The Hameau de la Reine at Versailles and the reproduction of vernacular architecture
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Abstract
The proposed paper analyses the system of small buildings that compose the Hameau de la Reine in the Petit Trianon gardens in the park of the royal palace of Versailles. The complex of architectural artefacts, built at the end of the 18th century, emulates the features of vernacular architecture typical of the villages of Normandy. The main interest lies in the analysis of the masonry which reproduces the signs of wear caused by the salty coastal climate of northern France using the trompe-l’oeil technique. The studies conducted on the buildings of the Hameau de la Reine highlight the typical features of Norman vernacular architecture. The analysis process can be achieved through the methodologies of the restoration discipline, The availability of many iconographic and documentary sources testifies the will of the planner to emulate the vernacular landscape by reproducing the peculiarities of its architecture. Enlightenment thought derived from the physiocratic theories expressed by Quesnay and the Marquis de Mirabeau is the cornerstone of the design and realization of this section of Marie-Antoinette’s Domaine. The contribution intends to underline, through the analysis of the method of imitation of vernacular architecture, the importance that this architectural typology assumes in the process of rediscovery and fruition of the territory. The analysis of the Hameau complex testifies how vernacular architecture, not yet codified according to this terminology, was already identified at the end of the 18th century as an example of high-quality value that found its effective collocation within the boundaries of the royal park of Versailles. The characteristics of this architecture allow it to find an effective place even inside the perimeter of the royal park of Versailles. It is possible to identify the prodromes of the modern architectural sensibility that recognizes and codifies the values of vernacular architecture within the site studied by this paper proposal.

Keywords: garden; landscape; Versailles; vernacular architecture reproduction.

1. Introduction
The Petit Trianon Park of Versailles has its origin in the middle 18th century by the will of king Louis XV. The area of the future park is identifiable in the cartography of 1766 made by Louis Charles Desnos in the north-eastern sector of the wider Royal Park between the gardens of the Grand Trianon and the Saint-Antonie gate. The area was an empty territory, characterized by clearings and woods. The main one of the woods is of rectangular shape and it is known as
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Bois des Onze-Arpents. The founding act of the Petit Trianon Park can be identified in the 1749 assignment to the architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel of a menagerie for the Grand Trianon palace.

Fig. 1. Versailles Royal Park. Nouveau Plan des villes, château et Jardins de Versailles dessiné sur les lieux en 1766 (Louis Charles Desnos, 1780).

The menagerie of Trianon must be less representative than its counterpart called Royal, which is situated at the end of the opposite branch of the cross-shaped Grand Canal. Even if the Royal one houses the most exotic and rare species of animals, to be shown off in occasion of institutional visits, the Trianon menagerie is designed to accommodate more ordinary species such as farmyard animals. The architect connected the two structures through a French-style garden with geometric parterres and fountains. Gabriel endows this space with two architectural elements. The first, well-known as Pavillon Francaise, is placed in the center of the garden. It is a small neoclassical pavilion composed of four orthogonal rooms that converge towards a central circular summer dining room. The second element is the Pavillon Frais, made entirely of wooden trellises and surrounded by two small fountains. Subsequent evolutions led its development towards the eastern edge. A section of the park, that was destined to safeguard valuable and exotic essences, was realized through the creation of flowerbeds, canals and greenhouses necessary for the planting and survival of these botanic species. The extension, realized by Bernard de Jussieu, configures a botanical garden equipped with a channel for aquatic plants and with a Dutch greenhouse which is also called serre chaude. Later, during the sixties of the 18th century the menagerie was almost completely dismantled for the realization of a new building in neoclassical style, but the French garden did not suffer the same destiny. Finally, years after the first interventions, the Petit Trianon’s project was commissioned to the architect Gabriel, to be built in the old area previously used for the menagerie. The building is designed to host the Marquise of Pompadour, the sovereign's favorite. It is separated from the more imposing Grand Trianon by the French garden. The Seven Years' War caused a considerable delay in the execution of Gabriel's project, and so the construction of the Petit Trianon palace did not begin until 1762 (Hoog, 1992).

Fig. 2. Petit Trianon, Versailles Royal Park. Nouveau Trianon planté par Louis XV (Georges-Louis Le Rouge, 1774).

The final configuration of this section of the park is due to the reign of Louis XVI who, in
1774, gave to his wife Marie-Antoinette of Habsburg-Lorraine as wedding gift the of the Petit Trianon palace and the entire enclosed Domaine. Marie-Antoinette significantly modified the site by removing the greenhouses and exotic cultivations which were transferred to the Parisian Jardin des Plantes. According to the late 18th century taste for the emerging modern style, the queen commissioned the realization of an English garden initially to Antoine Richard and later to Richard Mique with the help of the Count of Caraman. The figure of Caraman is emblematic for the configuration of the spaces of the park (Lablaude, 2003). The Count personally directed the construction of his own garden of Roissy in the previous years. As part of Marie Antoinette's entourage, he transferred the knowledge acquired during that experience into the creation of the Petit Trianon's English garden. The works that led to the configuration of the English garden in the form that has been transferred to the present day began in 1777.

2. The Hameau de la Reine

The last section of the garden is the subject of the present study. It was created at the eastern end of the Domaine from 1783 onwards. This appendix was created with the purpose of widening the spectrum of scenarios offered by the garden complex: «there is still a missing nuance in the mixed palette of the various English, mountain, classical or Chinese genres. The queen obtained the annexation to her small property of the free land adjacent to the north, towards the Bois des Onze Arpents, in order to complete it with the contribution of the rustic taste. This style had been happily illustrated already in 1775 by the Hameau created for the Prince of Condé on the idea of the ornate farm». (Lablaude, 2010, p. 173).

Lablaude's affirmation clarifies how the rustic taste of the jardin champêtre completes and enriches the glossary of scenes of the park.

Fig. 3. Petit Trianon, Versailles Royal Park. Plan du jardin et château de la Reine (Richard Mique, 1779).

The project of this new expansion is assigned once again to Mique who avails himself of the Hubert Robert's pictorial work, who was able to capture the Norman landscapes towards which the project had to aspire. Duvernois affirms that it was the figure of «Hubert Robert, that once again provided the impulse for the start, inspired by the beauty and picturesqueness of nearby Normandy and his own paintings. From these sketches, Mique and his assistants produced a series of drawings, paintings, and detailed studies of the Hameau and its landscape. [...] Thanks to the talents of Richard Mique and Hubert Robert, the small rustic houses have a fascination and an elegance that make them models that have subsequently been reproduced many times over» (Duvernois, 2008, pp. 51-52).

The village of the Hameau de la Reine is structured in a compound of eleven small houses arranged in a hemicycle around the artificial lake. Five buildings were for the queen and her guests; these are: the Maison de la Reine, the Billard, the Boudoir, the Moulin and the Laiterie de propreté. Four other buildings in-

Fig. 4. Petit Trianon, Versailles Royal Park. Jardin pittoresque du Petit Trianon (Louis-Pierre Baltard, 1784).
including the Ferme, the Grange, the Colombier, and the Laiterie de préparation were destined for those who would populate this small village and make it work as a self-sufficient village by cultivating the land and raising animals.

Fig. 5. Un moulin à eau, un homme sur un pont, un chien au premier plan. Red chalk (Hubert Robert, end of 18th century).

The Réchauffoir, that is located behind the Maison de la Reine, was dedicated to the preparation of meals which were served to the queen and her guests during their visits to the Hameau. The last building, the Maison du Garde, was used as accommodation for the guardian. Each house had its own vegetable garden and was bordered with low bushes and fences. Gustave Desjardins in his Le Petit Trianon Histoire et Description emphasizes how these plantings that surrounded the houses as well as contributing to increase the verisimilitude of the achievements had an actual productive vocation, stating that: «The gardens were real village yards, planted with vegetables: cabbages, cauliflowers, beans, etc.; strawberry bushes, raspberries and red currants and fruit trees: there were 50 walnut, 400 cherry, 200 plum, 400 pear and other 100, 100 peach, 200 apricot trees»1 (Desjardins, 1885, p. 287).

Close to the Laiterie de propreté there is an annex called Tour de Marlborough. The tower can also be considered as a twelfth building that completes the Hameau complex. This building has an octagonal floor plan, develops in height, and takes the shape of a lighthouse. Also known as the Tour de la Pêcherie, the building was configured as a docking point for boat trips on the lake. The tower housed the equipment used for pike and carp fishing. The upper part was used both as an observatory and to communicate with the castle of Versailles using signals. Its name is inspired by the song composed in 1722 at the death of the Duke of Malborough2 (Be-noit, 2016).

Fig. 6. Hameau de la Reine, Petit Trianon, Versailles Royal Park. Plan d’ensemble du Hameau - état actuel. (A. Bernard, 1928) (Source: Gromort, 1928 pp. 12-13).

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1 Original edition of the text: «Les parterres étaient de vrais jardins de village, plantés de légumes: choux de Milan, choux-fleurs, haricots, etc.; de fraisiers, de framboisiers, de groseilliers et d’arbres fruitiers: il y avait 50 noyers, 400 cerisiers, 200 pruniers, 400 poiriers de plein vent et 100 autres, 100 pêchers de plein vent, 200 abricotiers». G. Desjardins, Le Petit Trianon Histoire et Description, 1885, p. 287.

2 The song titled Marlborough s’en va-t-en guerre has a popular origin and dates back to the beginning of the 18th century. It was sung in France to joke about the historical enemy constituted by the British people and personified by John Churchill, first duke of Marlborough, who was wounded during the battle of Malplaquet (1709) during the Spanish war of succession (1701-1715). The already 70-year-old song returned to popularity in the eighties of the 18th century.
3. Venacular emulation features

The artifacts that compose the complex of the Hameau are made according to the rustic or country style emulating the aesthetic typologies typical of the villages of the Normandy coast. The masonry masses are finished with plaster and then painted to represent with the trompe-l’oeil technique the specific characters of the architectures taken as example. The applied method simulates different types of finishing. A first example is the simple pictorial representation on the plaster of a light-colored stone wall with the reproduction of the courses of mortar interposed between the blocks. An evolution of this methodology is represented by the reproduction of the masonry textures typical of the maison a colombage also known as pan de bois of Norman tradition. The Guide illustré des palais et jardins de Trianon published by Bernard in 1887 reports that: «The exteriors of all these houses were finished with decorations that imitated old bricks, crumbling stone and worm-eaten wood»3 (Bernard, 1887, p. 78).

The reproduction of the characteristics linked to the vernacular architecture of the northern French coasts is not limited to the emulation of the building typologies, but it extends to the simulation of the peculiar degradation phenomena of the materials of the structures exposed to the salty and humid climate of the Atlantic shore. It is therefore possible to detect, from the analysis of the masonry apparatuses, the representation of the typical phenomena such as: detachment, erosion, gaps and lacks. Through the pictorial film it is also possible to see the drippings, the presence of fronts of rising, of patinas or biological colonizations.

«The side of the Maison de la Reine is a good example of trompe-l’oeil painting intended to accentuate the rustic and decrepit character of the buildings of the Hameau» (Duvernois, 2008, p. 174).

The buildings of the Hameau de la Reine artificially reproduce the constructive typologies and degradation phenomena typical of the Norman vernacular architecture. The artificial reproduction of degradation phenomena complicates the identification of real ones.

Fig. 7. Hameau de la Reine, Petit Trianon, Versailles Royal Park. Maison de la Reine (Source: D. Crispino, 2021)

Fig. 8. Hameau de la Reine, Petit Trianon, Versailles Royal Park. Billard. (Source: D. Crispino, 2021)

affecting the architecture. To draw up an accurate study of the state of conservation of buildings, it is necessary to produce graphs that highlight and separate real deterioration phenomena from those made just to imitate the vernacular Norman architecture. It is necessary to consider that, in the case of the Hameau de la Reine, while constantly subjected over the years to a careful program of ordinary and extraordinary maintenance, the subject of the study concerns artifacts made during the eighties of the 18th century and therefore susceptible in their agedness to degradation related to the structures that the external pictorial film hides to a less careful observation.

The 20th century contained a series of interventions of restoration and rehabilitation of the buildings and gardens of the Hameau de la Reine. The first intervention, carried out in the 30's by Patrice Bonnet and financed by Rockefeller, involved all the gardens and buildings except the Réchauffoir and the Ferme. The objective of this first intervention was to restore the buildings and gardens to their 18th century layout, described by Baltard's plan of 1784 (Fig.4), and to their ancient village appearance. The structures of the buildings were consolidated, the roofs rebuilt, and the gardens replanted, but nothing was done about the interior decoration. The second restoration campaign was conducted between 1957 and 1958 by Marc Saltet. Due to recurrent problems of humidity, some of the wooden beams were replaced by metal ones, and the internal ground of the houses was reinforced. «At the end of the 20th century, various interventions concerned mainly the Moulin (1995), the Ferme (1996), the Réchauffoir (2000), and the staircase of the Tour de Malborough (2002), under the direction of Pierre-André Lablaude» (Garnier, 2018, p. 21).

Afterwards, in the early 2000s, several interventions were completed and aimed at restoring the rural landscape around the Grand Lac and the surroundings of the Ferme, recomposing the screen of trees along the eastern edge and partially restoring the network of internal paths of the Hameau.

The last restoration, completed between 2015 and 2018 by Professor Jacques Moulin, chief architect of historical monuments currently in charge of the park and gardens of Versailles, concerned the Maison de la Reine and the Réchauffoir (Moulin, 2019). The intervention focused on the restoration of the structure, facades and roofs of the two buildings. Regarding the gardens, the intervention has maintained unchanged the general layout re-established in the 1930s by Patrice Bonnet, just restoring the altimetric level of the late 18th century identified through an archaeological survey in 2013, to reduce the occurrence of degradation phenomena related to rising damp. Specific attention was given, as part of the restoration program to the reproduction of the peculiar aspects of the Norman typology through the execution of decorations on the restored plaster such as the reproduction of false stone blocks, false brick facings, false pan de bois walls. Similarly, an emulation of the typical degradations has been carried out through the realization of bois pourri decorations on all the external wooden works and the execution of patinas of aging and integration between old and new decorative elements (Garnier, 2018).

The final analyzed item as a distinctive mark of the emulation of the vernacular architecture of Normandy is the method used to produce the roofs. The roofs of the houses are made of straws or stubble defined in French as roseau or chaume. This type of construction technique requires constant care to guarantee good waterproofing. The rooms of higher value, provided with decorations or delicate vaulted systems, were equipped with a double layer of coverage. The first layer made of tiles to ensure safety and waterproofing. The second overlapping layer made of straw had only an aesthetic value and necessary to the consecution of uniformity with the context. A roof
composed only of stubble, in fact, if not properly maintained, could have deformed or collapsed, putting at risk the integrity of the internal decorations (Heitzmann, 2005).

Fig. 9. Hameau de la Reine, Petit Trianon, Versailles Royal Park. Le Moulin (Source: D. Crispino, 2021).

4. Conclusions

The complex of architectures contained in the Hameau de la Reine testifies how already at the end of the century of the Enlightenment there existed in Europe a culture capable of appreciating the characteristics of vernacular architecture, even if not yet codified according to this terminology. In the case of this garden, it is opportune to notice that both the architecture and the vegetation, declined according to the productive and ornamental plantings, contribute to the reproduction of the original landscape. All the elements of the scenic system participate in the representation of the vernacular. The effectiveness of the reproduction is entrusted to the high degree of fidelity of the compositional elements and to the harmony that the single parts establish with the totality of the configured scenery.

Fig. 10. Hameau de la Reine, Petit Trianon, Versailles Royal Park. Aerial photo of the Hameau (Source: D. Crispino, 2021).

References


