitif with delicious *panelle* (chickpea fritters) is followed by sardine dumplings with sour-dressed beet greens; short rigatoni, Norma style; roast octopus with basil pesto and green bean and potato salad; and finally miniature Sicilian *cannoli* and a creamy *cassata* dessert.

**SILVIA DE LORENZO**

President Petroni concurs on the advisability of seizing such opportunities, already successful in the Veneto region, further noting that the volumes, both in content and graphics, are handsome and user-friendly for the general public, who can perceive that this is a book series because of the works' twice-yearly appearance and therefore seek out

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# Travelling through Italy

*Increased internal tourism draws attention to itineraries exploring certified local foodstuffs.*

BY ELISABETTA COCITO

*Turin Academician - "Franco Marengi" Study Centre*

For a time, at the turn of the present century, everyone aspired to travel abroad, bundled off to exotic, distant and once unimaginable destinations by organised tour operators. Swift aircraft conveyed us to heavenly or harsh landscapes, to idyllic or unspeakably poverty-stricken locations: all of it was entertainment. We would be deposited in holiday complexes, insulated cocoons, sterile windows through which to view the world. At table we were comforted by international cuisine, or even, rather frequently, the cuisine which we would otherwise have most missed: the food of home. In reality, it was almost always a pale imita-

tion, but how reassuring it was to eat spaghetti in the middle of the desert or on a barge sailing down the Nile, complemented, perhaps, by something local. What an exotic frisson!

Such a time is by no means remote: this only happened yesterday or the day before. These days we are experiencing a sea change which is in many cases imposed, but in others, intentional: Italy is undergoing a fertile tourist season. Social upheavals, wars, and the consequent fears have narrowed the world, but these are not the only reasons for the new tourism characterising our nation: there is also the desire to rediscover a new style of travel whose aim is

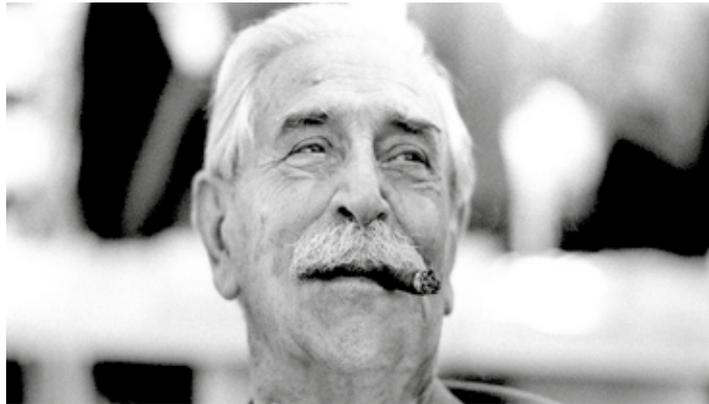




Mario Soldati

to see or revisit our home-grown wonders, to rediscover the variety and excellence of our own products. "Travel means knowledge, and the easiest and most straightforward way to know a country is through the food of those who live there... In that way we can understand... a people's culture and civilisation". These are Mario Soldati's words at the opening of a television programme which he presented in 1957. Its objective was to educate a population recently emerged from the war, during which food was a bare necessity of survival, to rediscover the exalted role of culinary appreciation and its associated local traditions. Soldati travelled by bicycle, train or car, aiming to induce Italians to rediscover their treasures, artisans and their creations, and the taverns and restaurants which he encountered in his wanderings. The path to internal tourism would soon be cleared by supermini cars and a newfound economic prosperity. Today we would view this endeavour as an education in taste and an incentive to local tourism.

Many years later, his words ring with a new timeliness, combined with a resurgence of interest in our own country; it is not a matter of regressing or folding in on ourselves, nor a project born of nostalgia. The pervasive sense of uncertainty and instability is paradoxically stimulating the national economy through tourism and food-related businesses great and small. This will be, it seems, the golden year for tourism on four wheels, both by nationals and foreigners. Cars mean freedom: the freedom to stop at a restaurant along the road; the freedom to buy cheese directly from a small-scale artisan; the freedom to bring home locally produced wine or traditional sweets without fear of confiscation at the airport or the problems of excess baggage. The windscreen is the window providing our vantage point on the world, allowing us to find



out about a village fair with its local specialities on the spur of the moment, and consequently deviate from our plans to visit areas which we would not otherwise have seen. Even tourist guides are adapting. For example, an important daily newspaper has suggested that the publication be supplemented by the *Autostrade Gourmet (Gourmet Motorways)* guide, which not only provides practical information about infrastructures, but also efficiently leads the traveller on a journey to discover local features through the Italian motorway network: where to sleep, shop, eat. Another guide by the same publisher invites readers to rediscover the visual and culinary delights along the revived Salerno-Reggio Calabria motorway.

A sign of the times is the recent inauguration of the refurbished Autogrill motorway rest stop on the Turin-Milan motorway: it was the first branch of the Pavese network of motorway restaurants, founded in 1947. The first veritably 'roadside' restaurant providing a delicious break from driving, it was greatly fashionable at the time, as well as convenient. The refurbishment, or better, the restyling of the new Autogrill was accomplished with energy saving in mind, as well as comfort and, especially, high-quality foods reflecting local traditions. It benefited from substantial economic investment, and in my opinion should be interpreted also in light of developments in travel not only relating to business but also to the projected increase in internal tourism.

There are also interesting initiatives

presenting biking itineraries - leisurely tours with breaks to sample typical and certified products along the way: biking is no longer the aim but a means of exploring the area's delicious offerings at a slow pace. Motorways and the newly devised biking itineraries could reclaim a role as conduits for stimulating local entrepreneurship, thereby becoming, as is worth pointing out, vehi-

cles of knowledge and exchange, especially where certified products are concerned, since these potently attract visitors, particularly foreign tourists, towards a greater knowledge of our lands' local delicacies, for example mortadella from Bologna, truffles from Alba, and the balsamic vinegar of Modena, to name but a few.

On this topic, it is enlightening to note a recent study by the Qualivita Foundation for defending rural and high-quality food culture, directed by Mauro Rosati, a member of the "Franco Marenghi" Study Centre, providing a bird's-eye view of Italian food and wine products by place of origin, highlighting their value both economically and as business models capable of protecting local producers. Italian foods and wines certified as PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) or PGI (Protected Geographical Indication), of which over a third are exported, account for over 6,000 million Euros in profits. The link with local territories is magnetically attracting several foreign investors desiring involvement in certified "Made in Italy" production.

This illustrates the necessity to promote our nation's treasures ever more diligently to aid the economy: nature, history and food are our strengths, and we should safeguard them carefully, not least so as to provide precious heirlooms for the future generations: all that is required is that instead of dissipating our heritage we favour its growth with intelligence and forethought.

**ELISABETTA COCITO**



# Le Monde forgets Italian cheeses

*In no less than five articles dedicated to cheeses in Europe, French journalists failed to mention even one Italian cheese.*

BY GIANNI LIMBERTI

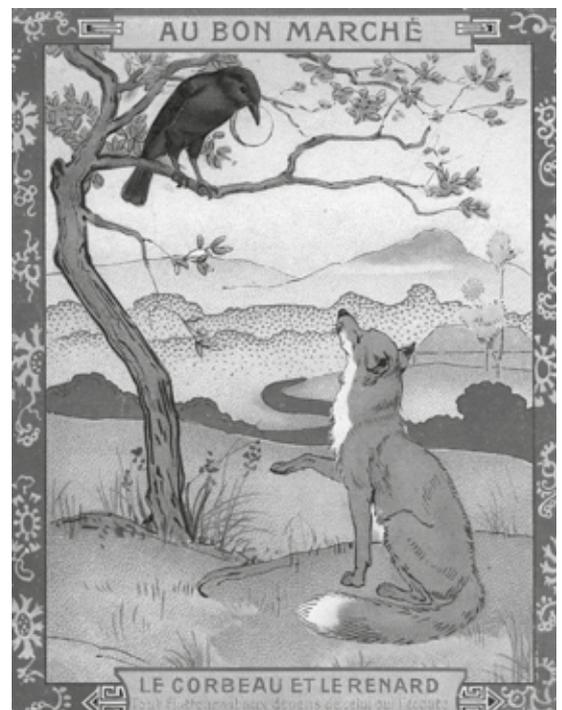
*Prato Academician*

A few kilometres from Paris is the Département of the Seine and Marne. Its archaic denomination, Brie, is preserved in the name of the cheese for which that area is famous. Two locations claim to be the origin of this delicacy: in the north, the episcopal city of Meaux; and in the south, the prefecture of Melun. This inter-city struggle is ongoing. Let us go back in time to late 1814, at the Congress of Vienna, history's paramount diplomatic gathering, lasting over eight months and spawning a new configuration for Europe after the abdication of Napoleon I. To pass the time, the delegations, numbering over 300, vied in organising sumptuous banquets entertaining guests with ingenious diversions. Talleyrand, Louis XVIII's foreign minister, hosted a memorable dinner during which the guests were invited to reveal what they thought were the

world's best cheeses. The delegates lauded the merits of their own countries' cheeses; Talleyrand withheld any pronouncement, but announced that a diplomatic courier had brought, along with the despatches, some brie cheese, which he ordered served immediately. France was declared the winner, and brie named "king of cheeses". Fair enough, but we still wonder today: was the crown earned by the brie of Meaux or the brie of Melun? According to the chronicles, none of the guests was enough of a cheese connoisseur to detect the difference - though it objectively exists. A wheel of brie from Meaux measures 36 or 37 centimetres in diameter, weighs up to 3.2 kilogrammes, and - seasoned for a maximum of eight

weeks - emits an aroma reminiscent of butter and hazelnuts. The brie of Melun is smaller, with a maximum diameter of 28 centimetres and a weight not exceeding 1.8 kilogrammes. Aged for longer, up to three months, it has a more persistent aftertaste; hence the inhabitants Melun accuse the brie of Meaux of being "insipid". Thanks in part to the vagueness of the records, the Knights of the Fellowship of Brie de Meaux - whose beige capes with golden highlights bring to mind the crust of their fabled cheese - and those of the Fellowship of Brie in Melun - with blue and red capes, the colours of nearby Paris - both claim victory in the contest

held in Vienna and historical pre-eminence. The Grand Master of the Melun Fellowship affirms: "Our brie is the most ancient. In the year 999, Robert the Pious, the son of Hugh Capet, was already partaking of it in the royal castle at Melun". The Mayor of Meaux forcefully supports his own city's cause. On 5 November 2016, while inaugurating the House of Brie in Meaux, a stone's throw from the cathedral, he exclaimed: "The brie of Meaux is part of our cultural heritage, a constituent particle of our French identity. Forget about Robert the Pious: Louis XVI was arrested in Varennes during his escape attempt of June 1791 because he remained at the table too long, wishing at all costs to finish the Meaux brie





which he had been served". Both sides invoke not only kings and princes, but also such eminent cultural personages as Balzac and Zola. Another author, however, is responsible for the controversy: Jean de la Fontaine. Could he not have been more precise? Why didn't he specify what that confounded crow held in its beak in the fairytale? The tale in question, *The Crow and the Fox*, was written in 1668, so we must exclude camembert, invented in Normandy in 1792 by Marie Harel. La Fontaine was born in 1621 in Château-Thierry in the Marne Valley, near Meaux. "Do we require more clues to divine that the crow holds our own brie in its beak?" asks the Grand Master of the beige-caped Knights. A representative of the red and blue Knights has a ready answer: "La Fontaine wrote his masterpiece in the castle of Vaux-le-Vicomte,

near Melun, while a guest of his friend and protector Nicolas Fouquet, Louis XIV's finance minister. The cheese is therefore one of ours". A third hypothesis also emerges, prudently suggested by Isabelle Ganot, aged 47, who, along with her brother, manages the family cellar used for ageing brie since 1895. Could it have been a brie from Coulommiers? Coulommiers lies between Meaux and Melun, and La Fontaine's grandparents lived there. Brie producer Jacques Cochaud, amused by this epic struggle over La Fontaine, further confuses matters by offering a few statistics: 80% of Melun brie is produced in Meaux, while 80% of Meaux brie comes from the Meuse area.

General De Gaulle springs to mind with a line he loved repeating: "Do you think it's easy to govern a country with 258 varieties of cheese?" These and many

other accounts and curious nuggets appeared in a series of five articles on European cheeses published in August in the daily newspaper *Le Monde*. The first was dedicated to brie; then came English stilton, Spanish manchego, Alsatian munster and finally Greek feta. But wait: not a single Italian cheese among the "cheeses of Europe"? Even leaving out large-scale production, as the journalists of *Le Monde* chose to do - hence no parmesan and such - how can one forget that the "cheeses of Europe" include gorgonzola, fontina, bettelmatt and more besides, all with their own histories? Having rapped these excessively Gallic knuckles, one must nevertheless acknowledge that these articles, each by a different journalist, were a joy to read and highly informative.

GIANNI LIMBERTI

### GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

Academics' contributions to the magazine are not only welcome, but essential. However Academics should keep in mind some important guidelines so that their contributions, which are the fruit of their passion and dedication, are expeditiously published.

● **Articles:** it is essential that the **text of articles be sent via email**, in MS Word format (not pdf) to the following address: [redazione@accademia1953.it](mailto:redazione@accademia1953.it)

● **Article length:** it is important that articles are between 3,500 and 7,000 characters (including spaces); this is the best way to avoid cuts that are bothersome for both the editors and those submitting the texts. All computers should be able to provide character counts..

● Each issue of the magazine is printed one month ahead of the cover date so that it can be delivered to the Academics by that date. Those submissions that are time sensitive should be sent in ample time.

● **"From the Delegations" Section:** In order to facilitate reading, please **limit articles to a maximum of 2,500 characters including spaces.**

● Please remember that in the "From the Delegations" section as well as elsewhere, **descriptions of meetings held outside the territory of the Delegation or in the homes of Academics, unless they are associated with an important event, will not be published.** Also, **please do not include a list of dishes and wines.** Such listing should appear on the appropriate rating form regarding convivial meetings.

● **Rating forms for convivial meetings:** should be sent to the Secretariat ([segreteria@accademia1953.it](mailto:segreteria@accademia1953.it)). It is also important to limit remarks in the "notes and comments" section of the form to **800 characters** (maximum 1,000) spaces included in order to avoid cuts. Rating forms that reach the Secretariat more than 30 days after the event will be discarded.

● We also request that you not submit reports on convivial meetings held **outside the territory of the Delegation**, or that take place in the **homes of Academics**, or are otherwise not held in restaurants or public venues, as they will not be published.