

THE STRUCTURE OF THE GARDEN AND ITS PLANTS

On entering the Palace from Via del Quirinale through the Porta Giardini and a 19th Century gate, one proceeds along the Viale delle Palme, a road lined on both sides by geometric flower beds hosting a wide range of arboreal species: *Chamaerops*, *Phoenix canariensis*, *reclinata* and *dactylifera*, *Butia capitata*, *Washingtonia robusta* and *filifera*, *Erythea armata* and *edulis*, *Cycas revoluta* and a very rare *Trithrinax campestris* from Brazil.

The Viale delle Palme, an ideal partitioning between the two different souls of the garden, ends with the verdant screen that hosts the bust of Hadrian, dating back to 200 AD.

On the left side, a maze of paths lined with mixed hedges of common box, laurel and holm oak, which was previously shaped into a tall gallery, outline the contours of the Italian Renaissance garden. The roads are interspersed with picturesque rest areas with marble benches and sculptural groups, many of which come from the rich collection of the Cybo family of popes and bishops. Among these are the groups of the Cobbler, the Jugglers, Cupid playing a *zampogna* (Italian bagpipes) and the statue of Hercules and the Dragon.

Continuing on the left-hand side towards the edge of the garden, we find the Fountain of the Turtles or of Dolphins, embedded in an elliptical espalier of laurel and common box, and decorated with four marble herms. Dating back to the 17th Century, the fountain features two large stone turtles, apparently originally part of the 16th Century fountain of the Tigris, which was previously located in the Vatican's Belvedere.

From here it is possible to reach a large clearing with, standing in the background, the brightly lit Coffee House facing the Caserta Fountain (Fontana delle Bagnanti). On the terrace in front of the building stand the statues of Bacchus and nine satyrs, also probably from the Cybo family collection.

Continuing the tour, we find the meridian of Urban VIII, placed in a large flower bed, where climbing roses soften the verticality of the trees. Alongside the palm species, there are several monumental Stone Pine trees, a large Camelia, a Japanese magnolia, an *araucaria bildwillii* and two *magnolias grandiflora*. After crossing a stone balustrade, you reach the heliport, which is surrounded by a large containment wall that was erected where the hillslope naturally descended in the 16th Century, crossing thickets, vineyards and olive groves. From this position there is an unmatched view of Rome, which is particularly impressive at sunset.

The Organ Fountain, which is visible from the terrace, was once the greatest attraction of the lower part of the garden. As has already been said, the fountain, built by order of Clement VIII, born Ippolito Aldobrandini, was the centre stage for a performance in which

Nature, through water tricks and a skilfully designed backdrop of vegetation – along with the ornamental and figurative component of polychrome stucco decorations and statues – merged with the harmonies of a water organ, creating an extraordinary spectacle. The inner lining of the niche, in polychrome stucco, depicts a series of the Stories of Creation and the Stories of Moses, interspersed with figures of sea deities, chimeric creatures and aquatic animals. The niches on the back wall originally contained the statues of Apollo and of nine Muses. Three large staircases fan out from the fountain, making the water race down in a cascade. In front of the fountain stood a large oval pond surrounded by tall trees, which was demolished during the construction of the royal mews.

The music mechanism, which was manufactured between 1596 and 1609 by organist Luca Blasi, was completely renovated in the 18th Century by order of Clement XI. The old mechanism was replaced with a new system operated by cascading water, which set in motion a toothed wheel connected to the keyboard. The organ is still in perfect working order.

The tour continues along the side of the Palace towards the oval-shaped garden Labyrinth encircled by cypresses and with a small obelisk at the centre, so typical of Italian Renaissance gardens. The maze is clearly visible from the terrace above the *Casina Svizzera*, a small 19th Century building with crenelated walls and Ticino-style interior decorations. After returning to the Viale delle Palme, you enter the eastern part of the garden, the one markedly landscaped in the vogue of English gardens. It is crossed by Viale dei Sarcofagi, which is lined by twelve prestigious sarcophagi of the Roman period. The arrangement in this part of the garden is less formal, with mixed groups of shrubs softening the landscape according to the Romantic vogue.

In recent years, the arrangement “à l’anglaise” was even more enhanced with the introduction of several species of roses and, more specifically, of a great variety of garden roses (*Rosa chinensis* "Mutabilis", *Rosa gallica*), old Bourbon roses (Mme Pierre Oger) and Polyantha (Cecile Brunner) roses, climbing (Mermaid) roses and floribunda hybrid (Iceberg) roses. The multi-faceted flower beds' sinuous contours are lined with several different species such as the *Casuarina equisetifolia*, a native plant of Australia, the *Araucaria*, with its large round seed cones, the *Cedrus libani* and the *Sophora japonica*, whose long pendulous branches caress a small rocky fountain.

The only geometrically arranged area is the former tennis court, which features a majestic plane tree alongside a *Ginkgo biloba* tree, with its arcane fan-shaped leaves, and a *Sequoia sempervirens*.

The Viale dei Sarcofagi ends in front of the exedra of the Palazzina Olivieri, located on the very edge of the garden. On the left are the greenhouses, half-hidden by the vegetation,

where the bedding plants destined to decorate the flower beds and the halls of the Quirinale Palace are grown and cared for.

On the right-hand side, the garden ends at the Palazzina del Fuga. The President of the Republic's office, located on the first floor of the building, overlooks an avenue lined with citrus groves and a rich collection of cactus plants and other succulents. The most outstanding of these is the *Selenicereus grandiflorus*, known as the Queen of the Night, a cactus whose large white flowers only bloom at nighttime.