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The Horti Sallustiani were situated in the nowadays stylish quarter of Via Veneto at Rome, within the Aurelian Walls between the Porta Pinciana and the Porta Salaria (formerly Porta Collatia). Perhaps not all archaeologists working in the library of the German Archaeological Institute realize that they are dwelling in one of the famous loci amoeni of the imperial period. The gardens were created by the historian C. Sallustius Crispus, who had become rich during Caesar's campaigns in Numidia, and enlarged by his adopted son and similarly adopted grandson. The last Sallustius was married to Agrippina, and through him the grounds came into imperial hands in the course of Nero's empire. It is, foremost, Sallustius II who embellished and extended the gardens. In the following centuries new elements were added. As with other imperial properties it was impossible for citizens to put their will upon the Gardens of Sallustius. I add a rather unexpected source, not quoted by Hartswick, viz. Ulpian, Digesta 30.39.8: Si vero Sallustianos hortos, qui sunt Augusti, vel fundum Albanum, qui principalibus usibus deservit, legaverit quis, furiosi est talia legata testamento adscribere (If someone bequeathes the Sallustian Gardens, which are of the Emperor, or the Alban properties, which serve for the princes, it is a fool's work to add such leavings to his testament).

During the Middle Ages the area was known as Sallusticum, in the Renaissance as Sallustrico. But little is known until the purchase by Ludovici Ludovisi, nephew of Pope Gregory XV, who brought a number of Bolognese artists to Rome. Ludovisi wanted to restore the ancient Roman custom of gardening and, hence, aspired to become a new Roman. The complex grew to 25 hectares in the 19th century, when the properties were split into smaller parts and, finally, fell prey to the building speculation of Rome's development as the new Italian capital. The German bookseller Josef Spithoever was a rising star in this process of buying and selling grounds and works of art. The last Ludovisi constructed a new palazzo, but it was sold to Queen Margherita and now houses the American Embassy.

The book is the first monograph on the gardens and their elements as a whole. It consists of three parts, each dealing with a fundamental aspect: (1) topography and history, (2) architecture, (3) sculpture. In the first section (pp. 1-30) Hartswick tries to reconstruct the topography of these horti that contained various buildings (pavilions, shrines, nymphaea) and groves, lanes and garden plots. The gardens' border lies on the Pincio and the Quirinal, probably between the old Servian Wall and the (later) Aurelian Walls. Graveyards limited the extension to the north and the northeast. Since the area changed radically in the last decades of the 19th century due to the building boom of the new capital of modern Italy, the shape of the ancient landscape cannot be experienced by walking over the streets. One of the major alterations is the fill of a huge indent near the Quirinal that was seen by Renaissance
antiquarians as a large circus. A huge terrace wall noted by many visitors and immortalized in
drawings and prints vanished completely, and it is even difficult to reconstruct its exact
location. Brickstamps of Hadrian enable us to date this 'vestibolo', which indeed had that
function. Moreover it made access from one level to the other more comfortable.

The changes of orography and landscape do not allow us to reconstruct the various original
parts. Most wall fragments and other monuments remain disiecta membra, which is not
Hartswick's fault. He tells about the obelisk standing on top of the Spanish Steps that was
mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus and probably was called pyramidion during the Middle
Ages.

Not all finds recorded in the LTUR lemma on the gardens are evaluated. Apart from real
remains like the series of niches along Via Lucullo that could form fountain or statue niches
and the cryptoportico with paintings from the late 1st century, there are phantom monuments.
A striking example is the Circus of Flora, believed by great scholars to have existed until the
beginning of the 20th century, but as a matter of fact a sort of stadium-shaped garden (p. 68)
like that in the Villa Hadriana at Tivoli. Moving between fact and fiction is the Temple of
Venus Erycina: there are records of a rich round building with columns in various sorts of
marble and there is the famous acrolyth Ludovisi (now in Palazzo Altemps): is she the
goddess from Sicily venerated here?

An appendix deals with the question of the house of the Flavian emperors and their temple,
sometimes located in or next to the Sallustian Gardens. Hartswick follows the new
assumptions that the domus Flavia may have been that with the wall mosaic under the
Caserma dei Corazzieri, whereas the temple was found under the Santa Maria della Vittoria.
The latter remains were mostly seen as those of the aedes Fortuna but are too huge for a
(small) temple in antis. Hartswick's reasoning is sound and convincing.

Unfortunately Hartswick's is not a book about gardening. He cannot reconstruct the plants
used and their setting on the slopes of the Pincio and the Quirinal. However, he makes some
general remarks based upon ancient sources like Varro and Pliny the Younger as well as
modern scholarship (notably Wilhelmina Jashemski). Important elements were wine, oaks
(connected with nymphs and bees), various sorts of trees, ars topiaria, water supply (cf. now
De Kleijn, cited in note 1). An aspect unfamiliar to us in this respect was that of graveyard,
but the notion of the Gardens of the Hesperides or the Elysium was not repellant. Like
Maecenas in his horti, Sallustius had his last resting place in his own gardens. Marcus
Aurelius would forbid this custom out of hygienic reasons.

More important than the architectural remains and topographical conjectures are the finds of
sculpture made over the four centuries of searching and working these grounds. The major
intervention was the installment of the previously mentioned Gardens of the Ludovisi, the
Bologna family that had become rich at the beginning of the 17th century and had acquired
great numbers of sculptures from old, less wealthy families at Rome like the Cesi. Therefore,
one always has to distinguish accurately between sculptures from the grounds proper, and
thus from the Horti Sallustiani, and those bought and re-dressed in the Gardens.
Unfortunately, the findspots' recordings are often of highly dubious and contradictory
character so that Hartswick can barely restore the items to their proper places within the
garden area, and attributing specific functions to these objects is still more a matter of
conjecture. While he has little success in this respect, he succeeds in thrashing out many other
problems concerning the sculptures from the Horti Sallustiani. For example, the puzzle of the
group of Artemis, Iphigeneia and the Stag (now in Copenhagen), dating at last to the Hadrianic period and the group of Niobids, to be distinguished from a second one in Florence. These high-quality statues belong to a pedimental group of the middle of the 5th century BC and it is probable that a 6th-century Amazon was put next to them in the garden to serve as the apparently missing Artemis. The ensemble enhanced the idea of a mythic adventurous spot within the gardens.

The two famous Gaul sculptures were found next to them and may have appealed to Roman sentiment of patriotism. In that case the garden represents a historical battlefield, which might be an interesting theme for a separate essay. Hartswick points at the restoration of the head of the Dying Gaul that might be a Roman addition, as the hair does not correspond to the stance of the head (p. 107). Here, however, the peculiar custom of the Gauls of making dreadlocks with chalk water must be kept in mind: the hairlocks would not move at all but produce a frightening impression. The author assumes the presence of a third figure, described (p. 107) as if it were the Ares Ludovisi.  

Passing over the Dionysian sculptures like a Silenus, Nymphae and the Crater Borghese, as well as the Egyptian figures (for example, the beautiful red hippopotamus, now in Copenhagen), I end with the clearest examples of problematic sculptures, the so-called Ludovisi and Boston thrones that have been a matter of hot debate among scholars. First of all, Hartswick believes that they are genuine antique carvings and not forgeries. He gives good reasons for his opinion: both reliefs are made of the same marble and show stylistic similarities and measurements. They were found in the same area (not well recorded, probably to avoid intervention of the state), where also four kneeling barbarians and a marble trophy come from. This section is somewhat confusing, as one object peeps up after the other and interferes with the discussion. I suggest reconstructing the matter as a whole before giving interpretations. Anyhow, the Ludovisi Throne might stem from a religious monument in Sicily, whereas the Boston Throne could be a Roman addition; the recent suggestion of chariot walls for mythological figures like Aeneas and Aphrodite is attractive. The whole set formed a mix of spolia within the Gardens and was, therefore, like the Gauls' battlefield, symbol of Roman superiority over other peoples.

Hartswick ends by saying that his study is preliminary. In this respect he is very modest. Of course, matters will be corrected or improved, but in several aspects this book will be a standard for the next decades. Besides, the book offers pleasant reading in a nice typography and format, almost to be enjoyed under a nice tree in a garden. And then, why not in those of Sallustius?

Notes:


Barbarians: The Grand Manner, in: E.K. Gazda (ed.), The Ancient Art of Emulation. Studies in Artistic Originality and Tradition from the Present to Classical Antiquity, Ann Arbor 2002, 205-223. Hartswick apparently read it (p. 185-186 note 144), but did not accept her conclusion that the Gauls are not Gauls (I do not either, but here is not the place to enter into this discussion).