I have often thought about the grandeur of the ancient Romans and their fine judgment in building, which can still be seen in the ruins of the very many buildings of great variety both in ancient Rome and in many parts of Italy as well as abroad. Therefore, in addition to my other labours on architecture, I decided to put in one volume, if not all, then at least a majority of those antiquities so that any person who enjoyed architecture could, wherever they find themselves, take this book to hand and see all the marvelous ruins of those Roman buildings. If these were not still standing, the writings which recount the many marvels of their constructions would perhaps not have been believed.—[

Now, to return to my principal argument, I say that since the Pantheon (in my opinion) is the best conceived of all the buildings I have ever seen or that can be seen, it seemed to me correct to place it at the beginning of the volume, as if it were the head of all the other buildings, especially since it is a sacred temple and was consecrated for divine worship by Pope Boniface. The founder of this temple, as Pliny states in several places, was Marcus Agrippa—executing, however, the wishes of Augustus Caesar who, cut short by death, was unable to do it. This temple was built in the fourteenth year of Christ, which comes out to be five thousand, two hundred and three years of the world, or there about. In the said temple (as Pliny writes), the capitals were made of copper. The said author writes that Diogenes the Athenian sculptor carved caryatids in the columns, which were greatly appreciated, and that the statues placed upon the pediment were highly praised, although owing to the height of their position they were never renowned. This temple was struck by lightning and damaged by fire in the twelfth year of the Emperor Trajan (which is one hundred and thirteen years after Christ and five thousand, three hundred and eleven years of the world). Lucius Septimius Severus and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus restored it with all its ornaments, as appears inscribed on the architrave of the pediment. It is possible to believe that all the ornaments were rebuilt, because the caryatids in the columns which the above-mentioned Diogenes made must have been set in a different way. However, it is true to say that the architect who arranged the ornaments had fine judgment and discretion; fine judgment, because he knew (50v) how to harmonise the 'members' and make them correspond to the whole body, and because he did not want to confuse the works with a large amount of carving but knew how to compartition them with great judgment—as I shall deal with at length in its place; and discretion, because he wished to keep to the Corinthian Order throughout the whole work and did not want to mix it with another Order, and because the measurements of all the members are better observed than in any other building that I have seen and measured. In
truth, this temple could be said to be an architectural exemplar. However, leaving aside these tales from history, which are of little importance to the architect, I shall come to the individual measurements of all the elements. And so as to proceed in a more orderly fashion with these antiquities, the first thing will be the *iconografia*, that is, the plan, the second the *ortographia*, that is, the elevation (others call it the section) and the third thing will be the *sciografia*, that is, the front and the sides of whatever it is. The following figure is the plan of the Pantheon; it was measured with the ancient Roman palm. […]

Although the central chapel corresponds excellently with all of the rest of the work, nevertheless it is the opinion of many that, because its arch breaks the five columns—something which was never the custom of the worthy ancients—it is not ancient, but was added to the Christian temple, since it is fitting for Christian temples to have a principal altar, larger than the others. […]

This cornice, frieze and architrave is above the door of the Pantheon. As to the measurements: the architrave is an eighth of the width of the door; the frieze, since it is uncarved, is a third less than the architrave; the cornice is as tall as the architrave. As for the individual members, they are proportioned with respect to the large work, whence with a pair of compasses all of the dimensions can be found.

In order to show all the parts of this most beautiful and well-conceived building, it has to be drawn from more than one side. Therefore, since I have shown above the front face straight on, with all the things that can be seen in a front view, I shall now show the portico, the vestibule and the entrance to the temple from the side. As to their exact measurements, the thickness and height of their columns and pilasters outside and their other ornaments, I recorded them above, and therefore shall not repeat them. It is enough however merely to see the disposition of the elements which, although they are very small, are scaled down in proportion to the originals. The smaller columns in the entrance to the temple are flat columns for use as pilasters; I shall their measurements below because they serve also for the chapels. The bronze half barrel vault, which I mentioned above, was equal to the space of these three intercolumniations. […]

This is a very ruined temple outside Rome, built for the most part of brick. None of these ornaments here, however, can be seen standing, but as far as the proportioned height can be deduced and estimated from the plan, it could have been like the figure at A and B. There are only measurements for the plan, and from these the work standing can be deduced. The plan below was measured with the ancient Roman palm, which is on page vi. First, the door of the temple is twenty-two palms wide, and the diameter of the temple itself ninety-six and a half palms. The two niches at the sides are as wide as the door; the door to the smaller temple is the same width. Similarly, the four chapels are the same width in their entrances, although they get wider on the inside, and their side walls converge towards the centre of the temple itself. These four chapels, as far as can be understood, took their light from their sides, and it is for this reason that the circumference of this temple is pulled in on the inner part at the two sides A and B—a shape which I do not dislike. The diameter of the smaller is sixty-three palms; the small chapel—both the concave and the convex ones—are fifteen palms wide. I cannot imagine
how the two convex chapels finished in the upper part because there is not enough of the elevation left such that their ends can be seen, but some of this does indeed appear above the ground. Although (as I said above) evidence cannot be seen above ground as to the appearance of the building, I nevertheless wanted to construct the elevation according to my opinion. Thus, the part on the left-hand side marked B gives an impression of part of the large temple, and the part marked A shows a part of the smaller temple.

The temple shown below is outside Rome, for the most part built of brick, very ruined and not very large. It cannot be deduced whether it received any light other than from the door and the high windows at the head above the cornice. All the other recesses were places for statues, idols or the like. The measurements of this temple got lost on the journey and so I will not give any others, but the architect can make good use of the invention. I do remember well, however, that the temple inside was a square and a half, both in plan and in height. […]

Augustus had this theatre built in the name of his nephew, Marcellus, and hence it is called the Theatre of Marcellus. It is in Rome. Part of it, that is, the external part of the portico, is to be seen still standing. It is of two Orders only, that is, Doric and Ionic, highly praised work even though the Doric columns do not have their bases or even their collar below, but simply rest upon the pavement of the portico, without anything beneath. Not much was known about the plan of this theatre. However, just recently the noble Roman family, the Massimi, wanted to build a house, the site for which turned out to be above part of this theatre—the said house was designed by that outstanding architect, Baldassare from Siena. While they were excavating the foundations they found the remains of many different parts of the ornamentation of this theatre and clear traces of the ground plan were unearthed. As a result Baldassare deduced the whole from that part uncovered, and thus measured it very carefully and set it in the form which is shown on the following page. Since I happened to be in Rome at the same time, I saw many of those parts of the ornamentation and had an opportunity to measure them, and truly there I found forms as beautiful as any I have ever seen in ancient ruins, especially in the Doric capitals and the imposts of the arches which I thought conformed very closely to the writings of Vitruvius. In the same way the frieze, the triglyphs and the metopes all corresponded very well. However, even though the Doric cornice was extremely rich in members and highly carved, nonetheless I found it very far from Vitruvian doctrine, very licentious in its members and of such a height that, in proportion to the architrave and frieze, two-thirds of that height would have been enough. Nevertheless I think that modern architects should not err (by err I mean go against Vitruvian precepts) by adducing the licence of this or other ancient things, or be so presumptuous as to carve a cornice or other element in exactly the same proportion that they have seen and measured and then to build it into a work. The fact is that it is not enough to say ‘I can do it because the ancients did it’ without considering whether the element is otherwise in proportion to the rest of the building. Furthermore, even if the ancient architect was licentious, we must not be so. We should uphold the doctrines of Vitruvius as an infallible guide and rule, provided that reason does not persuade us otherwise, because from the worthy ancients up to our times there has been no one who has written better or more learnedly on architecture than he. If in every other noble art we can see that there is a founder to whom
is ascribed so much authority that his pronouncements are given full and perfect trust, who would deny—unless he were very foolhardy and ignorant—that in architecture Vitruvius was at the highest level? Or that his writings (where reason does not dictate otherwise) ought to be sacrosanct and inviolable? Or that we should trust him more than any works by the Romans: although they learned the true order in building from the Greeks, nevertheless later, as conquerors of the Greeks, perhaps some of them became licentious? Certainly, anyone who had seen the wonderful works built by the Greeks—nearly all of which have disappeared, demolished by time and wars—would judge that the Greek works were better by far than those of the Romans. And so all those architects who might condemn the writings of Vitruvius, especially in those parts which can be dearly understood—like the Doric Order which I am discussing—would be architectural heretics, refuting that author who for so many years has been, and still is, approved of by men of discernment. […]

Perhaps it will seem to those who are completely intoxicated with the antiquities of Rome that I am too audacious in wanting to judge them, since they were built by the ancient Romans who knew so much. However, in this case they should take my words in good part because my whole intention is to teach those who do not know and who think it worthwhile listening to what I say, since it is one thing to imitate the state of ancient things exactly, but to know how to make a choice of the beautiful according to the rules of Vitruvius and reject the ugly and badly conceived is something else. It is certain that the finest quality of the architect is that he is not let down by his judgement, as many are. Obstinate in their opinion, they make things as they saw them in Rome and defend themselves saying that the ancients built these, without giving any other theory for them. Some say that Vitruvius was only human and that they too are men who are good at discovering new inventions, with no regard for the fact that Vitruvius admits to having learned from many knowledgeable men of his time and of the past, both by reading and observing the works of others. […]

Merely his shadow will frighten anyone who wishes to go against the true doctrines of the great Vitruvius, or against me, I who have placed every force in my body behind following him—and I exhort everyone intending to build to do the same, so that their buildings are full of goodness and beauty in complete harmony.