

recipes and I recommend the book for its idiosyncratic design, and above all I recommend the surreal portraits of executants and customers – Juliet Greco is not yet dead, talk about monotones. Highly recommended.

For my part, the familiar and irreplaceable qualities of Janet Ross's *Leaves from our Tuscan Kitchen* (reissued by Grub Street, £12.99) or the remarkable description of bourgeois cooking as it should be from the 1950s by Patience Gray and Primrose Boyd, *Plats du Jour* (reissued by Persephone, £10), leave our current authors standing open-mouthed by their over-photographed blocks. Subscribers will quite possibly have Prospect Books' version of *Plats du Jour*, which went out-of-print some years ago. It seemed to me that the cause of Patience Gray was better served in this new guise than reprinting the old, for Persephone reaches a reading public currently innocent of the blandishments of PG. Although Patience herself would say that she didn't want to be read by the masses, I am sure the masses will be better for having read Patience. Another reprint this season is Simon Hopkinson and Lindsey Bareham's *The Prawn Cocktail Years* (Michael Joseph, £25). Same words (good), new photos and new design (not so good). It now looks, in fact, exactly like one of those recipe books adverted to a few lines ago.

For something completely different, I recommend Cindy Pawlcy's *Big Small Plates* (Ten Speed Press/PG UK, £25). Pawlcy is the founder of Mustard's Grill in California where you eat tapas-sized portions of relaxed West Coast fusion foods. The recipes are clear, the flavours arresting, the food wildly up-to-date. A must-read for fashion-victims.

Katherine M. D. Dunbabin: *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality*: Cambridge University Press, 2003: ISBN 0521822521: £59.

Matthew Roller: *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome: Bodies, Values, and Status*: Princeton University Press, 2006: ISBN 0691124574: £26.95

I don't say these two books duplicate one another: their aims are quite different. I will say that when you've read both, you'll know enough about Roman tomb reliefs that depict the subject enjoying a meal. There are many such; in fact it was already a typical theme for relief sculpture in ancient Babylonia, Assyria, Persia and Greece.

Dunbabin starts from the imagery (wall paintings as well as sculpture) and traces it chronologically, from the late Roman Republic to the end of the Empire. She puzzles over the variations, but she doesn't know

why the dining theme was so enduringly popular, unless, perhaps, being ‘fundamentally multivalent’, it ‘owed much of its popularity precisely to its ability to convey a range of significance’. On the same page 7 on which she hazards this opinion, she issues a warning for anyone tempted to read true lives out of tomb reliefs: ‘Any approach to the visual material that looks on it primarily as a source of information about actual practice in real life is both limited and potentially misleading. The images are in no way intended to act as mirrors of reality.’ They are fascinating images, and Dunbabin explores them more searchingly and more successfully than anyone before her.

She’s right, though, I’m afraid. You can’t take pictures, or texts, or anything at all, as a reliable source for ancient social history. The safe way for a young academic is therefore not to do social history. Do bodies and status instead.

Matthew Roller saw this and has succeeded in publishing a study of ancient dining customs which will be really useful whenever any social historians put their heads above the parapet. I think he, too, started with the tomb reliefs, but he also read the texts very carefully, and in doing so he noticed that the ‘handbook’ views about the way people behaved at Roman dinners didn’t correspond with the evidence. (These handbooks, I must explain, are in German and classicists are therefore in the habit of taking them very seriously.) Roller shows that a Roman woman reclined at dinner, just as a Roman man did. We who didn’t bother with the handbooks already knew this from watching *I, Claudius* on television. But where, exactly, did she recline, and at what stage did she and her partner slip off to bed? Roller knows, and he cites the evidence to prove it. He also knows (better than anyone else, and much better than the handbooks) at what age Roman children began to dine among the adults, and at what age they reclined. He even knows exactly what went on in a *comissatio*. Need I say more?

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Fragkiska Megaloudi: *Plants and Diet in Greece from Neolithic to Classic Periods: the archaeobotanical remains*. Archaeopress: ISBN 1841719498: 95pp.: £28. Not everyone has heard of Archaeopress and their series *British Archaeological Reports*, but for this particular volume (which is number 1,516, no less, in the subseries *BAR International Series*) all who are interested in