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Helena Radziwiłłowa's Garden in Arkadia: The Question of Its Origin

In literature on garden set up by Helena Radziwiłłowa (de domo Przeddziecka, 1753-1821) in Arkadia, we can hardly find any analysis of its origins¹. Although many scholars were interested in the garden, some fundamental questions, such as why it was created and what was its function, are still open.

Inhomogeneous and fragmentary discussion on Arkadia genesis can be associated with complicated history of Radziwiłłowa's patronage. The Duchess was working on her *jardin à l'anglaise* during almost forty years and we can distinguish few stages of her patronage. We can embed first stage in years 177/8-1783 when Radziwiłłowa was cooperating mostly with engineers and was concentrated on idea on English landscape garden. Second stage should be associated with the royal architect: Szymon Bogumił Zug who was working for the Duchess until 1797. Activities of Henryk Ittar and Aleksander Orłowski in Arkadia around 1800 should be perceived as one phase. The last stage of garden starts in Napoleon Era and it continues to the death of Radziwiłłowa in 1821.

The aim of my dissertation project would be to present most important narrations on Arkadia's origin. I would like to focus only on the concepts and theories appearing in secondary literature and written by professional scholars. All the texts written by visitors of Arkadia in the 18th and 19th century and all the information that appeared in the press would be used by me only as a context.

In my dissertation I would like to show how in narrations the construct of "Radziwiłłowa" took over the place that should be given to Arkadia itself. I would like to show that scholars writing on Arkadia origin are often thinking about different stages of the garden and they tend to identify "Arkadia" with its masonic image (second and third stage). In the second part of my text I would like to show what in my opinion is missing in presented narrations and emphasize few problems that rise if we confront narrations with historical facts. I claim that one of this missing points is political dimension of Radziwiłłowa's artistic activities, ignored by almost all Polish scholars. Another one: question of its cultural context (often narrowed to French influences and rivalry among Polish female aristocrats). The idea

¹ Arkadia is situated in Łowicz County, Łódź Voivodeship, in central Poland. It lies approximately 6 km east of Łowicz and 4 km west of Nieborów where Radziwiłł's residence is located.

of my dissertation is not only to question the agreement of Polish art historians, but mostly to show what have been ignored by them. I do not want to criticize the narrations in 'primitive way'. My aim is to enrich them by adding new perspectives. The paper is conceived as sort of 'first chapter' or opening for new questions that can be asked about Arcadia and Radziwiłłowa's patronage. I would like to focus on something that is seemingly obvious and show how our idea of Arkadia's origin misses the historical sources.

Methodology that I am going to use is close to Hayden White's approach. I would like to go through historical narrations and show what is the base of their structures. After, I would like to confront narrations with more 'objective' historical sources (such as archives and correspondence). I want to use not only Polish sources but also testimonies from courts in Vienna, Berlin and Petersburg where Radziwiłłowa was a current guest.