A Companion to Early Modern Rome, 1492–1692

Edited by

Pamela M. Jones
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CHAPTER 20

The Cultural Landscape of the Villa in Early Modern Rome

Denis Ribouillault

In 1341, after a long walk through the streets of Rome, Petrarch and his friend, the Dominican friar Giovanni Colonna, decided to climb the vaults of the Baths of Diocletian to rest and enjoy there "*aer salutaris et prospectus liber et silentium ac votiva solitudo*" (the healthy air, unimpeded view, silence and desired solitude).[1] The landscape mainly comprised ancient ruins, early Christian basilicas, and fields and orchards linked by small tortuous paths. In the famous letter describing this view, the poet does not care about topographical accuracy. Rather, the landscape he sees with his feet firmly anchored on the magnificent ruins is a landscape of memory, not the ruins of a distant past world but the pictures, fresh and vivid, of its most emblematic mythical places: "[H]ere was the palace of Evander, there the shrine of Carmentis, here the cave of Cacus, there the nursing she-wolf and the fig tree of Rumina with the more apt surname of Romulus."[2] Long before Sigmund Freud's description of Rome as a "psychical entity", in the gaze and in the words of Petrarch landscape becomes history: Space conjures up an image of time.[3]

Petrarch's experience of Rome and his poetry describes, in a nutshell, the project of the Roman villa of the Renaissance. Following his lead, some of the most salient episodes of the complex development of Roman villas and their gardens from the late 15th to the 17th century are examined in this chapter. In large part, this history has been reconstructed in David Coffin's encyclopedic monographs and in the many illuminating studies by Christoph L. Frommel and Marcello Fagiolo.[4] However, by adopting a broader view and multidisciplinary approach, this brief narrative insists on three fundamental and

1 F. Petrarca, *Rerum familiarium libri* (*Letters on Familiar Matters*), trans. A.S. Bernardo, 3 vols. (Albany, NY, 1975–85): *Fam.* 6.2.15; *Familiar Letters*, 1:294.

2 Petrarca 1975–85 (as in n.1): *Fam.* 6.2.5; *Familiar Letters*, 1:291.

3 D. Ribouillault, "Landscape *all'antica* and Topographical Anachronism in Roman Fresco Painting of the Sixteenth Century," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 73 (2008), 211–39.

4 D. Coffin, *The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome* (Princeton, 1979); id., *Gardens and Gardening in Papal Rome* (Princeton, 1991). C.L. Frommel's and M. Fagiolo's fundamental

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intertwined issues that have been generally underestimated: the political and ideological dimension of the villa; the integrated relationship between villa architecture and decoration together with its garden and the larger landscape of Rome, especially the importance of the view; and the villa as a "lived space," where contemporary discourses about Rome's history, aristocratic identity, poetry, music, and science found material expression. Whereas a history of the Roman villa from the strict point of view of architecture and garden design is a daunting task because of the great variety of landscapes and building types that have been labeled with the term "villa" during this period,[5] a cultural approach reveals that the pertinence of the Roman villa rests principally upon ideological, social, and cultural issues, largely inherited from classical antiquity.

1 Innocent VIII's Villa Belvedere

"The healthy air, unimpeded view, silence and desired solitude": Petrarch's triad encapsulates the reasons why, at the end of the 15th century, Pope Innocent VIII (r.1484–92) had a villa built atop Monte Egidio, a short distance north of the Vatican Palace.[6] Turned toward the Roman *campagna* (countryside), Villa Belvedere was destined, as its name "beautiful to see" indicates, for seeing and being seen. With its loggias *all'antica* oriented towards the north, but skewed slightly eastward, the papal architects had followed the indication for the geographical orientation of the rooms contained in Vitruvius's *De architectura* (6.4.1). Indeed, the therapeutic dimension of the architecture and the views were essential to the pope, whose poor health explains in large part the necessity to have a villa built away from the bustling papal palace and the unhealthy air and winds of the Tiber valley. However, the symbolic importance of the views should not be underestimated. The villa's slightly asymmetrical plan could be explained by the importance given to the prospect towards the northeast, i.e. towards Ponte Milvio (Milvian Bridge), which would have been obstructed had the two lateral loggias been of similar length. Ponte Milvio marked the site of Emperor Constantine's victory over his pagan enemies in

studies are too numerous to be cited here. See also A. Campitelli and A. Cremona (eds.), *Atlante storico delle ville e dei giardini di Roma* (Milan, 2012).

5 Terminology can be confusing. In contemporary documents, the term *villa* is found, but properties were also often referred to as *giardino e palazzo*. The word *vigna* is the most common and designated the *villa, casino* (lodge), *palazzo* (palace), or even *rocca* (fortress), together with the formal gardens (*giardino*), groves of trees (*boschi*), vineyards, meadows, and hunting grounds (*barco*).

6 Ribouillault 2010.

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FIGURE 20.1 Bernardo Pinturicchio and Pier Matteo d'Amelia(?), *Group of Singers*, fresco, *c.*1486–92, Loggia of Innocent VIII, Villa Belvedere, Vatican City

the year 312, a crucial episode celebrated in the actual Arch of Constantine (312–15) and in the propagandistic repertoire used by Renaissance popes to assert their authority and reinforce their legitimacy in the face of heresy and schism. From the outside, the imposing facade with its superimposed loggias and fortress-like crenellation recalled a monumental urban gate and created a magnificent sight for the pilgrims and ambassadors arriving from the north, on Via Triumphalis. In short, papal ambitions, both cultural and ideological, were visible from afar.

The painted decoration (1486–92) of the loggia mirrored the iconography and function of the villa's architecture. In the main loggia, the lunettes painted by Pier Matteo d'Amelia featured groups of singers and musicians, recalling the concerts held in the loggia and the pope's rich musical patronage.[7] (Fig. 20.1) More conceptually, these painted concerts suggested musical harmony, which was then considered an effective tool to preserve good health and ward off melancholy.[8] Bernardo Pinturicchio painted the walls with landscapes mirroring the real views from the loggia, following the recommendations of authors

7 G. Bottari and S. Ticozzi (eds.), *Raccolta di lettere sulla Pittura, Scultura ed Architettura* (Milan, 1825), 8:22–25 (Andrea Mantegna to Francesco II Gonzaga, 15 June 1489). See Daniele V. Filippi's chapter on music.

8 Cavallo and Storey 2013, 194–99.

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such as Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* 35.116–17) and Vitruvius (*De arch.* 7.5.2) for the decoration of the *ambulationes* (covered walkways) of ancient villas. Another likely source is Leon Battista Alberti (*De re aed.* 9.4), for whom the contemplation of painted landscapes, rivers, and fountains had a therapeutic effect.

The landscape paintings not only referred to the *locus amoenus* (pleasant place) of ancient painting and poetry, they simultaneously represented the most famous cities of Italy, as Giorgio Vasari recalls in his life of Pinturicchio: Rome, Milan, Genoa, Florence, Venice, and Naples.[9] Through the ideal urban landscapes of his loggia, the pope emphasized the necessity of unity and peace among the Italian provinces (his funerary epitaph recalls him as "perpetual guardian of Italian peace"). During years of great political turmoil, the weakened papacy, threatened by its Neapolitan neighbors, was reasserting its role as temporal and spiritual leader of Christian Italy, a prerequisite for a crusade against the Turks. The painted views and the actual view towards Ponte Milvio, where Constantine, fending off pagan heresy, had united the new Christian world, thus complemented each other precisely. This was a major source of inspiration for the conception of Villa Madama a few decades later.

2 Creative Anachronism

Innocent VIII's Belvedere, the first classical villa to be built after the fall of the Roman Empire according to James S. Ackerman, thus had a discreet yet fundamental connection with its landscape, both actual and historical. During the 15th century, orchards, gardens with small houses, and villas had often been created in the midst of Roman ruins, sometimes directly on top of them, initiating a rich and meaningful tradition that lasted for at least two centuries. This tradition differentiated the Roman villa from its Neapolitan, Florentine, or Venetian counterpart, resulting in a variety of architectural forms that resist any attempt at a neat classification and provoked, in the 16th century, the disdainful remark of a traveler like Michel de Montaigne who wrote in 1581: "[O]n the very broken pieces of the old buildings, however fortune has located them, they have planted the feet of their new palaces, as on great chunks of rocks, firm and assured."[10] According to Flavio Biondo in his *Roma instaurata*

9 G. Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, ed. G. Milanesi, 9 vols. (Florence, 1878–85), 3:498.

10 Montaigne 1993, 80 (mid-January 1581); M. Brock, "La villa romana del Cinquecento in quanto recupero della topografia antica," in M. Fagiolo (ed.), *Roma e l'antico nell'arte e nella cultura del Cinquecento* (Rome, 1985), 339–55.

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[Rome Restored] of 1446–48, Cardinal Prospero Colonna had his palace built on the site of the ancient gardens of Maecenas, celebrated in a famous satire by Horace (*Sat.* 1.8.8–16). One loggia of Colonna's palace is documented as having been built on the ruins of a temple dedicated to the Sun or Serapis. In the 1460s, the humanist Bartolomeo Platina bought a garden with a house on the site of Constantine's baths, and Pomponio Leto followed in his footsteps when he founded his Academy in a nearby house. Another celebrated humanist, Angelo Colocci, also planted his garden on the site of an ancient one, the Horti Lucullani, near the Palazzo del Bufalo.[11] Outside of Rome, the colonization of Frascati as a site for papal *villeggiatura* (country retirement), starting in the 15th century, also resembled an archaeological quest for the sites of famous ancient gardens, in particular those of Lucullus and Cicero.[12]

Practical on the one hand, because ancient walls provided foundations for the new buildings, this habit of reusing ancient ruins was also profoundly ideological. In the Middle Ages baronial families, claiming descent from ancient Romans, had transformed monumental ruins into fortresses, laying the ground for the ideological impetus of the early modern Roman villa. In the 15th century, humanist gardens introduced a less political, more cultural dimension to this use of anachronism: the collecting and display of ancient statuary, sometimes according to patterns deeply influenced by poetic models. This had a major impact on the decoration of later 16th-century villa gardens. For instance, the fountain with a sleeping nymph in Angelo Colocci's garden is linked with ancient poetry and appears in many gardens of the 16th century, like the Vatican Belvedere and the Villa d'Este at Tivoli.[13] Most importantly, these early gardens functioned essentially as places for poetic, musical, and philosophical gatherings, again setting the tone for the great aristocratic villas of the following century. (Fig. 20.2)

There are several notable examples of 16th-century villas claiming such archaeological pedigree. The Villa Lante (1520–21) on the Janiculum Hill—with its stucco decoration by Giulio Romano in emulation of ancient Roman art—was built on the site believed to have been the ancient gardens of Julius Martialis. Both villas, ancient and modern, are represented in Pirro Ligorio's

11 F.-E. Keller, "Ricostruire l'antico. Ville rinascimentali su ville antiche," in E. Steinby (ed.), *Ianiculum-Gianicolo: storia, topografia, monumenti, leggende dall'antichità al Rinascimento* (Rome, 1996), 114–15; on this topic in relation to landscape design, see L. Morgan, "'Anciently Modern and Modernly Ancient': Ruins and Reconstructions in Sixteenth-Century Italian Landscape Design," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 36.4 (2016), 261–71. See also Kenneth Gouwens's chapter.

12 Ehrlich 2002, 49–67.

13 Christian 2010, 134–42, 308–13.

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FIGURE 20.2 Johann Sadeler after Jan van der Straet (Johannus Stradanus), *Apollo as Protector of the Arts and Sciences*, engraving, 1597

1552 map of ancient Rome. The villa, visible from all of Rome, was a *belvedere*. (Fig. 20.3) The extraordinary loggia, running the entire length of the facade with its balustrade and colonnade carefully delineating portions of the urban landscape like some panoramic maps set atop today's touristic viewpoints, affirmed gracefully this panoptic function. Inside the loggia, an inscription from an epigram by the Roman poet Valerius Martial in celebration of the ancient villa complemented the extraordinary view of Rome, taking the conflation between modern and ancient, visible and imaginary, another step further: "Here, you can take the measure of all of Rome" (*Ep.* 4.64). Inside the villa, the fresco decoration by Polidoro da Caravaggio recalled the ancient history of the Janiculum Hill and celebrated the alliance on this site of Tuscany and Latium, an allusion to the reign of Pope Leo x de' Medici (r.1513–21), one of whose closest followers was Baldassare Turini, the villa's owner.

In the mid-16th century, Cardinal Federico Cesi had a splendid garden built near the Vatican, where he could display his collection of antiquities and assert

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FIGURE 20.3 John Robert Cozens, *View of the Villa Lante on the Janiculum in Rome*, watercolor over traces of graphite, 1782–83

his (purported) ancient Roman origins (*romanitas*, or Romanness).[14] Among the objects artfully displayed in the garden and recorded in a famous painting by Hendrick van Cleve III (see Beaven, Fig. 21.1), visitors could admire the upper part of an antique sarcophagus of the so-called "*Caesia Daphne*." The fragment, previously displayed in Agostino Chigi's Villa Farnesina, had been purchased by the Cesi because of its implicit reference to the *gens Caesia*, the ancient Roman family with which the Cesi, newcomers to Rome's aristocratic world, desired to be associated. A similar strategy was employed in some of the family's recently acquired fiefs in the Roman *campagna*, this time through the use of painted decoration. In the massive Castello Cesi of S. Polo dei Cavalieri purchased by Angelo Cesi, heir to Cardinal Federico, new windows were opened and in the main reception room, *all'antica* landscapes, inspired by the fresco decoration of the nearby Villa d'Este at Tivoli, were combined with Cesi heraldry displayed in the frieze. The arms of the family set above the landscapes

14 K. Bentz, "The Afterlife of the Cesi Garden: Family Identity, Politics, and Memory in Early Modern Rome," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 72.2 (2013), 134–65. The original inscription reads: DIS MANIBUS CAESIAE DAFHNI DIANAE INVENTIA NAE SANCTISSIMAE COLUGIS OPTIMUS MARITUS. See Jacopo Mazzochi, *Epigrammata antiquae urbis*, Rome, 1521, fol. 162v.

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evoking the ancient Roman countryside acted as land deeds, as if the Cesi had always possessed this territory. In truth, Angelo had purchased the property in 1558, only a few years after his uncle had decided to expand his gardens in Rome.

During the Counter Reformation, villa owners continued to use the history or image of the place to enhance their family identity and reinforce their territorial and aristocratic claims. Pope Sixtus V (r.1585–90), who had exorcised and re-erected the obelisks of pagan Rome, took advantage of the many ruins located on the extensive grounds of his Villa Montalto.[15] The 4th century BC Servian walls that ran inside the property served as an elevated promenade from which to admire the panorama of the city and countryside. This practice of using ancient walls as viewing points is a major characteristic of the Roman villa garden. On axis with the main *casino* (country lodge), a prominent rise provided a visual pun on the name of the pope, Mont-Alto (high hill). The hill's traditional name, Monte della Giustizia, also aptly suited the pope's concern with justice, one of the major themes of his pontificate.[16] Lastly, antiquarians believed the hill to be the spot where the Tower of Maecenas once stood, and the pope planned to have an observatory built there. Two fountains, rarely considered by historians, also pertained to the ancient history of the site, the so-called Fountain of the Prisoner (for the ancient statue it displayed) (Fig. 20.4), topped by a figure of Jupiter as dispenser of justice, and the Fountain of the Dwarf, with a fresco representation of a grotesque dwarf wearing a huge hat set in a landscape.[17] Probably inspired by Michelangelo's statues of prisoners (installed in the Boboli Gardens, Florence, in 1585) along with Valerio Cioli's dwarf (1560), these characters both appear in Horace's already quoted satire in which the poet relates how Maecenas transformed the Esquiline, formerly used to bury cadavers of prisoners, criminals, and the poor, into a vast and splendid garden. Noteworthy features of Villa Montalto were inspired by Horace's text, which mentioned the miraculous transformation of the site and the Servian wall, already converted into a panoramic promenade. Horace also alluded to prisoners being executed on the Monte della Giustizia, the likely inspiration for the first fountain, and to a buffoon, Pantolabus, who ended up in a pauper's grave, conceivably the subject of the second fountain.

From the point of view of architecture and garden design, the three properties—Villa Lante, the Cesi gardens, and the Montalto *vigna*—could not have been more different. Villa Lante, a small cubic building, was used for very

15 D. Ribouillault, "La villa Montalto et l'idéal rustique de Sixte Quint," *Revue de l'art* 173.3 (2011), 33–42.

16 See the chapter by Elizabeth S. Cohen and Thomas V. Cohen.

17 C. Massimo, *Notizie istoriche della Villa Massimo alle Terme Diocleziane* (Rome, 1836), 143–44, 169.

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FIGURE 20.4 Domenico Fontana, *Fountain of the Prisoner*, *c*.1585, formerly Villa Montalto, Rome, now Villa Mameli

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short stays and had clear Tuscan origins bearing some resemblance to the Villa Medici in Fiesole. Its gardens were limited in size and ambition. The Cesi gardens developed out of a small *vigna* attached to the palace and became famous only after they were enlarged and opened to the public in the mid-16th century. Finally, the Casino of Villa Montalto, a cubic block topped by a *belvedere*, derived from the rural architecture of Tuscany and Latium, a fitting choice for a building that became the center of a park of territorial proportions, most of it planted with vineyards, orchards, and trees. Despite these differences in terms of plan and design, these places shared a similar relationship with the landscape of Rome to which they adapted both their forms and their narrative and symbolic content.

3 Bramante

Donato Bramante was the first architect to give a completely new architectural form to the *all'antica* ideal desired by Renaissance artists and patrons. At Genazzano, a fief of the baronial Colonna family since the 11th century, he built on top of an antique structure, the so-called *nymphaeum* (fountain grotto), used for daily banquets and other recreational activities. He purposefully gave it—in a Petrarchan spirit—the derelict form of an ancient building, thus inventing the artificial ruin that became so popular in the picturesque gardens of the following centuries. The *nymphaeum* was also set in the midst of a large park occupying the entire valley, dominated by the Colonna Palace perched atop a hill. A monumental portal, a *lavatoio* (basin) with a spring of tepid water, a small bridge, a cascade, and a *belvedere* were arranged around a system of two or three small artificial lakes.[18] The park may have been imagined as a recreation of one of the imperial parks celebrated in ancient texts, most likely the vast property built by Emperor Nero at Subiaco with its three artificial lakes described by Tacitus (*An.* 14.22). The fact that the patron, Pompeo Colonna, bishop of Rieti, had become lord of Subiaco in 1508, the year building work started at Genazzano, makes this hypothesis highly tenable. Bramante's artificial ruin, like other antiquities and ruins linked to the Colonna, was another sign of the dynasty's venerable age and *romanitas*.[19]

18 M. Döring, "La nascità della rovina artificiale nel Rinascimento italiano, ovvero il 'Tempio in rovina' a Genazzano," in F. Di Teodoro (ed.), *Donato Bramante* (Urbino, 2001), 343–406.

19 B.A. Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance: The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy* (Chicago, 2007), 263.

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Such claims for the ancient lineage of one's family were tied to political life during this period, which without much exaggeration may be characterized as a permanent struggle between the old baronial aristocracy, the Colonna and Orsini for instance, and the new aristocracy of papal families.[20] One of Pompeo Colonna's fiercest opponents during these years, Pope Julius II (r.1503–13), likewise fully understood the extraordinary potential of architecture and history to convey power. If Bramante's imperial park at Genazzano proclaimed Colonna to be a "new Pompey the Great," his Cortile del Belvedere, like contemporary panegyrics, proclaimed the pope to be a new Julius Caesar.

The Cortile del Belvedere (Belvedere Courtyard), begun in 1506, was not a villa in the strictest sense. Used as a link between the papal apartments in the old Vatican Palace and the Belvedere of Innocent VIII, the lateral passageways recalled the *ambulationes* of ancient Roman villas. The Cortile combined the forms of the Palatine amphitheater with the sacred architecture of the Temple of Fortuna at Palestrina, including its system of ramps and stairways. Bramante's *invenzione* would have far-reaching consequences for the history of European gardens for centuries to come. Whereas the Palestrina temple offered a panoramic view of the landscape from the upper theater, the lines of Bramante's architecture, originating from the central window of the pope's apartment in the renamed Stanza della Segnatura, converged on the exedra of the upper theater, the focal point of the entire perspective. Raphael's fresco of Mount Parnassus, painted above the central window, gave to the whole a symbolic resonance: a new Parnassus for Julius-Apollo. This was the first realization of an almost pictorial fusion of a palace, courtyard, and garden along a symmetrical axis, perhaps with the exception of the Delizia of Belriguardo near Ferrara (*c.*1434), whose central axis, carefully aligned to correspond with the sun's course, is continued by a long road.[21]

Like Villa Belvedere and Villa Lante, Bramante's Cortile appeared, anachronistically, in early modern maps of ancient Rome. It was also featured in treatises on ancient architecture and represented as if it were an ancient monument in several artists' drawings, paintings, and engravings. (Fig. 20.5) Even the foundation medal for the building, dated 1503, mirrored ancient practice. The dimensions given on the medal recalled literary classical models, such as Suetonius's description of the Domus Transitoria as well as the corpus of

20 On the rivalry of the old and new aristocracies and their patronage of art and architecture, see the chapters by Stephanie C. Leone and Lisa Beaven.

21 M. Sambin de Norcen, "'Ut apud plinium': giardino e paesaggio a Belriguardo nel Quattrocento," in G. Venturi and F. Ceccarelli (eds.), *Delizie in villa* (Florence, 2008), 65–89. On papal patronage at the Vatican Palace, see also Margaret A. Kuntz's chapter.

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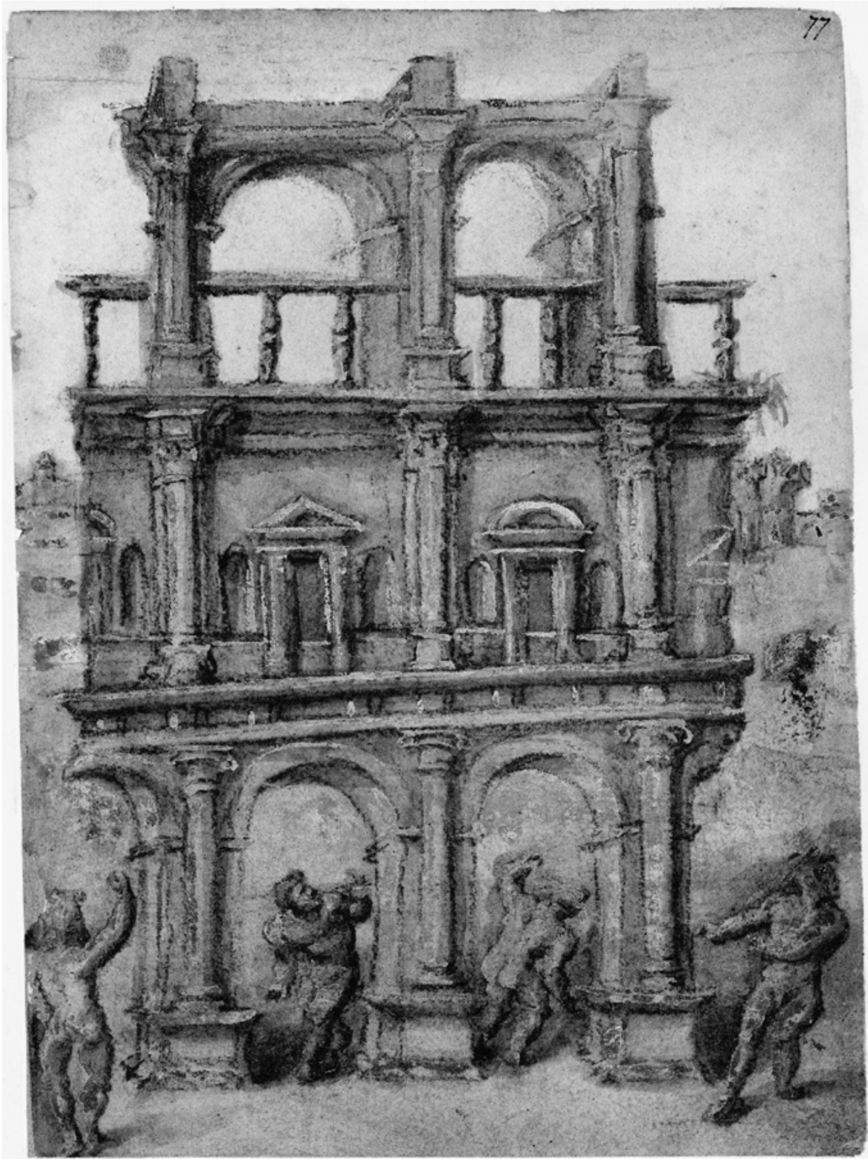

FIGURE 20.5 Amico Aspertini, *Elevation of the Belvedere Courtyard Seen as a Ruin*, black chalk with brown wash, heightened with white (mostly discolored), *c.*1530–40

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ancient medals that was becoming a crucial source for Renaissance antiquarians. Bramante's architecture was also a space for viewing. Not only did it provide magnificent vistas of the city of Rome, it could also accommodate a large public on the occasion of festivals, tournaments, and theatrical performances. (See Schraven, Fig. 14.2; Collins, Fig. 30.1)

4 Villas for Popes and Bankers

For Villa Madama (1518–25), built on Monte Mario for Cardinal Giulio de' Medici (the future Clement VII, r.1523–34) and his cousin Pope Leo X (r.1513–21), Raphael closely followed the architecture of Palestrina, organizing the space in a meaningful relation with the surrounding landscape.[22] This was especially important because Villa Madama was used for welcoming ambassadors arriving from the north on Via Triumphalis.[23] Had the villa been completed, the architecture and the landscape would have been united by the geometrical axis originating from the upper theater and terminating at Ponte Milvio, as if this symbolically significant bridge had been "made for this villa", as Raphael noted in a letter (*c.*1518–19) addressed to the pontiff.

This letter illuminates the culture in which Roman villas were created, not only helping historians reconstruct Raphael's original project, but also revealing the decisive influence of Pliny the Younger's letters describing his Tuscan and Laurentine villas. It is a further demonstration of the important role ancient poetry—and ekphrastic poetry in particular—played in Renaissance villa culture. Francesco Speroli's description with its indicative title *Villa Iulia Medica versibus fabricata*—literally the Medicean villa "built of verses"—also dates from 1519 (Villa Madama was the name used from 1537 on).[24] Following this model, descriptions of villas flourished during the 16th century and provide an important complement to the increasing number of engraved and painted views of Roman villas circulating throughout Europe.[25] A discussion of all the elements Raphael borrowed—and reinterpreted—from Pliny cannot be provided here, but his insistence on the panoramic views towards Rome, the axial view towards Ponte Milvio, and on the aesthetic quality of the

22 L. Bek, "Lo squardo ampio: le lettere pliniane, la prospettiva e Raffaello inventore del vedere paesaggistico," *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* 30 (2004), 161–79; Elet 2017.

23 Y. Elet, "Raphael and the Roads to Rome: Designing for Diplomatic Encounters at Villa Madama," *I Tatti Studies in Renaissance History* 19 (2016), 143–75.

24 BAV, Vat. lat. 5812.

25 D. Manzoli, "Ville e palazzi di Roma nelle descrizioni latine," *Studi romani* 66.1–3 (2008), 109–66; Ribouillault 2011.

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FIGURE 20.6 Richard Wilson, *Rome from the Villa Madama*, oil on canvas, 1753

surrounding landscape visible through the villa's windows should be singled out.[26] (Fig. 20.6)

Raphael's attention to the orientation of the different parts of the villa and its windows is also evident in the letter, and betrays the influence of Vitruvius's *De architectura*, especially Chapter 9. This may well explain the specific attention given to the course of the sun in this villa. The *diaeta*, a small room set in a tower, directly inspired by Pliny's description, was conceived almost as a solar observatory, as Raphael's description underscores: "The Diaeta is a circular structure. It is lit through a ring of glass windows, each of which is successively visited by the sun from the time it rises until it sets. Plain glass being no hindrance, as Your Lordship knows, it follows that the room is made exceedingly agreeable by the constant sunshine and the panorama of town and country."[27] There also was a freestanding marble sundial at Villa Madama. It offers further confirmation that, for the scholars gathering at the villa, an

26 On windows in Roman villas, see Ribouillault 2013, 264–69; G. Blum, *Fenestra prospectiva. Architektonisch inszenierte Ausblicke: Alberti, Palladio, Agucchi* (Berlin, 2015).

27 G. Dewez, *Villa Madama* (London, 1993), 24.

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interest in the sun, the winds, and stars was no less important than appreciation of the landscape.[28] In fact, the entire decorative program revolves around solar imagery,[29] from Giulio Romano's *all'antica* stucco decoration in the loggia, inspired by Nero's Domus Aurea (Golden House), to his fresco on the Sala Grande's ceiling depicting the Sun and the Moon with their carriages revolving around the Medici arms, the heraldic *palle* (balls) standing for the planets of the solar system. This theme of the passage of time as seen in the seasons and fertility of the land is consonant with traditional villa iconography, but here it is also linked to Medici imagery and the belief in astrology. As Janet Cox-Rearick has demonstrated, both Leo X and Clement VII made the sun, astrology, and time the central elements of their imagery.[30]

At the Villa Farnesina (1506–10), Agostino Chigi, Julius II's banker, had similar preoccupations. His architect, Baldassare Peruzzi, made the link between the villa and the garden stronger than ever before in Rome, building loggias for use on hot days to the north and east, and rooms for the winter, such as the *triclinio* (dining room) and *sala* (living room) to the south. The garden loggia was used for theater performances, and even the stables were transformed by means of illusionistic paintings and used for the fabulous parties organized by the prodigal banker. Painted decoration thus played a key role in unifying interior and exterior space. In the famous Loggia of Psyche designed by Raphael, the beautiful garlands painted by Giovanni da Udine echoed the pergolas in the garden. An ancient statue of a winged crouching Psyche (now in the Capitoline Museums) placed in the middle of the garden further established a thematic connection between the two spaces.[31] In the Room of the Perspectives on the *piano nobile*, Baldassare Peruzzi created illusionistic views matching the real views of the surrounding landscape. On one side, was the country, on the other, the city (*rus* vs. *urbe*)—a *topos* of Roman villa culture that can be found, for instance, in the literary description of the villa by Blosio Palladio (*Suburbanum Augustini Chisii*, 1512). In the so-called Loggia of Galatea, Peruzzi painted in 1511 the famous astrological ceiling, an artistic variation on the theme of Agostino Chigi's natal chart. A few years later, in the same loggia, Sebastiano del Piombo and Raphael painted frescoes of Polyphemus and Galatea, the first works

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28 R. Lanciani, "Il Codice barberiniano XXX, 89 contenente frammenti di una descrizione di Roma del secolo XVI," *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria* 6 (1883), 223, 475.

29 C. Cieri Via, "Villa Madama: una residenza 'solare' per i Medici a Roma," in S. Colonna (ed.), *Roma nella svolta tra Quattro e Cinquecento* (Rome, 2004), 349–74.

30 J. Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art* (Princeton, 1983).

31 On the sculpture collection, see C. Barbieri, *Le "Magnificenze" di Agostino Chigi: collezioni e passioni antiquarie nella Villa Farnesina* (Rome, 2014).

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FIGURE 20.7 Baldassare Peruzzi, *The Illusionistic Colonnade of the Room of the Perspectives Reflected in the Convex Shield of the Goddess Bellona*, fresco, *c.*1516–17, Sala delle Prospettive, Villa Farnesina, Rome

during the Renaissance clearly inspired by descriptions of ancient paintings.[32] These works of art were all extremely complex and required wit and erudition on the viewer's part. Illusionistic details, anamorphosis, and double images punctuated the rich classical beauty of the paintings, provoking wonder while simultaneously engaging visitors in intellectual meditation.[33] (Fig. 20.7)

5 Systems of Villas

The great villas of the second half of the 16th century were profoundly indebted to these prototypes. Villa Giulia, for instance, built for Pope Julius III

32 L. Freedman, *Classical Myths in Italian Renaissance Painting* (New York, 2011), 54–88.

33 See, e.g., the priapic detail of a phallus in Raphael's Loggia of Psyche, the illusionistic colonnade of the Room of the Perspectives reflected in the convex shield of the goddess Bellona, and the profile of an immense hidden face in the forest behind Sebastiano's *Polyphemus*.

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(r.1550–55) by Giacomo da Vignola, possessed a magnificent sundial set on a "tower of the winds" and painted decoration based on the description of ancient paintings, some with astrological overtones in celebration of the divine destiny of its owner.[34] Like many others, this Roman villa with its great semicircular court and *nymphaeum* was used for short stays, displaying antique sculpture and hosting banquets and poetic and theatrical events. Easy access was provided from the pope's residence at the Vatican by means of a road in the meadows bordering the right bank of the Tiber to the north of the city and a private ford on the river. A small hanging garden with a fountain was set up outside the great Belvedere Courtyard, providing a visual connection between the two residences.[35] Earlier, Clement VII had done something similar when transforming parts of the Vatican walls into a hanging garden looking towards Monte Mario with his prized villa.[36]

This habit of connecting either visually or physically various residences and their gardens scattered throughout the city is a theme warranting further research. In the same way the old papal palace was connected to the Villa Belvedere, Paul III (r.1534–49) had his favorite residence of Palazzo S. Marco (later called Venezia) linked with his new villa, the so-called Torre Paolina on the Capitoline Hill, on the supposed site of the ancient temple of Jupiter Feretrius.[37] Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna have shown how Pius IV (r.1559–65) used several villas, old and new, as a way to assert his presence in the urban territory.[38] In his splendid Casino at the Vatican, designed by the antiquarian Pirro Ligorio, a fresco cycle by Santi di Tito illustrates this concept, showing that Pius's *vigne*—the Casino, Belvedere Courtyard, Palazzina on Via Flaminia, and the *vigna* on the Quirinal Hill—were considered in strict relation to his urban plans, especially the building of Via Pia.[39] Pius IV's "pastoral urbanism," a clear sign of the gradual stranglehold of the papacy on the disputed territory of the city, coincided with the colonization of the hills that had been deserted after the fall of the Roman Empire and the destruction of the aqueducts. Once the Eternal City's water supply began to be renewed in

34 D. Ribouillault, "La villa Giulia et l'âge d'or augustéen," in P. Morel (ed.), *Le miroir et l'espace du prince dans l'art italien de la Renaissance* (Paris, 2012), 339–88.

35 D. Ribouillault, "Jeux de mots et d'images: les frises peintes de l'appartement de Jules III au Vatican," in A. Lemoine and A. Fenech-Kroke (eds.), *Frises peintes. Les décors des villas et palais au Cinquecento* (Paris, 2016), 102–29.

36 A. Campitelli, *Gli horti dei papi* (Vatican City, 2009), 62.

37 A. De Michelis, "*Villeggiatura* in the Urban Context of Renaissance Rome. Paul III Farnese's Villa-Tower on the Campidoglio," in A. Ballantyne (ed.), *Rural and Urban: Architecture between Two Cultures* (London, 2010), 28–41.

38 Fagiolo and Madonna 2011.

39 Ribouillault 2013, 147–54. See Carla Keyvanian's chapter.

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the late 16th century, it was possible to revitalize and reconstruct the ancient gardens of Rome.[40] On the Pincian Hill, the Villa Medici supported by the Aurelian walls, evoked memories of Augustan Rome and its "hill of gardens." In his garden, Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici had an artificial hill constructed to partially cover an ancient "temple of Fortuna." This new "Parnassus" referred explicitly to the Mausoleum of Augustus, at that time transformed into a garden by the Florentine Soderini family, with which it was also axially and visually connected. Fabulous villas with extraordinary art collections were also developed by powerful cardinals on the Quirinal Hill and became the cultural hubs of Rome: the *vigne* of Ippolito d'Este and Rodolfo Pio da Carpi, and the Horti Bellaiani of Cardinal Du Bellay set within the ruins of Diocletian's Baths.

By this time, no powerful family could do without a villa. The Farnese selected no less than the Palatine Hill on which to build a splendid garden in axial connection with the great Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine in the Roman Forum, and Cardinal Alessandro had a villa built at Caprarola in 1559–75 in the form of a pentagonal fortress, a territorial "crown" expressing the family's feudal pretenses. Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, who became governor of Tivoli in 1550, created an extraordinary villa out of a former Franciscan convent, where Pirro Ligorio transmuted his antiquarian knowledge into extraordinary inventions of sculpture, painting, and fountains. The interior fresco decoration, the garden, and the larger landscape were all united in an unprecedented manner. The villa, heir to the villas of ancient Tibur studied by Ligorio, became the fulcrum of the entire territory in a grandiose theatrical scheme, and served as the model for the great gardens of Europe for years to come.[41] A retreat for the aging cardinal, Villa d'Este was also the stage of vibrant intellectual life, where the greatest scholars, poets, and musicians of the time gathered in a true "academy, a cenacle, a theater of the world."[42]

At Frascati, villas became increasingly grandiose in size and artistic wealth, reflecting the political ambitions of their owners, culminating in the 17th century with Pietro Aldobrandini's Villa Belvedere and Scipione Borghese's Villa Mondragone.[43] Like their antique sisters, the villas' facades were all turned towards Rome, visible on the horizon in a kind of architectural heliotropism. At the Villa Belvedere, a very large floral sundial complemented the panoramic

40 Samperi 2011; Fagiolo 2013. See Katherine W. Rinne's chapter.

41 Ribouillault 2005.

42 M. Cogotti (ed.), *Ippolito II d'Este: cardinale, principe, mecenate* (Rome, 2013). See the chapters by Kenneth Gouwens and Daniele V. Filippi.

43 Ehrlich 2002, 81–106, 115–70.

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FIGURE 20.8 Israël Sylvestre, *Casino del Monte* (*Villa Ludovisi*), graphite, watercolor, with gray and brown wash on cream antique laid paper, with framing lines in brown ink, *c.*1650

view. Several poets celebrated this landscape, which Cardinal Aldobrandini and his guests liked to scrutinize with Galileo's new telescope.[44]

A key difference between 17th-century villas and their 16th-century models is the sheer size of the later buildings and estates. Villas at Frascati had to be grand enough to house, sometimes for several months, the large entourages with which the dignitaries travelled. At Rome, although the *casini* remained modest and still served for daily recreation and displaying artistic collections, they were now the centers of parks of huge proportions, with a formal garden, vineyards, agriculture, and even hunting grounds. (Fig. 20.8) These great "estate parks" of the Baroque period, built by the Montalto, Borghese (see Beaven, Fig. 21.6), Ludovisi, and Pamphilj, have been analyzed as another product of the social and territorial ambition of their creators.[45] In these villas, the dialogue between interior and exterior remained important. The landscape paintings by Claude Lorrain that hung in the rooms of the Casino Bel Respiro at Villa Pamphilj—

44 Ribouillault 2015, 124–60, esp. 147–48.
45 Beneš 1997.

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for instance, his *Procession to the Temple of Apollo at Delos*—created a meaningful dialogue with the landscaped park outside.[46] If landscape painting had become an important source of inspiration for garden designers, the reverse also was true. Such landscape painters as Nicolas Poussin and Claude frequently sketched in these gardens. The poetic and historical vision of the Roman landscape they studied in these "artificially natural" environments contributed in no small part to their forging a new style.[47] This fusion between the villa's space and the artist's imagination, one inspiring the other, is perhaps what is most fascinating about the villa: not only a marvelous space for leisure and intellectual reflection, but an image of the self, a mirror of aspirations and ambitions.

6 Future Research

Further research is needed to better understand the culture of the Roman villa. For instance, we know still very little about musical, theatrical, and poetic performances held there. Likewise, the Roman villa and its gardens as a privileged site for humanist, artistic, and scientific academies is a promising topic that may result in new discoveries. Less elite villas and less elite members of society connected to villas and gardens also require more study as does the role women played in villas or as villa owners. Because the villa is as much an ideology and ideal way of life as a concrete place, learning more about what happened at the villa would enhance understanding of the architecture, painting, sculpture, plants, and trees that served as a backdrop to its social life. Thus, it is necessary to consider not only the villa's individual features, as scholars have done, but also the correlations among them.[48] This is significant because the creation and recognition of such connections by the artists and their public was a crucial aspect of Roman elite culture—a way for owners and guests to shape their family and social identities, elevate their intellects and souls, preserve their health, and, above all, encourage "conversation,"[49] a crucial social definer in early modern Rome.

46 Beneš 2005.

47 Ribouillault 2016, 81–90.

48 Yvonne Elet has argued for a "multimedia" approach to the Roman villa, while Hervé Brunon and I suggested bringing "intermedial" studies into the field; see Elet 2016 (as in n.23), 143–47; H. Brunon and D. Ribouillault, "Ut pictura hortus," in H. Brunon and D. Ribouillault (eds.), *De la peinture au jardin* (Florence, 2016), 1–26, esp. 22–26.

49 S. Guazzo, *La civil conversatione* (Brescia, 1574).

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