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Introduction

Scholars have traditionally studied cultural exchange in the ancient Mediterranean through the artifacts, writings, art, sculpture, and architecture of its various regions and civilizations. Ancient gardens and their associated horticultural practices are complex artifacts that contribute key information about cultural exchange in the Mediterranean, particularly notions about resources, cultivation, “nature”, power, and display. The ancient cultures of the Mediterranean and of the areas to the east and south, particularly Egypt and ancient Persia - had long, diverse garden traditions. Through commercial exchange and warfare, these various traditions cross-pollinated. As a result, many of the gardens in the Hellenistic and Roman world fused evolving local traditions with imported features.

The papers presented in this session examine these interactions across space and time, using all the available evidence – archaeological, historical, art historical and literary. The papers reveal how the fragmentary nature of evidence demands an approach that employs both humanistic and scientific methods, particularly in the area of archaeological investigation. Thus, study of ancient gardens is richly interdisciplinary, enabling scholars to construct a more complete picture of the their plants and significance than has been previously possible.

We begin these papers with a tribute to Professor Jashemski, whose death on December 24, 2007 marked the end of a pioneering era in garden archaeology. It also marks the beginning of a time of rapid growth in the field's development, one in which many archaeologists inspired by her efforts, are identifying hundreds of new Roman gardens. These results have been gathered in her final, forthcoming work, *Gardens of the Roman Empire*. Readers will be glad to know that this ambitious manuscript is nearing completion under the direction of team of editors and contributors, ourselves included, who have worked with Wilhelmina for many years. Please contact Kathryn Gleason, Amina Aicha Malek, or Kim Hartswick with any queries or new gardens to report. Cambridge University Press continues to be committed to seeing this work to press.

The focus of these four papers – on designing and constructing Roman gardens, the Roman plant trade, Byzantine gardens, and the royal gardens of ancient Judaea – highlights the diversity of the garden traditions of the ancient and late antique worlds. Gleason's paper explores the constructed and designed nature of the Roman garden and introduces an exciting new garden at Stabiae. Macaulay-Lewis' paper tries to construct an interdisciplinary approach to study to ancient plants and their trade. Evyasaf's paper takes a fresh look at the royal palaces of Hellenistic and Roman Judaea, arguing from their design that the gardens of Egypt were as influential as Persian designs, if not more so. Schryver's paper considers the literary descriptions of royal Byzantine gardens, as well as their connection to the gardens of the Roman Empire.

A number of key themes emerge. First and foremost is the process of exchange. Ideas about what gardens and plants mean, as well as how they were designed and constructed, were fluid and constantly

changing. In ancient Judaea, gardens seem to have been influenced by both Persian and Egyptian models. Design concepts and plants from the east often permeated Roman theories of horticulture as well as actual Roman gardens themselves. The importation of exotic plants into Rome sparked debate and controversy in the late Republic and early Empire; yet these plants continued to be imported *en masse*. The design and principles of the Roman garden, particularly the palace garden, seem to continue into the Byzantine period. This flow of ideas was not one-way from east to west but a continual cycle whereby. Roman gardens were influenced by traditions of Egypt and Persia, which in turn influenced Byzantium.

While many elements of gardens evolved and changed throughout antiquity, there is a remarkable degree of continuity in certain areas. Elite pursuits such as hunting continued from ancient Persia well beyond the regions and periods discussed in this session. Likewise, villa and palace gardens remained *loci* of leisure, display, power and retreat throughout this period. The power of plants as symbols endured; plants as floral embodiments of defeated nations featured in triumphs in Achaemenid palace reliefs and in the triumphal literature of ancient Rome and Byzantium. These papers mark a beginning that we hope will encourage scholars to ask more demanding questions of ancient gardens and plants, which are microcosms of cultural exchange in the world of the ancient Mediterranean.

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