

Notes Submitted by Desideria Pasolini, Vice president of Italia Nostra and representative of the Italian National Committee of ICOMOS

The Italia Nostra Association has been studying - and is continuing to study - the problem of the preservation and conservation of historic gardens, and has been doing so under the following different headings:

- a) Gardens as historical evidence and not merely works of art or cultural property
- b) The preservation of ancient or original species of plants
- c) Ecological equilibrium
- d) The "use" of gardens for public enjoyment

It has, in short, been studying the role of gardens as historic open spaces within the Urban fabric.

I know the two subjects of this international meeting are to be the inventorying of historic gardens in peril and the choosing of plants for ancient gardens which are being restored. I believe these subjects are both important and urgent. But I feel that as ICOMOS is preparing material to submit to the October 1975 conference marking the close of European Architectural Heritage Year - the subject of which will be the protection towns - where Italy is concerned we should, perhaps, broaden our range of vision and consider a few other points as well.

Here we must quote the resolution adopted by the Assembly of Europa Nostra on 4th July, 1974, which incorporates and expresses the conclusions reached by Italia Nostra after years of study:

"... the Assembly recommends the acceleration of regional planning and the assignment of distinct areas respectively to agriculture, forestry, new towns, leisure and the protection of nature..."

The study of the use of land implies planning, and also involves overall conservation through anti-pollution measures for the protection both of vegetation and of human life, the systematic location of industries at a long distance from both towns and beauty spots, the regulation of traffic, town-planning, and new legislation.

In its preparations for European Architectural Heritage Year, Italia Nostra has stressed the importance of properly conserving historic towns by fully preserving all their open spaces and historic gardens. In Italy in the last century hundreds of gardens were sacrificed and destroyed, always for the same reasons, namely, lack of planning, speculation in building land, indifference

towards the cultural importance of gardens, indifference to their social and sociological value in an urban built-up area, and indifference to the cost of upkeep and of taxation

Luckily, public and regional opinion have been becoming more aware of these problems during these last years. But unfortunately a lot of damage has been done and only a small portion of it can be repaired - and is, in fact, to be repaired by scientific methods

Our present Minister, Professor Giovanni Spadolini, the first to hold the newly-instituted portfolio "dei Beni Culturali," has taken the matter to heart. Collaboration between the State and the regions can be feasible. Laws on the protection of gardens have not so far been adequate; and we are drafting a bill on the subject for submission to Parliament. Under the existent law it is possible to list a building with its garden or a historic garden by itself, while a further law enables trees or landscapes to be listed. But these laws are inadequate, and availing oneself of them is a long and difficult business, while in the meantime far too many open spaces are being left unprotected. We are requesting that the Council of Superintendents of the Fine Arts should have on it an expert from the Ministry of Agriculture, a representative of the Universities and a landscape-architect, to render it competent to assist in the restoration of gardens. We also consider that the purpose and practical use to be served by a historic garden should be covered and regulated by national as well as regional legislation.

The restoration and upkeep of a garden are, of course, a great financial burden, and we are therefore asking for tax-exemption for private owners. We believe that the function of owner can still be very important where the owner is a highly-qualified curator who is an integral part of the community and works in harmonious collaboration with it.

The protection of a historic garden must be an overall operation, and the garden must be an essential part of a general scheme providing open space for sport and leisure both in the town and outside it. We shall not be able to protect or save historic gardens or valuable botanical gardens in Italy if we cannot at the same time give our ancient Italian towns a modern system of open spaces - including playing fields and playgrounds open primarily in the summer months - for the several benefit of old people, invalids, schools and younger children. All these categories are entitled to such outdoor facilities over and above the historic gardens; but if the municipalities fail to provide them for these specific users the public is bound to put heavy pressure on the historic gardens themselves. Some of the latter in Italy are unfit to become playgrounds or sportgrounds; very often they rather resemble museums or fragile botanical gardens. It would be a great achievement if there were regulations governing their use,

alternate opening days, school visits, botanical exhibitions to illustrate their history, and film-shows.

Since 1969 an excellent law has been in force in Italy, the passing of which was partly due to pressure from Italia Nostra; its title is: "Legge degli Standards Urbanistici". This compels municipalities to determine, in their town-planning programmes, the number of square metres of open space required per head of the population, in accordance with the national legal norm, and so decide on the area to be available for public gardens, school grounds, etc. The law applies to the country as a whole and is an excellent one, but it has often been misinterpreted, and the resultant confusion and ambiguities have been most harmful. Town-planners have often been influenced by pressure from other quarters, and to arrive at the quota prescribed by law, have been obliged to include historic gardens or parts of them, or such things as historic or archaeological sites, in their open spaces or "standards urbanistici". In several instances gardens, parks or villas have been cut in two or isolated from the building they were designed for and of which they were the setting; frequently they have been split up by a road and their whole plan damaged.

There are unfortunately tragic cases of this all over Italy (one example being the Villa Lucelletti at Frascati).

This is one of the laws whose interpretation as regards town-planning Italia Nostra is trying to have altered. Indeed, if historic gardens or grounds had a special law to protect them, towns would immediately come to enjoy far larger total areas of open spaces, comprising gardens and sports grounds alike, and both would be far better kept.

In a word, the proper upkeep of a historic garden depends greatly on proper townplanning, of sports facilities.

Once it had begun to make inventories of historic gardens in certain specimen parts of Italy, Italia Nostra found itself faced with a huge problem, which was that in Italy you cannot confine yourself to listing only the major historic gardens

One of the principal characteristics of an ancient Italian town is its gardens of minor importance which have still miraculously survived, both in the centre and on the outskirts, and which form a part of its traditional design. Sometimes the area covered by such gardens is modest in size and hidden from sight, and part of it may still be farm land; it may have acquired historical interest because its form is typical of its period, because of its location near a monument, for the historical circumstances of its origin, or for botanical reasons. Such areas are also worth

preserving for their trees and hedges, and for their lawns, which provide an open space behind buildings. They may have originally been the green setting of a church or been hidden within the walls of a convent and possessed a charmingly-designed orchard, or verziere, surrounding an old well; they may have been the grounds lying around the keep of a castle, converted into a garden in the 18th century, or have been partly garden and partly orchard, inside an ancient fortress, or the remains of an old 16th-century vineyard designed and laid out with exquisite taste around a Roman aristocratic country residence. Then there are all the "Sicilian Gardens" of Arab origin along the slopes of Etna, laid out round small country villas and planted with orange-and lemon-trees; their excellent scientific drainage system still works efficiently and there is a charming effect as one approaches the house, deriving from the systematic mingling of decorative plants and flowers with the orange-trees. Some gardens in Rome are the last remaining vestiges of great historic gardens forever destroyed by acres and acres of new buildings (The badly decayed villa in the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele is the last fragment of the famous 17th-century Villa Montalta).

We also have memories of lovely Italian hanging or secluded gardens in seaboard towns (Naples, Sorrento, Amalfi), shielded from the sea-winds and salt air behind the high walls of convents and palaces. Their charm is gentle and secret; their beautiful and unique character deriving from the creepers on their cloister columns, their deep wells and lovely Majolica pavements.

I admit that here we may tend to embrace too much. However, it is the declared opinion of Italia Nostra that within the framework of Architectural Heritage Year we must preserve this wider aim. If we lose the lesser parks or gardens which have become essential as part of the ancient fabric of our towns, the old towns of Italy will lose not only their significance but their very essence. For we must confess that, while present-day society is destroying its gardens and open spaces as though they were a thing of the past, that same society has not yet invented its own form of open space. Our society is losing touch with nature at a definite and regular rate, and the balance between life in society and natural life would appear to be lost forever.

The purpose of this meeting is partly to draft a list of historic gardens. But it will now be necessary to list historic grounds of minor as well as major importance for inventorying and photographing and subsequent protection, complete with whatever vegetation they may contain.

We must consider ourselves obliged to protect such minor beauty spots in their entirety, and this will mean preserving, or possibly re-creating, their original

plan and design, their buildings, equipment, decoration, sculpture, irrigation systems, ponds and fountains, and also their original vegetation.

I shall now try to classify some of the various possible examples under a number of different headings. These are the headings which we are pressing the Ministry to pass on to the regions and municipalities as a guide to what is to be listed and protected.

. Earlier and more recent gardens laid out around archaeological sites

The gardens laid out years ago around excavated ruins are of the greatest interest. We believe that in Italy our best landscape architects so far have been two archaeologists, Professor Giacomo Boni and Professor Spinazzola. Professor Boni planned the Orti Farnesiana on the Palatine and also selected the vegetation - cypresses, orange - and pomegranate - trees, as well as other trees and bushes described by Pliny or Garta. He achieved similar results on Horace's farm in the Sabine hills, where he planted lilies and roses, either growing over the ruins or set in regular hedges to mark the original design of the walls. At the Danzig Congress in 1909 he stressed - the first person in the world to do so - the importance of landscape, especially original vegetation, as a setting for ruins and excavations; besides being one of the world's most outstanding experts in archaeology and practical excavation, he was a leader in his own field. As for Professor Spinazzola, it was he who in 1911 laid out all the olive groves below San Martino in Naples - a most wonderful combination of architecture, ruins, landscape, olive-trees, roses and the rest, which remains an example for future generations. The problem of landscaping and planting along the Via Appia is a difficult one, but Italia Nostra is financing a project to level the roadside and replant the appropriate vegetation, namely, cypresses, acanthus, laurels and so on.

2. Medieval gardens and cloisters in convents and monasteries

Medieval Italian towns are still full of these precious and lovely works of art, important both as architecture and for the history of gardening and domestic agriculture. Their principal characteristic features were apple and other fruit trees and hedges of aromatic and medicinal plants; some of them have continued their secluded but useful existence over the centuries. (An example is the garden of the monastery of Santo Speco on the hills of Subiaco and the ancient olive-grove below it). Most of these gardens could be rescued and restored to form those delightful settings we can admire in the backgrounds of Siennese paintings or in frescoes painted before Giotto's day.

One of the most famous cloisters that could be restored is that of the Santi Quattro Incoronati in Rome.

3. Renaissance gardens and "verzieri", or orchards, inside castle walls and along the fortification surrounding keeps

A remarkable reconstruction job has been done by an architect named Cevalley on the Manfredi Balduino Castle near Pavia. Italia Nostra has financed a project for the replanning of the gardens of Belriguardo near Ferrara, and hopes to finance the scheme for restoring the gardens of the Padula charterhouse. Some of the fortresses or "rocche" in the provinces of Emilia or Veneto which at present have only a dusty courtyard could have their gardens restored or reinstated.

4. Renaissance gardens in the courtyards of palaces

Here we think of the handsomely-shaped lawn behind the fine courtyard at the Palazzo Farnese in Rome, which we cannot but contrast with the garden of the Palazzo Spada in the immediate vicinity - now a car-park.

5. Small gardens and grounds behind baroque palaces

Though small in size, these provide a satisfactory visual setting for their baroque buildings; there are large numbers of them in Bologna, Venice, Verona and Padua. They are, as it were, a projection or continuation of the building itself, giving an impression of depth and space. To mutilate them; divide them up by cross walls or hide them under new buildings is not mere vandalism; it is also proof of a lack of culture.

6. Roman vineyards (vigne)

These used to be planted around a casino or aristocratic country residence, for places of leisure as well as sources of income and one can still see the remains of some of them on the outskirts of Rome. In the 16th century some of them developed into the great parks of the residences of the nobility. One can still see the walls which divided the garden and vigna from the open country, and one can still admire imposing gateways which appear incongruous enough in the vicinity of an old farmhouse. However, with patience and with the aid of archives it should be possible to determine the plans of the original gardens (as at the Casale Strozzi)

The Villa Troyli, once the residence of the Duke of York, used to be a magnificent villa which had originally been a vigna. Italia Nostra is fighting to save the building, nymphaeum and garden from the speculative builders.

7. Olive groves around minor Florentine villas and farms

On the outskirts of Florence, half hidden by walls, are still to be found olive-trees, lemon-tree orchards, fountains and tiny Italian gardens - a testimony to the continuity of a highly civilized society in which art, agriculture and business were harmoniously mingled.

8. Sicilian "giardini"

This is the name given to the orange groves dating back to the time of the Arab domination which still flourish on the slopes of Etna near Catania as the gardens of picturesque 17th- and 18th-century buildings.

9. Secluded gardens in seaboard towns such as Naples, Amalfi or Sorrento

We may still admire these roof gardens or hanging gardens; they belong to many different periods and adjoin convents as well as private houses. With their many strongly-scented plants and herbs and their wistaria or other climbing plants they are a miracle of affectionate devotion to gardening in an area - for such is Southern Italy - where scarcity of water gives flowers and fruit-trees the quality of rare and precious things.

10. Botanical gardens in Rome, Florence, Palermo and Padua

11. Orchards and gardens behind the more modest 18th- and 19th-century palazzi of the Italian provinces

These are often enhanced by the presence of rare and beautiful trees and that seldom-met quality which gives the palazzi their nobility, speciousness and proportions.

They serve to provide the towns with those patches of greenery they need for both aesthetic and ecological reasons. Let us for a moment imagine some of the picturesque palazzi in the Marches or Romagna without their gardens. These would lose their whole character, for the fine staircases or loggias at their rear call for an open space with an avenue of trees to set them off.

12. Open spaces behind medieval town walls

These are to be found in Ferrara, Verona, etc., in the form of orchards, nurseries or gardens with picturesque sculptured walls.

13. The earliest late 19th-century public parks

These provided the first visible evidence of the new policy of urban planning which followed unification of the country.

In the 'seventies, gardens in the form of a square were planted round the monuments of the Risorgimento; they were filled with exotic trees (palms, sequoias, etc.) donated by politicians who had visited the great international exhibitions in London Paris or Florence. Rather larger were the "Gardens of Remembrance", generally on hills not far outside the towns; these were well designed and full of beautiful trees in whose shade were to be seen portrait heads or busts of the heroes of the Wars of Independence. Still larger sometimes - five acres or more - were the big Piazze d'Armi where military parades used to take place. One may still today, on the outskirts of many towns in the Po Valley, admire these broad open spaces with their double line of gorgeous plane or linden trees. Some of them have been sacrificed in favour of swimming pools and Disneylands - which is absurd.

14 Single trees and avenues which deserve to be protected as the remains of great historic avenues.

Every single plan tree in the Viale Carlo III leading to the palace in Caserta should be protected by law, as should the wonderful elms and illexes which grace and enhance so many of the Roman parks, and are all that are left of the once-famous Villa Massimo, the Villa Ludovisi, and others still.

15. We must not forget the "arts nouveaux" or "liberty" villas of the early 20th century with the charm of their willows drooping over lakes covered with water-lilies, their many hydrangeas, and their cypresses or oaks which are often survivals from earlier Renaissance gardens (These are found on the Ligurian coast, the Lombardy lakes, etc.)

16. Hanging gardens and terraces

Original hanging gardens dating from the 17th and later centuries are still to be found; in character they are at once gardens and terraces. Their vegetation is of a very special kind and largely consists of overhanging flowering creepers.

An Exemple is the Palazzo del Grillo in Rome

o

o o

Though I have been dealing with minor historic gardens and parks, I am not forgetting the great ones, several of which, though duly classified, still need to be protected. Several have undergone severe mutilation and are giving rise to enormous problems, owing to their incompleteness, lack of water, and want of maintenance personnel, the unsuitability of the plant grown, the need for restoration and the lack of park-keepers and custodians. However of these gardens, too, we shall have to draft a complete new inventory. We are hoping that a part of the zoo at the Villa Borghese in Rome may be done away with and the area it covers restored as a part of the park. There is also a big campaign afoot as a result of which we are hoping to have the motor-racing track abolished at Monza. The Villa Pamphilia, unique because it unites several kinds of gardens and parks, and severely damaged, is to be repaired as a result of the campaign at present being carried on by Italia Nostra.

These are only a few examples out of the hundreds of problems we are daily meeting with or forcing to the attention of public opinion while pressing the Government, Parliament and the Ministry to pass protective legislation.

Italia Nostra is also trying to encourage local associations and trusts to help the local authorities and the Sovrintendenze (which are the network of local offices of the Ministry of Cultural Property) to draft the lists of gardens to be protected and have photographs made of the gardens, cloisters, parks and so on which I have just been mentioning before they disappear

o

o o

The Association for the Defence of Culture in the South is at present, with great skill and speed, making an inventory of historic gardens in Naples. This big achievement should serve as an outstanding example which should spur the State on to pursue this highly important work further.

o

o o

To conclude, I express the hope that:

- 1) Historic gardens and open spaces in historic towns which are an integral part of the ancient urban fabric will be protected and scheduled as open spaces.
- 2) Each historic garden may be made the subject of a permanent exhibition comprising the original plans, drawings and other documents, for the use of schools and visit in general.
- 3) A study will be made of a draft European code of legislation providing for tax exemption.
- 4) Protection areas may be created around historic gardens
- 5) There will be instituted a "roll of honour" of the best preserved or restored historic gardens, as an incitement to public and private authorities to follow the example.

DESIDERIA Pasolini
ITALY