

Concept: Palladianism

The Villas Of The Ancient Illustrated

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The title of this book is very revealing about the content one could expect to find in it: the villas of the ancient. It should be no surprise then, that I deem the concept of “palladianism” as particularly important in order to fully comprehend this book or at least to relate it to the bigger picture, precisely because this is exactly the building typology which Palladio influenced the most during his time and for many years to come.

Robert Castell, the Author of this book, was not the first one, to look back to the ancient in order to understand their domestic, yet definitely aristocratic, architecture. Andrea Palladio, an architect who catered the rich and powerful of the Venetian elite during the Renaissance, already used the roman stately villas as a source of inspiration for his work, almost 200 years before Castell. Although Castell was not an architect, he did dedicate his book to Lord Burlington who was an architect himself. So it is safe to assume, that Castell’s research was intended to be a source of inspiration and assistance for practical use, just as Palladio investigated the ancient architecture to apply what he learned in practice.

But there are further parallels between Castell and Palladio. None of their conclusions were based on exploration of the ruins of the actual villas. Surely one must admit there were very few ruins left, of roman domestic architecture, that could really be useful, but still the findings made by both men are legitimized on a rather fragile manner. On the one hand Palladio assumes that the architecture of the well preserved temples can also be used for domestic architecture because he argues that religious architecture originates in domestic architecture. And on the other hand Castell’s study is based on letters of Pliny the younger, describing two villas. So Castell did base his assertions on secondary sources, just as Palladio.

What is even more interesting, is that, apart from looking at well preserved building (primarily temples and other monumental structures), Palladio also used Pliny’s letters as a source to understand roman domestic architecture. That is why it is no surprise that the drawings presented in Castell’s book depict several principles that Palladio identified of importance for a villa. The way that the manor sits on the landscape, which is of particular

importance for Palladio, seems to be of great significance in this book as well; making emphasis on the authority of the Landlord living in the villa. Furthermore the aspects of *convenienza* and *decorum* manifest themselves in these drawings as well, making sure that the architecture is suited for the lifestyle and status of the inhabitants.

Today we know that Lord Burlington did employ the “palladian” style when building his houses, almost nostalgic of the ancient, perhaps Castell’s book really did influence him in one way or another.

Keywords: Palladio - Domestic Architecture - The Ancient