

A guide to the culinary
delights of Cremona,
a small Italian city

Cremona presents its typical products from Italy

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Presentation

One of the primary duties of a body like the Chamber of Commerce, whose main goal is development of the economy and the enterprise system, is to ensure that local agricultural and food products are widely known and appreciated. Such products are the calling card of our area, a symbol of excellence to project the quality image of Italian products throughout the world.

This is not just an economic issue: our products represent an important element in our history and culture and contribute, together with numerous works of art and of musical craftsmanship, to making this area unique, awaiting the discovery and appreciation of visitors.

Confirming its commitment to promote local specialities, the Chamber of Commerce is publishing this booklet, "Cremona presents its typical products", as an invitation to try our products and enjoy them.

Leafing through its pages you will find pictures illustrating the vast extent of the plains and the cultivated fields. It was this situation, with its wealth of raw materials of excellent quality, which gave birth to Cremonese cooking, bringing together a skilful blend of tradition and innovation, its flavours and aromas expressing the generosity of the land.

We are therefore delighted to present this publication, in which appetising recipes and inviting photographs tempt us to rediscover unusual or forgotten tastes, reminding us that cooking is one of the ingredients of our identity.

Gian Domenico Auricchio

Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce

*"I set off again on the route towards
the Italian plains, from the snow-capped
proximity towards the bluish haze
of the maize-laden landscape,
from the shining purity of the
mountains and valleys to the boundless heat
and stillness of the green Po valley".*

(Herman Hesse)



Typical products of the Cremona area. Their history and current situation

“I set off again on the route towards the Italian plains, from the snow-capped proximity towards the bluish haze of the maize-laden landscape, from the shining purity of the mountains and valleys towards the boundless heat and stillness of the green Po valley”.

This was how the German writer Herman Hesse, travelling in Italy in 1913, described the area when he set out by train from Bergamo to Cremona.

Even today, the imposing expanse of the plains with their cultivated fields remains the most striking aspect, conveying a sense of calm and stillness that spans the province of Cremona. The land is flat and intensely cultivated with abundant water, bounded and crossed by numerous rivers.

Here is a landscape that seems eternal and changeless, but which in reality is the result of extensive and continual transformations brought about by mankind. Here more than elsewhere, the human race has adapted nature to the needs of agriculture and animal husbandry, which had always been the basic activities of successive populations that have exploited its land and water.

“Our cooking is the daughter of our geography, history and economy, and for many centuries our civilisation has been able to exploit the natural wealth of the land and the fish resources of our waters to produce generous and far from monotonous fare..”

The quotation is from Giovanni Nuvoletti, gentleman, writer and refined gourmet, and accurately reflects the variety of cooking in the Cremonese area. Let us now explore that variety, taking a journey through space and time, meandering between the Adda, Oglio and Serio rivers, not to mention old man Po, flitting from Renaissance courts to farmhouses, in a harmonious alternation of rustic, simple and elaborate flavours, striking a delicate balance between sweet and savoury.

Cremonese cooking is both rich and imaginative, making the most of the cheese makers' arts, showing intelligence and creativity in developing techniques of conservation of meat cuts, applying the knowledge of the spice dealers to the substances sold in their shops to obtain the sweet and spicy fruit of mostarda (sweet pickles) or the exquisite crumbliness of torrone (nougat), skilfully exploiting and transforming the products of fishing



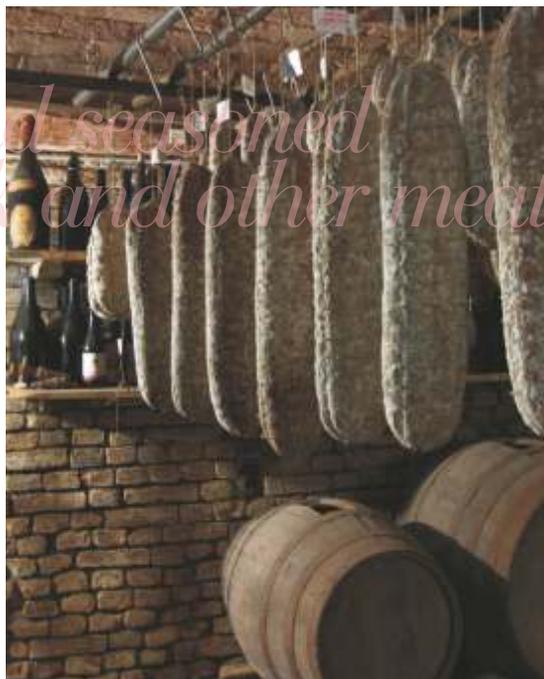
Cured and seasoned pork and other meats

Cured and seasoned pork and other meats

Even in Roman times Cremona was becoming famous for its production of pork meats and for its great autumn fair, “*at which*”, Tacitus wrote, “*much of Italy gathered*” to buy and sell livestock and pigs in particular.

Polibius, passing close to Cremona in the second century BC while retracing Hannibal's journey in Italy, reported that “*the majority of pigs butchered in Italy for the food-supply requirements of private people and armies were obtained from the Po Valley plains ...where food products are especially abundant and cheap...*”

In those days the Po Valley plains were only partly ploughed and cultivated, while the rest was covered in woods that included numerous oak trees, whose acorns were much



appreciated by the boars and pigs that grazed in a half-wild state. The situation did not change much during the reigns of the Longobards, first, and subsequently of the Franks. The meat was either consumed fresh or preserved with salt and spices, which were brought to Cremona and its area by means of the Po, the broad, safe link with the sea.

The production of cured and seasoned pork and sausages in Cremona in the sixteenth century was substantial and well documented, showing that the tradition was well established. The invention of Cremonese sausage was recalled as follows: “*certain Cremonese people, being for the most part industrious and very clever, thought up and prepared a type of pork or beef sausage to make a lavish meal for menfolk. Cut into small pieces, ground and mixed with powders of pepper or ginger, cinnamonum, cinnamon and other seasonings, and packed into the intestines of the animals and immediately cooked in*





*water or roasted, it is laid on the table
and eaten by the guests”.*

L. Cavitelli, *Storia annalistica della città di
Cremona, 1558.*

In the Sixteenth Century Tommaso Garzoni (1549-1589) mentioned the good quality of the mortadella produced in Cremona. The tradition must have been maintained in subsequent centuries, because one of the gifts sent to a lawyer in Milan was a **mortadella di Cremona**, and one of the recipes in an anonymous manuscript from the first half of the nineteenth century is the one for making Cremonese mortadella. Today Cremona falls within the production area of **mortadella Bologna PGI** (Protected Geographical Indication).

Among the gifts that the Magnificent Community of Cremona sent to the Spanish government of Milan in the second half of the sixteenth century, on the occasion of the Christmas festivities, there were always many salamis, as well as sweets like nougat and quince jam.

Several centuries have passed, and even today one of the most famous sausage products is undoubtedly **salame Cremona PGI** (a salami with the Protected Geographical Indication). The complex preparation of this product is based exclusively on pork from pigs bred and slaughtered in Italian regions identified in the production-area regulation. Lean meat, including the thigh, is used, together with dense fat and pink lard with streaks of lean meat.

Salame Cremona includes crushed and spread garlic and spices in the mix, and red or white wine may also be used.



While staying at the Farnese court in Parma, the abbot of Genoa, Carlo Innocenzo Frugoni (1692-1768), had an opportunity to try a **cotechino** (a type of sausage) made in Casalmaggiore. Finding it excellent and special, he wrote a sonnet to extol its merits:

*“The cotechino that was always best,
the cotechino that all who devour sausage
always eat with zest, is made at
Casalmaggiore...”*

A particularly famous version is **cotechino cremonese vaniglia**, so named not because there is vanilla in the mix, but because its taste is so delicate that it reminds one of the lightness and scent of vanilla.

Salame da pentola (salami to be cooked) (which at one time was used together with beef and chicken in the preparation of “tre bodi” (three broths) in which **marubini di Cremona** are cooked), is obtained from lean pork under-shoulder, the lean streaks in lard, and cured pork belly fat, salt, pepper and saltpetre. It sometimes contains a tongue that has already been corned and cooked.

Salame da pentola (salami for cooking) is one of the standard compo-



A stage in the preparation of salame Cremona



Gran bollito Cremonese (Special Cremonese-style mixed boiled meats)

nents of **gran bollito Cremonese** (special Cremonese-style mixed boiled meats), together with beef from adult cattle, calf's head and tongue, and chicken from a hen or capon. By the nineteenth century the pork products industry had already achieved an "uncommon level of perfection". Even today, pig breeding and pork processing are among the strong points of the Cremonese economy, and, following the transitional period of national protection, the **gran suino padano**, yielding excellent meat, is about to achieve the European Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) recognition. Within the province one also finds traditional products that are shared with bordering areas. These include **prosciutto cotto** (coo-

ked ham), **salamini italiani alla cacciatora** PDO (small salami with Protected Designation of Origin), the **Salame Brianza DOP** the **Coppa di Parma IGP** the **Cotechino Modena IGP**, the **Zampone Modena IGP**, **salame di filzetta** (a long, thin salami made from loin and pork neck, with a series of added seasonings, depending on the producer), **salame Milano** (salami), also known as "crespone", **greppole** (these are pork scratchings, known in Cremona as *gratòon*), **luganega** (a sausage whose name is derived from its long, thin shape), **salamina mista** (a small mixed salami) and **verzini** (small salami composed solely of lean and fat cuts of pork, ground and kneaded, prepared in strings of small pieces about 50 grams each. Traditionally these are eaten cooked with cabbage, from which the name comes). Sausages and verzini are the basis of certain traditional dishes.

Butòon de pajàas (Clown's buttons)

Ingredients (for six people)

-
- 4 fresh pork sausages*
 - 1 onion*
 - 250 grams tomato sauce*
 - half a glass of dry white wine*
 - 1 spoonful of lard*
 - 3 spoonfuls of olive oil*
 - salt and pepper*

Cut the sausages into pieces not more than one centimetre long. Cut an onion into fine slices and brown it in a broad saucepan with the lard and oil. When it turns brown, soak it in wine, let it evaporate, add the tomato sauce and cook it on a low heat for five minutes. Add the sliced sausage, preferably in a single layer, and cook it for two minutes on each side. Serve it on slices of roast polenta.

Its strange name (literally "clown's buttons") comes from the appearance of the pieces of sausage when they are cooked. The dish was prepared a few

Butòon de pajàas (Clown's buttons)

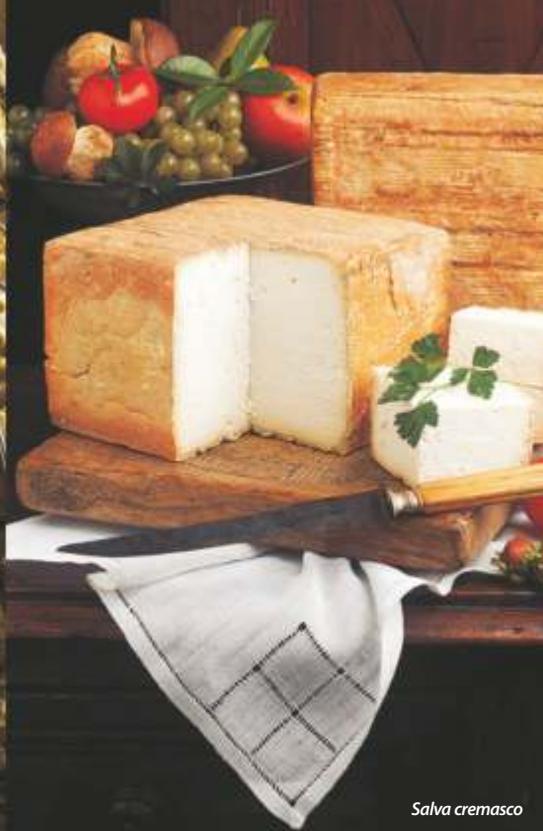


days after killing the pig, partly to put the butcher to the test, because from the taste of the sausage one could judge whether the salami would be good.

Ricette di osterie della Lombardia, Cremona e il suo territorio, edited by M. Marini, Arcigola Slow Food, Bra (CN) 1998, p85



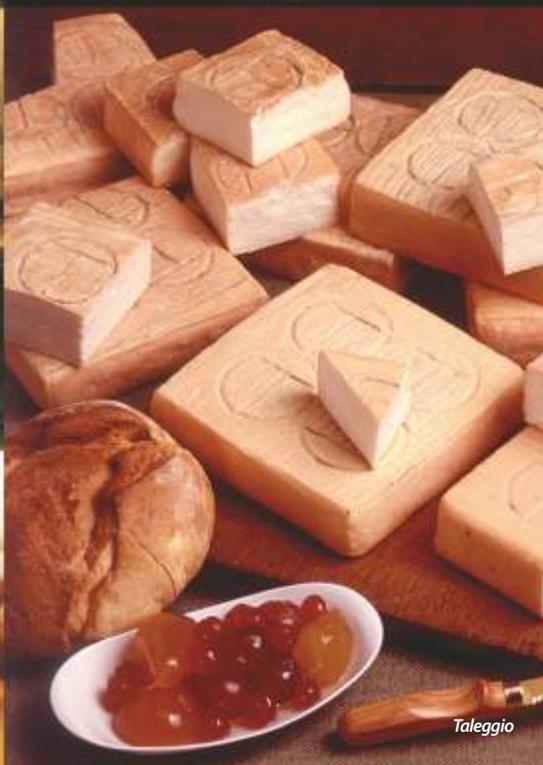
Provolone



Salva cremasco



Quartirolo lombardo



Taleggio

the cheeses

The cheeses

No less than five cheeses in the Cremona area have obtained the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO): **grana padano**, **provолone valpadana**, **taleggio**, **quartiolo lombardo** and **gorgonzola**, while a sixth and **salva cremasco**.

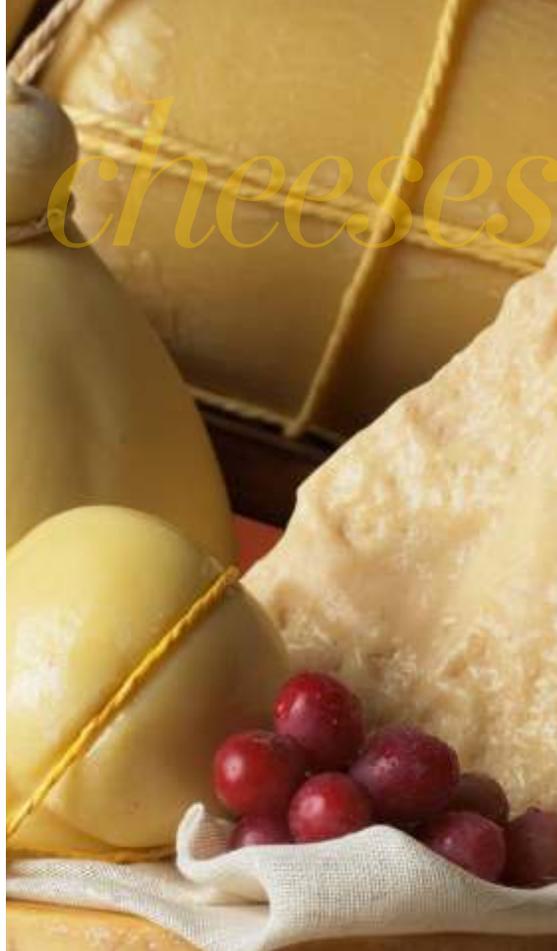
Grana padano, takes its name from the granular nature of its structure.

Its renown stretches back for centuries. In 1477 Pentaleone da Confienza sang the praises of the cheese makers, the production criteria and the excellence of the pastures: *“because they are near the banks of the Po, where nutritious grass suitable for cheese grows almost everywhere. They are in fact special pastures for milk”*.

With time industrial production also came to be practised for other types of previously handmade cheese, such as **crescenza**, **mascarpone**,



Stage in the processing of grana padano



ricotta and **caprino** made with cow's milk and with goat's milk. Depending on the method of preparation of the rennet, caprino can be produced by lactic coagulation or by rennet coagulation, giving the cow's milk version a milder taste and the one with goat's milk a stronger flavour.

Provolone, a typical cheese of Southern Italy that has been produced in Cremona since the nineteenth century because of the abundance and quality of the milk, has an especially interesting history.

Whether mild or sharp, **provолone** is a

medium-hard cheese obtained from whole cow's milk. Production of this cheese was thoroughly recorded in the famous 1884 agrarian survey coordinated by Stefano Jacini.

Salva cremasco is a dense seasoned cheese with a very white colour, produced in a tall square shape with a dark rind. It has a very aromatic taste that can be slightly sharp when young, but acquires an unmistakable flavour when aged - dry and a little spicy.

The classic way to serve **salva cremasco** is with *tighe* (cornet-shaped green peppers "scalded" in vinegar and then immersed in oil), but some people prefer to combine it with mostarda, quince jam, honey or *pipe-to* (a purè based on cabbage, garlic and grated bread).

Salva cremasco (cheese) with *tighe*

Ingredients (for six people)

- 500 gr. *salva*
- 200 gr. *tighe*
- extra-virgin olive oil
- freshly ground black pepper

Cut the salva into cubes of about half a centimetre square and add the cut tighe at random.

Leave it in the fridge for at least 2/3 hours. At the moment of serving add a small amount of extra-virgin olive oil and a sprinkling of pepper to the salva and mix it all carefully.



Panerone di Pandino

Panerone di Pandino is a cheese characterised by its many small holes, obtained from very fresh and completely unskimmed cow's milk (almost cream, hence the name). Both in production and during maturing this cheese is produced without salting.

Salva cremasco (cheese) with *tighe*



Filled pasta

filled pasta

The different types of Cremonese filled pasta reflect historical divisions in which Cremona and its surrounding area were linked to Milan, Crema and the Cremasco area to Venice, and Casalmaggiore and Casalasco to Mantua and to its traditions. We thus find three completely different types of filled pasta. These are the **marubini di**

Cremona, filled with meat and cooked in three broths obtained from cooking pork, beef and chicken, the **tortelli cremaschi**, to be eaten dry, in which the sweet and



savoury flavours of macaroons, saltanas, crystallised citrons, spiced biscuits known as **mostaccini** and marsala are combined, producing an unusual taste reminiscent of spicy Venetian cooking and that of the Arab world, from which they derive, and lastly the **blisgòn di Casalmaggiore**, which are pumpkin tortelli, a bit larger than those of Mantua, to be dressed with fried lard and tomato, or with melted butter and grana cheese.

Marubini have been well known since the sixteenth century, and indeed an old will mentions "a pastry cutter for making marubini". This is a classic dish whose traditional recipe was certified by the Accademia Italiana della Cucina (a cultural Institution of the Repubblica) in a notarised deed.

Although the original shape of marubini was round, square and half-moon shapes are also accepted. In the areas around Mantua one also finds **marubini** that are coiled round a finger.



In the recollections of the Cremonese, **marubini** are linked with family celebrations, large tables, the steaming soup tureens of great occasions, and with food preparation sessions involving the whole family. These were the words of Ugo Tognazzi who, although he lived far from Cremona, never forgot his roots, even if he reinterpreted the recipes of many traditional dishes in an entirely personal manner.

“marubini...are a Cremonese speciality... Cremona my dear, I feel I should say, because ever more frequently I go in search of old flavours, forgotten tastes, memories of childhood ... These marubini had been cooked in a great broth, made with capon, oxtail and guinea-fowl ...this was also a broth that brought to mind the warm dark kitchens of the past, the soups made by granny or aunty or in the old country trattorias where mud-spattered, half-frozen hunters went to warm themselves up. It is a Cremonese dish that



Mostaccini

brightened my childhood, when the kitchen was a bustle of mothers, grandmothers, aunts and the ladies from next door. Ah yes, because these marubini called for flexible, co-ordinated team work ...”

U.Tognazzi, “Il rigettario fatti, misfatti e menù



Tortelli cremaschi



Torrone di Cremona (Cremonese nougat)

the su The sweets

The very simple traditional sweets of Cremonese cooking are prepared with ingredients that were available on the farm: eggs, lard, white and yellow flour and fruit. The result was biscuits, such as **baci di Cremona** ("Cremonese kisses") (double biscuits, made with a macaroon-based paste, separated by a filling that could be chocolate, jam or whipped cream), and **bumbunéen** (dry biscuits, with white and yellow flour, flavoured with powdered mint and lemon peel). There were also cakes, such as the **bussolano di Soresina**, **torta paradiso di Cremona**, and **torta Cremona** (with diamond-shaped icing made from apricot jam and icing sugar).

Typical sweets of Crema and the Cremasco area are the **treccia d'oro** (gold plaits) (raised dough, cooked in the oven with crystallised orange and citron and with currants), the **spon-**



Treccia d'oro from Crema



Spongarda

garda, (a type of cake - sweet, rich and refined, one of the oldest in Italy), and **torta Bertolina** (with a filling of fresh grapes).

The Province of Cremona also shares two cakes with other areas in Lombardy. These are **torta di mandorle** and **sbrisolosa** (a "cousin" of the sbrisolona cake of Mantua).

Other traditional products have been rediscovered more recently, such as the **isolini** of Isola Dovarese, **castagnaccio** (or patuna) **ufé** of Calvatone, **pan Cremona** (Cremona bread), **pan torrone** (nougat bread), **torta di Castelleone** (Castelleone cake), **torta de Riòlta** (Riòlta cake), **dolce dei Gonzaga** (Gonzaga sweets) of Vescovato, and **torronina**.

The exquisite **graffioni** are always much appreciated. These are large chocolates filled with liquor and with a cherry, known as boeri, with an

uneven surface, now hand-made by private confectioners and produced industrially by local confectionary companies, but at one time made even at home, as the following account shows:

“I remember that when I was at the junior high school (my mother) learned from acquaintance how to make the so-called boeri, chocolates with a cherry. I recall that this is how it was done: cherries preserved in alcohol were taken out of the alcohol, dried thoroughly, and then rolled in a special sugar made in the following way. Put 1 kg of sugar and 1 litre of water in a saucepan, mix well and bring to the boil; continue mixing and then take it off the heat at the right moment, which is when a thin skin like the soap used for blowing bubbles forms on an iron ring immersed in the liquid ..and blow on the bubble of transparent sugar. Take it off the heat, put it on a marble slab and knead it. The sugar changes from transparent to opaque white and becomes firm. The following day take a spoonful of this sugar and put it in a pan on a low heat until the sugar becomes syrupy again; take it off the heat and put in one cherry at a time. Roll the cherry using a small iron-wire ring to cover it in dense white sugar. Then let it cool: the cheery cools and the sugar becomes solid. Next melt the chocolate, without adding even a drop of water. Roll the sugar-coated cherry in the chocolate and place it on a marble or glass surface. When the chocolate around the cherry is hard, each boero is turned over to fill up the small hole in the bottom with more chocolate. In a few minutes the chocolate becomes hard. After 10 days the sugar inside the chocolate sphere changes into liquid and the boero is ready to be eaten...”



Torrone di Cremona (nougat)

Account given by M. (born in Cremona in 1935), in *I Cremonese a tavola ieri e oggi* by C.Bertinell Spotti and A.Saronni, Cremonabooks, Cremona, 2005.

Another home-made sweet was **croccante**, a popular bon-bon based on caramelised sugar and almonds, in the classic version, or nuts, in a fairly common variation. When more suitable equipment was not available, the caramelised sugar was poured on to the marble top of a bedside table.

But undoubtedly the most famous sweet is **torrone di Cremona** (Cremona nougat).

How **torrone** came to Cremona remains to be proved. Legend has it that the sweet was invented for the banquet of Bianca Maria Visconti's wedding with Francesco Sforza on 25 October 1441, but in fact this was thought up by the admen of the two top Cremonese sweet manufacturers, who exploited the glamour of ducal weddings to capture the public's imagination. A more credible version is that in the 13th century, under Emperor Fredrick II, there were also Arab cooks working in Cremona (nougat is in fact a sweet of Arab origin, widespread throughout the Mediterranean



Croccante

region). The oldest documentary evidence of the tradition dates back to the sixteenth century. These documents show that there was an established tradition of production by flavour

merchants and spice dealers of a sweet named **torrone**, kept in boxes, and that it was the custom to make gifts of this sweet at Christmas and serve it at public and private lunches and feasts.

“The proper way to make (white) Cremona-style torrone, which is really something special...”

Take the almonds and shell them, then toast them in the stove ..next take the white honey: a pound of honey, a pound almonds and an egg white, these are the quantities. Put the honey in the cauldron, or casserole, and pound it with a pestle, and when it is thoroughly broken up, with the heat beneath and the honey beginning to boil, add the egg whites, well beaten, with rose water, and keep stirring with a long mixing spoon, and with the heat well up, and continue stirring without stopping until it is cooked and the stirred mixture becomes as white as snow. You'll need help and strength because as the honey expands it becomes firm and difficult to stir, and you have to use strength, and it takes hard work, and the stirring cannot last for less than three hours. And when you see that the honey is cooked, you need to have the almonds ready and throw them in and stir these almonds strongly with the mixing spoon. Before adding the almonds put in four or five grains of muschio (an aromatic substance used in the past both for preparing cosmetics and in the kitchen) blended with sugar. Next cut an ounce of cinnamon into small slices and add them, and then the almonds when the honey is cooked. Then increase the heat and stir the almonds into the honey. Get the boxes ready, with a thin film at the bottom, and then press the torrone with a wooden slat and by hand, because you have to be quick to pack it into the boxes, ...and add a pound of almonds, a pound of honey and an egg white. And for stirring you need a good long-handled paddle held in place by a plank with a hole in it (the plank was set in the wall and the paddle was inserted in the hole to provide more leverage for the rotary movement). The paddle needs a big, broad round handle that gives you a good grip.

Ricetta di un anonimo pasticciere del seicento, 17th - century manuscript kept at the Municipal Library of Piacenza, transcribed by A.Foglia.



A stage in the processing of Torrone di Cremona (nougat)



Mostarda di Cremona

The honey

The production of **honey** in Cremona is another long-standing tradition. Pliny the Elder, in his *Naturalis Historia*, described a system used by beekeepers along the Po to boost the production of honey. The hives were mounted on “hive boats” that sailed along the river, constantly giving the bees fresh banks to explore. *“When the boats were low in the water, reaching the mark showing that the hives were full again, we cast off our moorings to return to the original meadows”*.

At the end of the nineteenth century production of **honey** was very limited, despite being much in demand from the torrone industry. Subsequently, however, farmers took up this business again, as it offered a good supplementary income, and in 1930 sixty per cent of the hives were of the rational, modern type.



The honey now produced in the whole province comes from local sources and includes dandelion honey, mixed-flowers honey, acacia (or robinia) honey, linden tree honey, sunflower honey, clover honey and honeydew (from the sap of trees reprocessed by other insects). Some producers still practise nomadic methods (but not on boats) for the production of types of honey derived from botanical species of other geographical areas, including the chestnut honey of the Piedmont woods.

Mostarda and quince jam

Mostarda di Cremona, generally based on whole crystallised fruits, is certainly one of Cremona's best-known products in Italy and the world. This is the picturesque but very accurate description given by an English tourist, to whom it was served with a sumptuous plate of boiled meats:

“This is a dish of fruit candied in syrup, to which a dash of pepper and mustard powder has been added. It serves as sweet spice to the mild meats and sets them on fire, in a cool and lovely way, like moonlight burning on water. The fruit is luminously transparent, like semi-precious stones... There are several cherries, unevenly rounded like antique corals; a green pear of the size of a walnut, with the black pips shining like onyx; a larger pear of the colour of rose-quartz; a

green fig clouded like a flawed emerald, a curved strip of pumpkin, reddish brown and veined like chrysopase, and the half of an apricot which could have been carved out of a topaz. They are almost too splendid to be eaten. Before starting, I ponder over their many-hued flamboyance, and come to the conclusion that the colours of the Mustard of Cremona are those found in Veronese's paintings. It is an exceedingly raffiné dish, a Baroque dish, sweet, full-bodied, glowing and tingling."

E. Templeton, *The Surprise of Cremona*, London 1954, pp. 42-44

Although they contained no fruit, spicy sauces based on wine or must and mustard (the most probable etymology is that the name *mostarda* derives from "*mustum ardens*", hot must, grape juice with the tang of mustard dissolved in it), appeared in the recipe books of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, such as that of Maestro Martino, which inspired Platina.

The first recipe, *Pour faire mostarde de Cremone* (« To make Cremona mustard ») appears in a book published in 1604: *Ouverture de Cuisine* by Lancelot de Casteau, cook of the prince-bishop of Liege. The Affaitati, rich Cremonese merchants who were very active in Flanders at the end of the sixteenth century, had close links with de Casteau. Among the ingredients mentioned are crystallised fruit, mustard, sugar and a vegetable colouring, turnsole, which would have



Mostarda di Cremona and cheeses

given it a beautiful red hue. The recipe suggests combining it with roasts, tuna fish cooked in butter, and boiled dogfish.

The art of making **mostarda**, practised by the spice dealers of certain cities in Lombardy, continued in Cremona during the subsequent centuries, and in the nineteenth century in grocery shops and chemists.

At the beginning of the twentieth century **mostarda** began its transition to industrial production, with brands that are still active and famous today. In the sixteenth century Cremona and its area were also noted for production of jam based on quince, and even today both **cotognata** (quince jam) and **senapata** (quince jam flavoured with mustard) are produced in the area. Both are marketed in characteristic wooden boxes.



Mostarda di Cremona and gran bollito cremonese

vegetable products Fruit and vegetable products

One of the best-known traditional food products of the province of Cremona is undoubtedly **melone di Casteldidone** (Casteldidone melon), which has obtained protected Geographical Indication (PGI) in the area of Melone Mantovano for which the procedure to obtain Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) has recently begun. This melon is an oblong fruit and not very large, with a strong yellow or bright orange colour, very tasty and with a strong aroma. Rather like a pig, no part of it is wasted, because not only the pulp but also the seeds and skin can be used in the kitchen.



meloni di Casteldidone



Watermelons





Marquis Vincenzo Tanara, born in Bologna at the beginning of the Seventeenth Century, a passionate gourmet and author of a famous work on agriculture *Leconomia del cittadino in villa (The Economy of the Villa Resident)* (1644) described how to choose a good melon: "*Flos, pes, pondus, odor, scabies, resonantia nulla, haec sunt peonis signa futura boni*". In other words, the signs of a good melon are its "flower" (the part of the fruit from which the stalk emerges, which should be prominent and soft), the foot (the stalk, which should be large with a sharp taste), the weight, the aroma, the roughness of the skin, and the absence of an echo (when tapped lightly with the knuckles).

Casteldidone melon mousse

Ingredients:

<i>Cream</i>	<i>gr: 250</i>
<i>Egg yolks</i>	<i>gr: 110</i>
<i>Isinglass</i>	<i>gr: 30</i>
<i>Refined sugar</i>	<i>gr: 200</i>
<i>White chocolate</i>	<i>gr: 70</i>
<i>Melon pulp</i>	<i>gr: 260</i>
<i>Egg white</i>	<i>gr: 80</i>
<i>Vanilla</i>	<i>as required</i>
<i>1 disc of sponge cake</i>	

Boil the cream with the vanilla and 70 gr of sugar. Let it cool.

Mix the egg yolks and soften the isinglass in cold water. Pour the tepid cream on to the yolks and blend in the squeezed isinglass and the crumbled white chocolate. Add the



Casteldidone melon mousse



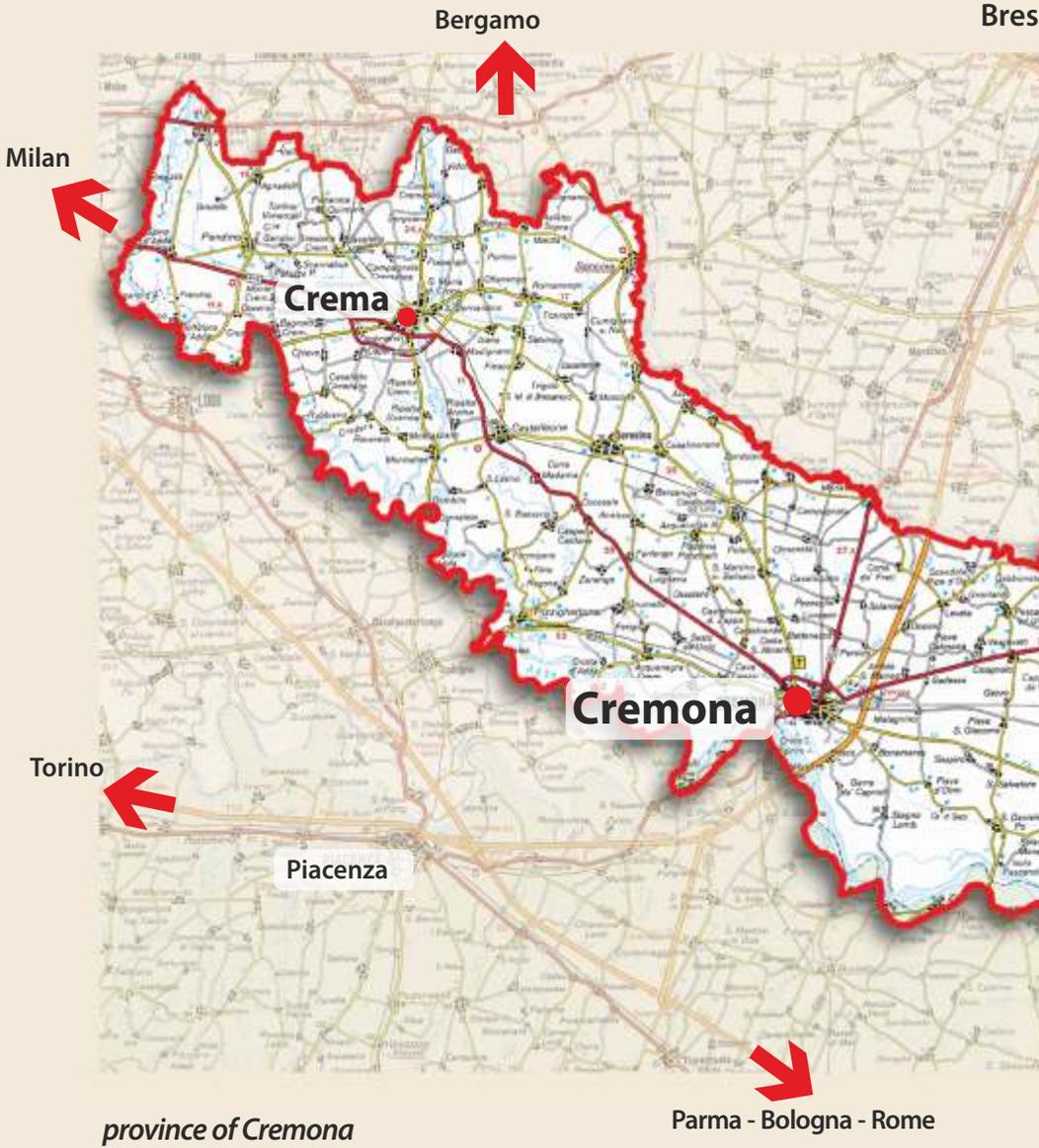
liquidized melon. Whisk the egg whites with the remaining sugar and add carefully to the mousse. Pour the mix into moulds or rings, with a disc of sponge cake beneath. Chill in the fridge. Decorate to taste with fruit and gelatine.



At the beginning of the twentieth century the Chamber of Commerce, in its periodic economic reports on the resources of the province, emphasized the importance of the production of **melons** and **watermelons** centred on Casalmaggiore, mentioning that in 1913 the cultivation of these fruits occupied 400 hectares. In present times the production of **tomatoes** is more prominent in the Casalasco area. Another much liked and sought-after product of the Cremonese area is **radici di Soncino** (Soncino roots), long taproots of a plant of the umbrelliferous family, white in colour with a slightly bitter taste. It is rich in minerals (iron, phosphorous, magnesium and sodium), and in an unusual substance, inulin, that has disintoxicating properties for the liver and intestines. In the past it was used only as a side dish, usually boiled and served with salad with oil and vinegar. These days Soncino roots are also desiccated to accompany aperitifs and toasted to prepare drinks with a special taste that reminds one of coffee. Their cultivation and consumption dates back for centuries, as witnessed by certain paintings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries kept in the picture gallery of the Ala Ponzzone Civic Museum in Cremona. These pictures are not just still-life works, such as *Bunch of turnips, thistle, roots and garlic* by Pietro Martire Alberti, working in Cremona in 1631, but also more bizarre and unusual works. These include the painting by Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1526-1593), which seems to show a *Vegetable Joke*, but, when turned upside down, becomes a grotesque "Gardener".



G. Arcimboldo, "l'Ortolano" (The Gardener), Ala Ponzone Civic Museum, Cremona



cia



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