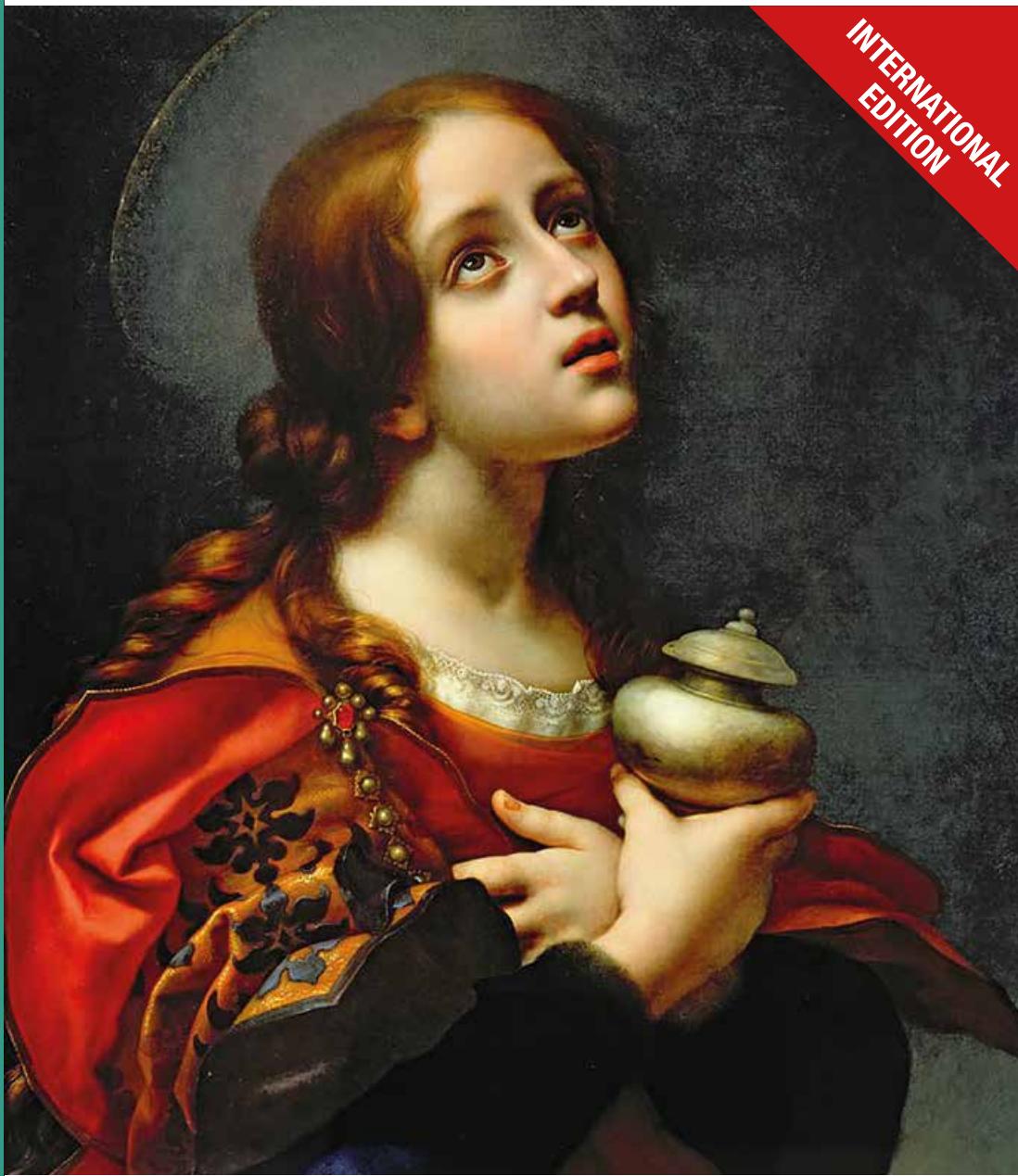


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# The long and winding road to Italian cuisine's UNESCO recognition

*The Academy's commitment is unwavering, alongside other supporting Communities.*

**A**rticle 3 of the Italian Academy of Cuisine's **Seventieth Anniversary Manifesto** declares that the Mediterranean Diet, considered the healthiest in the world (with UNESCO Intangible Heritage recognition since 2010), must be protected from the dangers of globalisation, laws influenced by lobbies, new lab-grown foods and foods from other cultures which distort ours. However, the Mediterranean Diet is not confined to Italy but also belongs (formally) to many other countries (Cyprus, Croatia, Greece, Morocco, Spain, Portugal). UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is a specialised United Nations Agency which oversees what it calls the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. **Italian cuisine per se, as a whole, has heretofore not received any such recognition.**

In recent years, other countries' cuisines have received Intangible Heritage status: first that of Mexico, followed by those of Korea (North and South) and Japan. France gained recognition for the "**Gastronomic meal of the French**", consisting of an apéritif, a starter, fish or meat, vegetables, cheese, dessert and liqueurs. The influence of this culture has been so strong that most western European meals follow this sequence. France also had its **baguette** recognised in 2022.

*The rituality of a process is what merits Intangible Heritage recognition*

We should emphasise that UNESCO **does not protect single foods but the traditions that include them**. It is the rituality of a process that merits insertion into the Intangible Heritage of Humanity list, not the preparation of food. Thus, for example, UNESCO protects the "Art of Neapolitan 'Pizzaiuolo'" and not Neapolitan pizza itself.

Regarding our candidacy, the proposed name for the **protected element** is "**Italian cuisine: sustainability and bio-cultural diversity**". It has then been linked with "a set of social practices, rituals and gestures based on the many local skills that, without hierarchies, identify and signify it". This mosaic of traditions reflects our country's biocultural diversity, rooted in the shared conception of meal preparation and consumption as moments of communal participation.

**by Paolo Petroni**

*President of the Accademia*



*The dossier is based on initiatives promoted by three Communities*

The dossier was drafted on the basis of initiatives promoted by three Communities: the **Italian Academy of Cuisine**, the **Casa Artusi Foundation** and the magazine **La Cucina Italiana (Italian Cuisine)**, founded by Umberto Notari in 1929 (the world's oldest cooking magazine), directed by Professor **Massimo Montanari** (Honorary Academician for Imola) as president of the scientific committee, and curated by Professor **Pier Luigi Petrillo**, an expert in this field, having overseen other successful UNESCO candidacies. In 2014, after a long, arduous process, Italy obtained UNESCO recognition for the "Vineyard Landscape of Piedmont: Langhe-Roero and Monferrato" and the "Traditional agricultural practice of cultivating the 'vite ad alberello' (head-trained bush vines) of the community of Pantelleria", followed in 2017 by, as above, the "Art of Neapolitan 'Pizzaiuolo'". **We are now at an important juncture for the recognition of our cuisine as a whole.** There have been and will be many lengthy and complex efforts involved. Creating a proposal that convinces all 12 countries represented in the Evaluation Body is no mean feat. Everyone expresses appreciation of our cuisine in words, but attempting to map its characteristics and values means entering a treacherous terrain full of menaces, hair-splitting and enervating bureaucratic hindrances. Nevertheless, the Academy's commitment is unwavering, alongside the other supporting Communities. Bolstered by the capable and conscientious activity of our Ministries of Culture and Agriculture, we trust that in 2025, our cuisine will gain the recognition it deserves.



# The first kiss

by Elisabetta Cocito

Turin Academician

*From dainty 'kissing' sandwich biscuits to the better-known chocolate 'love messengers'.*

In the collective consciousness, nothing is more romantic than a kiss, whose myriad variations are consequently depicted in painting, sculpture and poetry. It was therefore a felicitous idea to call one of the best-known Italian biscuits 'kisses': **two crumbly shortbread rounds joined by a drop of chocolate**, resembling two lips romantically kissing. Their success has encouraged many food companies, and espe-

cially artisanal bakers, to produce them and even export them, particularly to the Anglophone world, where they are known as 'ladies' kisses'.

The romantic air enveloping these dainties is attributed to **Victor Emmanuel II** asking his court cooks, on a warm day in 1852, to prepare a new, unusually shaped sweet. Thus they invented the **bacio di dama** ('lady's kiss'). Appreciated by the sovereign, these *baci* (the



plural) soon appeared on royal tables throughout Europe.

### *The 'golden kisses' of Tortona*

The spark of the first kiss was, however, well and truly ignited in Tortona, in the province of Alessandria, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. There they were **initially made with hazelnuts from the Langhe**, which were then more easily available and, crucially, cheaper than almonds. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the knight **Stefano Vercesi**, owner of an eponymous bakery, **perfected the recipe replacing hazelnuts with almonds** and adding cocoa, **distinctively wrapping each sweet in golden foil**. This was the birth of the *baci dorati*: the 'golden kisses' that **won gold at the 1906 Milan International Fair** and still follow their original recipe, becoming a symbol of Tortona.

Tortona kisses exude such romanticism that **an old anonymous poem** has been found which describes them simply but affectionately: "dear delights, delicious as the smiles of lovers and newlyweds". Their amorous power has been further confirmed by the PAT (**Typical Agrifood Product**) recognition which they have received.

### *Billets doux in Perugina 'kisses'*

The most spectacularly resounding and commercially successful call to romance was undoubtedly sounded by **Luisa Spagnoli** who, in 1922, invented the Perugina company's *Bacio* (kiss) chocolate, rescuing the hazelnut crumbs left over from other products, binding them in molten chocolate, crowning the resulting nugget with a whole hazelnut, and enrobing the entire creation with dark chocolate. **Giovanni Buitoni** defined this chocolate as a "messenger of love". The idea of adding a note with famous love-related quotes, ranging from romantic to sarcastic, came from the company's art director, **Federico Seneca**. It's worth briefly delving into



**the evolution of these notelets**, because, as we well know, whatever talks about food, even a little chocolate, is a **valid indicator of social change**.

Much time has passed since that distant 1922, but these amorous notes have constantly remained, keeping pace, as above, with the concept of love as it evolved over time: **no longer only dedicated to amorous couples but also encompassing universal love, friendship and family**. To attract a younger audience, young musicians and other performers have recently been invited to collaborate. For St Valentine's Day, the *Baci* have been 'dressed' by the designers **Dolce & Gabbana** and issued in various flavours.

### *The crunchy, irregularly shaped kisses from Cherasco*

**Evoking a more passionate love, the kisses of Cherasco**, in the province of Cuneo, were created in 1881 and consist of 65% cocoa dark chocolate with toasted, coarsely chopped PGI hazelnuts. They are **irregularly shaped** mounds of crunchy dark chocolate interspersed with hazelnut pieces. Transcending classic forms, they are each unique, just like impetuous kisses. These chocolates also have PAT recognition.

Alassio, a noted tourist destination in the province of Savona, has namesake

chocolates intertwined with its identity: the ***baci di Alassio*** ('Alassio kisses') invented in 1919 in a noted local bakery. Besides hazelnuts and sugar, their recipe includes egg whites, acacia honey and cocoa. Two biscuits 'kiss', joined by a layer of delicate chocolate cream. And after the kisses, there are hugs: **abbracci, the legendary shortbread and cream biscuits**, uniting a light biscuit and a cocoa biscuit in a tender embrace perfect for breakfast or an afternoon snack (*merenda*).

### *A savoury version for apéritifs*

Lady kisses (the aforementioned *baci di dama*) also exist in a bicoloured light and dark version, or in an aethereal almond version with white chocolate or pistachio cream in between. Every pastry chef has a signature variant, but their charming form remains the very same that first inspired the baker from Tortona who decreed their fortune.

These beloved kisses even have savoury versions alongside apéritifs or as *amuse bouche*s in restaurants: **two dainty savoury pearls** united by foie gras or simply cheese or ham.

If kisses denote love, affection or friendship, edible kisses gladden our palates and, why not, brighten our mood.

**Elisabetta Cocito**



# Sicilian Easter foods

by Attilio Borda Bossana

Messina Academician

*The island's  
'distinguishing features'  
include famed sweets  
and iconic  
savoury dishes.*

**S**icily is among the regions richest in Easter traditions, and the transition between Carnival excess and Lenten restraint followed by Easter cheer was sketched by the old proverb: "Nesci tu, porcu manciuni; trasi tu, sarda salata; veni tu, donna disiata" ("Depart, gluttonous hog; enter, salted sardine; come, desired lady") in which the hog is Carnival, the sardine, Lent, and the lady, the joy of Easter.

On the island, the religious observance of Easter traditionally required **the devotional use of ranaroli, wheat sprouts grown in the dark** to keep them white, for decorating the Easter Sepulchres in churches on Maundy Thursday. These

potted sprouts were called *lavureddi*, diminutive of *lavuri*, referring to wheat fields extensively worked (the word's etymological root; cf. 'labour') by farmers through *zzappulia* (hoeing) and weeding. This custom confirms the link with Easter gastronomic traditions also illustrated by the habit, current until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of calling Easter Sunday *Pasqua di li cassati* ('cassata Easter'), as **the holiday was celebrated with cassata**.

This may be the oldest European dessert with an attributed Arab origin, but it may also derive from the *casciata* known in all Italian regions from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, sparking debate between historians such as **Michele Amari** and **Ettore Li Gotti**.



Banquet with Easter Lamb by Alessandro Bonvicino known as Il Moretto; Duomo Vecchio (Old Cathedral) of Brescia



### Cassata is the fruit of the island's multicultural history

Cassata was appreciated by gourmets and became a speciality of monasteries in Palermo and Mazara; indeed, in 1575, a synod of the Mazara diocese prohibited its preparation because, presumably, the nuns had made it their primary occupation.

Sicilian cassata, due to its use of marzipan, surely has an Arab link with Norman variations, and also Spanish ones, as the original shortbread is replaced by sponge cake. **The Messina variant is more lightly iced:** chocolate mixed with ricotta and

'a frutta ncillippata (candied fruit), with less use of candied pumpkin. Despite uniting and representing all of Sicily, this cake exists in a plethora of subtypes due to the differences produced by the historical and cultural magma characterising a territory with three coasts and three seas, schematically echoing its threefold mediaeval division into three valleys: the Val Demone, Val di Noto and Val di Mazara, symbolising the Sicilian tradition of sweetmeats and the island's multicultural history.

**This thousand-year-old cake was revised in the Norman period, around 1100**, when in the Martorana convent in Palermo, **the nuns created pasta reale** ('royal paste': marzipan) with almond

flour and sugar. Cassata was **later transformed** by the great Palermo pastry master **Salvatore Gulì**, whose canonical 1873 version **included zuccata** (candied pumpkin), his invention, as the star ingredient. *Frutta martorana* (marzipan fruit), marzipan lambs (*picureddi*) and kids, little *cassatelle* from Ragusa (*ricotta* shortcrust tarts) or Agira (shortcrust turnovers with toasted almond and cocoa filling), *mpanatigghie* and *cuddure* biscuits, and Lenten biscuits are among the iconic Easter sweets, as are *pani di cena*: soft, sweet, fragrant buns spiced with cinnamon and cloves and covered in sesame. Associated with Maundy Thursday rituals, they are typical of the **Easter tradition in eastern Sicily**, particularly in Messina. The ten days leading up to Easter feature *cuddure* and *u pupu ccu l'ova*, also known as *panareddu* in Agrigento: shortcrust shaped into a basket shape or traditional Easter shapes enclosing a boiled egg.



### Easter meals are full of significance

Easter meals are full of significance. There is a series of Good Friday recipes following the Lenten meatless rules of **desinar di magro** ('lean eating'), including *pasta cu spezzi e muddica* (breadcrumb pasta),

a simple pasta dish with oil, salt and black pepper, and *pasta c'a muddica* (another breadcrumb pasta dish) also called *pasta ala milanisa* (Milanese pasta) because it recalls Milanese cutlet breadcrumbs. **Traditional Sicilian Easter luncheons** have lamb or kid as the main course, prepared according to each town's customs, whether stewed with potatoes and parsley, roast or baked as in Palermo, cooked with mint in Trapani, or, in and near Agrigento, with potatoes and small onions. **Typical of Ragusa are Easter impanate:** similar to the local *scacce* (stuffed flatbread) but containing turkey or lamb.

**Sicilian Easter pasta dishes** run the gamut from *maccheroncini* with pork sauce to baked pasta dishes including *pasta 'ncasciata* (baked pasta with cheese and aubergine). Palermo favours a timbale of baked *anelletti* pasta, while in Agrigento the usual dish is '*u taganu* or *tianu di Aragona*, the 'Aragona casse-role': cinnamon-spiced pasta baked in a special earthenware *tianu* from the nearby town of Aragona.

Last but not least, ***u sciusceddu*** is a soup from Messina with French origins containing eggs, meatballs and *ricotta*: a typical Easter dish, with dairy products as main ingredients, that is increasingly rare on domestic tables. *Sciusceddu*, from the Latin *iusellum* (a liquid soup or broth), is prepared for Easter lunch and contains *ricotta* and meatballs the size of pigeons' eggs made of minced meat, egg, breadcrumbs, *caciocavallo* cheese, parsley and a little water. Separately, eggs are beaten and combined with *ricotta* previously passed through a sieve, with *caciocavallo* and a modicum of salt and pepper. The meatballs are immersed into the broth and cooked for twenty minutes or so, adding the beaten egg and *ricotta* mixture and stirring briskly for a few moments.

After Easter Sunday, customs evoke the encounter on the road to Emmaus and the ensuing dinner that Cleopas and another disciple shared with Jesus, marking **Easter Monday**. People gather on lawns or in the country to celebrate the arrival of spring with barbecues preced-



ed by cured meats and typical cheeses, such as *pepato* (peppered sheep's cheese), accompanied by fresh fava beans, boiled eggs, olives and fresh home-baked bread.

Once again, food provides clues to "that sort of existential explosion" occasioned

by religious observances, which, wrote **Leonardo Sciascia**, "are foundational rituals for Sicilian identity, regenerating the bonds of belonging, family and blood; they are an atavistic contemplation of death".

**Attilio Borda Bossana**



# Easter Monday barbecues

by Morello Pecchioli

Honorary Academician for Verona

*The established custom of Easter Monday outings.*

It's a scorcher! After Easter and its rituals and traditional foods - from Campanian *casatiello* bread to the *paparèla* pasta ribbons of the Veneto (*Alleluja, alleluja, le paparèla le se desgarbuja* - Hallelujah, hallelujah, the *paparele* are getting tangled), from *torta pasqualina* (Easter spinach pie) to *colomba* (Easter dove cake) - turn the page, and here is Easter Monday: time for more gorging, this time 'al fresco', with outings, country picnics and barbecues. Italians have been polishing their grills, grates, hot plates and portable ovens since Holy Week and can't wait to ignite coals and logs and lay out kebabs, frankfurters, sausages, spare ribs, but also Florentine steaks, fish and vegetables. Proteins -

forward, march! And here we must warn vegans and vegetarians that the ensuing text is dripping with fat, and those who read it proceed at their own risk.

*Aromas and flavours gain a special something upon contact with a grill*

Through a magical combination of fresh and hopefully springlike air, good company, time and place, there are meats that give their utmost when grilled: the coals glowing under the scorching metal **coax the maximum flavour from salamella, pancetta, costata steaks,**





**mixed kebabs layered with vegetables**, lamb chops, *arroscicini* skewers, *branzino* seabass, cuttlefish, prawns...

Aromas and flavours acquire a distinctively delicious quality. What matters is that the 'serial griller' (as dedicated bbq virtuosi call themselves) be shrewd and refrain from hurrying the cooking, knowing when to follow the sage advice of St Lawrence to his torturers as they quite literally grilled him: "I'm done on this side; turn me over!"

The history of grilled meat began when our hirsute progenitors, having tamed fire, abandoned a raw diet and started cooking meat, fish and vegetables, first on an open flame, then skewered on sharp twigs, next on hot rocks, and finally, in the late Bronze Age, on a grill held over charcoal.

### *Roast meat nourished the great civilisations of Europe and the Levant*

Roast meat nourished the great civilisations of Europe and the Levant, from the Egyptians to the Achaeans, the Phoenicians to the Mycenaeans, the Etruscans to the Romans. **The Bible recounts** how during the Exodus, one of the pivotal moments in Jewish history, as the Israelites departed Egypt, the Lord decreed what then became **the Pesach meal**: a roast unblemished lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. "Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but

roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof". With its innards, that is.

"Offal? How awful!" say those who know not. The *quinto quarto* - **the so-called 'fifth quarter' - cleaned, properly treated and masterfully roasted, is delicious.**

Grilled offal remains a speciality in every Italian region. Ever tasted grilled pork livers wrapped in *ratta* (caul fat), the net which surrounds the hog's viscera? We suggest a trip to Tuscany to fill this regrettable culinary lacuna. Whoever summers at the Sardinian seaside should seek a restaurant with *sa cordha*, grilled or skewered sheep's intestine, on its

menu. A delight. Grilled tripe from Romagna is equally beloved of gourmets.

### *Grills and skewers among the Greeks and Romans*

Even **Homer** loved offal; according to the comic playwright Antiphanes, he did not "boil the flesh or the brains, but he roasted even the entrails, so very old-fashioned was he". The blind aoidos feeds Achilles, Odysseus, Ajax, Aeneas and Hector what he himself ate; his heroes' meals are frugal: bread and meat, whether ovine, bovine or, greatly es-





teemed, porcine. **The only acceptable cooking methods were grilling and roasting.**

In his ponderous *De Re Rustica*, **Columella**, a first-century Roman writer and farming estate manager, lists the useful implements to be used in the spacious kitchens of country villas. These include the **craticula**, a sort of brazier over which to grill meat.

**Petronius**, enumerating the courses in Trimalchio's feast in his *Satyricon*, describes how dormice covered in honey and poppyseeds were followed by sizzling sausages on a silver grill, and even snails.

### *The Middle Ages were decidedly carnivorous*

The Middle Ages were decidedly carnivorous. Huns, Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Longobards and Franks invaded the Italian peninsula with fangs at the ready. They preferred bows to hoes, hunting and war to work, prey over harvest. **Alboin** and his crew loved roast meats. Roast game was never absent from the 'mere' four courses of **Charlemagne's** daily meal. Whoever could, therefore, indulged eagerly and often in a roast or a mixed grill. After the year 1000 and its terrors, even the fasts and frugality of Christian asceticism were tempered. A document from the Benedictine abbey

of San Gallo informs us that the numerous and varied foods that the monks blessed before *manducare* (masticating, eating) included roe deer, boar, marmot, hare and ibex, baked or spit-roasted, and grilled pullets, pigeons, quails, turtle doves and small birds.

**Tastes remained the same from the Middle Ages to the courts of the Renaissance.** Indeed, banquets were enriched with new creations. The culinary art, *ars coquinaria*, became literature, first with **Maestro Martino** (Martino de Rossi of Como) and then with his legions of disciples and epigones. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the cook **Giovanni Rosselli** wrote the *Epulario* which teaches how to cook "any meat, fowl or fish". In the same century, **Bartolomeo Scappi** dedicated a part of his *Opera*, illustrated with 27 plates, to the indispensable equipment for a proper kitchen. Crucial is "a great fire with a sturdy *graticola* [grill] and andirons to hold up the logs".

### *The history of the grill intersects with that of the barbecue*

Some years before, in 1492 **following contact with the Americas**, the history of the grill encountered that of the barbecue. It was **Cristopher Columbus** himself who described how the inhabitants of the Caribbean cooked meat over indirect flames. The Spaniards called this

cooking method *barbacoa* referring to the frames on which food was cooked. Other food scholars maintain that the term 'barbecue' derives from the French expression *de la barbe à la queue*, 'from beard to tail', first used by French explorers witnessing a goat being grilled whole. An important agri-food company which sells meat for barbecues has conducted research suggesting that the explorer **Hernando de Soto** witnessed the preparation of a barbecued meat banquet by the Chickasaw tribe: a cooking technique that spread throughout the colonies until it reached present-day Virginia. It spread like wildfire, so that the territory from the Carolinas to Texas and encompassing the midwestern Kansas City is now called the 'barbecue belt'.

**What's the difference between barbecue and grilling?** In Italy, grilling means that meat is laid on a grill and cooked as is, possibly with minimal marinades using local ingredients: lemon, extra-virgin olive oil, salt, pepper, garlic, thyme, bay, rosemary. A barbecue is an American-invented mobile device to be used outdoors with charcoal. American grillers and smokers cook meats very slowly after treatment with elaborate marinades: fruity ones with apple or citrus juice or mint, or exotic ones with yoghurt, coconut milk, spiced vinegar, paprika etc. After cooking, sauces are de rigueur: yoghurt, avocado, Worcestershire or, of course, mayonnaise or ketchup.

**Morello Pecchioli**