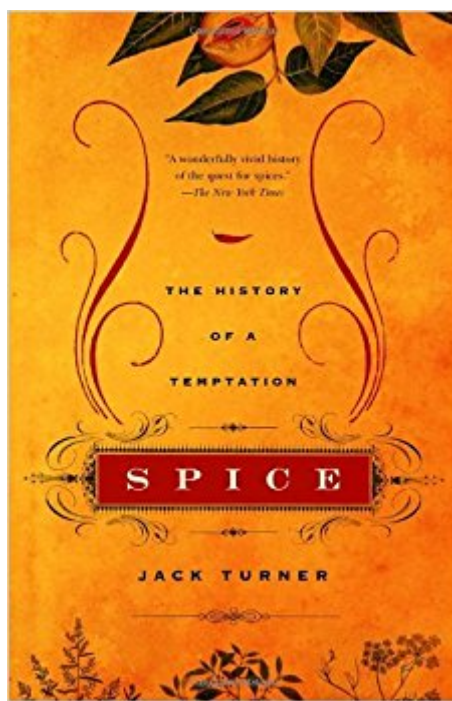


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Spice: The History Of A Temptation



Synopsis

A brilliant, original history of the spice trade and the appetites that fueled it. It was in search of the fabled Spice Islands and their cloves that Magellan charted the first circumnavigation of the globe. Vasco da Gama sailed the dangerous waters around Africa to India on a quest for Christians and spices. Columbus sought gold and pepper but found the New World. By the time these fifteenth- and sixteenth-century explorers set sail, the aromas of these savory, seductive seeds and powders had tempted the palates and imaginations of Europe for centuries. *Spice: The History of a Temptation* is a history of the spice trade told not in the conventional narrative of politics and economics, nor of conquest and colonization, but through the intimate human impulses that inspired and drove it. Here is an exploration of the centuries-old desire for spice in food, in medicine, in magic, in religion, and in sex and of the allure of forbidden fruit lingering in the scents of cinnamon, pepper, ginger, nutmeg, mace, and clove. We follow spices back through time, through history, myth, archaeology, and literature. We see spices in all their diversity, lauded as love potions and aphrodisiacs, as panaceas and defenses against the plague. We journey from religious rituals in which spices were employed to dispel demons and summon gods to prodigies of gluttony both fantastical and real. We see spices as a luxury for a medieval king's ostentation, as a mummy's deodorant, as the last word in haute cuisine. Through examining the temptations of spice we follow in the trails of the spice seekers leading from the deserts of ancient Syria to thrill-seekers on the Internet. We discover how spice became one of the first and most enduring links between Asia and Europe. We see in the pepper we use so casually the relic of a tradition linking us to the appetites of Rome, Elizabethan England, and the pharaohs. And we capture the pleasure of spice not only at the table but in every part of life. Spice is a delight to be savored. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Vintage; unknown edition (August 9, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375707050

ISBN-13: 978-0375707056

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars See all reviews (63 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #171,429 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #9 in Books > Business & Money > Management & Leadership > Distribution & Warehouse Management #112 in Books > History > Ancient Civilizations > Egypt #112 in Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Cooking by Ingredient > Herbs, Spices & Condiments

Customer Reviews

Three thousand years after one of the greatest of Egypt's pharaohs, Ramses II, was embalmed and put into his tomb, he was discovered to have a couple of peppercorns up his nose. This was in some ways unsurprising. The Egyptians used all sorts of spices to preserve the body so that the soul might wander back into it. But regarded historically, this is an astonishing use of pepper; the peppercorns were not any African species, not anything Ramses's lands had grown. The only source at the time was the tropical south of India; there must have been a previously unsuspected direct or circuitous trade route between the regions. No details about the route can now be known, except that it was part of the lucrative spice trade that for centuries powered economies and exploration. In *Spice: The History of a Temptation* (Knopf), Jack Turner includes the story of the first known consumer of pepper along with hundreds of other facts as a way of looking at a part of human history that was vital and has been influential into our own times, but is now merely curious. Spices are high on the list of goods that have made the modern world. Spices were costly and mysterious, and people thought that they came from Paradise itself, the place in the East from which Adam and Eve had been banished. It was to gain spices that Columbus sailed, and spices he did bring back, but they were disappointments; that did not stop the continued search for them, and the resultant expansion of the world. Turner shows that spices were not really used to help make old meat palatable; fresh meat was cheaper than spices. But they were used to improve wine, a use that became unnecessary after bottle and cork technology came in the sixteenth century.

Spice, The History of a Temptation by Jack Turner is a very well written history of the spice trade, written in the popular history mode. A tremendous amount of research must have gone into this work as it is absolutely filled with little gems of detail and wonderful small side stories. There are a number of other books out there that deal with this subject. A recent one, *Dangerous Tastes* by Andrew Dalby comes to mind, but the work being reviewed here, unlike so many of the others, including the aforementioned, is not an imposing tome which reads more like a doctoral dissertation, than a readable story. If I want sleep, I can always increase my exercise or simply take some sort of pill. I read books such as this for information and to be entertained. They go hand in

hand. With Spice I got just what I wanted. With this work the author has given us a very readable history of spices and the spice trade, starting from the beginning dating back to ancient Egypt and beyond. Of course the majority of the book is rather Eurocentric, but hey, that is where the author was educated, did his research and wrote the book. I suppose if you want a history such as this that is not Eurocentric, then you should probably find a non European author! Anyway, the author has discussed at length the impact spice has had upon world civilization. It was the prime motivator during the Age of Discovery and of course an undeniable pillar of Western Civilization along with quite a number of other civilizations throughout history. Today we have oil; in days gone by we had spice! The author's organization of the book is different, but once you get use to it, it does make sense. At times he will bounce around just a bit, from country to country; from civilization to civilization.

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