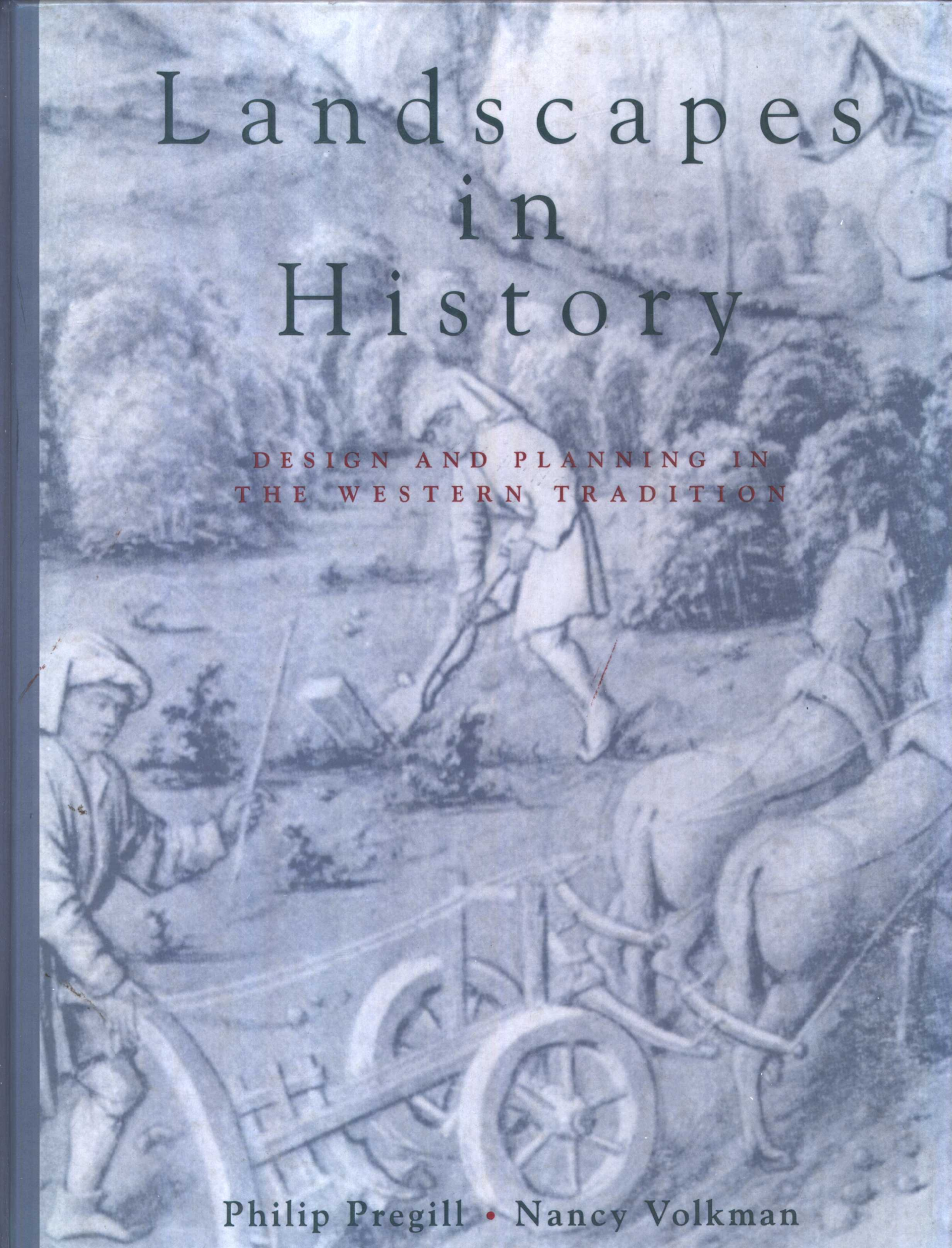
Landscapes in History

DESIGN AND PLANNING IN THE WESTERN TRADITION



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VAN NOSTRAND REINHOLD
New York

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 91-48094
ISBN 0-442-31804-9

Printed in the United States of America.

Van Nostrand Reinhold
115 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10003

Chapman and Hall
2-6 Boundary Row
London, SE1 8HN, England

Thomas Nelson Australia
102 Dodds Street
South Melbourne 3205
Victoria, Australia

Nelson Canada
1120 Birchmount Road
Scarborough, Ontario MIK 5G4, Canada

16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pregill, Philip, 1944-
History of landscape architecture / Philip Pregill, Nancy Volkman.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-442-31804-9
1. Landscape architecture—History. I. Volkman, Nancy, 1949-
II. Title.
SB470.5.P74 1992
304.2'3—dc20 91-48094

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Preface

The history of human interaction with the landscape spans the scope of cultural achievement. During the past ten millennia—the period of human evolution defined by settlement and technological advancement—religion, philosophy, economics, politics, and aesthetics have directed the course of human activity in the landscape. While landscape does not determine human endeavors, it has set limits to human activity and has directed subsequent human strategies. In the large scale these strategies include broad land use patterns, often leading to metaphysical interpretations of physical reality. In the small scale, landscape often functioned like an environmental toy, molded to express human abstractions of natural landscapes. Sometimes these particular schema have led to artificial fantasy environments with little relationship to the natural landscape, save for the need to feed some real or perceived human need. This book explores these patterns of human utilization of the landscape from prehistory to the present, illuminated by pertinent physical and cultural circumstances.

As much as we are tied to modern perceptions of the landscape, earlier periods reaching back to early human hunting and gathering also influence our values and understanding of the environment. Migration, early sedentarism, agriculture, and preindustrialization all contribute to the layers of human predilection regarding the land, especially in forming our perennial fascination with the pastoral and the idealized landscape.

Our modern concern with planned and designed landscapes is a relatively new concern, stemming from Renaissance interest in great architectural and landscape architectural works from antiquity. The classical revival of the Renaissance established the study of past architectural works, an important cultural activity that fostered broader design vocabularies beyond traditional, vernacular themes. Then, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the expanding field of archeology exposed deeper layers of past environmental works. These revelations expanded the scope of earlier design concepts and made designers more aware of the range of design solutions—including some that were ill fitted to their own era. The nineteenth century was an especially important period in this incipient study of past designs, fueled by European and American nationalism and romanticism, which encouraged serious organized study of historic built environments. In addition, improvements in printing and publication and the growth of literacy allowed greater dissemination of historical information. These factors led to a florescence of serious study of landscape architectural history in the early twentieth century, when the Beaux Arts revival focused on history and precedents. The outcome was a series of garden design histories, with an attenuated regard for the history of large-scale land use and land planning, except among those pursuing the emerging geographical disciplines.

Among the first works to address comprehensively the subject of landscape architectural history was Newton's *Design on the Land,* first published in 1971. This book and three other standard references—G.B. Tobey's *A History of Landscape Architecture: The Relationship of People to the Environment,* Susan and Geoffrey Jellicoe's *The Landscape of Man,* and W. Mann's *Space and Time in Landscape: Architectural History,* are major syntheses of landscape architectural history. In addition, since its inception in 1910, the periodical *Landscape Architecture* had

included articles dealing with the history of the profession, most of which focused on Renaissance design or American design since the colonial period. However, in the past twenty-five years a more academic strategy has imbued landscape architectural history with a greater sense of scholarship. Much of this effort has combined traditional art and architectural methodologies with new investigative methods suitable to the scale and transigence of landscapes. Lately, research in design, geography, and landscape ideology had added to our comprehension of the environment. It is the purpose of this book to combine the substance of earlier summary histories with the new research and interpretations into a overview of the human landscape as it is now understood.

Certainly it is necessary to synthesize traditional and contemporary information about land planning and design; however a mere update of landscape architectural history would overlook the larger implications of the subject, especially the need to place it within a broader social and environmental setting. Therefore, this book examines the role of six issues in human interaction with the environment: the relationship of people to the natural environment; the effect of technology; human values concerning urban, rural, and natural landscapes; symbolism of the landscape; the social role of design; and the role of aesthetics in land planning and design.

Discussion of the first issue, the relationship of humans to the natural environment must reach back to humankind's early migrations in the landscape, and concludes with a summary of contemporary environmental issues. In between, the discussion engages physical and psychic dimensions, both of which are relevant to attitudes and values about the landscape. Throughout, humans have established a relative relationship to the landscape as master, servant, steward, or interpreter of the natural world. These roles rest in large part on the level of technology possessed by a particular society at a given time. For example, mastery of a region could not have occurred without the development of agriculture and reclamation techniques in the earliest cultures, nor would a sense of stewardship have emerged without the effects of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century industrialization, including the introduction of new forms of transportation after the eighteenth century, which altered the use and appearance of the landscape.

Thus for some time people have viewed the environment as either natural—unaltered by human activity—or urban and rural. These categories stem from prevailing attitudes and values about the landscape. For example, prehistoric cultures, in the early stages of forming urban patterns, were likely to be more influenced by the natural environment, while within a few thousand years, agricultural societies had clearly distinguished urban and rural environments. Within the recent past, as humans commodified the landscape, the urban, rural, and natural distinction became more pertinent. During each phase, humans have evidenced a preference for one or more of these landscapes over the others; recently, contradictory preferences for either urban or rural living have emerged as people idealize one and malign the other. These preferences indicate a deeper consciousness regarding the landscape, beyond a desire that it merely satisfy functional needs. Every culture has had some symbolic attachment to the landscape, including the earliest prehistoric settlements, whose inhabitants maintained vigorous animistic religions. Much later, certain environments—for example, Walden Pond—symbolized human spiritual freedom, while others—the Dutch polders, for example—symbolized human ingenuity and persistence. Modern cultures maintain a symbolic vocabulary as well, apparent in designed landscapes including cemeteries, monuments, and, lately, avant-garde works in urban settings. Regionally, landscapes such as the Black Forest in southwestern Germany and the Hudson River valley in North America reign as symbols for natural beauty.

At the personal level, landscapes have also been a vehicle for social expression, a way of indicating status. Design in the hands of individuals and powerful groups has left an indelible mark on the landscape, notably in the building of sumptuous pleasure landscapes. Early on, the possession of lands allowed certain individuals to establish a superior position in society. Soon after, planning and design of private landscapes increased one's social status, and later, less fortunate individuals began to create their own distinctive landscapes within the urban realm. The possession of some part of the landscape is still regarded as a measure of social worth, especially as democratic capitalism spreads throughout the globe. Implied in the issue of social status is the concept of aesthetics, the presentation of some sense of order in the design and planning of the landscape. Each major phase of human activity carries an aesthetic label, certain cultures bearing a more graceful tag than others. Regardless, this last issue sums up the previous five by expressing a particular culture's sense of order within the perceived randomness of the natural world.

This text's exploration of these six issues within the context of landscape architectural history relies on two sources of information: existing literature and documentation in design, archaeology, geography, and aesthetics, and field observation and analysis. By using documentary sources, including unpublished material, it is possible to form a better impression of the recent past within the backdrop of earlier history. However, field study is also essential to confirm with the eye the impressions gathered from the literature. The material presented by the authors includes the results of years of travel and field observation and analysis. However, as with any summary work only a selection of relevant issues and material could be addressed in this book.

The book consists of two sections. Part One examines the European region, including adjacent Near Eastern and North African lands, and traces the development of human activity in the landscape through early settlement, agricultural societies, industrialization, and the modern period. Much of the material deals with landscape design and planning before the inception of formal landscape architectural practice. This section emphasizes the development of techniques and values that are antecedent of the North American experience, though it does not exclude events that have occurred in the recent past within or near the European region. Part Two reviews landscape precedence in North America from prehistoric to contemporary times, with particular emphasis on the emergence and the philosophical development of the profession of landscape architecture.

Contents

PART ONE

THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE

Introduction to Part One
The European Landscape

Only ten thousand years have passed since the first settlements appeared in the Near Eastern foothills, a short duration in human evolution. In those ten millennia, human culture has evolved from occupying a tentative place in the landscape to near control over many of its environmental elements. In the process there has been a perceptible cycle in which cultural efflorescence preceded social stagnation and decline, often the result of economic expansion reaching the limits of landscape sustainability. All of these achievements and failures—the agriculture, industrial, and early modern phases of landscape utilization—have an influence on how we, as contemporary individuals, perceive and utilize the landscape.

Within this broad framework of events, we will examine two aspects of human utilization of the environment in the Near East and Europe that cause us to form conclusions about landscape history. The first has to do with how and why humans have shaped the landscape over the millennia, and how certain values influenced the use of particular technical strategies over others. The second aspect has to do with perception—or idealization—of the landscape, itself a function of human values relative to time and place. Together these aspects stimulated societies to create patterns in the landscape, public and personal, that over time have created a rich layering of form and meaning in the old world and European region. Each of these layers is stamped with exemplary evidence of human endeavor, as well as a sense of how far a culture could expand before the environment limited human advancement.

In the European Region—by which we mean here the lands surrounding the Mediterranean basin, including the Near East and continental Europe—time and human activity define several broad periods of landscape development. The first phase, prehistory, is the period of human activity through the end of the most recent Ice Age, 9200 B.C., during which humans had a minimal impact on the structure and function of the landscape. The second phase is the period of agricultural civilizations, beginning with the small communities in the uplands of southwestern Asia and concluding with the beginning of industrialization in Western Europe in 1400 A.D. The third phase includes the period of industrialization and rapid urbanization in the West; the emergence of national political regions and the influence of the Renaissance, Baroque, and Romantic aesthetics. This phase corresponds to a period when the "idea" of landscape—landscape as an economic and aesthetic entity—prevailed in Western Europe. The fourth and last phase includes the period from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present, when changes in science, politics, and art altered the way we currently view and affect the landscape.