

# RENAISSANCE ARCHITECTURAL CODEX OF FIVE HUNDRED YEARS IN BUDAPEST

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## Summary

Collection of the Municipal Library of Budapest includes a paper codex from the 15th—16th centuries, an interesting document of Renaissance culture. This codex composed of parts of several books of different ages contains drawings of antique architectural elements, inscriptions, ornaments, manuscript of a treatise on architecture, collection of oriental ornaments, and some 260 Italian poems from the 15th—16th centuries. Architectural aspects refer to Venice in the first half of the 16th century, and to the school of Fra Giocondo. Further processing the codex might be instructive on architectural relations between the Veronese master and Francesco da Giorgio da Siena, quoted by name in this codex.

A unique document of the history of Renaissance architecture: an Italian architectural manuscript from the 15th and 16th centuries has been preserved by the Szabó Ervin Library in Budapest. Witnessing the manifold interests of artists of that age, the codex contains — in addition to drawings of antique architectural elements, inscriptions, ornaments — manuscript of an architectural treatise, a collection of oriental ornaments, and some 260 Italian poems from the 15th and 16th centuries.

This so-called Zichy Codex is not perfectly unknown in the special literature.

Over a century ago, a short description had been published of it by Imre Henszlmann in the review "Archaeologiai Értesítő" [1]. Some excerpts have been published in a work on graphic art by the end of the past century [2] and also Jolán Balogh refers to it in her fundamental book on Renaissance art in the period of King Matthias [3].

Early in this century, Alajos Zambra (1886—1947), professor at the Department of Italian of the University of Sciences in Budapest, published several studies on the codex, elaborating its literature historical relations [4].

Let us recapitulate now some architecture historical relations of the codex [5] emerging in the direct study of text and drawings. At the same time, further trends of the work will be indicated expected to provide deepgoing knowledge of the codex, a wider disclosure of its relations, maybe to help its publication.

### Description of the codex

This paper codex originating from the 15th and 16th centuries measures 292 by 192 mm, contains 199 paginated pages [6]. Parts of the volume date from different times. Some of its pages bear triple, others double pagination. Modern pagination dates from 1943 [7] and coincides with one pagination up to 199 pages likely to date from the 16th century. In addition, some of the pages exhibit intermittent pagination different from the other two ones.

The volume's content is about the following:

Page 1:

Some introductory sentences of a to-be architectural treatise, as well as mixed notes, e.g. a prophecy for the years 1492 to 1500 ("Profecia trovada Ataranto in la chixia de San Cataldo").

Page 1 verso:

three notes referring to Venice, from the first half of the 16th century; slogans.

Pages 2 to 87 recto:

drawings of Roman architectural details, cornices, capitals, column footings, friezes, pilaster ornaments, candelabres, as well as of Renaissance reconstruction of Roman buildings.

Pages 2 to 88, verso:

poem copies, often with monograms of poets.

Pages 87 to 89:

sets of Latin and Greek roman letter types.

Page 89 verso:

beginning of an architectural treatise, about following Vitruvius, with explanatory drawings between and beside the text. The treatise ends on page 155 verso.

Pages 156 to 162:

vocabulary of abbreviations in Roman inscriptions.

Pages 163 to 171:

drawings of coffered ceilings, here and there with ulterior drawings of oriental ornaments.

Pages 172 to 183:

oriental ornaments.

Page 183:

collection of antique inscriptions.

Pages 184 to 198:

collection of oriental ornaments.

Page 199:

records of the first (1489) and second (1506—1507) regulations of Brenta river.

Besides, many pages of the codex earlier were covered by drawings and etchings stuck on, hiding original drawings and text.

### Sketchy history of the codex

The book has been ulteriorly bound from paper sheets of different origins, and from rests of other handwritten books.

#### *The earliest part of the codex*

The oldest part of the book is assumed to be that consisting of pages with three different paginations, that do not follow the pagination sequence. This early part may be dated from a note on page 30: "Quando andante aurbjno djmandate d' franc° dj Giorgio dasjena arhjtetore cha o dj butjegha", that is: "going to Urbino look for house or workshop of Francesco di Giorgio of Siena" (Fig. 1). This note is likely to date between 1477 and 1482, when, according to his biographers, Francesco di Giorgio, "the Archimedes of Siena" was engaged at the construction of the palace in Urbino [8].

#### *Venetian relations of the codex*

The earliest dated note in the book dates from 1489 and refers to Venice. Page 199 — as mentioned — bears a record of the 1489 regulation of Brenta river, and of the second levelling known from other sources to have been in 1506—1507 [9] (Fig. 2). The next record exhibiting a datum is from 1535. "Noto chomo nasito mj anzelo Cortiuo adj 8 feurer 1462 aore 12 adj 14 domenga ditto fo batizado asan marchuola stagando in le chaxe de m(isi)er Ant Venier(?) anj 73 adj 7 feurer 1535" [10] (Fig. 3). Angelo Cortivo had been identified by Alajos Zambra, historian of literature, early in this century. According to data acquired by him from the State Archives of Venice, Angelo Cortivo had been draftsman, then "pertegador", inspector at the water regulation office of the Venetian Republic, where the archives still keep two of his drawings from 1521 and 1524 [11]. While in 1528 he was appointed head of the tax office of Venice. Thus, according to the autographic record on the first page of this codex, Angelo was born on February 8, 1462 in Venice.

The next record, due to Nicolò, nephew of Angelo, refers to the decease and burial of his uncle in 1536. "Notto fazo mj nic° Como el sopra ditto s(ignor) anzello mjo barbo passo di questa vita a d 1536 ajd 24 aprile elunj aore 20 circha the fu lavizillja di s.marcho inanz ditto Et fo sepolto adj 25 d°i(n) S<sup>to</sup> Andrea da Riva o zove nelle schalle che e p(er) mezo ladita chieuxia" (Fig. 3). By the way, the water regulation office of Venice keeps also three drawings

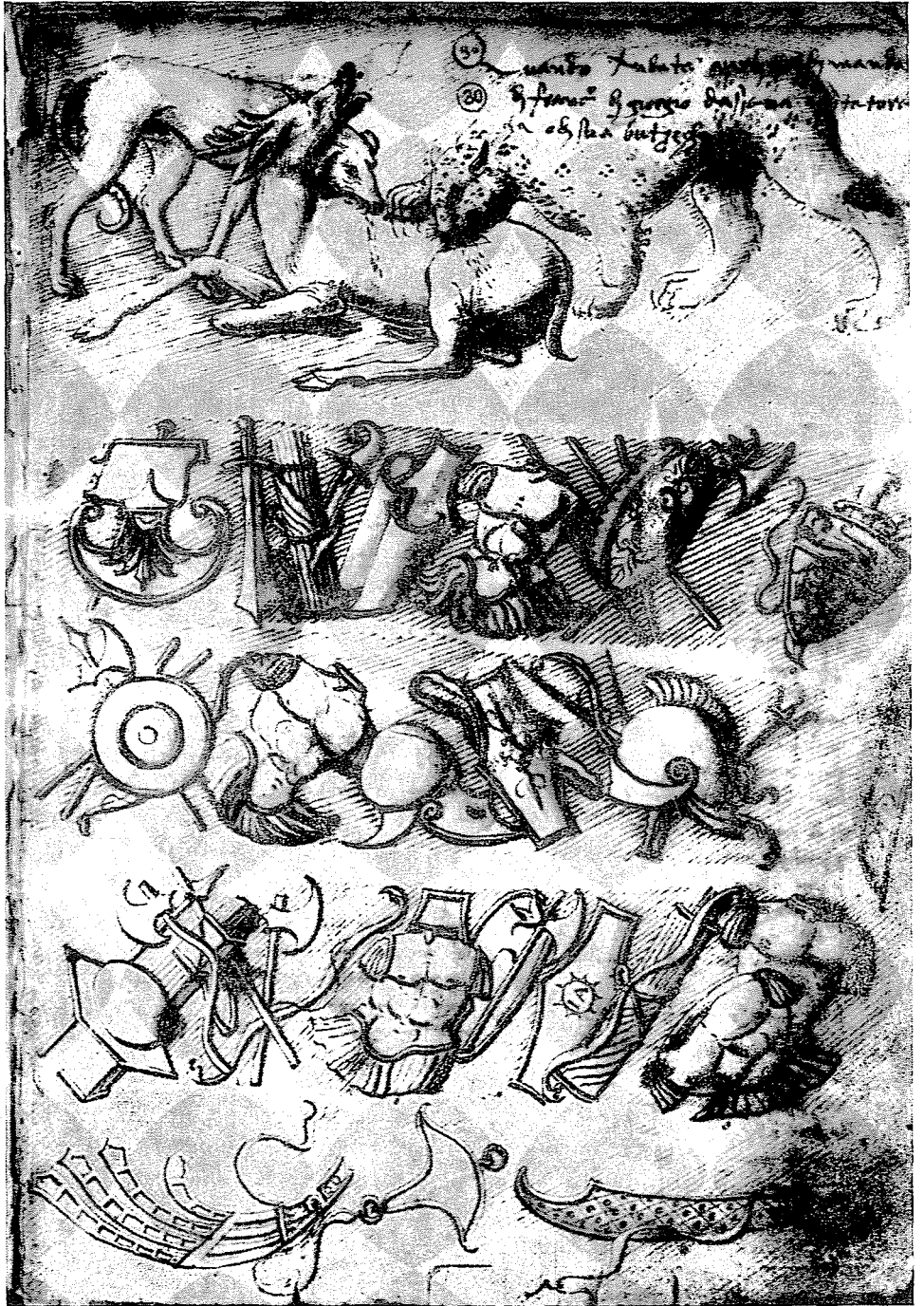


Fig. 1. Zichy Codex f. 30. r.v.



signed by Nicolo del Cortivo from 1534 and 1540 [12]. Another record referring to Venice is that on the collapse of part of the library built by Sansovino: "1545 . . . de aore 12 di notte chasco la volta et parte dela fazada dell fabbrica . . . dela panataria fatta per il sansovino i(n)piaza de s marchò" [13] (Fig. 3).

### *Poems in the codex*

Part of the poems have been presented by Alajos Zambra in a series of papers. Of the 259 poems he found 114 known ones and 145 unknown or unpublished ones. He also stated the poems to date from 1420 to 1530. Most of them are due to 15th century poets, mainly to Tebaldeo of Ferrara, San-nazzaro of Naples, including several ones from the beginning of the 16th century, concerned with the politics of Venice [14].

### *Drawings and etchings stuck in*

Part of drawings and text on the pages were nearly all covered by the over hundred drawings and etchings stuck on [15]. Besides, part of surfaces empty to then just as preexisting drawing areas have been filled with drawings of oriental ornamental motives (Fig. 4). Also a high number of ornamental patterns were stuck on, cut out of a collection of etchings. This category of ornaments has been presented by Mária Aggházy, stating them to belong to a late group of Venetian ornaments of oriental pattern, a late type where in addition to abstract patterns, also natural elements (leaves, flowers) appeared [16].

### *Story of the codex in Hungary*

As mentioned before, a short description of the codex had been given already in 1861 by Imre Henszlmann, pioneer of Hungarian history of architecture. "Count Ödön Zichy spoke to me about an old Italian hand-written and hand-drawn book, sold by Samu Literati Nemes to his brother, the late Count Jenő Zichy, with the comment: This rarity has been recommended to me (Literati) as one-time property of the architect of our King Corvin . . ." This book is supposed to have get in Hungary by 1841. Namely Sámuel Literati Nemes, art dealer living a life of vicissitudes in the Reform Period — sometimes suspected for adventurism — died in 1842. Still in 1841 he sold two other books to the Library of the Hungarian National Museum, originating from the S. Andrea de Litore monastery in Venice [17]. This monastery has been referred to in the Zichy Codex as burial place of Angelo Cortivo indicated as owner of the book, who died in 1536 according to his nephew. The book is likely to have get to the monastery's library by about

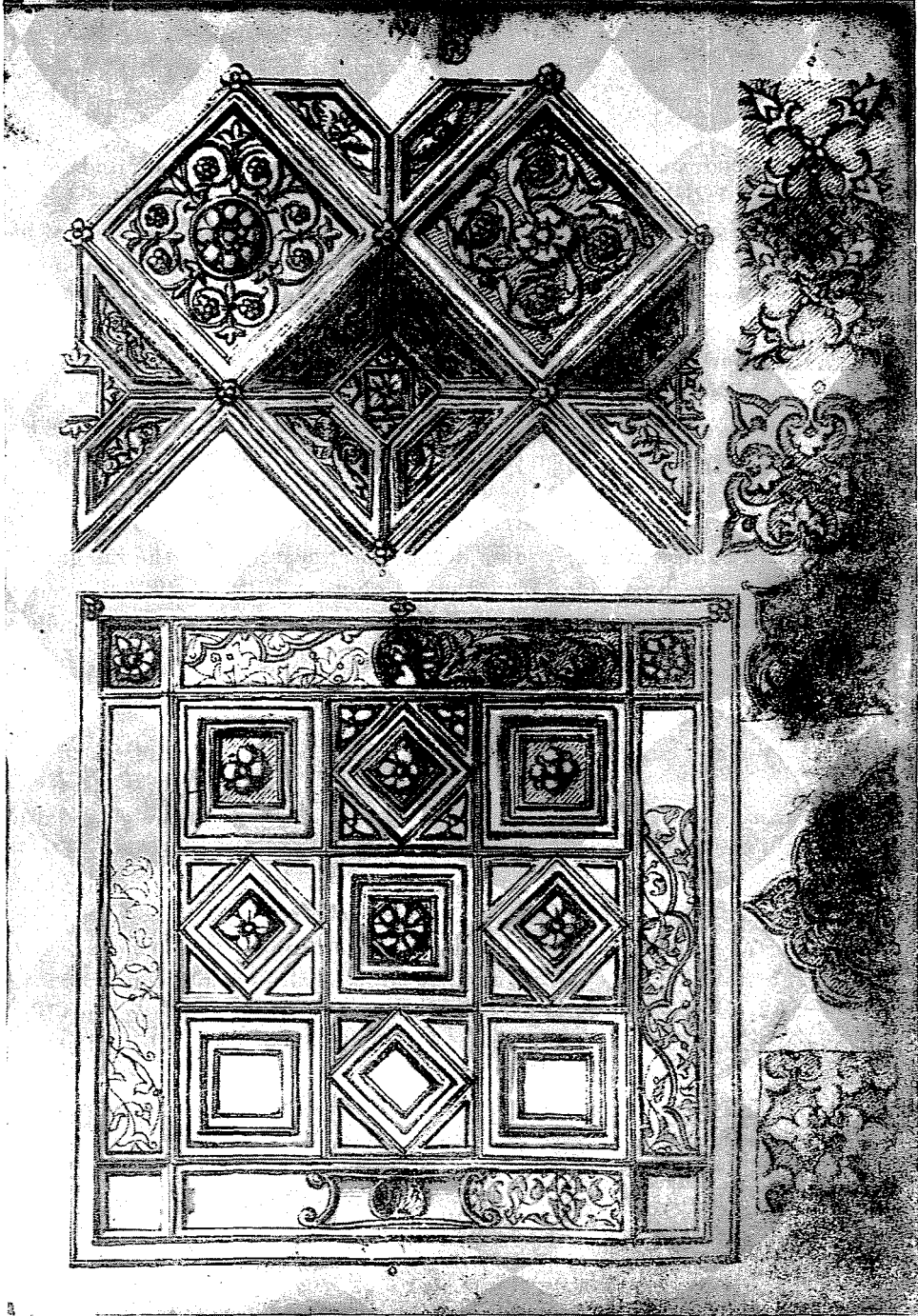


Fig. 4. Zichy Codex f. 170. v.

1545, after the last record, and kept there to 1554 when the church and the monastery were demolished to be replaced by the S. Andrea fortress built by Sanmicheli [18]. Thereafter the codex remained hidden for three centuries to emerge in Hungary where it was purchased by Count Jenő Zichy (1809—1848), inherited by his brother, Count Ödön Zichy (1811—1894), and after his death, the codex as an item of his valuable collection was inherited by his son, Count Jenő Zichy jr., a politician renowned as explorer of Asia, patron of industry and arts (1837—1906). Jenő Zichy demised his palace, most of his treasures of art and valuable library to the Municipality of Budapest, under the condition to establish a “Zichy Museum”. But the testament raised a trial that lasted for years, so that the codex got into the Municipal Library as late as in 1911, as part of a collection of about 3000 items, — among them several geographic works and *Aldinae* — it still belongs to [19]. In 1943, codex pages have been photographed and repaginated, the missing 19 pages were likely to be replaced by empty paper sheets. This photo series is very significant for subsequent research, namely in the unskilled 1968 “restauration” the pages were cut around, sacrificing part of earlier pagination, even of marginal explanatory drawings. Besides, some details disappeared with the ink fading out can better be reconstructed from the old photos. In 1983—1984 the codex was again restaured, this time skillfully, to be preserved in the rarity collection of the library.

#### Origin and architecture historical significance of the codex

According to the records mentioned, part of the codex should be dated to the '70s of the 15th century. It might have been possessed by an architect or attendant artist, stone carver or other ornamentalist invited to take part in Urbino constructions in the workshop of Francesco di Giorgio. Like other architects of the period, Francesco di Giorgio is known to have been concerned with ancient monuments, even planned to process all ancient monuments in Italy, of what several remnants persist in drawing collections of e.g. the *Bibl. Saluziana* in Torino, and the *Palazzo Uffizi* in Firenze [20]. A similar collection work seems to have influenced that resulting in the first part of this codex. There are a multitude of antique cornice, pedestal, pilaster, ornament, frieze, altar drawings, but they seem rather copies than sketches made in the field. Some bear the indication of its location, e.g. “a roma”, “in sto petro in roma”, “pola in dalmatia” etc. (Fig. 5). Thus, it may be concluded that the owner of the first part of the book had relations to the circle of Francesco di Giorgio. On the other hand, data and some drawings related to Venice (e.g. copy of the so-called “Renaissance reconstruction of the *Palazzo dei Tribunali* in Rome” [21]) may be reduced to the circle of Fra Giovanni Giocondo (Fig. 6).



Again, the “vocabulary” of abbreviations in antique inscriptions with explanations in the codex hints to Fra Giocondo or his circle. It is known, and also related by Vasari, that Giocondo not only studied antique buildings but also collected antique inscriptions in a beautiful book dedicated to Lorenzo il Magnifico [22].

Also the record on regulating the Brenta river refers to Fra Giocondo. “Among works of Fra Giocondo, that one merits memory of the whole world that, keeping in mind the merits of the Republic of Venice, was devoted to preserve this place where this city was wonderfully built . . . and to prevent its depopulation due to foul air or shallowing of the lagoons . . . Architects of all Italy were summoned together who made great many drawings and expertizes but those of Fra Giocondo were the best and got realized . . .” wrote Vasari. By lowering the Brenta water level, Fra Giocondo prevented silting of the lagoons [23]. Names of those taking part in the 1489 regulation of the river have been recorded in the Zichy Codex [24]. The second regulation with no year recorded here took place in 1507, to that Fra Giocondo delivered four different proposals based on the comparison of old and new river water levels. Venetians, however, did not give the commission to him but to Alessio da Bergamo who appears from the list on the codex page to have shared the works already in 1489 [25].

There are also data on the relation between Francesco di Giorgio and Fra Giocondo. They are known to had been co-workers in Naples in the years about 1490. Referring to the Prince of Calabria, Summonte wrote: “. . .for building the Poggio Reale, this unhappy lord invited Julian Maiano of Firenze, Francesco da Siena, master Antonio of Firenze — although he was great master at building military structures and fortresses — and above all, he let to come the unmatched, excellent Fra Jucundo da Verona . . .” [26] while in 1492, Fra Giocondo was remunerated by the Naples treasury for 126 drawings made for the copy of “two books on architecture and warfare hand written on paper by Francesco da Siena” [27].

Significant data on the history of the relation between them, on the origins and Vitruvian character of architectural treatise of Francesco di Giorgio may be expected from the transcription and study of the text of the architectural treatise in the Zichy codex [28]. Without deeming the problem of authorship to be decidable in the actual stade of research, some circumstances have to be pointed out.

In this codex, text of the treatise is begun twice. First, — probably starting from the idea of the relation between architecture and proportions of the human body, popular in that period — parts and proportions of the human skeleton have been recapitulated [29]. Second, fundamentals of geometry and of surveying are presented as an introduction [30] (Fig. 7).

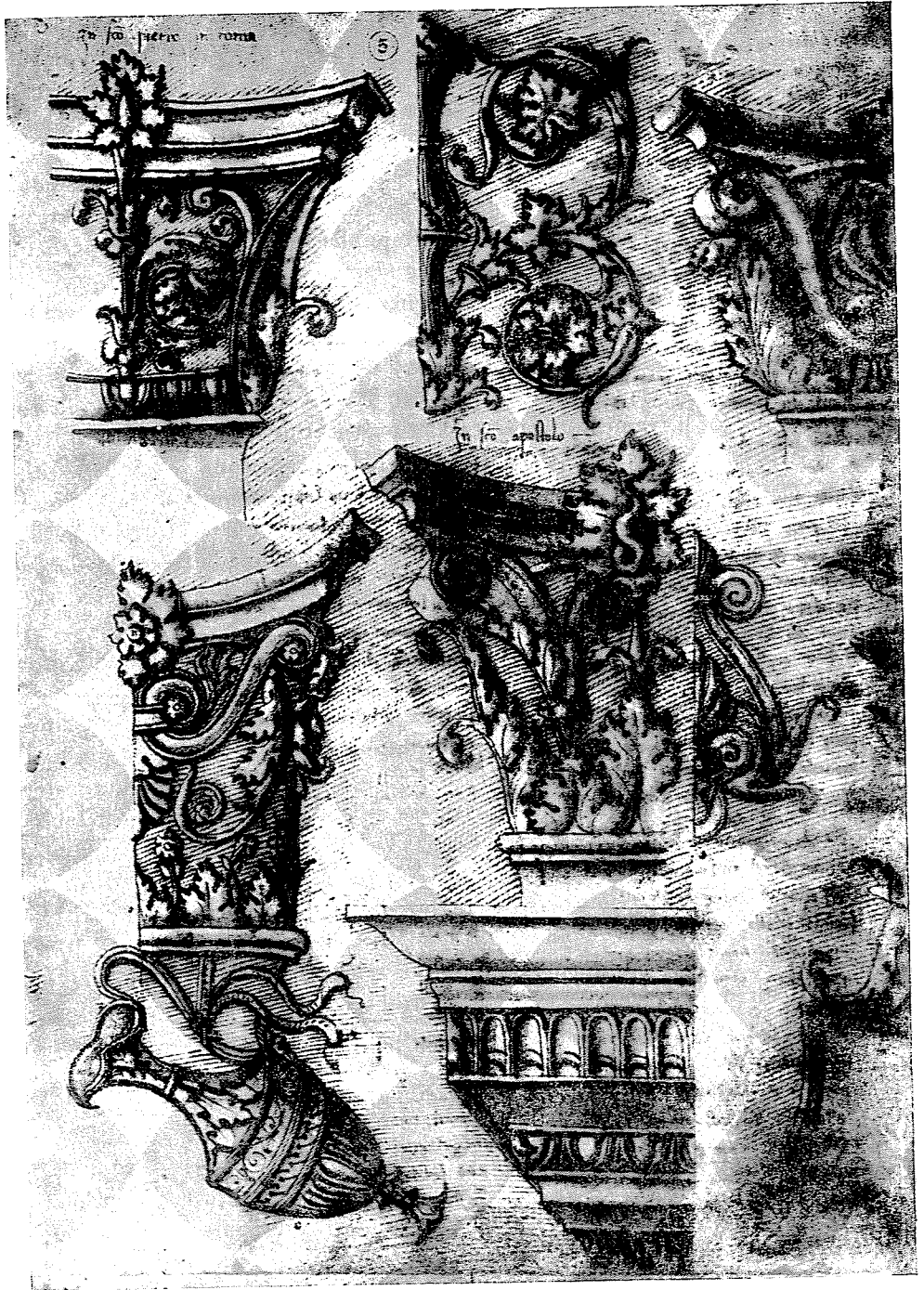


Fig. 5. Zichy Codex f. 5. v.

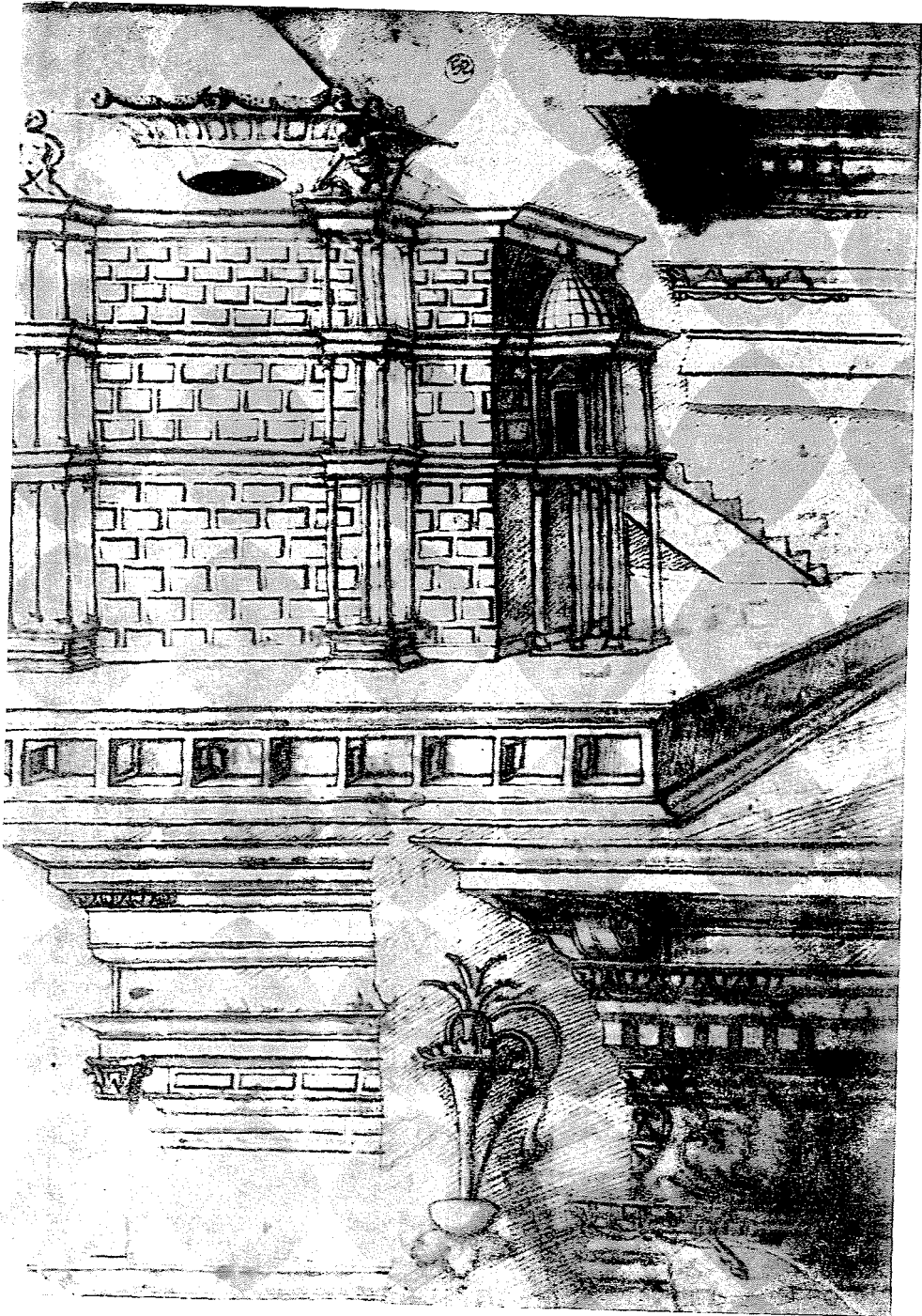


Fig. 6. Zichy Codex f. 52. v.

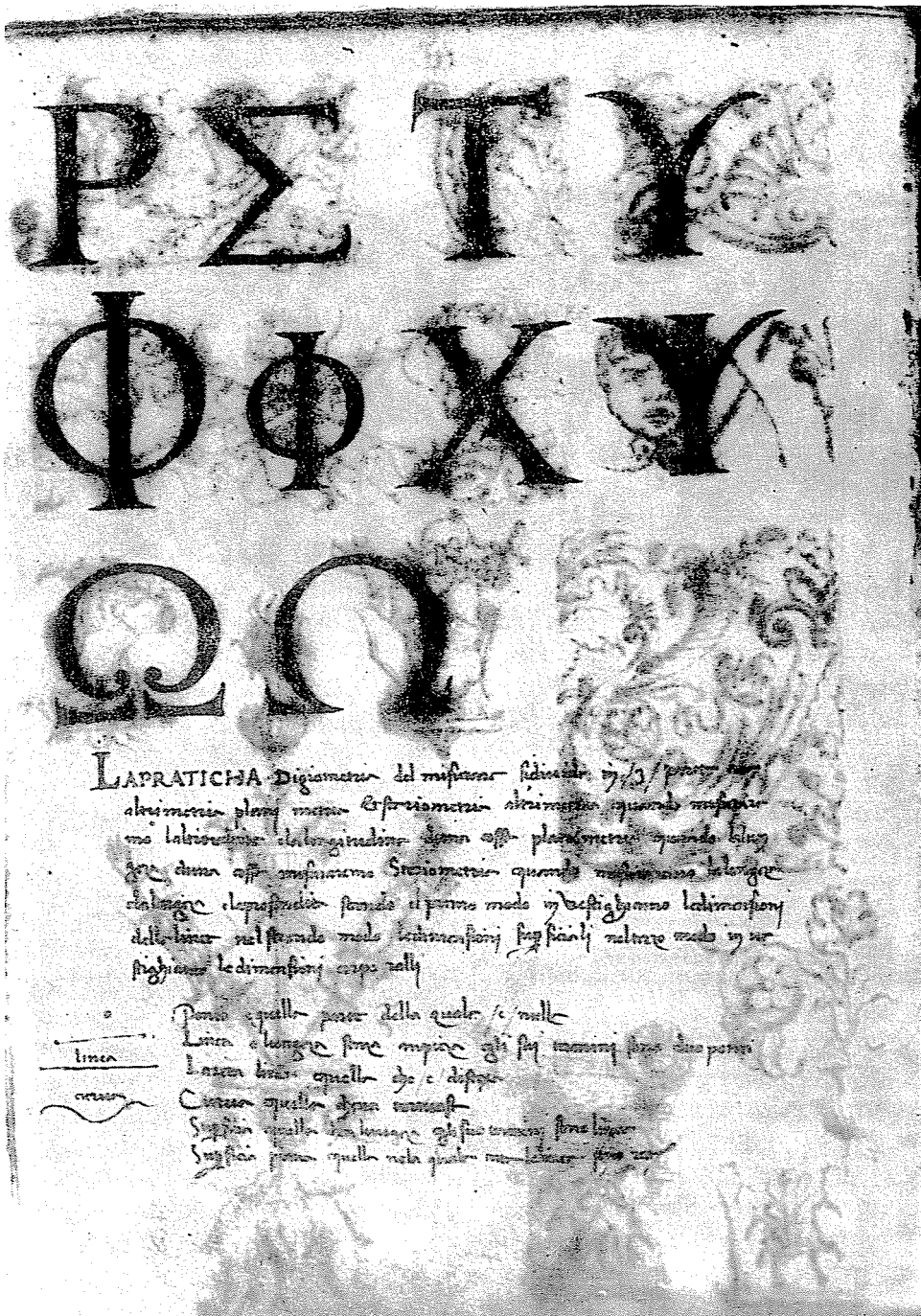


Fig. 7. Zichy Codex f. 111. v.



The text of the treatise on architecture in this codex was apparently destined to be copied afterwards, but not in the order of chapters here. Several passages are preceded by a number referring to the final order — probably for copying. Also ends of certain lines bear numbers of subsequent chapters — that are, however, elsewhere. The treatise exhibits marked influence of Vitruvius, at times (e.g. for church layouts) seeming even to follow him (Fig. 8).

Fra Giocondo is known to have been among those of his age best acquainted with Vitruvius, he is responsible for the first edition of his work in print. According to contemporary accounts, he wrote himself an architecture theory [31] but it does not subsist. Francisco Giorgio's theory exhibits, however, influence of Vitruvius in several matters. Analysis of the text of exactly the codex of Budapest is likely to be instructive on how much the Vitruvianism of the architectural treatise of Francesco di Giorgio Martini may be attributed to the influence of Fra Giocondo, and whether a direct connection between the two artists can be demonstrated to have existed in authoring the works on theory of architecture.

At last, remind that the codex was recommended at that time by Literati as "once possessed by the architect of our King Corvin". Subsequent research is expected to find out whether it was merely a business trick of Literati or was there really such a tradition related to the codex. In any case, the 15th-century origin of the codex could not even be clear for Henszlmann, namely he could not see it all because of the drawings and etchings stuck in. The record on Urbino seems to confirm that the first part originated at the time of King Matthias. This fact, however, does not refer in itself to Hungarian relations. This reference can be rejected or adopted only after further, careful criticism, because of the scarcity of architectural remnants from the Matthias period, while recent research pointed to important relations with Urbino, in addition to Firenze. All in all, Imre Henszlmann is still actual in writing: ". . . Nevertheless, this book is one of outstanding rarities, since architectural albums from that age are no everyday matter . . . thereupon I consider it worth to be published, although in two separate volumes, one for the poetry, and the other for the architectural part . . .".

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10. Zichy Codex.
11. Zichy Codex.
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\* In Hungarian.