

Landscape Architecture in the Recreational Parks and Botanical Gardens of Athens: a Historical Preview. The Cases of Royal Garden, Hasseki's Farm, Eptalofos and Zappeion Gardens

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Abstract: This paper aims to make a historical and landscape architectural preview of the recreational parks and botanical gardens of 19th century in Athens which were part of the “greenery” vision of Amalia, the first Queen of Greece. The Queen cooperated with architects, botanologists and gardeners and followed certain principles and European movements like the German Romantic Historism for their formulation. The Royal Garden, known today as National Garden, the Hasseki's Farm, Eptalofos land and the Zappeion Gardens are Amalia's main projects, through which she tried to contribute to the development of liberated Greece.

Key-Words: Romantic Historism, Royal Garden, Hassekis' Farm, Eptalofos, Zappeion Gardens

1 Introduction

After the liberation of Athens from the Turkish rule in 1833 the Royal Estate has promoted western landscape design visions alien to the Greek natural environment. The aridity, desolation and neglect of the Attic landscape didn't offer recreational areas and activities to the citizens. Queen Amalia determined the future of the district around the Royal House as an area for recreational uses with an especial charm.

2 German Romantic Historism in Landscape Architecture. The case of the “greenery” vision of Amalia

While the search for national identity was one of the mainsprings of German Neo-Classicism, the Sturm und Drang movement of 1760-1780 and the establishment of the *jardin anglais* also played important parts. Both incorporated the validity of Greek architecture as the ideal of freedom, truth and humanity. Both were based on the discovery of truth through sensibility. In the picturesque landscaped garden Goethe saw the approach of a Golden Age, in which the humanistic ideals of the Greeks would be symbolized in temples and classical structures. While paying tribute to the classical ideal, the Sturm und Drang movement as

well as the ensuing Romantic movement, transformed nationalist sentiment into a political plea [1].

Worlitz park in German, the first picturesque park of romantic movement, was widely known and admired for its novelty. The park with its numerous exotic garden buildings, is a combination of influences from English gardens. The most surprising features are the Rousseau island, the Stein, a bizarre man made cone of rocks, a model farm and a cast-iron bridge.

Queen Amalia von Oldenburg (Fig.1), aided by expert advice, tried to develop her vision to promote these central European urban landscaping schemes to Athenian terrain.

The Royal Garden [2,3], Hasseki's Farm and the “Tour la Reine” or “Eptalofos” are her main “greenery” projects with aesthetic pleasures hitherto unknown in Greece. All of them have a character of an arboretum with aesthetic values of picturesque. The Royal Garden was densely planted with plants from both northern and southern Europe. Its extreme irregularity of plan and outline, the preservation of ancient monuments and the creation of romantic schemes like small farm houses, lakes, grotto, etc –nurtured on picturesque principles- give great pleasure to the eye. Hasseki's Farm and Eptalofos were developed in the one hand as model farms for a variety of cultivations,

and in the other hand as a natural environment of the romantic theory.



Fig. 1. Queen Amalia, the first queen of Greece.

3 Royal Garden

The layout of the present Royal Garden (Fig.2) was developed in 25 years (1837-1862). It has been the creation of a strong personality, Queen Amalia von Oldenburg, who had a strong personal interest in horticulture and arboriculture. Her parent had also a strong tradition in landscape architecture as her Father the Duke of Oldenburg had created the picturesque family gardens at Rastede and Eutin, according to the romantic trends of the time.



Fig. 2. Ground plan of Royal Garden.

The garden was conceived as an urban park *sui generis*, with a triple function as a Royal Garden, a public park and a Botanical garden [4]. It was freely designed as a miniature landscape garden, according to the German tradition of *Landschaftsgarten*, densely planted with a variety of plants from both northern and southern Europe. The rich flora is arranged according to English

style, adapted to the warm climate by an ingenious scheme of densely planted sections, thus creating an agreeable microclimate in the midst of the dry city.

In 1837, under the chairmanship of Nikolaus Fraas, Professor of Botany, Amalia began acquiring different types of plants from the Botanicos tree nursery and other parts of the country, especially Euboea. The garden was additionally enriched with plants from foreign countries, such as ornamental trees from Genoa [5]. Since 1839 the garden was systematically laid out, planted and developed under the direction of the Queen and the French landscape architect, Bareaud (fig.3). An account of the first interventions in the garden area is given in Amalia's letters to her father [6] including the embankment of plant soil, the opening up of wells, the conservation of Tsakoumatos' aqueduct and archaeological excavations [7]. The difficulties connected with irrigating the garden led Amalia to divert part of the water supply in order to water supply. During the excavations of 1839 fragments of statuary, inscriptions and foundations belonging to one or more Roman villas were found [8]. The ruins of the ancient glory has been preserved *in situ* or used to create a kind of paper landscape architecture since many of its details were copied from imaginary engravings. The development of routes eye sighting the ancient remnants and the configuration of a pergola upon the remnants of a mosaic of a roman villa was a product of a similar antiquarianism.

After the King and Queen had moved into the palace, in 1843, gradually the garden had been enlarged, extending from Vasilissis Sofias Avenue down to the Arch of Hadrian and from there to the ancient Stadium in the east. The proposed plan by French landscape architect Fr. Louis Bareaud was an unsurpassed creation [9].

The lay out of the contemporary garden confirms that the plan has been executed in a large scale. The general layout design, the network of roads and the most characteristic and surprising features of the picturesque design such as artificial lakes and fountains, pergolas, plateaus, grotta, etc. have been developed. Royal Garden with the maze of paths, the evergreen alleys, the clusters of shrubs, the green lawns and flower beds and the shady arbours had provided in Athenian soil amenities and aesthetics of the romantic picturesque movement [10].

Like in Worlitz park in Germany, several interesting buildings were build in the Royal Garden, important monuments of modern architectural heritage : Otto's Hunting Pavilion

(Pavilion de chasse) in gothic rural style, the neoclassical pavilion (now Botanical Museum) designed probably by E. Ziller, the glass made conservatory-propagation bed and some small rural buildings of central Europe tradition.

The “greenery” vision of Amalia caused controversy about the imposing of plants needed intensive irrigation on the one hand, and the intervention to the native natural environment with western agricultural traditions on the other. Contrary to the desolate and bare character of the landscape of that time, the visitors of the Royal Garden in 19th century discovered a new kind of artificial natural beauty. The modern architectural monuments of picturesque architecture were also surprising features amongst the classical remnants. Henry Miller wrote after his visit in the Royal Garden: *“It remains in my memory like no other park I have known. It is the quintessence of a park, the thing one feels sometimes in looking at a canvas or dreaming of a place one would like to be in and never finds”*.

4 Hasseki’s Farm

In the area of the Agronomy University of Athens on Hieria Odos lie the architectural remnants of the Voivode of Athens Hatzi-Ali’s mansion [11]. These ruins, along with the two buildings of the early Classicism of the Ottonian period and the perennials trees of the first Botanical Gardens of Greece, form an important ensemble of the landscape architecture and town planning history of Athens (Fig.3).

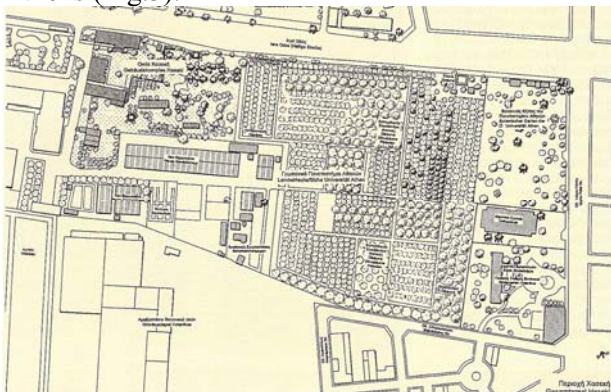


Fig. 3. Ground plan of Hasseki’s farm.

Since 1838 Hasseki’s farm started to operate under Royal Degree signed by her Majesty as a Tree Nursery under the chairmanship of Theodor von Heldreich. Amalia’s vision was to transplant different types of plants to the Athenian soil. With the supervision of professors from the University of Athens and specialists in horticulture and

arboriculture, the garden designed as a romantic park, additionally enriched with plants such as Euboa, mulberry Mura, etc. The gardens were designed in circular outlines leading to artificial lakes or fountains, small pavilions and clusters of trees.

Planting compartments and parterres had an irregular character. The incorporation of the new structures followed more formal and classical principles. From the former Hatzi-Ali’s Mansion, the nucleus of the entire ensemble, only a part has survived. The tower as a structure had a series of embrasures instead of windows in the ground floor, while its entrance, which was on the first floor, was accessible through a suspension bridge. According to the romantic antiquarianism Amalia preserved it along with other architectural remnants (fortification wall, Hasseki’s fountain), developing aesthetic pleasures of picturesque. Among the new structures, the most important features were the cistern – aqueduct of the architect Chr. Hansen, the garden pavilions and the first iron made greenhouse in Greece, similar to that of the Royal Garden.

The Ottonian buildings have been relatively recently restored and are presently used by the Agronomy University of Athens. The Old Greenhouse has been furnished with a new iron framework, a replica of the old one, and with modern equipment. Hassekis’ natural and built environment with the historic gardens and the Turkish remnants give a historic place of reference, in which elements of architecture and gardening of the 18th and 19th centuries are harmoniously combined.

5 Tour la Reine - Eptalofos

The land of Eptalofos is located in the fertile plain of Kifissos, at the western part of Attica, at the borders of current municipalities of Ag. Anargiroi and Ilion [12]. The property of 250 hectares (Fig.4) was bought with the prompt of Queen Amalia during the period 1848-1861, in order to create a resort for the Royal Couple in a picturesque landscape, which could be used as a model for the development and improvement of agricultural and stock production of Greece. Eptalofos is part of the cultural and modernizing proposal of Amalia for Greece through which she could express her European cultural influence [13,14,15]. Amalia gave the name Eptalofos (Seven Hills) to the property because it is consisted of seven hills (six

natural and one artificial)¹. Each hill has the name of an Argonaut (Jason, Polydeuces, Kastor, Theseus, Hercules, Orpheus, Pileus).



Fig. 4. Eptalofos with the palace Tour la Reine at the background and the houses of the gardeners at the foreground.

The palatial gardeners Friedrich Schmidt and Luis Pierre Bareaud helped to the creation of the farmstead. The natural environment of Eptalofos is also connected to the German's type garden-landscape (LandschaftsGarten) which is characterized by the freely curvilinear mapping of the roads and the arrangement of the trees in clusters. Emphasis was given on the promotion of the Mediterranean romantic garden-art with references in English and renaissance landscape architecture. Thousands of fructiferous and olive trees, 3700 mulberries trees and rare varieties of beautified plants from all over the world were planted. Imported seeds of wheat, cereals, cotton and silk were also cultivated in the farm land. The most modern agricultural machinery and equipment as well as a reaping machine of the McCormick Company were bought for the cotton and cereal cultivation. Schmidt and Bareaud opened a well for the adequate irrigation of the property and the breeding of the animals with clean water.

A lot of vineyards were extended on the hills. Eptalofos was known for the production of the red and white wine which was called "Tour la Reine". The wine was exported to Egypt and America. Very famous was also the vermouth "Torre".

The farm land constituted an innovative stock place with bull and sheep pens, pigsties, henneries and stables which were finished in 1850. There were 400 milking cows from England, Switzerland and Oldenburg (Germany), pigs, merino sheep,

¹ Constantinople is also known as Eptalofos because it was built on seven hills. Amalia wanted to a land which could remind the district of Constantinople. That's why she ordered the creation of the seventh hill.

hens and geese from India and Africa, doves, pheasants, giraffes and Arabic horses.

During the First Zappeian Olympic Games in 1859 various products of Eptalofos were displayed in the agricultural expedition and won the following awards: a) gold award for the quality of the bulls, cows, pigs and sheep, b) silver award for the quality of the corn, c) silver award for the world famous wine Tour la Reine, d) bronze award for the oats, the potatoes, the red and white beans.

The property of Eptalofos is consisted of the Swiss style gardeners' houses, which were built at the seven hills of the estate, and the Queen's Tower (Tour la Reine). The Tower, restored by Directorate of Restoration of Modern and Contemporary Monuments, is a unique monument of neogothic architecture in Greece, most likely work of F. Boulanger or Chr. Hansen (Fig.5). According to some researchers the Tour la Reine is a result of the repair of Williams' Mansion. The two storey building with the windows and towers of gothic style was constructed between 1851 and 1854 and it follows the European tradition of the *maisons de plaisance* [16].



Fig. 5. The palace Tour la Reine.

After King's Otto death in 1867, Queen Amalia sold the property to the baron Simon Sinas. Today the Queen's Tower and part of the land belong to the Serpieri family who continues the wine production. The rest of the estate (100 hectares) is comprised in the Environmental Park "Antonis Tritsis".

The Amalia's Tower at the Eptalofos Land is the best preserved project of the Queen. She increased the production and reinforced the competition of the Greek products in the international market, as she promoted the cultivation of certain plants and trees. The location of the Tower in a distinguished position at the land, the arrangement of gardens and trees, the curvilinear mapping of the routes, the cultivation of

certain plants make Eptalofos the best example of the romantic historicism in Greece.

6 Zappeion Gardens, a miniature version of French style park

The Zappeion Hall constitutes one of the leading monuments of the first Olympic Games of 1896 (Fig.6). The monument owes its existence to the generous contribution of the benefactors E. and K. Zappas, tradesmen from Labovo, and of the Committee of Olympic Bequests. In collaboration with the Greek Government the Committee of Olympic Bequests carried out the four Zappas' Olympics (1859, 1870, 1875 and 1888) combining sports with an industrial exhibition, a competition among producers of industrial or agricultural products and work of art. For the need of the Olympic exhibition the Zappeion Hall was built. The first drawings of F. Boulanger as they were rearranged by Th. Hansen compose one of the most magnificent works of Greek Neoclassicism, restored by the Directorate of Restoration of Modern and Contemporary Monuments for the 2004 Olympic Games.



Fig. 6. Zappeion Hall.



Fig.7. Zappeion Hall and its Gardens (photo from DAI)

The Zappeion Gardens around the exhibition hall, the second largest park in the city centre, extending from the Stadium at the east to the edge of the old town at the west are fairly large at 11.4 ha i.e two thirds of the surface of the Royal Garden (Fig.7) [17]. They are comprised by 83.000 square meters of planted area, 41.000 square meters of paved surfaces and 240 square meters of atriums and patios.

The first trees were planted in 1857. The wish of Zappas was to bring out the beauty of the idyllic and historical landscape of the Ilissos riverside area. At the first topographical layout of the area, where Zappeion Hall would have been established are presented the borders of the gardens between Royal Garden, Amalias and Vassilisis Olgas Avenues, and the properties of Professor Orfanidis, of the heritors of Hatzidimitriou and of the Duchess of Plakendia which should have been alienated. At the east side of the area were several creamery shops and the Protestant's Cemetery. The alienation of the properties fulfilled in 1914

Up until 1888 the site was almost barren land. In 1887 for the organization of the Forth Zappa's Olympics Theophilus Hansen did the planning and his French colleague Desire Matton executed it with some changes. The design, initially in French geometrical style, emphasized on two main axes. One is perpendicular to the main entrance of the exhibition hall, leading via wide steps to a large marble fountain in the centre of the flower beds, constructed by Ulen Company in the first decade of the 20th century (1931). The other, parallel to the building, links Amalias Avenue to the great esplanade in front of the Zappeion. The esplanade was designed as a monumental setting in front of the building. The layout rigid and geometrically formal was later redesigned in the free curved lines of the English garden. The planting was supervised by the Athenian agriculturist Antonios Schmitt, son of the Bavarian chief-gardener of the King's garden Friedrich Schmidt. The main avenues were designed by French engineer Kelleneck inspired by the Versailles' gardens. They have a considerable width and low planting leading the eye directly to the neighbouring urban districts. The openness and its large scale character create a successful transition to the spacious esplanades around the Olympeion and in front of the Stadium.

Since 1913 P. Basiakos, former Director of Hellenic Railways, as the director of the Zappeion gardens changed the first plan misshaping the style and the landscape architecture. The curved outlines of Kelleneck's plan changed in linear ones. In 1925 the distinguished sculptor G. Dimitriadis

completed the decoration of the gardens with waterworks, statues and cast-iron lamp posts.

For the irrigation of the gardens, the Olympia and Bequest Committee has utilized the canal of the public network and constructed a small dam and an engine-house. The irrigation of the garden was established in 1932 by the American Company Ulen, which was responsible for the construction of the Marathon Dam. To commemorate the inauguration of the Dam, Ulen donated the impressive fountain at the centre of the garden square.

In the grounds of Zappeion Gardens there are important monuments of Modern Greek sculpture, loaded with history and symbolisms, with an intense presence and a variety, representative as well as didactic. Typologically, almost all kinds are represented: statues, riding statues, statues in relation to a building, free composition, busts, and memorial compositions. Concerning theme coverage, a quite wide range is present: benefactors, philhellenes, intellectuals, poets, politicians, decorative sculptures. These are all works of the greatest Greek sculptors, such as Drosis, Kossos, Vroutos, G. Dimitriadis, Doukas, Filippotis, Tombros, K. Dimitriadis, and N. Mela. At the same time, they are works that express the evolution of Art, as well as its main currents: classicism, realism, romanticism, academism, modernism.

Since the arrangement of this recreational area the Zappeion terrace gently sloping southwards is one of the most popular places of social life in Athens accommodating cultural events, feasts such as Carnival, Anthesteria, etc., while the café "Aigli" constitutes up to now a place of meeting of Athenians. In 2005, the Olympia and Bequest Committee established the introduction of Organic Gardening methods, implementing the principles of Biological Agriculture.

7 Conclusions

There are two different attitudes on landscape treatment in the above mentioned recreational parks and gardens: The Royal Garden, the Hassekis' farm and Eptalofos are characterized by their freely, informal, irregular and romantic picturesque design. Zappeion Gardens pronounce symmetry with geometric patterns and rigid axis, a miniature version of French landscape architecture.

These artificial natural environments are places of historical references not only for the landscape architecture but also for the existence of

important monuments of architectural heritage of the 19th century. Various types of buildings are represented: exhibition hall, Gothic tower, greenhouses, pavilions, fountains, rural and breeders establishments. Concerning their architectural style a quite wide range of historic styles is promoted such as gothic revival, neoclassic, Swiss style, engineering architecture, etc.

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