

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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CESARE CHIODI, GIANNINO CITTERIO,
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EDITOR IN CHIEF
GIOVANNI BALLARINI

ASSISTANT EDITOR AND ART DIRECTOR
FRANCESCO RICCIARDI

COPY EDITOR
SILVIA DE LORENZO

EDITORIAL SECRETARY
TILDE MATTIELLO

LAYOUT
MARIA TERESA PASQUALI

TRANSLATORS
NICOLA LEA FURLAN
DONALD J. CLARK

THIS ISSUE INCLUDES ARTICLES BY
Giovanni Ballarini, Maurizio Campiverdi,
Silvia De Lorenzo, Paolo Petroni,
Gianbruno Pollini, Nicola Rivani Farolfi.



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

EDITORIAL OFFICE
VIA CASALE TOR DI QUINTO 1 - 00191 ROMA
TEL. 06 3336102 - FAX 06 3336102
redazione@accademia1953.it



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On the cover: Lobsters, painted by Pasquarosa Bertoletti Marcelli around 1930, is part of the exhibition *Our Fascination with Simple Objects*, at the GNAM in Rome through June 2. The subtitle, *Still Life* from the Collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art well describes the artist's slant. This rarely displayed series of works owned by the Gallery revolves around a common theme. There are many interesting still lifes in the exhibit, all painted between 1910 and 1950, including works by Pasquarosa (1896-1973 artistically she did not use her last name), a Roman painter of peasant origin born in Anticoli Corrado. Having come to Rome at an early age, she initially worked at as model. Her debut as a painter came in 1915 when the colorful verve of her work combined with her spontaneous opposition to the academy thrust her into the limelight. Starting in the 1920s, although she still occupied a marginal place in the Roman context, she participated in all major expositions of the time.

Italian Restaurants Abroad in a Time of Globalization

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI
President of the Academy

*The Academy
has an important role
to play in identifying
those restaurants abroad
that offer, maintain
and defend true
Italian cuisine.*

Dear Academicians, regional Italian cuisine is traditional and is based on the use of local products. This condition creates difficulties abroad, given the large number of so-called “Italian sounding” imitations - products that conjure up a non-existent Italian image but are not Italian at all. They are generally low quality products, packaged using an Italian name or flag but having nothing to do with Italy. For quite some time we have observed and noted this situation, which has caused considerable harm to the Italian economy and indeed to the very image of our products abroad. Today, rather than diminish-

ing, the problem has increased owing to the global economic crisis. One example is Argentina, which some time ago enacted a commercial policy that could lead to the closing of its markets to our typical and traditional products, and at the same time foster an increase in their imitations. Along these lines it is easy to imagine how, in addition to Argentine wines, we will soon see the emergence of Argentine olive oil, pasta, and especially a series of Argentine cheeses and salamis that are of lower cost and of increasingly good quality. All these Italian style products compete with those that Italy exports in an increasingly globalized market. The well known example of good quality Moldavian *grana* cheese that is available in Italy is a case in point.

What I have briefly outlined suggests a series of questions regarding Italian cuisine abroad in so many countries with their own different cuisines. For cultural reasons, the situation in North America is different from that in South America, or from the emerging countries of the Orient, and so on. Equally different is the condition of those dishes that are of necessity tied to the Italian, if not regional, origin of one or more ingredients, from that of those dishes that do not necessarily have that requirement, as in some of the above mentioned examples. There is also the delicate issue of the use in Italian cuisine of “made by Italy” products; that is, those Italian style products that Italian companies are increasingly producing abroad using Italian equipment exported for those markets (pasta, salami, etc.) In a complex situation like the one outlined above

it is necessarily to make a schematic distinction among at least three types of Italian cuisine abroad: *low cuisine*, *industrial cuisine*, and *high cuisine*, each of which is different from the other. These differences in part reflect a situation that has already taken place in Italy.

It is very difficult to affect *low cuisine* that, both in Italy and abroad qualifies itself as “Italian cuisine”, starting with pizzerias or places that offer low cost “pepperoni pizza” made with sausage (NB: In Italian, *peperoni* means green peppers) or “pasta Bolognese”, in which the spaghetti are served with meatballs. This is a cuisine in which “Italian sounding” products are used because their cost is much lower than the imported product. To some degree, perhaps it’s more opportune for Americans to believe that the pizza they order in a their local fast food restaurants is their own invention and a unique American patrimony, only to discover what real Italian pizza is when they arrive in Italy.

It is equally difficult to intervene effectively in the *industrial cuisine* of Italian style processed ready-to-eat foods, which owing to insurmountable conditions imposed by the industrial economy, primarily use generic products, or at best those “made by Italy”. It is also a cuisine that utilizes production, conservation, distribution and consumer systems that are not part of traditional Italian cuisine, starting with heating by microwave, that are required by customers who demand “fast” or “convenience” foods even at home.

Most important for Italy, and especially “made by Italy” firms, remains

high cuisine, which is analogous to high fashion, quality interior furnishings, exclusive jewelry, and luxury car sectors in which price is not seen as an obstacle, but rather confers an elite and prestigious symbolic value to the product. High prestige products, like *high cuisine*, cannot and should not compete with mass produced and broadly consumed ones, for which price plays a decisive role. In *high cuisine* everything must be

perfect, or near perfect, and it must satisfy the needs of a relatively restricted social group. It is in *high cuisine* that we find the best Italian products, in which the brand name or high specification assume particular importance: a simple DOP or IGP denotation will not suffice. A perfect example is DOP Champagne, in which the brand name, with the quality specifications, vintage, and inevitably price, predominate.

High cuisine Italian restaurants abroad, with their “great chefs” are the only ones that are able to promote, sustain and defend high quality and elite Italian food products. Our Academy has an important role to play by pointing out which restaurants abroad can teach people about true Italian cuisine, thereby safeguarding the identity of our traditional and regional foods.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI

FOCUS DI PAOLO PETRONI

THE PERENNIAL TOPICALITY OF THE ITALIAN ACADEMY OF CUISINE

The adjective in the title may appear a tad imposing, strong and almost a provocation. Perennial here does not mean eternal, but rather it stands for the enduring, continuous presence of our Academy. The name was debated long and hard by our founders, who at first were hesitant about “Association” or “Club” but then became convinced, at the suggestion of the talented publicity guru Dino Villani, that “Academy” was the correct designation.

With great wisdom it was decided that it would not be the Academy of Italian Cuisine, which does not exist, but rather the Italian Academy of Cuisine. The name stuck and surely was endowed with perennial “up-to-dateness”. But why academy? An academy is an institution dedicated to the most refined studies and to elevating knowledge to new heights.

The term *Academy* derives from the Greek to describe the philosophical school of Plato, founded in 387 BC and located just outside the Athenian walls, named after the war hero *Academus*, who had donated to the city a plot of land that became a public garden. It was here that Plato conducted his philosophical discussions with his disciples. Later on, as the sharper minds were curbed by the powerful censorship of the men in power and most decidedly by the dogma of the church, the place became a meeting point for groups of people stimulated by diverse disciplines, not all of them learned minds or practitioners of literature and philosophy by profession.

Starting with Humanism and the Renaissance, most notably in Florence, the modern academies came to life, oftentimes masked by imaginative names with a student’s mocking twist, in order to escape the blows of censorship. This is how academies came about, such as the Academy

of *Lincci* that could apply the acuity of sight of the lynx in observing the universe; the Academy of *Crusca* that aimed at protecting the true language by separating the wheat from the chaff; the Academy of the *Intronati* that strove to be free from the noises of the world and to harbor sharper thoughts; the Academy of *Concordi* that had solidarity on its mind; the Academy of *Oscuri* that was devoted to emanating the light of truth; the Academy of *Umidi* that celebrated the plain language of the populace in opposition to the Academy of *Infiammati* that upheld the classicism entwined with Latin.

In due time, with the advent of the Enlightenment, science too became enthralled with the academies, particularly those of “Cimento” that adopted the famous motto of “trying and retrying”, and the Georgophiles with whom we have recently signed a memorandum of understanding.

All things considered, Academy is the correct definition: we are not professionals, we are passionate lovers of our subject, free from encumbrances and not bound by censorship or moral debts. Freedom, however, must be handled with great care. We should be grateful not only to our founding fathers, but also to those who have led the Academy until now, preserving it from cliques, blandishments, egos and political and economic involvements. We have come to a new convocation in a delicate phase for our gastronomy, squeezed by an ever worsening crisis and the striving by the chef to introduce novelties at all costs.

We have always said that our mission is to protect our traditions by improving them from generation to generation, but everything that surrounds us must remind us of the commitment undertaken by the Academy. In this spirit, its work is vital and perennially up to date.

Piadinas and Piadinerias

BY GIANBRUNO POLLINI

Delegate, Cervia-Milano Marittima

*Once a hand made local food,
piadinas are now being
mass produced both
in Italy and abroad.*

Masotti's Dictionary of the Italian spoken in Romagna (*Vocabolario Romagnolo Italiano*, Zanichelli, 1996) contains the following definition: "Piada. A thin *focaccia* of unleavened bread, cooked over a hot surface, typical of the Romagna Region. The Romagnoli consider it a symbol of the family, of the land and the social life that the community had embraced. Its fragrance spreads happiness and feelings of friendship and love". In the beginning, it was nothing more than a simple *focaccia* made by peasants, never modified over the centuries, without any evolution, cooked to eat with whatever was leftover from a previous meal and whatever was available in small quantities. But later it did evolve into a typical dish with two souls: the first as a dish with the value of a memento that marks the tourist's adventure in Romagna and the second as a testimony of taste and of an Italian matrix that those people who have left their country wish to satisfy by finding a "*piadineria*" in order to feel close to home and rediscover the experience of a wonderful taste. If those are the visible souls of the *piadina* in our times, what is left of the original *piadina*?

The name, perhaps, that is still used in the hinterland, far away from the beaches and the night clubs, or in certain houses in small towns where little girls learn to prepare their first *piadine* rolled by their mothers. The name is still used by the people of Romagna when they buy them, although they are aware that nowadays the dough is worked by machine and the cooking surface is nothing but a flat metal pan heated by electricity. Even though tradition rests upon remembrances, the habit surrounding a certain food and its taste are also responsible for the modern face of the *piadina*.

The *piadineria* appeared in the years of the economic boom and the incipient mass tourism, as a provisional semi-mobile food stand, to satisfy the hurried appetite of the young. It featured *piadas* prepared at home and then cooked over hot plates with the traditional ingredients. Thus it became an official component of the vast and varied system of global eateries joining the most popular pizzerias, bread and kebab vendors. Food chains are now offering franchising, key in hand, of the gastronomic experience of the *piadina* (or *piadena* as the purist Morri called it), knowing full well that the taste comes first and foremost from the ingredients. They strive to serve a wheat base that must be "fresh and never frozen" and use as ingredients fillings that are produced in semi-artisanal kitchens.

The historic composition of such ingredients has remained basically the same, although it may be difficult to find some of them as a consequence of the evolution of cultures: "herbs from the house garden such as cabbages, nettles, corn poppies,

radicchio and so on, and then herbs to be sautéed with garlic, onion, shallots, pancetta, lard, fats, natural aromas. And then *squacquerone* cheese, pecorino, goat cheese and more seasoned cheeses. Also, cold cuts in general: lard, pancetta, *ciccioli* (scraps of pork fats)". Together with these fillings, the only ones that can be faithful to the original taste of this dish, the evolution of taste has introduced subtle changes, such as the addition of bicarbonate to make a softer dough, and a number of true mutations that no matter how improbable they may look, will probably enhance a new taste. We are thus seeing the arrival of *piadine* filled with *Nutella* and chocolate, tropical fruit, jams and marmalades, quite removed from the time when only honey was used, especially in the area around Cervia, all the way to marriages with foods of highly differentiated cultural traditions.

One could defend such trends by remembering that the *piadina*, in its essence, is nothing more than a bread, accompanied from the beginning of time by whatever may be available, in economic and cultural terms, to people who look for nourishment. Even the unthinkable fillings may be welcome because taste is taste. And yet, those who believe that food is also civilization are also cognizant that only by searching the roots of tradition we can understand the product of such civilization. Only the taste and aromas of the "original *piada*" can speak to us about Romagna and Italy. The "*piadinari*", i.e. the consumers of *piadine*, know that well even when adapting to the local preferences, they strive to offer a slice of genuine Italy in foreign countries.

The Birth of Middle Class Cuisine

BY NICOLA RIVANI FAROLFI
Academician, Milan-Brera Delegation

At the beginning of the 18th century there was already a demand for change in the art of cuisine.

It is widely accepted that the birth of bourgeois cuisine was a direct consequence of the French Revolution. The decimation of the noble class would have led the culinary personnel of the important families to seek out new occupations and open new businesses. This is true for the most part and explains why the establishment of great restaurants took place in France before anywhere else.

However, if we focus on the historical reality, we realize that as a social class, the bourgeoisie had already begun to develop much earlier, so much so that it was able to marshal the destructive force that allowed it to bring down the prevailing order.

The French middle class, and to an even greater extent that of the low countries, already played a fundamental role in the 17th century economy (one need only think of the Flemish paintings depicting wealthy bourgeois associations), and since the early 1800s we can detect a strong demand for a change in the art of cuisine.

In his *Cuisinier Moderne*, published in 1733, Vincent La Chapelle demonstrated that there was a great desire for culinary renovation.

The cuisine of the Renaissance was the province of the royal court, and as such was based on ostentation: its purpose was to demonstrate the opulence of the nobles, using as many of the rarest and most varied and unusual ingredients possible. The discovery of the Americas and the constitution of the East India Company constantly brought new products to the European courts, but it was difficult to integrate them into the exist-

ing cuisine. The era was a cornucopia of game, and of sweet and sour or sweet and savory contrasts that have survived to this day in some historic dishes, especially pastries. Some classic examples are *panforte* from Siena or *panpepato* from Ferrara. Still, these products were reserved for a small group of elites.

The desire for a culinary renovation that would lighten up dishes and make them available to a broader group of people was born in France. It was a phenomenon similar to the one that took place during the second half of the last century that led to the development of *nouvelle cuisine*. Sauces were made lighter, fresh herbs were added, and vegetables assumed a greater role in the main dish.

In essence, the technique of “enriching” the plate was replaced by one of the “counterpoint”. One principle ingredient was enhanced and showcased with other ingredients that exalted it.

The term “bourgeois” was already used in 1745 in François Menon’s *La Cuisinière bourgeoise* to refer to a modern cuisine, in polemical contrast not to a provincial one but to an “old” cuisine. The new fashion rapidly spread across Europe, as we can see from several cookbooks published in various countries. In Italy we had the publication of *The Galant Cook* by Vincenzo Corrado and *The New Economical Milanese Cook* by Giovan Felice Luraschi (1829).

The greatest change that would take place during the 19th century came about as a result of inventions both great and small that would

transform society. In more advanced economies like France, Great Britain and Germany the invention of the steam engine would lead to the development of a network of river and overland transport. This would allow for the rapid transfer of cargo from one part of the country to another, especially from rural areas to the city. More and newer products appeared at the markets at ever more reasonable prices. This exchange allowed for the diffusion of dishes of different traditions and expanded the gastronomic panorama. Another small invention that would have an enormous impact on cuisine was that of Nicolas Appert, who in 1810 patented a system for hermetically sealing food. That same year the Englishman Pierre Durant patented a method of conserving food in tin cans. These two inventions put at the disposal of cooks products that would become indispensable in 19th century cookbooks and in modern cuisine, such as canned tuna, anchovies, and capers, not to mention tomatoes.

In Italy the process of culinary renovation was much slower, as a result of its more complex geographical conformation and political fragmentation that would only be unified in 1861 under the Kingdom of Italy. The exchange of products was far more limited, even though in time it would become important for the creation of certain dishes. Even as late as the mid-19th century the transport of wine from Piedmont to Liguria or to Valle D'Aosta was done by horse cart, and in order not to return with empty carts, the drayers would take on barrels of anchovies in salt or wheels of *fontina*. The importation of these products that were unheard of in Piedmont would lead to the birth of the two great local dishes *bagna caoda* and *fonduta*.

Italian cuisine is the result of the

competition between the culinary style of the well off, or noble, families with that of the middle class. This competition led to the creation of many of the dishes for which our country is so well known today. They are dishes from many traditions that take advantage of the different components of a country that is topographically complex and climatically varied. It is a cuisine that is predominantly regional, and its variations constitute an incomparable wealth.

Bourgeois cuisine, understood as "within everyone's reach" exploded with the diffusion of popular cookbooks that took place after the unification of Italy. In 1864 Giovanni Vialardi, court chef to the House of Savoy for over 50 years, published his book *Simple and Economical Middle Class Cuisine*. In it we find many traditional Piedmontese recipes that are easily replicated even by non-professional cooks. The principal authority on bourgeois cuisine was undoubtedly Pellegrino Ar-

tusi. His *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*, first published in 1891, has remained in print for over 100 years and has been translated into many languages.

Alongside bourgeois cuisine we must add another, perhaps less noble in its balance and taste, but certainly no less important one of our tradition: peasant cuisine. In this instance, all the ingredients are grown on the home farm and are utilized with an eye to maximum savings both in terms of time and money. By and large, the products are of poor origins, but of extraordinary flavor, and have generated some of the most delicious dishes in our cuisine: *pizzoccheri* from Valtellina, Tuscan *ribollita*, Milanese *cassoeula*, *crescentine* from Emilia and *testaroli* from Pontremoli.

Certainly both bourgeois and peasant cuisine have contributed a character of excellence to Italian cuisine that is recognized throughout the world.

NICOLA RIVANI FAROLFI

2013 ECUMENICAL DINNER



The 2012 ecumenical dinner based on the cuisine of herbs and spices once again brought Academicians in Italy and around the world together at the virtual table. Next year the convivial ecumenical dinner will take place October 17 at 8:30 pm, and its theme will be The Cuisine of Unforgettable Meat. The theme, chosen by the Franco Marengi Research Center and approved by the President's Council, includes the cuisine of the "fifth quarter", but also other meats and animal products that have always had a place in popular cuisine but that are seldom used today because we are no longer subject to a "cuisine of poverty". The objective for 2013 therefore will be to rediscover traditional dishes that use offal - giblets, organ meats and tripe - that can still have a place in frugal modern Italian cuisine. Delegates will be charged with ensuring that the ecumenical dinner is accompanied by an appropriate cultural presentation that discusses the proposed theme and that the dishes chosen reflect the foods that have been selected by the Council.

Restaurant Acoustics

BY MAURIZIO CAMPIVERDI
Bologna-San Luca Delegate

*Is it possible
that once upon a time
all restaurant owners were
soundproofing geniuses?*

It has happened to all of us: We are seated at a restaurant only to find ourselves surrounded by an echoing cacophony that forces us to try to read the lips of our dinner companions. We look around and see a room filled with apparently civilized people, not making unseemly gestures or shouting. Everyone appears to be speaking in a low voice, but the words bounce off the walls, are deflected onto us from the ceiling and surround us in a deafening and irritating roar.

How is this scenario possible especially in newly opened restaurants in our increasingly technologically specialized world? The manager of a restaurant that is about to open must focus not only on the kitchen, service and ambiance, but should also pay attention to the lighting and also - and there's the rub - to acoustics. Soundproofing is of fundamental importance because we go to restaurants not only to eat but also to socialize and converse. Today there is no dearth of corrective measures that are both cost effective and non-invasive that can substantially mitigate acoustical problems and can make a room devoted to dining a place of conviviality.

Let us take a look at two cities that I know well: Bologna and Paris. The historic restaurants in Bologna do not have acoustics problems. It may be because the ceilings are high, often arched; perhaps because there are draperies or bottles lining the walls, but one thing is certain: even in a packed room one can converse comfortably. New restaurants are another situation altogether. One case in par-

ticular is emblematic. A restaurant recently opened in the city that can seat 400 in a single large room (we must recall that Bologna is a city of trade fairs). When the room is divided into four sections using removable walls the situation is acceptable. However when the entire vast space is used it is an acoustical disaster.

Clearly acoustics are not a priority in the restaurant business these days. This is also true for many smaller restaurants opened with enthusiasm and a spirit of sacrifice on the part of young managers. One consideration arises: it is likely that in the past a restaurant was built as a restaurant, not a recycled space once housing offices or stores as may be the case today.

The situation is analogous for Paris, which continues to be the world's restaurant capital. There is not a single old restaurant or typical *brasserie* that has an acoustics problem. Is it possible that once upon a time all restaurant owners were soundproofing geniuses? I hardly think so! But in recently opened restaurants problems abound. The most emblematic case is that of a restaurant that opened six years ago in the Latin Quarter and this year earned its second Michelin star. It is utterly impossible to converse. While it may be true that being deaf provides the advantage of not having to listen to nonsense, being deafened while dining is absolutely intolerable. Restaurant patrons should revolt! As Academicians we should disqualify without hesitation all those restaurants with acoustical issues that render normal and civilized conversation impossible.

Is Family Cuisine Still Alive and Well?

BY SILVIA DE LORENZO

A question that concerns a worrisome aspect of our cuisine was discussed at the meeting of the Franco Marenghi Study Center.

The President of the Study Center Paolo Petroni presented the new Director of the Regional Study Center of the Veneto Roberto Robazza, and Pierluigi Fedele, Academician from the Borgo Val di Taro Delegation the Commander of the Parma forest brigade, who may soon join the Franco Marenghi Study Center.

Thus we embarked on the first meeting of 2013 getting to the heart of some of the year's topics, especially cultural ones, which, as President Giovanni Ballarini emphasized, the Academy would like to increasingly focus on along with the human and convivial elements.

Ten years ago when we published the first volume in the *Cultural Gastronomy* series on the occasion of Academy's 50th anniversary, we looked back at the cuisine of the preceding fifty years, its evolution and

new trends. This year, with its 60th anniversary, the Academy examines Italian cuisine today. And this is precisely the title of the latest volume in the series, which will be presented at the convention in Montecatini. And "cuisine today" is the cultural theme that will inspire the Academy's work this year, continued President Ballarini, keeping in mind that while Italian cuisine is currently enjoying great popularity around the world, at home we are confronted with an epochal change: the collapse of family cuisine. Many issues have contributed to this phenomenon: among them, the "time" factor, which has led to the use of pre-cooked industrially produced products. And as Secretary of the *Franco Marenghi* Study Center Alfredo Pelle has pointed out, another factor is the barrage of television cooking shows that have destroyed our love of cooking. The Academy, concluded President Ballarini, must seriously evaluate the current state of our cuisine and oversee and focus on it with great dedication.

Returning to the book *Italian Cuisine Today*, which contains many articles by Academicians and members of the Regional Study Centers, Paolo Petroni discussed the positive results of the synergetic work of the *Franco Marenghi* Study Center and the Regional Study Centers that over the course of the years have come to represent the Academy's primary structural support in the area of culture. The President of the Study Center then emphasized that because of this very synergy, an imposing work in gastronomic culture is taking shape: the new Academy cookbook. This effort already includes more than 2,000 recipes, not including side dishes and desserts. This work represents a

unique patrimony that is up to date and rich in the wisdom and flavors of our regional cuisine. Carla Chiaramonti, the editor of the cookbook, then updated us on the progress of the project.

Paolo Petroni then turned to the online *Restaurant Guide*, which as we know can be downloaded on more than 75% of cell phones. The Academy's website now averages 5,000 visitors each month, and we have more than 90,000 users on cell phones and tablets. And since we are considered the world's most consulted restaurant guide it is essential that the information be continually updated and that the information it contains is valid. After a short debate on the measures to be adopted toward this end, it was decided that regional editors of the *Guide* would be nominated by the Regional Study Centers. Their job will be to keep restaurant information and descriptive ratings current, as well as to handle new entries and any cancellations, working hand in hand with the Delegations. At our October meeting we will tackle the subject of the printed version of the Guide, *The Good Traditional Table*, which now has a established format.

The final item discussed was the *Gastronomic Cultural Itineraries* series. After having mentioned the 2013 issue that will be devoted to "Meats to Remember", we moved on to suggestions for the 2014 topic. President Ballarini recommended that we choose a subject that reflects family cuisine. Among the various subjects proposed three were selected to be submitted to the new President's Council for a final decision: the cuisine of rice, the cuisine of legumes, and street food.