

M I S T E R O
D I P L I N I O

Letters to

Plinius

LETTERS TO PLINIUS

Mistero di Plinio

LETTERS TO PLINIUS

About disbelieve and discoveries

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Content

Prologue 13

Letters 17

I

1 Mystery by contradiction 21

2 La Scoperta! 28

3 The DNA of ancient architecture 40

4 A reconstruction of relicts 60

5 The site for architectural treasures 76

6 What no longer exists 92

II

7 I go on a holiday ... 100

8 ... and with me I take 124

9 An outdoor room in Ghetto di Roma 128

10 A morning in Tivoli 142

11 A panorama on the Aventine Hill 156

Epilogue 171

List of literature, films and references 177

“Both past and future are wrapped in the present. Nothing surpasses in that world, in which all things (co)exist, peaceful in the bliss of their condition.”

- Selected Works of Plotinus. Translated by Thomas Taylor. London, 1817.

Prologue

Dear Plinius,

What an honor for me to be able to write you, a famous Roman senator and literary man. Not so long ago I discovered your letter collection and was enchanted by its content. In particular letter 8 arouses my interest. Not only does it appeal to the imagination through a meticulous description of spaces, furthermore it enables me to link your world to mine due to a central theme: living and everyday aspects. Generally I have a great love for this subject, just like you, it is something that keeps my mind busy and fascinates me. Of course it also forms a significant part of my occupation later as an architect, therefore I deem importance to the question what the essence of residing means to me.

To feel at home? Quite possible! The first element I consider responsible for this feeling is the rituals and obvious matters we have. The things that are obvious intrigue me most because they have something special in them. Usually we do not notice these things nor think about them, but the more we do, the more special they

become. Two years ago this became the subject of my bachelor's thesis in which I studied my own rituals and obvious matters in everyday life, it made me aware of their qualities, in particular how they allow transitioning, both in time and in space. Well, now, after reading your work, the essence of residing has gained more significance to me. The letters you wrote teach me the equal importance of a second element that causes this 'feeling at home' as well: being aware of existing qualities. This awareness results in the experience of intense moments which make it possible to enjoy a stay as pleasant as possible. In other words, I believe that a place to reside is a scenographic arrangement of moments and transitions, and with this as conclusion I like to clarify the reason why I write you letters.

Studying letter 8 has not only enriched my knowledge about the essence of residing, it also increased my interest in your mystery. After reading it over and over again, I made a discovery I would like to share with you. You can consider this series of letters an answer to letter 8 with the aim of immersing you deep into my thoughts and taking you along my trip.

Sincerely,

Rieke

LETTERS

I

MYSTERY BY CONTRADICTION

Dear Plinius,

It is not unlikely that you saw the next thing coming from miles away, but the exact location of your villa in Laurentum is still controversial to this very day. Writing such an incredibly detailed letter that however remains its mysteriousness is quite an achievement I believe. You've done an excellent job on that end! The best comparison I can make for this letter is that with a treasure map: intended as instruction for finding the treasure but blurry, so it increases the chance of never finding it. Over time, two groups emerged. The first one, where I take myself into account, believes every word of your description. The other group, on the other hand, classifies the letter as fictional. This is the same group of people who believe that your villa was found in the estate of Castel Fusano in 1713. In this year an archaeological complex was discovered that later would be identified as villa Laurentum (*a*). In 1933, the entire estate, including remains, was acquired by the city of Rome. You can verify this information on the official tourist website of Rome (www.turismoroma.it) where

they praise “the remains of the maritime villa of considerable size” (b), a must see if you are in Ostia. Today the villa is a real attraction if you ask me, fully focused on the economic side of the story. The complex does not match your description, only the location can confirm their statement. Eugenia Salza Prina Ricotti, an Italian architect, is also not convinced of the current location and cites a number of arguments that negate the context:

“As architect I could not agree, because even if one can greatly alter a house, it is impossible to change its fundamental structure. (...) I declared that to the best of my knowledge the so-called ‘Pliny’s villa of Castel Fusano’ was not the Laurentinum. To turn the Laurentinum into the Castel Fusano villa all its walls would have had to be destroyed and its foundations uprooted. Then one would have to rebuild it ex novo and make an entirely new edifice bearing no relationship to the old one. If this had been the case, all the masonry of its walls would have been later than the second century A.D. while the Castel Fusano villa is mostly built with opus reticulatum of the first century B.C. and it certainly does not seem to have suffered any kind of radical alteration since then.”

- (*The Importance of Water in Roman Garden Triclinia*, Ricotti, 1987, p.183)

As long as there is uncertainty I have a reason to go on with my search. The real location can't be far away. Imagine I find one that matches your description! I will keep

you updated.

Sincerely,

Rieke

Appendix



image (a)
Aerial view



image (b)
Official Villa di Plinio

LA SCOPERTA!

Dear Plinius,

After following some of the instructions from your letter and a subsequent thorough scan of the environment, I found it. Although it is well hidden, the evidence is there. $41^{\circ}41'34.4''\text{N}$ $12^{\circ}21'40.7''\text{E}$ (*a*) are the coordinates of the real site of your villa. And yes, I have proof of what I state, namely three relics that are still visible today. The first relic concerns the linear axis of your villa, an interesting walk especially for your guests. It is an extension of the road that crosses perpendicularly with the Viale Della Villa di Plinio and continues to the coast (*b*). A map of its location (*c*) can be found in the appendix. A second relic is the natatio of the winter quarters of the slaves and freedmen, which is clearly visible even on aerial photographs. It is a huge pool that is far too large to be a private property. However, I do not find anything that says it is public, strange. The third and final relic is the remains of your beloved pavilion of which only a few rooms remain. These three relics, just like the other parts of your villa, are described in letter 8. I will briefly add the relevant fragments:

My villa is of a convenient size without being expensive to keep up. The courtyard in front is plain but decent, however it is rather dark inside since the compluvium is the only natural light source. Through this space you enter porticoes shaped into the form of the letter D, enclosing a small but cheerful area between. After shadow comes light and green: these make a capital retreat for bad weather, not only as they are shut in with windows, but particularly as they are sheltered by a projection of the roof. Even animal residents, such as my sweetest cat Maurus, like to spend time in here. In front of the first courtyard a cross-covered peristyle serves as entrance. Two large columns emphasize a double wooden front door, furthermore they carry a colorful pediment that cheerfully welcomes my guests. From the middle of the porticoes ahead you pass into a bright, pleasant hall, and out of that into a handsome, sun-drenched, hexagonal dining-room towards the seashore; so that when there is a south-west breeze, it is gently washed with the waves, which spend themselves at its base. Walking this direction happens occasionally stepwise with the dining-room on top. On every side there are either folding-doors or windows equally large, by which means you have a view from the front and the two from the sides so three times the sea. From the back you see the bright hall, the portico and its area within, portico again, courtyard, peristyle, and out upon the woods and

distant mountains beyond. I regard the linear axis in my villa as a showroom, in one rectilinear movement my visitors see the wealth I possess.

Description of the linear axis

The angle formed by the projection of the dining-room with this private-room retains and intensifies the warmth of the sun, and this forms our winter quarters and family gymnasium. In this place both mind and body are trained. It is sheltered from all the winds except those which bring on clouds, but the clear sky comes out again before the warmth has gone out of the place. In the middle of the irregular complex is a sand-covered peristylum, ideal for ball games, open to the blue sky. A natatio, surrounded by tiles and filled with the residual water from my private baths, completes the courtyard. Two diving boards, different in height, serve as a challenge. Competition diving is a sport that I want to recommend here, elegance and courage are valuable traits. Next are the four covered colonnades, they surround the sandy court and offer protection from the sun. One out of four galleries is quite special, ribbed tiles alternate with smooth tiles over the entire length. Long ridges arise as they serve as a bowling alley. During my visit to Pompeii I saw similar pavement, the perfect relaxation for my people so I thought! The winter quarters also provides place for interior spaces. Several exedrai surround the colonnades and open up to the courtyard in various ways. The most

important exedra is the ephebeion, a place where my people learn about heritage and traditions of the Roman Empire. Benches flank three walls, direct natural light enters through windows in those walls and in the fourth wall a big entrance is possible thanks to a row of columns. A dressing room with benches, next to the entrance and exit of the complex, is closed off from the courtyard by a simple door. What cannot be overlooked in my description is the Konisterion, a room with a curtain, intended powdering and oils. This is an essential ritual in the athletic regime. The other rooms are intended for the storage of oil and any sports equipment. Yes, Gallus, well read, no one miss anything here.

Description of the winter quarters

At the upper end of the terrace and portico stands a detached garden building, which I call my favourite; my favourite indeed, as I put it up myself. It contains a very warm solarium, one side of which looks down upon the terrace, while the other has a view of the sea, and both lie exposed to the sun. The private-room opens on to the covered portico by means of folding doors, while its window looks out upon the sea. On that side next the sea, and facing the middle wall, a very elegant little recess is formed, which, by means of transparent windows and a curtain drawn to or aside, can be made part of the adjoining room, or separated from it. In my solarium I love to linger, a lockable inner courtyard surrounded

by columns provides multiple climates. It is my favorite place to read or to write letters. My private-room contains a couch and two chairs: as you lie upon this couch, from where your feet are you get a peep of the sea; looking behind, you see the neighbouring villas, and from the head you have a view of the woods: these three views may be seen either separately, from so many different windows, or blended together in one. The stairs in the exedra near my head lead me to the landscape panorama, to a viewpoint not too big in size and covered by a second leafy pergola of grape vines. Here I enjoy to the fullest, accompanied by a glass of my best wine. Adjoining this is a bed-room, which neither the servants' voices, the murmuring of the sea, the glare of lightning, nor daylight itself can penetrate, unless you open the windows. This profound tranquillity and seclusion are occasioned by a passage separating the wall of this room from that of the garden, and thus, by means of this intervening space, every noise is drowned. Annexed to this is a tiny stove room, which, by opening or shutting a little aperture, lets out or retains the heat from underneath, according as you require. Then, on the other side of my panorama-room, another bed-room with ante, which enjoys the sun, though obliquely indeed, from the time it rises till the afternoon. The most beautiful mornings I only experience here.

Description of the garden pavilion

Now that I read this all over again, I notice the big similarities once more. And aren't there just too many for it to be a coincidence? Dear Plinius, have I solved your mystery? Who will tell. That is also the great beauty of it.

Sincerely,

Rieke

Appendix



image (a)
Aerial view

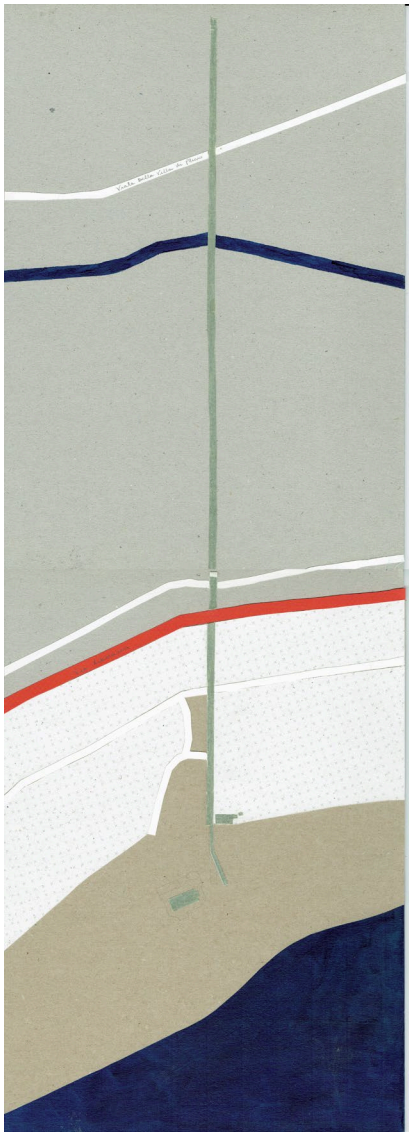
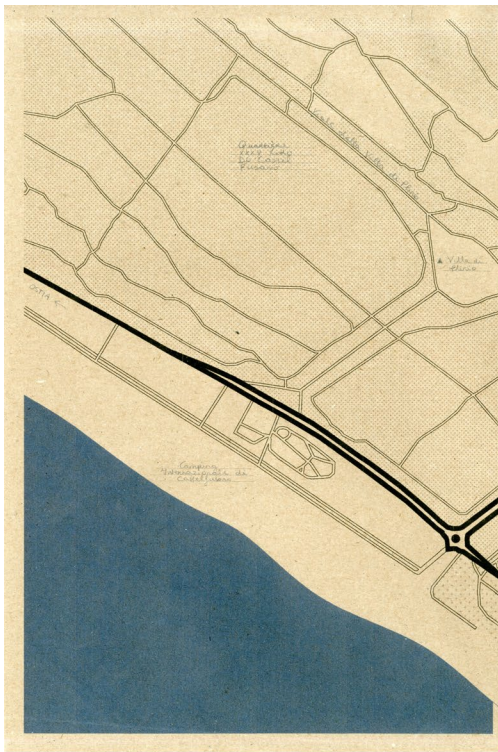


image (b)
Collage



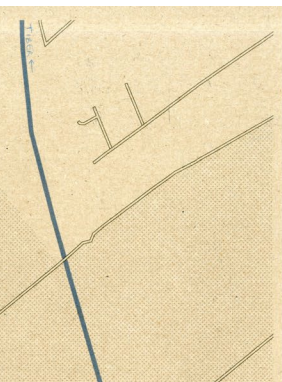


image (c)
Map

THE DNA OF ANCIENT ARCHITECTURE

Dear Plinius,

Now that I have found the location of your villa, I am very curious how your villa must have looked. I want to focus on the relics I found on site and reconstruct them with their description from my previous letter as guide. But to be able to make that reconstruction, I first have to study the architecture of your period thoroughly. The classical building order is one of the oldest styles in architecture. In a book I recently read, *Principles of Roman Architecture* (Jones, 2000), it's been compared with the DNA of classical architecture, an interesting comparison as far as I am concerned. It is a language that I can only understand by having knowledge of both vocabulary and grammar. So yes, I know what to do, a careful study will make me wiser. And this study I gladly share with you, Plinius!

For starters I went back to the origin of the building orders, which I found with the Greek. They invented the three antique and original orders: the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. Later on, these originals have been fu-

rther developed by the Romans, into a rare perfection. The Romans added the Tuscan order, simpler than the Doric, and the Composite Order, more ornamented than the Corinthian (*a*). Each order is characterized by its proportions and characteristic shapes, details and decoration. The concerning order is indicated best by the type of column that is used. So in other words, the column is the most important building element in classical architecture and the most important building element therefore plays a significant role in my research. By means of its structure and the function it fulfills, I try to grasp the architecture.

The structure. A column usually consists of three elements: the capital on top, the shaft in the middle and the base at the bottom. What also makes part of the column is the pedestal or podium it's standing on and the entablature above, resting on the capitals. The capital or crowning of the column is often provided with sculptures and mainly reveals the building order. For example, a column of Doric order has a simple capital consisting a squared abacus and a round pillow or echinus. For this reason the capital is sometimes called a pillow capital. As far as the capital the Tuscan order is comparable to the Doric. A column of the Ionic order has a more complex capital: double volutes under a thin cover plate adorn the corners. The complexity is only increasing now, a column of Corinthian order has a capital that is inspired by the leaves of the acanthus. And

finally there is the Composite order where acanthus leaves are combined with volutes on the corners of the capital.

As I have said before, every order is characterized by its own proportions and characteristic shapes, details and decoration. This is for all elements, yes certainly all, that construct a column, an entablement and a pedestal. I can write you full pages about the specifics of their details and decoration, but that would be too great an elaboration. More interesting is to focus on the proportions and characteristic forms of the elements. The entablement can be compared to a beam in contemporary architecture. The difference, however, is that the former is composed by these three: the architrave, the frieze and the cornice. A drawing of Viollet-le-Duc (*b*) shows this structure very clearly. The proportions of these elements are determined by guess what, the order of course. Luckily I also found a document (*c*) that clarifies a lot: five orders, five columns with their pedestal and entablement and five times the corresponding proportions of each element. Everything in function of the diameter of the column.

Furthermore there is the function. A column has fulfilled already various roles, from a pure functional one to one that is only decorative. The Greeks and then your Romans soon discovered them all. To give you a clear overview, I illustrated every function with a building.

Here they are:

1. The Primitive Hut: Essential Architectural Elements (*d*)

Upright branches give us the idea of columns and the horizontal ones on top form the entablature. Sloping branches covered with moss and leaves suggest the first frieze. A simplistic design, using geometric shapes and built from natural elements. Nothing is superfluous, everything has its function.

2. The Temple of Heracles: Form Follows Function Ancestor (*e*)

An anthropomorphic reading of the classical orders: Doric columns reflect male power, Ionic columns represent the feminine elegance and Corinthian columns represent virgin purity.

The Greeks chose the order of their temples according to the program. A temple dedicated to a male god was built in the Doric order.

3. The Arch of Augustus: Programmatic Polarity (*f*)

Different orders relate to one another, creating a certain hierarchy. The Corinthian columns mark the central arch while Ionic columns flank the side arches.

4. Bouleuterion Miletus, Turkey: Loss of Hierarchy

Combining orders occurs gradually on every scale, from complete elements to parts of that element to details of that part. Over-combination leads to the loss of hierarchy.

5. Trajan's Column: Independent Beauty (*g*)

Columns contribute to the aesthetic appearance of a classical building in such a way that they occasionally become independent artistic elements.

Allright then, the vocabulary is clear to me. I acquired a great deal of knowledge if it concerns the building elements. So Plinius, the next question I ask myself is how your villa is organised? What rules determine the connection of the rooms and their proportions and dimensions? Vitruvius, the source par excellence of the ancient Greco-Roman architecture, taught me a few things about the architectural grammar of that time. In 25 BC. he wrote his *Architectura Libri Decem*, ten books on architecture. I went looking for this one and found an English translation: *Vitruvius on Architecture* (Smith, 2003). Perfect, because my Latin is a bit dusty. Book VI deals with private buildings where Vitruvius in Chapter 1 cites how geography and climate influence the organization and type of a residence:

“It seems that building configurations ought to be established in one manner in Egypt, another in

Spain, differently in Pontus, and differently still in Rome. This is in response to the characteristics of various lands and localities: in one region the sun beats down upon the earth and in another it stands at a great distance from it. (...) the position of houses ought to conform to the characteristics of their geographical location and the different aspects of the sky.

- (*Vitruvius on Architecture*, p.182)

In Chapter 2 Vitruvius also describes a general rule for designing a home. A first step is to respond to precise ratios that apply to that type of space. To do this, a standard measure is selected based on the location where that space is situated. We can agree that the context is of the utmost importance here. A second step suggests additions or subtractions to meet the nature or needs of the site, either with regard to use or appearance. Reflection is the key to determine the need for such adjustments.

Next, in Chapter 3, Vitruvius describes the atria and the further layout of the houses. A chapter that I deem highly important for my planned reconstruction since the rooms of your villa start from an atrium. Vitruvius starts by naming the five different types of atria, then continues to determine the length and width according to three methods. Eventually he finishes with a method to determine the height. After the ratios that apply to

atria, he talks about the proportions of the wings of these atria. No element skips the eye of a Roman architect, even doors have their own ratio (*b*). Finally there is also a part in which he explains the proportions of triclinia. Collected as formulas on a sheet, I collected these proportions in my booklet (*i*). This piece of paper is, combined with the description of the relics, the most important instrument for the reconstruction.

Now we are at the end of this letter and I feel I am ready for taking a next step! But before I continue I would really like to ask your permission since this is all about your beloved villa. So Plinius what do you think? Are you ready for the sequel?

Looking forward for your answer,
Looking forward to start!

Sincerely,

Rieke

Appendix

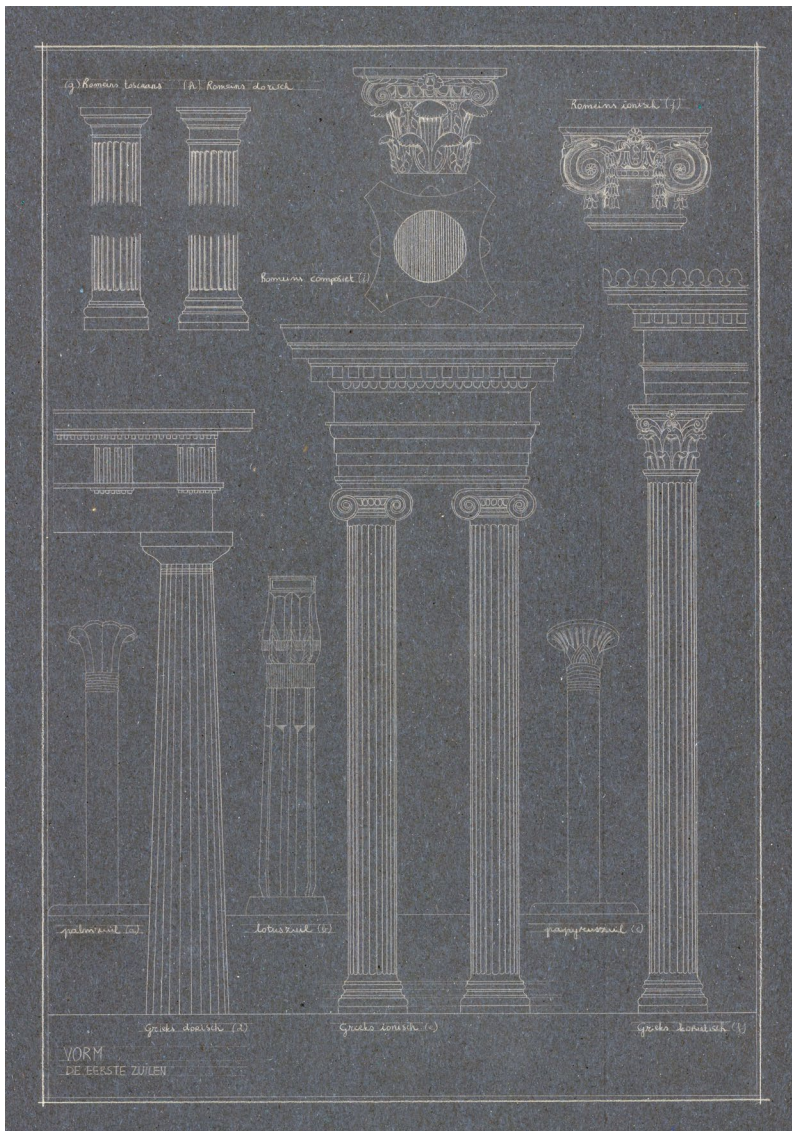


image (a)
 Origin and development of the column
 Own drawing

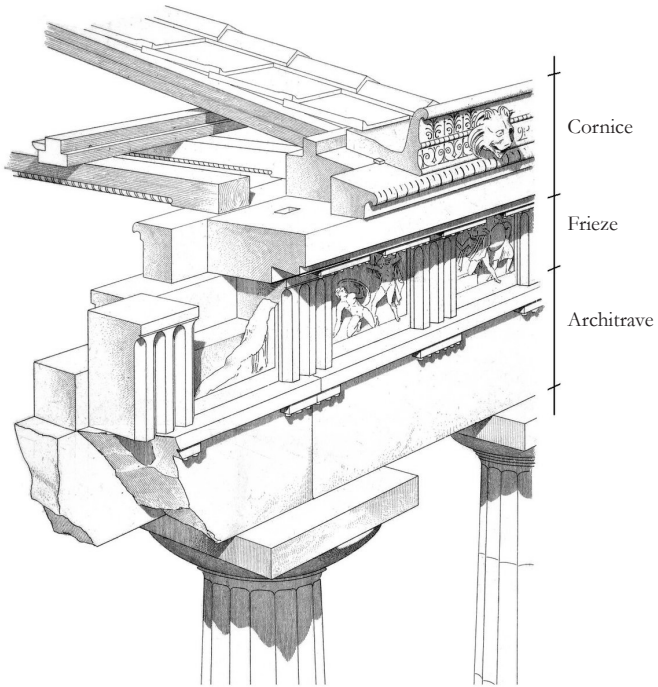
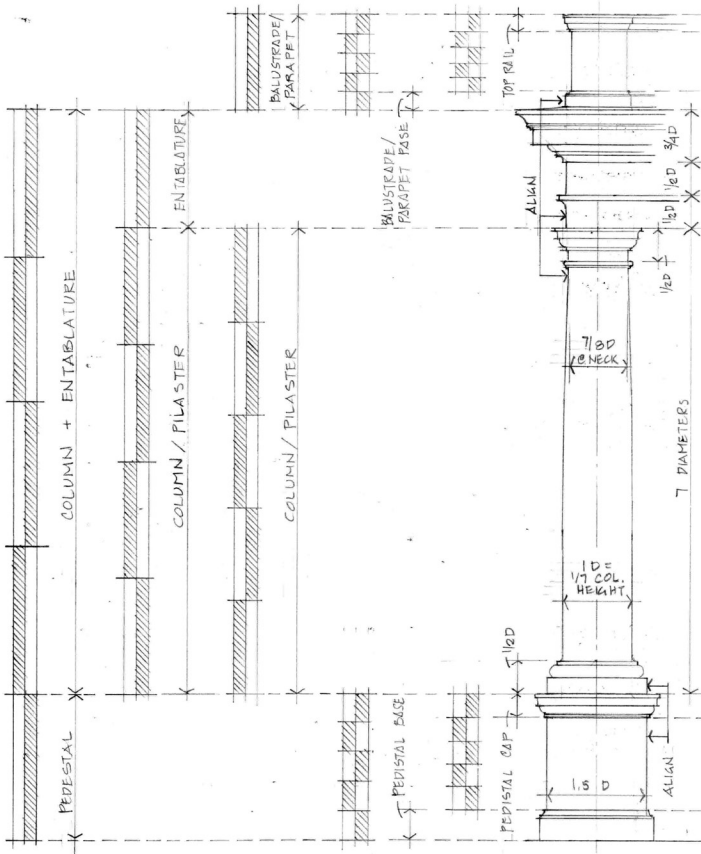
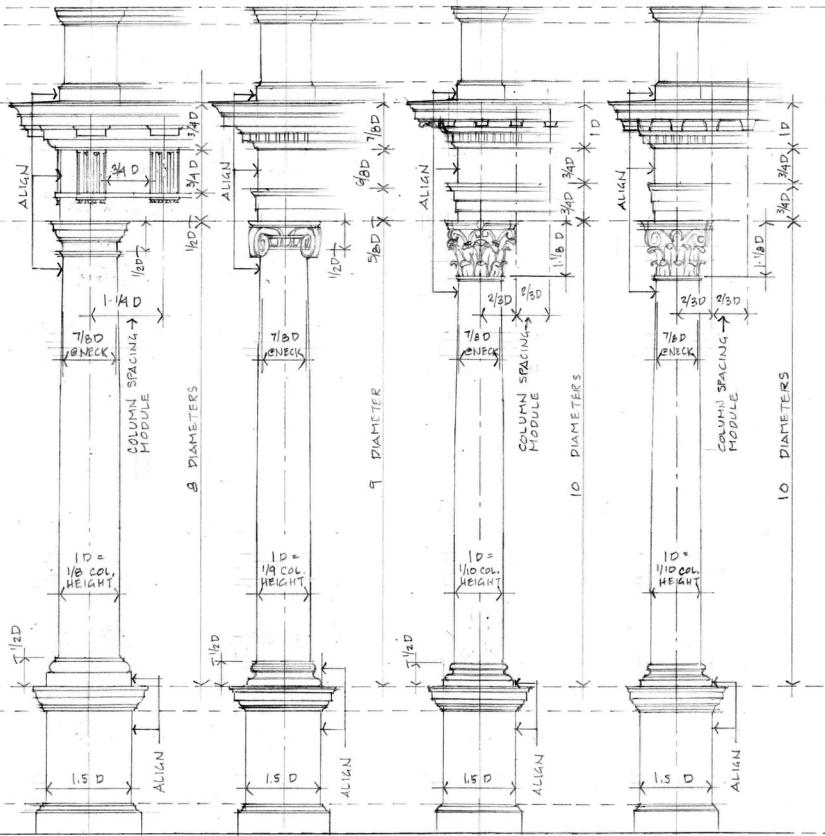


image (b)
Structure of the entablature
Viollet-le-Duc



TUSCAN

image (c)
Shape and proportion of the column
Rouchell



DORIC

IONIC

CORINTHIAN

COMPOSITE



image (d)
The Primitive Hut
Charles Eisen



image (e)
Anthropomorphic reading
Marco Vitrubio



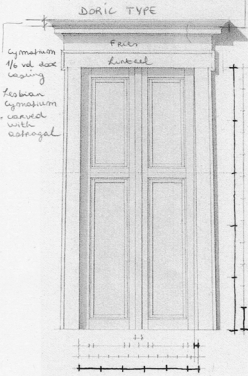
image (f)
The Arch of Augustus



image (g)
Trajan's Column
Own picture

CORONA

komt gelijk met de top van de kapiteelen v/d pedamenten in de ruimte waar het staat



hoogte

H pediment / $3 \frac{1}{2}$

Geef $2 \frac{1}{2}$ delen a/d hoogte v/d deur

breedte

H deur / 12

Geef $5 \frac{1}{2}$ delen a/d breedte v/d deur

Bovenaan is het iets smaller.

↳ H deur = 4.9 m

1/3 v/d 'door lassing'

H deur = 4.9 - 7.6 m

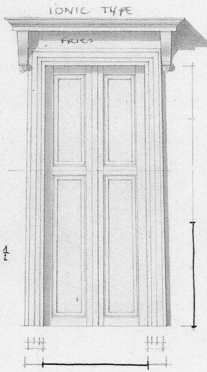
1/4 v/d door lassing

H deur = 7.6 - 9.1 m

1/8 v/d door lassing

H deur = > 9.1 m

toedicht (geen vermindering)



hoogte

zie dorische type

breedte

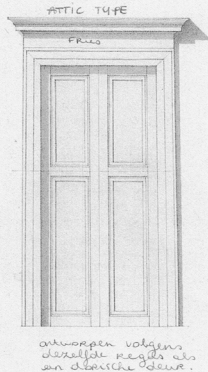
H deur / $2 \frac{1}{2}$

Geef 1 deel a/d

breedte v/d deur

Bovenaan is het smaller

↳ zie dorische type



omvoegen volgens dezelfde regels als aan dorische deur.

Bekalve:

- Geef vermindering naar boven toe.
- Fasien
- Boven openen naar binnen toe.

image (h)

Ratio of doors

Vitruvius

VITRUVIUS ON ARCHITECTURE

Book VI

- ① Ratio van de symmetrie
in overeenstemming met de
verhoudingen van een deel
dat als standaard maat
wordt geselecteerd
- ② Doe toevoegingen of verminderingen
om te beantwoorden aan de aard
of de behoeften van de context.

Chapter III

Atria (B en L)

3 methodes:

- ① Ratio 3:5
= lengte verdelen in 5 stukken
breedte krijgt 3 stukken
- ② Ratio 2:3
= lengte verdelen in 3 stukken
breedte krijgt 2 stukken
- ③ Vierkant
= breedte beschrijft standaard maat
lengte is de afmeting van de diagonaal

Atria (H)

Tot aan de balken $H = \frac{3}{4} B$
Dakstructuur $H = \frac{1}{4} B$

Vergelijking van atria

$$L \begin{cases} 9-12 \text{ m} : B = \frac{1}{3} L \\ 12-15 \text{ m} : B = \frac{1}{3,5} L \\ 15-18 \text{ m} : B = \frac{1}{4} L \\ 18-24 \text{ m} : B = \frac{1}{4,5} L \\ 24-30 \text{ m} : B = \frac{1}{5} L \end{cases}$$

Deven

Apaat blad

Triclinia

Twee keer langer dan ze breed
zijn.

$$B = \frac{1}{2} L$$

Hooft? :

$$H = \frac{(L+B)}{2}$$

A RECONSTRUCTION OF RELICS

Dear Plinius,

Your answer is wonderfully well received, I'm happy you gave me the green light. So here I go. As I put myself behind my drawing table (read: large coffee table in the living room), accompanied by my fluffy friend Nona but more important by the second and third letter I wrote you, I start the reconstruction. One space after another, one relict at the time. The winter district, however, I decided not to reconstruct because, unlike the linear axis and the pavilion, there are no remnants of spaces around it. The role that this relict fulfills is therefore pure motivating the chosen location.

I get started with the linear axis, or more concrete, with the peristylum as entrance followed by a dark Tuscan atrium. But before I forget, I want to mention that everything can be followed in attached plans (*a-g*). Even more, on those plans information is written that I will not repeat in this letter. It mainly includes formulas you better see next to the concerning piece of architecture. The standard measures of the spaces I reconstruct all

arises from the contemporary context. For the atrium, the width of the asphalted road becomes the length of the atrium and thus I also get to know the dimensions of the side wings. With this as known fact, defining the dimensions of the D-shaped atrium is peanuts: two times the width of the wings added to the length of the atrium makes the standard measure of this space. The D-shaped atrium consists of two parts: a closed rectangular part and a part that is open and curved. In the first part, only through two niches in the middle on each side, you can perceive the surrounding landscape. They serve as windows while in the four other niches you can take a seat and observe the green courtyard. In the second curved part, at the end, stairs lead you down, back on the beach. Next, separated from it but almost attached, a slightly more than 100 meters long light gallery begins. His 26 meter long break after the first 35 meters of gallery does not detract from his slender elongation. The standard measure for this one is determined again by the smaller road it lies on. Then at the end of the axis, just as you described, a triclinium stands as highlight of this walk. By multiplying the width of the gallery by three I obtain the standard measure for this room. By doing so, the dimensions of the two elements are again in proportion to each other. An open corridor around the triclinium provides a pleasant size inside. Visitors can admire the sea through four openings in three sides of the hexagon while they having dinner with you. They will love it, I'm sure.

The second reconstruction concerns that of your beloved pavilion. Remains of this are still present today. Three buildings, built on the foundation of three rooms: your panorama room, quiet room and morning room. Let me begin with the first one you come across, the panorama room. It has different climates you said. Starting from a Corinthian atrium that serves as a solarium, I draw the bedroom as a side wing. The sun room is divided into two parts: a closed part, adjacent to the bedroom and an open part, surrounded by columns. The closed part, or your little recess you are talking about, can be joined together with the adjacent room, or separated from it by means of panels with glass and curtains. Finally there is the courtyard where you love to read and write. Correct me if I'm wrong but I see three climates arising: inside, covered outside and outside. For the standard measure of this space, I select the width of the building currently standing here. This dimension becomes the length of the atrium plus its side wing. With this information calculating the individual dimensions of the atrium and side wing goes easy. The width of the atrium is necessary to determine the length of the interruption of the long light gallery on the linear axis. It has to be as wide in such a way your eyes can reach the sea. The second view you have here is that of the forest. It is located near your head and accessible by a smooth spiral staircase in the exedra on the right side of the bed. The size of these stairs I calculated of course by the height of the room. The villas in your back, to admire

from a window in the middle of the longest wall of the bedroom, is the last view. Unfortunately, this view has been lost.

The second room that crosses your path is the quiet room. Actually this one is a Tuscan atrium inside of a Corinthian atrium: where normally columns are placed, a wall takes over. This is how the sound-filtering corridor comes around. In the center you will find the Tuscan atrium. A window closes the compluvium and separates the outside from the inside. The spot underneath is perfect for the bed, here you can admire the splendid starry sky in utmost silence. The quiet room can be reached through an entrance hall in the side wing of the panorama room, adjoining the solar room. Also a tiny stove room is present in this wing. As standard measure I take the length of the side wing of the panorama room, this becomes the width of the quiet room and allows me to calculate the length.

Last but not least, there is the morning room: a Tuscan atrium. The width of the room corresponds with the width of the shed on that place right now. Next I can also perfectly draw the length. To determine the dimensions of the gallery adjoining this room, I use the rules of a side wing since, according to me, it can also be considered as an open side wing. The length of the gallery is equal to the width of the morning room plus the width of the quiet room. The morning room is compa-

red to the other two the smallest in size. Because of the sun can penetrate the space fully and stays there as until just after noon.

Until now I mainly reconstructed the villa in plan. I determined the two-dimensional proportions, organized the rooms on site and placed them in relation to each other. The reconstruction in section has not yet been discussed. This is the part where the importance of the classical building order and the role of the column becomes clear. For every room or part of the villa I chose a particular order. This makes you feel the transitions between spaces even better. In addition it creates a hierarchy between them. For the linear axis, the order to start with is the Doric order for the atrium and peristyle, followed up with the Composite order for the D-shaped atrium. When you walk through the gallery you are surrounded by Corinthian columns, to end in the triclinium built in the Composite order. Next for the pavilion you start with the Composite order in the solarium with its panorama room and when continue walking you come across the quiet room, built in Ionic order. And at the end Corinthian columns support the compluvium in the morning room and they reappear in the gallery. Now each room has a corresponding building order, I can determine the diameters of the columns, the thickness of the walls, the dimensions of the podia and the proportions of the entablement.

That's it! I finished the reconstruction, everything has been discussed. I hope you enjoyed reading it. By formulating my method as good as possible, I try to give you a chance to enter my head. Because I'm aware that this reconstruction will never show the real villa, I am not a historian, you know that, don't you? It will always be a translation. But I'm aware this also has its charms and its potentials. All these potentials, I see now, more than ever. So I would like to reflect on that for a while. I will give you an update of this in my next letter.

Sincerely,

Rieke

Appendix

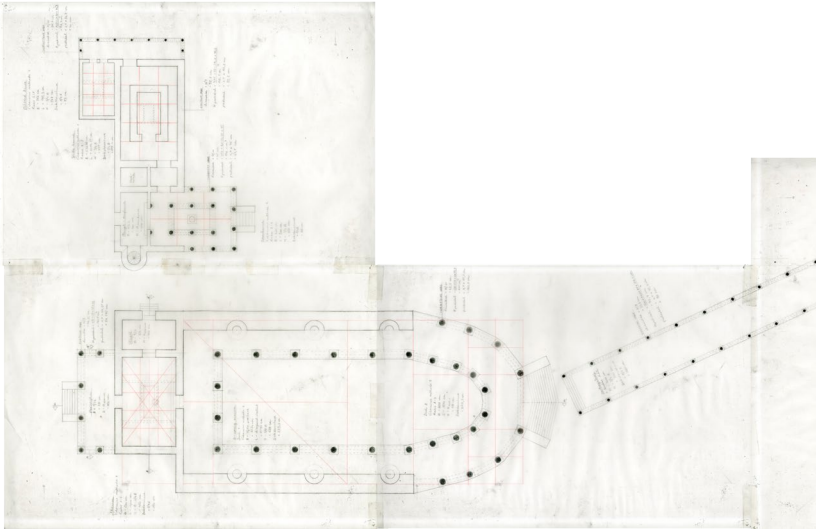
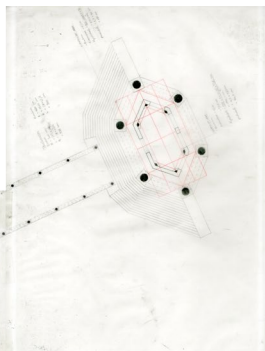
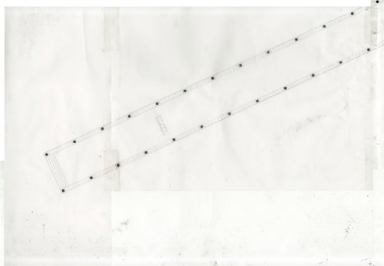


image (a)
Reconstruction of relics
The whole



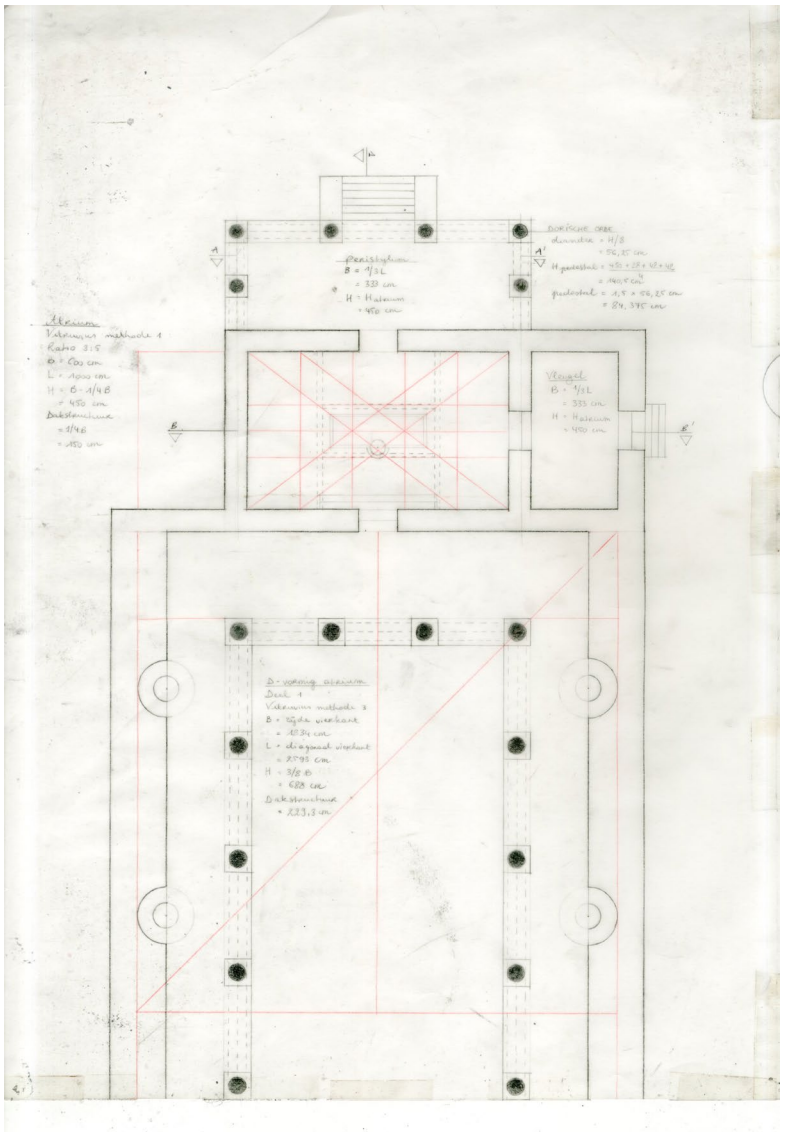


image (b)
 Reconstruction of relics

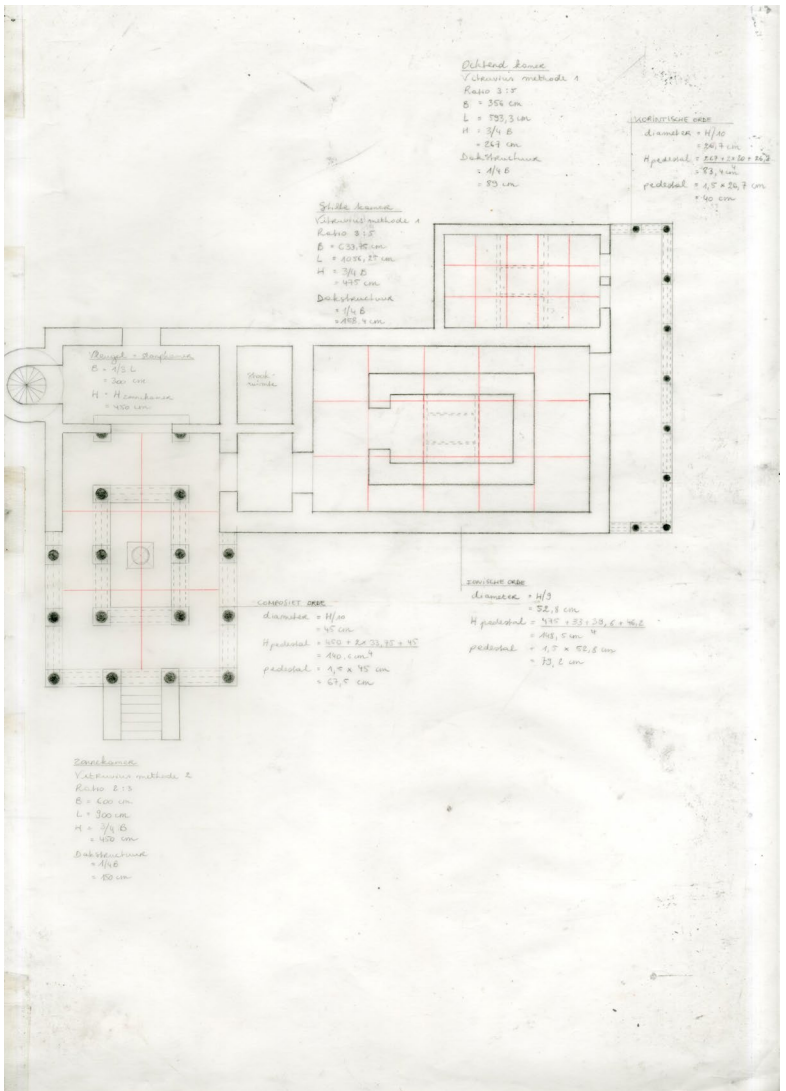


image (c)
 Reconstruction of relics

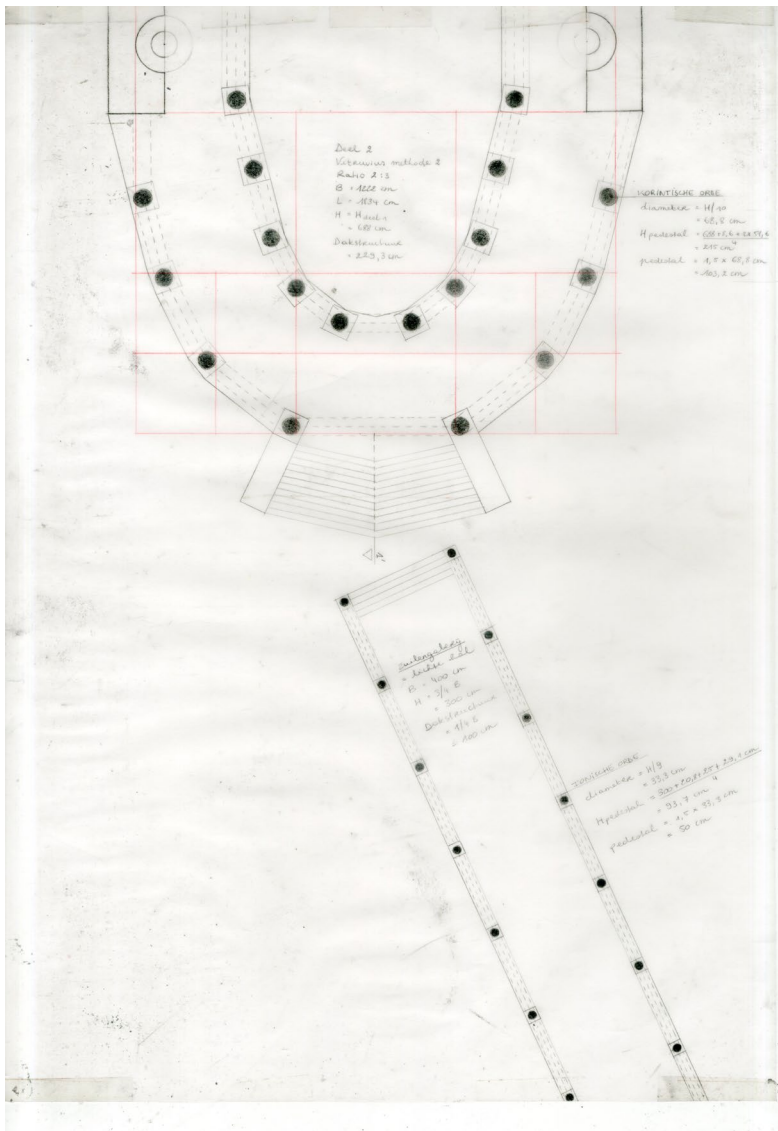


image (d)
 Reconstruction of relics



image (e)
Reconstruction of relics

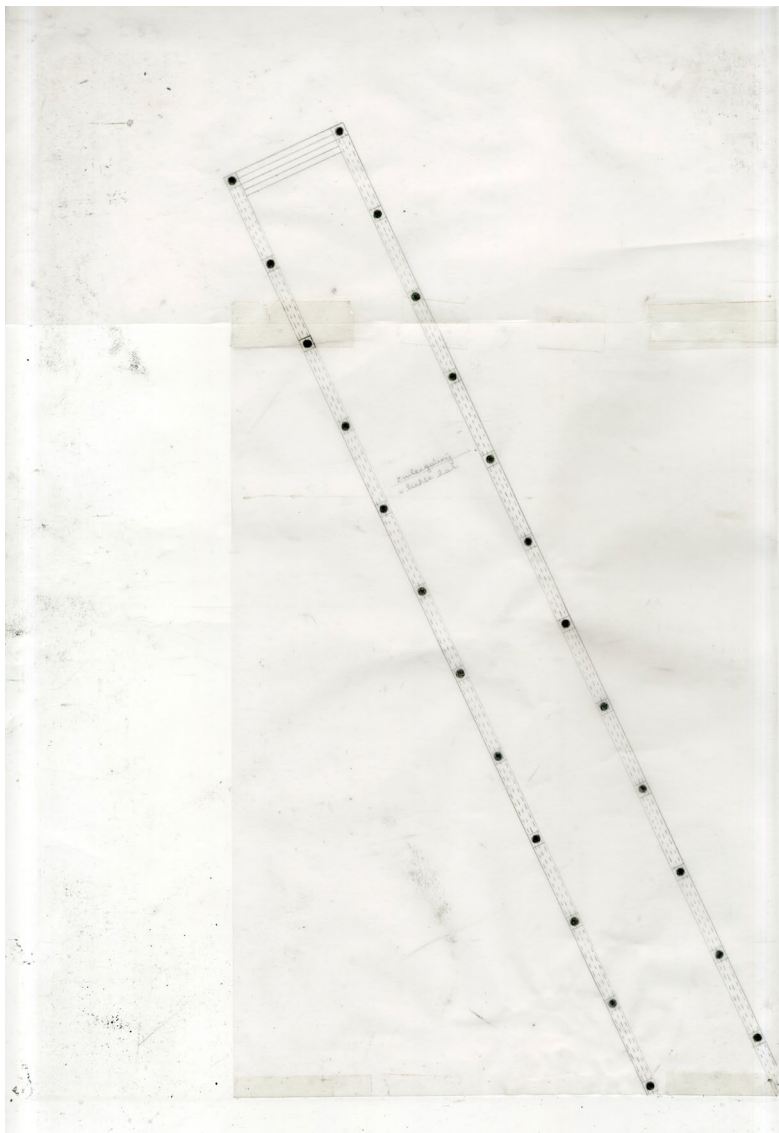


image (f)
Reconstruction of relics

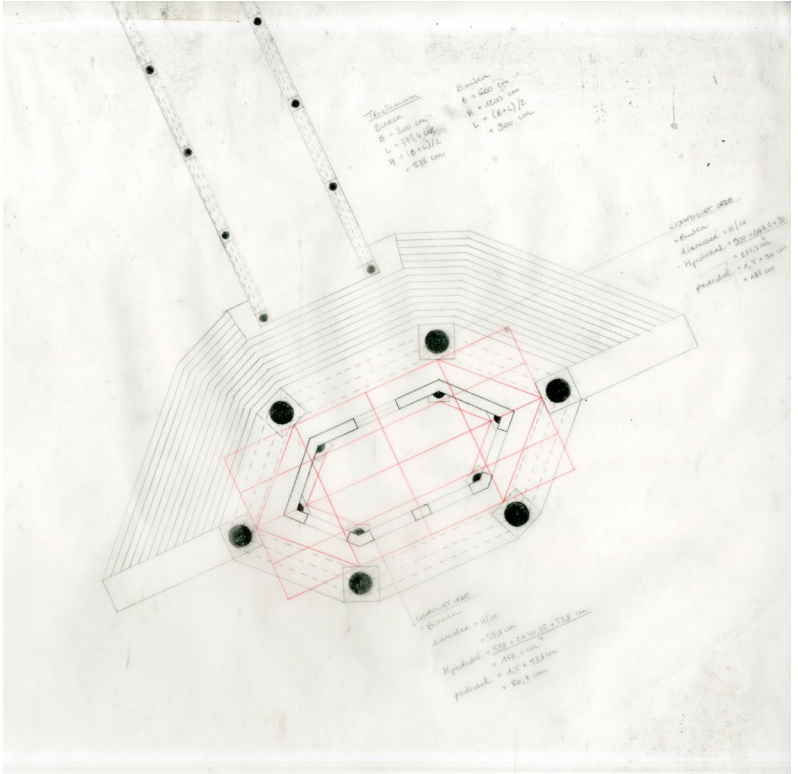


image (g)
 Reconstruction of relics

THE SITE FOR ARCHITECTURAL TREASURES

Dear Plinius,

Now, the question is what I have learnt by making a reconstruction? An utterly important question that I ask myself. The previous letter I ended with stuff to focus on in order to know my answer: what is the potential inside this reconstruction? Well, first I thought thoroughly, next I drew sections. They make me a lot wiser since they become a site where architectural treasures, originally present, reappear. These treasures incorporate qualities that can not get lost as they arise from the construction of this architecture itself. So, I hear you thinking, what are these qualities exactly? To me, classical architecture is dramatic architecture. Compositions between light and dark add an extra dimension to the space, different layers and their decoration provide a lot of depth. This makes me think about the relevance of decoration in architecture in general. By doing this whole exercise around reconstructing your villa I realize that decoration does not have to be subordinate to the ground elements of architecture. Another quality is the relation between every building block caused by a pro-

portion system. Every element, from the most fundamental ones to the ones that are rather petty, is attuned to one another. You really feel the balance in this architecture, a feeling I like. Anyway, I would like to end this letter with this point of view and continue with some visual work. Afterwards, from the reconstruction I described in words, I made a scale model in scale 1:33 from three rooms I adore most: your morning and panorama room and your atrium. A scale that allows you to imagine your presence within the space. For you maybe a little nostalgic, for me exciting. So go ahead and turn the page!

Sincerely,

Rieke

Appendix

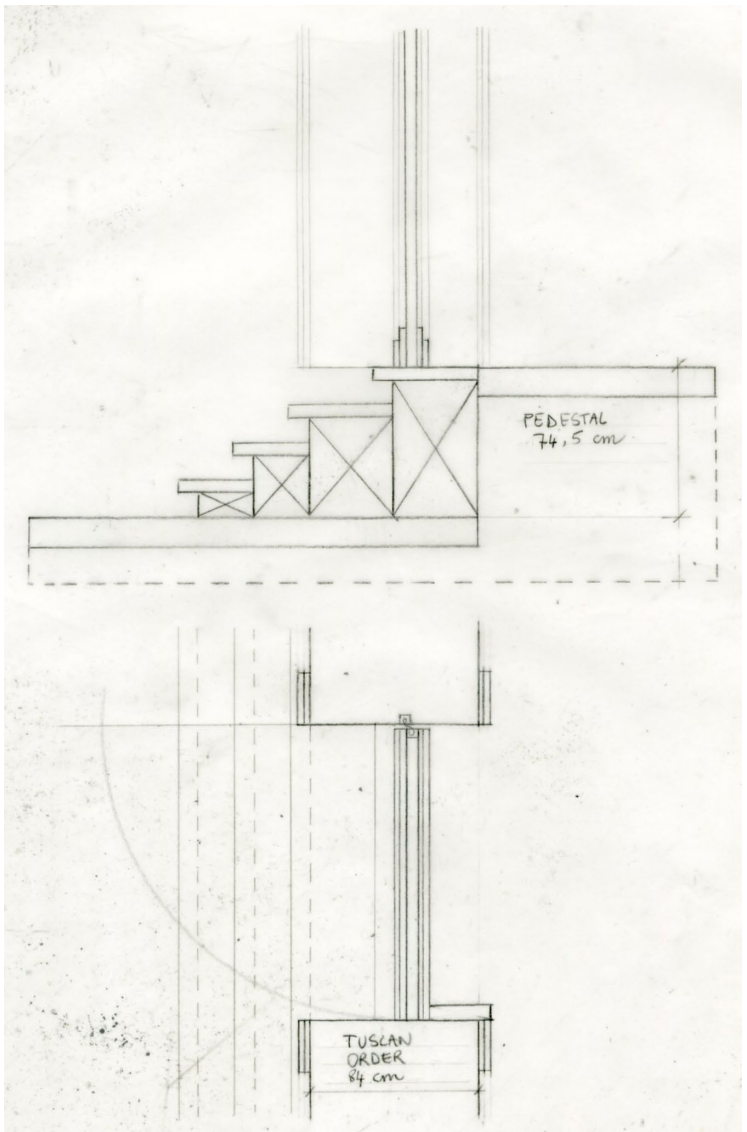


image (a)
Atrium
Entrance

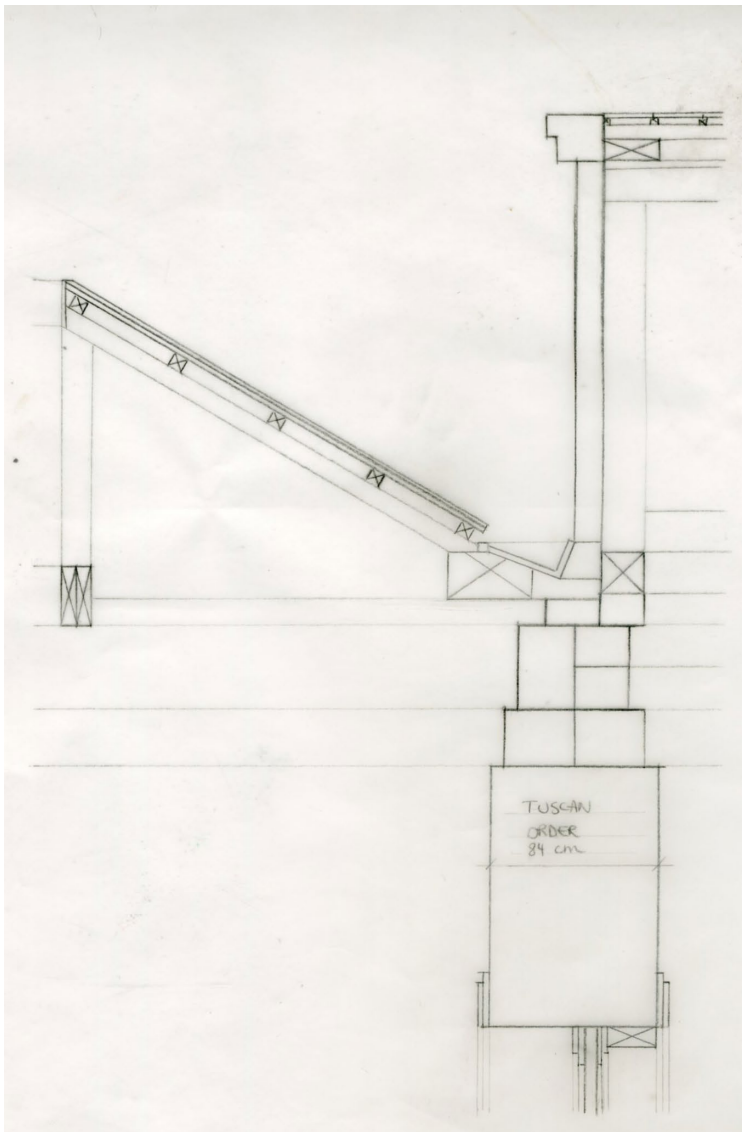


image (b)
Atrium
Connection with the peristyl

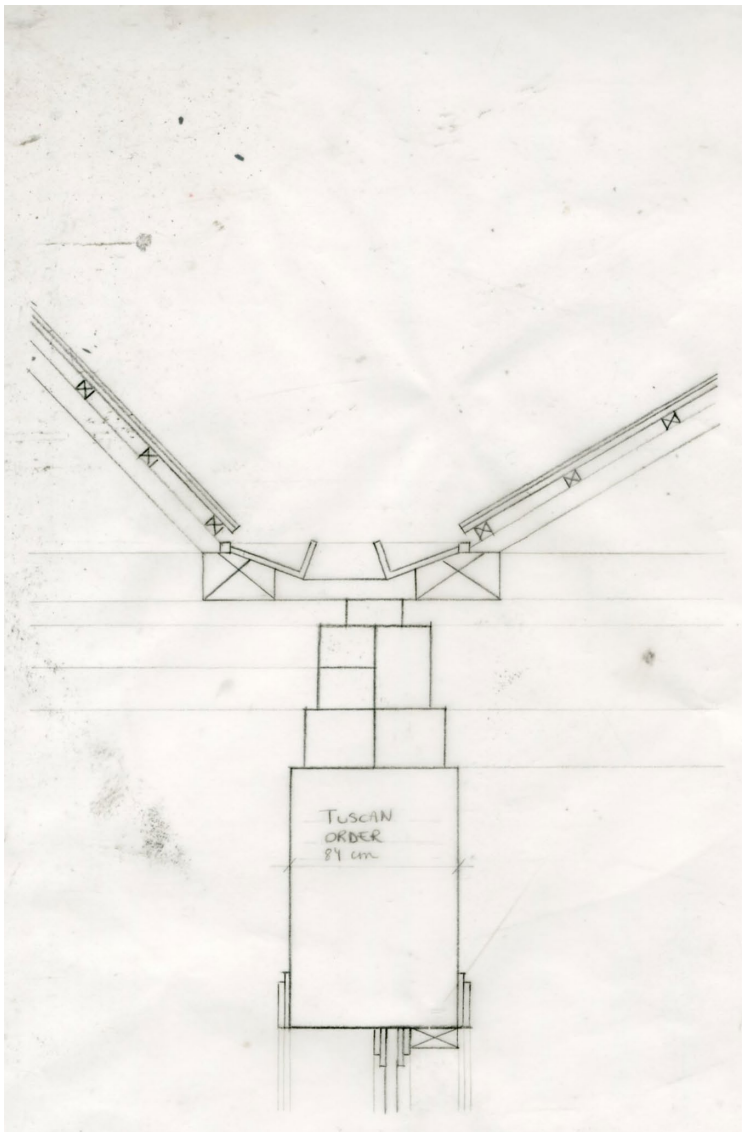


image (c)
Atrium
Connection with the D-shaped atrium



image (d)
Atrium

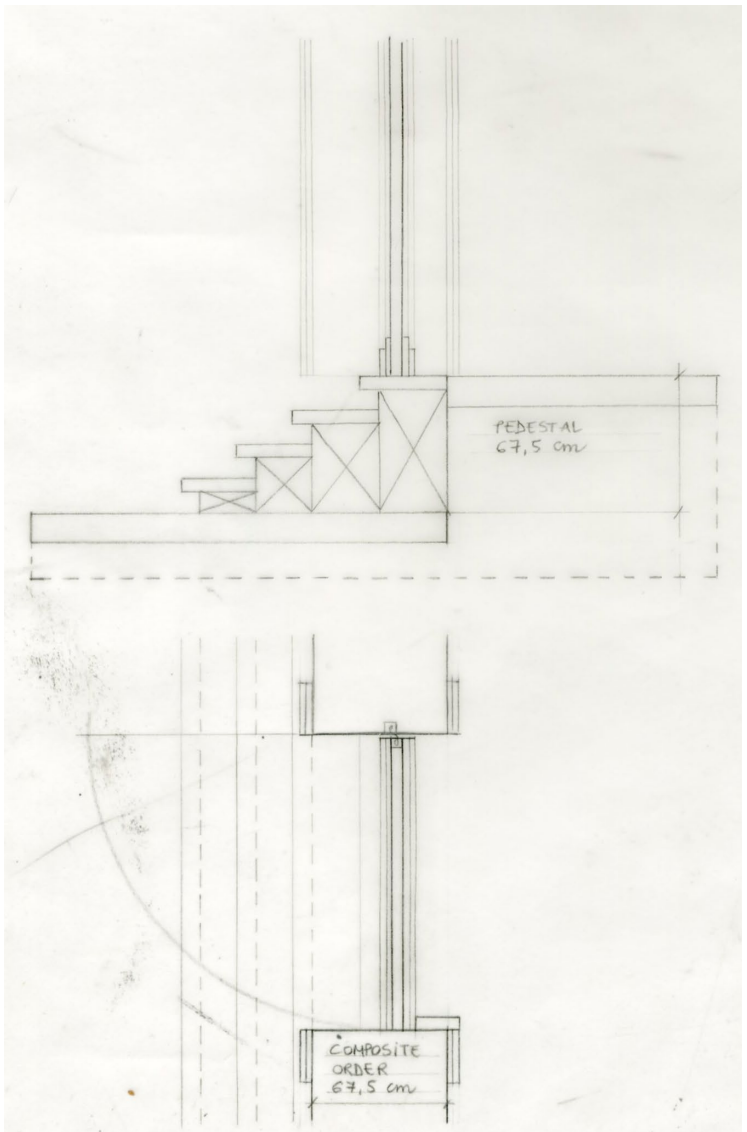


image (e)
Panorama room
Entrance

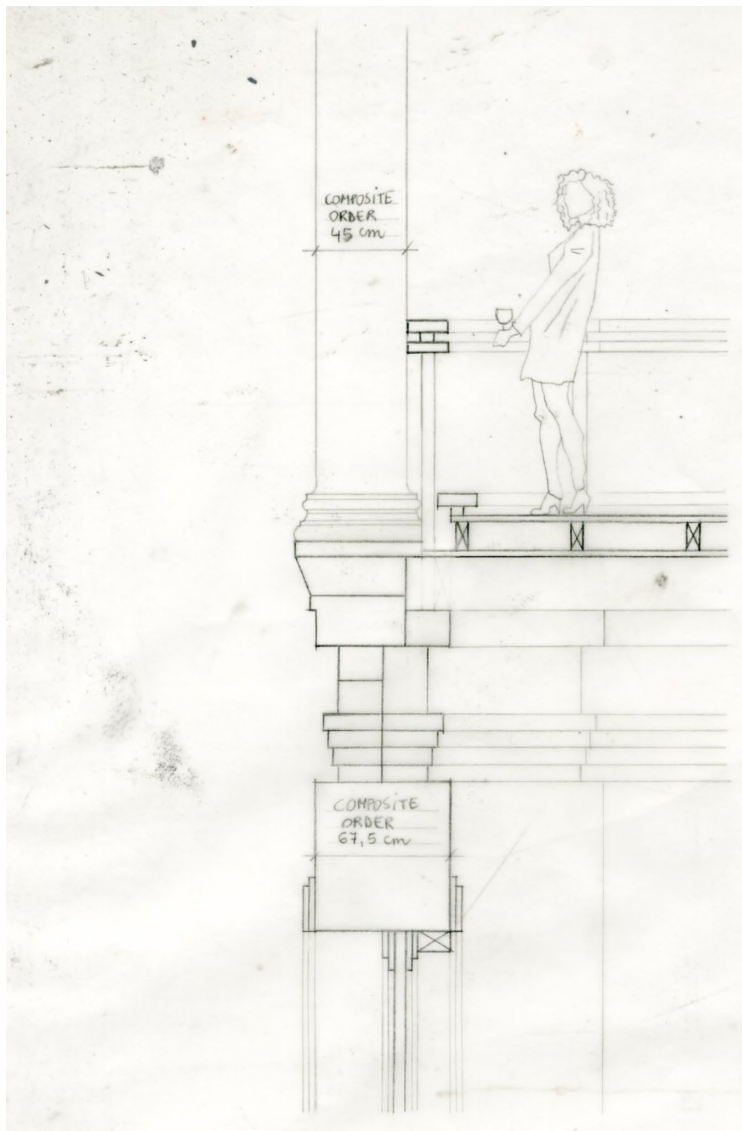


image (f)
Panorama room
Connection with terrace

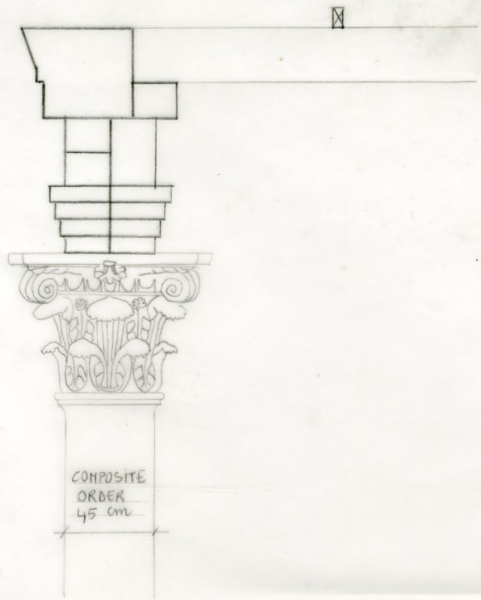


image (g)
Panorama room
Corinthian column with pergola structure



image (h)
Panorama room

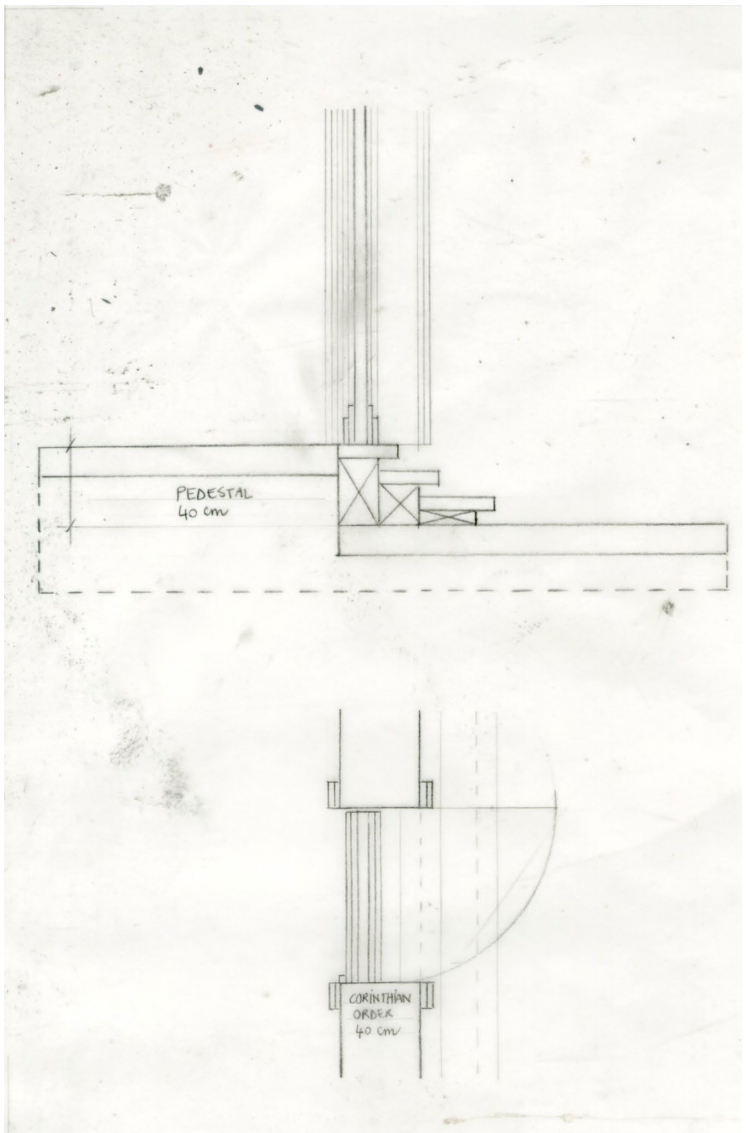


image (i)
Morning room
Entrance

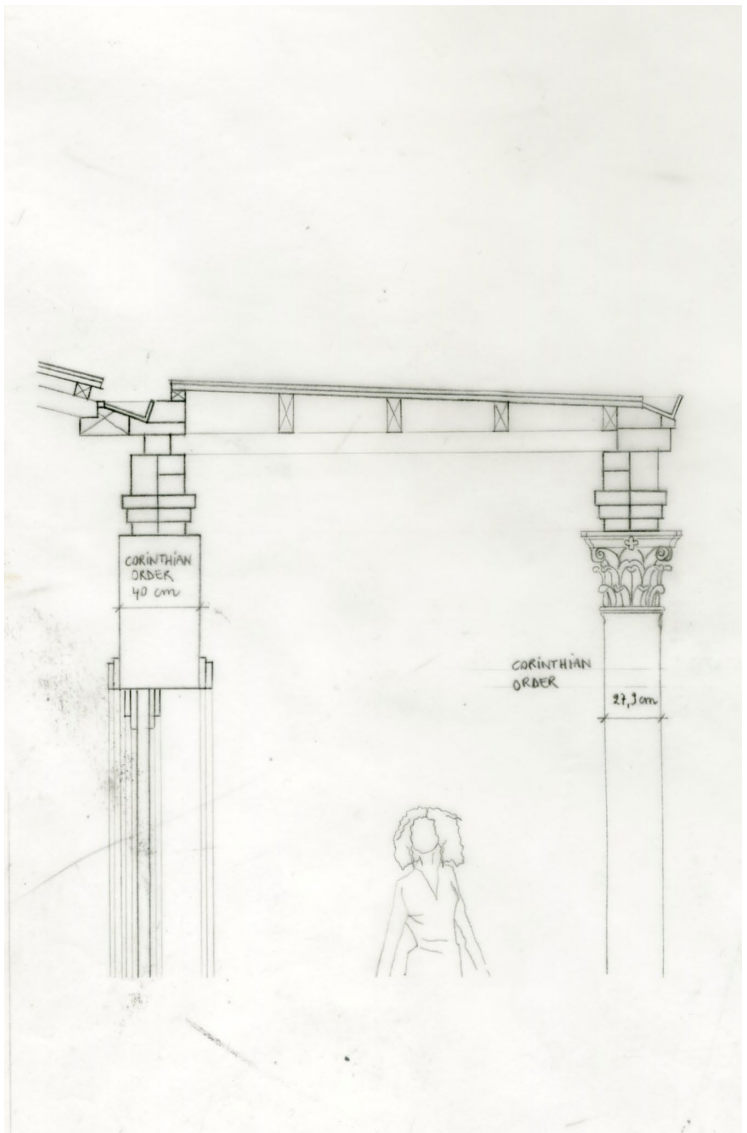


image (j)
Morning room
Connection with the gallery

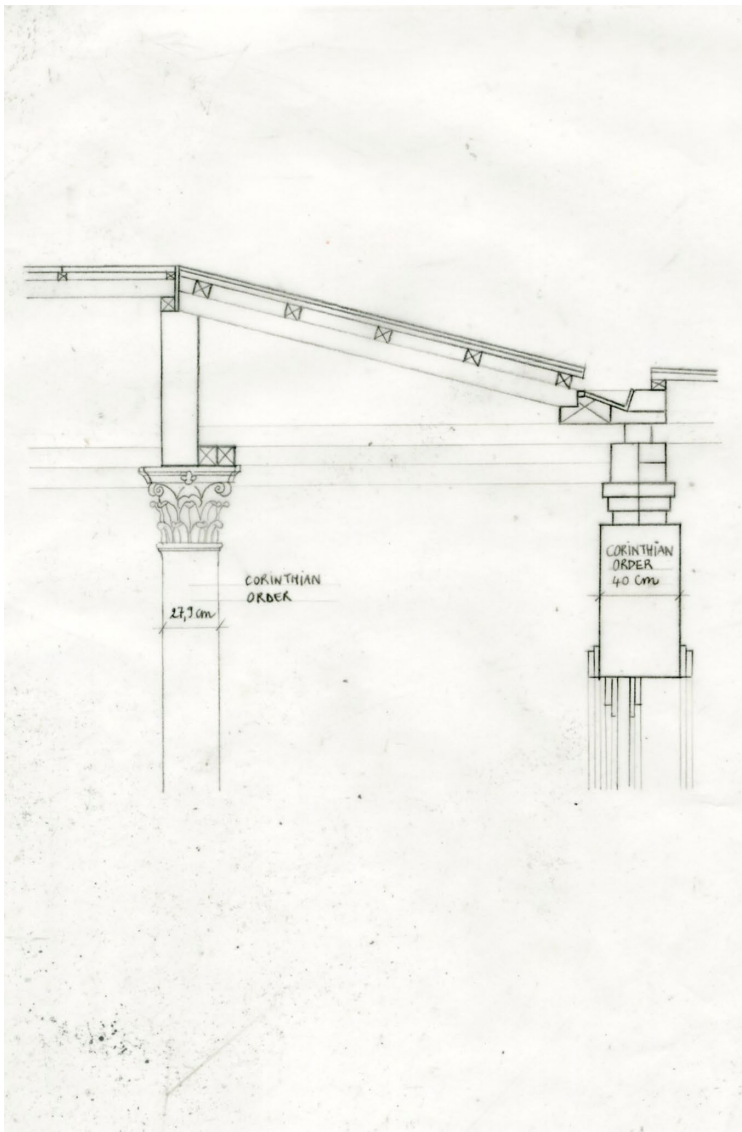


image (k)
Morning room
Connection with the corinthian atrium



image (l)
Morning room

WHAT NO LONGER EXISTS

Dear Plinius,

Last time I talked about the decoration and the proportion as qualities that can be brought back to life by making a reconstruction. These qualities I mainly identified as architectural ones. The qualities bounded by site can no longer be saved, they have been lost over time. First of all the relief changed: a flat sandy sandpit is what is left. Secondly the vegetation around it has lost its beauty: much of the same, no such diversity in species as in your gardens, Plinius. But not only the natural landscape is different. By reconstructing only a selection of the villa, the architectural landscape also changes. The result of that selection is a view of invisible terraces, gardens, galleries and roofs. Certainly a large share of quality that is lost. It makes me slightly sad, the original site has lost his value. Besides, I'm not the only disappointed person. Leon Krier, a Luxembourg architect, shares my feeling and shows great dissatisfaction with the changed landscape. He made one of the most recent reconstructions (*a,b*) in 1982 and decided to solve his problem by imagining a steep cliff as context, one that you can only find

on the island of Capri or around Positano. So, let me look on the bright side of this drawback: attractive places enough in wonderful Italy I would think! Perhaps this is the perfect opportunity to discover and experience this beauty for real, descriptions remains descriptions after all.

Alright Plinius, why not, let's book a flight to Rome!

Sincerely,

Rieke

Appendix

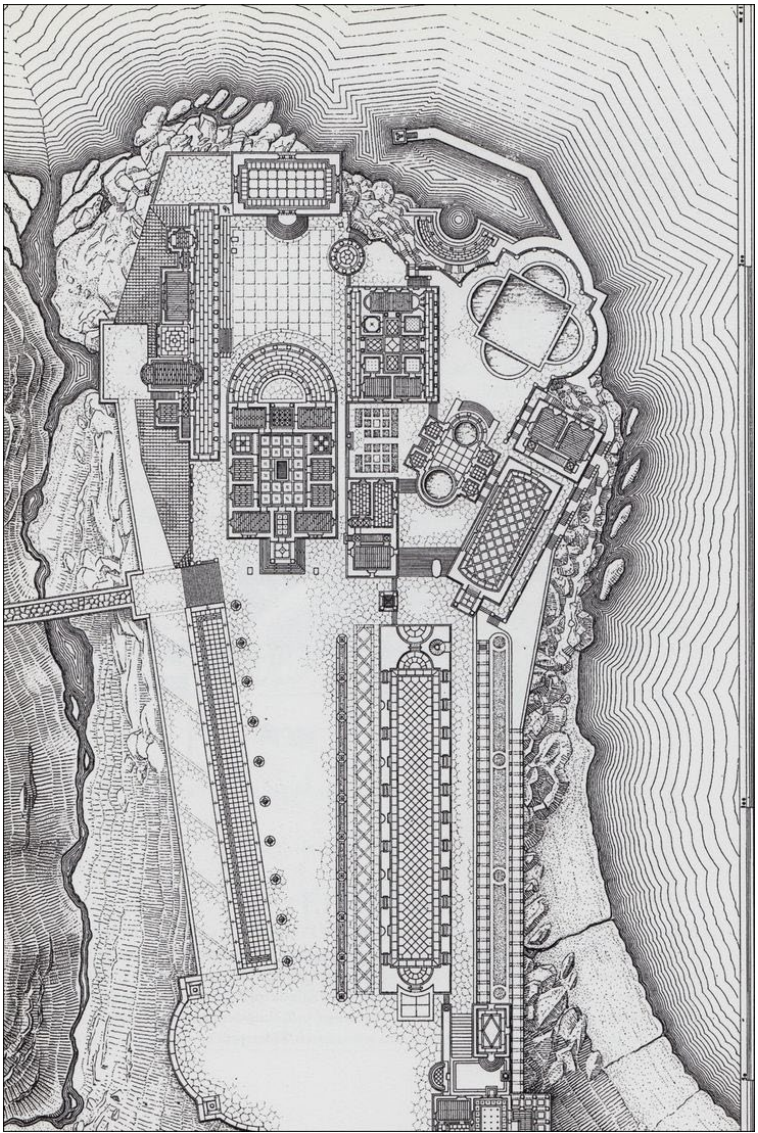


image (a)
Plan Villa Laurentum
Leon Krier

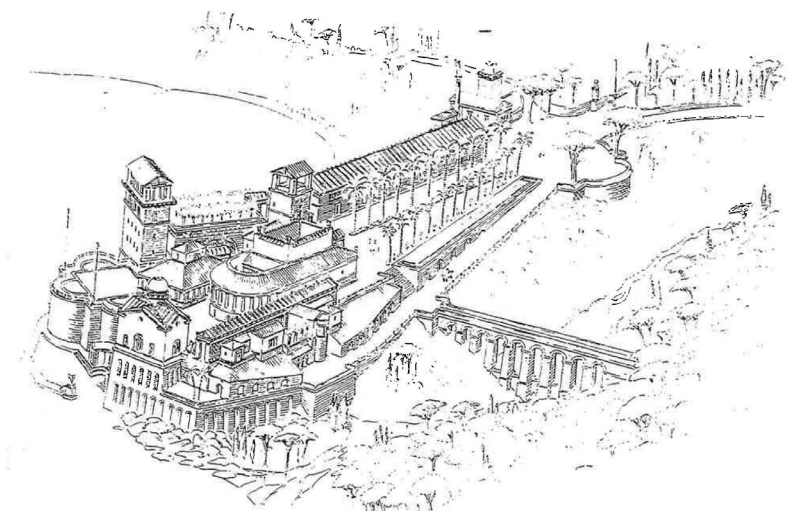


image (b)
Drawing Villa Laurentum
Leon Krier

II

I GO ON A HOLIDAY ...

Dear Plinius,

Tuesday, April 3th 2018, 8:36 am

Today is the day! Shortly, at 10 am, my flight leaves for Rome. My dad, sweet as he is, proposed to assist me during my stay. A helping hand is always useful, just as some company is always pleasant (*a*). In order to see a top view of Ostia, I specially booked a seat near the window. Perhaps I can see the relics with my own eyes, who knows. Currently I'm at the airport, making the final preparations of four intense days that are ahead of me. I decide to continue writing this letter every day, this way you will have a chronological overview of my experiences during my trip.

10.28 pm

OK, I already barely feel my feet anymore. However, I can't say I go to sleep unhappy, especially not with a rich day as this one. My intention is to walk within Rome all distances by foot. This will help me to get a realistic impression of the size of the city and of the mutual positioning of the things on my to-do list. Furthermore,

this way I will experience the city as much as possible. So, today was on the program: a visit to Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne (*b*), the Sant'Andrea al Quirinale (*c*) and the Giardino degli Aranci (*d*). At the first stop I had bad luck, the entrance gate was closed and the office next to it unmanned. My visit did not go further than the outside. Second on my list: The Sant'Andrea al Quirinale of Bernini. Five years ago I already entered the church, but now I want to admire it again with new eyes. Beautiful how light enters from a hidden source and illuminates the 'Martyrdom of Saint Andrew' (Courtois, 1668) (*e*). Finally, a visit to the Giardino degli Aranci, a location that I discovered by watching *La Grande Bellezza* of Sorrentino. During my walk today, some interesting things have crossed my path, the Portico d'Ottavia (*f*) in Ghetto di Roma for example. Suddenly it appeared from between a few buildings, it made me deviate from my route. In about an hour I tried to observe as much as possible and to be aware of my experiences on that particular place. Then I resumed my walk, along the Tiber and Isola Island up to the Aventine. Once there I enjoyed the orange garden and a beautiful view of Rome.

Wednesday, April 4th 2018, 11:47 pm

Day two had a visit to Tivoli looming ahead. After a train ride of about 50 minutes, 30 kilometers east of Rome, I arrived. On my way to the very first stop, villa d'Este (*g*), I already saw my second destination appearing from between some evergreens. Bathing in warm

radiance and balancing on the edge of a cliff it stood there, Tempio di Vesta (*h*). A small charming temple that is only half there. I will tell you the details later on. Now first villa d'Este. Unfortunately, the villa itself was under construction, however the garden made things right again. Actually I can not describe its beauty in words, it's a walk you have to experience yourself. My favorite part was without hesitation the enclosed garden with central Fontana dell'Ovato (*i*), likely because of my love for hidden things. When I entered, the astonishment was this big I can still feel it thinking about it now. On closer examination, the whole garden plays with that element of surprise. Only here, with its walls surrounding, you really have no idea of what's inside. The moment you come in, it's like another world you enter. Next up is the small temple I mentioned before, Tempio di Vesta. Here, on this location, you have the most beautiful view on Parco villa Gregoriana (*j*). Piranesi was attracted by the temple as well, different etchings make this clear. To this letter I will attach my favorite one (*k*), two layers that come together as one: old versus new as well as narrative versus architecture. I will also show you another etch, one from Constant Bourgeois Fidèle (*l*). I bought this one on site as souvenir.

Thursday, April 5th 2018, 10:53 pm

Over to day three, to Castel Gandolfo: a small village on the Albanian hills about 30 kilometers south-east of Rome. Once there, I had to walk uphill for a while to go to the village centre. Along my walk I was immediately

confronted with the sublime view over the crater lake (*m*). What is so special to this place, is the presence of the papal summer residence with its Barberini garden. In the papal palace, his study room I will remember most because it reminded me of your panorama room. There were also three views from just as many windows: one view on Rome, one on the Tyrrhenian sea and one on the Albano lake. Then the garden, immense in size and beautiful what concerns the view, however, the garden of villa d'Este pleased me more. The second part of the day I spent back in Rome, on the Forum Romanum (*n*). Concerning proportions and dimensions, this was an interesting experience as well. Useful to see different scales standing side by side.

Friday, April 6th, 2018 5: 11 pm

Unfortunately all good things come to an end. But first, one last important activity: villa Giulia (*o*). We were lucky with the weather, it was around 20 degrees and the sun was shining. When walking north we first came across Parco villa Borghese, a real pleasure to walk through, to arrive eventually at villa Giulia. I immediately understood its description as 'a climate on its own'. Despite the busy street surrounding it, I found an oasis of peace inside. Remarkable is the topography of the location (*p*). While the most important villas in Rome get a spot on the top of the hill, villa Giulia is drowned in one. These named elements create together an apparent focus on the villa and its indoor climate. However, the opposite is true, even the surrounding hills are in-

volved in the design. Jacopo Meneghini, a landscape architect, was responsible for planting around 36 000 trees of many different species. The villa itself was designed by some of the most famous architects of that period: mainly by Giorgio Vasari but also with the help of Michelangelo and the young Vignola and Ammannati. Conclusion: villa Giulia is a true beauty, but I can not say whether it is the most beautiful among the other villas in Rome. To know that, I first have to visit the rest. Next time.

There you go Plinius, it's a wrap! Satisfied I return to Belgium. Ready to pick up where I left off!

Sincerely,

Rieke

Appendix



image (a)
Selfie



image (b)
Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne



image (c)
Sant'Andrea al Quirinale
Exterior



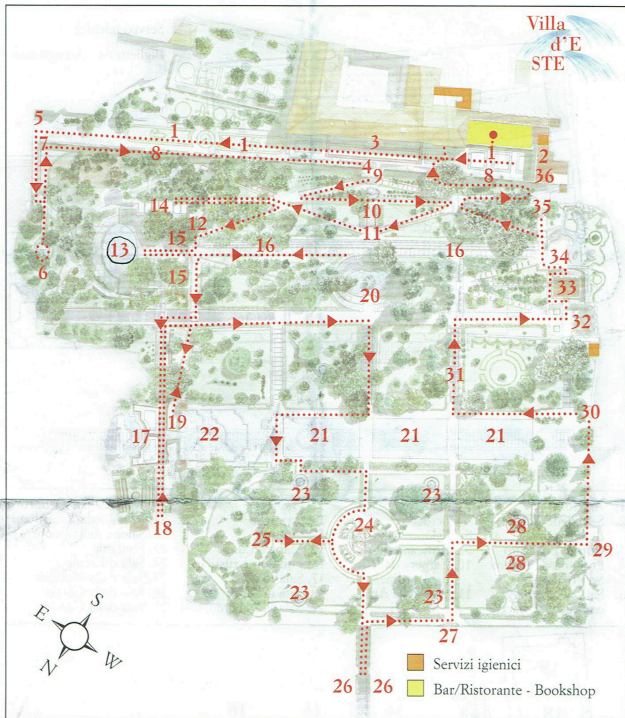
image (d)
Giardino degli Aranci



image (e)
Sant'Andrea al Quirinale
Interior



image (f)
Portico d'Ottavia



- | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Vialone | 14. Grotta di Venere | 26. Fontane rustiche del Colle |
| 2. Gran Loggia o "Cenacolo" | 15. Fontana di Bacco | 27. Fontana di Diana Efesia o Madre Natura |
| 3. Duplice Loggia | 16. Cento Fontane | 28. Fontane rustiche dette "Mete" |
| 4. Fontana del Tripode | 17. Fontana dell'Organo | 29. Fontana dei Cigni |
| 5. Fontana di Europa | 18. Fontana di Venere | 30. Torre di Barbarossa |
| 6. Fontana di Pegaso | 19. Grotte delle Sibille | 31. Scala dei Bollori |
| 7. Grotte di Igèa ed Esculapio | 20. Fontana dei Draghi | 32. Fontana della Civetta |
| 8. Passeggiata del Cardinale | 21. Peschiere | 33. Fontana di Proserpina |
| 9. Loggia di Pandora | 22. Fontana di Nettuno | 34. Fontana di Rometta |
| 10. Fontana del Bicchierone | 23. Fontane delle Aquile Estensi | 35. Fontana di Flora |
| 11. Grotta di Ercole | 24. Rotonda dei Cipressi | 36. Grotta di Diana |
| 12. Grotta di Pomona | 25. Fontanina Rustica dell'Inverno | |
| 13. Fontana dell'Ovato | | |



image (h)
Tempio di Vesta



image (1)
Entrance Fontana dell'Ovato

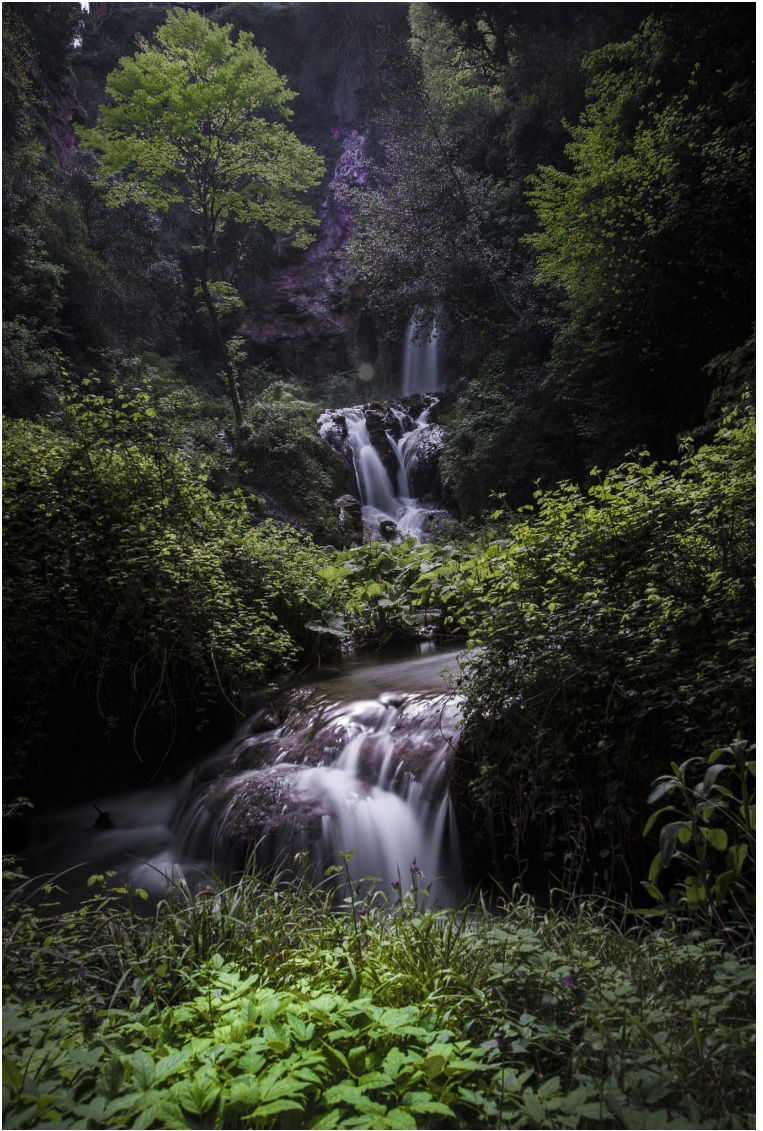


image (j)
Parco villa Gregoriana

Dimostrazione del Prospetto

L

del Tempio di Vesta in Tivoli

Tav. III
939

- Figura I. Prospetto del Tempio nello stato in cui presentemente esiste.
A. Intorno della cella spogliate di suoi ornati.
B. Finestra.
C. Ingresso del gradice che dal piano del portico si calava nel Tempio.
D. Foglia della porta.
E. Avanzo del muro che sosteneva la scala.
F. Cimasa del basamento interrotto da gradi della scala, la quale mostra la loro larghezza.

- Figura II. Dimostrazione del basamento tagliato nella parte orientale del Tempio: G. e del tribonale: H. che corrisponde al portico per nove gradi: I. quali erano racchiusi nell'interrotta cimasa X del basamento.
Figura III. Dimostrazione del ripiegamento della cupola K. con finim del fiondo L. e del tetto del Portico ornato con antefisse, e penna di terra con M.

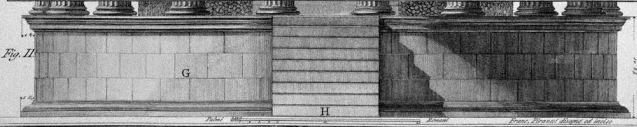
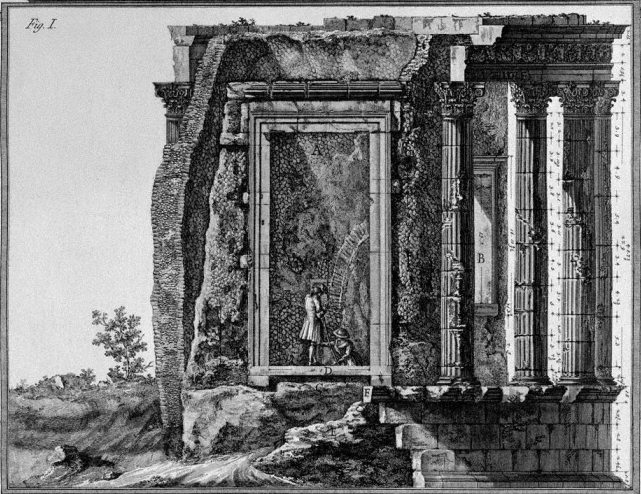
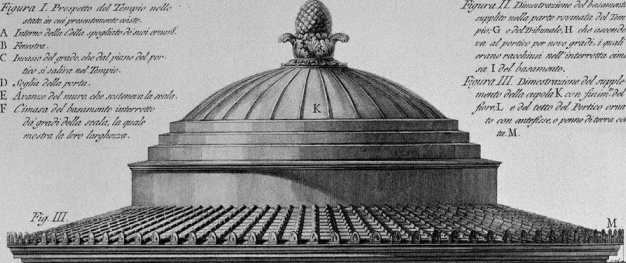
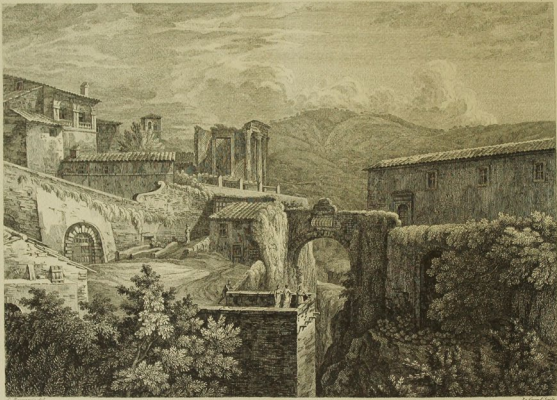


image (k)
Etch
Piranesi



Vue du Temple de Vesta vulgairement nommé le Temple de la Sibylle à Tivoly 18 milles de Rome .

image (1)
Etch
Constant Bourgeois Fidèle



image (m)
Albano Lake

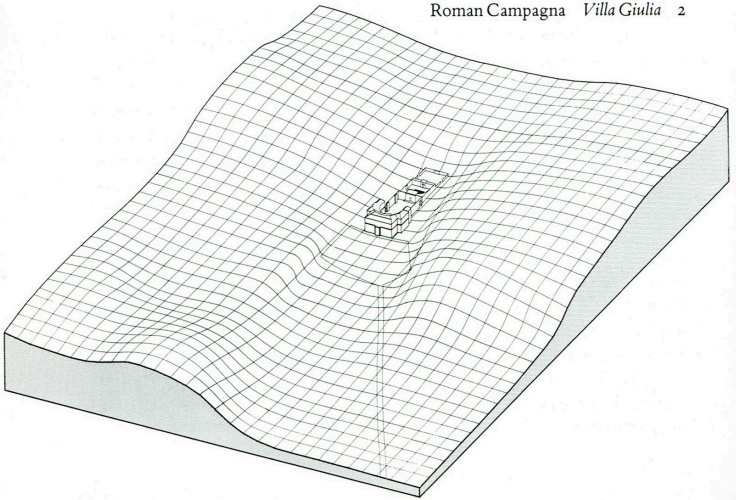


image (n)
Forum Romanum



image (o)
Villa Giulia

Roman Campagna *Villa Giulia* 2



... AND WITH ME I TAKE

Dear Plinius,

Let's have a look, where did I left of? Before my trip I identified the lost qualities (which were quite a lot) in your villa. Qualities that can never exist again on that exact place because of the changes the context went through. Therefore it seemed interesting to me to determine the context myself and select a number of places that fill in these lost qualities again. Each room of this immense villa of yours focuses on different aspects of the surrounding landscape and they all have their particular orientation. During my reconstruction I already emphasized my love for three rooms so I continue with this selection. In addition to the original qualities I redefine, I want to look out for a context that offers an added value, creating new qualities. For this, I traveled to Rome, a journey that would offer me a range of possibilities. And as a matter of fact, it absolutely did. I selected three places and took them back with me to Belgium, at least my experiences and memories of it. So here I am in Belgium with three sublime locations in mind. This moment is a milestone in my story, a mo-

ment where your role is still prominent, Plinius, however mine becomes at least as important. Your villa became a true source of inspiration to me. My desire to claim these favorite rooms I have, is great. So why don't I? With the knowledge I gained this far, I consider myself capable for this challenge. Thus, I no longer stop myself and get to work.

Now we have gotten to the point the roles are reversed: it is my turn to invite you! Just like you described your villa to your friend Gallus, I want to show you around in mine. My villa consists of three rooms, spread over a hilly landscape. Together with a walk that connects them, they form a whole. Every room gets its spot, each located at different height. This results in different views that can be admired through the architecture as looking glass in between. Actually I could say these rooms are each on a different row of the natural amphitheater, because that's what it reminds me of. By means of connecting hiking trails you're able to go from the one room to another. They follow the inclines suggested by the nature of the place, therefore they are quite intense, a great workout to do. The surrounding vegetation is diverse. To prevent a uniform monotony and to create the greatest possible beauty and picturesque novelty, many different species are utilized giving preference to those plants that do not shed their leaves in winter such as laurels, lichens, holly, marine cherries and so on...

In the next three letters I will guide you through the landscape and every room within. As my villa is a new version of yours some elements will sound familiar to you, although at least as much will be new. Detailed and step by step, I'll do this walk together with you.

Sincerely,

Rieke

AN OUTDOOR ROOM IN GHETTO
DI ROMA

Dear Plinius,

The beautiful piece of nature my villa is located in, is situated in the Sabine Hills, about 30 kilometers northeast of Rome. The easiest and most pleasant way to get there is by train. It moves as a caterpillar, smooth between hills, like I have shrunken. Every time I'm blown away by the view from the window: a splendid scenery with olive-clad hills and tiny medieval hilltop villages. While autumn is my favorite season, I prefer to come here during spring, when the countryside explodes in color with yellow broom and fields of sunflowers, accented by the silver green of the olive trees. Fifty minutes later the train arrives and a ten minutes walk north awaits you. The landscape surrounding completely hides my villa, it is only from the Ponte Gregoriano that you perceive the whole. After descending down the stairs on the other side of the bridge, you'll meet the front door. A heavy red pine entrance allows access to the Portico d'Ottavia (*a-g*). This ancient double pronaos, built by August, now acts as gateway to my property. Just as they replaced two columns by an archway in the

Middle Ages, I replaced the left arch by a half room. You might recognize some elements because your atrium forms the basis after all. The impluvium is a little bigger in size and is this time not accompanied by a compluvium above. A marble basin, supported by corinthian columns, collects the rain and spills in the water reservoir underneath. Then special attention goes to the rain gutter. Since there is only half a roof it guides the water, a few meters lower, through a gutter on columns so two tiny waterfalls arise during gales. Finally not to mention the route to the next room: zigzagging you walk through the outdoor room, enter and exit the architecture, a few times in a row. Different heights provide varied eye levels and various views on the rural nature. As I walk further, the second room is right in front of me, in the glow of the luminous morning sun.

Sincerely,

Rieke

Appendix



image (a)
Portico d'Ottavia
Front



image (b)
Portico d'Ottavia
Front



image (c)
Portico d'Ottavia
Rightt side



image (d)
Portica d'Ottavia
Inside

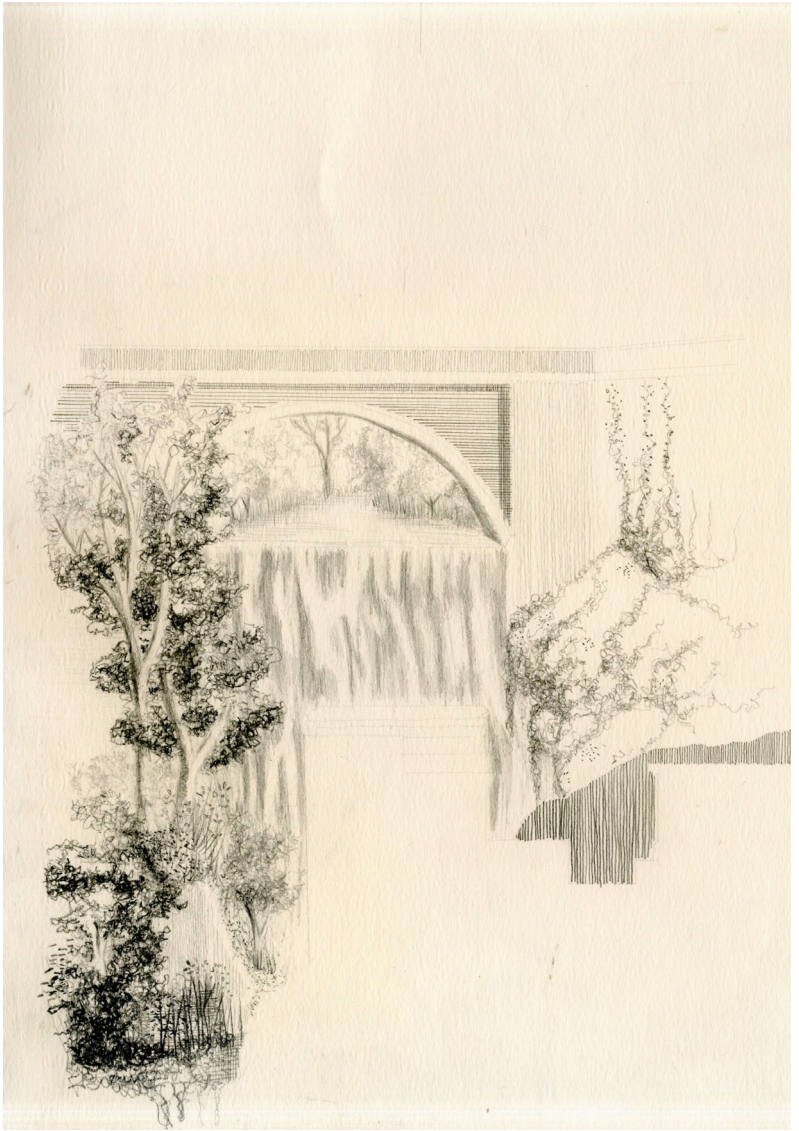
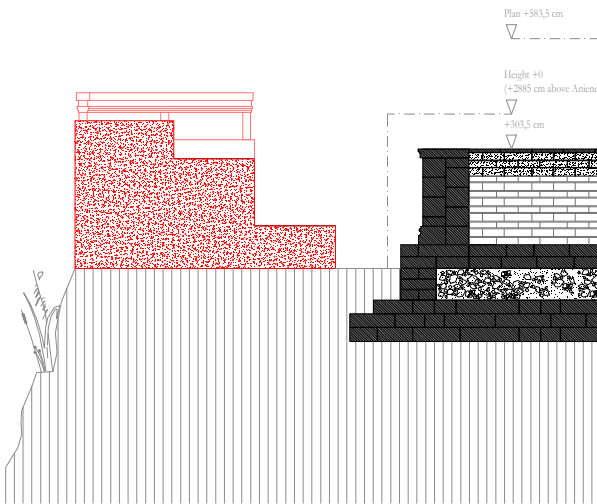
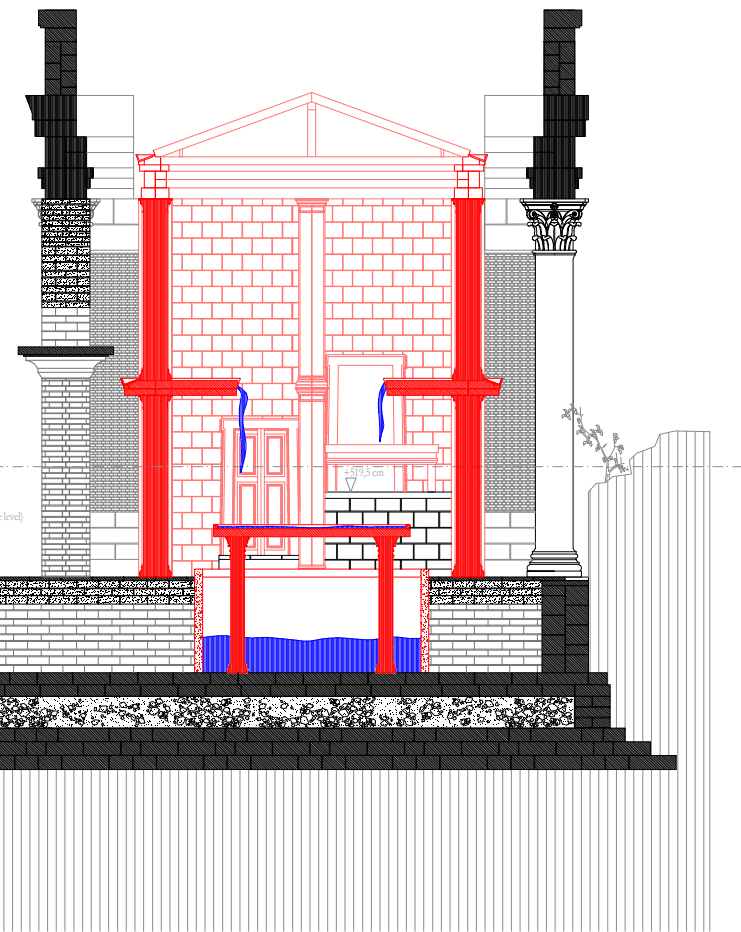


image (e)
The outdoor room in Ghetto di Roma





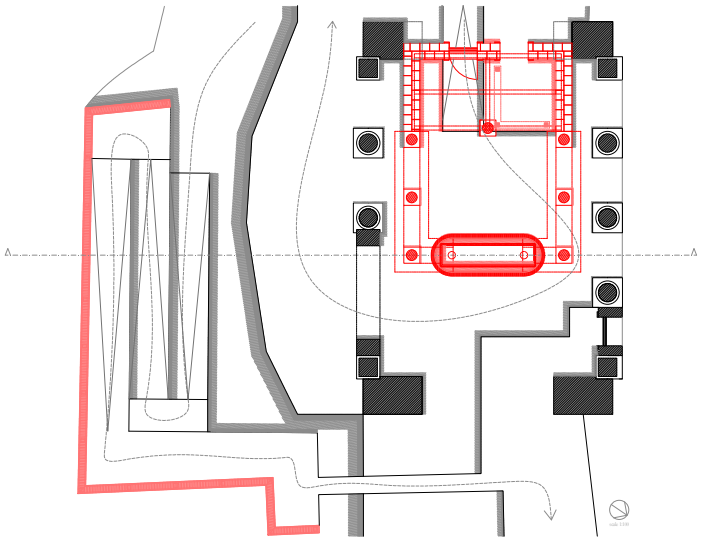


image (f)
The outdoor room in Ghetto di Roma
Plan

Architect: [unclear]
Scale: 1:25

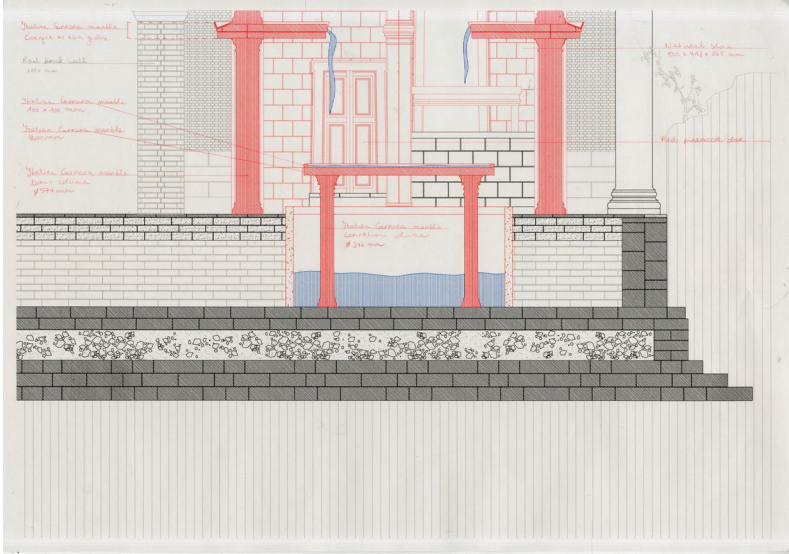
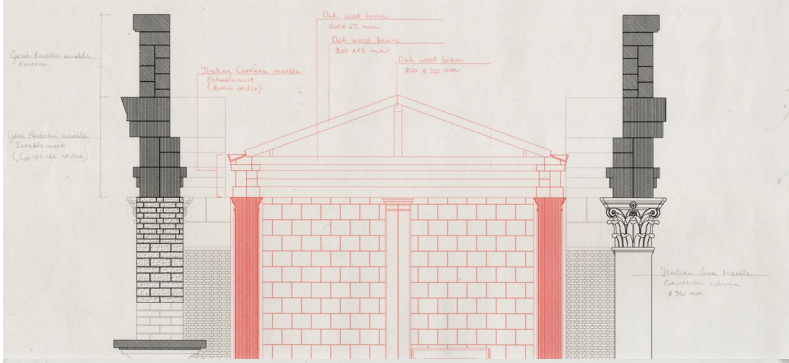


image (g)
The outdoor room in Ghetto di Roma
Section

A MORNING IN TIVOLI

Dear Plinius,

The hill you now see in front of you offers a place to my morning room: ideal in orientation and exceptional in its character. This circular Roman temple, dating from the ancient times, used to be the elegant Tempio di Vesta (*a-g*). With the necessary attention I have transformed it into a true luxury room. Standing on the edge of a cliff and overlooking the falls of the Aniene you can imagine I have my best morning coffee here. First, to get there, you have to climb a few stairs in order to cross the hill through a covered gallery. Once arrived, the entrance is based in the south. I decided to keep as much as possible of the remains and to intervene on the critical points. The cella of the peripteral temple is the only thing I replaced fully. A natural stone wall with the same thickness as that of your morning room takes its place. Important here is that I keep the position of the two windows and the entrance door forasmuch as they are located perfectly. Around this cella, in the ambulatory, I decide to keep its ten remaining Corinthian columns and furthermore, not to add more. Then in the east, on

the edge of the deep down below a portico is added as a place to enjoy the warmth of the sun, the delight of the view and all the things that go with it. Finally the centerpiece of this room is located inside: a circular four-poster bed with baldachin. The bed itself is built up by a constellation of columns. Four times two stacked Doric columns for the baldachin on the one hand and at the same time to support the roof on the other hand. A circular prestressed concrete beam connects the four columns on top and serves as a starting point for four pieces lace curtains: transparent on top and opaque below. A next series of columns, four smaller doric ones, support the end and the head of the bed. The last series is the smallest one, I use them to tie the pieces curtain around. For both sides of the bed there is a staircase. The railing is made of red pine wood and embraces the columns at the end for support. When I spent the night in this gorgeous bed, I feel like a queen in my castle.

Sincerely,

Rieke

Appendix



image (a)
Tempio di Vesta
View on the Ponte Gregoriano



image (b)
Tempio di Vesta
Entrance in the south



image (c)
Tempio di Vesta
Diverse vegetation



image (d)
Tempio di Vesta
Falls of the Aniene

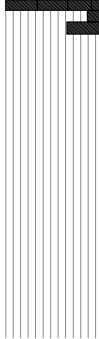


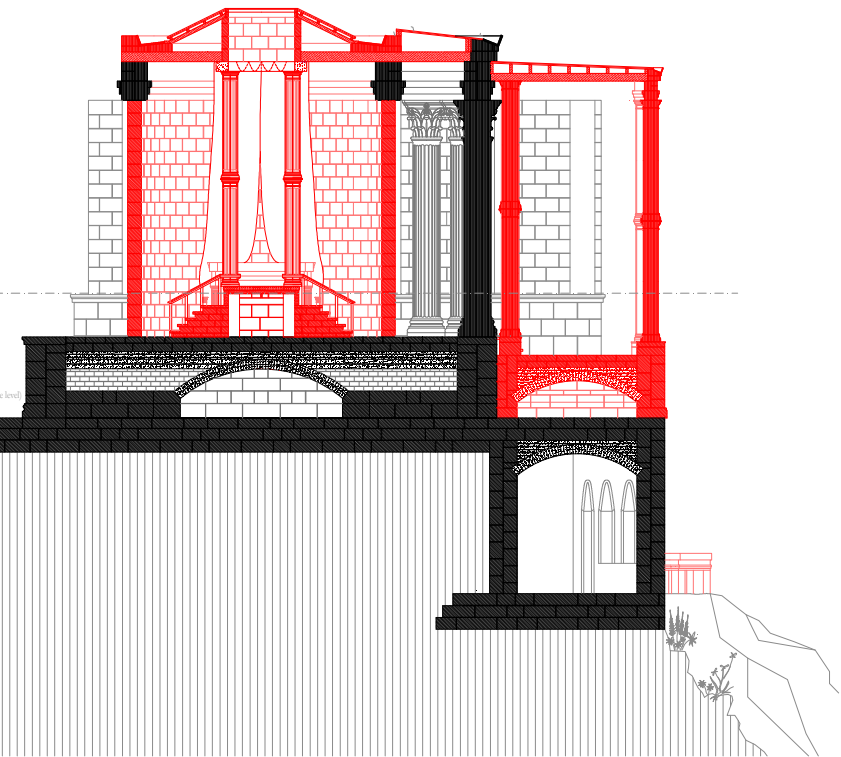
image (e)
The morning room in Tivoli

Plan +570 cm



Height +0
(+3920 cm above Amien)





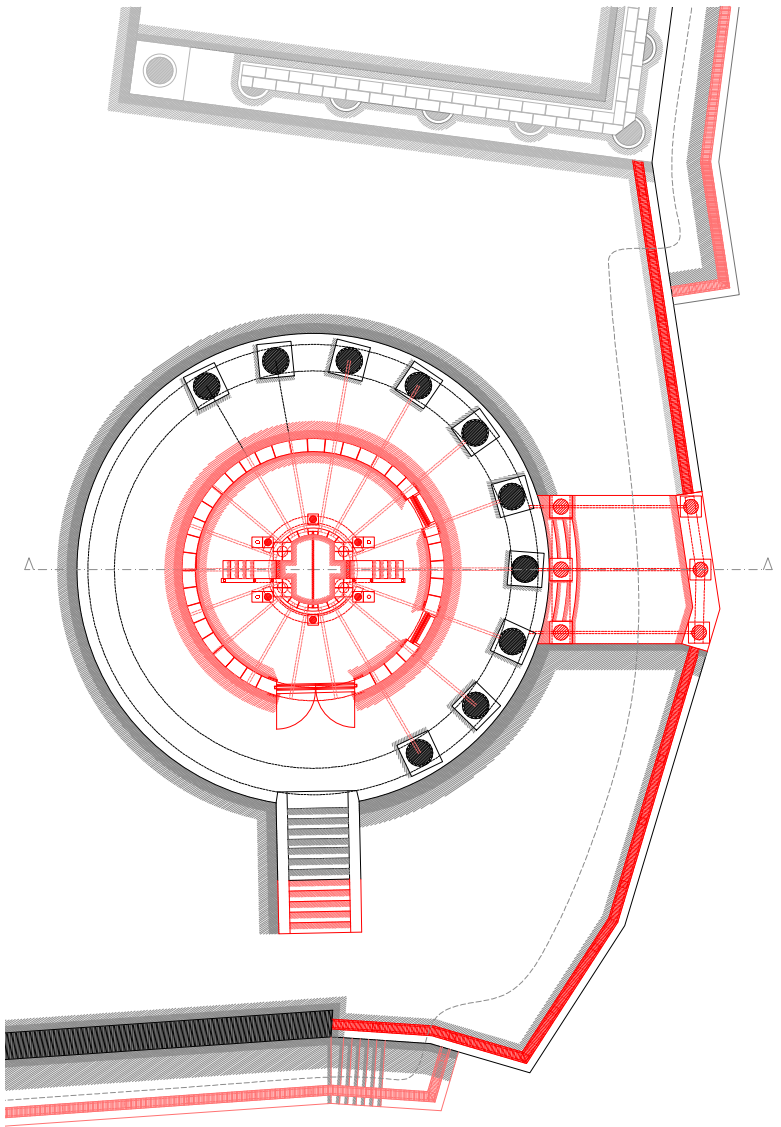


image (f)
The morning room in Tivoli
Plan

A PANORAMA ON THE AVENTINE HILL

Dear Plinius,

After spending the night in my luxurious bed and having an extensive breakfast in the early morning sun, I continue my tour. Last but not inferior is my panorama room. It is located on the Aventine hill, opposite to the one where I am now, about 72 meters above the Aniene level. Going there will require a little more energy than previous walks. As I already described the hiking trails in letter 8, they follow the inclines suggested by the nature of the place and are therefor quite intense. But no problem after this hearty breakfast, don't you think? After first descending to the river, you can cross it through a small bridge, to go up again. The Aniene often fluctuates in level although only during storms I advise you not to walk this route. Standing in the middle of the bridge is a point of observation you can not miss: in this rural romantic valley, where two mountains meet, the river meanders endlessly in front of you. Further, on your way up, you see this little lookout approaching. Once you arrive at the gate of the Giardino degli Aranci (*a-f*), enormous pine tree tops appear above the wall.

It is in this orange garden the last room of my villa is located. The garden, as it is today, was designed in 1932 by Raffaele De Vico. It owes its name to the bitter orange trees growing there in large amounts. For me, the garden provides the ideal variation with the rural landscape that dominates my property. In my panorama room it is all about the route that leads you to the view and it already starts at the beginning of the garden, where a linear axis of trees points out the belvedere. Next, when entering the room, a staircase as vine rambles around a Corinthian column. This main figure ensures you have seen all three different views out as many windows, therefore its first step begins after 180° turning. Going up eventually brings together these picturesque scenery in one image. Upstairs you will find a desk above which grows a frisky pergola. Here I diligently write you letters. But even when I'm not doing anything I adore this place: with a desktop as extension of the abacus and pointing to my favorite view, it is easy to enjoy my throne.

Well, what do you think? Does it meet your standard? Mine it does in any case! I know you are used to quite a lot, but for me it completely fulfills my wishes and desires. I hope you come visit, so I can finally meet you after all this correspondence.

Sincerely,

Rieke

Appendix



image (a)
Giardino degli Aranci
Entrance



image (b)
Giardino degli Aranci



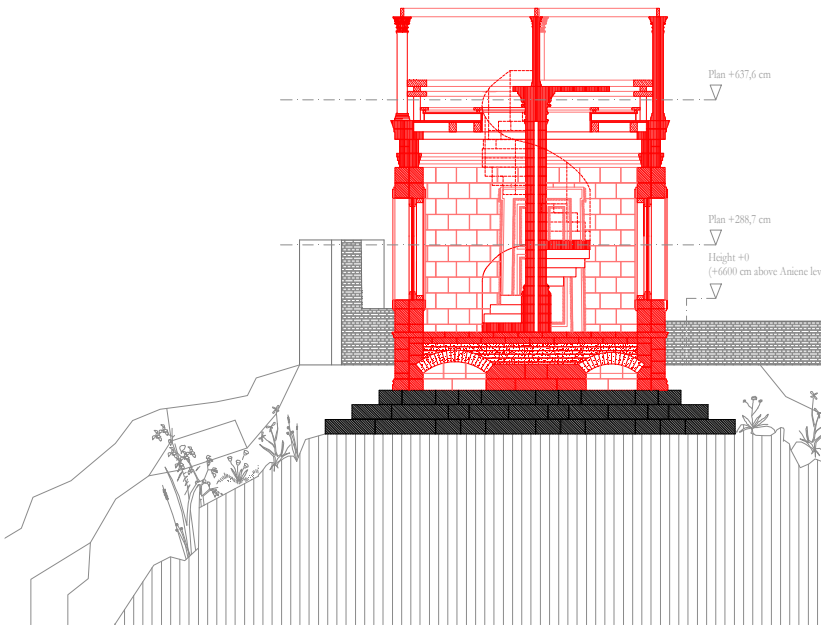
image (c)
Giardino degli Aranci
Panorama

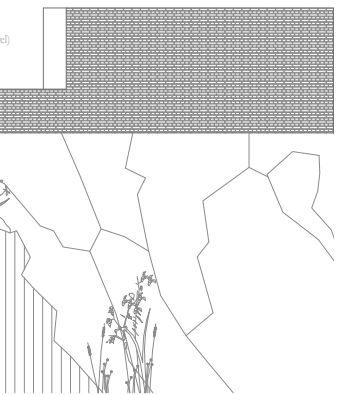






image (d)
The panorama room in Giardino degli Aranci





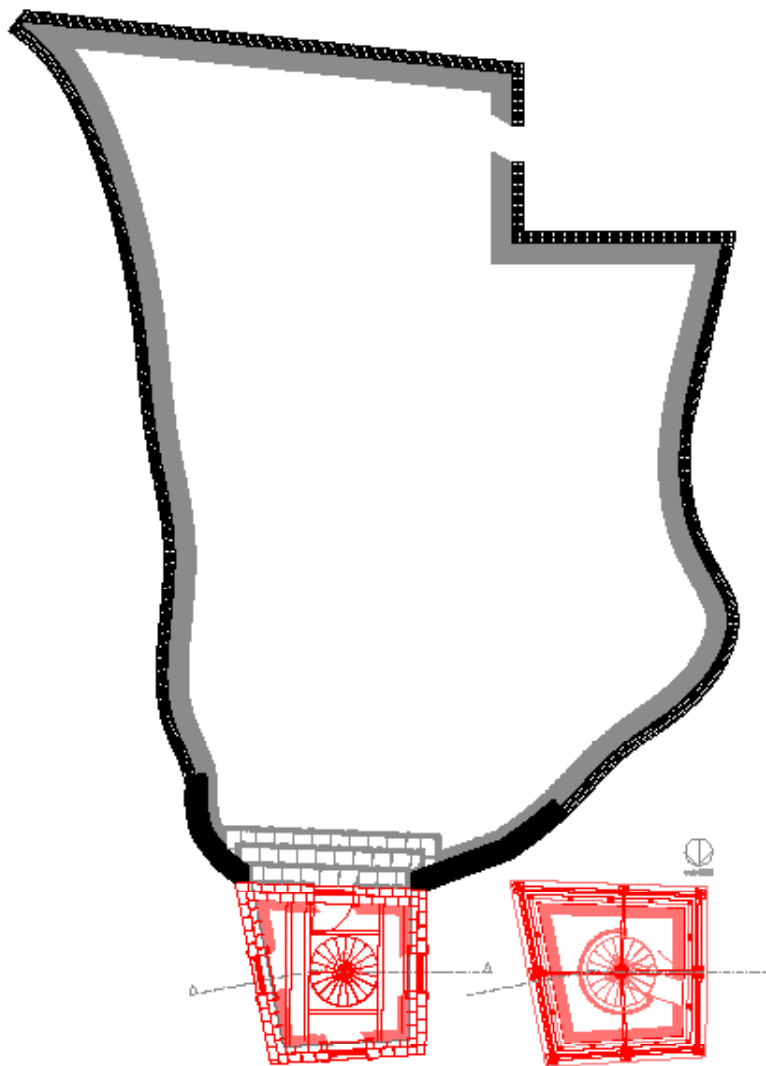


image (e)
The panorama room in Giardino degli Aranci
Plan

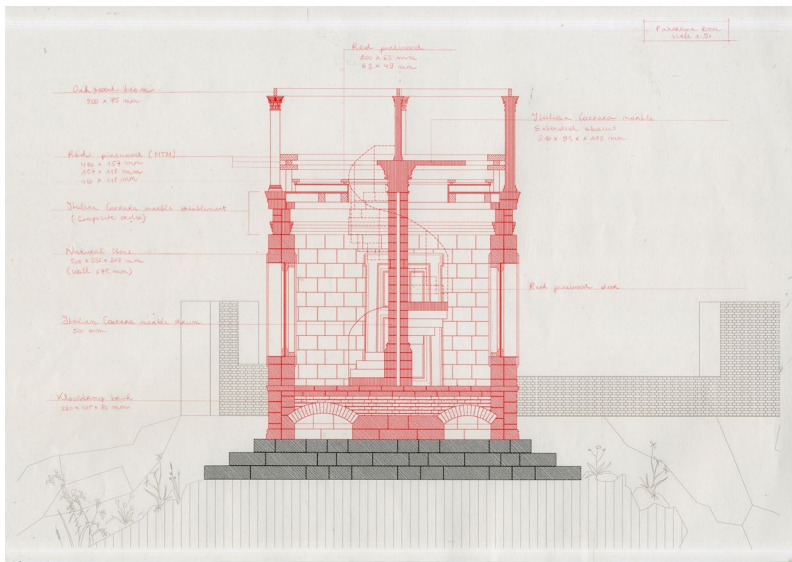


image (f)
 The panorama room in Giardino degli Aranci
 Section

Epilogue

My master thesis is about the turbid boundary between fact and fiction and how I can use fiction as an instrument to make architecture. This fiction is, however, not tenuous. It is based on well-founded sources, things I read, own experiences and memories. A fictional world and the architecture within it has a number of parameters the real world does not have. Therefore it allows me to make atypical things, an opportunity I gladly use. By doing so I took a step back, out of my comfort zone, and explored Plinius' era: the Classical Antiquity. An important era as foundation of all architecture, where I would, perhaps, never have been in contact with in such an intense way. Eventually, the narrative I spun through letters, offers a physical place for all the research I did and the architecture that arises from it. This place will continue to exist, meaning the rooms, their position and the constructive elements from which they are built are not final. I can and will certainly continue as the topics it deals with will keep me interested.

“... the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature of Europe, from Homer and within it the whole of literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity”

- T.S. Elliot, 1919.

Gladly I would like to thank a couple of people that were important during this thesis. First of all a big thank you to Jo and Thierry for the intensive guidance throughout the semester. With the right combination of both profound and casual moments, I can honestly say that your feedback inspired and enriched me. Secondly, I would like to thank my mentor Sander Rutgers. In times of confusion and doubt, I could always count on his opinion and insights during pleasant but helpful conversations. Lastly, I would like to thank my boyfriend for his moral support, my dad for accompanying me to Italy and my mom for all the support and lovely dinners when I was too busy working.

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