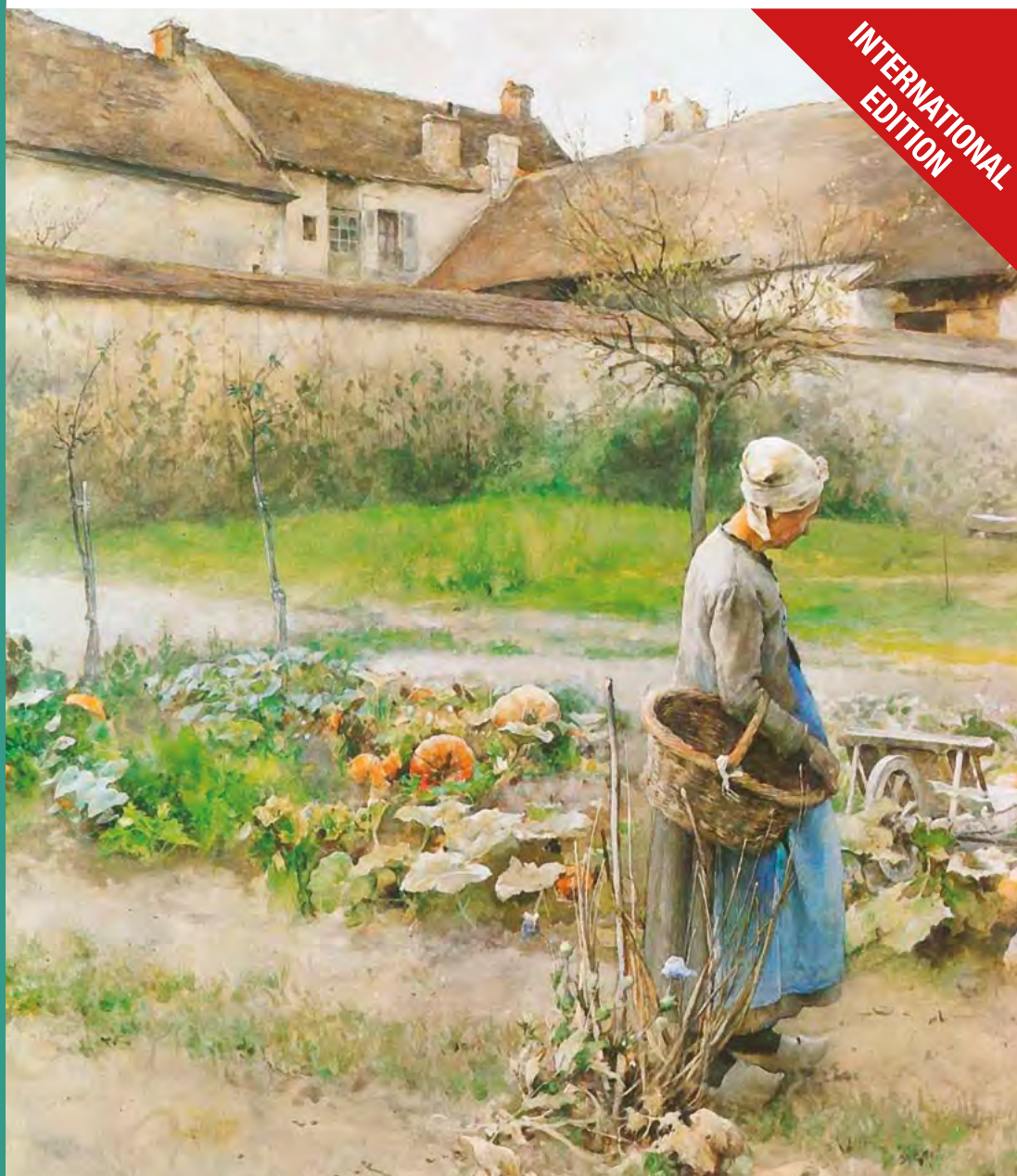


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The new *Academician's Manual* is attached to the magazine

*A precious tool
for understanding and sharing
the Academy's goals.*

I have often, during Delegations' convivial gatherings, welcomed new Academicians, pinning their badges on while delivering their membership certificates. I have always wished them a future of good work for the Academy, encouraging a spirit of initiative and active collaboration with Delegates and Advisory Boards. At the same time, I have also noticed that new members knew little, or almost nothing, about the rules guiding the Academy and its main goals, despite having participated in at least three convivial gatherings and signed the membership request which includes ticking a box declaring their knowledge of our Statute, By-Laws and Code of Ethics. On the other hand, objectively, even a general familiarity with our norms was not easy until now because they appear on our website (www.accademia1953.it) and our app. We must also recognise that such knowledge is not even common among long-term Academicians. To rectify this, during the summer we created a valuable new **Academician's Manual** with essential contributions from the **Milan Secretariat** and the **Editorial Office in Rome**.

by **Paolo Petroni**

President of the Accademia

*The new Manual accompanies those
for Delegates and Legates*

It accompanies the tried and tested **Manual for Delegates and Legates** whose format it shares.

This new manual has two aims: **raising awareness about the Academy's rules and, especially, making Academicians feel proud of belonging to our Institution**. Delegates and Legates have thus received several copies to be used for familiarising potential Academicians with the Academy, **while all Academicians will find a copy attached to this issue of the magazine *Civiltà della Tavola***. In future, all new Academicians will find this valuable guide in their welcome packs alongside their badges and foulards/ties. We have already **printed 10,000 copies** which will become part of all Academicians' information resources. The Manual is already available, **even in English**, on our website and app.

I ask you, before setting it aside, **to read it attentively**; later you can consult it whenever you wish. Happy reading!





Finocchiona: a glutton's delight

by Morello Pecchioli

Honorary Academician for Verona

*Aromatic cured meat
with wild fennel seeds
for a world of pleasure.*

So explains the *Complete Dictionary of Insults* by **Marco Zanni** (Baldini&Castoldi, 2000): “*Infinocchiato* (‘enfennelled’): tricked, deceived, the target of a ploy. **This term derives from finocchiona, a cured meat containing fennel seeds**, which farmers often fed to wine buyers when their wine was not excellent. **The fennel’s aroma masked the wine’s defects** and the buyers were tricked, hence ‘enfennelled’, by the *finocchiona*.” This generalised verdict originates in the 19th century when ‘peasant wine’ wasn’t always ‘honest’; however, one must not lump the sin and the sinner together: the naughty farmer and the innocent *finocchiona*, which is sinful, yes, but only gluttonously. Delicious as it is, it can leave us happily enfennelled.

*Finocchiona born in the
Middle Ages from rural poverty*

Finocchiona and its ‘enfennelled’ enthusiasts lived in Tuscany centuries before 1600. In 1612, the first edition of the dictionary *Vocabolario della Crusca* bore witness to the existence of a sausage containing fennel seeds, explaining the definition of *infinocchiare*: “Make someone understand one thing for another.” Historical sources testify that much earlier, Tuscan farmhands joyously devoured the fennel-studded flesh and allowed themselves to be enfennelled by the sly and the rich, who ate it just as lustily. A rather far-fetched hypothesis traces





finocchiona to the Etruscans just because **Pliny** and other Latin authors recounted how deftly the Etrurian farmers raised and 'transformed' swine. *Finocchiona* is a fruit of the Middle Ages and peasant frugality which compensated for a pecuniary penury by exploiting whatever nature offered. Were pepper and other spices an excessive luxury? **Sausage-makers of the era supplemented sausage pulp with seeds of wild fennel** (*Foeniculum vulgare*), which in Tuscany grows abundantly on the hills from Arezzo to Grosseto and costs nothing: they enfennelled cured meats during the cold winters to preserve them until the fennel would mask the incipient reek of putrefaction threatened by the summer heat. **Those wild seeds did not preserve, but flavoured**, making deteriorating meat still palatable. Was there perhaps a (very) secondary reason? In the Middle Ages, fennel was considered apotropaic: able, that is, to avert malign influences. Would evil-averting *finocchiona* not exert comfort from the cellar, similarly to garlic repelling vampires? Perhaps... Some scholars of Tuscan cuisine whose partisan allegiance outweighed their historical precision hypothesised that **Niccolò Machiavelli** adored *finocchiona*. This conjecture originates from an epistle addressed (in 1513) by the author of *The Prince* to his friend **Francesco Vettori**, Florentine ambassador to the court of Pope **Leo X**. In this letter penned from the Albergaccio, a farmhouse a dozen kilometres from Florence, Machiavelli describes how at supper "my crew and I dine upon those foods offered by this humble home and its scant resources".

That is, he ate the food available to the peasants, probably also served in the *hostaria*, the inn where he gallivanted after meals "playing at *cricca* and *trich-trach*" with the inkeeper, the butcher, the miller and the two bakers. Hence the scholars' arithmetic: if in the 16th century *finocchiona* was popular and offered by inns, then Machiavelli's daily fare must have included *finocchiona*.

The Finocchiona Consortium encompasses 44 producers and 8 Tuscan provinces

For a more precise sixteenth-century source, one must await the Florentine writer **Anton Francesco Grazzini**, known as 'il Lasca'. **Francesco Seghi**, director of the **PGI Finocchiona Consortium** (PGI = Protected Geographical Indication), encompassing 44 producers in 8 of the 10 Tuscan provinces, explains: "Grazzini praises the fennel sausage made and eaten in Florence. This demonstrates that *finocchiona* was already commonplace in Tuscany. It survived until our time, gaining our Agricultural Ministry's prestigious PGI certification." Naturally – like defending one's mother – the PGI Finocchiona Consortium (www.finocchionaigp.it) proclaims it "Queen of Tuscan charcuterie"; but that judgement is biased. It is fair, without diminishing the regality of *finocchiona*, to **point out that there are other crowns in the realm of Tuscan charcuterie**: PDO *cinta senese* ham, PGI lard from Colonnata, Maremma boar sausage, *soppressata*, and PGI *mortadella*

from Prato, all defended with equal dignity by *BuyFood Toscana*, an event celebrating the region's excellent food products.

Curiously, the Ministry's *finocchiona* protocol refers to "documents attesting in various ways to the product from the 15th century", without identifying them. Yet someone who speaks of 'enfennelled' sausages and suitors is **Luigi Pulci** (1432-1484), a Florentine poet and friend of **Lorenzo de' Medici**, known as 'The Magnificent'. When Lorenzo wrote the love poem *Nencia da Barberino*, Pulci replied with a parody in verse: *Beca da Dicomano*. Therein he contrasts the winsome Nencia with another Mugello farm girl, Beca: short, lame and moustachioed, yet surrounded by suitors, to whom **Pulci** refers thus: "tu gli 'nfinocchi come le salicce/ e coll'occhietto gli vai infinocchiando" ('you enfennel them like sausages/ and enfennel them by winking'). Is this not a *finocchiona* testimony pre-dating Grazzini, the Crusca Academy and all the nineteenth-century dictionaries cited by the Ministry and Consortium?

Sbriciolona is a close relative

A very close relative to *finocchiona* is *sbriciolona* ('crumbly'), containing approximately the same ingredients: it is another fennel-seasoned cured meat but **far coarser, aged for no more than a month**, and when **cut it crumbles**, true to its name. Relatives but with different consistencies: *finocchiona* can be finely sliced like *salame*, while the softer sister, *sbriciolona*, requires finger-thick slices. **Both complement unsalted Tuscan bread**, their perfect 'husband'; and the right Tuscan wine. But which wine, if, as noted, fennel seeds anaesthetise the palate? **Marzia Morganti**, a Tuscan journalist and AIS sommelier, suggests: "*Finocchiona* is different; it has modernised, and accompanies wine well. I recommend young wines: a Rosso di Montalcino or Vin Ruspo di Carmignano, vibrant, fresh and companionable."

Morello Pecchioli



Poor man's gold

by Anna Lanzani

Buenos Aires Academician

*History and memories
of the Valle Camonica
chestnut.*

For over 80 kilometres, the Camonica Valley rises from Lake Iseo towards the Tonale Pass. Half way along, at the level of Capo di Ponte, the landscape changes in two directions: westwards, at the feet of the Concarena, vineyards appear; eastwards, **towards Pizzo Badile, chestnut groves dominate.** Here, the village of Paspardo is located around 980 metres above sea level. The centuries-old chestnut groves of the Deria blanket the foothills towards Capo di Ponte, on the same side as the famous Val Camonica Rock Drawings. The Rock Art Natural Reserve of Ceto, Cimbergo and Paspardo, instituted in 1988, protects about 300

hectares and over 500 engraved rock surfaces; at Paspardo one can visit the areas of Plas-Capitello, In Vall and Sottolaiolo. The Reserve is within Italy's first UNESCO site, inscribed in 1979: the Rock Drawings in Valcamonica.

*Chestnut trees were practically
'vertical capital': family wealth
over common land*

Here, chestnut groves tell a tale beyond the more famous and common one of the 'bread tree': by ancient custom, a



family could own a tree, but the underlying land remained communal. This was *jus plantandi*, the 'right of planting', documented in various towns in the medium and high Camonica Valley. In 1896, a historian from Brescia, **Gabriele Rosa**, already defined this right as "ancient": **whoever planted a chestnut or walnut tree on common land acquired its ownership** and shared with their family its fruits, its fallen leaves and even the herbs growing in its shadow, without the communal ownership of the land changing. In Paspardo, there are *jus plantandi* maps dating to 1886; in the Reserve Survey approved by the Lombardy Region in 2020, common forest land parcels retain this customary use. Chestnut trees were thus a vertical resource: family capital above collective land.

How ancient is this presence? Palaeo-ecological studies find chestnut and walnut trees in the valleys of Lombardy between the first century BC and the second century AD. We cannot thus prove that the Camuni who made the area's oldest rock drawings already cultivated these trees, and though the image would be picturesque and promotionally useful, no such claim is made. **However, those trees are attested in the landscape and in archives from the Middle Ages.** A designation from 1252 indicates a *castanetum* in the territory of Zero, parish of Cemmo, in the area of modern Capo di Ponte. In 1463 the Land Registry of the Cluniac Priory of San Salvatore at Capo di Ponte recorded around sixteen *piò* of chestnut-bearing land. On 27 February 1476, the Municipality of Sonico, farther north along the Oglio river, sold **Filippo Federici** a chestnut grove for 409 *lire piane*: an act identifiable in the Brescia State Archive. Federici also owned eight dedicated chestnut groves at Edolo, and other single chestnut trees on other land parcels. Farther south, in Darfo, an order of the *Capitano di Valle* ('Captain of the Valley') from 27 April 1554 forbids cutting down chestnut trees on common land. **The chestnut tree, a nourishing resource, appears in archives as valued, recorded and sometimes bought.** When **Giovanni da Lezze** describes the



Camonica Valley in the *Catastico bresciano* (Brescia Land Registry) of 1609, he observes a reality consolidated over centuries, noting "a profusion of chestnuts" transformed into "dry, twice-cooked" chestnuts for sale even outside the valley; he also notes that abundant chestnuts coexist with "few, bad wines". In 1737, a priest in Paspardo described how the townsfolk had scant wheat but ate rye, buckwheat, beans, turnip greens, herbs and "quantities of chestnuts"; in 1760 **Giambattista Chiaramonti summarised the Camonica Valley's food as "chestnuts and milk"** plus the occasional morsel of bread or meat. The "poor man's gold" is thus not merely a romantic metaphor: **chestnuts contributed to make the winter bearable** where wheat bread was far from a staple.

*Dependence on chestnuts
even shaped the
community's calendar*

In Paspardo, this dependence even shaped the community's calendar. In October, many families relocated to the Deria for the harvest. The Sanctuary of the Maternity of Mary was built in the chestnut grove so its inhabitants could attend services even during their time in the forest. Part of the harvest was kept for the winter; another descended towards the Bassa Bresciana, the plain south

of Brescia where chestnuts were bartered for maize. **Mountain and plain thereby exchanged two foods destined, in different forms, to become polenta.**

Drying was necessary to preserve the harvest. A report gathered in 2012 in Cimbergo recalls the *agràt*: the chestnuts on a trellis, fire underneath, followed by beating and the *furhu*, a machine with a turning handle which separated out impurities until only "**the bilina remained**": **the dried, skinless chestnut.** Bilina is also the name of a local variety recorded since at least 1953. From the *bilina* to the mill, and thus, flour.

The iconic dish of Paspardo is pult e lat: chestnut flour boiled in salt water to produce a gruel softer than *polenta*, served with milk or melted butter. Local tradition also includes *pupa*, or **papa de schelt, with fresh cream.** The *biline* (plural) were also eaten whole, cooked in milk; some current harvesters from Brescia **add a pinch of cinnamon.** This variant is attested, but we do not know when it originated or have proof connecting it with certainty to Venetian rule over the valley. Following the post-war decline, **Paspardo has become the centre for reviving Val Camuna chestnut cultivation:** in 1996 the Valle Camonica Chestnut Consortium was created there. **The itinerary "Among the bread trees"** begins, nowadays, at Capo di Ponte, along the old Deria mule paths, reaching Paspardo and continuing to Cimbergo.

Anna Lanzani



Acciughe al verde: anchovies 'in the green'

by Romeo Ferrero

Academician for the Principato di Monaco

A traditional dish which has fostered a dialogue between the sea and the inland valleys.

Fresh anchovies, delicate and flavour-some, are accompanied by a fragrant condiment made of garlic, parsley and white wine. **It is the parsley,** worked into a distinctive green sauce, which gives the dish its intense colour and **herbaceous aroma immediately indicative of Ligurian cuisine.** The anchovies must be delicately cooked, keeping them soft and juicy. The white wine contributes to the basic aroma in which garlic and parsley meld with sharp flavours from the

oily fish. **This recipe is humble in name only:** few ingredients, but an extraordinary balance. **Fresh fish, garlic, parsley and white wine create a bold, profoundly Mediterranean dish** inextricably linked with Ligurian food culture, able to transform simplicity into memory, identity and flavour. On the coast, where very fresh anchovies arrived straight from fishing expeditions, this humble but precious fish represented one of maritime cuisine's fundamental resources.





The voyage of salted anchovies

Then came salt, an essential element for food preservation and a protagonist of the trade system for which the Salt Routes were named. Preserved anchovies could now **face the long journey from the coast to the inland towns, where sea fish was a precious commodity**. And herein lies **the fascination of the Salt Route**: not only a path travelled by mules and merchants, but **a bridge between worlds**. Salt, fish and other sea products departed from Liguria; cheeses, meats, grains and other mountain goods arrived from inland. Alongside merchandise, **recipes, preservation techniques, fragrances and lore** also travelled. 'Green anchovies' thus became a sort of edible memory of those voyages. Parsley and garlic testify to the coastal Mediterranean cuisine, white wine accompanies the preparation, and salt recalls the impressive trade artery which, for centuries, maintained communication between the inland valleys and the sea. Arriving inland, the anchovies were de-salted, cleaned and processed anew with garlic, olive oil and parsley: a prepa-

ration which, despite maintaining the same fundamental ingredients, acquired a different character. Salt was the medium which allowed the anchovies to travel, while garlic, oil and parsley formed the thread connecting the recipe to both mountain and sea. It is fascinating to ponder how behind an apparently simple preparation lies the history of an entire trade culture: Ligurian fishermen harvested the anchovies, salt allowed their preservation, muleteers transported them over mountain passes, and Piedmont transformed them anew into a presentable dish.

The equilibria governing marine ecosystems are changing, affecting fish harvests

There is, however, an aspect which makes this recipe particularly relevant nowadays. The Ligurian sea is changing, and rising temperatures in the Mediterranean are modifying the marine ecosystem's equilibria. **For small pelagic fish such as anchovies, water temperature, food availability and oceanographic conditions can influence distribution, repro-**

duction and growth. Scientific research has, indeed, shed light on the important effects of hydrodynamic and environmental conditions on Mediterranean anchovy populations. Whoever fishes along the Ligurian coast nowadays might thus encounter small anchovies that have not yet reached **the necessary size for processing according to PGI regulations. The 10-centimetre minimum is particularly significant**: it is not only a commercial parameter, but it also emphasises the need for fish biology to be respected. Here the link with the Salt Roads becomes even more poignant. Anchovies were once harvested on the coast, swiftly processed and preserved in salt for travel inland. **Salt allowed the sea to reach the mountains**, transforming a highly perishable food into a precious trade commodity. Today, the very same anchovies elicit a question about the future: **can the Mediterranean keep offering us the fish** which fed both coastal and inland communities for centuries? From the ancient caravans' voyages along the Salt Routes to modern climate change, 'green anchovies' become far more than a recipe: they are a thread uniting history, food culture, the sea and the environment.

Romeo Ferrero