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### Original Research Article

## Explaining the Contribution of Power to the Context of Communities in the Middle Ages and its Effect on the Functional Evolution of Gardens in the 6th-15 th Centuries

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### Abstract

**Problem statement:** The factor of religion and the domination of the church's instructions are the reason for undeveloped garden construction in the Middle ages. According to this fact, the human being in the Christianity era ignored nature and its manifestations because of ideological and extreme visions. As the matter of fact, the power of religious thoughts has led to not the cohesive gardens being formed in the early Middle Ages. As this power weakened in the late ages, the gardens were constructed according to aesthetics aspects. Religion dominated all dimension of the society. Therefore, other factors such as social status and people's livelihood, political revolutions of sovereign powers, and economical situations have not been precisely investigated.

**Research objectives:** This research aims to investigate the reasons for developing gardens in the Middle Ages and answers the question of whether or not the religious dogmatism and the belief injected by the church about nature, make a negative impression on the essence and function of gardens in the middle ages. Except for religion, which factors are interfering in the functional evolutions of this era?

**Research method:** This research specifies the functions of gardens in the Middle Ages manipulating the indicating approach and analytic method. The research considers historical events and social context based on the written and pictorial analysis.

**Conclusion:** Research findings represent the combination of religious, political, economic, and social factors in Middle Age cities during 9 centuries, had affected the construction of the gardens in this era and the factor of power also rulers determined the essence, soul, and function of the gardens. In the 6- 12 th centuries, the rulers (church- feudal) created religious, livelihood- functional gardens and in the 12-15 th centuries, elites (business categories) formed joyful gardens.

**Keywords:** *The function of gardens in the Middle Ages, The context of society, Church- feudal system, Business categories, Power.*

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## Introduction

According to ancient philosophy, the universe was God-based and nature was God's inhabitant (Ghalandarian, Taghvaei & Kamyar, 2016, 65; Qodusifar, Habib & Shahbazi, 2012, 39). Therefore, some believe gardens in Sent era result from religious belief and accompanied by antecedents' experience and practical skills and garden construction represents the symbols of God (Haghighatbin et al., 2018; Liddiard & Williamson, 2008) but in the Middle ages, Johannes Scotus Eriugena and Saint Augustinus's philosophy states that "The Universe and all its belongings are God's creatures. However, since nature was found guilty about human's downfall, the vicious nature replaced the righteous one (Nasr, 2007, 29). Martin (397AC) criticized polytheistic statues and sacred trees and believed that cutting trees was ethically essential (Turner, 2016; Koenigsberger, 1987; Seignobos, 1933). Just after the 12-century proceeding Thomas Aquinas's statements, the positive features of nature were considered again (Nasr, 2007, 136-137). According to this view, gardens in the Middle ages were fruitful with simple structure. Since they were influenced by religious view of church, they lacked any aesthetic aspects. In fact, these gardens were owned by affluent people (Haghighatbin et al., 2018) on other word, all dimensions of life were dominated by religion which leads to mind block and negative attitude toward nature. (Gholtash & Setayesh Fard, 2017; Qodusifar, Habib & Shahbazi, 2012). Therefore, the Middle Ages are considered as a demotion for the construction of the gardens (Fig. 1).

On the contrary, others believe the Middle Ages are distortions of Christianity not religious civilization (Zarshenas, 2008). The belief which says that Christianity era's human denies nature is wrong (Bies, 1905). Although church had a critical impression on people's attitude toward nature, it never caused it to have been removed from people's life. In the Middle Ages, there was

a mutual relationship between nature and human, also his eagerness to plant symbolism in religious frame in the Christianity era, represent his interest in the nature (Le Goff, 1988; Bies, 1905). According to tribal laws, deforestation and cutting the trees were forbidden except for building houses (Rohr, 2002). Also the investigation of artistic works like drawings from the Middle Ages, illustrates that nature and its elements as perfection signs and divinity symbols were found in the frame of religious and non-religious gardens (Bredin, 2002; Impelluso, 2007). Moreover, the medieval literature and poems reflects people's enjoyment of plants, gardens, and landscapes (Harvey, 1981).

Although there are many studies about human beings' vision for nature in the Middle Ages proceeding research about garden and garden construction based on a religious view, fewer studies have been conducted on the influential aspects over the construction of gardens in this era. Garden is a cultural phenomenon; it is the presence of beliefs, the hidden values in the context of society, and the instrument for expressing power. The relationship between the purpose of those who have constructed the garden (the "why" question) and its physical features (the "how" question) is a significant relationship which creates the overall pattern of the garden in a certain cultural and geographical context in a series of casual relations and presents the garden in the form of comprehensive totality and as a conceptual physical phenomenon (Abarghouei Fard, Saboonchi & Motedayen, 2021). Rereading this context can indicate the function of the garden in relation to the interpretation of the formal-semantic layers of human-nature systems in three levels: 1) meaning as beliefs and intellectual foundations of societies and type of mentality, 2) perception of nature through the senses, and 3) awareness of context and experience of events (Saboonchi & Abarghaouei Fard, 2020) in various socio-political-economic aspects. The integration

of these three levels for social institutions is a kind of cultural asset that is transmitted through cultural methods (Singh, Pretty & Pilgrim, 2010). Therefore, this research investigates the situation of Middle age cities through considering the context of society and deals with effective components in the functions of gardens in the Middle Ages. Based on these data, the research responds the question that whether garden construction is impressed just by religious beliefs or other factors are involved as well.

### The method of research

Descriptive and specifying approaches are important approaches in the study of historical research. According to the descriptive research, features, manners, signs, qualities, similarities, equalities in study subject have been described objectively without considering the causes (Moftakhari, 2010; Freund, 1983; Sarukhani, 1996; Rosher, 2002). while the enriched specification was the description and specifying approach analyses the investigation of the signs collection on created relationship between independent phenomena through the integrity generality (Mardiha, 2003; Moftakhari, 2010). Specifying historical subjects is in regard to ethnography with important explanation (Geertz, 1973). This approach represents a suitable

methodology frame for revealing the meanings, ideas, and various interpretations from cultural phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Huberman & Miles, 1994 quoted by Saboonchi, 2021).

This research firstly depicts the framework and functional features of gardens by the historical-analytical method and through a descriptive approach. Then it investigates the context of societies in the Middle Ages by foundational, religious, social, economic, and political indexes. Finally, it analyzes the reasons for functional evolution and the semantic dimensions of gardens in accordance with specifying approach and the current study. Since the lack of documents before 1100 AC, identifying the roots or developing the gardens is an arduous task (Lewis & Mitchell-Fox & Dyer, 1997) and it is just provided through studying the artistic works and ancient passages (Turner, 2016). The data of this research has been compiled based on written resources, books, pictorial essays, photos, pictures, and maps.

### Theoretical foundations

• **Form, function, and the meaning of Middle age gardens from a descriptive view**  
 Gardens in the Middle ages had various types of eclectic gardens (combinative), meditation, and ornamental gardens, and restricting their functions to food and medicine is not true (MacDougall,

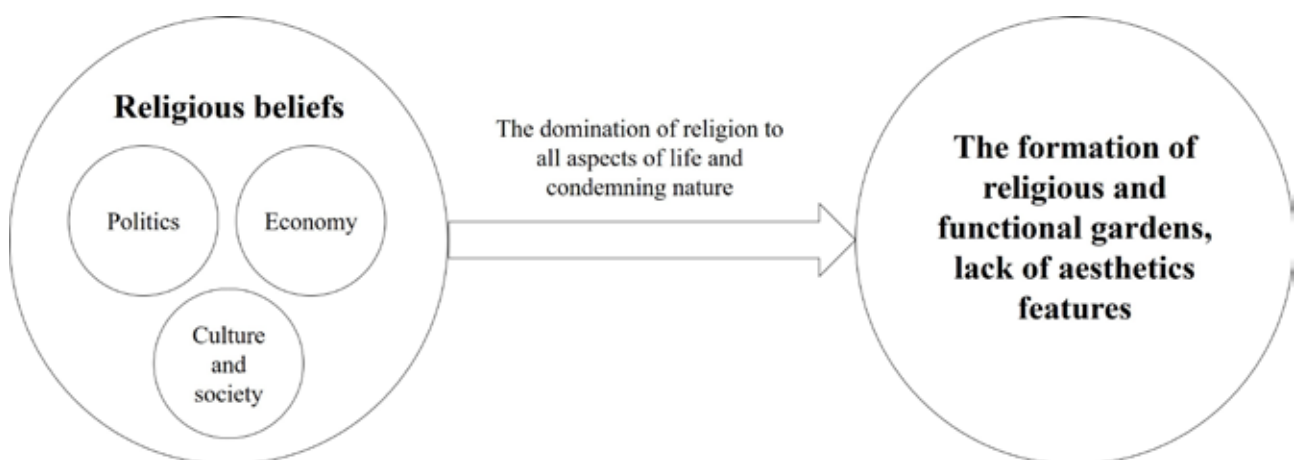


Fig. 1. The model is based on the domination of beliefs and religious thoughts in Middle age gardens. Source: Authors.

1986). In general, we can refer to three species of gardens; religious, functional, decorative (Landsberg, 2003).

• **Religious garden**

Church garden, monastic garden, hospital garden, t- meditation garden, religious garden and imagination garden are various kinds of religious and closed gardens (Hortus Conclusus), especially in early Middle Ages. Yard- garden, monastic garden were places for religious meditation and praying. Also there was a combination of fruitful agricultural gardens with plants and symbolic flowers in the yards as small gardens (Fig. 2). The plants which were cultivated by monks in the terraces were the symbols of heaven, God, and Saint Maria. They were also used for supplying food and medicine. Closeness, cross modeling cultivation, fountain or tree in the center are the figurative features of these gardens. The walls of the gardens were symbolically expressing the borders between the disciplined nature-wild nature – the inner discipline –external undisciplined. The four-part plan is the symbol of the four heaven river, four- main virtue, and four

bibles (Impelluso, 2007), and practical gardening functioned as edification and pray.

• **Functional garden**

In the early Middle Ages, livelihood-functional gardens were constructed to supply food, breeding plants, and gardening; the most common of that kitchen garden including organized terrace and above ground (Fig. 3). Garden of the feudal castles as masters’ residence were the Romance military castles (Le Goff, 1988) and in case of danger, local people took shelter there. castle gardens were the center of military and administration and designed based on functional, economic, defense (Morris, 2006, 98). Outside of these castles, the farmlands were formed to cultivate and plant in order to supply food for villagers (Fig. 4). On the contrary to relatively cohesive terraces, these gardens had never been recognized as formal gardens.

Ornamental gardens: In the late Middle ages, the secular gardens as a garden in aesthetic content replaced the religious gardens in the late 11th century and the early 12th century (Harvey, 1981, 11) the pleasure or ornamental gardens were the first formal gardens and were the result

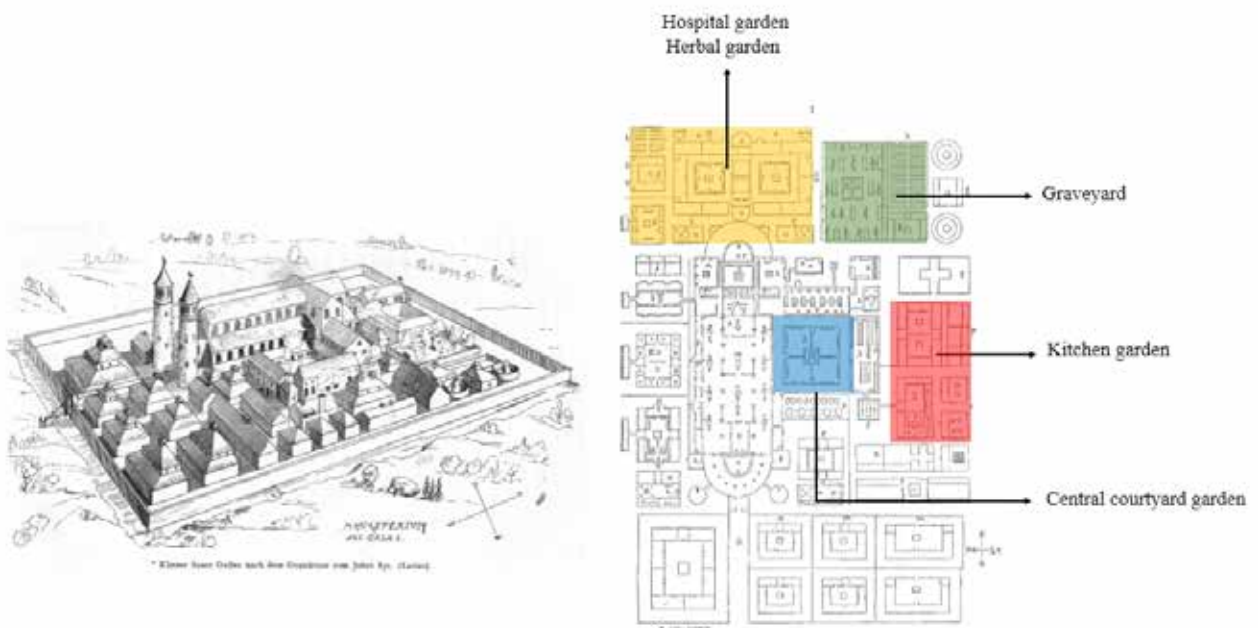


Fig. 2. The fruitful and symbolic eclectic gardens in the Abbey of Saint Gall’s yard. 816-820. Source: Rudolf Rahn, 1876.





Fig. 3. Kitchen garden inside the castle with organized raised beds above the ground and enclosed by fences. Source: Crescenzi, 1230-1320.

of the castles gardens development (Teysot, 1998; Zimmer, 1998) they were constructed to have pleasant landscapes, reconstruction, and beautifying of residential environment, playing and hunting around the castles, fruitful agricultural land and lakes (Haghighatbin et al., 2018; Roberts, 1998; Taylor, 1989). Archeological excavation in various regions of Britain represents the documentation of castle gardens the Middle Ages which indicates the construction of ornamental and hunting landscapes, formal gardens, not merely functional or agricultural in the 11th-12th centuries (Taylor, 2000); (Fig.5).

### The description of Middle age societies' context

Learning about different productive layers of society and investigation of streams of thoughts and events can lead to the multi interpretation

of Middle age gardens. The city essence and the political, economic, also social layers are the Middle ages case study.

#### • Physical context

The location of the Middle ages cities is on the ruin of romance cities or was based on (Benevolo, 2006) natural constructions. Barrier, moat, and natural organs were the deterrent elements against the enemy (Rohr, 2002, Benevolo, 1980, 308). Therefore ensuring security was the most important issue and defense indicated residents' financial ability and independence (Pakzad, 2013, 222). According to inside threat, (the war of power between trade people and serves against feudal who were supported by the church) and



Fig. 4. Agricultural lands, zoo and hunting garden outside the castle. Source: Cazelles & Rathofer, 2001.



Fig. 5. The ancient castle in Yorkshire England which the moat around it (for the security of castle) lake (hunting garden) playfields and agricultural lands are identifiable. Source: Taylor, 2000 (Cambridge University of Collection of Air Photographs).

outside threat especially after 9th AC (Javadian et al., 2000, 206; Mumford, 2006; 52), the context of city was formed as cramp and surrounded environment in which the feudal castle was in the center, agricultural gardens were located out of the castle and bound green space in inside yard (Dabaghian, 2017; 50, Durant, 2001, Benevolo, 1980).

**- Political context**

In the 3rd AC the Middle ages residence such as scattered villages were appeared which were ruled by bipolar systems; feudalism and church and being the member of them meant having the resource of permanent welfare and life (Dobb, 1980, 137; Mumford, 2006, 54). From 9th to 10th AC villages were becoming cities by the renaissance in economic life, population growth and developing of industry and business (Morris, 2006, 117; Benevolo, 2006, 35) and finally in 12th AC cities like non feudal islands were risen from feudalism sea (Postan & Habakkuk & Miller, 1987, 212). The necessity of establishing this network of cities (satellite cities around one big city) prioritized economic needs, since not only did this essentiality weaken the church's power but also made a revolution in social cast and hierarchy. In that case, in the late Middle Ages,

citizens and business people replaced clergymen and feudals (Pirenne,1946, 195; Dyer,1989).

**- Economic context**

The agricultural economy in villages continued until early 9th Ac after that, traders and craftsmen's immigrated to the feudal castles nearby, churches, bridges, crowded areas, the cities appeared and (Donskoi & Agibalova, 1978, 96) the economic corporations were found. Churches did not confirm these corporations' activities. As Saint Thomas Aquinas says "among occupations, business is the most abominable ones" (Becker & Duncalf, 2001, 299; quoted by Haghir & Kamelnia, 2016). As the corporations became independent and the power of the economy became exclusive, being a member of those corporations led to achieving citizenship and political, social existence (Soleimani & Parvareh, 2016, 92-94). Citizen corporatiosn such as the Medici family ,who were the biggest Italian bankers, were village traders in 13th Ac (Hause & Maltby, 2004, 185) they set the stage for ideological and thought revolution by rejecting church- feudal ruling system. Credit replaced the faith (Mumford, 2006, 55) business and trading centers took the church's place in the heart of the city (Palliser, 2000, 4; Hohenberg & Lees, 1996, 31-32).

**- Social context**

Regional conditions, water resources, and fruitful lands for agriculture affected the population growth and various Middle ages residence. There were about 60000 cities until 13th Ac (Crouzet, 2001, 24). As villages were apart from each other, production depended on local labors and the majority of people worked on agricultural lands outside the castles or gardens (Le Guff, 1988) this agricultural production was the main target of the enemy's attack. Therefore, in this situation supplying the required food to avoid famine and hunger, fighting with invaders, security issues, fear of losing villages and agricultural lands, natural disasters, and contagious disease outbreak



were the most important concerns in Middle age societies.

**Discussion**

**• The functional evolution of the Middle age garden based on the social context**

As it is said about the situation of European countries in the Middle ages, the construction of the garden and its functions dates back to two periods; religious and livelihood gardens in 6th to 12th Ac and pleasure garden in the 12th – 15th. The beginning of renascence is the dividing line between the first and second half of the Middle Ages (Hauser, 1984, 221). This century was the historical crisis to change the religious thoughts and beliefs and the landmark for huge political, social, and economic revolutions that can be named as one of the key roots of renascence thoughts.

6th – 12th century AD: In this periodic time, the general architecture – city- view restricted the expansion of garden because of social issues and foundations. Generally speaking, determining the

type of function was dependent on the church-feudal system in the frame of constructing symbolic religious gardens and non-livelihood and non-religious gardens.

Religious gardens: This garden is influenced by the church and its thoughts in a political and social context. Garden- church’s yard, monastic garden, garden- thought and garden- imagination have more symbolic and spiritual form than their previous gardens. The foundation form and its elements were simple reflecting imaginations from heaven (Turner, 2016). Hospital gardens (being formed in monasteries’ yards) were considered symbolically curable for patients and cured them with herbal medicines. Actually because of social situation (the pressure derived from insecurity and instability) and the type of city foundation, monks cured patients. Writing books and various written prescriptions about fighting with a disease, herbal botany, and paying attention to medicine indicate the importance of health in the Middle Ages (Carella, 2010); (Fig. 6).

Non-religious gardens: Creating these gardens

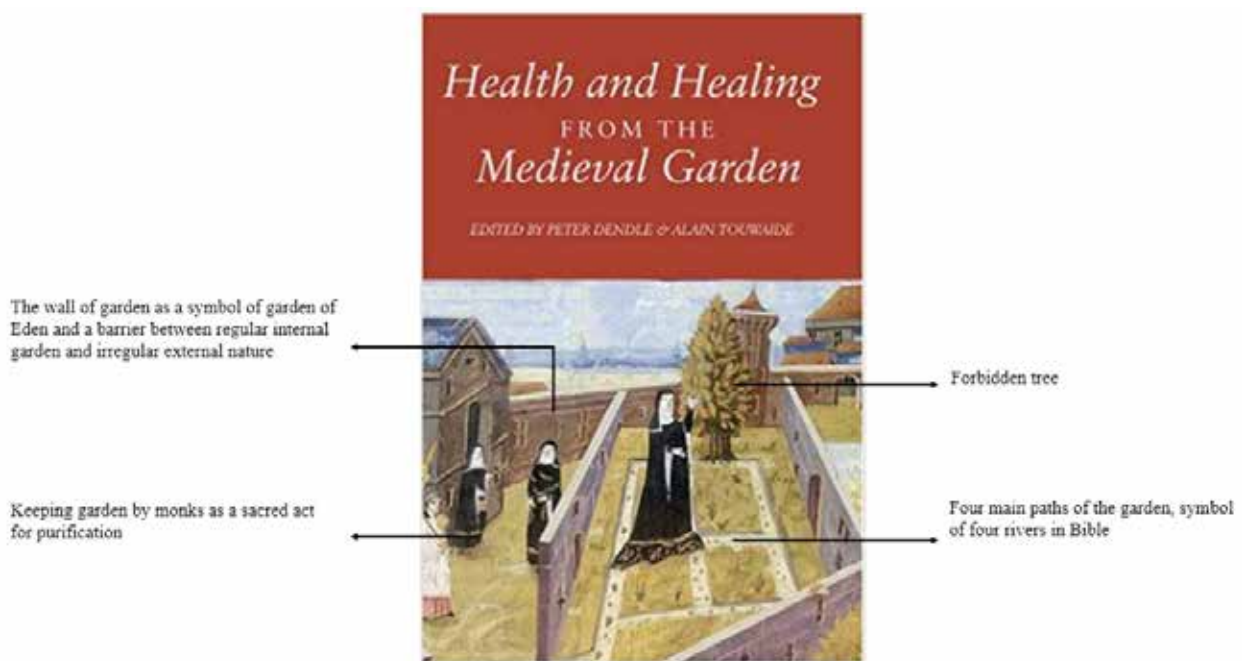


Fig.6. Hospital gardens in monasteries. Source: Dendle & Touwaide, 2015.

derive from feudal's domination in the economic and political context. Castles gardens, agricultural gardens, and zoos were created based on societies' requirements in social layers (supplying foods for villagers, food security, war, and strangers' threat) and economic factors (feudal made income from agricultural lands). Political, social, and economic factors caused restrictions for developing gardens as a pleasurable place therefore, little gardening gardens, and kitchen gardens were formed under the social conditions and cities foundation. As the matter of fact, religious factors as a justifying reason prevented enjoying nature and beautifying gardens.

12th-15th century AD: Because of social, political, and economic evolutions which were derived from emerging cities, corporations, the state of new ideology expressed by the genius and anti-structural people (in contradiction with previous religious thoughts), also the causation of relative stability and calmness the new world with new form and thought came into existence in which the construction of gardens in accordance with function, religion, and symbols changed to worldly gardens for recreation, pleasure and play. Later, the garden constructors' attitude toward nature in a more cohesive frame



Fig. 7. Garden-pleasure late Middle ages with amusement and aesthetic aspects. Source: Lewis, 1936.

according to form and function, set the stage for appearing renaissance gardens. From the semantic dimension, pleasures garden were impressed by elite citizens (business corporations) in the economic and social context and represented the lifestyle of this class (Taylor, 1972); (Fig. 7).

In general, we can specify in the early Middle ages, the politics and power dominated the society derived from the church- feudal system along with cities' social factors made a remarkable impression on constructing gardens in the Middle Ages. In late Middle ages 12th Ac as a vision change landmark, religious thought, and social revolutions, pleasure gardens were created proceeding the decrease of church power and rising against distorted, extreme Christianity. The findings of this study emphasize strengthening the political and economic power of business corporations was the main reason for decreasing the church's power. On the other hand, the emergence of business corporations led to church and feudalism collapse. Then intellectual priests' disagreement, intensified this process. Economic power as an index to prioritize cities, and as an anti-religion, introduced the cities' elites as a genius and powerful class of society; this group played a significant role in non-religious gardens and emerging garden- pleasures with aesthetic dimensions. Therefore, the power factor was the determiner in constructing gardens in each era.

## Conclusion

Although religion played an undeniable role in forming gardens during the Middle Ages, by investigating other factors considering it from different aspects, the power component in political, social, and economic areas can be recognized as the most influential aspect in on function essence of Middle age gardens. Religious and dogmatism are not the only influential factors, they are complement components along with other aspects. The kind of vision of nature from dominant power was imagined in the foundation of the garden.



Garden is the show of religious leaders, feudal and elites' power in different eras.

Based on this, in the first period of constructing gardens in the Middle Ages, religious and symbolic gardens were formed by religious people to represent God and Jesus's divinity. Feudal system's power was shown by the garden- castles, vast agricultural lands, and fruitful livelihood gardens to create dense cities for keeping security against attacks and lack of appropriate space to construct pleasurable gardens, the priority to supply food for a growing population,

disease outbreak, and natural disasters and the local economy based on agriculture was manifested. In the second period of the Middle Ages as business cities emerged, relative stability and calmness settled down, and religious thoughts were moderated proceeding church's influence, the upper class (business corporations in cities) determined the function of gardens. In contrast with church- feudalism thought and political system, the pleasurable gardens were created proceeding the secular gardens (garden-castle); (Fig. 8).

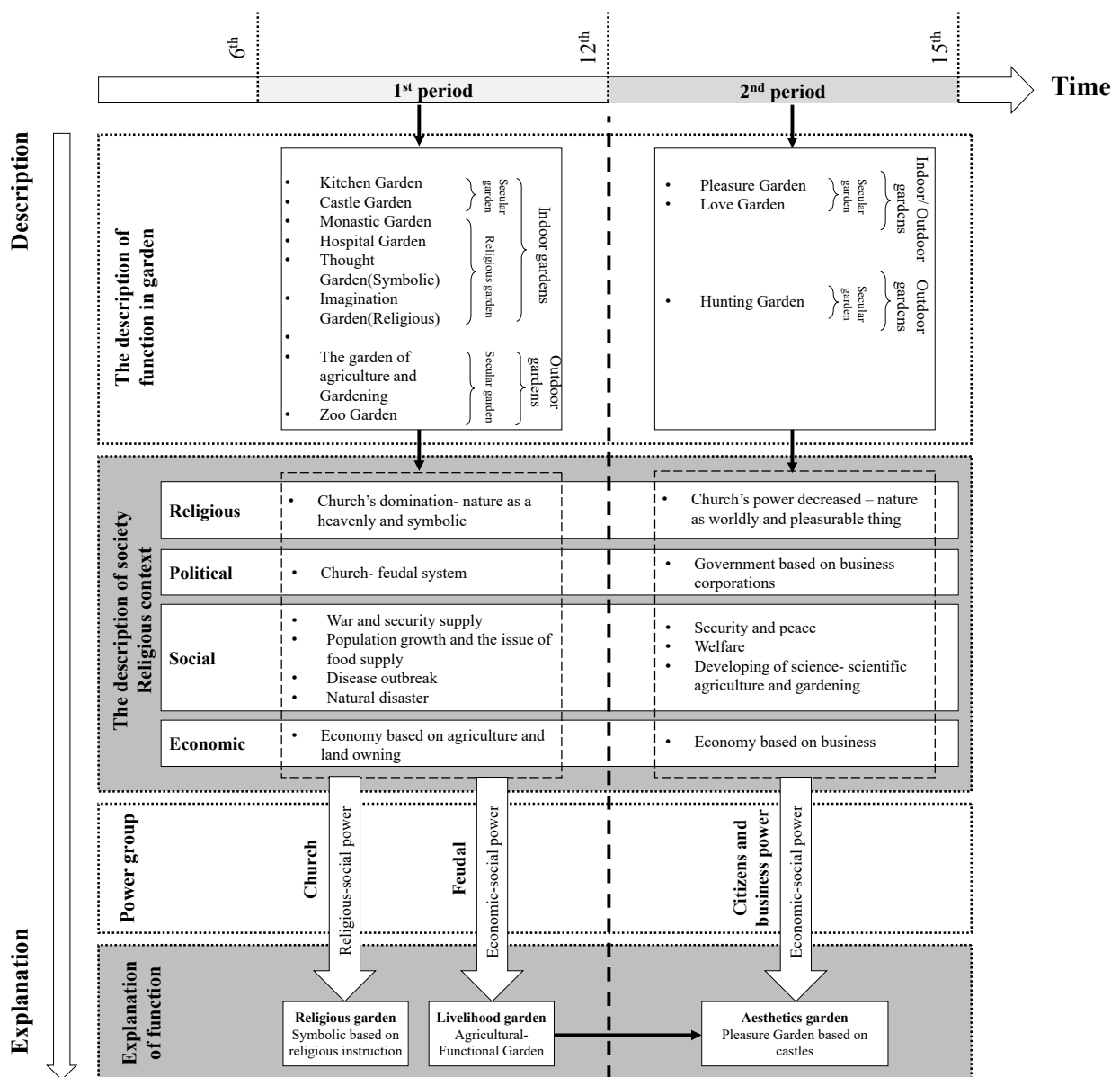


Fig. 8. Description and function of gardens in the Middle Ages. Source: Authors.

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