

A first edition of Serlio's "extraordinary book" of portals

Sebastiano Serlio, *Extraordinario Libro*. Venice: G & M Sessa, 1560. 17 inches x 11 5/8 inches (432 x 295 mm), 12 pages plus 50 plates.

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. In fact, the initial book in the series, *Regole generali i di architettura*, came to the notice of François I and caused him to ask Serlio to consult in the construction of the palace at Fontainebleau.

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 The unpublished Book VI depicts home designs encompassing everything from palaces to the humble dwellings of peasants.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.

"The Extraordinary Book of Doors" shows an assortment of gates including both the rustic and the refined, as in the examples of domestic architecture in Book VI. *Extraordinario Libro* also offered one of the first elucidations of Mannerist aesthetics. This supplementary book was sometimes included in the *Architettura* as Book VI but was eventually supplanted by the work on Renaissance home designs. Serlio also published several books (Paris, 1545)

of scenography — woodcuts of designs for stage sets.

This copy of *Extraordinario Libro* is from the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection at the Library of Congress and is in its original binding of limp vellum with the title partially rubbed off on the spine.

Octavo code: serext