

## BOOK REVIEWS

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**Food in the Ancient World from A to Z.** Andrew Dalby. 2003. Routledge, London and New York. Pp. xvi + 408. \$65.00 (hardcover). ISBN 0-415-23259-7.

Andrew Dalby has rapidly carved a name for himself as *the* expert on the ethnobiology of ancient Greece and Rome, and one of the leading experts on food during that period. Here he assembles a monumental amount of scholarship into a dictionary that will be a basic reference for a long time to come. This is the sort of book that one expects to see being produced by a whole team of senior scholars; to have such a work produced by one relatively young scholar is nothing short of incredible. Compiling such a dictionary for the Maya peoples, for example, would be hard enough; think of the task when one has to deal with thousands of original sources (ranging from vast books to scattered papyri and ostraca) and tens of thousands of secondary sources. Yet Dalby wears his knowledge lightly. He has made the entries notably readable, with wry and humorous asides in many cases. Sometimes these are his own; more often they are quotes or tags from the classic comic writers.

The entries cover foodstuffs, including those rare and exotic; ancient food writers and medical authorities, again including even the most obscure; and places noted for their food and wine. Dalby is very conscious of the enormous importance of that latter commodity in ancient civilization and has long and thorough entries on all aspects of wine culture, from manufacturing techniques to famous vintages.

Research in ancient-world ethnobiology has made great progress lately, thanks to archaeology and to scholarship such as Alan Davidson's work on Mediterranean seafood, but Dalby still had to sort through and evaluate a vast amount of nonsense, including early guesses at identification of species. He also has to tread lightly around some still-fierce controversies, such as the one over spices in the ancient world. J. I. Miller's *Spice Trade of the Roman Empire* (1969) assumed that cinnamon, cardamom, pepper, and the like were flowing into Rome in vast amounts. This position was sharply attacked by Patricia Crone in *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (1987); Crone held that words like *kinnamon* and *kardamomon* referred originally to local Mediterranean plants, being transferred only very late to Asian commodities, and that the spice trade never amounted to much. Dalby follows recent archaeological findings in taking a cautious middle ground, somewhat closer to Miller. Readers may wish he had said more about the issue, but his handling of it is delicate and sensible.

"Even Homer nodded," as the ancients said, and there are mistakes in this book. Most are trivial errors in nomenclature. Significantly, *Gallus gallus* is labeled as "*Gallus gallinaceus*" on page 83. On page 169, the hazel hen is called a "sand-

grouse," which it is not. More serious is the entry on the banana (p. 44): "fruit of a palm domesticated in New Guinea. . . ." The banana is, of course, not a palm, and only a rather obscure species (*Musa fehi* CLG Bertero ex E. (DE) Vieillard) was domesticated in New Guinea. The common banana (*Musa x paradisiaca*) is an artificially created hybrid probably "stemming" from Malaysia. No doubt an expert in the classics would find more errors than I have, but at the very least this is a notably reliable work.

Archaeobiologists will find this book particularly useful. The archaeological information is reasonably up-to-date, though not always. (*Panicum* millet is said to have been domesticated in the Caucasus, p. 218; most recent evidence supports China as the source, but the question is still very open.) Archaeologists will want to supplement Dalby's book with site reports.

Ethnobiologists frequently need references on the ancient world, if only because students and the public are often aware of, and very interested in, ancient Greece and Rome. This is clearly the reference of choice, and is a very worthwhile book to add to one's library.

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#### REFERENCES CITED

- Crone, Patricia. 1987. *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.  
Davidson, Alan. 2002. *Mediterranean Seafood: a Comprehensive Guide with Recipes*, 3rd ed. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley.  
Miller, J. I. 1969. *The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

**Discerning Palates of the Past: An Ethnoarchaeological Study of Crop Cultivation and Plant Usage in India.** Seetha Narahari Reddy. 2003. Ethnoarchaeological Series 5. International Monographs in Prehistory, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Pp. xi + 175; photographs, glossary. \$65.00 (hardcover), ISBN 1-879621-37-1. \$47.50 (paper), ISBN 1-879621-36-3.

It is a pleasure to read a well-written book that so masterfully welds together archaeology and ethnography about human and animal plant use. The focus of this volume is millets, Harappan sites in the state of Gujarat in western India, and the complementary interactions between pastoralism and agriculture. Although ethnoarchaeological modeling of crop processing for archaeological application premiered with the outstanding studies on wheat and barley by Hillman and Jones in the 1980s, nowhere before has anyone looked at millets. Millets are relatively small-seeded annuals with growth habits that range from strong-stalked, compact-headed inflorescences (Type A crops) to multiple weaker stalks with looser panicles (Type B crops). Domesticated millets originated in southern and eastern Asia as well as Africa, and wild millets are found just about world-