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Alcinous' Garden – Archetypical, Paradigmatic or Simply Imagined? Notes on its Reception in Byzantine Literature and Afterwards[1]

Spot more delicious then those Gardens feign'd
Or of reviv'd Adonis, or renownd
Alcinous, host of old Laertes Son

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IX (v. 439–441)

ABSTRACT: In this article, I offer a new reading of the well-known passus from Homer's *Odyssey* containing a description of the so-called 'garden of Alcinous' (*Od*. 7, 112–132). In the first instance, I draw attention to a context in the Homeric epic, given the formulaic language of the epic and the ambiguity of reading certain terms. In the following section, I focus on the presence of this passus in works of selected Byzantine authors, attempting to answer the question for what purpose they used this very reference. Finally, I try to show the reception of the aforementioned motif in modern times, namely in 18th century Britain, where it appears as a reflection of a lost ideal that needs to be recreated and adapted to new times. All of this

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serves, on the one hand, to refute the commonly held opinions repeated by historians of gardening that the first model of gardens could be found as early as Homer. Secondly, my findings also cast doubt on the question of the garden of Alcinous as a model for Byzantine literary gardens. Thirdly, they show to what extent the bearing of certain ideas can be misrepresented in translation and what consequences this issue has.

KEYWORDS: reception of Homer, reception of the *Odyssey*, Byzantine reception of Homer, nature in Homer, Alcinous' garden, history of gardens, history of gardening, Byzantine gardens, 18th century gardening, reception of antiquity, Alexander Pope

There is a strong belief among historians of gardening that one of the earliest descriptions of gardens, orchards – in other words, a place transformed by man – ever created, can be found in Homer's *Odyssey*.[2] In fact, there are two kinds of gardens distinguished in the Homeric epic: the carefully projected and neatly planned garden of Laertes, Odysseus' father, in book 24 of the *Odyssey* (336–344), and the enclosed orchard with fruit trees in Alcinous' palace[3] in the island of Scheria (*Od*. 7, 112–132). According to Hobhouse, who lists the aforementioned as the exemplary ancient Greek gardens, the descriptions of both convey all the elements of garden topography.[4] Both gardens, which should be underlined at this point, can be considered as utilitarian rather than awe-inspiring places for their aesthetics, much like the sacred groves we find in various places in epics.[5]

This is the first point to be clarified. Indeed, as I will try to show, we cannot think that Homer's verses give us anything more than

[2] Majdecki 2016: 37; Thacker 1985: 16; Hobhouse 2002: 32–34; Hilditch 2015: 69–70; Farrar 2016: 88–89. The exception is Stackelberg 2013 who notices different possible ways of reading Alcinous' garden. See Stackelberg 2013: 126–129. I shall discuss her assumptions below. The interesting interpretation see also Giesecke 2007: 35–78.

[3] In the article I use the spelling 'Alcinous' everywhere. In places sometimes quoted another version of the Greek name of the king of the Phaeacians appears: Alkinoos.

[4] Hobhouse 2002: 34.

[5] Majdecki 2016: 37.

a mythical, fairy-tale, generally literary (in the modern sense of the word) image. The concept that the description of gardens we find in the *Odyssey* may reflect the true knowledge of the archaic age expressed by one message: the cultivation of gardens is as close to the truth as Kirke turning Odysseus' companions into pigs. However clichéd this statement may seem, as I will attempt to highlight, this was not always the case. In later centuries, various authors, drawing on Homeric descriptions of gardens, adapted them to the realities of the time and created fanciful patterns that became popular in the particular era.

Of those mentioned above, the description of Alcinous' garden in particular influenced writers in later centuries. They made various attempts both to interpret the Homeric description in the spirit of their times and to use it as a kind of paradigmatic matrix in which the thinking of something ideal, almost unattainable, depending on the era, almost a garden of paradise, is reflected. In order to look at the reception of the Alcinous garden motif, I will use various literary texts written in Greek in later centuries, especially in the Byzantine period. The reasons why I limit myself to this period are several. Firstly, the subject, in my view, has not been properly researched. Secondly, although attempts have been made to investigate the presence of gardens in the Byzantine world, noting the rare archaeological evidence of their existence and focusing on the transmission of ancient texts in Byzantium,[6] no work has been produced with this particular theme as its subject. Thirdly, no one has so far ventured to question the extent to which this passus from Homer can be considered reliable as far as early garden art is concerned.

In this article I suggest a new reading of the passus from Homer, firstly by drawing attention to its context within archaic epics. In the following section, I will focus on the presence of this passus in selected Byzantine authors, attempting to answer the question for what purpose they used this very reference. Finally, I will show the reception of the aforementioned motif in modern times, where it appears as a reflection of a lost ideal that needs to be recreated and adapted to new times.

[6] It is worth recalling at this point Littlewood's important article in a memorable volume on Byzantine gardens. See Littlewood 2002: 13–21.

1. A real garden or a model among models?

The Homeric passage describing the garden of Alcinous (*Od*. 7, 112–132) is composed of three different parts, each of them referring to different sections of what is later named collectively as κῆπος (*kepos* – garden): ὄρχατος (orchard), πολύκαρπος ἀλωή (multifruit vineyard) and lastly κοσμηταὶ πρασιαί (well ordered planting beds). All of these form something which is described as κῆπος if we properly understand the phrase: κρῆναι ἡ μέν τ᾽ ἀνὰ κῆπον ἅπαντα / σκίδναται (the whole 'garden' is sprinkled by the waters of springs). Generally, it consists of the above-mentioned three components that are useful for men, and is rather devoid of any specific features suggesting that it might be a sacred grove such as we find elsewhere in the Homeric epics.[7] Although it seems obvious on the surface, some researchers, such as Stackelberg, go so far as to suggest that we are dealing here with an allusion to the afterlife.[8] The issue is not at all obvious because we consider here a very complex concept which covers most of the *Odyssey*, going back several books before and several books ahead, and cannot be read in isolation from the whole. As Stackelberg suggests, alluding to Motte's influential study,[9] Alcinous' garden evokes associations with similar concepts of the Hesperides and the Elysian Fields.[10] The problem, in my view, is far more complex than researchers suggest. It is arguable that this part of the *Odyssey* is only a fragment of a longer narrative, which could be framed as Odysseus' journey to the Netherworld, including the part called *nekyia*, where the protagonist does not actually go down to the underworld, but the spirits of the dead come to him after a ritual of libations.[11] Within this context it would be easy to associate Phaecians' island as a passage to the Beyond.[12] In my view, the

[7] Motte 1973: 233–279.

[8] Stackelberg 2013: 127.

[9] Motte 1973.

[10] Stackelberg 2013: 127.

[11] On different narratives within the motif of *Nekyia* see especially Zervou 2020: 213–242.

[12] The detailed analysis of the eschatological connections of Phaecians with the Underworld see especially Bierl 2020: 333–367. The eschatological aspect of Alcinous' garden is also noted by Peraki-Kyriakidou who argues that parallels seem obvious,

explanation lies in the phraseology of the aforementioned passage. Although the topic of interrelation of the Homeric description and archaic eschatological imagery is beyond the scope of this article, I will try to briefly explain why a philological reading of the passus can be helpful. This also seems relevant when it comes to the reception of this motif in later periods.

First of all we should ask if the description is a far echo of eschatological images associating the garden with afterlife beliefs and if there is any intermediate link between the whole Homeric epic with such an image. We can answer briefly and unequivocally: there is no such connection. As Bremmer convincingly put it, although there is no cohesive concept within the epics of afterlife beliefs, the prevalent idea is that *psyche* (activated in the moments of death, during life staying inactive), according to the most archaic visions, goes straightly to Hades, where it lives as a shadow of a man, his *eidolon*.[13] The concept of the Elysian Fields is much later and the allusion to it in the *Odyssey* comes from a book which was regarded even by the ancients as something added later.[14] We cannot, therefore, in any way link the concept of 'paradise' for the elect with the Homeric epic as a whole.

Secondly, as I assume, in order to prove that Alcinous' garden has something in common with eschatological beliefs, one should find any passage in Homer or in later Greek literature, where *kepos* has afterlife connotations. I dare say there are no such links. Returning to Motte and his analysis, he indeed indicated the connection of the concept of natural landscape as a reflection of mythical image of the Afterlife. However, he did not link his idea to κῆπος but specifically to λειμών (meadow). It is a 'meadow of asphodels' (κατ' ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα, *Od*. 11, 539) which is connected with eschatological images. The phrase that we come across twice in the *Odyssey*, in the second case it gives us a concept which excludes the general pessimistic view of Afterlife beliefs. In *Od*. 24, 13–14 the killed suitors led by Hermes go to

given also the metaphorical aspect of the episode at Phaecians – Odysseus' peculiar katabasis, i.e. his 'immersion' in the past and memories. See Peraki-Kyriakidou 2016: 232.

[13] See especially Bremmer 1987: 70ff. See also Sourvinou-Inwood 1995: 56ff.

[14] See Sourvinou-Inwood 1995: 104–106.

the 'Asphodel Meadows'. Similarly, the Ἠλύσιον πεδίον (the Elysian Fields or more properly: the Elysian Plain, *Od*. 4, 563), situated somewhere in the West on the far edges of the mythical Okeanos encompassing the world, is a completely different concept. Especially, that those fields, just once mentioned in the Homeric epic, are strictly reserved to the immortals. The question arises, what Alcinous' κῆπος has in common with all of the above-mentioned? Probably, nothing at all, as the description conveys, in my opinion, not a single mythical allusion. Let us therefore look at the passus, focusing on both the details and the overall picture.

The first problem that needs to be solved is the question of the term κῆπος which we automatically, without hesitation, nowadays understand as a 'garden'. However, it has already been noted that there are many different words in ancient Greek denoting the same semantic field, yet with slight differences, to mention here for instance – excluding three elements from the Homeric passage that I have already mentioned – ἄλσος (sacred grove) and παράδεισος (enclosed park). The question is what these words meant in the Homeric epic and how their meaning changed in later classical, Hellenistic and Byzantine literature.[15] The meaning of words, naturally, changes, either broadening their possible connotations or narrowing them. The centuries-old history of the Greek language is a unique case because it has never been interrupted as regards the written form of it, especially the conservative one during the Byzantine period, preserving the most archaic classical words. The Homeric epic needs a special treatment in this context. The words we come across here do not necessarily have the same meaning as in later literature, which is worth underlining. Therefore, let us look what lexicographers think of the word κῆπος.

Lexicon Homericum by Ebeling suggests linguistic connotations with Latin *campus*, namely a 'field', 'plain', and it pays attention to different understanding of the term in Byzantine commentators, Photius and Eustathios. For Eustathios the term the different form παράδεισος

[15] Bonnechere 2001: 31; Giesecke 2007: 39. As Bonnechere rightly notes, until now there has not been any systematic study of this question. See Bonnechere 2001: 31. Farrar notes than in the Archaic and Classical times this term referred generally to a vegetable garden. See Farrar 2016: 89.

is used and it may be understood rather as φυταλιά, namely a 'planted place', esp. orchard or vineyard (as LSJ explains) and denotes this as a carefully planted and perfectly organised place.[16] Cunliffe's Lexicon translates it as a 'piece of prepared ground, garden or orchard'.[17]

As it is visible from the above-mentioned examples, the question of Alcinous' κῆπος is still far from being solved definitely. What is yet rather obvious, both for lexicographers and Byzantine commentators, it has nothing to do with any sacred place but refers rather to a well-planned planting site. Similar distinction we can see in the *Geoponica* (Γεωπονικά), the sole surviving Byzantine treatise on agriculture composed in the 10th century for the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, where the author uses παράδεισος as a pleasure garden and κηποποΐια (namely 'making a garden/orchard') is used by him in connection with vegetables.[18] Thus, in later times the word kēpos certainly meant a man-made piece of land for cultivation. However, with regard to the passage from the *Odyssey* that interests us, I would like to propose another possibility, certainly less attractive to horticultural historians.

First of all, while analysing the above-mentioned passage concerning the garden of Alcinous, we tend to forget that we deal with a strictly formulaic language characteristic for oral poetry.[19] Thus, the repetitions of phrases and words that we come across to and from we cannot treat as separate images but we can consider them as an example of strictly formulaic language, as a component of techniques for memorising longer portions of text. In other words, they were used to join the sequences or to remind the teller of the story what comes next. Moreover, let us not forget about the character of the techniques of description used by Homer. In fact, as Edwards for instance underlined it, Homer gives us always a general topography, showing the most characteristic objects, but we will never find anything which we could call a 'landscape' in

[16] Ebeling 1987: 782. Eustathios clearly understands this passus as a carefully planned and organized orchard (ὄρχατος). See Eustathios 1825: 265.

[17] Cunliffe 1924: 226.

[18] See especially book 10, α' περὶ παραδείσου, book 12, b' περὶ κηποοΐιας.

[19] On the complex issue which goes beyond the scope of this article, see for instance recent monograph by Ready 2019.

a modern sense of the word.[20] The characteristic way of describing the nature in Homer's work is its directness and plainness – both in the *Iliad*, in brief similes, where these qualites most often appear, as well as in the *Odyssey*, in more extended descriptions.[21] If we look once more at the beginning of the description of Alcinous' garden, with the depiction of an orchard, we read:

> ὄγχναι καὶ ῥοιαὶ καὶ μηλέαι ἀγλαόκαρποι
> συκέαι τε γλυκεραὶ καὶ ἐλαῖαι τηλεθόωσαι. (*Od*. 7, 115–116)

These verses turn out to be repeated word by word some books later in the description of the Afterlife where Odysseus encounters the shadows of different mythical figures. The verses appear within the description of Tantalus standing in a lake and unable to quench his thirst (*Od*. 11, 588–589).[22]

Does it mean that both verses could represent 'real gardens' in which grow exactly the same trees: pears, pomegranates, apples, figs, and olives?[23] Given that the second description concerns eschatological

[20] Edwards 1987: 82ff.

[21] Fairclough 1930: 68–88.

[22] Peraki-Kyriakidou points out that here, even more emphatically than with Alcinous' garden, the lack of necessity for human effort in cultivating this garden is emphasised, which seems to me somewhat peculiar, given the context. See Peraki-Kyriakidou 2016: 232–233. Combellack highlights the absurdity of using this formula here. He points out the obvious fact, well known to the Greeks, that it is impossible to eat olives freshly picked from the tree – and it is precisely these that Tantalus, who cannot satiate his hunger, reaches for. See Combellack 1965: 53. If one were to ignore the context of the principles of oral poetry and mnemonics, one would have to conclude that Homer deliberately introduces here the motif of *locus amoenus* as *locus horribilis*, suggesting an ambivalent understanding of it. What is beautiful in the description of the garden in the land of the Phaeacians, in Hades intensifies the mood of horror precisely by contrast. In Alkinoos, the trees are within reach, whereas in the hereafter Tantalus cannot touch them. His greatest torment, therefore, becomes the awareness of the eternal loss of what is life-giving. It is interesting to note that – if we treat this motif in this way – we can consider that Homer is already the precursor of the rhetorical principles developed many centuries later, which Curtius, among others, discusses in relation to the scenes of medieval epic. See Curtius 2013: 200–202. The question remains open, of course, to what extent we can speak of a conscious repetition of the motif in Homer' s case.

[23] Giesecke 2007: 38.

imagery, they are used rather, I would say, to make a general impression of a garden,[24] – to pay the listeners' attention to the most typical species of fruitful trees one can cultivate in good climate as it might have been in mythical Scheria and Ithaca, as we can guess from the Homeric passages. The subsequent verses describing their constant productivity, although they may bring some connotations with the Hesiodic Golden Age (Hes. *Op.*, 109–126), in the Homeric passage rather tend to underline the effectiveness of cultivation.[25]

The Nature here is completely controlled by humans and maybe that is why it so much surprises Odysseus who – as all his adventures clearly show – cannot escape the power of the elements, symbolized in the poem by different mythical personages. Here he confronts the well-organized society that is in an absolute order, which is very effective.

To come back to the point, Alcinous' garden is just an exemplum, merely a mirror of what an ordinary listener/reader of Homeric story could imagine as κῆπος – the place ruled absolutely by man, without any divine power included. In this context, the subsequent description of the rest two parts of this place: the vineyard and the herbs growing fruitfully and effectively seems absolutely justified. The image of a fence surrounding the place (ἕρκος, v. 113 and ὄρχον, v. 127) strengthen the idea of an order.[26] Interestingly, as Giesecke notes, the episode in Scheria is a harbinger of what will happen in Ithaca, when Odysseus will restore order after killing the suitors. The garden is in this context a symbolic representation of the well-organized and well-ruled *polis*[27] (like Alcinous' Scheria), and as Giesecke writes: 'Odysseus must visit his father in *his* garden and must recall [...] their planting

[24] As Ready puts it: 'If our Homeric performers did not aim to tell the 'complete' story in a single go, they nevertheless sought to generate a coherent, self-contained, unified, and well-designed text, in this case an oral text.' See Ready 2019: 72. As for 'entextualising' tactics and strategies see Ready 2019: 66–72.

[25] Giesecke 2007: 38.

[26] Giesecke 2007: 40.

[27] The question of whether the description of Alcinous's garden brings a characterisation of an aristocratic society that lacks nothing and is overflowing with abundance remains open, and there are different opinions on the matter. See Peraki-Kyriakidou 2016: 230–231.

of the garden's orchard together.'[28] Maybe that is why the whole passage with the trees appears once more in the book 11 of the *Odyssey* where we come across Laertes' garden.

Brockliss, in his fundamental, as regards the nature in the Homeric poetry monograph – the only one, as far as I know, so holistic and contextual – agrees that the passage of Scheria brings both civilized and less civilized connotations.[29] As he convincingly analyses, the words used in this passage that allude to the semantic field of 'order' (ἕρκος, κοσμηταὶ, ὄρχον) indicate that – although we 'are' in a mythical land, unknown to men – in fact we face a well-organized human plantation and consequently, a civilization being on higher degree that the one known to Odysseus.[30]

However, I cannot agree with Brockliss' assumption that this plantation differs from the other ones described in the *Odyssey* because here no human help is required and the plants grow automatically. First of all, one thing needs clarification: there is no single word in the Homeric passage that would suggest the plants do not need any attendance from men. Secondly, not even a single adjective nor an adverb denote their automatic growth. What we have here is just a description of very luxuriant plant-life that, as Homer puts it, grows the whole year long (ἐπετήσιος). Brockliss' interpretation is thus based on misunderstanding of this passage. As he explains: 'While Laertes tends his orchards, the Phaecian plantations are not subject to human tendance in the same way and to the same degree.'[31] I wonder where he gets his assumption from, since the passage in question does not contain any allusion to this. Similarly, it seems incomprehensible to me to associate the aforementioned passage with a brief description of the Elysian fields (*Od*. 4, 565–567).

There is also another aspect often omitted while analysing this passage – the history of food in the Archaic period. As Dalby convincingly proves, there are no archeological evidence that the Greeks of that time

[28] Giesecke 2007: 27. The whole chapter, *Homer's Eutopolis*, deserves a special attention as regards different aspects of the opposites: Nature and order, the chaos of natural elements and the organised society. See Giesecke 2007: 11–34.

[29] Brockliss 2019: 142.

[30] Brockliss 2019: 142.

[31] Brockliss 2019: 145.

planted orchards and we know very little about the early history of fruit trees such as those mentioned in the cited fragment.[32] Moreover, as he interestingly states, there are no examples in the *Odyssey* of eating of a fruit,[33] which may indicate that fruits might have been used for another purposes at that time.[34] In fact, all of them mentioned in the garden of Alcinous: pears, pomegranates, apples, figs and olives, are characteristic and typical for the Mediterranean and were in use from prehistoric times.[35] As Dalby remarks, there are many similarities between the climate of Scheria and the fertility of the nowadays island of Corfu, where the climate is much more milder and suitable to the orchard described in Homer's work.[36] The fruit trees must have been cultivated for centuries, although some of them, as pomegranates enumerated by Homer, have their origin in Iran.[37] The others, as pears, apples and figs, were known in Greece from prehistoric times.[38] The plausibility of the poetic passage from the *Odyssey* can therefore be confirmed due to research into the history of food in ancient Greece. However these fruits were certainly eaten in Homer's time, it is not possible to state unequivocally that we are dealing here with a deliberately planned and organised garden as we understand it today.[39]

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[32] Dalby 1996: 76–77.

[33] Moreover, as Cook, who examines oriental influences, especially Assyrian palatial architecture, in the description of the Homeric Phaeacians, notes that apples, pomegranates and figs do not appear in the *Iliad*, and in the *Odyssey* they appear only in an eschatological context (in Hades) and in an orchard belonging to Odysseus. In other words, they are considered extremely exotic and rare. See Cook 2004: 54.

[34] Cook 2004: 54.

[35] Dalby 1996: 48–49, 77–82.

[36] Dalby, Dalby 2017: 32.

[37] Dalby, Dalby 2017: 34.

[38] The role of tree symbolism, especially of the apple and olive tree, in beliefs and cults, and its significance in later Greek literature, has been quite well researched and described. As this article is almost exclusively concerned with the garden of Alcinous and its subsequent history as a kind of reference point – in other words, the reception of this motif – I deliberately omit the wealth of mythological and symbolic associations connected with trees, as this is a subject that deserves a separate study.

[39] Given that, as Cook points out, the entire description of the episode on the island of the Phaeacians, especially the description of King Alcinous' palace, bears traces of the Middle Eastern epic tradition, especially Assyrian palaces and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, we can assume that the depiction of Alcinous' organised garden also refers,

Given the above findings, I can say with certainty that the assumption about Alcinous' garden reflecting a true example of a Greek garden from archaic times is not supported by sufficient evidence.[40] The Homeric description, dependent on techniques characteristic of oral poetry, brings only a vague idea rather than a concrete image that we could take as a reflection of reality. Perhaps this is why, as we will see later in my essay, it became a kind of model, adapted to the realities depending on the era.

2. A mirror for the Byzantines?

The Byzantines did not leave us much evidence of what their gardens might have looked like. As Littlewood notes, apart from some general comments in Libanios (*Or*. 11), there are only two literary testimonies on early Byzantine gardens: in Saint Gregory of Nyssa (*Ep*. 20) and in Julian's epistles (*Ep*. 4.426D–428B).[41] In the Christian Byzantium the

as it were, to this tradition. See Cook 2004: 54. In this sense, we can consider that the garden of Alcinous described by Homer may partly represent an actual garden – but a Middle Eastern garden, not a Greek one. The description would therefore echo the Middle Eastern, perhaps Assyrian gardens, carefully planned and placed in a square form, symmetrical and functional. In such gardens, trees were planted in even rows, as can be seen in surviving reliefs. See Majdecki 2016: 31. There is also no doubt that the carefully planned functional garden of Alcinous can echo the Persian gardens described by Xenophon among others. As he describes, Cyrus the Younger had a well-planned garden at his residence in Sardes with a multitude of fruit trees, planted in rows and irrigated. See Majdecki 2016: 34. On the Achaemenid gardens see Xenophon (*Oeconomicus* 4.8.10–12; 4.13–14; 4.20–25; *Cyropaedia* 5.3.7–13).

[40] Just as there is scanty archaeological evidence of small domestic gardens in the Classical period, see Reber 2010: 1–20.

[41] Littlewood 2017: 252. It is worth recalling that the garden of the Phaeacians from the *Odyssey* appears in Libanios' *progymnasmata* (Description 9, *A Garden* (κήπου)): 'Blessed, then, were the Phaeacians, not because they were born from the gods, but because they honored gardens above all else (ἐτίμων πρὸ παντὸς τὰ κηπεύματα). So, the good fortune among the Phaeacians was well known from their gardens, but I also want to describe in full one that I have seen.' This is followed by a description of the garden, which is essentially a paraphrase of the relevant passage from the *Odyssey*. There is also a detailed description of the fruit trees which include fig trees, 'to which some poet might have added the epithet "sweet"' – this is an obvious allusion to *Od*. 7, 116. See Libanios 2008: 446–449. I would like to note that Libanios' translator inac-

context of a garden was enriched by biblical connotations,[42] which is rather obvious, butat least from the 10th century the garden was also strongly associated with emperors as a visible embodiment of their virtues.[43] As the subject has been researched rather thoroughly, to remind here the memorable and still up-to-date monographs, *Byzantine Garden Culture*[44] and *Byzantine Gardens and Beyond*,[45] my concern here is to pay attention only to points related to Alcinous' garden that were merely highlighted in the aforementioned publications and were not followed by any deeper philological analysis or indication of intertextual links.

Indeed, it appears that there are not many passages in Byzantine literature in which allusions to the garden of Alcinous appear, and they are quite difficult to be found. Thanks to the thorough research of Byzantinists presented in the two monographs mentioned above, it is easier to see where to look for allusions to gardens in the rich literature of the Byzantine period.[46]

As Nilsson suggestively writes in her essay of the harmonious gardens of the Byzantines, regardless of the kind of a garden, it is the pleasure and the harmony that the gardens gave the Byzantines throughout the ages, as we can guess from different sources both literary and iconographic.[47]

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curately rendered into English the word κήπευμα, which rather than 'garden' means 'plants grown in a garden'. After all, this slightly alters the context of the rhetorical exercise. Libanios' paraphrase, however, demonstrates that exercises based on motifs or toposes from Homer were an essential part of the rhetorical art of the time.

42 Concerning Byzantine 'spiritual gardens' and their symbolism see, among others, della Dora 2016: 95–99. On allegorical gardens see Nillson 2013: 20–24.

43 Littlewood 2017: 253–254. See also Littlewood 2013: 44–45.

44 Littlewood, Maguire, Wolschke-Bulmahn 2002.

45 Bodin, Hedlund 2013.

46 A monograph on the presence of plants in Byzantine literature should undoubtedly be added to the above-mentioned items. Analysing Byzantine *oneirokritika*, the author shows the importance and richness of plant references in the works of various Byzantine writers. See Koutava-Delivoria 2015. I would also add a rarely cited monograph that also seems relevant as far as the presence of gardens in Byzantine literature is concerned, especially descriptions of paradise in the context of *katabaseis*, see Lampropoulou 2006.

47 Nilsson 2013: 17–18. It is worth noting that in the so-called Nomos Georgikos (The Agricultural Law), dated to the middle of the 8th century, the word κῆπος appears

Nilsson, who researched thoroughly the context of the garden in connection with Eumathios Makrembolites' prose novel *Hysmine & Hysminias* written in the 12th century, namely in the period of the so-called Komnenian Renaissance, indicates in her monograph that the model for the garden *ekphrasis*[48] in H&H represents undoubtedly the passage from Homer's *Odyssey* concerning Alcinous' garden. As Nilsson states, there is a direct allusion to it in Hysminias' words: 'Seeing this, I thought I beheld Alcinous' garden and felt that I could not take as fiction the Elysian plain so solemnly described by the poets' (H&H 1.4.3).[49] Nilsson repeats the importance of the Homeric passage in her above-mentioned essay, underlining that every kind of garden description in Byzantine literature 'reverberated with renowned literary gardens of the past, a long series beginning with the Homeric garden of Alcinous'.[50] The question that emerges is whether Alcinous' garden is really a source and model of Byzantine *ekphrasis* in the romance of H&H and other Byzantine works. Furthermore, we can ask if it is so important as to be commonly recognised.

The first issue to be clarified is whether Nilsson's suggestion based on H&H's translation of the romance finds coverage in the Greek original text. If we come back to Makrembolites' phrase and read it in original, we shall see some slight, but significant, differences. I find them

three times and mainly means a 'vegetable garden' or 'orchard' and therefore a carefully planned place for growing crops. For example, if a tree stands on a field plot and the adjacent plot is a garden, the tree branches should be cut off, which would mean that it is a vegetable or fruit garden. See Koder 2020: 55 (no 31). The next two passages state that, if an animal enters the garden area and dies impaled on fence posts or falls into a ditch, the garden owner does not pay compensation, which also suggests that this is a fenced vegetable garden or orchard. See Koder 2020: 63 (no 51, 51). According to the Nomos Georgikos, horticulture and vegetable growing were underdeveloped at the time, as only beans, figs and – the most common and abundantly grown – grapes are mentioned. See Evert-Kappesowa 1963: 60–61. More on the Nomos Georgikos see Evert-Kappesowa 1963: 58–73.

[48] In Greek literature of the Late Antiquity there are more imaginary gardens in *ekphraseis* than actual descriptions of them. We can come across such reminiscences for instance in: Diodorus Siculus (3.68.5–69.4), Strabo (5.4.8), Dio Chrysostomos (35.19 21) or Lucian (*Hist. Vera* 2.11–16). See Littlewood 2017: 248–249.

[49] Nilsson 2001: 100. The translation cited by Nilsson is by Jeffreys. See Makrembolites 2012: 179.

[50] Nilsson 2013: 18.

useful in the context of vitality of the garden motif. In the Greek text rather than 'I thought' there is a phrase 'It seemed to me that I see' (ἐδόκουν ὁρᾶν) and in the place of 'felt that I could not take as fiction' we have quite enigmatic phrase μῦθον οὐκ εἶχον.[51] The Latin translation of Makrembolites gives here: *et quaecumque de Elysio poetarum carminibus magnifice celebrantur pro fabulis habenda non duxi*,[52] what we could translate as 'I didn't think we could treat them like a fairy tale'. In my opinion both translations are wrong. It is not easy to find a similar phrase in any Greek text, however it seems to me that we could venture to translate the Greek phrase literally as 'I didn't have a word'. Then we would have the version of 'there were no words to describe something that is solemnly praised as the Elysium'.

If we translate the Greek text in this way, we notice things that escape a cursory reading: the narrator states that it seems to him (he is not so sure about it), which is an allusion to a dream, and he states he is aware of the fact that such a beautiful garden he sees, compared to Alcinous' garden, is generally regarded as an Elysium, namely the mirror of the Paradise itself.

One should ask in this place, what exactly does this garden look like if it is so amazing and – if the source was Homer – what is thus an intertextual game the author plays with the ancient Greek text. Let us then quote the passage in the English translation to see whether it has anything in common with the motif of the Homeric garden:

> [4.1] This was full of grace and pleasure, brimming with plants, completely full of flowers. The cypresses are in rows, the myrtles form a dense covering, the vines are wreathed with grape clusters; the violet leaps out from its leaves and beautifies the vision with perfume; as for the roses, one is emerging from the bud, another is swelling, yet another has already emerged; and some which have already reached maturity are spread on the ground. [2] Lillies decorate the raden, they sweeten the nostrils, they attack the spectator and contest with the roses; if you had to sit in judgment on them, you would not know on which to bestow the prize. [3] Seeing this, I thought I beheld Alcinous' garden and felt that I could

[51] Makrembolites 2001: 4.

[52] Makrembolites 1856: 524.

> not take as fiction the Elysian plain so solemnly described by the poets. For laurel an myrtle and cypresses and vines and all the other plants that adorn a garden, or rather that Sosthenes garden contained, had their branches raised like arms.[53]

The whole, extensive passage that does not stop here but evolves into dense, symbolic images, is taken, as Jeffreys notes,[54] from Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon* (1.15.1–6) and obviously has little in common with the Homeric description, which, as I have already mentioned, is very limited in its means of expression.

The garden of Alcinous here undoubtedly becomes a proverbial garden, devoid of any real reference to the familiar passage from the *Odyssey*. In this context, the phrase 'I see the garden of Alcinous' means only 'I see a beautiful garden', just as we might say at the sight of beautiful gardens that they are remarkable like the 'hanging gardens of Babylon'. Similarly, the Elysian Fields do not appear here in reference to the netherworld, but to draw attention to the similarity of the gardens described to an earthly paradise.[55]

It is undoubtedly a pleasure garden, not a place where different fruit and vegetables are cultivated. I wonder how it is possible that almost everyone dealing with this issue shares the common opinion that for the late Greek authors and the Byzantines, the garden of Alcinous was something of a prototype.[56] However, with some reservation, but also a small measure of certainty, I will put forward the conjecture that perhaps the problem stems from an obvious, after all, conviction as to the importance of Homer for the education of the Byzantines.[57]

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[53] Makrembolites 2012: 179.

[54] Makrembolites: 179. She probably repeats what has already been written in the Italian edition of the romance, where in a footnote appears the same unequivocal statement 'il giardino di Alcinoo rappresenta un modello per descrizioni di questo genere, che costituiscono un *topos* nella tradizone romanzesca'. See Conca 1994: 502.

[55] Besides, Tatius calls the garden παράδεισος not κῆπος: Ὁ δὲ παράδεισος ἄλσος ἦν (the garden was in fact a grove) [1.15.1].

[56] Demoen 2013: 120.

[57] It suffices to remind here that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were read and interpreted at every level of education and were undoubtedly the most important texts of the Greek antiquity in Byzantine education. The epics functioned as privileged texts and their role in education can be compared to the Bible, which is understandable as the Byzantines

An interesting example of the Alcinous garden motif can be found in John Kyriotes Geometres' (c. 935 – end of the 10th century) letters. His rhetorical progymnasmata 2 and 3 have been thoroughly analysed by Demoen (2013) in the context of the Byzantine gardens and typical subject matters for eulogy (*enkomion*) and *ekphrasis*. As Demoen notes, in those two letters addressed by Geometres to his friend, we can find 'the explicit and allusive references to classical motifs and authors, with a particular focus on Homer'.[58] The narrator indeed makes direct allusions to the Homeric passage, however, as Demoen underlines, the author, describing a real garden, wants to show that it is better than the Homeric one in many aspects. This, what normally may be ragarded as *ekphrasis,* here gains a specific dimension, turning into an obvious *synkrisis*.[59] Let me quote the fragment of the passage from Geometres in Demoen's translation to illustrate the use of the motif:

> Earlier, my friend, I used to compare this garden to the garden of Alkinoos. But now, I think it surpasses that one. Alkinoos' garden is, indeed, the creation of an autonomous tongue, a work of artistic fiction, conceived only for entertainment: Homer, the great poet with his mighty authority, credited that garden with all possible pleasures, and yet, he is defeated by ours [8.8–20].[60]

As Nilsson observes, what is remarkable in Geometres' description, although it alludes to the paradisiacal tradition, he distances himself from the biblical garden of Eden. On the contrary, he pays attention to earthly dimension of the place and the fact that it is accessible for everyone, not like Mesokepion in Constantinople.[61] In this case the comparison of the real garden with the Homeric prototype is in favour of the former. As Geometres writes earlier in the same letter, evoking the

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were Christians but also considered the Hellenistic heritage as part of their identity. More see Finkelberg 2012: 15–20. For more on Homer's role in Greek education, see the now classic study Marrou 1956: 29ff.

58 Demoen 2013: 118.

59 Demoen 2013: 119.

60 Translated by Demoen in Demoen 2013: 120.

61 Nilsson 2013: 20.

Homeric prototype, this garden has also – in contrary to ancient gardens – winds, rains and snows, but the pleasant ones (7, 8–19).

Once more, it is clearly visible, Alcinous' garden is not a prototype, paradigmatic garden, as it is commonly regarded, but rather – I would say – an exemplary, like in Makrembolites' case, proverbial garden. Here, even more explicitly, as the author uses not a literary, imaginary garden, but a real one, the existing work of human hands. Geometres, as we read from the above-mentioned passage, is fully aware of the fact that Alcinous' garden is just something artificial, created for amusement (πλάσμα πρὸς τέρψιν μόνον πεποιημένον).

The scanty evidence of the Alcinous' garden motif in Byzantine sources does not allow us to treat it as something more than just a proverbial, exemplary garden. As such it was used also by the Romans, as Grimal proves in a influential monography about Roman gardens.[62] The usage of this motif by different Roman authors[63] proves that for them it had already become a sort of cliché, without deeper connotations and thus rather meaningless. I am not going to argue that the same is relevant to the Byzantines because, as we have already seen, the literary evidence is rather scanty.

Although we find, for instance in Photius' *Bibliotheca* (186, 3), in lost to us a narrative by Conon (probably living in the 1st century BC / the 1st century AD), a mention about Alcinous, the king of Phaiakis (ἐφ΄ ᾧ βασιλεύειν μὲν Ἀλκίνουν τῆς Φαιακίδος), there is nothing about his gardens. Michael Psellos, the 11th century scholar, best known as author of *Chronographia*, in his *Epistulae* (32) makes a direct allusion to the Homeric passage, but he does not recall neither the name of the mythical king nor his garden, confining to enumerate the trees: Ὅμηρος, εἰς κενὸν μὲν τὴν ἐλαίαν ἐξύμνησε, μάτην δὲ τῇ μηλέᾳ ἐγκώμιον ἐσχεδίασε (32, 16–17).[64]

Likewise, Theodoros Prodromos, who in his satyrical Ἀμαθής ἢ παρὰ ἑαυτῷ γραμματικός mentions in the same breath Alcinous as

[62] Grimal 1969: 65.

[63] Virgil (*Georg*. II, 87) – commented by Serv.: *Alcinoos* [...] *cuius hortos Homerus nobilitavit*; Ovid (*Amores* I, 10, 56; *Pont*. IV, 2, 10, V); Martialis, *Ep*. VII, 42, 6; Statius, *Silv*. I, 3, 81; IV, 2, 3. See undernote I in Grimal 1969: 65.

[64] Psellus 2019: 77.

Diomedes, Pericles, Themistocles etc. (78–79), alludes to Alcinous' garden in *Historical Poems*, but also here it seems to be rather proverbial and is used just to underline the greatness of Komenos' achievement: σκῆπτρον μέγα […] ἀείκαρπον ὑπὲρ Ἀλκίνου κῆπον (XVIII, 23).[65]

Similarily proverbial use of Alcinoos garden, in this case slightly metaphorical and funny, we come across in Niketas Choniates' *Historia*, when he describes a man, called Kalomodios, who 'laden with much money and greedy of gain [...] often provided the gold-hunting emperors with the occasion to view him as the richest of men and as Alkinoos's orchard (ὡς κῆπος Ἀλκινόειος), where, in but a moment, not pear bore pear and fig yielded fig but gold brought forth gold and silver produced silver'.[66] The fragment resounds and plays with Homeric ὄγχνη ἐπ᾽ ὄγχνῃ [...] σῦκον δ᾽ ἐπὶ σύκῳ (7, 120–121): οὐκ ὄχνην τρέφειν ἐπ› ὄχνῃ σῦκόν τ᾽ ἐπὶ σύκῳ παρέχειν[67] but nothing more than this. The Homeric phrase must have been rooted as a proverb, as Choniates uses it once more in his letter *To Euthymion* (159, 17).[68]

A brief review of Byzantine literary sources shows that the Homeric garden of Alcinous was mainly used proverbially in various contexts, and not necessarily in relation to gardens. While it is certainly possible to find other allusions to this motif in the vast body of Byzantine literature,[69] the examples I have cited demonstrate that it was not necessarily the garden of King of Phaeacians that became the Byzantines' model for their actual gardens. Undoubtedly, the Homeric garden was idealised, reduced to the literary concept of *locus amoenus*, which by some convention used to appear in Byzantine *ekphraseis*. In this way it

65 Prodromos 1974: 303. See also Koutava-Delivoria 2015: 179.

66 Choniates 1984: 287.

67 Choniates 1975: 287.

68 Choniates 2001: 256.

69 There are certainly many other references to the Homeric garden of Alcinous scattered in Byzantine literature that I have not presented in this essay. As an example, I can cite Manuel Holobolos' praise of Michael VIII's gardening efforts, which he likened – remarkably – to the 'gardens of Alcinous'. This would indicate that by the second half of the 13th century the Homeric phrase established itself as proverbial. As Holobolos expresses it: Οἳ μακρῶν χρόνων ἀποψυγέντες διὰ σοῦ τὰ νῦν καινοπρεπῶς ἀνεθήλεσαν, τοῖς Ἀλκινόου κήποις, ὁποῖοί τινες ἦσαν ἐκεῖνοι καὶ ὅπως εἶχον, παρεικαζόμενοι. See Holobolos 1907: 58.

evolved and took on, over time, an ambivalent meaning which we have already observed in the case of the fragment from the *Odyssey*. From being a pleasant place, evoking exclusively positive connotations, the idealised garden, although not necessarily named the garden of Alcinous, became *locus horribilis (horridus)* in later Greek romances, at least from the 12th century onwards,[70] which is, of course, a subject for a separate study.

3. The garden of Alcinous in translation

The garden of Alcinous gains unexpected dimension in the real gardening practices of 17th and 18th century Britain, when the English landscape started to be transformed methodically in accordance with philosophy that had its origins in the reinterpretation of the concept of ancient Arkadia.[71] The translation into English such classical works as Virgil's *Georgica and Eclogae*, Pliny's letters, Lucretius' *De rerum natura* etc., contributed to the rediscovery of the classical past and greatly influenced not only the architecture but the gardening as well.[72]

What may seem astonishing for those who are not familiar with the architecture of gardens and the history of gardening, the classical *locus amoenus*,[73] of which example was Alcinous' garden as well as Calypso's cave, became mayor source of inspiration for a new kind of gardening.[74]

[70] Della Dora draws attention to the ambivalence of *loci amoeni* according to their location: inside the estate, inside the walls (private, small gardens) and outside (large, imperial parks). See della Dora 2016: 113–117.

[71] Chambers 1993: 5.

[72] Chambers 1993: 12–32.

[73] Classical examples of *locus amoenus*, mainly from Latin literature, and their reception in later centuries are analysed by Curtius in his influential monograph. He also lists various passages from Homer, noting that all descriptions of nature in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are pervaded by an aura of divinity, including associated with the description of the garden of Alcinous. See Curtius 2013: 185. Apparently, he also succumbs to stereotypical beliefs that there is some kind of divine force at work in the Pheacians' garden, which, as I have shown above, is not true because this is not explicitly confirmed in the text.

[74] Mack 1969: 51.

It was no other that Alexander Pope (1688–1744), the famous English poet and renowned translator of Homer into English, who in his essay in *The Guardian* (1713) writes about 'the Taste of the Ancients in their Gardens', suggesting that there are two ancient accounts worth quoting which present unadorned gardens, with happy simplicity: Virgil's about the Garden of the old bee-keeper Corycian and Homer's about Alcinous.[75] Pope invokes Sir William Temple's words, who said that the Homeric description 'contains all the justest Rules and Provisions which can go toward composing the best Gardens'.[76] Both of these accounts, as already the notices, proposed in fact, as Hunts puts it, 'that the ancient garden art could be recovered only by a double act of translation – from word into image and from past into present'.[77]

Thus, Pope's idea was not only to translate, but apparently to interpret the sources by changing and adapting them to modern reality and accordingly with his key philosophical concepts. As there was no translation of Homer's *Odyssey* into English at that time, Pope offered his own translation of the passage about Alcinous' garden.[78] Pope's translations, often criticised as being rather impressions on Homer than reproductions of the original text and as being in some places even more Homeric than Homer,[79] provided assumption to the whole innovations in a gardening style in Britain, and he is equivocally regarded as one of the founders of the landscape garden.[80].

The same he does with his pictorial analysis of the landscape in *Observation on the Shield of Achilles*, revealing his own pictorial imagination.[81] What should be underlined, Pope in his letter gave stress

[75] Reprint of the essay see: Hunt, Willis 1988: 182.

[76] Hunt, Willis 1988: 206. It comes from Temple's essay, see Temple 1963: 13. See also Brownell 1978: 106, footnote 12.

[77] Hunt 1993: 275. On the theoretical statements of Pope about garden see especially, among others, Lang 1974: 3–29.

[78] Hunt, Willis 1988: 206. Pope was influenced by Adisson – who admired Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711) and proposed a reformation of gardens, thus gaving Pope the opportunity to translate the relevant passage of Homer, as Batey notes. See Batey 1999: 22.

[79] Brower 1959: 114–115.

[80] Brownell 1978: 146–147.

[81] Brownell 1978: 80. See also the footnote 23, where Brownell cites Farnham's statement to Pope's observations on Achilles' shield – Farnham notes that before Pope

on 'painting' (*Picture of a Garden*; *Painting and Pleasure*[82]), and this is what he exactly does in his translation, giving the original text a quality of a landscape, which – as the ancients did not know the concept of landscape in the modern sense – inevitably had to create a very different picture from the original text. While keeping Homer's rhythm and order, he creates more abstract image, more generalised, almost Platonic as regards the expression.[83]

In Pope's translation that I am not going to cite in the whole dominates the notion of utility and naturalness – two features which Pope used to relate to his own estate.[84] It should be recalled at this point that in 1719 Pope begins building his Twickenham villa by the Thames and sets out to put in practice his theoretical considerations, experimenting in a new style of gardening.[85] His garden at Twickenham, highly admired by the contemporaries,[86] was a pleasure garden with many optical illusions, like for instance his grotto which contained a sort of camera obscura, showing the ones who passed the river an unexpected perspective of the garden.[87] It is generally considered that in constructing his garden Pope mostly used the description of Calypso's cave from Homer's *Odyssey* regarded as the classical *locus amoenus* and that the grotto was one of his key concepts.[88]

One of the guests from Newcastle, who visited the place in 1747, with enthusiasm admired Pope's garden as an 'elegant Retreat of a Poet strongly inspired with the Love of Nature and Retirement'.[89] Interestingly, Pope is regarded as the first to have used the expression 'picturesque' in English while speaking about Homer's 'imaging ad picturesque parts'.[90]. It explains in a way Pope's attitude to Homer's

there was not landscape without a human figure.

82 Hunt, Willis 1988: 206.

83 Brower 1959: 50–51.

84 Mack 1969: 53.

85 Batey 1999: 13. Chambers 1993: 61.

86 Mack 1969: 9–25. Brownell 1978: 146–162.

87 Chambers 1993: 88–89. More details about his Twickenham villa see especially Mack 1969: 3–40. Another innovations in his villa see Brownell 1978: 129–132.

88 Mack 1969: 42–51.

89 Cited by Batey 1999: 71.

90 Batey 1999: 99. On the concept of the 'picturesque' aspect in relation to Grand Tour travellers in the 18th century, see in particular Stoneman 2010: 136–164.

description of the Alcinous' garden in his own translation, in which he tended to stress the beautiful nature of the Golden age.[91] Thus the Homeric fragment gains in Pope's translation additional esthetical and visionary dimension. It is not just a common garden with utilitarian and rather typical plants, but it becomes a place of esthetic pleasure as well as a paradigmatic inspiring garden with the underling of its 'imaging' aspect, inspiring to contemplate, to move imagination. As romantic landscape in Pope's times is wilderness, picturesque, as a complex and meaningful aesthetic of natural scenery, it may be related with the sensibility of seeing the landscape both as a picture and a vision.[92] In his translations of the *Odyssey*, Pope mostly appeals to the visual imagination and with success uses a sort of 'poetical prospect'.[93] As we have observed before, Homer did not know the concept of the 'landscape' and what actually Pope does is creating the impression that Homer's poetry abounds in descriptions of that kind. Such superstructures over the poetic language of the archaic Greek epic gave readers, who were not familiar with Greek, the distinct impression of the esthetics they were used to.

So instead of the brevity and order evident in the ancient original, in Pope's version we have a very different aesthetic. The accumulation of stressed adjectives, the emphasis on 'happening', which is evident in verbs, mean that this translation cannot even be called a paraphrase, but must be considered a completely different text. Let us cite a handful of examples: *inclement Skies*; *a green Enclosure*; *Tall thriving Trees confest the fruitful Mold*; *the balmy Spirit of the Western Gale / Eternal breathes*; *With all the United Labours of the Year*; *the groaning Presses foam with Floods of Wine*.[94] Even that two-verse I have already quoted, which features ordinary trees, simply mentioned without any additional

[91] Batey 1999: 113.

[92] Brownell 1978: 98.

[93] Brownell 1978: 84–85. It should be recalled at this point that the translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by Alexander Pope became the main translation of Homer's epics for English-speaking readers for several generations. Homer's texts in Pope's translation became the prefiguration of the so-called Greek Revival in architecture and art, which took place in the second half of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. See Stoneman 2010: 111.

[94] I cite from Mack 1969: 52–53.

embellishments, takes on unexpected dimensions in Pope's translation. Let us compare then Homer's and Pope's lines:

> ὄγχναι καὶ ῥοιαὶ καὶ μηλέαι ἀγλαόκαρποι
> συκέαι τε γλυκεραὶ καὶ ἐλαῖαι τηλεθόωσαι.

> The redd'ning apple ripens here to gold.
> Here the blue fig with luscious juice o'er-flows,
> With deeper red the full pomegranate glows;
> The branch here bends beneath the weighty pear,
> And verdant olives flourish round the year.

Pope's version is not even something that remotely reminds Homer's verses. Alcinous' garden, that Pope took as one of his key models suitable for his innovations in gardening, in fact became his own imaginary garden, created by him based on Homer's to serve his own purposes. One of the verses in his satire, published in 1733 under the title *A Dialogue between Alexander Pope of Twickenham, on the one part, and the Learned Counsel on the other* (*To Mr. Bethel*) although may seem facetious, in the light of the above-mentioned could be the punch line of the considerations made above:

> For I, who hold sage Homer's rule the best,
> Welcome the coming, speed the going guest. (v. 159–160)

Conclusion

The review of the presence of the Alcinous' garden motif in Homer's epic, in selected examples of Byzantine literature and in Alexander Pope's 18th century English translation, shows that the question of its reception is not obvious. Firstly, the analysis has revealed the unfoundedness of the assumption that the passus from Homer can be regarded as the first description of actual garden settings in the history of European literature. Secondly, as I have tried to show, the suggestion by Byzantine scholars that the garden of Alcinous was a model for the

Byzantines when describing their gardens has also proved to be stereotypical and unsupported by evidence. Finally, the case of Alexander Pope and his free paraphrase of Homer demonstrate the non-obvious reception of antiquity in 18th-century Europe and the unique vitality of ancient ideas they attempted to embody.

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