

Hadrian's Villa and its Inspirations

Wealthy citizens and those who were poor in the Roman Era were clearly distinguished, socially. This can be seen in many different works erected by Roman emperors, generals, and political figures within the city. For example, the Imperial Fora in Rome clearly segregated their interior views - by means of colossal walls and barriers - from those of the larger city. Peasants and poor citizens resided outside of these walls. The finest and best-preserved examples of this type of architectural and social division can be found in the homes and temples of Pompeii. Over time, wealthy Romans living Rome "dared not display their wealth in the architecture of their urban dwellings for fear of offending the ethic of moderation" (Ingersoll-Kostof pg. 162-163). Due to this fear, Romans began to build villas outside the city walls, as oases from the political drive of the capital. Homes of wealthy Romans in the capital began shifting from residential examples of ornate spaces with mosaics and frescos to more modest spaces that represented the models and frugal lifestyles of the average citizen. This practice was specifically implemented by Hadrian and his villa constructed near Tivoli, Italy. Each building constructed in Hadrian's villa mimicked specific global locations he saw or conquered throughout his reign. The Island Enclosure (Maritime Theater) and the Pavilion of the Piazza d'Oro are the most famous and mysterious structures within his villa, both in purpose and in architectural structure. These two structures that were built by Hadrian echo other similar works that were built under Augustus and Trajan in their curvilinear geometry, spatial complexity, and materials used. These other works can be throughout the city of Rome and the Roman Forum.

As seen in other ancient structures, Hadrian's villa is now in ruins. This is due to the medieval era and the theft that occurred within it for stone and marble pieces that were recycled in cathedral construction projects or other cheap labor projects. Some structures are partially intact, giving researchers a vivid impression of the buildings incorporated into Hadrian's villa. This is especially the case for the Island Enclosure. Curvilinear construction can be seen once it is broken into its major components. The structure itself is Ionic, with a perimeter wall and ringed walkway that is divided from the central island courtyard by a moat. Hadrian mimicked previous building constructions to achieve such a beautiful courtyard and central fountain, which is comparable to the fountain court in Romus Domus Augustana (Ingersoll-Kostof pg. 169). Even the procession into the central courtyard is similar to that of the Roman baths of Caracalla. In these other structures, visitors are led in a pathway from the frigidarium that descends to a central meeting point, in this case a moat, by stairwell. However, Hadrian's courtyard is completely shaded by a ceiling that is supported by tapered Ionic columns on the outside perimeter of the central courtyard. The Island Enclosure gives a definite sense of enclosure and darkness to the location rather than a sense of illumination and light from the sky above. This enclosure was a sheltered area and considered to be private and isolated. The Island Enclosure is surrounded by walls, as if to protect something sacred. There must have been a sort of pleasure to this aspect of being surrounded by shade and cool water, especially during the hot summers. Having shaded walkways gives the island a beauty that allowed more universal use throughout the year instead of being limited to

Tivoli's bearable weather conditions. It could very well have been constructed to mimic a beautiful fortress for the emperor himself, like a secret garden that incorporates the heavenly shapes of circles. This layout was later used to help influence Constantine with his construction of the Mausoleum of Constantina in Rome. Similar features are observed in the layout and axial symmetry of the mausoleum structure when compared to the Island Enclosure. In comparison to the rest of the villa, the Island Enclosure is small. Even though it carries the same characteristics as that of its major buildings (constructed of stone, concrete, and faced with brick), it is not built to the scale of other major works within the villa. An example of a large-scale building found within this private villa is Hadrian's Pavilion.

The Pavilion is a massive structure, housed by a scalloped dome. Emphasized by axial symmetry, the dome gives a dominating sense of centralization to the entrance of the structure. This is completely different in scale and atmosphere from the small and enclosed environment of the Island Enclosure of the Maritime Theater. The sense of centralization is backed by the colossal atrium of the Pavilion. The scalloped dome, centered with an oculus, is directly oriented above the central fountain of the structure. The dome must have felt like a magnet as one proceeded from the open atrium, given its magnitude and size. As one entered the Piazza d'Oro, the complexity of its geometries and curvature must have continuously unraveled to the viewer. This space was littered with complex parabolas that reached up to the top of the oculus. The exterior of the Pavilion included an atrium that reflected very similar axially to that of the Forum of Trajan and the Basilica Ulpia. Delineating from the structural form of the Island Enclosure, the open interior of the scalloped dome for the Pavilion opened out to a large open atrium rather than enclosing it from its surroundings.

The Pavilion and its Piazza d'Oro is structurally more dynamic than that of the Island Enclosure. The scalloped dome of this structure has curvilinear surfaces that act as trabeated bases to its arcade, which bend the forces acting against its structural stability in a multitude of ways. The Pavilion dome is similar to Rome's Domus Aurea, characterized by an octagonal base. Compared to the other freestanding domes in Rome, its curved structure gives the villa a unique characteristic. Because of this structural design, the Pavilion provides a unique setting to the villa, portraying an iconic image with its complex design. Both the Island Enclosure and Piazza d'Oro share common Roman rituals of bath processions, which also follow the same traditions set in the Roman Bath of Caracalla. However, Hadrian's skill in innovating pastime structures for his own personal leisure provided a model for later works to come, including his constructed version of the Roman Pantheon.

The commissioned works within Hadrian's villa and the Roman Pantheon had important similarities in function, form, and materials. However, all these structures differed in meaning. At the time, Roman structures were made of stone, marble, concrete, and brick overlay. Other Roman emperors built different structures for public, political, religious, or personal uses as they saw fit. The villa was simply constructed for Hadrian as a paradise set away from all the political aspects involved with the capital of Rome.

This villa was dedicated to fulfilling the pleasures aimed to please a single person. In contrast, the Pantheon was erected with an intention to develop a meeting location for political, religious, and public gatherings. It was a publicly-built structure that was oriented in structure for the Roman civilian and the gods they worshipped. Prior to Hadrian's rule, major buildings in Rome were used to enhance the power and prestige of the government. Hadrian was able to successfully separate the spheres of private and secular construction projects through the establishment of his villa outside the city walls. No other Roman emperor before him was able to accomplish such a feat.

Throughout Hadrian's rule, he imposed new ideas on Roman society through varying forms of architecture. It wasn't until centuries later that these works would be revisited by later European architects who would reflect his practices in their works. Two great examples of Hadrian's architectural achievements can clearly be found within his villa at both the Island Enclosure and the Pavilion. Mastering the use of curvature and the complex interior geometry of domed structures were iconic staples to Roman architecture. To conclude, Hadrian utilized past architectural processes and skills to successfully intertwine a sense of interiorization, centralization, and curvilinearity within his buildings.

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Works Cited

Ingersoll, Richard, and Spiro Kostof. *World Architecture: A Cross-cultural History*. New York: Oxford UP, 2013. 162-69. Print.