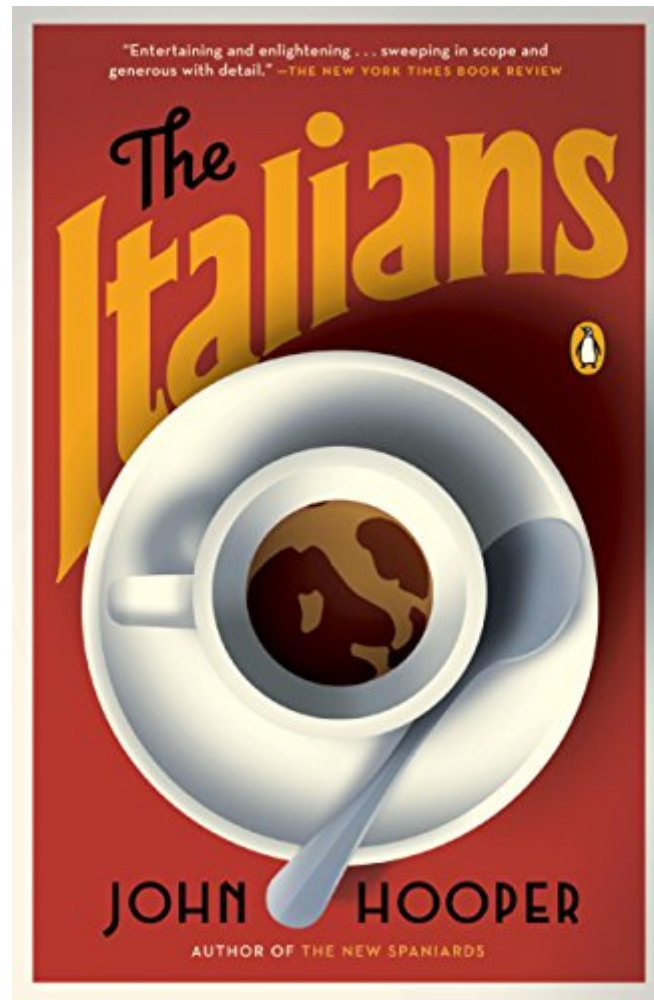


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# The Italians



## Synopsis

Washington Post bestseller Los Angeles Times bestseller A vivid and surprising portrait of the Italian people from an admired foreign correspondent How did a nation that spawned the Renaissance also produce the Mafia? And why does Italian have twelve words for coat hanger but none for hangover? John Hooper's entertaining and perceptive new book is the ideal companion for anyone seeking to understand contemporary Italy and the unique character of the Italians. Fifteen years as a foreign correspondent based in Rome have sharpened Hooper's observations, and he looks at the facts that lie behind the stereotypes, shedding new light on everything from the Italians' bewildering politics to their love of life and beauty. Hooper persuasively demonstrates the impact of geography, history, and tradition on many aspects of Italian life, including football and Freemasonry, sex, food, and opera. Brimming with the kind of fascinating and often hilarious insights unavailable in guidebooks, *The Italians* will surprise even the most die-hard Italophile. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

File Size: 12635 KB

Print Length: 338 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (January 29, 2015)

Publication Date: January 29, 2015

Sold by: Penguin Group (USA) LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00LFZ83PS

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #80,929 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #16 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Special Groups > Ethnic Studies #16 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Italy #20 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Europe > Italy

## Customer Reviews

If you are fascinated with modern Italy and modern Italians, you might enjoy this book. If you are

more interested in the achievements of past Italians in the fields of art, architecture, literature and music, this is not the book for you. If you are a person of faith, especially of the Catholic faith, you may be offended by the author's anti-Catholic and anti-faith bias. The author is a journalist, so the anecdotes and examples he uses to elucidate the modern Italian's generalized character often come from recent events, interviews, or recent books by others. He even quotes from the classic book with the same title, *The Italians* by Luigi Barzini. To be honest, I found it a bit odd to use the same title as Barzini's classic...but to each his own. The book begins by explaining Italy's geography, and uses it as a reason for the diversity of language and sub-cultures in Italy. The next section tries to cover Italy's 3000 year history, but as always when one tries to summarize Italian history, it passes in a blur. The sections after that address a single subject but there is much overlapping, and much jumping around in time. Some sections will likely confuse readers, such as the one on politics, since Italian politics is a confusing mess, with hundreds of political parties each called by nothing more than their initials, which the author uses with ease, being an experience journalist. As the author admits, in Italy: ...all sorts of things are immensely complicated. There is an inherent risk with books that attempt to describe a national character of a people: the generalizations do not fit everyone, and can be insulting to a huge swath of a country's population. The author attempts to address this, but I'm not sure he succeeds in that.

Hooper, a correspondent for both the *Guardian* and *The Economist*, reports as other English journalists have from Italy, guiding us into its fabled history, abundant culture, and its current predicament. As he cites Luigi Barzini's book of the same simple title, written a half-century ago about a far poorer and more rural country, John Hooper repeats Barzini's gambit. Both wrote to inquire why a territory so rich in art, design, literature, ideas, and innovations for so long remained divided into regional factions, bitter rivalries, and left itself open to coups, slavery, and invasion. This heritage casts a long shadow; "sudden breaks with the past have rarely been for the better," he concludes, after introducing us to the geographical diversity and historical legacy which attract so many to visit Italy's dramatic setting and splendid landmarks. Underneath this charm, as with other British male observers, as Beppe Severgnini's *"La Bella Figura: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind"* has noted (2005), Hooper tends to promote wise skepticism about the ability of Italians to cope, given their slippery nature to evade the truth or to multiply its meanings as deemed fit. "The real truth will remain unresolved, and may well even be different"; this observation by the presiding judge at the Amanda Knox murder trial could be inscribed in marble, Hooper avers, memorialized in the center of Rome. Truth is relative, and all the players in the Italian game have their own version to

peddle.

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