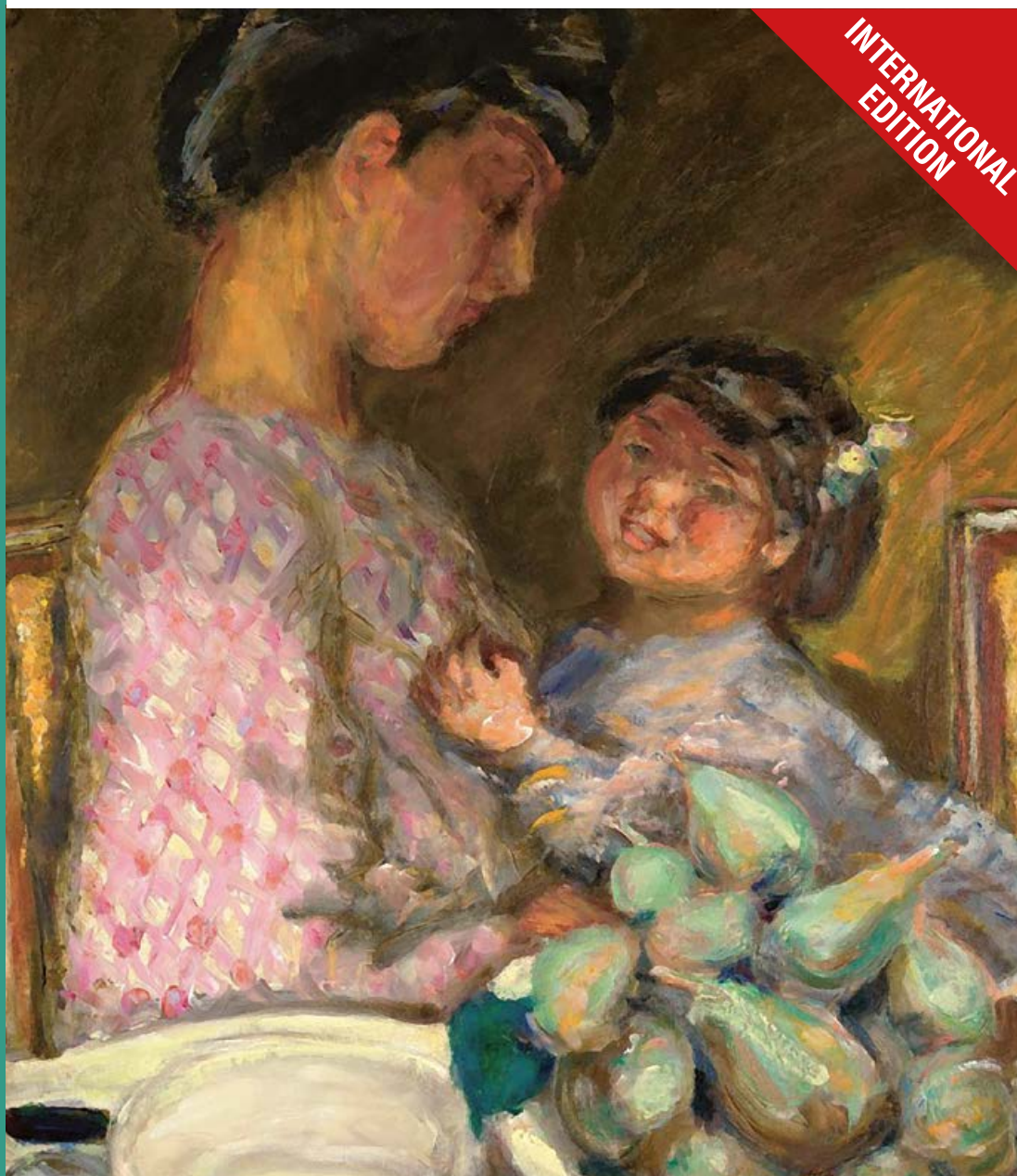


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GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: graphic elaboration of A Plate of Figs (1921) by Pierre Bonnard; private collection

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The mythical and mysterious shopping trolley

by Paolo Petroni

President of the Accademia

An array of symbolic products bought by a hypothetical (slightly unhinged) customer.

The problems mentioned in early summer persist, and have indeed intensified, in early autumn. Awaiting new winter variants of the perfidious virus, newspapers churn out sensationalist headlines about surging electricity and gas bills, galloping inflation and the mythical and mysterious “shopping trolley”. What it is and what it contains, nobody knows. Yet it is newsworthy and stokes the imagination. We picture a hypothetical supermarket customer - it matters not whether the shop is in the north or south, convenient or less so - filling this trolley with goods chosen by who knows whom, and thereby discovering a 10% cost increase in comparison with a few months ago. Like the ‘shopping basket’ posited by ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics), it contains various representative products which nobody, however, would buy in the same basket.

Consuming what is necessary, without waste

Let’s explore this ‘whopper’: 564 euros per family! But what family? With how many members? What do they eat? Whatever they desire! An indigestible mixture: seed oil, butter, margarine, flour, eggs. Furthermore, ice cream, which allegedly costs 18% more (though I suspect nobody has noticed this in August in comparison with June and July) and **pasta, with a 22% increase to date**. Pasta costs about 1 euro (from 0.60 to 1.60 and beyond) for a 500-gramme packet, yielding 5 portions: 0.044 eurocents more per person. **In a year, 10 euros more per head, according to the latest statistics about consumption**, which has increased by 21% in recent months. A bearable increase, therefore: we need merely consume what we need without wasting anything because of the frequently arbitrary expiry dates written on food packaging. We have already variously discussed **restaurateurs’ complaints**: emptied by the lockdown and now teeming with summer customers but **paying sky-high electricity bills, restaurants constantly require economic assistance**.



An amusing summer gastronomic topic

Another amusing summer gastronomic topic was the **parody manifesto** was the **parody manifesto which appeared on social media** asking the public to choose between **carbonara with pancetta or guanciale**. The answer seems obvious today: all agree on the necessity of *guanciale*. But this does not hold everywhere, nor was it always thus as the recipe evolved. Many books and articles have tackled this thorny subject, and this is no place to discuss it.

The *guanciale* was impossible to find outside Rome or Latium until a few years ago, and many people still use *pancetta*; indeed, the food industry sells trays of cubed *pancetta* - often smoked, alas - destined for carbonara. I remember well that even in Rome, in the 1970s, almost everyone made carbonara with *pancetta*. Using it is not a sacrilege; the beauty of recipes is that variants are part of cuisine and its history.





A change in the landscape?

by **Elisabetta Cocito**
Turin Academician

The Piedmontese panorama, dotted with vineyards, maize fields and flooded rice paddies, is changing because of climate upheaval; yet new crops could successfully take root.

An old postcard of Piedmont and a photo sent nowadays through WhatsApp, depicting its natural beauties and unmistakable panoramas dotted with vineyards, golden maize fields or flooded rice paddies: could these end up in albums of old memories or on television programmes about ‘the way we were’? Maybe not, at least not imminently; it is, however, worth **taking stock of the region’s current agricultural situation, and especially of its future.** The landscape holds a record of socio-economic history with its waves of technological and scientific development over time; and what we now behold is, alas, the result of neglect and overexploitation of land to maximise produc-

tivity and hence profit. The substantial climate change afflicting our territory exacerbates this, threatening our future.

Dried-out rice paddies are emblematic of this

A representative example is that of the dried-out rice paddies which, as the title says, change the landscape: the evocative image of flooded rice fields has, for now, given way to shoots germinating in arid soil **and reduced cultivation in comparison with last year.** Some growers have abandoned rice and **sown their fields with second-crop soya beans.** This prob-



lem **also has culinary repercussions.** Piedmontese rice is characterised by its excellence, cooking yield and health benefits; these have been emphasised to defend it against the aggression of the international market, so that now demand for it has finally risen both in Italy and abroad, and it would be paradoxical if such demand could not be fully satisfied.

This problem also applies to maize, alfalfa and other fodder, whose harvests are projected to decline by 30%-40%. Maize cultivation, in particular, has been reduced in favour of crops requiring less water, such as sorghum, sunflower and soya.

Striving to see the glass half full, rising temperatures in a territory such as Piedmont, accustomed to cooler weather, may **offer the opportunity to cultivate or experiment with unusual crops.** Climate change is also modifying harvest times, favouring those relying on late-season crops; this inevitably influences consumption, cuisine and its flavours. **Higher-altitude agriculture is reaping the benefits:** in late June we still have excellent cherries, mangetout and peas when under previous conditions their season would have been practically finished. Instead, delicious desserts and flavoursome jams can already be made from the large quantities of affordable fruit entering the market.

An innovative example is the peanut, whose large-scale cultivation could be attempted

An innovative example is the peanut, already grown, if sparingly, in Italy since the 1950s, but whose production, facilitated by climate change, could now be attempted on a large scale. Indeed, a Piedmontese dried fruit company is undertaking **a feasibility study in collaboration with the University of Turin.** Two **suitable, mostly sandy-soiled** areas, one near Vercelli and one near Turin, have been identified for testing different plant varieties. In 2021, seven were tested, and four this year. If these experiments



yield positive results, Piedmontese peanuts could be marketable as early as 2023, with indubitable benefits in terms of economics and ecological sustainability.

These plants are eco-sustainable since they do not require large quantities of nitrogen fertilisers, and would also permit gradual substitution of foreign imports, thereby avoiding long-distance transport. A product 100% Made in Italy, therefore. Peanuts are known to **yield an oil that is widely used** in the food industry for baking, mayonnaise and even frying. We have long smiled, almost condescendingly, when observing American film characters enjoying **peanut butter** for their afternoon snack; we have always palpably distrusted that substance. It seems to have been invented by **George A. Bayle Jr**, a pharmacist from Saint Louis who, in 1890, having ascertained the high protein content of peanuts, chose to create an alternative to meat for those unable to afford its high prices. An edifying lesson, perhaps: after all, haven't we often looked askance at recently arrived New World vegetables which later became culinary staples? This may be unnerving, but even peanut butter might become a resource one day...

Inclusion of 'exotic' crops is almost an inevitable necessity by now

Striving towards autonomous production of 'exotic' crops for national consumption has become almost an inevitable neces-

sity by now: we behold **avocados** and **bananas** growing in areas of our country recently dedicated to other crops, just as we should not be amazed by olive trees returning to Piedmont and **a brave entrepreneur starting a tea plantation on Lake Maggiore.** Records show various historical tea-planting attempts, particularly in Paris in the mid-19th century and then in Pavia, whence our entrepreneur drew inspiration: the Pavia studies had shown that the Premosello area in the Verbano Cusio Ossola province had a soil suitable for tea cultivation. **Following twenty years of experiments and long educational visits to China, today the Premosello company has already obtained a respectable harvest** and international recognition.

On another front, two enterprising youngsters perusing local archives have discovered that **in the Middle Ages, the Montferrat and Asti area was an important reference point for production of saffron,** appreciated even at the Parisian court, and thereby chose to begin cultivating it with support from the University of Parma: a worldwide authority for saffron evaluation, particularly regarding taste and fragrance.

These are some examples of how **agriculture is in constant flux,** bending sometimes to climatic vagaries but sometimes exploiting its possibilities. We surely cannot compete against the world's major producers, but if we manage, we will obtain healthful, fresh products which will influence our cuisine and render it unique. I want to believe this.

Elisabetta Cocito



K-rations and the Mediterranean Diet

by Attilio Borda Bossana
Messina Academician

In 1941, Ancel Keys was tasked with identifying a complete, affordable, compact and physically light ration. The resulting K-rations may have been named after him.

Ancel Keys

Napoleone Bonaparte maintained that “an army marches on its stomach”. Indeed, this may have been borne out by lost battles during the Russian campaign when the Grande Armée was left without victuals. Provisioning logistics played a crucial role in the War Between the States which incarnadined the USA from 1861 to 1865, and caused the crew of the battleship *Potëmkin* to mutiny in 1905 after being forced to eat maggoty meat. Reaching farther back in time, the expansion of the Roman empire is partially explained by the adage *più con il farro che con il ferro* (they conquered ‘more by spelt than by the sword’), attributing the legionaries’ vigour to that cereal which arrived from the Middle East through Sicily long before the dawn of pasta, used nowadays in a Roman soup called *farr-*

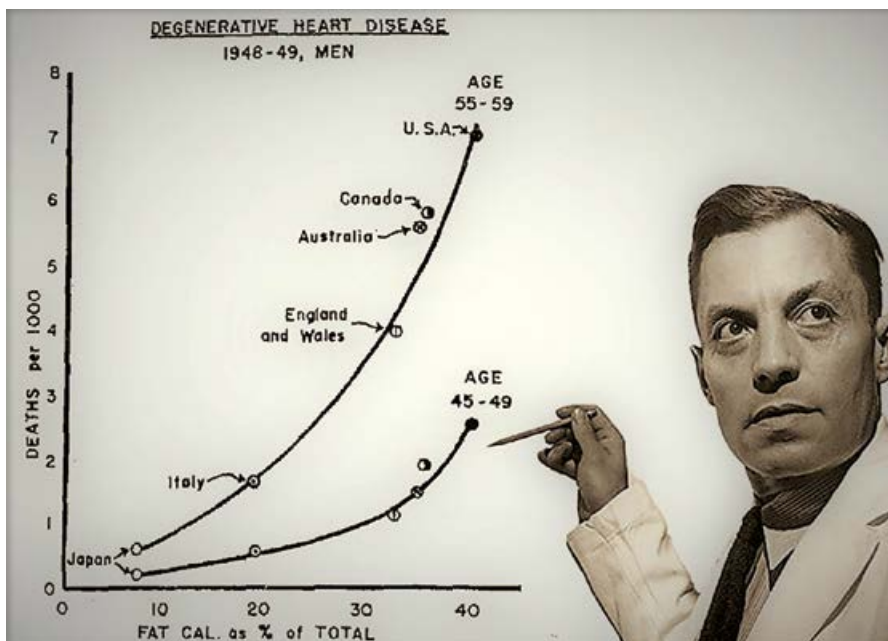
cello which has a variant involving tomato and *guanciale* (pork jowl).

Strategic provisioning became decisive in the Second World War

Strategic provisioning became decisive in the Second World War, and in 1941 the American physiologist and nutritionist **Ancel Keys**, newly appointed as director of the Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene in Minneapolis, was tasked with establishing a complete, affordable, compact and physically light ration. **His initial may have named the resulting K-ration**, introduced to the US Armed Forces and consisting of hardtack, dried pork, chocolate, dried fruit, lemonade powder and water-purifying tablets.

The ration included three meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) and its formulation was adapted to new war theatres outside the range of supply networks and for use by special forces and paratroopers. The National Research Council added cigarettes, matches, tin openers, hygiene supplies and sewing kits. **For the Italian Armed Forces**, the forerunner of the K-ration made its appearance **earlier, during the First World War, with long-life goods**, namely two tins of preserved meat and four packets of hardtack.

The first Italian K-ration was established in 1952; weighing 2.6 kg and providing around 4000 Kcal a head per day, it contained foods ready for immediate consumption in three waxed-paper boxes, one per meal, arranged with a burner within a second container.



Ration tins from the Great War



K-ration displayed at the Triennale in Milan (2015)



Burner for heating rations used by Italian military personnel until the 1970s

The current composition of rations

Today it consists of seven modules, each identified by colour: yellow, red, grey, green, white, pink and blue; the modules in three different boxes (breakfast, lunch and dinner) are differentiated by food type. A tin of ravioli with meat sauce, a container of chicken in aspic and a pot of fruit salad, with a set of accessories ranging from a miniature heating stove to a toothbrush, are among the main contents of today's *Razione Kappa* destined for front lines or rescue services during natural catastrophes. The world of military field rations was the focus of an exhibition in 2015 at the Triennale Design Museum in Milan, dedicated to the K-rations used by armies around the world.

Despite developments, the culinary traditions and habits of each NATO country have been preserved, and the new ration kits, unlike the old, replace the flame heater with a solution which, if lightly pressed, sets off a chemical reaction which heats the contents. Breakfast never fails to include bread or crackers, two portions of jam, chocolate, biscuits and an energy bar. Lunch includes bread sticks, dessert, an energy drink, an energy bar, and an array of different first and second courses which provide variety to soldiers in the field. For dinner, the meal is lighter, with a main course, crackers, bread sticks, cereal and a fruit bar, alternating according to various menus. Supplementary goods include a 'Cappuccino Sachet', instant coffee, lemon tea, sugar-free chewing gum for oral hygiene, water-purification tablets, toothpicks and wet wipes.

A nutritionally balanced diet

A nutritionally balanced diet compatible with Italian culinary traditions, even containing an *ante litteram* energy supplement equally appreciated by civilians: the legendary Armed Forces dark chocolate wrapped in its historic packaging and used since 1937, now back on the market to evoke memories as only food can do.

The American physiologist and biologist Keys has another well-known credit, having been the scholar who contributed to the (re)discovery of the Mediterranean Diet, whose acquaintance he for-

tuitously made at the FAO Conference held in Rome in 1951, after being intrigued by the low incidence of cardiovascular and gastrointestinal diseases in Italy's Campania region and on Crete. This correlation spurred his initial studies on a population sample in Nicotera, Calabria, to analyse the effect of poor diet on cardiovascular disease. In 1962, he moved to Pioppi, in the Cilento area, where he resided for 28 years, painstakingly documenting the local population's diet and thereby reaching the conclusion that the so-called 'Mediterranean Diet' - a term which he coined himself - confers evident health benefits thanks to its high content of fruit, vegetables, dairy products and cereals, the exclusive use of olive oil as a cooking and seasoning fat, and the low consumption of meat and fish.

It was 1975 when the American researchers Ancel and Margaret Keys published their book *How to Eat Well and Stay Well, The Mediterranean Way*, which introduced the whole world to the Mediterranean Diet.

Keys died in Minneapolis on 20 November 2004, aged 100 years: a concrete example of his scientific results.

Attilio Borda Bossana

Roman legionaries' food packs





Alcohol consumption *rising among the young*

by **Gabriele Gasparro**
Rome Delegate

Not just a health problem but a social one if youth malaise drives them to the bottle.

Wine consumption is falling. A bottle or a classic *fiasco* of wine no longer occupies our luncheon tables. Food habits are gradually changing. The bottle of 'good wine' only makes an appearance on special occasions or feast days. Long gone are the taverns whose customers took refuge from their worries in the soothing torpor of a glass of wine. **Wine consumption is diminishing while that of strong drink rises meteorically, and what is most worrisome is that it is among the young that a propensity for strong spirits is wildly increasing.** This is not only a health problem but a social one, if malaise among the young drives them to require the stimulus of alcohol.

Italy's Health Ministry has presented a worrisome report

In Parliament, the Health Ministry recently presented a worrisome report: **as many as 8.6 million people in Italy are considered vulnerable to alcoholism.** Yet more alarmingly, these include **800 thousand minors** whom the fad of the *movida*, by now pervasive, causes to ingest alcohol outside meal times and at a swift rate. Maximum consumption is **concentrated among the 18-24 age bracket, with a split of 22.1% female and 14.3% male.** For youngsters **between 11 and 15 years**, it is likewise unnerving to note





that **even in this age range, girls display a higher alcohol consumption rate** than boys.

Binge drinking outside the home has involved **4 million and 100 thousand consumers publicly inebriated in 2020** (930 thousand between 11 and 25 years of age), with **120 thousand intoxicated minors**. Of these, only 3,300 went to the emergency room, representing approximately 10% of alcohol poisoning admissions.

'Digital apéritifs' through online chat and social networks

According to the **Italian National Institute of Health's National Alcohol Observatory**, isolation caused by **Covid** has increased **uncontrolled consumption** of alcoholic beverages, partially through **new initiatives** such as digital apéritifs through online chat and social networks.

Fear spreading through a population rendered more fragile by **problems with work and finances caused by current circumstances** has exacerbated alcohol consumption.

The trend is for increased incidental alcohol between meals combined with a

progressive reduction in the proportion of consumers who limit themselves to beer and wine, especially among the youngest and women over 45.

Since alcohol addiction still requires **serious attention because of its attendant health and social consequences**; the relevant medical authorities are taking on the problem.

The World Health Organisation maintains that prevention must exclusively be undertaken, with unwavering commitment, by those with a mandate and vocation to oversee public health, and not by holders of conflicting or commercial interests.

The UN 2030 Agenda, the FAO and the European Parliament have clearly indicated **the necessary path**: a strategy of **zero alcohol for minors** through reduction of alcohol availability; changes to taxes and price policies; stricter marketing and advertising regulation; enforcement of sale and consumption prohibitions, including online; and limits on sponsorships for sports and cultural and musical events.

Emanuele Scafato, Director of the National Alcohol Observatory, has declared the urgency of adopting prevention programmes tailored according to age and both physical and cognitive developmental stage, avoiding the ambigui-

ty of the 'responsible drinking' model, which is inappropriate and thoroughly ineffective for youngsters.

The problems delineated above are certainly real; however, **consumption regulation strategies must be crystal-clear** and include a distinction between wine and spirits.

The 'nectar of the gods' which has been with us for millennia must not be demonised and conflated with high-alcohol beverages. Wine is the pride of our lands, indispensably complementing the foods on our tables. It must remain immune from sneak attacks by those who would secretly benefit from increased consumption of other beverages, including non-alcoholic ones.

Gabriele Gasparro

