Romagna, co-op dairies, and local production, which highlight intelligence and humanity). This approach makes for good work, a living wage, professional pride, and produces “exquisite food in the process” (p.286). Harper might have resisted, however, a grandiose salute to all of Italy—“grazie mille, Italia!”—and yet another photo portrait of himself.

—Luisa Del Giudice, Los Angeles

*Tenendo innanzi frutta: Vegetali cultivati, descritti e dipinti tra ’500 a ’700 nell’Alta Valle del Tevere / Beholding Natural Fruits: Vegetables in cultivations, writings and paintings in the Upper Tiber Valley, from the 16th to the 18th centuries* Isabella Dalla Ragione
Città di Castello: Petrucci Editore, 2009
165 pp. Illustrations. €70

Isabella Dalla Ragione’s text, supplemented with essays by Giuditta Rossi and Mario Squadroni and photographs by Emilio Tremolada, is born of the love of the botanical species of Italy’s Upper Tiber Valley in the modern region of Umbria. The volume is part of a larger project to re-create in San Lorenzo di Lerchi an orchard of the lost or forgotten arboreal species of the area around Città di Castello. *Tenendo innanzi frutta* is thus a study of fruit and vegetable cultivation rather than of gastronomic or art history. The period in question is the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the evidence consists of documents from the archive of the Bufalini family in San Giustino and contemporary botanical frescoes in Umbria.

The documents, which had already been published in 2001 by Enrico Mercati and Laura Giangamboni, give an account of the agricultural activities on the estates of the Bufalini and Vitelli families. They are a primary source for the history of agriculture; one of the registers, called “Harvests of Several Estates,” dates back to 1479 and is among the oldest of its kind in Italy. Other volumes attest to the introduction of early forms of tenant farming, the working conditions of laborers, and the equipment used to work the land. But Dalla Ragione’s primary interest is the cataloguing of the produce grown for family consumption and sale.

“Occasionally,” the author confesses, “to rest my mind and eyes during the study of the documents, I looked up at the wonderful frescoes that decorate the noble rooms of the Bufalini Castle” (p.47). What she saw, and what the book lavishly illustrates, are the works of Cristofano Gherardi, an artist from Sansepolcro who moved in the circles of Giorgio Vasari, the painter and unrivalled biographer. Vasari’s sympathetic *Life* of Gherardi confirms Dalla Ragione’s hypothesis that the festoons of vegetables and fruits the artist painted in 1546–1554 were accurate imitations of what was growing at the time in the castle’s orchards and gardens. While the visual evidence supports Vasari’s premise that Gherardi was indeed beholding natural fruits to portray lively pictures of them, the empiricism of the artist’s approach was by no means unique, for the same fruits and vegetables are seen in Prospero Fontana’s frescoes in the nearby Palazzo Vitelli, while the underlying pictorial conventions originated in Rome at the beginning of the century.

The festoons surrounding Raphael’s mythological frescoes in the entrance loggia of the Villa Chigi (now Farnesina) in Rome set the tone. Begun in 1518 by Giovanni da Udine, many of the fruits and vegetables depicted in these frescoes clearly had sexual overtones. In his *Life* of this artist Vasari described “a Priapus fashioned from a gourd and two eggplants for testicles…while nearby a cluster of large figs, one of which overripe and bursting open, is penetrated by the gourd.” Erotic puns were common in Renaissance poetry and art, with the fig and the peach being especially popular symbols of human sexuality. Dalla Ragione generally steers clear of such allusions, however, although her discussion of peaches does read them as “feminine, almost sensual” (p.108). Florio’s 1598 Italian-English dictionary confirms the meaning of *pesca* as “a young man’s bum.”

The author’s agricultural interests are occasionally complemented by references to historical publications like Costanzo Felice’s famous 1569 treatise on salad, or Vincenzo Tanara’s 1644 investigation of Italian farming practices, but dietary issues of the kind raised by Giacomo Castelvetro’s *The Fruit, Herbs, and Vegetables of Italy*, composed in 1614 (English translation, 1899), are not addressed. Mixing gastronomy with the prevailing belief in humoral theory, Castelvetro’s text recounts that melons, for example, are “marvelously refreshing to the system…and are excellent for those troubled with kidney stones and will cure burning urine between midday and starlight.” For recipes based on the same fruits and vegetables, one may also wish to turn to Terrence Scully’s new and well-indexed translation of Bartolomeo Scappi’s *Opera*, originally published in 1570.

—John Varriano, Mt. Holyoke College