

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

of its presence – it is best known for its ties to the industrial sector – but turned out to be ideal in flavour and performance. Alas, it was a rare coincidence. Many artisan bakers have shown interest in organic flour, which is, after all, a logical extension of their *raison d'être*, since they practise traditional methods and shun additives, but price, availability, and above all, performance are all barriers. Hopefully this will change as more suitable wheat varieties are introduced and as increased production allows millers to mix different lots of wheat to maintain constant quality, but for the present, bakers are too often forced to choose between good intentions and great results.

‘The state of modern bread’ has an ominous ring to it, and in the first fifty pages, Whitley delivers on his promise: he describes factory loaves and the additives they contain, he provides statistics showing the increasing cases of allergies and intolerance to baked goods, and he points to solutions to be found in growing grains organically, pursuing proper nutrition, and allowing time for traditional long fermentations. The earnestness of his convictions is compelling, but along with it a late 1960s sort of paranoia feel is revealed in certain phrases – ‘the covert corruption of our daily food’, ‘Much of what you get in shops should probably be avoided’ – beliefs which can lead to uneasy silences among even good friends. Most people I know favour transparent labelling, and would thus agree with Whitley’s condemnation of a legal loophole which exempts industrial loaves from listing added enzymes among the ingredients, many would be intrigued by the possibility that long lactic fermentations might allow those with coeliac disease to eat bread, but few bakers I know would agree that organic stone-ground flours are the only ones to use in every case. I lack both the knowledge and the gall to enter the fray. But I do wonder whether this negative approach will find most readers running into the kitchen and ‘taking control’.

Whitley knows his way around the bakeshop, and his teaching experience, too, is apparent. He bravely recommends the use of the metric weights and measures, which once one takes the plunge are indeed more exact and user-friendly and, since digital scales have simplified the process, soundly proposes that readers weigh rather than measure the volume of water. His ‘Eight illogical instructions’ are an entertaining discussion of useless practices which have found their way into too many baking books over the years (though I disagree that attempts to produce steam to form a

*baguette*-type crust in home ovens are futile), and he provides a formula for calculating the water temperature required to produce a dough at the ideal fermentation temperature. (This is a good start, but it does not consider room temperature and flour temperature separately – a good idea for those who store their flour in a cool pantry – nor does it take into account the heat created by friction when a machine is used to mix the dough.) I was surprised to find a section on gluten-free baking, but these days, it does seem we all know someone who could benefit.

Beyond its familiar format and recipes, *Bread Matters* is not the general-interest bread book it first appears. Perhaps Whitley's leanings are well-enough known that British readers assume this, but any one else should bear in mind that like the added baggage that 8 or 12 inert grains add to loaves (curiously, there are no recipes for these), his philosophy adds unexpected weight to the book as a whole, as if having a good time, making a great loaf, and devouring it were reasons too shallow to don an apron. He conveys the mechanics of sourdoughs, not the joys. 'Real taste and integrity' or 'the beguiling smell of baking bread, the satisfying sound of crackling crusts' are as good as it gets. Though baking might not be a chore for him, he seems to assume that it will be for his readers, whom he feels bound to remind that the active work amounts to only 30 or 40 minutes, and that although hand kneading should be 'fun, energetic, even therapeutic', it also 'beats going to the gym, if only because it costs little, can be done at home and has an edible end-product'.

The formulas are consistent with his beliefs. The amounts of salt in the bread recipes are about half of what most bakers would consider a moderate amount (8 grams per kilogram of flour as opposed to 17 or 18, and in commercial bakeries 22 grams is not uncommon), and although he allows readers the option of substituting white flours for wholemeal and vice versa (and, more grudgingly, he allows non-organic ingredients), all but three doughs – for Danish pastries, brioche, and croissants – contain wholemeal flours. Why those exceptions, I wondered, and not others for Stollen, Tuscan Harvest Bread, ciabatta?

Whitley's true passion is for the issues, and he supports his views with 5 pages of notes. Readers with a more middle-of-the-road set of priorities will find nothing on the more technical aspects of baking, nor mention of other baking books. Instead, his focus is upon the evils of the Chorleywood Bread Process, which in the 1960s led to the puffy industrial loaves which

so many of us are justifiably proud to hate, and upon his own intransigent solutions. Lost in all this is the notion that in the general scheme of things, any long-fermented loaf made with unbleached flour and no additives is a huge step in the right direction. Whitley does mention artisan bakers – his phrases ‘skill not scale, time not trickery’ have the ring of a picket-line chant – and he says that the craft bakery sector accounts for only 6% of U.K. bread. But neither in the text nor in the resource section on equipment and ingredients does he mention individual bakers and bakeries, though he does chide unnamed bakers on occasion for indulging in the wrong obsessions: ‘the term [poolish, a liquid sponge] is much loved by a rather earnest kind of American artisan baker’, ‘The sourdough grail is guarded by zealots, who expatiate interminably on the size of the holes in their niches’. Yet apart from the rhetoric, these are just the people that bread lovers should seek out.

Looking towards the other end of the spectrum, the vehemence of Whitley’s feelings towards the industrial sector has blinded him to an important reality just emerging. New technology allows factories to produce ‘artisanal’ loaves using the same soft, well-fermented doughs that have been exclusive domain of small bakeries. In addition, the ‘par bake’ method permits baking loaves to a certain point and flash-freezing them so they can be delivered to points of sale and finished off as needed to produce ‘fresh’ bread all day. There might well be a slight loss of flavour, but these are clearly a threat to all but the most skilled and committed artisans. Ignoring the implications of this, Whitley uses his encounter with a less than successful batch in what appeared to be a small bakery in France as a pretext to round up the usual suspects: ‘I made a rapid exit and sought out some genuine artisan bread in the nearby town. My children were not as po-faced as I and ripped into “fresh” baguettes with glee. Within two days, they couldn’t eat another morsel. The roofs of their mouths were red and bleeding, lacerated by the razor-sharp crusts twice-baked into those industrial baguettes.... I’m a bit of a no-pain, no-gain person myself, but I draw the line at a technology that turns daily bread into an instrument of torture.’

JAMES MACGUIRE

I have many other books to review but no space in which to review them so they will be held over to the next issue. The spate of books concerning food runs so lustily that one could devote an entire journal to the subject.