FROM DELUXE ARCHITECTURAL BOOK TO BUILDER’S MANUAL: 
THE DUTCH EDITIONS OF SCAMOZZI’S *L’IDEA DELLA
ARCHITETTURA UNIVERSALE*

Vincenzo Scamozzi’s treatise *L’Idea della Architettura Universale* was first published in Venice in 1615 as a large and expensive, deluxe folio edition. Following in the footsteps of Serlio and Palladio, Scamozzi’s work was profusely illustrated with plans and elevations of various edifices and included an extensive treatment of the orders of architecture, which described the five canonical forms of columns, as well as recording some of his own buildings. His intention to write ten books also linked Scamozzi’s work to the earlier architectural treatises of Vitruvius and Alberti. The high cultural tone of *L’Idea*, with its masses of erudite classical knowledge, was matched by the dedications of the six published books to leading European rulers. Yet, subsequent translations of Scamozzi’s treatise present a work largely shorn of its erudition and transformed into what was essentially a builder’s or craftsman’s manual. This change was brought about in Holland in the middle of the seventeenth century in the context of rival Dutch editions of Scamozzi’s treatise: one a deluxe architectural book, the second


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Querendo 26/4
and third simplified versions of Scamozzi's orders, and the fourth a compendium of the orders according to Palladio, Vignola and Scamozzi. The original 1615 Italian edition of Scamozzi's treatise comprises only six of its ten projected books. Part One includes Book I on 'the excellence of architecture, its parts, and that which is common to excellent architects'. Book II treats 'the regions and countries, the quality of sites, and the forms of cities and fortresses'. The subject of Book III is private buildings, 'for convenience, and for delight'. Part Two includes Book VI on the orders, and ornaments. Book VII examines building materials, and Book VIII discusses the foundations and roofs of buildings. Of the four unpublished books, Book IV was to have treated all types of public buildings, Book V sacred buildings, Book IX the finishing details of buildings, and Book X the alteration and restoration of buildings, together with land reclamation. In the work as published in 1615 there are two elaborately engraved title-pages, 800 pages of text and indices, and 43 copperplate engravings, 39 of which illustrate Book VI on the orders. There are also 42 woodcuts, with 28 alone illustrating Book III.

It was most probably a grandeur of vision which prevented the completion of L'Idea, in preparation since 1591. When, in the 1590s, Scamozzi decided on folio size copper-plate and woodblock illustrations, he committed himself to the elaborate and expensive, but traditional large format used for first editions of architectural treatises. Whether Scamozzi's work would have been a publishing success in Italy will never be properly known as he died in August 1616, just eight months after its initial publication in December 1615, and the 670 copies remaining at this time, probably from an original print run of 1000, were purchased by the publisher Justus Sadeler from Leiden. Certainly Scamozzi's treatise never