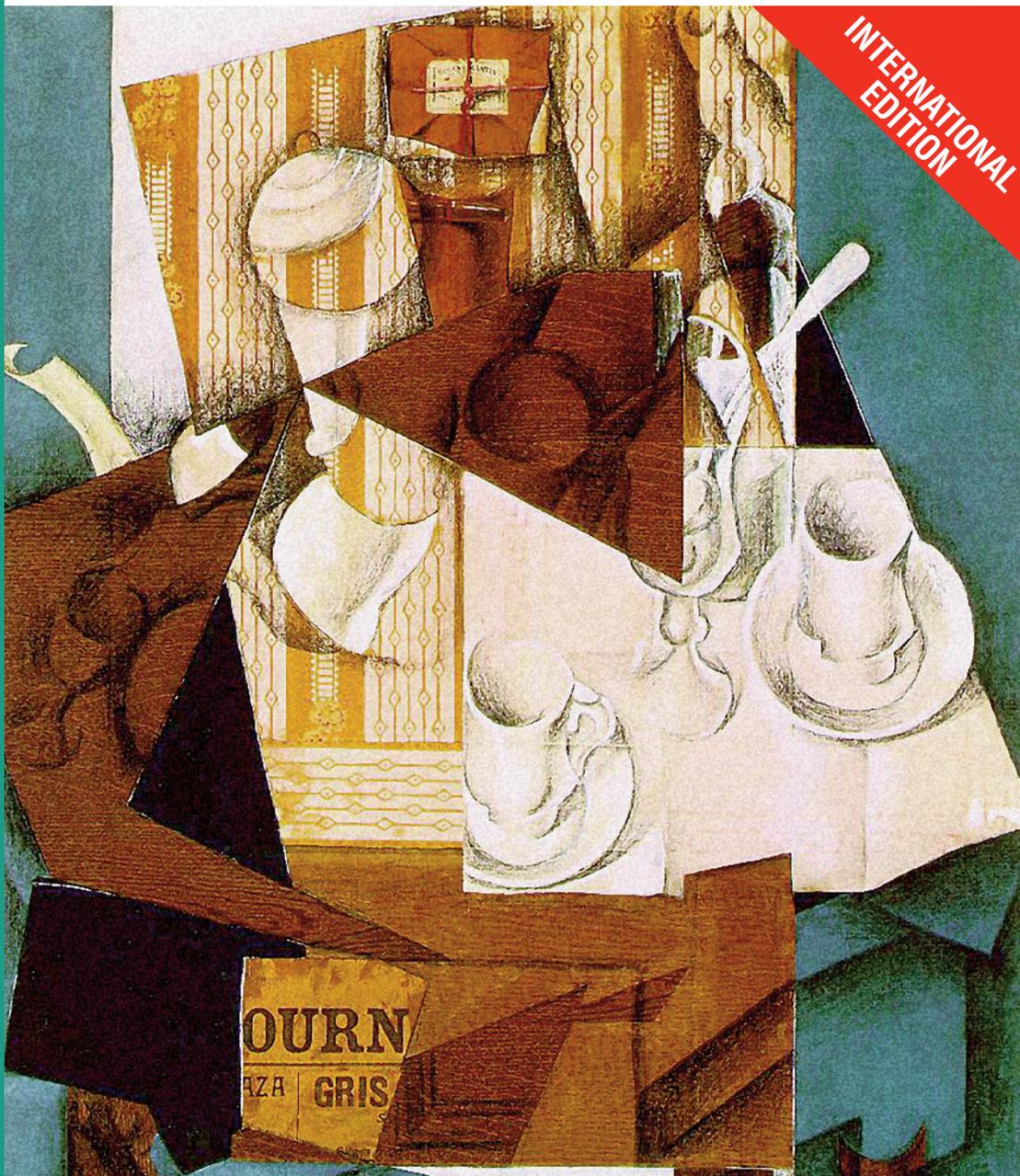


CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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EDITOR IN CHIEF
PAOLO PETRONI

COPY EDITOR
SILVIA DE LORENZO

LAYOUT
SIMONA MONGIU

TRANSLATOR
ANTONIA FRASER FUJINAGA

THIS ISSUE INCLUDES ARTICLES BY
Elisabetta Cocito,
Silvia De Lorenzo,
Elio Palombi,
Alfredo Pelle,
Paolo Petroni.



PUBLISHER
ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
VIA NAPO TORRIANI 31 - 20124 MILANO
TEL. 02 66987018 - FAX 02 66987008
presidente@accademia1953.it
segreteria@accademia1953.it
redazione@accademia1953.it
www.accademia1953.it



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On the cover: Graphic elaboration of the work
Breakfast (1914) by Juan Gris, Museum of
Modern Art, New York.

Will we all become vegetarians or even vegans?

Less and less meat: the unstoppable trend of our times.

BY PAOLO PETRONI
President of the Academy

Pellegrino Artusi maintained that vegetables weren't of much use, and that one should eat mostly meat in order to remain healthy. He declared: "Vegetables, if not in excess, are a cleansing agent in cooking, since they dilute the blood". On this theme, it is truly amusing to read his comments on two recipes, one from Emilia Romagna and one from Florence. Regarding the Ravioli typical of Romagna, he recounts often hearing the following in rustic taverns: "Waiter, a portion of boiled meat; but no spinach please". Or "You can use these (indicating spinach) to make a poultice for your rear end". A propos of the recipe for Florentine black Risotto, he asserts: "Tuscans, and especially Florentines, are so enamoured of vegetables that they'd like to include them in everything, and so they add chard to this dish, though it is quite out of place. This overuse of vegetables may be one of the principal reasons for the flaccid constitution of certain classes of people, who fall like autumn leaves the moment they encounter any disease, being unable to withstand its force". In other words, eating only vegetables is a recipe for death. It is a fact that our generation was raised with these ideas: a wise proverb intoned "flesh makes flesh, wine makes blood, leaves make c**p". People who were unwell were thought to 'need some meat'. There was even the so-called 'birthing broth' administered after childbirth, and made from a good beef steak. Today things appear to have changed. Meat is apparently somewhat unhealthy (roast meats being among the principal offenders) and vegetables are healthy, such that we can survive, at least as adults, on vegetables alone, and indeed better and for longer. It is a fact that meat consumption has slumped and vegetarians, and even vegans,

are far more numerous. There is a proliferation of supermarket shelves dedicated to such customers, who are said to constitute over 10% of the population. This new trend is not only rooted in health reasons but ethical reasons too. Game, once the centrepiece of celebrations and sumptuous banquets, has all but vanished. Young people don't even want to hear of it. *Foie gras* is often entirely unavailable (fortunately) in many supermarkets because of the way it is obtained. What we learn about death camp-style chicken and livestock production and slaughter methods is truly horrifying. People took note when ten police officers in Messina became vegetarians because of the animal holocaust which they witnessed in the course of their work of monitoring livestock breeders and abattoirs. Many people would probably turn vegetarian when faced with illegal animal breeding facilities and repugnant slaughter methods. Alas, not only is regulation insufficient (though Italy is the most equipped nation for this), but all this often happens in foreign countries where regulations are totally absent or mere formalities. In any case, this trend is unstoppable: less and less meat and more and more fish, vegetables and fruit. Every historical era has its food customs, and it must be emphasised that these always have their reasons. We merely remind the

reader that our own Academy's Ethical Code rejects any mistreatment of animals, whether farmed, kept in captivity for production, or hunted (including fish, crustaceans and molluscs) and is in conformity with the European Convention for the Protection of Animals. The Academy prohibits the gastronomic use of species protected by European or Italian legislation, and we must unflinchingly respect these laws.





The Academy's Cultural Engine

In collaboration with the "Franco Marengi" Study Centre, the Regional Study Centres are exceptionally placed for spreading awareness of the Academy's activities.

BY SILVIA DE LORENZO



Today the Academy faces new challenges, begins President Paolo Petroni, opening the meeting of the Regional Study Centre Directors in the absence of the "Franco Marengi" Study Centre's President Alfredo Pelle for temporary health reasons. What was to become the Academy, founded by a group of friends who thought that it would remain small, already had more than 3000 members just a few years after its foundation. Since then it has continuously evolved, proving that the idea was a winner, and that the ability to combine culinary gatherings with cultural content (a second phase of the Academy since 2003) led to its ever-growing success. Today, Petroni declares, a third phase begins, in which the Academy breaks free of self-referentiality and emerges as an authority in the broad field of food culture. For example, government ministries have entrusted us with the task of promoting high-quality Italian cuisine abroad, which we have successfully carried out through events organised by our foreign Delegations in conjunction with Italian Consulates, Embassies and Cultural Institutes. Within Italy, we have undertaken the onerous project of publishing works for a wide audience, including the recipe book *Tra-*



ditions of the Table and the very recent volume *Sauces and Gravies in Regional Cooking Tradition*. This volume, resulting from collaboration between the various Regional Study Centres, is a source of pride for the Academy. Presented in the course of the meeting, it receives unanimous appreciation, bringing satisfaction to those who have worked on it. The publications which will form part of the *Food Culture Library*, supported by the expertise of the Regional Study Centres and entrusted with fostering reader loyalty, will come out biannually: the spring publication will be dedicated to one of the themes from previously published volumes from the series *Cultural Gastronomic Itineraries*, while the autumn publication will follow each year's distinctive theme. In a market saturated with cooking publications, a book of a rather different nature from the others, which offers cultural depth but does not disdain recipes and appealing images, is likely to find an interested audience. In relation to this, and notwithstanding the short notice involved, Paolo Petroni invites the Regional Study Centre Directors to review the text of the volume about fish, elaborated 11 years ago, to update it and make it more accessible with a view to publishing it in spring. The

introduction will once again fall to Honorary Pesaro-Urbino Delegate Corrado Piccinetti, one of the foremost authorities on the subject, who is present at the meeting and, with his habitual competence, delineates the various topics he intends to discuss.

The chair of the gathering, the "Franco Marengi" Study Centre's Vice President Sergio Corbino, announces the annual theme for 2017, which will be "The cuisine of cheese". Commenting on the importance of this new series' constituent volumes, he discusses the challenges of setting out the texts.

There is a reminder about the upcoming publication of the next *Good Traditional Table Guide*, which has raised considerable awareness about the Academy and now boasts substantial international involvement.

Following several contributions by Study Centre Directors concerning appreciation for the new *Food Culture Library* volume and ideas for collaborating on future publications, President Petroni concludes the meeting by thanking the participants, also on behalf of Alfredo Pelle, for their hard work in producing these publications, in which cultural content, depth, fruitful dialogue, and punctual delivery resulted in a highly satisfying end product.

The many projects undertaken, governmental recognition of the Academy's role, and success in raising awareness among a wider audience indicate that we are strong enough to participate decisively in today's food world and can be proud to call ourselves part of the Academy.



Cinderella's carriage

The pumpkin's ability to grow large within days led to its ancient associations with speed and weight, inertia and strength.

BY ALFREDO PELLE
Vicenza Academician

President of the "Franco Marengli" Study Centre

Who knows which type of pumpkin Cinderella harvested from her vegetable garden to make the carriage for the ball. Pumpkins must already have been enormous even then, if it is true that a mammoth pumpkin harvested in Canada in 1996 weighed 446 kilos! The problem begins from the complexity of the pumpkin in terms of the different countries, climates, hybridisations, and crosses which have always made it tricky to pinpoint this vegetable's nature. Therefore the pumpkin - *Cucurbita* in Latin - may be yellow, white, green, brown, smooth, wrinkly, large, huge, medium, small, spherical, flat, flattened at the poles, elongated,

straight, curved - and that is just the beginning. Indeed there are different gourd species: *Cucurbita maxima*, *C. moschata*, *Lagenaria leuchantera*, etc, whence originate a near-infinity of varieties, some eaten when fully ripe and others when still 'green'!

A truly complicated affair, then, also because there are, to name but a few, pumpkins from Holland, Val di Chiana, Spain, Valparaiso, Virginia, Messina, Naples, Genoa, Albenga, and Marina di Chioggia. How can one claim with any certainty that the best pumpkins are the dark green ones, the lumpy ones, those flattened at the poles, when those with white flesh are just as valid?





We must also remember that courgettes are none other than a type of pumpkin which is eaten while still unripe, and they have a wide variety of different shapes and colours: round, cylindrical, club-shaped, grooved, spherical, or shaped like a spinning top... All in all, with its ninety genera and nine hundred species, with its variation in volume, structure and weight, in shape and colour, the gourd exemplifies Nature's whimsical and intemperate character!

We had them even before European contact with the Americas, and Roman cuisine used them in simple fare. The ancient Roman gastronome Apicius provides various pumpkin recipes: once boiled, it can be spiced and seasoned, accompanied by a sauce, or fried.

The *maxima* variety arrived from the Americas and entered the diet of the poor, where it remained for centuries. The noble classes, though not necessarily objecting to it, did not consider it important either. Since it can attain its full size in six or eight days, in the ancient world the pumpkin was associated with speed and heaviness, inertia and strength. "No sooner does the pumpkin begin trailing its tendrils along the ground, than it is ready for the table".

The seventeenth-century agronomist

and gastronome Vincenzo Tanara wrote: "In this the pumpkin outdoes all other plants/Faster than stubborn Ivy/Covering in a single month/What takes the other a lifetime/Yet spent and wilted on the ground/When the nightingale grows silent".

And though pumpkin is indeed mentioned by Mediaeval and Renaissance court chefs, from Cristoforo da Messisbugo to Bartolomeo Scappi, it was gradually relegated to a minor role: Giovanni Vialardi (1804-72), court chef to the Italian king Victor Emmanuel II, hardly mentions it, in Artusi it figures only in a soup and a cake, and Escoffier ignores it altogether. Luigi Carnacina regards it with suspicion and it migrates from haute cuisine to rural cuisine, supplanted by the courgette and replaced by the potato, the great new love of chef and housewife alike, until the pumpkin only takes a bit part in soups...

But now it's back in vogue, with an increasing demand for *tortelli di zucca* (pumpkin ravioli), a mainstay of Po Valley cuisine. It is a gastronomic diva, sharing in the triumph of the newly resurgent *tortelli* and *risotti*. Even its seeds are now seen year-round: slippery, convex, white and oval, they are washed, dried, set out in the sun or beside the stove in winter for further

drying, and then eaten as has been done since time immemorial, by extraction of the kernel with one's teeth. Though its role is not identical to that of times past (such as the *suca baruca*, the fresh-baked 'sea pumpkin' once ubiquitous as street food in Chioggia), this vegetable resource forms part of human history, spanning the ancient, the old and the modern, in beautifully prepared and well-designed recipes. All manner of arcane procedures have historically been deployed to determine the quality of pumpkins: it was seized by the stem and weighed, the heavier the better; a thick stem was considered a good sign because it meant better absorption of lymph, hence a superior pumpkin; thumbnails or knitting needles were pressed into it to gauge its firmness, the more resilient the better; and so on. Another method was to immerse a 'shred' of pumpkin pulp into cold water: if it sank immediately, the pumpkin was of high quality. Pumpkins and gourds were used in many ways beyond cooking itself: small ones were used as bottles, as depicted in images of St. Rocco, and larger ones, once dried out, were used by farmers to store seeds or salt (the famous 'pumpkin salt'). They were even tied around the waists of sailors as flotation aids. Giuseppe Arcimboldo's famous portrait of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II as Vertumnus, the Roman god of metamorphoses, depicts him entirely in the form of vegetables, principally gourds; while Teofilo Folengo situated all the characters of his *Maccheronee* inside a giant pumpkin, concluding the poem with the declaration *Zucca mihi patria est*: "the pumpkin is my homeland".

The Celtic rituals of Samhain are evoked at Hallowe'en all over the USA and beyond when a large pumpkin is lit from within with candles; in Italian, the pumpkin is also a colloquial metaphor for stupidity when used in expressions of the type "you pumpkin-head" or "have you a head or a pumpkin?"

ALFREDO PELLE



Victor Hugo's tree

The exotic new crops introduced into our fields and now firmly established will have considerable effects on our food culture.

BY ELISABETTA COCITO
Turin Academician
"Franco Marengi" Study Centre

"Das the trees: change your leaves, but keep intact your roots". This quotation from Victor Hugo expresses the ideal attitude towards tradition in a clear and reasonable manner: preserve its roots, and therefore its trunk and branches, on which new leaves, flowers and fruits will sprout over time. This concept, applicable in any area of life, allows us to retain a fresh outlook, because tradition remains a living and meaningful thing if it maintains fluidity and openness to change and new influences. Hugo's wise words, though metaphorical, can also be taken literally in our time to illustrate momentous upheavals which, in large part because of climate change, are befalling our plant life, agriculture and food busi-

nesses, with nascent consequences for food culture.

New leaves and fruits are growing, and not just metaphorically, but in a tangible way, making their way to our tables. This is tradition on the move: some foods are fated to disappear, and others to become ubiquitous or blend with already established ingredients, perhaps gradually at first, and ultimately becoming standard. Climate change, a frequently discussed source of indubitable and serious problems, is viewed by some as a challenge and an opportunity for innovative and sometimes even revolutionary agricultural entrepreneurship.

Until recently it would have seemed impossible to eat passion fruits or avocados grown in Italy - but nowadays

we can. A representative example is that of a youth from Giarre, in Sicily, who decided to grow avocados in what were originally his grandfather's olive groves, which his father had converted to lemon orchards: three different strategies in three generations. Sicily's increasing tropicalisation, combined with its topography and the fertile volcanic soil in some of its areas, make for a particularly delicious and therefore prized fruit. Another advantage is freshness, because the fruit need not be shipped from far away to reach consumers in Italy. Additionally, it is grown with respect for traditions but using modern technology and organic standards.

The banana was possibly the first exotic fruit made widely available in Europe and North America due to advances in





transport and the fruit's ability to remain fresh for long periods; but even that archetypally exotic fruit is now grown in Sicily, albeit on a small scale. This is the brainchild of a young woman who added a few banana plants to her family's long-standing cultivation of local fruits, obtaining positive results. Obviously this enterprise cannot compete with large-scale imports from multinationals, but its aim is to reach local consumers with a fresh product of high quality.



Will avocados and bananas become local typical products? This might sound premature now, but let us remember that even those local products most intimately associated with the region once came from far away and were initially considered exotic or even viewed with suspicion (for example, tomato and potato). The stated goal is to cultivate avocados and bananas of excellent quality, able to satisfy the most demanding palates; due to their excellence, if all goes well these products might even conquer a portion of the international market.

Another fashionable fruit is the red goji berry, to which a plethora of health benefits are attributed. Imported from

Asia, due to its popularity it is now starting to be grown in Italy. A new enterprise is mobilising various agricultural companies in southern Italy to produce goji berries "Made in Italy": fresh, of high quality, and without artificial preservatives, grown according to the strict regulations (both voluntary and legally enforced) governing organic produce. The same enterprise is also promoting other innovative projects: goji tourism, goji cuisine and goji in restaurants. This is a challenging endeavour to produce the high-quality Italian goji berry and create agricultural innovation. Where cuisine is concerned, the goji berry now seems to be making its way into traditional food, accom-

panying or sometimes even replacing the traditional tomato in the preparation of spaghetti. Stockfish with fresh goji berries, goji octopus, goji doughnuts, and so on, are making their debut on the most innovative tables.

Farmers abroad are also significantly modifying their methods in response to recent climatic changes: sparkling wine is now produced in Britain, thyme and strawberries are appearing in southern Greenland, and in Italy, saffron, aloe and olive oil are being grown in Lombardy, while coriander is

cultivated in Veneto. All these changes and adaptations introduced into agriculture, whether as a challenge, through necessity, or to follow a fad, cannot fail to have a considerable effect on cuisine in the medium and long term if they become the norm. In a hypothetical future Italy, we might consider spaghetti with goji berries to be a traditional dish or an avocado starter to be a local speciality, while a tart made with northern European strawberries could be viewed as an 'exotic dessert'.

Nothing new under the sun, or rather, under the ground: this is just history repeating itself.

ELISABETTA COCITO



THE ACADEMY SILVER PLATE

An elegant silver plated dish engraved with the Academy logo. This symbolic object may be presented to restaurants that display exceptional service, cuisine and hospitality. Delegates may contact the Milan Headquarters (segreteria@accademia1953.it) for more information and orders.



Conservatism today

*It doesn't mean mere nostalgia for times past,
but vigilance and readiness in the defence of food quality.*

BY ELIO PALOMBI
Napoli-Capri Delegate



Giuseppe Prezzolini

From a postmodern perspective, our society is characterised by a dissolution of rules, corroded by the vacillation of the underlying principles. It's a vision of an evolving-devolving system, which offers no reliable footholds, partly because of globalisation, with its inevitable interferences between cultures. Fluid-culture theories have contributed to the destruction of fundamental values, with dramatic results.

On the continuum between innovation and tradition, when it comes to food the younger generations lean strongly towards the 'desacralisation' of meals: finger food, informal restaurants like those often found in English-speaking countries, fast food. This total upheaval in our food habits has caused everyone who tries to defend long-standing culinary traditions to be disparaged as 'conservative'.

Confusion regarding this concept makes it necessary to clarify the meaning of 'conservatism', however hard it may be to avoid the disparagement of those convinced that being 'conservative' today means being moderate, retrograde, or even reactionary, just because one attempts to limit the uncontrolled influence of fads.

In his *Manifesto dei conservatori* (*Conservative Manifesto*), Giuseppe Prezzolini defined himself as a conservative because he fought strenuously in defence of natural law as a guarantee of human liberties: eternal but always perfectible values, and adaptable to changing social circumstances. Amid the political unease of the 1920s, Prezzolini, impotent witness to the destruction of the most basic principles of liberty and respect for the individual, did not view himself as a nostalgic lover of the past, but as "a conservative with no illusions, not because the past was necessarily good, but because the future threatens to be even worse".

In assessing the disruption that is assailing our food habits, through reality TV circus and more, conservatism today, far from constituting mere counterproductive nostalgia for the past, means vigilance and alertness in the defence of food quality while also remaining open to the changes necessitated by new social circumstances. In today's food world, conservatism means not only defending tradition from a potentially even worse future, but protecting the quality of food against the grave health risks occasioned by globalisation. Conservatism doesn't mean plaintive nostalgia for times past, but a ceaseless

attempt to limit the chaos imposed by today's breakneck pace which disintegrates the structure of meals. Conservatism nowadays means standing firm not so much against the advance of the new, but against a food 'style' which has taken root among the younger generations and is in danger of jeopardising human health.

We must acknowledge that passively waiting for "the corpses of those who have set our era's culinary scene" to pass is an illusory solution. The Academy and the guardians of high-quality cuisine are bent on defending food traditions, relying on respect for basic nutritional principles without ignoring the pleasure which food gives us through taste, which according to Brillat-Savarin "is, among all our senses, the one which relies on direct contact of a specialised organ with flavour-bearing particles". We must, therefore, satisfy the palate but also safeguard health. Today's eating habits are questionable. In my opinion it is necessary to educate consumers about food health. As Pope Francis observed when receiving the FAO delegates in the Vatican: "We must modify our lifestyle and rediscover the word 'sobriety'". There must be an awakening of consciousness with an educational focus; we must break free of apathy and unfettered consumerism, establishing as standard the principle that food and its producers must equally be respected. There have been campaigns to raise awareness, but collective action is necessary to fine-tune educational efforts aimed at fostering a genuine appreciation for food among the younger generations.