Introduction

From charred seeds to ancient texts

When a bowl of warm lentil soup or a slice of delicious '*trachanópita*', a pie made with cracked wheat and feta cheese, is devoured nowadays in Greece, hardly anybody is aware of the nearly 9,000 years that have intervened since the first bowl of lentil soup was cooked in a Neolithic cooking pot or the first batch of clean wheat grain was coarsely ground to be eaten. It was during this prehistoric past that the wide range of plant food ingredients, landraces and great variety of recipes was shaped. Archaeobotany, the study of ancient plant remains that have been preserved in archaeological deposits as a result of human activity, usually through contact with fire, offers a wealth of information on ancient plant foods (Figure I.1, I.2, I.3). For prehistoric Greece, charred plant remains recovered from excavations of Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements have been published in comprehensive, synthetic accounts (e.g. Megaloudi 2006, Valamoti 2009, Valamoti in press). They provide a basis for exploring aspects of prehistoric human-plant interactions such as the origins of crop cultivation, the range of plant-originating food ingredients during the Neolithic and the Bronze Age or, their means of storage and transformation into specific food preparations. Archaeobotanical investigations reveal changes in plant food ingredients and culinary practices over time, thus allowing interesting inferences about contact networks, population movements and cultural identity. For Late Bronze Age Greece, the exploration of plant ingredients in food and other recipes is further enriched by the deciphering of Linear B where several plant ingredients have been listed in the Mycenaean palace archives, revealing plants that were of special concern for the Late Bronze Age palatial centres (Figure I.4). Moving on in time, from prehistory to the first millennium B.C., ancient texts offer an alternative, additional field of evidence that allow us to follow plant foods on their journey from the first farmers of prehistoric Greece to later periods. Combined with archaeobotany, they form a powerful tool to approach past culinary practice.

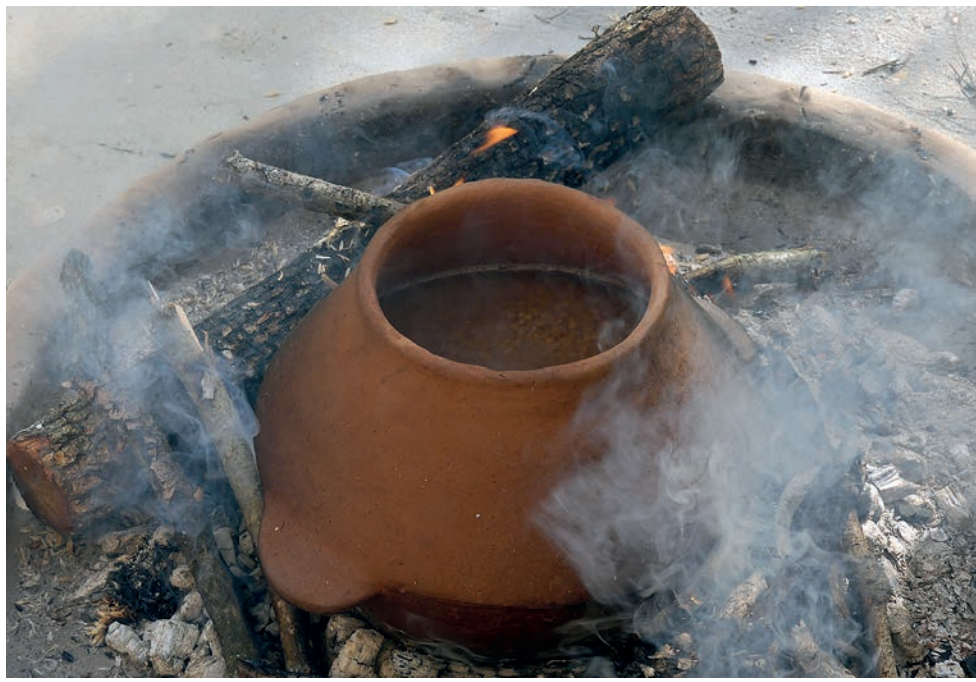


Figure I.1 Cooking accidents often lead to the charring of plant remains; the same happens when houses or other structures are burnt by fire. Such charring episodes lead to the preservation of ancient plant remains in archaeological deposits. Photo of a cooking experiment using replica Neolithic pots (PlantCult project).

Archaeobotany has been the key tool for understanding the origins of crop and fruit tree cultivation among communities inhabiting Greece from the 7th to the end of the 2nd millennia B.C. These origins, for ancient Greeks, are blended in myth, with particular gods being in charge of their domestication and the spread of their cultivation to humans. Cereals were associated with Demeter, the grapevine, wine and wild vegetation with Dionysos, and the olive and olive oil with Athena. Such origin stories were not only recorded in texts but also depicted in many different ways on vases, coins and reliefs (Dimakopoulos et al. in prep). Other specific plants were sacred for the gods, such as the oak tree for Zeus and laurel for Apollo, and various myths were woven to explain the origin of certain plants, often corresponding to the transformation of young women into a plant in their attempt to escape rape by their male god suitors (e.g., Daphne). Pulses do not seem to have had patron gods or special myths woven around them, yet they provided important ingredients for many recipes, including ritual ones, as we shall see below.

For the historic periods, ancient Greek texts are a rich source of information on plants and plant foods not as mere components of a cuisine but in the contexts

Figure I.2 Charred cereal grains during excavation. Limnochori II, four lakes region near Amyndaion, northern Greece (courtesy of Panagiotis Chrysostomou).

of their preparation, consumption and ways they were perceived by those who wrote the texts. Through the works of famous ancient Greek historians, poets and doctors we can learn of plants that were used as food and/or medicine in the ancient Greek world. We can also find fragments of recipes and occasionally explore when, where and by whom they were consumed. A combination of written sources and a rich archaeobotanical record is the ideal way to approach the plant foods of the historic periods that followed the Mycenaean, which witnessed contact with new lands and the introduction of new plant foods as a result of Alexander the Great's expansion to the East. Yet, unlike the rich archaeobotanical record of prehistoric Greece, this type of archaeological evidence from historical times is meagre, with such remains only occasionally being retrieved from excavations of the region. Flotation, the main method through which charred plant remains are retrieved from archaeological deposits, is only rarely applied during the excavation of archaeological sites of the historic periods. It is a shared belief among archaeologists specializing in these periods that textual evidence alone offers sufficient information about past plant uses though recently this has begun to gradually change. At the relatively few sites where archaeobotanical remains

Figure I.3 Flotation machine in operation at Dikili Tash (top). Charred pears near the sherds of a vase during excavation, House 1, Dikili Tash (bottom left), detail (bottom right): wild pears are collected by special sieves during processing with flotation.

from the historic periods are being studied, the preliminary publications show the potential of this material to highlight aspects of past culinary practices (Megaloudi 2006; Livarda 2012, Margaritis 2016, 2017; Valamoti et al. 2018; Douché et al. 2021).

In *Food Crops in Ancient Greek Cuisine* we have attempted to integrate ancient documentary records with archaeobotanical data from Greece, a combination that offers exciting insights into the continuity, divergence and variability in culinary practice across space and through time in the ancient Greek world. The chapters that follow take the reader on a culinary journey through ancient Greek plant foods, starting from their prehistoric roots and proceeding through to the end of the 1st millennium B.C. It is by no means intended as an exhaustive presentation of ancient Greek plant food species or of recipes using plant ingredients. Ancient Greeks used a wide variety of plant food ingredients, some rooted in prehistoric times, others introduced later. Such crop introductions happened

Figure I.4 Linear B tablet from Thebes. Photo courtesy of Vassilis Aravantinos, after Aravantinos et al. 2001 and Aravantinos 2010.

in ways similar to those that had existed since the emergence of the first farmers on the western shores of the Aegean and the Greek mainland: contact networks; people moving from their homelands carrying seeds and the knowledge of their cultivation and culinary transformation.

The focus in this book is primarily on plant foods from crop-fields, cereals and pulses. Only minor complementary information is gleaned from the literature as regards the other components of the Mediterranean tetrad (as defined by Sarpaki 1992), the grapevine and the olive, or other potential plant food ingredients from trees and shrubs. The rich spectrum of plant food ingredients consumed in ancient Greece included many more crops, fruit and wild plants that are either only briefly mentioned in this book or not considered at all. Many among them were primarily used in medicinal recipes for poultices and special

preparations, a domain that lies beyond the scope of this book. Medicinal remedies based on plant ingredients, however, were often food preparations such as healing soups, a practice well rooted in the pioneering perception of ancient Greek doctors that diet played an important role in maintaining good health and that special foods could act as a medicine when the balance of the four humours was disturbed thus causing illness (cf. Krug 1997, Wilkins 2015). The focus of our book rests on food from the cultivated parts of the landscape called *ároura* in ancient Greek.

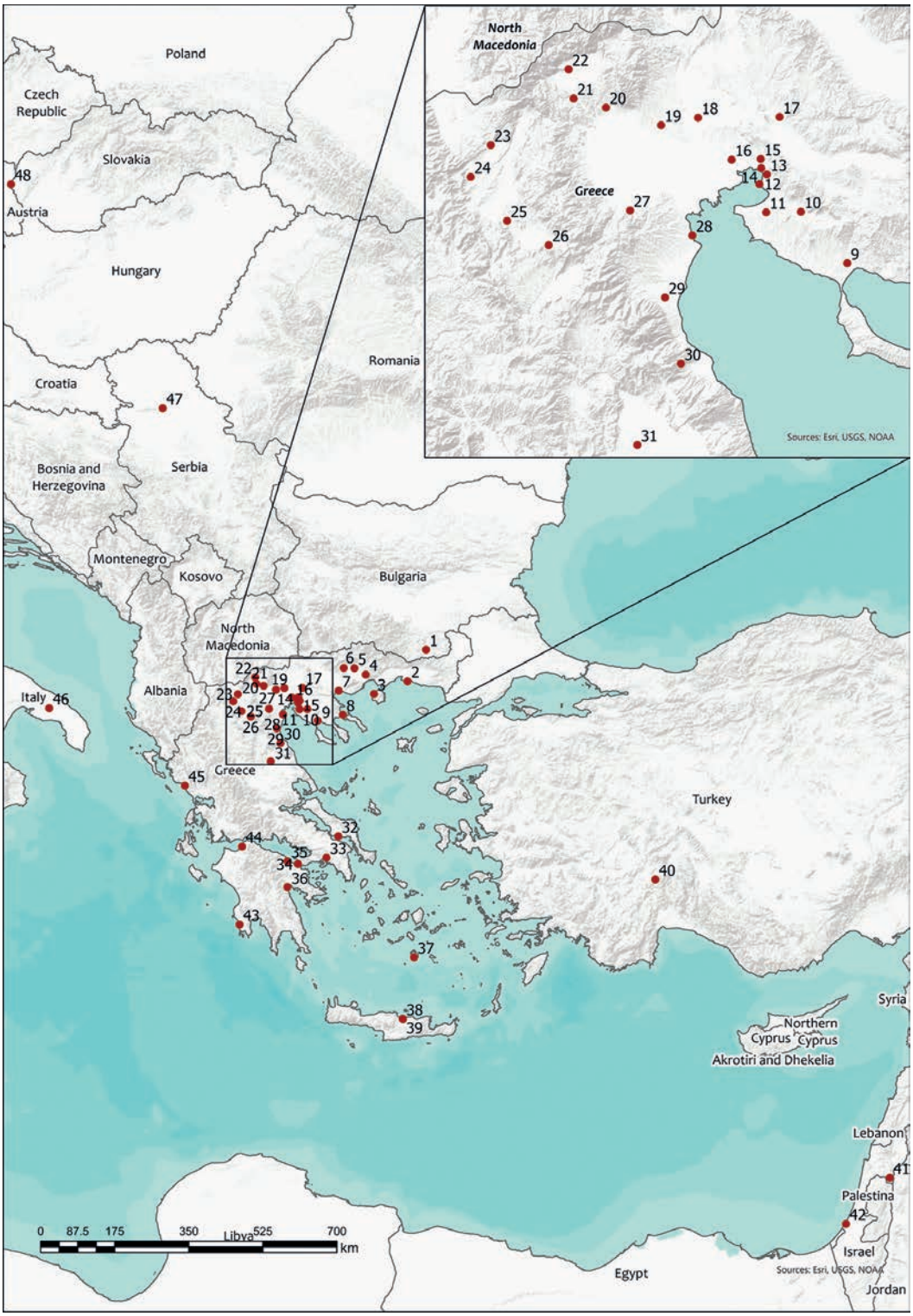
Books on ancient Greek cooking have previously been published, including those offering a selective overview of ingredients and recipes (Dalby 1997), specialized enquiries into the works of specific writers or types of works (for example Wilkins and Hill 2011/1994 on Archestratus; Wilkins 2000 on ancient Greek comedy) or more comprehensive approaches to ancient food (Wilkins and Nadeau 2015; Dalby 2003) and ancient taste (Rudolph 2017), along with publications intended to inform a wider readership, including the interested public, about ancient Greek cooking and diet (for example, Thermou 2017, Psilakis and Psilaki 2001, Dalby 1997). The work of Gennadios, originally published in 1914 and later reprinted in 1997 offers a list of plant species known in the Greek world, including their mainstream accepted ancient Greek names and uses. Some of the plants discussed in this book are also included in Dalby's *Food in the Ancient World from A to Z* (Dalby 2003), while articles on certain types of plant foods such as ritual breads and Celtic bean are also available (Brumfield 1997 and Hamilton 1999 respectively).

As is often the case in ancient Greek and later texts, the description of "recipes" consists more or less of a list of ingredients mixed together and, very rarely, processing steps are offered or implied by the utensils and facilities (e.g.,

Figure I.5 Map of Greece and surrounding areas showing archaeological sites with archaeobotanical material, mentioned in the text. The map has been created ArcGIS® software by Esri. ArcGIS® and ArcMap™ are the intellectual property of Esri and are used herein under license. Copyright © Esri. All rights reserved. For more information about Esri® software, please visit www.esri.com.

The sites are organized alphabetically: Ada Tepe-1; Agios Athanasios-16; Akanthos-8; Akrotiri-37; Apsalos-21; Archondiko -19; Argilos-7; Argissa-31; Arkadikos-5; Ashkelon-42; Assiros-17; Corinth-34; Dikili Tash-4; Dioiketerion, Thessaloniki-14; Dion -29; Düzen Tepe, Sagalassos-40; Eleusis-33; Eretria-32; Kalakača-47; Kali Vrysi-6; Karabournaki, -12; Kastanas-18; Knossos-Gypsades-38; Krania, Pieria-30; Kyparissi, Vasilika-10; Lerna-36; Limnochori-24; Makrygialos-28; Mandalo-20; Mavropigi-Fillotsairi-25; Mesimeriani Toumba-11; Molyvoti (ancient Strymi) -2; Monte Papalucio-46; Nekromanteion (Epirus)-45; Nysa-Scythopolis (Beit She'an)-41; Olynthos -9; Patra-44; Petres Florinas-23; Polichni -15; Pylos-43; Sikyon, Peloponnese-35; Skala Sotiros-3; Sosandra-22; Stillfried, Austria-48; Toumba Kremastis Koiladas-26; Toumba Thessalonikis -13; Vergina-27; Villa Dionysos-39.

→


North Macedonia
Poland
Czech Republic
Slovakia
Austria
Hungary
Romania
Croatia
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Serbia
Montenegro
Kosovo
Bulgaria
North Macedonia
Albania
Italy
Greece
Turkey
Syria
Northern Cyprus
Cyprus
Akrotiri and Dhekelia
Lebanon
Palestina
Israel
Jordan
Egypt
Libya
Sources: Esri, USGS, NOAA
0 87.5 175 350 525 700
km

hearths and ovens) that were used for their preparation (e.g., Wilkins and Hill 2011; Tromaras 1991). Such "recipes" are provided here for the plant species that have been systematically researched, yet, the book is not the equivalent of a dictionary of plant foods and plant food recipes nor an account of ancient Greek culinary practice; for this the reader is referred to a range of published works such as *Food in the Ancient World* (Wilkins and Hill 2006), *Siren Feasts* (Dalby 1997; 2003), *Archestratus: Fragments from the Life of Luxury* (Wilkins and Hill 2011). Our investigation into the texts has been exhaustive for the periods researched using certain keywords and we have been critical and cautious as regards species attribution to specific ancient Greek words as well as specific food preparations.

The aim of this book is not to provide a comprehensive presentation of the full literary record on ancient plant foods, but rather to demonstrate, through a detailed examination of the sources, how elements of the prehistoric cuisine of Greece, as presented in various archaeobotanical publications, continued into the historic periods, at the same time being transformed and enriched over the centuries that followed the Late Bronze Age (Figure I.5). Ancient texts expand our knowledge of plant ingredients and the foods made from them by offering insights impossible to achieve from archaeobotanical information alone, such as the creation of a special barley landrace (Galen, *Explanation of Hippocratic words* 19.87, see below p. 54), the flatulence caused by consuming pulses (Heniochus, *fr.* 4.7-8 *PCG*, 'the gruel of celtic-beans swells the belly') or the barley crumbs covering a man's beard as he sprinkled them above his cup that was full of wine, in the context of drinking *kykeṓn* (Eupolis *fr.* 99.81-82 *PCG*, see below p. 60). The plant ingredients which we find in the texts sometimes refer to everyday food, or on other occasions to special or ritual practices, such as, for example, the preparation of special breads, sometimes in the form of human genitalia (see section below) or the sprinkling of phalluses with what most probably was some form of grain (Figure I.6).

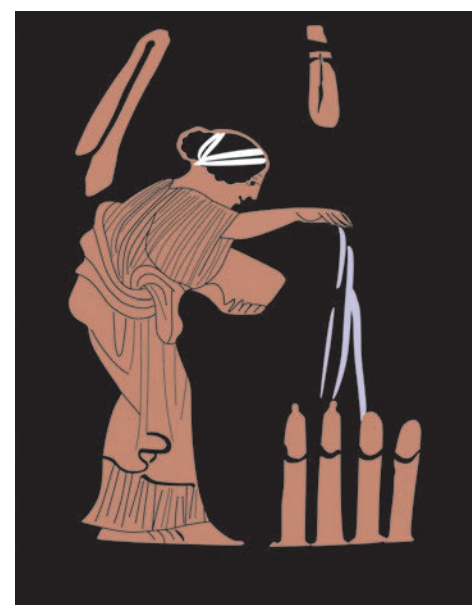


Figure I. 6 Celebration of Aloa, depicted on a red-figured pelike (440-430 BC): Phalluses are sprinkled with something resembling ground grain. Drawing: Danai Chondrou, after British Museum E819 (1865, 1118.49)