Lecture 18
Roman Agricultural History

View from the Tower of Mercury on the Pompeii city wall looking down the Via di Mercurio toward the forum
History of Horticulture: Lecture 18

Carthage
Founded 814 BCE in North Africa
Result of Phoenician expansion
North African city-state opposite Sicily
Mago, 350 BCE, Father of Agriculture
Agricultural author wrote a 28 volume work in Punic,
A language close to Hebrew.
Roman Senate ordered the translation of Mago upon the fall of
Carthage despite violent enmity between states.

One who has bought land should sell his town house so that he will
have no desire to worship the households of the city rather than
those of the country; the man who takes great delight in his city
residence will have no need of a country estate.

Quotation from Columella after Mago

Carthage

Hannibal

Capitoline Museums
Hall of Hannibal
Jacopo Ripanda (attr.)
Hannibal in Italy
Fresco
Beginning of 16th century

Hannibal

Roman History

700 BCE  Origin from Greek Expansion
640–520  Etruscan civilization
509      Roman Republic
264–261  Punic wars between Carthage and Rome
Roman Culture
Debt to Greek, Egyptian, and Babylonian Science and Esthetics
Roman expansion due to technology and organization
Agricultural Technology
  Irrigation
  Grafting
  Viticulture and Enology
  Wide knowledge of fruit culture, pulses, wheat
  Legume rotation
  Fertility appraisals
  Cold storage of fruit
  Specularia—prototype greenhouse using mica
  Olive oil for cooking and light

Ornamental Horticulture
Hortus (gardens)
Villa urbana
Villa rustica, little place in the country
Formal gardens of wealthy
Garden elements
  Frescoed walls, statuary, fountains trellises, pergolas,
  flower boxes, shaded walks, terraces, topiary

Getty Museum reconstruction of the Villa of the Papyri. Large peristyle garden.
Peristyle garden. House of the Little Fountain.

Peristyle garden. House of Venus Marina.

Vine-covered triclinium in the garden of the House of the Ephebe.
Today glass protects Egyptian paintings on the triclinium.
Pedestal in pool, Pompeii

The garden scene of which this is a part ran around all four walls. In the foreground of the fresco a simple wooden lattice fence encloses a green walk; a more complex fence with three repeated patterns surrounds the flowers, shrubs and fruit trees. (Late 1st century BCE) An Illustrated History of Gardening. Huxley, 1978

The garden room in the Empress Livia’s Roman villa was subterranean—a cool place of escape in hot summer.

Garden painting. House of Venus Marina.
Garden paintings in room off the peristyle. House of the Fruit Orchard. Detail of painting on east wall.


Garden painting on rear wall of small raised garden.


The leaf, bud, blossom, and seedpod of the Indian lotus are accurately portrayed.

The mongoose, hippopotamus, Egyptian cobra, sheldrake and songbirds are also pictured.

Isis ceremony
Painting from Herculaneum, now in Naples Museum.

Plums and quince in glass bowl. Wall painting in room 23.
Villa at Torre Annunziata.

Basket of figs. Wall painting in triclinium.
Villa at Torre Annunziata.
Fruit in a glass bowl

Source: Hyams.

Excavation showing drainage for Roman gardens, Fishbourne

Source: Hyams.
Cupids gathering grapes from vines supported by trees

Cupids as wine dealers. House of the Vettii

Reconstructed wine press. Villa of the Mysteries.
Cupids and psyches as flower dealers.
Drawing of a painting, now longer in existence, which was in the macellum at Pompeii.

Wild rose on pedicels
Source: Singer.

Detail of marble sculpture at entrance of the Eumachia. Acanthus pattern with birds, snail, rabbit, and bee.
First Use of Weed control

In the last Punic war Carthage was destroyed along with its agriculture.

*Building and walls were razed to the ground; the plough passed over the site, and salt was sown in the furrow made…A solemn curse was pronounced that neither house, nor crops, should ever rise again.*

B.B. Hallward. The Siege of Carthage. Cambridge Ancient History Vol VIII

Pest Control in Classical Greece and Rome

Religious Practices
Based on concept that operations of husbandry, like war, were in the hands of the gods.
12 Priests of the Field, yearly sacrifice to Lares
Godesses: Flora, Ceres
Gods: Segesta and Robigus (rust and mildew)
Festival of Robigalia

Folk Magic
Mildew control by laurel
Millet diseases controlled by carrying and burying a toad
Power of virgins and menstrual blood
Fungal Disease Control (rust and smut)
(unclear if fungal signs was cause or results of disease)
Use of animal, vegetable and mineral products
Juice of house leek
Amurca
Wine and ashes
Smoke
Blood, fat, and oil (pruning knives)
Extracts of bitter lupin and wild cucumber

Non-insect Pest Control
(e.g. mice, moles, rats, weasels, bats, scorpions, and snakes)
Bait and poisons included absinthe, asafoetida, aromatic plants, olive oil, amurca, bitumen, sulfur, burning sandarach (an arsenical), hellebore, hyocynus, hemlock, and wild cucumber (Ecballium elaterium)