

THE GARDENS OF

Hellbrunn

Hellbrunn is a unique total work of mannerist art and is quite rightly described as being a “chamber of wonders of garden architecture”, the last secrets of which have yet to be revealed.

This diversity still encompasses the great attractiveness of the entire grounds today. Hellbrunn is an important and convenient recreation area for the people of Salzburg. Sportspersons and strollers find the park grounds equally attractive because they have the necessary spatial qualities.

The Salzburg Royal Archbishop Markus Sittikus was elected into office in 1612. In his seven-years’ rule he developed a lively period of building. Shortly after his election he apparently decided to have his own “villa suburbana” constructed in the Italian style.

Building began in June 1613. The architect was the Italian, Santino Solari, who was also commissioned with the rebuilding of the cathedral sponsored by the Salzburg chapter. On the spacious piece of ground, which covers 60 hectares, the palace building was already completed by April 1615. In December 1616 the little Belvedere Palace, the Stations of the Cross with chapels and hermitages, as well as the Stone Theatre on Hellbrunn Hill, were also completed.

A first comprehensive view of Hellbrunn is seen in the background of a portrait of Markus Sittikus, which is attributed to Donato Mascagni. This depiction can be seen as the most important document to the history of the grounds because it is also the only one made during the building period, and there is a complete lack of any other building documentation.

The building work was finally concluded in November 1619, which was almost exactly at the same time as the death of the builder Markus Sittikus on 8 October 1619.

An anonymous engraving dated 1630 from the time of Archbishop Paris Lodron presents the entire complex of Hellbrunn in its original design. The engraving by Merian in the “Topographia Bavariae” from 1644 shows a view of the palace building and the pleasure gardens and follows the left half of the plan of 1630. The Merian engraving generally adopts the errors of the anonymous overview plan of 1630.

Records of repair and renewal exist from the period between 1647 and 1652. They are especially concerned with the mechanical trick fountains. In 1659 the wine cellar was constructed between the Orpheus Grotto and the Altemps Fountain in the area of the trick fountains.

During the governing periods of both Archbishop Max Gandolf von Khuenburg (1668-1687) and Archbishop Johann Ernst von Thun (1687-1709), the area of Hellbrunn was apparently neglected. Records relate that much was left undone in respect of repairs.

In 1720 and 1735 a far-reaching redesigning of the park grounds and the large central pond took place. In those days the taste for the High Baroque of France also prevailed in Salzburg. Thus from 1721 to 1727 Mirabell Palace and its attendant garden were adapted to the new style as commissioned by Archbishop Franz Anton von Harrach (1709- 1727). Hellbrunn offered practically ideal prerequisites for redesigning according to the French pattern. The “hortus conclusus” with its ponds and mazes is surrounded by a wall. An artistically arranged, ideal garden design conceived according to strict rules. The “Strawberry Hill” at the centre of the “hortus conclusus” had to make way to the demand for clarity and was removed.

The engraving from Matthias Diesel (1675-1752) is the first to show the redesigning in circa 1720 of the pleasure garden according to French taste of the period. Nevertheless, it is generally debateable whether the views of Hellbrunn by Diesel depict unrealised ideal designs or actual projects carried out.

In any case, for the first time the two stone hills, which today flank the lowest pool of the Altemps Fountain, can be recognised.

Diesel’s successor, the architect Franz Anton Danreiter (circa 1695-1760), has been accredited with an anonymous plan of the palace building and the pleasure garden from the period around 1730. It is practically identical with the engraving made public in 1735 by Franz Anton Danreiter. The newly planted avenue of spruce trees, extending toward the neighbouring Goldenstein Palace, is clearly to be seen. The engraving is distinguished by its clarity and exactness: the artistic design of the ornamental borders, hedges and decorative beds is clearly seen.

Under Archbishop Andreas Jakob von Dietrichstein (1747-1753), the Mechanical Theatre was constructed on the site of the old Forge Grotto among the trick fountains. This original showpiece, which has been preserved to the present day, shows the life and activity of a small Baroque city. Over 100 figures are moved and a mechanical organ is played by the power of water.

The overview plan by Stefan Müllner shows the situation in circa 1776. While nothing had changed within the garden grounds, the chapels, hermitages and Stations of the Cross on the south side of the grounds are no longer given. On the other hand the entire complex appears to have fallen into decay. The final far-reaching redesigning of the gardens took place around 1790 during the period of rule of Archbishop Hieronymus

von Colloredo (1772-1803). The thrifty sovereign had the north- and south-east part of the surrounding wall removed and had a park laid out in the English style.

The plan drawn up in 1803 by Karl Steinhäuser shows the new situation. The newly created, somewhat triangular “nature park”, with its purposely irregular path geometry, was in crass contrast to the severe asymmetry of the old area around the ponds. This situation, other than a few small changes, is generally maintained to this day at Hellbrunn.

In 1803, following the Reichsdeputationshauptschluß, Salzburg became a secular principality. Following Austrian-French and Bavarian rule, Austria of the Hapsburgs, then strongly decimated, was finally assimilated in 1816.

Thus Hellbrunn became a Hapsburg possession. Hellbrunn was transferred to become a possession of the City Council of Salzburg in 1922, which administrates it to this day.

The entire complex of Hellbrunn comprises around 60 hectares. It is about four kilometres to the south-east of the centre of the provincial capital of Salzburg. The road from the city to Hellbrunn leads along the so-called Hellbrunn Allee with its more than 250-year-old oaks. There are many other rural residences on the way to Markus Sittikus's “villa suburbana”. No continuation of the road is to be seen at the end of the avenue. Nevertheless, after a sharp change of direction one reaches the main axis of the palace approach, which turns off in a south-westerly direction. The palace and its side-wing form a courtyard of honour. A walled pheasant enclosure is attached on the north-west side. The exterior grounds protrude in a south-east direction from the palace axis. They then divide to form the so-called large water parterre. It comprises an almost square pond, in the middle of which is an equally square island that is reached across bridges.

There are small fishponds on the long sides of the pond complex. The main axis points to the south-east and continues in a severe avenue of spruce, at the end of which lies Goldenstein Palace. Severely cropped rows of trees today flank the long sides of the large pond complex and separate it from fishponds to the side. The so-called Month Palace on the slope of Hellbrunn Hill, which rises forested to the south-east, forms a second main focal point. A triangular garden in the “English style” adjoins to the north-east.

The old avenue of chestnuts on its eastern boundary forms a transition to spacious stretches of fields, which are encompassed by old avenues of trees. The Royal Way area is also to be seen as part of the so-called water parterre with the multifaceted water arts on the south-west side of the palace. On the flanks of Hellbrunn Hill, up to the surrounding wall and to the southernmost part of the park grounds, is “Hellbrunn Zoological Gardens”. Many changes have taken place in this area to accommodate animals properly according to species.

The entire complex is surrounded by a wall. Portals allow access in the direction of Anif, towards the Salzach and in the area of the main entrance. In a figurative sense, the expression the “chamber of wonders” of Markus Sittikus represents to a greater degree the artistic garden diversity that distinguishes Hellbrunn. The arrangement of the entire complex allows clear recognition today of its basic mannerist character.

The palace building and the Month Palace appear outwardly and essentially unchanged. The original “hortus conclusus” with its water basins and the Royal Way and water arts also still give this impression. On the other hand, the changes and additions, often only recognised by experts, are unnoticeable and not essential. This overall tolerance may well be founded in the fact that the original pleasure garden is already to be addressed as a conglomerate of quotes or several models. Recent examinations have established connections to the Villa Pratolino, to the Villa d’Este in Cerobbio and to the Villa Lante.

Hellbrunn is also a tourist attraction, the importance of which reaches far beyond Salzburg. An average of 450,000 visitors has been counted at the trick fountains each season. The “Festivity at Hellbrunn” is an important addition to the Salzburg Festival and the opportunity to celebrate like the builder Markus Sittikus.

A central question in the drawing up of the current park cultivation is the establishment and explanation of the limits of burdening of individual areas. Strategies are also to be established for the so-called “English part of the garden” in the future to ensure a continuum of the high-growth structures formed by the trees that are already old today. Great care is to be used in the maintenance of memorials and expert restoration of the comprehensive grotto complexes, the water automats and the numerous sculptures. The responsible handling of the richly available historic substance is the uppermost need for further procedures.

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