

Carol I Park in Bucharest at the Beginning of the 20th Century

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Abstract. The first stage of the evolution of Carol I park is important for the history of Romanian landscape architecture and also stands as an example for the design of parks nowadays. Carol I park was conceived at the beginning of the 20th century, as a national park, to host the “General Romanian Exhibition”, a jubilee exhibition celebrating 40 years since Carol the II became king of Romania, 25 years since the proclamation of the Kingdom and 1,800 years since Trajan’s conquest of Dacia. The authorities invited the French landscape architect Édouard Redont to design this park - inaugurated in 1906. Redont worked in a mixed style, with an important part of romantic style, French landscape style, and a geometrical part in the entrance zone. These styles compounded a belle époque park, with a lot of pavilions for the exhibition. The composition of the park was centred on an important, large axis cadenced by lots of pavilions and geometrical vegetation and water elements with a hill over a lake as its perspective end. On this hill, the Palace of the Arts, and below it, an elegant romantic cascade and grotto decorated with a sculptural ensemble. The alleys and the vegetation near the lake and on the hill were designed in the French landscape style, in contrast with the geometry of the axis zone and the alleys on its side, with alignments of trees, pruned shrubs and flower platbands.

Keywords: public park, landscape architecture, romantic style, *belle époque* style

INTRODUCTION

This paper will briefly present the first stage of the evolution of an important public park in Bucharest, Carol I park, in an inter-disciplinary approach, in order to reveal the importance of horticulture as a creative branch of the agricultural sciences. Horticulture was part of the urban development at the beginning of the last century that was profoundly marked by transformations in the landscape paradigm and by distortions in the relationship between a human being and the space that surrounds him.

Another approach to horticulture used in this work was etymology based: *hortus* means garden, and *cultura* means to cultivate, so one may say that urban garden is the park, and the ones cultivating it (by planting, gardening) are landscape architects.

By this perspective, this paper proposes Carol I park, that is one of the largest parks in Bucharest and one of the oldest horticultural sites, besides Cișmigiu Garden.

Nowadays, in the third millennium, it is essential to know and understand the parks as they evolved in the last century and, especially how they have been transformed by the hard times and systematizations we had overcome.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methods I used in studying/analysing Carol I park and specially it’s history are:
- visits and analyses of the park;

- study of documents: books, reviews, internet sites, images, archive documents;
- systemisation of analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Carol Park (formerly named Libertății Park) is located in the southern part of Bucharest, set between the hills on the way from Cotroceni to Văcărești. The area was once a large vineyard, Bucharest Vineyard. In 1792, on a slightly hilly land situated behind the place called before the 19th century *the Pond of Șerban Vodă*, Metropolitan Filaret II built a gazebo from where to admire the view. City locals would come to the renowned gazebo to enjoy the cool shade. During weekends, hundreds of people would come there to relax and feast. In Metropolitan Filaret's time, the place bore the name of *Filaret Hill*; the lower part was called *Filaret Plain* (Potra, 1990) (Fig. 1). Later on, in 1863, Metropolitan Dositei Filliti extended and refurbished the old gazebo, adding another storey to it, and built a new fountain (Drăgan, 2006). The ceiling of this construction was adorned with twelve stone slabs, representing carvings of the astrological signs (Majuru, 2007). Throughout the 19th century this area remained “the place of holiday celebration for the people”. The plain kept the name Filaret until 1848 when, due to the bourgeois-democratic Revolution, it was renamed ‘Liberty’ Field. (Potra, 1990). At that time, Giurgiu Road passed right through, the Filliti gazebo on one side, replaced in 1870 by a Neoclassical fountain inspired by the Triumphal Arches; the fountain is nowadays known as the Cantacuzino Fountain, named after the Mayor back then who was also its constructor - Grigore Cantacuzino (Marcus, 1958; www.cIMeC.ro). It is the oldest fabric in the park that has survived to this day (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Filaret plateau in June 1905 (Noica, 2007)



Fig. 2. Cantacuzino fountain in Carol I park, June 2011

During the second half of the 19th century, Libertății Field became property of the Bucharest City Council, who would lease it to cattle farmers for pasture. In 1894, the city council intended to turn this place once brimming with people into an “urban rustic park”; it wasn’t until 1905, at the suggestion of Take Ionescu, that it was decided to design the place as a national park, with the purpose of hosting the “General Romanian Exhibition”. This was a jubilee exhibition celebrating: 40 years since Carol the II became king of Romania; 25 years since the proclamation of the Kingdom (Potra, 1990); 1,800 years since Trajan’s conquest of Dacia and the arrival of the first Roman colonists (Parusi, 2007).

To design the project, the authorities invited Édouard Redont to Bucharest, a French landscape architect, a brilliant student of Barillet-Deschamps and Édouard André’s (De Ganay, 1949; Marcus, 1958). These were leading French landscape architects in the second half of the 19th century, authors of famous parks in France and Europe. Édouard Redont was the former chief gardener with the Department of Promenades and Plantations of the City of Paris. Redont had already accomplished park projects and execution in Romania, of which the most renowned is Bibescu Park in Craiova. Currently Romanescu Park, it is a large landscape park that achieved great success at its opening.

Between September 1905 and June the 6th 1906, which was to be the opening date of the Exhibition, the marshy land was drained and levelled out and transformed in a public park coordinated by Redont (Potra, 1990). The plan of the Exhibition was drafted by Romanian architect Ștefan Burcuș, who worked under the supervision of the Chief Commissioner of the Exhibition, the scientist, professor and academician Constantin I. Istrati (Marcus, 1958). According to the Exhibition framework, Redont designed this park for initially 36 hectares (www.cIMeC.ro), to express a mixed style that combined dominant Romantic composition with geometrical, monumental and architectural landscape features (Fig. 3, 4).

The park’s general composition and facilities

The main coordinating element in the composition of the park is a large axis, an ample alley bordered by curbs and hedges of buxus and flower plat-bands, with two sidewalks flanked by alignments of linden trees. The monumental axis was strewn with water pieces and exhibition pavilions - a geometrical, architectural element.

The alley stemmed from a circular small square bordered by trees, which had at the end a small, only 2 hectare pond with smooth edges, set at the bottom of Filaret Hill (Fig. 5, 6). The perspective end of this axis was the Art Palace (Fig. 7), situated up on the hill, on the other side of the pond. Later on titled the Military Museum, it catches fire in 1938 and is demolished after the earthquake of 1940. On the edge of the pond, at the bottom of the Palace - still as end of perspective - Redont placed a grotto with a large cascade adorned with a lovely Romantic statue group: two giants sculpted by Dumitru Paciurea and Frederic Storck and a nymph by Filip Martin, illustrating the legend of the Bucegi mountain dwarf pine (Parusi, 2007). The construction of the grotto and cascade was contract based by the engineer Vasile Petrescu (Potra, 1990).

On the Eastern side of the park the first reinforced concrete bridge built in the country (Fig. 10). Designed as an arrangement of consoles, it was built in 1906 by the engineer and inventor George (Gogu) Constantinescu, the inventor of sonicity, who was also known abroad as one of the pioneers for reinforced concrete in construction. (Măruță *et al.*, 2008; Mihăilescu, 2008; Răducan and Panțu, 2004; www.cIMeC.ro).

The built elements of the park were designed to reflect the Romantic style, the landscape garden, fashionable in the 18th century and early 19th century, and buildings from

different times and styles, ruins, etc. The plans for the buildings were realized by architects Ștefan Burcuș, Petculescu, Schindl V.G. Ștefănescu, I. Berindey and engineer Grant. Apart from this group, architects and engineers Mingopol, Kantzler, Engerlein, Hălăceanu, Cerchez, Schmits, At. Bolintineanu, Stavăr, D. Maimarolu also took part in conceiving the edifices (Potra, 1990). The built elements are: a Roman-style summer theatre, the Roman Arenas, with a capacity of 5,000 places, now a popular venue for rock bands; a tower ruin - the Vlad Țepeș Water Tower (Fig. 8) built in the 15th century style of Țepeș Vodă in Cheia Argeșului (designed by the architects Petculescu și Schindl, it is a 32 metre high and 32 metre diameter tower, with a platform upstairs from which doubles as an observation deck) (Potra, 1990); a mosque (Fig. 9); Cuțitul de Argint Church (Bărătescu Nou Church, finished in 1906, designed by architect Nicolae Ghika-Budești in the style of St. Nicolae Domnesc in Iași (Ionescu-Ghinea and Stoica, 2005); rustic bridges; etc.

The exhibition pavilions were conceived in the style of old boyar houses and monasteries. Since then they have, however, been demolished, and only the Vlad Țepeș Tower, the Roman Arenas, Cuțitul de Argint Church, the reinforced concrete bridge and Cantacuzino Fountain remain. The Technical Museum Prof. Ing. Dimitrie Leonida was inaugurated in 1909 and reorganized in 1954 (www4.pmb.ro).

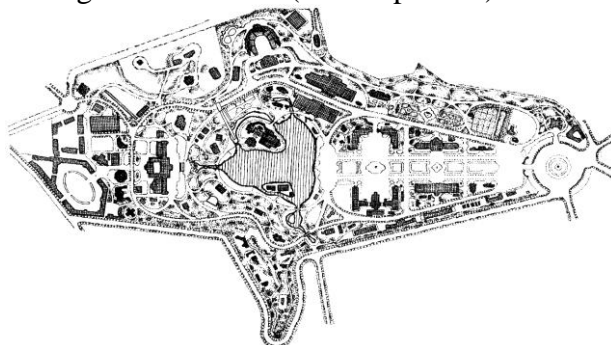


Fig. 3. Carol I park plan in 1906 (Marcus, 1958)



Fig. 4. Carol I park in 1906. General view (Noica, 2007)



Fig. 5. Carol I park in 1906. View over the lake next to the Țepeș Tower (Noica, 2007)

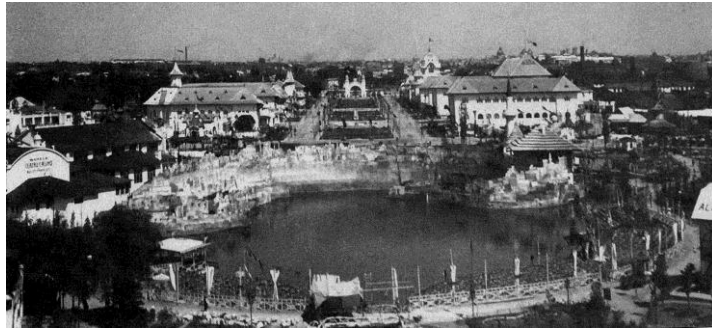


Fig. 6. Carol I park in 1906. View from the Palace of the Arts (Noica, 2007)



Fig. 7. Carol I park in 1906. View towards the Palace of the Arts (Noica, 2007)



Fig. 8. The Ţepeş Tower, June 2011



Fig. 9. The mosque in Carol I park (www.artline.ro)

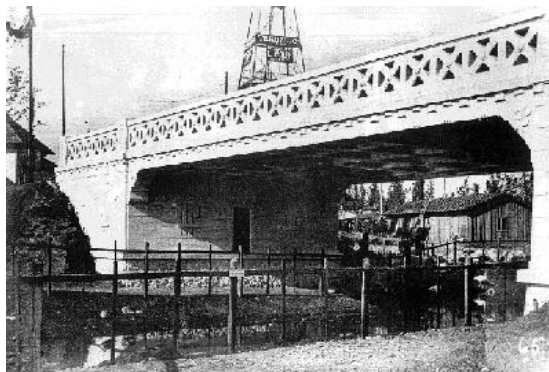


Fig. 10. The first reinforced concrete bridge in Romania (www.gid-romania.com)

The composition of the circulation system

Redont designed the circulation system of the park in a hierarchical manner. The geometric axis and the main pavilions grant an exquisite openness to the monumental main alley. They project a central and generous down floor with neoclassical shapes, outlined by a curb of buxus and flower platbands, separating two carriageways each flanked by two footpaths, and each harboured by the cool shade of the linden trees in alignment. The main axis is strewn with both vegetal, boxwood cut into spheres (Potra, 1990) and water games which grow in intensity as the axis approaches the pond, the high point of the gradation.

All along the edge of the park, Redont creates a sinuous alley of intermediate width, with alignments of deciduous trees, similar to other important lanes of the park, which form the link to different facilities. These lanes have broad smoother curves, feebly defined, typical for the French landscape style. Other tighter lanes (ranked third), smoother, with tighter curves, meander freely among the tree masses on Filaret Hill and all along the sinuous canals. Despite the fact that they are made of various smaller curves, these lanes do not fit the pattern of English landscape, where the alleys follow a very (and sometimes too) meandering path, characterized by much more freedom. The trajectory of the lanes is a bit more organized, with geometrical curves, resembling the French landscape parks and gardens, the *alphandist* style, named so by landscape theorist Le Dantec after the famous French landscape architect Alphand (Le Dantec, 2002). The landscapes created in water areas are the most representative for the French Romantic style: the regular canals, with slopes either fluid or rough consolidated with rockeries, the uneven areas levelled out with the use of stairs with rustic steps, made of raw stone slabs, brick pieces or tree trunks, the rustic bridges etc. The entire circulating system is very sinuous and well-ordered, allowing easy access to the park's various facilities and main points.

Redont suggests as main point of access a small circular square, with a central round and surrounded by an alignment of deciduous trees, currently 11th July Plaza. From this small square, the way to the park went through a masonry arch gate (Fig. 11). It used to lead to generous open space, the very starting point for the large main axis, with the two perimeter sidewalks, symmetrical and surrounded by alignments of poplars. On the right-side lane, the Cantacuzino Fountain can still be found, a beautiful neoclassical fabric.



Fig. 11. Carol I park in 1906. The main gate (Noica, 2007)

The relief was modified according to the principles of the French landscape style. For these works 575 246 cubic meters of earth were displaced (Parusi, 2007).

The composition of vegetation

When thinking about the composition of vegetation, Redont had in mind a mix of styles, a romantic landscape style working as dominant; therefore, he grouped the plants so as to resemble natural landscapes. Alignments of trees guard the main alley, the main axis and the lateral lanes, while the rest of the park is planted with trees and shrubs freely arranged in bulks, groups, or featuring as isolated elements. The vegetation along the main alley is arranged according to geometry and architecture: alignments of linden trees, pruned buxus, flower platbands; in the rest of the park, the vegetation falls into a picturesque landscape pattern, free. Under the care of the horticulturist gardeners Samuel and Louis Leyvraz (Majuru, 2007) 4,206 high deciduous trees, 5,983 resinous trees, 48,215 shrubs, 49,200 forest plants, 8,400 plants with varied flowers, 97,950 flourished plants and 3,500 kg of grass seed were planted in Carol I Park (Potra, 1990).

The resinous trees outnumber by far the deciduous trees, not at all the rule for parks set in the plain. Nevertheless, Filaret Hill itself together with modifying the relief through the use of rockeries and abrupt vegetation allows the evergreen trees to dominate the sight.

In his general framework, Redont included also a lot of rich lawns, meadows, these too following a smoother geometrical curvy line, specifically to the *alphandist* style. The vegetation takes up a very small percentage of the park's area, as shown in the plan, and this is mainly due to reserving the greater area to constructions and pavilions, as well as to paved open spaces, very ample and generous, which give the entire composition pleasant breathing breakthroughs which render the architectural elements more visible. Nevertheless, the promenade alleys and the resting places are very well shaded, which is very nice for Bucharest weather. The way the vegetation is placed also creates clever games of light and shadow.

The pond

Another important element in the composition of the park was the two hectare pond, also used for amusement purposes: boating during the summer and skating during the winter (Potra, 1990). Its smooth contour also included the grotto with a cascade on the main axis, two islands different in size with exhibition pavilions (Fig. 12), and two well defined canals (Fig. 13) with rustic bridges, in a Romantic style. The bridges forming the link to the islands were made of stone and reinforced concrete and imitated tree trunks, copying in pattern the French landscape parks, after the *alphandist* style. On one island was set a mosque (Fig. 9) where the Mohammedans gathered every Friday (Potra, 1990).

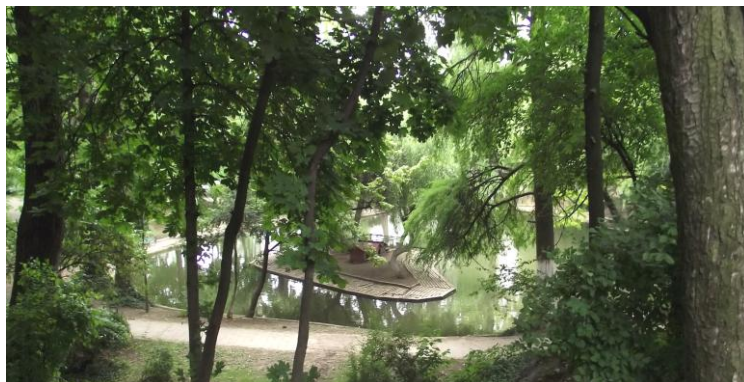


Fig. 12. Small island in Carol I park, June 2011



Fig. 13. The sinuous canal, June 2011

CONCLUSIONS

Remarkable as example of *Belle Époque* garden, Carol Park was damaged by the transformations brought about by 20th century history, and lost its distinctive features. During the second half of the past century, this landscape jewel was given a new name, Liberty Park - quite a cynical twist - and turned into a platform for Communist propaganda, in an attempt at making a wallpaper out of public space and national symbols.

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