RESEARCH OF AESTHETIC LANDSCAPE IN THE ROMAN GARDENS AND ANGLO SAXON GARDENS

CERCETĂRI ÎN ESTETICA PEISAJULUI LA GRĂDINILE ROMANE ŞI GRĂDINILE ANGLO SAXONE

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Abstract: *The Anglo-Saxon laws in Alfred's day (849-901) legislated for certain horticultural disputes. Most significant is the fact that vineyards received special attention; for vineyards entail a degree of skill in gardening which, in my belief, entitles us to assume that where there were vineyards there were orchards, vegetable, and herb gardens. '. . . Si quis damnum intulerit alterius vineae vel agro, vel alcui ejus terrae, compenset sicut quis illud aestivet.*

Key words: *roman gardens, landscape,, nature, surface*

INTRODUCTION

Rome, then, brought to Britain gardening of a kind devised in the Near East. There seems every reason to suppose that the gardens of Roman villas in Britain,, far from making use of the nature of English soil, climate and flora, were simply aridland gardens of the south and east Mediterranean type as adapted to Italian conditions. There was, for example, a terrace by the villa, overlooking the garden, and designed as an open-air dining room. It is true

Such small gardens were much cultivated by the monks and late Saxon England was rich in monasteries for not only was Edward a bigot if not a saint, but even the warlike Harold was a deeply religious man, as witness his Waltham Abbey. As for the Celtic part of these islands during the post-Roman pre-Norman centuries, there is evidence in plenty for orchards and it seems to me improbable that there would be orchards and no other kind of gardens whatever.

There is an ancient poem of Merddin the Caledonian which begins: 'To no one has been exhibited at one hour of the dawn what was shown to Merddin before he became aged, namely seven score and seven delicious apple trees, of equal age, length and size, which sprang from the bosom of mercy. One bending veil covers them over. They are guarded by one maid with crisped locks. Her name is Olwedd with the luminous teeth.' This Merddin was Judge of the North, and a bard, in the sixth century. In the same century St Teilo, bishop of Llandaff, crossing over to Armorica to spend some years with his erstwhile fellow-student bishop Samson of Dol, planted not a mere orchard but a whole forest of fruit trees; it is said to have extended over three miles. It still existed, known as the arboretum Teliavi et Samsonia five centuries later.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The two divergent tendencies in English gardening were as it happened strengthened by economic influences. Civilization, and therefore gardening, was born in parts of the world where physical difficulties offered such a challenge to man that he was forced to be inventive in order to survive. The earliest civilizations of which we have any knowledge are irrigation and terracing cultures; they arose not where conditions for food production were easy but where they were very difficult.

In the course of struggling to survive, the men of the Near East, who taught arts and laws to the rest of the Old World, learnt of necessity to impose order on the natural scene, to change it, to make it into something different. If civilization did not arise in these lands where soil was fertile, water plentiful, game abundant, it was because man is not willingly civilized; he is probably as happy as he is capable of being as a hunter-artist. The nature of the civilization which spread westward by way of Greece into western Europe was, so to speak, not really suitable to the terrain it invaded. Still, such was its radiant energy that it imposed itself.

Thus when the English had reached a stage of advancement such that they could begin gardening, the art of gardening which they received from the East had been contrived by men with no notion at all of a nature as gentle, as friendly to man, as generous in yielding sustenance, as that of north-west Europe. Nothing is more striking, in such early gardening books as those of Barnaby Googe for example, than the way in which instructions

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

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The Romans were the first people to make, or to have made, gardens In western Europe and therefore in Britain. But the Romans were not an inventive people; they had picked up their gardening, as they had picked up their other arts, from Greeks, Egyptians, Syrians. (The first good horticultural manual was, as a matter of fact, Carthaginian.) At least three other great schools of gardening developed in the world, but of them Europe knew nothing until the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries: gardening was a sophisticated art in China before, and probably very long before, the Roman Empire came into existence. Japanese gardening, brilliant derivative of

Chinese gardening was likewise very ancient. On the other hand, the remarkable gardening arts of the Maya-Toltec-Aztec civilization, and of the pre-Inca and Inca peoples of the western Andes, were young when we came upon them, even by European standards.

As everybody knows, Hampton Court was built and laid out by Cardinal Wolsey. As a fairly representative Renaissance prince of the Church, Wolsey's taste, like his diplomacy, was Italianate. But Hampton Court garden was certainly not Italianate as we now understand the word. It was, as far as one can tell from the very small amount of information available, enclosed, a place of walks and resting-places, arbours, geometrical in design, with its alleys probably lined with fruit trees and nut trees, with knots rather than borders (plate 9) and, as for flowers, if the exiguous contemporary records of garden-material are reliable, only rose trees were planted. After Wolsey's death, when Hampton Court became one of the royal palaces, Henry VIII enlarged the gardens.

He built a Mount on a foundation of bricks and earth, planted this with hawthorns and crowned it with a pavilion. He crammed it with heraldic beasts, that being the fashion, cut in stone; they were often, however, made only of wood; lead does not seem to have been used until later. It is entertaining to reflect that at this very time in still unknown Peru the gardens of the Sapa Incas were adorned by beasts, birds and even plant-portraits made of pure gold and silver. Henry's Hampton Court contained more flowers - probably nearly all native flowers - planted in beds surrounded by palings painted white and green. As well as stone animals there were wooden cut-out effigies of more heraldic creatures and devices stuck up on poles.

There was, apparently, a kitchen garden for the production of pot-herbs and salads; the fruit trees included apricots, almonds, peaches and figs. Until as late as the eighteenth century nature in the raw, even the mild English raw, was still 'horrid'. In such conditions the garden must be as artificial as possible to please the prevailing taste. In any case the prevailing taste was not native; the day was yet to come when the English would start feeling their way back to paradise. And although a 'flowery mead' might well be enjoyed on a fine summer day, there was hardly any need to make one in a land still only very lightly touched by human hand. It seems clear that in early Tudor times a garden was a pattern made of geometrically symmetrical walks, clipped evergreens, statuary and masonry; this material

was as highly stylized in arrangement as if wrought of yarn in a tapestry or of wood in a rood screen. The beauty of a planting was in its regularity. In later Tudor times this was still and so much the case that there was virtually only one garden design, with local variations.

CONCLUSIONS

Evidence from monastic and cathedral chapter accounts, the only kind we have at this stage, refers only to produce of the garden that was bought and sold, so that we know that apples, pears, grapes, mulberries and cherries at least were grown, and such vegetables as leeks, carrots and peas, as well as medicinal herbs. If any flowers were grown; if these small gardens had design; if the beds were edged by clipped box, we should not know it. But in his Gardening in Britain, by far the best book on the subject yet written, Miles Hadfield, a cautious historian, cites the interesting case of the Tresco Abbey daffodils: when, in 1872, T. A. Dorrien Smith began the commercial growing of daffodils in the Scilly Isles, the two varieties used were -those found naturalized among the abbey ruins, thereafter named 'Scilly White' and 'Soleil d'Or'. These must have derived frorn_old garden plantings; and as far as I can discover daffodils have no medicinal value.

By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries noblemen as well as the regular clergy had their gardens of fruit, some vegetables and perhaps a few cultivated native flowers: mazes of clipped evergreens, usually box, were fashionable. The English gardens of this period were orderly and very formal, in fact as 'unnatural' as possible. They were simply European gardens which happened to be in Britain. It is true that by late republican times in Rome a taste for 'wild', for 'natural' corners in the gardens had developed. But this taste is possible only to a people who have built, cultivated, imposed order on so great a part of their landscape that there is a reaction in favour of the wild. Before men love the wild they must feel safe from it, it must have become clear to them that they have power to tame it. This was far from being the case in fifteenth century England where a couple of million people lived in relatively small enclaves of civilization set in a land still Nature's.

The argument of this work will be illustrated by reference to actual and still existent gardens; each will be, as far as that is possible, representative of a whole class of English gardens. But as has been pointed out elsewhere the very fact that the English are active and enthusiastic gardeners means that

very few gardens remain for long of one form or fashion; it is true that from time to time an attempt is made to restore a garden or part of a garden to the fashion oJ an earlier time: it is also true that a number of the great picture gardens of the eighteenth century, to which we shall come in due course, have been kept more or less as they were intended to be by the artists who made them. In their case a particular difficulty arises in that they were composed and made in the same spirit as that in which a paysagiste paints a picture, and in some cases with astonishing success. But paint is dead, whereas the -material of the landscape artist is alive and continually escapes from his control: a garden whose trees are thirty years old does not look like the same garden with trees a hundred years old. However, from the eighteenth century onwards it is possible to present gardens representative of each change of fashion in gardening, each development towards the ideal of English gardening still, until Robinson's day, latent, dormant, unrealized in the English soul. For the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, then, the nearest we can get to a specimen garden now is that of Hampton Court.

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