

is the only one-volume translation in any language: the translators are skilled in botanical history as well as Greek, and have provided useful notes, plant identifications, and excellent indexes.

Archestratos is, by most counts, the first gastronomic author. There are English translations of his surviving work by Wilkins and Hill (Prospect Books) and by Olson and Sens, but Carmen Soares' study goes into aspects of food history that these authors didn't approach, with maps and full references. It's illustrated in colour, well indexed, and accompanied by recipes reconstructed with Lusitanian flair.

ANDREW DALBY

Vanina Leschziner: *At The Chef's Table. Culinary Creativity in Elite Restaurants*: Stanford University Press, 2015; 256 pp., hardback, £22.99.

Understanding the mind of a chef can be difficult when you're sitting in a restaurant eating a combination of flavours and textures that you yourself wouldn't have put together. 'Where did they come up with this?' I often think. Vanina Leschziner must have had the same thought. Her book seeks to answer this question of creativity in the kitchen. For her research Leschziner visited elite restaurants in New York and San Francisco and interviewed chefs and other employees to try and understand the elusive concept of creativity. Creativity is a tricky subject, but more so in food where recipes are easily accessible everywhere, yet, what she discovers is, like many artists, they gather inspiration from a number of places – other restaurants, cookbooks, travel and their own imagination and experience with tastes and flavours.

What emerged is especially telling of the two cities. Many chefs in New York cite Wylie Dufresne at wd-50 and his modernist cuisine as inspiration. Chefs in San Francisco, who according to Leschziner are more focused on tradition, simplicity and a 'reverence for ingredients,' lauded Alice Waters. The bi-coastal nature of this book leaves out a larger part of the United States and cities like Chicago or Los Angeles; yet, her choices are appropriate as important gastronomic hubs.

What I feel most strongly about in this book is the lack of interest in mystery, in romance. The fact of trying to understand creativity, to research it, place it within a rubric of academic understanding takes away the romance, the struggle, the energy that's necessary to create something that is significant. Its significance to the chef who created it – a creation of their mind – but one that is fleeting instead of lasting like a book or a piece of music. It moves through the world, leaving behind no trace of what it was, perhaps just a line on a menu. Creativity is elusive, and as she concludes in her book, it's because of its elusiveness that it is in constant need of research and understanding.

JESSE DART