notable Italian scene for smart young Englishmen making the Grand Tour in the 18th century was the spaghetti hanging out to dry in the streets of Naples.’ This historical snapshot was described by Anna Del Conte in her 1976 Portrait of Pasta in prose that still bristles with a fresh sea breeze and hot Vesuvian winds (‘perfect drying conditions’) in the revised book, Anna Del Conte on Pasta, published last year. Nigella’s ‘Conrad of the kitchen’, Anna Del Conte writes cookbooks that become reading books – those you keep open on the sofa or piled beside the bed to thumb through before falling asleep.

We have travelled to Italy through the pages of many cookbooks of late, from the bean-podding rituals of Roman locals recounted in Rachel Roddy’s Five Quarters, to Emiko Davies’s fruit-stained and sweet-scented accounts of modern Tuscan life in Florentine, shared recently in these pages. The Calabrian chef Francesco Mazzei gave us a tour of the toe, while Rick Stein whizzed us to the top of the boot in Venice – and great Italian cookbooks keep coming.

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Hamish Anderson welcomes the return to favour of a neglected grape from northern Italy.

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