

The Origin of the Patios and Gardens of the Islamic Period in Spain and Portugal.

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Both the art and the architecture of gardens are strongly influenced by the ecological conditions prevailing in the country where they are practised.

From the 8th century onwards it so happened that the area covered by Islamic expansion closely coincided with the ecological area traditionally known as "Mediterranean", and that within the Iberian Peninsula the two areas were exactly coextensive. It is for this reason that the effects of Islamic and of Mediterranean influence are so frequently confused, both with each other and with those of the Roman culture lying below surface-level in the countries of the area.

Portugal occupies the piece of land which was both the Lusitania of Roman times and the Garbe of Arabian Andalusia, and consequently has the advantage of the cultural experience of the two civilizations. It further lies at the junction of the two ecological zones of Europe, the Mediterranean area and that of the North Atlantic. We are thus in a privileged position to study the convergence of the different influences affecting our gardens, though unfortunately, since the traces it has left have been inadequately studied as yet, our archaeological and historical information on the presence of Islam in our country is insufficient. I will nevertheless try to give you a personal view of

the origins of the patios, gardens and "leisure resorts" of the Islamic period in the Peninsula.

1st to the 4th centuries

In the ruins of Conimbriga a number of impluvia and peristyles have so far been discovered which I consider to be of great importance for an understanding of the subsequent evolution of the art of the patio in the Iberian Peninsula. In these peristyles water – in ponds or tanks – plays as essential a part as the flower-beds in the composition of the whole, and sculpture does not seem to have had the same importance as elsewhere-at Pompeii, for instance.

At Conimbriga and Emerita Augusta we begin to find the main features we shall be meeting again in the patios of the Islamic period in the Mediterranean area, namely, ponds, flower-beds, water-jets and narrow irrigation canals. Particularly striking is the extent to which two peristyles at Conimbriga resemble the "patio de la Machuca" and one of the Partal patios in the Alhambra at Granada (See Nos. III and V of the seven patios shown on the plan of Conimbriga in Fig. 1)

5th to the 7th centuries

The disintegration of the Roman Empire in the fifth century as a result of the migrations of German, Slavic and Mongol tribes had disastrous effects on the urban civilization which had spread

throughout the provinces. The sack of Bracara, Aeminium, Conimbriga and other Lusitanian towns by the Swabians, and of the rest of the Peninsula by the Alans and Vandals, led to their almost complete abandonment, while, many other towns were ruined owing to the disorganization of inter-regional commerce, with the result that the inhabitants of these and other provinces reverted to an agricultural and autarkic economy.

Another result of what the Romans referred to as the "barbarian invasions" was the separation of the Roman world, both geographically and ecologically, into two completely different spheres whose cultural development was to become mutually independent. There were, on the one hand, the sunlit countries of the Mediterranean sea board with their warm and dry climate which, under the political hegemony first of Byzantium and then of the Arab Caliphates, produced an art which was a development of the Roman. Meanwhile that seething cauldron which was Central Europe continued, in its evergreen surroundings and its wet and misty climate, to turn out an art derived equally from that of the Roman Empire; but here, in isolation from the culture of the Mediterranean world and under the influence of the Christian faith, the pattern of development was very different.

Belonging, as it did geographically to both worlds, the peninsula was able to share in the development of each of the two parallel trends. Indeed, the barrier formed by the Guadarrama, Gredos and Gata mountains in Spain and by the Estrella, Buçaco and Buarcos mountains in Portugal, and running southwest from the Pyrenees to the Cape of Mondego, separates the country ex-

actly into those two distinct ecological regions we are concerned with.

At the close of the most active period of the migrations we find the Swabians established in Lusitania with their capital at Bracara, and the Visigoths, with theirs at Toledo, occupying all the rest of the peninsula, with the exception of the southernmost part which for seven decades was to remain a province of the Byzantine Empire. During the 6th century the Visigothic Monarchy succeeded in dominating the entire Peninsula.

From the works of the 6th and 7th centuries which have come down to us, whether from Swabian or Visigoth territory, it may be seen that architects continued to use the techniques and follow the rules adopted by their Roman predecessors, though the existence of cultural contacts with the rest of the Mediterranean world is definitely proved. A good illustration is the small church of San Frutuoso near Braga in Portugal (6th century), while the churches of Lourosa and Balsêmao as well as those of Banhos and Bande in Spain, with their generalized use of the round horseshoe arch and the exuberant decoration of an architectural feature here and there, would seem to represent a local development of Roman architecture; and the same might have been true of the patios of the period.

8th to the 10th centuries

At the beginning of the 8th century, when the Mediterranean areas of the Peninsula were occupied by Arab and Berber Muslim warriors, the central mountain barrier became a political frontier. Whereas to the south, stretching across into North Africa, the Caliphate of Cordoba remained unrestrictedly open to cultural contacts with other Mediterranean peoples, some

of the Christian chiefs to the north, in closer touch with the world lying on the northern shores of the Atlantic, strove to take advantage of any occasional weakness on the part of these usually powerful southern neighbours, in order to enlarge their own princedoms.

The geographical and political separation into two distinct worlds meant that the art of the Iberian Peninsula of the 8th to the late 15th centuries was to come out of two separate melting pots. In the Mediterranean area, where Islam was the dominant religion, artistic creation took the form of exuberant decoration designed for mosques, palaces and schools; whereas in the north-westerly area towards the Atlantic where the Christian religion had been almost universally adopted it was the cathedrals and convent or monastery churches which were the great artistic monuments. So that while the patios to be found in the north are almost exclusively the stereotyped cloisters of cathedrals and monasteries, in the south the palaces ("alcáçovas"), mosques and medersas offer a greater degree of variety in this respect. Further, whereas the Visigoth towns occupied either by Arab tribes from the Yemen, Syria, Palestine or Egypt, or else by Berber or Moorish tribes from Africa, continued to develop and progress peacefully, the few towns existing in the north were, on the contrary, frequently sacked

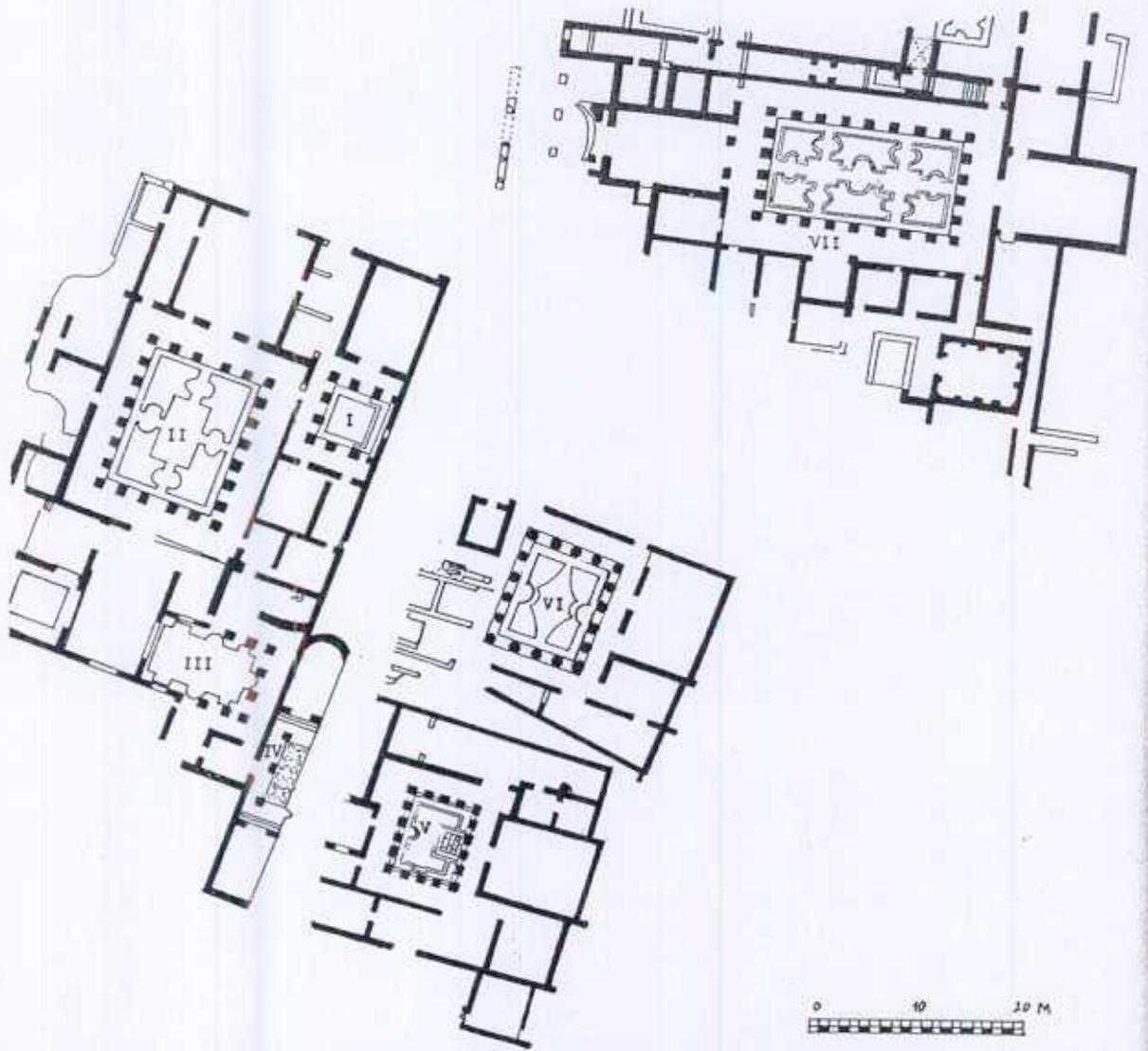
When the court of the independent emirate of Andalusia was set up in Cordoba in 756 A.D., a further opportunity arose for the population of the Peninsula to demonstrate its already proven creative talent. The mosque of Cordoba, built between 785 A.D. and 790 A.D., still shows-as the one in Seville, begun in 825 A.D., probably did likewise - how the architectural

norms handed down from the Visigoth period had remained almost unchanged. The planting of trees in the patio is said to be a peculiarity of the mosques of Andalusia, while the arrangement by which the water which is to irrigate the trees and cool the atmosphere runs through a network of artificial canals is already to be seen in a Roman peristyle at Emerita Augusta (The technique for channelling the water was subsequently widely used in Portuguese gardens down to the 17th century).

It was in the town of Medina-al-Zahra, built, with its several palaces, over a period which began in 936 A.D. and was destroyed in 1010 A.D., that the local artists had their great opportunity as garden-designers; in the vicinity of one of the great palaces they laid out a large garden intended both for the growing of fruit and vegetables and as a place for leisure. Its architecture reveals the permanency of that trend in the direction of exuberant decoration which, already visible in the pre-Roman towns, had further developed during the Visigoth period, while in the gardens themselves natural adjustment to ecological conditions is exemplified in the system of irrigation by overflow, involving flat ground and damming at higher points. We can also find unquestionable proof of artistic influence from the Orient, especially in the use of decorative details brought by the Arabs from Iran from 960 onwards. Such are the multifoil arch, the pointed or ogival arch (which in Spain was the forerunner of the Moorish horseshoe), stalactites and "azulejos" (coloured tiles), and, in gardens, cruciform central water tanks (Garden pavilions were already known in Roman times.).

11th to the 13th centuries

The fall of the Ummayyad Dynasty



Conimbriga. Maisons à "patios"
Conimbriga. Houses with "patios"



"Patio dos Cisnes". Palais de Sintra
"Patio dos Cisnes". The Palace of Sintra

in 1031 and the division of the Cordoba Caliphate into several small kingdoms led to the construction of buildings of some importance in the capitals of these kingdoms and of the "taifas", or smaller realms, dependent on them. Of particular interest are, in Seville, the two biggest and oldest patios, the Patio del Alcazar Viejo (11th century) and the Patio del Crucero (12th century) described to us in his report by Mr. R. Martos. Also in Seville are the two "hortos reales" - one near the Alcazar and the other near the "Cartuja" - which illustrate the survival of the Roman tradition of "leisure resorts". In this case they are specially designed to suit flat ground liable to flooding by the swollen waters of the Guadalquivir and raised paths overlook the gardens themselves.

In southern Portugal the towns of Silves, Mertola, Ossonoba (in the former kingdom of Seville), Lisbon, and perhaps Santarém and Evora (kingdom of Badajoz) were capitals of "taifas", and remains of their "alcáçovas" are still to be seen. Those at Evora, Sintra and Vila Vicosa have retained their patios, but these have not yet been studied archaeologically. Special mention must be made of the Patio dos Cisnes at the "alcáçova" of Sintra with its sunken pool, built either during the 12th century or in the period immediately preceding it.

It was in the 12th and early 13th centuries (the process being completed by 1238 A. D.) that the Christian princes and their military chiefs moved southwards to the Mediterranean section of the Peninsula and extended their domination over the populations which had been living under Muslim rule, the Kingdom of Granada alone remaining Muslim until 1492 A. D.

As they came south the Christian princes brought with them an art which had its origin in the Roman tradition just as much as the architecture they were to find in the Mediterranean area itself. However, by the 12th and 13th centuries the two trends, though stemming from one and the same root, had produced completely different styles, as may be seen by comparing the little mosques and "alcáçovas" of the Garbe with the cathedrals and royal residences of the kingdoms of the north. Here the patios generally had a flagged paving and a plain fountain, well or cistern in the centre; no decorative garden of the period is known anywhere in the area.

14th century

The Christian kings transferred their courts to the Mediterranean region and eventually, as they adapted themselves to local ecological conditions, adopted the local style of architecture both for their palaces and for domestic use in general. For cathedrals and monastery churches the Romanesque style of the north had been imposed, but even this was adapted to suit the new materials and climate.

In Portugal King Dinis had residences built for himself in Leiris and Estremoz and existent ones improved, and his grandson Pedro I built royal residences in Serra das Pescaris and in Belas. The latter has a patio now entirely paved with small stones.

About the same time - i. e. between 1350 and 1369 - the King of Castile (another Pedro I) had the Alcazar at Seville altered by adding a few external planted courtyards immediately adjacent to the palace. These were to be the first small pleasure gardens, forerunners of the "hortus conclusus" which was to spread through Europe on so wide a scale in the 15th century.

But in the 14th century the Muslim princes of Granada were still present in the country too, and early in the century they built that most beautiful example of the "leisure resort", the Generalife with its interesting patios, and its water stairway in which the Roman tradition is enriched by Hispano-Arab sensibility and Hispano-Arab decoration.

In the patios of the Alhambra, as in the Machuca patio and in several of those in the Partal Gardens, we can recognize genuine products of the Hispano-Roman tradition. In others the central feature is a pool set level with the ground instead of a tank, and this seems to be an innovation to be attributed to Arab sensibility. The Court of the Lions, built between 1353 and 1391, likewise follows the Roman tradition of the central fountain surrounded by flower-beds.

As Lévi Provençal says, the art of the Maghreb in mediaval times was essentially the work of Peninsular artists.

Résumé : de l'origine des patios et des jardins de la période islamique en Espagne et au Portugal

Cette communication se fonde sur le principe que l'art des jardins, ainsi que l'architecture, sont des arts fortement influencés par les conditions écologiques caractérisant les régions où ils se développent. L'orateur a appelé l'attention sur le fait que, à partir du 8ème siècle, on peut remarquer une étroite coïncidence entre l'ère de l'expansion musulmane et la zone écologique traditionnellement considérée comme méditerranéenne. Dans la péninsule hispanique, cette coïncidence est parfaite.

Il en résulte que l'on attribue souvent à l'Islam des phénomènes dont l'origine doit être cherchée dans l'influence méditerranéenne, parfois dans la civilisation romaine et, aussi, dans les cultures régionales sous-jacentes à la culture islamique dans la zone considérée.

Parlant des patios à jardins construits au Portugal, entre le 1er et le XIVème siècles, l'auteur conclut qu'il ne s'agit pas de jardins islamiques et que les jardins aménagés au Portugal à cette époque étaient de type méditerranéen quoique l'on y voyait quelques éléments empruntés au monde musulman.
