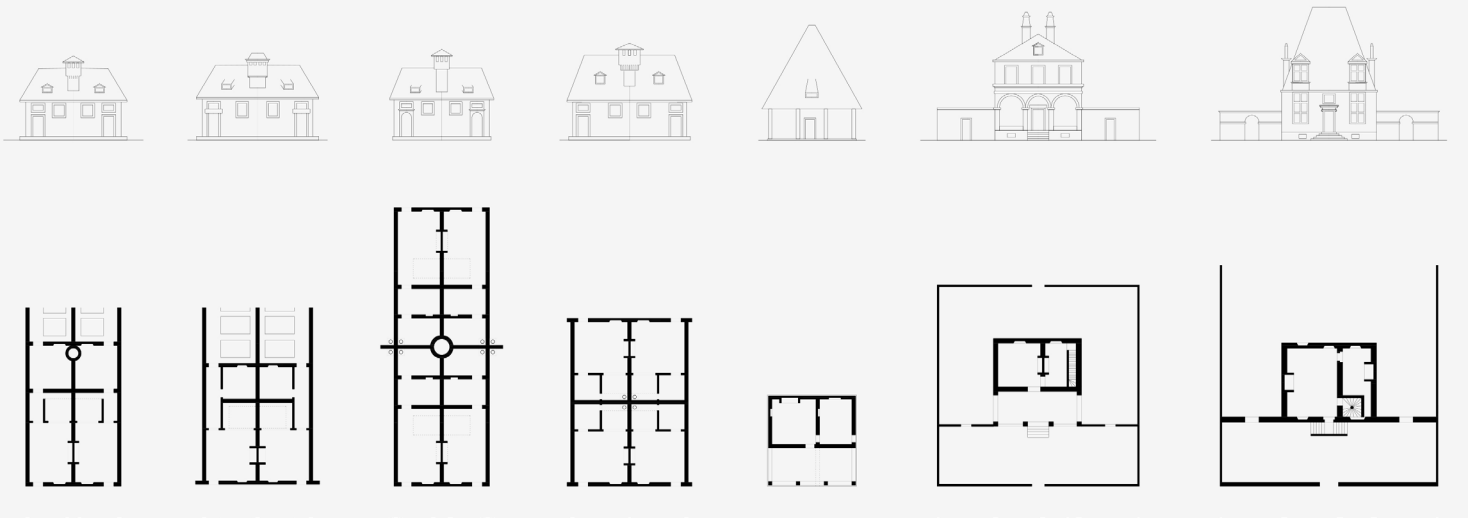
On Sebastiano Serlio's Domestic Architecture

James S. Ackerman



Houses for the poor artisans and citizens in the countryside and in the city. Adapted from Plates I (Projects A1-C3) and XLVIII (Projects A-F), Sebastiano Serlio, *The Sixteenth-Century Manuscript of Book VI in the Avery Library of Columbia University* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1996). Drawn by Theodora Giovanazzi.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Sebastiano Serlio's work on houses for all kinds of people and James Ackerman's writings are milestones in the history of architecture, particularly that of domestic space. In *Book VI* of the *Seven Books on Architecture*, Serlio was the first architect to systematically address the project of domestic architecture. Ackerman produced one of the most acute historical assessments of domestic ideology with his *The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses* (1990).

This is why Burning Farm republishes here Ackerman's brilliant introduction to the 1978 republication[1] of Serlio's *Book VI*, titled *Sebastiano Serlio on Domestic Architecture: Different Dwellings from the Meanest Hovel to the Most Ornate Palace*. Written seven years before the lectures that gave origins to his book on the villa, Ackerman's introduction anticipates the methodological reorientation that the American historian would later consolidate. Since the 1960s, Ackerman had been concerned with integrating architecture into "the rest of human history,"[2] moving beyond a purely programmatic reading of buildings. Inspired by Manfredo Tafuri's wide-ranging scholarship, Ackerman began to approach architectural history as a field that included cultural and social issues. Ackerman situates Serlio's work within the 'urban revolution' taking place in Western Europe between the 14th and 15th centuries. The main protagonist of this

1 Serlio's *Book VI* was published for the first time in the volume: Sebastiano Serlio, Myra Nana Rosenfeld, *Sebastiano Serlio on Domestic Architecture: Different Dwellings from the Meanest Hovel to the Most Ornate Palace. The Sixteenth-Century Manuscript of Book VI in the Avery Library of Columbia University* (New York and Cambridge, Mass: The Architectural History Foundation and the MIT Press, 1978). This book was of extreme importance because it included a facsimile of one of the two surviving manuscripts of the *Sixth Book*—held at the Avery Library of Columbia—by the Bolognese architect Sebastiano Serlio, which was not previously available to wider scholarship. Indeed, the manuscript had never been published during Serlio's lifetime, despite its widely accepted influence on the 16th-century architectural milieu and beyond. The original manuscript was only recovered in the 1920s by Sir William Bell Dinsmoor, librarian of the Avery Library at Columbia, and first announced in 1942 in an article in the Art Bulletin. See: William Bell Dinsmoor, 'The Literary Remains of Sebastiano Serlio', *The Art Bulletin* 24, no. 2 (Jun., 1942) (1942). *Sebastiano Serlio on Domestic Architecture* includes an extensive essay and commentary by Myra Nan Rosenfeld, a foreword by Adolf Placzek, and an introduction by James S. Ackerman, who at the time was teaching at Harvard.

2 David Friedman, 'James Ackerman (1919–2016)', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 76, no. 4 (2017): 449–53, https://doi.org/10.1525/jsah.2017.76.4.449. 451

revolution was the rise of the bourgeoisie; the Italian Renaissance city was the main stage. Self-governing cities were, in fact, moving away from their medieval characteristics of "towered, fortress-like enclaves of extended aristocratic" settlements towards cities that accommodated people of different classes. Urban dwellers, now detached from the nobleman's family enclave, built accessible residences for individual families and their servants, thereby redistributing the population in the urban environment. This process went hand in hand with the differentiation between workspace and living space. These changes led to the establishment of city centres for the privileged and to peripheries populated by the poor. Even if Serlio does not explicitly elaborate on this new conception of urban form in the manuscript, he takes for granted the growing stratification of the city's dwellers into distinct classes that he seeks to accommodate in appropriate domestic buildings. Another important characteristic that Ackerman addresses in his essay, is that Serlio's dwellings for the lower classes seem to have been designed to be mass-built by speculators for the purpose of rental. In parallel, Ackerman suggests that the villa designs proposed by Serlio, which include work areas and agricultural spaces, are typical of the Venetian move towards the *terraferma*. These designs stand in stark contrast to other villa examples of central Italy, which functioned as opulent retreats for extravagant entertainment, situated in formal gardens and intended for influential exponents of the church or state. Serlio's villas indeed addressed the new needs of Venetian 'citizens'—the professional rank who did not participate in the island's politics—to engage in land reclamation and agriculture as viable substitutes to the diminishing revenue once derived by maritime trade. For Ackerman, a valuable feature of Serlio's manuscript is also found in the city houses and palaces sections, as they portray sixteenth-century vernacular architecture and the differences between French and Italian trends. To France, Serlio brought "Italian Renaissance taste" and consolidated it through print. At the same time, Serlio also adopted and implemented distinct features of French architecture, such as the need for privacy within dwellings (achieved through the provision of corridors) and stylistic characteristics, including high-pitched roofs with dormer windows and the absence of ground-floor porticoes. For Ackerman, Serlio's achievement lay in being a pioneer of the pattern book with printed illustrations, likely inspiring Palladio to publish his *Quattro Libri* in 1570. However, if Palladio's work is a testament to the mastery of its author in the art of proportions and classical orders, it was not intended for a varied spectrum of clients like Serlio's manuscript. This is why, according to Ackerman, *Book VI* remains a "unique treasure" since it provides the reader with an understanding of Renaissance society and customs beyond simple architectural form.

Theodora Giovanazzi

ON SEBASTIANO SERLIO'S DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE[3]

Sebastiano Serlio projected seven books for his architectural treatise. Six of these were published, and one, Book VI on domestic dwellings, remained in two autograph manuscript versions, the one presented for the first time to the public in this facsimile edition and a later one in the Munich Staatsbibliothek. Book VI is in some ways the most important of Serlio's works—I do not call them "writings," because they are conceived essentially as illustrations with explanatory texts. Like the preceding book on churches, Book VI consists entirely of proposals for contemporary buildings, but readers of the time would have been far

3 Editorial note: The original title of Ackerman's essay was 'Introduction.' For the purposes of this republication, we have retitled it *On Sebastiano Serlio's Domestic Architecture,* a change intended to better reflect the essay's content and its presentation here as a stand-alone text rather than an introductory piece.

more likely to turn to Serlio's plans of dwellings than to his designs of churches. Then, as now, most housing was built without architects, and there was a vast potential market for standardized models in the latest style such as Book VI would have provided had it been available in print. Builders long after Serlio's death would surely have continued to rely on this book for inspiration as they did on Palladio's publication of twenty-five years later. For today's students of the Renaissance it offers an insight into the full spectrum of domestic building problems of that age and the social and political structure that shaped them.

Serlio's architectural career was blocked, for reasons that are not clear. In his early years in Rome, he was an assistant to Baldassare Peruzzi and had no independent commissions. He moved to Venice following the Sack of Rome in 1527, at the same time as two great contemporary architects, Jacopo Sansovino and Michele Sanmicheli, who were given official positions and captured most of the important public commissions while native architects were assigned the remainder. But it is odd that a designer with the fertile imagination displayed by Serlio's published and manuscript works was almost totally rejected at a time when building in the Venetian republic was undergoing a great spurt after a generation of inactivity. Certainly his expertise was recognized: in 1534 he was appointed to a commission including Sanmicheli and Titian to advise on a proposal, based on a system of harmonic proportions, by the monk Francesco Giorgi to alter Sansovino's design for the church of San Francesco della Vigna. In 1539 he was summoned to Vicenza to consult on the project to envelop the civic "Basilica" there with a new portico; other experts in the "arte architectoria e fabricandi usu praestantes" called there for advice were the most celebrated of their generation: Sansovino, Sanmicheli, Giulio Romano, Spavento and later Palladio, who was awarded the commission for the building. Apparently some trait of Serlio's character repelled, or at least failed to attract, prospective clients. To this fact we well may owe his literary career, and the ample time permitted him to gather his thoughts, to measure ancient and modern monuments and to draw the buildings and architectural details that became a resource to generations of followers.

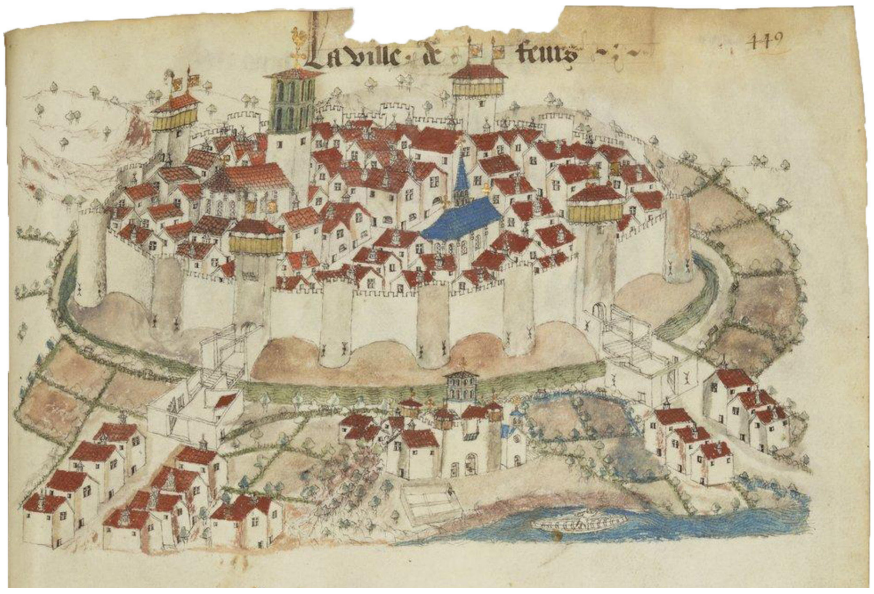
THE URBAN REVOLUTION

Serlio's manuscript is a contribution to and evidence of one of the great social and political revolutions of Western history: the rise to power and influence of a new class, the bourgeoisie.

The city was the theater of this revolution. Cities as we know them today, as dense concentrations of people governed by a more or less representative local body that provides services, water, markets, protection from external and internal coercion, public streets and gathering places, began to appear only in the later Middle Ages after a millennium of virtual disuse. This flowering was stimulated by different needs in different places; some cities grew out of markets and fairs, some were launched by grants of political and economic freedoms by kings and lords in exchange for taxes and other revenues, some were strengthened and even newly founded to guard frontiers. In the nascent city of Italy, where Serlio's social and political concepts were formed, the urban trader and artisan struggled for rights and for autonomy against the traditional aristocracy of the feudal period, whose power and wealth were based on the yield of the land. On the eve of the urban revolution the few towns that had survived the Dark Ages may have been concentrations of towered, fortress-like enclaves of extended aristocratic families, each enclave containing its own servants, soldiers, artisans, chaplains, notaries and physicians, and each claiming sovereignty over a portion of the area within the walls. San Gimigniano in Tuscany, with its forest of tall, thin family towers, is one of the few towns that still evokes its feudal origins

because it failed to grow in the subsequent capitalist era, though the private enclaves were broken through to create public streets and a civic area was carved out at the center.

The documents of the self-governing cities from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries record incessant battles by communal governments to assert public rights over private privilege in access to urban space. At the same time, the urban dweller gained increasing freedom from the obligations and protections of a feudal relationship; the artisan or the merchant could set up shop and sell his product or his labor to the public; being no longer a member of the nobleman's extended family, his residence and workshop no longer had to be attached to the family enclave. In many cities, such as Florence, Venice and the towns of the Hanseatic League, the rise of the bourgeoisie was so decisive that the richer merchants and bankers became themselves the ruling class and virtually an urban aristocracy; they built accessible palaces rather than fortified precincts, palaces designed for use by a single family and domestics, not for a mini-community representing a cross section of the whole of society. Other, lesser towns of the later Middle Ages, such as the one illustrated below, had no individuals sufficiently eminent in either birth or wealth to distinguish themselves from other citizens by the size and elegance of their dwellings.



Guillaume de Revel, *The Town of Feurs*, ca. 1456. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 22297, folio 499, ink on parchment.

The dissolution of traditional bonds and the realignment of class structures in the late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance cut urban dwellers of all levels loose from their habitual locales within the city and brought about totally new spatial distributions of the population. In the older large cities, the change came about slowly, because housing, workspace and institutions of earlier eras continued to serve traditional functions. But in newly built structures and districts, and in the ideal projects of the theorists, the urban configuration was altered radically. Grand squares were carved out in town centers. They were bordered by imposing structures of the municipality and the church. Rich and powerful citizens sought to build either on the major squares or along major arteries leading from them. The spatial configuration, once a cluster of separate enclaves or cells, now became one of concentric rings, with the more privileged citizens located at or near the center, and others in circumferences of shorter or longer radii according to their degree of eminence and wealth. The

poor were forced to the outer periphery: Serlio places them even outside the city gates, a position traditionally indicative of disenfranchisement and denial of rights.

The city of Serlio, like that of the earlier theorists Filarete and Francesco di Giorgio, would thus have had a conical profile, with the tallest and most imposing structures at the center and the lowest and simplest in the immediate suburbs—the poorest artisans' huts are arranged in row housing one story in height (PI. XLVIII). Likewise cleanliness and the freshness of air would have declined from an apex at the center to the foul odors and refuse produced by tanneries and slaughterhouses in the poor areas, compounded, no doubt, by the filth of unpaved streets.

Segregation of the population by trade is another innovative feature of the Renaissance theorists' city: districts would be assigned to each industry and craft, which had the effect of accelerating the separation of work space from living space. Very few of Serlio's working-class houses have a workshop area. Presumably even the merchants who tended the shops provided in his Palace for the Podestà (Justice of the Peace; PI. LXII) lived elsewhere.

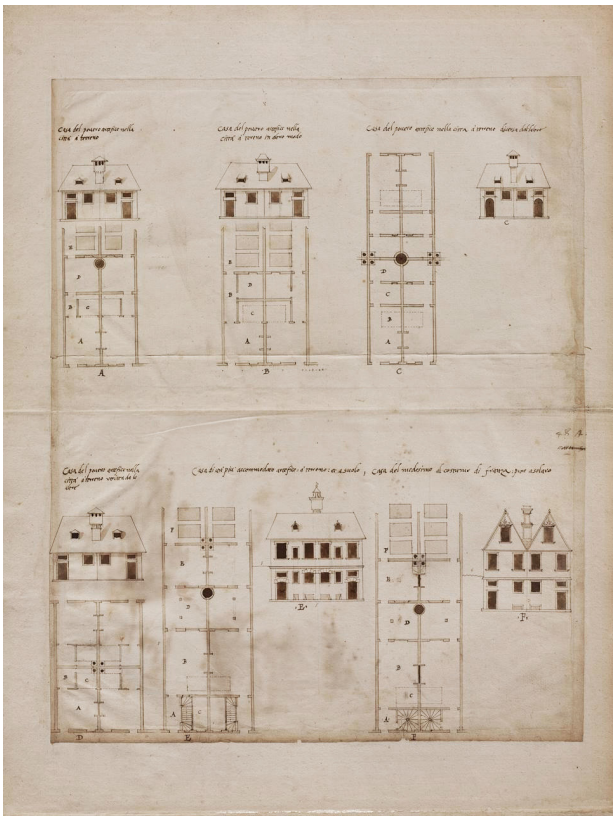


Plate XLVIII: Hovel for a poor artisan (A); Hovel for a poor artisan (B); Dwelling for a poor artisan (C); Dwelling for a poor artisan (D); House of a better-off artisan (E); House of a better-off artisan in the French manner (F).
Sebastiano Serlio, *Book VI*, Plate 48, ca. 1550. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York.

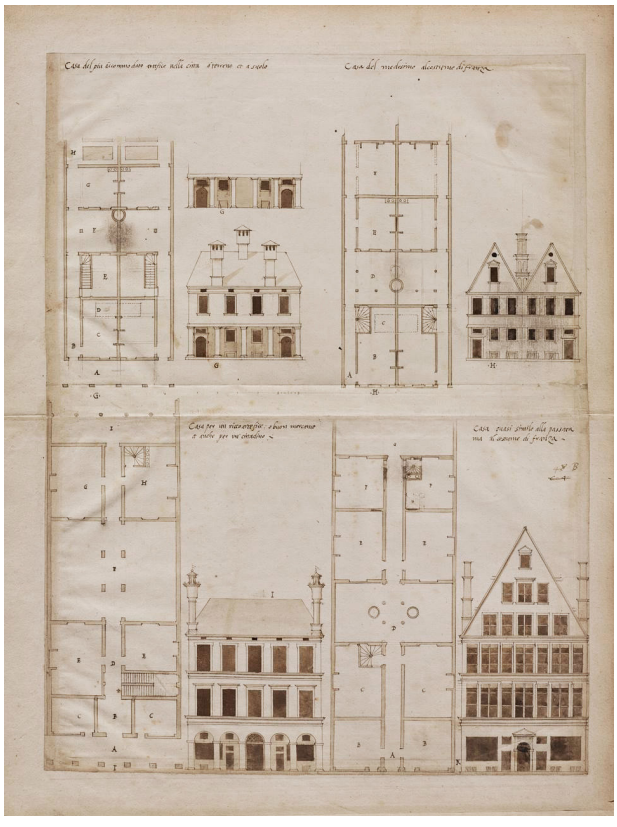


Plate XLIX: House of a better-off artisan with an upper floor (G); House of a better-off artisan in the French manner (H); Dwelling of a rich artisan or good merchant or citizen (I); Dwelling of a rich artisan or good merchant or citizen in the French manner (J).
Sebastiano Serlio, *Book VI*, Plate 49, ca. 1550. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York.

Serlio does not fully articulate his new conception of urban form in Book VI—he is too much a participant in an evolving social structure to see it quite in perspective. In his view, contemporary society has a highly differentiated number of socioeconomic strata which he accepts without consciousness of potential alternatives, and which he attempts to accommodate in suitable dwellings. He wants an individual's status to be exactly reflected in the height and decorative detailing of the façade and in the number, size and degree of privacy of interior spaces.

We would assume, from what Serlio tells us, that each person builds for himself the dwelling suited to his income. But that would not have been any more plausible in his time than it would be today. A dual class division must be superimposed on Serlio's multiple strata, differentiating those who own and build their own living space from those who depend on housing built by others, for which they pay in rent or services. But apparently Serlio's "artisan" housing is distinguished not only in being owned by others but, more significantly, in being built for the specific purpose of rental by developers with disposable capital.

It reflects one of the revolutionary innovations of the age of capitalism. The semi-detached and duplex artisans' dwellings in Pls. XLVIII and XLIX—the first of their kind in architectural literature-were obviously designed for mass production and not as individual undertakings, along streets newly laid out for the purpose. The few developments of this kind that survive from the Renaissance are discussed by Myra Rosenfeld.[4] Serlio's urban situation, in short, is that of modern Western bourgeois society, except that the tenements are designed as row housing rather than as multistoried high-rise or walk-up housing. This fact reveals what a major leap Renaissance planning as represented in Book VI has made away from the medieval city. Whether that leap can be called progress is uncertain, partly because of the absence of adequate data, and partly because the answer depends on one's system of values.

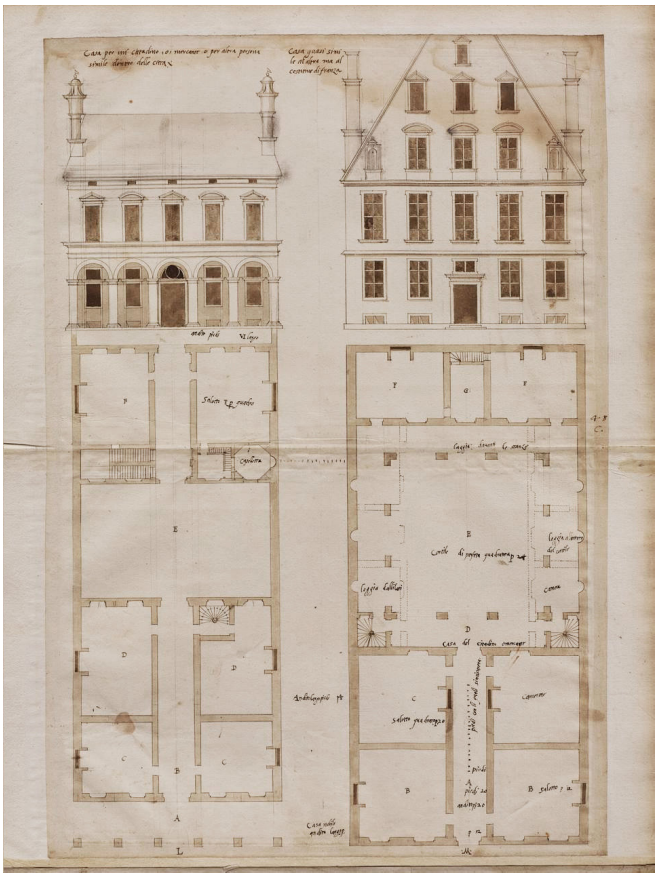


Plate L: House for a citizen or merchant or similar person (L); House for a citizen or merchant or similar person in the French manner (M).
Sebastiano Serlio, *Book VI*, Plate 50, ca. 1550. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York.

4 Adolf K. Placzek et al., *Sebastiano Serlio on Domestic Architecture* (The Architectural History Foundation, 1978). 44-45.

Though Serlio identified many economic strata in Book VI, they are assigned to only four classes: 1) artisan (including unskilled laborers), 2) citizen (roughly equivalent to "professional" and merchant (the notes in French translate either of these two as "bourgeois"), 3) nobility and high officers of the state, and 4) royalty. Serlio does not refer to the hierarchy of the church, though its upper strata abounded in patrons of architecture, and though one of his two chateau commissions came from the Ferrarese Cardinal-Legate at Fontainebleau. Apparently he believed that clerical patrons were the exact equivalents of laymen of comparable means; nothing about their dwellings was intended to symbolize or even to reveal their spiritual calling; worldly rank was what mattered. This conformed to Renaissance practice and was probably an unconsciously acquired attitude.

Serlio assumes equivalence of social and economic level as a general rule, though he recognizes that the barriers are so vague that on occasion a merchant may be able to "live more sumptuously than some gentlemen by reason of the great earnings brought by commerce" (Pl. L). At one point he implies even that there is an ethical-spiritual hierarchy of class that may raise people above—or drag them below—their economic level:

> I do not want to dedicate a house rather to a merchant than to a citizen or rich gentleman because minds are not always at the level of rank. Sometimes a very rich citizen will have a spirit so low and vile that, overcome by avarice, he will live in an old, smoky, and even ruinous house, and another citizen of modest means living with difficulty on current income will be liberal and generous, and will sell property to build a beautiful house. [Munich ms., fol. 48v.]

Serlio's suggestion that virtue may be measured in terms of one's degree of willingness to build a new house is not just the special pleading of an underemployed architect. It reflects the conviction of Renaissance intellectuals, and specifically of the French King, that to replace medieval buildings with new ones in the *all'antica* style was to participate with others of lofty purpose in a great spiritual-cultural renewal. Similar moralistic implications were imputed by Ruskin in the last century to patrons who reversed that process and replaced classical buildings with neo-medieval ones, and by the pioneers of twentieth-century architecture who sought to put an end to revivals of any sort.

THE VILLA

In the Sixth Book, Serlio, like Palladio a quarter of a century later, presents his domestic designs in two categories: buildings for the country and buildings for the city. But unlike Palladio, he seeks to accommodate in each case the entire social spectrum, ranging from rustic huts to grand villas and from minimal urban housing units to royal palaces. This even-handed distribution of urban and rural projects was not typical of an Italian Renaissance architectural practice, but was a particularly Venetian phenomenon. While wealthy patrons in Rome, Florence, Milan or in the smaller states occasionally commissioned grand suburban villas, Venetians of Serlio's generation were moving onto the mainland—called the *terraferma*—in unprecedented numbers. Writing shortly after 1500, the Venetian patrician Girolamo Priuli mourned the abandonment by his compatriots of their glorious, virile and enriching seafaring tradition in favor of the debilitating pursuit of agriculture or simply of leisure:

> There is no citizen, nobleman or working man who, having the means, has not bought at least a piece of land and a house in the *terraferma*, and particularly in the provinces of Padua and Treviso, since these places are nearby, in order to

> go there to relax and to return in a day or two.... Nowadays, to tell the truth, the young Venetian nobles and citizens, who earlier in this epoch used to attend to navigation and to earning, pursue relaxation, pleasure, falconing, the making of houses and aviaries at enormous expense and, having once been merchants, are now farmers without the slightest experience of the things of the world.

The country buildings of the Veneto were thus quite unlike those of the rest of Italy, which were typically palatial retreats for lavish entertainment set in formal gardens, designed for powerful dignitaries of the church or the state and, more rarely, persons of private wealth like the banker Agostino Chigi, for whom Serlio's mentor Baldassare Peruzzi built the Farnesina Villa in Rome. Serlio had included three examples of this kind in his Third Book, published in Venice in 1540: the Belvedere Court in the Vatican, Villa Madama in Rome and Poggioreale in Naples, all of which he must have illustrated from drawings made before his departure for Venice in 1527. The demand for villas of this sort continued throughout the Renaissance in many parts of Italy, the Palazzo del Te in Mantua and the Villa d'Este in Tivoli being characteristic examples built contemporaneously with the earlier and later years of Serlio's career.

What distinguished the Venetian *terraferma* phenomenon from that of the other states of Italy was not just that, on Priuli's evidence, the patronage represented almost the entire economic and social spectrum; it was the fact that the villas, though they provided delightful environments for relaxation, were virtually all working farms. They represented a revival of the villas described by ancient Roman writers such as Pliny, Virgil, Cato and Varro, and their owners, despite Priuli's polemic appeals to the contrary, typically interested themselves deeply in agriculture and land reclamation—sufficiently, in the case of large landholders, to counterbalance the decline of income from maritime commerce. This explains why Serlio was concerned in the designs and accompanying texts to provide a majority of the villa schemes with working areas, and why a number of the designs have, in addition to the main dwelling, outbuildings for the accommodation of tenant farmers and their equipment (the more elaborate villas would have isolated such accommodations in more distant places).

Thus the middle-sized projects in the Sixth Book correspond closely with Venetian terraferma practice of the mid-sixteenth century. For obvious reasons, the more modest huts proposed by Serlio were not destined to be and never had been architect- y designed: the impoverished contadini lived in round mud hovels with floors of earth and thatched roofs; and, at the other end of the spectrum, there were in the Venetian Republic no viceroys, princes or kings to build on the scale of the more elegant projects proposed to Serlio's royal patron.

How applicable the Venetian villa type would have been to conditions elsewhere in Europe is uncertain. In France, where Serlio sought to get support for the publication of his book, the countryside remained in the hands of the landed aristocracy and was cultivated by peasants in a virtually feudal condition. There could not have been a body of lower- and middle-class city dwellers seeking to invest capital in modest rural estates for the pursuit of pleasure and gain through agriculture. Thus, the numerous designs for "citizens or merchants" appearing on plates II-VI of the manuscript would probably not have been of interest to that social stratum. Even Serlio's term "citizen" is peculiarly Venetian: it was the designation for a legally distinct category of the population which might be designated today as the "professional" class-the doctors, lawyers and civil servants who enjoyed a considerable degree of rights and privileges, not, however, including direct participation in the legislative activities of the Republic, which was reserved to a limited number of the patrician class. Serlio's modest villas, however, might have attracted the interest of an occasional French aristocrat of moderate means whose hereditary castle needed replacement as opposed to the traditional custom of piecemeal extension.

But, judging from the relatively few small châteaux newly constructed in Renaissance style in mid-sixteenth-century France, there must have been economic constraints coupled with a reluctance on the part of aristocrats outside court circles to assimilate the Italian Renaissance style.

CITY HOUSES AND PALACES

The city dwellings presented in Book VI range from the meanest one-story, two-room structure outside the city walls to a royal palace. There is a significant division at the level of the first habitation devised for a "gentleman," which is to say aristocrat (PI. LII): that palace and those which follow, for military and civic chiefs, princes and kings, are inventions that for the most part recall in some way the grander palaces of Rome and Venice.

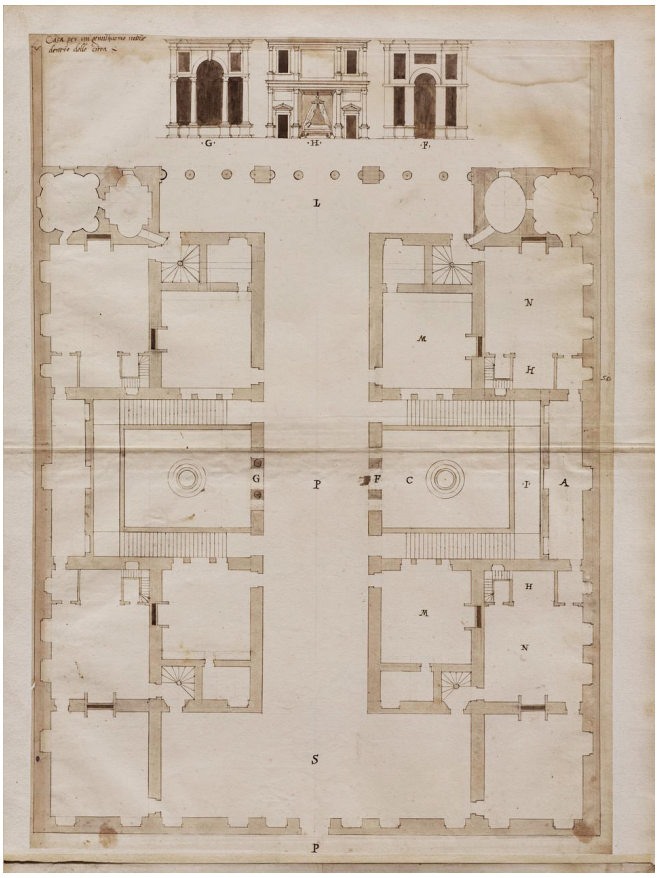


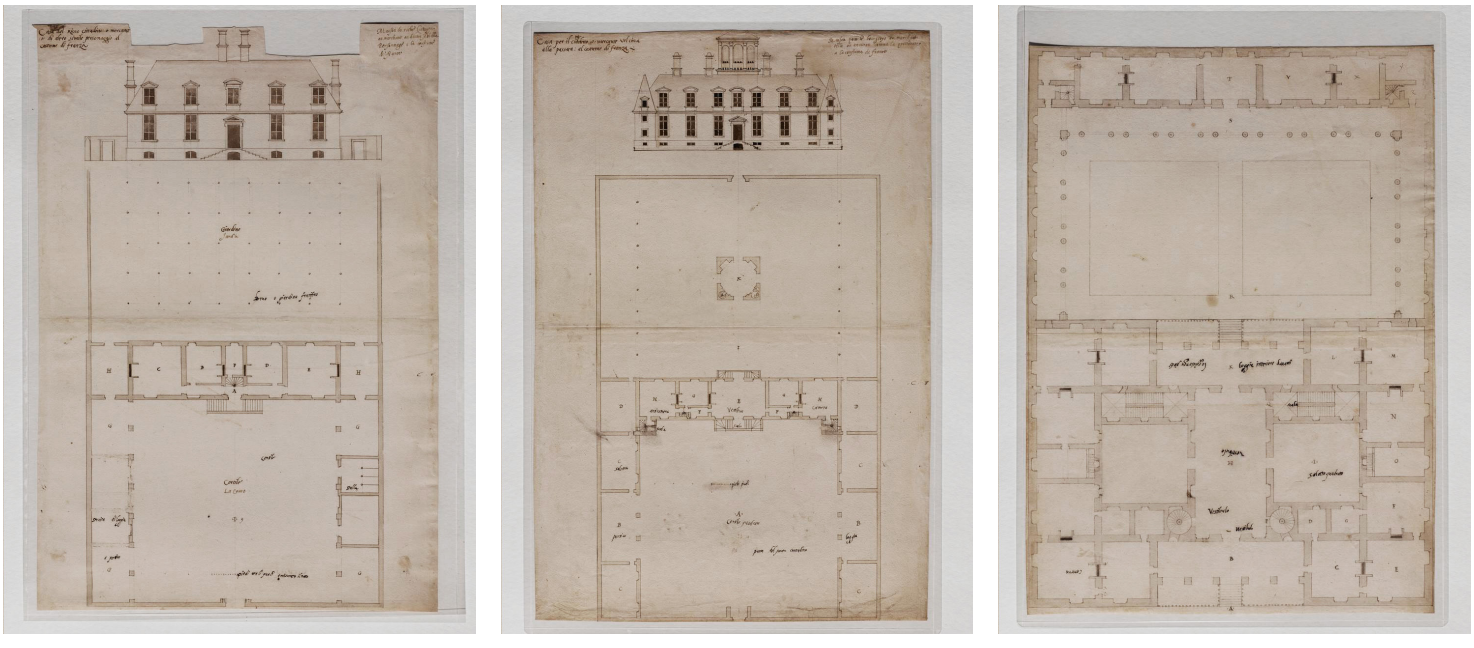
Plate LII: House for a noble Venetian gentleman (P).
Sebastiano Serlio, *Book VI*, Plate 52, ca. 1550. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York

Frequently they are rich in imaginative variations on their Italian forerunners, but for two reasons they are less informative than the simple houses and mansions. First, little of the less pretentious architecture of the sixteenth century has survived to the present day unchanged; the more modest the structure, the more likely it is to have been destroyed or remodeled. Second, for each of the simpler designs Serlio matched his Italian models with French, particularly Parisian, counterparts, which he does not do for the more grand, assuming, no doubt, that his richer clients would want to adopt the Italian style, with perhaps minor accommodations to French tradition.

Thus he gives a unique insight into what vernacular architecture may have been like in his time, and what differences there were from country to country, though the information has to be taken cautiously. The designs are ideal rather than actual schemes: the houses may have been no more like real dwellings than were Le Corbusier's Domino or Citrohan projects of the 1920s. Also, in his simplest buildings, Serlio seems to have been interested in the French tradition only insofar as it affected the façades.

ITALY AND FRANCE

Serlio's role in France was that of a purveyor of Italian Renaissance taste. François I, in inviting him to the court in 1540, may or may not have had grand building projects in mind for him; as it turned out, he commissioned no more than a relatively minor work at Fontainebleau, and Serlio had a chance to build only one villa-château for a French patron, Ancy-le-Franc, and one for an Italian, Le Grand Ferrare. Serlio, and perhaps François I himself, must have wanted this modest contribution to the great shift that ultimately interrupted the tradition of French fifteenth-century building and replaced it with Italian norms (as Myra Rosenfeld has shown in earlier studies), to be reinforced and consolidated by the power of the printed word. His Sixth Book, unlike those which preceded it, was specifically addressed to the situation in France, though its Italianate versions of many designs were calculated to attract the attention of Venetians and other Italians.

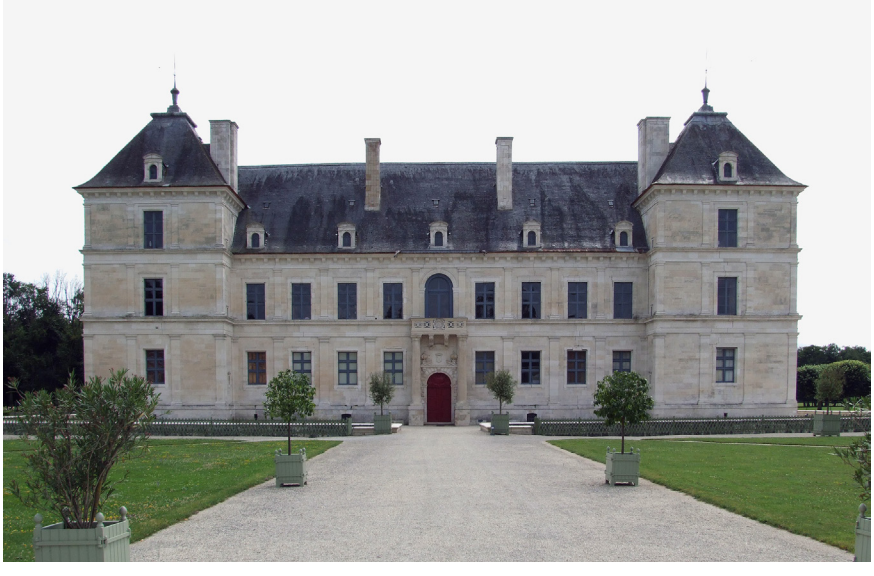


Left: Plate IV: House for a richer citizen or merchant or similar person in the French manner (I9).
Sebastiano Serlio, Book VI, Plate 4, ca. 1550. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York
Center: Plate VI: House for a citizen or merchant, similar to the past project in the French manner (L11).
Sebastiano Serlio, Book VI, Plate 6, ca. 1550. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York
Right: Plate VII: Villa for a noble gentleman (M12).
Sebastiano Serlio, Book VI, Plate 7, ca. 1550. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York

The fact that Serlio's effort to lead the French out of what some progressive arbiters of taste regarded as medieval darkness into the light of the maniera antica did not blind him to the virtues of the French tradition is extraordinary in a culture as ethnocentric as that of Renaissance Italy. I do not believe that his decision to present the projects of his more modest dwellings in a French version as well as an Italian one is to be attributed simply to his hope of attracting French patronage for his publication. He confesses, indeed, to have learned something from the French medieval tradition: "Although the French articulate their buildings," he says, "in a way that is different from ours, nonetheless they have the same comfort" (PI. IV). From today's perspective, in fact, they may have been more comfortable, particularly with respect to personal privacy: the French frequently provided corridors that skirted bedrooms, while the Italians invariably made all but the end rooms in a file so that private chambers doubled as public passages (Pls. IV, VI-VII). The other significant aspects of French tradition apparent in the projects of Book VI are the high-pitched roofs with dormer windows (or, in the case of some urban designs, windows within the gables), tall, thin windows to admit greater light, and the avoidance of ground-floor porticoes, all traceable to climatic differences between the Mediterranean and central France.

SERLIO'S ACHIEVEMENT

It would not be quite just to compare Serlio's unexecuted designs with the villas and palaces of his contemporaries who executed many buildings. Ideal schemes unavoidably are conceived without the constraints and stimuli provided by clients, by the need to accommodate specific functions and ideals or by the character of a particular site. Serlio's one surviving residence, Ancy-le-Franc, shows how different an actual building can be from the architect's initial preparatory designs (compare images below and Pls. XVI-XVIII), even in a situation where the client was at hand and, presumably, a site was established. Still, the verdict of later criticism has been that Serlio was not as original or as gifted an architect as his contemporaries who succeeded in getting the major commissions in Italy.



Sebastiano Serlio: Château Ancy-le-Franc, 1541-1546. North facade,
Yonne, Bourgogne, France.
Photograph by Christophe Finot, 2008.

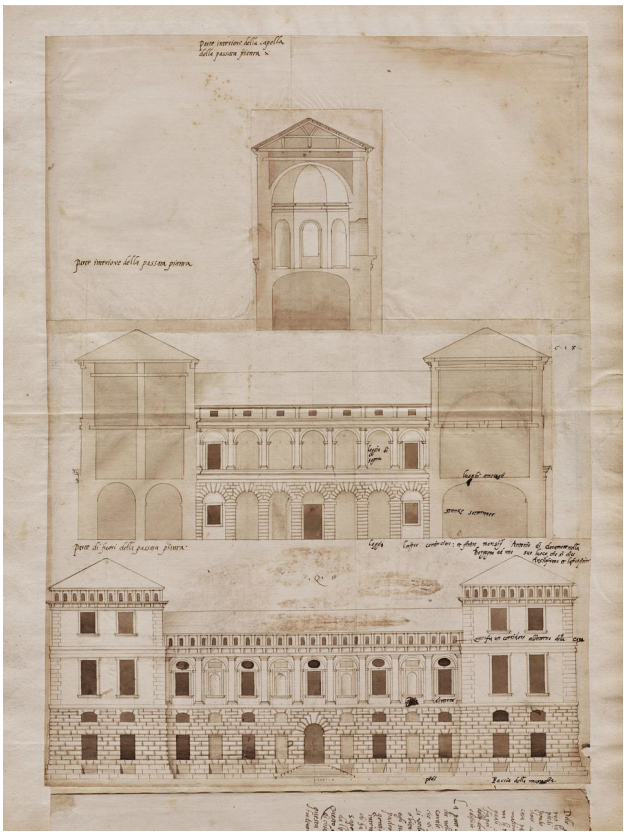


Plate XVIII: Dwelling for a noble gentleman, the Château of Ancy-le-Franc (Q16).
Sebastiano Serlio, *Book VI*, Plate 18, ca. 1550. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York

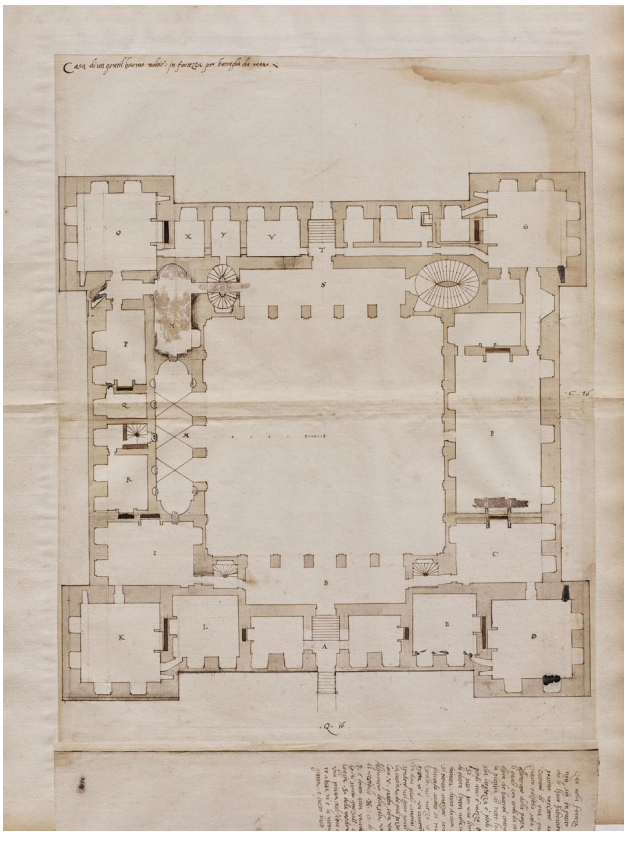


Plate XVI: Dwelling for a noble gentleman,
the Château of Ancy-le-Franc (Q16).
Sebastiano Serlio, *Book VI*, Plate 16, ca. 1550. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York

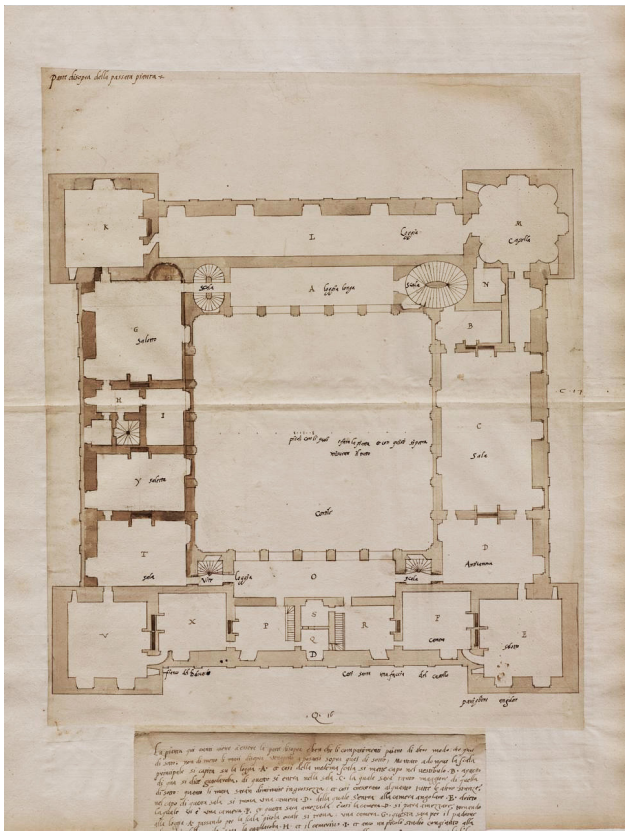


Plate XVII: Dwelling for a noble gentleman,
the Château of Ancy-le-Franc (Q16).
Sebastiano Serlio, *Book VI*, Plate 17, ca. 1550. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York

He had, however, an exceptionally fertile imagination in conceiving variations and enrichments—*invenzioni,* in the professional language of the time—of the ideas he had absorbed in Rome, Bologna, Venice and France. He demonstrates this gift in his published Extraordinary Book on Doors, a collection of lavish, mannered fantasies that stimulated the imagination of generations of later designers of garden portals-a genre that has always invited whimsy. He was a veritable sponge for the innovative designs of his time, and this was a great virtue in one who was to become the pioneer of the architectural pattern book, the first in a succession that continued up to the present day, of architects whose published drawings and commentaries served both to stimulate the art and to record its evolution.

Palladio was an early beneficiary of this achievement; no doubt he was inspired by Serlio to publish in 1570 a volume that capitalized on the essential innovation of a text made subordinate to illustration, a book the success and influence of which would depend almost entirely on the woodcuts, and which could survive essentially untarnished through many editions with newly copied plates, often adjusted to suit the taste of later ages. In illustrating his own inventions for country and city dwellings (that division follows Serlio's), Palladio could, unlike Serlio, turn to an abundance of drawings that had been commissioned by the wealthy patrons of Venice and the *terraferma*. And, since these patrons were all in more or less the same economic condition, the Quattro Libri differs from its forerunner by not undertaking to offer models for a wide spectrum of clients: there is nothing for those of low or modest income, and nothing for princes and kings. But a number of Palladio's solutions are similar to Serlio's middle range; Dr. Rosenfeld illustrates an instance in comparing Plates V and VII to figures 78 and 81 (early drawings for villas in the Quattro Libri).[5] Palladio's book was incalculably influential—more so than any architectural book ever published. His villas and palaces, conceived for the Veneto, proved to accommodate the social and aesthetic aspirations and the economic condition of centuries of European and American middle- and upper-class patrons. Serlio would undoubtedly have shared some of that fame if Book VI had been printed: because it remained in manuscript, Palladio got all the glory.

But one factor in Palladio's success was absent from Serlio's projects: the harmonic system of proportions that underlies the measurements indicated on the plans, sections and elevations. Serlio did not concern himself much with measurements, beyond indicating occasionally an approximate scale in feet, and this was not due just to the fact that the majority of his projects were ideal schemes. Nor was he particularly sensitive to proportions, as is evident from his postscript to the Munich manuscript (fol. 74r), in which he discusses the question of how to determine the heights of rooms (apparently to give the reader a key to interpreting many of the preceding drawings in which only plan measurements are provided). He criticizes Vitruvius's rule of thumb (height - ½ length + width) because it results in rooms that are too high, and suggests rather that the height of entrances and loggias be twice their width and that of rooms be equal to their width. This oversimplified system would reduce flexibility and produce exceptionally monotonous sequences of spaces; it is the antithesis of Palladio's carefully orchestrated ensembles. Weaknesses in Serlio's proportioning are especially noticeable in the treatment of elevations in which he employed superimposed orders: the columns and pilasters often look squat or inert (Pls. X, XXV, XXVII). And the grand, multistoried palace schemes tend to have an excess of small elements that draw attention away from the overall form. For this reason, the projects for small villas and houses in which the classical orders are not employed, or appear sparingly, are the most appealing; the simple forms are treated with a straightforwardness rare in Serlio's time. The minimal plans are also better conceived than those for royal monuments, some of which appear to

5 Placzek et al., *Sebastiano Serlio on Domestic Architecture*. 68-ff.

be grandiose assemblages of abstract and functionless forms (PI. XLVI).

But enough of criticism: Book VI is a unique treasure because in the great variety of needs it seeks to accommodate it gives us, as no other book of its age has done, an insight into Renaissance society and customs. The insight is not, of course, that of a judicious and enlightened critic of society, or analyst of the real needs of clients in the several classes. Like all artists of his time, Serlio saw the path to success in terms of accepting as his own the attitudes of the rich and powerful who might employ him to build a mansion, or at least assist him to publish a book.

Finally, the book is important for its form as well as its content, for the fact that the manuscript was prepared to exploit creatively to the full the technology of printing with illustrations, initiating a great tradition of books that communicate through their pictures, a tradition that has had untold impact on the history of architecture.[6]

May, 1978
James S. Ackerman

6 For the purposes of this republication, we have omitted the final sentences of Ackerman's text, which we include in this footnote: "In the following pages, Myra Nan Rosenfeld distils the fruit of her many years of study on Serlio, on French Renaissance domestic architecture, and on this manuscript in particular in a text illuminating the essential issues raised by Book VI. Her work has made possible the restoration of the manuscript to its original sequence of folios, which were scrambled in the process of binding in 1919, and has facilitated our grasp of the structure of the text. I have written this introduction as an expression of the gratitude of our scholarly profession to her and to the Architectural History Foundation for making this long-anticipated volume a reality."

AUTHOR

James Sloss Ackerman (1919–2016) was an architectural historian and professor at Harvard University whose work on Renaissance architecture remains central to the discipline. Ackerman is the author of *The Architecture of Michelangelo* (1986) and *The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses* (1990), among other works.

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