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EARLY CHRISTIANS AND THE GARDEN

IMAGE AND REALITY*

“God almighty first planted a garden”, wrote Francis Bacon in his much-cited essay *On Gardens*, “and indeed it is the purest of human pleasures”. For the early Christians, the purity, I wish to argue, was less straightforward.

I. The ‘pagan’ garden

In the textual world about them, gardens confronted literate early Christians with a far from pure range of uses and associations. Poets and novelists had made gardens the settings for sex and romance. We need only think of Horace’s Pyrrha and her bed of roses or the rose garlands at other Horatian dinner-parties or the brilliantly erotic use of roses by Apuleius’ fictional young Photis.¹ In Apuleius’ rose-filled novel of sex, crimes, mimes, and conversion, roses are specified as the Ass’s means of liberation and are eventually found in a rose-garland

* I wish to thank two of my fellow-guests at the Fondation back in August 2001: Mme Isabelle Bruneti  re (now, CNRS, Sources Chr  tiennes) has pointed out to me the evidence in Gregory’s *Dialogues* and Prof. Sigrid Mratschek (now, at Rostow) has deepened my sense of Paulinus through her fine book, MRATSCHEK 2002.

¹ HOR. *Carm.* 1, 5, 1-3; 1, 36, 15; 3, 19, 22; 3, 29, 3; APUL. *Met.* 2, 16, 1; BARBER 1992, 1-19, for Byzantine evidence.

held by a priest of Isis (Apuleius' significant alteration to its context in his Greek source).² These literary precedents were not ones which good Christians could cheerfully annex for their own use.

Pagan art was no better. Gardens sometimes contained erotic paintings and statues of the sexually aroused Priapus. Paintings with garden themes might even show half-naked ladies, as we see particularly well in the wall-paintings, found in 1979, at Pompeii's House of the Golden Bracelet.³ Their painted pillars uphold marbled plaques which display reclining ladies, perhaps maenads, topless among exactly-depicted flowers (see Fig. 6.19). These pillars carry individualized portrait-heads, surely showing features of the garden's owners, who are linked, therefore, to the fantasy supported above them. Temples of erotic Aphrodite had gardens round them too. Her Hierokepis on western Cyprus speaks for itself. The association between pagan temples and gardens struck Christians wherever they looked. In Egypt, temple-gardens often lay behind big walls. Tombs, also, had gardens where spirits of the dead were ever-present. They were demons in the early Christian world-view.⁴

Flowers were a prescribed part of so many pagan cults. The annual *Floralia* at Rome was a flower-festival very different from those held to enliven modern Anglican parish-churches. Prostitutes and the demi-monde were integral to the occasion. At the Vinalia on the kalends of May, prostitutes, according to Ovid, would bring reeds intertwined with roses to honour the goddess Venus.⁵ Roses were particularly prominent in pagan cult. *Rosalia*, or rose-rites, are attested in a wide range of inscriptions outside Rome and have been much discussed. In many cases they are the marker of a Roman citizen, buried

² APUL. *Met.* 3, 25; 3, 27; 3, 29; 4, 2; 10, 29; 11, 3; LUCIAN. *Asin.* 54.

³ JASHEMSKI 1993, 348-358.

⁴ STRAB. 14, 6, 3; HUGONOT 1989, 21-85; BAGNALL 1996, 145-152; GREGORI 1987-1988, 175-188; SEG 1988, 1004.

⁵ Ov. *Fast.* 5, 331-354; 4, 863-868.

abroad.⁶ However, the cultic use of roses and rose-garlands in a specified *rhodismos* was by no means confined to this one Italian ceremony. In Egypt, several papyri attest a *rhodophoria* in the 2nd century CE, which scholars are unwise to identify with the Italian *Rosalia*. In Ptolemaic Egypt, as in pharaonic Egypt, a crown of roses (the “Crown of Justification”) was still offered formally in Egyptian temples to Osiris.⁷ In the Greek world roses were also offered and burned in private funerary cults without any Italian connections.

At a simpler level, many people’s lives were brightened by flowers, a ‘luxury’ in the moralists’ opinion. The trade in cut flowers was vast, whether in Rome’s suburbs or in fertile spaces in Egypt. It brought beauty into ancient life in a way better caught for us in modern films about antiquity than in the *Cambridge Ancient History*. To a Christian perfectionist’s eye, cut flowers involved luxury, love and pleasure in a most unascetic way. High-class fruits for the table and flowers for the garlanded room were forced with ever-increasing ingenuity. Violets were brought on early in cold frames. The emperor Tiberius even patronized a type of movable frame to keep cucumbers growing in sun.⁸

This ubiquitous flower-culture provoked a pagan moralizing literature, as the poems of Horace and Martial exemplify.⁹ Early Christian moralists simply borrowed and adapted this literature’s themes. It expressed so well what Christian moralists believed for austere reasons of their own. Garlands, it said, were a superfluous extravagance, full of sensual danger. Seneca, when moralizing, even deplored roof-gardens.¹⁰ The forcing of flowers was an artificiality, contrary, Christians added, to God’s well-ordered Creation. Forcing, however, has proved useful for modern Christians. In Italian art, but not Byzantine art, the

⁶ PERDRIZET 1900, 299-323; KOKKINIA 1999, 204-221; SEG 1999, 2508.

⁷ DERCHAIN 1955, 225-287; GWYN GRIFFITHS 1975, 159-161.

⁸ VARRO *Rust.* 1, 16, 3; PLIN. *HN* 19, 64, 1.

⁹ HOR. *Carm.* 1, 38, 4; 3, 15, 15; FABBRINI 2007.

¹⁰ TERT. *Coron.* 5; SEN. *Ep.* 122, 8.

angel Gabriel is shown holding a white lily, *Lilium candidum*, at the Annunciation. This iconography goes back to Cavallini in the late 13th century. However, this lily, the Madonna lily as it is now known, does not flower naturally in the Holy Land until May-June. Strictly, the Jesus whom these lily-scenes announce would have been premature if born on December 25. Recently, botanists in Israel have discovered how to force Madonna lilies so that they produce flowers for Easter and even for the Annunciation, whose date was ordered, in the year 560, to be fixed everywhere as March 25. 'Unnatural' forcing and breeding in Israel have brought Christian iconography into line with Christianity's own calendar.¹¹

II. Christian attitudes

Everyday Christians, who did not read their own moralists, surely continued to look on the flowers around them and see beauty, not temptation. Were not flowers and gardens fine gifts of God? In their scriptures they inherited a positive imagery of them. There was Eden, of course, but there was also the enclosed garden in the story of Susannah and those dirty old voyeurs and the enclosed garden of the Song of Songs. Christians' sermons and texts developed this Jewish legacy in many directions. The Beloved in the Song was sometimes interpreted as Christ, just as Christ was understood to be the flower born on the "shoot" from the rod of Jesse, praised in proto-Isaiah. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus praised the "lilies of the field", probably the bright red-flowered *Lilium chalcedonicum*. It had already impressed the ancient Phoenicians, whose craftsmen in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE had used it as their model for fine bronze candlesticks on which scented incense was burned. Jesus' point was that these lilies

¹¹ <www.madonna-lily.blogspot.com/2006/05/unsealed-room.html>; VAN ESBROECK 1969, 442-444.

were wild flowers, lovely but uncultivated.¹² They are still visible in wild beauty around Gennesaret in Galilee near where he may have preached.

Gardening was quite another matter. Jesus and his disciples met often in the garden of Gethsemane before his 'agony' there, but this garden was probably only an olive grove and they never did anything practical in it. Previously Jesus had simply blasted a fig tree which was without fruit. In the late 4th century Paulinus of Nola claimed that Jesus cursed the barrenness in the tree, not the tree itself, but then recalls that the tree was not in the fruiting season. He tries to save Jesus' credit by a complex allegory about the need for our souls to bear fruit at all times.¹³ By a misplaced simile, Paul shows that he had no idea how to graft an olive tree and I doubt if Peter, a fisherman, was more adept. In a parable Jesus was also said to have claimed that a man who sowed a "mustard-seed" in his garden saw it grow into a tree, fit for birds.¹⁴ That image would not readily occur to an alert field-botanist. Yet, it was as a gardener that Jesus was mistaken by Mary Magdalen beside the site of his tomb, which was imagined, therefore, in a garden-setting. When expounding these verses, Augustine does not comment on Christ's horticultural disguise and its suitability. He is concerned only to explain why Mary Magdalen had called a mere gardener 'Sir' and then, when Jesus spoke her name, why she recognized him and called him 'Lord' or 'Master'. She called him 'Sir', Augustine explains implausibly, "whose servant she was not, so that she might come to the Lord, whose servant she was".¹⁵

For the early Christians, Paradise still had two locations, one earthly, one heavenly. Many early Christian writers assumed that the Garden of Eden still existed in their world. Conveniently, it was located in the east. At the opposite end of

¹² Song of Sol. 2, 8 - 6, 3; Isa. 11, 1-2; Matt. 6, 28; CULICAN 1986.

¹³ John 18, 1-2; Mark 11, 12-14; 20-22; PAULIN. NOL. *Ep.* 43, 4-8.

¹⁴ Rom. 11, 17; Luke 13, 19.

¹⁵ John 20, 15-16; AUGUST. *Tract. in Ioh.* 121; MOREAU 2012, 403-420.

the world, pagan Greek poets and mythographers had located the western Garden of their Hesperides and its wondrous fruits. The god Zeus, some said, had had sex there with Hera.¹⁶ The word 'eden' derived from the Aramaic word-root for 'abundance'. In the Greek *Septuagint* it was still translated as "garden of luxury", or "delights", although God never made love in it. Only later did Eden become a place-name in its own right.¹⁷ In the 6th century Cosmas Indicopleustes still accepted that an earthly Eden existed out east, from which the four Biblical rivers continued to flow into the known world. Eden's river Gihon was taken to be the source of the Nile. Epiphanius insisted against wild allegorists of the Book of Genesis (none wilder than the admired Augustine) that he had drunk personally from one of these four rivers' actual waters. He surely meant that he had drunk from the Nile, not the Euphrates.¹⁸

In the 180s, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, made the subtlest use of garden-imagery to explain our human predicament. He accepts that Eden is out east. First, God acted as a discriminating gardener should. He created man from the dust, or soil, but not from any old dust. He used the finest and softest, sifted like fine seed-compost. He then placed little Adam and Eve in a specially-prepared place, "better than this world". It was a garden. It was the necessary safe haven in which the two little children could grow up. They ran around, with no clothes on. The garden was also a school, as God's Word taught them in it, telling them how to behave in the world outside. As yet, there was no death, no sex, but God surely intended both to begin when his little children grew and aged.¹⁹ They fell, surely as God foresaw, and entered a world of hard gardening and labour. In it, however, God has provided a second garden, the

¹⁶ EUR. *Hipp.* 742-751; BARRETT 1964, 303.

¹⁷ DALLEY 2013, 158; PHILO *De cherub.* 12; CLEM. AL. *Strom.* 2, 51, 5; BREMMER 1999, 1-20.

¹⁸ COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES *Top. Christ.* 2, 82, ed. WOLSKI; HIERON. *Ep.* 51, 5; EPIPHANIUS, *PG* 43, 386; MAGUIRE 1987, 8; 22-25.

¹⁹ IREN. *Epideixis* 11-12; 15-17.

Church. He also improved man, not by genetic modification, but by grafting him with the Holy Spirit. Developing Paul's image to the Romans, Irenaeus presents this grafting as the improvement of man's wild olive-like nature. Then, in the millennium, improved man will grow on so as to be able to partake of Paradise. This Paradise is, again, a burgeoning garden. As God had promised to Jacob in Genesis 27, He will give an abundance of produce from the earth. In Paradise restored, He will realize His promise. Irenaeus then gives a fascinating view of Paradise as a garden teeming with vines of amazing fertility, tens of thousands of shoots, each with tens of thousands of bunches and tens of thousands of grapes, each one of which will give 25 jugs of wine. Remarkably, he states that this view of Paradise has come to him by direct oral tradition from Papias, who got it from the beloved disciple John, who got it directly from Jesus himself. Paradise as a teeming vineyard is a promise ascribed to Jesus himself.²⁰

From one garden, Eden, to another, the Church, to yet another, Paradise, Irenaeus' thinking is very neat. The world and the flesh are not evil, he is arguing, contrary to his Gnostic contemporaries. God has planned each step for us, from seed-compost to garden play-school to the oasis of the Church and then the prolific vineyard, Château Paradis. No pagan could ever have used the garden as a symbol in this way, lacking the ideas of Paradise and God's Creation and the accompanying scripture for this metascriptural reading.

Is gardening thereby sanctified for Christians? As Augustine observed, Adam had an easy life as a gardener. God had done all the planting and Adam engaged only in a little maintenance in the most benign conditions without any pests.²¹ As for Paradise, it has no seasons. Everything flowers and fruits all the time. In Homer, Alcinous' garden wondrously bears fruits and

²⁰ IREN. *Adu. haer.* 5, 20; 5, 10; 5, 31-32; 5, 33, 3-4 (citing Papias).

²¹ AUGUST. *Gen. ad litt.* 8, 8, 15; 8, 10, 22.

grapes throughout the year.²² In Roman poetry about a Golden Age, spring is eternal. For Virgil, memorably, continual spring is a feature of Italy, his heaven on earth. For Ovid, it was even a feature of the fair field at Enna where the fairer flower, Proserpina, was gathered.²³ From quite a separate tradition, the Christians' paradise was imagined as non-seasonal too. In his Revelation, John (following Ezekiel) saw the "tree of life", bearing "twelve crops of fruits, one for each month of the year".²⁴ These crops were not different crops from one month to the next. When Christians recognized the coincidental parallel with Homer's Alcinous, their rhetors exploited it too.

Wild flowers in nature, not flowers in flowerbeds, were the flowers most extolled by Christian preachers. There were two main contexts for their rhetorical praises. One was their eulogies of springtime, never more romantic than in orations by Gregory of Nazianzen, not a man to get his hands dirty. A practised recycler, he took his praises of flowery spring mainly from pagan Libanius' rhetorical exercise on spring.²⁵ The other context was the *Hexaemeron*, the series of sermons which celebrate the Six Days of Creation. In it, wild flowers could be eulogized as part of the Third Day. This new genre had a greater impact than the texts of pagan moralizers, because congregations had to listen to sermons, in so far as they ever stayed quiet in church. Ambrose's and above all Basil's *Hexaemeron*s are forerunners of a long tradition which runs importantly into Byzantine prose.²⁶ In these sermons almost anything could be cited to explain the significance of flowers. Direct associations, therefore, are perilous between these textual ecphraseis of spring or newly created nature and the flowers

²² HOM. *Od.* 7, 115-128.

²³ VERG. *Georg.* 2, 149; Ov. *Met.* 1, 107; 5, 391.

²⁴ Apoc. 22, 2; Ezek. 47, 12.

²⁵ GREG. NAZ. *Or. 44 In Nouam Dominicam*, PG 36, 617C-620B; LIB. *Progymn.* VIII, 479-482, ed. R. FOERSTER; MAGUIRE 1981, 42-44.

²⁶ BASIL. *Hom.* I-IX, ed. S. GIET, with BERNARDI 1961, 165-169; AMBR. CSEL 32, 1, 3-261, ed. C. SCHENKL; MAGUIRE 1987, 18-72.

which are shown in Christian art. Rhetors could be so idiosyncratic when trying to hold an audience's attention. They were not enunciating agreed typologies as if from a pattern-book for artists. There was no 'intermediality' here between spoken sermons and visual artists.²⁷

Down at ground level, flower gardens always involve pretence, even when they claim to be natural. Like pagan moralists, Christian moralists were quick to denounce artificiality. Texts by Clement of Alexandria are the most eloquent. He presents his *Stromateis*, a miscellany, as being variously adorned "like a meadow". Even in Paradise the plants, he remarks, are not segregated into families. Just as pagan authors have compiled works called "Meadows", so his miscellany has been constructed in a free and easy manner. In his *Paedagogus*, he is equally favourable to natural meadows, "soft and damp in spring, burgeoning with fresh flowers of many kinds", among which it is "fine to spend time like a honey-bee". Clement is the first Christian apostle of meadow-gardening.²⁸

Cut flowers and garlands are quite another matter. Here Clement draws on earlier pagan moralists, shared by his Latin contemporary Tertullian, especially in his glittering work *On the Crown*.²⁹ Clement's erudition is dazzling on anything from the medical properties of flowers to the properties of scents and perfumes, but he also observes that a garland is the "symbol of a tranquil absence of anxiety" and that is why not only the dead are garlanded but also 'dead' idols too.³⁰ Christians, rather, must wait for their immortal, amaranthine garland, the "crown of glory that fadeth not away", as the First Petrine Epistle had stated, the one which will be bestowed by the Good Shepherd when He returns. Clement understands it as a garland of the flowers of an amaranth.³¹ In this context Clement

²⁷ MAGUIRE 1981, 6-7.

²⁸ CLEM. AL. *Strom.* 6, 1, 1, 4 - 6, 1, 2, 2.

²⁹ CLEM. AL. *Paed.* 2, 8, 70, 1 - 2, 8, 73, 2; TERT. *Coron.* 5-10; BAUS 1940.

³⁰ CLEM. AL. *Paed.* 2, 8, 73.

³¹ CLEM. AL. *Paed.* 2, 8, 73, 2; I Pet. 5, 4.

usefully cites pagan sources which claim that particular deities love particular flowers: Hera loves the lily, Artemis the myrtle, and so forth. Christians, therefore, should avoid them all the more, "for reasons of conscience", a phrase from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.³²

This moralizing attacked garlands for the living, but it left a little space for bringing flowers to the Christian dead. In the 4th century, in his poem for martyred Eulalia, Prudentius urges Christians to bring violets, dark crocuses and lilies to her tomb at Merida. No doubt flowers and fruit had always been among the offerings which Christians brought to the little 'tables' by tombs and burials of their martyrs and their dead.³³ We do not hear of dutiful Christians 'doing the flowers' in Church, but flowers were surely also brought to the altar with fruit as offerings of first-fruits. By the 12th century, Byzantines were adorning images of the dead Christ with fresh flowers at their Epitaphios ceremony.³⁴

Though excluding so much, Clement is the first Christian author to weave a Christian typology of flowers as a counter-weight to the pagans' imagery. He emphasizes the grim example of Christ's crown of thorns and digresses on the thorny bush which was revealed when on fire to Moses.³⁵ In a notable flourish, he presents man as the true crown of woman, marriage as the true crown of man, and children as the "flowers of marriage". Admirably he quotes the words of Proverbs on grandchildren as the "garland of the old". Whereas all other types of crown are luxurious or demonic, he concedes that floral scents and ointments are admissible for Christians in small quantities. Neatly, he cites Ben Sira in support: "Bud forth as a rose growing by a river . . . put forth flowers as a lily . . .".

³² CLEM. AL. *Paed.* 2, 8, 72, 4; I Cor. 10, 20.

³³ PRUDENT. *Perist.* 3, 201-206; FRAZER 1929, 434 on violets; AUGUST. *Ciu.* 22, 8.

³⁴ MAGUIRE 1981, 141 n. 119.

³⁵ CLEM. AL. *Paed.* 2, 8, 75.

spread abroad a sweet smell . . . bless ye the Lord for his works". Scents are God's blessings, he accepts, and are to be used and enjoyed, but not to excess.³⁶

Clement presents the *bon usage* of flowers in a way which exemplifies the 'liberal puritanism' which Henry Chadwick has well detected in other sides of him. Restraint and an absence of showiness and artificiality are his keynotes.³⁷ Did anyone pay much attention? By Clement's time, rich-living, educated Christian readers were to be found in his Alexandria and elsewhere and, if they read him, they at least found some ground-rules which they might consider seriously. However, they and their fellow-Christians could not reject the eternal seduction of the flowers and flower-gardens around them. Instead, they transposed it to their future Garden in heaven.

The most graphic early sources for this transposition are the most personal and touching. They occur in the recorded visions of martyrs-to-be, waiting in the hideous heat and gloom of north African prisons. In February 203 the deacon Saturus described how he had been transported with Perpetua to a "great space" which resembled a green garden-park. In it were "trees" of roses and every type of flower. The rose-trees were as tall as cypresses, indeed a wondrous sight, and were constantly shedding their leaves, indeed a miracle without any earthly mildew or black-spot disease to cause it. In this garden was a place enclosed by four walls, built as if of light, where an aged (but also childlike) man was seated on a throne, surrounded by elders and attended by angels. The visiting Christians kissed him and then the elders told them, "Go and play", referring, I assume, to that same child-like simplicity which Irenaeus ascribed to Christians in Paradise. Outside the gates, Perpetua then met a bishop and a deacon, who begged her to resolve

³⁶ CLEM. AL. *Paed.* 2, 8, 71, 1-2; PROV. 17, 6; BEN SIRACH 39, 13-14; CLEM. AL. *Paed.* 2, 8, 76; HARVEY 2006, on Christians and scents.

³⁷ CHADWICK 1966, 31-65.

their quarrels. They fell at her feet, a mere woman's, and she took them aside under one of the trees of roses and had words with them in Greek.³⁸

III. Paradise

This sense of Paradise as a *locus amoenus* is stronger, even, in the remarkable prison-visions of another north African martyr, James. In 259 he dreamed that he was seated before the heavenly tribunal of an executing judge, from whom the great martyr-bishop Cyprian rescued him. He watched the "others" being judged and then he and Cyprian escorted the judge to his palace, through a heavenly landscape "pleasant with meadows and clothed with the joyous leaves of green groves, shaded with cypress-trees rising on high and pine-trees beating their heads against heaven". In the centre was a pure fountain, from which he drank. Later, the very night before his execution, James dreamed that he had seen fellow-martyrs from the prison at Cirta celebrating another banquet in heaven, like the 'last supper' which they had recently enjoyed on earth. A boy, one of a pair of just-martyred twins, ran to meet him. "Why are you hurrying?", the boy seemed to say, "rejoice and exult, for tomorrow you too will dine with us." The boy was wearing a garland of roses round his neck, surely as a happy diner in heaven, and was carrying a "very green palm indeed" in his right hand. It is the transposed symbol of an earthly victor, triumphant in the games.³⁹

Why does this memorable imagery occur at this date in two Latin north African texts? The detail of a *locus amoenus* had also been exploited in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, where earthly roses burst from jewelled meadows in spring or "virgin roses flourish beside pleasing little plants in a decidedly pleasing little

³⁸ *Mart. Perp. et Fel.* 11, 5-6.

³⁹ *Mart. Mar. et Jac.* 6, 10-11; 11, 5-6.

garden". However, the martyrs are not drawing on Apuleius. Both the martyrs and Apuleius draw independently on the literary imagery of the *locus amoenus*, which was mediated to Christians by earlier texts on the nature of Paradise, apocryphal to us, but not to them. This imagery is present, too, in the account of the heavenly park in another African text, Pseudo-Cyprian's *Praise of Martyrdom*.⁴⁰

Early apocryphal texts say much about Heaven's landscape, though some of them say even more about Hell. The *Apocalypse of Peter*, partly a work of the 2nd century, refers to Moses and Elijah in heaven wearing garlands of fair scented flowers and to Paradise as full of "blessed" fruits and scents, a "great, open garden", at least in the Ethiopic and Coptic versions, which are the only ones to survive.⁴¹ In the *Acts of Paul*, partly a mid- to late-3rd-century text, Paul sees cypress trees bowing their heads, then straightening themselves, just outside the gate into Paradise. He learns that they stand for those who have fasted day and night but are too proud of their own achievements. Only when Christ comes with his saints will these saints' prayers allow the cypresses to enter Paradise itself.⁴² The floweriest of all heavens, however, is the one described by Mani and his followers, "true Christians" in their own opinion. In Mani's dualist universe, the Father of Greatness rules in a Kingdom of Light which is teeming with flowers. He is attended there by "powers" who sing, but do not dance, in his presence and throw flowers at Him in heavenly joy. As in Heaven, so on earth, flowers were celebrated in the vivid psalms which Mani and his followers sang together. When the followers met each spring for their festival, the Bema, which commemorated Mani's death, the scent of roses was part of the occasion, at least according to the fine Bema Psalms which survive in Coptic. A crown of roses is said to be woven by the

⁴⁰ APUL. *Met.* 3, 29; PS.-CYPR. *Laud. mart.* 21; BREMMER 2004, 159-173.

⁴¹ *Apoc. Petri* 5, 15-16; DANIÉLOU 1953, on paradise in the early Fathers.

⁴² *Acta Pauli* 24.

Spirit from the “roses” brought by each of the faithful, and perhaps actual roses were part of the festival.⁴³

The richest elaboration of this heavenly imagery involves two new, but immensely influential, elements: virtue and female virginity. Before his martyrdom in 314 the Lycian bishop Methodius composed a remarkable reworking of Plato’s famous *Symposium*. Its participants were all virgin females. Methodius describes how the girls were transported into an allegorical garden, plainly a foretaste of Paradise. We learn about their journey from the virginal Theopatra, who had told it to virginal Gregorion, who narrates it in the text.⁴⁴ She and her female companions had followed a hazardous route through the “meadow of Incorruptibility”, a Christian perfectionist’s riposte to the pagan Elysian Fields, until they were met by an imposing female. She was Virtue, the daughter of Philosophy. She ushered them into a garden which lay, significantly, “towards the East”, like Eden. It was gated, also significantly, like post-lapsarian Paradise. It was wondrously beautiful, containing a marvellous fountain whose river-like streams, like the rivers of Paradise, radiated outwards, while its own water was as smooth as olive oil.

Every kind of fruit was ripening on this garden’s trees. It had an ever-flourishing meadow, set with all sorts of flowers which were wafting a fine fragrance. In this meadow-garden, significantly a non-seasonal garden, three virgins were preparing to dine, like martyrs transposed into heaven. Theopatra and her six virginal companions joined them, making ten in all, and they began to talk one after another beneath the trees.⁴⁵ The trees were symbolically appropriate. Some were willows, like those on which the psalmist in exile had hung his harp in Babylon, and, above all, there was the apt *agnus castus*. By pagans too, *agnus castus* was considered an antaphrodisiac

⁴³ AUGUST. *C. Faust.* 15, 5-6; RIES 2011, 187.

⁴⁴ METHOD. *Sypos.* Prologue 5; BROWN 1988, 184-189.

⁴⁵ METHOD. *Sypos.* Prologue 6-10.

because its branches, when soaked in water, gave off an infusion which combatted passion. At their Thesmophoria, Athenian women had sat chastely on branches of the plant. Now, ten virgins sat beneath an appropriate *agnus castus* 'tree', though in nature it is only a large shrub.⁴⁶

The ninth and, above all, the tenth speaker, Domina, are the most arboreally explicit. Domina gives the most complex interpretation of the symbolisms of fig tree, vine, olive, and *agnus castus* to be found in early Christian literature. There are two types of such trees, she explains, one good, one bad, as revealed in scriptural citations. Mani's "true Christians" made the same point, but used it to a very different effect. Above all, the fig tree, by its sweet fruits, signifies the sweet delights of Paradise, a garden of delight. The Greek *rhamnos*, our *Vitex agnus castus*, is the same bush, she claims, as the Biblical thorn-bush which was implicit in Christ's thorny crown. This crown, merely touched on by Clement, now symbolises virginity's role in salvation history.⁴⁷

Pagan authors had already exploited an association between fresh uncut flowers and virginity, whether in the "unshorn meadow" of Euripides' proudly virginal Hippolytus, closed to vulgar outsiders, or the "virgin-roses" of Apuleius or the uncut flowers to which Catullus compares the modest bride in his fine *Wedding Song*.⁴⁸ There were also stories of the origin of Flora herself. They are best known to us in a superb passage of Ovid, *Fasti* Book 5.⁴⁹ Here we learn that fair Flora was first called Chloris, a recession-proof green shoot. She had a figure so gorgeous that she blushes to describe it and, as a result, she was once taken off and raped by Zephyr, the west wind. As a dowry and a reward, Zephyr gave her a land of perpetual spring, centred on a garden, and told her, "Be the queen of flowers". Until then, the world had been monochrome, but by

⁴⁶ METHOD. *Sympo.* Prologue 8; AEL. *NA* 9, 26; DAUMAS 1961, 61-66.

⁴⁷ METHOD. *Sympo.* 10, 260-265; COYLE 2009, 65-88.

⁴⁸ EUR. *Hipp.* 73-76; APUL. *Met.* 3, 29, 1; CATULL. 62, 39-47.

⁴⁹ OV. *Fast.* 5, 195-275.

scattering seeds from her post-coital garden Flora has caused multi-coloured flowers to spread everywhere. Once, she even helped the jealous Juno to rival Jupiter and have a child without having sex. She touched Juno with a potent flower in her garden "from the fields of Olenus". As a result, Juno conceived little Mars and gave Flora a place of honour at Rome. We are still looking for Juno's fertilizing flower.

Flora's story tells of an enclosed garden and a virginal conception among the gods. Christians tell of them too, but behind most of Methodius' girl-speakers lies a very different source, the Biblical Song of Songs, as recently allegorized by Origen. The seventh virginal speaker, Procilla, presents a betrothed girl as "intact and immaculate, like a garden of God in which grow all the plants embalmed with delicious heavenly scents, so that only Christ can penetrate it to gather the flowers". Here the garden is the setting for virginity, not an Ovidian reward for heavenly rape. This sort of interpretation had been supported by Origen and was to have an immensely rich future.⁵⁰ On earth we must work to cultivate our garden, the soul, a task in which we will be helped by Christ, the heavenly gardener. In Latin this theme is amply deployed by the chastely-married Paulinus of Nola in his letters to Aper and Amanda, two new recruits to sexless marriage, who are still living on their big farm-estate.⁵¹ The Song has enjoyed the most remarkable mis-reception in all reception-history. An erotic song by origin, it sang of lilies and myrrh and the knocking of the Beloved on the garden door, where he "put in his hand by the hole of the door". This wondrously erotic imagery became neutered and recycled as inspired words about the inner virtue of a virginal soul which is awaiting its garden-master, Christ. Alternatively, as Origen explained, especially in his *Homilies on the Song*, the 'garden enclosed' is a symbol of the pure Church,

⁵⁰ METHOD. *Sypos.* 7, 152; ORIG. *Cant.* 2, 5.

⁵¹ PAUL. NOL. *Ep.* 39, 4-6.

a society of saints.⁵² Cyprian agreed with this misreading and, around him, the enclosed garden became a symbol of the traditional Church in north Africa. By its 4th-century opponents, the self-styled *Catholici* or 'Universals', this Church was labelled the 'Donatist' Church. Augustine and his fellow-bishops then declared it heretical, not schismatic, and set about forcing its members out from their garden and into their own sectarian Church instead.⁵³

In Gregory of Nyssa's sermons on the Song of Songs the Biblical links were drawn even closer. The Burning Bush, blazing but unconsumed, became an explicit type for Christian virginity, beyond anything imagined at Methodius' banquet.⁵⁴ Artists and poets soon followed up and added the Virgin Mary to the garden. Flowers and roses around her became elaborated in Christian texts, gaining complexity as time passed. Hesychius of Jerusalem already compares Mary to an enclosed garden, fertile but unseeded, whereas Origen had interpreted the "lily among thorns" and the Song's enclosed garden only as the Church.⁵⁵ This Marian garden-imagery was to have a very long medieval life.

Lucian once contrasted the perishable flowers of nature with the imperishable flowers in paintings on the walls of a big house.⁵⁶ In their post-Constantinian churches Christian artists began to show the imperishable flowers of Paradise in fine mosaics. There were flowers and palms in Paulinus' apse-mosaic at Nola c. 400. In mosaics of the 6th century, whether at Ravenna or Poreč, the ground of Paradise is set with a standardized range of flowers. They are not imaginary 'fleurets' or a general sort of 'variegated' meadow.⁵⁷ Lilies and roses, fittingly,

⁵² Song of Sol. 5, 4-5; ORIG. *Hom. in Cant.* 1, 1; 1, 7; 1, 9.

⁵³ CYPR. *Ep.* 69, 2; BROWN 1967, 212-213.

⁵⁴ GREG. NYSS. *Hom. 4 in Cant.*, PG 44, 830-858.

⁵⁵ HESYCH. *Hom. 5*, 1-3, ed. M. AUBINEAU; MAGUIRE 2012, 79-80; ORIG. *Hom. in Cant.* 3, 4.

⁵⁶ LUCIAN. *Dom.* 9.

⁵⁷ PAUL. NOL. *Ep.* 32, 10-17; TERRY & MAGUIRE 2007, 163-164 and Pls. 259-260, showing the apse in the basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna.

are in the foreground and palms, of course, are in the saints' hands and around their bodies. The puzzling open-faced white flowers are not imprecise, either. They are, I suggest, none other than the amaranth, the elusive flower of Paradise, now given artistic form. This paradise-flora had not been formed by rhetors' verbose ecphraseis of spring or Paradise or Creation in their sermons. It was a simple, symbolic flora which was known to many of its Christian viewers and was passed on, surely, in conversations. In Roman Augustan poetry, white lilies among roses had been a simile for the blush of a maiden when touched by love. Girls who "weave white lilies among amaranth" were compared to a virgin-bride being brought to her husband.⁵⁸ The main flowers in early Christian paradise-mosaics happened to have had an erotic past in pagan imagery. Christians, surely unaware of it, gave these same blossoms a different meaning in their own language of flowers.

So many of these Christian texts and images were to have a vigorous Byzantine and Western medieval life. In the 10th- to 12th-century texts of the Byzantine compendium, the *Symbolic Garden*, we find the fullest surviving list of the meanings of Christian flowers, from cypresses to scented styrax and many others. In fact, Aelian and the anonymous pre-Christian *Physiologus* were non-Christian sources for much of this lore.⁵⁹ In medieval Western literature we then find heavenly rose trees, the soul as a garden and Christ as its gardener (such a favourite of early Cistercian meditative writings), the crucial association between virginity and the enclosed garden (in the medieval Latin West, the *Song of Songs* was to attract more than thirty commentaries, each making this point) and the linking of lilies and roses with the Virgin, whether in a garden or on her 'assumption' up to Heaven.⁶⁰ Much, of course, was newly

⁵⁸ VERG. *Aen.* 12, 68-69; TIB. 3, 4, 33-34; LYNE 1983, 59-60 = 2007, 142-143.

⁵⁹ THOMSON 1960; RIGO 2008, 287-319 translates a revised text; BOOTH 1998, 15-19.

⁶⁰ ANTOINE 2002, 20-21; 25-26; 47; 66-79; GOUSSET 2001.

elaborated in the later period, whether the iris or the aquilegia as symbols of the Holy Spirit, or the West's reading of the Song of Songs as a song about a chivalrous earthly Beloved, courting his earthly lady in an enclosed or walled garden.⁶¹ The latter, naturally, was never an image in readings of the Song by earlier Christian celibate perfectionists. However, as so often, the medieval Christianity which we admire in superb illuminated manuscripts and florid poetic texts was indebted to the first four centuries of Christian writing and imagination. They were already very florid and their cultural, though not sexual, legacy proved fertile.

IV. Gardens in Christian literature

In pagan literature, earthly gardens had been places of retreat and philosophical debate. Early Christian writers at first tended to prefer the setting of the seashore or places near to it for their dialogues. A breakwater on the beach at Ostia was the setting for Minucius' enchanting *Octavius* and the sea-shore itself was the setting for one of the denouements in the Clementine *Recognitions*. Many reasons have been adduced for this notable change of literary scene.⁶² In my view the important ones are that conversions by the shore recalled Christ's calling of future apostles by the "sea" in Galilee and that sea-water was handy for baptism. As a compromise, a place with a sea-view might be preferred, not least because it would be quieter. Justin Martyr met an elderly Christian and was converted by him in a "green field near the sea, at a distance from the actual shore". So, too, Peter in the Clementine *Recognitions* meets a hard-line astrologer on the beach but takes him away from the shore to dispute with him in a "quiet recess away from the harbour".⁶³ In the

⁶¹ LEVI D'ANCONA 1977; ANTOINE 2002, 90-93.

⁶² MIN. FEL. *Oct.* 3; PS.-CLEM. *Recog.* 8, 1-3; EDWARDS 1987, 267-276.

⁶³ IUSTIN. *Tryph.* 2; PS.-CLEM. *Recog.* 8, 3.

pagan emperor Julian's enchanting prospectus for the estate which he is giving to Evagrius, he describes it as "not more than twenty stades from the sea", so that no "trader or sailor harasses the place with his chatter or insolence". Its view of the sea and ships is cited as a strong point in its favour. It lay near Constantinople, "presumably", modern topographers think, "somewhere on the rising ground above the modern district of Maltepe, overlooking Princes' Islands to the south and the city to the west".⁶⁴ Justin and Pseudo-Clement shared something of Julian's taste in landscape.

In early Christianity, the garden is the scene of announcements rather than discussions. In the 2nd-century *Protevangelium* of James we meet the fullest description in early Christian literature of a garden in which an Annunciation occurred. It is the Annunciation to Anna, the mother-to-be of the Virgin. Lamenting her infertility, Anna goes out into her and Joachim's garden and complains to its laurel trees (pagan symbols of triumph and of prophecy) and its sparrows (pagan attendants of the goddess of Love). These items were to lead a rich afterlife in Byzantine art and texts of this episode.⁶⁵ Then and there, an angel announces (prophetically) that Anna will bear a child (triumphantly) with love (but not sex). This garden, however, is fictional. For gardens to be important in real Christian authors' lives, authors had to emerge from the garden-and park-owning upper classes. It is not until Cyprian that we have such a Christian author.

Cyprian's letter to Donatus is a neatly-constructed conversion-text (written c. 246) and, in it, we meet a description of a Christian's actual garden, written by a Christian who was rich enough to have had one. Cyprian invites Donatus to a discussion overlooking the autumnal charms of his green estate, under a vine-covered pergola, surely his own. Augustine

⁶⁴ JULIAN. *Ep.* 25; MAGUIRE 2000, 231-264, at 262; compare LONGUS 4, 2-3 for the 'luxury' of a sea-view.

⁶⁵ *Proteu. Iacobi* 2-3; DOLEZAL & MAVROUDI 2002, 105-158; MAGUIRE 2012, 65-66; 70-74.

admired the lavish style of this scene's description but it was also, surely, based on Cyprian's own green *horti*, or estates, near Carthage.⁶⁶ After withdrawing to these *horti*, he was eventually arrested there in late summer 258. His biographer Pontius insists that at first Cyprian had sold his *horti* and given away the price, but then they were restored to him by "the indulgence of God", although Cyprian would gladly have sold them again if the fear of persecution had not deterred him. A similar note of evasive defence has been detected in Cyprian's own phrase for these gardens in one of his last letters, *horti nostri*, our gardens, a phrase with community undertones, not simply 'mine'.⁶⁷

Like bishop Cyprian, the 4th-century Cappadocian fathers were rich enough to have garden-pergolas and fine features in the setting of their own villas and estates. At the end of his life, Gregory Nazianzen is as defensive as Cyprian about his retreat to one such place, his family estate near Kerbala. In a memorable poem, he defends himself against rich and fashionable critics who are accusing him of not being a proper ascetic because he is living in such a favoured retreat, a "garden gay", in Cardinal Newman's translation, with a "gently trickling rill, / And the sweets of idleness".⁶⁸ Too big a personal garden, evidently, was a sore point with poor Christians or other hard-line Christian ascetics. Just how lovely Gregory's surroundings could have been emerges from the pearl of all early Christian letters on landscape and green gardens, Gregory of Nyssa's letter to the lawyer Adelphius in praise of his estate near Vanota.⁶⁹ Near the house the fruit trees even include peaches. The climbing roses and the vines on wall-trellises surpass the most famous gardens in all antiquity, Alcinous' in Homer's *Odyssey*. The fish

⁶⁶ CYPR. *Ad Don.* 1; AUGUST. *Doctr. christ.* 4, 14, 30-31.

⁶⁷ PONT. *Vita Cypr.* 15; CYPR. *Ep.* 81, 1; CLARKE 1989, 314-315.

⁶⁸ GREG. NAZ., PG 37, 1349-1353; McGUCKIN 2001, 397, quoting Newman's translation (1840).

⁶⁹ GREG. NYSS. *Ep.* 20, ed. G. PASQUALI, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* VIII.2.

ponds are amazing, as are the grapes and the fruit served for breakfast *al fresco*.

In the West, too, the writers who make the most of gardens are propertied Christians, Augustine and Paulinus of Nola. Augustine recalls two gardens at crucial moments in his religious progress. One, in Milan, was the scene of his abandonment of sex and worldly ambition and was complete with a fig tree which was surely real enough, not a fictitious Biblical echo in his presentation of the episode. It was a small garden, however, in a tenanted house, like the garden in Ostia over which Augustine and his mother Monnica looked out in the following year while enjoying their famous shared ascent to God.⁷⁰ Both of these gardens existed, but their specific mention in the text is also there to enhance the setting of these visionary episodes, far from the madding crowd.

Paulinus was vastly richer and grander than Augustine and was more active as a garden-landscaper in his own right. At Nola, he claims, his patron saint Felix had once worked as a gardener, leasing a "modest" three acre plot and cultivating it himself without a labourer. Professing to honour this saintly role-model, Paulinus embarked on early Christianity's most lavish and aggressive garden-landscaping. The shacks of "squatters" and their dirty little vegetable gardens were obstructing Paulinus' vision for his new Church and garden complex, planned as a sort of St Peter's in Nola for the worship of Felix as his patron saint. Thankfully, "fire from Heaven" descended to burn off the squatters' hovels. Paulinus credits Felix with the miracle, but historians may prefer to credit Paulinus' own staff. Copious fountains were then installed, diverting Nola's precious water-supply to Paulinus' garden.⁷¹ Paulinus was as tiresome a neighbour to Nola as Ippolito d'Este and his villa's teeming garden-fountains were later to be to Tivoli. Instead of

⁷⁰ AUGUST. *Conf.* 8, 8, 19 (*hortulus*); 9, 10, 23, read too symbolically by SMOLAK 2003, 149-160.

⁷¹ PAUL. NOL. *Carm.* 16, 284-290; 28, 61-104; 146-164; 266-279; MRATSCHEK 2002, 400-401.

squatters' plots, expanses of green grass greeted visitors to Felix's shrine with orderly fruit trees and vegetable beds, from which produce could be graciously offered to them in the saint's name.⁷²

V. Christian gardeners

What about actual gardening? Unlike his role-model Felix, Paulinus was only a projects-man outdoors, like many a modern banker turned garden 'designer'. He refers to himself in his garden, but the references are all entwined with neat metaphors about his "little" garden as Paradise or the "gardening" of Paulinus' own sinful soul. He even presents its "manure" as "humility". His garden-references are most artfully adapted to their recipients. Owners of big farm-estates receive some of the most cultivated, including praises of God as a Gardener.⁷³ Likewise, when Paulinus invites Sulpicius Severus to come and be a *colonus* in his "little garden", he is playing with the metaphor of serving God as a Christian hired labourer and tending His oil and wine. He is not inviting Severus to become a working gardener, let alone a "worker" like himself. He claims to picture Severus' attendants arriving at the garden and making it more cultivated, but again the reference is scriptural. Severus never came, but not because he was afraid of being made to dig with a spade.⁷⁴

In c. 401 Augustine evoked the joys of actual gardening, the first Christian to do so. Here too, however, the context is important. He is commenting on Adam's role as a cultivator in Eden. He asks what could be more "wonderful a spectacle" than a man "speaking to nature by sowing seeds, planting a

⁷² PAUL. NOL. *Ep.* 32, 12.

⁷³ *Ep.* 29, 3; 43, 6; 44, 7, on humility as his "manure"; *Ep.* 39, 6, God as Gardener; HUNT 2012, 149-160 follows this theme in Syriac sources, which represent God as "farmer-cultivator" of the heart.

⁷⁴ PAUL. NOL. *Ep.* 5, 15-16.

tree or shrub or grafting onto one?" Augustine is discussing benign gardening in Paradise, which he considers to be an example of an activity which had been freely undertaken while unencumbered by the Fall. He imagines a gardener who even seems to "ask each root and seed what it can and cannot do, and why". This gardening is so blessed because it suggests noble, improving thoughts to its practitioner's mind.⁷⁵ Augustine's idealizing of gardening is a far cry from the daily routine of a post-lapsarian garden-worker, always thinking of his next break.

Significantly, both Paulinus and Augustine were celibate monks. Augustine strongly supported the tradition of monks working with their own hands. Even as a priest he was given, in 391, a garden-space in the ground around the Catholic church in Hippo in which to found a monastery.⁷⁶ This garden would have had to be maintained. Presumably monks who joined the community were expected to work in its area. They were a human rag-bag, some of them from labouring backgrounds, and there was no novitiate of lesser brethren to be assigned the dirty work. Perhaps Augustine sometimes pulled out a weed, but he was surely too busy praying and teaching and reading to dig in person. It is among monks, however, that Christian gardening became distinctive.

At the head of it, naturally, stood stories of Antony himself, the first desert father. When he withdrew further into the Egyptian desert, he begged a little grain and then asked for a hoe, an axe, and a spade to clear ground and cultivate it himself. Next, he began to grow "a few" vegetables with the aid of a nearby water-spring. He could then offer vegetables to visitors. Inevitably his vegetable beds were trampled by visiting wildlife, but Antony was said to have caught one invading animal. He asked it why it wished to harm him, as he did not wish to harm it, and then he blessed it in the Lord's name

⁷⁵ AUGUSTIN. *Gen. ad litt.* 8, 8, 15; HARRISON 2002, 13-33.

⁷⁶ LAWLESS 1987, 58-61.

before releasing it. Supposedly he was never troubled again.⁷⁷ In England gardeners have yet to try blessing their bothersome badgers.

These stories are stories of productive gardening, not flower gardening for scent and display. They are also stories of charity and hospitality, expressed with produce. They were soon matched by monks' practice elsewhere. In the early 380s the travelling virgin, Egeria, invaluabley observed the existence of plots for fruit and vegetables at several of the Holy Places in Palestine. On the rocky top of Mount Sinai, Christians even gave her "blessings", not bits of bread but fruits which, she cannily emphasises, had been grown in kinder ground at the mountain's foot, near the monks' cells. At the site of the Burning Bush, no less, she found that there was a "very pleasing" garden and in it the monks ate a light dinner in front of the Bush itself. She also found that there was a garden where John the Baptist had baptized his visitors. The nearby river allowed fruits to grow very well.⁷⁸

What Egeria saw was typical elsewhere. In hostile surroundings, monks used nearby water-springs and engaged in hard-won productive gardening. Adam and the recreation of Paradise were cited as their models, at least by authors of their hagiographic Lives. Even in the harsh Judaean desert, monks tried to grow a few struggling plants, although the fertile oases of nearby Jericho sent them rather more fruits and greens which they could eat. Archaeologists have continued to find evidence of cultivated plots and terracing round remote monastic settlements in the region.⁷⁹

The apostles of early Christian gardening are therefore monks, a new phenomenon to pagan eyes. Like many simple occupiers of a bit of property in the Roman world, they grew their own vegetables, with the added motive to grow more so

⁷⁷ ATHAN. *Vita Ant.* 50.

⁷⁸ *Itin. Egeriae* 3; 4; 15; HUNT 2000, 34-51.

⁷⁹ BROWN 1988, 221; 381; HIRSCHFELD 1992, 148-161; PATRICH 1995, 61-63; 78; 100-107; TALBOT 2002, 42-46.

as to show charity to visitors, the model alleged by Paulinus to have been Felix's too. In the Byzantine era, monk-gardeners become most famous on Mount Athos, where Athanasios in the 10th century began to garden on the most forbidding rocky site. Continuing claims that Athos' flora is 'special' or 'divine' are a pious delusion.⁸⁰ Meadow-flowers in Romania or the rock-flora of the Carpathian mountains are far more impressive without being connected to a 'holy' Mountain. In later Byzantium the supreme gardening saint is not an Athonite: she is Matrona of Perge. She began by dressing as a man and presenting herself as a gardener to the monks whom she visited on her travels. As gardening was regarded as fit work for new arrivals in a community, this role for future saints is an apt narrative-convention. Later, Matrona settled her own nunnery in Constantinople, on the site of a former rose-garden.⁸¹

Bishops did not garden in person. They were mostly too busy. Only one bishop is known to have taken a special interest in soil and then for a very special reason. By the 6th century pilgrims had begun to bring bits of 'holy' soil west from the Holy Land in little *ampullae*, carried on their persons. It was left to the archbishop of Pisa in the 1190s to transport by ship a load of earth from the Hill of Golgotha in the Holy Land to dignify his Cathedral's cloister. He had been serving there as a Crusader. The city had been open to visitors again since 1192 and, although Golgotha itself was now supposedly enclosed inside a church-precinct, the soil had been plausibly sourced. It was spread in a special Campo Santo and marketed as a burial-ground for Pisa's especially rich families.⁸²

In 6th-century Italy, by contrast, humble Christian vegetable-gardeners had become credible recipients of miracles. In the early 590s, Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* include a significant cluster of garden miracle-stories, including the legendary tale

⁸⁰ TALBOT 2002, 45; SPEAKE 2002, 29-36, on the "Garden of the Mother of God" (36).

⁸¹ TALBOT 2002, 66.

⁸² TOBINO 1982.

that Paulinus of Nola, no less, had gone off to a Vandal king in Africa and had volunteered as a gardener. He had been wanting to earn the ransom of poor Christians who had been taken captive from his homeland. The Vandal king's son enjoyed talking to him in the garden more than to his other friends. It is the last of antiquity's many garden-dialogues.⁸³ Gregory's other garden-miracles are rather different. They include cautionary tales which good Christian monks should take to heart. There is a story warning of the perils of eating lettuce without blessing it first with the sign of the Cross. Above all, there are stories which warn against stealing produce from a monastery garden. The temptation was plainly a familiar hazard of garden-life: pagans, too, had told tales of the god Priapus, active against garden-thieves. At Nursia, a wicked priest was even said to have tried to corrupt Benedict's monks by sending seven naked ladies into their garden. Scholars have tried to link these girls, too, to pagan cult. It is more likely that they owe their role in the story to the monks' psychology.⁸⁴

In each case, the workers of Gregory's garden-miracles are living persons, usually abbots of a community, especially one Equitius from Amiternum. Abbots were praised conventionally as 'gardeners' tending the souls of their community. Miracles set in a monastery-garden related to this theme.

Not that abbots did much heavy work themselves. They had an alternative of their own. Among Manichees, the inner Elect lived in Christ-like poverty and were exempted from digging or gardening by their powerful theology of the Light-particles and Evil which were scattered in plants and the soil. Gardening and pruning were for second-class Hearers only and even then they had to confess the sin involved.⁸⁵ Abbots had a different escape-route. Gregory's near-contemporary Cassiodorus is explicit about it. In the 550s, he withdrew to his charming

⁸³ GREG. M. *Dial.* 3, 1, 1-8; PETERSEN 1984; MÜLLER 2005, 46-55.

⁸⁴ GREG. M. *Dial.* 1, 4, 7; 1, 3, 2-4; 3, 14, 6-7; SOCRATES *Hist. eccl.* 1, 12, for similar thefts; GREG. M. *Dial.* 2, 8, 4, with LAPORTE 1963, 6-17.

⁸⁵ BEDUHN 2000, 30-68.

monastery at Squillace in southern Italy. Here, his productive gardeners were to be his monks, but not himself. If monks are admitted to a community, he states, but are too stupid to learn to read or write, they can praise God by working in the garden or the fields instead.⁸⁶ Cassiodorus uses two neat citations of consecutive lines from the *Georgics* and then cites Psalm 127: "You will eat hard-earned bread, you are blessed and it will be well for you".⁸⁷ He then moves on to a splendid recommendation of practical gardening books for his educated readers. They include such neglected classics as Gargilius Martialis, an authority on the best fertilizers for vegetables, whose work is known to us only in citations by the Elder Pliny.⁸⁸ The novices at Squillace could count on excellent horticultural advice from their well-read Father. As often, those who could not read did the actual work.

Christians changed the symbolic language of flowers and immortalized particular varieties in art. They envisioned gardens in new ways, enjoyed them, if they were rich enough, as places of retreat, and anticipated them in heaven. Among their modern scholars these sensitivities are most memorably expressed by A.-J. Festugière, himself such a great admirer of the Fondation Hardt. In 1949, he stayed for three days in Taormina with the Franciscan sisters in their Sicilian convent. I note that he could not have stayed in the former Dominican convent of his own monastic order, because its cells had been turned into rooms for one of Italy's most expensive hotels. Like San Domenico, the Sisters' convent had a fine garden and, a year later, Festugière recalled its impact in a characteristically moving preface to his book *L'Enfant d'Agrigente*, which he dedicated to the nuns. When he shuts his eyes, he writes, he recalls this beautiful wild garden on its cliff, behind which is Paradise, "non pas trop soigné, mais libre encore, innocent et fantasque,

⁸⁶ CASSIOD. *Inst.* 1, 28, 6 - 1, 29, 1.

⁸⁷ VERG. *Georg.* 4, 484-485; Ps. 127, 2, cit. CASSIOD. *Inst.* 1, 28, 5, trans. J.W. HALPORN.

⁸⁸ CASSIOD. *Inst.* 1, 30, 6; ROSE 1875, 129.

où toutes les plantes ont mariage, et la bête et l'oiseau amitié avec l'homme et l'homme amitié avec Dieu". This enchanted garden will live on, he concludes, in his inner depths, this garden which we all carry in the secret of our hearts, this beautiful Lost Garden which, sometimes, Providence grants us to rediscover here on earth so as to comfort us on our road and to remind us of its end-point.⁸⁹

Father Festugière had a truly patristic sensibility but he was not, I think, an active gardener himself. Long before him, previous monks had entrenched gardening in new places and related it to a new scale of values. In pagan anecdotes, the Roman consul of 299 BCE, Valerius Corvus, was said to have continued to work very thoroughly in his farm-fields in his old age, persisting to the age of a hundred. Significantly, late medieval illustrators presented Corvus as digging in raised beds in a garden.⁹⁰ Monks had become the new icons of 'gardening for the elderly'. They were the champions of vegetable gardening. They were the new aspiring martyrs and, in turn, they became heirs to the former martyrs' flowery visions of Paradise.

The Fondation Hardt needs a new vision for its garden. I suggest a monastic model. All novice-visitors should be required to work in it daily. A hermit has to be found and put in charge. There should be no promise of seven naked ladies on the lawn as an incentive.

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⁸⁹ FESTUGIÈRE 1950, vi-vii.

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DISCUSSION

B. Bergmann: You have referred to Paradise as a garden. The term 'paradise garden' is used rather loosely in modern studies of Roman art. It is sometimes applied to the flowery abundance which collapses the divisions of the seasons in such landscape-frescoes as the Garden Room at Prima Porta and in Pompeii's House of the Golden Bracelet. Yet the word *paradeisos* in classical writers seems to hold no such consistent meaning and certainly was not associated with the Golden Age. How should we distinguish the imagery of spontaneous efflorescence and the lack of time in Roman garden art from the early Christians' Paradise?

R. Lane Fox: There are three main issues here. The pagan world used the term 'paradise' for parks, especially hunting-parks, having borrowed the word from the Persians. The foundational texts here are by Xenophon and, for the Persian context, Pierre Briant.¹ If we call these flowery landscape-frescoes 'paradise-gardens' we are not following pagan antiquity's usage. There is also the need to distinguish between representations of the four seasons, sometimes combined in one image, and Christian paradise-gardens in which there are, strictly, no seasons at all. Henry Maguire provides a helpful point of entry into this issue.² Greeks and Romans did have the idea of a 'utopian' garden whose flowers and fruits are born all the year round, but not all their flowery frescoes are of this type. Even when they are, they are not strictly 'Paradise'-scenes. Paradise had specific garden-features, fruit trees, a spring, understood as

¹ XEN. *Oec.* 4, 20; BRIANT 2002, 201, 443.

² MAGUIRE 1987, 25-26.

a central fountain, from which flow the four rivers.³ More is usually said about its trees than its wild flowers. As a result I prefer to be strict. We should call the scenes you mention scenes of 'abundance' and discourage loose use of the term 'paradise' for such non-Christian images.

K. Coleman: Cultivation of the monastic garden required fertilizer as well as irrigation. In the pre-Christian world, sanctions against temple-robbery included prohibition of the theft of 'sacred' manure. Epigraphic evidence about this topic has attracted quite vigorous discussion recently.⁴ As everything attached to a sanctuary belonged to the god, would the dung of the sacrificial animals have done so also? Perhaps it would have been considered all the more efficacious, and therefore valuable, for having been the god's possession.

R. Lane Fox: You raise, if I may say so, a truly fertile question, one which we too often overlook. To the Athens texts we should add others, for instance the classic one from Arcesine on Amorgos.⁵ I know of no cautionary tale against stealing manure from a monastery's dung-heap. In the desert, I suppose Antony and his later followers would collect up any droppings from visiting wild-life and, if available, from their monastery's donkeys. Above all, they would use their own droppings, monastic 'night-soil', as the Chinese call it. In Paradise John Milton's Adam and Eve say they are doing likewise, in the burgeoning Garden "which mocks our scant manuring". It would be worth looking for Jewish texts on this question, not least because sacrificial animals and birds were so prolific in the cult at the Jerusalem Temple. I cited the remarkable Campo Santo of holy soil at Pisa. However, I do not myself think that dung from pagan sanctuaries was thought, like this holy soil, to be

³ Gen. 2, 6-9.

⁴ OWENS 1983; KEEGAN 2008.

⁵ RHODES & OSBORNE 2003, No. 59, with bibliography.

'sacred' and to have special divine qualities. It was just a very valuable resource.

C. Loeben: Eine Bemerkung über die Gärtnerei des Heiligen Antonius. In der östlichen Wüste von Ägypten, wo er sich ansiedelte, gibt es fast keine anderen Oasen, im scharfen Kontrast zur westlichen Wüste. Ohne Zweifel dachte er, dass er von Gott an seine Wasserquelle geführt wurde, aber es gab fast keine andere Quelle in der Nähe. In welchem Ausmaß kann gesagt werden, dass er sie entwickelte? — nur für seine Besucher oder für andere Leute in der Umgebung?

R. Lane Fox: The topography is indeed always crucial for understanding the places where saints settled. Peter Brown has some fine remarks on the question of the desert and the not-so-desert in his classic paper, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man".⁶ In his *Life of Antony*, Athanasius writes only of Antony feeding his visitors. He does not find a big supply-garden.

S. Dalley: You mentioned that in the apocryphal *Acts of Paul* cypress trees were imagined to be standing outside the gate of Paradise. I think this motif has old non-Greek roots which we can already see in the Babylonian tradition. My paper mentioned the pair of tree-gods who are depicted in terracotta as standing as guardians at the entrance to a shrine and others in a seal-impression who are bending their heads. I think the Christian text has developed this imagery.

R. Lane Fox: Thank you for this unremarked detail. In Christian texts which survive in non-Greek versions or arise outside or on the edges of the non-Greek world, so much remains to be traced which is missed altogether by classical and patristic readers like myself.

⁶ BROWN 1971, 80-101, esp. 83-84.

K. von Stackelberg: I have two questions. First, your paper illustrates the marked tension between the erotic, seductive aspect of gardens and their cultivation by monks as a way to the improvement of their souls. Is there also a sense in which the pleasure of the garden is acting as a prophylactic against temptation? Secondly, elements of Irenaeus's description of paradise (e.g., the grapes) remind me vividly of Lucian's description of the Isle of the Blessed in the *Verae Historiae*. Do you think Irenaeus is also playing with a metatextual aspect of the garden, grafting healthy Christian Gospel material onto pagan paradoxography?

R. Lane Fox: Pleasure is never a prophylactic against temptation in Christian texts, unless it is pleasure or delight in God. The only permissible pleasure would be the idea of 'gardening for God' in his Creation, not the simple pleasure of gardening or gardens *per se*. Secondly, Irenaeus was certainly not playing with pagan texts in any controllable sense of metatextuality. He is metascriptural. However, I would reverse your point about Lucian, as it reminds me of something fascinating. In the *Verae Historiae*, the semi-females who sprout vine-branches from their fingers may be a parody of the talking females in trees whom Alexander meets at the edge of the world in the *Alexander Romance*.⁷ However, the enclosed city, shining and bejewelled, also in the *Verae Historiae*, is taken by the (Christian) scholiast to be a parody of the Christians' New Jerusalem.⁸ I think the scholiast, remarkably, is right. The city is populated by souls in a sort of transfigured body. There is no pagan philosophic source for this notion. The only obvious source is the transfigured body in Christian teachings of the future Resurrection. The city also enjoys "perpetual spring", causing grapes, pomegranates, and apples to bear fruit constantly. This perpetual fruiting can be traced back to Alcinous'

⁷ LUCIAN. *Ver. hist.* 1, 8.

⁸ LUCIAN. *Ver. hist.* 2, 11; RABE 1906, 21, lines 19-20.

garden in Homer and the perpetual spring to later poems on the Golden Age. However, it also matches Christians' ideas about Paradise, as my paper noted. I think Lucian is indeed parodying the Heavenly City of Christian teaching, a point which has not been widely recognized.

É. Prioux: Vous avez évoqué l'Alexandrie tardo-antique et la figure de Clément d'Alexandrie. Peut-on évaluer l'influence éventuelle sur ces auteurs de la poésie hellénistique et/ou de la Seconde Sophistique, qui semblent constituer deux moments essentiels dans la constitution d'une approche littéraire du thème des jardins?

R. Lane Fox: Clement wrote a lot and I can only answer for his *Paedagogus* and then only because of the superb *Sources Chrétaines* edition by H.-I. Marrou, expert on the cultural ballast shared by writers of this period. Marrou's notes never find a late Hellenistic or Second Sophistic parallel. The only sources he detects are scripture or archaic-classical Greek poetry or sometimes some late Hellenistic prose 'diatribe', hard though this genre is to pin down. Marrou's fine introduction wonders if Clement used an intermediary, a *florilegium* we might say, for his classical allusions.⁹ Late Hellenistic epigrams are nowhere detected. Perhaps renewed study might detect their presence in other works, especially Clement's *Stromateis*. I am doubtful, but I am no expert in this field. In the *Paedagogus*, Clement describes "God's education" as a "possession for all time", an allusion to Thucydides, of course, which will pain all loyal Thucydideans.¹⁰ My sense is that Clement looks back to collections of such classics, not to contemporary sophistic prose.

⁹ MARROU 1960, 66-91.

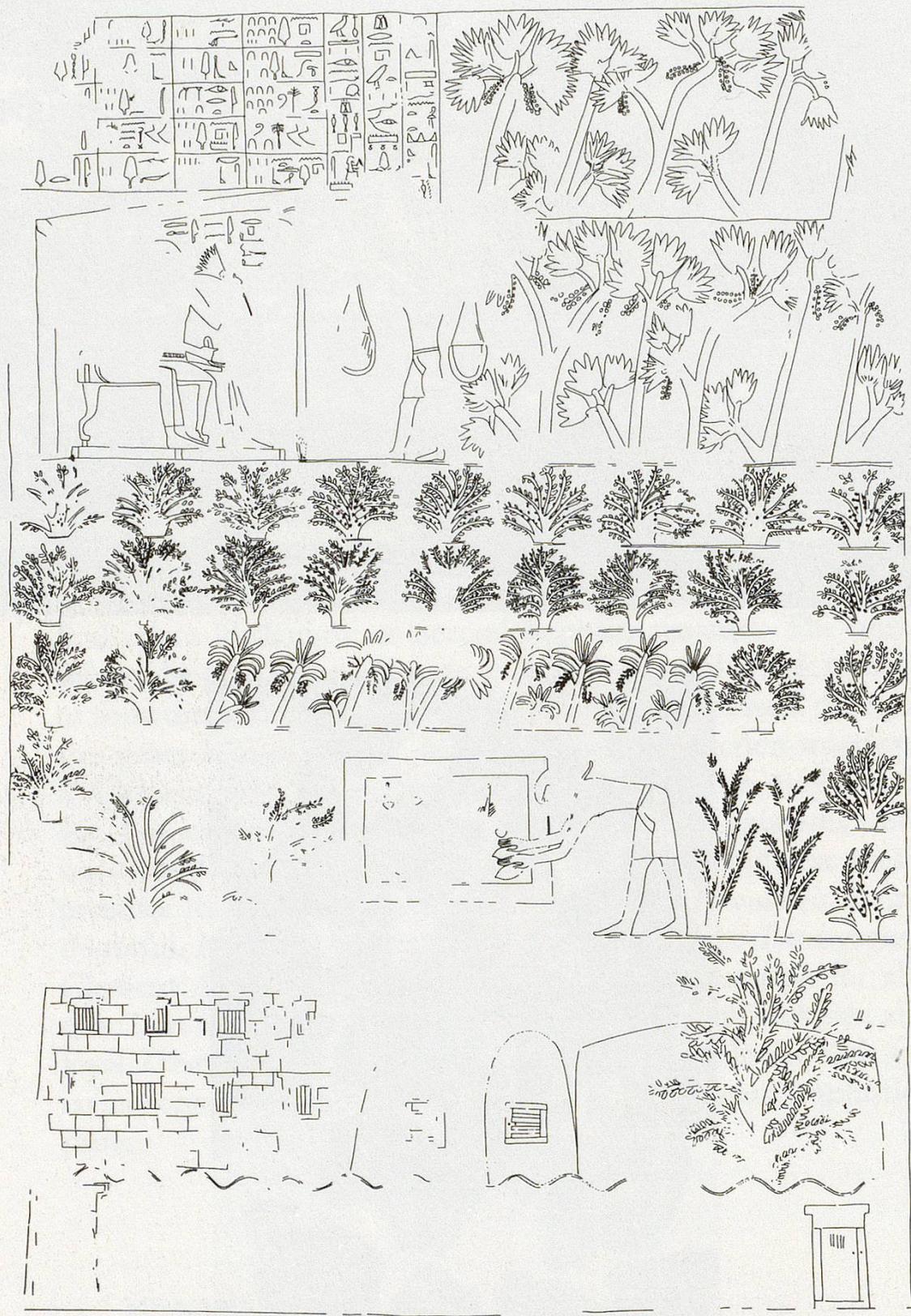
¹⁰ CLEM. AL. *Paed.* 1, 54, 3.

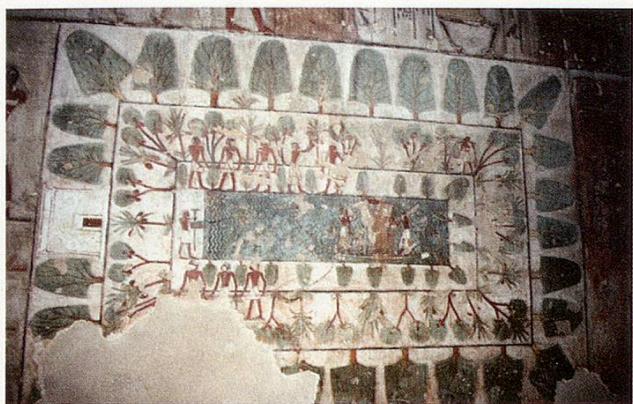


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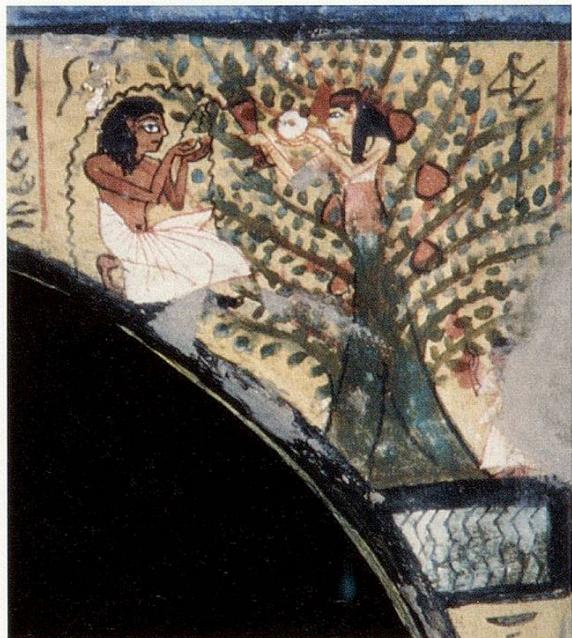
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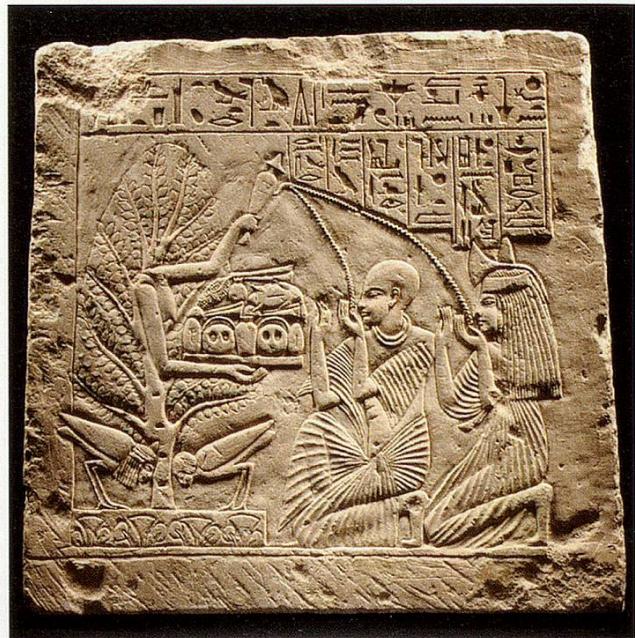
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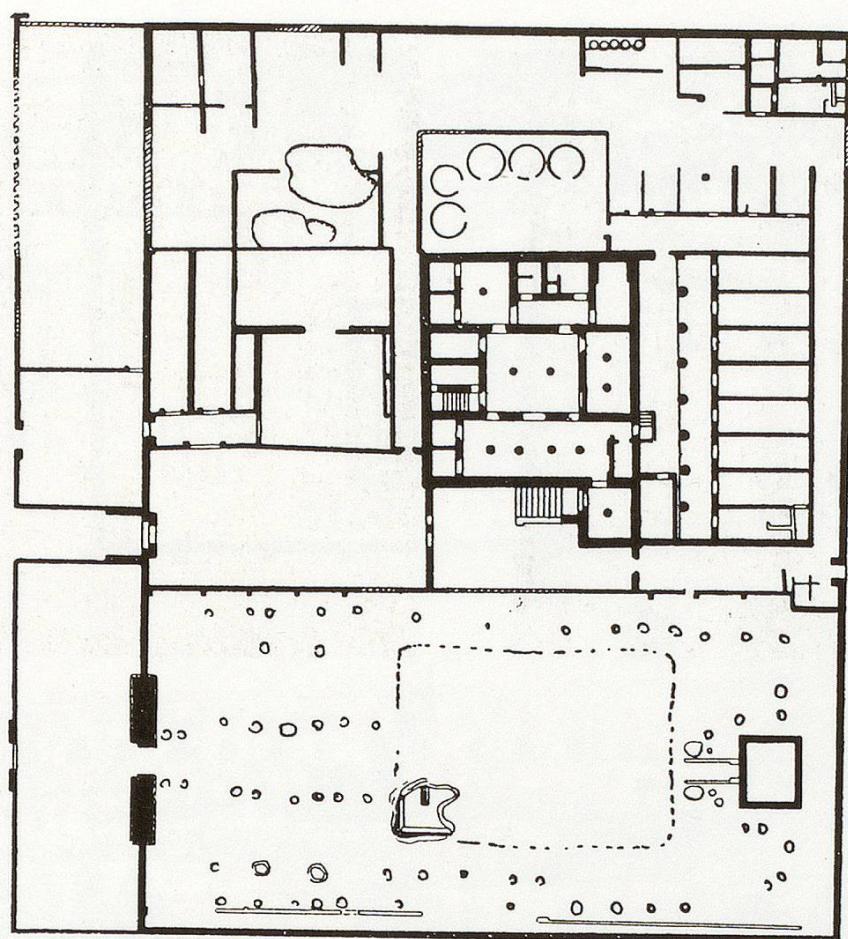
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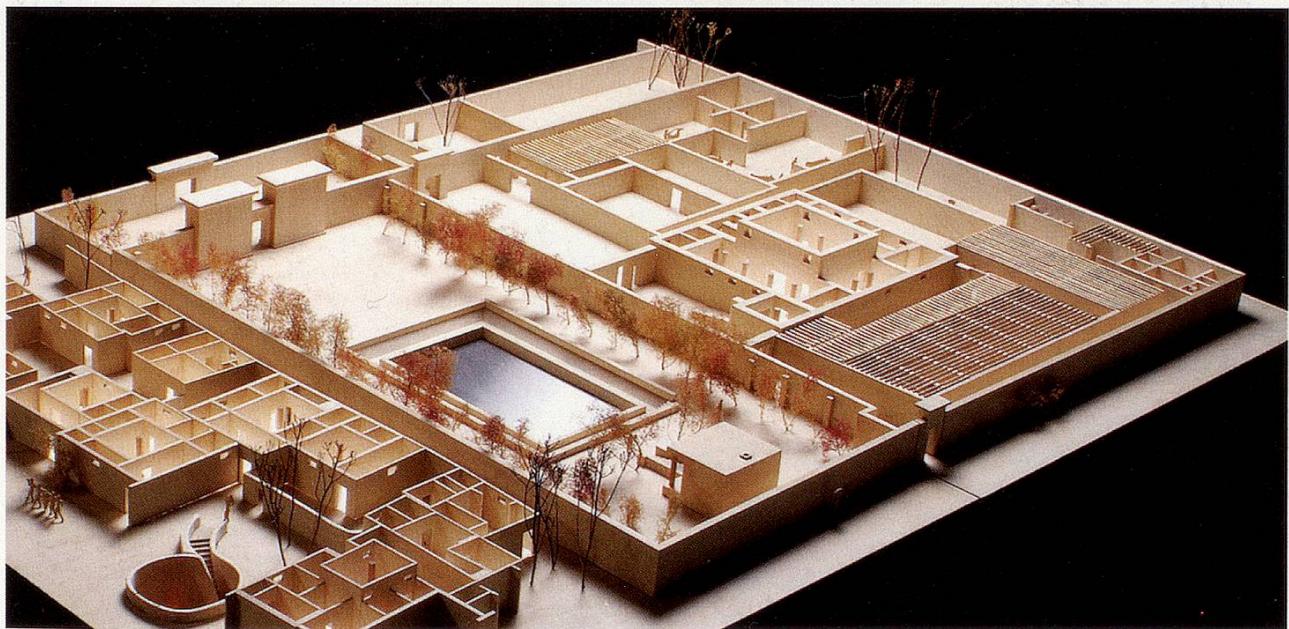
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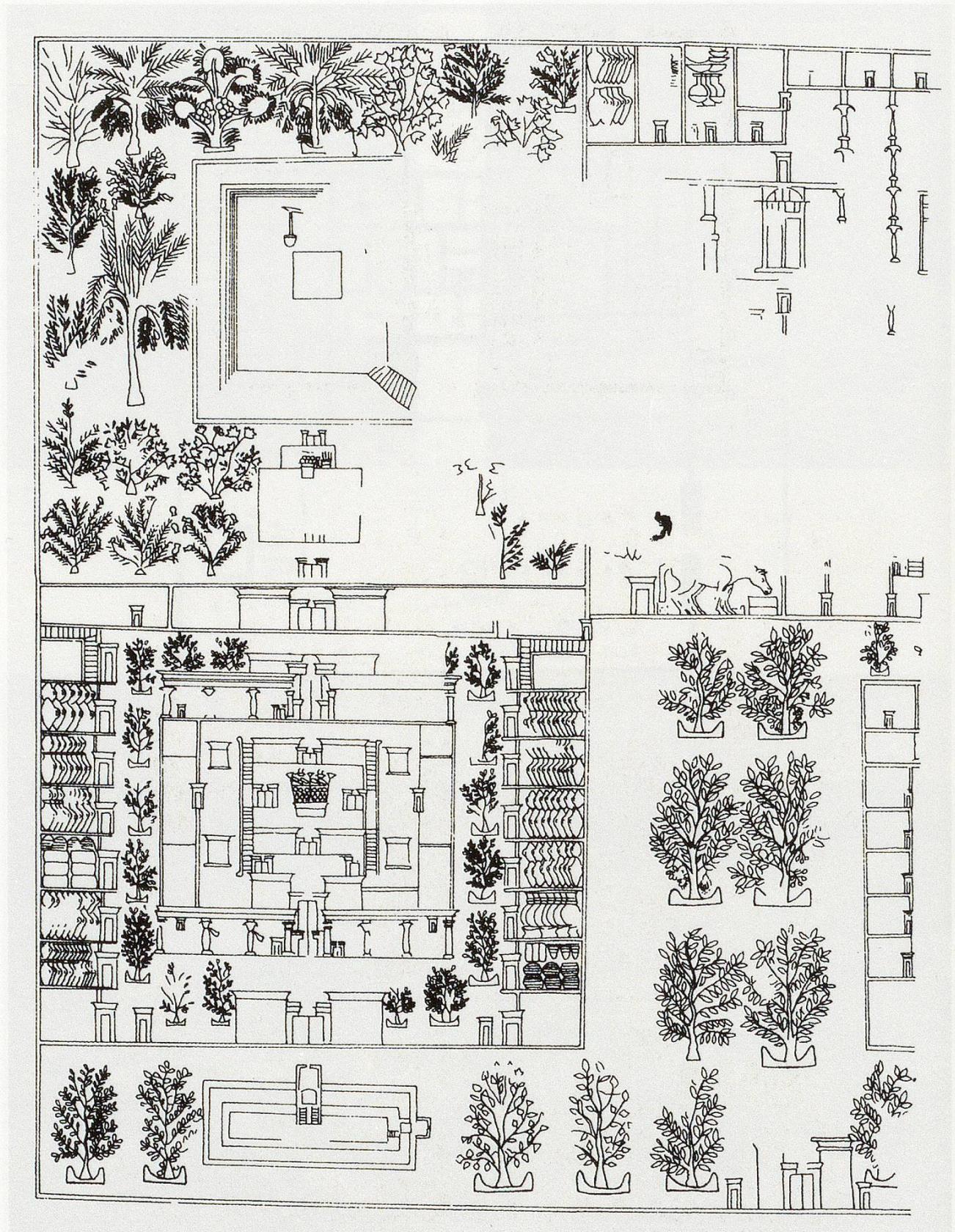
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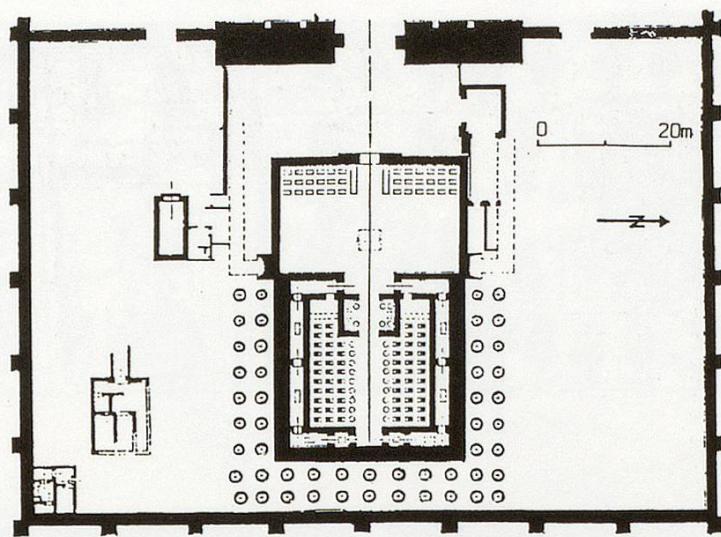


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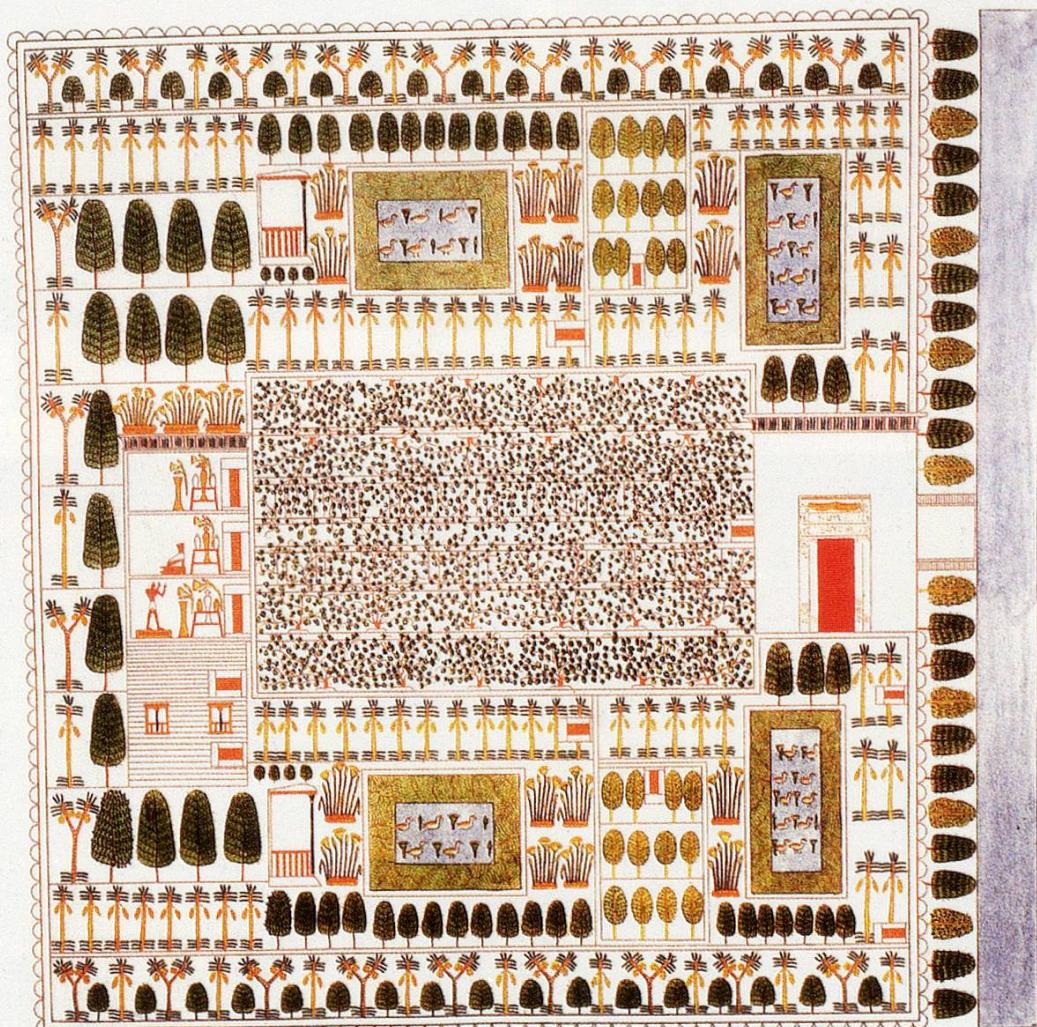


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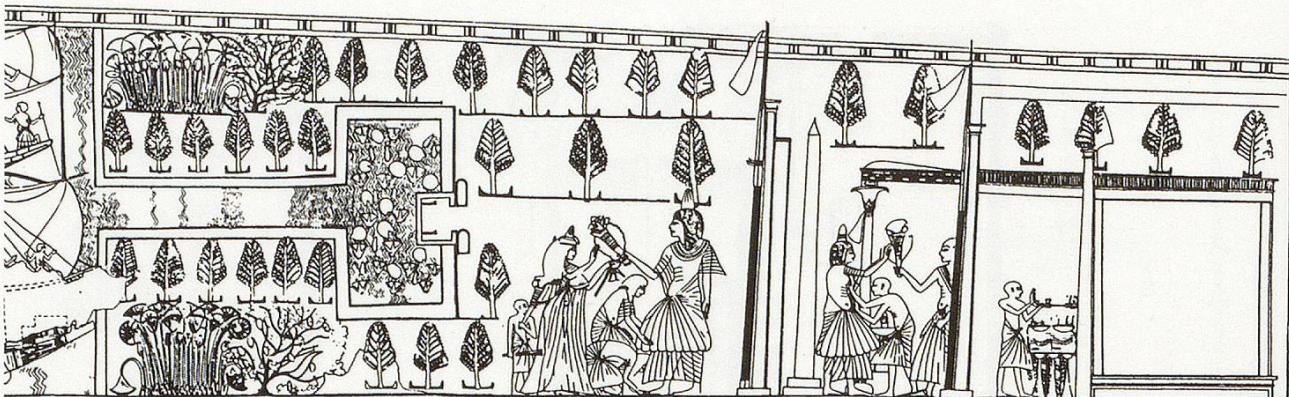




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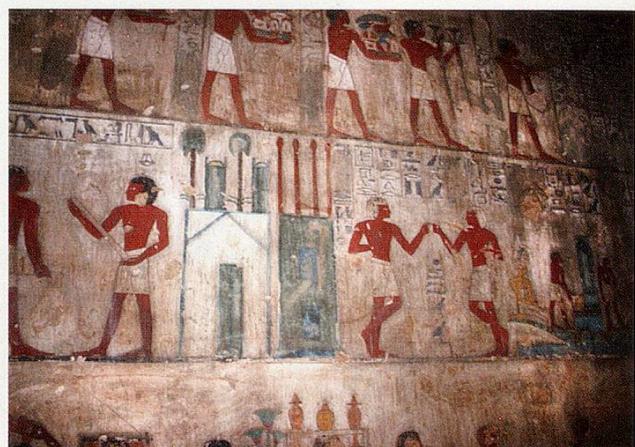
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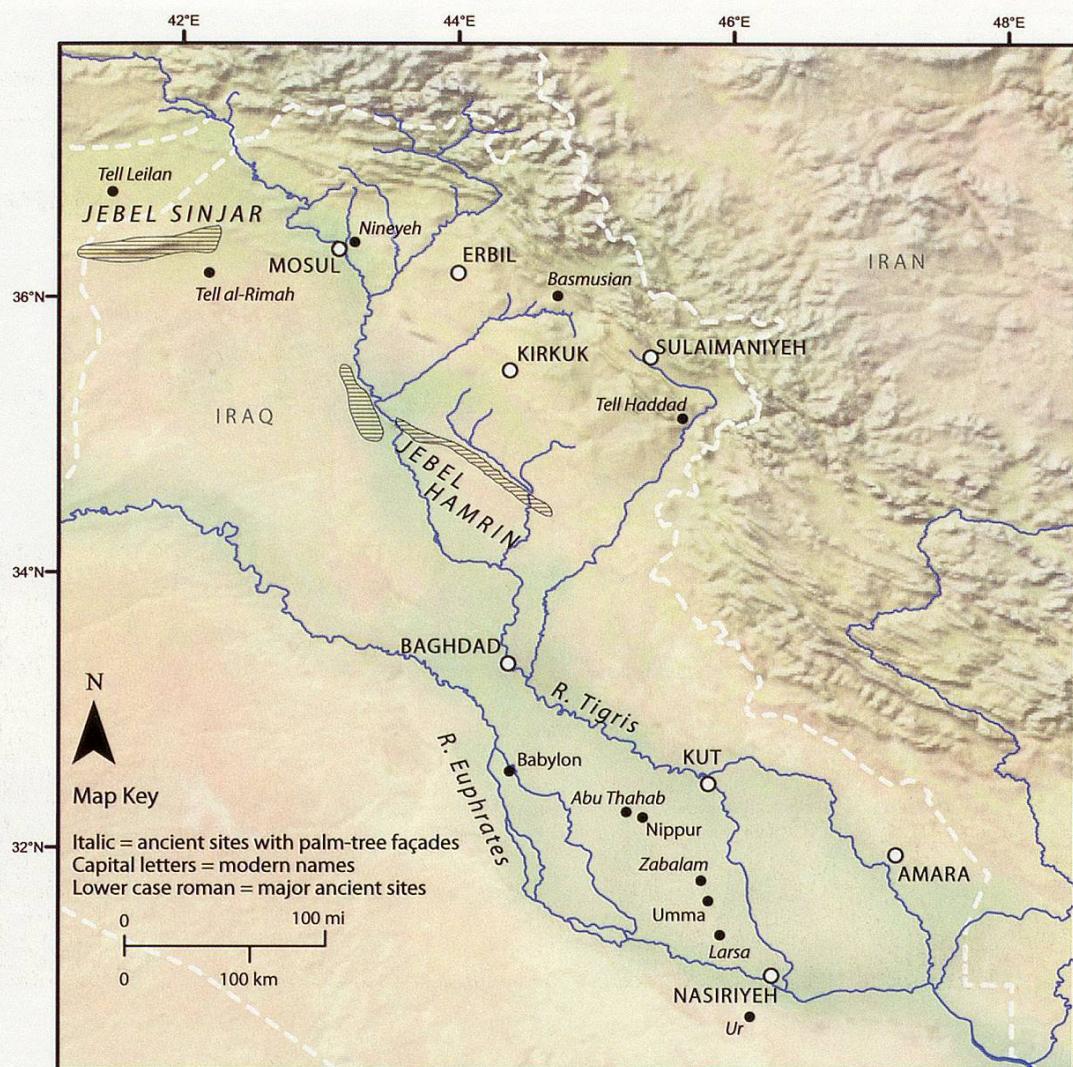
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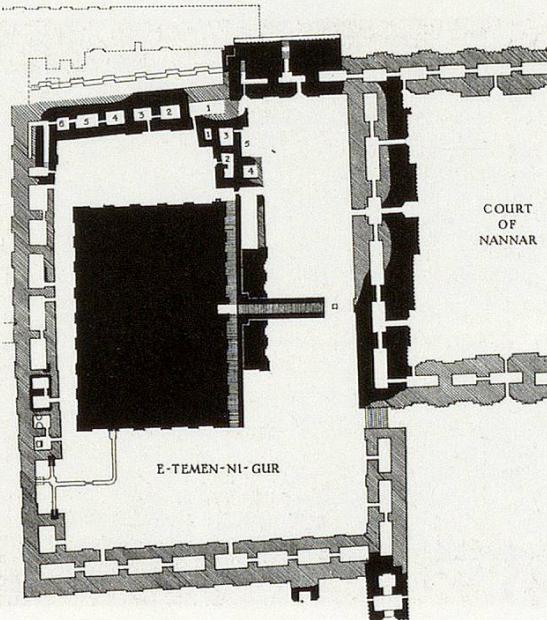
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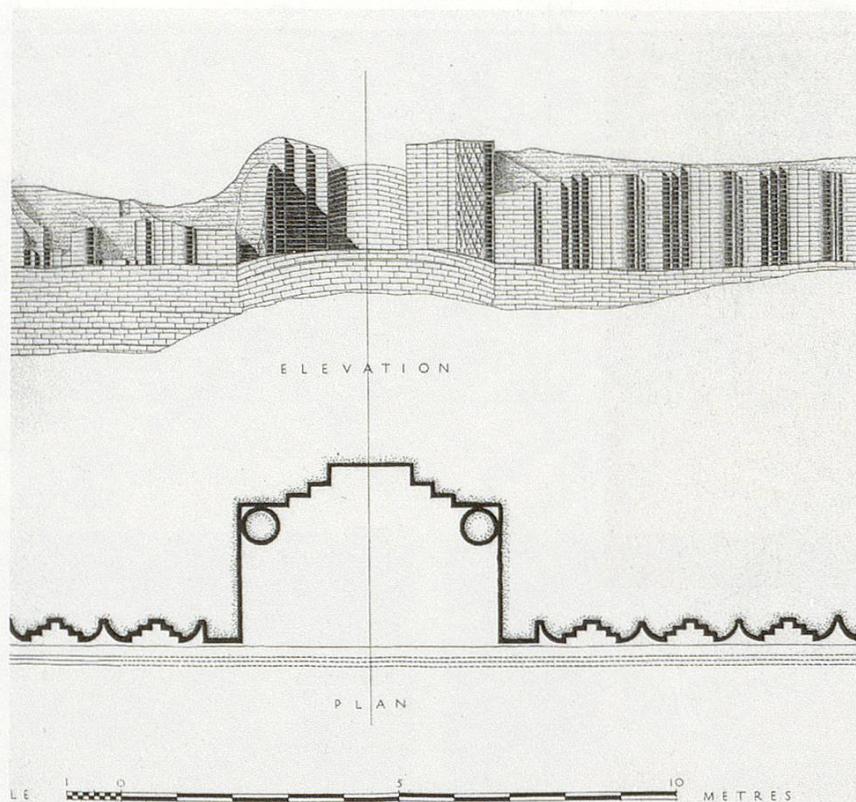
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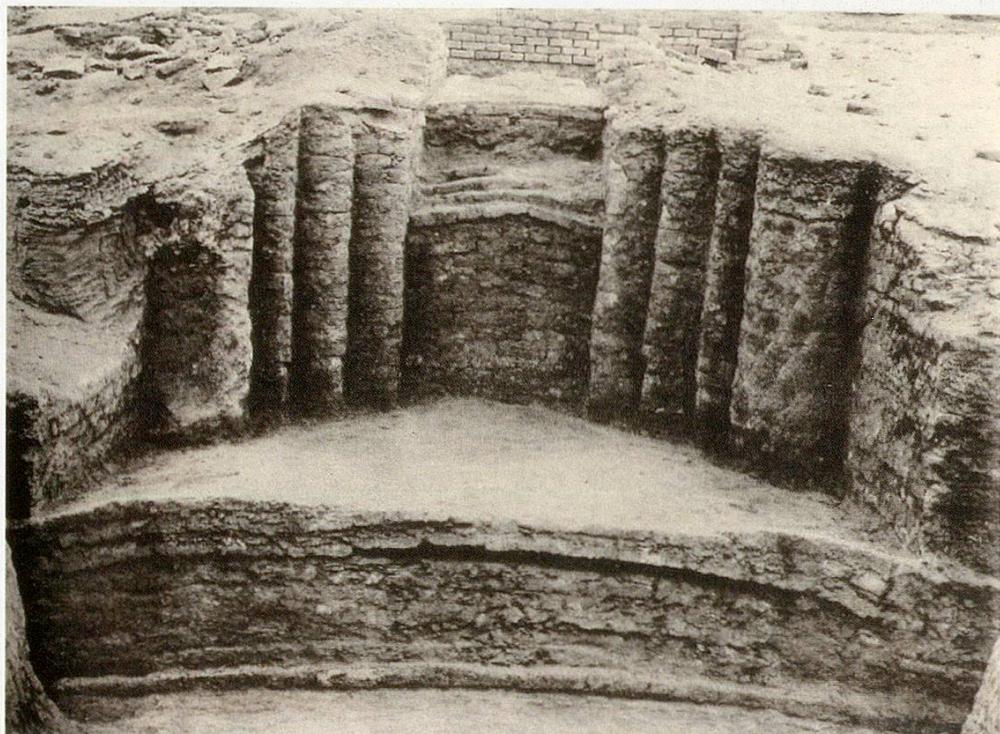
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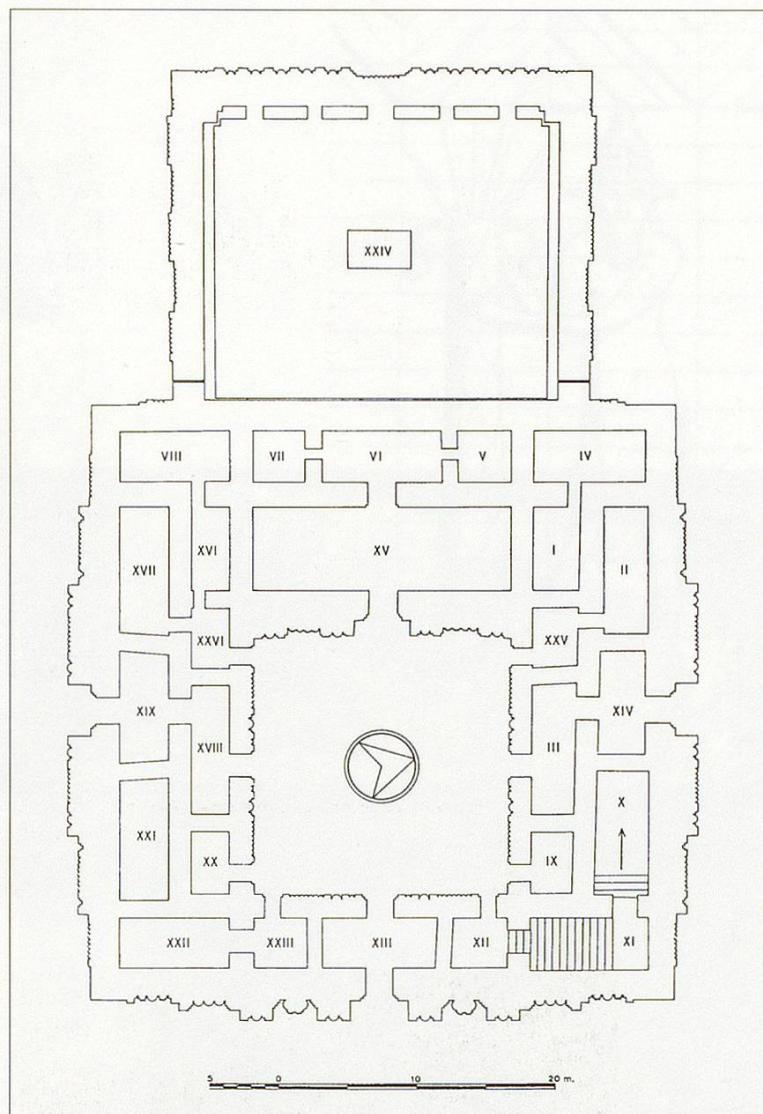
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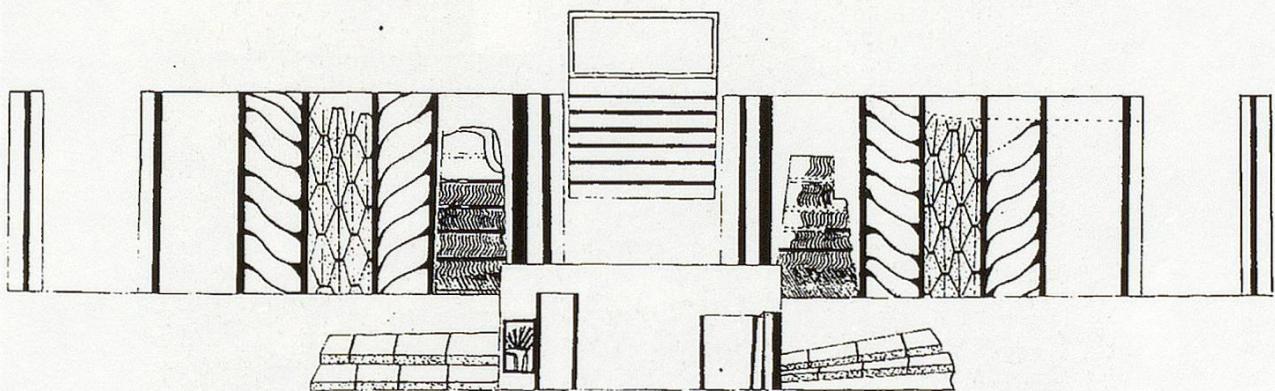
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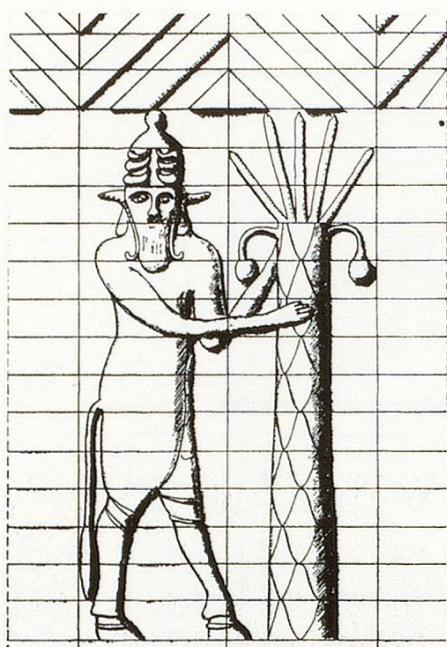
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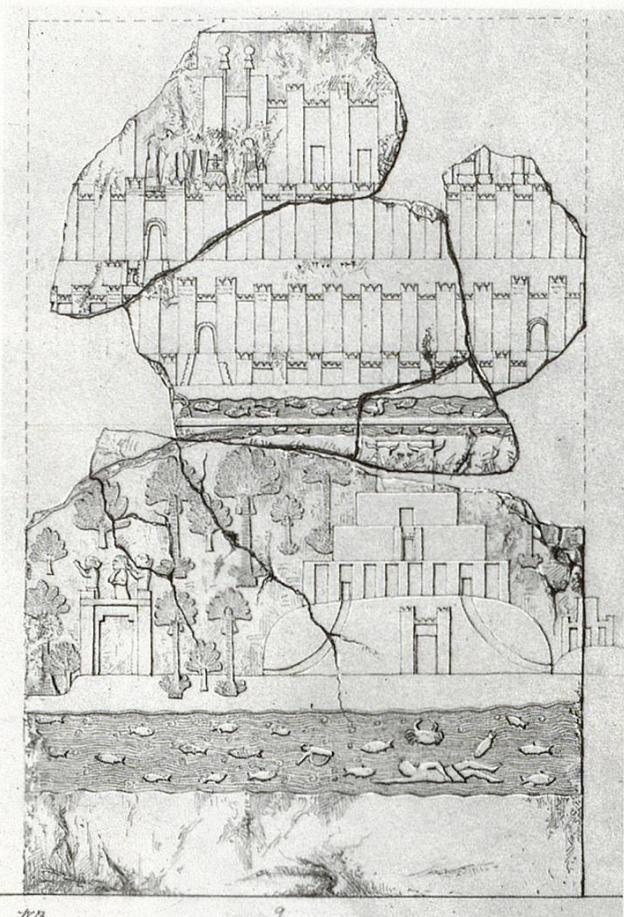
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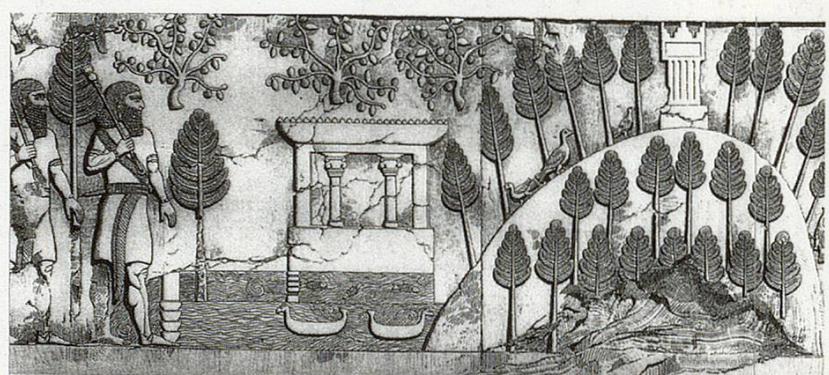
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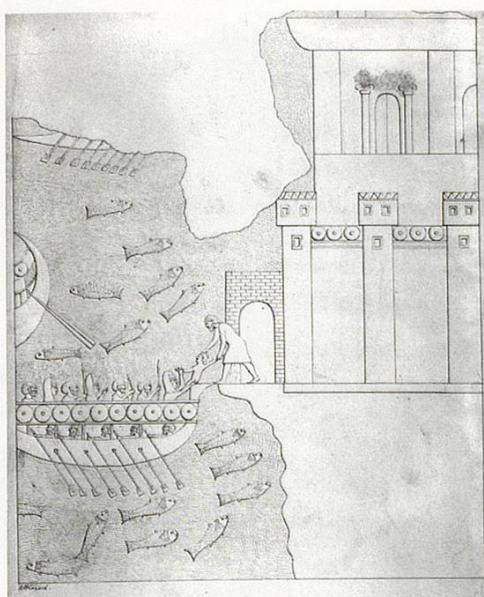
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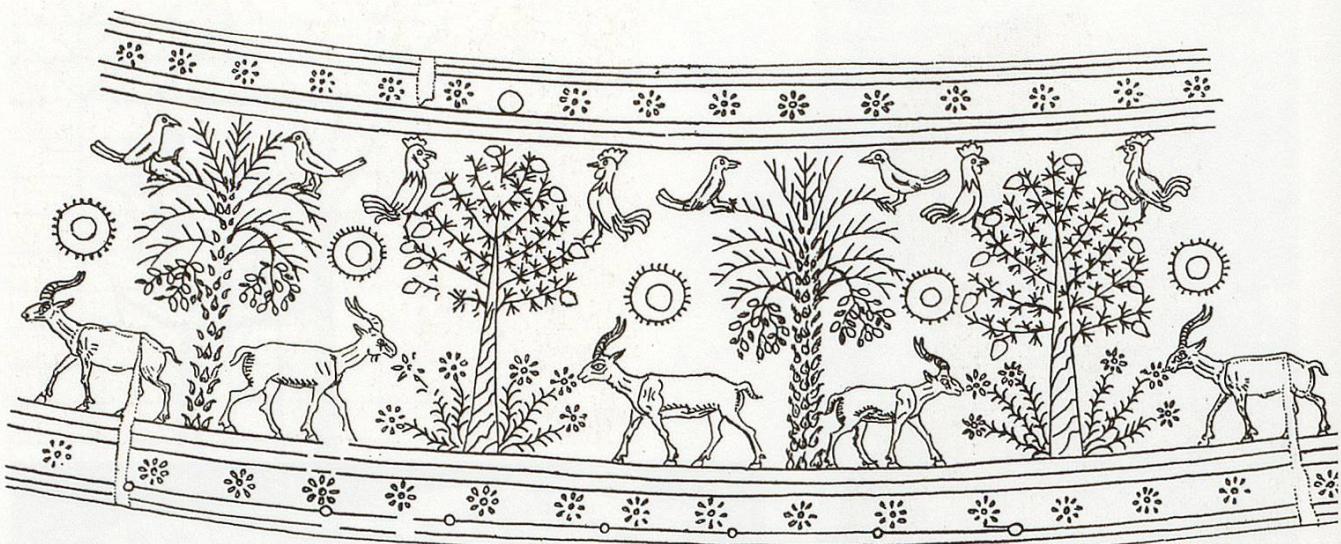
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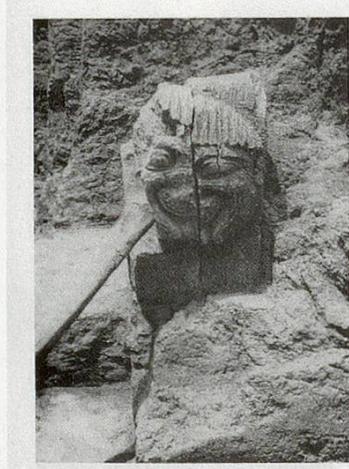
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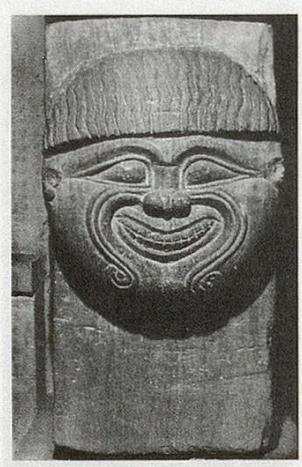
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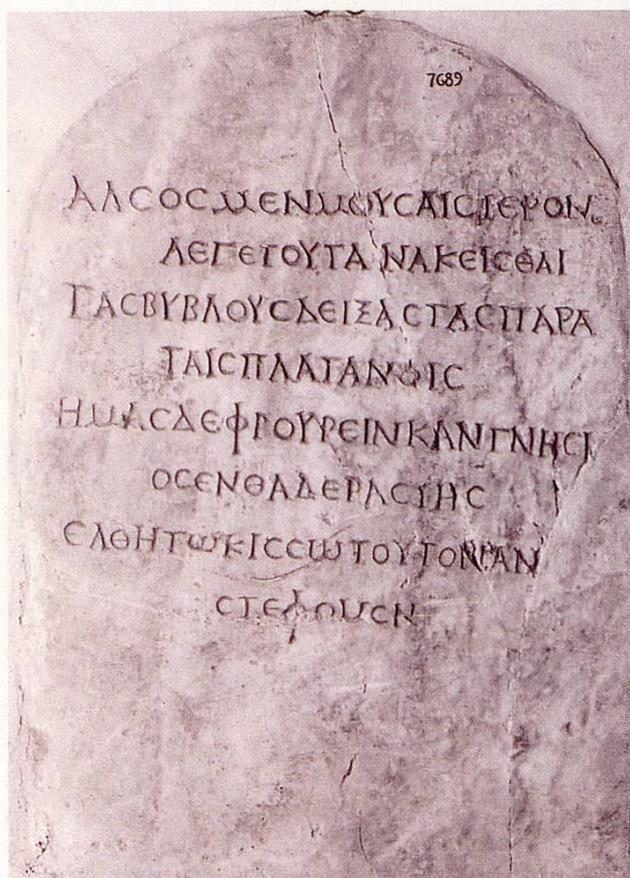




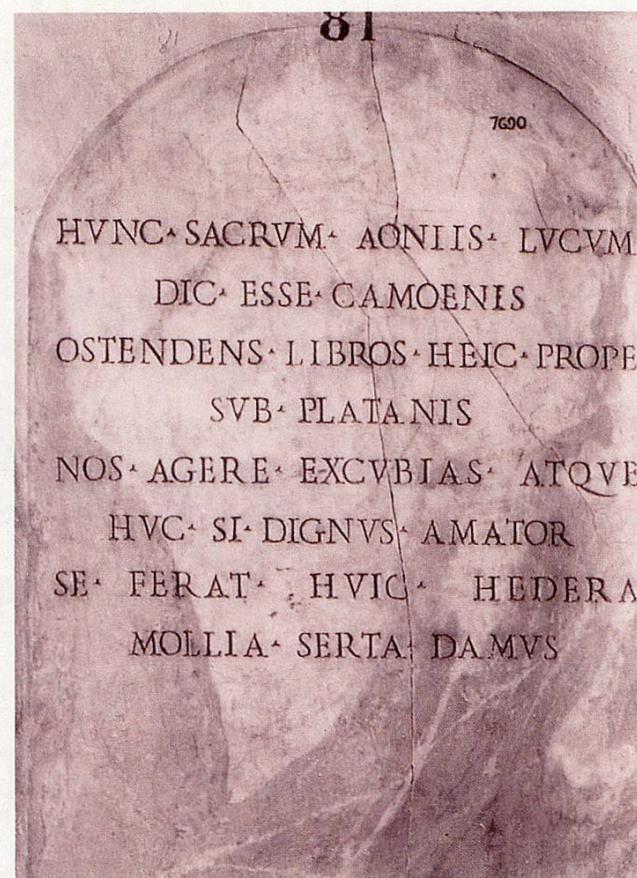
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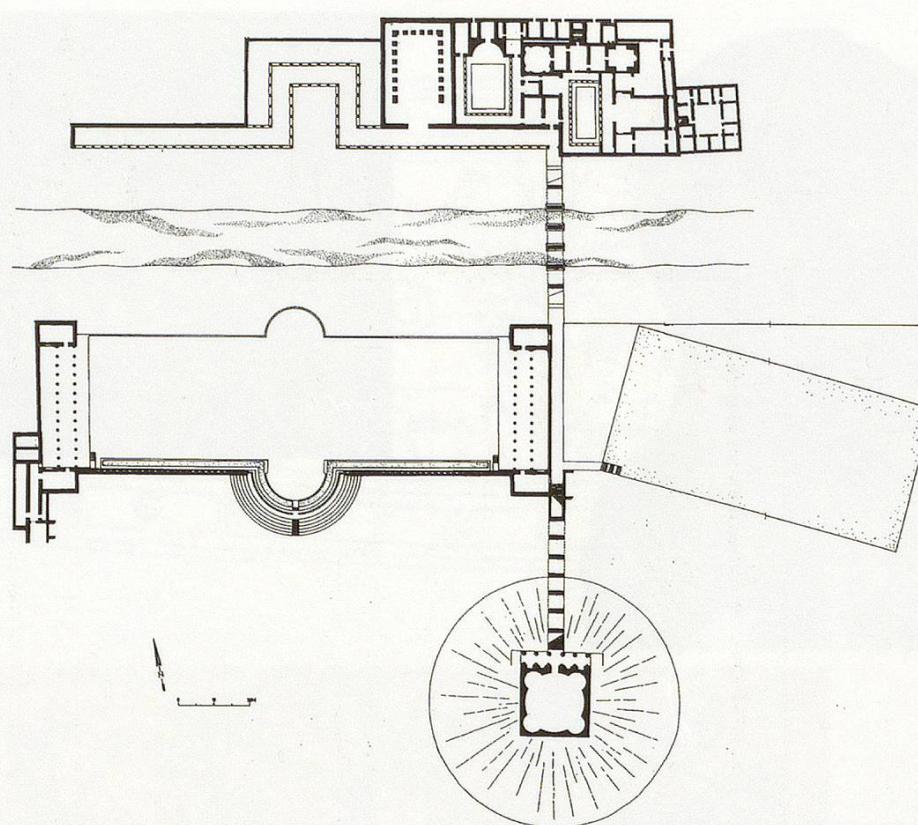
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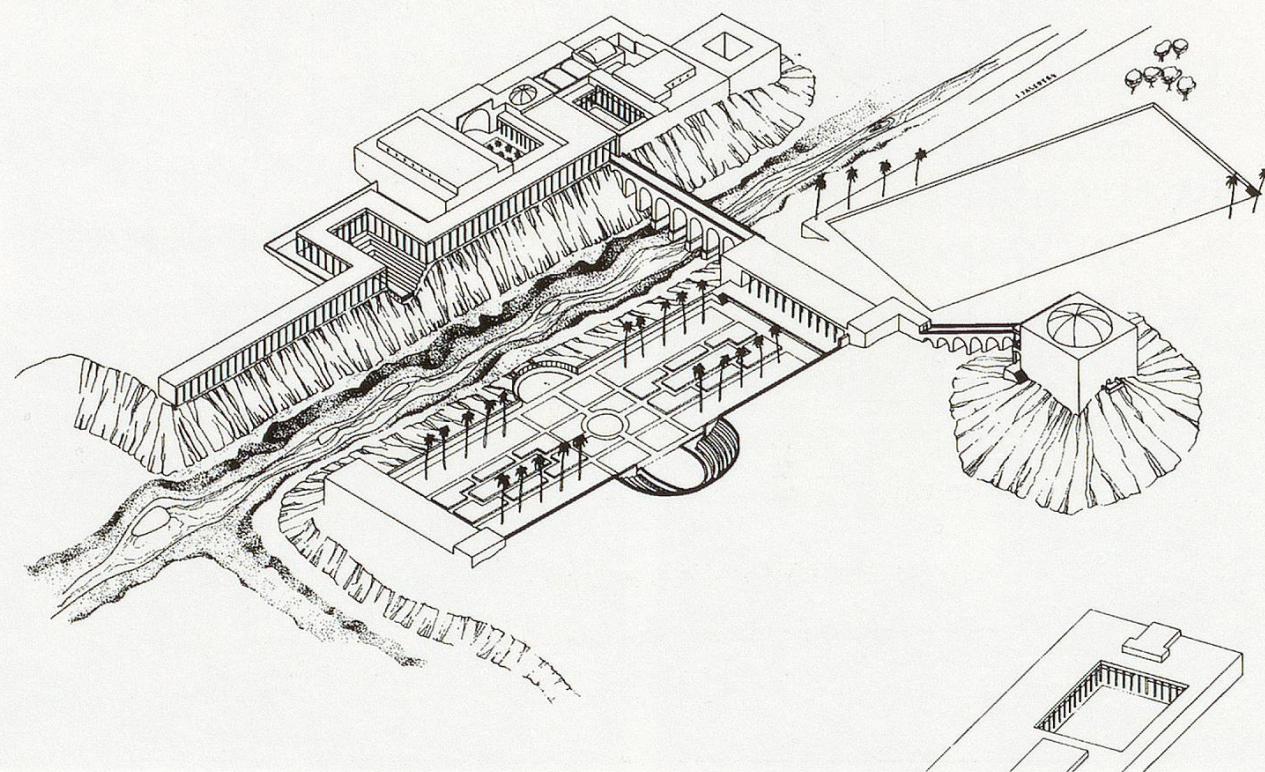
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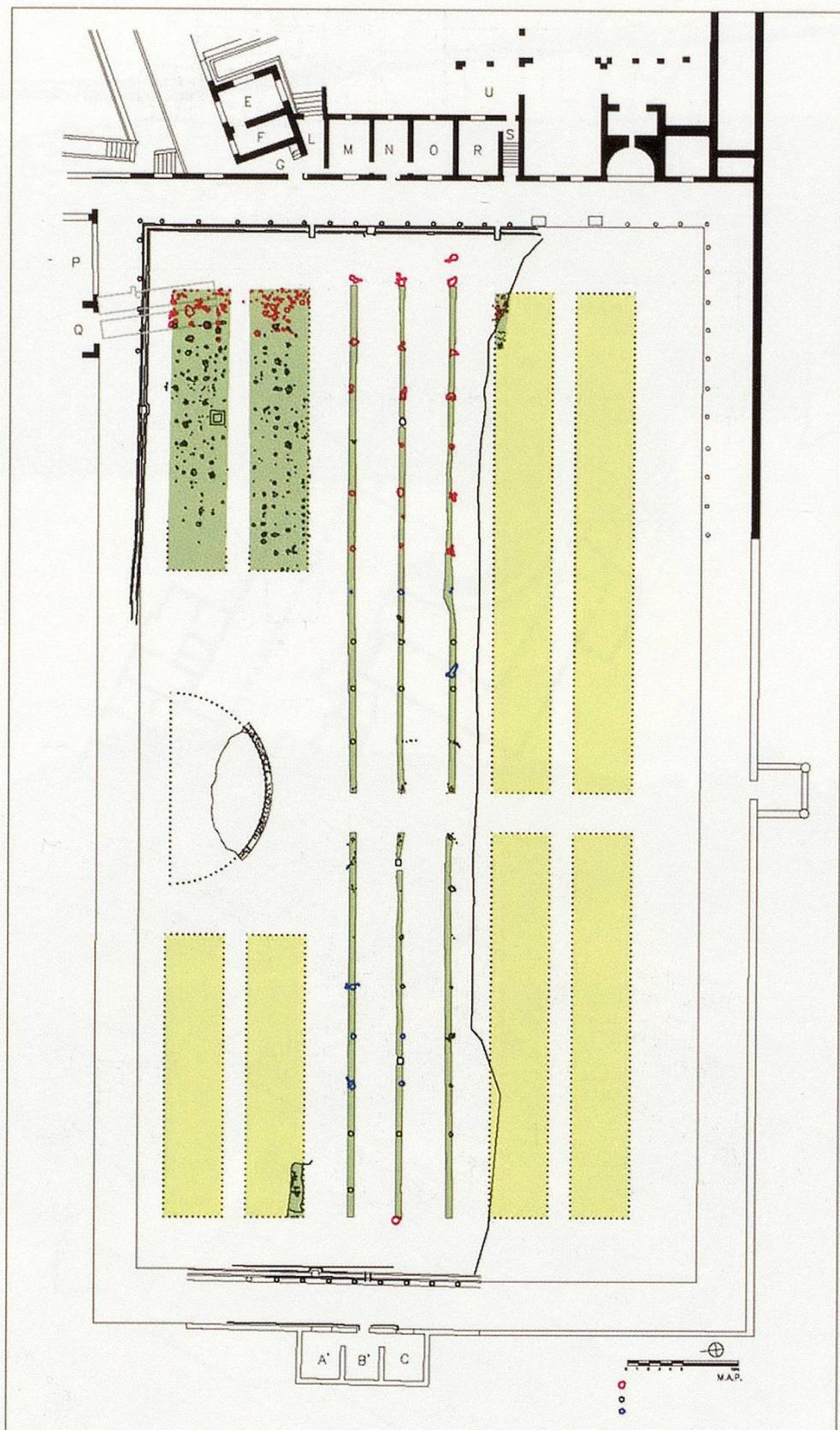
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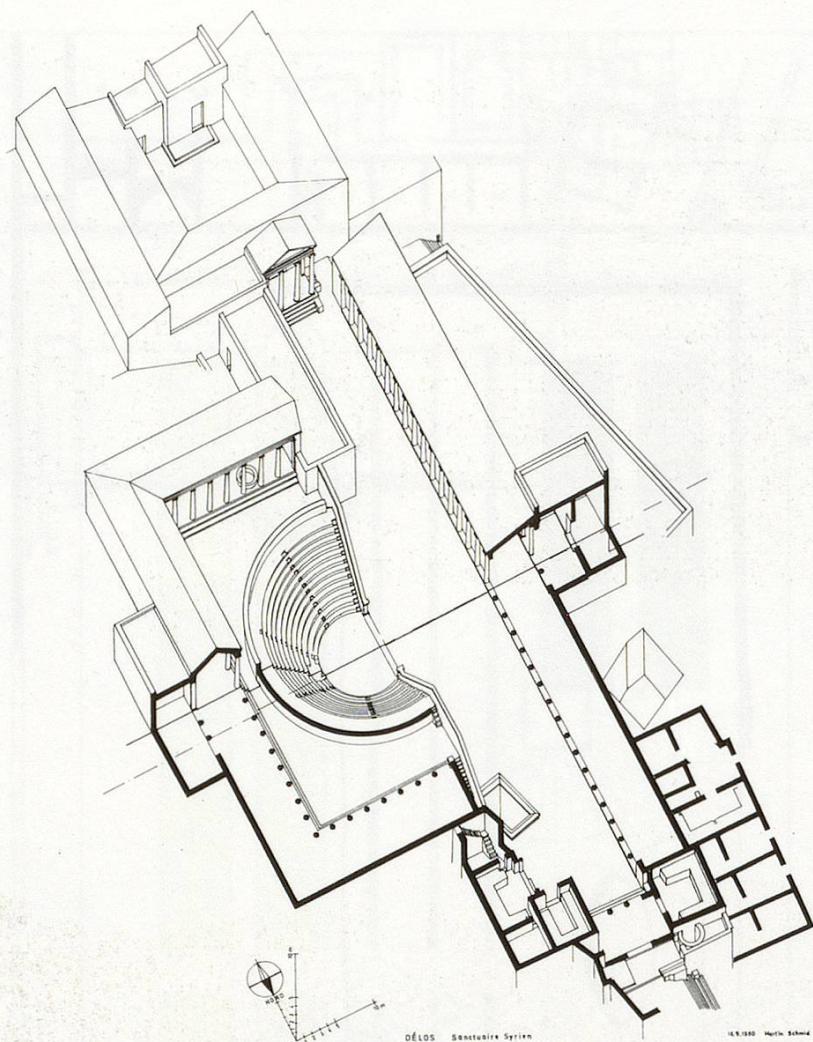
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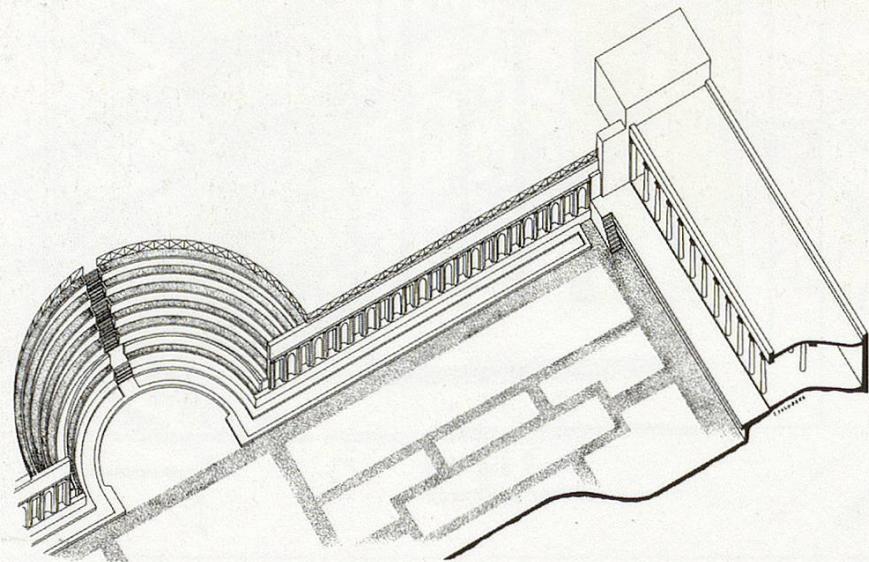
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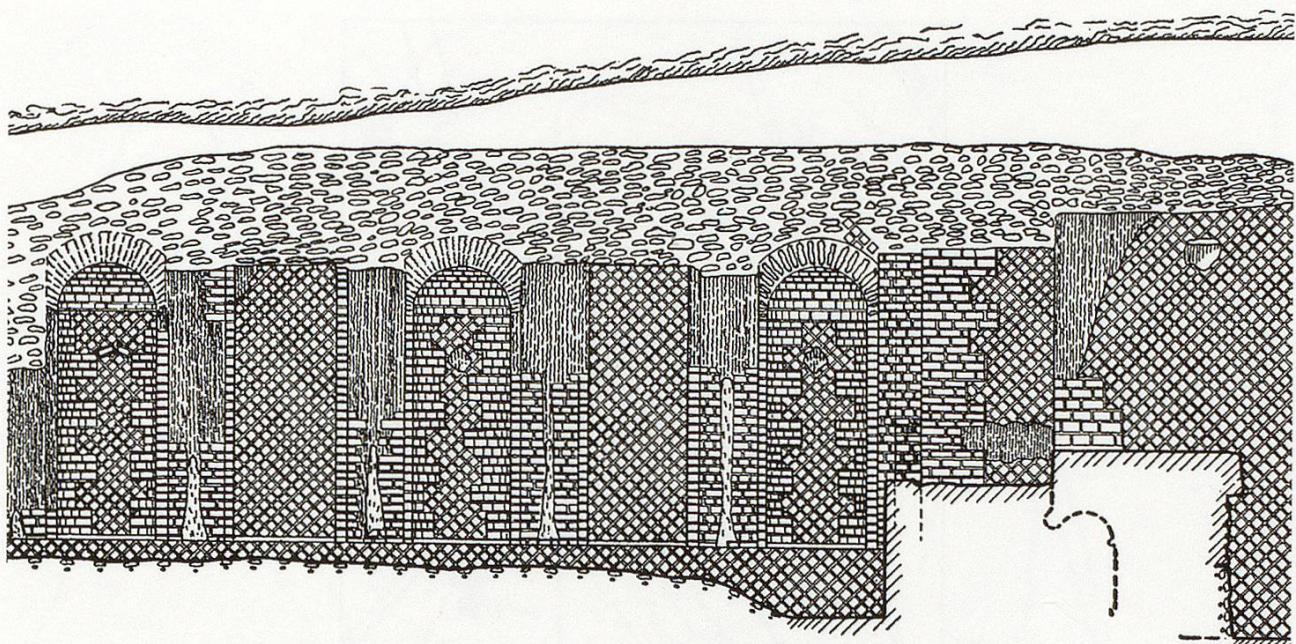


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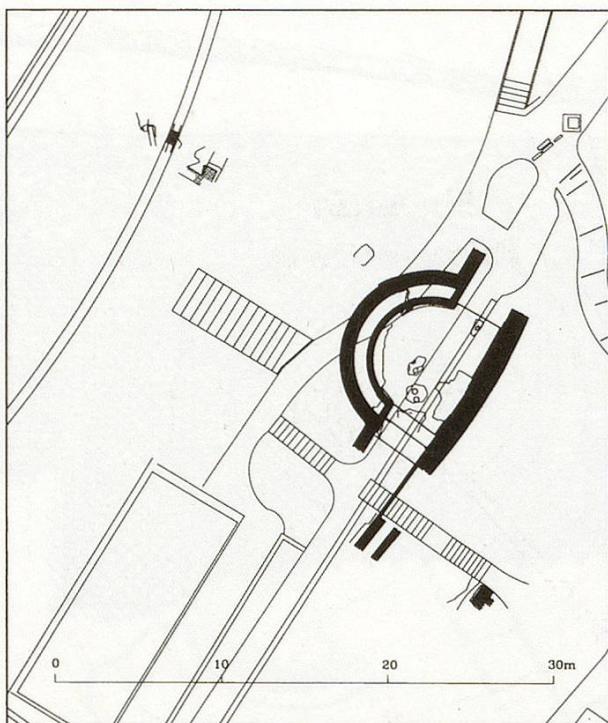




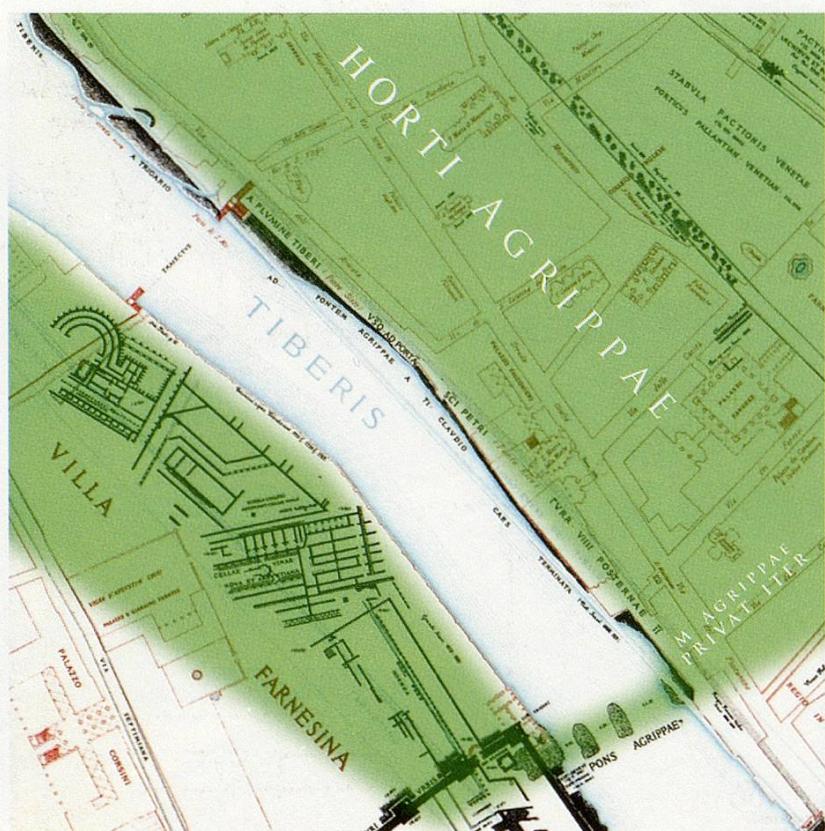
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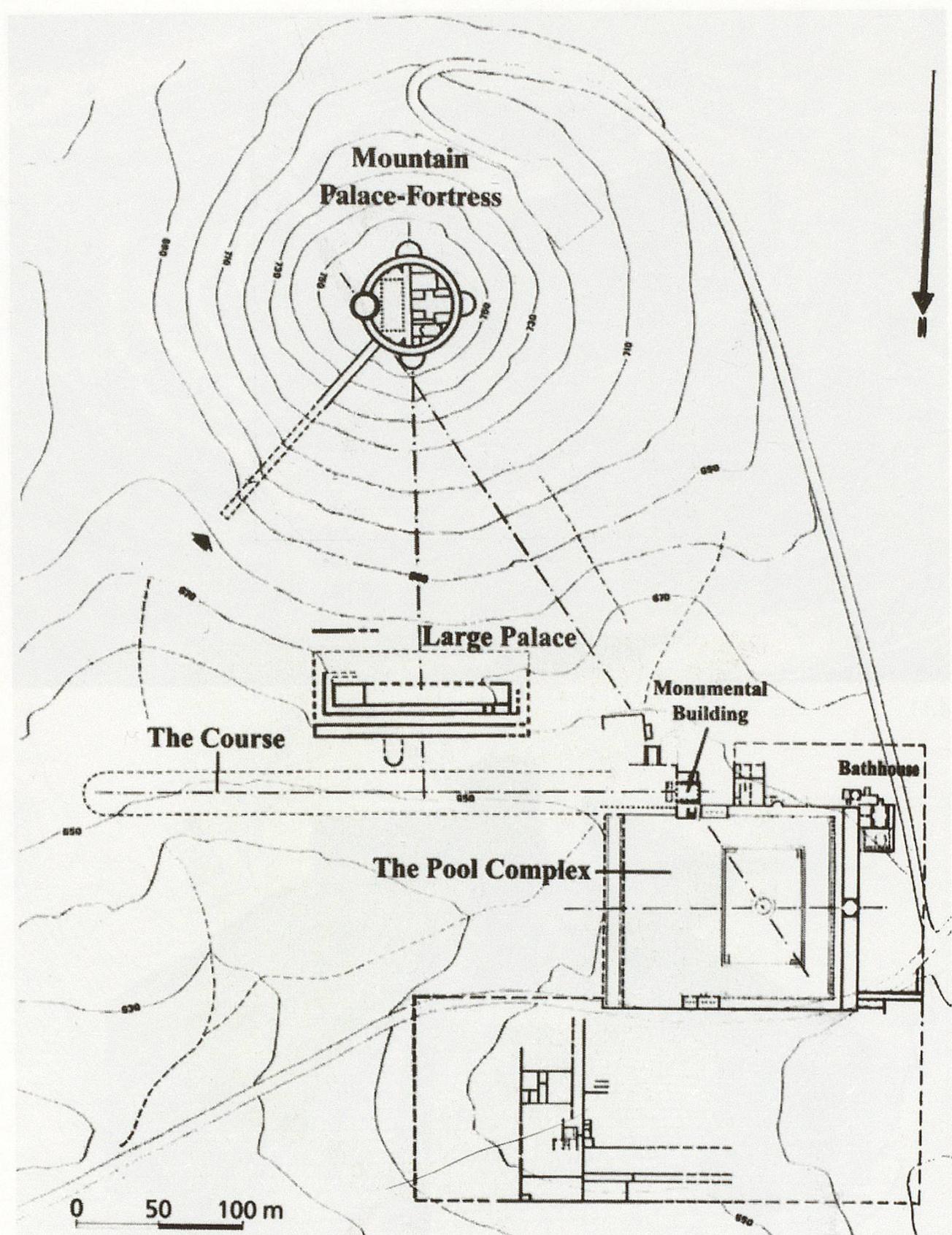
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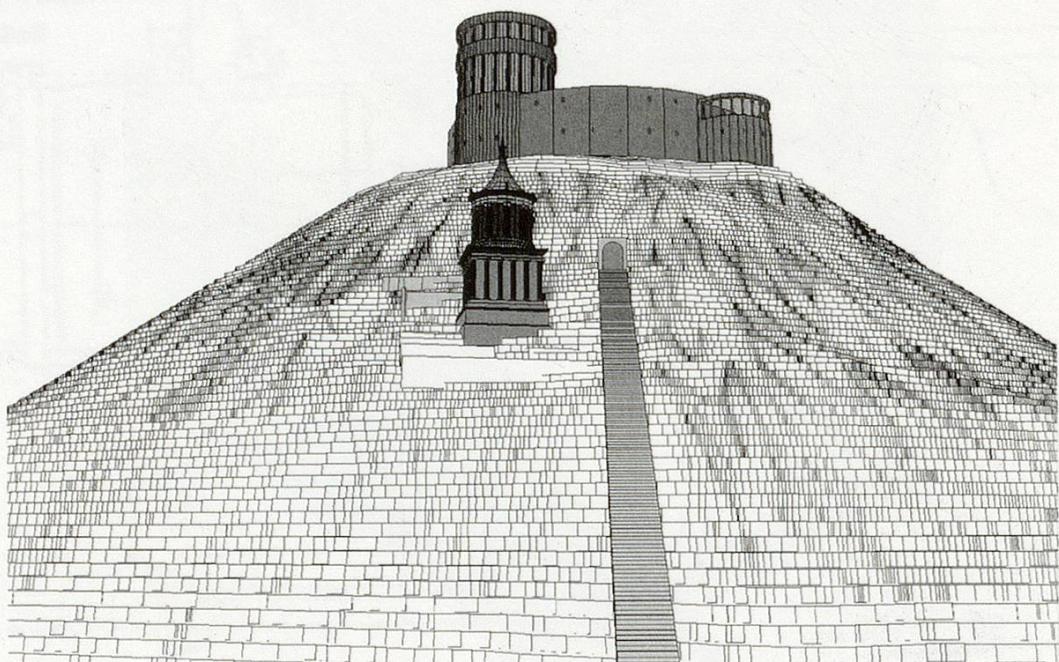


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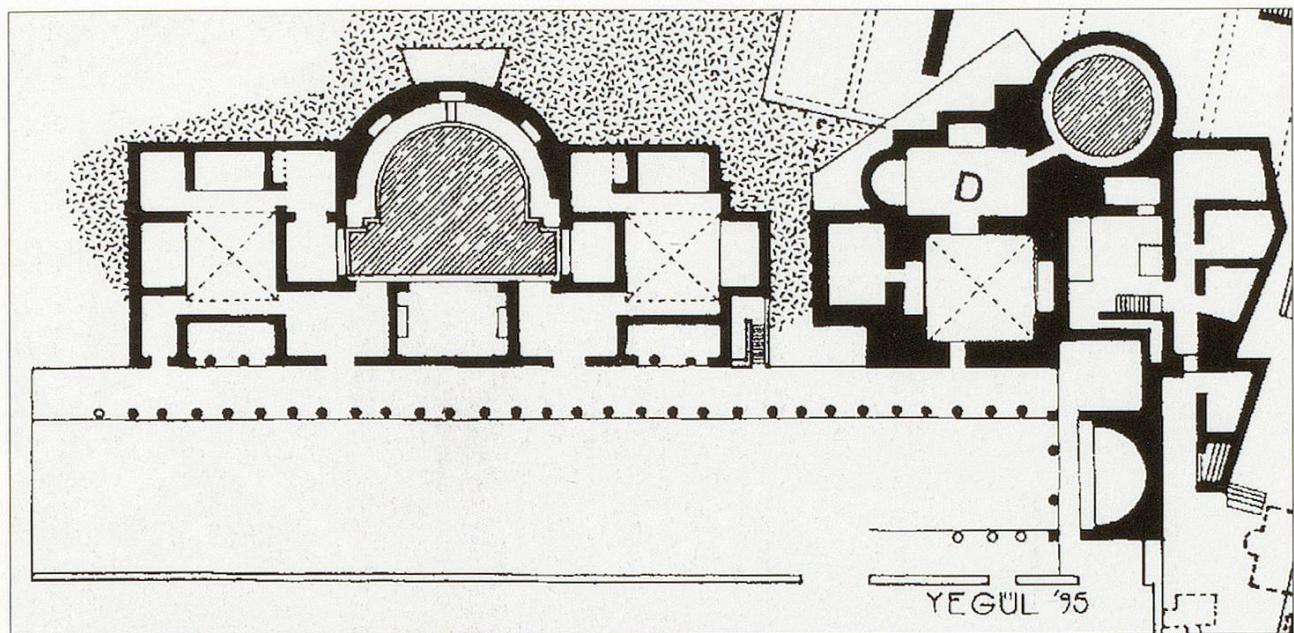




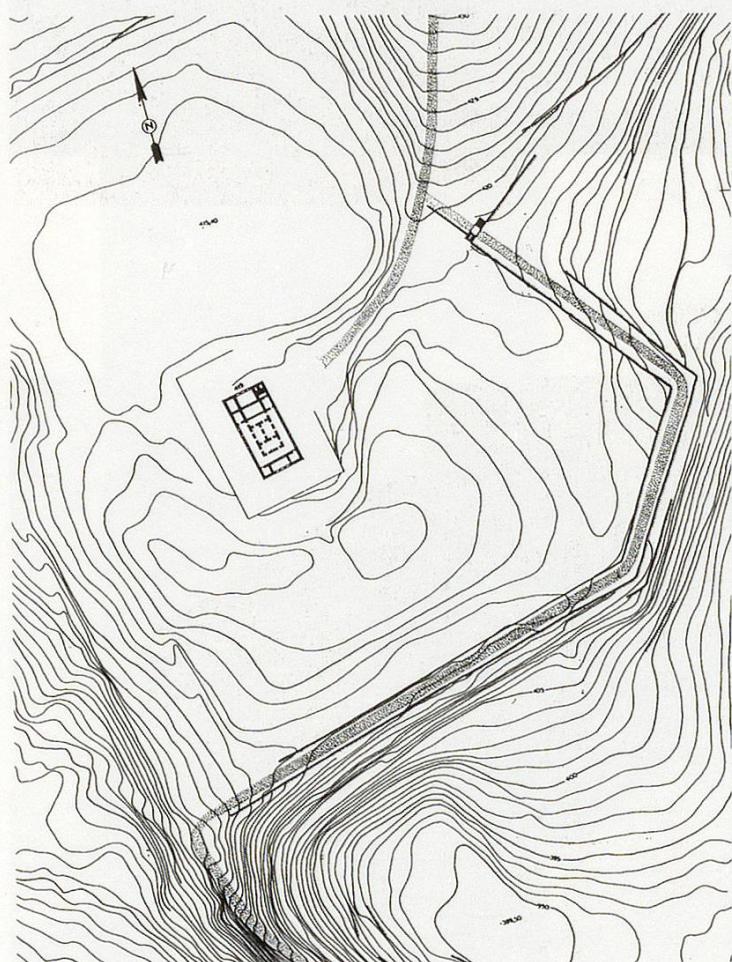
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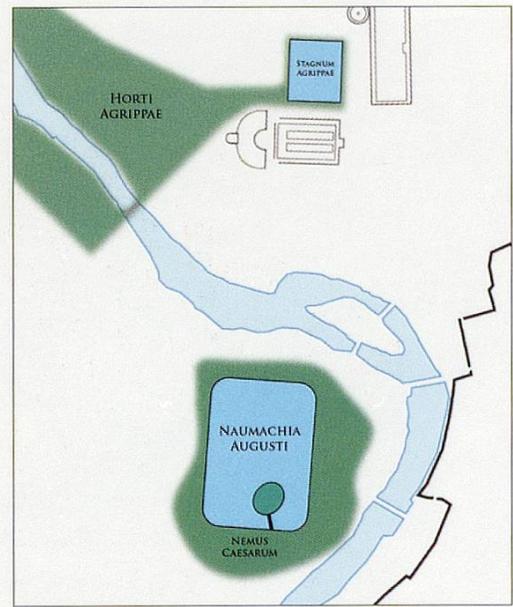
4.12



4.13



4.14



4.15



6.1



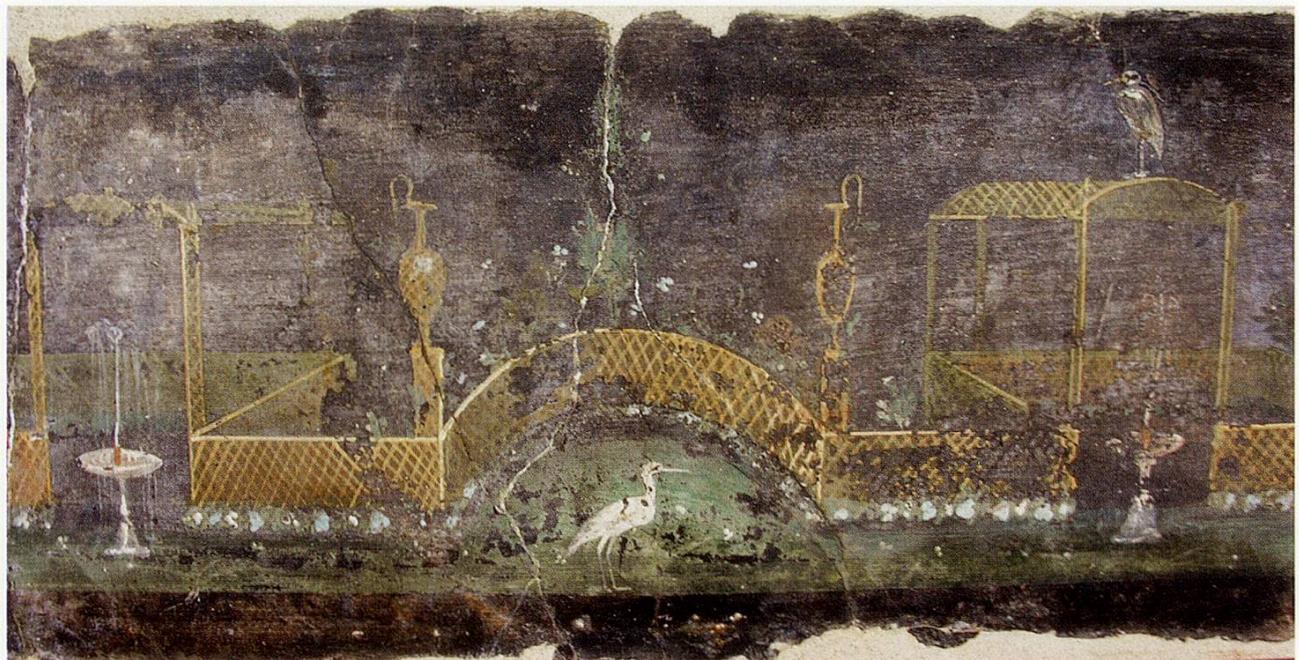
6.2



6.3



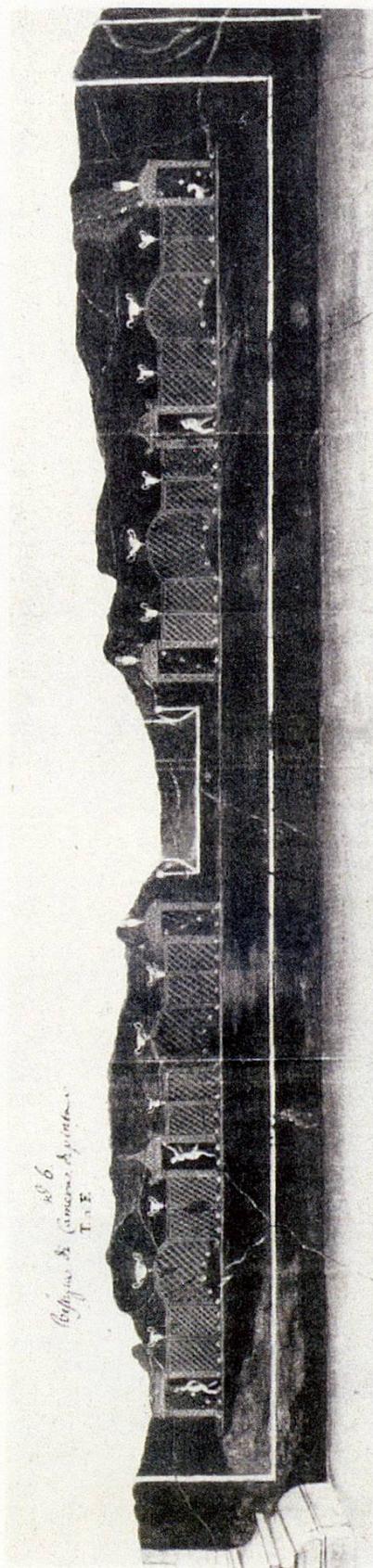
6.4



6.5



6.6



6.7



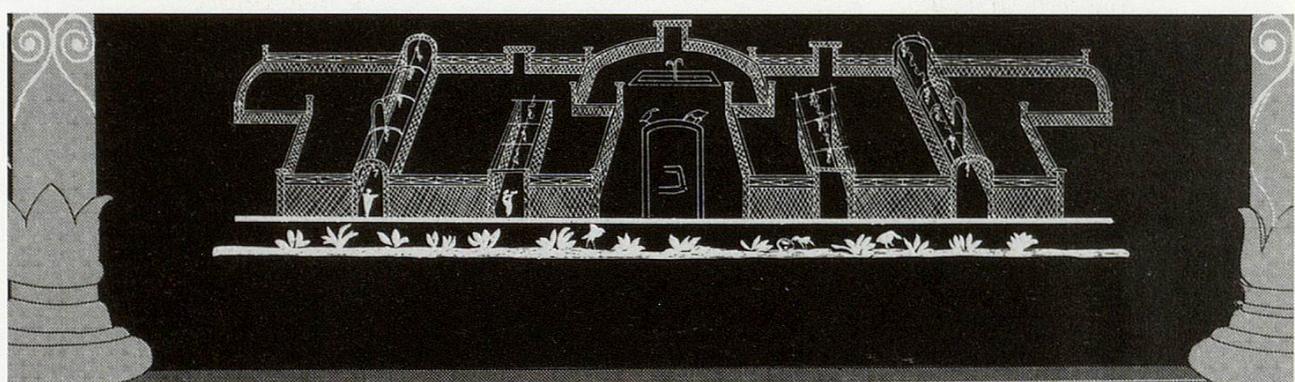
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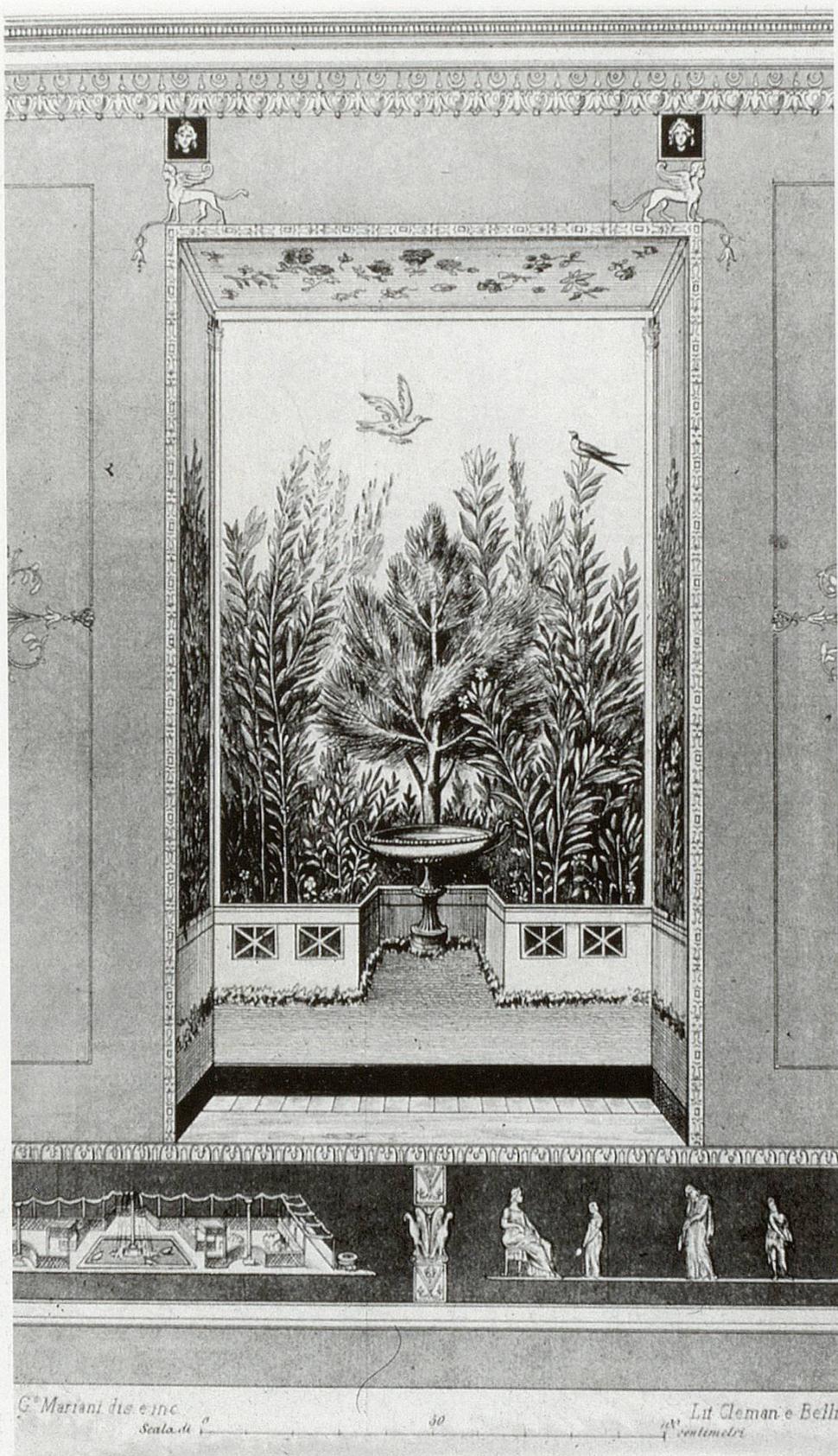
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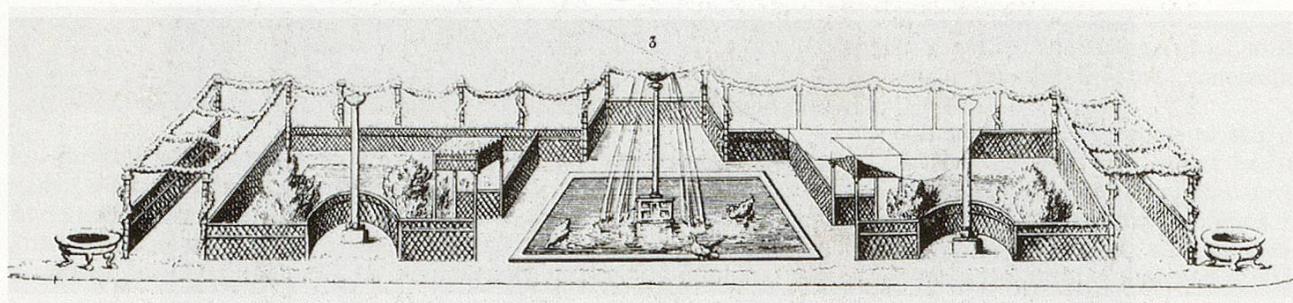


6.10

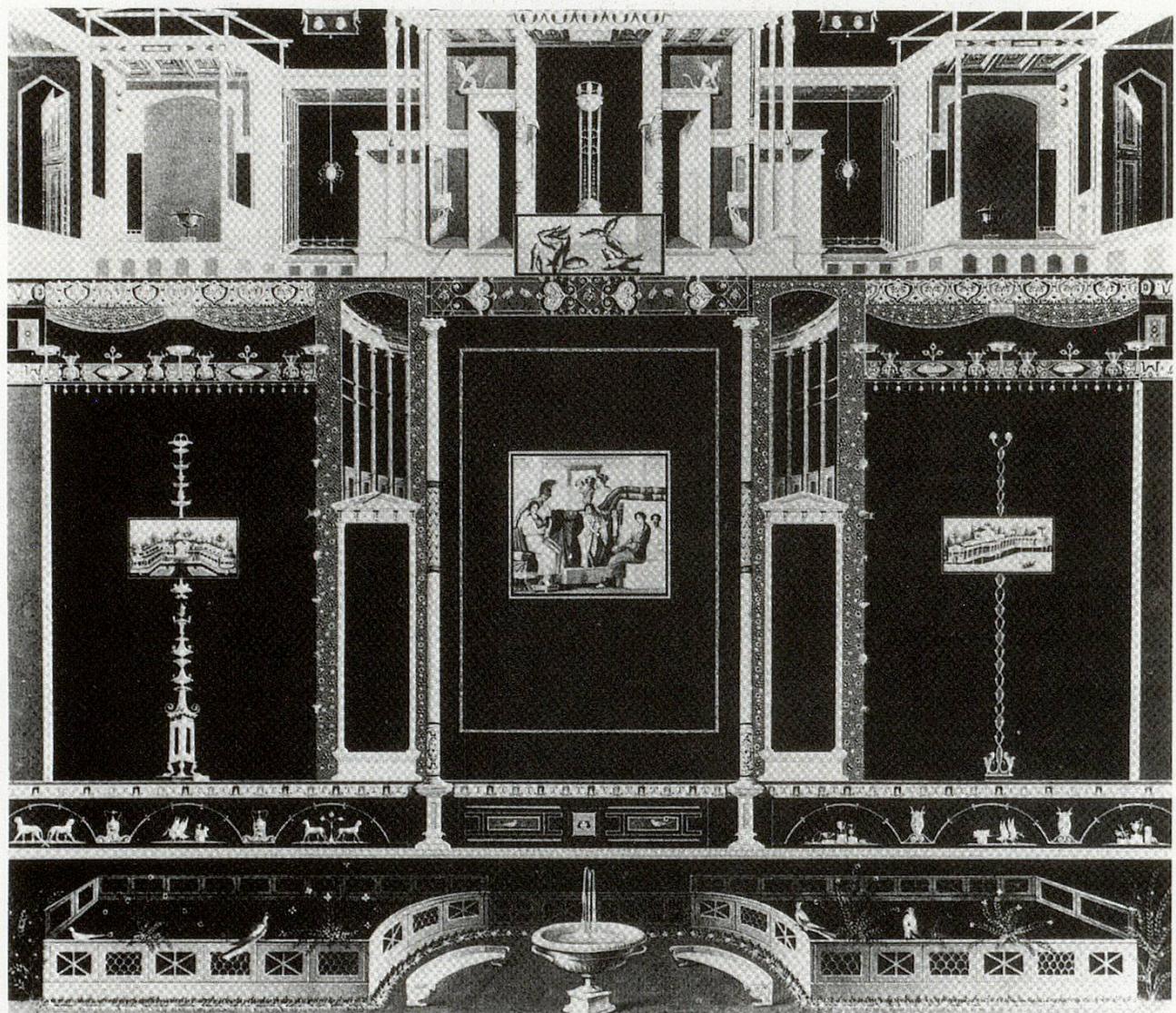


6.11





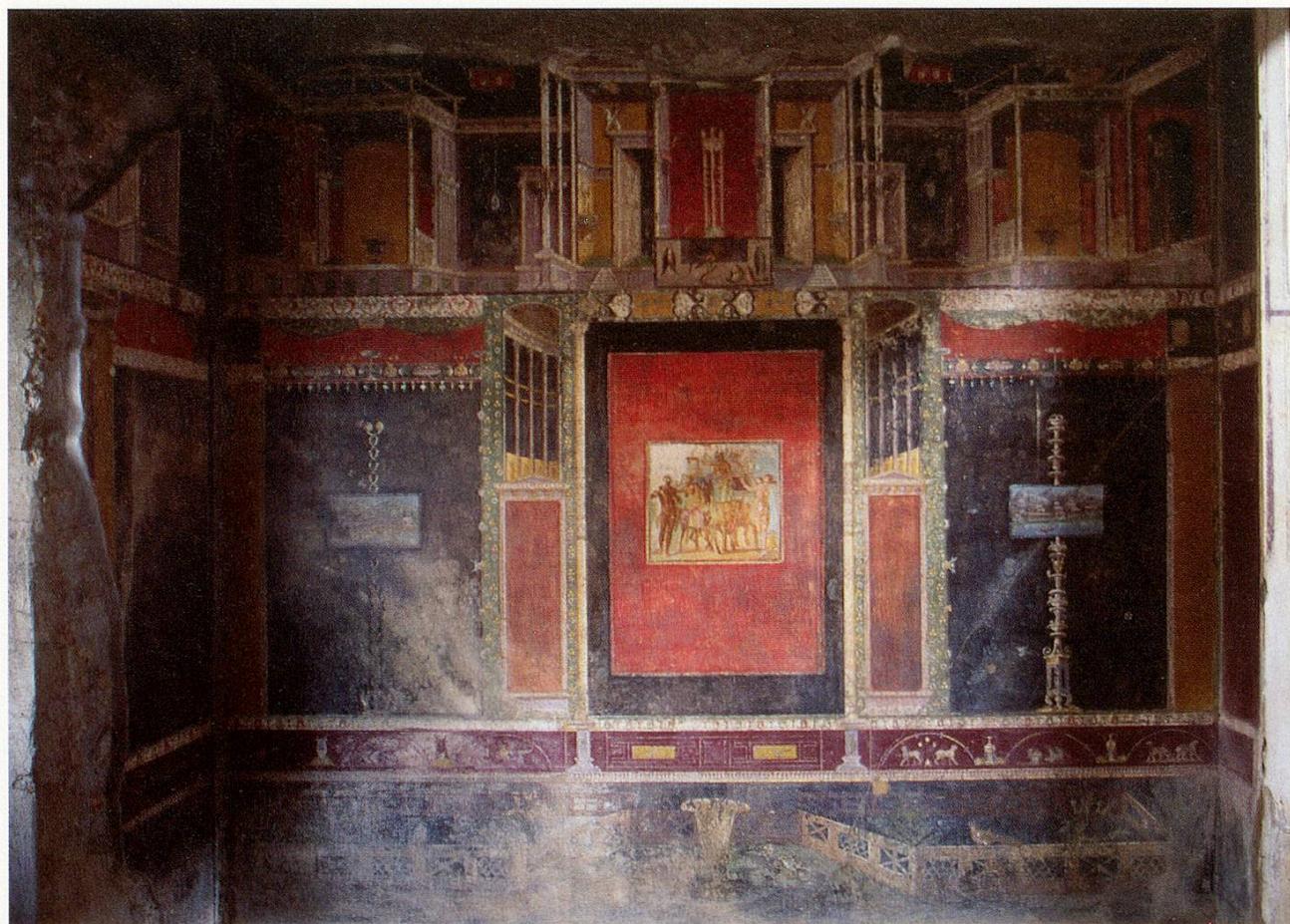
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6.14



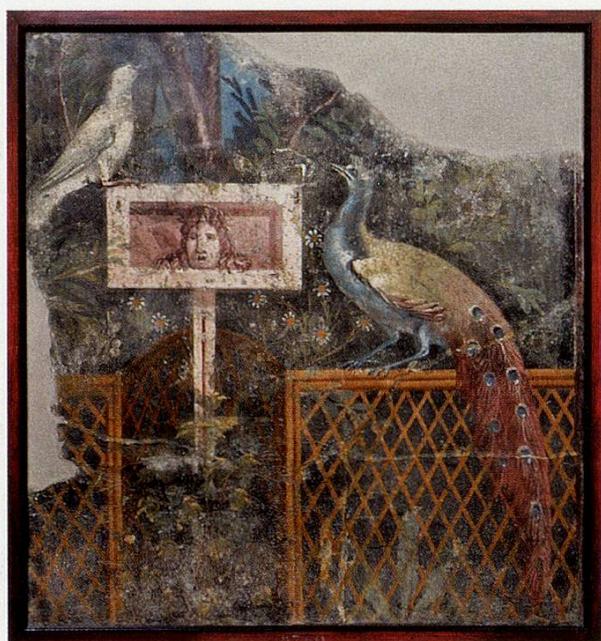
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6.16



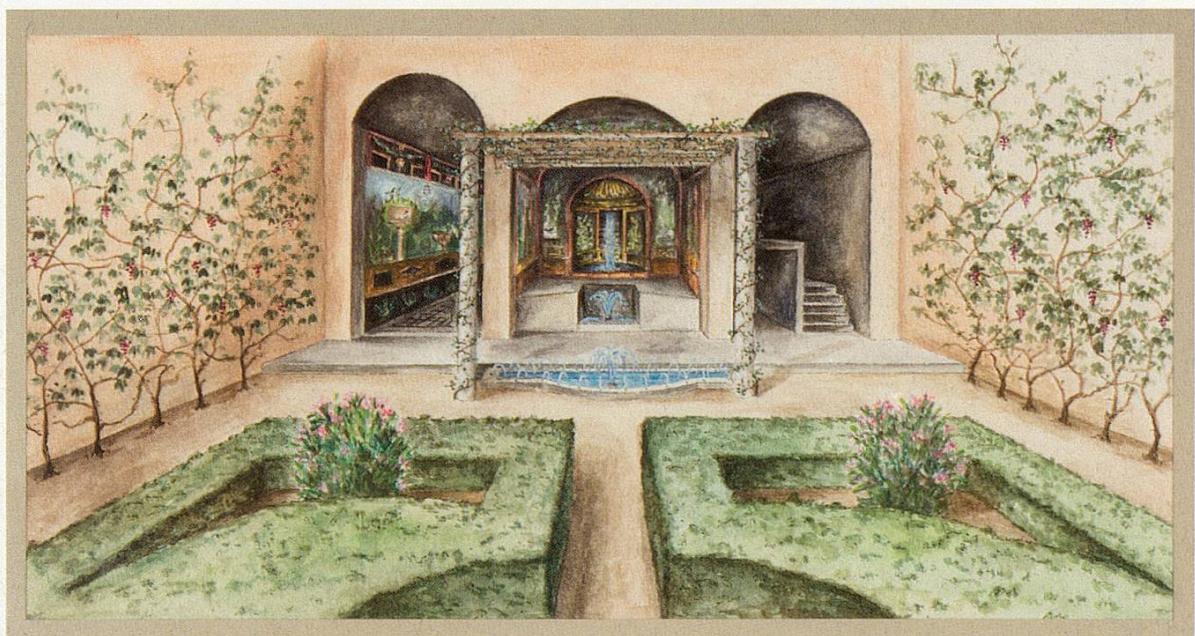
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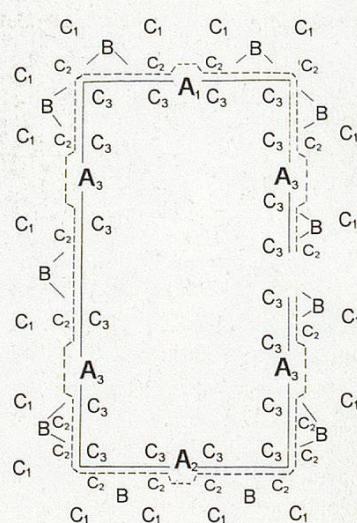
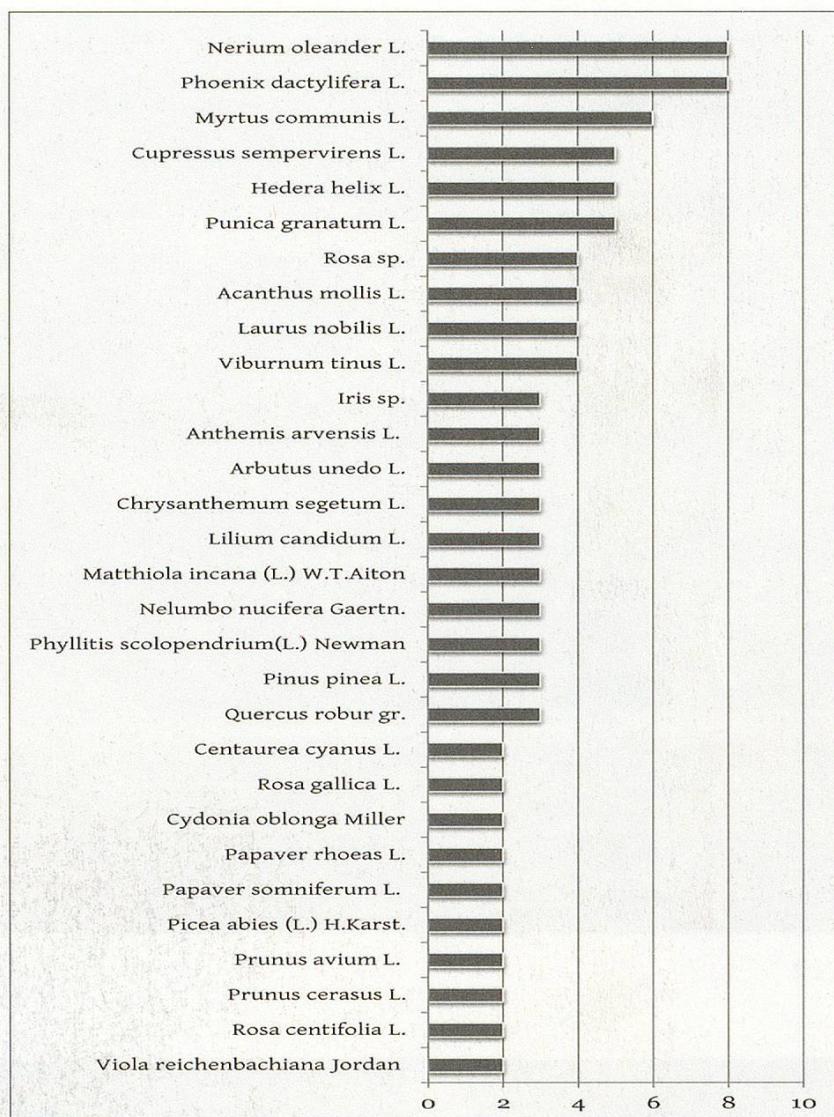
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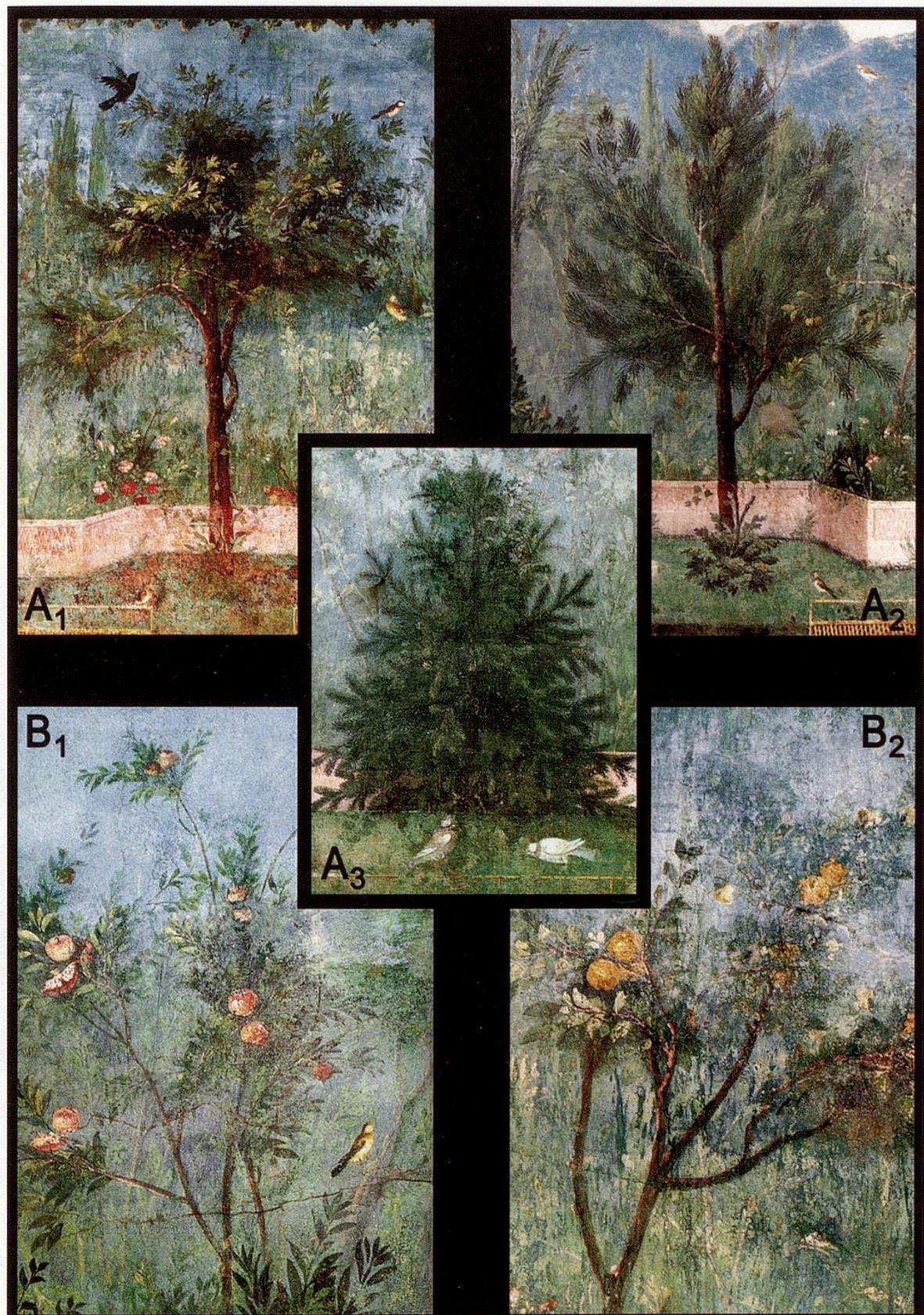
6.19



6.20

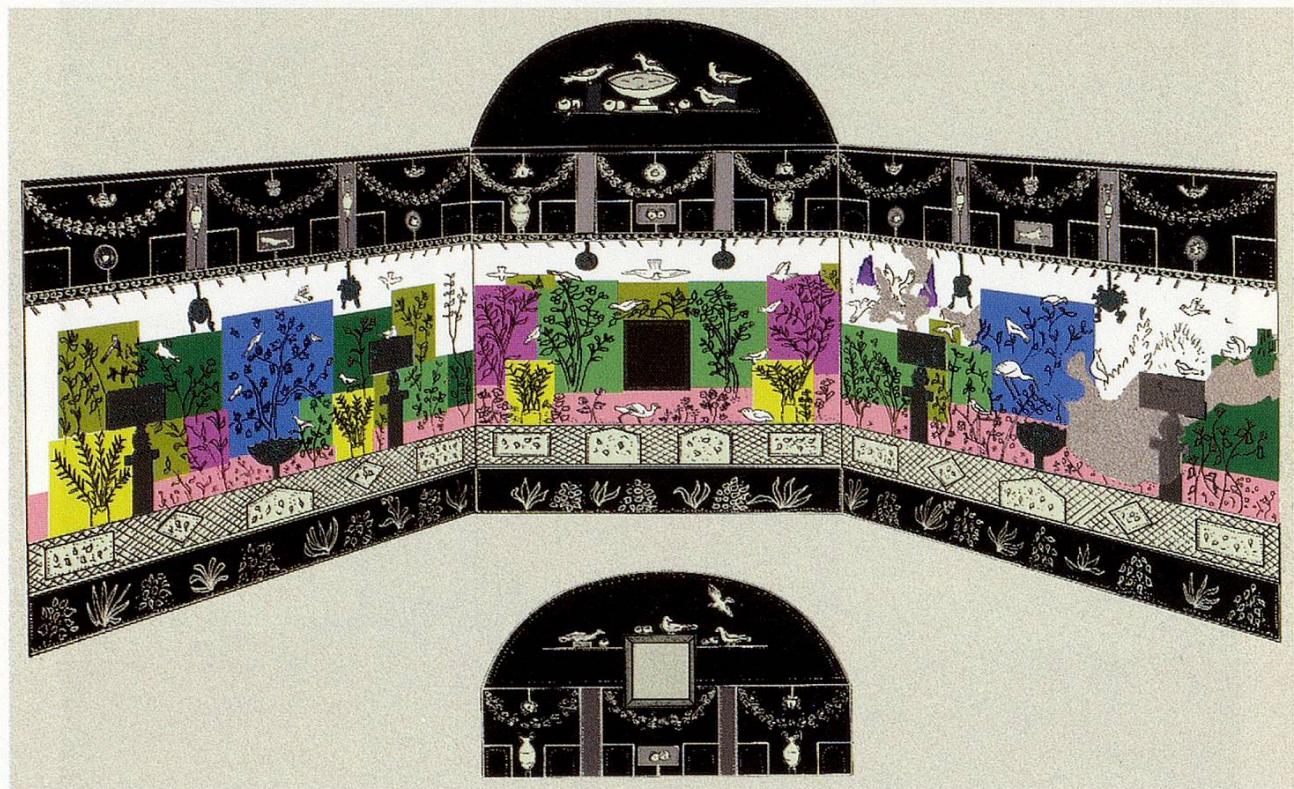


7.2





7.4



■ <i>Platanus orientalis</i>	■ <i>Phoenix dactylifera</i>	■ <i>Nerium oleander</i>	■ <i>Lacune</i>
■ <i>Arbutus unedo</i>	■ <i>Viburnum tinus</i>	■ <i>Laurus nobilis</i>	■ <i>Cupressus sempervirens</i>
■ Piante erbacee e arbustive nel registro basale del giardino			

7.5