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KATHLEEN COLEMAN

## MELIOR'S PLANE TREE

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ANCIENT GARDEN

"Within a few weeks of surveying all the empty space we had on the building's roof and how it was bathed in sun the whole day, I decided to start a garden and received permission to do so from the commanding officer. I requested that the prison service supply me with sixteen forty-four-gallon oil drums that they sliced in half for me. The authorities then filled each half with rich, moist soil, creating in effect thirty-two giant flowerpots. I grew onions, aubergines, cabbage, cauliflower, beans, spinach, carrots, cucumbers, broccoli, beetroot, lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, strawberries, and much more. At its height I had a small farm with nearly nine hundred plants."

Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*

What is a garden? At the very least, it is a cultivated space, distinct from — though possibly blending into — the surrounding landscape, and associated with a settled way of life accommodating the cycle of the seasons that is necessary for cultivation. As a "central, essential expression of cultural and social life", gardens are a cohesive historical subject whose comprehensive study requires the combined resources and methodologies of the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the

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humanities.<sup>1</sup> They constitute both universal and culturally specific ways of accommodating the natural world and expressing human attitudes and values. Gardens are material but also symbolic. Their essence is elusive. Their histories tend to be localized in periods or nations, however broadly or narrowly conceived. This volume spans three millennia of history in the Mediterranean world; it is about the ancient garden.

Can we, however, speak of 'the ancient garden'? Should we not, rather, speak of 'ancient gardens' in the plural, without the definite article? The *Entretiens* at the Fondation Hardt on "Le jardin dans l'Antiquité" conveyed, above all, the multiplicity of spaces that qualified as gardens in Antiquity, the myriad uses to which they were put, and the range of ways in which they were represented. This volume does not claim to provide an overview of the subject or to represent all the ways in which it can be tackled; rather, the individual contributions focus on specific moments and locations within those three millennia of ancient Mediterranean history, taking up the evidence for specific themes and employing inter-disciplinary approaches to interpret it.<sup>2</sup>

The *Entretiens* were conducted during a week of glorious late-summer weather in 2013 in the idyllic setting of La Chandoleine, the villa owned by Baron von Hardt, set at the top of a sloping garden with a view of Mont Blanc in the distance. The year would close with the death of Nelson Mandela, the genesis of whose garden on the roof of Pollsmoor Prison outside Cape Town is described in the epigraph to this chapter. The garden at the Fondation is mostly parkland — grass surrounded by trees shading gravel walks, beehives, and the

<sup>1</sup> DIXON HUNT 1999, 79, arguing eloquently that garden history should be regarded as a separate discipline. On the necessarily heterogeneous nature of writing on gardens, see ELKINS 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Gardens in Greek culture, represented here by the article by Évelyne Prioux, should also have been treated by the doyenne of Theophrastan studies, Mme Suzanne Amigues, who was unfortunately prevented by ill health from participating. For evidence not treated in this volume, papyri, in particular, remain an untapped resource.



Baron's grave. President Mandela's prison plot was a kitchen garden, brimming with vegetables. Leisure activities and edible produce are the two commodities most obviously supplied by gardens today: food for the soul, as well as the body. Both these functions are attested in the evidence for gardens in Antiquity; the garden setting for the Baron's tomb also has ancient precedent.

Some aspects of ancient gardens are less familiar today, however, although not entirely unknown: their religious associations; the incorporation of vegetal motifs as architectural features; plants as metaphors for literary production; the status of gardens as competitive cultural symbols; their cachet as loci in which to display exotic new species; the interplay between boundedness and permeability; the symbolism of individual species of plants; and gardens' contested status as loci of danger and seduction, but also of honest labor and productivity. All these aspects are treated in the essays that follow, which themselves address different sorts of evidence by means of various methodological approaches. Adopting a primarily philological method, I shall here try to tease these same aspects out of a literary description of a noteworthy feature in a single Roman garden in the first century CE, and then show how it reflects *in nuce* the themes of the rest of the contributions.

## I. Putting down roots

A garden is somebody's property. A particular feature in it may, indeed, be a prized possession. If so, it is a sure bet for access to its owner's heart, on the same footing as a precious statuette, a precious pet, a precious slave.<sup>3</sup> During the late Flavian period, Atedius Melior owned a residential property on

<sup>3</sup> Cf. STAT. *Silu.* 4, 6 (on the Hercules Epitrapezios statuette of Novius Vindex); 2, 4 (on the death of Atedius Melior's parrot); 2, 1 (on the death of Melior's *puer delicatus*, Glaucias); 2, 6 (on the death of Flavius Ursus' *puer delicatus*, Philetos).



the Caelian Hill, probably on the southern slope, due south of the Colosseum along the so-called Via Caelimontana, where residences were located in *praedia* of ample dimensions.<sup>4</sup> A notable feature of this property was a tree with a remarkable growth-habit, described by Statius in the opening lines of a poem composed for Melior and subsequently published in the book dedicated to him:

Stat quae perspicuas nitidi Melioris opacet  
 arbor aquas complexa lacus; quae robore ab imo  
 <in>curuata uadis redit inde cacumine recto  
 ardua, ceu mediis iterum nascatur ab undis  
 atque habitet uitreum tacitis radicibus amnem.<sup>5</sup>

5

"There stands a tree that shades the clear waters of brilliant Melior, embracing its pool. Curving over the water from the base of its trunk, it grows back, raising its lofty head upright, as though it were born again from the middle of the water and dwelt with hidden roots in the glassy stream."

To explain the tree's extraordinary shape, Statius tells a story (8-61): Pan chased the nymph Pholoë from one fabled haunt of Rome's rural past to another, until she sank down, exhausted, beside a pool on the spot that would one day become Melior's garden; as Pan closed in on her, Pholoë, warned by an arrow from Diana, took refuge in the pool. Pan, unable to swim, was foiled of his prey, but he achieved virtual union with Pholoë by planting beside the pool a plane-tree sapling, which curved over it to caress the nymph's waters with its leaves before continuing its growth into the sky. The story ends in a neat paradox, *exclusos inuitat gurgite ramos*, whereby Statius imagines

<sup>4</sup> GIANNELLI 1993, 209. For a concise description of the Caelian, "densely inhabited by the C2 BC and . . . predominantly residential thereafter", see CLARIDGE <sup>2</sup>2010, 341-343 (quotation at 341). For plans, see COARELLI 2007, Fig. 56; CLARIDGE <sup>2</sup>2010, Fig. 153. On Atedius Melior, wealthy and cultivated, see *PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 1277; WHITE 1975, 272-275. The exact location of his property is unknown; literary attestations are collected by RODRÍGUEZ ALMEIDA 1995.

<sup>5</sup> *Silu.* 2, 3, 1-5. In the passages quoted in this article, I print the text I think most likely to be authentic, with *apparatus criticus* appended where it is warranted. Unattributed translations are my own.



predator and prey achieving a lasting accommodation.<sup>6</sup> This harmonious conclusion to the story is mirrored by the qualities that Statius ascribes to Melior in a graceful coda, offering the poem to him as a birthday gift and expressing the hope that he will live to a robust old age in peaceful seclusion, pursuing a moderate lifestyle amid his ample wealth and cultivating the memory of his deceased friend, Blaesus.

Statius himself describes this poem, and the following one in memory of Melior's parrot, as *leues libellos quasi epigrammatis loco scriptos*.<sup>7</sup> It is rooted in the ecphrastic tradition of the *locus amoenus*.<sup>8</sup> The myth that it recounts is predicated most immediately upon Ovid's account of Pan and Syrinx (*Met.* 1, 689-712), but it also alludes to his treatment of Apollo and Daphne (*Met.* 1, 490-567), Poseidon and Coronis (*Met.* 2, 572-588), and Alpheius and Arethusa (*Met.* 5, 577-641), with echoes of his tale of Narcissus (*Met.* 3, 402-493). The Ovidian cast to this whimsical *aetion* has often been discussed; so has the Epicurean lifestyle pursued by Melior, who, like many of Statius' patrons, adapted the tenets of orthodox Epicureanism to accommodate a high standard of comfort and refinement.<sup>9</sup> The poem has also been interpreted as a political allegory or, at least, as alluding to political difficulties in Melior's past.<sup>10</sup> What has not yet been appreciated, however, is the botanical and horticultural precision with which Statius fertilizes the

<sup>6</sup> "She invites the branches she had shut out with her water", *Silu.* 2, 3, 61. On the syntactical ambiguity of *gurgite* — instrumental or separative — mirroring the ambivalence of the story, see CANKIK 1965, 56. English syntax does not admit this ambiguity; the translation "with her water", ostensibly instrumental, is placed after "shut out" to convey the possibility of a separative sense.

<sup>7</sup> "Light poems written, as it were, instead of an epigram", *Silu.* 2 *praef.* 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> RÜHL 2006, 290. On the *locus amoenus* as part of Ovid's legacy to subsequent literature, HINDS 2002, esp. p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> Ovidian features: VAN DAM 1984, *ad loc.*; BILLERBECK 1986; PEDERZANI 1992; 1995; DEWAR 2002; MORZADÉC 2003; HARDIE 2006; NEWLANDS 2011a, *ad loc.* Epicureanism: ANDRÉ 1996; MYERS 2005; NEWLANDS 2011a, 13-15.

<sup>10</sup> WHITE 1975, 272-273; VESSEY 1981; HARDIE 1983, 66-67; NAUTA 2002, 312-323. Political overtones are resisted by BILLERBECK 1986, 533-535.



story.<sup>11</sup> The Ovidian atmosphere of lecherous gods, fleeing nymphs, and virtual metamorphosis is the more brilliantly crafted for being cast in authentic botanical terms. All these delicately observed details are, indeed, reminiscent of Ovid's own 'cinematographic' technique; an acute discussion of Statius' poem has commented on the way in which it displays "the same literalness of myth that characterizes the humor of the *Metamorphoses*".<sup>12</sup>

Melior's tree was a plane, as emerges halfway through the poem (*primaeuam . . . platanum*, 39). Its shape in the opening description comprises precisely the growth habit of *platanus orientalis* L., the magnificent shade tree from the East that was first brought to Rome in the competition to import exotic species during the territorial expansion of the later Republic.<sup>13</sup> Unless they are pruned, the lateral branches will dip downwards to the point where they touch the ground, and the growth is so vigorous that they then grow upwards again, either rooting at the point of contact or propped up on an artificial support (Fig. 0.1).<sup>14</sup> This is the swooping habit that Statius ascribes to Melior's tree: *robore ab imo / <in>curuata uadis redit inde cacumine recto / ardua* (2-4). Statius' words seem to imply that the crown (*cacumen*) rises directly from the growth that curves over the water, in which case it is possible that Melior had had the rest of the tree pruned away by an expert *topiarius* (surely included among the team of gardeners employed by a wealthy home owner), so as to create this effect; but it suits Statius' purpose to treat it as a natural

<sup>11</sup> Without adducing any details, MORZADÉC 2003, 102 notes the general characterization of Pan as a gardener: "Pan se comporte en véritable paysagiste créant un 'jardin' autour de ce lac en transplantant un jeune platane et en l'arrosant, avec tout le savoir-faire d'un bon jardinier".

<sup>12</sup> DEWAR 2002, 399.

<sup>13</sup> JASHEMSKI, MEYER, & RICCIARDI 2002, 145-146; MARZANO *infra*, 215-218. The leaves of the plane are conducive to evaporation, which cools the ambient temperature: VIGOUROUX 2007, 83.

<sup>14</sup> VIGOUROUX 2007, 52.



and spontaneous growth that is not to be ascribed to human intervention.<sup>15</sup>

In Statius' poem, the atmosphere of untrammelled nature is paramount; unlike his other poems about properties belonging to his patrons — Manlius Vopiscus' villa at Tibur (*Silu.* 1, 3), the baths of Claudius Etruscus in Rome (1, 5), the villa of Pollius Felix at Surrentum (2, 2) and its shrine to Hercules (3, 1) — this one mentions no man-made elements: neither buildings nor landscaping. The 'marvels of civilization' that are so prominently celebrated elsewhere in the *Siluae* are here replaced by the product of cultivation: nature facilitated by nurture.<sup>16</sup> The stamp that Melior has imposed upon the landscape of the Caelian — attributed by Statius to the divine collaboration of Pan — is not the unmistakably human construct of Pollius Felix' roofed open-air staircase (*Silu.* 2, 2, 30-33) or Pliny's row of box neatly clipped to spell his gardener's name and his own (*Ep.* 5, 6, 35); rather, it is nature herself, in an unnatural but (Statius implies) spontaneous form. The focus upon pristine nature rather than a built environment cannot have been determined by Melior's Epicureanism, since other patrons whose building projects are extolled — notably Manlius Vopiscus and Pollius Felix — are presented as equally Epicurean in their outlook. Rather, we seem to see here a sensibility that privileges the natural over the artificial in a landscape where the only mediation is effected by a deity who embodies the wild in nature.

Statius attributes horticultural skill to Pan by incorporating exact observation and appropriate terminology into his racy Hellenistic *epyllion*:

primaevam nisu platanum, cui longa propago  
innumeraeque manus et iturus in aethera uertex, 40

<sup>15</sup> *Topiarii*: MARZANO *infra*, 228-229. On the enormous range and specificity of employment in a wealthy Roman household, see TREGGIARI 1975.

<sup>16</sup> On 'marvels of civilization' as a trope characteristic of the *Siluae*, see PAVLOVSKIS 1973, 1-21; for a corrective emphasizing the same trope in earlier Latin authors, ÖBERG 1978.



deposuit iuxta uiuamque adgressit harenam  
optatisque aspergit aquis<sup>17</sup>

39 *nisu Peyrarède: uisu M*

"Beside it, with an effort, he set a sapling plane, which would have a long stem and innumerable 'hands' and a top soaring into the sky, and he piled up fresh earth and sprinkled it with the longed-for water."

Pan goes to a lot of trouble in planting the plane tree; the conjecture *nisu* for the redundant *uisu* of the manuscript — a sapling is, of course, going to look like one — fits the context of careful horticulture, as Pan, the archetypal gardener, sets about transforming the primeval landscape into a *hortus*. (*de*)*ponere* (41) is the *mot juste* for planting a seedling, sapling, or slip; the word itself conveys the importance of getting the plant into the right position.<sup>18</sup> Both the simplex and compound forms are used in technical treatises, such as in giving instructions for planting olive slips (*taleae*) in holes (*scrobes*): *Si in scrobibus aut in sulcis seres, ternas taleas ponito*;<sup>19</sup> *oportet . . . arbusculam deponere ita rectam, ut quod scrobe extiterit in medio sit*.<sup>20</sup> Hence Ovid uses the precise word in recommending this activity as a way of getting over a love affair: *ipse potes riguis plantam deponere in hortis; / ipse potes riuos ducere lenis aquae*.<sup>21</sup>

As Ovid knows, after planting comes watering; but on Melior's property things are done with proper care, as well as in the proper sequence, so that Statius imagines Pan building a trough around the sapling first, to keep the water from running away:

<sup>17</sup> *Silu.* 2, 3, 39-42.

<sup>18</sup> *ponere*: TLL 10/1.2636.35-2636.63 (REINEKE & HILLEN); OLD s.v. *pono* 4; SVENNUNG 1935, 597. *deponere*: TLL 5/1.576.74-577.1 (JACHMANN); OLD s.v. *depono* 5a.

<sup>19</sup> "If you plant in holes or trenches, put slips in three at a time", CATO *Agr.* 45, 3.

<sup>20</sup> "You should set the small tree in an upright position, so that the part which stands out from the planting-hole is in the middle", COLUM. *Liber de arboribus* 17, 2, trans. E.S. FORSTER & E.H. HEFFNER.

<sup>21</sup> "You yourself can set a plant in a well-watered garden; you yourself can guide the channels of gently-running water", OV. *Rem. am.* 193-194.



*harena* (41), denoting light soil in general (i.e., not only sand),<sup>22</sup> had to be 'heaped up' (*adgessit*), just as Columella prescribes banking up earth around fruit trees as one of the tasks for the end of May (i.e., before the dry spells of summer): *Item omnes arbores frugiferae circumfossae aggerari debent, ut ante solstitium id opus peractum sit.*<sup>23</sup> Caesar uses the same word to describe damming narrow valleys so as to cut off the Pompeians' water supply at Dyrrachium: *has [angustias uallium] sublicis in terram demissis praeseperat terramque adgesserat, ut aquam contine-rent.*<sup>24</sup> Watering a newly planted plane tree is essential for packing the earth down around the roots,<sup>25</sup> but Pan is careful not to drown the sapling by pouring a stream of water over it; rather he 'sprinkles' the thirsty plant (*aspergit*, 42).<sup>26</sup> This basic fact of plant care was more or less proverbial in the ancient world, providing a ready analogy for the disastrous efforts of parents who give their children homework that is either too much or too difficult: "Just as plants are nourished by moderate amounts of water, but drowned by too much, in the same way the mind is developed by moderate tasks, but submerged by those that are overwhelming".<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, Melior's plane tree is subtly anthropomorphized:<sup>28</sup> *primaeuus* is overwhelmingly applied to human beings, and the only other application to a plant is by the late

<sup>22</sup> TLL 6/3.2526.53-2527.25 (BRANDT); MYNORS on VERG. *Georg.* 1, 69-70.

<sup>23</sup> "Likewise, all fruit trees should be dug round and earthed up so that this task can be accomplished before the solstice", COLUM. *Rust.* 11, 2, 46.

<sup>24</sup> "Sinking piles into the ground, he fortified the narrow defiles and heaped up earth, to keep the water inside", CAES. *BCiu.* 3, 49, 3.

<sup>25</sup> VIGOUROUX 2007, 75.

<sup>26</sup> Presumably with water from the pool, hence the subtle *double entendre* in *optatis . . . aquis*: the water is desired by the plant; the nymph that the pool embodies had been desired by Pan.

<sup>27</sup> ὥσπερ γὰρ τὰ φυτὰ τοῖς μὲν μετρίοις ὕδασι τρέφεται, τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς πνίγεται, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ψυχὴ τοῖς μὲν συμμέτροις αὔξεται πόνοις, τοῖς δ' ὑπερβάλλουσι βαπτίζεται, [PLUT.] *De liberis educandis* 13.

<sup>28</sup> The identification between the tree and Pan is noted briefly by commentators: CANCIK 1965, 50; VAN DAM 1984, 315; PEDERZANI 1995, 185; NEWLANDS 2011a, 169.



antique agricultural writer, Palladius, describing the young flowers of 'Phyllis', i.e., the almond tree:

Phyllis odoratos primaevus floribus artus  
discisso pruni cortice fixa tegit  
pomaque permutat uelamine persica mixto  
duritiemque docet tegminis esse loco.<sup>29</sup>

*propago* is strictly the slip from which a new tree is grown, but in Statius' poem it looks forward to the trunk that will develop from Pan's sapling.<sup>30</sup> In descriptions of trees, technical and metaphorical language come together in the common designation of branches as *brachia*,<sup>31</sup> but *manus* (40) is almost unattested, save for one instance in Palladius: *Nunc teretem pingui producit acumine malum / fraxineasque nouo flectit honore manus*.<sup>32</sup> Hence, in conjunction with *primaevam* and *uertex* (40), *manus* contributes to the anthropomorphization of the tree precisely by substituting a new anatomical metaphor in place of the familiar *brachia*.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, plane trees grow to an enormous size: under favorable conditions, their height can reach 40-50 m, or occasionally 60 m; the diameter of the area covered by foliage can extend to 75 m.<sup>34</sup> Hence *innumerae* and *iturus in aethera uertex* are also justified.

Having planted the sapling, Pan addresses it as *nostri pignus memorabile uoti* ("memorable token of our desire", 43), asking

<sup>29</sup> "Phyllis, installed in the plum's divided bark, / covers its fragrant limbs with early flowers. / She changes peaches into fruit with hybrid coats, / and trains her hard shell to replace their skin", PALLADIUS *Ins.* 149-152, trans. J.G. FITCH; *TLL* 10/2.1234.13-15 (WERNER).

<sup>30</sup> Hence closer to the primary meaning than the rubric "laxius, sc. vario respectu, de quolibet ramo vel parte arboris" at *TLL* 10/2.1942.52-57 (BURCH), which is more applicable to the other example cited, *propagines e uitibus altius praetentas non succedit [flamen Dialis]*, GELL. *NA* 10, 15, 13.

<sup>31</sup> PERUTELLI 1985.

<sup>32</sup> "Now lengthens the rounded apple to a fertile tip / and bows the ash tree's hands with novel honours", PALLADIUS *Ins.* 59-60, trans. J.G. FITCH; *TLL* 8.366.32-34 (BULHART). (A textually vexed passage at *Hercules Oetaeus* 1625 is too insecure to be taken into account.)

<sup>33</sup> As noted by VAN DAM 1984, 315.

<sup>34</sup> VIGOUROUX 2007, 52.



it to caress the pool with its leaves and promising to guard both sapling and pool in return. In such contexts, *pignus* would normally refer to children.<sup>35</sup> Just as, from birth, a child starts to grow, so Statius goes on to describe how the sapling develops into an adult tree:

Illa dei ueteres imitata calores  
uberibus stagnis obliquo pendula trunco  
incubat atque umbris scrutatur amantibus undas. 55  
Sperat et amplexus, sed aquarum spiritus arcet  
nec patitur tactus. Tandem eluctata sub auras  
libratur fundo rursusque enode cacumen  
ingeniosa leuat, ueluti descendat in imos  
stirpe lacus alia. Iam nec Phoebeia Nais 60  
odit et exclusos inuitat gurgite ramos.<sup>36</sup>

53 imitata *Markland*: animata *M*

"The tree, reflecting the god's former passion and leaning over the abundant waters, broods over the stream with its curved trunk and explores it with its loving shade. It hopes for an embrace, but the breeze on the water keeps it away and will not accommodate its touch. Finally, struggling into the air, it balances underneath, and skillfully lifts its smooth head again, as though it were descending to the depth of the pool with a second root. Now Apollo's Naiad no longer resents it and invites the branches she had shut out with her water."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> E.g., Cornelia to her husband: *nunc tibi commenda communia pignora Paule* ("Now I entrust to you the pledges of our mutual love", PROP. 4, 11, 73); Medea to Jason: *per superos oro, per auitae lumina flammae, / per meritum et natos, pignora nostra, duos* ("By the gods I beg you, by the light of our ancestral flame, by my own service and the two children who are our pledge", OV. Her. 12, 191-192); TLL 10/1.2125.37-48 (OTTINK). Examples referring to plants are confined to poetry: cf. (of the time for sowing) *Date nunc sua matri / pignora, tempus adest* ("To the mother give / — The time is come — the pledges of her love", COLUM. Rust. 10, 163-164, trans. E.S. FORSTER & E.H. HEFFNER); (of reciprocal grafting between the citron and the black mulberry) *nec non et citrei patiuntur mutua rami / pignora, quae grauido cortice morus alit* ("The citron's branches allow the loan of their offspring, / which the mulberry nurtures in its teaming bark", PALLADIUS Ins. 109-110, trans. J.G. FITCH).

<sup>36</sup> *Silu.* 2, 3, 53-61.

<sup>37</sup> For the ambiguity of the syntax: *supra*, n. 6.



It seems that the tree dipped over the water and up again, which Statius interprets as a sign that its attempt to embrace the nymph who had taken refuge there was unsuccessful. Rising from its own reflection, the tree then grows straight up into the air, *as if* (Statius says) *it had rooted underwater*. Planes do, in fact, root where their branches touch the ground (see Fig. 0.1), and forcing them to the ground so as to root is one way of creating a new plant.<sup>38</sup> Statius cannot see what is happening underwater; but the reflection of the tree climbing into the sky looks, upside-down, as though it is descending all the way into the depths, and Statius' description of this reflection may hint also at this rooting-habit of the plane.<sup>39</sup> As with the description of the tree in the opening lines, his account here follows the order of the tree's growth, from root to top, perhaps an acknowledgement of a garden-owner's interest in the progress of his plants.

The plane tree was an exotic and fashionable import, renowned for its shade and its fabled association with intellectual discussion and a cultivated lifestyle.<sup>40</sup> Statius stresses the reflection of Melior's tree in the pool at its base. The spot was doubtless chosen, in part, to cater to the plane's need for a well-watered site; plane trees flourish in the saturated soil on the banks of rivers, where the water is well oxygenated, and are therefore commonly planted along rivers and canals.<sup>41</sup> Archaeology confirms that the Romans favored planes as poolside trees: two parallel rows of root cavities on either side of the pool in the peristyle garden of the Villa San Marco at Stabiae are thought to belong to planes; likewise the row of root cavities in the sculpture garden alongside the pool at Oplontis.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> VIGOUROUX 2007, 71-72.

<sup>39</sup> As the commentators note, the diction in this passage creates great difficulties, but, on the interpretation above, the objection that *ueluti descendat in imos / stirpe lacus alia* is "sheer nonsense in the context" (SHACKLETON BAILEY 2003, 389-390) is unsustainable.

<sup>40</sup> MARZANO, *infra*, 215-216.

<sup>41</sup> VIGOUROUX 2007, 80-81, 87.

<sup>42</sup> JASHEMSKI 1993, 298 and Fig. 333 (Oplontis); 306 (Villa San Marco).



But Melior's impressive specimen was probably also planted beside the pool precisely to exploit its aesthetic potential. The younger Pliny comments on the aesthetic effect of the reflection of ash and poplar along the banks of the Clitumnus, using diction strikingly similar to Statius' (and employing the reflexive technique of anaphoric juxtaposition), *ripae fraxino multa, multa populo uestiuntur, quas perspicuus amnis uelut mersas uiridi imagine adnumerat*.<sup>43</sup>

Plants, however, were not the only decoration in an ancient garden. The presence of sculpture in Roman gardens is amply attested, not only by archaeology — the finds at Oplontis being a signal example — but also by paintings, such as those in the Casa del Bracciale d'Oro in Pompeii depicting a garden dotted with herms topped by portraits, and pillars supporting *pinakes* of sleeping Maenads and the like.<sup>44</sup> The subjects are overwhelmingly mythological. Mythology is the natural dimension from which to evoke creatures to populate a garden. A painting, shattered into many fragments and discarded on a trash heap in the garden of the Casa del Bracciale d'Oro, seems to have been part of the decoration damaged in the earthquake of 62 CE. The restored portion depicts the mask of a Silenus — along with Pan, a regular in the entourage of Dionysus — surrounded by a profusion of vines, ivy, quinces, olives, olean-der, and roses, with a set of panpipes suspended from a red

<sup>43</sup> "The banks are clothed with ash trees and poplars, whose green reflections can be counted in the clear stream as if they were planted there", PLIN. *Ep.* 8, 8, 4, trans. B. RADICE. The 'Spiegelmotiv' is noted by CANCIK 1965, 49-51 (parallel quoted on p. 55).

<sup>44</sup> Sculpture as a characteristic element in Roman gardens: VON STACKELBERG 2009, 24-35; case-study of garden sculpture at Oplontis: DE CARO 1987; garden paintings at Casa del Bracciale d'Oro: CONTICELLO 1991. In contrast, some garden paintings are entirely devoid of man-made decoration, such as the 'garden room' in the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta, in which a lattice fence, a wall, and a bird cage are the only man-made structures within a landscape prolific with trees, flowers, shrubs, and birds: for reproductions in full color, see SETTIS 2002, 78-89.



ribbon in front of it and a *situla* (bucket) below (Fig. 0.2).<sup>45</sup> This painting suggests a pictorial rendering of the same impulse that lies behind Statius' gift to Melior: a sensibility that gardens are host to hidden forces. These forces generate a pronounced erotic charge, the natural manifestation of nature's fertility — hence the lust that characterizes Pan, god of the woodland and nature.

Whether Statius knew something about gardening or picked up tips from the head gardener, or whether Melior himself conversed enthusiastically with him about the care of young plane trees, is difficult to say. Part of the success of Statius' occasional poetry is that he elaborates manual labor and other banal activities into subjects for poetic ecphrasis, his most notable achievement in this regard being the description of the building of the Via Domitiana (*Silu.* 4, 3, 40-55), which is the most detailed account of road building to have survived from the Roman world. At the same time, he elevates his patrons' concerns by blending the everyday realm with the mythological.<sup>46</sup> Gardens are a sphere where untamed forces are in constant tension with human control. Myth provides a satisfactory explanatory model for such forces. We should neither assume that Melior 'believed' the story of Pan and Pholoë, nor categorize the poem as a mere literary diversion. Melior may have himself suggested the mythological *aetion* to Statius; or, as is usually assumed, Statius may have invented it. But, either way, it provides a piquant and satisfying explanation for a prominent feature on Melior's property; and Statius' expert inclusion of precise botanical and horticultural detail must have increased Melior's satisfaction even more.

<sup>45</sup> SAP (Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei) inv. 86075: MASTROROBERTO 2003, 402-403 (with illustration on p. 403); ROCCO 2003 (with Fig. 3). Further Dionysiac accoutrements (*syrinx*, *cista*, phallus, and goat's head) are badly damaged and only partially visible. Dionysiac associations of the Roman garden: VON STACKELBERG 2009, 27-30. Dionysiac sculpture in Italian gardens: NEUDECKER 1988, 47-51. Statue of Pan in the garden of the Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum: NEUDECKER 1988, 154, No. 14.62.

<sup>46</sup> COLEMAN 2005, 57-58.



## II. Branching out

Slight though Statius' poem may be, it refracts in miniature many of the persistent themes in the rest of these *Entretiens*. Gardens in soggy northern climes have no need of water-features, although they sometimes include them all the same, but in the dry Mediterranean climate in Antiquity they were highly prized features requiring much skill in hydraulic engineering, and they were often decorated with corresponding intricacy and extravagance.<sup>47</sup> The gardens of Pharaonic Egypt, whether attached to temples, palaces, tombs, or private houses, consistently display a water-basin as the central motif and, together with the refreshing presence of water, they also emphasize shade, a feature likewise prominent in Statius' poem. Visual evidence for Egyptian gardens, much of it displaying multiple simultaneous perspectives, survives from the walls of the rock-tombs of the Egyptian elite in Thebes from the New Kingdom (latter half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE); the most famous of these is the painting of an enormous temple garden from the tomb of Sennefer during the reign of Amenhotep II (1425–1400 BCE), now destroyed, but fortunately copied meticulously in watercolor in the nineteenth century.

Starting from these tombs, which are painted with colorful scenes that seem to convey to the viewer a lively impression of daily life, Christian Loeben explains how they also show nature playing a religious and cultic role; in the approximately fifty tombs painted with such scenes, it is not easy to draw a line between a faithful representation of daily life and a symbolic expression of religious belief. By comparing these representations with gardens that have been recovered by archaeological excavation, including the site at Tell el-Dab'a in the eastern Nile delta that probably qualifies as the most ancient garden in

<sup>47</sup> For the recent discovery of a spectacular *nymphaeum*, 25 m long, at Massa Lubrense on the Sorrentine peninsula, comprising 12 mosaic niches and a cascade, see BUDETTA & VON HASE 2013 (with further bibliography at n. 3).



the world, Dr. Loeben is able to test the extent to which the paintings corresponded to reality. He emphasizes the multiple functions of actual Egyptian gardens and also the specific significance of these paintings in the tomb, where the realistic features of gardens were blended with idealized representations, perhaps not simply representing pleasure gardens, but functioning as symbols of an ordered world that overcomes chaos. High walls and rigid orthogonal plantings accordingly characterized Egyptian gardens. It is noteworthy that these features receive no mention from Statius, who imagines a pristine landscape in the mythological past, before Melior became its custodian;<sup>48</sup> but it seems likely that in reality part, at least, of Melior's property displayed the orthogonal regularity that the younger Pliny cultivated in his own gardens and that we see reflected in the bird's-eye views of villasces in paintings from Pompeii and its environs.

One of the functions of the individual poems in the *Siluae* is to perpetuate the honorand's reputation and interests, with the result that, in Melior's case, his memory and that of his plane tree are preserved to this day. Literary perpetuation obviously depends upon the transmission of the text; that of the *Siluae*, disseminated in a single manuscript, hangs by a thread. Another method of perpetuation involves the incorporation of specific vegetal motifs into art and architecture, buildings being one of the more robust means of perpetuating memory (*Exegi monumentum aere perennius / regalique situ pyramidum altius*).<sup>49</sup> Cryptic textual references are sometimes confirmed by iconographic features, as in the dissemination of palm-tree motifs as architectural ornament in Mesopotamia, supplementing glancing

<sup>48</sup> Hence Markland's conjecture of the archaic *tesca*, denoting wild places devoted to rural deities, for *tecta* at *Silu.* 2, 3, 14, where a reference to buildings (represented by the *tecta* of the sole surviving manuscript) would be out of place in the pristine landscape: for archaisms in the *Siluae*, see VAN DAM 1984, 297-298.

<sup>49</sup> "I have built a monument more lasting than bronze and higher than the royal mound of the pyramids", HOR. *Carm.* 3, 30, 1-2.



references in the Assyrian epics. Stephanie Dalley explains how, early in the second millennium BCE, several temples in Babylonian, Assyrian, and northeast-Syrian cities were decorated with external and internal façades representing male and female date-palm trees in mud-brick. Significantly, some have been found outside zones in which the date palm produces fruit. This decorative scheme symbolizes a sacred grove, such as is very common at religious sites known from later Elamite texts, and the design coincides with a time of Elamite supremacy in Mesopotamia. But date-palm symbolism persisted beyond the early second millennium; it is found in Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine on column bases, capitals, and balustrades, foreshadowing the design of load-bearing Ionic capitals. It is also shown on Hellenistic and Roman sculpture and coins, well beyond zones where the tree bears fruit, and so Dr. Dalley argues that we have to seek reasons for its dissemination among the adjacent cultures that produced it.

Statius' poem, which ends by wishing Melior a long life, has been interpreted as hoping that his poem, too, will last, and his landscapes have been interpreted as reflecting the artifice of his poetry.<sup>50</sup> The identification of poems with different types of plants is a trope that goes back to the archaic lyric poets, who were the first to use the metaphors of picking flowers and weaving garlands to describe the qualities and workmanship of poetry. In her contribution on the image of the garden in ancient stylistic discourse, Évelyne Prioux shows how these metaphors were gradually expanded to equate poetry with fruit, or poetic activity with the grafting of trees, so that the text itself came to be compared to a garden, in the sense of a cultivated space combining the qualities of a kitchen garden and one designed for pleasure. Descriptions of gardens in classical literature generally imitate a restricted range of models. Scholia on many of these texts emphasize the central importance of

<sup>50</sup> Longevity: BILLERBECK 1986, 535; HARDIE 2006, 213; NEWLANDS 2011*b*, 108-110. Artifice: MYERS 2005, 111; NEWLANDS 2011*a*, 15.



poetic composition and the notion of mimesis in ancient literary theory: the garden of Alcinoos comes to stand for the paradigm of 'sweetness' of style, while ancient critics evaluating the comparison in *Iliad* 21 between the Scamander and domestic irrigation channels either celebrate or bemoan Homer's talent in evoking little rivulets in a garden. Dr. Prioux demonstrates how Greek and Latin authors quote the Homeric descriptions and Virgil's account of the garden of the old man of Tarentum in *Georgics* 4 in order to stake out a position in these stylistic debates, and how their own garden descriptions, especially those of Second Sophistic authors such as Longus, the Elder Philostratus, and Achilles Tatius, establish criteria for evaluating their literary creations and advertising their aesthetic principles by making use of terminology borrowed from ancient literary criticism. By his choice of critical terms, each author therefore seeks to differentiate his own 'garden' from that of his predecessors.

Statius' poem on Melior's tree implies that Melior's horticultural interests match Statius' emphasis on his refinement and cultural tastes. In the poem commemorating the death of Melior's *puer delicatus*, Glaucias, the brief description of Elysium as a place of drab sterility (*quae munera mollis / Elysii, steriles ramos mutasque uolucres / porgit et obtunso pallentes germine flores*<sup>51</sup>), in contrast to its usually lush characterization, suggests that, in addition to being influenced by Seneca's barren Underworld, Statius interpreted the pain of Melior's loss by imagining the afterlife devoid of the plants and birds that Melior appreciated on this earth. Melior's literary characterization in the *Siluae*, therefore, offers a hint of the role that the garden could play in the self-representation of a cultivated Roman in the first century CE. A more detailed picture, based largely upon archaeological evidence, is pieced together by

<sup>51</sup> "He stretched out the gifts of gentle Elysium, sterile branches, speechless birds, and pale flowers nipped in the bud", *Silu.* 2, 1, 203-205. For the non-canonical depiction of Elysium in these lines, see VAN DAM 1984, 171-172; NEWLANDS 2011a, 114.



Rabun Taylor for a supremely wealthy and powerful figure who was not Roman but Romanophile: King Herod.

Herod was an Idumaeon who adopted the customs of his Judaeon subjects, while also cultivating the fashions of the Hellenized Roman elite whom he served as client king and occasional companion. Dr. Taylor demonstrates that Herod's allegiance to his Roman allies is evident in the design of his palace-villas at Jericho, Caesarea, Jerusalem, and Herodeion, although these residences also drew from native, Egyptian, and Near Eastern traditions. Formal and symbolic parallels to Herod's architectural manipulation of garden landscapes can be found in many sites in Italy. Dr. Taylor explores the ways in which Herod's palace gardens, with their groves, pools, streams, peristyles, pavilions, and views (and, at Herodeion, perhaps even a royal tomb), consciously evoked both Roman and distinctly regional prototypes. He canvasses the possibility that Herod was directly inspired by the gardens and villas of his associates in Rome, Agrippa and Messalla, while adopting the Roman tendency to epitomize famous sites in miniature within grand domestic settings. The sites identified in connection with Herod, however, have specifically regional meaning: the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, which Herod quoted in the planted 'theatre' at his third winter palace at Jericho; and Tyros, the garden-palace of Hyrcanus the Tobiad in the Transjordan, which may have influenced the design of the Pool Complex at Herodeion. During this period of architectural ferment, ideas traveled westward too; and Dr. Taylor explores the possibility that the Naumachia of Augustus at Rome, with its island memorial and encompassing garden, took its cue from Herod's world.

The range of indigenous plants in any given corner of the world today has been so adulterated by the import and naturalization of exotic species that it is hard for us to appreciate the excitement and acquisitive instincts that were spurred by the successful introduction of a distinctly advantageous plant, such as the arrival of an enormous shade tree in a hot climate.



Annalisa Marzano describes the fever generated by 'botanical imperialism' in the late Republic and early Empire, with particular emphasis upon the reaction accompanying the introduction of the plane tree. Melior would hardly have shared the Elder Pliny's equivocal attitude to this foreign import, still highly prized more than a century after its arrival at Rome, whose only virtue (in Pliny's eyes) was the provision of shade; indeed, its lack of fruit had already been noted by the practically-minded soon after it was introduced to Italy.<sup>52</sup> Moralizing writers of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, including Livy, saw Rome's great territorial expansion in the Republican period as the turning point, when the influx of booty, slaves, and luxuries into Rome precipitated the decline of Roman moral standards. Dr. Marzano observes that military conquests brought not only works of art and new tastes to Rome, but also new plants and trees, which ended up in the villa gardens of victorious generals. But it was not purely a matter of decorative display. The dual character of the ancient garden as both decorative and functional is evident in this context also: the interest of the elite in new plants or new varieties of fruit tree is prompted in part by their concern to improve agricultural production on their estates, which helps to explain why, particularly in the Augustan period, a keen interest in horticulture and grafting developed among the upper classes.

In his poem about Melior's tree, Statius makes only one reference to his patron's house, locating the spot where Pholoë came to rest: *qua nunc placidi Melioris aperti / stant sine fraude lares*.<sup>53</sup> In conjunction with *lares*, metonymy for "house", *aperti*, literally "open", suggests generosity; but it also strikingly contradicts the traditional picture of the Roman *domus* as an enclosed space, cut off from the outside world. One of the features in common between Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and

<sup>52</sup> PLIN. *HN* 12, 6; cf. the disapproving designation *platanus . . . caelebs* ("bachelor plane", HOR. *Carm.* 2, 15, 4).

<sup>53</sup> "Where tranquil Melior's house stands open, free of guile", *Silu.* 2, 3, 15-16.



Roman gardens is the circuit marking the boundary between cultivated and uncultivated space or between private garden and public domain. In some modern societies, notably parts of the suburban United States, boundaries between neighbors' yards, or between the yard and the street, are marked by sporadic low bushes or a shallow ditch, or even eliminated altogether. But the garden as an enclosed and demarcated space seems to have been a fundamental concept in ancient society. Bettina Bergmann focuses on the enclosure via a group of images painted in porticoes and interiors in Italy in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE: miniature, self-contained, and perfectly ordered garden precincts, seen from above in an axonometric plan. She argues that such images were inspired by changes in the countryside after the granting of Roman citizenship to Italians in 90-89 BCE, when processes of colonization and centuriation were implemented that fundamentally reshaped the terrain, and she shows how inscriptions on rural landmarks, as well as texts and diagrams preserved in the manuscripts of the *agrimensores*, shed light on the immense value placed upon boundaries, both natural and man-made.<sup>54</sup> Surveying, in particular, she argues, constituted a sophisticated technique of reading landscape, and this skill became intimately allied with the evolving practices of agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, and the visual arts.

The religious associations of an ancient garden that make it a natural setting for figures from mythology — like Pan, co-opted by Statius as Melior's gardener — also invest its plants with spiritual symbolism. Giulia Caneva teases out this association from a botanical perspective, starting from the premise that extensive knowledge of the natural world in classical Antiquity acted as a vehicle for communicating spiritual and religious values. She analyzes the symbolic content of some key examples of floral elements in wall-painting from Rome and Pompeii, and examines the representation of nature in

<sup>54</sup> Hence the extensive body of Roman legislation concerned with this issue: BEHREND 2013.



sculpture of the Augustan age, notably the Ara Pacis, where the fantastic simultaneously — and impossibly — co-exists with the realistic, forming a continuum that underlines the interconnections existing within the natural world. The biodiversity of the floral kingdom in Roman iconography comprises about two hundred species characteristic of various Mediterranean habitats, chosen, Dr. Caneva argues, for their symbolic power. These shrink to about fifty species that are represented in the depiction of gardens *sensu stricto*. The meaning of these plants seems to depend upon the combination of selected species or their hierarchical arrangement within a single image. Allowing for variables, Dr. Caneva argues that in specific instances the ideal garden seems to embody a religious or philosophical message that expresses a vision of human life as transitory, but eternally capable of regeneration and rebirth, just like the cosmic cycle of nature.

The erotic atmosphere that infuses the description of Melior's tree is part of the pathology of gardens that troubled the early Christians, as Robin Lane Fox makes clear in his contribution; the ambiguity of the garden as simultaneously a spiritual retreat and a place of temptation was a paradox that the early Christians wrestled with, countering the eroticism of the pagan garden with the image of the 'enclosed garden' of the Church, which was associated with Christian virginity. Moralizing Christian writers soon set out the *bon usage* of scents and cut flowers, with special emphasis on 'natural' meadow gardening. While Christian accounts of martyrdom, the 'true Christian' gospel of Mani, and some of the apocryphal texts about Paradise transposed to Heaven particular flowers and trees, a new Christian 'language of flowers' emerged. Byzantine texts on the meaning of flowers and Byzantine mosaics of Paradise then established this imagery within formal parameters. But Christian gardens were real, as well as imaginary: Cyprian and Gregory of Nazianzus showed richer Christians the perils of having too grand a garden of their own. Productive vegetable gardening turns out to be the approved type



of early Christian gardening, exemplified by Antony in Egypt and monks in the Holy Land. In their different ways, two celibate Christians, St. Augustine and Paulinus of Nola, exploited the garden and gardening in their lives and writings. Garden-miracles and cautionary tales of divine intervention among gardeners appear in the dialogues of Gregory the Great, based on oral traditions in sixth-century Italy, and in his Italian monastery monks duly become role models for what is a recommended pastime today: gardening for the elderly.

Gardens exist both in reality and in the imagination. What do they symbolize? Nelson Mandela's garden on the roof of Pollsmoor Prison symbolized growth, and growth symbolizes hope. A single tree in Atedius Melior's garden symbolized the explanatory force of myth. Egyptian gardens symbolized seclusion, fecundity, and wealth in this life, and happiness and comfort in the next. Palm-tree motifs symbolized the importance of the date palm in Mesopotamian culture and religion, and the influence of that culture upon its western neighbors. For Greek and Latin authors, gardens and the plants within them symbolized the act of literary composition and its creations. For Herod the Great, gardens, and especially their water features, symbolized his personal power and, beyond that, his status among the power brokers of the Roman Empire. The bringing of new plants to Rome symbolized the fruits of imperialism and the initiative of the generals and governors who embellished Italy with these exotic acquisitions. The fenced-in gardens painted on Roman walls symbolized the order that the Romans imposed upon the landscape, and simultaneously the inter-penetration of nature and nurture. The plants of the Roman garden symbolized spiritual forces, and the conflicting symbolism of the garden in early Christian thought reflected the cultural tumult of the transition from pagan pluralism to a society ruled by the church. The seemingly inexhaustible symbolism of the ancient garden, combined with the desires and constraints that gave it physical shape, suggests that much in it remains to be cultivated by scholars in the future.



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