

THOMAS HANBURY AND HIS GARDEN

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Even if gardens rich in plants species were in ancient time, the first gardens were born in Italy between 1544 and 1547 in Pisa, Padova, Firenze, Bologna. Gardens were always linked to the University, "Orto dei Semplici" (garden of simple), related to medical schools. In fact, future doctors needed know plants used for treatment of various diseases.

In the Renaissance there was a great "Revolution": the Gardens became the Botanical Garden. This revolution, developed in the European Courts, culminated in the birth of Kew Gardens. In the nineteenth century took place a more modest revolution that appeared on the shores of the Mediterranean where, directly or indirectly, the Anglo-Saxons carried the spirit of the great "revolution". In this way were born the so-called acclimatization gardens where the plants native from all part of the world grew together with native vegetation and with traditional crops. When the lines become easier, and numbers of visitors from the Northern countries rise on the Mediterranean shores, these gardens increase in numbers and develop.

In the nineteenth century, the particularly mild climate persuade many English people to move in this area, extending on both sides of the Italian-French border. A high mountains chain protect these areas from the northern cold winds, besides to its good position. In this way began the cultivation of plants native of any part of the world. These plants often have already been cultivated into England where were they grew only in the protected environment of the greenhouses for obvious climatic reasons. The discovery of a favourable climate, the British also played the bet can be in full early flowering vegetation and plants that could flourish in British soil and bear fruit only in season very late. The discovery of a favourable climate induced the English people to cultivate the plants in nature in order to obtain an early flowering of those plants that fructify only very late in the season in the Great Britain.

In this time Thomas Hanbury arrived on the Riviera in Menton, in March of 1867, mostly for health reasons, but also desirous to spend your capital accumulated in his Asian business. By chance he found on sale, just near to the new border between France and Italy, the estate of Capo Mortola with inside an old mansion then ruined. All the Cape had already belonged to the noble families Lanteri, between the eleventh to the seventeenth century, and Orengo, between the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, and had been divided as a result of hereditary divisions. Thomas Hanbury purchased from Ambrosini and Devotina Grandis the core and, in later years by different owners, all other plots, restoring the unity of the promontory.

Thomas Hanbury wasn't a botanist and probably at the beginning had little knowledge about gardening. Daniel, the elder brother whom it refers and in which Thomas had great confidence, was the first promoter of the project. The two brothers meet the owners, managers and directors of public and private gardens, for any advices and suggestions, but also for collaborations. By chance Daniel started the collaboration with Ludwig Winter, an young gardener that become one of the protagonist of the nursery in the Riviera between the end of '900 and the beginning of the twentieth century.

The garden founded by Thomas Hanbury, even if it was developed throughout forty years of his life, was dynamic but always faithful to his original idea. The estate seemed more like an Botanical Garden as a

consequence of the contribution from eminent gardeners and taxonomists that collaborated to the project. Even if it was articulated in different sections and exposition and along the decades, Thomas Hanbury's Gardens maintained its original statement. New plantation and new architectural additions are in complete harmony with the original landscape of the area. Every new introduction is congruent with the original situation: the olivegrove, the orchard and the cypresses.

The generational transition underline a deep transformation in the concept at the base of the space-garden concept and the whole complex underwent so many structural alterations, that even not to be interpreted as wholly negative, they deeply modify the original statement. Sometimes, the new deal was not completely integrated with the surrounding landscape. The changes were not only in the garden concept but also in the relationship with the visitors living in it.

Inside Dorothy's garden, the Thomas's daughter-in-law who was directly engaged in the complex management, new garden's concept were present: new spaces development, new visual axes and points of view, new colour dresses along the seasons. In this period new deep operations were produced upon different areas, often in contrast with the original landscape. For instance, the creation of a unique space along Cycas' avenue created a reduction or the disappearance of the uphill pathway's access, excluding the visit and the declassing of the upper part. In the same way the enlargement of the Dragon Fountain induced the impossibility to reach the old stalactites cave once rich in drippings and little falls. All these modifications aimed to a new vision of the garden more based on landscape effects than on the botanic and collection contents.

With the beginning of the Second World War the development of the garden, lasted for more than seven decades, had a suddenly stop which delayed up to 1960. In 1940 the first damages were carried by the Italian troops that occupied the garden. They didn't give rise to a financial compensation by the Italian Government because (as written in the occupancy-administrator's relation) "the property belonged to an enemy citizen". The worst damages were caused by the German occupancy and by the connected bombardments of the Royal Navy. During the years following the war the garden's abandon favoured the depredation of the living collections (mainly succulents).

The Italian Government, driven by public opinion and by the scientific world, bought the garden in 1960. The land reclamation under Prof. Masera direction (for ten years), who received the garden after its abandon lasted many years, was very hard. He wrote his difficulty in reaching the sea from the upper main gate, that took him engaged with a three years work. During this operation he improved many sectors, he removed weeds, he pruned and fertilized plants and he re-determined many of them without any identification label. These restoration activities were followed by new plant introductions enriching the living collections.

The "Masera garden" showed not only his frenetic activity, but also a particular garden restoration philosophy, sometimes non really congruent with the original statement. Some years after his death in 1970, the international scientific world, attending to the vanishing of Masera's effort in saving the Hanbury Botanic Gardens, elaborated and suggested a new solution for the garden management. Only in 1987 the Italian Government assigned to the University of Genoa the management of the garden.

The last decades are characterized by a deep study and analysis of the plant heritage, by the interpretation of the real vocation of each area with the aim to produce a restoration masterplan congruent with the original establishment of Thomas Hanbury.

The preservation of Hanbury's original idea is nowadays perceived with new plantations, divulgation and didactic activities in order to safeguard and promote the garden.