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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
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E DA LUIGI BERTETT, DINO BUZZATI TRAVERSO,
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EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: graphic elaboration of Two children with bread and apples during a break (ca. 1870); Luigi Bechi, private collection

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Let's talk about our Academy

Though the pandemic has deprived us of conviviality, the Academy has held firm, thanks to our Delegates' and Academicians' competence and passion.

Since chaos reigns on all fronts (vaccinations, reopening restaurants, schools and more), and since the vaunted change of pace is nowhere to be seen, for this month let us refrain from discussing COVID. **We cannot, however, ignore the farce inflicted on Sardinia**, which within three weeks went from white (and universally envied last month) to red: from fully open to fully closed in the blink of an eye. Furthermore, we made a mistake last month: in a frenzy of enthusiasm, we defined the EMA (the European Medicines Agency) as a "lumbering rubber-stamp extruder". Alas, the cowardly Pilatism informing the AstraZeneca vaccine decision shows that it won't even extrude: those rubber stamps are gathering dust.

Vigorous protests from restaurateurs left to their own devices

Finally, we applaud the vigorous protests from restaurateurs, shamefully left to their own devices. It remains bewildering that such a strategically crucial sector for Italy, which, with tourism, accounts (accounted) for 13% of GDP, has been thus ignored, battered, deluded, mocked, scapegoated and subjected to scandalous charity. **The image of the young restauratrice published here is worth a thousand words.** The strong protests of people at the end of their tethers (aside from the occasional intrusion) have apparently been effective: change may be afoot, as we await the summer heat which, alongside the vaccines, should destroy the virus.

Seven online meetings with all Delegates within Italy and worldwide

Nevertheless, **let us now talk about our own Academy.** Recent days have seen 7 online meetings with all Delegates in Italy and worldwide. Since we cannot meet in person, **the virtual**

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia



symposium was warmly appreciated by all, because they could thereby exchange opinions, experiences and advice. The freshly appointed among them could meet their new colleagues, see them and speak to them. **Thanks to these Delegates' abnegation, diligence, capacity and passion**, our Academy has held out. In 2019, there were 307 Delegations and Legations; in 2020 there were 310, while today there are 312! **In 2020, which suffered the full force of the pandemic, an impressive 382 new Academicians** joined, and in this year's first three months we have already welcomed 92. Academicians number 7,295 in total: only 41 fewer members than last year.

We feel the Academy within us, uniting us, creating a sense of friendship

Another sign of vitality is the large number of prizes requested by the Delegations: 32 Dino Villani prizes, 44 Massimo Alberini prizes, 26 Giovanni Nuvoletti prizes, 36 Good Cooking certificates. The Academy is something that we feel within us, unifying us and creating a sense of friendship. This is further proven by the many diplomas that I have sent marking members' 25, 35 or 50 years within our Association. Those who leave don't do it lightly. Only debilitating age and ill-health occasionally, and always painfully, compel someone to leave their friends in their Delegations. Never would members depart because the pandemic temporarily hinders our gatherings round the table. Our magazine, *Civiltà della Tavola*; our newsletter; our food series' publications; our website; and **our brand-new App**, which I again warmly recommend you download, **as over 11,000 people already have** - these keep the bonds alive between the Academy's world and its members. Now all that remains is to start living again. Let's do our best.



A perfectly preserved *thermopolium Pompeii*

by June di Schino

Honorary Rome Academician

The recent extraordinary discovery of an eating establishment with food traces, cooking vessels and pantry supplies.

The EU-supported Great Pompeii Project, which aims to protect and enhance the archaeological area, has made a surprising discovery in Pompeii: the most complete and best-preserved *thermopolium* (an etymologically Greek term favoured by archaeologists, while *popina* would have been used in ordinary Roman speech) ever found *in situ*. So long after the devastating, tragic eruption of Vesuvius buried the city and its living inhabitants under a 6-metre pyroclastic deposit, among the multitude of everyday objects to remain **impressively preserved are flasks, ollae and paterae, alongside unexpected, and equally precious, food traces in cooking and storage vessels:** the remains of goats, pigs, ducks and other

fowl which were cooked notwithstanding contrary regulations.

Less wealthy Pompeians consumed hot food and drinks outdoors

It was, indeed, a habit for less wealthy Pompeians to consume warm food and drinks outdoors in so-called *popinae*, a custom **reminiscent of modern street food.**

The *thermopolium* is situated where the Lane of the Silver Wedding meets the Lane of the Balconies; it is no coincidence that the small square nearby contains a fountain, a cistern and a piezometric tower to distribute water. The perfectly preserved eatery has enormous artistic value. The spectacular decorations on the counter depict various vivaciously coloured objects against an intense ochre-yellow background. The front bears an image of a beautiful Nereid riding a seahorse, while the shorter side appears to display the shop sign. The *anforae* found in front of the counter seem to reflect the painted image. Other splendid still-life scenes with animal images have also been discovered, and bone fragments from the same animals were found in the containers from the counter. The most striking include **images of two mallards hanging head-down, ready to be cooked**, of a fine cockerel; and of a little dog on a leash. **The frescoes' high quality is even more noteworthy considering that these were eateries frequented by the poor.** Also interesting was the discovery of



human bones - partially disarranged by looters - and **various pantry supplies**: nine *anforae* for wine, *garum* and olive oil, a bronze *patera*, two flasks, two cooking pots, and a plain earthenware *olla* for serving food. **These vessels are messengers of civility, using the eloquent language of ancient culinary knowledge**, a sort of glowing common thread running through the evolution of *Homo sapiens* (*sapiens*, among other things, for our sense of 'taste' and ability to savour things): the domestication of fire, dating to the Lower Palaeolithic, inaugurated the most important revolution in the history of humanity, marking the transition from *res naturalis* to *res culturalis*, the natural to the cultural domain, as expressed by **Claude Lévi-Strauss** in his dichotomy between raw and cooked, nature and culture.

Similarly expressive of continuity is the Roman patricians' impressive *strumentarium domesticum* (array of household tools), drawn and described by **Carlo Ceci** using the terminology found in 419 specimens, many identical to those of our Third Millennium.

*Massimo Osanna,
the archaeologist who oversaw
Pompeii's marvellous rebirth*

Following the deplorable degradation and abandonment of Pompeii, one of the world's most important archaeological sites, this discovery **marks a marvellous rebirth**, due first and foremost to its *deus ex machina*, **Massimo Osanna**. Previously director of Pompeii's archaeological park, he was recently appointed Director-General of National Museums. Combining strategic intelligence, passion and vast competence - qualities that could be summarised in the motto 'Real Revolution and its Rewards' - he has had the foresight to create an exceptional interdisciplinary team. During the lockdown, archaeologists, architects, engineers, vulcanologists, geologists, anthropologists, archaeobotanists and archaeozoologists



have worked feverishly to offer the world context for the material culture of 21 centuries ago: an effort rewarded *inter alia* by the amazing discovery of a unique, intact ceremonial chariot, decorated with roundels depicting erotic scenes, perhaps an offering to a bride or the goddess Ceres. Thanks to such discoveries we can gain a deeper understanding of the knowledge, techniques and forms involved in material culture. This was already demonstrated in 2004 by the exhibition "Minoans and Mycenaeans: the flavours of their time" at the National Archaeological Museum in Naples, organised by the Greek Ministry of Culture. Thanks to the manifold investigation techniques used, this exhibition provided invaluable information about food thousands of years ago, as I could prove through the mouth-watering recipes recovered: grass pea (*cicerchia*) soup served in a three-legged vessel, flatbreads, resin-infused wine and barley beer. However, the Academy had already set up a large display in Verona in 1989, entitled "L'arcano convivio: 4000 anni a tavola" ("Banquet of Mysteries: 4000 years at the table"), curated by yours truly, with such exalted collaborators as **Eugenia Salza Prina Ricotti, Edda Bresciani and Claudio Saporetti**.

The importance of innovative sources and new analytic techniques

To reconstruct the ancient world's food habits, innovative data sources were used, such as archaeozoological and archaeobotanical studies and new analytic techniques allowing the detection of trace metals (e.g. zinc and strontium) in bone as markers of animal and vegetable matter consumed by ancient populations. These previous experiences allow me once more to champion the cultural value and irresistible attraction of a 'tourism of taste', providing evocative 'flavours from history', for Pompeii today, certain of a positive reception by visitors.

Time is generously on our side, permitting us to reconstruct that marvellous historical and gastronomic mosaic in all its nuances, testifying to a cultural continuity wherein the tiles are interchangeable and may overlap: observed synchronously, they reveal snapshots of a civilisation's essence; viewed sequentially, they show us the many phases of human development.

June di Schino



Aglione: the 'kisser's garlic'

by Marilena Moretti Badolato
Perugia Academician

*Cultivated between
the provinces of Arezzo,
Siena e Perugia,
it has gigantic bulbs
and spares the breath
of those who eat it.*

Aglione (literally 'large garlic'), *Allium ampeloprasum* var. *holmense* (also known as elephant garlic, Big Tex garlic or Tahiti garlic), is a gentle giant. **Its bulbs are far larger than those of common garlic, and its aroma far more delicate.** It is considered a cultigen (a plant cultivated by humans and unknown in the wild), and some credit the Etruscans with first domesticating a wild bulbaceous plant similar to *aglione*, namely *porrancio* or *porrandello*, a mutated version of wild leek. The varieties *holmense* and *porrum*, leek, probably derived from a spontaneous mutation of *porrancio*, as demonstrated by genomic bio-molecular studies (Brewster, 1994; Engeland, 1991; Rabinowitch and Brew-

ster, 1989; Stephens, 2003). The name *allium* may derive from the terms used by the Celts and Persians to indicate edible bulbs; another hypothesis traces it to the Greek word *àglis*, meaning 'clove' or 'segment'. Instead, the term *ampeloprasum* comes from the Greek *ampelos*, meaning 'vine', and *prasios* meaning 'leek', resulting in 'vine leek', a description attributable to its habitat (Tremori and Santiccioli, 2016). It is clear that *aglione* was historically cultivated in Tuscany thanks to an important figure: **Peter Leopold of Habsburg-Lorraine**, the enlightened Grand-Duke of Tuscany who drained the malarial marsh of the Chiana valley (Valdichiana), rendering its reclaimed soil rich and fertile, and built





appropriate housing for its new inhabitants. Indeed, the *leopoldina* named after him is a historic type of farmhouse in Valdichiana: solid, with clean lines, it symbolised a new relationship between agricultural labour and human exigencies.

Aglione has gigantic, almost spherical bulbs with a colour verging on ivory

Aglione has gigantic bulbs, is white, verging on ivory, and is almost spherical; its bulbs, **slightly flattened at the poles**, can reach 600-800 grammes in weight, with far **larger segments** than those of ordinary garlic, **weighing up to 70-80 g** and containing approximately six separate bulbils. Its fragrance and characteristically delicate aroma are due to the **absence of allicin**, a substance which instead produces the strong taste and smell of garlic when its bulbils are cut or crushed. **A typical crop of the historic Chiana valley and part of the Orcia valley**, a particularly productive territory for growing vegetables extending between the provinces Arezzo, Siena and Perugia, *aglione* provides health benefits and is truly delicious. Its fragrance is piquant yet delicate, because, as explained above, it contains none of the allicin responsible for garlic's strong, pungent odour which can so easily cling

to the hands; its **sweetish** taste makes it a valid substitute for classic garlic in any recipe, from pasta sauces to meat or fish dishes, but also on bruschetta; and it is easily digestible, a feature not to be overlooked by sufferers from acid reflux: indeed, one can hardly discern its aroma after the meal is finished. Some time ago, *The Guardian* published an article saying: "*Giant variety known as aglione - kissing garlic - is milder, odourless, and easy to digest... the giant odourless garlic was prevalent in Tuscany but has not been mass-produced for four decades*", enumerating its main characteristics alongside its long neglect and recent rediscovery and resurgence thanks to farmers, local organisations and consortia in the Valdichiana.

Umbria and Tuscany recently included it in their Regional Biodiversity Registries

Aglione has now been entered by the Regions of Umbria (on 16 December 2020) and Tuscany (this February) into their respective Regional Biodiversity Registries, and likewise **into the National Biodiversity Registry**, since it has long been cultivated in certain townships within the valley of the Clanis, now Chiana: the great navigable river of Etruria, land of the Etruscans. These two regions have joined forces to obtain

European PDO/PGI recognition for the *Aglione* of the Valdichiana, the historic area once defined by Leonardo da Vinci as "*Lago di Val di Chiana*" (Chiana Valley Lake). **Classic *aglione* recipes in Tuscany include *pici all'aglione*; in Umbria, it can be served with *ciriole* from Terni, *stringozzi* from Spoleto and *umbricelli*:** all elongated hand-made pastas made of water, flour and salt, widespread throughout central Italy and enjoyed with seasonings based on the area's prized extra-virgin olive oil: our rural 'poor dishes', just as the ingredients in their condiments were 'poor'. The farm wives of old often had to 'invent' in order to produce good meals, but with *pici* they attained culinary heights using two ingredients: *briciole*, meaning 'crumbs': stale bread, crumbled and sautéed with a drop of olive oil; and *aglione*. *Aglione* sauce was considered a 'richer' preparation because it contained tomato, and, more recently and in some areas, chillies.

Many years ago, aglione was ash-baked and eaten on bread

We should recall that many years ago, *aglione* was **grown only for family use** and its main purpose was not to flavour other foods (there often weren't any), but to accompany bread: it was baked over embers covered in ash, and then **eaten with a slice of bread**. 'Big-head' garlic, as it is also known, **remains a niche crop** in Italy's national agricultural scheme. Inspiration for exploiting it better could come from the USA, more specifically Oregon, where the **Elephant Garlic Festival**, held each August since 1997, offers the chance to sample distinctive, local and whimsical dishes. Some American scholars believe that 'elephant garlic' was introduced by American troops returning from Italy after the Second World War. An intriguing detail: one of its peculiarities is that **it produces no bad breath in those who eat it**, being therefore dubbed 'the kisser's garlic' or 'lovers' garlic'!

Marilena Moretti Badolato



The *cuoncio cuoncio* method for living well

by Gigi Padovani

Honorary Academician for Torino Lingotto

*The Mediterranean Diet:
a view from
its birthplace in Cilento.*

"Health and long life are not only promised us by Heaven by the very fact of our birth, but are further procured through our own diligence; and nothing is more useful to humanity, in this respect, than to know which rules to follow regarding nourishment". Thus wrote the papal physician **Castore Durante** in his treatise *Il tesoro della sanità* (*A Treasury of Health*), published in Rome in 1586. It is hardly news that our food affects our health: these days, the fastest-selling cookbooks are those containing nutritional advice (vegan fare, fruit and vegetable smoothies, longevity diets etc),

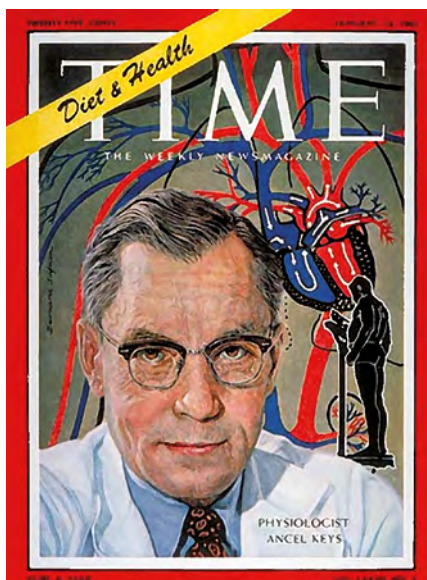
their directives often at loggerheads with gastronomic pleasure. Yet, though even in the Renaissance there were texts prescribing healthy eating, **for centuries human gluttony has been accompanied by a profound 'nutritional illiteracy'**, leading to coronary heart disease, obesity, diabetes and various maladies caused by unsuitable diets.

*The turning point occurred
in the mid-20th century*

The turning point occurred in the mid-20th century, and is **represented by a book** which was not well received in Italy when it came out: ***Eat Well and Stay Well*, written by the married couple Ancel and Margaret Keys**. It was published in the USA in 1957, while **its first edition translated into Italian by a small publisher, Piccin of Padova, dates from 1962**. Nobody heeded it at the time. It was the era when Italians were beginning to discover processed foods, margarine was favoured over olive oil, and massive Sunday lunches were standard; meat was finally available to all, and the *fettina al burro* (thinly sliced meat pan-fried in butter) was invading everyday diets. Meanwhile, in the small village of Pioppi, two hours by car south of Naples on the coast of Campania, that American scientist couple - physiologist husband and chemist wife - were studying the advantages of the local populations' lifestyle, and especially longevity, the low incidence of cardio-vascular diseases and the absence of obesity. **How did they reach those conclu-**



sions? Ancel Keys began dedicating himself to dietary issues when, in 1941, the Pentagon tasked him with developing military rations during the Second World War: **the famous 'K-rations'**. **Arriving in Naples** ten years later, he was impressed by the lifestyle in Campania: he noted that heart disease was exceedingly rare among hospitalised Italians there. **From then on, he studied the local population's health**, performing blood tests on vast samples of Neapolitans, thereby verifying to his considerable surprise that their blood cholesterol was far lower than that of Americans. Why was this? From that moment, Ancel and Margaret decided to dig deeper; **moving to Pioppi**, they established an analytic laboratory and **extended their investigations with what is known as the Seven Countries Study, with a sample of approximately twelve thousand people in seven countries: USA, Finland, the Netherlands, Italy, Yugoslavia** (areas now in Croatia and Serbia), and



Japan. The study showed that excessive dietary fat, common in northern or more developed countries, endangers health, while the Mediterranean diet, centred almost exclusively on olive oil and plant-based foods, was a veritable panacea.

Only after several years were those studies accorded the attention they deserved

Only after several years were those studies accorded the attention they deserved.

The celebration of the Mediterranean Diet, with its famous pyramid, was only sanctioned many years later, when on the 16th of November 2010 **UNESCO proclaimed it part of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity**, expressing its motivation through these well-known words: "The Mediterranean diet is characterised by a nutritional model that has remained constant over time and space, consisting mainly of olive oil, cereals, fresh or dried fruit and vegetables, a moderate amount of fish, dairy and meat, and many condiments and spices, all accompanied by wine or infusions, always respecting beliefs of each community". Communities in four countries joined forces to support the UNESCO candidature: Soria in Spain, Koroni in Greece, Cilento in Italy and Chefchaouen in Morocco, with Portugal, Croatia and Cyprus joining in 2013.

Cilento is therefore, without the shadow of a doubt, the cradle of the Mediterranean Diet. This is a territory with a hundred-odd kilometres of beautiful coastline and approximately 90 thousand inhabitants, on land protected by a National Park spanning 180 thousand hectares: the largest in Italy. It has a noteworthy characteristic: **it has the highest centenarian population in Italy** - about 300. Its average life expectancy is 92 years for women (data: ISTAT [National Institute of Statistics], 2019) and 85 for men, as opposed to 85 and 80, respectively, nationwide. Such figures and the history of the Keys pair (Ancel lived 101 years, Margaret 97), still not well-known, have inspired a newly published book

CIAMBOTTA

Ingredients: 300 g of aubergines, 200 g of red and yellow peppers, 250 g of potatoes, 200 g of tomatoes, half a glass of extra-virgin olive oil, 50 g of caciocotta goat's cheese, 2 cloves of garlic, 1 onion, fresh chillies to taste, origano, salt.

Preparation: after carefully washing the vegetables, peel the potatoes and aubergines and de-seed the peppers. Cut them all coarsely. Using a large pan, fry the garlic and onion in the oil until golden; then add the minced fresh chillies. Add the vegetables and let them cook, stirring frequently to avoid burning. When they are nearly cooked through and well-mixed, add the tomatoes and cook for another ten minutes or so, stirring occasionally. Before turning off the heat, add a pinch of origano and the caciocotta cilentano. Allow to rest for about half an hour before serving.



(From *Il metodo Cilento. I cinque segreti dei centenari*)

by the gastronome **Luciano Pignataro** and the oncologist **Giancarlo Vecchio**, a member of the Lincean Academy and university lecturer (he recently passed away, shortly after finishing the volume). Both are from Cilento, and the book's title is inviting: ***The Cilento Method: The five secrets of centenarians*** (Mondadori, 18 Euros).

Unable to relocate en masse to the happy lands between Paestum and Sapri, we can mine Pignataro and Vecchio's tome for its **wealth of practical advice for "living Cilento-style" following the "cuoncio cuoncio method"**. This dialectal phrase means 'calmly', and not just 'slowly': a challenge to the frantic lifestyle, to neutralise agitation and stress. It rests on **five pillars**: nutrition; regular physical activity; adequate rest; conviviality and a sense of belonging to a community; and spirituality.

The thirty recipes of Cilento's centenarians

The authors define their homeland as an "island of long life and good life", with an enthusiasm which may seem excessive; but their advice and gastronomic suggestions are assuredly interesting, including the thirty "centenarians' recipes", often surprisingly named: **maracuciata** (a purée based on the *maracuoccio* of Camerota, an ancient legume once considered a 'poor food' and now the

subject of a Slow Food Presidium); **ciam-botta** (see recipe); **pollastro tinto** ('died cockerel') **from Trentinara** (named after an inland village); and **scauratielli**, sweet fritters associated with Christmas festivities.

We can make surprising discoveries through Professor Vecchio's very clear scientific records. For example, did you know that pasta cooked *al dente*, typical of the food culture in Cilento and Campania as a whole, is more digestible than overcooked pasta, which has a higher glycaemic index? And that to reap red wine's famed anti-oxidant benefits caused by the resveratrol in grape skins, one would have to drink four litres of it per day?

What we end up learning is that **the "Cilento at the table" method consists of few rules born of common sense**, including awareness of 'how we eat', which is not secondary to 'what we eat'. The COVID-19 pandemic has deprived us of the pleasure of conviviality, and we all hope to find it again with friends and relatives, around the Sunday family lunch table or in a good traditional restaurant, where the food aims to nourish, not to impress. Not only that: the authors invite us to take all the time we need when preparing food. "*Cuoncio cuoncio*", calmly, we can cook splendid food, which we could perhaps walk off with a pleasant stroll (hopefully without filling the nightmarish travel justification forms required during the lockdown).

Gigi Padovani



Marie-Antoine Carême

the Bonapartes' favourite cook

by Giuseppe Benelli
Lunigiana Academician

The French emperor's entire family benefited from the refined and sumptuous creations wrought by the "Palladio of Cuisine".

Marie-Antoine **Carême**, known as "the king of cooks and cook of kings", was born in Paris in 1784 to a very poor family, and died in 1833, a few months before turning fifty. While still a child, Antonin, as he was also known, began working as an errand boy in a cheap tavern called Fricassée de Lapin, in exchange for room and board. Aged twelve, he was apprenticed to the

famous *pâtissier* **Sylvain Bailly**, using his evening leisure time in the Royal (now National) Library not only to read books on cooking but also to copy splendid architectural drawings in the *Cabinet des estampes* (Print Room). This passion would later be crucial to his **construction of cakes shaped like temples or pyramids**, composed **entirely of sugar and marzipan** and used as table centrepieces. He soon started working independently, creating pieces for the diplomat and gourmand **Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord**, but also other members of Parisian high society including the Bonaparte family. Antonin cooked for **Caroline Bonaparte** and her husband **Joachim Murat** in the Élysée palace, bought in March 1805 with **Napoleon's** money. In that splendid residence, the emperor's younger sister wanted her table to be the most elegant and desirable in France. For a dinner in honour of Napoleon, **she ordered a seven-tiered pièce montée (centrepiece) from Carême**. The first three tiers, with 'Italian-style' wafer bases, were decorated with crunchy biscuits and studded with fruit pralines and miniature *madeleines* with two hel-



Marie-Antoine Carême

mets at the sides. This was the first time that Carême prepared his ‘French helmet’: life-sized and wrought of confectioner’s paste (*pâte d’office*) made of flour, sugar and egg white, glazed with a thin coat of jam. **Its crest was of gilded spun sugar; its feathers, of white spun sugar; its laurel crown of green biscuit dough.** Its resounding success caused the *pièce* to be exhibited several times during the course of the evening.

For the actor Talma, Napoleon had the helmet from Iphigénie recreated in sweet dough

For a meal in honour of the celebrated actor **François-Joseph Talma**, the then-lover of the uninhibited **Pauline Bonaparte** and greatly popular both for his talent and for his innovative acting style, Napoleon sought the skills of Carême. Not only did Talma delight the sovereign by discussing acting, sceneries and directorial choices, but his habit of announcing Napoleon’s conquests from the stage, even by interrupting performances, linked him intimately to the Napoleonic saga. In homage to Talma, the emperor commissioned Carême to make a confectionery reproduction of the archaic helmet he had worn in Racine’s *Iphigénie*: **a pink spun-sugar crest and the titles of the most famous performances on show in Paris engraved in gold-coloured sugar** on each of the green biscuit leaves constituting the laurel crown. Carême’s foremost triumph occurred when **Caroline Bonaparte**’s majordomo had him prepare an exorbitant number of both hot and cold appetisers, eight large main dishes and eight *pièces montées* for a party in the Château de Neuilly. Murat engaged Carême even when Napoleon sent him to Düsseldorf, where he was to spend six weeks visiting conquered lands beyond the Rhine. Such was the success of his cuisine that, before returning to Paris, **Murat** wrote to his wife that he had Carême work alongside his chef **Laguipierre**, whom even Carême recognised as “the most extraordinary

cook of our times”. In 1804, Napoleon sent Talleyrand, as his Foreign Minister, to acquire the extensive estate of the Château de Valençay as a venue for receptions in honour of foreign dignitaries. “Diplomacy passes through the gastric juices. **When negotiations go awry, one must organise a meal**”. Talleyrand took Carême with him and asked him to create a new menu every day without repeating a single dish. In 1806, for the dinner offered at the Hôtel de Ville to celebrate Napoleon following his stunning victories at Jena and Auerstädt, Carême worked with Laguipierre to decorate fourteen trays with six hams, six galantines, two boars’ heads, and six veal sirloins in gelatine. **Sixty-six entrées**, including aspic decorated with cock’s combs and kidneys, French partridge salmis, *foie gras*, poultry mayonnaise, sole fillet salad, salmon steaks and eel galantine with Montpellier butter: a symphony of shapes and colours, echoing the golden artefacts displayed on the gilded console tables.

“Sight is the first sense to register pleasure or displeasure”

Marie-Antonin **Carême** revolutionised **not only the methods of cooking and preparing pastry, but also kitchen and serving habits**, “because sight is the first sense to register pleasure or displeasure”. **We owe him the chef’s uniform and the famous white, cylindrical chef’s hat**, known as “*toque blanche*”. In fact it already existed, but Antonin stiffened the inside to keep it rigid and high on the head, allowing air circulation. Food service was also revolutionised: the French style, with one large central dish whence diners took their share, gave way to the Russian, with individual plated portions. Carême was likewise entrusted with the menu for Napoleon’s wedding with Archduchess **Marie Louise of Austria**, apart from creating the cake, of course. To honour the new empress, who had a sweet tooth, Carême studied Viennese pastry, superior in some ways to its



French counterpart, eventually discovering that the secret lay in the ingredients’ temperature: they must be tepid. In any case, **dinner for the empress normally included four entrées**, a potage as required by the new standards imposed by Carême, **two meat or fish dishes, and of course dessert and cheese**, indispensable at the end of any French meal; all irrigated by wine, preferably sweet, but also Champagne and Bordeaux; coffee, by then all the rage in Paris and Vienna; liqueurs, digestives, and finally bonbons, because life is never sweet enough. As late as 1813, as France awaited the Napoleonic empire’s inevitable collapse, Carême accepted the task of preparing a banquet for **Joseph Bonaparte**, Napoleon’s elder brother and king of Spain, in the château at Mortefontaine. Despite the impending end of the Spanish venture, Carême presented ‘Talloncourt’, as Talleyrand scornfully called Napoleon’s brother, with a *gênoise*: a delicate lemon-perfumed sponge cake glazed with apricot jam and garnished with pistachios and unrefined sugar. Carême wrote *L’Art de la cuisine française* (*The Art of French Cookery*) in five ponderous volumes, and other books including *Le Pâtissier pittoresque* (*Picturesque Pastry*), whose illustrations justified his epithet “The Palladio of Cuisine”.

Giuseppe Benelli