

Savor the innovative cuisine from this beautifully calligraphed cookery manuscript by Renaissance master chef Maestro Martino

Maestro Martino, *Libro de Arte Coquinaria*. Rome, ca. 1465. 9 inches x 5 3/4 inches (229 x 146 mm), 176 pages.

Maestro Martino's *Libro de arte coquinaria* is undoubtedly one of the most important surviving cookery books of the Renaissance. Martino's status as an eminent chef in the service of Italian princes and popes prepared him to undertake a synthesis of the cooking of his time; bridging the cuisine of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, he cooked both trendsetting modern food and traditional banquet fare for his prominent employers.

Martino was born in the province of Ticino (now part of Switzerland), and as a young man went to Milan to seek his fortune as a cook. In the 1450s the Sforzas were the first to enjoy his food. He went on to cook for Cardinal Ludovico Trevisan, popes Paul II and Sixtus IV, and the famous condottiere Giangiacomo Trivulzio. His employers were discerning, demanding gastronomes who would have insisted on expertise with familiar foods, as well as the imaginative handling of new flavors, dishes, and ingredients discovered in the course of their travels. Continuity and innovation are constant factors in the history of Italian gastronomy, and both are seen in Martino's work. Martino's cuisine had an enduring influence on European cooking, and today it continues to inspire innovative chefs.

The composition of Martino's recipes anticipates the modern cookery book in many ways: he introduced a distinct vocabulary and gave specifications for cooking times using hours and fractions of hours instead of the prayer durations then standard. Martino divided his material into clearly differentiated chapters following a new logic — that of the preparations themselves — so that meats, sauces, tarts, etc., are presented in rational sequence; within each chapter similar recipes are grouped together according to name or content.

This manuscript from the Library of Congress, with its wonderfully legible humanist hand, is in a contemporary binding, probably Paduan, of full calf

over wooden boards. The earliest recorded owner of the Martino manuscript is the unknown contemporary (or near-contemporary) whose name appears at the top of the blank verso facing the first page of text. Variouslly read as “Liber mej. Raphaeli Baldeli” or “Liber mej. Raphaelis Baldotj,” the name cannot be identified (in either form) with a documented Italian of the Renaissance. In 1927, the manuscript was bought by Joseph Dommers Vehling (1879–1950), a socialist immigrant who began his career as a *sous-chef* and rose to the heights of hotel management and founded the International Hotel Workers Union. Many of Vehling’s books are now at Cornell University. Vehling sold the manuscript to A.W. Bitting, who presented it to the Library of Congress (according to the penciled note on the verso facing the opening of the manuscript) on January 29th, 1941.

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