



The Bagel: The Surprising History of a Modest Bread

Maria Balinska

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If smoked salmon and cream cheese bring only one thing to mind, you can count yourself among the world's millions of bagel mavens. But few people are aware of the bagel's provenance, let alone its adventuresome history. This charming book tells the remarkable story of the bagel's journey from the tables of seventeenth-century Poland to the freezers of middle America today, a story of often surprising connections between a cheap market-day snack and centuries of Polish, Jewish, and American history.

Research in international archives and numerous personal interviews uncover the bagel's links with the defeat of the Turks by Polish King Jan Sobieski in 1683, the Yiddish cultural revival of the late nineteenth century, and Jewish migration across the Atlantic to America. There the story moves from the bakeries of New York's Lower East Side to the Bagel Bakers' Local 388 Union of the 1960s, and the attentions of the mob. For all its modest size, the bagel has managed to bridge cultural gaps, rescue kings from obscurity, charge the emotions, and challenge received wisdom. Maria Balinska weaves together a rich, quirky, and evocative history of East European Jewry and the unassuming ring-shaped roll the world has taken to its heart.

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