

# THE VILLA IMPERIALE OF ALESSANDRO SFORZA AT PESARO\*

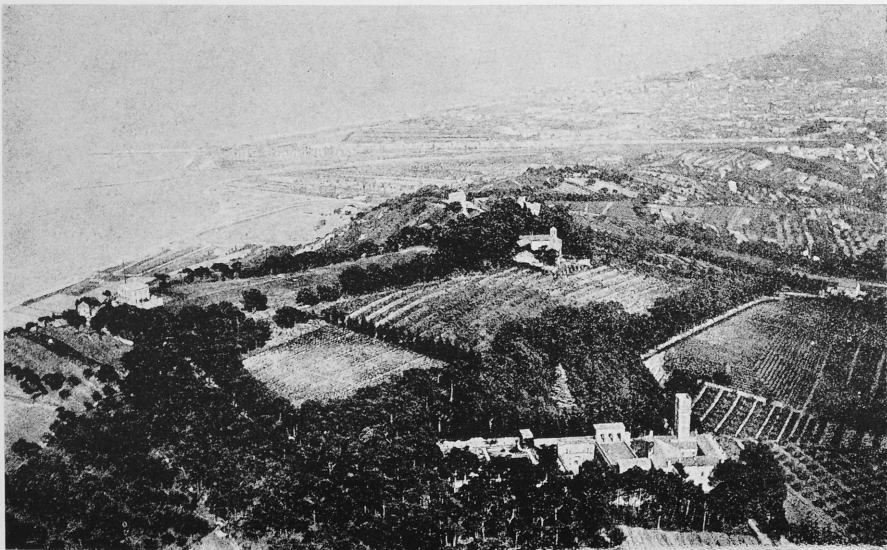
*For David R. Coffin*

*by Sabine Eiche*

Alessandro Sforza, the lord of Pesaro from 1445 to 1473, has not fared well in modern studies. Younger brother of Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, his career as soldier and ruler initially was closely linked to that of his brother and subsequently to that of Federigo da Montefeltro, but historians necessarily have focused on these more dynamic figures, leaving Alessandro to be resurrected by local scholars.<sup>1</sup>

Alessandro's artistic undertakings have been as neglected as his public life.<sup>2</sup> During the almost thirty years of his government in Pesaro he built two residences, one in town and the other in the country. They were not projected contemporaneously, the town palace corresponding to the early years of his rule, the Villa Imperiale to a later period in his life. Both buildings were enlarged and partially restructured in the 16th and 17th centuries; neither has been adequately examined in regard to its 15th century form.<sup>3</sup> It is all the more surprising that questions concerning Alessandro's architectural patronage have never been asked when we realize that he was not only an ally but also a neighbour, relative and fervent admirer of Federigo da Montefeltro, and was occupied with the design of his Imperiale at about the same time that Federigo and his other acquaintances, Pius II and Paul II, were engaged on the construction of their palaces.

Investigations have shown that Alessandro, in his role of enlightened ruler, was receptive to influences and stimulations from his friends<sup>4</sup>, and the Villa Imperiale is an excellent case in point. We shall see that aspects of the plan, as well as other features drawn from illustrious sources, in combination with the personal vocabulary established earlier at the town palace, clearly reveal his approach to architectural patronage and render the Imperiale the most explicit manifestation of his cultural aims.



1 Aerial view of Monte S. Bartolo with the Villa Imperiale.



## Introduction to the site

The Sforza Villa Imperiale rises at the edge of a fold of Monte S. Bartolo, close to the summit and overlooking Pesaro to the south (Fig. 1). Ever since the third decade of the 16th century the Sforza villa has not stood alone, for behind it, terraced up the slope of the hill, was built the grandiose villa of the Della Rovere Dukes of Urbino (Fig. 2). At approximately the same time that Girolamo Genga designed the new complex, he decorated eight rooms of the old villa with frescoes and planned an overpass running from the upper storey of the Sforza building to the lowest level (because of the rising terrain) of the Della Rovere villa. Thus Alessandro's Imperiale, thanks to its important relationship to the newer villa, has survived to this day.

The Imperiale had wide contemporary fame after the Della Rovere created their splendid addition. Praising descriptions abound, and since the setting of the Sforza villa was not altered radically by the construction of Genga's Imperiale, we can read the observations of a late 16th century scholar, Lodovico Agostini, to gain a vivid impression of the physical environment of Alessandro's creation (Figs. 3 and 4).

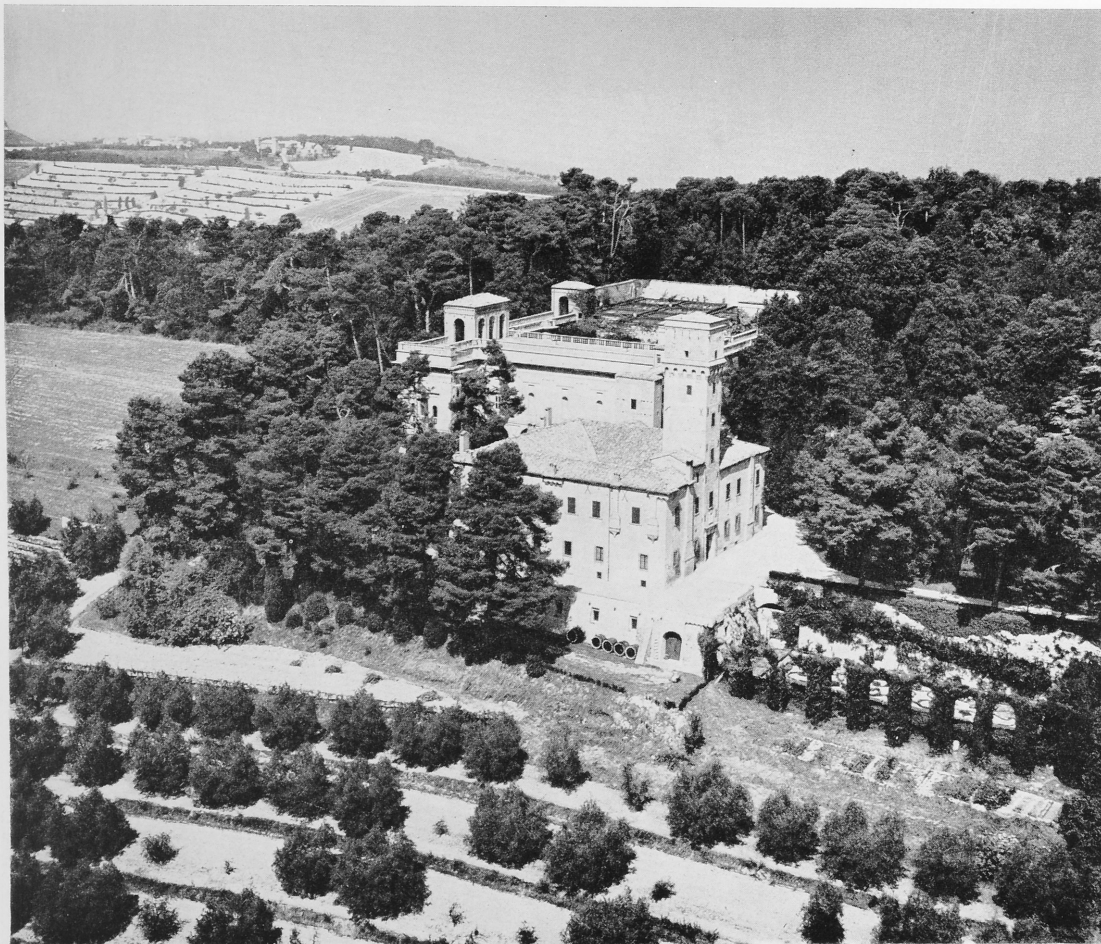
... è un sito, ch'entrandovi per un bosco d'altissime querce, ch'al cielo par che si appoggino, si arriva in un assai largo e spazioso prato, sempre vago per la varietà de' fiori ch'ivi mai non mancano, sostenuto in egual piano da una lunghissima e grossa muraglia, che da austro fa riparo alla tagliata del colle, in scoperta degli altri fruttiferi monti di Pesaro infin agli Appennini, alla cui man dritta da settentrione seguita il bosco in forma di teatro, assai eminente per la spianata del luogo del prato, sott'il quale vi è tirato un giardino di cedri e di aranci chiuso di mura, ove per mezzo vi è una strada che dai secreti del palagio scende, accomodata fuori della vista d'ognuno, pel passeggio della mattina.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that Agostini describes the oak trees as very tall is proof of their great age. They may have been part of the *selva* surrounding the Imperiale that Alessandro's grandson, Giovanni, specified in his will of 1510 as belonging to the estate.<sup>6</sup> Indeed the hill of S. Bartolo was always fertile and well cultivated, mainly with vines and olive and fruit trees, as we can read in countless property sale documents of the period.<sup>7</sup> Thus even if a few details were altered, the 16th century setting of the Della Rovere villa largely preserved the lines and character of the site of Alessandro's 15th century Imperiale.

Before going on to the villa itself it will be useful to examine the approach to the estate. It is after all an integral part of the scene and to an extent will have influenced the orientation of the structure. By 1533, sixty years after Alessandro had died, there were five roads leading from the Porta del Ponte in town up the hill of S. Bartolo to the Imperiale, as we know from the Duke of Urbino's decree that all must be lined with trees to provide shade.<sup>8</sup> Only one of these will have been the direct access to the villa and almost certainly it coincides with the still rural via S. Bartolo. And there is no reason why the 16th century main road should not have been the same as that of the 15th century. The documents recording the sale of the property to Alessandro mention two private lanes and one public road as the boundaries and with the latter must have been meant the present via S. Bartolo.<sup>9</sup>

A unique 15th century representation of Monte S. Bartolo can be seen on the reverse of one of Costanzo Sforza's medals, cast 1474 by Gianfrancesco Enzola, showing Alessandro's son and his troops ascending the hill (Fig. 5). But as documentation for the original





2 Aerial view of the Villa Imperiale.

topography it must be interpreted with a good deal of caution. Enzola depicts a series of hairpin curves that are no longer, and are unlikely ever to have been encountered. Knowing his tendency to *horror vacui* on the reverse of his medals, we can dismiss the tortuous course Enzola gives to the road as an exaggeration to conveniently fill the middle ground of his scene.<sup>10</sup>

The private lane leading from the public road to the villa proceeds in a graceful curve, with the hill rising on the right and falling gently on the left. As we approach we never lose sight of the Imperiale, but only towards the end do we confront it face on. Here the area of level ground widens to the right to provide a grand setting for the Sforza villa. If this plateau is simply an accident in the landscape it was nevertheless appreciated by Alessandro and his contemporaries as appropriate to the Imperiale, for in a document of 1471 it is described with the following words: *platea magna posita iuxta et prope palatium ... Alexandri Sfortie*.<sup>11</sup> Another open space that is an integral part of the setting, but



constructed rather than natural, is the terrace in front of the southern, town-side facade, beneath which is located an extension of the villa's subterranean area (Figs. 2, 19, 21).

The Sforza Imperiale appears as a rectangular block, two storeys high. Like Alessandro's palace in town, and like most other constructions in the area, it is built of pale-coloured brick with the few architectural details executed in stone. The east wing, which overlooks the *platea magna*, incorporates a tall, slim tower, at the foot of which is an imposing portal (Fig. 4). The four facades of Alessandro's villa are bare of architectural decoration, except for the portal, with the result that the two most significant faces of the Imperiale (the east/entrance side and the south/town side) are distinguished primarily by the adjacent open spaces (*platea magna* and terrace), which are so conspicuously a part of the situation. Not even a stringcourse interrupts the elevations although a number of exterior chimneys, clues to the location of Alessandro's living quarters, relieves the walls from absolute monotony.<sup>12</sup> All the windows are now simple rectangular apertures and even those on the upper level, many of which were restructured in the 16th century, have no more than a modestly profiled ledge.<sup>13</sup> The rhythm of the windows does not ever seem to have followed any aesthetic principle, although the position of many has been changed and walled up



3 Francesco Mingucci, Villa Imperiale, 1626 (Biblioteca Vaticana, Barb. lat. 4434, c. 14).





4 Villa Imperiale.

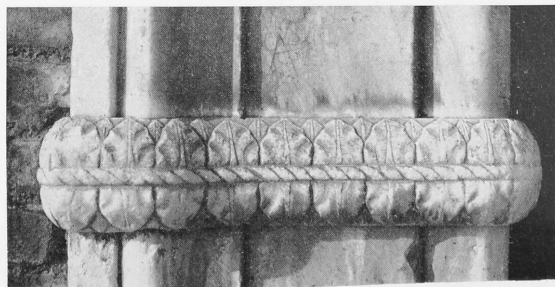


5 Gianfrancesco Enzola, reverse of the medal of Costanzo Sforza, 1474 (Biblioteca Oliveriana).





6 Main entrance of the Villa Imperiale.



7 Detail of Fig. 6.





8 Pesaro, main entrance of the Palazzo Ducale.



9 Detail of Fig. 8.





10 Villa Imperiale, courtyard.

apertures can be discerned on the east, south and west facades. The present arrangement came about with the periodic alterations in the living spaces, so that the only windows that we can presume still to be in their original place are those of three ground floor rooms in the north wing.<sup>14</sup>

Alessandro's villa is entered by way of the east portal, which is a finer, smaller-scaled version of the one in his town palace (Figs. 6-9). As we advance along an unremarkable barrel-vaulted passageway cutting through the tower we discover that the villa is laid out as four wings around an arcaded courtyard (Fig. 10). On a plan we can see that the four wings of the villa are not equal in width, the southern one being considerably narrower than the others (Fig. 16). Furthermore, the room in the north-east corner, irrespective of the wall lines in the north and east wings, juts into the courtyard loggia space (Fig. 11). The small court, nonetheless, is quite symmetrical and in this way tends to obscure the irregularities of the plan. The ground floor loggia, which today exists on three sides only, has a flat wood-beam ceiling decorated with modest ornamental painted motifs. The fourth side, that of the narrower south wing, was later walled up and has since been divided into living quarters (Fig. 12).<sup>15</sup> But the ceiling has not been changed since the 15th century when almost the whole ground floor of this wing was open as a loggia. Here the main supporting beams of the ceiling run in a north-south direction, at right angles to those of the other three sides.



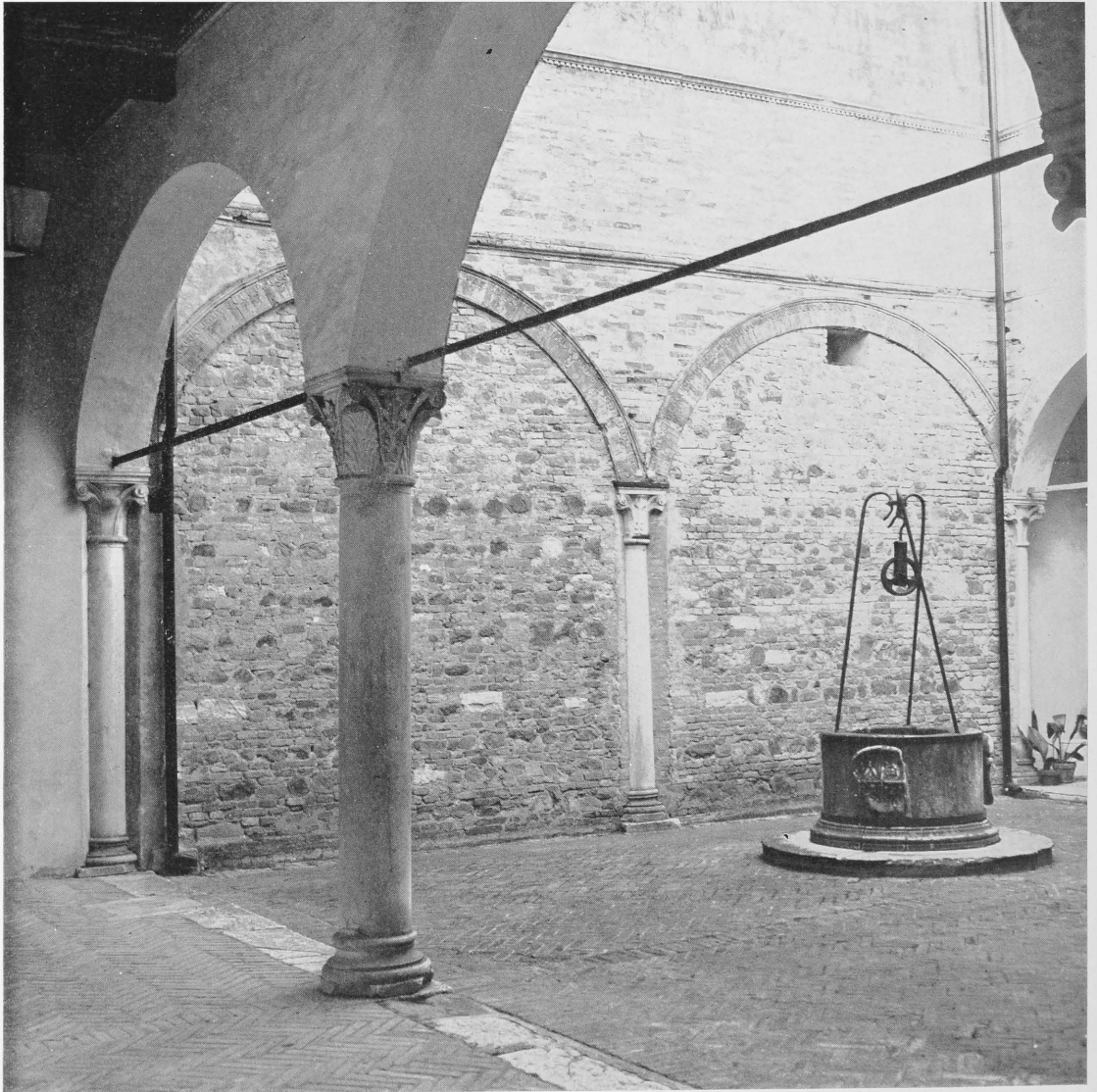


11 North-east corner of the courtyard.

At the upper level of the courtyard there had originally been an open loggia in all wings except the south. It was probably in the 16th century, when Genga began to fresco some of the rooms on the *piano nobile*, that the loggia was closed in. Small colonnettes with plain capitals and curled-leaf bases, in line with the columns of the arcade below, had supported the overhanging eaves and they are still visible, embedded in the wall (Fig. 13).

Genga's work in the Sforza villa altered somewhat its aspect but never to the extent of completely effacing its 15th century character. With the help of documents pertaining to the building chronology, and guided by what the town palace has revealed about Alessandro as an architectural patron<sup>16</sup>, we shall attempt to discover the history and function of the Imperiale, and to interpret it typologically.





12 Walled-up south side of the courtyard.

#### Building history of the Imperiale

Alessandro's interest in rural estates is well documented.<sup>17</sup> Much of the land he owned was farmed and the resulting income made an important contribution to his purse. At a late time in his life Alessandro decided to purchase a property that was designated above all as the site for a country house although the surrounding land was arable and would continue to be worked. The fact that he waited as long as he did to build his villa, and the circumstance of its creation, strongly suggest that he had had a specific motive. After





13 Walled-up loggia, *piano nobile*, east side.

all, with his age-old ties of friendship to the Este and Gonzaga families and his visits to their country places, he never, not even in his earliest years, would have lacked the precedents to encourage him if he had been so inclined.<sup>18</sup> But Alessandro did not set things in motion until the late 1460s, subsequent to an important political event in his life, and by which time he also must have desired fervently what Cosimo de' Medici in 1462 so aptly termed the cultivation of the soul.<sup>19</sup>

Alessandro already owned various pieces of land on Monte S. Bartolo when, on 20 December 1468, he purchased another estate, which was to become the site of the Imperiale. The transaction is fully documented, from the renouncement of four parties of the titles to the land, to the actual sale itself.<sup>20</sup> The property, in the *fondo* of Casartola, had been left by Matteo di Maestro Paolo da Urbino to the Confraternity of S. Maria Annunziata of Pesaro, and to his four children, Pietropaolo, Galeotto, Teodora, and another unnamed daughter. By 1468 the latter presumably was deceased because her portion was then held by her offspring, Angela and Raniero. Pietropaolo and Galeotto were the two sellers after their sister, Teodora, their niece and nephew, Angela and Raniero, and the Confraternity of S. Maria Annunziata had withdrawn their claims.

Houses, olive groves, vineyards and a *canneto* made up the estate for which the sons of Matteo da Urbino asked 600 *scudi d'oro*. Although no absolute scale of values can be established for land and buildings in the Pesaro area during these early centuries, the amount





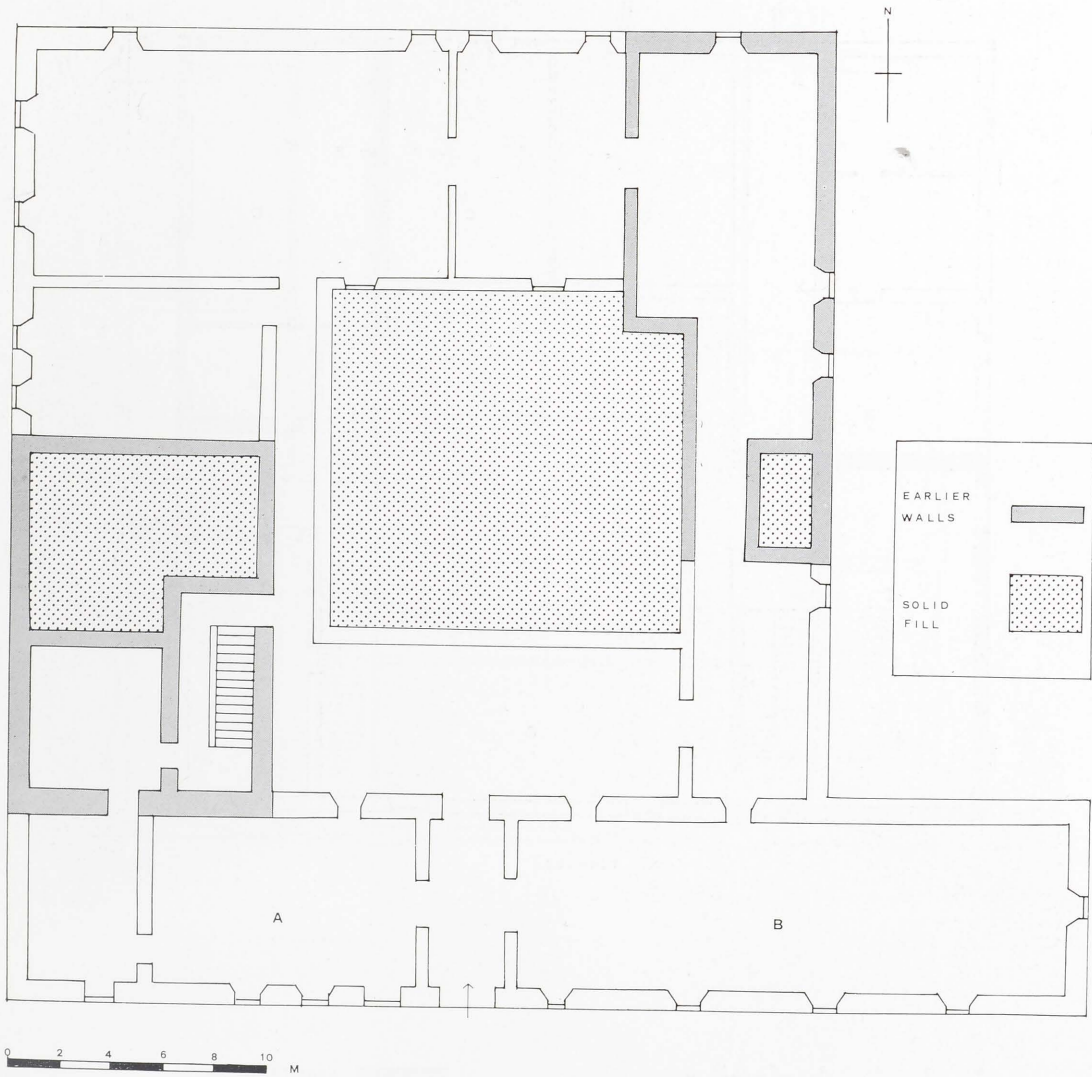
14 Sforza escutcheon above the main entrance, detail.

paid by Alessandro is high in comparison to other known property prices.<sup>21</sup> From this we can reasonably conclude that the property was extensive, or that the houses were more than modest rustic constructions, though in all likelihood both factors contributed to the high value.

Alessandro's villa was known from the very beginning as the Imperiale. The story told of the founding of the villa explains the choice of name and at the same time suggests one of Alessandro's motives for the project. Marc'Antonio Gozze, a 16th century historian of Pesaro, is responsible for transmitting the legend, and since those of his data that could be verified were found to be correct, we can accept him as a reliable source regarding the origin of Alessandro's villa.<sup>22</sup>

Protagonist of the legend is the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III. In December 1468, sixteen years after his coronation trip, Frederick came to Italy again, this time on

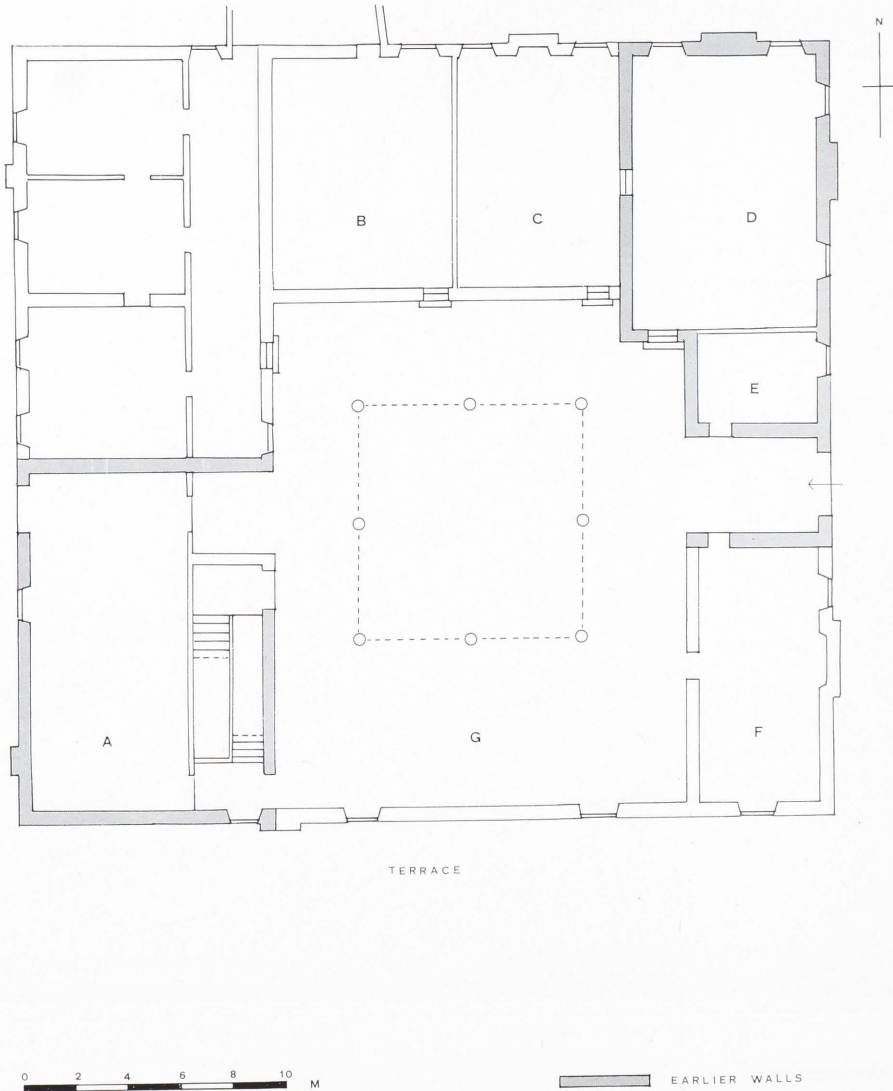


15 Villa Imperiale, plan of the *cantina*.

a pilgrimage to Rome in fulfillment of a vow made at the siege of Vienna in 1462.<sup>23</sup> With a cavalcade of about six hundred the Emperor reached Ferrara on 10 December.<sup>24</sup> He enjoyed the hospitality of Borso d'Este for two days and then continued southward to Pesaro where he arrived, according to Gozze, on 16 December at 6 o'clock (c. 11 p.m.). Vespasiano da Bisticci has given a favourable account of his visit to the court of Alessandro, and we know from other sources that Sforza had a chamber of his private suite in the town palace especially prepared for Frederick, a room thereafter distinguished as the *Camera dello Imperadore*.<sup>25</sup>

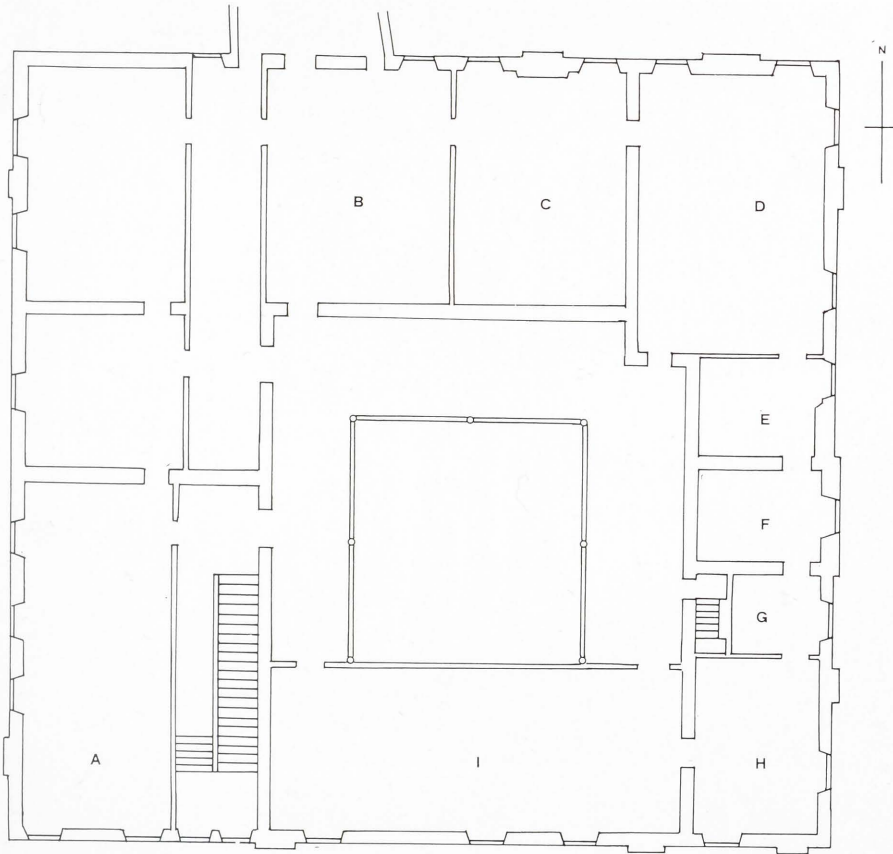
Throughout his journey the Emperor sold titles and honours at considerable profit to himself. This questionable practice was standard procedure, in view of which the granting



16 Villa Imperiale, plan of the *pian terreno*.

of a dignity cost free must have had tremendous significance. Following Vespasiano's report, Alessandro showed Frederick the greatest honour whereupon the Emperor *per questo onore ricevuto gli donò l'arme sua, et fece moltissimi privilegi a tutta la sua casa gratis*.<sup>26</sup> The concession to include the imperial eagle in his coat of arms was an important one for Alessandro.<sup>27</sup> The last time an Emperor had honoured his family with a heraldic privilege had been in 1401 when Robert of Bavaria granted the emblem of the rampant golden lion to his father, Muzio Attendolo.<sup>28</sup> Thanks to Frederick's munificence Alessandro's escutcheon could now bear comparison to those of the Montefeltro and Este, to name only two of his closest friends. He will have lost little time in ordering his new coat of arms to be painted and carved.





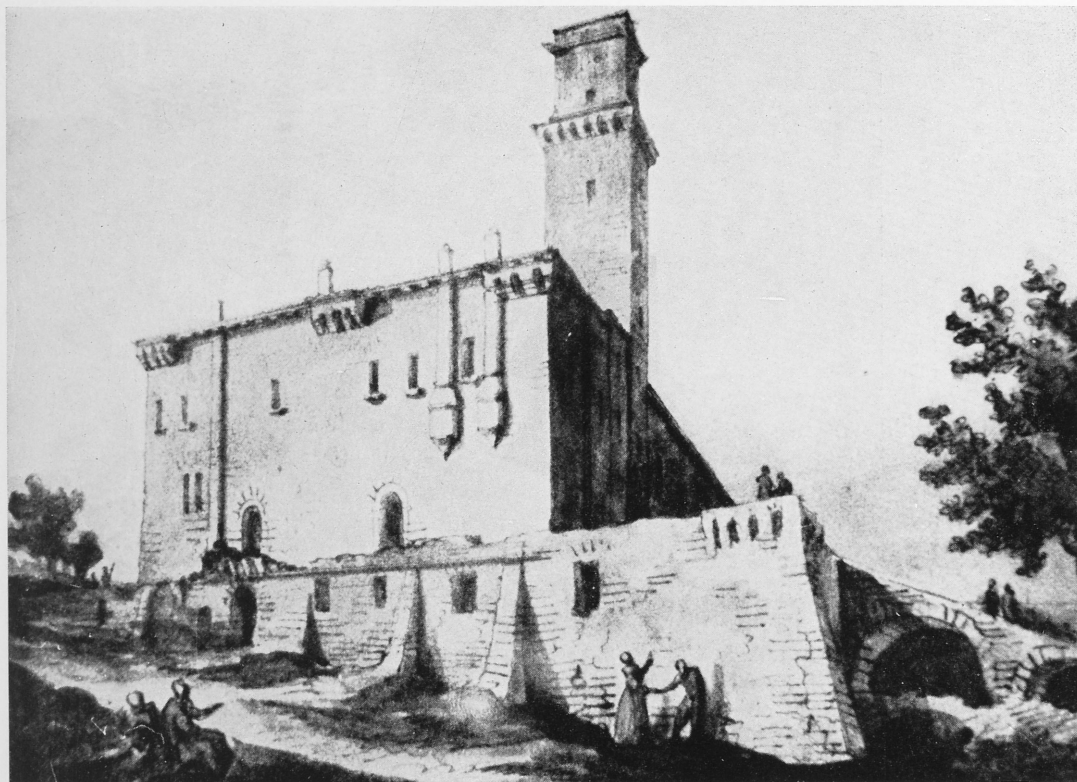
17 Villa Imperiale, plan of the *piano nobile*.

The Emperor left almost immediately, for by 18 December he had reached Ancona. His visit in Rome lasted until 9 January 1469, when once more he was on his way.<sup>29</sup> A fortnight later, on 23 January, he again stopped off in Pesaro, and regarding this second visit Gozze noted:

... e gli fu fatto grande onore in Pesaro dal Commune e dal sig. Alessandro Sforza, et andò a spasso per la città, e lodò il sito dove è posta, e volse andare sopra il vicino colle, dove nel fondamento vi buttò una pietra di sua mano, e volse che il Palazzo che il sig. Alessandro aveva dato ordine di fare si chiamasse Imperiale, e così si è sempre nominato.<sup>30</sup>

18 Fireplace in the east wing, *piano nobile*.



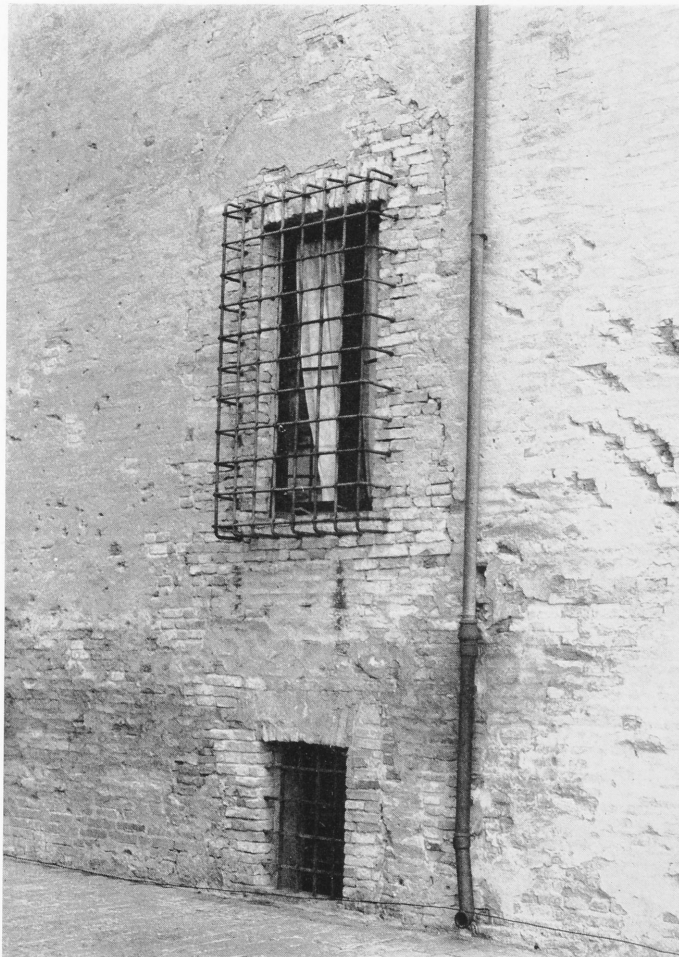


19 Romolo Liverani, *Villa Imperiale* (private collection, Candelara).

Frederick's desire to ascend the hill of S. Bartolo probably was not a spontaneous thought on his part but rather a plan carefully worked out by Alessandro, most likely already in December before the Emperor had left Pesaro for Rome. We recall that Alessandro purchased the estate for his *Villa Imperiale* on 20 December, four days after his first meeting with Frederick. The proximity of the dates suggests that Alessandro was motivated to undertake this project partially in commemoration of his newly granted imperial privilege. We might object that the purchase of a property usually requires time for negotiation, that four days would not have been adequate for the conclusion of such a business deal. However, as ruler of the town, Alessandro surely will have been able to apply the necessary pressure to convince the sellers to act in accordance with his wishes. Furthermore, a document of 1465 recording a land sale by Alessandro, although under particular circumstances, provides evidence that the transaction could be effected even in two days.<sup>31</sup>

Above the entrance to the *Villa Imperiale* hangs a shield displaying the new Sforza coat of arms, inscribed at the bottom with the name of Alessandro Sforza followed by the date 1469 (Figs. 6 and 14). This inscription has been the source of much confusion regarding the building dates of the villa, due in part to the misreading of the Roman numerals as 1468.<sup>32</sup> The correct date records the founding of the *Imperiale* by Frederick III, and the escutcheon above proclaims the virtually contemporary grant of the imperial eagle. The fact that it is set above the *Imperiale* portal rather than in the town palace is not without significance. The coat of arms now quartered with the eagle, and the tribute Frederick





20 South facade with traces of walled-up windows at ground level.

paid Alessandro by laying the foundation stone and bestowing his title on the projected building suggest Alessandro's motivation. The villa would signify an honour to the Emperor because it would immortalize him, and an honour to Alessandro since it would underline the tie between himself and the Emperor and thus become a particularly august example of his magnificence.<sup>33</sup>

In May 1469, five months after the first major purchase, Alessandro bought some adjacent land. Paolo and Giovanni, sons of Andrea di Diotalevi da Pozzo, sold him a vineyard with a *canneto* and some olive trees for 55 *scudi d'oro*.<sup>34</sup> This may not have been the last time that Alessandro added to the estate although notice of subsequent acquisitions has not yet been found. His son, Costanzo, also was interested in expanding and at an unspecified date purchased another *possessione* near the Imperiale. In September 1481 he disposed of some land on the estate by way of sale and barter, possibly exchanging one piece of the property for another more attractively situated.<sup>35</sup> Judging by the surviving records, these kinds of transactions were common.





21 Villa Imperiale, 19th century.

By the summer of 1470 construction work on the Imperiale had not yet reached an advanced stage. To date only two building accounts dealing with the Sforza villa have been found. One is in a letter sent 20 July 1470 by Sforza's secretary in Pesaro, Francesco da Todi, to Alessandro in Milan, in which he reports on the various expenses incurred at home. Towards the end, deploring the impossible state of Alessandro's finances, he writes that he does not know how ever to pay for the timber and iron still needed at the Imperiale and that, furthermore, bricks still have to be baked, yet there is no more wood to fire the furnace.<sup>36</sup> The materials specified by the secretary are those used for basic construction.

The second building document is undated. It is headed *Expesa bisognaria per lavorare al presente*, and on the reverse is identified in Alessandro's own hand as *la spesa per la Imperiale per coperala tutta*.<sup>37</sup> Filippini has interpreted it as referring to work on the roof but it is evident from the list of supplies that it deals with the whole building.<sup>38</sup> The amounts are estimates and were intended to continue rather than begin a construction since the quantities of materials, when converted into cubic measures of fabric, account for only a portion of the actual structure.<sup>39</sup> By the time the estimate was drawn up the massive subterranean area must already have stood. With 40,000 bricks it was possible to build 168 m<sup>3</sup> of wall, a fraction of the total c. 1,136 m<sup>3</sup> of the Imperiale.<sup>40</sup> Probably most of the walls were already in place. 10,000 *tavelle* for the roof and 600 *tavole* for floors/ceilings represent approximately two-thirds of the entire quantity, a significant figure to remember for the later analysis of the structure. The 8,500 litres of gesso were used on the interior.<sup>41</sup>



By late 1471 the Imperiale may still have been under construction. Dated 2 October of that year is a deed with which Alessandro reverted to Sveva da Montefeltro, his second wife, all the properties that he had acquired by way of her dowry. It was notarized in his presence *in strata seu platea magna posita iuxta et prope palatium seu domum I. Principis D.N. d. Alexandri Sfortie que domus vulgariter nominatur ac nuncupatur la imperiale*.<sup>42</sup> The circumstance of the document being drawn up outside the villa could suggest, although it is by no means conclusive, that the Imperiale was not yet inhabitable. But a year later, in September 1472, Alessandro had the occasion to receive the notary, Ser Sepolcro, *in una stanza a piè piano del suo Palazzo che si dice la Imperiale*.<sup>43</sup>

The building period of about three years is remarkably short for Alessandro, who spent his whole lifetime on the town walls without finishing them, and who was occupied for almost a decade in getting his town residence into shape.<sup>44</sup> Of course it is possible that, at age sixty, Alessandro felt time was fleeing and that if he wanted to enjoy his country palace he would have to work quickly. The brief time span can have another meaning, which does not at all contradict the preceding suggestion: that Alessandro built his Imperiale, not from the foundations up on a cleared site, but rather incorporating the older houses already standing when he bought the property. It is a procedure encountered in the building of his town residence<sup>45</sup>, and it is entirely consistent with his attitude to architectural patronage: to work in such a way that his social and cultural aspirations find expression, while at the same time the restrictions of his budget are respected.

If we return to an examination of the plan of the villa we see that there are revealing irregularities in the organization of the layout that are not later changes and that are irreconcilable with a plan that could have developed freely on an open site (Fig. 17). Coming through the entrance vestibule into the courtyard we notice that the entrance is not in line with the bay of the loggia arcade, but that one of the columns intrudes about a quarter of the way in from the left (Figs. 6 and 16); the same is true regarding the exit of the villa, which is directly across from the entrance. Furthermore the loggia has a slightly different depth on all four sides and a part of it is considerably obstructed by the corner of the north-east room (Fig. 11). These structural blemishes in an otherwise satisfactorily proportioned building are the result of a Renaissance plan adapted to accommodate earlier walls.

Alessandro must have specified that he wanted a building with a central, arcaded court and a loggia on all sides. The column in the north-east corner was located at a point that left enough space between it and the corner of the room. An arch span was then calculated that would have an acceptable proportion and that could be repeated within the limits imposed by the older walls. If the column in the north-east corner was one fixed point, the other one was the column diagonally across from it in the south-west corner. In other words Alessandro's villa had to be designed around structures in the north-east and south-west of the present area.

The layout of the subterranean level confirms a part of this hypothesis (Fig. 15). In the south-west the foundations form a rectangle subdivided into an L-shape, which is solid fill, a square chamber to the south, and a long, narrow space housing a stair. Above this, on the ground floor, is a continuation of the stair in its 16th century version and a long salon that corresponds to the foundations in its external and north walls only and in the wall it shares with the stair. The small, square chamber in the cellar does not relate to a separate room above. One of the houses that preceded Alessandro's Imperiale was built on these foundations. This supposition is further confirmed by the discovery, in this century, of a bifora window in the wall that separates the 16th century *Sala del Giuramento* from the stairwell.<sup>46</sup>





22 Fireplace in the central sala, pian terreno.





23 Coat of arms on the well: a shield quartered with the eagle and lion.

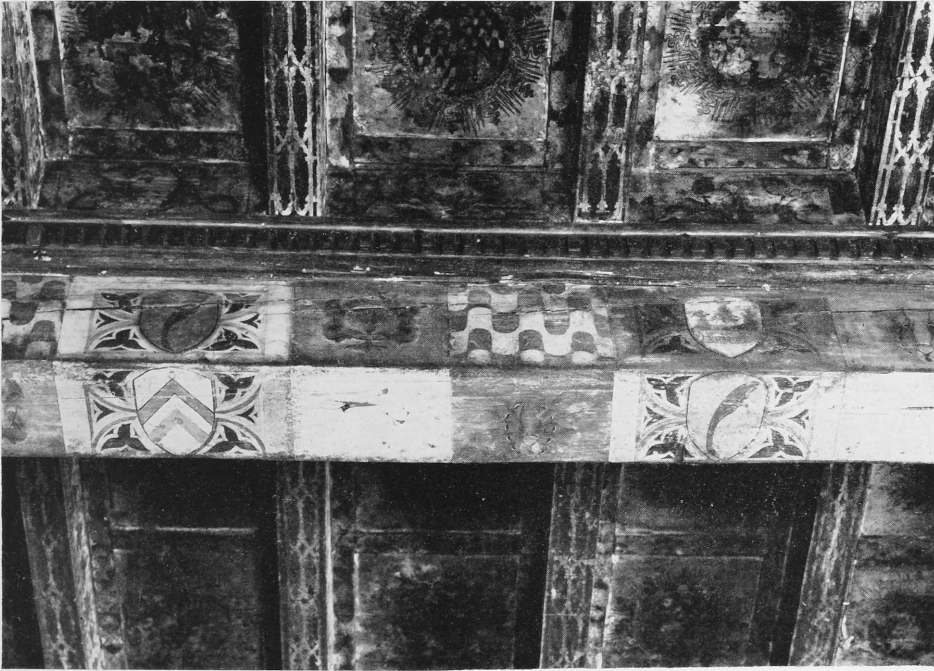


24 Coat of arms on the well: a shield quartered with the diamond ring with flower, dragon wings and vair.



25 Coat of arms on the well: the rampant lion surmounted by the Sforza crest, an old man with dragon wings, holding a ring.





26 Ceiling of the central sala, pian terreno.

The other pre-Imperiale building was in the north-east part, comprising the present corner room, adjacent chamber and tower.<sup>47</sup> Following my hypothesis, the foundation of the 15th century tower was only partially filled in to leave a space for the passageway, necessary since the solid fill foundation below the open courtyard extends to the wall in line with the arcade above.<sup>48</sup> The tower is likely to correspond to an earlier set of walls since its position in relation to the arcades is rather awkward, suggesting that the designer was here compelled to use an existing structure.

Two other factors point to a pre-Sforza history of this part of the villa. A small room in the upper storey (Fig. 17-E), between the tower and the corner sala, has a fireplace (now covered with a 16th century fresco; Fig. 18) that is not provided with a chimney on the facade like all the other 15th century fireplaces at the villa. It was not, therefore, constructed contemporaneously with the Sforza Imperiale. Nor was it likely to have been installed in the 16th century since at that time it was closed and frescoed. The fireplace must have been in the house that Alessandro acquired with the estate in 1468. Finally, there is a difference in floor levels on both storeys between the older houses and the 15th century expansion. At ground level the floors of the corner room and the small room to the south (Fig. 16-D and E) are the same height. Passing from the corner room to the one west of it (Fig. 16-D and C) we have to negotiate a rise of 27 cm. Upstairs there is another noticeable, if less drastic change in levels: moving from the chamber south of the tower into the tower room (Fig. 17-G and F) we step up 8 cm.

The building account for the Imperiale, with the list of bricks, boards and tiles, becomes more comprehensible in the light of my hypothesis. As was mentioned, the number of *tavelle* and *tavole* corresponded to approximately two-thirds of the quantity necessary for



the whole building, from which we can conclude that what represented one-third of the fabric already stood. Consulting the plan of the Imperiale we can see that the two parts designated as earlier in fact do comprise about one-third of the villa.

#### Organization and function of the Sforza Villa Imperiale

One area in the villa that is unlikely to have been drastically changed over the centuries is the *cantina*, situated under the whole villa block as well as under the terrace preceding the south facade. Access is by way of a massive door slightly to the left of centre in the south side of the terrace substructure (Figs. 15, 19). The entrance vestibule of the *cantina* has doors leading to vast rooms to the left and right (Fig. 15-A and B), which may have served as stables.<sup>49</sup> Their dimensions are suitable and their position in the complex is convenient for this purpose. A rider would dismount before the villa portal or in the courtyard and his horse would then be led by way of a ramp built at the edge of the retaining wall of the *platea magna* in front of the villa, down to the *cantina* level (Figs. 3 and 19).<sup>50</sup> The location of such quarters within the precincts of a residence is more the rule than the exception in the 15th century. Separate buildings designed as stables do not become common until the next century, although Federigo da Montefeltro had both types in Urbino, one located beneath the hanging garden of the palace and another near the Mercatale. Similarly under the garden was the stable at the Palazzetto of Palazzo Venezia in Rome. The Urbino or Rome examples could well have suggested to Alessandro the possibility of utilizing the space beneath the terrace, an area comparable to the gardens, but even closer is the arrangement at Pienza where the stables were identically situated, below a terraced garden laid out at the back of the palace.

The remaining spaces of the cellars can have served various purposes. We know that the Imperiale lands were cultivated with olive trees and vines, and it is reasonable to assume that Alessandro used the subterranean rooms for the storage and conversion of these food-stuffs.

The stairs linking the *cantina* with the ground storey are located at the left between the stable and the infilled room, and lead to a space just outside the extreme left corner of the formerly open ground floor south loggia. Since there is no sign of another stairwell in the cellar we can assume that from the 15th century on this must always have been the position of the stairs between the two levels.

Of all the rooms on the ground floor, those in the west wing are the most difficult to analyze and interpret. In the south-west corner is a long, narrow room, occupying half the length of the wing and corresponding to one of the two older houses (Fig. 16-A). It has a wood-beam ceiling, the logs roughly hewn and simply white-washed. An exterior chimney on the west facade suggests that there had been a fireplace here, but no trace of it remains. Towards the north end of the room are two doors communicating with the outside and with the courtyard. On the basis of size and position in the complex, at some distance from the noble apartments, it is possible that this space functioned as a *tinello* for Alessandro's *famiglia*.<sup>51</sup>

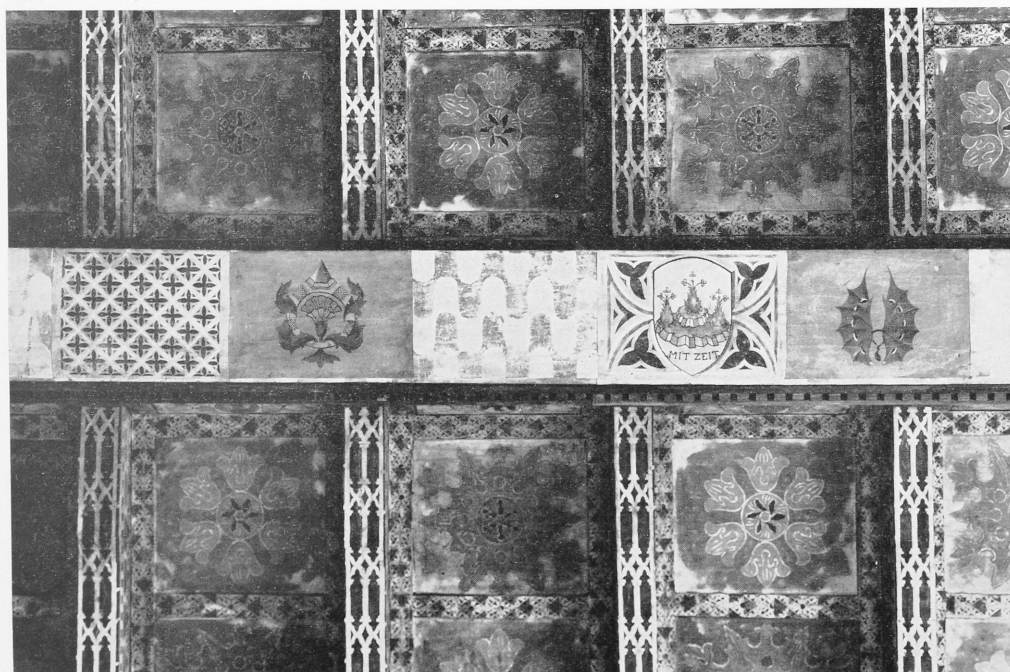
To the north of the *tinello* are two large rooms, now divided into three, which in this century were service quarters and at the time of Alessandro were probably used in the same way. In any case nothing remains to suggest that in the 15th century the ground floor rooms in this wing were designated as noble apartments.

Entering the courtyard, a guest of the Sforza would have seen a loggia on all four sides at ground level, the one towards the south (now closed) being especially inviting because of its great depth reaching from the arcade to the wall of the south facade. Originally two





27 Ceiling of the corner sala, pian terreno.



28 Ceiling of the corner sala, pian terreno.



large, roundheaded apertures penetrated the wall, so that in the 15th century the south loggia provided a cool and shaded, but at the same time open and airy space, which was to be enjoyed like the garden loggia of Palazzo Medici or Palazzo Piccolomini.<sup>52</sup> Traces of the windows can still be detected easily in the brickwork (Fig. 20), and the evidence presented by a 19th century watercolour and an old photograph (Figs. 19 and 21) reveals that they were modified only at the time of the early 20th century restorations.

South of the entrance vestibule is a long room, presently subdivided by a thin wall (Fig. 16-F). The fireplace in this area, with its corresponding chimney on the facade, is the largest 15th century one in the villa, suggesting that here we are dealing with the original kitchen serving Alessandro and his guests. As there are no stairs in this part communicating with the *cantina* or the upper storey, the servants will have had to pass across the courtyard, a problem that Pius II neatly solved by appending to the rear of his palace three kitchens one above the other to serve the three storeys.<sup>53</sup>

Three handsomely proportioned rooms with wood-beam ceilings occupy most of the north wing. They are among the largest quarters in the villa, one of which will have been the room mentioned in the document of September 1472: *in una sala a piè piano del suo Palazzo che si dice la Imperiale*.

The first room at the left is entered from the courtyard, the door reached by way of one step in the loggia area and two others cut out of the thickness of the wall (Fig. 16-B). If there had been a fireplace here in the 15th century it was destroyed in the course of structural changes undertaken in this space when the Della Rovere Imperiale was joined to the Sforza villa by an overpass. Separating the room from the adjacent salon (Fig. 16-C) is a rather thin wall. Such flimsy partitions are seen elsewhere in the villa and in spite of their unsubstantiality they are likely to be part of the original construction. Checking in the *cantina*, we find that the partition relates to a foundation wall, which is also not as solid as some of the others, diminishing in thickness towards the top and terminating in a wood beam (Fig. 15). Pope Pius's method of building walls solid for twelve feet, as in the terrace substructure at Pienza, or four to six feet as in his palace, was not to be contemplated by Alessandro.<sup>54</sup> We know that he was chronically out of funds, and he must have skimped wherever he could.

The room at the centre (Fig. 16-C) communicates with the *sala* to the right and is also accessible through a door from the loggia, with steps accommodated like those of the other rooms (Fig. 11). Against the north wall, between two windows, is a fireplace richly decorated with the armorial bearings of Alessandro (Fig. 22). At the centre of the mantelpiece is a shield like those above the main entrance to the villa and on the well in the courtyard (Figs. 14 and 23). Lion and eagle appear again singly, folded around the corners of the mantelpiece. The coloured *impreses* of the ceiling, which are woodcuts on paper glued to the beams, appear in very bad condition because of an 18th century coat of whitewash, but they can be recognized for the most part as identical to those elsewhere in the Sforza villa (Fig. 26).<sup>55</sup>

In the north-east corner of the villa is the room that corresponds to one of the houses already on the site when Alessandro bought the estate (Fig. 16-D). The internal wall, separating it from the *sala* to the left, was originally the external wall of the older structure. Built of solid brick, it is 48 cm. thick and rests on a sturdy foundation in the cellar. The floor level is considerably lower than that of the adjacent room, unequivocally demonstrated by the doorway between the two, where the pair of steps contained by the wall thickness accounts for a 27 cm. difference in height. From the court the *sala* is entered by way of a door fitted into the space between the corner and the wall of the small chamber to the south (Fig. 11). As with the entrances to the other rooms, we have to ascend three steps although in this case they are much lower.





29 Ceiling of the *Sala Grande* (16th century), *piano nobile*.



The wood-beam ceiling of the corner room is in nearly perfect condition (Figs. 27, 28). Its decorative scheme is a virtual catalogue of Sforza heraldry, and even includes one *impresa* associated with the Milanese branch of the family: three houseleeks (*Semprevivo*) blooming on a rocky surface with the motto, *Mit Zeit*, below. The fireplace along the east wall undoubtedly dates from the Sforza period, judging by the exterior and the chimney-breast extending to the ceiling, similar to that in the preceding room. The original mantelpiece is, however, replaced by one taken from a Montefeltro residence, a change effected at the time of the restorations early in this century. A second fireplace may have been located in the short window wall, where there is an external chimney, although no traces remain inside the room.

To the south of the corner room, abutting the tower, is a small chamber (Fig. 16-E). Entrance is now from the courtyard loggia (Fig. 11) but it is probable that in the 15th century it was entered from the vestibule, like the kitchen across from it. Separating it from the large room is a thin partition that was once, probably in the 18th or 19th century, broken through by a door but is now, and most likely was originally, entirely closed. The dividing wall is not supported by a construction in the foundations. Covering the chamber is a simple, whitewashed open-beam ceiling showing an irregularity in the south-west corner, as though an opening through the ceiling had been closed up. Probably a ladder or narrow stair to the tower, passing through the aperture in the ceiling, had been placed here in the 15th century, an arrangement that leads us to think that the room had been intended for Alessandro's guards.

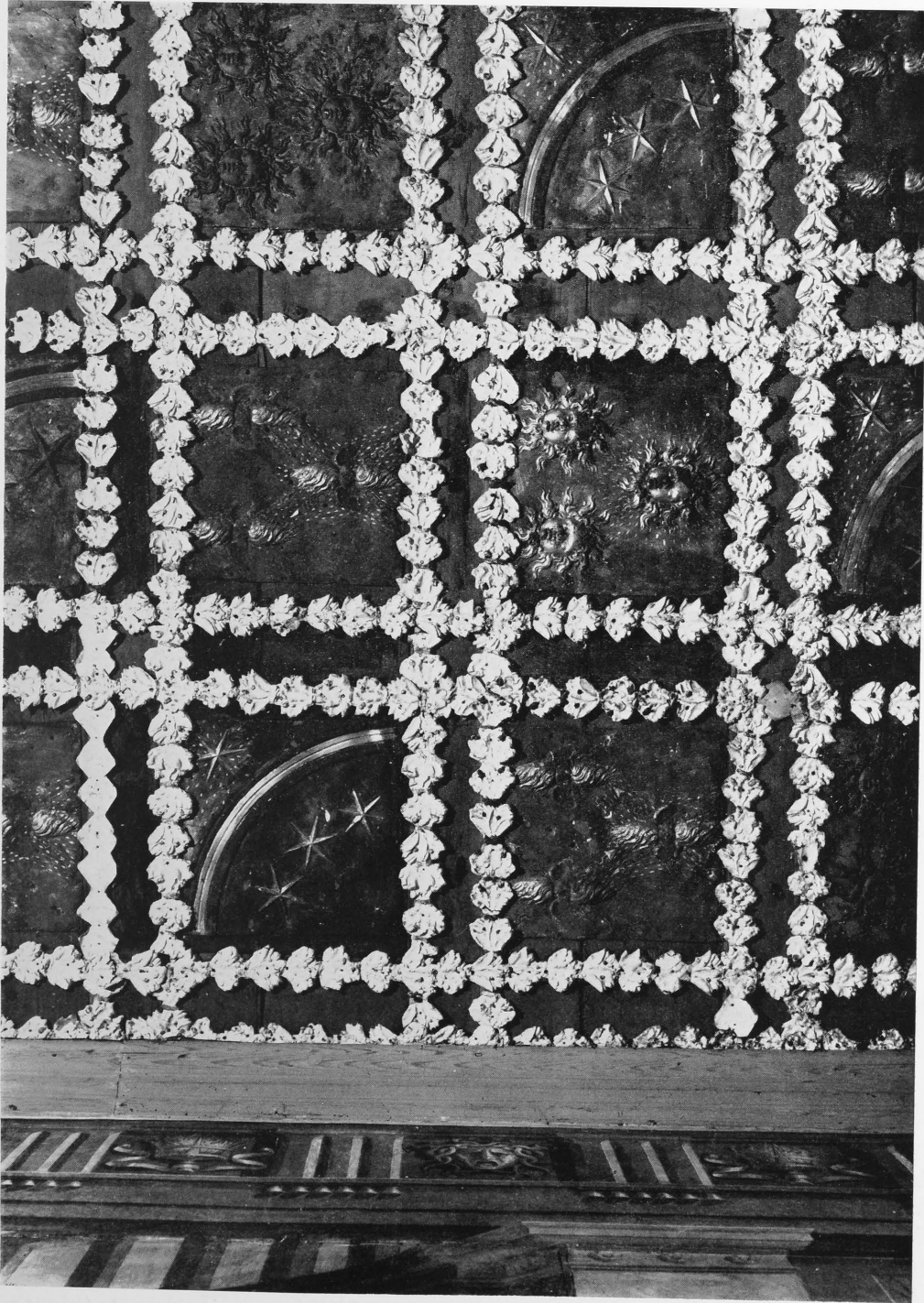
The ground floor apartments were ideal for residency during the hot summer months. They are in the north wing, the corner room also having an eastern exposure. Before Genga constructed his addition the terrain behind the north wing had been composed of a shady, wooded hill. For more sun Alessandro had the south court loggia where at noon plenty of light streamed in through the two large roundheaded openings piercing the south facade.

In the 15th century, as now, a visitor ascended to the upper storey by way of the stairs off the courtyard, and arrived at an open loggia circumscribing the west, north and east sides of the court. Originally this loggia served as the means of access to the different wings. Occupying the south-west corner of the villa was a long room (Fig. 17-A), now divided into two, which corresponds to the *tinello* below. Its original appearance and role are difficult to elucidate. There could have been a fireplace in the west wall, judging by the chimney located on the facade. The one presently in the room, on the south wall, is a lovely 16th century example that did not replace an earlier fireplace. Considering the room's position in the villa, with windows to the south and west, we can conjecture that it served as a winter apartment for the Sforza. The remaining rooms in this wing were remodelled in the 20th century and defy all attempts at reconstruction.

The north wing is given over to three spacious rooms exactly reflecting the plan of the ground storey. In Genga's *Sala della Calunnia* (Fig. 17-C) a 15th century fireplace is still visible although its mantelpiece dates from the Della Rovere period. The chimney-breast, in shape like those of the Sforza examples on the ground floor, was later painted with a Diana of Ephesus as part of the decorative scheme in the room. No fireplaces remain in the corner salon (Fig. 17-D), the *Sala Grande* of the fresco cycle, although two chimneys on the north and east facades testify to their original existence. Further confirmation for a 15th century fireplace along the east wall, probably removed to make a more suitable surface for the illusionistically painted balcony and landscape, is provided by the vestiges of a hearth-support, visible at ceiling level in the room below.

On the upper storey the loggia and the large rooms of the north wing possibly preserve traces of another feature surviving from the 15th century. Unlike the remaining rooms





30 Ceiling of the *Sala della Calunnia* (16th century), *piano nobile*.





31 Chimney on the south facade.

of the fresco cycle, which are vaulted, these spaces have flat, wood-panelled ceilings (Figs.29, 30 and 32). The heraldic motifs refer to the Della Rovere, indicating that the ceilings were modernized in the 16th century, but the basic structure beneath probably dates from the Sforza period.<sup>56</sup> At the time of Alessandro the whole upper floor must have had wooden ceilings, conceivably decorated with emblems as those downstairs.

The east wing south of the corner salon is divided into four smaller rooms (Fig. 17-E to H). Those to either side of the tower subsequently had a part of their walls and roof raised above the 15th century level. The revealing seams in the fabric are best seen from the upper



32 Colonnette in the south-west corner of the loggia on the *piano nobile*.

loggia of the west wing (Fig. 13): the elevated portion at right dates from the 16th century and serves as access to the tower stair installed by Genga<sup>57</sup>; the raised wall to the left could be more recent, for on an old photograph we can see that this part was then in fact below, not above, the roof line (Fig. 21).

Virtually the only clue to the function that these rooms had in the 15th century is provided by their size. It is apparent that they were more intimate quarters, perhaps including a winter bedchamber and a *studiolo*, a room that would have been keenly desired by Alessandro during his later years. One of the rare notarial deeds drawn up





33 Window of the *Sala del Giuramento* (16th century).

at the Imperiale in the 15th century must be referring to the chamber next to the corner room (Fig. 17-G) when it describes the site of the act as the *prima camera iuxta salottum versus S. Bartolum*.<sup>58</sup>

The room in the south-east corner, *salottum* of the above cited deed (Fig. 17-H), will have been a favourite place during the cold season since it is fully exposed to the winter sun. On the south facade at the upper level is a chimney indicating the original existence of a fireplace in this room (Fig. 31).

Since the 16th century the upper area of the south wing between the stair to the west and the corner room to the east has been divided into Genga's *Sala del Giuramento* and *Sala delle Cariatidi*. At the time of the Sforza it is likely to have been one large space (Fig. 17-I). Suggestive but not conclusive is the fact that the floor levels of the two 16th century rooms are exactly the same, whereas that of the corner room (Fig. 17-H) is almost 4 cm. higher. As one large *sala* the room would have corresponded exactly to the southern log-





34 Pesaro, portico of the Palazzo Ducale.





35 Villa Imperiale courtyard, plain capital.

gia of the courtyard. Unlike the ground floor loggia, however, the upper space was never open towards the court, indicated by the two colonnettes in the south-west and south-east corners, which are terminating members (Fig. 32). The means of heating this room was limited to a fireplace in the east corner, all traces of which have vanished except for the chimney on the facade. The absence of more fireplaces in such a spacious room suggests that it was to be used only when the weather was favourable.

The brickwork of the upper south facade, particularly around the two windows of Gen-  
ga's *Sala del Giuramento*, reveals that at a certain point in time alterations were under-



36 Villa Imperiale courtyard, ornate capital.

taken in this area. The mosaic of breaks and uneven surfaces is not easy to decipher. Patzak reconstructed this facade with an open loggia just under the roof<sup>59</sup>, an attractive idea but difficult to justify on the basis of the evidence presented by the actual fabric. It is more logical to interpret the irregularities on the upper level as the result of a 16th century modification involving the setting of the two *Sala del Giuramento* windows into earlier, larger apertures (Fig. 33). Such an alteration can be reconciled satisfactorily with Genga's project for he needed wall space to create his illusionistic painted architecture. With the south facade originally perforated by larger windows at the upper level, the *sala* corresponds



even more closely to the open loggia off the courtyard below. The upper hall would have served Alessandro in the winter as a comfortable place to take fresh air and to gaze upon his state unfolding before his eyes. The situation is reminiscent of Pius II's description of his *piano nobile* garden loggia, which he lauded as a pleasant place to sit during the colder months.<sup>60</sup>

### Style and type

The name of an architect for the Sforza Villa Imperiale does not appear in Alessandro's records, and given the dearth of architectural decoration it is almost impossible to recognize an individual's hand. The architect or master builder has to have been someone skilled in restructuring and extending pre-existing walls, since at the Imperiale it had been necessary to unite into one complex two houses in corners diagonally across from each other on the site. The form of the 15th century chimneys, unique in this zone, suggests a Venetian background or training for the architect/master mason.<sup>61</sup> It is safest to await further researches, however, before pronouncing the name of the man who had been in charge of the project.

Certain details seem to point to Alessandro's town palace as the source of inspiration for the designer of the Imperiale.<sup>62</sup> For instance, the main entrance portal at the foot of the tower is a slenderer, more refined version of the one in town (Figs. 6 and 8). The reinterpretation of the formal elements could be explained by two different artists's conceptions. Or it may have been conditioned by the changed situation: what was sobriety and dignity in town became graceful elegance out in the country. The association between the two buildings is continued in the courtyard. Like the arch of the entrance portico at the town palace, that of the Imperiale court has a wide span and springs from relatively short columns (Figs. 10 and 34). The broad wall strip on the town facade, separating the six arches below from the five windows above, reappears in the villa courtyard, although at the Imperiale it is not needed to distract the eye from any lack of alignment between architectural elements of the ground and upper levels. Outlines of *tondi* in the spandrels of the court arcade, and the avoidance of contact between the archivolt and the lower stringcourse similarly recall the composition of the Pesaro residence facade. However, the vocabulary that has its source at the town palace is here modified in size and profile. At the villa the stringcourses of the broad wall strip are reduced in the number of mouldings, although the top one has retained the row of dentils (Fig. 13). The archivolts in the courtyard would have been overwhelming with a profile like those of the town palace; they have been given instead a flat, incised band decorated along the upper edge by a leaf-and-tongue moulding. Even if the similarities suggest that some elements in the villa are copied from the town palace, the explanation is too facile, misleading, and completely overlooks the distinct features of the two buildings.

We can reasonably assert that Alessandro must have had precise ideas about nearly every matter regarding his building commissions. He wanted to create the image of an all-round cultured ruler<sup>63</sup>, and architecture was one of the carriers of his message. His financial limitations did not allow him a free rein, however, and he was obliged to respect priorities. But the priorities were never chosen at random. Alessandro's image was achieved in part by reference to his illustrious contemporaries, and when it came to architecture he selected the elements that would most directly express the correspondence he wished to underline.

That is not to say that Alessandro's image as architectural patron was composed exclusively of an ever growing number of foreign associations. By the time he began the Villa Imperiale he had already formulated a personal architectural style at the town palace,



37 Rome, Palazzetto of Palazzo Venezia, capitals.

transmitted most clearly by the facade elevation and the entrance portal. When seen in this light, the reappearance of the palace door at the entrance to the Imperiale and of the palace portico in the villa courtyard is not mere repetition depending from a lack of ideas but rather a reiteration of an established image of his social and political position. We are meant to see at first glance that the palace and villa are representative of the same man. In effect such behaviour is not different from that of Federico da Montefeltro, whose palaces in the various centres of his state more or less reflect, in architectural details, his principal seat at Urbino. Federico's personal architectural style even was superimposed on Luca Pitti's villa at Rusciano, presented to Federico by the Florentine Republic after 1472.



There are other features in the Villa Imperiale that go beyond the rapport with the town palace and these support our impression of Alessandro as a keen patron who responded to new ideas that would create associations prestigious for his reputation. A case in point is the ground floor arcade of the courtyard. In the immediate area of Alessandro's state arcuated construction systems employed in civic or domestic architecture were limited virtually to street front porticos.<sup>64</sup> The central, colonnaded courtyard is instead a characteristic feature of the Tuscan palace and villa. Already Seitz discerned this foreign quality, and Patzak expanded on the theme, noting that Alessandro had had countless opportunities to admire the country estates of the Florentines, since during the 1450s he spent extended periods in Tuscany at the service of the Republic.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless it is more plausible that Alessandro, instead of reviving an early memory, was stimulated by the much more recent building activities of his friends and acquaintances.

Three architectural projects are of particular relevance for the argument. Of these, the earliest is Pius's palace at Pienza, constructed 1459-62. At about the same time that Alessandro was occupied in designing the Imperiale, two other major buildings were underway, both of which he must have known at first hand: Paul II's Palazzetto of Palazzo Venezia, c. 1464-68, and Federigo's palace at Urbino, where Luciano da Laurana worked c. 1467-72.<sup>66</sup>

The Imperiale courtyard is the starting point for the comparative analysis. An examination of the eight capitals of the ground floor arcade reveals that they fall into two distinct groups: absolutely plainleaf and a decoratively carved variation of that type (Figs. 35 and 36). Neither corresponds to the most popular type in Pesaro during the period 1450-70, the full-leaf form, which can be seen on one of the windows on the side facade of the town palace and on the doorway at piazza Collenuccio n° 10.<sup>67</sup> Nor do they have much in common with another early specimen, used on a street portico along the Corso.<sup>68</sup> The four ornate capitals at the Imperiale are evocative, instead, of the type chosen for the ground floor loggia in the Palazzetto of Palazzo Venezia (Fig. 37).<sup>69</sup> Alessandro, as commander of Paul II's troops in 1468-69, will have had the occasion to visit Rome during those years, and it is reasonable to assume that he was received at Palazzo Venezia, the preferred residence of Pope Paul. The difference of a few years between the Roman loggia and the Imperiale did not diminish the appeal that such an illustrious source held for Alessandro.

The arrangement of the capitals in the Imperiale courtyard follows an ordered rhythm. At the centre of each side are placed the ornate ones while the plain capitals appear in the corners. The pattern is too neat to be accidental: the plain capitals relegated to the corners visually reinforce these critical points of the court. For 15th century architects the turning of corners was a problematic stage in the design process and legion were the attempts at solutions. The difficulties encountered by Michelozzo in the court of Palazzo Medici serve well to illustrate the situation. Laurana was the most successful of his contemporaries. In the courtyard of the ducal palace at Urbino he placed sturdy L-shaped piers in the corners, attached half-columns to carry the arches, and applied tall pilasters in the angles to support the entablature.

Although the court at the Imperiale cannot approach the sophistication of that at Urbino, it is apparent that at least one lesson has been learnt from the Montefeltro palace, namely the visual strengthening of the corners. In Alessandro's villa the plainer, more solid-looking capital plays the role that Laurana's massive architectural member does at Urbino. Significantly, also Laurana selected a less ornate capital type for the pilasters in the angles. The order of the Urbino ground floor arcade is Composite, but the pilasters have Corinthian capitals, in other words a simpler design (Fig. 38). Laurana is consistent





38 Palazzo Ducale of Urbino, courtyard.

on the *piano nobile*, for there the small pilasters carrying the entablature around the four sides of the court are Corinthian, while the larger ones in the angles are given capitals composed of a fluted head topped by an egg-and-dart moulding as abacus.

An even more notable correspondence between the Imperiale and the palaces of Alessandro's friends can be found in the groundplan. The south wing of the Sforza villa, it will be recalled, was too narrow to accommodate both a loggia and a line of rooms, and was therefore completely open as a loggia. Two other Renaissance palaces demonstrate the same organization of spaces around the court: Pius's palace at Pienza, the plan of which is based on that of Palazzo Medici in Florence.<sup>70</sup> Both have the narrower, fully open loggia wing adjacent to a garden; at the Imperiale the loggia is juxtaposed to a terrace. In the





39 Mingucci, view of Pesaro from Monte S. Bartolo, 1626 (Barb. lat. 4434, c. 6).

Tuscan monuments the axis through the building has been given prime consideration to ensure that upon entering the visitor has a view across the court, through the deep open wing as far as the garden. A doorway in the far wall of the open wing, in line with the principal entrance, leads into the garden. The procession of vestibule, court, loggia and garden is direct.

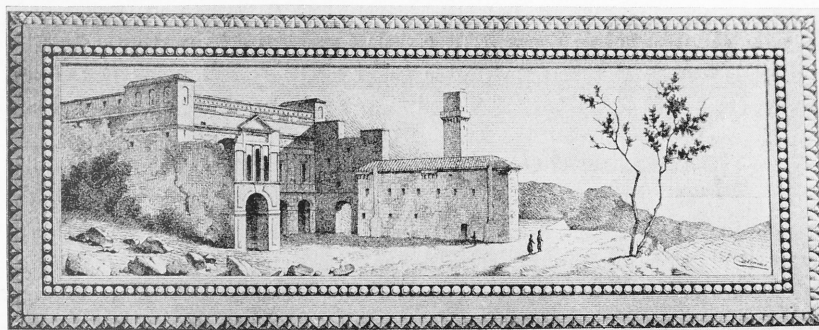
Alessandro was handicapped in his design. Because of the physical formation of the terrain he could set the entrance in the east or west side only. Since he selected the east, he would have had to locate the narrower loggia wing and adjacent garden/terrace at the west in order to achieve the axial succession of spaces that is so admirable in Florence and Pienza. But the west wing, half the length of which corresponded to the older house on the site, could not have been satisfactorily adapted as an open loggia. Moreover, even though there would have been space for a garden like that of the Medici or Pius next to the Imperiale's west wing, there is no particular view in this direction. Alessandro had to compromise, and view won over axis. To the south, the hill of S. Bartolo rolls away gently to reveal a spectacular vista of Pesaro nestling in the plain of the Foglia, with Monte Ardizio and Novilara in the background (Fig. 39).

At the Palazzo Medici, the wall separating the courtyard loggia from the garden was originally opened by four small windows in addition to the door; Pius chose two larger apertures, and Alessandro at the Imperiale followed the same arrangement. In the Florence and Pienza examples a central door leads from the deep loggia into a garden. The open green area of Palazzo Medici is small because it is in the centre of town; at Pienza space was not at a premium and a view was desirable, so that even the enclosure of the vast garden/terrace was broken through at appropriate points by three large apertures. The horizon of Pius's garden thus extends to the horizon of the southern landscape.

The gardens of Palazzo Medici and Palazzo Piccolomini are exchanged at the Imperiale for a spacious terrace. Alessandro's villa has no door leading from the loggia to the outside terrace, and it is doubtful that one had ever been planned. The terrace, without a protective encircling wall, was not to be used as were the gardens of the two Tuscan palaces, possibly

because the threat of local wars was still real in this area.<sup>71</sup> But it did constitute a firm link between Alessandro's creation and the palaces in Florence and Pienza, reinforcing his reference to the celebrated prototype in a way that the south loggia alone might not have done.<sup>72</sup> In any case the terrace did serve Alessandro in another way since it permitted a substantial extension of the subterranean area of the villa. He cannot have been unaware that precisely the same arrangement was to be found at Pienza, Urbino, and at the Palazzetto of Palazzo Venezia.

Alessandro's Imperiale can no longer be dismissed as an anomalous design in the Marches, generally recalling the Tuscan Early Renaissance villa type. The organization of the groundplan and the selection of certain architectural elements reveal that Alessandro had carefully studied the most lauded building projects of his time, all of which he may have known at first hand. In designing the Imperiale, Alessandro did not intend to compete with Federigo da Montefeltro or Pope Pius or Pope Paul, but saw in their palaces features that, transposed to his villa, would enable him to link his name with theirs in cultural splendour, and that finally would rank the villa worthy of its imperial foundation.



40 Giuseppe Vaccai, Villa Imperiale.



## DOCUMENTS

- I *Bibl. Oliv. 937, vol. V, Sq. Z, c. 8; 20 Dec. 1468 (notarized by Ser Sepolcro)*  
La nobile donna Angela figlia del già Bonacursio di Pietro di Nicola delli Monatoi da Pesaro moglie del Cavaliere Maestro Samperino del quondam Ser Alessandro delli Samperoli da Pesaro presente e consentiente assicurata sopra il ritratto della possessione che si vende e sopra tutti li beni presenti e futuri di Pietrapaolo, e Galeotto figli del quondam Matteo da Urbino già suo Avo Materno sopra li 600. scudi d'oro che si vende la possessione rinuntia loro tutte le sue ragioni che per il testamento di detto Matteo rogato dal già Ser Marco di Giovanni Paladini da Pesaro haveva sopra la detta possessione in Corte di Pesaro Fondo di Casartolo, lato li beni della Chiesa di San Bartolo, quelli di Paolo da Pozzo quelli di Giovanni Francesco delli Bianci da Piacenza orefice habitore di Pesaro la via vicinale da doi, e la pubblica da uno ...
- II *Bibl. Oliv. 937, vol. V, Sq. Z, c. 8 v; 20 Dec. 1468 (notarized by Ser Sepolcro)*  
Donna Teodora figlia del già Matteo di Maestro Paolo da Urbino moglie di Luca del quondam Ser Giovanni di Ser Nicolò da Pesaro ch'è presente, et acconsente ... assicurata anch'essa prima per le sue ragioni sopra li 600. scudi d'oro fa la rinuntia come ha fatto Donna Angela sua nipote qui sopra a Pietropaolo et Galeotto figli del detto Matteo di Maestro Paolo suoi fratelli sopra la detta possessione come sopra laterata che detti fratelli vogliono vendere all'Illustrissimo Alessandro Sforza...
- III *Bibl. Oliv. 937, vol. V, Sq. Z, c. 8 v; 20 Dec. 1468 (notarized by Ser Sepolcro)*  
A di detto nella detta Corte dello Illustrissimo Signore alla presenza delli medemi Testimoni Maestro Jacomo del quondam Giorgio da Zara calzolaro cittadino et habitatore di Pesaro come Priore della Scola di Santa Maria dell'Annuntziata di Pesaro et Prencevalle delli Samperoli Sottopriore, et Maestro Jacomo del quondam Bartolomeo da Norzia et Giovanni Francesco delli Bianci da Piacenza orefice fratelli o confrati di detta Scola ed Ordine della medesima assicurati prima per le sue ragioni sopra li 600 scudi che si cavano della possessione e sopra tutti li beni di Pietropaolo, e Galeotto figli del quondam Matteo di maestro Paolo da Urbino rinuntiano come sopra alle ragioni che ha detta Scola per il Testamento di detto Matteo sopra la predetta laterata possessione a San Bartolo che venderono poi al Signor Alessandro Sforza li detti Heredi come sopra.
- IV *Bibl. Oliv. 937, vol. V, Sq. Z, c. 9; 20 Dec. 1468 (notarized by Ser Sepolcro)*  
Alberto del quondam maestro Alberto da Pesaro rinuntia anch'egli a nome di maestro Raniero del quondam Bonacursio delli Monatoi da Pesaro assente con suo mandato assicurato prima per le sue ragioni sopra il ritratto della possessione da vendersi che è 600 scudi e sopra tutti li beni di Galeotto e di Pietropaolo del quondam Matteo di maestro Paolo da Urbino per scudi 600 d'oro cioè per 400 sopra quelli di Galeotto e 200 sopra quelli di Pietropaolo come hanno fatto tutti li altri che hanno rinuntiato ...
- V *Bibl. Oliv. 937, vol. V, Sq. Z, c. 9; 20 Dec. 1468 (notarized by Ser Sepolcro)*  
Pietro Paolo e Galeotto del quondam Matteo di maestro Paolo da Urbino vendono all'Illustre Prencipe e potente Signore Messer Alessandro Sforza Conte di Cotignola, Signore di Pesaro e Grancontestabile del Regno di Sicilia presente una loro possessione con casa ulivi vigne e canneto in Corte di Pesaro Fondo di Casartolo, lato la via pubblica da uno, e la via vicinale da doi appresso li beni della Chiesa di San Bartolo Corte di Pesaro, quelli di Paolo da Pozzo, e quelli di Giovanni Francesco delli Bianci da Piacenza orefice per 600 scudi d'oro de quali 300 ne tirano di presente e 300 altri tirarono prima ...
- VI *Bibl. Oliv. 376, vol. X, c. 149; 6 May 1469 (notarized by Ser Sepolcro)*  
Actum in Civitate Pisauri in domibus Illustris D. N. Alexandro Sfortie [Comitis Cotignolae, Pisauri Domini] etc. videlicet in camera residentie [et ad presens] prefatti Illustris domini detta la camera de lo Imperadore posita in dictis domibus etc. presentibus egregij verij Anton Maria, domini Johannis de Urbino, Lodovico quondam Bartholomei spetiarria de Pisauro et Zanono Jacobi de Parma omnibus ad presens habitatoribus Pisauri testibus etc. sponte Paulus et Johannes fratres et filii quondam Andree Diotalevi da Castro Putei Comitatus Pisauri pro se etc. dederunt vendiderunt Illustri D. N. Alexandro Sfortie ... presenti et stipulanti pro se etc. unum petium vinee cum canneto in fundo Casartole juxta bona prefatto Illustris domini etc. et hoc pro pretio et nomine pretii 55. ducatorum auri quos 55. ducatos Iacominus ... camerarius prefatti Illustri D. N. dedit solvit dictis Paulo et Johanni presentibus et recipientibus etc.
- VII *Bibl. Oliv. 374, vol. I, c. 56; undated*  
Expesa bisognaria per lavorare al presente  
Prima per stantiare tutti li muri migliaia 40 de petra monta  
libri centosexanta ..... [libbre] 160-0-0  
Item per tavelle migliaia dece monta libri quaranta ..... [libbre] 040-0-0  
Item tavole - 600 a ducati septe et mezo el cento libri centodece ..... [libbre] 110-0-0  
Item per quarti 200 de gesso a bolognini 3 el quarto monta libri quaranta .. [libbre] 040-0-0  
Item per adiutare li Maistri libri cento ..... [libbre] 100-0-0

[libbre] 450-0-0

## NOTES

\* I wish to thank my friend, Clemente Castelbarco Albani, to whom I am deeply indebted for years of patience, help and co-operation.

Bibl. Oliv. = Pesaro, Biblioteca Oliveriana.

- <sup>1</sup> The best work is still that by A. Olivieri, *Memorie di Alessandro Sforza*, Pesaro 1785.
- <sup>2</sup> But see now S. Eiche, *Alessandro Sforza and Pesaro: A Study in Urbanism and Architectural Patronage*, diss. Princeton University, 1982.
- <sup>3</sup> On the town palace see now Eiche (n. 2), pp. 67-79, 149-195, 203-218. F. Seitz, *Die Villa Imperiale bei Pesaro*, in: *Deutsche Bauzeitung*, vol. XXXIX, n<sup>o</sup>s 75-77, 1905, was the first to carefully examine the structure of the Sforza villa, followed by B. Patzak, *Die Villa Imperiale in Pesaro*, Leipzig 1908, who included a brief discussion of the 15th century building while concentrating on the Della Rovere structure. Neither Seitz nor Patzak, however, considered the villa from the point of view of Alessandro's patronage.
- <sup>4</sup> Eiche (n. 2), pp. 117-148.
- <sup>5</sup> Bibl. Oliv. 191, c. 1 v; the extract is published by L. Firpo, *Lo stato ideale della Controriforma*, Bari 1957, p. 73.
- <sup>6</sup> Bibl. Oliv. 376, vol. I, c. 452; Eiche (n. 2), p. 504.
- <sup>7</sup> Eiche (n. 2), pp. 103, 463-473.
- <sup>8</sup> G. Vaccai, *Le ville del monte Accio e la società pesarese nel sec. XVI*, in: *Picenum*, vol. XVIII, 1921, p. 262.
- <sup>9</sup> See n. 20.
- <sup>10</sup> On the medal see A. Olivieri, *Lettera sopra un medaglione non ancor osservato*, Pesaro 1781 and Hill, p. 72 n<sup>o</sup> 291. On Enzola's abilities see C. von Fabriczy, *Medailen der italienischen Renaissance*, Leipzig 1903, p. 47 and Thieme-Becker, X, p. 572.
- <sup>11</sup> AS Pesaro, Notarile, Sepolcro di Pietro Sepolcri, vol. 6 (1469-72), c. 251 v; see also below p. 248. All the documents from the AS Pesaro were kindly passed on to me by Dr Paride Berardi, and I thank him cordially.
- <sup>12</sup> Mingucci (Fig. 3) draws a stringcourse just below the upper windows, but on the 19th century paintings of the villa it is missing, nor are there any traces of it on the fabric itself.
- <sup>13</sup> The windows on the upper floor of the west and part of the south wing have an even more unpretentious ledge consisting simply of *tavelle*. The window frames in the north-west part of the villa probably do not predate the end of the 16th century and are possibly even later. The window ledges of the rooms of the fresco cycle are of stone and similar ones can be seen in other Renaissance houses of Pesaro, for instance in the 16th century Casa Vaccai.
- <sup>14</sup> By the 19th century the window at the north end of the east facade had been enlarged as a door (Fig. 21). It led into a chamber partitioned off the large north-east corner room. The dividing wall has since been removed, and the window restored.
- <sup>15</sup> Patzak (n. 3), pp. 69-70, believed that Genga was responsible for this change.
- <sup>16</sup> Eiche (n. 2), pp. 154 ff.
- <sup>17</sup> Eiche (n. 2), pp. 101-105.
- <sup>18</sup> For the 15th century Gonzaga country estates see E. Marani, *Mantova. Le arti*, vol. II, Mantua 1961, p. 61, n. 25, and *idem.*, *Gli edifici padronali della campagna mantovana*, in: *Palazzi e ville del contado mantovano*, Mantua 1966, pp. 4-6, including the names of over fifty Gonzaga estates with a list of the surviving ones on p. 5, nn. 3-4. For the Este consult G. Pazzi, *Le 'Delizie Estensi' e l'Ariosto*, Pescara 1933, although she is interested mainly in the 16th century. Also useful are W. Gundersheimer (ed.), *Art and Life at the Court of Ercole I d'Este*, Geneva 1972 and *idem.*, Ferrara, Princeton 1973.
- <sup>19</sup> As Cosimo wrote in a letter to Ficino, published in M. Ficino, *Opera*, vol. I, Basel 1561, p. 608. For Alessandro's changed way of life see Eiche (n. 2), pp. 91-93.
- <sup>20</sup> See docs. I-V. Nb. that the documents exist only in this 18th century copy. For two documents, 1432 and 1457, referring to the lands eventually purchased by Alessandro for the Imperiale see Eiche (n. 2), p. 464 n<sup>o</sup> 6 and p. 466 n<sup>o</sup> 12.



- <sup>21</sup> See *A. Olivieri*, Della Zecca di Pesaro e delle monete pesaresi dei secoli bassi, in: *G. A. Zanetti* (ed.), Nuova raccolta delle monete e zecche d'Italia, vol. I, Bologna 1775, pp. 206-207. See also a selection of 15th century deeds of sale for land in the *fondo* of S. Bartolo in *Eiche* (n. 2), p. 465 n° 8, p. 467 n°s 13-14, p. 468 n° 16, p. 469 n°s 18-20, p. 470 n° 22, p. 471 n° 25. For the types of rustic constructions in this area see *A. Movi*, La casa rurale nelle Marche settentrionali, Florence 1946.
- <sup>22</sup> *Olivieri* (n. 1), pp. CIII-CIV, publishes the relevant passage.
- <sup>23</sup> *L. von Pastor*, Geschichte der Päpste, 3rd and 4th ed., vol. II, Freiburg 1904, p. 421.
- <sup>24</sup> Diario ferrarese, in: *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, vol. XXIV-7, Bologna 1928-33, p. 53; *L. A. Muratori*, Annali d'Italia, vol. 23, Florence 1827, p. 16.
- <sup>25</sup> *Vespasiano da Bisticci*, Le vite, ed. *Greco*, vol. I, Florence 1970, pp. 423-424. On the *Camera dello Imperadore* see *Eiche* (n. 2), p. 162.
- <sup>26</sup> *da Bisticci* (n. 25), p. 424.
- <sup>27</sup> The concession is recorded in another contemporary document that has escaped notice: *Bibl. Oliv. 441*, c. 22 - *Privilegio imperiale de re de romani de portare le aquile*. This is one of the headings in the index to Alessandro's papers, the index alone surviving. See also *Bibl. Oliv. 380*, c. 169; on c. 245 v we find the date 1462, but the author of this manuscript is notoriously unreliable when it comes to figures. Cf. *A. Marucchi*, Stemmi di possessori di manoscritti conservati nella Biblioteca Vaticana, in: *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant*, vol. VII, Vatican City 1964, p. 40, who writes that the eagle came to Alessandro via the Montefeltro, perhaps thinking of Alessandro's marriage to Sveva, Federigo's half-sister, in 1448.
- <sup>28</sup> *P. Giovio*, Vita di Sforza Attendolo, in: *M. Fabi* (ed.), Vita degli Sforzeschi, Milan 1853, p. 26.
- <sup>29</sup> For his arrival in Ancona see *L. Barnabei*, Croniche anconitane, in: *C. Ciavarini* (ed.), Collezione di documenti storici antichi delle città e terre marchigiane, vol. I, Ancona 1870, p. 186; *Pastor* (n. 23), p. 421. For the Emperor's departure from Rome see *Pastor*, p. 427.
- <sup>30</sup> Published by *Olivieri* (n. 1), p. CIV.
- <sup>31</sup> *Eiche* (n. 2), p. 102 and p. 468 n°s 16-17.
- <sup>32</sup> *I. Zicari*, La data di fondazione della Villa Imperiale, in: *Studia Oliveriana*, vol. XIX-XX, 1971-72, pp. 41-45, reviews the various arguments but persists in misreading the date as 1468.
- <sup>33</sup> According to *Olivieri* (n. 10), p. VIII, there had originally been an inscription commemorating the laying of the foundation stone, which was moved from its place when the Della Rovere villa was joined to the Sforza Imperiale. In the 18th century the architect Vichi of Fano, who was in charge of restoring the villa for the Jesuits to whom it had been given in 1763 by Pope Clement XIII, altered the inscribed block to serve as a wash-basin for the religious community. I wonder if this inscription had been placed above the entrance portal, where there is an appropriate strip between the door lintel and entablature.
- <sup>34</sup> See doc. VI.
- <sup>35</sup> See *Eiche* (n. 2), pp. 360-361 n. 92, for Costanzo's purchase, sale and exchange.
- <sup>36</sup> *Bibl. Oliv. 374*, vol. I, c. 105: *...certamente quando Io penso bisognare suplire di ligniami et feramenti per lo palazzo Imperiale et per legne et manifatura de mattoni se restano a fare alla fornace del verzier et in corte non ce essere niente de legne et ancho de le altre spese occorono: dubito questo anno ch'abbia a remanere debitore ultra libri mille...* The letter is fully published in *Eiche* (n. 2), pp. 474-475.
- <sup>37</sup> See doc. VII. *Olivieri*, in the index to the manuscript, identified the handwriting as that of Alessandro. The paper carries the same watermark as that of the 1470 letter (n. 36): a pair of round scissors, closest to n° 3766 in *C. M. Briquet*, Les Filigranes, Paris 1907, ed. Stevenson, rpt. Amsterdam 1968, vol. III; see also vol. I, p. 239. These are the only two examples of such a watermark that I have found among the 15th century letters in Pesaro.
- <sup>38</sup> *F. Filippini*, Luciano da Laurana a Pesaro, in: *Melozzo da Forlì*, fasc. 7, April 1939, p. 356. He also assigns it the date of 1471, without however indicating his reason.
- <sup>39</sup> This is in fact what *Olivieri* has written in the index of the manuscript *Bibl. Oliv. 374*, vol. I: *Lista di robba che bisognava per continuare una fabrica*.
- <sup>40</sup> For *stanzare* I have found it most satisfactory to follow *C. D. Du Cange*, Glossarium, vol. VI, Venice 1740, col. 674: *stanzare = statuere* (to erect, raise). I interpret *petra* as bricks. The interchangeability of names was not uncommon, for which see *G. Barbieri* and *L. Gambi*, La casa rurale in Italia, Florence 1970, p. 54. The 15th century bricks at the Imperiale measure 33 × 18 × 5 cm. Engineer E. Mocchi was in charge of the restorations at the villa after the war, and both he and Count Clemente Castelbarco Albani assisted me in these calculations.
- <sup>41</sup> The 15th century *tavella* at the Imperiale measure 33 × 18 × 3 cm. The *tavole* could not be measured. My calculations are based on the maximum measurements (40 × 500 cm.) given in the *Dizionario enciclopedico di architettura e urbanistica*, vol. VI, Rome 1969, p. 153. For the *gesso* see *Francesco di Giorgio Martini*, Trattati, ed. C. Maltese, vol. II, Milan 1967, p. 316. For *quarto* see *Dizionario enciclopedico italiano*, vol. X, Rome 1959, p. 27 n° 4, e) ... *la quarta parte di uno stajo*. For *stajo* see *A. Martini*, Manuale di metrologia, Turin 1883, p. 519.
- <sup>42</sup> See n. 11.
- <sup>43</sup> *Bibl. Oliv. 937*, vol. V, Sq. AA, c. 37.
- <sup>44</sup> See *Eiche* (n. 2), pp. 52-54, 159-163, 186-195.
- <sup>45</sup> *Eiche* (n. 2), pp. 154 ff.
- <sup>46</sup> Personal communication from Countess Archinta Castelbarco Albani.



- <sup>47</sup> Patzak (n. 3), p. 76, explains that the north-east corner room intrudes into the loggia space because Alessandro had wanted a large room, an argument that I find unconvincing.
- <sup>48</sup> A passage was left also to the west of the courtyard foundations, since otherwise the chamber to the north of the L-shaped space and the whole north wing would have been inaccessible from that direction.
- <sup>49</sup> Note that also Buonamici has labelled this area *Scuderie* on his 18th plans of the Imperiale; see the reproductions in G. Marchini, *La Villa Imperiale di Pesaro*, Milan n.d., pp. 28, 31.
- <sup>50</sup> Towards the end of the 16th century Francesco Maria II della Rovere built a new stable at the foot of the ramp, as can be seen in Mingucci's drawing (Fig. 3).
- <sup>51</sup> On the *famiglia* see my article, *Towards a study of the 'famiglia' of the Sforza court at Pesaro*, in: *Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. 9, 1985, pp. 79-103.
- <sup>52</sup> Although many structural changes were undertaken by the Jesuits in the 18th century, some of which are noted by Patzak (n. 3), pp. 52-53, they tended to wall up rather than open areas, and for that reason I do not believe these large apertures date from that late time. Genga, of course, also carried out alterations, but he similarly tended to close rather than open spaces in the old villa. Moreover, the large windows are so in keeping with the concept of an open loggia wing that they must belong to the original design.
- <sup>53</sup> E. S. Piccolomini, *The Commentaries of Pius II*, transl. Gragg, Northampton, Mass. 1951, Bk. IX, p. 600.
- <sup>54</sup> Piccolomini (n. 53), pp. 597, 600.
- <sup>55</sup> The Jesuits used some of these rooms for their silkworm culture. Included on the ceiling of the room at centre is an *impresa* that I have seen in one other place only: two dark chevrons on a light shield, which appears as part of the wedding decorations for Camilla d'Aragona and Costanzo Sforza (1475), with the motto *A bon foit*; see Biblioteca Vaticana, Urb. lat. 899, cc. 7, 8v, 99, 114, 119. Cf. C. Padiglione, *I motti delle famiglie italiane*, Naples 1910, p. 97 n° 7, who gives the motto as *A bon droit*. Another *impresa* on the ceiling has eluded me entirely: a dark feather on a shield lighter in tone. I could not trace it in the manuscripts on local heraldry, and found no other instance of its appearance elsewhere in the villa.
- <sup>56</sup> See also Patzak (n. 3), p. 76 and Marchini (n. 49), p. 12.
- <sup>57</sup> Vasari-Milanesi, VI, p. 319. Patzak (n. 3), p. 72, believed this raised portion to be a construction dating from the 15th century, serving to bind two older houses together.
- <sup>58</sup> AS Pesaro, Germano Germani, vol. 4, c. 271 (7 June 1487).
- <sup>59</sup> Patzak (n. 3), p. 70.
- <sup>60</sup> Piccolomini (n. 53), p. 598.
- <sup>61</sup> The Venetian source of the chimneys was pointed out already by Marchini (n. 49), p. 6 and in Per Giorgio da Sebenico, in: *Commentari*, vol. XIX, 1968, p. 221. A comprehensive discussion of this chimney type can be found in L. Candida, *La casa rurale nella pianura e nella collina veneta*, Florence 1959, pp. 79, 104, 175-176, 187.
- <sup>62</sup> Suggested already by Vaccari, Pesaro, Bergamo 1909, p. 56 and Filippini (n. 38), p. 356.
- <sup>63</sup> Eiche (n. 2), pp. 80 ff.
- <sup>64</sup> See also Eiche, (n. 2), p. 64 and n. 86. Two examples of 16th century loggias survive in the courts of the Casa Fronci and Palazzo Barignani. However it is unlikely that courts arcaded on all four sides were common, or even appeared at all, in Pesaro.
- <sup>65</sup> Seitz (n. 3), p. 453; Patzak (n. 3), pp. 6, 79, 117-118.
- <sup>66</sup> On Palazzo Venezia see D. R. Coffin, *The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome*, Princeton 1979, pp. 27-30 and Rome, Museo di Palazzo Venezia, Palazzo Venezia, Paolo II e le fabbriche di S. Marco, 1980, pp. 130-137; and, most recently, C. L. Frommel, *Francesco del Borgo: Architekt Pius' II. und Paus II. (II): Palazzo Venezia, Palazzetto Venezia und San Marco*, in: *Röm Jb.*, vol. 21, 1984, pp. 71-164.
- <sup>67</sup> See Eiche (n. 2), Figs. 34 and 41.
- <sup>68</sup> Eiche (n. 2), Fig. 27.
- <sup>69</sup> Both the Palazzetto and Villa Imperiale capitals ultimately depend from those on the ground floor of the garden loggia at Pienza; see Frommel (n. 66), pp. 146-147.
- <sup>70</sup> I wish to thank Brenda Preyer for her observations. See W. Bulst, *Die ursprüngliche innere Aufteilung des Palazzo Medici*, in: *Flor. Mitt.*, vol. 14, 1970, p. 386 and n. 91.
- <sup>71</sup> See Bibl. Oliv. 937, vol. V, Sq. V, c. 22v (28 Jan. 1466): ... *vendono una vigna per novanta fiorini posta in corte di Pesaro fondo San Bartolo ... con patto che il Canonico di detto Don Giacomo si debba rimettere in una altra vigna il prezzo in luogo più commodo et meno pericoloso ne' tempi di guerra che sono assai frequenti in questi contorni ...*
- <sup>72</sup> Marchini (n. 49), p. 6, considers that the terrace at the Imperiale had been built for defense purposes, and implies that it was originally free-standing instead of being exposed on only one and a half sides as today. There is no physical evidence to support Marchini's thesis.



## RIASSUNTO

In questo articolo l'autrice esamina il ruolo di Alessandro Sforza committente di realizzazioni architettoniche, conducendo una analisi della Villa Imperiale quale tardo esempio della sua committenza. Dopo aver esaminato il sito della villa, considera la storia del fabbricato, la struttura, la funzionalità, lo stile e la tipologia. È emerso dall'indagine che precedenti alla costruzione della villa esistevano sullo stesso terreno due case poi incorporate da Alessandro nell'Imperiale. Il problema della data sullo stemma sopra l'ingresso è risolto una volta per tutte: 1469 non 1468. La villa di Alessandro trova paralleli con costruzioni contemporanee commissionate da suoi amici: il Palazzo Piccolomini a Pienza di Pio II, il Palazzetto di Palazzo Venezia a Roma di Paolo II ed il Palazzo Ducale ad Urbino di Federico da Montefeltro. I rapporti e le risposdenze hanno messo in luce che l'Imperiale non è semplicemente un anomalo progetto di villa toscana di primo rinascimento realizzato nelle Marche, come in genere si era supposto, ma piuttosto l'opera accurata di un mecenate la cui ambizione era alimentata dall'emulazione delle imprese architettoniche dei suoi potenti amici, ma allo stesso tempo sensibilmente rispettosa delle limitazioni delle sue finanze. Così che, sebbene Alessandro non poté copiare integralmente i loro palazzi, le scelte e le modifiche a cui fu costretto sono risultate in ultime analisi più importanti e significanti di quanto non lo sarebbe stato una realizzazione semplicemente emula di illustri prototipi.

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R. Calderoni: Fig. 1. - Galvani (Cattolica): Fig. 2. - Biblioteca Vaticana: Figs. 3, 39. - KIF (L. Arlini): Figs. 4, 6, 10-13, 18, 22, 26-30, 32, 35-36. - Author: Figs. 5, 7, 9, 14-17, 20, 23-35, 31, 33, 38. - Gabinetto Nazionale Fotografico: Figs. 8, 34. - C. Castelbarco Albani: Fig. 19. - KIF Fototeca: Fig. 21. - Alinari: Fig. 37. - From C. Cinelli et al., *L'Imperiale castello sul colle S. Bartolo presso Pesaro, Pesaro 1881*: Fig. 40.