P. Mazzola, N. Marsiglia, S. Ciccarello & F. M. Raimondo

Contributions to the study of the historical gardens of Sicily. The garden of Villa Filangeri in Santa Flavia (Palermo)

Abstract


The Villa Filangeri in Santa Flavia is among the most remarkable historical residences in the plane between Bagheria and Santa Flavia, south of Palermo. Built in 1742, in the last decades its garden has gradually lost its original richness and elegance. Presently its general structure is not still in good condition, and the plant heritage appears significantly varied and impoverished with respect to its original composition. Therefore, in the absence of recent surveys, the inventory of the present ornamental plant heritage was carried out. This, in order of adding new data to the ornamental flora of Sicilian parks and gardens and of giving a contribution to the possible restoration for public and cultural purposes.

Key words: ornamental plants, heritage, inventory, restoration.

Introduction

The city of Palermo with its surroundings, lying in a well protected basin by a crown of reliefs and fed by ample water reserves, was the seat of rich agricultural crops and of gardens for which for its cultivated plant heritage it has been appreciated and valued by the dominations that have left you, more or less deep traces since the origins. Thus we can recognize the signs of the passage of the Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Muslims, Normans and various other peoples who have followed it until today. All this also applies to the rest of Sicily but especially the areas in contact with Palermo itself.

In these places, starting from the XVII century, flourishing activities typical of the dominations that took place in Sicily have developed (introduction of citrus, rice, cotton, etc.) and, during the development, extended private properties with the relative residences which were real villas that were considered valuable expressions of wealth and power. Concentrated on the outskirts of the city of Palermo, they would gradually shape large sections of the growing urban fabric in which they would soon be incorporated. Today most of these villas have disappeared. Several others located between the urban centers of Bagheria and Santa Flavia, are more or less abandoned but still are the testimony of the
aforementioned splendours. Among them, here we just examine the garden of Villa Filangeri, one of the most important fates in the XVIII century.

**The Sicilian garden between the 18th and 19th centuries**

As we know, the culture of the informal garden spread in the nineteenth century. It includes various examples of English inspiration as well as the transformation of the garden into new romantic trends. Added to this is the entry of numerous exotic elements that impart to the ornamental heritage of the Sicilian coast the well-known tropical cosmopolitan character for which it stands out as an autonomous cultural unit even compared to the historic Italian garden. Furthermore, the Sicilian gardens that have developed as informal gardens are marked by a Masonic symbolism, just like the new English gardening theories (Lanza Tomasi 1974; Cazzato & Maresca 2006).

**The garden of the Villa Filangeri**

Along the path marked by the axis, leaving behind the winter garden, hidden by the imposing front overlooking the village of Santa Flavia, you will discover the garden, a reality that was once used exclusively by the Filangeri family (Figs. 1-3). Inscribed in a

![The prospectus of the villa. Today the building is the seat of the administration of Santa Flavia.](image)
rectangular area of 8,500 m², almost flat, according to archive sources, the installation dates back to 1742, when Mastro Antonio Paladino and Mastro Antonio Sperandeo, led by Giuseppe Caccaminisi, worked on the enlargement of the villa, creating the wall of the back garden and the fountain in the middle of the octagonal space at the intersection of the two orthogonal avenues that cross the garden. The planimetric layout of the garden gives a not unusual image in the gardens of the contemporary villas in the territory (similar compositional schemes can be identified in the gardens of Villa Galletti-San Cataldo and in the now disappeared garden of Villa Butera, lying in Bagheria. However, both the Villa Filangeri and the Villa Butera plan are based on a doubled form, unlike that of Villa Galletti-San Cataldo which is more complex due to the presence of oblique avenues. The plant, originally from the eighteenth century, still legible, consists of a regular pattern, formed by two avenues, of which the longitudinal one is the continuation of the road axis in front of the villa and the other orthogonal to it, divides the parterre into four rectangular modules of 48 × 30 m. The axes, intersecting form an octagonal space that finds at its center a quadrangular lobed fountain, around which four stone seats are arranged in front of some recently built statues pedestals. Other statues, also of recent construction, can be found scattered in the garden without ever having been placed there. The enclosure consists of limestone walls that terminate in a semicircular exedra at the main axis. Another exedra is found at the transversal axis, which does not find its correspondent to the opposite extremity of the north-west axis. This leads to the hypothesis that a part of the garden has been renewed or sold. In the second half of the nineteenth century the plant was trans-
formed, with the creation of flower beds and irregular paths, some of which mirrored with respect to the longitudinal axis that continues the road axis in front of the architectural complex along which the inhabited center developed. The nineteenth-century plant is a complete “romantic” landscape arrangement. It is probably the work of an amateur aware of the Anglo-Chinese models that interprets the taste of the landscape garden in a Mediterranean key. Of the previous geometric layout, the two orthogonal avenues, the fountain and the exedras were maintained, while other elements were introduced with the nineteenth century transformation. Among the subsequent additions we find the hill, slightly sloping, at the top of which is a characteristic Aspra stone bench, hidden among the rich tropical vegetation (Fig. 4). Remains of another bench the same as the one on the hill are located next to the characteristic artificial rock “montagnola”, whose height reaches 6 meters from the base. Inside it develops an artificial cave of about 4 meters in diameter which is accessed by four entrances. The exterior of the relief is furrowed by paths that lead to the summit that ends in a pagoda-shaped iron gazebo. An irregularly shaped basin is home to aquatic animals; moreover, in the garden are scattered various structures for exotic animals.

**The plant heritage**

The florula, moderately diversified, is composed of 241 specific and infraspecific-taxa, belonging to 237 species, 176 genera of 88 families of spermatophytes and one of pteridophytes. These are mainly exotic, in part already represented in the Sicilian ornamental flora at the time of the first planting of the garden. Many others plants were gradually planted later, even in recent times. The families represented by a greater number of specific ranks or lower taxa are *Arecaceae* with 9 taxa, *Agavaceae* with 7 taxa and *Fabaceae* with 6 taxa. The species occurring in the greatest number of specimens are *Aloe ×caesia*, *Aloe saponaria*, *Brachychiton populneus*, *Cercis siliquastrum*, *Chamaerops humilis*, *Chlorophytum comosum*, *Crassula ovata*, *Ficus microcarpa*, *Lantana camara*, *Nerium oleander*, *Olea europaea*, *Opuntia ficus-indica*, *Pelargonium ×hortorum*, *Phoenix canariensis*, *Pinus halepensis*, *Pittosporum tobira*, *Tecomaria capensis*, *Viburnum tinus*, *Washingtonia robusta*, and *Yucca elephantipes*. It should be noted that the current floristic composition does not correspond to the initial one; many specimens are lacking both for lack of replacement and for inadequate maintenance, as
shown in the flowerbeds various dead but not yet wasted strains. The marked deterioration is also evidenced by the presence of young specimens that, born from seed (*Cercis siliquastrum, Lantana camara, Olea europaea, Pittosporum tobira, Washingtonia robusta*, etc.), are common throughout the area, along with many other elements completely unrelated to the garden context. In a hypothesis of recovery and functional restoration, these elements should be removed. In the plant, however, there are various other elements that can be considered to represent real floristic emergencies and embellish the cultivated heritage. This is the case of a mature specimen of *Rhus lancea* (Fig. 5), native to South Africa, unique in the historic Sicilian (and perhaps even Italian) gardens (Ciccarello & al. 2015), as well as of a large specimen of *Araucaria bidwillii*, rare throughout western Sicily. Other floristic emergencies are: *Casuarina equisetifolia* and *Grevillea robusta* which, apart from the considerable size reached in the garden, are a distinctive sign that characterize the historic Sicilian gardens of the nineteenth century; *Washingtonia filifera* for the size and chronological context (early twentieth century) in which it was inserted. Also noteworthy are the two specimens of *Ficus microcarpa*, one at the entrance to the garden, the other near the rocky hill; the *Dracaena draco* specimen near the entrance to the garden; the two specimens of *Pinus halepensis*, in a central position near the fountain; on the gentle slope of the hill; the four specimens of *Washingtonia robusta*, arranged around the *Araucaria bidwillii* (Fig. 6), *Rhus lancea, Agave sisalana, Schinus molle, Arbutus unedo*, and *Spartium Junceum* characterize the slope of the artificial hill.
Below is the complete list of specific and infraspecific taxa detected in the garden object of our study. In it, the generic, specific and infraspecific taxa are arranged in alphabetical order. Nomenclature is according to Mazzola & Di Martino (1996).

### The plant list

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Species</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACANTHACEAE</td>
<td>Justicia adhatoda L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACANTHACEAE</td>
<td>Thunbergia coccinea Wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACERACEAE</td>
<td>Acer negundo L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADIANTACEAE</td>
<td>Adiantum capillus-veneris L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGAVACEAE</td>
<td>Agave americana L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGAVACEAE</td>
<td>Agave americana var. marginata Trel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGAVACEAE</td>
<td>Agave attenuata Salm-Dyck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGAVACEAE</td>
<td>Agave ferox C. Koch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGAVACEAE</td>
<td>Agave sisalana Perrine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGAVACEAE</td>
<td>Cordyline australis (G. Forst.) Endl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGAVACEAE</td>
<td>Yucca elephantipes Regel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGAVACEAE</td>
<td>Yucca aloifolia L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGAVACEAE</td>
<td>Yucca aloifolia L. ‘Tricolor’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGAVACEAE</td>
<td>Yucca gloriosa L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIZOACEAE</td>
<td>Apenia cordifolia (L. f.) Schwantes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIZOACEAE</td>
<td>Carpobrotus aciniciformis (L.) Bolus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIZOACEAE</td>
<td>Carpobrotus edulis (L.) N.E.Br.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIZOACEAE</td>
<td>Drosanthemum floribundum (Haw.) Schwantes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIZOACEAE</td>
<td>Lampranthus sp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCACEAE</td>
<td>Alocasia macrorrhiza (L.) G.Don</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCACEAE</td>
<td>Colocasia esculenta (L.) Schott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCACEAE</td>
<td>Monstera deliciosa Liebm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCACEAE</td>
<td>Zantedeschia aethiopica (L.) Spreng.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCACEAE</td>
<td>Hedera canariensis Willd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCACEAE</td>
<td>Hedera helix L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCACEAE</td>
<td>Fatsia japonica (Thumb.) Decne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCACEAE</td>
<td>Meryta denhamii Seem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCACEAE</td>
<td>Oreopanax dactylifolium hort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCACEAE</td>
<td>Tetrapanax papyrifer (Hook.) K. Koch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARAUCARIACEAE</td>
<td>Araucaria bidwillii Hook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARECACEAE</td>
<td>Chamaedorea elegans Mart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARECACEAE</td>
<td>Chamaerops humilis L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARECACEAE</td>
<td>Livistona australis (R.Br.) Mart.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phoenix canariensis Chabaud
Phoenix dactylifera L.
Syagrus romanzoffianum (Cham.) Glassman
Washingtonia filifera (Linden) H. Wendl.
Washingtonia robusta H. Wendl.

ASCLEPIADACEAE
Araujia sericofera Brot.
Asclepias fruticosa L.

ASPARAGACEAE
Asparagus asparagoides (L.) Druce
Asparagus densiflorus (Kunth) Jessop
Asparagus falcatus L.
Asparagus setaceus (Kunth) Jessop

ASTERACEAE
Argyranthemum frutescens (L.) Sch. Bip
Barlettina sordida (Less.) R. King & H. Rob.
Dahlia ×hortensis Guillaumin
Farfugium japonicum (L.) Kitan. ‘Aureomaculatum’
Santolina chamaecyparissus L.
Senecio cineraria DC.
Senecio angulatus Otto
Senecio petasitis DC.

BIGNONIACEAE
Campsis grandiflora (Thumb.) Schum.
Campsis radicans Fuss.
Distictis buccinatoria (DC.) A. Gentry
Jacaranda mimosifolia D. Don
Macfadyena unguis-cati (L.) Gentry
Tecomaria stans (L.) Humb, Bonpl. & Kunth
Tecomaria capensis (Thumb.) Spach

BOMBACACEAE
Chorisia speciosa A. St. Hil.

BORAGINACEAE
Heliotropium arborescens L.

BRASSICACEAE
Matthiola incana (L.) R. Br.

BUDDLEJACEAE
Buddleja davidii Franch.

BUXACEAE
Buxus sempervirens L.

CACTACEAE
Cereus jamacaru Dc.
Hylocereus undatus (Haw.) Britton & Rose
Myrtillocactus geometrizans (Pfeiff.) Console
Opuntia dillenii Haw.
Opuntia ficus-indica (L.) Mill.
Opuntia maxima Mill.
Opuntia microdasys (Lehm.) Pfeiff.
Opuntia monacantha (Willd.) Haw.
Opuntia subulata (Muehlenpf.) Engel.

CANNACEAE
Canna indica L. s. l.

CAPRIFOLIACEAE
Lonicera japonica Thumb.
Viburnum tinus L.

CASUARINACEAE
Casuarina equisetifolia Forst. & Forst.

CELASTRACEAE
Euonymus japonica L.

CONVALLARIACEAE
Aspidistra elatior Blume

CONVOLVULACEAE
Ipomoea indica (Burm.) Merr.

CRASSULACEAE
Aeonium arboreum (L.) Webb & Berthel.
‘Atropurpureum’
Aeonium arboreum (L.) Webb & Berthel.
‘Holochnysum’
Aeonium decorum Webb ex Bolle
Cotyledon orbiculata L.
Crassula arborescens (Mill.) Willd.
Crassula ovata (Mill.) Druce
Graptopetalum paraguayense (N.E.Br) Walter

CUPRESSACEAE
Chamaecyparis lawsoniana (Murray) Parl.
×Cupressocyparis leylandii (Dallim. & A.B. Jacks.) Dallim.
Cupressus arizonica Greene
Cupressus macrocarpa Gordon
Cupressus sempervirens L.
Platycladus orientalis (L.f.) Franco
Tetraclinis articulata (Vahl) Mast.

CYCADACEAE
Cycas revoluta Thunb.

CYPERACEAE
Cyperus alternifolius L.
Cyperus papyrus L.

DRACAENACEAE
Dracaena draco L.
Nolina recurvata (Lem.) Hemsl.

EBENACEAE
Diospyros lotus L.

EUPHORBIACEAE
Euphorbia candelabrum Kotschy
Euphorbia milii Des Moul.
Euphorbia pulcherrima Klotschsch
Euphorbia ramipressa Croizat
Euphorbia tirucalli L.
Euphorbia triangularis Desf.

FAGACEAE
Quercus ilex L.

GERANIACEAE
Pelargonium capitatum Sol.
Pelargonium peltatum (L.) L’Hér.
Pelargonium × domesticum (L.) L. H. Bailey
Pelargonium × hortorum L. H. Bailey
Pelargonium zonale (L.) L’Hér.

HYDRANGEACEAE
Hydrangea macrophylla (Thumb.) Ser.

HIPPOCASTANACEAE
Aesculus hippocastanus L.

IRIDACEAE
Antholyza aethopica L.
Iris germanica L.

LAMIACEAE
Lavandula angustifolia L.
Rosmarinus officinalis L.
Salvia officinalis L.

LAURACEAE
Laurus nobilis L.
Persea gratissima Mill.

FABACEAE
Acacia cyanophylla Lindl.
Acacia dealbata Link
Acacia karoo Hayne
Albizia julibrissin Benth.
Bauhinia diphyllea Buch.-Ham.
Caesalpinia gilliesii (Hook.) Benth.
Ceratonia siliqua L.
Cercis siliquastrum L.
Parkinsonia aculeata L.
Robinia pseudoacacia L.
Sesbania punicea (Cav.) Benth.
Sophora japonica L.
Spartium junceum L
Wisteria floribunda (Willd.) DC.
Wisteria sinensis Sweet.

LILIACEAE
Agapanthus africanus (L.) Hoffm.

LYTHRACEAE
Lagerstroemia indica L.

MAGNOLIACEAE
Magnolia grandiflora L.

MALVACEAE
Abutilon × hybridum (Lam.) Sweet
Alcea rosea L.
Hibiscus mutabilis L.
Hibiscus rosa-sinensis L.
Lagunaria patersonii (Anderss.) G.Don.

MELIACEAE
Melia azedarach L.

MORACEAE
Ficus carica L.
Ficus elastica Roxb. ex Hornem. ‘decora’
Ficus macrophylla Desf.
Ficus microcarpa L.
MUSACEAE
Musa ×paradisiaca L.

MYOPORACEAE
Myoporum tenuifolium G.Forst.

MYRTACEAE
Callistemon citrinus (Curtis) Skeels
Eucalyptus camaldulensis Dehn.
Myrtus communis L.

NEPHROLEPIDACEAE
Nephrolepis cordifolia (L.) Presl

NYCYAGINACEAE
Bougainvillea glabra Choisy

OLEACEAE
Jasminum azoricum L.
Jasminum fruticans L.
Jasminum officinale L. f. ‘Grandiflorum’
Jasminum nudiflorum Lindl.
Jasminum sambac (L.) Aiton
Ligustrum lucidum W. T. Aiton
Olea europaea L. var. europaea

PASSIFLORACEAE
Passiflora coerulea L.

PHORMIACEAE
Phormium tenax Forst & Forst

PINACEAE
Abies cephalonica Loud.
Pinus canariensis Sweet

PITTOSPORACEAE
Pittosporum tobira (Thumb.) Aiton f.

PLATANACEAE
Platanus ×hybrida Brot.

PLUMBAGINACEAE
Plumbago auriculata Lam.

POACEAE
Cortaderia selloana (Schult. & Schult. f.)
Asch. & Graebn.
Phyllostachys nigra Munro

POLYGONACEAE
Polygonum aubertii L. Henry

PORTULACACEAE
Portucalaria afra Jacq.

PROTEACEAE
Grevillea robusta R. Br.

PUNICACEAE
Punica granatum L.

RHAMNACEAE
Rhamnus alaternus L.

ROSACEAE
Cydonia oblonga Mill.
Eriobotrya japonica (Thumb.) Lindl.
Prunus armeniaca L.
Prunus cerasifera Ehrh. ‘Pissardii’
Prunus dulcis (Mill.) D.A. Web
Prunus persica (L.) Batsch.
Pyracantha coccinea Roem.
Spiraea ×vanhouttei Zabel
Rosa banksiae Ait.

RUSCACEAE
Ruscus hypophyllum L.

RUTACEAE
Citrus aurantium L.
Citrus deliciosa Ten.
Citrus ×paradisi Macfad.
Citrus limon (L.) Burm.
Citrus sinensis (L.) Osbeck
Fortunella margarita (Lourr.) Swingle
Murraya paniculata (L.) Jack

SALICACEAE
Populus alba L.
Populus ×canadensis Moench
Salix babylonica L.

SAPINDACEAE
Cardiospermum halicacabum L.
Koelreuteria paniculata Laxm.

SAXIFRAGACEAE
Bergenia crassifolia (L.) Fritsch
Philadelphus coronarius L.

**SCROPHULARIACEAE**
Paulownia tomentosa (Thunb.) Steud.
Russelia equisetiformis Schldl & Cham.

**SIMAROUBACEAE**
Ailanthus altissima (Mill.) Swingle

**SOLANACEAE**
Brugmansia suaveolens (Willd.) Bercht. & C. Presl
Solandra maxima (Sessé & Moc) P. Green
Solanum capsicanstrum Link
Solanum wendlandii Hook. f.

**STERCULIACEAE**
Brachychiton populneus (Schott & Endl.) R. Br

**STRELIATZIACEAE**
Strelitzia alba (L.) Skeels.
Strelitzia reginae Banks

**TAMARICACEAE**
Tamarix africana Poir.
Tamarix parviflora DC

**ULMACEAE**
Celtis australis L.
Ulmus aff. canescens Melville

**VERBENACEAE**
Aloysia triphylla (L’Hér) Brit.
Duranta plumieri Jacq.
Lantana camara L.

**VITACEAE**
Parthenocissus quinquefolia Planch.
Vitis vinifera L.

**ZINGIBERACEAE**
Alpinia zerumbet (Pers.) B.L. Burtt. & Rosemary M. Sm.

**Final considerations**

The florula recorded in the garden of Villa Filangeri reflects, with few exceptions, that found in the nineteenth-century gardens of the adjacent city of Palermo.

In conclusion, the historical garden of Santa Flavia, although relatively diversified, does not present particular elements related to the ornamental floristic heritage with the exceptions of Rhus lancea and Araucaria bidwillii. Such specimens could be usefully employed in the hypothesis of a functional and landscape recovery and requalification.

**References**


Lanza Tomasi, G. 1974: Le ville di Palermo. – Palermo.


Address of the authors:
Pietro Mazzola, Nunzio Marsiglia, Sebastiano Ciccarello & Francesco Maria Raimondo, PLANTA/Mediterranean and Tropical Center for Research, Documentation and Training, Piazza Cairoli 11, 90123 - Palermo, Italy.