



Beppina and the Kitchens of Arezzo: Life and Culinary Art in an Ancient Tuscan City

Elizabeth Romer

Prospect Books (Oct 13, 2020)

Softcover \$25.00 (288pp)

978-1-909248-66-3

A cache of handwritten recipes tucked in an antiquarian cookbook inspired this lively account of Arezzo's history and culture. From the Etruscans to the present day, Elizabeth Romer captures the Tuscan city's culinary traditions of frugality and living close to the land, molded by occupying forces from the French to the Florentines.

Romer first explores Aretine cuisine with the recipes of a letter-writing nineteenth-century home cook, known only as Beppina, found inside of her 1900 edition of Pellegrino Artusi's classic Italian cookbook. Beppina's recipes are interspersed with delightful quotes and chatty recipes from Artusi's book, which reveals the national identity of a newly unified Italy and new ideas about hygiene and food science. Engaging historical detective work teases out details about Beppina's life, reflecting the rise of a new bourgeois class with the income for meat and multi-course feasts to impress others.

Other chapters probe how robust, economical Aretine food developed over centuries of rule by outsiders, with Arezzo's markets serving as the vital link between the city and country. Tough times fostered foods based on seasonal harvests and foraging, and every butchered scrap, from muzzles to innards, was destined for the cooking pot. Romer relates how her longtime neighbors and friends remain thrifty and connected to the land, tending kitchen gardens and preserving food and wine from country plots and markets.

Larded with recipes and snippets of food writing by other contributors, this book is a sensual tour through Arezzo via the stomach and heart. Romer writes with expertise about her adopted hometown, with vibrant descriptions of dinner parties, local food shops and restaurants, and wanderings among historic neighborhoods.

Beppina is a dazzling culinary treatise, and Romer is a proud, knowledgeable guide through Arezzo's distinctive foodways, underscoring that "food is a major expression of culture."

RACHEL JAGARESKI (September / October 2020)

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