

HISTORICAL GARDENS OF NEOCLASSICISM IN CHANIÁ, CRETE

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ABSTRACT

The current work presents the beginning of a wider research for the study of the historical gardens in the island of Crete. Beginning from the city of Chaniá, this work tries to interpret the dual essence of such spaces both as the continuation of the built environment as well as being a natural resource, complementary to the network of planting in urban public spaces.

The formation of a new state of things and the rise of the upper middle class in Chaniá, during the late 19th and early 20th century, had as a consequence the planning of the city's new extension through buildings and public spaces inspired by the prevalent, at the time, trend of neoclassicism.

The gardens that were designed and built during this period until the middle of the war comprise the focus of the present study. In this study we focused to the imprinting of the architectural background and the correlations with the urban landscape. The focus at present lies with the gardens of Chalepa: Venizelos' residence, Mitsotaki residence (palataki), the French School, Saint Magdalen church, and other private residences. Then, the identification of the flora resource with the botanical taxonomies in Latin and corresponding common names tries to focus the originality in the selections. A double motivation moves these choices: the imported European exoticism and the local climate which benefits these options.

The gardens, this different kind of cultural heritage, even in Greece should be studied through the perspective of their rehabilitation, strengthening of such cultural wealth in its dual essence, as architecture and as nature.

INTRODUCTION

The Florence Charter in 1981 introduced officially the notion "Historic garden" as an architectural and horticultural composition of interest to the public from the historical or artistic point of view". As such, the historic garden it is to be considered as a monument. In 1992, the countries of the European Community adopted the legislation called Habitats Directive and Birds Directive, which forms the basis for the creation of Natura 2000. This consists of a large network of areas all over Europe, for the protection of wild life and natural habitats. The Council of Europe adopted the convention for *The European Landscape*, on 20 October 2000 in the same city, Florence which came into force on 1st March 2004 (Council of Europe Treaty Series no. 176).

Between these three legal sectors, in Greece the *Natura 2000* project was adopted immediately, fortunately, but not with the same restrictions as in other countries. As regards cultural landscapes, at least, half of the Greek land should be considered as totally protected. This could challenge the criteria for further economic progress, when the country is not culturally prepared. On the other hand, smaller scale areas where human intervention is prevalent but in accordance with the natural, the two conventions of Florence have been signed, but yet at this moment they do not supersede the national law. Bureaucrats prefer to intervene using the Law n.1650/1986 which treats the ecological balance of the environment, introducing the environmental studies and projects. In the case of historical landscapes and gardens the only possibility this law allows for, is the characterization of each tree or bush, as a listed monument of nature. Automatically the nomination and protection of these natural elements is a matter for the Ministry of Rural Development!

In this way the only historical garden which is already listed as monument of nature, is the *National*, or *Royal Garden* in the center of Athens. Others, like the *Achilleion* in Corfú are considered merely as the surrounding area of monuments, which are the buildings themselves!

In this framework, our proposal concerns the study of historical gardens beginning within the wider vicinity of the city of Chaniá, which is the seat of the Polytechnic University of Crete. The dual essence of such spaces both as the continuation of the built environment and as a natural resource, complementary to the network of planting in urban public spaces, leads us to consider these fragments of nature in the city as areas of great value and to propose combined actions, towards restoration and structural integration with the city's urban green.

GARDENS' ARCHITECTURE MAPPING

In Crete the implementation of a new state of affairs and the rise of an upper class in Chaniá during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, had as a consequence the planning of the city's new extension through buildings and public spaces inspired by the prevalent trend of neoclassicism. We should note that in Greece these aesthetics continue to interfere in these late times and especially in architecture, as the fundamental national style, for obvious reasons and they characterize the urban landscape not only in late 19th century but until the 2nd World War.

In our case, Crete, the predominance of the Ottoman government until 1899, did not create the conditions for the import of this new style as it happened in the mainland. During the Interval of the Cretan Independency 1900- 1912, and later, the consulates of the European powers and the residences of the upper classes, rose in the new suburb of Halèpa, east of the old Venetian city.

The gardens that were designed and built during this period, until the middle of the war constitute the focus of the present study. The sections of this study comprise :

1. The survey of the architectural background and the correlations with the urban landscape. Considerations towards investigating a design methodology for rendering landscaping as an architectural component belonging to a broader whole, plus its application to the gardens under study.

2. The study of the remains of the Venetian and Ottoman legacies in garden design, in both in the city and its surroundings.

3. The identification of the flora resource with the botanical names in Latin and the corresponding common names. This permits the study of originality in the selection of newly imported plants and the possible continuities with the Cretan landscape and the gardens of the Ottoman period.

4. A critical approach is assumed towards the role of this different kind of cultural heritage. The aim is the rehabilitation and strengthening of such a cultural wealth in its dual essence, as architecture and as nature.

The first four gardens located in the area of Chalepa are to be considered as an homogeneous system: Venizelos' residence (the historical greek leader), Prince George's residence, the garden of the French School, the Saint Magdalen church's garden. They are more public than private in the present situation, so other private residences has to be studied in the future. Subsequently there will be a mapping of the city's wider area in search of other examples centering on the old municipal garden.

For this first attempt the students of the Architectural Engineering Department proceeded first with the research into old representations of these gardens, and secondly to the survey of the consistency of all the kinds of plants in them, followed by the identification of the plants with their Latin botanical names and their Greek common names. A plan and a main elevation were required when the garden was drawn, with the real area and volume of each plant today. The existing buildings were presented as a photo collage, leaving the primary position to the flora's presence.

Eleutherios Venizelos renovated his family house in Chaniá before the 2nd world war creating a small garden in front of the façade where two *Trachycarpus fortunei* and two *Araucaria bidwillii* provide the vertical lines of the garden in the middle of *buxus* hedges, with other scrubs, some of them imported from Athens and Egypt.

Prince George's residence is located west of the Venizelos house. In the original garden two *Trachycarpus fortunei* and two *Phoenix Canariensis* were located symmetrically by the central path framed by pruned *Pittosporum tobira*, and *Acanthus spinosus*.

The Saint Magdalen church, designed as Russian church, is in the middle of the Prince's daughter's garden. All kinds of *Phoenix*, *Cupressus Sempervirens varitoea Horizontalis* and *Pyramidalis*, *Pittosporum tobira* and *Bougainvillea glabra* are combined to create a vertical green mesh in front of the Prince's residence, looking south.

The garden of the French School, seat of our faculty of Architecture, was created by the Catholic French nuns, and in it a pine tree of large dimensions dominates a symmetrically designed courtyard with *Phoenix Canariensis*, *Morus alba* and *nigra*, Citruses and Roses. Between these gardens, a small square where the main streets direct, is covered by a large tree *Pinus Canariensis* and the crowns of many *Washingtonia filifera* and *Phoenix Canariensis* palm trees. The design of the flowerbeds is new and totally foreign to the rest.

In Chaniá, the neoclassicism imported from the capital of the new Hellenic state, creating the current (gousto) taste for things promoted the use of trees and shrubs of the Greek antiquity, as narrated by the poets and studied by Theofrasto. In the same moment exotic plants easy to cultivate in the Cretan climate, were also planted. As result, the composition of both, a middle European and both Mediterranean urban landscape, in this peripheral city offered the real final aspirations (inhalations) of the neoclassical movement.

ARCHITECTURE'S AND FLORA'S VALUES

In these gardens we find that the initial young palms and pine trees has grown up, becoming a reference for a wider area of the urban landscape and in parallel, the severely pruned *Pittosporum tobira*, after decades of abandonment, in these five gardens became big trees, with integrated the canopies giving informal shapes. The Italian style flower beds declined into a sort of wilderness, and *Acanthus spinosus* roots has been extended everywhere.

These observations conducts to the 2nd *Article. Of the Florence Charter*. "The historic garden is an architectural composition whose constituents are primarily vegetal and therefore living, which means that they are perishable and renewable." Thus its appearance reflects the perpetual balance between the cycle of the seasons, the growth and decay of nature and the desire of the artist and craftsman to keep it permanently unchanged.

Here we find that the age value, of the artefacts of the past, a concept introduced by Alois Riegl in the first decade of the 20th century, has its reflection in the vegetal monuments, just as happens with the human constructions. The flora's values in combination with old buildings, increase the emotion of the signs of aging, creating a double projection of the time gone.

CONCLUSIONS

The outcome of the present study will contribute to:

A. The methodical compilation of evidence, for the characterization of the historical gardens in the city of Chaniá as monuments.

B. The future rehabilitation of these city gardens and the configuration of the possible new relations with the public green areas.

C. The consolidation, on behalf of the wider community, of the plant wealth as an historical token, complementary to the structured memory of the urban space.

The current proposal promotes interdisciplinary investigations with the purpose of breathing new life into research concerning the historical environment. It also supports the establishment of a new charter with regard to protected green zones within the city, as an inherent wealth in Crete.

Our proposal sets out to deepen the designs and choices of the local community in landscaping the neoclassical town through gardens, and to study the web of interdependencies on the town planning scale. Such an enquiry leads to conclusions which could reinforce the positions of urban historians, but which also deeply engage with structures complementary to the urban landscape, that warrant our attention and protection.

In this scheme, considering on one hand, the original intentions of the architects and plantsmen and on the other, the value of the existing state of the gardens' flora, enables us to

form a hypothesis for their restoration. The gardens, this different kind of cultural heritage, should be studied in the perspective of their rehabilitation. This kind of actions are not visible so far in Greece, where strengthening such cultural wealth is very necessary, also because of the unnatural urban growth. The flora's values could also intervene as determinant elements in the urban scene. In the historical centers, where the urban continuity is perturbed the historical essences can be used not only as a protective curtain but also as a kind of companion of buildings, with the outlook of creating a new balanced environment. Architecture and nature in this procedure tries to give elements one to the other for the rehabilitation of the totality of the human actions.

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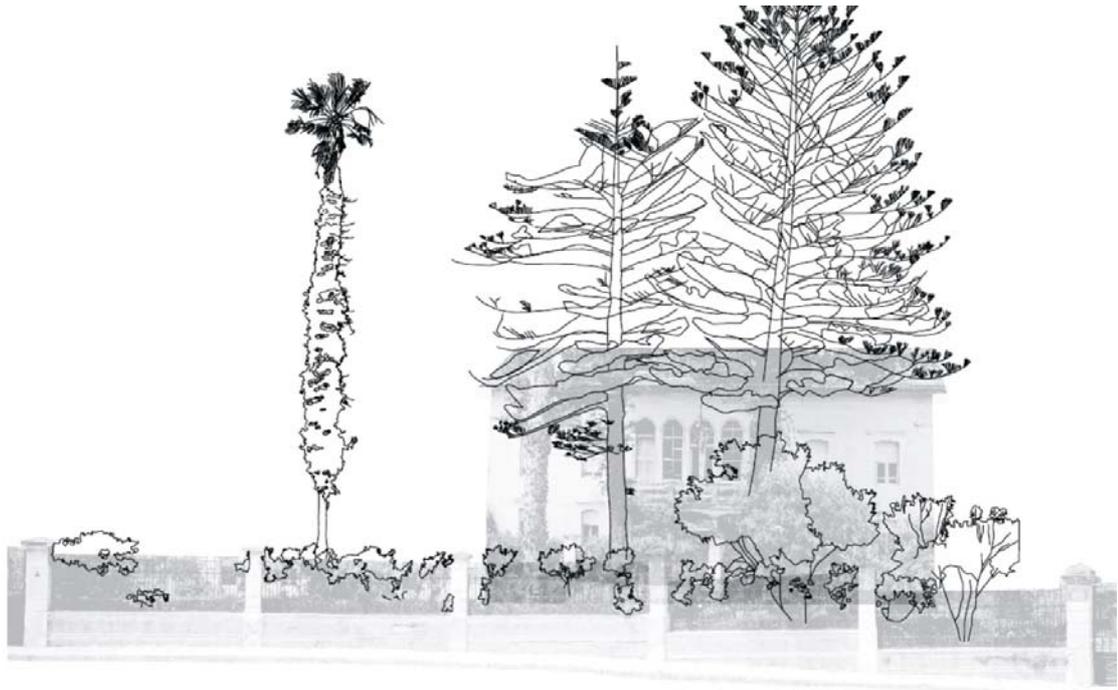


Fig. 1: Elevation of the Venizelos' house garden.



Fig. 2: Elevation of the Palataki garden.



Fig. 3: Elevation of the French School's garden.