

## RESTAURATION OF THE ROMANIAN WRITER'S ROTUNDA – CISMIGIU GARDEN

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### Abstract

*Cismigiu Garden is a part of our national heritage and it is almost lost in favour of kitsch and ugliness. As a consequence of the lack of experience and professionalism of interest and as well of public income, this garden becomes a shadow of its old glory. One of the most important architectural and landscaping compositions in Cismigiu Historical Garden is the Writers' Rotunda. Focusing only on the Rotunda, the study was based on "in situ" research and on historical documents research. The study revealed a series of inconsistencies and discrepancies between historical text description and historical images as well. Also, our paper lead to showing different patterns on which the Rotunda was designed and it also reveals patrimony objects that seemed to be lost. The aim of this case study is to emphasise the Rotunda image created by Friedrich Rebhun and how should it look like after a much-needed restoration. In order for a city that lost most of its history and patrimony, attention should be accorded to the built heritage including historical gardens and parks and especially to their most important features. One of them is the Writer's Rotunda.*

**Key words:** heritage, history, patterns, patrimony, restoration.

### INTRODUCTION

A city's patrimony consists in buildings and monuments, as well as in gardens and parks. One such part of Bucharest's patrimony is the Cismigiu Garden. Designed by Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Meyer in 1845, the garden was designed over an old puddle flooded frequently by the Dambovită River crossing Bucharest (Panoiu A., 2011). Cismigiu was a romantic garden, designed according to the 19<sup>th</sup> century's citizens of Bucharest personal desires and way of life. The garden went through a series of successive changes that brought new zones of interest in the garden. One such newly created zone of interest is the Writer's Rotunda. This rotunda is part of this garden's history and also it is part of Bucharest patrimony. The actual state of preservation of this part of history is very low and special assistance is needed in order for the Rotunda to be conserved in the future.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was led in the Romanian's Writer's Rotunda during a period of several months, in seasons of autumn and winter.

Special attention was accorded to details, planning sequences, and to the grade of deterioration. Our study was based on historical descriptions, images and plans. Most of our work was to compare text descriptions with images and plans because there were a lot of inconsistencies and discrepancies between them. The study reveals how the Rotunda was mainly designed and how it should be restored.

#### - Cismigiu Garden – Short History

Cismigiu garden represents, chronologically, the second public garden of Romania. Designed after Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Meyer's plans, Cismigiu garden was designed as a romantic green space, but it was also designed according to the desires and to the way of life of the citizens of Bucharest of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century.

The garden went through a series of successive changes, the last of them being the most important. This way, Cismigiu was redesigned by Wilhelm Knetchel in 1882-1883 and by Friedrich Rebhun in 1910-1943.

Along with the new transformations, newly added zones contributed to the improvement of the garden, and, despite its low surface, it became a complex garden, all of the three stages of design bringing new valuable elements to the garden.

### - The Writer's Rotunda

"The construction of the Gheorghe Lazar high school in 1890, meant that the main entrance to the garden had to be moved on to the Queen Elisabeth boulevard and it also meant giving up the elm round-point. Those works preceded the drastic redesign by the German architect, Friedrich Rebhun in the years 1899-1910, when a new, classical style, opposite to Meyer's concept was imposed. This transformation can be seen in many of the garden's subspaces (the roses terrace, the alley with pergolas, the Romanian Round). The decommissioning of the Music and the Semicircular pavilions meant a radical change of the aspect on the Schitu Magureanu street side of the garden. By creating the Romanian Round and the nearby spaces, easy terms of accessing those spaces and the garden as well, were created." (El-Shamali S., 2011).

Rica Marcus, in "Parks and Gardens of Romania" is offering a series of information about this newly created space: "it is placed over what used to be a restaurant that left behind a circular platform with a diameter of about 20 m. According to the English traditions, this forms a bulingrin from all four access points, that descends on a few steps to the circular alley paved with stone that stands between the central round and the surrounding plantation. On the rounds perimeter there were planted cone-shaped yews, and groups of Forsythia in between, in contrast of color and form. On the bordure were perennials such as Sedum, Stochis, Cerasium, Campanula etc. Parallel to the alley a similar bordure can be found, followed by a lawn with 16 statues of the most valuable Romanian writers. The silhouettes of the statues of white marble, placed on high stone pedestal were in contrast with the green background of the compact vegetation. The bulingrin was separated by the rest of the garden through a row of niches formed by walls of vegetation that stand to represent the lodges from where you can admire the center of the composition: the yew round. The niches are formed by iron grids and are climbed by lianas and forsythias. At two of the entrances in this garden were placed columns with pedestals surrounded by groups of *Cotoneaster horizontalis*." (Marcus R., 1958).

The description made by Rica Marcus is one that presents numerous elements that made up the Writer's Rotunda. However, a few discrepancies appear between the text descriptions and the images posted in the same book. Though being described as having 16 statues, photographs posted in the book to emphasize the description show that there were actually 12 statues, three on each quarter of the rotunda. The text description mentions two entries with columns while the plan shows that all four entries had columns, and one image that reveals the fact that the entrance from the main axis had no columns at all. Though the description made by Rica Marcus is one of the oldest and most trustful, the discrepancies between text and images do not reveal how the Rotunda was originally designed by Rebhun.

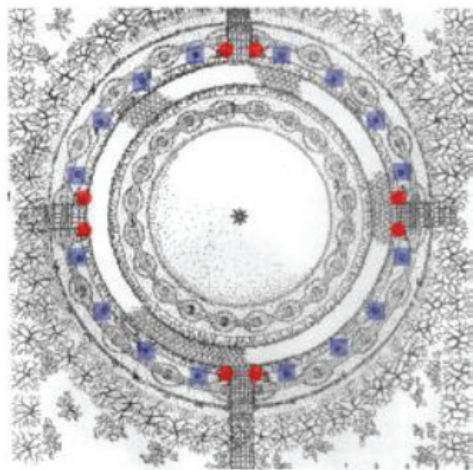


Figure 1. Plan of the Rotunda – 16 statues a 8 columns appearing on the plan (Marcus R., 1958)

Another description of the Rotunda and of its components appears in "Bucharest's gardens": "[...] the marble columns from the Rotunda were taken from the Royal Palace during a fire. The iron pergolas, [...] were initially placed in the palace garden, placed by Carol I while Queen Elisabeth was in a foreign visit, to make the queen a surprise. When the palace garden was disbanded, Rebhun asked for them and brought them in Cismigiu. The pavement is part of the pavement that was disbanded from the Rondul I de la Sosea." (Lancuzov Al., 2007). Though interesting details were offered

by this description, those information could not be yet verified.

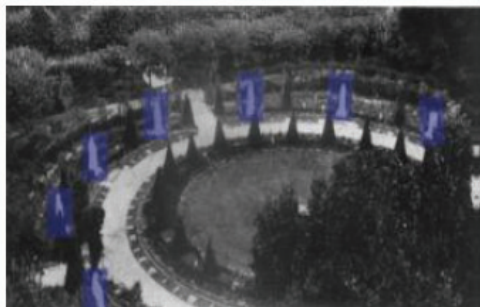


Figure 2. Entrance from the main axis – sequence of 3 statues on a quarter (Marcus R., 1958)



Figure 3. Entrance from the main axis – entrances and columns – columns do not appear at the entrance from the main axis (Marcus R., 1958)

One more interesting description helped us to make an impression of what used to be The Writer's Rotunda: "But the most interesting intervention that Rebhun had in this part of the garden was the so-called Romanian Round, designed in 1942-1943 over an old restaurant. A scientifically distribution of trees, shrubs and flowers make up, on a circular platform of over 20 m length diameter, a spatial framework rhythm by the 16<sup>th</sup> statues of the most important Romanian writers and by coned-shaped yews, placed along a circular stone brick paved alley. Coned-shaped yews are planted on the perimeter on the round as well. The space is separated from the garden through a series of niches made up by walls of shrubs(lianas and forsythias), placed on metal grills and with a circular row of regular pruned linden tree in behind. The statues were made by some of the most important Romanian

sculptors: Mihai Eminescu, Al. Odobescu, Titu Maiorescu, I.L. Caragiale, G. Cosbuc, St. O. Iosif, Ion Creanga, Al. Vlahuta, Duliu Zamfirescu, M. Onofrei, C. Baraschi, Th. Burca, B.P. Hasdeu, N. Balcescu and V. Alecsandri are the work of Ion Jalea, Militia Patrascu, D. Barlad, Oscar Spaethe, Iona Popovici, Cornel Medrea, I.G. Jinga, Oscar Han and Al. Calinescu." (Raducan V.) The text refers to 16 statues but enumerates only 15. However, out of those 15 statues, only 12 really exists, while the rest of the three statues (M. Onofrei, C. Baraschi and Th. Burca) are only mentioned in documents but do not appear in any visual documents.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

*In situ* observations and old document research made us get an idea of how the Rotunda must have been designed. We started focusing on each component of the Rotunda and we discovered elements that seemed to be lost, planning sequences that were altered in time and evidences that supported parts of the old text or image descriptions.

### Vegetation

The Writer's Rotunda vegetal design is made up by a handful of plants that are described in historical documents and also, partially appear in old images as well.

Yew trees are the most common trees in the rotunda, and they were placed in sequences, according to the symmetrical design that characterizes the entire composition. Those trees are mostly in a advanced state of deterioration, having lost their original cone-shaped form. According to the Florence Charta (Charte de Florence, 1981), we decided to keep the original image of the Rotunda, this way being obliged to eliminate all the yews and plant new ones. The new yews have to be cone-shaped and have approximately 2.5 m high and 1.2 to 1.5 m in diameter. Those dimensions were approximated after scaling several historical images.

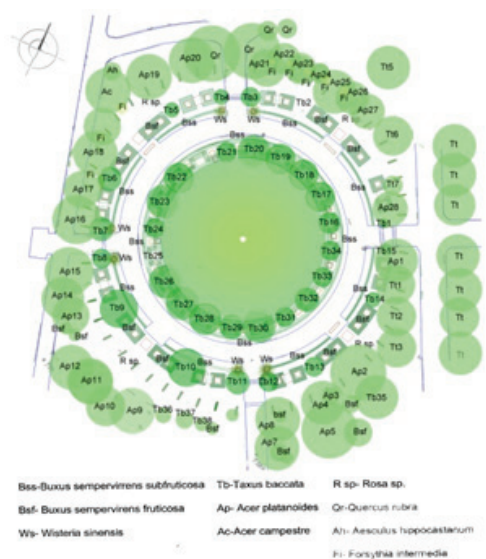


Figure 4. Vegetation plan

Regarding other species of trees such as Tilia, Acer or Quercus, we decided to keep them in their actual status considering that they are not major elements of design in the Rotunda, and that they are, generally in a good state of preservation.

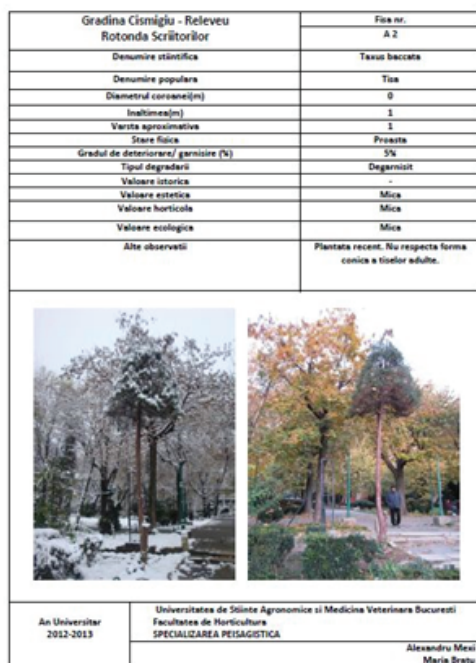


Figure 5. Vegetation data sheet, yew no. 2



Figure 6. Vegetation data sheet, yew no. 9

In what concerns low vegetation such as shrubs, lianas or erennials we considered replanting roses, in groups of two, in between pergolas, such as texts and images suggested and replanting Wisteria sinensis nearby columns, mentioning that this liana must be kept under control in order not to fully cover the columns. Though historical texts mention Forsythia, Sedum, Campanula, Stochis, Crasium etc. we weren't able to pinpoint their exact planting location. Neither plans nor old images show those plants appearing in the Rotunda, so we decided to fully give up on planting those plants.

## Architectural components

### - Statues

Although text descriptions mention more than 12 statues, we found no evidence that there really used to be more that 12 statues in the Rotunda. We recommend that the actual statues be preserved and no additional changes are to be made.



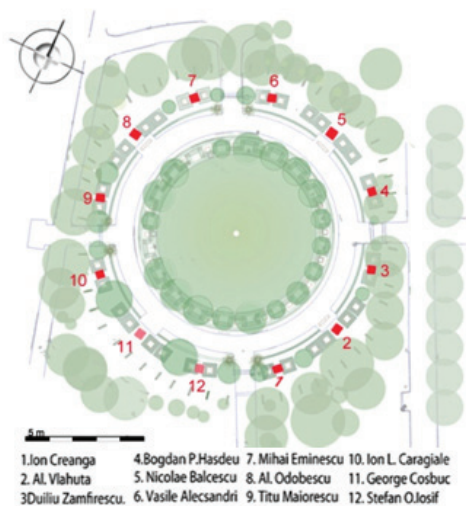


Figure 7. Statues

### - Columns

We came to the conclusion that the northern and southern entrances to the Rotunda have columns with Corinthian capitals, while only the western entrance had two columns with Ionic capitals. The entrance from the main axis had no columns, as it can be seen on old images as well. However two out of six columns are covered by lianas and one is represented only by its pedestal. Thus we propose to restore the ones that are left and to make two copies of the columns with the ionic capitals in order to place them at the east entrance, following Rica Marcus's plans and the Rotunda's logics of symmetry.

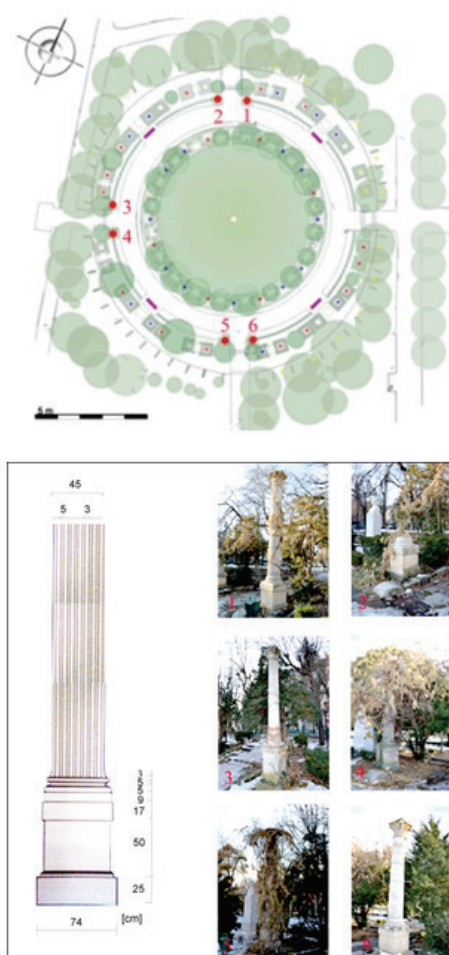


Figure 8. Columns

### - Benches

The Rotunda was designed with 4 stone benches. All of those benches are in an advanced state of deterioration, thus we advise that all of them be restored, if possible, if not, then they must be replicated and placed according to their original location.

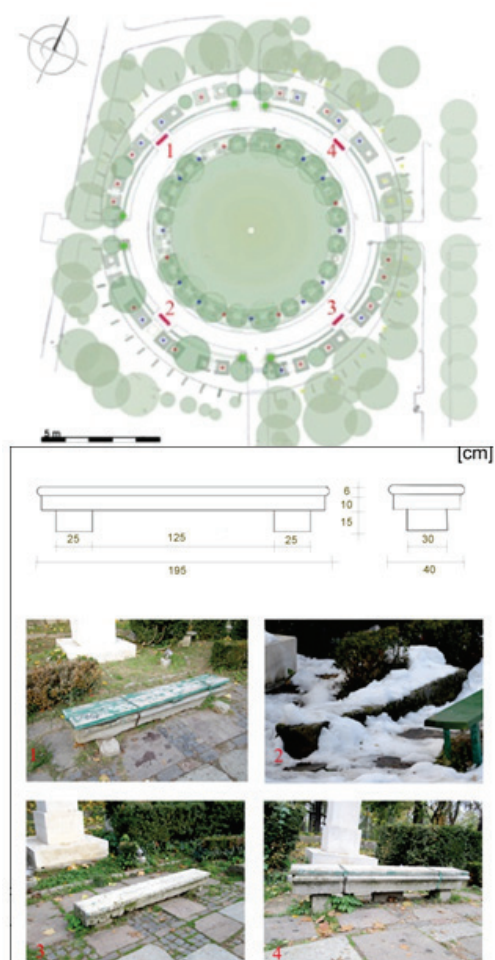


Figure 9. Benches

## Vases

There are 4 kinds of vases, that were originally placed in sequences according to a logic of symmetry that characterizes the entire Round. The largest type of vase is made out of reinforced concrete and it is placed in the center of the composition.

Another kind of vase is a plate-like concrete vase that it is placed in sequences and in between pergolas. The other two kinds of vases are made out of stone and are placed in sequences in between statues and yews and on both sides of the circular alley. Most of the vases are in a advanced stage of deterioration. We propose that the vases be restored or replicated and placed replaced according to their original position.



Figure 10. Vases

The pergolas are preserved in a relatively good condition and they have not been moved or replaced. We propose that the pergolas be conserved in the future and only minor repairs be conducted at this moment.

On both sides of the circular alley are placed 2 kind of stone slabs, also arranged in sequences according to the symmetry design of the Rotunda. Alike pergolas, the stone slabs are in a good condition so we consider that only minor repairs are to be conducted at this moment and conservation over time is needed.

#### - Wrought iron pergolas and stone slabs

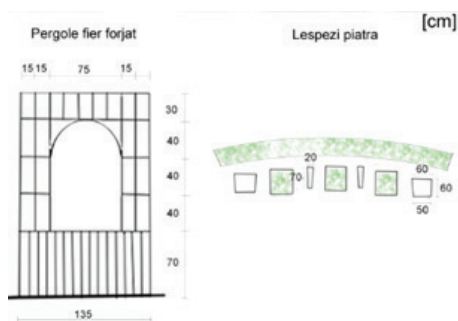


Figure 11. Pergolas and stone slabs

#### Damages/Deteriorations

Either it came to damages or deteriorations, lack of experience and lack of concern made the Rotunda to degrade over time. New installations were added without approval from specialists and thus they destroyed the image of the composition. While new elements were added, old ones were left to deteriorate and panels with messages for preserving the garden were just placed to hide the true nature of the damages, as shown in the pictures below.



Figure 12. Please protect the Rotunda!



Figure 13. Framing damages

#### CONCLUSIONS

Our research revealed the way the Rotunda was designed by Friedrich Rebhun and how it presents itself today. Lack of interest and of experience, combined with uninspired measures taken inside the Rotunda badly deteriorated most of this composition. However, the fact that there are still numerous elements that have not yet been damaged beyond repair give a chance for specialists to restore the Writer's Rotunda.

Immediate actions are needed in order to save not only this composition, but the entire Cismigiu Garden.

Our own restoration proposal is based on a minimum of actions, but all of them are necessary in order to bring back the old image and atmosphere in this part of the garden.

Beside the proposals we made for every element of the Rotunda we emphasize that it is totally necessary to remove all the new elements that do not belong to the original design, and we recommend, according to the Florence Charta, that the entire garden to benefit from a special visiting program.

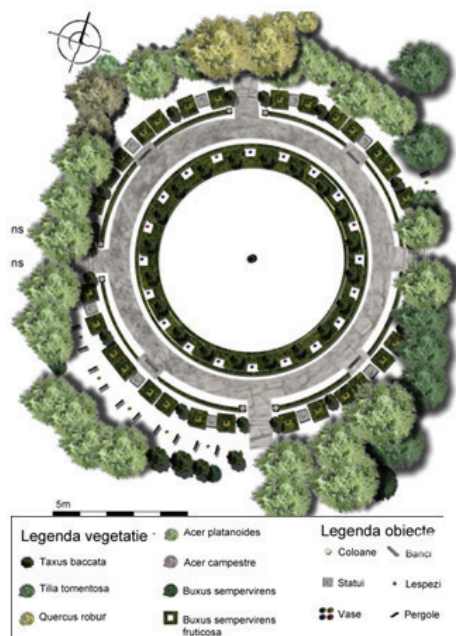


Figure 14. Proposed plan for restoration

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