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Tradition and innovation in the project of Villa Adriana

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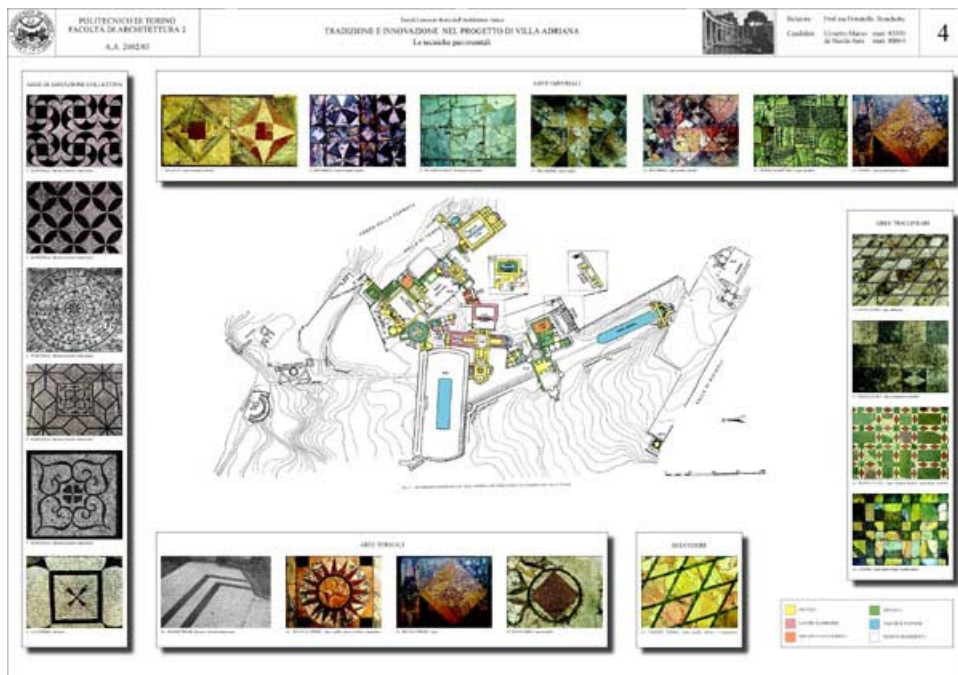
The great princes and clergy of the Renaissance increased the magnificence of their palaces and country seats thanks to the ruins of imperial Rome surrounding them. Thus by the middle of the 16th C., when Cardinal Ippolito d'Este decided to build a villa in Tivoli, he gave his architect Pirro Ligorio the task of exploring and systematically excavating the estate of Villa Adriana, in search of the remains of the past. Over the centuries, the property had fallen into disrepair, abandoned, looted and weather-worn. However, Pirro Ligorio realized that place was much more than a yard from where to get decorations for the cardinal's gardens. One hundred and twenty hectares represent a whole hard to grasp at first sight, nearly imposing' consecutive and deeper and deeper approaches. A journey through Emperor Hadrian's history and his villa, which leads us to go back over all the stages marking its origin and development, up to its neglect. Such a course, from building to building, is the starting point of an in-depth complex inquiry: the Villa naturally represents a balance point between innovation and tradition. It is an estate which must be seen as a whole: you cannot take one part only into consideration, without weighing all that accompanies it.



Villa Adriana

Indeed, you often happen to come across features which are peculiar to some tradition, a Roman rather than a Hellenistic one, while, even today, it is astonishing to see how far they went with their architectural technique, avant-garde solutions and Baroque virtuositities. When you read of rooms devoted to Hadrian, of baths and triclinia built according to the canons of the time but often reinvented by the taste of the emperor-architect, you are struck by some features which reveal a definitely modern character, such as the very long articulated drive, which quite stands comparison with a contemporary underground. Hadrian made culture a link for the various ethnic groups of the Roman empire and made architecture a concrete representation of his cultural project. In so far as it represented the State, besides being the princeps' seat, Villa Adriana is the clearest: statement of Hadrian's project. Those features which are peculiar to the Capitoline tradition merge with others belonging to Oriental art, causing an utterly original style, rich in

imaginative technical cues. Tivoli Palace, is a balance point among several influences, being extremely innovative at the same time a realization which is both unique and embedded in a historical continuity of techniques and formal experiences. Its legacy would be received not only and not so much in the immediate future, but it would affect architecture yet to come, from late antiquity to Baroque. All this was accomplished by extraordinary hands, about whom we do not know much, unfortunately, but who certainly were repository of a sound architectural tradition. The use of bricks had paved the way for the more and more complex spatial forms of Neronian and Flavian architecture, while the technique of opus caementicium was at its height. Building proficiency is also witnessed by the prefabrication of various items, including the sectilia pavimenta, some parts of the decorative set of the orders and the reinforced flat arches.



Sectilia pavimenta

Villa Adriana represents not only the highest and closing point in one or more traditions of the ancient world, but it is rather an outstanding work which traced out an everlasting mark in the history of Western architecture, whose development would probably have been different without this paramount climax, well fitted in a tradition which was offered a still new way towards some possible development. An unprecedented project in ancient times, a matchless work, a dream where innovative features and tradition admirably merge



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