ARCHITECTURE IN ITALY
1400–1500
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Revised by Paul Davies
The work of Brunelleschi and Michelozzo matured in the practice of their art. Both gave their capomaestri and masons such precise instructions, furnishing them with models exact even to the smallest details, that their style is immediately and unmistakably recognizable from the general plan down to the details. Compared with them, the third personality who took a leading part in establishing the ideal programme of the new style is far more difficult to place in the roll of creative artists. For Leone Battista Alberti (1404–72) was never an architect by profession. On the contrary, he was the first to represent that type of the uomo letterato who was to play such an important part in the age of humanism, and who, himself a man of wide and versatile culture, set out to establish for the visual arts their new dignity and enhanced status as *artes liberales*. It was in this preoccupation with painting, sculpture, and architecture — truly the work of a dilettante — that Alberti elaborated important theories of those arts, which combine their aesthetic principles and the practical rules for artistic creation in one doctrine. As an expert in this sense of the word, he felt called — and was fully qualified — to take an active part in practical problems of creative art. But in his practical work, he remained to the end the adviser who laid down the general lines and occasionally gave instruction for details — thus he made models for capitals in plaster or clay — but he never set one stone on another.

It is true that Alberti’s spirit can be felt in the buildings erected under his supervision, but in the execution they are the productions of other men, i.e. of architects and capomaestri who gave visible form to Alberti’s projects. This was the origin of a style which differs widely from Brunelleschi’s or Michelozzo’s, since it lacks what might be called the craftsman’s signature. Yet an attempt must be made to show how distinctive this style of Alberti’s is, how highly it must be valued aesthetically, and what eminent historical importance it has.

Leone Battista Alberti was born at Genoa on 18 February 1404. He was a natural son of Lorenzo Alberti, the descendant of an ancient patrician family of Florence which had suffered banishment. He enjoyed, however, all the rights of a legitimate son, and received, first at Genoa and later at Padua, an excellent education which befitted his standing, though it was extremely strict. In 1421 he began to study canon law at Bologna; he graduated in 1428 and took holy orders. At that time he made the acquaintance, among others, of Tommaso di Sarzana, who later became Pope Nicholas V. After a short stay in Florence connected with the repeal of his family’s banishment, he continued his studies at Bologna and devoted himself from then on to the *discipline philosophica*, which include science and mathematics. With his remarkable intelligence he gained wide knowledge in humanistic subjects. He began to write early in life; he was hardly twenty when he wrote his *Philodoxius*, an imitation of a classical satire which was long believed to be the work of Lepidus. In 1429 came his treatise *De commodis et in commodis literarum*; in 1432 he began his *De familia*. Those are only his most famous works. His brilliant all-round knowledge, his personal vitality, and the stimulating influence that radiated from him very soon won him unusual respect throughout Italy. His manner of life was outwardly very simple — in 1432 he was appointed *abbreviatar apolitonicus* at the Vatican, which carried with it as a benefice the priory of the church of S. Martino at Lastra a Signa near Florence — yet he was on terms of friendship or intimacy with many eminent members of the circle of the Medici, the Este, the Gonzaga, and the Montefeltro. In 1434 he went to Florence in the suite of Eugenius IV and remained there for two and a half years; it was at that time that he wrote his treatise on painting and probably his *De statuas* also. Later, various missions took him to Bologna (1436), Venice (1437), and Ferrara (1438 and 1444). In 1444 he was back in Rome. With the elevation of Nicholas V he began his collaboration as adviser in the Pope’s great projects for the restoration of Rome (1447–55). At the same time he also became architectural adviser to Sigismondo Malatesta (from 1450 on). The beginnings of his work *De re aedificatoria* may also be placed in the forties; it was practically finished in 1452. The second half of the fifties saw Alberti’s designs for Giovanni Rucellai’s buildings in Florence: the façade of S. Maria Novella, the Palazzo Rucellai, and the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre in S. Pancrazio. In 1459 Alberti accompanied Pius II to Mantua and revived his relations with Ludovigo Gonzaga. He supported Ludovigo in the bitter dispute about the choir of SS. Annunciata, Florence (see above, p. 26) and took over the superintendence of two new buildings endowed by the Duke of Mantua, S. Sebastiano and S. Andrea, directing operations mainly from Rome, where he died in 1472. His grave is unknown.

The decisive factor in Alberti’s whole artistic practice was that his approach to antiquity and the Rinascita, to which he gives such moving expression in his treatises, was primarily literary in origin. When, in his first years in Rome (i.e. from 1432), he began to take an interest in the monuments of antiquity, he was already a thorough-paced humanist and the author of treatises which had soon won fame. On the other hand he had become acquainted in Florence with the great pioneers of the new art — Brunelleschi, Donatello, and others — and met them again in Rome. Above all, however, this was the time when the Popes — in Alberti’s case Eugenius IV — were attacking the huge problem of the restoration of Rome, in which a mind as alert and eminent as Alberti’s could not fail to take a personal interest. Still more, here, in the field of art, Alberti, the humanist philosopher, discovered a unique and ideal opportunity of giving practical expression to one of his basic ethical challenges: ‘essere utile a tutti i suoi cittadini’. This is the standpoint which enabled Alberti to regard architecture as a supreme spiritual aspiration, joining letters and science, theory and practice, in a natural and
fruitful union. I am convinced that it was Alberti's first encounter with Rome that prompted him to turn to architecture, which he had always regarded with special interest, as an independent field of study.

We have, however, as yet no evidence of any active work by Alberti in architecture during these first years in Rome, especially as he left the city with Pope Eugenius in 1434 and did not return till 1444. Thus the pedestal for the equestrian monument to Niccolo d'Este at Ferrara (c. 1446–50), which is believed on good grounds to be based on a design by Alberti, may well be his first contribution to the formal repertory of the new architecture; no Florentine or Ferrarese could have invented a composition which is so un-Tuscan and so entirely inspired by antique monuments, and it reflects a distinctive personality which links it up with Alberti's later works, especially at Rimini.7

His relation to architecture, however, was only established in the following years, when Nicholas V consulted him in his urbanistic projects for Rome.8

The fact that Alberti was witness to, and partner in, these great schemes is the decisive fact which casts into the shade any question of his possible active participation in the various building enterprises launched by the Pope, for instance, the Fontana Trevi, the Tiber bridges, and especially the Vatican Palace.9 Special scholarly research has recently confirmed the fact that there can never be an unambiguous answer to this question, particularly as far as the rebuilding of the Borgo is concerned.10 A mere reference to these works will suffice, but a few remarks on the project for the rebuilding of St Peter's [30] may not be out place. The peculiarly tradition-bound form of the so-called Rossellino choir, which, with the new east wall of the transept, was begun on a gigantic scale behind the apse of the ancient basilica, is the product of a particular historical situation. Owing to its huge scale, colossal forms were necessary, but there was no prototype for them in the most recent building practice in Rome. Elements which could be pressed into service were therefore sought in the latest great buildings outside Rome – the cathedrals of Florence and Milan, S. Petronio at Bologna, and, last but not least, the torso of the cathedral of Siena. These elements were mainly the shape of the pillars, of the dome over the crossing, and of the vaulting otherwise. With the necessary adjustment of the disposizione to the requirements of St Peter's, there emerged practically the only plan which could have been imagined in 1450, and which is extensively described by Gianozzo Manetti. It is Günter Urban to whom we owe the most recent and fully convincing reconstruction of Rossellino's project (see below, pp. 58–9).11 Whether Alberti approved or disapproved of it must remain guesswork: Mattia Palmieri's saying that the Pope took Alberti's advice to stop work on the building already begun seems to show that he was at least sceptical.12 Yet the project must have confronted Alberti seriously with the great problems of building arising here, such as the mastering of vast spaces by means of articulation and vaulting. He encountered this problem everywhere in Rome, for instance in the rebuilding of the Palazzo S. Marco, which will be discussed later. This preoccupation with great size, which was, so to speak, compulsive in Rome – and only in Rome – conditioned, too, the feeling for the single form, for order and ornament. Direct guidance from the works of antiquity presented itself to Alberti as a perfectly natural process. This explains his unshakeable conviction of the paradigmatic quality of antique building. For Alberti it included proportions and technique as well as decoration, and he had plenty of opportunity later to take up the passionate defence of his conviction.

We shall probably not go far wrong in assuming that Alberti's treatise on architecture, the idea of which may have been conceived as far back as the pontificate of Eugenius IV, first took on definite shape in these years. In 1452 he showed the Pope a first version of the work.13 It was not until about 1450 that Alberti seems to have undertaken his first, quite independent commission, namely the rebuilding of S. Francesco at Rimini.14 The real originator of the plan was the patron. Sigismondo Malatesta (1417–68) represents what may be regarded as the Renaissance prince in his most primitive form. He was not more than fourteen when, by bold and prompt action, he secured the lordship of Rimini, which had been bequeathed to him and his brothers but was being contested by his uncle, Carlo Malatesta. Having eliminated his brothers, he soon became sole ruler. The opportunism of the policy by which he strove to maintain his authority against his greater neighbours, Florence, Venice, Milan, Urbino, and Mantua, began well and led to the recognition of his status by the Emperor Sigismond (1433) and Pope Nicholas (1450). But it brought him into growing conflict with his enemies, particularly the Vatican. He met his most implacable enemy in Pius II, who finally defeated him. With the greatest of political sacrifices he once more managed to achieve a reconciliation with the

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30. L. B. Alberti (?) and Bernardo Rossellino: Project for St Peter's, Rome, c. 1450

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Alberti • 35
31. L. B. Alberti: Rimini, S. Francesco, begun c. 1450

32. L. B. Alberti: Rimini, S. Francesco, begun c. 1450, plan

- Built to Alberti's design
- Later additions
church under Paul II, but his strength was broken. He died at Rimini, aged only fifty, on 9 October 1468. A man of power and lust, ambitious and intelligent, Sigismondo tried to emulate the Medici and the Este by making his capital a centre of humanistic culture, but he lacked the true dignity which gives single-mindedness, and so he failed to make of Rimini a centre of learning like Florence, Ferrara, Urbino, and wherever else the patrons themselves were men of culture and could make great demands and attain great ends. Even Sigismondo's cousin Randolfo Malatesta, the ruler of Cesena and founder of the famous Biblioteca Malatestiana, surpassed him there. Like everything else which Sigismondo initiated in this field, his plan of transforming the modest friary church and burial place of his ancestors, S. Francesco, into a resplendent monument to his own glory bore from the outset the stamp of extravagance. Huge niches in the façade [31] were planned to hold the sarcophagi of himself and his mistress, Isotta degli Atti, while the deep arcades on the long side were planned as tombs for the scholars and poets of his court. The chapels inside were intended as memorials for Sigismondo, Isotta, their ancestors; or for purposes of liturgy and cult, with the existing parts of the building incorporated into the new plan [32].

For this pantheon, which Pius II described as 'so full of pagan images that it seems like a temple for the worshippers of demons, and not for Christians', Alberti devised a form which shows the closest approximation to antique monuments ever until then achieved in Renaissance architecture. The project can be reconstructed from Matteo de' Pasti's foundation medal [33], from other contemporary reproductions, and from documentary evidence. In the latter we find several mentions of a wooden model and of detail drawings by Alberti. The medieval aisleless church was retained, and so were the chapels of Sigismond and Isotta in the right hand wall of the interior, which had been begun before Alberti came on the scene. All that was done was to clothe the Gothic building in a shell consisting of the façade in the form of a temple front evolved from motifs of antique triumphal arches, and along the sides of a pillar-and-arch construction borrowed from Roman aqueducts. Instead of the current plain, straight end to the choir, an antique rotunda with a massive dome was to be added to the church, and would have been the dominating motif of the whole. The nave was to be covered with a barrel-vault in timber, which was, in its turn, to be covered with a pitched roof spanning both the side chapels and the nave.

The finished parts of the exterior show what dignity Alberti was able to give to the rather primitive temple-of-glory idea of his patron, simply by his greatness as an artist. The precious building materials stripped from the churches of Ravenna by Malatesta are used with moderation, particularly in the incrustation of the main portal. Alberti derived (not copied) his motifs from the antique monuments of the region (e.g. the Arch of Augustus at Rimini), and adapted them to his purposes by intelligent variation. The elements of his articulation, for example the fluted engaged columns, and especially his capitals [148] are the product of an imagination schooled in antique forms but creative in its own freedom. Above all, Alberti battled with the architects to have his proportions respected, and defended them with the utmost firmness both in the dome and in the design of the roofing and façade. The result is a monument in which features of Roman, Ravennate, and perhaps other architectural traditions of the Adriatic are fused into a completely unprecedented and independent unity by the force of a new stylistic will.

The surprisingly monumental impact of the church, which is actually not very big, is due entirely to the formal apparatus employed and its strong sense of volumes; it was this monumental effect that became a kind of ideal to its contemporaries, although the church was never finished. As for the great problem of the front elevation, Alberti's façade of S. Francesco at Rimini is the first composition of a façade as a unity, based on the use of great, simple forms.

The Tempio Malatestiano is a characteristic specimen of 'princely architecture'. This imposing, absolutist manner of building would have been impossible either in republican Florence or in imperial Rome. The type of aisleless church, balanced, if not dominated, by a rotunda at the east end, which was already being built in SS. Annunziata in Florence, became at Rimini a representative monument of purely secular power, an impression which is enhanced by the fantastic ornament in the interior with its mystic and secret iconography. The building, therefore, displays a 'new style' which is certainly absolutely distinctive on the one hand, yet cannot be entirely associated with the name of a single master on the other; it was the product of a collaboration between patron, adviser, and working architects. We shall see later that 'local styles' of this kind occasionally appear, but only where the political structure of the region favours them, especially at Pienza, Urbino, and Mantua, where the intentions of the patron were a decisive factor in the design.
How deeply the traditional forces in a city can influence the idiom of an architect can be seen in the buildings which Alberti executed or designed for Giovanni Rucellai in Florence. These, begun at the earliest in the second half of the fifties, were continued till 1470.

Among them, Alberti’s great artistic adaptability comes out again in the perfection of the façade of S. Maria Novella [34]. The order of pilasters and engaged columns which he set before the Gothic ground floor is a simple means of unifying the façade. The projection of the cornice over the great half-columns and their pedestals (a form unknown till then in Tuscany) are as Roman in inspiration as the deep arched recess of the main entrance. The high attic zone which separates the pilaster front of the upper storey from the lower tier is superbly proportioned. Yet Alberti sacrificed these proportions in order to incorporate the round window which remained from the Gothic building and weighs rather heavily on the attic. Finally the volutes which screen the lean-to roofs of the aisles and form a harmonious transition between the lower and upper storeys of the façade were an invention of great historical consequence. The double scrolls planned for Rimini are the preliminary – and still ornamental – version of this motif. The idea of converting it into an independent structural member first came to Alberti in Florence, and was clearly inspired by Brunelleschi’s volutes on the lantern of the Duomo. From S. Maria Novella on, the scroll became the most important element of composition in Renaissance and Baroque façade design.

But the most remarkable feature of the façade of S. Maria Novella is that, while the predominating tendency to design in large units is unmistakably Roman in origin, it is carried out with formal means which are mainly drawn from Tuscan tradition. The incrustation, the type of capital, the ornamental motifs, and even the scroll all have their prototypes in Florentine architecture, as we have seen. It is in this power of synthesis that we recognize Alberti’s distinctive gift, and realize at the same time that his principles of style were applicable to many different purposes. The executant architect was Giovanni di Bertino, whose clear and delicate chiselling may be recognized in the delightful decoration of the small antechamber to the tabernacle in SS. Annunziata.

In the Palazzo Rucellai, which was also executed by others, Alberti established the prototype of the pilaster façade [35]. The motif in itself had actually been used before in the
arches subdividing the barrel-vault. As far as I know, this chapel is the first building in Florence to have a true barrel-vault, and this gives it special importance.

In the centre of this clearly proportioned hall stands the shrine of the Holy Sepulchre [36, 37], its profusion of many-coloured and costly material intentionally set in striking contrast to the severe grey and white structure of the chapel. The inscription over the entrance to the chapel states that Giovanni Rucellai caused the shrine to be built in imitation of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Any departures from this original can be explained by Alberti’s obvious intention not to copy the still extant Gothic sepulchre, but to create his ‘likeness’ of it in the form of the antique Constantinian prototype which had been handed down in old descriptions and illustrations.33 He derived the structural elements from the baptistery in Florence, which, in common with all his contemporaries, he believed to be late antique. On the aedicule he set a spiral-fluted onion cupola, an unmistakable approximation to the original in Jerusalem.34

In its conception, the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre is a humanistic concetto which bears the true Albertian stamp. The stonework was executed with the greatest care by other hands, but many of the individual motifs, among others the pilasters with seven flutings (from the Pantheon?), the heavy garlands of the window frames, and above all the barrel-vault of the chapel — not to forget the superb inscription of the sepulchre in Roman capitals — are all pure Alberti. In my own opinion, this little building is the most perfect expression of the spirit and style of Albertian architecture.35

The versatility of Alberti’s style is again illustrated in the buildings commissioned by Ludovico Gonzaga at Mantua, where it attains an ultimate and superb expression. From 1460 to 1472 — that is, till he died — he superintended the building of the churches of S. Sebastian, begun in 1460, and S. Andrea, begun in 1472.36 S. Sebastiano [38] is a votive church which Ludovico began ‘in the utmost haste’, as the sources relate, in obedience to a call which had come to him in a dream. It was to replace a very old oratory which

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36. L. B. Alberti: Florence, S. Pancrazio, Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, c. 1458

idealized architectural background of paintings and reliefs, but this intentional combination of the pilaster system with the traditional rusticated front was Alberti’s most personal achievement and had the greatest possible influence on later building, though more especially outside Florence. There are Roman echoes in this façade too: the plinth, with its paraphrase of the opus reticulatum in the pattern of the masonry, the rather broad proportions of the doors with straight lintels on S-scroll brackets, the small oblong windows on the ground floor, and the employment of the three orders. There is yet another important innovation — the gradation in the size and courses of the flat rustication in the various storeys, which gives an ornamental quality to the modelling of the wall surfaces. Here again a new structural system of supreme quality has been created in terms of traditional Florentine building, and Alberti’s ‘synthetic style’ has stood the test.

Alberti could work most freely however in the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre which Giovanni Rucellai built in the church of S. Pancrazio adjoining his palazzo.31 In the course of time the chapel has undergone many alterations. Originally, the long side next to the church was open and supported on two fluted columns which (since 1807) have formed the entrance to S. Pancrazio: the corner pilasters and fluted frieze above them were part of the original building.32 The original entrance to the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre was therefore on its long side; the entrance columns are echoed by pilasters on the opposite wall which take the transverse

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37. L. B. Alberti: Mantua, S. Sebastian, and Florence, S. Pancrazio, engraving from Seroux d’Agincourt, early nineteenth century
is recorded in the documents as far back as the tenth century, and was therefore pre-Romanesque.\textsuperscript{37} The combination of an oratory with a votive church may have been responsible for the peculiar form of the centrally planned building, as well as for its division into two parts, an upper and a lower church, which, as a type, recalls the mausoleum of Theodoric at Ravenna. In any case, this building of Alberti’s is one of the strangest works of Italian religious architecture ever erected in the Renaissance. Unfortunately, the church, which was never finished and had remained derelict for centuries, was so greatly altered by the restorations and rebuildings carried out in 1925 in order to convert it into a war memorial that it is practically impossible to imagine it in its original state.\textsuperscript{38} With the help of old engravings \textsuperscript{37}, the old parts may be reconstructed as an extremely massive, two-storeyed building on a Greek-cross plan. The lower church is a large, seven-naved crypt with piers, the upper an impressive cruciform spatial organization with very sparing use of pilasters or brackets; above the main compartments is a huge cross vault, 17 m. (56 feet) in diameter. Even during building operations, it collapsed, and as far as I know was never rebuilt to the original plan.

The unusual disposition of the interior is in perfect keeping with the equally unusual articulation of the exterior, especially of the façade. The massive superstructure rises on a basement storey, the five arcades of which were originally open and led into the vestibule of the lower church. The five loggia openings, set close but at rhythmic intervals, are answered by three middle portals in the recessed entrance wall which lead into the church and two large exterior niches in the wall of the tower. This vestibule, and from it the upper church, is reached by a double flight of steps at the side, which, in all probability, was not part of Alberti’s design.

Four pilasters, very plain in the modelling, support the entablature which is broken in the middle by the tympanum of the arch rising above it. Thus if the basement is included, there is a peculiar central axis with four superposed openings, or blind arcades, which comes to an end in the arch. As a whole, the façade is a bizarre revival of late antiquity; there seem to be echoes of provincial Roman motifs, which are familiar from Spoletto and Orange (tympanum of arch) or Ravenna (palace and mausoleum of Theodoric); yet Alberti may have borrowed them from other Roman ruins unknown to us. The building is an experiment, full of capricious details, but a conception of genius as a whole; even in the travesty in which we now see it, the wide, almost austere spaces of the lower and upper churches give an impression of no common power. It may not be quite wide of the mark to suppose that the idea of a monumental Early Christian work also played its part in the conception.\textsuperscript{39} The building was no less enigmatic to its contemporaries than it is to us, as can be seen from a letter written by the young Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga to his father in 1478 – he couldn’t say whether Messer Alberti’s fantastic mind had conceived this classic building as a church, a mosque, or a synagogue.\textsuperscript{40}
The design for the second church which Alberti submitted to Marquis Lodovico in 1470 — ten years later than S. Sebastiano — is all the more perfect; it is that of S. Andrea in Mantua [39, 40]. An imposing new building was required to replace a small church which was to be pulled down. Lodovico had already received a design from Antonio Manetti, and sent it to Alberti for his opinion. In reply, Alberti submitted an altered plan, which he himself called sacrae structura. The Marquis accepted it, and Alberti went to Mantua, where Luca Fancelli, the executant architect commissioned for the building, made the model in 1471. The demolition of the old church was completed in February 1472, and the new building was begun. On 7 August of the same year Alberti died, so that the work passed entirely into Fancelli’s hands. He followed Alberti’s plans to the letter; in 1494 the barrel-vault of the nave was finished as far as the crossing, and thus, with the realization of Alberti’s conception, the most important church built in the Quattrocento came into being. The whole, planned on simple and grand lines, is impressive in the extreme — the dominating nave, the modelling of its walls, and its alternating large and small chapels. The transepts were not part of Alberti’s plan; in my opinion he had provided for a central composition to be added to the nave, which either — as in Rimini — would have been in the shape of a rotunda or, as seems more likely, would not have exceeded the width of the nave, and would thus have resembled the arrangement of the Gesù in Rome. The huge barrel-vault over the long nave, with a span of 17 m. (56 feet), is slightly stilted in accordance with Alberti’s rule, expressed in his treatise, that tunnel-vaults must be raised above the semicircle in exactly the proportion to which the projecting cornice would conceal them from sight. Thus the spatial proportions are calculated and perfected by the employment of the laws of optical perspective. The modelling of the walls of the nave in their pseudorhythmic travé stresses the force of the structure. We find formal elements already familiar from other buildings by Alberti: the tall pedestals of the piers, the doors closely enframed by pilasters, the beautifully moulded cornices. For the first time in the architecture of the century, I think, a most important feature makes its appearance here, namely, the lighting. The sources of lighting, direct and indirect, are distributed over the openings in the side niches and in the accompanying chapels, as well as from the rose window half concealed from the outside by the canopy of the façade. The lighting of the interior is thus very carefully graded and the total effect is sublime. The lighting follows the lines laid down by Alberti in his treatise; for the first time, with the exception of the Cappella Ruscelli, it appears as a factor in design.

The front elevation of S. Andrea is a characteristically ‘theoretical’ solution [40]. It can only be understood as an entrance porch intentionally kept low, for it is only in that way that its independence of the section of the church can
be explained. In itself, it is a pioneer composition. The total wall surface is organized by four giant pilasters on high pedestals which support the cornice and the pediment. In the central bay there is a large arched recess with its own beautifully coffered vault, and the narrower side bays, with their three superposed openings (door, niche, window) may on the one hand have been inspired by the arch of Titus, or, on the other, be a more lucid variant of the same motif in S. Sebastiano. It is impossible to discover how Alberti had devised the facing of the wall of the church jutting out over the pediment of the entrance, yet the curious canopy (‘ombrellone’) in front of the central window probably figured in his design; it also plays its part in the directional lighting.

On the long sides of the exterior the buttresses and great blind arcades are worth attention. Even here the idea of the Etruscan temple can be sensed, and a kinship with antique and Early Christian monuments seems obvious.\(^47\)

Alberti, it will be remembered, only lived to see the laying of the foundation stone of S. Andrea. In the Cinquecento the nave was raised as far as the crossing, and two and a half centuries passed before the building was in any way completed. Even today, part of the exterior is still in the rough. The later sources show that the intention to continue the building in Alberti’s spirit and, as far as possible, after his model never wavered.\(^48\) Even as late as the eighteenth century, when the transepts and choir were erected, it was expressly stated that they ‘were executed to the topmost cornice in accordance with the ancient model’.\(^49\) Finally, the dome begun after a design by Juvara, but only finished in 1763, was given a shape which was totally different from Alberti’s plan. Yet in spite of all later alterations, the spatial impression of the nave, one of the grandest in the whole of western religious architecture, is faithful to Alberti’s conception in all characteristic features.

If we look back on Alberti’s work in architecture as a whole, all the buildings erected under his supervision appear as ‘exampli’, which no practical architect of his age would have ventured with such boldness. True, there is an air of experiment about most of them, yet they are distinguished by a consistency of development which culminates in the grandiose finale of S. Andrea. Alberti’s essential contribution to the architecture of later times consists in the new sense of monumentality he awakened, which evolved in his own mind out of a new and quite personal feeling for Roman antiquity. This sense found expression in his spatial organizations (nave, vault, large surfaces, giant orders) – S. Francesco at Rimini, the Rucellai Chapel, and S. Sebastiano and S. Andrea at Mantua are all spatial compositions of a most distinctive character – and in his use of architectural ornament: pedestals, shafts of columns and pillars, capitals, architraves, and sunk panels are always great in scale and sculptural treatment, i.e. they are conceived with a view to a monumental effect. And yet, with all its versatility, there is a constant feature in Alberti’s formal language; however widely the works at Rimini, Florence, and Mantua may differ, and however much they may be influenced by the genius loci, they are unmistakably united by what we may call the super-regional style which, in my opinion, evolved out of Alberti’s conception of antiquity and formed the bond between his building practice and his architectural theory. A series of interesting recent studies has shown how far the laws of proportion laid down in Alberti’s Ten Books of Architecture can be demonstrated in his buildings.\(^50\) The same applies to a number of individual architectural forms. This growing interdependence of theoretical reflection and practical design resolves the conflict – so long hotly disputed – between the man of letters and the artist in Alberti, or rather it ceases to exist. At the same time it helps to explain the specific character of Alberti’s style. It may perhaps be best apprehended in that striving for \textit{concinnitas} which pervades all his architectural work, however different the forms it may take on.

According to Alberti’s doctrine, \textit{concinnitas} is the supreme challenge by which the beauty of a building becomes manifest. It is based on the expert application of the fundamental laws of architecture contained in \textit{numerus, finitio, and collocatio}. All factors of design, quantitative and qualitative, are comprised or united in it. \textit{Concinnitas} sets no bounds to the architect’s imagination, but subjects it to a supreme law of order which covers on equal terms the technical, artistic, and utilitarian requirements of his work.

From this standpoint Alberti’s architectural theory is seen in its real and timeless significance as the first manifestation in literature of a new way of thinking in architecture which consciously and deliberately set its sights beyond antiquity, however deeply it may be indebted to it. This way of thinking is also characteristic of Alberti’s architectural works and their ‘style’. We can hardly speak of a direct influence from Alberti’s architecture, i.e. from his style, on the succeeding generation, but its indirect influence was all the greater. Alberti’s real influence, however, consists in his having established universally valid standards of value which – whatever use they may have been put to – have remained through the centuries, and down to our own day, ‘principles of architecture’.