

THE "PROMENADE ARCHITECTURALE" FROM A LANDSCAPING PERSPECTIVE

PROMENADA ARHITECTURALĂ DIN PERSPECTIVĂ PEISAGISTICĂ

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Abstract. *This paper aims to address, from a landscaping perspective, an idea that has crossed the history of ideas - from ancient Rome, through Renaissance, and to Le Corbusier: the idea of 'promenade architecturale', of axes, predetermined perceptions, and carefully elaborated dramatic scenographies. The research is based on historical evolution and uses as examples ancient Roman structures, like the sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia in Palestrina, a temple complex whose overall compositional structure supports and demonstrates the influence theory of ancient models on the Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque garden design in Western Europe.*

Key words: *promenade architecturale, scenography, axiality, baroque.*

Rezumat. *Lucrarea de față își propune abordarea din punct de vedere peisagistic a unei idei care a traversat istoria, începând cu Roma antică, trecând prin Renaștere și poposind glorios în arhitectura lui Le Corbusier: ideea de "promenadă arhitecturală", de axe, parcururi și perspective predeterminate, de spectacol prestabilit și scenografie atent elaborată. Cercetarea se bazează pe un parcurs istoric general și este susținută apoi prin analiza unor structuri antice romane, precum sanctuarul Fortunei Primigenia din Palestrina, a cărui structură compozițională generală susține și demonstrează ideea influențelor, în parcursul istoric, asupra organizării grădinilor renascentiste, manieriste și baroce din Europa de Vest.*

Cuvinte cheie: *promenadă arhitecturală, scenografie, axialitate, baroc.*

INTRODUCTION

The ancient Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia in Palestrina, near Rome, one of the largest religious complexes built by the Romans, is composed of a series of seven terraces connected by stairs and ramps, a two-dimensional pyramid made of concrete, perfectly adapted to the natural ground slopes, and complying to a rigorous symmetry and axiality, while emphasizing the ascensional character of what we shall call, in this paper, a "promenade architecturale", borrowing the term from the twentieth century French architect Le Corbusier. The justification of the term stems from the scenographic quality of the sanctuary. Ancient Romans had a predilection for spectacular vistas and fabulous locations, and left nothing to the accidental, not even the spatial perceptions, thus organizing, predetermining and modulating spatial experiences, a model later taken on by Renaissance,

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Mannerist and Baroque architects and artists, the terraces and the ramps becoming extensions of the villas and palaces into the adjacent gardens.

When Le Corbusier introduced the concept of “architectural promenade”, it was considered that the idea of movement in space was to become the guiding principle of a new and different architecture – not just movement in and through space, but an alternation between moving and resting, predetermined, controlled perspectives, experiencing a narrative construct whose architectural conclusion, the major architectural element of the complex, opens up towards the broadest perspective, reconnecting the dots and recomposing in one image the journey and the spectacular natural setting.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

When researching the art of gardening in Europe, mainly Italy, the ancient documents are of inestimable value, as well as ancient Roman ruins, because they explicitly show the tradition embraced by Renaissance architects, lately to be transformed into more complex shapes by Baroque artists. Once the premise is established, research uses literature and archeological reviews, a historical method using primary sources, collecting data and interpreting it, and providing an empirical conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After the Roman Empire fell, Europe went through times of cultural stagnation which spared neither agriculture, nor the art of gardens. The memories of ancient Roman gardens vanished, and the tradition was lost. It was only during the 9th century that the interest in the aesthetic qualities of nature witnessed a rebirth. Monks were among the first ones to rediscover the culture and art of horticulture, drawn from the ancient treaties preserved in the monastic libraries, an activity that will remain bound to their interior gardens like a well-kept secret, and used for their own benefit or for that of a powerful ruler (Mosser and Teyssot G., 1991).

Towards the middle of the fifteenth century, the suburban villa with garden, designed in accordance with the indications contained in the ancient Roman treaties, became the predominant type. The treaty *De re aedificatoria* (Leon Battista Alberti, 1485), which was resuming the canons of the ancient classical architecture (Pliny the Younger, 1858- ed; Vitruvius, 1914- ed.), was to become one of the fundamental texts for the development of Renaissance architecture and town planning. Alberti emphasized the importance of choosing the correct location for a new residence, preferring hilly areas with spectacular views, an optimal orientation towards the cardinal points, and exposed to the sun and to the salubrious action of the eight winds. Regarding gardens, he was recommending the *ars topiaria*. The enclosed and compact character of medieval architecture was decomposed through the use of loggias, terraces and stairs featuring spectacular vistas. Gardens were thus becoming the materialization of an art, the art of transitioning from the built environment to the surrounding landscape.

The profound religious schism caused by the Reformation, as well as the process of power reunification and the recomposing of feudal territorial fragmentation already begun in the fifteenth century, had created favorable conditions for the sixteenth century to become a time of European cultural and political renewal. This century will witness a new revival of classical art and architecture, and Rome shall be the converging point of such activities, especially during the first two decades. A new language will evolve, sprang from the reevaluation of the ancient orders and from the complex spatial organizations based on axial symmetries, in a reinterpretation of the typological models of Greek and Roman classicism. The garden becomes the ideal place to celebrate ancient culture, embracing the values of a glorious and intellectualized civilization whose memory was present in the form of ruins scattered across the entire Italian landscape. It is an ulterior development of humanistic thinking, strongly expressed through human controls over nature, in the shape of landscape design. The garden becomes the expression of the creative and organizing energy of the lord of the land, expressed through axial perspectives and panoramic views over the landscape, open transitional spaces in which the inside and the outside become a unified whole.

Although the Roman and Florentine regions are the richest in landscape art manifestations, in the sixteenth century villas and gardens are built throughout the entire Italian territory. In the second half of the century, the Genoese Republic, under the leadership of Andrea Doria, enjoyed a period of great economic prosperity manifested especially by the advent of many villas surrounded by beautiful gardens, molded on the typical, rugged Ligurian landscape, offering great views and panoramas. In 1543, Andrea Doria commissions Antonio Montorsoli for the Palazzo Doria garden project. The gardens, located on a gently sloping area overlooking the sea, are composed of many overlapping terraces. The composition is developed on a central axis with a series of fountains, pergolas and flower beds framed by green hedges. The terraces are so well-suited to the rugged terrain, that they became a constant all over Genoa. The Villa, a compact element, opens to the sea through the loggias on the ground floor, and towards the mountain through those of the piano nobile, and is surrounded by extensive gardens in both directions, the result being a scenography with strong visual impact, dictated by the landscape conditions (Mader and Neuber-Mader, 1987). A strict geometry organizes the succession of terraces and ramps of stairs linking them, highlighting and emphasizing axuality and the emergence of the Villa from the garden. The garden adopts less rigid and schematic shapes, while keeping Renaissance's straight lines, but adding to them elliptical, circular and diagonal ones, introducing a variety of new perspectives. Dramatic effect becomes predominant; the entire complex of the Villa and the garden is designed and built in close connection to the natural environment, integrating a part of the surrounding landscape and highlighting the dramatic elements – the play of terraces at different heights, fountains, and vegetation.

The fragmentation of the small states of Italy, a phenomenon also encountered in Germany, impeded the adoption of the ample French garden designs. Throughout the century, the gardens that are being designed are still fairly reduced in dimensions, following Mannerist compositions, even though in the North, the French model will increasingly impose itself in the second half of the century. The specific geomorphologic conformation of Italy, as well as the reduced availability of water, resulted in a clear predominance of the architectural element.

Perhaps the most significant example of Italian Baroque landscaping splendor is represented by the gardens of Isola Bella on Lago Maggiore (fig. 2-3), a lacustrine structure transformed into a garden at the request of Count Carlo III Borromeo (Grimal, 1987, Fariello, 1967). Completed in 1670, the island is a completely artificial structure developed on several levels, a floating garden composed of architectural elements, terraces, statues, railings and stairs with precise shapes and strong theatrical connotations, a pyramid structure composed of ten terraces descending towards the lake, overcrowded with niches, statues and trees, a composition whose sole purpose was to inspire awe and admiration.



Fig. 2 - Isola Bella, aerial view and detail of the parterre

http://ades.dicar.units.it/01_progetti/proj_103/img/giaridno_barocco.pdf



Fig. 3 - View towards the stairs inside the garden

http://ades.dicar.units.it/01_progetti/proj_103/img/giaridno_baroc

In Tuscany, in the case of the Villa Garzoni in Collodi (fig. 4 - 5), the Baroque garden are developed vertically, adjusting to the conformation of the

ground and creating an impressive scenographic composition, but in this case off centre with the architectural object. At the entry level there is a parterre decorated with green embroideries and two fountains. The slope is cut in an orderly succession of terraces that visually enhance the ascensional quality of the composition (Vannucchi, 2003).



Fig. 4 - View over the Garzoni gardens. Perspective towards the entrance.
(http://ades.dicar.units.it/01_progetti/proj_103/img/giaridno_barocco.pdf)



Fig. 5 - The ramps and stairs composition inside the garden with emphasis on symmetry and axiality
(http://ades.dicar.units.it/01_progetti/proj_103/img/giaridno_barocco.pdf)

CONCLUSIONS

The “architectural promenade”, key-term of the modernist architecture language, is superior to the one of “movement”, of a passing through space, because it provides different sensorial experiences, unexpected and spectacular. Stricto senso, it is a journey, but both the Corbusian understanding of the term, as well as in its ancient architectural expression, the “promenade” reflects the initiation character of architecture. The successive terraces connected by ramps give an illusion of infinity, a universe designed according to a rigorous geometry, and having an inherent ontological structure. The experience of the space depends on the interdependence of the built and natural environments - in the case of the Renaissance and Baroque gardens, and the relations between the structure of the villa and the succession of terraces opening it towards the landscape.

The architectural promenade is an itinerary to be followed, a “travel” investing the architectural object with a seemingly infinite variety of perceptions. Thus, the promenade is the synergic manifestation of a spatially dynamic experience whose value is more significant than the sum of the effects the separate elements of the ensemble might have. The ramps become a spectacle of pure form and space, a design in space-time.

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