



# 1495 Italian Wedding Course

by Baroness Briana Etain MacKorkhill

The end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century was a time of change in what was commonly available on the table. Venice was the queen of the trade routes and with the firm establishment of the spice trade in Venice, households were now able to experience new tastes and combinations like never before. And since Venice was the cornerstone of that lucrative trade, citizens benefited from the increased economy and provided many with the bounty that the merchants brought with them.

As Florence re-established itself as a distribution center for many points in Western Europe, they too, took advantage of the prosperous trade economy. Many flavors and new food items flooded into Northern Italy from not only other European countries but also from the Middle East and the north coast of Africa.

Communal holidays, rites of passage, office-holding celebrations, ecclesiastical feast days, and the accompanying feasts for these special occasions were some of the ways that the noble class could and would display their wealth. Their tables were expected to offer the best and the most bold and inventive dishes served. These feasts were hosted by important families for both personal and political reasons.

One of the primary rites of passage was of course, a wedding. This was one occasion that was comprised of both political and personal aspects. Most noble weddings were state occasions – the joining of political and economic factions to form strong ties and business opportunities, not at all what we usually think of weddings today.

At these gatherings, many guests that the families might want to impress were invited. Many partnerships and economic agreements depended on the success of the meal. Many contemporaries of Platina believed as he did and began to ascribe meanings to the use of certain foods and combinations of foods to affect emotions and body reactions. This philosophy made planning and executing a grand feast certainly more important than merely providing sustenance.



## Beginnings

Many large state occasion feasts featured far more dishes than what will be presented here. Consider this course as a highlight of a feast, if you will. To start, we have some scented water to wash our hands. There are some pine nuts, almonds, olives and dried apricots on the table.

We have Chicken Ambrogino with Dried Fruit, Ricotta and Herb Ravioli, Crushed Chickpeas with Onions and Basil and a Marzipan Tart. We also have some Lemon Water as a palate cleanser.

## Chicken Ambrogino with Dried Fruit

The first appearance of this recipe was for a celebration feast in 1324 according to the *Medieval Kitchen*. When I started looking at recipes, I found at least three different versions of this dish in various manuscripts of the period but I liked this one the best. This particular version caught my eye because it offered quite a challenge to balance the complex play of sweet and sour so popular in period.

The first time I tried this recipe, the onions disintegrated a little too much because I put the onions in first and then without removing them, put in the chicken. This made it hard for the chicken to brown and caused the dish to overcook a little. It was still delicious but I felt that it could be done better. Hence I changed the order that the two ingredients were added into the skillet. It was speculated in the *Medieval Kitchen* that the word Ambrogino was from the same root word as ambrosia, and indeed I found the taste quite heavenly.

### *Italian wording*

#### **Se vuoi ambrogino di polli**

*Togli li pollo, ismembrali, poi li soffriggi col lardo fresco et uno poco di cipolla tagliata a traverso. Quando è a mezzo cotto, togli latte di mandorle et istempera con buglione et uno poco di vino, e metti con questi polli et iscema in prima del grasso s'egli è troppo, e mettivi cennamo trito col coltello e pochi garofani. E quando s'apparecchia, mettivi susine secche, datteri interi, alquante noci moscate tritate et uno poco di midolla di pane abbruscata, bene pesta e stemperata con vino e*



*con aceto. Questa vivanda vuole essere agra e dolce, e guarda li datteri che non si rompano. (Gu 20)*

### ***English translation***

### **To make Chicken Ambrogino**

*If you wish to make a chicken ambrogino, take the chickens, cut them up, then put them to fry with fresh pork fat and a bit of onion, cut crosswise. When this is half cooked, take some almond milk, mix it with broth and a little wine, and add it to the chickens, first skimming off the fat if there is too much; add cinnamon cut up with a knife and a few cloves. When it is dished up add some prunes, whole dates, a few chopped nutmegs, and a little crumb of grilled bread, well pounded and mixed with wine and vinegar. This dish should be sweet and sour; and be sure that the dates do not burst open.*

*Source: The Medieval Kitchen, recipe 30, p 83. (Framento di un libro di cucina del sec XIV)*

And here's my redaction:

3 ½ to 4 pounds of chicken pieces  
3 ounces of pork fatback or panchetta  
2 medium-large onions, sliced  
8 prunes  
10 dates  
2 slices of country bread  
generous ¾ cup white wine  
3 tablespoons white wine vinegar  
½ cup chicken broth  
1-inch piece of cinnamon stick, coarsely broken up  
3 cloves  
1 pinch of freshly grated nutmeg  
almond milk made up of 1/3 cup of almonds with 2 cups of warm water  
salt to taste

Toast or grill the bread; remove and discard crusts.

Cut the panchetta into 1/8 cubes. Over medium heat, render the fat in a large skillet, then add the chicken. Once it is lightly browned, remove and add the onions. Once they are translucent, make room among the



onions and add the chicken back in.

Mix the almond milk with the broth and half of the wine. Once the onions and chicken are back in the skillet, add the almond milk mixture along with the cinnamon and cloves and simmer for about 30 minutes or until the chicken is done.

Pit the prunes and dates if needed. Break up the bread and mix it with the vinegar and remaining wine. When the chicken is nearly done, combine the prunes, dates, bread mixture and nutmeg into a small saucepan. Cook over low heat, ensuring that the prunes and dates remain whole. When the sauce is thickened, salt to taste and remove the pan from the heat.

To serve, arrange the chicken on a serving platter, topped with the almond-milk sauce in which it cooked and surrounded by the prunes and dates from the second sauce. Pour the second sauce over the first.

## Ricotta and Herb Ravioli

There are so many versions of ravioli that it was really difficult to decide which one I wanted to make. I selected this one because it complements the Ambrogino Chicken so well. And the *Medieval Kitchen* actually mentions that at the feast that the chicken recipe appeared, it was accompanied by Ravioli Bianchi. I did not want to duplicate that combination exactly, preferring to substitute this ravioli recipe instead. I dressed the pasta simply in butter and parsley so as to allow the wonderful flavor of the cheeses to be highlighted. It also allows the diner to choose to put some of the sauce from the chicken on it and not have conflicting tastes.

### *Italian wording*

#### **Rafioli Commun de Herbe Vantazati**

*Se tu voy fare ravioli de herbe o de altre manere, toj herbe e mondale ben e lavale; po'le alessa un pocho e trali fuera e spremali ben fora l'acqua e batelli con el cortello e poy in mortaro e toy del caxo fresco e passo, ova e specie dolze e forte e mena ben in seme e fay pastume e poy fay la pasta sotille a modo de lasagne e toy uno mizolo largo e fay i rafioli. Quando sono fati mitili a choxere e quando è ben cocti polverizage suso specie asay con bon caso assay e son boni assay.*



### ***English Translation***

#### **Fantastic common ravioli with herbs**

If you want to make ravioli with herbs or with other things, take herbs and peel (strip from stalks) and wash well. Put them to boil for a little time (parboil) and pull them out (of the pan) and squeeze out all the water. Beat them with a knife (chop) and then in a mortar (grind). Take fresh strained cheese, eggs and strong and sweet spices and mix these all well together and make a paste. Then take a thin layer of pasta, in the way of lasagna sheets, and take a large measure (spoon) and make the ravioli. When they are made put them to cook and when they are well cooked, powder them above with enough spices and enough good cheese and they are very good.

*Source: Libro Per Cuoco*

#### ***My redaction***

##### *Fresh pasta:*

2 cups of flour

3 eggs

pinch of salt

##### *Filling:*

3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

3 tablespoons fresh marjoram

3 tablespoons fresh sweet basil

8 ounces ricotta

½ cup freshly grated parmesano-reggiano cheese

1 egg

freshly ground black pepper

freshly grated nutmeg

salt to taste

chicken stock for cooking

2 tablespoons butter

coarsely chopped parsley to dress

freshly grated parmesan for serving

*To make the pasta:* Sift together and then mound the 2 cups of flour and a pinch of salt in the center of a large wooden cutting board. Make



a well in the middle of the flour and add the eggs. Using a fork, beat together the eggs and begin to incorporate the flour, starting with the inner rim of the well. Add more flour, if needed.

As you expand the well, keep pushing the flour up from the base of the mound to retain the well shape. The dough will come together when half of the flour is incorporated.

Start kneading the dough with both hands, using the palms of your hands. Knead for about 15 minutes, adding any of the remaining flour if necessary to create a cohesive mass. Once you have a cohesive mass, remove the dough from the board and scrape up and discard any leftover bits. Lightly re-flour the board and continue kneading for six more minutes. The dough should be elastic and a little sticky. Wrap the dough in plastic and allow to rest for 30 minutes at room temperature. Roll or shape as desired. I used a hand cranked pasta rolling machine to flatten the dough to the desired thickness.

*For filling:* Combine chopped herbs, ricotta, parmesan, egg and seasonings and blend to a homogeneous mixture. Check seasoning – the filling should be quite strongly seasoned. Lay one sheet out and place small amounts of the mixture evenly spread out for the length of the sheet. Slightly moisten the edges and then place a second sheet on top and press to seal between the bundles. Cut apart and place on a platter. Continue until all mixture has been used.

Heat chicken stock. When it comes to the boil, carefully drop in the ravioli and boil gently for about 5 minutes or until pasta is cooked through. Remove from stock and dress with the butter and parsley. Sprinkle generously with parmesan.

## **Crushed Chickpeas with Onions and Basil**

This recipe is taken from Anonimo Toscano, *Libro della Cucina*. This is a work that the Italian digital version was posted to the internet by Thomas Gloning and then a fellow SCA member, Vittoria Aureli, translated it into English and posted the translated document on the internet. There are no redactions posted with this. The original recipe only calls for fried onions to be added to the chickpeas but I have added some basil also, so that it brightens up the flavor. I took the inspiration from other legume recipes that I have read.



### ***Italian wording***

#### **Ceci Altramente**

Togli ceci rotti bulliti, e gittata via l'acqua della cocitura, colle predette cose ponasi cipolla soffritta, e bene confetta con oglio o lardo, come el tempo o di richiede.

### ***English Translation***

#### **Chickpeas, Another Preparation**

Take boiled crushed chickpeas, and throw away their cooking water, and add fried onions to the aforementioned things, and preserve them well with oil or lard, as the weather or season requires.

*Source: Anonimo Toscano, Libro della Cucina.*

### ***My redaction***

1 pound dried chickpeas  
1 medium red onion, diced  
1 teaspoon chopped sweet basil  
olive oil  
salt & freshly ground pepper

Let the chickpeas soak overnight. Discard the water and cover with fresh water and a little salt, and cook over medium heat. After about an hour, add basil and continue cooking until tender. Drain the chickpeas, transfer them to a bowl and crush them until most are broken but not pureed. Take a small skillet and heat olive oil, add onion and sauté until soft and transparent. Add onion to bowl with chickpeas and toss until blended. Season to taste with salt and pepper. If it is a little dry, drizzle a little extra virgin olive oil on top. Garnish and serve.

### **Marzipan Tart**

This was a dish that was served at the Bandinelli banquets of Siena. This is a very early recipe for the now famed marzipan sweetmeats that we are familiar with today. I chose this after reading Platina's recipe which notes that this dish promotes fertility and arouses the



passions, quite perfect for a wedding feast. This was a very challenging tart because the temperature that I cooked it at was critical to getting it just right. The first time I made this, I undercooked it just a little and it was tasty but a little too sticky. I also changed the crust from that published in the *Medieval Kitchen* after consulting both Platina and Nostradamus in their recipes for this delicacy. A continuous crust makes more sense than that of layered pizelles and I believe makes the presentation better.

### ***Italian wording***

#### **Marzapane**

*Monda l'amandole molto bene, et pistale quanto più sia possibile perché non fanno a passare per la stamegna. Et nota per fare le ditte amandole più bianche, più gustoes et più dolci a la bocca, se vogliono tenere a mollo nell'acqua fresca per un dì et una nocte o tanto più, che da se stesse premendole con le ditte se mondino. Et pistandole le bagnarai con un pocha d'acqua rosata, perché non facciano olio. Et se vol fare bon la ditta torta, metteragli a peso equale tanto zucchero sino quanto amandole, cioè una libra dell'uno et una dell'altro, o più o mancho como ti piache, et metterali anchora una oncia o doi d'acqua rosata bona; et tutte queste cose incorporarai molto bene insieme. Poi pigliarai di cialdoni o nevole fatte col zucchero, et bagnate prima con l'acqua rosata; distemperarale sopra el fondo de la padella, et dentro gli metterai questa compositione o pieno sopra ditto. Et disteso et spianato che l'haverai, un'altra volta si vole bagnare un pochetto con l'acqua rosata, sopragiogendoli ancora di sopra di bono zucchero spolverizzato. Et spianato bene per tutto con il zucchero la farai cocere nel forno overno al focho como l'altre torte molto ad ascio, havendo bona avvertenza a dargli il focho temperato et di rivederla spesso perché non s'abbrusciasse. Ricordadoti che simile torta di marzapane più tosto vole essere un pocho bassetta et sottile, che troppo alta et spessa. (Ma 168)*

### ***English Translation***

#### **Marzipan Tart**

Skin the almonds very well and pound them as finely as possible, because they will not be put through a sieve. Note that to make the almonds whiter, more flavorful, and sweeter in the mouth, they should be put to soak in fresh water for a day and night, or even longer, so





that they can be skinned by pressing them between your fingers. When you pound them, dampen them with a little rose water so that they do not become oily. And if you want to make this *torta* good, use equal weights of sugar and almonds, that is one libra of one and one of the other, or more or less as you prefer; and also use one or two *oncie* of good rose water; and mix all these things together thoroughly. Then take *cialdoni* or *nevole* made with sugar and first moistened with rose water; arrange them on the bottom of the pan, and on top put the aforementioned mixture or filling. And when you have spread it and flattened it, you should moisten it again with a little rose water, also putting on top some good pulverized sugar. And when the sugar is spread evenly over all, cook it in the oven, or over the fire, very slowly as with other torte, taking great care to keep the fire moderate and to check it often so that it does not burn. Remember that such marzipan torte should be low and thin rather than high and thick. (Ma 168).

*Source: Libro de arte coquinaria*

### ***My redaction***

#### *For the sweet crust:*

Generous  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of flour  
2 tablespoons of sugar, preferably superfine  
2 –3 tablespoons rosewater  
1 pinch salt

#### *For the marzipan filling:*

1  $\frac{3}{4}$  cups unblanched almonds  
1  $\frac{1}{4}$  cups of sugar  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of rose water  
sugar for topping

One day in advance, pour boiling water over the almonds to cover. When it is cold, pour it off and rinse the almonds in several changes of water until the water runs clear. Soak the almonds overnight and it will make it easy to pop off the skins.

To make the crust, mix the flour, sugar, salt and then stir in the rosewater until you have a fairly elastic dough. It should be soft but not sticky. Let the dough rest for 30 minutes covered in a damp cloth or wrapped in plastic wrap. After it has rested, roll out the dough to be very thin and line the bottom of a 10-inch tart pan.



Preheat the oven to 250 degrees F.

Grind the skinless almonds to a fairly smooth puree with 3 tablespoons of rose water. Add the sugar and an additional 3 tablespoons of rose water and stir until smooth.

Turn the almond mixture into the tart pan and spread evenly over the crust. Sprinkle the top with a little more rosewater and with fine sugar.

Bake for about an hour, until the top is lightly golden. Check from time to time to make sure the tart does not become too brown. Cool completely before serving.



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<http://www.uni-giessen.de/~g909/tx/an-tosc.htm>

Thomas Gloning's text is based on: E. Faccioli, **Arte della cucina**, Milano 1966, vol. I, p. 21-57, without Faccioli's notes.

"Faccioli says that he relies basically on the 19th c. edition of Zambrini with some slight changes. And he was inclined to date it rather from the beginning of the 15th c. than from the late 14th. c."

Vittoria Aureli's Digital English Version of Anonimo Toscano, **Libro della Cucina, "The Cookery Book"**. late 14th or early 15th century. Translated in 2005.

[http://www.geocities.com/anahita\\_whitehorse/LibroDellaCocina.html](http://www.geocities.com/anahita_whitehorse/LibroDellaCocina.html)