



# A TASTE OF EMILIA ROMAGNA

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Although Jews lived in several towns of Emilia Romagna throughout the centuries, including Modena, Bologna, Parma, Reggio and Finale Emilia amongst many others, the Jewish cuisine which seems to have survived or prevailed is the one of the charming city of Ferrara.

An old saying from Ferrara goes “Dell’oca non si butta via niente”, which translates as “Nothing gets thrown away from a goose”. Inspired by the local cold cuts of pork, the local Jews recreated similar cuts using goose, so much so that the celebrated Pellegrino Artusi called the goose in Italian cooking “the pork of the Jews”.

All its parts were eaten: its fat was widely used in cooking as it was full of protein and calories and was cheap to buy. Its meat was used, especially to make ‘prosciutti’, literally ‘ham’ (but of course not real ham), or to make goose sausages or salami. For centuries the word ‘sallame’ (spelt with two ‘l’) instead of ‘salame’ was used within the Jewish communities in order to distinguish the goose salami from the forbidden pork one. Finally, foie gras was made from the goose liver and it was, like today, very expensive. Sometimes it was even the subject of illegal bets and smuggling.

Goose was widely used in Emilia Romagna, Veneto and Piedmont, and played an essential role in the domestic economy of Italian Judaism from the late Middle Ages until modern times, when it was replaced by turkey as its meat was tenderer, less fat and cheaper.

Many tasty dishes from the Jewish community of Ferrara have goose and turkey as their main ingredients, and turkey meatloaf is still a popular dish. A well-known and interesting goose dish is the ruota del faraone (Pharaoh’s wheel), also called frisensal or hamin as eaten on Shabbat, in particular for Shabbat Beshalach (when the Torah portion describes God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt). It is made with fresh tagliatelle, goose salami and fat, pine nuts and raisins. It’s very tasty even if its grisly ingredients represent the Egyptian soldiers and chariots being caught up in the waves of the closing Red Sea for chasing the Jews escaping from Egypt.

This dish, and many other old traditional recipes, are laborious and few people make them still, if at all. These include the testine di spinaci – stems of spinach – and guscetti – husk of green peas – reflecting what I call ‘inventive thrift’, which is using parts of food that others would throw away and making a meal out of it. These dishes were in fact created at the time of the ghettos, when living conditions were particularly poor and creativity was a necessity in the kitchen.

Although there were Ashkenazi Jews living in Emilia Romagna, Jews mostly arrived after the Inquisition in 1492 from Spain, Portugal and Southern Italy. The influence in the regional cooking is therefore mainly Sephardi, with dishes such as buricchi, which remind us of the Spanish and Portuguese empanadas and can have both sweet and savoury fillings. Jenny Bassani Liscia, sister of Giorgio Bassani (*The Garden of the Finzi Continis*) wrote a delightful recipe-memoir of her time growing up in Ferrara in the 1930s and then in Livorno after WWII. She describes the buricchi with savoury or sweet filling

and the little shop in the ghetto in Ferrara which used to sell them – specifying as well that her mum used to make them much better, which charmingly reflects a true Italian Jewish mother-daughter relationship! Jenny graciously describes many other delicious dishes using popular regional ingredients such as pumpkin and fresh pasta in any possible form.

Finally, unique are the special dishes to celebrate the Jewish festivals, such as the zuccherini and montini – sweets for Purim, the scacchi ferraresi – savoury matzo bake for Pesach. Riso in brodo al limone – a warming broth for the breaking of the fast of Yom Kippur, and zucca frita con lo zucchero – a sweet fried pumpkin, also for Yom Kippur.

And those of you looking for an easy summer recipe should try fried aubergines with cantaloupe melon, which replace the classic Parma ham and melon dish often served as a starter. The recipe, from Franca Passigli Romano, says to dice the aubergines, soak them in water for one hour. Drain them and add rock salt. Then leave them in the colander for another hour. Squeeze them well, there will be dark liquid coming out, and shallow fry them in hot oil on high flame for a few minutes until golden. Drain on kitchen paper and serve with the melon or on their own as a side vegetable dish. The aubergines are quite salty here and go very well with the sweet melon. Interesting and original, like the Jews of Ferrara.



## COTOLETTE AL LIMONE DELLO SHABBAT (LEMON SCHNITZEL)

This is a recipe of Jose Romano Levi, who lived most of her life in Ferrara, married into the long-standing Jewish Ferrarese Bonfiglioli family. This is the Bonfiglioli family recipe for cold lemon schnitzel, an ideal recipe for a summer Shabbat lunch. It is easy to make and is truly delicious. It can be made with either chicken or veal.

2-3 eggs  
salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
approx. 100 gr plain breadcrumbs  
approx. 100 ml mild olive/sunflower oil  
6 chicken breast fillets  
juice of 2 lemons  
approx. 500 ml water

Break the eggs and mix in a shallow bowl with a little salt and pepper. Pour the breadcrumbs in a separate shallow bowl.

Warm up the oil in a non-stick frying pan. Coat the chicken fillets in the breadcrumb, then in the egg mixture and in the breadcrumbs again.

Shallow fry the chicken fillets, on a low-medium flame and uncovered, for 3-4 minutes on each side. Place the cooked schnitzels on paper towel to drain the extra oil.

Place them back in a large wide saucepan and add the lemon juice, the water – enough to cover them, and cover with a lid. Bring to the boil and gently simmer for 40-45 minutes, turning the fillets only once, otherwise they break.

Leave to cool down completely and serve at room temperature. The lemon sauce will become dense, of a similar consistency to a jelly.



I would like to thank my dear friend Deborah Romano Menasci, her mother Franca Passigli and her aunt Jose Romano Levi for their useful tips and warm contributions.

## DISHES TO DIE FOR

The Emilia Romagna Tourist Board laid on some wonderful meals for its *Jewish Renaissance* and other guests. All the restaurants managed impressive variety without using any meat or non-kosher fish. The menu was rich even for the one member of the party who did not eat fish. The flavours were subtle and the presentation superb. Two restaurants went to particular trouble to utilise Jewish recipes. These were the menus they served us.

### FERRARA

IL RISTORANTINO DI COLOMBA  
Vicolo Agucchie, 15, +39 0532 761517

**Budino di zucca** pumpkin/squash soufflé (a traditional Ferrarese Jewish recipe)  
Kamut (khorasan wheat) and rye **pappardelle** with a vegetable ragu  
**Ricotta stuffed ravioli** with a taleggio (cheese) and walnut sauce  
Platters of **grilled vegetables and cheese**  
**Apple tart** (typical Ferrarese Jewish recipe)



### CENTO

HOTEL EUROPA, Via IV novembre, 16,  
Tel +39 051 903319

**Filets of St Peters fish** wrapped in aubergine  
Canaroli rice (the local speciality) **risotto with asparagus**  
**Ravioli stuffed with salt cod** and potatoes in a creamed courgette sauce  
Transparent envelopes filled with **sea bream and vegetables** served with rosemary scented roast potatoes  
A tulip-shaped biscuit basket filled with **seasonal fruits** on a bed of crème patisserie

FOR OUR VEGETARIAN  
**Radicchio soufflé** on creamed gorgonzola  
Hand-made **tagliatelle with artichoke hearts**  
**Frittissimo Bolognese** traditional Bolognese mixed deep-fried vegetables  
**Crema** crème patissiere.