

THE BEGINNING OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY IN RELATION TO THEORY AND PRACTICE THE ACCADEMIA DELLA VIRTÙ, ROMAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND SOME (POSSIBLY PALLADIAN) CONSEQUENCES

“... *in the beginning was Palladio.*” This paper will suggest that this claim from the *Call for Papers* is true – if at all – only with some very strong limitations: While Palladio certainly was the first to *publish* a rather systematic collection of Roman antiquities in his *Libro Quattro*, the question remains, if this was his own idea or – if not – where he might have taken his inspiration from. The hypothesis to be presented at the conference is, that Palladio with his publication of the *Quattro libri* only fulfils (and in parts: extends) parts of the program of the *Accademia della Virtù*, transmitted in the famous letter by Claudio Tolomei from 1542, published in 1547. “... *his [Palladio’s] was the first systematic publication of architectural works themselves.*” Of course, Palladio’s surveys are not only more comprehensive or more systematic than publications of his contemporaries and precursors like Serlio or Labacco, but the idea to collect and present all important Roman buildings in a survey with exact measurements and historical and architectural commentaries stems from Tolomei’s letter (if not from Raphael’s ‘letter’ – never sent – to Leo X). That Palladio knew about this project and even took part in its realisation can be derived from very few surviving sources and his travel(s) to Rome in the 1540s as a companion to his mentor Trissino who took part in the *Accademia*’s meetings.

But is this historical footnote of any importance for architectural history? First of all, it can help to overcome a ‘historiography of heroes’ that should have been abandoned long ago. In addition, the intrinsically interdisciplinary project of the *Accademia* deserves more attention – especially, when it should be true that it did not only remain a concept but created the biggest amount of Renaissance drawings and manuscript sources documenting Antiquity, which largely has been ignored and not seen as a *corpus* until recently.

Furthermore, the project was not only intended to understand Vitruvius but to deliver the most comprehensive documentation of antique architecture and its theory based on *all available sources*! And its purpose was not ‘purely scientific’ but to establish *the* guideline for a most perfect modern architecture. This should sound familiar to any reader of Palladio’s *Quattro libri*. To modern scholars it could serve as a methodological example how architectural theory, history and practice could be joined for a very contemporary purpose.

The vast amount of material connectable to the *Accademia*’s project and documenting (not only) antique architecture in its (much more complete) state of the 1540s should be recognised by architectural historians and archaeologist as well as historians of science and engineering. Because these sources are now spread all over the (western) world, the paper will present in short a suggestion for a form of publication that also could serve as a model for similar and other cases where large amounts of historical documents (not only from the history of architecture) should be made available for the scientific community as working material with digital tools.

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Bernd Kulawik