INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

ART and LANDSCAPE

Edited by GEORGE L. ANAGNOSTOPOULOS

H

PANAYOTIS AND EFFIE MICHELIS FOUNDATION — ATHENS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PLACES AND CREATIVE LANDSCAPE DESIGN. A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

Katerina GOLTSIOU, Helli PANGALOU, Greece

The relationship between man and nature: its depiction in ancient Greek art

It is generally axiomatic that there is a dialectic symbiosis between man and nature, and that the primary concern of our times is to preserve and enhance this relationship. One way of achieving a better understanding of this relationship is to see how it was depicted in various art forms in ancient times. Ancient Greek literature (for example the writing of Homer or Pindar) provides us with an idea of the way in which the ancient Greeks perceived, and referred to, nature, such as Hermes' discovery of the garden of Calypso. Such descriptions point to an aesthetic appreciation of, and sensitivity towards, landscape. And by nature, landscape exists only through the vision of man, the observer.

In ancient Greek iconography – frescoes and ceramics – nature is also represented as interrelating with human figures, an element always present. The

graphic representation of the natural elements – in this case trees and flowers – not only introduce the idea of nature but contribute to the organisation of the picture (see fig.1). It should be mentioned here that although no images of classical gardens or landscapes exist in ancient Greek iconography, the setting usually consists in buildings or monuments. The spatial arrangement of the architectural elements and their relation to the landscape, the way that the ancient Greeks perceived and arranged the space is of recurrent interest for academic research.

Spatial arrangement in ancient Greece

It is interesting to look at some of these theories that were often contradictory or complementary. Le Choisy (1899) suggested that there was a strong calculated relation between site and temple, and saw it in purely 'picturesque' terms. Le Corbusier shared this view and had a fundamental



Figure 1: A symbolic representation of nature. Fresco from ancient Thera about 1500 BC. Reproduced by kind permission of the Ministry of Culture, Athens, Greece

belief in strict and pure geometry. According to R.D. Martienssen (1956), the setting of the buildings in the sanctuaries was in accordance with an aesthetic and religious relationship. The route followed by the spectator was an important factor in this spatial arrangement. P. Smithson (1958), on the other hand, believed that Greek architects had not arrived at the mental necessity for a concept of relationships. R. Scranton (1949) also believed that there was no topographical consideration in Greek design, and there was no variation in the form of the building related to differences in natu-

ral setting. However, the grouping had a functional character. V. Scully (1962) approached the issue in a more idealistic way. He placed great importance on the landscape and its relation with the built environment. He dismissed the a priori conception of order¹. Hamilton (1930) shared this view, and expressed his belief in the conceptual relation of the architectural and natural elements. Finally, Doxiadis' theory on the subject, was based upon the Greek conception of the universe as circular, and on human vision extending across an angle of 180 degrees.

There seems to be an apparent haphazard arrangement of buildings in many Greek sanctuaries. The final result, however, is an organic composition harmoniously integrated with the landscape. Ancient Greeks had a holistic approach to spatial composition. They established a physical bond with the space and with the greater natural and human environment. Purpose, function and form were closely related, and according to C. Norberg-Schulz (1980) 'the Greek sense for plastic form and boundary for the whole and the parts, is founded on the landscape'2. Their perception of nature was clearly depicted in their design. The natural elements, the topography, the setting affected their spatial conception, and the relation of the architectural elements with the landscape was in fact a creative interaction (see fig.2).

The contemporary role of archaeological places

Archaeological sites are, by definition, places where time has left its traces, natural as well as man-made. They are places of remembrance and although their use has changed throughout the years, today, surprisingly, they continue to maintain a strong relationship with the visitor. They confirm our sense of affinity with the past and, as such, are places of cultural significance and aesthetic value.

Due to the fact that archaeological sites represent a complex stratification of cultures, they must be treated as dynamic, evolving places and not as empty spaces or as relics of the past. Nowadays, there is a growing awareness of their multiple significance and efforts are orientated towards their preservation and enhancement, and their integration in the evolving social fabric. The design of archaeological/heritage parks and open air-museums are some notable examples of these efforts. However, we should note here that the use of the term 'park' connotes by definition entertainment or amusement. It thus disorientates the visitor from the actual significance of an archaeological site. The implementation of a creative landscape design may contribute to the enhancement and interpretation of the physiognomy of the historic site.

Archaeological sites: contemporary approaches to landscape design

Landscape design approaches concerning the treatment of archaeological sites fall into three main categories. The first is the acceptance of the neglected status quo as in the example of the Olympieion terrace³. The second approach is more conservative in character and is usually adopted in the case of historic gardens, as, for example, in the gardens of Pompeii, or in the landscape design project for the Athenian Agora carried out by R.E.Griswold in the '50s. Last but not least, the more evocative approach concerns the interpretation of historic

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PLACES



Figure 2: Panoramic view of Delphi: interaction of landscape and architecture. Reproduced by kind permission of the Ministry of Culture, Athens, Greece



Figure 3: The 'neglected status quo approach' in an Olympian Terrace. Reproduced by kind permission of the Ministry of Culture, Athens, Greece

sites, with the example of Pikionis' design (1953-1958) for the surrounding area of the Acropolis.

The 'neglected status quo approach', is based on philosophical and aesthetic concepts concerning the treatment of archaeological sites and cultural landscapes. It gives secondary priority to the preservation and the readability of the monument, along with the accessibility and circulation of the visitor. This approach fails to solve the problem posed by uncontrolled vegetation (see fig.3). The lack of views and vistas, of a clearly defined circulation network, and of interpretation signs, undermine the educative role of the archaeological site. However, this approach stresses the sculptural quality of the natural elements and the poetic character of the genus loci of the site, but it does not take into account the integration of the place with the evolving social fabric.

The second approach, the conservative one, which is usually adopted for the treatment of historic gardens (restoration, reconstruction), is debatable due to the lack of evidence. The reintroduction of plant species used in antiquity, the symbolism and the tradition that they carry with them is the driving force of this approach. However, the planting layout is still questionable, since it is not based on accurate sources. It thus creates doubts about its scientific substantiation (see fig.4).

Both approaches above indicate a lack of creative imagination. They do not relate the site to its immediate environment and do not offer a tranquil transition from the actual to the factual. They do offer remembrance, but do not honour the place, nor engage people with it.

The third approach is that adopted by Pikionis in his intervention on the surroundings of the Acropolis, which is an interesting example of evocative landscape design, driven by the memory of the place and the *genus loci*. Pikionis' design does not actually interfere with the monuments. It creates a pattern of pedestrian access paths that link the Acropolis rock with the surrounding areas, by interpreting the topography and taking the man-made factor into consideration. The use of local materials from old masonry in an effort to enhance the tradition and continuity of space and time, is characteristic of the design and

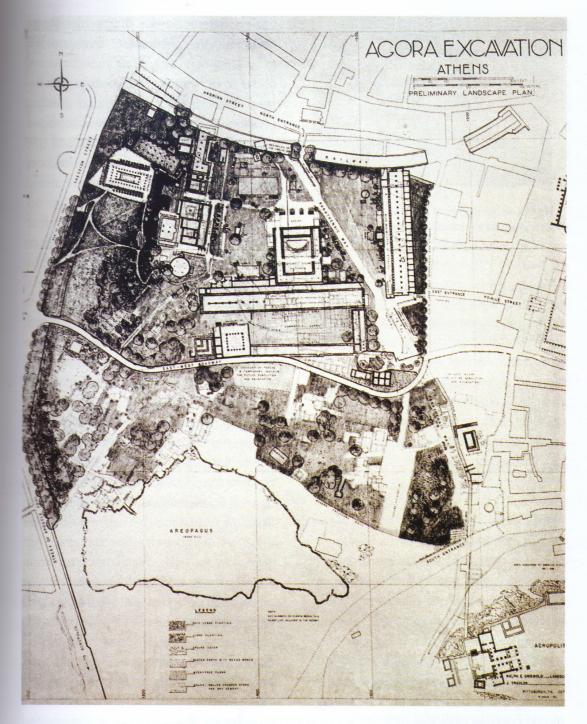


Figure 4: The masterplan for the Athenian Agora, by R.E. Griswold.
Reproduced by permission of the American School of Classical Studies, Athens: Agora Excavations



Figure 5: Use of local materials in Pikionis' design for pedestrian access paths to the Acropolis (1998)

its artistic forethought (see fig.5). Indigenous species were used, with the planting interpreted in a different way than that in the Ancient Agora. However, the planting did not fulfil Pikionis' initial concept, as it was not carefully planned. Finally, the lack of plant management concealed the views and deformed the original spatial arrangement⁴.

Guidelines

Fictitious creation through texts and drawings associated with the place is also essential for the implementation of a creative design. In that way, the value attached to the rational design process is eliminated. Bearing in mind the words of Brenda Colvin, 'that design implies change from that which has been, to that which will be under new circumstances'5, one might say that the landscape design of archaeological places requires special attention. The particular character and

the spatial properties of the landscape determine the parameters that one has to take into consideration in order to implement a creative and meaningful design. Environmental factors and existing site conditions (geomorphology, topography, hydrology), as well as a floristic and structural survey of the vegetation, are the starting points for every successful landscape design.

The idea of reintroducing native species and their symbolic connotations, as well as maintaining the ecological balance, should be adopted in order to fill the time gap between the past, present and future. One should not forget that plants appeared simultaneously in the contexts of medicine, magic and symbolism. Special attention should be given to the structural qualities of planting, whereas ornamental planting should be avoided, as it does not coincide with the cultural identity of the place. The vegetation, soft or hard materials used for the path layout, as well as the protective and shed structures, should be simple and not compete with the monuments. The designer engaged in the task of promoting and enhancing the special and unique character of an archaeological site, must try to balance all these contradictory elements. He must express himself through the variations of scale, form, colour and texture, and relate the time dimension to the changes of materials. In addition, in order to enhance the visitors' experience, the designer should not only stress the visual qualities, but also relate the interpretation of the place to the multiplicity of human senses (vision, smell, touch, sound).

Archaeological sites should not be designed as separate entities. They should be considered in relation to their surrounding landscape, especially when they are part of a city fabric. In that case their role as open urban spaces should also be examined. Any attempt to design landscape and interpret archaeological sites should take into account the current consensus concerning the preservation philosophy of the Venice Charter (1956), and should be in accordance with the objectives of the Florence Charter⁶. A multidisciplinary committee should be responsible for the concept, the design, maintenance, the conservation and restoration of archaeological places, cultural landscapes or historic gardens in order to preserve and enhance their natural and cultural significance. According to Articles 24 and 25 of the Florence Charter:

'Interest should be stimulated by every kind of activity capable of emphasizing their true value as part of the patrimony and making for improved knowledge and appreciation of them: promotion of scientific research; the encouragement of public access under suitable control and use of the media to develop awareness of the need for due respect for nature and the historic heritage'7.

Importance should be given to the conceptual identity of the place (its perception and relation with the surrounding

landscape). A holistic approach should be implemented in order to restore the balance between the factual identity (archaeological site), and the actual identity (sacred site). The feeling of the *genus loci*, in relation to the present uses and the visitors' needs, should be the driving force behind the design.

Conclusion

The preservation and conservation of cultural and symbolic landscapes, and the rediscovery of the original processes on which they were based, is of paramount importance for the wider understanding of the spatial and temporal environment. The implementation of a holistic approach in the treatment of archaeological places is fundamental. There is a need to establish an idea of human cultural evolution, in order to achieve the continuity that is essential in design, since creative design is an interactive process, also based on past experience.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Scully V. (1962) The Earth, the Temple and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture: New Haven & London: Yale University Press
- ² Norberg-Schulz, C. (1980) Genus Loci towards a phenomenology of architecture: London: Academy Edition
- ³ See Papageorgiou-Venetas A. (1994), "Athens, The Ancient Heritage and the Historic Cityscape in a Modern Metropolis", The Archaeological Society at Athens: No.140: Athens
- 4 Pikionis D. (1987) Texts (κείμενα): National Bank Cultural Foundation
- ⁵ Brian Clouston (ed.), Colvin, Brenda (1994) "Design: Introduction", Landscape design with plants: Oxford: Landscape Institute: 3-5

The Florence Charter" (1982) ICOMOS-IFLA International Committee for Historic Gardens
 Ibid

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bauman Helmut (1982) 'Die Griechisce Pflanzenwelt' in *Mythos, Kunst und Literatur:* Himer Verlag: Munich
- Bedard J.F. (ed.) (1994) Cities of Artificial Excavation: Canadian Centre for Architecture: Rizzoli International Publications
- Chazalon L. (1995) 'L'arbre et le paysage dans la ceramique attique archaïque à figures noires et à figures rouges' in *Annali di Archeologia e storia Antica, Nuova Serie:* No.2: Instituto Universitario Orientale: Napoli
- 'Issue on archaeological monuments, parks, museums', (in German) (1987) *Garten und Landschaft:* no 12:19-50
- Karakitsou V. (1997) 'The Dynamics of Time and Space' in Archaeological Interpretation: Thesis: Reinwardt Academy: Amsterdam
- Marinatos N., Hagg R. (1993) Greek Sanctuaries, New Approaches: Routledge: London
- PACT 42 (1994) Journal of the European Network of Scientific and Technical Cooperation for Cultural Heritage
- Pangalou H. (1996) Epidaurus, The Creation of a Sacred Place, or An Holistic Approach to Landscape Architecture: Thesis: University of Edinburgh
- Wrede S., Adams W.H. (1994) Denatured Visions, Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century: The Museum of Modern Art: New York