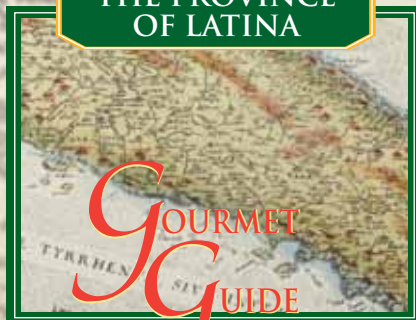


THE PROVINCE  
OF LATINA



OF LAND AND SEA

Food and Wine Project  
of the Province of Latina



# GOURMET GUIDE

*Tourism and*



*Gastronomy here,  
indeed, are two  
hallmarks of the  
Province of Latina.*

*Our Gourmet Guide will help you discover a world of typical restaurants and farm enterprises, of sublime dishes and fine*



*wines, produce of  
land and sea, reflecting the very best of  
our traditions and*



*the essential character of our  
people and their  
deep sense of hospitality.*

*You will experience all this along a route replete with natural and architectural beauty, offering compelling insights into our folklore and history*

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## INTRODUCTION

*to the cuisine of the Riviera of  
Ulysses and the Volsci Mountains*

*di Pier Giacomo Sottoriva*

From a gastronomic perspective, the greatest challenge facing the province of Latina has been how to reduce to a single cultural identity the complexity of its many regional components: the Roman and Lazian origins of its cooking evident in the north of the province, the Campania and Neapolitan influences in the south; and the cooking styles imported from numerous cultures which have formed and continue to form the ethnic universe of the province since the 1930s. Apart from a metropolis, it is hard to find a community as diverse and complex as that of Pontinia which, in spite of deep 'local' roots - (by 'local' one might only need to refer to the villages lining the Lepini, Ausoni and Aurunci mountains, and other many examples in the surrounding Ciociaria) - has still managed to bring together such a variety of regional influences. These come from the north of Italy: the Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli, the Abruzzo and the Marche; from the Lazian and sub-Roman hill settlements, the Campania, Sicily, and the northern and southern corners of Calabria; and also from overseas: the Philippines, China, Central and above all from North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia). To these influences may be added numerous and significant immigrant families, notably from Tunisia and Libya, bringing with them their own culinary traditions. It is hardly surprising, for example, to find well-prepared couscous in the pro-



vince. All this, in a social nucleus hardly exceeding half a million inhabitants, means many different cooking styles. Seemingly unthreatened by homogenisation, however, something typical has steadily emerged. And it is towards this that our Gourmet Guide aims to point the traveller in search of good food. We hope that a comprehensive introduction to that intriguing world of wonderful dishes, set before us on a lavishly prepared table, may have purpose. Our gourmet route will, of course, observe carefully the two great mountain and coastal boundaries of the province of Latina, while bringing you a pleasing and varied combination of ingredients and products, some basic, all transformed into simple but exquisite dishes.

### **The hills**

That we should have inherited the ancient flavours of traditional dishes, with age-old origins, owes more to the skills of successive generations than to any process of formulation. Each village adds its own original cooking touches. However minor these touches, they are enough to result in dishes both typical and different, even though they are essentially the same. Pasta, good homemade pasta, still manages to take pride of place in certain small restaurants. It is, admittedly, harder to find. Could this be because there are fewer of those robust house mammas who once would stand for hours vigorously kneading the water, flour and egg dough used to make thin layers of pastry, cut then to an imaginative variety of shapes appropriate to the seasoning? Or is it because pasta consumption, fortunately, is on the increase due to a greater demand for restaurants or a preference for machine-made pasta, however fresh and consistent this may be with the old recipes, shapes and cuts? Whatever the answer, pasta is queen of the dishes.





The ingredients remain the same, whether for the *tagliolini* of Cori, the *ramiccia* from Norma, *fettucine* or *tagliatelle*: water, flour, eggs and oil and, as usual, a long and thorough mixing process - at times vigorous, at times delicate. Lâcchene pasta, which can take on different names (*laine*, *lacne*, *lâcane*) depending on the village where it is made, varies from the norm in that to prepare it requires only eggs, water and flour. Pasta dishes with meat sauces, made with bits of pork, sausage, mushrooms, plain tomatoes, carefully seasoned with natural flavourings; *minestre* and bean soups, vegetables, lentils or chick-peas - wherever you go, you'll find something excellent to taste. A minor curiosity is the 'soup of the married' (or as the citizens of Sezze would say 'soup of the cuckolds'). It takes no time at all to prepare and consists of chopped *zucchini*, together with their soft part known as *tanni*, a couple of eggs served up in the Pavese style and wholemeal bread. The advantage of the soup was that it could be hot and made ready for the husband in an instant, even if he were the type to observe maliciously that the time saved in the preparation might well have been used for another purpose. The goat sauce used with *tortiglioni* is still served in Bassiano; and the use of goat meat, (with mutton it used to be regarded as food for poor or shepherd families) is still a widening tradition in towns such as Sonnino, Prossedi, Roccagorga and Roccasecca dei Volsci. Less surprising is the use of mushrooms and sausages not only to accompany first courses but also as main or side dishes, particularly tasty when grilled. Among the most interesting and delicious main courses are the highly tasty *ciam-*



*maruche* (snails) left soaking in water for weeks before being cooked in a spicy sauce. In Campodimele, snails are given special treatment. They are prepared in a green sauce, as tasty as it is eclectic, to celebrate the anniversary of S. Onofrio on the 12th of June. Up in the hills, with due respect to those who don't see eye to eye with the followers of Saint Ubaldo, one cannot ignore the culinary trademark of the 'Cori ovens' - thrush and quail, not to mention rabbit. No less are there guns and ovens in Monte S. Biagio, Itri, Lenola, Fondi, Ponza and Ventotene, where a number of modest eating houses preserve the unmatched secrets of a cuisine as simple as it is delicious. Nor can one ignore Cori's cooked ham marinated in wine and flavoured with sage and rosemary; or the ham of Bassiano, sweet, resonant and aromatic tasting, just as famous as those soft, plump *cimaroli* artichokes and young broccoli, the vaunted vegetables of Priverno. These compete with Sezze, whose artichokes are smaller and full of taste and whose young broccoli are no less enjoyable for their bitterness. The *Indicazione Geografica Protetta* (I.G.P.), borne by the Sezze artichokes, denotes authenticity and quality associated with the environment and area of production. This particular area, besides Sezze and Priverno, takes in Sermoneta and the Pontine region. Monte S. Biagio shares with Fondi, Itri, Maranola di Formia and Maenza a reputation for delicious sausages that can be found smoked, flavoured with oleaner, served sweet or with spicy peppers, not in the least filling. With some nostalgia for the good and simple foods that may die out, it is proper to recall two rustic hill dishes: the '*mpanata*' (bread softened in a bowl of hot milk and then covered with bits of cream cheese); and brick-baked maize pizza (*agli mattono*), for some reason also referred to as *fanciulla* (little girl), cooked on smouldering square bricks and

eaten with young broccoli in a piquant sauce. To round off this incomplete excursion into the hills, reference should be made (more for the sake of nostalgia) to the *panonta*, a grainy bread, greased in the fats derived from cooking a ham; or the maize pizza, or pasta made from flour with pork *sfizzoli*. Country cakes and confectionery, on the other hand, are very much in evidence. The most labour-intensive are the *ciamelle d'acqua*, the simplest and the *ciamelle di vino*. These ring-shaped biscuits are made from a soft pastry that includes olive oil, sugar and wine, and they are baked in the requisite shape the moment the dough is ready. There are, also, the large and steamy *scottolate* puddings and the *frascatiei* (though on the decline) made with water, oil, flour or *polenta*, with or without Muscat grapes. *Pezzetti* or *tozzetti* (hard biscuits of almonds and honey) are still made. Though with more difficulty, you will also find the elaborate and highly calorific *panciale* cake, filled with all manner of good things ill-suited to diets: chocolate, sweet dried figs, almonds, nuts, pine nuts, and anything else one fancies, mixed into an egg and oil dough to bind it all together, then baked until firm. There was a time when you could round off a meal with a drop of cherry-brandy, distilled in Maenza. With a bit of luck, you might find a family that still keeps this old tradition alive.



## Along the Coast and on the Pontine islands

Like the hills, the sea is full of delicious produce that enriches menus and flavours dishes - fish, seafood, shellfish and molluscs that can be boiled, grilled, stewed, baked in foil or roasted. The recipes are traditional: essentially *pescatora* (fish) sauce made from various ingredients that make for a delicious dish, in as many varieties as there are cooks who prepare it. Then there are the famous and pungent seafood entrées in their many forms. One food that doesn't vary is genuine fish soup. This, also, includes a variety of fish and seafood, in particular the ugly but extremely tasty sea scorpion. Another



is the simple mixed *antipasto* fry, with squid and prawns. It is increasingly hard to find if you want it served fresh, but it can also be made with lesser fish that can be just as good to eat. *L'acqua pazza* (literally 'mad water') is a

curious name for a soup made with the humblest of fish, which fishermen would make on their boats using fish scraps, a drop of oil, garlic and water. The poorest men of all would take a stone from the seabed and put it into the soup to add flavour. Returning to more classical cuisine, remember that a fish best conserves its flavour if grilled alive, like the ugly but tasty Gulf mullet and the tender sea bass, both just as good after a short boiling. Baked fish can be lightly seasoned using rosemary, juniper and fennel from the crags of Monte Circeo. A point of interest on the subject of Circeo: the Homeric legends recount that Ulysses was imprisoned by the





sorceress Circe who made him fall in love with her by administering a potion of her making. Some studious botanist has identified the principle component of the potion as the herb *moly*, growing in a field of wild garlic up on the mountain. Sea dishes become distinctly Neapolitan the moment one tastes octopus steamed in its own water or, even better, when one can find the original baby octopus. They take on, instead, an entirely original taste when cooked with the famous giant prawns (*mazzancoli*) that used to abound on the seabed in the Bay of Gaeta and above all near the mouth of the Garigliano river, but that are



often forced to lend their prestigious name to the

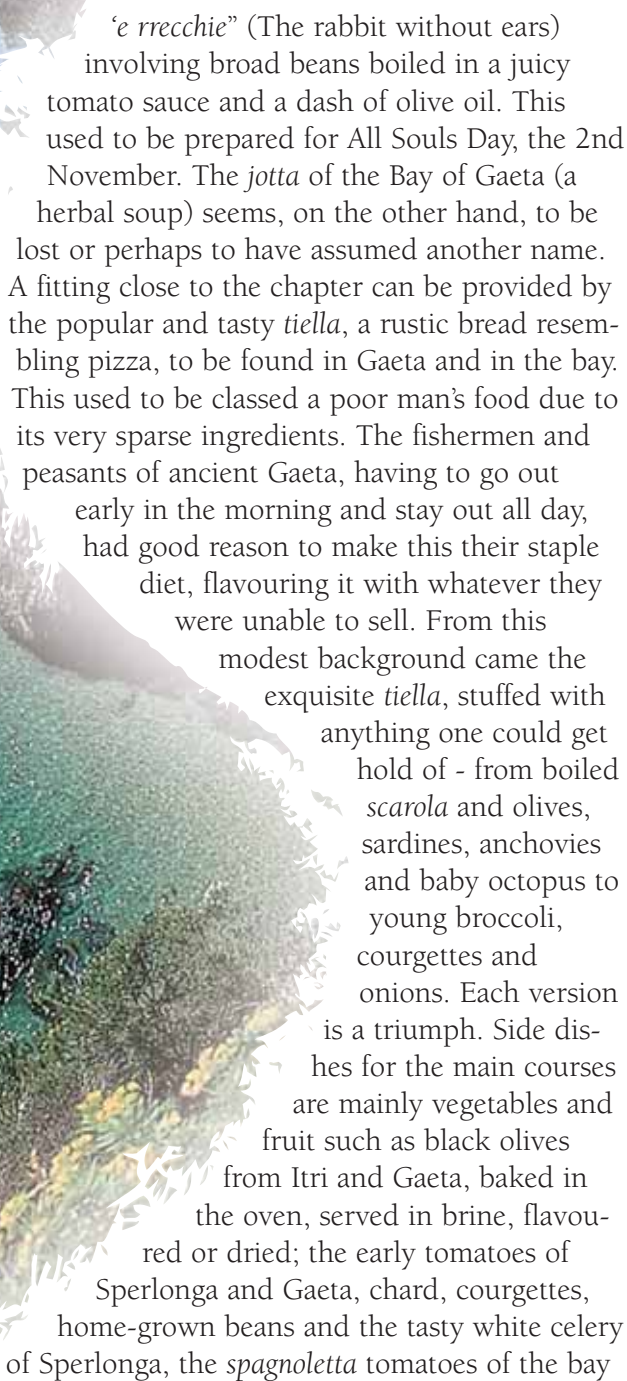
common prawn or to their relatives grown and caught in other seas. In one of his epigrams, Martial wrote: *Coeruleus nos Liris amat, quem silva Maricae – protegit: hinc squillae maxima turba sumus*. The sea in this area is a healthy and fertile source of good dishes. The best produce is found in the unofficial markets of Terracina, Formia, Gaeta, San Felice Circeo and Sperlonga, just when the early boats come in. Long ago it was trawler boats fishing by lamplight. Today, however, this is the stuff of memories, like casting nets off the beaches. A rapid account of some of the finer species: the *palaja* (the name almost forgotten); the small but tasty sole that Mamurra would bring from Formia to Rome, preserved in algae and seawater, to keep his patrons sweet; or the elegant dory, a rapacious devourer of flavoured algae that give it its distinctive taste. In

fact, the fishermen attribute to the dory the habit of resting on a comfortable bed of algae whilst also observing a schedule of five meals a day with British punctiliousness. Today, the dory is farmed in purpose-built seawater tanks. The seafood hierarchy, however, is a relative and even outdated qualification, from the time when kitchens re-classified certain species that were once thrown back into the sea or sold at an extremely low price. These, for example, would include *sciabola*, *palamiti* and *sea-urchins*; at times also the small *cicinelli*, destined to become fragrant *pizzelle*, made with flour, water and salt and fried in a batter till crisp, similar to that used for marrow flowers and now hard to find. Still in the field of marine delicacies, the unforgettable, banned or extinct species deserve a mention - the *datteri del mare*, *casciolelle*, *sconcigli*, *ventagli*, *cinci* or *ricci*, (tasty though lacking in flesh), mussels cultivated in the bay of Gaeta and the tiny clams dug out of the sand. Among the 'poorer' relatives, the *rotondo* fish deserves a mention, very popular on Ponza, fried or boiled with parsley, olive oil and lemon, with or without tomatoes. A place of honour is kept on Ponzan tables for the *rancio fello-ne*, a large crab cooked in its shell straight over a fire, the insides seasoned with aromatic herbs and garlic to make an exquisite pasta sauce. Sometimes, even the firm and fleshy eels enrich the island's menus. These can be fried in large slices, avoiding flour to keep the skin crisp, then seasoned with laurel or else steamed like the regal grouper that used to thrive in the underwater caves of these beautiful islands. Remember, too, the swordfish, taken by boat off Ponza, a real local delicacy even if the recipes are largely borrowed from Sicily. In Ponza it tends to be cut thin, smoked and immersed in




lemon juice for curing. Squid and cuttle-fish also play an important role at table, cooked over embers (eaten immediately whilst flaming hot) or stuffed. Conserved fish are also delicious, for example sardines marinated in vinegar with a touch of garlic, lemon, parsley and a hint of chilli; or tuna in oil, a recipe, with minor variations, known to all the seafarers in the Pontine region (especially in Terracina and Gaeta). It is not true, however, that coastal cooks are only capable of tackling fish. On the contrary, there have always been excellent vegetable first courses on Ponza and Ventotene. Take *cicerchie* soup, for example, popular also in the mountains even though it is among those dishes ostracized in more refined cooking circles. Happily, now, it is on its way back to the tables. On Ventotene, the lentils and broad beans are widely known. The former are cooked in a terracotta pot on a rasher of lean tripe already browned with quarters of onion and mixed herbs, with three or four tomatoes. They make a flavour-some dish, coming straight from the volcanic rock on which they grow; and they were a godsend in times of war, when the small island had to rely on internal resources to put food on the table. Lentils are a real Ponzan dish. The *favetta* di Ventotene is made from broad beans. These are boiled into a purée and seasoned with salted anchovies, garlic and olive oil. It seems that the beautiful Giulia used them in her exile to keep her skin velvet-soft. Still on the subject of broad beans, one recalls a very simple dish with a peculiar name, “*u cuniglie senza*



An aerial photograph of a coastline, likely in Gaeta, Italy. A prominent white path or road runs along the edge of a lush green hillside that descends towards a blue body of water. The path is bordered by a dense line of trees and shrubs. The water is a deep blue, and the sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall scene is bright and scenic, with a clear view of the land's topography and the proximity to the sea.

‘*e rrecchie*’ (The rabbit without ears) involving broad beans boiled in a juicy tomato sauce and a dash of olive oil. This used to be prepared for All Souls Day, the 2nd November. The *jotta* of the Bay of Gaeta (a herbal soup) seems, on the other hand, to be lost or perhaps to have assumed another name. A fitting close to the chapter can be provided by the popular and tasty *tiella*, a rustic bread resembling pizza, to be found in Gaeta and in the bay. This used to be classed a poor man’s food due to its very sparse ingredients. The fishermen and peasants of ancient Gaeta, having to go out early in the morning and stay out all day, had good reason to make this their staple diet, flavouring it with whatever they were unable to sell. From this modest background came the exquisite *tiella*, stuffed with anything one could get hold of - from boiled *scarola* and olives, sardines, anchovies and baby octopus to young broccoli, courgettes and onions. Each version is a triumph. Side dishes for the main courses are mainly vegetables and fruit such as black olives from Itri and Gaeta, baked in the oven, served in brine, flavoured or dried; the early tomatoes of Sperlonga and Gaeta, chard, courgettes, home-grown beans and the tasty white celery of Sperlonga, the *spagnoletta* tomatoes of the bay



of Gaeta, *puntarelle* (or curly Catalonian chicory) from Gaeta, *signorinella* lettuce from Formia; carrots, cabbages and turnips from Terracina, Sabaudia and S. Felice Circeo; the citrus fruit of Fondi-Monte S. Biagio and of the Garigliano, and the large mushrooms that draw up the essence of the forest beds of the Circeo and surrounding hills. These foods are tasty and diverse. They grow abundantly in the province whose soil, differing in quality from place to place, is always rich enough to nourish its produce.

### **Dairy Products**

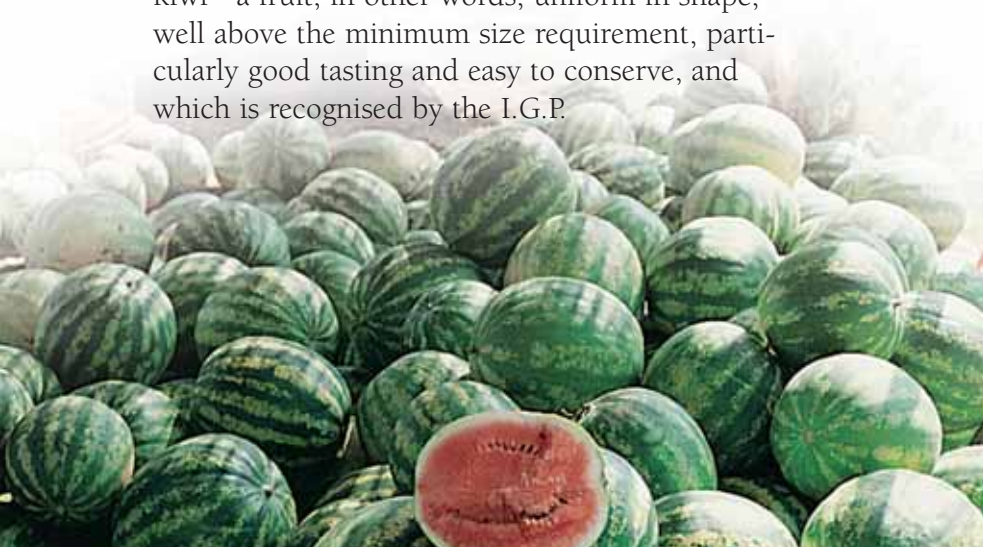
Dairy products are a strong symbol of new Pontine cuisine. From either buffalo or cow's milk (there was a time when these long-suffering animals were used only for labour such as ploughing river beds to remove the growth that would reduce the flow of water) came the *mozzarelle* cheeses of all sizes: the prized *fior di latte* of the Pontine plain, the *treccia*, butter, *caciocavallo* (savory oblong-shaped cheese), *silano*, fresh or smoked scamorze, the *primo sale* and soft cheeses - all are authentic dishes. The famous buffalo *mozzarella* and the *fior di latte* are the pride of the industry. The first, produced under the D.O.P. classification (Denominazione d'Origine Protetta), using the trade-mark '*mozzarella di bufala campana*', is made exclusively from buffalo milk mostly from Priverno, Prossedi, Maenza as well as Pontinia, Sezze, Sabaudia and Fondi. It is of very ancient origin and slightly sour. The *fior di latte*, younger and sweeter, is instead made of cow's milk. Already classified as a 'traditional product' it has recently received the D.O.P. certification for its unique links to the region, the Pontine plain and

to Fondi, each of which provides specific pasturing conditions for cattle. Alongside these widely-established products, a rich heritage of ancient methods is still in use for making sheep and goat's cheeses such as the *caso marzolino* and *caso peruto* from the south of the province, once sold by women moving between towns on foot. These can be found fresh, matured and in oil; and they have a considerable bite. Another aspect of buffalo farming, secondary to the production of cheese and its derivatives, is meat. This undoubtedly benefits from local conditions and farming practices and is open to wider development thanks to a consistent suppliers' market of medium to large companies and the possibility of butchering and processing

on site. The meat itself has a very strong flavour and must be cooked well, but it represents a real culinary discovery served as steak, roasted, stewed and in pâté that some intelligent, imaginative and discerning chefs have already started to put on offer. Who would have thought that on the Pontine plain of all places, bresaola could be made with buffalo meat?

## Fruit

Fruit itself isn't a specific product, even though delicious in all its forms, from the delicate cherries of Maenza which flash like meteorites across the sales counters and onto the tables, the chestnuts of Norma and Spigno Saturnia and the early strawberries cultivated on the hill slopes; to the small and sweet-tasting prunes and plums, the wild peaches and melons. Watermelon production is ample, as is that of citrus fruits and their exquisite marmalades swamping even the nearby markets of Rome and Naples besides those in the north of Italy. The province of Latina, however, is above all the region of kiwi fruit, or actinidia. In the Pontine area (Cisterna di Latina and Aprilia first, then Pontinia, Priverno, Sezze, Sermoneta, Cori and parts of the municipalities of Latina and Sabaudia), over 100,000 tonnes of kiwi are produced annually, equivalent to 35% of the entire national production. This is thanks to an excellent climate, to soil conditions well suited to this kind of cultivation and to the use of highly modern farming techniques. Many, indeed, are the growers who produce 35 to 40 tonnes per hectare of saleable kiwi - a fruit, in other words, uniform in shape, well above the minimum size requirement, particularly good tasting and easy to conserve, and which is recognised by the I.G.P.



## Pontine wines

How can one possibly forget the domestic grape, for eating or drinking at the table, available today in few but highly classified hectares of *Moscato di Terracina* and of *Cesanese*, or the ancient wines recalled in the classics? Martial, in particular, tells us in his epigrams how he repeatedly enjoyed their delights, as the following quotations remind us: “*Sezze, little town suspended above the Pontine marshes sends forth its barrels of old wine*” or: “*One exceptional autumn below Opimio /the consul gave us this Fondi wine, which he himself made and would drink*” and again: “*Near Fondi, at Amicle, the vigorous Coecubum matures, its vine grows green among the marshes*”. To this day, the grapes of Sezze are picked from the delicate vines and even some reds come from those of them once known as *Coecubi montes* - in Fondi, Itri, Sperlonga, Gaeta, Formia, Minturno, Sezze and Mondragone - all of them producers of the *Coecubum* grape. A wine of times past was *Falerno*, a dry white pressed between Formia and Il Màsico (12°-13°50) and that turned to a red in the Sessano, in the adjoining region of the Campania. Commercially speaking, it is worth remembering the wine of Ponza, referred to as the 4 Fs, extracted from the tiny vineyards lying side by side on little strips of land excavated from the sides of volcanic craters. This wine, from Punta del Fieno, Frontone, Faraglioni and Forna, is said to be the oldest in these islands. Today, one or two landowners grow very small quantities for personal consumption but we are not saying that luck won't smile on the emboldened seeker. The development of new vineyards producing Merlot, Sangiovese, Trebbiano as well as Cabernet Sauvignon, Montepulciano, Chardonnay, Nerobuono, Malvasia di Candia, Petit Verdot, Bellone (vineyards made exceptional by the climate and soil and modern methods of wine-making used by the local farms), continues to ensure the quality of Pontine wines even today. Some of these, in fact, are holders of the I.G.T., while others bear the D.O.C. certification. The Aprilia D.O.C, specific to Trebbiano (white), Merlot (red) and Sangiovese (rosé), is reserved for wines from vineyards containing at least 95% of local planting stock, encompassing the municipality of Aprilia and part of the municipalities of Latina and Cisterna di Latina. Cori, and part of the municipality of Cisterna, are instead within the production zones.

of the D.O.C. for Cori white and Cori red: the first extracted from grapes of the Malvasia di Candia vines (up to 70%) and Trebbiano Toscano (up to 40%), in competition, alone or jointly, with grapes from vines that have up to a maximum of 30% of Bellone and/or white Trebbiano present in the vineyards. The second, however, signifies wines derived from Montepulciano vineyards (40-60%), Nerobuono di Cori (20-40%) and Cesanese (10-30%). Lastly, the Circeo D.O.C. (part of the territory of the municipalities of Latina, S.Felice Circeo and Sabaudia) reserved for the white wine made from grapes of the vineyards of Malvasia di Candia (up to 30%), Trebbiano Toscano (at least 60%) and other authorized and/or recommended vineyards (up to 30%); for the red (including the new) and the rosé from the vineyards of Merlot, for the Trebbiano and Sangiovese - all with a minimum representation of 85% and the inclusion of other authorized or recommended vineyards up to a maximum of 15%. The province of Latina is also endowed with the D.O.C. Velletri not only for growing (part of the municipality of Cisterna di Latina), but also for the wine-making (part of the municipalities of Aprilia and Cisterna di Latina); and Castelli Romani (Cori and part of the municipalities of Aprilia and Cisterna di Latina)

## **Beekeeping**

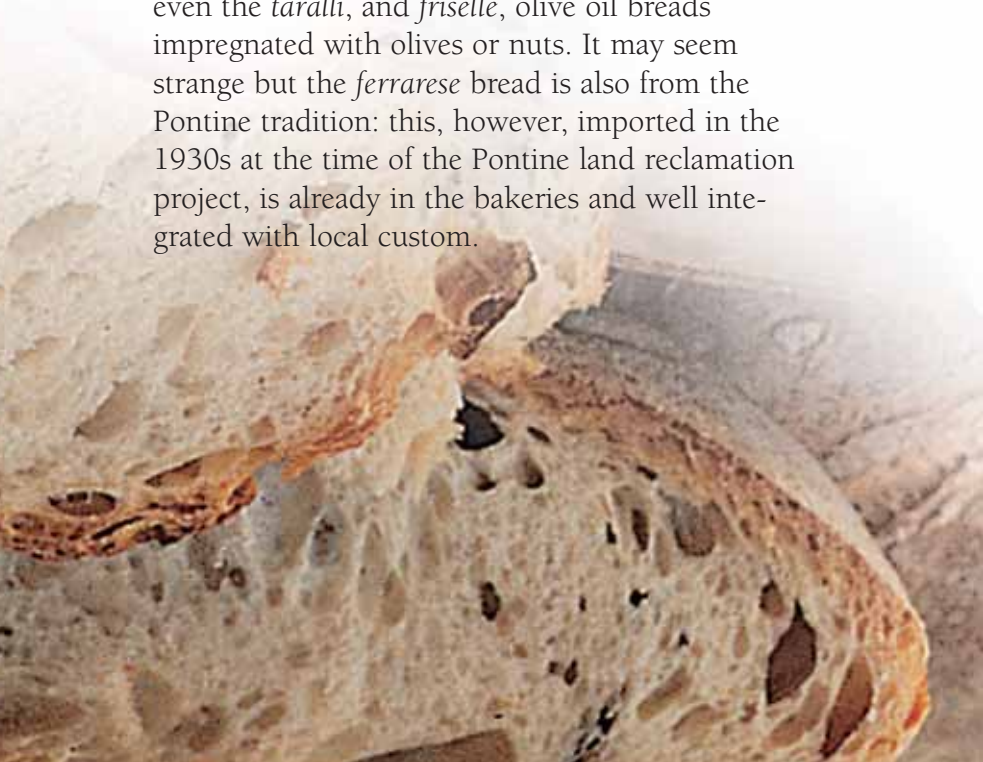
It is proper to make a small digression from cooking to beekeeping, which has gained an important national reputation. Particular merit goes to eucalyptus honey produced in the Agro Pontino, thanks to the many and old-established plantations that exist today; and to the high yield, higher than from any other shrub. The fruit honeys are also sound and of good quality (chestnuts, hives, yarrow, in honeycombs or scented with rosemary) as are derivatives such as bee pollen, royal jelly and wax.

This rapid excursion from pot to pan clearly cannot hope to have covered the great diversity of Pontine cooking, not even in its most elementary forms. These days even the oldest recipes are undergoing change, to keep up with taste or fashion.

## OTHER SPECIALITIES

### Bread

Traditional breads from the province of Latina come mainly from the north in the form of the *pagnotta* loaf; the Sezze version, claiming superiority, to be compared to the wholemeal loaf of Bassiano, and the loaves of Cisterna, Cori, Norma and Prossedi. In fact, each town has its own formula, its own technique. At times, industrialisation invades even this field; and yet bakeries that make bread according to the old methods can still be found. The *pagnotta* of Sezze is not really a standard round loaf so much as a thin bar of pure wholemeal bread; like the Priverno loaf, a cross of kinds between bread and *pizza*, as much a delicacy as young *broccoli*. To the south of the province people prefer the slimmer loaves or the larger *palatone* that betrays its country provenance, or even the *taralli*, and *friselle*, olive oil breads impregnated with olives or nuts. It may seem strange but the *ferrarese* bread is also from the Pontine tradition: this, however, imported in the 1930s at the time of the Pontine land reclamation project, is already in the bakeries and well integrated with local custom.





## Oil and olives

The province has substantial olive plantations in the foothills of the Lepini, Ausoni and Arrunci Mountains (Cori, Rocca Massima, Bassiano, Norma, Prossedi, Sonnino, Priverno, Fondi, Spigno Saturnia). The local authorities have for some decades been reclaiming these areas, once abandoned and at risk from unpredictable outbreaks of fire. Production of olives, used as food or oil, is becoming more quality-sensitive, as are the derivative oils used also in a high-grade range of vegetable conserves. The olive presses, once set up near the old plantation houses, are again part of the sociological landscape. Particular mention should be made of the Gaeta olives (half of which are from Itri), a forthcoming D.O.P.-rated product, harvested late in the season and kept for at least five months in natural brine. Much can be said of the extra-virgin olive oil taken from these healthy olives, grown in conditions typical of the region. The use of wide-ranging modern and traditional techniques directly in the production area and the avoidance of chemical or biological additives are what give the oil its special flavour. It is particularly light, with a fruity flavour and a mild sensation of bitterness or spiciness. It goes extremely well with meat or fish in a variety of recipes, for which a D.O.P. adjudication is in progress.



## Cakes and confectionery

The tradition of homemade cakes, and their many varieties derived from differing ingredients, measures and cooking times, is still very much alive particularly in the hill towns; on the plain and along the coast these home-baked products are still appreciated at the end of a meal or as a snack. From *serpette* to *torti*, *amaretti* to *tozzetti*, *pizza cresciuta* to the various types of *ciamelle* (plain or with wine or water); from egg biscuits to *caciata*, *struffugli* to *zippole*, and from *spaccarelli* to jam tart. Not to be overlooked are *picelatielli*, *pastiera*, *cecamariti*, *sciuscelle*, *casatiello*, *pigna*, *tortoli*, *crostoli*, fruit tarts, *frappe* and *castagnole*, *mostaccioli* and *cicerchiata*.



# *P*ONTINE GASTRONOMY

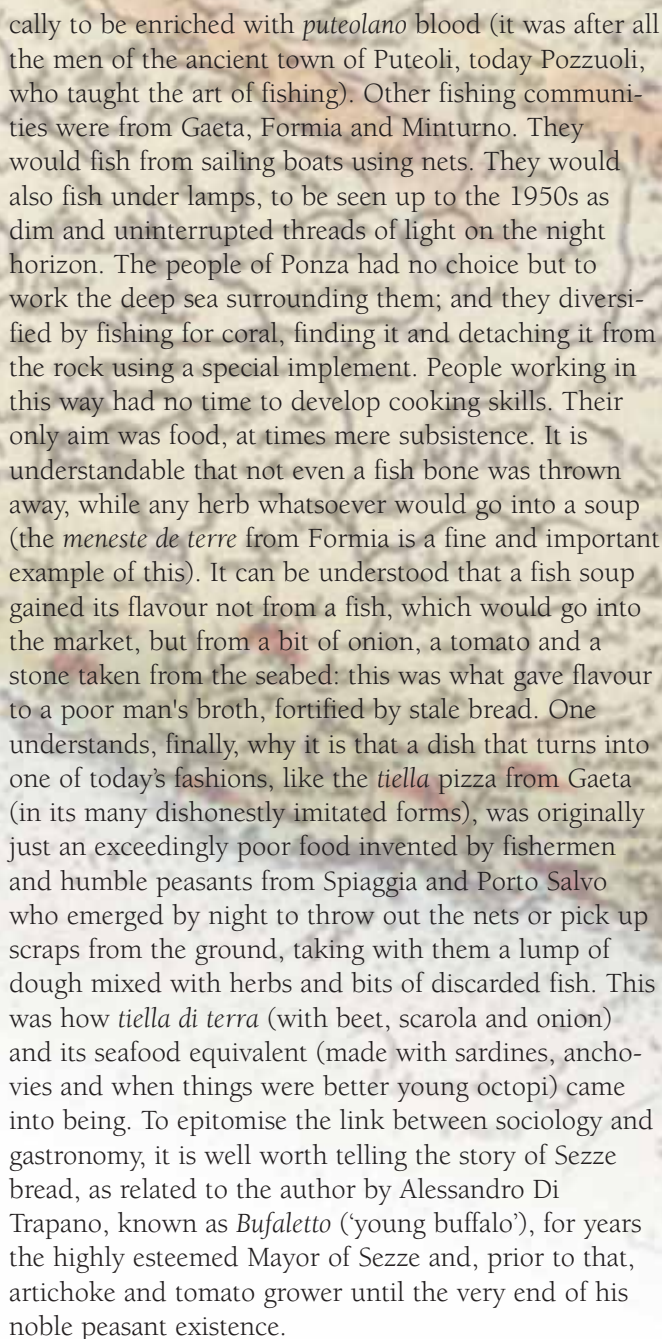
## *A brief analysis of a social and culinary phenomenon*

*Pier Giacomo Sottoriva*

The province of Latina is divided almost equally between mountain and coastal plain. The Volsci mountains, as once they were known (today people prefer to call them, rather like a peal of bells, Lepini, Ausoni, Aurunci), are home to the wandering shepherds and peasants who came down to the plains to cultivate patches of land snatched from the marshes up to the time of the land reclamation, and the many land developments since the marshes disappeared. As we have seen, these lands yield tasty produce, good and well-flavoured meat (the Lenola goat, for example, that once ate and still eats aromatic herbs) and good basic recipes. They were home to peasant, shepherd, grape-picker and olive-crusher. People who produced for their own consumption, but who then



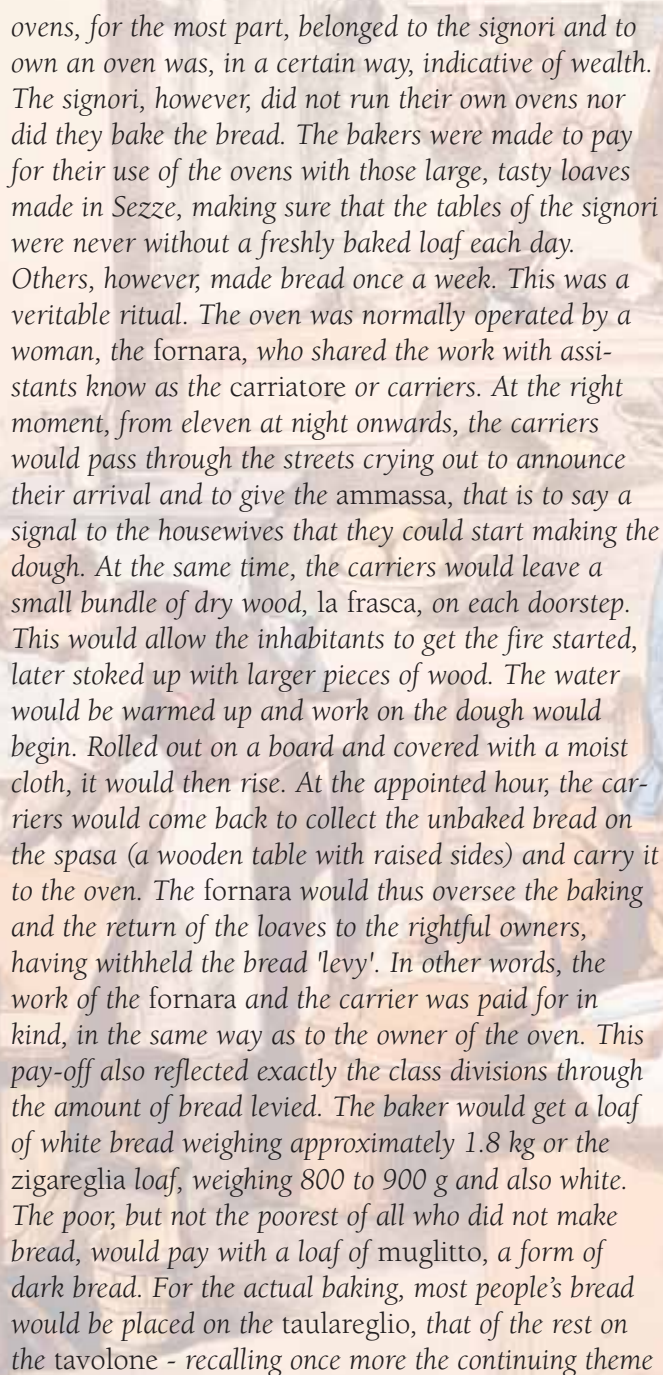
had to learn to trade in order to make more money. The situation of those living in the plains was not much different. Their food came from hunting in the forest, a forest that once covered 20-30,000 hectares, stretching from Terracina to Cisterna, from sea to hinterland; it came from fishing using the old and always efficient fish-pond systems, or the lakes that first the Romans, then the monks of Grottaferrata and, lastly, the Caetani family would use as vast and abundant sources of a wide variety of fish. Less efficient was sea fishing in the north of the province, because the complex relationship between Latina and Circeo made it impossible to develop communities of fishermen; and the uneasy social status of Terracina, that up to a point had demographi-



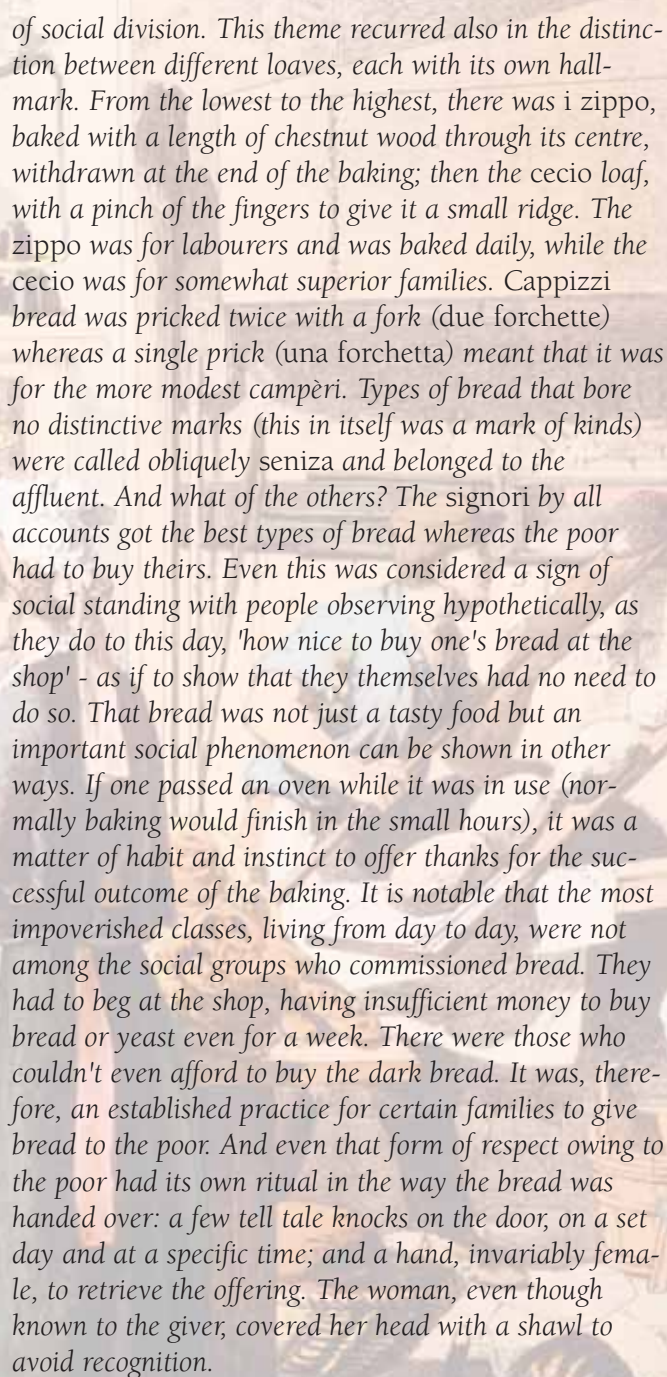
cally to be enriched with *puteolano* blood (it was after all the men of the ancient town of Puteoli, today Pozzuoli, who taught the art of fishing). Other fishing communities were from Gaeta, Formia and Minturno. They would fish from sailing boats using nets. They would also fish under lamps, to be seen up to the 1950s as dim and uninterrupted threads of light on the night horizon. The people of Ponza had no choice but to work the deep sea surrounding them; and they diversified by fishing for coral, finding it and detaching it from the rock using a special implement. People working in this way had no time to develop cooking skills. Their only aim was food, at times mere subsistence. It is understandable that not even a fish bone was thrown away, while any herb whatsoever would go into a soup (the *meneste de terre* from Formia is a fine and important example of this). It can be understood that a fish soup gained its flavour not from a fish, which would go into the market, but from a bit of onion, a tomato and a stone taken from the seabed: this was what gave flavour to a poor man's broth, fortified by stale bread. One understands, finally, why it is that a dish that turns into one of today's fashions, like the *tiella* pizza from Gaeta (in its many dishonestly imitated forms), was originally just an exceedingly poor food invented by fishermen and humble peasants from Spiaggia and Porto Salvo who emerged by night to throw out the nets or pick up scraps from the ground, taking with them a lump of dough mixed with herbs and bits of discarded fish. This was how *tiella di terra* (with beet, scarola and onion) and its seafood equivalent (made with sardines, anchovies and when things were better young octopi) came into being. To epitomise the link between sociology and gastronomy, it is well worth telling the story of Sezze bread, as related to the author by Alessandro Di Trapano, known as *Bufaletto* ('young buffalo'), for years the highly esteemed Mayor of Sezze and, prior to that, artichoke and tomato grower until the very end of his noble peasant existence.

## **Sezze bread and the social castes**

It is interesting to note how the social division between peasant and feudal culture came about and how it continues to be reflected daily in a number of distinct ways. At Sezze, social classification followed a certain pattern: Signori or Lords (the very word reveals the meaning) belonged to the highest caste, by social extraction and wealth; Campèri, were the smallholders (normally four to five hectares of land); Cappizzi the peasant, the labourers; and Sfuzzuni, the poorest class, among them the small artisans (shoemakers, tailors and so forth). The term sfuzzuni has another meaning, being given to people suffering from stomach troubles. It is unsure whether the metaphor derives from this condition or whether it has come to refer to those in this social class who, through no fault of their own, cannot take care of themselves. Social class, other than as matter of economic circumstance, was also revealed in the manner of dress. The signori wore high leather boots, trousers, jackets made of Alatri cloth and cloaks. The campèri indeed wore cloaks and cloth jackets, even though of lesser quality, whereas instead of boots they wore tight sandals made of strips of leather. The cappizzi didn't even have cloaks, but blankets of untreated cloth, short trousers down to the knees and long undergarments tucked into sandals fastened, unlike those of the campèri, with cord or string. Among the sfuzzuni there were no divisions. Any type of clothing would do, as it served to cover rather than to adorn. The cappizzi, even though occupying the third social position, knew how to gain respect. On feast days, the more boastful and exhibitionist among them would sport a pink carnation inserted in the tips of their sandals. It was not unusual for their festivals to end in revelry, even in wild and sometimes bloody fights. Class division, furthermore, had its echo in the way bread was prepared. Considering the importance of that food in an agricultural economy, one can also find reasons for the etiquette involved in baking. The



ovens, for the most part, belonged to the signori and to own an oven was, in a certain way, indicative of wealth. The signori, however, did not run their own ovens nor did they bake the bread. The bakers were made to pay for their use of the ovens with those large, tasty loaves made in Sezze, making sure that the tables of the signori were never without a freshly baked loaf each day. Others, however, made bread once a week. This was a veritable ritual. The oven was normally operated by a woman, the fornara, who shared the work with assistants known as the *carriatore* or carriers. At the right moment, from eleven at night onwards, the carriers would pass through the streets crying out to announce their arrival and to give the *ammassa*, that is to say a signal to the housewives that they could start making the dough. At the same time, the carriers would leave a small bundle of dry wood, *la frasca*, on each doorstep. This would allow the inhabitants to get the fire started, later stoked up with larger pieces of wood. The water would be warmed up and work on the dough would begin. Rolled out on a board and covered with a moist cloth, it would then rise. At the appointed hour, the carriers would come back to collect the unbaked bread on the *spasa* (a wooden table with raised sides) and carry it to the oven. The fornara would thus oversee the baking and the return of the loaves to the rightful owners, having withheld the bread 'levy'. In other words, the work of the fornara and the carrier was paid for in kind, in the same way as to the owner of the oven. This pay-off also reflected exactly the class divisions through the amount of bread levied. The baker would get a loaf of white bread weighing approximately 1.8 kg or the *zigareglia* loaf, weighing 800 to 900 g and also white. The poor, but not the poorest of all who did not make bread, would pay with a loaf of *muglitto*, a form of dark bread. For the actual baking, most people's bread would be placed on the *taulareglio*, that of the rest on the *tavolone* - recalling once more the continuing theme



of social division. This theme recurred also in the distinction between different loaves, each with its own hallmark. From the lowest to the highest, there was *i zippo*, baked with a length of chestnut wood through its centre, withdrawn at the end of the baking; then the *cecio* loaf, with a pinch of the fingers to give it a small ridge. The *zippo* was for labourers and was baked daily, while the *cecio* was for somewhat superior families. *Cappizzi* bread was pricked twice with a fork (*due forchette*) whereas a single prick (*una forchetta*) meant that it was for the more modest *campèri*. Types of bread that bore no distinctive marks (this in itself was a mark of kinds) were called obliquely *seniza* and belonged to the affluent. And what of the others? The *signori* by all accounts got the best types of bread whereas the poor had to buy theirs. Even this was considered a sign of social standing with people observing hypothetically, as they do to this day, 'how nice to buy one's bread at the shop' - as if to show that they themselves had no need to do so. That bread was not just a tasty food but an important social phenomenon can be shown in other ways. If one passed an oven while it was in use (normally baking would finish in the small hours), it was a matter of habit and instinct to offer thanks for the successful outcome of the baking. It is notable that the most impoverished classes, living from day to day, were not among the social groups who commissioned bread. They had to beg at the shop, having insufficient money to buy bread or yeast even for a week. There were those who couldn't even afford to buy the dark bread. It was, therefore, an established practice for certain families to give bread to the poor. And even that form of respect owing to the poor had its own ritual in the way the bread was handed over: a few tell tale knocks on the door, on a set day and at a specific time; and a hand, invariably female, to retrieve the offering. The woman, even though known to the giver, covered her head with a shawl to avoid recognition.

## *T*HE NEW CULTURES *Couscous and ethnic cooking*

In the 1960s the regional politicians in power brought about the repatriation of numerous Italians who had been working in Tunisia and Libya. But it was above all those in Tunisia who, after many years in Africa, had absorbed its flavours and certain ways of cooking and brought them back with them. Whilst these dishes have not become local traditions, some of them, above all variations on couscous, can be found either among families or in restaurants. From the mid-1980s onwards, immigration from various parts of the globe introduced other idiosyncratic cuisines, from the Philippines to North African, Magreb and above all China. The Chinese in particular introduced certain foods from their own culinary heritage and opened numerous restaurants across the country, showing their extraordinary entrepreneurial capability.





## SOME RECIPES

The two original traditions of gastronomic culture (from the mountains and the recently reclaimed plains) are now infused with fish-based cooking, giving life to a rich and tasty cuisine that rightly takes its place at the forefront of Lazian culinary arts. Not presuming to give a complete overview of the traditions and popular creativeness of the province, we can at least offer a token if not fanciful 'summary' by way of some recipes or, more simply, just a few salient facts.

### The hills

#### **Sezze bean soup**

For 4 people: slowly cook approximately 340 g of *faso gli* (beans) in a terracotta pot and add pieces of pork rind, tail, trotters or leg bone. To one side prepare a garlic and dried rosemary pesto adding the freshly picked beans; then add three tomatoes, celery, fennel seeds and fennel, basil to taste, a large glass of olive oil and a pinch of salt. Cook it all slowly for 2-3 hours without removing the lid. When ready, pour the portions onto thinly cut slices of Sezze wheat bread. All that remains is to sample the dish with some bitter olives or fresh onions. It should be remembered that beans are a staple diet for peasants, to which each town adds its own sea sonings, inventing specific dishes. It is enough to change the type of vegetable or substitute one herb for another. They are all good.

#### **Fettucine with mushrooms**

Clean some porcini mushrooms and cut them into slices (if dried leave them to soften in tepid water). Transfer to a pan in which some garlic has been gently fried in oil. Remove the garlic and fry the dish on a lively heat, adding a pinch of salt and some peeled and chopped tomatoes (tinned if time is short). You should then transfer the fettucine, cooked al dente, into the pot and mix briefly.

### Beans cooked with “ventrisco”

In Castelforte, for example, vegetables are cooked in terracotta pots, making the fire with branches of the aromatic and resinous ‘lentisc’ or Mastic shrub (ventrisco in dialect) that grows along the southern borders of Latina province.

### Artichokes alla Giudia


After removing the harder outside leaves as well as most of the stalk, you place the artichoke in a water and lemon juice mixture. After draining and drying, stretch them lightly at the centre and place them upside down in plenty of boiling oil. When nearly cooked, press them onto the bottom of the pan to spread the leaves even further and make them crisp and golden. Salt to taste before serving.

### The ‘cianfotta’

This is a mixed vegetable dish that includes many recipes under one name. This one is from Ponza, but it would be enough to add an artichoke, a few lentils, a couple of beets and the dish could be from any other town, where traditional cooking based on products from the family vegetable garden, continues. Recipe for four: 500 g potatoes, 250 g each of aubergine, peppers and courgettes, an onion, a few tomatoes, oil, vinegar and salt. Wash, dice and deep-fry some of the vegetables in oil before draining them thoroughly. Dice the onion, brown it in a pan with very little oil, adding at the right moment the tomatoes, salt, and a few drops of vinegar. The whole should be covered and boiled for ten minutes. Add the remaining vegetables with a few basil leaves and serve warm.

### The ‘lacne’

A pasta of ancient origins that assumes various names depending on traditions and local dialect (*laccane-laccchene-laina*). It is a variation on *fettucine* and *tagliatelle*, made different by being cut into wider strips, using a pastry made only with flour and water. You can prepare it in many ways but tradition ties it to a simple vegetable like the bean, cooked possibly in an earthenware pot with onion, rosemary, thyme and bacon rind. You



mix lard or prosciutto fat, onion and garlic, adding tomatoes once the mixture is browned, and leave it to cook until it turns into a thick sauce. Add this to the beans and mix well before transferring it to the pasta al dente.

### **Tagliatelle with goat sauce**

Boil the meat in water and onion, cut it into pieces, and place it in a pan with a lightly browned mixture of chopped onion, garlic and celery. Leave to marinate and then douse it with dry white wine evaporated over a high flame. Add tomato paste, salt, peppers and a clove. Cover the pasta with the sauce and serve with pecorino or goat's cheese.

### **The 'bazzoffia'**

Coarse soup made with onion, celery, potatoes, beet, spinach, courgettes, beans, peas, fresh broad beans and thistles. Add, also, the flowers and soft seeds of a marrow. Cut the vegetables into large pieces and allow them to soften in water for several hours. To one side, crush garlic and rosemary with oil, and brown the mixture with onion and celery using lard in the place of oil. Add a stock (made separately) followed by the well-drained vegetables. Put a layer of sliced and stale country bread into a large terracotta-lined pot, and pour on the soup when cooked through, ensuring that the bread absorbs the mixture uniformly. Sprinkle the mixture with large quantities of goat cheese and allow it to sit for thirty minutes. Serve the dish with fresh onions and black olives.

### **Jo'palocco**

*Focaccia* bread made with maize flour, served with stewed broad beans and onion. The beans should be small and dried out. Soften and drain them, before cooking in a pan with olive oil, onion and stock.

The flour is added once the flavours have been absorbed.

### Stuffed peppers

Remove the stalk, hollow and stuff these with a mixture of breadcrumbs, olive oil, parsley, lard, basil, anchovies, capers, de-stoned olives, salt and pepper. Place in a pot, cover with chopped onion and olive oil, and allow to cook for roughly one hour. The stuffing can also be made of lean veal mince, grated Parmesan, garlic and de-cruised bread soaked in water or stock and drained.

### Grilled mushrooms

Normally large porcini mushrooms are used, with big, firm, almost flat heads. Once cleaned, and all traces of earth and rotten bits removed, they are flavoured with olive oil, garlic, parsley, salt and pepper and put on the grill at moderate heat.

### Pan-cooked primo sale

Pecorino cheese cut into slices and placed in a pre-oiled warm pan. The meat should be allowed to cook until such time as a crust is formed on the surfaces and the inside has softened.

### Gliù zeppone

Wild country vegetables flavoured in a pan with olive oil and garlic to which are added in turn parsley, mint, salt and chillies, a dash of vinegar and maize flour. The whole should be cooked until golden brown. The dish is typical of Spigno Saturnia.

### The 'ciavarrotto'

Adult goat raised on the hillsides of the south of the province. Preferably roasted, the meat has a very specific taste due to grazing largely on aromatic herbs and sage. This is even tastier than lamb spare ribs or 'cora tella in a spicy sauce'.

### **The 'abbuoti'**

Tripe of suckling lamb or kid, browned in a pan with celery, olive oil, garlic, chillies, salt, parsley and bacon, or grilled and flavoured with wild fennel, chillies, thyme and salt.

### **Thrush with olives**

Salt and place the thrush in a casserole with crushed garlic and laurel, drizzle with oil and allow to brown, frequently turning. Add wine slowly and allow it to evaporate. Add chopped olives and the gravy (if desired also the chopped thrush liver and a slither of tripe.) Continue cooking until the thrush is tender and dry. The dish is excellent with polenta and toasted bread.

### **The 'cranunchi'**

The frogs are rolled in flour and baked in a pan with fresh tomato, basil, pepper and oil. In some variations to this, a sauce made from rosemary, garlic and vinegar is added after cooking.

### **Cori cooked ham**

Although traditional, this is a food that, until a few years ago, was eaten only on feast days, between two slices of the well-known Cori *pagnotta*. Place a 9-12 kg ham (seasoned for between 4 and 6 months) into a pot on a bed of rosemary and sage, and cover it with water. Dress it on top with the same herbs. After cooking (2 to 4 hours), place the herbs onto a wooden surface under the ham, cover with cloths thoroughly soaked in red or white wine, and top the ham with more herbs and some farm hay.

### **Tiella of Gaeta**

Ingredients: 1 kg of flour, 1 knob of yeast, 2 table spoons of oil, a dash of water and salt. Pour the brewer's yeast into the warm water. Work the oil, salt, water and yeast into the flour using the knuckles. A soft consistency must be achieved so that the dough does not stick to the fingers. Cover the mixture and leave it to rest for at least 2 hours. Prepare the stuffing with vegetables (scarola, fresh or dried, baby broccoli, onions, courgettes and egg) anchovies, sardines, octopus or squid; naturally each tiella requires its own special stuffing. When the dough has risen, lay it out in two layers. Put the first on the bottom of the appropriate oven dish (tiella in Gaetan dialect), and spoon on the stuffing; then lay the second on top. Prick the surface with a fork and drizzle some oil over it. It should then sit for half an hour before being baked at 180° for 30 to 40 minutes.

### **Fish soup**

The shades of this dish vary greatly depending on local tradition and imagination but everywhere its success will depend on the quality of fish, molluscs and shell fish used. First cut the cuttlefish, squid and octopus into small pieces, and cook them in a frying pan in which garlic and chillies have been browned in olive oil. Cover the whole in white wine before adding the peeled tomatoes. Bit by bit add the other types of fish starting with the bigger, firmer pieces then the shellfish and, after careful washing to remove any sandy residue, the molluscs. Next strain the liquid used to open the molluscs and add this to the soup in a quantity depending on the number of people. When cooked, the soup should be poured over stale, toasted bread.

### **Bavette with lobster sauce**

For four people: 2 lobsters of 5-600 g each, baby tomatoes, one or two cloves of garlic, parsley, chillies to taste and 4-500 g of linguine pasta. Chop the lobsters and put them over a high flame in a pan containing garlic. Turn them after 30 or 40 seconds, sprinkle with parsley and add half a cup of white wine. When the wine is evaporated, add the halved baby tomatoes, cover the pot and leave over a slow flame for 10 minutes. The bavette are added to the soup after being boiled and dried, and the whole is then slowly heated with the optional addition of a few tablespoons of olive oil.

### **Spaghetti gransèola**

This dish is found mainly on Ponza. Recipe for four: 1 female granseola crab, 400 g of baby tomatoes, 4-500 g of spaghetti or the thinner vermicelli, garlic, olive oil, parsley and chillies to taste. Put the crab into boiling water and allow it to cook for 20 minutes. Crack open, remove the innards and place these, including the shell lining, in a bowl. Brown the garlic to one side and add the halved baby tomatoes with the crab filling and some finely chopped parsley. Cover the whole and allow it to boil for a few minutes. When the pasta is ready, add to the sauce with a small amount of good quality olive oil if desired. The dish can be embellished with the crab shell.

### **Spaghetti Formia-style**

For four: 500 g of spaghetti, 400 g of mussels and 400 g of local clams in their shells; 200 g of prawns, 200 g of squid, 500 g of peeled tomatoes, half a glass of white wine, 2 tablespoons of olive oil, salt and pepper to taste and two cloves of garlic. Brown the garlic in the oil and add the squid and the shelled prawns. Brown these in turn and add the wine. Evaporate the wine, add the tomatoes and cook the whole for 15 minutes. The mussels and clams should open in the sauce. Salt and pepper before adding to the spaghetti cooked al dente. The same preparation is involved for spaghetti with spernocchie, with care taken to make an incision in their shells before cooking.



### **Linguine with baby squid**

Recipe for four: 1 kg of wild fresh baby squid, 500 g of fresh tomatoes, 2 cloves of garlic, 2 table-spoons of olive oil, 500 g of spaghetti, a generous amount of chopped parsley, salt and chillies to taste and half a glass of white wine. Flash-fry the squid with pre-browned garlic and olive oil, before adding the wine and cooking the whole for a few minutes. Add the chopped tomatoes with the seasonings, and carry on cooking. Cook the spaghetti separately and then add to the sauce after the squid have been removed. Embellish the dish with the squid and some fresh parsley.

### **Risotto alla pescatora**

A base of oil, garlic and chillies is used to brown octopus, baby squid, chopped cuttlefish and prawns, to which you should add chopped tomatoes infused with a generous measure of white wine evaporated over a high flame. Add the par-boiled rice and allow it to soak up the flavours, gradually introducing the onion, celery, carrots and fish stock (alternatively the cooking water of the clams and mussels). When cooked, garnish the dish with shelled molluscs.

### **Linguine with giant prawns and sea truffle**

For four: 400 g of linguine, 400 g of giant prawns (mazzancolle), 300 g of ripe tomatoes, 400 g of sea truffles, 2 cloves of garlic, 150 g of olive oil and salt and red pepper. Fry the prawns and truffles in the garlic, chillies and oil. As soon as the molluscs are open, add the tomatoes and leave the whole to cook for five minutes. Meanwhile, soften the linguine in salted water and a drop of oil until al dente and after careful draining mix the sauce in and add the parsley.

### **Fish soup with pasta**

After browning some garlic in olive oil, add a purée of tomatoes and a little water and allow the mixture to cook over a slow heat for a few minutes. Add the fish stock (normally sea bass or cod) seasoned with salt and red pepper, followed by the cooked and stirred pasta.

### **Prawns with olives**

Recipe for four: 1 kg of shelled prawns with heads, 400 g of Gaeta olives, 900 g of peeled tomatoes, half a glass of dry white wine, 2 cloves of garlic, 2 tablespoons of olive oil, a sprig of parsley and salt and pepper to taste. Fry the prawns and the stoned olives in the oil and garlic. Once heated add the wine and the moment it is evaporated the peeled, chopped tomatoes and the parsley, salt and pepper. Serve after a slow cooking of ten minutes.

### **Prawns au gratin**

For four people: 16 Ponza prawns, 80 g of bread crumbs, 150 g olive oil, 2 cloves of garlic and the juice of 2 lemons. Brown the oil and garlic in a pan and add the prawns cut in half. Sprinkle them with bread crumbs, garlic and parsley, drizzle some lemon juice over them and cook for 12 minutes in a hot oven.

### **Stuffed squid**

Clean the squid and remove the two longest tentacles breaking them into pieces. Put them in a pot adding the soft part of a loaf of bread previously moistened in water and dried out. Then add eggs, pine nuts, raisins, Parmesan, a clove of garlic and crushed parsley. Mix the whole and put into a pan with boiling oil for several seconds in order that the eggs should set. At this point the stuffing is ready to insert into the squid, which you should then close up with the remains of the head and cocktail sticks, and immerse in the tomato juice, garlic, oil and parsley. Bring to the boil and simmer for twenty minutes.

### **Acqua pazza**

Made with bony fish pieces. Clean the fish carefully and placed it in a large pan in which some olive oil, garlic and parsley have been heated, adding some tomato to give it a pink colour. Add the fish pieces and a good amount of water and cook at length. The fish, once boiled out, should be thrown away. Strain the stock and pour it over some toasted breads.

### **'Vòtapiatto'**

This consists of fish (anchovies and squid) fried in a pan with a touch of olive oil on the bottom. First roll the fish in flour, remove the excess, and place in the saucepan with the hot oil. Allow them to cook like an omelette. When the oil is absorbed, turn the fish over (as with an omelette), add more oil and cook the other side. This is an excellent, non-greasy fried dish, traditionally from Gaeta.

### **Fried whitebait (cicinjeie)**

Make a fairly liquid dough with eggs and flour, a little chopped garlic and parsley and salt. Immerse the whitebait into this, and when they are well covered, spoon them into deep oil and brown. Salt them lightly and serve hot. Whitebait can also be steamed, seasoned with olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper and served on rocket leaves – a favoured method in the Bay of Gaeta.

### **Frittura di paranza**

A mixture of small fish (mullet, soai, lattarini, cod, anchovies and sardines) lightly floured and deep-fried in oil. Served very hot with a sprinkling of salt.



### **The ciammelle d'acqua**

Using one part oil and sugar to two parts water and as much flour as can be absorbed, you get a consistent dough which you then work for one to two hours. Form the ciambelle (ring-shapes) and put them into boiling water until they float up. Place them on a cloth and bake them the next day.

### **The casatiello and the zèppole di Ponza**

This is an Easter tart made of flour, yeast, lard, sugar and spices. You prepare and leaven the pastry according to taste, making sure of course that the tart does not become dry and indigestible. It then goes into a moderate oven for 20 minutes. The casatiello is eaten during the traditional walk in the hills at Easter time and honoured in a festival that takes place on Easter Monday. Another Ponza dessert is the zèppola. Made of flour, brewer's yeast, salt, milk and sweet liqueur, it differs from the Neapolitan variety, celebrated on the 19th of March. The dough is fried and the zèppola, while still hot, is dusted in sugar.

### **The 'cicerchiata'**

For these cakes you need eggs, lard, a pinch of salt, flour, honey and lemon zest. When the dough is ready, knead it and cut it into small pieces. Deep-fry these in boiling oil and immerse them one by one in boiling honey. Finally, lay them out on lemon leaves. The preparation is identical to that for cecamariti and, with a few small variations, for struffugli.

### **The pastiera**

Flour, sugar, butter, eggs and dry white wine are needed for this dough; the cream for the filling is made from blending flour with egg yolks, sugar, milk and vanilla; to one side the wheat, milk and cinnamon are cooked and left to cool; the egg yolks are beaten with the sugar and lemon rind. Bring everything together slowly adding the egg whites, pieces of candied fruit and ricotta. Spread the filling on the sheet of pastry and cover it with strips of the same pastry to form a lattice. Bake at an initial temperature of 150° for 20 minutes, then for an hour at 180°. Dust the cake with sugar before serving.

### **The serpetta**

Beat eggs, sugar and lemon rind in a tureen and pour the resulting liquid into the flour and work it a first time to obtain a compact but malleable pastry. Rework this while adding olive oil, and until the characteristic bubbles can be seen at the centre. Leave the pastry for an hour, then cut it into finger-sized sticks formed into 's' shapes. Cover in sugar and cinnamon and cook for an hour at 180°.

### **The casciatella**

This is a typical Easter time dessert. Mix fresh ricotta, eggs, sugar, cinnamon, a pinch of salt, a small glass of liqueur and some grated lemon rind. Leaving the filling to sit, prepare the pastry with eggs and flour and roll well to form a thin round film. Put this on a baking tin greased with lard and flour. Spread the filling well over the pastry; decorate it with strips of finger-width pastry, in the shape of rhombi. Before putting it in the oven, glaze the cake with egg yolk to give it a golden colour.





### The pigna

This is another Easter cake, this time from Formia. Similar to panettone, plaited and filled with hard-boiled egg, the mixture is based on eggs and flour, butter and milk. It is wellworked and left to rise at length.

### The tozzetti

For these biscuits, eggs, sugar, lard, bicarbonate of soda, yeast and flour are used to obtain quite a thin mixture. The dough is moulded into sticks that are then covered with egg whites and baked on a flour-covered baking tray. When half-baked, they are cut into slices and then finished off in the oven.

### Sanguinaccio cake

Sugar is melted into pig's blood taken fresh to avoid coagulation. Cocoa is added and the whole is flavoured with fennel and cinnamon. After having been slowly baked, it is left to cool and then tipped onto a sheet of short-crust pastry that will also be used as the lid. The sides are then sealed. Cooking takes place in an oven preheated to 40°.

*To finish off every meal, we recommend Fondi Erbes biters, hazelnut liqueur and the liqueur of Valvisciolo.*



# *T***RADITIONAL** *farm and food products*

Ottavio Cacioppo, Silvano Sperandio e Bruno Maragoni

*Are the goodness and flavour of a simple dish or of an elaborate recipe enough to guarantee authenticity? The answer must be 'yes' if ingredients and seasonings in the right proportions combine with skilled preparation, time-honoured flavours and traditional methods of cooking; and when the right climatic and environmental conditions prevail. Changes in lifestyle and working patterns have caused the disappearance of some of these dishes and with them the secrets of home cooking. Fortunately, however, the love and passion for culinary tradition are not completely lost and some small but important elements, passed down from generation to generation, have been preserved. The evaluation of such dishes is entrusted not just to culinary authors but also to the laws (D.Lgs 173/98, art.8) governing their classification. This in an evolving and increasingly important area, because in-depth research can help rediscover yet more gastronomic treasures, pertinent to other economic, commercial and tourist spheres of activity.*



# Confectionery

**Gli amaretti** (Sezze). Biscuits made with sweet almond flour, with normal flour added together with bitter almonds, sugar and egg white, cooked on a wafer base in a wood-fired oven.

**I biscotti** (Sezze). Made from blended flour, egg, yeast, sugar, lard and lemon zest. The biscuit mixture is then cut into stick shapes and cooked in a pre-heated oven for half an hour.

**I croccanti** (Sezze, Cori, Norma, Priverno and other hill towns). Made with the same ingredients as the above biscuits, apart from the addition of toasted almonds. Before they are fully cooked, they are removed from the oven and cut into lozenge shapes before being finished off.

**La caciata** (Sezze, Priverno and other hill towns). Puff pastry cakes filled with well-worked creamy ricotta and eggs, lemon rind, liqueur, sugar and cinnamon. Decorated with pastry strips and glazed with beaten eggs.

**Castagne stampate**. The chestnuts are kept immersed for several hours in a pan with salt and bay leaves, before being cooked in a slow oven.

**Ciammelle d'acqua** (Sezze, Priverno and the Lepini Mountains). The dough must be heavily worked with oil-soaked hands. Before being baked in the oven, the ring-shaped ciambelle must be boiled until they float and then left to dry overnight.

**Ciambelle con gelo** (Maenza). Using the same ingredients as above, the dough shapes are dropped into boiling water for a few minutes, left to dry and then placed in a hot oven. Once cooked, the biscuits are dipped into syrup of water and sugar.

**Ciambelle al vino** (Lepini Mountains). Once the soft dough is sufficiently worked, the ciambelle are formed, dipped in wine and covered in sugar. There is also a variation with aniseed.

**Ciambelle al mosto** (Pontine plain). Large cakes typical of the harvest period, made from grape juice, yeast, flour, sugar and sometimes aniseed.

**Ciambelle di magro** (Sermoneta and the Lepini Mountains). These also contain wine but are glazed with sugar and cinnamon.

**Ciammella elenese** (Gaeta). Small ciambelle without holes, in the form of simple biscuits covered in julep, the dough prepared in the normal fashion on a marble slab.

**Crostatino ripieno** (Maranola of Formia). A tart, with pastry made from soft-grain flour, eggs, sugar, milk, olive oil and pig lard, laid out in paper moulds and topped with apricot or plum marmalade.

# Confectionery

**Frittelline di mele** (Maenza). Apple slices first covered in a light batter of flour, sugar, oil, eggs, yeast, milk and aniseed liqueur. They are then deep-fried in oil and dusted with sugar.

**Giglietti** (Sermoneta and Priverno). Made from flour, sugar and lemon rind, and originally lily-shaped (whence their name); nowadays they resemble flat meringues.

**I recresciuti** (Maenza). Oven-cooked cakes that, in addition to the standard ingredients, include liqueurs like rum or alkermes and aniseed. The mixture, having sat overnight, is re-worked into ring shapes and glazed with egg yolk.



**Crespelle** (Maenza). Typical stick-shaped Christmas cakes. The pastry ingredients, including raisins, pine nuts and Sambuca are well mixed and when risen fried in boiling oil and dusted with sugar.

**I pezzetti** (Sermoneta). Consist of very hard, oven-baked strips of biscuit with hazelnuts, almonds and honey.

**La sciuscella** (Gaeta and Formia). Traditional carob-shaped Christmas cake, made with honey, sugar, sprinkled with fresh orange or mandarin peel, cocoa, flour and spices and glazed with chocolate.

**Le serpette** (Sermoneta). The flour, egg and sugar dough mixture is worked twice (the second time with oil-covered hands until the characteristic bubbles form on the inside). The pastry is then cut into little sticks and formed into 's' shapes. The biscuits are then covered in sugar and cinnamon before being baked.

# Confectionery

**Gli spaccaregli** (Sezze). The pastry mixture for this biscuit, added to which are lard and lemon rind, is worked just enough to incorporate the ingredients. Shaped between the hands into little pastry buns, a crisscross is cut in their surface before they are sprinkled with sugar and placed in the oven.

**Struffoli** (Sezze and Lenola). These small, gnocchi-shaped biscuits require the dough to be worked hard. After being fried and drip-dried, the biscuits are dropped into melted honey and laid on washed and dried lemon leaves.

**Ciacamariti** (local variations). Very similar to the above struffoli but without lard and, depending on where they are made, with the addition of various liqueurs.

**Taralli** (Lenola). To the classic dough is added olive oil and aniseed and the whole mixture is left to rise overnight; small doughnuts are formed and left to rise for another 3 hours before being covered with egg yolk and placed in a hot oven.

**Torta di ricotta** (Sermoneta). Oven-baked tart made from ricotta cheese, sugar, honey, eggs, cinnamon and aromatic liqueur. Must be eaten fresh.

**Tortolo** (Sezze). Shaped into little loaves, the dough has to be worked twice before being baked for half an hour. The unusual aroma is from the addition of Sambuca.

**Tortano di Pasqua** (Gaeta and Formia). Cakes that require, in addition to the classic butter, milk, lemon, vanilla and cinnamon, oil and lard, a decoration of naspro, almonds and coloured sugar.

**Torteni** (Lenola and other hill towns). After the oil, aniseed, brewer's yeast and other ingredients have been well mixed together, the dough is left to rise for 4 to 5 hours; the ciambelle are then shaped and left to rise for another 12 hours before being glazed with egg yolk and baked.

**Zippole** (Sezze). The ingredients, including grape juice and pine nuts, are worked together, except for the brewer's yeast to be added after being dissolved in hot water. Once a soft pastry is obtained, it should be allowed to rise to double its size. The zippole, or rounded cakes, are coated with honey during the final frying stage.





# Bread pizza and pasta

**Bread with green and black olives** (Lepini, Aurunci and Ausoni Mountains). Durum flour can be used as an alternative to white, in addition to natural yeast. The olives are added before the dough is left to rise for the last time. Cooked directly on the bottom of a wood-fired oven.

**Bread with mashed potato** (Lepini, Aurunci and Ausoni Mountains) The preparation, including the durum wheat, is the same as above with the substitution of the olives for the mashed potato.

**Durum wheat bread** (Lepini, Aurunci and Ausoni Mountains)

**Wholemeal bread baked in a wood-fired oven** (Campodimele and Maranola di Formia). Soft grain flour spiked to break up the coarse bran. The oven is fuelled with oak, holm-oak or olive tree wood.

**Torteno bread** (Aurunci Mountains). An Easter bread made with eggs, using the same technique as for the cake of the same name. When ready, the natural yeast is added to the flour and left to rise. Just before baking, the eggs are added and covered with the dough.

**Falia** (Priverno). Long, flat, rectangular bread drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with salt. It often follows the pagnotte (round loaves) into the oven. Tradition calls for it to be eaten with sausages or local baby broccoli.

**La tiella** (Gaeta). A product almost exclusive to the region formed of two layers of leavened and kneaded bread dough that enclose delicious fillings such as octopus, squid and cuttlefish, scarola and dried fish, anchovies or sardines, onions, spinach and ricotta.

**Pizza a gli soio and Pizza a gli matono** (Sezze). The former consists of corn flour and white flour mixed, with yeast and flat beer added. The mixture must be slightly runny and is drizzled with oil before being baked. The 'matano' is made with corn flour and is typically cooked beside the oven on two pre-heated bricks.

**Lacna stracciata** (Norma). Dough made of just water and flour with the name coming from the fact that the pastry is torn up by hand before being cooked. It can also be dried and conserved for a short time.

**I Frascatelli** (Prossedi, Roccafgorga, Maenza, Norma and other towns). A type of dough made from sprinkling water onto the flour that is then worked into little balls. These are then shaken in a sieve to eliminate excess flour. Classical seasonings would be tomatoes or pecorino or marzolino cheese.

**Fettucine**. This is a classic pasta prepared throughout the province, characterised by its many sauces and seasonings.

**Strozzapreti** (Sermoneta, Roccafgorga and others). Similar to the lacna of Norma in terms of dough mix and preparation, they differ only in their soft cylindrical form and pointed tips.

## *Fresh Meat and Sausages*

**Bassiano ham**. Made from pig thighs weighing on average 9 kg when fresh. They should be immediately salted and kept under weight for twenty days and then left to sit for three months before being washed and flavoured and then hung for a further nine months.

**Coriander sausages**. From Monte S.Biagio and Fondi and the villages of Itri and Maranola di Fonia. Lean pork seasoned with salt, chillies and coriander and packed into pig intestine before being left to mature, interrupted only by occasional smoking over Mastic wood.

**Pork liver sausages** (Monte S.Biagio and Fondi). The liver is prepared with other offal to which are added a chopped bay leaf, garlic, mandarin zest, pine nuts, grape juice, apples, coriander, chillies and salt. They can also be conserved in extra-virgin olive oil.

**Rustic pork liver sauce** (Itri and Formia). The livers and other offal are combined in the same proportions as in the animal. The ingredients are the same as above but are cooked in a simple tomato sauce.

**Le coppiette** (Cori and elsewhere). Long, fine slices of horse, cow and pig muscle that, when dried, become extremely hard. They are seasoned with salt, oil and lots of chilli pepper.



# *Cheeses*

**Il marzolino** (from the Lepini, Ausoni and Aurunci mountains). A small, fresh cheese made from goat or sheep's milk using the natural curds, and later salted.



## Fruit vegetables and preserves

### **Actinidia deliciosa Ferguson, Liang, cultivar Hayward**

Commonly known as kiwi, this is one of provincial province delicacies in terms of quantity and quality, thanks to the climate and the specific soil conditions of the Pontine region. Grown under canvas or plastic it is eaten fresh, used to decorate desserts and fruit salads, and also to make wines, liqueurs, and ice creams.

**Peaches and apricots in syrup** (Garigliano plain). The fruit, washed, cut in half, stoned and in some cases peeled, is placed in glass jars and covered with water and sugar. Sterilisation takes place in a bain marie, but care must be taken to avoid boiling.

**Dried figs** (Sonnino and surrounding areas). The smaller and late-maturing figs typical of the Christmas season. They are first dried in the sun and then in wood-fired ovens, before being skewered onto spliced canes for preservation.

**Dry peppers** (Fondi, Monte S. Biagio, Sperlonga). Ripe red peppers, baked briefly at low heat and sun-dried once their stalks and seeds have been removed. Eaten with cod or, once dried, with salted anchovies and good quality olive oil.

**Young broccoli** (Sezze). Delicate, with long green leaves and a very particular taste, these have long been associated with the area. They are stewed with oil and salt, or cooked in a frying pan with garlic, oil and small chilli peppers.

**Signorinella lettuce** (Formia). With its characteristic red-edged leaf, this lettuce has been grown all year round since time immemorial. Should be eaten fresh, with oil, vinegar and salt.





**Catalonian chicory** (Gaeta). This age-old vegetable, uneven in shape, has undergone a long natural selection. It is traditionally harvested from Christmas to Easter and eaten cooked or raw.

**Baby artichokes in oil** (Monti Lepini, Ausoni, Aurunci). Once the harder leaves have been removed, the artichokes are dipped in lemon water to stop them losing their colour, then boiled for a few minutes with salt and vinegar, dried and preserved in jars with good local olive oil.

**Pickled onions, chilli peppers and pears** (Monti Aurunci). These are carefully washed and cleaned (the onions have their stems and outer layers removed), then placed in homemade red wine vinegar.

**Aubergines in oil** (Fondi). Skinned and cut into strips, these are then dipped in lemon water, rinsed, dried, soaked for 24 hours in vinegar and salt, then preserved in fine oil with added slices of carrot, celery, garlic, chilli peppers and parsley.

**Lentils** (Ventotene). These are smaller than average lentils and particularly good for soups because they do not flake during cooking. They are sown from December to March, depending on the amount of sand or clay in the soil, and harvested in June, always before sunrise.

**Pine nuts from the coast of the Lazio** (mainly around Sabaudia). The nuts are extracted, washed, dried and selected in a traditional process that takes place in the pinewoods themselves.

**Pale olives from Itri and black 'Gaeta' olives in brine** (Itri, Gaeta, Campodimele, Formia). These are the first and last crops of the Itri variety of olive, and undergo a natural sweetening process. The brine allows both flavour and consistency to be retained for years.

**Smoked olives** (Monti Lepini, Ausoni, Aurunci). Fully ripened black olives, dried, dropped into boiling water and left to cool, before being smoked. They can be prepared with oil, salt, the juice and rind of lemon or orange, or can be used in focaccia bread or pizza with vegetables and Parmesan cheese.

**Olives treated in lime** (Terracina and Lepini towns). Green olives from Itri, harvested from the end of October to early November, and then left for 24 hours in a paste of lime and ashes. They must then be thoroughly washed until they lose all their bitterness.

**Crushed olives** (Monti Leprini, Ausoni, Aurunci).

Crushed green olives preserved for over a year in salt water, then seasoned with oil, garlic, fennel seeds, carrot, celery and chilli pepper.

**Spagnoletta tomato** (Gaeta and Formia). A sought-after tomato much appreciated because of its bittersweet taste. It is used fully ripe for sauces and half ripe for salads.

**Purée of spagnoletta tomatoes** (Gaeta and Formia). The tomatoes are cut and cooked, then drained, sieved, bottled and finally sterilised in the traditional way.

**Marmalade of pale and bitter oranges, clementines, lemons and tangerines** (Plain of Garigliano). The fruit is washed, peeled, and diced; and for every six fruit one rind is added without its white pulp. This mixture is brought to the boil with an equal weight of sugar added by degrees.

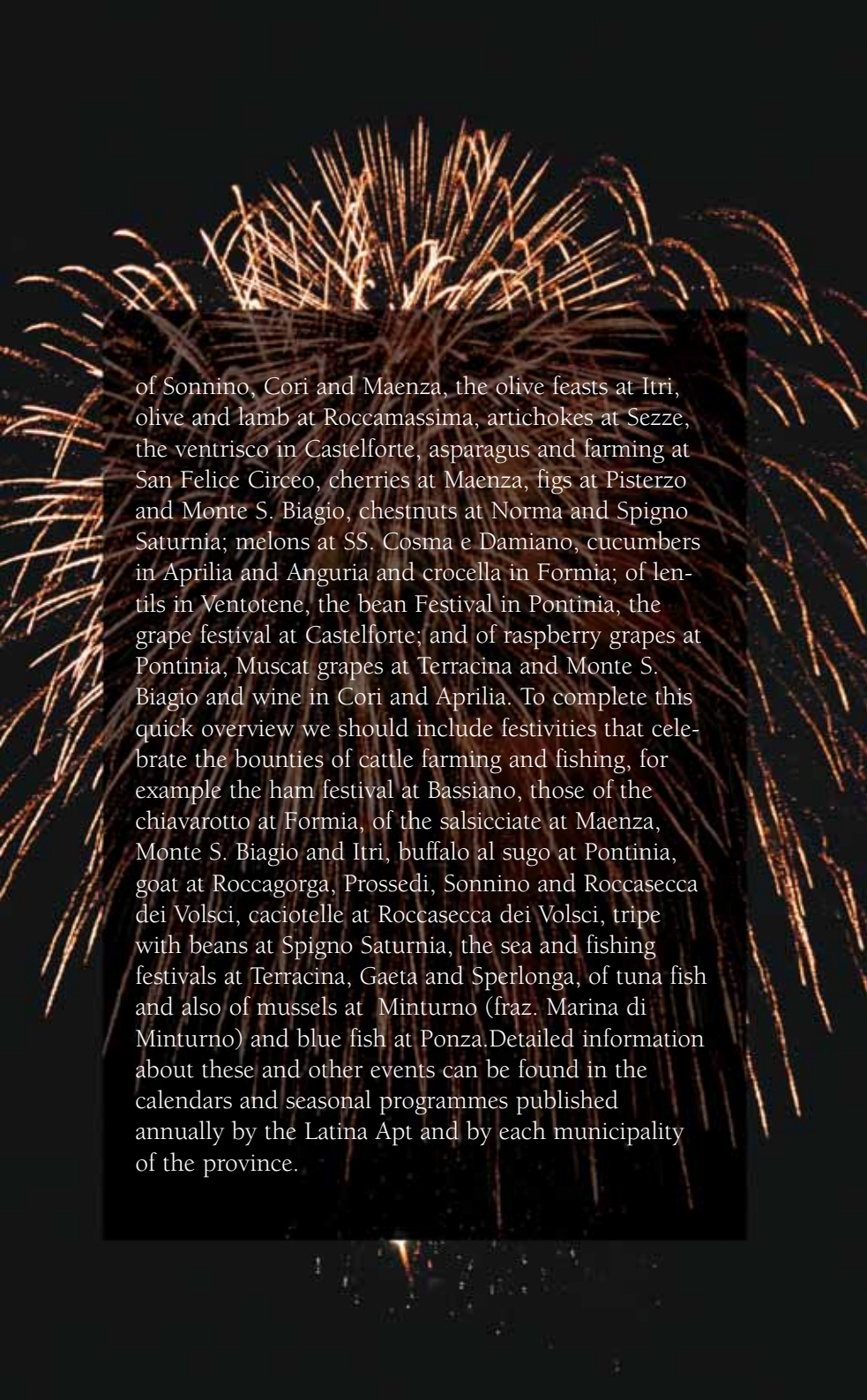
**Grape jam** (Fondi and Monti S. Biagio). Raspberry grapes are cooked to a pulp, to be sieved and then cooked again with added sugar.

**Wild cherry jam** (Sezze). The cherries are first cooked for 20 minutes over a low flame with a little water; after that sugar is added and cooking continues at a simmer.



## EVENTS

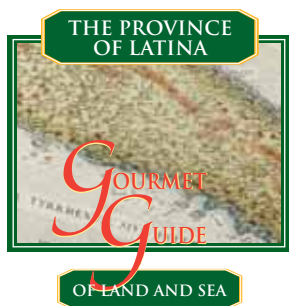
The many country festivals, often linked to religious feasts and saints' days or to historical and nostalgic events, are the most appropriate and lively occasions for remembering and enjoying, in good company, our typical dishes and specialities. The full list would be too long, but we'll name just a few, including some words of dialect to tease the curiosity of our readers and visitors: the pancake in the piazza festival in Maenza, the zeppolata in Ponza, the festival of polenta in Sermoneta, the p'tlata of Lenola, the night of the sette minestre (seven soups) in Prossedi-Pisterzo, the feast of the bazzoffia, of artichokes and bread soup with beans in Sezze; the festival of the gnocchetto with truffles and of fettucine in Cori, the gourmet nights of laini and beans, of ciammotte and goat sauce and of cicerchia in Campodimele; the festival of pasta and beans in Spigno Saturnia, tiella in Gaeta, beans and broccolli in Priverno; the festival of the mill at SS. Cosma e Damiano and at Minturno, the festival of the faòni at Priverno, Roccasecca dei Volsci, Sermoneta and Itri with food stands and tasting of local produce and specialities; the gourmet and social evenings in Fondi and Sabaudia, the festival of the casatiello fave and wine in Ponza, the blessing of animals and, in various neighbouring centres, the traditional distribution of blessed local bread. Other festivals celebrate the good produce of the earth such as the olive oil festivals



of Sonnino, Cori and Maenza, the olive feasts at Itri, olive and lamb at Roccamassima, artichokes at Sezze, the ventrisco in Castelforte, asparagus and farming at San Felice Circeo, cherries at Maenza, figs at Pisterzo and Monte S. Biagio, chestnuts at Norma and Spigno Saturnia; melons at SS. Cosma e Damiano, cucumbers in Aprilia and Anguria and crocella in Formia; of lentils in Ventotene, the bean Festival in Pontinia, the grape festival at Castelforte; and of raspberry grapes at Pontinia, Muscat grapes at Terracina and Monte S. Biagio and wine in Cori and Aprilia. To complete this quick overview we should include festivities that celebrate the bounties of cattle farming and fishing, for example the ham festival at Bassiano, those of the chiavarotto at Formia, of the salsicciate at Maenza, Monte S. Biagio and Itri, buffalo al sugo at Pontinia, goat at Roccagorga, Prossedi, Sonnino and Roccasecca dei Volsci, caciottelle at Roccasecca dei Volsci, tripe with beans at Spigno Saturnia, the sea and fishing festivals at Terracina, Gaeta and Sperlonga, of tuna fish and also of mussels at Minturno (fraz. Marina di Minturno) and blue fish at Ponza. Detailed information about these and other events can be found in the calendars and seasonal programmes published annually by the Latina Apt and by each municipality of the province.

## *B*some recent BIBLIOGRAPHY

For those wishing to read further, we recommend two handsome volumes by Adriana Vitali Veronese: "Aromi e sapori antichi e nuovi" (Old and New Aromas and Flavours) and "Versi divini per vini diversi" (Divine Verses for Diverse Wines), both edited by Editrice Il Gabbiano



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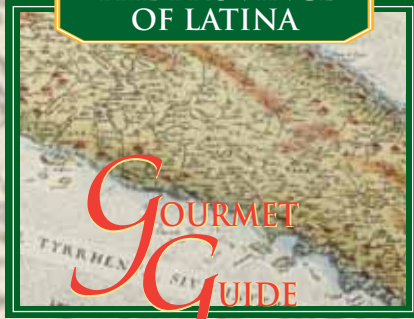
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