

Allen J. Grieco

FOOD, SOCIAL POLITICS AND THE ORDER OF NATURE IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

The act of eating is a basic human need. Yet, in all societies, quotidian choices regarding food and its consumption reveal some of the most deeply-rooted of shared cultural conventions. Food goes beyond issues relating to biological needs and nutrition or production and commerce; it also engages with social and cultural criteria that determine what dishes are prepared on what occasions, and unveils the politics of the table via the rituals appropriate to different meals.

This book approaches the history of food in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy through an interdisciplinary prism of sources ranging from epistolary correspondence, literature both high and low, medical and dietary treatises, cosmographic theory and a variety of iconographic evidence.

The volume is divided into three parts. The first is an introduction to the specific foods consumed at socially diverse “tables” in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, focusing on both raw materials and the recipes served in different contexts. The second part pursues the theme of the social politics of distinction and analyses how dietetic theories and classificatory systems both reinforced and legitimized social status in subtly pervasive ways. In the third and final part of this volume, the cultural meaning of specific foodstuffs is observed through literary and visual sources, thus revealing the resonant connotations that foods would have triggered in a contemporary audience.

Using a variety of analytical methods and theoretical approaches, this volume moves food firmly into the arena of Late Medieval and Renaissance history, providing an essential key to deciphering the material and metaphorical complexity of this period in Italian history.

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