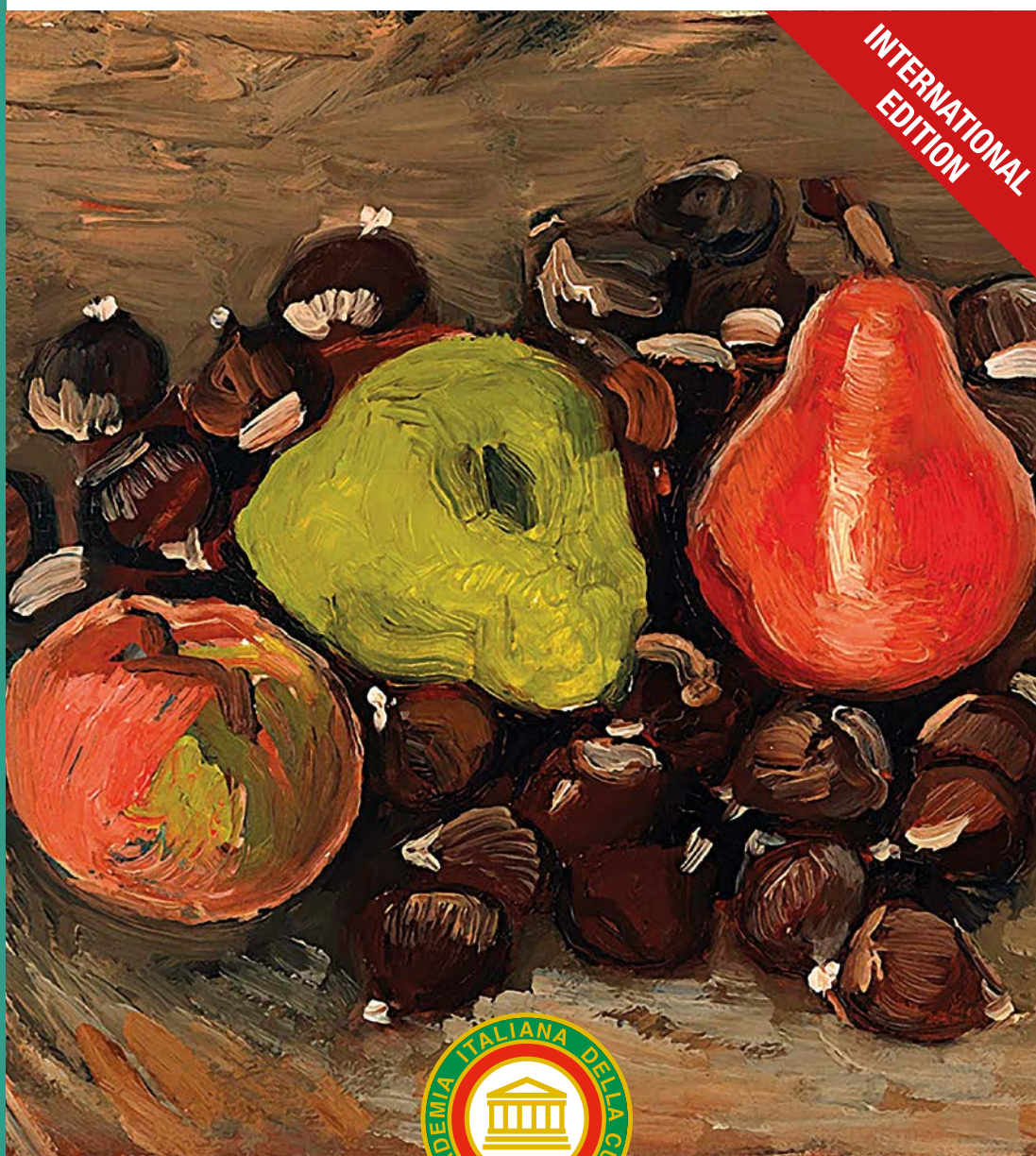


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Table of contents



L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
È STATA FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI

E DA LUIGI BERTETT, DINO BUZZATI TRAVERSO,
CESARE CHIODI, GIANNINO CITTERIO, ERNESTO DONÀ
DALLE ROSE, MICHELE GUIDO FRANCI, GIANNI MAZZOCCHI
BASTONI, ARNOLDO MONDADORI, ATTILIO NAVA,
ARTURO ORVIETO, SEVERINO PAGANI, ALDO PASSANTE,
GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: graphic elaboration of *Still Life with Fruit and Chestnuts* (1886) by Vincent van Gogh, Fine Arts Museum, San Francisco

Focus of the President

- 2** The new Good Traditional Table Guid is ready
(Paolo Petroni)



Current Events • Lifestyle

- 3** What future for taste and tradition?
(Mauro Catellani)



Territories • Tourism • Folklore

- 5** Turin breadsticks
(Elisabetta Cocito)



Cuisine • Products • Food Technology

- 7** The delicious history of the universal seasoning
(Filippo Scevola)





The new Good Traditional Table Guide *is ready*



*Suspended for 4 years
due to the pandemic,
it is now online
with a new app.*

The unfortunate Covid interlude that oppressed us for over two years also forced us to cease updating and publishing our Good Traditional Table Guide, which we also sent to reviewed restaurants. Amid closures and inactivity, **the pandemic's chilling effects on restaurants**, including manifold complications in dish presentation and ingredient use, hindered any objective review; besides, going to restaurants was impossible for long periods.

Normality has been reinstated for several months, albeit with decidedly higher prices, but with most restaurants full to bursting. Our Delegates, Legates and Secretariat having **resumed updating it** some time ago, the new Good Traditional Table Guide for 2024 is ready for publication.

A new editorial form and a new app

For this edition, we have created a new editorial form and a **new app, dedicated entirely to the Guide**, which will no longer be distributed in printed form but **will only be available online**. It is no longer feasible, with today's prohibitive costs, to print and send thousands of copies which often languish in drawers and furthermore become obsolete soon after distribution. **The new Guide reviews over 1,200 restaurants** that offer good traditional cuisine, courteously served at a reasonable price. All reviewed restaurants will still receive a laminated poster: over 1,000 will be sent to restaurateurs, who will familiarise their clientele with the Academy and its Guide by displaying **the attractive sign on their premises**.

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia



A Guide that is always up to date

This Guide will always be up to date: **the app will be updated whenever it is opened**, reflecting new entries and any closures. **Constant updates from forms delivered by Delegates and Legates to the Secretariat** are therefore crucial; but we invite all Academicians to point out errors, closures and changes, thereby ensuring a reliable, high-quality Guide worthy of our Academy.



daily (Bloomberg; Statista GmbH; Market Cap; AtlasBig). Oxfam, the non-profit organisation which has fought poverty and social exclusion since 1942, has declared that **the 10 largest food-producing multinationals dominate about 70% of food purchases**. With revenue is around 550 billion US dollars, these businesses **directly and indirectly control over 700 food and beverage brands**, operating a vast, capillary food production and trade network worldwide (Oxfam, 24/7 Wall St.).

Companies research how to make food more appealing

Production companies **invest enormously in choosing ingredient combinations to maximise consumer appeal** and guarantee 'optimal sensory appreciation'; they analyse how to in-

crease palatability by **painstakingly calibrating flavours**, namely sweet, salty, sour, bitter and umami, extensively investigating **the ideal consistency, aroma, sounds when chewed, physical appearance**, packaging and even name: **all factors which together affect sensory perception**.

Being so pervasive and invasive, the food industry has progressively succeeded in **modifying collective tastes, rendering consumers dependent on certain flavours**.

'Natural' or 'nature-identical flavours' - numbering over 2,500 - are a euphemistically named series of substances added to food to exalt some of its organoleptic properties. **Their overuse has weakened our taste perception**, modifying the thresholds at which we detect flavours and experience the pleasure of eating.

All this has been associated with a publicity campaign. The top ten food multinationals spend around 7.5% of

their revenue, exceeding 40 billion US dollars annually, on advertising. Almost half (48%) of world advertising expenses come from the US. The result is evident when we observe how relentlessly our means of mass communication have been infested by invasive ads in the past 5 years.

Hegemonic food uniformity aided partly by low costs

The consequence of this process, under way for more than a decade by now, is a hegemonic food uniformity, partly aided by low costs, characterised by massive distribution and **flavours which must be as consistent as possible across an ever-greater geographical territory**. Contamination thus drives us downwards: towards **standardisation rather than diversification, reducing choice and variety**, distancing us from tradition. The link between cuisine excelling in flavour and preparation, using local, traditional, often simple ingredients, and popular preference is being lost. Excellence must increasingly be tempered by the standards that are daily, and by no means coincidentally, presented by the mass media, television and specialised magazines.

In such a scenario, our foremost risk is that local cuisine, bound to seasons, raw materials and traditions wisely preserved (though sometimes with changes or even improvements) by families through many generations, could progressively vanish or be massively diluted. So traditional food rooted in its territory's collective experience could be relegated to a niche, perhaps commanding exorbitant prices due to its exclusivity, or even be lost altogether, yielding to increasingly global, uniform taste palettes.

Mauro Catellani





Turin breadsticks

by Elisabetta Cocito

Turin Academician

Emblematic of their city, grissini breadsticks have conquered the world, so much so that in America there is a dedicated Breadstick Day.

As often happens when trying to identify a recipe's origin, clues may be smudged by time or surrounded by a halo of romanticism or nobility; more frequently, that origin may be contested by multiple parties. The breadsticks known as *grissini* are no exception.

Possibly the most reliable account **attributes the origin of grissini to the latter 14th century**, when bread was sold by unit rather than weight (one *soldo* per loaf). Pervasive economic hardship caused *grissia*, *ghersa* in dialect (a com-

mon type of loaf), to become ever thinner until it became a *gherssin* (diminutive of *grissia*). **A more stately account** ennobles the *grissino* (the singular form) by linking its fortunes with King **Victor Amadeus II**. The sovereign, who became Duke of Savoy aged only nine, under his mother's regency, after the death of his father **Charles Emmanuel II**, had a sickly constitution and considerable digestive problems. The court physician **Teobaldo Pecchio** from Lanzo (Turin) prescribed a diet including light, flaky bread for his little patient. Thus the ducal baker, **Antonio Brunero**, created the *grissino*. A commemorative plaque in Lanzo reads: "according to tradition, here lived the physician Teobaldo Pecchio, who, aided by the baker Antonio Brunero, invented the *grissino* in 1679, thereby curing Victor Amadeus II". **Making grissini was complex and required multiple skills**. The *stiror* stretched out the dough; the *taior* cut it into pieces about three centimetres wide; *coureur* placed them into the oven using a baker's peel; and the *gavor* extracted them and broke them in half. The oven was heated with poplar wood.

The grissino owes its success to its digestibility and long shelf life

Whatever its origin, the *grissino* was clearly appreciated by aristocrats. King **Charles Felix** of Sardinia munched *grissini* at the theatre, as described by **Massimo d'Azeglio**: "he deftly devoured them, grasping one end between two fingers and swiftly nibbling the other". *Grissini* aroused the curiosity of European courts, who so coveted them that **Louis XIV** of France tried reproducing them in Paris by hiring two Turinese bakers. It is well-known that culinary success partially depends on environmental conditions, and the Seine water and Parisian air gave rise only to *grissini* of modest quality. **Napoleon Bonaparte** organised a courier service between Turin and Paris to bring this quintessentially Turinese delicacy, probably accompanied by other products, as a novelty to the French royal table as *les petits bâtons de Turin*: 'Turin twiglets'.

The success of *grissini* must surely have been aided by their digestibility and longer shelf life than bread. **They were eaten dipped in milk at breakfast, in broth at lunch, or as a pleasant snack**. They were **also used as an ingredient**, such as in delicious **egg fritters** incorporating milk and crumbled *grissini*. They likewise appear in the recipe for **supa barbetta**, a historic dish of the **Valli Valdesi** (Waldensian Valleys), prepared for the Christmas festivities, when hogs were butchered and in particular on 17 February, the date when in 1848, King **Charles Albert** of Sardinia recognised the Waldensians' political and civil rights. It is an **oven-baked soup**, made of broth, *toma delle valli* cheese and spices. Originally it employed stale bread, which





wealthier families replaced from the mid-19th century onwards with *grissini* bought for that purpose in Turin. Dressed to the nines in charcuterie slices, this versatile product acquits itself well as an appetiser, and is indispensable in restaurants' bread baskets. Who among us has not nibbled one while awaiting the first course?

Emilio Salgari defined Turin as "Grissinopoli"

Returning to the hypothetical birth date of *grissini*, in his *History of Turin* the **historian Francesco Cognasso** reports that

in 1643, Paris-bound ambassadors from the Grand-Duchy of Tuscany pausing in Chivasso, in Turin province, "tasted at their table a novelty of wondrous form: bread longer than a yard and a half, and thin as the bones of the dead".

Whether through truth or legend, the dignity bestowed by Turin upon its *grissini* is indisputable, so much so that in 1853, **when an obelisk was placed in Piazza Savoia** commemorating the Siccardi Laws' abolition of ecclesiastical courts, a chest was buried in its foundations, containing "positive symbols documenting **some representative products of the city** for posterity and the level of civility reached by the Piedmontese people in the second half of the 19th century". These

included a copy of the Siccardi Laws; issues 141 and 142 of the *Gazzetta del Popolo* newspaper; several coins; grains of rice and other cereals; a bottle of Barbera wine; and **four *grissini***.

So popular was the *grissino* that the author **Emilio Salgari** defined Turin as "Grissinopoli". **That name was later applied to a cutlet breaded with roughly crumbled *grissini***, differentiated from a Milanese cutlet by its distinctive crunch. Beloved by Turinese people, it is hard to find nowadays: roaming among restaurant tables we were delighted to discover a Michelin-starred Piedmontese chef offering it, with Savoyard pride, in his restaurant, proving that though traditions may be obscured by fads, they always return to remind us of their excellence and value.

The oldest, most traditional grissino is the robatà

The oldest, most traditional *grissino* is the **robatà** (meaning 'rolled' and pronounced *rubatà*). It is forty to eighty centimetres long and **its distinctively rustic texture** is due to its artisanal processing and hand-rolling. **More recent is the 'stretched' *grissino***, whose dough is not rolled but indeed stretched, making it flakier. It is recognised as a PAT (Traditional Agrifood Product) for Piedmont.

Over time, *grissini* **have been enriched with new flavours** and varieties: whole-meal or adorned with sesame, olives, walnuts or chillies, or in the most audacious, toothsome variants, caramelised or chocolate-covered. There are rice oil *grissini* for sensitive palates; fragrant, amber-hued maize *grissini*; and scrumptious hazelnut *grissini*.

Lastly, a reminder that *grissini* are also greatly appreciated abroad, such as in America which has a dedicated **Breadstick Day** on 25 November; even though **Mario Soldati** wrote: "It's recreated everywhere in Italy and abroad, but cannot be exported, since even fifty kilometres from Turin, it's no longer itself". Different visions for different eras.

Elisabetta Cocito





The delicious history of the universal seasoning

by Filippo Scevola

London Academician

*"There must be something strangely sacred in salt. It is in our tears and in the sea."
(Khalil Gibran)*

certainty is that the transition from a hunter-gatherer to an agricultural society suddenly rendered this condiment more important.

Red meat, a dietary classic before the Neolithic Revolution, was our pre-agricultural ancestors' main source of salt. When society turned agricultural, its chiefly vegetarian diet was low in salt, requiring additional sodium chloride as a matter of survival.

Salt has played an immense variety of roles throughout history.

Many things are unknown about the history of salt, including who first used it and when or how its food preservation ability was discovered. In historical terms, it seems to have been known since the dawn of humanity, but we don't know exactly how salt culture developed; the only

Salt has played an immense variety of roles throughout history. It has been used **as food, for preservation, as medicine, or as a means of barter, payment, protest or prayer.**

From the *garum* prepared by the ancient Romans from salted fermented fish guts

to the Vietnamese *Nuoc Mam* fish sauce to any number of modern recipes, salt has claimed important roles in the kitchen and beyond. It was known since antiquity as a disinfecting and preserving agent, as **proven by finds in Egyptian tombs** from the 3rd millennium BC demonstrating its use to preserve game and fish and process olives.

In China, food was commonly preserved by salting, and thus eaten salted. However, it was in the Western world that more efficacious techniques for using salt were developed: the Celts, who occupied a salt-rich area (from southern France to Salzburg), were versed in its many uses, and **it was from the Celts that the Romans acquired the habit of salting meat** from the animals they hunted, including pigs and boars.

As our economy evolved, this elusive and coveted substance assumed a crucial role especially as an **exchange commodity**. For instance, the people of Salento (the 'heel' of Italy in modern-day Puglia/Apulia) harvested and traded salt deposited on seaside rocks. Merchants travelling along the 'salt roads' had to pay a toll based on the value of their goods, providing an important source of income for areas lucky enough to be traversed by such routes. Various major trade networks emerged this way, including the famous Via Salaria, connecting the Adriatic Sea and Etruria (modern Tuscany) to the Ostia salterns. Throughout the epochs of the Italic peninsula's history, the salt tax was an integral part of daily life: in Italy it was only definitively abolished in 1975.

In the 20th century, **Gandhi** led peaceful protests against India's oppression by the British Raj, one of which was the famous Salt March.



Salt was omnipresent in medicine for millennia

Is human life imaginable without salt?

Probably not, since it symbolises life itself. **Our basic physiological functions depend on the balance between salt and liquids within our bodies.** Consequently, when that equilibrium is altered, illnesses can ensue. Salt has been an essential ingredient and omnipresent in medicine for millennia.

Greek medicine, especially the curative techniques of **Hippocrates** (c. 460 - c. 370 BC), made frequent use of salt, considered an expectorant or, mixed with water and vinegar, also used as an emetic.

During the Middle Ages, various documents from the **Schola Medica Salernitana** (a medical school founded in the 9th century in Salerno, southern Italy) identified roasted powdered salt as a painkiller and rock salt as a fever reducer. The book *L'Arte di mantenersi in salute* (*The Art of Maintaining Health*) explicitly recommended salting bread and other food. However, the risks of oversalting were already warned against.

During the Renaissance, the alchemist and physician **Paracelsus** (c. 1493-1541) introduced a novel medical concept: **he held that only salted food could be digested correctly.** "Human beings must have salt, and cannot persist without it. Where there is no salt, nothing remains, but all tends to putrefy".

In the 17th century, apothecaries continued classifying the functions of salt according to external appearance (rock salt, sea salt, refined salt and roasted salt). Respect for salt was as profound as its prices were high. Until the 17th century, **apothecaries favoured and most frequently used rock salt**, mostly sourced from the Carpathians, Transylvania, Tyrol and Poland. Pharmacists recommended salt ingestion against digestive problems, goitre, glandular diseases, intestinal worms, diarrhoea, dropsy, epilepsy and syphilis. A salt enema was believed effective even for "apparently dead and apoplectic" patients.



In the late 19th century, salt was adopted as a curative element in **heat therapy**, later incorporated by mainstream science in the early 20th century.

In 1832, the British physicians **Thomas Latta and Robert Lewins** first used a saline solution against the dehydrating effects of cholera. Today, an isotonic sodium chloride solution (**physiological saline**) has many uses, including as a 'replacement fluid' in emergencies, as a temporary substitute for large quantities of blood, or as a fluid medium for medicinal substances.

Salt, however, is **a double-edged crystal**. In the Middle Ages, the Schola Salernitana already warned against excessive salt consumption: a peril still under discussion.

Medical science has discovered that salt overconsumption with food, especially by those with hereditary salt sensibility, may **increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases** (CVD). Some avoid all added salt; others recommend no more than 5-6 grammes a day.

This food has interwoven social, cultural, economic and religious themes

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise what has transformed **salt from something worth fighting for to a commonplace, affordable condiment** on grocers' shelves.

Among the various reasons for this tran-

sformation is, crucially, **the discovery of the geological relation between salt domes and petroleum deposits.** The frantic search for salt domes as indicators of petroleum deposits in the early 20th century accelerated the discovery that salt is far more abundant on our planet than we'd previously thought: every continent is vastly rich in salt. A second reason is that salting was superseded by other food preservation methods and therefore much less of it was used.

Indispensable for flavouring and preserving food since antiquity, salt assumed enormous economic and religious value as history progressed, even playing a fundamental role in major world events. Alongside precious metals, it has empowered sovereigns and governors in every epoch. Long one of the principal international exchange goods, it favoured the birth of industry as a concept, and **allowed the creation of the first State Monopoly.** Salt, therefore, has profoundly affected social development in every era, and its centrality to human life is amply borne out in literature, myths and religions. Nobody would have expected such a simple substance to have such an incredible history. Let us all take heed from this passage from the Sermon on the Mount wherein Jesus addresses the Apostles thus: "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." (Matthew 5:13).

Filippo Scevoli