
A European garden history event: a garden plant congress in Bergen

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Parallel to the PaCE partner meeting (project CLT2007/1.2.1/IT-182. EU European Culture Program, 2007-2013) in Bergen, Norway, Friday 24th April 2009, the University of Bergen initiated and invited a garden conference in memory of the late prof. Dr. Knut Fægri (1909-2001). The local committee consisted by people from Museum of Natural history (botany), Museum of Cultural history (archaeology), and The Arboretum and Botanical garden. The conference took place from Friday 24th to Sunday 26th April. The invitation was sent to journals and institutions in Europe calling for contributions connected to research and general studies of ancient garden elements. The conference topics included European garden history in general, archaeological excavations, ethno-palaeobotanic topics, water elements including fish ponds in gardening, varieties/forms of garden plants including molecular studies, documentation and strategies and other aspects of garden restoration. Interdisciplinary research focusing on the links between European plants and traditions, art and history, were highlighted, including plant introductions, exchange of plant material and forgotten traditions.

As a part of the conference, shorter excursions were arranged. Fortysix persons from ten different European countries including Turkey participated during the congress days. Rector of the University of Bergen, prof. Sigurd Grønmo opened the meeting.

Prof. Dr. Knut Fægri

Knut Fægri (prof. Dr., Dr. h.c., K. St.O.O.) grew up in the floristic/plantgeographic tradition which dominated Norwegian botany since the second part of the 20th century. In addition to his major interest in pollen analysis, he also was fascinated with pollination ecology and initiated a general interest in ancient gardens, plants and traditions. Knut Fægri was honoured in different ways by many scientific organisations, associations and institutions in Norway as well as abroad, first of all he was announced Commander of The King's St. Olav's Order (Oslo, 1980), and awarded the The Millenium Botanist Medal (St. Louis, 1999). He will be remembered as a brilliant scientist and one of the few polyhistorists.

Oral and poster sessions

Sixteen lectures and seven posters were presented during the indoor sessions elucidating ancient garden and plant traditions, excavations from the Roman period, the Medieval and Renaissance, as well as and more modern periods. Some of the presentations were based on results obtained within the framework of the PaCE project.

Excursions

The first excursion started at Damsgaard, an estate established about 1790 and restored during the 1980s. Since the beginning, the formal garden at Damsgaard had been established as a Renaissance garden, but during the restoration processes, it was decided to make a miniature in the baroque garden fashion. The garden plants (forms as well as varieties) used in the garden to day are all of old origin and known from local use in the second part of the 18th century in Bergen.

A second stop was made at Sandviken and Skuteviken, just north of the Bergen centre, where a walk was made among the small wooden houses from the end of the 17th century and into the beginning of the 18th century. Also the small gardens, most of them not larger than 30 m², connected to the white painted houses, are from the same period, and are in many cases still kept with respectful enthusiasm. The walk passed along the green areas within the walls of the Bergenhus castle. Garden elements extant from the 18th and the 19th centuries were presented and discussed. The only known reservoir (pond/dam) for saltwater fish one so far has recorded in Norway was connected to this castle and was in operation at least as late as during the 17th century (saltwater fish ponds are known to be used by rich families as early as in the Roman period). Formal gardens as well as orchards are recorded in the literature from the 13th century onwards at the castle.

The first excursion ended in the backyard of the Bryggen, the former trade centre for the north European Hanseatic trade system on the Bergen Harbour. The green patches behind the old buildings were originally mostly used for vegetables and crops during medieval times, in some cases up to more recently as long as the Hanseatic ruled this part of the town.

The second excursion was devoted to visiting The

Arboretum and Botanical Garden at Milde and the Store Milde Estate, 22 km south of the city center of Bergen. The walk started just outside the walls of the former estate garden, and the first stop was made in The Arboretum's rose garden, with several collections of species roses, historic roses and modern roses suited for the climate of Western Norway. The Arboretum is involved in a project aiming at documenting, identifying and collecting all historic rose cultivars extant in old gardens in Norway; a collection of these cultivars are displayed along with a reference collection for comparison.

The walk proceeded into the hill Hatlehaugen, where, due to an extraordinarily favourable local climate, the Arboretum is able to grow several exotic species like *Sequoia sempervirens*, *Quercus ilex*, *Broussonetia papyrifera*, *Athrotaxis cupressoides*, *Davidia involucrata*, *Osmanthus suavis*, *Argyrocitrus battandierii* and others. The walk passed through Nydalen where a collection of *Rhododendron* cultivars were in sparkling flower. Next there was "Blondehuset", a small wooden house originally built as a farm house before 1700 and redecorated in the 1850s as a romantic summer house, before serving for many years as the home of a Bergen family until it was taken carefully down when the central hospital in Bergen was extended in 1973. It was put up again at Milde in 1992 and now it is serving as information center and café surrounded by a garden with plants grown in gardens of Western Norway before 1900.

The green-house was next visited. Per H. Salvesen showed the collections of Box (*Buxus sempervirens*) and other species, gathered as part of the PaCE project studies. The material has been made a major subject of the genetic diversity studies conducted at the University of Bergen.

Returning to the Milde Estate, the collections of species from the Southern Hemisphere were visited, featuring among others young healthy stands of *Araucaria araucana* collected from trees growing in Bergen and also from native stands in Southern Argentina. In the Estate garden the old Boxwood thickets on the former parterre in front of the manor was studied, and Dagfinn Moe showed the site for the excavations of the former fish pond system. On the stairs of the Manor house the participants were welcome by the former rector of the Fana folkehøgskule, Knud Jørgen Holck, who, after refreshments in the Italian style, invited to visit the baroque and regency style halls inside the manor house. Dinner was subsequently served in the school's refectory. At the table, prof. Per M. Jørgensen held a speech commemorating the late prof. Knut Fægri, who was instrumental in initiating the scientific interest in garden history at the University of Bergen, and whose spirit was certainly present at the dinner table.

The evening was spent walking into the Botanical Garden, which is under construction by the University of Bergen, at the lake Mildevatnet just downhill to the west

of the Milde manor. Here the newly constructed Japanese garden was studied with keen interest, as well as the Alpine garden, where many species were at their most charming in full flower. The walk touched down the small display of traditional vegetable and utilitarian plants featuring *Angelica archangelica* var. *maiorum* and the plants represented in the grave of the Queen of Oseberg dated ca. AD 800, among others. The extraordinarily warm and sunny day had since long passed into a blond nordic dusk as the coach picked us up well passed 11 pm.

Acknowledgement

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