

Sweets



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It is a truth universally acknowledged that everyone loves sweets. However keen we might be on fine cheese, vintage wine or acorn-fed Iberian ham, much of the time we'd be happier with a Curly-Wurly. But why do we like sweets so much? Why is there such an enormous variety of types, a whole uncharted gastronomy in itself? And where do they all come from? Many of the sweets we recognize today have a lineage going back hundreds of years. Sugar was first transported around the world with the exotic herbs and spices used by medieval apothecaries. By association, the confectioner's art was at first medical in nature and many sweets (such as aniseed balls, which were a medieval cure for indigestion) were originally consumed for reasons of health. Other sweets came in-to being in the worlds of ritual and magic. Chocolate, for example, was mixed with chilli and used as a libation by the Aztecs. It subsequently appeared in other rather more palatable drinks around the world, but not in the solid form we now recognize until about 150 years ago. But the special significance of a gift of chocolate remains ...Whatever their manifold origins, sweets are still a feature of every human society around the world. Tim Richardson's book tells the extraordinary story of comfits and dragees, lozenges and pastilles, sherbets and subtleties. Like a box of chocolates, it's something you can just dip into - or scoff all at once.

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