In early January 1517, Leonardo worked quickly to develop plans for an urban renewal of Romorantin for Francis I of France. For this last major architectural commission, Leonardo had hundreds of architectural and canal studies, as well as the assistance of Francesco Melzi, who measured streets and studied the region. For this project Leonardo could also reference his treatise on sculpture, painting, and architecture, although this is now lost.1 Francis I told Benvenuto Cellini that Leonardo was a “man of some knowledge of Latin and Greek literature,” a qualification Francis likely considered important for the architect of a project that would identify Romorantin with the grandeur of ancient Rome.2 But the last time Leonardo addressed urban planning on such a comprehensive scale was in Milan during the late 1480s. He had worked as an architect for several patrons thereafter, though there is no evidence after the mid-1490s of a continuation of his initial interest in developing a palace that was part of a two-level city over a network of canals. Having lived in Rome between September 1513 and late 1516, he was influenced by the Colosseum; its three stories of exterior arcades may be recognized as part of the unusual Romorantin palace façade design, as illustrated on Windsor RL 12292 v (Fig. 7.1).

For Leonardo, the grandeur of both structures was important.3 While in Milan for seventeen years, from 1483 to 1499, he studied at length optimal urban planning and the means by which the Sforza court considered Milan the new

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3 This form of arcaded façade would influence the 1519–20 construction by Francis I of two stories of arcades along a new wing of the castle at Blois. See Jean Guillaume, “Leonardo and
Athens. Instrumental in that consideration, as Leonardo was likely well aware, had been Francesco Filarete’s (Antonio Averlino, ca. 1400–69) *Libro architettonico* (ca. 1464) and its Neoplatonic discourse on the economic, social, and educational virtues of the ideal city of “Sforzinda” (Fig. 7.2). Three tiers of arched openings are features of the Sforza Castle, which Filarete helped to rebuild in the 1450s and early 1460s. While studying Romorantin in 1517, Leonardo possibly thought of this and of Sforzinda, along with his earlier designs for a comprehensive canal system to help rid Milan of epidemics of the plague. Neoplatonic influences and proportional consistencies are visible in drawings on seven folios (figs. 7.1, 7.3–8) that have been associated with Leonardo’s Romorantin project, though this association of folios is based primarily on