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I-ATE Food Terminology

Parthenope University



Introduction

The I-ATE Food Term of the Week is a weekly publication that the Terminology Coordination Unit of the European Parliament (TermCoord) initiated in 2016. It is predominately concerned with food terminology, with the objective of presenting the similarities and differences of gastronomic culture between and within different countries. Every Saturday, TermCoord publishes an article on a specific typical dish of a given country. Normally, the I-ATE Food Term of the Week articles are written by the communication team of TermCoord, however anyone could give their contribution by proposing an article about their food term.

In this context, the University of Parthenope has been collaborating with TermCoord for multiple years now and has provided some interesting and “delicious” articles for the I-ATE Food Term of the Week. These articles are mostly related to the agri-food domain. So far, their contribution includes 41 articles about typical regional Italian food, which have been drafted and edited by Professor Raffaella Antinucci and her PhD students.

Professor Raffaella Antinucci is the collaboration coordinator between the University of Parthenope and TermCoord. She is an associate professor of English Literature as well as the Director of CERILICUA (Interdepartmental Research Centre for Languages and Cultures) in the University of Parthenope in Naples (Department of Business and Legal Studies - DISEG).

In 2020, Professor Antinucci started this collaboration, which involves the participation of her PhD students from the Eurolanguages and Specialised Terminologies program.

The aim of this e-book is to archive the articles from this long-lasting collaboration in the hope that it will continue in the future.

Written by **Toffee Eleni Vanelli**

Pizza Dolce Abruzzese



The first thing you have to know about the pizza dolce (literally: sweet pizza) is that it has nothing to do with the world-famous pizza, not even with a dessert pizza, except for the fact – if you're looking for an etymological reason – that the colours mirror those on a pizza. As a matter of fact, pizza dolce is very similar to an Italian party cake. What sets it apart from a common ceremony cake is its regionality, tradition, and peculiarity of the recipe.

As regards geographical location, pizza dolce belongs to the precious gastronomic heritage of Abruzzo, a region in central Italy on the Adriatic sea, and you will not find it elsewhere. It is in fact registered in the Traditional agricultural and food products of Abruzzo, recognized by the Italian Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies.

The Pizza Dolce in Abruzzo is the cake by definition. Although of ancient origin, it has survived to the present day in its traditional version. Reserved in the past especially for weddings or important celebrations of the family, it shows an elaborate appearance but is actually as simple as life in the countryside or in the mountains, when weddings were celebrated at home. According to the tradition, on the occasion of wedding parties the pizza dolce was prepared by the close relatives of the couple. The cake was huge: depending on the number of guests it could measure 50 cm in diameter and 20 cm in height and was divided into five layers. It was filled with cooked must, chocolate cream, almond paste and custard, while to cover the surface it was used a white icing prepared with egg whites, butter and icing sugar, completed by tiny silver or coloured candies as decoration.



Not much has changed in today's version of the recipe: three layers of sponge cake are soaked with a different liqueur mixture, whose main components are alchermes, coffee, rum, maraschino or other liqueurs at will, whole or diluted with sweetened water. The main liqueur, however, is the alchermes, that gives the sponge its characteristic crimson colour. The cake is finally filled with almond mix, chocolate and Italian custard, while its surface is still covered with white sugar frosting, or the more "modern" whipped cream. On the top, you can find toasted and chopped almonds or hazelnut grains. Although the classic pizza dolce is the most loved one also today, there is no lack of attempts at innovation, such as the latest recipes that, following the recent Italian lust for Anglo-Saxon cake decorating, propose a glaze in sugar paste to cover the cake.

Today pizza dolce is served as a traditional dessert in typical restaurants, or it is still homemade by people who want to celebrate significant events following the tradition of recipes handed down from generation to generation. It can also be purchased in long-established bakeries or pastry shops.

If you're bold and you want to test yourself, you will find a few links for the recipe at the bottom of the article. Although its preparation is a little elaborate, it is not difficult to achieve. Yet, if you have a chance to try this special cake, remember that you will not only be tasting a simple dessert but a piece of history of Abruzzo, whose antique flavour echoes ancient festive songs and promises full of hope and life in a harsh but "strong and gentle" land, as this region is said to be.

Written by **Raffaella Sciarra**

Panettone, a symbol of Italian Christmas



Whoever finds himself in Italy these days will see the panettone, a Milanese cake traditionally consumed during Christmastime, being on display in any café, pastry shop and grocery shop windows. It is a baked product, about 4.7 inches high, weighing 2.2 pounds, characterized by a soft dough, a cylindrical-shaped base and a dome-shaped top. The golden cracked crust on the top has a crossed cut – the scarpatura –, while the yellow sponge has a cell-texture, the so-called “holes” and a distinctive sweet and sour aroma. The recipe requires simple and natural ingredients: wheat, sugar, butter, eggs, milk, candied fruit – orange and cedar peel –, and currant.



Nowadays there are a lot of versions of panettone on sale, especially regional variations, which meet with the consumers’ new tastes on the one hand, and ‘betray’ the recipe’s authenticity on the other hand. Hence we have glazed, cream-filled, chocolate, lemon, yogurt panettone and even the soymilk version for vegan customers. The panettone is connected to Christmas since the early 1600s but it is not just a Christmas cake, since it represents an appreciated gift, once wrapped in refined tin boxes alongside with sparkling wine and other delicacies.

But where does the term panettone come from? The root is quite surely pane – bread – (panetto being the bread dough), plus the augmentative suffix -one added to the ending, on account of its big size. Indeed, until the first decades of the 20th century, the panettone still had the appearance of a loaf, short and round. It is attributed to the pâtissier Angelo Motta the idea to bake a taller and softer cake, letting the dough rise into the guêpière, a kind of paper cup that sticks to the cake during the cooking and gives it its vertical shape.

However, since this is a very ancient cake, several legends surround its origins. The first one tells the story of Ludovico Sforza's chef, Toni, who unluckily burnt the dinner dessert and so, having nothing to replace it with, decided to serve a baked pie the shop boy had cooked mixing the leftovers. The host liked the confection so much that he asked for its name and was given the following reply: "l'è 'l pan de Toni", that is Milanese for "It's Toni's bread". A more credible hypothesis is that the term originated from pan de ton, meaning the "classy bread" for the rich, different from the millet flour bread that the poor used to eat. As further proof of that theory, the Guilds' Statute of Milan prohibited bakers to make white bread, but this right was extraordinarily granted during Christmas time.

There are some cakes and sweet bread in other European Countries that can be compared to the meneghin specialty, such as the Christmas Pudding in Britain, the Weihnachtsstollen in Germany and the Cozonac in Bulgaria and Romania. The Christmas Pudding (known as Plum Pudding, plum standing for currant) has got a round shape, too, and is connected to the Christmas festivities.



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Over the centuries the panettone has gained its “aristocratic titles”, becoming the subject for literary works by famous Italian writers like Pirandello, Calvino, and Moravia, or turning up in artworks such as Still life with fruit (1644-1666) by the Dutch painter Rootius. Moreover, some high standing personalities contributed to give the Milanese cake great prestige, for example Manzoni, Rossini, Garibaldi, prince Metternich and Pope Pius IX, since their predilection for that gluttony was well-known.

As time went by, the panettone got more and more popularity, so that it was selected to be the prize to award the Tour of Italy’s winner, and then, the Tour of France’s winner, too. Despite its old origins, the panettone never ceases to be reinvented and to surprise: starting from the traditional recipe, we have now sophisticated versions, which include the 18-Karat gold leaves panettone, limited edition.

To sum up, the panettone shows off on all the Italian tables set for Christmas celebrations, and symbolizes joy and feast, just as the title of the early twentieth-century artist Ettore Mazzini’s illustrated book suggested: *Nel Pane la vita. Nel Panettone la gioia* (Life in bread. Joy in panettone). In more recent times, a new Italian term was coined, *cinapanettone* (from the words cinema and panettone), to mean Italian comedy films released each year around Christmastime and focused on the holidays abroad of stereotypical Italians.

Finally, a fun fact. In Italy there is a joking rivalry, a kind of “derby” between panettonisti – panettone fans – and pandoristi – pandoro fans –, being the pandoro a similar Christmas cake with no raisins nor candied fruit. Actually those ingredients do not satisfy everyone’s taste and hence the hilarious and also childish expedient to get rid of them by concealing them into a napkin!

Written by **Lucia Golino**

Cannoli



Tracing the origins of the term cannoli is quite challenging due to the legendary myths and emotional ties that have mixed and stratified in the collective memory.

Etymologically, cannoli derives from Sicilian “cannolu” and Italian “canna” (reed or pipe). The denomination comes from the tool originally used to make the typical shape of cannoli, the “canna da fiume”, namely a long thin shrub growing near rivers. As a matter of fact, in the past the dough was rolled up in the trunk of this shrub in order to give cannoli their typical tubular shape. In Italian, cannoli is a plural name whose singular form is cannolo. As for its English counterpart, the Oxford English Dictionary reports its first occurrences back at the beginning of the XX century. According to its definition, cannoli are “deep-fried crisp pastry tubes with a sweet filling [...] originally a speciality of Sicily”. The word has been incorporated into English language without much change, except for the formation of the plural which follows the morphology of English rules. Truth be said, the OED reports the form cannolis as a very rare plural form, but also cannolo is widely accepted as a singular form. Nonetheless, current attested usage testifies as the most established form is the loanword cannoli used as a collective noun. Specialised texts mention also the endearment form cannolicchi – cannulicchia in Sicilian language – which are smaller and considered as a mini size of the traditional fist-size pastry.

The origin of the cannoli recipe is born out of the inextricable tight of culture, conquest and tradition flourishing in Sicily during past centuries of foreign dominations. Back in the I century BC, Cicero already praised the precursor of cannoli, describing them as a “a tube-shaped waffle containing a sweet filling made from milk”. Ricotta cheese was surely the sweet filling he mentioned but at that time honey was used as a natural sweetener. It was Arabs that brought brown sugar to Sicily and since then sugar has been used as a sweetener in confectionery, including cannoli. During the Arab period, in the neighbourhood of present-day Caltanissetta, the women of the harem got inspired by Cicero’s pastry and mixed it with an Arab recipe made of almonds to create a treat in honour of their men. Nowadays we can trace the Arab origins of cannoli in similar sweets coming from the Islamic world such as Zainab’s fingers, whose ancient version resembles the shape of cannoli, and qanawāt, deep fried tubes whose name literally means “canal”, thus reinforcing the etymological bond with the Sicilian pastry.



The shape of cannoli recalls a phallic symbol, which at that time stood not only for virility but also for the prosperity of earth. This pleasure-loving message was imported also during the Middle-Ages when cannoli were served during the cheerful celebrations of the Christian Carnival. Generally, they were consumed in the spring due to the bigger production of sheep milk for ricotta cheese as in this season pasture lands are richer.

In Modern times, confectioners enriched the cannoli recipe putting in the ricotta mix flavours that exalt its Sicilian birth. Depending on the areas, apart from ricotta cheese, the filling may contain sugar, chocolate chips, grinded nuts and candied fruit. Some of these can abound or be omitted and recipes from one side of the island to the other usually cross-contaminate. Serial cannoli tasters state that near Palermo, apart from ricotta, the filling contains chocolate chips, while candied citrus skin towers above each cannolo; going eastward, near Catania, cannoli are filled with ricotta, chocolate chips, candied fruits and a bunch of grinded pistachio. This addition pays a tribute to the green nuts growing under the slopes of Volcano Etna.

The ricotta taste is actually what an expert on cannoli would notice at once, since ricotta cheese from sheep milk is stronger than that obtained from cow milk and if you use the latter the result would consist in a dramatic change on the flavours. Non traditional fillings vary and the curious taster is spoilt for choice in this case, since cannoli are also filled of custards flavoured with pistachio, chocolate, orange or lemon. Even if cannoli should be enjoyed when they are freshly filled, nowadays bakers coat the inside of the shells, alias the “scorza”, with dark chocolate. This prevents its softening and the shells can be filled also hours before. But, forewarned is forearmed, you should consume cannoli within a few hours from their preparation!

Last but not least, which is the best way to eat cannoli? Ideally, in a good Sicilian confectioner’s! Make sure the inside is cold and smooth and the “scorza” is crunchy. If you are not satisfied with it, you can make a complaint on its softness and a proud Sicilian confectioner would be happy to restore you with another crackling cannolo!

Written by **Carmen Serena Santonocito,**

Babà



In Naples we say “*si ‘nu babbà*” – literally “you’re a babà” – and that means “you’re a sweetheart”: the expression refers to a person “who is distinguished by particular pleasantness” (Treccani), nice and sweet as a babà, one of the most typical desserts of the Campania regional capital. Offered in standard size, larger or smaller, simple or soaked with rum or with sugared water, filled with cream or chocolate, the babà is an institution. It is “a small cake of leavened dough, sometimes mixed with currants and usually soaked in rum” (Collins Dictionary), with a golden and spongy surface and a characteristic mushroom shape. The ingredients are simple, but the preparation – whose main secrets are the dough technique and the leavening – is very elaborate.

Despite being a symbol of Neapolitan pastry, the babà, as Colella points out, is an imported dessert. Its origins, in fact, can be traced back to the European courts of the eighteenth century, and the etymological definitions present in both English and French dictionaries confirm it: the Collins Dictionary and the *Trésor de la Langue Française* agree that the term derives from the French word *baba*, which, in its turn, is a borrowing from the Polish *babka*, literally “old woman”.

Therefore, the name of this dessert seems to allude to the softness of the dough, which is more suitable for old peoples’ teeth; alternatively, it could derive from the *babka*’s skirts, whose shape is recalled in the pastry. Other sources, however, associate it to the figure of Ali Baba – one of the heroes of *One Thousand and One Nights* –, as originally the babà, flavoured with saffron and decorated with Smyrnaean and Corinthian currants, had a more exotic look. In this case, the form would refer to Byzantine and Middle Eastern architecture.

But who invented the babà, at least in its Polish variant (*babka ponczowa*)? The inventor – almost accidentally – was Stanisław Leszczyński, king of Poland from 1704 to 1735, and Duke of Lorraine. Among other things, Stanisław spent a period at the court of the Sultan of Constantinople, where he read *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. Legend has it that Stanisław, tired of the usual, dry Alsatian cake he was offered, threw it against a cupboard, breaking a bottle of rum that soaked it. Passionate about culinary experiments, Stanisław tasted it and fell in love with the new dessert.

Later, the word baba made its appearance in the French language, when Diderot recalled it in a letter to Sophie Volland in 1767, but it is only in 1835 that it reaches Paris thanks to the pastry chef Nicolas Stohrer, who went in the French capital with Maria Leszczyńska, daughter of the Polish sovereign and future bride of Louis XV. Stohrer made the dessert popular, removing saffron from the recipe; this way, the rum babà – as we have it today – was born. The Stohrer bakery is still located in Rue de Montorgueil.

In Paris there is also a variant, the Savarin, whose name derives from the gastronome Brillat-Savarin, inventor of a liqueur that accompanied fruit salads. In this case the Julien Brothers had the idea of enclosing the fruit salad in a doughnut-shaped baba painted with apricot jam to prevent the liqueur from escaping.

As for the city of Naples, the babà arrived with Murat and the monzù, the court cooks who served the noble families and who were sent in Paris to learn French culinary techniques. Here the French term baba adapted itself to the Neapolitan dialect: it took the final accent and doubled the intervocalic “b”. Amabile points out that it resembles a typical Neapolitan dessert as early as 1836 when the chef Angeletti describes the recipe with currants and saffron in the first manual of Italian cuisine. After the Italian unification (1861), the babà left the noble houses and arrived in popular bakeries, where it lost the candied fruits and gained the characteristic mushroom shape of the one and only Neapolitan babbà.



Written by **Nicla Mercurio**

Polpette



From Italian polpetta to French boulette to Lebanese falafel: a journey through lexicon and cultures

Polpetta take us back to our childhood. For many Italians, their flavour has the same evocative power of Proust's famous madeleine: a bite and you travel back immediately to the age of six, when your grandmother used to prepare this dish especially for you. A dish of minced meat, seasoned and mixed with various ingredients, compressed into the shape of a slightly flattened ball, fried or cooked in tomato sauce (see Treccani), the polpetta have won undisputed success over the centuries even if, over such a long period of time, they have changed frequently in the way of being cooked and served, not to mention their ingredients.

The word polpetta was used for the first time in Italian in the XV century to describe the cuisine of Mastro Martino da Como. According to some, it derives from the French paupière because its shape recalls that of the eyelids. There is another hypothesis, though, which traces its origins back to ancient Persia. Kofta (typical polpetta of the Middle East) probably derives from the Persian word koofteh, which means "minced meat". They thus spread throughout the Middle East, and during the Arab conquest of Persia – as it had happened to the Romans after their conquest of Greece – the losers culturally conquered the winners, especially in terms of food.

Boulettes

The Persian culinary traditions, indeed, have influenced the Arab cuisine in a deep and lasting way as testified by polpette, which survived under the name of bonâdiq and reached Europe through the Arab conquest of Spain. In Spanish polpette are called Albondigas, a term stemming from the Arabic al-bonâdiq.

Although polpette are a traditional dish of Italian cuisine, they can actually be found in every country. In France and in Francophone countries they are called boulette, defined by the TLFi as “Petite boule de viande hachée, de purée, etc., destinée à la nourriture d’êtres humains ou d’animaux”, and, unlike polpette, they can also be made of fruit, vegetables and cereals. A particular type of boulette made in a Francophone country is the Lebanese falafel, a Middle Eastern variation consisting of spiced and fried legumes: broad beans, chickpeas and beans, chopped and seasoned with sumac, onion, garlic, cumin and coriander.



Falafels

Historically, falafel were used by the Egyptian Copts to replace meat during the days of fasting. The term consists of three words that in Coptic literally mean “with many beans”. Falafel are generally served with hummus, but also with yogurt and/or vegetables (tomatoes and cucumbers, either natural or pickled), in a soft and thin Arabic bread that can be easily rolled or cut in order to be filled with other ingredients. The great success of falafel in Lebanon is probably due to their affordability: they can be found everywhere, are even sold as street food, in the market stalls of big cities and villages, or in filling stations lost in the desert.

In short, what a delight!



Written by **Michele Bevilacqua**

The Neapolitan Pastiera



Pastiera is the Easter Neapolitan cake par excellence, made with ricotta cheese, grain and eggs. Neapolitans usually start preparing it on Maundy Thursday in order to eat it both on Holy Saturday and on Easter Monday. Its importance has also been officially recognized as a traditional agricultural product of Campania.

According to the Dizionario Treccani and the Dizionario Garzanti Linguistica, the term pastiera derives from pasta. While in the Italian language its plural form is pastiere, in English it is only used in the singular. Moreover, in some English texts it is possible to observe the entire Italian adjectival syntagm that is pastiera napoletana (Neapolitan pastiera).

The origins of this delicacy are mentioned in Giambattista Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*, published in the XVII century, a renowned source of inspiration for Western fairy tales. Where - one may ask - does the Neapolitan name come from? In "*La Gatta Cenerentola*", when describing the sumptuous feast organized by the king in order to find the beautiful owner of the shoe, Basile mentions this Easter dish with the same name used today. Nevertheless, it is supposed to derive from Latin.

According to a fairly imaginative hypothesis, the term pastiera stems from the union between the word *pastam*, which in Latin indicates the dough, and the suffix of French derivation, which means "from yesterday". As a matter of fact, such an etymological interpretation can refer to the ancient custom of adding the leftovers of the previous days to the dough of the pastiera. Therefore, from this point of view, the cake developed from a recipe created to avoid throwing food away, much like the typical *frittata di pasta*. However, this hypothesis has never been deemed valid.

The legends connected to the origin of the recipe of this typical Easter cake are very ancient and bound to the foundation myths of the city of Naples. According to one of these, the beautiful mermaid Parthenope lived in the wonderful Gulf of Naples; she was a very sweet creature who chose the bay of the Castel dell'Ovo as her home. There, she would sing her melodious songs that melted the heart and ravished the soul of those who met her, keeping company with people and sailors with her gorgeous voice. In order to thank her for her divine voice, Neapolitans honoured her with the flour, a symbol of prosperity, ricotta, indicating abundance, eggs, the embodiment of fertility and reproduction, grain cooked into milk, standing for the fusion of the animal and vegetable realms, orange flowers, reminiscent of the wonderful scents of Campania, spices and candied fruits, suggesting the hospitality of all the peoples from the East and the West, and sugar, representing the sweet song of the Mermaid. Once received these seven gifts, the happy Mermaid Parthenope plunged in the water to reach the crystalline bottom of her sea, bringing her gifts to the feet of the gods who thought of combining them all together thus making the first Neapolitan pastiera.

A fun fact: the most ancient and rudimentary Neapolitan pastiera seems to date back to the Classical age: during the pagan festivals for the celebration of the spring, the priestesses of Ceres carried an egg in procession as a symbol of prosperity and new life. According to a more recent and likely hypothesis, it seems that the invention of the pastiera is to be attributed to the skillful hands of the nuns of the Convent of San Gregorio Armeno, who were renowned for the desserts and cakes they baked for the Neapolitan aristocracy during the Holy Easter.



Written by **Antonella Guarino**

The Neapolitan Gattò di patate



Gattò di patate, also commonly known as gattò – a term derived from the linguistic corruption of the French gâteau (“cake”) – is a savoury oven-baked dish made of potatoes, and it belongs to the traditional Neapolitan and Campania cuisine. This Neapolitan delicacy, appreciated throughout Italy, is sometimes also called pizza di patate or torta di patate (literally “potato pizza” and “potato cake” respectively).

Its origins can be traced back to 1768, when Archduchess Maria Carolina, Empress Maria Theresa of Austria’s daughter and future wife of Ferdinand I Bourbon, invited to the court of the Kingdom of Naples a staff of high rank French chefs, known for this reason as *monsieurs* – a French epithet that the Neapolitans modified into *monzù*. For Maria Carolina’s wedding the *monzù* introduced in the Parthenopean capital several dishes, including some sweet gateaux, coming from the other side of the Alps, adapting and mixing them with the ingredients and the uses of the Neapolitan gastronomic tradition.

These refined chefs, who were also serving the noble Sicilian families of the Kingdom as *monsù* (a local variation of the term *monzù*), preferred to remain in the aristocratic palaces, even when the French court of the then king Joachim Murat was forced to leave Naples after the defeat against the Austrian army in 1815. In addition to the delicious gattò di patate, the *monzù* created dishes that immediately became part of the Neapolitan gastronomic tradition and have over time become renowned worldwide, such as ragù (from the French ragoût), sartù di riso (from surtout), and sciù (from chou). Over the centuries gattò has turned from sweet to savory dish, typically served warm but not cladding hot as a main course, although a thin slice can be eaten as a starter or as a side dish.

From representing a gastronomic term born in a local context to indicate the typical savory pie made of potatoes, eggs, sliced meat and cheese, the headword gattò is today present in some Italian dictionaries such as the *Il Nuovo De Mauro* (according to which the word appeared even earlier than 1775) and the *Dizionario Garzanti Linguistica*, as evidence of the attested use of the term into the Italian national lexicon. The *Accademia della Crusca* provides detailed information about the particular graphic form of the term – with double t, instead of one, and the open tonic o, instead of the closed one. This spelling recalls the original French pronunciation (even if the more recurrent doubled form gattò coexists with gatò), and can be explained by the phenomenon of the frequent phono-syntactic doubling, typical of the Neapolitan dialect.

English language dictionaries such as the *Cambridge Dictionary* and the *English Oxford Dictionaries* simply indicate, with the headword *gateau* (using the adapted spelling that does not include the circumflexed accent of the original French form), a cake decorated and filled with cream, fruit or chocolate. They thus do not mention the typical Neapolitan dish. Conversely, the latter is mentioned in the *Italian Vocabolario Treccani*, although in relation to the French term *gâteau*.

Finally, versatility is the distinguishing feature of this dish, which lends itself to all sorts of variations according to town and family traditions or personal taste.

Written by **Vincenzo Simoniello**

Caprese



Our Italian food tour brings us to Capri and the Amalfi coast today, with the typical caprese. But, are we talking about the cake or about the salad?

Interestingly, caprese is a polysemous word referring both to sweet and salty delicacies originated (hence the name) from the Italian isle of Capri. However, these can be tasted in the Neapolitan territory and in most parts of Italy too, having become two of the symbols of the traditional Italian cuisine.



For what concerns the sweet specialty, caprese is a flourless dark chocolate almond cake. It was first made in 1920, when two gangsters went to the famous Carmine Di Fiore's bakery to get a cake for Al Capone. Knowing that the cake was for the boss, the pastry chef got so nervous that forgot to add flour to the batter. This mistake resulted in a huge success: it became a cake from the crispy surface and a soft, moist and chocolatey inside... everybody loved it! Even if the original story of this cake does not mention it, it must be said that the authentic caprese cake also has a thick layer of confectioner's sugar on it, often showing the writing caprese and/or the image of the Faraglioni, the icon of the isle of Capri. Today it is still much appreciated and, being also gluten-free, it can be eaten by many. To get how it tastes like, imagine a classic brownie with chopped almonds inside.

The salted caprese, instead, refers to the caprese salad, a typical summer salad that includes the colours of the Italian flag, red, white and green. It is said that its origins date back to the aftermath of World War I, when a Caprese worker filled his sandwich with “cuore di bue” tomatoes, fior di latte cheese (a sort of mozzarella cheese but made from regular cow’s milk), basil and olive oil, to honour the Italian flag. In 1922, it was also served at the dinner organised by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (the founder of Futurism) at the Grand Hotel Quisisana – the most famous hotel in Capri – to surprise the poet. On that occasion, knowing that Marinetti condemned pasta for “its lassitude and pessimism”, the chef decided to propose him something new: the caprese salad.

He was enchanted with the harmony of these three simple and genuine ingredients. A few years later, in 1951, it was also appreciated by King Farouk – king of Egypt – and since then has become widely spread in Campania, especially on the islands and on the Amalfi and Sorrento coasts. Today, depending on where you eat it, caprese salad can be made with fior di latte or mozzarella (made from buffalo’s milk). For example, along the Sorrento Coast, fior di latte will be more likely to be used, together with the local variety of tomato, the “pomodoro di Sorrento”, being typical products of the area. Sometimes, also oregano can be added, fresh or dry.

Interestingly enough, the Oxford English Dictionary includes only the definition of this latter food; in fact, it defines the term caprese as “an adjective denoting a salad of mozzarella cheese, tomatoes, and fresh basil”.

Written by **Vittoria Massaro**

Arancina or Arancino



It is said that food always brings people together, but what happens when it leads to inner divisions in a country?

It is the case of the Sicilian delicacy called arancina/o whose name is strongly disputed throughout Italy, but before we even discuss controversies due to the name of the dish, some curiosities about the origins and its preparation have to be provided.



The arancina is a rice dish made up with boiled rice, which, after being seasoned with saffron, is used to make little balls that can be filled with different ingredients. Only after having given the round shape to the rice, it is breaded and fried. Its origins probably date back to the period of the Arabic domination in Sicily (IX-XI A.D.) when Arabs used to eat little rice balls (hence the round shape of the dish) with lamb meat, which even today, together with tomato sauce and mozzarella, is one of the most common ingredients of Sicilian arancino. Several other ingredients, however, can be used to fill these delicious rice balls such as spinach, aubergines, ham, salami, seafood and more.

With regards to the composition of the dish, it has to be highlighted that in the *Dizionario siciliano-Italiano* by Giuseppe Biundi (1857) the arancina is described as a sweet dish, which is partially true bearing in mind that nowadays it is possible to find sweet arancine made up with rice and cocoa and filled with cream, chocolate or black cherry. In order to recognize different flavours, different shapes can be used; in fact another form largely widespread for arancine, besides the ball, is the cone. The choice of one shape rather than the other can be related to different regions of the island; indeed the arancini that are produced in the Eastern part of Sicily tend to have a conical shape rather than spherical.

But now let's move on the name of this delicious food.

If you have paid attention you have surely noticed that until this moment the two forms arancina and arancino, with their corresponding plural forms, have alternated. Why?

The name arancina comes from the Italian arancia, which means orange, a good quality fruit that is very common in Sicily. Arancina with the Italian feminine ending -a comes from the gender of the fruit, which differs from the orange tree, which is characterized by the masculine ending -o, namely arancio. The choice of this name is due to the shape and the colour of the dish which, made as a ball, acquires by means of the fry a vivid orange colour. The colour has probably been the reason for the birth of the other form of the name, which is arancino with the Italian typical masculine ending -o, due to the fact that in the Sicilian dialect 'orange', meant as a colour, is obtained by adding the suffix -inu, which is typically masculine (Salvatore C. Trovato, 2016).



The standardization of the dialectical expression arancinu has led to the masculine denomination of the dish, which nowadays coexists with the feminine form, although the latter is perceived as more correct and is preferred in written Italian. The masculine form is, however, frequently used in speech and it has become typical of some regions of the island such as those of Ragusa and Siracusa, but also in many other Italian areas. However, it may be generally said that the feminine form is more used in the Western part of the island while the masculine denomination is typically preferred in the East of Sicily.

Regardless of the gender issues, the point is that no matter how you want to name it, the stunning tastiness of this dish unifies all arancin* eaters.

Written by **Emanuela Ammendola**

Insalata Russa

 Food Term of the Week



Insalata Russa

One of the most famous salads in Italy is the insalata russa (Russian salad), known in Russian-speaking countries as Olivier salad (салат Оливье, salat Olivye).

There are different theories about its origins: the only thing they all have in common is that Russia is somehow involved.

Some experts say that the salad was prepared for the first time in a prestigious Muscovite restaurant by a French chef. Others think that it's called "Russian" because it was firstly made by Lucien Olivier during the French invasion of Russia. There is also an Italian origins' hypothesis: the salad was probably created in France by the Italian personal cooks of Catarina de' Medici, which moved there in the 16th century.



Linguistically, this famous salad takes different names, depending on the most valued theory about its origin and the version of the dish eaten in each country, so we have ruska salata (руска салата) in Bulgaria, Serbia and North Macedonia, insalata russa in Italy, salat Olivye (салат Оливье) in Russia and other post-Soviet countries, sallatë ruse in Albania, francuska salata in Croatia, salada russa in Portugal, white salad in Lithuania and the interesting American salad (Amerikan salatasi) in Turkey, probably coined during the Cold War period.

In Italy, especially in the south, the insalata russa is made during the Christmas period and it's considered a rich side dish.

The main ingredients of the modern "Russian salad" are: boiled potatoes, dill pickles, peas, eggs, carrots and boiled beef/chicken, all dressed with mayonnaise. It's very easy to prepare and it has to be eaten cold.

As they say in Russia: Приятного аппетита! (Prijátного appetita!, Buon appetito!)

Written by **Serena Mottola**

The Neapolitan “Danubio”



The Danubio (Italian for Danube) is a typical Neapolitan dish, which can be either sweet or salty. It is a leavened pie, made of several buns of “pan brioche” stuffed in different ways. The simplest explanation for its name is linked to the structure of its surface, which refers to the homonymous river, rippled by the waves.

Although the name seems to suggest a Central European origin, its history and diffusion are rooted in Naples. The story about the origins of the Danubio is quite controversial: some people say that it was invented by Mario Scaturchio's maternal aunt, whose origins were Austrian. The Scaturchios, famous Neapolitan confectioners, had moved to Naples from Calabria in search of fortune at the beginning of XX century.



In 1905 Giovanni, one of the ten Scaturchio brothers, opened a pastry shop in Naples, at 19, piazza San Domenico Maggiore. The pastry shop, already known for its “Pastiere”, “Babà”, “Sfogliatelle riccie”, “Roccocò”, “Struffoli” and “Susamielli Calabresi”, began to produce new pastries in the 1920s: the Strudel, the Sacher cake, and the “Buchteln”, a cake filled with plum and apricot jam, which was later Neapolitanized in “Briochina del Danubio” (Tiny Danubian brioche) and then in “Danubio”.

According to other sources, the Danubio had already appeared in Naples decades before, notably during the reign of the Bourbons. As a matter of fact, in 1768, King Ferdinand IV married Maria Carolina of Habsburg-Lorraine, who brought a group of Viennese chefs to court. As a consequence, the Austrian tradition merged with the Neapolitan one. Among the most renowned culinary products of the time there was a delicious pie, stuffed with ingredients such as salami and scamorza: basically, it was one of the many variations of what would become the Danubio. Indeed, this pie ideally represented the transformation of an ancient Austrian cake made of tiny buns stuffed with jam called "Danubiana" (in reference to the finest Hungarian flour it was made with), which was also known as "Brioche al pizzico" (pinched brioche).

This version of the Danubio is an extraordinary match of flavours that can accompany many dishes and be enjoyed on many occasions. Its special feature is the contrast between the sweetness of the brioche and the salty filling, creating a perfect combination of taste and goodness.

In the Neapolitan cuisine, it is baked on feast days and on special occasions, when it even stands up to challenge the undisputed supremacy of the "Casatiello". In its salty version, each bun contains a different ingredient (salami, cooked ham, bacon, sausage, provola, scamorza, that is the same ingredients of the Casatiello).

As with many other leavened cakes, such as the "Panettone", the Danubio also requires a long and laborious process that includes three leavenings at different stages of its preparation: the minimum time is 4 hours. Several experts agree that the best results are obtained by leaving the dough to rest in the refrigerator for 8-12 hours, as it happens with the brioche.

As far as the filling is concerned, the only limit is imagination: cherry, orange or berries jam, cream, chocolate, or a mix of different ingredients can be placed in each bun.

Picking the sweet or salty version is almost irrelevant for the dough, which is the same, regardless of the incorporation of a pinch of salt or sugar. The filling does the rest: the salty Danubio usually requires cold cuts and cheeses.

Among the current reinterpretations of this famous Neapolitan pie, it is worth mentioning the gluten-free and lactose-free sweet versions. The latter is a very fragrant leavened cake, made of several buns filled with chocolate, custard or jam. It is better to eat it warm: one can heat a portion for a few minutes in the electric oven at medium power before serving it. Each guest can pick one bun and eat it ... no cutlery is needed!

Written by **Valentina Russo**

Acquacotta – An Autumn Soup



Sometimes it can be very cold in Maremma, the name given to the Italian area between southern Tuscany and northern Lazio. Fierce winds frequently blow in this part of Italy at the end of November, and when this happens some reticent grandmothers, remembering the cold winters of their childhood (when huge fireplaces had to keep warm the whole room and stoves were essential), know that it is time to greet the season with a hot soup, which is called acquacotta.

Being a “poor” dish, literally meaning “cooked water”, it is no wonder that its ingredients are easy to find. This recipe was handed down by peasants and probably derives from the habit of the Italian cowboys, the *butteri*, of boiling the vegetables they found while driving their cattle. For this reason, the main ingredients are: potatoes, onions, garlic, olive oil, chicory and tomatoes. Variants can include carrots, beans and celery, as well as eggs, which add to the dish an elusive thickness in texture, and bacon, if one wants to give to the soup a strong robust flavour.

Bread, moreover, is a key feature. Since the summer brightness is over, the slightly failing light that is typical of the new season, makes the loaves acquire again their bulky shape, rich in crumbs. Cut in slices, the bread is laid carefully on the plate before the soup is poured, vanishing under a surface that is littered with gold and with the dark shapes of the cooked vegetables. It is a real pleasure, at the end of the meal, to taste the bread once it has been soaked into the soup; the wet slices have indeed absorbed all the different flavours of this dish, ranging from the slightly bitter chicory to the tasty potatoes, from the pungent onion to the sweet beans.



Even from an aesthetic point of view, the dish is rich in colours. Carrots break the monotony imposed by the green hues of the vegetables, as orange pebbles lost in this warm sea of jade. While the boiled potatoes, cut in pieces that have been caught in the spires of the chicory, look a little bit like rocks interspersed with seaweed, the tiny tomatoes seem reed crescents that have been laid on the bread. It is natural, then, to think of the cold starry nights that will be in store in the coming weeks, featuring a moon that can be often found casting a bright light above Maremma's landscape, whose flat shape reminds us of how in the past this part of Italy was known as a malevolent, dangerous marsh.

Given the cold autumnal weather, acquacotta pairs splendidly with a glass of red wine. After all, the fire-red shades of a Sangiovese, and the dark hues of a Montepulciano, seem naturally to match the colours of the season, whose orange and reddish tints can still be found flourishing in green areas and in the countryside. Since the world has not yet been plunged into winter's grey palette, let us enjoy the last golden and bright evenings of the season: a steaming dish of acquacotta seems perfect, then, to warm us up before the long nights that lead to Christmas.

Written by **Angelo Riccioni**

Chestnuts and Beans Soup



Many people in Italy are used to eating chestnuts, the autumn fruit par excellence, roasted or in the more typical version of castagne del prete. According to an ancient recipe from Irpinia (a territory mostly situated in the province of Avellino, in the Campania region), the latter includes cooking this autumn fruit in the gratai, special structures heated constantly for fifteen days with the aim to dry chestnuts; subsequently, these are roasted in very hot ovens, which provide an intense flavour. Since this process results in the fruit becoming dry and stringy, the last phase of the preparation consists in immersing chestnuts in water to re-hydrate them without altering their taste. Ready to be consumed or eaten later, even in the sweet version of the well know marron glacé, chestnuts are the basic ingredient for many succulent desserts. However, they are also ideal for various savoury recipes.

In these rainy and cold autumn days nothing more than a seasonal dish can warm up our bodies and souls. With its ancient tradition typical of Irpinian culinary knowledge, the zuppa di castagne e fagioli (chestnut and bean soup) can be the solution to chilly hearts and minds. The territory of the province of Avellino is renowned for its long tradition of chestnut cultivation, especially in the areas of the Monti Picentini and the Alta Valle del Sabato. In these areas, chestnuts, together with hazelnuts, are among the most typical products. Chestnuts and hazelnuts are symbolic products, very rooted into the territory, and for centuries, in addition to supporting the economy, they have been part of the basic food intake for the population. In particular, in the past chestnuts were considered the food of the poor, as they were mostly consumed by less privileged people. At the beginning of the harvest period, starting in autumn, every single home had its own chestnut reserve. Thanks to their high nutritional value, people considered chestnuts as meat substitutes, since not everyone could afford the latter. In addition, chestnut flour – hence bread and pasta – was made with the fruits that could not be sold. This highly versatile fruit was used in a thousand other dishes to feed the whole family all the year round. Nowadays, anyone who pays a visit to the various Chestnut Festivals in the province of Avellino notices that one of the main dishes based on this fruit is the zuppa di castagne e fagioli, the chestnut and bean soup.

This consists of a tasty and nutritious course created with the intent to warm up the long and cold Irpinian days that in this area begin in early autumn. This soup is a savoury recipe, easy to prepare and effective in satisfying the palate pleasantly. First of all, being chestnuts the main ingredient, premium varieties should be chosen; among these, Irpinian high-quality chestnuts are: the “Castagna di Montella PGI”, the “Castagna di Serino”, the “Marrone di Santa Cristina”. These are used not only to make excellent soups, but also for exquisite and seasonal jams.



The original recipe, for 8 people, is made with the following ingredients:

- 500g chestnut
- 300gr beans
- 1 garlic clove
- 1/2 decilitre of olive oil
- parsley
- rosemary, to taste
- salt, to taste

The first step involves boiling the chestnuts and removing their inner peel. Then, overnight-soaked beans can be cooked in a separate pot where oil, garlic, parsley, rosemary and salt are added according to taste. Halfway through cooking chestnuts can be poured into the pot and hot water can be added if necessary. Bring everything to complete cooking and serve while it is still hot. Over the years, the soup has undergone a number of variations, so there are also versions enriched with dried mushrooms or pork, or even both for gluttons, as well as with homemade bread croutons.

The chestnut and bean soup from Avellino recalls past times. It brings to the memory the smoke of a hot dish that can warm up the cold, grey, and rainy winter days. Eating it in this period may help to add warmth and flavour to our days.

Written by **María Lucía Carrillo Expósito and Carmen Serena Santonocito**

Struffoli, a traditional Neapolitan festive dessert



Struffoli, along with mustaccioli, susamielli, roccocò and raffioli are a classic dessert of Neapolitan cuisine at Christmastime. According to the popular belief, these fried balls of honey-drenched dough, crunchy on the outside and light inside, are symbolic of money, and eating them would bring prosperity in the new year. They represent a moment of pleasure which usually ends the meals of Neapolitan families during the holiday season, when one portion leads to another, often accompanied by a good glass of dessert wine or prosecco, while playing tombola and card games. They are also mentioned by the contemporary Neapolitan writer and poet Erri de Luca in his book *Tre Cavalli*, and by the nineteenth-century novelist Matilde Serao, who described struffoli as “the delight of the Neapolitan crowd at every party”, giving them also a “literary glory”.

Despite being a symbol of Neapolitan Christmas, struffoli were not invented in Naples for they were imported from the Greeks, when Neapolis was still part of Magna Graecia. There are a couple of theories about the origin of their name: some state that the term derives from the Greek word *strongoulos* (στρογγύλος), which means “round in shape”, referring to the shape of the cooked dough pieces, and even today, Greek people prepare a very similar dessert, but made with more elongated shaped balls, called *loukoumades*. According to another theory, the word derives from the Italian verb *strofinare* which means “to rub together”, and refers to the act of rolling out pieces of dough into a long, thin rope shape before cutting it into small balls; others believe that struffolo is called in this way because it “rubs” the palate in the sense that it tickles, for his goodness.

This traditional Christmas dessert is made not only in Naples, but also in other regions of Central and Southern Italy, where it goes by several different names: in Sicily, for example, the word loses an “f”, becoming strufoli; in the regions of Lazio, Molise, Abruzzo and Umbria, in central Italy, they are known as cicerchiata for the shape of the balls being very similar to that of cicerchie (grass peas), while they are called purceddruzzi in Puglia and turdiddi or cicirata in Calabria. Similar dishes in other cultures are the croquembouche, a French dessert consisting of choux pastry puffs piled into a cone and bound with threads of caramel, the piñonate, a sweet from the village of Jimena in Andalusia based on anise, lemon and honey, and the already mentioned loukoumades in Greece.



The recipe of struffoli became popular thanks to the convents of Croce di Lucca and S. Maria dello Splendore, where nuns prepared and offered them as a Christmas gift to all those noble families who, during the year, had distinguished themselves for their sense of charity and piety. A first recipe was provided by Antonio Latini, who during the 16th century mentioned them in his culinary treatise, using the expression “struffoli alla Romana”. While in the past they were kneaded and fried with lard, currently it is common to use butter and sesame oil. Making struffoli is not difficult if you have two main ingredients: love and time. First you make the dough, then cut the dough balls and fry them. Once cooked and cooled, the dough balls can be stored at room temperature in a tightly sealed tin or container for up to one week.

When you are ready to assemble struffoli, all that will be left to do is warm the honey in a pot, and spread it on the dough balls. Some families prefer to bake them in order to cut down the number of calories and make the recipe “healthier”. They can be served into a wreath, a pyramid or mound on a large platter, in small paper muffin cups or even in a Christmas-themed shaped cake pan (such as a Christmas tree). There are different ways to flavour them, but the traditional one is to mix the fried balls in honey with diavulilli (nonpareils sprinkles), Italian confetti (sugared almonds, comfits) and candied citrus peel. Other popular decorations include cinnamon, nuts and glacé cherries.

Finally, a sweet curiosity: in Naples, the recipe is handed down from grandparents to grandchildren and people usually prepare large quantities of these honey balls for friends and family. When one visits relatives during Christmastime, a platter of struffoli is often given as a gift to spread holiday cheer and in keeping with the spirit of Christmas as the season of giving.

Written by **Carolina Iazzetta**

Sfogliatella



The sfogliatella is perhaps the most representative dessert of Neapolitan confectionery and comes in two main variations: the riccia, “curly”, shell-shaped, based on puff pastry, and the frolla, dome-shaped, based on shortcrust pastry. The filling, with its characteristic scent of vanilla and cinnamon, consists of semolina, sweetened ricotta, sugar and candied citrus.

Like many other delicacies, the origins of the sfogliatella are lost in a distant past, when history often intertwines with legend, and are to be found in the kitchen of a convent where the nuns used to make tempting delicacies, especially during the visits of special guests. Legend has it that in 1600, in an ancient village on the Amalfi Coast, there was a monastery of Benedictine nuns. One day, a nun named Clotilde mixed some leftover semolina with ricotta cheese, dried fruit and lemon liqueur, then covering the dough with two sheets of pastry closed in a cone shape, to remind the Monk’s hood. With great surprise, this sweet, which was called Santarosa, after the name of the monastery, turned out to be a real delight.



But for the sfogliatella to land in Naples, you have to wait two centuries, that is, the early 1800s, when Pasquale Pintauro, an innkeeper working in Toledo Street, having had the opportunity to taste the Amalfi specialty, decided to turn his business into a confectionery workshop and to reinterpret the recipe, eliminating cream and black cherry, and thinning the puff pastry: the sfogliatella was born. According to a different version of the story, the mentioned artisan was from Sorrento and the novice was his daughter, a “Mata Hari” ante litteram, who infiltrated the religious order to steal the coveted recipe.

However, other accredited sources provide quite different information: no longer in the 17th century but in the Renaissance, not in Naples but in the capital, not an innkeeper or pastry chef, but a renowned cook, at the service of Popes and cardinals, Bartolomeo Scappi. Indeed, his cookbook *Opera dell'arte del cucinare* mentions sfogliatelle and both the ingredients and the process described in detail leave no doubt as to the identity of the dessert. But it doesn't end there because, according to some scholars, the origins of the ‘curly cake’ date back to the second millennium BC and would be due to some votive practices in honour of Cybele, with the aim of aiding fertility. During the rites, which took place in the crypt of Piedigrotta, in Naples, young Vestals would offer to the goddess triangular-shaped breads which were reminiscent of the female reproductive organ.

Ultimately, whether it came from sacred or pagan hands, the sfogliatella has conquered the palate of all Neapolitans and not only, also as a result of its unmistakable scent of vanilla, cinnamon and orange blossom that, from the cafes and bakeries, spreads through the streets and alleys of the city. No wonder, then, that these places are always crammed with people, nor that the same long queues are found in front of similar shops in New York, Chicago or Buenos Aires.

Enjoyed at breakfast, together with a coffee or cappuccino, or at the end of a lunch, the sfogliatella is a real “ritual”, a moment of undisputed pleasure and perhaps it is precisely because of its “side effects” on good humour that it is often mentioned, in familiar language, metaphorically: the service of a judicial act, an unexpected fine, a fee, is compared to a “sfogliatella”. If there is no apparent connection between the nuisance and the sweet, it is also true that, by oxymoronically associating the image of a delicacy with that of a bother, the person's annoyance is somehow unconsciously “sweetened”. After all, the great Neapolitan playwright and actor Edoardo De Filippo used to say that “sfogliatella lifts you up when your heart is down”.

In conclusion, the sfogliatella, which currently enjoys the P.A.T. (Traditional Agrifood Product) label, is one of the symbols of Neapolitan gastronomy and never ceases to inspire chefs and confectioners: in addition to the coda di aragosta (the “lobster tail”, an elongated sfogliatella filled with chocolate or chantilly cream) and the santarosa (with black cherry), lately the sfogliacampanella is dominating the shop windows, a bell-shaped sfogliatella, also called Vesuvius, containing a half baba inside, while some artisan bakery also try to offer alternative ingredients, such as pistachio or berries.

Because of its main ingredients – puff pastry and filling – the sfogliatella vaguely resembles some desserts typical of other countries, like the Turkish baklava and the French millefeuille, but its taste and aromas make it unique and special, to such an extent that a popular saying celebrates it like this: “Napule tre cose tene e belle: ‘o mare, ‘o Vesuvio e ‘e sfogliatelle”, namely, “Naples has three beautiful things: the sea, the Vesuvius and the sfogliatella”!



Written by **Lucia Golino**

Cassata



Sicilian cassata as we know it today has nothing to do with the culinary saying “the simpler the better”. This tempting Baroque cake, which is prepared only in a few households as the majority prefers to leave it to the skilled hands of experienced confectioners, owes its existence to the millennial foreign dominations that have weaved Sicilian history.

The origins of the word cassata spread through alternating phases of colonization and fruitful blends of cultures and traditions, and are blurred by oral transmission and an irresistible legendary flavour. Its etymological derivation has been originally traced back to the 9th-century Arab occupation of Sicily; more precisely, to the word *qas'at* that referred to the round pan used to shape a cake made of ricotta cheese and sugar. Other sources attribute the derivation to the word *quesada*, a Spanish designation for Catalan culinary specialities made of cheese, coming directly from *caseus*, the Latin for cheese. Since the Arabs began their occupation centuries before the Spanish dynasties, it seems likely that the word cassata has Arabic roots while over the centuries it began to incorporate also Spanish influences.

This intermingle is also reflected in its recipe. Originally, as confirmed by the Sicilian-Italian dictionary by Mortillaro Vincenzo published in 1853, cassata was a rather simple pastry made of dough stuffed with sugared ricotta cheese and, occasionally, with candied fruit and chocolate chips. This constitutes what is nowadays called *cassata al forno*, baked cassata. The dough is made of *pasta frolla crust*, an Italian kind of pie dough, which is simpler to obtain and explains why most Sicilians prefer this *al forno* version to the homemade variant. However, as pastry making and wealth increased in the island, aged nuns replaced the old Arab recipe with a surface and side decoration made of *pasta martorana*, a marzipan obtained from the mixture of almond flour and sugar, eventually green-coloured with herbal extracts.

In the following centuries, the Spaniards brought to Sicily the recipe of the so-called pan di spagna, sponge cake, while sugar icing and elaborate coloured decorations of marzipan were sprinkled during the Baroque age. This gradually came to form the uncooked version of cassata that is currently served in restaurants and sold in almost every Sicilian confectionery.



Even if in past times this delicacy was the delight of Easter festivities, today this magnificence of layered liqueur-soaked sponge cake and sweetened ricotta cheese, candied fruit and chocolate, surrounded by green marzipan and decorated with garnishes of marzipan fruits and flowers, can be found all the year around. Among many other elements, cassata also testified to the closeness and prosperity of the two monotheistic religions in the island: indeed, historical documents show the cake was made by both nuns for Easter and Sicilian Jews for Purim. There is also a 16th-century veto from the city of Mazara del Vallo prohibiting its making at the monastery during the Holy Week because the nuns preferred to bake and eat cassata than pray. From its simplest version to the latter, more elaborate and solemn, cassata is believed to encompass the inner Sicilian soul that roams freely from the goodness of humble origins and genuine raw ingredients to the refinement of Baroque intricacy.

As with all preparations that carry the same name through time, there is no doubt that cassata became different things in different eras and places. Within Sicily, apart from the distinction between the two variants, cassatelle di Sant'Agata are small dome-shaped cakes that imitate St. Agata's breasts: this individually-sized cake is a tribute to the martyrdom of the Saint, who is the patron of the Eastern city of Catania

In recent times Sicilian cassata has inspired many curious re-adaptations. In the US, Italians who immigrated at the turn of the 20th century spawned a whole new variety of cassata, from versions spiked with chocolate and coffee to some – like the fruity one popular in Cleveland – made without ricotta cheese. In Australia, cassata is an ice confectionery sold in individual portions; it resembles the Neapolitan re-interpretation of the Sicilian cassata for its small shape and its colours: pink, green and white, this ice cake is made of a pink layer in the centre obtained through soaking and flavouring with a cherry liqueur, and two layers sprinkled with candied-fruit.

Whichever version of the cassata has sparked your curiosity, make sure a taste of this twisting and sweet history rests in your mouth and sates your appetite.

Written by **Carmen Serena Santonocito**

Friarielli



Italy offers a wide range of vegetables throughout its twenty regions and many of them can have a different name according to their region of origin. This is the case, for example, with friarielli, as we call it in Campania. It is a green cruciferous vegetable characterised by its bitter tasting stem and leaves. In other regions people call it rapini (Tuscany), cime di rapa (Apulia), broccoletti (Rome), mazzareddi (Sicily) or pulezze (Valdichiana). However, never try to compare it to any other kind of similar greens, because “friarielli is just friarielli!”

In Naples this food is actually very widespread and beloved; recently even a hymn of praise has been written by Francesco Andoli, deputy editor of the online newspaper *Identità Insorgenti*. In this short dialogue someone tries to define friarielli by comparing it to something else, but every definition turns out to be unsatisfactory to the other speaker who concludes with a sort of personification of “the friariello” (singular for friarielli): “The friariello doesn’t look like anybody. The friariello doesn’t speak Italian. The friariello is native and self-sufficient. The friariello is Neapolitan and the sausage... knows it all!” (translated from Neapolitan). This reference to the familiarity between friarielli and sausages is not random, for if it is true that friarielli can be cooked and eaten with meat in general, the combination sausages-friarielli is considered to be a perfect culinary marriage, something almost sacred. Indeed, as a traditional Neapolitan saying goes, “a sasiccia è ‘a mort’ d’e friarielli” (literally meaning “sausage would die without friarielli”), which underlines that they are meant for each other.



For the reader's sake, here follows a traditional recipe reported in The New York Times, which shows the extent to which this typically Mediterranean food is now also well known overseas:

Broccoli Rabe (Friarielli)

Time: 20 minutes

4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil;

2 or 3 garlic cloves, peeled and slivered;

3 or 4 dried chilies;

2 pounds broccoli rabe, trimmed of stalks over 1/8 inch thick, washed and left wet;

Salt and pepper.

1. Put oil in a skillet over medium-low heat and add garlic and chilies. When they sizzle and garlic begins to color, add broccoli rabe all at once.

2. Cook, stirring occasionally, until broccoli rabe is very tender, 10 to 15 minutes; if stalks are thick, you may have to add a few tablespoons of water to let them cook all the way through, but keep this to a minimum. Remove chilies before serving, if you like.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings.

(The New York Times, Aug. 29, 2007)

Among the other European countries, friarielli (or something like it) can be also found in Portugal (grelas de nabo) and in the Galicia region of northwestern Spain, in particular in the town of As Ponte where every February the so-called Feira dos grelos is celebrated. Even in China, kai-lan (芥兰) could be considered the brother or the sister of friarielli. Well... ok, maybe its cousin!

As for the etymology of friarielli, there are two different schools of thought. On the one hand, the term could derive from the Castilian expression frio-grelas (winter broccoli); on the other one, it could simply stem from the Neapolitan verb frijere (to fry). The latter is very likely to be true, also because, even though some national and international recipes tell us to boil or blanch it, the only possible way to cook friarielli is just by sizzling it! But be careful, because just this aspect, linked to the verb "to fry" (friggere in Italian), leads many people to confuse friarielli with friggitelli. The latter refers to small sweet peppers which are generally fried and eaten with meat or pasta; whereas friarielli ...is just friarielli.

So the Friariello, almost always accompanied by its faithful consort the Sausage, is definitely the king (or the queen, if you want) of the Two Sicilies' vegetables. However, despite its irresistible and unique flavour, the Friariello has a spiteful disposition and very often it is ready to sneak into our teeth and ruin our best smiles! But we can forgive it, because friarielli... is friarielli.

Written by **Antonio Leo**

Arrosticini



Arrosticini are a true emblem of the culinary tradition of Abruzzo, a region in central Italy stretching between the Appennines and the Adriatic Sea. The original indigenous name of this dish is rustill, rostell or arrostell, all dialectal variants of the Italian word arrostelli, which in the 1960s converted into arrosticini, following the commercial Italianisation of the product.



Although they are apparently simple meat skewers, Abruzzo's arrosticini are the result of a long history and of a specific culinary tradition. They most likely date back to the end of the 19th century, born as shepherds' food during transhumance and therefore considered an ancient, "poor" and pastoral dish, still to be found today in the mountainous and hilly areas of the region. As the term suggests, these skewers are roasted over a charcoal brazier – never on the electric grill – which is one of the typical features of their preparation.

Also the brazier, called *fornacella* or *canalina*, is very peculiar with its characteristic elongated canal-shaped form. Without this method of cooking and equipping, it is very difficult to obtain the typical *arrosticini* flavour. Moreover, what makes them different from other skewers commonly available in Italy is the type of meat used and the way in which it is cut. The original version of Abruzzo's *arrosticini* is the one that uses sheep meat or mutton. In the handmade variety, the most valued, the meat is cut with a knife into irregular chunks of various sizes, and layers of very lean meat are interspersed with small pieces of sheep fat, which help the meat resist cooking while remaining soft and succulent. Those of industrial manufacture, on the other hand, are easily recognisable because they are mass-produced and perfectly cut into 1 cm cubes, but are still very good. In recent years, even liver *arrosticini* have begun to spread. In this case, the piece of meat is mingled with a laurel leaf or a slice of onion to make the meat taste less strong.



Arrosticini cool very quickly, so they are never served in plates or trays: to keep them warm they are brought to the centre of the table in bundles of about 20-40 pieces – depending on the number of diners – wrapped in tin foil or in special terracotta containers, just like bunches of flowers. The only side dish to *arrosticini* is homemade bread toasted on the same brazier and seasoned with salt and extra virgin olive oil from Abruzzo. As a drink, a good Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, the region's red wine, is preferred or, as still in use in more traditional trattorias, some red house wine diluted with soda (*gassosa*). The usual serving for a hungry stomach is ten pieces – fifteen for very strong appetites – but there are stories of legendary creatures that have taken out as many as 140 of them at once.

Last but not least, mind the way you eat them! Don't even think of using a fork in the clumsy attempt to pull the meat off the stick, but simply rely on your teeth: hold the skewer with your right hand, grip a piece of meat firmly with your teeth and simultaneously draw the stick towards the right. Repeat the procedure for each chunk of meat. Don't worry about looking too wild or getting your face dirty and greasy, because that's the traditional way!

It is also customary to cook and consume the arrosticini outdoors, surrounded by nature on excursions, trips to the mountains or similar situations. They are likewise popular in country fairs and festivals as a juicy and practical street food. Nowadays, thanks to large-scale marketing, this typical Abruzzi dish has become a highly sought-after street food from Rome to Milan, as well as in London and New York. But for the raw material and the equipment, the preparation and the way in which they are cooked and served, the best place to taste arrosticini is definitely Abruzzo. Don't forget to bring a nice bunch of friends, the ultimate ingredient for a perfect arrosticini night!

Written by **Raffaella Sciarra**

Maritozzo



Either stuffed with whipped, fresh, and sweetened cream or filled up with salty dressing, maritozzo is a local treasure almost as ancient as Rome. Maritozzo is the name of a sweet bun whose origins date back to Ancient Rome when women used to prepare loaves for their husbands who stayed far from home all day. A loaf was put into the men's saddle bags who ate it when taking a break from their work in the fields. Flour, eggs, butter, honey, and salt were the main ingredients of the dough, which was sometimes enriched with dried fruits.



This tradition was passed on from generation to generation. It seems that in the Middle Ages, during Lent, women prepared a slightly different version of these loaves: smaller, made with oil instead of butter, and with the addition of pine nuts, raisins, and candied fruits. Today's maritozzo is likely to derive from this traditional Lenten cake, one among the few Catholics were allowed to eat in this period of prayer and fasting. As a matter of fact, Lent is for Catholics a transitional period that starts immediately after Carnival and lasts 40 days during which fasting is demanded so as to prepare body and soul to the celebration of Easter. Notwithstanding this, a day called "Mid-Lent" was established when people could temporarily stop their abstinence from consuming certain foods; thus, some special cakes came up in each Italian region and maritozzo was the one peculiar to Lazio, especially Rome.

Nowadays, maritozzo is served either with sweet or salty dressing: the classic one is stuffed with whipped cream, but you can taste it also with ice cream, especially in summertime. Instead, the most popular savoury option is maritozzo filled with burrata (creamy cheese made from mozzarella) and anchovies.



There are several stories concerning the origins of the name of this sweet bun. Romans called it “er santo maritozzo” (literally, “the holy maritozzo”) and legend has it that on the 1st of March – that was a sort of Valentine’s day – young lovers used to give one to their girlfriends, often with a ring hidden inside: a gift for their brides-to-be. In fact, the word ‘maritozzo’ is an affectionate form of the Italian word for husband, marito.

Adone Finardi, instead, in his short poem in six cantos *Li maritozzi che se fanno la Quaresima a Roma* (“Maritozzi that are made in Rome for Lent”, 1851), narrates the deeds of two rival kings, Mari and Tozzi, and their soldiers. The two kings are longstanding enemies and end up fighting each other: Passerina (raisin), Fiore (flour), Cannito (candied fruits), Legna (firewood), Acqua (water), and Forno (oven) fight in king Mari’s army while Pignolo (pine nuts), Zibibbo (that is the name of a sweet wine), Zuccaro (sugar), and Lievito (yeast) are at the service of king Tozzi. Lately, Mari and Tozzi decide to put an end to their war: Pignolo and the brave warrior Passerina fall in love and get married, while the kings decide to immortalize the event. They proclaim they will reward anyone who creates something that can be passed on to the next generations: so a cook invents some pastries kneading flour, sugar, water, and yeast, then adding raisins, zibibbo, and candied fruits. Finally, he bakes the pastries in a wood-burning oven and calls them after the two kings’ names: Mari+Tozzi.

Whatever the origin of the name, maritozzi are still very popular today and people love having it in the morning with an espresso or a cappuccino. Moreover, a Roman culinary association established the maritozzo day some years ago, an event where it is possible not only to taste maritozzo in its endless variations, but also to contribute to special fundraising.

Written by **Alberta Boschi**

Delizia al Limone



A pastry from Campania, between lemons and sighs

The arrival of the summer provides the perfect occasion to talk about a dessert that, due to its origins and freshness, reminds you of the summer months. Although the delizia al limone – literally “lemon delight” – does not boast such an ancient and complex history as that of the Neapolitan babà and pastiera, it has quickly become one of the most typical and loved pastries of the Campania region cuisine. More precisely, the delizia al limone originates in the area of two famous Southern Italian coasts – the Amalfi and the Sorrento coasts. These are lands full of colours, smells and flavours that can be found in this small dome-shaped sponge cake.



The name of this dessert is very simple – although the same cannot be said of its laborious preparation – and evocative: the term delizia (delight) indicates a “feeling of very great pleasure” (Collins Dictionary) that can refer to all the senses – just think of the expression “a delight for the eyes and the palate”. The lemon, on the other hand, is the undisputed but delicate protagonist of the delizia al limone, “because it is the lemon aroma that is dominant without imposing itself”, as Machado and Prete point out. How could it be otherwise, given the fame of the juicy lemons from the Amalfi and Sorrento coasts?

The delizia al limone was invented in 1978 by the pastry chef Carmine Marzuillo who worked in the prestigious hotel Parco dei Principi in Sorrento (other sources, however, state that Marzuillo presented it for a culinary competition held in Formia) and, since then, his workshop in Viale Nizza has hosted important pastry chefs interested in discovering the secrets of the preparation of a pastry that has become the symbol of Sorrento all over the world. In addition, it seems that its success has greatly influenced the local economy, because lemons – being previously used only as a disinfectant or seasoning – began to be grown in Sorrento for the production of limoncello or precisely for the delizia al limone.

Regarded as one of the cakes par excellence for weddings, and in general for festive occasions, for its taste and shape the delizia al limone comes as a sponge cake – or a small dessert – topped with a white icing, soaked with a limoncello-based syrup, covered and filled with cream made of milk, flour, egg yolk, sugar, whipping cream and, obviously, lemon.

Furthermore, it is noticeable that the preparation of the delizia al limone crosses over with that of another Southern confectionery specialty, the sospiro (“sigh”), which is a soft and round sponge cake stuffed with cream. The sospiro is originally from the city of Bisceglie, in Apulia, but there are numerous variations even in Southern Italy. According to a legend, the recipe has been circulating since the fifteenth century, when the poor Clare nuns made the so-called sospiretti delle monache (“nuns’ little sighs”).

They were also prepared for the wedding of Lucrezia Borgia, the much-discussed noblewoman of the Italian Renaissance, with a certain Count of Conversano. While they were waiting for the bride, who never arrived, the guests ate and sighed over these small cakes. Another legend says that a young lover invented the sospiri by reproducing the breasts of his beloved: in this case, the shape recalls the round female breast that caused the men’s sighs. The original recipe included the addition of a drop of rosolio, the rose liqueur, nowadays replaced with lemon to give freshness. This brings us back to our delizia al limone: a single portion of this pastry also has the shape of a breast, on which a caramelized lemon or a small strawberry is placed on top in addition to a tuft of whipped cream.

The delizia al limone, which can now be found in all the pastry shops in the Campania region in different sizes, has been personalised by great chefs. Among these, the famous Sal di Riso stands out: for his delizia al limone, he has chosen precisely the famous, sweet and aromatic lemons from Amalfi.

Written by **Nicla Mercurio**

Polacca Aversana



With the heat of summer, there is more desire for something sweet but fresh. In this respect, Italy has a record for sweets and ice creams for every season, and among the most classic sweets of the Italian and Neapolitan tradition to eat at temperature, we also find specialties that have a dough as simple as tasty. We are talking about the Polacca (literally “the Polish cake”), a typical cake of the city of Aversa that, although little known outside the territory of Caserta, has conquered anyone who has tasted it for the first time.

Often the origins of a dessert are shrouded in legend, probably because the recipe has only been transmitted orally over the years or perhaps because of the inspiration produced by the pleasant sensations that only desserts can give. The first legend tells that during the Middle Ages a nun from Poland, who lived in a convent in Aversa, gave the recipe for a cake, a typical sweet of her homeland, to a confectioner from Aversa and it was he who reworked it, creating two different cakes: a brioche (now known as a polacchina, literally “the little Pole”) and a cake; the second legend, however, tells of a visit to Aversa by a Polish queen, who was hosted in one of the convents of the city. The nuns made a cake with ingredients similar to the Central European taste, from which it seems that the “Polishness” came out. However, the most widespread of the legends tells us this cake owes its name to a Polish nun that in 1926 suggested the recipe to pastry chef Nicola Mungiguerra, who then reworked it and called it so.



The Polacca Aversana is made of a thin shell of dough, brioche-like, stuffed with plenty of custard studded with sour cherries in syrup. Simple ingredients and delicate flavours melt and enhance each other, thus conquering everyone. Some people appreciate the Polacca for the crunchiness of the sugar on the surface, for the softness of the dough, the silkiness of the cream, and the acidity of the sour cherries. The fact is that it is difficult to resist it. The list of admirers of this cake is long and varied. It is said that among the most famous lovers of this cake were the former President of the Italian Republic, Giovanni Leone, and Pope John Paul II, who tasted and appreciated it because it reminded him of the flavours of his land. In Aversa it is customary to eat it for breakfast or on Sundays, both in the form of a cake and as smaller single-portions called polacchine. The recipe of Polacca is really easy and simple to prepare

Ingredients for the dough

- 300 g Manitoba (strong) flour
 - 230-250 g flour 00
- 3-4 g dry brewer's yeast
 - 200 ml whole milk
 - 120 g butter
 - 2 medium eggs
 - 100 g caster sugar
 - grated lemon peel
 - 10 g salt

Ingredients for the custard cream

- 500 ml whole milk
 - 30 g flour 00
 - 4 egg yolks
- 100 g granulated sugar
- vanilla or lemon peel for flavouring
- sour cherries in syrup as required

Preparation of Polacca Aversana

Prepare the dough by kneading (by hand or in the mixer) the flour with the sugar, the lemon rind, and the eggs. Gradually add the yeast dissolved in warm milk and incorporate the soft butter one piece at a time. When the dough becomes elastic and well strung, add the salt. Transfer the dough into a floured bowl for about 2 hours or until the volume doubles.

Divide the leavened dough into two pieces, roll out the first one in a sheet a few mm thick giving it a circular shape. Prepare the custard. Stuff with the custard and sour cherries leaving the edges free. Close with a second disc of dough by sealing the edges well with the cake ring. If you prefer you can vary the recipe by adding chocolate chips or by replacing cherries with chocolate chips for the cream. Finally, bake the polacca in a static preheated oven at 180° for about 30 minutes, until the surface is golden brown. Once cooked, take the cake out of the oven and let it cool; if you wish, you can sprinkle it with icing sugar, and... enjoy!

Written by **Vincenzo Addio**

Mozzarella di Bufala Campana



“White gold”, “the queen of the Mediterranean cuisine”, “the pearl of the table” – this is how one of the most appreciated and finest delicacies of the Italian cuisine is commonly known.

Mozzarella di Bufala Campana delights the senses from first sight to last bite. Its porcelain white colour, its smooth surface, its distinct aroma and organoleptic properties are its most appreciated features. Made from Italian water buffalo milk, it is produced exclusively in the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) area of Central and Southern Italy, primarily in Campania, which is arguably the country's most fertile agricultural region. This ubiquitous creamy cheese is not to be confused with its toned-down cousin made from cow's milk, known in Italy as fior di latte (literally “milk flower”). Mozzarella di Bufala Campana is richer in nutrients, with a higher protein and fat content than fior di latte; it is an easily digestible cheese, with a reduced content of lactose and cholesterol and a good mix of probiotics too! Last, but not least, it is the only mozzarella that has entered in the register of Protected Designations of Origin.

Mozzarella's Origins

The origins of mozzarella are directly linked to the introduction of the water buffalo in Italy, whose history is not well settled yet. The most likely theory, though, is that Asian water buffaloes (originally from Eastern India) were brought to Italy by Normans from Sicily around year 1000. However, the term Mozzarella comes from the Italian verb *mozzare* (literally “to cut”), referring to the way the cheese makers cut each ball by hand from the large mass of stretchy curd formed when the cheese is immersed in hot water and kneaded by hand. What's interesting is that the first document attesting its existence dates back to the year 1200, when the monks (not surprisingly!) of the monastery of San Lorenzo in Capua – in the countryside near Caserta – used to produce and offer pilgrims a piece of bread together with a cheese made from water buffalo milk called *mozza* or *provatura* (when smoked). But the term *mozzarella* as we know it appeared for the first time in the second half of the 16th century, in a famous six-volume treatise on cooking by Bartolomeo Scappi, cook at the Papal Court. At the end of the 18th century the Bourbons created the first buffalo farm within the Real Sito di Carditello, in the province of Caserta. The consumption of buffalo cheese spread significantly, and so did the number of buffaloes.

In his book *Contadini del Sud* (1954), a study on peasant culture in Southern Italy, Italian poet and writer Rocco Scotellaro reports that the *bufalaro* – the person in charge of breeding the buffaloes – used to treat these beautiful animals as if they were *cristiani* (“Christians”, which in a wider sense means “people” in Italian). He also gave them specific names, which usually recalled court characters: “Contessa” (Countess), “Monacella” (Young Nun), “A malatia” (The Disease), “Ncoppa a paglia” (On the Straw). Sometimes the names were transformed into real and funny mottos coming from animals’ behaviours: for example, “Chi comanda” (“The ruler”) was only a shortened form of the full expression “Chi comanda...non suda” (“The ruler... doesn’t sweat”).

Besides the typical well-known mozzarella ball, *Mozzarella di Bufala Campana* can come in other shapes as well: cherries, *bocconcini*, knots, braids, etc. In order to fully enjoy it, it is advisable to eat it the very same day it’s made. If not eaten immediately, it is best to keep it in a cool environment (10°/15°C) and in its own liquid. If stored in the fridge, before consuming it, leave it at room temperature for at least one hour; otherwise put it, for about 5 minutes, in hot water (35°/40°C), as the Consortium for the Protection of the *Mozzarella di Bufala Campana* suggests.



Mozzarella di Bufala Campana PDO can be enjoyed both as a cold dish (i.e., *caprese*, on salads), and in hot preparations (i.e., pizza, *parmigiana*, *mozzarella in carozza*). The best way to eat it, though, is in the raw. Stick a fork into the tender white ball and watch the juices stream out; its fresh, milky aroma of lactic ferments will wake up your taste buds. Then take a bite and surely “Mm-hmm. . .” will echo around the table.

What makes Italian *Mozzarella di Bufala Campana* PDO such a fantastic experience is the care and love that goes into every aspect of its production, from the animal wellness to the balls of milky cheese, travelling around the world cushioned in their own protective fluid and finally ending up on our tables. This is more than just a food; it becomes a pure act of love crafted with great care.

Buon appetito!

Written by **Estela Hamiti**

Pasta all'Amatriciana



Pasta all'amatriciana (or matriciana) is a typical dish served in Roman trattorias and taverns but it originally comes from the town of Amatrice, in the province of Rieti. Its main ingredients are basically three: pecorino cheese, pancetta (bacon) and tomato sauce. It seems certain that the addition of this latter element dates back to the end of the 1600s but there are many variations of the dish because a real recipe is difficult to trace.

In fact, it is a dish of peasant origin handed down mostly orally from generation to generation and, although several historical documents about amatriciana have survived, they are very often discordant. What is certain is that all the various additions provided by the various recipe books have enriched its flavour. However, in honour of the land that gave prestige to the amatriciana, here follows the recipe according to the tradition of Amatrice.

Pasta all'amatriciana originally had a white sauce and was called "pasta alla Gricia" (or Griscia, so-called after the town of Grisciano, near Amatrice). Centuries ago, the many shepherds who lived in the mountains surrounding Amatrice carried in their saddlebags the ingredients necessary for its preparation, including: pieces of bacon, pecorino cheese, lard, black pepper and dried pasta. Only later, with the seasonal shift of shepherds to the Roman countryside, was the tomato introduced in the preparation of the famous spaghetti all'amatriciana.



How to prepare Pasta all'Amatriciana?

Its recipe is based on a simple but at the same time meticulous preparation, both in the various steps and in the use of particular kitchen utensils, such as the iron pan used for cooking the sauce, essential to make an "authentic" matriciana:

- The real secret behind pasta all'amatriciana is the fat of the pancetta, the white and slightly pink part of the bacon. Pancetta, however, stands for guanciale, the ingredient that most of all connotes the amatriciana and which is obtained from the cured pork cheek and flavoured with a particular mix of spices. This needs to be cut into very fine and long strips, and never into cubes because you could risk hardening the lean part during cooking.
- The tomato sauce, on the other hand, must be made with fresh ripe tomatoes (casalino or San Marzano), cut into thin fillets, without seeds and left in a bowl with its juice. As for the pecorino cheese, another of the key ingredients of amatriciana, it is preferable not to use the Roman one as it is too salty and strong.
- The traditional recipe also does not include oil but a generous spoonful of lard to be heated over high heat strictly in the iron pan. Unlike common pans, in fact, the iron one is able to keep the flavour of the sauce unaltered.
- As soon as the lard has melted, you can add a whole red chilli pepper and the strips of bacon, to be mixed immediately using a wooden ladle. Lower the heat and wait a couple of minutes until the bacon has reached a golden-yellow colour: it is at this point that you have to stop the browning by adding the tomatoes with their juice.
- Cook for about 10 minutes, stirring the sauce from time to time and, after draining the cooked spaghetti, remove the chilli and pour the pasta into the pan with the sauce. Skip the pasta and gradually add the grated pecorino cheese that will serve as a binder with the other ingredients. At this point, your pasta all'amatriciana is ready to be served, but do not forget to add another final sprinkling of pecorino cheese.

The story goes that the merit of its diffusion is due to a courageous woman, a certain Anna De Angelis from Amatrice, who arrived in Rome with her "mappatella", a capable haversack used by wayfarers, which contained homemade and dried pasta, slices of cured pork, pecorino cheese and wild herbs. She immediately began to prepare the original version of bucatini (type of pasta) with her very modest means: the first to appreciate it were the passing gardeners, soon joined by many other citizens of Amatrice, enthusiastic about the good country flavours of the dish prepared by the "Amatriciana" (the woman coming from Amatrice). And despite the fact that the "matriciani" (the inhabitants of Amatrice in the Roman mispronunciation), like all strangers to the city, were disliked by the Romans (they used to say "a strange guy has arrived who looks like a matriciano"), this specialty in no time earned the consent of all gourmets. Over time, the tomato was added, and the bucatini all'amatriciana were renamed as the "5 P's dish": pasta, pancetta (bacon), pomodoro (tomato), peperoncino (chilli), and pecorino (sheep's milk cheese), to which in the Sixties Aldo Fabrizi, a very famous Roman actor, added a 6th P, with a witty remark in the Roman dialect: panza (the potbelly).

Written by **Teresa Bifulco**

Tiramisù



Tiramisù – Between Legends and Reality

Tiramisù is one of the most distinctive desserts of Italian pastry tradition. We can undoubtedly say that this is the most famous Italian dessert in the world: a cold dessert with a creamy and soft consistency, to be eaten with a spoon.

The recipe for this dessert is very simple: eggs, mascarpone cheese, sugar, ladyfingers (savoiardi) dipped in coffee and bitter cocoa powder. What is not so simple is determining with certainty which Italian area should be accredited with the creation of tiramisù because there are many Italian regions that claim its invention.



Some scholars trace its origin to Siena, in Tuscany, where in the 17th century the Sienese pastry chefs prepared it to celebrate the greatness of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo de Medici, during his visit to the city. Therefore, the dessert was called zuppa del duca (literally, “the Duke’s soup”) in his honour. This story reports that the nobles of the Grand-Duchy attributed exciting properties to it and therefore began to call it tiramisù, which literally means “lift me up / cheer me up”.

Others believe that it was created in Turin, Piedmont, in the 19th century by a renowned pastry chef who decided to dedicate it to Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour, to support him in the difficult job of the unification of Italy.

According to other sources, the Venetian origins of this dessert date back to the 20th century. In a restaurant in Treviso, called Alle Beccherie, a pastry chef who had worked in Germany is said to have created it, drawing inspiration from Bavarian desserts.

Actually, Treviso is known as the capital of tiramisù since it has been hosting the Tiramisù World Cup since 2017 and has a Museum of Tiramisù. According to the Tiramisù Academy, the word tiramisù comes from the Treviso dialect Tireme su, literally “pull me up”. It seems that the name has a very energetic connotation, but there are also those who argue that it hides a more suggestive allusion, because of its apparent aphrodisiac effects. This legend has it that it was invented by a “maitresse” from a brothel in the centre of Treviso. The “Siora” who used to run the place began to offer this sweet with aphrodisiac properties to customers at the end of the evening in order to reinvigorate them and to help them with their marital duties when returning to their wives. It thus seems that Tireme su was a natural viagra dating back to the 19th century, served to customers in a brothel.

According to this legend, tiramisù became a simple and delicious dessert prepared in all Treviso houses, and was also called sbatudin: a creamy dessert initially made only of beaten egg yolks and sugar, served with crumbly biscuits, commonly eaten by the Treviso farmers and used as an “invigorator” by newlyweds. Many grandmothers prepared this dessert for their grandchildren and for this reason the original recipe does not include the use of liqueur, which was later added together with coffee, mascarpone cheese and cocoa powder, and that’s where the recipe begins to take the shape it has today.

Actually, there is certainly no trace of the tiramisù recipes before the 1960s. This leads us to assume that tiramisù, as is known today, is a relatively recent invention. Between legend and reality, a large part of Italy feels that they have contributed to the spread of the Italian dessert par excellence. In any case, we are all grateful to the mastermind who gave us this delight to the palate.



Recipe

Ingredients

- Lady fingers 300 g
- 4 eggs (very fresh)
- Mascarpone cheese 500 g
- Sugar 100 g
- Coffee from a mocha espresso machine (sweetened to taste) 300 g
- Bitter cocoa powder

Preparation

To prepare the tiramisù, you must first make coffee, sweeten it, and let it cool.

Then proceed with the fresh eggs: separate egg whites from yolks.

Whip the yolks with half the sugar.

When the mixture is light and fluffy, add the mascarpone cheese to obtain a cream and set it aside.

Beat and whisk the egg whites, pouring the remaining sugar, then add them to the yolks.

Once the mixture is ready, dip the ladyfingers for a few moments in the cold coffee, drain, and distribute at the bottom of a baking tray.

Spread three spoonfuls of mascarpone cream evenly on the biscuits, to obtain a first layer. Make a second layer of biscuits soaked in coffee and complete with the cream.

Level the surface and cover it with a sprinkle of bitter cocoa powder. Put it in the refrigerator for at least a couple of hours.

Your tiramisù is ready to be served.

Enjoy!

Written by **Valeria Cicala**

The Neapolitan Torrone



'O murticiell: the Neapolitan Torrone

Every year in the days before the 2nd of November the city of Naples, in Italy, teems with stalls selling many varieties of nougat known as torrone napoletano (Neapolitan torrone), which differs from the traditional nougat consumed all over the world.

Traditional nougat, in Italian torrone, takes its name from the Latin verb *torréo*, which means 'to toast' in relation to the dried fruit used in it. Indeed, the origins of this sweet date back to the Roman age in the Italian city of Benevento, but its evolution is strictly connected to the city of Cremona[1]. Traditional torrone is made with almonds, honey, and sugar (additionally, egg white), and is characterised by a rectangular shape that has been inherited by its Neapolitan version.

Neapolitan torrone, instead, is creamier and softer than the traditional one; it is made with cocoa as a substitute of honey, and a mix of white chocolate and nut cream. This creamy part is enriched with dried fruit, such as nuts and almonds, or candied fruit, coffee beans, puffed rice and many other ingredients, and it is covered with a harder part usually made of black chocolate. Neapolitan torrone is commonly cut into slices and served after a meal or to visiting guests during the period running from the end of October to the beginning of November.

This particular type of nougat has a gastronomic tradition that carries social and cultural associations to the mortuary cult in Naples. No wonder Neapolitan torrone is also known as *torrone dei morti* (literally 'nougat of the dead') or *murticiell* (the Neapolitan word for 'the little dead'), and its history is connected to the 2nd of November, when in contemporary Western Christianity the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, also known as All Souls' Day, is celebrated.

The story goes that in the past torrone used to be a gift for the dead: children were chosen to bring torrone to the dead as a way of brightening their afterlife journey. Others say that torrone was placed on the graves so that the dead could come back to visit their loved ones (it was not rare to find food on the graves in the past). It is not a coincidence that Neapolitan torrone has the typical shape of a coffin[2].

Many stories have been told about the tradition of Neapolitan torrone, like that of the ghost of a glutton child who appears during this period of the year to eat torrone in one of the most famous cafés in Naples: the Gambrinus. Located between “via Chiaia” and “Piazza del Plebiscito” square, it offers different variants of torrone, including a version called Conte Dracula, which is covered with dark chocolate and filled with almonds and a red cream. Different flavours can also be found at Carraturo bakery, on “via Casanova”, among which a variant of the traditional hard nougat with honey, almond and black pepper. Other bakeries, saloons and chocolate shops such as Gay Odin and Gallucci sell torrone for all tastes. One thing is sure: no matter where you buy it, no doubt you’ll lick your fingers.

Written by **Emanuela Ammendola**

Roccocò



Roccocò can be considered as the hardest and the most durable cake among all the Neapolitan Christmas cookies: it is a crunching rock monolith covered with a mixture of whole almonds made to last from Advent until Epiphany. It looks like a dark squashed doughnut, flavourful and crunchy, made of flour, sugar, candied fruit peels, almonds and a spice mixture called pisto, which is the real secret of each pastry chef. It is made of different amounts of nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon and coriander ground in a fine powder.

Roccocò is part of the range of cookies that usually enriches Neapolitan tables during this period of the year and it is one of the most appreciated, despite the fact that it can be very hard to break and chew. It is a real pleasure to see all those dry pastries disposed in colourful and tasty lines shown in every window shop of Neapolitan patisseries. The names of all those cookies fall down like an avalanche of sweetness: roccocò, mostaccioli, susamielli, struffoli, divino amore, raffioli, esse nasprata.

They are part of a big family of Italian pastries that the nuns once used to prepare in the nunneries all around the peninsula. In fact, for them was very easy to find many spices and exotics ingredients, thanks to the link between the monarchs of Naples with France and particularly due to the commercial exchanges with the Eastern merchants. Those pastries represented a great present for benefactors and authorities. Today they are the best way to end up a rich holiday lunch with a glass of Marsala or Vin Santo as an accompaniment, sometimes preferred to a liqueur or a glass of red wine, the way our grandparents loved to do in the past times.



The word Roccocò comes from the French word rocaille, which literally stands for an artificial rock and it also denotes the name of an ornamental style that reproduces natural elements. This is probably due to its shape similar to a stone or a shell, and its hard texture. However, even though, the two terms Roccocò and Rococò have the same origin, our delicious dry pastry is older than the artistic movement, born in France in the 18th century. In fact, the original recipe was conceived with a different name in 1320 by the nuns of the Real Convento della Maddalena in Naples, founded by Sancha d'Aragona, queen of Jerusalem and wife of King Carlo d'Angiò, to save young and poor girls from prostitution. Even if the nunnery was finally destroyed in 1955, nowadays all the bakeries and pastries in Naples produce tons of Roccocò to delight our senses, also in a soft version that shocks the purists of the tradition.

Since they are deeply rooted in their food culture, at Christmas time many Neapolitans love to arrange homemade Roccocò, filling their homes and the entrance halls with their delicious smell. For a sensational tasting in the name of tradition, there is nothing better than a stroll through the very throbbing city centre, looking at the colourful windows of celebrated patisseries. A few minutes walking from the area where the old Real Convento della Maddalena was located and this delicacy was created, you will find the old Pasticceria Carraturo at Porta Capuana, founded in 1837 and managed by the same family since then! Obviously, they keep on following the original recipe, by producing exclusively the tough Roccocò as the tradition demands. Another must-try is Di Costanzo in the Sanità district or the old Scaturchio at the Pignasecca.

Written by **Cristina Carraturo**

Crostata



The crostata: a typical Italian dessert

The crostata is a baked tart similar to a fruit-filled pie, composed of a base of short pastry, called pasta frolla, topped with a lattice crust, that is filled with jam, cream, fresh fruit or ricotta cheese. Because of its particular shape, it has been described as «a triumph of shells filled with jams, preserves and creams». It is traditionally consumed at breakfast, but it may be eaten at any time of the day, served as a dessert; moreover, this cake is usually homemade and baked in characteristic round moulds with knurled sides.

Its name derives from the Latin *crustata*, which means crust; the French term *croustade*, as well as the English *custard*, derived from it. This word appeared in the earliest Italian dictionaries, included in the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, and its earliest mentions can be found in old cookbooks, such as *Libro de Arte Coquinaria* («Book of the Art of Cooking») by Martino da Como, published in 1465, and in *Cuoco Napolitano* («Neapolitan Cook»), published in the late 15th century, containing a recipe titled *Crostata de Caso*, *Pane*, etc, that is «cheese crostata», «bread crostata», etc.

In the past, as a matter of fact, it was a meat or fish dish, baked in the oven in the form of a cake. In fact, in a well-known collection of Tuscan short stories, dating back to the last twenty years of the 13th century, the *Novellino*, written by an anonymous author, there is a reference to an «eel crostata» that a woman placed in a cupboard, but a mouse crawled in, so she cunningly thought of having her cat catch him and closed it inside. It happened, though, that when she opened the cupboard, the mouse jumped out running away, while the cat remained motionless, unable to move with its swollen belly, having eaten the whole hash! A savoury pie is still the focus of another literary work in which the two protagonists, a courtier and a parson, put on the table for their dinner a cat tart and a mice tart respectively, out of spite.

Actually, we have to wait until the year 1000 AD to find in Venice the first sweet recipe, with cane sugar that finally came from the Middle East, even if it seems that the cake has also Neapolitan origins, since many attribute this tasty dish to a nun from the convent of San Gregorio Armeno, in Naples: the strips of short pastry on the top remind the grates through which cloistered nuns attended religious services. Notwithstanding its humble beginnings, this dessert was a success and was even served to the royal Bourbons afterwards.

The crostata is very common not only in Italy but in many other countries, too, the recipes being quite similar and, most importantly, having in common the main ingredient, namely the shortcrust pastry. Some famous variants include the Austrian Linzer torte, the Spanish tart and the South American Pasta Frola de Dulce de Membrillo; the French Galette, too, could be somehow comparable to the crostata, even though the top is not covered with a lattice crust but with a series of concentric curved lines.



Although nowadays confectioners are constantly striving to experiment with different and original cakes, the crostata remains a classic of Italian pastry, much loved by children and adults alike, and the increasing number of variations proves, along with its high versatility, that this recipe is simply everlasting. Some well-known variations include peach, apricot, cherry or berries filling, and recently also Nutella.

Then, it is not surprising that an initiative was taken to create the National Crostata Day, which takes place every year on 9th September, in order to celebrate this delicacy.

Before concluding, it is worth mentioning the great French writer famous for his «search of lost time», Marcel Proust, because, in one of his works, he recalled the snacks he used to eat during picnics. Unlike his friends who preferred sandwiches, he used to eat only cakes and apricot crostate, and these latter, according to the author, had the peculiarity of being «chatty»: they talked about fresh fruit!

Written by **Lucia Golino**.

Chiacchiere



Carnival is what makes the period preceding Lent memorable all over the Italian peninsula. If it is true that every festivity in Italy has traditional delicacies that accompany it, Carnival is no exception. Indeed, culinary customs contribute to create the joys of celebrating each holiday by rediscovering food traditions and myths while satisfying even the most demanding palates.

Historically, Carnival marks a period during which Christian people tend to eat and party in excess prior to Lent. This excess is transposed in the culinary tendency of preparing Lucullan sweets, including fritters.

Deep fried and sprinkled with powdered sugar, sometimes even filled with flavoured custard, chiacchiere are considered one of the milestones of Carnival food in Italy. Every region has its own variation and, from the top to the last edge of the Italian boot, people call this temptation by different names. So, you may encounter bugie, lasagne, pampuglie, crostoli, sfrappole, chiacchiere, frappe, or sprelle, but rest assured that this crispy and tasteful delight can recall the festive spirit of Carnival from the first bite! The same range of variety also goes for the shapes these tasty treats are cut into. Some come into square, diamond or long and narrow rectangular shapes. Others are tied into a knot or twisted. A pastry wheel can be used to cut out the pieces, forming zigzag edges.

Some denominations of these crispy slices of dough have an onomatopoeic derivation, for the name suggests the brittle sound they make when people eat them. Other names highlight the indulgent merrymaking and gaiety of the Carnival period, when people enjoy – more than other times of the year – gathering, talking and revel in delicious food and beverages. A mixture of the previous etymologies links the name chiacchiere (Italian for 'chatters') to the crunchy noise people do while eating them. You should try! It sounds like chatter!

Traditionally, the origin of chiacchiere seems to date back to ancient Roman times, when the pastry frictilia marked the celebration of the Saturnalia, the ancient feast of the god Saturn, the equivalent of today's Carnival. These sweets were made with eggs and flour, then fried in lard. Frictilia – from Latin frictus, 'fried' – were considered a sweet for poor people, made in big quantities to be distributed to crowds celebrating in the streets.

However, we know how easily ancient customs can blur over the centuries by creating folkloristic and varied origins. In the case of *chiacchiere*, the recipe of ancient *frittulia* intermingles with a Neapolitan legend tracing the origins of these sweet crunchy pastries back to the wish of queen Margherita di Savoia. According to this version, the monarch asked her chef to make something special to offer to her guests during a light afternoon spent in *chit chat*. This could explain the name *chiacchiere*, namely chatter, *chit chat*, gossip. Bear in mind the plural form here, *chiacchiere*, because it is unthinkable to eat only a single *chiacchiera* and then walk away!

If you want to dispel any doubt about the impossibility of eating just one *chiacchiera*, this is one version of the many recipes you can find (highly depending on which part of Italy you visit!):

(Makes about 3 dozens)

- 3 cups (375 grams) all-purpose flour, plus more for rolling out the dough
- 1/3 cup + 2 tablespoons (80 grams) granulated sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons (4 grams) baking powder
- Pinch of salt
- 2 eggs
- 5 tablespoons (75 grams) butter, at room temperature and cubed
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2-3 tablespoons (35-50 ml) liquor (dry white wine, sweet Marsala, grappa)
- About 6 cups (1 1/2 litres) of oil for frying
- Powdered Sugar for dusting

Mix together the flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. On a board, make a well with the dry ingredients. Break the eggs into the centre, and gently whisk them with a fork to break the yolks. Add the vanilla extract, 2 tablespoons of the liquor and the butter. It is very important that the butter is very soft. With the fork, stir the flour mixture from the sides into the centre of the well until all the flour mixture has been mingled with the wet ingredients. When the ingredients form a homogenous ball, cover it with plastic wrap, and let it rest on the counter for 30 minutes.

On a lightly floured surface, roll out the dough to 1/8-inch thick (2-3 mm). With a fluted pastry wheel, cut the dough into rectangles (or other forms). At this point, the dough is ready to be fried. Gently place the dough into the oil and fry your *chiacchiere* until they are golden brown. Place on a plate with a paper towel to drain the excess oil and cool. Dust with powdered sugar and enjoy!

Written by **C. Serena Santonocito**

Zeppole di San Giuseppe



Whether they be baked or fried, filled with custard or whipped cream, topped with cherries in syrup or chocolate sprinkles, the Neapolitan zeppole di San Giuseppe will always whet your appetite. Let us find out more about the origins of this delicious dessert before diving into some of the modern-day recipes.

Even though the etymology of the word zeppola is still uncertain up to this day, it is possible to learn something more about the history of this term by following different paths. According to one school of thought, the word zeppola might derive from the Latin word *cippus*, a tiny wooden block that Neapolitan people used to place under chairs and tables so as to make them stand still. With time and after some phonological changes, people probably started using it also to refer to zeppole (plural of zeppola) because of their mutual little size. Conversely, others trace the etymology of this word back to the Latin words *serpula* and *saeputla*: while the first term was employed to refer to snakes, the second designated every round shaped object. Thirdly, some claim that *cymbala*, the name of a flat-bottomed and round shaped boat, might be the etymon of this toothsome Italian treat. In both cases, it was this round shape that allowed linguists to create an etymological connection between the terms. Since the mystery deepens, it is worthwhile looking at some of the legends related to this dish.

Two myths surround the birth of this delightful pan-fried dough. Chronologically speaking, the first takes place in 500 A.C. during the Roman empire when Quirites, as Romans called themselves, used to celebrate the Liberalia on 17th March in tribute to Liber Pater (Bacchus) and his wife Libera (Proserpine), deities of fruitfulness and prosperity. Among festive songs, cups of wine and horns of plenty, it was also possible to taste an archetypical zeppola made with wheat flour and fried in lard. Moreover, it is believed that Catholicism assimilated this pagan worship by marking 19th March as the feast of Saint Joseph (Father's Day). That might be the reason why today zeppole are considered to be the typical dessert of this recurrence in Italy.

Moving closer to the Anno Domini, according to another legend Saint Joseph, after the flight into Egypt, had to take up another job in order to support his family, therefore, alongside his carpentry trade, he started cooking and selling deep-fried zeppole on the street. This Catholic anecdote might have had an impact on the city of Naples where just few years ago it was still possible to see street vendors frying and stuffing zeppole in the most popular alleys, probably in honour of the Father of Fathers. However, in order to understand why Naples is believed to be the home of zeppole, an imaginary trip to the 19th century might be useful.

The first official recipe of this pastry dates back to 1837, when the Italian chef and man of letters Ippolito Cavalcanti, Duke of Buonvicino, wrote in Neapolitan the *Trattato di Cucina Teorico-Pratica* in which he listed all its ingredients: water, flour, aniseed liquor, white wine or marsala, salt, sugar and frying oil. Nevertheless, in almost two centuries this initial recipe has undergone so many changes that nowadays almost each Italian region has its own version. In Calabria both the filling and the dough have been modified: while ricotta cheese, sugar, cinnamon and lemon make up the cream, potatoes have been added to the mixture. In Sicily zeppole are realised with rice flour and covered with honey or icing sugar. The Puglia region offers chocolate-flavoured zeppole for all chocoholics out there. Furthermore, many Italian chefs have also started creating their own original and unique zeppole made with the most diverse ingredients such as pistachio cream and tiramisu cream, to name but a few. If the most conservative tastes would turn pale just by hearing about the deconstructed or the vegan zeppola di San Giuseppe, the delicacy of these alternative recipes can be denied. Apart from the one on its top, no cherry-picking needed in this case.

Written by **Raffaele Pizzo**

Neapolitan Taralli



Taralli (in the local dialect “taralli ‘nzogna e pepe”) are very popular in Naples. They are hard savoury doughnuts made of ‘nzogna (lard), pepper and toasted almonds. The etymology of the word tarallo is uncertain: some speculate that it may derive from the Latin torrere (to roast) or from the French toral (dryer); others believe that the word refers to its round shape, probably originating in the Italic tar (to wrap) or in the Old French danal (pain rond, round bread).

The History of the Tarallo

Historically, taralli date back to the eighteenth century, when some bakers, after having made bread, mixed leftovers of dough, called sfriddo, with lard, pepper and almonds (this latter ingredient was actually added in the nineteenth century). Taralli were once eaten dunked in sea water. These days, we cannot do that despite the improvement in the quality of the Neapolitan Gulf’s waters.

The taralli seller, or tarallaro, was a characteristic figure. The tarallaro, with his basket full of taralli on his shoulders, covered with a woollen cloth to keep them warm and fragrant, would run through the city far and wide in endless rounds, crying out loud: “taralle, taralle càvere!” (which meant “hot taralli!”). Today the tarallaro has disappeared, but what disappears in reality often survives in the language: even now, to indicate a person jostled to and fro and forced to bustle about non-stop, Neapolitans say “me pare ‘a sporta d’o tarallaro!” (“he/she is like the tarallaro’s basket”).

Where you can find some taralli in Naples:

In the Neapolitan tradition, taralli can be shared with friends during parties, accompanied by a mug of beer. They may be eaten in the narrow streets of Naples, such as Via Foria, the temple of Neapolitan taralli, or in Mergellina, along Naples' coast, where it is possible to buy them at chioschetti (small kiosks). Today, in the city there are many bakeries, pastry shops, and gourmet shops that sell fresh taralli, but the most popular one is Leopoldo Infante, tarallaro since 1940.

How to make taralli

For the benefit of anyone who wants to have a try at making taralli at home, here is a recipe:

Ingredients for the dough

- 400 g of plain flour (00 flour)
- 8 g salt
- 7 g of pepper
- 100 ml of lukewarm water
- 200 g of lard
- 150 g of chopped almonds
- 1 teaspoon of honey
- 30-40 almonds for garnishing

Ingredients for the lievito

- 100 ml of water
- 8 gr of fresh yeast
- 1 teaspoon of sugar
- 100 g of plain flour

Begin the preparation of the taralli by making the so-called lievito. Form a dough by mixing the yeast, flour and water required, and let it rise until it has doubled in size.

In the meantime, roast the almonds in the oven for 3-4 minutes on an oven tray. Once proved, put the lievito in a large bowl and add all the ingredients for the dough: flour, lard at room temperature, chopped almonds, pepper, salt, honey and water. Mix quickly.

Cut dough pieces of 70 gr each from which to obtain two strands of about 35 gr and 20 cm long. Close the two strands at one end, twist them and close them on the other end to form a circle. Put the taralli on a baking tray covered with baking paper.

Let them rise for 2-3 hours, then bake them at 180 degrees for 40 minutes and enjoy!

Written by **Fabiana Errico**

Impepata di cozze



The *impepata di cozze* (peppered mussels) is a traditional dish of the Neapolitan cuisine; it is simple to prepare but, at the same time, extremely tasty. It can be served like a starter or as a second fish course. Its main characteristic is the freshness of the seafood. The term *impepata* comes from the Italian verb *impepare*, which means to add pepper or season with pepper. In a figurative sense, however, it can also mean to add spicy details to a story to make it more interesting.

A Brief History of Impepata di Cozze

The history of *impepata di cozze* features two main characters: a king and a priest. The first is Ferdinand I of Bourbon, king of Naples from 1759 to 1816, who inspired this typical recipe. He really liked fish dishes and in particular mussels. Legend has it that the king used to fish his mussels personally in the wonderful bay of Naples. Furthermore, the king had his peculiar habits, like most sovereigns, and used to demand different specific preparations for his dishes. The second character is the priest Gregorio Maria Rocco, who asked the king to follow a balanced diet during the Lent period. Ferdinand I was deeply religious and accepted the priest's advice, so he ordered the cooks to season the mussels with only a few ingredients: garlic, oil, black pepper and parsley.

Where to eat some Impepata di Cozze

Impepata di cozze is a typical Neapolitan dish, therefore in Naples you will easily find many restaurants that have it on their menus. The most famous ones for this dish are located in the city centre, so you will be able to visit some charming places of Naples too, such as the Royal Botanical Garden in via Foria and Borgo Marinaro, surrounding the famous Castel dell'Ovo. Other places where you can eat the typical *impepata di cozze* are located between the famous Mercandante Theatre and the ancient castle Maschio Angioino, near the harbour. If you pay a visit to these places, you will have a complete Neapolitan experience, which includes gastronomic, cultural and touristic aspects.

How to prepare Impepata di Cozze

Ingredients for 4 people:

- mussels (1 kg)
- black pepper
- parsley (1 bunch)
- clove of garlic (2)
- spicy red chili peppers (1)
- extra virgin olive oil (4 tablespoons)
- lemon juice (optional)
- white wine

Preparation of the impepata di cozze:

1. Clean the mussels, remove the "beard" that comes out of the shell and any impurities.
2. Chop the parsley and garlic, then fry them in a pan with extra virgin olive oil and hot pepper.
3. Add the mussels and a splash of white wine, while keeping the pan on high heat.
4. Let the mussels begin to open, then add a pinch of black pepper.
5. When the mussels will be completely open, turn off the heat and bring them to the table. You may serve them with lemon wedges.

Written by **Fabio Scamardella**

Mozzarella in carrozza



Mozzarella in carrozza, literally “mozzarella in a carriage”, is a typical appetizer of the region Campania – one of the cradles of Italian gastronomy, which holds the secret of ancient culinary traditions handed down over centuries. Simple and cheap, mozzarella in carrozza is a very tasty street food consisting of two pieces of homemade bread or sliced bread with mozzarella (generally buffalo mozzarella) in between, dipped in egg and then fried, thus creating a crispy breading and a soft filling.

This Neapolitan dish became popular throughout Italy, giving rise to local variations in several regions, especially in Lazio, Veneto and Sicily. In the Roman tradition, buffalo mozzarella is replaced by fior di latte, while the Venetian version is made with sliced bread rather than homemade bread. Both recipes require extra ingredients such as anchovies or cooked ham. The Messinese version involves the addition of bechamel sauce, which gives more creaminess to the breading. Mozzarella in carrozza has also an international variation, namely Smažený Sýr or vyprážený syr (both meaning “fried cheese”), which is a Czech and Slovak cheese-based dish. It consists of a slice of local cheese (Edam, Niva or Hermelín), breaded with flour, egg and breadcrumbs and then fried, often served with a side salad, boiled potatoes, or fries.

Despite its royal name, mozzarella in carrozza is a dish of humble origins, born in Campania at the beginning of the XIX century as a recovery recipe to reuse ingredients such as stale bread and leftover mozzarella. There are several anecdotes concerning the meaning of the name of this tasty dish. According to popular belief, the denomination “mozzarella in carrozza” derives from the round bread, whose form recalled the wheels of a carriage. Similarly, a second hypothesis is that melted mozzarella recalls the bridles of the horse of a carriage. The historical perspective, however, suggests a connection with the carriage itself, which was the ancient means of transport used to carry foods in the XIX century. Due to the perpetual motion of the carriage, milk carried inside would sometimes curdle, thus becoming cheese upon arrival – hence the name mozzarella in carrozza.

The mozzarella in carrozza went from star of Neapolitan cuisine to movie star thanks to the 1948 neorealistic masterpiece *Bicycle Thieves* directed by the Italian filmmaker Vittorio De Sica. This film, a portrait of post-World War II Italy affected by the crisis and poverty, includes a scene where the protagonist Antonio and his son Bruno eat in a Neapolitan restaurant, surrounded by the local bourgeoisie, and order two mozzarelle in carrozza. This delicious dish represents a whole meal for them, but to the other customers it is only a small appetizer while waiting for the following courses.

Mozzarella in carrozza is a recipe of the genuine Neapolitan tradition – simple, substantial, and tasty, a bundle with a fragrant shell and a melted heart, a must-try if you happen to stroll in the narrow alleys of a city of Campania.

Written by **Camilla Nappi**

Limoncello



Limoncello is the name of an intensely lemon-flavored liqueur produced in the Italian region of Campania, in the area of Sorrento, by the Amalfi coast, and on the island of Capri. It is the most traditional digestive or after-dinner drink in almost all regions of Italy, where having a glass of this lemon liqueur is a great way to end a Sunday or a festive meal. It is a social ritual, very much like the “espresso” coffee break.

The History of Limoncello

The history of its origins is rather vague and winds through a series of anecdotes and hypotheses. On the Sorrento Coast, for example, the story is that some local families, at the beginning of 1900, would always ensure that their illustrious guests would get a taste of limoncello, made according to the traditional recipe. In Amalfi, the liquor is said to have older origins, linked to the cultivation of lemons. One of the accounts is that limoncello was drunk in the chilly mornings by fishermen and countrymen to fight the cold, since the Saracens’ invasion period. Others, instead, claim that the recipe was born in a monastic convent to delight the monks from prayer to prayer.

On the website of Federvini, the Italian Association of Wine/Liqueur Producers, it is reported that limoncello was created at the beginning of the 20th century, in a small boarding house in Capri, where a lady called Maria Antonia Farace took care of a fruitful garden of lemons and oranges. Her nephew, during the post-war period, opened a bar near Alex Munte’s villa, whose speciality was the lemon liquor made by following his nonna’s old recipe. In 1988, the grandson’s son, Massimo Canale, started a small handmade production of limoncello and registered the first trademark.

What makes an Authentic Limoncello

Setting aside limoncello's origins, it is certain that what makes it special is the type of lemons used for preparing it. An authentic limoncello requires lemons from the Amalfi Coast, (the so called Sfusato Amalfitano) precisely in the area between the towns of Vico Equense and Massa Lubrense, and on the island of Capri. It is only there that, thanks to the Mediterranean climate, lemons grow with a thick and light-coloured skin that is rich with essential oils, fragrant and with an intense aroma.

There are many variations of limoncello: pistachiocello (flavoured with pistachio nuts), meloncello (flavoured with cantaloupe), arancello (flavoured with oranges), and fragoncello (flavoured with strawberries). A version made with milk instead of simple syrup also exists, known as crema di limoncello (limoncello cream) and is often sweeter, thicker and less alcoholic.

The Fame of Limoncello

Limoncello is very popular also in literature: in the best tradition of Italian hospitality, it was offered to Robert Langdon, the main character in Dan Brown's "Inferno", as well as to his travel companions Sienna Brooks and Dr Ferris, by the owner of a large boat called "Mendacium", which escorts them to Venice's Piazza San Marco.

Nowadays, this liqueur has reached worldwide fame, like Bitter or Amaretto. In order to defend it from the imitations, the production of the characteristic "oval" Sorrentino lemon has been awarded the denomination of Protected Geographical Indication (PGI).

How to make Limoncello

The traditional recipe of limoncello is handed down from a generation to the following one. It includes only a few ingredients:

- 1 / 2 litre of pure alcohol (at 90%)
- 4-5 large lemons from the Amalfi coast (those with a thick skin)
- 1 l water
- 500 gr sugar

Making limoncello is simple but not fast. First, the peels of the lemons need be left to soak in spirit, then the sugar syrup is filtered and added, and in the end, everything is put into the bottles where it must rest for at least a month before drinking it. Cheers!

Neapolitan families treat the consumption of limoncello almost like religion with precise rituals that is sacrilegious not to follow by the book. They say that there is at least one Neapolitan in every country of the world. If this is even a little bit true, the tradition of drinking limoncello is so important for Neapolitan culture that, very likely, you will find a bottle of limoncello in the pantry of every emigrated Neapolitan.

Written by **Carolina Iazzetta**

Porchetta



The I-ATE Food Term of this week is the Italian dish “porchetta”. With its crispy and golden ‘crust’, porchetta is one of the most renowned Italian delicacies appreciated worldwide.

The Origins of Porchetta

Porchetta has its roots in the culinary tradition of the central regions of Italy, notably Lazio and Umbria, even though the exact town of origin remains uncertain. Ariccia, a town in Lazio, claims the authorship of the original recipe that presumably dates to the pre-Romanesque period. Moreover, porchetta of Ariccia was awarded the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status by the European Commission in 2014. However, some maintain that porchetta originates in town of Norcia, in Umbria, where pigs were mostly bred since the Roman Empire; while others, especially in the northern area of Lazio, date it back even to the Etruscans.

It is likely that the ancient Romans were used to eat this goodie. Evidence of this is provided by an ancient collection of Roman recipes attributed to Marcus Gavius Apicius, who lived in the first century AD. His cookbook is entitled *De Re Coquinaria* and it includes several recipes suggesting the best ways to cook pork. Among these recipes there is one for a delicious roasted pork, the so-called “porchetta”.

The Peculiar Cooking Procedure of Porchetta

The name porchetta, literally ‘little female pig’, is likely to derive from the traditional cooking procedure that consists of baking a whole female pig for hours – about 6 to 8 hours – after seasoning it with salt, black pepper, and a mix of herbs that varies from place to place. Its peculiarity is the crunchy crust that is obtained by removing the pork from the oven every hour and brushing it with lard until perfectly cooked. In doing so, the crust stays crunchy for days and prevents the meat inside from drying out and hardening.

The Variants of Porchetta

While some ingredients are common to all variants – such as salt, pepper, and garlic – others depend on the area of production. There are two main variants. In South Tuscany, Castelli Romani, and Ariccia, porchetta is typically enriched with rosemary. In the northern areas of Lazio and in Umbria, instead, wild fennel flowers are used to give a very peculiar flavour.

Porchetta can be eaten almost everywhere in central Italy. Nowadays, it is a much appreciated street food: you can buy it in local grocery stores as well as from street vendors on the main square in villages and towns. If you want to eat it on the go, you can have porchetta in a sandwich, especially in a typical bun called rosetta (literally “small rose”), or with focaccia bread. There are also many local food festivals dedicated to it. One of the most renowned of these “sagre” is Porchettiamo. It is organised every year in Umbria and attracts large crowds from all over Italy.

The great love Italians have for this dish is proved by the endless fights to be awarded the ‘place of origin’ status that still remain unsolved. Regardless of its place of origin, porchetta is now an international goodie, one of the must-have street food in the United States and in Japan.

For more Italian dishes, check out our articles about the Roman supplì and the Neapolitan panuozzo di Gragnano.

Written by **Alberta Boschi**

Neapolitan Pizza



Pizza is a staple food that originated in the Mediterranean area. According to some scholars, this poor food was invented by the Egyptians, the first ones that distinguished between small spelt and “normal” spelt, and the ones who understood the role of yeast. Romans, instead, were the first people to use round-shaped bread as plates that contained succulent dishes.

In 997, for the first time the word pizza was used in the Codex Cajetanus of Gaeta to indicate a focaccia. In the course of its history, pizza experienced a second turning point when it started to function as an “oven test” for bakers to test the temperature.

Finally, in the 18th century the wood-fired masonry oven revolutionised the world of pizza, giving Neapolitan pizza its specificity.

The characteristics of a good pizza

The main characteristic of a good pizza is its digestibility, which depends on the leavening process. In a good Neapolitan pizza, specifically margherita and marinara, flavours blend perfectly, thanks to the cooking at 480°C for a maximum of 90 seconds.

The Cornicione

The term cornicione indicates the raised edge that surrounds the central part of a pizza with the seasoning. Whereas in the past people tended to ignore the cornicione, now pizza is mainly evaluated from this outer ring, and for young pizza makers it is a source of pride. These pizza makers are called canottisti because they make cornicione similar to a canotto (rubber dinghy), that is particularly pronounced and fluffy.

Neapolitan pizza is the only type to have a dedicated oven: the one with the crescent-moon shaped opening. This oven has a structural feature that allows to reach a temperature between 450-480°C internally, requiring 60 to 90 seconds for a pizza to be evenly cooked.

According to the rules of the Verace Pizza Association, the temperature required for cooking the Neapolitan pizza is about 430°C at the base and about 485°C at the vault of the oven.

Pizza outside of Italy: who are the best foreign pizza makers?

"Italians think that pizza was born in Italy, but if you talk to Americans you will find they think this dish was born in America." This quote can be hilarious, but it could be motivated by the existence of 5,000 pizzerias in New York alone. The city with the most pizzerias in the world is Sao Paulo in Brazil with 6,500 shops. Naples is only third with 1,500 shops. Outside Italy pizza is transformed: for example, the Japanese have become meticulous masters of the Neapolitan style, while in the United States new styles are flourishing such as the New York and Chicago, which are similar to Bari's focaccia. Here pizza is not served whole, but in portion-size slices because of the excessive seasoning. Pizza is also very common in Arabic countries, masters of the schiaffo (slap) technique, that is the ability to enlarge the dough by tossing it from one hand palm to the other according to a typical gesture.

UNESCO Recognition

In 2017 the art of the Neapolitan pizzaiuolo became part of the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The importance of pizza and everything that revolves around it has changed, starting from the very people who make pizza, the pizzaioli, who are strongly demanded abroad, especially in Dubai, Hong Kong, Shanghai and the United Kingdom. Even in France, where pizza was looked down on, it has now become a real trend.



All over the world pizza is one of the most appreciated dishes, but the queen of pizzas is certainly pizza Margherita: simple, tasty and traditional. Prepared with healthy ingredients, such as flour, tomato, fiordilatte cheese, basil, salt and extra virgin olive oil, pizza Margherita contains a combination of carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals that make it a nutritionally complete dish.

Pizza Margherita, the Royal Pizza

After Neapolitan pizza makers had spread various qualities of pizza among the population, this was officially approved in 1889, on the occasion of a visit to Naples of the then sovereigns of Italy, King Umberto I and Queen Margherita. During their stay in the city, the sovereigns were welcomed by Raffaele Esposito, the best pizza maker of the time, who made for them three pizzas: Pizza alla Mastunicola (lard, cheese, basil), Pizza alla Marinara (tomato, garlic, oil, oregano) and Pizza pomodoro e mozzarella (tomato, oil, mozzarella, oregano and basil), the latter made in honour of Queen Margherita and whose colours intentionally recalled the Italian flag. The Queen appreciated the pizza so much that she wanted to thank and praise its creator in written form. For the pizza maker the only way to repay the queen's gesture was to name this pizza after her, hence the culinary creation Pizza Margherita.

If you liked this article, we recommend you to read also the one of Soul Cakes.

Written by **Teresa Bifulco**

Ragù



Among the many recipes that make the Neapolitan culinary tradition unique, there is one that the Neapolitans particularly care about. It's the recipe that one associates with Sunday and family, the recipe in which all the Neapolitan pride is condensed. We're talking about ragù.

In cookbooks and food websites you will find it indexed among the "main courses", but it's much more than that.

Ragù is a very versatile dish: in Naples, not only pasta, but also the second course (especially meat) can be seasoned with the ragù sauce, and, in the end, even bread is dipped into it through a ritual called *scarpetta* (literally, "little shoe").

If you are curious and want to have a try at preparing Neapolitan ragù – perhaps to surprise your friends – we have bad news: it's not that easy!

Every family in Naples has its own traditions, from the choice of meat cuts to the cooking times, including the order in which to use the ingredients and the many additions. Each family recipe is often kept secret and handed down from generation to generation.

The difficulty of the recipe is also relative. There are those who use only fresh cuts of meat and those who, on the other hand, cook them in various ways before starting to prepare ragù. Don't be surprised if you find meatballs in one ragù, *braciole* seasoned with raisins and pine nuts in another one, and, in yet another, *cotiche imbottite* prepared with pork skin.

According to a Neapolitan legend, ragù was invented to sweeten the heart of the ruthless king Philip I of Anjou. The king, surprised by the quality of the dish, decided to be reconciled with his subjects, who were given the recipe for ragù.

Historical sources, on the other hand, claim that ragù was first introduced in noble houses, thanks to the virtuous Monsieurs, chefs who arrived in Naples at the behest of Queen Mary Caroline of Austria.

Over time, the recipe passed from noble to popular kitchens, and the original name was mangled: the French ragoût, which derived from the verb ragoûter (literally “revive the taste”), became ragù. Even the poor Monsieurs were referred to simply as Monsù!

Here follows the ragù recipe of the multi-starred Neapolitan chef Antonino Cannavacciuolo:



[serves 4]

1 pound of pork ribs

1 white onion, very thinly sliced

2 pounds of peeled San Marzano tomatoes

1 chili pepper

1 bay leaf

1 glass of red wine

extra virgin olive oil, salt and pepper

Clean the pork ribs and cut them in the direction of the bone. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, and let marinate for around 10 minutes. Fry the ribs in a large saucepan with a drizzle of oil until a golden crust is formed, then add the sliced onion and the chili pepper (if you don't like chili pepper you don't have to add it). Let it sweat, then simmer with red wine. As soon as the alcohol evaporates, cover all the ingredients with peeled tomatoes. Cook over low heat for at least 5 hours. Halfway through cooking, add the bay leaf and, when cooked, remove the meat from the bone.

One way or another, the origins of this typical Neapolitan dish seem to be firmly linked to nobility. One thing is certain: Neapolitan ragù, along with its inseparable friend “scarpetta”, is definitively the king of Neapolitan Sundays.

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Written by **Antonio Leo**

Parrozzo



Parrozzo is a traditional Christmas cake from the city of Pescara, in Abruzzo (a region of central Italy), officially recognised as a traditional food product. Dome-shaped, it is composed mainly of semolina and almonds, and entirely covered with melted dark chocolate. The consistency is that of a moist cake, with an intense flavour given by the presence of liqueur in the mixture.

Parrozzo is a dessert of contrasts: dark outside, light inside, tough and soft at the same time, somewhat like the people from Abruzzo.

Its recipe was conceived and developed around 1920 by Luigi d'Amico, a pastry chef from Pescara. D'Amico had the idea of making a cake resembling the ancient rustic bread of the Abruzzo peasants, called "pane rozzo" / "rough bread" (from which the name parrozzo is derived), which was a dark loaf meant to be preserved for many days. It was made from the less-valuable corn flour, and then baked in a wood-burning oven. D'Amico gave the parrozzo the same semi-spherical shape as the bread. He then worked a mixture of egg yolks and finely crushed almonds to reproduce the yellow colour of corn and the roughness of the bread; finally, to give it the typical burnt appearance of wood baking, he covered the cake with a rich dark chocolate glaze.

The first person to try the new delicacy was the confectioner's friend, poet and fellow citizen Gabriele d'Annunzio, who was immediately enraptured by the cake, and composed a madrigal called "La Canzone del Parrozzo" ("The Song of Parrozzo"), written in local dialect. It was 1926 when d'Annunzio sent this lyric to Luigi D'Amico, to thank him for the gift of the parrozzo and to glorify the latter as "the sweetest of all sweet things".

D'Annunzio also went on to refer to parrozzo in several of his works. In 1927, paraphrasing a quatrain by Dante Alighieri (*Inferno* XXVIII, 17-18), the Vate renamed it usbergo (armour), asserting that in the famous battle of Tagliacozzo between Guelphs and Ghibellines, Conradin would have defeated the gluttonous Alardo (Erard of Valery) if he had protected himself with the parrozzo, since the Angevin would not have dared to hit him: "Dice Dante che là da Tagliacozzo, ove senz'arme visse il vecchio Alardo, Curradino avrie vinto quel leccardo se abbuto avesse usbergo di Parrozzo" ("Dante says that there at Tagliacozzo/ where unarmed old Alardo won/ Corradino would have won/ if he had a hauberk of parrozzo"). All this too is contained in a parrozzo.



These verses still appear on the hexagonal packaging that characterizes the precious cake, designed and coloured by Pescara-born ceramist Armando Cermignani, a reminder of the noble origins of the literary Parrozzo. The idea was successful and d'Annunzio contributed, as he had previously done with other products, to increasing its fame. The parrozzo appeared on the tables of artists, men of letters, politicians, and even the Pope, all won over by its deliciousness.

Nowadays, the parrozzo is also produced industrially by the company founded by its creator, so that it can be enjoyed throughout the year, even in mono-portions called parrozzini (small parrozzi). As d'Annunzio further wrote, "the first slice is still for appetite, the second for delight, the third for voluptuousness". Beware of the fourth!

If you liked this article, you may also like the one of Panettone.

Written by **Raffaella Sciarra**

Migliaccio



Carnival in Italy is that period of the year during which sweet dishes, such as chiacchiere and sanguinaccio, bring people from all around the country together. Differently from these nationally renowned specialities, there are less known traditional desserts like the so-called migliaccio napoletano, a semolina and ricotta cheese cake typical of Campania, a region in the South of the country. While the word napoletano indicates the place of origin of this food, traditionally associated to the city of Naples, migliaccio comes from the Latin word miliaccium, which refers to the traditional bread made of millet, whose cultivation was widespread in Campania. In the past, millet flour was often used by poor people for cooking and preparing sweets, which is why it is believed that migliaccio was invented by a peasant in the Middle Ages, around the year 1000.



This hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that the original recipe of migliaccio included pig's blood, a common ingredient of poor people's recipes, especially in the past, thanks to its high nutritional value. However, the use of blood for this sweet, usually prepared in the Carnival period, was harshly criticised and forbidden by the Church, which associated such a practice with pagan traditions.

After a long time, the recipe was changed, the millet was replaced by durum wheat flour, or semolina, its main ingredient today, and in the late 18th century the blood was replaced by sugar, milk and eggs.

Migliaccio today is a soft cake baked in the oven that, according to the popular Italian cooking website Giallozafferano, is prepared with semolina, milk, water, butter, ricotta cheese, eggs, sugar, and vanilla and citrus flavourings.

Nevertheless, there is no official recipe for migliaccio; it is the result of a long tradition and its preparation may vary in many ways. For example, vanilla and citrus can be replaced or accompanied by other flavourings, like cinnamon or wildflower. Additional ingredients, such as candied fruit or chocolate, can also be used in the cake preparation.

A further variation of migliaccio is its salty version, which is filled with salami, ham and cheese. Despite all these variations however, the traditional sweet version of migliaccio remains the most popular one with Neapolitan people.

Migliaccio is often linked to the Neapolitan pastiera due to the presence of many common ingredients such as ricotta cheese, milk, cinnamon, and wildflower flavourings. However, while pastiera is mainly prepared during Easter time, migliaccio is typically eaten before Lent as a symbol of Carnival. When in Naples, do not miss the opportunity to taste a slice of homemade migliaccio!

Written by **Emanuela Ammendola**

Patate Cunzate



If there is proof that cultural mixing is always a good idea, try patate cunzate from Cilento and you'll understand why.

Although this dish is popular around various regions of Southern Italy, it is an institution in Cilento, the southernmost area of Campania, which borders the neighbouring region of Basilicata. On this territory, the cultural contact between the two regions has shaped the local dialect and customs – with people living the old way in villages where farming is still the main activity – and especially the local food traditions.

The origins of patate cunzate are lost in time, but it is safe to assume that it is one of the many poor dishes that shepherds and farmers created to make the most of simple, yet delicious products.



It is a mix of potatoes from the Cilento mountains and crunchy peppers from Basilicata, usually called crusco peppers.

First, potatoes are boiled and cut into large cubes; then, dried peppers are fried for a few seconds.

Finally, the crunchy pepper crumbles are added to the slightly mashed potatoes and stir-fried for a perfectly balanced taste.

As a matter of fact, the name indicates that the potatoes are seasoned with the peppers, as the verb *conzare* (also *conciare*) suggests. This regional verb, corresponding to the Italian *condire*, literally means “to season”, and it is used throughout Southern Italy with this sense; however, it may have other meanings, such as “to set the table” or “to get dressed”. As for *patate cunzate*, other versions are popular, for example in Sicily, where they are made with olives, capers, and vinegar – a typical Sicilian way of dressing food.

But *patate cunzate* from Cilento are unique: served hot from the pot, they are perfect with a slice of local cheese and a glass of homemade red wine.

The small village of San Gregorio Magno (70 km from the province city of Salerno), in particular, is one of the best places where to eat this delicacy: during the annual wine festival, you can visit the natural stone cellars, eat *patate cunzate* as a street food, and get a taste of Cilento’s renowned hospitality.

Written by **Marina Niceforo**

Neapolitan Easter Cakes, Casatiello & co.



With its crispy crust and its soft core, the Neapolitan casatiello is perfect to satisfy most tastes during the Easter period. The history of this Neapolitan Easter cake can be traced back to the Greek-Roman period, when spring festivals were organised in honour of the goddess Demeter (Ceres for the Romans). During these celebrations, known as Cerealia, they were used to making bread stuffed with various ingredients including eggs, which were considered the symbol of the reawakening of nature in spring. What later created a link between this pagan feast and Christianity is the resurrection of Christ (the Holy Easter), which falls right in the same period.

This explains why the present-day Casatiello, with boiled eggs on the outside and whose shape resembles Christ's crown of thorn, is viewed as the symbol of this holiday in the Campania region. Its appearance in Giambattista Basile's "La gatta Cenerentola" in the XVI century further stresses its relevance to the Italian culinary tradition, and it is not without reason that its name comes from the Latin word caseus (cheese), caso in Neapolitan, as it is one of its fundamental ingredients. Moreover, the Neapolitan dialect features the expression "Si 'nu casatiello" [You are a Casatiello], which is metaphorically employed to describe an annoying and unpleasant person since Casatiello is not one of the lightest meals.



But which are its ingredients and how can they be put together to bake this salty doughnut? Its preparation can be divided into two stages: the dough and the filling. First, the dough is made by mixing flour, lard, grated Parmigiano and Pecorino cheeses, brewer's yeast, water, salt and black pepper. While it rests for a couple of hours, the filling can be prepared by chopping and putting together cold cuts and cheeses such as: salami, cracklings, provolone, Emmenthal cheese, Pecorino cheese, Parmigiano cheese, and a generous sprinkling of black pepper. With the help of flour and lard, it is then necessary to mould the dough into different shapes. First, it must be made into a rectangular shape with the help of a rolling pin. After that, it is time to place the cold cuts and cheese mixture on top and roll it up into a cylindrical shape before placing it into a circular pan. The final touch is to place raw eggs on its surface and secure them with thin strips of dough perpendicularly placed to form a cross. Lastly, it is left to rest for another couple of hours and then it can be baked and served. As tradition has it, it is prepared since Holy Thursday and offered to family and friends.

Despite being one of its kind, the Neapolitan culinary tradition features a similar Easter cake known as Tortano. It is made with the same ingredients and has the same shape; what differentiate the two is where eggs are placed. While casatiello has eggs on top, tortano has egg slices on the inside. Therefore, the choice between casatiello and tortano during the Easter period is just a matter of family traditions rather than food preferences.

In addition to casatiello and tortano, other dishes characterise the Neapolitan Holy Easter. First, there is the sweet casatiello. Even though it is mostly just known in the Caserta area, it is not less tasty with its white icing and coloured sprinkles on top. Differently from the latter, pastiera is the most renowned Neapolitan Easter dessert. Tied to the myth of the Parthenope mermaid and viewed as a symbol of rebirth by Christianity, as it also contains eggs, it is prepared with shortcrust pastry, ricotta, eggs, wheat, orange blossom, sugar, and spices. Different varieties with fewer or more ingredients exist, and they are all worth the hype. All these and many other dishes are perfect to be prepared beforehand and consumed on Easter Monday, a day that is typically spent outdoor with family and friends in most southern Italian regions. Therefore, if you are going to pay a visit during the Easter period, be prepared to put on some weight with all those delightful dishes.

Written by **Raffaele Pizzo**

Carciofi Arrostiti



From the Friday of the Octave of Easter to the following Monday the streets and air of Pagani – near Salerno in the Campania region of Italy – are thick with the smoke of fireworks and carciofi arrostiti (roasted artichokes) as part of a centuries-old ritual celebrating the feast of Our Lady of the Hens (Madonna del Carmelo detta “delle galline”).

The story has it that some hens scratching the soil found a panel depicting the Madonna del Carmelo; this was assumed as a divine sign by the locals and religious authorities who decided to build a Sanctuary in her honour. Since then, the religious feast has revolved around a procession of the statue of the Madonna del Carmine transported on a cart to which people offer various birds, but it also hinges upon unchanged gastronomic traditions the locals preserve and spread painstakingly. The traditional meals consumed during the 4-day celebration are tagliolini al ragù, casatiello, tortano and, above all, carciofi arrostiti.



The artichoke is native to the eastern Mediterranean basin, including the Aegean Islands, Cyprus, North Africa and Ethiopia, and it was already popular among the Greeks and the Romans, who referred to it as *cynara* and attributed to its fleshy leaves an aphrodisiac power. Indeed, Pliny the Elder in ‘*Naturalis Historia*’ extolled its aphrodisiac and depurative powers, and Pharaoh Ptolemy Evergete of Egypt (3rd century B.C.) obliged his soldiers to eat them before every battle. *Cynara* was also the name of a Greek nymph –called like this because of her ash-blond hair and green-purple eyes – turned into a green-purple artichoke with bristly leaves and a thorny heart by Jupiter, whose love for nymphs was unrequited.

Going back to the feast, artichokes are cooked by families in courtyards, on balconies and in so-called *toselli* (spaces of worship decorated with fine drapes and a picture of the Madonna del Carmelo) by using a traditional cooking tool called *fornacella* (a charcoal-fed grill). Artichokes are washed and beaten with the tip of the leaves pointing to the table so that they spread out and can be easily stuffed with fresh garlic and parsley. After 30 minutes, the burnt outer leaves are cleaned off with the tip of a knife and olive oil is added. Traditionally, it is served on a slice of *pane cafone*, which absorbs the flavours of the oil and the seasonings.

A similar culinary tradition rooted in Italy is that of the so-called *carciofo alla giudia* (Jewish-style artichokes), a speciality of Roman Jewish cuisine originally conceived to celebrate the end of the Yom Kippur fast but now popular with Romans from all communities.

Photo Credit: Domenico Varone

Written by **Francesco Nacchia**



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