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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
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GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: Graphic elaboration of the work
"Madonna of the Book" (c. 1480-1481)
by Sandro Botticelli, Museo Poldi Pezzoli of Milan

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New York, like California, *bans the sale of foie gras*

by **Paolo Petroni**

President of the Accademia

*In Italy, as in most European countries,
its production is forbidden,
but unfortunately not its sale.*

This just in: from 2022, in all restaurants and shops in the city of New York, it will be illegal to serve or sell *foie gras*, **the fatty duck or goose liver obtained by unacceptable methods**. This decision, though not immediately implemented, was strongly championed by mayor Bill de Blasio and follows those adopted some time ago in California and Chicago. This provision will affect approximately a thousand restaurants, mostly French, and **many chefs are preparing for battle, abetted by local producers**. Let them do their worst: the fact remains that this food is produced by intolerable means.

This food is produced by intolerable means

Indeed, *foie gras* is produced **by force-feeding ducks and geese** in a process called *gavage*, while confining them to tiny cages which prevent them from spreading their wings. This causes an abnormally enlarged liver, up to 10 times larger than normal, through hepatic steatosis. *Foie gras* is currently restricted in all EU nations (except France, obviously) and in India, Israel, and Britain. These countries ban its production but hypocritically permit the sale of the imported product, thereby endorsing its presence in shops and on restaurant menus. These countries include Italy, though luckily most supermarket chains have removed *foie gras* from their shelves. **However, its import volume remains very high**. France is the largest producer and consumer of duck and goose *foie gras* (accounting for approximately 70%), of which 96% is derived from ducks and



the rest from geese. The EU has granted PDO status to the *foie gras* produced by traditional methods in south-eastern France. Hungary is the second largest producer worldwide. Other substantial producers are Bulgaria, Canada, the USA and, just for a change, China.

*Foie gras is not the only product we should
eliminate from our tables*

Foie gras, alas, is not the only product which we should eliminate from our tables. Recall the horrors associated with **battery hens, farmed salmon, shark fins, whale tongue, bluefin tuna, juvenile fish** such as whitebait and baby eels, and **migratory birds**.

I would like to remind Academicians of the crucial **article 5 of our Code of Ethics**: "*The Academy opposes any form of mistreatment of animals, be they farm-raised, bred, or hunted (including fish, crustaceans and molluscs) and adheres to the European Convention on the Protection of Farm Animals. The Academy prohibits the gastronomic use of endangered species as provided for in European and national legislation.*"

We can happily celebrate and honour our culinary prowess without foods obtained through methods which inflict suffering on animals, even if they are in France or other countries.



The history of the croissant *intertwines with legend*

by **Cesare Dami**

Academic for Montecatini Terme-Valdinievole

Viennese pastry chefs called their invention kipferl, whence the Italian cornetto.

Eugene of Savoy was born in Paris in 1663 and died in Vienna in 1736. He was a son of Eugene Maurice of Savoy Carignano, Count of Soissons, and Olimpia Mancini, a niece of Cardinal Mazarin. On his father's death, he was raised by his grandmother, Marie de Bourbon, Countess of Soissons, who intended for him to join the clergy. Instead he became one of the best military strategists of his time, whose victories and political acumen allowed the Habsburgs and Austria to increase their power in Italy and central and eastern Europe. He strenuously defended Vienna from the Turks, thereby gaining the title of Prince. **At this point, history blends with legend.**

The croissant is said to have been created to celebrate a clever feat of derring-do. The setting is Vienna in 1683, besieged by the Turks and fiercely resisting, holding fast within its walls. To undermine the Viennese defences, the Ottoman troops dug tunnels leading

into the city centre to seize it from within. However, they had not considered the bakers, who, hard at work in the small hours, noticed suspicious movements and raised the alarm.

To celebrate the victory over the Turks, a crescent-shaped sweet was invented in Vienna

After defeating the Turks and winning their freedom, it was time for the Viennese to celebrate. What better way to honour that victory than to invent a sweet shaped like a crescent, symbol of the Ottoman Empire?

Thus emerges the arcane secret of the croissant, which we would eat every morning if only we could.

On the same occasion, legend has it, the **escaping Turks left behind substantial supplies of coffee.** The beans burning in the fires of the retreat filled the coun-





tryside with their distinctive aroma, **unfamiliar to Jerzy Franciszek Kulczycki**, a Polish officer with Hungarian ancestry, who **was thereby inspired with a new idea: to open a café**. Why was this a novelty? Because there were still no cafés in Vienna, but 'thanks' to the Turks, Kulczycki opened the first, **initiating what, in the 19th century, became a fully fledged European fashion**. Such cafés probably also served the very first croissants.

Viennese pastry chefs called their invention *kipferl*, ancestor of the Italian *cornetto*, still far from the famous croissant.

The French christened it 'croissant': 'crescent', like the moon

The French name originates from an ill-fated marriage: that between the French dauphin, the future Louis XVI, and Marie Antoinette of Austria. It may be untrue that the French queen, learning of the protests leading to the revolution of 1789, replied "They have no bread? Let hem eat croissant"; but it is known that she could not give up her

favourite breakfast - so much so that when arriving from Austria she had brought the recipe for *kipferl* which **the pastry chefs of Versailles adored and adopted**, having first increased its dosage of butter.

Another perhaps less glamorous tradition attributes the pastry's migration from Austria to France to an Austrian official, August de Zong, who crossed the Alps and opened the Boulangerie

Viennoise in rue de Richelieu, in Paris. That small establishment specialised in Austrian cuisine, including *kipferl*.

Its name, however, could not remain German. So the French, inspired by its crescent shape, used their imagination and christened the delicious pastry *croissant*, which means 'crescent', recalling the moon which rapidly grows, just like leavening dough.

Cesare Dami





Traditional Christmas sweets

by **Morello Pecchioli**

Honorary Academician for Verona

A mouth-watering journey through Italy's Christmas recipes.

Is it sinfully gluttonous to enjoy Christmas sweets? Heaven forbid! The slice of *pandoro* with a snowy layer of confectioner's sugar, the slab of *panettone* studded with raisins and candied fruits, or any other sweet is a blessing sanctifying the year's most gorgeous festivity, the delicious *amen* which closes the circle of family affection. The Christ Child himself, in his manger, blessed the sweets and those who offered them: there, in front of the crib, stand the shepherd bearing a humble doughnut, the farmer with a basket of oven-fresh biscuits, the housewife proffering flatbread wrapped in a warm cloth. Italy is a formidable repository of 'holy' sweets, created in monastery kitchens between a *Personent hodie* and an *Adeste Fideles* or cooked under ash or over charcoal in modest country hearths. During Yuletide

even the poorest peasants indulged in the luxury of adding sugar to a water and flour dough, shaping it into symbolic shapes: the star, the infant, the hut, the angel and so forth. For example, this is how, long before the *pandoro* whose ancestor it is considered, the *nadalin* of Verona came into being: a five-pointed star of eggs, flour, water, lard (now replaced by butter), sugar and a drop of aniseed.

Italy abounds in sweets: soft or dry, leavened or not, with raisins or candied fruit

Christmas after Christmas, century after century, the Italian peninsula has pulled out with biscuits, *torroni*, *panforti*, *pan-*



dolci, pandori, pan di Toni, pan degli angeli ('angel bread'), cakes and doughnuts. Dry or soft, leavened or not, sugared or honeyed, with candied fruit or raisins, using wheat, maize or chestnut flour. In Lucania, the Carmelite nuns created **linguette**, large Christmas biscuits with cooked grape must and cocoa recalling the **m'stazzuoli** (*mostaccioli*) present throughout Basilicata. In Calabria, rich in Christmas sweets, **mustazzuoli** appear alongside **susumelle** (honey biscuits), **turdilli**, fried gnocchi immersed in honey, and the venerably ancient **pitta ccu passuli**: a cake with raisins, walnuts, almonds, honey and spices. The name derives from the Greek *pita*, 'flatbread'. Curiously, *pitta ccu passuli* has the same shape – a concentric series of roses – as the **rose cake** from Valeggio sul Mincio. It also possesses the same richness and caloric density as the **zrtuséin**, also known as **certosino** or **panspeziale**, created in a monastery oven in Bologna. Similarly to the Calabrian version, *pitta calabra*, it is a generous mass of honey, almonds, pine nuts, raisins and cinnamon. It contains no eggs, but makes up for it with an abundance of candied fruit and chocolate. Its recipe, historically reconstructed by the Academy, has been certified and notarised.

Legend and reality of the thousand-year-old panforte from Siena

Similar in terms of compactness, calorie density and ingredients is the thousand-year-old **panforte** from Siena. According to legend, a little boy had gone to the hut in Bethlehem to offer the Holy Infant all he had: bread and almonds. St Joseph blessed these gifts, which were transformed into the first *panforte*. In Siena it is said that panpepato ('peppered bread'), as it was formerly called, so revived the flagging Sieneese Ghibelline troops at the battle of Montaperti (1260) that they defeated a vastly superior Florentine Guelph army. The **pan pepatus** prepared with medicinal substances, pepper, various spices, almonds, oranges,



citrons and lemons was their 'doping'. The steeping citrus fruits lent their acidity to the concoction, which was renamed **panis fortis** ('strong bread'). This Christmas sweet from Siena underwent numerous tweaks over the centuries. The number of ingredients is crucial: 17, one for each of the city's feisty districts. In Sardinia, pabassinas, biscuits with almonds, raisins, cooked grape must, cinnamon, candied citrus peels and sugar glaze, vie for popularity with **suspiros** from Ozieri: scrumptious biscuits made of minced almonds with a crackly glaze. Say 'Sicily' and think of **cannoli**. For these, too, we must thank pious monastic hands. The Dominican nuns of Santa Caterina, in Palermo, are famous for their huge cannoli. Over Christmas, sweets burst forth in the entire Trinacria area like almond trees blooming in February: pastries and shortbreads, biscuits and cakes, fritters and marzipans. Traditional sweets include **cobaita** (honey, toasted almonds, sesame), **mustazzoli** (again!), **sfinci**, fritters with honey, innumerable sweets with dried figs, Christmas **cassata**, and **nucatili**, characteristic biscuits with honey and a filling of hazelnuts and walnuts. Particularly prized are those of Palermo, prepared since the 16th century by the nuns of Santa Elisabetta. The **sweet couscous** of Agrigento merits a standing ovation. First 'baptised' centuries ago by the nuns of the Great Abbey in the Spirito Santo monastery in Agrigento, it is prepared by them today following unchanged methods.

Not all Christmas sweets have religious roots. A few are originally secular, such as the **parrozzo** from Abruzzo, created nearly a century ago by the pastry chef Luigi D'Amico from Pescara using flour, starch, milk, sugar, eggs, minced almonds and orange peel. D'Amico performed the final brush-stroke which covered the **zuccotto** cake with piping-hot dark chocolate. It was a success. Musicians, writers, artists and poets fell in love with it. **Gabriele D'Annunzio dedicated a madrigal in Pescara dialect to D'Amico.**

A secular 'designer sweet' is the **anello di monaco** ('monk's ring') from Mantova, invented by a pastry chef with Swiss origins, Adolf Putscher, in the late 18th century, drawing inspiration from the German **kugelhupf**. This is a doughnut-shaped cake with a white glaze, reminiscent of a snow-covered volcanic crater.

A Christmas cake which takes the stage from the Alps to Punta Raisi in Sicily is **buccellato**, a large doughnut whose name originates from the Latin *bucella* ('morsel'). It has the same shape, with more or fewer ingredients and similar names, in Liguria, Tuscany ("Chi viene a Lucca e 'un mangia il buccellato è come se 'un ci fosse stato", says the proverb: "Coming to Lucca without eating a buccellato is like not coming to Lucca"), Calabria (where it's called **muccellato**) and Sicily (**cuccidatu**). With a central hole it is found in the Veneto, Lombardy, Friuli and Emilia regions bearing similarly



sounding names: **bussolàn, bossolà, buslàn, bisulàan**. A common feature of *buccellati* and *bussolàni* is their popular origin. **Born poor, they became wealthy over time** and with changing economic circumstances. Frequent ingredients are flour, yeast, sugar, raisins, eggs and butter. The Sicilian *cucciddatu* abounds in dried figs, pistachios, almonds, walnuts, spices, fruit, candied citrus fruits and coloured sprinkles.

The **putàna** from Vicenza does not have a Christmas-inspired name. A sweet of peasant origins whose name's etymology is unknown, it was once prepared for feasts in a terracotta receptacle, under the coals in the hearth, using stale bread, lard and a generous amount of grappa. It has become genteel in modern pastry shops, which substitute stale bread with cornmeal, and lard with butter. And the grappa? It is now a 'fragrance'. Also cooked on charcoal was the grilled **fugassin** from the environs of Verona, likewise containing lard, but now practically extinct, outcompeted by pandoro.

Rather similar in shape and ingredients to **panettone** is the Val d'Aosta region's **mecoulin**, a sweet bread originating in the Cogne valley.

Zelten, a classic Yule sweet from Trentino and Alto Adige, has a German name. Its recipe is traceable to the 18th century. *Zelten* derives from *selten* meaning 'rarely': it was formerly prepared but once a year, for Christmas. Its ingredients vary from valley to valley, but the basic ones

are the same: flour, yeast, eggs, sugar and butter. Variants may include almonds, pine nuts, walnuts, raisins or candied citrus fruits.

*'Sanction biscuits'
(biscotti sanzionisti) recall
difficult Christmases*

Let us conclude with a reminder of straitened Christmases: **biscotti sanzionisti** or 'sanction biscuits'. They emerged from the grim festivities of 1935, when raw

materials were lacking after the League of Nations decreed economic sanctions against Fascist Italy, leaving housewives without sugar or chocolate. The publication *La Cucina Italiana (Italian Cooking)* suggested the autarkic recipe for sanction biscuits: "You can make excellent, substantial, nutritious, flavour-some and crumbly biscuits of higher quality than English biscuits in your own homes. In a quarter-litre of very hot milk, melt 100g of butter and allow it to cool. Combine 400g of flour with 60g of potato starch and a sachet of Italian 'Delizia' brand starch. Mix these well and sift them twice, forming a hill-ock on the chopping board. Into this make a depression and pour in the cooled milk and a grated lemon zest. Knead these ingredients together into a compact and firm dough. Roll it out to a thickness of approximately 2 millimetres; make biscuit shapes with a cutting wheel and bake in a medium-hot oven. Remove them when they begin to brown slightly".

Given current circumstances, sanction biscuits may tempt us again. Merry Christmas, whether it be autarkic or abundant.

Morello Pecchioli





Food expiry dates

by **Andrea Vitale**

Honorary Academician for Milano Navigli

The difference between foods with a brief shelf life and foods which can be consumed with impunity having reached or passed their expiry dates.

Article 2 of Regulation (EC) 178/02 defines a food as any substance or product, processed, partially processed or unprocessed, intended or likely to be ingested by humans, also encompassing drinks, chewing gums, and any substance, including water, intentionally incorporated into foods during production, preparation or treatment. This definition, however broad, is crucial, as it is enshrined in the aforementioned European Regulation which sets food safety standards, definitions and general rules for all food handlers.

Food safety is a responsibility shared by all food handlers including those in all phases of food production and distribution. This regulation's fundamental principle is to **forbid sale of a food which may be considered risky**, meaning even potentially damaging to human health or unfit for human consumption. Final consumers of these foods are the intended beneficiaries of these legal protections, and must, at the time of purchase, be able to verify the nature of products and their ingredients, production chains and safety.





In light of the above, it is essential that foods avoid even potential risks when placed on the market, and retain this feature throughout their 'lifespan', which according to popular belief ends on their so-called 'expiry date.'

For expiry dates, the presence or absence of the phrase 'best before' makes all the difference

However, there are two types of expiry dates. In this regard, article 24 of Regulation (EC) 1169/11 specifies that an expiry date following the phrase **'use by'** is for foods whose high microbiological perishability could swiftly pose an immediate danger to human health. Such foods must be consumed by this date, and it is **unambiguously illegal** to sell, reclaim or distribute them **after their use-by date**. Different provisions govern products labelled **'best before'** or 'best before end', which, according to the aforementioned Regulation, indicate the Date of Minimum Durability (DMD) applicable to products which remain fit for consumption on or after such a date if stored safely and with intact packaging. These are generally packaged and storable goods, such as dried pasta, rice, couscous, packaged sweets or snacks, flours or cereals, ground coffee, oils, foods

preserved in oil, frozen foods, jams, bottled water, cured meats, or dehydrated powdered foods.

Obviously safety does not continue infinitely after the DMD, and good hygiene practices suggest **consuming foods within a time ranging from 1 to 12 months after the DMD**, only after tactile and visual examination of the product in question, which must be discarded in cases of suspicious odours, mould or insects.

The distinction between 'use by' and 'best before' is not, therefore, meaningless, but this is often sadly unknown to consumers, who may consequently discard and refrain from using products which have reached or recently passed their DMD, thereby **contributing to food waste**, a frequent and well-known problem of our era.

Major distributors, familiar with such matters, have tried to solve this problem by discounting foods on or approaching their expiry dates, but statistics reveal low purchase rates in such cases, ascribed by experts in the sector to two fundamental reasons: mass-market retailers (MMRs) often have return policies whereby expiring products return to producers or distributors who replace them with newer goods; and **consumers are not attracted by products which according to popular belief are at the end of their 'lifespans'** and therefore feel safer purchasing the same products with later expiry dates. Operators in the sector also often prefer

to avoid the problem lest they incur sanctions; hence they may fail to differentiate the two forms of 'expiry', preferring to withdraw all products upon their expiry dates.

Italian law (article 5 of Legislative Decree n. 283/62) **forbids and criminalises only the sale of foods unfit for human consumption**, a condition independent of 'expiry dates', which, as discussed above regarding DMDs, may occur long thereafter.

Consumers may be induced to discard products which are not in fact expired

It should be emphasised that through Legislative Decree n. 231/17, Italian law states that except in cases which are not proscribed as delineated above, anyone giving or selling foods past their expiry dates will be fined from 5000 to 40,000 Euros, without mentioning foods labelled with a DMD, but merely establishing another fine for incorrectly displayed or absent DMDs.

Concluding in less technical and juristic terms, and holding to the unwavering principle whereby **every regulation** - a fortiori those governing matters involving vastly varied expertise, cultural parameters and customs, such as the sphere of consumption - **must be as clear and easily comprehensible as possible** to avoid generating doubts or contending interpretations, **we hope that the above distinctions affecting expiry dates will be eliminated**, either by introducing 'unambiguous' expiry dates even for products with long shelf lives, or by mandating that the labels of such products should include not only DMDs but also the later dates of *maximum* durability, as required by the most updated food hygiene standards.

Such knowledge belongs to a corpus of studies and research which is constantly updated and codified by operators in the sector, and which can therefore be consulted with ease.

Andrea Vitale