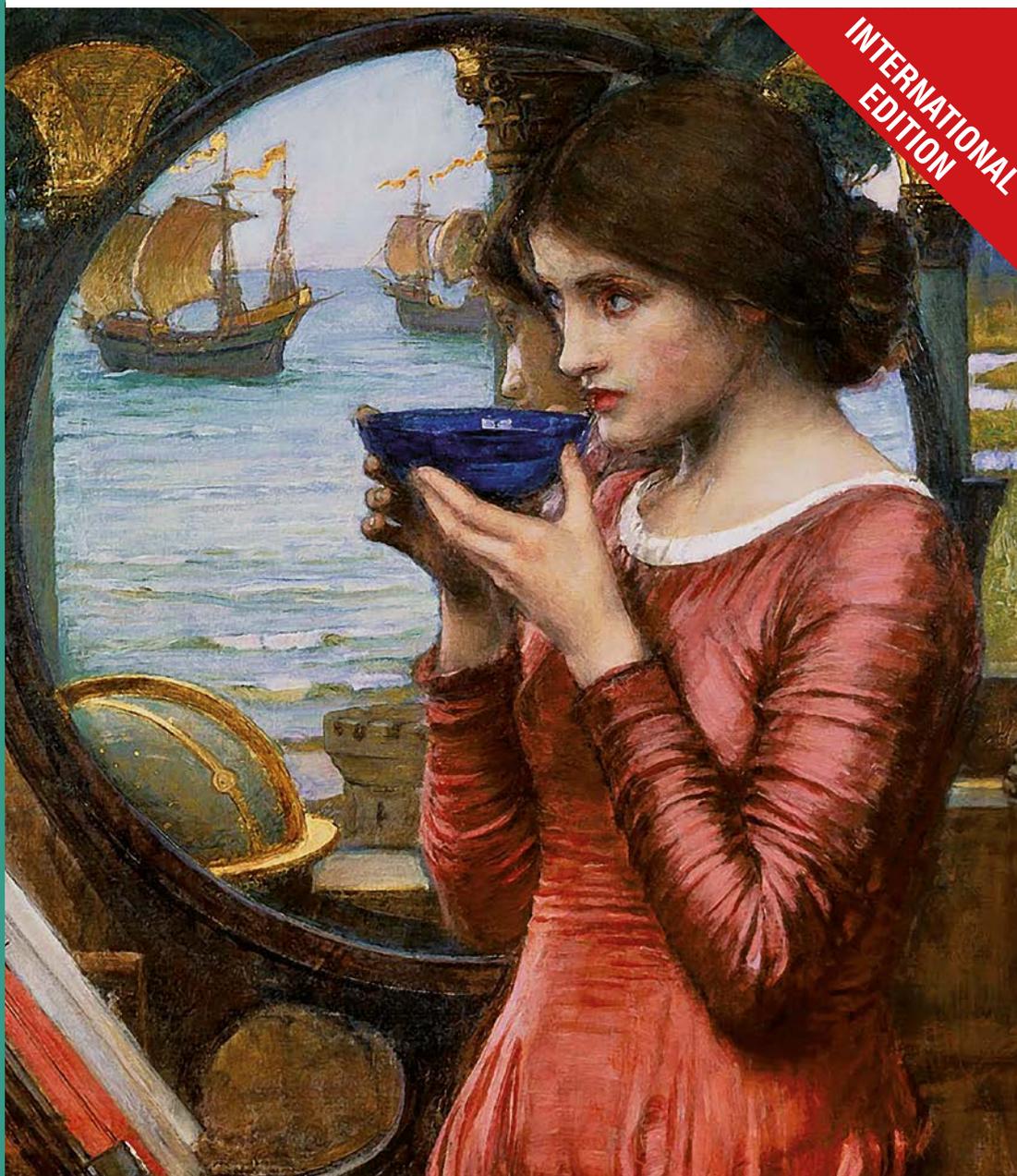


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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
È STATA FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI
E DA LUIGI BERTETT, DINO BUZZATI TRAVERSO,
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GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: *Graphic elaboration of Destiny (1900), by John William Waterhouse; Towneley Hall Art Gallery & Museum, Burnley (United Kingdom)*

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New challenges and new opportunities *await us*

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia

*Increasingly valued by institutions,
the Academy is called upon to foster Italian
cuisine and food culture worldwide
in an incisive manner.*

Over the past few days, we have had **extremely fruitful and interesting meetings with representatives and functionaries of governmental and private bodies** including universities, other academies and cultural associations. These were exchanges of opinions and perspectives regarding the current and future situation pertaining to the agrifood world, particularly cuisine. Each meeting differed in content and some even led to the signing of Memoranda of Understanding, while others were **harbingers of further developments in the short and medium term**. Of course, each participant's vision depended on their own role, but there was always unanimous appreciation of the work and organisation of our Academy, which has succeeded in holding firm to its principles over time and has continuously and concretely undertaken its activities in the recent terrible months of the pandemic.

Four primary objectives

Coexisting with the multiple viewpoints mentioned above, **several firm commonalities** clearly and preponderantly

emerged; we should summarise and emphasise them here to make **all Academicians informed and active participants** in our Academy's forthcoming endeavours.

Our **four primary objectives** can be identified thus:

- 1) Foster Italian cuisine worldwide;
- 2) Safeguard the Mediterranean diet's distinctiveness;
- 3) Provide information regarding food choices; and
- 4) Stimulate opportunities for interaction and deeper understanding.

To reach these goals, our Delegations and Legations must take action to **promote our best local products** (PDO, PGI, TGI) by, inter alia, protecting our country's varied local traditions. Particular effort should be dedicated to **organising conferences, seminars, round tables and awareness campaigns**, in schools and elsewhere, and informing consumers about balanced and healthy nutrition and lifestyles.

Initiate communication, especially with the young

We are called upon to be **more incisive** in communicating with Europe and the world about **the principles of Italian food culture**, especially with young people. In other words, our actions and publications, which have garnered much appreciation, should not only foster Academic cohesion but also **credibly and authoritatively inform the outside world**, which is increasingly beleaguered and threatened by counterfeit products and misinformation. New challenges and opportunities await us, therefore. I am certain that we shall not disappoint those who believe in us.





War comes to dinner

by **Gigi Padovani**

Honorary Academician for Torino Lingotto

Sky-high costs and environmental risks.

Italian milk sold to France, vegetable oil vanishing from supermarkets, imminent flour shortages, all manner of speculations on such commodities as coffee, sugar and cocoa; Polish apples bring prices down while a drought in Canada triples the cost of wheat. **The food world has gone mad and we're all paying the consequences.** The dramatic Ukrainian war is, by now, affecting our tables. After the Covid pandemic, another global crisis hammers the economy, though that conflict remains regional thus far. Scenes of the massacres and devastation perpetrated by Russian troops have cast a pall over our evening television-viewing for weeks, and at the time of writing we remain unaware

whether there will at least be a ceasefire, if not peace. What all agrifood experts agree upon, however, is that **the consequences of this war in Europe will last longer** than those of the virus, partially because vaccines have, by how, at least attenuated the emergency, and the flow of tourists, which satisfactorily bounced back for Easter, allows hope for the hotel and restaurant sectors.

The food market crisis also affects gourmets

The food market crisis, indeed, also affects us gourmets, because - as observed by the American ecologist and poet **Wendell Berry**, who coined the oft-quoted phrase "eating is an agricultural act" - what lands on our plates, whether at home or in restaurants, arrives through a supply chain that is not invariably virtuous. **There are at least three risks now:** the abolition of limits on the use of **chemical pesticides and fertilisers to increase crop yield**; the **unavailability of raw materials of Russian or Ukrainian origin**; and the **penalisation of high-quality Italian exports** (organic, PDO and PGI specialities, wine etc). In part, this is already happening, notes **Luigi Scordamaglia**, Honorary Academician and board member of Filiera Italia, a foundation created in 2018 connecting the national growers' association **Coldiretti** and **Italy's most important food businesses** with strategic partners and large-scale distributors. "Our exports, which began the year well with an 18% increase even in February, will inevitably



Luigi Scordamaglia



Stefano Francia



be affected by the fact that surging energy and raw material costs will render our businesses less competitive in various areas of the world. We can therefore already imagine **an increase in the 'Italian-sounding' phenomenon** whereby our best products are imitated".

Barbara Nappini, a Tuscan with past careers in fashion and communication, is the new President of Slow Food Italia: "For our Terra Madre (Mother Earth) initiative, which will return to Turin in person in September, we have chosen the theme of 'regeneration', also applicable to thought: regenerating means prioritising an (eco)systemic approach and concentrating on what food is and what we think it should be".

Growers, breeders and fishermen are again caught up in the global market storm

The focus shifts, as it has done for some time, from 'flavour' to growers, breeders and fishermen, once more caught up in a global market storm.

Stefano Francia, an agricultural entrepreneur with thirty-odd hectares of grain and vegetables, is the President of the young agricultural entrepreneurs' section of the CIA (the Italian Agricultural Confederation, a representative category-based professional association). Francia is very worried by **rising cereal and vegetable protein production costs** caused by a shortage in fertilisers, whose main producers are indeed Russian and

Ukrainian. "Regarding our exports, for wine alone those two warring States represent approximately 200 million euros. Sending a message by blocking exports to an aggressor was the right thing to do, but we are paying dearly for it. We should remain especially conscious that the vast distribution and value imbalances within agricultural supply chains persist and may be aggravated. We are the most competent producers and processors; we also know how to sell well, but there is a truth which is insufficiently acknowledged: **quality starts in the field**. Following recent cost increases, without greater attention to agricultural labour, **we risk losing our best crops**. Hence, alongside the CIA, we propose an overarching agrifood alliance recognising the role of each player. We must provide high-quality, healthy products to consumers, at an equitable price which helps those working in the supply chains but also those working in the fields every day".

There are fears of a prolonged conflict

There are fears of a prolonged conflict. Scordamaglia says: "This war's effects will be more lingering and onerous than those of Covid. While the pandemic emergency was symmetrical, affecting all countries equally, this one is asymmetrical, **predominantly affecting the direct participants and Europe. Other parts of the world can continue to**

develop. Furthermore, the geopolitical fallout will continue long after the crisis, unlike the difficulties unleashed by the virus, which will end with the contagion".

The risk now is that 'best practices' defending biodiversity and the environment could be forgotten. Barbara Nappini emphasises this: "In Italy we had made some progress, with a belated but important organic food law, but we now risk slipping back with deregulation attempts: intensive agriculture is deleterious".

Will our food habits change because of the war crisis? This may be necessary. Unfortunately, the populations of less wealthy countries, especially in Africa, will suffer heavy consequences of the Russian and Ukrainian grain shortage. As for the dangers for 'Made in Italy', at the moment, says Scordamaglia, there are no dark clouds on the horizon: "Our products' sustainability is undoubted, as it is not merely ideological but concrete and competitive. We produce the highest agrifood added value in Europe: 64 billion euros with only 30 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions, far below France's 77 million or Germany's 65 million. We have scarce land and must therefore treat it with the utmost respect and leave it more fertile after every harvest thanks to technology and innovation". Everyone hopes, obviously, that the Ukrainian conflict will soon end, with equitable solutions which safeguard freedom. But we have, by now, understood that nothing will be the same as before, not even at the table.

Gigi Padovani



In praise of wine

by **Rossana Ragionieri**
Empoli Academician

Alongside innovations in wine production, between the 17th and 18th centuries numerous writers praised the nectar of Bacchus.

The paths of culture meander around vines and wine, but also those of art, poetry, history and human endeavour, intense and laden with cherished symbols and multiple meanings. “Wine knows how to adorn the most sordid hovel with marvellous luxury, and make more than one fabulous portal appear in the gold of its red mist, like a sun setting in a cloudy sky”, declares **Baudelaire** in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, describing the nectar of Bacchus. Indeed, a possible etymology of the word ‘wine’ links it to the Sanskrit word *vena*, meaning ‘longing’, ‘love’ or ‘desire’, also related to the Latin Venus, goddess of love.

Between the 17th and 18th centuries, the nectar of Bacchus was greatly transformed

cially for red wines or clarets. A French treatise of 1718 declares that wine could now be kept for “*quatre, cinq et même six ans*”.

Bottled wine became synonymous with quality and prestige

Bottled wine became synonymous with quality and prestige. The use of better containers spread to France and Italy, **demonstrating increased attention to preservation** and innovation in this sector. Around 1775, **the Schloss Johannisberg winery** began bottling Rheingau wines, while a general **flourishing of agronomic culture** occurred, animated by initiatives and studies such as those of the Georgofili Academy.

Even monarchs turned their attention to this issue, such that on **24 September 1716**, in Florence, the Grand-Duke **Cosi-**

Albert de la Fizelière



Between the 17th and 18th centuries, the nectar of Bacchus was greatly transformed. In the 19th century, **Albert de la Fizelière** wrote: “1635! What a noble date, what an excellent moment for drinkers! Cafés had not yet been invented. Spirited people, whose brains are nowadays clouded by adulterated beer fumes, by the ghastly absinthe, by an exorbitant number of low-grade alcoholic mixtures, could and did, in those days, feed their verve with the divine flame of Beaune and Pomard”. In that period, **wine technology, unchanged since the Middle Ages, were modified in pursuit of reliable quality and flavour. From 1660, in England, glass bottles** produced by Sir **Kenelm Digby**, sealed **with corks**, preserved organoleptic properties for longer, espe-



Kenelm Digby



mo III de' Medici issued a proclamation "Regarding the Declaration of Borders for the Four Regions of Chianti, Pomino, Carmignano, and Val d'Arno di Sopra", which, for the first time, determined **the geographical areas for producing Chianti, Pomino, Carmignano and Val d'Arno di Sopra wines**, somewhat anticipating the later DOC (Controlled Designation of Origin) wine production zones.

The Grand-Duke also issued a **Decree establishing a committee overseeing wine production, transport and commerce and fraud prevention**, anticipating today's Consortia.

Again, in the same century, the adventurous globetrotting physician **Filippo Mazzei**, born in Poggio a Caiano on 25 December 1730, emigrated to Virginia in



Cosimo III de' Medici

Bacchus (1496-1497),
Michelangelo Buonarroti, Florence



1773, **transporting vines and olive tree cuttings to America**. His entrepreneurial project seemed suitable for that area, whose climate apparently favoured Mediterranean plants.

Many authors chose wine as a principal motif of their works

While wine crossed the seas and entrepreneurially ventured abroad with Mazzei, many authors chose the nectar of Bacchus as a central flavour of their works. Italian wines attracted attention, but so did those of other countries as far as Bohemia, of whose wine **Anton Friedrich Busching** observed in 1782: "among red wines, the best is that of Mělník". It is unsurprising that wine and the general Bacchic theme attracted particular attention in that period, and that it was the late 17th century that spawned **the most acclaimed Italian dithyramb, Francesco Redi's jocular poem on wine *Bacco in Toscana* (*Bacchus in Tuscany*)**, published in 1685. Inspired by an annual convivial meeting of the illustrious linguistic association Accademia della Crusca and composed of approximately a thousand verses, it is **an ode to wine in general and Tuscan wines in**

particular. The variety of metres used, the onomatopoeia, the spontaneity and the vigorous rhythm of the work masterfully render the cheer, enthusiasm and increasing intoxication of its protagonist, namely Bacchus himself.

Redi's celebrated dithyramb, **alongside wine-making innovations**, catalysed and inspired other, similar works. Indeed, various texts called *Vendemmie* ('grape harvests') appeared, and many composed *Brindisi* ('toasts'), such as that of the Florentine **Antonio Malatesti, *De' Brindisi de' Ciclopi* (*On the Toasts of Cyclops*)**, considered by **Girolamo Tiraboschi** "most excellent in its category", and others printed in Verona in 1723, all extolling the nectar of Bacchus; and several dithyrambs appeared with Bacchantes and the wine god as their protagonists.

Bacco in Giovecca appeared in 1710, printed by **Bernardino Barbieri**, while in 1711 the Milanese **don Basilio Bertucci**, a Basilian monk, composed the dithyramb *Bacco in monte di Brianza*, printed by **Carlo Giuseppe Quinto** in Milan.

This renewed focus on wine paved the way for yet more compositions, in particular, *Bacco in Boemia* (*Bacchus in Bohemia*) written by none other than a native of Empoli, **Pietro Domenico Bartoloni**.

Rossana Ragionieri



Extra-virgin olive oil: *a good fat*

by **Matteo Pillitteri**
Sciacca Academician

*Highly digestible,
it facilitates gastric
and liver functions
and regulates
the intestines.*

The health benefits of olive oil were first made public over 25 years ago, when the data from the *Seven Countries Study* (**Keys, A.** et al, *Am J Epidemiol*, 1986), gathered from 11,579 men aged between 40 and 59 years, monitored for 15 years, associated the Mediterranean Diet with decreased mortality, plausibly because of olive oil consumption. Extra-virgin olive oil is a healthy, minimally processed food; it is highly digestible, facilitates gastric and liver function, and regulates the intestines. It also reduces gastric acid secretion, preventing duodenal ulcer.

One or two tablespoonfuls on an empty stomach, before the first meal, can combat simple chronic constipation, also improving the motility and action of the gall bladder. **It prevents and protects against various other health problems.** It reduces the risk of heart attacks, hypertension and atherosclerosis, because **it keeps 'bad cholesterol' (LDL) low** and its monounsaturated fatty acids protect levels of 'good cholesterol' (HDL), indispensable for cleaning arteries. It guards against diabetes by improving the blood's glucose profile, regulating lipid metabolism and limiting the for-





mation of harmful substances. It also has important anti-tumour abilities.

The only oil capable of limiting oxidation and cell ageing

Extra-virgin olive oil is also noteworthy for its **exceptional heat resistance**, which makes it the only oil capable of limiting oxidation and cell ageing. Unlike other oils, extracted from seeds and rich in polyunsaturated fats, and butter, high in saturated fats (easily degraded by heat and badly tolerated by all the digestive organs), olive oil is **uniquely capable of reducing the impact of hot condiments, contemporaneously 'cleaning' the blood**. On one hand, monounsaturated oleic acid hinders intestinal absorption, thereby reducing total cholesterol and triglyceride levels; on the other, it facilitates disposal of the cholesterol responsible for ischemia and hypertension. Furthermore, by **increasing blood fluidity**, it reduces the risk of clots and thrombosis, playing a role half-way between food and medicine. Food seasoned with extra-virgin olive oil not only favours the secretory stimuli which help digestion, but is also well tolerated by the stomach and intestines. It contains important elements (oleic acid, polyphenols and vitamins) with **positive effects on metabolic processes**, and the foremost experts now consider it **a nutraceutical food**, meaning that its properties can regulate bodily mechanisms in a healthful manner. The composition of extra-virgin olive oil has **protective effects on the arteries, liver and stomach**.

It helps cells to absorb substances indispensable to growth

Its high unsaturated fat content ensures **more balanced development in childhood**, helping cells to absorb substances indispensable to growth. **The classic olive oil drizzle over a child's food** is the healthiest and best-loved condiment. A diet rich in extra-virgin olive oil is also important **for adolescents**, as growing organisms need **a supplement to the daily energy and calorie intake**. As mentioned already, extra-virgin olive oil facilitates liver activity and regulates the intestines. Its consumption **reduces the risk of gastric and duodenal ulcers**, has a **laxative effect** which is most efficacious on an empty stomach, and furthermore helps to prevent gallstones. Olive oil is not less digestible than other

oils, as some would have uninformed consumers believe. On the contrary, it has been scientifically demonstrated that it is the only 100% digestible oil, against 85% for sunflower seed oil, 81% for peanut and 36% for maize. Compared with other fats, especially those of animal origin, it is the most digestible.

A recent discovery

The pungency that we perceive in our throats from food seasoned with good extra-virgin olive oil **represents a 'pinch' of additional health**: it is caused by a recently discovered **anti-inflammatory substance called oleocanthal** (also found in *sansa*, the pomace left over from pressing olives). Its characteristics are similar to those of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, and thus its action is comparable to that of ibuprofen. Oleocanthal was discovered by chance during a molecular gastronomy meeting in Sicily, when the scientist **Gary Beauchamp**, tasting dishes containing **newly pressed extra-virgin olive oil**, recognised the same pungency that he had experienced when tasting ibuprofen. It is plausible that regular olive oil consumption benefits health because it constantly exposes us to the anti-inflammatory effects of oleocanthal.

Matteo Pillitteri

