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photographs by Maurizio Maurizi

THE BOQUERIA

and the markets of Barcelona

Guido Tommasi Editore



INTRODUCTION

“(…) tout un arrivage traversant les ténèbres et le gros sommeil de deux heures du matin, berçant la ville noire du bruit de cette norriture qui passait”

Le ventre de Paris, Émile Zola

This book is a love story and like all love stories there are days of joy and hours of despair, that strange coming and going between the sensation of having always known someone and the bitterness of total incomprehension. La Boqueria (or maybe Barcelona?) is a place of blinding seduction and also a universe difficult to penetrate, to really get to know, beyond the stereotype, beyond its apparent ease that it displays to the public. It took me years, of days and days, with my shopping bag swinging on my arm to really feel at home, but at the same time I remember clearly just after moving here my first place of discovery and happiness was the market. Yes, definitely the Boqueria, but not only, because Barcelona is a city of markets. Each neighborhood has its own unique market, made up of goods and people, but also of events and meetings that make it a place existing beyond the business of trade, in perfect harmony with the rhythms of daily life. The market is a place where carnival is celebrated, nativity scenes are mounted, roses are bestowed on Sant Jordi day, roasted chestnuts are offered at the Castanyera festival; people enjoy breakfast and have lunch here, they meet for coffee or a beer, they take courses, they play, they gravitate towards the culinary evenings and sometimes they just come for a stroll. I love it.

CROQUETES DE PERNIL

Cured ham, which in Catalunya is called *pernil*, is a kind of very special religion. Rigorously sliced with a knife, eaten at all hours and naturally nothing is thrown away, not even a morsel. After all it is very expensive, especially when the quality is good: a selected breed (*porc ibèric*) reared in freedom, at the right point of maturation and correct nutrition (which in the star product is strictly and exclusively acorn-based thus turning into *pernil de gla*) making it a product of absolute exception. The cut crumbles from the knife, too small to be relished on a plate, are cooked. And indeed ham fits into many Catalan heritage recipes, though personally I think that it is really in the croquettes where it proves to be irresistible.

Kneaded without potato or rice, the croquettes are dishes of leftovers with a base of thick bechamel enriched with sautéed onions. In addition to ham, they can be mixed with cod, with chicken, with squid, with the leftovers of a boiled or roasted joint, in short, practically with anything you have on hand.

FOR 4 PEOPLE

500 ml of fresh milk
200 g of cured ham in chunks
100 g of onion
60 g of butter
60 g of flour
salt
nutmeg (optional)

200 g of breadcrumbs
100 g of flour
2 eggs, lightly beaten
oil for frying

Bring the milk to the boil and keep it warm. Finely slice the onions and gently fry with the butter in a large frying pan, without browning. As soon as they are transparent, add the flour and mix constantly for about one minute. Pour in the boiling milk, mix well to prevent the formation of lumps and cook thoroughly. Turn off the heat and incorporate the ham, adjusting with salt.

Spread the mixture onto a large baking tray or plate to allow it to cool and leave it to rest in the fridge for at least 4-6 hours, but if possible overnight.

Once the bechamel mix is completely dry shape the croquettes by hand, toss them in the flour, then dip them into the beaten egg and finally roll them in the breadcrumbs. Repeat this sequence so to be sure they are perfectly sealed.

Fry in hot oil until golden brown and serve piping hot.





CALAMARS FARCITS

There are endless recipes for stuffed calamari: it is probably the shape of this popular mollusk that facilitates the idea, and indeed throughout the whole area of the Mediterranean there are versions, more or less inventive (with rice, with vegetables, with potatoes, etc.). The Catalans however think about it in their own way, always with *mar i muntanya* in their minds and a love for the *picada*: so get ready to stuff them with meat and accompany them with a hazelnut and chocolate sauce.

FOR 4 PEOPLE

8 medium sized calamari
500 g of minced pork
(you can also use half beef
and half pork)
3 large onions
2 small ripe tomatoes
1 hard-boiled egg
1 glass of sweet wine
(*vi ranci*)
½ glass of white wine
6-8 tablespoons of extra virgin
olive oil
salt and pepper

FOR THE PICADA

25 g of lightly toasted hazelnuts
2 cloves of garlic
one slice of toasted or fried
bread (or a couple of dry
biscuits)
10 g of stone-ground dark
chocolate

Start by washing the calamari well, separate the tentacles and the fins from the sacs and evenly chop the fins with a sharp knife. Put them to one side. With the help of a wooden spoon turn the sacs inside out: this way not only will you be able to clean them more easily but more importantly you will not need to close them once they are stuffed – a trick Belén taught me (see inset) and it really works, try it and see for yourself.

Finely chop one of the three onions and sauté with 2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil, add the minced meat, and as soon as it has changed color, also the chopped fins and tentacles. Mix everything carefully and moisten with ½ a glass of white wine. Allow the liquid to be absorbed and then turn off the heat. Now incorporate the finely chopped hard-boiled egg and season with salt and pepper. Let it cool and then, with the help of a spoon, stuff the calamari, pressing the mixture down well.

Heat 4-5 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil in a large pan. When it is hot fry the calamari quickly on both sides, just to sear them, then remove them, lower the heat and in the same oil sauté the rest of the finely chopped onion. When they have changed color, incorporate the grated tomatoes and let it reduce again. Add a glass of sweet wine, allow the alcohol to evaporate and then place the calamari in the pot. Moisten with a few ladles of hot water (or fish stock, if you have it on hand), cover with the lid and cook on a gentle heat for about twenty minutes.

After prepare the *picada*: place the hazelnuts, the garlic and the bread in the mortar and start pounding. When a type of paste has formed, add a few tablespoons of the calamari cooking liquid to the mortar, immediately add the chocolate as well and amalgamate it all. Pour the *picada* into the pot with the calamari, mix well and allow it to reduce for another 5 minutes.

LLAGOSTA A LA CATALANA

Here we are talking about a renowned recipe, well known outside of Catalunya and often misinterpreted. You may come across this named dish in Italy, but not only, many different from one another, but if by now we have gained at least a little understanding of how the grammar of Catalan cuisine works, we will not struggle to identify what are, once again, the distinguishing features.

FOR 4 PEOPLE

- 1 large lobster (about 2 Kg)
or 2 smaller ones
- 1 large onion
- 3 small ripe tomatoes
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1 glass of brandy
- 5 tablespoons of extra virgin
olive oil
- fish stock (or, in its absence,
water)
- salt and pepper

FOR THE PICADA

- 20 g of lightly toasted almonds
- 1 slice of toasted or fried bread
- 10 g of coarse stone-ground
chocolate (optional)
- parsley (optional)

First place the lobster (alive, sigh!) onto a chopping board or on a surface that will allow you to collect the precious juices released during cutting. With courage and a wide-bladed knife, that is very sharp, cut off the head of the lobster in one clean stroke, then cut it in half lengthwise and following the rings of the carapace, cut the rest of the body as far as the tail into even pieces. Keep the liquid that has remained on the chopping board in a bowl.

In a large frying pan heat the extra virgin olive oil and briefly fry the lobster pieces. Season with salt and pepper and put them to one side. In that same oil now make a *sofregit* with the finely chopped onion, the chopped cloves of garlic and the grated tomatoes; let it reduce on a gentle heat, mixing regularly to avoid burning. Once ready you can pass it through a strainer to obtain a finer sauce.

Pour the sauce into the saucepan, heat it and add the lobster; moisten with the brandy and turn up the heat so that the alcohol can evaporate, then add a few ladles of fish stock and bring to a gentle simmer, without the lid.

Prepare a *picada* by pounding the almonds with the bread in the mortar, adding the juice of the lobster kept aside. When you have a smooth mixture dilute with a tablespoon of the cooking sauce and add the chocolate (and the parsley) if using it, pour the *picada* into the saucepan, mix well and continue the cooking for a further ten minutes. Salt and pepper to taste and turn off the heat.





Just like all Mediterranean cuisines the Catalan cuisine is one with a strong vegetable base: very special tomatoes, peppers of all kinds, artichokes that seem like flowers, purple eggplants, speckled and even white in color, pinkish sweet Figueres onions, broad beans and spring peas and a whole unexpected variety of winter cabbages. Take time to stroll through the market and you will discover that the most beautiful vegetables are those that can claim their provenance from Baix Llobregat in the south or from Maresme to the north, the city's vegetable gardens. There was a time when the boundary between the city and the countryside was outlined with difficulty: the convent vegetable gardens stood right where the markets are today and in general every piece of land, just outside the narrow walls that surrounded the city, was cultivated. Precisely the Raval, the neighborhood where the Boqueria lies, was incorporated into the new city walls commissioned by Pedro III in the 14th century to ensure the supply for the Ciutat Condal. Today the land has moved away from the city, so much so that it risks being forgotten about, but it is the market itself that reminds us of where what we eat comes from and in which season of the year it ripens. We just need to pay attention.



PANELLETS

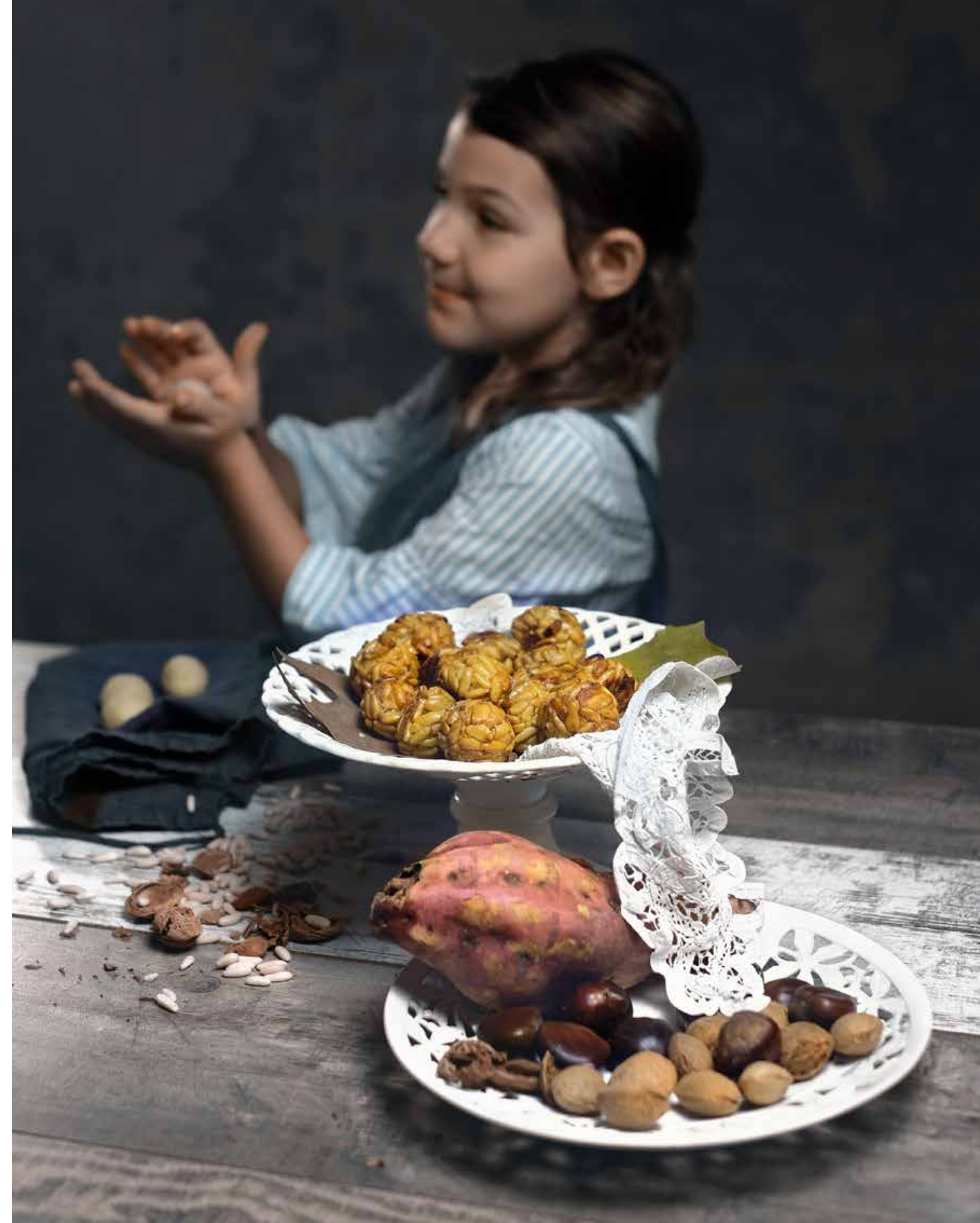
These biscuits are typical of All Saints Day and mark the beginning of autumn. There are innumerable versions, with almond flour but also with sweet potato, with pine nuts, with chestnuts, as well as with almonds, with coffee and even coconut. It is a tradition that the children make them at school and so Anna, our daughter, has been bringing them home since she started kindergarten.

FOR ABOUT 15-20 BISCUITS

200 g of almond flour
200 g of icing sugar
1 egg
100 g of pine nuts

With patience, and preferably on a marble surface, knead the almond flour (which really must be fresh, that is, freshly ground) with the sugar and the egg white, until a consistent and moist dough is obtained (if it is necessary, you can add a little cold water).

With wet hands form small evenly shaped balls, dip them in the beaten egg yolk and then press the pine nuts with the palms of your hands so that they adhere well to the biscuits. Place all your biscuits onto a baking sheet lined with parchment paper and bake in a preheated oven at 200 °C for about 15 minutes. Leave them to cool.





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