

# Soothing Gardens

***Ancient ideas and practices  
about plants, natural  
environments and well-being***

*A workshop within the collaborative project  
'Gardens and Eudaimonia'*



## Programme

- 1:30 - 1:45 p.m. Dana Zentgraf/Chiara Thumiger -  
Welcome and introduction
- 1:45 - 2:45 p.m. Laurence Totelin  
Plant imports in the Greek and Roman worlds:  
imaging the other's gardens
- 2:45 - 3:45 p.m. Patricia Baker  
Roman Conceptions of Wellbeing:  
Sensory Experiences and Flower Crowns
- 3:45 - 4:00 p.m. Break
- 4:00 - 5:00 p.m. Sean Coughlin  
Recreating the Pleasures of Scent in the  
Greco-Egyptian and Greco-Roman World
- 5:00 - 6:00 p.m. Grazia Piras  
Bringing Classical wellbeing practices  
into everyday' life
- 6:00 - 6:15 p.m. Conclusions

### *Laurence Totelin: Plant imports in the Greek and Roman worlds: imaging the other's gardens*

The Greeks and the Romans imported many of the plants they used in the production of medicines, cosmetics, and perfumes from regions beyond the boundaries of their empires, in particular from the Middle East and Arabia. With those plants travelled stories of the wondrous gardens or wild regions in which they grew, the fantastic animals that protected them, and the rituals involved in collecting them. These stories, some of which are preserved, offer an insight into how Greeks and Romans perceived 'foreign' gardens as places of eudaimonia, but also of lurking dangers, of threats to their identity. In this paper, I examine several of these stories and reflect on the ways in which the Greeks and the Romans both appropriated and othered imported products in their search for healing and wellbeing.

### *Patricia Baker: Roman Conceptions of Wellbeing: Sensory Experiences and Flower Crowns*

The history and archaeology of Greco-Roman flower crowns are the main topics of this presentation. I begin by explaining how my study of flower crowns developed out of my research which demonstrates how the Romans believed that the sensory experiences they had in salubrious spaces, such as gardens, were conducive to mental and physical health and wellbeing. Crowns, too, were said by ancient writers to have some health-giving properties that are similar to those had in natural spaces and gardens.

Following the introduction, I use experimental archaeology to demonstrate how I think Roman crowns were made and the types of flowers and greenery used in them. I will also explain the sensory experiences I have when I create and wear them.

Finally, I consider the reception of ancient techniques by floral designers today. Flower crowns are still popular for special occasions, but they are far from environmentally friendly. By using ancient techniques our understanding of Greco-Roman perceptions can help florists and wearers of the crowns chose a more environmentally friendly option. At the same time, creating these crowns also has benefits for mental focus. Thus, I conclude by asking what a Roman technique can teach us about environmental sustainability today and how their perceptions of natural materials might benefit our mental wellbeing.

### *Sean Coughlin: Recreating the Pleasures of Scent in the Greco-Egyptian and Greco-Roman World*

There is an immediate delight that comes from fragrance, and in Greco-Egyptian and Greco-Roman antiquity these pleasures infused everyday life, from the natural fragrance of healing gardens to the aesthetic and medical use of incense and aromatic oils. Even ancient philosophers like Aristotle and Theophrastus believed that the pleasure we take from fragrance was something uniquely human: animals can smell, but only humans experience pleasure and pain, beauty and ugliness, through scent. In this talk, I discuss some insights into the past and its pleasures that we can gain by recreating these scents. The focus of the talk will be on new approaches to recreating the olfactory heritage of Greco-Egyptian and Greco-Roman perfumery. These approaches form part of a five-year initiative funded by the Czech Science Foundation and the Czech Academy of Sciences: Alchemies of Scent.

### *Grazia Piras: Bringing Classical wellbeing practices into everyday' life*

Classical Greek and Roman culture made important contributions to philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, botany and more.

Over the centuries this wealth of knowledge has been at times feared, and at times overlooked and dismissed; yet, more recently, there has been a renewed interest towards Graeco-Roman antiquity as a source of inspiration for wellbeing and self-care practices.

What is the role of classical scholars in bringing into contemporary lifestyles the lessons learned from ancient Greek and Roman sources (medical, philosophical and otherwise)?

Two case studies from two different fields, public and private (respectively urban policy and the cosmetic industry) will offer the chance to explore and debate gaps, challenges, and opportunities of integrating Classical wellbeing traditions into everyday' life.

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**LINK TO HOMEPAGE:**

[www.cluster-roots.uni-kiel.de/en/field-work-and-activities/soothing-gardens](http://www.cluster-roots.uni-kiel.de/en/field-work-and-activities/soothing-gardens)