

Columella *Res Rustica* 10 and Nicander's *Georgica*

The tenth book of Columella's agricultural treatise *Res Rustica* concerns gardening and is written in hexameter verse, unlike the prose of the other eleven books. Columella says that he did so in response to the challenge, as it were, issued by Virgil in the fourth book of the *Georgics* (*RR* 10. Pr. 3.; 10.1-5): after the digression about the Corycian gardener and his garden (*Georg.* 4. 125 ff.), Virgil remarks that he would like to discuss gardening at greater length but is prevented by insufficient space (*Georg.* 4. 147-148). Columella chooses to pick up the cue and write his own gardening poem, clearly modeled on the *Georgics* and intended, in a sense, to supply the purported "missing" book of the *Georgics* about gardening (*RR.* 10-1-5).

One source for Virgil's *Georgics* was, most likely, the *Georgica* by Nicander, which now exists only in fragments, mostly quoted in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*; Virgil may even have taken the title of his work from Nicander's (cf. Quint. *Inst. Or.* 10. 1. 56; Harrison 2004, 110). This fragmentary nature of Nicander's poem makes it difficult to trace specific examples of Virgil's indebtedness to it, but Stephen Harrison has convincingly argued that the Corycian gardener episode shows clear ties to known fragments of Nicander's *Georgica* (Harrison 2004, 109-123).

Columella neglects to mention Nicander in his survey of important agricultural writers on whom he relies (*RR* 1. 1. 1-14), though he includes Hesiod and other poets in his list. Given his stated intention of emulating Virgil's *Georgics*, however, it is likely that Columella knew Nicander and had him in mind when writing portions of *Res Rustica* 10, particularly since he was prompted to do so by the Corycian gardener episode of *Georgics* 4, Virgil's brief digression on gardening, and its clear allusions to portions of Nicander's *Georgica*.

Despite its title, Nicander's *Georgica* appears, on the basis of the surviving fragments, to have mainly "laid stress on kitchen-gardening rather than arable or stock farming" (Harrison 2004, 110). Harrison follows Wilamowitz in concluding that "horticulture rather than agriculture seems to have been the subject of the *Georgica*" (Harrison 2004, 110; cf. Wilamowitz 1924 I. 85). This makes it an even more appropriate model for Columella's gardening book than for Virgil, since Columella is concerned with a garden that is practical, not merely ornamental, which will supply produce that can be eaten, preserved for later, (*RR* 12 *passim*) or sold for cash (*RR* 10. 304-310)

In her paper on Columella's garden catalogs, Sara Myers remarks, "The tradition of the poetic catalog is rooted both in heroic epic and in the learned didactic tradition that Columella is following" (Myers 2016). She notes that one of the principal surviving fragments of Nicander (Gow-Scholfield fr. 74) is a garden catalog. At 72 lines this is by far the longest surviving single fragment of the *Georgica*. Athenaeus introduces his quotation of the passage by noting that Nicander listed flowers that were suitable for wreaths (Ath. xv. 683Aff.; cf. Gow-Scholfield 1953, 150).

Columella also gives a catalog of flowers (*RR* 10. 94-109) before moving on to a catalog of various vegetables and herbs. While Columella's catalog does not exactly follow or mimic Nicander's he mentions a number of the same flowers: e.g., violets, roses, lilies, hyacinths and poppies. Nicander notes the use of flowers to make garlands and to adorn the graves of the dead (Gow-Scholfield fr. 74, 66-72). Columella does not explicitly suggest such a use for flowers, but later in the poem he encourages his gardener to harvest the flowers and take them into town to sell for cash (*RR* 10. 304-310), presumably so they can be put to the uses suggested by Nicander.

Nicander also gives advice for preserving poppies from caterpillars and similar pests which can destroy them (Gow-Scholfield fr 74, 43-50). Although Columella doesn't include such remarks in his flower catalog, he elsewhere in the poem admonishes the gardener to guard his crops from pests such as caterpillars, as part of his catalog of disasters than can befall even a diligent gardener (*RR* 10. 321-324).

While Columella does not appear to follow Nicander literally, the similarity of their subject matter and overall treatment, along with the Virgilian connection, clearly suggest that Nicander's *Georgica* was one of Columella's models for his own garden poem.

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