THE PORTUGUESE EMPIRE’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS (1500-1860)

Ana Duarte Rodrigues
Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas
Universidade Nova de Lisboa
ana.duarte.rodrigues@fcsh.unl.pt

Abstract

Foreign visitants have always recognized a certain exoticism in Portuguese gardens and villas since Renaissance. The difference between our Early Modern gardens and their contemporary models is due to two main reasons: the influence of Islamic art and gardening and the elements that have come from different parts of the Portuguese Empire. In this conference I seek to study the Portuguese empire’s contribution to the zoological gardens in Europe and its contribution for knowledge, science and art.

How did the Portuguese empire contribute to the circulation of wild animals not only from Africa, Asia and America into Portugal but also between European countries? What were the first zoological gardens? Who built them and what were the main features of their architecture? What were the animals that existed there? And how important was the perception visitants had on them? How was the display of wild animals? What was the impact these animals had in Portuguese gardens and estates? And were they just for entertainment or did they contribute for scientific knowledge and art?, are some of the questions I intend to answer in this paper.

Wild animals are, besides ceramics and different species of Botany, the elements whose presence in gardens and estates gives a taste of the empire in Early Modern period. We recognize it in the menageries created at the royal palaces and villas, such as Paço da Ribeira, the Royal Villas of Belém, the Royal Villas of Queluz and at the Tapada das Necessidades. Besides menageries’ architecture as structures to display the empire and the choice of their location in the villa, we also seek to study their function and perception.

Portuguese people were the first to bring animals from Africa that were not seen in Europe since Antiquity such as elephants and rhinoceros with some famous histories associated with them such as the rhinoceros offered by King D. Manuel I to the Pope which became famous due to a print based on Durer’s drawing; the elephant running in Lisbon from Terreiro do Paço to Estaus palace after a fight that King D. Manuel I organized inspired by the Roman Circus; the elephant offered to the King of Austria in the 16th century, dying when he has arrived there because of the weather; or the elephant studied by Machado de Castro at Belém Royal Villa to get acknowledge of the animal’s anatomy to carve an example to the pedestal of the equestrian statue of King D. José I. I will analyze how these events might have contributed to the general knowledge they had on these animals.

Thus, and using comparative methodology with other European cases, archival and bibliographical research, it is our goal to demonstrate how these exotic elements would completely change the perception of a garden or villa because these are always places to be experienced and they involve visitants through all senses and nothing could ever compete with the exotic effect created by the body, movement and sound of wild animals.

Key Words: zoological gardens; villas; wild animals; circulation; knowledge

Ana Duarte Rodrigues is currently Lecturer at FCSH/UNL. She has received her BA (2002) in Art History, Master (2005) and PhD (2009) in Art History of Early Modern period from the FCSH/UNL. She is an associated researcher of CHAIA/UE and CHAM/FCSH. Among more than 40 titles on bibliography, stands out her PhD on Garden Sculpture of the 17th and 18th centuries in Portugal (2011) published by FCT and FCG. Her Master thesis has been the base for the exhibition O Virtuoso Criador. Joaquim Machado de Castro (1731-1822) that occurred at the MNAA between the 18 May to the 30 September 2012. She has been selected to do research at Dumbarton Oaks/Harvard University (2013).