

Alberti, Leon Battista, 1404-1472.

De re aedificatoria.

MS 1-V.

Italy (in Latin)

Ca. 1485.

Alberti was an archetypal Renaissance man, skilled in science, art, and literature. His main works are Philodoxeus (ca. 1424), a play in Latin which was believed by his contemporaries to be a lost classical work; Della pittura (1436), the first literary treatment of the aesthetics and techniques of Renaissance painting; Della famiglia (1430's), a treatise on education and ethics; and De re aedificatoria (1452), a work combining scholarly knowledge of ancient sources and models and an innovative architectural technique, based on musical harmonies and mathematical principles. But Alberti's literary output was by no means restricted to these areas: he wrote poems, fables, and diverse essays on such subjects as jurisprudence, domestic animals, the priesthood, mechanics, and language.

Alberti was also a practicing architect, whose buildings included the churches of S. Francesco in Rimini and SS. Sebastiano and Andrea in Milan, Sta. Maria Novella and the Rucellai palace in Florence. He is reputed to have assisted in the replanning of Rome.

The Chicago MS of the De re aedificatoria is a handsomely proportioned one of large format, written on paper. The watermark, easily visible for example on ff. 280 and 281, is a flower of somewhat indeterminate species

in an ornamented circle, to be identified with #6700 in Briquet's Filigranes, dated in the last quarter of the 15th century and the product of the paper-producing area bounded by Ferrara, Modena, Reggio (in Emilia) and Mantua.

The paper is gathered most often in tens, occasionally without defect or loss of text, into sixes and eights. There are thirty-two gatherings only rarely numbered in the upper right hand corner of the recto; and a fallible count indicates an almost equal number of scribes, even allowing for changes in handwriting appearance due to haste, fatigue, change of pen and change of ink. In general one scribe will write an entire gathering, ending in the lower left hand corner of the verso with the catch-word that will begin the first side of the next gathering. In no case has one scribe written successive gatherings. Toward the end of the MS, as many as ten scribes, who have written earlier portions of the MS, have collaborated on the production of one gathering. This practice suggests a large and well-staffed scriptorium and a certain dispatch in the writing of the MS.

All the scribes write versions of Italic hands, varying in proficiency and degrees of cursive admixtures. They range from the calligraphic hand of the scribe of ff. 97-106 to the rapid, rough and unpleasing hands of the scribes of ff. 205-211v and 212r-214v. Punctuation and capitalization are fully used; abbreviations vary from one hand to

another but seem neither drastic nor unusual. The ink is usually brown, but occasionally, when a new batch is mixed, it begins black and gradually returns to brown.

Large blue Roman initials were intended to mark the beginning of each section, but after the introduction and Book I, the initials have not been painted in. Instead, space has been allowed for them and a tiny letter written in to indicate to the illuminator what he is to complete.

The contents of the MS are as follows:

Introduction	ff. 1-4r	inc. multas et varias artes expl. nam primi quidem libri titulus
Book I	ff. 4v-28r	inc. de lineamentis aedificiorum expl. sed prius de materia et rebus his quae parasse ad opus oportet
Book II	ff. 28r-53v	inc. opus aedificiorum atque im- pensam expl. de his hactenus
Book III	ff. 53v-82v	inc. omnis astruendi operis ratio expl. emendandis atque instaurandis transigemus
Book IV	ff. 82v-104v	inc. edificia[...]esse[...] constitua expl. de his igitur suo dicetor loco.
Book V	ff. 104v- 138r	inc. operum varietates cum intra urbem expl. tardius contervescit(?)
Book VI	ff. 138v- 162v	inc. [1]ineamenta et materiam operum expl. ad pristorum delicias mirifice con[.....]
Book VII	ff. 162v- 194v	inc. rem edificatoriam constare partibus expl. profanis edificationibus demandandas statuo
Book VIII	ff. 194v- 218r	inc. ornamenta que operibus adhibeantur expl. pedes plus centenos decies centies

Book IX	ff. 218r- 243r	inc. meminisse oportet privatorum edificiorum expl. favete his studiis litterarii(?)
Book X	ff. 243r- 281v	inc. fide operum vitiis emendandis expl. ut digniores multoque elegantiores habeantur. Deo gratias. Τέλος.

Certain features of the MS--the uneven amount of text per page, the variations in margins, and the sometimes remarkably small space left for initials (cf. 243r)-- suggest that each quire was to contain an arbitrarily set amount of text, with no allowance for the vagaries of individual scribes. It also raises the possibility of a printed exemplar, rather than a handwritten one, with the consequent uncertainties about space requirements. The editio princeps of the De re aedificatoria was published in 1485. It would be worth the effort to compare this edition (a copy of which is owned by the Newberry Library) with the Chicago MS.

The MS has been somewhat perfunctorily corrected throughout in a contemporary hand; the corrections appear both in the margins and in the text itself (cf. f. 22r).

At the bottom of f. 150v. there is a colophon, written apparently by the scribe of that gathering:

scriptū manu cancellarii ex^{tis} regni sciciliae (sic)
cancellarii (sic)

The colophon suggests that the MS was written either in a Sicilian center or in some other place where a royal scribe might naturally find himself. If not Sicily, then Naples

is perhaps the likeliest spot. After the death of Alphonso in 1458, the kingdom of Aragon, Sicily, and Naples was divided; and Ferdinand, the illegitimate son of Alphonso, ruled Naples, while Alphonso's brother John succeeded to the kingdom of Aragon and Sicily.

A trace of this work's existence in the Aragonese Library may be found in a letter reproduced in Tammaro de Marinis' monumental Biblioteca Napoletana de Re d'Aragona, vol. I, P. 88. The letter, dated February 7, 1483, is from the cardinal Giovanni d'Aragona to the Florentine Francesco Gaddi. The cardinal thanks Gaddi for his good offices in persuading Lorenzo de' Medici to lend him a manuscript for copying, then makes another request:

non pero restamo anco de reingraciare ad voi de lo
affanno haviti pigliato in questo como in l'altre
cose nostre et pertanto ve pregamo vogliati anco
havere quella de Messer Bactista deli Alberghi (sic!)
et dare ordine farla trascrivere. . . .

De Marinis does not doubt that Alberti is the author meant in the above scribal mistake. But it is possible that some other work than the De re aedificatoria may be intended. And it is indeterminate whether the copying was to be done in Florence, Gaddi's native city, or in Naples, to which Gaddi came on prolonged business in a period when relations between the Medici and the king of Naples were particularly cordial. Of course, if we assume that the MS Gaddi had in 1483 was the archetype of our MS, we must abandon the printed exemplar hypothesis advanced above.

281 leaves, 30 x 21 cm. 32 gatherings, usually 10's, occasionally 8's and 6's.

25-41 long lines per page, varying with individual scribes and even within the writing of one scribe.

Brown ink; Italic hands written by a number of scribes. Large blue initials supplied at ff. 1, rv, but lacking elsewhere.

Scribal colophon f. 150v., see above discussion.

Bound in brown leather with gold tooled spine. Title lacking on spine or in MS. On the inside front flyleaf, someone, mistaking the contents of the volume, has written "Vitruvius," but "Alberti" has been written over it.

Acquired by the University of Chicago in the Berlin purchase.

See also: Edgar J. Goodspeed. A Catalogue of Manuscripts in the University of Chicago Libraries. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912.

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