

Romantic Reform

By Ana Šverko

Nature, science, profit and beauty were the elements all placed at the heart of an agricultural park in Croatia.

The city of Trogir, the Tragurion of the Greeks, founded in the 3rd century BC, lies on the Adriatic coast of Croatia, on an islet between the mainland and the island of Čiovo. Considered one of the best preserved Romanesque and Gothic cities of central Europe, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Near to the stone bridge that joins the city to the mainland is the agricultural park of the Garagnin family, a wealthy trading and later aristocratic dynasty which arrived in Trogir from Venice at the end of the 16th century. In about 1800 the Garagnins initiated extensive plans, including a neo-Palladian villa, for their estate at Divulje, 4km (2½ miles) to the east of Trogir, as well as planning the modernisation of their palace in Trogir and its surroundings. Today, the palace, which lies on the other side of the bridge from the park, alongside the northern city gate, houses the Trogir Municipal Museum, in which most of the Garagnin archives are kept, including a fine library.

Opposite the main building, the Garagnins created a botanical garden, in effect a three-dimensional plant catalogue, which successfully combined the seemingly incompatible – the ambience of a pleasure garden with a practical farm – as well as providing a setting for ancient stone fragments and showcasing their new architecture.

A key role in putting the garden into order was taken by the owner, Gian Luca Garagnin (1764-1841). While still a young man, this *physiocrat, agronomist and economist became a prominent member of all the economic academies in the region of Dalmatia and of many similar, mainly Italian, learned societies. He also wrote scientific studies based on farming economy and practice at that time, and associated with many of the most distinguished scientists of the day, with some of whom he maintained a lively correspondence.

** For an article about another park based on physiocratic principles see 'To Frame a Ruin' in HGR 24.*

Below: A portrait of Gian Luca Garagnin.

Left: An 1830 map of Trogir, showing the Garagnin estate.



These included Luigi Mabil, who was one of the first to initiate Italy into the changing spirit of garden design; Vincenzo Dandolo, chemist, pharmacist, and civil governor of Dalmatia during French rule; Dominique-Vivant Denon, first director of the Louvre, and Francesco Aglietti, poet, scholar, physician and friend of the sculptor Canova, who was described by the poet Lord Byron as “the best physician, not only in Venice, but in Italy”.

The state of Dalmatian agriculture at that time is shown in Garagnin's book *Riflessioni economico-politiche sopra la Dalmazia*, published in 1806 and the best-informed discussion of the region's economy in the early 19th century. He described the problems affecting agriculture in this backward but naturally rich and favourably located area, analysed their causes, and suggested measures which might improve the situation, from the education of the peasantry and legal reforms to visions of the re-organisation and modernisation of farming as the basis for a strong economy.

On his own estate, Garagnin introduced plants and animals which he hoped to see spread throughout Dalmatia.



Above: The garden in about 1900.

Lists of garden plants from 1828-9 include some 350 species. Along with grape vines and olives (the most important economic

plants of the Croatian coastal region) Garagnin raised legumes and other vegetables that had not so far been grown there, such as the eggplant or aubergine, zucchini or courgettes, watermelon and tomatoes; root vegetables such as swedes, beetroot, potatoes, and leafy greens including broccoli, lettuce, and wild cabbage, as well as Chinese spinach.

Citrus trees, such as lemons and bitter oranges, also had their place in the garden, and in evidence, too, were stone fruit trees like the plum, sour cherry and apricot, as well as nut trees, such as the English walnut and the Eastern Black walnut. There were also small ornamental trees and shrubs: the Japanese Pagoda tree (*Sophora japonica*), for example, and the Jerusalem cherry (*Solanum pseudocapsicum*), as well as several kinds of aromatic and medicinal herbs. In addition, the estate grew certain plants commercially for use in the textile industries where Garagnin planned improvements: indigofera (*Indigofera caerulea*), safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius*), several species of mulberry (*Morus alba* etc.), hemp (*Cannabis sativa*), and flax (*Linum usitatissimum*).

The Garagnins also concerned themselves with other aspects of agricultural practice, crossing Merino sheep with local breeds to raise the quality of the wool as well as planning and erecting model farm buildings.

Right: Selva's design for the western entrance of the orangery.

The garden sat in between the family residence and the model farm at Divulje. Employing proficient Italian gardeners, it belonged on one hand to the opulent urban palace with Garagnin's theoretical base (the *studiolo* with its extensive library, where he did his creative work and studied documents related to horticulture), and on the other to the mini family farm, intended for the practice of physiocratic economic ideas, which viewed farming as the essence of development and believed that the laws of nature governed both economic and social behaviour.

What made the practical plantations of Garagnin's estate exceptional were its aesthetic surroundings. The fields were not divided by the usual fences, but by trees and flowers; and the paths were broad, laid down to grass or gravelled, and got broader at key points. In the centre of the garden was an elegant area with a noble *casinetto di delizia*, a building meant for the proprietor's enjoyment, located in the centre of the garden alongside an elegant orangery.

This is where elements of English landscape gardening can be seen in Croatia for the first time, particularly in the winding paths in the northern part of the garden, in the meadows, the rare and precious trees, and the artificial mounds. If the mounds were there to make the composition more picturesque, they also played a practical role in protecting the orangery, while also containing the ice house, in which food and drink were kept in the summer months.

The Garagnins also decorated their garden with ancient monuments found during archaeological excavations in the nearby Roman metropolis of Salona. In 1805, Gian Luca Garagnin ran the excavations himself: well-informed about Antiquity, he was actually appointed the first conservator in Dalmatia.





Photographs taken in the Garagnin garden in 1954 show (*above left*) an ancient altar and (*above right*) an antique sculpture, both brought from Salona, capital of the Roman province of Dalmatia.

The garden was the practical laboratory for Gian Luca Garagnin's scientific work rather than a mere botanical collection. Founded on experiment and the cultivation of new plants, it was complemented by plant catalogues and herbaria, as well as by records of the income from the sales of garden produce. How well he worked out the plan of the plantations is shown by surviving drawings which illustrate the degree of continuity in the scheme.

Although private, it was open to his own numerous guests. Visitors included Marshal Marmont, Emperor Franz I accompanied by the botanist Franz von Portenschlag-Ledermayer, Friedrich August, King of Saxony, with the botanist Bartolomeo Biasoletto, Archduke Maximilian with the Bourbon princes, and the governor of Dalmatia, Ludwig von Welden. Many of them took seeds and cuttings home from the garden and this exchange of plants, coupled with the communication with experts seen in



Left: An early 19th century plan of the garden by Giovanni Miotto, of Padua, the Garagnins' surveyor and gardener.

Garagnin's correspondence, support the view that the garden can be seen as the first private botanical garden in Croatia.

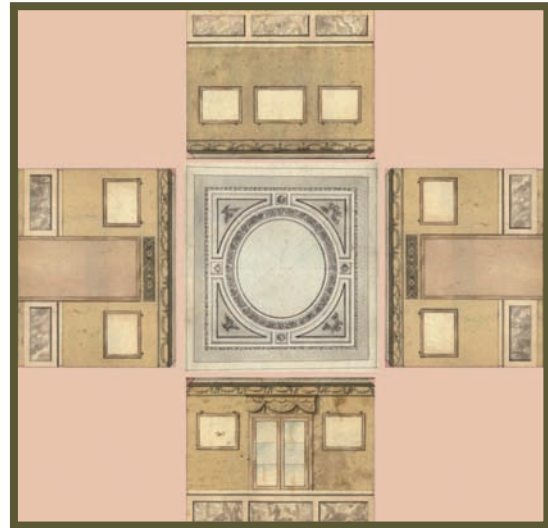
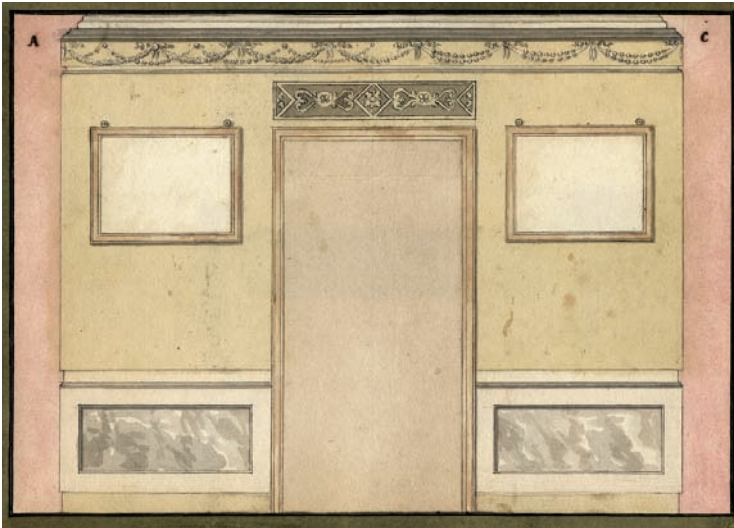
For Gian Luca Garagnin, as an agronomist, experiment was a challenge, while the improvement of agriculture was his real calling. For him, as an archaeologist and conservator, the stone monuments were not merely nostalgic symbols; for such a connoisseur of contemporary art and architecture, the aesthetic element was extremely important.

The books Garagnin refers to in his notes provide an insight into his conception of garden design and how the family estate was laid out. These include *Observations on Modern Gardening* by Thomas Whately (1770); *A dissertation on oriental gardening* by William Chambers (1772); *Essai sur les Jardins* by Claude-Henri Watelet (1774); *Théorie des Jardins* by Jean-Marie Morel (1776); Hirschfeld's *Théorie de l'Art des Jardins* (1779-85); and Horace Walpole's *Essay on Modern Gardening* (1784).

Reading these books, as Garagnin once did, shows his knowledge of garden history and of the debate about garden design as a liberal art. They contain descriptions of different places and how they change according to the season; they emphasise the role of the proprietor, and give exhaustive theoretical and practical instructions about giving shape to a garden, a park or a farm with regard to the character of the region, climate and location.

In Whately we find chapters devoted to farms, parks, gardens and areas for horse riding, with descriptions of specific examples; and so we know how these elements were

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Two of Selva's designs for the interior of the *casinetto*: the northern wall (*above left*) and the southern room (*above right*).

perceived at the time the Garagnin estate was created. Whately drew parallels between the shaping of garden and park, and of garden and farm. A garden and a park often have no clear border, and, with subtle gradations, can be part of the same whole, while the shaping of a garden and that of a farm are essentially different. The purpose of the first is pleasure, the second profit.

Yet in the same book we come upon the *ferme ornée*, which combines these two extremes of landscape cultivation. In his reading, Garagnin became acquainted with the ornamented or embellished farm, a type brought in by the garden planner, Stephen Switzer (1682-1745), better known as a writer on the topic. Switzer highlighted the beauty of vegetables and went on to define the way in which a whole estate could be turned into a kind of garden.

This combination of utility and the new landscape aesthetic, employed in the design of many properties in England in the 18th century, was unknown in Croatia, and seldom used even in Italy. The aesthetic and philosophic ideal of the English garden, which was modelled on landscape as distinct from drawing on architecture, as was typical of the Italian and French garden, spread in Italy only at the end of the 18th century. In his garden, Garagnin aimed at composition of farm crops in surroundings of horticultural and architectural decoration. In Whately and Watelet we find descriptions of the embellished farm that resembles an image of Arcadia, where human harmony and the perfection of nature meet. These authors are also quoted by Hirschfeld, and, in one of his letters to his architect, Garagnin refers to them as a possible source of a model for the *casinetto*.

For his architect he had chosen Giannantonio Selva (1751-1819), professor at the Venetian Academy of Fine Arts, who had designed the Public Gardens at Castello (where the Venice Biennale now takes place) and the La Fenice theatre in Venice, and was in charge of the master plan for the city during the time of Napoleonic rule there. Garagnin and Selva probably got to know each other in the

salotto letterario of Countess Teotochi-Albrizzi, the Venetian equivalent to Mme de Staël's salon in Paris, and it is likely that Garagnin became acquainted with contemporary ideas about garden design in the intellectual environment of the countess's salon.

Selva drew up many plans for Garagnin, although the only part of the garden that was entirely designed by him,

Below: Gian Luca Garagnin-Fanfogna (1851-1902), Gian Luca Garagnin's grandson, in front of the *casinetto*.



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The garden today: the park in its current state of neglect (*above left*), and (*top right*) a view to the ruins of the *casinetto di delizia*.

from the shaping of the volume to interior decoration, was the garden *casinetto*. (The set of drawings for the internal decoration of the *casinetto* are one of the few extant interior designs by Selva.) As with the ancient stone fragments set out in the garden, the aim was to use the decoration in the interior of the *casinetto* to create the atmosphere of a museum. Selva worked in the spirit of Romantic Classicism which brought together feeling for the beauty of nature, and for the picturesque potential of architecture and archaeology, within an elegant neo-Grecian style.

Selva also had an impact on the Garagnin's garden itself. On a journey to England he had visited many gardens, among others the property of the poet William Shenstone, The Leasowes, which in his diary he describes as *orna ferma*, a *ferme ornée*. He found the art in it to lie in the recognition of places that were so beautiful as to need no modification, only emphasis. In such a landscape it was enough to place vases, resting places and inscriptions to sharpen even further the natural feelings created by such scenes. Selva was a representative of a compromise approach, between the landscape and the formal garden, characteristic of Italy in the Enlightenment, a kind of architectural equivalent to the writing of Ugo Foscolo, which achieved a balance between Classicism and Romanticism.

The Garagnin garden cannot be considered an example of a *ferme ornée* because it was much more a park into which farming elements were introduced than vice versa. But knowledge of this ideal undoubtedly affected Garagnin in the design of his agricultural park, a miniature that was balanced in several ways. Gian Luca Garagnin recognised the spirit of the place in his garden. In its architecture he aimed, as he says in one of his letters to Selva, at "a refined illusion of rusticity".

Maps of Trogir from the first half of the 19th century show that most of what was planned had been achieved by then. But after Gian Luca Garagnin's time, when he was succeeded by the Garagnin-Fanfogna family, the character of the park overpowered all the other values, and the practical plantations faded. The garden became the

Garagnin-Fanfogna Park, the name by which it is known today – when, completely neglected, it is fast disappearing.

Over the course of time this work of the Age of Enlightenment has unfortunately been almost lost, but it could probably be reconstructed to provide important points of reference for Croatian horticultural, agricultural and architectural history. The contours of the garden are still visible, and more research into its former appearance and significance would enable us to get a little closer to its original essence for the purpose of future restoration.

Understanding the original character of Garagnin's park could be a spur for its revitalisation. Today it is the property of the city of Trogir and perhaps the best purpose for the site would be educational, with a focus on teaching the importance of preserving natural heritage. Through working with experts and volunteers, children could learn about cultivating

vegetables, pruning fruit trees, collecting medicinal herbs, and could familiarise themselves with botany.

The extensive documentation that has been preserved does allow such reconstruction of the garden, its architectural features and its decoration. The advanced ideas of the past could then be followed by those of today: organic food and biodynamic cultivation. A shop selling garden produce would also go some way towards enabling the project to be self-sustaining. The reconstructed farm buildings and *casinetto di delizia* would provide space for hospitality as well as for cultural and artistic events. The agricultural park, the garden of all the citizens of Trogir, might, as if in a new spirit, reunite utility and pleasure. ❁

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