**BOOK NOTES**


Garden history is a young field, and like all adolescents it is struggling to free itself from familial ties, in this case the disciplines of art history and literary theory. Chambers, a professor of English at the University of Toronto, moves the field of garden history beyond the social history of patrons and the documentation of careers of designers to an approach in which plants and planters—gardener, nurseryman, and amateur botanist-owner alike—take center stage. He focuses on the period from the middle of the seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth, when Stowe, Stourhead, Chiswick, and Rousham, the great icons of the English landscape garden, were being developed. Chambers’ descriptions of the processes and materials of gardening are greatly enhanced by his familiarity with the botanical and horticultural history of the period. This was an era of extensive plant exploration and importation combined with the profound scientific contribution of Linnaeus’ elaboration of the principles of taxonomy.

The opening essay, “The Patriots of Horticulture,” is an excellent stand-alone commentary on English garden theory and its relationship to classical ideas of husbandry. Chambers identifies Virgil’s Georgics as the aesthetic model for this new landscape. From this text he extracts classical concepts of arcadia, including the idea of rural withdrawal, the integration of farming and gardening (“the unity of beauty with profit and use with pleasure”), and the alliance of science and imagination in our understanding of nature.

Chambers also cites the influence of John Evelyn’s *Silva* (1664) and *Dendrologia* (1706) on a new generation of estate builders. Evelyn’s writings encouraged a massive replanting of English woodlands devastated by war. His motivation has been described as economic or technical, but the *Silva* had the unexpected effect of promoting the great wealth of trees available to the British gardener, not least the newly imported and highly valued North American species. His book inspired the planting of thousands of acres of both native and imported species, an effect that in turn required the development of new methods of transportation, planting, nursery management, and propagation.

Chambers examines the writings of Stephen Switzer, Lord Shaftesbury, and others for their ideas about appropriateness in plantings in a world of expanding options. Chambers also focuses in detail on the work of Lord Petre at Thorndon Hall, his estate in Essex. Petre’s plans included massive tree-planting schemes that are described as combining beauty with botany: “The landscape and the greenhouse are one continuum.”

Chambers’ book is not unique in its focus on plants and planting techniques. Claudia Lazzaro, in her recent book, *The Italian Renaissance Garden: From the Convention of Planting, Design and Ornament to the Grand Gardens of Sixteenth Century Italy* (Yale University Press, 1990), places great emphasis on the contribution of plants to the architectural character of the Italian garden. She describes specific plants and their treatment as features in a larger composition. In her epilogue, she reflects on the transformation of these gardens over the years due to the maturation of plants and the changes in maintenance that have been dictated by changing tastes. This is an area all too often neglected by historians and one that needs far more work to support responsible efforts in present-day garden restoration projects.

Landscape historians John Dixon Hunt and
Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn have recommended that garden history reach out beyond “high culture” to “lost habits of mind” to illuminate subjects that have been relegated to the margins. Both Chambers and Lazzaro are to be commended for bypassing a traditional academic approach and revealing the rich history of the planting process, a blend of craft, science, and technology.

Phyllis Andersen

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For those interested in historic landscapes The Greek Plant World is a must. The author has painstakingly collected all references to plants in the writings of ancient Greeks—as well as references in works about the ancient Greeks—and assembled them in highly coherent and readable fashion. An excellent index makes it easy to track down what Homer, Herodotus, Plato, or Dioscorides had to say about a particular plant.

It would be a great book to read before visiting Greece, given that most of the plants covered are illustrated in sharp color photographs and are still growing there today. The armchair traveler, too, will find interest in its portraits of daily life in ancient Greece.

In a related vein, it is worth noting the recent publication of the final two volumes of Theophrastus’ great work, the two-thousand-year-old De Causis Plantarum. Remarkably, this is the first publication of Books III through VI in English. (Volume I, encompassing Books I and II, was published in 1976 as Loeb Library no. 471.)

Theophrastus, born around 370 BC, is the author of the most important botanical works that have survived from classical antiquity. He was in turn a student, collaborator, and successor of Aristotle at the Lyceum. Like his predecessor, he was interested in all aspects of human knowledge and experience, especially natural science. His writings on plants form a counterpoint to Aristotle’s zoological works. Books II and IV of De Causis Plantarum covers techniques of cultivation and agricultural methods in ancient Greece, while Books V and VI take up plant breeding, diseases and other causes of death, and distinctive flavors and odors.

For those interested in Theophrastus, the publication of these long-awaited books is cause for celebration. After two thousand years, it might even be called the publishing event of a lifetime.

Peter Del Tredici