

*Giacomo Castelvetro*

‡ *The Fruit, Herbs* ‡  
*and Vegetables of Italy*

‡ *an offering to* ‡

*Lucy, Countess of Bedford*

TRANSLATED

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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PROSPECT BOOKS

2012

Published in Great Britain in 2012 by  
Prospect Books at Allaleigh House, Blackawton, Totnes,  
Devon TQ9 7DL.

An edition of this book was first published by Viking in  
association with the British Museum, Natural History in 1989.

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BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA:  
A catalogue entry for this book is available from the  
British Library.

Set in Matthew Carter's Galliard.

ISBN 978-1-903018-64-4

Printed and bound in Malta by Gutenberg Press Ltd.

# *Contents*

Foreword *page* I

Introduction II

## *A Brief Account of the Fruit, Herbs and Vegetables of Italy*

Spring 45

Summer 63

Autumn 82

Winter 107

Glossary and notes 115

Bibliography 137

Acknowledgements 143

Index 145



# Foreword

Where I first read the name of Castelvetro, I cannot clearly recall. It seems to me that it was in the Linnaean Library, in 1976 or 1977. I was writing a book on vegetables at the time, and I had gone to the library to look at Parkinson's *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris* and Thomas Martyn's 1807 edition of Philip Miller's *Gardener's and Botanist's Dictionary*. While waiting for these grand and ancient books to be brought to the desk, I dipped into the seventeenth-century chapter of some vast modern history of gardening. In it there was enough about this early-seventeenth-century immigrant from Italy, friend to Sir Henry Wotton and the Countess of Bedford, to make me rush back to the London Library to follow up the reference.

Lucy, Countess of Bedford, had always meant John Donne to me, and Ben Jonson. I had not realized she was a great gardener too, likely to be interested in the vegetables and fruit of Italy. It gave a whole new dimension to Jonson's punning lines:

Lucy, you brightness of our sphere, who are  
Life of the muses' day, their morning star!

I pictured her wandering through the kitchen-garden in the sharp brightness of a summer morning, talking in Italian to this much-travelled Castelvetro about the progress of her salads and peas.

What I do remember, most vividly, is clattering up the

## THE FRUITS, HERBS AND VEGETABLES OF ITALY

iron stairs at the back of the London Library, to a high level I had never visited before, and coming eventually to the corner where the deep-red volumes of *Italian Studies* have their home. Up there, with the sedate periodicals of so many learned societies, the solitude of the library is at its most intense. One feels completely out of time. The air is undisturbed in an awesome tranquillity of dust, held in place by streaky windows and regular rows of bound volumes. It's the kingdom of philosophers and scholars. One waits, as if in an antechamber, for enlightenment. One hopes, but expects nothing.

That day I was in luck. Writing a book is for me an act of faith and folly. You have a plan of course, but you bluster about in the work, following blindly, one step after another, slogging it out in the early stages. Then suddenly you come across one thing, one reference, one passage, that explains to you why you are writing this particular book, that gives you the theme, that shows you the way. You have in a sense to earn this discovery. It is a reward. And Castelvetro was, in that sense, my reward, that voice from three hundred and sixty years ago speaking to me as if here standing beside me.

Though not directly in Italian – that came later – but through that article in *Italian Studies*, ‘An Italian’s message to England in 1614: “Eat more fruit and vegetables”’. I read through the entrancing article, not at all dead or dusty, came to the signature K. T. Butler. And realized that this was Miss Butler, a luminary of Newnham College when I went up to Cambridge after the War, in 1946. Her small neat figure, impeccable despite clothes rationing, had a scholarly chic that I found dazzling. She represented intellect, elegance,

## Foreword

generosity of mind, an icon of the possibility of living a rich, rewarding life.

My last recollection of her was seeing her walk slowly away from Newnham – perhaps she was already ill, since she died in May the following year, 1950 – along Sidgwick Avenue, under the trees. I leaned on my bicycle and watched her, dimly understanding that she held knowledge that I desired, but was at that time incapable of pursuing. Then I forgot all about her. Now here in the London Library, twenty-five years later, Miss Butler was offering me more than I could have hoped for. That neat, compact figure, a study in grey, black and white in green shadows, returned to mind as clear as yesterday.

A little later, when the *Vegetable Book* was published, an old friend, Gillian Riley, told me she had seen one of the surviving MSS of Castelvetro's *Brieve racconto di tutte le radici, di tutte l'herbe et di tutti i frutti, che crudi o cotti in Italia si mangiano* in Trinity College Library. She lent me her photocopy. She hoped at some stage to be able to work on it herself, when she could fit it into the exigencies of freelance survival, a problem we shared.

And now here it is, in Gillian Riley's fine translation that picks up the notes of crisp gaiety as well as the suppleness of Castelvetro's Italian. In great English prose of that period, a tone of Biblical grandeur puts a distance between writer and reader – as do the breathless intricacies of punctuation and phrasing in lesser works such as Sir Hugh Plat's *Delightes for Ladies*, as if English was not yet quite ready for describing the technicalities of life, such as gardening or sugar-boiling. Castelvetro's Italian is as lively as one could wish.

## THE FRUITS, HERBS AND VEGETABLES OF ITALY

One assumes that the souls of great academics are composed of dust and old bindings (with today a nice admixture of floppy discs), but so great was Castelvetro's charm that Miss Butler fell for him. At the end of her life she tackled his other manuscripts on more elevated subjects, religion, politics, satire, discovered more about his life, his role as Italian tutor to the grand figures of the time, including James I and Anne of Denmark, his queen, his friendship with Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Henry Wotton, Sir John Harington – not, alas, the one who invented a water-closet but his cousin, brother to the Countess of Bedford. But it was in that first 1938 article that she fell in love with him, and betrays without shame or excuse – a rare thing in a scholar – her own love of good food, her own regret that the English had not taken Castelvetro's message to heart. She ends up, despairingly, with this quotation from Byron:

But man is a carnivorous production ...  
Although his anatomical construction  
Bears vegetables in a grumbling way,  
Your labouring people think, beyond all question,  
Beef, veal and mutton better for digestion.

I doubt whether Castelvetro was in any way concerned to touch the 'labouring people' of England. The ostensible purpose of the *Brieve racconto* is to get people here to eat more vegetables, as they do in Italy. The project is dedicated to the Countess of Bedford, a great gardener. He might expect that her circle would read it, an educated and cosmopolitan group of people who had found a hero in Prince Henry, whom it is tempting to describe as the only deeply educated member of



## *Foreword*

our royal family, apart from Queen Elizabeth I and Charles I. Alas, Prince Henry, that paragon, died young, as did his close friend John Harington. Castelvetro was perhaps impatient at our slowness in absorbing the discoveries of Renaissance Italy into our eating patterns. He could see his patrons and friends building Italianate houses, planning Italian gardens, visiting Italy, speaking Italian, reading Italian writers, wearing Italian clothes. The shopping list he has left us, of things he was to bring back to friends in the north from a visit to Italy, includes soft slippers, trimmings for collars, lotions and soap, lute strings, damask from Bologna, silk flowers, perfumed gloves, masks and spectacles, as well as such edibles as caviar, botargo, tamarind and pomegranate syrup – and a long list of seeds. Perhaps he wished that as well as wearing Italian lace cuffs and smelling of Italian toilet waters, we would also sit down to the austere elegance of Italian meals with their healthy emphasis on vegetables and fruit.

Castelvetro may not have realized, moving in the circles he did, that the labouring people were indeed eating far more vegetables. It is known that Dutch Protestant settlers in the middle of the sixteenth century brought their knowledge of intensive market gardening to Britain, especially to the areas around Norwich and Sandwich. Commentators of the time had noted this, and Miss Butler remarks on it in her 1938 study of the *Brieve racconto*. Lately this general impression has been backed up impressively with figures and statistics by Malcolm Thick, the agricultural historian. He has pointed out that the first immigrants were closely monitored and directed to certain places, that these refugees from religious persecution were extremely skilled and hardworking, and

## THE FRUITS, HERBS AND VEGETABLES OF ITALY

that they prospered, so that the numbers of ‘strangers’ grew rapidly, and to our benefit.

They were so well established around Norwich when the bad harvests of the 1590s caused a great scarcity of bread that they were able to ship quite a tonnage of root vegetables from Yarmouth to London. The shortfall in the wheat harvests greatly stimulated market gardening around the capital as well. In his *Profitable instructions for the manurings sowing and planting of kitchen gardens*, of 1599, Richard Gardiner of Shrewsbury describes how by growing four acres of carrots and seven hundred tight-headed cabbages he was able to keep many hundreds of people going during the twenty ‘pinch’ days before harvest, when the previous year’s wheat supply had run out.

Oddly, perhaps, carrots do not figure much in the *Brieve racconto*, but I would imagine that Castelvetro’s opinion of Gardiner would be that he did not go far enough. Vegetables were not just a substitute for bread, a response to famine, but a delight in themselves. He comments that Italians do not in any case fancy meat on account of the hot climate: he does not, I think, take into account how much our climate affects our diet and how much more difficult it is for us to grow wonderful vegetables and fruit even with the intensive skills that we learned from the Dutch.

Reading Malcolm Thick’s chapter on market gardening in Volume V of *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* (1985) and his more recent study on ‘Root crops and the feeding of London’s poor in the late 16th and early 17th centuries’ led me to itemize the vegetables Castelvetro writes about, and the fruit, to see how much was strange

# Introduction

Giacomo Castelvetro, the author of *Brieve racconto di tutte le radici, di tutte l'erbe e di tutti i frutti, che crudi o cotti in Italia si mangiano*, was born in Modena on the twenty-fifth of March 1546, the son of Niccolò Castelvetro, a wealthy banker, and Liberata Tassoni, also of noble birth. He died in London in 1616, in poverty, but looking back on a long and eventful existence, short of money in his old age, but not of things to do, as this work, and a mass of papers and books in the Puckeridge collection, now in Trinity College Library, demonstrate.

When a friend first drew my attention to the three anonymous manuscript copies of the *Brieve racconto* in this collection, I was intrigued by the snippets of autobiographical information embedded in the text. Chasing up the clues to the identity of the author was exciting work, involving many happy hours in the British Library, a pilgrimage to Charlton, a visit to Modena in the glowing September sunshine, and a welcome escape from the cold summer rain of Edinburgh into the hospitable National Library of Scotland. In fact many distinguished scholars had already investigated the author of the *Brieve racconto*. In 1938 an article in *Italian Studies* by Kathleen Butler gave a detailed, affectionate account of the life and personality of Giacomo Castelvetro, pieced together from the profusion of papers and jottings he seemed to leave behind him wherever he went. He devoted much time and energy to getting hold of first-hand accounts of diplomatic

## THE FRUITS, HERBS AND VEGETABLES OF ITALY

and political events and copying out his versions of them, which were by no means objective, coruscating with virulent anti-Catholic sentiments. Castelvetro's role as Italian master in various royal and noble households must have been useful here, giving him access to correspondence and ambassadors' reports, and making it easy to gather and pass on information.

His long and peripatetic life had been far from unhappy. The first of Castelvetro's many adventures began at the age of seventeen, when he and his brother were smuggled out of Modena 'in two chests on a mule'. His enthusiasm for the Reformed Religion made it necessary for him to flee to join his uncle Ludovico Castelvetro, the humanist man of letters and teacher, already in exile in Geneva. A celebrated literary spat, and his openly expressed sympathies for the Protestant cause, had led to Ludovico's persecution by the Roman Inquisition, and for the next seven years Giacomo shared the wandering life of this distinguished but restless man of letters, living in Geneva, Lyon, Basle, Vienna and Chiavenna, and studying Greek and Latin as well as French, German, Spanish and English.

The literary spat was a violent quarrel with Annibale Caro, poet and man of letters, which seems out of all proportion to the cause, a scathing criticism by Ludovico of a poem by Caro, *Venite all'ombra de' gran gigli d'oro*, 'Come to the shade of the great golden lilies', overblown praise of the King of France and the Farnese family. This rather flabby verse, with more than a whiff of McGonagall, was overpraised by Farnese hangers-on at the Papal court, and excoriated by Ludovico for what he felt was a gross and slovenly misuse

## *Introduction*

of the vernacular, the equivalent of splattering ‘innit’ and ‘sort of’ all over a poem. Italian as a literary language had developed from the fresh, clear writing of Boccaccio, Dante and Petrarch, in the fourteenth century, and Ludovico’s life’s work was to expound and defend the purity and correctness of this early humanist version of the language, which he did with a violence and a passion that made him enemies as well as friends. Insults flew around – *gramaticuccio*, *pedantuccio*, *mala gatta a pelare* – as Caro and Castelvetro slugged it out. Seven years of bitter enmity seems an excessive reaction to an accusation of sloppy thinking and sloppy writing, but the controversy also had serious political and religious implications; the golden lilies were the emblems of the Valois rulers of France and the city of Florence, as well as the Farnese family, part of the web of alliances and intrigues of the Roman papal court, and the cultural and religious ethos of the Counter Reformation. Caro, secretary to Pier Luigi Farnese, nephew of Pope Paul III, was totally reliant on their patronage, while Ludovico on the other hand was intellectually and financially independent, a free spirit, proud citizen of the prosperous provincial city of Modena (only a few hours away, down the Via Emilia from Parma, home of the Farnese). His independence of mind made for a sympathy with the Reformed Religion, and a dislike of the cultural hegemony of Rome and Florence. Caro had enlisted the Florentines Pietro Bembo, and Benedetto Varchi to justify his innovative, colloquial language, with Virgil, Dante and Petrarch roped in to back them up, but Ludovico roped them in too, and claimed to be rescuing these early writers from the vulgarities and corrupt practices of this contemporary,

more easy-going, version of the vernacular. So the ‘golden lilies’ carried a weight of unsavoury connotations as well as being Bad Botany – they might have been the wild yellow iris, or the cultivated lily, though not the *giacinto* mentioned by Caro, but nobody in his right mind, thundered Ludovico, could imagine the Muses sheltering in the shade of a plant as insignificant as the lily.

Caro fought dirty, bringing the full might of the Inquisition against Ludovico, who was already under suspicion for his religious views, and a possible connection to the murder of Alberigo Longo, one of Caro’s admirers. Ludovico, called to Rome to explain himself, was imprisoned and interrogated, and eventually fled the country in 1560. Caro was later sacked by his patrons, and fobbed off with the Order of Malta. It is likely that the sorrows of exile were mitigated for Ludovico by his friendship with the intellectual élite of Protestant Europe, and the stimulus of travel, changes of scene and climate, often in the company of his young nephew.

A little episode in an eighteenth-century account of his life by Muratori shows Ludovico in a Venetian printing office, taunting the editor of a new version of Bocaccio’s *Decameron*, with the sarcastic question ‘Bread or melon?’ to the hapless man’s attempt to tidy up Bocaccio by describing the word *menomare* (to diminish) as *voce affettata* (an affected expression). But *affettata* can mean sliced as well as affected, and Ludovico was sending up the editor’s sloppy use of the word, while defending the author’s scrupulous choice of vocabulary. And there were times when translating his nephew’s work that I sensed the irascible presence of Ludovico, chiding me for my own sloppy rendering of

## *Introduction*

### *A note on the translation*

This translation was originally based on the presentation copy dedicated to Lucy, Countess of Bedford, dated 11 July 1614, now in the library of the Natural History Museum. Castelvetro had made another copy in his own hand on 24 June that year, with many marginal comments and additions, and then made a fair copy on 28 September, with more revisions, at Charlton. These are in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge. There are two versions in the British Library, and another one I have not managed to see in the library at Woburn.

When revising the 1989 translation I compared the three 1614 versions, and came to realize that my earlier enthusiasm for achieving a crisp, clear rendering of Castelvetro now seems in places unfaithful to his tone of voice and intentions. The more I read, the more I came to respect Castelvetro's turn of phrase and choice of words; sometimes an apparent long-windedness gives an agreeable conversational tone, a friendly way of imparting information without being didactic or bossy. Castelvetro knew all too well the problems of searching for a just balance between colloquial speech and written vernacular language, having learnt from his uncle Ludovico's experience how passion and rage over the pedantic misuse of words could generate unforgivable animosities.

Castelvetro's lilting, repetitive prose is far from colloquial, using spoken expressions in a literary way but ever mindful of those grotesque golden lilies. His description of spring as that *tututta ridente stagione*, with its musical repetition, is untranslatable, as is the opening sentence of the work: *Piu*

## THE FRUITS, HERBS AND VEGETABLES OF ITALY

*volte meco medesimo pensando e sottilmente considerando.* When writing of the mixed salads of summer, Castelvetro uses rhymes and rhythms that have no equivalent in English: ...*le mischianze, quali andrò notando, portando di bontà il vanto, e la seguente maniera si fanno.*

Castelvetro realized that reproaching us for our crude eating habits was no way to get the British to enjoy reading about Italian fruit and vegetables, and so the endearing enthusiasm of his description of vegetables and how to cook and serve them draws the reader into his nostalgic world of sunlit orchards and lightly dressed salads, with gentle anecdotes and disarmingly amiable prose. He presented his message to us in a deceptively simple style, and this translator can only diffidently try to emulate one of his contemporaries, Giacomo Corbinelli, whose approach to translating a vernacular text was *Quale io l'ho ritrovata, tal la do*, 'As I found it, so I give it.'





*A Brief Account  
of the  
Fruit, Herbs and Vegetables  
of Italy*





## *Dedication*

*To my most illustrious lady & patron,  
Lucy Countess of Bedford*

Since God, in His wisdom, held me worthy of being of service in teaching Italian, my native language, to your Ladyship's late brother, Sir John Harington, I venture today to beseech His Divine Majesty to admit me to the company of your Ladyship's most faithful servants.

As your Ladyship must know, just over two years ago I was imprisoned by the Inquisition in Venice. God rescued me from its murderous clutches through the intervention of His Majesty's Ambassador, who despatched me to safety here in England. When I arrived I was courteously received by my former patron, your Ladyship's brother. As soon as he heard of my impoverished condition, he instructed that I should be given a pension, which was duly paid, as his Lordship's faithful overseer Monsieur Purefoy well knows. My late patron also endeavoured to procure for me a comfortable and honourable situation by which I need not be a burden to anyone, thanks to the talents the Good Lord endowed me with.

I therefore beseech your Ladyship most earnestly that if the occasion ever arises she might do the same, to the everlasting honour and prosperity of her name. Meanwhile I hope she will not disdain to accept this humble offering,

THE FRUITS, HERBS AND VEGETABLES OF ITALY

compiled at the request of my Lord her brother; her well-known enthusiasm for all matters concerning the health and well-being of mankind may dispose her to consider it of some small interest. I humbly salute your Ladyship and kiss your hand.

London, the 27th of July 1614.

Your Ladyship's most humble & obedient servant,

*Giac. °. Casalbetti*

*On the plants  
which are eaten raw or cooked  
in Italy during the Spring  
& also in other seasons*



Over and over again I ponder and wonder at the variety of good things to eat which have been introduced into this noble country of yours over the past fifty years. The vast influx of so many refugees from the evils and cruelties of the Roman Inquisition has led to the introduction of delights previously considered inedible, worthless or even poisonous. Yet I am amazed that so few of these delicious and health-giving plants are being grown to be eaten. It seems to me that through ignorance or indifference they are cultivated less for the table than for show, by those who want to boast of their exotic plants and well-appointed gardens.

This moves me to write down all I can remember of the names of the herbs, fruits and plants we eat in Italy, my civilized homeland, and to explain how to prepare them, either raw or cooked, for the table, so that the English no longer need be deprived, through lack of information, of the delights of growing and eating them.

## THE FRUITS, HERBS AND VEGETABLES OF ITALY

I shall therefore begin my I trust not unworthy undertaking, with God's blessing and an ardent wish to give pleasure to my fellow men, by describing the first fruits of our green and pleasant spring time.



## *Spring*



### *Hops*

And so I start with hops, the first shoots to appear at this time of year. These we never eat raw, but serve as a cooked salad. We wash them in several waters and then cook the desired amount in water with a little salt, when done we take them out and drain very well and serve in a nice clean dish seasoned with salt, plenty of oil, and a little vinegar or lemon juice and some crushed, not powdered, pepper.

Alternatively, once the hops are cooked, some of us flour them and fry them in oil and serve sprinkled with salt, pepper and bitter orange juice, and very tasty they are.

Since hops are an excellent simple for refreshing and purifying the blood, those of us who are concerned for our health but do not wish to bother the doctor with trivial complaints, or fall into the hands of some grasping druggist, take a handful of hops and the same amount of fumitory, chicory, endive and borage, and boil them, well washed, in fresh water without salt. There should be at least two quarts of liquid which must be boiled until reduced by half. The

## THE FRUITS, HERBS AND VEGETABLES OF ITALY

leaves are then taken out and eaten as a salad. The following morning, on rising, we drink a glass of the liquid, tepid, and continue thus for seven to nine days. We then take a dose of senna or manna or some other light purgative. In this way, we keep ourselves fresh and healthy at very small cost. Those troubled with a nasty itching rash use this remedy and in a twinkling become clean and clear.

### *Spinach*

Next comes spinach, a very good and wholesome garden plant, which we eat on its own or accompanied by other herbs, such as chards, parsley and borage. In Italy it is eaten especially in Lent, cooked in salted water and served with oil, pepper, a little verjuice and raisins.

Another way is to cook the spinach first in plain water, drain it, chop it very fine with a large knife, and finish cooking on a low heat in a pan with oil or butter, seasoned with salt, pepper and raisins; this is not at all bad, a really delicious dish.

We often put this spinach mixture in tarts, and in *tortelli* which are fried in oil or butter and served with honey or, better still, sugar.

### *Asparagus*

Next, or more or less at the same time, asparagus begins to appear, which is even better than hops as a vegetable or medicine. Some people eat them raw, with salt, pepper and Parmesan cheese, but I prefer them cooked and served like hops, with oil, a little vinegar, and salt and pepper.

Others take the plumpest spears of asparagus, oil them



## *Spring*

well, roll on a plate in salt and pepper to season them thoroughly, and then roast on a grid. Lavishly sprinkled with bitter orange juice, this makes a most delicate dish.

Quite apart from being good to eat, asparagus is a most health-giving vegetable; it cannot harm any part of the human body and is positively helpful to those who find urinating painful.

At this point I shall digress a little, to explain the best way to grow asparagus, for when I see the weedy specimens of this noble plant for sale in London I never cease to wonder why no one has yet taken the trouble to improve its cultivation. It would certainly be profitable. (One really has to admire those who manage to get rich without endangering their immortal souls, for although we all acknowledge that the pursuit of disproportionate profits is a sin, it surely offends neither the Good Lord nor one's neighbour to earn as comfortable a living as possible from the land.) I am convinced that with the right care you could grow abundant crops of asparagus here with spears as thick as your middle finger, so that one acre of land would yield more income in less time than ten fields sown with wheat. I cannot pass by this opportunity to expound the best way of doing this.

### *How to grow a large crop of good thick asparagus*

First dig a ditch in the spot where you wish to grow the asparagus, say twenty feet long and ten feet wide and three feet deep. Put the soil from it to one side, and sift it carefully to remove stones and pebbles. Cover the bottom of this ditch with a layer of horns from bulls or heifers and over these a layer of the prepared earth four fingers deep. Then on top

## THE FRUITS, HERBS AND VEGETABLES OF ITALY

of this, plant or sow the asparagus and sprinkle over it some fragments of horn left over from the manufacture of combs or post-horns. Cover this with some more of the earth, barely a foot this first time. If this is done in the spring, the ditch should be left half full until the following autumn, when the remaining half of the soil should be thrown in. Then nothing more needs to be done, apart from keeping it free from weeds.

If you want really thick asparagus, on no account cut any of the newborn shoots for the first two years after planting, or the third year if they were grown from seed. Cover them well in mid-autumn with stable straw, which you remove when the danger of frost has passed, and then hoe the surface gently to help the young shoots find their way out.

And also note that when cutting asparagus the shoots should never be severed above the ground, but a good finger's breadth below. Do not take the very small ones, but leave them to grow until the seeds are almost ripe, then cut the haulms and throw them away. And note also that your precious crop should never be harvested before the third year, if grown from seed, but if grown from shoots it may be cut after the second year. This long interval deters many from growing asparagus, yet they are quite happy to plant a walnut tree and wait as long as ten years for a crop.

Finally, as I should have mentioned earlier, sow your asparagus seeds in rich soil in a sunny spot; and with the addition of some mature and well-sieved compost you should get an even more copious crop. You can believe me that an asparagus bed made in this way will last a good ten to twelve years with no further attention. The roots, though,

## *Spring*

will spread unbelievably, so they should be cut back every so often, as all good gardeners know.

Whoever reads this little work should note how the land-owners of Verona gave up cultivating flax and wheat some twenty years ago, realizing what large profits could be made from asparagus, and now get three times their yearly income, sending vast quantities as far as Venice, fifty miles away.

### *Sprouting Broccoli*

Next come broccoli, the tender shoots which grow on the stalks of cabbage or cauliflower plants left in the garden over the winter. They are cooked and served cold with oil and salt and pepper, as I said earlier, when showing you how to prepare hops. Some prefer to cook them with plenty of cloves of garlic, which gives them a wonderful flavour.

### *Artichokes*

Artichokes follow; in Italy their season is the spring, unlike this happy realm, where you are fortunate enough to have them all the year round.

We eat them raw or cooked. When they are about the size of a walnut they are good raw, with just salt, pepper and some mature cheese to bring out the flavour. Some people never eat artichokes with cheese; they either don't like the idea, or it gives them catarrh, or they are simply unaware of how it improves the flavour. Artichokes are good eaten raw until they get as big as ordinary apples.

We cook them in various ways, as well as your English manner, which is not unpleasant. So if we do not feel like



## Summer



In this, the hottest of the seasons, we use far more fresh fruit and vegetables, and dishes made from them, than meat, which seems to us quite nauseating in the excessive heat. Of all the nations in the world, we are paramount in our profusion of good, refreshing fruit in summer time. But I must keep to my plan and so will start by describing the salads and then go on to the fruit of this season.

### *Hearted Lettuce*

So then, these are for the most part lettuce salads; the crisp, white *capucina* is refreshing and at the same time induces the sweet sleep disturbed and driven away by the heat. We also use this in some good cooked dishes, as well as the solid heart, cut into four parts, each well oiled and seasoned with salt and pepper and roasted on a grid over hot embers, not burning coals, so that they are not scorched, and eat them sprinkled with bitter orange juice, which is delicious, almost as good as asparagus. These lettuce hearts are also good stewed or braised.

*Cos Lettuce*

As well as the *capucina* lettuce, there is the *romana* with its much longer, smooth leaves, which our ingenious gardeners tie tightly together round a cane, so that the insides blanch as white as snow and become wonderfully crisp.

*Purslane*

Purslane is eaten a lot as a salad on its own, or more healthily with other greenstuff; and never without some finely chopped onion and pepper to counteract its coldness.

*Cucumbers or Watermelons*

At the same time cucumbers are good. Because of their coldness, we eat them with onions and pepper, or serve them stewed with gooseberries or verjuice. We never use the large yellow ones in salads, as the English do, but only the small, completely green cucumbers.

We make another dish with the big ones, which is very good; we cut them in half lengthways and hollow out the soft part inside. Then fill them with a stuffing of finely chopped herbs, breadcrumbs, an egg, grated cheese and oil or butter, all mixed together, and then roast them on a grid, or cook them gently in an earthenware pot or a tinned copper dish with a lid. You could add pepper or strong spices.

*Early Figs*

Towards the end of May the *fichi fiori* or *primaticci* are good. These early, or first crop, *fioroni* figs are so-called because this noble tree produces, instead of flowers, a fruit even bigger

## *Summer*

than the real fruit which it bears in early September, and which I shall describe later on. This early fig is around for only twenty to twenty-five days. In Venice they call this the Madonna fig, for no good reason that I can think of.

### *Sweet Fennel*

At more or less the same time, the stems of sweet fennel appear, which we eat raw with salt after meals. The young shoots make an excellent Lenten dish, cooked in water and eaten with oil, salt and pepper, which not only tastes delicious but is also incredibly healthy.

This medicinal plant has several good effects. One is that it improves the taste of bad wine – our villainous Venetian wine-sellers solicitously offer innocent or simple-minded customers a piece of nice fennel to eat with their wine, or a few nuts, charitably insisting that otherwise they might do themselves harm by drinking wine on an empty stomach. The other virtues of fennel are that it warms a cold stomach, gets rid of wind, helps digestion and sweetens bad breath.

We preserve quantities of fresh fennel in good white wine vinegar and eat it in summer and in winter when offering drinks to friends between meals. We also serve this pickle with fruit as part of the dessert course, when fresh fennel is not to be had. Fennel seeds are gathered in the autumn. We flavour various dishes with them, and eat them on their own after meals.

### *How to grow sweet fennel from bitter seeds*

At this point it might not come amiss to explain here how sweet fennel can be grown from the bitter kind. Some people

do this by planting the bitter seeds inside a dried fig, others sow them in old pig manure.

### *Lupins*

Our womenfolk and little children nibble at lupin beans between meals during the hottest summer days. They are very bitter but can easily be sweetened by putting them in a canal or deep stream of clear, running water in a tightly fastened bag secured to a pole or hook, so that the current flows right through them. The lupins are left there for two or three whole days, until they have lost their bitterness and become sweet. Then they are peeled and salted and nibbled more as a *passatempo* than anything else, the sort of thing that only appeals to pregnant women or silly children. Dried lupins are used to fatten pigs and other animals.

### *How to rid fields of troublesome moles*

Although this is somewhat outside my main theme, I must mention the fact that, wherever lupins are grown, they drive away moles, who flee their accustomed nests and go looking for lodgings elsewhere. Indeed, to clear a whole field of them you have only to plant twenty of the seeds in different places.

### *A cheap way to enrich poor soil*

The foliage of lupins has the peculiar quality of enriching poor soil, however sterile it may be. So good farmers sow them on their least fertile land, and when the lupins are just about to produce pods, they plough them in, which soon



# Autumn



Autumn in Italy is so temperate and delightful, with such an abundance of every kind of fruit, that we have the saying:

*L'autunno per la bocca et la primavera per l'occhio*

Spring is for looking, autumn for tasting.

And indeed in my province, *la grassa Lombardia*,\* if a nobleman has to send some of his household staff on a long journey he will give them very little money for expenses, knowing very well that for the entire length of the journey they will be able to have as much fruit as they want, without spending a penny.

## *Salads*

First I shall deal with the salads of this season, which are more or less the same as the ones we eat in the spring.

### *Endive* [Cichorium endivia?]

But as well as mixed salads and lettuce, the crisp, white endive starts to appear, and lasts all through the winter.

\*In Castelvetro's time Lombardy included the whole of the Pianura Padana. Today his home town, Modena, is in Emilia.



## *Autumn*

### *Chicory* [Cichorium intybus ?]

When endive is not available we use the tender, green leaves and shoots of chicory, which we chop up fine and serve in a dish rubbed with garlic, and the usual condiments.

### *Cauliflowers*

For beauty and goodness these take pride of place in the cabbage family. First cooked in salted water, cauliflowers are served as I described for hops [cold, dressed with olive oil, salt and pepper]. They also make a wonderful dish cooked in broth and served on slices of bread, with some of the broth poured over, seasoned with grated mature cheese and pepper; cooked this way they are excellent.

### *Hearted cabbage*

These start at the beginning of autumn and go on through most of the winter. We cook them in various ways, besides the English manner, which I quite like: slice a cabbage finely and cook it in a pot in good broth, and when it is half done add a mixture of parsley, beets, borage, thyme and *lardo*,\* chopped together with a big knife until the fat is like butter, and let it finish cooking on a low heat. When dishing it up some add grated cheese and pepper, and some don't. Pounding two or three cloves of garlic with the fat and herb mixture gives it a wonderful taste, if you don't mind the smell of this health-giving plant.

\**Lardo* is not lard, and is best understood as cured hard pork fat. *Guanciale*, cured pig's cheek, and *pancetta*, cured pork belly, are similar. Bacon is as near as we can get (see Glossary).

## THE FRUITS, HERBS AND VEGETABLES OF ITALY

Another way is to take a whole cabbage and simmer it in broth until it is half cooked, then hollow out the middle and stuff it with some of the cabbage you have removed, chopped and mixed with herbs, pounded *lardo*, breadcrumbs, grated cheese, and pepper, along with one or two eggs. Finish cooking the stuffed cabbage in a fresh pan of broth on a low heat and send it to table whole. Adding strong spices, pepper and a little garlic to the stuffing is a good idea.

Sometimes we boil the cabbage whole in salted water and then cut it into four or more pieces, salt them and cover with melted butter and pepper, then leave to mature in a covered dish on the fire until time to serve them up. This method is by no means unpleasant.

By the end of the season all the other kinds of cabbage are good, for they will have had their first touch of frost; without this they are better not eaten. The more frost they get, the better they are.

### *Savoy cabbage*

These are green on the outside and white in the middle, but crisp and open, not closed like the hearted cabbage. They are called *verzotti* or Lombard cabbages. Some are curly and some are not; both are good but the curly ones are considered the best. The other kind are called *verze*. We cook both kinds in two different ways: one is to simmer them in rich broth with a piece of salt pork. Another makes a dish for lean days – cook the cabbage in salted water and when nearly done add a generous ladle of oil and at least two or three heads\* of garlic, which this dish really needs, and serve it with pepper.

\**Capi* means heads, a lot of garlic.

## *Autumn*

It is worth knowing that if you have no salt pork for the first recipe, you can use half a pound of yellow sausage or a mortadella, which you must first wash well in hot water. I know from experience that this eats very well.

Note that if the stalk is left in the ground all winter, after the cabbage has been cut off, little shoots, *broccoli*, will grow on it in the spring. I described these in the section on spring vegetables.

I must not omit to reveal to whoever might deign to cast an eye over my humble efforts the singular virtue of these cabbage stalks – dried in the sun or in the oven, they can be ground to a powder, and make a tried and trusted remedy for pains in the chest. The weight of a gold *scudo* of this powder, taken in good beef or chicken broth, not too fat or too salty, will loosen the chest, and so save the life, of sufferers from the stitch or *point de côté*, as the French call it.

### *Green cabbage*

There is another kind of cabbage which we only eat as a cooked salad; it is all green and grows no higher than a foot or thereabouts, and forms a big head, like broccoli, and should be treated in the same way – not overcooked and well seasoned. To do this we bring a pot of water to a rolling boil and plunge the well-washed cabbage into it two or three times, holding it by the stem. When seasoned as I have described above, it is as good as broccoli.

### *White cabbage*

There are also white cabbages, so called because they are all white. I am not sure if, like the preceding ones, they are



## Winter



### *Chicory*

At the beginning of this dismal season, we use the green leaves of chicory in salads; the tenderest leaves, well washed, are finely sliced with garlic, which we always eat with chicory, and added to other ingredients we use in salads.

At the same time we have the shoots of the chicory plant, which are buried in sand to make them white and crisp.

The roots are also eaten. First they have to be scraped really well with a knife, then cut down the middle and the woody and unpleasant core, its *anima* or soul, as we call it, removed. They are then boiled and cut into pieces and seasoned like other salads, but we put in as well some stoned and well-washed raisins to mitigate their wholesome bitterness.

### *White endive*

For a good part of this season we also have white endive, which I have already described. Since it is well enough known in this country, I need say no more here.

*Watercress*

Then we have watercress, the last green salad of the season, which goes on being available all winter provided the streams are not frozen. This makes quite a pleasant salad, but since there is no alternative it always seems better than it really is. Because it grows in fast-running water it is very refreshing and is usually eaten raw. Unless I can think of anything else, this is all there is to say about green salads

*Cabbage salad*

I once happened to be in France in the company of a group of ladies and gentlemen, and we came one afternoon to a large village with a good inn, where we proposed to dine. One of the ladies, sitting in the window-seat of the dining room, which overlooked a fine kitchen garden, said to me, 'Let's go and pick a salad!' To which I replied, 'Yes, indeed!' When we got there we found nothing but cabbages, so the young lady picked one of these saying: 'Well if there's nothing else, I'll make you all a nice salad with this.'

Having never seen or eaten anything like this before, I kept silent and waited for the outcome. First she removed the green outer leaves until she came to the white part which she proceeded to slice very finely with a razor-sharp knife. She then salted and dressed it in the usual way, and brought it to the table, where it was considered not at all bad, and her ingenuity was admired in no small measure by the entire company.

## *Winter*

### *Cooked onions*

When there are no spring onions, we eat onions cooked under hot ashes, seasoned with crushed pepper. This is tastier and more wholesome than eating them boiled.

Onions are excellent for clearing up the sort of bad cough that lingers after a cold, but without the pepper.

### *Carrots*

We prepare salads from pink and yellow carrots, roasted or boiled in the same way, and turnips as well. They all need pepper as the most important seasoning.

### *Turnips*

We make an excellent dish with turnips, different from the way you do here, first peeled, then cut into thin slices and cooked in good broth, and served with grated mature cheese and pepper.

And this is all I can recall about winter salads, so I now go on to the fruit we have in this cold season.

### *Fruit*

We eat more or less the same kinds of apples and pears in winter as in the autumn. The same applies to fresh grapes, which, as I have explained, we preserve by hanging from the rafters.

So I shall say no more about these, but go on to talk of truffles, as more appropriate to the season, although they can be found somewhat earlier, and indeed in many regions of Italy.

*Truffles*

Botanists tell us that this 'rare fruit' is a kind of noble mushroom, which grows hidden underground and never sees the light of day. Some people go hunting truffles out of gluttony, others are greedy for the money they bring in, and they have two ways of searching for them. When the ground is covered in snow, there sometimes appears on the surface a tiny, bright yellow plant which peasants know conceals truffles, hidden about five or six inches underground. Our renowned poet, Petrarch, comparing the eyes of his beloved to the rays of the sun, said in his ninth sonnet, which begins *Quando 'l pianeta che...*' 'When the planet...' [see Introduction p. 19]:

*E non pur quel, che s'apre à noi di fore,  
Le rive e i colli di fioretti adorna;  
Ma dentro, dove giamai non s'aggiorna,  
Gravido fa di se il terrestre humore:  
Onde tal frutto, e simile si colga... etc.*

But not that glow which lights up  
Hills and dales with little flowers,  
But cannot penetrate the earth,  
Which, pregnant by itself alone,  
Brings forth this fruit so rare,  
As do ... etc.

'This fruit so rare' refers to a dish of truffles the poet was intending to send to a friend.

The other way of finding truffles is by means of that dirty animal, the pig, who loves them more than anything else, and whose acute sense of smell leads it to where they are hidden.

eat frogs and snails, when I was in your charming country. I thought they were quite repellent and harmful, and now I enjoy them so much I eat them the way other people do chickens or partridges.’

He then went on to talk of other things, and our conversation came to an end. Later he very courteously invited me to visit him. I was entertained on several occasions in his beautiful castle, delightfully situated on a nearby hilltop, and there he would offer me exquisitely prepared snails, and we would both laugh heartily at our little misunderstanding.

And here I finish by beseeching God that this little undertaking of mine will be to His greater honour and glory and also of some use to whoever deigns to cast their eye over it.



THE END

*of the account of the*

*Fruits, Herbs & Vegetables that are eaten in Italy.*

*Rewritten on the 28th day of September in the  
village of Charlton in England.*



M. DC. XIV



## *Glossary & Notes*

AGLIATA is a sauce made from garlic pounded in a mortar with peeled and skinned walnuts and salt, and thinned to the required consistency with stock, cream or lemon juice. It is similar to the Middle Eastern tarator sauce. It may have been introduced to Europe by the Arabs, but in countries where nuts were a plentiful local crop the idea of using them to thicken sauces and stews probably developed independently. Breadcrumbs can be used along with the walnuts.

AGRESTO or verjuice is the juice of unripe grapes, used as a mild souring agent or for seasoning dishes instead of vinegar or lemon juice. Sometimes Castelvetro just squeezes a handful of unripe grapes into a stew or over a salad, but a slightly fermented version is now made commercially, with good keeping qualities. The English version of this was made from sour apples or gooseberries as well as grapes. Way back in the 1460s Martino added a handful of de-pipped sour grapes to some chicken fried with diced bacon, which he served with chopped mint and parsley.

ALEXANDERS is one of the Umbelliferae family with a flavour rather like celery or lovage, and grows wild in Britain. The shoots, leaves and stems were all used as flavourings or as a vegetable. It has been superseded by the blander cultivated celery.

ALMONDS were used in ways familiar to us, in marzipan and almond paste, in England as well as Italy, but Castelvetro

also reminds us of their use in almond butter and almond milk. These were not unknown, though, in early seventeenth-century England, and are described in *Elinor Fettiplace's Receipt Book*, contemporary with Castelvetro's work, where the editor, Hilary Spurling, gives clear versions of how to make them today.

When in a hurry, with no time to shell, peel and grind almonds in the correct way, commercial ground almonds can be used to thicken the juices of baked fish or meat. This is a delicious alternative to flour- or cream-based sauces, but must be used thoughtfully, for the almonds can swamp some delicate flavours.

In Castelvetro's time shelled but unpeeled almonds were pounded up and used in sauces; the skins gave the sauce a brown colour, but did not spoil the flavour.

Green almonds can be eaten shell and all; the flavour is rather sharp and fruity.

APPLES: sadly, we have no commercial equivalents today of the varieties of apple described by Castelvetro. Bland Coxes and crisp, tasteless Golden Delicious do not have the aromas and sharpness of the many traditional apples which are now difficult to find.

I once strayed into an abandoned orchard in Herefordshire and every windfall I tasted was an explosion of flavour – sharp, sweet, perfumed – and all different. It is a good idea on country walks to look out for wild crab apples and escapes from gardens and orchards and try using them in sweet and savoury dishes. They are a good addition to fruit jellies.

Castelvetro writes of the *paradiso* apple being used to

## Glossary & Notes

perfume ointments. In addition, apple juice has a tonic, toning effect on the skin, hence the name ‘pomade’, from the French *pomme*.

APRICOTS are transformed when dried or preserved in sugar. They develop a rich aroma and a dense texture and can be used in savoury as well as sweet dishes. Dried apricot paste, sold in paper-thin sheets, is a useful source of energy and vitamin A and can be whizzed with water in the blender to make the delicious Middle Eastern apricot drink, *qamar al din*. In Italy the kernels are made into a liqueur, *Amarretto di Saronno*, and also used to flavour bitter-sweet macaroons, *amaretti*, which are used, crumbled but sparingly, to flavour sweet and savoury dishes, like pumpkin *tortelloni* or dried vegetable purées.

ARBUTUS is a juicy, astringent, red fruit on a bush or small tree, also known as the strawberry tree, which grows wild all over the Mediterranean, and in south-west Ireland. It is also grown as an ornamental tree in gardens in the milder parts of England.

ASPARAGUS is used in Italian regional cooking in many inventive ways which makes dunking them messily in melted butter seem quite barbaric. They can be rolled in oil and salt and pepper and grilled or roasted. Castelvetro’s use of olive oil and bitter orange juice as a dressing is light and delicious. Lightly cooked asparagus is excellent served with a little butter and grated Parmesan, and passed briefly under a grill or in a hot oven.

The bones and horns Castelvetro instructs us to use in preparing an asparagus bed provide a slow release of

## THE FRUITS, HERBS AND VEGETABLES OF ITALY

nitrogenous fertilizer into the soil, similar to hoof and horn meal.

AZAROLE, *Crataegus azarolus*, was introduced into Italy from the Middle East in Roman times. The fruit is eaten ripe, and used in jams and jellies.

BACON, see *lardo*.

BITTER ORANGE JUICE is a delicious alternative to lemon or lime juice on meat or fish, or with a cooked vegetable salad. Although sweet oranges were available in Castelvetro's Italy, their juice would not have been used in this way. Slices of citrus fruit were often arranged decoratively round the rim of a serving dish, and chopped citrus fruit dressed with sugar, salt and rosewater made a tasty relish. The aroma of both the juice and the peel of bitter oranges can be enjoyed all the year round by buying a crate of Seville oranges when they come into the shops briefly in January and February. After making a year's supply of marmalade, there will still be plenty of oranges left to squeeze out the juice to freeze in the ice-cube tray. Scrape in some peel as well, and store the orange cubes in plastic bags in the freezer. They can be used in salad dressings, sauces, popped inside the cavity of duck before roasting, added to Mexican and Latin American recipes, and put into drinks. The peel can be frozen separately to use where the aroma but not the acidity is needed – it is excellent in chocolate cakes and spiced buns.

BEANS: Broad beans have been around in Europe since the Stone Age, enjoyed raw when young, later cooked, as Castelvetro describes, and also dried as a resource for winter

## Glossary & Notes

consumption. *Fava dei morti*, ‘beans for the dead’, was a dish of slowly stewed dried broad beans before they morphed into bone-shaped sugared biscuits in later times.

As well as the native ‘horse beans’ or black-eyed beans, Castelvetro mentions the relatively new arrivals, brought in from the New World during the previous century and assimilated much more rapidly than the potato and the tomato. Our name ‘French bean’ reminds us of the French presence in North and South America. Castelvetro describes runner beans as ‘Turkish’, meaning exotic or foreign. They did not originate in Turkey. These beans caught on because they were an easy crop, content with poor soil, and useful to grow in the fields between main crops. They could be eaten fresh and young, shelled or in their pods, and kept, dried, for use through the winter. Castelvetro’s instructions for cooking dried beans are precise and in line with what we now know about the dangers of eating undercooked beans. (They contain harmful cyanogens which can be destroyed by boiling, uncovered, in water.) He tells us to throw away the water after the first boiling and then simmer them in fresh water, only then adding salt and seasonings.

BROCCOLI in Castelvetro’s time was not a specialized crop like calabrese, but the little shoots which grew on the stalks of cabbages and cauliflowers left in the garden over the winter. The addition of lots of chopped garlic when cooking broccoli is a great improvement, together with the anachronistic chilli pepper.

BROTH is how I translate *brodo* – the word ‘stock’ has uncomfortable associations with commercial stock cubes.

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Castelvetro spent the last years of his life in the household of Sir Adam Newton. The Castelvetro books and papers came into the possession of Sir Adam's son, Henry, who took the name Puckering when he inherited the estate and title of Sir John Puckering, the Lord Keeper. The Puckering library was left to Trinity College, Cambridge in the late seventeenth century, and embedded in it are many manuscripts in Castelvetro's hand. The ones which are relevant to this study are listed below:

Three versions of *Brieve racconto di tutte le radici, di tutte l'erbe e di tutti i frutti, che crudi o cotti in Italia si mangiano* in Castelvetro's handwriting:

R.14.19, dated 14 June 1614.

R.3.44, dated 28 June 1614, dedicated to 'Il signore Girolamo Biedo, Il Senatore'. This copy contains many reworkings and alterations.

R.3.44a, dated 28 September 1614.

R.10.6, Italian conversations. A rough draft of a conversation

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manual prepared by Castelvetro for some of the Cambridge students to whom he taught Italian in 1613.

R.10.7, a fair copy of a version of this manual, not in Castelvetro's hand.

R.4.24, 'Pezzi d'istoria...' a translation by Castelvetro of political writings by Antonio Perez, in Castelvetro's handwriting. 'Il vulgarizzamento di questo libro fu per ispetial favore di Dio, compiuto da Giocopo Castelvetri modonese a xiii di Febraio MCDVII et incominciato ma diverse fiate tralasciate per vari impedimenti sopravvenutigli a xxiv di novembre del MDCV In Vinegia. Ne prima l'ha riscritto come qui hora si vede, al netto, se non hoggi, ch'e Lunedì, terzo giorno del MDCXI nella stessa citta, del quale favore egli si rende all'eterno Iddio, tutte le gratie maggiori che sa, et piu.'

At least fifteen other volumes of political writings, either in Castelvetro's hand, or with annotations by him, are among the Puckering papers. They seem to have been written, or copied, by Castelvetro during his last years in Venice or his exile in England.

R.4.36, 'Italian tracts' contains 'Eccellente trattato della mercantie de Preti...' Charlton, viii Agosto 1614, finished xi Ottobre 1614; 'Insegnamento di quelle particelle della vulgar lengua che turbano piu gli stranieri che ad'appararla si danno' is written in a copyist's hand, with corrections and alterations by Castelvetro.

The same volume contains the story of Giulietta, written in Castelvetro's rough script, an innocent young girl whose rendezvous with her lover in the local cemetery ended in tragedy.

R.14.36, alchemical tract: 'Libro per certo d'oro, come della contenenza delle sue principali materie, posta nella facciata seguente chi leggera ben tosto vedra. In Venetia rescritto d'originale antico, l'anno di salute MDCIV.' Written in a copyist's hand, with titles

THE FRUITS, HERBS AND VEGETABLES OF ITALY

and introduction by Castelvetro. Some 'segreti medicinali'.

R.14.47, 'I rari e non mai stampati secreti medicinali dell'eccellente fisico et filosofo Sr. Tadeo Duni medico principale di Zurico vivente, e che passa ottanta sette anni. Havuti del MDCXII in Zurico.'

*British Library, London*

Add. 9282, *Brieve racconto di tutte l'herbe et di tutti i frutti, che crudi o cotti in Italia si mangiano.*

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Harley 3344, *Album amicorum* inscribed on the fly-leaf in the hand of the Cambridge antiquary, Thomas Baker: 'Jacobus Castelvetri, his Album, who lived and probably died in the house of Sir Adam Newton...'

## *Acknowledgements*

My thanks are due to the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, for permission to study the Castelvetro material in the Wren Library, and for the use of their MSS of the *Brieve racconto* in this translation. The Botanic Library of the British Museum, Natural History (now the Natural History Museum), made available the MS dedicated to the Countess of Bedford, on which this translation is based, and provided generous help with the illustrations in the original edition of 1989.

I am also grateful to the following (not all of them, alas, alive today) for their generous help and encouragement: Luigi and Anna Balsamo, Nicolas Barker, Trelde Bicknell, Paul Breman, Alan Davidson, Philip Gaskell, Patience Gray, Mary Greco and Diana Thomas, Jane Grigson, the Lancellotti restaurant, Sarah Martin, David McKitterick, Dr D. N. Pegler, Denis Rhodes, Professor W. T. Stearn, John Tyldesley, and the staff of the Botanic Library, British Museum, Natural History. I am particularly grateful to the editor of the first edition, Caroline Davidson, for all her help with this project, and to James Mosley, who first drew my attention to the Castelvetro manuscripts and has been a constant support throughout. I am grateful to Tony Kitzinger for providing moral and technical support. Tom Jaine has been active and zealous about this new publication of Castelvetro's text, and I thank him for his enthusiasm and encouragement.



# Index

- Acetaria. A Discourse of Sallets* (Evelyn) 29  
*agliata* 74–5, 115, 136  
*agresto* 76, 89, 115  
    *see also* verjuice  
*Albana* grape 88  
*albatro* 92  
*Album amicorum* (Castelvetro) 17, 23, 25–6  
Aldrovandi, Ulisse 28  
alexanders 59, 115  
almond butter 74, 116, 126  
almond milk 35, 74, 116, 126  
almond paste 74, 115  
almonds 74, 87, 115–6, 135  
    ground 132  
*Amanita caesarea* 129  
*amaretti* 35, 117  
Anne of Denmark, Queen 22, 27  
appetite 78  
apples 87–8, 109, 116  
    sour 115  
apricots 67, 117  
arbutus 92, 117  
*Archidipno overo dell'insalata*  
    (Massonio) 29  
*armelini* 67  
artichokes 28, 49–51, 55  
asparagus 24, 28, 46–9, 117–8  
azarole 118  
  
bacon 34, 115  
bacon fat 34  
bad breath, and fennel 65  
balsamic vinegar 130  
basil 52, 56  
  
Basle 90, 112  
beans 24, 32, 35, 76–8  
    broad 51–3, 118  
    and chestnuts 97  
    dwarf 77–8  
    runner 119  
    split 53  
    Turkish 76–7  
Bedford, Lucy, Countess of 19, 26–7, 32, 36, 37, 41  
beef 35, 78, 122  
beef marrow 50  
beets 83  
*biancomangiare* 132  
Bimbi, Bartolomeo 126  
bladder, regulation of 60  
blood  
    and grass peas 123  
    purification of 45–6  
*bollito misto* 35, 131  
Bologna 20, 23, 28, 70, 71  
borage 28, 45, 46, 56, 83  
Bottighisio, Francesco 69  
bracken shoots 124  
bread  
    and chestnuts 97  
    and millet 81  
Brenta canal 98  
Brescia 91  
broccoli 33, 34, 49, 85, 119, 125  
    sprouting 49  
broth 34, 35, 50, 54–56, 75, 77, 80, 83–5  
burdock 54–5  
butter 35  
    almond 74, 116, 126

## Index

- cabbage 28, 33, 34, 49, 120  
  green 85  
  hearted 83–4  
  salad 108  
  Savoy 84–5  
  white 85–6
- cannabis 76
- capers 59, 131
- cappuccino* 35
- capucina* 63
- cardoons 55
- Carleton, Sir Dudley 24
- carobs 99
- carrots 28, 34, 109
- Castelvetro, Giacomo 11–38, 115–35
- Castelvetro, Ludovico 12–18, 37
- Castelvetro, Niccolò 11
- catarrh  
  and carobs 99  
  and strawberries 60
- cauliflowers 49, 83
- Cecil, Sir Robert 22
- celery 33, 104, 115
- Charles, King of Sweden 22, 72–3
- Charles I, King 25
- Charlton, near Greenwich 25, 26
- cheese 23, 33  
  and artichokes 49–50  
  grated 56, 61, 64, 83, 84, 86, 109  
  Parmesan 46, 51, 61, 117, 123  
  ricotta 61, 135  
  salty 51
- chestnuts 95, 129  
  sweet 96–7  
  water 98–9, 136
- Chiavenna 68
- chicken 35, 60, 62, 97, 99, 132
- chickpeas 79, 120
- chicory 28, 45, 83, 107, 120–21  
  wild 56
- chillies 35, 131
- Ciotto, G. B. 23
- cocido* 131
- coffee 35
- constipation 54, 68–9, 133
- cooking vegetables 33–5
- Cope, Lady 24
- Copenhagen 23, 72
- cornel (cornelian cherry) 92, 121
- cornelian cherry 92, 121
- Cornus mas* 121
- Coronopus squamatus* 135
- cotechino* 35
- coughs and dried figs 87
- Crataegus azarolus* 118
- crème fraîche* 123
- cress, swine 135
- Crete 51
- cucumbers 61, 64, 121
- currants 68, 122
- D'Este family 28, 33
- digestion, fennel as aid to 65, 122
- dogwood 121
- Donne, John 27
- druggists 122
- Duni, Taddeo 21
- dysentery 81, 98
- egg 33
- eggplants 60–1
- elder flowers 61
- Eleocharis tuberosa* 136
- Elinor Fettiplace's Receipt Book*  
  (ed. Spurling) 116
- Elizabeth I, Queen 18
- Eltham Park 25, 26, 102, 129
- endive 45, 83  
  white 107
- English cooking, salad 58
- Erastus (Thomas Lieber) 20, 21
- Evelyn, John 29

## Index

- fat dishes *see* lean dishes  
*fava de morti* 52–3  
*favetta* 53  
Felici, Costanzo 30, 120  
fennel 56, 122–3  
    sweet 65–6  
*fesenjan* 132  
Fettiplace, Elinor 116  
fever  
    and cornelian 92  
    and pomegranates 98  
figs 23, 64–5, 87, 123  
fish 15  
Florio, John 27–8  
flour  
    broad bean 52  
    millet 128  
    sweet chestnut 97  
fritters 78  
frogs 114  
fumitory 45  
*fungghi porcini* 101–2, 129  
  
garlic 33, 34, 35, 49, 56, 74, 79, 83, 84,  
    100, 101, 107, 115, 119, 120, 124, 125,  
    127, 136  
Garzegnuolo pear 88  
*gavagnini* melons 71  
Genoa 28, 71, 126  
*ghiaccioli* pears 70  
*gnocchi* pears 70  
Gonzaga family 33  
goose 80–1, 75, 97, 123  
gooseberries 60, 64, 115, 123  
gourds 30, 61, 104–6, 133  
grafts, preserving 72–3  
grape sauce 89  
grapes 17, 109, 130  
    *agresto* 76, 89, 115  
    *albano* 88  
    common 88–91  
    *duora* 89  
    *luglienga* 67  
    *marzemino* 88  
    muscat 67–8, 130  
    *pignuola* 89  
    *rosetta* 89  
    *tosca* 88  
    *trebbiano* 88  
    *tremarina* 68  
    unripe 89, 115  
grass pea 123  
*gremolata* 127  
Guarini, Giovanni 22  
gums and strawberries 60  
  
*habb-al-musk* 130  
ham 35  
Harington, Lord, of Exton 26  
Harington, Sir John 25, 26–7, 41  
Harvey, Dr Gabriel 21  
hazelnuts 73–4  
health and diet 31–2  
Henry, Prince 25  
honey 22, 46, 54, 71–2, 78, 120, 124, 130,  
    134, 135  
hops 45–6, 124  
humours 31–2, 55, 124–5  
  
Inquisition 18, 24, 41, 43  
Isotta de' Canonici 20–22  
  
James I (VI of Scotland) 18, 22, 26,  
    27, 33  
Jones, Inigo 27  
jube berry 95–6, 125  
  
Kent Museum of Rural Life 124  
kidney ailments  
    and chickpeas 79  
    stones 71, 79, 87  
    and strawberries 60



## Index

- kohlrabi 86
- Laetiporus sulphureus* 129
- Laws of Moses 81, 90
- 'lean' days 35
- lean dishes 126
- lemon balm 56, 121
- lemons 126–7
- Lent 35, 46, 65, 74, 87, 98, 101, 120, 126,
- lentils 79–80
- Lepiota* species 129
- Lettera sulle insalate* (Felici) 30
- lettuce 28, 82, 127
- cos 64, 127
- hearted 63
- hearts 34, 56, 63
- Webb's Wonder 127
- liliotti* melons 71
- liver, inflammation of 60
- Lombardy 51, 75, 90, 111,
- luglienga* grapes 67
- lumbago 120
- lupins 66, 127–8
- 
- mallow 54
- malmsey 69, 133
- manna 46
- marjoram 52
- marrows 75–6
- Marzemino* grape 88
- marzipan 74, 115
- Masque of Queens* 27
- Massonio, Salvatore 29
- medlars 17, 93–5, 128
- melon rind 71
- melons 70–72, 136
- millet 80–81, 128
- minestra* 128
- mint 52, 56, 115
- Modena 23, 24, 35, 68, 70, 71, 82, 103,
- 121, 128
- 
- moles, driving away 66
- Montaigne, Michel de 27
- Moor Park, Herts 27, 36
- mortadella* 107
- mostarda* 89
- mostarda di frutta* 35, 130
- mulberries 62, 128
- muscardini* 67
- muscatelli*
- melons 71
- pears 67
- mushrooms 99–103, 129
- boletus 75, 101–2, 129
- field 100–1
- ovali* 100–1, 129
- parasol 101, 129
- polmoneschi* 102
- sponge 103, 129
- stone 103, 129
- 'without a name' 102–3, 129
- musk 129–30
- must 130
- mustard seeds 130
- mutton 78
- 
- Naples 99, 120, 126, 129
- nasturtium 56
- nettles 124
- Newberry Library, Chicago 23
- Newton, Sir Adam 25, 26, 102
- Newton, Lady 102
- North, Sir John 17, 91
- Nyköping 73
- 
- olive oil 34, 35, 36, 50, 53, 76, 77, 83, 111,
- 117, 124, 126
- olives 96
- olla podrida* 59, 131
- onions 33
- cooked 28, 109
- orange juice (main reference) 118

## Index

- oregano 35  
oysters 50, 126
- Padua 71, 98  
Pallavicino, Horatio 20  
panic grass 81  
paradise apple 88  
parsley 32, 46, 52, 83, 101, 115, 127  
parsnips 34  
*Pastor fido* (Guarini) 22  
pastry 78, 135  
    and artichokes 50  
    and beans 78  
pastries 35, 99, 135  
peaches 86, 131  
pears 70, 109  
    Bergamot 88  
    Garzegnuolo 88  
    Muscat 67,  
peas 54  
    mangetout 34  
*pekmez* 130  
pepper 28, 32, 33, 131  
peppers 35  
*persicata* 87  
Petraarch 13, 18, 110  
pies 50, 60, 68, 81, 122, 126, 135  
*Pignuola* grape 89  
pig's cheek 35  
pine nuts 99  
Piobbico 30  
*Piper longum* 131  
*Piper nigrum* 131  
Piuro 68–9  
pizzas 35  
*Plantago coronopus* 135  
plums 91  
*Polypodium vulgare* 130  
*Polyporus tuberaster* 129  
pomegranates 98, 132  
*poppone* melons 71  
pork 75, 80, 84, 85, 123, 125–6  
potatoes 35  
poultice 81, 120  
prunes 91, 97  
Puckering, Sir John 25  
pumpkin tips 105–6  
pumpkins 17, 30, 35, 104–5, 133, 135, 136  
Purefoy (overseer) 41  
purslane 33, 64, 125, 133
- qamar al din* 117  
quinces 93, 133
- radish juice 79  
raisins 46, 53, 59, 68, 69, 91, 97, 107, 133  
Raleigh, Sir Walter 19  
rampion 56  
rashes, itching 46  
ravioli 35  
rhubarb 69, 133  
rice 80  
rocket 56, 120  
*romana* 64  
*romanette* melons 71  
Rome 13, 103, 111  
root vegetables 33, 34  
rosemary 53, 56, 79  
*Rosetta* grape 89  
Rosselli, Giovanni 30  
Rötteln, Baden Baden 112
- sage 53, 79  
salad burnet 56  
salads 55–6, 82–3  
    bean 77  
    cabbage 108  
    and cucumber 64  
    German 58  
    and hops 45–6  
    making 57–8  
    other writings on 28, 29, 30  
yoghurt 121

## Index

- San Grigioni 68  
Sandonnini, Tommaso 20  
*sapa* 89  
Sardinia 51  
sauces 32, 60, 115, 116, 118, 123, 132  
sausages 23,  
    yellow 85  
*Saxifraga rotundifolia* 135  
Scappi, Bartolomeo 28, 122, 131  
scions 124  
*scotie* melons 71  
*senape* 35, 130  
senna 46  
service fruit 97–8  
sesame seeds 130  
Sidney, Sir Philip 19  
skin impurities 52  
sleep  
    and aubergines 61  
    and lettuce 63  
snails 114  
sorb-apples 97–8, 134  
sorrel 56  
soups  
    almond and bread 74  
    and panic grass 81  
*sozzobuoni* pears 70  
spices 23, 26, 33, 35, 54, 64, 78, 84, 86,  
    99, 105, 122, 133  
spinach 46, 135  
spinach beets 52  
Spurling, Hilary 116  
squabs 60  
squashes 160  
stews 71, 75, 81, 115, 125, 127, 128, 131, 134  
'stitch' 85, 120, 134  
Stobart Special 132  
stock 33, 54, 56, 77, 83, 84, 85, 115, 119–  
    20, 132, 133, 134  
stomach, cold 65  
strawberries 59–60  
Struppius, Dr 21  
*sucuk* 135  
sugar 28, 35, 46, 54, 60, 61, 73, 76, 86,  
    93, 94, 96, 98, 99, 117, 118, 119, 122,  
    130, 134  
*sugolo* 135  
Sweden 22, 23, 36, 72, 132  
sweet herbs 52, 54, 61, 76, 100, 123  
swine cress 135  
  
*tagines* 133  
tarragon 56  
tarts 46, 60, 78, 99, 105, 135  
Tassoni, Liberata 11  
teeth  
    and strawberries 60  
thyme 52, 83  
tomatoes 35  
tongue, pickled 35  
*tortelli* 46, 135  
    of *favetta* 53  
*tortellini* 135  
*Tosca* grape 88  
*Trapa natans* 136  
*Trebbiano* grape 88  
*tremarina* grapes 68  
truffles 18, 19, 110–13  
turkey 97  
turnips 109  
Tuscany 74, 92, 93  
  
urination, painful 47, 54, 71, 79  
  
vanilla 35  
veal 60, 123  
vegetable purées 117  
vegetables 29, 38  
    charcoal-grilled 33–4  
    cooking 33–4  
    root 33, 34  
Venetian glass 24

## *Index*

Venice 23–5, 26, 41, 49, 65, 70, 71, 76,  
80, 90, 92, 98, 126

*ventura* 94–5

verjuice 46, 60, 64, 75, 89, 100, 115

*see also agresto*

Verona 24, 49

*vin cotto* 89,

vinegar, balsamic 130

violet, sweet 56

walnut oil 75, 136

walnuts 74–5, 115, 132, 136

watercress 108

watermelon seeds 73, 136

watermelons 64, 73

wind

getting rid of 65

and vetch 80

wine

improving taste of bad 65

pomegranate 23, 98, 132

Wolfe, John 20, 30

Wotton, Sir Henry 23, 92

Yoghurt 121

Zante 68

*zatte* melons 71

*zuccato* 76

