

Russian Gardens in the 17th and 18th Centuries: the Italian Prototypes*

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Abstract—The article is devoted to the history of Russian gardens in the 17th and 18th centuries, in which various influences of Italian garden culture can be found. The author emphasizes links with the Italian culture through literature and mythology, as well as the influence of the direct impressions of the embassy participants and travelers in the Italian States. In conclusion, the scheme of development of garden Italianisms in Russia is outlined — from the use of schematic and simplified regular plans of gardens in the Middle ages, only remotely resembling their Italian prototypes, to the development of technical innovations and imaginative analogies in the New time, and from them to the art of artistic transformation and harmonization of the Russian landscape.

Keywords—*Russian gardens in the 17th and 18th centuries; Italian Renaissance gardens; Italian influence; “Giardini segreti”; Botanical gardens; the development of Russian-Italian ties in the landscape gardening; gardens of Peter the Great*

I. INTRODUCTION

The influence of French and English gardens and parks on the Russian landscape art has long been given the status of an irrefutable truth due to the Russian terminology — "French" regular gardens and "English" landscape parks. The influence of Italian gardens is much less common, usually restricted to the gardens located on a steep terrain. However, it seems that their role in the addition of the aesthetics of the Russian garden was much deeper and wider. This article attempts to outline the common features and figurative parallels that influenced the development of Russian garden art until the beginning of the 19th century.

The first meeting of the two cultures, Russia and Italy, is usually attributed to the end of 15th - the beginning of 16th century [1], when a significant wedding of the Russian Tsar Ivan III and the Greek Princess Sofia Palaeologus (1472) was held. However, according to the historian I. E. Zabelin, Italian merchants "surozhane" (Genoese merchants of the Crimean towns of Kafa and Surozh), were traditional visitors

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in the early Moscow and the ancient Kiev, (i.e., before the 13th century) [2]. With the emergence of a new Queen, the foreign influence on the arts has increased significantly. Almost every royal mandate to the Russian ambassadors in the Italian town mentioned the employment of architects, artists and craftsmen of different professions [3].

There was nothing special about the preference of foreign craftsmen. Italian architects, builders, artists were valued deservedly everywhere in Western Europe of that time. Construction and related finishing works have long been a kind of Italian seasonal work. There were even areas with an expertise of their own, and masters from there were usually referred to the native places (for example: Maestri comacini (from Como), Maestri ticinesi (Ticino canton of Switzerland) or Maestri campionasi (from the town of Campione, Lugano), etc.). They have worked all over Europe at that time.

There is no any lengthy information about the Russian gardens of the time of Sophia Palaeologus, although at that time they became integrated into the life of rich Russian estates. Italian Pavel Ioviy in 1535 wrote down the words of the Moscow envoy on the construction of the city: “almost every house has its own garden, serving for the pleasure of the owners and at the same time delivering them the required amount of vegetables” [4].

II. THE IZMAILOVO GARDENS

The first sufficient details about the Russian gardens are referred to the 17th century, the era of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, most memorable in Russian history as the era of prosperity and peaceful creation, as well as the years of the establishment of wide and diverse contacts with Western Europe. That time revived the Russian-Italian ties that contributed to the emergence of the first Italianisms in Russian garden art.

Among the Russian gardens of that time, the central place is occupied by the gardens in the Royal estate of Izmailovo near Moscow. This residence was then one of the most developed, besides there are related graphic materials preserved. The planning uniqueness of Izmailovo consisted in the fact that there were several regular gardens there, and they were laid out autonomously, without the visible connection to each other — as closed, surrounded by fences,

artificial formations of regular geometric shape, which, like Islands, “floated” in the landscape surrounded the sovereign’s yard and were not compositionally linked even with it. Each of the gardens was named, corresponded to his specialism or the nature of the plan — “the Grape”, “Prosyanskiy”, “Mulberry”, “Round”, “Strawberry”, “Raspberry”, etc.

The grape garden was originally intended for the cultivation of grapes, which has been later replaced with the local fruit and berry crops. Its plan resembled a square fortress with round corner towers. The area of the outer square was lined with successively smaller squares — in the resulting frames, decreasing to the center, mainly herbs and cereals were planted — rye, oats, barley, buckwheat, wheat, poppy, closer to the center — there were shrubs: raspberry and currant. In the corner circles fruit trees like pears and cherries, plums were planted. Thus, visually the garden was quite picturesque — it had a clear silhouette with high-altitude accents at the corners and a fairly bright color scheme (parallel strips of cereals, poppy, buckwheat, etc.).

“Prosyanskiy” garden also had a square shape. On its edges equal stripes of cereals and legumes were planted, closer to the center fruit trees were located, thus its composition resembled a pyramid rising to the center. There was a tent garden house in the center, surrounded by a flower garden, consisting of 12 squares. On either side of the garden house stood sculptural fountains in the form of animals, from the mouth of which water flowed.

Round (“Aptekarskiy” - Pharmaceutical) garden (diameter 280 m), which had a radial-ring layout, with its concave shape was the opposite in terms of volumetric composition. Ten beams and two inner rings divided it into 30 sectors; in the outer wild roses, mulberry, birches grew; in the middle ring barberry played a significant role, in the inner — vegetables and medicinal plants grew. The survived drawing reported in detail what and where was expected to grow. It is worth noting that, despite the correctness of the plan, planting there were not subject to strict symmetry — in each of the rings trees, shrubs and numerous annual plants alternated quite freely.

Even the brief verbal characteristics of Izmailovo regular gardens are easily comparable with the Italian “secret gardens” (*giardini segreti*), also isolated from the environment and organized, in fact, on similar planning basis. “Secret” gardens, which were usually located near the master’s house, were surrounded by fences (sometimes non-transparent), and therefore almost isolated from the surrounding landscape. Their task was different as they served for solitude or face-to-face conversations, and were very popular during the Renaissance as small private gardens for the owners of palaces and villas. Italian historians consider them to be direct descendants of the medieval *hortus conclusus* (“garden of the prisoners”)[5], enclosed with walls, they should be considered figuratively and iconographically back to their absolute prototype of the garden of Eden. (In Russian iconography it is perfectly illustrated with the icon of Nikita Pavlovets’s “Our Lady of Vertograd” from the collection of Tretyakov gallery).

In addition, the geometrically correct plans of Izmailovo gardens in combination with the asymmetry of plantings and the lack of volumetric and spatial balance find a close analogy in the design of the Italian Botanical or pharmaceutical gardens of the 16th-17th centuries, which also represented a kind of version of *hortus conclusus*. For example, that times round Renaissance Botanical garden [6] remained in Padua, while in Florence, such gardens had a shape close to a square with the corners highlighted by tall trees.

Given Moscow’s ties with the Italian principalities, it is natural to assume the Moscovites’ interest for the novelties of medicine and the cultivation of medicinal plants, and therefore Russian ambassadors were most likely interested in the construction of special botanical or pharmaceutical gardens. It seems that the European examples were taken as a basis at the layout of, for example, a round garden in Izmailovo. The overall free composition of Izmailovo gardens also reveals certain semantic parallels with the placement of the botanical gardens of Italy — designed not for display but for growing plants in a certain system, and therefore, surrounded by a massive fence and having a little connection with their environment. They represented self-sufficient regular systems that existed in the natural or urban environment like Islands.

III. THE AMUSEMENT GARDEN AND KRUTITSKY METOCHION

Italian analogies come to mind ones again when looking at the drawing of the Amusement garden (*Poteshnyj sad*) with the chambers¹, which had the most complex and professionally executed plan. Plantings here also occupied a square area, divided into 9 smaller squares. In the center there was a square maze with a fountain (let’s emphasize — this is the first known Russian garden maze!), on the sides of which, crosswise, square parterres were arranged that did not repeat each other in the pattern, divided into four parts each. In contrast to the already mentioned Izmailovo gardens, the planting of the Amusement garden was spatially strictly ordered — the labyrinth was planted with cherries and currant bushes, ornamental parterres and low bushings were surrounded on the sides by fruit tree plantations.

Although this drawing has been accompanied with the explication in Russian and had typical for the old Russian plans orthogonal drawings of garden buildings on the sides, its subtle graphics, the complex geometry of the plan, finally, its own aesthetics takes us to the regular gardens of Renaissance Italy². Ornamental parterres and mazes have long been arranged in Italian gardens. However, the similarity is read here, first of all, in the principles of the partners’ layout. It’s fair to assume that such one-dimensional approach was due not only to the different nature of the Russian landscape, but also to the limitedness of information about the Italian gardens, that Muscovites has, which was

¹ This drawing is also associated with garden in Izmailovo, although there is no exact indication of its location.

² Dubyago supported the idea of the European character of this plan, but believed that it had little of common with Italian gardens [8].

coming mostly from sporadically from the stories of witnesses. The culture of orthogonal drawing had just started to settle in the Russian landscaping, so books and albums have not yet become real agents of Western European influences.

And still, the Amusement garden followed the same principle of planning and spatial symmetry, combined with the variety and asymmetry of small planning elements, characteristic for both small “giardini segreti” and extensive gardens of rich villas, for example, beautiful gardens of Villa Medici di Castello near Florence or Florentine gardens Boboli, laid out in the 16th century following similar principles and already known in Moscow in the middle of the 17th century. After all, it's the gardens of Boboli which a Russian Ambassador was telling Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich about with great admiration when returned from the Duchy of Tuscany: “and near the princely court, there are cedar and cypress trees and the fragrance is great. And the beauty of the gardens can not be described” [7]. It is possible that the ambassadors brought to Moscow from Florence then not only precious ducal gifts, but also some books on gardening, and maybe... even a gardener. Anyway, the plan of the Amusement garden with a high probability can be associated with the work of a foreign gardener or with the presence of a well-defined Western European prototype.

Krutitsky metochion — one of the most beautiful monastery gardens in the Moscow demonstrated similar planning principles. It's garden, close in form to a rectangle, was divided on square bosquets by perpendicular tracks, each of which was a miniature regular garden. As the first Russian parks historian Arnold Regel wrote about it: “this garden in its walking parts, already had the character of a modern park. It was distinguished by the wealth and splendor of flowers, and the contained several natural and deliberately dug springs.” [9] Surrounded with a stone wall (!) and consisting of bosquets with differing patterns and functions, this garden can also be easily verbally comparable with the Italian “secret garden”.

As it is known, the gardens of the Renaissance Italy with intricate labyrinths and numerous fountains influenced the development of regular park construction all over Europe. The ingenious methods of their layouts and spatial arrangement, transferred to the Netherlands, France, Spain and combined with their natural features, national preferences and traditions, have created original local versions of regular gardens. As J. De L'Isle noted, “When the gardens were transformed in Italy, the order with the magnificent design settled there; their brilliance has instantly amazed France” [10]. Sparks of that brilliance has also reached Russia. The noted similarity of Izmailovo gardens with the Italian prototypes suggests that the formation of the principles of Russian regular park building began in the 17th century and, like in Western Europe, under the indirect influence of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque gardens of the 16th-17th centuries. Summing up this first, still largely superficial, stage of the absorption of the Italian experience in Russian gardening, let's emphasize its importance — it became a prologue to a consistent exploration of art culture, fundamental to all European art.

IV. THE PETER'S GARDENS

Peter's time, taking a course on Western European models without hesitation hospitably opening doors to foreign architects and gardeners, has become a reference point for the wide penetration of many foreign influences, including Italian. The peculiarity of each national culture is usually manifested in how and what it borrows from others, what patterns it chooses to follow, what kind of harmonic and imaginative tasks it solves. Italian influences, as we know, are deeply and vividly manifested in various spheres of Russian culture of the 18th-early 19th century, being extremely fruitful for the formation of a new national tradition. These features are fully present in the field of landscape art. The first Emperor, unfortunately, did not visit Italy, although he intended to go there from Holland in the summer of 1698 (this was prevented by the Streltsy uprising, which forced him to return to Moscow). However, in the last years of his reign quite intensive contacts with Italy were established. Special Russian sales agents have been buying up works of Italian painters and sculptors, which were immediately implemented in the decorations of the new palaces and gardens of Peter and his associates. So, Italian art in life or on the prints and albums has become an important part of the Russian culture of the first quarter of the 18th century.

Although architectural and artistic tastes of Peter The Great were formed on other samples, however, it was since his times, when Italian masters — architects, painters, decorators, sculptors — the Europe's most desirable builders has begun to constantly come to Russia. Many other Italian masters who helped to implement the plans of the architects worked next to them. First there was D. Trezzini, N. Michetti, G. Chiaveri, B. Tarsia, K. and F.-B. Rastrelli, later P. Gonzaga, V. Brenna, L. Rusca, G. Quarenghi, D. Trombara, etc. Their work has had a direct impact on the formation of the image of the Russian garden. Let's outline only some functional, compositional and figurative parallels.

The element of water is the key to the Peter's era. The movement of water, its cheerful murmur was the aesthetic value of that time which produced a literally fascinating effect on the Russian people. As it is known, the waters of the Neva River and the Gulf of Finland has become the basic idea of almost all gardens and country estates of that time. The first decree of Peter in 1714, prescribing the construction of the banks of the Moika and Fontanka rivers (“take drawings from the architect Trezzini” [11]), laid the foundation for the construction of a new capital's indispensable connection with water. The plots were cut in such way that everyone had an access to the river, but driveways along it, or, especially embankments, were absent, so almost all of the St. Petersburg residents arranged a marina, a harbor or an access canal in front of the house (and, as a rule, all of them were completely different), which somewhat resembled the coastal blocks of the Venetian lagoon or intricate chains of various marinas near the villas along the banks of Lago Maggiore or Lago di Como. The proximity of a big river allowed to actively use canals, ponds, and favorites of the era — fountains in the composition of homestead gardens. Since the Italian Renaissance, the

fountain has been the symbol of creative energy, the image of a pure Castalian Spring, flowing from Parnassus and protected by muses. The love for fountains is the feature that distinguishes gardens and parks of all the 18th century. It is no accident that in 1714 the Italian emissary of the Tsar was looking for gateway masters in Venice [12] — the idea of creating channels of the Strelna Park apparently belongs to the "mechanics-Venetians" who came there shortly after [13].

Many fountain ventures of Peterhof have Italian prototypes. The abundance of fountains ones made D. S. Likhachev to associate the idea of Peterhof with the famous Villa d'este in Tivoli [14], created in the second half of the 16th century by Pirro Ligorio which was notable by the abundance of cascades and fountains — few hundred in total. Fountains form the basis of both ensembles, and the composition of Peterhof shows a lot of purely Italian techniques and details. This is not surprising, given that after Leblon, who laid out the foundation for Peterhof's planning composition, its development and further implementation belonged to the wonderful Italian architect N. Michetti, still not fully appreciated in the history of Russian art.

Large fountains in the Lower Park next to the central cascade ("Italian" — built by Italian masters, "French" — by French ones) were conceived by Michetti in 1720-1722 and resembled numerous fountains in the squares of Rome and other Italian cities. The composition of the Pyramid fountain (N. Michetti, 1721), although initially was inspired by Versailles "Obelisk", reminded the architectural design of the Central fountain of the famous Renaissance Villa Lante in Bagnaia. The Italian features in the Grand cascade of Peterhof are numerous and undoubted. The arrangement and decoration of the grotto of The Grand cascade are comparable to the fountains of the grottoes of Villa Madame in Rome, Aldobrandini in Frascati and the Villa d'Este in Tivoli. The inner walls of the grotto, decorated with tuff and shells and equipped with "watering amusements", are typical for the grottoes of Italian villas. The grotto of the Summer garden, as well as later grottoes in St. Petersburg residences and other estates, despite the discrepancy with each other, refer, in fact, to numerous Italian prototypes. Later fountains — "Roman" (1739), reminiscent of the fountains in the square near the Cathedral of St. Peter and "Terraced" (1800), were also inspired by Italian culture.

Although Russian gardens were lacking striking sculptures of giant monsters like in Bomarzo, or the Villa Medici di Castello, near Florence, the desire for simple garden fun, surprises, "amusements", and rarities was also present. Water features in new gardens gave Peter The Great a pleasant opportunity to fool around with his guests.

Such features Emperor has seen abroad (for example, this kind of attraction, that pours water on guests, has been built in the Dutch residence of Zorgvliet). They were immediately recreated in the gardens of Peterhof. The idea of such fountains, directly related to the medieval Italian "water jokes" ("giochi d'aqua"), was very popular in the European Baroque gardens of that time. Hidden devices allowed pouring water on an unsuspecting guest when the fountain suddenly started to work. "Giochi d'acqua" got particularly

widespread and sophisticated in the gardens of Italian mannerism. Water "jokes" in the gardens of the Villa d'este in Tivoli were ruthless to visitors and amazed them during Peter's times. Peterhof's amusements — these inimitable treacherous pathways, sofas, benches, an umbrella, etc. — are the only fountains in Russia that are directly connected with the ancient Italian "water jokes".

The traditions of "secret gardens" have also been developed. Their features are easily noticeable in the garden of Monplaisir and other estates of Peter's time, and later in the "hanging" garden of Catherine in the Small Hermitage. A Private garden, as the descendants of "giardino segreto" were called in Russia, was laid out and under the walls of an elegant Pavlovsk Palace, imitating the Palladio's Venetian villas in the fashion of that time, as well as many other palaces and manors of the late 18th-early 19th centuries.

Peter's gardens give an opportunity to outline some semantic and symbolic parallels with the Italian prototypes. For example, the image of Hercules which impressed the Emperor was extremely popular at that time. It is known that the mythological story of Hercules was to become the leading motif in the sculptural decoration of the Golovinsky garden in Moscow. These themes Peter has been also developing in Peterhof. Peter supposed to arrange two fountain cascades near Marli ensemble, one of which was to present "the history of Hercules" [15]. It is complemented by the garden of Venus "Parnaso Monte" (mount Parnassus — M. N.) and "The Garden of Bacchus". Later, this image became almost traditional in the manor ensembles of the 18th century. The statue of Hercules defeating lernaean Hydra ("the snake of seven heads") was to take place in the center of the reconstructed Annengof cascade. It is among the sculptures of the Old Garden and the Cameron's gallery in Tsarskoye Selo. Hercules fighting Antey is located in the center of the upper terrace in Archangelskoye near Moscow, and the copies of ancient statues of Hercules and Flora similar to those from Tsarskoye Selo stood at the shore cliff at the end of the green parterre in front of the Palace. The statue of Venus is traditional for the manor gardens of the 18th — early 19th centuries. The famous predecessor of such semantic elements of Russian gardens — is again the garden of Villa d'Este in Tivoli, where the basis for the symbolic design was the story of Hercules, which family d'Este, thought to be their legendary ancestor, and the cult of Venus. This list can be continued.

V. CONCLUSION

Over time, Italian associations in Russian gardens became more and more diverse — Renaissance allusions were supplemented with the wide range of ancient prototypes, architectural and compositional analogies, landscape and figurative characteristics. They seem to have helped to feel the originality and beauty of the Russian landscape more sharply and more subtly.

The logic of the development of garden Italianism in Russia goes a long way from schematic and simplified regular plans, only vaguely reminiscent of their Italian prototypes, to the development of technical innovations and

figurative analogies, and from them to the art of the transformation and harmonization of the Russian landscape. In other words, Italian influence helped not only to fully master European art culture, but also, as if in a magic mirror, to show the national character of the Russian culture of the New time.

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