FOUR

Fragmentation and Unification

The Italian Renaissance – including its culinary aspects – was marked by unprecedented brilliance and originality, with lords and kings competing with one another as patrons of the arts, literature and refinement. Banking on its financial and commercial power, the burgeoning bourgeois class strived to reach comparable levels of conspicuous consumption. However, the lingering social contradictions and the political fragmentation of the Italian peninsula eventually resulted in long-lasting economic stagnation. During the seventeenth century foreign occupants left a strong imprint on local eating patterns, while Italian cuisine lost its role as a powerhouse of culinary novelty and sophistication at the European level.

Italy under Foreign Influence

During the seventeenth century, Italy remained politically divided, allowing Spain to extend its direct control over Lombardy and Milan, Sicily, Sardinia and the whole south. The efforts of the Catholic Church to limit the expansion of religious Protestantism against their temporal power, known as the Counter-Reformation, imposed a cultural climate that snuffed out the creative spirit of the Renaissance all over Italy. War, famine and epidemics decimated the population. The resulting decrease in demand for food made staples more affordable for city dwellers, despite the concurrent slump in agricultural production caused by lack of innovation and a temporary cooling of the climate. (A period of cold winters and humid summers, sometimes referred to as the Little Ice Age, had started at the end of the Middle Ages but worsened around 1650.)[1] As grain prices dropped, partly due to imports from Ukraine and

Eastern Europe, landowners – especially in the centre and the south of Italy – shifted their focus to cash crops such as grapes and rice, the latter spreading to Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto and to the lower plains of the Po River. In those areas, the introduction of rice was facilitated in large expanses of land that had been reclaimed during the Renaissance and had turned back into swamps due to lack of hydraulic control. A similar abandonment of cultivated land took place in Tuscany (Maremma and Arno valley) and south of Rome in the Agro Pontino. As malaria became endemic, hunting and fishing were frequently the only viable productive activities as farmers could not settle down to grow crops.[2]

While depopulation heavily affected agriculture, Italian traditional luxury industries such as silk and wool manufacturing were facing competition from cheaper foreign goods. In northern Europe, textile production had moved out of the cities and into the countryside, far from the control of guilds, allowing for greater efficiency and lower prices. Unable to keep up with technological advances, Italian manufacturers also suffered from the shifting focus of Western trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean. The crisis of Italian commerce caused the stagnation of banking and finance. The *patriziato*, grand families who had made their fortune lending money to the rulers of the Italian states, took to buying land, hoping to be accepted among the upper ranks of society. These dynamics, which historian Emilio Sereni defined as the 'commercialization of the fief', were reflected in the multiplication of luxurious villas surrounded by glorious gardens that maintained no connection with productive activities but reflected their owners' wealth and social status.[3] The famous villas of Veneto, where artists like Palladio were able to express their creativity, continued to proliferate well into the eighteenth century.

Under the influence of Spanish culture, a growing distaste for mercantile and financial occupations shaped the nobility's sense of identity, expressed in the cult of lineage, the practice of duelling and the extreme value of honour. These practices were reflected in juridical institutions such as primogeniture, which ensured that all possessions of a noble were to be inherited by his first male heir, and *federcommesso*, which prevented an heir from dividing or fragmenting the estates he received. The noble landowners in the south of Italy, the *baroni*, suffering from Spanish fiscal pressure, had no interest in investing to increase agricultural yields and focused instead on husbandry activities, especially sheep for wool production. More intensive cultivations were visible only

Bernardo Strozzi, *The Cook, c.* 1625, oil on canvas.

around towns and villages, in small plots and temporary clearings that did not contribute much in productivity.

The deterioration of agricultural production in central and southern Italy was intensified by ecclesiastic organizations owning vast estates that were exempt from taxes and grew constantly through donations from nobility who died without heirs. These lands, on which no investment and little management were applied, could not be sold without explicit permission from the pope, according to a custom known as *manomorta*. The cultural and political influence of the Church of Rome, reinforced by ties with noble families whose cadet sons and daughters often joined its ranks, grew in the years of Counter-Reformation. The Italian Protestant movement was virtually suppressed, with the exception of the Waldensians, a community established in the thirteenth century that took refuge in the valleys of the Alps in Piedmont. In their relative

isolation, the Waldensians developed culinary traditions that included buckwheat-based gruels, cheese-and-bread soups (called *barbet* from the local name for preachers), as well as meat-and-potato dumplings (*calhetta*), still found today in some villages in the area.

Motivated by the decreasing value of their agricultural production, nobles and landowners – both lay and religious – increased the pressure on peasants and farmers in terms of rent, services and other kinds of feudal encumbrances that had largely gone unreinforced in the fifteenth century. This trend towards 'refeudalization' limited the peasants' traditional rights of access to common lands that allowed them to practise subsistence agriculture, pasturage and wood gathering. Countryside dwellers moved to cities, increasing the numbers of urban poor and creating conditions for social unrest and full-on riots, especially in southern Italy. Naples, with its 300,000 inhabitants, had become one of the largest European cities, together with Paris and London. Most nobles in the kingdom of Naples lived in the capital, which attracted products from all provinces. At the time, Neapolitans were known as 'leaf-eaters' due to the prevalence of vegetables in their diet and their alleged passion for cabbage and broccoli. In 1647 the populace of Naples reacted to a new levy on fruit by taking to the streets. Their leader, the fishmonger Tommaso Aniello, known as Masaniello, was assassinated right after the riots. The movement, coordinated by the local bourgeoisie in search of greater influence over the politics of the kingdom, spread to the countryside, where peasants revolted against the barons. The Neapolitan rebels proclaimed a republic and asked France for help, but to no avail – the barons tightened their relationship with the Spanish representatives to avoid future reoccurrences of similar events.

Social tensions resulted in episodes of mass hysteria; in Milan individuals accused of spreading the plague were executed. Jews, who in many Italian cities were forced to live in closed ghettos, also became an object of suspicion. They were banned from selling macaroni and lasagne to Christians, and some local authorities issued sumptuary laws to limit food consumption in their communities. Little did they know that these laws were setting the building blocks for the creation of classic Jewish–Italian dishes. For instance, when in 1661 the Jews of Rome were prohibited from eating any fish but anchovies and sardines, they took to baking anchovies and endives arranged in layers, giving rise to the Jewish–Roman speciality, *aliciotti con l'indivia*.[4] Under heavy financial constraints, Jews in major cities were applying kashrut laws with

Representation of Neapolitan fishermen in an illustration for the opera *Masaniello*, by John William Gear, 1829–33.

flexibility, to the horror of the rabbis. Eels and sturgeon were widely appreciated. Roman Jews routinely ate mozzarella from the nearby countryside, while those in Emilia did not refrain from using parmigiano.[5] On the other hand, desserts, biscuits and marzipans produced by the Jews were highly appreciated outside the ghettos, even reaching the tables of nobles and lords.

Decadence and Prestige

Italian courtly culinary styles lost some of their originality and inventiveness compared to the work of the sixteenth-century *scalchi*, the masters of the banquet that had marked Renaissance splendour. Bartolomeo Stefani in Mantua, in his *L'arte di ben cucinare et instruire i men periti in questa lodevole professione* (The Art of Cooking Well and of Educating the Less Expert in this Praiseworthy Profession, 1662), upholds Renaissance tradition but reveals less creativity, all the while making

Changing medical theories

From the sixteenth century, authors such as Gerolamo Cardano, Alessandro Petronio and Giovanni Domenico Sala opposed traditional nutritional theories, basing their critique on personal observations. A German travelling doctor, Theophrastus Bombastus of Hohenheim, famous as Paracelsus, introduced chemical factors to explain the causes of diseases, indicating specific remedies for each. Building on the theories put forth by Paracelsus, chemists and alchemists postulated that many natural substances, when heated, separated into a volatile fluid that they equated to mercury; an oily substance, or sulphur; and a solid residue, or salt. While mercury determined smells, sulphur induced sweetness and moistness, and salt controlled the taste and texture of foods.

As the humoral theories were attacked by chemistry, the idea that digestion was similar to cooking slowly became obsolete and the process was interpreted instead as fermentation. Some physicians, referred to as iatrophysicists, tried to explain all physiological processes according to the laws of physics and mechanics. The Croatian Santorio Santorio (1561–1636), the son of a nobleman from Friuli in the

recipes and banquets more complex and overdone, reflecting the prevalent Baroque aesthetics that often highlighted exaggerated grandeur, exuberance, motion and drama over refinement and restraint. In the description of the banquet he organized for the visit of Queen Christina of Sweden in Rome in 1655, Stefani describes dishes from the first service of *credenza* thus:

> Strawberries, washed in wine served with white sugar on top, and all around the dish seashells made of sugar and filled with those same strawberries, interspersed with small birds made of marzipan that look like [they are] pecking at strawberries. A soup of large pigeons cooked in milk and malvasia wine and, taken out of the cooking liquid, cooled off, stuffed with angel cake soaked in malvasia and sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon. The pigeons

service of the Venetian republic, had studied the human body by weighing its solid and liquid intakes and excretions. Other doctors, known as ierochemists, maintained that chemistry was sufficient to account for all medical facts. Among these, the Belgian Jan Baptista van Helmont (1577–1644) argued that many physiological processes, including digestion and nutrition, are caused by fermentation converting food, a dead substance, into living matter. Franz Sylvius (1614–1672) also sought to explain physiological processes by suggesting fermentation (molecular motion of matter) and 'vital spirits' as moving forces.

Medicine gradually separated itself from dietetics and doctors focused more on identifying and healing diseases than on maintaining a healthy body. Scientific research and the theory of digestion as fermentation presumably had some impact – albeit indirect – on the way food was perceived and prepared; sauces rich in butter and oil were considered useful to bind salts and solid ingredients to substances with a high content of mercury, or volatile fluids, such as wine and spirits. Ingredients that fermented easily, like fresh vegetables and fruit, grew in acceptance and popularity.

were arranged in the shape of a rose, covered in pistachio milk, sprinkled with pine nuts soaked in rose water. On the rim of the dish there was a floral decoration made of sugar-glazed marzipan and outlined in gold.[6]

The pasta dishes and the vegetables conspicuously featured in works from the previous two centuries are almost entirely absent in Stefani's work, probably because they had become too common and accessible to deserve a place on the elite's tables.[7] Despite the stagnating economic situation, made worse by plague, war and social instability, a few high-end products from specific places remained popular among the elites of the Italian states. For instance, in 1661 Bologna had to issue a proclamation against the counterfeiting of mortadella, the famous pork product, still the pride of the city.[8] Some cookbooks displayed a stronger influence

of local traditions, like Francesco Vaselli's *L'Apicio ovvero il maestro de' conviti* (Apicius, the Master of Banquets, 1647). However, the clearest examples of this trend were *La lucerna de corteggiani* (The Oil Lamp of Courtiers, 1634) by Giovan Battista Crisci and *Lo scalco alla moderna* (Modern Banquet Directions, 1692) by Antonio Latini, both Neapolitans. Crisci provides us with a broad and detailed list of delicacies and ingredients from the south, including areas like Abruzzo, Basilicata and Calabria. Tellingly, Crisci's references do not focus on cities, but rather on villages and rural areas, revealing the limited relevance of urban cultures in a political system dominated by nobles and landowners with sources of revenue located in the countryside.[9] In his book's preface, Latini declares his affection for Naples:

> Since I wrote in Naples, I decided to use the words that are common in this land, and not the foreign ones that are not understood here; moreover I declare myself particularly fond of it not only because of the advantages I obtained from it but also because of its rare privileges that everybody admires and that nobody can deny Nature has made a particular effort to endow it with.[10]

In his recipes, Latini paid particular attention to the local products of the southern peninsula, including the newly arrived tomato. We know from John Ray, a British naturalist who travelled in Italy in the 1660s, that tomatoes had already entered the culinary customs.[11] Among the recipes that included this ingredient, Latini presented a sauce for boiled dishes, quite similar to contemporary Mexican salsa, an aubergine, squash and tomato soup and a casserole including eggs, veal, pigeon and chicken necks.

Latini moved towards a clearer distinction between savoury and sweet dishes, embracing the culinary renewal spreading from France.[12] Those changes in culinary practices and cultural preferences took place along the lines of innovative medical and dietary theories that marked the end of the humoral interpretation of nutrition, shifting towards ideas and practices based on experimental sciences.

The treatise *Brieve racconto di tutte le radici, di tutte l'erbe e di tutti i frutti che crudi o cotti in Italia si mangiano* (Short Account of All the Raw and Cooked Roots, Herbs and Fruits Eaten in Italy), written in 1614 in London by Giacomo Castelvetro, highlights how Italians ate more vegetables than their northern neighbours. He wrote:

Felice Fortunato Biggi, *Putto with Fruit Festoon*, oil on canvas, *c*. 1750. Italians consumed greater quantities of vegetables than northern European populations, as writer Giacomo Castelvetro observed while living in London in the 17th century.

> I am amazed that so few of these delicious and health-giving plants are being grown to be eaten. Through ignorance and indifference, it seems to me they are cultivated less for the table than for show by those who want to boast of their exotic plants and well-stocked gardens.'[13]

Later on, he revealed his dismay at how foreigners handled salads:

> It is important to know how to wash your herbs, and then how to season them. Too many housewives and foreign cooks get their greenstuff all ready to wash and put it in a bucket of water, or some other pot, and slosh it about a little, and then, instead of taking it out with their hands, as they ought to do, they tip the leaves and water out together, so that all the sand and grit is poured out with them. Distinctly unpleasant to chew on.[14]

The Grand Tour

Despite its lag in economic development, between the end of the seventeenth century and the mid-1840s, with the onset of rail transportation, Italy became an important travel destination for upper-class males from northern European countries. The main goal of what became known as the 'Grand Tour' was supposed to be educational, exposing young men to the sources of classic culture through visiting archaeological remains and works of art in cities like Venice, Florence and Rome. In many ways, however, the tour was perceived also as a rite of passage, during which the future members of the upper classes could experience exotic and at times dangerous environments. As only the richest families were able to send their scions to Italy for a long period of time, the tour also became a marker of social distinction.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the famous German poet and intellectual, was one of those who embarked on the tour between 1786 and 1787. He left written memoirs of these travels in his *Italian Journey*, published in 1816–17. After visiting northeastern cities like Trento, Verona and – of course – Bologna, Florence and Rome, he continued south to Naples, even crossing by sea to Sicily to explore Palermo and other towns on the island. Although food was clearly not among his main interests, he provides interesting observations about the culinary customs of Italy, especially among the upper classes with whom he interacted. In 1787, for instance, he dined with the Filangieri family in Naples. Here are some excerpts from the description of the event, where one of the female hosts kept on teasing the monks at the table, a reflection of the changing intellectual climate at the time:

> 'The meal will be excellent,' she told me, 'all without meat, but all good; I will show you what's best, the choicest morsels. But beforehand, I need to torment the monks a little bit. I cannot stand this kind of people: every day they take something from our house. All we have, we should eat it with our friends.'

> Meanwhile, soup was served and the Benedictine was eating with a modest attitude. 'Please, no ceremonies, reverend,' she said. 'If the spoon is too little I will have somebody bring you a larger one. You are used to eating in larger mouthfuls.' . . . During our conversations the good fathers were not left alone a second by the petulant insolence of my neighbour. In particular fish, which – respecting Lent – had been prepared to look like meat, became the never-ending source of irreligious and immoral comments.[15]

Goethe's description of Naples during the Christmas holidays is lively and rich with interesting details.

> The stores where they sell herbs and show cantaloupes, raisins and figs, really cheer you up. Edibles are hung in wreaths along the street: you can see large crowns of golden sausage, tied with red ribbons, and turkeys all have a red banderole on their butt. They assured me that 30,000 had been sold, excluding those fattened in private homes. A great number of donkeys loaded with vegetables, capons and goat kids roam the city and the markets, and the mounds of eggs that you see here and there form a mass that you would not imagine this large. It is not enough that all this is devoured. Every year, an officer rides through the city, together with a bugler, and announces in every square and crossroads how many thousands of cows, veal, goat kids, lambs and pigs Neapolitans consumed. The populace pays great attention and rejoices for those numbers: everybody remembers, with satisfaction, the part they had in that delight.[16]

Goethe also left a lively account of the landscape and the inhabitants of Sicily. Nevertheless, the writer seemed to be more interested in the environment from a scientific point of view than in tasting the fruits of nature. For instance,

describing Segesta, he mentions the intensely cultivated fields, the farmers at work, the cardoon and the wild fennel, but he does not provide any description of the aromas or flavours of those products. This is not surprising, as it was common for noble travellers to avoid local foods, especially when served by lower-class establishments, for fear of contamination and diseases.

The Enlightenment

In the eighteenth century, just as in the previous one, the political destiny of the Italian states was determined elsewhere. Tuscany was given to the dukes of Lorraine, related to the Habsburg family. Spain transferred Lombardy to Austria, the Savoy of Piedmont extended their control over Sardinia and the kingdom of Naples passed to the son of the king of Spain, Charles of Bourbon, establishing a local dynasty, independent from Madrid, which ruled over southern Italy and Sicily until 1861. This period of intense diplomacy and widespread conflict also saw tensions grow between the Church and the rulers of various Italian states, who were trying to assert state authority over the nobility and to centralize bureaucracy, the economy and the military. In 1728 King Vittorio Amedeo II introduced the *catasto*, a register of all land estates for fiscal purposes, in Piedmont and Sardinia. The Austrian authorities in Lombardy did the same between 1749 and 1759, reducing fiscal pressure on farmers and peasants and applying taxation to ecclesiastic properties. In many Italian states convents and monasteries were closed, and their estates were expropriated, while it was forbidden to add land to *manomorta* properties. Under the pressure of the European monarchs, in 1773 the pope abolished the order of the Jesuits, and their patrimony passed to lay authorities.

Despite the political upheavals, the eighteenth century was marked by two major developments: a noticeable growth in population all over Europe, sustained by the diffusion of American crops, and the introduction of new technologies and production systems in agriculture. Foods such as tomatoes and potatoes, previously viewed with suspicion, met growing acceptance. Agronomists and politicians promoted the diffusion of potatoes in the countryside and among the lower classes to limit the

The Savoy king Vittorio Amedeo II and his family, 1697, French print.

effects of famine. The elites did not seem to have any qualms about them. In 1801, Vincenzo Corrado, the kitchen steward of the king of Naples, wrote a treaty on potatoes in which he offered the first known recipe for potato gnocchi, testifying to their acceptance at the royal court.[17] Corn was grown all over Italy, frequently replacing other cereals like sorghum and millets. The grain was easily integrated into local diets in the form of polenta, made with cereals in the past. Rural workers cultivated it in marginal lands and consumed it as a cheap source of energy while growing cash crops to sell in the market. Despite its identification with poverty and the unhealthy conditions in which it was grown, rice was the remedy to food scarcity in many areas. Among the upper classes it was incorporated into refined dishes like the Neapolitan *sartù* and risotto in the north, thanks to the introduction of varieties that were better suited for those specific preparations.

Landowners in the most advanced areas of the country invested in their estates to introduce modern technology and new labour relations with the peasants, shaking traditional rural societies to their cores. In Lombardy, under the 'enlightened' reign of Maria Theresa of Austria, sharecropping slowly disappeared, replaced by rent contracts. Irrigation and better management of the land allowed the increase of rice production, as well as the success of farms where intensive agriculture and livestock herding sustained one another. This kind of management required considerable units, favouring rural entrepreneurs who had the financial means to rent large estates, invest in cattle, organize crop sales and pay for salaried labour. Furthermore, the Austrian empress centralized all traditional levies, taking the right away from nobility. In 1776 she also introduced reforms that facilitated free trade. The reforms continued in Lombardy under her son Joseph II. Following the Austrian example, the duke of Tuscany introduced laws to ease the sale and acquisition of land, allowed the free trade of crops and initiated the reclamation of large marshy tracts in Valdichiana and Maremma. However, sharecropping remained the prevalent form of rural contract in Tuscany, as well as in Romagna, Marche and Umbria.

In regions where large estates were owned by the Church or by nobles who could not divide them or sell them to raise capital, innovation was virtually impossible, allowing customary arrangements to survive.[18] The attempts by the Bourbons to introduce the *catasto* failed thanks to the resistance of the *baroni*, who appropriated the best tracts of land to plant wheat as its price kept on rising. Poor farmers and salaried rural labour bore the brunt of the inflationary trend as their salaries did not grow at the same pace as food prices. However, the increased availability of wheat laid the basis for a dietary shift in the urban populace of Naples, from vegetables to pasta. Neapolitans came to be known as *mangiamaccheroni*, macaroni eaters, a sobriquet that replaced the old one of *mangiafoglie*, leaf eaters. The introduction of the extrusion press and other manually operated machinery allowed an increase in pasta output and in its quality, while reducing its cost. Taking advantage of the local milling industry, the towns of Torre Annunziata and Gragnano, south of Naples, emerged as major production hubs. Manufacturers perfected a drying system in three phases: *incartamento*, in the natural heat of the sun, which produced a thin crust on the surface of pasta, called *carta* (paper); a period in a cool location that allowed the *carta* to absorb the remaining moisture from inside the pasta; and another exposure to the open air, usually away from

Giorgio Sommer, *Mangiamaccheroni*, or macaroni eaters, *c*. 1865, albumen print.

direct sunlight, for the final drying. Spaghetti and other long shapes often needed to undergo the second and the third phases more than once.[19] Other important areas for dry-pasta production were located in Liguria, particularly in Savona and Portomaurizio (today's Imperia), and in Apulia, where artisans in the Bari area took advantage of the long-standing trading relationship with Venice to export their goods.

Not all kinds of food production enjoyed such efficiency. The overall stagnation in the agricultural sector was a target for those who sustained

free entrepreneurship and private property, embraced and promoted by intellectuals and businessmen alike. The intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment had a strong influence on how these economic debates unfolded, creating the political climate that eventually led to the French Revolution. Economists known as physiocrats argued that the creation of wealth is based on the land, and the income it creates can be reinvested in other activities. By promoting the privatization of large open fields previously available for traditional uses, the abolition of pasturage rights and the abolition of all constraints that limited the free trade of agricultural products, the physiocrats embraced private enterprise and capital as a crucial factor in economic activities.

The main centres of diffusion of newfangled economic theories were Milan, Florence and Naples. Antonio Genovesi's *Lessons on Commerce and Civil Economy* (1754) solidified political economics as an academic field, while *The New Historical and Geographical Description of the Two Sicilies*, published between 1786 and 1794 by Giuseppe Maria Galanti, painted a harsh critique of the remnants of feudalism in southern Italy. In Florence the main intellectual association was the Accademia dei Georgofili (Academy of the Friends of Agriculture), founded in 1753, which focused on issues of agronomy. Its influence was visible on the work of Giovanni Fabbroni, a Tuscan living in France whose *Reflections on the Present State of Agriculture* (1780) introduced physiocratic principles among Italian thinkers. The Milan circles focused instead on politics and found a public voice in the journal *Il Caffè*, published between 1764 and 1766 by the brothers Alessandro and Pietro Verri, the latter also author of the influential *Meditations of Political Economy* (1771) that explored the notions of demand and supply.

These intellectuals not only made their own unique contribution to the political and technical aspects of food production, but also embodied models of consumption that were considered more attuned to modern and progressive individuals. Their point of reference was, of course, France, where salons and cafés provided new forms of socialization and an environment that was supposed to stimulate free and vigorous discussions based on reasoning and clarity of ideas. Many members of the Italian bourgeoisie embraced the political and intellectual approach of the Enlightenment, with its appreciation of human rationality, the power of scientific research and the ideal of progress. These values were particularly relevant for a class that was trying to assert its role – at the expense of the nobility's prerogatives – in politics, economics and the

management of the state. The light of knowledge offered necessary tools to fight superstition, ignorance and prejudice, until then ascribed to the influence of religion and, more specifically, the Catholic Church.

The bourgeoisie was developing its own culinary taste. Food and its consumption was becoming an arena where cultural identity could be shaped and performed. The exotic and excitant substances from the European colonies generated trends and fashions that played an important role in the definition of bourgeois taste. Sugar loafs from the Americas made sugar consumption more affordable. Coffee was supposed to increase intellectual sharpness and alertness, allowing witty conversations at dinners and parties to last late into the night. Its consumption was so fashionable that specialist establishments started catering to a growing and demanding clientele. The coffee shop originated in the Ottoman Empire as a public space for men to gather, relax and discuss current issues outside the structured environments of the home, the work place and the mosque. The first coffee house in Italy opened in Venice in 1683. It was followed closely by ones belonging to Jews in the port cities of

A café in St Mark's Square, Venice. Venice was the first Italian city where cafés opened in the 17th century.

Livorno and Venice, who kept close connections with their peers in the Ottoman trading centres of the eastern Mediterranean.[20] In fact, the Islamic origin of coffee had been problematic until Pope Clement VIII approved its consumption for Christians.[21]

Chocolate and cocoa drinks had been introduced to the Spanish court in the sixteenth century, where their preparation was kept secret. Approved at the end of the century by Pope Gregory XIII as a drink that did not break liturgical fast, chocolate was embraced and promoted by the Jesuits, although other religious orders were not in favour of it. Only in 1606 was the Florentine Francesco d'Antonio Carletti able to get hold of the recipe, bringing it to the Medici court in Florence.[22] Here, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the scientist Francesco Redi developed a chocolate formula that included jasmine, so appreciated by Duke Cosimo Medici that it was proclaimed a secret of state. By the eighteenth century hot cocoa drinks had become fashionable all over Italy. These new trends provoked a backlash from some intellectuals, as we can see in *Il risveglio del Giovin Signore* (The Awakening of the Young Lord, 1765) by the poet Giuseppe Parini:

> I already see your well-coiffed servant enter again; he asks you what drink, among the most popular, you would like to sip today from a precious cup. Cups and drinks are goods from India, choose the one that you prefer. If today you want to give your stomach a sweet fomentation, so that natural heat burns moderately and helps your digestion, choose brown chocolate, given to you as a tribute by the Guatemalan or the Caribbean whose hair is wrapped in barbarian feathers. If you feel oppressed by hypochondria, or too much fat is growing around your pretty limbs, honour your lips with the drink in which the grain from Aleppo and Moca – never exalted by its thousand ships – smokes and burns.[23]

Suspicious of the complicated and expensive dishes of the old nobility, considered heavy and overdone, bourgeois eaters were more in synch with the simple flavours of popular traditions. These new tastes, however, went through their own process of refinement and elaboration in order to satisfy more sophisticated palates. Vulgar and excessive flavours and aromas, including garlic, onion, cabbage and cheese, were to be avoided. Great efforts were dedicated to the study and selection of

new varieties of fruits and herbs, stimulated by the accessibility of exotic products like pineapples and the diffusion of glasshouses (*stufe*) to grow tropical plants. Orangeade and lemonade, sorbets and ice creams enriched the menus, and raw oysters and truffles made their appearance. As the great food scholar Piero Camporesi poetically remarked:

> It is striking that the decline of sumptuous Renaissance and baroque cuisine marked an end to the great hunts and the downfall of everything that darted through the air or dashed across the ground, everything that moved, flexed, leaped, expended energy or lived in close animal familiarity with the rain, the wind and the sun. Striking indeed that the century of intellectual light, the enemy of darkness and shadows, should prefer to seek nourishment from gelid, inert, corpse-like organisms, ripped from water, or from sterile bulbs that hated light, fed on the dank lunar dankness of great autumnal forest subsoil.[24]

When entertaining, hosts preferred to impress their guests not so much by sheer quantity, but rather with variety, lightness and harmony among the dishes. Great attention was paid to the visual aspects of the meal such as colour, layout of the dishes and tableware. Chinese porcelain, together with silks and wood objects, were all the rage. Measured sobriety in the menu and on the table was considered a reflection of the *esprit de finesse* of the eater. Sauces, one of the distinctive traits of French culinary technique, allowed eaters to enjoy concentrated flavours without too much heavy matter to weigh on the stomach.

Culinary fashions from France exerted an unprecedented influence over well-to-do tables. The French preference for fresh ingredients, distinct flavours, subdued use of spices and clear separation between sweet and savoury dishes slowly spread throughout Italy. Appreciation for English and French merchandise grew among consumers with disposable income, while Italian traditional products were considered more provincial and of lesser quality. Author Pietro Verri wrote to his brother Alessandro that he preferred mediocre Austrian wine – probably referring to Hungarian Tokaj – to the best product of Lombardy, because the former kept one merry, while the other was just consumed to get drunk.[25] Nevertheless, not everybody shared the admiration of French cuisine. The abbot Giovambattista Roberti took an ironic tone in his *Lettera sopra il lusso del secolo XVIII* (Letter on the Luxury of the Eighteenth Century, 1772):

> The people of Paris are more malnourished than any other European people. But the fastidiousness of some French is so arrogant that, when they arrive in Italy and taste some dish cooked in a different way from what they are used to beyond the Alps, they condemn it as detestable, even if they are poor men like dancing instructors or language teachers . . . The glory of this famous nation seems ridiculous to me; we could remind them that at the time of Caterina de' Medici our professors from the fireplaces and the *credenze* of Italy went to teach them the art of eating well.[26]

Kitchen professionals were particularly sensitive to the French culinary influence. Families of means preferred to hire chefs from France who enjoyed higher status than their local counterparts and were more familiar with the customs and fads of their compatriots. The chefs working for aristocratic families in Naples and Palermo were addressed as *monzù*, a local distortion of the French word *monsieur*, used to underline the prestige of French cuisine among the southern nobility. The so-called French-style service, where a first course of soups and appetizers was followed by a second course composed of several main dishes and finally by desserts, became popular. In 1693 La Varenne's seminal *Le Cuisinier françois* (The French Cook, originally published in 1651) and in 1741 Massialot's *Le Cuisinier royal et bourgeois* (The Court and Country Cook, 1691), two masterpieces of the French culinary canon, were translated into Italian, followed by cookbooks that mediated local recipes and ingredients with the French model. Among them, *Il cuoco piemontese perfezionato a Parigi* (The Piedmontese Cook Perfected in Paris, 1766) and *La cuciniera piemontese* (The Piedmontese [female] Cook, 1771) showed how Piedmont had taken on the role of mediator between Italian and French traditions. Outside Piedmont, the Roman Francesco Leonardi explored cold cuts, pork products and all sorts of local specialties in the six volumes of the encyclopaedic and monumental *Apicio moderno* (Modern Apicius, 1790). The author offered recipes for a tomato sauce that includes onions, garlic, celery and basil, and for stuffed tomatoes that are basically the same as recipes found today. In fact, tomatoes had already found their way to refined tables, as suggested by the presence of a tomato-sauce recipe as early as 1705 in a collection by Francesco Gaudenzio, a cook at the Jesuits' college in Rome.[27]

Illustration from the 1721 edition of La Varenne's seminal *Le Cuisinier françois* (The French Cook), originally published in 1651, which had a huge influence on Italian cuisine in the 18th century.

Vincenzo Corrado, at the court of Naples, applied French techniques to southern ingredients in *Il credenziere di buon gusto* (The Tasteful *Credenza* Manager, 1778) and above all in his masterpiece *Il cuoco galante* (The Gallant Cook, 1786). Polenta, herbs, capers, swordfish, anchovies, parmigiano, prosciutto, *castrato* (castrated ram), tomatoes and other typical products are featured in several recipes.[28] Corrado's attention to local foodstuffs also shines in *Notiziario delle produzioni particolari del regno di Napoli e delle cacce riserbate al real divertimento* (News about the Particular Productions of the Kingdom of Naples and the Hunting Exclusively Reserved for the King's Amusement, 1792). If on one hand the author wants to give homage to his king (and patron) by showcasing the wealth of his territories, on the other he reveals a true interest in his subject-matter, praising specialities such as the *maccheroni* from Torre Annunziata, the chocolate cakes of Aversa and cheese and mozzarella from Cardito.[29] Vegetables come to the fore in *Del cibo pitagorico ovvero erbaceo per uso de' nobili, e de' letterati* (Pythagorean

Food [that is to say vegetarian] for the Nobles and the Literati, 1781), where Corrado presents them as healthy and worthy of the most sophisticated tables.

In the preface to *Il Credenziere*, Corrado expounds his theory on the historical evolution of cooking. He argues that the age of temperance and moderation, when people ate simply and according to their needs, was short-lived.

> The custom of eating always the same things, and prepared almost in the same way, caused disgust. Disgust spawned curiosity; curiosity led to having experiences; and experience generated sensuality. Man savoured, tasted, diversified, chose to his satisfaction.[30]

The result was cuisine, which Corrado considered a simple and natural art that the ancient Romans had perfected with sumptuousness, delicacy, variety and magnificence. For the Neapolitan chef, the Italians inherited the Roman passion for food and transmitted it to the French, eventually surpassing their masters.

Francesco Narici(?), *Giacomo Casanova*, 1767(?), oil on canvas.

The interest in food as a source of pleasure and entertainment is apparent from one of the most infamous libertines of the period, Giacomo Casanova, who used the table as an occasion for witty conversation and seduction.[31] The positive evaluation of culinary refinement contradicted the theories expounded by Louis de Jaucourt in his entry about cuisine in the foundational text of the Enlightenment, the *Encyclopédie*. For de Jaucourt culinary excesses, decadence and preoccupation with what one eats, introduced to France with the arrival of Caterina de Medici, were a sign of degeneration.[32] Many Italians shared de Jaucourt's scorn for the excessive sophistication of food. Catholic conservatives considered culinary hedonism and the appreciation of artificiality as corrupting influences both on personal moral life and on social mores. Many members of the nobility preferred abundance in their meals – an appropriate reflection of wealth and power at a moment when their prerogatives and entitlements were questioned by unprecedented circumstances.

The slow and limited political and economic reforms of the Italian states were accelerated by the momentous events that shook France at the end of the eighteenth century, into the beginning of the nineteenth: the French Revolution – the decapitation of the king, the Republic, the Terror, the bourgeois reaction and finally the ascent of Napoleon. The French emperor extended his control over most of Italy, with the exception of Sicily, which was a British protectorate. Republics were instituted in the north and the centre of the peninsula but fell under the control of the French military, despite attempts by local revolutionaries to achieve autonomy. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, the enemies of France met in Vienna for a congress that restored the European political system as it was before the French Revolution. At the same time, all the dynasties of Italy that had been dethroned were able to regain possession of their lost territories. However, the status quo was not to last for long.

Throughout the political upheavals, Italy maintained an astounding diversity of rural cultures and economic structures. In the valleys of the Alps and in the nearby hills, land ownership was fragmented; small farmers and shepherds took advantage of traditional rights regarding summer pasturage and exploitation of common plots. In the hilly areas south of the Alps, groups of several families lived and worked together on large farms called *masseria*, where the owner was entitled to half the production. Over time, these farms were broken down into smaller plots occupied by single nuclear families that were easier to control than larger

groups. New contracts obliged farmers to pay a fixed quantity of wheat, the production of which often required the cultivation of more than half the farm. Farmers were forced to use their best land for wheat and base their diet on potatoes and maize. As a consequence, their standard of living plummeted and pellagra, a disease that can lead to dementia and eventually death with symptoms including diarrhoea and dermatitis, became widespread.[33] Pellagra is caused by vitamin B deficiency; when maize has not gone through the process of nixtamalization (as discussed in the previous chapter) the vital niacin (vitamin B3) cannot be absorbed. Maize was often excluded from the culinary repertoire of the upper classes and closely identified with poverty.

In the plains around the Po River, agriculture was mostly oriented to produce for commercial markets. The investment in irrigation and public works made this area the most advanced in Italy. Laws facilitated the sale and acquisition of land, and modern techniques were used that integrated agriculture with intensive cattle herding. The situation was ripe for the intervention of entrepreneurs, called *affittuario* or *fittavolo*, businessmen who rented medium or large farms (*cascine*) from absentee owners and managed them to maximize returns on investments. Often paid by the day, fixed-wage workers (*braccianti*, from the word *braccia*, arms) provided most labour. In central Italy, traditional sharecropping (*mezzadria*) remained prevalent; the land was divided into units called *podere* or *fattoria*, which included a home for the farmer's family and other productive structures such as barns and stables. Sharecropping did not boost investments, since owners only had the right to half of the product. Furthermore, as farmers often lived in relative isolation and their production was geared towards self-sufficiency, the arrangement was not favourable to the expansion of cash crops for the market. As a consequence, the continuous rotation system that was becoming prevalent in the north did not expand to Tuscany and central Italy. Fallow periods remained prevalent in the *alberata* landscape, composed of narrow fields where many trees were planted and vines were festooned between trees. In southern Italy, nobles and ecclesiastic institutions still owned most of the land, as only a small portion had been expropriated during the French occupation. The rural poor had to work as salaried labour since they owned no land. At times they rented tiny plots but it was frequently not enough to guarantee self-sufficiency. They commonly lived in villages located on hills or on the slopes of mountains, and they had to commute daily – on foot – to their plot or to the land they were paid to

In the 19th century corn was grown all over Italy, often consumed in the form of polenta.

till. The only exceptions to the desperate situation of southern agriculture were found along the coasts, where fruit and olive trees, together with vines, provided high-quality products that commanded good prices on the market.

Overall, in the century preceding the unification of Italy, agriculture saw a slow but unstoppable penetration of the capitalist mode of production due to the intervention of economic factors that shattered the traditional customs regulating the lives of rural workers. Land privatizations, new contracts and the reorganization of production worsened the living conditions of farmers, precisely when the decline in mortality rates was causing the population to grow.[34]

The Process of Unification and its Consequences

Starting in the mid-1800s, the complex and varied rural landscapes described above became part of a single country, the Kingdom of Italy. At the Congress of Vienna, the Savoy rulers were able to extend their territories to the former republic of Genoa. While the Savoy territories already included Piedmont and Sardinia, this final shift marked the end of the Napoleon era and an end to Genoan independence – just as had happened with Venice, given to Austria by Napoleon. In 1848, following

Italy, 1837.

a period of conspiracies and revolts aiming to eliminate foreigners and absolutist regimes from the peninsula, the Savoy kings initiated wars that led to the annexation of large areas in northern and central Italy. In 1860 an expedition led by Giuseppe Garibaldi landed in Sicily and moved north, causing the fall of the Bourbon Dynasty and ushering in the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. After the conquest of Veneto in 1866, the Italian troops penetrated Rome in 1870. The pope

was left with the Vatican State, diplomatically isolated from Italy until the Lateran Treaty of 1929, which restored official realations between the Vatican and the Italian State.

If the peasants in central and, above all, southern Italy hoped that the unification and the arrival of Garibaldi's troops would bring change, they were quickly – and brutally – disillusioned. When Garibaldi landed in Sicily, needing the help of the locals to overthrow the Bourbons, he announced that lands would be redistributed to the needy. However, when in the town of Bronte social unrest turned into riots, the Italian army general Nino Bixio doled out harsh punishment and executed some of the rebels in order to quash the movement. While the properties of the nobility did not undergo any major reform following the occupation of Rome in 1870, the liquidation of ecclesiastical lands increased the patrimony of a growing bourgeoisie in the centre and south of the country. However, most new owners did not introduce

Giuseppe Garibaldi, 1861, photographic print on a *carte de visite*.

modern farming techniques but modelled their management on the style of previous landowners, all the while eliminating the remnants of farmers' traditional access to open fields and asserting property rights in a modern and business-oriented manner.

The first governments of the unified country left agriculture to private initiatives. In Piedmont, a network of canals named after the former prime minister, Camillo Benso di Cavour, was completed between 1863 and 1866, and in 1878 the drainage of the Fucino lake in Abruzzo was completed. Only in 1882 did the state dedicate limited funds to the reclamation of marshy lands with the manifest goal not of increasing agricultural output, but of getting rid of malaria. Blatant inefficiencies eventually forced the government to entrust the operation to private consortia. Large territories were reclaimed in Emilia Romagna and in the countryside near Rome, where an important private agrarian enterprise was established in Maccarese. Laws were introduced to control the reforestation of mountain slopes to avoid landslides – a problem that still plagues Italy, as the destructive flood that swept through the Cinque Terre villages in October 2011 sadly demonstrated.

In the years following the unification, internal borders and custom fees were removed. The construction of railways eased the movement of goods and pushed landowners to specialize their productions for the market. In the south, citrus and almond plantations acquired large-scale dimensions, while sizeable areas in Piedmont and Lombardy focused on rice, which had all but disappeared in Veneto and Emilia. Olive oil and wine production increased, but most of it was consumed locally. Conversely, pasta and cheese were increasingly appreciated abroad.[35] Italian agriculture still suffered from inadequate transportation, intricate distribution networks, lack of storage facilities, insufficient availability of credit and a mind-boggling array of taxes and levies. The growing integration of Italian agriculture into global trade exposed the rural world to the uncertainties of market economies. A global over-production crisis in the 1880s depressed agricultural incomes and pushed rural workers to abandon the countryside and resettle abroad, mostly in the United States, Canada and South American countries such as Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina. It was the beginning of a long history of migration that would scatter Italians all over the globe. The crisis caused the decrease of average daily calorie consumption for Italians from 2,647 in the 1870s to 2,197 and 2,119 respectively in the two following decades.[36]

The unification of the country did not correspond to a sudden integration of its citizens. Most inhabitants of the countryside and large numbers of urban dwellers were illiterate and unable to speak standard Italian. Social and political systems were so radically diverse that the government had to fight for years to establish its authority, especially over Sicily and the south, where bands of brigands took to the mountains, often backed by the locals. The diet in the countryside was very limited, both in terms of variety and calories. Wheat production was mostly directed to middle-class urban consumers, while rural workers ate maize, barley, millet, buckwheat, chestnut, lentils, fava beans and chickpeas, also grinding them into flours that were used for porridges, dumplings, breads and focaccias. Beans and rice also provided some nourishment. Only peasants in Sicily and Apulia had access to wheat, the production of which was concentrated in those areas, but their living conditions were no better, as suggested in the poem *Il canto dei mietitori* (The Reapers' Song, 1888) by Mario Rapisardi from Catania:

> We are the reapers' army
> And we reap the crops for your Lordships.
> Welcome is the scorching sun, the sun of June
> Which burns our blood and darkens our snouts
> And makes the hoes in our fists red hot
> While we're reaping the crops for your Lordships . . .
> Our little children have no bread
> And, who knows, might die tomorrow,
> Being jealous of your dogs' meals.
> And we keep on reaping the crops for your Lordships.
> Drunken with sun each of us staggers:
> Water and vinegar, a piece of bread and an onion
> Are enough to quench our thirst and appease our hunger.
> They even fill us up.
> Let's reap the crops for your Lordships . . .[37]

Workers were provided with larger meals to ensure their productivity during the long days of the grape harvest, the gathering and squeezing of olives and the killing of pigs.[38] Realist writer Giovanni Verga gives us a good description of a grape harvest in Sicily in his short story '*La Roba*' (The Stuff, 1883):

> At the time of the grape harvest whole villages came swarming to his vineyards, and wherever you hear people singing on the land, there was singing as they picked Mazzarò's grapes. As for the wheat harvest, Mazzarò's reapers spread out across the fields like a whole army, and you needed fistfuls of money to provide for all those people, with their early-morning biscuit, their bread and Seville oranges for breakfast, their picnic lunch, and their lasagne in the evening. The lasagne had to be served up in bowls as big as wash basins.[39]

The central government tried to achieve a better understanding of the situation of the Italian working class by financing surveys and ethnographic research including the agrarian inquiry into conditions of the rural classes led by Stefano Jacini between 1881 and 1886.[40] Around 80 per cent of the working-class household budget was spent on food, with most concentrated on basic staples.[41] *Maccheroni* were sold on the streets of workers' neighbourhoods in Naples, often eaten outdoors on the

Tripe became an important element of the lower classes' diet at the end of the 19th century.

spot. Meat was consumed in small quantities and only on special occasions. In 1892, a massive slaughterhouse was inaugurated in Rome to satisfy the demand for meat, connected with the city's status as the capital and the influx of employees and bureaucrats in the new government offices and ministries. Yet most workers did not have access to the best cuts they butchered, but could only afford the offal, ironically defined as *quinto quarto*, the fifth quarter left after the animal's quartering. The availability of ox tails, suckling veal intestines and tripe were soon incorporated into low-class Roman cuisine with dishes like *coratella* (lung and heart of lamb, sautéed with slivers of artichoke), *coda alla vaccinara* (braised ox tail with herbs, lard and chopped tomato, in some versions with the addition of cocoa powder and pine nuts), and *trippa alla romana* (tripe [cow stomach] stewed with tomato sauce and mint, and served with grated pecorino romano).[42]

Italian intellectuals and politicians often framed the analysis of undernourishment in terms of differences between north and south, developing what historian Carol Helstosky aptly defines as 'a tale of two diets'.[43] However, class distinctions were more relevant than geographical environments, with blue-collar and rural workers suffering from endemic food scarcity. This situation frequently caused turmoil, as happened in 1868 when the government reinstated a milling tax based on the number of turns of the milling stones; in 1887 because of a duty on cereals; and in 1898 when, under the effect of the agricultural depression of the 1880s, prices rose quickly and riots exploded in many major cities, culminating in a massacre of protesters in Milan.[44] As social historian Paolo Sorcinelli acutely observed: 'In order to eat, Italians had to learn to demonstrate and to dissent.'[45] In the Po plain, where fixed-wage labour was prevalent, workers organized themselves to launch strikes and negotiate with their employers for better pay.

The end of the nineteenth century saw the rise of industrial food-manufacturing companies, despite the fact that most agricultural production was consumed locally, either fresh or as dried or cured goods.[46] Distribution infrastructure was also lagging. The first large, refrigerated warehouse was inaugurated in Milan in 1897, much later than in other European countries, followed by similar initiatives in northern Italy, particularly for the conservation of butchered animals, as frozen meat was still regarded with suspicion. Yet the need to feed Italian troops in the First World War changed this attitude, forcing the use of frozen and canned meat at the front.[47] Pasta stayed at the vanguard of more

A pasta factory in Naples, 1875, photo by Giorgio Sommer (1834–1914).

efficient distribution networks, as it had already experienced technological innovations in the previous centuries. Steam- and electricity-operated machinery, such as the wheat sifter, the mechanical kneader and the drier, produced pasta that could travel well nationally and even satisfy the demand from migrants all over the world. Gragnano and Torre Annunziata remained the main centres of production, and new factories opened in Abruzzo (de Cecco and Cocco), Emilia (Barilla) and Tuscany (Buitoni). Pasta, a product that had traditionally been perceived as southern, was increasingly embraced as a national speciality, although different shapes and lengths maintained elements of localism. Consumers were able to choose among pasta made of semolina or flour, or a mix of the two, at times dyed yellow with saffron, red with tomato and green with spinach. Industrial *pasta all'uovo* (with the addition of fresh or powdered eggs) and stuffed pasta made their appearance, while companies tried to differentiate their products by adding gluten, iron, calcium, beer yeast or anything that was supposed to increase nutritional values.[48] From the Naples area, the custom of pairing pasta with tomato sauce rapidly spread northwards.[49] Canning technology, based on the discoveries by Nicolas Appert, offered an alternative to the traditional production of *conserva nera*, the dark paste made from boiling and sun-drying

tomato pulp, used for sauces during the winter. As grain prices plummeted following the 1880s crisis, farmers looked for profitable crops, and tomatoes took centre stage in the areas of Naples and Salerno in the south, and around Parma and Piacenza in the north, generating a lively canning industry. Cirio, founded in Turin, embraced tomato canning and opened plants near Naples, quickly establishing an international network of distribution. Italians are still familiar with brands that were launched during this period, like Perugina chocolate in Perugia; Caffarel chocolate-and-hazelnut *gianduiotti* and Martini & Rossi and Cinzano liquors in Turin; Lazzaroni cookies in Saronno, Lombardy, and Stock brandy in Trieste.[50] These products, renowned and appreciated abroad, helped establish a small but growing high-end consumer culture shared by the upper and middle classes all over Italy, who relied on brands as a form of protection against the growing plague of adulteration.[51] The wine industry was still lagging, with most of the production focused on *vini da taglio*, wines with a high alcoholic content that were exported to foreign countries to be mixed with local products, and *vini sfusi*, table wines resulting from the mix of different grapes and varieties grown more for quantity than for quality. When the grapevine disease phylloxera spread to France in the 1870s and to Italy in the late 1880s, growers were pushed to reorganize and streamline their vines. The reorganization improved production, but also pushed many low-yielding local varieties to the sidelines.[52] Some areas showed signs of commercial expansion. In western Sicily the local Florio family established a popular brand by embracing a product launched by the British during the Napoleonic occupation: fortified *marsala* wines.[53] Marsala became the drink of choice for the bourgeoisie, together with vermouth from Piedmont, where companies like Gancia and Cinzano stimulated farmers to improve their crops.

The central government contributed to the unification of food habits, as a side effect of the mandatory military service. Young men had to leave home for five years – three after 1875 – for training and stationing, shipped to faraway locations where people spoke unintelligible dialects and had different customs.[54] Italian military leaders clearly understood the importance of living conditions – and in particular food – for troop morale.[55] For many recruits, it was the first time they had access to three nutritious meals a day. Some of the victuals were not particularly popular, in particular canned meat, but others like coffee, pasta (with tomato sauce) and cheese became everyday items for recruits. At the end of

military service, many former soldiers returned home with a taste for them, a symbol of the national identity that the country was still struggling to achieve.

Little information is available about the quality and quantity of food consumed among middle-class citizens as the government, cultural researchers and charitable institutions were much more concerned about the diet and nutrition of the lower classes. However, we can use newspapers, magazines and cookbooks to understand their culinary habits, their table manners and, above all, their inspiration as they shaped their cultural and social identity as citizens of a new country. In the years preceding unification, cookbooks tended to reflect local practices and ingredients, both for the aristocracy, like Ippolito Cavalcanti's *Cucina teorico-pratica* (Theoretical and Practical Cuisine, 1837), and for larger audiences, like *Il cuoco senza pretese* (The Cook without Pretensions, 1834). Others, like *Il nuovo economico cuoco piemontese e credenziere napoletano* (The New Economical Piedmontese Cook and the Neapolitan Butler, 1822), attempted to connect different regional traditions.

The first book that contributed to defining a national cuisine for the Italian bourgeoisie was *La scienza in cucina e l'arte del mangiar bene* (Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Good Eating), published by Pellegrino Artusi in 1891. Artusi was born in 1820 in Forlimpopoli, a town near Forlì. The son of a successful merchant, he moved his business to Florence in 1852 where he lived until his death in 1911, enjoying his wealth and dedicating himself to literature and cooking. As he could not find an investor for his recipe collection, Artusi published it himself, selling 1,000 copies of the first edition in four years. Soon the book was discovered by middle-class cooks and by the time Artusi died more than 200,000 copies had been sold – a huge number for the time, considering how few Italians were literate. The volume went through fourteen editions, growing from 475 to almost 800 recipes. Despite the fact that he was most familiar with the cuisines of Tuscany, Emilia and Romagna, Artusi included recipes from all over Italy, single-handedly creating a nation-wide Italian vocabulary for food and cooking. The recipes, although at times not very precise, are lively, entertaining and full of stories, making for a pleasant read. Artusi's repertoire included *costoletta alla Milanese* (Milanese-style veal cutlet) and eel in the style of his native Romagna, as well as southern dishes like couscous from Sicily (*cuscussù*, identified as a Jewish speciality) and what he considered as Neapolitan pizza, a dessert with almonds and ricotta cheese. The author, who avoided hot

peppers and did not even mention Sardinia, provided a few foreign recipes such as roast beef and soufflés, revealing the influence of international cuisine on Italian bourgeois cooking. Artusi's books reflected not only the cultural and social values of the middle classes, but also their access to food and spending power. The author adopted an educational approach, mixing home economics tips, hygiene counsel and medical advice aimed at sobriety, temperance and good management of domestic finances. His tone is light and entertaining, offering side notes that give us a better sense of the culture of the time. Reading his recipes, including the two I have translated below, it is noticeable how Artusi gave vague indications about quantities, assuming that readers, mostly women, would know exactly how to measure the ingredients.

Bourgeois families embraced the model of the shared family meal, which reinforced the patriarchal structure of the nuclear family and distinguished them from lower-class individuals, both rural and urban, who tended to eat alone and more frugally (except on festive occasions), depending on their work schedule and location.[56] Historian Paolo Sorcinelli ironically points out that the way workers ate, quickly, voraciously and without great attention to manners, resembled more the ethos of contemporary fast food than the imaginary ideals of the traditional family sitting around the table and taking the time to eat together.[57] The proper meal, both in restaurants and private middle- and upper-class homes, slowly acquired a structure based on the sequence of antipasto (appetizers), *primo* (usually a soup or a pasta dish, less often rice), *secondo* (meat or fish) with *contorni* (side dishes, often vegetables) and dessert at the end. Antipasti were reserved for special occasions, but in the south it was normal to keep finger food on the table before the meal or between meals: olives, slices of salami, pieces of cheese. (Today, the meal structure has fundamentally remained the same, although now Italians tend to eat fewer courses, with the exception of special occasions and Sunday meals.) When guests were invited, the new meal structure allowed the host to decide its content and timing, controlling the quantities of food while at the same time demonstrating propriety. Bourgeois families, in some ways, tried to transform the Sunday meal into a special occasion, a minor version of important banquets. During the week, though, meals were much simpler, and recipes that allowed the recycling of leftovers were appreciated.

Hotels and restaurants flourished, becoming places of conspicuous consumption for the bourgeoisie. From the point of view of the table

Florence-style Black Risotto with Cuttlefish

This invertebrate (*Sepia officinalis*) of the order of molluscs and the family cephalopods is called *calamaio* (inkwell) in Florence, perhaps because (as the beautiful Tuscan language often forms vocabulary based on similarities) it contains a little bladder, which nature gave it for defence, containing a black liquid that can serve as ink. The Tuscans, the Florentines in particular, are so passionate about vegetables that they would put them everywhere and consequently they put beetroots in this dish, which I think fits in it as *pancotto* (bread soup) fits in the Creed prayer. I would not want that this excessive use of plants be one, and not the least, of the causes of the flabby constitution of certain classes of persons, who, under the influence of some illness, cannot stand its brunt and are seen falling thick as leaves in late autumn.

Peel and separate the cuttlefish to clean them of the useless parts, such as bone, the apparatus of the mouth, eyes and digestive tract; put aside the ink bladder. After washing them well cut them into small squares, and the tails into pieces. Chop two large onions minutely, or rather one onion and two cloves of garlic, and put them to the fire in a saucepan with fine and plentiful olive oil. When the onions have browned, add the cuttlefish. Wait for them to boil and turn yellow, then add about 600 grams of chard, without the thicker ribs and chopped in large pieces. Stir and let it boil for about half an hour, then pour 600 grams of rice (which will be the weight of the cuttlefish before cooking) and the ink, and when the rice is well soaked in the sauce, cook it by slowly adding hot water. Rice, as a general rule, needs to be under-cooked, and when we say dry it should form a mound on the tray in which you serve. Always season it with grated Parmesan cheese, but if you have a sensitive stomach, refrain from using it: when it is cooked with these and similar ingredients,

it is not easy to digest. Now I will show you another way to make this risotto, so that you can choose the one you like between the two. No chard, no ink, and when the cuttlefish, as we said, are beginning to turn yellow, add the rice and cook it by slowly adding hot water and tomato sauce or paste, giving it more grace and flavour with a bit of butter; when it is almost cooked add the Parmesan cheese. If you want it even better, at two thirds of cooking add the peas we mentioned in the risotto with the tench.[58]

Stuffed Potato Croquettes

potatoes, 300 grams
parmesan cheese, two tablespoons well filled
eggs, two
a hint of nutmeg
flour, as required

Boil the potatoes, peel them and pass through a sieve, making them fall on top of a thin layer of flour. Make a hole in the mound of potatoes, add salt, give them the aroma of nutmeg and pour in the eggs and grated Parmesan. Then, using as little flour as you can, work the mix into a soft mass that you will divide into 18 parts. With floured finger, make a small hole in each of these and fill it with chopped meat. Pull the flaps over to cover the meat and, with floured hands, shape round balls that you will fry in lard or oil, sending them to the table as a side dish for a fried meat course. This dish is flashy, good and inexpensive, because you can also make the filling just out of a single chicken giblets, and when you happen to buy a whole chicken, you can grind its crest, the gizzard, the unborn eggs cooked with a little chopped onion and butter, and then add a diced slice of ham (both fat and lean). If you do not have a chicken, form the filling some other way.[59]

Carl Heinrich Bloch, *Osteria in Rome*, 1866, oil on canvas.

service, a new style known as 'Russian' became popular, where a succession of individual dishes – as opposed to the previous multi-dish services – were presented to all the guests at the same time. Those who could not afford elegant establishments would still patronize *osterie* or *trattorie*. Many city dwellers enjoyed Sunday excursions to the countryside immediately outside the cities, where *trattorie* offered simple meals and at times allowed customers to bring their own food if they bought wine. The quality of wine sold in these places varied, often proportionally to price. The less fortunate had access to water in which grape marc had fermented, or a mix of vinegary wine and water. Only after a tariff war with France in the early 1890s did large quantities of wine, previously exported, find their way into local distribution, at the same time becoming more affordable. Its consumption increased. Abroad, the most progressive members of the medical establishment identified alcoholism as a medical condition, but in Italy the cultural perception was much more ambivalent. While on the one hand wine was considered healthy, nutritious, effective against malaria and less damaging than stronger

spirits, its excessive consumption was also branded as personally and socially destructive.[60]

Incomes and living conditions in the countryside were still worse than for urban blue-collar workers. Illiteracy was rampant, despite the law of 1879 that made elementary schooling mandatory. Overall, women and children suffered from undernourishment more commonly than men, who were considered the breadwinners and thus worthy of larger portions of the meagre family meals:

> Women (both single and married ones) ate standing, in the kitchen, in a corner, on the cutter, on the box for the fire wood, with the dish in their hands, or sitting on the floor and without silverware, reserved for the exclusive use of the males; they often ate what was left, alone, when – as a Piedmont female rural worker remembers – 'they [the males] were not at home'.[61]

While the agricultural crisis of the 1880s laid the basis for agricultural development in the Po plain, living standards for rural workers in the centre and the south worsened. Pellagra decreased in many northern areas, where rural families could count on higher income connected with seasonal employment in the growing industrial sector and could afford more varied food.[62] However, pellagra cases increased among sharecroppers in central Italy, especially on the mountains, where it had up until then been a rarity. The disease spread as farmers were forced to subsist on corn, growing cash crops on most of their land to pay taxes and buy commercial goods.[63] The myth of the Italian farmer as a strong, parsimonious and frugal worker became an excuse for the upper classes – including political leaders – to justify their failure to improve rural living conditions. At the same time, rural workers were depicted as lazy, indolent and lacking in initiative, ignoring the connection of these behaviours with insufficient nutrition. Yet at the turn of the twentieth century agriculture still employed the great majority of Italians, with industrialization and economic development still a long way off.