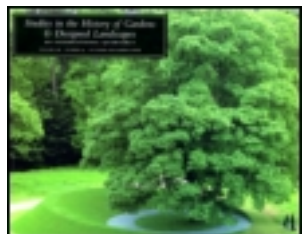


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Palace gardens in Istanbul: the example of Dolmabahçe

YILDIZ AKSOY

Introduction

The Turks' passage into a settled order and lifestyle, following their migration from Central Asia to Anatolia, manifested itself not just through architectural actions like the building of houses, mansions, villas, palaces, mosques, fountains, streets, etc., which can be considered to be symbols of a permanent and continuous settlement, but also through agricultural activities like planting trees. At first, the aims of the latter activity were of a purely functional nature, since it was carried out to grow fruit and vegetables, or to obtain cool and shady places; however, this practical action later turned into a passion and efforts to create a beautiful and cool environment with an abundance of greenery and flowers.

The best symbol of those days' efforts to create a beautiful environment consists of rather small and enclosed landscaping at a garden scale, which is also a concrete expression of a longing for the Garden of Paradise; however, there were also gardens on a bigger scale, inclusive of some architectural elements and details; these were the parks of palaces built by Seljuk sultans during the thirteenth century, when they established settled courts. Following the Ottoman Dynasty's permanent settlement in Istanbul, villas, mansions, sea-front houses and especially palace parks were laid out on the basis of artistic considerations, thus leading to the birth of the Turkish garden in Anatolia image.

The Beşiktaş Palace and gardens (Beşiktaş Gardens — Dolmabahçe)

During the time when Sultan Yavuz Selim (1495) was a royal prince and governor of Trabzon, Yahya *Efendi* was born there in the same year (in 1495) as the sultan's son, Prince Süleyman (who would himself later become sultan and be known as Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent) and became a 'milk brother' of

the prince (due to the fact that both were wet-nursed by the same woman). During the principdom of his 'brother', Yahya Efendi moved to Istanbul and settled in Beşiktaş, where he bought a garden that was to be known as the Beşiktaş Garden.¹

During the later reign of Sultan Bayezid Khan, Evliya Çelebi recounts that at that time, in place of the Beşiktaş Garden there was the waterfront mansion of a pasha, which was later acquired by the Ottoman dynasty. In the same source, it is said that this land had at first been a small vineyard with cypresses, and that following Sultan Osman's orders, during the years 1618–1622, stones had been transported to the area by using a variety of boats and vessels. The stones had been dropped into the strait creating a space of a length of 400 *aşın* (a measure of length of approximately 68 cm). This area became known as *Dolmabahçe* (garden on reclaimed land).²

In a general classification of gardens by Evliya Çelebi, the Garden of Beşiktaş is referred to as *Bina-i Hayrettin Paşa, Kari-Sinan*, from which expression of Evliya Çelebi we understand that the design of the Beşiktaş Garden was the work of the Ottoman Master Architect, Sinan. Evliya Çelebi describes Dolmabahçe in the following way:

The vast open space on which Sultan Osman used to play the *cirit* game of horseback javelin throwing, was later transformed into a garden. It seems that the only constructions occupying this space were a pavilion of Sultan Selim I and a pool, and that 200 gardeners headed by a master gardener were employed in the garden.

It is said that the place was known also as *Beşiktaş* (cradling or supporting stone) because, since the area was exposed to the *lodos* wind blowing from the direction of the sea, oak logs and stones had been placed all along the shore to prevent the wind damaging the garden sitting on reclaimed land.³

In his description of eighteenth-century Istanbul, Inciciyan mentions Dolmabahçe as the sultan's garden and recounts the way land had been reclaimed from the sea creating a garden, the way it was set out and the sweet water fountains. According to information provided by Inciciyan, the garden of Beşiktaş containing some pavilions of the sultan and a beautiful palace occupied a space near the mausoleum of Barbaros Hayrettin Pasha. The Tiled Mansion was the most beautiful among the mansions of the sultan and had seven domes. Water flowing from fountains present in front of each of the Tiled Mansion's windows flowed into pools with tanks. It is believed that the tiled mansion was built upon the orders of Sultan Mehmed IV. Sultan Selim III entrusted Architect Melling with the job of working on the properties of his sister Hatice Sultana, upon which Melling restored and expanded the existing palaces, and reorganized the gardens. Since royal wishes were that the gardens should be of European type, a labyrinth or maze like the ones in the gardens of Europe was made of lilac, acacia and rose hedges.⁴

Marshal Moltke described the Beşiktaş palace and gardens of his time in the following way:

“Through a gilded gate I entered into a small garden, which with its flower beds enclosed by boxwood hedges, and sea-shell strewn pathways, was a veritable Turkish garden. Pools with water spouts and red fish swimming in them were surrounded by pyramids of cypresses and orange trees. At the back the land was terraced, and contained beautiful hot-houses and pavilions; however all of these were surrounded by high walls.

The walls were painted, but nevertheless had an oppressive quality about them. The windows facing the Bosphorus were covered not just by gratings, but also by rather thickly woven cane grilles. Thanks to these, the inside of the gardens was invisible from the outside, but people in the gardens could see the outside. On the harem side these cane grilles were double, and covered completely the windows up to even the third floor.”⁵

The gardens of Dolmabahçe Palace

During the second half of the 1750s, the Beşiktaş Palace, which was made up of adjoining one- and two-storey buildings, was built on the site of the Beşiktaş Garden; however, this palace, which had its best days during the reign of Selim III, who was known for his fondness for the arts and for nature, did not last long and was demolished completely during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecit, who had the Dolmabahçe Palace built in its place within four years. In the

construction of the Dolmabahçe Palace, many old wooden mansions that were annexes to the old palace, and in particular the Tiled Mansion built during the reign of Mehmed IV, which was of great importance from the point of view of Turkish architecture, along with the Beşiktaş Garden, were destroyed; and the new palace and gardens were laid out in their place. In later years, the ‘*Hareket Köşkleri*’ (residences and lodgings for princes, kitchens, servants' quarters) and the crown prince apartments were built, with the result that the last remaining part of the Beşiktaş Garden was destroyed.

Since Sultan Abdülaziz was worried that an eventual fire in adjoining neighbourhoods like Beşiktaş, Vişnezade or Süleymaniye might destroy the new palace, all wooden houses in areas adjacent to the palace were demolished. In these areas surrounding the palace, monumental buildings like the Silahhane and Taşkılla barracks and the Akaret terraced houses, which were considered to be more appropriate for the neighbourhood of the palace, were built.⁶

Following the demolition of houses that were a fire hazard, trees were planted on the slopes descending towards Beşiktaş and Dolmabahçe, and these areas were turned into a park for the palace (*has bahçe*). The cove that extended between the Beşiktaş *Hasbahçe* and the Karabali gardens in Kabataş was filled in and reclaimed up to the Bayıldım Garden, thus joining these two green areas and obtaining a vast area of gardens. The Dolmabahçe Palace was located at the centre of this vast and rather well guarded green area. Even though Western-style designs continued to be applied to the gardens within the palace walls, Turkish garden characteristics continued to be used in the Bayıldım garden directly opposite these walls.⁷

A multitude of documents about the late period of the palaces throw light upon various subjects. From sources mentioning repairs to the water channels we learn that the water used in the Beşiktaş and Çırağan palaces used to come from the Bahçeköy reservoirs. And from sources about repairs to pavements around the Beşiktaş-Çırağan palace complex we deduce that the paths in the palace gardens were well tended, and also that in the late period the gardens closer to the old gasworks were vegetable gardens.⁸

The design characteristics of the Dolmabahçe Palace gardens

From the point of view of their scales and ways of usage, Turkish gardens can be subdivided into two categories. The first group is made up of large-scale green

areas like vegetable gardens, parks for public recreation (*mesire*), and meadows. As for the second group, it is made up of small and enclosed areas like house, mansion, and palace gardens. The first group is made up of external gardens that mark a transition to nature, while the second group is made up of internal gardens that mark a transition to architectural spaces. While the first group is closely connected with nature, the second group is closely connected with architecture.⁹

From the point of view of their scale and usage, the Dolmabahçe Palace gardens are to be included in the second group, and can be defined as 'architectural gardens' or 'geometrical gardens'. The Dolmabahçe Palace gardens are architectural gardens and exist within the grid of urban plots. As scale goes, they are smaller than a natural park. They are private and enclosed, or in other words they are a complex of palace gardens. They are a separate space, with their own scale, and they have a weak connection with the surrounding areas. The gardens are regulated by a strict architectural order. Whenever the surface and borders permit it, symmetrical or at least axial compositions have been employed. This order has been introduced by means of regular pathways, flower beds and walls. Rather than a spontaneous or naturalist plan, a plan based on certain geometric rules and conceptions has been preferred.

This is why the gardens are set along a main axis and along secondary axes around the main one. These axes end, according to need, either with a heavy or a light architectural element. Geometric lines dominate the layout of the gardens. The fact that architectural elements like pavilions, pools and stairways, or flower beds have been placed along one or two axes according to a symmetrical conception, has led to a formal layout.¹⁰

As in many other issues, the opening up of the Ottoman state during the eighteenth century also led to an aspiration to imitate the West in matters related to gardening. The flat surface of the formal garden adjacent to the Dolmabahçe Palace has been decorated with flower beds in a way suitable to a French garden, with the result that the garden's surface has been underlined, leading to an increase in importance of the flower beds. Thus, the French flower bed decoration known as lacework (*parterre de broderie*) reached Turkish gardens through the example of the Dolmabahçe Palace gardens.¹¹

The surfaces of the sections of the gardens are all horizontal. Terracing has been applied to the gardens, with the result that the palace garden is made up of five interconnected main sections. The *Hasbahçe*, the Aviary Garden, the Harem Apartments Garden, The Princes' Apartments Back Garden and

the Sea-side Garden, make up the internal gardens of the palace. Was necessity the factor leading to these horizontal levels in the gardens? Or was it just a matter of taste or tradition?

Looking at the way that the gardens are used, you see that a subdivision into horizontal levels is a necessity. The surface had to be placed on a horizontal plane, both for the pathways and the pools, and for the flower beds. In addition to this, the preference for terraced gardens within ancient Eastern tradition tells us that the choice for these horizontal lanes must not have been due only to a matter of necessity, but also to a matter of taste and tradition.¹²

The internal gardens of Dolmabahçe Palace

Has Garden

This garden known also the Mabeyn or Selamlık Garden, in consideration of the fact that it was a public or official space within the palace, is located between the treasury door and the entrance to the palace. It is a rectangle, close to a square. It has been laid out symmetrically along the main axis of the palace. Its geometric layout is inspired from French gardens (figure 1).¹³

The pathways of the *Hasbahçe* are visually striking and have been laid out in a way focusing on the steps leading to the *selamlık* section (the area reserved for men and their guests). As for the botanical layout, a symmetry along the axis is apparent. Trees are set within the flower beds (figures 2 and 3).¹⁴

The main elements of the garden include the central great pool together with the swans in it and the concentric circles around it (circular layout), all set along the main axis parallel to the sea. The pool in the *Hasbahçe* has an octagonal shape with rounded angles (figure 4).¹⁵

The *Hasbahçe* with its central pool, the axially symmetrical order around it, and its two-dimensional layout are quite dissimilar from the complexity of typical Turkish gardens and reflects nineteenth-century European influence.¹⁶

Two lion statues and vases set symmetrically on both sides are located on the pathway leading from the pool to the entrance of the *selamlık* entrance. This layout very clearly shows the effects of a baroque conception of gardening. The lampposts and statues at the entrance of the *selamlık* are no different from their equivalents in Europe (figures 5 and 6).¹⁷

The pathways among the greenery of *Hasbahçe* and of the other gardens are covered with sand and gravel.



FIGURE 1. French-inspired layout of Has Garden.

The Aviary Garden

Located on the land side of the Ceremonial Throne Hall is the 'Aviary Garden', called so because of the Aviary and the Aviary Pavilion in it. The Aviary Garden has the characteristics of Ottoman-era Turkish gardens. Trees are set in informally laid out beds. Linden trees, horse chestnuts and sycamores, which were much used in Ottoman-era garden design, are all present in the garden. As a result of the fact that the trees in the Aviary Garden form a thick canopy, it has an enclosed and dark look.¹⁸



FIGURE 2. Has Garden symmetry of the layout.

In comparison to the front garden, the Aviary Garden has a more natural look. The beds are covered with *Ophiopogon japonicus* (*Osmanlı çimi*) (figures 7 and 8).¹⁹

The round pool with grottoes, and surrounded by trees, is quite different from the other pools in the gardens (figure 9).²⁰

The Dolmabahçe Palace Aviary is the only one among Ottoman palace aviaries to serve its original purpose once again. The Aviary Garden contains cages and perches with thousands of birds, a bird hospital and the Aviary Pavilion. The Aviary Garden is used as a centre for research, study and publication on the subject of 'birds', and as a recreational centre (figures 10, 11 and 12).²¹

FIGURE 3. *Has Garden botanical layout.*FIGURE 4. *The pool in the Has Garden.*

Harem Apartments Garden

Located on the land side of the L-shaped block making up the harem, the Harem Garden is more like an internal courtyard, since as a result of privacy requirements it is separated from the other gardens of the palace by means of walls (figure 13).²²

The oval pool at the centre of the garden and the geometrically shaped plant *parterres* reflect the influence of the Baroque style of gardening (figure 14).²³

The big rose garden along the land-side wall reminds us of the simple rose gardens (*gülistan*) of Ottoman tradition (figure 15).²⁴

Conclusions and proposals

The Dolmabahçe Palace gardens are enclosed by high walls on the land side, and by iron railings on the sea side. In this way, visual obstacles have been placed all

around the palace; both on the sea and land sides. The railings on the sea side are made up of concave units, with the look of festoons, attached to stone pillars set at distances of 9 m. The stone pillars have square plans as in waterfront mansion gates. The corners of the pillars have been decorated with extremely fine columns.²⁵

In the Dolmabahçe Palace gardens there are two elements that are not to be found in present-day gardens. The first is a 'mosaic' texture consisting of small boxwoods with red and green leaves that as far as floor decoration is concerned was a fashion of the previous century.

This is a confirmation of European influence on Turkish gardening. The second is the fact that the pathways among the greenery have been paved with sand and gravel.²⁶

In the Dolmabahçe Palace gardens there are also very rare kinds of trees and bushes. The only examples in Istanbul of *Cunninghamia lanceolata* and of *Buxus sempervirens* 'Rosmarinifolius' are to be found here.²⁷



FIGURE 5. *Lion statue in the Has Garden.*



FIGURE 6. *European-style lampposts in the Has Garden.*



FIGURE 7. Tree planting in the Aviary Garden.



FIGURE 8. Shade from the tree canopy in the Aviary Garden.

In addition to these plants, the gardens contain also fine examples of *Araucaria araucana*, and one well-developed specimen each of *Podocarpus macrophyllus* and of *Picea smithiana*, which are rarely found.

Also many other species like magnolias, cedars, labdanum, red-leafed beeches and *Sequoia sempervirens* (coast redwood), further embellish the gardens of the Dolmabahçe Palace.

European influence is evident in the Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens in the geometrically laid out flower beds, the use of flower *parterres*, statues, vases and garden paths and in the fact that all of these elements have been concentrated at a single level. One of the reasons why the gardens have been influenced by Europe is that the gardeners employed were brought from Western countries. The Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens reflect the work of the German Sester, Fritz Vensel and Koch Münika.

Also the use of plants of European and Asiatic origin is a result of the reflection on the garden of a more general European influence. Despite this, Ottoman

influences are not totally lacking, even in these formal gardens. Elements of Turkish gardens such as efforts to create shady areas, aviaries, and plant cultivation in hothouses are present in the layout of these gardens.

The Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens are not just historically precious, they also have multi-faceted, significant and effective functions like being a space that is lived in, used and admired even today.

We can define the Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens as ‘Living Cultural Monuments’ that establish a connection between the past and the present and the future, and that are based on a living, biological foundation.²⁸

As time went by, the Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens, which we could define as being an aesthetical manifestation in the guise of historic parks and gardens of the sociological environmental development, acquired a value as a monument, exactly as if they had been buildings, and in this way they became part of Istanbul’s historical and cultural landscape and heritage. The Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens, which have complex characteristics from both functional and



FIGURE 9. *The grotto pool in the Aviary Garden.*



FIGURE 11. *Aviaries in the Aviary Garden.*



FIGURE 10. *Pavilion in the Aviary Garden.*

aesthetical points of view, resulting from the integration of botanical and architectural elements, have acquired a documentary characteristic in that they express and transfer to our day in a concrete way the conception of outdoor life of the past. We have to preserve the palace gardens, which we consider to be documentary heritage that have carried to our time and will transfer to the future the natural and cultural values of the past, and in particular we should appreciate better the Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens. Guaranteeing the design originality of the Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens, and the existence of its botanical, structural and architectural elements, will be possible thanks to a constant cycle of preservation–maintenance–repair, and to an enlightened policy of utilization.

Even though the preservation of historical gardens is ensured through legislation in most countries, up to now no such regulations have been introduced in Turkey. In the recent past, a greater consciousness and interest concerning the preservation of historical gardens has become apparent in European society. Since the English Garden in Munich, the Herrenhausen in Hanover, Hampton

FIGURE 12. *Aviaries in the Aviary Garden.*

Court near London and the Versailles Palace in Paris are sites that attract both local and foreign tourists' attention at least as much as buildings, and since they are among the most visited places, the need to preserve and restore parks and gardens with great care together with historic buildings has become apparent.²⁹

The Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens are historic, but it is not a separate cultural value, since it also increases the importance of Istanbul, where it is located, and adds quality and fame to the city. The Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens are a living monument. Since the plants in the garden are living organisms, they will evolve over time as far as their dimensions and shape are concerned. These changes over time will change the look of the garden as well. This is why gardens are not the same as buildings, which have kept their original shapes. As a result of all this, palace gardens should also be subjected to a restoration programme just like a historic building. Since the criteria taken into consideration during the restoration of buildings are not valid for gardens, new criteria for landscape repair work in gardens should be formulated.³⁰

FIGURE 13. *The walls of the Harem Garden.*

The problems connected to the Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens can be subdivided into two groups: problems related to the order, and problems related to maintenance. The factors that damage partially or destroy totally the order of these areas can also be subdivided into two groups:

1. Problems that have appeared as a result of changes in elements of an architectural nature (walls, steps, pavements, pools, aviaries, grottoes, etc.).
2. Problems related to the special and general character of the garden, resulting from added plants and the loss of plants due to age or lack of care.

In the case of the Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens, problems related to the order cannot be distinguished with certainty from problems related to the care of the garden or lack of it, because lack of care and erroneous interventions create problems related to order.

The following are the short- and long-term steps that can be taken as a remedy against the problems deriving from maintenance and order, in the Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens:



FIGURE 14. *The oval pool of the Harem Garden.*



FIGURE 15. *The traditional-style rose garden in the Harem Garden.*

An approach in which the gardens are considered an architectural element should be adopted.

A committee of experts that will run inventory listing, technical drawing and research-planning activities for the Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens should be established.

Necessary maintenance and repair work aiming to conserve the existing situation should continue with the aim of preserving the existing situation, until restoration work for the gardens can begin.

A list of tree and bush species that exist, or that used to exist, in the Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens and that now for various reasons do not exist anymore, should be prepared, and a special nursery for these kinds should be established. Big and mature plants should be cultivated in this nursery.

Plans and practices to revive typical Turkish gardening, which began to gradually disappear from the eighteenth century onwards, should be reintroduced.

As in all other kinds of buildings, the Dolmabahçe Palace should be taken up as a whole together with its gardens. The gardens surrounding the Dolmabahçe Palace are extremely important as a document about the past, since they have managed to survive till our time.

The species of trees in the palace gardens are very important from the point of view of maintenance, repair and renewal work.

Planting a new bush, of the same kind and with similar dimensions, in place of one that has died away is no problem. Reforming the plant cover in a spot that has been ruined is also not a difficult operation. However replacing a century-old tree is not an easy thing to do. In particular, if this tree is a natural monument, experts who know special maintenance and repair techniques are needed to ensure that the tree should live for many years. A tree of this kind, which symbolizes an ancient past, has to be preserved from the negative effects of time and of fast urbanization. These negative circumstances will affect the trees in the palace gardens just like they affect the existence of trees in the streets

of the city. It is for this reason that ensuring that the trees that influence the general aspect of the palace gardens thanks to their dominant character should live as long as possible, without losing their health and maintaining the characteristic shape of their species, is quite an important problem. This can be done by carrying out maintenance and repair work that is appropriate.³¹

When, even though all necessary maintenance work has been done in the gardens, a tree dies sooner or later as a result of an inescapable law of nature, than a specimen of the same kind will have to be planted in its place. However, planting a 3- to 4-year-old and 1- to 2-metre-high tree in place of a 50- to 60-year-old, or even older, tree, will, to a great degree, ruin the look of the garden. It is for this reason that in these cases a 15- to 20-year-old specimen of that kind should be brought from somewhere else, using appropriate techniques.

Additions to the palace gardens or within the palace buildings, which are absolutely necessary, should be done only after detailed and careful studies.

Ramshackle additions built without ensuring their connection to the space, will ruin the looks of the place and the historical texture. The shack housing a motor pump in the Harem Garden of the Dolmabahçe Palace and the building for an air pressure tank in the Aviary Garden are examples of this matter.

The shack-like ugly buildings in the Aviary and Harem gardens should be demolished and the air pressure tank and motor pump should be transferred to more suitable locations.

The Dolmabahçe Palace Gardens, which have the general characteristics of both Turkish and European gardens, should be transferred to future generations, with all their characteristics intact and in a well-kept state. This is why the matter should be approached using scientific and traditional preservation methods.

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