



The Delizia!: The Epic History of the Italians and Their Food

By John Dickie

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The Delizia!: The Epic History of the Italians and Their Food By John Dickie

Buon appetito! Everyone loves Italian food. But how did the Italians come to eat so well? The answer lies amid the vibrant beauty of Italy's historic cities. For a thousand years, they have been magnets for everything that makes for great eating: ingredients, talent, money, and power. Italian food is city food. From the bustle of medieval Milan's marketplace to the banqueting halls of Renaissance Ferrara; from street stalls in the putrid alleyways of nineteenth-century Naples to the noisy trattorie of postwar Rome: in rich slices of urban life, historian and master storyteller John Dickie shows how taste, creativity, and civic pride blended with princely arrogance, political violence, and dark intrigue to create the world's favorite cuisine. *Delizia!* is much more than a history of Italian food. It is a history of Italy told through the flavors and character of its cities. A dynamic chronicle that is full of surprises, *Delizia!* draws back the curtain on much that was unknown about Italian food and exposes the long-held canards. It interprets the ancient Arabic map that tells of pasta's true origins, and shows that Marco Polo did not introduce spaghetti to the Italians, as is often thought, but did have a big influence on making pasta a part of the American diet. It seeks out the medieval recipes that reveal Italy's long love affair with exotic spices, and introduces the great Renaissance cookery writer who plotted to murder the Pope even as he detailed the aphrodisiac qualities of his ingredients. It moves from the opulent theater of a Renaissance wedding banquet, with its gargantuan ten-course menu comprising hundreds of separate dishes, to the thin soups and bland polentas that would eventually force millions to emigrate to the New World. It shows how early pizzas were disgusting and why Mussolini championed risotto. Most important, it explains the origins and growth of the world's greatest urban food culture.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this revelatory history of gourmet Italy from antiquity to today, Dickie (*Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia*), examines the centuries of religious, political and sociological events that effectively thrust Italian food into today's global limelight. Though it begins with the requisite gnocchi, lasagna, tagliatelle and tortellini, this bittersweet historical narrative quickly dispels the romantic notion that contemporary Italian fare has been the prideful plate of the rural peninsula and peasants throughout the ages. Dickie tracks the country's culinary saga to medieval times, during which the impoverished would have been less likely to eat *bistecca alla fiorentina* or *risotto alla milanese* (had either existed), as they were to subsist on banal fare like turnips and polenta, with little concept of epicurean taste or pride. He notes that it was the urban areas, replete with food markets and money, that enabled foods like Parmigiano-Reggiano and mortadella to become Italian staples. As Dickie shows, the mainstream American concept of Italian food is a modern-day notion developed as a mixture of the multiple identities of the country's cities. Boisterous, gluttonous stories—some verging on salacious—are balanced by accounts of paucity in this look into Italian history and its edibles. (*Jan.*)

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Review

"Revelatory history of gourmet Italy from antiquity to today...Boisterous, gluttonous stories -- some verging on salacious -- are balanced by accounts of paucity in this look into Italian history and its edibles." -- "Publishers Weekly"

"A book that is as much a feast of horrors as delights...[Dickie's] book is hard to fault: densely researched, enlightening, and consistently moreish." -- "The Sunday Times" (London)

"A literally mouth-watering read, which counters the misconception of "Italian" cuisine, as well as the myth that it originated among peasants." -- "The Herald"

"A clever and provoking account of Italy's history...informs as well as enlightens." -- "The Guardian"

"Lots of books are written with passion about Italian food, precious few backed up with the deep historical background here presented in allegro con brio style by a clear-headed historian who rubbishes some too-persistent myths and replaces them with factual narratives no less fascinating. Dickie shows how Italian regional cuisines developed and some dishes became global icons. If we are what we eat, who wouldn't want to be Italian?" -- "The Times" (London)

About the Author

John Dickie lectures in Italian Studies at University College London. *Cosa Nostra*, his award-winning history of the Sicilian mafia, has been translated into twenty languages and has sold nearly half a million copies throughout the world; it was hailed in Italy as the best book ever written about the Mafia. In 2005 the president of the Italian Republic appointed him a Commendatore dell'Ordine della Stella della Solidariete Italiana. He lives in London with his family .

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