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DINO VILLANI, EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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DEAR ACADEMICIANS...

FOCUS

CULTURE AND RESEARCH

On the cover: *Reproduction of the painting Pantry with Sweets, Eggs, Salami, Cheese, Icebox and Basket of Lemons (1730-40) by Tommaso Realfonso. On exhibition at the Civic Museum of Pesaro.*

There is no gastronomy without analysis

Thanks to gastronomic criticism, cuisine has turned into a culinary art that must be developed by gastronomes and above all, by Academicians.

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI
President of the Academy

Dear Academicians, today as never before the information industry and media in all their diverse forms, abound with culinary reporting. But what is limited if not absent altogether, is a coherent gastronomic history, criticism and analysis.

If reporting is the description or impersonal listing of facts, then through thoughtful criticism, history can provide an interpretation. This is the case as well for cuisine and gastronomy.

The concept and definition of gastronomy are neither simple nor univocal. However, in general one can describe gastronomy as a complex of rules and behaviors relative to culinary art, which in the preparation of food favors the aspect of sensory enjoyment over simple human nutritional requirements. Regarding the latter, gastronomic criticism takes into consideration not only the nutritional, technical, economic, and ethical aspects of nutrition, but also the artistic ones that are inherent to all human activity, including the preparation of food.

The art of cuisine and pleasure are closely linked in gastronomy, when they are analyzed, studied and discussed through gastronomic criticism - a subject that is not easy to expand upon in a few short lines. As such, I will list some important points, starting with a basic concept.

Criticism, including gastronomic criticism, must be as objective as possible, and thus should not be based on a question of "I like this" or "I don't like this".

The criticism should be carried out based on investigations aimed at understanding and appreciating, on the basis of theories and various methodologies, the elements that help us to formulate a judgment on a culinary or gastronomic creation or menu, or an alimentary custom or ritual. Such judgments are always subject to debate, because debate and discussion and the clash of opinions are vital to any critical process. Gastronomic criticism is a relatively recent phenomenon, as is gastronomy understood as an artistic expression either of a people or of a quality cuisine. It began, perhaps between the 16th and 17th centuries when a new notion of art, including the art of cuisine, began to be perceived as forms of creativity and individuality with unique modes of expression and a progressive overcoming of the dichotomy between form and content. In terms of gastronomy, this complex process of change led to the affirmation of artistic autonomy and the increased importance of two new figures: the gastronome and the cook.

In order to arrive at a value judgment in terms of goodness and beauty (and not only visual) the study of a work of gastronomy should use methods derived from other human sciences such as physiology, psychology, anthropology, history, etc. And we must keep in mind that any gastronomic creation should have as a basis its nutritional, economic and ethical values, among many other elements of critical judgment that are often lacking, such as an historical analysis and study of gastronomic transformation. These are two aspects that should lead us to the protection and improvement of nutritional traditions.

A prerequisite for gastronomic criticism is an historical assessment, be it recent or ancient history, of the subject at hand. To be avoided are expressions such as "they say that" or "we hear that", and above all any personal impressions.

Criticism should take as a point of departure the examination of the data that explain the gastronomic work without judging it: its composition, historical and environmental circumstances, manners of use, diffusion, as well as the influence of other studies and articles and the reasons for its success.

On this basis, through gastronomic

criticism we can identify and organize two basic orientations or criteria. The first tends to analyze the work in relation to a given concept. This is an historical, sociological and anthropological approach. The second considers the work in terms of its technical, taste, and stylistic elements, and is a strictly gastronomic type of analysis. The two approaches can coexist and in combination contribute to a critical synthesis.

Never before have the focus and work of the critic had to pay so much attention to the changes taking place in cuisine, with widespread and rapid gastronomic transformations owing to both internal and external influences, that lead to the disappearance, substitution and modification of seemingly immutable and consolidated traditions.

So rather than waxing nostalgic over a supposed lost gastronomic paradise of old, the gastronome, and especially the Academician, must study these changes by means of gastronomic criticism, just as happens with other artistic endeavors which are also undergoing profound changes.

Along these lines, the habits adopted as part of culinary traditions must be examined by gastronomic critics from a point of view that takes into consideration alimentary styles, with analyses of the old and new meanings or a dish as well, and not just its form and variations, with the goal of understanding the processes of change that traditions undergo and contributing to their improvement.

From this brief exposition, we can see that the gastronomic critic must also act as mediator between cuisine and a gastronomic work on the one hand, and the consumer on the other, thereby making the meaning and values that were once connected with tradition and are now in a state of rapid change, available to that consumer. It is up to us to help them orient themselves in the new, and for many, unexplored, territory of nutritional innovation.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI

XVI REGULAR ASSEMBLY OF DELEGATES MEETING

Michelangelo Room
Grand Hotel Baglioni
(Piazza dell'Unità Italiana, 6 - 50123 Florence)

Saturday, May 30, 2015

8:00 am first convocation
9:00 am second convocation

AGENDA

1. President's Remarks
2. Election of the President of the Academy
3. Election of the members of the Academic Consulta
4. Election of the members of the Board of Auditors
5. Election of the members of the Arbitration Board
6. Other business

Luigi Veronelli, the man who created oeno-gastronomic criticism

A grateful reminiscence ten years after his passing.

BY PAOLO PETRONI
Secretary General of the Academy

After recollecting last month the fundamental work done by Ancel Keys to showcase the Mediterranean Diet and accordingly, Italian gastronomy, I feel the need to evoke - just about ten years after his death in Bergamo on November 29, 2004 - a man who was the harbinger and the teacher of all gastronomists and aficionados of Italian wines and cuisine. His name was Luigi Veronelli, known by his friends as Gino. I was lucky enough to meet him and to collaborate with him, albeit for a short period. I saw him first on television at the end of the 1960s on the program "At the Table at 7" that had its start in 1966 and featured both Veronelli and Umberto Orsini, flanked by the flamboyant Delia Scala. Scala's bad health brought aboard Ave Ninchi. It was a good program, with a very large following, a true innovation compared to the slow and somewhat boring *"Voyage along the Po Valley in Search of Genuine Foods"* led by Mario Soldati.

At that time I was not concerned with cuisine but the explanations about white and yellow potatoes used to make mashed or roasted potatoes fascinated me. After that, I was thunderstruck at the end of the Sixties when I bought books that few people knew: *The Veronelli Guides to a Pleasant Italy*. These guides covered region by region, municipalities galore with historical and architectural notes, with extraordinary and innovative reviews of artisan pastry makers, shepherds, pork specialists, and most of all inns, *trattorias* and restaurants. They were a veritable gold mine of news and informations that opened my eyes to the world. Unfortunately, the series was never completed. It is possible that Veronelli ran out of time or the publisher Garzanti did not find it convenient to continue. However, the guide dedicated to my region, Tuscany, is always within reach and I peruse it with nostalgia, in spite of the fact that most of the restaurants praised by Veronelli no longer exist or, if they do, they bear no resemblance to their past.

Veronelli was born in Milan in 1926 and for almost fifty years he was recognized as the foremost oeno-gastronomic reviewer. He was a feisty libertarian, a vigorous polemist by virtue of his culture and curiosity, ready to stimulate and to follow his great intuitions. He thought up the idea of "Communal Denominations of Gastronomic Fields" and "self certification". He was maniacal in his fight for autochthonous varietals and the excellence of extra virgin olive oil. He even picked a fight with Vissani who was guilty of not frying food in extra virgin oil. He also created a particular lexicon that quickly found converts: "wine for meditation", "full and warm mouth", "dialectic red". One of his aphorisms became famous: "life is too short to drink bad wines".

Veronelli was a publisher as well. In 1959 he published his first book dedicated to wine, *"Italian Wines"*, and as a writer he unleashed his polemic inspiration against big industry at the side of vintners and artisans. Meeting Luigi Carnacina was a pivotal event. Carnacina was a maître and manager of the most important hotels and restaurants of the time. A long collaboration ensued that brought about the publication of books of recipes that met great success (*The Great Cuisine, To Eat and To Drink the Italian Way, The Rustic Regional Cuisine*). He wrote *"La Pacciata"* with Gianni Brera. His guides to restaurants and wines, albeit surrounded by some criticism, set the pace. Veronelli did not just classify "restaurantism" he rewarded them with "suns" and "hearts" for dishes that fascinated him. He was a truly great protagonist of our gastronomic culture, a true teacher who will be justly honored by EXPO 2015 that will dedicate to him the exhibition "To Walk the Earth".

Easter and the reawakening of nature

A marriage of symbols and popular traditions that enrich the cuisine this holiday.

BY ARNALDO GRANDI
Academician, Pordenone Delegation

Spring and Easter clearly have close ties: Easter is the symbol of resurrection, a message of renewal and a time for new hope. Spring is a testament to the reawakening of the earth, of the growth of new seedlings. It represents the beginning of a new reality, and seen in this light, Bern Williams wrote: "The day that the Lord created hope was probably the same day that He created Spring". Easter falls on the first Sunday after the full moon following the spring equinox. In other words, the day in which the fields pass from resting fallow to new planting and new life. Thus as often happens, symbols and signs of popular traditions, including pagan ones, combine and intersect with religious events.

Pellegrino Artusi stated "the hypocrites of the world do not lend importance to eating, but there is not a single festival, be it civil or religious, that doesn't include spreading a tablecloth and endeavoring to eat the best foods". Therefore food, and the quality of that food, become essential conditions that are tied to offerings whose origins are lost in time and whose selection is tied to the region and the normal course of the laws of nature. The moment of joyous reawakening of the land can be found in the first offerings of the fields that enrich convivial events, and in popular tradition are particularly welcome after the austerity of the long winter. Easter traditions fit in perfectly with this reality.

It is almost impossible to express our

desire to be together and rekindle family ties without gathering around a table dominated by typical dishes that often recall symbols of religious festivals: starting with roast lamb or baby goat, eggs, fresh vegetables and special desserts. This convergence of religious rituals, traditions, and seasonal trends is the source of the custom of eating lamb or kid, which were used in antiquity as sacrifice to the gods, and in the Christian symbolism of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The use of lamb was already present in the Jewish holiday of Passover, which began as a pastoral festival, then became an agricultural festival in which the earliest harvest offerings were served until it finally became explicitly associated with the flight out of Egypt. The story goes that the Jews were required to slaughter a one-year-old lamb, and to eat the roasted meat while on foot and to use the blood to mark the doors of their houses so that their children would be spared from the exterminating angel, who would "pass over" their homes. It is also indicative that the Italian word for Easter, *"Pasqua"*, derives from the Hebrew term *Pessach*, meaning passage, in this case the reference is to the Red Sea. In the Jewish Passover tradition the lamb is roasted whole and eaten with some bitter herbs and unleavened bread, foods that symbolize the suffering of the Jewish people in exile. Eggs are offered as a symbol of eternal life.

This other fundamental element of Easter culinary tradition is clearly present in association with spring (recall the *fortajade* omelet of Pordenone): the use of eggs is an important symbol of spring and this fact is also closely linked to prehistoric depictions of fertility and rebirth in spring pagan rituals. Modern industries have made a fortune from producing and selling chocolate Easter eggs, both with and without "surprises" inside. Nonetheless their use during Easter is something that even ancient traditions had assumed as symbols of the season: *"Omni vivum ex ovo"* was an old saying the confirms that all life originates from an egg, and thus it became a symbol of fertility. Eggs have a long history in pagan traditions because the egg, as a symbol of new life, is the source of the origin of the world. In their spring festivals, the ancient Greeks, Chinese and Persians exchanged eggs to celebrate abundance and the return of life. The ancient Romans used to bury a red-painted egg to insure a good harvest. In addition, in the cult of Ceres, celebrants marched in procession carrying an egg, and the ancient Christians offered eggs that had been blessed to the faithful.

According to the ancient Egyptians, the god Ptah created and laid a cosmic egg on the banks of the Nile, where it was hatched by the holy goose. The egg opened in the spring and the sun god Ra was born. In the Nordic countries spring and fertility were celebrated by a ceremony in which an egg was carried to the goddess *Ostara*. The etymology of the word is clear in the German and English words *Oster* and Easter.

I believe that this may be the origin the modern Easter tradition of coloring hard boiled eggs with artisanal methods (cooked onions and tea for brown, ivy leaves for green, saffron and cumin for red). It used to be traditional for young boys to compete by rolling their own colored eggs so that they crashed against those of their adversary: the broken eggs were collected and eaten by the winner. Since there were old secrets among families regarding the cooking and coloring of the eggs that rendered their shells more durable, some kids really made out like bandits. Perhaps an ancient tradition, probably of Celtic origin, was unconsciously reborn: the rolling of eggs down a hill in celebration of spring. Finally all Italian Easter meals end up with the inevitable parade of Easter pastries, varying from region to region, in which we can see that many pagan rituals associated with spring have been recaptured as Christian symbols.

We need only recall the Easter dove cake (*colomba*) that is linked to the Great Flood as a symbol of peace, to see the association with the beginning of a new era. And rabbits, even those made of chocolate, recall the Nordic spring festivals dedicated to Ostara, who was symbolized by a rabbit or hare and is an animal well known for its prolificacy. The Neapolitan Easter pastry goes back to the legend of the siren Partenope. As she emerged from the Bay of Naples to delight the inhabitants with her songs, Partenope decided to send them seven young girls, each representing flour, ricotta, eggs, grain, rosewater, spices and sugar. The goddess laid the gifts at the feet of those who through divine inspiration mixed the ingredients and created the famous pastry.

So we see that Easter and spring are joined in a marriage that invites us to celebrate the unparalleled Italian art of cuisine, a joy for the eyes and palate and giving credence to Manuel Vásquez Montalbán's assertion that "You can't trust any human being who is indifferent to food".

ARNALDO GRANDI

The Academician: glutton or gourmet?

The modern socio-psychological research and the "Ten Commandments" of Orio Vergani.

BY ALDO E. TAMMARO
Academician, Milan Brera Delegation

In a recent Focus feature in our magazine, Secretary General Paolo Petroni brought to the attention of readers a "Decalogue" written by Orio Vergani and published in one of the first bulletins sent to the Delegations. Paolo Petroni remarked on the up-to-dateness of the arguments advanced by the founder of our Academy, inviting the reader to reflect upon and treasure them.

The second commandment of the Decalogue states: "Firmly reject the common saying that classifies the Academician of Cuisine as synonymous with glutton and intemperate. The gastronome is concerned with quality and good taste, and not the quantity of food that he consumes".

To be true, my personal experience - and I am sure that of other people - suggests that in over half a century the situation has not changed; qualifying oneself as an Academician of Italian Cuisine poses the listener with a dilemma: is the person before me a glutton who at the table gets his inspiration from the unrestrained hedonism such as that of the characters created by Marco Ferreri in *The Big Feast*, or rather a refined gourmand who is interested in the historical and cultural aspects of oeno-gastronomic science?

Vergani has rightly underlined the epithet of "glutton" that the Academy "must reject scornfully"; in this case, the dictionary of the century the old Accademia della Crusca defines "glutton" as a person who has the vice of greediness, meaning "an immoderate desire for food".

In the history of humanity one can find attitudes far more intransigent in the case of gluttony. A millennium ago, Pope St. Gregory Magnus depicted a merciless portrait of the glutton by defining the impossibility of his deriving any satisfaction from food, a demonstration of excessive proclivity towards material pleasures and not enough attention to what is divine and spiritual. In the Middle Ages, more condemnation was added and gluttony was listed among those deadly sins that would have condemned man to the eternal damnation in the torments of hell.

One can rule out that in redacting the Second Commandment Vergani was inspired by a concept of gluttony and gluttons that is Taliban-like in its extremity while it is clear that his intention was to emphasize the importance of style and moderation as we approach the pleasures of the table as Academicians. We find confirmation in a recent book with a rather captivating title: *The Taste of Sin*, published by Sperling & Kupfer, Milan, 2013. The author is an Australian socio-psychologist, Simon M. Laham, who on the basis of careful and rigorous experimental research proposed to demonstrate that the seven deadly sins, when wisely committed, not only do not send us to hell but they make us better people as individuals and members of society. Gluttony is the second sin examined by Laham,

coming right after the one that in our collective imagination and in the execration of moralizers, is considered the father of all sins: lust.

One of the major health problems that western society must more seriously confront today is obesity, with all its nefarious consequences on morbidity and mortality. At first glance it would seem to be a given that gluttony = obesity, and therefore justify the exclusive demonization of gluttonous impulses and "immoderate" food consumption. And still, while it does play an important role, gluttony is not the only guilty party in this crime against humanity. Socio-psychological research has also focused attention on environmental factors, demonstrating that the quantity of food people ingest is also a function of the amount of food at their disposal. Doubling of portion size has led to a 25 percent increase in quantity in terms of meals and a 45 percent increase in terms of snacks. In addition, the consumption of artificially colored candy increased when those tested had access to ten colors instead of seven. The majority of those interviewed stated that they would drink more of a beverage in a tall thin glass than in a short, wide one.

Our excessive consumption of "simple" sugars (glucose and sucrose) has been condemned as being the potential cause of metabolic imbalances associated with the beginning and development of many pathologies. We should not forget, however, that glucose is the primary source of energy for the brain, which uses it, among other things, to manage cognitive activities, make complex decisions and carry out demanding mental activities such as self control, that deprive the brain of the energy necessary to carry out its function. Subjects charged with carrying out several acts of self control (among them, not coincidentally, diet) demonstrated a reduction in mental efficiency that was not observed if the same subjects consumed small amounts of beverages containing sugar. And the benefits of sucrose don't end there: drinking a beverage containing sugar was followed by mental reassessments and the suppression of stereotypical ideas about others. Eating a slice of cake tended to make subject more inclined to make donations. In sum, sugar seemed to make the subjects better citizens than those who did not receive sweet gratification.

These small examples, like others cited by Laham, are providing new grist for the mill of Vergani's second "commandment", lending scientific support to our indignity in rejecting the broad identification of Academician with gluttony. And all this without neglecting the profound social significance of our conviviality: "eating together" has always acted as the glue that holds families and society together. With the understanding, of course, that we don't lose sight of the type of food we eat and moderation in its consumption.

ALDO E. TAMMARO

ITALIAN CUISINE RECOGNIZED BY *THE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY OF GASTRONOMY*

The General Assembly of the International Academy of Gastronomy, that took place February 1, 2015 in Paris, showed their recognition with the conferral of numerous awards. Three Italian institutions and individuals stand out.

*The **Grand Prize of Gastronomic Culture** was awarded to ALMA, the International School of Italian Cuisine of Colorno (Parma) for its role in the construction of a new Italian cuisine by making the most of its cultural roots.*

*A **Prize for Gastronomic Literature** was attributed to "The Story of What We Eat" by Renzo Pellati, Academician of the Turin Delegation and member of the "Franco Marenghi" Study Center, for the book's cultural value and excellent layout.*

*A **Prize for Chef of the Future** was given to Pier Giorgio Parini, a young Italian who works in the restaurant "Povero Diavolo" in Torriana (Rimini) for his noteworthy gastronomic creations.*

With the conferral of these three awards, Italian cuisine was well represented on the global scene. Unlike other prizes, it should be noted that this is not a competition, and no institution or person can receive the award more than once, at least in the same category, as is the case with the Nobel Prize.

Culinary time

"Any good roast must be cooked slowly", according to Maestro Martino, but today less cooked, pinker meat is in fashion.

BY GIULIANO RELJA
Trieste Delegate

Our mothers and grandmothers who devoted so much time and patience to their cooking, knew exactly how long different foods and recipes took for reach the perfection of slow cooking. They had a daily routine and handed down their recipes, both written and oral, to their daughters. They also maintained carefully handwritten notebooks with their best recipes. And going far back in time to the distant Paleolithic era, man as hunter discovered how to use fire and no longer simply consumed his meat raw, but roasted it on rudimentary spits or red-hot rocks. We don't know if he liked his meat rare, medium rare or well done. As we know from historic writings and artifacts, the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans also roasted or cooked fish, poultry and various meats such as lamb, goat, pork, beef and even peacock. We see this technique's reappearance in the great banquets of the Renaissance. Many of these animals, especially when cooked whole and stuffed with all manner of fillings, apparently required cooking times of Biblical proportions.

In his 15th century book *Libro de Arte Coquinaria*, Maestro Martino of Como described in detail the methods and cooking times for his recipes: "Any good roast must be cooked slowly… little by little"; for a pie made with venison or roebuck "… put it in the oven at low heat and let it cook very slowly. It must be served well done"; "to make a capon consommé…let the cooking pot boil for seven hours". One interesting feature in some recipes is the indication of the number of prayers, Paternosters or Misereres to recite as a way of measuring cooking time: for meat ravioli: "let them boil for the duration of two Paternosters". Pellegrino Artusi's 1891 *Science in the Kitchen* contains many elaborate recipes, especially in the chapter devoted to stews and roasts. The author is very precise in providing the exact measurements of ingredients and describes their preparation in detail. He does not always provide the exact cooking times, but emphasizes "cook for a long time", "as well done as possible" and "perfect doneness", "remove from flame after an extended time". However even then short cooking times were de rigueur for the famous Florentine steak: "put it on the grates over a hot charcoal flame…it should not be overcooked because it is cooked to perfection when it exudes abundant juice when cut".

Many of the great traditional regional recipes from our country call for long and laborious hours of cooking. One need only think of Bolognese or Neapolitan ragù, which must "simmer away" for five hours, or *baccalà* from Vicenza, the great *bollito misto* or stews and roasts. From the area around Trieste, heavily influenced by the cuisine of central Europe, we have Hungarian style goulash, pork shanks, and roasted veal. Beginning in the 1950s in order to reduce the time spent slaving over a hot stove, the pressure cooker became very popular. The "atomic" pot, as it came to be called, has all but disappeared today.

More recently, cooking meat only until it is pink has become popular, although it is not to everyone's taste. This means rapid cooking not only for steaks, but also for lamb, goat, game, as well as some fish, especially tuna: this under-

cooking keeps the juices inside and renders the meat softer and more digestible. There is also a debate about the classic *costoletta* Milanese: some favor pounding the meat to resemble an "elephant ear" and cooking it through, while others prefer it cut thick and served pink inside.

The fastest thing one can serve is raw food, and given the popularity of Oriental cuisine, it is becoming more widespread. Witness the explosion of "tartare" and *carpaccio*. If you like it, it constitutes a simple, healthy and easily prepared meal. It is essential however, to make sure that the fish has been flash frozen long enough to kill any dangerous parasites. Among raw meat dishes, one of the most successful is the carpaccio created by Giuseppe Cipriani at Harry's Bar in Venice in 1950. It was thus named because its color recalled those in the paintings of the artist Vittore Carpaccio.

As a counterpoint to this passion for raw food we have the new technique of cooking at very low temperatures for long periods of time. However this phenomenon is largely confined to a few very experimental restaurants.

The profound change in today's pace and lifestyle has naturally affected how we use our time and how we live, eat and interpret cuisine. The more complex and elaborate dishes have progressively given way to ones that are easy to prepare, and we have a whole new set of offerings on the part of the food industry: frozen, boxed, precooked, freeze dried and vacuum sealed. Just toss them in a pan and you have foods, sometimes fairly complex, that look good and are ready in minutes. But *how good* are they?

The media, especially television, seem to favor cooking shows that depict stressed people preparing food in a hurry. In 20 minutes two professional chefs each working with an amateur prepare an entire meal. Another competition gives two amateurs, under the guidance of a professional chef 10 minutes to prepare a meal to be judged by three culinary professionals. A dinner can be made in just 8 minutes, with the understanding that exchanging your high heels for a pair of ballet slippers will enable you to dash more easily between the stove, refrigerator and counter.

Many people lament that cooking is no longer what it once was and the culture of tradition is being lost. But perhaps between low quality street food gobbled down in a rush while on foot and the elaborate home cooked roasts that we enjoyed with our families around a table in days gone by we can find, at least sometimes, some sort of compromise. After all, more than 2,000 years ago Aristotle declared that "virtue lies in the middle."

GIULIANO RELJA

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

Academicians' contributions to the magazine are not only welcome, but essential. However Academicians should keep in mind some important guidelines so that their contributions, which are the fruit of their passion and dedication, are expeditiously published.

● ***Articles:*** *it is essential that the* ***text of articles be sent via email****, in MS Word format (not pdf) to the following address:* ***redazione@accademia1953.it***

● ***Article length:*** *it is important that articles are* ***between 3,500 and 7,000 characters*** *(including spaces); this is the best way to avoid cuts that are bothersome for both the editors and those submitting the texts. All computers should be able to provide character counts..*

● *Each issue of the magazine is printed one month ahead of the cover date so that it can be delivered to the Academicians by that date. Those submissions that are time sensitive should be sent in ample time.*

● ***"From the Delegations" Section:*** *In order to facilitate reading, please* ***limit articles to a maximum of 2,500 characters including spaces****.*

● *Please remember that in the "From the Delegations" section as well as elsewhere,* ***descriptions of meetings held outside the territory of the Delegation or in the homes of Academicians, unless they are associated with an important event, will not be published****. Also,* ***please do not include a list of dishes and wines****. Such listing should appear on the appropriate rating form regarding convivial meetings.*

● ***Rating forms for convivial meetings:*** *should be sent to the Secretariat (****segreteria@accademia1953.it****). It is also important to limit remarks in the "notes and comments" section of the form to* ***800 characters*** *(maximum 1,000) spaces included in order to avoid cuts. Rating forms that reach the Secretariat more than 30 days after the event will be discarded.*

● *We also request that you not submit reports on convivial meetings held* ***outside the territory of the Delegation****, or that take place in the* ***homes of Academicians****, or are otherwise not held in restaurants or public venues, as they will not be published.*

Smile and say vinegar

There's the kind made with wine and the ones made with alcohol. There are traditional and non-traditional balsamic varieties with varying aging times, and each one has a specific culinary use.

BY NICOLA BARBERA
Academician, Milan Duomo Delegation

Vinegar is a liquid that contains acetic acid that forms by aerobic fermentation. That is, when exposed to oxygen (air and water), Gram-negative bacteria (*aceto bacter*) become pinkish when they undergo the coloration process invented by the Danish physician Hans Christian Gram, while the positive ones retain their original bluish-violet color. These bacteria oxidize the ethanol contained in wine (and also in beer and cider), transforming them first into acetaldehyde and then into acetic acid. In 1864, Louis Pasteur was the first to identify the principal component of the "mother of vinegar" in a living microorganism that he called *mycoderma aceti*. Thus he was able to explain the transformation of wine into vinegar. By law the acidity of vinegar is expressed in grams of acetic acid per 100 ml; that value should not be less than 6 percent and the alcohol content should not exceed 1.5 percent in volume.

In the Old Testament, vinegar is cited by Moses in the laws dictated to him by God. The law called for abstaining from vinegar as it was used as a thirst quenching stimulant. It was called *ossicrato* by the Greeks and the blend of water and vinegar known as *poscia* was widely used by the Roman military forces. Therefore, when the Gospel relates that a praetorian gave the crucified Christ a sponge soaked in vinegar, it was not an act of cruelty, but more likely one of pity for the dying man. Later it would be customary for the Romans to have an *"acetabulum"* on their tables: a bowl of wine vinegar in which diners could dip pieces of bread to "cleanse their palate" between courses.

The many different varieties of vinegar depend on the "raw material" that is used to produce them, but the most noble kind, wine vinegar, is obtained by acetic fermentation.

After a long period in which vinegar was not particularly important, it became relevant once again in the late Middle Ages thanks to the great agronomist of the time Pier de' Crescenzi of Bologna (1233-1320). He was able to make vinegar by exposing open containers of wine to air in a hot environment. In France, however, the city of Orléans became the European capital of vinegar production and in 1394 the first professional guild of vinegar producers was formed. Since Orléans was the last navigable port on the Loire it is likely that some wines were partially acidified by the time they arrived. As they were not sellable as wine, they were "recuperated" as vinegar. Once it was discovered that people appreciated good vinegar they began to induce acetification of better quality wines with low alcohol content and adding a wine base containing the vinegar "mother" or sometimes yeast.

Wine vinegar also became the major prophylactic method against the spread of the black plague, which killed nearly one-third of Europe's population in the 14th century. To protect themselves when visiting infected patients, physi-

cians began to wear masks with long "beaks" that covered their noses. The beaks were stuffed with a sponge imbued with vinegar through which they breathed.
In more recent times, we note that in 1867 in Ghemme (Novara) Giovanni Ponti founded his still active business and in 1925 a new law regulated vinegar production, defining "vinegar" as a product "of wine" (red or white) as opposed to "alcohol vinegar" which was suitable for preserving and pickling foods.
And now a word about other types of vinegar: apple cider vinegar is the best known kind made from fruit. It developed in Normandy, the home of the famous apple brandy known as Calvados. Malt vinegar, typical of the United Kingdom, is made from "malted" barley obtained by transforming the starch of the grains (partially sprouted and dried) first into sugar and then through alcoholic fermentation, into vinegar (as is the case with beer). In China, Japan and Korea rice vinegar is a typical condiment. The first phase (alcoholic fermentation) produces "rice wine" (Japanese sake) and the second (acetic fermentation) phase produces the vinegar. Let us not forget mead (*idromele*, from the Greek words for water and honey), perhaps the world's oldest fermented alcoholic beverage, made with honey diluted in hot water. Mead even predates beer, which was not created until man began cultivating grain.
The "official" birth of balsamic vinegar took place around the 12th century. This "condiment" (it is not truly a vinegar) is obtained through the natural acetification of the must of cooked grapes, followed by a fairly long period of aging, concentration and refinement (with periodic withdrawals, decanting and recasting so as to obtain the same amount) in wooden kegs of progressively diminishing size. No aromatic substances are added.
In 1600 there was a great explosion of the vinegar industry and its methods of production began to be codified; thus Modena became the Italian Orléans of balsamic vinegar. Actually the term "balsamic" only appeared in 1730 when the cleric and great 18th century historian Ludovico Antonio Muratori of Vignola used this adjective to describe the beneficial and curative properties of the tiny bottle of vinegar given him by the Duke of Modena Francesco I. He soon began to popularize the product.
It is important to clarify that there are two totally different kinds of balsamic vinegar (as well as the abyssal difference in their cost). Industrially produced balsamic vinegar (which does not have lengthy aging and cannot be labeled "traditional"); and artisanal "traditional balsamic vinegar" (aged up to 25 years!) Official European recognition of the two types only hap-

PAIRING WITH FOODE

- *Wine vinegars, 7% acidity (preferably red and those costing between 3 and 7 euros per half-liter bottle): appropriate for dressing, along with olive oil, salads or cooked vegetables, for marinating, and for cooking sweet-and-sour preserves (such as peppers, eggplant, zucchini).*

- *Non-traditional balsamic vinegars, 6% acidity (the best are unquestionably the Modena IGP, aged in bottles up to 3 months. A 0.250 liter bottle varies in cost between 3 and 10 euros): these are the vinegars that in terms of price-quality ratio are the most versatile and lend themselves to pairing with many foods; for heated sauces and to season grilled meat, oven roasted fish and meat, omelettes and salads that are not seasoned with oil.*

- *Traditional balsamic vinegars: as a reference we will use the three qualities of Reggio Emilia vinegars rather than the two from Modena: for 10 ml bottles, the price is 45-55 euros for the "lobster" stamp; 80-85 euros for the "silver" and 100-130 euros for the "gold". Traditional balsamic vinegars are exclusively used cool, never cooked.*

  - *The "lobster" stamp variety is known for its volatile acidic sensation. It is particularly suited to raw meat "carpaccio", to crustaceans, and is good for marinades and vinaigrettes.*

  - *The "silver" stamp variety is extremely versatile and provokes a sweet-sour taste sensation, but one that is very different and much more complex than that of foods cooked with wine vinegar. It is ideal as a condiment straight from the bottle, but it is also an excellent "accompaniment" for boiled meats and delicate fish dishes. It can balance the intensity of sharp aged cheeses, but is especially good with shaved parmigiano reggiano.*

  - *The "gold" stamp variety is an extraordinarily organoleptically rich balsamic that must be enjoyed a drop at a time to appreciate and perceive its olfactory and gustative complexity. It pairs well with noble, strongly flavored cheeses, but also with sweet pastries and non-fruit based ice cream. However, experts recommend sampling it "purely" at the end of a meal, using a porcelain spoon or a tiny glass.*

pened recently (after a 15 year application process). In 2009 the IGP for the industrial product, classified as a vinegar, and in 2000 (again, after a 35 year process) the DOP for the traditional product, classified as a condiment. The Traditional Balsamic Vinegar of Modena, like that of Reggio Emilia, must be achieved through a process of soft-pressing the grapes, which must be picked by hand and come from their respective territories): primarily the white Trebbiano grape, and the red Lambrusco and Sangiovese varieties. The must is filtered and decanted; it is then cooked (within 24 hours of pressing) in copper or steel pots that are left uncovered to prevent the beginning of alcoholic fermentation. During this phase the must is reduced by 30-50 percent and it assumes its characteristic brown color (owing to the "caramelization" of the sugar). The "cooked must" is then cooled in wooden or stainless steel tubs and then loaded into large glass bottles to be aged for several months, allowing the sediment and mucilage to settle. Finally, the most delicate phase begins: the seasoning, or aging, with further concentration and refinement of the must in small wooden bottles known as "vaselli". These are left unsealed, and are simply covered with a cloth to allow the *acetobacteria* to interact with oxygen and the outdoor environment (by norm, in lofts with tile roofs).

The numbered and dated barrels are stored stacked beside one another in the cellars. Each cask has a 20-30 percent smaller capacity than the preceding one, and each cask is only filled to ¾. The number of years of aging are calculated from the first year of the process, that is, the introduction of the first must into the largest barrel. According to the production regime every October about half of the contents of the smallest barrel is topped up (*"rincalzo"*), using a inclined slat that is partially immersed, with the same quantity that has been withdrawn from the next largest barrel that contains "younger" vinegar. This process continues until the largest barrel contains the cooked *"mosto fiore"* or noblest liquid. For example, a typical "battery" may be constituted by 5 kegs of 60, 50, 40, 30 and 20 liters, and respectively of oak, chestnut, cherry and ash wood, with mulberry wood used for the smallest. Passing from the largest barrel to the smallest, the vinegar is increasingly concentrated and refined (for a minimum of 12 years, up to more than 25 years). At this point no more than 20 percent of the vinegar is withdrawn from the smallest barrel and sold in the typical 100 ml "ampules" with cork stoppers that are sealed with red sealing wax. In addition to being numbered, the ampules are catalogued in the appropriate registry.

Balsamic vinegar from Modena has two levels of aging: Refined, aged for at least 12 years, and Extra-aged, for at least 25 years. That of Reggio Emilia has three qualitative levels, with different colored stamps applied to the bottles: "lobster orange" for at least 12 years of aging, "silver" for 12-25 years, and "gold" for more than 25 years.

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