



## The Roman rose. An anthropological approach

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### 1. Introduction

Sources prove that the rose was unknown to the inhabitants of the Italian peninsula from the beginning of the first millennium BC all the way to the third century BC, and the Latin name of the plant itself derives from the Greek name. The plant and its everyday and symbolic use appeared as a result of cultural contact, a gift, as it were, of Greek civilization. It appears certain that the plant came to the peninsula not as a result of direct selection, but rather in the company of other cultural items, and in time it became increasingly valued both from a cultic/sacred point of view as well as in terms of hygiene, medicine and nutrition.

Considerable material evidence indicates the decline of the old Central Italian heritage and the rise of the Hellenic influence. Contemporary Greek manners of expression, the use of garlands and floral strings as decoration, and the appearance of rosettes in floral motifs all entered layers of Roman society with more open attitudes. The *Sarcophagus of Cornelius Scipio Barbatus* (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, Vatican Museum, Rome) is one of the earliest examples of this mixing of traditions. In contrast to the general custom of burial by cremation, the Scipios placed their deceased in coffins, as did the Etruscans, but in place of the Etruscan bed- or house-shaped sarcophagus they undertook an imitation of a Greek altar. Decorated with elements of Doric and Ionian architecture, the Sarcophagus of Cornelius Scipio Barbatus includes a row of rosettes with single and double layers of petals, some of which contain outward-stretching cupped leaves among the petals. These are customarily cited to explain the proximity and transitional forms of the rosettes and rose. As with the Greeks, the meaning of these decorations is double. The rose symbolizes the world of the gods, but it also has the hygienic function of removing odor.

Thus, previously indirect Greek influence became direct in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, when the Romans annexed the Southern Italian colonies of Tarentum and Rhegion. After the war Greek slaves taught the language and other subjects in schools, whereby new Greek words entered the Latin, and works of Greek literature, philosophy and science, and the processes and devices of Greek everyday life became recognized and used. Influenced by Greek New Comedy, Roman playwrights wrote works retaining the Greek environment and characters, but with a somewhat Romanized plot – the presentation of these signified entertainment and the introduction of Hellenic culture to the masses. References to the rose are also found in linguistic influences. But even more importantly, verbal and written effects transmitted the philosophical system where the rose was assigned a specific function in the cosmology based on the principle of the four elements.

Which layer of Roman society was it that received this influence? And which cultural pattern was it that primarily transmitted rose symbols?

The Roman elite were the most susceptible to Hellenic influences in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC. Greek friendship also appeared at the state level. Some Greek cities entered accords with Rome to ensure their internal autonomy, while others were declared by Rome to be unilaterally free (196 BC).

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In 167 BC Rome abolished the kingdom of Macedonia, and in 148 BC made it a Roman province. In 133 BC, with the extinction of the dynastic branch of the Kingdom of Pergamon, Asia Minor became a Roman province in accordance with the king's last will. The Greeks themselves also gave numerous signs of Roman friendship; for example, both peoples took part in the honoring of the Delphic Apollo. Many Greek gods were identified with Roman deities with similar qualities; one of the most important was Venus *qua* Aphrodite, with a very close association with the rose.

Oddly enough, Roman conquests contributed to the increased presence of Greek material culture in Italy: one of the forms of adoption of the magic/religious practices of conquered enemies was the relocation of the statues of their gods from occupied regions to Rome. With the accumulation in Italy of art objects and treasures from the intellectual centers of Magna Graecia, the independence of local decorative forms was replaced by a Mediterranean universality of shared taste. Objects on view in public squares, looted treasures displayed in triumphal parades, and figural depictions on statues and architecture all served to popularize and maintain the artistic vocabulary of the Empire, which was Latinized and incorporated into later Roman works. Architecture, painting, and sculpture (especially reliefs) offered an ornamental presence for rose depictions.

The Roman state's idea of service became more humane under Greek influence, at the same time that it offered models for Roman mythology, literature, philosophy and practice: although this also led to anti-Greek sentiment, society was unwilling to give up Greek achievements and knowledge, or their slaves. Some Roman authors wrote in Greek: Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus in the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC, for example; the Emperor Marcus Aurelius also wrote *Meditations* in Greek in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, as did fourth-century poet Claudius Claudianus with his work *Gigantomachia*. Nor did the earliest Latin Christian authors despise Greek, although they rejected elements of Greek – pagan – civilization less suited for the proper practice of their culture. Tertullianus, Lactantius, Hieronymus and Cassiodorus were all familiar with the ways of Greek science, while only a few – including Saint Gregory the Great – rejected the accumulated knowledge of the East. The attitude of the Church Fathers of Rome was similar to that of the population of the Empire: they preached simplicity in life-style and mentality, but they did not practice it – just as the patriarchs were unwilling to give up the joys offered by (Greek) knowledge, so were the citizens with life's other, often extreme, forms of luxury.

The spread of the rose as a plant and as a symbolic source in Roman culture and literature began with the integration of Greek mythological effects, and reached fullness with the annexation of Magna Graecia. The further spread and unification of universal and local Greek symbols was served by the fact that Latin was the language of the entire Roman Empire, and readers of literature had more access to the volumes and, beginning in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, codexes (through copies of texts, and public and private libraries) than the elite of earlier culture had had. The use of the rose was promoted by the odd fact that, as Tamás Adamik expressed it, “the Romans generally made Stoic declarations, but lived in Epicurean fashion”; and this Epicureanism, rather unlike Hellenic philosophy, was also quite rich in hedonistic aspects.

*Plautus: Appearance of rose symbols linked to Venus*

Umbria, the birthplace of Titus Maccius Plautus (ca. 255/250 BC - 184 BC), was taken over by the Romans a few years before the comedy writer's birth. Plautus went from here to Rome, but virtually nothing else of his personal life is known. Of his prolific works, 21 *fabula palliata* have survived through selection by Varro; all are in Greek, by an author highly influential in the evolution of New Comedy, with Greek locations, characters and plots. Even the characters' customs, beliefs and clothes are largely Greek. The Latinization of the comedies derives from the insertion of topical elements and rustic slapstick, and from linguistic innovations – but none of this concealed the origin of the works. In comedies of romantic complications, the Greek origin is evident in the customs of Aphrodite worship, the conduct of the lovers, the feasts, the wedding celebrations, the fertility rituals, and the environment of the courtesans acting as servants of the goddess of love, despite the fact that the mythological figures have Latin names (Venus, Bacchus, etc.). Although in Hellenic culture this medium is abundant in rose references, in Plautus it is rather sparse. The rose appears on but two occasions as a qualifiable symbol. In *Asinaria* (*The Donkey Market*) and *Bacchides* (*The Two Bacchises*) –

adaptations of Demophilos' *Donkey Driver* and Menandros' *The Double Seducer* – flower references involving the word 'rose' are uttered by courtesans.

"My light, my rose, give me, my splendor, my soul, / Leonida, the silver, do not separate two lovers"<sup>1</sup> – pleads the prostitute Philaenium to Leonida, the servant. The price for the desired woman must be paid a year in advance by the procurer's mother, the amount having been generated by the enamored youth from the sale of donkeys in *Asinaria*. In *Bacchides* the constantly confused twins are both Athenian courtesans. Bacchis I addresses her suitor as follows: "Beside me, my soul: beauty beside beauty. / Your place, however unexpectedly you may come, is free with us. / And if you wish entertainment, my rose, say to me: / 'Give me what is good' – and I will give you a nice little place."<sup>2</sup>

In Plautus' works the word 'rose' is used to address male clients, in keeping with the usage of Greek courtesans. In its primary meaning the man addressed possesses the value of the flower which the woman will receive: as the woman is a prostitute and servant of Venus, the person received as a gift appears as a rose, a gift of Venus. The link to Venus is understood by both lovers through the rose reference. This tie is the desire of both parties, and thus properly describes the intent. The rose is a unit of measure of the outcome, a kind of possession by one party – as well as a promise of ownership. (However, the meaning can hardly be literal when Philaenium describes the servant similarly, in the hope of obtaining silver. In this case the flower becomes a device for heightening description.)

What precedes the expression 'my rose'?

Pistoclerus, combed and oiled, accompanied by servants bearing festive dishes, in answer to his guardian's question "Why thither? Who lives there?" describes the pleasures to be found in the house of Bacchis: "Lust, Desire, Splendor, Charm, Merriment, Love, / Conversation, Play, Jokes, Honeyed Kisses."<sup>3</sup> That the love Pistoclerus anticipates here may easily become physical love is proven by Bacchis I's impish offer of a bed: "...my rose, ... / 'Give me what is good' – and I will give you a nice little place."<sup>3</sup> One of the numerous ribald double entendres in Plautus' works is the dual meaning of bed.

In Plautus' adaptations, written on the basis of Greek neo-comedies for the entertainment of the masses, mention of the rose is associated with persons employed in the service of Venus: the flower represents physical pleasure, and in a broader sense proliferation. Greek and Latin comedies involving courtesans illustrate the ambivalence toward the profession and the people making their living from it: partly as faithful worshippers of the goddess of love, who pay tithe to her in both sacred and profane manners, and partly as invited and paid participants in feasts appropriate in private life to the religious fertility celebrations parading products of the Earth, but whose services outside such occasions are rejected and condemned.

## 2. Heritage and evolution of the rose symbol in the Golden Age

Although at the end of the third century BC, the time of the Punic Wars, relations between the Greek and Roman cultures in southern Italy and the Balkans deteriorated, within a hundred years Hellas – with the exceptions of Athens and Sparta – became part of the Empire, and it was Greek culture that had the strongest influence on the Roman. Cato (234-149 BC), who in his own stern way advocated the preservation of ancient morals and placed the interests of the Roman state above those of the individual, rejected Greek intellectualism in his speeches, but through Plautus and his contemporaries the literature of the masters of the Golden Age of prose and poetry – Cicero, Lucretius, Catullus, and Virgil – was imbued with a respect for the Classics (albeit not entirely free of prejudice) and overt or covert usage of the models it offered. Hellenic influence was incorporated and gave promise of being continued by Roman authors, whether by translation of the works into Latin, or by transmission in their own works of a familiarity with the tenets of Greek intellectualism.

The teachings of grammar and rhetoric played a role in the formation and unification of literary Latin and its norms, but also, through the use of symbols, offered opportunities which cultures in areas under Roman rule had already used earlier, but now in unified form. The complex group of symbols

<sup>1</sup> Plautus: *Asinaria*. 664-665; Hung. trans. Devecseri G. (1977) vol. 1. p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Plautus: *Bacchides*. 81-84; Hung. trans. Devecseri G. (1977) vol. 1 p. 198.

<sup>3</sup> Plautus: *Bacchides*. 114-116; Hung. trans. Devecseri G. (1977) vol. 1 p. 201

associated with the rose which was known throughout the Hellenic world and, according to sources, used in a variety of ways, proved equally suited for utilization for the Roman mentality, and in the first century BC took on a well-defined, unified form used frequently in the literary vocabulary first in Roman prose and later in the poetry of the Golden Age.

What were the most frequently occurring, known forms of evocation, and what were the public and private occasions in which rose symbols continued to thrive, offering ever-newer manifestations and interpretations?

## 2.1. References to the botanical characteristics of rose

### 2.1.1. Sign of the cyclical (ancient) concept of time

It seemed obvious – once interest in the plant had emerged – to use the simple botanical characteristics of the rose in a moral interpretation. What morphological characteristics were categorized, and what rose characteristics offered themselves for these categorizations? And was a given sign used alone, or in combination, and in what manner?

The rose often appeared alone. The period was characterized and described by Cicero when he categorized the sight of the rose (the plant in bloom or the flower itself) as the natural herald of the arrival of spring.<sup>4</sup> Titus Lucretius Carus also declared it the sign of spring, in fact the solitary mark. To the question “*Why do we see the rose when it sprouts ...?*”<sup>5</sup> he answered: because Nature deems this to be the time for the plant to appear. The season, the life-giving soil, and light are the triggers of the appearance of the flower which, if planted carefully, will surely bloom at the appointed time. Following the Theocritan model, Virgil in his pastoral *Ecloga IX* regarded this highly valued, prestigious, extremely virtuous purple flower (*hic ver purpureum*) as the primary handmaiden of spring,<sup>6</sup> while in *Georgica* he considered it proper that “*the rose blooms in spring, the first quince in autumn.*”<sup>7</sup> The rose remained closely linked to the season in which it bloomed. (Later, in the case of rose varieties that bloom more than once, this tie loosened, as changes in the meaning of seasons enabled this change of symbolic meaning.)

Appearing every spring, this flower signified the existence of Laws of Nature – the cyclical nature of the concept of time in Greco-Latin cosmology, and the harmony of ceaselessly recurring Time – and men found it an example of an order to be accepted and followed. Thus, the rose also played an important role in the designation and evaluation of the seasons.

### 2.1.2. Evaluation of fertility

The appearance of the rose explicitly signified the season and its floral splendor, as well as its figurative meanings: when Albius Tibullus writes, “*On blessed / Grounds a fragrant rose blooms in the tree,*”<sup>8</sup> one may rest assured that the plant appears in the company of allusions to spring, youth and fertility, as well as figures characterized by these qualities.

It is unclear whether the roses described above refer to the plant itself or to its flower. Their interpretation is rather broad, much more so than that of the flower associated with the petals and the color and fragrance of the petals. Can we assume that attention was given to the difference between the rose plant and the rose flower?

The most frequent references are those in which the textual elements consist of specific organs and parts of the plant rather than the plant itself. If a thorn or petal can appear, then a differentiation is likely to have been made between the flower as botanical organ and the plant.

<sup>4</sup> “Cum rosam viderat, tum incipere ver arbitrabatur.” Cicero: *Verr.* II. V. 10. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura.* I. 174-175; Hung. trans. Tóth B. 21. 168.

<sup>6</sup> Virgil: *Eclogae,* IX. 40-41; Hung. trans. Lakatos I. p. 32. 40-41.

<sup>7</sup> Virgil: *Georgica.* IV. 134; Hung. trans. Lakatos I. p. 93. 134.

<sup>8</sup> Tibullus: *Elegiae,* I. 3. 61-62; Hung. trans. Vas I. p. 17. 61-62.

The rose's thorn is mentioned by the author Publilius Syrus of Antioch (85-43 BC), among others: "*Even a thorn bush can be pretty if a rose grows on it – Spina etiam grata est ex qua spectatur rosa.*"<sup>9</sup> With its ethical message, the sentence calls attention to the most striking of the plant's inner dualities, the combined presence of the image of injury and the ameliorating flower.

Lucretius cites the petals of the rose at celebrations of triumph, where they were strewn as a floral carpet over the celebrants, under their feet and over the deities overlooking the festival: "... *great blessings being brought to the people, / Every road is strewn first with silver, gold, / And lush gifts, and rose petals, / Like snow, atop ...*"<sup>10</sup>

The color of the petals continued to convey the theory of *kalokagathia*: a body held to be healthy and pretty simultaneously qualified the soul of a person bearing rose symbols. Pinkness and fullness of spirit went together. The explanation for this derived from the tenets of the Four Elements: both the flower and the soul proved to be closely linked to fire and the light it emits.

### 2.1.3. The expression of fullness of soul

The color in question (in addition to its visual image) may have had a complex meaning which authors often exploited: the time, enthusiasm, cause and purpose of flowers blooming may all occur. Lucretius paired the color of the rose, and its sensitivity to changes, with the human face and its faithful expression of the soul;<sup>11</sup> Horace considered perfect youthful beauty to be pinker than the rose;<sup>12</sup> Catullus (84-54 BC) described the color as identical to the lips of the self-emasculated Attis, the goddess Cybele's lover;<sup>13</sup> Virgil linked it to a virgin (Iris);<sup>14</sup> Ovid used snow and rose to describe Narcissus' complexion;<sup>15</sup> and Virgil described Venus likewise, as did Horace a handsome youth's neck.<sup>16</sup>

The color of the flower's petals was used to describe the face, mouth and skin – the blood-filled human organs as well as the human body itself – and to convey changes in condition, but this was not its only role in tradition: color associations also provided opportunities for other comparisons. Lucretius in *De rerum natura* compared not only the face but also light with the rose: "...*the Sun shining on high with rosy light.*"<sup>17</sup> Both dawn and its light were conveyed through this color; in his explanation of the Sun's travels Lucretius used it to describe dawn: the movement of the celestial body through the ether is accompanied by this color when it again becomes visible as it rises into the sky from the regions beneath the Earth.<sup>18</sup>

Lucretius declared the color to be a primary color belonging to the four elements of Nature. He leaves no doubt that it is a manifestation of the element of fire, and an expression of the quality of heat. The association with heat ties red or pink with any phenomenon which emits heat, with burning objects, and with processes perceived as a flame, such as when a change in the weather is described as "*with a rose torch sunlight rises in the sky.*"<sup>19</sup>

In the *Aeneid* Virgil, utilizing one of the elements of mythological tradition, describes dawn as arriving on a celestial chariot, making the color a characteristic of the vehicle: "*When tomorrow's dawn rises / in the sky on its red-pink (puniceus = purple) coach.*"<sup>20</sup> Tibullus also referred to it in this fashion, except he assigned the color, and its association with light and rank, to the chariot's horses: "*on rose steeds splendid dawn / again brings us this fine hour.*" The poetic formula also declares that

<sup>9</sup> Publilius Syrus: *Sententiae*. 669; Hung. trans. Nagyllés J. p. 133. 669.

<sup>10</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*, II. 625-628; Hung. trans. Tóth B. p. 62. 625-628.

<sup>11</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*, I. 174-175.

<sup>12</sup> Horace: *Carmina*. IV. 10. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Catullus: *Carmina*. LXIII. 74.

<sup>14</sup> Virgil: *Aeneid*. IX. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ovid: *Metamorphoses*. III. 422-424. and Virgil: *Aeneis*. I. 402.

<sup>16</sup> Horace: *Carmina*. I. 13. 2; Hung. trans. Csengery I. p. 28. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*. V. 610; Hung. trans. Tóth B. p. 157. 598.

<sup>18</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*. V. 646-671; Hung. trans. Tóth B. pp. 158-159. 634-659.

<sup>19</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*. V. 976; Hung. trans. Tóth B. p. 167. 963.

<sup>20</sup> Virgil: *Aeneid*. XII. 76-77; Hung. trans. Lakatos I. p. 361. 76-77.

the phenomenon indicates value – the long-awaited hour. The comparison occurs by placing emphasis on the special esteem of objects perceived as rose-colored.

The structure of the poetic image conceals a series of deduction by analogy: the sequence of light/fire → dawn → steed → fine hour are merged together by this color trait, thus providing a wealth of complex meanings.

Ovid also placed the light of daybreak in a unique image: “*And thus freshly awake dawn opened / its purple gates in the glowing sunrise, exposing the rosy / halls.*”<sup>21</sup> – that is, the gate itself and the area exposed behind it are both characterized by the redness of the flower. Dawn as a time of day and as a goddess (Aurora) also appeared in Tibullus: “*on rose steeds splendid dawn / again brings us this fine hour.*”<sup>22</sup>

Perceived as identical to the light/heat phenomena indicative of the psychic content of the microcosm of the human body and of the macrocosm, this color offered opportunities for a variety of comparisons. The pinkness which symbolized psychic content – inasmuch as it belonged to both cosmoses – in itself symbolized the mutuality of the cosmoses. Pinkness was one of the symbols identical in both. The similarity existing between the spheres of the Spiritual, Celestial and Elemental worlds made it possible for celestials to possess senses based on sensory-organ experience, and for mortals to acquire divine qualities.

Propertius expressed this through the color similarity of dawn and the face, then immediately turned the poetic image upside down: “*I sang your face was lovelier than dawn’s rose light, / and I knew it was but the glow of red face-paint.*”<sup>23</sup> An example from Catullus’ poetry is simpler than the refined rhetoric of Propertius. In *Cybele* the veracity of the words of the dying god Attis is presumably confirmed by being uttered from rose-colored lips; his message was to the other gods: “*My lament flew from rose lips, and took / the message to the ears of the great gods, ...*”<sup>24</sup>

The reason the rose appears as a flower attributed to the gods is that it represents their fullness of spirit and the place they occupy in the cosmos – spatially nearer the spirit characterized by the element of fire. For this reason Propertius was able to use this flower and the association of its color with light in describing the fields of Elysium, the netherworld home of the blessed. On his death he would go “*To the pink, sweet-breathed fields of Elysium,*”<sup>25</sup> he claimed, as he had been faithful to his lover, and not to the circle of the damned where the mendacious and unworthy dwelled. Also, his important message emphasized the unity of love and the spirit.

#### 2.1.4. Expression of change

The Roman sources presented above confirm that the various parts of the rose plant were also identified. The part referred to most often was the flower, the properties of which suggest belonging to the spiritual sphere. The other parts were less valued, and generally placed in contrast to the flower.

Having surveyed the rose plant and its thorns and petals, let us now examine the rose references in Golden Age poetry which clearly emphasized the (colorful, fragrant, beautiful, etc.) flower of the rose, regardless of whether the reference was in a realistic or metaphysical context.

Virgil, comparing two plants emphasized for their color, was not compelled to stress the components of the rose flower:

*“Just as blood drips into the Hindu river  
Or a white lily will become red in the midst of roses,  
The face of the girl seemed to change in color.”*<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ovid: *Metamorphoses*. II. 112-114; Hung. trans. Devecseri G. (1975) p. 40. 112-114.

<sup>22</sup> Tibullus: *Elegiae*. I. 3. 93-94; Hung. trans. Vas I. p. 18. 93-94.

<sup>23</sup> Propertius: *Elegiae*. IV. 24. 5-8. “*Falsa est ista tuae, mulier, fiducia formae*”; Hung. trans. Horváth I. K. (1963) p. 264. III. 24-25. 5-8.

<sup>24</sup> Catullus: *Carmina*. LXIII. 74-75; Hung. trans. Devecseri G. (1976) p. 57. 75-76.

<sup>25</sup> Propertius: *Elegiae*. V. 7. 59-60. “*Sunt aliquid Manes: letum non omnia finit*”; Hung. trans. Kerényi G. p. 265. IV. 7. 59-60.

<sup>26</sup> Virgil: *Aeneid*. XII. 67-69; Hung. trans. Lakatos I. p. 381. 67-69.

Elsewhere the same author has the soft fragrant flower rocking a cradle: “*ipsa tibi blandos fundent cunabula flores.*”<sup>27</sup> In *Ecloga 4*, beginning with the line “*Sicelides Musae, paulo maiora canamus*” he celebrated the prophesied arrival of a happy, just and humane future, the rule of Apollo. Around the newborn child all sources of harm – serpents and weeds – are destroyed, and the cradle which is rocked by flowers (soft precisely because of their petals) promises joy. In this world/child connection the same promise of happiness applies to both components of the image.

In *Carmen 3* Horace calls for “*the transitory flowers of the fairy rose,*”<sup>28</sup> along with wine and ointments, to enjoy the passing moments of life more fully. The flower itself is also transitory, but by blooming – although it does hint at surcease – it proclaims not the sadness thereof, but the celebration of its splendor. Propertius expressed the same when he evoked the floral garland and the sign of its passing, the falling petals, in his elegy (II. 15)<sup>29</sup>. The narrator of the poem speaks of a wilted garland whose fallen petals float in a cup of wine. This image suggests the conclusion that those who live now with love for each other will die having fulfilled their fate. Here the duality of the flower and the petals, the combined presence of the positive and the negative, and their inseparability are manifested just as in the case of the rose and thorn.

The rose as a part of the Elemental world – regardless of which part of the plant is mentioned – occurs in a relatively small number of sources. Although Lucretius, Catullus, Tibullus and Propertius occasionally speak of realistic roses, these always have a function as decoration in a mythical environment or as part of a poetic image. Virgil and Horace went further, with references to real flowers in real gardens: that is, they did not consider it necessary to confirm a tie with the world of the gods.

The rose and its symbols were customary decorations in the mythical environment. The following section will examine what figures and situations were associated with these decorations, and in what manner, and to what extent the associations manifested the Greek heritage or the emergence of Roman culture.

## 2.2. Lucretius and the appearance of Epicurean philosophy

Cicero posthumously published Titus Lucretius Carus’ (ca. 98-55 BC) *De rerum natura*, a work summarizing and popularizing Epicurean philosophical tradition. Based on the teachings of Epikuros – quoted frequently in the six volumes – Lucretius questions the usefulness of religion: the gods live in such utter tranquility, and so far from mankind, that it is pointless to deal with them. At death the human body and soul both cease to exist, therefore the living must free themselves of their fears of punishment in the netherworld after death. For this purpose Lucretius introduces the readers to the atomist views of Epikuros (and his predecessors, Leukippos and Demokritos) – poetry making the exposition easier to follow – and recommends consideration of the ethical consequences thereof.

Convoluting to the point that only cultured Romans could follow it, Lucretius’ reasoning attempted an explication of the cosmos, relying on the traditions of Alexandrian philosophers. He regarded Venus as the original mother of the Romans and all mortals; however, the goddess was presented not merely as a mythical figure, but rather as a personification of the creative power of the world and its *voluptas* (splendor) which in Epicureanism was the primary moving force of human morality. Therefore the prologue to the first volume is a hymn to Venus followed by a summary of the work’s contents and praise of the Greek philosopher.

Lucretius considered the power of Venus to be the source of the attainment of peace, in which process a role must be played by love – that is, the subduing of Mars by the senses – and by Harmonia, the daughter of the two gods. Consequently it would seem natural if the rose and rose symbols expressed the environment of this goddess, received by the Earth with fragrant flowers, and of the logical system referring to her. The rationalist philosophical text, however, uses this device less often than one might expect: in one spring metaphor, one cultic description, and in references to the light and fire of Dawn and the Sun; moreover, none of these are particularly Roman, but rather are in

<sup>27</sup> Virgil: *Eclogae*. IV. 23. Hung. trans. Kardos L. p. 43. 23.

<sup>28</sup> Horace: *Carmina*. II. 3. 13-14; Hung. trans. Szabó L. p. 175. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Propertius: *Elegiae*. II. 15. 51-54; Hung. trans. Babits M. p. 156. 51-54.

keeping with Greek phraseology and imagery. Nevertheless, a survey will be useful, as it may serve as the groundwork for one form of use among the symbols of the late Republican era.

The first rose reference is found in the discussion of the uncreated world – as part of a series of examples. Knowledge of the strict order of Nature causes the secret of things to be opened – and provides an explanation for its phenomena: like light in Nature, the Mind helps disperse the internal darkness and drive away the monsters of the soul. Lucretius demonstrates that nothing can be created out of nothing; not even the gods are capable of this: there must be something which has existed eternally: the atom. This atom, and everything created from it, has its own germinative ability from which, in accordance with its own laws, various results are created in their proper times.

*“Why do we see the rose when it sprouts, and wheat in summer,  
And in autumn the grape, dripping its sweet nectar?”<sup>30</sup>*

F. Braudel states that three plants played a role in the evolution of Mediterranean cultures. In agricultural/commercial cultures with plant-based diets these plants were the fundamental means of creating, accumulating, storing and exchanging value, and thus are justly called “plants of civilization.” Reproducing themselves from the soil and representing the beginning of existence, two of these three plants are named in the quotation above, wheat and the grape. Along with the unmentioned olive, these three had a fundamental role in the ideas of fertility throughout the Mediterranean region, and are mentioned frequently in sources in both sacred and profane contexts. But how did the rose come to join them? It is known to have been used from very early times, especially in the area of religion, but it also had a role in medicine and hygiene, and it cannot be proven that it had no function, at least minimally, in dietary habits.

In spring, the season of flowering and proliferation, marking the return of fertility, the rose was justifiably featured very prominently, particularly since there was a special goddess of fertility, whom Lucretius discussed right at the beginning of his first volume and at great length, proving that she was the mother of the Romans and of all souls. If the rose had already been given a presence in the environment of Aphrodite in Greek thinking, then it would have the same place with the Roman Venus, and if Venus was the mother goddess, then the rose was therefore to be placed foremost, like a queen, among all plants with similar qualities. The rose marked the arrival of spring and was the emblematic sign of its cause, the fertile earth and the goddess of fertility – in contrast to wheat and the grape, which stood as end results, the success of the act of fertility. This line of reasoning also serves to explain why the rose appears so often in various forms of wheat and grape worship.

Peace, tranquility, and the undisrupted order necessary for fertility – concentrated in the figure of Harmonia – provide Lucretius with a new means of interpreting the flower. Under the sign of the rose he reinforces the sacred tradition that nothing is worth dealing with other than the act referred to by this special flower, and the content of this act – given that the actor is linked to some god of fertility – is also undisputed: it is tied to one of the customs serving material, physical and intellectual proliferation.

The second volume gives an explanation and interpretation of the atom theory. Lucretius (and others) explains the existence of things by various combinations of the four elements, and states that there is no being that consists of only one element. The abundant variety of mixtures of the elements is the reason so many types of things are created, and the more complex the thing, the greater the number of elements affecting it. In his description of the cult of the Phrygian *Magna Mater* – Greek *Rheia* – the rose appears for the second time as part of floral carpets and the casting of flowers:

*“Quietly yet richly bringing blessings on the people,  
All roads are strewn with silver and gold before her,  
Lush donations are given, and rose petals  
Fall like snow on the god-mother’s army;”<sup>31</sup>*

<sup>30</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*. I. 174-175; Hung. trans. Tóth B. 21. p. 168-169.

<sup>31</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*. II. 625-628; Hung. trans. Tóth B. 62. p. 625-628.



The Phrygians regarded *Magna Mater* to be the mother of the gods – and worshiped her along with her child, as did the Greeks with *Rheia* and Zeus (Jupiter). The worship of *Magna Mater* was later merged with the goddess Cybele, a figure with similar characteristics and likewise of Asia Minor origin – and whose chief sanctuary was likewise in Phrygia, on Mount Ida. Lucretius considered the cult a parallel phenomenon to the spread of wheat cultivation, which he also regarded as Phrygian in origin, and he thought the celebrants were ridiculous and contemptible with their leather drums, zithers, and brandished weapons. Lucretius found it acceptable that one thing (for example, wheat) should be given different names by the people, nor did it upset him that they gave the name of their goddess alternately as Ceres or *Magna Mater*. Their religion, however, he considered primitive superstition.

Although in this sense the rose can be the sign of any goddess, it nevertheless symbolizes the earth's sensitive capacity to create living beings, and its function is to convey the same.

As to what qualities the rose possesses, Lucretius gives no information. One may deduce, however, that the flower is the loveliest of all beautiful flowers and other objects, as Venus, representative of the most important quality of all, is worshiped through it. It is a matter of mere assumption that the Lucretian rose was fragrant, or that it was necessary for it to be.

The Epicurean manner of explaining the sense of smell employs a characteristically tighter grip of the motifs in the background of rose symbols known thus far. The fourth volume presents the reader with the theory of the senses: smells are exuded from the inside of things:

*“That the smell breaks forth from the depth of things  
Is proven if you crush a thing or melt it on fire,  
Whereby the smell comes out all the stronger,  
It is therefore obvious that smell consists of heavier elements  
Than sounds do ...”*<sup>32</sup>

The method of creating an aroma as described here is for an object, a combination of elements, to be heated on a fire: the resulting smell, originating from the inner depths of the object, obviously possesses some of the qualities of the object, mainly the one which defines it best. The smell is a defining characteristic of any object, and as the number of objects is great, so is the number of smells. The smell and the thing smelling it and finding it pleasant show the existence of similar internal qualities: thus bees may be identified with honey, and vultures with carrion. If people find the rose's aroma pleasant and wear it on their bodies, then they become similar not only to the qualities of the rose but also to the world the plant represents.

Lucretius listed a sixth sense in addition to sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell: the desire for love. Describing the reproductive instinct, the fire of passion from Venus, Lucretius gave the same information on the color of the rose as his predecessors did. However, his explanation of the creation of the visual image differs from that of smells. In terms of his science of the senses, an image is seen because the heat of the sun causes the object to release layers of atoms: all the observer receives of a human face or fine color is its image.<sup>33</sup>

The image which a lover receives from the object of his attraction is impalpable; he struggles in vain to seize it and enjoy it fully. Yet, instinct forces him continuously to regard the body of his adoration, and to seize it, although they will never be able to merge into one.

The fifth volume discusses the creation and structure of the cosmos, independent of gods, with a cosmology and then anthropology following the theory of the four elements. Bodies shooting from a collision of the original elements caused the formation of the world's major components, the sensorily perceptible – not the same as the original elements – earth, air, water, and pure fire of ether: the description of this process uses another rose simile. Each element “...*Came into being / From rounded elements ... / In just the form people often see them / At dawn, glowing rose-colored in the Sun's / Golden light on top of dew-beaded grass,*”<sup>34</sup> or like clouds out of the mist rising from lakes. The poetic image of the sun glimmering on dewy grass is nearly identical to the one used for the dawn dew

<sup>32</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*. IV. 677-681; Hung. trans. Tóth B. 125-126. p. 677-681.

<sup>33</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*. IV. 1094-1096; Nemes Nagy Á. p. 76.

<sup>34</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*. V. 455-458, 461-462; Hung. trans. Tóth B. 445-446, 450-451.

on rose petals: contemporary thinking considered the rose to be made fertile by the dew. The cover of dew in nature – particularly when the dewdrops reflect the rosy light of the sun – is similar to this idea, giving rise to the comparison in which the sun gods, sunlight and the rose were traditionally placed in a fixed association, obviously because of the great similarity between the light of dawn and dusk, and the color of the rose. It is also necessary to remember the story of Venus in which the goddess was born of the fertilizing mist rising from the waters of the sea.

Thus the generative light of the Sun is rose-colored and, like a rosy face or rosy bosom or skin, is attractive both to the sensory organ of the eye and to Love: whether of plant or human origin, a celestial phenomenon or manifestation of the gods, the color of the rose alludes to fertility, and to a stage in the order of nature: that of fertilization and reproduction.

Emitting light from its fire, the Sun, like light itself or the closely related fire, is also rose-colored: their combined presence shows a kinship with the soul (with creation), and thus the soul is also endowed with qualities of the rose. Lucretius frequently used the association of light/fire/sun and the rose, with mentions of the sun shining in rosy light,<sup>35</sup> a similar description of dawn,<sup>36</sup> and the rosy torches of sunlight.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.3. *The rose as ethical valuation*

Lucretius' work and Epicureanism had an influence on Publius Vergilius Maro (70-19 BC) and his work *Georgica*. *Georgica* followed such predecessors as Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Cato's *De agricultura*, and Varro's *De re rustica*, but unlike the others it was not restricted to a discussion of agricultural methods, but was also an exaltation of the farmer's way of life. This spartan, utility-based way of life became glorified in Virgil, a tradition transcending itself, whose spiritual value was self-evident and to be followed. Like Lucretius, Virgil found generative peace to be the most needed in the life of the farmer, the oldest of professions – as well as in the Roman state built on his work. Although he did not dispute the role of the gods, he considered the true master to be Nature itself, and recommended its observation in order for man to live in harmony with its recognized laws, and for the government to serve it.

Two rose references in *Georgica*, each echoing the other, emphasize this view. One section in volume IV, on bees, conjures the image of a bountiful garden and sings praises to the opportunity that formerly Greek *Posidonia*, now Roman "*Paestum's twice-blooming roses are so lovely.*"<sup>38</sup> A few lines later these plants, unnatural because they bloom twice, and their luxurious flowers, are contrasted with an Asia Minor garden which he had seen in Corycus, a place famous for its horticulture, and which he recommended as a model for Roman agriculture, in which the poor ground had never been plowed, or even used as a vineyard, yet its owner's painstaking work made it a place where poppies, garden vegetables and lilies grew in abundance, surrounded by bay trees – and all in accordance with the order dictated by Nature. Thus "*the rose grew in spring, and the first quince in autumn.*"<sup>39</sup> The norm for men to follow is provided by the wise order of Nature, not by one rule-breaking example or another, however spectacular it might be.

The national epic *Aenid* "continues" the story of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: led by Aeneas, Trojan refugees seek and find a new homeland. Written during the reign of Augustus, the epic features an unusually large number of rose references, partly because Venus is the mother of Aeneas, and it was around this figure that the national mentality and religious piety reached fulfillment. However, Virgil used the customary descriptions of the goddess in moderation compared to his predecessors and contemporaries, such as when he describes her fertile body:

*"She spoke and turned; her rosy neck glowed; divine  
scent of ambrosia wafted from her locks;*

<sup>35</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*. V. 610; Hung. trans. Tóth B. 157. p. 598.

<sup>36</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*. V. 656-666; Hung. trans. Tóth B. 159. p. 644-645.

<sup>37</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*. V. 976; Hung. trans. Tóth B. 167. p. 963.

<sup>38</sup> Virgil: *Georgica*. IV. 119; Hung. trans. Lakatos I. 92. p. 119.

<sup>39</sup> Virgil: *Georgica*. IV. 134; Hung. trans. Lakatos I. 93. p. 134.

*her clothes dropped away, falling to her feet; she stepped forth:  
truly, she was a goddess!...*<sup>40</sup>

The description of the neck – or any body part – is done simply: Virgil, like his predecessors, made no effort toward the slightest alteration of recurring description motifs. Value was placed on simple body descriptions that seemed natural and became increasingly puritan over time – yet retained echoes of the archaic style. There were aesthetic and ethical reasons for this style: respectful emphasis on the ancient customs was reinforced by it. The rose-red color of healthy, beautiful skin were quite everyday, and quite human: men and gods both possessed them, and the fact that the same descriptions were used for the skin color of gods and men was an allusion not only to the anthropomorphic nature of the gods, but also to the divine nature of men as well as to the similarities between gods and men in some areas. A similar description of a god's lips – "*then, seizing my right arm, with rosy lips / he spoke thusly: ...*"<sup>41</sup> – also makes this analogy.

The poet also used rose-red lips to describe Isis.<sup>42</sup> Tradition similarly dictated the color purple for describing the chariot of Aurora on numerous occasions.<sup>43</sup>

#### 2.4. Joy of life

The rose was a means of elevating both sacred and profane situations: the plant, and associated items such as floral garlands, indicated the value and honor of the situation. Its user proclaimed readiness for the occasion, and demanded a specific type of behavior from those around him.

A special category consisted of festive occasions in private life, closely tied to wedding feasts and wine-drinking – here (and elsewhere) wine, ointments, aromatics and roses were present in abundance, similar to public holidays, except the intimacy was deeper and of a more personal nature. Quintus Horatius Flaccus' (65-8 BC) *Carmen To Dellius*<sup>44</sup> praised the celebration of youth in a manner suggesting Epicurean morality: the rose in this case becomes a symbol of the transitory nature of time and of flowers:

*"bring wine, ointments, scents,  
the momentary flowers of the fairy rose,  
now, while money and youthful age  
are granted by the Fates."*

A similar verse with instructive tones occurs in another of Horace's *carmens*. Two men are drinking to celebrate the anniversary of the donning of the man's toga – the day marking the coming of age in Roman custom when a young male (age 14-16) was dressed as a man and acknowledged an adult. "*Let us not forget this joyful day,*" they beseech each other in a "Thracian" drinking contest, quaffing immoderately:

*"Wine-loving Damalis shall not  
Defeat Bassos in Thracian wine-drinking  
And there shall be no lack of roses:  
Let there be celery, evergreen  
And wilting lily flowers."*<sup>45</sup>

The occasion for the celebration is the safe arrival home by Numida, the host, after a long voyage. He gives offerings of thanks – incense is burned and a calf is slaughtered – after which the invited

<sup>40</sup> Virgil: *Aeneid*. I. 402-405; Hung. trans. Lakatos I. 121. p. 402-405.

<sup>41</sup> Virgil: *Aeneid*. II. 593-594; Hung. trans. Lakatos I. 593-594.

<sup>42</sup> Virgil: *Aeneid*. IX. 1-5; Hung. trans. Lakatos I. 299. p. 1-5.

<sup>43</sup> Virgil: *Aeneid*. VI. 535-536, XII. 76-77; Hung. trans. Lakatos I. 240-241. p. 535-536, 381. p. 76-77.

<sup>44</sup> Horace: *Carmina*. II. 3. 13-16; Hung. trans. Szabó L. "Aequam memento rebus" 175. p. 13-16.

<sup>45</sup> Horace: *Carmina*. I. 36. 13-16; Hung. trans. Csengery J. 57. p. 16-20.

guests rejoice: on their heads they wear garlands of roses, celery leaves and lilies, all of which were considered aphrodisiacs, as was wine. The implicit qualities of the gods suggested by the plants – Venus, Proserpina, Bacchus – have one meaning in common: fertility. The rose and the lily were gifts to appease Persephone (Virgil: *Aeneid* VI, 883-886), and celery was also a plant indicating the netherworld.

The person addressed in II, verse 3, Dellius, a knight of Maecenas, is encouraged by the narrator to enjoy Nature and merry company, inasmuch as regardless of whether he spends his life in gaiety or in sadness, one day he will die, and after him all will remain here on earth. (*Take wine, and expensive ointments, / And the rose's dear transient flower, / Whilst you live the springtime of your life.*<sup>46</sup>) The same thought is expressed in II, 11, slightly differently: depending on the addressee, wine to banish cares is recommended not only to youthful celebrants, but also to those whose hair is graying:

*“Why not drink and forget our worries  
While we can, in the shade of plantain and fir,  
Our graying locks adorned with roses,  
Drenching them with its lush scent?”*

*If troubles torment you, here is Bacchus to banish them.*<sup>47</sup>

Another symposium enjoins the participants to unbridled merriment:

*“What delays the Phrygian reed?  
Why does the melodious lyre  
Hang silently on the wall?  
Shall the mind be buried now, or never?”*

*I despise the miser's hand:  
Scatter Roses! Let old stingy neighbor Lycus  
Hear our mad merriment.*<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the rose was also present at drinking occasions following celebrations of Bacchus: not only because the wilting and falling of its petals recalled the passing of time and of youth, and the transitory nature of life, but also because it expressed the beautiful things in life – for example, a gathering of men in company – and the garland placed on the head was woven mainly of it. *“The string of roses is ready for your head,”*<sup>49</sup> the poet tells the awaited guest, Maecenas. Also, the rose was a sign of gaiety, and its prolific or extravagant scattering expressed joy of life and forgetting of cares.

Drinking poems and the recurrence of roses in them tended to express a moral view: in fact, this was often their fundamental purpose. These poems, whether they sang praises to moderation or immoderation, were presentations of proper behavior and enjoyment of life as well as rejections of the improper. Cybele, Venus, Bacchus, Aurora and other figures were invoked in these rhetorical works.

## 2.5. The rose as judgment

Horace's final poem in *Carminum liber primus* (which follows the work celebrating news of the death of Cleopatra) is *Ad puerum ministrum*: a light text rejecting oriental splendor. He states (for neither the first nor the last time) that the rose, which he names the foremost of flowers, should not be sought when it is not in bloom, in hopes of perhaps finding a late bloomer. Instead, the evergreen and less ostentatious myrtle will suffice for garlands for wine-drinking – that is, although he acknowledges the rose's primacy in garlands over all other flowers, when the flower is not in season it qualifies as

<sup>46</sup> Horace: *Carmina*. II. 3. 13-15; Hung. trans. Csengery J. 67. p. 13-15.

<sup>47</sup> Horace: *Carmina*. II. 11. 13-16; Hung. trans. Csengery J. 77. p. 13-16.

<sup>48</sup> Horace: *Carmina*. II. 19. 18-24; Hung. trans. Csengery J. 131-132. p. 22-28.

<sup>49</sup> Horace: *Carmina*. III. 29. 3-4; Hung. trans. Csengery J. 147. p. 3-4.

oriental luxury. The Latin text also suggests that a secondary blooming of rose plants in autumn may have been a known phenomenon.

*I detest Persian pomp, my boy!  
I have no need of motley garlands;  
Seek not the harvested autumn fields  
In hopes of finding a late rose.*

*Simple myrtle, nothing fancy!  
A myrtle branch is enough for our heads:  
It will not diminish you, the servants, or me,  
When I have a drink in my vineyard.<sup>50</sup>*

The poet speaks against behavior which is dislikable for being inappropriate to one's age or station (lines sharply echoed in late Renaissance depictions of Vanity as a dislikable old hag) when he admonishes a flirtatious old woman (*III, 15*):

*O wife of poor Ibycus!  
Is there no end to your promiscuity?  
Give licentiousness a little pause!  
This close to the grave it is wrong for you  
To mingle with young maidens,  
Casting mist over shining stars.  
What is right for Pholoe somehow  
Is not right for Chloris, certainly not for you.  
Let your daughter contest the homes of youths,  
As Bacchanalian, made wild by drumbeat,  
As desire for Notus drives her,  
Let her entice him, like the slender heron.  
Put down the lyre, old mother, better for you  
To weave the cloth of Luceria.  
The red rose does not become your hair,  
Though you drink the wine pitcher dry.<sup>51</sup>*

## 2.6. Joy of love – flower of death

Sextus Propertius (ca. 49 BC - 15 AD) in *Qui nullum tibi dicebas jam posse nocere* deemphasized the primary importance of the outward characteristics of an obviously beautiful woman. Although he describes in details and with clever similes the face, neck, waist, legs, and grace, as well as the harp-playing, of the woman who captivated him, the poet continues:

*“Yet it is not my darling's face, however radiant, that enchanted me,  
Though her cheeks are whiter than lilies,  
And purple like the high northern peaks,  
Red and white like rose petals in milk,<sup>52</sup>*

He considers the Roman woman a literally divine gift, given by Amor, the reincarnation of Helen, and his overpowering emotion is not a disaster, but rather a natural part of life, passion flowing from the depth of the soul.

<sup>50</sup> Horace: *Carmina*: I. 38. 1-8; Hung. trans. Csengery J. 60. 1-8.

<sup>51</sup> Horace: *Carmina*. III. 15. 1-16; Hung. trans. Csengery J. 126. p. 1-16.

<sup>52</sup> Propertius: *Elegiae*. II. 3. 9-12; Hung. trans. Lator L. 135. p. 9-12.

Similar to the conventional facial signs, the association of the rose with wounds is also rooted in tradition – at the same time, its usage is not only innovative but also subtle and complex. The wound as the source of blood, and blood as that of the rose, is a known motif in stories of the creation of plants. In Virgil's *Aeneid* the protagonist sees the dying Hector in a dream, his body covered in roses from a hundred wounds.

Propertius, in contrast to Roman morality, did not consider love to be an emotion which signified enslavement and vulnerability for the lovers; rather, he called it the promise of self-fulfillment and freedom, in which sense he may be considered a violator of the norm. His verses, inspired by the splendors and agonies bestowed by Cynthia, are striking not only for their accumulation of Greek-based allusions, but also for their daringly new images and formulations, as well as their unexpected twists. For example, at the close of the poem – demanding the right to night-time happiness – he gives as reasons the transience of time and inevitability of death, and not, as elsewhere, the right to love.

*“And you, my darling, enjoy it! Enjoy your kisses  
As you kiss your fill: You will see how little it is!  
You see? – the petals have fallen from the open rose,  
Yellowed leaves floating in the vase!  
We lived our proud splendor, shining, and tomorrow  
Death clangs shut its metal gate.”*<sup>53</sup>

The rose, which earlier appeared as the plant of amour and passion, now, with its fallen petals, signifies the passing of time, whereby the closed floral symbolism of the poem is not only full and complete, but also objective: a genuine rose appears which was kept alive in a vase; that is, a form of decoration with flowers is encountered here which previously had not been documented.

The narrator in one poem by Propertius is the shape-changing, originally Etruscan god Vertumnus, whose statue stood at the Vicus Tuscus in Rome, who may appear in the body of a natural flower, crop or fruit important to man, or as a grass-cutting peasant, weapon-bearing soldier, or flower-bedecked celebrant, like the vendor who is described as follows: “...in the dust of the arena / I distribute roses, tiny baskets on my arm.”<sup>54</sup>

The figure of the panderess in Greek and Roman comedies was an object of derision: Acanthis, who is mocked in a poem written on her death, may have been a real figure for Roman audiences. The role of the panderess is portrayed by Propertius as one whose only deed is the seduction of honest faithful women from their husbands by guile and charm, and the mediation of their lovers' trysts, in hopes of financial reward. That old age should not go unpunished in Propertius' *haetaera* heroine is proven in this invective poem. The reasons given by the panderess include the passing of beauty: “I saw the sweet blooms in the rose gardens of Paestum, / and all withered as the south winds blew.”<sup>55</sup> Virgil was the first to mention Paestum, a town in southern Italy famous for its rose gardens; this mention may be regarded a heightening of the expressive value of the flower. Also, the plant is an apt sign for the profession and appearance of *haetaeras*, and its usage may permit the woman addressed to believe herself to be similarly splendid.

Of the initiation of the temple of Apollo in Palatinus – also mentioned in elegies II, 31 and IV, 1 – Propertius wrote a poem as his own sacrificial offering, in which Augustus Caesar, who earned the construction of the temple through victories in battle, is duly lauded. In the well-earned peace:

*“... Let there be dance.  
In the lap of shaded peaks let us sit to a grand feast,  
let roses fall caressing from my head;  
let flow the best wine the presses of Falernum can bring,  
fragrant saffron washing my locks.*

<sup>53</sup> Propertius: *Elegiae*. II. 15. [III. 7.] 49-54; Hung. trans. Babits M. 156. p. 49-54.

<sup>54</sup> Propertius: *Elegiae*. V. 2. [IV.2.] “Quid mirare meas tot in uno corpore formas?” 40-41; Hung. trans. Kerényi G. 250. p. IV. 2. 40-41.

<sup>55</sup> Propertius: *Elegiae*. V. 5. [IV. 5.] “Terra tuum spinis obducat, lena, sepulchrum” 62-62; Hung. trans. Kerényi G. 259. p. iV. 5. 59-60.

*The Muse better inspires poets immersed in wine;  
Bacchus, for Phoebus you pour your thick loam.*<sup>56</sup>

It has been seen that Virgil and others sometimes associated the rose with wounds, death and passing – either as a flower of mourning in honor and esteem on the body of the deceased, or as a plant accompanying the dead on their journey in the netherworld. In an extension of this symbolism, Propertius changes the rose from a sign of love to a flower of death in two elegies. In I, 17, the poet travels to Greece, leaving his love behind, and his ship is caught in a storm and unable to put to port. He believes it is the curse of his abandoned lover; thus he beseeches her:

*“Better that I should have continued to serve female caprice  
– a rare girl was she, though stubborn and stern –  
than to see the sons of Tyndareus before the coast  
of this foreign land hemmed with bleak forests.  
Should Fate return me home after long torment,  
where my faithful love rests will stand a stone  
and she will give a lock of her own sweet hair as offering,  
I will lay my bones softly among roses,  
she will speak exaltations to my ashes,  
lest the earth press the burden of its weight on me.”*<sup>57</sup>

Although the rose accompanies the lover not only in life but also in the netherworld, and rose flowers are placed on his ashes, the rose also characterizes the tie with the survivor in mourning. In contrast, the following excerpt states that the flowers are found not only in and around the urn containing the ashes, but also in Elysium, one of the fields in the Empire of the dead.

*“Behold, others are taken by flower-decked boat  
to the happy soft-sweet rose fields of Elysium.  
Lyres sing their song accompanied by Cybele’s drum,  
And Mithral dancers dance to the Lydian music;”*<sup>58</sup>

In the Golden Age of Roman literature, the rose primarily appeared in situations associated with Venus and Bacchus, the main gods of fertility. But it was also used to describe situations involving the figures of *Magna Mater*, Cybele, Apollo, Aurora, Iris and Proserpina, or secondary cultic figures connected to them, such as Attis, the Fates, and the Muses. There are also examples of individual references (such as to Vertumnus).

### 3. The rose in Roman fine art

The burial customs of the Scipio family reflect a large-scale mixing of cultural influences, with Hellenic influence exhibited in the rosette which appeared occasionally and was considered to have some of the qualities of the rose. In combination with the decorations on the altar-shaped sarcophagus, the rose suggests a sacred interpretation. The burial memorial and its secondary floral motifs emphasize the nature of the body as a sacrificial offering to the gods.

In the first century BC Rome took over the leading role in fine art from Greek and Hellenic culture. Mass demand for *ornamentumi* took shape on the basis of state and official purchases and private orders, reflecting the market for tiny decorative objects, relief works, ornamental sculpting and copies of classic pieces. The allegorical and emblematic Greek and Hellenic motifs can be considered an

<sup>56</sup> Propertius: *Elegiae*. V. 6. [IV. 6.] “Sacra facit vates: sint ora faventia sacris” 70-76; Hung. trans. Kerényi G. 263. p. IV. 70-76.

<sup>57</sup> Propertius: *Elegiae*. I. 17. 15-24; Hung. trans. Trencsényi-Waldapfel I. 122. p. 15-24.

<sup>58</sup> Propertius: *Elegiae*. V. 7. [IV. 7.] “Sunt aliquid Manes: letum non omnia finit” 59-62; Hung. trans. Kerényi G. 265-266. p. 59-62.

acceptance of and respect for a popular contemporary worldview which had an instructive and protective function in the lives of their owners. Roses in bacchic and romantic drawings and in landscapes had a symbolic meaning transcending their ornamental function, while retaining their illustrative status.

The first-century BC *San Ildefonso group*, from the southern Italian Hellenic school of the Greek master Menelaos, follows the classic pattern in its depiction of Castor and Pollux, the brothers transplanted from Greek mythology into Roman. The two figures make a flame with a torch on the altar in front of them. The tiny, characteristically Greek altar is girded by floral strings, above which is a single, six-petalled, rose-like relief less stylized than rosettes. Also from the first century BC and transmitting Hellenic influences is the *Esquilinus Venus* (Capitoleum, Rome), which object is likewise decorated with flowers beside the young goddess. Five-petalled flowers, again less stylized than rosettes, cover the pedestal on which stands a serpentine column or vessel covered by a kerchief.

The abstract nature of decorations to augment interpretation of the figures and their actions is reduced by the skillfully sculpted main figures: the accuracy of ideal images turned away from the simplification of details toward greater precision. On some occasions the rose symbols appear with sepals included among the petals, while elsewhere – more often – the petals will have two lobes, as they do in reality.

Other procedures were also available for rendering a rosette into a more precise rose. With growth in the demand for realism, the rose became used in ornamental combinations where, although its genre-specific characteristics were given no special significance, the unrealistic combination of patterns is nevertheless realistic in its details; on the relief *Ara Pacis Augustae* this was apparently attempted in the sculpted creations and the painted or gem-set wall decorations – grotesque patterns brought back to life in the Renaissance. Another possibility was to emphasize rose characteristics not just through the petals or the flower, but collectively with the rest of the plant. This was a characteristic technique in painting.

The first major work in Roman art is *Ara Pacis Augustae* (13-9 BC, Rome), a series of allegorical scenes with relief decorations carved in marble. Under the figural relief strips the wall of the altar stand is supplemented by ornamental surfaces with floral patterns. Among acanthus leaves on stems winding and twisting from enormous acanthus roots, a variety of large flowers, fruits and animals are presented sometimes in elaborate detail, sometimes merged into the background. The objects depicted in this symmetrically arranged plant composition are in total contradiction to botanical reality, but in spite of the artificiality the imagery and sensation of three dimensions make the relief a striking work. The majority of the flowers in this illusionist sculpture are unidentifiable in the absence of elaboration of the rest of the plant, but among them can be found a few flowers that are more rose-like than the rosette, an open oval flower with five petals.

A late first-century pilaster from the Haterius burial vault in Rome (Vatican Museum), displaying the influence of the late neo-Attic school, features a string of roses. The rosebuds and leaves are botanically accurate, but the open four-petalled flowers are not; plant forms appear on the relief both completely raised from the plane as well as merged almost smoothly into the background. The historical flat reliefs also provide other examples of the optical illusion style – in them the decorative effort and allegorical nature merge together.

A characteristic feature of Roman art was the effort, with emphasis on the elementary rules of perspective, to achieve the greatest possible identity between reality and the artistic image, despite the fact that it was generally unable to produce images in keeping with reality. It attempted to unite too many traditions – for example, the ornamentality of Pergamon and Hellenism (where roses were shown with only five petals), the plasticity of Attic sculpture emphasizing forms and patterns, and the structure of Greek allegorical/mythological compositions – and the originals proved more powerful than the efforts to synthesize them.

With the collapse of the republic and the foundation of imperial Rome, painting, which served a predominantly private clientele, was the genre which showed the greatest progress, and influenced the evolution of other branches of fine art (such as mosaic art) which were more suited to works commissioned by the state and community. Paintings on the inside walls of residences and painting-like mosaics on the floors functioned as decoration. M. Vitruvius Pollio's *De architectura libri decem* also surveys the evolution of fresco painting in the Augustan era (VII, 5). In the author's opinion the earliest frescos imitated the marble cladding of public buildings, and later depicted entire buildings –



larger interior surfaces were painted with theater scenes from comedies and tragedies, and the exteriors with scenes of covered walkways, landscapes, parks, and so on.

In the first century BC the complex “architecture of seeming” of wall surfaces, following the models of Hellenic palace architecture, were made richer – in Vitruvius’ opinion, more theatrical – by the increased use of sculpted elements including landscapes, plant images, and urban details. The wall of one dark, underground room in the Prima Porta villa of Empress Livia (late first century BC) was painted to give its inhabitant the feeling of being in the veiled depths of a carefully planned and cultivated garden. The walls show an artificial orchard and its crowded lush green vegetation, with (stylized) roses in full flower in the rich undergrowth. The garden is “separated” from the room by a path stretching between a painted plank fence and a stone base wall carved with geometric patterns, thus giving perspective to the image. The picture of a spring garden abundant in flowers and fragrant leafy trees gave guests in the grotto chamber the illusion of comfort in the summer heat.

Detailed landscapes also featured the oft-depicted roses. For Romans, the pleasure of landscapes and gardens – whether real or in idealized imitations – gained importance with the spread of the passion for building gardens and parks. Landscape painting bore the elements of its Hellenic predecessor, characterized by graceful figures, gay environments, light yet accurate depictions, group compositions, perspective and occasionally a wealth of color. The landscape was generally speckled with people, and even if people are absent, there are still signs of the hand of man and a character to entice or receive population. Wealthier city residences covered their walls with pictures of cultivated landscapes, which differed from Greek pictures in that the natural environment was also given a role in addition to depictions of people: the realism of the topography and plants and animals marks a turning-point, as the Romans added this new dimension to their paintings.

The surviving frescos of Pompeii are testimonies of first-century painting. In 62 many of the houses in this city at the foot of Vesuvius were damaged in a minor earthquake and then renovated. The volcanic eruption in 79 buried and preserved these new pictures. On these large, dark red and black surfaces are floral strings, unrealistic combinations of plants and animals, fine patterns, and architectural details quite removed from reality, as well as scenes and landscapes depicted as if seen through an opening in the wall. The frescos of the Vettius home (Pompeii, late middle first century) include a red rosebush (*R. gallica*) with many petals, tied to a stake. The leaves of the plant are drawn with a variety of placements, and among the open flowers some buds can be seen. The painter strove for the same realism in the case of this plant as he did for the bird sitting on top of the stake. The rose bush in Livia’s villa, although recognizable, relies on mass and spots for its effect; the rose in the Vettius residence is more detailed. The one in Livia’s home uses the image merely as an evocation, while the one in Pompeii, in what is known as the fourth fresco style, is more life-like, identified by greater reliability of detail.

However, roses were also depicted outside their appearance in nature, which partly explains the preferred presentation of the fragrant flowers. In the *pinacotheca* of the Vettius home, the picture of a bower appears as if through a window, surrounded by a copy of a Greek painting, with two trees on the left and right. The structure comprising part of the upper storey opens to a wall surface, and an open door is under it. On the support planks lie sheared rose branches blooming with red petals. This garden is fenced in, a place closed off from prying views, with flowers scattered randomly on the roof: according to plant use, it offers the undisturbed opportunity for amorous encounters, or evening drinking, or other forms of intimate company not intended for public scrutiny. The phrase ‘sub rosa,’ or under the roses, allows for a number of meanings. For those in a garden, only the scent of the roses would be sensed, but for the viewer of the painting it is the place marked by the flower which is described. Those under the rose are isolated from the rest of the world, so whatever they do is secret. Further light on the meaning of ‘sub rosa’ is shed by the legend of the god Harpocrates. Mistakenly believed by the Hellenic world to be of ancient Egyptian origin, Harpocrates was the god of silence who was bribed with roses by Cupid not to reveal the loves of Venus. Nothing is known of the notions held by the residents of the Vettius home with regard to the rose, but every layer of meaning in the picture is explainable by knowledge supported by Hellenic sources.

The roses in the painting in the Vettius home are allegorical in meaning – and the viewer arrives in similar fashion at the meaning of each image. Additionally, the flowers are so realistic – as are the plants in the house’s painting of a staked rose bush – that the species is identifiable: *R. gallica*. (Pliny would later describe this plant in *Naturalis Historia* as growing in the wild in Praeneste [today:

Palestrina]. A temple to Fortuna was erected in Praeneste in the first century BC on the cultic site of a former oracle, and was sought out by masses seeking favor from the goddess of happy accidents.)

Further, in addition to this presumably everyday form of use, the placement of this rose painting on the roof of the wooden structure alludes to the respect – and usage – its powerful scent was accorded.

While at the end of the first century fresco painting (with the exception of landscape painting in the Flavian period) was pushed to the background and wall decoration lost its importance in interior design, there was an increase in the importance of mosaic art, which had formed in the classical era and became widespread and popular under Hellenism. Wealthier citizens decorated the representative rooms of their homes and the floors and selected wall sections of public buildings with ornamental and figural images made of marble or stone tiles fixed in cement. The centers of larger surfaces were usually occupied by imitations of paintings.

The Caselei villa near the settlement of Piazza Armerina in Sicily has more than thirty rooms with mosaics taking up more than 4000 square meters, made in the late imperial era, the third or fourth century. The columnar mosaic on the floor of Room 45 *a* and *b* shows a scene of garland-weavers in a garden. On the upper section of the mosaic two girls are at work underneath a tree: sitting on wicker seats they weave a *corona* from a basket of flowers. Two plants are identifiable in the mosaic. Hanging from the central tree is a single enormous ivy leaf, often considered to be the emblem of the people of Herculia, while also – as the plant of Bacchus – recalling the Dionysian legends and the garlands awarded conquerors. The entire field of the picture is covered by sheared branches which bear the same flowers as those in the basket and the semi-finished garlands. Highly simplified flowers, presumably roses, are also on the two *coronas*, which are placed on a little table beneath the scene amid palm branches and bags of money.

An understanding of the meaning of the mosaic is provided by the custom of the Rosalia, a pagan flower festival in May, although it may also be tied to the Cerealia celebrations in April, when festival events were held in theaters between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup>, and in the Circus Maximus in Rome on the 19<sup>th</sup> when the consuls' terms of office officially expired.

*Filosofiana's* Rooms 43 *a* and *b*, which may have functioned as a *nymphaeum* or bedroom, are decorated by a similar garden scene. Two girls in the uppermost column of the mosaic are picking flowers from leafy bushes very similar to those of the previous drawing. In the field below it floral strings are being made from the collected products.

According to the two pictures roses were used to make garlands to award those who had earned praise as well as for floral strings to decorate areas, objects, plants and animals, and people in both sacred and profane contexts. However, picked roses may also have been used for purposes in addition to the multifunctional floral strings in the garden: the youth in the mosaic between Room 43 *a* and *b*, carrying two baskets of flowers on a pole balanced on his shoulder, is consistent with the conclusion that the product was also used in other places for other purposes.

What is beyond doubt is that the flowers used were supplied from widespread plantations for their production. In the pictures – unlike the scenes of gardens of numerous species, including roses – the bushes are all of the same type, with the exceptions of a single ivy leaf and one unidentifiable bush.

In the third century the most characteristic change in painting was in the tomb paintings in private burial chambers and catacombs. The seemingly undemanding minimalism in them reflects the influence of the Christian worldview. The paintings of the *burial vault of the Octavia family* were also made with this influence as its driving force. The picture of the afterlife continues only a few sparse symbols, while the majority of the surface is a simple unpainted wall. The white background is the “landscape” itself, and the tiny figures in the foreground, souls in the afterlife, wander on loose soil amid flowering plants much larger than themselves. In the foreground is the largest figure, Hermes, beside whom a soul falls to the ground from a birdcage. The only color in the region of Hades is provided by red rose-like plants, some open, some budding, among which lonely souls wander, picking and gathering them.

Given the mythological origin of the rose, its use in tombs seems justified through its association with blood and with death. The first-century *Haterius burial vault* also calls attention to the fact that the living plants around the tombs should include roses as reminders of the earthly past and symbols of the otherworldly future. A tomb inscription found in Pannonia similarly requests the inheritor to honor the grave with this flower:

*Whoever you are who inherits this house and garden after me,  
Scatter all the roses from my little garden on my ashes  
And adorn my grave with radiant lilies.*  
(Hungarian translation: József Révay)<sup>59</sup>

#### 4. Roses associated with the main figures of Roman mythology

The stories of the gods in ancient Greek and Roman mythology read as parts of a constantly changing process, the components of which were created by the ideas of the community and the individual. In this religious idea an important role was assigned to interpretations of godly and human love and reproduction in direct and indirect expressions of anthropomorphizations of fertility characteristic of both the early forms of religion and the mythic worldview. Human-shaped gods gave explanation and regulation to Nature and man's place therein. Of the fertility divinities there were some who represented immortality as manifested through fertility. These gods in a crop agriculture society bore numerous qualities characteristic of plant life.

In the separation of gods by function Aphrodite/Venus was associated with the ancient, overpowering reproductive instinct and emotion-laced love, and Dionysus/Bacchus with the enjoyment of life freed from both rationality and irrationality. They were cloaked in images of biologically based rapture, ceremonies, and customized rituals. The concept of fate implicit in the existence of gods was apparently sufficient for the members of the community to accept it without an order of priests. Partly for this reason, the symbols associated with the members of the pantheon took shape in a variety of ways, with numerous interconnections between the symbolic elements. The figures of Aphrodite and Dionysus explained human reproduction bared of the bonds of man's dependency on Nature – and his own body. The rose of Aphrodite/Venus and Dionysus/Bacchus (and of Persephone, the Muses, and so on) was always partly an elementary symbol of reproduction and partly a representation of the emotions, interests and psychological conditions tied to the continuation of the species.

A natural consequence of centuries of mutual influence between Greek and Roman culture was the great degree of similarity between the two mythological systems, as well as the political structures and tiny details of everyday life. The mythic legends of the Roman mother goddess appear identical to Greek stories of Aphrodite, and the secondary figures associated with them likewise underwent little change. The roses in these legends are flowers expressing youthful beauty, overwhelming desire and ecstasy, and self-driven sexuality. The rose was the flower which belonged most to Venus, and the Romans believed it to have been created at the same time as the birth of the goddess.

Like the Greeks, the Romans tied the creation of the rose to body fluids, especially blood.<sup>60</sup> The interpretation of the role of the blood in ancient thinking appears in association with the soul and thus with life and particularly the changes in life. Plants coming into being from the drops of blood of a mythological being are reported in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, including the hyacinth (X, 162), the narcissus (III, 399), the crocus (IV, 283), the pine (X, 104) and the anemone (X, 503).

That the Roman rose should be tied simultaneously to creation, fertility, beauty, love, exaltation, passage, and the celebration of all of these, as well as being their symbols, is explained in the figure of a single god: Venus, to whom the flower most belonged. Venus was originally an ancient Italian fertility goddess, and her name traces back to the verbal root *wen-*, 'to desire.' Venus was worshiped as the goddess of spring in the town of Ardea, and mentioned in three secondary forms at the harvest festival of August 19: Venus Murcis, Venus Cloacia, and Venus Libitina. Venus Libitina was the goddess of death and the namesake of morticians (*libitinarii*). The first temple of Venus was erected in 215 BC in Rome, by which time she was identified with Aphrodite, and her features derived from those set down in objects and written sources from Greek culture.

The Romans gave the name Rosalia to the holiday honoring the transformation of the dead into a rose and the transcendence of love over death. This holiday began being held only in the first century BC, and on dates ranging from May 11 to July 15, depending on the region.

<sup>59</sup> Poetae Latini minores. V. Dracontius: 12. 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> Dracontius. Poetae Latini minores. V. 12. 6-7.

The figure of Venus perpetuated the ideas of pre-Roman Italian cities, such as when she was merged with Frutis, the goddess of gardens and fruits.<sup>61</sup> The ancient goddess of flowers and spring, Flora (to whom an ancient temple stood at Quirinalis, and a newer one built in 238 BC near the Circus Maximus), was identified with Venus in the Hellenic era. This latter – with Greek mediation, indirectly – also merged features of the fertility goddess of eastern cults into her figure. Early ideas of her would eventually be replaced by the unified myth of the origin of Rome, in which she was identified as the mother of Aeneas.

In Titus Lucretius Carus' Epicurean *De rerum natura* Venus is considered the source of all life, the progenerative force and power of creation, and the mediator of peaceful artistry; the work begins with a hymn to Venus, one of the finest passages in world literature.<sup>62</sup> Elements of the Roman myth recording the role of the community in the goddess' transformation from Aphrodite to Venus and attempting to define her features can be found from the time of the Punic War; but it was Titus Livius and Virgil who put them in unified form. In the *Aeneid* Venus is the original mother and patroness of the Romans, for which reason her cult became widespread by the first century BC. Venus worship increased when Caesar claimed that the Julius family from which he was descended originated with the goddess herself, and her son, Aeneas of Troy, the founder of Rome. In 48 BC Caesar erected a temple to Venus at the Julian Forum. In Ovid's *Hymn to Venus* the goddess is now viewed as the one who maintains order in the world through love.<sup>63</sup>

The mythological order began to lose its popularity in the first century with the formation of the Empire, and the figure of the goddess came increasingly to include the characteristics of the sensual oriental deities Ishtar and Astarte. When Greek and Latin prose and satirical and epigrammatic poetry presented her as a character of ribald tales or as an allusion to such works, Venus lost her eminence as goddess.

In written sources and painted depictions Venus continues to hold her association with amorous desire – sometimes mercilessly so – and this trait justifies her popularity. Her father is Caelus, god of the dew. Like her predecessor, Venus was born near Cyprus in a seashell, and is raised by the Seasons, personifications of time and its laws depicted as young women. It is they who lead their ward before the gods, with a mysterious belt around her waist and a garland of myrtle and roses on her head. Venus is taken by another triad, the Graces (Joy, Charm and Beauty), on a chariot drawn by doves and presented to Jupiter. Sources vary on the birth of the Graces: some give the father as Zeus, others as Helios, or occasionally Dionysus, while the mother is Eurynome Oceanis, or sometimes Aphrodite. Although she has many suitors, Venus is wedded to Vulcan and moves to the underground darkness. Phoebus Apollo and Mars both compete for her, but Mars, the god of war and brute force, will become her lover: their child is winged Cupid, or Eros, usually depicted as a child who shoots his arrows of love.

Mars and Venus' affair is revealed, however, and Vulcan ensnares the lovers in a net of chains and shames them. In Greek tradition Venus also had an affair with Dionysus, the offspring of which was another fertility god, Priapos, whose cult came to Rome directly from Asia Minor – without Greek mediation – sometime in the pre-Christian era. Priapos was worshiped as the god of physical love and gardens.

Venus falls in love with the mortal prince Adonis, a passionate hunter, and therefore Mars kills him, attacking him in the form of a wild boar and shedding his blood.

The ambivalent nature of Venus' character is suggested by her quite dissimilar lovers, Vulcan, Mars, and Adonis. However, these mythical male figures share features related to fertility.

The stories of Venus are preserved in numerous episodes, the majority of which cannot be tied to a single storyline. However, sources very frequently give the rose as one of the plants or animals dedicated to her, along with the myrtle, apple, poppy, linden, dove, dolphin and swallow.

<sup>61</sup> Naevius, G. In: *Corpus Glossarium Latinorum*. V. 521, 565.

<sup>62</sup> Lucretius: *De rerum natura*. I. 1-43.

<sup>63</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. IV. 90-132.

#### 4.1. Venus

Tibullus, in his first book, third elegy, portrayed Venus as the goddess not only of fertility but also of human love. Yet, Venus is not the guide to a happy and full life, instead taking the complaining poet to Elysium, the habitat of those slain by the arrows of Amor. Writers of Roman elegies often built on the internal contradiction represented by melancholy love.

*“And I, eternal devoted subject of gentle Love,  
am taken by great Venus to the soft fields of Elysium,  
where there is singing and dancing, and flocks  
of honey-voiced birds sing their charming songs;  
cinnamon grows wild there, and orchids bloom, and the rich soil  
graciously scatters fragrant roses everywhere,  
and youths play in the meadow with charming maidens,  
Amor conquering endlessly for their troops;  
there dwell all lovers who came to an untimely end,  
green myrtle garlands on their lovely heads.”<sup>64</sup>*

From the myrtle to the rose, from volatile desire to Amor, every theme is enumerated in this melancholy poem; the goddess, however, is not portrayed as the mother goddess and guiding force of the Romans. In place of community ordainment the poet's private life is given a fatal role: although this dirge is subjective, there is no reason to doubt its seriousness. The narrative nature and tragic atmosphere of the Roman love elegy accurately reflects the difference between their interpretation of love and that of the Greeks. This is not merely a question of the poet emphasizing his own deep emotions instead of a mythological love situation; he also describes the irresolvable and ultimately fatal tension between desire and the resultant defenselessness. For Catullus love represents infinite suffering, manfully endured. Tibullus' Delia, of *Elegy* 1, 3 – not his wife, this tormenting mistress lives according to her own laws and rejects the commitment of marriage – offers no less. Still, Tibullus stresses the value of events from personal life and believes in the attainability of a kind of idyll where peace and love have the greatest appeal. (*“He who loves is holy and inviolable; wherever he may go, / none shall lay snares beneath him.”*<sup>65</sup>)

In Tibullus' moralistic works Venus and Cupid (Amor) are described as gods simultaneously causing splendor and pain. Nor does he neglect praise of Bacchus and other gods important to the rustics. Through his re-thematization of the figures of the pantheon he also provides information on the common folk's ideas about these gods.

*“Come to honor this great goddess, Latin women, / and you who wear unscented short dresses. / ... / Again floral garlands and roses shall cover her!”*<sup>66</sup> calls Ovid to Roman maidens and women for the April 1 celebration of Venus, Mars' lover, in a passage from *Festal Hymn to Venus*. For the Vinalia, the wine-tasting festival of April 23, prostitutes are urged to turn to their goddess: *“Give offerings on the altar of Venus, ladies of the evening! / ... / Bring your lady myrtle and garlands / of rose woven among fragrant cress and bulrush!”*<sup>67</sup> Worship of Venus was expected of all Romans: her popularity is proven by the number of temples built to her and the frequency of her image on vases, frescos, reliefs, and statues.

An anonymous author – probably in the fourth century – wrote *Cras amet, qui nunquam amavit; quique amavit cras amet* (*Waking of Venus*). The poem collects the best-known tales of Venus and symbols of her character: the recurring abundance of Nature, the dove, the opening of flowers. Fertile rain falling from the sky onto the sea is given as the origin of the goddess' birth; similar arguments justify the use of dewdrops on a rose as signs of fertility. The dual association of rain and flowers immediately implies an evocation of Venus:

<sup>64</sup> Tibullus: *Elegiae*. I. 3. 57-66; Hung. trans. Kerényi G. (1962) 17. p. 57-66.

<sup>65</sup> Tibullus: *Elegiae*. I. 2. 27-28; Hung. trans. Kerényi G. 13. p. 27-28.

<sup>66</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. IV. 133-134, 138; Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) 74. p. 133-1234, 138.

<sup>67</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. IV. 865, 869-870; Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) 93. p. 865, 869-870.

*“With fresh buds She lightens this purple season,  
and caressing the fresh blossom tips with a gentle breeze,  
She enlarges them to lush chalices, and what was left by the night wind:  
she scatters the nectar of heavenly dew glowingly.  
A flood of tears falls shining, weighing but a drop, trembling,  
but the light pearl of teardrops, reaching earth, is caught:  
the virgin ash of the petals’ purple disappears:  
and behold! the nectar which the sky bedewed in the quiet night  
disrobes the virgin blossoms at dawn ...  
She willed it thus: and at dawn the rose takes its wedding bed,  
– virgin flower, born of Amor’s kiss and Cypria’s blood,  
in it the union of the Sun’s flame and the red ruby, –  
tomorrow to be dressed in veil, fresh and beautiful as a young girl,  
exposing the dawn of her young body from its hiding place ...*

*Love me now, if ever you loved me, – you loved me not? Love me now!’<sup>68</sup>*

Although *Ver erat, et blando mordenti a frigore sensu* was attributed to Decimus Magnus Ausonius (310-395), the poem is actually the work of an anonymous author. Spring dawn, dew on a rose, signs of the certainty of Venus – star and flower – in the celestial and elemental worlds, a color metaphor of Aurora, and at the end of the elegy a moralist conclusion of the proper lifestyle – all of these are the same cliché motifs as found in the poem beginning *Cras amet, qui nunquam amavit; quique amavit cras amet*, proving the contemporary popularity not only of the topic but also of the repertoire for expressing it.

*Spring came, and after the bitter frost today with such sweet gold  
and mild breath appeared the morning light,  
the breeze playfully preceding the chariot of dawn’s light,  
its charming words bring the promise of milder weather.  
With desire I wandered the gardens, so lovely the smooth road:  
hoping the light would warm my heart,  
and I saw the frost still sparkled on the earth-bent grass,  
its beads rocking the leaves of many plants;  
yet on the buds the drops were already melting,  
– impregnated by celestial waters –  
and I saw roses rejoicing in the garden of Paestum:  
rose stems in the dewy new light;  
now feeble the bead of thaw on them,  
ready to wither away in the Sun’s beam,  
and wondering whether the red was stolen from them by Dawn,  
or whether the celestial beam gave them new color...*

*One color, one dew, and with them one light shines on both:  
star and rose – for they are one with Venus –,  
and perhaps also one scent: but the former is dispersed in the ether,  
while the latter wafts all the richer –  
woman of both star and rose petal, lovely Cytherea,  
dressed in a veil also of one color ...  
This is the minute when, growing in the various  
stages of life, flowers appear before us:  
and while they grow hidden in the thin cover of leaves,  
the feeble leaf anticipates their fresh red all the more:  
already the bud opens its needle tip,*

<sup>68</sup> *Poetae Latini minores*. IV. 307. 13-26; Hung. trans. Maticsó J. 411-412. p. 19-34.

*extinguishing the dagger with its purple petals at least,  
then its head emerges from its thin cloak,  
and readies to spread its petals and show itself ...  
the moment flies past: extending its basket with gay smile,  
exposing the dense cluster of its secret gold seeds,  
and that which the moment before shone with the fire of its lush chalice  
pale and bent lowers its orphan head.”<sup>69</sup>*

The rather detailed scenes of the poem draw the image of the rose with a plasticity unprecedented in written texts: the colorful petals emerging from the cover of the sepals, the sepal-tips stretching like daggers over the bud, the basket-like opening of the petals, the gold-colored stamen amid them, and its rapid season of bloom – this accurate and realistic description of the *R. gallica* flower and its blooming also conveys the mysterious nature of the rose. The rose is the emblem of a secret which grows hidden and protected and then is suddenly exposed, the sign of all the unnamed values which manifest themselves to the viewer *sub rosa*.

*“And I watched the rapid flight of the thief of time:  
hardly is it born and already the flower wilts ...  
its red petals falling, its ruby jewels shedding:  
you barely say a word and the earth shines covered in red.  
What hopes, what variety, what a multitude of forms  
are shown in a single day – then the day takes them away ...  
and we complain, O Nature, why are your charms so fleeting:  
scarcely do you show your treasure when you snatch it away.  
One day’s fleeting run: that much is a rose’s bloom,  
beautiful youth is followed by the shadow of old age,  
and she whom the dawn Star perceived yet as a maid  
is a withered old woman by evening.  
It is good, at least, that this creation which lives but a few days  
leaves its seeds to inherit its existence –  
Pick the rose, girl, while its flower is young and fresh,  
and do not forget: time will slip away from you, too! ...”<sup>70</sup>*

The following story of the origin of the rose was reported by Blossius Aemilius Dracontius, a fifth-century Carthaginian Christian poet who used pagan mythology as light playful topics to entertain his readers:

#### *The birth of the rose*

*From Mars’ embrace Venus fled over the meadow,  
and her feet – they say – bore no sandal.  
But a thorn hid in ambush amidst the gentle grass:  
she steps on it, and forthwith her foot begins to bleed.  
A few drops fall on the vile thorn, and the assassin  
is dressed in scarlet robe and balsam scent.  
And all the underbrush of the glowing meadow is bright purple,  
and star-petalled red roses bloom on their hills.  
O Cypris, what availed it to flee violent Mars  
if your foot soaks the ground in flame-colored blood?  
And is this how you punish those who hurt you, blushing Cytherea,  
hiding the rude thorn in purple buds?*

<sup>69</sup> Ausonius (1961) Appendix II. 1-34; Hung. trans. Maticsó J. 414-415. p. 1-34.

<sup>70</sup> Ausonius (1961) Appendix II. 35-50; Hung. trans. Maticsó J. 415. p. 35-50.

*It becomes you thus to take vengeance, lovely goddess  
of love: you make beautiful that which harms you.*<sup>71</sup>

The rose was so closely tied to the person of Venus that its subordinated role gradually changed, and eventually each became a symbol of the other. Tiberianus (early 4<sup>th</sup> century) in his celebration of spring beginning *Amnis ibat inter arva valle fusus frigida* produced a magnificent poetic inversion through which Venus herself became a symbol of the rose, rather than the other way around.

*“And behold among all the treasures and jewels of fresh spring  
– there is the dawn of colors and queen of all scents –  
a rose appears sparkling: beautiful Cypria...”*<sup>72</sup>

The Carthaginian epigrammatist Luxorius (early 6<sup>th</sup> century) similarly used Venus (as well as the Sun and dawn’s light) to symbolize the many-petalled, fragrant, blood-colored rose rather than the rose to symbolize the goddess in *Hanc puto de proprio tinxit sok aureus ortu*:

*“I believe the dawn light of golden Sun painted it  
whereby this rose is almost a pure beam;  
as if the hundred-petalled flower revealed Cypris herself,  
its magic blood was bestowed by Venus.  
She is the star of flowers, dawn light on the fields,  
For her scent and color honored and blessed by the sky.”*<sup>73</sup>

Rose symbols associated with Venus in Roman history exhibit the same rhetorical change as that observed for the majority of symbols which were used throughout. The god association initially demanded conceptual proof by the simple use of the word ‘rose.’ Later the most important traits of the rose (alluding to and linked with the qualities of the gods) also appeared, such as its scent or color. Still later – following changes in the ideas on love – the norm became a more detailed, informative, sensual description of the rose, along with individual interpretations. The richly ornamented texts were coupled with explanations of the ethical worldview, generally in the spirit of either Stoic or Epicurean philosophy. The microcosm of the rose had meaning on the macrocosm for the viewer, pointing to the proper path to be followed in everyday life. The flower was given a role in sensory proofs: in the late imperial era its previous use as symbol of the gods was re-evaluated, and it became important for its rhetoric rather than for its grammar.

#### 4.2. Cupid/Amor

Until the third century Greek was the language of Christianity. Although the switch to Latin (325) made Christian ideas available to wider circles, throughout the fourth century the religion continued to exist alongside and parallel to pagan culture. Pagan traditions survived in villages and in aristocratic families, who considered themselves the perpetuators of the Roman religion. The spread of pagan ideas and beliefs was also supported or tolerated by several of the emperors. Decimus Magnus Ausonius (310-395), tutor of the son of Emperor Valentinianus I, was a Christian poet, but his poetic repertoire abounded in elements of Greek and Roman mythology. As a teacher of grammar and rhetoric he also provided his students with elements of traditional Roman culture, including Virgil, Terence, Cicero and Sallustius. His love epigrams include ribald pieces featuring Venus: an epitome of his poetry is the work beginning *Æris in campis, memorat quos musa maronis*. The characters in this satirical poem – Narcissus, Hyacinthus, Crocus and Adonis, Sappho, Phaedra, Thisbe and others – take revenge on Amor, as their fate was determined by passionate love induced by Cupid’s arrow. When

<sup>71</sup> *Poetae Latini minores*. V. Dracontius: 12. 1-14; Hung. trans. Rónai P. 473. p. 1-14.

<sup>72</sup> *Poetae Latini minores*. III. Tiberianus: 1. 8-10; Hung. trans. Maticsó J. 435. p. 8-10.

<sup>73</sup> *Poetae Latini minores*. IV. 520. 1-6; Hung. trans. Kurucz F. 476. p. 1-6.



Cupid flew among them on the celestial field, they seized the winged miscreant and tied him up in a myrtle orchard, where they sentenced him to compensation for their wounds:

*“..., as if they were merely playing with him, with pretended good humor they stabbed him with small darts, bringing forth warm blood which opens the rose, or holding an impish burning lamp and moving it near his loins.”*

Venus herself is found among the women who behave like Furies because their son was forced to the love of Mars.

*“Yet lovely Venus does not just speak: with a rose string she beats her sad child, who expects even worse. From the many wounds of the beaten body the rose string calls forth purple blood, blood falls on the flower, deluging it and making it shine in fiery red light.”<sup>74</sup>*

The story of the creation of the rose is subjected to two twists in this work. First, the blood from Amor's wounds opens into a rose. In the second instance, this is what gives the reddish-purple color to the obviously non-red rose string. As objects of poetic twists a vast number of similar works characterize the late imperial period. Blossius Aemilius Dracontius' *Dicitur alma Venus dum martis vitat amores*, cited earlier, was built on similar poetic invention.

Claudius Claudianus (ca. 370 - ca. 404) was a Greek-born poet who left Alexandria to join the Western Roman Empire and become one of the greatest Latin poets of the late imperial period. When Emperor Theodosius the Great from his deathbed approved the marriage of his son Honorius, the boy was only 14, for which reason the wedding had to wait until 398. *Epithalamium de nuptiis Honorii Augusti* is representative of the exaltative literature of this Greek-influenced panegyric poet, who enjoyed the benevolence of the Christian emperor in Ravenna. In it he relates everything that can be found in the mythology about Venus and her constant attendants, including Amor, and the goddess' favorite venues, and the episodes of her life – all naturally in order to adorn his poem of praise of the recipient. He also considers it important to describe Venus' sea voyage on a triton, in his characteristically detailed style. The half-man, half-fish monster

*“Looms over the goddess, bending concave, and with purple blankets making soft his hard, barnacled back; this cave will be Venus' galley: she travels, dipping her snow-white foot into the water, accompanied by the wing beats of little Amor, as the sea resounds with their dance. Neptune's palace is in flower, Leucothoe child of Cadmus plays there, a nimble dolphin is led on a rose braid by Palaemon, and Glaucus' gray locks are garlanded with bay.”<sup>75</sup>*

#### 4.3. Flora

Unlike the Greeks, the Roman gods had no mythology of their own. Literarians contributed to its creation, including one who compiled and arranged the scattered traditions with great artistry: Ovid (43 BC - 17/18 AD). Ovid undertook the compilation of Greek myth variants, clichés, ideas and stories taken unchanged from Roman predecessors, and on numerous occasions elaborated his tales

<sup>74</sup> Ausonius (1978) XIV. 75-78, 88-92; Hung. trans. Bede A. 426-427. p. 76-79, 88-92.

<sup>75</sup> Claudianus: *Epithalamium dictum Honorio Augusto et Mariae* (10.) 149-158; Hung. trans. Rónay Gy. 451-452. p.

with individual embellishments. The *Flora* fragment, for example, combines narrative facts and undocumented Greek opinions to provide posterity a newly formed mythology.

Flora was the goddess of grain, gardens and flowers, at whose uninhibited festivals the providers of love – prostitutes – mixed with the common folk during the celebrations<sup>76</sup> and stripped naked at the mime performances. At the request of the goddess of spring fertility the gods had changed a dead nymph into a flower. This resulted in the rose, which gained its life from Apollo, its nectar from Bacchus, its fruit from Pomona, its fragrance from Vertumnus, and its petals from Flora. This is all related by Flora herself in Ovid's *Fasti* at the author/narrator's request – and during her tale “*from her lips the rose breath of spring*” flies. Ovid considered Flora to derive from the Greek nymph Chloris.

*“Flora I am, Chloris I was. The Latin tongue  
cannot pronounce my name correctly.  
I was Chloris, a nymph in the field of happiness, where  
once long ago the human race lived happily.”*<sup>77</sup>

The goddess (according to Ovid's tale) was pursued by the enamored Zephyrus, who took her virginity. As a gift he gave her the garden of the most splendid season, packed full of flowers – thus she became the queen of gardens and flowers, displaying her regenerative science every spring. At this time the Graces arrive bearing floral garlands.<sup>78</sup>

Flower-rich spring – in the Flora interpretation – was the time to make garlands to honor the gods, and the weaving of the *coronas* was the office of the goddesses of charm, the Graces.

Flora herself lists the plants which originated from the blood of various mythological persons:

*“I created the hyacinth from Spartan blood:  
its moan can still be seen written on its petals.  
You, too, I will mention, poor Narcissus, among the garden's  
adornments: your face is different – yet the same!  
What of Crocus and Attis, son of Cinyas? Shall I speak of them,  
from whose blood their memory lives through me?  
And did you know Mars himself gained his existence from them?”*<sup>79</sup>

This was also a partial explanation of the Floralia, games in celebration of fertility, held occasionally since the third century BC and annually from 173 BC (April 28-May 3), at whose feasts roses had a variety of functions. Decoration of the tables, foods and drinks with these flowers and the rose garlands on the celebrants' heads praised not only Flora but also Bacchus.

*“Until wine was added to your drink, ...  
it was no joy to wear a rose braid.  
Bacchus favors the rose braid, and the flower;”*<sup>80</sup>

However, Flora – from whose hair flowers fall when she nods, “*like rose petals falling at a feast*”<sup>81</sup> – also gives a warning: Ovid makes the proper Epicurean deduction regarding the rose:

*“Live the day – so she teaches, while you have your youthful beauty!  
Pay no heed to the thorn, if the rose has fallen!”*<sup>82</sup>

The early transformation of Artemis into Diana as goddess of light and life (the latter also of the Moon and the hunt) was, like Flora, of old Italian origin. As sister of Apollo she also ruled over

<sup>76</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. V. 183-378; Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) 100-105. p. 183-178.

<sup>77</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. V. 195-198; Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) 101. p. 195-198.

<sup>78</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. V. 219-220; Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) 101. p. 219-220.

<sup>79</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. V. 223-229; Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) 101. p. 223-229.

<sup>80</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. V. 343-345; Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) 104-1085. p. 343-345.

<sup>81</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. V. 360; Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) 105. p. 360.

<sup>82</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. V. 353-354; Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) 105. p. 353-354.

fertility – primarily birth, as well as the entire plant kingdom. Since the hunt was also part of her domain, she was occasionally a patron in the related endeavor of war and battle. She hunted in the company of her nymphs, and one of the metamorphoses, into a rosebush as it happens, takes place in the stories of Diana. When the virgin goddess discovered that one of her attendants, Roselia, had agreed to marry Cynedor, in her anger she mortally wounded the man with her arrows. However, at the sight of his painful suffering she transformed his bleeding body into a rosebush.

#### 4.4. Proserpina

Daughter of Ceres and Jupiter, and wife of the king of the netherworld, Proserpina also has her tale related by Ovid (*Met.* V, 341-571). At Venus' encouragement Amor enflames the heart of Dis, who kidnaps Proserpina while she is tempting fate by picking flowers with a group of maidens at the banks of the lake of the netherworld, where "*the moist earth yields purple flowers: / spring lasts always.*"<sup>83</sup>

Claudianus' unfinished epic on this mythological theme, *De raptu Proserpinae*, made use of Ovid's version of Persephone/Proserpina, as well as the Eleusis cult of Demeter, and Egyptian Isis and Osiris worship. Interpreting this as a mystery religion, he relates the journey of grain and the soul to the underworld and its subsequent resurrection. In one scene it is Venus who, to prepare a kidnapping by Pluto, god of the underworld, encourages the maidens to pick flowers:

*"Venus urges them to pick flowers: 'Go now,  
girls, while the rising sun pours sweet dew,  
and my Lucifer casts moisture on the bright fields  
from his mighty steed,' she says, and picks  
the flower of pain while the maidens flock  
to the lush meadows.*"<sup>84</sup>

Lucifer – the Dawn Star – is naturally associated with the goddess, a frequent arranger of trysts: the dew which he scatters, as has been seen elsewhere, alluded to fertility and was interpreted as a harbinger thereof. Venus' 'flower of pain' is none other than the rose (cf. Dracontius). The picking of flowers at dawn accurately indicates the condition and role of the girls:

*"The meadow loses its wonders: One strings a bunch of lilies  
with blue violets; another is adorned with amarcus;  
on the others glitter garlands of flame-rose and privet.*"<sup>85</sup>

As the girls designate themselves with flowers they are stormed by Pluto, who, accompanied by the cries of the fertility goddess, seizes Proserpina and transports her to the underworld. The loveliest of the garlanded maidens has met her fate. However, her fate was predicted not only by her picking the blood-colored flower and making a garland from the most beautiful plants; earlier, at the beginning of dawn, a cloud of fragrance had covered the field, and spring-bringing Zephyr had also arrived, renewing the lawn and banishing clouds from the sky, then:

*"He paints the wild rose the color of blood, the fresh anemone  
blue, and the lovely viola brownish red.*"<sup>86</sup>

Resplendent in these marvelous colors – including that of the wild rose, symbol of the soul – the landscape is ruled by rejuvenated spring. It is precisely this point which Venus deems appropriate for the maidens to be tempted to pick flowers, for girls to become women.

<sup>83</sup> Ovid: *Metamorphoses*. V. 390-391; Hung. trans. Devecseri G. (1975) 141. p. 390-391.

<sup>84</sup> Claudianus: *De raptu Proserpinae*. II. 119-124; Hung. trans. Rónay Gy. 454. p.

<sup>85</sup> Claudianus: *De raptu Proserpinae*. II. 128-130; Hung. trans. Mezei B. 189. p. 128-130.

<sup>86</sup> Claudianus: *De raptu Proserpinae*. II. 92-93; Hung. trans. Mezei B. 188. p. 92-93.

Claudianus – court poet of a Christian emperor and presumably, judging from his selections of topic in his poetry, himself either a Christian or at least familiar with Christianity – in this poem with its pagan theme subtly interweaves the rose’s various fertility symbols. Christian dislike of the Greek and Roman mythological past was important to him, as it was a rich storehouse of rhetoric, a vital element of refined culture. In any event Augustinus judged him not to be a proper Christian, and in the centuries to follow he would continue to be considered a pagan, despite the fact that his poems were favorites of readers in the Middle Ages.

#### 4.5. Bacchus

Liber, who is identified with Dionysus and Bacchus, is also a god of fertility (and the grape). At his festival celebrants made “*raucous merriment*”<sup>87</sup> with phalluses made of flowers, and his attendants adorned themselves with garlands of flowers and leaves as they sang and danced. It was Bacchus who, when a maiden he was trying seduce was prevented from fleeing by the thorns of a briar rose, rewarded the bush by covering it in red roses. Here the rose is a subtle sign of the loss of virginity, a symbol of mature femininity as well as of sexual fulfillment. The connection between wine and love is indicated in the Cupid tale where a rose bush springs from the wine stain spilt from a cup.

Everything which Ovid listed as coming from Flora was characteristic of ordinary bacchic joys. Participants at feasts – giving blessings to both mortals and immortals – adorned their heads with garlands, and more rose petals were scattered on the table. Wine, the drink of Bacchus, dictated that the garland should be made of roses, as it was a favorite of the god, as were gaiety, merriment, celebration and youth.

*“For wined heads are decorated with floral garland,  
and the marvelous tables are covered with roses.  
With a linden garland on his head dances the drunk. The guest  
does not know how wine teaches him to dance.  
He sings drunkenly to a pretty girl at the somber doorstep,  
a floral garland adorning his fragrant locks.  
Nothing serious is done while wearing a garland.  
One with flowers on his head does not like to drink water.  
Until wine was added to your drink, O Achelous,  
it was no joy to wear a rose braid.  
Bacchus favors the rose braid, and the flower;  
behold, the star of Ariadne teaches this.  
Merry play becomes her. She is not one  
of the goddesses who favor sad things.  
And why do prostitutes sit at her feasts?  
The reason is not difficult to explain.  
She is not a stern goddess. Flora promises no great things.  
She is glad if the people sit at her feasts.  
“Live the day – so she teaches, while you have your youthful beauty!  
Pay no heed to the thorn, if the rose has fallen!  
Yet why is this goddess in mottled dress,  
if on the day of Ceres her robe is white?  
Perhaps it becomes white when the wheat ripens for harvest?  
and the colors of Flora’s flowers are a thousand fold?  
She nods, and flowers fall from her waving hair  
as rose petals fall at a feast.”*<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Tokarev, S. A. (1988) II. 171. Virgil: *Georgica*. III. 380.

<sup>88</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. V. 335-360; Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) 105-105. p. 335-360.

The rose-Bacchus association worked the same way as that observed for Venus and the rose. They became interchangeable. The interchangeability of sign and signified in turn meant a blurring of border between sacred and profane methods of use, as will be seen later in examples of garland use. Originally the garland, as a device to honor the gods, served an actually sacred function.

The rose was basically a fertility symbol of Venus. Through its association with fertility it became a sign of the closely related phenomena of beauty, love and spring, the season of beauty, love and selection of mate, as well as an expression of joy and rapture, and the gods whose domains these were (Amor, Diana, Flora, Adonis, Bacchus), and the fertility cycle and change of seasons (Proserpina), and occasionally even a stand-in for the gods themselves.

Thus, in Roman mythology as elsewhere the rose remained a flower of the gods – and of people who held the laws of the gods in respect. Through Venus the plant was associated with fertility, amorous attraction, physical love and spiritual beauty manifested through the body, innocence, youth and fulfillment, as well as with birth and death. Its physicality linked it to spring, the season of plenty, and to fertility and reproduction. Additionally, in accordance with the ancient concept of time, it was the plant of death as a part of fate. For these reasons it was the flower of the soul – and of the habitat of the soul in the human body, the blood. The rose frequently occurs in references to blood, as evidenced in myths of plants created from the blood of mythological figures, and when a person departed from life, the rose was an allegoric means of expressing the loss and pain. Through Greek culture, the rose's connection with the netherworld remained part of the Roman mythological belief system. It was linked to blood motifs in origin myths and a sign of pain, suffering and death. Through its connection with worship of the dead it was also an attendant on the road to the afterlife as well as a flower of the afterlife.

## 5. Roses and rose symbols in ancient love novels

Despite the fact that by the end of the imperial era public opinion held the reading of romantic novels to be the sign of a lack of culture, and authors lampooned those who read or wrote dubious works of this sort, the surviving manuscripts and manuscript fragments indicate that the genre was quite popular throughout the Empire. These entertaining works, rich in plot, were in their day considered by neither pagan nor Christian to be sufficiently instructive or edifying, and were roundly denounced by the authors of supposedly more serious works, philosophical treatises on the facts of reality, for example, the apostate emperor Iulianus (360-363), who reported on the reading material of the pagan priesthood in one of his letters, or the aristocrat Macrobius (early fifth century). These popular and highly readable works were at best recommended by doctors as a stimulant for male patients who sought a cure for sexual inadequacies.<sup>89</sup>

In the typology of Greek and Latin novels a separate category is composed of love novels. While the other, more prestigious types – historical, mythological, travel, comico-satirical, and Christian – had no shortage of fictitious elements, it was the love novels which, although they did not completely ignore the devices of contemporary natural philosophy, fed most on the imagination of their authors.

The novel, including the love novel, was a product of Hellenism also favored in Roman culture; its form at all levels was attained under the press of syncretic influences, and its organization was in many regards uniform – a framed string of episodes, scientific inserts, brave use of elements from existing genres, adventure, and a wide variety of settings. For citizens becoming autonomous of the polises of Hellenism, interest grew in stories of events from private life, and they took pleasure in reading about illustrative lives driven on their winding paths by capricious fate; readers trusted in the enduring power of love, the only emotion providing security and alluding to the harmony of the world. With the evolution of Hellenism a sense of lack in the vast literate middle class brought about this genre of light novel which, albeit superficially, promised an answer for everyone, each in an individual way, to questions arising in average civilian life, especially those relating to emotional security and insecurity.

A characteristic feature of these love novels was that the story of its protagonists developed in the framework of private life. These works strove to meet readership expectations which were below those

<sup>89</sup> Theodorus Priscianus: *Euporiston* libri III. 2. 34.

of the cultured elite, but characteristic of the less educated but still literate classes, as well as audiences who wanted stories but had to have them read to them. This nature as light entertainment makes it possible to examine rose symbols as a set of motifs installed in everyday form in the knowledge of the middle class. The structure of the love novel of ancient literature was surely meaningful to many, and its content was formed by consensus. That this genre maintained its popularity from its inception in the third century BC to the end of its heyday (by which time it approached higher literature) is similarly an indication that rose symbolism can be examined in unified form.

A common feature in love novels is that travel becomes an organizing element along with the emotional thread: numerous venues of the Mediterranean region appear in addition to the public and private spheres. The unities of plot and location as well as over-lapping make it possible to examine which signs of the love novel allowed a pairing with standard traditional rose usages. There were many shared permanent traits of this sort – due partly to the identical pasts, and partly to the identical genre. The emotional world of passionate heroes immediately promises the rose as signal of condition beside the figure of Aphrodite/Venus. The flower is also well-suited to express the spiritual wealth, purity or beauty of a given figure. The rose invests virginal women and men with godlike eternal signs, and expresses a life's fate. The rose is a device for expressing qualities or signs of a goddess' beauty and rapture, an indication that some spiritual, emotional or physical sign of a Parnassian nature should be perceived.

However, the rose expresses not only the origin, definition and current condition of the characters, but also forecasts their futures. Fate will bring the protagonists to fulfillment after seemingly hopeless tragic situations. Designation by the rose in this fashion is not only an expression of current value but also a promise of happiness – in the future tense and sense.

The locations of the adventures are always the coastal regions of the eastern and middle Mediterranean: Greece, Italy, Sicily, Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. According to the novels, how did knowledge of the rose in this region evolve? What information on the properties of the species and its cultivation are given? What benefits did the rose have, and which of these are implied in occurrences of rose symbols? Does the plant – and its linguistic manifestation – indicate geographic differentiation, or does it exist without localized signs? Is the biological plant or the associated mythological imagery referred to more frequently?

How do the symbols built on the botanical qualities of the plant change over time? In references to its color, thorns or scent are there new geographical, ecological, cultural or other signs, or are rose references in love novels characterized by an inner immobility or simple rearrangement of previously fixed patterns?

And finally, to what extent are the answers to the above questions different or the same if a distinction is made between realistic and idealistic versions of ancient love novels, if the *Satyricon* and donkey novels are compared with the unknown author of *Historia Apollonii regi Tyri*, or Heliodoros' *Aithiopika*, or Longos' idyllic pastoral novel *Daphnis and Chloe*?

### 5.1. Petronius

The *Satyricon* by Petronius (fl. 66), of which only fragments have survived, is a uniquely roseless novel of love and adventure. In the environment of the bedeviled, fraudulent protagonists, who experience sexuality in a wide variety of forms as revenge on the fertility god Priapus, the flower appears on two occasions, in poetic inserts which were used in early novels as a mnemonic device so that listeners to whom the story was read would find it easier to interpret and remember the inner meaning of the given passage. Little is known today of the practices of the cult of Priapus, or *mystedes*, as they were duly veiled in the cloak of mysticism; thus their use of the rose is also unknown. What can be learned of the flower is no more than what was known already. A greater respect and value for rare objects can be deduced from one of the passages.<sup>90</sup> A smell – the object nearest the ancient element of fire – is described through mention of cinnamon and the rose.

<sup>90</sup> Petronius: *Satyricon*. XCIII. "Our mistress / is prettier than our wife, and cinnamon is better than the rose." Hung. trans. Horváth I. K. (1972) 103. p.

The second passage, in an extended metaphor, describes a luscious lawn as a field as beautiful as the floral environment of the wedding night of Jupiter and his wife. The mundane and divine environments momentarily emphasize the otherwise undescribed rose motif which elsewhere was used to denote highly special amorous situations.

The reason and explanation for this second poetic insert is that the aptly named Circe was attempting to seduce the protagonist Encolpios, who was having an affair with a boy, into a concealed plantain orchard. The ecstasy which she hoped to achieve echoed the well-known passage from the *Iliad* (*Iliad*, XIV, 347-49) in which Juno seeks out her husband, Jupiter, to dally at Mount Ida in order to distract his attention from the battles over Troy.

*“Like the lush petals with which the Earth covered  
Mount Ida when Jupiter had nuptials with his wife  
and all his heart and soul were enflamed,  
roses and violets bloomed, and the white lilies  
laughed on fresh cyperon and the green field’s lawn:  
so lovely was the field which called Venus to the lawn bed,  
and the sun shone bright on our secret splendor.”*<sup>91</sup>

The rose ensured the exalted environment of the wedding night, and was as important to the other major gods as it was traditionally to Venus. Nor was it neglected by similarly impassioned humans – thus it is understandable that Circe and Encolpios, in hopes of consummation, intertwined on the lawn.

## 5.2. Lukianos

The short story *Lukios, or, The Donkey* survives under the name of the author Lukianos (120-180). The original story was a lost text by Lukios of Patra, which later was also used by a contemporary of Lukianos, Apuleius (124 - ca. 180), in his *Metamorphoses*. The two surviving versions are love stories describing the fate of a man transformed into a donkey, where the rose plays a major role in his transformation back. The formerly human protagonist attempts to find the flower that will break the spell. This magic, truly supernatural rose is found only in a human environment, in gardens, in the story: the plant alternately represents the condition of love or the quality of cultic situations, as a sign of decoration and celebration.

Tradition alone lists *Lukios, or, The Donkey* among the works of Lukianos, thus analysis of this work adds nothing to the knowledge of this author. It is interesting, however, to compare – based on the link to the name – the rose motifs in the Lukios tale which certainly existed in the second century, and those of Apuleius’ work, written at practically the same time, given that same tale was the basis for both versions, one written by a Greek and the other by a Roman (although he calls his work a Greek-style novel).

Lukios is a handsome young man who wishes to learn witchcraft while journeying in Thessaly. The wife of his host being an alleged witch, he seduces her serving maid in order to learn her secrets. His lover uses an ointment which, instead of turning him into a bird, transforms him into a donkey. From then on this being, with the mind of a human but the shape and voice of an animal, must live a donkey’s accustomed life of toil. He cannot escape his bitter fate, trying in vain to reverse the spell and being put to humiliating tasks, as he cannot obtain the crucial flower to turn him back. A beast of beggars, thieves and debauched priests, he roams about with a statue of the goddess Syria on his back, and has an amorous adventure with a wanton woman fascinated by the donkey’s phallus. Finally, when he is taken to a theater to display his sexual exploits, he finds a barrel of flowers and, digging among the flowers, eats a rose to regain human form.

In the story the rose is presented to describe a condition: anticipation of the sensual ecstasy soon to occur. *“Finally, on pretext of being sleepy, I got up and went to my room. In there, the girl had already arranged everything: she had made her bed outside, and beside my bed she set a table: there was a chalice on it, and beside it wine and hot and cold water. These preparations were the work of*

<sup>91</sup> Petronius: *Satyricon*. (XXVII.); Hung. trans. Horváth I. K. (1972) p. 153.

*Palaistra. The bed was strewn with roses, rose stems, rose petals, rose garlands. Before me was this cornucopia, and I waited for the girl to join me.*"<sup>92</sup> Live roses were in common use in both cultures, placed on the bed as a sign of the highest status: rose stems, petals, and garlands – and beside them wine and water. The bed would soon be the site of a love offering, where the two lovers give glory not only to each other, but also, through the act of love, to Eros.

The phallus and the rose: both are signs of love, but their meanings are not the same. The phallus represents the less valuable physical – indeed, animal – form of sex, while the rose represents the ethereal feeling more worthy of humans.

Her amorous transgression is the reason the maid shows Lukios how her mistress turns herself into an owl, then anoints him with the magical ointment – but instead of an owl, he is transformed into a donkey, an animal legendary for its enormous phallus. Afterwards Lukios is a prisoner of the life of a donkey, and of one of the donkey's attributes, its phallus. His only hope is the knowledge the despairing girl provides him after his transformation: "*Fear not, dearest, the problem is easy to solve: you must simply eat a rose, and forthwith you will remove the guise of beast of burden and return my lover to me. Dearest, remain a donkey just for tonight, and at dawn I will run and fetch a rose for you to eat and be cured.*"<sup>93</sup> Thus the rose is the ingredient capable of transforming a sheerly physical donkey into a lover capable of fully emotional action – the flower's association with sexuality also appears in the other rose locus.

Where did the girl pick those flowers, and where did she plan to get one the next morning? Where would she run to find the magic ingredient? The author prematurely informs the reader that the host and his household lived in a house in a city, with a fenced-in garden. The roses must have grown here. They were scarcely available in the wild. Nor did they grow in the city, except for sale in shops.

In the scenes set in the wilderness in the story, no roses are to be found; indeed, one passage seems to confirm the fact that this plant can be found only in gardens. Of his unsuccessful rose hunt the hero in donkey form recalls: "*At the end of the yard my eye was caught by a garden, full of marvelous vegetables of all sorts, and above them roses. ...Thus, I sneaked unnoticed into the garden to eat my fill of the vegetables and especially the roses, as I was certain that if I ate that flower, I would immediately change back to human form. So I entered the garden ... but the flower wasn't a real rose, but a kind that grew on wild vines. Its folk name was leander, a plant inedible to horse or donkey: one who ate it would supposedly die at once.*"<sup>94</sup>

The protagonist tries unsuccessfully to come across a rose. Much later he discovers the solution as a result of a woman's passionate lust for him and his phallus. The spectacle of the nightly dalliances of donkey and trollop become notorious. The animal's owner decides to show a theater audience what his beast is capable of. Among the crowd gathered to behold the event Lukios finds the flowers that provide his deliverance. However, his return to human form also represents a loss: without his donkey-sized phallus, he is rejected by his lover – and the protagonist himself is alienated from his source of lusty pleasure, from inordinately physical love.

Transformed from donkey/lover to human being, the protagonist, having proven no longer suited for a sexual role, anoints himself with the aromatic oil and dons the rose garland that had been made as a love offering, then spends the night banished from the house, naked, lying on the ground – as he says, he slept "*with the naked earth*"<sup>95</sup> – and gives thanks to the gods who rushed to his aid, whose sign, the rose garland, was the only apparel he wore.

The two types of love are outlined in Lukianos' story. A contrast is made between base, genital-centric sex and ideal, rose-symbolized love. And, although only remotely (as both were components of a single symbolism), the rose became a symbol of the phallus, and the phallus of the rose.

<sup>92</sup> Lukianos: *Lucius sive Asinus*. 7; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1974) vol. 2, p. 11.

<sup>93</sup> Lukianos: *Lucius sive Asinus*. 14; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1974) vol. 2, p. 15.

<sup>94</sup> Lukianos: *Lucius sive Asinus*. 17; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1974) vol. 2, p. 17.

<sup>95</sup> Lukianos: *Lucius sive Asinus*. 56; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1974) vol. 2, p. 43.



### 5.3. Apuleius

Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* – Augustine gives the title of the work as *Asinus Aurus (De civitate Dei, XVIII, 18, 1)* – is a religious work with numerological elements (the novel consists of eleven chapters, and the protagonist, Lucius, fasts on three occasions, each of which is on the eleventh day). The story told here is less ribald than Lukianos' version, yet more adventurous and also longer, through the insertion of new episodic stories to give added meaning to the basic plot. The Apuleian tales, with episodes and short stories inserted into the main history in a manner which slows the narrative and may or may not pertain to the protagonist's fate, thoroughly broadens the work's range of interpretation. In contrast to the donkey's existence as a symbol of the crude, the animal, and the earthly, the potential of ethereal/spiritual/divine attainment is emphasized by the tale of Amor and Psyche from folk poetry, and by Lucius' gradual initiation into the mysteries. The stress on physical and utterly grotesque existence and its contrast to spiritual transfiguration testifies to Apuleius' neo-Platonic perspective, whereby the donkey's tale is also the story of the cleansing of the soul – in which the rose emblematically offers deliverance.

The pagan neo-Platonism of Apuleius' tale promising salvation and a perfect life speaks of ancient religious belief. Transfiguration, as promised in the parable, is made possible by white magic establishing a contact with the gods, by which the forces of evil can be defeated, and which require a degree of knowledge equal to that of the Oriental mysteries of Isis and Osiris, and of the Greek cults of Hermes Trismegistos. Thus, the meanings assigned the rose in the symbolism of *Metamorphoses* should be examined from the point of view of which signs represent the body, and which ones the soul, as well as the role played by various forms of enrapture on the road to spiritual salvation.

The main plot, except for the ending, is virtually identical to that of the story attributed to Lukianos. Arriving in the Thessalonian town of Hypata, Lucius, who is interested in the magical arts, finds lodgings at an acquaintance of the family, where he soon discovers the wife is a witch. Out of curiosity for the practice of magic and cleverly exploiting his sexual magnetism, the protagonist seduces Fotis, the serving maid, in order to witness the mistress' transformation into an owl. Presumably in part as a result of overriding lust, Lucius is turned into a donkey with an enormous phallus, marking the beginning of his unusual adventures. He becomes a beast of burden for thieves, and is cast adrift by fate among merciless masters, and eventually becomes acquainted with the false priests of the hypocritical religion of Cybele. He very nearly dies on several occasions. His master, whether a miller, gardener, soldier, chef or confectioner, treats him as an animal living for strictly physical needs, and whenever he has an opportunity to acquire the rose that would save him, for one reason or another he either fails to acquire it, or it turns out he was deceiving himself. He falls in love with a woman, and news of his love-making with a human results in plans to put him on display in a circus. However, he escapes from performing the act in public, and is cast onto a beach. In a dream he encounters Isis – here Chapter 11 differs significantly from the original story – whose prophecies enable him to find the long-sought flower to change him back. As an initiate into the cult of Isis he comes to the cult of Osiris and eventually, through a third initiation, rises to a harbinger of religious belief.

A comparison of the rose images in Lukianos' and Apuleius' versions of the tale reveals some changes, but the interpretation of their meaning is tied primarily to the inserted episodes, which have little to do with the main plot, but all the more to do with the underlying philosophy.

The flower appears on numerous occasions as a describer of color: the first is when Lucius sees a statue of the goddess of victory.<sup>96</sup> The color of the holy object is of course red.

In the first crucial situation the two texts are identical. Lucius and Fotis prepare to make love. "*I had just lain down, and – having put her mistress to bed – there was Fotis, smiling, with a bouquet of roses and a rose garland. She kissed me passionately, crowned me with a garland, and covered me with rose petals, then grabbed a glass, filled it with water and gave it to me... I drank my fill... Fotis did not wait: with great speed she cleared the table, cast off her clothes and let down her hair, ready for licentious play, like Venus rising from the waves of the sea in her radiant nudity, and, her rose-colored hand tending more to coyly expose her hairless loin than chastely cover it, she spoke...*"<sup>97</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 2. 4; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1984) p. 73.

<sup>97</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 2. 16-17; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 81.

Celebrant Fotis brings flowers, in a bouquet and garlands, to adorn the object of her love before offering her body. The youth considers the girl to possess godlike qualities, comparing her to a nude Venus rising from the sea. The hand with which Fotis “covers” her modesty is described as the color of the goddess’ flower, a gesture more to call attention than to conceal. With extraordinary rhetorical elegance and knowledge of style, Apuleius uses the same phrases to reinforce the effect: the roses from when the lovers first met are paled in comparison to the rose hand covering her loins.

The new information from the second rose motif is that Fotis, whether by design or habit, always used rose garlands to augment amorous trysts. The complex meaning inseparably combines a foreshadowing with an evaluation of the relationship and an allusion to its divine quality. According to Fotis: “*Woe is me! In my excitement and rush I made a mistake! I was confused by the similarity of the vials. But do not worry, for there is a simple means to return you to your original shape: you must simply eat a rose, and forthwith you will remove the guise of donkey and become my Lucius again. If only I had made a few rose garlands tonight as I usually do, you would not have to endure this night in this form. But at the break of dawn I shall rush to fetch your cure!*”<sup>98</sup>

During Lucius’ hunt for the rose to turn him back he frequently comes near the needed flower. When he goes in donkey form to the stable to await his liberation at dawn, he notices a statue of Epona, the Roman goddess of teamsters, horsemen and mule-drivers, “*carefully adorned with freshly woven rose garlands.*”<sup>99</sup> Later – when bandits drive him as a beast of burden – at the edge of a town “*amidst other splendid flowers chaste roses bloomed in the dawn dew.*”<sup>100</sup> However, resigned to his fate, he does not eat them, fearing he would be considered a magician and would never escape the bandits. Next he arrives at the place of his despondence, the third point of text comparison: “*I prayed to all the gods, and looked all around, hoping to find roses blooming in one of the neighboring gardens. My solitude encouraged me with hope that I might withdraw somewhere and hide in the underbrush to partake of my antidote and change from a four-legged beast into a man again without anyone seeing me.*

*As I harbored these fancies I saw in the distance a shaded valley with leafy orchards: among the many flowers and fresh grass glorious roses laughed gay and red toward me. With my human mind I thought it might be a park of Venus and the Graces, shining the royal light of this celestial flower toward me through its mysterious mist ... I arrived at that place, but I found no trace of lovely nuptial roses washed in the nectar of heavenly dawn, concealed in the blessed bushes and happy thorns, nor did I find the valley, but only the banks of a river lined with trees. They were trees with long leaves, like the bay tree, and grew slender pale red blossoms which, although they hardly have any fragrance, are called bay roses by unlearned peasants. To any animal that eats it, the flower is deadly poison.*”<sup>101</sup>

The rose orchard dedicated to Venus or the Graces proves an illusion, but two seemingly incidental signs point to the flower’s dual nature and usage: the valuable red flower grows among thorns, and is considered nuptial. The marriage association is to be interpreted broadly, referring not only to weddings but also to the merger with the gods. The rose, as the flower of love, may be chosen as a sign of both earthly and heavenly love.

The key scene in the plot, where in the story attributed to Lukianos the roses of a flower vendor in the circus crowd spells the protagonist’s deliverance, is radically changed by Apuleius and imbued with religious meaning. In place of the simple, snappy conclusion to the tale, this marks the beginning of Lucius’ true life – the long process of spiritual development – which is actually longer than the time he was imprisoned in donkey form.

Escaping from the horror of exhibiting himself at the circus, the donkey arrives at a seashore where he has a dream: Isis appears, in a dress woven of a fine veil “*flaming rose-red,*”<sup>102</sup> and as the mother of nature she tells him she is worshiped by a thousand names, Venus, Diana, Proserpine and others, but in fact she is all of them, the goddess of the elements. Isis informs him that the time of his salvation has arrived: the next day, at a holy festival to the goddess, the high priest in the procession

<sup>98</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 3. 25; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 105.

<sup>99</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 3. 27; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 106.

<sup>100</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 3. 29; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 108.

<sup>101</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 4. 1-2; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) pp. 109-110.

<sup>102</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 11. 3; Hung. trans. Révay J. p. 251.

will be wearing a rose garland, and if Lucius is able to eat some of it, he will return immediately to human form. The rose is the flower of salvation, marking change of condition.

Everything happens as the dream foretold. The high priest is indeed wearing the garland, and the crowd does not prevent the hero from sneaking up and eating the roses. *“He held out the garland for me. I began to tremble, my heart pounding feverishly, and I greedily snatched the splendid garland of marvelous roses and ate it, in the hope of fulfillment. And the heavenly promise was not broken ...”*<sup>103</sup> Thus begins the process of spiritual enlightenment, at one stage of which, the first initiation, Lucius will stand before the goddess’ statue *“in the clothes of the sun god.”*<sup>104</sup>

The presence of the rose is justified by its sacred nature. Its appearance in the environment of Isis is explained by the fact that the person of the goddess incorporates all the figures of goddesses traditionally associated with the rose for whatever reason. Nor is the Oriental association with Helios/Apollo a new development. Attention has already been paid to the use of the rose in worshiping the major gods, of the custom of crowning their statues with roses in celebratory processions, and in other applications of rose decorations. It is also clear why Lucius’ attraction to the rose was a compelling force: through his calvary of physical love, setting off in a quest for the rose, he arrives – with a reshaping of the original story – at the object of spiritual love, Isis. The rose as a symbol, just as in the Greek and Roman myths, continues to have a complex meaning of a sacred nature, now a sign of the mystery religion, the abundant content of which it presents and conveys.

*Metamorphoses* on two occasions names the season of roses blooming. Previously the flower appeared in godly spheres or in gardens, and if it seemingly grew in the wild (in forests or riverbanks), it quickly proved illusory; in contrast, here it is a flower of plains<sup>105</sup> and fields.<sup>106</sup> Spring, meanwhile, is the time of hope for salvation: this is the time when fragrant rosebuds appear, first hidden in thorns, and later blossoming into purple petals. From a frightening, cutting, injurious yet not wholly useless plant the rose suddenly undergoes a metamorphosis to become a glorious flower. This process of budding and blooming foreshadows and predicts Lucius’ development from a stupid donkey into a human being wedded to beauty and defined by beauty. And the location of this blooming is a spring field – not some fearsome and ominous wood, where, according to the story at least, the harpies dwell. It should be remembered that roses do not grow in closed forests: *“In my utter despair I cheered myself with the faint hope that spring would arrive, scattering its colorful flower-blossoms, dressing the fields in purple radiance, and roses, breaking out of their thorny armor, would breathe their verdant fragrance, and then I would be changed back to my old self,”*<sup>107</sup> recalls Lucius of his desperate condition; and instead of referring to the individual properties of the rose he emphasizes its nature as a botanically organized complex, in order to stress the process of bloom as an example of hope in the future.

Of the inserted episodes in *Metamorphoses* two situations in *Amor and Psyche* reinforce the rose’s station as a nuptial flower as well as one closely tied to the gods. *“No sooner had night fallen than Venus arrived at the wedding feast, intoxicated, aromatic with scented oils, and covered from head to foot in a cavalcade of beautiful roses”*<sup>108</sup> – here it is the flower of Venus, the goddess having every reason to appear at the wedding and subsequent celebration, where wine was also drunk. Psyche’s wedding-night procession also features roses. The flowers of the wedding feast supply the esteemed color of purple: *“Straight away an abundant wedding feast was laid out ... cooked by Vulcan: the Hours covered everything in purple from roses and many other flowers, the Graces scattered aromatics, and the Muses sang in ringing voices.”*<sup>109</sup> In the combination of goddess-wedding-rose the flower is a sign of value, confirmed further in later passages by the naming of its coloring material, purple.

<sup>103</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 11. 13; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 257.

<sup>104</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 11. 24; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 264.

<sup>105</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 10. 29; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 230.

<sup>106</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 7. 15; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 172.

<sup>107</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 10. 29; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 230.

<sup>108</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 6. 11; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 151.

<sup>109</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 6. 24; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 158.

Thus, the rose gave color not only to the leg,<sup>110</sup> arm,<sup>111</sup> hand<sup>112</sup> and face,<sup>113</sup> but also was itself described by colors known from other places, such as purple or blood-red.<sup>114</sup> Also, in some places the rose is used to evoke or identify the color red.<sup>115</sup>

The following sections will provide a survey of some examples of what new symbolic images, in addition to the rose symbols of “realistic love stories,” appear in three stories of “ideal love.”

#### 5.4. Longos

Longos (third century) is the author of the bucolic, pastoral novel *Daphnis and Chloe*, in which the presence of the rose is tied to a natural medium interpreted through religion. It presents the story of how two foundlings grow up and eventually fall in love on the island of Lesbos. Chloe, whose “lips are smoother than a rose petal, while her mouth is sweeter than honey but her kiss more bitter than a bee-sting,”<sup>116</sup> is divinely beautiful, as is her admirer, Daphnis. Fate has assigned them to each other, of which decision Eros informs the young couple when the time is right, and their mutual attraction is the sole meaning of their existence.

Two scenes are set in a garden where roses grow. The function of this plant is justified several times over. One garden is explained by the figure of Eros, and the other by that of Dionysus. This obviously religious environment promotes the maturation of the two protagonists’ adventurous relationship.

The fate of Daphnis and Chloe is sealed from the start: they were created by Eros, who oversees the park-like area in which grow the ornaments of happiness and devotion, the symbols of acceptance of divine destiny, the garland flowers of celebrations. The area is kept by the rustic shepherd Philetas, who has an important role in that his dialogs inform the reader of the gods’ destiny, and it is Philetas who, as instructed by Eros, gives the hesitant, inexperienced young couple advice on love.

Philetas relates: “*I have a garden, cultivated by my own hands, where I have toiled since I gave up herding animals in my old age. All things grow in their own time, as the seasons bring them. In spring, the rose and lily, hyacinth and various violets. In summer, poppy and pear, and many sorts of apple. And in autumn, the grape, fig, pomegranate and green myrtle. At dawn birds flock to my garden, some to eat seeds, others to sing. Its water comes from three leaf-covered, shaded springs. If it were not walled in, everyone would think it a forest orchard.*

*As I entered the garden today around noon, under the pomegranate and myrtle trees I spotted a boy. He held a myrtle berry and pomegranate in his hand. He was white as milk, blond as fire, and his skin shone as if he had just bathed. He was alone, and sat naked. He played there as if he owned the garden. I went toward him to grab him, as I was afraid he would break the branches of the myrtle and pomegranate. But he scampered nimbly away, first sneaking through the rose bed, then hiding among the poppies like a little quail.*”<sup>117</sup> The boy, the guardian of Daphnis and Chloe, who made the garden so rich and beautiful, is Eros himself. It is he who endorsed their love and directed their fates toward each other.

The other garden is a designation of Dionysus.

Daphnis’ foster father, Lamon, is responsible for tending his master’s garden on the island of Delos. When late one summer the news arrives that his master is coming to visit, Lamon works hard to prepare for his reception. He cleans the springs, tidies up the garden, and carries off the manure to get rid of the smell. Set on a hill, a stadium in length and four hundred feet wide, the garden is described by Longos as royal property, where many different fruit trees grow, and grapes ripen in dark clusters. The fruit trees are located at the center of the garden, and around them their keeper planted bay trees, pines, plantains, and cypress. The area is enclosed by a low stone wall, marking its borders and

<sup>110</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 2. 4; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 73.

<sup>111</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 3. 1; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 92.

<sup>112</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 2. 17; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 81.

<sup>113</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 3. 19; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 102.

<sup>114</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 5. 23; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 140.

<sup>115</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 4. 2; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 109.

<sup>116</sup> Longos: *Daphnis et Chloe*. I. Hung. trans. Détschy M. pp. 73-74.

<sup>117</sup> Longos: *Daphnis et Chloe*. II.; Hung. trans. Détschy M. pp. 82-83.

separating the natural environment from cultivated area, requiring upkeep. On one section of the estate is a bed of flowers, some wild and some planted by human hand, and all fragrant. “*A gardener grew the roses, hyacinths and lilies, and the Earth grew the violets, narcissus and daisies.*”<sup>118</sup> This beautiful, shady and fragrant garden is not only a good place to live, but also provides a view of the surroundings, from which one can survey the plains on which herds graze, and the sea where ships sail: This populous location does not isolate its inhabitants from the world; rather, it offers a fuller reality. From all aspects the area is a manifestation of wealth (and, in a figurative sense, zeal).

This area is not only important to men, but is also holy ground. Dionysus has a sanctuary and altar there. All of this increases its value – and gives it meaning.

However, the garden is vandalized by a vengeful rejected suitor. He hoped to incur the anger of the landowner, whose approval is needed to marry Chloe, against Lamon and his ward, Daphnis, by ripping the flowers, trampling the sprouts, and tearing out the roots – everything that Eros had forbidden in the other garden. The vandal hoped to destroy both the garden and Daphnis’ happiness. The extent of the destruction is reflected in Lamon’s lament: “*O, my roses, they have all been ripped up! O, my violets, they have all been trampled! O, my hyacinths and narcissus, a vile human hand has shredded them. Spring will come, and they will bloom no more, and summer will come, and they will not show their splendor, in autumn no one will weave garlands from them. My lord, Dionysus, could you not show mercy on the poor flowers, when you dwelt among them, and watched them grow, and wore their garlands? Now how shall I show my master the garden?*”<sup>119</sup>

The rose – beyond its role as an analogy for blood-filled organs, such as the color of the mouth, and especially an expression of its state of enticement and exchange value for becoming a lover – is a garden plant. Although it is a plant of nature, appointment and selection make it more than that – an object of human values. It is tied to men in a unique – and known – way, because it is closely associated with the gods, despite the fact that none of this is explained in the novel. It is found frequently in places set apart, in wall-enclosed gardens and carefully nurtured flower-beds. Its presence is an indication of the worth of the garden and its owner, and its destruction is a great loss. It is demonstrably able to express either of these static conditions. Also, it is able to indicate a change of condition, and even indicate the direction of the process.

In addition to the above, the novel also makes a fourth reference to the flower, this time as value given in exchange. For the hand of Chloe, now a fully grown woman, an entire horde of suitors besiege her foster father (in the summer, of course). They ply gifts on the poor shepherd, who keeps postponing the decision: the objects he had found when he discovered the child clearly indicated that the foundling should not be married to one of his kind. His wife, however, thinks otherwise. Nape urges marriage, not wanting to continue to provide a home for the maiden, preferring to see her as a wife, and to receive the bride price, and devote future expenditures solely to her son. Arguing for marriage, she says: “*She will not long be a maiden in any case, if she always watches the herd in the pasture. There she will find a husband among the shepherds, for a round apple or a single rose. Rather, marry her to someone who can make her lady of the house, and who will pay handsomely for her in return.*”<sup>120</sup>

The rose expresses changes in value. The description of the destruction of the roses in the garden alludes to loss. Is this loss the bartering of maidenhood for a single rose? The absence of the flower in the vandalized garden suggests a qualitative change. Is it the waste of Chloe’s beauty below its worth, her becoming a shepherd’s lover and giving away her virginity for less than its value?

At the same time, the rose suggests a combination of several meanings, being endowed with both positive and negative aspects. The beauty of the rose which the maiden receives for her virginity is ambivalent, because it is transitory – yet it is highly esteemed.

In the story, however, the love-giving maiden and the rose represent identical value. And they are interchangeable.

<sup>118</sup> Longos: *Daphnis et Chloe*. IV.; Hung. trans. Détsy M. p. 115.

<sup>119</sup> Longos: *Daphnis et Chloe*. IV.; Hung. trans. Détsy M. p. 118.

<sup>120</sup> Longos: *Daphnis et Chloe*. III.; Hung. trans. Détsy M. p. 109.

### 5.5. *Heliodoros*

The protagonists of Heliodoros' *Aethiopika* possess physical and spiritual characteristics of almost godlike perfection. Theagenes and Charikleia are spectacularly beautiful, amazingly virtuous, and deeply – and virginally – in love with each other, persevering through all trials: at the end of their tribulations they are justly united. The story is thought to have been written in the third century, coinciding with the popularity of Helios-centered worship. The cult of Helios is considered by some to be related to neo-Pythagoreanism, and by others to neo-Platonic religious philosophy. Although a full exposition of Heliodoros' Helios-centered philosophy is unjustified at this point, it should nevertheless be noted that Helios was originally a Titan, the son of Hyperion, and his figure later merged into that of Phoebus Apollo, born on the island of Delos. In any event by the end of his novel Heliodoros considered the sun god of his birthplace, the town of Emessa in Syria, to be identical to Apollo, the patron god of Delphi. The land in the title, Aithiopia, is the land of Helios (2.35=77.10).

The cult of Helios was widespread in Asia Minor and the nearby islands as early as the fourth century BC. The city-state of Rhodes was best known for its sun cult; for example, it issued coins which had a portrait of Helios/Apollo on one side and a picture of a rose on the other. These tetra drachmas also indicate that the rose was associated with the sun god, for the ecologically sound reason that roses are heliophytes, plants that grow only where there is plenty of sunlight. Heliodoros' novel was written at approximately the time of the rule of the likewise Emessan-born Emperor Heliogabalus, who did much to spread the Syrian or Persian cult of Helios. During his rule (218-222) Heliogabalus himself organized festivals where the flowers of his god were featured.

Given the above, the rose references in the novel demand close examination. Do signs of the Helios cult appear here, or are the facts replaced by the customary Hellenic or Roman forms of rose reference? How often do they occur, and to whom or what are they linked? If Heliodoros, in accordance with his usual custom, makes mention of the rose merely as stock descriptions, should these mentions have a role in the interpretation of the novel? The terse rose references give little answer to these questions. Presumably a pagan priest, the author mentions the rose not only infrequently, but also with little substantial innovation. On one occasion a beautiful maiden's blushing face is likened to the color of the rose ("*excitement painted her face even rosier than usual*"<sup>121</sup>), and elsewhere an extremely beautiful woman's hair is compared to the softness of the petals ("*Like soft rose petals, her blonde locks fell in thick waves on her neck, shoulders and back, while on her forehead they were adorned by a garland woven of fresh laurel*"<sup>122</sup>). The rose was unquestionably suited to help describe a beautiful young maiden on both occasions, and the second is a less standard usage. Their common meaning is that a person with such characteristics can, for a selected reason, be described the same way as a (by implication) perfect plant. Later, in a description of a girl tortured by love, it becomes clear that the color is indeed the sign of a god. "*Why should I elaborate?*" says one of the characters in the story, "*Aphrodite has taken complete hold of her. Her rosy face has gone pale, and the radiance of her eyes has been extinguished by tears like water on a fire.*"<sup>123</sup>

The last rose reference is tied to the Sun, though not to divinity. It occurs in the description of the masterful ring paid in ransom of Charikleia. The jewel is carved of amber and set with three amethysts, one Ethiopian, one Iberian and one Britannian. "*The two western stones were a pale purple, like a newly sprouted rosebud whose petals have already been painted slightly red by the heat of the sun.*" This statement implies the empirical knowledge needed to differentiate the – genuinely existent – shades of rose petals from a freshly opened bud and that of an older flower.

Thus, Heliodoros compares two of the amethysts to a rose reddened by the sun. The third stone, which is translucent and does not blind the eye, is given the ability to preserve its wearer's sobriety while drinking. Ancient cultures recommended wearing an amethyst to counter the harmful effects of wine, along with wearing a rose garland, or eating the petals from such a garland. Their shared counter-intoxicant effect justifies the proximity of the amethyst and rose symbols.

In Heliodoros' utopic description of the Ethiopian state three gods play a major role: Helios, linked to the king; Selene, associated with the queen; and Dionysus. It can be no accident that the ring is set

<sup>121</sup> Heliodoros: *Aethiopika*. I.; Hung. trans. Szepessy T. (1964) p. 32.

<sup>122</sup> Heliodoros: *Aethiopika*. III.; Hung. trans. Szepessy T. (1964) p. 97.

<sup>123</sup> Heliodoros: *Aethiopika*. III.; Hung. trans. Szepessy T. (1964) p. 113.

with a stone effective against drunkenness, the idyllic pastoral scene carved onto the ring is gilded by the pale light of the Ethiopian stone, and the other two polished crystals shine in rosy light above the carvings. The jewel presents an emblematic scene to the characters, and the text itself anticipates the final, sun-drenched idyll.

Heliodoros' exposition of his political philosophy offered many opportunities for the use of rose symbols. In addition to the fact that love scenes naturally attracted the appearance of the rose, with long-established Homeric descriptions in existence for this purpose, the Helios cult also made use of the plant. Historical connections also presumably encourage its appearance, inasmuch as the story is set at a time when Aithiopia was part of the Persian Empire (525-523 BC), and Heliodoros' authenticating sources include Herodotos (484?-424? BC), author of the history of the Greek and Persian War. The selection of topic offered numerous opportunities for rose references to embellish the details of a scene; nevertheless, unlike Longos, Heliodoros did not take advantage of them.

### 5.6. *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri*

The absence of rose images is also proven by other novels of "ideal love."

*Historia Apollonii regis Tyri* survives in a Christian version in Latin from the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century. It is thought to have been preceded by a third-century Latin version and another, probably Greek, from the first or second century, and there is considerable reason to assign it only a distant kinship to the love novel type, as it relates the story not of a couple but of a family. Through it, and the *Pseudoclementina* to which it is often likened, if a sufficient number of rose motifs could be found, then it would be possible to make a broader examination of the events forming rose symbols in the stories of gods, families and individuals. As has been seen already, the use of the rose as an attribute of the gods was a chronologically earlier development, and only later and very gradually did it come to express human qualities, and even then in such a way that continued to associate it with the gods. The mythifying effect of the rose would be easier to follow if it revealed a transformation by consensus into a series of qualifiers of families and/or individuals.

This question is impossible to answer for two reasons: first, the late date at which these two novels were written, as love stories in which civil attitudes were expressed outside the supportive background of the polis had appeared much earlier; second, the number of rose images in them is substantially reduced. Still, the flower does appear in one poetic insert in *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri*, where it suggests that virgin purity can be preserved even amidst great tribulations:

*"Through muck my road takes me, but the muck cannot touch me,  
Just as no thorn can injure the rose,"*<sup>124</sup>

The image, built on the internal duality of the rose, is an argument for the indestructibility of ideal beauty. The rose appears in a key situation in the novel, and signifies more than an indication of the virginity of the maiden reciting the poem, or her superhuman beauty, which not even the brothel was able to sully: Tarsia attempts to talk Apollonius out of committing suicide, and thus the significance of the rose also extends to the perseverance of the soul amid the trials and tribulations of life. The reference to the thorn in this pagan story is not a case of original Christian influence, although it parallels Christian ideas; there are numerous precedents among the Christians and pagans alike.

The Latin version of this story became part of *Gesta Romanorum* and was popular throughout Europe. *Gesta* appeared in Hungarian translation in 1591, and again in 1695 translated by István Haller; the influence of this work has been demonstrated in Hungarian folk tales as well as those of other peoples – in which roses were to appear as signs of love on countless occasions.

The method of description in love novels is strikingly sketchy in the presentation and characterization of the actors and settings. Typically backdrop-like elements and standardized devices appear – the binding of the reader to the text is by the rapidly moving scenes and the flow of narrative. In the course of the protagonists' adventures rose symbols cannot be tied to individual characters or

<sup>124</sup> *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri...*; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1971)

locations: when they appear, they do so in a tradition-bound manner according to a fixed mythological worldview, linked or linkable to gods. The rose and rose-colored images form part of the unified repertoire of ornamentation – and of the worldview – and their function is not in individualization, but in a comparison, a pointing to timeless mythological signs. For this reason their value is unimportant, while their rhetorical role contributes to the preservation of timelessness.

Roses directly or indirectly suggesting a divine relationship are not specific to a single sex. They may be signs of men or women, whether they be gods or mortals: the value is their allusion to beauty and intellect.

Although the rose does not allude to biological sex, it does suggest sexuality. They may have close or remote connections extending to events of sexuality, a lover's body, lovemaking, wedding nights, celebrations, or ultimately any form of ecstasy, whether physical or spiritual. In addition, the rose may be either the means or the object of a simile (being like blood, purple, or amethyst).

Roses had an important role not only in Greek and Roman mythology but also, as shown in Apuleius' works, in mystery religions. In the opinion of Tibor Szepešy, the preferences of the cultured masses resulted in a large number of overlaps between love novels and mystery religions, which in turn resulted in each suggesting in its own way that, despite appearances, there is order and justice in the world and in human life, and happiness and well-being await at the end of the trials the protagonists suffer;<sup>125</sup> if this is indeed the case, it follows that the two answers to the same challenge offer the same result.

For this reason, roses generally were not given fundamentally contrastive meanings, but rather were forced by contemporary fashion whims to be used in a manner similar to old existing symbolic elements, defining the environment of the gods and expressing their pomp and mystery, as evidenced by the two parallel developments, the love novel and mystery religions.

## 6. From the sacred to the profane

### 6.1. Garlands

Gaius Plinius Secundus' (23-79) *Naturalis historiarum triginta septem* is a summary of practical activities. Attempting to demonstrate the unity of the cosmos and reflecting the influence of Stoic thinking, this encyclopedic work refers to and summarizes all available works on nature by contemporaries and predecessors, where the author adds little beyond arranging them in a coherent order. *Naturalis historia* volumes XII-XXI are a storehouse of ancient data and facts on the plant kingdom: known plants, their cultivation, and their reasons and manners of usage. The popularity of the rose is indicated by the fact that Pliny discusses it at length and mentions it in numerous places.

Volume XXI of Pliny's *Naturalis historia* discusses plants used in garlands, as well as how bee-keeping is tied to the growing of plants in garden cultures. Pliny claims that the use of garland plants was first promoted by Cato, who pointed primarily to plants with beautiful flowers as the most useful. However, Cato also emphasized the usefulness and nutritional value of garland plants in addition to their decorative utility as manifestations of the carefree creativity of Nature. Oddly, the first property of flowers he mentions is their scent, and only afterwards their color. At the same time, in their use in garlands Pliny considered their color – which should be as varied as possible – to be the most important (XXI, 1).

Pliny believed the garland to have originated from prizes awarded to the winners of holy contests under the patronage of one god or another. These were made solely of twigs and branches, and later were replaced by garlands woven of flowers of various colors. Characteristically, at this point he notes that the function of the color is joined by that of the smell, each heightening the effect of the other (XXI, 3). Thus, the garland was a badge of victory, and for decorations indicating this honor very few garden plants in Rome were considered suitable: only the rose and the violet (XXI, 10). Equally obviously, if the meaning of the garland has a religious element, that element is also transferred onto the garland plants.

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<sup>125</sup> Szepešy T. (1987) p. 109.



The historical evolution of the symbolic meaning of the garland was surveyed by K. Baus. He also considers it to have originated from ancient Greek sports contests, but also points out its role in parades, whose function was in part analogous to that of competitions. A garland made from the branch of a tree mythologically linked to the gods was ceremoniously awarded to the winner – in addition to bouquets and garlands thrown at him by the crowd as a sign of honor. The father and birthplace of the winner were also honored. Following the award ceremony was a prayer of thanks to the gods, and then a feast – here, again, garlands of glory played a role, as they did at the series of celebrations held at the victor's birthplace.<sup>126</sup>

Consequently, the symbolic meaning of the Greek garland was basically tied to victory, fame, glory and immortality. The Romans supplemented this – in accordance with the concept of *vir bonus* – with bellicosity, virtuous courage, and heroism. The various types of Roman victory garlands marked differing degrees of honor to participants in a war; for example, one type of *corona* was worn by the first to enter an enemy camp, another by a victorious general, and yet another by an ally, who received his garland from the general. In the imperial period garlands became an important accessory to victory parades – at the same time that their general use also became widespread. In addition to victors in battle, winners in circuses, literary contests or rhetoric competitions were also awarded them, and the sign of honor originally made of leaves was gradually replaced by garlands of gold and silver. Through this the sacred function also changed, a sign of which was already manifest when sacred personnel also received garlands; but the phenomenon became general when earthly activities were also awarded garlands.

However, garlands and their awarding were but one object or action among many used in the cults of the gods. Fond of rustic simplicity, Tibullus described them as an archaic yet complex form of celebrating the patron spirit, or *genius*:

*“Let the incense burn, let the aromatic flame,  
which soft-muscled Arab sends from lush lands.  
Let the Spirit come and see the pomp devoted to it here,  
its holy locks covered by a modest garland,  
a drop of spikenard trickling down its forehead,  
let it eat sweet biscuits and drink pure nectar,  
and may it give you, O Cornutus, whatever your heart asks.”*<sup>127</sup>

Garlands, incense, anointment with aromatics and offerings of food and drink combine to express properly the relationship between mortals and gods. Ovid also reports on the simplicity and ritualized nature of offerings, while also specifying its reason as entreating the gods:

*“Once man entreated the gods with other objects:  
flower and pure grains of sparkling salt.  
Myrtle dripping under its bark were not brought hither  
by distant ships over the seas,  
Euphrates sent no incense, India no oil,  
nor were red saffron petals known.  
If a juniper pine smoked on the altar, that was enough:  
or if bay burned crackling there.  
Rich was he who wove strings of meadow flowers  
and even added violet to the meadow flowers.”*<sup>128</sup>

Nevertheless, the original function of the garland also survived, as in Virgil's example from the *Aeneid*.

*“Lo, goddess Venus...*

<sup>126</sup> Der Kranz in Antike und Christentum. In: Theophranea 2, Bonn, 1940. see: Vanyó L. (1977) pp. 144-152.

<sup>127</sup> Tibullus: *Elegiae*. II. 2. 3-9; Hung. trans. Kardos L, 43, 3-9.

<sup>128</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. I. 337-346; Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) pp. 13-14, 337-346.

....

*Sets forth, ...  
where her shrine is located, and a hundred altars  
are fragrant with fresh garlands*"<sup>129</sup>

In similar fashion references occur to the fundamentally valuable aroma of plants woven into garlands, to the spiritual connection they bring about, and to the attendant physical effect generating a sense of coolness, freshness, invigoration and cleanliness.

Ovid's Flora, continuing the living tradition, also tells why she became so angry at the human race that she destroys every flowering treasure of spring, and how she may be placated by festivals, offerings and garlands.<sup>130</sup> In *Fasti V* Ovid explains why it is an ancient custom to placate the gods with aromatic smoke. Says Flora:

*"We, too, gladly accept respect:  
– holidays, altars!  
Immortals also desire popularity!  
Man often angers the gods with his sins,  
and placates us with offerings for his sins.  
I have seen Jupiter prepare to smite with a thunderbolt:  
incense smoke rose, and he lowered his hand."*<sup>131</sup>

As with the Greeks, objects and ornaments of plant origin were offered primarily to the gods, all as a sign of the exalted respect they earned. Jupiter was offered oak, and later wild chestnut and walnut; to Mars, oak and myrtle; to Apollo bay, olive and palm; and to Ceres and Proserpine the plants of mourning: mistletoe, cypress, pine, and pomegranate. Pomegranate was also the plant of Bacchus, although the grape was primarily his, while Flora's was primarily the rose, shared with Venus, as she shared the myrtle with Mars.

Thus, garlands from various plants were originally devoted to the gods in the Romans' case as well. The desacralization process was already evident when, in addition to the main gods, secondary gods were also given garlands. For example, Catullus describes the tireless Fates as follows:

*"Bending their limbs over the snow-white throne, they sat,  
countless dishes filled the many tables before them,  
and as they rocked themselves, swaying gently,  
the Fates began to sing their song of truth.  
Their white robes covered their quivering ribs,  
a thin purple stripe wound twisting to their ankles,  
and roses garlanded their ashy heads,  
as their fingers continued their eternal weaving."*<sup>132</sup>

As attested by the third century BC records of the *Fratres Arvales*, an agriculture-oriented society of priests, celebrants at religious holidays to the gods placed decorations on doors of homes<sup>133</sup>, private altars, public buildings, temples to the given god, and other cultic places.<sup>134</sup> Adornments were also placed on the sacrificial offerings, animals,<sup>135</sup> plants, and the celebrants themselves. Although knowledge of the garland came from the Greeks, it was the Romans and the expansion of their Empire

<sup>129</sup> Virgil: *Aeneid*. I. 411-417; Hung. trans. Lakatos I, 121, 411-417.

<sup>130</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. V. 311-330.

<sup>131</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. V. 297-302; Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) p. 103, 297-302.

<sup>132</sup> Catullus: *Carmina*. LXIV; Hung. trans. Devcseri G. (1976) p. 66, 303-310.

<sup>133</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. I. 613-614.: "Long live our general and his empire, / and oak garlands protect your doors." Hung. trans. Gaál L. (1968) p. 20, 613-614.

<sup>134</sup> *Acta Fratrum Arvalium*. ILS 5036

<sup>135</sup> Prudentius: *Peristephanon*. X. 1021-1025: "then a large, angry wild bull / – floral strings decorating its horns – / is stood before the covered pit: / gold glittering on the animal's / forehead..." Hung. trans. Bollók J. p. 216, 1021-1025.

which made it a widespread custom, inasmuch as it had been previously unknown in most of the Mediterranean Basin. The Romans themselves considered Janus to have invented the garland, and honored his holiday, January first, with bay garlands.

Garlands were given to the owners of slaves victorious in contests, or to victorious animals in battles,<sup>136</sup> and occasionally even to plants. A person awarded a garland also wore it in his funeral procession, and took it with him to the pyre or grave, although the garland itself, according to the law of the twelve stone tablets, became the property of the hero's father and could also be worn by the parents – in the specified form and at the specified time.<sup>137</sup>

Different garlands were given for different virtues: *corona civis*, a civil crown of oak branches, was awarded for saving the lives of Roman citizens; *corona ovalis*, or myrtle garland, was for doers of even greater deeds; while *corona gramineae*, the grass garland, went to saviors of the nation or of cities.<sup>138</sup> There were also *coronas* made of flowers; according to Pliny,<sup>139</sup> one such award was given to Scipio, despite the fact that no living man had received one before. Scipio incidentally permitted his soldiers to pin an emblem alluding to a garland flower, the sign of a red rose, on their shields.<sup>140</sup>

The wearing of garlands – that is, the reception of divine glory – was regulated by laws. One case of garland abuse is also recorded by Pliny. During the Second Punic War (218-201 BC) the moneychanger L. Fulvius appeared on his balcony wearing a rose garland – whereas the use of floral garlands was permitted only after victory in war. For this action the perpetrator was sent to prison.

Victory processions, of which garlands were also a part, were regulated in 62 BC, because too many people had come to expect this symbol of victory, and abuse was frequent.<sup>141</sup> The law was to no avail. Emperor Vitellius, who ruled for eight short months, was greeted with rose petals and bay leaves strewn in his path when he visited the battlefield of Bedriacum, still covered with the bodies of dead soldiers – despite the fact that the Emperor had not participated in the battle and thus should not have been entitled to the flower of glory and heroism.<sup>142</sup>

Meanwhile, Pliny, who considered the rose to be one of the most important garland plants, accorded the garland not only to gods and divine beings but also to graves and the souls of the dead. The explanation, in his opinion, was that a garland awarded in life still belonged to the victor after death, and even to his parents, and consequently could be worn during the funeral procession (XXI, 5).

The connection between death and contests held in honor of the gods was noted by several ancients, such as Clement of Alexandria,<sup>143</sup> who held the contest itself to be a laudatory speech spoken over the grave; in other words, a kind of commemoration of the past. At some contests, such as at Nemea in honor of Heracles, the referees dressed in mourning clothes, while at the contest of Isthmos in honor of Poseidon the victory garland was made of the plants of mourning growing around the gates of Hades, celery and parsley. The intertwining of the plants of death cults and the garlands of victory cults is explained by the shared respect of the gods and the dead: in turn, this also signified an interrelated interpretation of victory and death.

Joy and sorrow, life and death resulted in the same garlands and in part the same garland plants. Pliny distinguished between short-lived and long-lived garland plants, and those of the netherworld – having less water content than tubers or roots – generally were among the latter. The rose was one of the quickest to wilt, which may be one of the reasons it so quickly became part of the burial garland as a symbol of the passage of life. Another reason is the rose's association with blood: mythological

<sup>136</sup> Ovid: *Tristia*. IV. 2. 21-22.: “chains on their necks, this horde / marched before a column of green-garlanded steeds.” Hung. trans. Kárpáthy Cs. (1968) p. 218, 21-22.

<sup>137</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XXI. 5.

<sup>138</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XX. 4.

<sup>139</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XXXI. 3.

<sup>140</sup> Heinz-Mohr, G.–Sommer, V. (1988) 140.

<sup>141</sup> “Certain generals liked to be awarded triumphal parades for insignificant battles. To prevent this, it was set down in law that triumphal parades could be awarded only to those who felled five thousand enemy soldiers in a single battle. Our ancestors were of the opinion that it was the significance rather than the number of triumphal parades that served to praise our City. That this highly worthy law should not later be abolished out of desire for praise, it was reinforced by a second law enacted by tribunals L. Marcius and M. Cato.” Valerius Maximus, II. 8. 1; Hung. trans. Korchmáros Valéria, p. 218, 2, 8, 1.

<sup>142</sup> Philips, R.–Rix, M. (1993) 18-21.

<sup>143</sup> Dionysius Halic. *Ars rhet.*, I. 12.

figures who shed blood and Roman soldiers wounded in battle were entitled to wear the flower both in stories and in real life. The rose garland, a rose pinned on the shield, or rose petals from their general on the bodies of fallen soldiers were forms of commemoration of the blood that was shed and its transformation into something spiritual. The garlands of the victors could not be woven of anything except plants arising from the blood of the dead.

Pliny also records that, along with garlands, aromatics also served as a sign of reverence toward the dead: “*However, I myself am most inclined to assume that the most common aromatic is the one made from the rose.*”<sup>144</sup> He also gives an example from Homer’s *Odyssey* where part of the death cult is the anointment of the body in rose oil. The driving need to preserve tradition made it likely that someone who could not afford expensive rose oil, or ointments made from it, used simple rose flowers or rose garlands as the cheapest substitute for this sign of respect.

## 6.2. Other forms of decoration

The custom of early Mediterranean cultures of fragrance and plant offerings was interwoven into a single object: the garland. However, roses were used not only as components of garlands or as substitutes for incense, but also had a function in festive bouquets and flowers strewn on triumphant heroes. What were the forms of celebration and adornments used during the procedures, as recorded by sources?

In addition to garlands of flowers, the Romans used leafy<sup>145</sup> and flowering branches, bouquets,<sup>146</sup> floral strings,<sup>147</sup> open and closed garlands, floral carpets<sup>148</sup> and the scattering of flower petals<sup>149</sup> for a variety of purposes. The especially popular, aromatic flowering plants and leaves were initially picked in the wild, while later certain plants came to be cultivated. In contrast to the Greeks, the Romans had far-ranging knowledge of gardening. In the cultivation of garland plants Horace wrote of flower beds, Pliny of rose gardens, Martial of special procedures in rose gardening to speed or delay blooming time, and Seneca and others<sup>150</sup> of the use of warm water and greenhouses to grow winter roses. Out-of-season production of ornamental plants in Italia could not have been very efficient, however, despite the fact that enormous areas of land were used for mass production of flowers, as it was a sought-after commercial item which had to be imported from outside the peninsula.

In time,<sup>151</sup> the garland and other decorations from live flowers became customary, as did the use of plant and floral scents in various forms – depending on what events were considered especially important in state, family or individual life, and the respective honor, luster and prestige was marked in the same forms which earlier had been accorded only to the gods in state or religious celebrations.<sup>152</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XIII. 1. 9.

<sup>145</sup> “Now people in their overwhelming joy brought green branches, garlands, and flowers, and kissed the goddess’ feet – a silver statue of her stood at the highest stair – and then returned home to their hearths.” In: Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. XI. 17; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 259.

<sup>146</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. V. 429-442.

<sup>147</sup> Petronius: *Satyricon*. LXX. Hung. trans. Horváth I. K. (1972) 75, LXX.

<sup>148</sup> Ovid: *Tristia*. IV. 2. 47-50. “Now march in in purple, Caesar, standing before your people in the triumphant chariot; don festive pomp and receive applause wherever you go, from its hands the crowd scatters flower petals everywhere as your carpet.” Hung. trans. Kárpáthy Cs. (1968) p. 219, 46-49.

<sup>149</sup> Pl. Tacitus: *Annales*. XIV. 61. 1.: “Then they proceeded happily to the Capitolium to honor the gods. The statues of Poppea were pulled down, images of Octavia were carried on their shoulders, and they scattered flowers and placed them in the forum and the temples.” Hung. trans. Borzsák I. vol. 2, p. 374, XIV, 61.

<sup>150</sup> Historia Augusta. *Verus*. 5. 1-6.: “other gifts included cups of gold, silver and gemstones, and garlands woven of gold ribbons and greenhouse flowers.” Hung. trans. Boronkai I. p. 179.

<sup>151</sup> An example of how this may have happened, from Petronius’ *Satyricon* (XCIII.): “Our mistress / is lovelier than our wife, and cinammon is better than the rose. / The best is always that which is difficult to get.” Hung. trans. horváth I. K. (1972) p. 103, XCIII.

<sup>152</sup> Virgil: *Aeneid*. I. 723-727. “then the table / was set, mixing bowls brought in and garlanded, / and echoes resound throughout the spacious chambers of the palace; overhead gold lamps scatter fire from on high / and the light of the torches banishes blind night.” Hung. trans. Lakatos I. p. 130, 723-727.

In place of live flowers garlands were often made of more lasting material, such as precious metals.<sup>153</sup> The value of these was no doubt commensurate with the moral value of the garland.<sup>154</sup> Decoration with flowers was not considered hackneyed puffery,<sup>155</sup> and could be used at any time – in the proper manner – by men, women and children of any age.

### 6.3. Occasions of decoration

The rose accompanied Romans throughout their lives, from birth, through annual birthday celebrations, to the funeral wake. It was present at feasts and occasions of wine drinking, in the preparation of foods, in flavoring and aromatizing, at love trysts<sup>156</sup>, in medicines and magic potions – in communities, families and private lives. At weddings the gate of the house was decorated with a garland and another was offered to the gods of the house altar; at parties flowers decorated the heads of the participants as well as the dishes, servants, table and dishes; decorations of live flowers were used at outdoor sacrificial offerings; and even graves were covered at least once a year with flowers mixed with cypress, marjoram and pine.<sup>157</sup> These flowers and fragrant plants were used to make cosmetics, cleaning products, ointments, and decorations for simple relaxation as well as orgies.<sup>158</sup>

Thus the rose garland was also an accessory at holiday feasts. It was on the head of the drinkers – lest they blab away their secrets – and also on the mixing bowls. At the wine-tasting holiday, April 23, the garland plant was the rose<sup>159</sup> – and on this day streetwalkers, the servants of Venus, had the opportunity to perform their services more freely (Ovid: *Fasti* IV, 865-872). That the rose was the flower of the *lupanariae* is documented by Petronius' *Satyricon* as well as contemporary frescos.

The Romans also made rose wine, which in Diocletian's time was one of the cheapest wines for purchase: its cost was one Italian *sextarius* and 20 *denari*, compared to the price of 30 *sextarii* for the wines of Tibur or Falernum.<sup>160</sup> The recipe for rose wine according to the recipe book of Apicius (?25 BC - 25 AD): “*String rose petals – with the white parts removed – onto a thread. Put as many of these as possible into enough wine to stand covered for seven days. After seven days take them out and string more petals. Put the new string in the wine and leave for another seven days, then remove. Repeat a third time. Then strain the wine. Add honey before drinking. Use only the prettiest petals and take care that there are no dewdrops on them. Violet wine is made similarly, and likewise flavored with honey.*”<sup>161</sup> But, characteristically, the Romans also liked imitations and counterfeits in drinks and elsewhere: “*Here is how to make false rose wine. Take a palm-basket of green lemon leaves, and place them in unfermented must. Leave for forty days, then remove. Add honey if needed and drink in place of rose wine.*”<sup>162</sup>

Petals were picked from the rose garlands to prevent intoxication, to cool heated foreheads, and to mask the smell of wine on one's breath; also, Apuleius' fictional donkey was not the only one who ate roses as a magic love potion. Roman physicians believed the rose to have a cooling effect, based on the alleged properties suggested by Dioskorides and Galenos. Rose was also used in cooking. A Roman cookbook generally attributed to Marcus Gavius Apicius, the only surviving collection of ancient recipes (later it was to function also as a diet book and pharmaceutical collection), records the grand feasts of the era before Christ, and in all likelihood does not contain recipes of commonplace or individualized dishes.

The recipe for rose pudding is as follows: “*Pick a number of rose petals, remove the white parts, and put the petals in a mortar. Add garum, and crush. Then add one and a half cyathi of garum, and*

<sup>153</sup> From surviving fragments of the description of the shrine in Cirta (Constantine) (ILS 4921): “Inventory...” Hung. trans. Hahn I. p. 155.

<sup>154</sup> Suetonius: *Divus Verspasianus*. 19; Hung. trans. Kis F. p. 324

<sup>155</sup> *Digesta*. 34. 25. 10-11.: “the listed ...” Cf. Szepessy T. (1968) pp. 39-40.

<sup>156</sup> Ovid: *Amores*. I. 4. 37-3/8.

<sup>157</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. II. 535-537.

<sup>158</sup> Seneca: *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*. 51. 12. “You think....” Hung. trans. Maróti E. p. 210.

<sup>159</sup> Ovid: *Fasti*. IV. 865-672.

<sup>160</sup> Edict. Dioclet. 2.

<sup>161</sup> Apicius: *De re Cogninaria*. I. 4. 1; Hungarian: 41, I. 3. 1.

<sup>162</sup> Apicius: *De re Coquinaria*. I. 4. 2; Hungarian: 41, I. 3. 2.

*allow to strain. Take four brains, remove the membranes, and crush with 8 scripula of pepper, then add to the paste and mix well. Next beat 8 eggs, [add] one and a half cyathi wine, one cyathus sweet wine and a little oil. Place an oiled baking dish on hot ash and pour in the dough. When done, sprinkle with finely ground pepper and serve.*"<sup>163</sup>

Immoderate rose use and the practice of raising everyday pleasures to godlike heights appear to spring from the same source. Gardening methods to produce flowers made the rose available even outside its traditional flowering season, as warm-water irrigation and greenhouse production made it an available product (though very expensive) both before and after its normal season. Slippages in the flowering season also resulted from the peculiarities of climate of the various Italian production sites. These rose gardens delivered their flowers by ship or wagon to Rome and other cities. There were large famous gardens in Campania and in Paestum on the Bay of Salerno. Romans needed roses for their everyday lives, but there was also demand for extreme luxury items like pillows and beds made of rose petals. Eventually, after the occupation of Egypt, wheat-producing lands in the mother country were partly converted to rose production, and wheat to feed the people was imported by boat from the provinces. Fresh flowers were also imported from Carthage to meet ever-increasing demands – mainly in the months when winter weather came to Rome. All this made it possible for anyone who could afford it to have this seemingly indispensable flower at private celebrations.

Cato disapproved of the awarding of rose garlands for practically every military victory instead of reserving them to honor important triumphs only; centuries later, Tacitus similarly denounced the now-commonplace use of garlands as military honors. He also objected to the agricultural production of Africa and Egypt, as they put the people of Rome at the mercy of the ships and random chance.<sup>164</sup> He quotes Varro (?116-28 BC), because the immoderately overgrown rose-producing lands left no land for wheat, to have exclaimed: "*We are forced to rely on Sardinia and Africa to eat well.*"<sup>165</sup> In the winter of 89-90 the rose crop in Paestum was so large that imports from Egypt became unnecessary. Montialis (41-100) echoed the centuries-old worry in his epigram:

*"O Nile, Roman roses are now much prettier  
than yours!  
We no longer need your roses, but send  
us your wheat!"*

Taken from the Persians and Greeks and heightened to immoderation, floral gardening and flower use, floral carpets and floral rains were all interpreted as signs of moral decline. Horace also lamented that so many fertile croplands had been changed to flowerbeds.<sup>166</sup>

Cicero (106-43 BC) disapproved of the governor of Sicily for his extravagant way of life and oppression of the people, traveling on pillows made of rose petals and sniffing packages of rose petals to counter the smells and diseases of the people: "*When our general, Verres, left his palace in Syracuse, he traveled by a sedan in which the pillows were stuffed with rose petals. Moreover, he wore a rose garland on his head, another around his neck, and a net woven of fine flax thread and stuffed with roses over his nose.*"<sup>167</sup>

In order to produce the floral rain for guests of the Domus Aurea, an astonishingly practical structure was devised for Nero (37-68). As Suetonius reports: "*The inside of the building was gilded everywhere, adorned with gemstones and mother-of-pearl; the ceilings of the dining chambers were equipped with movable ivory plates and tubular grids to scatter rose petals and spray aromatics on the guests: the grand dining area was circular, and, like the sky, turned constantly night and day.*"<sup>168</sup> Nero also imposed himself on his friends: one organized a garlanded feast that cost four million sestericii, while another who embellished his evening with roses paid even more.<sup>169</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Apicius: *De re Coquinaria*. IV. 2. 9; Hungarian: 79, IV. 2. 9.

<sup>164</sup> Tacitus: *Annales*. XII. 43. 2.

<sup>165</sup> Tacitus: *Annales*. XII. 43. 133/a; Martialis: *Epigrammata*. VI. 80. 9-10.

<sup>166</sup> Horace: *Carmina*. II. 15. 4-10.

<sup>167</sup> Cicero: *Verr.* II. 10-11. 27. Comp. Tergit, G. (1969) p. 40

<sup>168</sup> Suetonius: *Nero*. 31; Hung. trans. Maróti E.

<sup>169</sup> Suetonius: *Nero*. 27; Hung. trans. Kis F. p. 254

Nero, before whom the roads were sprayed with a saffron-scented liquid, won the favors of the crowds awaiting him with tasty delicacies, and his bedroom was piled high with victory garlands; he was fond of the spa of Baiae near Naples, where floral garlands frequently floated in the bay.

In his description of the rule of Lucius Verus (161-169) Spartianus reports<sup>170</sup> that the Emperor slept in a bed made of rose petals. The petals were held together in a net, and the net interwoven with lily petals made his blanket. The Emperor also lay on luxurious pillows of rose and lily petals while dining. The chambers of Cleopatra's Egyptian palace were similarly covered in roses when she received Antonius.

Heliogabalus (204-224), who was fond of bathing in rose wine, like Nero ordered a floral rain to cover invited guests in the enclosed grand chamber of his palace to celebrate the beginning of his reign – in consequence, several of the guests died.

In their wall decorations the Romans often used festoons, carved banners depicting leaves, flowers and fruit, in addition of course to the ubiquitous garlands. Decorative forms imitative of living flowers were popular in architecture and interior design, and adorned altars, temples, and other sacred and profane places. Rosettes and roses painted on ceilings or carved of wood or stone symbolized secrecy. The evolution of the expression *sub rosa*, an admonition not to reveal confidential information, may have originated as an allusion to the legend in which Cupid bribed the god of silence with a rose not to betray Venus.<sup>171</sup> In all likelihood the Romans had a great need for all this, inasmuch as from the high point of the Empire unbridled drinking and drunken feasts became increasingly common.

#### 6.4. The therapeutic rose

Reliable sources in the history of science, despite the paucity of data available to them, make it certain that in the early stages of the ancient Greek and Latin cultures healing was conducted within the framework of religious cults – plants and animals that had functions in religious activities also had a role in medicine. Two variants of the combination of religion and medical practice evolved, based on the schools of Asklepios and Hippocrates. The former, and probably earlier, version relied on irrational, supernatural aid in healing, and strongly manifested a religious perspective utilizing magic and sorcery: the best-known of the *asklepieia*, curative shrines run by physician-priests, were located in Pergamon, Epidauros, Egypt, and Southern Italy. The Hippocratic variant, appearing in the fifth century BC, utilized rational healing and may be considered part of natural philosophy, practice being determined by observation of the assumed order of the cosmos. The theory of balanced pairs – wet and dry, hot and cold, etc. – is attributed to Alkmaeon, who was thought to be a student of Pythagoras (sixth century BC). From this initial concept of pathology evolved the Greek pathology of humors, through Hippocrates, later supplemented by Galenos, which defined medicine in the ancient Mediterranean, and in later periods of cultural history determined the direction of folk medicine still present in modern European practice. In addition to Alkmaeon's fundamental qualities, the evolution of medicine was also influenced by the natural philosophy of Empedokles, who joined the four elements (earth, water, wind and fire) with the four fundamental qualities (dry, wet, cold and hot). This system was later expanded – and still later adopted by Aristotle – by the Pythagorean fifth element, ether, such that the Elemental World of ancient cosmology was comprised of the four qualitative elements, and the Celestial World of mineral, plant, animal, and celestial matter combined from ether.

Hippocrates' pathology, following the principles of the four elements and four qualities, placed the focus on the four humors. Blood, bile, gall, and phlegm also influenced character, resulting in sanguine, melancholic, choleric, and phlegmatic personalities. A disruption of the balance between the four humors led to disease, to eliminate which physicians used objects from the Elemental World with qualities opposite those of the disease. In addition, other objects and materials were used which were related to objects of the Celestial World by virtue of their identical qualities – this resulted in the inclusion of astronomy and magic in medical practice.

<sup>170</sup> Sutoris F. (1905) 606.

<sup>171</sup> Phillips, R. – Rix, M. (1993) 20.

The objects needed in medicine were grouped in accordance with the spheres of the Elemental World, based on the guidelines of cosmological belief. In the simple materials used in medicine categorized according to mineral, plant, animal, or human origin, what role was assigned to matter derived from the rose?

Pedanius Dioskorides, Pliny, Celsus, Galenos and others followed Theophrastos in claiming that matter garnered from the rose should be used primarily as an ingredient in substances to reduce passion, inasmuch as healing and the selection of medicine observed the cooling effect of roses in accordance with the principles of humor pathology based on the theory of the four elements. Behind this belief was practical experience which also characterized the rational approach to healing represented by Alkmaeon, Hippocrates and Galenos. Sensory observation determined that both the rose and aromatics made from it had a cooling effect on the skin, due to their high rate of evaporation.

As a supplement to the pathology of humors, Hippocrates also originated the belief that a symptom of disease and the substance to be used against it showed an identical nature in some property (shape, appearance, color, smell, and so on). For example, for diseases of the blood or mild inflammations involving reddening of the skin some part or derivative of a red rose was recommended. Thus an item used for inflammations of the eye was dew collected from a rose.

During the reign of Tiberius Caesar (14-37) A. Cornelius Celsus published his six-volume encyclopedia, with a number of articles on medicine after the volume on agriculture and before the volume on fishing. He called the rose a plant which was always readily available, therefore it was not necessary to use complex medicines containing roses, and the plant was effective in liberating the body of pathogens. He classified it as one of the commonly occurring plants usable directly in unprocessed form, with both a cooling and drying effect to reduce inflammations.<sup>172</sup> He claimed the same effects for rainwater from the sky, as well as wine and vinegar, and objects soaked in these were also more effective. He recommended rose tea as a therapeutic potion, which should be taken in spoonfuls by the patient if water made his or her body swell. For dropsy patients, however, medicines made from the petals of this plant were recommended only at the beginning of treatment as mild medicines, to be replaced later by stronger substances.<sup>173</sup>

A student of Celsus was Scribonius Largus who, in addition to using many Greek sources, was the summarizer and heir of Latin pharmacology. Scribonius discussed the recipes for various medicines in 271 chapters.<sup>174</sup> Like his master, he was a proponent of the empirical school and was critical of the use of substances and procedures prescribed on the basis of other practices. Also, in keeping with the Roman mentality, he categorized pharmacological materials according to practical aspects, such as what parts of the body they were used to treat. Consequently he began his series of recipes with recommendations for diseases of the head. One of the treatments for headaches he provided was the following recipe (widely used), which also included the rose: “*Against headaches and even for fever a good counter is a quarter pound of thyme and a quarter pound of dried rose petals. These should be boiled in two pitchers (sextarii) of very strong vinegar until the solution is reduced to half its original volume. Pour this into a cup (cyathus) and mix with two cups rose petals; headaches are frequently cured with this. However, if this potion is heated it will become harmful unless a fresh batch is added to it.*” In the series of medicines of similar composition the ubiquitous aspect is the use of plants with high contents of rapidly evaporating (cooling) volatile oils mixed with sour tastes.

Pedanius Dioskorides (late first century) used three basic sources for his *Peri khyles Iatrikes* (*De materia medica*), the most influential text in ancient pharmacology: one was *Rhyzotomikon*, by Krateuas (first century BC), physician to the king of Pontos; the second was the work of Sextius Quintus from the time of Augustus; and the third was the pharmacology of Sextius Niger highly esteemed by Seneca. In five volumes Dioskorides discusses medicines of plant and animal origin – with reliable descriptions of more than five hundred plants, making it the largest surviving work on ancient medical botany. He presents the medicinal plants of the entire Roman Empire, and his descriptions are more professional than those of Pliny the Elder, whose texts were identical at numerous points, although the two did not know each other: both had studied the now-lost works of Sextius Niger. Although generally more precise and striving for descriptions based on personal

<sup>172</sup> Celsus: *De medicina*. II. 33. 3-4.

<sup>173</sup> Celsus: *De medicina*. III. 21. 7-8.

<sup>174</sup> Scribonius Largus: *Compositiones*. 1; Hung. trans. Havas L. In: Szabó Á. – Kádár Z. (1984) 380.



observation, Dioskorides' description of the oleander, for example, is so similar to Pliny's that one may conclude they were both working on the basis of an identical text. In Dioskorides' description of the oleander, "*its leaves are longer and thicker than those of the almond tree, and its flower is similar to that of the rose,*"<sup>175</sup> while Pliny is more taciturn, noting only that it is evergreen and its flower is similar to that of the rose.<sup>176</sup>

In his categorizations Dioskorides gave consideration to aromatic ointments and oil-yielding plants. In comparison to the recipes of Scribonius Largus, the selection criteria appear more characteristically chosen where recommending the use of the rose. In his summary – cited on countless occasions over fifteen centuries – Dioskorides states: "*The rose has cooling and binding effects. Dried, it is even more binding. The juice of fresh rose petals is pressed out after removing from them with scissors that which we call its cuticle (unguis): the remainder is pressed and then crushed in a mortar in a shaded place, stirring constantly lest it settle and spoil. The juice from a dried rose boiled in wine is applied by a plume or poured onto the afflicted part of the body, to relieve pain in the head, eye, ear, gums, intestines, anus or womb. Meanwhile, after pressing, the crushed petals are applied to the body against inflammations of the cardiac region and erysipelas. Dried and crushed roses may be scattered onto the female genitalia, or mixed with so-called anthera mixtures and antitoxins for wounds. Also, the flower found in the center of the rose may be dried and applied to the gums to stop gum infections. Boiled rose flowers are useful against diarrhea and to stop bleeding.*"<sup>177</sup>

Consequently the properties of the rose appearing in the context of paired qualities are its cooling and drying effects. It was noted earlier that Theophrastos claimed that the different parts of a single plant have fundamental properties of an identical character, though in varying strengths; the same holds here: a fresh rose has a desiccant effect, but a dried rose even more so. Rose-based substances, depending on the mixture of the elements, were considered effective against varying diseases and symptoms – depending also on the amount of other elements, especially water, present in the rose. The nectar of fresh rose petals, because its principal quality was water, was quick to spoil. Boiling dried petals in wine produced a (weaker) medicine to reduce inflammation, at the same time that rose petals containing diluted essence could be used in the treatment of diseases with virulent symptoms. Dried and powdered rose was recommended for wounds.

In Scribonius Largus' recipe the vinegar heightened the cooling effect; here this function was taken over by wine, which was less acidic and thus had less sting in the treatment of wounds. A suggestion by Galenos indicates that contemporary practice considered the degree of effect of the medicine to depend on the solvent. The panacea of Mithridates Eupator (second century BC) for singers before and after concerts<sup>178</sup> – it also cured tonsil and throat inflammations, hemoptysis and catarrh – was mixed with syrup, wine or water, or undiluted, depending on the desired effect. The effect of mixtures of poppy, fern, comfrey, mandrake, sumac, rose and other fragrant plants is unknown, but according to the raw materials used they may have had a calming and cooling function.

Caius Plinius Secundus, who wrote during the same period as Dioskorides and somewhat earlier than Galenos, was not a physician, and in fact produced no independent findings in the study of nature; nevertheless, *Naturalis Historia*, in keeping with the encyclopedic perspective and practice-based scientific attitudes of the time, provides plentiful data on pharmaceuticals as well. The work is worth comparing with Dioskorides not only to obtain knowledge on their shared sources based on the similarities, but also to gain information on the attitudes of culture recognized by the Roman elite. This includes a listing of substances which could be used by anyone.

According to Pliny the Younger, the rose was the source of medicines usable for an unusually large number of diseases. Each of these, as noted earlier, matches the descriptions of Dioskorides. Obviously an elaborated theory lay behind the canonization of utility, but its explication never took place, except for enthusiastic summations of references to others. A review of the diseases enumerated by Dioskorides and Pliny – diseases of the womb, pain in the womb, pain in the groin, discharges, bleeding, headache, sweating, fever, dysentery, diarrhea, gastric diseases, visceral diseases, eye diseases, insomnia – makes it obvious that the majority related to the organs of the reproductive

<sup>175</sup> Dioskorides: *De materia medica*. IV. 82.

<sup>176</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XVI. 79; XXIV. 90.

<sup>177</sup> Dioskorides: *De materia medica*. T. 112; Hung. trans. Magyar L. A.

<sup>178</sup> Galenos: *Opera omnia*. XIII. 55-56.

system or the digestive system. The same was observed in the use of rose symbols: in keeping with contemporary thinking the plant (now as a pharmacological material) contributed to the survival of the individual and the species. Thus, in this regard, the rose retained its association with mythology-based notions of fertility.

Diseases of male and female internal and external sexual organs, as well as the accompanying symptoms (including symptoms which appeared in other diseases as well as here), were the jurisdiction of Venus, which may explain why the rose was recommended for their treatment, along with oils, wine extracts, rinses and detergents, powders, pressed nectars and unguents derived from the rose.

Pliny describes in more places than his contemporary which parts of the rose were used in medicines and how they were processed. For the most part the petal was used, either in full or with the unguis removed (and in fresh or dried form). This was because the rose used was red, but the base of the petal was pale or white: to improve the effectiveness of the medicine this part was removed from the red petal. Also, the non-red part contained the most moisture – that is, the element of water – which diminished the desired character of the medicine. The carrier of the color associated with spirit/light/fire was promised in petal pieces showing the purest form.

Extracts of greater strength were produced from fresh petals by soaking them in oil or wine in a glass vessel in sunlight. If diarrhea or the vulva was to be treated, salt or plants with a constrictive and drying effect were mixed into the solution while fermenting. There was also a third method to obtain the raw ingredient: after removing the unguis the petals were crushed and pressed to extract their juice. This liquid was boiled slowly to produce a kind of syrup, sometimes with fragrant plants added to alter the smell.

Thus obtained, these extracts were then put to use. For example, freshly pressed rose nectar was used for inflammations of the mouth, or mixed with vinegar to treat nausea. The coloring matter of the petal had a function in medicinal cosmetics, and was mixed with materials to make eye shadow. Discharges and rashes of the sexual organs were treated with dried rose powder.

Pliny also valued the drying and binding properties of the rose; consequently, he considered it usable for the treatment of dysentery, hemorrhages, and symptoms involving major loss of fluids. On the basis of this effect he also said rose petals could be used as food, with a sour flavor similar to that of spinach. The desiccant effect was best achieved by dried rose petals: by heating the body it caused it to release water.

Both Pliny and Hippocrates recommended rose petals for bites from mad dogs.<sup>179</sup> According to the principles of humor pathology, the drying effect of the rose was necessary inasmuch as rabies involved excessive salivation. *“Formerly there was no cure for the bite of a mad dog. A few years ago, however, the mother of a soldier in the guard in Hispania dreamed she sent her son the flower of a wild rose which she had spotted on a bush the previous day, with the message that he should drink of it. She wrote this to her son, who happened to have been bitten by a mad dog at that time and was beginning to feel the effects of the bite. In her letter the mother asked her son to obey the admonitions of the gods. He followed her advice and was saved. Since then everyone uses this cure.”* This quote also shows that the rose used in medicine in this case was not a cultivated plant from a garden or suburban plantation, but a wild plant of Nature, and also that ideas on the use of the rose were the same in the more remote parts of the Empire.

Two remarks, however, are particularly interesting. *“The flower brings sleep,”* says Pliny, and elsewhere: *“The rose is worth the least as a garland.”*<sup>180</sup> Pliny not only discusses the scent of the rose and its use in garlands, but also hints that the fragrant volatile oil of the rose was a tranquilizer, whether it came from a single flower or from several woven into a garland. Also, he considered the garland to be both a sacred device (in keeping with its original function) as well as an adornment with a curative effect (which may or may not have been a consequence of the former). Here medical thinking appears at a point where the separation of rational and irrational healing has not completely taken place, and the two methods of the rose’s involvement in culture – the religious/cultic and the medicinal/hygienic – are merged in the text. Additional clues on the meaning of his remarks are provided by the occasional rose references in Dioskorides.

<sup>179</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XXV. 2.

<sup>180</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XXI. 4. XXI. 19. etc.; Hung. trans. Magyar L. A.

The greatest figure in Roman-era medicine was Claudius Galenos (131-180), who was born in Pergamon, studied surgery in Alexandria, and eventually became physician to Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Based on the teachings of Aristotle and Hippocrates, his medical methods and knowledge required the combined use of experience and investigative analysis; however, he claimed practicality to be a natural truth guided by divine order, and encouraged a religious perspective in the practice of medicine. Like Dioskorides he listed 473 therapeutic plants, including the rose.

Galenos wrote on the rose in several works,<sup>181</sup> more systematically than his predecessors and much more subtly. He also claimed the effect mechanism of rose-based substances to be more dynamic; accordingly, he was quoted often from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment. In his opinion the rose was partly sour in nature, suggesting the element of earth, and therefore cold and thick, and partly bitter, which is warm and diffuse. A third aspect of its nature was the property of water, which attracts the quality of cold. Because of this combined presence of thickness and thinness, the quality of the rose is of an intermediate nature. Further, as a consequence of the mixing of qualities neither the sourness nor the bitterness is able to achieve full force. And all of this can be confirmed by an expert by a simple taste test.

Galenos sheds more light on Pliny's statements regarding the rose scent and garlands. "*The nectar of the rose obtainable by simple pressing is in his opinion mildly warm, for which reason it is capable of evaporating easily. For this reason it releases a scent, and dries out so quickly.*" This also provides an explanation why the plant is so fragrant, as well as why the flower wilts so quickly, as noted frequently in literary sources. (Romans occasionally lamented that the roses ceased to bloom after a short spring. Some also felt it important to note the places where roses that bloomed twice in the spring could be found.) Furthermore – on the principle of "like attracts like" – the properties of a "mildly warm" plant show a kinship with the basic characteristic of the element of fire, justly indicated and allegorized in the concepts surrounding fire/spirit/light.

Galenos' works explain the ancient practice in which the rose and materials and objects made from it were used. The flower, rose garlands, rose nectar and rose oil were all part of the same practice, but changes in the specific action ensured changes in form and in the concentrations of active ingredients. Also, inasmuch as the properties of the rose were shaped on the basis of a pairing of qualities, rose-based objects contributed to modifications in both qualities. Third, it also became obvious that Galenos was also a believer in empirical practice. "*Yet there are many doctors who ignore experience and are curious only as to whether the rose is red, and fragrant, and gain no experience whether they should treat themselves with a rose garland, or the nectar of the rose, or perhaps rose oil if they have a hangover; that is, to discover by experience how things stand. It may be that the rose emits warmth if heated and cold if chilled, and it makes no difference in its otherwise cooling effect on the human body. Yet experience as to whether roses are concerned or other medicines is easily obtained. The rose can be used with equal effect as a garland or crushed in a paste, but it can also be rubbed on the stomach of a heartburn patient, or the pressed nectar can be used, or mixed with oil or water and rubbed on the afflicted part of the body. But why do I list all these, when there are some who add opobalsam [the syrupy resin extracted from the branches of *Balsamodendron gileadense*] to rose nectar to anoint their bodies on hot summer days, which obviously experience has taught them, as the rose has a strong cooling effect.*"

At the same time that items and potions made from the rose represent an assortment of active ingredients of varying strength, the rose itself and its various organs and parts had varying degrees of effectiveness. For example, the flower of the rose was more desiccant than the plant itself. This explains when the leafy branch was to be used, and when the flower, or garlands made of the flower or perhaps the petals alone.

Pliny also mentioned the drying – and thus heat-retarding – effect of the rose. Galenos, however, provides an explanation why certain notoriously extravagant emperors and their imitators were led to use enormous quantities of rose petals. Although the literature had already recorded pillows stuffed with rose petals, and aromatic bags and rose beds as the accessories of immoderate luxury, there may also have been a medicinal explanation. Galenos states: "*A man who suffered from constant night-time love fantasies was once recommended to try using roses. After he covered his bed with the flowers and*

<sup>181</sup> Galenos: *Opera omnia*. XI. 550-551, 558-559, 563, 700-701; XII. 114; X. 298. etc. Excerpts Hung. trans.: Magyar L. A.

*slept on them, his complaints were alleviated, and without damage to his kidney.*” That is, Galenos was afraid the drying, constricting effect of the rose may damage the kidneys.

However, medicines made from roses were used not only on humans. Virgil, for example, found a solution for bee diseases if they languish, change color, or lie with folded parched legs at the entrance of the hive.

*“Here cast fragrant resin into a flame, I recommend,  
and dribble honey on them through reed tubes, to encourage  
tired bees to their customary food.  
Also good is a bundle of dry rose petals;  
boil the must at your fireplace till fat,  
add to it grape raisins picked from the vine,  
and Cecrops honey grass and pungent gentian on top.”*<sup>182</sup>

Eating dried rose petals heals the digestive system of bees – and also of human beings. Behind the theory which recommends the same treatment for two highly dissimilar members of the animal kingdom is the concept of a universe in which living beings and non-living things, objects and stars are all part of a single system. More modern Roman forms of the Aristotelian concept of a hierarchical cosmos continued to use the same laws linked to the four elements to define the existence of things at various levels of the *quinta essentia*, or pure proto-matter. For example, for a man to regain his optimal balance of personality, the same laws must apply as in the case of bees, insects at a lower level of development than man, as well as in the case of plants, minerals, or stone.

Romans explained the medicinal and related cosmetic functions of the rose on the basis of humor pathology principles; at the same time, this also justified sacred and profane use of the plant in a wide variety of forms. The red color, penetrating scent, heating/cooling and drying effect of the rose were all incorporated in one system – a system with some empirical base, but nevertheless speculative. The manner in which plant use was interpreted provided an opportunity for the rose to occupy a place in the mythological and resultant religious and ritual symbol systems, and at the same time to receive rational elements.

## 7. Reasoning – with roses

The Romans’ beloved rose had so many meanings that it became a metaphor of divine perfection and much-desired youth, of yearning, of requited or unrequited love, of temptation and desire, of sexual services, sexual fulfillment, fertility and wealth, of the covenant of marriage, of life and the afterlife, and, of course, of perseverance, heroism and even death. It alluded to courage, blood and rapture, and marked the connection between gods and mortals. However, the rose and the wealth of its use as symbol was characteristic of the Empire’s population, but not of single individuals. The Roman citizen selected from among metaphorical forms in accordance with his social station, education, and worldview, and objected to the forms he did not use.

The sometimes moderate, sometimes extreme, use of the rose and its symbols influenced Roman attitudes toward religion – a return to the simplicity of the past, an emphasis on the role of the gods, or a denial of their impact. Those distancing themselves from sacred usage of the rose did retain the traditional forms of rose symbols, but narrowed the interpretation of their content. Some used them as signs of physical, hedonistic pleasures, while others attempted to view them strictly as the sign of human love.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ca. 4-65) lived in the first half of the first imperial period: it was he who defined the era known for its highly rhetorical style as the Silver Age. The Silver Age lasted from the death of Augustus (14) to the death of Traianus (117). Imperial consolidation created the *Pax Romana* and offered equality to the inhabitants of Italia and the provinces: the formation of the Roman mentality owed just as much to the Seneca family of Hispania as it did to the provincial Martial.

<sup>182</sup> Virgil: *Georgica*. IV. 264-270; Hung. trans. Lakartos I. pp. 96-97, 264-270.

An opponent of the Empire and advocate of the republic, Seneca professed Stoic views, and his *Epistulae morales* are saturated with remarks on practical life reflecting a worldview characteristic of many Romans, in which one might live austere and undisturbed, and through self-examination attain the god dwelling in the soul of man (*Epistulae morales* 31, 11).

It was Stoicism which was best able to continue Roman traditions in comparison to the other philosophies of Hellenic origin. The 124 letters of *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* (62-65) were nominally addressed to Lucilius, procurator of Sicilia, but Seneca actually intended them for everyone. Lucilius – according to the letters addressed to him, in which the writer attempted to express principles based on utility rather than pleasure – professed Epicurean beliefs. The sentential linguistic purity served to express a practical ethic “to live nicely and properly” (*Ep.* 69). This attainment is also suggested in the line where the rose becomes part of an allegory: “*Is it not unnatural to yearn for roses in winter?*”<sup>183</sup> This statement, of course, is based on an oversimplified judgment of the Epicureans, as they did not believe in immoderation in life’s pleasures: nevertheless, the winter rose as a flower of luxury is presented here as an example of unnatural behavior.

A hundred and fifty years earlier the premier author of Roman Golden-Age prose was Cicero (82-43 BC), who strove to reconcile Greek models and the traditional Roman sense of duty, arriving at an individual philosophy through the clash of Stoic, Epicurean and skeptical views, much as Seneca would do later, with his own rose allegory to promote natural behavior: “*When he saw the rose, he understood that spring had come.*”<sup>184</sup> Marcus Aurelius (121-180), the Stoic emperor who interpreted philosophy as conduct, used rose references in *Meditations* which coincided with the views of not only the two authors mentioned *supra*, but also Lucretius and Virgil: “*Whatever happens is as natural and self-evident as the rose in spring and fruit in summer. Such is illness, death, slander and deceit: all that which delights or saddens the stupid.*”<sup>185</sup> In the Stoic view acceptance of the rose was permitted by the natural nature of the plant, but was rejected when it contradicted it or when its meaning was not used in accordance with the rules.

Marcus Valerius Martialis (?38/41-104) denounced the extreme followers of the philosophies – both the Cynics (III, 93, 13; IV, 53, 7; VII, 64, 8; XI, 84, 7) and the Stoics (VII, 64, 8; XI, 56, 1; XIV, 106, 2; XI, 84, 7). He disagreed with the teachings of the Cynics – that virtue was sufficient for happiness, and all which impeded its practice (possessions, home, family, children) was to be despised – as well as those who flouted their poverty and sought to forge virtue out of necessity, such as Chaeremon. He made the individual responsible for poverty, and called it shameful. In his opinion the principles of those who lived improperly would be immediately exposed if they turned to the proper way of life.

*“As if the bed swelled from its fine wool padding,  
lovely woven purple your two blankets,  
he sleeps his rose cheek beside you, the boy  
who in the evening offered wine and enflamed his companion”*<sup>186</sup>

Martial’s relationship with stoicism is not without contradiction. He often mentioned them together with the cynics. Cato, the most frequently quoted source of the stoics, is alternately banished from his book (1. *Praef.*), or elsewhere made the object of ridicule, declared a hypocrite for his opposition to the rose:

*“In late evening you arrive happily,  
the time when Lyaeus is merry:  
all is covered by roses, your hair by scents:  
at such times even Cato reads me.”*<sup>187</sup>

<sup>183</sup> Seneca: *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*. 122. 8; Hung. trans. Szabó Gy.

<sup>184</sup> Cicero: *Verr.* II. V. 10. 27.

<sup>185</sup> Marcus Aurelius: *Ad se ipsum*. IV. 44; Hung. trans. Huszti J. pp. 48-49.

<sup>186</sup> Martial: *Epigrammata*. XI. 56. 9-12; Hung. trans. Balogh K. p. 57.

<sup>187</sup> Pliny the Younger: *Epistulae*. 3. 21; Hung. trans. Adamik T. p. 181; Martial: *Epigrammata*. X. 20.. (19) 18-21.

At the same time it was a fact that in Rome it was the Stoics – the Senecas and the Pisos – who were known to enjoy support. Martial himself was not above stressing Stoic virtues, but he did not commit himself to them, or to Epicureanism. His era was characterized by a number of philosophical directions, and it was largely a question of politics as to who followed which. During the rule of the middle-class-oriented Flavian dynasty (Vespasianus and Domitianus) the ideology of Stoic and Cynic worldviews defined the views of opponents of the emperor, and believers in Epicureanism remained receptive as proponents of happy private life. In the politics of the republican era the Epicureans had been the opposition against the Stoics.

Martial's poetry is also rich in Epicurean ideas: he frequently cites healthy, happy, good life in the present as a goal and as an attainment. He calls his provincial estate in Bilbilis a kingdom:

*“Here this orchard shades the spring and high vine,  
and abundant aqueducts water the field,  
roses lovelier than those of Paestum, and grassy meadow,  
and frost-proof vegetables that sprout in January,  
here gentle eels swim in the blue water of the lake,  
and there stand the old hawking mews of this white castle.”*<sup>188</sup>

This region compares with the garden of Nausica. Of this idyllic yet puritan location Martial also conscientiously reports that it is his own – and lists its boons, including roses lovelier than those of Paestum (also an indirect reference to Fortuna).

Maintaining an equal distance from eternal – even spiritual – emotions as well as unassailable philosophical truths, often playful and satirical, preferring life to a good death, Martial did consider the rose a sign expressing high value; but there is no reason to assume a transcendental meaning in his references to the flower. *“Dear is the rose which our fingers are the first to pick,”*<sup>189</sup> he writes, when he sends his latest collection of unpublished poems to his patron and reader. The accompanying poem is set in early spring (the grapevines on the hill have not budded, but they have changed color) and there is a purple toga in the poem. Both the season of spring and the purple color of the toga anticipate the appearance of the rose. The rose image may be interpreted without a multitude of implications or mythological allusions: its freshness makes this possible.

The rose reference used in one of the key points of *Epigram* IV, 29 is specifically to the value of a flower that opens in winter. In this work addressed to Pudens, a centurion from Sarsarina, Martial ranks poets who write a few short poems higher than those who write lengthy works on mythological topics.

*“My little books are hurt, dear Pudens, by their numerousness,  
for even if you read them, you are wearied and bored by their  
number.  
Rarity gives pleasure; let the first be all that is savory.  
This is why roses in winter cost more.”*<sup>190</sup>

Moderation and appreciation of the value of rarity were among Martial's guiding principles.

A similar call for proper behavior occurs in II, 59, *Mausoleum*, but, as the couch, wine, and spikenard are also present, in addition to the rose – accessories to a feast held in the inn *Mica Aurea* ('Gold Crumb') opposite the mausoleum of Augustus (who became a god after his death) – the meaning is more strongly defined by Stoic tradition than in the previous examples. The present and the future, life to enjoy and death to come, are parts of a single whole:

*“They call me Crumb; you see what I am: a little inn.  
From here one can see Caesar's tomb opposite.”*

<sup>188</sup> Martial: *Epigrammata*. XII. 31. 1-6; Hung. trans. Gradsack H. p. 179.

<sup>189</sup> Martial: *Epigrammata*. X. 93. 5; Hung. trans. Horváth I. K. (2001) p. 29.

<sup>190</sup> Martial: *Epigrammata*. IV. 29. 1-4. Hung. trans. Adamik T. p. 165.

*Bring the couch, wine, and rose, and scatter the spikenard:  
The god's resting place warns: do not forget death.*"<sup>191</sup>

Complete rejection of the rose came only from the increasing number of Christians in the Empire. They believed that not only symbols associated with pagan gods were harmful, but so was the rose, with its emphasis on the beauty of earthly life; and they condemned possession of the plant. The early Christian poet Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (348-379) in *Lechery goes to war (Venerat occiduis de mundi finibus hostis)* states: "*Behold, the enemy comes from the Far West of the world: / Lechery.*"<sup>192</sup> Earthly joy and the pursuit of pleasure entered battle against true men and women in order to rule over them. This battle took rather unusual form:

*"... no whizzing arrows  
fly from the bow, nor piercing darts from twisted  
sling, nor does its right hand flourish a spear:  
for it battles lecherously with violet and rose petal,  
scattering flowers from a basket on its enemy's army.*"<sup>193</sup>

The rose in Christian thinking was transformed into the forbidden flower of lechery and physicality.

## 8. Roman gardens and their roses

The Greek ideal of a small ornamental garden beside the home, full of marvelous flowers and fragrant plants in beds separated by species, was not adopted immediately by the agricultural Romans when Greco-Roman ties strengthened. Although free landed estates were called gardens (*hortus*), around 450 BC they were used solely for crop agriculture. Provincial villas which depict gardens on their frescos were built after the second century BC. It was at this time that the Romans separated agricultural areas from gardens in the modern sense, a place serving relaxation and enjoyment of life. Created at this time were the spacious gardens around the house or villa, providing pleasure and making the land and buildings into a harmonic environment, as well as smaller ornamental gardens, and later a special form thereof, the rose garden. As a result of Greek influence, there were also sacred locations, holy parks, emphasizing the nature of the place with statues and cultic structures, as well as sacred public grounds containing numerous temples or cultic sites, where the vegetation was left to grow naturally, and especially, the trees providing cool shade were not pruned.

In Hellenic and Roman culture the theoretical questions of living Nature were completely neglected by thinkers and natural philosophers, but answers to practical questions were considered all the more important. After Theophrastos, the founder of botany, there was no one who dealt with that science as an independent discipline. In contrast, there were many spokesmen – of varying degrees – for the issues of agriculture. Agricultural procedures not only served food needs but also provided the raw materials for medical biology and religious cults. Understandably, agriculture developed in accordance with these practical demands.

Agricultural reform between the two Punic Wars (at which time wine and oil production became economically important), and the later switch from small self-sufficient farms to large-scale slave-based production necessitated summaries of plant-growing knowledge. Marcus Porcius Cato (234-149 BC) was to write *De agricultura* between 164 and 154 BC, a book filled with advice for small producers as well as information on animal husbandry and medicine. The first significant summary of agricultural science was by M. Terentius Varro (116-27 BC), who cited nearly fifty Greek scientists in his compilation *De Rerum Rusticarum libri tres [Three Books on Agricultural Matters]*. Varro is credited with the foundation of Roman agricultural science. His manuscript was published in 36 BC. For Varro agriculture was not only a learnable, utility-based craft but also an art, and although he

<sup>191</sup> Martial: *Epigrammata*. II. 59; Hung. trans. Adamik T. p. 92.

<sup>192</sup> Prudentius: *Psychomachia*. 310-311; Hung. trans. Rónay Gy. p. 442.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 323-327

considered utility to be more important, he was less neglectful than his predecessors of its function as luxury (*voluptas*). Virgil's *Georgica* was written under the spell of Theophrastos and Varro. One of the goals in Augustus Caesar's program was the promotion of *ars topiaria* (the art/science of horticulture); Virgil satisfied this expectation in Volume IV of *Georgica*. The traditions of Virgil and his contemporary Cornelius Celsus influenced the encyclopedic *Rei rusticae libri* by Lucius Iunius Moderatus Columella of Hispania (first century). In Volume X of this work the author gives advice to horticulturalists, in verse form, as to the planting times and methods of care for flowering plants.

### 8.1. Garland plant gardening

Cato the Elder, an opponent of luxury and spending, was familiar with farm work and practiced it in his youth. Although Cato was to become the model of the austere way of life, his major work dealt in part with the maintenance of large farms which provided a reliable income for the aristocracy. The religious commitment and medicinal procedures of farmers led Cato himself to recommend growing roses and other flowers for weaving into garlands. All this is reported in Pliny.<sup>194</sup> Varro recommended growing garland plants in farms near cities, where delivery was easy and costs were low. Here "*it is advantageous to raise, for example, violets and roses in large gardens, as well as many other things the city desires, but it is not wise to grow these same things on distant farms where there is nowhere to take them for sale.*"<sup>195</sup> Varro promoted large, commercially oriented farms: this is an indication of the constant demand of city dwellers for large amounts of garland plants. Of the plants grown in ancient times for weaving into garlands, Pliny named two: the rose and the violet.<sup>196</sup> Columella also discussed how to grow these two plants. He recommended that violets be planted in beds as produce vegetables, and roses in foot-wide furrows.<sup>197</sup> *De arboribus [On Trees]* was not originally part of *Rei rusticae libri*, and was later placed between volumes II and III; nor was that its original title. But Pliny, a contemporary, accepted it as an authentic source. This little book is a listing of empirical advice on the growing of plant species which were better suited for large farms than for ornamental gardens – monocultural rose growing, in beds or rows, was behind this sort of approach.

### 8.2. The rose's function in bee-keeping

Agronomic writers, except for Cato, included bee-keeping as a part of agriculture. *Auctores* were fond of combining the keeping of bees with the growing of fragrant or garland plants. Bee-keeping was naturally considered a form of animal husbandry characteristic of small farms, since regardless of the size of the flower crop, animals could also be raised as supplementary income. With their value on practicality, Romans justly demanded that works on agriculture include animal husbandry advice.

Varro in fact placed emphasis on animal husbandry (and the animals he lists as domesticated include the likes of the snail and the dormouse). Bee-keeping and bee ethology is covered in III, 16, 8-9. Varro notes: "*If there is no natural feed crop, the farmer should plant what bees particularly like. For example, the rose ...*"<sup>198</sup>

Virgil began writing *Georgica* in 36 BC, the time Varro's work appeared. Volume IV deals in part with the life of bees and their species and diseases. Meanwhile, a contemporary wrote specifically on bee-keeping: unfortunately, Hygimus' manuscript *De apibus* survives only in highly fragmented form.

Virgil mentions the example of an old man in Asia Minor whose farm was but a few acres of generally worthless ground, unsuited for pasture, plowing, or vineyard.

*"So the old man encircled this underbrush with bay trees,  
prodigal poppies, vegetables, snowy lilies,*

<sup>194</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XXI. 1.

<sup>195</sup> Varro: *Rerum rusticarum*. I. 16. 3; Hung. trans. Kun J. p. 163. I. 16. 3.

<sup>196</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XXI. 10.

<sup>197</sup> Columella: *De arboribus*. XXX.

<sup>198</sup> Varro: *Rerum rusticarum*. III. 16. 13; Hung. trans. Kun J. p. 437. III. 46. 13.



*and like a king he lived; when he came home in the evening  
his table was laden with a supper that cost no money.  
He grew roses in spring, and the first quince in autumn ...*<sup>199</sup>

Thus the Corycus farmer lived happily from bee-keeping, and for the bees planted his land with plants the insects liked, including garland plants to ensure honey production.

Pliny said essentially the same thing as Varro and Virgil. Following the works of earlier agricultural authors, he also noted a close connection between gardens, garland plants, and bee-keeping. Consequently he advised farmers: “*Bee-keeping under the proper circumstances involves little expense and brings great profit. Therefore you should plant thyme, lemongrass, roses, violets, lilies, alfalfa, broad beans, chickpeas, oregano, poppies, inula, casia, melilot, honey-flower and cerinthe. ... These are the flowers that bees prefer ...*”<sup>200</sup> Columella also mentioned bees, treating them along the lines of Hygimius with an eye to Aristotelian taxonomy, in addition to a traditional discussion of bee diseases.

### 8.3. Rose farms

On suitable sites rose farms (*rosetum*) were founded, where large-scale production of roses, as well as ancillary materials for sale, was conducted. These provided the model for smaller rose gardens (*rosarium*) established for private purposes. By definition, horticulture dealing with the production of plants by agricultural methods was practiced around these settlements. Famous for their splendid roses were Praeneste (now Palestrina, near Rome), Leporia (20 kilometers from Naples), and Paestum on the Bay of Salerno (the Greek settlement of Poseidonia, founded sometime before Christ), as well as the environs of Alexandria (the Fajjum oasis), the Nile delta (where roses were shipped to Rome in six sailing days) and Carthage in North Africa. Sources also report on farms in Hispania. From these sites near large towns citizens who had no garden could satisfy the demands for roses needed for public holidays and private celebrations.

Roman authors gave particular importance to the practical procedures of plant growing. Pliny even noted the method for growing roses out of season. In *Introduction to the Natural Sciences* Seneca likewise speculates how roses are grown out of season in “greenhouses” covered with plaster plates, and how warm-water irrigation can be used to produce temperatures and other conditions normally found only in summer. First-century author Columella also noted the rules for growing roses, writing the following in *De arboribus*: “*To increase the production of roses and grafts, plant them in foot-long furrows at the same time as the violet. However, this ground must be hoed every year and weeded before the first of March. With such care it will produce for many years.*”<sup>201</sup> Fourth-century Palladius’ fourteen-volume *De re rustica* on agriculture and horticulture also gives great importance to pruning procedures; Palladius also recommends watering roses with warm water to make them bloom earlier. Egyptian-born Kassios Bassianos similarly reports on the growing of early roses (*rhodon proimon*); his knowledge would be used as a source in Byzantine science.<sup>202</sup>

### 8.4. *Ars topiaria*

The *hortus* – where garland plants were grown for market, and bees, which used the flowers for nutrition, were also kept – eventually evolved into a new type of ornamental garden, rich in plants and not ignoring aspects of profit. Beginning in the second or first century BC the courts and yards of Roman residences planted gardens not entirely for purposes of utility. Very little archeological data is available, but from scattered written sources it may be assumed that it was at this time that multi-

<sup>199</sup> Virgil: *Georgica*. IV. 130-135; Hung. trans. Lakatos I. p. 93. 130-135.

<sup>200</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XXI. 41. Hung. trans. Tóth S. ....p.!!!BG

<sup>201</sup> Columella: *De arboribus*. XXX. 2; Hung. trans. Hoffmann Zs. p. 95. XXX. 2.

<sup>202</sup> Kádár Z. Agrártudomány a 2-5. században [Agricultural Science in the Second through Fifth Centuries], In: Szabó, Á. - Kádár Z. (1984) 342.

function commercial gardens were separated from specialized single-crop gardens, fruit orchards, vineyards, olive orchards, vegetable and garland plant gardens, and also rose farms.

From the Augustan era Virgil's *Georgica* mentions *ars topiaria*, the art of topiary gardening, in volume IV. Suetonius thought it important to note that Augustus Caesar had parks with walk paths around his villas. The villa of Augustus' wife Livia near Prima Porta also must have had a garden – if the building's underground chamber was decorated with a realistic garden fresco.

*Topia* (landscape) is a Greek word, indicating not only where Virgil and Pliny attributed the origin of the new procedure, but also that Hellenic and Roman cultures came together yet again in ornamental gardens.

The establishment of a combination of natural and artificial elements was an expensive venture, and not just anyone could undertake the construction of even a small topiary. These sites mixed valuable statues, furniture and other constructed elements, and watered basins around natural plants – all of which cost a fortune to acquire or maintain. Describing his villa in Arpinum in a letter to his son written in 54 BC, Cicero mentions – the first instance of the word *topiaria* – that he possessed in his art collection a valuable Greek statue, behind which carefully nurtured ivy grew.<sup>203</sup> The buildings of Augustus, Tiberius Caesar's villa on Capri, and the villas around Rome in Cicero's time were collecting places of Rhodesian and neo-Attic stone carvings (statues and vessels, reliefs and candelabra), where the impact of plants on the environment was ensured by landscaping, or *nemora tonsilia* (which Pliny attributed to C. Matius).

The similarity between gardens made to look like parks and holy grounds formed from park-like combinations of natural plants suggests that artificial coppices created for family use may also have had a sacred meaning – mainly associated with fertility. The rose, as demonstrated earlier, was associated with fertility and the gods of fertility.

The size of these park-like gardens (rich in both light and water) was influenced by the source and especially the amount of water available for the plants. The creation of Roman aqueducts and access to surplus water made it possible to put pools and fountains in the gardens, and also delineated the size of irrigable – and arable – land. The first artificial gardens appear on frescos from the first century BC. The symmetric, geometrically arranged area consisted of carefully pruned green bushes and trees, and beds of colorful flowers, with art objects among them – suggesting a kind of ideal value as well as no little theatricality. In the back niche of the garden of M. Lucretius Fronto's home in Pompeii stood a statue of Silenus, the guardian of Bacchus, with a wineskin in his hands from which water poured into a round pool. The garden scene contains other allegorical statues as well. Propertius himself describes a statue of sleeping Silenus decorating a fountain among the plantains of Pompeius' Roman columnary.

Demanding considerable watering and care, these ornamental gardens offered the greatest scope for the refined practices of plant-shaping described in Pliny's *Naturalis historia*; first created in the *peristylum*, they were for the exclusive enjoyment of the residents of the house. These small, enclosed private gardens were set inside the walls of the building, and the owners – possibly out of a need for spaciousness and an openness to the landscape, or possibly in order to imitate or evoke the open gardens of aristocratic villas – covered the walls with frescos which depicted gardens. The living garden gained new emphasis from the painted garden which depicted a wide assortment of plants and animals, mythological scenes, and architectural and sculptural forms. These paintings covered the entire wall as if to continue the garden. In some cases a picture of a door or gateway was painted on a wall, seeming to open to the true external landscape. The painted pictures generally contained an episodic glimpse of an interesting natural environment, generally with human or mythological figures. The frescos of Pompeii and the garden scenes of the frescos discovered in Livia's house in Rome contain botanically identifiable trees, bushes and flowering plants. Citrus types, walnut, pomegranate, olive, oleander, plantain, cherry, quince, myrtle, ivy, acanthus, posy, lily and rose – the presence of each indicates that these plants were useful in a number of ways.

In addition to the *peristylum* gardens popular among the middle class, garden architecture also appeared in other forms. Both the paintings of Pompeii and Herculaneum and the archeological finds from villas indicate that, in contrast to the buildings with introverted gardens in their centers,

<sup>203</sup> Meredith A. In: Boardman J. – Griffin J. – Murray O. (1996) p. 748. and In: *Az ókori görögök és rómaiak története [History of the Ancient Greeks and Romans]*. p. 748.

beginning in the early imperial period the aristocracy also made buildings with larger gardens outside the structures. Looking outward to the sea, or a terraced garden, or the untamed landscape, these provincial palaces with their ornate columns and decorated façades divided their ornamental gardens into galleries, grottos, arboreal avenues, brooks, springs, larger pools, traversable bowers, terraces, paths and open spaces, serving as an opportunity to be close to nature as well as to marvel at the panorama.

Ornamental gardens of this size were built and cared for by those who had the financial means as well as a need to maintain their own villas as summer homes. Pliny the Younger (61/62 - 112?) had two gardens, one in Tusci and the other in Laurentinum near Rome; Cicero had a suburban villa in Tusculanum as well as villas in Puteoli and Arpinum. Lucullus was notorious for his extravagant villa in Monte Pincio, where flowerbeds were planted amid lined fruit-tree orchards. He also had other villas, one in Tusculanum and another in Baiae.

Pliny the Younger described both his gardens in his letters. One is described in such detail that it could even be reconstructed. It also provides insight into a basic quality of Roman villa gardens, whereby the building(s) and the appurtenant garden were not on the same axis: the garden stood alongside the building in such a way that it was not integrally connected to the living space. Most of the surface area had lawn plants surrounded by trimmed hedges and flowers in high piled beds. The most valuable part of the garden was the open hippodrome at the center, from which the entire garden and its many pavilions could be surveyed.

Pliny the Younger had roses growing at the center of the hippodrome – a most striking location. This accorded with the botanical needs of the plant, in full sunlight. Of this area he writes: “*However pleasant and practically arranged the house might be, the hippodrome surpasses it substantially. It is open at the center, allowing a view of the entire area: it is surrounded by ivy-covered plantains, their own leafage growing green at the crests and an alien leafage at the trunks. The ivy covers the trunks and branches, and ties them like braids to the neighboring trees. Among them are boxwood bushes. The ivy covers them, too, and unites their shade with that of the plantains. The edge of the hippodrome twists to offer another view. This part is surrounded and covered by cypress trees, their leafage giving a darker, almost black, shadow. The inner circles, however (for there are several tracks), are open to full sunlight. Here roses grow, and cool shade alternates with benevolent sunshine.*”<sup>204</sup>

Ornamental garden culture was not universally accepted, however: “*Decrepit plantains, myrtles and boxwood, / mere wastes of space to be chopped down, but unloved / useful plants can take no root / in our Faustinus’ estate in Baiae. / This should be farmland, ... not some ornamental garden!*”<sup>205</sup> rages Martial, voicing an opinion no doubt shared by others. Nevertheless, more and more new provincial gardens were created, the most important of which was that of Emperor Hadrianus created in Tivoli between 118 and 138.

In the first century BC a variety of garden forms existed in the Roman Empire, fit to the social station and needs of the citizens. Those living from agriculture in the provinces supplemented their croplands with a garden next to the living quarters, with a variety of plants for the everyday needs of the family. Urban homeowners, due to the lack of space, used potted plants in terraces and internal gardens to make their living space more amiable, while urban public areas and plant-rich holy grounds offered similar pleasures for those living in rented homes. Although the *peristylum* gardens of wealthier urban homes offered similar multi-functional means of plant use, the gardens beside the palaces and provincial villas of the aristocracy rejected all this, and became areas exclusively of appearance and luxurious ornamentation. Yet, as seen from the frescos of Pompeii or the letters of Pliny the Younger, roses were grown in all locations. Authors who grew roses for their own use – such as Varro, both Plinys, Seneca, Martial, Columella and Palladius – offered a number of suggestions on plant care, generally based on observation or their own experience.

#### 8.5. *Copa* – poem on rose use

<sup>204</sup> Pliny the Younger: *Epistulae*. V. 6; Hung. trans. Muraközy Gy. p. 220.

<sup>205</sup> Martial: *Epigrammata*. III. 58. 1-5; Hung. trans. Hegyi Gy. pp. 210-211.

Whenever Albius Tibullus mentioned the rose he was surely referring to the role it played in the everyday life of simple, traditional gods-fearing people. The poem *Copa (Innkeeper's Wife)*, falsely appearing under the name of Virgil, evokes the trinity of bread-love-wine as symbols of the sustenance of the individual, the maintenance of the species, and the enjoyment of life. Pseudo-Virgil marks all the symbolic roles the rose played in Roman life: through Amor and Bacchus (Bromius), the rose garland and rose-colored corset, and the floral string on the tombstone he utilizes the metaphorical potential of the rose and its association with the gods and with sex, as well as its role in death cults, while also speaking of the idyllic happiness of earthly life. However, all this is placed in a new setting – the ornamental garden. Although the Syrian innkeeper's wife's monologue portrays the inn and its environment, a place of hospitality, as a kind of rustic Eden, there is no doubt that the ideas of luxury tied to the garden were also present in the lower social classes:

*"I have an ornamental garden, a little house, song of lyre and reed, a full cup, roses,  
I have a cool, reed-covered shady bower.*

...

*I have a full pitcher, I have just opened the keg,  
and its liquid drips in a quietly humming stream.  
I have a little saffron-colored string woven of violets,  
and purple roses color the yellow garland,  
and lilies, picked by Achelois  
in a wicker basket beside the virgin brook.  
And I have cheese, dried, in a reed basket,  
and waxy yellow plums in the autumn sun;  
and chestnuts grow here, and walnuts and sweet red apples:  
here are pure Ceres and Amor and Bromius.*

...

*If you have any wits, come hither, drink the pitcher dry,  
and I will bring you new crystal chalices, if you wish!  
Lie down here, the vineyard's shadow will cover you, rest  
your heavy head on the rose-colored corset,  
stealing a kiss from the young maiden's lovely lips!  
To Hades with pontificators of outdated virtues!  
Why leave the fragrant garlands for your cold cadaver;  
will it be better if flowers decorate your gravestone?"<sup>206</sup>*

It seems natural that the author used the gods of Roman religion to reinforce both the traditional and new values of the garden. The god of gardens, Priapos, is now the guardian not only of produce gardens which promise wealth, but also of ornamental gardens. This is proven by the reference from the lecherously seductive innkeeper's wife: "*And there is someone who watches over the garden, a willow cane in his hand, / his enormous member does not stand up wildly.*"<sup>207</sup> This garden no longer serves to grow plants strictly for cultic, cosmetic, medicinal or culinary purposes, but also provides an opportunity to invoke the gods of fertility. It has become a place of hitherto unknown splendors.

#### 8.6. Rose settings. The flower of splendor

According to horticultural historians Roman agriculture rarely used bowers. It recognized them for their shading function alone. The previously green bowers of grapevines or ivy were replaced by floral rose bowers, as attested by the garden fresco in the Vettius house in Pompeii (however, picked roses lie on the pergola covering the terrace, as if they were serving as decorations for a secret rendezvous nearby), as well as a passage in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*: "*perhaps I will discover a rose bower*

<sup>206</sup> Pseudovirgil: *Copa*. In: *Poetae Latini minores*. II. 7-35; Hung. trans. Szabó K. pp. 202-203. 7-35.

<sup>207</sup> Pseudovirgil: *Copa*. In: *Poetae Latini minores*. II. 23-24; Hung. trans. Szabó K. 203. pp. 23-24.

*blooming in one of the neighboring gardens,*"<sup>208</sup> thinks the donkey to himself, hoping to regain human shape by eating a rose. Although the source does not note what function the provincial rose bower had in the life of the garden's owner, this type of flower growing is beyond doubt.

The following passage, although seemingly incidental to the plot of the novel, indicates that roses also appeared outside urban parks and villa ornamental gardens: "*while I console myself with this wave of idle dreams, I spot a leafy copse in a shady valley somewhat farther away: amid the hundreds of flowers and fresh lawn the red of splendid roses laughs toward me. With my not entirely animal mind I immediately think this is a park of Venus and the Graces, ...*" Thus roses grew in holy parks, those nurtured, artificially formed sparse orchards; further, they were in all probability planted there by man, as suggested by a passage from a different novel.

Rich, thriving Hellenic traditions together with the characteristics of Roman manors, rustic villas and holy parks combine to shape the glorious yet human-sized garden of Lesbos which the Greek novelist Longos (second and third century) describes in his pastoral *Daphnis and Chloe*.<sup>209</sup> One location filled with love is the produce garden beside the house: "*This garden was wondrously beautiful, like a garden of kings. It was one stadion in length, four hundred feet in width, and as it was set on a hill, one might think it was a vast plateau. Many sorts of trees grew there: apple and myrtle, pear and pomegranate, fig and olive. Elsewhere a high grapevine wove onto the trunks of the apple and pear trees, its dark clusters competing with their fruits. These were the modest fruit trees, but there were also cypress and bay trees, and plantains and pines, ivy covering them instead of grapevine, its large black beads competing with the grapes. Further in were the fruit trees, as if they expected protection, and further out stood the fruit beds as if standing guard. All was clearly delineated and separated, with the trees at the proper distances from each other, but their branches merged up high and their leafage mixed together. It appeared this was arranged not by Nature, but by human hand. Flowers also bloomed in separate beds, some raised by the earth itself, some planted by a gardener. Roses, hyacinths, lilies were the work of the hand of man, and violets, narcissus and daisies were grown by the earth. The garden was rich in shade in summer, flower in spring, and fruit in autumn, and thus in sheer beauty throughout the year. From here one could view the plain, and the shepherds tending their herds there. One could see as far as the sea, and follow the progress of the ships. This, too, increased the garden's magic. In the very middle of the garden stood a small shrine and altar to Dionysus. The altar was surrounded by ivy, the shrine by grapevine. Inside the shrine were pictures relating to Dionysus: Semele in labor, Ariadne asleep, Lycurhos in chains, and Pentheus dismembered. Also there were the subjugated Hindi, and the Tyrrenians transformed to dolphins, while satyrs trampled the grapes all around, and bacchanalians danced. Nor was Pan forgotten: he was sitting on a rock, and on his syrinx blew a tune for the marchers and dancers.*

*Such was the garden, and Lamon made it even more beautiful. He pruned the dry branches, tied the grapevines, crowned the statue of Dionysus, and watered the flowers. For there was also a spring which Daphnis found for the flowers."*

In its structure, plants, and decorations, the garden is a copy of the ornamental gardens of luxury villas. It differs from them in only one aspect: the economic function of its produce, something the gardens it was modeled on never had. This fictitious garden was undoubtedly shaped in accordance with the expectations of contemporary readers – and the morality of the pastoral idyll permitted the interweaving of the functions of ornamental and produce gardens.

### 8.7. Evaluation of the rose

A garland flower, the rose changed from a plant of financial profit in bee-keeping, a raw ingredient in medicine, and an aromatic and dye in cosmetics, into a garden decoration. And, as visual image was an important function of the garden, the rose was a plant expressing luxury in a variety of forms. Obviously, this variety of rose use increased the value of the rose. Aemilius Macer states of the rose: "*It is praised as the flower of flowers, surpassing all others in fragrance and appearance,*"<sup>210</sup> pointing

<sup>208</sup> Apuleius: *Metamorphoses*. 4.1; Hung. trans. Révay J. (1983) p. 109.

<sup>209</sup> Longos: *Daphnis et Chloe*. IV. ....; Hung. trans. Détsy M. 15-16. p.!!!BG

<sup>210</sup> *Mater med.* I. nr. XXI; Heinz-Mohr, G. – Sommer, V. (1988) 15.

to the rose's primacy among flowers as well as to two fundamental reasons for its selection and use. Essentially the same was said around 139, albeit in more poetic form and sacred justification, by Achilles Tatios, a Hellenistic rhetorician of Alexandria: "*When Zeus gave flowers a queen, he found the rose alone worthy of this honor. It is the glory of the earth, pride of the plant kingdom, crown of all flowers, purple of the fields, reflected light of beauty. It is love itself. In the service of Aphrodite it glories in fragrant leaves, to the joy of smiling zephyrs.*"<sup>211</sup>

#### 8.8. *Rosa damascena*

Indications of which rose species and which varieties were cultivated by the Romans can be found in Virgil and especially in the texts of Pliny the Elder. Virgil's *Georgica* includes a parenthetical line which makes it possible to identify one species. Botanical historians believe *Rosa damascena* to be the one whose most important quality is its strong fragrance. Blooming twice, in spring and autumn, red *R. damascena* hybrids attracted human attention as early as ancient Asia Minor, from whence they populated gardens throughout the ancient world.

"And now ...  
I would sing of how to care for lush gardens,  
and how lovely are the twice-blooming roses of Paestum."<sup>212</sup>

In *Naturalis historia* Pliny does not mention *R. damascena* – at least, not by name. He lists "Thracian," "Cyprian" or "Greek minor," "Carthaginian" and even "thorn bush" roses, but describes no distinctive features for any which would aid a similarly reliable identification of species. Pliny's method is unique inasmuch as he follows Virgil's method of naming: roses are assigned names according to their assumed place of origin. Further, Pliny speaks at great length of aromatic plant matter, and one would expect him to mention those of Paestum.

#### 8.9. *Pliny's rose species: R. centifolia, R. canina, R. damascena, R. gallica and R. cinnamomea, R. alba*

Caius Plinius Secundus was a student of the noted ancient-era botanist Antonius Castor. *Naturalis historia* may understandably be considered a summarizing work in botany: this thirty-seven volume work contains practically nothing that could be considered independent or original, yet it has a number of valuable features that make it much more than merely the first encyclopedic collection. Pliny surveys and uses the known works of approximately two thousand ancient authors – including some who remain known today only through his work.

Pliny deals most with the rose in volume XIII, on aromatics made from foreign trees, and in volume XXI on floral garlands. Following Theophrastos, Pliny deals simultaneously with the characteristics, uses and growing methods of the rose, devoted the most space after the basic produce plants yielding grain, fruit and vegetables.

Pliny begins his discussion of the rose with one of the reasons it came to be used – its use as a garland flower – thereby emphasizing his attention to aspects of plant use with the presentation of the rose.<sup>213</sup> Earlier, in the discussion of aromatic substances, he had pointed out that familiarity with rose oil is useful,<sup>214</sup> as other ancients also mentioned when praising oils. He states that a tired, weary man "*is given oil to refresh his limbs*" (12,2).

In modern terms the rose species Pliny mentions are the highly fragile hundred-leaf rose originating (probably) from the Persians and extremely popular among the Greeks (formerly considered to be

<sup>211</sup> Heinz – Mohr, G. – Sommer, V. (1988) 15.

<sup>212</sup> Virgil: *Georgica*. IV. 116-119; Hung. trans. Lakatos I. p. 92. 116-119.

<sup>213</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XXI. 10.

<sup>214</sup> "They were also familiar with rose oil, for they mention it, too, when praising oil." Pliny: *Naturalis historia*, XIII. 1. 1-2; Hung. trans. Tóth S.

*Rosa centifolia*,<sup>215</sup> now regarded to be a variety of *R. damascena*<sup>216</sup>, and the wild rose (*R. canina*). However, he does not mention the oil rose (*R. damascena*) – at the same time that he gives one of the uses of the rose as a source of oil.

Pliny lists twelve rose varieties,<sup>217</sup> the two identifiable species mentioned above as well as several presumed local forms of different varieties, most of which were probably variants of *R. gallica*; and several of the many later names – e.g., vinegar rose, sugar rose – indicate that some varieties were used in the kitchen.<sup>218</sup>

Pliny considered differences in flowering times to be *differentia specifica*; thus, examples which many believe to be the briar rose (*R. gallica*) are listed, based on their flowering times, as the early-blooming “Campania rose,” the later-blooming “Milesian roses,” or the even later-blooming “Praenestian roses.”<sup>219</sup> It is possible that the “Campania rose” is the same as *R. cinnamomea*, based on its reddish purple petals and early spring bloom season, while the “rose from the Leporia vicinity” may perhaps be *R. alba*.

What characterizations did Pliny give while emphasizing usage and growing in place of botanical descriptions?

#### 8.10. Botanical and agronomical description of the rose

Pliny deals with the habitual characteristics of the plant: its fruit, thorns and flowers. The bush of the garden rose is extremely thorny, as is that of the wild rose. Both have a pleasant but weak scent.

Each bud is initially covered by a grainy peel, which later swells to a pointed green pear-shaped formation, which then opens and gradually turns red. Finally it blooms in a chalice shape and produces numerous yellow-tipped stamens in the center.

“The seeds are situated under the flower in a pod covered with fuzz. From the seed it grows very slowly, therefore it is propagated by cuttings and – like the reed – pieces of root containing a bud. The flowers of one rose variety propagated by grafting has a pale flower, while its stem is thorny and can grow to be quite long. The flower has five petals.” Pliny gives the number of petals as five for the simple Greek-origin rose, but the aptly named “hundred-leaf” variety indicates that there also existed roses with varying numbers of petals – indeed, others considered the multi-petalled roses to have the most appealing fragrance. Pliny does not deal with the many varieties of color of the rose flower, in contrast to the named colors of the bud, the leaves and the yellow stamen.

Pliny description of the petals as “opening and gradually turning red” seems rather sparse. The rose varieties of the Roman era presumably included flowers colored white, pale or dark pink, purple, and red. In fact Pliny did not wish to describe the beauty of roses with or without flowers, and this aloof method (which might be called scientific today) is similarly characteristic elsewhere.

Pliny discussed flowering times. Roses bloomed after the spring plants and before the summer flowers, as if to mark an intermediate period. The spring plants he considered Greek were, in order of blooming: white violet, ion, phlox, cyclamen, narcissus, oversea (i.e., Asia Minor) lilies, anemone, oenanthe, and finally violet. In Italy the blossoming season of the roses discussed began after the violet.<sup>220</sup> Lilies also began to bloom at the same time, followed by the wheat flower – these and the lychnis, Jupiter flower, Phrygian marjoram, iris and amaranthus were the flowers of summer.

<sup>215</sup> However, this *R. centifolia* is not the same as the one which became known in Europe around 1700. Presumably it was a rose variant with a strong fragrance and many petals, unidentifiable today.

<sup>216</sup> Phillips, R. – Rix i.m

<sup>217</sup> According to Márk, G (1976) 9, *R. alba* is also among the 12 roses reported by Pliny. Foy, N. és Rix, A. believe the Campania rose may be *R. alba*. ( Phillips, R. - Rix, M. (1993) 21) Other authors also consider it possible that *R. alba* was cultivated in the first century AD. Edwards, G. (1975)

<sup>218</sup> Edwards, G. (1975)

<sup>219</sup> According to Clusius this is the modern *Rosa damascena*.

<sup>220</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XXI. 39.

However, not all spring and summer flowers were garland plants; for example, the iris was not, despite its striking beauty and fragrance.<sup>221</sup>

The Plinian “Grecian rose,” unlike the long-flowering hyacinth and white violet, was a garland plant “*which is the soonest to stop blooming, except for cultivated species.*”<sup>222</sup> Elsewhere Pliny mentions only one Greek rose as a “little Greek rose,” but it is unlikely that this plant had a wild variety and several domesticated varieties. Rather, Pliny was distinguishing the short flowering time of wild, uncrossed roses with that of cultivated flowers in order to demonstrate that cross-breeding also had a function in increasing flowers’ lifetime.

According to Pliny’s observation, the qualities most valued by the Romans in the rose depended largely on soil and weather conditions. In some years roses were less fragrant than expected, and roses growing in a dry environment tended to be more fragrant than those in moist habitats. The rose doesn’t like the soil to be too fat, clay or watered; it is satisfied with rocky soil and indeed prefers dry, meager soil. Pliny writes of this several times, and emphasizes it again when discussing the care of garden roses: “*Geographic situation matters a great deal, for in Egypt these plants have no scent, except the myrtle, which has a discernable scent. There are also places where these plants – the white violet, rose and myrtle – bud two months earlier than in Italy.*”<sup>223</sup>

Pliny also discusses soil care, propagation methods and plant care: “*For the rose the soil should be turned deeper than garden vegetables, but not as deep as for the grape.*” The starting point for soil care – which Pliny held to influence the rose’s properties the most, along with the weather – was that the rose should be planted in dry, thin soil in order to develop properly. This soil had to be turned deeper than for garden vegetables, but shallower than needed for grapevines – that is, a depth of 40 to 45 cm. The soil around the rosebush should also be turned, in mid-winter: “*If weather permits, the soil for the rose and grape should be turned with a two-edged hoe – for an area of one acre 70 workers are necessary...*” Elsewhere he also calls attention to care of the surface of the soil: “*The soil of the rose garden should be turned immediately following the west wind, and again at the summer solstice, in the meantime taking care that it remains clean and weedless.*”

Preservation of the rose as a hybrid underlies the above care procedures. Pliny recognizes a number of varieties of hybrid roses for propagation and spread, and recommends them in favor of slow raising from seed. The most common methods of crossbreeding are the use of a cutting from a piece of root containing a bud, or from a branch, or grafting. “*Every rose develops well if it is pruned, burned, or even transplanted. It grows well and quickly, like the grape, if pieces of branch four inches or longer are planted after the Vergiliae, then when the west wind comes they are moved to distances of one foot from each other, and the soil around them is frequently turned. Those who wish their rose variety to bloom early should dig a trench approximately a foot deep around the rosebush as soon as the buds appear, and pour warm water into it.*” Thus, for knowledgeable care of the rose Pliny suggests elimination of groundwater up-flows as well as pruning, burning and transplantation; and for early blooms warm water poured around the bush when it is full of buds. These are all techniques which still exist in ornamental horticulture practice.

Pliny also provides information on the lifespan of the rose. He states: “*The rose will bear as much as five years without pruning or burning, for in that way it may be rejuvenated,*”<sup>224</sup> from which it follows that pruning or burning will also extend the plant’s life, just like the transplantation recommended earlier.

### 8.11. Reasons for rose use according to Pliny

What reasons does Pliny give for the rose’s selection in gardening? “*I myself am inclined to assume,*” he writes, “*that the most generally used aromatic is the one made from the rose. A great*

<sup>221</sup> “Consideration must also be given to the fact that many fragrant plants were not garland flowers; for example, the iris or the spikenard, although both have a very pleasant scent. Of the iris only the root was used, for ointments and medicines.” Rapaics R. (1932)

<sup>222</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XX. 38; Hung. trans. Tóth S.

<sup>223</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XXI. 11; Hung. trans. Tóth S.

<sup>224</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XXI. 11; Hung. trans. Tóth S.



*many varieties grow for this reason. Consequently, for a long time oil pressed from the flowers of the rose was the simplest aromatic, to which omphacium, rose and saffron petals, vermilion, calamus, honey, rush, salt, or red-root and wine were later added.*"<sup>225</sup>

Pliny attributes the increased use of aromatics to the attraction of the human race to luxury, resulting in the creation of special aromatics with mixed scents after the original use of aromatic matter. He believes none of these to have existed before the Trojan War; and, in fact, knowledge of aromatic substances such as incense had not yet developed. Therefore such matter was not burned at religious rituals. He claims that there was merely a smattering of experience in the use of cedar and citrus, although rose oil was also used.

Pliny attributes the discovery of aromatics to the Persians, who anointed themselves with substances to eliminate body odor and the stink of perspiration. Anointment of the body for pleasure purposes was followed by the spread of the use of oil to embalm the dead: according to Homer, at the time of the Trojan War it was the custom to soak the rose flower in oil and use this in the cult of the dead.

In Rome (Pliny states) few garden plants were known to have flowers usable for garland weaving, basically only the violet and the rose. Use of the rose in garlands was just one of the ways in which roses were used, and not the most important. As noted above, it was also used as a raw material for aromatic ointments. Warnings as to the quality of aromatics occur frequently in Pliny, indicating what an important role these products had.<sup>226</sup>

Pliny also seeks an explanation of what could have caused Nature to have created such a beautiful flower which has no usefulness at all. His answer is that it serves as a moral lesson for man: that which blooms the most beautifully is the quickest to perish. For this reason the flowers have a short-lived fragrance. And it is for the same reason that the wonderful garlands and strings made from these flowers are as transitory as their raw material: It is all a moral message to the user.<sup>227</sup>

#### 8.12 *Rosa sancta* (= *R. x richardii*): *The first archeological rose find*

There are no data on rose production before the Roman period, in spite of the fact that there is considerable material on Egyptian horticulture; the nature of plants used in nutrition, medicine and cosmetics; burial customs; and plant use. The list of plants at the second-millennium BC temple of Amon at Karnak does not include the rose, although other plants were imported from distant lands, such as pomegranate from the Caspian Sea region around 1550 BC, where roses were already artificially cultivated, or the frankincense imported from Somalia by Hatshepsut around 1470 BC.<sup>228</sup> Tutmosis III's military campaign in Syria and Palestine (1450 BC) failed to bring the rose to the Nile, as did commercial and geographical contacts, according to sources, nor is there evidence that the 671 BC Assyrian campaign or the Persian presence in Egypt beginning in 525 BC resulted in the import of this plant. There is similarly no evidence that Greeks during the Ptolemaic period might have brought the rose to Egypt from the city-state of Rhodes (400 BC - 80), where coins were minted with an open rose on one side and the sun god on the other. Phaselis, a commercial town now in ruins near Tekirova where rose-scented perfume was once made, is thought to have been founded by the Rhodesians around 690 BC, and rose plantations were established on lands bought from shepherds.

During Roman rule sources name the Nile delta region and the environs of Alexandria as places where roses were grown. A scientific expedition around Fayyum in the early twentieth century found rose farms and basins for distilling rosewater.

<sup>225</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XIII. 1. 9; Hung. trans. Tóth S.

<sup>226</sup> "A freshly cut rose emits its fragrance further, while a wilting flower can be smelled only from close up.... The scent of the rose and saffron is stronger if they are picked at the right time, and both flowers are similarly more fragrant if the weather is hot than when it is cold." (XXI, 11.) "The scent of flowers containing a lot of water is not completely independent of its nectar, as with the violet, rose, and saffron.." (XXI, 18.) "It has been noted that geographical location counts a great deal, for in Egypt none of these has a scent, except the myrtle, which has a palpable scent there, too." (XXI. 11.)

Hung. trans. Tóth S.

<sup>227</sup> Pliny: *Naturalis historia*. XXI. 1; Hung. trans. Tóth S.

□ *A művészet kezdetei [The Beginnings of Art]* (1990) 77.

These facts support the assumption that roses were grown in these areas for the benefit of the Romans and/or that the locals conducted trade in the living flower or its volatile oil. According to legend, Cleopatra VII (69 - 30 BC) covered the throne room with roses when she received Marcus Antonius, thereby outdoing the Persians and their floral carpets and setting an example to the Romans for lavish extravagance.

From an attachment to an Egyptian grave in Hawarra a floral garland was discovered and preserved. This decoration of the corpse was made of roses, and since it did not crumble to dust when the site was opened and was properly preserved, a number of contemporary rhodologists were able to examine it. They dated the burial to have taken place in 170, and the burial rose garland is naturally from the same time. That is, it dates from a time when Egypt was part of the Roman Empire.

This head ornament of live flowers was examined by botanists by every possible method in order to determine what rose species the flowers were from. As the flowers had dried in the coffin and later were covered with dust and sand, they remained examinable; also of assistance to Percy E. Newberry (1869-1949) was the fact that the roses were woven into the garland in bud or half-open condition, and thus did not shed their petals. The dried flowers were rehydrated, their petals were spread open, and the structural characteristics of the flower became examinable. Surviving in this conserved state, the rose (preserved in Kew Gardens in London) is a specimen of the pale pink *Rosa sancta* of Asia minor (now classified as *Rosa x richardii*).

*R. sancta* (= *richardii*), also known as Saint John's rose, was reintroduced into Europe from Ethiopia in 1895. Rhodologists believe it to have developed from a natural (perhaps spontaneous) crossing of *R. gallica* and *R. phoenicea* or *R. abyssinica* at the beginning of the ancient age in the Near East, and is actually an early variant of *R. damascena*. *R. sancta* is a domestic rose, with white or pink petals; its color lacked the purple characteristic of *R. gallica* and its fragrance was much more pronounced, making it a raw material for rose oil.

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