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NOTES ON THE HISTORICAL GARDENS OF THE USSR

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A. On the significance of Historic Gardens and their Originality

1. Of those gardens which may be considered "secondary" from the point of view of garden art, in that they are partially copied from greater works, or lacking in really well-executed details, some are nevertheless very valuable from the historical point of view (for example, as the unique setting of some great man's life), or else for the important role they play as part of their surroundings. Among the gardens mentioned on the Fontainebleau list, Spasskoe Lutovinova (31) or Serednikovo (32) are in this category. Of lesser gardens Malinniki, Bernovo (between Moscow and Leningrad, often visited by Pushkin), Olgovo near Moscow, Ryabovo near Leningrad, and many others, may be cited as examples. Perhaps, in addition to originality of design and state of preservation, historical associations and spatial significance should be admitted as criteria for evaluation.

2. There is another important point connected with such "secondary" gardens which arises out of the disappearance of gardens under the pressure of modern circumstances. With the loss of certain gardens in the highest class - some of which have already perished, while others are beyond saving - secondary examples belonging to the same styles and periods acquire a new significance and the right to renewed attention. They become worth preserving and restoring as unique examples of types which are disappearing. To single out these gardens is no easy task, since gardens are still unclassified and many have not even been recently inspected by specialists. But if they are not to follow their "betters" and be lost in their turn, the problem is an urgent one.

"Secondary" parks and gardens are excellent places for tourism and vacationing. Recent research has shown that in the Leningrad region, for instance, there are 516 parks of the 18th and 19th centuries of which more than a hundred are valuable enough to be restored to their original condition, while the rest should be preserved and made use of. Within this galaxy the famous great parks of Leningrad assume a new importance.

The same kind of research is going on in other regions of the USSR and the list of historic gardens is currently being reviewed and enlarged on the basis of the resultant findings.

4. A very important point is the possibility of raising the aesthetic standards of modern landscape-design through knowledge of the ways in which the magnificent gardens of old were made. This special aspect of the historic garden should be greatly stressed.

5. On the Reasons for their Disappearance

1. The main enemy of the historic garden is considered to be urbanization, with the resultant gross over-use.

The problem of over-use gives rise to a great deal of conflict in day-to-day city planning. Though a particular number of visitors may be considered too large for a given site, so long as that site continues to exist and no building on it is contemplated, the problem of conserving the garden laid out over it does not become obvious.

This is the case with many of Moscow's historic parks, now surrounded by large recently-built blocks of flats, with no large green space designed for mass recreation in the vicinity. As an example, let us take the Vorontsovsky Park in Moscow; whereas analysis shows that it can survive under the impact of 7,600 visitors, the number now expected from the new housing developments in the neighbourhood is as high as 21,000.

Though all these historic parks are protected by law, in reality they are deteriorating from over-use, simply because of the popular need for open spaces. This means that, while they will continue to exist as open spaces, they will - perhaps inevitably - lose their historic character.

The main problem, therefore, is how to apply the excellent conservation

laws existing in the USSR today to day-to-day planning.

2. Of those gardens not adversely affected by mass use, there are many which are deteriorating from neglect and failing to attract public attention because they are virtually unknown. An example is the house and grounds of Gliadichi in the Bryansk region, laid out in grand 18th-century style. The tourist routes miss it, and the neighbouring villages can find no use for a large establishment of this sort, so that it is slowly disappearing. An important objective is thus to find a contemporary use for many of these gardens.

3. The best way of using a house and garden is still considered to be to have them house a school or sanatorium, with proper provision for visitors. Recent surveys show, however, that some of the gardens used in this way suffer from permanent lack of upkeep, stemming from inadequacy of financial support. Many such examples have been found in the Moscow region alone, where surveys have been recently conducted.

4. An important question which should, perhaps, be yet further elucidated, is : just what is a "conserved" garden ? Even among specialists concerned with the restoration of architecture - not to mention practical architects and the large body of people on whom the fate of a garden depends - the prevailing view is that as long as the garden site and its boundaries exist the garden is more or less safe. All sorts of deterioration, from cracking sculpture to dying plants, may thus pass unnoticed.

This means that wider distribution of information on historic gardens is urgently necessary.

C. On ways and Means

The Moscow Institute of Architecture is experimenting with graduate courses in historic garden restoration. The most important objective is to work out a method of teaching the students the specific nature of landscape restoration and bringing home to them those elements which make this a most difficult and complex field of practical planning and design.