



Leon Battista Alberti

On the Art of Building in Ten Books

translated by

Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, Robert Tavernor

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On the Art of Building

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Introduction

Joseph Rykwert

Vitruvius and Alberti

When Alberti wrote his treatise on the art of building, *De re aedificatoria*, about the middle of the fifteenth century, his was the first book on architecture since antiquity. Indeed, it was only the second to be entirely devoted to architecture: the very first, the *De architectura* of the Augustan architect Vitruvius, was, like Alberti's, divided into ten books, and Alberti's very title was a deliberate challenge to the ancient author across a millennium and a half.

Vitruvius had written to record a passing epoch rather than open a new one. He rehearsed and even codified the building theories and practices of preceding generations, of the Hellenistic architects of Asia Minor and the Greek mainland during the three or four centuries before his time. Their books were still available to him: they seem mostly to have been monographs which architects wrote to justify the design of a single building. Probably none contained a general statement about architecture such as Vitruvius proposed. For his part he was clear about the novelty of his ambition, but conditioned by his admiration for the older architects, so that he emulated their attitudes and adopted their vocabulary. Many of his technical terms are simple transliterations of Greek words; even his obsessive habit of setting categories and notions in triplets was much favored by Hellenistic thinkers. The brief bibliography he provided in the preface to his seventh book is the only reliable guide to the theoretical writings of Greek architects.

Vitruvius was well aware of the technical advances of his own time, such as concrete vaulting and improved siege engines, as well as the development of new building types, such as the steam bath (one of the earliest to have survived was built in Pompeii, probably after his death) and the permanent stone stage set. He was nevertheless most interested in recording the way Hellenistic (and probably earlier Greek) architects had gone about designing the temples he proposed as the only exemplars by which all other building had to be guided and judged. In particular the elements of the design of columns—elements later to be called the *orders*—were codified by Vitruvius. Whatever brilliant achievements the future may hold, it is the glory of the past that Vitruvius extols—and regrets. In his writing there is no sense of the vast achievement of Roman imperial architecture that was to come; and yet he was considered by later ages as its harbinger.

Alberti was, on the contrary, consciously setting out on a fresh enterprise. While the buildings that Vitruvius theorized were those which he and his

readers could see in the city of Rome as well as in the colonies of the empire, those to which Alberti appealed were either described in ancient literary sources or accessible only to the most intrepid travelers, or yet visible only as ruins. The very few antique buildings to have survived entire and gained his admiration, such as the Pantheon or the tomb of Theodoric in Ravenna, had been achieved by a building industry whose techniques and organization were a mystery to him and his contemporaries. Specific buildings of his own time are never mentioned. It is from the ruins and the texts that a new architecture, as solemn and as impressive as that of the ancients, will have to be derived. And, as Alberti insists, the ultimate criterion is neither the written nor the ruined examples, but nature herself.

The essential difference between Alberti and Vitruvius is therefore that the ancient writer tells you how the buildings that you may admire as you read him *were* built, while Alberti is prescribing how the buildings of the future *are to be* built. In order for his lessons to have the proper authority, however, the tone and the audience to which he addresses himself must be established. And there, too, the difference with Vitruvius is at once clear: whereas Vitruvius, for all his encyclopedic and philosophical pretension, writes to confirm his position as the custodian of a tradition, and to claim imperial patronage in its name, Alberti writes to claim a high place in the social fabric for the re-formed discipline of the architect, which has to be established anew. He writes, moreover, not just for architects and craftsmen, but for princes and merchants, for the patrons—perhaps for them primarily. That is why he writes in Latin only, and that is why the book, in its original form, required only the fewest and tiniest illustrations. He wants to hold their attention by the elevated tone of his argument and by the elegance of his language. In this matter, as in several others, he sets himself against Vitruvius, who (as he rather insists) was no great stylist. There is no place in his book for Vitruvius' Hellenizing technical neologisms; not Vitruvius, but Cicero—the Cicero of the legal and rhetorical treatises—is the model to whom Alberti appeals. And religion appears only in ancient dress: the deity is always plural (*dei, superi*), churches are always “temples.” The ancient Romans are referred to as they might have been by a late Republican writer, as *patres nostri*, “our fathers,” “our ancestors.”

And his contemporaries read him as if he were another Cicero. He wrote *divinissimamente*, Cristoforo Landino, Latin secretary to the Florentine republic, opined. And the enterprise proved a very difficult one: he swears (*me superi!* “by Heaven!”) that he would never have done it, had he known, when he set out on the hard slog of compiling his treatise, how much trouble it was all going to cost him—this invention of a whole new range of discourse about building.

Alberti's Childhood and Youth

When Alberti set out to project how architecture was to be ordered in the future so as to have something of a beauty “so ancient yet so new,” he was already a famous man of letters and an accomplished diplomat, a member (albeit illegitimate) of the great Alberti clan of Florence, in whose villa outside the city Giovanni da Prato (a latter-day Boccaccio) laid the scene of his collection of novels and anecdotes, the *Paradiso degli Alberti*. These powerful merchants and bankers, like the Medici, had fought the old Florentine nobility in all the disturbances that followed the rebellion of the Ciompi; they were in temporary disgrace, having been exiled from Florence at the instance of Maso degli Albizzi in 1393. Some were exiled specifically to Spain or Flanders, others just a distance outside the city. Benedetto, the first major statesman of the family, had already been exiled in other troubles and had gone on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He died on his way back, on Rhodes in 1387.

His grandson Battista was born in January 1404 (February in the old style) in Genoese exile: the second illegitimate son of Lorenzo de' Benedetto degli Alberti and Bianca Fieschi, a Genoese widow (Grimaldi was her married name) who had already borne Lorenzo another son, Carlo. She seems to have died soon after Battista's birth during an outbreak of the plague, after which Lorenzo moved with his children to Venice and later to Padua, though he did marry in Genoa in 1408. Battista seems to have been very precocious and was sent to the most brilliant educational establishment in north Italy, the school, already called *gymnasium*, of Gasparino Barzizza, where the scabrous Panormita, as well as Francesco Barbaro and Francesco Filelfo, were also pupils; as was Vittorino da Feltre, who succeeded his master as professor of rhetoric at Padua University and later founded his own school in Mantua. In his teens, probably in 1421, Battista went to Bologna to take the usual degree of doctor *utriusque juris*, of canon and civil law, which was a standard introduction to a high clerical career. While a student he became extremely interested in mathematics and seems already to have met the mathematician-engineer-geographer-physician Paolo Toscanelli. During that time his father died, followed a few months later by Battista and Carlo's uncle Ricciardo, who was also their guardian. Apparently some greedy relations then decided to use the boys' illegitimacy as an excuse to strip them of their inheritance, which caused Battista great grief and unsettled him thoroughly—he seems to have passed through a time of bad health, caused (as his anonymous biographer, or perhaps he himself as autobiographer, suggests) partly by worry and partly by overwork.

At this time he worked his first literary triumph, the comedy *Philodoxeos*: a pseudo-antique play, which passed for a long time as the work of a fictitious silver-Latin writer, Lepidus. It was an elaborate joke, a literary forgery rather than an independent composition, but it showed the author as a wit,

already an accomplished Latinist, and a literary inventor of some power. The comedy circulated in a version that was rather sultried-up by the naughty “epicurean” Panormita; later Alberti would reclaim his authorship so that he could return his juvenile effort to its proper integrity, though a century and a half later it was again published as a genuine “antique” play. At the same time he was becoming an accomplished writer in the vulgar tongue: from this period date some love poems, of a conventional cast, which imply an ill-starred entanglement with a young lady of whom we know very little—that she was of a lower social class, that she was jealous, and that she seems to have left him with a bitter distaste for female company; indeed, their conventional nature has been taken by some to imply that she was as much a fiction as Lepidus. Whatever the truth, the poems show Alberti as a master of Italian verse forms.

He was no mere highbrow, however. He prided himself on his reputation as an athlete: he was supposed to be able both to jump over a man’s head with his feet joined and to throw a silver coin up to the vault of Florence Cathedral so that you heard it ring. He was also very sociable, a man of strong loyalties and friendships. The most important of those he made at university was with Tommaso Parentucelli of Sarzana, who was to become Nicholas V, the humanist pope. It may well be that Tommaso, the secretary of the saintly Carthusian Niccolo Albergati, archbishop of Bologna, brought him to that cardinal’s notice.

Meanwhile in Florence, circumstances had changed. Pope Martin V interceded for the exiled Albertis, and the ban was lifted. Some members of the clan had in fact already returned, and Battista probably had his first opportunity to see the home of his family in 1428. The occasion proved intoxicating: for the first time Alberti came into contact with the new Florentine art. The frescoes of Masaccio in the Carmine and in Santa Maria Novella, the sculptures of Donatello and of the della Robbias, and the overwhelming bulk of the cathedral dome all made an enormous impression on him. A direct result of the visit was the little book on painting, *De pictura*, in which Alberti set out the new method, first formulated by Brunelleschi, of *constructing* three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane by the use of the *costruzione legittima* of monocular perspective, which was to dominate discussion about art for the next century. Although he wrote in Latin first, by 1435 he had translated it into Italian at Brunelleschi’s request: he dedicated the translation to *Pippo architetto*, whose great structure “rose into the sky, so ample that it can cover all the people of Tuscany with its shadow.”

The Papal Functionary

Soon after that first visit of Alberti’s Florence, Martin V sent Cardinal Albergati on an embassy to make peace between Charles VII of France, Henry VI of England (or rather his uncles, who ruled in his infancy), and Philip the

Good of Burgundy. English readers may recall that Joan of Arc was burnt in 1431. In Alberti's biography there is a hiatus about this time—but little positive evidence to support the idea favored by some of his biographers that he traveled in the cardinal's suite through northern Europe, though it would have been the only opportunity of observing people skating on ice (which he describes in book 6, chapter 8) and would account also for some very telling details of northern European use of building materials. At any rate, in the course of that journey the cardinal probably sat for Jan van Eyck in Bruges during a brief visit there—a drawing and a painting are traditionally described as being of Albergati—and it is tempting to conjecture that Alberti met not only the great Florentines of his day, but Jan van Eyck also.

By 1432 the cardinal had been legate at the Council of Constance (no sign of Alberti there) and returned to Bologna, where the council had been adjourned. Alberti reappears in the records: this time as secretary to Biagio Molin, patriarch of Grado (and later of Jerusalem) and head of the papal chancery. At Molin's instance Alberti became a member of the College of Pontifical Abbreviators: the diplomatic office, where all the papal documents were edited and written out in fair copies for publication. It was one of the main agencies through which the newly reformed Italic hand became the standard civilized manner of writing throughout Europe. It had been developed in Florence in the late fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century by Coluccio Salutati, Niccolo Niccoli, Ciriaco of Ancona, and Poggio Bracciolini (Poggio became the official scribe to Pope Martin V) out of the book hand of Carolingian scribes. Most of the writings of ancient Latin writers were preserved in Carolingian manuscripts, and the new calligraphy was a kind of programmatic declaration of loyalty. Inevitably, Alberti also practiced it. To oblige Biagio Molin, he began writing a series of new-style, Ciceronian saints' lives, though he seems to have completed only one, the life of a little-known martyr, St. Potitus.

By this time Pope Martin was dead, and in October 1432 his Venetian successor, Eugenius IV, removed the canonic disabilities of illegitimacy that affected Battista. It is not certain that Battista was actually ordained priest (though the phrase *aureo anulo et flamine donatus*, by which he describes himself, would suggest it), but the pope's action allowed him to hold church livings: he became prior of San Martino in Gangalandi at Signa, outside Florence, and later also rector of the parish of San Lorenzo in Mugello; he was a canon of Florence Cathedral—and there may have been other benefices. All this meant that he had a steady income.

In Rome his main concern outside official duties seems to have been the drawing up of a complete and accurate survey of the monuments of the city. He may at this time also have begun, though not completed, the book that gives him a permanent position in the history of sociology as well as in

Italian letters: *Della famiglia*, a dialogue on the duties and pleasures of family life—even if his particular family seems for the purpose of the dialogue to be composed exclusively of men: father and sons, brothers, uncles and nephews. Women exist only in reported speech.

But the stay in Rome was not long. Eugenius was expelled by the rioting Romans at the end of May 1434 and a republic proclaimed; although the rule of the Church was quickly restored, the pope continued to hold court in Florence and other northern Italian cities. Alberti followed him, and moved with the pope to Bologna. He was present at the consecration of his kinsman, Alberto Alberti, as bishop of Camerino (he later became a cardinal) in the autumn of 1437 in Perugia. More important was the visit—with the papal court—to Ferrara in 1438, for the opening by the now aged Cardinal Alberghati of the council between the Eastern and the Western churches, which later moved to Florence because of an outbreak of the plague, or perhaps because the papal coffers were empty and that was Cosimo de' Medici's condition for financing the proceedings; it is in fact known as the Council of Florence. Alberti was to stay in Florence almost constantly until 1443. It was in Ferrara, however, that he befriended the learned and gentle marquess, Lionello d'Este. To him he dedicated the “purged” *Philodoxeos* and his little book about breaking in horses, *De equo animante*, as well as one of his Italian books.

Architecture, Virtue, Fortune

It may well be that Alberti's knowledge of horses led, indirectly, to his first “professional” involvement with the visual arts: Lionello d'Este declared a competition for an equestrian statue of his father, Nicholas III. Alberti was invited to help judge it. The prize was divided quaintly between one sculptor for the horse and another for the rider. The statue was then set in the cathedral square on a strange, I am tempted to say unique, podium: it looked like the fragment of a triumphal gate. At the same time the bell tower of the cathedral, which had been funded by Duke Nicholas, was completely redesigned. Building went on for another century and more, and it is not at all clear what part, if any, Alberti had in the wholly revolutionary design of both monuments; if he had no hand in them, there must have been some unacknowledged architectural genius working in Ferrara at the time.

Meanwhile the council was sitting in Florence. Between the cathedral and Santa Croce a covered walkway was built. The hundreds of prelates, as well as the Byzantine emperor and his suite (seven hundred persons are said to have arrived in Venice on ships—Greeks, Russians, later Syrians, Armenians, Copts—but only thirty signed the decrees in the cathedral), would proceed frequently through the center of Florence. Bessarion of Nicea and Gemistus Pletho, both recognized as the great Greek scholars of their time,

were part of the Greek delegation, and Bessarion was to live his life out as a cardinal in Rome. Ambrogio Traversari, the vicar general of the Camaldolite monks, was one of the council's main protagonists and coauthor of its decree, since he was a fluent Greek writer and speaker. He died soon afterwards, and Alberti, who had been a friend, was commissioned to write a biography, though the project fell through. However slight Alberti's acquaintance with the Greek language before the council, as a working official of the papal chancery he must have come into contact with many of the Greeks.

The Florentine stay also meant that Alberti became a fluent and accomplished writer in his mother tongue, the Tuscan or Florentine dialect. It may well be that he finished the third (and most impressive) of his four books, *Della famiglia*, at this time. He was also becoming something of a connoisseur of Italian verse. The *Certame Coronario*, a competition for Italian verse on a given subject, was devised (and the prize partly paid) by him. Although the first occasion, in October 1441, was a solemn one, the competition did not establish itself as a yearly event.

However, Pope Eugenius had returned to Rome in 1443. A number of moves were made to restore St. Peter's Basilica, including the casting of new bronze doors by Alberti's contemporary, the sculptor-architect Antonio Averlino, who called himself Filarete; there is an allusion to this in book 2, chapter 6. The negotiations started at Florence were being continued in Rome with the Copts and the Armenians by Tommaso Parentucelli. When Eugenius died in Rome in 1447, Parentucelli was elected pope and took the name Nicholas V in honor of his old patron, Cardinal Albergati.

Alberti also returned to Rome with the papal court. Florence he regretted. "I am like a foreigner there," he wrote toward the end of his life; "I went there too rarely, and lived there too little." About this time he began the lengthy composition of *Momus*, or *The Prince*, which he thought of as his Latin masterpiece: a satirical dialogue on the model of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Gods* and *Dialogues of the Dead*—emulating the Latin of Cicero much as Lucian, writing in the second century A.D., had emulated the Attic style of Plato and Xenophon. Lucian's works were well known in Italy, and several Latin versions (by Poggio and Guarino of Verona) were in circulation. In at least one dialogue, *Musca* (the fly), Alberti imitates Lucian explicitly, and another, *Virtus dea*, was considered to be a translation from Lucian by Carlo Marsuppini, a man of letters who certainly should have known better.

Alberti's anti-hero Momus had made occasional appearances in classical literature as the god of mockery and satirical wit. He was the son of Night and Sleep. At the beginning of Alberti's book the gods are invited to provide some ornament to the world that Jove has made: Momus produces the insects that so much troubled Alberti's contemporaries. After a number of other misdeeds and misadventures, Momus is emasculated and set on a rock

in the sea, like a eunuch Prometheus. The father of the gods becomes convinced at some point that the world he has made should be destroyed and replaced by one or more new ones. Much of the book is concerned with the gods' search for a world design, which they first think will be supplied by philosophers or other "experts"—who turn out, however, to be malicious, quarrelsome. The work of the ancient architects turns out to be the one guarantee against Momus' malignities and the proof of man's devotion to the gods, and therefore the only proper pattern for their project. How the world escapes destruction and Momus his rock, both to be restored to Jove's favor, is shown in the fourth book. It was almost certainly a satire on Alberti's contemporaries, and many commentators have seen the features of Eugenius IV in Jove, while Momus has been equated with the writer-humanist Bartolommeo Facio or Fazio. Whatever the truth of all this, *Momus* is, in a sense, an introduction to Alberti's main preoccupation during the second half of his life, the theory and practice of architecture. The first sure and committed record of it is his *De re aedificatoria*, but *Momus* provides the essential clue about the extraordinary change in Battista's career, in his way of life: architecture was to him the ransom that any public man must pay to fortune if he would display the mask of virtue to his fellow citizens.

About this time simple Baptista becomes the more familiar Baptista Leo or Leon Battista and seems also to have adopted his "device," the flashing, winged eye with the motto *Quid tum*, "what then?" It is possible, even probable, that both name and device were taken on by Alberti at the same time, perhaps when he joined a small but powerful literary society in Rome, the "academy" gathered round Pomponio Leto—and that the name and the device were interdependent. *Quid tum* is a question about the human condition of mortality, to which the device is Alberti's personal answer. The lion's eye, it was generally believed, had the unique power of retaining the lion's majesty after his body died—that is the significance of the flashes. That power was likened by the philosopher Philo and the poet Statius to the way in which the name of a famous man, a man of virtue, survived the death of his body; though the device of the eye, the winged eye in particular, had appeared in Alberti's earlier writings, *Intercoenales*, his table-talk, as an emblem of divine omnipresence and omniscience.

De Re Aedificatoria

It was to Pope Nicholas that Alberti presented a version of his architectural treatise about 1450. By then he seems to have acquired considerable experience of building problems. Lionello d'Este's court may have provided small beginnings; but even before that he had been engaged on the great survey of Rome. His mathematical writings had made him even more famous among his contemporaries than his literary compositions. Some time about 1445/6 Cardinal Prospero Colonna, who as nephew of Martin V had been persecuted by Eugenius IV, employed Alberti, as a great mathematician and re-

nowned engineer, to raise a Roman ship that was known to have lain on the bed of Lake Nemi, in his estates, since ancient times. Alberti brought some expert divers from Genoa and had them fasten air-filled skins to the wreck, but only managed to raise half of it. This was, however, considered a great triumph and became material for much speculation. In 1450, chronicling the event, his abbreviator colleague Flavio Biondo describes Alberti as a “brilliant geometer and the author of most elegant books on the *arte dell’edificare*.” It is not absolutely certain that he had *De re aedificatoria* in mind, but it is most likely. At any rate, there is plenty of internal evidence that the ten books were not written in one continuous redaction. Some have even taken the preamble of book 6, chapter 1, to suggest that Alberti had interrupted work and/or that he had second thoughts about the project. And it is only in the latter part of the text that the reader will find the many blanks left not only by the printer but by practically all the scribes, since the author did not have the time to check or verify his references.

The new pope certainly used Alberti as a consultant. There were a number of problems on which his immediate opinion was sought. Old St. Peter’s was in very bad condition, as Alberti is constantly reminding his reader, and measures had to be taken to remedy the most threatening defects. The pope decided definitely to settle in the Vatican and identify his office with the cult of his first martyred predecessor, so that the whole access to the basilica, as well as the extensive papal headquarters to the north of it, had to be integrated. A number of other churches in the city also needed immediate attention, such as Santo Stefano Rotondo. Alberti’s part in all this building activity is uncertain. However, when the pope declared a holy year in 1450, the number of pilgrims was unprecedented. The balustrades of the bridge of Hadrian, which was the main one connecting the two sides of the Tiber, collapsed during a rush, and some two hundred people were killed in the panic. Alberti was almost certainly in charge of its rebuilding, and is probably describing his design here in book 8, chapter 6.

If Vasari is to be believed, many of the Roman works were carried out in collaboration with Bernardo Rossellino, a Florentine sculptor-mason. He and Alberti were certainly friends. However, while records of payments to Rossellino confirm his participation in them, no such records exist for Alberti. As an amply beneficed papal official he may well not have been entitled to professional fees. It does seem certain, at any rate, that for these and for other works such as the Fontana di Trevi, which was finished in 1453, he was in the inner councils of Nicholas V.

It was not the pope, however, but a warlord who provided Alberti with his first opportunity to apply his principles to a building which has survived, at least as a fragment. Sigismondo Malatesta, lord—more often called tyrant—of Rimini, consulted him on the rebuilding of the old church of San Francesco in his city, turning it into an antique-modern *tempio*. With

the building of the Tempio Malatestiano, Alberti's career as an independent consultant and architect begins. His book is written, his principles are stated: however much he develops those principles, it is on the basis of the ideas set forth in his book that he orders his practice.

Reception of the *De Re Aedificatoria*

Alberti's contemporaries accepted *De re aedificatoria* as a model of learned Latin writing immediately. When it came to be printed, in 1486, some fourteen years after its author's death, the introduction was written by the great scholar-poet Angelo Poliziano and addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici, who was the virtual ruler of Florence. It is known that the sheets of the book were taken to Lorenzo at his villa in Careggi as they came off the press. Before it was printed, he was jealous of his own manuscript copy of the book; in a letter addressed to Duke Borso d'Este of Ferrara in 1484, he agrees to loan him a copy of the as-yet-unprinted book on condition that it be returned soon, "because he is very fond of it and reads it often."

Versions of the Latin Text

The manuscript that Lorenzo lent Borso d'Este was not the only one available at that time, though it may be the one the printer used. Another, rather splendid one belonged to Bernardo Bembo, ambassador of the Venetian republic in Florence and father of the great humanist Pietro, from whose library it was most probably bought by Sir Henry Wotton when he in turn was King James I's ambassador in Venice. Wotton left it to the library of Eton College (of which he was provost) when he died in 1639. It has bound in with it a portion of the second half of book 9 taken from an earlier and rougher manuscript—perhaps the one that the printer used—with notes added in Battista's own hand.

Another manuscript was finished in 1483 for the very recondite bibliophile Federico da Montefeltre, duke of Urbino, whose library (he would have been ashamed to have a printed book in it, one of his suppliers said) became part of the Vatican when his heritage was absorbed into the papal states. Two manuscripts were copied out and illuminated in Florence for another great bibliophile, Matthew Corvinus, king of Hungary. One is in the civic library in Modena, the other in the cathedral library at Olomuc, in Czechoslovakia. There are four further manuscripts that seem earlier than the first printed edition: a second one in the Vatican, one in the Laurenziana library in Florence, one in the Marciana in Venice, and one in the University of Chicago library.

The first edition was finished on the fourth of January 1485; though since the Florentines counted the year of the Incarnation from the feast of the Annunciation on March 25, it was really 1486 in our accounting. The printer was Niccolo di Lorenzo Alamani, one of the very first to work in

Florence. The next, a Parisian one, was edited and laid out by the great humanist-typographer Geoffroy Tory, who first divided the books into chapters; it was printed in 1512 by Berthold Rembolt. In 1541 a much more handy but also much more crabbed one was printed in Strasbourg by Jakob Cammerlander: it was the last one in which the Latin text appeared alone. Within a decade it was replaced as the “authorized version” by Bartoli’s translation, of which more later.

Early Translations

Alberti’s treatise was being translated into Italian perhaps before it had even been printed. The earliest translations remained in manuscript. A much-corrected late-fifteenth- or early-sixteenth-century version of the first three books in the Biblioteca Ricciardiana in Florence was mistaken by one of Alberti’s nineteenth-century editors, Anicio Bonucci, for a holograph. Slightly later (dated 1538) is the charmingly but rather anachronistically illustrated version by one Damiano Pieti of Parma, which is now in the civic library in Reggio Emilia. The first printed translation “into the vulgar tongue” was done by Pietro Lauro of Siena, a practiced translator from Greek (Arrian, Plutarch’s *Moralia*) and Latin (Columella); it was published by Vincenzo Valgrisi in Venice in 1546 and almost immediately replaced by a more faithful—and the first illustrated—version by Cosimo Bartoli, a Florentine cleric, who was to translate many of Alberti’s other works, particularly the mathematical ones. It had a charming title-page woodcut after a drawing by Giorgio Vasari that is in the print room of the Uffizzi in Florence. The title page proclaims (presumably polemically against Lauro) that it is not just in any “vulgar tongue” but in the “Florentine language.” This is the most familiar version, which was not really displaced until 1966, when a new critical Latin text with an Italian translation based on it was published by Giovanni Orlandi and Paolo Portoghesi. There have been several Italian editions since the sixteenth century; a complete Italian translation from Latin by Simone Stratico of Udine, whose eight-volume edition of Vitruvius (Udine, 1825) is certainly the bulkiest one, has remained in manuscript.

A French translation came next, in 1553. It was the work of Jean Martin, who had already produced a translation of Vitruvius in 1546 and of the *Hypnerotomachia Polyphili* in 1547. A posthumous publication, it carried a long lament for Martin by Pierre Ronsard; it was illustrated with woodcuts, mostly after Bartoli’s, though with some others taken out of Italian Vitruviuses. A variant edition of Bartoli’s including a version of the *Della pittura* by Lodovico Domenici, first appeared in 1565. In 1582 in Madrid Alonso Gomez published a Spanish translation, without a translator’s name: it was probably the work of Francisco Lozano. A passage of chapter 13 in book 7, which reproves certain abuses by the higher clergy in the name of the primi-