

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

IMAGO HORTORUM:

PLINY THE ELDER AND THE GARDENS OF THE URBAN POOR

A substantial part of Book 19 Pliny devotes to vegetable gardens. At *Naturalis Historia* 19.59 we read:

iam in fenestris suis plebs urbana imagine¹ hortorum cotidiana oculis rura praebebant, antequam praefigi prospectus omnes coegit multitudinis innumerae saeva latrocinatio.

Thus even the urban plebs enjoyed, for a time, an *imago* of gardens. What kind of *imago*? A recent and learned student of gardens is perplexed: "I am unclear on the meaning of Pliny's remark, that the urban poor in Rome used to content themselves with [public?] paintings of gardens, until for security reasons they had to bar their windows."² Observe that "paintings" are taken for granted; the only point in dispute remains the question whether these *imagines* were public or private. We are indeed well informed of the paintings of gardens³—but not in the plebeian quarters.⁴ If this interpretation is correct we acquire a new understanding of the artistic sensitivities of the Roman plebs. Doubts obtrude. If we deal with paintings that the poor had in their own apartments, one wonders why they were placed in the windows, and not affixed to a wall. Next, if they were public paintings (murals of some sort?), they must have been so ubiquitous as to be easily seen from the windows of poor tenements, a rather unlikely proposition. But as a matter of fact we need not interpret *imago* in the sense of "picture." The use of the word *imago* in the meaning of "imitation" is well attested.⁵ And thus lest the authority of an impressive article published in a luxuriant volume prevail, we hasten to remark that Pliny does not speak of paintings at all; he speaks of imitation gardens, of window boxes, such as can still today be admired in the windows of many apartments (and single houses), and not only in Europe.

The verse of Martial comes to mind, perhaps the most charming poem in the whole collection (11.18): *Donasti, Lupe, rus sub urbe nobis; / sed rus est mihi*

1. So C. Mayhoff, ed., *C. Plini Secundi "Naturalis Historiae" libri*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1892). J. André, ed., *Plinie l'Ancien: "Histoire naturelle," livre XIX* (Paris, 1964), opts for the reading *in imagine*. H. Rackham, ed., *Pliny, "Natural History,"* vol. 5 (Cambridge, Mass., 1950) prints *imagine*, and erroneously attributes to Mayhoff the reading *in imagine*.

2. M. T. Boatwright, "Luxuriant Gardens and Extravagant Women: The *Horti* of Rome Between Republic and Empire," in *Horti Romani*, BCAR Suppl. 6, ed. M. Cima and E. La Rocca (Rome, 1998), 71–82, at p. 72, n. 11.

3. See above all W. Jashemski, *The Gardens of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius* (New Rochelle, N. Y., 1979, 1993), 1:55–87, 2:313–404.

4. On the living conditions in poor tenements in Rome, see A. Scobie, "Slums, Sanitation, and Mortality in the Roman World," *Klio* 68 (1986): 399–433, esp. 401–4; H.-D. Bottke, "Römische Mietshäuser. Die Wohnverhältnisse sozialer Unterschichten von der ausgehenden Republik bis zur hohen Kaiserzeit und deren bautechnische sowie ökonomische Ursachen" (Ph.D. diss., University of Duisburg, 1999), available on the Internet at the site <http://www.pomoerium.com>.

5. *OLD*, s.v. *imago* 8, where among several examples we duly find the passage of Pliny. Rackham, *Pliny* (n. 1 above), 459, renders *imagine hortorum cotidiana oculis rura praebebant* as "used to give their eyes a daily view of country scenes by means of imitation gardens." Very similarly André, *Plinie* (n. 1 above), 46: "le spectacle d'espèces de jardins, image quotidienne de la campagne."

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maius in fenestra. The following twenty-five lines describe the delights and dangers of this miniature *hortus*, not large enough for a cucumber, where the harvest hardly fills a shell of a snail, and a mouse is feared by the farmer as if it were a Calydonian boar.⁶ The commentators of Pliny naturally adduced the verse of Martial and the commentators of Martial the passage of Pliny.⁷ But to a window gardener an important question poses itself: earthenware pots or baskets?

Jacques André resolutely speaks of “pots de fleurs sur les fenêtres.” N. M. Kay refers generally to window boxes, but by recourse to an oriental feast that became popular also in Greece and Rome he seemingly strengthens the case for pots: “during the Adonia it was a custom to sow wheat and barley in pots and call the seedlings ‘The Gardens of Adonis’.”⁸ This is somewhat inaccurate, for the “gardens” of Adonis displayed also fennel and lettuce (Hesych. A 1231; *Suda* A 517), and perhaps flowers (Philostr. *V A* 7.32). These plants were sown, however, not only in earthenware pots⁹ but also in all kinds of baskets and other containers¹⁰ (wooden boxes, so popular in some places today, are not on record). The same will be true also with respect to the window gardens: pots and baskets.

Kay surmises that the Adonis gardens may have been “something similar” to Martial’s *rus . . . in fenestra*, but first, judging by Martial’s evocation, the window gardens sported a much greater variety of plants, and second, there is no indication that the Adonis gardens were displayed in the windows. Quite on the contrary, they were speedily¹¹ grown inside a warm house under the roof,¹² when exposed to the sun they immediately wilted, and were thrown into the sea or a well.¹³ The sterile, frantic, and perishable “Gardens of Adonis” became proverbially a symbol of short-

6. See the marvelously erudite commentary by N. M. Kay (*Martial. Book XI* [London, 1985], 105–109).

7. André, *Pline*, 119; Kay, *Martial* (n. 6 above) 106. The two passages are also juxtaposed in *TLL* s.v. “*Fenestra*,” col. 479, lines 48–49, and in many older commentaries; see, e.g., L. Friedländer, *M. Valerii Martialis Epigrammaton libri mit erklärenden Anmerkungen* (Leipzig, 1886), 2:177. In Juvenal’s evocation of urban dangers “broken or leaky vessels fall from the windows” (*rimosa et curta fenestris vasa cadant*, 3.270–71), perhaps potted plants: so, e.g., E. Post, *Selected Epigrams of Martial* (Boston, 1908), 277, but this specific interpretation is (rightly) not entertained by E. Courtney (*A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* [London, 1980], 190).

8. Kay, *Martial*, 106, says that this information comes from Schol. Pl. *Phdr.* 276b, but although this text mentions indeed the gardens of Adonis, the information on the sowing of wheat and barley is provided by Schol. Theoc. 15.112–13. The search in *TLG* revealed some thirty passages recording the Ἀδωνίδος κήποι, most of them already known to pre-*TLG* scholars; see W. Atallah, *Adonis dans la littérature et l’art grecs* (Paris, 1966), 211–28; M. Detienne, *Les jardins d’Adonis* (Paris, 1972), 191–205; and especially the articles by J. D. Reed, “The Sexuality of Adonis,” *CIAnt* 14 (1995): 317–47, esp. 323–28, 338–40, and “Arsinoë’s Adonis and the Poetics of Ptolemaic Imperialism,” *TAPA* 130 (2000): 319–51, esp. 321–22. The most detailed study (with a few texts not yet in *TLG*) remains the article by R. Rochette, the leading French art historian and antiquarian of the first half of the nineteenth century, “Mémoire sur les Jardins d’Adonis,” *RA* 8 (1851): 97–123, at 105–23.

9. ὄστρακα: Plut. *Mor.* 560c; Julian. *Caes.* 329d; *Suda* A 517, 807; Hesych. A 1231; Schol. Theoc. 15.112–13.

10. See esp. Eust. *Od.* 11.590, who so describes the gardens of Adonis: φυτάρια ταχὺ ἀναθάλλοντα ἔσω χύτρας ἢ ἀρίχου καὶ ὅλως κοφίνου τινὸς καὶ αὐτίκα ῥιπτούμενα κατὰ θαλάσσης, “plants speedily sprouting afresh in an earthen pot, a wicker basket or generally any basket, and immediately thrown into the sea” (or a well: so Zen. *Cent.* 1.49, in *Corpus paroemiographorum Graecorum* [Göttingen, 1839], 1:19). According to Reed (“Arsinoë’s Adonis,” p. 324, n. 25; cf. “Sexuality of Adonis [n. 8 above] p. 320, n. 18), the testimony of Eustathius is solely “a conflation of Zenobius’ account with the Theocritean scholium.”

11. In eight hours, according to Pl. *Phdr.* 276b; cf. Simpl. in *Phys.* 230a18 (= *Comm. Graec. in Arist.* 10:911.11–15), who stresses the requirement of warm temperature.

12. Philostr. *V A* 7.32: ὁμορφίους αὐτοῦς φυτεύοντες. Cf. Atallah, *Adonis* (n. 8 above), 215–16.

13. Diogen. *Cent.* 1.14, in *Corp. paroem. Graec.* 1:183; Julian. *Caes.* 329d; and above, n. 10; cf. Detienne, *Les jardins* (n. 8 above), 192–93, 203.

lived and superficial pleasures,¹⁴ an image not very appropriate for the year-long toil and enjoyment of the window gardener.

August Mau in his old but still informative treatment of Greek and Roman windows mentions *Blumentöpfe* placed in the windows on an upper floor (*Oberstock*); for this information he quotes only Pliny and Martial.¹⁵ In point of fact these authors do not specify the floor; Mau's statement is based solely on the fact that ground-floor windows were relatively rare,¹⁶ though this circumstance hardly holds for the apartment blocks. Thus in Pliny we may very well deal with window boxes also on the ground floor.

It may be significant that Pliny uses the word *prospectus*. For with reference to the buildings *prospectus* had a definite legal meaning: whereas *lumen* denoted the view only from an upper floor, *prospectus* applied to the view from all floors, including the ground floor.¹⁷

This meaning of *prospectus* squares well with the fear of *latrones*. The urban plebs used to enjoy their gardens in the windows, but this was "before the time when atrocious burglaries in countless numbers compelled them to bar out all the view with shutters."¹⁸ This peculiar piece of information is generally taken to refer to some specific flare-up in banditry during Pliny's lifetime,¹⁹ but it may well be only an example of Pliny's moralizing, his praise of old customs versus the creeping corruption of the present.²⁰

The passage is not easy of comprehension. Pliny avers that the *plebs* was forced to bar out (*praefigi*) all the sight (*prospectus omnes*), and as a result was deprived of the view and enjoyment of their "gardens." The key word is *praefigi*. The *Digest* (8.2.6) is again (cf. n. 17) of help: *praefigo* happens to be a technical term opposed to *obstruo*. If I own a house, and a neighboring house is burdened with a servitude in favor of

14. Schol. Pl. *Phdr.* 276b; *Suda* A 517; Eust. *Od.* 11.590. The proverb is attested only in Greek; it is absent from Latin: cf. A. Otto, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer* (Leipzig, 1890).

15. "Fenestra," *RE* 6 (1909): 2180–85, at 2182. See also G. Cressedi, "Finestra," *Enciclopedia dell'arte antica* 3 (1960): 694–96; and above all R. Herbig, "Fensterstudien an antiken Wohnbauten in Italien," *MDAI(R)* 44 (1929): 260–321; J. E. Packer, *The Insulae of Imperial Ostia* (= *MAAR*, vol. 31 [Rome, 1971]), 24–30 (none of these studies mentions the window gardens).

16. Mau, "Fenestra" (n. 15 above), 2181.

17. *Dig.* 8.2.16 (in the discussion of urban praedial servitudes): *Lumen, id est ut caelum videretur, et interest inter lumen et prospectum: nam prospectus etiam ex inferioribus locis est, lumen ex inferiore loco esse non potest* (the passage felicitously adduced by André, *Pline*, 119). For a legal analysis, see J. M. Rainer, *Bau- und nachbarrechtliche Bestimmungen im klassischen römischen Recht* (Graz, 1987), 273–74 (with an unfortunate misprint in the Latin text).

18. So Rackham, *Pliny*, 459. André, *Pline*, 46, translates as follows: "jusqu'au moment où les horribles brigandages d'une multitude innombrable eurent contraint à clore tous les jours des demeures."

19. Cf. Botke, "Römische Mietshäuser" (n. 4 above), 73. By the time of Martial, as Kay (*Martial*, 106) dryly observes, "perhaps the vandals had had a change of heart." In this sense, but less wittily, already Friedländer, *Martialis Epigr. libri* (n. 7 above), 2:177. In his *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms in der Zeit von Augustus bis zum Ausgang der Antonine*⁹, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1919), 22, Friedländer associates the enunciation of Pliny with the growth of insecurity in the aftermath of the civil war of 69.

20. As suggested by a referee for this journal. On Pliny as a moralist, and on his "opposizione di passato-presente tipico del moralismo," see S. Citroni Marchetti, *Plinio il Vecchio e la tradizione del moralismo romano* (Pisa, 1991), 197, and passim; F. de Oliveira, *Les Idées politiques et morales de Pline l'Ancien* (Coimbra, 1992). Neither of them mentions the passage here discussed. Still I doubt that Pliny intended to criticize the lack of security in the Rome of Vespasian, and on the whole it may be preferable to uphold the interpretation of Friedländer (cf. n. 19). In this context it may be of interest to observe that Roman criminal law distinguished a special category of thieves who sneaked into apartments (*derectarii* or *directarii*); they were punished more severely than the ordinary thieves. See *Dig.* 47.11.7; H. F. Hitzig, "Directarii," *RE* 5 (1903): 1166–67.

my house, I will lose my right to an unobstructed view *si . . . per statutum tempus fenestras meas praefixas habuero uel obstruxero* ("if for the prescribed period I will keep my windows blocked up or will keep an obstruction in front of them"), and *si tu per hoc tempus aedes tuas altius sublatas habueris* ("if you during the same period have raised and kept raised the height of your house").²¹ This is also the situation envisaged by Pliny. The windows solidly blocked with shutters or boards, the *plebs* was not able *oculis rura praebere*, to view their gardens, which also interestingly implies that the boxes were placed (as is normally the case also today) on window-sills outside the shutters²² and windowpanes.²³

There do not appear to exist any other literary sources referring to window gardens. We should be thankful to Pliny for preserving for us this bit of the gardening lore and urban life, and to Martial for endowing it with wit and charm.²⁴

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21. To explain Pliny this passage was adduced already by older commentators: cf. the *notae in usum Delphini* in the publication (*curante et imprimente*) of the *Natural History* by A. J. Valpy (London, 1826). And contrariwise, T. Mommsen in his edition of the *Digest* (Berlin, 1868) did not of course fail to adduce as illustration the passage of Pliny. After twelve decennia regress: Rainer, *Baubestimmungen* (n. 17 above), 52, has no word of Pliny. As revealed by the Packard Humanities Institute's Latin data bank these two passages appear to be the only examples of the locutions *praefigere prospectus* and *praefigere fenestras*. In general the usage of *praefigo* in the sense of *occludo* or *praecludo* is rare; cf. *TLL*, s.v. *praefigo*, col. 635, lines 8–17.

22. On the various kinds of shutters, see Mau, "Fenestra," 2183–84; Bottke, *Römische Mietshäuser*, 16–17, 62–63. Pliny must be indicating shutters or boards and not grates or bars (cf. *fenestra clatrata*, Plaut. *Mil.* 179; *faber . . . faciat oportet . . . clatros in fenestras maioris*, Cato, *Agr.* 14.2; *clatras in fenestris posuit*, *CIL* 6.260), for only in this way would all the view be blocked. A reader for this journal (cf. n. 20) observes that if we take Pliny's story of the robbers at face value, the robbers must have been vandalizing also the window boxes, and thus presumably the people simply ceased to cultivate them, and were thus deprived of their enjoyment. This may well have been so, but it is not exactly what Pliny writes: his stress is exclusively on the blocked sight.

23. Earlier scholars believed that the windows were commonly closed, even during the day, with (double) shutters, thus admitting little light, but Packer, *Insulae* (n. 15 above), 27, persuasively argues that the window openings were often equipped with transparent panes. This interpretation squares very well with the passages from the *Digest* (cf. nn. 17, 21), and the passage of Pliny.

24. We can profitably compare and contrast Martial's *rus in fenestra* with Pliny the Younger's meandering description of his villas, with their elegant windows overlooking the manicured gardens (*Ep.* 2.17.13–16, 5.6.19–23).