

ART + CULTURE

Ada Boni

*Cookbook author, editor and educator*BY **Deirdre Pirro**

Share



bookmark

Sat 29 Jun 2024 4:54 PM

The start of the Italian summer brings not only a long-awaited annual vacation, whether at the sea or in the mountains, abroad or in the countryside. It also heralds in the busiest wedding season throughout the peninsula. According to Bmii – *Borsa del Matrimonio in Italia* (Marriage Stock Exchange in Italy), Italy has increasingly become one of the favourite countries for **destination weddings** among couples from all over the world with Tuscany topping the list, followed by Puglia and Campania, while Lazio, Sicily, Piedmont and Veneto are not far behind. June, July and especially September are the most popular months to tie the knot, while **Saturday remains the preferred day of the week and Monday the least**. However, this lack of preference to get married at the beginning of the week seems to belie the old Italian saying, “*Né di Venere né di Marte, non si sposa non si parte*” (Neither on Friday, nor on Tuesday, do you marry or leave to go away)

For many years, it has been a tradition to gift one (or both) of two famous Italian cookbooks—*Il Talismano della Felicità* (The Talisman of Happiness) and *Il Cucchiaino d'Argento* (The Silver Spoon)—to a new bride. I was given both by two of my Italian husband's maiden aunts as a wedding present. While I love them both, the one I like the most is the *Talismano*, not only because of its **recipes and sound advice**, but also because of the good wishes contained in the title. The *Talismano*, which was promoted as a “precious aid in reaching marital happiness” was the **first Italian cookbook specifically aimed at brides-to-be** or newlyweds, who were “very elegant women of impeccable taste” but who probably did not even know how to cook a boiled egg. The recipes range from *antipasti* to entrees, main courses and desserts, many of which are easy to prepare, while others are more challenging. Nevertheless, they are all written clearly and concisely, and cover many different Italian regional specialties.



Published by *Preziosa* magazine, whose owner and editor-in-chief at the time was **Ada Boni**, who also authored the cookery book, the first edition came out in 1925 and was followed by six more editions until 1933. Later editions were produced by the Colombo publishing house in Rome.



Born **Ada Giaquinto** in Rome in 1881, she developed an early passion for food because her paternal uncle, Adolfo Giaquinto, was a renowned chef and food writer who founded the culinary magazine *Il messaggero della cucina* (The Messenger of the Kitchen). At a young age, she married sculptor and music critic, Enrico Boni, who came from a wealthy family of jewelers in Rome. They set up house in the beautiful **Odescalchi palace** in the heart of the city and had a summer villa along the Santa Marinella coast. In 1915, her husband, who shared her interest in food, suggested they founded *Preziosa* together. Although occupied with her writing, Ada gradually managed to set up a **cooking school for the aristocracy** in the capital, giving lectures, taking part in round table discussions and later having a **radio programme** of her own. Towards the end of the 1950s, she began writing a column called *The Talisman of Arianna*, based on an obvious allusion to her most famous cookbook for *Arianna*, the women's magazine. Throughout her life, she continued to write cookbooks, including *Elogio della cucina italiana* (Praise of Italian Cuisine), which was translated into English and Spanish; *La Cucina Romana* (Roman Cuisine), published in 1930; *Prime esperienze di una piccola cuoca* (Early Experiences of a Small Cook), published in 1949; and *Cucina regionale italiana* (Italian Regional Cooking), which was published in 1979, also in English, after her death from pneumonia at her home in Rome at the age of 92 in May 1973.

In 1972, the English language version of the *Talismano* had been published under the title, *The Talisman Italian Cookbook*. It was updated to suit the American market by converting the weights and measures to its standards and by adapting some of the ingredients to ones that could easily be found in any local supermarket.

The legacy left by Ada Boni is reflected in her philosophy that, "Cookery, the most joyful of the arts and at the same time the most pleasing of the sciences. A field much more modest than the others but one of great practical utility", a point of view shared by many over the last seven decades since the *Talismano* first appeared.