

Siren Feasts: A History of Food and Gastronomy in Greece. Andrew Dalby. Routledge, London and New York. Pp. xv; 320. US\$55.95 (hardcover). ISBN: 0-4151-1620-1.

This book is not being marketed as an ethnobiological treatise, and thus there is real danger that ethnobiologists will miss it; I am writing this review to alert them. *Siren Feasts* is a genuinely indispensable work for anyone interested in the ethnobiology of Europe or the Mediterranean. It is up-to-date, scholarly, accurate, and thorough. It treats just about every plant, animal and mineral that the ancient Greeks ever thought to devour, and pays more than lip service to modern Greek ways as well. The book is definitely focused on Classical times, but it covers archaeology (with some important new information on the early Neolithic) and also Byzantine and modern times. It is a work of traditional scholarship; sources are described and evaluated with care, on the assumption that the reader will want to look at them. Among other things, Dalby has exhaustively searched through Greek plays (including some only recently rediscovered, as papyrus mss.) and carefully translated sections dealing with food.

Ethnobiologists will be especially interested in the chapter "Divine Inventions" (pp. 57-92), which provides a full list of Classical Greek foods with their Greek names. Most of the Greek names have come into service, in the last 300 years, as scientific names. It is interesting to see how often the old names have been misapplied. The extreme case is *kaktos*, which originally referred to thistles. *Kardamon* originally referred to cress (presumably what we now name *Lepidium*). *Hamamelis*, which is now the scientific name of the witch hazel genus, then meant "wild apple."

The most interesting philological note, however, appears on page 182, where we learn that the Spanish *higado* and other Romance words for "liver" come from Latin *ficatus*, "stuffed with figs," which in turn was a translation gloss on Greek *sykoton*. The Greeks force-fed geese with figs to make the ancestral form of *pate de foie gras*, and the adjective applied to the resulting fatty livers is still with US.

Dalby's work is encyclopedic, not theoretical; it is a reference work. However, conclusions of wide interest do emerge, including the early emergence and great flourishing of gourmetship.

This book pairs usefully with Hellmut Baumann's recent book, *The Greek Plant World in Myth, Art and Literature* (1993). Baumann's book is less scholarly but has exquisite color photographs. It covers the wild plants, and thus forms a perfect complement for Dalby's coverage of the domesticated ones. Baumann addresses myths about wild plants, while Dalby covers the gastronomic literature.

To anyone who, like me, has some slight familiarity with Greece and wishes to know much more, these books are a true delight. All ethnobiologists should be aware of Dalby's book. No ethnobiological researcher or writer on European history or on the Mediterranean area can afford to ignore it.

LITERATURE CITED

- BAUMANN, HELLMUT. 1993. *The Greek Plant World in Myth, Art and Literature*. Translated and augmented by William T. Stearn and Eldwyth Ruth Stearn. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon.

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