Sixteenth-century Ottoman ceramics are adorned with cypresses and roses, carnations, tulips, and hyacinths, to name just a few of the flowers that appear on these celebrated vessels. They are resplendent in color and suggest gentle scented breezes cooling long afternoons for patrons enjoying musical entertainments, literary discussions, and convivial meals. The margins of Mughal Indian manuscript and album pages from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are filled with meticulously drawn and colored flowers, and Safavi Iranian textiles from the same period present a profusion of gardens and blossoms. The Dubai palms are abstracted from this historic visual culture and are used to imply a unique past. Even if the wealthy and powerful in the Islamic world are no longer designers of gardens like the Ottoman sultans or the Mughal emperors, the garden is still a redolent image.

Over many years the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library in Washington has maintained a vibrant program in garden history, and Middle East Garden Traditions: Unity and Diversity is the latest in a series of publications based on scholarly conferences. Edited by Michel Conan and published a year ago, this volume consists of sixteen essays, ranging over major issues in garden history and dispelling the simplistic division of Islamic gardens into two types—gardens based on the four rivers of paradise described in the Qur’an and gardens based on the mythical and hubristic wealth of the Arab royal garden of Iran. Previous scholars have focused attention on garden design, meaning, and history, but several essays here are directed at other concerns: the Islamic garden was a source of perfume and medicines, in particular of roses and balsam, while careful attention was paid to soils and pesticides. Contemporary agricultural and botanical treatises from Al-Andalus establish that patrons and garden designers did not strictly differentiate between decorative plants in formal gardens and produce grown in orchards.

In the constant or intermittent semi-aridity of much of the Middle East, Iran, Central Asia, and India, gardens were only possible in association with skillful water management. With its intact remains, the gardens of the Alhambra provide a valuable and complex history that has been the subject of numerous studies. Much less well known are the gardens of contemporary rulers in the Maghrib from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries, who maintained elaborate reservoirs, aqueducts, and qanats (underground water canals) to maintain and nourish gardens.

Gardens were also statements of power and prestige for rulers, as an essay by Mahvash Alemi, ‘Princely Safavid Gardens,’ demonstrates. Alemi first examines the gardens of the Safavi capital Qazvin in the second half of the sixteenth century, and makes valuable use of rough plans by the seventeenth-century German scientist Engelbert Kaempfer, as well as a long poem by the Iranian court poet Navidi that defines three key garden elements: the plaza (maydan), the avenue (khiyaban), and the garden (bagh). The maydan was the center of political, social, and economic life in Qazvin, while the khiyaban was the focus of aristocratic social life. The public gardens were centers of rituals and celebrations. Alemi rejects the idea that the chahar bagh (four-part garden) was the only kind of garden design and argues that the Safavi garden could take many forms, just as it served many different purposes. Jean-Do Brignoli, who examines the vast royal gardens of Farahabad adjacent to Isfahan, also doubts the significant presence of the chahar bagh in Safavi Iran: axial orientation was the dominant mode, but it did not necessarily lead to a four-part organization. Gardens and palaces were deeply interrelated, and the garden dominated the architectural space. They were garden palaces rather than palaces adorned with gardens.

It was in Mughal India that the chahar bagh came into full form, closely associated with the dynasty and frequently rendered as a geometric landscape centered on a tomb. We find it brilliantly expressed in the tomb of Humayun, begun in 1562. The dynasty cherished the Bahurumana, the memoirs of the first Mughal king, Humayun’s father Babur, and even its harshest reader notices that the emperor finds little good to say about India or about its pre-Mughal gardens. In her essay Ebba Koch presents Mughal gardens pre-
eminently as political expressions of the dynasty, and the geometric garden becomes a module in city and palace design. While the *chahar bagh* is the earliest garden form and is popular well into the eighteenth century, there are other garden types, notably the terraced Shalimar gardens seen in Kashmir and Lahore, and waterfront gardens like the *Taj Mahal*. In his essay James Wescott examines the politics of water and the relationship between the *Taj Mahal* and the Mahtab Bagh across the Jumna river.

The other great Islamic empire, the Ottoman sultanate, promoted gardens across its vast territory. Its finest painter, Matrakci, accompanied Sulayman II on his 1533–36 military campaign into Iraq and Iran, and depicted gardens in both countries. A century later, the great Ottoman traveler, Evliya Celebi, began journeys that were to conclude forty years later and, as the Turkish scholar Nurhan Atasoy demonstrates, described not only many notable gardens but even individual plants. Evliya was keenly aware of the economic value of garden produce, and in his descriptions of Bursa and Istanbul also noted that hospitals and pharmacies could maintain impressive and useful gardens.

Since the gardens’ original hydraulic devices and plantings are no longer extant, in their essay Abdul Rehman and Shama Anbrine base their analysis on Mughal poets who praised the scents of flowers and blossoms, the song of birds, the beauty of running water, and the peacefulness of the physical environment. Literary sources also give us more precise Persian-language nomenclature: a tomb garden is a *raza*, a house garden is a *khana bagh* or a *pa’ in bagh*, an imperial garden is a *manasik gab*, while a paradise garden is a *fidarav* or *bibisht*. With their passion for gardens the Mughals also identified aromatic gardens (*bustan*), fruit gardens (*chaman*), rose gardens (*gulistan*), tulip gardens (*lalazar*), and meadows (*marghzar*), among others. All the features of gardens—blossoming shrubs, flowers, birds, water, light, and buildings—contributed to the overall experience. The garden was “an extraordinary place where the sensual encounter with nature invited an exalted overcoming of worldly experience” (232). Names for gardens, such as the *bagh-i bibisht* (paradise-like garden), reveal the abiding image of God as the archetypal gardener, and this association was strengthened by Nizam al-Din Awliya and other Sufis in fourteenth-century Delhi who spent much time in gardens and whose tombs were often situated in gardens.

The Islamic garden ideal in northern India was also taken up by the Hindu Rajputs. At least some of their formal gardens are as complex as Mughal gardens, though they did not carry the same connotations. Water usage underscores the differences. Muslims ritually washed face, hands, and feet before prayer, while Hindu worshippers immersed themselves in sacred water. While Mughal gardens expressed dynastic power and prestige, they also carried an image of paradise that was not part of Hindu belief. As Jennifer Joffee and D. Fairchild Ruggles point out, “though there are lush gardens for Rajput patrons and for their gods to inhabit, Hinduism did not adopt the concept of garden as paradise” (273).

Michel Conan’s collection of essays is a valuable contribution that focuses on individual aspects of the garden tradition. D. F. Ruggles’s insightful book, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes*, argues that gardens must be understood not only as images of paradise and symbols of political power, but in a wider context of landscape, agriculture, and water supply. Islamic gardens were meant to be viewed and understood in a specific environment, and her admirable volume is a study of such planned landscapes. It is clearly organized, concisely written, and richly illustrated with excellent photographs and plans. Of course the formal garden was an expression of power, particularly since it existed in marked contrast to the lands tilled by the peasantry, just as its architecture was at some variance from village buildings. Palace and garden were part of the same entity, in a space determined by the owner’s view. Among the most important aspects of Islam’s great building tradition, gardens were presented in more imaginative forms in literary sources. Names like *Hasib Behebebi* (Seven Paradises) and *Chehel Sutun* (Forty Columns) were applied not only to real palaces and gardens but also to imaginary ones.

Farming in the desert estates of eighth-century Syria depended upon the maintenance of existing aqueducts and the creation of new ones: accordingly, the *qanat* was widespread in Iran and the Middle East. Roman aqueducts in Andalusia remained in use and were a major component of the complex web of waterways that made Umayyad Spain’s wealth possible. Farming also depended upon the scientific knowledge of plants. As Ruggles points out, “the fact that there were so many written works on medieval Islamic botany, agriculture, and land management reveals the acute interest of farmers, scholars, and princes in the cultivated landscape” (38). But these texts seldom included information on the visual form of gardens, except for general references to formal gardens and meadow gardens. Floral and garden carpets suggest that garden plants and flowers may have been cultivated in soil as much as half a meter below the pavement and were accordingly meant to be seen from above. In the finest princely gardens there could even be elaborate automata for distribution of water and other liquid refreshments.

While the *chahar bagh* design predates Islam, it was not the dominant garden form, nor was it necessarily an image of paradise. One of the most famous Quranic references to the paradise garden is in 48:5: “That [Allah] may bring the believing men and the believing women into Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide, and may remit from them their evil deeds—That, in the sight of Allah, is the supreme triumph.” Neither this Quranic citation nor others describe the actual layout of the gardens. Lacking such descriptions, Muslim religious authorities did not consider mosque gardens, like that at the Great Mosque of Cordoba, to be images of paradise. It is likely that such gardens were intended to provide fruits and vegetables for the faithful and revenue for the mosque.

Sadly, the great tradition of Islamic garden architecture is in decline. Not just the *chahar bagh* but also gardens based on other geometric patterns have all but vanished. A few, like the gardens of the Alhambra and the reconstituted *chahar bagh* of Humayun’s tomb in Delhi, have
have been preserved and now suggest past glories that served the needs of rulers, poets, artists, and sufis, among others. One of the most elaborate contemporary projects is the vast al-Azhar park and garden in Cairo, a successful reclamation project and congregational blend of playground, restaurants, green grass and flowers, and places to stroll. But it has much more in common with nineteenth- and twentieth-century urban parks and gardens in Europe and North America than with the walled paradises of Islamic history that are so effectively examined in these two important publications.

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Note

Christine Smith and Joseph F. O’Connor
Building the Kingdom: Giannozzo Manetti on the Material and Spiritual Edifice
Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, and Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006 (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Volume 317), 518 pp., 24 illus. $95.00 (cloth), ISBN 0866983627

If Sixtus V can be said to have left his personal imprint on the cityscape of Rome more systematically than any Renaissance pope before him, then arguably it was Nicholas V who did the most to lay the groundwork. 1 Tourists today can easily recognize the stellar plan of Sistine Rome in the long radiating avenues terminated by vertiginous obelisks. In the case of Niccoline Rome, the evidence is less physical than literary, much of it composed by prelates in epideictic prose. Several early Christian monuments—San Teodoro, Santo Stefano Rotondo, and San Lorenzo fuori le Mura among them—were partially restored. As for the basilica of St. Peter’s and the Trevi Fountain, the later history of these monuments has obscured almost entirely the contributions of Nicholas. And much the same is true for the Vatican palace, where only the defensive ramparts, now nestled behind the Porta de’ Palafrenieri, give testimony to his extensive campaign to modernize the urban fabric of the Borgo district. To judge from his secretary and biographer, Giannozzo Manetti, this pope’s ambitions were just as far-reaching as those of Sixtus—less “to edify and educate,” as Christine Smith and Joseph F. O’Connor point out, “than to impress and even intimidate” (251). The pontificate of Tommaso Parentucci lasted eight years, scarcely longer than that of Felice Peretti. Nonetheless, as popes they were equally autocratic. Most telling, the execution of their respective master plans were put in the hands of men known more for their engineering than architectural expertise: Bernardo Rossellino and Domenico Fontana.

To assess the importance of Nicholas’s patronage, architectural historians have rightly shifted their focus to the experimental and tentative nature of the design process in mid-quattrocento Rome. Architects were treading on terra incognita: their bold innovations, cloaked in the new style all’antica, had not been fully tempered. Buildings failed, like the great Torrione inside the Vatican complex. Critics attacked the new forms for their lack of structural integrity. Projects got rebuilt, and so an architectural language evolved through trial and error. As Smith and O’Connor’s study shows, the situation was not much different for contemporary humanists. Texts were routinely presented to one patron, then rescinded or retracted, and redeployed to another—most notably in the case of Alberti’s De re aedificatoria. For this reason, the reception of new ideas—even those grounded in classical literature—was as mutable as the courts in which these humanists circulated.

The authors center their study around three of Manetti’s Latin texts: a firsthand account of the ceremonies surrounding the consecration of Florence cathedral on the feast of the Annunciation, 25 March 1436; and more extensively, book II and book III of the Vita Nicolai Quinti, treating the achievements of his pontificate and his testament, respectively. Just as the archbishop of Florence, Antonino Pierozzi, concerned himself with the religious imagery of painters, so Manetti does not refrain from describing architectural marvels such as Brunelleschi’s soaring cupola and the stained-glass oculi in the tambour below. Manetti’s symbolic reading of the Duomo largely rehearses the writings of Durandus of Mende, a thirteenth-century theologian, and St. Augustine. The authors provide Latin texts and translations of De pompis and De gestis in the appendix. 2 Dissecting Manetti’s vocabulary, the editors reveal how Manetti framed his visual and spatial understanding of the built environment within the context of Holy Scripture. Admittedly, this is not the picture of a discriminating observer, but of a critic who saw the need to defend the magnificence of his patron by ornamenting his argument with references to Biblical tradition—specifically, the archetypal temple of King Solomon. 3

Ironically, Manetti arrived in Rome at the behest of Nicholas only in 1453, so that he had but two years to witness the sweeping changes underway before the pope’s death in 1455. This has left scholars to debate whether the Vita is to be interpreted as an Apologia addressed to Nicholas’s critics, who objected to his megalomaniac tendencies, or as a series of guidelines laid out for his successor, Calixtus III. (The authors subscribe to this latter view.)

Although Smith and O’Connor have produced a near seamless book, the chapters follow different themes, alternating between textual exegesis and architectural ekphrasis. It is where these intersect that the discussion is most illuminating.

Manetti recognized Nicholas’s two greatest achievements as the collection of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew manuscripts, today the core of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana that is housed in the wing of Sixtus V, and the rebuilding of St. Peter’s. Nicholas deliberately patterned his library on that of Ptolemy II Philadelphus at Alexandria, as Manetti states, and O’Connor considers what this might signify in terms of the balancing of classical (pagan) and Judaeo-Christian texts. Given Manetti’s level of architectural literacy, Smith conjectures that he would have relied on graphic representations, such as the Ptolemaic maps disseminated through the workshop of Piero del Massaio, in