

Ancient Mediterranean Wisdom Poetry, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and Planetary Gardening

This paper leverages the lens of permaculture in order to explore how ancient Hellenic and Roman wisdom poetry dialogues with Gilles Clément's concept of planetary gardening. French gardener, horticultural engineer, landscape architect and lecturer at the *École Nationale Supérieure de Paysage* at Versailles, Clément envisions planet Earth as "autonomous and fragile enclosure where every factor interacts with the whole and the whole with each of the creatures present" (2015, 36). The planetary garden "proposes a relationship between [hu]man[ity] and nature in which the preferred actor—in this case the gardener, the citizen of the planet—acts locally on behalf of and in awareness of the planet" (2015, 64). Clément asserts the existential imperative for humans to cooperate with ecological systems: "[w]ork 'with' whenever possible, 'against' as little as possible" (2015, 34). This fundamental imperative of Clément's concept of planetary gardening mirrors permaculture. Permaculture (a portmanteau that combines the words "permanent" and "agriculture"), as defined by Bill Mollison, a co-founder of permaculture, "is the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive ecosystems that have the diversity, stability, and resilience of natural ecosystems" (1997, ix). While permaculture attends to the design of local ecosystems to maximize their agricultural production capacities, Clément's conception of planetary gardening looks at municipal and global ecosystems and embraces all efforts to mitigate climate change and to preserve ecological diversity, including arts, education, and research such as that proposed here. Planetary gardening broadens the domain of ecological stewardship beyond yields and offers a visionary conception of gardening as planetary citizenship.

Permaculture's attention to precedents of traditional ecological knowledge for its practices and ethics offers a basis for inquiring whether practical and ethical parallels to permaculture exist in the wisdom literature of Hesiod's *Works and Days* (Nelson 1998, Canevaro 2015, and Loney and Scully 2018) and Vergil's *Georgics* (Nelson 1998, Thibodeau 2011, and Volk 2002). Fikret Birkes offers "a working definition of traditional ecological knowledge as *a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationships of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment*" (2012, 7, italics in original). Traditional ecological knowledge is embedded in and articulated by both agricultural practices (Farrar 2016) and ancient Greek and Roman religious practices represented in these texts. Discovering parallels between that traditional ecological knowledge and permaculture will enable me to articulate how ancient Mediterranean wisdom poetry dialogues with Clément's concept of planetary gardening. How does the traditional ecological knowledge embodied in the poetry of Hesiod and Vergil engage the theory and practice of planetary gardening? The point of this inquiry is ultimately to explore how the microcosm of the Mediterranean basin might inform conceptions and practices of planetary gardening understood as planetary citizenship. The density and duration of human activity in the Mediterranean basin may be viewed as a microcosm for the planetary garden that exhibits an exemplary case in point for mutual relationship between humans and ecosystems: "[n]owhere else more than in the Mediterranean region has nature moulded people so much and people have in turn so deeply influenced landscapes... As a result, human activity should be considered as an integral ecological feature of the region" (Blondel et al. 2010, 202). As a cultural product of such a milieu, the traditional wisdom of ancient Hellas and Rome offers planetary gardeners as Clément envisions them

lessons about how human care for the planetary *oikos/domus* fosters *bios*: how the arts and ethics of planetary gardening might contribute to conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity and might instill a sense of wonder in the face of recognizing the inextricably and ineffably mutualistic relationship between humans and nonhuman life.

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