

Reconstructing Urban Horticulture in Pompeii

Traditionally, scholars have approached the study of Roman urban horticulture through binary lenses that place gardens into one of two categories, pleasure or productive (Pagan 2016). Recent scholarship has shown that these categories are not always static, rather they often overlap (Bannon 2009). The multi-functional nature of urban gardens, however, has not been explored in depth due in part to the lack of palaeobotanical evidence found in identified green spaces. This lack of evidence makes the reconstruction of gardens difficult. Scholars tend to rely on the art historical evidence that depicts gardens found within Roman houses to guide their reconstructions. While this art historical evidence sometimes reflects blended qualities (e.g. fruit trees in the garden frescoes from the House of the Orchard, Pompeii), it is not entirely reliable for understanding what Romans planted in garden spaces and how they were used. W. Jashemski (1979 and 1993) cataloged the archaeological evidence found in the gardens of Pompeii, but no one has used this data to suggest what types of plants might have been grown in certain garden spaces.

This paper presents the results of my comparative analysis of garden spaces in Regio I of Pompeii, where palaeobotanical evidence is better preserved, and Regio VI. Using Jashemski's catalog, I organized the gardens into six groups according to the architectural and archaeological evidence. For example, gardens categorized in Regio I Group C consists of gardens which have evidence of greater water accessibility or sophisticated irrigation systems, indicating that these spaces were heavily maintained and cultivated. For each group, I identified the palaeobotanical remains (where preserved) and listed what plants attested from the archaeological record would have grown well in that type of garden space based on the evidence: architectural and decorative features, size, location, access to sunlight, and potential

functions and activities. The gardens of Group C in Regio I, gardens that have easy access to water from gutters, cisterns, basins, and irrigations systems, would have been ideal spaces for fruit orchards and vegetables gardens. This is supported by the paleobotanical evidence found in the gardens in this classification (eg. the orchard and vegetables gardens of the House of the Ship of Europa). This classification system can be used to guide the reconstruction of garden spaces. By analyzing how these gardens were designed, we will discover how these spaces were seen and used by Romans in the 1st c. CE.

My work is already being used by the Virtual Pompeii Project at the University of Arkansas to inform their 3D reconstructions of the garden spaces in the House of the Prince of Naples (Pompeii, VI.15.8), House of Paquius Proculus (Pompeii, I.7.1), and House of the Small Fountain (Pompeii, VI.8.3). Researchers are able to test different hypothetical reconstructions in these 3D visualizations to better understand how plants and architectural features might have influenced movement patterns and social interactions within garden spaces. Ultimately, my analysis and classification of gardens in Regio I and Regio IV helps shift the focus away from whether gardens were primarily aesthetic or productive toward a discussion of how these spaces may have been designed, used, and experienced by people from all levels of society.

Bibliography

Jashemski, W. F. (1979). *The Gardens of Pompeii: Herculaneum and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius*. New Rochelle, New York: Caratzas Brothers, Publishers.

Jashemski, W. F. (1993) *The Gardens of Pompeii: Herculaneum and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius Volume II*. New Rochelle, New York: Caratzas Brothers, Publishers.

Pagán, Victoria E. (2016) "Horticulture and the Roman Shaping of Nature." *Oxford Handbooks Online*. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935390.013.78

Bannon, Cynthia Jordan. 2009. *Gardens and Neighbors: Private Water Rights in Roman Italy*.

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.