



Those who contributed to this recipe book:

- * Signora Giovanna Maria Battista di Firenze (Elizabeth Pearson) valkyr8@yahoo.com
- * Chiara Belladonna (Chantal St. Claire) csclaire@yahoo.com
- * Mistress Aramanthra the Viscious (N.B. Read) aramanthra@juno.com
- * Lady Margaret Fitzwiliam of Kent (Jennifer Getty) pixel@hundred-acre-wood.com

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Jubilee in Florence

Recipe Book

Barony of Nordskogen

poet.minstrel.com/nordskogen

October 16th, 1999

Jubilee in Florence web site <http://www.gryph.com/florence/Default.htm>

When planning the dishes for the feast we tried to keep in mind the context in which the first Jubilee took place, specifically the social and economic flavor of Florence in the year 1300. The earliest cooking text from the region that we could reference was Le Viandier De Taillevent, which dates from the mid 1300's. This is a French cook book, which we felt could give us some guidelines as to the types of dishes that were common of the time, but we didn't believe would provide a lot of insight to the Florentine pallet. I then turned to the poetry of the day, specifically the poems written by Folgore da San Gimignano, a contemporary of Dante, commemorating the activities on the day of the Jubilee; Easter 1300.

“In gay brigade, from morn to night we dine
On aspic jellies that, incarnadine,
Garish fat grouse or partridge, good to taste;
On capon or on kid, piquant and fine
As sauce is when with garlic it is laced...”

“Comfits and cakes be found at bidding there;
And let your gifts of birds and game increase:
And let all those who in your banquet share
Sit with bright faces perfectly at ease.”

His poem did give me some specifics, but unfortunately I didn't have the budget for a lot of game, or goat; and although I love aspic, it is not popular with a lot of people. Despite this, I believe it gave me a good start.

Florence is a unique city of the Middle Ages in the fact that the wealth resided not in the coffers of kings and queens but with the merchants, tradesman, and bankers.

Outstanding evidence of this economic expansion was the coining in 1252 of the gold florin, which joined the silver florin coined as early as 1235. The gold florin testified to the existence, in 13th-century Florence, of a flow of precious metal, furnished by commerce, which by this time was on a continental scale, and credit, which was to make the city the financial capital of the West.

At the end of the 13th century Florence could rightly consider itself the main city of the West, as cited in the commemorative tablet of the construction of the church of Santi Simone e Giuda "... de florentina (civitate) pre qualibet urbe latina..!"

The prevalence of a wealthy Merchant class in the early Middle Ages is unique to Florence. This unique arrangement is represented in the popular dishes that were preferred in the homes of the “*novi riche*”. Simple hearty dishes, that reflect the variety and wealth of the fields and vineyards of the Tuscan countryside, elegantly prepared in well-appointed kitchens (a new element in many of the homes and palazzos being constructed around this time). Despite the lateness of his book, we chose Platina's “*Of Right Health and Good Eating*” as our primary source for the menu. Although not a cookbook specifically, his insight into the popular approach to preparing a variety of foods was very beneficial in our planning.

¹ Information taken from the [Art and History of Florence](http://www.arca.net/tourism/florence/arthisto.htm) web site:
<http://www.arca.net/tourism/florence/arthisto.htm>

Feast Menu

On the table:

Pickled onions
Pickled garlic
Boiled eggs
Coccoli
Sugared almonds

Second Remove:

Pork in wine sauce
Risotto
Armored turnips
Spinach with herbs

Forth Remove:

Fish with parsley and garlic
Salad
Almond blancmange

First Remove:

Focaccia
Fried cheese
Baked garlic
Fresh fruit

Third Remove:

Roman noodles
Asparagus
Peach comfit with
walnuts

Dessert:

Almond and ricotta cake
Candied fennel
Candied orange peel
Figs with roses

“There is an order to be observed in taking food, since everything that moves the bowels and whatever is of light and slight nourishment, like apples and pears, is more safely and pleasantly eaten in the first course. I even add lettuce and whatever is served with vinegar and oil, raw or cooked. Then there are eggs, especially the soft cooked kind, and certain sweets which we call bellaria, seasoned with spices and pine nuts, or honey, or sugar. These are served very appropriately.”²

Recipes

Pickled Garlic (*Agli sott’ aceto*)

The recipe that I found gave no specific quantities for the ingredients, so your guess is as good as mine.

Ingredients:

Large fresh garlic cloves (they suggested the use of elephant garlic)
White vinegar
Sage (fresh)
Pepper corns
Salt

I took a gallon jar and filled it $\frac{3}{4}$'s of the way with peeled garlic cloves and added a sprig of sage, 2 T pickling salt, 1 T peppercorns and covered the whole thing with white vinegar and let it sit for a month. The recipe cautioned to use an earthenware jar, or something that was opaque because the cloves could discolor is exposed to the sun. My cloves turned a bluish tinge, which we are attributing to the dye in the peppercorns, since I kept them covered while they were sitting in the vinegar.

Pickled Onions (*Cipolle sott’ aceto*)

Once again, no specific quantities.

Ingredients:

Pearl onions
Red wine vinegar
Red wine
Bay leaves
Black peppercorns
Garlic cloves
Thyme (fresh)
One stick cinnamon
Salt

Fill a 1-gallon jar $\frac{3}{4}$'s full with peeled pearl onions (we used white and red and shallots). Add 2 cups of wine, a couple of bay leaves, 2 T peppercorns, 2 T pickling salt, 1 sprig of thyme, the cinnamon, 4 cloves of garlic and cover with the red wine vinegar (we actually used cider vinegar). Let it sit for a month or so.

Bread Dough Fritters (*Coccoli*)

“Fried bread dough has always been popular in Florence and in Tuscany in general. By spreading the dough with a rolling pin to about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick and cutting it into ‘diamonds’, you can make the famous “crescentine”.

“Panzanelle, Panzerotti and Ficattole are all bread dough fritters with different shapes from different parts of Tuscany.”³

Depending on the size of your cutter this recipe will make 60-80 coccoli.

Ingredients:

6-8 cups of flour
4 cups of milk (105-110°)
1 oz. cake yeast (equivalent to 2 pkgs. dry yeast, use the rapid rise)

² Platina, Book 1, Chapter 16, p. 123

³ Petroni, Paolo: “The Complete Book of Florentine Cooking”, p. 31

4 T softened butter or lard
2 t salt
Oil for frying.

Dissolve the yeast in 2 cups of milk with 1 T honey or sugar. Place 4 cups of flour in a large bowl and make a well in the center and pour the milk and yeast mixture into the center and add the salt. Beat for 2 minutes until it's thoroughly blended (if you need to add more of the milk, go ahead). Slowly add the rest of the flour until you have a smooth dough that pulls away from the sides of the bowl. Knead briefly and place in a greased bowl and allow to rise (45 minutes). Punch down and roll out to ¼ inch thick and cut shapes. Heat your oil to 375° and fry for a couple of minutes. Don't over fry or they will get chewy.

You can roll your coccoli in coarse salt (they taste a lot like soft pretzels) or sugar, which is what we opted for.

Sugared Almonds (*Mandorle*)

This is Mistress Aramanthra's tried and true sugared almond recipe, which is fabulous!

Ingredients:

1 pound of almonds (not salted)
1 cup of sugar
½ cup water
1 t almond extract
1 t cinnamon

Combine the sugar and water and bring it to a boil, boil for 5 minutes. Add the almonds to the syrup, keeping it on high heat, and stirring frequently. After 10 minutes or so you will see the syrup begin to crystallize and suddenly the whole mixture will seize up. This will happen instantly! Remove from the heat and add the cinnamon and extract. Let sit covered for 10 minutes. Bring the pot back to the burner on low and heat it enough to separate the nuts. Spread it out on waxed paper over cooling racks and let it sit until cool.

Fried Cheese (*Cascius Fritus*)

“Fry pieces of rich cheese, neither obviously aged nor obviously fresh, in a pan suited to it, with either butter or fat. When they are becoming tender, turn them, and take them out immediately.”⁴

The original recipe in Platina describes a dish that is more than likely deep-fried; at least we needed that much oil in the pan to keep it from turning into a gooey mess. (See, it's not just for the Minnesota State Fair anymore, although I don't have any evidence to suggest that they used cheese curds.) Because we really didn't feel like doing deep fried cheese the day of the feast, we opted to change the recipe to a baked cheese.

Ingredients:

8 oz Feta, sliced ¼ inch thick
Milk (use 1 % or higher)
Italian seasoned breadcrumbs
Flour

Combine the flour and the bread crumbs together. Take the Feta and roll it in the milk and roll it in the flour and breadcrumb mixture and place it on a greased pan. Turn

your oven to 325° and place the pan in for 5 minutes. Turn once and continue baking for another 5 minutes. Serve immediately, it's best hot, but it isn't too bad cold. We served it with slices of fresh apples; firm nectarines (although out of period) are fabulous and I would recommend grapes too.

“Among the fruits of the earth discovered for man's use, grain is the most useful.”⁵

Focaccia

Most of us are not used to seeing loaves of white bread at feasts, but Platina suggests that flour in Italy was frequently sifted to remove “the bran and the inferior flour with a very fine flour sieve”.⁶ Focaccia is a wonderful bread, very rich in olive oil and easily changed by adding a variety of herbs and spices.

Ingredients:

2 c warm water
5 t dry yeast
4 pinches of sugar or drops of honey
2 ½ c bread flour

The Sponge

Dissolve yeast and sugar (or honey) in warm water. Stir in flour and beat for 100 strokes. Set aside to rise for 1 hour. (Focaccia can be made by just throwing all the ingredients in a bowl and kneading, however, I've found that it takes more effort to incorporate 5 c flour into the mix and the bread does not rise as well in the end.)

Add to the Sponge

6 T olive oil
2 t salt
2 ½ c bread flour

Sprinkle salt and olive oil over the sponge. Knead in the rest of the flour (5 c total) and knead for several minutes (5 or so), adding a minimal amount of flour to prevent sticking. When the dough "bounces back" when pressed, cover and let rise until doubled (30 min). After the dough has risen, split into whatever size ovals you want to eat. (I've divided this into 6's for sandwiches, 4's for company and 2's for pizza.) At this point you can knead in herbs such as rosemary, basil, or oregano. Roll out until dough is ¾ to 1 inch thick. Press in thinly sliced onion or salt or nothing. Brush with olive oil, cover and let rise 20-30 minutes. Bake at 400-450° on the top rack of the oven for 20-30 min. Brush with olive oil or butter when you take Focaccia out of the oven.

Note: Most of us are used to having butter on the table to spread upon our bread. Putting butter on ones bread in period was a practice of the peasants and the lower class and was relegated to regions of Germany and England. Italians and the French would have never put butter on their bread! With this in mind we provided the tables with plenty of olive oil and rich sauce to dip the focaccia into.

⁴ Platina, Book VIII, Chapter 60, p. 385

⁵ Platina, Book I, Chapter 14, p. 121

⁶ *ibid.*

Pork in Wine Sauce

Original recipe:

Cormary: Roast Loin of Pork with Red Wine

Take finely ground coriander and caraway, pepper powder, and ground garlic, in red wine; mix all this together and salt it. Take raw pork loins, skin them, and prick it well with a knife, and lay it in the sauce. Roast it when you wish, and save what falls from the meat as it roasts, and boil it in a pot with good broth, and then serve it with the roast.

My Redaction:

Take a 5 pound roast and make slits in the skin and insert 10 cloves of garlic.

Combine:

2 t ground coriander

½ t caraway seeds (*be careful with the caraway as it tends to overpower easily*)

½ t celery seed

½ t ground pepper

2 t salt

Rub this mixture on the surface of the roast. Place the roast in a Reynolds™ Roasting bag with 1 cup of red wine. Cook in 350° oven for 2-3 hours, or until roast reaches 185°. Remove roast from bag and dump juices into a saucepot. Slice up the roast and put back in the bag and keep it warm. Add enough stock to the wine and juices to make 2 cups and enough breadcrumbs to make the sauce thick (2 T). (You could also use cornstarch dissolved in some water to thicken the sauce, if you are not concerned about using modern ingredients.) Check the sauce and season to taste. Place the slices of pork on top of cooked grains (a pottage, rice, barley, risotto) and serve with the sauce on the side. In period the roast would have been presented to the table whole and then spirited to a side table where a carver would be waiting to slice the meat.

Italians are very fond of sauces accompanying their courses, and frequently serve several with one dish. Pasta connoisseurs know that the noodle is only a vehicle for the sauce that accompanies it and not the other way around. Although I would prefer to serve the meat with the sauce already on top, it's always a good idea to serve it on the side so people can help themselves to as much, or as little as they want; and besides it was done this way in period.

Armored Turnips (Rape Armate)

“Martino’s custom of making a special dish of an ordinary vegetable like turnips was typically Italian; elsewhere in Europe cooks regarded most root vegetables as food for the poor.”⁷

We used Martino’s recipe for Turnip Cakes taken directly out of Anne Willan’s “Great Cooks and Their Recipes”, p. 32. This dish works well with fairly inexpensive cheese and it freezes beautifully! We served the turnips as a side dish to accompany the pork instead of a dessert, which is what Ms. Willan suggests it was originally served as.

Ingredients: *serves 8*

2 lbs. large white turnips

½ cup sugar

2 t ground cinnamon

1 t pepper

½ t ground mace

½ t ground cloves

1 ¼ lb. Soft cheese

Mix the sugar with the spices and set aside. Peel the turnips and cut them into slices and place in a pot with salted water and bring to a boil. Boil for 15-30 minutes or until tender (cook like you would potatoes).

Drain the turnips and place a layer on the bottom of a greased 8-inch pan. Place slices of the cheese over the turnips and sprinkle the sugar mixture over that. Continue to layer in this manner until you run out of stuff, ending with a layer of cheese. Place the pan in a 375° F oven and bake for 30-35 minutes, until top is browned. You can unmold this dish, like a cake, and cut it into wedges when it is chilled. If you are serving it with meats it is best to serve it warm.

Fish with Parsley and Garlic

When people found out that we were serving fish at the feast, most were shocked! The legend in Nordskogen is that a fish remove marked disaster for a feast. Always up for a challenge I decided to ignore superstition and find a recipe that I felt would be well liked by the general populace. Even by those who usually shy away from fish.

I was surprised that a lot of people generally don’t associate fish as a standard meat served in Italy. This is probably due to the lack of fish on most “Italian” menus in the US. The Arno River, which flows through the center of Florence, was fished up into the 1950’s. With their fresh water supply and their proximity to the Mediterranean, the Florentine diet was filled with all types of fish; salt water, fresh, and shell. Platina’s Tenth book is entirely dedicated to the discussion of fish in which he references 67 different types of fish and ways in which they should be prepared. Present day Italy is the largest importer of dried cod from Norway (they’ve held the patent on the system that re-hydrates the cod for the past 500 years). I didn’t think that the majority of people would be that happy if I served eel in aspic or stuffed cuttle-fish, so I chose to serve a white fish fillet with lots of oil, garlic and parsley. Something even my sister would eat.

The original recipe calls for 1 ½ pounds of salt cod. If you use this very salty fish you must soak it in several changes of water for 24 hours before using it.

Ingredients:

1 ½ pounds boneless, skinless fish filets

2 T olive oil

3 T fresh cropped parsley

2 cloves finely chopped garlic

2 T butter (cut into small pieces)

1 cup of flour

1 t salt

Fresh ground pepper (couple of turns)

Combine the flour and the salt and pepper. Coat the fish filets with the flour mixture and lay it in a baking dish with the olive oil. Combine the garlic and chopped parsley together and spread it over the top of the fish and dot it with the butter. Bake at 375° for 15 minutes. Turn the fish and bake for another 15 –20 minutes more, or until tender.

Salad

You are saying to yourself, **salad?** Like I need a recipe for salad? According to Giacomo Castelvetro in his book “The Fruit, Herbs & Vegetables of Italy” the

⁷ Anne Willan’s “Great Cooks and Their Recipes”, p. 32.

majority of the world does. His quote is so marvelous that I must share it with you here.

“It takes more than good herbs to make a good salad, for success depends on how they are prepared. Never do as the Germans and other uncouth nations do- pile the badly washed leaves, neither shaken nor dried, up in a mound like a pyramid, then throw on a little salt, not much oil and far too much vinegar, without even stirring. And all this done to produce a decorative effect, where we Italians would much rather feast the palate than the eye.”

“So to make a good salad the proper way you should put the oil in first of all, stir it into the salad, then add vinegar and stir again. And if you do not enjoy this, complain to me.”

“The secret of a good salad is plenty of salt, generous oil and a little vinegar; hence the text of the **Sacred Law of Salads**:

*Insalata ben salata
Poco aceto e ben oliata*

*Salt the salad quite a lot,
Then generous oil put in the pot,
And vinegar, but just a jot.*

“And whosoever transgresses this benign commandment is condemned never to enjoy a decent salad in their life, a fate which I fear lies in store for most of the inhabitants of this kingdom.”⁸

I think Signor Castelvetro would nod in approval at our salad. We chose a spring mix because of the color and the texture of the leaves. We used good olive oil and cider vinegar and kosher salt in the dressing and simply followed the **Sacred Law**.

Almond Blancmange

The following recipe is unusual in that it contains no chicken or fish, but only almonds and rice. This recipe is a simplified (read modern) rendition of Tallevant's Striped Blancmange found in Anne Willan's "Great Cooks and Their Recipes" p. 20. Platina also talks about coloring blancmange with saffron, to make it appear striped. For ease and convenience I chose to eliminate coloring the layers of the blancmange. Traditionally the blancmange (white food) uses rice starch or gelatin to stiffen the mixture. Platina suggests using the shavings of a breastbone from a capon to gel the mixture. A modern approach is to use cornstarch, which works wonderfully; and a good recipe can be found in Betty Crocker.

An alternative to blanching the almonds, chopping them up and straining them to make almond milk is to use a small amount of almond extract (which can be documented) added to your liquid. For the rice starch we used Cream of Rice cereal. A wonderful solution!

Ingredients:

1 cup of Cream of Rice® cereal
4 cups of water

⁸ Page 65. Giacomo wrote his book while exiled in England from his native Italy. He dedicated his book to his patroness, Lucy, the Countess of Bedford.

¾ t salt

Mix together according to the directions on the package. Cook until the mixture is stiff. Add **1 t almond extract** and **¾ cup sugar** to the hot mixture. If the mixture is too fluid keep it on the heat until it firms up (you really can't over cook this). Take a mold and coat it with butter and spoon the rice mixture into it. (Pam and other sprays leave a funny taste, don't use them!) Let it set up in the fridge for a few hours. When ready to un-mold, run a knife around the edge and gently turn onto a plate.

Almond and Ricotta Cake

Dessert is always a tricky thing when planning a feast. Most of the confections that we associate with dessert are relatively modern inventions. This isn't to say that people in the Middle Ages didn't have sweets, but they varied greatly depending on the availability of sugar in various communities. Platina contains recipes for numerous pies, some containing meat and some fruit. Le Viandier De Taillevent has a wonderful recipe for an apple pie, which is quite rich and a bit on the tart side. There is also a mention of a number of custards and Blanc Mange (white food) in Platina's 8th book and a score of recipes for fritters in the first half of the 9th.

I believe I'm stretching this recipe a bit by serving it at this feast, since the earliest I could really justify its existence would be late 15th century. I chose to include it because it has a similar texture and ingredients to a lot of custard pies and puddings of the period. And besides, it is a very tasty desert!

Cake:

2/3 cup butter
2/3 cup sugar
5 eggs separated
Grated rind of one orange
2/3 cup ricotta cheese
6 T flour
1 cup of almonds roasted and sliced

Glaze:

4 T apricot jam
2 T brandy
Place the almonds in a pan and slowly roast them over medium heat. Slice the almonds and set aside. Cream the butter and ½ cup of sugar together and add the egg yolks. Combine thoroughly and add the grated orange rind, ricotta and flour. In a separate bowl whip the egg whites until they are stiff and add the remaining sugar. Gently fold in the almonds and the egg whites and place the mixture into a greased and lined 8-9" spring form pan. Bake at 375° F for 30 minutes, or until the middle is set. Let the cake cool in the pan and run a knife around the outside edge and remove it carefully to a platter
Place the jam into a saucepan and simmer over low heat with 1 T of water. Remove from the heat and press through a sieve and stir in the brandy. Pour the glaze onto the cooling cake. Garnish with candied fruit and nuts, or whatever you like.

Recommended Reading

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