

# Understanding Organised Space

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*Journey, Supra-Historical Constants, Organised Space, Design, Project*

## /Abstract

The objective of this research is the investigation on the relationship between the Italian and Portuguese architectural culture in a time span between the end of the second World War and the Carnation Revolution, that sees the fall of the Salazar regime in Portugal in 1974, paying particular attention on the figure of Portuguese architect Fernando Távora (1923-2005), one of the greatest exponents of the Portuguese architectural scene of that period. The debate that took place in those years in Italy around the design, paying attention to the relationship with the context and the right “language” to use, combined with the liveliness of the architectural landscape, pushed some Portuguese architects to have an interest in the Italian architectural sphere with which they come into contact through travels, publications and meetings. This research does not want to be an historiographical analysis of the development of projects but rather a process of synthesis of the compositional thought of the architect and the influences deriving from the Italian culture context, whether explicit or documented, but also stemmed from personal experiences and architectures visited by Távora during his travels to Italy.

The research delves into the compositional aspects of some of Távora’s projects, developed and produced at this stage of his professional career, through a parallel with several Italian buildings of the same period or belonging to classical architecture, which Távora knows and has had the chance to visit in person.

By redesigning the architectures of Távora, as well as the Italian ones examined in the analysis, it was possible to fully understand the links between the various projects and therefore developing a schematic graphic clarifying the examined aspects and support the written text.

This article is excerpted from the writer’s doctoral thesis: G. Liverani, *Contesto e progetto. Influenze italiane sull’architettura di Fernando Távora*, Università di Bologna: Bologna 2017 (Tutor Antonio Esposito).

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Since 2009 he has been working as a freelance in the **ellevuelle architetti studio**, a collective formed by Giorgio Liverani (Modigliana, FC), Luca Landi (Predappio, FC), Michele Vasumini (Forlì) and Matteo Cavina (Faenza, RA). Together they deal mainly with the theme of residential, productive and cultural recovery. In 2013 they were published in Casabella in the international selection of young designers under 30, and in 2014 they were among the 10 nominees of the Young Talent of Italian Architecture Award banned by the CNAP-PC of Rome with the Filandone di Modigliana renovation project. They are among the architects invited to rethink the transformation of the former military area Sta.Ve.Co. in Bologna, among the winners of the competition Scuole Innovative (Innovative Schools) and third place in the competition of ideas ‘Fabbrica della Meraviglia’ called by Orogel for the new administrative headquarters.

In 2019 they come second in the design competition for the construction of the new secondary school in San Piero in Bagno and among the finalists in the international design competition called by the Municipality of Milan for the design of the Scialoia School. In June 2020, they are among the 10 studios invited to the ‘young Italian architects’ meeting cycle promoted by Casabella magazine. In October 2022 they were awarded the ‘Prossima stazione Cesena’ competition for the regeneration of the complex system of public spaces between the station and the historic centre. This year they are among the winners of the 40 under 40 European design with casa bieffe, Corte San Ruffillo and the Neverending Park project in Cesena.



## Understanding Organised Space

The need to understand organised space in architecture has been an obsession for Fernando Távora since the years of his academic training until it became a constant requirement that has accompanied him throughout his life. From a young age, Távora needed knowledge beyond the architectural disciplines and ranged into literature, poetry, and other art forms. This attitude leads him to seek outside the academic world new stimuli and new certainties, not only through his relationship with relevant figures in the Portuguese architectural scene of that period, such as Viana de Lima and Carlos Ramos but also through the intense reading of Portuguese literature and travelling, the proper escape route from the limitations and restrictions imposed by the regime.

The publication of *Da organização do espaço*<sup>1</sup> in 1962, twenty years after the beginning of his training at the *Escola de Belas Artes* in Porto, represents a synthesis of the cultural research pursued by Távora in the period between his training years, his first design experiences and the occasions of encounter and comparison with the European and non-European architectural scene. The book is also a turning point and a point of awareness for the overcoming of inner restlessness, a sense of inadequacy that permeated him throughout his youth, an “*atrocious suffering*”<sup>2</sup> that never completely disappears but turns positive in need for a constant search for certainties and a deepening of the understanding of organised space. The initial tension to the imitation of the Master of Architecture, to their unreachable “genius”, then dissolves in the awareness of profound humanity that permeates architecture and space in general:

[...] the activity of organising space belongs to all men and not only to some. In other words, the organisation of space is a work in which all men participate, with varying degrees of intensity and responsibility, a work from which no man can consider himself exempt. [...] our eyes are always encountering organised space, organised by men, and organised in such a unitary form that it is not easy to distinguish what exactly belongs [...] to each man.<sup>3</sup>

Man’s influence on organised space is therefore profoundly immanent and not genial, found in all circumstances, both in urban landscapes where human action is most evident, from the more rigorous ones deriving from the Roman *cardo-decumano* grid to the spontaneous ones born out of uncontrolled aggregation in the slums of the suburbs of large cities, and in landscapes that are defined as “*natura*”, ranging from those organised for cultivation to the wilder ones but in which we can always find anthropic elements.

The awareness of acting in contexts that are already in some way conditioned by human action facilitates the compositional process set in motion by the architect who, thanks to the ability to read these elements to understand

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1 Fernando Távora, *Da organização do espaço* (Porto: FAUP, 1962).

2 Fernando Távora, “Escola primária do Cedro”, *Arquitectura*, no. 89 (1964): 175.

3 Távora, *Da organização do espaço*, 19-20.

the context and the “circumstance”, can act in the design and organisation of space more consciously:

[...] the artificial forms, the result of human creation – in addition to the natural forms that play a role of fundamental importance – find themselves to be conditioning factors for every new form created since the space organised by man is conditioned in its organisation but, once organised, becomes in turn conditioning for future organisations. [...]

The ‘circumstance’ will therefore be, in the proper meaning of the term, that set of factors that surround man, that are around him and, since he is the creator of many of them, to these must be added those that derive from his very existence, from his being.<sup>4</sup>

The form thus becomes an element with which the project makes the circumstances of the place in which it is inserted its own, inserting a new element that goes on to modify and redefine the space in which it is inserted as a further factor added to that place, in a constant stratification of elements given by history. In this inseparable link between the built form and the circumstance in which it is inserted, the physiognomy of the free space is also defined, organised and influenced by circumstances.

Távora’s focus on the form of the space as opposed to the architecture itself can be seen in numerous travel sketches in which the object of interest is not the pre-eminent building in the place but the place itself and how it has been organised to accommodate and enhance the architecture that finds its fulfilment in it.

This often forgotten notion that the space that separates – and connects – forms is itself form is a fundamental notion, as it allows us to become fully aware of how isolated forms do not exist and how there is always a relationship, either between the forms we see occupying space, or between them and space itself, which, even if we do not see it, we know is constitutive of form – the negative or matrix of visible forms.<sup>5</sup>

The profound understanding of space and architecture, for Távora, cannot be separated from the direct experience of it.

It is also true that the explanation of forms according to certain circumstances is difficult, especially their complete understanding; just as one appreciates a good wine by tasting it and not by reasoning about its chemical composition, so one can only understand a form by experiencing it and its circumstance and not by listening to descriptions of it or consulting its reproductions.<sup>6</sup>

So, a fundamental tool for understanding is, and remains throughout his life, the journey, the discovery of space through an experience that nourishes his

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4 Távora, *Da organização do espaço*, 21-22.

5 Távora, *Da organização do espaço*, 12.

6 Távora, *Da organização do espaço*, 23.

desire to understand space. The experience is almost always also an opportunity for comparison with colleagues such as Álvaro Siza, Eduardo Souto Moura, Alcino Soutinho, and José Paolo dos Santos, who with him can observe the different ways in which man has acted on the territory, has shaped it to his liking to make it more welcoming to host his dwelling.

The journey will also be the basis of the teaching courses that Távora will hold at the university, as an indispensable training moment for understanding the constants and permanence of architecture, the historical and cultural heritage, as well as, in its sense, profound knowledge of the territory and landscape, the first stage of design work.

During his formative years, he made several trips in search of the constants of classical architecture and the experiences of Modern and Rationalist architecture. In addition to several trips to Portuguese territory, Távora made several journeys between 1942 and 1944 to Spain, close in terms of borders and terms of political ideology, therefore more accessible to access: he visited Madrid, Toledo, Salamanca, Seville, Granada and Santiago de Compostela.

But it is in Italy that the trips of the following years are concentrated, first in 1947 as the final stage of the European journey, then in 1949 with a trip dedicated to the peninsula alone, and finally in 1952, 1956 and 1964. During his travels, he does not fail to keep a punctual diary in which he jots down impressions, suggestions and emotions he feels while visiting various Italian cities and monuments. With writing, drawing represents another tool for summarising the things seen, allowing him to report the essentials, the volumes, and the relationships between constructions, leaving out all the elements related to stylistic qualities and language to note only the intrinsic values of the architecture. Many of these sketches are contained within books (on the first page of which he never fails to mention the place and date of purchase accompanied by his unmistakable signature) purchased during his stays in Italy and then jealously preserved and archived in his library.<sup>7</sup>

The following is an extract of research whose aim is to explain how Távora's observation of space and circumstances became a conscious or undefined basis for the development of the upcoming or later architectural projects in those years.<sup>8</sup>

The research was not a historiographical analysis of the development of the projects but rather a synthesis effort of the architect's compositional thinking and influences from the Italian cultural context, both explicit and documented, but also deriving from personal experiences and from architectures Távora visited during his trips to Italy, which added to his cultural background as a designer.

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<sup>7</sup> An important section of Fernando Távora's rich library is now preserved, available for consultation, at the Marques da Silva Foundation in Porto.

<sup>8</sup> This article is excerpted from the writer's doctoral thesis: Giorgio Liverani, *Context and Project. Italian influences on the architecture of Fernando Távora*, Università di Bologna: Bologna 2017 (Tutor: Antonio Esposito).

Starting from the basis of the documentation found in the archives and the study of the existing publications, the research delves into the compositional aspects of some of Távora's projects, developed and constructed during this phase of his professional activity, through a parallel with various Italian architectures of the same period or belonging to classical architecture, which Távora knew and had the opportunity to visit first-hand.

### **Vila da Feira Municipal Market**

The Municipality entrusted the Vila da Feira Municipal Market project to Távora in 1953. The Municipality intended to cope with the town's development by reinforcing the road axis of Rua dos Descobrimentos, bordering the centre and developing on the straight line that visually connects the town's fulcrum to the Castle of Santa Maria da Feira. The site initially chosen for the project was on the left-hand side of the street, a flat space free of private dwellings. Távora changes that determination and chooses a facing site, a vacant space between several existing two-storey dwelling houses. The position of the parcel of land defines the limit of the built-up area to the west, on the slope that opens to the countryside and cultivated fields and is characterised by the presence of an unevenness that requires a study of the altimetry and an adaptation of the project to the existing morphology.

The beginning of the 1950s represents for Távora a peculiar moment in his research path within the Portuguese and foreign panorama.

In 1951, with his participation in his first CIAM in Hoddesdon, he had the opportunity to confront himself with those he considered to be the "masters" of Modern architecture and with the themes they pursued. For Távora, however, the CIAMs of these years also represent the turning point for a change in the vision of Modern architecture. The key idea is that architecture cannot disregard the relations with the place and the people who will use it; a change in perspective is necessary. It is easy to understand how the theme of the CIAM held in 1951, *The Heart of the City*<sup>9</sup>, positively marks Távora, fully grasped by the need to put man back at the centre of architecture, freed from functionalism and tyranny of the machine.

The following year, he took part in the first CIAM summer school in Venice, an opportunity to return to Italy and compare himself with various professionals who gravitated around the Venetian school at that time, experiencing first-hand the results of the research they were carrying out, as well as the traditions and places of a city like Venice. On this occasion, he also met Le Corbusier, who gave a lecture during the summer school.

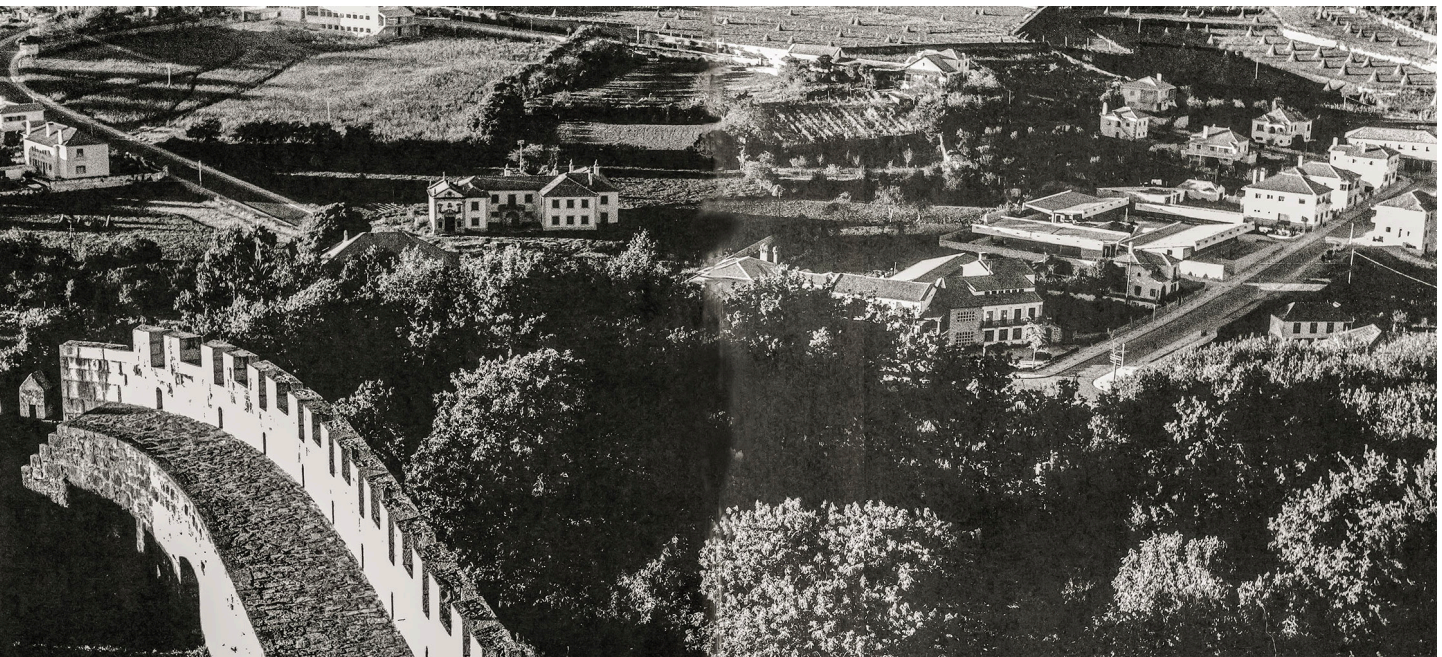
The changes within CIAM also manifested in 1953 in Aix-en-Provence, a congress Távora attended with the Portuguese group. In the same year, the Santa

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<sup>9</sup> Ernesto Nathan Rogers, Josep Lluís Sert, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, *CIAM 8: The Heart of the City: Towards the Humanisation of Urban Life* (New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy, 1952).

Maria da Feira Market project started as the first building of public character and large scale realised by Távora, who could better express the reasoning and concepts expressed so far through writings and projects on paper.

The project gives shape and synthetises Távora's thoughts at that moment. The proximity to modern language and its theories must be measured here with the tradition of the place, with the need to design for the village a space in which to exercise an ancient and locally bound activity such as the market, which bases its essence on personal relationships and local products: in Vila da Feira, the functionalism of Modernism must come to terms with the customs and traditions of the place [Fig. 1].



### *The Rigidity of the Modern*

"Building a market in a square of 50 metres, a module also square, of one metre, guides the composition and founds its geometry".<sup>10</sup>

Despite the irregularity and slope of the land on which the Vila da Feira Market is to be built, Távora starts from a scheme based on a regular grid of one metre by one metre that defines all the different elements of the project.

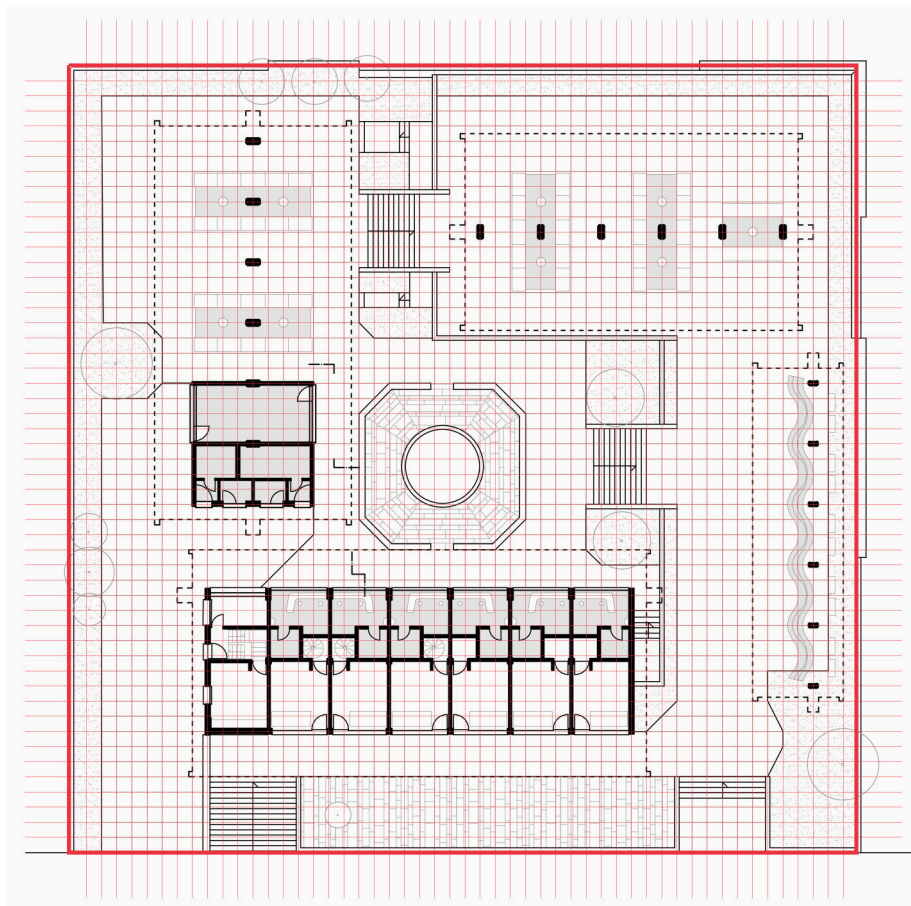
The volumes, perceived as white suspended canopies, are precisely defined within the basic module, fitting with the pillars and retaining walls within the regular pitch of the pavement. The position of the pillars in the axis with the joints can easily be compared to the schematic plans by Mies van der Rohe and, indeed derives from design settings learned during the CIAM meetings. The theme of the "grid" had been introduced by Le Corbusier at CIAM VI, which took place in Bridgwater, England, in 1947. The concept had been carried forward in the following years by the ASCORAL group, and Távora certainly became aware

Fig. 1  
Historical photo Market seen from the castle (FIMS/AFT).

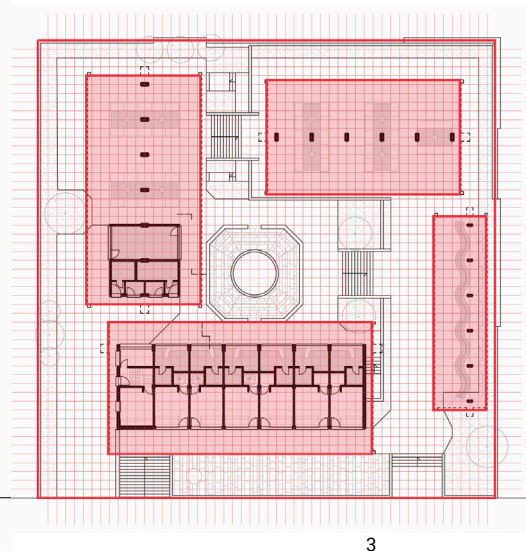
<sup>10</sup> Antonio Esposito, Giovanni Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa* (Milano: Electa 2005), 318.

of it during his participation in the CIAMs after 1947 and through his preparatory studies for the meetings. Admiration for the Master of Modern Architecture was great in these years, and his influence on Távora's first projects is visible [Fig. 2].

After defining the essential grid, the volumes are inserted according to a spiral design starting from the main entrance on Rua dos Descobrimentos, beginning with the smallest pavilion, the flower pavilion, up to the largest one, which returns parallel to the street and stands as the main façade of the complex above a podium that raises it above the street, the only two-storey element [Fig. 3].



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The white roofing defines the main façade and gives proportion to the elevation on the street; at the same time, it marks the boundary between the Inner Market and the city and relates to the neighbouring façades of the residential houses along the street axis. The modern mark, represented by the white roof, will be mitigated in the project's development using rougher and more traditional materials such as granite for the base and reinforced concrete with a bush-hammered finish. The same beam heads protruding from the roof break up the white surface, marking the structure's pace and the project's entire modularity [Fig. 4].

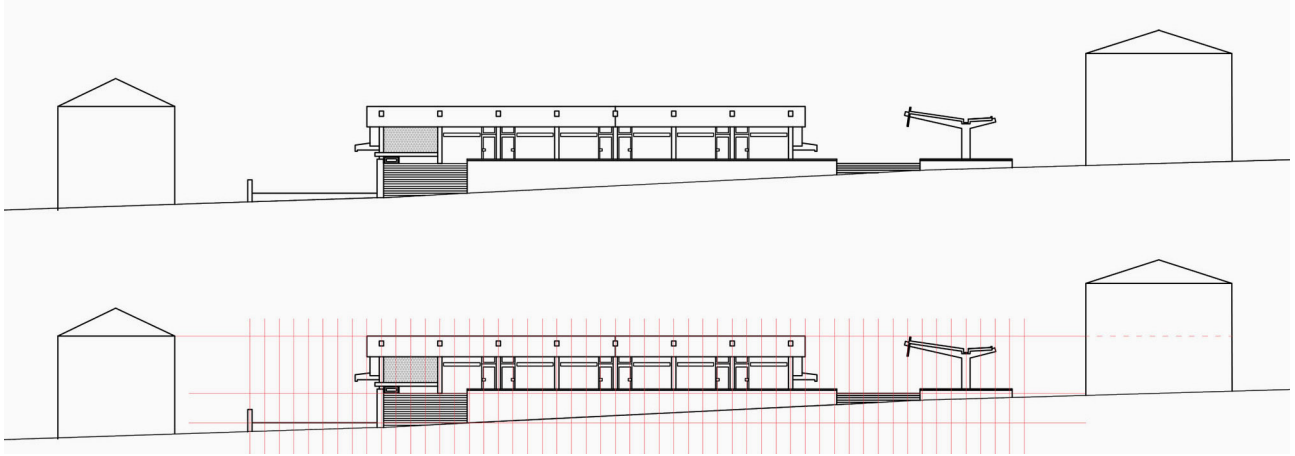
The arrangement of the volumes also defines a central space, protected and not visible from the outside. In the centre, as the fulcrum of the entire composition, a fountain is placed precisely on the diagonal of the 50 by 50-metre base square; the same spiral formed by the different positions of the volumes ends in the central area and the fountain [Fig. 5, 6].

Fig. 2

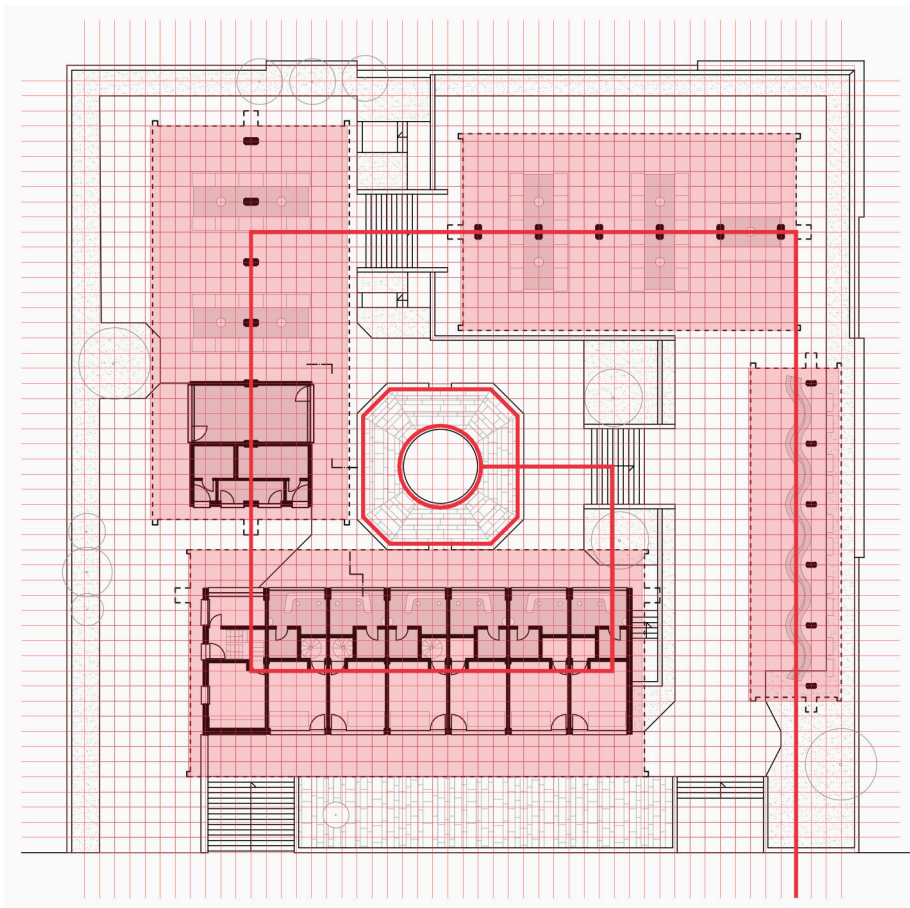
Floor plan with grid 1x1 meter (graphic by the author). All the graphic diagrams included in this essay are contained in the PhD thesis of architect Giorgio Liverani "Contesto e Progetto. Influenze italiane sull'architettura di Fernando Távora" (Context and Project. Italian influences on Fernando Távora's architecture), Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna, PhD in Architecture, Cycle XXIX, 2017.

Fig. 3

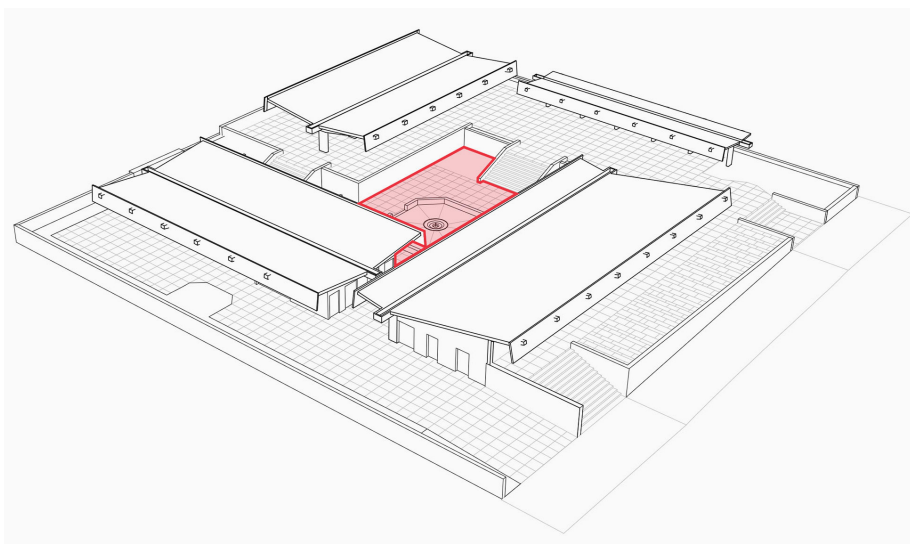
Planning scheme with grid (1x1 meter) and volumes (graphics by the author).



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Fig. 4  
Scheme elevation with grid and relationship to neighbouring houses (graphics by the author).

Fig. 5  
Planning scheme with spiral of volumes (graphics by the author).

Fig. 6  
Perspective scheme with definition of the courtyard (graphics by the author).



### *Familiarity of Tradition*

The schematism and rigidity in the plan, under the influence of the grid promoted by the Modern Movement, are not perceived with the same force in the spatiality and use of materials employed in the construction. A visit to this building completely changes the reading and understanding of the project, as if there were a clear division between the line drawn on the sheet, lacking in materials, depth and spatiality, enslaved to a defined and rigid schematism, and the actual space, the sensations perceived on site, where there is a strong presence of tradition, of indigenous materials and an awareness of the place in which the building fits.

The desire to define a new "Heart of the City" leads Távora to make a crucial compositional choice.

The recently completed markets in the vicinity of Porto, such as the Mercado Municipal in Vila Nova de Famalição, designed by Julio de Brito (1947-1950) or the one in Ovar by Januário Godinho (1948-1955), are based on a compositional scheme open to the city, a sort of new square characterised by a central element, a fountain or a green pool. Separation from the town occurs in these cases by means of gates.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, Távora's choice is oriented towards delimiting an inner space defined on the four fronts by the volumes of the cantilevered buildings under which the sale occurs. Access to the market is guaranteed and controlled in two defined positions, one for the public and the other as a driveway entrance for goods. Thanks to the positioning of the main volume on the façade facing the street, the definition of the Market's boundary and access to it is clear. The separation between outside and inside allows the space to be defined no longer as a square, as is usually the case in public markets, but as a courtyard, separated from the rest of the city and more intimate [Fig. 7].



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The space is thus defined by using the volumes of the sales canopy as buildings in an urban composition that give space to a small square. At the same time, it is easy to associate the planimetric layout with the courtyard typology that Távora finds in the models from antiquity, where this represented the heart of the building, a protected space around which the whole building developed. The references are, of course, the cloisters of the numerous Portuguese convents, which he visited many times both as a student and as a professor, and the stately palaces such as the Ducal Palace of Vila Viçosa<sup>12</sup> with its interior gardens derived from the Hispanic-Moorish tradition of the courts of Seville and Cordoba<sup>13</sup>. However, the proportion of the

11 Susana Milão, *Mercado da Feira de Távora: o centro (herma e core). Une telle symétrie ne convient pas à la solitude*, in: Fernando Távora, *"Minha casa"* (Porto: Fundação Marques da Silva 2015): 216.

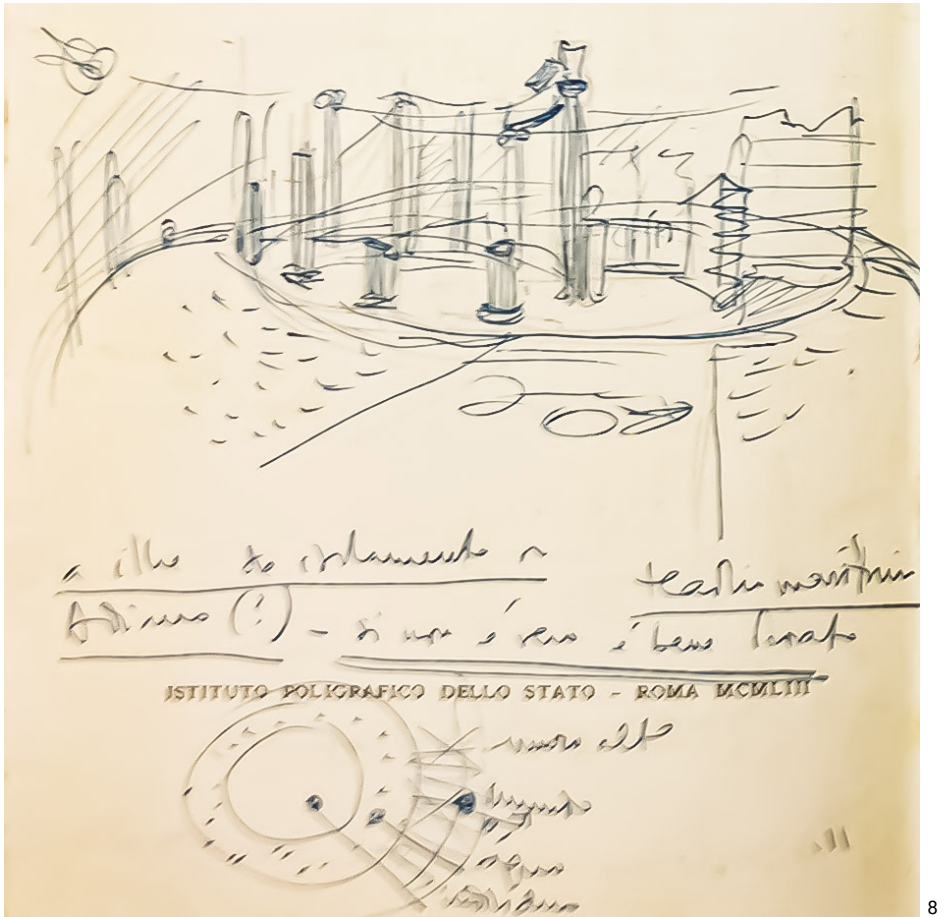
12 Milão, *Mercado da Feira*, 222.

13 Távora made a trip dedicated only to the city of Seville in 1942.

Fig. 7

Januário Godinho, Mercado municipal, Ovar 1948-1955 (Fernando Távora, *"Minha casa"*. *Uma porta pode ser um romance*, edited by Manuel Mendes Porto: FIMS/FAUP, 2013), 216.

roofs and the size of the Vila da Feira Market are more comparable to those of an ancient Roman villa, in which the relationship between the building and the garden is found through the portico that runs on all four sides. In 1956, during the construction of the Market, Távora made a trip to Italy. A visit to Villa Adriana and Villa d'Este in Tivoli allowed him to study these classical residences, especially their outdoor spaces, providing Távora with insights he would use in different projects. It is no coincidence that in two books<sup>14</sup> purchased during his stay in Tivoli, he jotted down various comments on the



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architecture he visited, focusing on the intimate spaces of the dwellings and the courtyards or places dedicated to meditation and rest. The sketches in the books depict three courtyard spaces in which the element of water is very present: the Recinto dell'Isola and the Terme con *heliocaminus* inside Villa Adriana and the Corte dell'Ovato in Villa d'Este [Fig. 8].

The Vila da Feira Market shows many of these elements: the definition of a closed, intimate courtyard and a space that allows social relations. The same sensations experienced inside Villa Adriana, defined by Távora: "Place for rest, contemplation (island), strolling, social life (pecile), prayer, entertainment, study, work and hygiene".<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Gioacchino Mancini, *Villa Adriana e Villa d'Este* (Roma: Libreria dello stato, 1953); Salvatore Aurigemma, *La Villa Adriana presso Tivoli* (Tivoli: Arti grafiche A. Chicca, 1953).

<sup>15</sup> Távora's notes on the title page of the cited book by Salvatore Aurigemma (Marques da Silva Foundation Archive).

Fig. 8

Fernando Távora, Teatro Marittimo 1956, drawing in the book: *Villa Adriana e Villa d'Este*, (FIMS/AFT).

Sensations also sought in his design, as stated in the memoir dated 1980: “Not only a place to exchange goods but also to exchange ideas, an invitation for men to come together”.<sup>16</sup>

The central element of the fountain, as well as the radial seats around it, recalls the basins and fountains seen in the courtyards and gardens of Villa d’Este at Tivoli and Villa Adriana, where the water basins inserted in the courtyards, in addition to the refreshing purpose, ensure a very present sound effect, capable of giving a further detachment from the noise from the outside environment. You can find the same elements in many convent cloisters: “The central space around the lake, with its pool of water, its magnolias, the bench covered with azulejo, the paved floor, evoke the tranquillity and beauty of any Portuguese cloister”.<sup>17</sup>

The octagonal shape of the seats arranged around the central fountain is undoubtedly a reference to the various examples of fountains placed in convent cloisters. The evolution of the project initially envisaged an ever-circular fountain within a square-shaped green space (1954). Still, in the final version completed in 1956, after returning from the trip to Italy, the seating around the fountain became octagonal, perhaps as a reference to the fountain courtyard highlighted in the plan of Hadrian’s Villa in Tivoli in the book purchased during the trip. The definition of this space through the positioning of two octagonal basins connected by a long channel certainly struck Távora, who recalled its shape in the Market Court he was designing [Fig. 9].



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A further element of rupture concerning the rigidity of the plan is the presence of the difference in level in the plot: not only the different heights of the soil but also the slope of Rua dos Descobrimentos impose the definition of different levels in the project. The grid defining the pavement, continuous throughout the project, almost seems to try to determine a single flat level

16 Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*, 318.

17 Fernando Távora, *Project Description* (Marques da Silva Foundation Archive).

Fig. 9

Photo Court of Fountains  
Villa Adriana. Source: William  
L. MacDonald, John A. Pinto,  
*Villa Adriana* (Milano: Electa,  
2006), 48.

in the lot, juxtaposing the platforms as typically defined by Mies in his projects: pure, linear and without exception. The relationship between the rectangles defined by the four Market canopies and the spiral they form from the entrance to the centre would determine a central and well-proportioned space even without height differences. The slope of the land gives this arrangement and the visitors' paths more strength, defining not only the spiral but also a descent towards that intimate and reserved place, represented by the central courtyard and the fountain.

The two elevations which solve the design problem are a consequence of the slope of the street on the main front. Távora chooses to place the public entrance to the Market at the top of the street, closer to the city centre. A few steps lead from the street level to the higher level of the pavement and direct the route to the smallest pavilion, the flower and fruit pavilion, which, thanks to its proportion, leads the visitor into the heart of the Market and towards the other stalls. Once through the entrance, one arrives at a position dominating the entire courtyard space and the inner pavilions, which allows one to perceive the entirety of the Market and grasp the heart of it with its fountain and central square. The visitor is immediately apparent of the position of all the goods and the downward path to follow to see all the stalls.

The level of this paving also continues on the west side of the Market, under the vegetable pavilion. This area represented the highest part of the lot. Placing a retaining wall made of granite blocks and a green belt around the perimeter of the building on this side allowed for green mitigation and the spontaneous growth of vegetation that provides a backdrop for all the stalls.

The second level, the lower one, is defined by the height of the low access to the main street, dedicated only to the entrance of goods by vehicles. The paving continues flat to the inside of the central courtyard, where the fountain is located. The fish and bird pavilion closes the south side of the lot, separating the driveway from the pedestrian part for customers. Connections between the upper and lower parts are ensured by two staircases, one descending from the vegetable stall continuing the spiral path. In contrast, the other descends from the north side, exactly on the axis with the fountain, reminiscent of the monumental entrances of classical villas.

The composition closes with the insertion of the east pavilion. Through positioning this building, Távora solves several project problems and defines some fundamental aspects. The need to give the Market a recognisable façade on Rua dos Descobrimentos, capable of relating with the neighbouring houses, imposed the construction of an element higher than the other canopies, or at least placed at a higher level than the ground, which in that position was the same as the fish and feather pavilion. The aim is achieved by constructing a plinth that detaches from the main road and is at the same height as the high entrance to the Market, on which a building of equal size to the others can be placed. The height thus defined allows the insertion of two superimposed

floors, that of the basement warehouse and that of the shop on the upper floor, at the level of the upper part of the market, which always becomes accessible independently of the operation of the rest of the complex. The asymmetry of this roof, on the other hand, allows the height of the building to be lowered on the internal front, facing the courtyard, where it is aligned with that of the fish and poultry pavilion. Underneath this roof are the meat shops.

The inclusion of this pavilion makes it possible to proportion the external front towards the street and to define the inner courtyard on all four sides.

Távora tries to maintain the relation with the greenery on the lot before the building was inserted and to relate to the countryside behind the market. The base square, the limit of the entire intervention, defines a green belt of about two metres that runs around the perimeter and hosts various plantings related to the greenery outside the lot [Fig. 10, 11, 12].

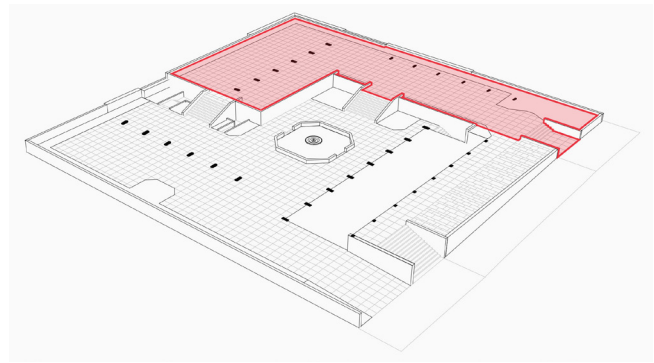
In the same way, the altitude jumps between the high and low levels, where the stairs are inserted, are left green with the presence of trees of considerable size.

The description of Távora's Market proposal is defined as if it were a park (garden), in which the bodies designed by Távora are separated by vegetation in which the public can easily walk through the spaces intended for them, and in the centre of the Market, around a small lake, an almost continuous seating area creates a zone of rest and relations between passers-by.<sup>18</sup>

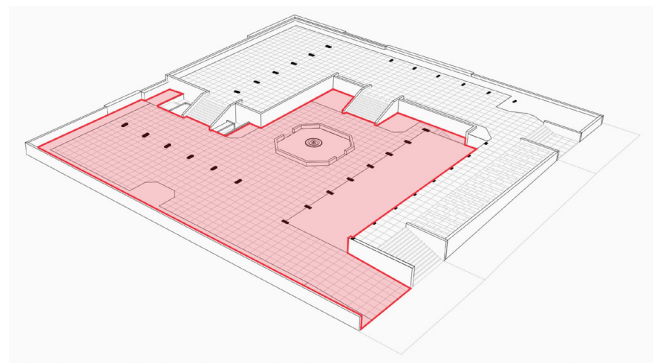
The sense of protection given by the courtyard, the presence of trees and vegetation, as well as the central fountain with a seat lined with azulejos, define a space between garden and square, not detached from the reality and tradition of the place, but in complete harmony with its users.

### Green Space in the Market

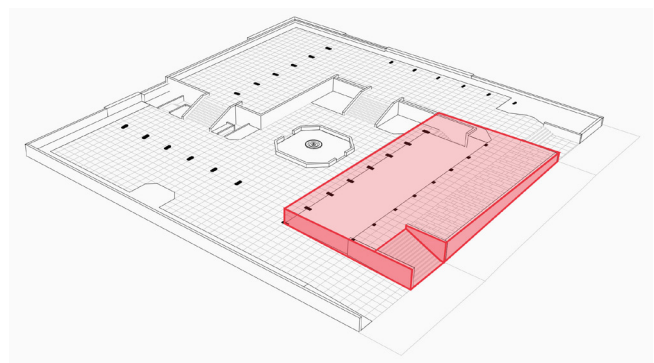
The location chosen for the Market also allows a direct visual relationship from inside the courtyard, with the Castle of Vila da Feira overlooking the town. An ambivalent relationship is thus created between two similar spaces: the



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Fig. 10  
Scheme with a intermediate floor (graphics by the author).

Fig. 11  
Scheme with division between upper and lower part (graphics by the author).

Fig. 12  
Scheme with basement element as closure towards the street (graphics by the author).

<sup>18</sup> Milão, *Mercado da Feira*, 222-224.

castle courtyard with its internal unevenness, staggered planes, and precise views of the town on one side, and the intimacy of the market cloister, overlooked by the fortress on the hill on the other.

Tradition has a significant influence on Távora's design not only from a composition point of view, recalling the cloisters and courtyards of convents and classical palaces, but also from a material point of view, where the skilful use of material defines a space that is entirely familiar to its users, despite the highly modern language compared to the surrounding buildings. Granite stone, the basis of the local building system and found in large quantities in the quarries of northern Portugal, is used in the project with different finishes. The uncertain texture, recalling the composition of the walls of the Castello da Feira, made of semi-finished but not completely squared blocks assembled with variable geometries according to their size, is used for the retaining walls towards the ground in the upper part of the Market and the large plinths of the canopies, defining the ground connection of both the front facing the street and those of the central courtyard on at least two sides. However, the same material is also used unusually for the masonry of the pavilion walls on the street front [Fig. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17].

The structural system of the building is based on a mixture of very different materials. The granite blocks, now assembled in regular courses of equal height and exactly squared, define the external masonry of the shops, which is only interrupted by the insertion of reinforced concrete, which is inserted into the masonry through an interlocking that accommodates the load-bearing pillar, and defines the top of the wall through the roofing beam that juts out on both sides, overcoming the limit of the granite block masonry. Traditional construction techniques merge with modern reinforced concrete techniques, shaping it in unusual ways compared to other examples that modern architecture has developed. The reinforced



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Fig. 15, 16, 17  
Market views (photo by the author).



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Fig. 16, 17  
Market views (photo by the  
author).

concrete uses a bush-hammered surface to better relate to the wall's granite. The same finish is used in the structures of the various canopies made entirely of reinforced concrete, which rest on the ground on rectangular pillars with rounded corners that engage centrally on a reinforced concrete beam tapering outwards, which supports the cantilevered roof on both sides. The pillars fit exactly into the one-metre by one-metre base grid of the entire Market, with a regular four-metre pitch. The beams also mark the rhythm of the façade through their lugs, which protrude from the white surface of the canopy, breaking its purity but defining its proportion with the entire composition. The white plaster of the canopies defines the four volumes of the market, while inside, the ceiling takes on a red colour, which mirrors the tiles that define the bases of the sales counters. Reinforced concrete, made of slabs measuring one metre by one metre that materially define the grid and allow the stones that make up the concrete to emerge in very fine cobblestones, is also used for the flooring. The tradition of Portuguese ceramics and azulejos is used to determine some essential elements, such as the seats around the fountain, the walls of the butcher's shops and the fish market, as well as, through mosaic, to indicate the goods for sale in each pavilion. The design of these mosaics was entrusted to Álvaro Siza. Wood is used with the care and craftsmanship of tradition to make all the fixtures in the market [Fig. 18, 19].



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Fig. 18, Compositional analysis model of the Vila da Feira Market, based on a project by Giorgio Liverani, realized by students L. Rosetti, M. Spadoni, F. Spartà, M.C. Ricci, S. Baiardi coordinated by D. Giaffreda and M. Mangano of LaMo of the Department of Architecture, Cesena Campus.

Exhibited during the exhibition "I viaggi di Fernando Távora", Galleria del Ridotto, Cesena, September 23 – December 11, 2022.

Fig. 19 A model comparing the Red Patio of the Quinta da Conceição and the Corte dell'Ovato at Villa d'Este in Tivoli, designed by Giorgio Liverani, realized by students L. Rosetti, M. Spadoni, F. Spartà, M.C. Ricci, S. Baiardi coordinated by D. Giaffreda and M. Mangano of LaMo of the Department of Architecture, Cesena Campus.

Exhibited during the exhibition "I viaggi di Fernando Távora", Galleria del Ridotto, Cesena September 23 – December 11, 2022.



## Quinta da Conceição

The project of the Quintas da Conceição and Santiago in Leça da Palmeira was entrusted to Távora in 1956. Unlike the other projects carried out up to this point, it is not a building but the redevelopment of a Quinta (farm) from which the Municipality of Matosinhos intends to make a municipal park.

Following an expropriation to build the new access to the Port of Leixões and its road system, Távora is asked to manage the park's construction. Judging the planned road system to disrespect the park, the architect proposed an alternative solution to the junction, capable of preserving some remains of a 15th century Franciscan convent located within the Quinta.

The construction took about four years, from 1956 to 1960, and the project was carried out unhurriedly and with due care, thanks to an agreement between the architect and the Municipality:

The Municipality paid me at the end of each year according to what was being realised. In carrying out the work, I acted as if I were the prior of the convent; I would walk around with the masons and gardeners, telling them what to do. An employee gave me advice, and I often followed it. All this was done in a familiar, almost domestic, atmosphere, thanks to the support of the mayor, a very sensitive man who did not attach great importance to money and believed that the important thing was to do things well.<sup>19</sup>

But between 1956 and 1957, Távora designed and planned the elements he would later realise in the following years, even with considerable variations from the initial ideas. The Municipality of Matosinhos had already granted Távora the commission when the architect left for Dubrovnik in 1956 for CIAM X. On his return from the trip, Távora stayed in Italy, visiting many historical architectures and jotting down notes and sketches in books purchased.

The analysis that follows studies Távora's project for the Quinta, starting from the situation of the park before his intervention, from the intentions shown in the first projects to the final realisation, and analysing the different elements that compose it, in connection with the architecture he visited during his trip to Italy in 1956.

The state of Quinta da Conceição at the beginning of Távora's project shows certain elements that will be maintained and become its cornerstones. "There was already the avenue, the chapel, the cloister, so there were already elements that offered a structure to be preserved".<sup>20</sup>

These are mainly architectural remains from the Franciscan monastery in the area in the 15th century. The main avenue of the park was an important axis for the connection between the lower part, where there was an entrance and the upper part with its secondary entrances. The management of the slope of

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<sup>19</sup> Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*, 318.

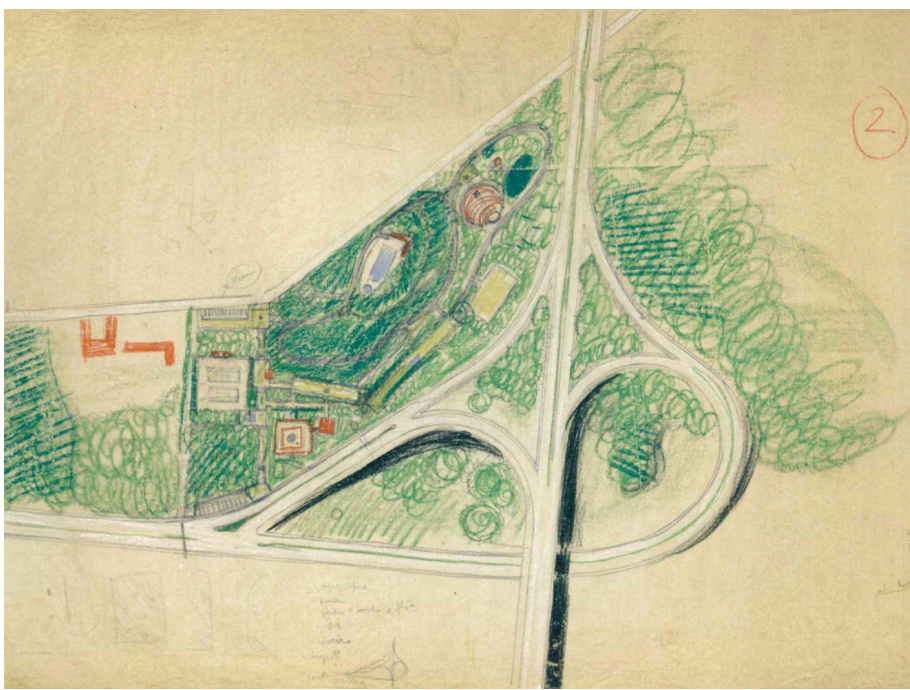
<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



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the Quinta was entrusted to this gradual path on which several spaces opened on both the north and south sides. On the south side, a series of retaining walls were built into the path, probably to make the space flatter and more manageable to cultivate. Moreover, the presence of the spring ensured plenty of water for irrigation. On the north side, the Franciscan cloister and chapel define the path. In particular, the chapel acted as a hinge between this and a slope that developed towards the north and led to a flat area defined by two walls of remarkably long proportions, at the centre of which was a second spring. The fixed points are therefore already in place at the start of the design process. Távora works on these to redefine the spaces without upsetting the park's layout but restoring the right proportion and relationship of all the elements to each other.

The park's requirements to respond to after the intervention were quite different from those of a private home garden, as it had been up until then, and the need arose to provide fixed reference points for visitors and well-defined accesses and routes. At the same time, the park had to fulfil services that had not been present until then. The first freehand drawings already show a desire to define elements that would bring order to the park, starting with the pre-existing elements and putting them into a system. In sketch 1 [Fig. 20] and even more so in sketch 2 [Fig. 21], there is a clear intention to define precise, orderly spaces connected by paths that are better defined and proportionate to the spaces they serve. In the initial sketches, we see Távora working on reinforcing



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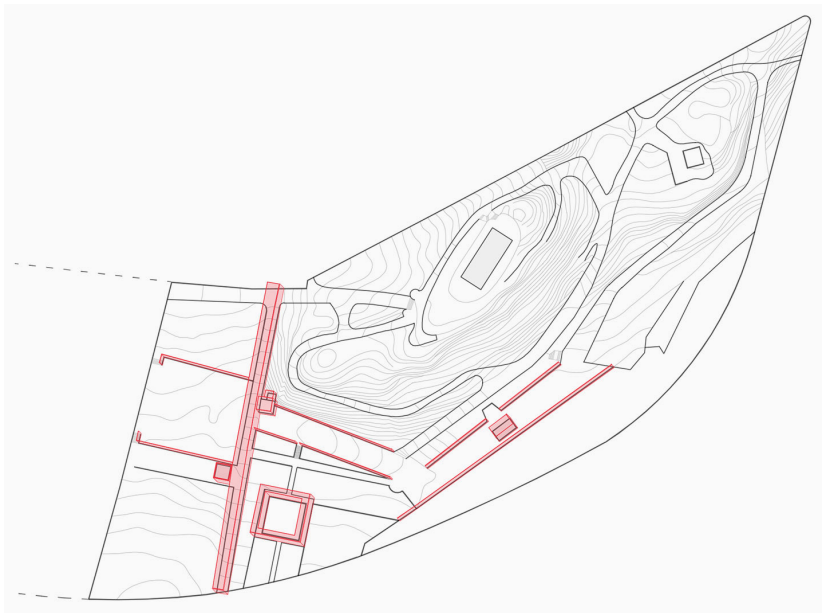
Fig. 20  
Quinta da Conceição, sketch 1,  
1957 (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 21  
Quinta da Conceição, sketch 2,  
1957 (FIMS/AFT).

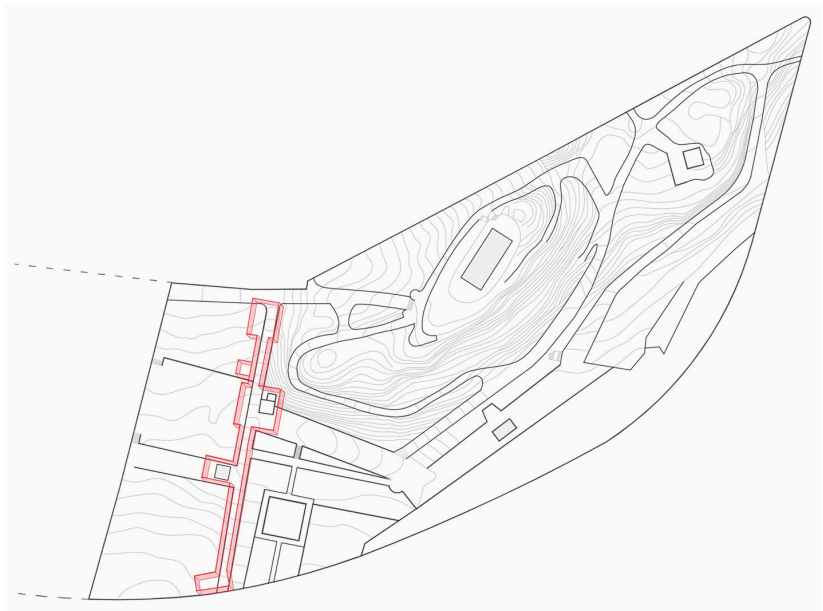
the main avenue as the connecting element of the two entrances, the northwest one in the upper part and the southeast one in the lower part adjacent to the new road system. The visual linearity of the path, clearly expressed in the initial drawings, finds several exceptions at the pre-existing elements, at which it undergoes a dilation, a slowing down, a moment of calm and a pause before continuing its way. The fountain and the chapel are thus inserted in a dilated space that emphasises their importance, as is the case for the entrances at the beginning and end of the route, at the top and the bottom, to which Távora chooses to give prominence with the insertion of two courtyards.

The flat land between the retaining walls to the South of the axis houses two tennis courts. The direction of the courts will then be marked by the presence of the Tennis Pavilion, which was initially only meant to be a small volume for the inclusion of changing rooms but will become an essential visual element for the organisation of the park [Fig. 22, 23].

On the right side of the axis, the paths that previously intercepted the avenue almost randomly and uncontrolled become more clearly defined, differentiating themselves by type. On the top, the path around the upper part of the Quinta seems to start directly from the entrance, wrapping around what will become the new swimming pool, conceived as a further public service element in the park. The path starting from the chapel, on the other hand, is different. It is defined by the succession of narrow spaces that flow into larger spaces, well delimited by rectangular shapes, like clearings in the forest, in which central elements are inserted as focal points to define their dimensions further. These courts are derived from the flat parts already in the park, redefining them, their accesses and perimeter boundaries, and inserting new internal elements. The last route is dedicated to a component on which Távora concentrates his early design phases: the cloister, reorganised to house the function of a museum. As we will see from the subsequent sketches, several solutions are proposed,



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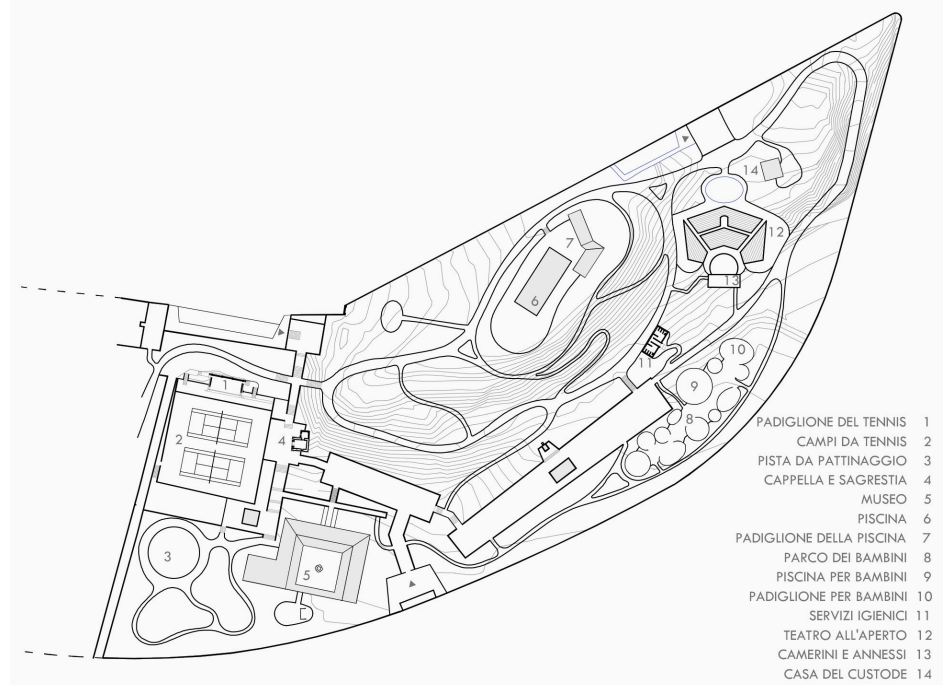
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Fig. 22, 23  
Schemes with the main axis  
(graphics by the author).

varying languages and details. The following choices will lead to the building not being constructed, but the work undertaken for its design will be the basis on which Távora will define all the other elements of the park.

The project presented to the Matosinhos City Council dated August 1957 is where Távora synthesises all the suggestions expressed in the previous sketches. The plan, shown below, highlights the totality of the elements and services conceived and designed for the Quinta da Conceição, which Távora and his collaborators would later develop in detail.

In particular, the insertion of the museum defines the end point of the main avenue; through this building, moreover, the difference in height between the lower part towards the street and the upper part where the cloister is placed is overcome. The museum's presence also determines the displacement of the southeast entrance, which is not on the axis with the avenue but is connected to the first rectangular spaces defined in the first sketches. The proposal also envisages the presence of more facilities with the inclusion, in addition to the tennis courts, of a swimming pool at the top, later entrusted to Álvaro Siza, an open amphitheatre for performances, a skating rink and a children's area with a park and dedicated swimming pool. Of all these elements only a few, as we shall see, will be built [Fig. 24].



**Cloister and Museum**

The starting point of Távora's design research on the Quinta, as already mentioned, is the pre-existing buildings. Particularly in the preliminary sketches anticipating the first project presented in August 1957, the architect focuses on the most striking element present in the area, the cloister of the former 15th century Franciscan convent. The precise square shape of the colonnade was still a trace within the park even though the columns of the portico had mainly collapsed.

Távora had already made several trips to Europe and Italy and was researching popular architecture in Portugal. The investigation into the "supra-historical constants" that the architect was pursuing could not set aside such an important, albeit now ruined, element within the park.

Távora had already been commissioned for the Quinta da Conceição project prior to his 1956 trip to Italy and therefore did not fail to turn opportunities to

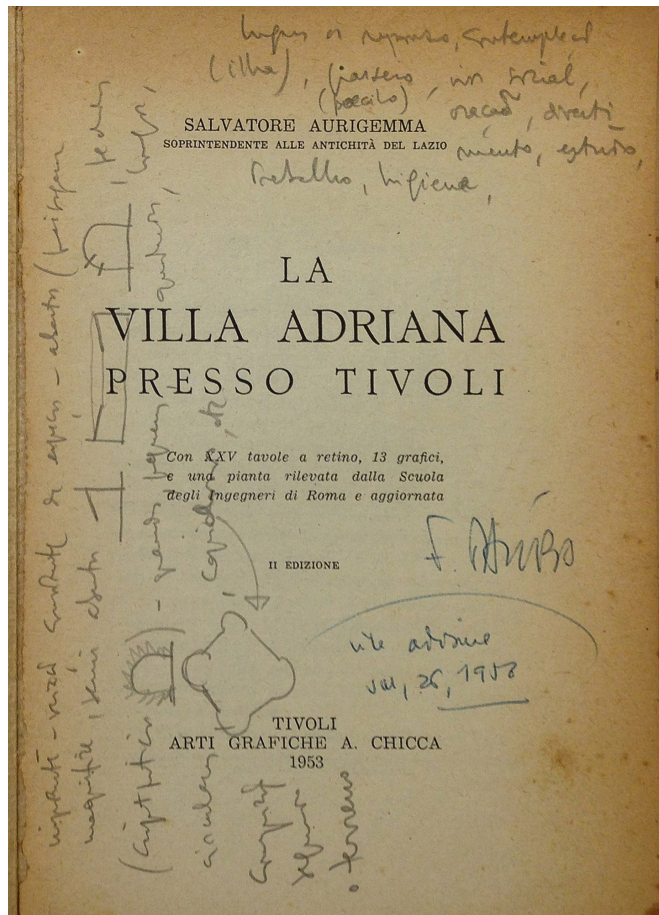
Fig. 24  
Project presented by Távora in 1957 (graphics by the author).

visit historic Italian buildings into opportunities to jot down themes and references that he would later use to some extent in the development of the project.

Távora visited Villa Adriana in Tivoli on 26 August, coming into close contact with the ruins of the ancient residence. In the notes on the title page of the book *La Villa Adriana presso Tivoli*<sup>21</sup>, purchased during his stay, the archaeological site is described in words already quoted about the Market, which would fit well with the purpose he sought in the project of the Quinta: “Place of rest, contemplation (island), strolling, social life (pecile), prayer, entertainment, study, work and hygiene”.<sup>22</sup>

He is enchanted by the succession of spaces in the Villa and how they relate, creating continuity and constant surprise. The lack of homogeneity found and the multiplicity of places are not read as chaotic but as a wise desire to surprise and vary the paths within the villa: “Important constant variation of spaces, open (magnificent landscapes), semi-open, closed (cryptoporticus), large, small, square, elongated, circular, whimsical, etc”.<sup>23</sup>

Alongside this description, he does not fail to note down the different spaces using sectional diagrams [Fig. 25, 26].



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Within the same book, Távora sketches a particular place in Hadrian's Villa, an unusual space that is not among the most attractive exhibits. The sketch concerns the Baths with Heliocaminus as part of the areas reserved for the emperor, accessible through the circular enclosure of the island. Távora notes: “How many times did Hadrian and Antinous bathe here...”.<sup>24</sup>

The sketch, represented in plan and perspective, focuses on the central space of the baths, i.e. the largest pool, once the only uncovered part. In the plan drawing, it is clear that Távora's interest lies in the rectangular central space, defined by the perimeter colonnade and the different heights of the pavement. He also does

21 Aurigemma, *La Villa Adriana presso Tivoli*.

22 Távora's notes on the title page of the book: Salvatore Aurigemma, *La Villa Adriana presso Tivoli* (Tivoli: Arti grafiche A. Chicca, 1953).

23 Távora's notes on the title page of the cited book by Salvatore Aurigemma (Marques da Silva Foundation Archive).

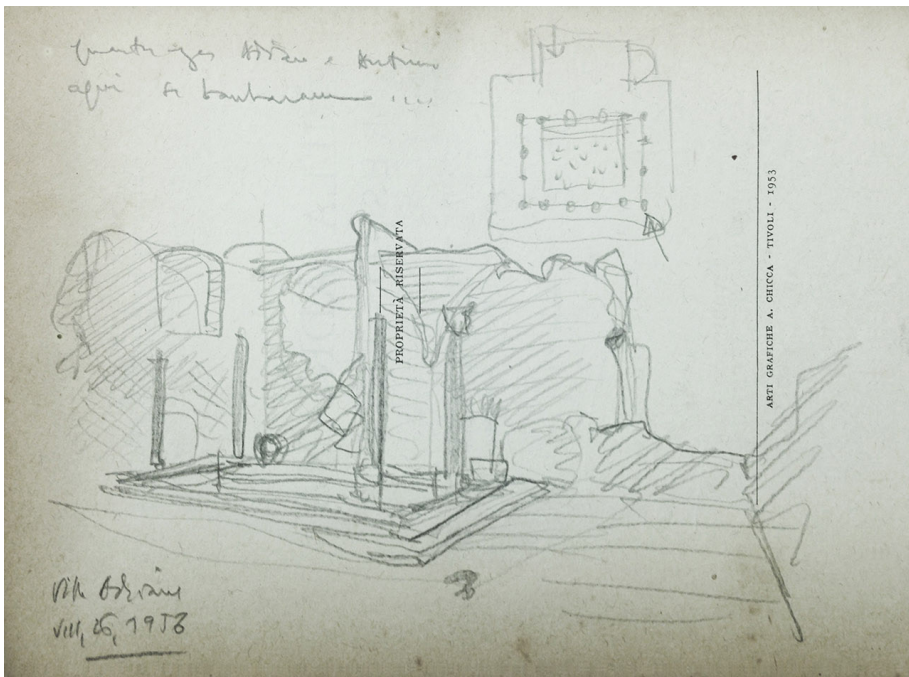
24 Ibid.

Fig. 25

Cover of the book *La Villa Adriana presso Tivoli* with pencil annotations by Fernando Távara.

Fig. 26

Schemes of the sections annotated by Távora (graphics by the author).



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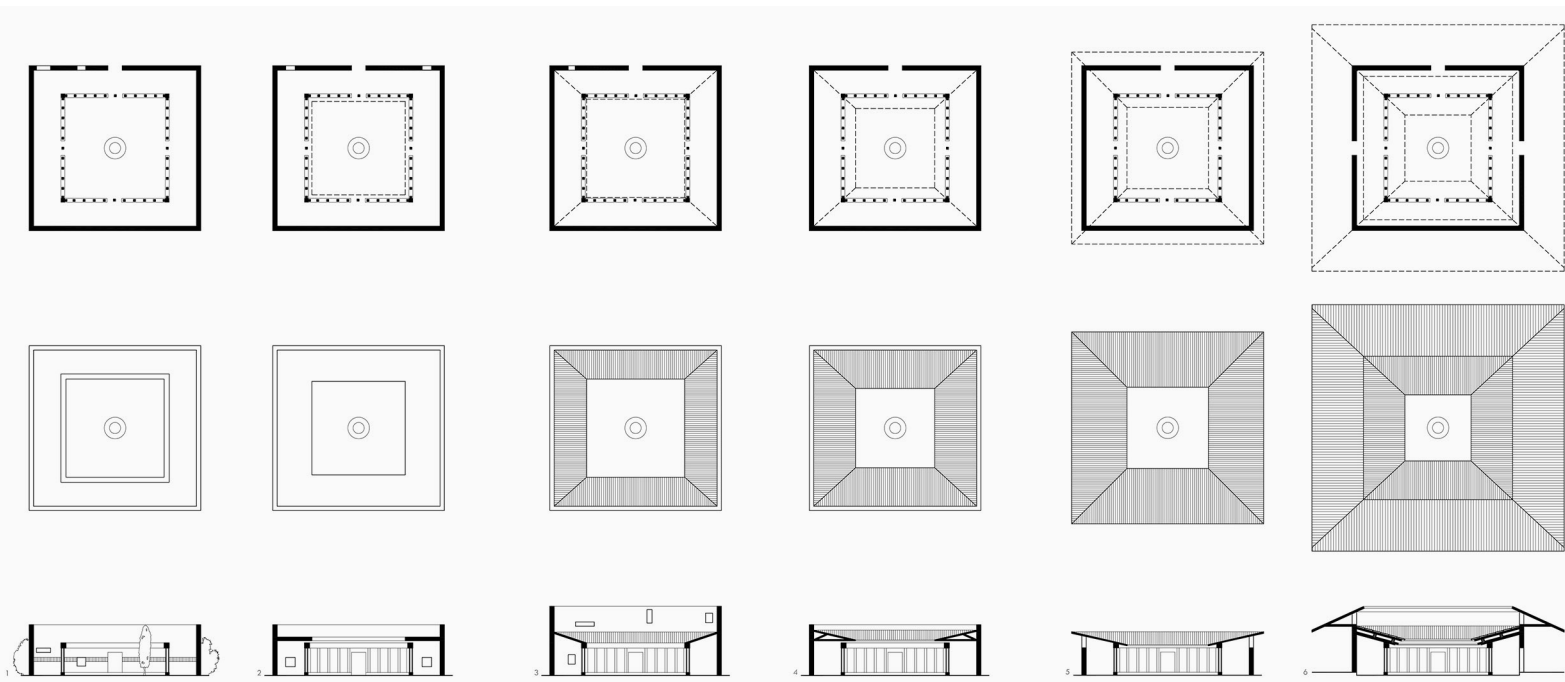
not fail to note the ruins in the background, walls almost two storeys high beyond the colonnade, as a further element of closure to the outside, giving the space an even more pronounced centrality, a clear division from the outside, and an unusual privacy and quietness [Fig. 27].

The situation of the Franciscan cloister's colonnade inside the Quinta da Conceição should not have been too different. The perimeter colonnade was only partially standing, and the traces of the building and walls surrounding the cloister separating it from the outside were completely obliterated. This pre-existing element represented for Távora a fundamental point of management of the park as a natural continuation of the axis of the avenue that could not fail to connect with its square shape. In fact, from the very first drawings of the entire park, the definition of the project focuses on the cloister, and sketch 1 (see fig. 22) shows a series of study sections on the possible completion of the courtyard.

From the small perspective drawn, there is a desire to close off the central space using a new modernist element characterised by high perimeter walls and well-defined openings at precise focal points. The detail of the entrance door and the enclosure in general, which was not built in the museum, will later be taken up in the definitions of the entrance courts.

Internally, the desire to restore the colonnade's function as a perimeter pathway running along an open central space is pursued through different hypotheses of sections that, in different ways, dialogue with the existing. Once the outer boundary has been defined through the parallelepiped about twice the height of the peristyle, Távora draws several schemes, starting from modernist matrices to more classical pitched models with a central *compluvium*. He has different ways of approaching the existing historical element, with the reverential awe of one who has understood its importance and value. Thus, in some cases, the perimeter wall is positioned at a proper distance from the columns without any

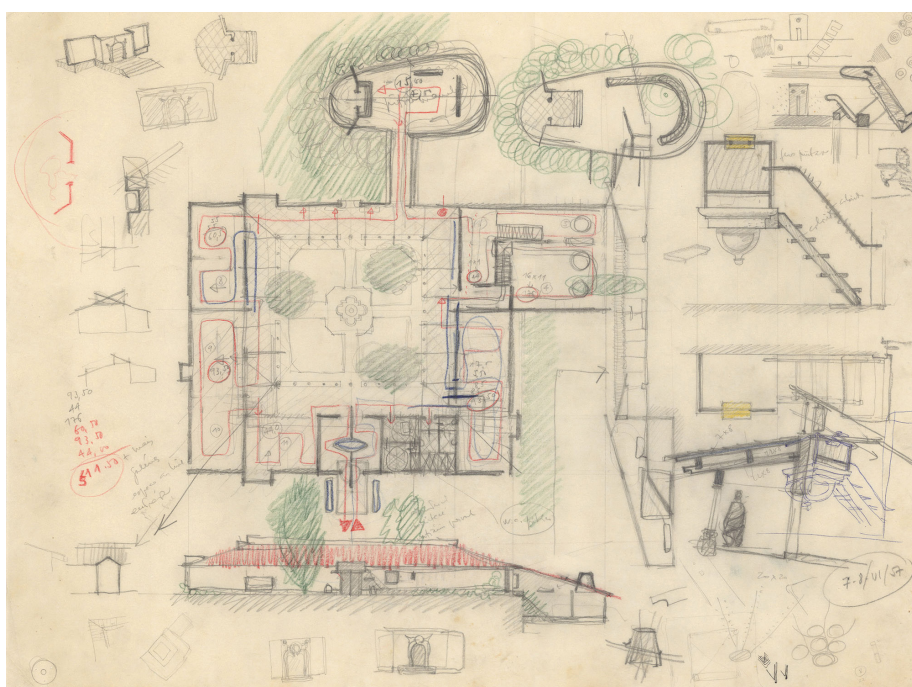
Fig. 27  
Fernando Távora, Heliocaminus  
1956, drawing in the book:  
*La Villa Adriana presso Tivoli*  
(FIMS/AFT).



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element interfering with them. In others, the flat roof overhangs the colonnade truss without touching it; in still others the sloping roof rests on one side on the new wall on the other side on the existing stone beam [Fig. 28].

The drawing dated June 7-8, 1957 [Fig. 29] focuses more deeply on the cloister and museum theme. Starting from the initial idea of a single perimeter wall to redefine the enclosure, it acquires depth by defining interior spaces, actual rooms with defined paths, and niches to display works and artefacts found on-site or elsewhere. All the rooms unravel around the peristyle, which becomes a distributive space of passage between one room and another. The pedestrian connection, perpendicular to the axis of the main avenue, is strengthened, and the museum, through the transit inside the cloister, becomes the connection between the upper



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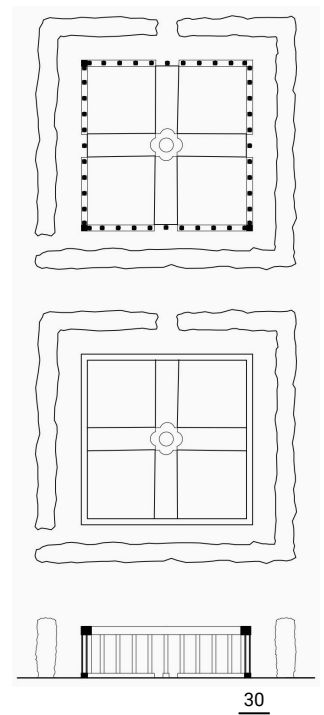
Fig. 28  
Schemes of the 6 solutions  
(section and plan) for the  
museum court.

Fig. 29  
Floor plan and elevation of the  
Museum (FIMS/AFT).

and lower parts of the park, where the circular skating rink will be placed. The elevation and section sketched alongside the plan make it clear how, through the square body added now on the left of the cloister instead of the right, the difference in level between the two elevations is resolved. Two staircases are inserted into the lower portion of the museum so as not to interrupt the circular route to the works on display. Positioning the fountain and some trees in the centre of the cloister transforms it into an intimate space, separated from the rest of the park and characterised by a more intimate atmosphere suitable for a museum.

The composition thus acquires the valence of a classical Roman *domus*, also approaching the layout and atmosphere breathed by Távora in the Baths with *heliocaminus* visited at Hadrian's Villa, albeit with due differences.

The section chosen as a further advancement of the previous schemes is developed in detail in the drawing. In addition to the perimeter wall and the inclined



inner roof, selected as the ideal solution, a second roof is added, inclined in the opposite direction. Távora's study focuses on the relationship the two inclined roofs must have when they meet at ridge height. The offset of the lower inner to the higher outer one will allow light to enter the rooms arranged around the cloister through a high skylight. At the same time, the light wooden structure of the roof will rest on the existing columns and truss of the cloister. As already mentioned, this study will not lead to the realisation of the building. Still, the detailed section will be reused in the later *Tennis Pavilion*, just as the diagrams of the relationship of the pitches will be taken up in the *Escola primária of the Quinta do Cedro*<sup>25</sup> [Fig. 30, 31].

The financial impossibility of the Municipality of Matosinhos immediately scuppered the idea of building the museum. Still, Távora nonetheless chose to create a closed and reserved space by exploiting the pre-existing convent and

Fig. 30  
Schemes of the realised  
cloister.

Fig. 31  
Image of the cloister (photo by  
the author).

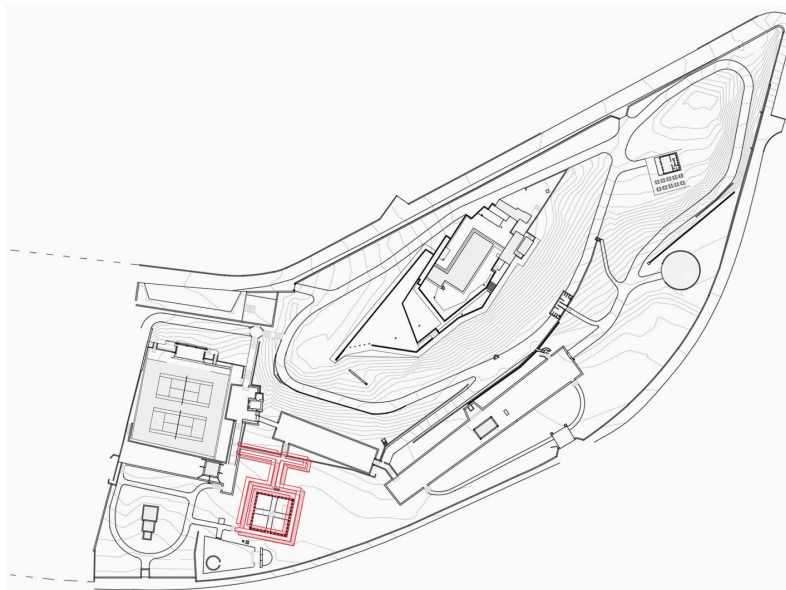
25 The Escola primária do Cedro was built in Vila Nova de Gaia between 1958 and 1960.



cloister colonnade, which he complemented with the remains of another cloister found in Gaia, as Álvaro Siza recalls:

There was an old convent in La Quinta at the lowest location, where he then made the fence with the hedge, and he managed to convince the municipality to buy a porch that he had found in Gaia. It was in a convent in Gaia, not as part of the convent itself but in a garden, and he convinced the president of the Municipal Chamber to bring it here because it was a period thing and reminded him of the old convent that had been built here.<sup>26</sup>

It is therefore not an actual building but a green wall, formed by tall hedges well suited to the available economic resources. The green curtain separates the environment from the outside, protecting and controlling it. The convent's cloister is hardly noticeable from the outside except through openings and paths clearly defined by the high hedge. From the main avenue, a perpendicular path branches off that also marks the start of the hedge from which it is possible, thanks to a difference in height, to have a perspective view of the entire cloister from above. On the lower side towards the lower entrance, we find a staircase that connects this level to the mezzanine floor of the cloister, inserting itself at an angle directly into the green courtyard [Fig. 32].



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### *Tennis Pavilion*

The study on the Tennis Pavilion in the Park of the Quinta da Conceição included in this research is not intended to repeat the countless critiques, descriptions and studies already carried out on this building but attempts to take a different look by analysing the composition of the project in relation to the entire Quinta and the pavilion itself. "The problem arose of marking the park with a building, creating an object with presence, affirming the axis of the tennis courts and serving as a landmark".<sup>27</sup>

Távora's compositional requirement was to mark the axis of the tennis courts from the bottom upwards, giving strength to the part of the park to the left of the main avenue. The presence of the cloister element on the right side unbalanced the overall composition, leaving a void on the opposite side that had to be characterised in some way. At the same time, the view from the lower part towards the slope of the hill lacked a visual element to act as a focal point. Távora decided to include the Tennis Pavilion as a visual horizon on the hillside,

26 Unedited conversation with Álvaro Siza (February 2016).

27 Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*, 319.

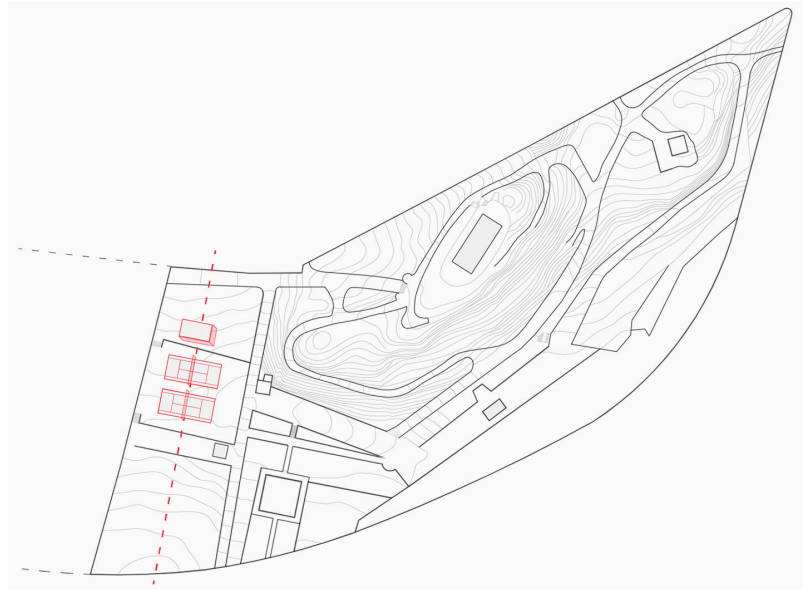
Fig. 32

Diagram Development of the museum cloister (graphics by the author).

making compositional choices in the plan and the section and studying how this could be visible from below. In this way, the main axis of the avenue gains even more strength in the plan as it also distributes the pivotal spaces of the park: the cloister on one side and the Pavilion with the tennis courts on the other [Fig. 33].

During his trip to Italy in 1956, Távora visited Villa Adriana and Villa d'Este in Tivoli. As in the imperial residence, he was also impressed by the design ability to organise such an important building and park by making the most of the steeply sloping terrain, devising expedients to make the slope a strong composition point.

In the garden plan, shown on the back cover of the book *Villa Adriana e Villa d'Este*<sup>28</sup> purchased during the visit, Távora notes three different sections passing through the main axes of the park. The slope and level jumps emphasise the strong axial character of the composition. The visual axis starts from the lowest point of the park, the main gate, and culminates in the prominent element of the composition, the Villa, which is not a walkway in its entirety but only in part. The aim is to emphasise the architecture at the highest point and ensure that the visitor must walk through the garden not only in a linear path but by crossing different spaces. In this way, the transition between the different heights takes place gradually and at pivotal points of the garden, which are



identified in the meeting of the main axis and two systems perpendicular to it, the water basins ending in the Neptune fountain and the path of the hundred fountains with the courtyard and the Ovato fountain at the apex. Távora also notes the sections of these two transversal axes and then concentrates on two details concerning the court of the Ovato and the walkway of the hundred fountains. Siza testifies to the importance Távora gave to Italian gardens and referring to the Quinta, says:

But Távora was Mediterranean, so if you look at his work at the Quinta, you can see the relevance of his culture as a man from the South. He was referring to the Italian garden, the Italian garden and the Mediterranean. He did a lot of travelling and drawing, and a part was strictly dedicated to gardens. So that when he came back (I still remember the great discussions I witnessed), he would modify the whole project.<sup>29</sup>

The situation in the Quinta is similar. The slope of the terrain and its complexity require control through design that must be respectful of the existing.

28 Mancini, *Villa Adriana e Villa d'Este*.

29 Unedited conversation with Álvaro Siza (February 2016).

Fig. 33  
Schematic diagram Tennis pavilion and playing fields axis (graphics by the author).

The territorial control interventions dating back to when the Quinta was a convent and the phase when it was a farm were already aimed at softening the terrain by making it flatter, but without any real design intention. Távora's intervention, starting from the retaining walls and the spaces already present in the park, aims to systematise the composition by working on the individual portions, studying in detail the proportions and control of all the spaces, linking them together through paths that are sometimes more direct, such as the avenue, and sometimes gradual, such as the path at the top, which make it possible to discover all the points of the garden through a promenade *architecturale* [Fig. 34].

In this sense, the definition of a main visual axis, that of the tennis courts and the Pavilion parallel to the driveway, serves the architect to order the overall composition. Thus, from the design presented to the City Hall in 1957, the current situation has changed, mainly by varying the entrance on the southeast side from the lower driveway, also due to the failure to build the museum. The visual axis of the tennis courts is then strengthened starting from the lower entrance gate, inserting a new fountain consisting of three different square pools of larger size as they rise the slope. The central path then widens as in Villa d'Este, circling the new fountain until it reaches the avenue connecting with the upper part.

The need to visually mark the axis of the tennis courts necessitates the positioning of a closing element of the perspective, the Pavilion, which also becomes the endpoint of the high route [Fig. 35].

The Tennis Pavilion designed on the summit synthesises the compositional research carried out for the museum and represents the evolution of the detail sections previously represented and readable within the initial sketches. The skilful use of traditional materials, combined with modern ones such as reinforced concrete, makes the Pavilion a synthesis of

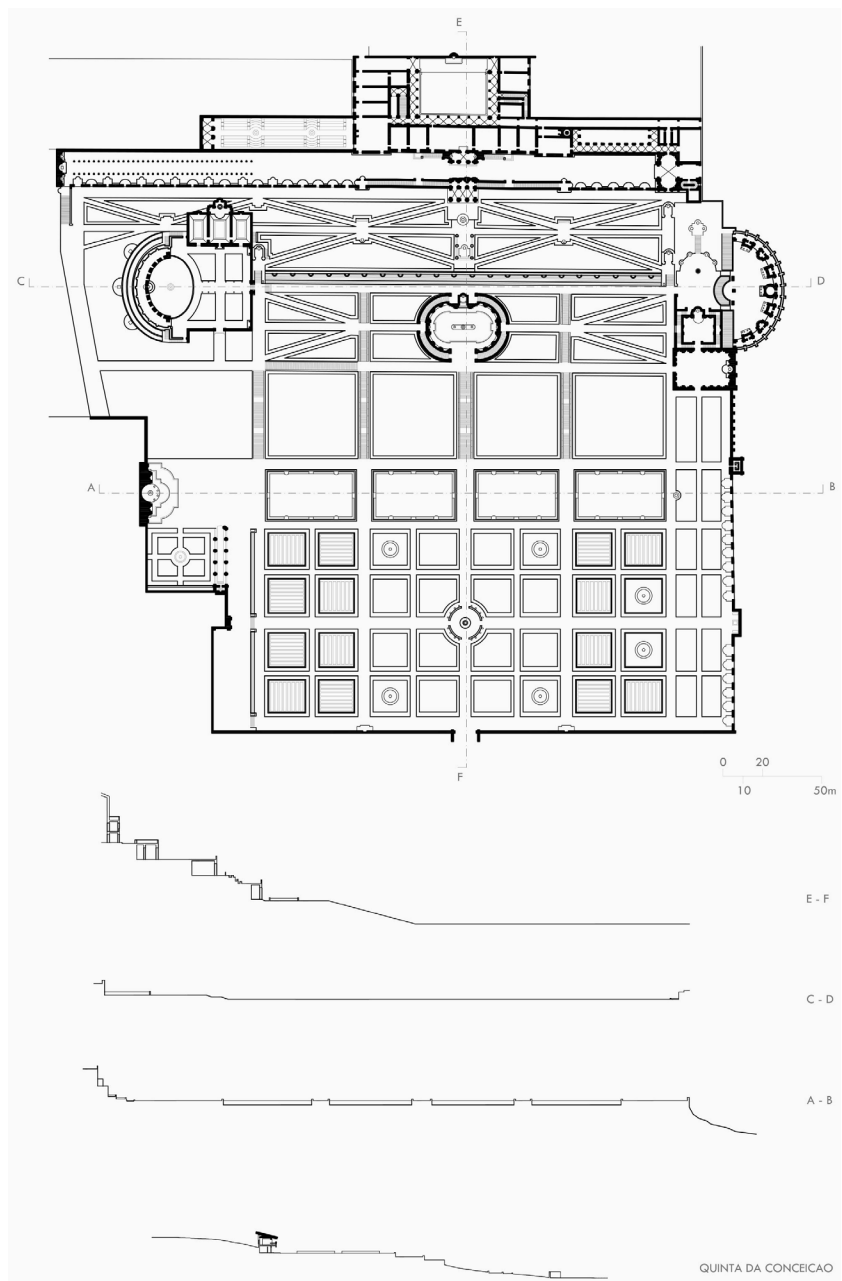


Fig. 34  
Schemes of the plan and sections of the Villa d'Este at Tivoli annotated by Távora in G. Mancini, *Villa Adriana e Villa d'Este*, 1956 and below longitudinal section on the tennis pavilion and the axis of the courts (graphics by the author).



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Távora's design process, inextricably linked to the teachings of classical architecture but profoundly attracted to the modern, to the point of a clash, a mixture, a synthesis.

The weight of popular culture as understood by local materials, the acceptance of the consistency of each material or the use of traditional building solutions, will be incorporated into a modern, almost neo-plastic or Japanese syntax in the details and in some ways proper to the contemporary Le Corbusier.<sup>30</sup>

The juxtaposition of the Pavilion's design with Japanese architecture is echoed in many publications about this project. This is not to be completely ruled out, given Távora's deep thirst for knowledge, who may have also previously studied Japanese architecture, which, however, he only saw live during the 1960 trip, when the Pavilion was already finished in its structure. It cannot be ruled out that some details may have been developed on his return from the trip, such as the handrail and eaves, even though they were already present in the executive design of the previous year. In any case, the link with the traditional architecture seen on the trips to Italy is very clear in the correspondence of the sectional diagrams drawn on the visits to Hadrian's Villa and re-proposed in the museum project that was later not realised to define the final section of the Pavilion [Fig. 35].

#### *Entrance Courtyard and Main Avenue*

The design study starts, as mentioned above, with the definition of the main avenue, which undergoes several modifications during the various stages of the project. The final version is very similar to that assumed in the 1957 project, with the exception of the access in the lower part.

<sup>30</sup> Javier Frechilla, *La Quinta da conceição: Opus con amore*, in *Fernando Távora, DPA – Documentos de Projectos Arquitectònics de la Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya*, no. 14, 1998: 24-29.

Fig. 35  
Image of the tennis pavilion  
(photo by the author).

The desire to widen the avenue at precise points along its course remains unchanged and leads to the construction of the *Red Pavillion*, the true gateway to the park, the *Chapel Court*, the entrance court to the tennis courts and, as an endpoint, the Fountain Court.

Analysing the composition of the Red Pavillion, one can find several analogies, both with the buildings visited during the trip to Italy in 1956 and with the first hypotheses concerning the museum project included in sketch 1. Távora notes two precise spaces, which can be traced back to the compositional basis of the new entrance to the Quinta, in the book on Villa d'Este and Villa Adriana<sup>31</sup> purchased during the trip.

The first sketch (see [Fig. 8]) is of the Maritime Theatre of Villa Adriana, which the architect reproduces in one of the blank pages of the book through a perspective drawing and a plan with some annotations. Clearly visible is the high perimeter wall that delimits the theatre cylinders. Távora also notes some words concerning the composition of the space and a consideration: "High wall, world, water, individual. Hadrian's Isle of Isolation? If not, it is well found".<sup>32</sup>

The feeling of isolation from the outside world remains imprinted on Távora, as does the intimacy of the space that is visually separated from its surroundings and only communicates with the surroundings through a door. The proportion of the floor area in relation to the height of the wall is not claustrophobic but cosy and protective.

In the same book, Távora sketches two details concerning Villa d'Este, which he visits on the same day. He is impressed by the solution devised to connect the level jumps within the garden by means of a stepped wall that also serves as a fountain. The wall called the Hundred Fountains, impresses the architect with its ingenuity and the exorbitant amount of water. He notes, in fact, both the elevation and the section of the fountains. The *Hundred Fountains* also mark one of the transverse avenues in the garden, characterised at its ends by spaces that mark the ending. On one side, the avenue arrives at a panoramic terrace, which opens onto the valley below Tivoli, offering surprising views. On the other hand, it arrives in the *Corte dell'Ovato*, a high-walled enclosure that separates a portion of the park from the rest. The wall only opens at specific points, towards the Avenue of the Hundred Fountains and in a southerly direction. From the outside, the high perimeter prevents a view of the inner part. The only perceptible interior elements are the crowns of four trees that can be seen towering over the top of the enclosure. Távora draws the plan of the system, also positioning the trees, the interior seating, and the oval fountain. From the inside, the space is well-circumscribed, separated from the outside, which it communicates only through the view of the two doors. The roar of water from the fountain helps to define the area, echoing between the walls and

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31 Mancini, *Villa Adriana e Villa d'Este*.

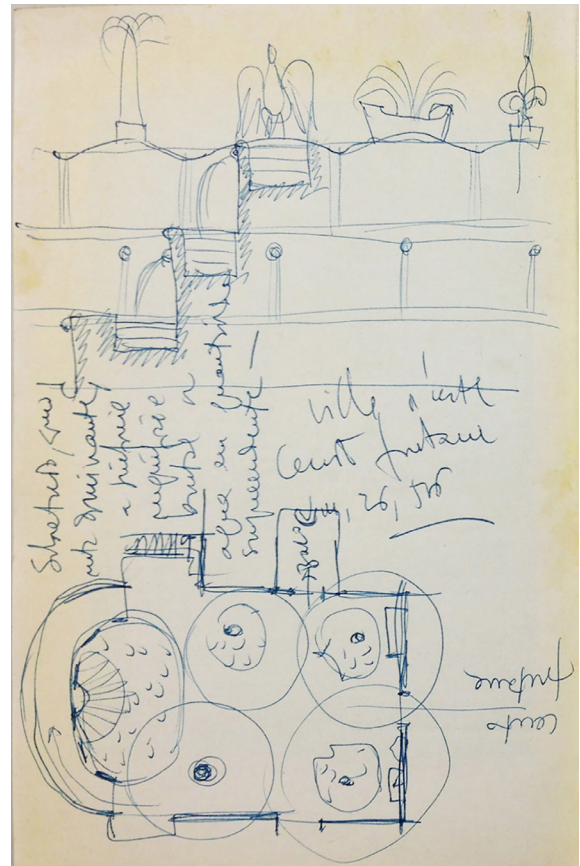
32 Notes by Távora, handwritten beside the sketch in the book: Mancini, *Villa Adriana e Villa d'Este* (Marques da Silva Foundation Archive).

imposing itself as the only source of sound. Furthermore, the possibility of a superior view of the courtyard through two staircases leading to the pathway above the fountain allows for an even better understanding of the shape of the space and the relationship between it and the rest of the garden. The exit door of the courtyard faces the axis of the avenue of the *Hundred Fountains* and is connected to it by a descending staircase. The intersection of four different paths at this point defines a connection between different heights. Távora notes beside the sketched plan: "Above all, as a dominant note, a magnificent and brutal surface" [Fig. 36].<sup>33</sup>

Through his direct experience of these spaces during his trip to Italy in 1956, Távora arrives at a synthesis in the park of the Quinta da Conceição, initially designing an introverted place like the museum developed around the cloister. In the previously described sectional sketches, he manifests his desire to build a casket within which to store the "treasure" of the cloister's remains. The only perspective sketch of the various diagrams developed in this section concerns an external view in which the perimeter is defined as a parallelepiped with a few openings. The door is a clean cut in the masonry, a clear separation of two sides that remain connected only through an architrave placed halfway up the wall [Fig. 37].

It is from this detail that the strongest visual analogy with the high entrance court, later realised in the Quinta, arises.

This space becomes the main entrance, as a connection of the upper street with the lower park and as a closer access to the *Tennis Pavilion* not far away. Walking along the upper street, the view down the valley is blocked by the granite wall that separated the Quinta from the rest of the city even before Távora's intervention. An interruption in the granite wall along the route defines the new access, underlined by the red colour of the new courtyard inserted by the architect. The courtyard is the only entrance from the car park towards the park, located at a much lower level. The three different levels, car park, entrance, and park, are connected by stairs inside the perimeter of the courtyard. The limit imposed by the red walls seen from the car park seems to embrace and welcome the visitor, interrupting itself right at the entrance, completely removing one of the four sides, the one facing the car park. From above, one does not perceive the floor of the courtyard, which remains at a lower level, reached



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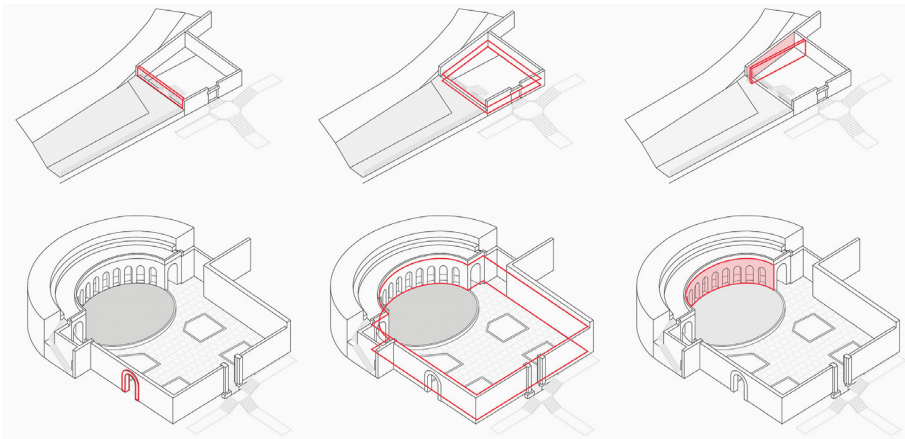


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Fig. 36  
Fernando Távora, Corte dell'Ovato e Cento Fontane 1956, drawing in the book: *Villa Adriana e Villa d'Este* (FIMS/AFT).

Fig. 37  
Fernando Távora, perspective sketch of the museum building designed around the cloister (FIMS/AFT).

<sup>33</sup> Notes by Távora, handwritten beside the sketch in the book: Mancini, *Villa Adriana e Villa d'Este* (Marques da Silva Foundation Archive).



38 |

by the staircase that represents the real point of detachment from the outside. The visitor is led down into a space defined by the red walls, which control the surrounding terrain, fitting like a perfect and unusual shape into the orography of the ground. The only exception is the north side, which bends following the course of the upper street. The rotation of this courtyard wall does not prevent Távora from nevertheless closing off the space by marking the perfect square on the ground through the paving and leaving the remaining part of the surface green. The presence of a tree in this portion of land, now absent, was meant to recall the space of the Ovato courtyard, with controlled and defined greenery within the wall enclosure. Once the level of the courtyard is reached, the feeling of detachment from the outside is already very present. The gradual access to the garden is accentuated more by the presence of a door, the only gap in the courtyard wall, closed on all sides. The visitor is naturally attracted by the visual perception through it, which, with the positioning of the granite architrave, a clear reference to the perspective sketch of the cloister courtyard, defines a frame for the greenery below and for the path of the main avenue that begins its descent in axis with this point. The proportion of the perimeter wall recalls the enclosure of the Maritime Theatre of Hadrian's Villa, an example of a place of rest and separation from the outside world. The descending path from the car park towards the garden recalls that of the courtyard of the Ovato at Villa d'Este, with a succession of perceptions on the part of the visitor: the view from above the fountain, the descent inside the enclosure, and the opening towards the garden through a well-defined door in the wall [Fig. 38].

The main avenue can be glimpsed through the door in the courtyard and continues in a linear form until it joins the lower level of the park.

The geometry that is defined is very clear and essential based on a sequence of spaces and then using different frames along the way. At a certain point, one arrives at a tennis court right in front, then a horizontal space, then the long staircase continues with landings that define different spaces and ends in access upstairs where there is a beautiful pátio delimited by red walls.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Unedited conversation with Álvaro Siza (February 2016).

Fig. 38  
Comparison diagrams Quinta da Conceição – Corte dell'Ovato at Villa d'Este (graphics by the author).

The perception of the route from above is that of an elongated space, of which one can see the conclusion but also several points of exception due to enlargements of the same. The first dilation of space occurs at the chapel and is already perceptible from inside the entrance courtyard. As soon as you enter through the courtyard door, the space opens in all directions, and all the main points of the park are clearly perceptible: the Tennis Pavilion on the right and the white walls of the swimming pool on the left. In this place, the paths of the park intersect the axis of the main avenue and the gradual path that runs around the summit of the Quinta, reached from here by a staircase. The octagonal space, defined by the paving, connects all the flights of stairs that lean against it and is therefore comparable to the space one encounters when leaving the courtyard of the Ovato towards the avenue of the Hundred Fountains at Villa d'Este [Fig. 39].

The upward path of the avenue continues until it reaches the chapel courtyard, where it expands to allow a better view of the small church and access to the sports area of the tennis courts, which is also managed by a small courtyard defined by the hedge, within which there is a seat. The attempt to give the chapel courtyard a rectangular shape, as in the initial design hypothesis, must be subject to the rotation that the small church presents. Two L-shaped walls that rotate in different ways are defined, one coming perpendicularly on the chapel wall, the other running parallel to the main axis.

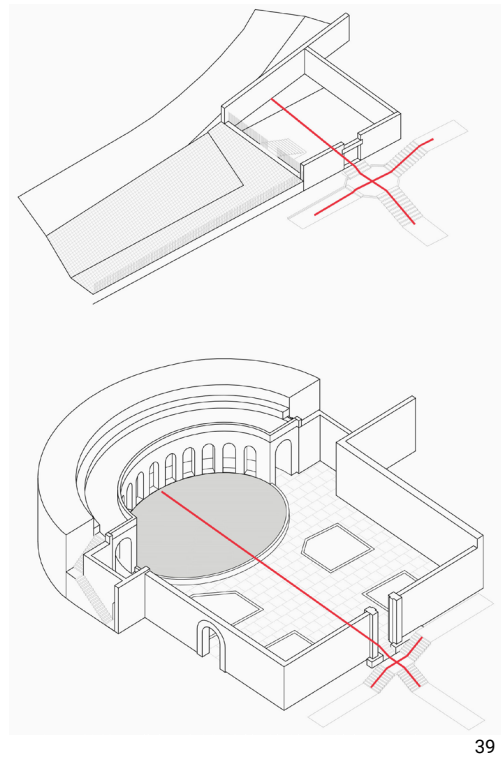
The courtyard is defined by perimeter seating, which creates a more secluded atmosphere than the rest of the park, while high hedges block the view. Within the perimeter, the path coming from the yellow court also converges. Continuing the descent towards the lower part of the park, one encounters an interruption of the hedge to the right at a statue that marks the start of the path to the cloister of the former convent.

The endpoint of the avenue is the space dedicated to the old fountain, elongated in shape and defined by the retaining wall of the tennis courts above. The fountain has remained untouched except for the addition of a few elements reminiscent of the wine cultivations of Portugal, with thin granite poles topped by iron rods.

The path ends in a staircase that connects it to the lower part of the park and the respective entrance, not axially but perpendicular to the path, concealing the ramp through a wall [Fig. 40].

### ***Rectangular Courts and Paths***

The theme of the relationship with the orography of the terrain was a very important point for Távora in this project, as it was not a question of organising a flat terrain but of developing a composition that would exploit the potential of the terrain by adapting to it while defining precise spaces.



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Fig. 39  
Comparison diagrams of the Quinta da Conceição – Corte dell'Ovato at Villa d'Este (main axis graphics by the author).

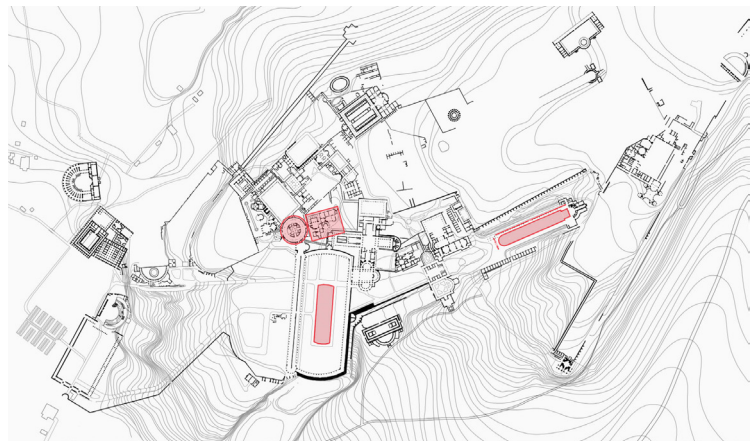
Fig. 40  
The entrance court of the Quinta da Conceição from the main axis (photo by the author).



The interest in Villa Adriana and Villa d'Este also stems from this need. The sites of the two villas are actually very different from each other: Villa d'Este is located on a steep slope, which required a very precise organisation of the garden with many artificial elements to control the ground, while Villa Adriana is located on a much gentler and easier to control slope, but despite this, the general composition of the imperial villa follows the terrain with continuous changes of level between the different sectors of the house. Távora, in his notes on the villa, writes: "The composition follows the terrain".<sup>35</sup>

He is impressed by the ability of a project of such dimensions to best fit on the hillside. In the general plan of the villa, included in the book purchased for the visit, he does not fail to note the most interesting spaces visited: the *Baths with Heliocaminus*, already described in their composition, the *Maritime Theatre*, the *Pecile* and the *Canopus*. Of the latter two spaces, he notes the measurements and highlights the central portions of the water courts [Fig. 41].

In the layout of the Quinta prior to the project, there were two spaces of similar size to those noted in the Canopus and with the same proportions. These portions of the park were difficult to manage because they were very elongated and poorly defined in their surroundings. Through the design and subsequent realisation, Távora acts by redefining the limits of these spaces and their access. Reusing the signs of the retaining walls already present on the site, he inserts two walls, closing off the spaces on the short sides defining the rectangle. In the courtyard, which will later be painted yellow, by raising the perimeter walls, he controls the existing slope, bringing the plan to a single level. The definition of the boundary establishes a precise point of the beginning and end of the courtyard and consequently imposes a study of the accesses: the first, coming from the chapel described above, crosses a narrowing of the path that leads to the median point of the short side of the perimeter; the second is on the opposite side and joins the slope, at this point descending, by means of a staircase that connects it to the second, lower courtyard. At this junction, there is also the change in colour, from yellow to red, of the perimeter walls containing the land, which characterise the two different courts. In addition to defining the spaces through the colour of the perimeter, Távora positions two rows of trees parallel to the long side, accentuating the perspective vision of the space and giving it three-dimensionality, which now, thanks to the division into three naves covered by the green foliage of the trees, is perceived no longer only as a sign on the ground, clearly visible in plan, but also as a volume in height. The same expedient is used in the Red Court



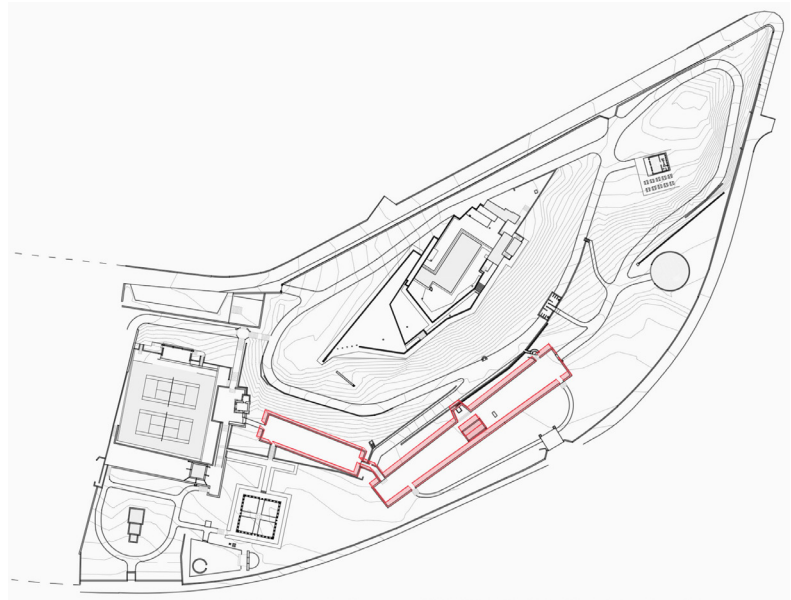
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Fig. 41  
Villa Adriana, Tivoli, spaces noted on the plan by Távora inside the book *La Villa Adriana presso Tivoli* (graphics by the author).

<sup>35</sup> Notes by Távora, handwritten beside the sketch in the book: Aurigemma, *La Villa Adriana presso Tivoli* (Marques da Silva Foundation Archive).

further down. The larger trees already present define a constant shading over the entire ground. Given the size of the space, which is very similar to that of the Canopus of Hadrian's Villa, the choice is to reuse an existing central element, the fountain, as a junction and stopping point within the promenade. To do this, the existing niche on the west wall upstream is better defined by inserting two seats and a sculptural fountain, fed through a channel running parallel to the upper walkway, reminiscent of the traditional Portuguese linear fountains as well as the one in the fountain courtyard at Villa Adriana. The retaining wall defining the courtyards always acquires a double value as a containment upstream and as a seating area downstream [Fig. 42].

On the north side, the path that unravels around the highest part of the park has a completely different significance from that of the main avenue: the rectilinear course, the insertion between two precise walls and the connection of different heights by means of stairs is completely lost in this path which, although defined on the edges by a stone pavement, gradually follows the slopes and contours. The intention is not to reach the summit as quickly as possible, but in a gradual manner, through a *promenade architecturale* that allows the view of the summit, which houses the swimming pool, from different points. The architecture of the building itself rests on the ground and gradually blends into it until it fades and dissolves into the greenery. Walking along the path from the high entrance courtyard in a clockwise direction, one perceives only the park with an unusual white retaining wall, completely different from other walls or embankments. The wall septum ends in greenery, almost as if it were incomplete, and is lost in the vegetation. Advancing, one perceives a new wall, now further back than the first, almost as if to create successive green terraces, and finally, one perceives the retaining and protective wall of the swimming pool, which, like a white volume, stands out at the top dominating and controlling the surrounding nature. One reaches the entrance, marked by a spire inviting one to enter and by a flight of steps connecting the external level to that of the swimming pool. It is only when entering the building that you realise how the white retaining walls, described earlier, are actually three different steps down, which control the slope and create flat areas used entirely by the pool users. Távora entrusted the design of the swimming pool at the top of the Quinta to his collaborator Álvaro Siza in 1957 still within the firm, knowing that the student would be able to complete the work. The project presented by Siza under Távora's signature in 1958 was influenced by the recently completed Tennis Pavilion. However, the lack



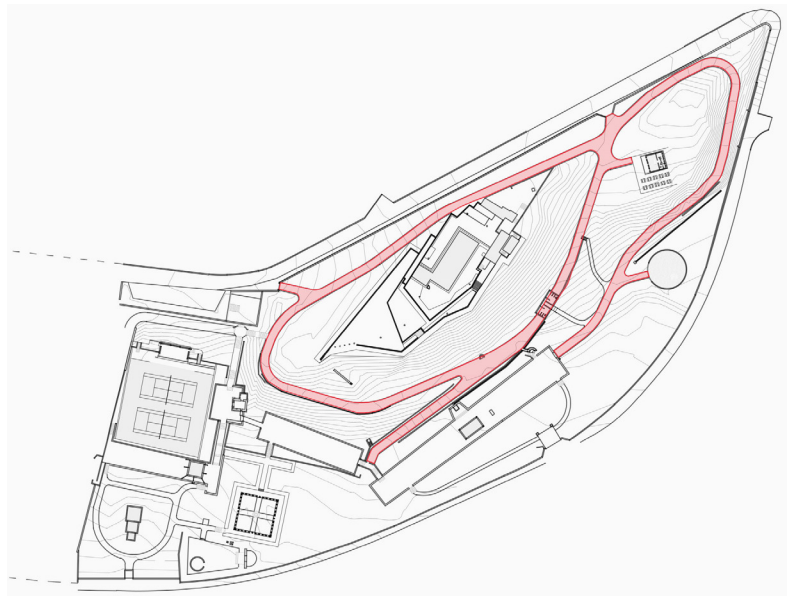
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Fig. 42  
Quinta da Conceição, the yellow and red courts. (graphics by the author).

of financial availability caused the realisation to be delayed and allowed Siza to revise the project in the following years, in 1961 and 1966, after having already realised the swimming pools in Leça da Palmeira and the Boa Nova restaurant. The greater awareness in controlling the terrain and the aspects that the site presented led to the introduction of the retaining walls in the existing slopes [Fig. 43, 44]. Siza writes in a 2002 article about the swimming pool project:

The location of the pool was determined by the presence of an ancient irrigation reservoir, located at the highest elevation of the estate, with no contiguous areas of equal level, because they were not needed.

The new platforms are supported by long walls of varying directions according to the topography, creating suns on three distinct elevations. The solid geometry of the first two platforms precedes a third, which concludes the enclosure, dissolving in the vegetation and undulations of the terrain. If this last phase of the project, of greater essentiality in design, did not contaminate the buildings, it is simply because they had already been partially constructed. The work had suffered a long suspension for financial reasons. This suspension allowed the project to be rethought and matured.<sup>36</sup>



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Fig. 43  
Quinta da Conceição, the yellow and red courts (graphics by the author).

Fig. 44  
View of the swimming pool inside the Quinta da Conceição (photo by the author).

<sup>36</sup> Álvaro Siza, "Quinta da Conceição", *Archi*, no. 5, 1 (February 2002): 6-15.

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