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Palladio's Literary Predecessors

ANDREA PALLADIO's masterwork, *I quattro libri dell'architettura* [Four Books on Architecture] (Venice 1570), appeared relatively early in the history of printing. Yet it was preceded by a handful of other architectural treatises in Italy, Spain and France, some of which clearly influenced Palladio's own work.

Palladio's motivation for writing *I quattro libri dell'architettura*, he noted in his

Foreword, was his observation of how much the 'usual manner of building' diverged from ancient buildings he had investigated and from those he had read about in the works of 'Vitruvius, Alberti and the other excellent writers who came after Vitruvius.'

Here are leading examples of architectural books (with their key editions) released before Palladio's own treatise appeared.

I. Vitruvius [Marcus Vitruvius Pollio]

De architectura libri decem [The ten books on architecture]

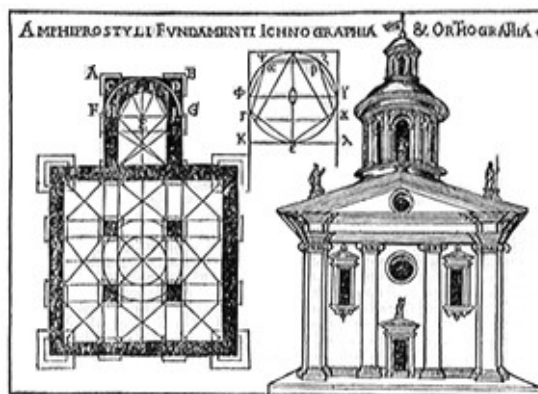
(i) Rome: Latin manuscript ed., c. 25 B. C. [A 9th century manuscript was rediscovered in Switzerland, 1414]

(ii) Rome: 1st printed ed. 1486. Edited by Fra Giovanni Sulpitius.

(iii) Venice: Giovanni de Tredino, 1st printed and illustrated ed., 1511. Edited by Fra Giovanni Giocondo

(iv) Como: Printed by Gottardo da Ponte for Agostino Gallo and Aloisio Pirovano, 1st printed Italian language ed. 1521. Translated by Cesare Cesariano; commentary by Cesare Cesariano, Benedetto Giovio and Bono Mauro. Illustrated with 119 woodcuts by Cesare Cesariano and others.

(v) Venice: Francesco Marcolini, 1556. Translated with a commentary by Daniele Barbaro. Illustrated by Andrea Palladio.



C. Cesariano edition, 'Amphiprostyle temple'

Vitruvius was an architect in classical Rome, born about 75 B. C. Palladio wrote in the Foreword to his *Four Books on Architecture* that 'since I always held the opinion that the ancient Romans, as in

many other things, had also greatly surpassed all those who came after them in building well, I elected as my master and guide Vitruvius, who is the only ancient writer on this art.'

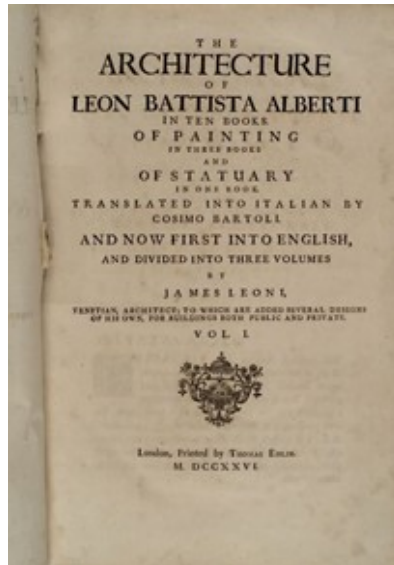
For his 1521 edition of Vitruvius, the first to appear in Italian, Cesariano was supposed to provide the entire commentary, but quarreled with the publishers and abandoned the project after Book IX, chapter 6, forcing them to have others complete it.

Palladio himself furnished the illustrations for the 1556 edition, with the Italian translation and commentary supplied by his patron and friend Daniele Barbaro.

II. Leon Battista Alberti

De re aedificatoria [Ten books on architecture]

- (i) Florence: Latin manuscript ed, 1452.
- (ii) Florence: 1st printed ed., 1486.
- (iii) Venice: Pietro Lauro, 1st Italian ed., 1546.
- (iv) Florence: Cosimo Bartoli, 1st illustrated ed., 1565.
- (v) London: Giacomo Leoni, 1st English ed., 1726.



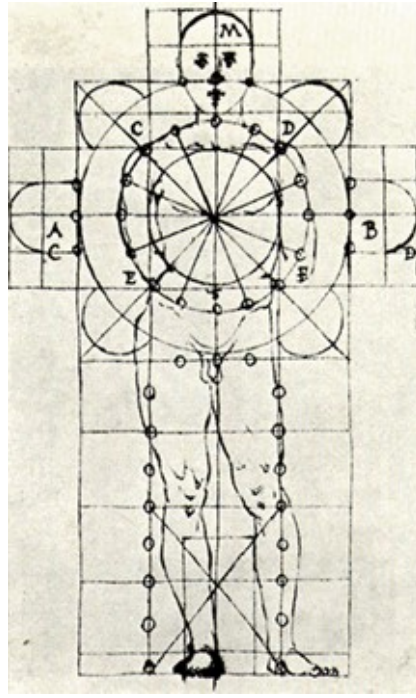
Alberti's *Ten Books on Architecture* was the first treatise on architecture since classical Rome. Alberti is repeatedly cited by Palladio in his *Four Books*.

Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1572) was the most celebrated and influential classical scholar of his age. Born in Genoa, he was educated in Padua and Bologna and admitted to the priesthood. His interests and written works ranged from architecture to painting, sculpture, Italian grammar, cryptology, geography and even household administration. He was also a practicing architect, painter and playwright, but his great strength was in his scholarship and writing.

III. Francesco di Giorgio

Trattati di architettura [Treatises on architecture]

Manuscripts, 1476-1492.



Although available then only in manuscript, the treatises of Francesco di Giorgio Martini (1439-1501) are believed to have been widely circulated in architectural circles in the 1500s. His architectural ideas, drawn from Leon Battista Alberti and Filarete [Antonio di Pietro Averlino], influenced Fra Giovanni Giocondo, Baldassarre Peruzzi, Sebastiano Serlio, Pietro Cataneo and Palladio. Concerned that contemporary architecture was compromised by false proportions and other errors, Francesco urged that the proportions of classical buildings be recorded before they became destroyed by time.

All architectural proportions are derived from the human body, he insisted. The human head, for example, he felt was the basis of entablatures in temple architecture. 'Man, called a little world, contains in himself all the general perfections of the whole world.'

Born in Siena, Francesco was a painter, sculptor and architect. He became acquainted with Leonardo da Vinci while both were in Milan, and Leonardo's iconic drawing of 'Vitruvian man' may have been inspired by Francesco's previous drawing on the same subject. During his career, Francesco designed fortifications at Urbino and was involved in work on the cathedrals of Pavia, Milan and Siena.

IV. Fra Luca Pacioli

De divina proportione [On divine ratio]

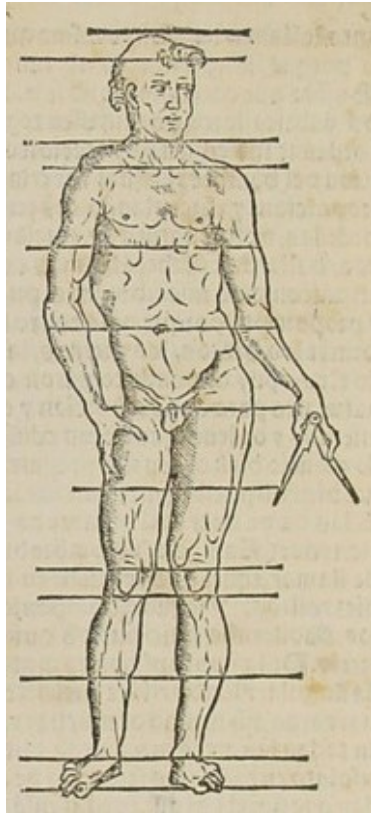
Venice: A. Paganus Paganinus, 1509.

Pacioli was a peripatetic mathematics scholar and an associate of both Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci. His earlier work, *Summa de arithmetica, geometria, proportioni et proportionalita* (Venice 1494), was the first published description of double-entry bookkeeping. The first part of *On Divine Ratio* deals with the 'golden ratio,' the second with architectural design. Classical builders, he maintained, based all their works on the proportions of the human body,

V. Diego de Sagredo

Medidas del Romano

Toledo, 1526.

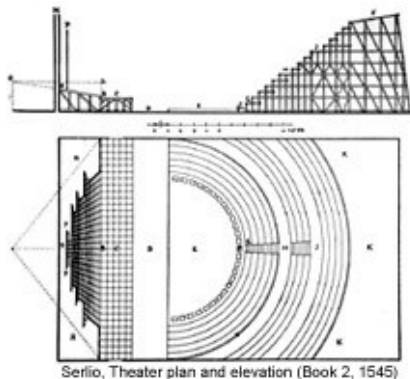


Diego de Sagredo, a Spanish priest who spent time in Florence and Rome before 1522, was primarily concerned with the classical Orders and theory of proportion. He was heavily influenced by the notion of Vitruvius, Alberti and Francesco di Giorgio that the human body provides the proportions of architecture. Architecture, he said, is based on the 'secrets and experiences of Nature.'

VI. Sebastiano Serlio

L'Architettura di Sebastiano Serlio Bolognese [Architecture of Sebastiano Serlio of Bologna]

- (i) Book 4. *Regole generali sopra le cinque maniere de gli edifici* (Venice: 1537).
- (ii) Book 3. *Il terzo libro di Sebastiano Serlio Bolognese nel qual si figurano e descrivano le antiquita di Roma, e le altre che sono in Italia, e fuori d'Italia* (Venice: 1540).
- (iii) Book 1. *Libro primo di architettura di Sebastiano Serlio Bolognese* (Paris: 1545).
- (iv) Book 2. Paris: 1545.
- (v) Book 5. Paris: 1547.
- (vi) Book 6. [Not published, but extant in manuscript, c. 1550.]
- (vii) Book 7. *Il setimo libro d'architettura nel qual si tratta di molti accidenti* (Frankfurt: 1575).



Serlio projected a series of seven books on architecture, but only five volumes were published (out

of order) in his lifetime. The sixth volume never appeared and the seventh was published posthumously. Serlio's great innovation was his emphasis on practical drawings and advice for builders instead of abstract theoretical discussion for intellectuals.

Serlio trained first in the studio of his father, who was a painter in Bologna. After a stint in Pesaro, Serlio worked in the Vatican workshop of Bramante and Raphael, but he later claimed Baldassare Peruzzi as his most important influence. The Sack of Rome by forces of the Holy Roman Emperor in 1527 precipitated Serlio's move to Venice. By the following year he was referring to himself as a 'Professor of Architecture,' and architecture remained the focus of his work thereafter.

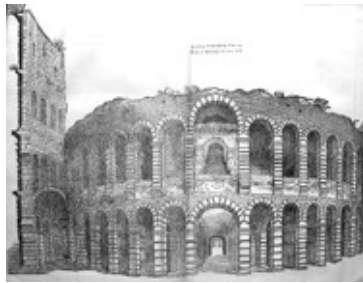
Palladio was acquainted with Serlio, probably through Palladio's mentor, Giangiorgio Trissino. (In planning the renovation of his villa at Cricoli in 1537-1538, Trissino may have relied upon Serlio's drawing of Raphael's Villa Madama in Rome.) Palladio attended a theatrical performance staged at Palazzo Porto in Vicenza in February 1539 in a temporary theater designed by Serlio. The event prompted formation of Vicenza's Accademia Olimpico and construction of its Teatro Olimpico, designed by Palladio. While in Vicenza in 1539, Serlio presented a proposal for renovating the city's Basilica, but that commission ultimately went to Palladio.

Later Serlio was in Verona, where he may have aided Torello Sarayna in producing his 1540 book *De origine et amplitudine civitatis Veronae* (see below). Serlio finally attracted the attention of King Francis I of France, who invited him to France to work on the royal chateau at Fontainebleau. He died in Lyon in about 1554.

VII. **Torello Sarayna**; woodcut engravings by Giovanni Battista Caroto

De origine et amplitudine civitatis Veronae

Verona: Antonio Putelleti, 1540.



Sarayna's pioneering work in identifying the antique Roman structures surviving in cinquecento Verona is overshadowed by the remarkable illustrations of Caroto, whose 29 woodcuts include plans, views and architectural details of antiquities, a double-page view of the city and its environs, and a three-block foldout of the Roman amphitheater. The book was republished under Caroto's name, without Sarayna's Latin text, in 1560 and 1764.

Two years after this book first appeared, Sarayna published a second volume on Verona, entitled *Le historie e fatti de' Veronesi nelli tempi d'il popolo e signori scaligeri* (Verona: Antonio Portese, 1542).

VIII. **Antonio Labacco**

Libro di Antonio Labacco appartenente a l'architettura nel qual si figurano alcune notabili antichità di Roma

[Book of Antonio Labacco concerning architecture, in which are portrayed some notable antiquities of Rome]
Rome, 1552.



Antonio Labacco (c. 1495-1559) was an architect who trained with Antonio da Sangallo (the younger). Working in Rome, he began creating perspective drawings of buildings from the city's classical past. Numerous editions followed, including several published in Venice beginning in 1567.

IX. Pietro Cataneo

I quattro primi libri di architettura di Pietro Cataneo Senese [The first four books of architecture of Pietro Cataneo of Siena]

(i) Venice: Figliuoli Manuzio, 1554.

(ii) Venice, expanded ed. 1567



Palladio: 'Signor Pietro Cataneo was so well pleased when I told him of [my procedure for defining the entasis of a column] that he gave it a place in his Treatise on Architecture, with which he has not a little illustrated this profession.'

The second of the two editions added four new books, on ornament, water resources, geometry and perspective.

X. Alvise Cornaro

Trattato dell'Architettura [Treatise on architecture]

Padua: mss. c.1557-1566; published posthumously.

Tintoretto, *Alvise Cornaro*

At his home in Padua, Cornaro commissioned construction of the Loggia Cornaro, designed by architect Giovanni Maria Falconetto, which is generally considered the first building in the Veneto and northern Italy comprehensively based on the motifs of classical Rome. Palladio was probably first introduced to Cornaro in Padua about 1538, and he likely had access later to Cornaro's unpublished manuscript.

XI. **Vignola** [Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola]

Regola delli cinque ordini dell'architettura [Canon of the five orders of architecture]

Rome: 1562. Illustrated with 32 drawings.



Based on his own measurements of classical monuments, Vignola presents a system designed to produce correctly proportioned columns in the five classical Orders: Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite.

XII. **Fra Anton Francesco Doni**

Le ville [Villas]

Bologna: Alessandro Appresso Benacci, 1566.



Anton Francesco Doni

Doni, who was likely acquainted with Palladio, is best known for his bibliographies. In *Villas*, his artificial ideas about country life center on the notion that different kinds of villa are suitable to the different socio-economic classes. 'Our Princes and Signori, in order to separate themselves from the great noise of the crowd, make beautiful country houses . . . so beautiful, rich and comfortable that they are no different from the palaces and beautiful structures within the City,' he said.

XIII. Philibert De l'Orme

Le premier tome de l'architecture de Philibert de l'Orme [The first book of architecture of Philibert de l'Orme]

Paris: Federic Morel, 1567.



A book of practical advice for patrons and builders. A native of Lyon, Philibert De l'Orme in his youth spent time in Rome studying and measuring classical buildings.

XIV. Silvio Belli

Della proportione, et proportionalità [On ratio and proportion]

Venice: Francesco de' Francheschi Sanese, 1573.



Palladio praised Belli, a native of Vicenza and a fellow founder of its Accademia Olimpico, as 'the most excellent geometrician we have here.' One contemporary writer observed, 'Certainly everybody knows how much talent and nature means even without learning; or if he does not know it, let him turn to Andrea Palladio and Silvio Belli. For these with a minimum of erudition and skill bring back into use the measurements, forms and works according to the rules of Archimedes, Euclid and Vitruvius and embellish our age with very beautiful buildings.'