

THE ROLE OF GARDENS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY MODERN THOUGHT

“Gardens as Laboratories. The History of Botany Through the History of Gardens,” eds. Fabrizio Baldassarri, Oana Matei, *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, Volume 6, Issue 1 (Spring 2017), ISSN: 2285-6382 (paperback), ISSN: 2286-0290 (electronic), 218 pp.

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The volume *Gardens as Laboratories. The History of Botany through the History of Gardens*, Volume 6, Issue 1 of the *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, attempts to reconstruct the role played by gardens in the development of early modern European thought. The volume comprises nine articles, the first one is introductory, the following five articles are focused on the role of gardens and botanical knowledge from the perspective of natural history, whilst the last three essays tackle the subject of plants and gardens as perceived by art and literature. All these articles were presented, as Fabrizio Baldassarri emphasizes, at the conference *Manipulating Flora. Gardens as Laboratories in the Renaissance and Early Modern Europe* which was held at the University of Bucharest, in January 2016 (p. 14).

The first article is written by Fabrizio Baldassarri, one of the editors of the volume, and, as the title clearly suggests, “Introduction: Gardens as Laboratories. A History of Botanical Sciences” (pp. 9-19), it is an introductory article meant to offer both a general presentation of the volume and a valuable insight into the history of gardens. Thus, the author makes a very precise and meaningful chronology of gardens, starting from the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance and emphasizes the transformation of gardens into laboratories where theories and hypothesis were tested by experiment, in the 16th and 17th centuries: “the seventeenth century extended the meanings of gardens, positioning them as ideal locations to further the quest for scientific knowledge – the new way of investigating nature in early modernity” (p. 12).

The second essay, “Experimenting with living nature: documented practices of sixteenth-century naturalists and naturalia collectors” (pp. 21-45), belongs to Florike Egmond and it is divided into four sections. The first part is dedicated to analyzing experimentation in the gardens and it is based on the correspondence between important plant collectors like Jean Boisot and the naturalist Carolus Clusius (1526-1609). In the following two parts, the author discusses about experimenting with both plants and animals, and in the final section analyzes the links between these different types of experimentation in natural science and natural philosophy. It can be remarked that the article is based on the use of historical sources, mainly manuscript letters, from different European countries – the Low Countries, France and Germany-Austria.

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The third study, entitled “Planted Knowledge. Art, Science, and Preservation in the Sixteenth-Century Herbarium from the Hurtado de Mendoza Collection in El Escorial (pp. 47-67), by María M. Carrión, analyzes the increasing importance of *herbaria* in Early Modern Europe and their crucial role in the development of botany. This overview has the role to introduce the reader to the main theme of the article: the extensive presentation of the Hurtado Herbarium, a four volume anonymous herbarium that originally belonged to the Ambassador Hurtado de Mendoza that was later offered to the Royal Library of the Palace of El Escorial. This Herbarium represents another example of dissemination of scientific botanical knowledge in Early Modern Europe.

In the fourth article, “The Role of Portuguese Gardens in the Development of Horticultural and Botanical Expertise on Oranges” (pp.69-89), Ana Duarte Rodrigues explores the fascinating journey of oranges from Asia to Europe, more particularly to Iberian Peninsula and from there to the New World. As the author emphasizes, in many cases the scientific research in the fields of botany and horticulture was not accomplished within universities, academies, laboratories, or botanic gardens but in different types of gardens, belonging to royalty, church or just ordinary people. The complicated art of growing oranges generated in Portugal a scientific emulation that contributed to the advancement of botanical knowledge.

The fifth essay belongs to the other editor of the volume, Oana Matei, and it is entitled “Reconstructing *Sylva Sylvarum*. Ralph Austen’s *Observations* and the Use of Experiment” (pp. 91-115). Ralph Austen was a member of the Hartlib Circle, influenced by Francis Bacon’s projects to develop a natural history. He used Bacon’s *Sylva Sylvarum* as a model in an attempt to construct his own project of a natural history of the vegetal domain. Therefore, this article is dedicated to the analysis of Ralph Austen’s *Observations upon some part of Sr Francis Bacon’s Naturall History* as compared to Bacon’s *Sylva Sylvarum*.

The sixth contribution, “Leaves on the Loose: The Changing Nature of Archiving Plants and Botanical Knowledge” (pp. 117-135) by Alette Fleischer focuses on the history of archiving plants during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The author describes a few of the most important herbaria of that period, from Jacob Breyne’s *Herbarius vivus* of 1659 and *Plantae rariores Borussicae et Cassubicae* of 1673 to the works of Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) who introduced the binomial system.

The seventh study, “Experimenting with ‘Garden Discourse’: Cultivating Knowledge in Thomas Browne’s *Garden of Cyrus*” (pp.137-159) by Sarah Cawthorne, explores an epistemological link between books and gardens in the early modern period as reflected in Thomas Browne’s work *Garden of Cyrus*. Browne cultivates “the cultural, philosophical, material and linguistic links between books and gardens”, thus allowing “his *Garden* to bloom as a heterotopic site where poetic and philosophical innovation and investigation can grow in harmony” (p. 143).

The eighth essay, “Science, Art and the Classical World in the Botanizing Travels of William Bartram” (pp.161-179) by Gabriel R. Ricci focuses on another literary work that presents Bartram’s explorations of wilderness in a narrative that mixes romantic conventions with natural history and Quaker theology. Although

Bartram's observations regarding nature were seen as useless for everyday farming, he still deserves credit for linking classical literature to natural history.

The ninth and last contribution, "Early Modern Garden Design Concepts and Twentieth-Century Royal Gardens in Romania. Peleş Castle and the Mannerist Landscape" (pp. 181-196) by Alexandru Mexi highlights the connections between the Romanian Royal Garden of Peleş Castle and the early modern Western European gardens. Moreover, this study reveals "the various ways in which, by manipulating nature according to Late Renaissance and Mannerism principles, nature was staged to achieve political goals" (p. 181).

From the pages of this excellently elaborated volume an important but often overlooked history emerges – that of gardens seen as laboratories, places where not only botany as a science developed but also where modern philosophical reconstructions of nature were tested.