

The work concludes with a full bibliography, a helpfully exhaustive index of Biblical and Ancient texts cited in the course of the study, and finally an index of subjects and names.

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John M. Wilkins & Shaun Hill, *Food in the Ancient World*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2006. Pp. 300. ISBN 0-631-23550-7. £55.00/\$70.95 (hardback), £17.99/\$29.95 (paperback).

This attractive volume is a worthy contribution to the series Ancient Cultures, which aims to present 'enjoyable, straightforward surveys of key themes in ancient culture' to new-comers to the study of the ancient world. A short time-line, map of the Mediterranean and excellent illustrations of animals and plants from Dioscorides (ed. A. Matthioli, 1598) and of culinary *realia* add to the book's usefulness and appeal. Each chapter, written by Wilkins (W.), Professor of Greek Culture at Exeter, is preceded by a short introduction by Hill (H.), chef and Honorary Research Fellow at Exeter. A comprehensive Bibliography (281-89), an Index (290-300) and three recipes (277-80) appear at the end.

In the Introduction to Chapter 1 ('An Overview of Food in Antiquity, 1-38), H. touches on various aspects of the ancient culinary world: the different preferences of the wealthier and poorer classes; the influence of changing social and economic conditions, fashion, medical considerations and food prejudices determined by religious belief; the strictly seasonal availability of food and the limited storage facilities and preservation methods; the absence of tomatoes, peppers, maize and chillies; the lack of cookery manuals and scarcity of recipes (the chefs being illiterate); the unfamiliar tastes and textures (e.g. *garum*, likened to Thai Nam Pla) and the fondness for rank flavours (e.g. cheese) and sweet (honey, dried fruit), strong spices (asafoetida) and herbs (hyssop) to improve often bland food; and the role of inns, private dinners and street food.

Chapter 1 (4-38) proper offers a historical framework (750 BC-AD 200) with the main focus on Greece and Rome and their cultural interaction, but with due attention to exchanges through trade and travel with other regions (4-7). The evidence and problems of interpretation are then discussed (7-17). The main sources are Plutarch's *Symptotica*, Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* and Galen's *On the Powers of Foods*, as well as sympotic literature and archaeology (e.g. interesting observations on diet and diseases from the bones of a Late Minoan III cemetery at Armenoi, near Rethymnon and from Grave Circle B

at Mycenae). Other literary sources are the casual references to eating and drinking encountered everywhere in Greek and Latin literature and technical treatises: cookery books (first written by the Greeks in the 4th century BC), works on the rustic agricultural world (Cato, Varro and Columella, Hesiod's *Works and Days*), technical treatises on food and medicine (Aristotle, Theophrastus), works on zoology, botany, cities, agriculture, travel, geography, the encyclopedic works (Pliny the Elder), and Porphyry's treatise *On Abstinence* (3rd century AD). The confused and confusing terminology in most of these sources makes only a broad treatment possible; the matter is further complicated by the vastness of the ancient world, its many cities and varied cultures, and the time-span. Perspective is gained by comparison with pre-modern shortages and modern Western culture; and by the cultural component of anthropology. After a section on the foods and drinks of the ancient diet (17-30), the chapter closes with mythological and poetic accounts of food for sustenance and healing as a civilising force in human development: the Golden Age, Prometheus, Heracles, Demeter, Persephone and Triptolemus, and Dionysus (30-38).

The Introduction of Chapter 2 ('The Social Context of Eating', 39-78) surveys the diets of the rural poor, with their starch-based diet of porridge and flatbreads, supplemented with herbs, salads and milk, and of the urban poor who relied on street food, occasional fish and game. The cooking methods were simple and practical, using olive oil, *garum* and wine. Upper-class cuisine was characterised by an element of pretension and sophistication, using rare ingredients such as silphium and following particular codes of behaviour (39-40). The main body of the chapter first discusses the more rigorous lifestyle and simple eating-habits of the Spartans, both of soldiers in the field and aristocrats at the *sussitia*, compared to those of the Athenians, who imported much of their food (41-45). The most complete and sumptuous meal recorded (Athen. 3.126e), the Macedonian wedding-breakfast of Caranus, is discussed to illustrate its influence on Athens (45-48). Another influence was the courts of the Sicilian tyrants. From the 5th century voices were raised on the dangers of luxury (Theopompus, Timaeus) and simplicity in elegant dining advocated. Eventually, boosted by the extravagant banquets at the courts of the Hellenistic Ptolemies, luxurious dining made its impact on the Roman élite and populace, and served as a model for the triumphs, processions and banquets in the Empire (49-51). The populace, meanwhile, were limited to insufficient foods of poor quality: the cheaper grades and kinds of cereal, vegetables and fruit in season, but also acorns, cicada, locust, and, in time of famine, animal fodder and chestnuts, and very little or no meat or fish. Galen warned of the dangers of foods that were indigestible and malnutrition regularly appeared during shortages before the Spring

crops. There were, however, even for the lower classes, occasions for feasting (birth, marriage, death); and manual workers, some slaves, soldiers and athletes enjoyed special diets. Sharing a meal was of paramount importance: tyrants dined alone (51-63).

The next section (64-73) discusses the physical spaces relevant to food and eating: the market place, civic buildings (*tholos*, *thesmotheteion*, *prytaneion*) – from which women were excluded –, private homes, public areas, religious precincts, bars, inns, street-shops, tents, gardens (64-67). The symposium is singled out for its special place in Graeco-Roman society: the arrival of the Eastern custom of reclining on couches in the 6th century BC, the expensive furniture, tableware, utensils, frescoes and mosaic floors adorning *triclinia*, which became the centre of both private meals and organised feasts on special occasions (68-73); the elements of equality and sharing in the Greek meal, whether private, sympotic or sacrificial, in contrast with the Roman context where status difference was maintained between patron and client or emperor and people (73-74); the attendance of women of status at symposia, slaves and *hetairai* being more usual (75); the changing structure of the Greek symposium in Roman dining, and variations in different periods, places and social strata (77-78).

In Chapter 3 ('Food and Ancient Religion', 79-109) H. surveys the food restrictions imposed by religion and the symbolic significance of fasting, vegetarianism and the offering of meat to a god or gods (Introduction, 78-79). W. discusses the religious festivals, the sacrifices of animals, the connection with social structures, sanctuaries throughout Greece (and in particular at Olympia, Eleusis and Delphi), sacrifice and feasting, major and minor shrines, the Panathenaia, local deities, and the regulations and prescriptions applicable to them (81-87). The Roman situation was similar. The importance of meat is singled out: apart from the pleasure it imparted, the leather from sacrificial animals generated revenue and confirmed the status, power and wealth of those who had access to it. Foreign cults (Adonis, Isis, Cybele, Bendis) added further elements (foreign foods, perfumes, herbs) to the pleasure factor, and the religious ceremony shared elements of the secular symposium (88-92). The various festivals promoted communal solidarity and identity (93-105): the Panathenaia (94-95), the City Dionysia (95-96), the Carneia (96), the Thesmophoria, Adonia and Agrionia (96-98), the rural Dionysia (99). In Rome, where religion was closely tied to political power, the same applied (99-100): the Ludi Saeculares (100), the triumphal processions (100), the Cerealia (100), Fornacilia (100-01) and Parilia (101). Hellenistic religious festivals had also brought leaders and people together and displayed power at, for example, the Ptolemaia (101-05).

Bloodless sacrifices (cheese, bread, beans, pomegranates, apples, eggs) determined by Pythagorean vegetarianism or food taboos are discussed next. Dogs and certain fish were dedicated to the dead, and first fruits included agricultural products, fish and hunted animals. The problem faced by all such sacrifices was: How did gods eat? Myths created the divine diet of nectar and ambrosia enjoyed at elaborate anthropomorphic sympotic or nuptial scenes, and festivals such as the *theoxenia* or *lectisternium* provided the concrete means of transferring earthly food to heavenly beings (105-09).

In his Introduction to Chapter 4 ('Staple Foods: Cereals and Pulses', 110-39), H. dismissively states: 'Porridge has a deeply unappealing image. Made from oats, it forms the traditional breakfast in Scotland, where it is considered part of the country's heritage, but it is little eaten by choice elsewhere. American grits made from corn may have the same reputation in southern states' (110). One suspects many more than just the Scots would disagree – oats, as porridge or in muesli mixtures, is now widely consumed as a food associated with weight-loss and lowering of cholesterol; and as for grits: maize- or mealmeal porridge constitutes a major part of the diet of millions in countries like South Africa (*putu*) and Italy (*polenta*) both as a staple food and as a food of choice.

This chapter discusses the grains or starches (*sitos*). Availability depended on the region (e.g. proximity to the sea); production and international distribution were very limited and only the wealthy had access to luxurious foods, spices and wine. Yet from the East came food technology and many foods (chicken, pheasant, rabbit, damson plum, citron, wine, olive and cereals). Grain supply was handled by the authorities, especially during the festivals of Demeter/Ceres, Persephone/Proserpina. In Greece the staple starch was barley and barley porridge (*masa*); in Italy it was wheat (*far*), though millet, oats and rye also featured. The arduous and time-consuming preparation of the grain (grinding, cooking, making of bread or porridge) was the work of women. The various starches were mixed with beans, chickpeas or each other, and even with wild plants (berries, acorns) in time of famine. Boiling with milk or water was the main method of cooking, and the final product was flavoured with honey, wine, oil or pork-fat, sesame, salt or vinegar in sweet or savoury versions. For cakes and flatcakes cheese, flour, honey, dried figs and walnuts were used. Vegetables were less favoured than fruits (fresh, preserved or dried figs, grapes and peaches) and nuts, though salads, onions and garlic featured in diets. The versatile olive played an important role as a vegetable, as oil for cooking and lighting, and as a cosmetic for anointing. It was for good reasons a valued prize at the Panathanaic games (112-37). The Romans had a higher regard for vegetables such as lettuce, beet, asparagus and cabbage, often combining them with luxury foods such as asphodel,

cardoons (thistle), shellfish, silphium (giant fennel), asaphoetida (both a flavour and a drug), spices (cumin, pepper) and herbs (basil, mint).

The main fare of Chapter 5 ('Meat and Fish', 140-63) is the *opsa* (meats, *pulmentaria*, plus vegetable proteins, things eaten with bread). H. observes that meat and fish are today more readily available than in antiquity, but that meat in excess is potentially harmful or subject to taboos, and fish not that popular (140-41). In antiquity meat and fish were status foods, the food of gods, heroes and the élite, and only regularly accessible to the poor from sacrificial animals. Preservation for a larger market was by salting, smoking or drying, which altered the flavours. The meats consumed were beef, pork, mutton, goat, but also birds, fox, hedgehog, ass, dog, puppy, wild boar, deer, hare, horse and camel (bear, lions, panther and leopard being considered less palatable). In the outlying areas of the Empire insects, locusts and snakes were eaten. Meat featured in the Roman military diet as in Homer's epics. The most common meat was pork, but according to Pliny (*NH* 8.209) the censors prohibited the serving of pork bellies, sweetbreads, testicles, wombs or halves of heads at *cenae* (cf. Trimalchio's extravagance in Petronius' *Cena*). Wild animals (dormouse, guinea-fowl, flamingo, pheasant, francolin) were also culinary prizes. In Greece meat was mainly sacrificial, whereas in Rome it was acquired without sacrifice. Fish was not sacrificial, but still élitist, except close to the coast. It is not eaten in Homer: the heroic code demanded meat. Supplies fluctuated with the shoal runs, and there was great variety of kinds and flavours. Shellfish such as oysters were always luxury items (142-60). The chapter closes with a discussion of animal products and their uses: honey, milk, butter and cheese (161-63).

The modern wine trade, with its snobbery and absurd descriptions, is the theme of H.'s Introduction to Chapter 6 ('Wine and Drinking', 164-65, 166-84). W. emphasises the difficulty of comparing ancient and modern wines and drinking: the vines were different, quality varied with area, the amphorae were lined with resin to waterproof them, and the wines themselves were diluted with water or sweetened with honey. Wine featured prominently and widely at entertainment, religious festivals and symposia. From its possible origins in Eastern Turkey around 5000 BC, wine moved into the Minoan and Mycenaean worlds, where it was resinated or flavoured with bay and rue (166-70). The symposium is then discussed: its absence in Homer, where heroes sit on chairs and drink, its role in the Archaic period, its ethical code of proper behaviour, the sympotic songs disseminating advice and confirming social cohesion and shared ideology, the painted pottery, the use of diluted rather than neat wine, the restraints on women consuming wine, the other phases of the symposium, and the kinds of symposium found among the lower classes (171-84).

Chapter 7 ('Food in Ancient Thought', 185-86, 187-210) offers some thoughts on modern cooking and food preferences, while the main part of the chapter deals with ancient philosophical debates on food (plants, animals) in the cosmic order, their taxonomy and concerns about the ill-effects of pleasure and luxury. Plato's *Timaeus* and the Hippocratic *Regimen* 1 are used to construct the ancient relationship of humans to animals in a hierarchy from god, man, woman, animal to fish. The point is made that the rearing and slaughtering of animals, today removed from common view, were very real in antiquity (187-90). The humans-animals relationship is explored further in philosophy, fable, comedy and poetry (191).

The classification of animals (Aristotle) and plants (Theophrastus) is then treated (191-92), and in the final section the debate on pleasure and luxury (192-210). Ancient writers are cited for attitudes to and warnings against excess: Galen, Athenaeus, Cato, Seneca, Plutarch, Plato, Porphyry. In his *Republic* Plato offers the diet of the ideal state (195-97): barley meal, wheat flour, wine, meat, salt, olives, cheese, green vegetables, dates, chick-peas, beans, myrtle berries and acorns. Couches, tables, myrrh, incense, courtesans, cakes, paintings, gold, ivory, sculpture, poets, actors, dancers, craftsmen, women's adornments, servants, tutors, hairdressers, barbers and chefs were all considered as luxurious. The dangers of pleasure are portrayed in comedy in the figures of the chef, parasite and *betaera* (197-98). Medical writers emphasised the medicinal value of foods taken in moderation, and Galen, Pliny, Columella and Cato idealised the simplicity of the past. Confronted by the influx of wealth from conquests, Roman writers such as Plautus, Terence, Horace, Cicero, Seneca, Ovid, Sallust and Tacitus continued the philosophical, rhetorical and literary debate, developing the contrast between *rūs* and *urbs*. Musonius advocated inexpensive foods and plants in a meatless and dull diet prepared with a minimum of cooking, and Arcestratus highlighted the dangers of the cookery book (199-207). Few cookery books survive: Mithaecus, Paxanus and Arcestratus (in fragments), Apicius, a late compilation, rich in terminology, ingredients and recipes (208). Diversity prevailed in the Roman Empire, with luxury existing alongside vegetarianism (208-10).

Chapter 8 ('Medical Approaches to Food', 211-44) surveys the theory and practice of food in health and healing: the diagnosis of exterior symptoms, the effects of food and drink on the body, diet, digestion (seen as a process of 'cooking'), divine intervention sought through sacrifice to gods of healing (e.g. incubation at the Asclepieia), the role of cooking in the process of civilisation, the influence of food on the humours (Hippocrates and Galen), healthy diet and deficiencies due to food shortages and regional variations (Galen, supported by analysis of skeletal remains, 213-17). There follows a

discussion of the theoretical work on the relationship between medicine and eating, in which the views of Celsus, Galen, Athenaeus and the Hippocratic corpus are set out: food as an element in the cosmic order, environmental factors, specific foods for particular ages, sexes and seasons, various lifestyles, therapeutic foods, natural history and cultural commentary, exercise and the working activities (e.g. digging) of ordinary people, the hypochondria of the pampered classes, the development of pharmacology and invasive surgery, the proneness to illness of especially travellers and sea voyagers, Galen's curiosity concerning the eating habits of other cultures (217-30).

From food as medicine we pass on to its part in the creation of the humours in human characterisation: the location of morality in the liver, the powers (*dunamis*) of food, the easy or slow passage of food through the intestines, the use of diuretics (e.g. oats, a food for animals), the 'cold' effect of less digestible foods (millet being better than oats), the 'warming' effect of juniper and cedar fruits that clean the kidneys and liver, the 'thinning' effect of just a little nutriment, the heartburn and headache caused by excess. The experimentation with various drugs (at first dried versions of foodstuffs) to induce such digestive changes led to the development of pharmacology in the Hellenistic period (231-36).

The chapter ends with a section on ecology (236-44): Galen's interest in clear water and fresh wind for fish, different areas for quality, the effect on the humours of, for example, mountain-grown animals and plants, and the seasonality of plants, his incorporation of geographical names and areas of the Empire, his social commentary on the wealthy and poor, local and foreign people, labourers, athletes and soldiers, his identification and listing of drugs (*pharmaka*), systematic explication of their use and efficacy according to medicinal properties, terminology, classification, usage as food, seasonality, flavour, and their use in cooking as *opsa* for good flavours.

The aims of Chapter 9 ('Food in Literature', 245-76) are (1) to present literary texts that link with the social, religious and scientific features identified earlier; (2) to identify the main aspects of literature's engagement with food and eating; (3) to show engagement with the food of literary genres (epic, satire, tragedy); and (4) to draw together and review the themes (247-48). In the process various ancient writers are quoted to illustrate themes on *eating and drinking* (urban corruption vs. rustic simplicity, nostalgia for the country and the past, anti-trade attitude, feasting and communal eating, pleasure, the growth of civilisation, 250); *food and genre* (richer food content in the 'lower' genres, moralising, sympotic poetry and prose, banquets and feasting, exotic settings and foods, rituals, 250-55); the relationship between the *human and natural worlds* (256); *human need* (hunger, food shortages, beggars, 256-57); *medicine and special food* (rations for wounded or weary

soldiers, potions, 257); *Greek and non-Greek* (strange foods, 257); *detailed descriptions* (257); *meals* (sharing, special occasions, sacrifice, sympotic, 258); *the reception of food in Homer* (in Athenaeus, Plato, Petronius, Galen, Hesiod, Cato, Juvenal, 258-60); *Greek and Roman Comedy and Tragedy* (Utopia, symposium, sacrifice, poisoning, gluttons, destruction of order, forces disrupting normal categories, 261-68), *Roman Satire* (attack on the rich and on excesses, 268-69); *the revealing anecdote* (stories on food and eaters, Galen's case histories, 269-73); and the value of Athenaeus' *The Deipnosophistae* (273-76).

This book contains a wealth of interesting details and observations, obviously well researched. The material, based on quotation and discussion of ancient sources, is solid and informative and presented in a readable style. The relatively few typing-errors are minor and easily corrected, though 'from the rich valley of the Eurotus valley' (p. 40), the use of dining-couches moving 'eastwards' (p. 68), 'embed' for 'embedded' (p. 161), the absence of references to the quoted fragments of Anacreon and Sappho (p. 174) and 'Guissepe' for 'Giuseppe' (p. 276) should have been picked up. The only real flaw is the rather loose structure. This is apparent in (1) the unnecessary repetition caused by constant reference to what has already been dealt with and anticipation of what is still to come; (2) actual repetition of material in other chapters; (3) the practice of adding on references to secondary literature (some bracketed, others not) in positions where the flow of the reading is interrupted (e.g. p. 160-61), both of which problems would have been solved with foot- or endnotes; and (4) the rambling and repetitive final chapter surveying ancient literature, much of which features in other parts of the book. A more structured and trimmed menu would have enhanced the already rich fare.

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