## [6]
THE CAPITOLINE HILL

Medieval Rome had no centre. Other Italian towns that had been smaller in antiquity grew in clusters about their ancient squares, while Rome gradually shrank until its fora and major churches were on the outskirts, and the remnants of a metropolis settled in compressed disorder along the banks of the Tiber. When the city government decided to raise a communal palace in the twelfth century, it chose the deserted site of the Tabularium on the slope of the Capitoline hill overlooking the Republican Forum. The decision must have been dictated by the dream of *renovatio* – the restoration of ancient glory – as the hill had been the site of the *Arx* of the earliest settlers and of the major temples of Imperial Rome.[1] Isolated from the everyday life of the city on a summit without paved accesses, the Capitol, or Campidoglio as the Romans called it, failed until the sixteenth century to arouse sufficient civic pride to foster the construction of a monumental communal piazza such as nearly every major Italian city had produced in the Middle Ages. We owe to this delay one of the most imposing architectural compositions of all time; nowhere but in Rome had a Renaissance architect been given the opportunity to create a grandiose environment for the political life of a great city.

It was lack of opportunity rather than of desire that deterred early Renaissance designers from executing ambitious civic schemes. Every architectural theorist of the Renaissance was a philosopher of urbanism; Alberti and Leonardo thought primarily of improving the appearance and convenience of existing towns; Filarete and Francesco di Giorgio drew ideal, geometrically perfect projects to be raised anew. But their schemes remained on paper, and only in occasional provincial villages, such as Pienza, Cortemaggiore, or Vigevano, or in the refurbishing of existing squares, could modern ideas be tested. Unfortunately, the largest planning project of the sixteenth century was totally destroyed: the town of Castro, redesigned by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger for Pope Paul III as the capital of a Duchy fabricated for the Pope's son.[2]

The square at Pienza, of 1456/8–64 [59], is the only Quattrocento scheme comparable to the Campidoglio. Built for Pope Pius II by Alberti's follower Bernardo
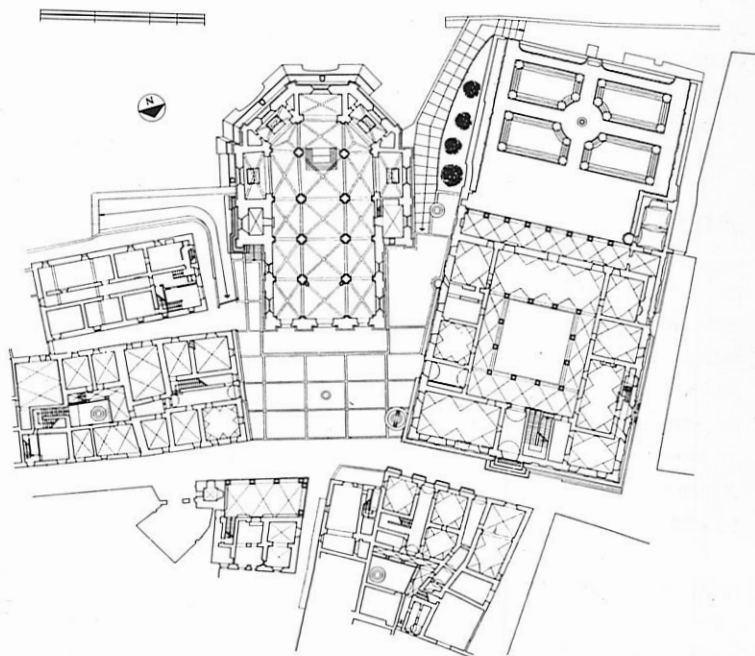
59. Pienza, cathedral square. Plan

Rossellino, it was the core of the town's life, containing the cathedral at the centre, and, on three sides, the palaces of the Bishop, the Piccolomini family and the Commune.[3] By chance, the plan is trapezoidal, like Michelangelo's [65], because of the axes of the pre-existing streets on either side, and because the expansion in width opened prospects past the cathedral transepts over a panorama of Tuscan valleys and hills. Though the major street runs through the base of the trapezoid, a lesser one enters, like the Capitoline *cordonata*, on the principal axis. Rossellino divided the piazza into rectangles by horizontal and vertical bands which help to draw together the façades and lead the eye towards the cathedral. The projects of Rossellino and Michelangelo have similar devices: the regular plan, symmetrically organized about the entrance axis of the central building; the systematization of the entrance ways into the piazza, and the pavement pattern calculated to integrate the several buildings. But the effect is quite different; the Pienza buildings are diverse in size and scale, and above all, in style; the sole monument within the square – a wellhead – is eccentrically placed on the right edge. The harmonious relationship among independent units, characteristic of the Quattrocento (cf. Chapter 1), focused attention on the individual buildings, and spatial effects were a by-product of the design of the enframing masses. Only in the last generation of the fifteenth century did architects begin to think of single elements as a function of the whole – to regard a given environment not merely as a neutral repository for a work of art, but as something that might be formed and controlled by the manipulation of voids and the coordination of masses. The difference in approach is illuminated by a similar change in the music of this generation; the polyphonic structure which produced harmonies through the superposition of independent melodies began to give way to homophonic forms in which the several lines were subordinate to harmonies constructed vertically to produce

60. Capitoline Hill. View

sequences of chords; a concordance of voices became primary.[4]

The new spirit, foreseen in certain sketches of Francesco di Giorgio, appeared in the planning schemes of Leonardo and Giuliano da Sangallo, but was first applied in practice by Bramante. In his plan of 1502 for the precinct of the Tempietto of San Pietro in Montorio, the central building was not intended to stand isolated in a neutral space as it does today, but to be the nucleus of a scheme which controlled the total environment, which formed palpable spatial volumes as well as architectural bodies, in such a way that the observer would be entirely enveloped in a composition that he could grasp only as a whole. Two years later Bramante applied the principles of environmental control to the most monumental programme of the age, the Cortile del Belvedere [107]. Here his raw material was an entire mountain side; his design had to impose the authority of intellect upon nature. Inspired by antique precedents, he devised a sequence of rectangular courts on ascending levels, bound by stairways and ramps of varying form and framed by loggias. His principles of organization were: first, emphasis on the central axis (marked by a centralized monumental fountain in the lowest court, a central stairway and niche in the central court, and a focal one-storey exedra in the garden at the upper level, the last already destroyed by Michelangelo in [107]); second, the symmetrical design of the lateral façades; and third, a perspective construction in three dimensions devised for an observer in a fixed position within the Papal stanze, and reinforced by the diminishing heights of the loggias as they recede towards the 'vanishing point' at the rear.[5]

Michelangelo must have borrowed certain elements of his composition from the Belvedere; the fact that he used a replica of the Senatore staircase in remodelling Bramante's exedra in 1551 [60, 106] indicates his awareness of the similarity of the two plans. Both required the regular-

ization of rolling hillsides, the integration of pre-existing buildings, and covered porticoes on either side. Several of Bramante's devices were applicable to the Campidoglio, particularly the central monument and stairway used for axial emphasis, and the niche centred in a triangular plane formed by ramps. Bramante's static perspective construction was unsuitable to the Capitoline topography and was anyhow uncongenial to Michelangelo's interest in movement through space; but the Campidoglio plan does fix the observer's viewpoint momentarily by forcing him to enter the piazza on the central axis at the only point from which the composition can be viewed as a whole.

The common feature of the two plans is a unity achieved by the organization more than by the character of the component parts, a unity imposed by general principles – axis, symmetry, convergence – which command the voids as well as the architectural bodies. The actual form of certain elements might be changed without disturbing the organization – for example, the Marcus Aurelius monument could be a fountain; and this illuminates what Michelangelo meant when he said in speaking of axial compositions (p.37): 'the means are unrestricted and may be chosen at will.' What distinguishes Michelangelo from his predecessor is that his choice of means more effectively reinforces the principles of organization and binds the Campidoglio into a coherent unity. His individuality emerges in dynamic composition; the elements in the Campidoglio do not produce the restful progression of the Belvedere, but are directed towards a dramatic climax at the portal of the Senators' palace. Internal tensions built up by contrasts of equally potent forms – horizontals and verticals in the façades; oval and trapezoid in the pavement – offer diversions and ambiguities that only amplify the ultimate confluence towards the goal. This crescendo of forms was destined to become archetypal in civic planning; though the vigour and ingenuity of the Campidoglio have rarely

been equalled, the U-shaped plan, the convergence of low wings towards a dominant central accent, the double-ramped stairway and the centralized monument were to become characteristic components of urban and villa design in the following centuries.

On 10 December 1537, 'Master Michelangelo, sculptor', appeared on a list of foreigners awarded Roman citizenship in a ceremony at the Capitol;[6] in the same month, he probably started designing for the statue of Marcus Aurelius – which Pope Paul III had brought to the hill against his advice – a pedestal, the shape and orientation of which implies the conception of the entire plan. No more is known of the circumstances leading to his project for the Piazza; but certain conditions of the commission may be
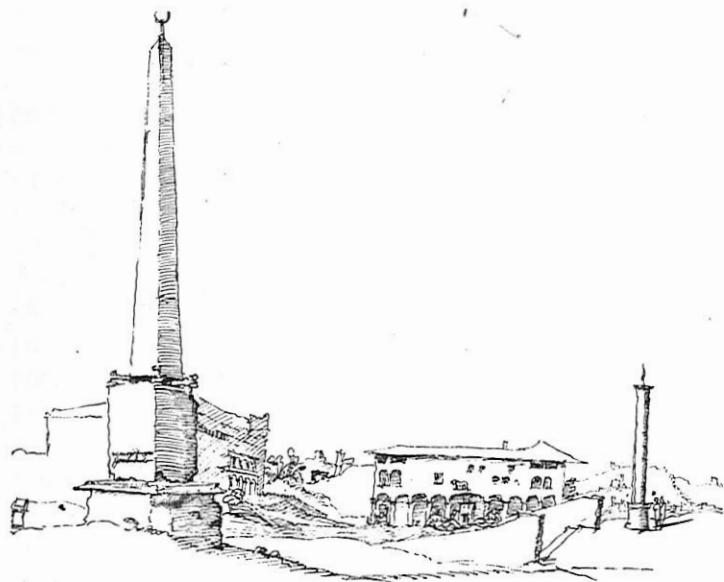
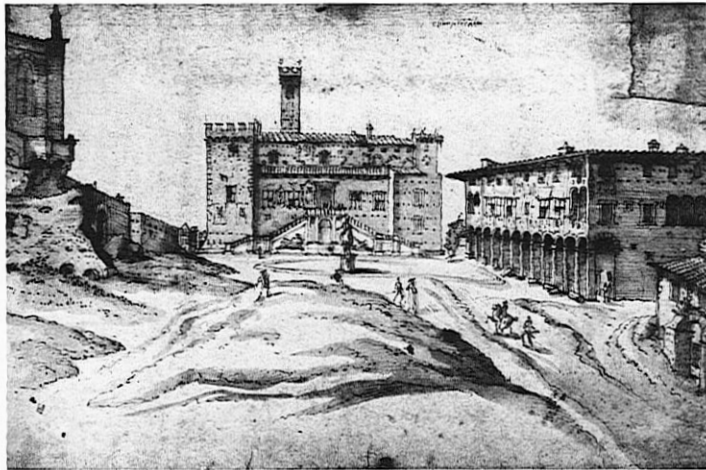61. Capitoline Hill. View, 1535–6
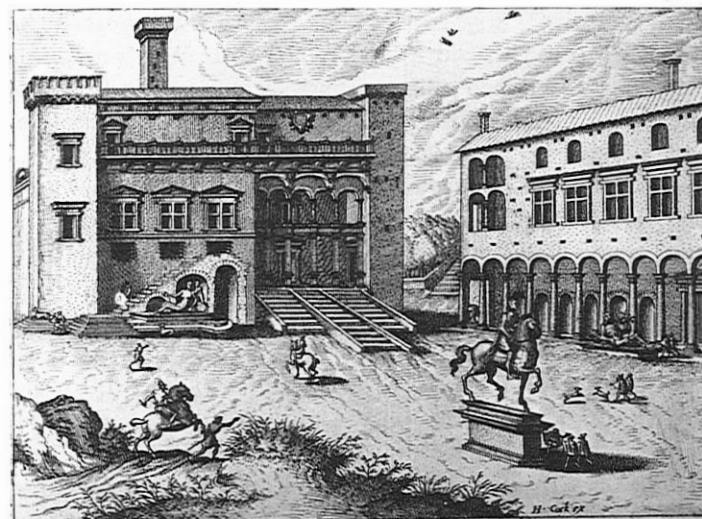
62. H. Cock. Capitoline Hill. View as of *c.*1544–5
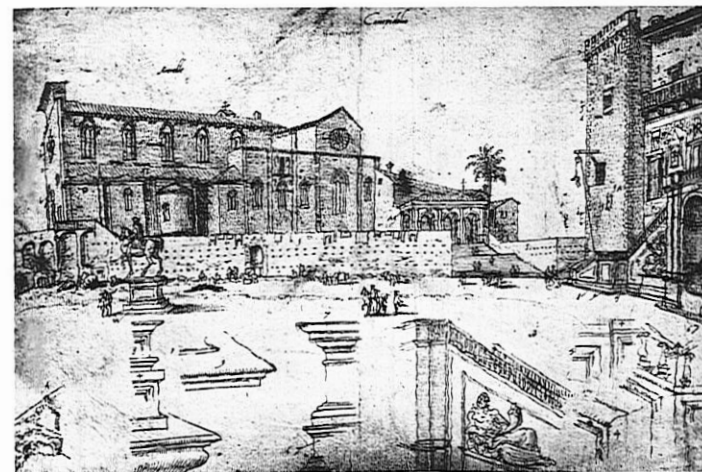
63. Capitoline Hill. View, *c.*1554–60

deduced from knowledge of the site in these years. The statue had been placed in an uneven plateau in the saddle of the hill between the northern peak occupied by the church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli and the southern rise towards the Tarpeian Rock [61]. Two structures bordered the plateau: the medieval Senators' palace on the east, and the Quattrocento Conservators' palace on the south. The only paved access was a stairway descending from the transept of the Aracoeli; towards the city the slope of the hill, creased by muddy footpaths [64], fell sharply off to the west. Michelangelo must have been asked to submit proposals, first, for an entrance from the city, second, for the conversion of the plateau into a level paved area, and third, for a modest restoration of the dilapidated palaces.

The plan that transformed the disorderly complex into a symmetrical composition unifying five entrances, a piazza, and three palace fronts [65–7] was too extraordinary to have been foreseen by lay administrators; Michelangelo must have found in their mundane programme an inspir-

64. Capitoline Hill. View, c. 1554–60
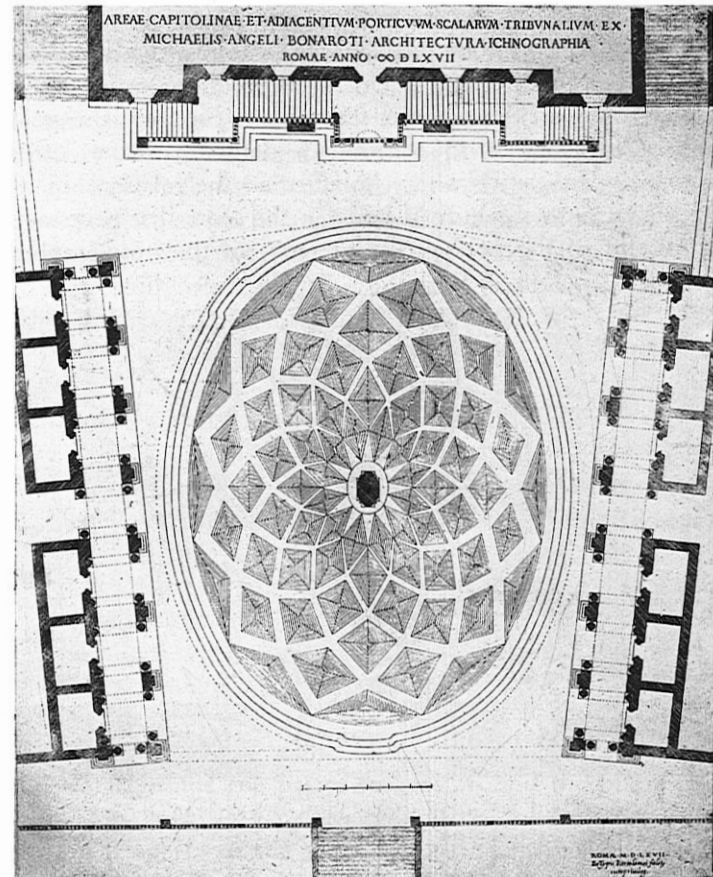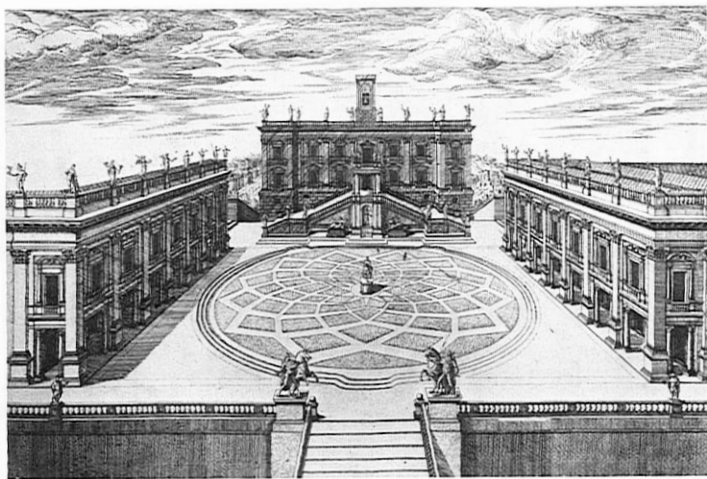
65. Capitoline Hill. Plan, after Michelangelo, 1567

ation for a design the grandiose character of which persuaded them to raise their goals. The Conservators may not have assented easily: their budget was restricted throughout the sixteenth century, and they cannot have anticipated proposals to build a new campanile simply to emphasize the axis, and to raise a third palace along the left

side of the square the function of which was to be purely aesthetic. Yet without the 'Palazzo Nuovo' (the name indicates the absence of a practical purpose), no order could be imposed on the scheme; it achieved precisely the goal that Michelangelo so vigorously defined in the letter quoted on page 37, where he affirmed the relationship of architecture to the human body in the sense that necessary similarity of the eyes and uniqueness of the nose implies

66. Capitoline Hill. Perspective, after Michelangelo, 1569

that architectural elements to the left of a central axis must be mirrored by those on the right, while the central element must be unique. Aside from the gratuitous addition of a palace front, economy was a major determinant in Michelangelo's solution; he accepted the condition that the existing palaces were to be retained intact and merely to be covered with new façades. This gave his patrons the freedom to execute the project in stages, according to their means; the Senators' stairway could be finished fifty years before the façade, and the Conservators' façade be built in

one-bay sections without demolishing the earlier façade or interrupting the normal functions of the offices inside.

In accepting the existing conditions, Michelangelo had to rationalize the accidental orientation of the two palaces, the axes of which formed an 80° angle. An irregularity that might have defeated a less imaginative designer became the catalyst that led Michelangelo to use a trapezoidal plan and to develop from this figure other features of his scheme; he so masterfully controlled this potential disadvantage that it appears quite purposeful.

In the engraved plan and perspectives after Michelangelo's design [65, 66] only those elements are specified that may be seen by an observer within the square: of the five access stairways only the first steps are indicated, and nothing is shown of the palaces except the façades and porticoes. Obviously the project was not envisaged as a complex of individual building blocks, but as an outdoor room with three walls. This is a response to topographical conditions that are falsified by engravings and modern photographs [60] where the observer is artificially suspended in mid-air. In actuality, one cannot grasp the composition from a distance; it unfolds only upon arrival at the level of the piazza, as upon entering a huge *salone*. So Michelangelo did not continue the palace façades around the buildings; they stop short at the corners as if to indicate that they belong properly to the piazza. Consequently, the Palazzo Nuovo was planned simply as a portico with offices; the present interior court is a seventeenth-century interpolation. Michelangelo built the niched wall that appears in [64] just at the rear of the offices (note the shallow roof in [66]).

Another explanation for the apparent artificiality of the solution is the immemorial function of the Campidoglio as the site of solemn public ceremonies performed in the open air. The piazza was to be the chief locus of civic events, rather than the conference halls, prisons and tribunal within
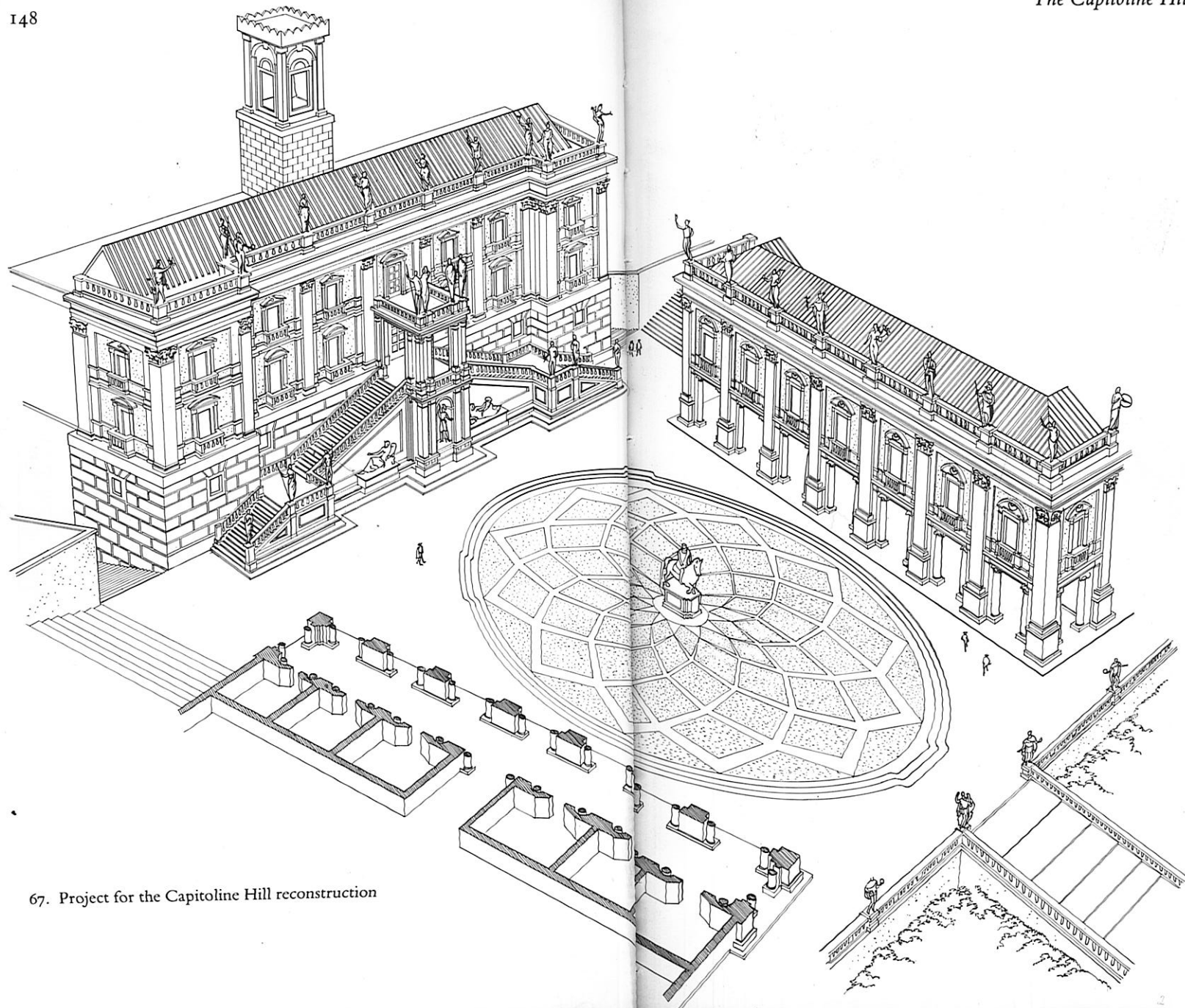
67. Project for the Capitoline Hill reconstruction

68. Francisco d'Ollanda. Statue of Marcus Aurelius, 1538–9

69. Statue of Marcus Aurelius on Michelangelo's base

the palaces. The average citizen would come to the hill only to witness some ritual that demanded an awesome and spectacular setting. Perhaps the project was visualized as a translation into permanent materials of those arches, gates, and façades of wood and canvas erected in the sixteenth century for the triumphal entries and processions of great princes. Indeed, an occasion of this kind prompted the renovation of the Capitol. When the Emperor Charles V entered Rome in 1536, the lack of a suitable access and the disreputable condition of the piazza combined with political considerations (it was only nine years after the sack of the city by his troops) to frustrate the enactment on the hill of the traditional climax to an Imperial triumph. The Pope's determination to acquire the statue of Marcus Aurelius for the Campidoglio in 1537 appears to have been the initial reaction to the embarrassment of the previous year.

In order to place the equestrian statue properly when it arrived in 1538, an overall plan was needed, since it had to be purposefully related to the existing buildings. Michelangelo's plan must have been produced at that time since the oval statue pedestal, which mirrors the proposed form of the piazza, bears an inscription of 1538, and appears in a drawing made shortly after by Francisco d'Ollanda [68]. The oval area, with its vigorous stellate pattern [65], is one of the most imaginative innovations of the Renaissance: set off by a ring of three steps descending to its depressed rim, it rises in a gentle domical curve to the level of the surrounding piazza at the centre. The oval was almost unknown in earlier architecture: Michelangelo had proposed it in projects for the interior of the tomb of Julius II, and it appears in church and villa sketches by Baldassare Peruzzi; but humanistic distaste for 'irregular' figures discouraged its use.[7] Further, it was traditional to treat pavements – particularly in outdoor spaces – in rectilinear patterns, either in grid form [59, 84] or, in the courts of large palaces,

as bands radiating out from the centre. But neither solution was adaptable to the trapezoidal boundary of the Campidoglio. The problem, so elegantly solved by the oval, was to find an organizing figure that would emphasize the centre where the statue was to be set, and yet not counteract the longitudinal axis of both the piazza and the statue itself. While the circles, squares and regular polygons that formed the vocabulary of the Quattrocento could meet only the first condition, the oval combined in one form the principles of centrality and axiality; it was this dual character that later made it so popular in church design. As a pure oval, however, Michelangelo's figure would have conceded nothing to its trapezoidal frame, but it contains a further refinement: three concave recessions formed in the surrounding ring of steps suggest to the visitor entering from the cordonata the expansion of the piazza towards the rear, and at the same time introduce him to the choice of two ascents to the Senators' palace.

The offer of alternative routes imposes an unclassical ambivalence: while the visitor enters the piazza, and later the Senators' palace, on axis, his direct progress is barred first by the statue, and then by the entrances to the double-ramped stairway. He is not only forced to choose between two equally efficient routes, but is distracted by an emphatic stellate pavement that suggests movement of a different sort, along curvilinear paths towards and away from the centre. He thereby becomes intensely involved in the architectural setting to a degree never demanded by earlier Renaissance planning. By forcing the observer into a personal solution of this paradox, Michelangelo endowed movement, which usually is just a way of getting from one place to another, with aesthetic overtones.

The stairway to the Senators' palace [66], though also anticipated in Peruzzi's sketches, was the first of its kind to be adapted to a palace façade. Like the oval, this form solved several problems at once: it pre-empted a minimum of

space in the piazza, it gave direct access to the great hall on the *piano nobile*, and it was the perfect setting for the reclining river gods that had previously blocked the entrance to the Conservators' palace [61]. Its purpose was expressive as well as practical; the dynamic effect of the triangular form, which so powerfully coordinates the three façades and masks their inequality in height, had been evoked by Michelangelo in organizing the figures of the Medici chapel and in his fortification drawings [21, 53]; perhaps it was initially suggested by the analogy of the river gods to the reclining allegories in the chapel. The baldachin at the summit of the flights, which may have been devised as a ceremonial setting for the appearance of dignitaries, diverts the angular accents of the stairway into the mainstream of the central axis, echoing the form of the campanile above.

As the stairway covered most of the lower storey behind and raised the entrance to the level of the *piano nobile*, the façade could not conform to the three-storey Florentine tradition exemplified by the Farnese Palace [75]. The lower storey had to be treated as a basement distinct from the upper floors; its drafted facing emphasized this distinction and also expressed the rude character of the prisons behind. In effect, the palace became a two-storey structure like those on either side, so that it proved possible to harmonize the composition by adapting to all three palaces the colossal order with its heavy cornice and crowning balustrade; within this syntax the central palace could be differentiated by the design of its apertures.

The open porticoes of the lateral palaces belong, like the loggia of Brunelleschi's Foundling Hospital in Florence and the Procuratie of St Mark's Square in Venice, as much to the square as to the buildings [70, 71]. They even favour the piazza by screening the entrance portals within, so as to increase the dominance of the longitudinal axes over the cross-axes. They are extraordinary in structure as well as in form. Early Renaissance porticoes had been a succession of vaults

supported by arches. Though Alberti insisted that antique precedent demanded that arches be sustained by piers while columns should carry only lintels, his advice was ignored before 1500; Quattrocento arcades are generally columnar. Bramante reintroduced the column-and-lintel system in open loggias in the Cloister of Santa Maria della Pace and in the Vatican façade (now Cortile di San Damaso), but only in upper storeys, where the interior could be spanned in wood. Peruzzi's entrance to the Massimi palace of 1535 was perhaps the first revival of the ancient technique of spanning a portico with stone beams, though on a much more modest scale than at the Campidoglio. Michelangelo's combination of column and pier provided sufficient bracing to allow expansion of the system to monumental scale. The scale actually precluded the use of arches; openings as broad as those of the Conservators' palace could not have been arched without penetrating into the pre-existing second storey. Furthermore, Michelangelo preferred the effects of post-and-beam construction; in 1548 he walled up Sangallo's arch over the central window of the Farnese Palace to replace it with a lintel [85], and on the one occasion when he used structural arches on the exterior of a building – at the Porta Pia, where they were imperative – he disguised the form [123]. Semicircular arches have a static effect uncongenial to Michelangelo's powerful interplay of horizontal and vertical forces. Although Michelangelo used monolithic lintels or beams over the columns of the piazza façade of the Conservatori, the portico itself is spanned by flat 'arches' – horizontal members composed of three separate voussoir stones doubtless joined internally by iron braces; these are made to look as much as possible like monoliths [72].

In the Conservators' palace, this interplay recalls the effects of a framed structure; the façade construction is as close to a skeletal frame as it is possible to attain in stone. Where the columns, pilasters and entablatures of San Lor-

enzo and St Peter's [12, 94] merely express stresses of load
and support that actually are absorbed by the wall-mass,
here they really do the work that they appear to do. The
cornice is supported by the pilaster-piers and the lower
entablature by the columns; the façade wall is no longer a
major bearer of loads; it is itself supported on beams and
takes so little stress that della Porta was able to replace
almost an entire section with glass [70]. Consequently, so
little wall is left that attention is drawn to the members,
where it is held by the contrast of their rugged texture and
light, advancing colour to the smooth surface and receding
colour of the brick wall-plane. But the stability of the
portico [72] and façade is not wholly due to the 'skeleton';
it requires stiffening by internal walls perpendicular to the
principal axis – those in the rooms above, and especially by
those of the lower floor [65], which Michelangelo ingen-

70. Palazzo de' Conservatori. View
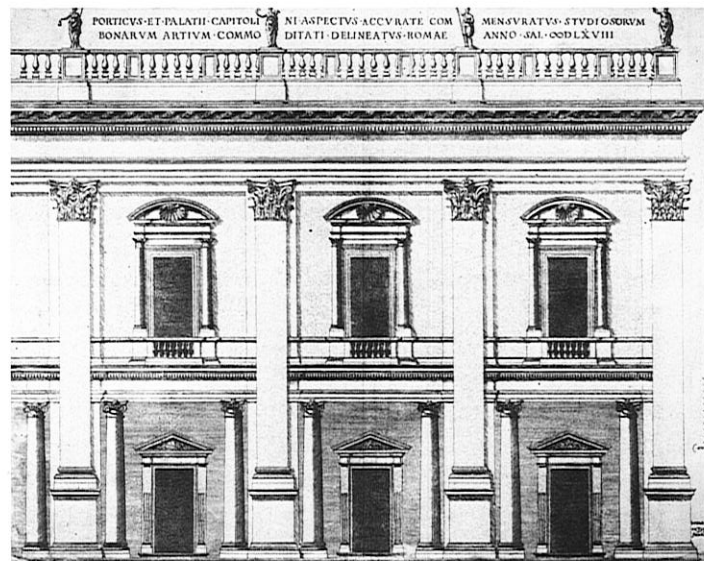
71. Palazzo de' Conservatori, 1568

iously calculated to work both as buttresses and as parti-
tions between the guild offices.

Because the Conservatori design gives the antique order
a structural as well as a decorative function, it may be used
profitably to illustrate the relationship of building tech-
niques to expression in Michelangelo's architecture. The
decision to unify the three palaces by a continuity of hor-
izontal accents indicated lintel construction and emphatic
cornices. In the final design it appears that Michelangelo
intended to keep the potentially overwhelming horizontal
accents in check by applying verticals of equal power: the
colossal pilasters which, in embracing two storeys, interrupt
the continuity of the lower entablature and, together with
the columns, window-colonnettes and balustrade figures,
establish a tense equilibrium of forces. But a structural
analysis reverses the process proving that ingenious devices

72. Palazzo de' Conservatori. Interior of portico

were necessary to prevent *verticals* from dominating the façade. The loads are concentrated in heavy masses of masonry extending from the foundations to the cornice, out of which the pilasters are carved [65, 70]. To de-emphasize these, Michelangelo *made it appear that the pilasters alone sustain the weight. The remaining surfaces of the pier-mass on either side of the pilasters he disguised as superficial decorative bands – first, by covering them with horizontal relief elements that make them seem discontinuous, and

second, by applying to the wall-surface above the windows horizontal bands of the same dimensions, so that the recessed pier-surfaces should be read as part of an applied wall-frame. So the colossal pilaster order functions as a means of diminishing rather than of emphasizing the preponderant verticality of the piers; perhaps Bramante had a similar purpose when he first used the colossal order on the piers of St Peter's. Conversely, the horizontals had to be exaggerated to maintain an equilibrium, and again Bramante's inventions were called into service: the crowning balustrade, which appeared first in the Tempietto of 1502, augments the crown of the building to nearly six metres without substantially increasing its weight; the window-balconies which Bramante had used in the House of Raphael diminish the verticality of the apertures without obstructing light.

When the vocabulary of the Conservators' palace was adapted to the Senators' façade it became purely expressive, since there were no structural problems in facing the existing medieval structure [64]. Now the pier surfaces, which had originally masqueraded as ornament, became honestly ornamental; and it is this change in function which suggests that the design of the lateral palaces preceded that of the Senators'. Moreover, it strengthens the hypothesis that the Campidoglio façades were designed in tentative sketches if not in their final form before the elevations of St Peter's (1546–7); a similar motif appears there in a context that must be ornamental, since the structure depends wholly on wall-masses and not on surface members.

To appreciate fully the significance of the Campidoglio design we must understand what might be called its subject-matter as well as its architectural character. Like the Cortile del Belvedere, which was built to rival the great villas of antiquity, the Campidoglio was a monumental symbol in which the haunting dream of ancient grandeur

became concrete. Like paintings of their time, both communicated a specific content of a more complex sort than is usually found in architecture.[8]

Sculpture played a peculiarly formative role in the evolution of the Belvedere and the Campidoglio. Distinguished collections of antiquities assembled in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries stimulated the urge to build; the statues had priority, and the architecture took shape around them. The Belvedere was planned as a setting for and approach to the papal museum, and the resurgence of the Capitol awaited the arrival of its equestrian centrepiece.

The ancient bronzes donated to the people of Rome by Sixtus IV and Innocent VIII in the fifteenth century were chosen more for their associations than for their beauty. They were objects of almost totemic power which the medieval mind had endowed with the responsibility for sustaining the legal and imperial symbolism of antiquity. A figure of the mother wolf which had nursed Romulus and Remus, mythical founders of Rome, was placed over the entrance of the old Conservators' palace [61] – and to emphasize her significance, a pair of suckling infants was added by a Quattrocento sculptor. A colossal Constantinian head, and a hand from the same figure bearing a sphere, were placed in the portico [62]; the medieval pilgrim's guidebook called the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* identified these as the remains of a colossal 'Phoebus, that is, god of the Sun, whose feet stood on earth while his head touched heaven, who held a ball in his hand, meaning that Rome ruled the whole world'. Both stood by the Lateran, near the *Marcus Aurelius*, throughout the Middle Ages, in a spot of which the *Mirabilia* says 'There the law is final'. A third figure of Hercules, whose relation to the city was less firmly established, was installed on a base pointedly inscribed 'IN MONUMENTUM ROMANAE GLORIAE'. Further additions were made in the sixteenth century: Leo X installed the colossal statues of two river gods before the

Conservators' portico [61], and donated reliefs depicting the triumphal procession of Marcus Aurelius on to the hill.

Some of these pieces were integrated into Michelangelo's scheme, and others were moved indoors, but the theme *Romanae gloriae* was reinforced by new acquisitions, and made explicit by inscriptions. A tablet alongside the portal of the Conservators' palace reads: 'S.P.Q.R., imitating as far as possible its ancestors in spirit and deed, restored the Capitolium decayed by the ravages of time, the year 2320 after the founding of the city.' But on the opposite side of the portal, a similar inscription, dated 'in the year of our salvation 1568' consigns 'to Jesus Christ, author of all good' the care of the people of Rome and of the Campidoglio 'once dedicated to Jove'. The twin tablets are a clue to hidden meanings in the design of the Campidoglio and a reminder that a Christian motivation underlies the pagan splendour.

It was Pope Paul III rather than the city fathers who insisted that the statue of Marcus Aurelius be brought to the hill against the wishes of its proper owner, the Chapter of St John in the Lateran. Michelangelo opposed the project, but managed only to dissuade the Pope from expropriating the statues of Jupiter's twin sons, Castor and Pollux, with their rearing horses, that had stood throughout the Middle Ages on the crown of the Quirinal Hill [126]. It is difficult to explain the choice of the *Marcus Aurelius*, not because the meaning of the transfer is unclear, but because it had so many meanings. The most important, perhaps, is that the statue, one of the finest and best preserved ancient bronzes known to the Middle Ages, had grown, rather like the *Wolf*, into a symbol of law and government, so that executions and punishments regularly took place before it. Consequently, once it was in place, two hallowed legal symbols were removed from the piazza: the *Wolf*, and the group with an attacking Lion on

the steps of the Senators' palace which marked the spot for the sentencing of criminals far back into the Middle Ages. In this penal role, the equestrian group was known from the earliest records in the tenth century as the *Caballus Constantini*. The convenient misnomer, which combined Imperial power and Christianity, survived throughout the Renaissance.

But another legend, nearly as old, identified the rider as *il gran' villano* ('villein', in English); it was fostered for political reasons in the twelfth century, at a moment when the Holy Roman Emperor was in bad repute in Rome. It told of a low-born folk hero in Republican – not Imperial – days who, singlehanded, captured a besieging army and its royal general and was honoured with a statue. So the figure came to symbolize a mixture of Republican, anti-monarchial *virtù* and romantic heroism that reminds one of the iconography of the French Revolution. The *villano* tradition may have led to the type of Early Renaissance equestrians: Simone Martini's *Guidoriccio*, Uccello's *Hawkwood*, Donatello's *Gattamelata*, Verrocchio's *Colleoni*, and others – all soldier adventurers of low birth rather than prelates or princes.

The inscription designed for the statue by Michelangelo identifies the rider as Antoninus Pius [68]; though the correct identification had been made in the fifteenth century, it still was not accepted generally. But in any case, both Antoninus and his adopted son and successor Marcus Aurelius were represented by Renaissance humanists as the ideal emperor – the *exemplum virtutis*: peacemaker, dispenser of justice and maecenas. Paul III must have stolen the statue both to capitalize on the public pride in the Roman heritage and its medieval glosses and to suggest that his rule of the Roman people and of the Papal States reflected the virtues of a heroic antecedent. This would explain why there was no thought of commissioning a new statue from Michelangelo or another contemporary sculptor, and why

Marcus Aurelius was not merely set into the piazza but inspired its very shape.

In Michelangelo's design [65, 66] the two river gods were given a more imposing setting before the triangular stairway, the form of which must have been influenced by their characteristic attitude of fluvial repose. Yet, if the decision to use the pair was made for formal reasons, it was essential to give it an iconic rationale. One was the Nile, supported by a sphinx; the other was the Tigris, identified by his crouching tiger; but before being reinstalled by the steps, he became the Tiber, Rome's own river, by the ingenious expedient of replacing his Mesopotamian prop with a new wolf suckling the two founding fathers. According to Pirro Ligorio, the exchange was made 'through the ignorance of a poor councillor', meaning Michelangelo, one supposes. Its purpose, however, was not to please such testy antiquarians as Ligorio, but to suggest the scope of Roman culture by linking great rivers at home and abroad.

If Rome is symbolized as the Tiber, it is incongruous that the figure in the central niche should be *Roma*, an ancient *Minerva* supplied with urban attributes. Her presence is, in fact, a makeshift solution; Michelangelo's plan was to place a *Jupiter* in the niche. The statue would have called to mind the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus which had stood on the Capitoline in antiquity, and which appears in the background of the triumphal relief displayed in the Conservators' palace. Had the god been in the centre of a triangle flanked by the two rivers, the composition might have suggested the temple pediment, with the titular deity in the dominant position.

Attention is also attracted to this area of the piazza by a baldachin or canopy over *Jupiter's* head at the top of the stairs, a curious appendage to a Renaissance façade. In late antiquity and in the Middle Ages it was one of the most universally used symbols of Imperial power. But it could

be Christian, too: in the sixteenth century one would have seen such a baldachin only over the main altar of a large church.

A visitor's first impression on ascending the hill is of the statuary along the forward edge. In the earlier engraving of Michelangelo's project (cf. [67]) four male figures adorn the balcony: they are all Imperial state portraits, and the two in the centre, who carry spheres, are Constantinian figures found for Paul III in about 1540. The second version [66] replaces two emperors by a pair of horse-trainers. They appear to be the Quirinal *Castor and Pollux* [126] sought by the Pope thirty years before; but in this respect the engraving is inexact. A second, more relaxed version of the twins, found near the Capitol in 1560, was ready for mounting [60]. So the Pope's wish came true posthumously without despoiling the Quirinal, of its traditional monuments. We may ask why Paul had so coveted the Dioscures. Contrary to my interpretation in earlier editions, it has been shown that the twins had not been identified as Dioscures in the mid sixteenth century, but were believed to be paired portraits of Alexander the Great carved in competition by Pheidias and Praxitiles. Paul III, Alexander Farnese, used references to his great namesake frequently in the ubiquitous self-glorifying artistic programmes of his pontificate.[9] Opposition to his effort to put his personal stamp on the hallowed hill was sufficiently strong to preserve the two groups in their original site to be incorporated by Michelangelo into an urban design of a later Pope [126].

After the Pope's death in 1549 the Conservators gained a greater control of the acquisition of symbolic statuary. The antiquarian-architect Pirro Ligorio identified the Dioscures set up in 1560 as coming from the ancient Curia of Pompey, and the association with that Republican hero would have made the two horse-tamers appealing to the representatives of the people, if not to the Pope. Next to the Dioscures on the forward balcony were placed, in 1590,

two still-lifes on a military theme, of Imperial origin, taken from an aqueduct near the city walls [60]. They were acquired – again no doubt at the instigation of the Conservators – because they were believed to be trophies of the victories of the Republican, anti-patrician leader Marius, which ancient sources located on the Capitoline. The original Capitoline, moreover, had been the goal of all great triumphal processions. The tradition was revived in 1571, when Marcantonio Colonna, the victor over the Turks at Lepanto, was given a glorious triumph in the antique mode which ended in ceremonies on the piazza.[10]

The outermost decorations of the balcony crowd together as many symbolic overtones as is possible in so little space. They are columns, symbolic of power, carrying spheres, symbolic of Rome's world-wide rule. To clarify the point, the columns are mileposts from the Via Appia. The theme so abundantly illustrated on the piazza was continued in the palace courts, and in the halls of the Conservators' palace, frescoed with scenes from Republican Roman history.

To support the foregoing analysis, which may appear to discover more allusion than the Cinquecento intended, we may call on a contemporary witness whose interpretation took the form of a frescoed vignette in the salone of a Roman palace [73].[11] The painter of about 1550–60 depicted the oval piazza with Marcus Aurelius in the centre, the cordonata and the rear stairway as Michelangelo had planned them. But in place of the Senators' palace are three huge chapels of pagan divinities, the central one in baldachin form. There the herm of Jupiter is the object of unreserved adoration on the part of two Romans not yet imbued with the spirit of the Counter-Reformation. Yet it is inconceivable that Christian imagery was absent from the iconographic programme. Our knowledge of Michelangelo's deep religious convictions following the period of his association with Vittoria Colonna tempts us to see the
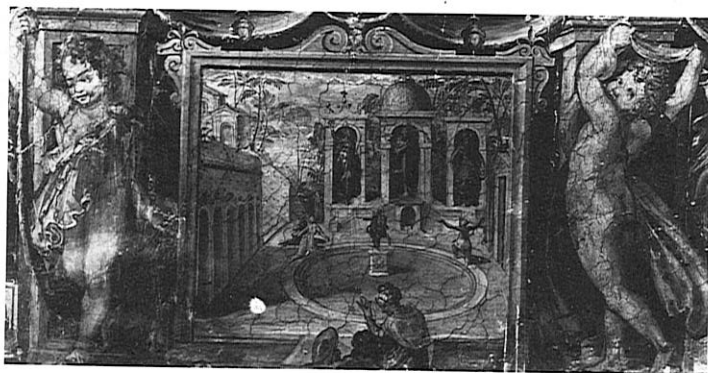
73. Anonymous fresco. *Pagan Worship on the Capitoline Hill*

central Jupiter figure as an anagogical reference to Christ; the presence of the baldachin overhead and the absence of any other member of the Roman pantheon admits such an interpretation.

Furthermore, the arrangement of the piazza unites the ancient Rome of the forum and the New Rome of the church, a connection suggested in the inscriptions quoted above as well as in the engravings which pointedly show the ruins behind the Senators' palace [66], although they are not actually visible from any standpoint in or before the piazza [60].[12]

We come finally to the most intriguing and original feature of Michelangelo's design, the central oval which supports *Marcus Aurelius* at the apex of a gentle domical mound. Tolnay has persuasively suggested that the design may be connected with the medieval designation of the Campidoglio as the *umbilicus* or *Caput Mundi*;[13] but his belief that the convex form is intended to represent the curve of the terrestrial globe is not similarly supported by tradition or texts. The curvilinear grid dividing the pavement into twelve compartments recalls a symbolism commonly used in antiquity on the interior of cupolas, where

the twelve signs of the zodiac were used to suggest the Dome of Heaven or the Music of the Spheres;[14] in Christian architecture the twelve Apostles surrounding a central figure of Christ sometimes took the place of the signs. The twelve-part division appeared almost as often in circular pavements as a kind of counter-dome. Vitruvius (V, 6) advised that the circular pavement of theatre orchestras be inscribed with four interlocking triangles forming a twelve-pointed star, since 'in the number twelve the astronomy of the celestial signs is calculated from the musical concord of the stars'. These parallel traditions were fused in Cesariano's Vitruvius edition of 1521, where an entire theatre is reconstructed as a round, domed 'Tholos' inscribed within a twelve-pointed star.[15]

While the duodecimal division in these examples is usually formed by radiating lines or by triangles, Michelangelo's complex curvilinear construction is found among a class of medieval *schemata* in circular form used to coordinate the lunar cycle with other astronomical inferences of the number twelve, such as the Hours and the Zodiac. [74] is only one of many, from a tenth-century (?) manuscript of *De Natura Rerum* of St Isidor of Seville, in which the lunations and signs appear in a form that differs from Michelangelo's chiefly in not being oval. The manuscript *schemata* of Isidor were reproduced in early printed books, establishing a contact with the sixteenth century.[16]

The fact that the prototypes were round, rather than oval, may be explained as an aesthetic prejudice: the circle was preferred in architecture prior to the sixteenth century – and in astronomy, until Kepler's time; Michelangelo introduced the oval in a project of the early years of the century, and the first oval dome was built by Vignola shortly after the foundation of the Campidoglio.[17]

The cosmological pavements and schemata do not explain the mound-like rise of Michelangelo's oval; its convexity adds a new dimension to the tradition in meaning
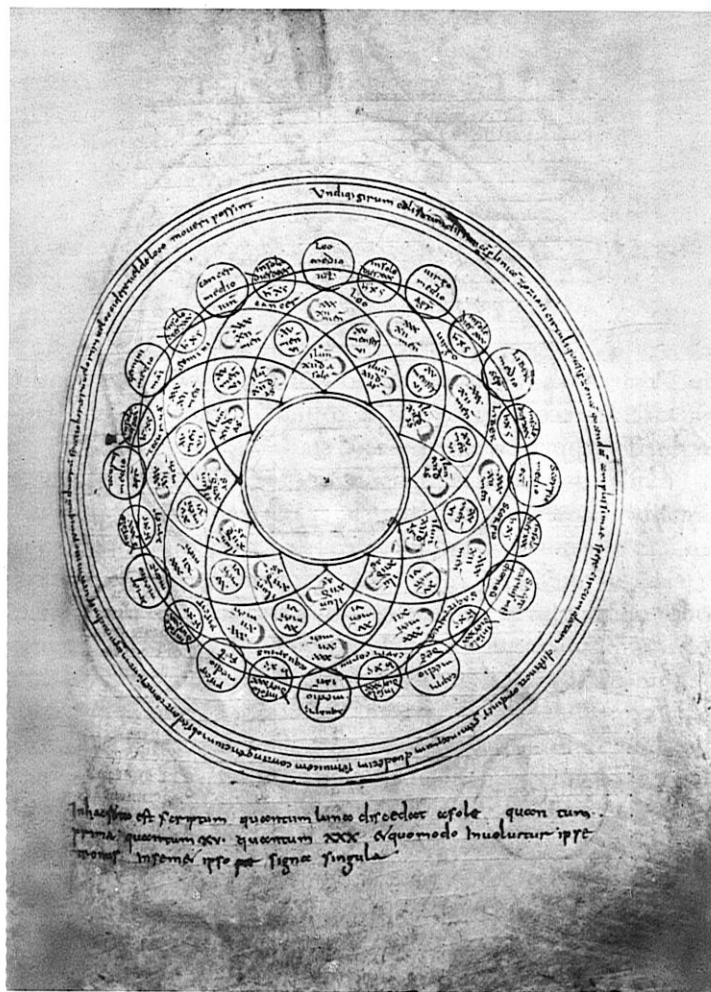
74. Isidor of Seville. Cosmological schema, ? tenth century

as well as in form. The exception to the ancients' distaste for the oval may be found in a type of military shield that was well known to Michelangelo since it was represented not only in the vault stuccoes of the Conservators' portico and on the '*Trofei di Mario*', but had been adopted by the Commune as the coat of arms of the S.P.Q.R. - it appears in wooden ceilings of the Conservators' palace dated 1516-18 and 1544.[18] As was customary with the ornamental arms of the sixteenth century, these ovals are convex in shape. While ornamental shields cannot be associated with the twelve-part division of Michelangelo's pavement, there was a type of ancient shield upon which the zodiac was represented. The legendary shield of Achilles was adorned with the celestial signs, and Alexander the Great adopted the Achillean type along with the epithet Kosmokrator - ruler of the Universe.[19] The title, and the shield along with it, was transferred to Roman Emperors. Another attribute of certain Kosmokrator portraits is a corona simulating the rays of the sun, indicating the resplendent powers of Apollo; and armoured Imperial portraits where the corona is not used have images of Apollo on the breast-plate.

Usually the snake Python appears at the centre of these shields, as it does in non-military representations of the zodiac. The myth of Python is associated with the shrine of Apollo at Delphi, where the snake reportedly dwelt under a mound-like stone known as the *omphalos* or *umbilicus*, which marked the centre of the cosmos.[20] (So the central boss on military shields came to be called the *umbilicus*.) The *omphalos* stone became an attribute of Apollo, who appears seated upon it in Greek vases and Roman coins.

The ancient Romans moved the *umbilicus mundi* figuratively from Delphi to the Forum, where it remained until medieval legend shifted it once more to the Campidoglio.[21] Here it was permanently fixed in Michelangelo's pavement, which combined its zodiacal inferences with its

mound-like form. *Marcus Aurelius*, mounted at the centre, might have been a foreign element if iconic tradition had not permitted his association with the *umbilicus*. As Kosmokrator, he succeeded to Apollo's position upon the mound, and since the ancient sculptor had not equipped him with the requisite attributes, Michelangelo placed around his base the corona of Apollo: the twelve pointed rays which also serve as the starting-points of the zodiacal pattern.

[7]
THE FARNESE PALACE

When Cardinal Alessandro Farnese became Pope Paul III in 1534, the palace that he had been building for nineteen years on the Tiber bank seemed incommensurate with his elevated position; as Vasari said, 'he felt he should no longer build a cardinal's, but a pontiff's palace'. Paradoxically, the 'pontiff's palace' was to be occupied not by the Pope, who had moved to the Vatican, but by his illegitimate son Pier Luigi, for whom he fabricated the Duchies of Castro and Nepi (in 1537) and of Parma (in 1545). The palace was to become a symbol of the temporal power which the pontificate had brought to the Farnese dynasty – not so much a home as a monumental instrument of propaganda.

A century earlier a new fashion in urban domestic architecture had been formed by the rising élite of commerce and politics. Florentine merchants of the mid fifteenth century – the Pitti, the Rucellai and especially the Medici – grasped the potential of monumental classicizing architecture as a symbol of power and of progress. The Medici palace was the earliest and most grandiose of all; towering over medieval Florentine streets and low dwellings and crowned by a huge antique cornice, it announced a new era in the evolution of the city. Contrary to popular belief, early Renaissance architecture marked the end rather than the beginning of an orderly system of town planning. Medieval ordinances had severely restricted the height, placement, overhangs and general design of private houses and palaces in order to gain a uniformity that may be appreciated still in the streets of Siena. The new palace style violently disrupted communal controls to substitute an