A romantic manor park: Trakošćan, Croatia

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Introduction

Trakošćan¹ is one of numerous manors in North Croatia. It is for Croatia what the romantic castle Neuschwanstein is for Bavaria (Germany). It is a symbol of Romanticism in Croatia and the most famous manor in Croatia. It has been used as a museum for over half a century, and the manor itself and its landscaped lands have been protected as a cultural and natural heritage monument since 1955.

Trakošćan is situated in Hrvatsko Zagorje (northwest Croatia), 60 kilometres to the north of Zagreb. Hrvatsko Zagorje is famous for its numerous castles and manors situated within a picturesque hilly landscape, full of remnants of the past that date back to prehistoric times.² In the Middle Ages, numerous fortified castles (Burgs/Wasserburgs) were built all over Croatia.³ During the Renaissance villas with gardens were built in Dalmatia (the southern part of the Adriatic), especially in the environs of Dubrovnik — and at the same time as those famous for this period were built in Italy.⁴ In northern Croatia (the Pannonian region) manor houses were built from the beginning of the seventeenth century and until the beginning of the twentieth century and were modelled on similar manors in Europe, especially those that were built in Central Europe.⁵ There were once around 700 medieval fortified castles in Croatia, although few of them have been preserved in their original form — some underwent adaptation and were renovated, receiving additions in the spirit of Romanticism during the nineteenth century; most, however, fell into disrepair. Of the 300 or so Renaissance villas along the Adriatic coast, only 80 or so have survived; only about 10 of them are in good condition and are still used. There are still around 200 manors in northern Croatia — half of them are in poor condition; a third are abandoned and no longer serve their original purpose.⁶

Trakošćan includes three entities/themes: a manor house, a romantic manor park and a landscape forest park. It epitomizes values and characteristics that surpass the local and national borders and boundaries of Croatia. It belongs to the Central European tradition in architecture and landscape architecture of the nineteenth century. This is why the research presented in this paper will offer insight into parks from the Romantic period in Europe, especially in southeastern Europe, the historic parks of which are little known in the world and about which very little has been published in literature worldwide.

A brief history of the manor

During the seven centuries that Trakošćan manor has been in existence, it has undergone additions, transformations, and improvements to its architecture and fortification — thereby transforming it from a small castle, to a feudal castle and then into the picturesque romantic manor of today.

Architectural changes to the manor

As with other medieval castles, it is not known when Trakošćan was built or who built it. One thing is certain — it already existed in the second half of the thirteenth century. It was built as a medieval feudal fort and was part of a system of forts that watched over the important thoroughfares in north-western Croatia. It was situated on a hillock and was constructed to ward off cold steel weaponry. The ground plan included an irregularly shaped square, about 30 × 25 metres in size. Typologically, Trakošćan was similar to other fortified castles in Steiermark (Austria) and the whole of north Croatia (figure 1). Although the original appearance of the manor has undergone changes due to renovation and
additional construction work in the nineteenth century, the earliest construction layers are an integral part of the manor as it exists today.

In the mid-sixteenth century Count Drašković/Draskovich and the Drašković/Draskovich family made Trakošćan their home and residence, although it still remained a fortified castle. The first significant changes to the existing building were made by the Drašković Family in 1592 with the addition of a round Renaissance bastion. In the seventeenth century, a low, semicircular bastion with arrow slits was added on its southeast side. In the eighteenth century, outhouses were built at the base of the manor. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the manor was in good condition, but the adjoining defence system (towers, bastions, walls) was derelict.

The renovation of the manor in the spirit of Romanticism and the neo-Gothic was begun in 1844 and continued into the second half of the nineteenth century. The renewal of Trakošćan did not significantly increase its ground plan area; the aim was to affirm the trendy neo-Gothic style of the time. The manor was intended as a comfortable living space, so the interior was changed and adapted. The architectural changes and reconstruction work invested in Trakošćan transformed it from a medieval castle into a manor that was pleasant to live in, and it continued to be a residential home until the end of the Second World War.7

The manor as a museum

The Drašković family lived in Trakošćan until 1944 when they moved to Austria. The manor escaped damage during the Second World War and most of its furniture, paintings and other inventory were still intact after the war. It became state owned, and in 1953 it was turned into a museum, known today as Dvor Trakošćan. The transformation of the manor into a museum was possible because, unlike most other Croatian manors, the interior of the manor had not sustained major damage. The interior of Trakošćan is a true treasure trove from the second half of the nineteenth century with a collection of unique historic artefacts: starting with its furniture, wallpaper and wood panelling, to its floors, windows, doors and other innumerable details. The systematic renovation of the manor started in 1988 and went on until 2006. Trakošćan is one of the few manors cum museums in Croatia to which visitors and tourists have flocked for decades.8

Owners of the manor

The Drašković/Draskovich Family owned Trakošćan for 376 years — from 1569 to 1945. Before them there were a number of owners — in the fifteenth century: the Count of Celje, Jan Vitovec, Mathias Corvinus, the Hungarian and Croatian King and his son, Johanes Corvinus, and from 1503 to 1566 the Gyulay Family. The Drašković Family were one of the most famous and richest noble families in Croatia. They belonged to a line of Croatian nobility dating back to feudal times. They also owned many other mansions and estates in north-west Croatia, in Steiermark, Lower Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and Switzerland. Many members of the Drašković Family — barons since 1569 and counts since 1631 — were eminent and famous personages, not only in Croatian but also in Austrian history. This family included four Croatian bans/viceroy, army leaders, bishops, a cardinal, royal chancellors, judges, and other prominent figures. The last owner of Trakošćan was Ivan-John X Petar (1916–1993).9

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1 Figure 1. Trakošćan before renovation, collotype 13, 4 × 10.4 cm, before 1853; source: Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb.
The design and original layout of the park

Up until 1853 there was no manor park, only the odd tree growing on the slopes around the manor. This allowed for a better command of the approach. A photograph (collotype) taken in the mid-nineteenth century, just before the manor was renovated (see figure 1), shows the state in which Trakošćan was before its architecture and landscape were transformed. The concept and implementation of the renovation of Trakošćan was viewed and carried out as a joint architectonic and landscaping plan and took two decades to complete.

The park was laid out according to the design and plans drawn up by Franz Risy (1814–1896) between 1858 and 1861. It is not known precisely when work on the park started. The cadastre records from 1858 (figure 2) show the envisioned park plan. Two dates are noted on the plan, which was done in Indian ink and watercolour, and according to which the park was laid out (figure 3): 1858 and 1861. The year 1858 is noted in black Indian ink and is an integral part of the plan; the year 1861 is part of the signature appended by the authors and is written in ink.11 The appearance of the park today, and historical graphic sources confirm that the park was laid out according to the plans drawn up 1858–1861.

In the plan (figure 3) the following buildings and park areas are designated as follows: (1) paths and routes; (2) outhouses (servants’ quarters, administrative building and wine cellar); (3) outhouses for livestock (sheds); (4) sawmill; (5) garden; (6) orchard; (7) meadows; (8) bridge; (9) woods; (10) seedling nursery (nursery garden); (11) orchard, tree nursery; and (12) gardener’s house. The park plan coincides with the cadastre record (see figure 2), but also with the layout as it exists today. A variety of graphic symbols are used to denote various types of trees and bushes. A differentiation is made among trees with pillar-shaped crowns (black poplars — *Populus nigra* ‘Italica’), coniferous trees (spruce — *Picea* sp.), deciduous singly-planted trees and those planted in groups (possible exotic types), an autochthonous sessile oak forest (*Quercus petraea*) and the common hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), groups of bushes and rare flowering plants.
The park at Trakošćan has not undergone major transformations through the years. Some facilities have disappeared due to negligence and lack of maintenance in the decades following the Second World War. The trees have grown and have concealed some of the picturesque views. Most of the exotic bushes have vanished, and only a few new types of bushes have been planted. Despite this, the park has managed to maintain its original appearance and layout composition.\(^{12}\)

Trakošćan Park, along with Maksimir Park in Zagreb,\(^ {13}\) is the most intact and best preserved romantic park in Croatia.

The composition of the park

The ensemble that makes up Trakošćan consists of the manor at the top of the hill, the surrounding park on the slopes, a lake in the valley below the manor house fed by a stream, an assemblage of outhouses (farmstead), and native and planted woods in the surrounding area.

The owner of Trakošćan during the nineteenth century, Juraj-George VI Drašković (born 1803) ambitiously envisioned the future planning of Trakošćan in the spirit of Romanticism.\(^ {14}\) The old medieval castle was transformed into a romantic manor, a landscape romantic park was laid out and the valley and stream below the manor were turned into a large lake. Coniferous groves and woodlands were added to the existing deciduous woods, providing Trakošćan with an alpine landscape in which a contrast was set up between the dark colouring of the conifers and the lighter hues of the original indigenous woods.\(^ {15}\)

Apart from the (ground) plans (see figure 3) for the park, ambient drawings — graphics were also produced (figures 4–6) by L. Czerny.\(^ {16}\) They depict landscape

\(\text{figure 4. Manor lake, manor and Trakošćan Park, lithograph, 1860s; author: L. Czerny; source: Trakošćan Museum.}\)

\(\text{figure 5. Trakošćan Manor and Park, lithograph, 1860s; author: L. Czerny; source: Trakošćan Museum.}\)
scenes that were first put on paper and then realized. During the romantic period the tendency was to first present the concept of the landscaped park as an addition to design plans, which was enough for landscape gardeners to then realize the initial idea.

Czerny's lithographs are rich in romantic detail, typical of landscape art from the second half of the nineteenth century. A group of black poplars (Populus nigra ‘Italica’) is a common composition in parks that are romantic in character and was first applied in France in 1778 for the commemoration of Rousseau’s last resting ground, situated on an islet on the lake near Ermenonville.17 Trakošćan had two groupings of poplars, both by the lake, one of which was just below the manor (see figure 4), while the other was by the “Crvena kućica” (the Red Lodge) on the lake (figure 6).

Among the architectonic buildings in the park, the most significant are the following: the manor chapel of St John, located southeast of the manor (see site in figure 2), the round pavilion-gazebo at the entrance to the park (right-hand side of the drawing, figure 5), two bridges spanning the narrowest parts of the lake, about ten resting places (located around the manor and chapel) and five resting places near the Red Lodge (northwest part of the lake).

The landscape composition of Trakošćan has all the characteristics of Romanticism from the nineteenth century (figure 7). By employing an alternation...
between groves/woodlands and meadows, that is, an alternation between shrub-
like and tree-like flora (an alternation between “full” and “empty” spaces) a possible
monotony of the park’s architecture is avoided and sauntering through the park,
much like strolling through the manor’s salons, offers an abundance of visual stimuli
and experiences. Seen from the angle of the promenade around the lake, the manor
is a central motif and the core of numerous vistas and panoramic views (figure 8).
The manor also offers a view to a variety of sights — the surrounding hills, the lake,
the chapel and the park (figure 9). Old graphic depictions of the vistas, as well as the
layout today, include a variety of plants, shrubs and trees — differing in the shapes
of their crowns and heads, and the texture of their surfaces, which was typical of
romantic landscape compositions.18

The most picturesque composition in the romantic landscape is the artificial
lake, which is around two kilometres long and extends over an area of 23
hectares. It was created in the mid-nineteenth century during the renovation
of Trakošćan. Apart from its initial aesthetic and ambience function, the lake was
also used as a fish nursery. The lake and manor, and especially the reflected
image of the manor in the lake, are the characteristic romantic traits of
Trakošćan.

**Trakošćan within the european context**

Trakošćan is the most famous and picturesque manor in Croatia. Its appearance,
park and woodlands make it into a metaphor of Romanticism and an example of
the romantic conception of Central European summer residential architecture
from the mid-nineteenth century, a period that celebrated the past and life in
tune with nature. The ambience of Trakošćan was created according to the
German romantic tradition and the coniferous woods and forests that are part of
the scenery and landscape are reminiscent of the Rhine Valley, the valley and
locality that were such an inspiration to the composer Otto Wagner and the
Bavarian king, King Louis II, whose castle, Neuschwanstein, is considered to be
an epitome and symbol of romantic castles and manors and romantic landscapes
in all major works on the Romantic Period.19

The renovation of Trakošćan Manor, which was the first monument to be
restored in Croatia, was started in 1844. Major architectonic work in the style of
the neo-Gothic was overseen by the Austrian architect and builder, Michael Riedl. Most probably the romantic renovation of Trakošćan was modelled on Laxenberg Manor, the imperial and royal summer residence south of Vienna, where major construction work and the laying out of the park in the romantic spirit commenced in the 1830s under Riedl’s supervision. Michael Sebastian Riedl (1786–1850), administrator of the imperial courts at Schönbrunn, Hetzendorf and Laxenburg, arrived in Zagreb at the request of Juraj Haulik, the Bishop of Zagreb, to oversee the laying out of the romantic park Maksimir in Zagreb from 1838 to 1843.

The romantic and historicist renovation of late-medieval Trakošćan Castle was carried out at the same time as the renovation of the first castle in Austria and others in Germany. The period from 1838 to 1867 saw the romantic renovation and additions to Wartburg, a castle near Eisenach in Germany (west of Erfurt) based on a project by Hugo von Rittgen; from 1840 to 1842 Stolzenfels, a castle in Prussia (Germany), was also renovated in the romantic style; and from 1849 to 1853 the castle at Marienburg in Germany was also renovated. Two of the most famous romantic castles in Central Europe — Miramare by Trieste (Italy) belonging to Maximilian of Habsburg and Neuschwanstein (Germany) belonging to King Louis II of Bavaria — were built later than Trakošćan. Unlike the last two examples of completely newly built castles, which are today about 150 years old, Trakošćan has layers of architecture and a past that is at least 700 years old.

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6. The modern-day renovation and revitalization of manor houses in Croatia has become a topical issue in recent years, and the European research project Interreg III B Cades dedicated to this end included the participation of Croatian institutes, resulting in the publication of two conference proceedings: Mladen Obad Šćitaroci (ed.), _Contemporary Use and Creative Management of Manors, Castles and Villas_ (Zagreb: Faculty of Architecture, University of Zagreb, 2003), ISBN 953-6229-40-4; Mladen Obad Šćitaroci (ed.), _Manors and Gardens — Cultural Heritage as a Generator of Economic Development_ (Zagreb: Faculty of Architecture, University of Zagreb, 2006), ISBN 953-6229-49-8.


8. In 2004 there were about 60,000 visitors to Trakošćan, which may be a relatively insignificant number on a European scale, but noteworthy as far as Croatia is concerned. For the sake of comparison, in the same year there were 107,000 visitors to The Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb.


10. Franz Risy or Risig (both transcriptions of the surname are cited) was born in 1814 in Varaždin (Croatia; part of the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy at the time). Very little is known about him. He died in 1896. Towards the end of his life, 1894–1895, he was city gardener in Varaždin.

11. The first year noted (1858) probably denotes the year in which the geodetic map and project were started, the second year (1861) confirms when the author completed the plan for the park. The park plan was done on thick drawing paper, 51 × 73 cm. It was first published in the book: Mladen Obad Šćitaroci, _Perivoji i dvorci Hrvatskoga zagorja_ (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1890), p. 132. The following text in German is appended to the plan: _Seiner Excellenz des Hochgeboren Herrn Georg Grafen von Draskovich/Parkplan zu Trakostanz 1858/Projekt durch Franz Risig, 1861 — in translation: His Excellency the noble Count Georg Drašković/Trakostanz Park Plan 1858/Project led by Franz Risig._

12. Trakošćan Park is mentioned in the following literature: Mladen Obad Šćitaroci, _Manors and Gardens of Croatian Zagorje_ (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1992, 2005), ISBN 953-0-60525-0, pp. 260–273; Mladen Obad Šćitaroci and Bojana Bojanic Obad Šćitaroci,
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13. Maksimir Park in Zagreb is the largest and most valuable public park in Croatia. This public park has recognizable characteristics within the European context. Two Zagreb bishops are credited for its creation, and the transformation of a bishopric forest into a public park. Started at the end of the eighteenth century, it was completed in the 1840s, just before the renovation already existed, although it was not yet documented in the plans. Construction work on Neuschwanstein in Bavaria started 5 September 1869, at a time when Trakošćan was almost already completed, and the park has already been laid out. Source: Ivan Sra, ‘Dvor Trakošćan u 19. stolječu’, Kaj, XXXVI/4–5, 2003, pp. 94–96.

14. Since the renovation of Trakošćan required a lot of money, the then owner, Juraj VI Drašković, sold off the adjacent large manor — Klenovnik, which had been part of the family’s estate since the end of the sixteenth century and which had been the Drašković family residence more than Trakošćan in earlier centuries.

15. The park-woods, partly native sessile oak trees (Quercus petraea) and European hornbeam (Carpinus betulus) with sweet chestnut trees (Castanea sativa), and mostly planted Norway spruce woods (Picea abies) and silver fir (Abies alba). Apart from its significance as a nature and ecological oasis, the park-woods are also unique in their composition as they create a thick frame around the manor, park and lake.


18. The following species of plant life was to be found in the park: larch (Larix decidua), Scots pine (Pinus sylvestris), black pine (Pinus nigra), Eastern white pine (Pinus strobus), purple beech (Fagus sylvatica ‘Atropurpurea’), wisteria (Wisteria sinensis), common hornbeam (Carpinus betulus), false arbor-vitae (Thuja occidentalis), common ashen (Fraxinus excelsior), silver fir (Abies alba), Nordmann fir (Abies Nordmanniana), field maple (Acer campestre), common hazel (Corylus avellana), Swiss stone pine (Pinus cembra), white magnolia (Magnolia obovata), false cypress (Chamaecyparis Lawsoniana, C. pisifera), American plane (Platanus occidentalis), Norway spruce (Picea abies), Colorado blue spruce (Picea pungens ‘Glauca’), English yew (Taxus baccata), Japanese pyramidal yew (Taxus Baccata var. pyramidalis), giant cedar and arbor-vitae (Thuja occidentalis, T. orientalis, T. plicata). Apart from the autochthon trees (mostly oak trees and common hornbeams in the lower lying areas, and beeches and firs in the higher lying areas), the following species of trees were also to be found in the park-woods: larch (Larix decidua), Scots pine (Pinus sylvestris), Eastern white pine (Pinus strobus), blue and green Douglas firs (Pseudotsuga Taxifolia), white fir (Abies concolor), false cypress (Chamaecyparis Lawsoniana), American plane (Platanus occidentalis), and bald cypress (Taxodium distichum). Source: data according to records from 1973 and 1977. No list of original plant life from the second half of the nineteenth century exists.


22. Construction of Miramare Castle by Trieste started in 1856 and continued until 1866. Renovation work on Trakošćan started in 1844 and a romantic concept for the renovation already existed, although it was not yet documented in the plans. Construction work on Neuschwanstein in Bavaria started 5 September 1869, at a time when Trakošćan was almost already completed, and the park has already been laid out. Source: Ivan Sra, ‘Dvor Trakošćan u 19. stolječu’, Kaj, XXXVI/4–5, 2003, pp. 94–96.