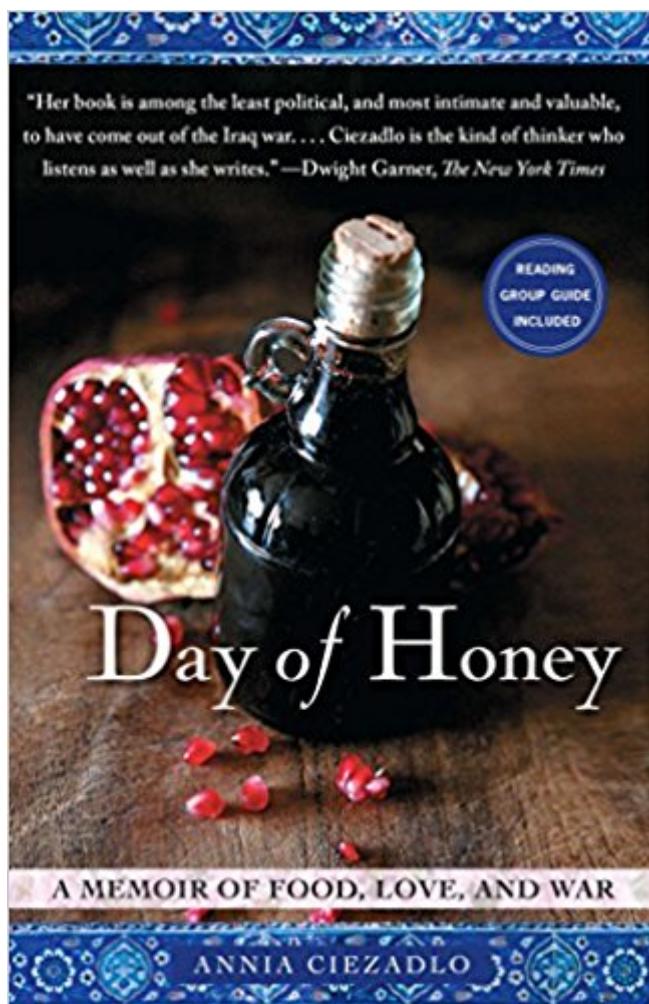


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Day Of Honey: A Memoir Of Food, Love, And War



Synopsis

Now in paperback, the powerful memoir that The New York Times described as "filled with adrenalized scenes." Ciezadlo is the kind of thinker who listens as well as she writes. Her sentences make a smart, wired-up sound on the page. Readers will be lucky to find her. • American Book Award Winner • Winner of Books for a Better Life Award (First Book) • James Beard Foundation Award Nominee • BNN Discover Awards, second place nonfiction IN THE FALL OF 2003, AS IRAQ DESCENDED INTO CIVIL WAR, Annia Ciezadlo spent her honeymoon in Baghdad. For the next six years, she lived in Baghdad and Beirut, where she dodged bullets during sectarian street battles, chronicled the Arab world's first peaceful revolution, and watched Hezbollah commandos invade her Beirut neighborhood. Throughout all of it, she broke bread with Sunnis and Shiites, warlords and refugees, matriarchs and mullahs. Day of Honey is her story of the hunger for food and friendship during wartime—a communion that feeds the soul as much as the body. In lush, fiercely intelligent prose, Ciezadlo uses food and the rituals of eating to uncover a vibrant Middle East most Americans never see. We get to know people like Roaa, a young Kurdish woman whose world shrinks under occupation to her own kitchen walls; Abu Rifaat, a Baghdad book lover who spends his days eavesdropping in the ancient city's legendary cafés; and the unforgettable Umm Hassane, Ciezadlo's sardonic Lebanese mother-in-law, who teaches her to cook rare family recipes (included in a mouthwatering appendix of Middle Eastern comfort food). From dinner in downtown Beirut to underground book clubs in Baghdad, Day of Honey is a profound exploration of everyday survival—a moving testament to the power of love and generosity to transcend the misery of war.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review "I cook to comprehend the place I've landed in," muses Ciezadlo early in her first book, a vividly written memoir of her adventures in travel and taste in the Middle East. Like any successful travelogue writer, she fills her pages with luminous, funny, and stirring portraits of the places and people she came across in her time abroad. But there is also, always, her passion for food, and through it, she parses the many conundrums she faced in her wanderings, such as the struggle to define identity, ethnic and personal, and the challenge of maintaining social continuity in wartime. The capstone to all her thoughtful ruminations is a mouthwatering final chapter collecting many of the dishes she describes earlier in the book. She does this all in writing that is forthright and evocative, and she reminds us that the best memoirs are kaleidoscopes that blend an author's life and larger truths to make a sparkling whole.

--Taina Lagodzinski --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Ciezadlo's lovely, natural language succeeds where news reports often fail: She leads us to care. • The Oregonian "Her book is full of more insight and joy than anything else I have read on Iraq. . . . Ciezadlo is a wonderful traveling companion. Her observations are delightful • witty, intelligent and nonjudgmental. • The Washington Post Book World "Her writing about food is both evocative and loving; this is a woman who clearly enjoys a meal... A glass of Iraqi tea, under Ciezadlo's gaze, is a thing of beauty. • The Associated Press "In her extraordinary debut, Annia Ciezadlo turns food into a language, a set of signs and connections, that helps tie together a complex moving memoir of the Middle East." • The Globe and Mail

The 'Day of Honey' is neither a cookbook nor a travel book: it is a free of stereotypes journey through the cultures of the Middle East, from Lebanon to Iraq and back to New York city. In a very tensed world, facing wars and violence, food is the only recipe for peace and dialogue. It is a book that should be included in the list of the compulsory bibliography of any diplomat ready to enter the real world of wars and peace between the nations. Being able to eat is part of the basic survival, but sharing the food is the art of the conversation between the cultures. The dialogue around the table goes far beyond the global level and focus on the very person and human communication: if you love your children you give them good food. If you want a future for them, you plant the seeds

of the new harvest and do your best for avoiding as much as possible the possibility of avoiding the causes of destruction of your harvest. It could be life threatening effort to try changing a society manipulated by war thugs and fanatic leaders, but at least you can hope that when the war is over you do not forget how to broke bread around the dinner table. This could be more available for Lebanon whose South was and is extensively used as a war area by the terrorist Hizbullah who does not put any price on the life of their own people. Besides the good writing, the Day of Honey is a wise lesson in public diplomacy, but also a lesson of good taste and good food. Honestly, from the beginning to the end of the book, I was all the time hungry and ready to taste a fresh pita and some good hummus. I finished the book just in time for getting ready to prepare one of the recipes included at the end of the volume.

To start, I read this book alongside Anna Badkhen's Middle East cookbook/memoir "Peace Meals: Candy-Wrapped Kalashnikovs and Other War Stories," a remarkably different book in terms of tone and writing style while still focusing on similar themes. As a result, this review serves more as a compare/contrast between the two books than a standalone look; however, I think the books are both similar and different enough to warrant this, and it should give you the information to discern which of the books will better suit your tastes. On its own, Annia Ciezadlo's memoir would not stand out among the thousands of other memoirs to be found about the Middle East. What makes hers unique, however, is her focus on food and her inclusion of recipes to provide a second experience for the reader. This makes her more relatable and her story overall more personable. Ciezadlo recalls her experiences in Lebanon and Iraq alongside her husband Mohamad, and food, arguably, is the thing that keeps her sane throughout the strife-filled state of affairs, particularly in Lebanon. Unlike in Badkhen's memoir, Ciezadlo's thoughts and experiences are integral to the story. She may be a freelance reporter, but this story shows no signs of the objectiveness of wartime reporters and instead reads like a memoir should. The grittiness found in Badkhen's story is replaced with more flowery prose and more memorable characters like Dr. Salama, Roaa, and Umm Hassane. Each character is fleshed out with loads of personality that impact the story and make you sympathize with Ciezadlo's situation. They honestly feel like family, and when characters are put in danger you begin to fret and wonder how it will turn out. The flip side, of course, is that locales and environments are left to the imagination of the reader and there is very little tension compared to Badkhen's life-or-death situations. Ciezadlo only briefly describes the escalating sectarian violence occurring in Iraq, and even then it is not seen as an

impending threat that plunges the country into civil war and leaves people cowering in their houses. Even the way she describes Baghdad is bizarre: She considers it a “honeymoon” rather than the war zone that it should be. Pressing concerns are not about where she can walk without being a target, but instead about where she can find “true Iraqi cuisine. Needless to say, Ciezadlo’s accounts feel out of place with the Iraq Americans are familiar with today, and to say that she wears rose-tinted glasses would be an understatement. The main criticism with this book is that it feels too long considering how little is actually accomplished. The section on Iraq, in particular, seems to drag on without any stakes being raised or dilemmas being resolved. What made Badkhen’s experiences so memorable is that she wastes no time establishing settings and dives into the meat of whatever problem she must contend with that day. Everything clicks along at a crisp pace without sacrificing the imagery or drama of the story. In contrast, however, Ciezadlo feels slow and lifeless at times, and that may be enough for some to put down the book halfway through without finishing it. This is a shame, however, considering that she does a wonderful job in delineating her characters and actually providing some humorous and often touching anecdotes throughout the book. However, the most telling part of the story is that you could essentially eliminate the Iraq section and little to nothing of importance would be lost. Thankfully, however, her experiences with the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon, presumably because they hit closer to home, are more gripping and exciting for the reader. Once again, you sympathize with the trials and tribulations of the characters as they try to carry on a normal lifestyle while war breaks out in the streets, all while the tension ratchets up and the writing tightens up. This is what constitutes the bulk of the book, and it is also where it is most enjoyable to read. Her interactions with her mother-in-law are all too relatable even for Western audiences, and her commentary on Lebanese society is biting and well-written. Like Badkhen, she prefers to remain neutral as chaos reigns all around her, but unlike Badkhen she is attached to her setting because it is her adopted home; even though she could leave, she chooses not to. Food becomes more important than ever as stores close ahead of the Israeli bombing campaign and subsequent political violence, and this is how she connects to the reader. Food, like with Badkhen, provides an essential social link that can provide comfort in times of turmoil, and here that social link is made stronger by Ciezadlo’s connection to the story. When her father-in-law passes away, she goes into detail about the food that was served at the wake and connects it to social commentary about the peculiarities of Lebanese society as well as to the emotions of her family. Cooking with her mother-in-law is a humorous vignette that contrasts with the turmoil outside their apartment window

and provides a sense of normalcy. The fact that Mohamad does not try to emphasize the cooking and the ensuing marital troubles they must endure emphasize the political troubles of the country as a whole. Food is the ultimate connection in this book, and without it the story would not have the same resonance that it does. On the whole, *Day of Honey* is a wonderful memoir that knows how to play to its strengths but ultimately feels so long-winded that it might drive some readers away despite how well the latter half of the book is written. The section on Iraq feels tedious and uneventful, but the rest of the book is gripping, relatable, and rather enjoyable. In comparison to *Peace Meals*, *Day of Honey* is a better overall book but *Day of Honey* has more memorable characters and readers can invest more into the author. If you have a large chunk of time and enjoy reading about foreign cultures and cuisines, this book will give you that and a compelling narrator to guide you along.

Cielzadlo professes to be a journalist, but she is really a philosopher and playwrite. Her characters are real people she knows, but we all know them as people we know well wherever we live and whomever we are. Remarkably is Umm Hassane who is familiar in any family or a frustrating friend, anywhere in the human race. I laugh out loud at her words on paper, because she is so universally outlandish! Mohamad Bazzi, her loveable husband, plays a strong steady hand for the smart, curious, almost fearless, foodie author. Mohamed tells her, "The war would never end..you ended it yourself," The author finds an inner light in almost everyone in the midst of the carnage or war. She finds paradise on Mutanabbe Street and cuisine in Shabbandar. You will want to join her. Beautiful people ultimately must leave the wreckage of war to save their soul. They must take with them the poetry, cuisine and culture, the humor and literature and shared memories. Will war never end as Mohamad claims? Can we feast with our fellow man and laugh at their humor? Can we join them for a drink and have a chat? Is "fast food" the real weapon of mass destruction, replacing the aromatic stovetop, fireplace, tabletop dressed with fresh and cooked creations in the company of friends and family? You read *Day of Honey* and wish for world peace!

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