

This interesting and compelling account does at times leave the reader wanting more. Beginning the discussion in Europe effectively frames the migration process in a transnational sphere, but it would have been helpful to hear more about how leaving represented a carefully negotiated and orchestrated family strategy that affected both those who left and those who stayed behind. Similarly, the governments of the sending nations also played a key role in the nascent regime of global immigration restriction. The inspection process on Ellis Island evolved partly in response to the American frustration with the resistance of sending countries to immigration regulations because they viewed U.S. requests for help in establishing a system of monitoring and medical inspections at the emigrants' point of departure as a violation of national sovereignty. Lastly, Bayor might have more closely explored the long-term effects of the Ellis Island experience on today's immigration system with a more detailed comparison between the admission process then and now in order to understand both change and continuity.

Aside from these minor quibbles, *Encountering Ellis Island* is an accessible, succinct, and easy-to-read book. It speaks to several fields of study and can easily be adopted in courses focusing on U.S. immigration history and the immigrant experience and those dealing with progressivism, the Gilded Age, and the social and cultural history of the United States in the twentieth century.

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*Al Dente: A History of Food in Italy.*

By Fabio Parasecoli.

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332 pages.

*Al Dente* is one of two books launching the Reaktion Books' "Foods and Nations" series (the other is *Beyond Bratwurst: A History of Food in Germany*) designed to appeal to a popular audience. *Al Dente* has the appearance of a cookbook: It is a heavy tome, with lavish color illustrations throughout and even a ribbon bookmark for keeping one's place. It is likely that Fabio Parasecoli, a professor of food studies at The New School, had to work within specific editorial parameters for the series. More important, perhaps, the author had to believe in the organizing idea of a national cuisine and a national food history. On the one hand, this idea seems unremarkable; almost everyone thinks they

know what “Italian food” is, at least in terms of standard Italian dishes (pasta, pizza) and food products (olive oil, cheeses, canned tomatoes). On the other hand, as one begins to dig beneath the surface of a generalized definition, difficulties arise. For example, within the geopolitical boundaries of Italy, there are significant regional and even provincial differences in food and food preparation techniques, such as those between dishes from Sicily and Veneto.

One wonders what these two very different types of cuisine tell us about a national Italian cuisine, other than exemplifying regional variety. An equally important challenge to any sense of a national cuisine is the fact that, from the beginning of Italy’s history as a unified nation in 1861, millions of Italians have lived outside the boundaries of the state, either permanently or temporarily. Italians outside of Italy tried to re-create familiar foods, often adding new ingredients, but could the end results be considered Italian? When one thinks long and hard about what constitutes a national cuisine or a national food history, a simple definition of Italian food becomes problematic.

Despite these potential difficulties, Parasecoli has written a comprehensive history of Italian food, with eight chapters covering ancient times to the present. The chapters unfold chronologically, with the first three discussing Italy’s earliest settlements, ancient Rome, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. Chapters 4–6 cover modern Italian history, from the eighteenth century through to the present, while the last two chapters deal with the binary concepts of globalization and localism (in Italian *campanilismo*) as related to Italian food habits. Much of the material in the first half of the book is synthetic, drawing heavily on secondary literature (in particular, essays written for Parasecoli’s edited six-volume *Cultural History of Food*). In writing a history of food in any time period, most historians have to contend with little or no reliable evidence of what ordinary people ate: There may be shopping lists and menus for medieval feasts or Renaissance advice manuals, but few resources can tell historians what everyday food habits were like. Parasecoli shapes his narrative to deal with this relative poverty of evidence by explaining how key historical events and processes affected agriculture, consumer habits, and the economy, demonstrating to readers interested in food why history matters. The result is a smooth and engaging account that skillfully ties social, environmental, and cultural history to food history.

The last three chapters, covering much of the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, are the most useful for interrogating the history of Italian food. By focusing on what Italians themselves think about food, Parasecoli perceptively explores a dominant Italian attitude toward food, one that values locality, authenticity, and artisanship. Perhaps this attitude arises as a coping mechanism for recent food-related concerns (mad cow disease, genetically modified organisms, processed foods, adulterated

foods) generated by the rise of an increasingly industrialized and global food system. To a great extent, all cultures and nations face similar, if not identical, challenges given the ubiquity of the industrial food system and its pressures on traditional food networks and consumer habits. These anxieties can sometimes have positive results—as in the case of the Slow Food movement’s activities within Italy to protect local foods and culinary traditions and, by extension, farmers, retailers, and consumers—yet sometimes, the response to these modern food problems can reveal a darker side, such as when Italians vocally protest the intrusion of foreign foods (and often, by extension, foreigners themselves) on what they perceive as traditional ways of life, including food habits. One may sympathize with the Slow Food members protesting a McDonald’s in the Piazza di Spagna in Rome but also worry about various measures taken against non-Italian foods, as in the 2009 anti-kebab laws in Lombardy (and more recently in Verona), which were clearly aimed at recent immigrants under the guise of protecting a national Italian food heritage. In these last two chapters, Parasecoli puts forward an intriguing idea: What people think about food constitutes a significant part of food history. Food becomes a means by which to consider the issues of the day, like globalization or immigration. Food is also a way to think about a nation: One can interpret a national cuisine as a mental construct as well as a material reality.

Those interested in Italian American food and foodways will be disappointed in this book: Although there is a chapter dedicated to “The Globalization of Italian Food,” there are only seven pages dedicated to the migration of Italians to the Americas (225–231), and those pages consist mostly of photographs and descriptions of Italian American food habits. Parasecoli is far more attentive to what happens within the geopolitical boundaries of Italy to the detriment of an otherwise comprehensive study. Certainly, the geographic mobility of Italians could figure more strongly in this narrative, which maintains a narrow focus on what constitutes Italians and therefore Italian food. Perhaps it would be beyond the parameters of a book in the series “Foods and Nations” to expand definitions of Italian cuisine to incorporate, for example, Italian American (or Canadian or Argentinean, for example) food habits and history.

*Al Dente* is the latest in what has become a steady stream of books about Italian food history that adopts a conservative definition of Italian cuisine and tells a mostly triumphal story of how Italian food became so popular throughout the world. These histories pile up, but the reader is still curious about how, exactly, Italian food won its extraordinary popularity and what Italians and their children outside Italy did to create and sustain this process. There is still room for a history of Italian food that takes seriously immigrant contributions to the shaping of consumer habits and the popularizing of Italian cuisine throughout the world.

Reading this book one can tell that Parasecoli, a former writer for the Slow Food magazine *Gambero Rosso*, clearly loves food, and he thoughtfully tackles some of the big questions about Italian food: Why is there such enormous variety in Italian foods like pasta, wine, and cheeses? What is the historical relationship between Italy and the rest of the Mediterranean region when it comes to characteristic ingredients and dishes? What myths and stereotypes about Italian food have been perpetuated by non-Italians, and what cultural purposes do these myths serve? All of these questions are fascinating but difficult to answer with any degree of certainty, given the frequent lack of sufficient evidence for certain time periods or for specific events and circumstances. Despite these obstacles, creative food studies and food history scholars have pressed on, developing the field with lightning speed over the last decade. As Parasecoli concludes in his book, there are valid reasons to look to food as a tool for broader historical analysis, even for a process as complicated as nation building: “Food allows individuals to experience the material and physical reality of integration and exclusion, much more directly and compellingly than any intellectual discussion” (275–276).

In the end, the food habits of Italians tell us much about the complexities of Italian identities, which are fluid, changing, and potentially unstable in the absence of a centralizing or homogenizing national force. While there is the potential here to problematize the very notion of Italian identity through a history of Italian food, Parasecoli’s account does not challenge or revise this traditional celebratory narrative.

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