

## ARCHITECTURE, TEXTS, AND IMITATION IN LATE-FIFTEENTH- AND EARLY-SIXTEENTH- CENTURY ROME

---

Cammy Brothers

### INTRODUCTION

Metaphors of language have become so diffuse in discussions of architecture that it is easy to forget the assumptions on which they are based and what exactly is meant by them.<sup>1</sup> The difficulties of discussing the relation between architecture and language in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are compounded by the fact that then, as well as now, language could mean so many different things. Concerns related to language in the Renaissance, which have little correspondence to our own, included questions of rhetoric, of grammar, of orthography, and of the use of the vulgate versus Latin.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the canonisation of the orders in the early to mid-sixteenth century, championed by Serlio, Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, and others, there was little consensus over rules or forms to guide architectural practice. If we interpret buildings of this period using the metaphor of architecture as language, we may inappropriately suggest the existence of a rigid grammar and vocabulary. An alternative paradigm emerges, however, from reading late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century texts on architecture. Although they show little interest in the relationship between architecture and language, they are concerned with the problems and methods of imitation. Alberti advocated the imitation of well-chosen models, and it is apparent from other writings about architecture that imitation governed the way in which buildings were perceived. In this chapter, writings on literary imitation provide a background for a consideration of the use of imitation in architecture. The question of the proper relationship to models was felt with particular urgency in Rome, in the midst of so many architectural possibilities. Thus the importance of imitation in late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento architecture can be seen through a comparative analysis of three palaces in Rome – the Cancelleria, Palazzo Castellesi, and Palazzo Turci. Another perspective on the culture that produced these buildings may be gained through a consideration of the *Codex Coner*, a book of drawings of ancient Roman ruins attributed to Bernardo della Volpaia and held in the Sir John Soane Museum in London, which documents the gradual codification and canonisation of ancient architecture.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Georgia Clarke for her incisive editorial comments on the text.

## IMITATION IN ARCHITECTURE AND LITERATURE

Although imitation had long formed a crucial element of architectural practice, its methods and virtues were first articulated in the sphere of literature. These literary discussions and debates were formulated in broad terms, so that at least in their general principles they could be transferred to other arts. The applicability of literary ideas of imitation to architecture was stated explicitly by Alberti, in a well-known passage in *De re aedificatoria* (1485):

I would have him [the architect] take the same approach as one might toward the study of letters, where no one would be satisfied until he had read and examined every author, good and bad, who had written anything on the subject in which he was interested. Likewise, wherever there is a work that has received general approval, he should inspect it with great care, record it in drawing, note its numbers, and construct models and examples of it . . . and should he find anything anywhere of which he approves, he should adopt and copy it; yet anything that he considers can be greatly refined, he should use his artistry and imagination to correct and put right.<sup>4</sup>

Alberti recommended a wide-ranging survey of possible models, followed by close study and appropriate modification. His comments were general compared to those of writers on literature, but clear in their statement of the principle of imitation and of the compatibility of approaches to literature and architecture.

Social factors also encouraged the sharing of ideas between humanists and architects; in Rome, important exchanges of this sort took place within the circle of Cardinal Raffaele Riario. The protagonists of this group included the humanists Paolo Cortesi, Raffaele Maffei 'il Volterrano', and Giovanni Sulpicio Veroli (editor of the first printed edition of Vitruvius of 1487–88).<sup>5</sup> Cortesi and Maffei both wrote about architecture, and Cortesi's writings on imitation in literature articulated principles relevant to contemporary architectural practice.

Paolo Cortesi's exchange of letters with the humanist scholar and poet Poliziano, before 1490, contained the seeds of the debate on imitation as it ensued over the following century.<sup>6</sup> In essence, the discussion was about whether it was more appropriate for a writer to model his style on a single classical author, namely Cicero, or on a variety of authors.<sup>7</sup> In response to Cortesi's collection of letters in imitation of Cicero, Poliziano argued that imitation of a single source is apish and stifles personal expression, and that it is much better to be stimulated by a variety of models and to use what is best in each to find a personal voice.<sup>8</sup>

Cortesi responded that imitation does not have to be slavish but can be as a son's imitation of a father. He made the point that even when "everyone chose the same model to imitate, they are still very dissimilar among themselves and all are distant from Cicero."<sup>9</sup> He suggested that his ideas might be applied to other arts, writing, "In my opinion not only in eloquence, but in every art imitation is necessary."<sup>10</sup>

Soon after Cortesi's debate with Poliziano, he wrote *De hominibus doctis dialogus* (c. 1491), in which he took a more moderate position and suggested the possibility of eclecticism.<sup>11</sup> In an important passage he developed the analogy between literature

and the other arts and indicated the relationship between rules and the practice of imitation. He suggested that imitation was necessary in order that rules might be discerned, because good writing depends on the use of rules. The discussion arises in the midst of a consideration of history writing:

Often I truly marvel how in history . . . no relevant precept has been left to us in the writings of the ancients that could teach us in what way one should write, and which norms are necessary to observe in historic works. In fact, not to mention studies of the most important disciplines, artists in every field have rules: the architect cannot stray from them, even the musicians hold them present when they must make hexachordal mutations, when for instance the song must be inflected, either higher or lower. Some make use of certain precepts in design, others in constructions [*mensuris*], others in sculpture, others in painting, from which it can be understood how nothing great may be created without the rule of art [*artis ratione*].<sup>12</sup>

The passage explicitly generalised the principles of literary composition to encompass the visual arts. The emphasis on rule implied that it is not enough merely to possess models for imitation, but that rules are also needed to imitate these models properly – an idea that would become crucial to the architectural theory of Serlio, as will be discussed in this chapter. The passage also suggests an awareness that all current needs could not be met by ancient writers and that important lacunae remain. Alberti and others were well aware of the important problems left unanswered by Vitruvius. The unstated implication was that the burden of filling in the gaps fell on the shoulders of modern writers and architects.

The need for precepts of composition, and guidelines for judgement, was also articulated by a humanist close to Cortesi and an advocate of the *volgare*, Vincenzo Calmeta. Calmeta wrote in ‘S’egli è possibile esser buon poeta volgare senza aver lettere latine’ that he agreed with Quintilian that art without principles,

will be like a very rich brocade garment made by an inept tailor, which is blamed for its artifice more than it is praised for its material. Words without precepts cannot be well put together, and judgements without doctrine are frivolous.<sup>13</sup>

Although Calmeta did not say so, the clothing metaphor might also be applied to architecture; at least according to Alberti, rich materials do not suffice to make a building praiseworthy.<sup>14</sup>

The other theme of Cortesi’s passage, which suggests that what survives from Antiquity was not sufficient, also surfaces in a letter from Fra Giocondo to Lorenzo de’ Medici. He wrote,

The ancient appearance of the city of Rome, most excellent Lorenzo, is changed to such an extent, and its place names so forgotten, that we can scarcely understand what we read in the books of the ancients . . . But even if these authors were not corrupt, they would not sufficiently fill our need unless we could see the things which they saw.<sup>15</sup>

The passage suggests the connection between ancient texts and the understanding and perception of the city of Rome. Rome became a metaphor for all that had been lost in

literature, and for the impossibility of fully recovering the losses. This transformation of the loss of ancient literature into an architectural metaphor had already been made by Petrarch, who referred to literary remains as *ruinae*, and taken up by many others in the fifteenth century including Poggio Bracciolini and Lorenzo Valla.<sup>16</sup>

The theme of loss was coupled with that of reconstruction in an extended metaphor by Alberti, who like Fra Giocondo was in a special position to be able to compare the realms of architecture and literature. In his dialogue 'Profugiorum ab Aerumna' he describes an ancient temple with a ruined mosaic. After remarking on the splendour of the temple, with its marble, gilded bronze, and porphyry, the speaker notices that the pavement was bare and neglected. He gathers up the fragments and pieces them together, creating a new mosaic. The speaker observes that this is like the work of writers who usurp the words of others from many sources to create their own.<sup>17</sup> An unusually negative portrayal of the imitator, almost as a scavenger, emerges. The metaphor also plays upon the tension between two different and potentially clashing ways architects had of relating to their surroundings: by literally reusing the pieces for building materials in their projects, or by imitating the forms of the ancient fragments and monuments. As we will see, the Cancelleria, like many buildings in Rome, makes use of both approaches.

The discussion of imitation continued over the course of the sixteenth century, replaying a number of aspects of the Cortesi-Poliziano exchange and enriching it in many ways. The next important debate took place between Pico della Mirandola and Pietro Bembo, in an exchange of letters in 1512–13.<sup>18</sup> Pico's response to Bembo included an allusion to contemporary opinion that may be of particular relevance here.

Developing the metaphor of a person who wishes "to walk in the tracks of the ancients," Pico wrote,

even if you [Bembo] should find in some remote treasure house antique sandals and should put them on, you could never persuade the critics that they were really antique.

Jealousy will always create dissent in such a case, for the new will never be considered anything but imperfect. This we have seen often illustrated in the case of works of art which, though superior to those of ancient times, if circulated as new are pronounced inferior, so completely does that empty shadow of a thousand years, as a pest, invade the judgements of men. If they are believed to be ancient, or if the critic is in doubt whether they are or not, there is no censure; but if it is found that they have been recently wrought and the name of the workman is made known, then a thousand hissings of Aristarchus will be heard.<sup>19</sup>

It was an impassioned critique of the way in which adoration of all things ancient had clouded men's judgements, making them incapable of recognising the achievements of their contemporaries. It was this atmosphere that encouraged the production of forgeries, as Pico suggested later in the same passage.<sup>20</sup> But of particular interest here is the possibility that Pico meant to make a backhanded reference to the incident, exceptionally famous in its time, of the presentation of a sleeping Cupid to Raffaele Riario as an antique, and Riario's subsequent rejection of it upon his discovery that it was by Michelangelo.<sup>21</sup> Such a reference would be consistent with Condivi's later sixteenth-century report in his life of Michelangelo that Riario was much

criticised for spurning such a fine work. Although necessarily more speculative, it may be worth reflecting on what Pico's comments suggest about Riario's taste, and the consequences for his palace building. The implication is that Riario only approved of things that were genuinely antique, not merely antique in form. This in some way might account for his exceptional efforts to obtain ancient materials for the construction of his palace.<sup>22</sup>

While a number of humanists writing about imitation employed architectural metaphors, or suggested the broad applicability of their paradigms, Pietro Bembo took the connection a step further in his *Prose*. Here he suggested that writers should follow the practice of artists and architects such as Michelangelo and Raphael in imitating a model.<sup>23</sup> It is a measure of the new cultural centrality of the visual arts that Bembo reversed the relationship between architects and writers proposed by Alberti.

#### ANCIENT AND MODERN MODELS

In architectural as in literary imitation, the challenge was to determine which sources to use, and how to transform them to suit current requirements. In literature, the problem of anachronism might concern, for example, the translation of Quattrocento vernacular expressions into Latin.<sup>24</sup> In architecture, the problems involved reconstructing the original appearance of the model, adapting the scale and plan to fit modern limitations and needs, and achieving in available materials the same effects as those attained in rich, ancient ones.<sup>25</sup> There was, however, a means around these complications, through the use of modern models.

Although humanists were unlikely to declare that they were making use of a recent model, in practice they did so all the time. The production of a book such as Cortesi's *De hominibus doctis dialogus*, with its critical assessment of all major modern writers of Latin beginning with Petrarch, demonstrates a sense of the need to distinguish among potential contemporary models.<sup>26</sup> Even though Cortesi was a strict Ciceronian, he was also a great advocate of modern exemplars, listed and assessed in *De hominibus doctis dialogus* and often referred to in *De cardinalatu*. Maffei also referred frequently to his contemporaries, as did Alberti; there seems to have been a consensus even among the most classicising authors that it was possible for their contemporaries to equal the ancients. Calmeta also concerned himself with the critical assessment of living writers in his essay, 'S'egli è lecito giudicare i vivi o no' (c. 1500).<sup>27</sup>

The idea of the modern model carries with it the assumption that a modern work is capable of attaining the status of an ancient one. This was not universally believed. Raffaele Maffei, for example, held that the ancient Romans had reached the apex of civilisation, unattainable by others; the Rome of his day only depressed and discouraged him.<sup>28</sup> Cortesi took a more positive view. While in *De hominibus doctis dialogus* he criticised recent authors, in *De cardinalatu*, published in 1510, he included a long list of contemporary figures who in his estimation surpassed their ancient predecessors.<sup>29</sup> Cortesi also wrote that recent historical events should be chosen as *exempla* in favour of ancient ones.<sup>30</sup> To demonstrate his idea that man's inventiveness grows with



22. Cancelleria palace, Rome (photo, Cammy Brothers).

time, Cortesi chose the realm of architecture. Cortesi himself made ample use of a modern model, Alberti, in the section of *De cardinalatu* devoted to architecture.

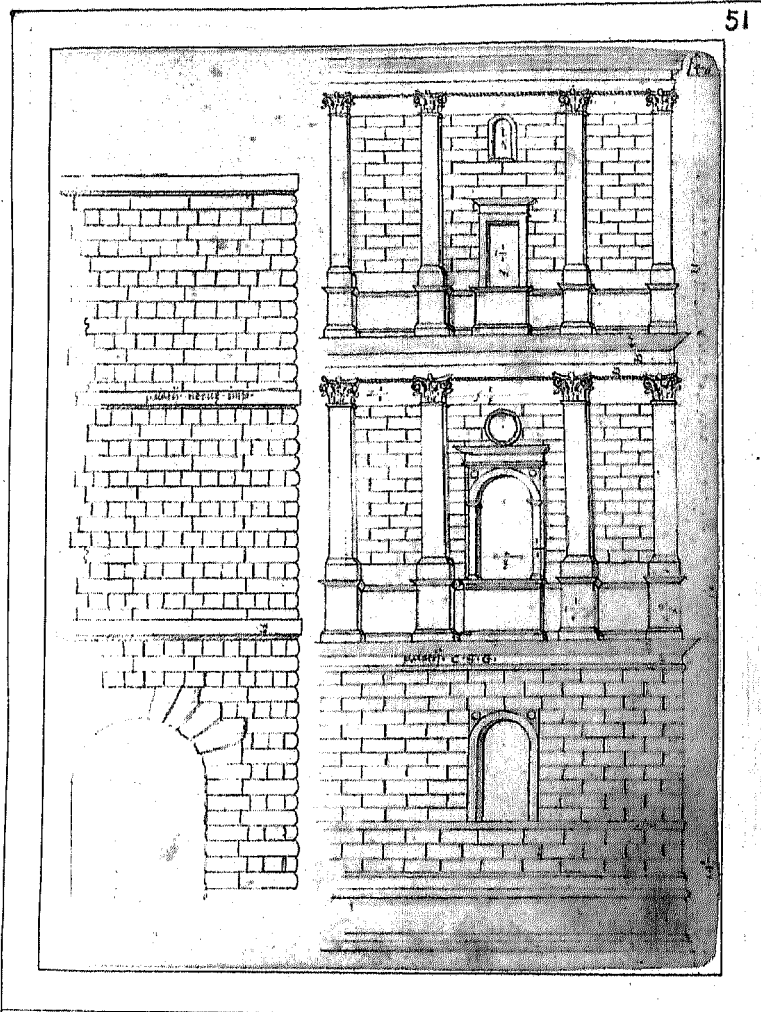
#### THE CANCELLERIA

In late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento Rome, the Cancelleria approached the status of an ancient monument in its capacity to provide an authoritative model for

new buildings. It was seen as the new model of an *all'antica* palace, as a result of its own imitation of ancient models and its use of ancient materials (Figure 22). Therefore imitating the Cancelleria could become a way for contemporary architects and patrons to achieve the status associated with antique models.

Maffei and Cortesi suggested how the Cancelleria achieved its status. In his *Commentariorum rerum urbanorum*, published in 1506, Maffei wrote that the Cancelleria façade followed Vitruvius, specifically in its use of *opus isodomum*, or smooth, flat rustication, cut into equally measured courses.<sup>31</sup> Cortesi, referring to the new style of rustication used on Palazzo Medici in Florence, wrote that “Cosimo de’ Medici, who initiated the revival of the manner of the ancients in Florence, first used the example of Trajan’s Forum [i.e., the perimeter wall of the Forum of Augustus] in planning the decoration of the walls.”<sup>32</sup> Although the rustication used in the Forum of Augustus is indeed closer to that of Palazzo Medici than it is to the Cancelleria, it appears to have been perceived as a model for both palaces. A drawing in the Codex Coner places the two side by side; the annotation refers to the Forum wall as the Palace of Nerva, suggesting that it may have been considered an appropriate model because it, too, was thought to be a palace (Figure 23). With regard to *opus isodomum*, the drawing may be somewhat misleading, in that the stonework of the ancient wall is quite unlike that of the Cancelleria. Not only is it constructed of masonry blocks, rather than a thin travertine veneer over brick as at the Cancelleria, but the stones are in high, uneven relief rather than smooth, and the pattern created is one of alternating short and long blocks, rather than the evenly cut pattern of the Cancelleria.<sup>33</sup> The comparison in the Codex may have been based not so much on the quality of the stone as on the organisation of the façade into three storeys marked by horizontal bands and articulated by arched openings.

A number of closer parallels may be found elsewhere, and another Renaissance book of drawings provides the clues. Giuliano da Sangallo’s Codex Barberini reveals its author’s interest in various methods of arranging stone façades.<sup>34</sup> Buildings with evenly cut stone blocks include a tomb in Vienne (f. 7v), the round temple at the Foro Boario (f. 37r) and Castel Sant’Angelo (ff. 35r and 37v), the Arch of Augustus at Fano (f. 61v), and the so-called Temple of Serapis on the Quirinal hill (ff. 65r and 68v).<sup>35</sup> Among these, the Castel Sant’Angelo is the closest to the Cancelleria stonework. Although only a small hint of the original facing of the Castel Sant’Angelo can still be seen today, it was carefully drawn by Giuliano in a view (f. 35r) and in a measured detail of the stones (37v) (Figure 24). The latter drawing illustrates precisely the details that would have been relevant to the architect of the Cancelleria: the measurements not only of each stone but also of the grooves between the stones.<sup>36</sup> Giuliano’s annotation demonstrates his interest in the grooves: “questi chaneli vano atorno gli ordini.” Also close to the Cancelleria type is the monumental tomb of Cecilia Metella, not shown in the Codex Barberini but included in the Codex Escorialensis and the Codex Coner.<sup>37</sup> This use of a range of buildings as sources, each modified and interpreted in such a way as to become a coherent part of

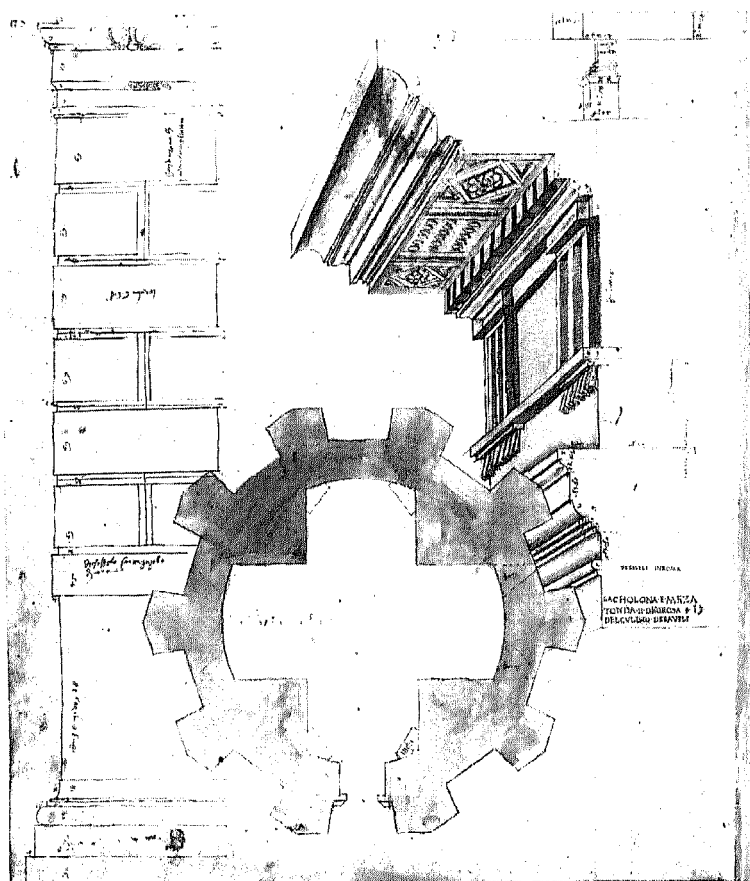


23. Codex Coner, Sir John Soane's Museum, London, f. 51 (photo, Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, by courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, London).

the new work, is comparable with Poliziano's belief that literary composition should take place only after reading and digesting a variety of good authors.<sup>38</sup>

Other references to ancient buildings can, of course, be seen in the Cancelleria. In the courtyard, the Doric capitals with rosettes are the most obviously antique feature (Figure 25). It was a motif that would have held instant appeal for Riario because of its correspondence with his own heraldic symbol, and many ancient examples were available.<sup>39</sup> These include the Doric capitals at the Baths of Diocletian, as in the Fogg book of Renaissance drawings attributed to the circle of Sangallo, and those from the





24. Codex Barberini, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barberini Latini 4424, f. 37v (photo, by courtesy of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome).

so-called Basilica Aemilia, as in the Codex Barberini.<sup>40</sup> Another of the Cancelleria's antique features came from outside Rome: the window details are taken almost precisely from the Porta dei Borsari in Verona.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the use of rich materials, which themselves are of antique origin, would have enhanced the Cancelleria's claim to antique status. Documents from the palace workshop indicate widespread excavation all around Rome to feed the material requirements of constructing a travertine palace on this scale. The sites included the Baths of Diocletian, the Colosseum, the Quirinal temple, and the arch of Gordian at the Castro Pretorio.<sup>42</sup> Most obviously antique are the columns of the courtyard, of alternating pink and grey granite, taken from the Baths of Diocletian.<sup>43</sup> The use of whole ancient columns may have carried an authority similar to that gained by humanists employing words of Ciceronian Latin. There is, however, a difference: to use classical Latin does not entail its destruction. It hardly seems coincidental that three of the quarries for the palace also provided architectural models. As already mentioned, the capitals with rosettes may have been copied from the Baths of Diocletian; the arrange-



25. Cancelleria palace, Rome, courtyard (photo, Cammy Brothers).

ment of three levels of superimposed orders around arched openings may come from the Colosseum; and the use of *opus isodomum* may be based on the Quirinal temple. As suggested earlier in Alberti's image of the imitator as scavenger, imitation in architecture has the potential to be of a paradoxical, even hypocritical nature, in which the imitator's desire for possession of the model expresses itself through consumption, and thus destruction, of its object.

Although many of the Cancelleria's motifs came from the antique, the impetus to build a palace so different from its neighbours was thoroughly based in the Quattro-

cento. Riario probably recognised that the style and luxury of Roman palaces was lagging behind that of rival cities such as Florence, Urbino, Pienza, and Mantua. Frommel has suggested that the Cancelleria was based on models such as Luca Fancelli's *Domus Nova* in Mantua for Federico Gonzaga and the *Palazzo Ducale* in Urbino by Luciano Laurana.<sup>44</sup> Valtieri has emphasised the importance of Albertian models and suggested the involvement of Antonio da Sangallo the Elder, il Cronaca, Bernardo della Volpaia, and Bramante.<sup>45</sup> Most important here is how the Cancelleria was perceived by contemporaries; judging from the comments of Maffei and Cortesi, it was seen in terms of its ancient models. This was also the measure of the success of a literary work: it was taken for granted that authors would benefit from the achievements of their contemporaries, but the important thing was to make manifest the imprint of their study of ancient examples.

### THE THREE PALACES

The Cancelleria's status as an authoritative model becomes clear through comparison with two other nearby palaces built shortly afterwards: the *Palazzo Castellesi* on via Alessandrina (now *Palazzo Torlonia* on via della Conciliazione), built by Cardinal Adriano Castellesi circa 1496–1504 and sometimes attributed in part to Bramante, and *Palazzo Turci* on the via Papalis (now via del Governo Vecchio), built by Giovan Pietro Turci, apostolic secretary, and completed in 1500 (Figures 26 and 27).<sup>46</sup> The variations in scale, location, and use of ornament register the differences in wealth, social status, and taste of their patrons, in accordance with Vitruvian and Albertian ideas of decorum.

In architecture as in literature, the idea of imitation carries no weight unless it is obvious enough to be recognised by its intended audience. But imitation in architecture has to operate at a more obvious level than literary imitation because it relies on visual memory. Any comparative information the architect or patron wanted to convey had to be clear enough to have a chance of surviving in the mind of the viewer when he or she saw another palace. Appropriately, then, it is in the broadest interpretation of the rhythms of the façades, the pattern of their openings, and their horizontal divisions that the palaces resemble each other. At an even more obvious level, they resemble each other because of their use of travertine. The symbolic power of materials would have had, for the Roman public at large, a greater resonance than the niceties of architectural articulation. The contrast between the use of travertine over an entire façade at the Cancelleria and *Palazzo Castellesi*, and its use only for window and door frames at *Palazzo Venezia* (begun 1455) or *Palazzo dei Penitenzieri* (c. 1490), would certainly have struck even the most uninformed of viewers.<sup>47</sup>

The relationship between the Cancelleria and *Palazzo Castellesi* is commented on by Cortesi with regard to their use of materials:

And since, in exterior decoration, many modes of building are in favour and since the system [*ratio*] of ornament used is most varied, it is easy to see why some habitually use travertine in building walls in the manner [*symmetria*] of an amphitheatre. We can see this in such palaces

26. Palazzo Castellesi  
(now Torlonia), Rome  
(photo, Cammy Brothers).



27. Palazzo Turci, Rome (photo,  
Conway Library, Courtauld  
Institute of Art, London).



as those of Cardinal Raffaele Riario at the Theatre of Pompey [the Cancelleria] and of Cardinal Adriano [Castellesi] near the Vatican.<sup>48</sup>

As the reference to the amphitheatre suggests, not only the use of travertine but also the overall arrangements of their façades is loosely modelled on the Colosseum. As already mentioned, the fact that part of the Cancelleria's travertine was quarried from the Colosseum adds an extra dimension to this connection. Cortesi's remark also confirms that contemporaries noticed the similarities between the two palaces.

A passer-by would probably not have been able to detect any clear differences between the Cancelleria and Palazzo Castellesi, aside from noting the smaller size of the latter. A more attentive viewer, possibly prompted by a guide, might have noticed some distinctions in the façades: the windows on the first level of Palazzo Castellesi are square rather than round; the windows on the second level fill almost the entire height of the storey; and so on. Overall, a viewer might have noted the fewer ornamental details adorning the façade of the Palazzo Castellesi; the pilasters framing the windows, for example, are simple panels rather than ornamented with vegetal motifs as at the Cancelleria. These are the kind of subtle variations from the model which, in a literary context, would have flattered the reader capable of discerning the distinctions.

The greatest contrasts between the Cancelleria and Palazzo Castellesi appear in the courtyards. The courtyard of the Cancelleria is articulated by two vertical layers of columns and a third of pilasters, creating a steady rhythm mirroring that of the façade while also opening it up (Figure 25). The use of the Doric order in the first two layers of arcades suggests solidity, an idea reinforced by the use of broad corner piers, whereas the ornamental detail of the rosettes in the column necks and in the roundels set between the arches creates an effect of delicacy. In the courtyard of Palazzo Castellesi, the pier is used in place of the column, and the decorative elements are completely eliminated (Figure 28). In place of the second layer of arches or columns are two layers of bare window frames. The overall effect is austere. The simultaneous qualities of luxury in materials and restraint in details were also characteristic of the contradictions of Castellesi's life, as one of the richest members of the cardinalate and a writer of pious, moralising tracts.<sup>49</sup> The likeness of the façades gives Palazzo Castellesi a striking external resemblance to the Cancelleria, but the contrast of the courtyards makes clear its very different character. An analogous approach was often taken by writers: by selectively adopting the structure and forms of their model, they made their new work bear the stamp of their authorship.

The distinctions between Palazzo Turci and the Cancelleria are much more easily discernible, as befits the wide gap in the social status of the patrons. Aside from the vast difference in the size of the palaces, travertine is used only on the ground floor of Palazzo Turci (Figure 27).<sup>50</sup> This is articulated with broad arches that house shops, in itself a clear indication of the more modest status of the building.<sup>51</sup> The proportions of the palaces are also completely different, with Palazzo Turci being characterised by its height – it has four floors instead of three – rather than its breadth.



28. Palazzo Castellesi, Rome, courtyard (photo, Cammy Brothers).

Despite these variations, a viewer would be encouraged to recognise the shared qualities of Palazzo Turci and the Cancelleria by their physical proximity and by the like arrangements of their façades. The vertical alignment of the pilasters and arched windows is similar, as is the framing of the second-storey windows of Palazzo Turci. Palazzo Turci is characterised by restraint in its use of ornament; the implied pilasters on the second level are especially abstract. This abstraction of architectural detail recalls the courtyard of Palazzo Castellesi more specifically than the Cancelleria.

Should these points of similarity have escaped a passer-by, the connection is

spelled out by the inclusion of a classically styled Latin inscription, just as at the Cancelleria. The inscription on the Cancelleria reads,

RAPHAEL RIARIUS SAVONENSIS SANCTI GEORGI DIACONUS CARDINALIS SANCTAE ROMANAE ECCLESIAE CAMERARIUS A SIXTO IIII PONTEFICE MAXIMO HONORIBUS AC FORTUNIS HONESTATUS TEMPLUM DIVO LAURENTIO MARTIRI DICATUM ET AEDIS A FUNDAMENTIS SUA IMPENSA FECIT MCCCCLXXXV ALEXANDRO VI P.M.

and on Palazzo Turci,

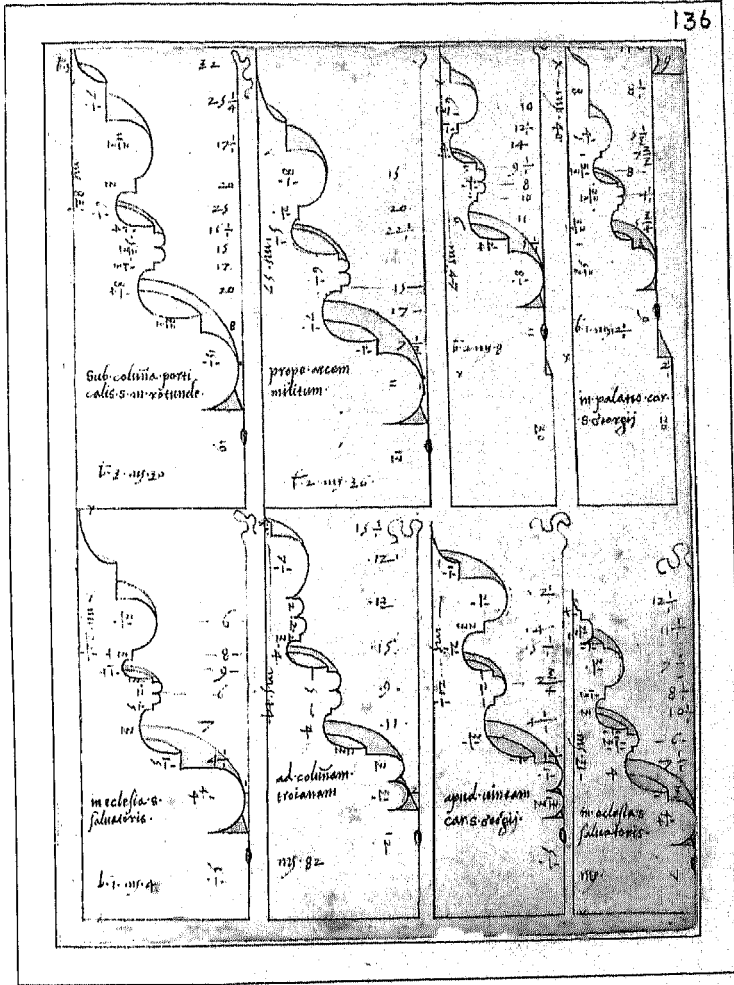
SUI POSTERUMQUE COMMODITATI IO PETRUS TURCIUS NOVARENSIS A LITTERIS APOSTOLICIS SCRIBENDIS DICTANDISQ. ANNO SAECULARI MD FECIT.<sup>53</sup>

The relationship between Palazzo Turci's inscription and the Cancelleria's parallels the one between the architecture of the two palaces. The use of a Latin inscription in Palazzo Turci was enough in itself to signal the learnedness of the patron, while its relative simplicity would have ensured that it was in keeping with standards of decorum, as stated by Vitruvius and refined by Alberti. The adaptation of an ambitious, large-scale model to a modest scale also took place in literature, for example in the use of Virgil's *Eclogues* as a model for fifteenth-century pastoral poetry by Poliziano, Lorenzo de' Medici, Jacopo Sannazaro, and others.<sup>53</sup>

In the case of the palaces considered here, architectural imitation did not consistently adhere to the paradigm proposed by either Poliziano or Cortesi. At the Cancelleria, many antique models were used in accordance with Poliziano's position, whereas at Palazzo Castellesi and Turci, the model of the Cancelleria was followed exclusively, as Cortesi's position would recommend. The differences between Palazzo Castellesi and Turci, and between both of them and the Cancelleria, confirm Cortesi's assertion with reference to imitators of Cicero: "Everyone chose the same model to imitate, and yet they are greatly dissimilar among themselves and all distant from Cicero."<sup>54</sup> Despite these distinctions, the problems of attribution that have plagued all three palaces suggest that Poliziano's worry that imitation could overtake personal expression may have been well founded. Even the question of whether an architect in this period would have been perceived to have a personal style is uncertain.<sup>55</sup>

### THE CODEX CONER

Further insight on imitation and architecture in this period may be gained through an analysis of the Codex Coner. It is specifically linked to the palaces discussed here through Bernardo della Volpaia, who is documented in the workshop of the Cancelleria and to whom the Codex has been attributed.<sup>56</sup> Compared to earlier drawing books of a similar nature, the Codex Coner is characterised by a high degree of organisation, a consistency of representation and composition of the page, and an analytical focus on details. It marks a significant step in the development towards the



29. Codex Coner, Sir John Soane's Museum, London, f. 136 (photo, Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, by courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum).

classification, analysis, and eventual transformation of an uneven architectural reality into a set of rules and principles. Whether it constitutes an attempt to establish an architectural language is another question, which may be addressed through a consideration of its form and contents, its likeness to contemporary books of grammar, and its relation to books of drawing that precede it and treatises that follow.

Overall, the book is divided between elevations of whole monuments and the representation of details. The pages of details are composed so as to encourage analytical comparison of profiles and proportions. Architectural details are isolated from their original contexts, measured, placed together, and drawn according to consistent con-



ventions (Figure 29). The disjunction of the detail from its source implies that the nature of the building it adorned was irrelevant. (Of course in some cases drawings were made from fragments, so the source may have been difficult to identify.) Even size, though indicated by measurements, is made secondary to proportion by the uniform presentation of scale. Ancient and modern bases, capitals, and entablatures are placed side by side, with the implication that in their capacity as models they are equal.<sup>57</sup> This in turn suggests that architects were looking to the antique not just for illustrious precedents but also, more simply, for forms.

The impulse to organise the drawings into categories and the isolation and comparative analytical treatment of details may have resulted from a growing interest in the orders as a separate, special category of architecture and from a desire to organise forms in such a way as to constitute a coherent set of models. Unlike other aspects of ancient architecture described by Vitruvius, such as the plans of houses and temples, the orders were relatively easy to integrate into modern building. Problems of function, structure, and materials mainly concern imitation on a grand scale. Imitation of details did not pose these difficulties, and hence was much more widespread and direct.<sup>58</sup> The organisation of details might also be seen as a step in the direction of the formation of a language, in a manner analogous to the assembly of books of Latin and vernacular grammar.

Grammar books had been written in a continuous tradition from Antiquity, but they began to be produced in greater numbers, and with renewed rigour, around the last decade of the fifteenth century and the first decade of the sixteenth. They were inspired by the same sense of frustration with current usage that drove Cortesi's call for imitation. Cortesi argued that oratory and elegance had descended to such a level, as if men had forgotten their own language, that "it is not possible in our time to speak in an elegant and varied way if not by imitating some model."<sup>59</sup> Lorenzo Valla and, later, Alberti and Pomponio Leto produced grammars that sought to codify Latin usage according to classical standards.<sup>60</sup> Given the contacts and exchanges between architects and humanists mentioned earlier, it seems more than pure coincidence that the urge to systematise and organise architecture and language occurred around the same time.

A grammar book had several purposes: to set out clear rules for the use of Latin or, in Alberti's case, the vulgate; to purify usage that had become corrupt; and to revive the language of ancient Rome for Renaissance poets and writers. The same goals applied to what architects sought to do for ancient Roman architecture. Just as ancient texts in themselves did not clearly set out rules of Latin grammar, and it took scholarly and philological work to produce good editions of the texts and then to extract and analyse the necessary information, similarly the monuments as they lay dispersed and ruined around Rome did not obviously suggest how they could be transformed into models, nor what rules might have governed their production. Books such as the *Codex Coner* played a crucial role in recording, classifying, and presenting in coherent form the antiquities of Rome so as to facilitate their appre-

hension by Renaissance architects. It is in this function, of refashioning a model so as to make it more accessible to a wider audience, that the similarity between these books of drawings and grammar books arises.

The qualities that justify an analogy between the *Codex Coner* and books of grammar emerge with particular clarity through a comparison with Giuliano da Sangallo's *Codex Barberini*, another volume of drawings of ancient Roman ruins, produced from circa 1465 to 1516. The contents of the two books overlap considerably, and they differ principally in the presentation of material. While almost every folio of the *Codex Barberini* is composed according to a different principle, sometimes only that of filling all available space, the *Codex Coner* is marked by its extraordinary consistency, placing the whole monument in the centre of the page and neatly arranging the details on separate sheets. Similarly, while the *Codex Coner* adopts a standard method of representing elevations, sections, and plans, in the *Codex Barberini* Giuliano's mode of representation varies widely: he zooms in, backs up, and in general provides distinct views of each monument according to his interests. This approach underscores the personal and inventive nature of his vision of the antique and resists the categorisation and analysis necessary for the formation of a grammar.

A further clue to the function of the *Codex Coner* occurs on the folio representing a single bay of the Cancelleria façade alongside a portion of the Forum of Augustus outer wall (Figure 23). This image can be read as a paradigm of how the relationship between an ancient monument and a new building should be: not one of slavish imitation but one of approximate and recognisable similitude. As already mentioned, this is just as Cortesi recommends: that the likeness is as the relation of a son to his father, in which the son "has something of his own, natural, and different, so that when they are compared they seem unlike each other."<sup>61</sup> It gives visual form to the idea that the role of the ancient monuments depicted in the book is to supply models for new buildings such as the Cancelleria.<sup>62</sup>

The inclusion of a drawing of the façade of the Cancelleria among ancient monuments brings us back to the question of whether some modern works are capable of attaining the status of antique ones. The *Codex Coner* raises to this level the Cancelleria (ff. 51, 68, 119, 136) (Figure 23), Palazzo Castellesi (f. 14), the Vatican Belvedere Courtyard (ff. 43–45, 78, and 117), the tempietto at San Pietro in Montorio (ff. 33–34), details of Bramante's temporary 'Tiburio' in St Peter's (ff. 71 and 79), and an entablature designed by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger (f. 82). It is not coincidental that almost all of these are works in some way associated with Bramante. It may be a reflection both of Bramante's high status and of his close association with Bernardo della Volpaia.<sup>63</sup> In either case it is worth noting that Bramante continued to be the one Renaissance figure whose works were included beside ancient ones in collections of ancient architecture, such as those by Serlio and Palladio.<sup>64</sup>

In architectural theory if not in practice, by the mid–sixteenth century Vitruvius and Bramante may have come close to occupying a position analogous to that of Cicero in the realm of literature. Ciceronianism does not have a precise correspon-

dence in the realm of architecture, in part because no single building, or set of buildings, would be capable of attaining the status of Cicero. Nonetheless, the desire for authoritative models emerges from architectural treatises with increasing clarity over the course of the sixteenth century and parallels the development of an increasingly strict Ciceronianism.<sup>65</sup>

Another way of addressing the question of whether the Codex Coner constitutes an attempt to define an architectural language is by comparing it to later architectural treatises that may more readily be seen in those terms, for example Serlio's Book 4 *On the Orders* (1537) and Book 3 *On Antiquity* (1540). Serlio makes explicit the idea of the rule and of its source. He recommends that the architect "hold the doctrine of Vitruvius as a guide and an infallible rule . . . his writings must be sacrosanct and inviolable."<sup>66</sup> Serlio does allow for the judgement and discretion of the architect, but the prominence and authority he grants Vitruvius is a significant departure from Alberti's critical stance.<sup>67</sup> He also presents a standard by which one could judge among the possibilities that ancient architecture presented; in his words, "it is one thing to imitate the state of ancient things exactly, but to know how to make a choice of the beautiful according to the rules of Vitruvius and reject the ugly and badly conceived is something else."<sup>68</sup>

It is in these statements that the crucial difference between Serlio and the Codex Coner emerges – Serlio articulates the concept of the rule, and without the rule it is not possible to speak of grammar. The sheets of measured architectural details of the Codex Coner do represent a conception of architecture in terms of modular units, and thus a step towards the formation of a language. However, the selection of models that occurs in the Codex Coner does not in itself make clear how they should be employed or what aspects should be imitated. The problem of what to imitate was a central one, according to Quintilian.<sup>69</sup> Certainly the way a monument was drawn, the views included – plan, section, or elevation – and the details provided and omitted circumscribed the possible ways in which it could be imitated. However, it is hard to imagine that drawings of ancient Roman ruins or modern works, no matter how they were visually presented, could in themselves constitute a set of rules.

Textual annotation is required to make grammatical rules explicit, and this is the most obvious distinction between the Codex Coner and Serlio. Many of Serlio's illustrations are in fact copied from sources close to the Codex, and there is no great change in the arrangement of the page or in the precision of the drawings. But without a text to articulate guidelines, even the Codex Coner's sheets of details are only a vocabulary list, or a selection of possibilities from which to choose. How to form the sentence comes from an understanding of Vitruvius, which is what Serlio newly articulates. Serlio also focusses attention on the aspect of architecture most subject to Vitruvian rules, the orders. With the canonisation of the orders came a new form of signification, based on norms governing their use.

In late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century Rome, preoccupation in literary circles over the imitation of ancient models was also manifest in the realm of architec-

ture: in texts, palaces, and books of drawings. The Cancellaria retained its status for only a few years; patterns of imitation of modern models were often short-lived. The assembly and organisation of a group of ancient and modern buildings and details in the Codex Coner may also be seen as a step towards the formation of a canon of models, crucial for the development of rules that could eventually constitute a grammar. But this next step was dependent on a new form, that of the printed, illustrated, architectural treatise.

F7NE  
AR75  
N7  
2543  
.L34  
A73  
2000 C.2.

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, UK

<http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

<http://www.cup.org>

10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

© Cambridge University Press 2000

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2000

Printed in the United States of America

*Typeface* Adobe Garamond 11/13,5 *System* QuarkXPress® [GH]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Architecture and language / [edited by] Georgia Clarke, Bernard Paul Crossley.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 65078 X (hb.)

1. Architecture – Language. 2. Architecture – Europe. 3. Architecture, Gothic. 4.  
Architecture, Renaissance. I. Clarke, Georgia, 1962– II. Crossley, Paul, Ph. D.

NA2543.L34 A73 2000

720'.1'4 – dc21

99-0552216

ISBN 0 521 65078 X hardback