



HUMANISM AND THE ROLE OF SCULPTURE, NATURE, AND SYMBOLS OF PRESTIGE IN GARDEN ICONOGRAPHY

4.16. Oval court, Villa Pia, Vatican Gardens, Rome. Designed by Pirro Ligorio. 1560

In G. B. Falda's engraving of the Vatican Gardens we see the Villa Pia, also called the Casino Pio, built by Pirro Ligorio for Pope Pius IV in 1560. Like the Villa Giulia it has a spatially ambiguous plan that visually pulls one in and through while making physical passage at first appear occluded. At the same time, it provides an example of another important Renaissance Italian contribution to the tradition of garden design: the *casino*, or summerhouse, built as a retreat from the bustle and ceremony of court life. Here the pope held soirées at which invited scholars sat around an oval court discussing philosophy, poetry, and religion. Discussion groups had become an important part of the intellectual life of Renaissance men of letters, and Ligorio's oval, which is embraced by exedras of carved stone seats, is an architectural expression of the humanists' pleasure in scholarly conversation (fig. 4.16).

The recovery of the art and architecture of antiquity provided villa designers with immediate sources of inspiration. As an archaeologist, Ligorio himself had thoroughly explored Hadrian's Villa on behalf of the Este family, and the mosaics that embellish the loggia of the Villa Pia and the arched portals entering the court reveal a renewed appreciation of ancient Roman decorative art. Low reliefs in stucco found on ancient Roman baths, palaces, and villas were echoed at the Villa Pia and elsewhere.¹³

Along with the wall frescoes and mosaics uncovered by sixteenth-century archaeologists, ancient marble sculptures were being excavated from the Roman soil. Several great collections were formed

at this time, and to accommodate them the garden began to assume the role of outdoor museum. In addition to the Belvedere Court at the Vatican, Bramante built a *giardino segreto*, the so-called Statue Court, located between the upper court and the Belvedere, for Pope Julius II's collection of antique sculpture. In 1584, Cardinal Fernando de' Medici bought the collection amassed some sixty years earlier by Cardinal Andrea della Valle, sending the free-standing pieces to Florence to embellish the Boboli Gardens and keeping the reliefs to decorate the facade of his villa on the Pincian Hill in Rome.

Inspired by the discoveries of classical archaeology, patrons commissioned new sculpture. The notion became firmly established that the garden was a setting in which white marble figures should be seen against dark green foliage or framed by architectural niches within building facades and garden walls. The humanists' interest in classical mythology furnished artists with thematic material, which they wove into narrative itineraries. Familiar literary themes that found expression in the garden included those of the Golden Age, Elysium, rustic goodness, Venus presiding over the Garden of Love, Apollo, the Muses, Mount Parnassus, and the virtuous hero assigned near-impossible tasks or waylaid by treacherous enchantments.

An important element of Renaissance garden iconography was nature itself. One sees, for instance, in the *bosco* above the Belvedere Court and the Villa Pia in the Vatican Gardens, the desire for a wildwood, an evocation of the sacred grove in antiquity. Similarly, it is reported that Pope Julius III, with his taste for simple country food, peasant dances, and wine festivals, enjoyed strolling in the untamed parts of his *vigna* (literally vineyard, the term contemporaries used for a suburban villa retreat). These were abundant with wildlife, melodious with birdsong, and adorned with works of art. Like their ancient predecessors, Renaissance villa owners wanted their groves to be haunted by the sculptural representatives of river gods, nymphs, satyrs, Pan, Diana, and Venus.

Added to this literary agenda was another, more obvious, motive for the development of Renaissance garden iconography: the aggrandizement of the garden owners' reputations through symbols, with the implication that the patrons' power was being put to beneficent use for humankind. Increasingly, after the middle of the sixteenth century, Italian gardens became manifestations of princely power. This was true in Florence as well as in Rome, although such Tuscan gardens as the Medici villa at Castello remained much more conservative in design than did the dazzling villa creations of the popes and cardinals in and around Rome.

APOTHEOSSES OF THE RENAISSANCE VILLA GARDEN: VILLA D'ESTE AND VILLA LANTE

Although Castello and the Boboli Gardens contained water features symbolically associated with Duke Cosimo's reputation as a builder of aqueducts, it is to the Roman Campagna that we must turn to find gardens that apotheosize water and use it with the inventiveness of a choreographer directing the movements of the dance or the creativity of a sculptor exploring the plasticity of clay. These effects were accomplished through the ingenuity of sixteenth-century *fontanieri*, virtuosic hydraulic engineers with an understanding of metaphysics as well as physics and a reputation akin to that of magicians because of the ingenuity of their creations.¹⁴ In the gardens of Villa d'Este water reaches a height of expressiveness that is analogous not only with dance and sculpture, but with music as well. For it is the drip and gurgle, the murmur and roar, the splash and tinkle, as well as the cooling spray, of water everywhere that has made this garden unforgettable to visitors through the centuries.

Like other superb gardens, Villa d'Este is the product of a passionate obsession on the part of an owner willing to spend extraordinary sums of money and with the taste to hire the best design talent available. In 1550, the cardinal of Ferrara, Ippolito D'Este (1509–1572), was appointed governor of Tivoli by Pope Julius III. Tivoli, an ancient Roman summer resort about twenty miles west of Rome, was not only the site of Hadrian's Villa, but of many other second century C.E. patrician villas. Its desirability then as later was due to the waters of the Aniene River, which came cascading dramatically down steep precipices; to its salubrious mineral springs; and to the excellent drinking water that was channeled from several sources along the riverbank to four major aqueducts serving the Roman metropolis. An aqueduct carrying water from the Rivellese Spring, the cost of which was borne by both the cardinal and the town of Tivoli, which also benefited, was built in 1561 after work on the garden had begun in earnest.

The governor's palace, a perquisite of the cardinal's appointment, was part of an old Franciscan monastery beside the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore at the top of a hill adjacent to the western town wall. Pirro Ligorio was commissioned to oversee the renovation of the palace into a summer residence suitable for Cardinal Ippolito, the son of Duke Alfonso I of Ferrara and Lucrezia Borgia. But the palace was to be a relatively minor element of the entire project; as the cardinal had already demonstrated at a villa he had rented on the Quirinal in Rome, gardens were his passion. In Ligorio he had not only a capable designer but also the foremost archaeologist of his day, the person

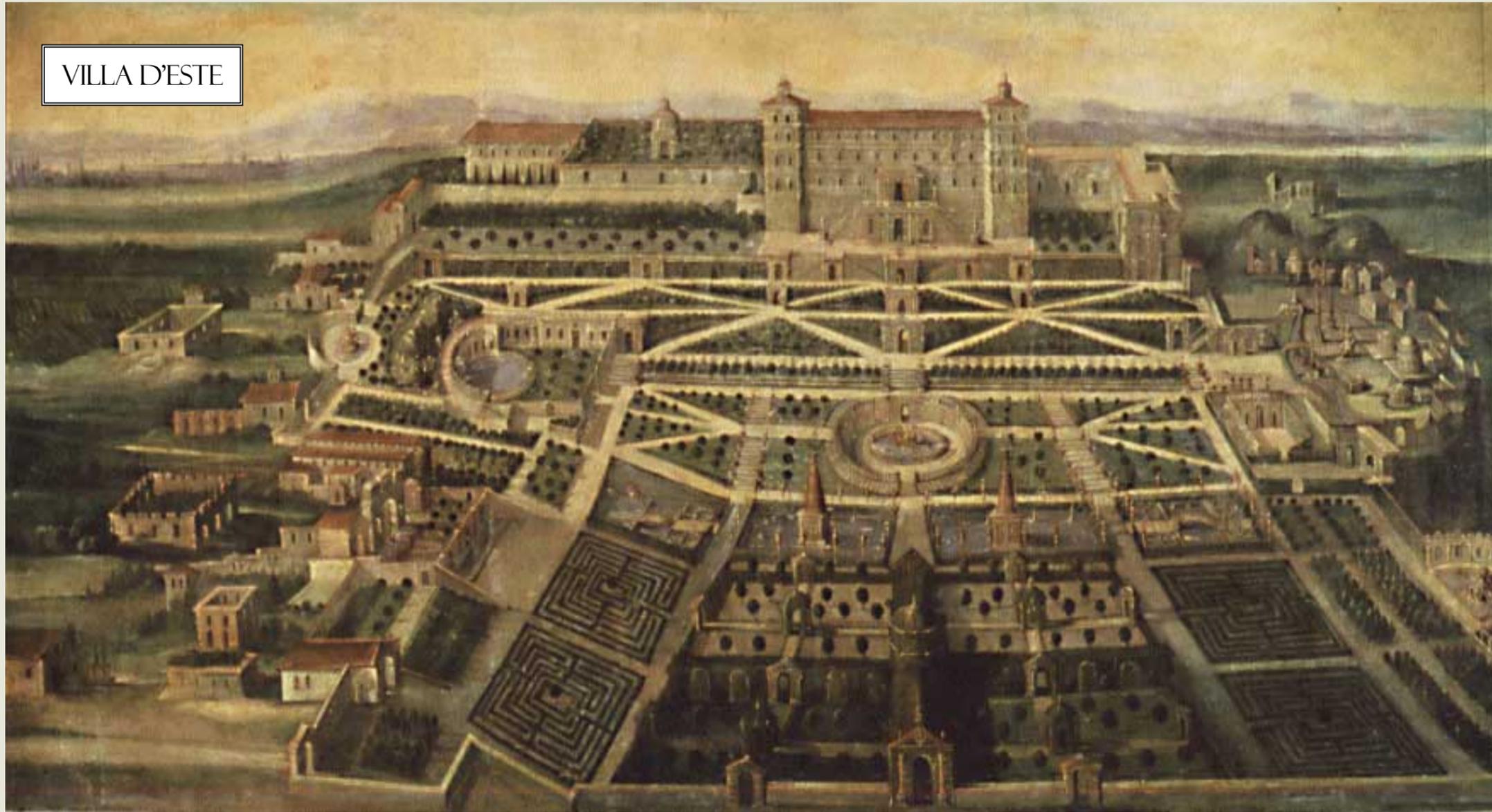
who was responsible for several excavations including that of nearby Hadrian's Villa and for the rediscovery of many antique marbles, mosaics, and other artifacts. Being a wealthy humanist collector, Ippolito had, in fact, put Ligorio on his payroll as his personal archaeologist in 1550, the year in which he had been appointed to the Tivoli post and had begun to dream of a great hillside garden below the palace. One part of Ligorio's job was undoubtedly to garner antique marbles to combine with contemporary sculpture in allegorical compositions throughout the garden.

Although Ligorio was himself a sufficiently accomplished classicist to develop the various iconographic themes that would portray the humanistic ideals of the cardinal, he was probably assisted by the cardinal's resident poet, Marc-Antoine Muret (1526–1585).¹⁵ After 1560, Giovanni Alberti Galvani served as superintending architect in charge of overseeing the construction of masonry stairs, fountains, fish ponds, and other features. Professional *fontanieri* were hired to develop the water devices that operated the spectacular fountains.

The construction of the gardens of the Villa d'Este continued over a twenty-two-year period until the cardinal's death in 1572, when work stopped abruptly. Contemporary visitors, including the French essayist Montaigne (1533–1592), lamented their unfinished state, although in the seventeenth century, when inheritance problems engendered by Cardinal Ippolito's will were finally resolved, Cardinal Alessandro d'Este undertook some restoration and improvements. While vegetative growth, alterations, and periodic lack of maintenance have blurred some of the formality seen in a contemporary engraving, we can still discern Ligorio's design and, with the help of modern scholarship, decode the humanist themes that are woven into its fabric: Nature's abundance and generosity and the relationship between Art and Nature—one of the central preoccupations of the Renaissance (figs. 4.17–4.20). In parsing the humanist meaning of the garden, which besides expressing the Art–Nature duality has many references to the virtuous mythological hero Hercules, here identified with Cardinal d'Este, one should remember that the original public entry to the garden was not from the villa, but rather from a gate in the outer wall set in the hillside below.

Standing on the balcony of the villa today, the visitor looks beyond the verdant mature tree canopy of the gardens to the distant hills. Below is the Cardinal's Walk and the rainbow spray of Bernini's seventeenth-century Fountain of the Great Beaker, which mingles visually with the watery plume of the Fountain of the Dragons beneath it. The dragons symbolize the ones guarding the Garden of the Hesperides, which were slain by Hercules. Descending

VILLA D'ESTE



4.17. Villa d'Este, Tivoli. Designed by Pirro Ligorio. 1550–72. Panoramic view after an engraving by Étienne Dupérac. 1573

The traditional plan of most Italian Renaissance gardens—a plan in which there are compartmentalized beds near the villa and, as one approaches the outer limits of the property, a surrounding screen of trees—has been reversed here because of the nature of the site. A wooded slope with diagonal paths to accommodate the steep grade lies directly beneath the retaining wall supporting the villa terrace. Where the valley has been remodeled by an extensive process of cutting and filling to create an apron of level terrain and a geometrically pitched northeast side slope, cross-axes divide the garden into square compartments.

The relationship between Art and Nature constitutes the principal theme of

the garden's iconography. Nature is dramatically manifested in the Fountain of Nature, also known as the Water Organ, culminating the water axis on the northeast (fig. 4.18). Following a "concert," which occurred when water pressure was manipulated to trap and release air in its pipes, a *fontaniere* would flush the vaulted chambers behind the elaborate facade, and a deluge would spill down the steep slope. This effect was made permanent in the twentieth-century Fountain of the Cascade, an enormous waterfall pouring into the pond below. An earlier cascade was created here by the seventeenth-century architect, sculptor, and fountain designer, Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680); it fell in successive stages like a natural waterfall rather than

as the dramatic sheer spill we see today.

The human ability to employ the resources of nature toward fruitful ends constitutes Art, which is celebrated along the second major cross-axis, the Alley of the Hundred Fountains (fig. 4.20). The Alley itself is composed of three conduits symbolizing the three tributaries of the Tiber—the Albunee, the Aniene, and the Erculaneo—which flow toward Rome. The art of channeling their waters into aqueducts was an important factor in the life of the recently reborn metropolis. Along the upper rim, water is channeled between carved obelisks, boats, eagles, and *fleurs de lys* (the last two forms being emblematic of the Este family).

At the northeast end of the Alley of the Hundred Fountains, within an

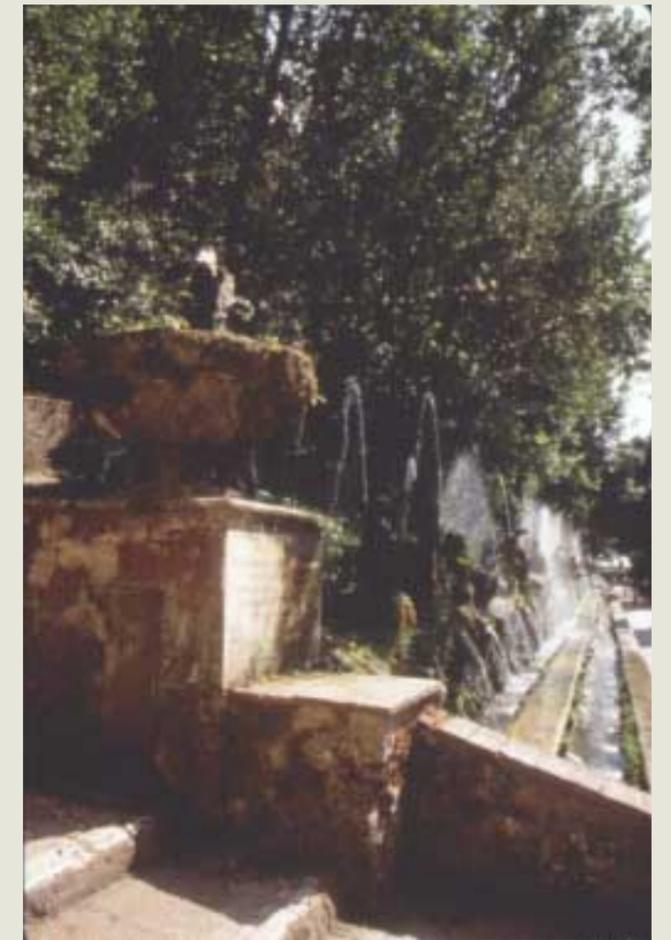
enclosed piazza, stands the principal fountain of the garden, the Fountain of Tivoli, or as it is now known, the Oval Fountain (fig. 4.19). A colossal statue of Albunea, the Tiburtine Sibyl, presides over the cascade, which is furnished by water from the River Aniene, which flows into an oval basin surmounted by a ball; its spurting jets delineate the Este *fleur de lys*. The sources of the Aniene and the Erculaneo are represented as reclining river gods set in naturalistic grottoes built into the surrounding slope. Crowning this artificial rock work is a statue of Pegasus, the magical horse whose hoofprints supposedly struck water out of Mount Parnassos, thereby creating the fountain of the Muses and proclaiming the power of Art.



4.18. Fountain of Nature, engraving by Giovanni Francesco Venturini, plate 13 from *Le Fontane del Giardino Estense in Tivoli, con li loro prospeti, e Vedute della Cascata del Fiume Aniene, Parte Quarta*. n.d.



4.19. Oval Fountain



4.20. Alley of the Hundred Fountains

one of the diagonal ramps, one comes to the Alley of the Hundred Fountains composed of three conduits symbolizing the three tributaries of the Tiber, which flow from the hills of Tivoli toward Rome. Here water is channeled between carved obelisks, boats, eagles, and *fleur de lys* (the last two forms being emblematic of the Este family) and pours from one basin into another through grotesque animal heads.

After visiting the Fountain of Tivoli and the Fountain of the Rometta, a water feature that was fashioned of stucco-covered brick to represent ancient Rome in miniature, one returns to descend one arm of the sweeping oval staircase and gaze back up at the villa through the spray of the Dragon Fountain. Taking the central staircase, which has channels of clear water running down its flanking walls, one arrives at the next level, that of the fish ponds. Here, looking back toward the villa, one realizes that Ligorio has repeated Bramante's design for the Belvedere Court as a series of descending terraces organized around a central axis. But there is an important difference: Bramante's Renaissance garden could be grasped in its entirety from a single vantage point within the Vatican Palace, but the Villa d'Este cannot be taken in altogether. Not only is it more spatially intricate than the Bramante prototype, but it is also a programmatic garden, one in which the separate parts are meant to be experienced sequentially as part of a humanist itinerary that celebrates the importance of Cardinal d'Este and the noble family of which he was the most conspicuous representative. Today, it is shorn of much of the sculptural decoration because the cardinal's fine collection of antique statuary was sold in the eighteenth century. While this loss deprives the villa of iconographic specificity and thematic continuity, the garden tour that was once enjoyed by the cardinal's guests and subsequent travelers nevertheless remains a memorable experience for modern visitors.

Contemporary with the Villa d'Este is Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Gambara's garden at Bagnaia, three miles east of the town of Viterbo. It is known today by the name of its seventeenth-century owners, the Lante family. Like the Villa d'Este, it offers a virtuosic expression of Bramantian axial planning combined with a highly imaginative use of water. Also like the Villa d'Este, the Villa Lante is filled with an allusive iconography wedding humanist learning to personal glory and family pride. It bears further similarity in being a garden that is meant not to be taken in all at once, but rather as sequential stops along a prescribed route that move the visitor off the central axis. Here, however, the garden itinerary has a prologue as one is meant to pass first through the kind of "dark wood" traversed by certain literary figures as they started out on their journeys of initiation, a

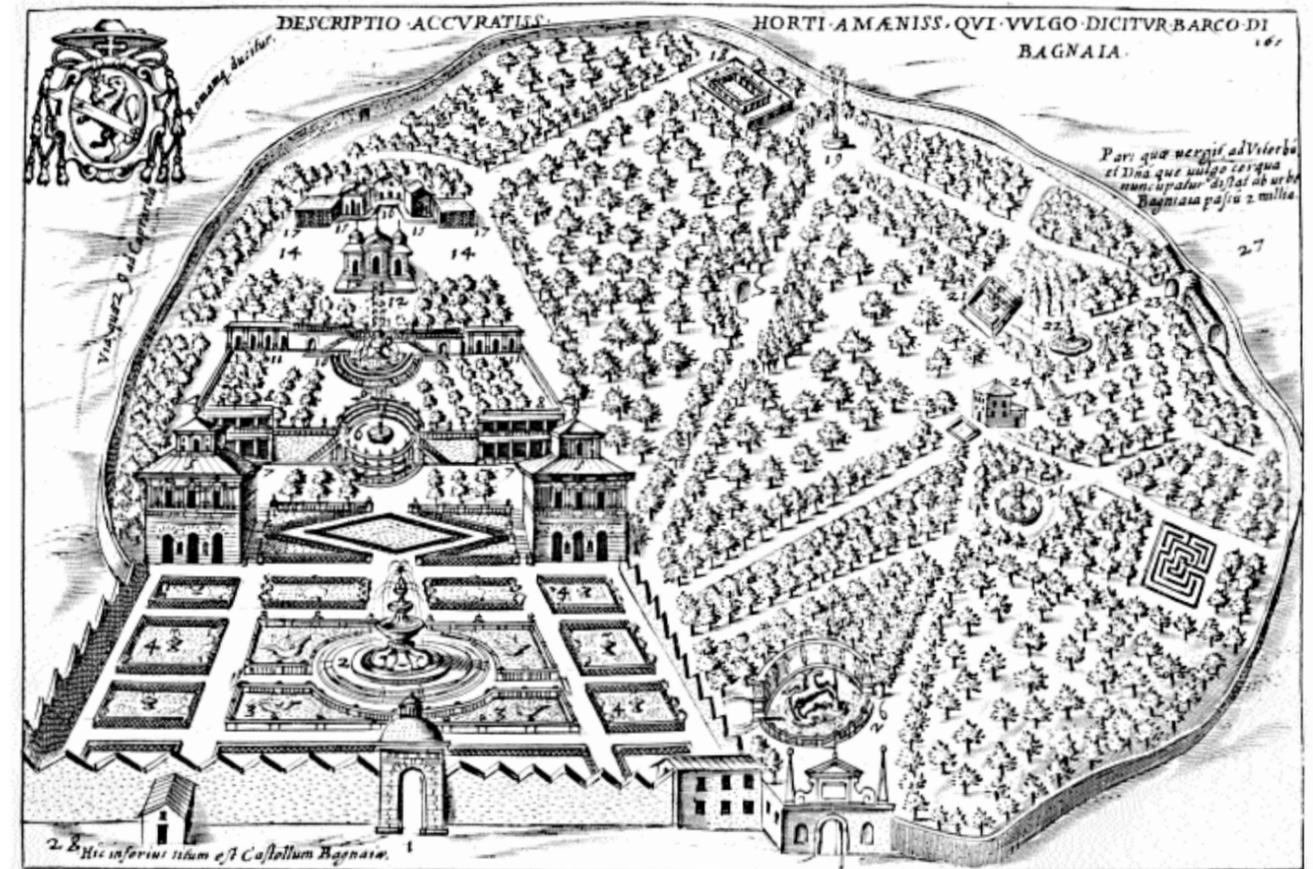
device with great appeal to the humanist imagination.

Cardinal Gambara was given the bishopric of Viterbo in 1566, and two years later received confirmation of one of the perquisites of his office, property rights in the old hunting park at Bagnaia. His predecessors had enclosed the park, which consisted of the wooded slope of Monte Sant'Angelo, and had built the aqueduct that brought water to the town as well as to the park. A small hunting lodge was the only structure on the property when the cardinal conceived the notion of building a great villa garden there. In place of the *barco*, or park for hunting, there would be a twenty-acre *bosco* with the kinds of messages of allusion that a humanist scholar steeped in the literature of antiquity would have sought. Continuing this iconographic narrative, there would be a formal garden in which Art gained the upper hand over Nature, in celebration of the cardinal's magnificence and benefactions to the people of Viterbo.

The designer of Villa Lante is almost universally believed to have been the architect Giacomo da Vignola, whose services Cardinal Gambara begged of his friend Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, as Vignola was then engaged upon another important garden commission at the Villa Farnese nearby at Caprarola. Construction proceeded over the next decade, and in August 1579, a lavish banquet was given there for Pope Gregory XIII (papacy 1572–1585), after which the pontiff promptly canceled Gambara's pension. Knowing that Gambara had been appointed by Pope Gregory's predecessor, the reform-minded Pius V (papacy 1566–1572), and that he was a prominent officer of the Inquisition, we may find it strange that he would build opulently, in a style derived from pagan art and literature. That, however, was the mentality of a proud and wealthy aristocrat whose appointment had as much to do with politics as with piety.

While the garden is the renowned part of Villa Lante and the park is often neglected by visitors, one should tour the *bosco* first in order to follow the itinerary planned by Cardinal Gambara. The *bosco* evokes the Golden Age myth, investing it with another, that of a punishing flood familiar to readers of the Old Testament. In the classical version, because of human wickedness, Jupiter, like Jehovah in the Hebrew scriptures, became angry and decided to destroy the earth with a flood so mighty that dolphins could be found swimming in the forest. Only two virtuous humans were left to repopulate, and their descendants were compelled to labor in order to make the earth fruitful.

The garden spells out the virtues of Cardinal Gambara, who made the surrounding land more bountiful and, in the tradition of classical civilization, was a patron of the arts enabling the human spirit to reach its highest potential. This, in brief, is the mes-



sage of the park and its adjacent garden. It develops through design, as at the Villa d'Este, the age-old theme of relationship among humans, art, and nature, while symbolically portraying the heroic efforts of one man in bringing the three into such an enriching harmony as to constitute a second Golden Age (figs. 4.21–4.27).¹⁶ Thus, the humanistic text encoded in its design program gives, as does that of the contemporary Villa d'Este, a literary dimension to the garden experience, and the presence throughout the garden of the cardinal's device in the form of a crayfish (a visual pun matching his family name, *Gambara*, with *gambero*, the word for "crayfish" in Italian) suggests his achievement.

Inspired by a sense of ancient geometry and proportion as well as by the iconographic program derived from antique themes, the Villa Lante can be seen in plan as a counterpoint of circles and squares. It is finally this balance and harmony of design, and not the messages of a new Golden Age under Pius V or Cardinal Gambara's prestige in the guise of humanism, that account for the deep pleasure that so many visitors have experienced in viewing it. In creating a hillside garden built upon a clear, strong axis, its several terraces linked by stairs, Vignola displayed a debt to Bramante. But he altered and expanded Bramante's design means. His axis is aquatic and can only be trav-

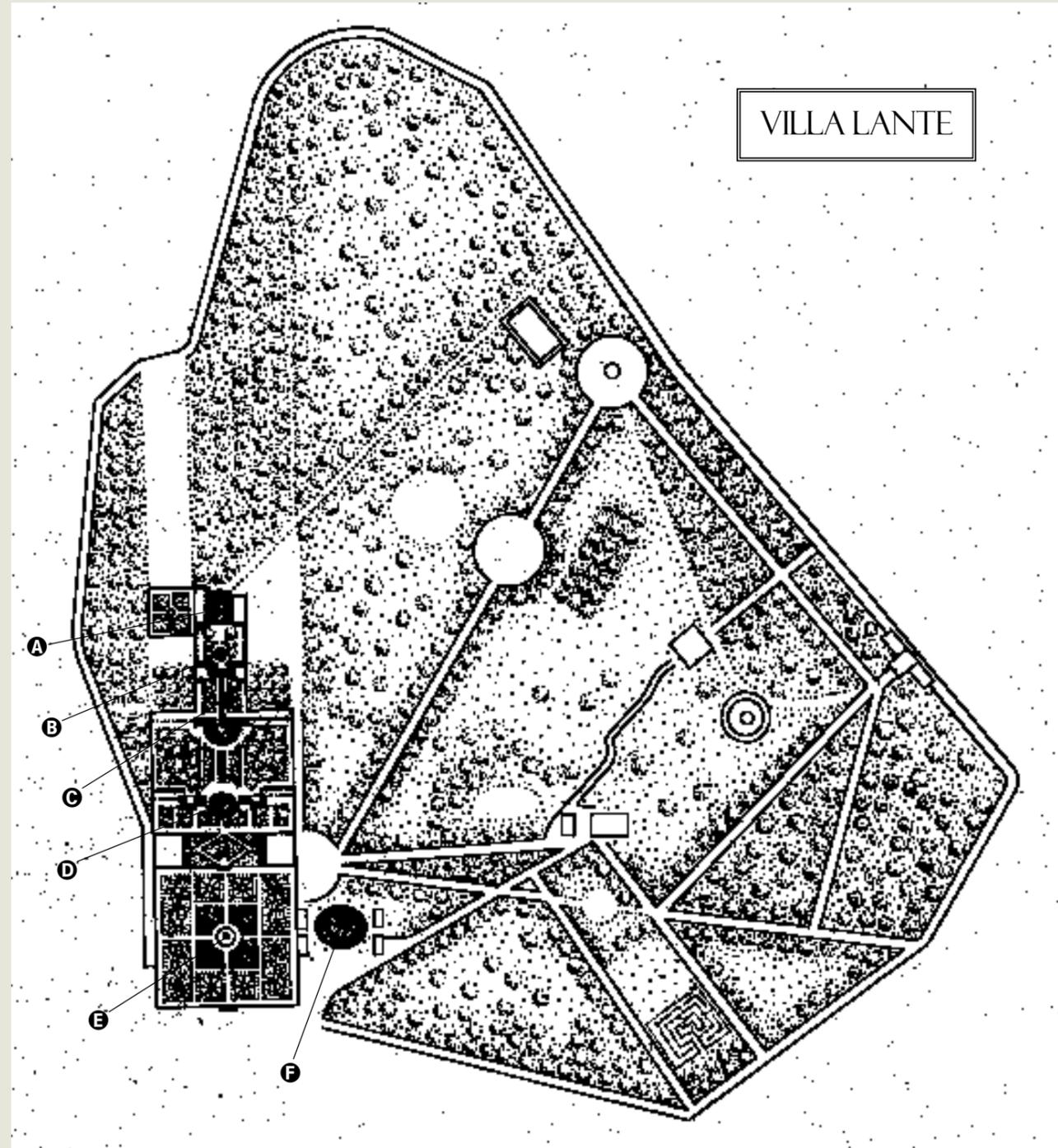
eled visually for the most part; one walks alongside it, perceiving it perhaps more powerfully for this very reason. And, instead of the architectural climax of the Belvedere exedra, here the central axis simply melts into nature as it ends in the Fountain of the Deluge.

EXTRAVAGANT EPITOME OF HUMANIST ALLEGORY: THE SACRO BOSCO AT BOMARZO

We must turn to Bomarzo near Viterbo, the garden of Cardinal Gambara's friend Count Pier Francesco Orsini (1513?–1584), to see the arcane climax of humanism as a programmatic factor in garden design. The epic poem *Orlando Furioso*, completed in 1532 by Ludovico Ariosto (1473–1533), as well as Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Inferno*, and probably the writings of Petrarch, provided inspiration for this enigmatic landscape in which Count Orsini manipulated scale and perspective to create an itinerary of unusual scenes studded with bizarre sculpture and architectural monuments forming a series of tableaux, each serving as a riddle to be decoded by his guests.

It was only gradually that Bomarzo assumed its character as an enchanted forest, or *sacro bosco*, as the count developed one part after another into an itinerary of personal history and symbolical discovery. For instance, the gruesome tableau of a stone giant

4.21. The Villa Lante, Viterbo. Designed probably by Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola. c. 1568–1579



4.22. Plan of the Villa Lante.

4.23. Fountain of Pegasus



4.24. Fountain of the Deluge



VILLA LANTE



Above left: 4.25. Water Chain

Above: 4.26. River Gods representing the Tiber and the Arno

Left: 4.27. Boxwood compartments and Water Parterre



Upon entering the Villa Lante, one first encounters the Fountain of Pegasus surrounded by Muses Ⓞ , perhaps derived from the Pegasus on the rock above the Oval Fountain at Villa d'Este. In both, the winged horse's hoof striking the earth generates the Spring of Hippocrene, symbol of the source of artistic creativity (fig. 4.23).

Along one of the diagonal paths through the park was the Fountain of the Acorns, now vanished, which linked the *bosco* with the Golden Age, since acorns were, according to Ovid, a staple in the diet of Arcadian man. Another vanished fountain, that of Bacchus, evokes Virgil's descriptions of the Golden Age when wine was believed to run freely in streams from the ground. Other trellis-surrounded fountains depicting unicorns and dragons symbolized the life of virtue and helped establish the identity of the park as the earthly paradise. High up the wooded slope there is a gate through which one can enter the garden at its top. There one is confronted by the Fountain of the Deluge Ⓞ , a fern-encrusted grotto with six openings from which water drips and pours into a basin where two dolphins are swimming, their forms now almost obliterated by vegetation (fig. 4.24). This refers to Ovid's account of

the destruction of mankind by flood. Flanking the Fountain of the Deluge, twin dining pavilions, known as the Loggias of the Muses, bear the name and crayfish device of Cardinal Gambara. (The word for crayfish is *gambero* in Italian, and his crest is therefore a visual pun referring to his name.) Reinforcing the symbolism of the Deluge, small pipes installed beneath the eaves of the pavilions that frame the Fountain of the Deluge allowed water to rain from above. These also served a sportive function, permitting water tricks in which garden visitors were sometimes treated to an unexpected drenching in keeping with the humor of the day. Symmetrical colonnaded aviaries, modeled probably on descriptions of those in Varro's ancient garden, were designed as wings to the Loggias of the Muses, and within them berry-producing plants were grown to attract songbirds.

Around the octagonal Fountain of the Dolphins Ⓞ , below some stairs, a stepped ramp leads down to the next terrace. A greatly elongated crawfish, its head and front claws emanating from the middle of the stairs at the top of the ramp and its rear claws hanging over top of the Fountain of the River Gods that stands on the terrace below, forms a *catena d'acqua*, or water chain (fig. 4.25; Ⓞ). Its

linked curves both create and echo the movement of the swirling water that spills over the shallow shell-like basins set within it. Thus, out of the wreck of the Deluge, Cardinal Gambara can be seen to be harnessing water for human welfare. The water spilling through the beneficent crayfish's claws symbolically becomes the Tiber and the Arno as it falls into the basin flanked by the two great river gods (fig. 4.26). Their cornucopias denote the fertility that water brings to the land, a fertility that is emphasized by the statues of Flora and Pomona standing in niches within the retaining wall near the base of the steps leading from the terrace above. In the middle of this terrace, which is flanked by rows of plane trees, stands the Fountain of the Table. The stone table with its central water channel and bubbling jets provided Cardinal Gambara and his guests with an experience similar to that of ancient Romans whose banqueting arrangements sometimes included pools upon which servants floated food (see figs. 2.42, 2.46).

The Fountain of Lights Ⓞ links the Cardinal's dining terrace with the water theater below, a concentric construction of upper concave and lower convex steps. One hundred sixty small jets shoot

upward from small lamps when the fountain is turned on; water pours from the sides of each step into a channel in the one below. From the terrace of the Fountain of Lights, one gazes down upon a series of garden compartments outlined in boxwood and a central water parterre. Within the water parterre Ⓞ is a circular island, recalling perhaps the Marine Theater at Hadrian's Villa (fig. 4.27; see fig. 2.44). The loggias of the twin *palazzine* open onto the garden, and in them one finds frescoes depicting the Villa Farnese at Caprarola, the Villa d'Este at Tivoli, and the Villa Lante itself. In this part of the garden, wild nature has been thoroughly tamed by art, and Cardinal Gambara is seen as the patron of this transformation. Cardinal Gambara's original centerpiece of the island terrace, a water-oozing spire (*meta sudans*), was replaced in the seventeenth century by four bronze youths holding aloft Cardinal Alessandro Peretti Montalto's device of three mountains and a star. The surrounding water parterre was meant to evoke an ancient *naumachia*, a flooded theater where mock naval battles were held. In each of its four ponds is a small stone boat holding stone arquebusers. These were engineered to fire jets of water toward the central fountain.

4.28. Sculpture of a giant tearing a young man apart, Sacro Bosco, Bomarzo. After 1542. Carved from the native rock, this ensemble represents a scene from *Orlando Furioso* and is believed to express Orsini's passionate despair over the rejection of his suit by a young woman with whom he had fallen in love some years after his wife's death.



4.29. Hell Mask, Sacro Bosco, Bomarzo. The legend above the Hell Mask, drawn from Dante, reads in translation: "Cast away every thought, you who enter here." But instead of embarking upon a terrifying journey into the underworld, Orsini's guests were actually being invited into a banquet pavilion. The huge stone tongue within the Hell Mask served as a table and its eyes as windows.

tearing a young man apart is derived from a scene in *Orlando Furioso* and may refer to Orsini's grief after being rejected by a young woman; whereas the war elephant carrying a dead soldier with its trunk and other fantastical figures grouped around a gaping Hell Mouth bearing an inscription derived from Dante resemble the monsters at the entrance to the underworld in the *Aeneid* (figs. 4.28, 4.29). Like the Villa d'Este and Villa Lante, the *sacro bosco* of Bomarzo is a domain of allusions. Its architecture and sculpture represent various literary themes, not least of which is the theme of the sacred wood itself, a deity-haunted precinct, an Arcadia, or *locus amoenus* like those found in Ovid or Virgil. One may approach this curious place therefore with a disposition to look for humanistic literary themes, autobiographical and philosophical allusions, a great deal of epigrammatic didacticism, and a fascination with the antique and the exotic such as propels Colonna's narrative in the

Hypnerotomachia Poliphili—indeed, the same kind of Renaissance appetite for marvels as is found in Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

Much of the garden's intended meaning is obviously lost upon the modern visitor who is directed to the garden of the Villa Orsini by signs pointing to the "Parco dei Mostri" (Park of Monsters), an invitation for tourists to stop and gawk at a collection of fantastic forms, some of which are carved out of the living rock, a soft tufa. Lacking familiarity with the literary symbolism that was the common currency of humanist intellectuals, one may at first wonder: Is this an exhibition showing the hallucinations of a deranged brain? Is it a sixteenth-century version of Coney Island with some of the twentieth-century amusement park's topsy-turvy atmosphere and penchant for the freakish, the magical, and the macabre.

Although now exploited commercially as a local wonder, the garden at Bomarzo, in fact, provides a fascinating window on the landscape of the Renaissance. Count Orsini, a renowned military captain and friend of several eminent men of letters, inherited the property at Bomarzo in 1542. Shortly thereafter he married Giulia Farnese to whom he was apparently deeply devoted, as evidenced by the small temple commemorating her, which is the culmination of the visitor's itinerary through the garden. Interrupted by the count's military campaigns, the building of the *sacro bosco* nevertheless became his obsession and occupied his imagination until his death in 1585.

Bomarzo's lack of a tautly geometric plan is explained by the fact that it was built by several different architects who attempted to express the owner's literary and personal passions over a long period of time. The result is a closer approximation in spirit to the multivalent, initiatory, and allegorical character of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* than perhaps any other Renaissance garden. Its disorganized appearance and the discrepancies in scale among its monuments are further explained by the fact that these fantastic forms were carved from various natural boulders strewn about the site. There is even uncertainty as to the point of entry, although logic points to the northeast corner, where two sphinxes bear legends enjoining the visitor to discern with awe and amazement the marvelous character of the works that lie beyond.

Bomarzo is a unique expression of landscape art, and its inherent theatricality points the way to the dramatic character of seventeenth-century Baroque design, a stylistic development we will trace in the next chapter. Here we will turn our attention to villas of a different character in which abstract mathematical composition and architectural spatial configuration is much more important than humanist iconography.