



## Evaluation of gastronomic objects in Renaissance painting

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### ABSTRACT

The Renaissance period, as an enlightenment period after the strict Christian rules of the Middle Ages, represents a period in which many discoveries have been made for about four centuries and which continues its effects in terms of art as well as political, cultural, and scientific developments. Thanks to the Renaissance, the times when artists could only express themselves through church rules were left behind, and sections from routine life began to appear in the paintings. When it comes to daily life, nutrition is the most essential need of human beings, and since then, foods have begun to appear in pictures, and gastronomic objects, which have intertwined with nature since ancient times, have been frequently used in paintings. Simultaneously, artists have become masters of conveying these gastronomic objects, which they use in their paintings, by giving a message in symbols and allegories. Our study aimed to determine the gastronomic objects in Renaissance painting art and to investigate the philosophical meanings of the symbols and their current reflections by examining them, especially in the context of symbolism. The Renaissance paintings were scanned with the document analysis method, and examples containing gastronomic objects were evaluated in a symbolic and allegorical framework with the semiotics method. Our findings indicate that 17 early and high Renaissance painters used 61 gastronomic objects in their paintings, and three Flemish school painters used gastronomic objects in 35 of the collections. *Giuseppe Arcimboldo a notable artist of the era* shockingly used gastronomic objects and has the mastery of allegory. The painting “*Vertumnus*” turns into the magnificence of the Roman empire, and “*The Gardener/Vegetables in a Bowl*” becomes an allegorical interpretation of the concept of food and fertility represented by God Priapus from two different perspectives. Overall, it has been determined that Renaissance painters used vegetables like artichokes, which look much more aesthetic with their leaves, or lemon, which creates an exotic atmosphere, instead of foods like chicken and eggs, which were the most consumed at that time.

### 1. Introduction

The Renaissance, which means rebirth in French, is expressed as the period when the interest in Roman and Greek classical values, which were removed by the pressure of the church after the Middle Ages, increased in Europe. In this period, scientific, cultural, and historical events such as the discovery of new continents, the replacement of the Ptolemaic (100–170) system in astronomy with the Copernic (1473–1543) system, the collapse of feudal systems, the development of trade, and the inventions of the compass, gunpowder, and printing press in the field of science were witnessed. At the end of the Middle Ages, especially from the beginning of the 12th century, the Roman Catholic Church began to lose its power with social, political, and intellectual changes. The foundation of the Renaissance was laid as a result of the humanism movement initiated by intellectuals, including writers such as

Dante (1265–1321), the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottoman Empire in 1453, and the migration of many scientists and intellectuals to Italy with important books, manuscripts, and knowledge (Baxandall, 1988) (see Figs. 1–5).

The Renaissance period is the most important in European history, and its influences and the works of this period have affected not only Italy and Europe but also beyond Europe's borders. The humanism and cognitive enlightenment movements that spread with the Renaissance revealed the advanced European civilization and represented the age of enlightenment in art as well as in science. The Renaissance's awakening was also reflected in the works of artists. On the way to the Renaissance, the pictorial goal reached the depiction of nature through perspective and visual solutions where the feet of the figures are firmly on the ground. The use of perspective in paintings has been the biggest feature that makes Western and Eastern art different from each other (Kubovy,

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Fig. 1. "Four Seasons in One Head" by Giuseppe Arcimboldo.



Fig. 3. "Vertumnus" by Giuseppe Arcimboldo.

1986).

The emergence of individuality during the Renaissance also affected the artist's position in society and assumed a different role as a high-quality personality with supernatural abilities. The Renaissance understanding first began to take shape in the art of painting, and perspective was needed for this shaping, and the vertical form of the Middle Ages left

its place in the horizontal form. The new understanding of Renaissance art manifested itself with elements such as classical style, perspective, the landscape rendered in the background, and the understanding of triangular composition (Panofsky, 2018).

The Renaissance is considered to be two periods. The Early Renaissance is this period called the "Proto-Renaissance" in Italy, and it is the period that started in the 1400s and exhibited the naturalist approaches of the artists. Artists such as Cimabue (1251–1302) and Giotto (1266–1337) preserved the aesthetic principles of classical art and



Fig. 2. "Four Seasons" and "The Four Elements" by Giuseppe Arcimboldo.

influenced those who came after them. The most famous artists of the period are the architect Brunelleschi (1337–1446), who continued the classical Roman and Greek art with the humanism movement and developed the linear perspective technique; the sculptor Donatello (1386–1466); and the painter Masaccio (1401–1427), the master of the shading technique. All three artists created their art in the Florence City Republic, which was under the protection of the Medici (1434–1737) family, who supported art and culture (Campbell and Ainsworth, 2002).

It is accepted that the High Renaissance Period started in 1490 with the painting “*The Last Supper*” by Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519). High Renaissance artists were influenced by the linear perspective, shading, and naturalistic approaches of artists like Masaccio before them. However, they have developed new techniques that will bring the concept of aesthetic beauty to the fore. The human figure is depicted as the embodiment of divine power. Most oil paintings have been produced with toning and coloring techniques that would bring bodily movements and visible characteristics to the fore. The principles of exact proportion and anatomical accuracy of the human body seen in classical Greek and Roman art emerged as the perfect harmony of people with their environment in the paintings made by artists such as Leonardo, Michelangelo (1475–1564), and Raphael (1483–1520). The period lost power with the death of Leonardo in 1519 and then Raphael at the age of 37. Although the period was short-lived, it still affects the world at a social and cultural level with the ingenuity of artists, the basic nature of classical art, the human being at the center of the universe, the value of science and discoveries, and the emphasis on humanism (Nagel, 2011).

Symbols of belief, mythology, social, and cultural sense have been used since the first people painted on the cave walls, in which they generally describe their daily lives. Likewise, symbols can be found in all art movements. The symbols that affect the people living in nature the most are these symbols, which are a part of nature (Chwalkowski and d’Ancona, 2016).

Scientific studies today do not only analyze the paintings made throughout history in terms of art. At the same time, genetic botanists and art history experts are also investigating how the fruits and vegetables depicted in the paintings have reached the present day by following the changes and developments they have undergone throughout the ages (Chatterjee, 2014).

In this study, the Renaissance period paintings were scanned to identify those with gastronomic objects, and information about the symbols of some prominent paintings was obtained, taking into account

the conditions of the period. It has been discussed what kind of results can be achieved in terms of philosophy with these findings.

## 2. Methodology

To meet the research objective of the current study, the research employed semiotic analysis. According to Mingers and Brocklesby (1997), semiotic analysis of research questions involves the study of how meaning is generated and interpreted through signs and symbols. In other words, through a carefully curated collection of art Works in the Renaissance period, we applied the four steps of integrative semiotic methodology to uncover the meanings of gastronomic representation in the artworks.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the word *symbol* is defined as “a concrete object or sign that indicates something that cannot be expressed with the senses”. According to the OED, the word allegory that we encounter in the art of painting is defined as “the situation in which the elements in a work of art represent something from real life, instead of visualizing and expressing an image, an experience, or behavior to better understand it”. The main difference between them is that while allegory starts from an idea to reach a representation, the symbol itself is a representation (OED, 2022).

The scientific interpretation technique, which is called the semiotics method, was associated with the symbols determined as indicators in both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period and the things they represent. Initially, what was meant to be said in religious texts was interpreted in layers, from general to specific. In the 20th century, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1922) dealt with semiotics in terms of language, while the American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce (1839–1914) stated that it would cover the entire field of life (Lagopoulos and Boklund-Lagopolou, 2020).

The semiotics method is commonly used to determine the relationships between symbols, describe symbol systems, and evaluate the process of meaning emergence. Today, semiotics is used in many fields, from medicine to art history, from literature to biblical interpretations, and from fashion and advertising analysis to art criticism (Lagopoulos and Boklund-Lagopolou, 2020). A work of art can be analyzed with the semiotics method and defined as art criticism with semiotics. Umberto Eco defines works of art as open works, and according to him, each sign is open-ended (Eco, 1989).

Semiotics can be approached as a scientific orientation that



Fig. 4. “*The Gardener/Vegetables in a Bowl*” by Giuseppe Arcimboldo.

investigates and reconstructs the phenomenon of meaning, as well as being a branch of science that examines symbols. According to J. Mukorovsky, a work of art consists of symbols, and the establishment of the relationship between the signifier and the signified in a sign is called signification (Sládek, 2015). When a signifier is seen or heard, the meaning of the signified is formed in the mind and thus the comprehension process begins. The parts of semiotics related to denotation and connotation gathered under signification are based on Roland Barthe's theory (Barthes, 1981).

Semiotics, which is an analysis method, tries to find the underlying meanings of the visible and the invisible. It is known that in addition to subjective meanings, cultural meanings can also be inferred and this result is objective. Semiotic concepts cannot be separated from cultural phenomena in this context; they gain significance due to their position in a specific cultural connection and order. A symbol has three essential qualities: first, it must have a physical form; second, it must refer to something other than itself; and third, it must be accepted by people as a symbol (Mertz, 2013).

According to semiotics, paintings have different functions. Paintings were specially ordered for the artists to decorate the church walls during the Renaissance period in the West, and they mostly consisted of works of immovable size. The woman with a child on her lap on the church wall is the Virgin Mary, and the child is the Prophet Jesus in the context of the church and has stereotypical poses. In Islam, mosques are not decorated with human images, but stories are told with pictures of miniatures. These paintings are not just made for artistic purposes; they have certain references and are meant to complete a story (Van Leeuwen, 2001; Shadaram and Namwar, 2022).

Finally, to effectively ensure the application of the semiotic methodology, an in-depth qualitative observation of the documents was used in the study, and document analysis was used as a data collection tool. Artists and painting artwork samples were determined by scanning the studies related to the subject. Among the paintings of the Renaissance period, works containing gastronomic objects were analyzed by the relationship between the symbol and the signified. Lastly, the symbols and the signage were specified, and then the selected images were discussed according to the semiotic analysis method (Hennink et al., 2020).

### 3. Results and discussion

The current research was motivated by the need to explore and preserve the importance of gastronomic elements in paintings and

artworks in the Renaissance period. To achieve this goal, detailed literature research and document analysis through a mixed-method of qualitative observation and semiotic analysis were carried out to determine the gastronomic objects included in Renaissance painting art.

Our findings validated the use of gastronomic objects in the artworks, and several thematic clusters were generated. In addition, the sub-theme of specific gastronomic objects appertaining to the classical period of the Renaissance period was also determined. Furthermore, our result aided the determination of which meanings the symbols in this subset have been associated with since the classical period. For instance, in the case of the works of Giuseppe Arcimboldo, who is one of the most discussed and thought to be valuable in terms of gastronomy in the groups, they have been examined from an allegorical point of view.

The Renaissance period painters were examined chronologically into two subgroups: (1) Early and High Renaissance painters (Italian school) and (2) Flemish school painters. Table 1 presents an inventory of paintings containing gastronomic objects created by painters of the Italian school of the Renaissance. Table 2 presents an inventory of paintings containing gastronomic objects created by painters of the Flemish school of the Renaissance period.

Food has been a dominant factor in our lives since the existence of the world, from its harvest to its preparation and consumption. Roberta Smith writes in her book "*Food: Subject, Symbol, and Metaphor*" that food has existed in visual communication since the beginning of time. In the visual arts, food constantly appears as a reflection of life (Smith, 1994). In European geography, gastronomic objects have always been used symbolically in the field of art. The foundations of the symbolic meanings of food and beverages date back to the ancient ages (Meagher, 2009).

Especially in Greek and Roman mythology, it is often seen that gods are associated with food. Artemis (goddess of hunting), Bacchus/Dionysus (the god of the grape harvest and wine), Ceres/Demeter (goddess of grain-seed), Gaea (goddess of the earth), Hestia (goddess of bread), Kronos (god of harvest), Persephone (goddess of seeds), Plutus (god of the crop), Priapus (god of fertility), and Venus (pomegranate) can be associated with the mythological gods and food (Agrarian Gods, 2022).

The majority of the paintings created during the Renaissance were commissioned by the church. The altarpieces, or walls in churches, are in the form of panels in which scenes from the Bible are portrayed, and the Virgin Mary and Jesus are the main figures. The naturalistic approach and depictions of everyday life are also seen in the painting



Fig. 5. "The Cook" by Giuseppe Arcimboldo.

**Table 1**

Early and High Renaissance (Italian school) painters identified as using gastronomic objects and, the inventory of paintings<sup>a</sup>.

The Artist	Title of the Work	Creation Year	
1	Donatello (1386–1466)	The Feast of Herod (Relief) <sup>b</sup>	1427
2	Bastiani (1429–1512)	Madonna of Humility <sup>c</sup>	1470
		Madonna and Child <sup>c</sup>	1470
3	Pannonio (1438–1463)	Madonna and Child in Painted Frame <sup>d</sup>	Unknown
		The Muse Thalia <sup>e</sup>	1457
4	Botticelli (1445–1510)	The Birth of Venus <sup>f</sup>	1483
		Nastagio degli Onesti <sup>g</sup>	1483
		The Banquet in the Forest <sup>h</sup>	1483
		The Wedding Banquet <sup>g</sup>	1483
		Madonna of the Pomegranate <sup>f</sup>	1487
		Madonna of the Book <sup>c</sup>	1480
		Youth of Moses <sup>h</sup>	1482
		Spring <sup>f</sup>	1482
		Madonna and Child with a Pomegranate <sup>i</sup>	1475
		Fruit, Vegetables and Other Studies <sup>j</sup>	1487
6	Antonio della Corna (Unknown)	The Last Supper (fresco) <sup>k</sup>	1498
		The Last Supper (fresco) <sup>l</sup>	1490
7	Bellini (1435–1516)	The Feast of the Gods <sup>i</sup>	1514
8	Sesto (1477–1523)	Young Bacchus <sup>i</sup>	1514
		Madonna and Child with the Lamb of God <sup>m</sup>	1516
9	Raphael (1483–1520)	Young Man with an Apple <sup>f</sup>	1500
		The Miraculous Draught of Fishes <sup>n</sup>	1500
		Three Graces <sup>o</sup>	1504
		Madonna with the Fish <sup>g</sup>	1513
10	Barthemely d'Francesco Melzi (1493–1570)	St Anne with the Virgin and the Child Embracing a Lamb <sup>f</sup>	1520
		Pomona und Vertumnus <sup>p</sup>	1523
		Supper at Emmaus <sup>q</sup>	1533
12	Jacopo Bassano (1510–1592)	The Fall of Man <sup>g</sup>	1550
		Last Supper <sup>r</sup>	1546
13	Vasari (1511–1574)	The Purification of the Temple <sup>i</sup>	1580
		Supper at Emmaus <sup>q</sup>	1538
		The First Fruits of the Earth Offered to Saturn <sup>i</sup>	1557
14	Tintoretto (1518–1594)	Marriage at Cana <sup>e</sup>	1566
		The Supper at Emmaus <sup>e</sup>	1542
		The Last Supper <sup>h</sup>	1594
15	Veronese (1528–1588)	Marriage at Cana <sup>v</sup>	1561
		The Marriage at Cana <sup>q</sup>	1563
		The Feast in the House of Levi <sup>w</sup>	1573
16	Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527–1593)	The Gardener <sup>x</sup>	1587
		Vertumnus <sup>y</sup>	1590
		Autumn <sup>q</sup>	1573
		Summer <sup>z</sup>	1563
		Winter <sup>z</sup>	1573
		Earth <sup>aj</sup>	1570
		Still life Summer <sup>aa</sup>	1573
		Spring <sup>ab</sup>	1573
		The Four Seasons in one Head <sup>i</sup>	1590
		Basket of Fruit <sup>ac</sup>	1590
		The Gardener/Vegetables in a Bowl <sup>x</sup>	1587
		Portrait of Eve <sup>aj</sup>	1578
		The Cook <sup>ad</sup>	1570
Seated Figure of Summer <sup>ae</sup>	1573		
The Waiter <sup>aj</sup>	1574		
17	Vincenzo Campi (1530–1591)	Fruit saleswoman <sup>af</sup>	1580
		The Ricotta Eaters <sup>ag</sup>	1585
		The Bean Eaters <sup>aj</sup>	Unknown
		Christ in the House of Mary and Martha <sup>ah</sup>	1580
		Chicken Vendors <sup>af</sup>	1580
		The fishmongers <sup>ai</sup>	1579
		The fishmongers <sup>af</sup>	1580
The Kitchen <sup>af</sup>	1580		

**The resource:** Created by the authors (Web Gallery of Art, 2022).

<sup>a</sup> The place where the work of art is exhibited today.

<sup>b</sup> Baptistery of San Giovanni, Siena, Italy.

<sup>c</sup> Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan, Italy.

<sup>d</sup> State Museums, Berlin, Germany.

<sup>e</sup> Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary.

<sup>f</sup> Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

<sup>g</sup> Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain.

<sup>h</sup> Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, Italy.

<sup>i</sup> National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, USA.

<sup>j</sup> Institute of France, Paris, France.

<sup>k</sup> Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan, Italy.

<sup>l</sup> Basilica of San Lorenzo, Milan, Italy.

<sup>m</sup> Milan House Museums, Italy.

<sup>n</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK.

<sup>o</sup> Condé Museum, Paris, France.

<sup>p</sup> Picture Gallery, Berlin, Germany.

<sup>q</sup> Louvre Museum, Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, France.

<sup>r</sup> Borghese Gallery, Rome, Italy.

<sup>s</sup> Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, USA.

<sup>t</sup> Palazzo Vecchio Museum, Florence, Italy.

<sup>u</sup> Church of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, Italy.

<sup>v</sup> Saint Mary of Health, Venice, Italy.

<sup>w</sup> Accademia Galleries, Venice, Italy.

<sup>x</sup> Ala Ponzone Civic Museum, Cremona, Italy.

<sup>y</sup> Skokloster Castle, Sweden.

<sup>z</sup> Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

<sup>aa</sup> West Dean House (Edward James Foundation), Sussex, UK.

<sup>ab</sup> Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, Madrid, Spain.

<sup>ac</sup> French and Company, New York, USA.

<sup>ad</sup> National Museum of Fine Arts, Stockholm, Sweden.

<sup>ae</sup> Tosio Martinengo Art Gallery, Brescia, Italy.

<sup>af</sup> Brera Art Gallery, Milan, Italy.

<sup>ag</sup> Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon, France.

<sup>ah</sup> Estense Gallery, Modena, Italy.

<sup>ai</sup> La Roche-sur-Yon Museum, France.

<sup>aj</sup> Private collection.

orders given by both the church and the aristocratic class (Nagel et al., 2010). Gastronomic objects are often paired with some meaning in paintings. It symbolizes the pomegranate (Virgin Mary and child Jesus), the apple (the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise and the savior of baby Jesus from sin and death), the wine (the blood of Jesus), the bread (the body of Jesus), the cherry (the childlike sweetness of the baby Jesus, the sacrifice of his blood), the quince (fertility), the lamb (baby Jesus and the sacrifice of Jesus), the egg (resurrection of Jesus), the fish (Jesus and God) and the orange (wealth) (Martyris, 2017; Meagher, 2009).

While medieval painters generally considered gastronomic objects as an element of gluttony, which is one of the seven deadly sins in Christianity, the different use of these objects in painting began to become fashionable with the Renaissance. Renaissance art is very rich in depictions of food, and it is known that nature is observed directly in the paintings created. It is seen that there are still life elements in the paintings that contain other religious teachings, especially mythology. These usually consist of fruits with sacred symbolic meanings, such as pomegranates, apples, grapes, and figs. In addition, the rituals of the food culture are observed in the paintings (Riley 2014). Plates and glasses in Veronese's (1528–1588) "The Wedding at Cana" painting, milk and honey rivers in Bosch's (1450–1516) "The Garden of Earthly Delights" and walls of pecorino and ricotta cheese began to appear. Aertsen (1508–1576), one of the Flemish school painters, painted "Butcher's Stall with the Flight into Egypt" in 1551, which is considered the earliest example of still-life in art history. Italian Renaissance painters were greatly influenced by the agricultural activities that began to develop, and fruits and vegetables grown in Italy began to be seen frequently in their paintings. For example, cherries, pears, figs, grapes, and peaches are symbols of abundance in Campi's (1530–1591) painting "The Fruit Seller," created in 1580. Again, in the artist's work "The Kitchen," all the details of the kitchen of an aristocratic house are depicted (Martinetti,

**Table 2**

Flemish school painters identified as using gastronomic objects and, the inventory of paintings<sup>a</sup>.

The Artist	Title of the Work	Creation Year	
1 Hieronymus Bosch (1450–1516)	The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things <sup>b</sup>	1480	
	The Garden of Earthly Delights <sup>b</sup>	1495	
	The Marriage Feast at Cana <sup>c</sup>	1500	
	Saint Christopher Carrying the Christ Child <sup>c</sup>	1500	
	The Wayfarer <sup>c</sup>	1494	
	The Ship of Fools <sup>d</sup>	1494–1510	
	Triptych of Haywain <sup>b</sup>	1502	
	2 Pieter Aertsen (1508–1576)	Butcher's Stall with the Flight into Egypt <sup>e</sup>	1551
		Christ and the Adulteress <sup>f</sup>	1557–58
		Christ and the Adulteress <sup>g</sup>	1559
		Christ in the House of Martha and Mary <sup>c</sup>	Unknown
Cook in front of the Stove <sup>h</sup>		1559	
The Cook <sup>i</sup>		1559	
The Egg Dance <sup>j</sup>		1552	
The Fat Kitchen. An Allegory <sup>k</sup>		1565–1575	
Market Scene <sup>l</sup>		1561	
Market Scene <sup>m</sup>		Unknown	
Market Scene <sup>n</sup>		1560–1565	
Market Scene <sup>o</sup>	1550		
Market Woman with Vegetable Stall <sup>p</sup>	1567		
Peasants by the Hearth <sup>q</sup>	1560		
The Pancake Bakery <sup>c</sup>	Unknown		
Peasants Meal <sup>n</sup>	1566		
Peasant Feast <sup>n</sup>	1550		
Vanitas Still-Life <sup>n</sup>	1552		
Vendor of Fowl <sup>r</sup>	1560		
3 Bruegel (1525–1569)	The Harvesters <sup>s</sup>	1565	
	The Peasant Wedding <sup>n</sup>	1568	
	The Egg Dance <sup>j</sup>	1552	
	The Fight Between Carnival and Lent <sup>n</sup>	1559	
	Netherlandish Proverbs <sup>p</sup>	1559	
	The Triumph of Death <sup>b</sup>	1562	
	Haymaking (July) <sup>t</sup>	1565	
	The Land of Cockaigne <sup>o</sup>	1567	
	Gula (Gluttony)- Engraving <sup>u</sup>	1556–1557	

<sup>a</sup> The place where the work of art is exhibited today.

<sup>b</sup> Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain.

<sup>c</sup> Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Netherlands.

<sup>d</sup> Louvre Museum, Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, France.

<sup>e</sup> University Art Collections, Uppsala University, Sweden.

<sup>f</sup> Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Netherlands.

<sup>g</sup> Städel Art Institute, Frankfurt, Germany.

<sup>h</sup> Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels, Belgium.

<sup>i</sup> Strada Nuova Museums, Genoa, Italy.

<sup>j</sup> Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

<sup>k</sup> Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, Denmark.

<sup>l</sup> Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary.

<sup>m</sup> Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne, Germany.

<sup>n</sup> Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

<sup>o</sup> Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany.

<sup>p</sup> State Museums, Berlin, Germany.

<sup>q</sup> Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp, Netherlands.

<sup>r</sup> The Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Russia.

<sup>s</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, USA.

<sup>t</sup> Lobkowitz Collections, Lobkowitz Palace, Prague, Czech Republic.

<sup>u</sup> British Museum, London, UK.

2018).

It is accepted that food represents a very rich visual language in Byzantine, Gothic, and early Renaissance art and is given in Table 3 (Adams, 2018).

In the 16th century, fruits represented both the seasons and what the upper class of the time ate to get rid of gluttony and sin. Peeled or cut

**Table 3**

Some foods' symbolic meanings in Byzantine, Gothic, and early Renaissance art.

Foods	Symbolic Meanings
1 Lemon	A peeled, translucent lemon; it represents charm and beauty with its bitter and sour taste. In Christian tradition, it is associated with fidelity and thus with the Virgin Mary. Since it is an imported fruit, it is a symbol of wealth and luxury.
2 Apple	A ripe apple represents earthly pleasures and sin. (Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise)
3 Peach	Immortality, Unlike the demonic apple, it represents honesty, salvation, and fertility.
4 Fig	Since it is the third tree mentioned in the Bible, it is closely related to Christianity. It represents the loss of innocence and disgrace. Adam and Eve's covering themselves with fig leaves also contains connotations of humility and sexuality.
5 Pear	Marriage commitment,
6 Pomegranate	The sweetness and fertility of heaven in its entirety, The exploded state is the symbol of Jesus' suffering and resurrection.
7 Grapes	It has a symbolic relationship with the blood of Jesus and represents fertility and salvation. It is also a symbol of the danger of debauchery.
8 Oyster	Birth and fertility, Oysters with pearls in their purest and most perfect form,
9 Asparagus	Luxury, wealth, and abundance,
10 Cabbage	Internal beauty,
11 Lobster	Wealth, gluttony, and sin, "Life and death" symbol

fruit represents that human life, like fruit, is ephemeral. Ripe and fresh fruits symbolize abundance, fertility, youth, and vitality; rotten fruits symbolize human mortality (Martinique, 2017; Garwood, 2014; Snow, 2021; Marks, 2020).

In the medieval monastery gardens, vegetables, fruits, and medicinal plants were grown with the knowledge of the Ancient Age. In the Renaissance period, the increase in interest in botany led to an increase in the number of gardens where fruit and medicinal plants were grown. Plants, one of the gastronomic objects in a Renaissance painting, represent religious symbolism, and the depicted medieval gardens contain two metaphors. The first of these is the "hortus conclusus", the secret garden that the church chose as a symbol for itself, the garden of the Virgin Mary, who sits on the throne of the sky and rules the church. Here are the symbolic meanings of each plant and flower. The other metaphor is the "hortus deliciarum", the garden of delights (love), which is the source of worldly pleasures (d'Ancona, 1977).

The garden layout of the Middle Ages in the paintings has intuitive and symbolic meanings beyond being visual or scientific, and imagination and reality are intertwined in the depictions. As Umberto Eco emphasizes, "Medieval people are full of meanings, symbols, and super meanings; God appears everywhere; a symbolic language is spoken in their natural world; lions are not just lions; walnuts are not just walnuts; hippogriffs are as real as lions; and they are all God. He lived in a world that seemed to be written by the hand of." (Bondanella, 2005).

The Renaissance also coincided with geographical discoveries, and botanists as well as painters were impressed by the variety of exotic new fruits and vegetables. At that time, exotic fruits and vegetables were considered luxury consumer goods that ordinary people did not use. For artists and intellectuals, craving too much exotic food was seen as the first sign of cultural decay, and they criticized gluttony, greed, and luxury. The artists, on the other hand, preferred to use luxury foods in their works rather than everyday foods (Toussaint-Samat, 2009).

With the development of the reform movement within the Protestant church, still-life paintings began to be made more and more by the Flemish school painters during the Renaissance period. In particular, kitchen scenes, fruit and vegetable counters, and banquet tables are free from religious symbols and depicted in their most realistic form

(Hepworth, 2016). Although the still-life paintings made in this period are understandable subjects, the items depicted are important in terms of showing the philosophical changes and the separation of economic and social classes. The centrality of God, seen in medieval paintings, disappeared, and the most basic human needs, namely food, self-importance, and wealth indicators, began to come to the fore (Batty, 2002).

Flemish painters took food as an important source of inspiration. They painted it with a very realistic perspective. In some paintings, they used great feasts; in others, abstinence and modesty were the objects. They often used the symbolism of food and drink to represent certain traits and virtues (Martinique, 2016).

#### 4. Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527–1593)

Arcimboldo is an artist whose art is not fully understood among Renaissance painters and whose reputation has not survived as much as other artists, but he uses gastronomic objects in a very surprising way. Various debates continue as to whether his works are the creation of a genius or a diseased brain. Born as the son of a painter working in Milan, Arcimboldo's early years began with various classical stained glass, frescoes, and drawings for the Duomo, Monza, and Como cathedrals. He later became the official portrait painter of the Habsburg and Prague Palaces. However, his real recognition was the portraits of the creature, using many gastronomic objects such as fruits, vegetables, flowers, and fish as symbols (Ferino-Pagden, 2017).

While the artists of his period specialized in either portraits or still-lives, Arcimboldo created a new trend by combining both genres. In the "Four Seasons" series he made in 1563, he made male portraits from young spring to old winter using seasonal products. In this series, he made the ears of corn in the summer and the heads of pumpkins in the fall from white pumpkins and used the products that entered European geography with the discovery of America. In addition, the painting "Four Seasons in One Head", in which he exhibits all the seasons together, is considered one of his most important works (Bendiner, 2004; National Gallery of Art, 2022).

He used the same technique when making portraits of real people. One of the most important examples of this is the painting "Vertumnus", the god of seasons, growth, vegetation, and fruit, in which he painted the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II. This painting is considered an allegory of the empire. By placing the Emperor at the head of the series of seasons, the artist exhibits his sovereignty. The flowers used and vegetables from all seasons symbolize the return of the golden age under the rule of the Emperor (Arcimboldo, 2000).

On New Year's Eve 1569, he presented "The Four Seasons" and "The Four Elements" series to his patron, Emperor Maximilian II. With the face of a young man made entirely of flowers in the seasons, he expresses the youth of spring and the old age of winter with a gnarled tree trunk. Summer with corn and vegetable ears and autumn with seasonal fruits represent the human life cycle. In objects, sea creatures form a head and describe water, various animals, and soil. For example, the cunning fox is located on the forehead, and its tail forms the eyebrows. The elephant, symbolizing humility, is located on the cheek. The faces appear to complement each other. The elements of autumn, winter, air and water are masculine. The elements of spring, summer, earth, and water are female. These eight paintings symbolize the magnificence and harmony of the Empire as a whole (Kriegeskorte, 2000).

The artist used the elements of the four seasons in harmony in his painting "Vertumnus". The wig was made of millet, grapes, sheaves of wheat, and ears of corn. An apple and a peach are located on the cheeks, and a pear is located on the nose. The forehead area is formed by a melon. One eye is made of cherry, one eye is made of red mulberry, and the beard is made of hazelnut and chestnut (Harris, 2011).

The two paintings he made in his portrait still life work are his works known as "The Gardener" or "Vegetables in a Bowl" and "The Cook," in which a completely different image is encountered when reversed. In the

"Vegetables in a Bowl" painting, various vegetables such as onions, carrots, mushrooms, zucchini, spinach, radishes, and greens are placed in a bowl. The way the vegetables are placed is reminiscent of the phallus of Priapos, the patron god of cattle and gardens. When the picture is turned upside down, the plate at the bottom turns into an allegorical portrait, symbolizing a hat, radish nose, mushroom lips, walnuts and hazelnut eyes and onion cheek, and represents the gardener. The same painting turns into an allegorical interpretation of the concept of fertility, represented by Priapos with two identical perspectives (Battistini, 2005).

The artist's painting, "The Cook," also has different meanings in two ways. What appears to be a piglet and a bird randomly placed between two trays when viewed from one side, turns into a grotesque face when turned upside down. The bird is perceived as having a deformed nose and the piglet as having curled hair. One of the trays takes the form of a hat, decorated with lemons and greens (Bendiner, 2004).

While Arcimboldo's works deal with the theme of parallelism between humanity and nature, his portraits are also likened to symbolic picture puzzles. The tendency towards the creative and imaginative elements of the Mannerist style is observed in his portraits. The portraits he made in his last period were blended with the knowledge of a botanist and the skills of a miniature master, and the details in the flora were perfectly combined (Bosch, 2022).

#### 5. Conclusion

The origins of the symbolic meanings of food and beverages date back to ancient times and appear as a reflection of life in the fine arts. Especially in Greek and Roman mythology, it is frequently seen that gods are associated with food, and gastronomic objects have always been used symbolically in art in the Medieval and Renaissance periods. In Renaissance paintings, it is seen that there are still life elements in paintings that include mythology and other religious teachings. These usually consist of fruits with sacred symbolic meanings, such as pomegranates, apples, grapes, and figs. Although exotic fruits and vegetables are luxury consumer goods that ordinary people do not use, they are also used by artists. During the Renaissance period, the centrality of God, which was depicted in medieval paintings, disappeared, and instead, images of food began to come to the fore as signs of luxury and wealth. Another important aspect of painting is the clues it gives us in terms of gastronomy, social life, and culture. For both the painter and the viewer, painting the foods that appeal to the eye, not the daily meals, is a centuries-old phenomenon and is worth examining from a cultural point of view. Today, we publish the most beautiful and different dishes on social media as if we were eating them every day. Similarly, it is seen that Arcimboldo and other Renaissance painters used vegetables such as artichokes, which look much better with their leaves, or lemon, which creates an exotic atmosphere, instead of the most consumed foods such as chicken and eggs. In addition, vegetables, fruits, and especially seafood used in the paintings were also used as elements that determine social status in a sense.

#### Implications for gastronomy

The most basic need of human beings in daily life is to eat and drink, and for this reason, gastronomic items have been the subjects of the art of painting since ancient times. In our study, the artistic aspect of gastronomy was brought to the fore and a contribution was made to the field of gastronomy with the evaluation of gastronomic objects, which became evident in the art of painting during the Renaissance period of enlightenment.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Murat Doğan:** Definition, Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Zeynep Savcı Yaşlıca:** Definition, Conceptualization,

Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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