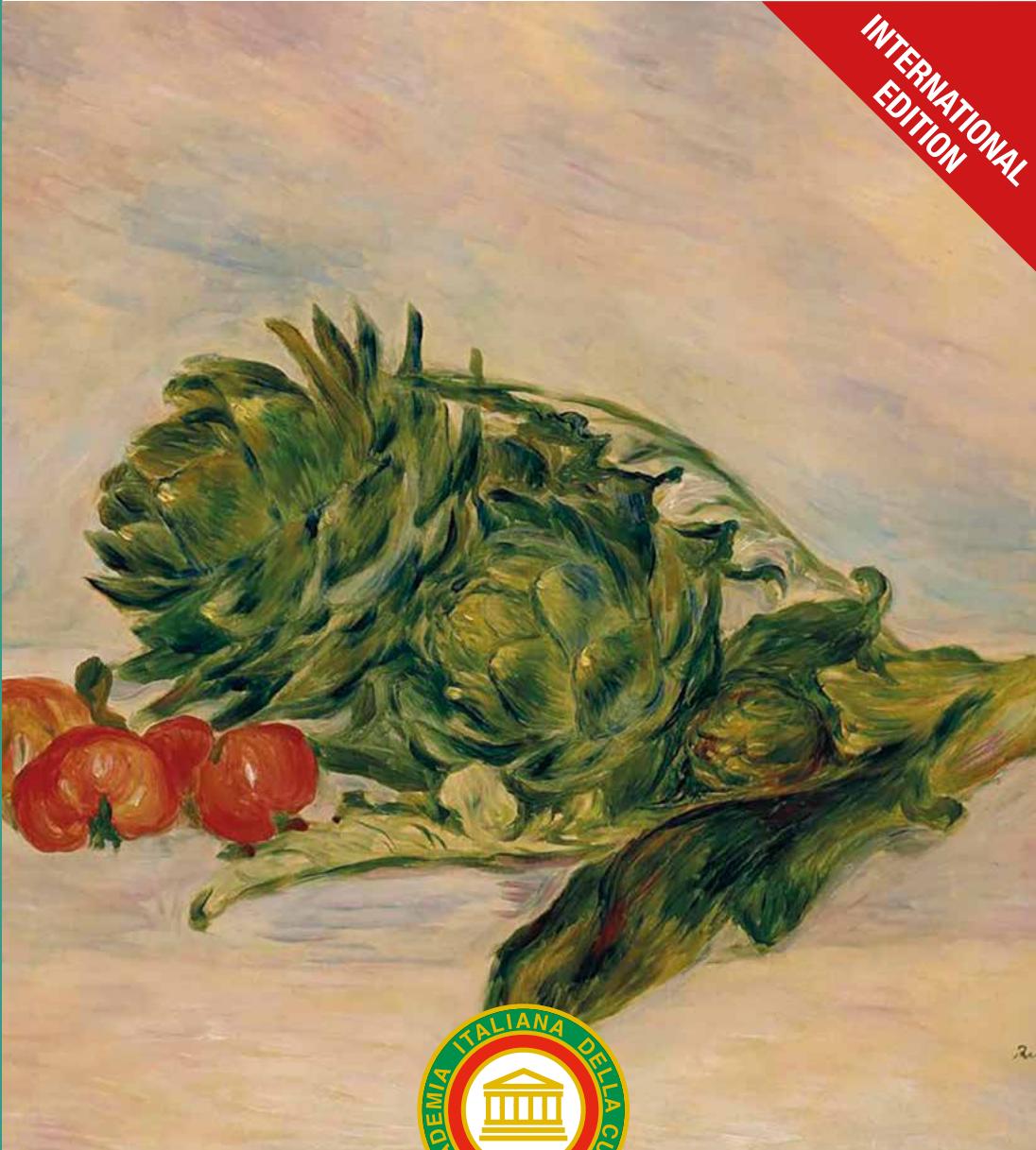


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# Success breeds envy

*Our cuisine's candidature for UNESCO  
Intangible Cultural Heritage status must  
be defended and supported.*

In the introduction to his monumental work *L'Art culinaire français* (1950), the publisher **Ernest Flammarion** wrote: "We must recognise that the Italian cooks who came to France in the retinue of Catherine de' Medici when she married Henry II (1533) were at the origin of French cuisine, for the elements and condiments, new to us, that they brought, which so felicitously inspired our cooks". Long before (1822), the celebrated cook **Antonin Carême**, father of grand French cuisine, admitted that "Cooks in the latter eighteenth century had known the taste of Italian cuisine which Catherine de' Medici had introduced to the French court". More recently (1986), in his biography of Catherine, **Jean Orieux** also declared that modern French cuisine can indeed trace its roots to Italian cooks and bakers. Despite such fulsome praise, our gastronomists and scholars demand 'proof', maintaining that the French exaggerated, because we have no incontrovertible documentary evidence demonstrating Catherine's true contribution to the development of French cookery. Some overstatement may have occurred, since later, as Flammarion says, the French "outclassed" us; but it is pure self-harm to split hairs regarding a long-forgotten credit that has been attributed to us.

### *Voices raised in mockery*

These remote facts spring to mind upon witnessing events following the Italian government's request, **with crucial support from the Italian Academy of Cuisine**, for recognition of **Italian cookery as part of humanity's intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO**. Just when our cuisine is being ap-

by **Paolo Petroni**  
President of the Accademia

preciated throughout the world thanks to substantial improvements in basic ingredients and processing techniques, voices are being raised in ridicule of this initiative, **perceived as the pursuit of useless 'rubber stamps'** for a non-existent so-called Italian cuisine that is only a few years old. Though it is our duty and delight to research the roots of our traditions (the dissection of 'carbonara' and its origins from every possible angle has become rather tiresome), it is fundamental to confirm the quality of our typical dishes which are appreciated wherever they were born, and no matter when.

### *Events and conferences to demonstrate our cuisine's uniqueness*

After the recognition obtained by the Mediterranean Diet (itself under heavy attack), the art of the Neapolitan *pizzaiuolo*, and the French baguette, our cuisine - as it stands today, not as it was in centuries past - fully deserves this candidature. Because a candidature is indeed what this is, not a confirmed status. The proposal will be discussed in the coming years, and hopefully accepted. For this very reason, what we need is not 'friendly fire', which is especially hurtful because it strikes us in the back, **but concrete support from all sides, especially from our own Academy**, so that at every event and conference, in Italy and abroad, our cuisine's uniqueness will be borne out, with unfailing emphasis on our superb raw materials and our cooks' and families' excellent skill in transforming them.





# Food in the time of Artificial Intelligence

by Maurizia Debiaggi

Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia Academician

*A machine's ability to demonstrate human capacities, including cooking.*

**S**cience fiction, fantasy, reality? No; simply Artificial Intelligence (AI), meaning a machine's ability to demonstrate such human capacities as reasoning, learning, planning and creativity - even in the kitchen.

**AI undoubtedly represents one of our most important and complex future challenges.** It is constantly evolving, having progressed, for instance, from machine learning to deep learning, and is now used in many fields including scientific research, industrial automation, robotics, information security and the food industry. Indeed, in the latter sector, companies are increasingly using it for a vast array of purposes. PepsiCo, for example, is exploiting AI to improve the quality and safety of its prod-

ucts, and Kraft Heinz to optimise production processes, including waste prevention and cost reduction. McCormick, one of the world's largest spice producers, has created 'ONE', a system to identify new aroma combinations; while Tastewise uses AI to analyse food trends, helping companies to design products that satisfy consumers' preferences.

## *The emergence of 'digital chefs'*

The real novelty is the emergence of 'digital chefs', or better, '**digital entities**', including '**Giuseppe**' and '**Chef Watson**', to cite a pair with 'human' names despite being machines **capable of dialogue**.





and 'human capacities'. Indeed, Chef Watson can **suggest recipes and unexpected but delicious ingredient combinations**, and Giuseppe creates recipes using algorithms and automatic learning. Let us learn more about these 'chefs'. Where have they studied? Where do they work?

**Chef Watson, born in 2014 at IBM, uses natural language processing and machine learning to create new recipes** and suggest them to professional cooks and amateurs alike. This digital system has been trained using a vast data corpus, including information about the properties of ingredients, cooking techniques and flavour combinations.

Though still young, he boasts an experience-packed CV. His smartphone app offers, *inter alia*, **a function which provides detailed cooking instructions through a vocal assistant**. He has also 'worked' in various culinary contexts, including the creation of a four-course menu for a benefit dinner and a recipe series published in a cookbook.

**Giuseppe, born in 2015 in NotCo**, owes his name to the Italian chemist **Giuseppe Colombo**, who in the 1970s discovered the technology to emulsify vegetable proteins, creating products

similar to their animal counterparts. NotCo, headquartered in Santiago, Chile, was founded to offer healthy, sustainable vegan alternatives to conventional foods.

**Giuseppe's AI analyses plant ingredients' molecular properties, combining them to imitate the tastes and textures of such animal products** as meat, milk and eggs, giving rise to NotMilk, Not-Mayo, NotChicken, NotBurger, and even a NotBolognese sauce!

**The only thing that Giuseppe cannot do, obviously, is taste the food he produces;** for this, human taste buds remain (fortunately) necessary! This is one of the most important phases in a NotProduct's development: culinary experts and consumers try the food and provide feedback so Giuseppe can learn and improve the recipe's next iteration.

#### *Advantages and risks of AI in the food realm*

AI can indubitably benefit the food world: consider its ability to analyse and optimise food processing or distribution and **evaluate food quality**.

AI can also **gather historical information regarding traditional recipes, ingredients and cooking techniques** which might easily be lost over time, and can teach cooks. **However, worries about AI in the food sector**, such as a **decline in proficiency or creativity** among human cooks or the absence of an **artisanal approach** to food preparation, are justified. AI could also **promote food standardisation**, limiting cultural diversity in the culinary world. **We cannot escape this question: will AI change how we eat?** Probably. We are all too aware that there is no culinary tradition without evolution: today's traditional cuisine is not the same as yesterday's, having developed over time through the influence of many factors from ingredient availability to cultural cross-pollination, to name a couple.

It's useless to deny, however, that Giuseppe's lack of taste buds reassures us all. Food is a multi-sensory experience involving the faculties of taste, vision and smell. **It is therefore comforting that AI cannot replace individual humans** and their personal preferences, which still determine the creation and appreciation of traditional cuisine.

**Maurizia Debiaggi**



# From soirées to smartphones

by Giovanni Picuti

Foligno Academician

*The relentless barrage  
of online food images  
is transforming the  
meaning of conviviality.*

**F**ood, for centuries an expression of each distinct people's cultural heritage, elevated through the many millennia of human history to the status of a cultural paradigm, can become an obsession when viewed through social media. Assailed by a barrage of online food images, conditioned by an endless panorama of abundance and variety, we are neck-deep in other people's meals by now. A dish is a cultural manifestation when it is planned, prepared, created and consumed. It is less so when thrust unsolicitedly through a smartphone. After centuries of wholesome sharing through depiction and experience, the 'food porn' era is upon us. We have gone from experiencing the significance of breaking bread with our companions (from the Latin *com panis*, 'with bread') to virtual social networks; from the shared soirée to the smartphone.

*Photographs cannot convey  
the flavour of food*

If it's true that cuisine is the result of combinations and each dish allows its ingredients to blend in harmonious expression, the selection of which has exercised the creative skill of humans throughout their history, then photography (and painting before it) cannot fully convey the character of a recipe, let alone its flavour. **At best it can immortalise the ephemeral art of culinary decoration** with which cooks have been trying to drive us crackers about their food from time immemorial. Though we have been taught that photography is an *art moyen*, a middle-brow art, the confines of its territory have been rendered uncertain by increasing digitalisation from the twentieth





century onwards. Like any piece of information, **an image can also be transformed into digital language**, memorised, modified through a computer and shared. As in traditional art, **food remains an inexhaustible source of inspiration**, as demonstrated by the works of **Paolo Veronese, Tintoretto or Giulio Romano**, whose frescoes depicting the banquet of Cupid and Psyche adorn the Palazzo Te in Mantova. Some artists, whose motives are not only visual but also spiritual and aesthetic, express themselves by less obvious means.

We eat through necessity, yet humans must also contrive to satisfy their need for beauty by rendering food pleasing to the eye as well as the palate. Whether or not food bloggers (real or aspiring) manage this is a different kettle of fish. After all, these are not the best of times. Though depictions of food are almost as old as our species, **the 'imago cibum' also constitutes an immense catalogue of customs pertaining to humanity's many peoples and civilisations, and should be appreciated as such.**

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*"Only a naïve realism sees the photographic representation of reality as realistic"*

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Returning to social media, **how can we judge food through a screenshot?** Or through reviewers' photos on Tripadvisor and similar websites? Those, indeed, have undercut our restaurant guides. We know that **our brains assess food before we taste it**; that an appealing presentation whets our appetite, since we experience food with all our senses. We see faster than we taste or smell, so vision predisposes us to like or dislike food. How much are we conditioned by beguiling social media images? **Have you tried eating while blindfolded?** Spaghetti cooked *al dente* might appear overcooked, or a meatball, which seen directly would have revealed its magnificence, might seem insignificant and bland, when photographed. "Only a naïve realism sees the photographic representation of reality as realistic; if it appears objective, it is because the rules defining its social use conform to the social definition of objectivity", argued the sociologist **Pierre Bourdieu** (1930-2002), introducing the revolutionary concept of symbolic violence.

It is one thing to admire **Renato Guttuso's** 1974 painting *La Vucciria*, and quite

another to venture into the sumptuous abundance of fruit, vegetables, fish, colours and flavours of Palermo's famous Vucciria market itself, in all its variegation and hullabaloo. You might get your wallet stolen there, but soulfully. So why socialise through a smartphone? Why risk that your carbonara will congeal while you're photographing it? There are better ways to get ourselves drooling, eat things up with our eyes, devour with a glance - witness how comprehensively food has entered our idiomatic speech!

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*Some clouds have silver linings*

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Entr'acte. Some clouds have silver linings. **If this method is now de rigueur for introducing youngsters to nutrition, stimulating their interest** in how raw materials are transformed into food and in the idea of eating as one of life's pleasures, then we welcome any new avenues that foster these experiences. But **we should be careful about which hashtags we select**. And for the moment, let us concentrate on the fight against insect flour, a theme which these days should bother us more than the regrettable habit of coming to the table clutching a smartphone.

**Giovanni Picuti**





# Ginger: a spice of many virtues

by Giancarlo Burri

Padua Academician

## Beneficial properties and culinary versatility.

**T**oday's ample availability of the lanky, knuckled beige rhizome *Zingiber officinale* R. in greengrocers' shops represents the welcome culinary and phytotherapeutic resurgence of a spice which had, perhaps for too long, been marginalised.

Ancient eastern cultures attributed numerous medicinal properties to ginger, and thus used it in many herbal remedies, principally for **soothing the stomach and fighting inflammation**. Confucius never ended a meal without chewing a little piece of it; Pythagoras considered it a snake bite antidote; Pliny the Elder recommended it as a digestive.

Ginger (*zanjabil*) is even mentioned in the Qur'an as one of the plants delighting the blessed in the heavenly garden: "There are they watered with a cup whereof the mixture is of *zanjabil*" (76:17).

So says the celebrated Greek physician and botanist Pedanius Dioscorides in his *De materia medica*: "Ginger is a particular plant widely cultivated by Berbers in Arabia. They use it, still green, for various purposes, as we would rue, boiling it in their drinks before meals and mixing it into stewed food as a condiment. They also preserve the portions free of worms to trade, packed in earthenware jars".





### Past therapeutic suggestions

In her medical treatise *Physica*, **Hildegard von Bingen**, one of the best-known female luminaries of the Middle Ages and venerated as a saint by the Catholic church, describes over 175 aromatic herbs and spices and their curative uses for the body and soul. She recommends ginger to **cure constipation, blurry vision, stomach pain, discoloured skin, seasickness...** but, curiously, advises against it for the healthy, lest they lose vigour. The **Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum** (XII-XIII centuries) describes ginger's therapeutic uses in a manner summarising what is recognised by modern pharmacotherapy: "Ardent ginger valiantly opposes chills of the stomach, lungs and kidneys; it quenches thirst, invigorates, excites the brain, and in old age revives youthful, new love".

**Anti-inflammatory, antirheumatic, antioxidant, digestive and tonic:** ginger can help us to combat what are often called 'modern maladies' thanks to such active principles as gingerol, shogaols, paradol and zingerone. A study conducted in 2015 found that ginger could also have significant antidiabetic properties. Due to its capacity to make food more digestible, mask unpleasant odours and "awaken carnal appetites", mediaeval and Renaissance cuisine often centred around ginger, which became one of Europe's most widely traded and used spices alongside black pepper.

The 14<sup>th</sup>-century merchant **Francesco di Balduccio**, who wrote the manual *Libro di divisamenti di paesi e di misuri di mercatantie e d'altre cose bisognevoli di sapere*

a mercantanti (Book of Descriptions of Countries and of Measures Employed in Business and Other Matters that Merchants Must Know), also known as *Pratica della mercatura* (The Practice of Commerce) or *Merchants' Handbook*, recounts how, in his day, the array of culinary spices had grown substantially compared with previous years, and included an impressive six types of ginger (*gengivo*).

**Geoffrey Chaucer** (*The Canterbury Tales*, 1387-1400) writes rapturously: "There spryngen herbes, grete and smale, The licorys, and Cetewale, And many a clove Gylofref And notemuge, to putte in ale... Or for to leye in cofre" (There spring herbs great and small: the liquorice, and zedoary [a relative of ginger], and many a clove-gillyflower, and nutmeg to put in ale... or to lay in a coffer" (Tale of Sir Thopas, lines 70-75).

**In the rich Venetian spice market, there were three types of ginger:** the common *belledi* (from the Arabic *baladi*, 'rustic, local'), *colombino* (referring to the port of Columbum, also known as Quilon or Kollam, on the Malabar Coast), and *michino* (from Mecca). This last was the most delicate and recherché at the time.

In his *Libro de arte coquinaria* (*The Art of Cooking*, 1450), **Master Martino da Como** cites **zenzevero** in no less than 40 recipes, from *civiero* (civet, a game and onion stew) to the Catalan *mirrause* ('half-roasted' meat stewed in spiced sauce), from rooster offal timbale to *brodetto* fish stew, from Lenten blancmange to white cake.

In *I discorsi di M. Pietro Andrea Mattioli sanese, medico cesareo nelli sei libri di Pedacio Dioscoride Anazarbeo della materia medicinale* (*Discourses of the physician Master Pietro Andrea Mattioli of Siena on the six medical treatises of Pedanius Dioscorides of Anazarbus*, 1544), one of the

foremost Renaissance botanists describes ginger in detail, including its origin and structure and its use in antidotes, adding that: "È il gengevo convenevole nei cibi & costumasi di mangiare ne i condimenti" ("ginger is also suitable for food and is customarily eaten as a condiment").

*Today, the spice graces many preparations, both sweet and savoury*

Such eminent Renaissance authors as **Platina**, **Scappi** and **Messisbugo** curiously note among their recipes **many fruit or herbed cakes rendered more precious by ginger**.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the spice lost ground until it entirely disappeared from European tables; today, however, surveying the inspired output of many celebrated chefs, it seems that ginger's three distinctive notes - **freshness, tang and spice** - can admirably accompany any culinary creation, whether savoury or sweet.

**Ernesto Iaccarino** chooses ginger to enliven his **Mediterranean dumpling**, filled with vegetables, enrobed in a vegan demi-glace, alongside a bean and fresh ginger ice cream.

**Real, hand-made pici with datterini tomatoes, ginger and ventresca** (tuna belly): in this recipe by **Enrico Bartolini**, the long, rustic Tuscan noodles are topped with fresh tuna *ventresca* (cooked in oil at low temperature with lemon zest, lime, ginger, thyme and garlic), sliced *datterini* cherry tomatoes, ginger, spring onion and *fines herbes*.

**Francesco Mascheroni** arranges red Mazara prawns (marinated in extra-virgin olive oil, Maldon salt and passion fruit seeds) with chives and ginger inside a circle of carrot purée, covered with passion fruit jelly and accompanied by warm clarified butter.

In homage to his many travels, the noted pastry chef **Ernst Knam** prepares a short-crust base darkened with cocoa, surmounted by tropical fruit, pink peppercorns and ginger.

**Giancarlo Burri**