

The Effect of Designed Green Spaces on the Changing Transylvanian Landscape

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Introduction, Historical Retrospective

THE EARLIEST evidence of the great renaissance of the 15th century in Transylvania could be seen in religious paintings with natural backgrounds. Around the Saviour and Saints, a natural background was painted very realistically by painters—so naturally that they placed biblical scenes in central and northern European locations. Instead of palm trees, they painted gardens specific to these landscapes (*Figs. 1, 2*).

If we survey the shrine paintings of this century, we find old vineyards and orchards where gardens can be observed in the background. Wall paintings represent simple gardens in the Middle Ages with hedges, apple trees and dandelions surrounded by grass, indicating that these gardens were rather neglected. Gardening in this period was characterized by wild and untended areas between the trees, as it was

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Fig. 1. The first Transylvanian religious painting containing a natural background



Fig. 2. Religious painted gardens specific to Transylvanian landscapes

considered that this would not substantially influence its function (Stirling 1996).

Transylvania needed no foreigners to create garden art in this period, as is illustrated by the fact that these traditions can already be found to have existed as early as the sixteenth century. Green space design was not carried out based on a model; instead, it was developed according to the characteristics of the landscape and the climate conditions.

Peasant Gardens

THE EXISTENCE of peasant gardens, or kitchen gardens, is shown in documents as early as the thirteenth century. In general, the main plant cultures were garlic, red onion, chilli, poppy and herbs to which therapeutic effects were attributed. People in this area learned gardening and planting from monks, who were the first growers. Details were recorded about scented and perfumed herbs, even in the legends of the heathen period.

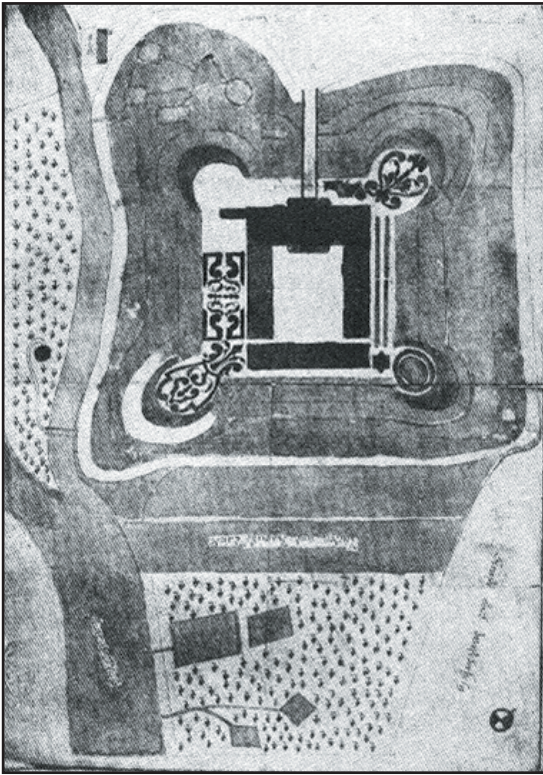


Fig. 3. Example of decorative garden found in royal castles

chromatic beauty. This was in contrast to ancient gardening, of which the sole objective was harvest quantity. A further requirement of the new gardening art in Transylvania was the cult of the plants, which appeared later than the animal cult but was more persistent.

Royal Gardens

EVIDENCE OF the presence of royal gardens near castles, fortresses and common houses did not appear until around the sixteenth century. On the lower hills of the villages, massive buildings were built and protected by strong walls, but gardens were also created outside the walls. Decorative gardens existed only in royal cities and castles. King Matthias Corvinus was the first to introduce luxury, which took effect in decorative gardens and parks as well. The

Our predecessors cured themselves with herbs, to which magical forces were attributed, and even prepared balms. Evidence shows that in the Christian period they secretly brought sacrifices with these plants to their gods (e.g., the legend of Bálványos fortress), thus it is possible that they grew these plants in their gardens.

However, the new gardening needed some order, especially straight lines and arithmetical rules. This element was inserted into the Transylvanian gardening as a first artistic requirement, and those who were first to have developed this most elementary knowledge must have observed the disorder and mess.

Besides the arithmetical punctuality of the line, gardening also had another requirement, namely the recognition of formal and

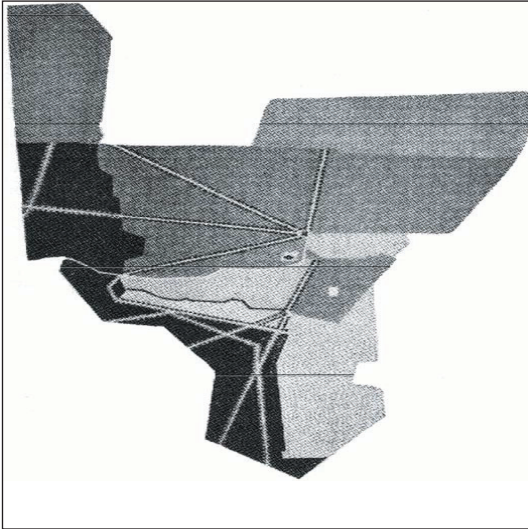


Fig. 4. Example of Italian style garden from 16th century Transylvanian castles

character of the gardens was influenced mainly by the Italian style, followed by the French style (Figs. 3, 4) and later by the English style (Fig. 5).

The French style park in Gornești was developed in 1792 by András Mayerhoff on the orders of Count József Teleki. The garden was created independently from the castle and it differs greatly from other gardens in Transylvania.

The Bonțida French park style dates back to the period after 1750, and was conducted by Johann Eraras on the orders of Count Dénes Bánffy. On the west side of the castle, one can distinguish four lines

of linden trees starting from a bridge, almost one thousand feet in length. The outside of the castle was ornamented with hunting men and artificial caves.

The English style later became dominant in gardens. This was of major importance, as people began to plant new trees brought from abroad—locust trees, Canadian poplars, American whip trees and other species, which appeared for the first time in the gardens of the aristocracy. We could say that the English style of gardening was an attempt to afforest places without trees, where local trees could not take root easily.

However, these garden styles were later transformed throughout Transylvania. For example, the garden of Bonțida was transformed by Count József Bánffy, who followed the plans designed by János László in 1831. He ordered the cutting of three-fourths of the interior of the three boulevards, and he surrounded the castle with crooked roads and disparate artificial layers of bushes and flowers. The detailed plan showed designs for the park, according to which an old fishing house, memorials, a church of loneliness, a pan church, fountains, flag hermitage, botanical gardens, a fruit dryer, a place for beekeeping, an obelisk and a sun-dial would have ornamented the garden.

The Gornești French park was transformed by József Teleki, Jr. into an English park as at the beginning of the last century, and this is what Rohbock etched later.

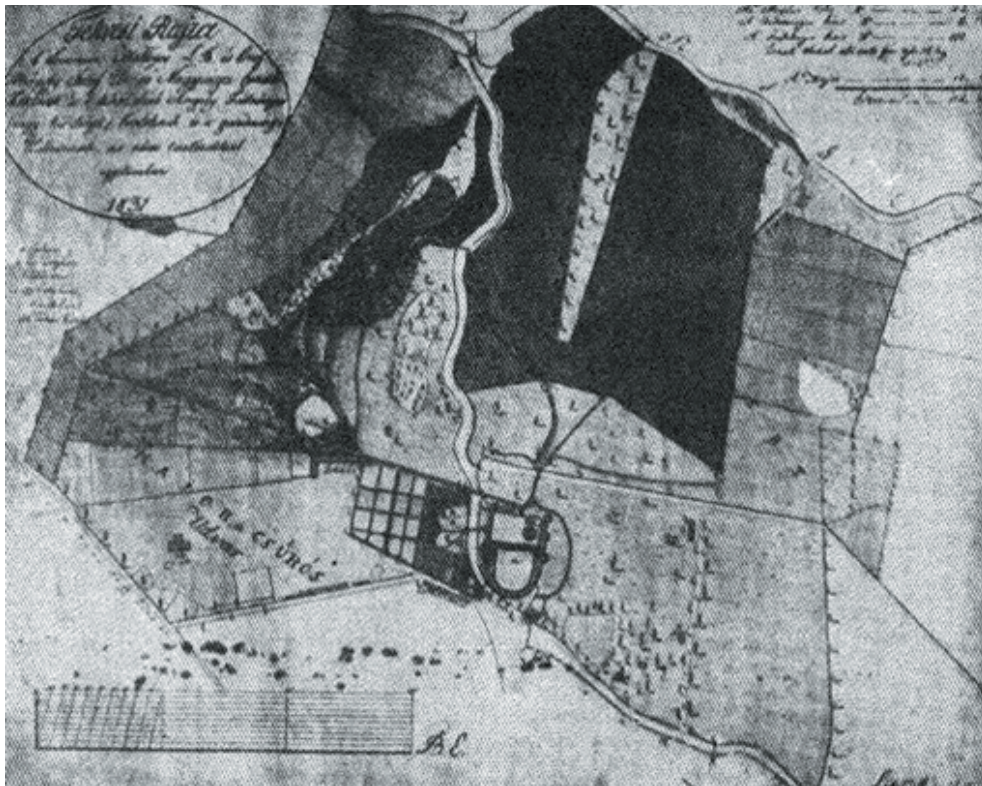


Fig. 5. English style garden from 16th century Transylvanian castles

Monastery Gardens

SMALL GARDENS near monasteries and plots cultivated with medicinal plants will be transformed later into flower gardens with roses. Let us remember that roses and lilies were considered medicinal plants in medieval gardens. These gardens would be known as gardens of herbs in spite of the aforementioned changes and their transformation into botanical gardens.

A similar arrangement can be observed in the garden of St. Gallen Monastery, where a huge garden extends along both sides of the building. In the garden of the center-court, we can see a linear system of four rays in a square; at the intersection of the four lines there is a small circle in which we can see the inscription of the *Savina a Juniper* species. The small square which occupies the center of the court is actually the juniper. The main courtyard laid out by this plan is in fact the first court-garden in Central Europe. A square similar to these central circles can be seen in the courtyard of each house, and it is clear everywhere that the same thing symbolizes the tables of the lawn, trees, and probably groups of fruit trees (which received the status of decorative plants in the meantime).

These abovementioned monastery plans suggest an artistic system of gardens composed of vegetable and herb gardens as well as orchards. The monks of St. Gallen had intended the above plan to be the model for construction; however it was applied only partially, due to the peculiarities of the local landscape. This landscape divergence resulted in a great variation of the Central European monasteries in spite of their similar plans (Nagy 1973).

Cemetery Gardens

IN SOME distinct parts of the monastery gardens we can observe cemeteries from the early Middle Ages. They were similar to today's cemeteries with lined knolls, trees and a decorated place in the middle.

In past centuries, people tried to bury their neighbours near churches and, if it was possible, even under the church. The upper class actually often built churches only for this purpose. Later, for health reasons, they moved the graves outside the city walls. The period of outside and systematic cemeteries began in Transylvania in the eighteenth century. At first they were very rudimentary, surrounded only by hedges or trees, and in some cases only by a simple groove. In the Middle Ages, fruit trees were planted in cemeteries and the area was entirely covered in grass, which was taken care of regularly. This is the reason why these cemeteries were called gardens of the past centuries (Goodchild 2003).

The Házsongárd cemetery (at present the central cemetery of Cluj-Napoca) was a vineyard located in the southern part of Cluj-Napoca city, and was investigated by employees and students of the University of Cluj under the leadership of János Eder in 1782. The greater part of the map is full of "Vitis," whereas in the middle part an orchard can be observed banked by a stream on one side. Ornamental plants replaced the fruit trees and flowers. Only when the decorative gardens and the crop-providing gardens began to be distinguished from each other did people start thinking that cemetery gardens should be converted into ornamental gardens. The first cemetery of this type is Házsongárd, where the gardening competes with sculpture (Galavics 2000).

Conclusions

GARDEN RESEARCH in Transylvania does not have comparable traditions to similar sciences in other countries, and this is especially true for Transylvanian garden art, which is highly neglected. There is also a great lack of park investigation and restoration in the botanical and dendrological sense.

My overall aims here were not only to present the evolution and actual stages of the designed green spaces of Transylvania, but also to start a revitalization and protection plan for conserving these gardens together with other historically important constructions and monuments.

As it has been shown, the natural landscape played a significant role in designed green space evolution throughout Europe. In Transylvania, models for constructions were applied only partially because of the local landscape characteristics. This landscape divergence resulted in the great variation in Transylvanian and Central European designed gardens and green spaces (Alföldy 2003).

Considering the botanical and monumental value of these spaces, as well as the possibility of utilization for social and/or cultural purposes, it would be judicious to set up in Romania one Restoration Committee for Designed Green Spaces, as it has been done in many EU countries.



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Abstract

The Effect of Designed Green Spaces on the Changing Transylvanian Landscape

The purpose of this article is to present the effect of various gardens (peasant, castle, monastery and cemetery) on the evolution and composition of the Transylvanian landscape, along with other historical changes. The influence of these green spaces was very significant for the landscape structure and design in the region. Garden research in Transylvania does not have comparable traditions to similar sciences in other countries, and this is especially true for Transylvanian garden art, which is highly neglected. Park investigation is also non-existent, and restoration in the botanical or dendrological sense cannot even be discussed yet.

Keywords

cemetery gardens, historic gardens, royal gardens, Transylvania