

## INITIAL PLANTING DESIGN OF THE CAROL I PARK IN BUCHAREST

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### Abstract

*This paper aims to analyze the planting composition of the Carol I park in Bucharest at the beginning of the 20th century. The Carol I park is important for the history of Romanian landscape architecture and stands also as an example for the design of parks nowadays. Conceived in 1906 as a national park to host an international event, the "General Romanian Exhibition", The Carol I park was transformed throughout the 20th century to represent symbolically different political powers. A royal showcase at first, it then became a tool of communist propaganda in the '60s. The park's compositional style also changed with its ideological mutations and its planting design followed. It is essential to analyze and understand the evolution of parks and especially the evolution of their planting design in order to valorize and preserve and/or restore national landscape heritage. The first stage of the history of the Carol I park demonstrated an elegant Belle Époque style with both Romantic and geometric areas designed by the French landscape architect Édouard Redont, specially invited for the abilities he had already demonstrated in Romania. The composition of the park was centred on a generous circulation space with lots of pavilions, interspersed with water elements. Elegantly planted in a geometric style with a lot of attention to detail, this axis has continued visually towards a hill over a sinuous lake. On this hill, the eye is drawn to the Palace of the Arts. Below it, an elegant coniferous composition engulfed a graceful Romantic grotto with a high cascade guarded by a sculptural ensemble. The alleys and the vegetation near the lake and on the hill were designed in the French landscape style, in contrast with the geometry of the axis zone and its side alleys, with alignments of trees, pruned shrubs and flower platbands.*

**Key words:** Belle Époque style, geometric style, planting design, public park, Romantic style.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper will analyse the planting design of the first stage of the evolution of the oldest and one of the most important public parks in Bucharest, the park Carol I. Conceived in 1906 as a national park to host an international event, the "General Romanian Exhibition", a tribute to Carol I, who had then reigned for 40 years (Parusi, 2007; Potra, 1990; Panțu, 2011), the park was transformed in the '30s (Panțu, 2011) and more radically in the '60s in order to eradicate its royal symbols and become a tool of communist propaganda (Panțu, 2015). Thus, the park changed in compositional style, including its planting design, over its ideological mutations. The history and morphological transformations of the Carol I park demonstrate all of the Romanian landscape styles of the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century in just one park (Panțu, 2012).

The French landscape architect Édouard Redont was invited to design the park due to the great abilities he had already demonstrated

in Romania (Teodorescu, 2007). He created an elegant Belle Époque park in a mixed style with predominant Romantic style - French landscape style, and a geometric part from the entrance zone to the heart of the park (Panțu, 2011) (Figure 1).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Redont conceived a mixed style planting design, with a large part in the Romantic style, where he grouped the plants so as to resemble natural landscapes (Figure 1).

The composition of the park was centred on a generous circulation space with lots of pavilions – a large parterre with two lateral alleys shaded on both sides by alignments of linden trees (Figure 1). Redont treated in an architectural, geometric manner, in a classical style, the plantation along this main axis: the symmetry of the parterre with bowling green rhythmized with spherical box and yew, borders of ornamental leaf plants, flower platbands, tree alignments etc. He designed the rest of the park

in a Picturesque, Romantic style: trees and shrubs in free shaped masses, in groups or isolated, composed in order to create varied sequences, profusions, clever effects of light and shade etc. The main axis continued visually

over a sinuous lake towards a hill with the imposing building Palace of the Arts that dominated the entire park. Below it, a grotto with cascade and a sculptural ensemble was the heart of the Romantic area (Figure 1).

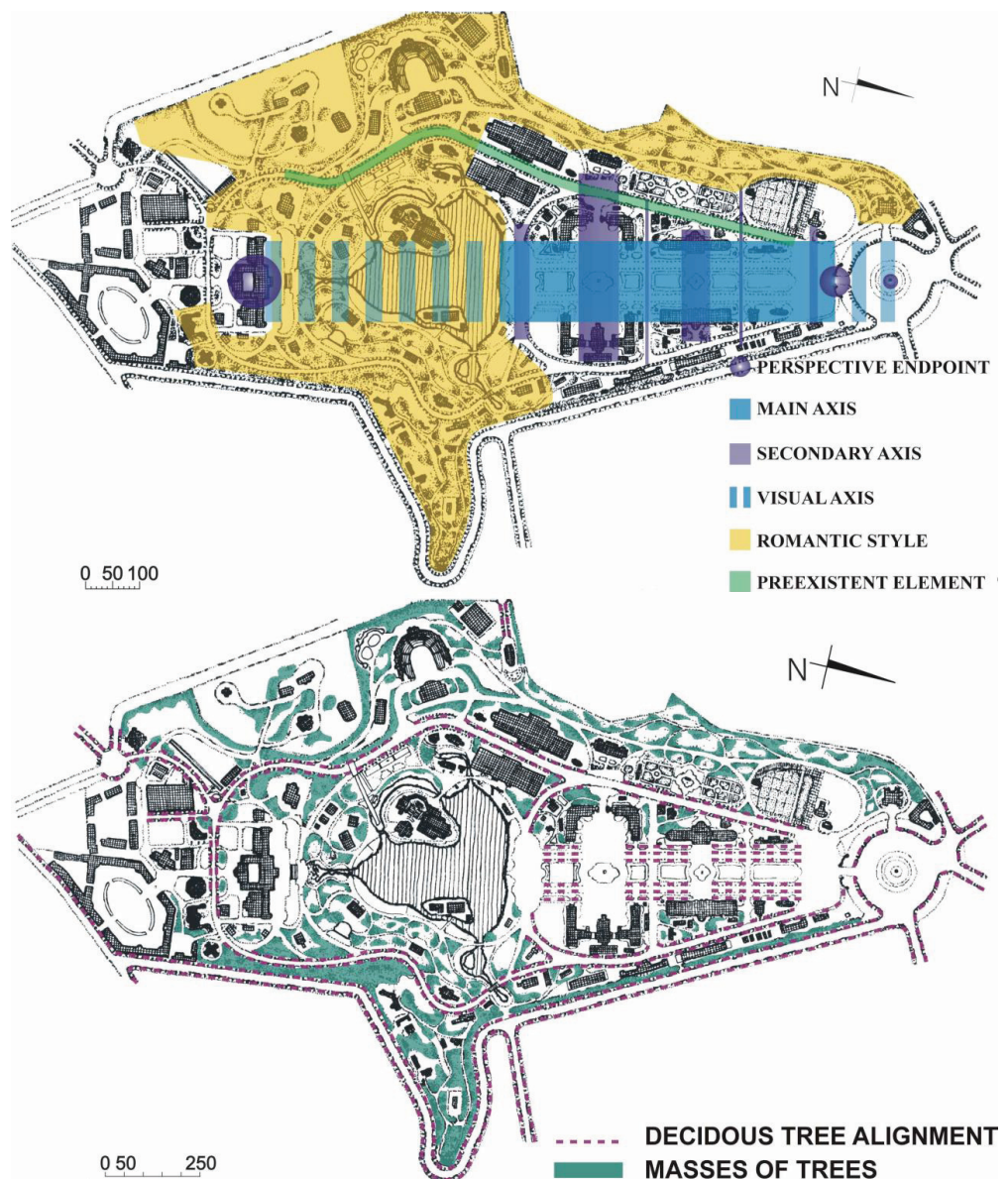


Figure 1. Composition and vegetation structure of the park Carol I in 1906 (Panțu, 2011; Marcus, 1958)

In order to create the planting design, Redont diligently searched Bucharest and discovered valuable mature tree species. Their vitality, their habit, the colour of their foliage, their blossom or fruit offered total success to one

who knew how to find the right place to set them off. Redont's inventory stands as evidence for that (Teodorescu, 2007). In addition to the plants brought from nurseries, these species numbered about 6,000 resinous



trees, 4,200 high, mature deciduous trees, 90,000 young trees (Teodorescu, 2007; Bulei, 1990), 48,200 shrubs, 49,200 forest plants, 8,400 plants with varied flowers, 98,000 flourished plants and 3,500 kg of grass seed (Potra, 1990; Panțu, 2011). All of these species conferred to park visitors all the benefits of a vegetation at least partially mature, such as shade so welcome in the hot Bucharest summers.

In the general framework, coniferous outnumbered by far deciduous trees (1.43 times), unusual for a park situated in the plain (Figure 1). Nevertheless, the large difference in

level in the park site (Filaret Hill) amplified by Redont, by modelling the landscape and the usage of rockeries and abrupt vegetation created a mountain-like image and so allowed the resinous trees to dominate the view (Panțu, 2011, 2012).

Redont retained in the park's composition the former road that traversed the site as an important side alley with its double alignment of *Populus alba* - the oldest trees in the park, giving a lot of shade, necessary in the Bucharest summers (Figure 2). These white poplar lines are easily distinguished in all the early aerial views of the park. (Figures 3-5).

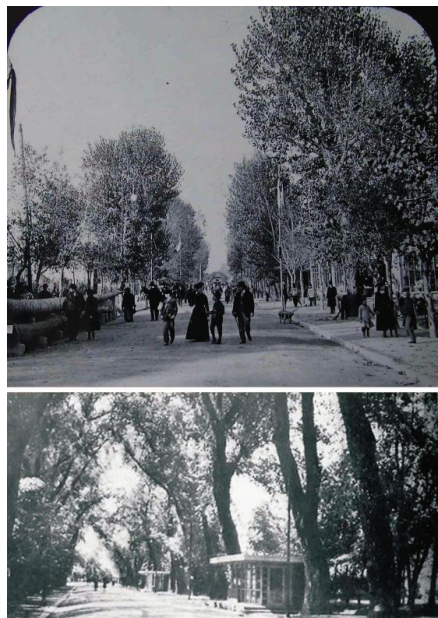


Figure 2. Former Filaret Avenue in 1906 (Zaharia, 1906) and late '50s (Marcus, 1958)

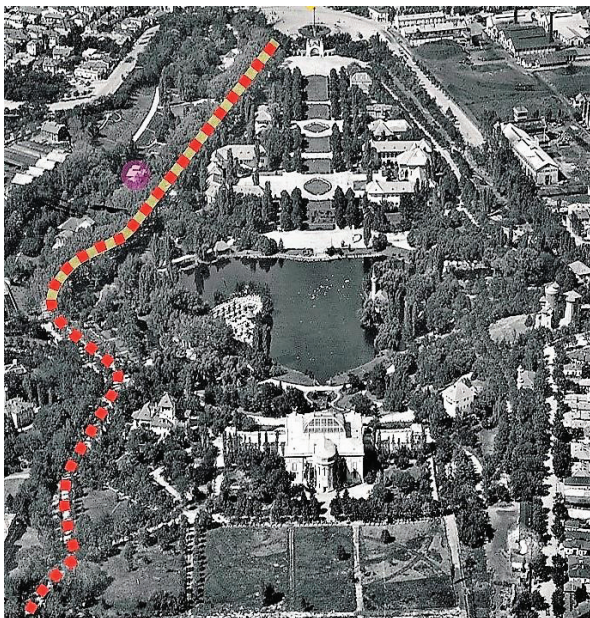


Figure 3. Visual analysis of the park Carol I in 1927: red - alley on the former Filaret Avenue with its white poplars alignment - yellow (Panțu, 2012; Drăgan, 2006)

The roads edging the parterre in the main axis were flanked on both sides by alignments of linden trees – young at plantation time (Figures 1, 8). On the outside margins of the axis, Redont put a line of more widely spaced columnar poplars alongside the linden trees, creating interesting vertical accents (Figures 4, 5, 7, 8). He used these species also in other areas of the park, especially on the lake shore, conceiving great compositional effects (Figures 14, 19).

On the eastern side of the park Redont designed an alley symmetrical to the former Filaret

Avenue. He shaded it with a quadruple alignment of chestnuts a few of which remain today (Figure 4).

The axis was underlined by the horizontality of the linden alignments foliage, of the columnar poplars curtain and of the old white poplars in the background, as well as by the linearity of the parterre and of the box borders and box spheres that rhythmized its long edges (Figures 4, 5, 7, 14).

Redont placed spherical box not only along the axial parterre sides, where it highlighted the classical style, but also along secondary alleys

to smooth the transition to the Romantic areas of the park (Figure 6). Some of these spheres

still remain nowadays thanks to the well-known longevity of box (Figure 6).

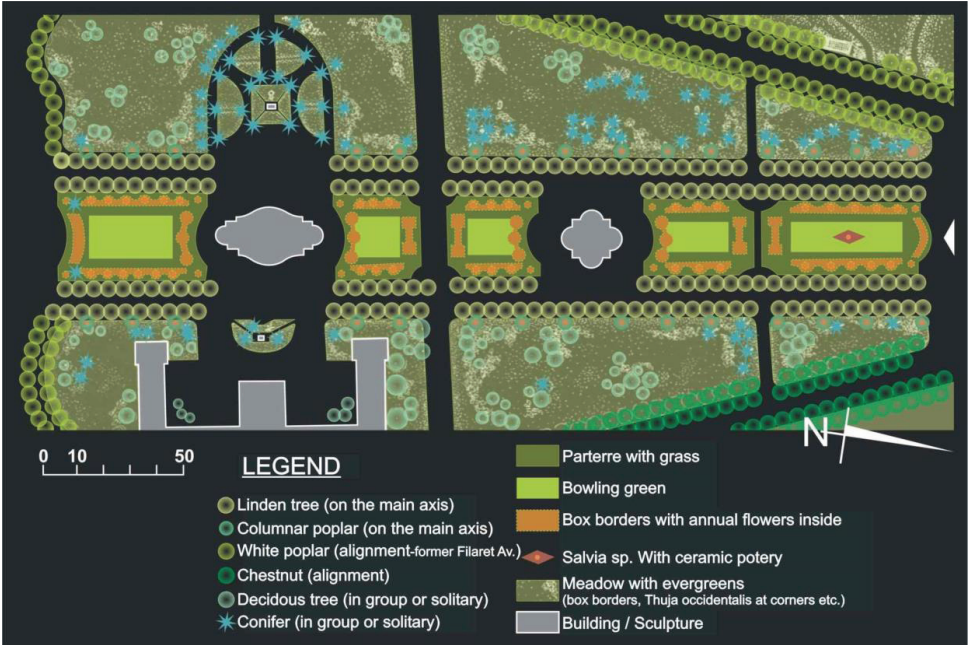


Figure 4. The main axis plan (Panțu, 2012; Marcus, 1958)

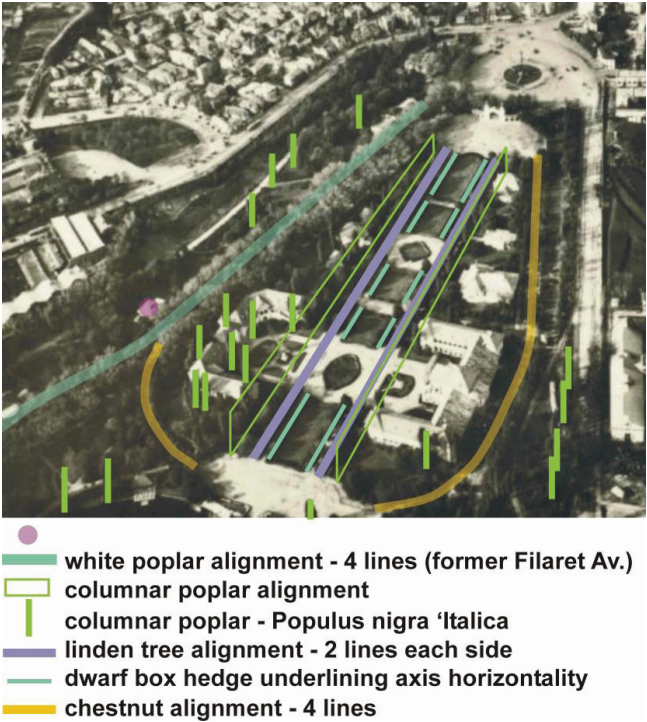


Figure 5. Analysis of 1930 vegetation (Panțu, 2012)





Figure 6. Box spheres along curved alleys in 2011

We believe that the quadruple linden alignment on the main axis was geometrically pruned in 1935, on the occasion of another important exhibition that brought also other transformations to the park analysed in the paper *Carol I Park in Bucharest in the '30s – Celebrate Bucharest Month* (Panțu, 2011). The crowns formed long prisms, typical of the classical French style (Figure 7). Our arguments are that the intention of geometrization of the linden trees does not appear in the images until 1935 (Figures 3, 5), and becomes evident in the photographs from 1935 onwards (Figure 7). It is possible that the pruning of the alignments was part of Redont's vision for the future, as it was not possible in 1906 when the lindens were far from mature. The intention of pruning was still visible in the late '50s, but subsequently lost.



Figure 7. The main axis with the pruned linden trees, 1938

The vegetation details in Figure 8 from 1906 are in the same range of classic elements. The linden trees are young and the parterre with geometrical bowling green is contoured with small hedges in light coloured foliage plants and flowers. Those borders are punctuated with sphere shaped yew or box. The parterre corners were accentuated with *Canna indica*. Later, in the '50s, the ornamental details of the central parterre retained the same French classical spirit (Figure 9): strips marking its contour in *Begonia* and double borders in dwarf box, with accents of *Canna indica* and *Yucca filamentosa* etc.



Figure 8. The axial parterre and the Industries Pavilion at left to the entrance (Zaharia, 1906)



Figure 9. Planting design in a corner of the axial parterre in the '50s (Marcus, 1958)



Figure 10. Decorative basin on the main axis in 1928

In 1928 the neoclassical outline of the decorative basins was valorised by floral bands of *Canna indica* and *Tagetes* (Figure 10). The border of the basin in front of the Royal Pavilion was also accompanied by *Canna indica* (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Decorative basin on the main axis in front of the Royal Pavilion

We believe that there was a predilection for *Canna indica*, that can also be identified in other designs of the time, especially around basins, not only in Romania, but also in France, where, in our view, this fashion emanated at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, The Buffet of the Avenue in Bucharest (a heritage building from 1892 by arh. Ion Mincu) (Figure 12) and a fountain in an important plaza in Bordeaux (Figure 13).



Figure 12. The Buffet of the Avenue in Bucharest

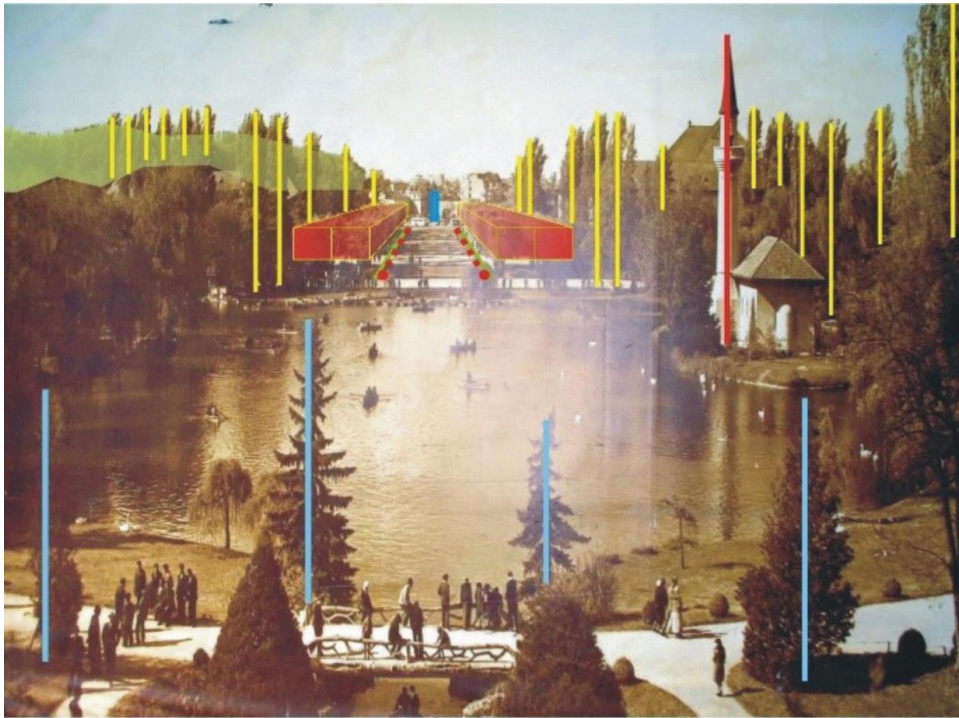


Figure 13. Fountain on Allées de Tourny, Bordeaux



Figure 14. The main axis from the Palace of the Arts (Romanian National Library Archive)





- Linden alignment created prisms accentuating axiality and horizontality
- Vertical accent of columnar poplar - *Populus Nigra 'Italica*
- Coniferous vertical accent
- Built vertical accent
- Water jet vertical accent
- Horizontal ligne in box
- Rhythm elements in pruned box and yew accentuating axiality, horizontality
- Background - white poplar alignment accentuating the horizontality

Figure 15. Visual analysis in 1935 (Panțu, 2012)

The most visible vertical accent in the Carol I park in the '30s was the minaret clearly distinguished not only on the sky by the contrast with the dark colour of its top, but also against the background vegetation by the difference in texture and colour and on the lake. Its verticality was underlined by the lake's horizontality and by dark foliage and a slender conifer that Redont placed in front (Figure 15). So, the minaret constituted an interesting landmark visually, but also culturally, as a Romantic park folly.

Vertical accents were placed also on the other side of the lake – unaligned, as a Romantic figure. Two spruces asymmetrically disposed framed the perspective of the axis towards the main entrance. The composition was balanced to the visual axis and so were all the vegetal

elements (Figure 15).

The main axis continued visually over the sinuous lake towards a hill – the Romantic area. Here a balanced composition took the place of symmetry. Each element had something to balance it on the other side of the visual axis: the two slender spruces on the lake shore, the weeping trees on their side, the voluminous conifers with compact foliage – pruned yews or compact horticultural forms – the bold cypresses, the small shrubs at the ends of the Romantic bridge imitating tree branches (Eiffel pattern) etc. (Figures 14, 16). The group of three weeping trees - *Ulmus glabra 'Pendula* - formed an interesting presence on the lake shore (Figures 14, 16). Redont placed this variety of elm elsewhere in the park also, for its spectacular shape.



Figure 16. Views from the grotto towards the main entrance around 1910, in 1928 and in the '50s (Panțu, 2012; Octavian and Georgescu, 1999; A.F. Iliescu archive)



Beneath the Palace of Arts, around the grotto, Redont conceived a vegetal composition in conifers only, appropriate to the rockery articulating different height levels and so

creating a mountain-like image on the steep slope. Dense habit, voluminous conifers were balanced disposed to the main axis (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Coniferous composition on the hill beneath the Palace of the Arts around 1910 and later, in 1937

Redont designed the plantation in Romantic style also in the surrounding park areas, on the lake shore and on the slopes. He composed it in elegant tree and/or shrub masses and groups and solitary specimens with which he created savant landscape sequences, in a clever

scenography (Figures 17-19).

The lake shore was decorated with black and columnar poplars, willows, bold cypress spectacularly colouring the park landscape in autumn (Figures 16, 18, 19).



Figure 18. The lake, the mosque and the palace



Figure 19. The eastern lake shore in the '50s

Under the communist regime, in 1960, the Carol I park underwent radical transformations and lost a great part of its Romantic style in favour of a monumental geometric style. As a consequence, a lot of the plantation from 1906 disappeared. The percentage of original plantation from 1906 that has lasted until nowadays is small, about only 10%. I believe that this was caused also by the passing of time over 100 years, lack of vegetal protection strategy, bad heritage park management and faulty maintenance.

## CONCLUSIONS

The percentage of the 1906 plantation that had lasted until nowadays is small, about only 10%. I believe that this was caused by the radical transformations in 1960, passing of time over 100 years, lack of vegetal protection strategy, bad historical park management and faulty maintenance.

Planting design is most important for overall composition and shows the characteristics of respective styles. It is primordial to understand the initial design of the Carol I park in order to comprehend, then preserve and/or restore the national landscape heritage.

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