THE VILLAS OF PALLADIO

AND THE

TRANSFORMATION OF THE SITE

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para Mariana

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ABSTRACT

The complex panorama of the Mediterranean area in the fourteenth century compelled Venice to modify its economic patterns. The city started to pay attention to the Italian mainland, developing its agriculture and other industries. But the Veneto was marshy and needed to be drained and improved. The Venetian and mainland aristocracy gradually abandoned commerce for agriculture and land reclamation. Andrea Palladio built many villas for them from which they could administer their estates, transforming the marshes of the Veneto into sites for the villas. Those villas became the perfect place for retirement and contemplation.

RESUME

La situation complexe qui reignoit dans la Mediteranée au quatorzieme siecle a incité Venise a modifié sa stratégie économique. La ville a commencer à porter une attention particuliere au continent ainsi favorisant le developpement de l'agriculture et autres industries. Mais la region du Veneto étant marécageuse avait besoin d'un bon drainage et d'amelioration. L'aristocratie Venetiene et continental a graduellement abandoné ses commerces pour s'orienter vers l'agriculture et l'appropiation de la terre. Andrea Palladio à construit beacoup de villas pour ceux-ci, transformat les marécages du Veneto et permetant aux gens de mieux administrer leur propietes.

PREFACE

By the end of the fourteenth century, Venice was affected by important changes in the pattern of commerce in the Mediterranean sea, and by the military aggression of foreign powers. One of the richest city-states in Italy, Venice nevertheless owned hardly any territories, an essential requisite to attaining higher social levels among other Italian states. In order to endure in this complex panorama, Venice began to concentrate its attention on the Italian mainland as a source of food, protection, and international prestige. In this way Venice started to encourage land reclamation and agriculture. The patriciate and merchants enriched by trading focused their efforts on draining and improving the swamplands of the Veneto. They moved to their estates and built villas from which to administer them, while at the same time they enjoyed the pleasures of contemplative live. Many of these villas were designed by Andrea Palladio (1508-1580), who developed interesting and diverse

solutions to a whole new program in the Veneto The life of commerce and political affairs of the city was exchanged for the life of agriculture, scholarly contemplation, and amusement in the countryside

A great part of the territory was unsuitable for cultivation; therefore, a major effort was concentrated on transforming the marshes into profitable land. Renaissance man became aware of his power to transform the physical world; nevertheless, there was always a limit In the case of Palladio, the transformation of the site of the villa reveals his reconciliatory intentionality with nature. Despite the fact that Palladio never included any topographical reference of the site in his *Quattro Libri*, the importance of the site is crucial to each of his villas. In many other Renaissance villas, the garden is either enclosed by walls or open to the natural milieu, but with great changes, such as at the villas Belvedere and d'Este, respectively In Palladio's villas, however, both the building and the garden remain open to the landscape and nature.

Palladio's villas were regarded as farms, the country-seats of Venetian and mainland noblemen, and masterpieces of architecture All of these aspects are true, but they always were considered separately; however, Palladio put them together as part of a complex program. The majority of the written material about the villas focuses on their formal aspects, such as ornamentation, studies concerning their shape, and the

mathematical ratios that regulate their plans Avoiding the isolation of Palladio's work from its context, the present work attempts to analyze it in its proper political, social, and economic situation in order to focus attention on his architectural intentions rather than his built result.

In Palladio's *Quattro Libri*, it is difficult to find any trace of his intentionality about the villas and their relation to the site. It is important to understand that, during the Renaissance, theory was not instrumental. There was not a split between theory and practice, as Alberto Pérez-Gómez pointed out: "the former maintained its role as the elucidation and justification of the latter, while practice retained its primordial meaning as *poesis* (not merely *praxis*), as a form of reconciliation between man and the world,..."[1] It is not surprising, then, that Palladio took many things for granted when he wrote his treatise, for instance, the act of transformation. Hence, it is necessary to connect him with other figures of his time and from antiquity, in order to understand his intentions in the villas.

The main aim of this thesis is to explore the subtle connections between Palladio's villas and the site, and the recreation of the city in the villa. The first part of this work deals with the economic, social, and political events that led Venice to conquer the Italian mainland, by developing the Veneto through agriculture and land reclamation. Alvise

[1] . . . and the . . . of Modern . . . (Cambridge, Mass . . . MIT . . .)

Cornaro was among those who played an important role in the improvement of land and properties, and his interest in theatre had a great influence on Palladio's work The second part of this work explores the aristotelian influence on Palladio's aesthetic intentions, as well as that of Classical Roman scholars, all of these influences leading Palladio to recreate the past in his own way. He applied his creativeness to adapt the villas to each particular program, with immense coherence and diversity at the same time. The third part analyzes Palladio's intention to recreate a city in each villa, and the villa's relationship with the territory and the landscape This part also analyzes the importance of the site in Renaissance cosmology and its relation with the garden. Palladio's villas gather the site, the farm, the garden, the building, and its decoration into one whole

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SITE

Historical context in the late Venetian Renaissance

We tend to regard the Late Venetian Renaissance as a peaceful and happy part of the history of Venice. In reality, this age was a complicated period of great political, economic, and social changes. These same transformations, however, allowed Venice to survive around three hundred years longer than the other Italian states, which collapsed under foreign domination.

During the first thousand years after its foundation in March 412 AD,[2] Venice owned hardly any territory on the Italian mainland. Seeking protection from invading tribes, a group of *veneti*[3] (the inhabitants of the Veneto in Roman times) had moved off the mainland and founded Venice

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suggested as a probable date of foundation by William R. Thayer, *A Short History of Venice* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1905), p. 4

[3] Ibid, p. 3

on the Rialto Island amidst the changing lands and sluggish waters of the Venetian Lagoon.

By the end of the fourteenth century, the city-state of Genoa was Venice's most decided rival for the Levantine trade and for shipping routes in the Mediterranean. This tension ultimately led to the conflict known as The Genoese War, the final victory of which went to the Venetians in 1381 in the battle of Chioggia.
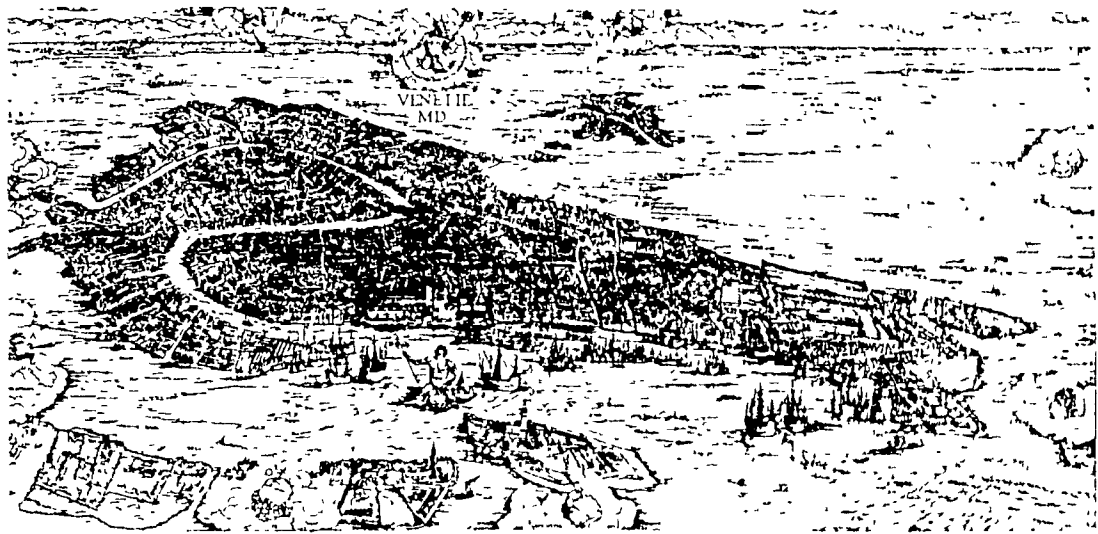
Aerial view of Venice, form Jacopo de'Barbieri *Venetie MD*

Once Venice defeated Genoa, the government of *La Serenissima* adopted an aggressive policy in northern Italy in order to secure the Venetian Republic against any future threat from the mainland. Political stability was brought to the region when the tyrannical *signori* of each rival city were replaced by the protection of a central government in Venice. Conquering the mainland brought protection from Venice's neighbours, a basis for international prestige; significantly, it also provided land to

cultivate for food, which had previously been brought from parts of the eastern Mediterranean that were now threatened by Turkish aggression.

Because this acquisition of land pressed upon the limits of St. Peter's patrimony, Venice was brought into direct conflict with the Papacy in 1483. The League of Cambrai, organized by Pope Julius II to stop the ambitions of Venice in the mainland, was the first great international coalition of arms in European history, combining the power of the Pope, Ferdinand II of Spain, Louis XII of France, the Emperor Maximilian. and a legion of minor Italian princelings. The League defeated the Venetian army at Agnadello in 1509. Facing total disaster, Venice deployed its diplomats among the members of the coalition, manipulating them into declaring war on each other. This manoeuvre was crowned by the Treaty of Noyon in 1516, with which *La Serenissima* regained all her lost territory in the *terraferma*.[4]

At the end of the fifteenth century, with the discovery by the Portuguese of a sea passage to India around the Cape of Good Hope, and the arrival of Columbus' caravels in America, Venetian trade came under fire. Nevertheless, Venice maintained an overland spice-route through Syria. Although the decline was not immediately evident during the sixteenth century, the enlargement of the world by the great oceanic

[4] The Veneto is a flat and fertile region crossed by numerous rivers and small streams flowing into the sea. As well the Po, many of these rivers would flood in the spring and autumn, making the land unsuitable for cultivation. From Reinhart Wolf, *Villas of the Veneto*, with a preface by Peter Lauritzen (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1988), p. 13

discoveries gradually diminished Venice's influence, changing her from a power of the first order to a second-rate state.

Venetian aristocracy increasingly transferred its capital from commerce to investment in land. This turning to the land, however, did not instigate a conflict between trade and venture in land. Through agriculture, land reclamation, and industries, particularly cloth and luxury goods, the investment in the *terraferma* became a more tranquil and agreeable way for the Venetian patriciate to invest money.

A great deal of the land that Venice owned during the preceding century was swampy and malaria-ridden, and those areas able to be cultivated were done so by medieval methods. In order to make investment in agriculture more attractive and provide food for the growing population instead of importing from inflated markets, it was necessary to incorporate two important innovations: land reclamation and the introduction of corn, which had been brought from America. Because corn requires more care than lesser cereals, its cultivation led to improved methods of farming and provided a healthier diet for the peasants.

Land reclamation began in the swampland and deltas of the *terraferma* in order to make these areas more suitable for farming. Water control was brought about through canals and seawalls, which attracted investments from private and state companies. In 1556 Venice created the

Board of Uncultivated Properties, which subsidized reclamation and coordinated the projects of the private individuals and consortiums that had been developing on the models proposed by Alvise Cornaro.[5]

That the accumulation of money, and not land, was the basis of power for Venice drew criticism. As Machiavelli notes, the Venetian aristocracy was never considered by other Italian states to be true nobility:

> **The gentlemen of the Venetian republic are gentlemen more in name than in reality: they do not derive a large income from landed states, for the bulk of their wealth is invested in merchandise and movable goods. Moreover, none of them has a castle or wields any jurisdiction over other men.[6]**

Land was a good through which the Venetians enjoyed the money acquired in commerce. Wealthy Venetian aristocrats wanted to climb to a higher social level, for which landed properties and a certain style of country life were indispensable. Although Venetians never used titles of nobility, they were lords of vast domains. Nevertheless, they were looked down on by the society of the Italian mainland. As Priuli observed, the epithets "fishermen" and "sailors" were applied to the Venetians by the inhabitants of the Lombard plain, by Ludovico Sforza, and by the citizens of Padua:

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[5] See James S. Ackerman, *Palladio's Villas* (Locust Valley, N.Y. published by the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1967), pp. 8-10

[6] Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, I 55, quoted from S. J. Wolf *Venice and the Terraferma Problems of the Change from Commercial to Landed Activities*, Brian Pullan Ed., *Crisis and Change in Venetian Economy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, (London Methuen & Co Ltd, 1968), p. 187

Before these forefathers of ours had the *terraferma* they devoted themselves to voyages and navigation to the great advantage and emolument of the city and they earned much money each year, and yet they were not renowned throughout the world and were regarded as fishermen. Whereas, having conquered the *stato* of the mainland, they have gained great reputation and name on that account and are much esteemed and appreciated and honoured by the *signori* of the world and respected by all.[7]

Thus the Venetian patriciate committed their fortunes to land investment: land was real, as opposed to government bonds, which were merely paper and ink. They returned to their estates, assuming the responsibilities they had assigned to supervisors, building villas as another way to objectify their wealth.

Having been a maritime republic for almost a thousand years and having passed through such terrible changes in order to endure, Venice was pushed to create her own space and order on the mainland, as Alberto Tenenti pointed out:

> **The first characteristic of Venetian space, as has been noted, is that of not having had any natural geographic or geopolitical coherence. Insofar as there was cohesion, Venice had had to create it.[8]**

Between 1550 and 1570, the growth of the economy in general was very important on the Venetian mainland.

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[7] Girolamo Priuli, *Diarii*, ii, 116, quoted in Alberto Tenenti, *Ware of Space and Time in the Venetian World*, J R Hale Ed, *Renaissance Venice* (London, Faber & Faber 1973, .973), p

[8] Ibid, p 19

Born in Padua in 1508, named Andrea in honour of the saint whose feast was celebrated on that day, son of the miller Piero dalla Gondola and his wife Marta, the future Palladio was introduced into this complex panorama of events. By building villas for the Venetian and *terraferma* aristocracy, he was to become the most prominent architect of that time.

Farming and land reclamation

Little progress had been made in the improvement of agricultural techniques until the last quarter of the sixteenth century. The invention of printing in the fifteenth century, however, made it easier to record the theories and thoughts that used to belong only to the oral tradition. Many authors from Roman antiquity, such as Virgil, Cato, Varro, Columella and Rutilus Palladius, were rediscovered and published. Those ancient manuscripts had not only been rare, but had been owned only by wealthy and educated people, or were in the libraries of monasteries.

As we have noted, the Venetian and mainland aristocracy started to move from the city to the their country estates, leaving their commercial activities in the hands of professional sailors, having villas built from which they could administer their properties, and enjoying country life in general. The rich merchants and aristocrats became a sort of landed aristocracy concerned with the economic development of the region. Previously their estates on the mainland had been administered by foremen or cultivated by tenants, while they themselves were involved in commerce. This change, therefore, was an important one: and just as the popular proverb says "the eye of the owner enriches the soil," with the presence of their owners, the estates were made profitable.

Marcus Porcius Cato (234-149 BC) was a prolific writer on husbandry in Roman times, and was a lover of simplicity and austerity. In his agricultural treatise *De Re Rustica*, he recommended the virtues of the "good farmer" over the merchant in the following way:

> **The trader I consider to be an energetic man, and one bent on making money; but as I said above, it is a dangerous career and one subject to disaster. On the other hand, it is from the farming class that the bravest men and the sturdiest soldier come, their calling is most highly respected, their livelihood is most assured and is looked on with the least hostility, and those who are engaged in that pursuit are least inclined to be disaffected.[9]**

Agricoltura was understood as a gentleman's pastime, a pleasure, as gardening is today. But at that time it was an art or a "science," although not in modern terms, and was grounded in empiricism and common sense. To avoid being cheated by the tenant, to make sure that the labourers worked, to maintain good irrigation in the fields: all these things required personal attention by the owner.

Nevertheless, most of the landlords' intensive *agricoltura* was probably limited to 40 acres. Indeed, this was the case with the Barbaros' villa Maser; only in this circumstance could the owner supervise the crops by himself and see the growth from the seed to the fruit personally. It is important to emphasize that at that time, the peasants sowed the seeds and

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[9] Marcus Porcius Cato and Marcus Terentius Varro, *On Agriculture*, trans. by William D. Hooper (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 3.

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left them to the forces of growth, watching over their increase.

The improvement of the plain of the Po, begun in the twelfth century with the work of the Cistercians and the Benedictines, was exploited after the Lombard canals had been completed. But as a result of the wars in the Veneto, much damage was done to existing dikes and watercourses. In a flat region where many rivers have their release, land could return to swampland easily. On the other hand, it could also be drained without great problems. According to Alvise Cornaro, though a third of the area in the provinces of Verona, Padua, Treviso, Rovigo, and Friuli was useless and uncultivated, most of it could be recovered.[10]

Land reclamation played an important role in the development of the Venetian agricultural economy. Due to the perpetual and renewed decomposition of animals, plants, insects, and so forth, the soil was astonishingly fertile; thus the land that was unsuitable for cultivation could be made profitable. In a rising market, instead of buying and selling cultivable land, wealthy people like Cornaro became interested in the business of land reclamation. He bought cheap marshy land and, after it was drained, sold it for a higher price for greater profit. But not everything was easy for Cornaro. On November 23, 1541, the government of *La Serenissima* imposed a reduction in the embankments that Cornaro and two

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[10] See S J Wolf, *Venice and the Terraferma, Price Increases, Reclamations and Change in the Agrarian Economy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, p. 6

partners had created in order to reclaim a few valleys. Because the embankments had subtracted an important surface area from that over which the high tides could flow, the authorities argued that the equilibrium of the Lagoon was affected.[11]

Alvise Cornaro[12] was a controversial character in Padua. In addition to performing an important role in land improvements, he was an avid practitioner of agriculture; more particularly, he held to a belief in what he called *santa agricoltura*, a philosophy of life and making money. Modern property development, and the money associated with it, was as much his interest as innovations in agriculture. A pioneer of modern land reclamation, Cornaro was convinced that land was waiting to be improved by the hand of man, as had happened with the land he had seen already developed and with which he had become fascinated:

> **I see the works they have recently made and see again earlier works, and I always learn things that I take pleasure in knowing. I see the palaces, gardens, the collection of antiquities. But above all, I take pleasure in the voyage going and coming, as I consider the beauty of the sites and landscapes through which I pass. Some of them flat, others hilly, near the rivers or springs, with many beautiful**

[11] The struggle between Cornaro and Sabbadino, who defended the balance of the Lagoon, is very well documented in Manfredo Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, trans. by Jessica Levine (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1978), pp 140-144

[12] Alvise's real name was Rigo or Righi; he changed it for Cornaro, which was the name of an important, ancient, and wealthy Venetian family. Alvise inherited the bulk of his fortune from his mother's side. See Paul Holberton, *Palladio's Villas* (London: Butler & Tanner Ltd, 1990), p 62

habitations and gardens around them.[13]

Thus farming and land reclamation together played an important role in the economic development of the Veneto.

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[13] G. Fiocco, Alvise Cornaro, il suo Tempo e le sue Opere, Verona, Neri, II, Ackerman, The Villa, Farm and Ideology of Country life p 91

Earth and water

Conquering the elements of earth and water was essential in order to transform the whole Veneto or a particular site. With the *terraferma* full of streams, rivers, and roads destroyed during the wars of the Veneto, it is not surprising that Palladio devoted more than the half of his third book of the *Quattro Libri* to this problem. Though much attention has been paid to Andrea Palladio's edifices, roads and bridges played a vital role in his architecture. When Palladio spoke about roads and bridges he was aware of the usefulness to link them to the whole mainland and to develop the region economically. But he was also aware that such utilitarian constructions must contribute to the embellishment of the city and the countryside:

> **In the first place, I shall put those of the streets, and of the bridges, as belonging to that part of architecture which regards the ornament of cities and provinces, and which serves as universal convenience of mankind.[14]**

In his treatises Palladio gives a number of guiding principles about the construction of roads and the proportion of bridges, guidelines that were valid until the eighteenth century. Regarding the bridge as the most important part of the road, he put special emphasis on its durability, as

[14] Andrea Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture*, ed. by I. Ware (New York: Dover Editions, 1965), p. 3.

well as the beauty and the selection of its site, which should to be "convenient to the whole province."[15]
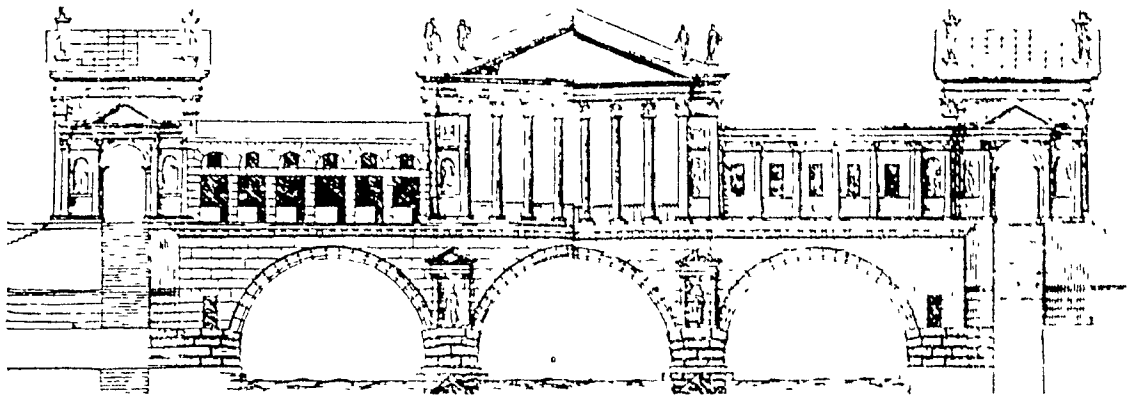
Design for the Rialto Bridge, from A Palladio *Quattro Libri*

Waterways were for Palladio an important access to the country estates from the Lagoon, but also the route by which to transport crops to market. The beautiful sight of villa Malcontenta from the Brenta Canal reminds the traveller of Pliny the Younger on the *Clitumnus* River, from which he saw several little houses on the banks, and temples consecrated to different deities.[16]

Water was, on the one hand, the means by which Venice reached a privileged position in the Mediterranean and accumulated its immense wealth. But on the other hand, because the presence of water in the soil made it unsuitable for construction, it was an ever-present problem for the
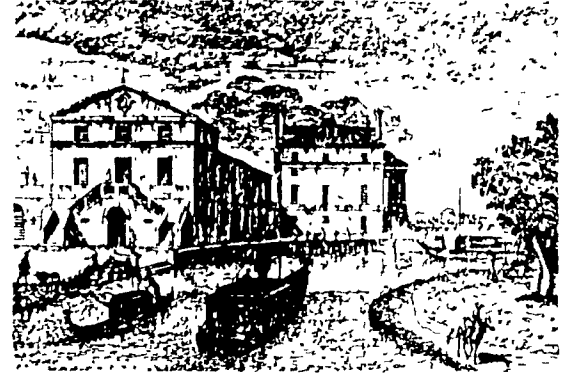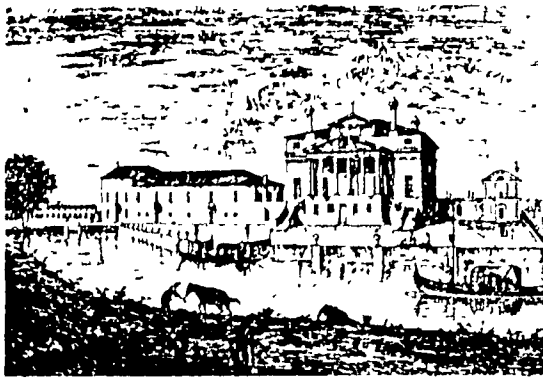
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[15] Irid, p 6?

[16] See Alfred J Church *Pliny's Letters*, ... 129

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inhabitants of the Lagoon and the *terraferma*.

Villa Malcontenta from the Brenta Canal, from G. Costas *Villas of the Brenta*

Building on the reclaimed marshy lands of the *terraferma* was always

a problem. The construction of the villas followed the traditional solutions

of the Venetian palaces. Due to the low resistance of the soil and the desire

to build inexpensively, the materials used were the lightest and cheapest

possible, for instance brick, wood, and stucco; stone was used primarily for

decorative accents. Almost all of Palladio's villas, such as villas Eric and

Malcontenta, were built in brick and stucco. Only the villa for the Serego

family, near Verona, was built in stone.

In the Veneto water was always present. In the villas, it was used for

hygiene, irrigation of fields and gardens. Furthermore, in his treatise

Palladio always recommended a site close to the water:

> **If one may build upon a river, it will be both convenient and
> beautiful; because at all times, and with little expense, the
> products may be convey'd to the city in boats, and will serve
> for the r ses of the house and cattle. Beside the cooling the air
> in summer very much, it will afford a beautiful prospect. with
> which the estates, pleasure and kitchen gardens may with
> great utility and ornament be water'd, which are the sole and**

chief recreation of the villa.[17]

Hydraulic devices such as fountains and other waterworks were the delight of Renaissance engineers. This interest in hydraulics became important due to the discovery of Hero of Alexandria's treatise *Pneumatics* Even in difficult cases like the villa Maser, which is not close to a water-stream but sited on a gentle slope at the foot of a hill, Palladio (with the Barbaro brothers, who were also interested in hydraulics) solved the dilemma with intelligence. The system was an homage to the hydraulic engineering of Roman antiquity. In fact villa Maser is set upon spring-water, which runs underneath and describes an interesting course The water begins in the nymphaeum, a grotto-fountain rich with imagery, where Diana, crowning the composition, spurts water from her breasts into the fishpond, built in the pavement of the villa's backdoor. The water from the pond then follows two ducts, one providing the kitchen with running water and the other directed to the stables. This second duct is further divided into two conduits: on the one hand, a gutter to facilitate the cleaning, and on the other hand, one that leads into the drinking troughs. Once the water passes through the villa and follows the slope of the hill, it is led by underground pipes which irrigate the gardens in front of the villa. It eventually arrives at the bottom of the hill with such force that a great

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[17] A. Palladio, The Four Books of Architecture, p. 1.

fountain is activated; this fountain serves as a drinking trough for any passing animals in the garden. The water then irrigates the orchards and fields laid out in the distance.

The transformation of the site

Palladio, in the first book of his *Quattro Libri*, devoted to building materials, techniques, and the orders, left only a few traces of his worries about the marshy land in which his edifices had to be built. Palladio drew his buildings in a very enigmatic way. Completely detached from the ground, they are without any reference to the surroundings, ignoring perhaps the unacceptable features of the soil, and giving to the building, in his drawings, a certain lightness. The paradox is that, whereas in the woodcuts of the *Quattro Libri* the villas appeared completely detached from the site, all the villas that Palladio designed were perfectly well-sited, acknowledging all the topographical characteristics of the landscape, manufacturing and improving the site in which they are located We may speculate on why he drew his buildings in this way, but it is important to remember that during the Renaissance theory was not instrumental. It was an ideal that inhabits the real but never dominates it, as Alberto Pérez-Gómez suggests: "Renaissance architectural drawing was perceived as a symbolic intention to be fulfilled in the building, while remaining an autonomous realm of expression."[18] A good example of this is the comparison between the woodcuts of villa Rotonda in the *Quattro Libri* and

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[18] Alberto Pérez-Gómez, Architecture as Drawing, Journal of Architecture, Education, Vol. 22, p. 22.

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the actual finished appearance of the building. The measurements of the drawings do not match with those of the actual building. The woodcut shows a drum rising through the attics to support a dome, while the actual villa has an unattractive flat-cone roof. If Palladio had added a drum and put a dome on top of it, the effect from the inside would have been like a tall cylinder with a dome above barely discernable, acknowledging that he changed the proportions of the drum. In this way the ideal inhabits Palladio's buildings in a magical way; perhaps the void where his drawings float is the distance between his theory and practice.

Section of Villa Rotonda, from A Palladio *Quattro Libri*   Section of villa Rotonda, from O Berttoti Scamozzi *Fabbriche e Disegni di Palladio*

Because of the lack of information about Palladio's intentionality concerning land improvements, it is helpful consider his relationship to Alvise Cornaro, who was explicitly interested in this problem. They met each other, perhaps through Giangiorgio Trissino, probably in 1538, in Padua. Cornaro achieved considerable influence by force of his personality. Besides being an astute businessman and farmer he devoted part of his time to writing. His brief treatise on architecture, published around 1554, is very practical and simple, and full of common sense.

In his treatise Cornaro recommends, among other things, construction in a comfortable and inexpensive way, as well as building with sobriety and avoiding the traditional ornament of the façade. Indeed, for Palladio it was very difficult to escape such an influence in the ornamentation of his villas. Cornaro also wrote *Il Tratatto de la Vita Sobria* (The Sober Life), published in 1558, which propagates a theory which was simply a regime avoiding excess, which causes the imbalance of the humours in the body. Such lack of equilibrium, he believed, was the reason behind many diseases and even death. Cornaro claimed that his age of ninety-five was due to the "sober life" that he followed when he was actually eighty-two. In the *Vita Sobria* he describes an ideal community in one of his estates on reclaimed lands, in which his will is explicitly to modify the natural milieu, and by doing so, improve the conditions of life and health of the inhabitants of this area:

> **...it is divided by a broad and swift passage of the river Brenta, on both sides of which there is open ground, all of fertile and well cultivated fields, and is now, God be thanked, very well inhabited, which it was not before, instead quite the contrary, because it was marshy and full of bad air, and the residence more of snakes than men. But when I drained it, the air changed to good, and people came to live, and the souls began to multiply greatly, and the place was brought to the perfection you see today: such that I can say truly that in this place I have given God altar and temple, and souls to adore him - all of which gives me the greatest pleasure, solace and contentment, every time I return to see and enjoy it...[19]**

[19] Alvise Cornaro, *Il Tratatto de la Vita Sobria*, quoted from Paul Holberton, *Palladio's Villas*, p. 88

Urban celebrations were a part of life in the cities during the Renaissance. Coronations, royal weddings, military victories, and ceremonies of entry were celebrated throughout Europe from the beginning of the fourteenth century, and were the subject of theatrical productions.

Renaissance man became responsible for his acts and the construction of the city as the *scenario* of human life[20]. Therefore, the increasing interest by Renaissance architects in the design of stage-sets is not surprising. Palladio added a theatrical façade to the Basilica in Vicenza, which sheltered a theatre in its great hall, where he designed a stage-set in 1561 for the performance of *L'amor Costante* capable of accommodating eighty actors. He also designed a festival arch for the entry of Henry III into Venice in 1572.[21] During this period appeared several permanent indoor theatres, the finest example Palladio's *Teatro Olimpico*, a reconstruction of the Vitruvian theatre.

It is important to note in this context Cornaro's project for the restructuring of the Basin of St. Mark. This project comprised a theatre in the water and an irregularly shaped artificial island, both on the water in front of St. Mark Square, and a fountain with fresh water. His intention was to transform not only the landscape, but also to restructure the Basin,

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[20] See Alberto Pérez Gómez, *The City as a Paradigm of Symbolic Order*, Carleton Book, Ottawa, 1987

[21] Elvehjem Art Centre, *Italian Renaissance Festival Designs* (Madison, Wis. University of Wisconsin, 1973), p. 56

which would change the image of Venice.
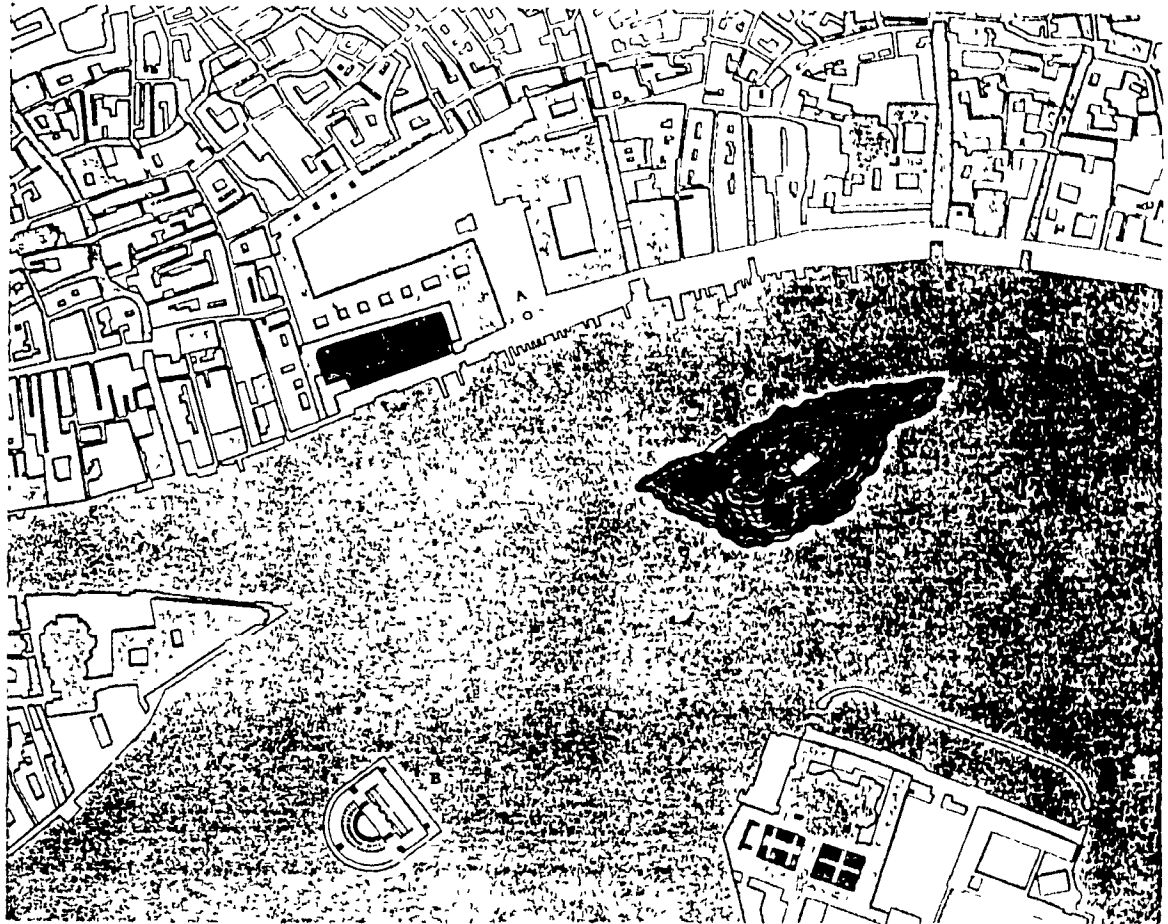
Graphic reconstruction of Alvise Cornaro's Project for the basin of St. Mark (A) the fountain, (B) the theatre in the water, (C) the "shapeless little island," drawing by Luca Ortelli

Cornaro was very interested in theatre since his youth. His theatrical experience started with the *Compagnia di Calza*, which performed comedies. The Company had a public role, to affirm in the city the political presence of a well defined aristocratic group as well as provide the city of Padua with pleasure and entertainment. Cornaro embellished his house in Padua with the Loggia and Odeon designed by Falconetto, who with his interest in archaeology, introduced, for the first time in the Veneto,

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architecture grounded in classical antiquity. The Loggia was used as a permanent proscenium (*scena fissa*) for the performances of Ruzante's plays.

In this theoretical project of the Basin of St. Mark, the theatre *all'antica*, was a revival of the public theatres of antiquity. It was to serve as a fixed theatre for Venice, contrasting with some temporary theatres erected at that time. Cornaro proposed a vast program for the theatre. It could be used for representations, for education, and as a gathering place for all the people of the city; but above all, he insisted on the moral duties of theatres.

The artificial island with a hill was thought of as a kind of place for amusement. It was planted with trees, a loggia open to every side which protected the people from the sun, and streets in which the people could walk. The island was a sort of "living theatre." The fountain of fresh water, the third element of the composition, played the role of a "fixed focal point" from which the inhabitants of Venice could enjoy a magnificent spectacle in the Lagoon:

> **...and in one glance one will see fountains, hill, and theatre; and between them many large ships, which will then be able to enter the port; and this will be a spectacle, and more beautiful, more charming, different from any other that has ever seen, or that one will be able to see in the future in the world.**[22]

These two new man-made islands, manufactured with the dredged mud

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[22] Alvise Cornaro, quoted from M Tatuii, *Venice and the Renaissance*, p 150

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that would be taken from the canals, emerge from the water challenging the Lagoon, but not dominating it. Thus the Basin of St. Mark became a spectacular fixed stage-set, creating a theatrical site in the city.

Palladio designed his villas upon marshy lands with the same intention as Cornaro's theatre and island that were built in the middle of water. Following the tradition of Venetian navigators, Palladio's villas appear like vessels in the middle of water, swampland, but never dominating the natural milieu, he operated with care, respecting the natural order as a reconciliatory act with nature.

PALLADIO AND ANTIQUITY

Palladio's predecessors in the *terraferma*

Fortifications, rather than villas, were the main structures in the medieval Veneto. These castles belonged to local nobles who ruled vast territories. Once Venice had conquered these territories in the beginning of the fifteenth century, the confiscated enemy land was and redistributed among the patriciate. This was the case for the land of the Da Carrara Lords of Padua, which were assigned to the Contarini family in 1413. Some of these noble families of the Veneto were allowed to keep their feudal states, but many of them turned against Venice, changing their allegiances when the League of Cambrai invaded the country. Once Venice had regained the *terraferma* after the treaty of Noyon, *La Serenissima* expropriated the fief of the traitor *signori* and assigned it to trustworthy Venetian families. Venice then ordered dismantled and transformed into

villas all castles in the mainland.

The Tuscan villa derives from the castle, which was turned inside out, enclosing a garden that came from the monastic cloister. The Venetian villa, by contrast, derives from a mixture of villa-castle, the Venetian palace, and the working-farm.
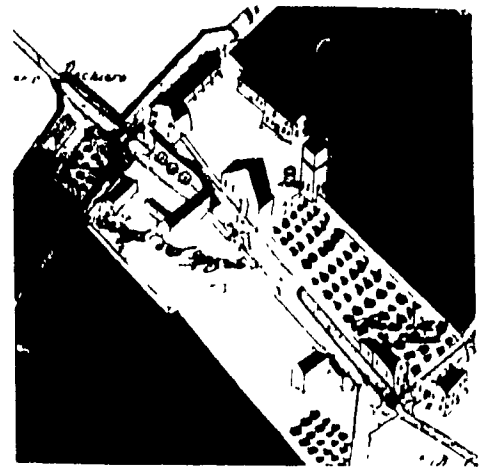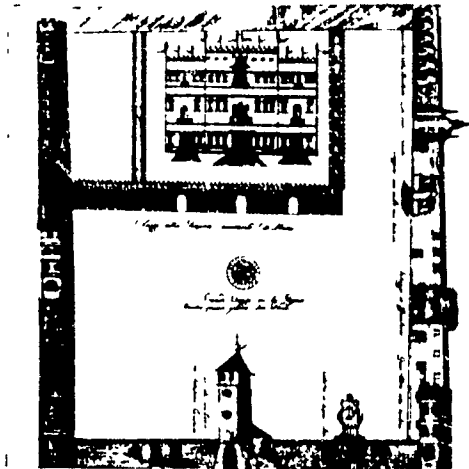
Barco della Regina Cornaro, 1490, from a contemporary engraving   A Venetian Farm of the 15th-C, from a 17th-C manuscript

The villa-castle, such as the Barco della Regina Cornaro built in 1490, retains the surrounding walls, the corner towers, and the medieval entrance gateways of the ancient medieval castles. These elements, however, were reduced to symbolic functions. The tradition of the *piano nobile* in the villas derives from the Venetian palace. Because the palace was built directly upon the mud flat, the ground floor in Venice was never suitable for the main rooms. The working-farm, the more common type of building in the country, begins with an open central area, frequently paved. This is surrounded by modest utilitarian structures such as a long barn, called in

the Veneto *barchessa*. The one side open to the central area, serves on the lower floor as a stable for animals, storage space, and housing for the labourers, and on the second floor as a granary. The farm had one or more dovecotes in the form of high square towers, which were an important source of meat and of dung to fertilize the fields. The complex was enclosed within a lower wall.

It is important to remember that, in contrast to Florence for example, Venice was not founded by Romans. Therefore, there are only a few examples of Roman ruins in the Veneto, which served as models for the architects at that time. Furthermore, the documentation of ancient farms or castles suffered from the pillage inflicted by the armies during the occupation of the League of Cambrai.

Villa Garzoni, from J Ackerman *Palldio*

Many architects emigrated to Venice; Serlio from Rome, Jacopo Sansovino from Florence, and the Veronese Michele Sanmicheli; the last two became official architects of *La Serenissima*. Sansovino designed villa Garzoni at Pontecasale in 1536, just when the young Palladio was travelling in Rome. Even though the owners encouraged Sansovino to propose a new type of design, the villa itself is a grandiose palace. It keeps many features of the traditional Tuscan villa, though this is out of tune with the functions of the building. Sanmicheli was the first to address the new exigences of the country. In his villa Soranza, built before 1540, the *barchessa* flanked the main block of the villa on both sides, a feature that would remain in Palladio's design.
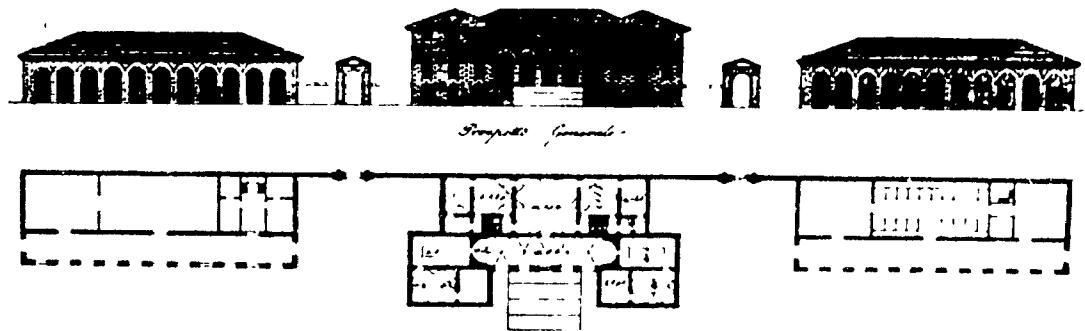
Villa Soranza, from J Ackerman *Palladio*

Palladio took the grandiosity as well as the simplicity of the tradition in the Veneto. With this he developed a formula that responded to the demands of his clients and the requirements of the villa as well

Pallladio's experience of antiquity

Palladio's work has multiple precedents, yet it is highly poetic and imaginative. He was very skilful in combining elements of the vernacular architecture of the Veneto with his knowledge about ancient scholars and archaeology in order to recreate antiquity in his own way. He left Padua for Vicenza in 1524, and joined the local guild of stonemasons. He worked as a partner in Giovanni da Porlezza and Girolamo Pittoni's workshop in Pedemuro street. This workshop was the most prominent in the city at that time; for instance, it won the commission to repair the *Loggia del Capitanato*. Along with Sansovino, Serlio, and Sanmicheli, the workshop was invited by the Vicentine aristocracy to change the symbolic image of the city and transform its *forma urbis*. These were years of growth and maturation for Palladio, who became an important figure in the Pedemuro workshop. Fully engaged with the crafts, he learnt all the secrets of the stonemason and stonecutter trades, which allowed him to have remarkable control over his work.

Palladio took three trips to Rome: a short one in 1541, another in the company of Trissino and some other students of his *Academia Olimpica* in 1545, and a third in 1547 with Daniele Barbaro. As a result of his trips Palladio produced two small books, *Le Antichita di Roma*, which consists

of a brief description of classical ruins and their history, and *Descritione de la Chiese, Statione, Indulgeze, & Reliquie de Corpi Sancti, che Sonno in la Citta di Roma*, which contains a description of Roman churches apart from the antiquities. Palladio visited, also in Rome, Bramante's buildings such as the Belvedere and San Pietro in Montorio, this latter being the only Renaissance building that he included in his treatise Palladio drew many ancient Roman buildings. Most of them were included later in his *Quattro Libri*, and were an important source of inspiration for his career. These included drawings of the Pantheon, his most admired building, as well as the baths of Agrippa and Trajan. His unpublished sketchbook is full of drawings and measurements of ancient public Roman buildings such as temples, baths, and bridges.

Around 1550 Palladio met Daniele Barbaro, who was the last influential character that gave form to Palladio's theoretical *corpus*. Palladio helped Barbaro with the drawings of his commented edition of Vitruvius published in 1556. The subject of theatres was studied deeply by both of them. Barbaro took advantage of his friend's drawings and measurements of Roman buildings in order to produce his illustrated edition of Vitruvius.

In order to avoid a simplistic formal analysis of Palladio's villas, and elucidate his intention to "recreate" classical antiquity, it is necessary to

pay attention not only to his archaeological or practical experience. During the Renaissance, classical literature played an important role. Treatises from classical antiquity were edited and published. Ancient Roman scholars such as Vitruvius and Pliny the Younger, as well as the agricultural treatises of Cato, Varro, Virgil, Columella, and Palladius, became well known. On the other hand, only a few ruins were excavated at that time. Although Adrian's villa was well known, and was probably visited by Palladio, it was not a good point of reference, because it was richer and more elaborated than one might expect even an emperor's villa to be. Thus literature became the main source of information about the ancient Roman villas. Renaissance architectural treatises were full of possible reconstructions of ancient Roman edifices, these reconstructions obviously enhanced by the imagination of their authors. Palladio was not the exception, and thanks to his archaeological trips and prolific imagination, his *Quattro Libri* are full of reconstructions of ancient buildings, even those that he never visited.

Vitruvius, the only architectural authority remaining from antiquity, was concerned with the proportions, orientations, and dispositions of different rooms in his descriptions and advice about the *villa rustica* and the *villa urbana*. However, he never left a good description of them like Pliny did. Roman agricultural writers left some practical advice about

farms. Cato, for instance, begins his treatise *De Re Rustica* by suggesting the location of the estate in relation to the different ways of access and so on, and Columella describes the healthy site that he chose for his house. Among ancient scholars who left some traces of Roman villas, Pliny the Younger was the authority until the excavations of Pompei and Herculaneum in the nineteenth century. Pliny was a wealthy Roman senator and writer of the first century AD, who owned numerous properties and two palatial villas: the Laurentine and the Tuscan. These two villas are more important than would appear at first sight. They form a unique document on the study of Roman houses due to Pliny's description of the gardens and their relation to the landscape. Indeed, the description of the villas and their gardens were known by Palladio; perhaps he tried to imitate Pliny's villas and their relation to the site. In decribing his Tuscan villa, which is close to Palladio's program for the villa in the character of a working farm, Pliny gives an idea how his villa was situated in relation to the landscape:

> **The country is wonderfully beautiful. It gives the impression of a huge natural amphitheatre, the arena is a wide plain surrounded by mountains which rise to a great height.**[23]

Pliny also left a description of the relation to the natural surroundings. He enjoyed plenty of beautiful sights from the interior of his

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[23] Tanzer, Helen Henrietta, *The Villas of Pliny the Younger*, with a foreword by ... York Columbia University Press, 1924), p. 10.

villa. This description surely influenced Palladio in his attempt to integrate his villas with nature:

> **The view from the house is like a mountain view though the house is really at the foot of the hills; the slope is so gradual that you never know you have climbed a hill till you look back and see how far you have come. Behind the house, but quite far away, are the Apennines and so, and no matter how warm the day, there is always a gentle breeze, but never a gale.**[24]

All the descriptions that Pliny left of his Laurentine and Tuscan villas were very valuable for the architects of the Renaissance. It allowed them to retrieve through their imagination the glorious antiquity of Roman times.

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[24] Ibid., p. 16

Mimetic intentionality in Palladio's villas

In his attempt to recreate classical antiquity not only in its architectural forms but also in its spirit, Palladio was acquainted with the architectural and academic sources, as we have noted. But this was not enough. It is important to acknowledge, first, Palladio's involvement in an extensive program of renovation of Vicenza undertaken by its aristocracy. Secondly, and more important, one must acknowledge the strong influence of Aristotelian aesthetic theory, which allowed Palladio to develop his buildings with a surprising originality and diversity, while always referring to the originals of antiquity.

In 1547, Giangiorgio Trissino's *L'Italia Liberata dai Goti* (Italy Liberated from the Goths) appeared. In this, the first heroic poem of the sixteenth century, the angel Palladio was sent from God to serve as guide and helper for Justinian's commander Belisarius, responsible for the expulsion of the Goths from Italy and to safeguard the classical tradition in the Italian peninsula.[25] The analogies between the angel in Trissino's epic and Andrea Palladio are clear. It was Trissino himself who gave him classical education, accompanied him to Rome, and was responsible for launching him in his career. The election of Andrea to fulfil the task of

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[25] See Rudolph Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, Part III

recreating classical antiquity was not a coincidence. He was, at that time, an important figure in the Pedemuro workshop, already well acquainted with classical structures. It was here that Palladio showed his skills, as a sort of partner of the workshop. In addition Vicenza, enjoying a privileged situation and autonomy among the rest of the towns in the mainland, was involved in a sort of competition against Venice. The Vicentine aristocracy was implicated in the change of the image of the city as well as of the country.[26] Palladio was virtually adopted by the aristocracy, and so he was the natural choice for the renovation of the city.

For Palladio it was almost impossible to escape from the Aristotelian influence of his most important mentors: Trissino and Barbaro. Aristotle was well known in North Italian circles, especially at the University of Padua, where Barbaro was the rector. Aristotle wrote several theoretical treatises on art: *On Poets, Homeric Questions, On Music. Poetics,*[27] however, is the only one that survived. In spite of its short length, it was one of the most influential books in the history of aesthetics. In it, "imitation" is one of the dominant concepts. A poet is a "maker"; for the Greeks, in the words "maker" and "imitator" lurks a fascinating ambiguity. Aristotle applied the concept of imitation or mimesis to tragedies, for

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[26] See Lionello Puppi, *Andrea Palladio,* trans. by Pearl Sanders (London. Phaidon Press Ltd, 1975), pp 9 q

[27] Perhaps better translated as "Concerning Productive Science," from Aristotle, *Poetics,* trans by John Warrington (London Dent, 1963), p 1

instance: "tragedy is imitation, not of men, but of action or life."[28] The statement referred to the change of ritual into art in classical Greece (art in a broad sense, including architecture). Among the imitative arts are painting, sculpture, poetry, and music. Though imitation is an essential characteristic, it does not imply mere copying. The artist can not only manifest reality as it is, but can make it more beautiful or ugly. The original, however, must always be recognized.[29]

The plot of a tragedy was for Aristotle more important than the character; it gives order to the action that is being imitated. For him, the action to be imitated must have magnitude and must be a whole story, not a collection of incidents. The length of the plot also was important, and the balance between beauty and size was crucial, as Aristotle pointed out:

> **Beauty is a matter of size and order, and therefore impossible either in a very minute creature, since our perception becomes indistinct as it approaches instantaneity; or in a creature of vast size -one, say, 1000 miles long- as in that case, instead of the object being seen all at once, the unity or wholeness of it is lost to the beholder. Just in the same way, then, as a beautiful whole made up of parts, or a living creature, must be of some size, and of a size to be taken by the eye, so a story or plot must be of some length, but of a length to be taken by the memory.[30]**

Perhaps it is possible to put in parallel the Aristotelian concept of the plot

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[28] Ibid, p 13

[29] See Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, History of Aesthetic

[30] Aristotle, Art of Poetry, with an introduction and explanation Press, 1963), p 22

with the wholeness of Palladio's villas. They were designed to be contemplated very easily, whether close to the viewer or seen from the distance.

Palladio found in his Aristotelian influence the ability to solve practical problems. Above all, however, he was able to understand classical antiquity in such a way that he could combine certain elements of the vernacular tradition of the Veneto with others belonging to antiquity. In villa Emo, for instance, the *barchessa*, the dovecotes, and the temple front are used as they were never used by the ancients. For Palladio, antiquity collapsed into the vernacular, and vice versa. The flexibility in Palladio's architecture permitted him to adapt each particular program to each particular site. This produced solutions with immense richness and diversity. Perhaps the example that best shows his genius is his celebrated villa Rotonda. This was inspired by the Roman Pantheon; it also could have been inspired by his own reconstruction of the Sanctuary of Fortuna in Palestrina.[31] For the first time, a dome was placed in a house and combined with not one, but four temple fronts. Prior to this, the dome had only been used in religious architecture. The fact that villa Rotonda was a sort of pleasure pavilion or a place for celebration for Paolo Almerico, not a farm like the case of villa Maser, allowed Palladio to eliminate certain

[31] Fully analyzed by Charles Burroughs, Palladio and Fortuna, Architectura, Journal of History of Architecture, Vol. 18, 1988, pp. 59-91

utilitarian elements of the farm, such as the dovecotes and the *barchessa*, and crown a hilltop with extreme ease.
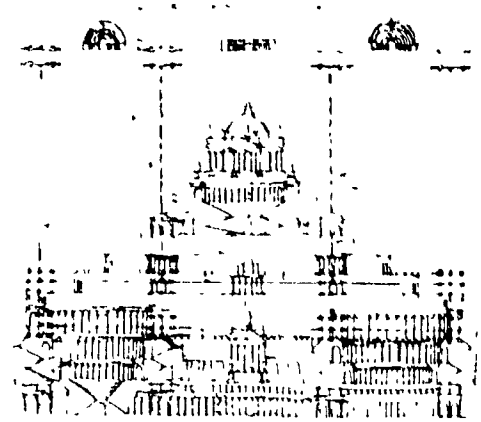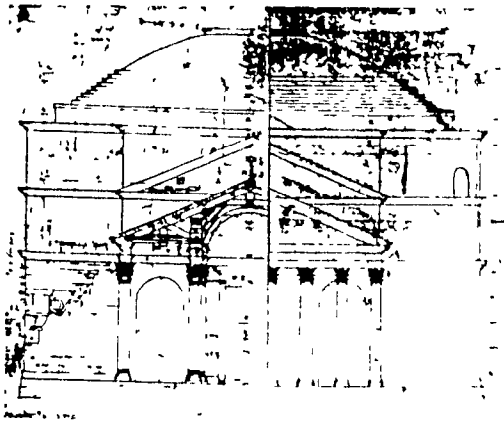
Elevation of the Pantheon, Rome, from *RIBA VIII / 9r* Palladio's sketch for an ideal reconstruction of the Sanctuary of Fortune, Palestrina, from *RIBA IX / 7*

Another ancient Roman structure that fascinated Palladio was the baths of Diocletian. This was probably the source of inspiration for the plan of villa Maser,[32] because of the special interest the Barbaro brothers had in hydraulics. The formal analogies between the two structures are remarkable, as are Palladio's skills at adapting a completely different program.

When many Roman villas were excavated in Pompei and Herculaneum in the nineteenth century, none of them were symmetrical. What is more, the temple front was completely absent. Perhaps Palladio himself would have been disappointed or surprised, realizing that he misunderstood Vitruvius. Palladio, in Barbaro's commentaries of Vitruvius,

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[32] L Puppi, *Andrea Palladio*, p 3.4

drew ancient Roman villas with a temple front. Clearly intending to imitate the ancients, Palladio was the first architect to systematically place temple fronts in his houses. Palladio, however, used the temple front for more than giving importance to the entrance·

> **I have made the frontispiece in the fore-front in all the fabricks for villa's, and also in some for the city, in which are the principal gates; because such frontispieces shew the entrance of the house, and add very much to the grandeur and magnificence of the work.**[33]

Palladio's reasons for using the temple front stem from the fact that the house for him, was the origin of architecture. The house was placed in a very important place among other buildings:

> **I thought it would be very convenient to begin with private houses, because one ought to believe, that those first gave rise to public edifices; it begin very probable, that man formerly lived by himself; but afterwards, seeing he required the assistance of other men, to obtain those things that might make him happy, (if any happiness is to be found here below) naturally sought and loved the company of other men: whereupon of several houses, villages were founded, and then of many villages, cities, and in this public places and edifices were made.**[34]

Palladio put a single temple front in the villas and palaces in the city. But he distinguished between "the house of man" and "the house of God." In churches that he designed, for instance,*Il Redentore*, he used a double pediment. This was a free interpretation of the double pediment of the

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[33] A Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture*, p 53

[34] A Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture*, Preface

Pantheon, a sacred building of ancient Rome.
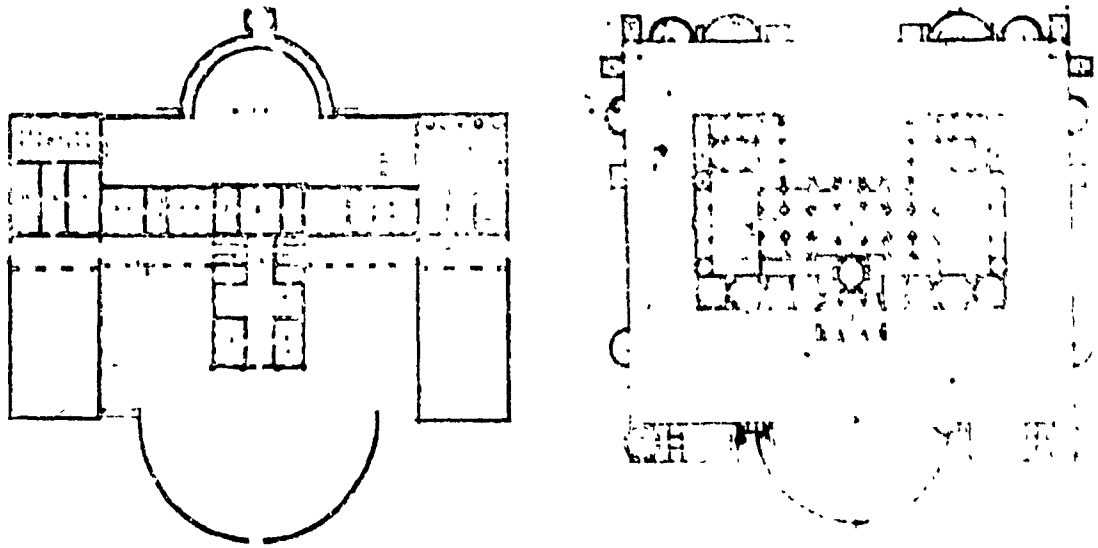
Plan of Villa Maser, from A Palladio *Quattro Libri* Palladio's drawing of the ground plan of the Bath of Diocletian, Rome, from *RIBA X/1r*

THE VILLA AND THE SITE

The villa as a small city

The majority of Palladio's villas were working farms. He thus faced

a whole new program, which had to respond both to the requirements of the

landlord's house and to the facilities of a farm. Therefore, Palladio

acknowledged the existence of two different kinds of fabrics in the villa: one

for the owner and another for the utilitarian needs of the villa. Palladio was

aware of how a villa worked, and the necessities in terms of space and

disposition; for instance, the position of the stables, which had to be far

from the landlord's accommodations because of the strong odours, or the

characteristics and orientation of the cellar that were required in order to

produce a good wine.[35] The landlord enjoyed the pleasures of the country-

life, while he supervised the vintage and the harvest; the selection of the

site of the villa itself on the country estate was crucial, in order to give the

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[35] A. Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture*, p 46

owner sufficient control over the territory:

> **In the first place therefore, let a place be chosen as convenient as possible, and in the middle of the state, that the owner, without much trouble, may view and improve it in every on side, and that the fruits thereof may be more conveniently carried by the labourers to his house.**[36]

Georgina Masson suggested that: "they were the first non-clerical centres of rural life consciously planned as such, upon what was believed in the classical model."[37]
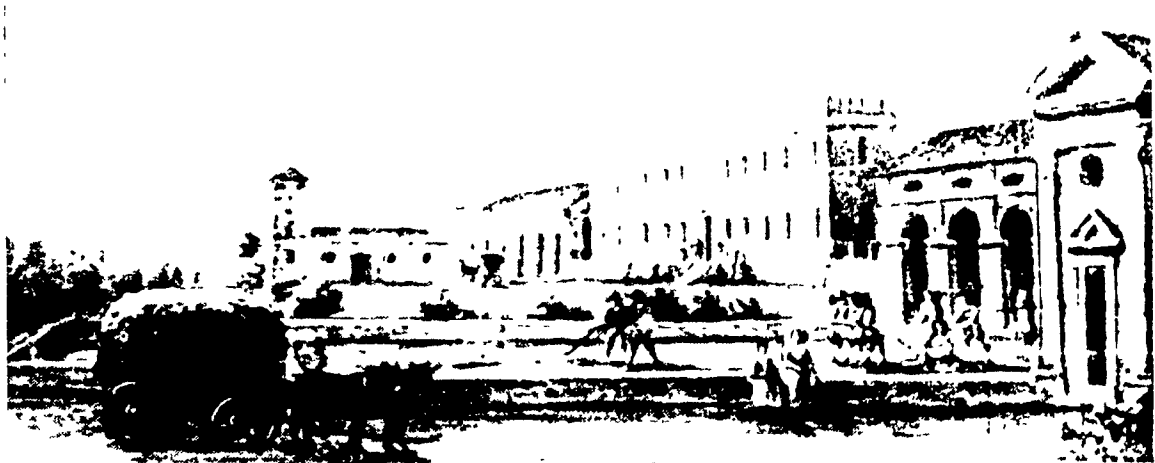
The bustling forecourt of Villa Giusti, Onara, from a contemporary drawing

The selection of the site was beyond considering only the formal features of the landscape, or the position of the roads or rivers. During the last two hundred years, buildings have been completely independent from the site. Artificial climate and "ideal" hygiene could be created with

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[36] A Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture*, p 46

[37] Georgina Masson was one of the first scholars to ... see Georgina Masson, *Palladian Villas as Rural Centres* ... pp 17-20

expensive technology; however, in antiquity the site assumed all these roles.

When Palladio spoke about the site for a villa, he was following Vitruvius'

recommendations on the selection of the place for a city:

> **First comes the choice of a very healthy site. Such a site will
> be high, neither misty nor frosty, and in a climate neither hot
> nor cold, but temperate; further, without marshes in the
> neighbourhood. For when the morning breezes blow toward
> the town at sunrise, if they bring with them mist from
> marshes and, mingled with the mist, the poisonous breath of
> the creatures of the marshes to be wafted into the bodies of
> the inhabitants, they will make the site unhealthy.[38]**

If we try to see Palladio's villas as the first "sub-urban houses" we are

missing the point completely. When he refers to the villas as city houses,[39]

he explicitly refers to a small urban settlement; the word villa in Italian is

perhaps the diminutive of *vicu*, which means village, hamlet, and country

seat.[40] Palladio conceived the villa as an autonomous organism capable to

survive by itself. Palladio was explicit in his treatise when he mentioned

the relationship between the city and the house:

> **And, finally, in the choice of the situation of the building a
> villa, all those considerations ought to be had, which are
> necessary in a city house, since the city is as it were but a
> great house, and, on the contrary, a country house is a little
> city.[41]**

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[38] Vitruvius, Pollio (Marcus), *The Ten Books of Architecture*, trans by Morris Hicky Morgan (Dover Publications, New York, 1960), p 17

[39] Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture*, p 46

[40] From *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, Volume XIX, (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1989), p 631

[41] Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture*, p 47

In reality, Palladio was founding a city in each villa,[42] bringing the "given" order of the city into the natural landscape. For instance, villa Emo was sited at the intersection of a *cardus* and a *decumanus*, where there was an ancient Roman *castrum*, (Roman military camp).

General site plan of Villa Emo, from *Corpus Palladianum Vol 5*

[42] _For the Roman rituals for the foundation of the city see J eft R/' ar', in Ide i f 'he I at,, (Princeton NJ Princeton University Press, 1976)Chapter 1 and 2

Life in the villa

Life in the country is always connected with the site; the diversity and quality of the activities of the villa depend on it. Since Roman times, life in the country was for the wealthy a sort of escape from the turbulent life in the city, with its governmental affairs and business. For Romans, *negotium* was understood as: business, affairs, preoccupations, and politics (the only activity that the Romans considered respectable), all of them being connected with the city. On the other hand, *otium* was its opposite, implying the opportunity to engage in physical and mental pursuits, the ideal conditions of country life in the Roman urban mentality. As did other rich men of his time, Pliny the Younger enjoyed the quiet and peace of his country retreats. In his letter to Minutius Fundanus, he contrasts life in the country with life in Rome:

> **There I am free from the anxieties of hope and fear; no rumours worry me; my books and my thoughts are my companions. True and genuine life, sweet and honourable repose, nobler than any sort of occupation! O sea and shore, true scene for study and contemplation.[43]**

Similarly, during the Renaissance, the debate between *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* was a recurrent topic for the Venetians.[44] In

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[43] Alfred J. Church, *Pliny' Letters*, p. 125

[44] See Oliver Logan, *Culture and Society in Venice 1470-1710* (London: B. T. Blatsford Ltd, 1972), p. 49

this context villas took on importance as prominent places for retirement and contemplation.

Having almost nothing to do in the city, Venetians moved to country estates for late summer and autumn, (coinciding with the harvesting and hunting seasons), and returned to the city around November. In fact, the state occupations usually started in November; for instance, according to a report from Padua in 1445, in September it was impossible to make up a quorum in the Great Council.[45]

At the villa, the owner also was devoted to intellectual quests in the company of selected friends engaged in erudite conversations, and above all to the improvement of his possessions. This virtuous life in the country was full of *incunditas*, *salubritas*, and *venustas* (pleasure, wholesomeness, loveliness and grace.)[46]

In Renaissance Rome the character of the villas was mainly for amusement and contemplation. Therefore, papal villas were not regulated by the rhythm of agriculture, but by a combination of the religious calendar and the weather. Cardinals, curial officials, and the pope moved to the villas seeking a cooler air. During the Renaissance this period of summer *villeggiatura* tended to lengthen, being in the late sixteenth century a

[45] See Paul Holberton, *Palladio's Villas*, p 1+6

[46] See Lionelo Puppi, *Nature and Artifice in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century*, Mo and I+ / , Ed , *The Architecture of Western Garden* (Cambridge, Mas   MIT Pre , 1991), p 47

period of four months. This social milieu encouraged the creation of many papal and cardinalate villas.[47] Bramante faced a whole new program in the Vatican Belvedere. It included a museum for the exhibition of ancient statues, a garden in the upper level, and a theatre in the lower terrace, that according to Terry Comito caused it to "become the first permanent theatre of the Renaissance."[48] The pope and his courtiers would enjoy the theatrical performances from the windows of the papal palace, while the other spectators could use as seats the flight of stairs between the middle and upper terrace, or view the performances from the side loggias. Pope Pius IV completed the court, with the palace's architect Pirro Ligorio introducing two major changes to the original design of Bramante: he added a semicircular auditorium of stone seats facing north, and in the upper garden he vaulted Bramante's exedra, which was used for the exhibition of spectacular fireworks at festivals. The works in the court were completed for the celebration of the wedding of Annibale Altemps, nephew of the pope.[49]

Palladio took for granted that all gentlemen would possess at least two houses; one in the city, where they would live during the winter, and

[47] See David R. Coffin, The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome (Princeton, N J   Princeton University Press, 1979), Chapter 111

[48] Terry Comito, The Idea of the Garden in the Renaissance, (New Brunswick N J , Rutgers University Press, 1977) p 162

[49] David R Coffin, Gardens and Gardening in Papal Rome (Princeton, N J   Princeton University Press, 1991), p 59

another in the country, where they would spend the rest of the year avoiding the heat and humidity of the city and also enjoying all the pleasures that a villa could provide, as Palladio pointed out:

> **The city houses are certainly of great splendour and convenience to a gentleman who is to reside in them all the time he shall require for the administration of the republick, or for directing his own affairs. But perhaps he will not reap much less utility and consolation from the country house; where the remaining part of the time will be passed in seeing and adorning his own possessions, and by industry, and the art of agriculture, improving his estate; where also by the exercise which in a villa is commonly taken, on foot and on horse-back, the body will the more easily preserve its strength and health; and, finally, where the mind, fatigued by the agitation of the city, will be greatly restored and comforted, and be able quietly to attend the studies of letters, and contemplation.[50]**

Gardens were sensual places, where the living experience of nature was present, for instance, the colourful flower beds, the call of the birds, and the scent of plants. The shade of trees and the whisper of running water were the perfect place for the contemplation of the animistic nature of the Renaissance.

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[50] A Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture*, p. 46

The site, the villa, and the garden

In the first axiom of Newton's doctrine of motion the difference between celestial and earthly bodies vanished. The supralunar world collapsed into the realm beneath the stars. The hierarchical universe of the Renaissance became completely uniform and the differences among hierarchical places also disappeared: "the concept of place itself is changed: place is no longer where the body belongs according with its inner nature, but only a position in relation to other positions."[51] In this way modern man lost the sense of place, finding instead a disordered universe.

On the other hand, in Aristotle's universe each body belongs to a place according to its kind. The four elements, for instance, were ordered in the following way: water is around earth, around them is air, and around this is fire. If an object is out of its natural place, it will tend to occupy its proper place. In Aristotle's doctrine of motion a body suffers alterations when it is moved from one place to another.[52] Therefore, each place is recognized as distinct from the other. In order to illustrate this the Greek temple and its place is a good example. Greek sacred architecture was always situational; the place of the temple was connected with the intention

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[51] Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, and London Harper & Row Pub , 1977), p 263

[52] Ibid , pp 259 262

of personifying the character of the deity that inhabited it, and vice versa, as Vincent Scully pointed out:

> **All Greek sacred architecture explores and prises the character of a god or a group of gods in a specific place. That place is itself holy and, before the temple was built upon it, embodied the whole of the deity as a recognized natural force.**[53]

The Greek holy places embodied aspects of the deity and its relation with men. Holy sanctuaries were recognized as distinct, one from the other, as the same deity varied from place to place; for instance, Apollo at Delphi was not exactly Apollo at Delos. Therefore, each temple differs from all others in certain formal aspects because it acknowledges the variation between places.[54]

During the Renaissance this strong link between site and architecture did not change much. In antiquity the private house had remained unimportant. But Palladio altered the importance of the house in certain ways; giving the house a privileged position as the origin of architecture and connecting it strongly with the site. He always used very simple gardens in order to link the buildings with the site; perhaps they were simple because he never intended to surpass the work of nature.

Nature during the Renaissance was still considered a reflection of the

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[53] Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the gods. Greek Sacred Architecture* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1962), p 1

[54] Ibid , Chapter I

cosmos. The universe was a network of hierarchically distinguished places: God was situated at the top, human beings in the centre, nature below, and each part related to the other; the visible world corresponded with the divinely created cosmos God was the first gardener, in the Garden of Eden, and the gardens of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were a recreation or reflection of Paradise here below. Therefore, the garden fulfilled the gap between nature and the heavens, and was an attempt to recover the Paradise that we have lost.

We tend to believe that during the Renaissance the garden tried to dominate nature, but this reflects our modern attitudes rather than those of the Renaissance. In reality, it was a match of equals, in which there was always a limit. Art and nature were united and reconciled; the only element that defined the interaction between them was the garden. Its design rested on the rule that art imitates nature; but at the same time, nature also imitates her imitator's art. Art's intervention, in the eyes of the Renaissance man, was not always perceived from nature's creation. The art of gardening imitates nature by reproducing artificially what nature put there naturally. This imitation was manifested through man-made elements such as grottoes and fountains.

In its recreation of nature, the garden revealed the laws of nature behind its material image. The ordered microcosm reflects the macrocosm,

and the garden became a vehicle by means of which to acquire knowledge of the divine order. In the garden it was possible to know all the components of nature, for instance, the four elements (earth, water, fire, and air), animals, plants, and minerals, the garden thus becoming a sort of "living museum." The botanical garden appeared during the Renaissance. It was a laboratory for botanical and medical research, and the most important in the Veneto was the Botanical Garden of Padua (the second of this type in Europe), founded by Daniele Barbaro in 1545. This "medicinal herb garden" took on an important role in the sixteenth century alongside the "pleasure garden."[55] Not only Flora (the goddess of flowers) was present in the garden, but also Fauna; many living species used to live in it. No garden was complete without fishpond and aviary. Domestic and exotic animals, brought from newly discovered lands, were also brought together in the garden; some of them were represented in "the grotto of the animals" in the villa Medici at Castelo. Even mythical creatures received the same treatment: unicorns, dragons, and sirens, whose existence was hotly disputed, were represented in sculpted replicas.

The rich iconographical program of Palladio's gardens were closely connected with the rituals and deities of the animistic nature of the Renaissance. The statues and sculptures throughout the garden were based

[55] See Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi, *Botanical Garden of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century,* M. and Teyssot Fd , *The Architecture of the Western Garden,* pp. 81 82

on the ancient Art of Memory. It consists in a technique for memorizing parts of a speech or story following a certain order, which corresponds to different rooms of a building or places in a garden.[56] Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Políphili* (1499) tells of a long meander by Políphilo, the lover of Polia, through a fantastic garden where amazing monuments, exquisite pavilions, and female figures led him to his beloved, at the same time that they taught him the secrets of architecture.[57] The clearest example of this is villa Maser, where a rich iconographical program was planned for the garden. The site was also important in this kind of theatrical garden, because each different view suggested a distinct scene.

Georg Agricola published in 1546 and 1556 *De Re Metalica*, which was the first treatise on metallurgy, geology, and mineralogy. Many of his illustrations were reproduced in one of the grottoes of Francesco de Medici's villa at Patrolino. The garden was the place were the manipulation of nature was visible.[58] The Renaissance engineers were fascinated with the study of hydraulics and its practical applications, especially pumps, which were used for drainage and irrigation. The principles of hydraulics and mechanics were applied to many "ingenious devices" that imitated nature,

[56] See Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), Chapter I

[57] See Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Políphilo or the dark forest revisited* (Cambridge, Mass MIT Press, 1992), Preface

[58] See Claudia Lazzaro, *The Italian Renaissance Garden* (New Haven and London Yale University Press, 1990), Chapter I

for instance, the theatre of automata, fountains with singing birds, and other waterworks.[59] Thus, the garden, the most ephemeral creation of man, became the *summa* of the knowledge available at that time.

It was difficult to give a name to the interaction between nature and art, which was both a "natural artifice" and an "artificial nature." The notion of a "second nature" had a wide currency in the Renaissance; the expression was used to describe human modifications to the natural environment. The notion of a "third nature" was coined for the first time by the Renaissance scholar Jacopo Bonfandio: "I have done much that nature, combined with art, has turned into artifice. From the two has emerged a "third nature," to which I can give no name."[60]
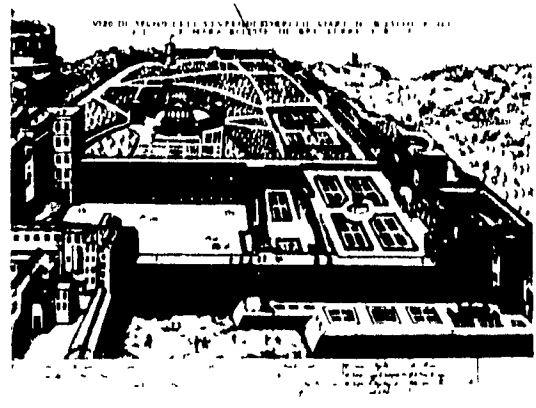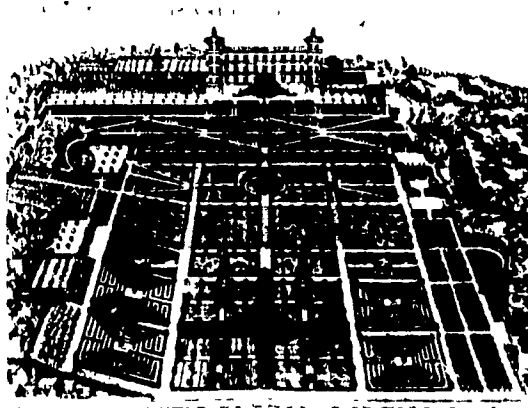
Villa d'Este, Tivoli, Engraving by E Dupérac *Bibliotera Hertziana* Belvedere Court, Rome, engraving by Cartaro in A Lafreri *Speculum Romana Magnificientiae*

Palladio's villas were never as exuberant as villas in the rest of Italy;

[59] See Luigi Zangheri, *Curiosities and Marbles of the Sixteenth century Garden,* in ed Iry   ied , *The Architecture of Western Garden,* pp 59 61

[60] Jacopo Bonfandio, quoted from Lionelo Puppi, *Nature and Artifice in the sixteenth century Italian Garden,* ibid , pp 47-58

for instance, villa d'Este at Tivoli and Bramante's Belvedere at Rome. These grand Roman gardens, with their immense terraces and topographical transformation of the landscape often exceeded the architecture of the villa. In Palladio's villas, on the other hand, the formal richness of the building, the simplicity of the garden, and features of the site were always in balance. Paradoxically, this is one of the reasons why architectural historians, often engage in purely formal analyses and pay more attention to the villa buildings, disregarding the garden and the site. Lionelo Puppi suggests that nature in the Veneto "was kept at a safe and respectable distance"[61] (he refers to physical distance). But Palladio conceived the villa, the garden, and even the orchard as a whole, completely incorporated within the site.

In villa Maser with its garden and *brolo*, it is possible to see the balance among them, the building at the foot of the hill and then the garden introduced into the orchard in the form of a row of trees. In this way Palladio transformed a simple hill into a magnificent site, giving the villa both the simplicity of a farm and the grandiosity of a palace.

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[61] Puppi, *Nature and Artifice in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century*, Ibid., p. 57

Villas Emo, Maser, and Rotonda

These three villas were chosen in order to illustrate Palladio's intentionality in the villas and its close connection with the site. There are many characteristics that are common to the rest of Palladio's villas, but in each of these three cases the relationship with the site is completely different.

Villa Emo, photograph by Philip Trager

Palladio designed villa Emo at Fazolo for the Venetian patrician Leonardo Emo. The first thing that calls one's attention to the villa is its simplicity of form and ornamentation. Furthermore, the site lacks any relevant topographical feature; the villa is set in a completely flat place, in contrast to the sites of the other two villas. Nevertheless, Palladio followed the footprints of the place, because the villa is located in the intersection of a *cardus* and a *decumanus*; the theatrical façade of the villa runs east-west, and the main block and the colonnades face south (the best orientation). He

also took advantage of the flatness of Emo's estate, having the site emerge

amidst the cultivated fields.[62] The series of frescoes at Fanzolo on classical

themes by Zelotti is one of the finest in existence. Apart from scenes

illustrating archaic Roman legends and virtues, there are scenes which

refer directly to the cultivation of Emo's land. The illusionistic paintings in

the villa reveal the Renaissance obsession in the theatre with trying to give

depth to a flat surface.[63]

Built at the foot of a small hill, villa Maser is halfway between the

plan of villa Emo, which is placed in the plain, and that of villa Rotonda,

on a hilltop. The slope of the lower garden emphasizes the beautiful view

of the cultivated fields below. From the distance the villa appears

dramatically over Barbaro's fields, the hill behind the villa reinforcing the

shape of the villa in the landscape. The interior paintings by Veronese in

the villa are in fact the very first pure landscape frescoes in the history of

European art.[64] Landscapes, jokes, and allegorical paintings reinforced the

theatrical character of the villa. Veronesse created a painted architecture

[62] When I say that the site "emerges," I use the word in the same way as Martin Heidegger uses it when he gives the example of a bridge and the banks of the river, "The banks emerges as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream." From M. Heidegger, Basic Writings, p. 330

[63] The representation of the city in the theatre captured the attention of many prominent architects, such as Bramante, Serlio, and Palladio. The problem was to represent the city in the most realistic way. The most important interest of painting had been in giving the effect of solid, three-dimensional architecture. But the single fixed viewpoint in the stage-set was not simple to solve, only a small number of spectators would enjoy the perspectival effect. In his Teatro Olimpico, Palladio resolved the problem by building in wood, plaster, and canvas the "real city" behind the scene, where there is not a single fixed viewpoint as in the painted scenes. In the Teatro Olimpico each spectator would enjoy many perspectival streetviews and a magical depth thanks to some visual tricks such as sloped floors and curved ceilings. In this way the theatre became a paradigmatic place where architecture, perspective, and the city were represented.

[64] Reinhart W., The Villa of the Veneto, p. 74

open to painted fields and distant skies where the gods take their place in the grand rituals of classical pageantry.

Villa Maser, photograph by Philip Trager

In the case of the Rotonda, the place chosen for the villa is the top of a small knoll. The villa becomes visible from almost all points, with the same façade in four directions. Perhaps the four directions of the villa embody an attempt to reconcile the villa with nature These four directions are charged with symbolic meaning: the four seasons, the four quadrants of the celestial sphere, the four humours, and the four elements The villa becomes a spectator of the theatre of nature and agriculture below, and a performer in the landscape; as Palladio pointed out:

> **The site is as pleasant and as delightful as can be found; because it is upon a small hill, of very easy access, and is watered on one side by the *Bacchiglione*, a navigable river; and on the other it is encompassed with most pleasant risings, which look like a very great theatre, and are all cultivated,**

and abound with most excellent fruits, and most exquisite wines...[65]

Palladio used four loggias instead of one in order to gain better views for the gardens and the villa. The four gardens play an important role in the complex: each of them enjoys a different feature and views, as Palladio explained, "as it enjoys from every part most beautiful views, some of which are limited, some are extended, and others that terminate in the horizon."[66] It is not surprising, then, that he took into account the use of nature as part of the backdrop for the villa.

Villa Rotonda, photograph by Philip Trager

[65] Palladio, The Four Books of Architecture, p. 41

[66] Ibid., p. 41

CONCLUSIONS

The transformation of the site was far from the domination of nature, as many contemporaries would see it; the intention of such an endeavour, despite the fact that these people were moved by economic speculation, was always reconciliatory with nature. In this context Palladio's intentionality toward the natural landscape was the same. For us, modern beings, the site remains unimportant; our uniform universal space does not allow us to recognize the particularities of each place. For Palladio, however, the election and transformation of each particular site were relevant for the building.

It is interesting to contrast Palladio's woodcuts with the constructed villas. While the drawings are detached from the ground like ideas, the actual buildings are very well sited. It is surprising, in his work, how the ideal inhabits the real, how he granted each specific feature in each place; the intention of the drawing was fulfilled in the site. This can be explained by taking into account the role of theory in the Renaissance, which was not

understood as mere rules to follow.

Antiquity played an important role in Palladio's intentionality; coming to him in different sources, such as ancient literature, archaeology, and even the practice of masonry. With great imagination he combined the vernacular architecture of the Veneto with other elements belonging to classical antiquity. His intentions toward the landscape could be easily connected with Pliny's descriptions of his Laurentine and Tuscan villas.

The owners of the villas never sought protection in nature, it was frightening and in constant change. Therefore, it was necessary to restore the "given" order of the city into the natural landscape.

Despite local differences, the issue for renaissance architects was to construct a *teatrum mundi*, as a place for representation not suburban houses or farms. Palladio transformed these rural estates into urban sites, where the rich iconographical program of the garden and the illusionistic paintings fit together. More Aristotelian than his contemporaries from Tuscany and Rome, Palladio's villas appear less as objects transforming the countryside and more as ambivalent stage-sets respecting and embracing the order of nature. In this context, the temple fronts were perfect backdrops for the whole drama of nature, where the villa became the spectator and performer in the rural landscape, while framing the rituals of the inhabitants.

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