

PAPER DETAILS

TITLE: YIRMİSEKİZ MEHMED ÇELEBİ NİN SEFARET NAMESİNİN MİMARİ AÇIDAN OKUNMASI
VE FRANSIZ MİMARLIGININ SA`DÂBÂD SARAYI`NA MUHTEMEL ETKİSİ

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PAGES: 221-237

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/1356992>

FRENCH AND BELGIAN GARDENERS IN CAIRO DURING THE 19TH CENTURY

19. YÜZYILDA KAHİRE'DE BULUNAN FRANSIZ VE BELÇİKALI BAHÇE TASARIMCILARI

Benoit FONDU

Keywords - Anahtar Sözcükler:

19th Century, Cairo, French, Belgian gardeners

19. yüzyıl, Kahire, Fransız, Belçikalı bahçe tasarımcıları

ABSTRACT

All too often, we tend to forget Emperor Napoleon III and the modernity of some of his ideas, which made him a true forerunner of the 21st century. This sovereign was the instigator of a new form of urbanisation in cities, which included the creation of parks and gardens. The main pillars of Napoleon III's success were the Universal Exhibitions of 1855 and 1867, devoted to this modernity. The example of this French success was to serve as inspiration for other crowned heads including the Duke of Brabant, the future Leopold II (1835-1909) second king of the Belgians, and the Egyptian Khedive Ismail (1830-1895).

*The creation of a "French-style" landscape garden at that time relied above all on horticulture; the choice of plants, their aspect and the desire to show off new plants. Buildings and follies were generally replaced with groups of trees or isolated trees. *Natura naturans* – real nature – was put to one side in order to be embellished with the help of industrial advances and the imagination of engineers, which was employed to help with the designer's work.*

For me, this period is interesting within the context of the history of gardens for a number of reasons:

First of all, I believe this was an era when no-one questioned the social expectations of a park landscape gardeners only worked on their aesthetic aspect. This was especially true in Cairo as well as in Belgium, and also undoubtedly in many other countries where, in the beginning, there was no real green policy or real management of public spaces.

Secondly, we should remember that these parks formed actual constructions in towns; they were projects of collective interest created within a hierarchical context in towns, designed on a large scale and part of a vast strategy.

Thirdly, the only major constraint concerning the realisation of these parks was land rights. To overcome this, the owner acted as a sponsor since he owned the land on the site. These parks marked new limits in the town,

delineated neighbourhoods, allowing extensions and even microclimates to be created.

Often, the development of new parks went hand in hand with other property and financial operations. It wasn't unusual for a property speculation to be closely followed by the development of new parks, thus creating streets with a high social prestige.

Consequently, I believe it is important to include a study of the land registry in the preliminary studies, which defines the legal status of a site and also helps to understand the driving force behind a town's evolution; owning land has always been synonymous with wealth and therefore power.

Fourthly, the site and its surroundings thus became favourable to the development of 'citizenship, public-spirit-ness and civility'. As I have already mentioned in another paper, this approach is similar to the 'court society' of Louis XIV, who, as described by Norbert Elias, "shaped a new structure and determined new behaviours in the town".

In the fifth place, these parks were also characterised by a complete blindness regarding the common problems faced by gardeners. They were unaware of the realities of the land and the unpredictability of the forces of nature, except for problems concerning water drainage, the main subject of rehabilitation and a better management of salubrity.

Finally, what I think is remarkable in these parks is the fact that, for the era, this typology of public garden seemed to be perfectly transposable to any other town worldwide, despite great geographic and climatic differences. This typology of garden seemed to be easily transferable, easy to copy, as is the case of the Ezbekiya Gardens in Cairo, founded in 1869 by the Belgian, Delchevalerie, or the Gezira / Zamalek zoological gardens designed by Barillet-Deschamps.

ÖZET

İmparator III. Napoleon ve onu 21. yüzyılın gerçek bir öncüsü yapan bazı modern fikirler sıklıkla unutulmaktadır. Bu hükümdar, bahçe ve park tasarımının da içinde yer aldığı yeni bir kentleşme anlayışının başlatıcısı olmuştur. III. Napoleon'un başarısının ana dayanakları, modern fikirlerinin bir ürünü olan 1855, 1867 Dünya Sergileri'dir. Bu Fransız başarısı, Brabant Dükkü, Belçikalıların ikinci kralı II. Leopold (1835-1909) ve Mısır Hidi-vi İsmail (1830-1895) gibi yöneticilere de ilham vermiştir.

Bu dönemde "Fransız stili" bir bahçenin tasarlanması herşeyden önce bahçıvanlığa, bitki seçimine ve yeni bitkilerin sergilenmesindeki istek ve tavıra bağlıydı. Binalar ve dekorlar genellikle yerlerini ağaç grupları ve tekil ağaçlara bırakmıştır. Bahçeler, Natura naturans – gerçek doğa – düşüncesi bir kenara konarak, endüstriyel üstün-lüğün yardımı ve tasarımcıların çalışmalarına destek olan mühendislerin hayal gücü ile süslenmiştir.

Benim düşünceme göre bahçe tarihi bağlamında bu dönem, birkaç sebepten dolayı ilginçtir: Herşeyden önce dönemin, bir parkın yaratacağı sosyal beklentilerin sorgulanmadığı ve bahçe tasarımcılarının işlerine sadece estetik açıdan yaklaştığı bir dönem olduğunu düşünmekteyim. Bu durum özellikle Kahire, Belçika ve şüphesiz en başta gerçek bir yeşil politikaya ya da bir kamusal mekan yönetimine sahip olmayan diğer birçok farklı ülke için de geçerlidir.

İkincisi, hatırlamalıyız ki, bu parklar kentlerde günlük tasarımlar halinde oluşmuştur. Bunlar, kentin hiyerarşik bağlamı içinde, ortak bir ilginin sonucu büyük ölçekli bir proje ve büyük bir stratejinin parçası olarak haya-ta geçmiştir.

Üçüncüsü, bu dönemde parkların ortaya çıkmasında tek ana kısıtlayıcı etken toprak ile ilgili haklar olmuştur. Bunun üstesinden gelmek için toprak sahibi, bir sponsor gibi hareket etmiştir. Bu parklar kentte yeni sınırları çizmiş, genişlemeye ve mikroklimaların oluşmasına izin vererek mahalleleri yeniden şekillendirmiştir.

Sıklıkla, yeni parkların gelişimi, finansal işlemler ve emlak işlemleri ile paralel ilerlemiştir. Bir emlak spekülasyonunun ardından yeni parkların oluşması ve bu sayede sosyal açıdan yüksek prestijli caddelerin oluşması olağandışı değildir.

Bu nedenle, arazinin yasal statüsünü tanımlayan ve bir kentin gelişimindeki itici güçleri anlamaya yardımcı olan

toprak kaydı ile ilgili bir çalışmanın, başlangıç çalışmalarına dahil edilmesini önemli bulmaktayım. Toprak sahibi olmak her zaman zenginlik ve güçle eş anlamlı olmuştur.

Dördüncüsü, arazi ve çevresi bu şekilde yurttaşlığın, yurtseverliğin ve medeniliğin gelişimi için elverişli bir yer haline gelmiştir. Başka bir yazıda da belirttiğim gibi bu yaklaşım XIV. Louis'nin 'saray topluluğu' na benzer bir durumdur. Norbert Elias, bu bağlamda XIV. Louis için, "yeni bir strüktürün yaratıcısı ve kentte yeni davranışların belirleyicisi" ifadesini kullanmaktadır.

Beşinci olarak, bu parklar, bahçe tasarımcılarının ortak problemleri göz önüne alındığında, tam bir "körlüğü" yansıtmaktadır. Bu dönemde bahçe tasarımcıları, su drenajı ile ilgili problemler dışında toprakla ilgili gerçeklerin, doğanın önceden kestirilemeyen güçlerinin, farkında değillerdi.

Son olarak, bu parklarda dikkate değer gördüğüm şey, dönem çerçevesinde, bahsedilen kamusal bahçe tipolojisinin coğrafi ve iklimsel farklar gözetilmeksizin dünyanın başka bir kentinde uygulanabilirliğidir. Bu bahçe tipolojisi, 1869'ta Belçikalı Delchevalerie tarafından Kahire'de kurulan Ezbekiya Bahçeleri ya da Barillet-Deschamps tarafından tasarlanan Zamalek zoolojik bahçeleri örneklerinde görüldüğü gibi kolaylıkla aktarılabilir ve kopya edilebilirdir.

FRENCH AND BELGIAN GARDENERS IN CAIRO DURING THE 19TH CENTURY

All too often, we tend to forget Emperor Napoleon III and the modernity of some of his ideas, which made him a true forerunner of the 21st century. Despite the shower of hateful insults uttered by the national standard bearer of literature, Victor Hugo, we are nevertheless forced to acknowledge the importance of the emperor's work and its effect on all echelons of society. This sovereign was the instigator of a new form of urbanisation in cities, which included the creation of parks and gardens. Some would even say that Napoleon III's direct influence on the development of landscape gardens is comparable to that of Louis XIV on French-style gardens; to me, he incontestably served as an example.

According to Cortesi in his book *Parcs publics – Paysages 1985 – 2000, the stylistic references of the works led by Haussmann, regarding urban renovations, were undeniably influenced by the emperor's extended stay in England; the tradition of rigour and geometry inherent to the teachings of Le Nôtre, inevitably rejected because it incarnated the Ancien Régime, was thus transformed by the English tradition of picturesque, romantic gardens* (Cortesi 2000). In terms of parks and gardens, and to quote Louis Michel Nourry : *Haussmann satisfied the emperor's taste for English practices* (Nourry 1996: 257 -) which struck a chord with the bourgeoisie's quest for picturesque and healthful natural settings.

The work of the Second Empire marked many of the biggest French towns such as Paris with the *Parc des Buttes Chaumont* or Marseille with the *Parc Borély* both designed by Barillet-Deschamps; Lyon with the *Parc de la Tête d'Or* designed by the Buhler brothers, but also smaller ones such as in Biarritz, Vichy, Fontainebleau and Compiègne.

It was thanks to the technical evolutions of the era, as well as the economic prosperity of the Second Empire, that these wide-scale expansions, embellishments and rehabilitation works were able to take place. The main pillars of Napoleon III's success were the Universal Exhibitions of 1855 and 1867, devoted to this modernity. These exhibitions were the *tableaux vivants* of the successes of the new wealth-generating industries; they were also the place to rub shoulders with the nobility – all the sovereigns came to the 1867 exhibition – meet the *bourgeoisie*, and even share gardeners.

The example of this French success was to serve as inspiration for other crowned heads including the Duke of Brabant, the future Leopold II (1835-1909) second king of the Belgians, and the Egyptian Khedive Ismail (1830-1895). Both of them were highly impressed with the works carried out in Paris under the direction of Baron Haussmann. This encouraged

Leopold II to carry out major improvements in various parts of Belgium as in Brussels, Spa or Ostend. The same is true of Khedive Ismail, who began wide-scale works in Cairo in 1868, influenced by what he had seen in Paris.

What is interesting here is that there were certain parallels in various countries in the development of garden design influenced by what was happening in France under Napoleon III.

In 1830, Belgium appeared on the European scene.

This recently-created country underwent rapid economic development, thus becoming the second most important industrialised nation worldwide. This phenomenon also led to the spectacular development of Belgian horticulture in the 19th century. Under the reign of Leopold II (1865-1909) - a visionary, persevering and stubborn man - several plans to develop parks were commissioned by the sovereign for the capital, Brussels, as well as for other Belgian cities. Brussels, which had almost no green spaces before his reign, boasted more than 1000 ha at the beginning of the 20th century less than 50 years later. These imperialist ambitions aimed to create *an outstanding town*, the true centre of his empire (De Bruyn O. and B. Fondu, 2009: 97).

Several landscape architects were commissioned to create gardens or parks. Some were French as Jean-Pierre Barillet-Deschamps (1824-1873), Edouard André (1840-1911) (See André, F. and S. de Courtois, 2001), Jules Vacherot (1862-1925) or Élie Lainé (-), others from German origin as for Carl Heinrich Petersen (1792-1857), Louis Fuchs (1818-1904) or Edouard Keilig (1827-1895). It is astonishing that there is no record of English landscape architects.

Within the framework of this presentation, it is the public park in Laeken near Brussels that interests us most.

Its creation in 1876 was part of the continuation of urban development plans – as regards its style – developed in Europe and elsewhere during the 19th century. It was the horticulturist and landscape gardener Barillet-Deschamps (1824-1873), head gardener of Paris's Department of Promenades and

Plantations Paris', whom we consider to be the designer of this park until his sudden death in 1873 were Grégoire, Paris's chief civil engineer, redesign the park's plan in 1876. The superb book by Mme Luisa Limido *L'art des jardins sous le second empire...* sheds a well-informed light on Barillet-Deschamps' live.

Based on the traditional style of the English landscape garden, Barillet-Deschamps developed a style of landscape gardens at the end of the 19th century that I would like to refer to as the *Landscape park - French Style*.

Personally commissioned by King Leopold II of Belgium, the public park of Laeken is a rare example in Belgium of this landscape style that was considered modern for the time. This style was elaborated by a veritable school of French landscape architects in co-operation with the municipal parks and gardens departments. The principle of concave/convex lines provided a new spatial dimension through undulations. In general, the grounds in Laeken are designed as a hollow in the main axes of the lawns and are raised on the sides where flowerbeds and groups of trees are placed. The overall concaveness of the undulation creates a greater sense of width and height in space. Hence, the undulating lawns include winding paths that turn into elongated, secant or tangent curves, and a wide sweep. This is what Edouard André called *gentle and harmonious inflexions*.

In his *Encyclopédie agricole* published in 1939, Bellair wrote: *The avenues immediately appear to be better suited to their purpose, their convexity and a regular rhythm, which gives them a sense of flexibility and freedom, similar to the mathematical trajectory or curve of a railway line* (Bellair 1939: 340).

Those *effortless curves* as conceived by the engineers are based on the Hindu designs found on cachemire shawls or also named paisley, which Josephine de Beauharnais turned into a symbol of luxury and wealth. Graphically, it represents a stylised palm leaf, generally filled with *millefleur*. Again, according to Luisa Limido (Limido 2002: 242), this basic motif, remodelled by the French artist Antony Berrus (1815-1883), was streamlined by increasing the intersections. Here, this is not a reference of plant origin, which we have deliberately chosen to ignore, but of its *artificialisation*.

Following the Universal Exhibition of 1855 in Paris, and thanks also to the progress in weaving processes, paisley shawls became highly fashionable. This new S-shaped design – which was easy to distinguish and very clear – was copied by certain landscape architects including the Belgian, Theodore Bona. Theodore Bona, a landscape gardener but also the director of Verviers' Ecole de Tissage et de Dessin Industriel, published a book in Brussels in 1859, for Emile Tarlier's Librairie Agricole, entitled *Tracé et Ornementation des Jardins d'Agréments*, orné de 104 figures.

Several years later (1857-1863) he published a weaving manual: *Manuel de tissage ou exposé complet de la fabrication des tissus*. The creation of a so called *French style* landscape garden at that time relied above all on horticulture; the choice of plants, their aspect and the desire to show off new plants. Buildings and follies were generally replaced with groups of trees or isolated trees. *Natura naturans* – real nature – was put to one side in order to be embellished with the help of industrial advances and the imagination of engineers, which was employed to help with the designer's work. As for the lampposts, dustbins and even the paths which were produced industrially this typology of public garden seemed to be perfectly transposable, easily transferable, to any other town worldwide, despite great geographic and climatic differences.

According to Odile De Bruyn, the image of a modern landscape was thus created, confirming the unity between *nature and technology*, which combined new technical elements and a highly efficient aesthetic apparatus. Here, we can indisputably refer to a new form of industrialisation of the notion of landscape, just like the title of one of the chapters of Mme. Limido's book, *L'art des jardins sous le Second Empire* (Limido 2002), not only in terms of layout but also contents.

The introduction by Admiral Richard Massie Blomfield of Walter Draper's book (Draper 2010) *Le Jardinage en Egypte*, published in 1898, caught my attention. The edition I bought from Kessinger Publishing attracted my attention, among other things, owing to the presence of a handwritten note shown on page 12.

Prince Ibrahim employed a Scottish head gardener called Traill, to develop his garden. He was sent along with another Belgian gardener called Nicolas Bové to the East Indies, Mauritius and other places in search of plants.

In an article that has yet to be published¹, Ms Alix Wilkinson expands upon the careers of the two Scottish gardeners, James Traill and his colleague William Mc Culloch, who were employed by Ibrahim Pasha. As for myself, I learnt from reading numerous articles by Delchevalerie that Nicolas Bové (1st January 1802, Millebach (Luxembourg) – died in 1842 in Kadem, Algeria) wasn't Belgian but was from Luxembourg, and that he wasn't a gardener but a botanist. Nicolas Bové arrived in Cairo in 1829 and left in 1832. He published reports on these numerous plant collections - which are still in the Museum of Geneva - as well as visits to the gardens and properties of Ibrahim Pasha, and even created a garden whose trace has now unfortunately been lost. However, it was the publication by Antoine Barthélémy Clot-Bey (Grenoble 5th November 1793 - Marseille 28th August 1868), a surgeon in Egypt, dating from 1840 and entitled *Aperçu Général de L'Egypte*, in which we find the most complete list of plants cultivated in Egypt under Mohamed Ali and Ibrahim Pasha. In this book, he also provides a description of certain gardens that existed at the time.

When Leopold II visited Cairo in 1855, Ismail (1830-1895) was not yet in power; he was a student in Paris. There, he undoubtedly witnessed the major works taking place in Paris. At the Universal Exhibition of 1867, when Alphand was president and Barillet-Deschamps secretary, Ismail - who had become Khedive (1863-1879) - was received by the prefect of the *Seine Département* at the Town Hall. Wanting to provide a fitting celebration for the opening of the Suez Canal two years later, in 1869, he planned to carry out major works in Cairo. For this purpose and upon the advice of Alphand, he was assisted by the engineer Pierre Grand and Barillet-Deschamps. The works were rapidly executed and, as was the case for the Potemkin facades, they initially focused mainly on the itineraries of the distinguished guests.

In a report of the visit to Paris's gardening department (also called *Le Fleuriste* or *Jardin de la Muette*) placed under the direction of Barillet-Deschamps,

Edouard Morren wrote that he had met several Belgian gardeners working in this department, including Messieurs Delchevalerie and Lambotte (Morren 1866: 168). At the time, this nursery was in some ways the plant production centre for all the squares that embellished, rehabilitated and brightened up Paris. With a collection of more than 6 000 species, it is clear that this was the place to learn and test all the new species and varieties that could render service to public horticulture. It was under the direction of Barillet-Deschamps, described as being *the one who did the most for the modern art of gardens and the one who, by planting tropical plants in the ground, created a type of grandiose embellishment that leaves an impression and that one admires*, that the Belgian gardener Delchevalerie, among others, did his apprenticeship.

Before the arrival of Barillet, Gustave Delchevalerie (1841-1899) from Namur, arrived in Cairo in 1867 and was immediately made *Head Gardener of Palaces, Viceroyal Parks and Egyptian Royal Gardens*. We don't know how he came to Cairo but one thing is certain, he created some of the most important gardens in Cairo, always in an *effortless* style; including the Zohirya Gardens, the Ezbekieh Gardens, as well as the Zoological Gardens, all sites he designed according to the purest Parisian tradition. We should also note here that it was Delchevalerie who created the first models of the grounds for the Gezira / Zamalek Gardens, before Barillet-Deschamps arrived on the scene. We no longer remember him as a gardener and author of numerous publications dealing with horticulture, only as a garden designer. More's the pity! His style seems to have been so Parisian that Linant de Bellefonds wrote in 1872: *... We can be certain that if the Egyptian Le Nôtre had studied Egypt longer without any preconceived ideas, before creating Ezbekieh Gardens, he would have created a work better adapted to the country, while still creating a thing of beauty...*

His extensive knowledge acquired in Paris in the multiplication, cultivation and nomenclature of ornamental plants was to incite him to become one of the essential pillars of horticulture in Egypt. The historian Mimi Debruyn conducted a study and created a complete bibliography concerning the writings of Gustave Delchevalerie (Debruyn 2005:

55-69). Besides various articles concerning plants such as the date palm, henna or poinsettia, Delchevalerie published a great many books. As soon as he arrived in 1869, he published an article entitled *Les jardins et les champs de la Vallée du Nil*. This precious article gives a description of the existing gardens and their contents in the Nile valley. It is clear from the article how attentive Delchevalerie was to the smallest details whether they concerned the use, cultivation or multiplication of plants. Special attention is given to the Gezira zoological and botanical gardens, whose plans he published. According to the wishes of Khedive Ismail, this garden stood out owing to its great excesses; undoubtedly a way of bringing himself into line with current tastes and to 'be seen', just like Leopold II. As well as the elaborate network of paths, mosaiculture and a serpentine river, there are quite a number of solitary trees.

Eustace Reynolds-Ball wrote in his book *Cairo, The city of the Caliphs* (Reynolds-Ball c1897: 248 -) that the Shubra Palace as well as that of Gezira were by far the most interesting ones to visit. The latter, according to the author, became the Hyde Park of Cairo *as the great focus and rallying-point of the European World of fashion*. Constance Fenimore Woolson shares this opinion: *The Gezira road is today the favourite afternoon drive of the Caimres. It is a broad avenue, raised above the plan, and overarched by trees throughout its course. ... Ismail's taste was French – that is, the lowest shade of French – as French is still the taste of the modern Egypt among the upper classes. It remains to be seen whether the English occupation will change this. During the festivities at the time of the opening of the canal, Ismail's royal guests were entertained at Gezira* (Fenimore Woolson 1896: 249-253). It was thus here, among other places, that numerous distinguished visitors were welcomed when the Suez Canal was opened.

In 1870, Delchevalerie published another book entitled *Cultures égyptiennes. Plantes tropicales utiles, officinales et* This collection suggests 96 species that could potentially be planted in Egypt and describes both their therapeutic and industrial properties. In 1871, he published his *Flore exotique du jardin d'acclimation De Ghezireh et Des Domaines de S. A. Le Khedive* (1871). Here, he endeavoured to retrace the history of agriculture and horticulture in

Ancient Egypt, and complete the work of Clot- Bey regarding the description of the gardens under Mohamed Ali and, above all, he listed the various species cultivated in the garden of Gezira. Finally, in his book *Les Promenades et les Jardins du Caire* published in 1899 (Fig. 1) and later translated into Arabic, he provided a *catalogue raisonné* with more than 4000 species cultivated in the gardens of Cairo under Khedive Ismail.

In the Garden History review, Alix Wilkinson published a very complete study in the 2010 summer's volume concerning certain gardens in Cairo created by Barillet-Deschamps (Wilkinson 2010: 125-147). Ms Wilkinson lists the gardens and, above all, gives a precise description of their current state.

This period is interesting within the context of the history of gardens for a number of reasons:

First of all, I believe this was an era when no-one questioned the social expectations of a park - even if, for instance, Leopold II announced loud and clear that he was establishing them for the people; landscape gardeners only worked on their aesthetic aspect. This was especially true in Cairo as well as in Belgium, and also undoubtedly in many other countries where, in the beginning, there was no real green policy or real management of public spaces.

Secondly, we should remember that these parks, like the public park of Laeken or those in Cairo, formed actual constructions in towns; they were projects of collective interest created within a hierarchical context in towns, designed on a large scale and part of a vast strategy.

Thirdly, the only major constraint concerning the realisation of these parks was land rights. To overcome this, the owner acted as a sponsor since he owned the land on the site. These parks marked new limits in the town, delineated neighbourhoods, allowing extensions and even microclimates to be created.

Often, at least in Belgium and also in Cairo (Arnaud 1993: 85), the development of new parks went hand in hand with other property and financial operations. It wasn't unusual for a property speculation to be closely followed by the development of new parks, thus creating streets with a high social prestige. This was the case in Belgium with the lobby organised by Leopold II to acquire land to create these parks and, according to Jean-Luc Arnaud, it was also possible to develop certain neighbourhoods in Cairo thanks to land provided by the Khedive (Arnaud 1991: 87-105). Consequently, I believe it is important to include a study of the land registry in the preliminary studies, which defines the legal status of a site and also helps to understand the driving force behind a town's evolution; owning land has always been synonymous with wealth and therefore power.

Fourthly, the site and its surroundings thus became favourable to the development of *citizenship, public-spiritedness and civility*. This approach is similar to the *court society* of Louis XIV, who, as described by Norbert Elias *shaped a new structure and determined new behaviours in the town* (Elias 1985).

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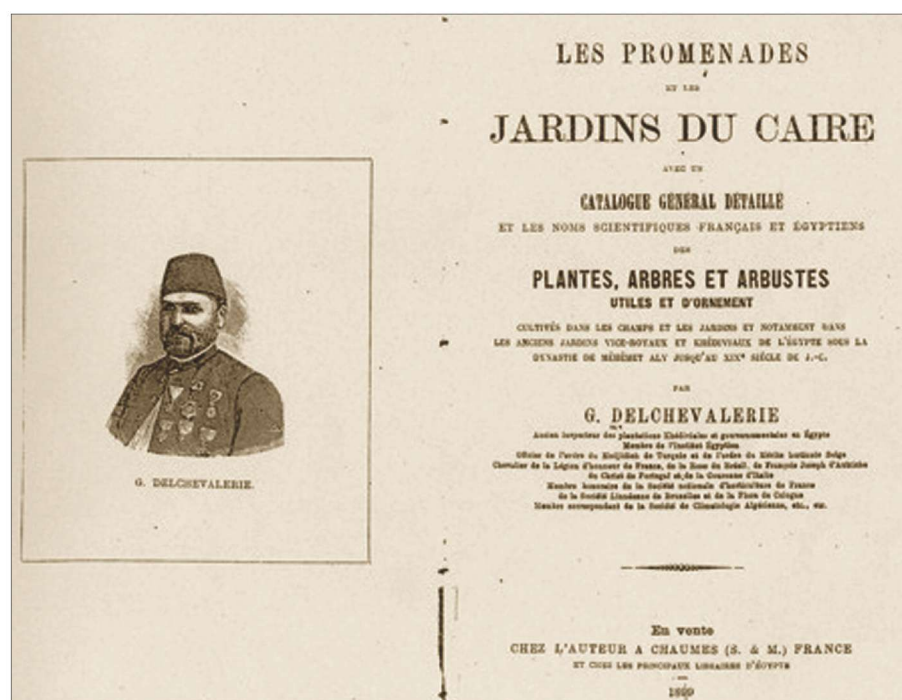
NOTES

¹ Wilkinson, A. "Two Horticultural Society Gardeners in Egypt", typescript of the article to be published.

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TÜBA-KED 9/2011

Fig. 1. Delchevalerie, G., 1899. *Les Promenades et les Jardins du Caire*.