

1545 Remove for an Al Fresco Lunch

by Baroness Briana Etain MacKorkhill

The 16th 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 items flooded into Venice from not only other European countries but also from the Middle East and North coast of Africa.

Great food was yet another of the aspects of the allure of being a courtesan. She was there to provide a feast in every way - intellectual, cultural, emotional and culinary. As a successful courtesan, her table was expected to offer the best and the most bold and inventive dishes served. They were to entertain not only their patrons but, at the frequent dinner parties given, any guests that the patron might want to impress. Many partnerships were forged, intelligence gathered and economic deals transpired during these little parties, so a success was certainly more important than merely sustenance.

Besides all the great book sources that I have been able to utilize in preparing this entry, (see bibliography), the Medici Archive Project has been a treasure trove of information about what kinds of food was consumed in what quantities. When Cosimo I became Duke of Florence in 1537, he decreed that all correspondence both public and private was to be archived. That archive has survived to this day and with the Medici Archive Project's goal to translate and categorize that bounty of information, we have a unique opportunity to get a rare glimpse into everyday life of the Medici court. I have tied one of my dishes to one of the archival synopses available.

Beginnings

Since this is an al fresco lunch setting, most of the dishes will be served at room temperature. To start, we have some scented water to wash our hands. There are some pine nuts, almonds, olives and dried apricots on the table. I have again catered to my patron's request for a pork dish, this time making two versions of Fresh Italian Sausages – one with rosemary added and the other with marjoram added. This is accompanied by a Traveling Mustard, a Spinach and Herb Torte, Roasted Onion Salad, and we finish up with Candied Lemon Slices.

Fresh Italian Sausages – 2 versions

In my research, the first thing that I read was a quote from Platina that there were hundreds of pork recipes. But once I started digging deeper, I realized that most of the recipes that were written down were, even for this period, vague, most authors assuming that everyone knew how to cook pork. There are a couple of recipes for sausages but in some it leaves the specific spices to the taste of the cook. So I took one of the basic recipes and decided to try two variations of the recipe. One with Rosemary added and the other with Marjoram. I really liked the way they turn out with a surprising play of flavors. Here is the basic recipe:

Italian wording

Salsize bone

Piglia carne magra de porcho ho de vitella magra he grassa, he falla battere molto bene; he guard ache non ci sia nervi; et se la carne he .x. libre, [f 33v] meteli meza libra de sale he onze due de finoghio ben nettado, et due onze de pebro grossamente pistado; he miscola tute queste cose inseam he lassa stare per uno di; dapoi tolle budella ben nettata he impele de questa material, poi pone le salzize a sugare al fumo.

English translation

Good Sausages

Get lean pork or lean and fat veal and beat it well – and mind that there is no gristle in it; if there is 10 lbs of meat, use half a pound of salt, 2 ounces of well cleaned fennel and 2 ounces of roughly ground pepper; mix everything together and let it stand for a day; then get very well cleaned intestines and stuff them with this mixture, and set the sausages to dry and smoke.

Source: Neapolitan Recipe Collection, recipe 84, p 190.

From “To Make Good Bolognese Sausage”

“...Furthermore, you can make fat ones by taking half lean [meat] and half fat, adding in a good lot of fennel, but those ones are not for keeping.”

Source: Neapolitan Recipe Collection, recipe 87, p190.

And here's my redaction:

Fresh Italian Sausages Basic recipe

6 lbs of ground pork
5 teaspoons of salt
5 teaspoons of freshly ground pepper
3 teaspoons of dried fennel seeds
Casings

After combining the above ingredients, I divided it into two bowls and for the

Rosemary version

To the above add:

3 teaspoons of fresh rosemary

Marjoram version

To the above add:

3 teaspoons of fresh marjoram

Mix thoroughly each batch. Stuff the mixture into casings to make sausages. Cover and refrigerate overnight so that the flavors are fully absorbed into the meat. Grill until browned and juices run clear when pierced.

Traveling Mustard

Mustard was very popular in period, much as catsup is today for us. This is so convenient and certainly would have been a likely addition to a lunch like this.

Italian wording

Mostarda Per Portare cavalcando in balotte

Habi de la sementa mostarda he, quando sera stata a moglio uno giorno, pistala molto bene cum uno pugno de uva passa, garofali, canella, he uno poco de pipero, he cum questa pasta farai balotte piccole ho grosse como una noce; poi meteralle a sugare sopra una tavola; et quando serano seche, le potrai portare cavalcando; et per distemperarle, tole agresto ho sabba ho vino ho aceto.

English Translation

Balled Mustard for Trips

Get mustard seed and, when it has steeped a day, grind it up with a handful of raisins, cloves, cinnamon and a little pepper, and with this paste, form balls, small or as large as a walnut; then set them to dry on a board; when dry, you can take them when you go riding; to distemper them, use verjuice or must or wine or vinegar.

Source: Neapolitan Recipe Collection, recipe 123, p195.

My redaction

1 cup of dry mustard

½ cup of raisins

1 teaspoon of ground cloves

1 teaspoon of ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon of freshly ground pepper

enough water to bind mixture

Combine all dry ingredients together. Grind raisins and mix with dry ingredients. Add just enough water to bind the mixture. Form into small balls and let dry. When ready to use, take ball and break it up and mix in either wine, verjuice or vinegar.

Spinach-Herb Torte

There are so many versions of the basic herb torte that I ended up trying quite a few, from the Bolognese Torte to the May Herb Torte to the Green Torte (all in the Neapolitan Recipe Collection). I decided to combine several to come up with my own version, one of the deciding factors being that one of my taste testers is allergic to mint, the other is that I found the Swiss Chard to be too bitter so I substituted Spinach instead. My version is closest to the Bolognese Torte. I also only used one crust so the beautiful green color can be seen. In the commentary section of the Neapolitan Collection for the Green Torte, “in the arte coquinaria (recipe 126) *E simile torta sive herbollata quanto piu sea verde tanto piu sera bella* – Any similar torte or herb dish looks prettier the greener it is.” p. 151. Since the top crust was usually added to help the filling cook in period, since I am using an oven, it is not necessary.

My redaction

2 bunches of spinach, stemmed and washed (using the inside smaller leaves)
1 bunch of Italian flat parsley
1 bunch of fresh sweet basil
1 bunch of fresh tarragon
1 bunch of fresh thyme
1 bunch of fresh marjoram
1 pound of cream cheese
4 eggs
½ teaspoon of salt
½ teaspoon of pepper
¼ teaspoon of saffron

Take all spinach and herbs and stem and wash thoroughly. Pat dry. Cut fine and then mix with the cream cheese. I used a food processor. Once thoroughly combined, take slightly beaten eggs and mix with herb mixture. Add salt, pepper and saffron.

Place in an unbaked pie crust and put in a 350 degree preheated oven for 30 minutes. Be sure to shield the crust until the last 10 minutes so that it retains it's golden tone. And because this has such a high egg and cheese concentration, I added a pan of water in the oven to reduce cracking in the surface of the torte.

Roasted Onion Salad

This recipe is one of my personal favorites. Onions were thought to have aphrodisiac properties, so I thought it would be perfect to serve in this lunch. It is good served warm or cold and tastes even better after marinating overnight.

Italian wording

De la insaleggiata di cipolle

Togli cipolle; cuocile sotto la bragia, e poi le manda, e tagliale per traverse longhette et sottili: mettili alquanto d'aceto, sale, oglio, e spezie, e da a mangiare.

English translation

Roast Onion Salad

Of onion salad. Take onions; cook them in the embers, then peel them and cut them across into longish, thin slices; add a little vinegar, salt, oil, and spices, and serve.

Source: The Medieval Kitchen, p. 79. (Za 90)

My redaction

2 lbs. medium red or other sweet onions, about 6 onions

Olive oil

Wine vinegar

Scant ½ teaspoon fine spices*

Salt

Pepper

Roast onions in a 500 degree oven for about an hour individually wrapped in aluminum foil. Remove the onions from the oven, unwrap them, and let them cool awhile. The skins should be blackened and caramelized. When they are cool enough not to burn you, peel the onions and cut them into thin slices with a very sharp knife.

Put the onions into a salad bowl. Season with salt, pepper, and the spice mixture. Add a little olive oil and vinegar to taste. Mix and serve. I combined the salad early so that it can marinate. I like it even better this way.

***Fine spices**

Italian wording

Specie fine a tutte cosse

Toy una onza de pevere e una de cinamo e una de zenzevro e mezzo quarto de garofali e uno quarto de zaferanno.

English translation

Take an onza of pepper and one of cinnamon and one of ginger, and half a quarter [onza] of cloves and a quarter of saffron. (Fr. 40)

Source: The Medieval Kitchen, p. 221. (Fr. 40)

My redaction:

2 rounded tablespoons freshly ground pepper

2 rounded tablespoons ground cinnamon

2 rounded tablespoons ground ginger

1 ½ teaspoons saffron threads

loosely measured crushed to a powder in a mortar or with your fingers

¾ teaspoon ground cloves

Candied Lemon Slices

I chose to make these as an homage to Eleanor di Toledo. In the Medici archives, there is an entry concerning a gift of lemons. Here it is:

Topic: [Food and Wine](#)

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Date: 1545 May 17

From: [Girolamo Marinozzi, Scalco segreto \(1545\)](#)

Location: [Volterra](#)

To: [Pier Riccio](#)

[Proposto di Prato, Canon of Florence Cathedral \(1538\), Maggiordomo \(1545\)](#)

Location: [Firenze](#)

Synopsis: [Basket of lemons sent by Pierfrancesco Riccio enjoyed by the court in Volterra; Eleonora di Toledo orders four lemons candied.](#)

[...] Io ricevetti la di V. S. insieme con un cestolino de bellissimi limoni, li qualj io presentai a lloro Ex.tie [Cosimo I; Eleonora di Toledo] con dirgli come V. S. me l'aveva mandati che io le presentassi a llor Ex.tie, che certo gli forno molte a caro. La S.ra Ill.ma Duchessa ne prese quatro con le sue mano et me comisse che le facessi trinciare con zucarro per cena el resto se guardassi, in vero che qui non era di tal sortta frutte si che io ne resto oblicatissimo a V. S. perchè quando vedo in tavola cose bone et che li patroni ne mangiano volentierj io ne godo fortemente e tantto più che gli era el S.or don Giovanni de Luna con el suo genero a cena con sua Ex.tia [...]

Extract:

This is still a favorite of the Tuscany region. I decided to make slices so that it is an easy finger-food keeping with the intimate and romantic nature of our repast. I based the recipe on several references to candied items, like the Candied Orange Peel in the Medieval Kitchen and candied spices or in Italian “confetti” mentioned in introduction to the sweetmeats section in Medieval Kitchen. Not many of the recipes for these survived as they were often ready-to-buy items from spicers.

My redaction

4 cups of water

6 cups of sugar

4 lemons sliced

Bring the water and sugar to a boil, stirring frequently, until it forms a soft ball stage, (mentioned in the Candied Orange Peel recipe). Then drop lemon slices in the water and reduce heat to medium. Make sure that the slices have been turned over so that the simple syrup has covered them. After 5-7 minutes have passed, turn off heat and cover the pan. Let lemons remain in liquid for 24 hours. Remove slices to a rack to drain and dry. Takes about 48 to 72 hours to fully dry. You may cut them or serve whole as desired.

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