

3.

The Cortile Del Belvedere (Studi e Documenti per la Storia del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano, III). By James S. Ackerman. (Vatican City) 1954. 259 pp, illus. \$27.00. (U. S. distributor — G. Wittenborn & Co., 38 E. 57th St., New York)

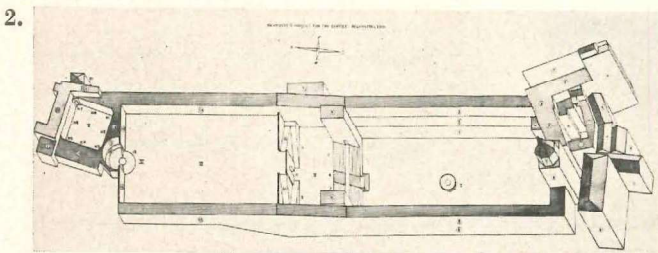
BY VINCENT J. SCULLY

THIS WORK BY ONE OF AMERICA'S most distinguished young architectural historians is the third in a series published by the Vatican Library and dedicated to the history of the Vatican buildings. The earlier volumes by other scholars treated the topography of the site and the history of the Vatican Palace in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The present volume is concerned with the most important period of all, that between 1504 and 1585, and with the historically most important domestic project ever undertaken for the Vatican, the Court of the Belvedere, designed by Bramante for Julius II.

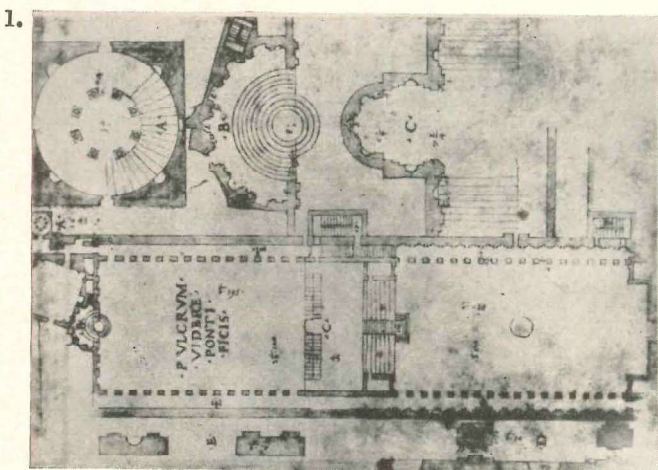
The author's task, as he points out, was primarily an

archaeological one, since Bramante's scheme for the court has been largely buried under later buildings. Because these, unlike earth, could not be removed to reveal the original complex, the author was forced to reconstruct Bramante's project through the use of sixteenth-century drawings. He has turned this requirement into an outstanding achievement. Years of patient research have turned up not only most of the drawings in European collections which can be made to bear upon the problem (Fig. 1) but also a staggering number of relevant and hitherto unpublished documents from the Vatican and other archives. The result is a careful, totally con-

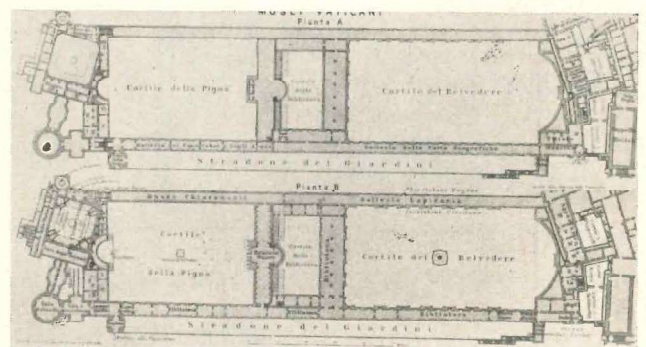
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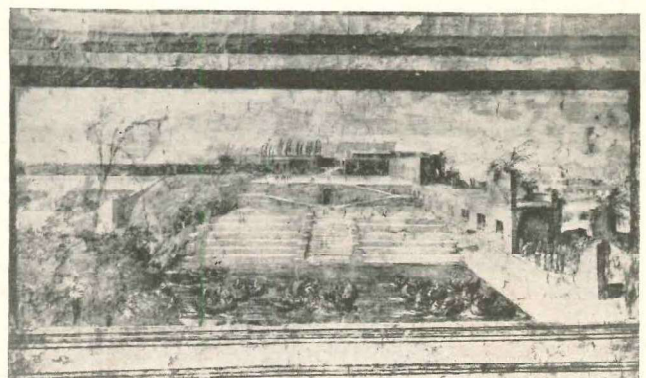
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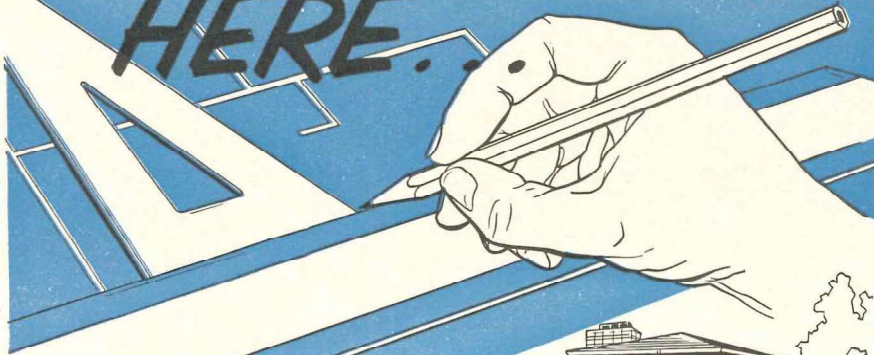


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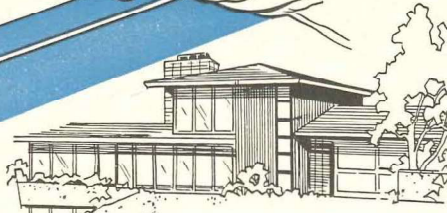


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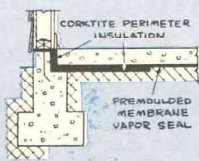
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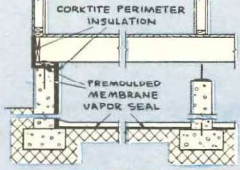
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REQUIRED READING

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6.

vincing study of the development of Bramante's project, of its fate at the hands of later architects, and of its critical importance in the history of western architecture as a whole.

After his Introduction, in which he is entirely too modest concerning the scope and importance of his work, Ackerman devotes his first chapter to a reconstruction of Bramante's scheme. This is illustrated by several magnificently conceived reconstruction drawings in isometric projection. The choice of isometric was a happy one in that it made possible not only the use of true dimensions but also a strong presentation of spatial volume, the essence of Bramante's design. (Fig. 2) In this way the reader can experience Bramante's power in walling off an extensive area of space, giving it direction by a strong axial movement, drama by changes of level using stairs and ramps, and climax in great Exedra. (Fig. 3)

Chapters II-X carefully follow the construction of the project to 1585, at which time, after certain modifications by other architects — especially Pirro Ligorio and Michelangelo — it was essentially complete. In the process Ligorio has substituted a more decorative set of details than had been envisaged in Bramante's stronger and simpler design. Ligorio and Michelangelo between them had also altered the Exedra by closing off the rear to form a corridor, changing the stairs to diagonal flights, heightening the mass above and turning it thereby into the present "Nicchione."

Only one chapter (XI) is given by Ackerman to the later history of the Belvedere, since directly after 1585 the whole complex was ruined by Sixtus V, who quite consciously destroyed the space by building the

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