

Cappadocia

Immediate Continuity

Thilo Folkerts. Visiting **Red and Rose Valley** of Göreme and around.

Turkey 19.08.–01.09. + 21.10.–25.10.2019

International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens 2020





View over Red Valley towards Uçhisar.



Route marking sprayed onto the tuff. Entering into the valley.



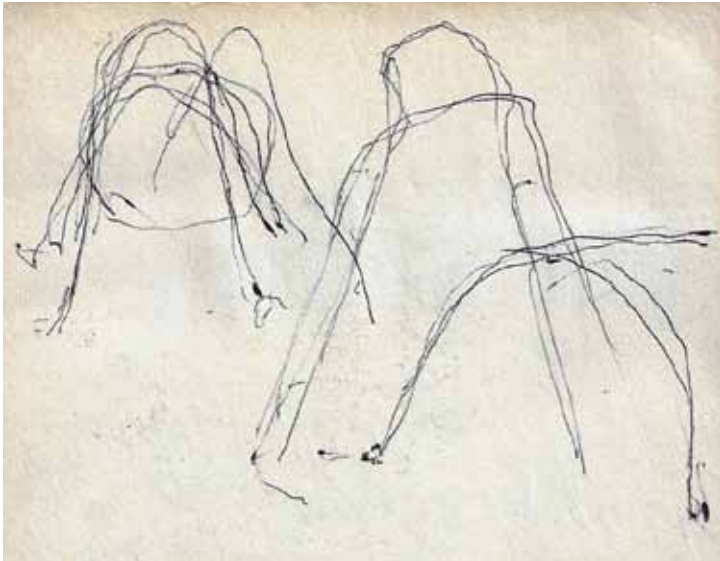
Light falls into the Column Church through a disintegrated hole.

finding your way

The ways through the valleys are informal. There is little cartographic material available for guidance. Several signage systems are in place, each presumably aiming to improve guidance and each presumably aiming to direct people to the authors' preferred features. Local initiative ensures that the visitor will easily find the Grape Chapel, but also the small, informal café next to it. The paths follow the folds of the tuff surface and the dry stream beds; one is hardly ever hindered by border markings, fences, or walls. Here and there some steps are carved into the sloped rock face in order to ease ascent or descent. One valley is separated from the other by short routes across an exposed plateau. With no pavement or other surface material protecting the soft surfaces, the network of paths is fluid, forked and freely adapted to use by walkers, horses, mountain bikes, motorcycles and—horribile dictu—quad treks.

outside inside

The relationship of churches, monasteries and dwellings to their gardens is immediate. Not only are they made from the same material, they share an uninterrupted surface. There are no joints. The interiors are not architectural, but essentially sculptural spaces; they are fractal extensions, an endodermic topography. Rock face and ground are continuous. The soil is loose and soft, like ground soap-flakes. It seems as if the sand and the chipped rock had freshly fallen off the folded, curvy sides of the valley. The gardens are cultivated in the loose rock material that has eroded from the rock facades—or, one might imagine, even in the material excavated from the interiors.



No sharp edges here.



Rockface at Red Valley.

youthful skin

There are no sharp edges here. While the valleys possess an archaic atmosphere, the surfaces are not immutable. In spite of their vast geologic time scale, they seem fluid and fresh; not weathered and tainted by wear and time, but continuously young and in dynamic motion.



'Liquid' rock face. Red Valley.

The soil, directly from the rock.

reconfiguration

Depending on the location within the very diverse geologic strata, the loss of substance on the rock face through natural erosion can be measured in millimetres or even centimetres—annually. A landscape whose surface material seems to be in a continuous change of state. The constant deterioration and reconfiguration is visible in the stunning rock formations, but also in the stupefying cracks that are splitting whole churches. The inside of extensive, complex living quarters is exposed after they have lost their 'facade', the thin layer of rock between interior and exterior.



Şahinefendi



Church space reconfigured as dove cove. Kolonlu Kilise, Rose Valley.

morphosis

A hole made to be a niche for a candle.

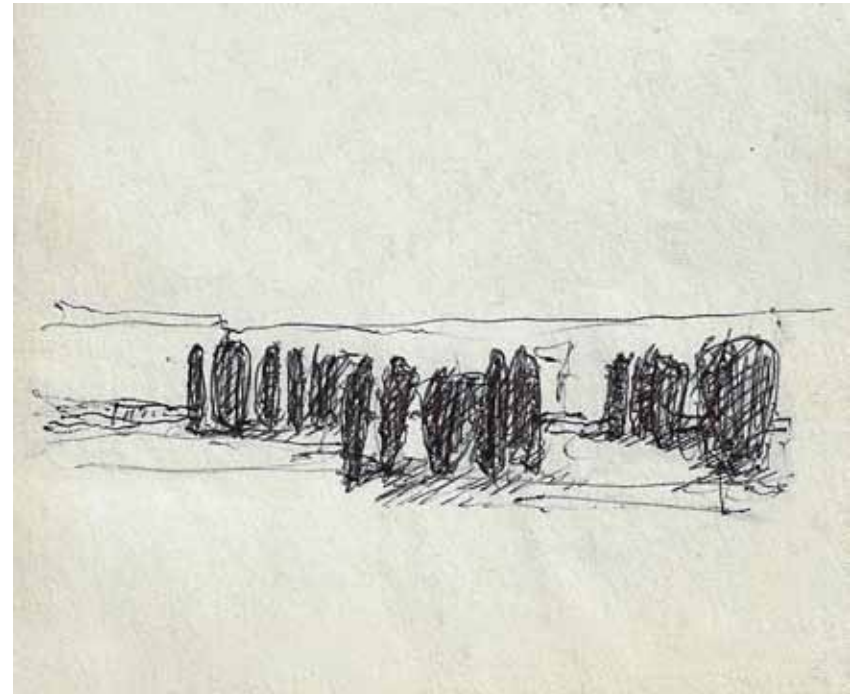
The niche may become a shelf, which may later become a stall, a shelter or a lookout. The shelter may become a barn, a refectory, a church. The church may become a living quarter, a stall, even a large dove cove. Excavated further, it may become a cistern. Or hotel rooms, or a restored church? A never-ending improvisation. Once the chisel is put to use, the original form will never return.



A group of fastigate poplar near Column Church, Red Valley.

spatial notation

The plateaus' vegetative structure is mainly characterised by sparse tufts of silverberry or widely spaced groves of fruit trees. In the valleys, clusters and free groves of poplars are ubiquitous. Expansive and fastigate treetops intermingle. The strong vertical marks contrast—and underline—the undulating horizontals of the topography. It is as if the poplars served as notation points in the linear sequences of the valley space.



Fastigate and regular poplar growing together in the valleys.



Lower end of Rose Valley. Access for ballooning and quad tours.



Lower end of Rose Valley. 'Airstrip' for ballooning and starting point for quad tours.

wild west

In many aspects, the lands of Cappadocia are an easy prey to un-hindered exploitation. The effects of the tourist economy is eroding traditional agriculture. The 'instagramable' scenic landscape backdrop is mainly pictured from the air. Nevşehir-Kapadokya and Kayseri Erkilet international airports, were both opened in 1998 and receive floods of tourists for rapid visits. Some 200 hot air balloon starts per day occur in Göreme. While individually light and with no permanently necessary structural interventions, the balloons require starting grounds and space for landings, which are quite often haphazard and damage crops. The continuous, often borderless topography seems to promise a 'Wild West' style freedom that is realised by the uninhibited exploitation of ranch-style horse riding, quad tours and cross terrain safaris. This kind

of ranging on unmarked paths, or free style, unbound, inevitably wears down the soil, causes rock surface abrasion, and destroys vegetation. Barren and open soil takes the place of fields and groves.



Irrigated garden patch. Rose Valley.

gardening

In the valleys, the vegetation is generally ample and sumptuous. Blissfully rich and exuberant amidst a vast geologic landscape that—at more than a thousand meters above sea level—is simultaneously harsh and barren. Perambulating the valleys, one perceives a continuous garden, full of flowers and fruits. The existence of a diverse variety of fruit trees, vines and berries bears witness to a (formerly) industrious garden culture. However, the plantations are in various states of topicality—from wildly overgrown to actual productive states. All the gardens are of a rather small dimension, at the level of subsistence agriculture. For the visitor, the borders of individual properties are not apparent. Rarely bound by fences or walls, the hiker literally wanders through the fields. Constructions have a fleeting, improvised character. And while nothing seems worth stealing, some clarifying signage indicating pathways has recently been implemented.



Dispersed plantings of wine and apricots.

dispersion

The agriculture consists of many individual plantings amidst a varied, ruderal vegetation. Pasolini writes, “there are plenty of fruit trees [...] Alone with their shadow.”¹ Every planting an attempt; a singular effort. Can we imagine that each individual plant is given a name?



View from an open 'room' in the rock over vines and the deeply incised stream. Rose Valley.



Ornamented dove coves in Soğanlı.



Pigeon dung as fertilizer in Ibrahim's vineyard, Red Valley.

symbiosis

The esteem for pigeons must have equalled the profoundness of the human desire to fly. Constructed at the most dizzying heights and often lovingly adorned, the innumerable dove coves substantiate life in the valleys.

Barely a soil, the raw mineral material fresh off the rocks is not fertile enough to sustain agriculture. We learned from Ibrahim that not the surface, but each individual plant is fertilised by a shovel of pigeon dung on each side of the roots: placed deep enough to be in the immediate reach of the roots, and far enough from the surface to not be washed out and carried off.



Improvised stand for selling fruit juice in front of the entrance to Column Church, Rose Valley.



Light, temporary roof structure at (informal) café at Cross Church, Rose Valley.

makeshift

While the cavernous architectures and rock formations are voluminous and massive, constructions in the open consist of light interventions; collaged, tinkered makeshift structures. In the light of public exposure, with hardly any social surveillance, whatever is built has as slight a monetary value as possible. Except for the architectures carved from the rock, nothing seems to be conceived for permanence. But then, even the rock architecture has been obviously reshaped, extended, re-functionalised, or abandoned. We find here a building culture that is not driven by programming and grand gestures, but rather one of common sense and pastoral smartness that is 'carved'; forming inventively from what is given. When considering possible improvements around heritage sites for better protection and control: would one not

wish for an imaginative, inventive architectural vocabulary? A careful adaptation of architecture that would lightly, and sensibly access this fluid cultural heritage. Not a fun-park, or museum-like architecture of never-changing appearance and program, but activators and protectors of the existing feeble substance that would echo the fluidity and inventiveness of the valleys.



Cartographic sketch of vegetation structures in part of Rose Valley (Ibrahim's garden).
Based on bingmap satellite imagery.



Outdoor kitchen. Ibrahim's garden, Red Valley.

cooking

Given the renowned culinary and hospitable character of Turkish and Anatolian culture, one might imagine that fostering a locally sustainable and creative gastronomy would establish a stable bridge between tourism and the sensitive landscape. Reactivating and furthering autochthonous food production and processing might simultaneously help to re-cultivate and maintain a careful relationship with the landscape. What a 'feast' for the guests and the hosting landscape alike!



Representation of trees, Santa Barbara, Göreme Open Air Museum.

representation

The complexes of troglodyte churches, monasteries, and dwellings, that have been awarded world heritage status, are anything but a world hidden away in stone. While the function, expanse and splendour of these constructions are often not at once apparent to the outside, the connection between interior and exterior is immediate. Living in dark, cavernous, inner spaces is not conceivable without a bright, open exterior. Both are inextricably linked as one. Maria Andaloro pointed out that the frequent use of simple triangular forms in some of the church paintings might not just be a geometric decorative element, but also recall the ubiquitous cone shapes of the landscape. If so, the drawings at St. Barbara church in Göreme could also be read as a representation of life in the this very specific, overarching landscape of Cappadocia.



Broom made from artemisia. Sweeping the ground in the entrance court of Keşlik Monastery, Damsa Valley, Ürgüp.



Brooms made from artemisia. Keşlik Monastery, Damsa Valley, Ürgüp.

gentleness

A former monastery. The caretakers, an older couple, maintain the place in a way that might serve as a metaphor of sensibility. In the entrance courtyard, under a shady walnut tree, the bare earth is kept impeccably clean. The sensitive surface of the exposed ground is swept with simple brooms crafted from mugwort weed from the fields around. A small gesture, certainly achieved with great physical effort and strain, and a bowed back. A careful, tender treatment. And while we do not ask for stand-ins who would populate a fabricated nostalgia for a pre-modern paradise, the ground thus prepared urges unto us a deep respect for this place and people. It's a place where we happily rested and lingered on.



Poplar




Guelder-rose



Apricot



Silverberry



moonlight

We met Crazy Ali in his former antique shop in Ortahisar. He is more a poet than a salesman and he read some of his poems to us. He told us that long ago he worked as a tourist guide in Cappadocia. He claimed to have been the first to conceive walks through Rose Valley and Red Valley, presenting their beauty in the tours he guided. His favourite excursions were those done in the light of the full moon. Like any true poet, he valued silence and made that a requirement on the walks—and punished disturbance by aborting the tour.

When we left his shop, I thanked him for his poems—and his silence.