

# TRASPORTI

59

*& cultura*

rivista di architettura delle infrastrutture nel paesaggio



## TERRITORI FRA DIVERSITÀ E OMOLOGAZIONE

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# Territory from diversity to standardisation

by Laura Facchinelli

*The theme of a territory's identity, which is the expression and mirror of a population's identity, has always been the focus of our research. We have explored it since the now distant issue number 20 "Economic development, landscape, identity", observing how too often (what we call) progress leads to the irreparable loss of elements in the landscape, architectural and cultural heritage which has sedimented over the centuries. In this issue, we return to this theme, focusing our attention on different situations and points of view.*

*On the theme of the loss of elements of the historic heritage, we consider the exemplary case of China. Following the "ideological" devastations of the 1950s and the loss of so much of the existing architectural heritage, replaced by buildings that were endless replicas of the "socialist" models imposed by the regime, in recent years China has begun equally radical demolition projects to build districts and cities inspired by propaganda and business, undertaken with no debate whatsoever about urban planning. This phenomenon takes place in other countries as well, in the pursuit of spectacular effects, the tallest skyscrapers, the most daring forms. The mad and convulsive pace of building robs each of us of the possibility of visiting, or even knowing that there are places that remain authentic, rooted in different cultures.*

*The transformations undertaken in the second half of the nineteenth century by Haussmann in Paris were of a completely different nature. They did in fact demolish old and suggestive streets and squares, but to bring a new and grandiose look to a city that since then has communicated the energy and fascination of sumptuous buildings, long straight avenues, squares with their typical "brasseries". In this case, the demolition of the old neighbourhoods served to create the Paris we all love today. A sociologist who considers all points of view underscores that, on the one hand, architects and urban planners are the ones who design the spaces, but on the other, residents and visitors are the ones who live in and experience the city, and that writers, artists and photographers have always been the ones who understand its needs and desires.*

*A city can also have its buildings, squares and monuments destroyed by the violence of wartime bombings. In postwar Germany, the need was felt to reclaim the soul of the city by reconstructing the buildings philologically, recreating the forms with the same materials. The traumatic event could also be an earthquake, a flood, a fire. At that point the question becomes "how" to rebuild. Opposing solutions can be sustained with theoretically founded arguments, from "like it was where it was" to innovation at all cost. But considering the question on an ethical level, is it acceptable to build concrete boxes in the place where water destroyed the small old houses of a mountain village? And do we not consider brazen the proposal of the architect who wanted to build a glass and steel pinnacle on the roof of Notre Dame in Paris, to take advantage of the void left by the fire?*

*In seeking a common denominator across different situations, we might consider valid the choices that are not aimed at immediate glory, but seek to leave their mark through meaning for the centuries to come. Beyond personal interests, beyond the trends and conceptualisations of the moment.*

*Of the many themes and points of view developed in this issue of our magazine, there is a recognition of the core of vitality that exists in the Italian landscape. While the inclination to value differences has contributed over the centuries to producing a living archive of extremely rich urban solutions, in more recent times perverse forms of development have gained the upper hand. But even a landscape of incomplete fragments often devoid of quality has continued to generate unexpected variations. And so, based on this analysis which we are pleased to share, the seeds of a possible renaissance remain viable.*

# Territori fra diversità e omologazione

di Laura Facchinelli

*Il tema dell'identità di un territorio, espressione e specchio dell'identità di un popolo, è sempre stato al centro delle nostre ricerche. Lo abbiamo esplorato a partire dall'ormai lontano numero 20 "Sviluppo economico, paesaggio, identità", constatando che troppo spesso il (cosiddetto) progresso porta alla cancellazione irreparabile di testimonianze paesaggistiche, architettoniche, culturali sedimentate per secoli. In questo numero riprendiamo l'argomento focalizzando l'attenzione su differenti situazioni e punti di vista.*

*In tema di perdita delle testimonianze storiche è esemplare il caso della Cina che, dopo le devastazioni "ideologiche" compiute dagli anni Cinquanta del Novecento a danno del patrimonio architettonico esistente, sostituito da edifici che moltiplicavano all'infinito i modelli "socialisti" imposti dal regime, negli anni recenti ha avviato altrettanto radicali interventi di demolizione per costruire quartieri e città ispirati da propaganda e business: il tutto nella totale assenza di un dibattito urbanistico. Quest'ultimo fenomeno si presenta anche in altri Paesi, con la ricerca di effetti spettacolari, di grattacieli sempre più alti, di forme sempre più ardite. Questo costruire convulso e dissennato ruba a ciascuno di noi la possibilità di visitare o comunque di sapere che esistono luoghi autentici, radicati nelle differenti culture.*

*Completamente diversi erano stati gli interventi di trasformazione compiuti, nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento, a Parigi da Haussmann. Interventi che avevano, sì, cancellato vecchie e suggestive case e strade e piazze, ma per dare un volto nuovo e grandioso a una città che da allora comunica l'energia e il fascino dei sontuosi edifici, dei lunghi rettilinei, delle piazze con le tipiche "brasserie". In questo caso, gli sventramenti dei vecchi quartieri sono serviti a far nascere la Parigi che tutti noi amiamo. Un sociologo attento alla molteplicità dei punti di vista sottolinea che, da un lato, sono gli architetti e gli urbanisti che disegnano gli spazi ma, dall'altro, sono gli abitanti e i visitatori a vivere la città, e sono sempre stati gli scrittori, gli artisti e i fotografi a comprenderne i bisogni e i desideri.*

*Una città può veder cancellati i propri edifici, piazze e monumenti dalla violenza dei bombardamenti. Ebbene, nella Germania del dopoguerra ha preso forma l'esigenza di ritrovare l'anima della città attraverso una vera e propria ricostruzione filologica degli edifici, ricreando le forme con gli stessi materiali. L'evento traumatico può essere anche un terremoto, un'inondazione, un incendio. Viene allora da interrogarsi sul "come" della ricostruzione. Si possono sostenere, con argomentazioni teoricamente fondate, soluzioni opposte, dal "com'era dov'era" allo slancio innovativo. Ma, ponendo la questione sul piano etico, è accettabile collocare scatole di calcestruzzo là dove l'acqua aveva cancellato le piccole vecchie case di un paesino di montagna? E non ci sembra sfrontata la proposta di quell'archistar che voleva erigere una guglia di vetro e acciaio sul tetto di Notre Dame a Parigi, approfittando del vuoto lasciato dall'incendio?*

*Volendo trovare un comune denominatore, nelle diverse situazioni potremmo considerare valide le scelte che non puntano sulla facile gloria del momento, ma si propongono di lasciare un segno ricco di significato per i secoli futuri. Al di là degli interessi personali, al di là delle concettualizzazioni e delle mode del momento.*

*Fra i molti aspetti e punti di vista sviluppati in questo numero della rivista, c'è il riconoscimento – nel nostro paesaggio italiano – di un connaturato nucleo di vitalità. Se l'attitudine alle differenze ha contribuito, nel corso dei secoli, a produrre un archivio vivente di ricchissime soluzioni urbane, nei tempi più vicini a noi hanno preso il sopravvento forme perverse di sviluppo. Ma anche un panorama di frammenti incompiuti e spesso privi di qualità ha continuato a generare variazioni imprevedibili. E quindi – secondo questa analisi, che vogliamo condividere – sono rimasti in vita i semi di una rinascita possibile.*



# The historical garden in Syria between tradition and identity

di Nabila Dwai

The designed landscape form in the Middle East influenced by symbols, beliefs of the ancient societies and religion as well as the geographical factors that have played a crucial role in the Middle East where the desert occupies large areas of it. Archaeologists recorded the earliest design landscape as a garden form in the middle east was used at the first Ancient Persian Era the Achaemenid dynasty (559-530)B.C. which was established by Cyrus the Great, in the royal palaces of Pasargadae<sup>1</sup>.

The location was in the southern region of the Iranian plateau, an area known today as "Fars", a part that participated in the traditional Ancient Near East with Elam the ancient Pre Iranian civilization. It was part of the Fertile Crescent where most of humanity's first major crops were grown<sup>2</sup>. The empire was influenced by the already well-established practices of the conquered lands which were based on the previously existing civilizations knowledge and accomplishments in the middle east.

The quadripartite design was used as a feature of a plan of the Ancient Persian garden. It was known as a "Chahar bagh" meaning "four gardens"<sup>3</sup>.

It presents a system composed of two perpendicular axes intersecting defining four equal quadrants. The form referred to the Neolithic period deity "Ishtar". It was associated with many symbols, as Firas Alsawah has referred in his book "Mystery of Ashtar"<sup>4</sup>. The form connected by an adopted canal technique, a way of moving water to a particular area, without exposing it to the evaporating by the high heat of the desert. it spreads throughout the land and over

## Il giardino storico in Siria fra tradizione e identità

by Nabila Dwai

Il giardino, inteso come parte di un più vasto ambito del progetto di paesaggio, riflette il particolare rapporto tra uomo e natura che si esprime all'interno di specifiche dimensioni e condizioni geografiche. Il giardino Chahar Bagh o "quattro giardini" rappresenta un elemento comune a diverse civiltà del Medio Oriente, in virtù della sua forma archetipica capace di strutturare formalmente il paesaggio agricolo. Sin dai primi insediamenti islamici in Medio Oriente, il modello tradizionale di giardino ha incarnato numerosi significati simbolici associati all'immagine del Paradiso come metafora della religione islamica unitamente al fatto che la forma stessa testimonia i caratteri tipici del contesto antropico di riferimento. Al giorno d'oggi sono molte le città siriane che presentano problemi legati all'assenza di aree verdi pubbliche laddove giardini e parchi, che svolgono ovunque un ruolo importante nel ridurre la discontinuità spaziale del piano urbano, potrebbero implementare la protezione dall'inquinamento valorizzandone l'identità, e preservando anche le risorse della comunità. Lo studio analitico degli elementi ricorrenti del giardino islamico, dalla sua forma alla compresenza di diversi elementi architettonici e naturali, è utile nell'individuare un abaco di tipi storici del paesaggio tradizionale siriano. Dallo studio di queste componenti e attraverso una visione processuale dell'architettura, il presente contributo intende riflettere sulle modalità attraverso cui il giardino storico reitera caratteri singolari, utili a promuovere uno sviluppo urbano sostenibile per il futuro delle città siriane.

On the previous page:  
Alhambra Palace, Court of Lion, Granada, Spain.  
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alhambra\\_-\\_Court\\_of\\_the\\_Lions.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alhambra_-_Court_of_the_Lions.jpg)

1 D. Ruggles F., *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes*, University of Pennsylvania, 2006, p. 40.

2 Cfr. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Iran).

3 Adler M.C., *The Garden as a Metaphor for Paradise*, Rhodes University, 2001.

4 Cfr. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halaf\\_culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halaf_culture)



1 - Detail of arabesque decoration at the Alhambra Palace in Spain. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_art)

2 - Water features in the Palacio de Generalife, Granada, Spain. Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generalife>

the region, provides high amounts of water which helped to extend widely the agricultural landscape. The form of the garden with its sophisticated irrigation system was used to organize the agricultural landscape. The philosophical design concept of the garden based on the Zoroastrian four sacred elements of water, wind, fire and soil of the cosmos.

The other distinctive feature of Persian gardens as many desert inhabitants are the thick brick walls, which surround the entire rectangular plan of the garden.

## The main architectural elements of the garden

When Islam, as a new power, conquered Persia (637–651), it became the official re-

ligion of Iran since then. The previous un-Islamic Zoroastrian origins of the Chahar bagh were imbued with Islamic significance, but the form of the Chahar bagh was adopted by the Muslims and widely used in their gardens. Islam represents another meaning for the gardens form of the four parts which depends on the description of the Quran (which Muslims believe to be the literal word of God). The four parts garden represents the paradise concept which was mentioned in details in their holy book with its four rivers. The Quran promises believers who perform these and other righteous acts<sup>5</sup>. The garden form remained enclosed with a high wall surrounding the outside. Most gardens have rectangular plans and have been divided into square or pseudo-square shapes. Despite the Islamic period has presented one ideology for the form of "cross-axis" garden design depending on the Quran imaginary of paradise. The whole Islamic landscape shares the garden meaning, but the gardens in the Andalusia palaces has presented many symbolic vocabularies with manipulation of irrigation system exploiting the site features and Mediterranean climate in a new development of the gardens form. The open courts and gardens in Spain give an excellent example of the supreme level of the landscape in the Islamic period.

The cross-axial plan continued appearing in the most if not entire palatine setting as in the large agriculture landscape, but the scale was reduced in the palaces. The daily irrigation canals and wells that provided the water for the agricultural landscape were presented as decorative water channels and fountains in palace gardens, as Alhambra Palaces in Granada, 1370. The centre of the courtyard contains the celebrated Fountain of Lions, a magnificent alabaster basin supported by the figures of twelve lions in white marble<sup>6</sup>. Besides the advanced and complex technique of the irrigation system, the palace presented the water construction divided the floor into four parts that became a remarkable sign of the Andalucía palaces gardens. It presents symbolic meanings, regarding the symbols of the four-part plan and the lion statues which they used previously in the courtyard houses of Damascus. It originally could be linked to the ancient history of Syria that associated with one of the Ne-

<sup>5</sup> Adler M.C., *The Garden as a Metaphor for Paradise*, Rhodes University, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Court\\_of\\_the\\_Lions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Court_of_the_Lions)

olithic deity symbols "Ishtar" which was well presented in the agricultural societies beliefs and myths. The garden plan looks like an unconscious expression of the memory, carried its symbolic through history.

By the time it lost its provenance to be used in another place and time. The meaning of this figure still refers to power and influence. Some of these references could be found in the ancient sites, for example the "Halaf site"<sup>7</sup> in Syria, which is an ancient culture that used the lion symbol in the temple of their deity.

Ishtar, the Neolithic religion, goddess of fertility and immortality. This symbolic vocabulary of the traditional landscape is still in the unconscious of the ancient middle east societies. After the religions emerged as a result of the social classes as Angeles explains, most of these beliefs have disappeared and the Myths of that period of human history has associated with the reference with the new holy books. So when Islam entered Syria and Mesopotamia, it has contained this heritage that extended to many thousand years ago, with its new ideology. It makes the Quran the main references to all these Myths that have already existed in the history of the ancient Levant. Therefore, the religion presents continuity in the culture of the ancient east while it has contained many of the heritage of the ancient east and its early agricultural civilizations.

The Chahar bagh garden that known later as the Islamic garden presents archetypal form as the ensemble of characteristics produced in a specific geography and period of history. Its form and philosophy the paradise concept has developed through ages by many ancient civilizations in the Middle East, which adopted the form and used it with different interpretations and beliefs. All of these civilizations shared the same geographical area.

As Saverio Muratori explains: «a type is also a generative action a priori: it already exists in the subconscious of the designer, and it is an integral part of collective imagery, thus anticipating the act of building. In the entire Islamic world, there is an archetypal form that has become almost synonymous with the Islamic garden, namely, the Chahar



bagh, a system composed of two perpendicular axes intersecting and defining four equal quadrants sometimes featuring a monumental landmark»<sup>8</sup>.

3 - Calligraphy in Andalusia palaces. Detail in the Alcazaba of Málaga, Spain. Source: Photo by Giusi Ciotoli.

## Towards the definition of an abacus of the Syrian garden

An Islamic garden is a landscape designed according to certain ideological principles. It employed certain physical elements and focused on certain intentions. The articulation of these elements and intentions is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Islamic faith and Muslim culture<sup>9</sup>.

7 Halaf site on the Euphrates river where a palace façade composed of many lion figures, its dated back to the period between 6100 and 5100 B.C.E, and the site belong to Neolithic period, and their deity was Ishtar. Now the facade of the palace became the Aleppo museum facade. Cfr. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halaf\\_culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halaf_culture)

8 Petruccioli A., *Rethinking the Islamic Garden*, Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre, Como, Italy. <http://environment.yale.edu/publication-series/documents/downloads/0-9/103petruccioli.pdf>

9 Hamed S.E., *Paradise on earth: Historical gardens of the arid Middle East*, <http://ag.arizona.edu/oals/ALN/aln36/Hamed.html>



4 - Layout of the Charbagh at the Tomb of Jahangir in Lahore. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charbagh#/media/File:View\\_from\\_atop\\_the\\_left\\_minaret\\_Tomb\\_of\\_Jahangir\\_gardens.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charbagh#/media/File:View_from_atop_the_left_minaret_Tomb_of_Jahangir_gardens.jpg)

5 - Painted vessel, Isfahan, Museum of Iran Antiquities, Tehran, Iran. Source: Halsted D., *The Perso-Islamic Garden: a reclassification of Iranian Garden Design after the Arab Invasion*, Tesi del Davidson College, 2014.

The essential physical elements that define the Islamic garden are as follows.

*The walls (enclosure wall)* - Most of the desert civilizations referred to the archetype of the fence, and the designed landscape as traditional gardens were surrounded by walls. It had inward-looking composition which is interpreted as an attempt to isolate human-made order from the perceived chaos of the surrounding harsh desert, and to protect the domesticated and cultivate area.

Attilio Petruccioli has referred that the Islamic garden portrays an attitude toward the environment, the taming and glorification of nature enclosed within four walls juxtaposed with the hostile areas of the outside world.

He referred to the concept of space in a culture that evolved from the desert and the necessity of protecting living space and transforming the enclosure into an archetypal sign of distinction, not only separation between the nomadic and the sedentary, between oasis and desert, irrigated and arid land but because there is no dialogue between the two. The enclosure becomes a fortress under constant attack from the desert symbolism-thirst, death, and evil spirits; therefore it was sheltered by high walls<sup>10</sup>.

All these aspects gathered to produce this protection to the organized and domesticated landscape. The gardens with their walled landscape presented treatment in the desert or Sahara regions, but the development of cities which are surrounded by natural views should consider another planning system to employ the natural features and invest them in the urban plan development and solving its problems.

*The gradation and successive levels* - It's a part of constructions of views in the Islamic gardens. It helped to view panoramically and to control the garden and the surrounding landscape. It was used in the gardens of the Achaemenids kings which is a pre-Islamic period on a sloped site. It's also considered as a part of the hierarchy in the palaces complex that put the king as the representative of God on earth. This was influenced by the religion of Mesopotamia, which has been adopted by many civilizations that coexisted in the Middle East.

Ruggles interprets this design in the palaces gardens as: «a social hierarchy design», and explains that this design of view from a high and vast expanse of land was an act from the ruler to signify his colossal power over the land and its inhabitants. It served state ideology and became a part of the palace typology that presented the sovereignty and the power of the king. This design became one of the architectural characters of Islamic gardens<sup>11</sup>.

*Pavilions* - The Pavilion was used in the garden layout for relaxation, gazing and contemplation. It provides a shaded vantage point in which everyone could sit and view the magnificent garden and surrounding

10 Petruccioli A., *Dar al Islam architetture del territorio nei paesi islamici*, Carucci, Roma 1985.

11 Ruggles D.F., *Garden, landscape, and vision in the palaces of Islamic Spain*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.

landscape and contemplate inner thoughts. It also provides a shelter from the heat of the desert.

Typically had a rectangular platform with open porches, probably columned, added to each of its shorter sides. In the religious context, it is mentioned in the description of paradise in Quran and also in the Hadith of the prophet Muhammad<sup>12</sup>.

But historically, the pavilion is used in Persian gardens for the first time in the Achaemenids empire period in the king's palaces garden before Islam, and it was used as an important central element in the design of palaces gardens in Syria Al-Rusafa (Byzantine site) and then it belonged to the Umayyad caliphs. The pavilion was elevated and surrounded by an arcade and had an opening on each side from which three steps ran down to the garden<sup>13</sup>.

The pavilion form changed from one gardens layout to another. Emma Clark refers to the Mughol gardens pavilion form and its symbolism. «*The pavilions at the four corners of many Mughol mausoleums including the Taj Mahal, are octagonal and the throne of God is supported by eight angels, signifying the renewed man after he has travelled through the seven heavens and regained paradise*»<sup>14</sup>.

But in Spanish gardens layout, it presented a distinctive feature of a small bower (Glorieta). It symbolized the pearl pavilion of the Quranic paradise. It was located at the junction path. It was often formed of Cypress trees the top of which would bend or clipped to form arches.

Alternatively, a light arch might be built and covered with vine<sup>15</sup>.

**Shadows** - Shadows serve the purpose of a cool place of rest and reflection and in Islamic garden as a reminder of paradise, and this evolves from an environmental perspective as It is a stark contrast between the harsh and arid landscape in most parts of the Islamic World and the gentle cool given by trees and the foliage of a garden and with a green canopy of shade.

Shadows beside the water are considered the most important aspect in the garden in Quranic text; Emma Clark explains the effect of the environment of a desert on the sacredness of the Islamic elements: «Two indispensable elements of the Islamic Gardens of Paradise are already evident here – water and shade. It is important to remember just how much more a garden means to those brought up in a hot desert climate than to those brought up in countries where rain is frequent and where the popular idea of paradise is a desert island with a palm tree»<sup>16</sup>.

This aspect is highly considerable in gardens features and presents a high-value environmental role in moderating climate and reducing the heat which are important factors for the environmental improvements in the landscaping study and design.

**Water features** - «*Water is the secret of the soul in many sacred traditions, its fluidity and constantly purifying aspect is the reflection of the soul's ability to renew itself*»<sup>17</sup>. Water has crucial importance in every living aspect, "and we made everything alive from water" it's a keynote in Quran that refers to the role of life-giving water in all of Islamic culture.

Water role was significant in the ancient Middle East, where it's considered a sacred element regarding its importance and influence on human life existence.

It has made civilization possible, most of the ancient civilization settled near the water sources like rivers, and its economy depended on the water ability for irrigation and agriculture and trade, like Mari kingdom on Euphrates River in Syria or Mesopotamia and Nile River in Egypt.

Therefore, water was considered a sacred element in many ancient civilizations and it is even mentioned in their myths. In the hot arid climate where desert water is essential to life and to survive so far, it is associated with wealth and fertility. Emma Clark points out In the Epic of Gilgamesh that water has much more value to people who live in arid countries and that desert dwellers traditionally viewed water as a symbol of God's mercy. This idea is evident in numerous verses of the Quran, where water and mercy are inseparable<sup>18</sup>.

12 Halim Ibn Muhammad Nassae As-Salafi A., *Description of Paradise In The Glorious Quran*, Darussalam Publisher, 2010.

13 Ruggles D.F., *Garden, landscape, and vision in the palaces of Islamic Spain*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000, p. 178.

14 Clark, E., *Symbolism of islamic garden*. <http://islamic-arts.org/2011/the-symbolism-of-the-islamic-garden/>

15 Lehrman J.B., *Earthly Paradise: Garden and Courtyard in Islam*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1980, p. 89.

16 Clark E., *The art of Islamic garden*, Times offset, Malaysia, 2010.

17 Clark, E., *The art of Islamic garden*, Times offset, Malaysia, 2010. page28.

18 Clark, E., *The art of Islamic garden*, Times offset, Malaysia, 2010.

In the garden, the water is located in the centre of the courtyards where there is a fountain from which radiate four paths. It's placed at the heart of the garden, and playing many roles within the garden design; it is emphasizing architectural elements, masking outdoor noise, producing pleasing sounds, refreshes the eyes, cooling the body in the high temperatures and providing a space for spiritual contemplation. Irrigating plants, and soothing the dusty wind<sup>19</sup>.

Water moves through the Islamic garden in many ways, it changes level over chutes and waterfalls, and spurts into the air from fountains. It sends out plums or bubbling out in sprays and swirls, filling the air with sound. In Spain, courtyard water has played a significant role in gardens as well as in other architectural spaces. Water features viewed as part of the spiritual conception of the landscape, while in other spaces the absolute stillness of a large pool would create almost perfect reflections of the surrounding architecture, even more, it's played a role as a divider of spaces like the courtyard of the Alhambra and The Generalife in the Patio de la Acequia. It has reflected and presented a high level of water irrigations developments through the recognizable water features and construction.

*Plants and trees* - In the dry, desert climate of Arabia, where Islam originated, a lush, green, and shady garden with water presented the paradise on Earth. From this environmental background of view, plants and trees in the Islamic world have acquired sacred and symbolic meanings, but trees in the three holy books of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are prominent and beyond their utilities. They are important for the holy books as a symbol and metaphor. In the Koran, trees are most frequently cited as gifts of a beneficent Creator, shady and fruitful trees are highly valued and many trees have mentioned in the Quran as olive, fig, and pomegranate. We can find them in most of the Islamic gardens (also of different period) in the palaces of Umayyad princes or as well as courthouse in Damascus and Aleppo, the power of the ruler stemmed from the productivity and fertility of the landscape that brings prosperity and richness. Emma Clark refers to the vegetation in Islamic gardens, that greenery softens the ordered and geometric nature of

the garden, as does the vegetation, it contains the generous planting of chinar trees (the plane tree, *Platanus orientalis*) with their large, shade-giving leaves, and the cypress, the palm-tree and the olive, as well as the different kinds of fruit trees: fig, cherry, peach, citrus, pomegranate and almond, with their abundant blossom and fruit. Flower-beds were most likely to be filled with fragrant varieties such as jasmine, roses, narcissus, violets and lilies<sup>20</sup>.

*Arabesque and ornaments* - Islamic art encompasses many visual arts produced from the 7th century. But not all of these arts restricted to religious matters but includes all the art of the rich and varied cultures of Islamic societies as well<sup>21</sup>.

Ornamentation is a central feature in many Islamic architectural types. Islamic gardens with their enclosed form and surrounded walls have over many Islamic periods presented a kind of ornamentations and calligraphy arts. It has added an aesthetic value to space. Geometric patterns make up one of the three non-figural types of decoration in Islamic art which also include calligraphy and vegetal patterns. Whether isolated or used in combination with no figural ornamentation or figural representation, geometric patterns are popularly associated with Islamic art largely due to their anionic quality. These abstract designs not only adorn the surfaces of monumental Islamic architecture but also function as the major decorative element on a vast Array of objects of all types.

While geometric ornamentation may have reached a pinnacle in the Islamic world. Islamic art developed from many sources like Greeks, Romans, Early Christian art, Byzantine styles, and Sasanians art of pre-Islamic Persia. Islamic artists appropriated key elements from the classical tradition, then complicated and elaborated upon them in order to invent a new form of decoration that stressed the importance of unity and order. The significant intellectual contributions of Islamic mathematicians, astronomers, and scientists were essential to the creation of this unique new style.

In the use of geometrical floral or vegetal designs, there are repeated elements, and it is known as the arabesque. The arabesque in Islamic art is often used to symbolize the transcendent indivisible and infinite nature

19 Hamed, S., E., *Paradise on earth: Historical gardens of the arid Middle East* <http://ag.arizona.edu/oals/ALN/aln36/Hamed.html>.

20 Clark, E., *The art of Islamic garden*, Times offset, Malaysia, 2010.

21 Cfr. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_art)



6 - Water features in the Alcazaba of Málaga, Spain. Source: Photo by Giusi Ciottoli.

of God. Islamic art has focused on the depiction of patterns whether purely geometric or floral and Arabic calligraphy, rather than on figures. Human representation for worship is considered idolatry and is duly forbidden in Islamic law<sup>22</sup>.

*Calligraphy on walls* - One of the decorative forms of art developed in Islamic culture is calligraphy, which consists of the use of artistic lettering. That is combined with geometrical and natural forms. As in other forms of Islamic art, Calligraphic design is omnipresent in Islamic art, whereas in Europe in the Middle Ages religious exhortations including Quranic verses. It may be included in secular objects, especially coins, tiles and metalwork, and most painted miniatures include some scripts, as many buildings. Other inscriptions include verses of poetry and inscriptions that record ownership or donation. Two of the main scripts involved the symbolic kufic and naskh scripts which can be found adorning and enhancing the visual appeal of the walls and domes of buildings, the sides of minbars, and metalwork. Islamic calligraphy in the form of painting or sculptures is sometimes referred to as Quranic art<sup>23</sup>.

## Conclusions

While the historical garden – conceived as an enclosed form – was part of the palaces of kings and elite classes during the Islamic period, subsequently it was used as a part of the landscape design. This form was employed for the distribution of the agricultural resources in the arid land where protection from the surrounding desert was required. In Syria, the recent decades have witnessed high urban expansion that caused the consumption of green areas, and inside the city, many gardens and green areas are neglected, exposed to be abandoned without care and maintenance. Therefore, the current gardens need to be reorganized and to be renewed in addition to the use of the vegetation cover, different types of trees, and water features, besides the art workings and constructions which enhance the identity of the place and the culture of the societies. The study of the typological characteristics of the historical garden is therefore fundamental to understand, and perhaps direct, further and possible developments of this particular architectural form that belongs to the urban landscape of Syria (and of the Middle East in general).

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22 Cfr. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geom/hd\\_geom.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geom/hd_geom.htm)

23 Cfr. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_art)