THE FOOD OF *IL GATTOPARDO*. HISTORY, CUISINE, AND SOCIETY IN THE LIFE AND WORKS OF GIUSEPPE TOMASI DI LAMPEDUSA

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Il Gattopardo (*The Leopard*) is the famous novel by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (1896-1957) published posthumously in 1958.[1] Initially criticized, but later considered one of the most important works of Sicilian and Italian literature, the book became a worldwide bestseller and has been translated into more than 40 languages (in English for the first time in 1960).[2] Director Luchino Visconti also produced a famous film based on the novel in 1963.

The novel has been the subject of numerous studies[3] but also of interpretations that have distorted its meaning, especially from a historical and historiographical point of view (it is, after all, a literary work and not a historical essay). As early as 1988, David Gilmour, author of a famous biography of Tomasi di Lampedusa, noted the obvious presence of many personal memories in the novel, and that the descriptions of certain places were "absolutely authentic,"[4] but it remains a novel set in 1860-1910, written in the 1950s, and largely based on the author's personal memories that date back the early 20th or late 19th century at most. For instance, one of the most famous sentences of the novel is still today the most misunderstood: Tancredi's famous line, which we will discuss later. – "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change" –, "which was widely seen as Lampedusa's view and even as his philosophy, although in the end, it is ex-

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1 Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1958).

2 Giuseppe di Lampedusa [sic], *The Leopard*, trad. Archibald Colquhoun (London: Collins and Harvill, 1960). Any additions or corrections to quotations are included in square brackets.

3 For an essential bibliography see Nunzio Zago, "Tomasi, Giuseppe, duca di Palma, principe di Lampedusa," in "Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani," vol. 96 (2019), https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tomasi-giuseppe-duca-di-palma-principe-di-lampedusa_(Dizionario-Biografico)/ (accessed March 2025).

4 Letter to Guido Lajolo, 31-03-1956, in Andrea Vitello, *Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1987), 334.

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plicitly rejected by Don Fabrizio himself. Francesco Renda considered this 'interpretation' as 'sterile' and 'distorted' […]."[5] This sentence becomes the basis of a historiographical thesis formulated by Denis Mack Smith in his *A History of Sicily* of 1968.[6] Mack Smith, "who took on the notion of 'transformism' as the original theme behind the history of the unification of Italy", observed, in the history of the island, a tendency towards immobility profited by, above all, the aristocracy "which, in order to preserve stability and privileges, gave Sicily to 'foreign owners', and blocked every domestic growth with corruption and criminality…". A tendentious theory, which – as also Maurice Aymard highlighted in those same years – was based on a modest critical and documental level bibliography.[7] A thesis that in recent decades has been rejected by deeper historiographical research.[8]

Preferring to therefore avoid perilous overinterpretations and misunderstandings, we will attempt to reconstruct and contextualize one particular aspect of the novel and its author: the attention to the culture of food and cooking.[9] Our analysis will be primarily historical, socio-cultural, in an open dialogue with literature: specialists will forgive us if, for reasons of space, we do not delve into critical theories relating to the topic of food in literature.[10]

Starting from the experience and creativity of Tomasi di Lampedusa, but also integrating several nineteenth-century historical sources, we attempt to reconstruct the relationship between food and society in Sicily between

5 David Gilmour, *The Last Leopard. A life of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa* (London: Quartet Books Ltd., 1988), 179.

6 Denis Mack Smith, *A History of Sicily. 2. Medieval Sicily. 800-1713*; *3. Modern Sicily after 1713* (London, Chatto & Windus 1968).

7 Maurice Aymard, "Mack Smith (D.), A history of Sicily (vol. I-II)," *Rivista Storica Italiana*, vol. 82, 1970, 481-483.

8 Paolo Militello, "The Historiography on Early Modern Age Sicily between the 20th and 21st Centuries," *Mediterranea Ricerche Storiche*, n. 36, aprile 2016, 101-118.

9 Cfr. Massimo Montanari, *Food is culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. On Italian cuisine, see Gillian Riley, *The Oxford companion to Italian food* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

10 Gianpaolo Biasin, *The Flavors of Modernity. Food and the Novel* (Princeton-New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), *Chapter 4. A Wise Gourmet: Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, Il Gattopardo*, 65-77; Giovanna Jackson, "Of Cabbages and Roses. Some Considerations on the Food Images of Lampedusa's Il Gattopardo," *Italian Culture*, 6 (1985), 125-141; Mary Taylor Simeti, *Pomp and Sustenance. Twenty-Five Centuries of Sicilian Food* (New York: Knopf, 1989) and *La tavola del Gattopardo. La cucina siciliana tra letteratura e memoria* (Palermo: Futurantica, 2 ed. 2006).

the 19th and 20th centuries. In those centuries, the millennia-old Sicilian gastronomic tradition had already fully absorbed Spanish influences (from 14th to 18th century, and even beyond, Sicily was closely linked to the Ibero-American world), Italian, French, and, more generally, Euro-Mediterranean influences of the preceding three to four centuries, demonstrating that the island was, and has always been, 'open' to the world.[11]

Tomasi di Lampedusa: a writer who is part flâneur *and part* gourmand

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's relationship with food and conviviality was certainly influenced by his life experiences. Born in Palermo (by now part of the Kingdom of Italy) in 1896, son of the Duke of Palma and nephew of the Prince of Lampedusa, Giuseppe was the last heir of an aristocratic family that was heading towards extinction, following the economic collapse. Despite this, he had a pleasant and 'aristocratic' childhood, spending winters in the vast Lampedusa palace in a poor area in the center of Palermo, and summers in the 'countryside' at the Santa Margherita palace in the Belice valley, about seventy kilometers south of Palermo. It is precisely in Santa Margherita di Belice that one of his earliest food-related memories dates back–the 'quintessential' countryside trip, with the whole family to Venarìa, a little hunting lodge about four miles out of Santa Margherita:

> Cooks had left that morning at seven and had already prepared everything; when a boy look-out announced the group's approach they thrust into the ovens their famous *timbales* of macaroni *alla Talleyrand*, (the only macaroni which keeps for a period), so that when we arrived, we had scarcely time to wash our hands before going straight out onto the terrace, where two tables had been laid in the open air. In the *timbales*, the macaroni was steeped in the lightest glaze and, beneath the savoury crust of flaky [not sweet], absorbed the flavour of the *prosciutto* [ham] and truffles sliced into match-like slivers.
>
> Huge cold bass with mayonnaise followed, then stuffed turkey and avalanches of potatoes. One might expect strokes from over-eating […] Next, all was put to rights by the arrival of one of those iced cakes at which Marsala, the cook, was a past-master. Wines, as always in sober Sicily, were of non-im-

11 On the history of food in Sicily in the medieval and early modern age, Maurice Aymard and Henri Bresc's essay, "Nourritures et consommation en Sicile entre XIVe et XVIIIe siècle," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome*, 1975, 87-2, 535-581, still remains valid. Most recent is Henri Bresc, *Il cibo nella Sicilia medievale* (Palermo: Palermo University Press, 2019).

portance. The guests expected them, of course, and liked their glasses filled to the brim, ("no collars" they would call to the footman) but in the absence of a collar to their glasses they emptied but one, at the most two.[12]

It was a countryside breakfast, a *déjeuner sur l'herbe*, but decidedly aristocratic. Even the 'maccheroni' (macaroni), the typical 'peoples' dry pasta of the Neapolitans (mancia-maccarruna; i.e., macaroni eaters) and the Sicilians (as the scholar of popular traditions, Giuseppe Pitré, asserted in 1889),[13] was ennobled in its version of *Timbale à la Talleyrand* (macaroni pie), with chicken quenelle stuffing, black truffles, madeira sauce and espagnole sauce.[14] After all, if Italy was the land of pasta, Sicily, at that time, was still one of the most important granaries of the Mediterranean.

In addition to an aristocratic lifestyle (despite economic difficulties), Tomasi di Lampedusa also had a cosmopolitan education, enriched after World War I by long stays in central-northern Italy, in almost all of the European countries 'of major interest' (except Spain and Greece) and, especially Paris and London in the mid-1920s. His stay in London coincided with the period when his uncle, Pietro Tomasi Marquis of Torretta, was ambassador (from 1922 to 1927, during the fascist era). In London, Gilmour informs us, Giuseppe often accompanied his uncle to official ceremonies and was frequently invited by ministers and ambassadors.[15] The years spent in England undoubtedly fomented Tomasi di Lampedusa's 'anglomania.' In London, the author also met his uncle's Baltic stepdaughter, Alessandra Wolff-Stomersee, known as Licy, a Freudian psychoanalyst, whom he married in 1932. From that moment, the couple's life was divided between the palace in Palermo and the castle of Stomersee in Latvia, although "Giuseppe, in spite of his cosmopolitanism, remained emotionally tied to Pal-

12 Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Places of my Infancy. VII. Excursions* (trad. Archibald Colquhoun), in *The Siren and selected Writings* (London: The Harvill Press, 1995), 47.

13 "Sicilians today enjoy calling Neapolitans "mancia-maccarruna" (macaroni eaters). This qualification applied to Sicilians two or three centuries ago […]; later, perhaps out of antipathy, it stuck to the Neapolitans, but they are still great eaters of macaroni, as claimed by Ortensio Lando, who was not Sicilian." Giuseppe Pitré, *Usi e costumi, credenze e pregiudizi del popolo siciliano* (Palermo: Pedone Lauriel, 1889), 73.

14 *La cuisine classique. Études pratiques, raisonnées et démonstratives de l'école française appliquée au service à la Russe*, di Urbain Dubois et Émile Bernard (Paris: Chez les auteurs, 1856), 228.

15 Gilmour, *The Last Leopard*, 46. See also *Viaggio in Europa. Epistolario. 1925-1930*, ed. Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi and Salvatore Silvano Nigro (Milano: Mondadori, 2006).

ermo, Licy, despite her travels, was firmly attached to the Baltic."[16] From the young Tomasi di Lampedusa's frequentation with European aristocracy and familiarity with the receptions of the *establishment* and international diplomacy, he will draw inspiration, as we will see, for the *haute cuisine* dishes mentioned in *Il Gattopardo*.

The quiet and worldly life will, however, be interrupted by World War II, a war that represented "a continual source of personal worry and unhappiness as well as a spectacle which disgusted him."[17] The beloved Lampedusa palace was rendered uninhabitable by the Allied bombings of 1943 and the author was, therefore, forced to evacuate to Ficarra, in the Nebrodi mountains (the 'house' was subsequently "literally razed to the ground" when the "bombs brought from beyond the Atlantic searched her out and destroyed her").[18]

There were moments of serenity, however, such as the writer's short but frequent stays in Capo d'Orlando, at the villa of his Piccolo cousins, on the northern coast 120 kilometres from Palermo. "Standing in one of the greenest corners of Sicily, the house was surrounded by citrus groves and gardens of orchids, palms and hydrangeas. For Giuseppe it had always been an enchanted place, an Arcadia to flee from the problems of Palermo."[19] Here, in addition to learned conversations and countryside walks, the food was one of the main pleasures.

> On Easter Sunday 1942 Giuseppe – Gilmour informs us, citing the letters of Tomasi di Lampedusa – described to Licy a typical dinner of lasagne, vol-au-vent with lobster, cutlets in breadcrumbs with potatoes, peas and ham, 'an admirable tart from a recipe of Escoffier' (puff pastry, cream and candied cherries) – and 'all in their usual quantities!' The manner in which the Piccolos were able to insulate themselves from the horrors of the Second War is remarkable. Throughout the summer of 1942 while massive armies confronted each other in Russia and Africa, there was no shortage of food at Capo d'Orlando: on 9 June Giuseppe reported 'tender and tasty beefsteaks two inches thick', exquisite cakes, a slice of tuna fish 'literally as large as a car tyre'. On another day Giovanna [Tomasi's cousin] announced that they were having a light and mainly cold lunch as it was summer, and afterwards Giuseppe listed for Licy's benefit the contents of this 'light' meal: 'real *fettuccine'* with butter and parmesan cheese, an enormous fish with various sauces, a *pâté de lapin* made 'according to the rules of the old game pâtés: liver purée, black truffles, pistachios

16 Gilmour, *The Last Leopard*, 68.
17 Ivi, 73.
18 Ivi, 81-82.
19 Ivi, 76.

and consommé jelly; a very successful product of Giovanna's art'; and finally meringues with real chocolate ice-cream.[20]

With the end of the war, the post-war years in the now republican Italy were characterized by monotonous daily life. Tomasi di Lampedusa lived in a new house that he did not cherish, and consequently spent most of the day outside. "Rising about seven, he would be walking down the Corso Vittorio Emanuele towards the centre of the city by eight. Turning west at the Via Roma or a little further on at the Quattro Canti, he then walked westwards until he reached one of his favourite cafes, the Pasticceria del Massimo in via Ruggero Settimo. There he had a long breakfast and read one of the books he had brought with him. He ate cakes and pastry with particular pleasure [recalled Francesco Orlando, his young disciple],[21] if he had before him a volume of sixteenth-century French poetry."[22] And, when he left the pastry shop, he carried a leather bag always overloaded with books and cakes to last him for the rest of the day. After stopping by the Flaccovio bookstore, Lampedusa would go to the Caflisch café, where he would join other intellectuals, such as the historians Virgilio Titone and Gaetano Falzone. ("who shared the prince's intellectual interests as well as some of his historical views"),[23] even if he rarely took part in conversation.

This routine was interrupted in 1954 by the decision to write *Il Gattopardo*. From then until the spring of 1957, Tomasi di Lampedusa dedicated himself to writing. That same year, he stopped visiting the Caflisch café: "in the diaries of his last years, where visits to cafes and restaurants are meticulously recorded, the Caflisch is scarcely mentioned. Its place was taken by the Mazzara, another cafe in an ugly modern building off the Via Ruggero Settimo. Lampedusa did not go there for company but to read and later to work on his novel."[24] During the last thirty months of his life "he worked almost every day on his novel and stories, writing painstakingly [with a] blue biro at a table at the Mazzara cafe or in his library at home": even in the final period, he would use a 'café' table as his desk.[25] It is certainly surprising that the lavish scenes of the Gattopardo's receptions were

20 Ivi, 79. For Tomasi di Lampedusa's correspondence see Caterina Cardona, *Un matrimonio epistolare. Corrispondenza tra Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa e Alessandra Wolff von Stomersee* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2023).
21 Francesco Orlando, *Ricordo di Lampedusa* (Milano: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1963), 11.
22 Gilmour, *The Last Leopard*, 92-93.
23 Ivi, 93.
24 Ivi, 98.
25 Ivi, 128.

written in a modest café and equally modest restaurants or places like the Pizzeria Bellini in a square behind the town hall, next to the small Norman churches of San Cataldo and La Martorana.[26]

On July 23, 1957, the writer died at the age of 60 in a clinic in Rome. On November 11, 1958, *Il Gattopardo* was published posthumously by Feltrinelli, edited by Giorgio Bassani.[27]

The novel Il Gattopardo*: 'culinary' classes and food hierarchies*

The well-known plot of *Il Gattopardo* unfolds irregularly from May 1860 (when Garibaldi lands in Marsala with the Expedition of the Thousand) until May 1910, the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the landing, "marking the irreparable decline (the *cliché* of leopardism does not take this into account!) of a great family and of the same noble privilege."[28]

The point of view is that of the Prince of Salina, Don Fabrizio, who in 1860 witnesses, apparently, unperturbed and disenchanted, the ruin and transformation of his own aristocratic class with the inexorable rise of the 'bourgeoisie'. The Prince is fascinated by his young nephew Tancredi, a daring nobleman, who pronounces to Tomasi di Lampedusa the most famous, and as we have seen, most misunderstood, phrase of the novel. ("Unless we ourselves take a hand now, they'll foist a republic on us. If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change").[29] The Prince allows Tancredi to marry the beautiful daughter of Calogero Sedara, a very cunning and wealthy farmer, representative of the new class of *parvenus*: Tancredi is poor and needs a rich dowry to remain among the 'dominators.' As for himself, the Prince refuses a seat in the new Senate of the Savoy Kingdom of Italy, proposing Calogero Sedara in his place. Fifty years later, in 1910, the last Leopard awaits only his death and, with it, the end of his lineage.

The literary, but also socio-historical background that Tomasi di Lampedusa constructs for his novel – the declining aristocracy, the rising bourgeoisie, and a series of characters interacting with these two social classes – seems to be reflected in the convivial scenes and descriptions of foods and dishes. We will retrace the most significant ones, following the order of the novel.

26 Ivi, 112.
27 Zago, "Tomasi."
28 *Ibidem*.
29 Giuseppe di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*, 31.

The first part (or first chapter) is set in Villa Salina, a holiday residence outside Palermo, and serves as the backdrop for the introduction of the main characters, the arrival of Tancredi, and the news of the landing of the Thousand (May 11, 1860). Here we find the first scene of the novel that describes a dining room and a dinner with guests:

> Ding! Ding! ding!" rang the bell for dinner […]
> Dinner at Villa Salina was served with the slightly shabby grandeur then customary in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The number of those taking part (fourteen in all, with the master and mistress of the house, children, governesses and tutors) was itself enough to give the dining-table an imposing air. Covered with a fine but mended lace cloth, it glittered under a powerful oil-lamp hung precariously under the Murano chandelier […] The silver was massive and the glass splendid […] but the plates, each signed by an illustrious artist, were mere survivors of many a scullion's massacre and originated from different services. The Prince ladled out the *minestra* himself […] symbol of his proud duties as paterfamilias.[30]

This passage is a merciless portrait of the 'slightly shabby grandeur' of the aristocracy and the 'style' of a kingdom in decline, but also a signal to duly consider all of the lavish banquet scenes that follow.

Shortly after, the writer introduces a different scene: the midday meal, consumed after receiving news of the landing of Garibaldi and his Thousand.

> The midday meal was the chief one of the day […].
> At the end of the meal appeared a rum jelly. This was the Prince's favourite pudding, and the Princess had been careful to order it early that morning […] It was rather threatening at first sight, shaped like a tower with bastions and battlements and smooth slippery walls impossible to scale, garrisoned by red and green cherries and pistachio nuts; but into its transparent and quivering flanks a spoon plunged with astounding ease. The Prince enjoyed watching the rapid demolishing of the fortress beneath the assault of his family's appetite. One of his glasses was still half-full of Marsala […] He drained his wine in a single gulp.[31]

The culinary direction changes: no longer a soup, but an 'aristocratic' rum jelly. This almost seems to symbolize the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, "threatening" and "impossible to scale." It is, however, "quivering" and destined to yield to the assaults of a spoon that

30 Ivi, 19-20.
31 Ivi, 43-45.

is "plunged with astounding ease," while the prince, sly as a leopard, watched "the rapid demolishing" and, in the end, he toasts with only a half-full glass of Marsala.

In the second part of the novel describes the journey and stay in Donnafugata, one of the Prince's fiefs, in August 1860. Here, the nobility 'descends' among their 'people,' granting them the honour of sharing moments of conviviality. Our writer seems to enjoy observing the effects produced by this mingling. For example, as soon as the family arrives in Donnafugata, the faithful don 'Nofrio, a steward of the estate highly esteemed by the Prince, is subjected to the "torture of tea": "Don Fabrizio had two cups brought, and with death in his heart Don Onofrio had to swallow one."[32]

Even more amusing is the description of the first lunch at Donnafugata, an event that the Prince wanted to earn "the stamp of solemnity": "children under fifteen were excluded from table, French wines were served, there was punch *alla Romana* before the roast; and the flunkeys were in powder and knee-breeches."[33] At the same time, however, the Gattopardo clearly understood that solemn lunches had to be adapted to the stature of the guests:

> The Prince was too experienced to offer Sicilian guests, in a town of the interior, a dinner beginning with soup, and he infringed the rules of *haute cuisine* all the more readily as he disliked it himself. But rumours of the barbaric foreign usage of serving an insipid liquid as first course had reached the citizens of Donnafugata […] So when three lackeys in green, gold and powder entered, each holding a great silver dish containing a towering macaroni pie [timballo di maccheroni], only four of the twenty at table avoided showing pleased surprise: the Prince and Princess from fore-knowledge, Angelica from affectation and Concetta from lack of appetite […] The burnished gold of the crusts, the fragrance of sugar and cinnamon they exuded, were but preludes to the delights released from the interior when the knife broke the crust; first came a smoke laden with aromas, then chicken livers, hard boiled eggs, sliced ham, chicken and truffles in masses of piping hot, glistening macaroni, to which the meat juice gave an exquisite hue of suède.[34]

Here the famous "timballo" (macaroni pie) of *Il Gattopardo* appears for the first time in the novel, not, however 'à la Talleyrand', as in the memoirs, but simply as 'macaroni timballo' (half a century earlier Federico de

32 Ivi, 62.
33 Ivi, 72.
34 Ivi, 75-76.

Roberto also had his Benedictines eat it in The Viceroys).[35] This 'lowering' of the nobility to non-aristocratic customs and traditions is revisited in the traditional visit to the Monastery of Donnafugata, where the Prince "the nuns' watery coffee drunk with tolerance and the pink and greenish macaroons ["mandorlati", sort of nougats "which the nuns made from an ancient recipe"] crunched with satisfaction."[36] Or when the day of Plebiscite, following the vote for the annexation of Sicily to the Kingdom of Italy, the Prince was invited for "a little glass" of *rosolio* liqueur, taken by the new mayor Sedàra from a small low table with "a plate with some ancient biscuits covered with fly droppings and a dozen little squat glasses brimming with rosolio wine: four red, four green, four white, the last in the centre: an ingenious symbol of the new national flag [of the Kingdom of Italy] which tempered the Prince's remorse with a smile. He chose the white liquor for himself, presumably because the least indigestible and not, as some thought, in tardy homage to the Bourbon standard [vexillum]. Anyway, all three varieties of rosolio were equally sugary, sticky and revolting."[37]

Conversely, there was no shortage of negative judgments from the 'common people' towards the sometimes overly sophisticated and tasteless cuisine of the aristocracy. When Father Pirrone visits his parental home in the 'tiny hamlet' of San Cono, "from the kitchen arose the centuries-old aroma of [ragù], simmering stew of essence of tomatoes, onions and goat's meat ["castrato", i.e. castrated sheep], for macaroni [indeed 'anelletti'] on festive occasions"; and as the priest began truly enjoying his 'anelletti': clearly, the writer notes, "his palate had not been spoilt by the culinary delicacies of Villa Salina."[38]

In this sense, Tomasi di Lampedusa is even more explicit in the novel *Gattini Ciechi* (*Blind Kittens*), which follows on from *Il Gattopardo*, unfortunately interrupted at the first chapter. When accountant Ferrara, the

35 "The Benedictines' kitchen had become a proverb in town. The macaroni pie [*timballo* di maccheroni] with its crust of short pastry, the rice-balls [*arancine*] each big as a melon, the stuffed olives and honey-cakes [crespelli melati, frittelle], were dishes which no other cook could make; and for their ices and fruit-drinks [*spumoni*] and frozen *cassata*, the Fathers had called specially from Naples, Don Tino, [the younger] from the Benvenuto café. All this made in such quantities that it was sent round as presents to monks' and novices' families, and the servitors would sell the remains and get four, and some six, tarì each for them daily": Federico De Roberto, *I Vicerè* (Milano: Casa Editrice Galli, 1894), 177 (transl. by A. Colquhoun).

36 Giuseppe di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*, 82-84.

37 Ivi, 102-103.

38 Ivi, 177.

Prince of Salina's attorney, is invited to eat at the protagonist's house (don Batassano Ibba, a 'quasi-baron' *parvenu*), he judges the lunch prepared by the wife as "excellent". The lady "offered Sicilian cuisine raised to another level—to its cube, in fact—in terms of the number of `portions and the abundance of sauces, thus rendering it lethal. The macaroni veritably swam in the oil of their sauce and were buried under avalanches of caciocavallo cheese; the meats were stuffed with fire salamis; "zuppa a 'mprescia" (a typical sweet blend) contained three times the prescribed amount of liqueur alchermes, sugar, and "zuccata" (candied squash). All this seemed exquisite to Ferrara, "the pinnacle of truly good cuisine", also because "his rare breakfasts at the Salina house had always disappointed him due to the blandness of the food." The following day, however, back in Palermo, Ferrara (who knew "the Prince's preference for the 'coulis de volaille' from Pré Catelan and the 'timbales d'écrevisses' from Prunier") described the lunch and "described as horrors what had seemed to him merits; greatly pleasing to Salina in doing so."[39]

In *Il Gattopardo*, there are, however, moments of reconciliation and sharing between the 'culinary classes', such as the hunting trip that the Prince takes in October 1860 with Don Ciccio Tumeo, the organist of the church of Donnafugata. When lunchtime arrives,

> the Prince and the organist rested under the circumscribed shadow of cork-trees; they drank tepid wine from wooden bottles with a roast chicken from Don Fabrizio's haversack, ate little cakes called *muffoletti* dusted with raw flour which Don Ciccio had brought with him, and local grapes [of Inzolia] so ugly to look at and so good to eat; with hunks of bread they satisfied the hungry dogs standing in front of them […] Under that monarchic sun ["sole costituzionale", in the original Italian version] Don Fabrizio and Don Ciccio were dozing off.[40]

Returning to the aristocratic world, the most famous scene dedicated to conviviality and food is the ball at Ponteleone Palace, two years after the landing of the Thousand, after the Aspromonte affair, when the situation had already placated and "the few hundred people who made up 'the world' never tired of meeting each other, always the same ones, to exchange congratulations on still existing."[41] The writer provides a page-long description of the buffet hall. First of all, the *tables à thé:*

39 Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *The Blind Kittens (Chapter I of an unfinished novel)* (trad. Archibald Colquhoun), in *The Siren and selected Writings*, 90-91.

40 Giuseppe di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*, 97-98.

41 Ivi, 196-197.

> Beneath the candelabra, beneath the five-tiers bearing [tray] towards the distant ceiling pyramids of home-made cakes ["dolci di riposto" with almond paste] that were never touched, spread the monotonous opulence of tables à thé and big balls: coraline lobsters boiled alive, waxy chaud-froids of veal, steely-tinted fish [spigole: branzino] immersed in [soft] sauce, turkeys gilded by the ovens' heat, rosy foie-gras [pies] under gelatine armour, boned woodcocks reclining on amber toast decorated with their own chopped guts, [galantine [dish of meat, ndr] of the color of aurora], and a dozen other [ten more] cruel, coloured delights. At the end of the table two monumental silver tureens held limpid soup [consommé], the colour of burnt amber [and limpid]. To prepare this [dinner] the cooks must have sweated away in the vast kitchens from the night before.[42]

Followed by the dessert table, so loved by the writer.

> Scorning the table of drinks, glittering with crystal and silver on the right, he moved left towards that of the sweetmeats. [There], huge blond *babà*, chestnuts [*sauri*] like the coat of horses, Mont Blancs snowy with whipped cream, cakes speckled [beignets Dauphine] with white almonds and green pistachio nuts, hillocks of chocolate-covered pastry [profiteroles], brown and rich [fat] as the top soil [humus] of the Catanian plain from which, in fact, through many a twist and turn they had come, pink ices [parfaits], champagne ices, coffee [dark] ices, all parfaits and falling apart with a squelch at a knife cleft, a melody [with violins: "sviolinature"] in major of crystallised [candied sour] cherries, acid notes [timbres] of yellow pineapple, ant those called "Triumphs of Gluttony" [The Sicilian dessert is made of layers of sponge cake, marzipan, yellow cream and ricotta cream, apricot preserve and jelly, ed.], filled with [opaque] green pistachio paste, and shameless "Virgin's cakes" shaped like breasts. Don Fabrizio asked for some [two] of these and as he held them on his plate looked like a profane caricature of Saint Agatha [showing off her sliced-off breasts]. "Why ever didn't the Holy Office forbid these puddings when it had the chance? ["Triumphs of Gluttony" (The gluttony, mortal sin!)], Saint Agatha's sliced-off breasts sold by convents, devoured at dances! Well! Well!"[43]

Apart from the final anticlerical quip[44] (given that in Sicily food and religion have always been closely related), here reappears the passion and gastronomic expertise of Tomasi di Lampedusa, an aristocrat who attended

42 Ivi, 214.

43 Ivi, 214-215.

44 Tomasi di Lampedusa "in some ways was an old-fashioned anti-clerical who, according to one acquaintance, might have accepted the Church in a Protestant country but was too aware of Catholicism's shortcomings in Italy to be able to support the Roman Church" (Gilmour, *The Last Leopard*, 110).

receptions all over Europe (recalling, however, that these pages were written in modest cafés in Palermo).

Particularly interesting is the description of the small mounds of chocolate profiteroles, described as, we saw above, as "brown and fat as the humus of the Catanian plain from which, in fact, through many a twist and turn they had come": clear reference to the economic wealth of the fiefs that financed the lifestyle of the Sicilian aristocracy. Just like the grand palaces with their superb halls, the banquets were also not simply a 'petrification' and a use of the income that, in any case, guaranteed the maintenance of the luxurious goods sector (consider the craftsmen involved); they were also a tangible and visible representation of the peculiarity and identity of a social class. As Maurice Aymard and Henri Bresc have pointed out, through food, a social hierarchy "based on quantities and qualities" was also expressed: at the top, the aristocratic tables, characterized by ostentation, and the conventual ones. At the bottom, the rural and popular world. In the middle, a predominantly "bourgeois" and urban diet, "which manages to create and animate the commercial circuits of livestock, large vineyards and olive groves, some oases of irrigated or intensively cultivated gardens."[45]

Moreover, food and conviviality are also culture and identity.[46] And this identity was beginning to be appropriated by the new class of *parvenus*. In some cases, showing their own "vulgarity," as when Sedara – "his quick eyes were moving over the room, insensible to its charm, intent on its monetary value" – approaches the Prince and exclaims: "Fine, Prince, fine! They don't do things like this nowadays, with gold leaf at its present price!" (and then the Prince "felt a loathing for him").[47] In other cases, ready to conform to the style of the aristocratic class. With Angelica, we offer our final example related to food. It is Tancredi who educates her: "look at everything and praise everything […] but as you're not just a girl from the provinces whom everything surprises, always put a little reserve into your praise; admire, but always compare with some arch-type seen before and known to be outstanding." And Angelica, after putting into practice the teachings through tapestries and paintings, "even of the slice of tart brought her by an attentive young gentleman she said that it was excellent, almost as good as that of 'Monsu Gaston,' the Salina chef. And as Monsu

45 Aymard e Bresc, *Nourritures,* 581.

46 Massimo Montanari, *Italian Identity in the Kitchen, or Food and the Nation* (Columbia University Press, New-York 2013). See, also, Enrico Iachello, *Space and Society in* The Leopard, in *The Territory of Sicily and its representations (16th-19th centuries)* (New Digital Frontiers: Palermo 2018).

47 Giuseppe di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*, 207.

Gaston was positively the Raphael of cooks, and the tapestries of Palazzo Pitti the Monsu Gaston of hangings, no one could complain, in fact everyone was flattered by the comparison."[48]

Conclusions

The analysis of the food culture in the novel *Il Gattopardo* and its author, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, combined with the consultation of period sources and historiographical contributions, has allowed us to outline some aspects of the relationship between history, food, and society in 19th-20th century Sicily. In these two centuries, the millennia-old Sicilian food tradition, renewed in the late medieval and early modern periods by influences mainly from Spain and France (but also Euro-Mediterranean and extra-European), appeared characterized by a 'food hierarchy' that, while maintaining class identities, became increasingly fluid and open to influences. The close relationship between food culture (and economy) and social status thus adapted to the period of significant transformation of the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and society as a whole.

The Sicily of Tomasi di Lampedusa – of his history, his memory, and his novel – thus seems to represent and bear witness to a world that changes and adapts to modernity, not only from a social point of view but also economically and culturally. *Il Gattopardo* therefore not only represents a literary work but also a historical source, and the descriptions of its meals, its banquets, and its buffets convey a food culture still alive and representative, even if destined to be lost (but this is recent history) in the globalization of contemporaneity.

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48 Ivi, 203.

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Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa and his wife Licy at the castle of Stomersee in Latvia (1932 circa). Photo n. 212 from Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Una biografia per immagini* (Sellerio, Palermo 1998).

Prince of Salina (Burt Lancaster) cutting the famous “timballo” (macaroni pie) in a frame from the film *The Leopard* by Luchino Visconti (1963).