

# BOOK REVIEW

## *The Banquet:*

## *Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe*

Ken Albala

University of Illinois Press

2007

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Ken Albala's *The Banquet: Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe* is a fascinating account of what dining was like in the great courts of Western Europe in the late Renaissance. He covers virtually every aspect, from table setting, to staff and carving, as well as the food, drinks, spices and garnishes. He even includes a small number of primary source recipes.

*The Banquet* has been thoroughly researched. There is an extensive bibliography as well as copious footnotes. It contains a great deal of information on the format of the Renaissance banquet that I had never seen before. I was fascinated to read, in the chapter on kitchen staff and carving techniques about the *scalco*, a man who was the head of a number of servants, including the cook, and whose job it was to oversee them and the kitchen, and decide what dishes the cook would make. There is no good translation into English for *scalco*, though the closest approximation, according to Albala, would be "banquet manager".

For anyone wanting to know the ins and outs of a banquet in the late Renaissance, or even earlier, since he does discuss some of differences and changes in banquets from the Middle Ages to the late Renaissance, *The Banquet* is a must buy.

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