

# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



**ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA**  
ISTITUZIONE CULTURALE DELLA REPUBBLICA ITALIANA  
FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI

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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA  
È STATA FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI  
E DA LUIGI BERTETT, DINO BUZZATI TRAVERSO,  
CESARE CHIODI, GIANNINO CITTERIO, ERNESTO DONÀ  
DALLE ROSE, MICHELE GUIDO FRANCI, GIANNI MAZZOCCHI  
BASTONI, ARNOLDO MONDADORI, ATTILIO NAVA,  
ARTURO ORVIETO, SEVERINO PAGANI, ALDO PASSANTE,  
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 Reading the News (1874) by James Tissot; private collection.

# Orio Vergani: man, journalist, Academician

*The mark he left is still strong in today's Academy.*

BY PAOLO PETRONI

*President of the Academy*

February 2018 will be the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Orio Vergani. We should like to recall him first and foremost in the words of **Eugenio Montale**: “Insatiable in his fervour to accomplish ever more and ever better, he lived with his face to the future”.

In turn, **Indro Montanelli** wrote about him: “... he knew everything about the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France, except who had won the day's leg, because he would have stopped along the way at some restaurant famous for its roasts or its *baccalà*, and his article would feature its delights”.

“A bad student, a stammering boy, a timid eighteen-year-old liable to pass from hot flashes of blushing to trembling pallors”, is how Orio (Vittorio, on his birth certificate) Vergani describes himself, recalling, years later, his first steps in the world of journalism. He presented himself to the *Idea Nazionale* newspaper, accepting a post as a shorthand typist: it was a stratagem, for he knew nothing about the art of abbreviating words. Nonetheless, he managed to do the job very well: he took notes, at the telephone, of what the correspondents told him, and then he wrote the articles. “Those twenty lines became a column, or a column and a half. The correspondents - who were then paid by the line - did not protest; in fact they were very happy. When the trick was found out they didn't tell me off. They moved me to the *Messaggero Verde* as junior sub-editor”. At grips with the first stages of a profession he would then bestride grandly for a lifetime, he even turned himself into a postboy when, at the suggestion of Pirandello, the *éminence grise* of the *Messaggero della Domenica*, he had to go to Giovanni Gentile's house to get him to cut a hundred lines from an article.

While certainly flippant in writing about himself in irreverent fashion, our founder was also a serious, tireless and many-faceted professional. After he joined the *Corriere della Sera*, his byline appeared uninterruptedly on thousands and thousands of articles (twenty thousand, apparently), but he was also a playwright and author of books

and essays. He wrote about everything: lifestyle, sport, theatre, war and travel, figurative art, applied arts, advertising - everything of whatever was alive and mirrored the times, in that indecipherable handwriting of his, with the lines forming an inverted pyramid.

His interest in promoting Italian cooking, together with our culture, developed early. For instance, his niece Vera recalled at one Academy congress the “literary/gastronomical experience” of the birth, in November 1926 (when Orio was 28), of the “Bagutta” prize, of which Vergani was one of the co-founders. It was a literary prize born under the sign of good eating: a permanent congress of literati, journalists and writers, in a restaurant elevated to the role played in the past by the *salon* or the literary café. Vergani was the first to intuit the cultural value of food in the human sphere, in open contrast with the conceptual positions of the times, when, with the sole exception of the futurist Marinetti, everyone regarded food as merely a means of guaranteeing survival, or at best of satisfying hedonistic pleasure.



Perhaps with the Bagutta, Vergani was at least starting to vaguely glimpse the idea of what was later to become the Academy, but later, when for the *Corriere della Sera* he was following twenty-five years of the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France, from the times of Binda and Guerra to those of Bartali and Coppi, he himself wrote that the Academy was “born of an observation by a wandering journalist who was amazed, in the civilised Veneto, to find waiters offering him Milanese breaded cutlets and being almost astounded that he was keen to try the *luganega* sausages of Treviso, while the host, who was from Conegliano, offhandedly offered him Tuscan wines and not the wines of the Piave”. Consequently, on 29 July 1953, at the hotel Diana in Milan, Orio Vergani, together with Dino Villani and other prominent figures from the worlds of culture, business and publishing, founded the Italian Academy of Cuisine.

And so our story began.



# Pizza, pure or jazzed up

*Pizza has finally been included on UNESCO's Cultural Heritage list.*

BY FIAMMETTA FADDA

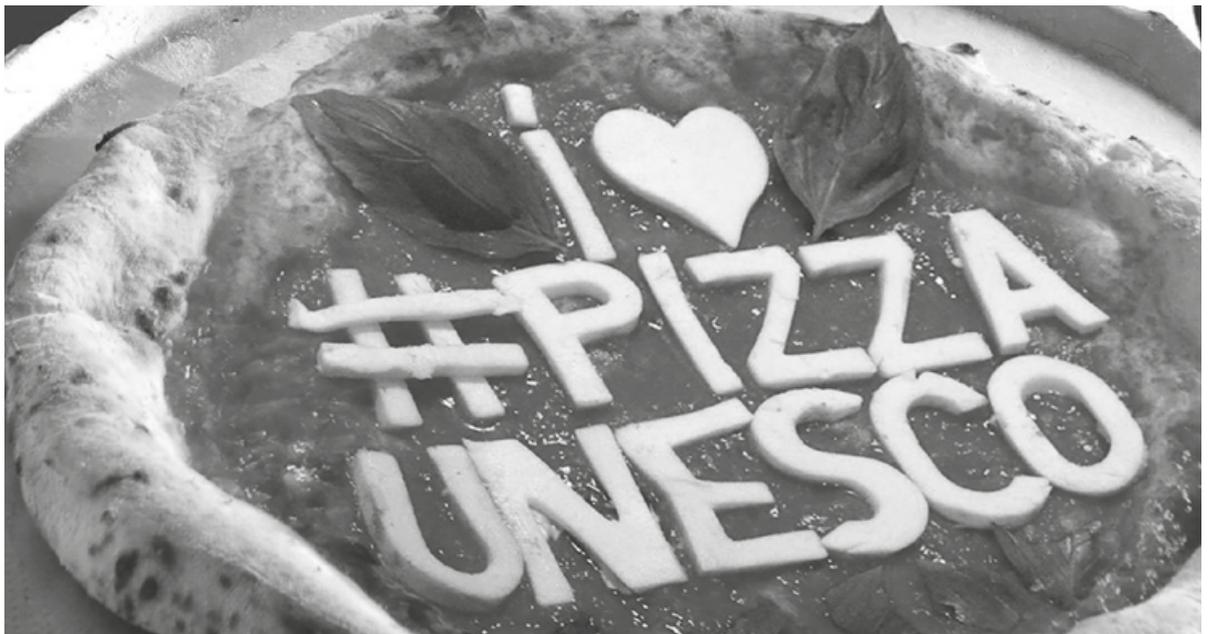
*Milan Academician*

“The art of the Neapolitan *pizzaiuoli* [pizza makers], custodians of the secrets of a speciality which defines our national identity” has just been added to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. We barely made it, countering the Americans' declared intention of submitting their own candidate, namely American pizza in seven variants including Chicago-style deep-dish pizza, which conquered the cover of *Wine Spectator*. Our own pizza, qualified as TSG (Traditional Speciality Guaranteed), is prepared with “tomato, PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) or TSG buffalo mozzarella, extra-virgin olive oil and *origano*, having a maximum diameter of 35 centimetres and an easily foldable raised crust between 1 and 2 centime-

tres high”, as the regulations decree, and is ideally made by a pedigreed artisan, better still the heir to a family of pizza masters possessing the ineffable ‘N factor’ - N for Naples.

Even the other areas of Campania, the region containing Naples, pay obeisance to Neapolitan superiority regarding the four pillars of pizza: dough, seasoning, manual dexterity, and baking at 400 degrees Celsius in traditional wood ovens.

The genuine article can fall victim to its own deliciousness by morphing into pizza sold by length, pan pizza, pizza hand-rolls or ‘calzonpizza’; it might be transported by motorbike in thermal containers; it can resurface in freezers and microwaves. And cooking magazines may offer three - to ten - day pizza-making courses or be crawling with





Gino Sorbillo (left) with Neapolitan pizzaiuoli



ads for semi-prepared pizza kits. “On the other hand”, explains a fatalistic Antonio Pace, President of the Genuine Neapolitan Pizza Society and owner of the glorious restaurant *Ciro* in Santa Brigida, “even in its most abysmal forms, pizza is such a clever invention that we end up loving it anyway”. True, but this may not extend to digesting it - a doubt only too familiar to the 75% of Italians who, according to data gathered by FIPE, the Italian food business association (*Federazione Italiana Pubblici Esercizi*), “habitually order it for meals outside the home”, or the 41% who also serve it while entertaining friends and the 29% who favour it over sandwiches during their lunch breaks. This is why, for purists, pizza is above all a metaphysical disc of dough, to be sent back if the crust is singed or blemished by popped bubbles. A delectable gastronomic monument which would not produce a yearly revenue of 5.3 thousand million Euros if it had not demonstrated an extraordinary capacity to be reinvented.

So much so that though it is still called pizza, it is often unrecognisable: slices decked out as haute cuisine creations; pizza makers who grow their own grain like agronomists or experiment with different yeasts like chemists; high-pro-

file cooks who use tweezers to deposit supremely selected ingredients on that palette of water and flour. Each trend has its acclaimed masters, who amass acolytes and open new establishments throughout Italy. The northern city which has proven most enthusiastically receptive to a preparation almost unknown until the 1950s is Milan, where over 9.000 pizzerie serve a substantial proportion of the 5 million pizzas dished out daily in Italy, as confirmed by FIPE.

Such enthusiasm has convinced the Milan Delegation to institute a pizza-themed group meal, after investigating which pizza most appealed to the Milanese palate. The practical Milanese chose tradition, paying scrupulous attention to the quality of the flour and the lightness of the dough, informed by the principle: “I want to eat it

all without falling into a food coma”. The task fell to Gino Sorbillo, the up-and-coming scion of a Neapolitan pizza-making family active since 1935, who has propagated the original family businesses in *Via dei Tribunali* and *Via Partenope* in Naples, creating three Milanese establishments (*sorbillo.it*) attracting prodigious queues (no reservations accepted). And nostalgia for the old country’s cuisine can be

staunch at the New York branch. This exemplifies how quality and quantity can coexist.

The secret of his interpretation of this Neapolitan classic is the ‘wagon wheel’: wide, very thin, soft at the centre, with a low crust. Dispensing with outlandish names, the menu entry for each pizza enumerates flour type and condiments, chiefly PDO, IGT (Genuine Geographical Indication) and Slow Food Presidium ingredients: anchovies from Cetara, *origano* from the Matese mountains, *nduja* cured meat from Spilinga, and so on. The newest Milanese branch is called “*Olio a crudo*”: Raw Oil, since the classic drizzle of olive oil is added after the pizza exits the oven, resulting in a lighter, more fragrant and more easily digestible preparation.

FIAMMETTA FADDA

## ECUMENICAL DINNER 2018

Our group dinner, uniting all Academicians worldwide around one virtual table, will take place on 18 October at 8:30 PM; its theme is “**Sweet and savoury cakes in traditional regional cuisine**”. The topic, chosen by the “*Franco Marenghi*” Study Centre and approved by the President’s Council, honours regional baked specialities, whether stuffed or dry, abundant in Italian home cooking and also amenable to interesting innovations. The Delegates will arrange a suitable cultural presentation to illustrate this important theme, and a menu befitting the same.

