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EDITOR IN CHIEF
PAOLO PETRONI

COPY EDITOR
SILVIA DE LORENZO

LAYOUT
SIMONA MONGIÙ

TRANSLATOR
ANTONIA FRASER FUJINAGA

THIS ISSUE INCLUDES ARTICLES BY
ROBERTO DOTTAPELLI,
ANNA LANZANI,
MORELLO PECCHIOLI,
PAOLO PETRONI.

PHOTO CREDITS
ADOBE STOCK.



PUBLISHER
ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
VIA NAPO TORRIANI 31 - 20124 MILANO
TEL. 02 66987018 - FAX 02 66987008
PRESIDENTE@ACCADEMIA1953.IT
SEGRETERIA@ACCADEMIA1953.IT
REDAZIONE@ACCADEMIA1953.IT
WWW.ACCADEMIA1953.IT



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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 La Maddalena (The Magdalen, ca. 1525), by Bernardino Luini, National Gallery of Art, Washington

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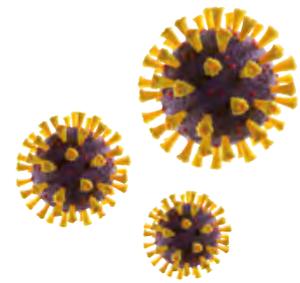


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Everything changes; nothing changes



Map colours proliferate, as do the institutions that allegedly protect us, but real hope rests in the swift availability of abundant vaccines.

In Lampedusa's classic novel *Il Gattopardo (The Leopard)*, Tancredi, the prince of Salina's favourite nephew, declares: **"for everything to stay the same, everything must change"**. This paradoxical statement comes to mind observing recent efforts to combat the pandemic in Italy. **The much-maligned legislative instrument known as DPCM** (Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers), branded by eminent constitutionalists and learned jurists as unconstitutional (since an administrative decree undergoes no scrutiny regarding the limitation of personal freedoms), **is alive and well as in days of yore** (but with the latest Easter provision, the legal decree was opportunely adopted). The frequently criticised Harlequinesque regional colour coding has held out and even expanded: **from three colours** (yellow, orange, red) **it now boasts five**, having acquired the glorious white (congratulations to Sardinia, where Academicians will be able to celebrate in restaurants again) and the lugubrious darker, or 'fortified', orange, denoting that hairdressers and barbers will be shuttered as vectors of contagion. Lest things be too simple, regional colours are supplemented by municipal and provincial colours (thereby breathing new life into the recently abolished provinces).

The colour-coded map idea is the main paradigm in Italy

The colour-coded map system is the foremost paradigm in Italy (it occasionally crops up in other areas, including California and Canada): we are cleverer than anyone else, and, as everybody knows, we have the best virologists, immunologists and epidemiologists, attracting the world's envy. But we also have the Ministry of Health, the National Health Institute (ISS), the Technical-Scientific Committee (CTS), the Civil Protection Department, the Special Commissioner, and of course the COVID Control Room. To these should be added the Italian Medicines Agency (AIFA), a tentacle of the European Medicines Agency (EMA), both lumbering rubber-stamp extruders. We're safe as houses, right? Everyone is watching over us, and we shouldn't worry **now that even the army has taken the field**.

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia



Meanwhile we're still forbidden to travel between regions, go out after 10 PM or visit friends and relatives; restaurants and bars (where open) close at 6 PM, and schools have limited opening hours, delighting pupils and parents.

Different chef, same menu - or a worse one

These are the frequently invoked 'discontinuity' and the martial 'change of pace': terms beloved of politicians and newspapers. In other words, there's a new chef, but the menu has remained the same or has worsened. **Meanwhile, the virus menacingly advances**, with all its variants and the feared 'third wave'. Might all these measures be somewhat ineffective? Perhaps the virus is colour-blind and can't distinguish red from yellow. Luckily, better news emanates from nations where vaccination has reached an advanced stage. Life is resuming in some countries. **This provides grounds for concrete optimism: the prospect that several vaccines, from various companies, will become available and we will be able to administer them.** That would be a real solution; the rest is bare survival (for those who manage it): the State can't afford economic stimulus payments and there's no point beating about that bush. Restaurateurs, hoteliers, travel agencies and tour operators will breathe again once the virus is under control. **We're close - maybe a few months away:** one final push to end the vaccination chaos, and we'll be in the clear. Images of reopened venues in Moscow, the USA and Cagliari can give us hope.



St Joseph and fried beignets

by Roberto Dottarelli

Roma Castelli Academician

A thin pastry shell with a soft and hearty filling represents the pater familias, who protects and nourishes his people.

a white dove flew up from Joseph's rod. Joseph protested that he was an elderly widower with children, and that his **hosting a maiden until her marriage would be universally viewed as questionable**. But the priests were adamant, and Joseph had to take Mary to his home and raise her until her fifteenth year,

when it would become appropriate for her to marry one of her peers. Yet before or during the year prescribed for the maiden's marriage, **the Archangel Gabriel informed Mary of her conception**. Learning of her pregnancy, Joseph intended to dismiss her quietly to avoid exposing her to public disgrace, but

Saint Joseph, the Prince and Patron of the Universal Church, was a man of silence (and obedience). The official Gospels barely speak of him, and **the scarce information available derives mostly from the Apocrypha**. These tell us that, at the age of three, Mary's parents took her to the temple to receive the education customary for girls, who were expected to leave the temple before they became fertile, to avoid contaminating it. However, unlike her age-mates, twelve-year-old Mary did not wish to leave, partially because her aged parents had meanwhile died.

A white dove flew up from Joseph's staff

The priests therefore gathered all noble or high-born, unmarried, widowed or aged men of the tribe of Judah. Each was told to bring his rod of family authority and let the priests keep it overnight in the temple. The following day,



instead obeyed the Angel of the Lord who came to him in a dream instructing him to marry Mary, explaining that she would bear a child generated by the Holy Spirit to redeem the people from their sins (Matthew 1:20-21).

From Mary's guardian, therefore, Joseph became her husband, assuming responsibility for her future progeny. **And it is precisely this assumption of responsibility**, alongside his profession of *téktôn* (more 'master builder' than carpenter), or *faber* in Latin, **which defines Joseph's character. He was a man who faced up to life and 'built' his future and that of those entrusted to him.**

Those entrusting themselves to his protection included the thirty artisans who founded the **Venerable Archconfraternity of St Joseph of the Carpenters** in Rome in **1540**, under **Pope Paul III**. At the turn of the next century, this was unified with the *Università dei Falegnami* (Carpenters' University), an agglomeration of trades and guilds with St Joseph as their patron.

In the early 17th century, the Archconfraternity was authorised to build a larger church than that whose use they had been granted, for the celebrations in honour of St Joseph. This church was completed in 1663.

The Archconfraternity celebrated a double feast on the 19th of March

Around this church, known as the church of the 'Carpenters at the Forum', and in the Monti neighbourhood nearby, the Archconfraternity celebrated a double feast on the 19th of March: **for the saint, and for the category of artisans which he protected.** Characteristic of this popular festival **were fritters and cream beignets (*bignè*) prepared by 'fryers' (*friggitori*)** in gigantic pans prepared the previous evening. The 19th of March falls during Lent, so a typical Carnival food, namely a fried sweet, and what's more, enriched by a cream consisting of egg, milk, sugar and



flour, certainly isn't suitable for a period of nutritional abstinence. The date of 19 March, instituted by **Pope Gregory XV** in 1621, is purely conventional, since usually saints' days correspond with their death dates, and nothing is known of Joseph's. The date may have been chosen for its proximity to the Annunciation (25 March) and the sacred events of the Easter period. However, this places the feast of St Joseph near the vernal equinox, which annually separates the period of nature's ritual death from that of its rebirth, traditionally marked with celebrations and propitiatory rites promoting fertility and agricultural purification.

Despite not having generated Jesus, Joseph protected and nourished him, fulfilling the classical conception of the *pater familias*: in symbolic depictions, if the *mater* is the person who provides milk, the *pater* is the one who provides bread. It is known that the foods associated with celebrations express those festivities' most authentic meaning. It must therefore be no coincidence that in Sicily, especially in Palermo, artistically decorated 'St Joseph's breads' are baked. However, in the case of the Roman carpenters, bread distribution during the festivities would probably have had a less cheering effect, hindering the preparation of the symbolic foods among the revellers themselves. Frying is prevalent in street food, and this pragmatic preference must have determined the choice to prepare fritters and *bignè* (beignets);

but it was probably not the only reason. It is justifiable, then, to ask why cream-filled *bignè* remained associated with that feast over the years.

The association of that festival with cream-filled bignè survived through the years

Regarding beignets, it is interesting to point out that **choux pastry seems to have arisen at the Medici court**, in the mid-16th century, thanks to the pastry chef **Penterelli**, while **the recipe for pastry cream (*crème pâtissière*) was first published in 1691** by the cook **François Massialot**. So perhaps the original *bignè* were filled with a slightly different cream. Aside from technical considerations, in semiotic terms one cannot overlook the symbolism of *bignè*: a thin pastry shell with a soft and very hearty filling. So if St Joseph represents the *pater familias* who nourishes and protects his people, cross-pollination with pagan traditions and seasonal propitiatory festivities must have **favoured the association between celebrations honouring St Joseph and that confoundedly delicious pastry, a stand-in for the egg** which, initially a symbol of nature's rebirth in spring, came to **symbolise humanity's rebirth in Christ** after the advent of Christianity.

Roberto Dottarelli



Balsamic vinegar - the real thing

by **Morello Pecchioli**

Honorary Academician for Verona

*A territory's bottled soul:
wine, must, people,
history, climate,
environment.*

Which is the firstborn: the Traditional Balsamic Vinegar of Modena, or the Traditional Balsamic Vinegar from Reggio Emilia? Reggio scholars assert, naturally, that theirs arose first: in 1046, 975 years ago. The Benedictine monk **Donizo** of Canossa cites it in his poetic biography *Vita Mathildis*,

wherein the Holy Roman Emperor **Henry III** implores **Boniface of Tuscany** to give him some of "that prized vinegar said to be prepared perfectly there". 'There' refers to the castle of Canossa, whose ruins are still visible in the province of Reggio Emilia. "That", retort the people of Modena, "doesn't count: the Canossa vinegar may have been 'perfect', but its description lacks the magic word: 'balsamic'". A word which, in 1747, we find in the *Register of grape harvests and wine sales concerning the two secret cellars in the ducal palace in Modena*, bearing the entry "a tub of white wine taken from the secret cellar on the orders of **Antonio Lancellotti** to refill the balsamic vinegar". So, officially, the Modena vinegar was born first.

Both agree on one thing: that the pedigrees of both Traditional Balsamic Vinegars, from Modena and Reggio Emilia,

are rooted in the Roman era. Before taking a trip to ancient Rome, let us define real balsamic vinegar.

Only three vinegars can call themselves 'balsamic'

Three - and only three - vinegars can call themselves 'balsamic': **PDO Traditional Balsamic Vinegar of Modena (TBVM)**, **PDO Traditional Balsamic Vinegar of Reggio Emilia (TBVRE)** and **PGI Balsamic Vinegar of Modena (BVM)**. Any other vinegar whose label boasts the title 'balsamic' is counterfeit, false as a tree-Euro banknote. These three vinegars are guaranteed by the EU, which has granted the two TBVs the PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) seal, awarding PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) status to the BVM. **PDO is the top designation; TBV represents the soul of a territory: wine, must, history, climate, environment and people.** PGI also guarantees the geographical origin and high quality of the product, but BVM has a briefer production process.

The PDO TBVs of Modena and Reggio Emilia are like identical twins, so similar that even their mother would have trouble telling them apart. All phases of the product's 'gestation - production, transformation and elaboration - take place within one province. The grapes are more or less the same (prevalently Lambrusco); the cooking times of the must are similar; the precious woods used for the barrels are the same; the **ageing time in barrel sets of descending size is the same: at least 12 years.** But those





traditional vinegar of Modena and Reggio centuries earlier.

In the 18th century, balsamic vinegar was well-established and coveted

History, which demands documents and sources, cannot subsist on ifs and might. And history, manifesting the same patience as the PDO balsamic vinegar which ages for so many years in wooden barrels, did eventually come up with a source: that order by Antonio Lancellotti to take a tub of white wine from the duke of Modena's secret cellar in 1747 to refill the balsamic vinegar.

Its fame spread from court to court. **In 1764, the Chancellor of the Russian Empire, Count Mikhail Vorontsov, was on a diplomatic mission in Modena and implored Francesco III d'Este, Duke of Modena and Reggio, to send some bottles of balsamic vinegar to Catherine the Great.** Ten years later, a letter accompanied the gift of four phials from one **Antonio Bocolari**, a restorer at the Este court, to the Milanese **Antonio Tocchi**: "I dare present Your Lordship with four small flasks of my Balsamic Vinegar".

By the late 18th century, balsamic vinegar was already well-known and coveted. **At the court of Ercole III d'Este, barrels and kegs of "balsamic vinegar in the style of Modena" were jealously guarded in the leftmost turret of the ducal palace.** Regrettably, such painstaking care could not protect the balsamic vinegar from the ravenous attentions of **Napoleon, who raided the ducal vinegar stores in 1796, while also filching the artistic masterpieces of Guercino, the Carraccis, Reni and Giambologna.** Still unsatisfied, France even tried to prevent the EU from conferring PGI status on Modena Balsamic Vinegar in 2009. Fortunately, they lost this battle at least. Learning of the PGI vinegar's retail profit of 970 million Euros (2017 data) must have been a bitter pill for France to swallow - not to mention the immense value of the PDO Traditionals.

Morello Pecchioli

who want the best of the best, the Mona Lisa smile, wait even 25 years.

What of PGI BVM? It is also an **excellent Italian product**, recognised by the EU since 2009. Of the three balsamic vinegars, it is **the best-known and most sold** worldwide, because unlike the aristocratic PDOs, it's easy on the purse: it is a democratic vinegar, **accessible to any gourmet** wishing to enjoy this superb Emilian condiment without having to take out a loan. **It is markedly different from the PDOs**, admittedly, but it is nevertheless **born of the same territory**, the same people and the same history: that of the ancient Este duchies. Its regulations are less restrictive regarding types of grape and ingredients that can be added to the must (wine vinegar, caramel), methods, and ageing times. PGI is not decanted from barrel to barrel, nor is it progressively refilled. It can be sold after 60 days of ageing, but to ascend to a higher level of refinement, it must sit pretty in its barrel for at least three years.

Is there a link between the ancient Roman sapa and the balsamic vinegar of Modena and Reggio?

And now, the million-Euro question: is there a link between **the ancient Roman sapa, cooked must used as a sauce**, and the balsamic vinegar of Modena and Reggio? *Sapa* derives from the Latin *sāpere*, 'to possess taste'. **Ovid, Pliny and Columella** mention it. **Apicius used defrutum - a cooked must less concentrated than sapa - on duck with prunes and roast lampreys**, dishes which would send the Luculli and Trimalchios of the Eternal City into paroxysms of delight. More so than *sapa*, **defrutum would seem to be related to balsamic vinegar.** It is known that

the Romans already distinguished between wine vinegar and *sapa*. **Martial** seasoned his epigrams with salt and vinegar, a condiment that he particularly loved: "Without its vinegary bite / the self-same food no longer pleases me".

Sapa held out for centuries. Pellegrino Artusi (late 19th century) explains: "*Sapa*, which is none other than grape syrup, is versatile in the kitchen, having a special taste that suits various dishes". He advocates dipping *gnocco fritto* (fried dough) or polenta into it. **Gabriele D'Annunzio** suggests mixing it with wine to invigorate those working in the fields: "Add *sapa* to the reapers' wine".

Illustrious 16th-century gastronomers differentiated the condiments derived from wine. **Ludovico Ariosto**, testifying to his simple tastes, **distinguished vinegar from cooked must**: "I'd rather have a turnip cooked at home / and skewered on a stick, and peeled, and sprinkled / with vinegar and *sapa*, than a thrush, / partridge, or boar in someone else's house". **Bartolomeo Scappi**, master of the culinary arts and secret cook to two popes, Pius IV and V, writes in his *Opera dell'arte del cucinare (Art of Cooking)* that vinegar, cooked must and verjuice are essential for preparing excellent dishes.

He makes a fundamental distinction: the verjuice of which he speaks (alas, nearly forgotten today) is not vinegar, and, though made with cooked grape must, it is not balsamic, nor can it be even minimally related to it. Firstly, the grapes for preparing it must be picked very unripe; secondly, its flavour is highly acidic, not sweet-and-sour; and finally, the technique for producing it is far less complex. The third element is cooked must. Might it have been balsamic vinegar? Perhaps, but Scappi, like the aforementioned Donizetti, omits the magic word 'balsamico', which could have dated the birth of the



Gardel's ravioli

by Anna Lanzani

Buenos Aires Academician

Italian cuisine in Argentinean tango.

When a skinny, limping twelve-year old stranger slipped through the window of the apartment where **Carlos Gardel** was staying, on the 18th floor of the Beaux Arts Building on 44th Street in New York, and handed him an invitation for lunch with his mother, the great singer, already famous worldwide, was unflappable and readily accepted. The stripling was **Astor Piazzolla**, who could barely play at the time. **What convinced Gardel was the menu: ravioli.**

The history of Argentine tango is rich in similar anecdotes, many featuring Italian food. **Unsurprising, since almost all the greats of tango's época de oro** ('golden

age') **were children of Italians**, raised in those marvellous melting pots that were the immigrant neighbourhoods in early 20th-century Buenos Aires, **where Genoese bakers made pizza** in *focaccia* pans (onion pizza still bears the name *fugazza/fugazzetta* there), and where **cutlets**, served with a tomato and mozzarella topping, **were dubbed *milanesa napoletana*** (Neapolitan Milanese).

Tango became part of the nightlife in the La Boca quarter, whose residents were 90% Italian

In the late 19th century, it was in the La Boca neighbourhood, whose population was 90% Italian, that tango became part of the nightlife. From the corner cafés of Suarez and Necochea Streets, it overcame the 'obscene', clandestine circum-

stances of its gestation and was *adecentado*, 'cleaned up', **rising to become the city's most iconic dance.**

Anibal Troilo, known as *Pichuco*, born of a mother from Agnone (Molise) and a father from Archi (Abruzzo), **praised the trattorie in La Boca**, now distorted by massive tourism, **where there was always an Italian playing a tango:** "... *la cantina/ llora siempre que te evoca/ cuando toca, piano, piano, / su acordeón el italiano...*" ('the cellar bar/cries, recalling you,/whenever the Italian softly plays his acordeon'). "A monster of intuition" and "able to distil the purest, richest essence of tango", according to Piazzolla, Troilo played, ate (macaroni and meatballs) and drank "to excess". **The Genoese were among the first arrivals in La Boca in the beginning of what was later defined as a tide of immigration. They influenced food terminology**, populating it with such words as *tuco*





La Boca neighbourhood, Buenos Aires

grants from various regions, in the Rio de la Plata, which **fought in Uruguay under Garibaldi from 1843**: far earlier, that is, than the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy.

Immigrants' words, food and habits made their way into tango lyrics

Traces of what could be termed an 'Italian melting pot' can also be found, obviously, in tango lyrics, such as "A contramano" from 1928, which warns of a certain Calabrian whose jealousy might induce him to clobber his rival with "el garrote de los tallarines": the rolling pin for *taglierini*. And **tallarines, now meaning, generically, any long pasta**, also appear in the beautiful words of "Chiquilín de Bachín", by Piazzolla, whose mother Assunta, from Massa Sassorosso in Garfagnana, was famous for her **tallarines con salsa fileto** (with finely sliced tomato).

Tango also invites us to reflect broadly on such concepts as authenticity, tradition and the origins of popular customs. In the *tangós* (gathering places) along the Rio de la Plata, the music associated with coronations in Congo (*candombe*) was played. When this rhythm was contaminated by the *milonga* (Angolan, then Brazilian and typical of the gauchos) and the Cuban *habanera* (derived, according to some scholars, from the Venetian *frotola*), what we call 'tango' had its beginnings. It became fully-fledged tango after blending with European dances (polka, mazurka and waltz) and with melodic Italian songs: this was the 20th-century manifestation of tango. **Only with its success during the época de oro, in the 1940s, were tango forms crystallised**, to the point where traditionalists excoriated Piazzolla as 'el asesino' ('the murderer') of tango for his innovative interpretations. Yet it was thanks to him that the genre enjoyed a new wave of worldwide success - to him, and those ravioli that his mother cooked in New York on a spring morning in 1934.

Anna Lanzani

(from *tocco*, the name of a Genoese sauce), now extending to any pasta sauce condiments; *pascualina* (from *pasqualina*, 'Easter cake'), now often indicating any savoury tart; and **tallarín** (from *taglierini*), synonymous, by now, with **espaguetis, 'spaghetti'**. Buenos Aires was expanding rapidly at the time, thanks mostly to immigration: from 200,000 inhabitants in 1870 it grew to 1.5 million in 1914. The resulting social ferment is evident in the lyrics of several songs.

The Genoese were followed by the Piedmontese, Venetians and Lombards: and they brought **polenta**, considered a nourishing and energetic food. *Pulenta*, in the slang of Buenos Aires, became **synonymous with strength and extraordinary energy**: this is the word's meaning in the tango "Bien Pulenta" by **D'Arienzo and Varela**, other greats of tango's *época de oro*. Another

piece made famous by D'Arienzo mentions **grappa**, which fuelled the nightlife of Buenos Aires alongside whisky, gin and fernet: the song is "Corrientes y Esmeralda", which describes the habits of nocturnal people and celebrates the Avenida Corrientes, the theatre avenue of Buenos Aires which Carlos Gardel considered "better than Broadway". The extraordinary social circumstances of the Rio de la Plata saw immigrants representing various regions - and dialects - living a few blocks apart, sharing streets, entertainment venues and workplaces. While Italian identity was being painstakingly cemented in the 'motherland', **in South American cities, immigrants precociously forged something akin to a national identity**, if not through language, then **through gesture and food**. Recall, for instance, the **'Italian Legion'**, consisting of immi-

