

Spice: The History of a Temptation

By Jack Turner

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In this brilliant, engrossing work, Jack Turner explores an era—from ancient times through the Renaissance—when what we now consider common condiments were valued in gold and blood.

Spices made sour medieval wines palatable, camouflaged the smell of corpses, and served as wedding night aphrodisiacs. Indispensible for cooking, medicine, worship, and the arts of love, they were thought to have magical properties and were so valuable that they were often kept under lock and key. For some, spices represented Paradise, for others, the road to perdition, but they were potent symbols of wealth and power, and the wish to possess them drove explorers to circumnavigate the globe—and even to savagery.

Following spices across continents and through literature and mythology, *Spice* is a beguiling narrative about the surprisingly vast influence spices have had on human desire.

Includes eight pages of color photographs.

One of the Best Books of the Year: *Discover* Magazine, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *San Francisco Chronicle*

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
There was a time, for a handful of peppercorns, you could have someone killed. Throw in a nutmeg or two, you could probably watch. There was a time when grown men sat around and thought of nothing but black pepper. How to get it. How to get more. How to control the entire trade in pepper from point of origin to purchase. In *Spice: The History of a Temptation*, classics scholar Jack Turner opens up the whole story of pepper and its kind like a ripe melon. He brings the exotic scents of the East deep into the history of Western culture.

Everyone knows a little bit of the story, how the desire to control the spice trade drove Western nations deep into the heart of the Age of Discovery, the Portuguese sponsoring Da Gama's push to India; the Spanish underwriting the many attempts of Columbus to get to India another way. The Western madness for spice was just about peaking in this time, and spice would all too soon become--gasp--common, much like the afterthought condiment it is for so many today. Who thinks twice about pepper any longer?

And yet, the history is long and glorious, and the window spice throws open on Western culture yields a glorious view. Jack Turner is a skilled tour guide and story teller. He starts his narrative with the 16th century quest for spice, then loops back into three mains sections of text: Palate, Body, and Spirit. Turner has mined classic and Medieval literature for any and every possible mention of spice and demonstrates how fixated the West became from the time of Augustus in Rome through to relatively modern times. He winds his narrative through the way spice was used in the foods of the wealthy (and puts to sleep the nostrum about rotting food), as a medicine, a sex aid, and as an aromatic channel to the gods of the time and place. He ably demonstrates the constant underlying tension surrounding spice--that it was both attractive and repellent, that it represented fabulous wealth and power for some and, for others, an abhorrence of the exotic East that exists to this day.

This is not an easy story to tell. But Turner makes it appear effortless. Pull a chair close to the fire, pour a draught of spiced wine, crack open Jack Turner's *Spice* and you'll read your way into the wee hours of the night. --*Schuyler Ingle*

From Publishers Weekly
Spices helped draw Europeans into their age of expansion, but the Western world was far from ignorant of them before that time. Turner's lively and wide-ranging account begins with the voyages of discovery, but demonstrates that, even in ancient times, spices from distant India and Indonesia made their way west and fueled the European imagination. Romans and medieval Europeans alike used Asian pepper, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and mace to liven their palates, treat their maladies, enhance their sex lives and mediate between the human and the divine. While many of these applications were not particularly efficacious, spices retained their allure, with an overlay of exotic associations that remain today. Turner argues that the use of rare and costly spices by medieval and Renaissance elites amounted to conspicuous consumption. He has perhaps a little too much fun listing the ridiculous uses of spices in medieval medicine—since, as he notes in a few sparse asides, some spices do indeed have medicinal effects—and fails to get into the real experience of the people. His account of religious uses, on the other hand, paints a richer picture and gets closer to imagining the mystery that people found in these startlingly intense flavors and fragrances. It is this mystery and the idea that sensations themselves have a history that make the entire book fascinating.
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From The New Yorker
Turner arranges his history of spices thematically, in a series of lively essays on their role in different aspects of human endeavor, such as exploration (Columbus was looking for cinnamon when he discovered America) and love (a fifteenth-century tract prescribes an ointment of honey and ginger for "Increasing the Dimension of Small Members and Making Them Splendid"). Turner's sedulous research is manifest on every page, as he follows spices across cultures and eras, with allusions that range from St. Augustine to the Spice Girls. The book's unlikely hero is the peppercorn, which has linked East and West since the time of the Romans and which typifies the way that spices, although no longer the luxury items they once were, have become quietly ubiquitous. Cinnamon and nutmeg are rumored to be the key to "capitalism's most closely guarded secret," the formula for Coca-Cola.
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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In this 21st hundred years, people become competitive in every single way. By being competitive at this point, people have do something to make these individuals survives, being in the middle of typically the crowded place and notice through surrounding. One thing that occasionally many people have underestimated this for a while is reading. Yeah, by reading a e-book your ability to survive increase then having chance to stand than other is high. For yourself who want to start reading the book, we give you this kind of Spice: The History of a Temptation book as starter and daily reading e-book. Why, because this book is usually more than just a book.

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