

**Anna Martellotti, *La cucina normannoaraba alla corte di Guglielmo II di Sicilia*. Indagine storico-filologica sui ricettari Normanni, Leo Olschki, Firenze 2024, pp. 383.**

It is immensely gratifying to see another publication by the Italian scholar Anna Martellotti appear on the publishing market. The book titled *La cucina normannoaraba alla corte di Guglielmo II di Sicilia*, published by Leo Olschki, is yet another of the author's works dedicated to culinary topics. In previous years, the same publisher released *I ricettari di Federico II. Dal "Meridionale" al "Liber de coquina"* (2005) and *Linguistica e cucina* (2012).

The current book is divided into two parts. The first consists of five chapters of varying length, while the second contains an edition of texts and their translation into Italian (pp. 330–355). In the first chapter (pp. 1–16), the author introduces two cookbooks, which she labels Normanno A and Normanno B, both preserved in the British Library in London. These two treatises, written in Norman, were copied in Sicily at the end of the 13th or beginning of the 16th century. In addition to discussing the manuscripts, the author compares their content with the *Book of Cooking* (*Kitāb al-Ṭabīḥ*) by Ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq, the oldest known cookbook of its kind, composed in Baghdad between 940 and 950.

The second chapter is the longest and most important (pp. 17–230). It contains a detailed description and analysis of recipes for dishes such as pasta, lasagne, omelettes, braised meats, stew, soup (including broth for the sick), as well as sweets like candied fruit, marzipan, pudding, puff pastry, and almond paste. The author also discusses the spices used in the cuisine of the time, noting that as many as 44 out of 61 dishes include such flavouring ingredients. Among those mentioned are ginger, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, black pepper, and saffron. This chapter also explores the use of colorants in medieval gastronomy. The author explains that in some dishes, the colour derives naturally from the ingredients themselves, while in others, it results from added colorants such as saffron or parsley. The last discussed ingredient is sugar, which, as the author notes, "is traditionally listed among the products that reached the West after the Crusades" (p. 226).

In the third chapter (pp. 231–250), the author analyses the characteristics of Norman cuisine in Sicily, basing her discussion on the recipes found in the Normanno A and B books as well as the aforementioned work by Ibn Sayyār al-Warrāq. The following chapter (pp. 251–284) primarily offers an analysis of food-related vocabulary appearing in the treatises. The fifth and final chapter (pp. 285–329) is dedicated to examining how Arab-Norman cuisine from the court of William II influenced later medieval European cuisine.

The considerable effort involved in preparing this publication should be emphasized and appreciated. Particularly engaging are the added descriptions explaining the origins of the discussed ingredients, their methods of preparation, and their use in the gastronomy of the time. Equally helpful for the reader are the explanations of difficult vocabulary and the comparisons between specific words and their equivalents in other languages or dialects.

The publication highlights the process of mutual influence and interpenetration between Arab and Norman culinary traditions. To reconstruct the culinary practices in question, the author drew upon rich sources, including manuscripts and numerous documents, which she frequently references throughout the work. By interpreting the texts in the cultural context of William II's court, the author demonstrates that cuisine was an important element of Sicily's

cultural policy. Her detailed explanations – including terms such as *crispelle*, *crosterole*, *tarte*, and *temprer* – enable a better understanding of the culinary practices of that era.

This book makes a valuable contribution to research on Arabic translations and the presence of Muslim elements in European traditions. One of its major strengths is the inclusion of both the original texts and their translations into Italian. The book is likely to interest historians, historians of medicine, linguists, dietitians, and history enthusiasts – especially those fascinated by the culture and cuisine of medieval Europe and the Arab influences within it.

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