

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?

ANDREW DALBY

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

prehistoric foods ought to be beating a path to their door. The pages? Large. The text? Meaty. The tables? Compendious. The price? A snip.

Frangkiska Megaloudi has worked on the archaeobotanical material collected in excavations at Mykonos, Ftelia, Messene, Limenaria Thasou and the Sarakenos Cave and, what's more, she has published the results. But this book isn't that. It's a synthesis, and an extremely useful one. She has gathered the reports from 43 sites in Greece where archaeobotanical studies have been published fully, and from 21 more where publication was more partial or anecdotal. In other words, all useful sites: she admits in the introduction that her study is 'not exhaustive', but in truth it is. She has set out the results very clearly, surveying the sites, surveying the food plants found, and finally giving a modest but efficient summary of the results. This summary is in effect a new history of the use of food plants in Greece from 6,000 to 400 BC, and as such it easily supersedes what Vickery said on the subject, in *Food in Early Greece* (1936), and what I said in the relevant part of *Siren Feasts* (1996).

There are surprises. Emmer was not always the dominant wheat species: einkorn remained unexpectedly popular, at least until classical times, and even spelt put in a prehistoric appearance. *Camelina sativa* (gold-of-pleasure or false flax) and *Lallemantia iberica* (for which I can give no English name, so obscure has it become) were both cultivated as sources of oil in northern Greece in the Bronze Age. An okra seed, and a bit of peach stone, were among the many exotic finds at the ancient sanctuary of Hera on Samos. And I didn't know till now that the fruit of the chaste-tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*) 'yields a spicy edible oil that is often used to spice up various foods in modern Greek cuisine'.

Archaeologists aren't always well read in ancient textual sources, but Megaloudi is. They are quoted frequently. On the subject of barley and its uses, we are even reminded of Aristotle's handy rule: those drunk on ale fall on their backs, while those drunk on wine fall on their faces.

ANDREW DALBY

Andrew Whitley: *Bread Matters: The state of modern bread*: Fourth Estate, 2006: ISBN 0007203748: 371 pp., £20.

Years ago, I taught the sourdough class at an artisan bread conference at the American Institute Of Baking. To my surprise, the flour I chose, after testing those available, was organic. I doubt if the A.I.B. even knew