

The first edition of Serlio's influential work on the rules of architecture

Sebastiano Serlio, *Regole generali di architettura*. Venice: F. Marcolini, 1537. 13 7/8 inches x 9 1/2 inches (352 x 241 mm), 156 pages, woodcut illustrations throughout.

Sebastiano Serlio (1475–1554), an Italian Renaissance painter and architect, was employed for more than a decade in the workshop of Baldassare Peruzzi, an apprentice of Raphael, Bramante, and Sangallo. Serlio is known primarily as the author of *Tutte l'opere d'architettura et prospettiva*, whose seven parts were published individually from 1537 to 1575 and later collected in a single volume, issued in 1584. Serlio augmented his text with high quality illustrations, an innovation at the time. The treatise was translated into Dutch, English, Flemish, German, and Spanish and was well respected across Europe as a reference on Italian Renaissance style.

The first part of the *Architettura* to appear, oddly, was designated Book IV and entitled *Regole generali di architettura* (1537). It clearly described and depicted the orders of Roman architecture, and it sketched out the content of the following books in the series. The *Regole generali* came to the notice of Francois I, who asked Serlio to consult in the construction of the palace at Fontainebleau. While in France Serlio accepted a number of architectural commissions, yet only the château of Ancy-le-Franc (ca. 1546), in Burgundy near Tonnerre, can — despite significant alterations — be recognized as Serlio's work.

Books I and II covered fields of knowledge once considered the purview of the painter: the principles of perspective and geometry. Book III documents the zenith of the Roman Empire with magnificent woodcuts of palaces, temples, baths, and other structures; Book IV offers rules for the design of architectural elements based on the structures presented in Book III. Also in Book IV, Serlio introduced the Composite order as an addition to the Corinthian, Doric, Ionic and Tuscan orders examined by Vitruvius. Using a dozen temple designs of his own, in Book V Serlio illustrated the orders. The unpublished Book VI depicts home designs encompassing everything from palaces to the humble dwellings of peasants. Book VII discusses a number of design dilemmas overlooked by previous architectural theorists.

This treasure from the Lessing J. Rosenwald collection at the Library of Congress is in an eighteenth-century Italian binding of marbled paper over boards with brown leather spine and tips; dark brown leather spine labels tooled with gold ornaments and 5 bands of gold tooled ornaments down the length.

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