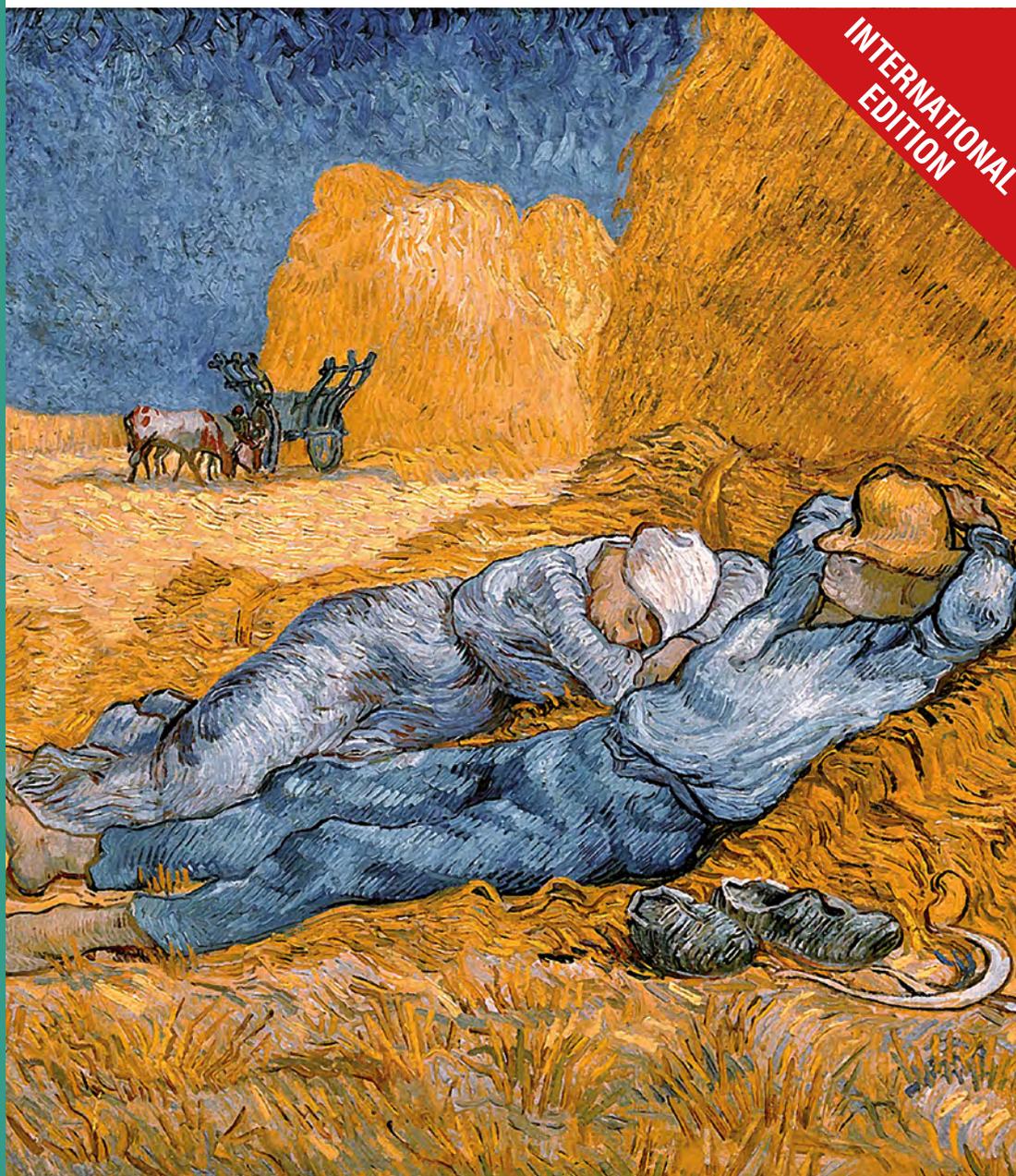


# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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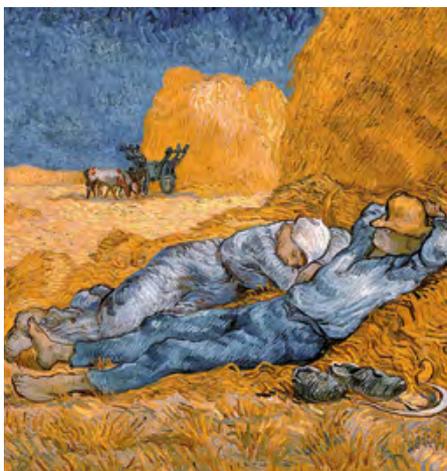
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EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,  
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



**On the cover:** *Graphic elaboration of The Siesta (after Millet) (1890) by Vincent Van Gogh; Musée d'Orsay, Paris*

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# If this weren't a tragedy, *we'd have reached a comic ending*

by Paolo Petroni

President of the Accademia

*Even lately, amid signs of viral retreat,  
we are at a fever pitch of confusion.*

It is well-known that the most perilous moments, often coming at the end of wars, are 'flicks of the tail': the final throes of dying regimes. Those who wielded absolute power, rooted in fears and self-serving laws, see their *raison d'être* vanish into thin air. This endgame script is being played out nowadays, when the virus displays clear signs of retreat. **Showbiz virologists** who recently tormented ordinary citizens **are on the verge of returning to obscurity**: talk shows are taking their habitual summer holidays, leaving nobody to interview them; newspapers will find other topics to fascinate them; politicians witness their appeal subsiding, having no more terror to sow.

## *The parting shots that may deaden our hopes*

Here, then, are the 'parting shots' which may deaden our hopes. Firstly, we should remember that the decline of infections and deaths to near-zero levels is identical to that of last June, when we were nowhere near a vaccine. Back then, we were unshackled: free to kiss, hug, dance and sing. Nowadays, we can hardly be called free (no more than 6 per table indoors, the rituals of the mysterious 'green pass', no more than 3 non-cohabitants in a car, no dancing, and other restrictions) but we are moving in that direction, hoping that vaccines will prevent a tragedy such as befell us last October. But we must clarify that, notwithstanding enthusiastic announcements, **vaccination remains mired in chaos**. In mid-June, we are 26% vaccinated, and the fabled 'herd immunity' (which, if it exists, will surely require more than the oft-quoted 70%) is yet to come in 2022, even without the latest hiccups which have wrought havoc amidst the bodies entrusted with safeguarding our health. A shining example is the CTS (Scientific Technical Committee) composed of 11 luminaries who suggested wearing masks even at the table, while eating, between bites. The suggestion was laughed out of court, but the mere fact of having articulated it says a lot about those who did so.



**Confusion has reached a peak**: they're all dazed, unsure where to turn; politicians and virologists flounder in a battle of all against all, to the detriment of vaccine candidates. They will never be judged in any tribunal, but they will, one day, be judged by history.

## *The Academy's activities and initiatives are on the verge of rebirth*

Let us conclude this editorial by returning to our 'oasis' inhabited by ordinary, prudent, hopeful people desirous of action. **The General Assembly of Delegates and the new Academic Council's meeting were held in May**. As promised, you will find exhaustive accounts of both events, held with resounding success despite occurring virtually. **The President's Council also gathered for the first time, in person, after a year of remote meetings**. This marked the symbolic beginning of all Academic activities. We've received news that, where possible, Delegations have resumed their gatherings; this month and the next will see our initiatives and habits reborn. **Thanks to the Delegates and all the Academicians, the long-awaited moment is at hand.**



# Caverns of the green gold

by Giancarlo Saran  
Treviso Academician

*Underground chambers in Puglia where all stages of oil production took place.*

There are experiences which fleeting time tends to leave behind, forgotten, buried perhaps not only in the memories of those who lived them, but, more literally, underground. Such is the case for the **subterranean trappeti** (oil mills; singular: *trappeto*), “hidden witnesses to a millenarian civilisation, inhabiting an arcane space made of twilights and silences”, as **Lucia Milizia Fasano** magically defined them in her excel-

lently documented (and passionately wrought) **Il Trappeto sotterraneo in Terra d’Otranto** (*Underground Oil Mills of the Otranto Territory*; Capone, 1991). Olive cultivation is so intimately intertwined with human civilisation that **Thucydides** declared: “The Mediterranean peoples began emerging from barbarism when they learned olive and vine cultivation”. The difference between them is noted by **Pliny the Elder** in his *Naturalis Historia*: “Two are the liquids beloved by humans: wine and oil, both derived from plants, though oil is the necessary one”. Originating in the Caucasus, the olive tree reached Italy through the Greek world, where it had arrived thanks to Phoenician trade. Indeed, it **solidly took root in Salento, then within Magna Graecia** (‘Greater Greece’, an area of Greek settle-

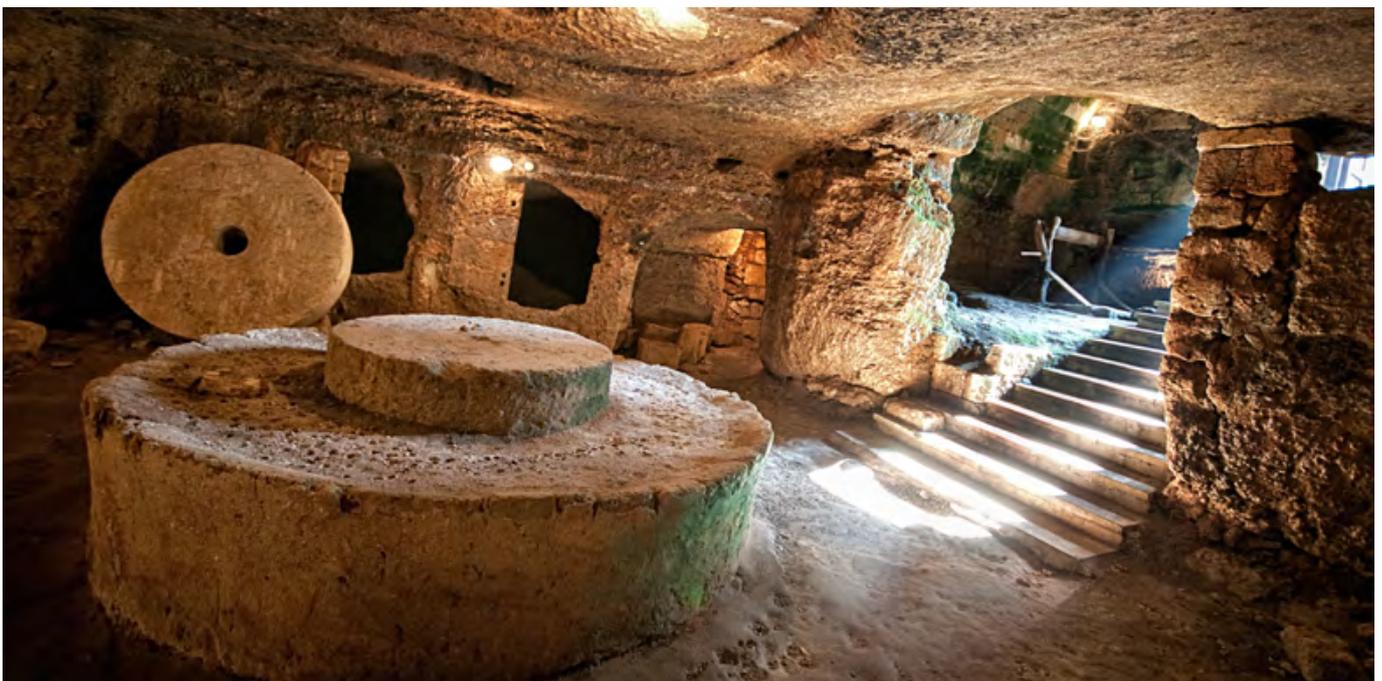
ment), to the extent that contemporary travellers’ diaries described how the olive tree characterised its landscape, though it was the **invisible trappeti which gave economic and commercial structure** to that world.

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*Karst chambers were transformed into mines for the ‘green gold’*

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This is where the **territory’s geological component** comes into play. Karst structures whose underground chambers had once hosted the earliest Messapian, that is, pre-Roman, populations taking refuge from frequent foreign incursions became grain and livestock repositories in peace-



time. It was the **Byzantine civilisation** which transformed them into **'green goldmines' from the 9<sup>th</sup> century**, dedicating them to refining the precious olive, thereby establishing **olive oil as the economic and commercial keystone** of Salento.

There are **two schools of thought** regarding the **etymology** of the term *trappeto*: from the Greek *trapeza*, meaning millstone, though there is no documentary evidence of this tradition when Greek colonies existed in the territory; or from the Latin *trapetum*, indicating an area, but outdoors, for working the harvest. **For centuries, trappeti were exclusively subterranean**, between two and six metres deep, and structured more according to the features of the location than some predetermined blueprint. As **Antonio Monte notes, various practical advantages** encouraged their development. A **constant temperature** facilitated optimal olive processing. **Pre-existing structures** made specialised builders unnecessary. The underground locations also afforded **protection from ever-present thieves** and **excellent storage conditions** for the oil awaiting sale.

An early description of these underground mills is by **Giovanni Presta**, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century physician and agronomist from Gallipoli. His notes confirm that "... these structures are not the work of architects, but masters of building lore who, with no doctrine or academy, relied on their acute observation with methods and techniques whose exquisite precision averted any danger to things or persons".

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*Besides humans, animals also went underground: the most delicate operation*

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Access was through steps generally opening southwards, therefore sunlit and protected from temperature fluctuations due to rain or gales. Besides humans, the animals who turned the millstones, generally mules, also de-



scended such stairs. "This was probably the most delicate operation. Blindfolded to avoid vertigo, the animals descended backwards, supported by robust farmers and slowly guided towards their stalls". The olives were gathered very 'artisanally': **a pizzicu**, meaning by hand, by women and boys after falling from the tree. The ground was first cleared of vegetation and compacted with a **cilindrarò**, a cylindrical stone pulled by an animal. It was surrounded by a **cjiaru**, a barrier of earth, twigs and stones, to prevent the olives from rolling too far. Carts then transported them to the *trappeto* where they were poured through an opening into **sciave**, repositories able to contain thousands of kilogrammes. They aged for several days, aided by the optimal temperature, until they were ideal for pressing. The **grinding vat** was the base for millstones, either one ('Calabrian style') or two ('French style'), **pulled for eighteen hours a day by patient mules**. The **turlicchiu**, a person tasked with preventing derailment of the millstone or escape of olives, oversaw everything, wielding a specialised paddle. The resulting paste was placed on a **bbanchina**, a surface where the **nachiro**, the leader of the **ciurma** ('crew': same as the naval term), placed it in **fiscoli**: frails, or flexible baskets then positioned under a **screw-operated oil extraction press**.

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*The painstaking work of hand-pressin*

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Over several hours of painstaking labour, the workers, or **trappitari**, hand-pressed the ground olives. The presses, made of oak or olive wood, could have the classic 'Calabrian' design (with two screws

through a horizontal plank) or the 'Genoese' design (larger, with one screw, widespread from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century). Then the *nachiro* performed a **first separation of the oil from the pomace**, meaning the solid residue, which was pressed again. The leftover solids became **fertiliser** or fuel in **bakers' ovens or potters' kilns**. The oil was filtered in special containers and then sold. However, **the final product was not always of prized quality** like that produced in Tuscany or even slightly northwards in the Bari area. There were several reasons. Olive trees were cultivated neglectfully: "they were considered wild trees, such that the farmers could not even distinguish fruiting branches from those invaded by parasites". Furthermore, conditions within the *trappeti* entailed considerable hygiene risks, not only for the workers, who **lived alongside livestock for months, though the resulting salary permitted their families to live comfortably for the months thereafter. Calling someone a trappetaro**, in common parlance, implied 'filthy and smelly'. The oil could also suffer, and consequently much of it was traded throughout Europe, but not for food use. **Gallipoli was the European capital of olio lampante**, the lamp oil that once illuminated cities. **Gallipoli oil set the standard price on the London stock exchange, and the Queen herself preferred it over all others** for lighting her palaces.

**With the advent of modernity and new technologies, the trappeti returned to the shadows**, though many of their beauties **can still be admired, perfectly restored**, not only in **Gallipoli**, but also **Grottaglie, Minervino, Sternatia** and other places in that **'Salento Greek'** land which is a treasure trove of so many other beauties.

**Giancarlo Saran**



# Vinicius de Moraes, *sonnets and spaghetti*

by **Anna Lanzani**

*Buenos Aires Academician*

*The Brazilian poet who loved music, cooking and Rome, remembered by his muse, Marta Rodriguez Santamaria.*

She is the Marta of the *Soneto de Marta*, the subject of *Se Ela Quisesse*, written by **Vinicius de Moraes** and later sung by **Ornella Vanoni** with the title *'La voglia, la pazzia'* ('The desire, the madness') in 1976. She is the woman to whom the author of the timeless 'Girl from Ipanema', composed fifteen years earlier with **Antônio Carlos Jobim**, dedicated verses brimming with mad passion in his mature years.

I first met her when visiting friends for dinner in Buenos Aires, where she lives, and I yearned to ask her what it's like to be Dante's Beatrice, or in this case, Vin-

icius' Marta. Instead, the conversation veered towards burrata, so hard to find in Argentina. Many other pleasant meetings followed over the years, and a joyous friendship developed amid music, food and anecdotes: "as Vinicius would have loved", says Marta frequently. The lockdown had a chilling effect, and this long interview took place under frigid, 'sanitised' conditions, in a ventilated bar with coffee in single-use cups. Only such a warm tale of love and life could banish that grim atmosphere.

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*Thus, over an Uruguayan national sandwich, began the story of Marta and Vinicius*

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Marta says of the songwriter, now 41 years dead: "**He was no glutton, but he savoured food, as he did life. (...) We met in a restaurant.** I was 22 years old; it was the height of summer, and with my first salary I'd paid for a trip to the beaches of Punta del Este, in Uruguay, with a friend. He was 60, and was the great composer, singer and poet that everyone loved. He would come out of concerts and have dinner, very late, at El Mejillón, an iconic restaurant of the area. My friend and I lay in wait there. On the first evening he didn't show up; on the second, he did. Our eyes locked and that was it. I had ordered a *chivito*: I never had a chance to finish it".

Thus began the tale of Marta and Vinicius, over the national sandwich of Uruguay, filled with meat, ham and vegetables. They got together immediately amid such roiling emotions that Marta



forgot altogether to change her return flight and alert her mother and brother, who waited for her at Buenos Aires airport.

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*In Italy, he worked with many artist friends and had a favourite restaurant in each city*

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**A few months later, they visited Italy:**

“For Marcus Vinicius, born in Rio de Janeiro in 1913, Rome was destiny. *In nomen, omen*, and he was acutely aware of this. We arrived in late 1975 to record Ornella Vanoni’s album *La voglia la pazzia la tristezza l’allegria* (*Desire, madness, grief and cheer*) with **Toquinho**. Italy was already home to him. In 1969, with the Italian poet **Ungaretti, Sergio Endrigo** and Toquinho, he had recorded *La vita, amico, è l’arte dell’incontro* (*Life, my friend, is the art of meeting*) with RCA. In 1971, he had made a duet with **Patty Pravo**. In 1974, *Per vivere un grande amore* (*To live a great love*) came out, another Toquinho collaboration. Vinicius basked in that warmth. In South America, we had dictatorships; **Rome was a parallel world, fresh, open**. We lived in the home of the unforgettable producer and lyricist **Sergio Bardotti**, or in the Hotel Imperiale on Via Veneto. **Vinicius was a bon vivant; he loved the street, bars, taverns**. We often ate at the restaurant Al Moro, in Vicolo delle Bollette. **Mario Romagnoli**, the innkeeper, had played Trimalchio in Fellini’s *Satyricon*. **Other restaurants where Vinicius felt at home were Alfredo and La Taverna Flavia**. We also visited other cities: Florence, Milan; each had friends and a favourite restaurant. From our Roman period I particularly remember a dinner at the Vanoni home. Ornella had prepared a collection of whisky glasses on the table for him. Of course, Vinicius drank. We all greatly enjoyed drinking, but he was not excessive with it. What got him, instead, were cigarettes. He smoked too much, but we didn’t understand that at the time”.

The second of four siblings, the poet (as he preferred to be called) had been



raised on *pudins e lombinhos*, puddings and fillets, and **had loved good food since childhood**, later manifesting a legendary propensity for hedonism. Emblematic is a letter to Antônio Carlos Jobim (the ‘father’ of Bossa Nova): “*Tomzinho querido* (dear Tommy)... as always, at this late hour I write you letters that I’ll never send... I’ll write home and ask them to leave some food out for me. For breakfast, some *tutuzinho con torresmo* (bean purée with fried tripe), a pork fillet, well *tostadinho* (well cone), *couvinha mineira* (green cabbage leaves sautéed with garlic) and a coconut sweet. For dinner, chicken with dark sauce, well-cooked rice and *papos de anjo* (an egg yolk dessert). But made as only a mother can, such as a worthy person should eat submerged in a warm bath, in total darkness, thinking only of the woman he loves”.

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*His posthumous book reveals all his favourite foods*

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His posthumous book, *Pois sou um bom cozinheiro* (*Because I’m a good cook*, 2013), reveals his favourite foods, **from the domestic flavours of his childhood to those of his years of ‘distance’**, as he himself writes, referring to his diplomatic service. “**Vinicius always referred to these dishes using diminutives and pet names**, as he also did for people he loved”, reminisces Marta – who, for him, was simply *Martinha*. Thus we find a sequence of cute pet names for soups, meatballs, chicken, turkey, macaroni and sauces.

**Did Vinicius cook?** “Barely”, his muse reveals. “He was a rather haphazard cook; he was an artist. I remember that one day, in Buenos Aires, he invited everyone

to lunch at 1:00 for a *feijoada*, the typical Brazilian rice, meat and bean stew. He began cooking when all the guests had already arrived. It was ready at 7 in the evening. He fared better with pasta, which he sometimes made. But those were years of much dining out, in fact”.

**The chapter “Vinicius na cozinha” (“Vinicius in the kitchen”) contains not only “feijoada my way”, but also poached eggs, spaghetti, tomato pasta, alphabet soup with beans, scrambled eggs and beer chicken.**

**Are there Italian recipes in the book? Of course. One is pasta alla chitarra (square-cut spaghetti) with white truffle.** “Miúcha”, as Marta often recounts, referring to the singer **Heloísa Maria Buarque de Hollanda**, sister of **Chico Buarque**, “always talked about the dinners after their shows, and the love that Vinicius had for truffles, especially the white ones, and for their fragrance. According to Toquinho, even more than the dish itself, **it was the poetry of its name that had enchanted him... a dish with a musical name...**”.

Indeed, the other Italian dish included in the poet’s recipe book is not lacking in charm: ‘Alfredo’s **triple butter fettuccine served with flower petals**’. Vinicius could transform every gesture, every bite into a nearly transcendent experience. Here is a line from his musical poem *Para viver um grande amor* (“To live a great love”: Vinicius de Moraes / Toquinho): “... **To live a great love, it behoves you to know how to make scrambled eggs, prawns, brothlets, sauces, steak Stroganoff, snacks** to enjoy after lovemaking. And there’s nothing better than going into the kitchen and preparing a sumptuous, delicious little salad to share with one’s great love”.

**Anna Lanzani**



# Peppers that paint the summer

by **Morello Pecchioli**

*Honorary Academician for Verona*

*Red, yellow and green,  
they colour fields and  
gardens before moving  
to conquer palates.*

**T**he pepper is king here in Carmagnola, a populous town thirty-odd kilometres from Turin, where legions of red, yellow and green peppers with a squared-off silhouette (known as *braghèis* or *povron ëd Carmagnòla*) colour fields and gardens before moving to the conquest of palates. These are the same fields, this is the same land, whence the unfortunate **Francesco Busone**, known as '**Count of Carmagnola**', set off on other conquests as a mercenary captain employed first by the Visconti rulers of Milan and then by the

Venetians, who, following the victorious battle of Maclodio, suspected him with some justification of yet another change of allegiance, and had him decapitated for treason in 1432.

The Count of Carmagnola was immortalised in the eponymous tragedy by **Alessandro Manzoni** ("*S'ode a destra uno squillo di tromba/ a sinistra risponde uno squillo...*" - "The peal of a horn resounds to the right/ from the left, a peal replies"). Living and dying at the threshold of the modern era, he never had the chance to encounter **peppers**, later so





renowned in Piedmont (what would *bagna càuda* be without peppers?) that the Ministry of Agriculture has **registered it as an Italian PAT - Typical Food Product**. Carmagnola and all the generations on the Italian peninsula born before 1492 never knew peppers because **this brightly coloured vegetable arrived on Christopher Columbus' caravels after their voyage to America**. The great Genoese navigator encountered peppers on the island that he named Hispaniola, now Haiti. The ship's log described the islanders' food habits thus: "There my men found many *aji* (peppers) which the locals used as pepper, and which are superior to our pepper, since they can be considered a proper meal... Nobody there eats without seasoning their food with this aroma". The newly 'post-Columbian' America, a fresh world still to be discovered, exuded the pleasant, pungent fragrance of peppers.

*Peppers were initially met with diffidence on the Old Continent*

But the Old Continent, like all old-timers, was suspicious of novelty, waiting quite some time before garnishing salads with slices of **those foreign fruits too beautiful and colourful to be trusted**. So the pepper shared the same early fate as its

cousin, the tomato (both from the *Solanaceae* or nightshade family): **it was used as an ornamental plant**, as an exotic design element. Europeans were unaware that besides being deliciously edible, it **offered ample health benefits**. However, vitamins, beta carotene and antioxidants did not yet figure in the health parlance of the time.

**About a century would pass before 'India pepper' became commonplace in European food**. In Italy it finally appeared on some tables. **Carlo Nascia**, the misunderstood author of *Li quattro banchetti destinati per le quattro stagioni dell'anno* (*The four banquets destined for the four seasons of the year*), **suggested combining it with turkey in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century**. **Vincenzo Corrado**, who lived in Naples between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, wrote in *Il cuoco galante* (*The Courteous Cook*) that: "*Peparoli* are a rustic and vulgar food, which however pleases many... who eat them fried while still green, and sprinkled with salt, or grilled and seasoned with salt and oil". *Pearòni soto asédo*, **vinegar-pickled peppers**, are an old peasant recipe documented by **Dino Coltro** in *La cucina tradizionale veneta* (*Traditional Venetian Cookery*). Thanks to an anonymous 19<sup>th</sup>-century Veronese inkeeper, *pearòni soto asédo* **reached the imperial tables of Napoleon** and the Austrian emperor, conquering royal palates.

*Peppers retained a piquant name, though selective breeding sweetened their character*

Towards the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, there were over 30 known varieties of *Capsicum annum*, as **Linnaeus** christened peppers in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, borrowing the Latin *capsa*, box (of seeds). Peppers retain their peppery name although centuries of selective breeding by agronomists and botanists have sweetened their character.

The pepper never lost its piquant beauty, remaining the Mel Gibson of vegetables: attractive and impetuous (despite having lost the lustre of *Lethal Weapon*), as is typical of those who know they are popular. Mel knows it, and so does the pepper. Observe supermarket produce aisles or market stalls where greengrocers display them in pride of place. This is a vegetable which stands to attention, chest out, like a proud praetorian guard. Before meeting its destiny in the kitchen - fried, peeled, grilled, sweet-and-sour, stuffed, baked, with *rigatoni*, chicken or foil-baked cod - the pepper shows off, resplendent, handsome and shiny in its three standard liveries: **yellow, green, red**.

It's aware of being special. South American and *caliente* by nature, it is also altruistic. **It will literally fall apart for its**



admirers: in *peperonata* (pepper stew), in *bagna càuda*, in sauce over *penne* and even in ice cream. Sceptics should stroll around Carmagnola during the days of the pepper festival to witness a riot of colours and a feast of flavours. Did Carmagnola not give its name to the dance of the French sans-culottes?

*It is grown predominantly in the South*

Both mega-rich (in vitamin C) and miserly (in terms of calories), the triumphant pepper is also a mainstay in other Italian regions. It is especially cultivated in the South: in Sicily, Puglia (Apulia), Campania and Basilicata. The *peperone crusco* ('crispy pepper', also a PAT) is typical of cuisine in Lucania. Another celebrated pepper in Basilicata is the **Senise pepper**. **PDO peppers from Pontecorvo** (in the Liri valley) are red and twisted into a horn shape, like those loved by the comic actor Totò; they are delicious both fresh and preserved in oil. A liqueur is also made from them. In the Oltrepo Pavese, an area within the province of Pavia south of the Po river, there is the **sweet white Voghera pepper**: actually pale green, ripening to yellowish.

**Modern art devours peppers.** Guttuso took them from the *trattorie* where he ate and then polished and painted them

in his studio: **still lifes which appear alive**, such that we can inhale the fragrance of those peppers who seem to say: "touch me". But if there is an artist who has created the authentic Vitruvian pepper, pure, simple and perfect in its luminous form, even though the image is in black and white, it is the American **Edward Weston**, a magical pioneer of photography.

*Originally American, it is now a standard of Mediterranean culture*

Originally American, the pepper is now a standard of Mediterranean diets and cultures, **waving over each cuisine overlooking the Mare Nostrum**. In Italy alone, every town between Mont Blanc and Capo Passero boasts its own pepper recipe, but we also find peppers in *méchouia*, the Tunisian grilled vegetable salad; in the Moroccan *matbucha*, very similar to the Italian *peperonata*; in Andalusian *gazpacho*; in *piperies ghemistes me feta*, the Greek feta-filled peppers; and in *biber dolmasi*, the classic Turkish stuffed peppers. A special dish of bread, wine, salt and peppers appears in the beautiful lovelorn verses of the Turkish poet **Nazim Hikmet**: "The days grow ever briefer/ the rains will begin./ My door has awaited you, wide open./ Why did you tarry so

long?/ On my table, green peppers, salt, bread./ Of the wine that I'd kept in the jug/ I've drunk half, alone, waiting./ Why did you tarry so long?"

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, **Ernest Hemingway** depicts a Spanish revolutionary eating rabbit prepared with peppers, peas and red wine. Some questioned the literary Nobel Prize winner's combination of these two vegetables, pointing out that they have different seasons. They were right. The correct ingredients were probably peppers and beans, but should we contest Hemingway's legume confusion? The important element is the pepper, inflaming rabbit and gourmet bomber alike.

**Showbiz has also always been a glut-ton for peppers.** **Eduardo De Filippo** loved the **Neapolitan papaccella pepper au gratin**: this most interesting pepper can be enjoyed raw, pan-fried or pickled. **Delia Scala**, in her book *Il cibo dei grandi* (*Food of the Greats*), recounts how following a show at the Bussoladomani, a legendary venue in Seventies Versilia, she and **Ginger Rogers** prepared an imposing dish of peppers, herrings and onions for **Paolo Panelli**, a comic actor who evidently loved strong flavours. We find peppers in the film *Cous Cous* by **Abdellatif Kechiche**, in **Fatih Akin's** *Head-On*, in the amusing *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and in the *peperonate* enjoyed by **Martin Scorsese**, who never forgot those of his mother, Catherine.

**Morello Pecchioli**