

*The Neapolitan Recipe Collection: Cuoco Napoletano.* Terence Scully.  
Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2015. viii + 256 pp. \$80.

*Cooking and Eating in Renaissance Italy: From Kitchen to Table.*  
Katherine A. McIver.

Rowman & Littlefield Studies in Food and Gastronomy. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. xii + 204 pp. \$38.

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For a long time, food was an underappreciated element of Renaissance (and wider) historical study. Thankfully, this has changed in recent decades, with food an increasing presence in research, publications, and classrooms. One important element behind this has been a focus on late medieval and early modern culinary texts, such as cookbooks and dietary handbooks, as a source for information on Renaissance cooking and eating practices.

The first paperback edition of Terence Scully's translated and annotated 2000 edition of the *Cuoco Napoletano*, a fifteenth-century culinary manuscript in New York's Pierpont Morgan Library, is an excellent example of the richness of such sources. Scully discusses the history of the manuscript and the context of its anonymous authorship, before analyzing each recipe in detail. The recipe commentaries are both detailed and fascinating, providing context and analysis for ingredients, methods, and contemporary parallels from other sources. For example, in commentary on recipe 197 ("Salsa hispana a calamari"), Scully notes a similar recipe in contemporary Catalan collections (a list of parallels is included in an appendix). Scully's command of language is

especially impressive, with both verbs and nouns analyzed in detail for their meaning and usage, and a rich glossary of ingredients and utensils (including variant spellings) included in section 5. There is also a useful list of late medieval cookbooks and culinary manuscripts. Details on both everyday dishes (recipe 11: “White Ravioli”; recipe 27: “Garnished Turnips”) and dramatic dishes (recipe 69: “Redressed Peacocks Which Seem Living; and How to Make Them Breathe Fire through Their Mouth”; recipe 70: “To Make a Cow, or a Calf, or a Stag Look Alive”) will interest both those working on food history and a wider audience.

The structure of the translation and annotation makes using the book somewhat difficult. The complete transcribed Italian text comprises section 2, followed by Scully’s excellent English commentary on each recipe in section 3 and the English translation of the text in section 4. While this structure permits a welcome unbroken Italian transcription of the original manuscript, the book would be considerably more user friendly were the English text of each recipe on the facing page, with the commentaries underneath. Instead, one has to constantly flip back and forth: for example, the intriguing (and in Scully’s view unparalleled for its time) recipe for Bolognese sausage (no. 87) is on page 63 in Italian, page 190 in English, with English commentary on page 136. This is difficult for both academic and lay use. Especially irritating is the fact that the recipes are identified only by number in section 3’s commentaries: no titles are listed. There is also, unfortunately, no index to search for specific ingredients or types of dishes. Despite these structural irritations, the edition is wonderfully rich and interesting, and its issuing in paperback will hopefully see it reach a wider audience. Scully’s editions make early modern culinary texts more visible and accessible, something that is essential for the growing field of food history to become a staple in university classrooms and curricula.

Such texts have become a key source for much recent research on early modern food history. In *Cooking and Eating in Renaissance Italy*, Katherine McIver references Scully’s edition of Bartolomeo Scappi’s 1570 *Opera*, and extensive use is made of other Renaissance cookbooks and culinary manuals, as well as a wide range of secondary material. McIver assembles a great deal of interesting detail on cooking and dining practices in elite households and courts, from the perspectives of their cooks, stewards, hosts, and diners. These sections (especially chapters 3, 4, and 5) will be useful and compelling to those interested in the culinary practices of the Italian elite during the Renaissance, the cookery practices in their households, their preferred dishes, and the ritual of their banqueting and dining. The textbook style — with introductions and recaps — will make the book useful for students seeking an introduction to the subject of elite Renaissance food practices, though the frequent section headings inhibit the development of a flowing argument, leaving much of the book descriptive rather than analytical. The editing and publication are both somewhat disappointing: the index, unfortunately, does not list any foods except bread, while the black-and-white reproductions of some vivid images (including Veronese’s *Marriage at Cana*) and discussed locations (such as the Palazzo del Te in Mantua) are of rather poor size and quality.

Much of McIver's description of elite cooking and dining comes from surveying a wide range of Renaissance culinary texts, such as those by Scappi, Platina, and others, though these are not the only sources used. An interesting section on food preferences as revealed in letters is based on McIver's research on the letters of Isabella d'Este in the state archives in Mantua. These illustrate a more personal source of information on cooking and eating than the texts of culinary writers. So too does an intriguing section on household inventories from the state archives in Parma and Rome, though it is frustratingly short on context: the details of kitchen inventories leave one wanting to know what kind of people these documents represented and what kind of a food culture and society they inhabited; but they remain undeveloped. Both of these sections using nonculinary texts could have formed a larger part of the book.

The food culture outside of elite households and courts is, unfortunately, not explored in depth. Artisans and artists (including Leonardo and Michelangelo) are used as examples for the food of "average people," while a two-page section on "The Working-Class Kitchen" actually focuses on courtesans, architects, and other people of upper or middling status. This inevitably also affects the gender focus of the book, with the women who did most of the cooking and food preparation in ordinary families obscured by the male cooks and stewards of courts and elite households. McIver's book is an interesting overview of cooking and eating in the higher echelons of Renaissance Italy, but it is disappointing that there is little discussion of historiographical issues (for example, the section on inventories does not address the vibrant field of material culture) or research on wider Italian Renaissance society and culture. The reader is left wanting a lot more at the end of each chapter and at the end of the book.

This is an important challenge for future research in food history: moving beyond the often-seductive richness of culinary sources to a wider range of sources on and around food, integrating the vibrancy of food into broader issues of Renaissance culture and society, and moving beyond revelation of too-long-ignored details into deeper historical analysis.

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