

Rome's Best Gelaterie

by Lucy Gordan | Food | 0 comments



The facade of Giolitti. Founded in 1900, it's Rome's oldest ice cream parlor



Giolitti's Specialties

Like pizza (January 2015), pasta, espresso coffee, and *gelato* are quintessential Italian foods. *Gelato* is the Italian word for ice cream, derived from the Latin word *gelatus* meaning frozen. Gelato can be made with milk, cream, various sugars and flavoring such as fresh fruit and nut purees. Denser, and creamier, it is generally lower in calories, fat, sugar, and air than ice cream.



Close-up of part of Giolitti's counter



Giolitti's counter. Usually it's impossible to see the counter because of all the people waiting

Since *gelato* means frozen perhaps a more appropriate name for ice cream in Italian would be *mantecato*, which means blend or mixture since what we call *gelato* is a mixture of several ingredients. Besides *gelato* there is *sorbetto* (sherbet), which derives from the Arabic via Turkish, indicating that it wasn't just the Romans who knew about the snow trick. *Granita*, a third member of the *gelato* family, is coffee or fruit juice, usually lemonade, frozen and reduced to grains (*grani*). The *grattachecca*, or *ghiacciata* (literally "iced") is crushed ice with a fruit or minted-flavored syrup. The "*gratta*" derives from the traditional grating of the ice; "*checca*" is of uncertain etymology.

The history of *gelato* is not well documented. Some say that it dates to the Persian Empire (c.500 BC) when, according to *Wikipedia*, "people would pour grape-juice concentrate over snow, in a bowl, and eat this as a treat. This was primarily when the weather was hot, using snow saved in the cool-keeping underground chambers known as 'yakhchal', or taken from snowfall that remained at the top of mountains by the summer capital Ecbatana. In 400 BC the Persians went further and invented a chilled food, made of rose water

and *vermicelli*, which was served to royalty during summers. The ice was mixed with saffron, fruits, and various other flavors.”



Yakhchal of Yazd Province

Other historians prefer a Roman origin, an anonymous genius, who during the reign of Nero (37-68 A.D.) poured fruit juice over snow, preserved underground, and ate it. The difficulty of obtaining snow and maintaining it meant that only the privileged could enjoy this proto-sherbet, which disappeared with the Fall of the Empire.



A bust of Nero

Around that time —400A.D.— according to *Wikipedia*, “Arabs used milk as a major ingredient of ice cream production and sweetened it with sugar rather than fruit juices. It was flavored with rosewater, dried fruits, and nuts.”



Marco Polo

It was not until the 13th century that anything similar to ice cream was known again in the West. Marco Polo brought back a recipe similar to the Roman with the addition of milk. He also probably returned with the first recipes for pasta. “A frozen mixture of milk and rice was used in China around 200 BC. Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat asserts, in her *History of Food*, that ‘the Chinese may be credited with inventing a device to make sorbets and ice cream. They poured a mixture of snow and saltpetre over the exteriors of containers filled with syrup, for in the same way as salt raises the boiling point of water, it lowers the freezing point to below zero.”



Catherine de' Medici and the Duke of Orléans getting married

According to legend, when Catherine de' Medici married the Duke of Orleans (later King Henry II of France) in 1553, she is said to have brought with her to France some Italian chefs who had recipes for flavored ices or sorbets. About 100 years later Charles I of England was so impressed by "frozen snow" that he offered his ice cream maker a lifetime pension in return for keeping his formula secret so that ice cream could be a royal prerogative.



Born into a Sicilian fisherman's family, Procopio Cutò (1651-1727), sometimes referred to as "The Father of Italian *gelato*," was another Italian who brought *gelato* to France. Before leaving Sicily he perfected the first ice cream machine, his grandfather's invention, and upon his arrival in Paris between 1670-74 worked as an apprentice for the Armenian immigrant Pascal who had a kiosk selling lemonade and coffee on Rue de Tournon. In 1675 Procopio took over the kiosk and in 1686 founded the first literary coffeehouse in Paris, the "City of Lights," the oldest extant café, Café Procope, across the street from the Comédie-Française. Over the years it has been a favorite of La Fontaine, Voltaire, the Encyclopedistes, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Oscar Wilde, Longfellow,

Robespierre, Napoleon Bonaparte, Balzac, Victor Hugo, and Anatole France. Here Procopio was one of the first to sell this new "European" product directly to the public in small porcelain bowls that resembled egg cups. Prior to then it was reserved for royalty only.



Café Le Procope is still flourishing

Speaking of Americans, Quaker colonists introduced ice cream to the United States. Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson were known to have regularly eaten and served ice cream. First Lady Dolley Madison, wife of President James Madison, served ice cream at her husband's Inaugural Ball in 1813.



Dolley Madison

A decade before Procopio founded his café, in 1674 to be precise, the first recipe in French for flavored ices appeared in Nicolas Lémery's *Recueil de curiosités rares e nouvelles de plus admirables effets de la nature*. According to *Wikipedia*, "recipes for sorbetti saw publication in the 1694 edition of Antonio Latini's *Lo Scalco alla Moderna* (The Modern Steward). Recipes for flavored ices begin to appear in François Massialot's *Nouvelle Instruction pour le Confitures, les Liqueurs, et les Fruits*, starting with the 1692 edition...The first recipe for

ice cream was published in *Mrs. Mary Eales's Receipts* in London in 1718.

In spite of *gelato's* popularity worldwide, Italy is the only country where the market share of handmade *gelato* versus the industrial one is over 55%. Today, more than 5,000 modern Italian ice cream parlors employ over 15,000 people, mostly Italians.



If you want to learn how to become a professional *gelato* artisan and run your own *gelateria*, enroll at Carpigiani Gelato University in Anzola dell'Emilia near Bologna. Set up by ice cream maker Carpigiani in 2003 it offers over 500 courses for beginners to experts, taught in Italian, English, French, and German, costing around 800 euro and ranging from a few days to five weeks. In little more than a decade approximately 12,000 students from around the world have attended.



Pantheon



In Rome the neighborhood around the Pantheon has the highest concentration of top artisan *gelaterie*: *Fiocco di Neve* (*Via del Pantheon* 51, best flavor: egg nog); *Della Palma* (2013 *TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence*, 150 flavors); *San Crispino* (branches on the *Trevi Fountain Square* and at *Via Acaia* 56 near *St. John in Lateran*, white peach and meringue); *Grom*, (all three on *Via Maddalena*; *Grom* has numerous branches all over Italy and in Dubai, Jakarta, Hollywood, Malibu, New York, Osaka, and Paris); *Ciampini* (outdoor seating, *Piazza San Lorenzo* in *Lucina* 24, chestnut) and family-owned *Giolitti* (most famous ice cream parlor in Rome, maybe in Italy, outdoor and indoor seating, *Via Uffizi del Vicario* 40, open 365 days a year since 1890 7-1:30 AM, 100 flavors all tops. On September 29th, 2010 fourth-generation Nazzareno opened *Giolitti's* first international branch in Istanbul's downtown neighborhood of Galata).



Part of the display at Dalla Palma's counter



g a lick at Della Palma



Luca at Grom



Near St. Peter's: V-Ice (5th bus stop (nos. 98, 881, 916) uphill at Via Gregorio VII 385 or downtown, branch on Corso V. Emanuele II, pistachio); Cremeria Aurelia (5th stop (no. 46) uphill at Via Aurelia 398, all seasonal fruits and spices); Gelateria dei Gracchi, (Via dei Gracchi 272, almond all'orange, chocolate with rum), Gelateria Oldbridge (Via Bastioni di Michelangelo 5, near Vatican Museums, 2014 TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence); Hedera (Borgo Pio 179, 2015 TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence, hazelnut, pistachio, and liquorice).



Stefano Marcotulli, owner of Gelateria del Teatro

Near Piazza Navona: Gelateria del Teatro (Via dei Coronari 65, Chocolate al nero d'Avola (Sicilian red wine), chocolate with basil or sage, raspberry); Il Gelato di Claudio Torcè, Piazza Monte d'Oro 91/92; over 100 flavors, most bizarre: gorgonzola with vinegar, ricotta with coconut, and chocolate with pink salt from the Himalayas).



Near St. John in Lateran: Besides San Crispino, Procopio (Piazza Re di Roma 39, all fruits especially mango); Petrini (Piazza dell'Alberone 16a,

chocolate).

Worth a detour: Al Settimo Gelo (Via Vodice 8, fig); Tony (Founded in 1965 and family-owned, Largo Alberto Missiroli 15-17, specialties: "gli spaghetti" and "un uovo al tegamino" (fried egg), best flavors: nutella, pistachio, bacio and pinolata (pinenut), closed Monday and from 14-14:45); Mondì (Via Flaminia Vecchia 468; cakes-to-order for all occasions, finger food,

mini ice-cream cones in a basket made of biscuit, best *gelato* flavor: *indispensabile*).

Outside of Rome: According to *National Geographic: Perchè No!*, *Via dei Tavolini 19r, Florence*, just a 2-minute walk from the Duomo. For more suggestions, click on www.walksofitaly.com.

Outside of Italy: According to TripAdvisor, *Frost Gelato*, 7131 N. Oracle Road, Tucson, Arizona and *Da Vinci Artisan Gelato Quality Chocolate*, Adrianou, Monastiraki, Athens, Greece.

It may seem strange, since every *gelateria* invents many flavors of its own, that the "classic" ones are still the favorite flavors. According to a recent survey conducted by Eurisko in Italy, 27% of the participants preferred chocolate, 20% hazelnut, 13% lemon, 12% strawberry, 10% vanilla, 9% *stracciatella* or chocolate chip, and 8% pistachio.



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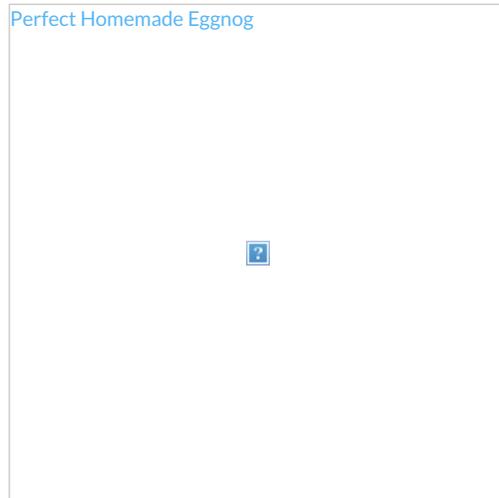
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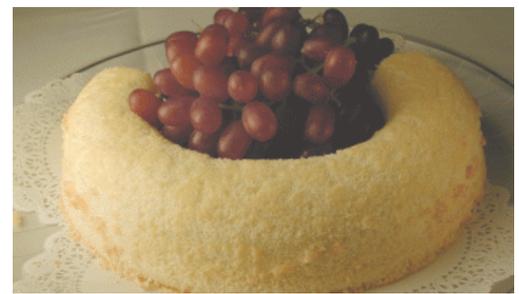
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