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Landscape as an Aspect of Andrea Palladio's Villa Architecture

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Although the Renaissance is generally seen as a cumulative and simultaneous period in the development of art and architecture, in the twentieth century there exists a tendency to examine the various aspects of spatial organization in each area of development as distinct from each other. Consequently, the understanding of Andrea Palladio's (1508–1580) aesthetic, ecological, and practical strategy for integrating architecture into the natural and cultural context is not understood as the logical whole he intended. Landscape design, and architecture as the building proper, were not viewed as separate entities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but instead the rationalization of space was a cognitive understanding of the world.

Site: Character and Context

Topography

Throughout the *Quattro Libri dell' Architettura*, Palladio's 1570 treatise on architecture, Palladio illustrated each villa as if it were constructed on a level plain, and he represented each one completely without a landscape context. In varying degrees, however, each villa responds to the physical constraints and opportunities of the site's topography, solving functional problems and responding to aesthetic criteria. Typically, villas are sited where a change in land form occurs—on subtle inclines, where hills and plains meet, or over the water's edge of rivers and canals. For the most part, they are located central to their site, providing the owner with a variety of views, and when viewed from a distance, the villa appears dignified.

To balance the stark architectural form of the dominant façade with the predominantly flat Veneto landscape, Palladio incorporated

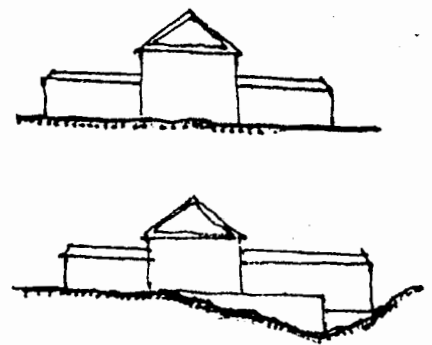


Fig. 1: Palladio sited each villa in response to the site topography.

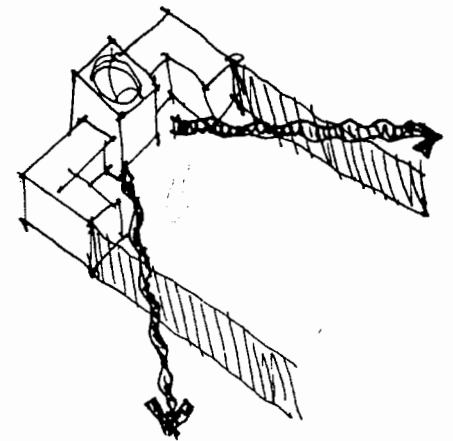


Fig. 2: Most villas include a plaza or agrarian court on the villa's dominant façade.

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Harping on a Lute String

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Sisyphus, a king of Corinth, was notorious for his cunning and double-dealing during his lifetime. When he underwent punishment in Hades for his offense, he was ordered to push a large boulder uphill and place it on the top. It seemed an easy task for Sisyphus, who was after all a warrior. But just as he reached the summit, the rock rolled down. Sisyphus tried again and again, but every time the result was the same.

What equals, if not surpasses, this Sisyphean ordeal? Tuning the lute!

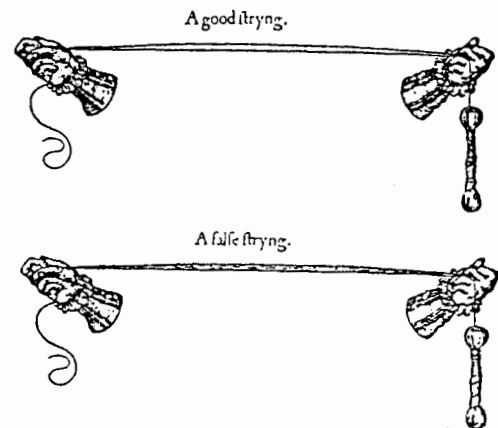
An eighteenth-century composer and music theorist Johann Mattheson once commented that "if a lutenist lives to be eighty years old, surely he has spent sixty years tuning." This cynic also lamented that "among a hundred (especially nonprofessionals), scarcely two are capable of tuning accurately."¹ We encounter one such amateur in Fernando de Rojas' *La Celestina*. This Spanish novel, published in 1499, contains a scene where the lovesick master commands his servant to sing a song with lute accompaniment to console him. But the servant cannot fulfill his master's wish, since his lute ^{was} out of tune.² Imagine how difficult it would be to tune the lute of the seventeenth or eighteenth century that has many more strings. Indeed, it is a widely held view that one reason the lute went out of fashion was the constant addition of strings, which made the tuning and playing so complicated.

The sixteenth-century lute instructions make the matter worse. They recommend that the highest string of the lute must be tuned as high as possible just before it breaks.³ This is an understandable practice, since the strings don't produce good sound when they aren't at their maximum height. But this gives you a problem. How do you know the precise moment when the string will break? Isn't it too late to find out the breaking point just after you break a string? Then you have to put on a new string and repeat the process—when, again, you may break the string. It seems like an endless task.

"Is it not strange that sheep's guts should hale souls out of men's bodies?" Thus Benedick, the young Paduan lord in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* 2.3 wonders about the magical power of music. Shakespeare may have been thinking of Orpheus and superimposed the ancient lyra-playing on the contemporary lute-playing. Orpheus was a legendary Thracian poet whose skill in lyra-playing was such that with his music he tamed the wild beasts and moved the trees and rocks. In the Renaissance, the ancient lyra was equated with various stringed instruments of the time, but

most frequently with the lute. It would be interesting to speculate that Shakespeare had John Dowland (called "English Orpheus" by his contemporaries) in mind when he put the remark into Benedick's mouth.

However impressed Shakespeare was by the sound of the lute's strings, these very strings caused pains to the lutenists. Until the invention of nylon strings, the ram's gut was the material used for lute strings. Gut strings were notoriously easy to slack and break, more so if the humidity was high. Some gut strings were certainly not satisfactory, due to the underdeveloped technology of the time. No wonder there were many instruction manuals that teach how to choose good strings. One might encounter cartoon-like drawings of the hands of an invisible man holding a bunch of



strings. They show that the good strings vibrate evenly, while the bad ones vibrate unevenly.

If the lutenist succeeded in tuning his lute after so much trouble, he must have felt quite happy; indeed, the well-tuned lute was a symbol of peace and harmony. Andrea Alciati's *Emblemata* contains an emblem of a lute with the inscription "Foedera," that is, federation, alliance, or bond. The description explains the symbolism thus: "Except for the learned, it is difficult to have many strings. If one string cannot tune well (easily done), or the string is broken, not only every grace of the instrument is lost but also the splendid music is ruined."⁴ But do not be discouraged even if you break many strings, the lutenist was told, for the broken string symbolizes the idea of *discordia concors*. Discord is essential to the harmony of the cosmos.

If lutenists broke so many strings, they must have purchased many. And if they purchased many strings, a sizable

(See *Lute String*, page 6)

Lute String (from page 5)

number of lute strings must have been manufactured. Johann Mattheson comments that "it costs as much in Paris to keep a lute as it does a horse," for there are troubles with bad strings, frets, and tuning pegs. Indeed, the string trade was a profitable business. The entries in a London Port Book for the years 1567 and 1568, for example, record that 13,848 lute strings were imported within a period of ten months.⁵ But this economic success story has an unmusical part to it. In England, money-lenders also bought lute strings and used them as "commodity," offering, instead of cash, a commodity that they represented as being worth the sum in question. But in reality, the strings were invariably worth far less and were almost impossible to convert into cash. If the debtor wanted to sell his commodities, he had to sell them back to the lender at a reduced rate. Greene and Lodge's play, *A Looking Glass for London*, has a scene where a debtor complains to his lender: He borrowed £40—£10 in cash and £30 in lute strings. When he sold the strings, they were valued at only £5.

I suspect that this debtor was not a lutenist. ✎

Notes

¹ Johann Mattheson, *Das Neu-Eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg, 1713): 274ff; the relevant passages are translated in Douglas Alton Smith, "Baron and Weiss contra Mattheson: In Defense of the Lute," *Journal of the Lute Society of America* 6 (1973): 50–51.

² The relevant passage is translated in Tes Knighton, "The *a capella* Heresy in Spain: An Inquisition into the Performance of the *cancionero*," *Early Music* 20 (1992): 576.

³ On lute tuning, see Hiroyuki Minamino, "Sixteenth-Century Lute Treatises with Emphasis on Process and Techniques of Intabulation" (Ph.D. diss., U of Chicago, 1988): 71–82.

⁴ The translation is taken from Peter M. Daly and Virginia W. Callahan, eds. *Andreas Alciatus: The Latin Emblems* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985): Emblem 10.

⁵ See John M. Ward, "A Dowland Miscellany," *Journal of the Lute Society of America* 10 (1977): 116–17.

From the Editor

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The past year has been an exciting one for *Discoveries*. With increased support from The Ohio State University (see page 14 for a list of the generous agencies and our thanks to them), we've been able to increase our size and scope, become a registered and indexed serial, and start appearing not only in mailboxes but on library shelves—not the least of which are those belonging to the Library of Congress.

We owe a special debt of thanks to our review editor, Christopher Baker, who did all the legwork—and voice and arm and hand work—toward getting us recognized by important bibliographies. As of this year, *Discoveries* will be listed in the *MLA Directory of Periodicals*, and indexed in the *MLA Annual Bibliography* and the *Music Index*.

Weaving Through the Web

Be sure to check in frequently at our SCRC web site, where webmaster George Klawitter has woven a tapestry of splendid (and sometimes raffish) art and important information about SCRC programs and people. From the main page you can link to pages about past and future conferences, *Discoveries* and *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, officers and membership lists, and other organizations. You can also read or download the conference program for our 1999 meeting in Savannah, as well as abstracts of most of the papers on the program. Or just enjoy the artwork. Visit us at: <<http://www.stedwards.edu/hum/klawitter/scrc.html>>.

**Jubilee Coming Up!**

In 2001, SCRC will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. Yes, fifty years of good scholarship and good friends, in the oldest—and friendliest—professional Renaissance association in North America. For this golden jubilee, we'll be meeting in College Station, Texas, hosted by our old stalwarts at Texas A&M University. (Please note that the adjective "old" refers to corporate fidelity rather than the chronological status of individuals!) We urge all SCRC members, especially the "old" ones, to make a special effort to attend this milestone (re)convention.

But why wait for the year 2001? Join us this year in Savannah—see the back page of this issue for details—and next year in Lafayette, Louisiana, where we'll be hosted by the University of Southwestern Louisiana. "Old" members will remember with delight our last meeting in Lafayette, and we have no doubt that the next one will equal or surpass it.

And Finally ... The Usual Dues Reminder

Check your mailing label for your membership status. If you aren't a member, or if your membership has expired, use the handy coupon on the inside back cover of this issue to join or renew. Do it today! (Well, okay, tomorrow will do.) Don't miss a single issue of our flagship journal, *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*. ✎