# Flowers in the Poem and Flowers in the Gardens: On Plant Lists in Nicander (frg. 74 Schn.) and Meleager (*AP* IV, 1)

Pascal Luccioni
Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3
*pascal.luccioni@univ-lyon3.fr*

**/ Abstract**

From various Ancient Greek poets we have lists of ornamental plants; longer examples are found in Nicander and Meleager, two poets who belong to roughly the same period. A detailed reading of both will confirm that they are not immediately concerned with real flowers found together in any real location. But the fact that (though their aim is very different) they have much in common, and particularly the numerous plant species they share, hint at a particular flower culture which is likely to have been characteristic of the late Hellenistic period. The gardens it allows us to imagine were artificial, filled with more or less exotic species, but the fashion they enjoyed compels us to consider that they were also real places where high cultural (and literary) life might be enjoyed.

*Da vari poeti greci antichi abbiamo elenchi di piante ornamentali; esempi più corposi si trovano in Nicandro e Meleagro, due poeti che appartengono più o meno allo stesso periodo. Una lettura dettagliata di entrambi confermerà che non hanno un interesse immediato per fiori veri trovati insieme in un luogo reale. Ma il fatto che (sebbene il loro scopo sia molto diverso) abbiano molto in comune, e in particolare le numerose specie di piante che condividono, alludono a una particolare cultura floreale che probabilmente ha caratterizzato il tardo periodo ellenistico. I giardini che ci fanno immaginare erano giardini artificiali pieni di specie più o meno esotiche, ma il fascino che esercitavano ci costringe a pensare che fossero anche luoghi reali dove si poteva godere di un'alta vita culturale (e letteraria).*

**/ Keywords**

*Ancient botany; Hellenistic poetry; Flower culture; Flower cultivation; Plants as metaphors.*

*Die alte Welt erneuern – das ist der tiefste Trieb im Wunsch des Sammlers.*

Walter Benjamin[1]

Botanists love lists. A *Flora* is a kind of list, but botanists also publish *Catalogues*, *Repertoria*, *Inventories*, *Check-lists*. They might browse *Florilegia*: in which last case, an aesthetic representation of all the species present in a garden or park is meant. The question of the precise area considered by the author of a given list shall come back soon in this essay. The first Florilegium published may well have been the one Adrian Collaert published around 1590,[2] and many will follow suit.[3] Though the word florilegium soon acquired a technical and generic sense, some well-known later florilegia have rather been titled *hortus*, "garden".[4] One might also take into account the *Amoenitates*: although the word originally means any kind of ornament (and as such has been used as a title in various disciplines), it is not infrequently used by botanists.[5] It may be that when talking or writing about plants, scientific work and aesthetic pleasure are not widely separated.

If we look at poets, the question might be slightly thornier, but it is nonetheless obvious that lists and poetry have a lot in common. We need only to think about how important the idea of catalogues has become for our understanding of archaic poetry, or again of the works of modern poets like Walt Whitman or (in French) Jacques Roubaud. If we limit ourselves to ancient literature, what we call the Catalogue of Ships in the *Iliad* is sometimes called *katalogos* (κατάλογος) by Greek authors, but sometimes also *diakosmos* (διάκοσμος), a word which seems to imply some kind of order or organisational principle which would contribute something to the beauty of the poetry. *Katalogos*, on the contrary, seems to link catalogues to the writing of prose-texts and to the adverb *katalogadēn* (καταλογάδην), "in prose".[6]

Within the study of lists,[7] two questions are first and foremost: how were the elements that belong to a given list selected within a larger set of elements? and how are the elements

[1] Walter Benjamin, "Ich packe meine Bibliothek aus", in Tillman Rexroth (ed.), *Walter Benjamin. Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4/1 (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), 388.

[2] Adriaen Collaert and Philippe Galle, *Florilegium ab Hadriano Collaert caelatum [...]* (s.l.: s.n., ca. 1590).

[3] One may mention in particular Emmanuel Sweert, *Florilegium amplissimum et selectissimum* (Amstelodami: apud Joannem Janssonium, 1647) produced on the occasion of Frankfurt Messe in 1612, and whose various reeditions would contribute to 17th century tulipomania. Lists *are* grounded in the real world.

[4] Notably Basilius Besler, *Hortus eystettensis* (s.l.: s.n., 1613).

[5] One might think of Engelbert Kämpfer, though his *Amoenitatum exoticarum politico-physico-medicarum fasciculi v* (Lemgoviae: Typis & impensis Henrici Wilhelmi Meyeri, aulae Lippiacae typographi, 1712) also contain much material which is not botanical, or of Heinrich G. Reichenbach, who titled some of his *Programm*-leaflets *Amoenitates botanicae dresdenses* (Dresden: Arnold, 1820).

[6] See Emmanuelle Valette (ed.), *L'énonciation en catalogue* [special issue], *Textuel* 56 (2008).

[7] For classicists, a useful survey is provided by Marie Ledentu and Romain Loriol, *Penser en listes dans les mondes grec et romain* (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2020) and by Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), especially 74–111 containing an illuminating chapter on lists in general: "What's in a list?".

classified within the list itself? or to rephrase the second question in other words, why does any given element follow any other? This second question is particularly important on the one hand in situations or societies where the alphabetical order is rare or absent, and on the other hand in poetical texts.

If we are dealing with poetry and plant lists, two classical examples from the *Odyssey* spring to mind, the description of Alcinoos' garden in book 7,[8] and Ulysses' memories of his father's garden in book 24.[9] Coming close to the end of the whole epic, this last description is remarkable, including in one and the same movement a memory of places, a memory of trees and a memory of Ulysses' family.[10] The rhapsode's listener is led to walk in imagination, following Ulysses and his father, from one row of trees to the other, and can thereby measure the paramount strength of family ties. We shall see later that this weight of the place, of the locality, is peculiarly absent from the two texts which we shall study now. I will introduce them in turn.

People who study Greek literature are often acquainted with Meleager of Gadara, who assembled, probably in the first years of the first century before our era, a collection of short poems (epigrams) usually known as the "Garland" (*Stephanos*, Στέφανος). Let us try to give a brief account of the *Garland*'s introductory poem, where Meleager gives us a long list of poets and plants (forty-seven poets and nearly as many plants, although Meleager himself seems to struggle to sustain the comparison-game until the end!). Although this is rather well known, I shall quote the first verses: "Dear Muse, to whom are you bringing this song, full of fruit, or who has wrought this garland of poets? Meleager has achieved it, and he has intended the gracious work as a dedication in memory of Diocles of high fame".[11]

The poet then goes on with his list of poets to be included in the collection, each being compared to a particular flower. Later on, I shall try to compare this poem with another list of plants, a fragment from another Hellenistic poet, Nicander, who left us a list of plants recommended, it might seem, as garden highlights. Meleager's list, as we said, has about 47 plants, Nicander has slightly less (about thirty, depending on how one counts different varieties of the same plant).

I want to stress right from the beginning that even if I happen to discuss, in the course of my essay, as it were, a particular identification, the core of my endeavour lies not with identifications (I might even go so far as to say that, for the time being, identifications of individual species are not at stake), but with the very process of creating a list and with the structure of the collection assembled by the poets, if there is one. Nor will I study both texts line by line; rather, in the short

[8] *Od.* VII, 112–131.

[9] Ibid., XXIV, 336–346.

[10] See Aldo Paolo Bottino, "Space, time and remembering in the orchard of Laertes: a cognitive approach", *Physis kai phyta conference*, January 29, 2021. A first outline of this research is found under https://chs.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/fdrafts-bottino-space.pdf (accessed March 5, 2025).

[11] Μοῦσα φίλα, τίνι τάνδε φέρεις πάγκαρπον ἀοιδὰν / ἢ τίς ὁ καὶ τεύξας ὑμνοθετᾶν στέφανον; / ἄνυσε μὲν Μελέαγρος· ἀριζάλῳ δὲ Διοκλεῖ / μναμόσυνον ταύταν ἐξεπόνησε χάριν. *AP* IV, 1.1–4 [Mel.].

space of this contribution, I will try to understand how both lists were put together and how far they can be compared with each other. My text of Nicander is taken from the edition of Gow and Scholfield,[12] and my text of Meleager is from Gow and Page's *Hellenistic epigrams*.[13]

Nicander is not as well-known as Meleager, unless one remembers him as an awfully tricky poet, the blight of translation classes, a fearful hoarder of rare words that cause the translator to shudder. I just mentioned "Nicander" in the singular, but inquisitive readers may already know that there are two Nicanders, probably at least two generations apart, and that the attribution of the various poems and fragments transmitted under that name has been a *vexata quaestio* for more than a century. I do not intend to solve the riddle, and I will use the name "Nicander" without further ado, as the name of the author of a fragment from the *Georgics* quoted by Athenaeus in the *Deipnosophists* XV, 682f–684d.[14] We may note that in all likelihood, whether Nicander II ought to be considered a contemporary of Attalus III of Pergamum, who died in 133 BC (as Jean-Marie Jacques and others have thought), or a contemporary of Attalus I, who died in 197,[15] he probably lived *before* Meleager (this would be even more true of Nicander I, a contemporary of Callimachus). The longish fragment (72 verses) we shall be dealing with gives advice for the sowing or planting of various plants, and we have to reflect on the principles which govern the constitution of this list.

I shall begin with Nicander, for the following reason. Among the few elements that are transmitted concerning Nicander (or concerning one of the Nicanders!) through the works of the Scholiasts, we have the following bit of information: "He spent most of his life in Aetolia, as appears from his writings about Aetolia, and also from the rest of his poetry, from the way he tells us about Aetolia's rivers, the places over there and other particulars, moreover from the peculiarities of the plants".[16]

Nothing proves Nicander's *Georgics* are meant here, rather than, say, the *Theriaka* or the *Alexipharmaka* (where plant names are particularly frequent), but it is tempting to infer from such a remark by the Scholiast the idea that Nicander's poetry is firmly anchored in the real, down-to-earth world, and that it owes something to a knowledge of plants *in situ*. One is even

[12] Andrew S.F. Gow and Alwyn F. Scholfield, *Nicander: The Poems and Poetical Fragments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953). I will discuss one particular line later on. I must add that while preparing this article, I fondly remembered Jean-Marie Jacques' conversations and profound knowledge of Nicander's poetry.

[13] Andrew S.F. Gow and Denys L. Page, *The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams I: Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

[14] It is the frg. 74 in Otto Schneider, *Nicandrea. Theriaca et Alexipharmaca* (Lipsiae: Teubner, 1856).

[15] The date issue is neatly summarized in Floris Overduin, *Nicander of Colophon's Theriaca* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), 10–11.

[16] διέτριψε δὲ ἐν Αἰτωλίᾳ τοὺς πλέονας χρόνους, ὡς φανερὸν ἐκ τῶν περὶ Αἰτωλίας συγγραμμάτων καὶ τῆς ἄλλης αὐτοῦ ποιήσεως, ποταμῶν τε τῶν περὶ Αἰτωλίαν καὶ τόπων τῶν ἐκεῖσέ τε καὶ ἄλλων διαφόρων διηγήσεως, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τῶν φυτῶν ἰδιότητος. Annunciata Crugnola (ed.), *Scholia in Nicandri Theriaka* (Milano: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1971), 34.

tempted to infer that the list in frg. 74 could have something to do with Aetolian plants or gardens. But we shall see that *in a way*, it would be hard to hit further off the mark.

The fragment we are going to deal with tells us how to grow flowers in a garden. Not just any kind of garden: Athenaeus says the quote deals with coronary plants, plants that are supposed to be used to make or adorn garlands (στέφανοι). Here Athenaeus' words (683a): "<Nicander> himself, giving a list of coronary flowers [...]".[17]

Growing coronary plants, then: but is this really the case or should we try and find another reason for the compilation of such a list? Of course, it is possible that Athenaeus' interpretation does not quite fit with Nicander's intent in the passage. The plants quoted do not seem to be food plants (for the most part at least). Nor do they seem to have any other immediate practical or industrial use. Are they medicinal plants? Most of them do, of course, have medicinal virtues, but this does not seem to be what drew the poet's attention to them.[18] Could we think of a bee-garden, such as those that are all the craze these days? We do have a few lists of melliferous plants transmitted by ancient authors. Some are very short, giving but a few examples,[19] and could hardly compare with Nicander's profuse list. But one ancient author, namely Columella, does give an extensive list of melliferous plants.[20] This list is very interesting for its own sake, but we cannot deal with it in detail here: suffice it to say that it mentions far more shrubs and trees than Nicander's list in frg. 74 (fruit trees are particularly appreciated), and that it does insist on what modern botanists call *Lamiaceae*: thyme, oregano, savory are given place of honour. Columella's list, in fact, is quite different from ours. On the whole, then, the idea of a list of coronary plants does seem to be the best one. Indeed a few words of the poet himself, introducing a kind of sub-list within the major list, give us a hint: "or again, all those which gardens produce *as garlands* for the labouring men".[21]

We do not know how the extract chosen by Athenaeus within Nicander's *Georgics* went on, but we can still remark on the last words, which also deal with a kind of garland or crown: "And the lizard-plant,[22] which is called crown of the Nether-God, Leader of the Crowds".[23]

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[17] καταλέγων καὶ αὐτὸς στεφανωτικὰ ἄνθη. Ath., XV, 681d had already used a similar wording a few paragraphs before: "I shall quote the verses in a short while, when telling about coronary flowers" (τὰ δὲ ἔπη ὀλίγον ὕστερον παραθήσομαι, ὅταν περὶ στεφανωματικῶν ἀνθῶν διεξέρχωμαι). Athenaeus, maybe under the influence of his *auctores*, seems to use indifferently στεφανωτικά and στεφανωματικά.

[18] Indeed, many major medicinal plants are not mentioned (Christmas rose, peony, diptam, spurges are all absent), but as we are dealing with a mere fragment, the argument does not carry much weight.

[19] Colum., XI, 39 (*thymum, ros marinus, cunela, serpullum*); *Gp*. XV, 2.5–6: four species are quoted (*thymos, elelisphakon, thymbra, kytison*, θύμος, ἐλελίσφακον, θύμβρα, κύτισον); the list coincides only partially with Columella's.

[20] Colum., IX, 4.2–5.

[21] ἠδ' ὅσα κῆποι / ἀνδράσιν ἐργοπόνοις στεφάνους ἔπι πορσαίνουσιν (l. 53–54).

[22] The plant called *saurē* (att. *saura*; σαύρη, att. σαύρα) is not clearly identified. But it may well be identical with *sauridion* (σαυρίδιον), which is addressed by a gloss in Erotianus: σαυρίδιον, ἣν ἔνιοι καρδαμίδα καλοῦσι, καρδαμῷ ἐοικυῖαν. See Ernst Nachmanson, *Erotiani vocum hippocraticarum collectio* (Upsaliae: Appelbergs Boktryckeri-Arktiebolag, 1918), 79 [Σ 24] and Joseph Klein, *Erotiani: Vocum Hippocraticarum Conlectio* (Lipsiae: Sumptibus Librariae Dykianae, 1865), 117: "A plant which some call 'little cress', being similar to cress".

[23] σαύρην θ', ἣ χθονίου πέφαται στέφος Ἡγεσιλάου (l. 72).

All this[24] contributes to our hypothesis that it is not without reason that Athenaeus chose to quote Nicander's fragment in the section of his work that deals with coronary plants. But we should not give too narrow a definition to that expression. As is well known, and as we shall henceforth confirm, coronary plants (*stephanōmatika*, στεφανωματικά or *stephanōtika*, στεφανωτικά) of the Ancient World are in fact roughly what we would nowadays call "ornamental plants".[25]

It is of course likely that in real gardens, as well as in the way they were represented by painters or poets, ornamental plants and food plants sometimes tended to overlap. It is at any rate the case in Virgil's *Georgics*, in the episode of the Garden of the Old Corycian, with roses and fruit trees growing next to each other.[26] Similarly, Columella's gardens in book X (in verse) and XI (in prose) do not draw a sharp line between ornament and food. And of course, ornamental plants can also be seen by the gardener as a source of income.[27]

But even if we are reasonably convinced that the plants mentioned in Nicander's garden (in our frgt. 74) are coronary or ornamental, this does not tell us where the plants came from. Were they indigenous plants? Did Nicander think one ought to "buy local"? The few verses that deal with roses would certainly not give this impression:

> But of the spiny rose-bush cut the shoots and stick them into furrows, reaching a depth of two palms: first, those which Midas, king of Odonia, as he left his Asian kingdom, used to grow in the fields of Emathia, and which always have a circular crown of sixty petals; and second, those from Nisaea, in the Megarid; and Phaselis is not to be spurned either, nor the city which adores the goddess of the white brow,[28] flourishing near the Magnesian Lethaios waters.[29]

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[24] On top of it all, a recent article by Boris Kayachev, "The Poets's Ivy: Nicander, *Georgica* fr. 74, 17–24", *The Classical Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2021): 664–671 suggests that vv. 17–24 of Nicander's fragment ought to be emendated and would actually refer not to growing ivy in baskets, but to braiding head-dresses from ivy. The emendations suggested are seductive (though not compelling). Would ivy have been grown in a basket, as v. 21 seems to say in the "classical" version of the passage (i.e. Gow and Scholfield, *Nicander: The Poems*)? It might also have been prepared as an ornamental set for a special occasion; a similar scene (plants interwoven with a pre-existing basket) is perhaps pictured by Colum., X, 277 telluris comas sacris *artate* canistris (v. l. *aptate*).

[25] On this category of *stephanōmatika* (στεφανωματικά)/coronary plants, see also Thphr., *HP* VI, 6. Pliny the Elder also has a whole book concerning the *coronamenta* (book XXI).

[26] Verg., *Georg*. IV, 116–148, particularly v. 134. Some readers have seen in this episode something reminiscent of Nicander's poetry, or indeed in the Old Corycian a figure of Nicander himself: Stephen J. Harrison, "Virgil's *Corycius Senex* and Nicander's *Georgica*: *Georgics* 4.116–48", ed. Monica Gale, *Latin Epic and Didactic Poetry: Genre, Tradition and Individuality* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2004), 109–123.

[27] Colum., X, 310 (*aere* "money").

[28] On the cult of *Artemis leukophryēnē* (Ἀρτεμις λευκοφρυήνη) in Magnesia, see Str., XIV, 1.40.

[29] αὐτὰρ ἀκανθοβόλοιο ῥόδου κατατέμνεο βλάστας / τάφροις τ' ἐμπήξειας, ὅσον διπάλαιστα τελέσκων · / πρῶτα μὲν Ὠδονίηθε Μίδης ἅπερ Ἀσίδος ἀρχήν / λείπων ἐν κλήροισιν ἀνέτρεφεν Ἠμαθίοισιν, / αἰὲν ἐς ἑξήκοντα πέριξ κομόωντα πετήλοις, / δεύτερα Νισαίης Μεγαρηΐδος · οὐδὲ Φάσηλις / οὐδ' αὐτὴ Λεύκοφρυν ἀγασσαμένη ἐπιμεμφής, / Ληθαίου Μάγνητος ἐφ' ὕδασιν εὐθαλέουσα (l. 9–16).

The roses in question, then, are not wild roses at all, which a sedulous gardener would pick from nearby hills, but garden varieties, which already have, during the Hellenistic period, a long, maybe a very long history of cultivation. They are, of course, kept and reproduced as cuttings (and not from seed).

Our extract might even be dealing with a frankly exotic species. The *libanos* (λίβανος) mentioned by Nicander (53) could be a frankincense tree, a member of the *Burseraceae*-family whose resin had been imported from Arabia or from the Horn of Africa region since very ancient times;[30] Nicander himself had likely never seen a branch of it. Theophrastus too seems unaware of the actual plant (*HP* IX, 4.7), though he had been told that a single tree had once grown in Sardis (*HP* IX, 4.9).

But concerning *libanos*, there is a much more satisfying hypothesis. As we shall insist later on, this *libanos* plant is included in a list of plants reproduced from cuttings, not from seed. This could lead the reader to think of a totally different plant, frequent around the Mediterranean Basin, namely rosemary. Rosemary is usually called *libanōtis* (λιβανωτίς in Ancient Greek, a word derived from *libanos*), and is frequently used for garlands.[31] Nowadays, too, gardeners tend to grow it from cuttings rather than from seed. Though predominantly a West-Mediterranean species, it can also be found in the wild in Greece, where it is nowadays called *dentrolibano* (δεντρολίβανο). It must be noted, however, that the *libanos* of Nicander is only quoted in a kind of secondary list where plants seem to be thrown together rather carelessly.[32]

The other species mentioned seem to belong, broadly speaking, to the category of Mediterranean species. In Antiquity, international trade of (living) plants was obviously much less developed than in later periods. The Renaissance, and even more so the subsequent centuries, have extended trade distances dramatically; the number of species transported grew enormously, and the transport techniques improved. This sometimes makes us blind towards the first "globalization" of plant trade around the Mediterranean (and beyond, if we take into account some resins and spices) during the Hellenistic period. A merchant of the 2nd century BC cannot imagine the amazing botanical variety grown in gardens at the end of the 19th century – say, at the time of the publication of the *Manuel de l'amateur des jardins* by Decaisne and Naudin (1862). But Nicander's garden, with all its species coming from various locations and regions, already shows quite conclusively that it has very little to do with local plants and habitats.

Focusing on the organisation of the list itself, we should also note that the plants chosen

[30] The word is already present in Sappho's text. See frg. 44 v. 30, in Edgar Lobel and Denys Page, *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963). The two chapters about *libanos* in the *Gp.* XI, 15–16 are very vague and do not necessarily imply an actual cultivation in Syria.

[31] Dsc. *MM* III, 75.

[32] We come back to this secondary list further on.

do not give the impression of belonging to a garden that an observer or the poet himself would be visiting, looking at the varied scenery while walking along the alleys. The part of the text where roses (l. 9–16) are followed by ivy (l. 17–24) makes one think of an opposition between plants grown from cuttings (l. 9–24) and plants grown from seed (*spermati*, σπέρματι), from l. 25 on. But even this rather concrete information seems to be wiped away in the following lines: no clues are given about the reproduction of rose campions[33] and mullein (l. 36).

But those two species (rose campions and mullein) lead us to make an important remark: why are those two mentioned together here, why do they figure, one could say, as a pair? The reason is probably purely literary. Both phytonyms happen to be, originally, metaphors in the Greek language.[34] The rose campion is called "small lamp" (*lychnis*, λυχνίς, cf. *lychnos*, λύχνος "lamp") and the mullein (just as quite a few other plants) is called "wick" (*thryallis*, θρυαλλίς), obviously because of its frequent use as a wick. What could be more natural than to pair the lamp and the wick? This little game seems to have given Nicander a great pleasure, since he made use of it twice, the other occasion being a passage from the *Theriaka*, 899–900: "And all that the rose campion [~lamp] and the reddening[35] mullein [~wick] and the rose and the wallflower produce, inside <their fruit>, as far as small seeds are concerned".[36]

We can almost see here how playing on words tends to warp the space of the projected landscape, nearly thwarting it.

The places mentioned within Nicander's garden (the trench dug for rose-cuttings, l. 10, the pit where ivy-cuttings are to be set, l. 17,[37] a well where creeping thyme – *herpyllon*, ἕρπυλλον, l. 40 – should be planted) all seem strangely detached, they rather look as if they were floating about in a pure list without any reference to the real world.

This apparent lack of reference is particularly visible in the rather long list which comes close to the end of Nicander's extract:

> And all the flowers which the gardens produce, creating garlands for hard-working men. There also the slender ferns and Love-for-the-boys which looks like a white poplar,[38] there grows the saffron

[33] Nothing to do with roses as far as botany is concerned, though: Nicander's *lychnis* (λυχνίς) is probably intended here to mean *Lychnis coronaria* (L.) Desr., commonly known as "rose campion" in English.

[34] In the case of the mullein/*thryallis* (θρυαλλίς), it is more specifically a metonymy, but the distinction is of no avail to us here.

[35] The adjective *ereuthēeis* (ἐρευθήεις) makes us decide for a mullein, against a plantain (*Plantago* species) which could hardly be called "reddening". Several species of mullein, including *Verbascum sinuatum* L., common in Greece, have red spots near the center of the petals. I have never encountered *Verbascum phoeniceum* L. (which is frankly red) in the wild (it is supposed to be native to Central Europe and eastwards), but doubt that it could be used as a wick, having much less down than other species.

[36] ὅσσα τε λυχνὶς ἔνερθεν ἐρευθήεις τε θρυαλλὶς / καὶ ῥόδον ἠδ' ἴα λεπτὸν ὅσον σπερμεῖον ἀέξει.

[37] On this passage, see Kayachev, "The Poets's Ivy".

[38] I have not been able to come to any fixed opinion about the *paiderōs* (παιδέρως)/Love-for-the-boys plant here mentioned. The allusion to white poplar reminds of the plant of the same name (*paiderōs*) cursorily described by Paus., II, 10.5–6.

> which closes in the Spring-time, and the henna-bush and sweet-smelling mint and all the beauties which, on wet and hollow ground, the meadow lets grow without any sowing, the ox-eye and the magnificent flower of Zeus [i.e. carnation],[39] chrysanthemums and hyacinths[40] and violets growing close to the ground, dark – among all the flowers those that Persephone most hates.[41]

Why are some plants *aspora* (ἄσπορα, l. 58)? It obviously does not mean that *they* do not seed, but that the gardener does not sow (*speirō*, σπείρω) them. Does Nicander suggest his reader should leave the garden and go into the wild searching for such plants to make garlands? Does he wish his reader to create one of those wild gardens which are quite a fad nowadays? Not exactly: the idea is rather, I believe, to list the plants which are to be brought to the garden as cuttings and planted there, rather than sown. Such was the meaning of the verses introducing this list (l. 52–54): "What makes the young shoots strong is a deep layer of dung in a bucket, young branches of marjoram or rosemary (?), and all the flowers that the gardens produce, creating garlands for hard-working men…".[42]

Dung in a bucket: we are indeed in the garden, not in the wild. And we are reminded of Theophrastus' observation that some coronary plants are taken from the mountains to be planted in gardens, especially when their germination and/or growth is difficult.[43]

Words and the taste for words are of course of primary importance for a poet, we have already touched on this subject when dealing with *lychnis* and *thryallis*. It sometimes leads Nicander to name plants through periphrastic enigmas, what modern scholars call *kennings*, rather than with their usual, more concrete name. The "old beard" named in verse 71, *geraon pōgōna* (γεραὸν πώγωνα), is likely to mean a flower known in Greek as billy-beard, *tragopōgōn* (τραγοπώγων). We have already mentioned the elusive "Love-for-the-boys" flower (*paidos erōtes*, παιδὸς ἔρωτες, l. 55).

Nature writing has accustomed us at least since the 19th century to a strong spatial refer-

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[39] "Magnificent" is my rendering of *eueides* (εὐειδές), a conjecture proposed by Otto Schneider to replace *euōdes* (εὐῶδες) of the manuscripts: Schneider noticed that Thphr. *HP*, VI, 6.2 and Plin. *HN*, XXI, 59 say that the flower does not have any smell. But some species of carnations do have a peculiar smell, notably so *Dianthus superbus* L., which is present in Northern Greece and frequent in Italy, and might have been recognized as "carnations"/*Diosanthos* (Διόσανθος) and been used in garlands.

[40] Hyacinths (*Hyacinthus orientalis* L.) are native to Anatolia, but have probably been cultivated in Greece at an early period, since we must accept, I think, Suzanne Amigues' cogent arguments, "*Hyakinthos*, fleur mythique et plantes réelles", in Ead., *Études de botanique ancienne* (Paris: Institut de France, 2002), 395–409, particularly 400 on "sowing" hyacinths as a garden flower – actually *planting* side bulbils.

[41] ἠδ' ὅσα κῆποι / ἀνδράσιν ἐργοπόνοις στεφάνους ἔπι πορσαίνουσιν. / ἤ γὰρ καὶ λεπταὶ πτερίδες καὶ παιδὸς ἔρωτες / λεύκη ἰσαιόμενοι, ἐν καὶ κρόκος εἴαρι μύων / κύπρος τ' ὀσμηρόν τε σισύμβριον ὅσσα τε κοίλοις / ἄσπορα ναιομένοισι τόποις ἀνεθρέψατο λειμών / κάλλεα, βούφθαλμόν τε καὶ εὐειδὲς Διὸς ἄνθος, / χάλκας, σὺν δ' ὑάκινθον ἰωνιάδας τε χαμηλάς / ὀρφνοτέρας, ἃς στύξε μετ' ἄνθεσι Περσεφόνεια (l. 53–61).

[42] ἀδρύνει δὲ βλαστὰ βαθεῖ ἐν τεύχεϊ κόπρος / σαμψύχου λιβάνου τε νέας κλάδας ἠδ' ὅσα κῆποι / ἀνδράσιν ἐργοπόνοις στεφάνους ἔπι πορσαίνουσιν.

[43] Thphr., *HP* VI, 7.3.

ence when talking about the environment and the plant or animal species we encounter.[44] We must admit that, despite the scholastic remark alluded to above, there is nothing specifically "aetolian" in the plants listed by Nicander in our passage.

I do not wish to say that the garden Nicander instructs us to sow and plant is entirely unreal. However, it is conceived as a collection of species, independently from their place in any real or imaginary mapping. The reader soon feels as if they are leafing through a botanical garden or nursery catalogue. This, in fact, contributes to making the list itself more appropriate for an ornamental garden than for a vegetable or even medicinal garden. We are thus closer to the Florilegium than to a Greek or Mediterranean Flora. And just as the Florilegium tends to become a work of art in its own right, out-drawing, as it were, the garden itself, so too does the poem, by playing with words and their associations, transcend the spatial limits of the garden and creates a new vision – or *regard* – for the imagination of the gardening reader.

Meleager's text (*Palatine Anthology*, IV.1), to which I am now coming, is not giving instructions for the growing of coronary plants, it *is* the garland itself. A garland (*stephanos*, στέφανος in Greek) is a plaiting of flowers one may wear as a head-dress or sometimes as a necklace. The Greeks of Antiquity loved flower garlands, at least since Anacreon and the archaic period,[45] and the Hellenistic period further developed this tendency. The garlands or crowns are associated with feasts, whether it is after victories in various competitions, during religious feast-days or on the occasion of various parties. Flower garlands, at least as much as flowers in vases or any other kind of decorative use of flowers, are the main use of flowers as ornament, so that at least from the Hellenistic period onwards, the Greek word for coronary flowers (*stephanōtika*, στεφανωτικά or *stephanōmatika*, στεφανωματικά) became equivalent to our modern concept of "ornamental" flowers.[46]

In the poem that introduces Meleager's *Garland*, each poet (or at least the main poets of whom Epigrams have been chosen in the selection) is associated with and symbolized by a flower. The sum of all these "flowers" makes up a kind of braiding which deserves to be called "garland". Lots of reasons have contributed to this association: garlands and poetry are both linked with banqueting, especially (during the Hellenistic period) epigrammatic poetry. Garlands are also a hint that the poet wishes to be victorious in poetry competitions, to be crowned in either an official or an informal meeting. And garlands (and flowers) are symbols

[44] At least since the publication by Gilbert White, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* (London: T. Bensley, for B. White and Son, 1789).

[45] See for ex. frg. 51 and 65 *PMG* (twice in a sympotic context). The hellenistic *Anacreontea* have obviouly recognised the garland as a typical feature of Anacreon's poetry, and they use the word frequently. An isolated mention of head-dresses (*stephanas*, στεφάνας in the feminine) for girls is made in *Il.* XVIII, 597, but does not necessarily refer to flower-garlands.

[46] This is particularly the case in Athenaeus great compilation, written at the turn of the 2nd/3rd century of our era.

of luxury. They are, in fact, the ornament *par excellence*. Maybe there is still one more reason: poets reading or listening to their predecessors' works have been compared with bees travelling from one flower to the other in order to collect honey (or more precisely the nectar out of which they make honey).[47] From one metaphor to the other, the passage was easy.

Since our passage is in fact a long metaphor – or even a string of comparisons –, it should be obvious that Meleager's list is not a botanist's list. Ancient science, in any event, did not produce anything like our modern taxonomies. And Meleager's plant names, like Nicander's, may well have been chosen not for their precision, but for their poetical quality. One may ask, for example, if "Sikelides' flowers, which grow in the wind",[48] is not a kind of "double kenning": Sikelides is obviously Asklepiades, following an usage which the *Scholia in Theocritum* have made well known.[49] But "the flowers that grow in the wind" could well be anemones, a flower whose Greek name (*anemōne*, ἀνεμώνη) means "flowers of the wind". Another example is the plant known as *buphthalmon* (βούφθαλμον), which Meleager, by re-motivating the compound noun, calls *omma boos* (ὄμμα βοός), "ox eye". And one may even surmise that some of the species mentioned do not represent real flowers at all: I am thinking in particular of "Plato's golden bough".[50]

On top of that, the list does not look exhaustive[51] – it looks decidedly haphazard. It has more flowers than any real garland would ever contain. Still, one does not understand what limits its scope or extent, unless the limit has to do with the number of authors; but in fact, the list of authors is not complete either, since it ends with the remark "and many other young shoots, newly engraved by other poets".[52]

Several other elements come as surprises in Meleager's list. One would have expected to come across herbaceous plants mainly, or at least plants likely to bend easily (so as to be able to be braided into a garland). In fact, several species show up that it would not be very easy to make into a garland, like the plane-tree (l. 17), or Simias pear-tree (l. 30), not to mention an apple "taken from Diotimos' branches"[53] – this would indeed imply a very strong garland! But maybe the ancient craftsmen were defter than one would think. Some species also cause

[47] For a nearly complete overview, see Jan H. Waszink, *Biene und Honig als Symbol des Dichters und der Dichtung in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1974). The image is familiar to English speaking readers because of its use in Jonathan Swift's *Battle of the Books* (1704), where the Bee, representing Ancient poets, takes "sweetness and light" from the flowers of Nature.

[48] Σικελίδεώ τ' ἀνέμοις ἄνθεα φυόμενα (l. 46).

[49] *Σ ad Thcr*. 7, 21b & 40a.

[50] "The forever golden bough of the divine Plato" (χρύσειον ἀεὶ θείοιο Πλάτωνος / κλῶνα, l. 47–48).

[51] Exhaustivity is of course by itself not a criterion of scientific writing, and even biologists may write incomplete lists: we may think of Geoffrey Taylor, *Some British Beetles* (Middlesex: Penguin Bks, 1948).

[52] ἄλλων τ' ἔρνεα πολλὰ νεόγραφα (l. 55).

[53] καὶ γλυκύμηλον ἀπ' ἀκρεμόνων Διοτίμου (l. 27).

us to wonder if their very smell should not have prevented them from being chosen, like terebinth (l. 30), but then again, tastes and olfaction, too, have a history of their own.

There is also the problem of the seemingly arbitrary comparison between poets and flowers. Of course one might think that the rose, a flower associated with love in Hellenistic poetry,[54] is a fitting metaphor for Sappho's poetry (l. 6), a poet with the reputation of a lover.[55] Or that myrtle, sweet and astringent at the same time, becomes Callimachus, whose verses are sometimes harsh (l. 21–22). But to come back to roses, it might have seemed even more natural to think of Nossis in connection with that flower, since an epigram by her,[56] chosen by Meleager himself for the *Garland*, claims that her poetry is associated with roses and love, in a way that reminds us of Meleager's verses (l. 9–10) in the prefatory list we are now reading: but Meleager chooses the iris instead. As often, Hellenistic poets play hide and seek with the expectations of their readers.

Close to the beginning of Meleager's piece, Anyte and Moero are introduced as two flowers which the Greek language often does not distinguish: "weaving together many lilies (*krina*) of Anyte, many lilies (*leiria*) of Moer".[57]

There are obviously many monocotyledonous bulbs in the Mediterranean flora that could be called "lilies" – though narcissus, for one, is already used in the next verse (l. 7, Melanippides). But in accordance with what we have already said, it is tempting to read here an allusion to a gloss well known in Antiquity for its difficult ambiguity: Dioscorides underscores the ambiguity of *leirion* (λείριον),[58] and Nicander himself had alluded to it in the fragment mentioned above: "Plants which some among the poets name *krina*, others *leiria*".[59]

It would seem that the two poets Anyte and Moero, often mentioned together (for example in an epigram by Antipater Thessalonicensis, *AP* IX, 26), are in fact "of the same flower". Those games on words and plant-names are reminiscent of the way Hellenistic poets love to play with Homeric *hapax legomena*.[60]

The sheer number of flowers described in the Garland, as well as the difference in their flowering seasons,[61] imply that those prefatory verses should be seen as a literary exercise rath-

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[54] One only needs to leaf through book 5 of the *Palatine Anthology* (the book which collects the erotic epigrams) to notice that roses (and *rose-buttocks* and *rosy skin* and so on) are rather frequent.

[55] Sappho was already in Hellenistic times believed to have been a passionate lover, cf. for example the legend of her love for Phaon and her *katapontismos* from the cliff in Leucadia/Lefkada, mentioned in a comedy of Menander and quoted by Str., X, 2.9. Sappho herself occasionally mentions the rose (frg. 55 and 96): the flower is called *brodon* (βρόδον) with initial digamma in the Lesbian dialect.

[56] *AP* V, 170.

[57] πολλὰ μὲν ἐμπλέξας Ἀνύτης κρίνα, πολλὰ δὲ Μοιροῦς / λείρια (l. 5–6).

[58] Dsc., *MM* III, 102.

[59] ἃ κρίνα, λείρια δ' ἄλλοι ἐπιφθέγγονται ἀοιδῶν (l. 27).

[60] Meleager maybe has in common with another passage by Nicander a very rare form of the name for *mint* in Greek: the non-diminutive *sisymbron* (σίσυμβρον) (Meleager l. 19 in our passage, Nic. *Ther*. 896). But the quantity of the initial iota (short in Meleager, long in Nicander) blurs the issue.

[61] We are reminded of the objection made by Theocritus *Cyclops* to himself (Theoc., *Idylls* XI, 58) when he dreams of the bouquet he wishes to offer to his lover.

er than as the offering of a real garland to Meleager's dedicatee. Many readers did find Meleager's programmatic text rather artificial.[62]

It did nonetheless enjoy a certain popularity: it served as a model for the introductory poem of the *Garland* of Philip (*AP* IV, 2),[63] a little more than a century later; this last poem, even more than Meleager's, sounds very artificial, with its list of thirteen flowers unpacked in the space of seven verses, and its casual conclusion: "as to other poets, compare them to whichever newly grown flowers you wish"[64] – one notices that if something attracted Philip in Meleager's poem, it was not its realism. The general idea of a comparison between flowers and poetry becomes part of the literary idiom with Diogenianos' *anthologion* (ἀνθολόγιον), usually dated to Hadrian's reign,[65] and a prelude to what we now find in the various modern European languages.

How did our poets choose their flowers? Whatever the artificial character of the piece, which we have just underlined, the species mentioned surely meant something to the minds of the readers or listeners. The number of species is limited (47 for Meleager, about 30 for Nicander), but all of them have a kind of ethnobotanical importance in the Greek world, whether they are species grown in Greece proper or in the Hellenic world during the Hellenistic period, or plants known to the Greeks for various reasons.

Let us come back once more briefly to the subject of exotic species. Be it in Ancient Syria, where Meleager was born, or in Anatolia where Nicander lived, or in a literary Greece where either poet might fictitiously place his bunch of flowers, some species mentioned do seem exotic. The *amōmon*, ἄμωμον (Meleager, l. 23), which is likely to have been a *Zingiberacea* from the Indian sub-continent (maybe our cardamon), has been known in Greece at least since Theophrastus. But when we read the passage where it appears, we wonder again whether the word is there only to make a word-play with the quality attributed to the poet alluded to, Dioscorides,[66] whose name is replaced by a transparent kenning: "And the faultless *cardamon* within the artists' world, the poet whose name comes from Zeus' twins"[67] (the translation tries to convey the fact that *amōmon* means at the same time "cardamon" and "faultless").

Such a game would be quite Alexandrian. A few verses further on, could Nikainetos, a poet

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[62] Gow and Page, *The Greek Anthology*, 596: "A hopeless task… tedious". Henri Ouvré, *Méléagre de Gadara* (PhD diss., Paris, 1894), 132–133 and 178 studies but cursorily the prefatory poem, but some of his general judgements on Meleager concur with Gow's: "On s'en consolerait aisément si elles étaient authentiques, mais il y a bien des fleurs artificielles dans la *Couronne*" (on Meleager's choice of epigrams. Ibid., 79), and "Il y a de la stérilité dans cette abondance […] Sans même y prendre garde nous rapprochons les images qui passent devant nous, et nous les classons dans notre mémoire comme les papillons d'une vitrine" (ibid., 196).

[63] Andrew S.F. Gow and Denys L. Page, *The Greek Anthology II: The Garland of Philip and some Contemporary Epigrams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

[64] τοὺς δὲ περισσούς / εἴκασον οἷς ἐθέλεις ἄνθεσιν ἀρτιφύτοις.

[65] See Hans Gärtner, "Diogenianos" (2), in *Kleiner Pauly*, vol. 2, col. 48–49.

[66] The Hellenistic poet has nothing to do with the doctor of the same name, author of the *MM*.

[67] ἰδ' ἐν Μούσηισιν ἄμωμον, / ὃς Διὸς ἐκ κούρων ἔσχεν ἐπωνυμίην (l. 23–24).

from Abdera, be compared to myrrh shoots (*smyrnaious te kladous*, σμυρναίους τε κλάδους, l. 29)? This would be surprising, since myrrh, a common import product, was probably known to most Greeks only as resin. But Theophrastus (IV, 4, 12) does seem to have heard of a kindred member of the *Burseraceae*-family as an actual tree, and Dioscorides (somewhat later than Meleager, though) does describe the plant correctly as "a spiny tree growing in Arabia".[68]

But I do not think that exotic plants and their identification is what is at stake here. The presence of exotic plants is important mainly because it helps us to put into perspective the real or spatially determined character of the flower-lists we are dealing with.

Maybe we would like the catalogues we are reading to correspond to a kind of journey along a particular route, be it real or imaginary, where the poet's memory would have planted, so to speak, the flowers quoted, which he could then pick one after the other, on his wandering tour in the hills around his city in Greece or Greek-speaking Asia. This would be in accordance with the word *anthology* which we mentioned earlier (i.e. flower-picking), and we would remember the fresco found in Stabia, picturing, purportedly, the goddess Flora (now in Naples' Archeological Museum: Fig. 1), and its main character leisurely walking along and picking flowers for her bouquet at the same time. While acknowledging the interest of numerous studies linking human memory with our feeling of the space around us,[69] it is important to insist that this is not what we have here. Two of Meleager's poets, Posidippos and Hedylos, are called "wild flowers of the ploughed earth": while "wild" might indeed suggest the vast spaces of the rural hinterland, we rather focus on "ploughed earth". The plants of both our lists are in fact collected because they are *garden* or *cultivated* plants. They have been acclimatized for a long time, they have been transported and sold, at times, through a kind of early small-scale globalization.

About ten species are common to both our lists (Nicander and Meleager).[70] They are species which their very ordinary character, I might venture to say, makes extraordinary, and that will be found again and again all along the history of (literature working on) gardens.[71] These

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[68] We might add that Dsc., *MM* I, 65 mentions a tree growing in Boeotia with the same name, and that Thph., *HP* IX, 1.4 says that the alexander plant (*Smyrnium olusatrum* L.) or a resin made from it, was sometimes confused with myrrh.

[69] We think of Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge & Kcgan Paul, 1966); but also of Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), on the links between walking, memory and vocabulary.

[70] A tentative list: *bouphthalmon* or *omma boos* (βούφθαλμον or ὄμμα βοός) [some kind of *Asteracea*]; *herpyllon* or *herpyllos* (ἕρπυλλον or ἕρπυλλος) [creeping thyme]; *ia* (ἴα) [violets or wallflowers or both]; *iris* (ἶρις) [iris]; *kissos* (κισσός) [ivy]; *krina* or *leiria* (κρίνα or λείρια) [lilies]; *krokos* (κρόκος) [saffron]; *kypros* (κύπρος) [henna]; *lychnis* (λυχνίς) [rose campion]; *rhoda* (ῥόδα) [rose]; *sisymbrion* or *sisymbron* (σισύμβριον or σίσυμβρον) [mint]; *hyakinthos* (ὑάκινθος) [hyacinth]. *Anthemion* (ἀνθέμιον) in Meleager is probably not very different from *anthemis* (ἀνθεμίς) in Nicander (they would both belong to the *Asteraceae*-family anyway).

[71] Most are found again in *Gp*. XI, whose subject is given as follows by the Epitomator: τὰ στεφανωματικὰ τῶν δένδρων, καὶ τὰ ἀείφυλλα καὶ φυτείαν ῥόδων καὶ κρίνων καὶ ἴων καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν εὐωδῶν ἀνθέων. "Trees used as

Fig. 1. Fresco from Stabia (Villa di Arianna), picturing, purportedly, the goddess Flora. 38x32 cm. Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. © Wikimedia Commons.

stars are particularly singled out into the limelight at the beginning of Meleager's poem,[72] as if he wished to celebrate them before turning to the rarities, or to plants that have a more dubious claim as coronary flowers. The lexicographer Pollux, at the beginning of the 2nd century of our era, gives a quite similar list when he provides a general list of flowers (I, 229): "Roses, lilies, violets, saffron, lotos, daffodil, hyacinth, mullein, mint, creeping thyme, anemones".[73] A second list of Pollux specifically enumerates coronary flowers (VI, 106): "In garlands: roses, violets, lilies, mint, anemones, creeping thyme, saffron, hyacinth, immortelle, day-lily, elecampane, mullein, chervil, daffodil, sweet yellow clover, marguerite, *parthénis*".[74]

In those various lists, we find both well-known luxury flowers and (equally well known) commonplace plants. When reading a treatise like Dioscorides' *De materia medica*, which is in a way quite close to a modern flora, inasmuch as it is a "super-list" of plants[75] (and animals and stones), we might ask what plants he uses as a basis for comparing unknown plants and making them recognizable. The plants used in comparisons are often the same, and this allows us to constitute a group of well-known plants, which everybody is supposed to know.[76] Most of the plants in this list are food plants, as could have been expected: olives, purslane, lentils, rue... were very often found on the dinner table. But within the list, we also find coronary plants, like ivy, lilies, and a *phlomos* (φλόμος) which is probably not very different from Nicander's *thryallis*, a mullein (genus *Verbascum*). Those plants are everyday plants: they grow spontaneously around the Mediterranean, but they can *also* be cultivated, especially with regard to large-scale banqueting as it was often staged in Greece (lots of garlands needed!).

We can consider small-scale importations for gardens, such as when creeping thyme (*herpyllon*, ἕρπυλλον) from Mount Hymettos was transplanted into Athenian gardens to be grown for ready use.[77] However, plants were already being cultivated by highly specialised farmers during the Hellenistic period. Saffron, mentioned by both of our poets, was already exported from Cyrenaica at the time of Theophrastus,[78] as were roses, it seems.[79]

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coronary plants; plants with evergreen leaves; planting roses, lilies and violets, and other sweet-smelling flowers".

[72] The poem is 58 verses long. Of the 12 flowers quoted above, 10 come before l. 23.

[73] ῥόδα, κρίνα, ἴα, κρόκος, λωτός, νάρκισσος, ὑάκινθος, θρυαλλίς, σισυμβρία, ἕρπυλλον, ἀνεμῶναι.

[74] τὰ δ' ἐν τοῖς στεφάνοις ἄνθη ῥόδα, ἴα, κρίνα, σισύμβρια, ἀνεμῶναι, ἕρπυλλος, κρόκος, ὑάκινθος, ἑλίχρυσος, ἡμεροκαλλές, ἑλένειον, θρυαλλίς, ἀνθρίσκος, νάρκισσος, μελίλωτον, ἀνθεμίς, παρθενίς. As I warned before, my purpose is not so much, for such long lists where hardly any context is given, to *translate*, as to give a general taste of what the *bunch* is like.

[75] Dioscorides' treatise lists more than 600 species of plants.

[76] Here is the list of the plants quoted more than seven times in comparisons in Dsc., *MM*: olive-tree, ivy, lentil, rue, dill, fennel, lily, coriander, mullein, purslane, lettuce, oregano. The plant which I have translated as mullein, *phlomos* (φλόμος), is probably quite similar to Nicander's *thryallis* (θρυαλλίς: same genus).

[77] Thphr., *HP* VI, 7.2.

[78] Ibid., IV, 3.1.

[79] Ibid., VI, 6.5.

Saffron might have been used as a condiment, but most probably the two uses (culinary and "coronary" or aesthetic)[80] were intertwined. Roses make a very interesting case: Theophrastus tells us that wild roses from the region of Philippi (northern Greece), known for the density of their petals, were transplanted in order to become cultivated.[81] And we know that Harpalos had vainly tried to acclimate ivy in the pleasure-parks (the *paradeisois*, παραδείσοις) of Babylon.[82]

In the same vein, we must remember that the advice given in Theophrastus' *De odoribus* for the preparation of perfumes points to a booming industry rather than to small local craftsmen – I am thinking for example of the preparation of rose and henna oils with the addition of exotic spices (*arōmata*, ἀρώματα). It would be natural to think that the production of coronary plants followed a similar course, and that they were cultivated rather than picked in the wild.[83]

It may seem incongruous to compare living wild plants to plant names in a list. But plants in a list do have something in common with *cultivated* plants. They appear each in its place in the list, neatly separated, like rows in a nursery.[84] On the contrary, wild plants growing in woods or *phrygana* are all mixed together, competing as it were in a confused struggle to define the facies of the plant community. The difference lies not so much in numbers as in organisation. The specific relationship that human beings and plants develop with the emergence of (agri-)culture ultimately leads to the appearance of the catalogue.

What I have wanted to show when bringing together those lists was that there is a kind of logic to Meleager's collection, at least as far as the choice of species is concerned. Like Nicander's, this list is a best-of of ornamental (garden) plants. These two lists, because of their abundance, because of their very form as lists in poems, are witnesses to a peculiar historical moment within garden history, when the Greeks, influenced by Eastern civilisations and specifically by Persians, have made their own garden culture much richer and deeper.[85] In the same period (that is, after Alexander), their written culture was experiencing a similar movement of expansion.

There is another, more ancient plant list in poetry, of which I have not spoken yet: it is

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[80] At the time of Dioscorides (*MM* I, 26.1) a distinction is made between medicinal uses of the saffron plant, condimentary uses, and tinctorial uses. No mention of "coronary" uses is made for saffron in *Materia Medica* (mentions of coronary uses are seldom found there, being somewhat alien to the subject of the treatise, though we saw one before concerning rosemary: *libanōtis*, λιβανωτίς).

[81] Thphr., *HP* VI, 6.4.

[82] Ibid., IV, 4.1.

[83] For the Roman side of those semi-industrial flower fields, the main documents are conveniently gathered by Jack Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 58.

[84] The Greek word *stichos* (στίχος) can mean a verse or *line* of poetry or a *row* of trees in an orchard.

[85] On the "culture of flowers" in the Ancient Mediterranean Sea before the Greeks, André Wiese and Christiane Jacquat, *Blumenreich. Wiedergeburt in Pharaongräbern, Katalog der Austellung des Antikenmuseum Basel, Sept. 2014–Febr. 2015* (Basel: Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, 2014), is a must-read.

a fragment of Cratinos' comedy, *Malthakoi* (Μαλθακοί):[86] "I am covering my head with all kinds of flowers, daffodils, roses, lilies, larkspurs, wallflowers, and then mint, the spring flowers of the anemones, creeping thyme, saffron, hyacinths, branches of immortelle, vine and the beloved day-lily †[87] and my head is in the shade of the sweet yellow clover, always standing guard, and alfalfa came all on its own from Medon".[88]

The list as it stands is a mere accumulation with hardly any embellishment, in accordance with the taste of the Old Comedy (one thinks of the *Kōmos* at the end of Aristophanes' comedies, wildly piled with various foodstuffs). It already contains quite a few of the coronary flowers we meet later on. It gives, in a way, a first glimpse into a literary phenomenon of great promise. But when the lists concur with each other to outline for us something like a nursery catalogue, we are not merely on the track of *literary* tastes anymore. To become aware of such evolutions in the relationships between plants and human beings, we must take the plants into account not so much as individual species, but as groups or series, we must try and understand how such series are imagined and repeated, so that we may, for example, get a better grip of such a category as "coronary plants".

All this brings me to a conclusion that goes against the prevailing opinion, to which I have already alluded: according to some, Meleager's (and Nicander's) lists are examples of a highly artificial kind of poetry, without any connection with the world around them. On the contrary, I think that this poetry, whatever its defects, is very much in harmony with human beings' efforts to (re-)create and inhabit the world. Both poems actually tell us something about nature recreated as a garden, but which is nonetheless real, and they show it to us, in their way, provided we listen to the meaning of their collections. They are quite coherent, in that they both put into words a fashion which surely was not only literary, but also horticultural, and their words are rather similar, whatever their overall differences (Meleager's piece being much more metaphorical than Nicander's).

Gardens and the so-called *locus amoenus* have often been seen as the ideal scenery for love (because of Theocritean idylls particularly). Hellenistic poetry, on the other hand, is seen as poetry for banquets and/or libraries. With the help of Nicander and Meleager, we have wanted to highlight here that gardens are also a place for (Hellenistic) poetry, and that gardens do not only offer shade – they also offer fascinating collections of words, and they are (also) a (real) place where you may discuss, for example, all the complexities of grafting and the

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[86] Quoted by Ath., XV, 685bc = Kassel and Austin, *PCG IV*, Cratinus 105 (p. 174). The title, likely to have been derogatory or mocking, could be translated as "the pansies" or maybe "the limp-wristed".

[87] One of the verses of the passage is corrupt and apparently beyond repair.

[88] παντοίοις γε μὴν κεφαλὴν ἀνθέμοις ἐρέπτομαι, / λειρίοις ῥόδοις κρίνεσιν κοσμοσανδάλοις ἴοις / καὶ σισυμβρίοις ἀνεμωνῶν κάλυξί τ' ἠριναῖς / ἐρπύλλῳ κρόκοις ὑακίνθοις ἑλιχρύσου κλάδοις / οἰνάνθῃσιν ἡμεροκαλλεῖ τε τῷ φιλουμένῳ, / † ἀνθρυσκισσου φόβῃ † / / τῷ τ' ἀειφρούρῳ μελιλώτῳ κάρα πυκάζομαι / καὶ <...> κύτισος αὐτόματος παρὰ Μέδοντος ἔρχεται.

*problēmata* (προβλήματα) pertaining to it, as Plutarchus would tell us much later: "Soclaros was treating us in the gardens circled by the Cephisos, and showed us trees that had been made motley by what they call grafting".[89]

Nicander's poetry and Meleager's laborious list both hint at such idyllic possibilities.

[89] Σώκλαρος ἑστιῶν ἡμᾶς ἐν κήποις ὑπὸ τοῦ Κηφισοῦ ποταμοῦ περιρρεομένοις ἐπεδείκνυτο δένδρα παντοδαπῶς πεποικιλμένα τοῖς λεγομένοις ἐνοφθαλμισμοῖς. Plu., *Quaestiones convivales* II, 6 (640b).