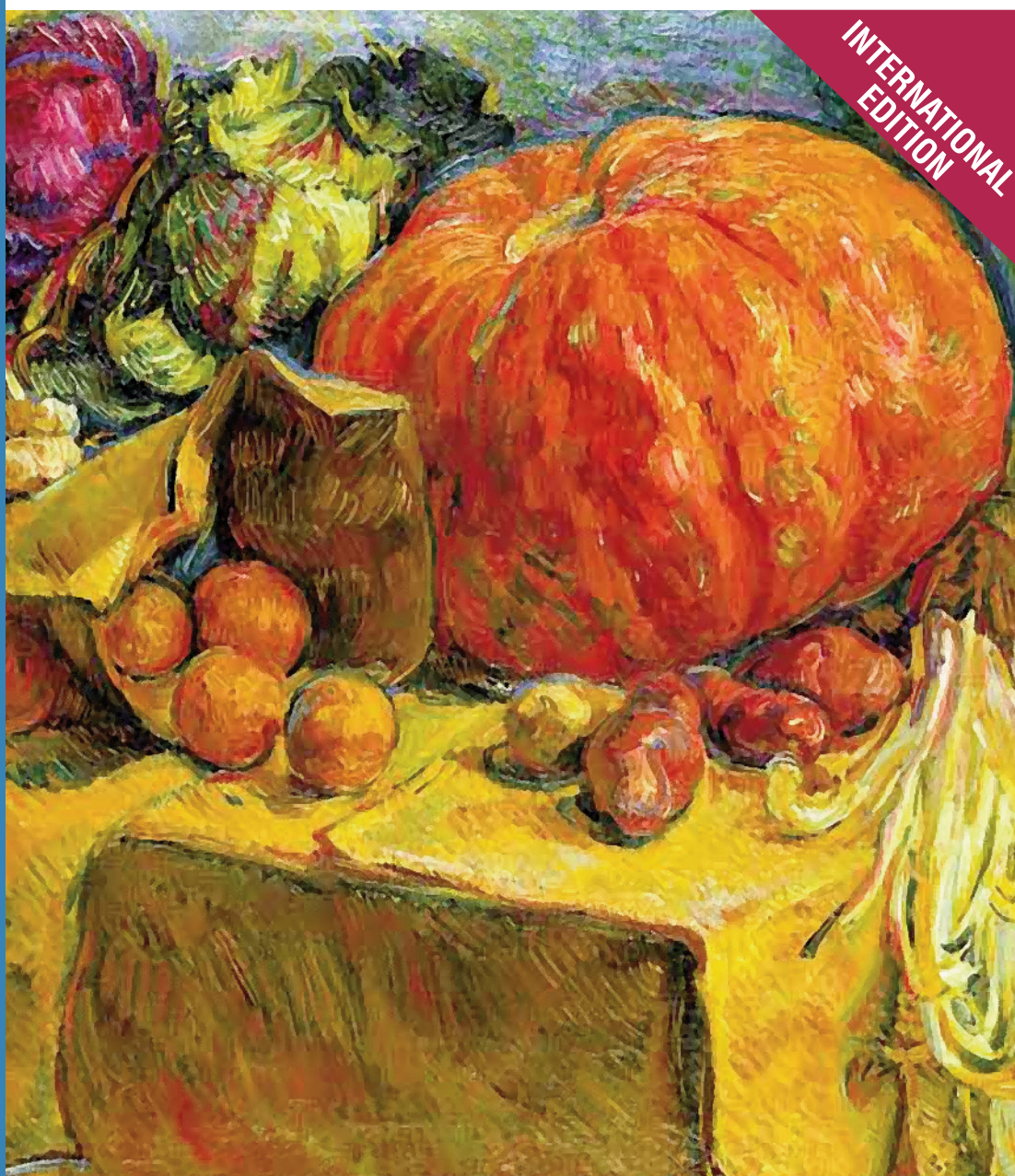


# CIVILTÀ TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



**ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA**  
A CULTURAL INSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ITALY  
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## L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

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WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

## CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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On the cover: Graphic reproduction of a detail  
from Still Life with Giant Pumpkin and Fruit  
(1902-1903) by Nicolas Tarkhoff. On exhibit at  
the Petit Palais Museum in Geneva.



# Building an Academy for the Future

*Elite groups by nature, academies must contribute to the construction of a future identity.*

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI  
*President of the Academy*

Dear Academicians, trying to solve modern problems with the solutions of the past inevitably leads to failure. It is an historical fact that conflicts led by generals using methods, and especially ideas, that were successful in preceding wars will always be lost, while commanders using innovative tactics and above all military strategies usually emerge victorious. In spite of the fact that history is life's best teacher, the danger of falling into the trap of tackling the problems of the present and planning for the future using only past experience is especially grave during times of social upheaval and especially of rapid change such as we are currently experiencing.

As is true in any attempt at restoration, hoping to revive an irretrievably lost past is absolutely unrealistic even in the areas of nutrition, cuisine and gas-

tronomy. This is demonstrated by the fact that foods have been successful over time only because they have evolved. The example of many Italian regions is illustrative: they have achieved and maintained their unparalleled success through constant innovations in production that enhance their uniqueness and quality. Most of these innovations were not nearly so evident a few decades or even centuries ago.

Tackling the problems of today and building a future with new ideas and methods is a task for an elite group, but they can meet with success if they are not in close contact and harmony with the society of which they are a part. Once again turning to the war metaphor, a victorious general must not only be brilliant, but he must be at the front lines of his army. He cannot simply sit in the background and consult maps of the battlefield.

These are the thoughts that have come to me after visiting the many Delegations that have recently celebrated forty, fifty, and even sixty years of existence, often celebrating the anniversary in the very restaurant where they held their first convivial meetings.

But in many instances that restaurant no longer exists, or if it does there is an abyss between what it once was and what it is today, just as the relationship between the elite founders and the current patrons has also changed radically. This revealing change in all its complexity merits a mention in this brief essay as it also regards the demand for a greater vis-

ibility on the part of the Academy.

At its inception, the elite founders of our Academy belonged to a society in which social distances and separations were not as marked as they are today. One needs only consider the restaurant world. There were many good quality trattorias that specialized in local cuisine. At the same time, the difference in cost of a meal at a decent trattoria and a renowned restaurant was nowhere near as great as that of a modern fast food establishment (10 euros) and a high quality restaurant (150 euros). Not to mention the dwindling number of intermediately priced restaurants that have a good cost-quality ratio.

Today there is a growing divide between elite and popular restaurants that is associated with social diversity that is almost tragically accentuated by an increasing division between old and young. We now have a different way of interpreting the tradition of senex and puer as interpreted by James Hillman.

At this point one must ask the practical as well as rhetorical question of what is the role of the elites, and hence what is, or what should be, that of our Academy - or any academy worthy of the name. In the opinion of this writer, it is herein that we will find the answer to the question of a greater "visibility" for our Academy which, without being overly pessimistic, seems to be eliciting less interest in a fragmented society from which the elites have all but disappeared, if not retired, to be replaced by extremely invasive and fast moving techno-industrial systems. This is a





question that cannot be exhaustively answered here, but it is a subject to be examined and pondered in a society such as ours that decreasingly reads or develops original ideas and instead supinely accepts pre-packaged slogans.

Although it is a difficult task, to increase visibility it is necessary to have appropriate ideas for interpreting modern day nutrition, and to contribute to the construction of a nutritional, and above all gastronomic, culture within the scope of Italian traditions, especially those set forth by the famous traditional cuisine of the bourgeoisie. This is the cuisine that our Academy has represented and that, starting with Pellegrino Artusi in the last century, has established a crit-

ical set of principles that we continue to represent. As an elite group today we have the duty to contribute to the gastronomic creations of tomorrow. We must maintain a set of principles for Italian cuisine that goes beyond merely collecting recipes to include interpreting the modern day traditions of Italian cuisine. Is our Academy - or better still, are our Academicians, an elite group capable of building a future, beginning with a more serious and deeper discussion of the "Italian Nutritional Question" in all its aspects?

Such a discussion must start with the still insufficiently studied and evaluated "Italian Gastronomic Question" in which gastronomic criticism (which does not mean "I like this" or "I don't

like that", much less "my mother did it this way") plays a fundamental and essential role in providing results that intrinsically provide some much touted "visibility".

In a society such as our current one, what sort of visibility can be achieved by announcing that a group of persons has given an award to a certain restaurant that, owing to its price or capacity is frequented by relatively few people, or that a centuries-old culinary notebook has been discovered in some remote monastery? Old systems and strategies will only lose in the modern war that involves us in the "Italian Gastronomic Question" where formation, rather than information, is the only path toward new ideas.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI



### GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

*Contributions to the magazine by Academicians are not only welcome, they are indispensable. However Academicians need to keep in mind some essential guidelines, so that their effort and passion are rewarded by rapid and thorough publication.*

● **Articles:** It is essential that **articles be sent electronically**, in Word format (not pdf) to the following email address: [redazione@accademia1953.it](mailto:redazione@accademia1953.it)

● **Article Length:** To avoid cuts that are irritating for both the writer and editor, articles should be between **3,500 and 7,000 characters** (including spaces). Your computer provides character counts.

● **"From the Delegations" Column:** For ease of reading, **maximum length is limited to 2,500 characters including spaces.**

● **Convivial Dinner forms:** it is equally important that the "notes and comments" section of the rating sheets **respect the 800 character limit** (Maximum 1,000 characters) include spaces, in order to avoid cuts and errors. Rating sheets that arrive at Headquarters more than 30 days after the event will be discarded.

● **Please do not send reports on convivial dinners held outside the territory of your Delegation, or on those held in the homes of Academicians** or places other than restaurants and public settings, as they will not be published.

● By observing these simple guidelines Academicians can be reasonably assured of rapid and accurate publication, thereby avoiding painful cuts.

● Obviously, the Editors reserve the right to edit all articles and publish them according to available space.



# Transparency is optional in restaurant menus

*Nicknames, trendy names - the listing of dishes is quite often a fair of vanities. The truly important information about what's being eaten is often ignored.*

BY PAOLO PETRONI  
Secretary General of the Academy

The menus of ranking restaurants (must we use that terrible term “star studded”?) offer an impressive specification of the ingredients used. More than the definition of a dish one finds substantive recipes accompanied by plenty of adjectives and places of origin. A few years ago the custom began of providing praiseworthy information such as “Colonnata lard”, “Lamon beans”, “Bronte pistachios” and so forth. Nowadays, the type of pasta is described, the grain used is specified, the tomatoes for garnishing always have a name and a place of origin: capers are unequivocally from Pantelleria, sardines are obviously from the Bay of Biscay and tuna comes from Favignana. All this information about ingredients, even though used in miniscule doses, causes the price to go up. Too bad that when we consider real content, the information is lacking. Where do the beautifully displayed porcini mushrooms come from? Silence and mystery. Apart from the fact that those mushrooms remain pristine in the exhibition case as the customers eat (the cooks have something else, quite different, to work with in the kitchen), it would be important for us to know if they were harvested in our woods or are a tasteless variety imported from far away countries. The same question applies to our precious truffles.

The real drama, however, arises over fish. Buying fish is already a problem for the consumer who finds it on the vendor's counter with the Latin scientific name (beside the commercial one) and a reference to the fishing zone FAO 37. What on earth is the fishing zone FAO 37? It's a mystery -- so much for an informative label for the fish buyer. Complete darkness reigns in the restaurant. The law compels the owner to specify whether the fish served was frozen or not. Nonetheless, some insert an asterisk that indicates: “in case of unavailability of fresh fish, it could be previously frozen”. Very clever! Even granting that the fish is fresh, nobody tells us if it was fished or came from aquaculture, and in the latter case, the country where it was farm raised. A fish raised in a sea pond in Orbetello, Italy, is quite different from a fish farmed in a pond in Turkey. The greatest sin is silence about the provenance of crustaceans. Red Shrimps, small shrimps and prawns may come from disparate places, some of which are unacceptable for their cultivation and processing methods. We might not care where anchovies in oil are from, but we are very interested in knowing where the shrimp that we are eating raw come from. Why there is no transparency when we talk fish but total transparency when we talk capers?





# The Academic Council's meeting in Naples

*The beauty of the area, the growing role of Neapolitan cuisine. An Academic Council with wide participation and intense discussions with many important announcements.*

BY SILVIA DE LORENZO



middle class that is increasingly lacking identity.

Paradoxically, many people today are searching for recipes and many more pursue innovation. Yet the motivations seem to be tied to a superficial curiosity and to a fast kind of cooking. All this leads to a cuisine made of food to be "assembled", a sort of "Ikea cuisine", in which prepared in advance components are ready to be consumed within those 30 to 35 minutes that each day are devoted to cuisine. Industry has replaced the family and talking about cuisine has replaced the actual cooking.

Hence the need for new rules to make a concrete cuisine (in fact, gastronomy stands for the rule of the stomach) where a recipe is separate from the pure and simple preparation of food and is also a system, a lifestyle, and most of all participation, insofar as thought confronts the past, the present and the future. Culture, and not theatrical grandstanding should then be the basis of rules, even the innovative ones, allowing the confluence of regional cuisines into perennial cuisine. As the past teaches us, cuisine must be capable of renewing tradition.

Today, the very vitality of the Academy points to the road ahead: our institution has implemented, through culture and ever new rules, a system that keeps moving forward with the changing times, while in essence remaining the same. This work must be accomplished through collegial decisions and most of all, a fundamental point in the President's speech, upon the "participation" of all Academicians in a host of cultural

initiatives (as the *Guides*, the *Cookbook*, the magazine, and the volumes on *Cultural Gastronomy* that are freely distributed on line as well) that allowed the Academy to be alive and vital, unlike many other institutions, aligned with the changing times.



Within the context of perpetual renewal, President Ballarini made an important announcement: in accordance with Article 20, paragraph 1 of the Academic By-Laws, **the President's Council, meeting on the preceding day, has nominated for the position of President of the Academy the Academician Paolo Petroni, the current Secretary General.** The members of the Advisory Council and the Territorial Coordinators received the news with a strong applause.

While expressing his satisfaction for such a response, the President went on to propose the co-optation to membership in the Advisory Council, in accordance with Article 13, paragraph 1 of the Statute, of Academicians Renzo Mattioni, current Regional Coordinator of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and Mario Ursi-

**I** Opening the session of the Academic Council, President Giovanni Ballarini emphasized that the welcome dinner of the previous evening, organized by Naples' Delegate Vincenzo del Genio, was the perfect example of the old aristocratic cuisine of Naples and the demonstration of how Italian gastronomy should evolve: by utilizing the products and the recipes of the territory and by placing a higher value on what has been fading away. We are living in a complicated age, the President remarked, when the canons and the rules that guided the cuisine of the aristocracy, destined to merge into the bourgeois model that is presently collapsing, are not to be found in the cuisine of the





no, current member-elect of the Advisory Council, replacing Aurelio Pappalardo and Giuseppe Di Lenardo who is nominated to the Honor Roll. The Advisory Council approved by unanimous vote. General Secretary Paolo Petroni came to the podium to thank, not without emotion, the President's Council for the nomination to succeed Giovanni Ballarini with whom he spent many academic years that brought about important initiatives in a spirit of intense cooperation.

He went on to say that if elected he would work to amplify as much as possible the image and the relevance of the Academy throughout the social fabric. He expressed his confidence in the existing structure and the organization (the Secretariat and the Publication Staff) that are working well and on the new rules, both clear and valid, of the Statute and By-Laws. Finally, he addressed his personal thanks to President Ballarini whose counsel will always be valuable.

Petroni proceeded to announce that the President's Council has set **the date of May 30, 2015 in Florence for the Ordinary Assembly of the Delegates.** The Secretary General went on to analyze past activities and those that are about to be implemented. He pointed out that the number of Delegations is substantially constant (a small decrease took place among the foreign Delegations with several solutions being considered to improve the situation); he stressed the quality of both the content and the graphic appearance of the volume on the cuisine of rice, and also the *Guide to the Good Table* (this publication will be sent to the restaurants that are mentioned with a plastic insignia and an item of exhibition to be displayed in the restaurant). In view

of some difficulties in providing material to the two publications, Petroni called for better coordination for the *Itineraries of Gastronomic Culture* and for the Regional Coordinators to be in charge of sending out the forms for the *Guide*.



After voicing his satisfaction with the editorial initiatives, Paolo Petroni announced that the President's Council had chosen as **the theme of the Year 2015: The Condiments: Traditional Italian Sauces and Dressings.** He also confirmed that the foreign Delegations will be able to contribute to the selected theme by describing how Italian cuisine may be adapted to the requirements of foreign countries.

The meeting continued with a report by Counselor Giuseppe De Martino (in the absence of Treasurer Roberto Ariani who attended the session of the President's Council but was unable to be present at the meeting of the Advisory Council). De Martino delved into the 2014 pre-final budget and con-

firmed that its objectives were achieved in terms of strengthening and maintaining the membership. Looking at the income, he confirmed that contributions, as foreseen, decreased by 5 per thousand. Looking at the estimate budget for 2015, he described the Academy's financial situation as "solid", enough so to rule out an increase of dues. For his part, Paolo Petroni announced that in 2016 a new forum similar to the one just held in Rimini will be called as a mid-course event between the ordinary assemblies that according to the Statute take place every three years.

The President of the Board of Examiners, Gianni Limberti, announced that the Board had favorably accepted the estimated budget for 2015. The President called for a vote and the estimated budget was approved unanimously. Many Regional Coordinators were present at the meeting; they were called to illustrate the Academy's operations, the projects and the programs aimed at improving the regional standing and relations between the various Delegations of the regions, taking into account certain critical aspects. In this regard, the General Secretary announced an accurate census of territories belonging to the Delegations, whose borders go

back in many cases to the foundation of the Academy or at least to many years ago.

President Ballarini declared the session closed after answering a question made by the Regional Coordinator of Molise, Giovanna Maj, regarding the Academy's participation in Expo 2015 by virtue of the excellent book on the Culture of Rice. While pointing out that the Academy will not be officially present at the Expo, he announced that it will make available to agencies, institutions and partners the cultural patrimony of the Academy. In this regard, the President recalled that a protocol has been signed with the Agricultural Confederation (Confagricoltura) in order to initiate a series of joint activities aimed at studying the problems of gastronomy and the civilization of the table.

The intense session in the morning was followed by a totally Neapolitan working lunch at the Trattoria Pizzeria "Fresco" that featured several variations of pizza (the one that won acclaim featured rapini flowers and sausage) and the fried "cafone".

A final surprise awaited the guests: a guided excursion in the late afternoon to the Monumental Complex Donnaregina, an exquisite marriage of gothic and baroque, before the gala dinner. The dinner itself was held in the Diocesan Museum, in the frescoed "Solimena" hall, where long ago the choir of the Clarisse Church performed. The menu, selected by the Naples Delegation, once again brought to the table the aristocratic cuisine of the city, with a scenic timbale flammand (tower of bucatini pasta) that came with a flame in the middle, and the "fricandoncini" of Monsù Francesco, the chef of the noble family Pavoncelli, and finally dessert and wines from the territory.

President Ballarini thanked the Delegate of Naples for the hospitality and the organization, summing up with the word "perfection" the excellent choice and preparation of the various courses, the splendor of the site and the conviviality that spread throughout the tables.

SILVIA DE LORENZO



# The food of the dead

*Legumes, like all seeds, are associated with the afterlife. Using fava beans as an offering to the dead signified wishing them a quick and happy rebirth.*

BY GIANNI DI GIACOMO  
*Academician, Chieti Delegation*

**T**he belief that the dead must be nourished is widespread throughout the world. Food is a symbol and a metaphor and is associated with both work and festival times. Therefore it is not difficult for us to believe that it is indeed through food that we can establish a dialogue with our late loved ones. It is the living who prepare special dishes in rituals for the dead: food establishes a one-on-one relationship because when consumed by the living it nourishes the bodies but food also nourishes, thus saving, the souls of the deceased.

The cult of the dead and festivals commemorating them are an ancient legacy and the rituals have many traditions in common. One need only take a look at any calendar of rural and peasant rituals to understand the importance of two

major holidays in western Christianity: All Saints' Day and the Day of the Dead. In fact, both festivals take place in the heart of autumn, the period marking the end of one growing season and the beginning of another. Grains have just been planted and seeds are seen as "descending into the underworld" in the heart of the Earth and beginning the long journey toward future germination. Enjoying a banquet around the tombs or offering food to the dead is one of the oldest spiritual practices in the world, just as is the cult of the dead itself. Among the ancient Romans, Etruscans and Greeks and all over the Mediterranean offering food to the dead was doubly linked to funeral rituals and not simply as a way of slaking the "hunger" of souls: foods were prepared and presented according to very precise pro-







cedures. For example, during the May festival of *Lemuria* celebrants threw a handful of black beans over their shoulder nine times while repeating a “*jacula*” or chant to salute the spirits who had returned from the dead to join the living for the occasion. In February, *manes*, the festal for spirits of the dead took place. Offerings included a rich variety of foods: grain, salt, oil, wine, milk, honey and the blood of pigs and calves. At the end of the festival the hulls of fava beans were burned and relatives dined at the tombs of their deceased loved ones. The same dining ritual was repeated on the day known as *Feralia* (the last day of the festival of *Parentalia* that was dedicated to one’s ancestors). The entire family would gather around the tombs of their dead and eat special foods that had been prepared at home while praying for the wellbeing of their dearly departed.

On the evening before the Day of the Dead (the night between November 1st and 2nd) an entire series of ritual behaviors associated with food were carried out: on that night eating and praying did not have their usual convivial and social connotations, but food could be shared with neighbors, relatives and friends.

In Abruzzo, in addition to the custom of leaving the dinner table set, a lighted candle was placed in the window for each beloved departed soul, and children were sent to bed with a packet of sweet fava beans and sugared almonds that symbolized the link between past and present generations. In the collective imagination of the ancients, legumes, like all seeds, were connected with the “ctonic sphere” and the afterlife. Fava beans, pomegranates and seeds of all types were particularly prized by the dead souls, as were walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds and chestnuts which held within themselves the power of life. Thus the seed represented the cycle of death-rebirth-life and humans, just like the dead, could become part of this cycle by consuming them. Offering fava beans to the dead signified wishing them a quick and happy rebirth.

Fava beans and chickpeas are still today considered the classic foods for the Day of the Dead in some rural areas. The rare black chickpea is the main ingredient in the Piedmontese soup *cisrà monferrina* as well as in the *zemino* of Savona. In Irpinia on November 2 the well-to-do families often used to distribute a soup of boiled chickpeas to the needy. In the northeast of Italy the so-

called “soup of the dead” was made with long simmered beans seasoned with pork fat. Around Piacenza the classic dinner for the Day of the Dead consisted of chestnuts, peeled and boiled with fennel seeds. Offering food to the dead led to the rise of the belief that on the day of their commemorative festival the dead would return to the world of the living to join them at the table. “Cooked chickpeas for the souls of the dead” was the sad refrain chanted by throngs of poor beggars, armed with bowls and spoons outside the houses of the nobles. In Venice, monks in convents frequently prepared a fava bean soup to be distributed to the poor on the first days of November. In Modena as well the classic “alms of the dead” consisted of boiled fava beans. In fact, from Egypt to Greece, from Rome to India and even in far away Peru, this legume has always played a major role in ancient funeral rites.

The most commonly used ritual foods for commemorating the dead are sweets. Every region has its own typical sweet made just for this celebration. In addition to “*grano cotto*” or cooked grain, the common ones, usually known as “fava of the dead” or “sweet favas” are fairly hard, usually made with flour, sugar, various spices, almonds, chocolate, jams, candied fruit, egg whites and pine nuts. In Lombardy they are called “bones for chewing” and in Veneto, Tuscany and Sicily “bones of the dead”, made differently according to the region: in Lombardy, they are made with crumbled dried cookies, chocolate and raisins; in Tuscany with pepper; in Sicily they are made in the shape of praying hands. Also in Sicily, in addition to “*grano cotto*” and “bones of the dead” they also prepare “*pupi di zuccaro*” or “sugar babies” - little statues shaped like the classic Sicilian puppets - and *frutta di Martorana* - almond sweets shaped like fruits. In Campania they still make “*torrone dei morti*”, a sweet and chocolate candy that are also called *morticelli*.

GIANNI DI GIACOMO



# The precious perfume from the woods

*The phoenix of international gastronomy and utopia of the senses, the white truffle is essentially pure perfume, and only later comes its flavor (Carlo Cracco).*

BY NICOLA BARBERA  
*Academician, Milan Duomo Delegation*

**T**ruffles are hypogean - or symbiont underground - mushrooms. This means that they live in symbiosis with the roots of plants and vegetables. The word truffle (in Italian *tartufo*; in Latin *terrae tufer*) literally means “excrecence of the Earth”.

In order for a truffle to develop its spores (reproductive cells) and hyphas (long filaments similar to those of mushrooms) it must come in contact with the roots of a truffle-attracting tree (oak, holm oak, evergreen oak, willow, linden, poplar or hazelnut) under environmental conditions that foster the sugars necessary for their development and growth, within a time frame that ranges from four to twelve years! Truffles are still not cultivable - they only grow spontaneously, and their reproduction depends in part on the spores

of the previous truffle and in part on their strong odor, a characteristic that becomes apparent only when the truffle is mature and thus able to attract wild animals that, in their attempt to dig them up, manage to disperse the spores. The white truffle is wrapped in a pale ocher outer peridium that can be either smooth or rough depending on the type of terrain (softer earth favors the development of an irregular potato-like shape and hard packed earth results in a knobbier one). The peridium encloses the gleba, or pulp which is rather hard, grayish-pink in color and covered in whitish veins. The black truffle is roundish and lobated, covered with thick brownish black protuberances known as “warts”, which are also covered with whitish veins.

Of the twenty-five different species of truffle found in Italy, nine are edible,





but only two of them are considered valuable: the precious white truffle, or tuber *magnatum* Pico (the term *magnatum* signifies “for magnates” therefore, costly; and Pico refers to the Piedmontese Vittorio Pico, the first scholar to classify truffles). There is also the precious black truffle, (*tuber melanosporum*) or winter truffle. These two species are followed, qualitatively, by two others: the black summer truffle (*tuber aestivum* or “thick skinned” truffle) and the white March truffle (*tuber Borchii*).

Italy is the world's leading producer of truffles (500 tons per year) followed by France and Spain. The Italian regions that traditionally are best known for white truffles are Piedmont, with its famous Alba variety, the Marche, famous for its Acqualagna (Pesaro-Urbino) variety and Tuscany for its San Miniato (Pisa) variety. Norcia, in Umbria, is the home of black truffles. Truffles have been known since ancient times, and the earliest historical testimonials (1700-1600 BC) are attributed to the Sumerians. The Romans also enjoyed truffles (*tuber terrae*) but they were of inferior quality. The *tuber magnatum* Pico never appeared on the tables of noble Romans even though the Emperor Publius Elvius Pertinace

(126-193) was from Alba (He only reigned for 80 days - he was elected and then assassinated by his Praetorian guards). In his *De re coquinaria* (which was written in the first century but discovered only in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD) Marcus Gavius Apicius provided six recipes that used truffles. Subsequently the truffle was abandoned and its unstoppable gastronomic ascent only began during the Renaissance, first in France (14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries) with the black truffle, and then in Italy with the white truffle. In 1700 the white truffle of Piedmont was considered a delicacy by all the European courts and truffle hunting became a favorite palace sport: In particular the Italian kings Vittorio Amedeo II and Carlo Emanuele III organized actual truffle hunts including foreign kings and nobles and utilizing dogs, which were much more elegant than the traditional pigs. In addition to being difficult to train not to eat the truffles once they unearthed them, pigs also destroyed the spores as well as the terrain.

It should be also mentioned that in Milan in 1831 a naturalist from the botanical gardens of Pavia, Carlo Vittadini, published his *Monografia Tuberacearum* that launched hydology (from the Greek *hydnon tubero*) - the

science of studying hypogean mushrooms.

Truffle gathering takes place only during periods authorized by the local provincial government administration, usually between October and February. Although to enjoy its full flavor and aroma the truffle should be eaten immediately, it can be preserved for several days by wrapping it and the earth surrounding it in a cloth or porous paper and storing it in a container in the refrigerator. The cloth should be changed daily, making sure that the hard texture of the truffle does not become soft or rubbery, in which case it must be eaten immediately.

Cleaning truffles should be done only a few minutes before they are served, using a brush under a stream of cold water and drying them immediately. White truffles are exclusively used raw, shaving them thinly with an appropriate instrument. It is excellent when served over hot dishes, thus enhancing its aroma: homemade pasta such as the famous *tajarin* (*tagliolini* cut into very thin *fettuccine*) with butter, risotto, fried eggs and fontina fondue. But it is also delicious on cold dishes like *carpaccio* Alba style, and salad made with ovuli and porcini mushrooms. Black truffles are primarily used after briefly being cooked, thinly shaved or diced, often in *risotto* with parmesan cheese, *patè*, “vol-au-vent” or *millefoglie* pastries. They can also be combined with simple condiments (garlic, olive oil and thyme) and sautéed as in the typical “strangozzi” of Umbria. The name “strangozzi” derives from the term “strenghe”, or square or rectangular strings of long pasta.

NICOLA BARBERA







# Neapolitan pasta with potatoes

*Although fairly common and traditional, this dish nonetheless appeared quite late in the recipe books.*

BY CLAUDIO NOVELLI

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It is easy to speak of historical recipes, the cuisine of our ancestors, traditional cuisine and so on. How historical? How old, and when we say old, what do we mean by that? Traditional for whom? Something that we were greedy for when we were children, as we look back as adult? Is it something that is no longer prepared at home because of simple laziness or (providential) lack of time? I asked myself this question on account of the umpteenth dish that leaves Anglo Saxons and Scandinavians dumbfounded, committed as they are to protein laden dishes that defy gout. It is a recipe that we might not define as aristocratic, given its dark origins, but rather a kind of proletarian comfort food for daily survival. Just like its sister foods, it had to obey the sacred laws of simplicity, speed of execution and economy.

It has the rare merit of being our most carbohydrateated carbohydrate, the southern ideological paradox that intrigued Trotsky, unsure as he was as to the mixing of potatoes and grains in the preparation of Vodka, in the absence of which it was good bye to the revolution, rather than feeding the hungry people. In our land, the gentle and farmer-friendly solanaceous food went together with the sub-proletarian “garbage”, that is to say with those forty-pound sacks of *maccheroni* that were inevitably devastated by the lac-

kadaistical care that caused them to crash to the ground. The same sacks received their coup de grace from their handling by the food stores and were thus sold at a much lower price. They joined the potatoes at the end, or at best in the middle of the boiling, which left them merrily bubbling over the fire with a little lard, celery, onion and occasionally tomatoes.

The recipe is not reported by any manual of cuisine, although Parmentier and our own Vincenzo Corrado devoted much attention to the potato; in fact, in his *Treatise on Potatoes* Corrado lists 54 preparations, among which the progenitor of our *gattò* (gateau) that can be simple, or filled with ham, chicken liver, sweetbreads, and mushrooms. Pasta and potatoes, however, were illustrious in their absence; certainly they were considered too humble a dish to aspire to the glory of a cookbook, notwithstanding the fact that in the second half of the nineteenth century manuals of “family” cuisine started to become popular in step with the emergence of bourgeois society. Before the cook stove one finds not a brigade of cooks but a lone woman, no matter whether mistress of the house, chef or all purpose servant, while things evolve to the point that the discussions at the table no longer address the new order in Europe but rather the performance of sons and daughters at school. Pasta and potato, however, is still seen as too poor a food, and it does not even remotely appear among the recipes of pythagorean provisions. In his *Vegetarian Cuisine and Crude Naturism* (Hoepli, 1930) Enrico Alliata, Duke



of Salaparuta, lists 41 ways to prepare potatoes. There are soups made with cauliflower, savoy cabbage, beans, pumpkin, zucchini, celery, beets and rutabaga, and with time both South and North will replace stale bread, respectively with pasta and rice. Other authors, less health conscious than Aliata, will look at potatoes and rice with some embarrassment and will present them as cuisine for weak stomachs, for sick and convalescent people, who are momentarily confined to a gastronomic limbo, waiting for meat pies, roasted and stewed meats and game. At any rate, there is no mention of pasta and potatoes. Who invented the dish then? Curiously, it is mentioned for the first time in the Bompiani *Almanac* of 1896, page 226, in the second paragraph of the *Gastronomist's Calendar*, under "Notes of fat and lean meals for each month of the year". The first lean meal for the month of January opens up with "Naples' pasta with potatoes". A detail that surely surprises, if not stimulates, is that this "note" is composed by a distinguished lady from Turin, Luisa Pacchiotti, the widow of a man named Pomba, who was the founder and editor of UTET, a printing firm. It is published here by kind concession of the author and the Unione Tipografica Editrice Torinese (UTET) which deserves the gratitude of so many passionate readers.

The notes had appeared a couple of years earlier in the *Journal of Women*, a fortnightly publication of "education, pastimes and morality" (1869-1924). No matter how hard I kept searching for it, the recipe actually appears for the first time in the *Collection of Recipes of Cirio Cuisine* (Portici 1952, page 19), under the heading: "Soup of pasta and potatoes". It was prepared in a different manner, more complicated than the present day preparation: "In three liters of water cook 4-5 potatoes cut into a large dice. After boiling for five minutes, add three thin slices of fresh lard, a pinch of salt and pepper, and half a clove of garlic. Sautee 30 grams of butter in a pan, a young



onion, a few basil leaves and pour into the pot. At this point in time, put into the broth 300 grams of ridged *ditali* (thimbles) (Pasta Cirio Vera) and tomatoes and let boil for another ten minutes, before taking it all out and serving it with cheese".

In 1965, Jeanne Carola offered a new version in her *Neapolitan Cuisine*. From this version sprang all the present variations. From that day on, town war-

fare erupted, in boroughs and even buildings, causing family quarrels, interminable infighting over the correct preparation of pasta and potatoes. To add to the confusion of this *vexata et irrisolta quaestio* - a troubling and unsolved issue - if one clicks today on Google "pasta and potatoes", within fourth-tenths of a second he will get 691,000 responses.

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# Music and cuisine

*The great composers of the past were able to combine the sublime culture of music with that of the good table.*

BY SAVINO SARDELLA  
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**"T**he appetite is to the stomach what love is to the heart". This famous quote by Gioacchino Rossini inspired me to look into some anecdotes from the lives of other great composers of the past that demonstrate how a passion for music, and musical theater in particular, goes hand in hand with a love of the good table. The illustrious maestro Rossini was in good company: Verdi, Donizetti, Mascagni and Puccini all frequently indulged in the pleasures of the table, especially after they had achieved fame and fortune. They participated in the preparation of some very refined dishes that became associated with their names or had been dedicated to them by great cooks of

the past: Maccheroni Rossini, Donizetti torte, Risotto Verdi - just to name a few. Giuseppe Verdi, who was called a "refined glutton" by Giuseppe Giacosa, had a healthy passion for home cooking and for the products of his region - the plains around Piacenza and Parma - as demonstrated by a cookbook found at his home Villa S. Agata as well as some of his correspondence with several of his contemporaries. He was always on the lookout for a great chef - not just an able cook but true food magician. He often said "One tyrant in the house is enough and I know how much work it takes to be that tyrant!". There is a famous caricature of Verdi by Melchiorre Delfico that portrays the maes-







tro wearing an apron and bearing a steaming dish of maccheroni or saffron rice. Verdi often described his favorite recipes in great detail: beef shoulder Saint Secondo style; Verdi soup made with diced potato dumplings served in chicken or turkey broth; Capon Supreme, capon breast sautéed in butter and champagne and garnished with slices of truffle; or zucchini flan. Gicchino Rossini's often repeated remark "I can think of no finer work than eating" speaks for itself. He im-

ported the best products from all over for his table, including truffles from Acqualagna. Rossini Salad with mustard, lemon, olive oil, salt, pepper and of course truffles and Tournedos Rossini are both famous and have many stories associated with them. The Laurenziana Library in Florence houses a document that discusses the pairings of food and wine according to Rossini: Madera for sausage and salami, Bordeaux for fried food, Rhine wine for cold pastries, Champagne for roasts,

and Aleatico or Lacrima for fruit and cheese. One of the most famous anecdotes describes how when Rossini, seated at the table with Donizetti, realizes that his dinner companion is in a bad mood, orders his chef to prepare a simple but delicious dessert: thus was born the Donizetti torte, made with butter, sugar, eggs, flour, cornstarch, candied fruit, Maraschino, vanilla and confectioners' sugar.

Giacomo Puccini was another famous musician who was a great lover of food. He often gathered his friends, including many writers and artists, around the table at a greasy spoon in Torre del Lago. He often indulged in the pleasures of fine dining after hunting competitions near Lake Massaciucoli or on the game reserves of friends. They would fry partridge and roast pheasant, and create dishes like pasta over eels or herring with radishes. He loved to finish a meal with mandarin oranges, sparkling wine, and crème caramel. He was also so fond of such typical Tuscan dishes as beans cooked in a flask that he would resort to the excuse of visiting his elder sister, a nun at a convent in Lucca, where he would stop and eat his favorite dish prepared by the pious nuns.

SAVINO SARDELLA



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