

Leon battista alberti essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Writer, Renaissance architect, humanist philosopher, and artistic theorist, Leon Battista Alberti is considered to be the Renaissance's "universal man" of learning. In addition to painting, designing buildings, and writing scientific, artistic and philosophical treatises, Alberti wrote the first book on Italian grammar and cryptography. Born in Genoa in the year 1404, out of wedlock but immediately legitimized by his father Lorenzo. Leon's mother, Bianca Fieschi, was a Bolognese widow.

She died during an outbreak of plague. He was a member of an aristocratic and wealthy Florentine family of merchants and bankers that had been exiled from Florence for political reasons in 1377. Having grown up in the shadow of exile, he spent his life in continuous travels even after his family was allowed to return to Florence in 1428. Under his father's influence, he studied classical subjects at the best universities: literature in Venice and Padua, law and Greek in Bologna.

But from an early age he privately cultivated the most diverse interests: music, painting, sculpture, architecture, physics, and mathematics. In 1421, on the death of his father, Alberti remained completely alone and began to suffer because of the differences with his family. This finally led him to turn to a safe ecclesiastical career, which also served to strengthen his social status. In 1428, he was able to return to Florence. In 1431 he became secretary for 34 years to the Patriarch of Grado and in a year he moved to Rome as papal abbreviator (writer of papal briefs).

Moving between Ferrara, Bologna, Florence, Mantua, Rimini and, of course, Rome, he expanded his direct study of the ancient ruins, the scattered

evidence of the imperial city's magnificence and the repositories of the language of Classical Antiquity. *Della famiglia* (On the Family), one of his earliest works; it is the first of several dialogues on moral philosophy, written in the vernacular, for a population not tutored in Latin. In these moral dialogues, Alberti combined the ethical ideals of ancient Rome with a contemporary point of view that considered labor as a virtue or a human outlook.

Alberti was able to paint, but barely any of his paintings still exists. However, in 1435 he wrote the book *On Painting*, which set out the rules for drawing a three-dimensional picture on a two-dimensional surface. Filippo Brunelleschi was the one who rediscovered and demonstrated these principles of perspective by Alberti. *On Painting* would guide dozens of Renaissance artists in producing more realistic, perspective artworks. In 1438, Alberti met the Marchese Leonello, who encouraged Alberti to turn his attentions to the field of architecture, at the Este court in Ferrara.

Alberti's earliest work still stands: a miniature triumphal arch, which supports a statue of Leonello's father on horseback. At Leonello's urging, Alberti undertook a thorough study of architectural theory and began restoring the text of the architect and architectural theorist Vitruvius of classical Rome. When Nicholas V became the pope in 1447, Alberti became his architectural advisor. Both collaborated together on a series of building projects in Rome, which included the reconstruction of St.

Peter's and the Vatican Palace. In 1452, Alberti completed his study of Vitruvius and finished his own completely new architectural text, *De re*

aedificatoria (Ten Books on Architecture). This monumental work would serve as a guideline for virtually all succeeding Renaissance architecture. For the next twenty years of his life, he contributed to a number of notable buildings, including the facades of Sta. Maria Novella and the Palazzo Rucellai, the Tempio Malatestiano, and the Church of San Andrea.

Though he continued to travel to various cities and courts of Renaissance Italy, Rome and Florence remained significant to his outlook. His last dialogue was *De ierarchia* (On the Man of Excellence and Ruler of His Family). Leon Battista Alberti died in Rome on April 25, 1472 at the age of 68. A few years later in 1485, Lorenzo de Medici launched the fortune of his most important treatise by having *De Re Aedificatoria* (until then copied by hand) printed by the prestigious editor Agnolo Poliziano, thus realizing a project that Leon Battista himself had dreamed of.