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The Byzantine Gardens of the Patriarchate's Theological School of Halki

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landscape design | monastic gardens | spiritual place

The research and the design focused at combining and enhancing the surrounding area of the school which is referred to as the "Lighthouse of Orthodoxy". The project has been envisaged in such manner as to provide a spiritual link between the contemporary garden design and Byzantine heritage. This required exhaustive research, as the available information on garden design in the Byzantine era is fairly limited. Plantation which has survived the 40 years of disuse of the School's closure will be enhanced by landscaping. New plants to be used in the project have been chosen accordingly to each of the species symbolic meaning in the scriptures (e.g. fig trees symbolise gentleness, vines symbolize calmness). Finally it is discussed the symbolic aspect of the garden design and its dual meaning and representation. The project was unveiled in a ceremony in the Holy Theological School of Halki, Istanbul, on September 1, 2013, in the presence of His-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople.

INTRODUCTION

The story of the Byzantine gardens was influenced by multiple cultural facts, to which the Byzantine Empire was exposed over the years (Talbot 2001, Lampropoulou 2006). The available knowledge about the Byzantine Garden mainly comes from written texts and images (Georgi et al, 2011, Maguire 2001a, Geoponika, Maguire 2001b, Wolschke et al 2001). According to these sources, monastic gardens were enclosed, decorated with elaborate water features, heavily planted with species of various colours and scents holding a distinct symbolic meaning, rich in fauna and well-watered (Wolschke et al 2001).

The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople commissioned to Assistant Professor Julia Georgi to submit a landscape proposal for the recreation of the gardens of the Holy Theological School of Halki, so as to promote the dual meaning of the historic garden as a spiritual place and a land of virtues.

STUDY AREA

The Holy School of Theology (1844 – 1971) was founded by Ecumenical Patriarch Germanos the 4th around the infrastructures of the Monastery of Holy Trinity. It is located on the Hill of Hope, one of the three hills of Halki, 19 km southwest of Istanbul (Bosphorus) and covers an area of about 1.6 hectares. Until the suspension of its operation by the Turkish authorities in 1971, it was the main Theological School of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople from where the Ecumenical Patriarchs graduated.

The Holy School of Theology is surrounded by enclosed gardens established during the same time that the buildings were constructed. No major landscape restoration has been implemented until recently. The current condition of the gardens requires consistent maintenance along with the implementation of a landscape proposal that respects the historic value of the site and meets the current needs of the School.

garden of virtues

plants symbols

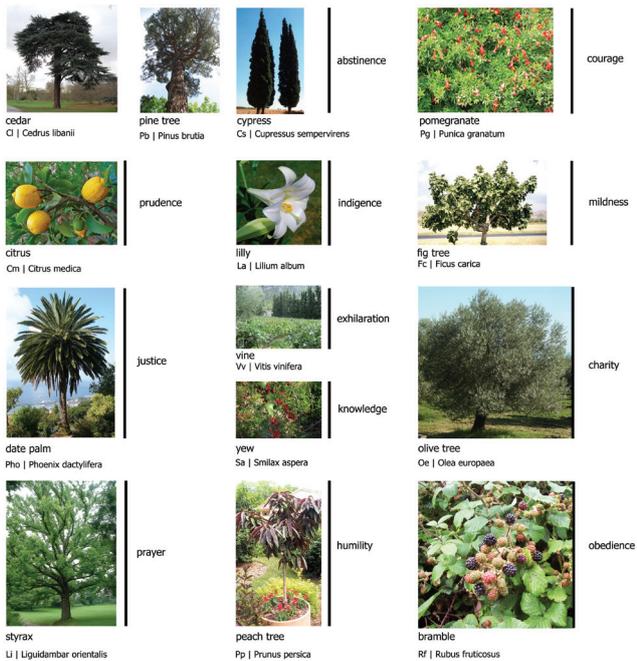


FIGURE 1. The plants and the symbolic meaning that uses at the Garden of virtues

binary architectural morphology

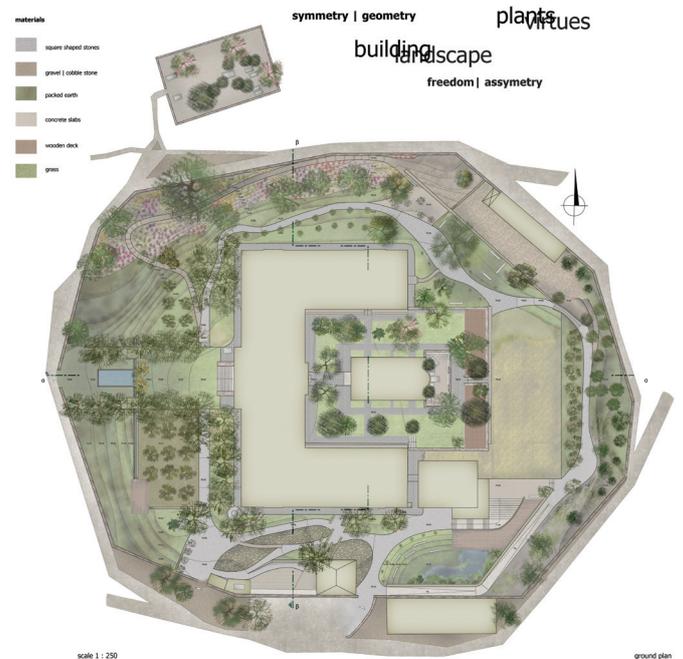


FIGURE 2. The design composition and the dual architectural morphology.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this paper is to give a brief description of the existing gardens of the Theological Scholl of Halki and present the landscape proposal envisioned to enhance the surrounding area of the School. The proposed landscape plan is based on bibliographical research concerning the Byzantine gardens, with a focus on site inventory recorded through pictures and drawings as well as reformulation of the current needs of the School based on interviews.

RESULTS

The proposed landscape plan attempts to attribute to the garden of the Theological School of Halki a dual meaning, both material and immaterial, as expressed by the meaning of Byzantine gardens. Plantation which has survived the 40 years of disuse of the School's closure will be enhanced by the new landscaping. Mediterranean species of flora were especially introduced to the "Garden of Merits", a major route connecting different parts of the Byzantine garden, where each plant symbolizes a merit (e.g. lilies symbolize indigence, olive trees symbolize mercy, fig trees symbolize gentleness, vines symbolize calmness). These species have been selected accordingly to each of the species' symbolic meaning described in the old handwritten anonymous manuscript of the 12th century found in Oxford Library (Thompson, 1989) in order to enhance the spiritual virtues like patience, stamina, and courage. Also, the landscape scheme focuses on separating the circulation (main, secondary, thematic), introducing pausing and viewing spaces. (Fig. 1).

The natural and the spiritual elements of the landscape proposal hold a strong symbolic dimension. The design composition consequently consists of a dual architectural morphology while the overall composition seems to successfully

integrate both as one emanates from the other (Fig. 2):

- Symmetrical – formal, dictated by the expressive presence of the School building, which dominates the site, and
- Asymmetrical– organic, which is mainly established as a network of serpentine paths well situated into the existing landscape which lead the visitors to the building.

There are two main entrances into the Halki Gardens which depict the double meaning of the proposed landscape scheme:

- A linear, monumental path that becomes the main entrance of the School, aligned to the historic axis of the School, and
- A second entrance (currently the main entrance of the School) that is characterized by its asymmetrical design.

The linear path is situated to the west of the site and is conceived to create a gradual transition from mundane to a spiritual atmosphere. The presence of a major water feature situated close to the entrance of the School, symbolising baptism and purification, and immediately next to it on both sides, the presence of two specimen Styrax trees (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) with star-shaped leaves symbolizing prayer, call for an uplift of look and soul towards the Universe, meaning divinity (Fig.3). On both sides of the linear path, there are two terraced gardens overlooking the sea similar to the ones depicted in miniatures in prayer books and gospels of the 11th and 12th centuries (Dolezal, et al 2002) (Fig 4).

To the north of the site, a woodland reinforces the existing pine trees (*Pinus brutia*) with a number of supplementary plantings mainly locust tree (*Ceratonia siliqua*). The under canopy of the woodland is heavily planted with myrtles (*Myrtus communis*), sages (*Salvia sp*), and other herbaceous and indigenous plants. This forested area leads through a serpentine path to an open recreational space where a specimen hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), symbol of hope, stands alone at its centre. At the highest level of this side, an orchard is planted in circles in a



FIGURE 3. The major water feature situated symbolising baptism and purification and the presence of two specimen styrax trees (*Liquidambar styraciflua*).



FIGURE 4. The two terraced gardens at both sides of the linear path.

similar way orchards were planted in Byzantine times (Dolezal, Mavroudi, 2002).

To the east of the site, an elevated garden composed of plants mentioned in the Holy Bible is created (i.e cedar (*Cedrus libanii*), cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*), Date Palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*), Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*), e.t.c.). The highest level of this garden contains two terraced gardens overlooking the sea and Istanbul.

The landscape project was unveiled in a ceremony in the Holy Theological School of Halki, Istanbul, on September 1, 2013, in the presence of His-Holiness Enumerical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople. The major part of the landscape project is currently implemented.

CONCLUSION

The recreation of the gardens enhances the historical character of the buildings and meets the current needs and functions of the School through an original concept design which is translated into a morphologically unique and sustainable ecosystem. Such a landscape design approach is directly connected to the broader meaning of “Heaven”, that is an autonomous and self-managed ecosystem (Dentle et al 2008).

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