

The Jesuit Garden: Rome

I am particularly concerned with the idea of the garden, of Jesuit ways of thinking about gardens, and of the ways in which Jesuit writers of the 17th century related an external and veridical garden to a mental or devotional map of ideas. In the writings of the Jesuit savants of the 17th century, the old accretive tradition of thinking about "an interior garden" acquired a focus and precision which it had rarely attained before.

—Peter Davidson

A meditation by Louis Richeome, S.J. (1544-1625) on the Jesuit gardens of the Novitiate of Sant' Andrea al Quirinale in *La peinture spirituelle* (1611) inevitably acts as a key to 17th-century ways of responding to gardens. On the simplest level, we are presented with a detailed representation of (and indeed a plant list for) an actual Jesuit garden of the beginning of the 17th century. If we trust that Richeome's list of flowers and trees is specific, rather than general, then we have an extremely rich planting, almost incomparable to the published plant lists of much more celebrated institutions such as the botanic gardens of Padua or Leiden.

As well as providing a fascinating documentation of one garden (complete with sundials and a symbolic obelisk already contributing an extra layer of meaning to the layout), Richeome's text offers a clear insight into a process of mental training in right perception of the world: nothing, no single object observed in the garden, is allowed to pass without being at once supplied with a spiritual reading, an interpretation concerned with the virtuosity and mercy of the Creator as well as with the perceptions and spiritual growth of the observer.

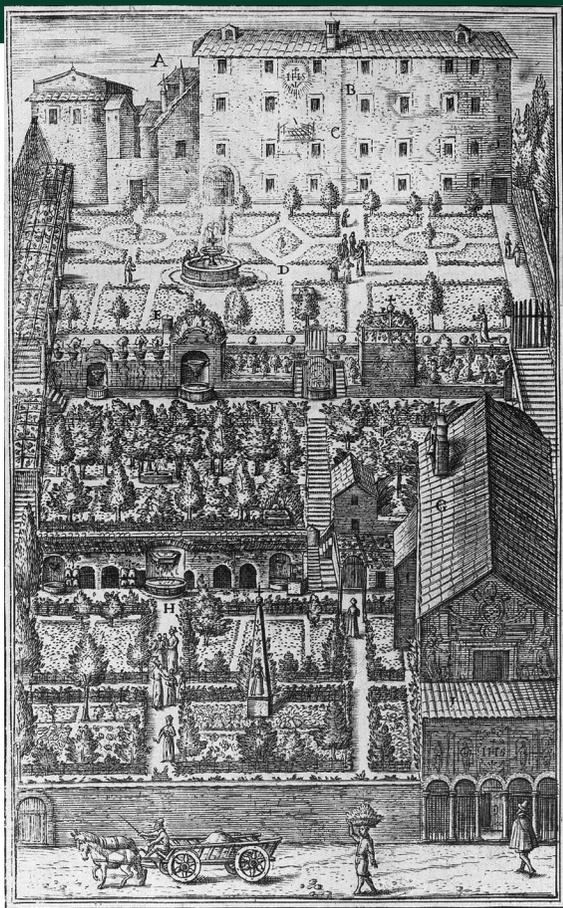
The central position of the fountain on the upper terrace at once evokes the earthly paradise, Eden. This symbolic perception is common in the recorded layouts of many early modern botanic gardens, in accordance with the idea of the sacrality of the botanic garden as a divinely sanctioned re-assemblage of the flora of the earthly paradise, scattered at the Fall.

The sundials of the upper garden offer an intriguing moment of contemplation of the light orbiting the globe (clearly these are superb Jesuit dials, offering readings of the hour at different places on earth) as an image of the universality and endless wakefulness of the Universal Church.

If Richeome's description of the garden is accurate in its itemization of an extensive Jesuit flower collection, then we can see how the culture of the Roman houses would foster the work of Giovanni Battista Ferrari, who published his central work, *De florum cultura*, in 1633. Ferrari's *De florum cultura* is a remarkable work. It covers all matters to do with the layout of a garden, including the symbolic force of different ground plans. It details the florists' flowers of the 17th century, with some emphasis on the newer introductions of bulbous plants. The educative function of the book is confirmed by an exhaustive concluding section on the uses of citrus fruits, which includes what looks like an early recipe for a type of lemon marmalade. In addition to the recording of marmalade, we must credit the Jesuits with being the first to record the green carnation.

In Ferrari's work, the garden is seen very much as a living *wunderkammer*, an outdoor extension of the global scope of Athanasius Kircher's famous museum at the Collegio Romano.

—Peter Davidson in *The Jesuits II: Culture, Science, and the Arts, 1540-1773* (University of Toronto Press, 2006)



The Novitiate of S. Andrea al Quirinale as it appeared in 1610. Engraving by Matthäus Greuter (1564?-1638) Louis Richeome, S.J., *La peinture spirituelle* (Lyon, 1611) Folger Shakespeare Library

S. Andrea was the first permanent novitiate for the Roman Province of the Jesuits. In 1569, construction began on some of the novitiate buildings on land acquired in 1565 on Rome's Quirinale Hill.

In his *Voyage en Italie*, French essayist, Michel de Montaigne (1533-92) reported a visit to the Jesuits of Ferrara in 1580:

"We saw all the notable sights of Ferrara . . . in the house of the Jesuits we saw a rose tree which bears flowers in every month of the year."

These few words indicate a crucial importation from the Far Eastern missions of the Society. If Montaigne's observation could be substantiated, this would constitute another botanical triumph for the Society of Jesus: the introduction of the remnant oriental rose a century and a half before the arrival of the "Banksian" rose at Kew Gardens in London.

—Peter Davidson in *The Jesuits II: Culture, Science, and the Arts, 1540-1773* (University of Toronto Press, 2006)

