

# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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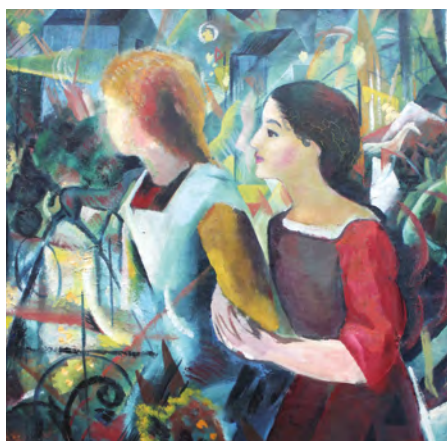


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# The will to start again *with renewed vigour*

by Paolo Petroni

*President of the Accademia*

*This state of affairs will end.  
Let us wait patiently.*

**D**ear Academicians, the issue of *Civiltà della Tavola* that you are now reading was made possible by the dedication and professional abilities of our editorial office, graphic specialists and Milan secretariat, who used 'smart working' - flexibility in time and space - to send the magazine, complete in every detail, to the printers and thence the postal and courier services. This has **contributed substantially to a sense of togetherness among Academicians**. The forthcoming issues will be progressively slimmer, alas, due to the nearly total absence of Academic activity, which has ground to a halt in Italy, China and many other parts of the world.

*This pandemic is having harsh  
and unexpected effects*

This pandemic is having harsh, far-reaching and unexpected effects on all group activity as well as **many types of businesses, with sometimes dire consequences**. We draw little comfort by remembering that the 14<sup>th</sup>-century the Black Death caused over 20 million casualties in Europe and that the ghastly upheaval was followed by the Renaissance. But it behoves us to recall that this famous Plague in 1630, known in Italy as 'Manzonian' because it was described in Manzoni's *The Betrothed*, had over a million victims just in northern Italy.



During the last century, between 1918 and 1920, 50 to 100 million people perished, including 600 thousand in Italy. More recently, in the post-war period there was the Asian 'flu' in 1957, with 30 thousand casualties in Italy, and the Hong Kong 'flu' in 1968 (also called 'space 'flu' in Italy), with 13 million infected people in Italy and 20,000 victims. And then there were SARS, Ebola, and swine and avian 'flu. Regarding avian 'flu' or 'bird 'flu', the WHO had predicted at least a million deaths, but notwithstanding experts' comparisons with Spanish 'flu, its victims numbered in the hundreds. Many of us are old enough to remember the events of '68-'69 to varying degrees, including many political and cultural upheavals, but without the media frenzy of today; yet over 20 thousand people died then. Life today is accorded more value than before, but still greater is the importance given to the press, television, the internet and politics. In 1957, when there were 30 thousand dead, the daily *La Stampa* ran the headlines "A mild influenza sows terror" and "They call it a national disaster, while overlooking 10,000 annual road fatalities".

*Many enthusiastic participants will flock  
to our convivial gatherings*

For the record, fatal road accidents have now fallen to barely over 3,000, while deaths for any reason are around 1,800 daily. This depressing mortuary panorama only confirms that this state of affairs will end. This is an era of vigorous interventions and strong safeguards for individuals. Let us wait patiently. **Restaurants await, chomping at the bit**; many enthusiasts will flock to our convivial gatherings. Our Delegates who strain at the brakes can't wait to take off again with renewed vigour. Long live the Italian Academy of Cuisine!





# I travel, therefore I eat

by Gigi Padovani

Honorary Academician for Torino Lingotto

*72% of tourists seek  
gastronomic  
experiences.*

In life we require diversions, distractions, "change of fashion, food, love and landscape". So said the greatest travel writer, the Briton **Bruce Chatwin**, who added: "We need them as the air we breathe". This is confirmed by recent research: "72% of leisure travellers want 'memorable' food experiences. Furthermore, 53% of travellers worldwide declare themselves wine and food tourists". These are the results of the interesting **Rapporto sul Turismo Enogastronomico Italiano** (Report on Italian Food and Wine Tourism) edited by **Roberta Garibaldi**, who teaches Tourism Management at the University of Bergamo. Collaborating with other international

experts, Garibaldi analysed both the gastro-tourism potential within Italy and the motives of those who enjoy visiting new countries. The collaborators presented 735 pages of data and analysis, first at the BIT travel exhibition in Milan and then at the Food Journalism Festival recently held in Turin.

*Our country attracts increasingly  
numerous gourmet visitors*

The study has identified our country's possible tourist magnets: "Excellent products, restaurants, agri-tourism,

Roberta Garibaldi







**food-related museums, wineries, breweries, oil producers, and Wine and Flavour Itineraries".** This gourmet heritage attracts increasingly numerous foodies. This was already noticed in 1854 by Giovanni Vialardi, cook to the House of Savoy in Turin, who described Italy thus in the preface to his *Trattato di cucina, pasticceria moderna, credenza e relativa confettureria (Treatise on cooking, modern pastries, pantries and associated preserves)*: "No other region in the world is so favoured by heaven for supremacy in the culinary arts: here there are excellent meats, quality poultry, flavoursome game, delectable fish both of salt and fresh water, delicious legumes, beautiful fruits, the finest oils, and cheeses and milk products of the highest calibre,



all of which are the foundations of good and healthy cooking". **What are the main reasons for travelling to Italy?**

According to the report, half of all travellers name **excellent food and wine** among their motives. Our nation is first in Europe for Geographical Indication (GI - 2019 data) products, with an impressive tally of 825, followed by France (687 specialities) and Spain (334). There is also another mark of quality, perhaps not yet known to 'gastro-nomads': Prodotti Agroalimentari Tradizionali (Traditional Agrifood Products), established by Italy's regional governments, numbering 5,155 (as of March 2019). Campania, with 531 PAT, has the most, followed by Tuscany (461) and Latium (428). Between *macarons* (as the French often call Michelin stars), chef's hats, forks and the temples awarded to the Italian Academy of Cuisine's 'Good Tables', **high-quality restaurants are truly abundant**. Quality and quantity, for there are 283 thousand active restaurant enterprises in Italy: another European first place. Our *agriturismi* or 'agri-tourism' locations (how many are 'genuine' and how many only present themselves as such is not, however, revealed by the study) are unique, because in Spain, France, Germany and Britain there are no similar enterprises capable of "offering multiple services, with the exception of lodgings, which characterise the 23 thousand ag-

ricultural tourism enterprises authorised as restaurant, lodging and tasting services".

*Italy boasts 117 food-related museums honouring local food specialities*

**Food is also culture.** There are 117 museums in Italy which honour typical foods of their territories, against 111 in France and 95 in Spain. **They are generally small exhibitions** - Emilia Romagna seems to have the best-equipped network of them - and it is interesting to note that **68% of Italian tourists wish to visit a national food and wine museum**. Furthermore, Italy, like France, **takes its place on the European podium with five food-related entries, both material and intangible**, included in UNESCO's World Heritage list: the Langhe, Roero and Monferrato wine countries; head-trained bush vine cultivation of Zibibbo grapes in Pantelleria; the art of the Neapolitan pizza masters; the Prosecco Hills of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene; and the Mediterranean Diet (transnational). In addition, Alba, Parma and Bergamo have each obtained the title of UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. Then there are the wine cellars, artisanal breweries, oil producers and



Wine and Flavour Itineraries yielding a total of 27.5 billion Euros (data from the Bank of Italy, 2018) spent by foreign tourists during their holidays in Italy. **Are we doing enough to sustain and increase this tourist influx?** Is Italy prepared? On what resources should we concentrate? Roberta Garibaldi answers by citing research data and the preferences that have emerged following internet-based studies, with occasionally surprising results: "Street foods in 'food trucks'" - she explains - "are among the most reported and researched experiences on the internet. Naturally they attract less demand than traditional food purveyors, such as restaurants, centuries-old cafés, the historic headquarters of agrifood companies, winery tours and cooking courses. Pizza remains our country's most popular speciality. But I firmly believe that following the UNESCO recognition of Neapolitan pizza artisans' work, it should become an asset on which to focus even more vigorously. Why not open a dedicated pizza museum or come up with diversified experiences? Wine cellars are always attractive, but the experiences on offer should always evolve towards greater specialisation and specificity". From this perspective, for example, the experience of visiting French wineries in Bourgogne, Bordeaux or Champagne is far more interesting than what our wineries can offer their wine-loving visitors.

*There is a dearth of useful and reliable travel-planning information online*

**Other things could also be improved, write the researchers in their report:** "Analysing the European context, direct competitors market their offerings with added value through concerted development and promotion initiatives on the national level. **In Italy, for example, information is missing from official websites and regional portals.** This is confirmed by direct analysis of foreign tour operators, which consider our food



and wine experiences to be good or excellent in quality, while noting difficulties in booking and gathering information about them".

In practical terms, precise information is lacking, and one gets lost attempting to find useful travel information online. This could be improved, given that gorgonzola and pizza remain the most searched Italian Geographical Indication products online between 2017 and 2019. There are also *arancini* rice balls, *osso-buco* marrow bone, and *parmigiano reggiano* and *pecorino romano* cheeses. Among wines, there are sparkling wines as well as the wines of Alto Adige and Chianti.

This research should therefore serve as a good starting point for taking action

to improve our image and the food and wine specialities on offer instead of allowing us to stagnate in the obvious and the folkloric.

The partners involved in the report include Unicredit, which has initiated the Made4Italy project: it "aims to promote a system integrating tourism and agriculture" with local programmes and 5 billion Euros to fund small and medium businesses. It is encouraging that the most active food and wine tourists are millennials, born in the new century: they are the 'super foodies' to whom restaurants, wineries and food artisans should cater. Yet not all of these businesses are, as yet, able to communicate with youngsters.

**Gigi Padovani**





# Lenten 'lean' eating

by Roberto Zottar  
Gorizia Delegate

## *The Lenten proscription of meat.*

**A** food-related practice found in several religions is abstinence or fasting as an act of morality or faith. **Food consumption and restriction can both have religious and communal significance**, bringing us closer to the divine and to fellow believers. Fasting prescriptions vary widely between religions, from Zoroastrianism which forbids fasting to Confucianism which requires abstinence from alcohol and specific foods before certain religious rituals, to Jainism which teaches that believers' principal purpose should be detachment from the passions, ideally culminating in voluntary starvation. In primitive religions, fasting is often a means of gaining the gods' favour, enhancing virility or preparing for sacred ceremonies.

*Many religions use fasting to acquire clarity of vision and mystical introspection*

Many religions use fasting to acquire clarity of vision and mystical introspection. **Judaism, Christianity and Islam have fixed fasting days**, generally associated with meat restriction or repentance of sins. **In Christianity, Lenten fasting is a prescription of the Church**; indeed,

the Gospel of Matthew says: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man". There is evidence of fasting in early Christianity, and from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, two days of fasting were prescribed in preparation for Easter. When Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire, the ceremonial aspect of its practice acquired more focus, and fasting and abstinence also represented a formal aspect of a more legalistic theology. Then, in the Early Middle Ages, the church extended its religious influence on European society, governing every phase of converts' daily life and **regulating** not only the passage of time but **food habits, through precepts whose contravention could be punished**.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, **Pope Leo I decreed the Ember Days** (*quatuor anni tempora*: 'four seasons of the year'), four series of three fasting days at roughly equidistant intervals over the year. **For each season**

**there were specific fasting days:** the Wednesday, Friday and Saturday following the first Sunday of Lent, Pentecost, and the Feast of the Cross on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September. The fourth fasting season ran from the 13<sup>th</sup> of December to Christmas, hence, perhaps, the Venetian proverb: "*chi vol goder la festa che digiuni la vigilia*" ('those who would enjoy the feast should fast on its eve'). In subsequent centuries, the church identified days of penance, and defined fasting and abstinence in terms of a classification of forbidden foods and beverages and the precise amount and nature of permitted foods.

*The arrival of foods from the New World sparked theological debates on permissibility*

The arrival of ingredients from the New World sparked theological debates on





## HERRING

their permissibility during periods of food restriction. There was much discussion about coffee, but certainly the food which caused the most theological disputes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was **chocolate**, which was then served hot, as a fortifying beverage, in a cup. We know that **restrictions often motivate the search for pleasure**. These lengthy theological diatribes were brilliantly resolved in 1669 by Cardinal Francesco Maria Brancaccio who cunningly reclassified chocolate as a drink, since "*liquidum non frangit jejunum*": liquids do not break one's fast! 'Lean eating' - in Italian, *mangiar di magro* - involved not only refraining from fats and sweets but also from meat, or, according to a popular theological simplification, **from the flesh of animals present aboard Noah's Ark**.

In this regard, for example, the cookbooks of the Dimesse nuns in Udine and of the countess Giuseppina Perusini Antonini di Rocca Bernarda both describe a "*Sòpe di spàrcs, cesarons, e croz, di vilie*", meaning a feast-eve soup of asparagus, peas and frogs. **Frogs in a feast-eve dish** demonstrate that they were not considered meat, but fish, and therefore appropriate for a 'lean' dish. Even **snails were considered 'lean'**: Pope Paul V, who craved them, is said to have declared when presented with a plate of snails: "*Estote pisces in aeternum!*" ('Be forever fish!'). Snails were thenceforth classified as fish!

**Beavers were allowed**, perhaps because they (also) inhabit water, and **all water birds, including scoters, coots, mallards and Eurasian wigeons, were considered 'lean'**, probably because they were not on the Ark and they eat fish and molluscs.

### 'Lean eating' in Friuli

'Lean eating', a tradition also deriving from ancient propitiatory pagan observances to promote fertility in fields and families, begins on *Feria Quarta Cinerum*, or **Ash Wednesday**, which, as decreed by the Council of Trent, marks the be-

Evidence of herring use is found even in the earliest printed books: herring, according to Olaus Magnus (1555), "*are caught in such abundance on the southern Swedish coasts in early autumn that, salted and stored in barrels, they could feed most of Europe. They are sold very cheaply, given the amount harvested*". Flanders fishermen preserved them and took them to Italy along the Rhine. After being salted, wrote Bartolomeo Scappi in 1570, "*they are smoked long enough to turn golden. The good ones are shiny and full of eggs or milk, these being the best, as their backs are thicker. Commoners prefer females, because their eggs are more filling*". Contemporary cooking uses both salted and smoked herring, silvery or golden in colour. Legends tell of times of great poverty in Friuli when polenta was 'dressed' only by being rubbed with a solitary smoked herring hanging above the centre of the table for the entire family.

Herring is traditionally rehydrated overnight in milk before consumption. Some then eat it simply with raw onion; others pan-fry it with oil and garlic or onion; others cook it under ash in the fireplace, wrapped in wax paper with oil, finely sliced onion and pepper. There is also herring omelette (*frataia 'ta la renga*) and *sevolada cu lis rênghis*, meaning 'onion stew with herring': a sort of savoury *savôr* (compote) served warm. In old Friuli there was a ritual of going to inns to eat *renghe e rati*: a curious and almost forgotten combination. The *rati*, also called *ramolaccio*, is *Raphanus sativus var niger*, or black radish: a black-skinned tuber with an intense and spicy flavour which, whether cooked or raw and grated, pleasantly complements smoked herring. Similar in flavour to radish, it is much heavier and spicier, so that an abrasive, irascible, irritable person is described in Friulian as *jessi un rati*: 'being a black radish'!



ginning of the period for 'abstaining from meat'. In Friuli this is the **season of renga, meaning 'herring' in Friulian**, as in the proverb "*Pe Cinise si mangje la renga*": 'on Ash [Wednesday] we eat herrings'. **Among the permitted foods**, in addition to **bigoli pasta with anchovy sauce and fresh onions**, some typical recipes included a **soup of rûz fasûi**, meaning

**only beans**, which in other periods would be seasoned with *pestât* (whipped lard, aromatic herbs and salt); **bacalà** (in this case meaning **stockfish**); and **sardines with radicchio**. In Friuli there is still the widespread habit of going to traditional inns to eat herrings for Ash Wednesday.

**Roberto Zottar**





# In Singapore, culinary traditions *step up to the plate*

by **Maurizia Debiaggi**

Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia Academician

*Garum, colatura di alici  
and fish sauce  
compared.*

**S**omething which has always impressed me about Singapore, apart from the skyline, is its strikingly unique food scene: **this city-state is a food hub!**

Here we can discover **dishes from all over Asia as well as illustrious representatives of Italian and other Western cuisines.** And what variety of flavours, with contrasts between sweet, salty and spicy - and then there are the seafood-based sauces which add *umami* flavour to any food. My favourites are rice noodles and pad thai, whose **pleasant savoury taste produced by the typical fish sauce immediately reminds me of the quintessentially Italian colatura di alici** (literally 'anchovy drippings'). The question comes natu-

rally: might these two sauces have something in common beyond fish and flavour? Yes: **both are indeed produced through fermentation with salt.**

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*Garum, the ancient Romans' beloved condiment*

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**Fish sauce is widespread in Asian cuisines:** it is called *nuoc mam* in Vietnam, *nam pla* in Thailand, *ngan bya yay* in Myanmar, *budu* in Malaysia and various other names in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia and the Philippines. Despite images of crab or squid on some fish sauce packaging, its simplest form consists of two ingredients: fish, usually anchovies,



Cetara

and salt, fermented for months in huge vats, generally with a ratio of three parts fish to one part salt.

Moving to Europe, we find **a similar recipe dating from the times of the ancient Greeks and Romans**. Apicius, in his 1<sup>st</sup>-century *De re coquinaria*, describes the use of *garum*, which he also called *liquamen*: a fish sauce so common at the time that he felt no need to describe its ingredients or preparation. **Apicius employed it for flavouring and cooking meats, fish, vegetables and omelettes and even for frying!** Precise information about *garum* is provided by Quintus Gargilius Martialis: his 3<sup>rd</sup>-century recipe describes “fatty fish, such as sardines and mackerels”, which, combined with fish innards, were layered in large vats with aromatic herbs and salt. Even Pliny the Elder had written two centuries earlier in his *Naturalis Historia*: “another prized liquid, known as *garon*, is made from fish intestines and other parts which would normally be discarded, mashed with salt into a putrefying mush. This *garum* was once made using a fish which **the Greeks called *garos***”. I find this description of *liquamen* hardly inviting, since it refers to organic putrefaction rather than fermentation, which would be more appropriate. Pliny’s text revealed that *garum*, though derived from fish waste, was particularly prized, its name harkening to the Greeks’ use of a small fish called *garos* several centuries earlier. Its culinary use by the Greeks was also described in the *Geoponica* compiled under the emperor Constantine VII and various literary sources including texts of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Plato. **There are even traces of *garum* in the Middle East: a 2000-year-old *garum* factory has been found on the outskirts of Ashkelon, in Israel.**

The Romans considered it so precious that it was an important exchange item in the Mediterranean, as Pliny writes, again in the *Naturalis Historia*: “Almost no other liquid, other than unguents, is beginning to be expensive even for noble families”. Reaching even farther back in time, **we discover that excellent**



***garum* was produced in Carthage and Numidia, in present-day Algeria, and introduced to Italy during the Punic Wars.**

We can be even more meticulous by noting that ***siqqu*, a fish-based sauce, was already used in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC in Mesopotamia**, where fish (and sometimes grasshoppers, known in Asia as ‘land shrimp’!) were generously salted and fermented into a sauce similar to the Roman *garum*. It is not a stretch to imagine that *garum* or *siqqu* then spread to Egypt and neighbouring areas until it reached Carthage and Rome.

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*Colatura di alici now has its main production centre in Cetara*

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**The current heir to all this in Italy is *colatura di alici***, whose principal production centre is Cetara. Its recipe is as described by Pliny except that **only the ordinarily edible fish parts are used**, without the head and innards, and the resulting liquid is filtered through linen cloths.

**Mark Kunlansky presents an interest-**

**ing hypothesis** in his book *Salt: A World History*, namely that **fish sauce and *garum* originated independently and the Asian fish sauce originated in Vietnam**, where it indeed remains the commonest condiment, used for dipping spring rolls, flavouring rice or noodles or marinating grilled meats. The Vietnamese were apparently inspired by Chinese soya sauce, which in antiquity was produced by fermenting soya beans and fish. Nevertheless, **we cannot exclude the possibility that *garum* arrived in Asia by the Silk Road**: indeed, Roman provinces traded with such distant regions as India and China, transporting wheat, oil, slaves, textiles, gems and many other goods including *garum*. Both hypotheses are fascinating, considering that in Singapore today one can find *colatura di alici* on a plate of spaghetti (hand-crafted with bronze dies, of course!) representing Italian haute cuisine, as well as delicious Thai rice noodles exuding the characteristic fish sauce aroma: cuisines, recipes and flavours so geographically distant from each other, but with one common ingredient.

**Maurizia Debiaggi**