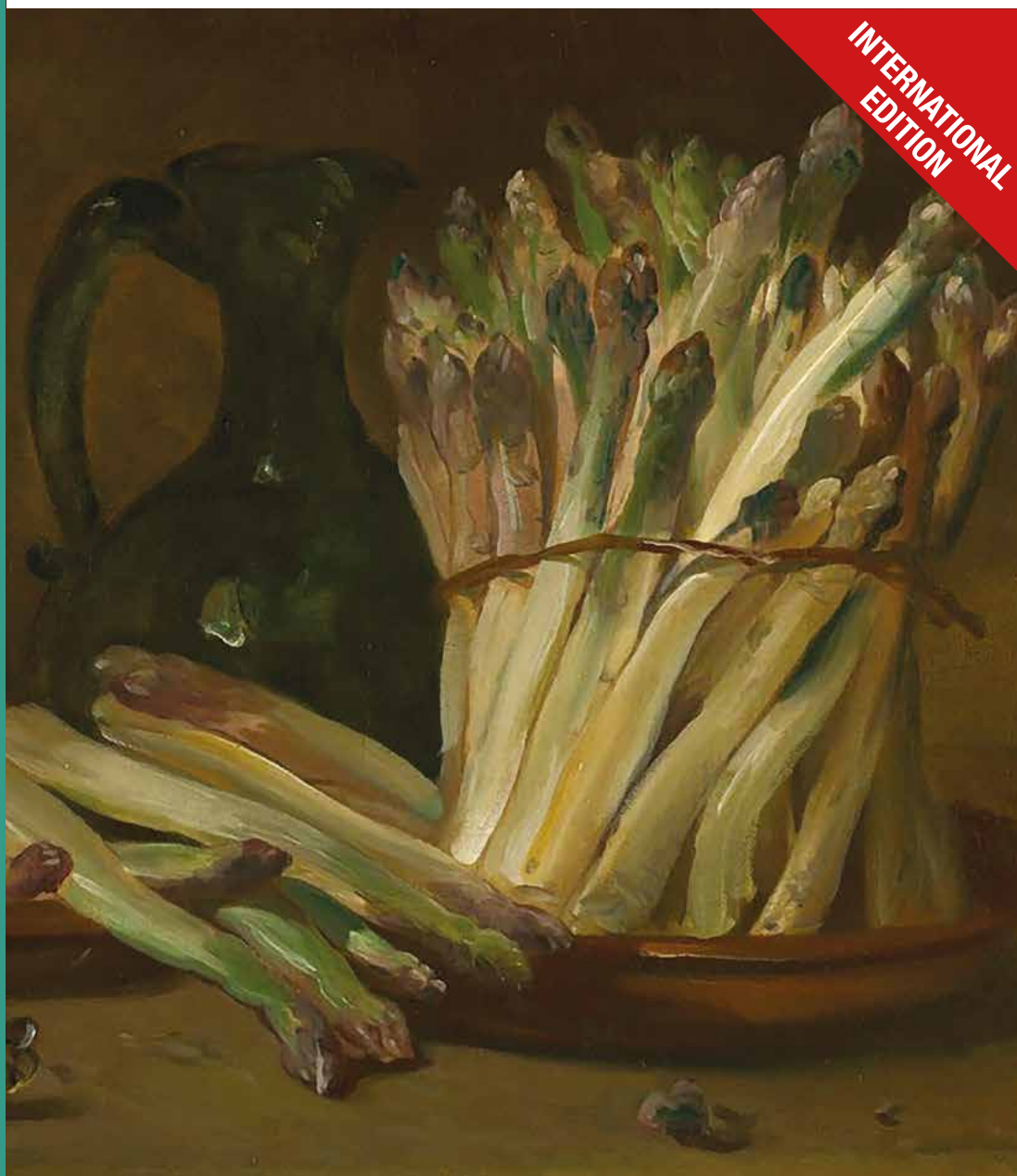


# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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# Accomplished cooks 'reinventing' trattorie and osterie

*Accommodating a younger clientèle that is less willing to spend large sums.*

**by Paolo Petroni**  
*President of the Accademia*

**M**uch (indeed almost all) restaurant terminology is of Gallic origin, though often ultimately deriving from Latin. The reasons for this are manifold and well-known and need not be repeated here. The very word 'restaurant' comes directly from the French *restaurant*, the present participle of *restaurer* (nourish, provide for), in turn from the Latin *restaurare* (restore, renew). During the fascist period in Italy, when foreignisms were frowned upon, restaurants were also called **ristoratore**.

Likewise **trattoria** derives from the French *traiteur* (from *traiter*, meaning to treat or negotiate) descending from the Latin *tractus*. Today in France *traiteur* means a delicatessen, rotisserie or catering service. Even **osteria** is from the Old French *oste* and ultimately the Latin *hospite*. This long introduction serves to show how **many of these terms have changed meaning over time**. 'Restaurant' nowadays is a generic term which has not changed its meaning, whereas the concepts of *trattoria* and *osteria* are evolving significantly.

*The concepts of trattoria and osteria are evolving significantly*

Traditionally, a *trattoria* is a humble restaurant, offering simple, often family-run service. By and large, an *osteria* principally serves wine, often alongside a few simple dishes. An *osteria* of the lowest tier was often called a **bettola**, a term which is no longer used other than in a derogatory manner. Such conceptions are being radically modified. Their traditional meanings are still manifested, say in a typical rural *trattoria* or a no-frills *osteria* with good wine sold by the glass, often called, as it happens, by another French term: **bistrot**. However, **the imagination and entrepreneurial capacities of many chefs who own acclaimed restaurants are concentrating on this much simpler sphere**, with its less onerous commitments and costs, to accommodate a younger clientèle less willing to spend large sums. The tendency, thus, is to offer hospitality, simple food, good quality and a welcoming atmosphere: top ingredients, traditional recipes with an innovative twist,



formal but not stodgy service, a less ponderous ambiance, and prices which, though not modest, are considerably lower than those of the 'mother house'.

*These are veritable offshoots of so-called 'starred' restaurants*

These are veritable offshoots of so-called 'starred' restaurants aiming to **include, with class, a customer base** that would rarely pursue fine dining. Some important cooks maintain that this is the way forward, **the future of modern, high-quality restaurants**. A downward path from the peak: an easy trajectory after all, conducive to a middle way that clearly has a market and a *raison d'être*. Such restaurants do not replace the classic *trattoria*, **but insert themselves between two worlds in a new and promising way**. But they will never supplant the places where history, socialisation, memory, familiarity, and something akin to friendship attract people to sit at the table.



# The curious case of “spaghetti alla bolognese”

by **P. Giulio Giordani Pavanelli**

*Bologna dei Bentivoglio Academician*

*Years of debate about  
a dish found worldwide  
that is not at all  
from Bologna.*

**F**or years and years, a debate about ‘spaghetti alla bolognese’ has raged in Bologna.

Some invoke centuries-old traditions to claim a custom of enjoying ‘vermicelli’, not spaghetti, topped with ragù, the city’s typical sauce/condiment, whose recipe has been twice deposited at the Chamber of Commerce by our Academy’s Bologna Delegations.

Others reject that theory, maintaining

that spaghetti with ragù are absolutely not part of the city’s culinary traditions, although **after pizza, that is the world’s most common Italian dish**: from Manila to Washington, from New Delhi to Moscow, locals enjoying spaghetti alla bolognese will always be found.

And in recent years, due to the wave of tourists descending on Bologna, some restaurants in the city have begun offering spaghetti alla bolognese; one in particular,



in the historic centre, even offers portions in 'small', 'normal' and 'large' sizes!

**From the dietary/nutritional perspective, spaghetti (alla bolognese?) with ragù are an excellent meal**, nourishing and healthy, which admirably combines the quintessentially Italian durum pasta with a delightfully savoury meat sauce, namely ragù; but **for best results**, a particular type of spaghetti is best: bronze-cut or otherwise rough-surfaced pasta, whose exterior is particularly suitable for absorbing and retaining the ragù sauce. Also important: **spaghetti** (like tagliatelle) should not merely be served surmounted by a generous heap of ragù (leaving the diner to mix everything together) but **briefly pan-tossed with ragù**, to make them absorb the delicious condiment properly.

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*The dish seems to have first appeared on a restaurant menu in Turin*

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**Two able researchers from the University of Bologna**, Professor **Patrizia Battilani** and Dr **Giuliana Bertagnoni**, have worked assiduously to shed light on 'spaghetti alla bolognese'. Following research that was by no means simple, they discovered that this culinary speciality **seems to have been 'born'** (or at least first found on a restaurant menu) in Turin, of all places! Precisely on **22 April 1898**, the renowned **Hotel/Restaurant Ville et Bologne** (!) included it on its menu, for a price of 0.90 Lire, qualifying it as **Spaghetti di Napoli alla bolognese** ('Neapolitan spaghetti, Bologna style'). The two researchers' article indeed has the title "Il restyling di una vecchia icona pop: la storia transnazionale degli Spaghetti alla Bolognese" ("Restyling an old pop icon: the transnational history of Spaghetti alla Bolognese"). That hotel/restaurant still happens to exist, now called, funnily enough, Hotel Bologna, and it is opposite the Porta Nuova train station, in an elegant late 19<sup>th</sup>-century building. Evidently, the chefs in that hotel kitchen chose to combine Neapolitan spaghetti



with a speciality from Bologna, namely ragù.

**The dish was a considerable success**, and the Director of the Hotel Ville et Bologne had the restaurant's menu printed in Turin's foremost daily, which was and remains *La Stampa - Gazzetta Piemontese*: the second item on the list was indeed 'Neapolitan spaghetti, Bologna-style'. In 1910, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December to be precise, the restaurant of the Mint in Turin added them to its menu. From 1920, Italian emigrants carried spaghetti to the USA and other overseas countries, and they gradually won over those nations too.

**Nel 1925 they appeared in the food column of the Los Angeles Times**. They later spread throughout the world, becoming, as above, the second commonest Italian culinary speciality after pizza. We repeat, however, that **this is not a typical dish from Bologna**; only one component, **ragù**, is part of Bolognese tradition.

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*It is found packaged, even freeze-dried or frozen, in supermarkets round the world*

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Travellers visiting countries far from Italy know that shops and supermarkets in

distant lands offer packaged versions, freeze-dried, frozen and beyond, of **so-called spaghetti alla bolognese**, having little or nothing to do with the speciality created in Turin in 1898.

**During the First World War the U.S. Army** even offered spaghetti alla bolognese **to privates and officers alike**.

Let us conclude by quoting **the beginning of the article by Drs Battilani and Bertagnoni**: "*Spaghetti alla bolognese, with a ground meat sauce (ragù), are today an example of international cuisine found in every country throughout the world. In supermarkets on several continents one can even find the sauce for spaghetti alla bolognese in tins, jars or pouches, or the entire dish freeze-dried or frozen. Though identified as an Italian dish, this has never been acknowledged among specialities that are 'Made in Italy' or found in any local Italian cuisine.*"

Even the great film director **Woody Allen**, in his pleasant French-language film *Coup de Chance* (2023) premiered out of competition at the 80th Venice International Film Festival, included 'spaghetti alla bolognese' in an endearing scene wherein the protagonists enjoy that speciality in a central Parisian attic apartment - but from a pan containing unseasoned spaghetti with a bowl of steaming ragù beside it!

**P. Giulio Giordani Pavanelli**



# Bata làvar: the agnolotti which tell the story of Canneto Pavese

by Maurizia Debiaggi

Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia Academician

*They are prepared in a small village of the Oltrepò following a protocol protected by their De.C.O. status and the Brotherhood named after them.*

**F**or those wishing to taste *Bata làvar*, the **generously filled agnolotti large enough to 'bump the lips'** (hence their name), **the destination is but one: Canneto Pavese**, a village set among vineyards **in the heart of the Oltrepò hills**. Here, before the descent into the Po Valley, is a perfect corner for lovers of nature, wine and authentic flavours.

The tradition of *Bata làvar* is **conscientiously protected by a dedicated Brotherhood** and by the Bazzini Restaurant, a true temple of local cuisine. Yes, there truly is a Brotherhood, founded in 2006 to preserve and promote the tradition of these distinctive *agnolotti*,

keeping alive a recipe rooted in the heart of Canneto Pavese.

The history of this dish has roots reaching somewhat earlier, in 1939, when the *bottega* (workshop) of the Bazzini family, already noted for selling flour and rice, began preparing hot meals for food shoppers. With a few tables, the *bottega* gradually became a restaurant, and the rest is history which delights the palate and piques curiosity.

This intriguing account came from *Signora Mariella*, who took the reins of this historic restaurant seven years ago. There, in the 1950s, Bazzini 'conceived' the *Bata làvar*, soon to be an emblem of the restaurant and symbol of local identity.





*Shape and size are tailored to prolong sensory experience*

This is no ordinary *agnolotto*. Its shape and size are tailored to prolong sensory experience, offering a unique taste journey. Indeed, a plate of *Bata làvar* unleashes **an enveloping fragrance of braised meat which inebriates the nostrils**, promising a moment of unforgettable flavour.

**Initially a dish for Sundays** or special occasions, to provide a festive atmosphere, they were originally cooked in broth, but are now also served dry, to suit the summer months too. In this variant, they are topped with the same

braised meat used in the filling. Traditionally, men were served five, women four and children two, due to their generous dimensions and rich filling.

*The elements that make this special agnolotto truly special*

**The perfect harmony of size filling and pasta shell.** Each *agnolotto* contains a quantity of braised meat which must not exceed the 'modest quantity' of **40 grammes**, while its diameter must be **7 centimetres**, just like the rim of a glass: the tool with which they were originally cut. But it is not merely a question of proportions: **the filling**, prepared

with meat slow-braised in red wine, **has a soft, 'pulled' consistency, just compact enough** so it won't fall apart when the *agnolotto* is cut on the plate.

**The texture of the pasta also plays a crucial role:** if too thin, it might break while cooking; if too thick, it might be overly stodgy. This delicate balance has been the fruit of innumerable trials and errors. And we must not forget that it has gained the seal of approval from the Brotherhood, attesting to its authenticity! Such specificities are not mere culinary curiosities, but fall within a **rigorous protocol** defining the characteristics, and ensuring the authenticity, of this **product, recognised through Denominazione Comunale di Origine** (Municipal Designation of Origin), or De.C.O., status. Thus, whoever tries to use the name *Bata làvar* outside these parameters risks incurring a severe gastronomic reprimand! In such cases, it is better to adopt the more generic phrase 'stew-stuffed *agnolotti*'. Canneto Municipality, indeed, proudly promotes this culinary tradition, emphasising its cultural and historical importance.

"The fame of *Bata làvar* is an authentic example of spontaneous marketing fuelled by word of mouth", explains Mariella: "We always tell our customers the history of the *agnolotto* from Canneto Pavese, and they find it fascinating. We now produce *Bata làvar* at a steady clip: around 1,000 a week, all strictly hand-made".

**Maurizia Debiaggi**





# Topinambur: *a topsy-turvy root*

by **Morello Pecchioli**

*Honorary Academician for Verona*

*Its delicious artichoke flavour, its health benefits and the prowess of the cooks that use it have brought it back into the kitchen.*

**L**et us first and foremost resolve the problem of the accent, lest we be tormented by doubt for the rest of the article. This lumpy root, composed entirely of contorsions and protuberances, resembling a plump alien worm, used by the Piedmontese in their traditional *bagna cauda* and apotheosed in risotto - is it a *topinàmbur* or a *topinambùr*? The second is correct: it is a *topinambùr*. **Name and accent both arose from a historic misunderstanding.** The plant arrived in France in the early 17<sup>th</sup>

century, with a party of Tupinambá people from the Amazon. Presuming that the roots originated from the same land as the folkloristic and lovable cannibals who called themselves thus, the French named them *topinamboux* and later *topinambour*. Yet, this New-World plant with its pretty, bright-yellow flowers was not from what later became Brazil, but from Canada.

*The plants adapted well to the European soil and climate*

It was the French explorer **Samuel de Champlain**, during one of his voyages to the North American coasts in the second decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, who discovered that **the roots of those pretty yellow-flowered plants**, which locals had grown as food since time immemorial, **tasted similar to artichokes**. Champlain sent the first shoots to France,

where they gained popular favour. His exploring colleague **Marc Lescarbot** increased their likability by describing them as a sort of turnip or truffle “that can be eaten like beetroots, but are more pleasant”. The plants adapted so well to the European climate and soil that they rapidly multiplied. Around the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the topinambur had become a commonplace vegetable, feeding not only people but livestock too.

This plant from North America may be admired in all its glory during the season from late summer to early autumn. It flourishes on headlands, along hill and mountain paths and on the edges of ditches and streams. **It is impossible to mistake it for other plants: elongated, with slender stalks two metres high or more** and schoolbus-yellow daisy-like flowers, it resembles a giant chamomile or skinny sunflower. Its scientific name (and its family, *Asteraceae*) associates it with sunflowers and recalls the sun: *Helianthus tuberosus*. *Helianthus annuus* is the common sunflower. *Helianthus* combines two Greek words: *hēlios*, sun, and *ánthos*, flower. This is **the ‘identity card’ issued by Carl Linnaeus**, father of modern taxonomy: **‘Flower of the Sun’**.

*Only its root is of culinary inte*

This plant is as pretty above ground as it is ugly below. However, malformed or not, all that matters is its root, **rich in health benefits**, tasting similar to artichoke and **an excellent ingredient in various recipes**. It can star in many scrumptious dishes. We have noted **how delicious it is in risotto**, but it is just as delightful **sautéed with pasta, boiled,**







**fried, puréed, or raw with oil, salt and pepper. Grated over salads,** it gives them a touch of additional flavour. In Piedmont, where it is called *ciapinabò*, it is used, as above, in a variant on classic *bagna cauda*, a warm sauce with anchovies, garlic and extra-virgin olive oil, in place of cardoons or artichokes. The tuber of *Helianthus tuberosus* has **various popular names** besides topinambur: poor man's truffle, German beet, Canada potato, earth apple, sun-root, sunchoke, or most commonly in English, Jerusalem artichoke. The latter is also the result of distortion, this time by the British. Since in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Italian courts, due its artichoke-like flavour, the topinambur was known as *girasole articiocco* ('artichoke sunflower') – indeed it remains known as *articiocco* or *ciòcolo* in some northern Italian areas – some British traveller took specimens home and called them by the similar-sounding 'Jerusalem artichoke'. Upon reaching Europe, the Jerusalem artichoke was received far better than the potato, which arrived around the same time. **Renzo Pellati** wrote in his book *La storia di ciò che mangiamo* (*The History of What We Eat*): "The topinambur tuber, **unlike the potato, was considered a fruit of providence:** tasting similar to delicious artichokes, white-fleshed, it was easy to harvest and produced no intolerance. Nuns and monks thus adopted it as **an affordable food for nourishing the poor and the peasantry**". The preference for topinamburs over

potatoes was bolstered by the belief that potatoes were toxic: some people had been poisoned by their peels and eyes containing solanine, a glycoalkaloid poison. One botanist even blamed them for leprosy. A French agronomist, **Antoine Parmentier**, rehabilitated them in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Soon potatoes replaced Jerusalem artichokes on French and other European tables.

*Despite some ignorance and misplaced mistrust, they are being rediscovered*

The once-forgotten tuber of *Helianthus tuberosus* is recently coming back into fashion, though surrounded by considerable ignorance and unjust mistrust. **Its knobby shape** deters many potential consumers convinced that it must be tricky to peel. However, **it must merely be washed and carefully brushed, as with truffles. In supermarkets, it is found already cleaned.** Bringing it back to family tables and restaurants is its pleasant artichoke taste, its important health benefits and the skill of the cooks that use it **to impart a more delicate flavour to various dishes in place of artichoke bases.** Even 'starred' chefs are contributing to its acclaim: **Carlo Cracco** has combined it with venison, **Antonino Cannavacciuolo** with chocolate and gorgonzola; **Norbert Niederkofler** makes it crunchy and

serves it with venison tartare and liquorice; **Massimo Bottura** includes it in *camouflage*, a particularly complicated preparation whose recipe, besides topinambur powder, also involves *foie gras*, espresso coffee, powdered aromatic herbs, truffle, spices and porcini mushrooms, and another twenty-odd ingredients. The recipe is on the internet, but if anyone thinks they might whip up a *camouflage* at home, either they are Bottura or they should abandon the idea and go and eat Bottura's version, having first reconfigured their wallet.

### *Its numerous health benefits*

The topinambur has an overabundance of health benefits, being **rich in minerals and fibre.** It contains magnesium, iron, phosphorus, vitamins A, C and E, and B-group vitamins. It has more **potassium** than bananas, which have loads. It is 20% carbohydrates, but in inulin form. It is recommended for dieters because it is **low in calories:** 80 calories per 100 grammes. It is a laxative, diuretic and **digestive aid.** As always, it is advisable to consult a physician before consuming industrial quantities thereof. Regarding the benefits of inulin, a polysaccharide, we yield the floor once again to Renzo Pellati: "**Inulin found in topinamburs is hydrolised into fructose, which is absorbed slowly by humans, without a glycaemic spike.** It can consequently be consumed, in reasonable doses, by diabetics. The topinambur improves intestinal function and provides raw materials for dietary supplements". The poet **Andrea Zanzotto** has **lyrically elevated this humble tuber.** His collection *Meteo* contains the poem "Altri topinambur" ("Other topinamburs"): "Among the scattered clumps/ of topinambur here and there along the banks/ each yellow glimmer foreshadows/ the autumnal catharsis... Where will I find my miseries/ as numerous as they are uncontrollable?/ But now they will return with the topinamburs/ muffled by the touch of other deities".

**Morello Pecchioli**