

Lasagne in the Style of Bartolomeo Scappi

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Lifespan of a Culinary Genius

Bartolomeo Scappi was likely born near the beginning of the 16th century, though no exact date is given. By the year 1536, he had established himself as a proficient master cook, implying that he must have been an adult, at least well into his twenties if not his thirties. This implies his birth was somewhere in the first decade of the 16th century.

Likewise, his death is not well established. His master work, *The Opera*, was published in 1570. He appears to have lived long after its publication.¹ An archival register in a Church in the small village of Dumenza is believed to indicate that town that as his place of origin, and also documents his death as April 13, 1577.²

Ties to the Church

It is difficult to describe Scappi's life without discussion of the Roman Catholic Church. Scappi was employed for many years by one of the Cardinals and on many occasions cooked for the popes and other high-ranking church officials.

In the 16th century, much of Italy and especially Rome was defined not only by political authority, but instead dominated by the Church. The power of the Catholic faith was under assault from multiple sides: the capture of the Pope by Charles V in 1527, the Great Schism between 1378 and 1417 where two independent popes both tried to claim power, the rejection of the Catholic Church by Henry VIII of England, and the challenge emerging from Martin Luther's demands for reform, challenged the traditional authority of the Roman Catholic Church. In response, a succession of popes responded in many cases by tightening authority and growing increasingly dogmatic.³ Excommunication was used as a weapon, and the Index of Forbidden Books was published in 1557. A crackdown on corruption within the church was one positive outcome, though nepotism became even more common in search of those who would be loyal.⁴

The Church is relevant because Scappi was employed by multiple cardinals of the Church, beginning with Cardinal Campeggio of Bologna, perhaps Cardinal Jean du Bellay, Cardinal Grimano, as well as others. The exact succession of employers is difficult to fully determine. What is known is that Scappi cooked for a number of Cardinals at various events, and even popes from time to time, during events and gatherings. The last documented event of his life had him as the pope's personal cook, preparing a banquet for the anniversary of the coronation of pope Pius V. Depending on accounts, this was in either 1566 or 1567.⁵

¹ Scully, Terence. *The Opera of Bartolomeo Scappi*, translated by Terence Scully. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2008. Kindle Edition, pp. 24-29. Original work dated 1570. The book contains both commentary by Scully and translations of Scappi's original text. I credit Scully for information coming from the commentary, and Scappi for citations from the original (translated) text.

² Scully, pp. 30-31.

³ Scully, p. 16.

⁴ Scully, p. 17.

⁵ Scully, pp. 24-25.

Being entrusted with such an event speaks to his great renown and skill at the time. Further, the Opera is voluminous, containing not only recipes but guidelines on everything from kitchen management and equipment, ingredient selection, to preparation techniques. The dishes listed come not from one region, but draw from experience from a number of regions of Italy.⁶

On Ingredients

In Book I of the Opera, Scappi writes as a conversation with his apprentice, explaining various aspects of cooking to the young man. He begins with the proper layout of a kitchen, and later discusses aspects such as the proper compensation for one with the proper skills. But he also gives detailed discussion of various ingredients.

On Butter

Butter, Scappi explains, should be made from the fat of fresh milk. Both yellow and white are good when fresh. Scappi favors butter made from milk taken in the months of March through May, which he believes also makes the best cheese. The color depends on the grazing land. He further gives instructions for preserving butter, which includes salting it to avoid it going rancid.⁷

On Cheese

In addition to the discussion under butter regarding the time of year for the best milk, he mentions that fresh cheese should be made from creamy milk. He discusses salted cheeses, among them Parmesan, describing the aroma especially among those made from March through June. He refers specifically to provatura, specifically those made in March, whether fresh or salted.⁸

On Sugar

He speaks of coarse and fine sugar, and emphasizes that they should be light and clean and free of dirt. He specifies that it must be stored in a dry place.⁹

On Flour

He recommends flour that is ground a month before it is used, in a mill driven by a good flow of water and when the millstones are not brand new. It may be because this results in a finer grind, after the millstone has had a chance to wear down slightly. Starch flour he specifically recommends be as white as possible.¹⁰

Scappi's Lasagne

Scappi provides a recipe for something called 'Lasagne', which is actually found in Book V of his treatise: **of Messer Bartolomeo Scappi on Pastry**. It appears to be a sweet dish, made primarily from pasta, cheese, cinnamon and sugar – and of course, butter, which he emphasizes explicitly.

Recipe

The text of the recipe (from the translation):

84. To prepare a tourte of tagliatelle or of lasagne cooked in a fat meat broth or in milk.

⁶ Scully, p. 32.

⁷ Scappi, p. 138.

⁸ Scappi, p. 139.

⁹ Scappi, p. 144.

¹⁰ Scappi, p. 146.

Get tagliatelle or lasagne made with fine flour, eggs and either warm goat's milk or warm water; cook them in a fat meat broth or in goat's or cow's milk. When they are done, take them out and let them cool enough to be cut. Then have a tourte pan greased with butter and lined with a sheet of royal dough made with fine flour, rosewater, sugar and butter. Onto that dough set down a layer of provatura slices sprinkled with sugar, pepper and cinnamon, with a few lumps of fresh butter and grated Parmesan cheese; then put the bits of tagliatelle or lasagne on that, and on top of them make another layer of the same ingredients as are under them. You can make up several layers doing the same thing. Bake it, open-faced, in an oven or braise it. When it is almost done, sprinkle it with sugar and cinnamon. Be very generous with the butter.

In the same way you can do any sort of macaroni, made on an iron bar and cooked as described above. You can occasionally intersperse mint, marjoram and ground cloves of garlic with the pasta. Always serve it hot.¹¹

Analysis

The recipe is very clearly a dessert, though one built on a base of pasta. It is also a somewhat flexible dish, given the options of making the pasta with either milk or water, to cook it in goat or cow's milk. Cooking the pasta in milk infuses some of the milkfat and flavor into it as well. With the quantity of butter and cheese, this is a fat-heavy dish, to the extent that the pasta is almost being fried by the butter, especially with the instruction to cook it open-faced.

The sprinkling of sugar and cinnamon over the top appears to be intended to create a glaze of sorts, as well as a bit of a garnish.

I read the last paragraph as describing another option, perhaps one in opposition to the cinnamon and sugar combination, to make a more savory version. However, the fresh mint is an interesting potential addition!

Components

The dish is assembled from several other components. Each of these components will be discussed in more detail in the 'Redaction' section.

Royal Dough

Used as in effect a crust. The addition of sugar will give it a sweet edge and crumb, with the rosewater adding aroma. Other than that it appears to be a pretty straightforward butter-flour-sugar pie crust. For this I plan to use All Purpose flour, simulating the 'fine flour' Scappi calls for.

Pasta

Described as a mixture of flour, eggs, and either warm goat's milk or water. A little salt should also be added. This is late enough period that soft wheat as opposed to a harder wheat like semolina would have been available and stored as ground flour. Scappi used the term 'flour', while elsewhere in the document he refers to semolina specifically. However I am choosing to use semolina for the pasta to encourage greater gluten formation to make the noodles easier to handle.¹² Another website references Scappi's work and calls for semolina/durum flour.¹³

¹¹ Scappi, p. 588.

¹² Scully, p. 83.

¹³ "Medieval Lasagna." *Historical Italian Cooking*, Unknown date, <https://historicalitaliancooking.home.blog/english/recipes/medieval-lasagna/>

Provatura

Scappi refers often to provatura as a cheese. I have not been able to locate it pre-made. Originally made from buffalo milk. Descriptions I have found indicate that it is similar to provolone and mozzarella, but softer and with a slightly more acidic flavor and a tougher outer rind.¹⁴ For this I am making fresh mozzarella with a little more acid in the water bath to attempt to get close to the texture.

Milk

I don't have easy access to goat's milk, so am using cow's milk (whole). When cooking the pasta, I will keep it around 180 degrees F (82 C) to prevent excessive curdling/burning. In addition, I am adding cinnamon and sugar to the water to infuse those flavors into the pasta as it cooks.

Sugar

I am using 'Turbinado' sugar (brand name: Sugar in the Raw) rather than modern granulated sugar, grinding it more finely as needed. Turbinado sugar is the least-refined version of cane or beet sugar, coming from the first pressing, and thus it might be more similar to what was available in period. It also supplies a slightly richer, more complex flavor.

Pepper

While long pepper (*piper longum*) might have been more common in period, Scappi would have had access to black pepper as well (*piper nigrum*). I am using black pepper for its less harsh flavor.

Cinnamon

I have not been able to locate a source for old-world cinnamon. Most of what is sold in the United States is actually Cassia. However, Chinese cinnamon that I can find from my local Asian Market appears to be closer in flavor to cinnamon as Scappi would have had. I am grinding it fresh for additional flavor and aromatic compounds.

Butter

I am making my own fresh butter from heavy cream, for the added flavor and richness that comes from the freshness as opposed to packaged butter.

Mint

I am including fresh leaves of mint, adding those into the layers, to help infuse the flavor through and complement the cinnamon and sugar.

Redaction

Pasta

For the pasta, using some experimentation, I arrived at the following set of ratios based on a website's recommendation original suggestion:¹⁵

Accessed 25 Sept. 2025.

¹⁴ "Buffalo Mozzarella Cheese." *Delicious Italy*, 1 Sept. 2010, www.deliciousitaly.com/campania-naples-food/buffalo-mozzarella-cheese

Accessed 25 Sept. 2025.

¹⁵ "Medieval Pasta - Tria Di Vermicelli." *Historical Italian Cooking*, Unknown date, <https://historicalitaliancooking.home.blog/english/recipes/medieval-pasta-tria-di-vermicelli/>

Redacted (Modern) Recipe

325g semolina (durum) flour
150g water
½ tsp salt
1 egg white

Mix milk with cinnamon and sugar in a pan, enough to cover the bottom. Add cinnamon and sugar to the mixture and blend.

Mix the ingredients on a surface by hand and knead, until the dough forms a ball, approximately 10 minutes. Let it rest for 20 minutes. Roll the dough out to approximately 1mm thickness and then cut into strips.

Heat the milk in the pan to 180 F (82 C) and carefully add each strip to it. Use tongs carefully to ensure the strips are completely submerged. Once finished, cut to the appropriate shape to form a flat layer in the pan.

Butter

I am starting with heavy cream, and whipping it until it goes past stiff peaks and becomes butter. I'm using a stand mixer for this. In period, a butter churn might have been used or it would be done by hand, generally by an assistant.

Redacted (Modern) Recipe

1 quart heavy whipping cream

Beat on high using a pastry paddle until whipped cream is formed. Continue mixing until the buttermilk and butter separate. Strain out the butter and set aside to drain. Yield: approximately 1 pound butter.

Royal Dough

The definition of a royal dough is referenced multiple times by Scappi, but he is not overly specific as to its nature. It appears to be a basic pie crust from the ingredients, with a mixture of sugar, flour, rosewater and butter. He doesn't mention blind-baking the crust and given there is not a great deal of liquid that step is likely unnecessary.

354g flour
8g granulated sugar
4g salt
284g butter in small roughly ½ inch pieces
½ cup ice cold water (with rosewater infusion)

Combine the flour, sugar, and salt in a bowl. Add small pieces of butter and use hands to cut the butter into the dry ingredients until it resembles small peas and beans.

Add 4 tablespoons of ice water and toss together with a rubber spatula. Add additional water and gently mix until it looks and feels wet.

Dump dough onto a lightly-floured surface and press together. Press out to a rectangle the size of your pan. Fold the top third toward the center toward you, fold the bottom third over the top half. Rotate and repeat twice. Make into round disks 1 inch thick and chill for 45 minutes.

Provatura/Mozzarella

This one is the most tricky. I am making it according to the process for mozzarella I used in a previous project, adding vinegar at the final stage to provide a slightly more acidic flavor.

- 2 gallons milk
- 1 tblsp citric acid
- 1 tablet vegetable rennet
- ¼ cup vinegar
- 1 tsp salt

Combine the tablet of vegetable rennet and the citric acid to the milk, and heat to 90 F (32 C). Once the mixture coagulates, cut the curd with a knife into smaller pieces. Heat to 110 F (43 C) and allow it to rest for 10 minutes.

Strain the mixture, using cheesecloth. Bring a fresh measure of water with vinegar added to 185 F (85 C) in a clean pot, using the cheesecloth to provide a porous container. Dip the curd into the water several times, then use a spoon to move the curds around and spread the heat. Do not stir while the mixture is in the hot water!

After the curd has started to develop a stringy texture, hands can be used to manipulate the curd and shape it. Chill the cheese prior to cutting.

Preparation

Once the above ingredients are prepared, final assembly can begin.

- [per half-pan of lasagne]*
- 2 lb mozzarella/provatura, cut into thin round slices
- 4 oz finely grated parmesan cheese
- 2 batches of pasta (see above)
- 1 batch of royal dough (see above)
- ¾ lb butter (see above)
- 2 tsp salt
- pepper to taste (fresh ground)
- fresh-ground cinnamon
- 100g fine-ground turbinado sugar
- coarse turbinado sugar
- 0.5 oz mint leaves (approximately 2-4 leaves per layer)

Roll out the chilled royal dough and line the bottom of the half-pan. If it is decided to do a blind bake, do so at 425 F (220 C) for about 10 minutes. Sprinkle fine-ground sugar and

cinnamon over this layer. Meanwhile, bring a pan of milk to 180 F (82 C), enough to generate visible steam but not to bubble and boil. Try to minimize burning on the edge of the pan.

Roll out the pasta dough until it is approximately 1 mm thick, then cook it in the milk for about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, place approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of the provatura and butter pieces into the pan, spreading out as necessary, as well as two to four mint leaves (depending on size). Also add about $\frac{1}{6}$ of the parmesan cheese. When the pasta is fully cooked, lay it out within the pan, trying to get as complete of coverage as possible. Dust the top with cinnamon, sugar, salt, and fresh-ground pepper.

Continue making layers in this way. You should be able to get four layers of pasta in addition to the base layer of royal dough.

Atop the final layer of dough, spread out the last of the parmesan cheese, to get an even coating over the top. Bake for 15 minutes, covered, then an additional 15 minutes uncovered. Next, add coarse-grained sugar over the top and increase the temperature to 400 F (205 C). Cook for another 10 minutes at the higher temperature, until the sugar and parmesan cheese melts and lightly caramelizes over the top of the pasta.

Increase the covered baking time to 20 or 25 minutes if the mixture is starting from a refrigerated state rather than being freshly prepared.

Garnish with any remaining leaves of mint and serve. After it cools slightly, it should cut nicely into squares.

Discussion

Scappi recommends cooking the dish uncovered. However, I have found that especially if starting from a refrigerated state, it helps to begin baking with foil atop to bring it up to temperature more slowly. Scappi did not have much access to refrigeration.

The pasta can be stretched lightly before being placed into the water. Using a durum/semolina flour-based pasta provides enough gluten to enable the dough to be stretched, especially if it ends up slightly too thick. Be careful manipulating it, using tongs to place it into the milk or remove it. The dough should be able to be cut to size. Try to use as few pieces as possible, especially on the top layer, to improve appearance and make it cut neatly.

The mint is optional, but I find it adds an interesting dynamic to the flavor, especially if it is relatively subtle. Too much can be overpowering.

Add a little bit of extra salt to the layers, especially if using unsalted butter.

In Scappi's time, they did not worry about cholesterol. Your cardiologist may have a heart attack just from reading this recipe.

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