

est frumētū ita funt ut rē. i. noctua & pñiciofa rubigo, eēt. i. cō
mos. f. frumētū, qđ pri⁹ leu⁹ veniebat,
& vt cardu⁹.

codicibus. In Mediceo nō ſpectabis, ſed expectabis, habetur, id
enim ſpectandi auget ſignificatum.



¶ SERVIVS.

¶ Arma, Inſtrumēta, vt alijs
bi, Cerealiaq; arma. ¶ Vos
mis, J& ab eo, quod eſt vos
mis ria, facit, ſed rōnis eſt vo
mer. Nam vomis uſurpatum
eſt. Rarum enim eſt, vt in ie,
exeontia, ri, in obliquis reci
pian, vt cinis, puluis. Talis
eſt, & in graciis rō. Nā aſtin
& aſtis dicūt, delphin & del
phus, eleuſin & eleuſis, ſed ve
rias in, n, deſinunt qđ in obli
qis habēt, vt aſtinos, & eleuſ

Dicendum, & quæ ſint duris agreſtibus arma:
Quis ſine, nec potuere ſeri, nec ſurgere meſſes.
Vomis, & inflexi primum graue robur aratri,
Tardaſq; Eleuſinæ matris voluentia plauſtra,
Tribulaſq; traheatſq; & iniquo pondere raſtris
Virgea præterea Cerei, vilisq; ſupellex,
Arbutæ crates, & myſtica vannus lacchi.

Omnia quæ multo ante memor prouiſa repones:

regnaret Cereus, & Cerenē
filiam quarentem liberaliſſa
ſine hoſpitioſuſcepiffet, illa
pro munere oſtendit ei oī
genus agriculturæ ſilum & et
eius. Triptoleum receu
natum per noctem igne ſea
uit, per diem diuino lacte
nutriuit, & eum allatis ſera
pentibus ſuperpoſitū p totū
orbem miſit ad uſum frumē
torum hominibus indicandū.
Ergo hoc dicit, plauſtra
volubilia mſis eleuſinæ, id

Le texte et la pratique

Dialogues interdisciplinaires sur le statut du traité d'agriculture

Actes édités par
Maëlys BLANDENET, Marine BRETIN-CHABROL
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From Didactic Poetry to Prose Treatise on Horticulture: the Authority of Columella (with Virgil) in his ‘Dual’ *Cultus hortorum* (*Rust.* X and XI)

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In his treatise *De re rustica*, dated from the Neronian age (1st century AD), *scriptor rei rusticae* L. Iunius Moderatus Columella gives us the opportunity to compare didactic poetry and scientific prose on the same subject directly: the cultivation of *horti*, intended as rustic and productive vegetable and flower gardens¹. In fact, he deals with both forms, respectively in Book X, *Carmen de cultu hortorum*, and in Book XI, *Vilicus et hortorum*² (in § 3). The dual treatment of this topic, fairly new in Latin works on agriculture, but of increasing importance, reflects Columella’s interest, on a small scale, on intensive and profitable cultivation (in opposition to large estates³), as well as his attention to social needs and means of subsistence for the population⁴.

The comparison between the two books about gardens, which we intend to consider here, is worth considering from both the literary and the technical viewpoint. From the former, it can throw light on the relationship between the two genres to which they belong, i.e., didactic poetry and prose treatise. From the latter, it contributes to the *uexata quaestio* of the reliability of didactic poetry regarding both Columella’s Book X and his source of inspiration, Virgil’s

¹ See SAINT-DENIS E. de (1969): 10. Columella seems not to be influenced by another concept of garden present in his time, namely as a place of recreation, taken into consideration by Varro instead; see LAFAYE G. (1900): 277-278.

² Scil. *cultus* (or *cultor*). The titles of the books were probably created by the author himself, as they are included in the *index* he placed at the end of book XI (*Rust.* XI, 3, 65). See CARENA C. (1977): 825 n° 22.

³ See KUZISČIN V. I. (1984): 172-174. Columella recommended a medium-sized rustic *uilla* to farmers, like Virgil and Cato the Elder; see *Rust.* I, 3, 8-9, in which the passage from the *Georgics* is quoted (II, 412-413): *laudato ingentia rura/ exiguum colito* (« give praise to large estates, farm a small one »).

⁴ See *Rust.* X, *praef.* 1-3.

Georgics. Virgil was greatly admired by Columella first and foremost as a scientific and technical source in its whole⁵ and included among his main Latin *auctores* in Book I⁶. Certainly, Columella also appreciated Virgil for his literary qualities⁷, as they were functional to the content and made it more appealing, according to the tradition of didactic poetry. However, while no one doubts the earnestness of technical prose writers, especially that of Columella, who makes agriculture a true *ars*, following the rational model proposed by Cicero⁸, Virgil was criticized by Columella's contemporaries, above all Seneca, who denied the didactic *utilitas* of the *Georgics*⁹, even though he had no specific agricultural skills himself to judge others¹⁰. Seneca's criticism has divided modern scholars¹¹, but even those who approve of the philosopher admit that the Virgilian precepts are mostly precise and reveal both scientific knowledge and direct experience¹². However, it cannot be excluded, as we suggest, that Seneca intended (with friendly irony) to directly provoke Columella, perhaps after discussing this topic together, given that they knew each other quite well¹³.

Columella, for his part, affirms and supports Virgil's authority in many passages, qualifying him with superlative attributes that underline his erudition, truthfulness and excellence¹⁴. Thus, Book II opens with quoting Virgil's *Georg.* II, 1 (« "Thus far of the tillage of the land," as says that most excellent poet »), followed by the author's firm statement that « as we are about to speak on the same topics, there is nothing to keep us from beginning under good omens with the opening words of that most renowned poem », alluding to the *Georgics* (*Rust.* III, 1, 1¹⁵):

⁵ A proof of Columella's technical use of the *Georgics* is the fact that he never mentions the *Aeneid* and rarely mentions the *Bucolics*, which were not relevant to his topic. See MAGGIULLI G. (1984): 848.

⁶ See *Rust.* I, 1, 13. Virgil is mentioned there after Cato, the Sasernas (father and son), Tremelius Scrofa and Varro, and before Iulius Hyginus, Mago, Celsus and Iulius Atticus. Columella also consulted Democritus and the *Cepurica*, specifically about gardens.

⁷ Indeed, Columella contributed considerably, with his many praises to Virgil, to the consecration of him as the greatest Latin poet (as Quintilian did later too).

⁸ The general model for the technical-didactic treatment of a subject is Cicero's *De oratore*, intended for the education and training of the perfect *orator*, on which that of the perfect *agricola* of Columella is based. See BRETIN-CHABROL M. (2020): 91.

⁹ Sen. *Epist.* 86, 15: [Vergilius] *nec agricolas docere uoluit sed legentes delectare*.

¹⁰ In fact, although Seneca was known to have very productive vineyards in the Nomentanum (see Colum. *Rust.* III, 3, 3), Pliny the Elder points out that the merit belonged to the previous owner, the grammarian Remmius Palaemon (*HN* XIV, 49-51).

¹¹ Like on other open questions about *Georgics*, as if it is an optimistic or pessimistic work, pro or anti-Augustan. See GALE M. (2000) who examines the relationship between Virgil and his predecessors.

¹² See DELLA CORTE F. (1985): 669.

¹³ Columella mentions Seneca as a *uir excellentis ingenii atque doctrinae* in *Rust.* III, 3, 3 and was a good friend of his brother Gallio, mentioned amicably in *Rust.* IX, 16, 2 (*Gallioni nostro*). Moreover, they were all originally from Spain (Seneca and Gallio from Cordoba, Columella from Cadiz).

¹⁴ See *Rust.* I, 3, 9: *uir eruditissimus*; I, 4, 4: *uerissimo uati*; III, 1, 1: *praestantissimus poeta*. Compare also IX, 9, 4: *ut uerissime dicit Vergilius*.

¹⁵ The text of Columella is quoted (here and below) according to the edition of RODGERS R. H. (2010) for the books I-IX and XI-XII and BOLDRER F. (1996) for the Book X. The English translation of books IX-XI is by FORSTER E. S. and HEFFNER E. H. (1954-1955).

«*Hactenus aruorum cultus, » ut ait praestantissimus poeta. Nihil enim prohibet nos, Publi Siluine, de isdem rebus dicturos celeberrimi carminis auspicari principio.*

In this defense of the usefulness of poetry, Columella was probably influenced by Cicero, who had studied his treatises (starting from *De oratore*) with verses by Ennius and many others, and believed that the perfect *orator* not only should acquire the *ars* of speaking, but also other knowledge and skills, including poetry¹⁶. Moreover, Cicero composed poems¹⁷, setting the example of a prose writer who was able to write poetry, as Columella himself did later in Book X.

The peculiarity of Columella, however, is that he was at the same time the most specialized *scriptor rei rusticae*, since he devoted himself completely to agriculture (unlike Cato and Varro¹⁸) and interested, more than others, in cultural, social and moral aspects related to agriculture. Therefore, his *De re rustica* seems more like an encyclopedia than a handbook¹⁹, open to various inputs, information and literary forms, without prejudice and supported by an audience that often conversed with the author, expressing judgments, praises and further requests, as was the case with gardens.

In fact, after carefully exposing other aspects of agriculture in the first nine prose books of his work²⁰, Columella dealt with gardens in hexameters in book X – which was still introduced by a prose preface – for two reasons. First, he aimed to satisfy the insistent requests of two friends, aware of his poetic abilities (not otherwise attested) and interested in didactic poetry. They were Silvinus, the recipient of the whole *De re rustica*²¹, and Gallio²² – evidently not prejudiced towards poems, unlike his brother Seneca –, as Columella says both at the end of book IX and later, mentioning only Silvinus²³, at the beginning of Book X (in the *praefatio* and in the *Carmen de cultu hortorum*) and of Book XI:

¹⁶ It is certainly a sign of literary ambition in prose writing, not common at all. See GIORDANO F. 2003: 124.

¹⁷ The *Aratea* (a translation of the didactic poem *Phaenomena* of Aratus of Soli), mythological and epic poems, probably an elegy, epigrams.

¹⁸ In addition to the manual on running a farm, Cato also wrote a historical work, precepts for the son, speeches. Varro, who was considered the greatest Roman scholar, wrote many works on history, antiquarianism, philology, language and grammar, Menippian satires and more, in addition to *De re rustica*.

¹⁹ See JANSON T. (1964): 92; KUZISČIN V. I. (1984): 171; PARRONI P. (1989): 495-496.

²⁰ They focused on choosing the land and location of the *uilla*, the owner's duties, sowing, planting, raising livestock, birds, fish and bees.

²¹ A man quoted by Columella at the beginning of each book, but otherwise unknown, probably a landowner, neighbour and friend of his in the area of Cere. See CARENA C. (1977): 7 n° 2; FÖGEN T. (2009): 156-157. The name is curiously linked to nature (*silua*), like some characters of Varro's *De re rustica*.

²² L. Iunius Anneus Novatus, known as Gallio (Cordova, 3 BC - Rome, about 66), politician and rhetorician. See also note 13 above.

²³ The omission of Gallio's name in Book X and XI could imply his death (about 65 A.D.) and be a *terminus post quem* for these books. For other elements of dating in Columella's *De re rustica* see KAPPELMACHER A. (1918): 1059.

*Sed iam consummata disputatione de uillaticis pecudibus atque pastionibus, quae reliqua nobis rusticarum rerum pars superest, de cultu hortorum, P. Siluine, deinceps ita ut et tibi et Gallioni nostro conplacuerat, in carmen conferemus*²⁴.

« Having now finished the discussion of the animals kept at the farmhouse and their feeding, the part of husbandry which still remains to be treated, namely the cultivation of gardens, we will now present in verse in accordance with the desire which both you, Publius Silvinus, and our friend Gallio were pleased to express ».

*Faenoris tui, Siluine, [...] reliquam pensiunculam percipere*²⁵.

« Accept, Silvinus, the small remaining payment of interest ».

*Hortorum quoque te cultus, Siluine, docebo*²⁶

« The cult of garden-plots I now will teach, / Silvinus ».

*Sed tibi, P. Siluine, pertinaciter expetenti uersificationis nostrae gustum, negare non sustinebam*²⁷

« But when you, Publius Silvinus, persistently demanded a taste of my versification I could not bring myself to refuse ».

Secondly, Columella wish to continue the interrupted project of Virgil's *Georgics*, where the poet, after dealing with honey plants in Book IV on beekeeping, reported about gardens (*horti*) giving two opposite *exempla* (IV, 116-148)²⁸: a spontaneously luxuriant garden, and an initially unproductive small field that was turned into fertile agricultural ground by the commitment and work of an old man dwelling near Tarentum, who is called by Virgil *senex Corycius*²⁹, a model of the perfect *holitor*, gardener and vegetable grower. However, since Virgil could not elaborate on this topic due to lack of space in his poem, as he said, he left it to others to treat it afterwards (*Georg.* IV, 147-148):

Verum haec ipse equidem spatiis exclusus iniquis praetereo atque aliis post me memoranda relinquo.

« But all this I must pass by, constrained by narrow bounds, and leave to others after me to record³⁰ ».

Columella, who accepted this invitation³¹, repeatedly quotes Virgil's words as a link and tribute to his source, both in the preface of book X, where he reveals his previous intention to write also this book in prose like the others

²⁴ Columella, *Rust.* IX, 16, 2.

²⁵ Columella, *Rust.* X, *praef.* 1.

²⁶ Columella, *Rust.* X, 1.

²⁷ Columella, *Rust.* XI, 1, 2.

²⁸ About the « two *horti* » of Virgil and the context of the *senex Corycius* see BOLDREY F. (2018a): 396-431.

²⁹ Because he was originally from Corycus in Cilicia, well-known for its gardens and their products (e.g. saffron, mentioned in Prop. 4,6,74). See BOLDREY F. (2018a): 408 and n. 55.

³⁰ Transl. by FAIRCLOUGH H. R. and GOOLD G. P. (1916-1999), here and later for the *Georgics*.

³¹ Interesting but unconvincing is Grimal's theory (GRIMAL P. (1990): 380 and 414, n. 40) according to which Virgil and Columella had a different idea of gardens, intended respectively as a symbolic and ornamental park by Virgil – the reason why he couldn't write about gardens – and as a rustic and productive field by Columella.

(perhaps alluding to a first draft, which would later be useful for Book XI), and in the *incipit* of the following poetic text:

*Quare cultus hortorum, quoniam fructus magis in usu est, diligentius nobis quam tradidere maiores praecipendus est isque, sicut institueram, prorsa oratione prioribus subnecteretur exordiis, nisi propositum meum expugnasset frequens postulatio tua, quae praecepit, ut poeticis numeris explerem georgici carminis omissas partis, quas tamen et ipse Vergilius significauerat posteris se memorandas relinquere*³².

« The cultivation, therefore, of gardens, since their produce is now in greater demand, calls for more careful instruction from us than our forefathers have handed down; and I should be adding it in prose to my earlier books, as I had intended to do, had not your repeated appeals overruled my resolve and charged me to complete in poetic numbers those parts of the *Georgics* which were omitted by Vergil and which, as he himself had intimated, he left to be dealt with by later writers ».

*Hortorum quoque te cultus, Siluine, docebo
atque ea quae quondam, spatiis exclusus iniquis,
cum caneret laetas segetes et munera Bacchi
et te, magna Pales, nec non caelestia mella,
Vergilius nobis post se memoranda reliquit*³³.

« The cult of garden-plots I now will teach,/ Silvinus, and those themes which Vergil left/ for future bards, when, closed in narrow bounds,/ he sang of joyous crops and Bacchus' gifts/ and thee great Pales and heaven's boon of honey ».

Thus, Columella underlines his continuity in the footsteps of Virgil as well as, implicitly, the natural evolution in the series of agricultural treatises, where each author added something to the previous works (in prose or poetry): just as Virgil had added beekeeping (*caelestia mella*) to the topics of Varro's *De re rustica* – who had only hinted at it³⁴ –, so Columella, after dealing with beekeeping in Book IX (2-16), adds horticulture and gardening, only hinted at by Virgil.

Moreover, the *Carmen de cultu hortorum* would be the elegant conclusion of the whole treatise *De re rustica*³⁵, because it was originally limited to ten books (later expanded to twelve), but this doesn't mean that it should be only a refined *lusus* for the enjoyment of readers or for the display of personal literary skills, regardless of technical accuracy and *utilitas*³⁶. On the contrary, the choice of a poetic form recalls an illustrious tradition dating back not only to Virgil, but also to the origins of didactic literature itself on agriculture, which was in hexameter starting with Hesiod's *Works and Days*.

As to the content, the close connection of Book X, written by an undisputed agricultural writer, with the *Georgics* appears as a proof of reliability of Virgil's didactic work. Although Virgil only hinted at the theme of the garden,

³² Columella, *Rust. X, praef. 3*.

³³ Columella, *Rust. X, 1-5*.

³⁴ In Varro, *Rust. III, 16, 10*. See BOLDRER F. (2018a): 415-416.

³⁵ Imitated by Palladius, who appended a poem *De insitione* (« On grafting »), but in elegiac verse, at the end of his *Opus agriculturae*.

³⁶ GRIMAL P. (1990): 279 also agrees that Columella's poem about gardens serves a useful purpose.

he stressed that he had personally seen the old man of Tarentum³⁷, using well-known proofs of truth and competence, i.e. autopsy and direct experience³⁸. In particular, Virgil's scientific seriousness emerges when Columella, speaking of beekeeping shortly before dealing with *horti*, points out that this poet did not deal with fairy tales, like the etiological myth of the origins of the first bee from the metamorphosis of a nymph named Melissa, which instead the prose writer on agriculture Hyginus related (*Rust.* IX, 2, 2-3):

Atque ea quae Hyginus fabulose tradita de originibus apium non intermisit, poeticae magis licentiae quam nostrae fidei concesserim. Nec sane rustico dignum est siscitari fueritne mulier pulcherrima specie Melissa quam Iuppiter in apem conuertit [...]. Ista enim, quamuis non dedeceant poetam, summatim tamen et uno tantummodo uersiculo leuiter attigit Vergilius cum sic ait: « Dictae caeli regem pauere sub antro » [Georg. IV, 152].

« The tradition of the fabulous origin of the bees which Hyginus has not passed over, I would rather attribute to poetic license than submit to the test of our belief; nor indeed is it a fit question for a husbandman to ask whether there ever existed a woman of surpassing beauty called Melissa, whom Jupiter changed into a bee [...]. Upon this story, though not unworthy of a poet, Vergil touched briefly and lightly in a single line when he said: "Neath Dicte's cave they fed the king of heaven" ».

Columella himself avoids poetic elements that are too imaginative and detached from reality, and modestly underlines the limits of his composition due to the difficult undertaking of both emulating Virgil³⁹ and dealing with a minute and inconsistent content (*tenuis materia*) such as vegetables, as he explains in the prose preface where he defined the *Carmen de cultu hortorum* as a « small part » (*particula*) of his *labor* (*Rust.* X *praef.* 4). However, he does not shirk the task – both poetic and technical – of writing a book in poetry about this new topic, drawing some ideas from various books (I and IV) of the *Georgics*, between imitation and variation. On the one hand, he imitates not really Virgil's great preface of *Georg.* I⁴⁰, but rather the simple introduction of *Georg.* IV (1-5), including in his proem (*Rust.* X, 1-5) the apostrophe to Silvinus and a summary of the four books by Virgil, and putting off his invocation to the Muses until verse 40⁴¹. On the other hand, as for the practical description of horticulture, his model is *Georg.* I, because he too follows the seasons of the year⁴² as well as the rise and sunset of the constellations in indicating the works to be done in the *hortus*.

Furthermore, while Virgil alternates pessimism and optimism in his four books, Columella is generally positive about the satisfaction provided by the

³⁷ *Georg.* IV, 125-127: *namque [...] meminisse me [...] Corycium uidisse senem.*

³⁸ Compare Colum. *Rust.* I, 1, 16 *usus et experientia dominantur in artibus.*

³⁹ Columella's modesty also seems to emerge from the length of his poem (436 lines long), shorter than all four books of the *Georgics* (respectively of 514, 542, 566 and 566 lines).

⁴⁰ Dedicated to the invocation to twelve gods and to Octavian (*Georg.* I, 1-42). In Columella's *De re rustica*, on the other hand, there are no explicit references anywhere to the emperor of his time, Nero, and the writer himself does not appear to belong to the aristocracy or hold important positions in the state; see KUZISČIN V. I. (1984): 172.

⁴¹ The Muses are already left in the margins in Virgil's *Georgics*, while Octavian and Maecenas are celebrated; see PÖHLMANN E. (1973): 858.

⁴² See lines X, 41-44 (autumn), 52-57 (winter), 77-80 (spring), 312-313 (summer).

farmer's commitment (as in *Rust. X*, 327 *holitor gaudet*) and the relationship between mankind and nature (Mother Earth)⁴³. Especially the finale is dominated by enthusiasm in the procession of Satyrs and Pans, who celebrate the time of the grape harvest⁴⁴. Understandably, the technical aspects are embellished with ornaments, especially mythological and astrological references used as temporal indications, and digressions⁴⁵, which moreover give rise to some philosophical and psychological reflections, following the rules of the didactic poem starting from Hesiod, and seeking a deliberate alternation of serious precepts and pleasant scenes⁴⁶. The result is an intertwining of *utilitas* and *uoluptas*, which Varro had already indicated and advised in agriculture⁴⁷.

However, the style of Columella's book X was so remarkable, pleasant and refined in emulating Virgil and other poets (Ovid, Horace, *Moretum*, Lucretius, elegiac poets)⁴⁸ that it apparently clouded the technical *praecepta* on horticulture, and confined them within the « laws » of metrics (*Rust. XI*, 1, 1 *carminis legibus*) according to some pragmatic (and prosaic) readers, who asked the author himself for a prose version on the same topic⁴⁹. In fact, Columella's audience appears both very interested in all of his work and very demanding and critical (though amicably), as it is apparent e.g. already from the preface of Book IV (1, 1) in which Columella reports that expert readers had found fault with some details he had given (about the size of the pits in which to plant the vines) or in Book V (1, 1), where the addressee Silvinus pointed out that Columella himself had not provided all the necessary information on vineyard cultivation.

In a similar way, an illustrious reader, *Claudius Augustalis*⁵⁰, together with interested scholars and farmers, induced Columella to exceed the predetermined number of ten books of his work, to deal again with horticulture in Book XI (*Rust. XI*, 1, 1):

Claudius Augustalis, tam ingenuae naturae quam eruditionis adulescens, conplurium studiosorum et praecipue agricolarum sermonibus instigatus extudit mihi cultus hortorum prosa ut oratione conponerem, nec me tamen fallebat hic euentus rei, cum praedictam materiam carminis legibus implicarem.

« Claudius, a priest of Augustus and a young man equally distinguished for his ingenious disposition and for his erudition, encouraged by the discourses of several men of learning and especially of those interested in agriculture, extorted from me a promise to write a treatise in prose on the cultivation of gardens. Nor did this

⁴³ See BOLDREER F. (2018b): 181-191; cf. LUCCIONI P. (2020): 88-90 on Columella's optimism also with regard to some mutations in nature (plants), considered as an evolution.

⁴⁴ This scene could reflect the pleasing use of gardens as meeting places, especially attested in the suburban area; see GRIMAL P. (1990): 64-65.

⁴⁵ There are digressions on Mother Earth (X, 58-67) and on the power of Love in spring (X, 194-214), an invitation to the nymphs to enjoy the flowering (X, 263-285) and a hymn to Bacchus (X, 423-432).

⁴⁶ See KROLL W. (1925): 1844.

⁴⁷ See Varro, *Rust. I*, 4, 1: *agricolae ad duas metas dirigere debent, ad utilitatem et uoluptatem*.

⁴⁸ See for poetic, technical and other features of Columella's book X, BOLDREER F. (1996): 15-32.

⁴⁹ According to MARTIN R. (1985): « le livre 10 [...] ne pouvait satisfaire les spécialistes, qui n'y trouvent évidemment pas la précision technique et le sérieux caractéristiques du traité proprement dit ».

⁵⁰ Although he appears to be young, he was probably part of a *collegium* that looked after the cult of the *gens Iulia*, and in particular of Claudius; see SCIVOLETTO N. (1992b): 813-814 n. 40.

circumstance escape my memory when I was seeking to confine the said subject within the rules of poetry ».

But the *holitoris cura* is neither the only theme of this book nor in a prominent position: in fact, it is preceded by other topics in the first two of the three chapters: the duties and of the landholder (*uilici officia*), as announced in *Rust.* XI, 1, 2⁵¹, and an astronomical calendar with corresponding agricultural works. So, gardens seem to be here an addition to other more important topics, with a choice that has been interpreted⁵² as a sign that the author had by now turned his attention to the behaviour of the *uilicus* (and of the *uilica* later in book XII), while the *hortorum cultus* would become a « pendant » in view of the conservation and transformation of agricultural products in Book XII.

In fact, the *hortus* seems to be intended here as a source for the sustenance of the landholder himself and of his *familia*⁵³, and, occasionally, to feed the *dominus* when he came from the city to visit the *uilla rustica*. This use of his own products allows Columella to allude again to the « poet » par excellence, Virgil, by quoting a passage related to the *senex Corycius*, who was proud to « load his table with an unbought banquet », and so inviting farmers to similar food self-sufficiency (*Rust.* XI, 3, 1):

memores polliciti nostri subiungemus cultus hortorum, quorum aequae curam suscipere debet [uilicus], ut et cotidiani uictus sui leuet sumptum et aduenienti domino praebeat, quod ait poeta, inemptas rure dapes [Georg. IV, 133].

« Mindful of our promise we will next deal with the cultivation of gardens, of which he [the bailiff] will likewise have to undertake the superintendence, in order to lessen the cost of this daily sustenance and provide his master, when he visits the farm, with what the poet calls “the country’s unbought feates” ».

On closer inspection, the two books X and XI show some difference in purpose and recipient, because the *holitor* mentioned in Book X (83, 148, 177, 229 and 327)⁵⁴ seems to be a small, self-sufficient landowner (like the *senex Corycius*), who cultivates for himself⁵⁵. In fact, at the beginning of Book X Columella emphasized the usefulness of horticulture for the sustenance of poor people in times of economic crisis, which stimulated teaching on how to cultivate vegetable gardens (*Rust.* X, *praef.* 3 *cultus hortorum [...] diligentius nobis [...] praecipendus est*)⁵⁶. On the contrary, the *horti* in Book XI appear as small parts of apparently large and rich *latifundia*, cultivated by a landholder at the service of

⁵¹ *Facturus mox, si conlibuisset, quod nunc adgredior, ut holitoris curam subtexerem uilici officiis* (« intending presently, if it should be your pleasure, to undertake the task on which I am now entering, namely, to append the duties of a gardener to the functions of a bailiff »).

⁵² See SCIVOLETTO N. (1992b): 814-815.

⁵³ See GRIMAL P. (1990): 67.

⁵⁴ The gardener is described respectively in Book X as fertilizing the earth (83), watering the plants (148), arranging flowers and plants in the beds (177), working in the green gardens (229) and being happy with his products (327).

⁵⁵ See FLACH D. (1990): 258, « Obst- und Gartenbau dienten zumeist dazu, den Eigenbedarf zu decken ».

⁵⁶ According to SAINT-DENIS E. de (1969): 11, Columella’s interest in gardens (in Book X) would be a reaction against large estates and unproductive parks. *Contra* MARTIN R. (1985): 1965.

a master and landowner. However, the two distinct images of *holitor* in Book X and XI might be conflated with the image of small holders presumably supplementing their crops by working for wealthy neighbours⁵⁷; in any case, horticulture appears to be useful for the rural and suburban population⁵⁸.

With regard to the general structure of the treatment and the specific precepts on horticulture, a comparison between the two books on the *cultus hortorum* shows both analogies and differences, which do not necessarily penalize the *Carmen*. In fact, if poetic ornaments are left aside, agricultural teaching can be distinguished quite well also in Book X, which is somewhat vaguer than Book XI in describing technical activities, but richer in botanic information (although including plants that are not always easy to identify) as well as mention of tools such as rakes and hoes, omitted in Book XI. Above all, it is remarkable that only in Book X the cultivation of flowers and fruits in the garden is mentioned in addition to vegetables, which are the only products dealt with in Book XI. In particular, as regards flowers, it seems that their presence in the poem is explained both by the link of Book X to beekeeping (see Book IX), as in Virgil, and by the attractiveness of such a beautiful subject, appreciated in poetic descriptions. However, their cultivation had a real economic value, since flowers were required to make crowns for religious rites, banquets, and festivals⁵⁹. On the contrary, their omission in Book XI seems to indicate a lesser interest in their trade on the part of the peasant (now *uilicus*) and a strict selection of products limited to human consumption. In any case, Columella almost completely excludes legumes from both « gardens » – beans are mentioned in line 377⁶⁰ only in Book X –, probably because they have been dealt with separately in Book II (10,1-24), after wheat, as in Virgil⁶¹.

In general, Columella seems to aim not to repeat in Book XI exactly what he had written in the previous one, or to present the matter in a different way. Certainly, he exposes horticulture in an easier prose form in Book XI, which appears clearer (even if much less appealing), but this does not diminish the technical value of Book X. The differences seem to depend on different points of view, as if Columella wanted to experiment with different teaching methods, and perhaps reflect his taste for *uariatio*⁶². On the one hand, Book X shows a different order of some of the topics, additions of products (as stated before) and references to their sale not mentioned in Book XI. On the other hand, Book XI provides more information, details and descriptions, and even apparent corrections of previous statements, such as those about fences or manure (see

⁵⁷ This was sometimes the case between the 2nd century BC and the 2nd AD; see CAPOGROSSI COLOGNESI L. (1982): XXXV. However, there were various types of farmers in the countryside, such as landowners, settlers, laborers. See KOLENDO J. (1989): 227-231.

⁵⁸ FRASS M. (2006): 128-132 compares Columella, who supported the social and economic usefulness of the *horti*, with Pliny, who criticized their transformation into (unproductive) gardens for pleasure.

⁵⁹ See LAFAYE G. (1900): 292-293; MARSHALL L. (1918): 53-69. Compare Varro, *Rust.* I, 16, 3 and 35.

⁶⁰ In Book X also *faba* and *lupinus* are present (in lines 113 and 115), but by association with other vegetables and not for their own cultivation.

⁶¹ See MAGGIULLI G. (1995): 176.

⁶² *Variatio* seems to be a feature of Columella's style; see KAPPELMACHER A. (1918): 1065-1066.

below). Consequently, the two books appear to be unequal, yet complementary to each other, as we will try to highlight through some examples.

The first difference in dealing with horticulture appears already at the beginning, as Book X opens with an extended description of the most suitable place for a garden (*Rust. X*, 6-22, starting with *Principio sedem numeroso*⁶³ *praebeat horto/ pinguis ager*⁶⁴), that depends on the types of soil and spontaneous plants, which are indicative of its good or bad nature. Conversely, Book XI begins with advice on how to fence a vegetable garden (*Rust. XI*, 3, 2 and XI, 3, 3-8 *de muniendo et colendo horto*), a theme that Columella addresses both by dissuading from building walls around the *hortus*, because they are too expensive (according to Democritus)⁶⁵, and by recommending a technique learned from ancient *auctores* and personally experienced, i.e., a « thorn-hedge » or « live fence » (*uiua sepes, uepres*)⁶⁶, whose realization is described in detail⁶⁷. Only after this premise, the best place of *hortus* is dealt with in *Rust. XI* (3, 8-9 *de situ horti*), more briefly than in Book X, e.g., without description of spontaneous plants, but with new tips about its location, e.g., the advice to place it close to the *uilla*, but not below a threshing-floor and not downwind in order not to damage the vegetables (*Rust. XI*, 3, 9). On the contrary, in Book X the reference to how to protect gardens was given quite later and in a different way: including not only hedges, but also walls⁶⁸ and even a scarecrow imitating the god Priapus to keep away thieves and birds (*Rust. X*, 27-34).

Subsequently, Columella deals with irrigation and manure in both books, almost at the same point in the discussion. In fact, the water in streams or wells is mentioned in *Rust. X*, 23-25 (and later in 47-49) as well as in Book XI (3, 8-10). As for the manure for fertilizing gardens, manure from donkeys is similarly recommended in both books, but Book X also lists other kinds of equally useful manure, produced by oxen or humans (*Rust. X*, 81-85⁶⁹), while in Book XI the author discourages the use of the latter (XI, 3, 12⁷⁰).

After this, Book X deals with the trenching of the soil, starting from autumn (41 ff.), and follows the various seasons and agricultural works until returning to autumn (with the harvest festival in 423 ff.), while Book XI indicates two times for tillage, autumn and May (XI, 3, 9 and 11; 14 *duobus... temporibus*), with subsequent sowing respectively in spring and in autumn, but adding, strangely enough, also a third sowing period in January (3, 15). Both

⁶³ It should be noted that *numerosus* is the first non-Virgilian word in Columella's poem; this shows linguistic experimentalism and originality, along with admiration for Virgil. See BOLDREY F. (1996): 114 *ad l.*

⁶⁴ « First for the varied garden let rich soil/ a place provide ».

⁶⁵ Columella, *Rust. XI*, 3, 2.

⁶⁶ See WHITE K. D. (1975): 26.

⁶⁷ Based on the use of bramble seeds grown on wet ropes and buried in ditches dug around the garden.

⁶⁸ See Columella, *Rust. X*, 27: *parietibus [...] claudatur [humus]*.

⁶⁹ Columella, *Rust. X*, 84-85: *nec pudeat fesso praeberere nouali/ inmundis quaecumque uomit latrina cloacis* (« nor should he hesitate to bring as food/ for new-ploughed fallow-ground whatever stuff/ the privy vomits from its filthy sewers »).

⁷⁰ *Nam quod homines faciunt, quamuis habeatur excellentissimum, non tamen necesse est adhibere* (« human ordure, although it is reckoned to be most excellent, should not necessarily be employed »).

books then further describe the times and modes of *satio*, providing various lists of plants to sow or to plant, to care for and to harvest, but following partly different criteria and sequences. However, not all products suitable and recommended for cultivation could or should really be included in the same field; the author nevertheless illustrates all or most possibilities to choose from, depending on the soil and on the location of the vegetable garden⁷¹.

Book X first illustrates the sowing (*semina*)⁷² of flowers (X, 96-102⁷³), i.e., of *leucoia*, *caltha*, *narcissus*, *leo*, *lilia*, *hyacinthi*, *uiola*, *rosa*. These are followed by medical, aphrodisiac and culinary herbs (X, 103-126), such as *panaces*, *glaucea*, *papauera*, *semina bulbi* from Megara and Sicca, *eruca*, *chaerepolum intiba*, *lactucula*, *alia*, *ulpica*, *siser*, *radix* from Assyria, *capparis*, *inulae*, *ferulae*, *menta*, *anethum*, *ruta*, *sinapis*, *olus pullum* (scil. *atrum*), *cepa*, *lepidium*. Later, Columella describes the varieties of some vegetables, such as cabbage (X, 127-139)⁷⁴, lettuce (*lactuca* in X, 179-193)⁷⁵ – spotlighting the lettuce of Cadiz, homeland of Columella, who inserts an autobiographical, albeit technical, detail⁷⁶ – and *cinara* (cardoon in X, 235-241).

On the contrary, Book XI starts with vegetables and in particular with cabbage and lettuce⁷⁷, followed by other vegetables which can be sown in two seasons, and which only partially coincide with those indicated in Book X (*Rust.* XI, 3, 14: *semina brassicae, lactucae, cinarae, nasturcii, coriandri, caerefolii, anethi, pastinacae, siseris, papaueris*). Afterwards, Columella teaches what is sown only in autumn (*alium, cepae, capitula, ulpicum, sinape*). But then he changes method (in *Rust.* XI, 3, 15)⁷⁸, perhaps influenced by the previous astronomical calendar (XI, 2, 4-98 with instructions from January to the following January): in fact, Columella gives a list of plants to be sown (or planted) month by month, starting from January until early summer (XI, 3, 16-18), and including, as mentioned above, the third sowing period (XI, 3, 15), useful for the *radix* from Syria, *rapa*, *napa*, *siser* and *holus atrum*.

⁷¹ See FRASS M. (2006): 132.

⁷² In Book X the *satio* in the *horti*, which concerns both flowers and vegetables, is described up to verse 254. In Book XI, where sowing is limited to vegetables, it recurs continuously in the treatment of garden (XI, 3, 9-64). On the term *semen* in Columella see BRETIN-CHABROL M. (2020): 91-101.

⁷³ Columella, *Rust.* X, 94-96: *Verum ubi iam puro discrimine pectita tellus/ [...] nitens sua semina poscet/ pingite tunc uarios, terrestria sidera, flores* (« now when the earth, its clear divisions marked as with a comb, shining [...] shall claim her seeds, 'tis time to paint the earth/ with varied flowers, like stars brought down from heaven »).

⁷⁴ Cabbage is not mentioned here by Columella with its name (*brassica*, used only in verse 326), but with the generic *caulis*, as if he wanted to leave the reader the task and pleasure of identifying it. See BOLDREER F. (1996): 190 *ad* Columella, *Rust.* X, 127-139.

⁷⁵ However, lettuce and other plants are also named before: celery, leek, parsnip, crocus, marjoram, myrrh, hyacinths, amaranth, coramblé (Columella, *Rust.* X, 154-178).

⁷⁶ Columella, *Rust.* X, 185-186: *et mea quam generant Tartesi litore Gades/ candida...* (« then there's my own, which on Tartessus' shore/ Gades brings forth (pale...) ») and cf. later, verse 192: *Tartesida*. The lettuce is mentioned also in Book XI (3, 26: *quae deinde candida est [...] ut in provincia Baetica et finibus Gaditani municipii*, « the [...] variety, which is white [...] such as grows in the province of Baetica and in the territory of the municipal city of Gades »), but here without reference to himself.

⁷⁷ See also Colum. *Rust.* XI, 3, 24-25.

⁷⁸ *Sed iam potius quo quidque tempore terrae mandari plerumque conueniat, per menses digeramus* (« but let us rather now arrange month by month at what season it is generally fitting that each kind should be put into the ground »).

Subsequently, Columella changes again his description criterion in XI, 3, 19 and up to 3, 63, because he decides to investigate specific vegetables⁷⁹. However, almost all of the plants that have been mentioned before are dealt with here again, with particular attention to *ulpicum* (garlic in XI, 3, 20-23), *lactuca* (lettuce in XI, 3, 25-27), *porrum* (leek in XI, 3, 30-32), *apium*, *pastinaca*, *atrum holus*, *menta*, *ruta*, *thymum*, *lepidium*, *beta*, and above all *satiui asparagi* (43-46), *cucumis* and *cucurbita* (cucumber and gourd in XI, 3, 48-53) as well as *napus* et *rapa* (navew and turnip in XI, 3, 59-63).

Otherwise, Columella had dealt with fruit in the last part of the poem (X, 401-418 *morae*, *figus*, *Armenia* and *cereola* [*mala*], *pruna Damasci*, fruits from the *Persea arbor*, *Persica*, *Gallica* and *Asiatica*, *mariscae*, *callistruthis*⁸⁰). So, only in Book X, he maintains the variety of products in Virgil's *Georgics* (flowers, vegetables, fruits), both in the description of spontaneously fertile garden and in that of *senex Corycius* – which also included unproductive but melliferous trees⁸¹ (the latter not considered in the *De re rustica*) –, adding more precise names of the products derived from places of origin.

Almost at the end of both Book X and Book XI, Columella faces the question of garden diseases (parasites) and their treatments. In this regard, he cites Democritus as his source in Book XI (implicitly used also in the poem), from whom he draws both rational remedies, based on medicine, and superstitious rites (as *extrema ratio*), such as that accurately described in X, 357-366 and repeated briefly in XI, 3, 64: a woman in her menstrual period walking around the flower beds three times would eliminate plant worms. However, this advice seems to be reported more out of curiosity or respect for the ancient tradition rather than with an authentic conviction about it: in fact, Columella's preference generally goes to rational explanations and solutions, especially those that he has experienced himself⁸².

Finally, the two books approach each other in their closing sentences, both of which begin with the adverb *hactenus* ("so far"). This seems to suggest that, after following partly different paths in dealing with *horti*, they have achieved the same goal:

*Hactenus hortorum cultus, Siluine, docebam
siderei uatis referens praecepta Maronis*⁸³.

« Thus far, Silvinus, I have sought to teach/ the cult of gardens and to call to mind the precepts taught by Maro, seer divine ».

⁷⁹ Columella, *Rust.* XI, 3, 19: *Nunc de iis, quae aliquam curam desiderant singulis loquar, quaeque praeteriero intellegi oportebit nullam postulare operam nisi runcatoris* (« I will now speak individually of those kinds which need some special care, and it will have to be understood those which I pass over require no attention except from the weeder »).

⁸⁰ A variety of *figus*; see BOLDRER F. (1996): 345 *ad* Columella, *Rust.* X, 416.

⁸¹ The products mentioned in Virgil's gardens (*Georg.* IV, 129-146) are the following: *rosaria*, *intiba*, *apium*, *cucumis*, *narcissus*, *acanthus*, *myrti*, *olus*, *lilia*, *papauer*, *poma*, *hyacinthus*, *tiliae*, *pinus*, *ulmi*, *pirus*, *platanus*.

⁸² Compare *Rust.* II, 9, 8-10.

⁸³ Columella, *Rust.* X, 433-434.

*Hactenus praecipendum existimaui de cultu hortorum et officiis uilici*⁸⁴.

« Thus far I have deemed it proper to give advice about the cultivation of gardens and the duties of a bailiff ».

This is also the final homage, both in poetry and in prose, to Virgil, who had also used *hactenus* in *Georg.* 2,1 (*hactenus aruorum cultus et sidera caeli*, « So far the cultivation of the fields and the stars of the sky »), while recalling the theme of the previous Book I.

Coming to the end of his dual *cultus hortorum*, Columella demonstrates that poetry and prose can coexist (even when cultivated by the same authors, such as himself or formerly Cicero, for instance), be equally effective, albeit in different ways, and mutually enrich and complete each other to transmit scientific and technical teaching⁸⁵, to the point that it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine which is superior. On the one hand, Book X in hexameter ennobled the material according to an ancient tradition and brought the readers closer to less popular themes, such as *horti* in the vast field of agriculture, according to the example of Lucretius in the *De rerum natura* (also followed by Virgil)⁸⁶. On the other hand, the prose treatise on gardens is both easier and clearer in giving information about measures, technical discussions and practical information, and stands out itself, like other prose books, for its sober elegance⁸⁷, without « the high-sounding rhetoric of his days⁸⁸ ».

As for the content, both books confirm Columella's undisputed competence, achieved in the previous nine books. This also applies to Book X, which is, on closer inspection and despite ornamental elements, even more complete than Book XI to some extent, e.g. about flowers and fruits. Even if poetry implied different rules and expectations from the readers, Columella sought and managed to maintain his authority until the end of the *De re rustica* (according to the first project), as he himself modestly stated about his poem on gardens (*Rust.* X, *praef.* 5): « whatever [...] has resulted from burning the midnight oil, is so far from claiming for itself any special commendation as to be satisfied if it brings no disgrace on my previously published writings⁸⁹ ».

Poetry did not limit the technical content; conversely, the technical commitment did not impair Columella's cultural and literary interest⁹⁰, and the audience appreciated the result, as the success of the dual *cultus hortorum*, and

⁸⁴ Columella, *Rust.* XI, 3, 65.

⁸⁵ Columella manages to be both technical and poetic. See SAINT-DENIS E. de (1969): 13.

⁸⁶ See the famous simile in *Lucr.* I, 936-950, which compares the use of poetry to teach philosophy to the honey that a doctor spreads around the rim of a cup containing the medicine to make children drink. In this and other passages Lucretius appears very thoughtful of his readers; see PERUTELLI A. (1989): 286-288.

⁸⁷ Columella's stylistic model for his books in prose is Cicero's *De oratore*. Compare RICHTER W. (1983): 643, who defines Columella as a « Klassiker der Prosa », NOË E. (2002): 170.

⁸⁸ ASH H. B. (1930): 17.

⁸⁹ *Rust.* X, *praef.* 5: *quicquid est istud quod elucubraui, adeo propriam sibi laudem non uindicat, ut boni consulat si non sit dedecori prius editis a me scriptorum monumentis*. See about Columella's competence and clear principles of composition, aimed at the reader's advantage, KUZISČIN V. I. (1984): 172, FÖGEN T. (2009): 166-171.

⁹⁰ See RICHTER W. (1983): 634 « Columella ist ein Mann mit wachem Sinn für alles Interessante ».

above all of the beautiful *Carmen*, testifies⁹¹. Although every means of teaching and spreading agriculture appears to be well accepted and carefully preserved by the ancient Roman world, due to the social and economic importance of this topic⁹², this author shows how an elegant expressive form gives further value and often rewards the effort, preserving even extensive works such as *De re rustica* of Columella and topics perhaps of lesser importance such as gardens.

In conclusion, horticulture, which had previously been neglected, suddenly became – with a singular change of fate – the object of even two treatises in poetry and in prose in the 1st century A. D., giving, against the widespread theories of a decay of mother Earth⁹³, an example of successful intensive agriculture, also thanks to a brilliant master such as Columella.

⁹¹ Book X was especially appreciated by posterity as a commendable example of Latin didactic literature and also had an autonomous manuscript tradition from the other books of the *De re rustica*. See BOLDREER F. (1996): 33.

⁹² This results from various facts: as is well known, the first complete Latin work handed down is Cato's treatise *De agri cultura*; of all the erudite works by Varro only the *De re rustica* is preserved in its entirety, and all twelve books of Columella were handed down as well as the fifteen books of Palladius' *Opus agriculturae*.

⁹³ See TRAINA G. (1990): 65; BOLDREER F. (2018b): 185-186.

Le texte et la pratique

Dialogues interdisciplinaires sur le statut du traité d'agriculture

Entre l'Antiquité gréco-romaine et l'époque moderne s'est constituée en Europe une tradition de traités en prose regroupant des conseils sur l'organisation et la mise en culture d'un domaine agricole ou d'un jardin, de *L'Économie* de Xénophon à *La Maison rustique* d'Estienne et Liébault. Cependant ces ouvrages, émanant généralement de hauts personnages lettrés, férus de poésie et de philosophie, soucieux d'éthique, mais aussi d'économie, de médecine ou de gastronomie, parfois plus intéressés par l'anecdote, la recette paradoxographique ou l'objet curieux que par le geste le plus quotidien, se souciaient-ils véritablement de transmettre un enseignement pratique à des hommes de terrain ? À la suite d'un colloque tenu à Lyon du 1^{er} au 3 juin 2022, ce volume fait dialoguer différentes approches disciplinaires – littérature, histoire, archéologie, archéobotanique – en centrant les discussions sur un texte ou les images qui l'ornent, sur un type de plante cultivée (céréales, vigne), une méthode de culture (compost, labours) ou un outil (moissonneuse gauloise, serpe de vigneron). Les contributions réunies ici étudient les interactions entre tradition et expérimentation ou observation de terrain, la posture d'autorité assumée par les auteurs qui écrivent sur l'agriculture, le rôle du destinataire des traités, praticien ou non, ou encore les enjeux idéologiques de ces écrits. Car une telle confrontation du texte à la pratique ne vise pas tant, *in fine*, à jauger de la pertinence technique des traités qu'à montrer comment les textes construisent notre savoir sur les pratiques d'autrefois et comment les traces archéologiques laissées par ces dernières, réciproquement, éclairent la nature des écrits anciens sur l'agriculture.

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