

In the seventh book of Vitruvius the Renaissance artist would find the chapter on wall painting in which the classical author bursts out in violent abuse against the 'surrealist' inventions of the decorators of his time<sup>52</sup> whose fantastic designs defied all rules of taste and reason. He contrasts these ancestors of the 'grotesque' with the style of decoration that had been in vogue in earlier times, when the walls of rooms were painted in imitation of theatrical stage decorations while long galleries were often decorated with realistic landscapes.

... galleries, because of their length, they decorated with a variety of sceneries, images depicting the character of certain localities, painting ports, promontories, shores, rivers, fountains, straits, shrines, groves, mountains, cattle and shepherds. . . .<sup>53</sup>

The list of subjects is very similar to that which Pliny gives for the paintings of Studius. But the importance of Vitruvius may lie in his special emphasis on naturalistic prospects which are opposed to grotesque decorations. True, his authority did not suffice to counteract the greater authority of actual classical relics—grotesques continued to be painted in the Renaissance despite the protests of such purists as Daniele Barbaro.<sup>54</sup> But this recommendation of real vistas as wall decorations cannot have been without its effect on the development of the genre in the South, from Peruzzi's illusionist prospect in the Villa Farnesina (Fig. 151) to Veronese's landscape frescoes in the Villa Maser and beyond to the lunettes of Paul Bril and even of A. Carracci,<sup>55</sup> which, in their turn, are usually reckoned among the ancestors of the ideal landscape of Claude.<sup>56</sup> Nor would this connection be quite fortuitous. For Vitruvius' injunction to represent a simulated view on the walls of the Italian country house implied that the painter had to evoke a vision of the garden of the world that lay outside. Thus this 'institutional' necessity may have driven the artists to develop the new vocabulary through which the beauty of the Southern scene could be assimilated and translated into paint. Moreover this new task compelled the painter to abandon the 'conceptual' accumulation of picturesque details that had been developed by the Northern specialists and to study the effects through which an illusion of atmosphere and distance is obtained.<sup>57</sup>

But if this connection between Vitruvius and the creation of 'ideal landscape' must remain somewhat conjectural, the importance of the whole passage for the subsequent history of landscape painting can hardly be doubted. Vitruvius had referred to the practice of adapting the various types of stage scenery to the decoration of rooms.

Turning from the chapter on decoration to the earlier section on theatres, the artist would find this remark elucidated in the famous passage explaining the distinct properties of the tragic, the comic and the satyric scene.<sup>58</sup> The tragic scene is filled with 'regal' objects, such as columns, pediments and statues, the comic scene with 'common' sights such as private buildings, while satyric plays are performed on a stage with trees, caves, mountains and other rural images (Fig. 154).