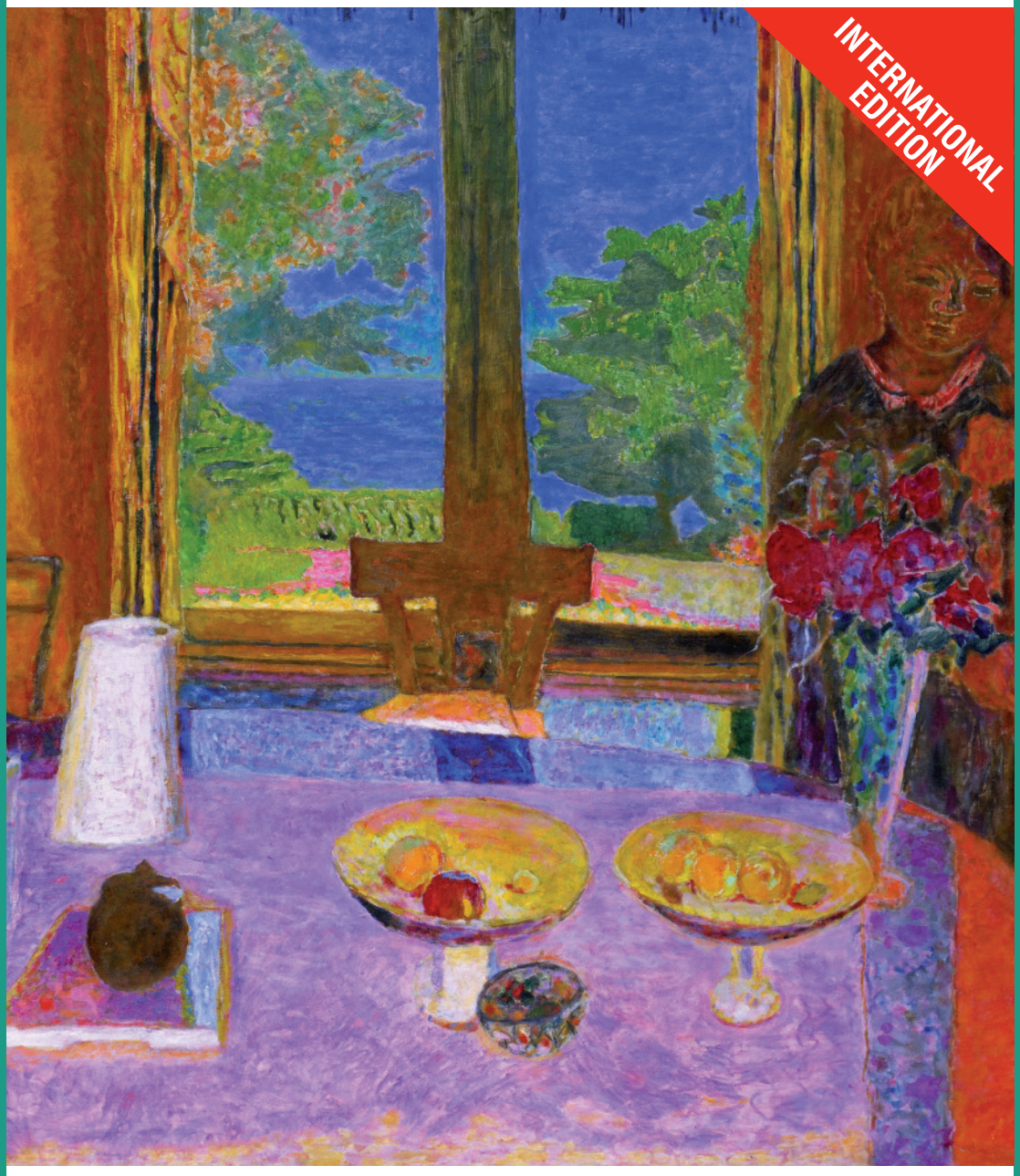
CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

INTERNATIONAL EDITION



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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
FOUNDED IN 1953 BY ORIO VERGANI
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ALDO PASSANTE, GIANLUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI,
DINO VILLANI, EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA
ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

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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
Enrico Baldi,
Elisabetta Cocito,
Mauro Gaudino,
Paolo Petroni.

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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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FOCUS

ACADÉMIE INTERNATIONALE DE LA GASTRONOMIE

CULTURE AND RESEARCH

On the cover: Graphic elaboration of the oil painting *Dining Room on the Garden* (Grande salle à manger sur le jardin) (1930-1931) by Pierre Bonnard, on display at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Delivery of the 102,000 Euros gathered by Academicians and of the Orio Vergani Prize for 2016

On the 23rd of February, the twenty businesses selected by our Delegates and the students of the Hotel Institute gathered in Amatrice.

BY **PAOLO PETRONI**
President of the Academy

When fundraising for the quake-stricken regions ended, the amount gathered had reached the highly encouraging sum of **102,000 Euros**, far exceeding our most optimistic expectations. Thanks to the efforts of so many Delegates and Academicians, we amassed a sizeable sum which allowed us to contribute substantially, not just symbolically, to several businesses, facilitating their continued activities in the restaurant sector and the production of cheeses and charcuterie. The breakdown of sums gathered in Italy and abroad is as follows:

Number of Delegations	Contributing Delegations	Euros donated
Italy 218	174 (79,8%)	61,000
Abroad 66	39 (59%)	41,000
Total 284	213 (75%)	102,000

There were seven beneficiaries in the Ascoli Piceno Delegation's territory. Pictured, among others, are Delegate Vittorio Ricci (on President Petroni's left) and Aleandro Petrucci, Mayor of Arquata del Tronto (wearing a jacket).

Paolo Petroni with Ascoli Piceno Vice-Delegate Alessandro Caponi (centre) and Aleandro Petrucci, Mayor of Arquata del Tronto.

Thanks to the painstaking local research undertaken by our three Delegates in the area, Francesco Palomba (Rieti), Vittorio Ricci (Ascoli Piceno) and Ugo Bellesi (Macerata), masterfully assisted by the Vice-Delegate for Ascoli Piceno, Alessandro Caponi, who sadly lost his home in Arquata (the Mayor, Aleandro Petrucci, was present), we were able to identify men and women truly deserving of our support.

The funds were not equally distributed among the twenty recipients, but in proportion to their most urgent needs, with particular attention to breeders and producers who suffered livestock losses in the thousands due to snow and the shortage of stables (promised but, shamefully, never delivered).

It was decided to gather all the beneficiaries in the symbolic city of Amatrice, hosting them in the S. Agostino Community Hall, made available by the parson, Don Savino, whom the Academy thanked with a donation.

The ceremony was also attended by representatives of the local tourism associations of Amatrice, Arquata and Accumoli: for Amatrice, President Adriana Franconi and Vice-President Carmine Monteforte; for Arquata, Lina Giorgi, a member of the Board of Directors; and for Accumoli, Vice-President Rita Marocchi. President Marocchi's presence was particularly appreciated, since it demonstrated the generous solidarity of the Accumoli Tourism Association even though no business in Accumoli received any funds.

Also participating in the event were Roberto Ariani, Secretary-General and Treasurer; Mimmo D'Alessio, Adviser and Coordinator for the Abruzzo region; Mauro Magagnini, Coordinator for the Marche region; and Piergiorgio Angelini, Study Centre Director for the Marche region.

Each representative of the selected

The Macerata Delegation identified 4 beneficiaries. Pictured, among others, is Delegate Ugo Bellesi (fourth from the right)

Nine beneficiaries were identified by the Rieti Delegation. Pictured in the centre of the photo (next to President Petroni) is Delegate Francesco Maria Palomba.

businesses (who had no idea of the sums to be awarded) received a cheque, a medal, a friendship banner and a certificate from the Academy acknowledging their services to the food industry and the region. They all accepted their gifts with gratitude and often palpable emotion; indeed some faces registered clear disbelief upon reading the amount written on their cheques, which they had imagined would be far inferior or merely symbolic. This was the first time that they encountered real money rather than the usual empty promises, parading politicians and radio or television interviews. One's impression upon visiting the area was of total immobility: not a single worker on the job; complete inertia.

5000 euros delivery to "Rifugio Colle Sottovento" (Colle di Montegallo)

A bus was provided to convey 18 students of the Amatrice Hotel Institute from Rieti, its new location pro tempore. They prepared a frugal buffet appropriately including amatriciana, Amatrice's iconic pasta dish. In Rieti on the previous day, the Delegate Palomba had conferred the Orio Vergani prize, fixed at 10,000 Euros by the President's Council, upon the Institute: following its directors' request, the award was delivered in the form of a machine of equivalent value for producing ice creams and sorbets. In Amatrice, the Institute's Educational Director Fabio D'Angelo was clearly touched and overjoyed upon receiving the award certificate on the school's behalf.

Dearest Academicians: if ever you should visit Amatrice hoping for signs of its revival, go to the restaurants that you've helped back on to their feet. In any case, be proud of having contributed to alleviating the suffering of twenty families in whose hearts the Academy will always retain a special place.

Paolo Petroni

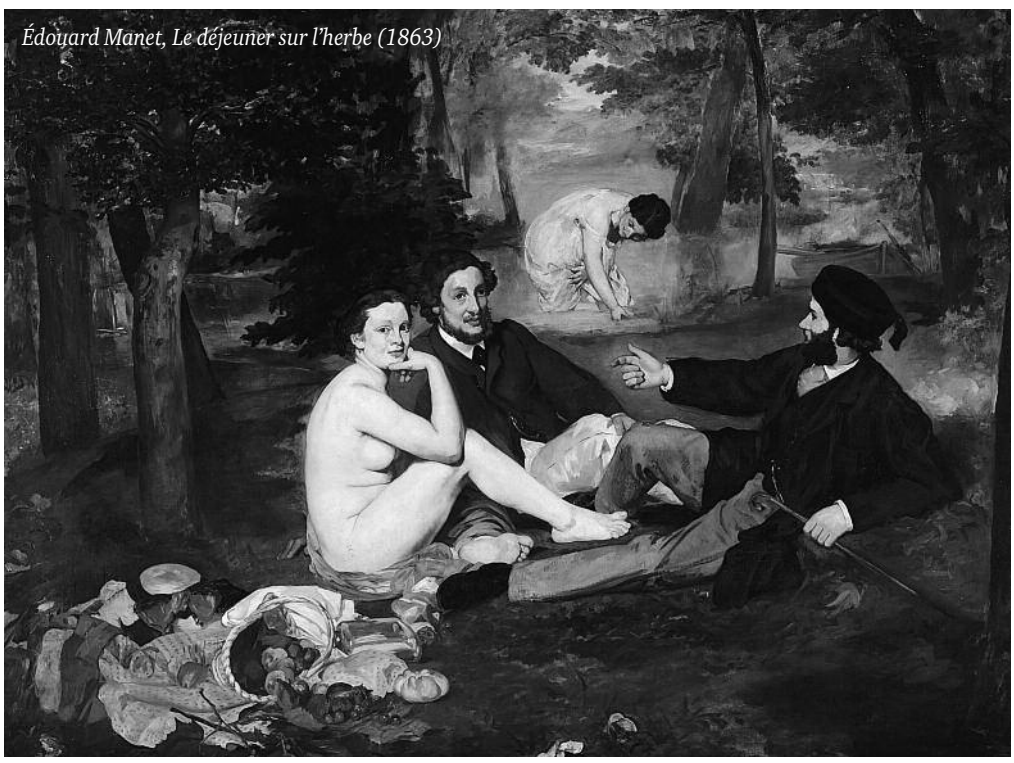
The *merenda* ritual

In the past it had its rules and significant moments.

BY ELISABETTA COCITO
Turin Academician
"Franco Marenghi" Study Centre

It's not by chance that the word *merenda*, the Italian term for an afternoon snack, originates from the gerund of the Latin verb *merere* ('to deserve'). After all, *merenda* (plural: *merende*) is a tiny luxury, an informal moment, a small (or great) pleasure which must be earned, by which one interrupts daily drudgery or briefly escapes one's routine. How many merende have punctuated people's days in times past, and how did they differ from today's *merenda*? Today, the term is usually associated with the midmorning or mid-afternoon snack, a quick break usually reserved for children, while in the past it referred to a veritable ritual with rules and embedded meanings. For example, the farmers around Asti interrupted their work in the fields at mid-afternoon to recover from their arduous labour by means of a simple snack brought from home *ant el fassolet* ('in the handkerchief'): a small and frugal meal eaten outdoors.

The *merenda sinoira*, instead, was a special *merenda*, reserved for noteworthy occasions. The term *sinoira* derived from the Piedmontese word *sin-a* (dinner): this meal began in the late afternoon and continued into the evening, almost replacing dinner itself, and marked the end of a day dedicated to particularly onerous collaborative tasks involving not only the farm hands but the families living in the countryside nearby. Indeed it was customary to help each other in times of difficulty or an excessive workload, for instance during harvesting and threshing, or following the hunt or the completion of a house. *Merenda* was a celebration, a communal event symbolising friendship, gratitude and sharing - not only of a meal but of everyday life. Accompanied by bread, there was a succession of colourful and aromatic dishes, beginning with raw or cooked *salame*, a typical product of the area. In turn, the table would be graced by fresh and aged cheeses, omelettes with seasonal herbs, mixed salads, and anchovies in green and red sauce. A mainstay of the meal was a garden vegetable soup served warm. The gathering ended with sliced fresh fruit, doused in Muscat wine, in which home-made biscuits were dipped.



Édouard Manet, Le déjeuner sur l'herbe (1863)

Even the aristocracy partook of *merenda* - or rather of a *piquenique*, a term used in the 17th century for informal outings characterised by frugal and almost improvised food. The word is derived from the French *piquer* (pilfer) and *nique* (trifling matter), later transformed into the English *picnic*, indicating a light meal eaten during hunting expeditions. Later, the fashion spread, becoming a pastime for intellectuals, nobles and commoners alike, who made the most of

good weather by allowing themselves gatherings in which rigid etiquette rules could finally be relaxed. The picnic became so fashionable and habitual at the time that it even attracted artistic interest. Throughout the 19th century, the most eminent impressionist painters depicted on their canvases what was by then a commonplace leisure activity. Outdoor painting took root in parallel with such outings. Natural light allows painters the best opportunity to pick out the nuances, the shadows, and the interplay of colour created by the different foods, and also to portray ladies and gentlemen in less formal, hence more spontaneous and relaxed, poses. We can therefore still enjoy those peerless paintings, in which a peach, a bunch of grapes or a pear are perceptible for what they truly are, though we sometimes forget: natural masterpieces. Food has the starring role: we can perceive the smell of omelettes, the aromas of meadow herbs and the fragrance of flatbread. Speaking of artistic depictions, even Picasso fell under the spell of Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, revisiting it according to his idiosyncratic perception of space, while in our own time Botero, through his picnic paintings and opulent representations, offers a symbolic interpretation of the changes in ways of living and relating to food. With the passage of time, the tradition of the 'outing outside the city walls' has not at all been forgotten, but has perhaps developed new forms, new approaches and new foods. A significant impetus to the festive excursion to meadows, rivers or the seaside was certainly provided by the so-called 'Italian miracle' for which 1958 was the 'watershed year' (as the historian Guido Crainz defined it): a time of national resurgence after the disintegration wrought by war. It was in the sixties that Italians finally took ownership of liberty and of the pleasure of free movement, with greater comfort and covering larger distances. The star of this phenomenon was the compact car (the Fiat 500 and 600), affordable to a vast proportion of the population: no more group outings in trains organised by unions or by the government, as in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but individual escapades with varying breaks, durations and itineraries. Home videos of that era portray families on the beach, by the lake or more simply cooking pasta in a roadside field. The concept of picnic became for many, especially in southern Italy, a transfer of Sunday lunch outside the domestic walls.

Much has changed since then: health policies, but especially women's newfound freedom to escape the role of 'cook', have made fresh or cold foods predominant in today's picnics. Next-generation containers have also helped. It is intriguing to compare contemporary picnic equipment with that of the past, comprising porcelain crockery, crystal glasses, teacups and teapots. Then came the wicker basket, followed by plastic dishes and glasses, now available in eco-friendly biodegradable versions. Transport and storage methods have also changed considerably: coolers and vacuum packaging are more hygienic and user-friendly. Any discussion of outdoor eating must mention the barbecue, now back in fashion: the rudimentary improvisations of the past (grills arranged haphazardly in the most disparate and *desperate* ways) have given way to sophisticated and appealingly designed gadgets exploiting cutting-edge technology without overlooking the necessary security concerns. Incidentally, I met a young barbecue enthusiast who managed to transform this passion into a profession. He has a blog, teaches successful courses and has written what is now a classic among barbecue lovers, explaining how even the most unlikely ingredients can be thrown on the grill.

Not even our Academy has escaped the lure of the picnic. Last summer several Piedmontese Delegations attended a traditional *merenda sinoira* in the manner of Asti, organised by the Asti Delegation. Similar success was enjoyed by the *déjeuner sur l'herbe* organised by the Novara Delegation. These are laudable initiatives to revivify traditions and solidify the spirit of conviviality and friendship with simple yet flavoursome victuals seasoned with the verve of sociability and the eager anticipation of the summer holidays.

Elisabetta Cocito

Oil past and present

The evolution of olive harvesting and pressing, narrated in part through the words of Enrico Pea.

BY ENRICO BALDI
Versilia Storica Academician

Olive cultivation has ancient origins, and limited space precludes a detailed account of the various techniques employed through the millennia for planting and treating (e.g. fertilising and pruning) olive trees and gathering olives (gathering off the ground, hand-picking, rake-picking, beating with poles or vibrating combs, machine-shaking single branches or entire small trees, etc).

Illustration by Luisa Lippi

Degree of mechanisation depends mostly on business size. Smaller landholders minimise mechanisation in favour of manual labour, since labour, frequently by family members, only minimally affects cost. Larger enterprises often maximise mechanisation.

At the turn of the 20th century, labour costs were minimal and female harvesters were hired seasonally. In Versilia, besides performing housework, many women also contributed to the family's finances by gathering olives.

It is interesting to note how Enrico Pea, in his novel *Magoometto*, narrates the journey of a drop of oil by using descriptions heard from his grandfather (who nicknamed him 'Moscardino') before the age of ten in the late 19th century.

"Imagine oil wrung from an olive drop by drop: how many drops are needed, and how many olives, to fill a bottle. Thousands, maybe. Yet each olive was gathered in winter, perhaps when it was frosty. Sought patiently in the wet grass by the cold-numbed fingertips of the harvesters, who roam the olive grove on all fours as if they were goats in skirts browsing the grass. But they're women of flesh and bone, scavenging in the soil and grass like hens scratching in pursuit of the precious olive, even unripe or flattened, fallen overnight or shaken off by the rain or the wind. Or knocked off when ripe by the pole of

the man who beats each branch. But the toil doesn't end there. If we were to begin the story of the drop's progress a bit earlier, do you know how many years the tree took to deliver its fruit? Never fewer than ten, which is more than you've lived, Moscardino. So the olive tree must be planted as a sturdy sapling, and pruned so its branches will grow sideways. It must be fertilised with calcium, all round the roots as broad as a wagon wheel, using a special recipe: the olive tree has a healthy appetite and will even digest old shoes and rags. And each year it wants to eat again. It doesn't excuse avarice; it doesn't forgive the farmer's neglect".

Olive oil production has also gradually developed over the millennia; essentially unchanged until the mid-19th century, it then evolved with increasing rapidity, especially in the past few decades. The concept is simple: to obtain oil, olives must be squeezed; and they're squeezed better if they're ground up. In antiquity they were simply flattened between appropriately shaped rocks; a portion of the oil dripped off immediately, and the rest was wrung through a bag containing the olive paste. Later, the flattening was achieved by stone and subsequently metal grinders rotating over a vat. The resulting paste was bagged and squeezed with lever presses similar to today's hand-held potato mashers. The bags evolved into double centrally pierced discs called *fiscoli*, and the lever press was replaced by a screw press. This was initially made of wood, and later metal.

The *fiscoli* were stacked by threading them on a pole (initially made of wood, and most recently, hollowed metal) fixed in the centre of the collecting vat. The 'castle' thereby obtained was then squeezed by the screw press. The resulting oil was certainly not ready for consumption, since it still contained water and paste residue which must be removed.

To extract as much oil as possible from the *fiscoli*, hot water was used, but though it increased quantity it harmed quality by altering the oil's organoleptic properties. Impurities were separated out by simple precipitation, while water was removed by exploiting the two liquids' differing densities which caused the lighter oil to float. Let us return to Pea's account.

"But returning to the olive, whether ripe or not, harvested with numbed hands and aching back: see how much trouble a drop of oil already cost. But before the oil can be drizzled over your beans, the olive must cry out full-throatedly when crushed by the millstone.

Reduced to mush, it bears the further indignity of being packed into string bags, garrotted by the screw press, drowned in boiling water as the wringer groans, oozing drop by drop through the mesh of that string bag, oil and water still mingled and steaming, down into the blackened vat that they call 'paradise'".

The modern centrifugal separators have simplified and accelerated oil production and filtering. Today oil mills do not use millstones and screw presses, but machines with rollers and various filters and separators whereby olives go in one end and oil, water, paste residue and other debris come out of separate exits: a veritable "disassembly line". Such systems have indubitably improved oil quality. In the past, small landholders who wanted 'their own' oil would have to bring a minimum quantity of olives – often about 200kg, but varying according to vat size – to the old-style millstone oil presses to justify the cost of use, often spending several days gathering the necessary amount. Consequently, olives harvested earlier would spoil due to mould or other factors, damaging the quality of the resulting oil. With today's continuous cycle presses, olive growers can process smaller quantities of olives, leading to better oil.

What is lost, however, is that atmosphere so poetically described by Pea, and even though the oil was less than perfect, a bruschetta made with toasted bread, rubbed with garlic, sprinkled with salt and chilli and doused with freshly pressed olive oil, must have had a flavour which now only survives in memory.

Enrico Baldi

Jean Vitaux is the new President; Paolo Petroni is confirmed as Vice-President

During the AIG's General Assembly Italians won several prizes including the Grand Prix de l'Art de la Cuisine.

The General Assembly of the Académie Internationale de la Gastronomie (AIG) was held on the 6th of February at the hotel Le Bristol in Paris. 16 Academies of as many countries were represented, to elect a new President and assign the annual prizes established by the various national Academies. Following Jacques Mallard's two consecutive terms of brilliant leadership, the unanimously elected new President is Jean Vitaux, President of the Académie des Gastronomes, a physician specialising in gastroenterology and a highly cultured doyen of gastronomic history.
Jacques Mallard was named Honorary President alongside Rafael Anson and Georges Husni. The newly elected President then formed a new Bureau, in which he chose to retain as sole Vice-President Paolo Petroni, President of the Italian Academy of Cuisine. The President then appointed as Special Adviser Alessandro Caponi, Vice-Delegate for Ascoli Piceno, who was present in his capacity as AIG Honorary Academician for Switzerland.

The new Bureau:

President: **Jean Vitaux** (France)
Vice-President: **Paolo Petroni** (Italy)
Secretary-General: **Gérard Heim de Balsac** (Belgium)
Maciej Dobrzyniecki (Poland)
Olivier Maus (Switzerland)
Khalil Sara (Syria)

President Paolo Petroni with Jean Vitaux

The Assembly unanimously assigned the most prestigious prize, the **Grand Prix de l'Art de la Cuisine**, to **Enrico Crippa**, of the Piazza Duomo restaurant in Alba, following President Petroni's nomination.

Enrico Crippa

Other prize-winners nominated by the President:
Prix au Chef de l'Avenir: Gianluca Gorini, chef and restaurateur, Romagna
Prix au Sommelier: Alberto Santini, "Dal Pescatore" restaurant, Canneto sull'Oglio
Prix au Chef Pâtissier: Martina Tribioli, freelancer, Florence
Prix de la Littérature Gastronomique: Gigi Padovani, journalist and author
Prix Multimédia: Paolo Massobrio, journalist and founder of the Club Papillon

Fresh or frozen fish?

Organoleptic and nutritional properties of frozen seafood and prevention of anisakiasis.

BY MAURO GAUDINO
Roma Nomentana Academician

Ever since the American biologist Clarence Byrdseye began commercialising the first frozen foods in 1930, techniques for preserving food at low temperatures have improved by leaps and bounds, such that nowadays we can store frozen foods even for months without losing flavour or nutritional qualities. These techniques, which are subdivided into refrigeration, freezing and fast freezing, have brought enormous benefits especially in safely storing fish, which spoils more swiftly than other foods.

We know that freshness is crucial in cooking fish with excellent results. But not everyone can purchase very fresh fish, caught recently enough to still appear curved and stiff. Immediately thereafter, the flesh begins maturing, after which, around the 30-hour mark, the fish begins to degrade. Its deterioration becomes more evident 4 to 7 days after the fish is caught. Fast-frozen fish, instead, can remain fresh even months after packing, with minimal loss of organoleptic and nutritional properties. The differences between fast-frozen and fresh fish lie in the increased flavour found in fresh fish, combined with its delicate briny fragrance, presumably due to longer exposure to sea water. Indeed, fish destined for fast freezing is immediately processed in so-called "factory ships", where it is quickly gutted, washed and skinned before being fast-frozen.

The freshness of fast-frozen fish is fundamentally important, but is not its only positive aspect. There is also the convenience to cooks of having cleaned and filleted fish always ready for use, with nutritional and organoleptic features maintained over time. In some cases, fast-frozen seafood might be preferable to fresh for health reasons, for instance in the case of fish predisposed to parasite infestation. To understand the importance of this preservation technique properly, we will compare it with two other methods of cold storage: refrigeration and freezing. Refrigeration of fresh fish is accomplished simply by covering it in ice: in this way, the water contained within the fish retains its liquid state, slowing bacterial replication. Fish preserved in this way remains fresh for four to seven days, after which it rapidly deteriorates.

Freezing doesn't kill bacteria but halts the development and multiplication of microorganisms. Water solidifies into ice crystals within the fish. These crystals grow in size the longer the freezing continues, eventually rupturing cell membranes, causing them to leak fluids. This damage causes the fish to lose much of its natural juice during thawing, giving it a tough and stringy consistency.

Instead, in fast freezing the centre of the food reaches -18 °C or lower in a maximum of four hours. The swiftness causes ice crystals to be much smaller (micro-crystals) in comparison with or-

dinary freezing, so the cellular structure of the food remains intact. Fast-frozen fish, therefore, will maintain similar properties to fresh fish.
Freezing and fast freezing both reach temperatures at which no microorganism can multiply. To ensure this, however, these temperatures must be maintained uninterruptedly until final distribution (this is known as 'the cold chain'). The greatest vulnerability of cold storage is transfer from producer to sale point, and thence to the buyer's freezer.

Another crucial health issue in cold storage is the prevention of anisakiasis by accidental ingestion of the nematode worm *Anisakis simplex*. Frozen or fast-frozen fish have the advantage over fresh fish in preventing anisakiasis (also known as anisakidosis or 'herring worm disease'). However, frozen fish retains the risk of anisakiasis if it is not frozen or fast-frozen correctly, using the necessary temperatures and freezing durations, especially if consumed raw or undercooked, for instance in the case of mackerel, sardines or tuna, the species most susceptible to these parasites. The worm's eggs are found in the faeces of marine mammals such as whales, dolphins and seals. The resulting larvae are ingested by cephalopods, including squid and cuttlefish, which are in turn eaten by fish. These fish consequently harbour an infection which can be transmitted to humans, especially if the fish are handled carelessly before consumption. The anisakis worm inhabits its host's digestive tract, but can migrate to other tissues after the host's death. Seafood is almost always frozen on ships shortly after being caught. This is why fish destined for fast freezing is gutted immediately. This reduces the chances of parasites present in the internal organs migrating to the flesh. In fact, the Italian Ministry of Health recommends prompt evisceration even for fish destined for immediate sale, through Circular n. 10 of 11 March 1992.
Restaurants offering raw fish employ specialists who can bring food temperatures down to -20 degrees Celsius within minutes. Raw fish is thus rendered safe while maintaining its nutritional and organoleptic properties. But if raw fish is frozen at home, it must be kept for at least 96 hours at -18°C or below, in a domestic freezer with at least a three-star rating (indicating the capacity to maintain -18°C), as recommended by the Italian Health Ministry's decree of 17 July 2013, in fulfilment of law n. 189 of 8 November 2012. Furthermore, the EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) recommends that each part of the fish reach a minimum temperature of 60°C for at least one minute during cooking. Considering, however, that normally a fillet with a thickness of 3 cm reaches 60 degrees after more than 10 minutes of cooking, it is advisable to cook fish at more than 70 degrees Celsius, and for a longer time.
Though normal cooking temperatures don't always guarantee elimination of all risks caused by deterioration or incorrect storage, proper cooking is always advised: in addition to eliminating the anisakis parasite, it also significantly reduces the population and activity of pathogenic microorganisms, to which seafood is always vulnerable. Even though anisakis worms cannot survive long in the human digestive tract, anisakiasis can have numerous and serious consequences from damage to the gastric walls to dangerous intestinal perforations. One must always be aware, finally, that anisakis larvae also create risks by releasing substances into the host's tissues before dying, potentially causing serious allergies.

MAURO GAUDINO

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.*