

founded their career on military and diplomatic abilities, while their descendants preferred to fulfil religious duties. One may wonder whether it was a general tendency; Żyromski uses only inscriptions of Moesian, Pannonian and Danube provinces as his evidence.

Agata A. Kluczek in her well (as usual) documented article discusses the dynastic policy of Maximinus Thrax (*W poszukiwaniu boskiej charyzmy w polityce dynastycznej cesarza Maksymina Traka 235–238* [*In the Search of Divine Charisma: Dynastic Policy of Maximinus Thrax*], pp. 230–246). Basing on numismatic evidence Kluczek tries to prove that Maximinus Thrax searched for his charisma to build a dynasty, but he did so when it was too late. Of course it can be one of possible explanations of Maximinus' failure (and subsequent death). His monetary programme (if there was any) could be ineffective or just useless.

Last two essays relate to Christianity. Gabriela Wcisło analyses Salvianus of Marseille's opinions on the causes of the decline of the Empire (*Bóg a upadek Cesarstwa rzymskiego w ujęciu Salviana z Marsylii* [*God and the Decline of the Roman Empire according to Salvianus of Marseille*], pp. 247–252). Salvianus thought that it was not God but human sins that was responsible for the decline. He also tried to persuade his readers not to doubt the Providence. Marek Wilczyński demonstrates (*Polityka religijna germańskich wodzów foederatii na terenach cesarstwa zachodniorzymskiego* [*Religious Policy of the German Foederatii Chiefs in the Western Roman Empire*], pp. 256–266) how barbarian kings and princes treated religion. They rarely used their power to convert conquered people and were proud of their piety. Besides Genseric, barbarian rulers sought to win support of their Catholic subjects.

The collection as a whole is an important contribution to Polish research on religion and politics in antiquity. Most of the articles are well documented and well written. The collection is also enriched by translations of Berossos (by Z.I. Brzostowski) and Ovid's *Tristia* I 2 (by E. Wesołowska). It will be useful for every scholar seeking to explore ancient history. But not every contribution deals strictly with religion and politics, a fact which makes the collection a little bit chaotic.

Paweł Madejski  
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin

Eos XCVI 2009  
ISSN 0012-7825

**Joan P. Alcock, *Food in the Ancient World***, Westport, Connecticut–London: Greenwood Press, 2006, 276 pp.

The reviewed work was written on the rising tide of interest amongst historians, evident in the nineteen nineties, in the field of nutrition and culinary sciences<sup>1</sup>. It was penned by a researcher boasting recognised achievements<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> The author has clearly noticed the trend (p. XI), and this fact finds reflection in her bibliography (*Selected bibliography*, pp. 253–262).

<sup>2</sup> Joan P. Alcock [= A.] was awarded a doctorate in archaeology. Her interest in everyday life, and in particular that of her native country, found reflection in the work entitled *Life in Roman Britain*, London 1996. The author's fascination with the history of food was initially limited to the British Isles (*Food in Roman Britain*, Stroud 2001; *Flavourings in Roman Culinary Taste with Reference to the Province of Britain*, in: H. Walker (ed.), *Spicing up the Palate: Studies of Flavourings, Ancient and Modern: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 1992*, Totnes 1993, pp. 11–23).

The objective of the work is to accessibly present the changes in production, consumption and food-related customs and practices that took place in ancient civilisations, starting from Egypt (from circa 3100 BC) and ending with the fall of the Roman Empire (5<sup>th</sup> century AD). Thus, the book is a *sui generis* “culinary voyage” through ancient Mediterranean civilisations, beginning with that established in the Nile Valley, progressing through Greece and Rome, and coming to a close in Celtic Gall and Britain. We should note here that information concerning Rome occupies a predominant position amongst the data gathered in the publication. This approach, as the author states, is deliberate and follows from the fact that Roman culture “subsumed these three other civilizations, concentrating on moulding them into a coherent whole” (p. XI).

A. states that her primary objective was to make the achievements of scholarly research more accessible to the “ordinary man” (p. XIII). This does not mean, however, that the work is devoid of an apparatus that would be useful to the specialist and more erudite reader<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, the author has decided to limit references to a minimum (cf. p. XII).

While working on her book, A. made use of a broad source base and numerous studies. It should, however, be noted that while we cannot really fault the sources selected by the author<sup>4</sup>, the group of studies does not contain many important – or indeed fundamental – works<sup>5</sup>. This

---

Gradually, however, she broadened her field of research to include the Mediterranean area, with the present book constituting proof of the change in scope.

<sup>3</sup> Footnotes are located at the end of each chapter, while the bibliography has been divided to include both general works [*General Reference*, pp. 253 f.] and those that are intended to broaden the reader’s knowledge on each of the six fundamental parts of the book – pp. 254–262), and placed at the end of the work.

<sup>4</sup> We consider the omission of the collection *De re coquinaria* (*On the Art of Cookery*), attributed to Apicius, to be of considerable import. In truth, this source has been discussed cursorily on p. 122, and references thereto are rather frequent, but this structural solution disrupts the overall structure of the work. We would also venture the opinion that the author should broaden the selection of Greek medical sources, for example by the work of Alexander of Tralles and Aëtius of Amida, whose periods of activity coincide with the chronological scope adopted for the book.

<sup>5</sup> However, we feel obliged to note that the list does not contain a number of significant works. Since an enumeration of all important works would have taken up too much space, in our review we shall refer only to examples. Namely, as regards the food production and processing technologies, the author has omitted such fundamental works as the study by Robert J. Forbes (*Studies in Ancient Technology*, vols. I–VI, Leiden 1964–1966) or the commonly cited book by Robert Curtis (*Ancient Food Technology*, Leiden 2001). The bibliography to the second chapter, which includes information on individual types of food, does not mention the fundamental work concerning fish, authored by D’Arcy W. Thompson (*A Glossary of Greek Fishes*, London 1947). When discussing various nutritional taboos, A. fails to include Frederick J. Simoons’ study (*Eat Not this Flesh: Food Avoidances from Prehistory to the Present*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., revised and enlarged, Madison–London 1994) in the bibliography. This omission has certain consequences as regards the quality of the conclusions presented by the author. We are referring here to the problem of consumption of dog meat in antiquity, which topic has been treated by A. on pp. 66 f. and 156. Had the author carefully read Simoons’ work, she would have discovered that this nutritional taboo was connected with a recipe for the *kandaulos* dish (discussed in the reviewed book on p. 121 on the basis of information provided by Hegesippos of Tarentum), which in turn would have forced her to take into consideration the results of research performed by Crawford H. Greenewalt, Jr. (*Ritual Dinners in Early Historic Sardis*, Berkeley 1976) and David Harvey (*Lydian Specialities, Croesus, Golden Baking-Woman, and Dogs’ Dinners*, in: J. Wilkins, D. Harvey, M. Dobson (eds.), *Food in Antiquity*, Exeter 1995, pp. 273–285). Finally, this would have made it possible to supplement information concerning consumption of this foodstuff by Greeks (which in the reviewed book is limited to just two sentences, on pp. 66 and 156).

shortcoming lowers the value of the publication, for – in our opinion – it casts a shadow on the effectiveness of fulfilment of the obligations set forward in the introduction to the publication<sup>6</sup>.

The structure of the work is clear and, in our opinion, correct. Out of concern for the above-mentioned group of readers, the book opens with a list of the Classical authors mentioned therein complete with short biographical entries<sup>7</sup>, which is followed by a calendar of what the author perceives to be the most significant events and developments<sup>8</sup>.

The first chapter of the book is a brief historical outline (*Historical Overview*, pp. 1–29) and contains a description of natural conditions, the size of the population, and the evolution of the farming and animal husbandry techniques utilised by the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Celts. In addition, a separate subchapter presents issues connected with the specificity of trade in antiquity (*Trade*, pp. 24–27).

The second chapter, devoted to types of food (*Foodstuffs*, pp. 31–101), has been divided into a number of subchapters that discuss various types of cereal crops, leguminous plants, mushrooms, fruits, vegetables, herbs, spices, meats (including fish), dairy produce, taste enhancers and beverages. This is the most copious part of the work, and particularly valuable at that, for it contains the largest body of information and is based in the main on sources. The author has adopted a fixed formula for the presentation of data, reporting when a given article appeared as an element of the diet, providing data concerning the conditions of its production (farming or husbandry) and occasionally citing Classical recipes for specific dishes<sup>9</sup> (together with clarifications as to whether they were considered luxurious); quite often, she supplements the data by a description of the dietetic and therapeutic properties of foodstuffs (taken from Classical medical writings<sup>10</sup>). The author has also included information about the importance of food in religious worship. This chapter has been written in an interesting manner, and allows readers to considerably broaden their knowledge of the dishes and ingredients known in antiquity.

The third chapter is devoted to methods of preparing dishes and the professions connected therewith (*Food Preparation and the Food Professions*, pp. 103–133). The author provides a broad description of various methods of preparing and storing (which includes preserving) foodstuffs, of the appearance and fittings of locations intended for the preparation of dishes (concentrating primarily on a reconstruction of Greek and Roman kitchens), and also of the conditions under which meals were consumed and the utensils used. Separate subchapters are devoted to cooks (their social

<sup>6</sup> Cf. “More detailed studies will be found in books and articles mentioned in the bibliography” (p. XIII).

<sup>7</sup> *Classical Authors Mentioned*, pp. XV–XXIV. It should only be noted that the younger son of Pompey the Great was Sextus Pompeius, not Sextus Pomponius (as we read on p. XXIV).

<sup>8</sup> *Time Line*, pp. XXVII–XXXII. Nevertheless, we will allow ourselves the opinion that this selection was not prepared by the author with due diligence. The choice of information is sometimes unexplainable (e.g. “Death of Emperor Claudius, almost certainly from eating poisoned mushrooms”, p. XXXI), while in a number of instances the wording is difficult to understand (e.g. “Persian Wars eventually lead to the Athenian defeat of the Persian navy at Salamis”, p. XXIX) or indeed incorrect (e.g. “Teutonic Forest” on p. XXXI instead of “Teutoburg Forest”). It should also be noted that the death of Alexander the Great occurred in the year 323, not in 324 (p. XXX).

<sup>9</sup> A. presents recipes in the form of quotes from sources. She does not, however, adapt them to the requirements of modern cuisine, which is an interesting trend first observed in the research of Sally Grainger (e.g. *Cooking “Apicius”: Roman Recipes for Today*, Totnes 2006), Mark Grant (*Roman Cookery. Ancient Recipes for Modern Kitchens*, London 1999), and recently in that of John Wilkins and Shaun Hill (*Food in the Ancient World*, Oxford 2006).

<sup>10</sup> The author most frequently cites Galen’s *De alimentorum facultatibus*, but sometimes also uses *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus*. Apart from the Pergamonian, other sources of information include Hippocrates, Dioscurides, Oribasius and Anthimus.

standing and skills) and the places where foodstuffs were consumed and/or sold (banqueting halls, inns, roadhouses, market stalls, etc.).

Chapter four (*Food by Civilization*, pp. 135–180) is also very general in nature, and contains information about the development of each of the civilisations in question, with particular attention being given to how farming and animal husbandry customs and practices changed over the years, and to the role of individual foodstuffs in the diet. The author analyses the causes of this evolution. Although we consider this concept of the chapter as correct, its execution – in our opinion – leaves much to be desired, for this part of the book is in fact a repetition of information presented in the preceding chapters<sup>11</sup>.

The next – fifth – chapter deals with nutritional customs and habits (*Eating Habits*, pp. 181–225). The author discusses not only daily meals (their place in the organisation of the day, menu, partakers and the course of meals), but also those consumed on special occasions (Egyptian banqueting habits and customs, Greek *symposia*, Roman *epulae* and *convivia*, and the collective meals of Celts). A separate subchapter (*Food for Special Groups*, pp. 206–223) has been devoted to specific nutritional practices of certain professional and social groups, such as soldiers<sup>12</sup>, gladiators and priests. The author expands on the issue of sacrifices made during religious holidays – touched upon previously – and gives a brief description of funeral and graveside feasts. This information is accompanied by a general description of customs and habits connected with interment ceremonies and their religious substantiation.

The sixth and final chapter is devoted to dietetic concepts that were adhered to in antiquity and an analysis of the nutritional values of consumed products, and thereby of their influence on the health of the populations under discussion (*Concepts of Diet and Nutrition*, pp. 227–252). The author makes another reference to Classical medical sources, searching them for signs of cohesive dietetic concept. She finds them in the form of the humoral theory<sup>13</sup>. She also compares the daily food of the wealthy and the poor, emphasising the importance that periods of hunger or malnutrition had for the diet and the state of health of the latter.

The main value of the work consists in the synthesis of literary and archaeological data, which results in a cohesive presentation of the role of food in selected cultures of the Mediterranean Basin in antiquity. Thus, the reader is acquainted not only with a list of foodstuffs specific for antiquity, but also with the evolution of the Mediterranean diet<sup>14</sup>. A. has determined the products that comprised the daily diet (she confirms the dominant position of cereals and leguminous plants, while we learn that meat products gained greater importance solely in Celtic culture), and also enumerates those foods that were considered as luxurious (meats and spices). The author confirms the existence of a constant threat of hunger, using archaeological materials as the primary source

---

<sup>11</sup> In some instances, the repetitions are nearly literal. Good examples of this disruption of the structural cohesion of the book are information concerning the production of beer in Egypt, given on pp. 90 and 145, and data regarding “bog butter”, presented on pp. 83 and 178.

<sup>12</sup> Availing herself of the opportunity, she makes her readers familiar with the basic principles of organisation and provisioning of the Roman army.

<sup>13</sup> It is, however, necessary to correct the nomenclature used by A. in the subchapter entitled *Humoral Theory*, pp. 229 f. Namely, Greeks termed bile *chole* (χολή), and not *choler*, as the author maintains on p. 229, while “melancholy” is not a Greek term designating black bile (this was called *melaina chole* [μέλαινα χολή]), but rather a description of a type of temperament that results from the predominance of black bile in the organism. It is interesting to note that recently published books place ever greater emphasis on analysing the achievements of Classical dietetics; proof of this trend is e.g. the chapter entitled *Medical Approaches to Food* in the recently published book by Wilkins and Hill (o.c. [n. 9], pp. 213–244).

<sup>14</sup> In order to systematise this knowledge, it would be best to compare it with Andrew Dalby’s excellent publication (*Food in the Ancient World from A to Z*, London–New York 2003).

of evidence; however, for the Greek and Roman cultures, she finds further proof in contemporary medical writings (with Galen being cited most frequently<sup>15</sup>).

No less interesting findings can be gleaned from the chapter entitled *Concepts of Diet and Nutrition*. Among others, the author has attempted to assess the actual impact of Classical dietetic theories on the nutrition of people in antiquity. In fact, A. doubts whether they could really have been applied in everyday practice<sup>16</sup>. Particularly instructive is the list of ailments that most frequently affected the people of the age, which were caused by malnourishment and poor hygiene. A. has determined that Classical societies most often suffered from diseases of the oral cavity, with the most common being enamel hypoplasia<sup>17</sup> and damage to the teeth caused by food contamination<sup>18</sup>. The shortage of calcium led to arthrosis, while the usage of lead in the production of kitchen utensils resulted in lead-poisoning<sup>19</sup>. Alimentary intoxication was frequent<sup>20</sup>, as were parasitic diseases, avitaminosis, anaemia and an overall lack of immunity (cf. pp. 247–251). Equally instructive are findings concerning average height (which did not exceed 1,69 m) and the life span of people of antiquity (for Egyptians it was calculated at 27 years, in Greece it totalled some 30 years, while in Rome and Roman Britain it amounted to some 25 years; cf. pp. 249–251).

To recapitulate the present deliberations, we should state that A.'s book constitutes an example of diligent popularisation. Her book fulfils this task thanks to its interesting presentation and logical arrangement. Without a doubt, this work may be recommended for everyone who would be interested in broadening their knowledge of daily life in antiquity. In our opinion, the book is worth translating into Polish, so as to make it available to Polish readers.

Maciej Kokoszko, Katarzyna Gibel  
University of Łódź

---

<sup>15</sup> Apart from the passages cited by A., it is worth reading other deliberations of the same author concerning the same topic. Cf. *Galenī de alimentorum facultatibus libri*, 622, 5–624, 11; 635, 16–637, 4; 644, 3–17, ed. D.C.G. Kühn, vol. VI, Lipsiae 1823. These same issues have been touched upon by Oribasius: *Oribasii collectionum medicarum reliquiae* II 11, 1, 1–4, 6; III 9, 1, 1–2, 5, ed. I. Raeder, vols. I–III, Leipzig 1928–1931 (hereinafter: Oribasius, *Collectiones medicae*); *Oribasii Synopsis ad Eustathium filium* IV 8, 1, 1–2, 5, ed. I. Raeder, vol. IV, Leipzig 1933.

<sup>16</sup> “How many people followed these theories is problematic”, p. 230. It should be added that A. Dalby (*Flavours of Byzantium*, Totnes 2004, p. 129) puts forward the opinion that Byzantine society took analogous dietetic advice seriously.

<sup>17</sup> We learn that this is a visible sign of malnutrition during adolescence, p. 246.

<sup>18</sup> This concerns in particular stone particles, which mixed with flour during the process of grinding grain using stone querns, pp. 245–247.

<sup>19</sup> The author considers that the common occurrence of this disease (manifesting itself, among others, in reduced sensitivity to taste) explains the presence of a large number of hot spices in Roman cuisine, p. 247.

<sup>20</sup> The author cites advice given by Oribasius, *Collectiones medicae* IV 3, 2, 3. Cautions of this type are frequent in medical sources. In any case, poisoning was caused not only by the consumption of contaminated or spoiled food, but also of products originating from a contaminated environment. For examples, cf. Oribasius, *Collectiones medicae* II 51, 1, 1–4; III 15, 5, 1–6, 3. Also cf. M. Kokoszko, *Fish and their Role in the Daily Lives of People of the Late Classical and Early Byzantine Period (III–VII cent.)* [in Polish], Łódź 2005 (Byzantina Lodziensia IX), pp. 150, 217.