

Giuseppe Squillace, *Gli inganni di Cleopatra. Fonti per lo studio dei profumi antichi*, Leo S. Olschki Editore, Firenze 2022, pp. 191.

The book under review is another publication by Italian researcher Giuseppe Squillace on perfume in antiquity. The work, with the intriguing title *Gli inganni di Cleopatra. Fonti per lo studio dei profumi antichi* [*Cleopatra's deception. Sources for the study of ancient perfumes*], recently published by the Leo S. Olschki publishing house, is a collection of source texts providing information on perfumes, fragrances, scents, and aromas used in antiquity. We learn about their use in everyday life, not only in cosmetics or medicine, but also in... the cuisine.

The author divides the collected material into fifteen chapters of different lengths and provides each of them with a short introduction of only a few sentences. Thus, we receive the necessary explanations and do not lose sight of the most important thing, namely, the source text, which, depending on the author or the character described in it, takes us to ancient Egypt, Greece or Rome.

In the first chapter of the book, we find texts by Lucan, Plutarch and Macrobius. These authors describe Cleopatra's "wiles" that helped her win over the most important men of her time. Therefore, we learn, among other things, about a banquet with a pearl or sails exuding a beautiful scent.

In the following chapters, Squillace recalls the myths described, a.o., by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, and the works of, for example, Theophrastus, Pliny the Elder, and Dioscorides, who devoted some attention to scents and aromas. We learn from them about the perfumes or fragrance oils used at the time. The authors reveal the techniques of the perfumers of the time but, unfortunately, as a rule, do not provide the exact recipe for obtaining the scents. Thanks to the descriptions by Theophrastus in *De odoribus* or Pliny the Elder in *Naturalis Historia*, we can almost smell the wafting scent of various kinds of flowers, resins, and spices. We learn that fashionable scents already existed at that time as well as their division into women's and men's fragrances (pp. 129-131) and pungent, strong, weak, sweet, and heavy (p. 30).

Chapter 7 of this book is dedicated to the ingredients from which perfumes and fragrant oils were obtained. The main source for this part of the book is Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*, but there is also one excerpt from Galena's *De antidotis* (pp. 53-95). Among the ingredients mentioned there, pepper, ginger, clove, myrrh, rose, crocus, and saffron are described.

Squillace does not confine himself to citing excerpts that describe the techniques of making particular perfumes and fragrant oils but includes sources explaining who used them and how. We learn a lot from them about the habits and everyday life of the people of that time. The use of fragrances or oils was not always perceived in a positive way as an expression of concern for hygiene or health. The works of some authors, such as Plautus, Cicero, Martialis, and Juvenalis, show that perfumes and covering the body with fragrances were also a cause for jokes or contempt. Women using them are described as fallen, and men demoralised (pp. 119-127).

The eighth chapter of the book under review contains several medical formulas. As his source, Squillace indicates Dioscorides' *De materia medica*, which was very popular for many centuries. In the first book of his treatise, this author, who lived in the time of Nero, discusses

fragrant oils such as rose, quince, or cinnamon. He describes the necessary ingredients, how the oils are prepared, and their healing properties.

In the following chapters of the book, the author presents sources providing information on the aromas used during various religious, state or family celebrations. We also learn where they could be purchased. In Athens, perfumes were mainly sold in the market, and in Rome, in Vicus Tuscus and Vicus Thurarius, as mentioned by Plautus and Horace, among others.

There is no doubt that the book prepared by Squillace is well thought out. The collected sources introduce the reader to the rituals, customs, and daily life of the inhabitants of ancient Greece and Rome, in particular. A great advantage of this publication is the inclusion of excerpts from the works in Italian and in original Greek and Latin, thanks to which it can be used not only by Italian-speaking readers. Most of the sources necessary to study the subject of perfumes, scents and aromas collected in one place can be of great help to researchers working on it. Moreover, the maps of the ancient world attached at the end of the book show how far the fragrant ingredients travelled, and the photographs present the appearance of some of the raw materials and items described in the texts.

This publication indicates the use of aromas on various levels of life. Knowing the scent of myrrh or incense, we can imagine what kind of aroma ascended in temples, streets, markets, lupanars or houses of ancient Greece and Rome.

*rec. Anna Głusiuk*