

The History of Pasta

Watch the video and choose True or False.

1. *The origins of pasta go back to prehistoric ages.* True False
2. *Marco Polo introduced pasta into Italy.* True False
3. *A dumpling like pasta existed in China in 1700 BC.* True False
4. *"Lagane" existed in Italy before Marco Polo left China.* True False
5. *Arab merchants introduced "lagane" into Italy.* True False
6. *It was dry to last over long journeys along the Silk Road.* True False
7. *Originally, pasta was eaten without sauce.* True False
8. *The Arabs introduced pasta machines into Sicily.* True False
9. *Originally, pasta was eaten with bare hands.* True False
10. *With the introduction of tomato sauce, Italians started using forks.* True False

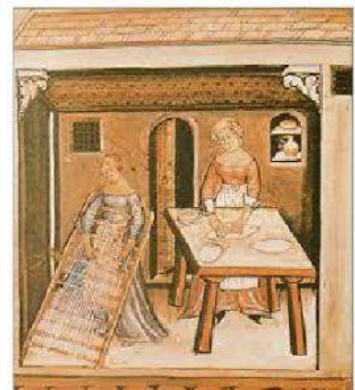
Read the text and complete the sentences by choosing the correct answer. Place the correct letter in the boxes.

The Twisted History of Pasta

While today it's an everyday meal for the masses, pasta was once only available for Italian nobles.

During the 20th century, Americans developed a love affair with pasta. On the big screen, spaghetti played memorable roles in classic films such as the Marx Brothers' *Night at the Opera* (1935), Disney's *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), and *Goodfellas* (1990).

Pasta became an increasingly common sight on restaurant menus in the United States, but the Italians' love affair with pasta has a long, complex, and passionate history. The route by which spaghetti, ravioli, and tortellini became international household names has taken some surprising turns over the centuries.



Made from the flour of durum wheat, pasta takes its name from the pasty texture of the dough when it is first mixed. Different pastas have different names, many based on the different shapes the dough is molded into. Fresh pasta is often mixed, cooked, and eaten right away, whereas *pasta secca* is dried in order to be stored; it is often prepared later by cooking it in boiling water.

The production process is simple, but the uses the finished product are put to are dizzyingly varied. The different shapes of pasta—cut into squares, rolled into tubes, pulled into long strings, and

twisted into spirals—stretch to at least 200 types, any one of which might be used in a huge array of sauces and accompaniments, all with their regional variations.

A Pasta Tree

Pasta's ethnic roots have been long debated. Many theories have been put forward, some notably far-fetched. An enduring myth, based on the writings of the 13th-century explorer Marco Polo, that pasta was brought to Italy from China, rose from a misinterpretation of a famous passage in Polo's *Travels*. In it, Polo mentions a tree from which something like pasta was made. It was probably the sago palm, which produces a starchy food that resembles, but is not pasta. This food almost certainly reminded the Venetian traveler of the pasta of his home country. Even while Polo was away on his travels in the 1270s, there is a reference to a soldier in the northern Italian city of Genoa, who owned a basket of "*macaronis*." A century before, the Muslim geographer al-Idrisi wrote of seeing pasta produced on Sicily.

Many Italian writers have argued that a tomb from the fourth century B.C. bears a relief of pasta-making equipment, suggesting the dish was being enjoyed in pre-Roman Italy. Many food historians, however, dispute this interpretation of the relief. They point out that Roman-era references to anything resembling pasta are scarce, and that the dish probably took hold in Italy as a result of extensive Mediterranean trading in the Middle Ages. From the 13th century, references to pasta dishes—macaroni, ravioli, gnocchi, vermicelli—crop up with increasing frequency across the Italian Peninsula.

Throughout the Middle Ages, until the start of the 16th century, pasta dishes were markedly different from those eaten today. Not only was pasta cooked for longer—there was none of the modern-day preference for pasta al dente—it was also mixed with ingredients that would seem surprising now, often combining sweet, savory, and spicy flavors.



Pasta was considered a dish for the wealthy, taking pride of place in aristocratic banquets during the Renaissance. For example, Bartolomeo Scappi, a papal chef in the middle of the 16th century, created a third course for a banquet consisting of boiled chicken accompanied with ravioli filled with a paste made of boiled pork belly, cow udders, roast pork, Parmesan cheese, fresh cheese, sugar, herbs, spices, and raisins.

Scappi's recipe for *maccheroni alla romanesca* was similarly elaborate. Flour and breadcrumb dough was mixed with goat's milk and egg yolk and flattened into a sheet, which was then cut into thin strips with a roller cutter (*bussolo*), to make the noodles. After being left to dry, the macaroni was boiled for half an hour, strained and covered with grated cheese, slices of butter, sugar, cinnamon and pieces of *provatura*, a Roman variant of mozzarella cheese. Finally, the dish baked in the oven for half an hour with a little rose water so the cheese would melt, while the macaroni was imbued with the flavor of the spices. It is no surprise that another 16th-century author, Giulio Cesare Croce, put macaroni on his list of "fattening dishes."

Food of Beggars and Kings

Pasta, by the late 17th century in Naples, was becoming the main staple of the common diet. Neapolitans had been nicknamed leaf-eaters (*mangiafoglia*) in the 1500s. From the 1700s they started to be called macaroni-eaters (*mangiamaccheroni*) instead. Several explanations have been put forward for this. One is a deterioration in the common people's standard of living, which significantly limited their access to meat, while the large landowners in the Kingdom of Naples or Sicily sold wheat relatively cheaply. Religious restrictions also had an influence on the changing diet: Pasta was an ideal food for days when eating meat was forbidden. But perhaps the main reason for pasta's dramatic spread was that, from the 17th century, industrial pasta production was developed with the use of machines such as the *torchio*, a mechanical press to make noodles or vermicelli.

Pasta was cooked for longer, with none of the modern-day preference for pasta al dente.

In Naples pasta became identified with beggars, or *lazzaroni*. "When a *lazzarone* has gotten four or five coins together to eat some macaroni that day, he ceases to care about tomorrow and stops

working,” a traveler said. That did not prevent pasta from conquering the palates of the upper classes. King Ferdinand IV of Naples devoured macaroni with gusto: “He picked them up with his fingers, twisting and pulling them, and voraciously stuffed them in his mouth, spurning the use of a knife, fork or spoon.”

Several things that have changed drastically over time are the flavorings added to pasta. Sweetness has been replaced by savory, sugar swapped out for vegetables, which helped make pasta a nutritionally complete dish. Then, at the beginning of the 19th century, tomatoes were added. For a long time Italians considered them to be too exotic. In fact, it is not until 1844 that the first recipe appears for the most common pasta dish today: spaghetti in tomato sauce.

1. *Pasta takes its name ...*
 2. *There are different names for pasta ...*
 3. *There are at least ...*
 4. *The myth of Marco Polo's bringing pasta from China ...*
 5. *Historians don't believe that ...*
 6. *The most widely accepted theory is that ...*
 7. *In the Middle Ages, pasta ingredients ...*
 8. *Pasta was considered a delicacy ...*
 9. *Pasta reached the poor as ...*
 10. *As from the 17th century industrial pasta production ...*
 11. *The abandonment of sugar and the introduction of vegetables ...*
 12. *The recipe for spaghetti tomato sauce ...*
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- a. *Pasta was eaten in pre-Roman Italy.*
 - b. *Made pasta a nutritionally complete dish.*
 - c. *According to the shape the dough is molded into.*
 - d. *Would include sweet, savoury and spicy flavours.*
 - e. *From the pasty texture of the dough.*
 - f. *Is due to a misinterpretation of his "Travels".*
 - g. *Served in aristocratic banquets.*
 - h. *Appeared in 1844.*
 - i. *200 types of pasta.*
 - j. *It was the result of Mediterranean trading in the Middle Ages.*
 - k. *They couldn't buy meat and the price of wheat was relatively cheap.*
 - l. *Was developed with the use of machines.*

Watch the video and complete the text with the missing words.

The classic dish of spaghetti and meatballs is an _____ invention. But the evolution of meatballs does start in _____. Italian meatballs are _____ pulp eggs. Italians are more likely to eat meatballs plainer in _____. They even can be made out of _____ or turkey. Meat was very _____ in Italy in the late 1800s. When _____ Italians came to America in the late 19th century, meatballs started to change. Food got much cheaper and ground _____ was at a perfect price to feed everyone in the family. The traditional Italian meatball has meat and _____ crumbs. In America meatballs started to have more _____ and mass. They went from the size of _____ balls to as big as the size of _____. The specific sauce for spaghetti and meatballs is a take from a marinara sauce from _____. It was made with _____, oil and tomatoes. Italians couldn't find _____ so they had to use _____ tomatoes. Spaghetti and meatballs probably first appeared in _____ or New Jersey in the late 1800s. Americans were used to _____ a starch to accompany their proteins. Spaghetti was one of the only Italian ingredients in American _____ stores. When Chef Boyardee came to America, he opened his own Italian _____ and it became one of Cleveland's top eateries. His signature dish was spaghetti with a savoury sauce and a tangy _____. After his business grew, he decided to put his pasta in a _____. Today spaghetti and meatballs is celebrated in Italian-American restaurants and _____.

