

THE VATICAN GARDENS FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY¹

ORTA ÇAĞ'DAN 20. YÜZYILA VATİKAN BAHÇELERİ

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ABSTRACT

The Vatican Gardens occupy 22 hectares within the Vatican State and are the oldest gardens in Rome. They have been transformed in successive stages from the thirteenth century to the present day and numerous popes have left signs of their patronage. In fact, they do not appear as unified gardens, but rather as a puzzle of various gardens that reflect different periods and styles. While their history is centuries old and extremely interesting, their present-day appearance is largely due to work done in the twentieth century, when the Vatican State received a large monetary indemnity from the Italian government in compensation for the vast territories taken from it by Rome to create the Italian State in 1870. These funds permitted the construction of numerous buildings and new gardens which, although created between 1930-1934, are for the most part in Renaissance and Baroque style.

ÖZET

Vatikan Devleti içerisinde 22 hektarlık bir alan kaplayan Vatikan bahçeleri, Roma'da bulunan en eski bahçelerdir. 13. yüzyıldan günümüze dek aşamalı olarak değişikliğe uğrayan bu bahçelerde sayısız Papa'nın himayesine dair izler okunmaktadır. Gerçekten de bahsedilen bahçeler bütüncül bir yapı sergilemekten çok, farklı dönem ve üslupları yansıtan çeşitli bahçelerin oluşturduğu bir "yapbozu" andırmaktadır. Son derece ilgi çekici geçmişleri yüzlerce yıl öncesine dayanan bu bahçelerin günümüzdeki görünüşü, büyük oranda 20. yüzyılda oluşturulmuştur. İtalya Hükümeti'nin 1870 senesinde İtalya Devleti kurulurken Vatikan Devleti'nden edindiği Roma'daki geniş araziler karşılığında mali tazminat ödemesi, bahçelerdeki değişimin nedeni olarak görülmektedir. Bahsedilen ödenekler, sayısız yeni yapı ve bahçenin yapımına izin verirken, bu yapı ve bahçeler 1930-34 seneleri arasında inşa edilmelerine rağmen çoğunlukla Rönesans ve Barok üsluplarında tasarlanmıştır.

Nearly half of the forty-four hectare expanse of the Vatican State is occupied by gardens, created over at least eight centuries on land characterized by significant disparities in elevation. Its present-day appearance is the fruit of multiple transformations, superimpositions, and alterations linked to the evolving taste with regard to the art of gardens, but also, and above all, the will of the single popes that succeeded one and other. The history of the Vatican gardens, in fact, is like a great puzzle, formed by a set of spaces in which each is articulated without being necessarily connected to the one next to it. Unlike an aristocratic villa, in which the family that owned it sought to maintain its ancestral traditions, and so each successive member sought to exalt the continuity with the past, for the papal residence the situation was completely different. The popes, in fact, belonged to families that were at times in conflict with one and other and thus they did not feel the need to respect what had been built by their predecessors; on the contrary, each sought to leave his distinctive mark in some way. Consequently, the Vatican gardens have reflected the various personalities and patronage of a great number of popes, making the reconstruction of the many building phases complex. This problem was accentuated, above all, by the last, most radical intervention, following the Lateran Accords of 1929 between the Church and the State, which assumed a predominant character with respect to the vestiges of the past and, in some case, canceled the previous layout of the sites.

The origins of the Vatican Gardens are attributed by common accord to Cardinal Giovanni Gaetano Orsini, a man of great culture and an expert on medicinal plants, who rose to the papacy with the name Nicholas III (1277-1280). Initially working alongside Pope John XXI, and then as pope, this illustrious member of the Orsini family amplified the Vatican territory beyond the wall erected by Pope Leo IV (847-855) and made a *viridarium* (garden) that had a doorway next to it, called the *Viridaria*, as it is referred to in a document from 1279. The Porta Viridaria, no longer extant, opened onto the garden and was located close to the great round keep built by Nicholas V, which with its imposing mass still dominates the area near the Porta Sant'Anna entrance. A description from the time allows us to identify the original garden as a *hortus conclusus*, a garden surrounded by a wall according to medieval custom and rich with symbolic references connect-

ed to the cult of the Virgin Mary, with frequent citations from the biblical Song of Solomon. The garden was carefully tended, as the documents show, and Nicholas IV (1288-1293) expanded it, calling in an important figure and connoisseur of plants, Simone of Genoa, who is credited with the creation of a true botanical garden that is believed by many scholars to be the first in Italy, predating those in Padua and Pisa. The garden was dedicated to the cultivation of herbs, or *semplici*, as medicinal plants were called, but there were also flowers with solely decorative purposes. The years of exile to Avignon (1309-1377) inevitably led to a decline in interest in the gardens, yet in letters written from Avignon the popes ask that the gardens be tended and maintained, and their references to them increase as the prospect of a return to the Vatican grows more likely. In 1368 a document attests to the presence in the gardens of citrus trees, which were valued not only for their eatable fruit, but also for the beauty that their foliage and golden fruit lent to the gardens. This is information of great interest, as it testifies to the originality of the Vatican Gardens, in which plants from other countries were introduced. The gardens were also a hunting site, as can be seen in a 1367 map of Rome by Brother Paolino of Venice, in which the Vatican citadel is shown surrounded by a crenelated wall enclosing some buildings, but above all trees, and animals scamper about freely.

An important image of the garden dates to 1465, when the citadel was depicted in a fresco by Benozzo Gozzoli held in the church of Sant'Agostino in San Gimignano (Fig.1). In this view the hill with the Basilica is depicted as is the first nucleus of Apostolic Palaces in the lower section, while in the upper part, within the walled area, is a vast empty space that we know was cultivated with grape vines and vegetable plots. The Palace has ample porticoes that open onto the space in front of them, where a garden arrangement is visible containing geometric beds with a central tree and also a pyramidal structure, probably a kind of pergola covered with climbing plants. A few years after this depiction, the highest part of the area, 300 metres from the nucleus of the Palace and the Basilica, was used to build a residence that permitted the pope to isolate himself from the affairs of state, while remaining nearby. Innocent VIII (1484-1492), in fact, began construction of the Belvedere, so called for the splendid panoramas afforded by its position of Rome and

the surrounding hills, originally a *palazzetto* (small palace) with just a few rooms suitable for brief stops in the cool air and greenery. The construction of the Palazzo del Belvedere marked the beginning of a project to organize the area that would conclude only a century later, but it also marked the affirmation of a building type that would spread to all of the subsequent aristocratic residences, that of the *residenza in villa* (garden house), characterized by the pergola and the primacy of the ground-floor spaces connected to the garden. Despite its relatively small size, the *palazzetto* was decorated with frescoes (mostly lost) and opened onto a garden with fountains and trees. Its elevated position on the hill allowed it to dominate the city and under its massive sustaining buttresses passed processions of pilgrims as well as those of ambassadors headed for the Vatican. The first nucleus of the building, with clear fifteenth century characteristics still closer to the fortified palace type than that of the villa, was destined for a series of expansions that would transform it into a sumptuous residence. The distance between the Palaces and the Basilica was substantial, however; to reach the Belvedere, one had to cross a glen with a drop of some 150 metres. It would fall to Donato Bramante (1444-1514), who came to Rome in 1499 to serve under Julius II (1503-1513), to invent a spectacular connection between the two residential sites, with a structure that united the typologies of the courtyard, garden, and theatre. His project was based on the construction of two parallel loggias that enclosed a courtyard which, to overcome the disparities in elevation of the terrain, was articulated on three levels connected by ample stairways that seemed like, and served as, theatrical wings. At the end of the loggias and leaning against the Belvedere was an exedra. Within it, Bramante conceived an additional, original space that united aspects of the courtyard and the garden to exhibit the magnificent collection of antique sculpture that the pope wished to display to the public, thus creating the celebrated “Cortile delle Statue,” or sculpture court, which formed the first nucleus of the Vatican Museums. Bramante did not complete his work. Only one of the loggias, that facing the city, was complete at the time of his, and the pope’s, deaths (Fig. 2). Not all of the successors of the humanist pope, Julius II, valued this creation that was so closely linked to the exaltation of the classical, and therefore pagan, world. Con-

sequently, only at the time of Pius IV (1559-1565) did the architect Pirro Ligorio build the second side of the loggias and transform Bramante’s massive exedra into an elegant niche that would later be adorned with the great bronze pine cone whence its name, the Cortile della Pigna. The primitive garden near the Apostolic Palaces and the Basilica was by then replaced by the Belvedere creations. There were thus two distinct areas, the older one for *negotia*, and the other, new, Belvedere, for *otium*. The internal courtyard of the loggias contained unique gardens, rich with symbolic significance and very “architectonic”, next to an agricultural area. Over the course of the centuries, the courtyard was transformed numerous times and ultimately subdivided into three distinct spaces (Cortile del Belvedere, Cortile della Biblioteca, Cortile della Pigna) with the construction of transversal structures (at the end of the sixteenth century the Biblioteca Sistina and at the end of the eighteenth, the Museo Pio-Clementino) and its appearance today is completely different from Bramante’s original plan. Over time various types of garden types were planted within the Cortile del Belvedere, from simple beds to elaborate *parterres* in the French style with colourful blooms and potted citrus trees. Today, only in the part known as the Cortile della Pigna remains a simple lawn design divided into four beds.

While the ambitious plan of Bramante and Julius II remained unfinished, another garden of modest size and of which we know very little was created by Pope Clement VII Medici (1523-1534) on the terrace next to the Belvedere, facing Monte Mario. No trace of this garden remains, yet it is documented in maps from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. It consisted of a few geometric beds that formed a prolongation of the Belvedere and allowed the pope to look at the still-unfinished Medici family residence, Villa Madama, located on the hillside directly in front.

In reality, the first garden in the Belvedere area, known to us only through descriptions or iconographic sources, was the one built at the behest of Paul III (1534-1549), destined to be transformed innumerable times, and whose site is now partially occupied by the Pinacoteca building built in 1930. The garden so desired by the Farnese pope and designed by the architect Jacopo Melegghino was a

perfect example of the “secret garden”: a quadrangular space surrounded by walls with monumental openings, destined to be the model for the type of garden that became widespread in Renaissance and Baroque aristocratic villas. The garden was divided into four large sectors defined by a cross-shaped pergola, an elaborate wooden structure covered with greenery that formed tunnels of vegetation. The presence of pergolas covered with climbing plants, usually roses and jasmine which united their fragrance with the beauty of the flowers, was widespread and advised by the treatises of the time and illustrated in famous texts such as *l'Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* by Francesco Colonna, printed by Aldo Manuzio in 1499. In the Secret Garden there were espaliers of citrus and other fruit trees and to guarantee their watering, complex hydraulic systems were put into place. To care for the flowers, in the medieval tradition a *semplicista* was called in, but the garden contained more than just medicinal plants. The documents indicate the presence of flower bulbs, probably anemones and tulips, which were in vogue at the time.

During his brief pontificate Julius III (1550-1555) too, in addition to initiating that extraordinary complex that is the Villa Giulia, began a small garden in the Vatican on the terracing near Bramante's loggias on the side facing the city, at the foot of the Palazzetto del Belvedere. It had a few flower beds and a nymphaeum with rocaille positioned against the walls, from which one could see the entire city. All of these gardens are visible in the detailed map by Mario Cartaro from 1574, whose legend makes clear their attribution (Fig.3).

Another humanist pope, Pius IV Medici (1559-1565), in addition to completing Bramante's project, entrusted Pirro Ligorio with the construction of the most incredible pavilion in the garden, the Casina named for him, even if the original design was made at the behest of his predecessor, Paul IV Carafa (1558-1559). The Belvedere had become overpopulated, and no longer served the function of a retreat as Innocent VIII had conceived it and Paul IV decided to build a small structure in the middle of the woods that covered a large part of the hill, halfway between the Apostolic Palaces and the Belvedere, next to a fountain. But with Ligorio and Pius IV the project assumed a different aspect, becoming a

splendid fusion of architecture and decorative arts, with antique marbles of complex symbolism, rightly defined by Johannes Burckhardt as “the most beautiful retreat for a mid-summer afternoon”. With the successor of Pius IV, the ascetic, rigorous, and Counter-Reformist Pius V (1566-1572) the Casina was stripped of its most clearly pagan decorations, but the space in front of it was enriched by a spectacular garden. In truth, the first information about the creation of this garden dates to the pontificate of Pius IV and more precisely to 1561 when Giacomo Boni or Bono, a noted Ferrarese botanist, was called upon to take care of the Vatican Gardens, but the definitive layout is due to the work of another great botanist, Michele Mercati. From Pisa, and a student of Andrea Cesalpino, Mercati was in contact with the most important flower collectors and experts of the time, in particular with the celebrated naturalist and professor at the University of Bologna, Ulisse Aldrovandi, with whom he exchanged the rarest, most precious flower species. Thanks to the network of the apostolic nuncios, he also received exotic, rare exemplars from many countries in Asia and the Americas. Of particular interest are his references to the king of Spain, Philip II, who served as a middleman to supply the pope with the rarest plants from overseas. Numerous documents that have survived to this day contain long lists of plants which tell us that in the gardens in front of the Casina there were some 470 varieties of flowers, among these “Indian shot” (*Canna indica*), “sunchoke” (*Helianthus tuberosus*), and “nicotiana” (*Nicotiana tabacum* from the tobacco family) from the Americas, as well as an incredible variety of tulips, narcissi, and anemones.

The flower beds were organized in a geometric patterns in front of and on the sides of the Casina. Behind it was a wooded area with tortuous paths, creating a marked contrast between the ordered design of the garden and the free, somewhat wild expanse of nature. In Cartaro's map, the various nuclei of the gardens within the Vatican's walls are clearly visible: the Belvedere with the Cortile delle Statue, Bramante's great terraced courtyard bounded by the now-completed loggias and organized into beds, the Secret Garden of Paul III with its distinctive cross-shaped pergola, and finally the garden of the Casina of Pius IV. Beyond the walls, behind the Basilica of St. Peter whose transforma-

tion was still underway (a part of the cupola, under construction, is visible) the landscape changes: the huts and vineyards on the productive part of the hillside testify to the continued coexistence of rural and pleasure areas.

The magnificence and spectacular nature of the garden designed and cared for by Mercati was such that it was often noted in the enthusiastic chronicles of foreign visitors. In addition, the garden was considered a fitting passion for the pontificates, not just for the inevitable analogy between the gardener who cultivates flowers and the church pastor who cultivates his flock, but also with reference to the biblical symbolism that repeatedly associates the Virgin Mary with floral symbols. Another element linked to religious symbolism was water, an element of earthly life but also of eternal life, salvation, and redemption, and thus in the Vatican Gardens it was never absent.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the presence of water went beyond the symbolic to the spectacular and scenographic, thanks to the construction of the Acqua Paola by Paul V Borghese (1605-1621). The pope, who is known for having commissioned, through his nephew Scipione Caffarelli Borghese, the most beautiful and famous Roman villa, located just outside Porta Pinciana, was a passionate lover of gardens and in his residences, in the Vatican, and on the Quirinale, signs of his patronage are still visible. Paul V left his mark on history for having finally supplied the city with enough water to satisfy its needs, by reactivating the antique aqueduct, the Acqua Traiana, which brought the Acqua Alseatina from Bracciano, and celebrating this feat with the monumental *Fontanone* on the Janiculum, from which it was easy to distribute the water to the entire residential area below. Once the city was supplied, a substantial part of this water was reserved for the Vatican Gardens, both for their irrigation and, above all, to feed the five fountains that the pope had placed on the grounds. Each of these fountains is extremely different from the others, and together they form a kind of sample book of the fountain types in fashion at the time. They range from simple, rigorous models in the Renaissance vein to the most fantastical and daring Baroque inventions, intended to inspire awe and wonder. The first to be built, in the Piazza del Forno (oven), also known as the Piazza della Panetteria (bakery),

is attributed to Carlo Maderno, an architect in the pope's service. Consisting of a simple circular basin with three smaller, tiered basins, it opened the way into the gardens. Not far away, a second fountain had a new and interesting appearance. The simple, rigorous aedicule type, here again assimilable with Renaissance architecture, is enriched with sumptuous, original decorations. The entire surface of the niche is covered with multicolored mosaics that compose *greillage* with flowers and birds and elaborate grotesques intermingled with dragons and eagles, emblems of the Borghese family. Amongst the mosaics, mirrors (now lost) were also inserted, and for this reason the fountain is known as the Fontana degli Specchi (mirrors). This small fountain is located next to the door of the papal apartments to allow direct access to the gardens for those coming from the Palaces.

This sample book of Borghesian fountains, which put to work the talents of the pontifical architects Carlo Maderno, Giovanni Vasanzio and Martino Ferrabosco (particularly competent in the area of hydraulic engineering) continued with the majestic and spectacular Fontana del Sacramento or delle Torri, inserted in the wall, with two towers with battlements used to frame the waterfall and decorated with the ubiquitous dragons and eagles to glorify the family. The culmination of the celebration of the conduits that brought water to the gardens was the magnificent Fontana dell'Aquilone, or dello Scoglio, so called because it was composed of rocks assembled to imitate a natural creation and for the imposing heraldic eagle on top of it (Fig.4). The fountain was justifiably defined the monumental display of the Acqua Paola, the foil, in rustic style, to the Fontanone del Gianicolo that dominated the city. The mountain of rocks that forms the grottoes and arches, bubbling and gushing water everywhere in a riotous mix of water, stone, and vegetation, is more baroque than one can imagine, while still adhering to the repertoire of the grottoes and nymphaeums that were already widespread in the sixteenth century with an interpreter of the level of Federico Barozzi of Vignola. Completing the itinerary was a fountain that unites spectacular invention with religious symbolism. This is the Fontana della Galera, a galley, in fact, in miniature, built entirely in metal—lead, copper, and iron—and a perfect imitation of the ships in the pontiff's fleet in the port of Civi-

tavecchia, there to defend the coasts of the Vatican State. No detail of this incredible creation was overlooked, from the shrouds to the figurehead at the stern and the miniature cannons which fire jets of water. The message it was meant to transmit is obvious: the Church, the vessel of salvation, spurted water, and not fire, from its cannons. The Galera navigated in a pond near a rustic niche that had existed there since the sixteenth century, probably due to a project commissioned by Pope Julius III. This was transformed in the eighteenth century into a flat wall with fake masonry facings, and the papal crest and inscriptions celebrating Pope Pius VI.

Despite this commitment to building many splendid fountains, Paul V did not forget to look after the gardens, which he had found in excellent condition, as his predecessors had entrusted their care to an exceptional person, Johannes Faber, a native of Bamberg and a founder in 1604, with Federico Cesi and other eminent figures, of the prestigious Accademia dei Lincei (Academy of the Lynxes) that contributed greatly to the development of interest in the natural sciences. Faber was a renowned naturalist and doctor, and a professor at La Sapienza University and was capable of uniting the scientific and the practical. Since 1600 he had been called upon to look after the Vatican Gardens by Clement VIII Aldobrandini (1592-1605), and then confirmed in this role by Leo XI Medici (1605) during his brief pontificate. He then continued his work under Paul V and, finally, under Urban VIII Barberini (1623-1644) his career ended in 1629, the year of his death. Numerous documents, many of which remain to be studied, contain evidence of the new vitality given by Faber to the gardens, with the increase in the variety of rare flowers. Like Mercati, he too utilized the pontifical nuncios to obtain plants and flowers from far-reaching places around the world. Among his papers are numerous lists of species to request from Constantinople, Alexandria in Egypt, Flanders, France, Venice, and Naples. Faber obtained the rarest, most precious specimens through exchanges with collectors of the time, but also went personally to look for plants in the Roman countryside and in Naples. His expertise was so superior that in addition to serving five popes he also worked for other families of Roman nobility. Among Faber's letters and papers are lists of great interest of the plants that were cultivated in the gar-

dens. These included many exemplars from the Americas and bulbs with spectacular flowers such as the *Fritillaria imperialis*, which surely elicited the admiration of visitors to whom the popes showed the carefully tended beds (Fig.5). Once again the maps of the time allow us to know how the garden was organized. A fine map of the Vatican citadel by Giovanni Maggi, dating to 1615, gives a detailed rendering of all of its elements. The fountains built at the behest of the Borghese pope are clearly visible and in the area in front of the Casina of Pius IV the gardens appear even more extensive and complex than they were at the time of Michele Mercati. In fact, they occupy the spaces to the sides and the corresponding legend contains a definition that would indicate the cultivation of herbs, or medicinal plants, exclusively. In reality, we know that at the time, the term "*orto dei semplici*" meant a true botanical garden, with useful as well as decorative plants such as, for example, the tulips that in the first half of the seventeenth century, were enormously popular, leading to exorbitant prices that gave way to a true "tulipmania", or economic speculation that brought many families to ruin, above all in Flanders where the bulbs were cultivated intensively. In the lists of plants prepared by Faber, we find medicinal plants such as absinthe, rue, psyllium, mallow, and camomile, but also valuable, decorative plants such as nicotiana, foxglove, varieties of ranunculus, iris of various colours, Peruvian hyacinth, (probably Peruvian squill), and trachelium. The arrival in the Vatican of plants from every part of the world is documented, other than in Faber's letters, by payment documents that, while rather generic, confirm the richness of the gardens which rivaled those of the most highly visible noble families of Rome. Under Faber's care, the gardens surely saw their moment of greatest splendor: water flowed in abundance, feeding the Borghese fountains, while in the flower beds blossoms of every colour abounded, set against the magnificent backdrop of the Casino of Pius IV and, further away, the dense woods in which to stroll in the shade of centuries-old oaks and organize hunting parties.

During his lengthy pontificate Urban VIII, while a notorious lover of the gardens, does not seem to have left significant traces, with the sole exception of the small Fontanina delle Api (bees), attributed to Gian Lorenzo Bernini but carved by Francesco Borromi-

ni, and so named for the presence of the heraldic Barberini bees.

A description of the gardens from 1640 by the illustrious British traveller, John Evelyn, confirms the image of splendor and beauty they transmitted: fountains, plays of water, collections of valuable sculpture, grottoes, shaded walks, and fruit groves; that is, a true earthly paradise for the use of the popes and their guests.

Two fine etchings from 1676 by Giovan Battista Falda allow us to verify in detail the layout of the Vatican citadel within the walls that isolated it from the city (Fig. 6). In the first, the entire territory is visible and is still subdivided in two distinct sectors, bounded by the walls built by Leo IV and greatly reworked by Nicholas V (1447-1455), but nevertheless generally referred to as the Leonine Wall. In the area behind the Basilica, by now complete, there was a disorganized grouping of huts, while others were isolated between the vegetable plots and vineyards which occupied the steep, uneven terrain. Beyond the wall, on the other hand, were the gardens with rectilinear paths and geometric beds in the area nearest the buildings, while in the higher area, further from these structures and from the city, was a wooded area with winding paths. Again, we have confirmation of the historic coexistence of productive and relaxation zones. The second plan, on the other hand, shows only the gardens and in great detail, such that we may even identify the exemplars of palm trees in the bed in front of the Casina of Pius IV. By now the Secret Garden of Paul III had lost its distinctive cross-shaped pergola and appears simply divided into four sections bounded by low hedges, probably boxwood. Easily recognizable along the bastions next to the Belvedere are the garden of Clement VII and, up against the loggias toward the city, that of Julius III to which Paul V had added the Fontana della Galera. Both the Cortile delle Statue and the two upper terraces of the Cortile del Belvedere feature geometric flower beds.

In that same period, beginning in 1677, the pontifical administration began keeping regular accounts relative to the gardens, noted in the registers called “Rincontro dei Giardini” (Garden Accounts), that

continued year by year until 1740, when they stop, or in any case they have not come down us. In 1795, they begin again and were once again interrupted in 1798, at the time of the French occupation of Rome. These are documents of immense importance, which allow us to understand the arrangement of the gardens and the cultivation practices in use, as all of the work carried out and the relative expenses are carefully noted. Glancing through the accounts, one notices the importance given in the gardens to citrus trees, which were present in great number and in many varieties ranging from the common *melangoli* (as bitter oranges are called in Rome) to valuable citrons. There were potted citrus trees and others planted directly in the ground, in groves or growing on trellises to form espaliers or pergolas. These plants, with their shiny leaves and golden fruit, were highly decorative, but they also provided a source of revenue, since at harvest time the “*merangolaro*” arrived, who bought a quantity of fruit to cover the needs of the pope’s table and that of his court. Consequently, the citrus trees received constant care. In addition to watering, pruning, and cleaning, during the winter every possible attention was paid to protect them from any eventual frost. The potted trees were moved to orangeries, while those varieties planted in the ground that were the most delicate were carefully covered in the coldest days: the gardeners tied mat coverings to protect them from frost damage and on the coldest nights braziers with burning coals were introduced to temper the inclement night air. The documents also reveal that the gardens contained flowers in great quantity, including roses, jasmine, tuberose, carnations, jonquils, lilies of the valley, and numerous tulips, which were evidently still very popular. The flowers, in addition to serving as permanent decoration for the gardens, were gathered in large quantities each year for the Feast of Corpus Domini (Corpus Christi), when their petals were scattered during the solemn procession. In the eighteenth century, the botanical garden designed by Michele Mercati and further developed by Johannes Faber was no longer in place, as its function had been passed on to the new civic botanical garden that Alexander had made on the Janiculum in 1659.

The gardens abounded with fruit trees of various species; these too were valued both for their lovely flowers and for the fruits they produced for the

table and the marketplace. In the rural area, located beyond the Leonine Wall, there was a true agricultural enterprise, where livestock was also raised, and whose products were regularly sold in the marketplace.

In fact, in this rural area, an extraordinary project was realized in the last years of the eighteenth century: a new, most unusual botanical garden of limited size, yet destined to hold American plants, and thus called "Vatican-Indico". The idea for this project came from Reverend Luigi Filippo Gili with the collaboration of Gaspare Suarez. Although it existed for only a brief time, it was incredibly innovative, as it introduced to Rome a quantity of plants from across the ocean as had never been seen before. Fortunately, the documentation of that brief experience was recorded in prints in 1794, and we thus have a description of the Vatican-Indico Botanical Garden, richly illustrated with vivid watercolours depicting the rarest, most original plants from North and South America. Among these species are *Annona squamosa*, *Kalmia angustifolia*, *Lippa americana*, *Myrica cerifera* and *Bromelia pinguin*, a variety of pineapple of spectacular colours. After just a few years, the Vatican-Indico Botanical Garden was virtually erased by the French occupation and in 1798 the Vatican citadel was also invaded by soldiers who sacked and devastated the gardens, where they dug trenches and erected barricades. The traumatic occupation opened a period of political turbulence that left little room for the care of the gardens. For the entire nineteenth century, there were no important changes, but rather a progressive "ruralization". In fact, the Catasto Gregoriano (Gregorian Cadastre) of 1818 registers the presence of an "artichoke bed" in the site next to the Casina of Pius IV, where in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries bulbs and rare flowers bloomed. In addition, the lack of attention to the gardens led to the practice of renting out large portions of them to private parties in order to raise funds and guarantee their maintenance. However, despite the political instability, two popes found the time and a way to show their passion for the gardens during this century. The first was Gregory XVI (1831-1846), described as an "expert in the natural sciences and particularly in herbs", introduced innovations inspired by English taste. One example is the new layout of the Secret Garden of Paul III that was completely redesigned

with flower beds, little fountains, potted citrus trees and espaliers, with the coat of arms of the reigning pope formed out of elaborate floral compositions (Fig. 7). According to contemporary descriptions of the garden, there were also two hothouses of pineapples, at the considered rare, valuable fruits. The "ruralization" that had characterized the first decades of the century not only came to an end, but some areas that had been used for vegetable plots were once again transformed into gardens. In addition to his love for the gardens, the pope also enjoyed hunting, and utilized a "roccolo", or bird trap, in the high part of the woods which he repopulated with some 1500 chaffinches from Lombardy. New sculptural elements were also added to the woods, in keeping with the style of English gardens. The expert French traveler Louis Eustache Audot, who during his Italian tour had described the most important and fashionable gardens, rated the Vatican Gardens as among the finest. The subsequent years were once again afflicted by political events and during the papacy of Pius IX (1846-1878) no attention was paid to the care of the gardens. In 1848, during the clashes between the Republicans and papal supporters, they were again invaded, with resulting damages, such that some 164 tall trees were cut down. Consequently, all of the efforts invested in the gardens went to repairs and renovations. After the "Porta Pia breach", and the capture of Rome by the Italian army, on September 20, 1870, the pope retreated to the Vatican. However, every day he strolled in the gardens where the only sign of his passage is the siting of the Monument to the First Vatican Council. The tradition of the "gardener pope", which had returned the gardens to their former splendor under Gregory XVI, was repeated with Leo XIII (1878-1903) who was a native of Carpineto, a town in the Roman countryside, and loved both the rural and pleasurable aspects of nature. He, too, focused his energy at first on reclaiming the gardens from their abandoned state and devastation, but also introduced improvements. To create the guise of a holiday place, he built a small residence at the edge of the woods, by creating a comfortable room in what is today the Radio Tower, along the surviving route of the Leonine Wall. Next to this, to receive guests and visitors, he built a rustic, medieval-style chalet. The pope's love of outdoor life also included hunting at the bird snare, and in the woods there was an enclosure for fallow deer and gazelles.

This interest extended to the vineyards, which the pope was intent on making a model of avant-garde wine production. It is said that up until the end of his life, Leo XIII never missed a day in his gardens, which he visited in a carriage, a concession to his advanced age. The first decades of the twentieth century were not particularly eventful for the gardens, which gained a few fountains in the wooded area at the behest of Benedict XV (1914-1922). These were modest structures, above all when compared to those of his predecessors, as they were made with such inexpensive materials as cement, rocaïlle, and some travertine decorations. Their architectural style was extremely simple.

With the pontificate of Pius XI (1922-1939) came a true revolution in the layout of the Vatican citadel, in particular the gardens. The image we have of them today is largely due to the changes undertaken in the last decade of his pontificate, which not only resulted in modifications to the existing gardens but also, in an even more striking way, the reclamation for pleasure purposes of the entire rural area with the creation, ex novo, of a new, eclectic layout of the greenery. In the first years of his reign, the pope limited himself to the addition of some small and modest fountains in the woods, similar to those commissioned by his predecessor, and made in the same cement material. But in 1929, with the signing of the Lateran Accord with the Italian State, the entire territory was transformed. The changes made are clearly visible in two maps published in the magazine, *Illustrazione Vaticana* in 1933 to show the importance of what was being done, that is the construction of a State. The Lateran Accord of February 11 between the Kingdom of Italy and the Holy See recognized the latter's territorial sovereignty over the Vatican State and the papal Villa of Castel Gandolfo. In compensation for the territories and property taken by force in 1870, an indemnity of one billion lire—a substantial sum at the time—was awarded, in addition to certain privileges regarding the supply of water and electricity. This money was used immediately to construct buildings for the new state, thus initiating a radical transformation of the antique, rural area. The mammoth renewal project, which included the gardens, also created numerous jobs for the many unemployed victims of the Great Depression. Work on the gardens began in March 1930 and was completed four years later. The vast scope of the

project encompassed the renovation of the existing gardens and the transformation of some 13 hectares of terrain that had been used for centuries for vineyards into an ornamental, richly decorated space that served as an elegant setting for all of the institutional buildings of the new State. The entire vast area between the Leonine Wall and the back of Saint Peter's Basilica lost its agricultural character once and for all, and even the shape of the terrain was modified by massive excavations. To complete the layout of the new area, water drainage channels were created and palisades built to reinforce the terracing and the uneven terrain. These were connected to escarpments that reached an incline as steep as 40 percent. According to a detailed chronicle, published in *Illustrazione Vaticana*, more than one million cubic metres of material were excavated, resulting in the demolition of the huts along the Leonine Wall. The huge building project was entrusted to the architect Giuseppe Momo, who probably also designed the gardens with the help of Giovanni Nicolini, the botanist who published a thorough accounting of their work in the January 1934 issue of *Illustrazione Vaticana*. As Nicolini recounts, the pope participated decisively in the choices and made his preferences clearly known. The first project undertaken involved the historic Secret Garden of Paul III which under Gregory XVI had been transformed into a composition of flower beds with the emblems of the reigning pope obtained using multicoloured flowers. The new Pinacoteca designed by Luca Beltrami was destined, since 1928, to be sited in that space and the necessary destruction of the antique garden raised some objections, which were dismissed with the reply that the nineteenth century creation was without historical and aesthetic importance, as it was "diminutive, if not to say tiny, with beds alternating with pots and statues of mediocre interest" according to *Illustrazione Vaticana*, in an article published in November 1932 when the work was complete. On the contrary, the article continues, the building fit "naturally in the vast extension of greenery" while the remaining part of the garden, "arranged in carpets of greenery and surrounded by masses of trees" gained importance from the monumental facade and did not elicit nostalgia for the old layout. The criteria for the project was very clear, and once again made explicit in *Illustrazione Vaticana*: "The nature, that of the centuries-old Vatican Gardens, is so forced by the

artistic will of man, that every plant, every flower, and every stream has its assigned task in the diversion of one's glance". Everything was thus organized and regulated by man, according to a precise design. And so, of the Secret Garden of Paul III, also called the "square garden" for its geometric form, nothing remains. Not only was its layout with the characteristic cross-shaped pergola, erased some time before, changed, but the integrity of the space was also altered given that one third of the space was occupied by the Pinacoteca (Fig.8). Consequently, a new plan for the flower beds was drawn up which subdivides the remaining space into four symmetric areas with a large, central fountain. The presence of two sides of the original boundary wall is a reminder of the original design, but the loss of its axial layout underlines the changes.

According to the philosophy of the approach adopted, nothing was to escape control of man's hand. "Don't think for a moment that even the woods will be neglected by the skillful shears or the careful hoe". The result was a series of formal gardens, inspired by Renaissance and Baroque geometries, with the hedges carefully manicured to form ornate borders or symmetric compositions, as dictated by contemporary taste that embraced a revival of historical typologies rather than the "naturalness" of the English-style gardens that had dominated previously. Another criteria was the evocation of the historical memory of the sites: in memory of the first Christian martyrs who were sacrificed in what had been the Horti Neroniani, austere plants were chosen, "from cypresses to firs, from laurels to myrtle, from oleander bushes on the lawns, to those of tree form along the sides of the roads, alternating with oaks". The hedges that enclosed flower beds and lawns, above all of myrtle, that is boxwood, extended for more than 10,000 metres. To ensure adequate water for the new gardens, an enormous tank was made and sited underground in the high part of the hill. The garden itself was geometric, with geraniums on all four sides and the Fontana delle Ranocchie (frogs) in the center, consisting of a low circular basin with some metal frogs along the border. The wooded area, other than being cleaned up—tree surgery was performed on some 150 centuries-old plants—was enriched with many new exemplars and an area of fir trees of many varieties was created on the slopes toward Monte Mario.

In fact, all of the work done was characterized by the will to recover autochthonous traditions, both in the typologies and in the choice of plants. There was no longer a trace of the exhibition of marvels as was true in the era of Mercati and Faber, with rare, valuable plants; rather, the rose and geranium were celebrated, with flower beds rimmed with boxwood borders and an overall evocation of the gardens of Renaissance and Baroque Italian villas. For exotic plants there was room in the hothouses that were built for this purpose, and which supplied fresh flowers on a daily basis for the Vatican's altars.

This re-evoking of the historical tradition of the art of gardens had an immediate correspondence in the architecture of the buildings of the new State that were under construction at the same time and that, analogously, were inspired by models from the past, thus creating stylistic harmony between the buildings and the greenery. In this way the scenographic Giardino della Conchiglia (shell), that takes its name from the fountain by Guarino Roscioli which decorates it, near the train station (Fig.9), the terraced garden with multicoloured blossoms all around the Palazzo del Governatorato, the Italian-style garden near the Stazione Marconi (Fig.10), and the rose garden on the highest point of the hill with a splendid view of the St. Peter's Basilica. Once again, as in the previous centuries, single gardens were created, each with its particular characteristics and autonomy, and with no connection between one and the other. Thus there was no unifying project in the organization of the gardens that unified old and new and transmitted a sense of the identity of the Vatican Gardens.

In addition, as previously mentioned, already in the nineteenth century, with the pontificate of Gregory XVI, the practice of placing monuments in the gardens had been affirmed. Initially, these were false ruins, fountains, and statues belonging to that repertoire of decorative elements prescribed by treatises of English gardens as necessary ornaments to complement the greenery. In any case, beginning at the latest with the first years of the twentieth century, numerous monuments were placed in the most disparate sites: every time a pope received a gift of a certain dimension from a community of the faithful or from a city or a

country, it was sited in the gardens. Only recently has the cataloging begun of these “objects” which number around 500 and include sculptures in marble or metal donated in some cases by famous artists, devotional monuments including Marian aedicules or statues, symbolic, curious structures such as the Chinese pagoda donated by the Catholics of that country or a fragment of the Berlin wall and a colossal bell cast for the Jubilee, and numerous other examples.

The gardens today have an extremely variegated appearance, with juxtapositions of additions from

various periods whose origins and patronage are not always clearly legible. Walking through them, one can observe sites of great interest, from both the historical and vegetation points of view, yet they often lack a common thread. Only through a careful reading of the individual sites is it possible to reconstruct the vestiges of the past and retrace the centuries-long history of the oldest garden in Rome. From this reading one can also arrive at an *excursus* on the history of Rome and its pontificates, who were, in various periods, among the most passionate innovators and experimenters in the art of gardens.

NOTES

¹ This text is a synthesis of the book by A. Campitelli, *Gli Horti dei Papi. I Giardini Vaticani dal Medioevo al Novecento*, Jaca book-Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Milano

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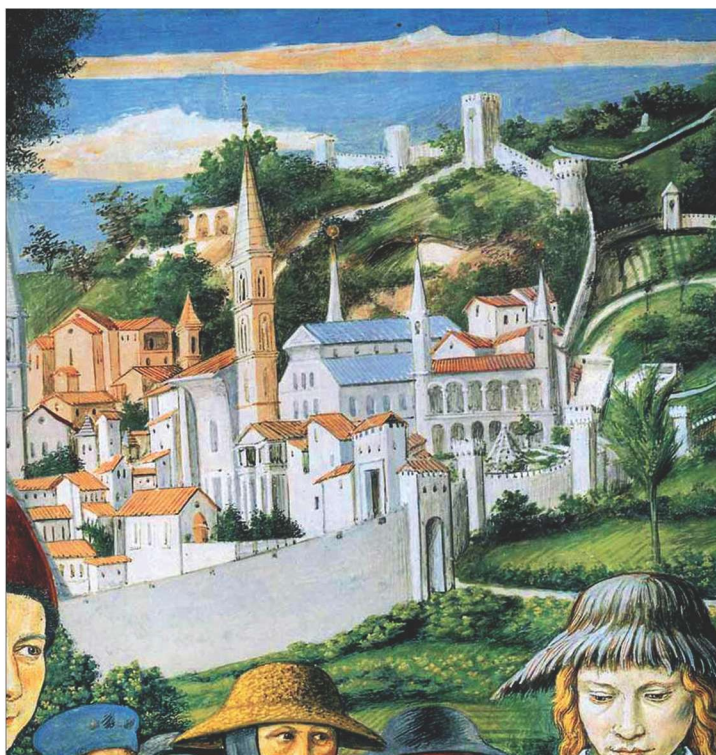


Fig. 1. Benozzo Gozzoli, *View of the Vatican*, detail of the fresco, 1465, church of Sant'Agostino, San Gimignano



Fig. 2. H. Van Cleef, *View of the Vatican*, 1564, oil on canvas

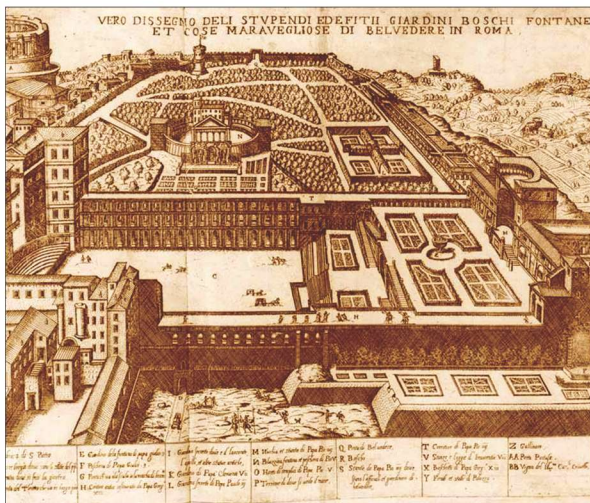


Fig. 3. M. Cartaro, *Plan of the Vatican*, etching, 1574

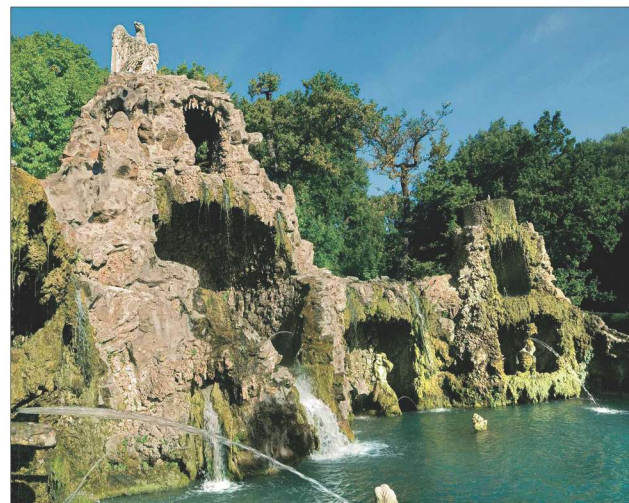


Fig. 4. The Fontana dell'Aquilone, 17th century, Vatican Gardens



Fig. 5. The *Fritillaria Imperialis*

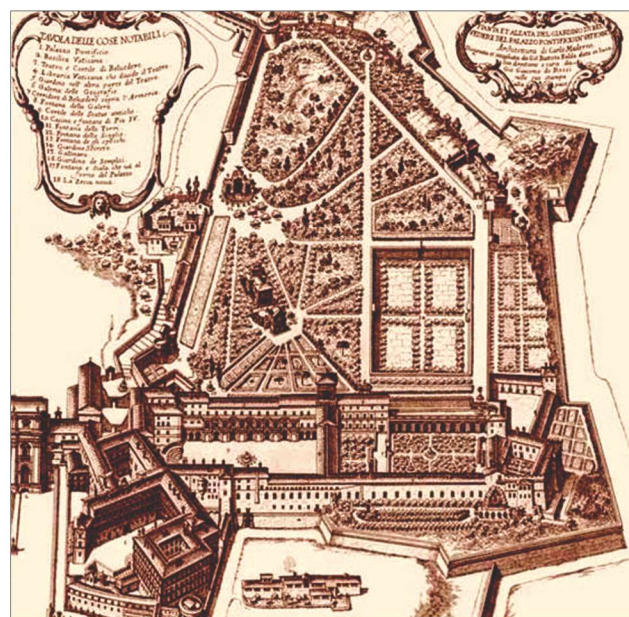


Fig. 6. G. B. Falda, *The Vatican gardens*, 1676, etching

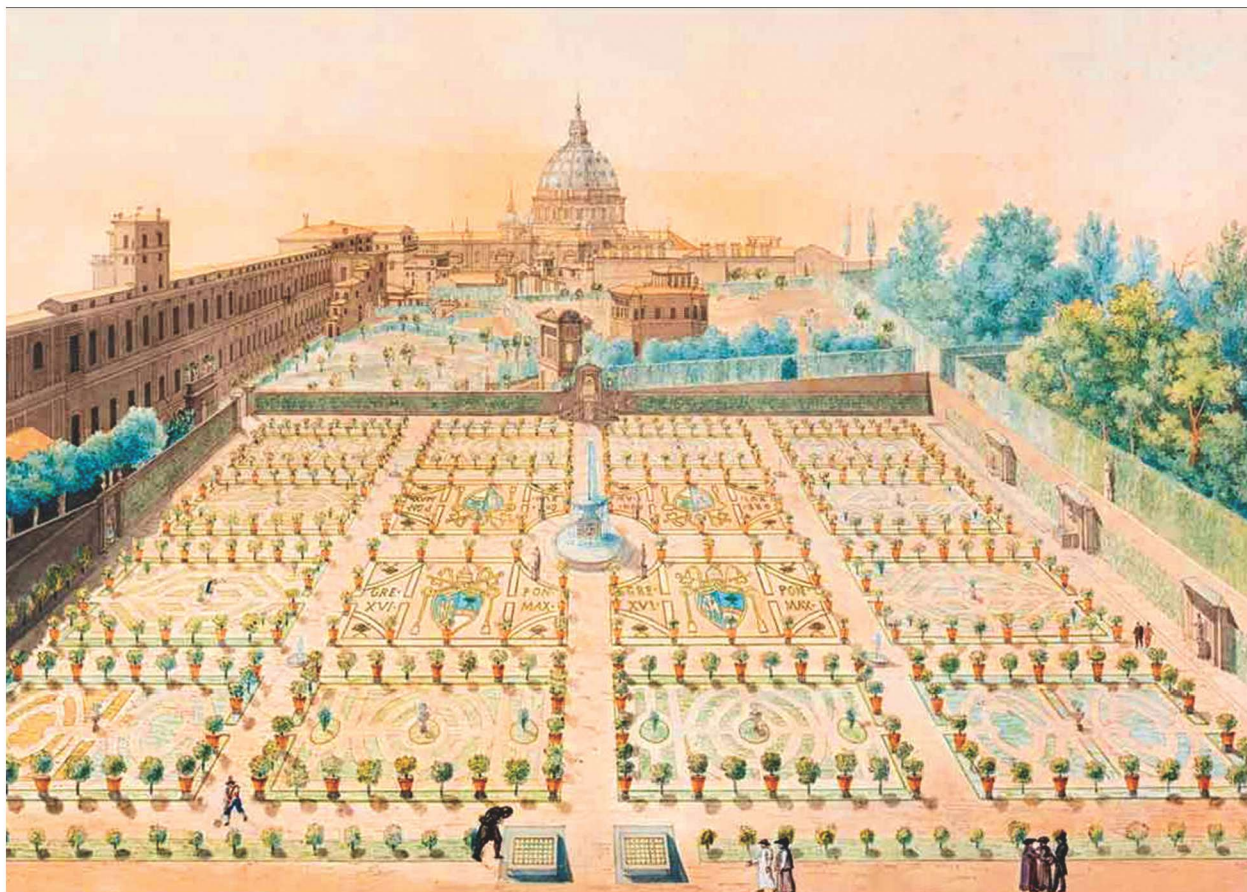


Fig. 7. *The Garden of Gregory XVI, 1846, watercolour, Musei Vaticani*



Fig. 8. *The Secret Garden with the Pinacoteca building*



Fig. 9. The Baroc Garden (Giardino della conchiglia), circa 1930



Fig. 10. The Italian-style Gardens, circa 1930