

# ORNAMENT IN ARCHITECTURE

*A Brief Introduction*

Prof. Brandon Ro, AIA, NCARB  
*Classical Architecture Workshop*

# UNDERSTANDING ORNAMENT

**What:** Definition

**Why:** Purpose

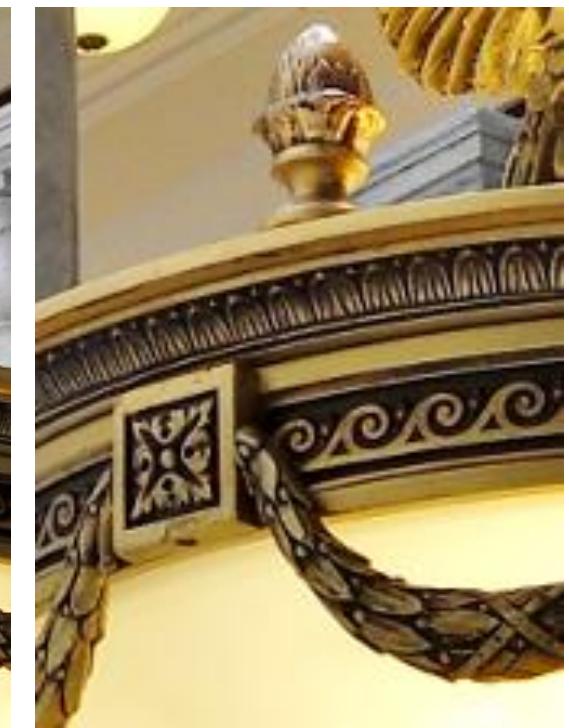
**When:** Categories

**Where:** Placement

**How:** Application

“Do not neglect small things, for  
that is where perfection is found;  
and perfection is no small thing.”

- Michelangelo



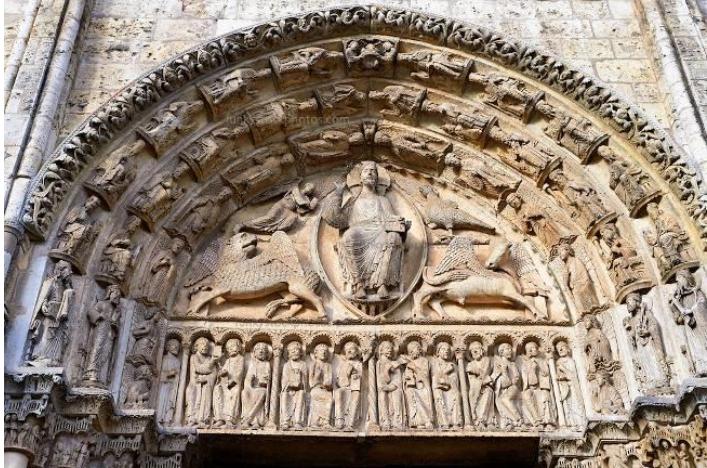
# ōrnāre

1. to confer honor or grace
2. to dress
3. to equip
4. to decorate, furnish,  
adorn, garnish, trim,  
embellish
5. to beautify



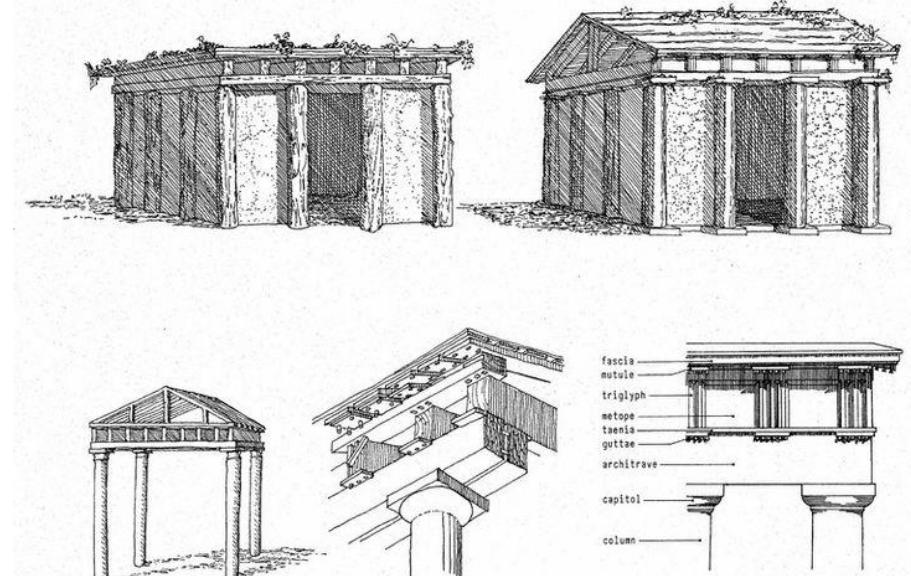
## ORNAMENT

“is an enrichment of a building in order to reveal a building’s use or purpose.”



**DECORATION** “is an enrichment of architecture that adds beauty by making the structural systems at work more legible...it is a *poetic expression of structure*”

[Denis R. McNamara, *Catholic Church Architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2009), 91, 101, 107]



# WHY ORNAMENT?

“It is generally allowed, that the pleasure and delight which we feel on the view of any building, arise from nothing else but **beauty and ornament...**

- Leon Battista Alberti, *The Ten Books of Architecture*, bk VI, ch II, p.112-113





# CLASSIFICATION OF ORNAMENT

SYMBOLIC  
(ALLEGORICAL)

MNEMONIC  
(MEMORY DEVICE/  
PATTERN)

AESTHETIC  
(DÉCOR)



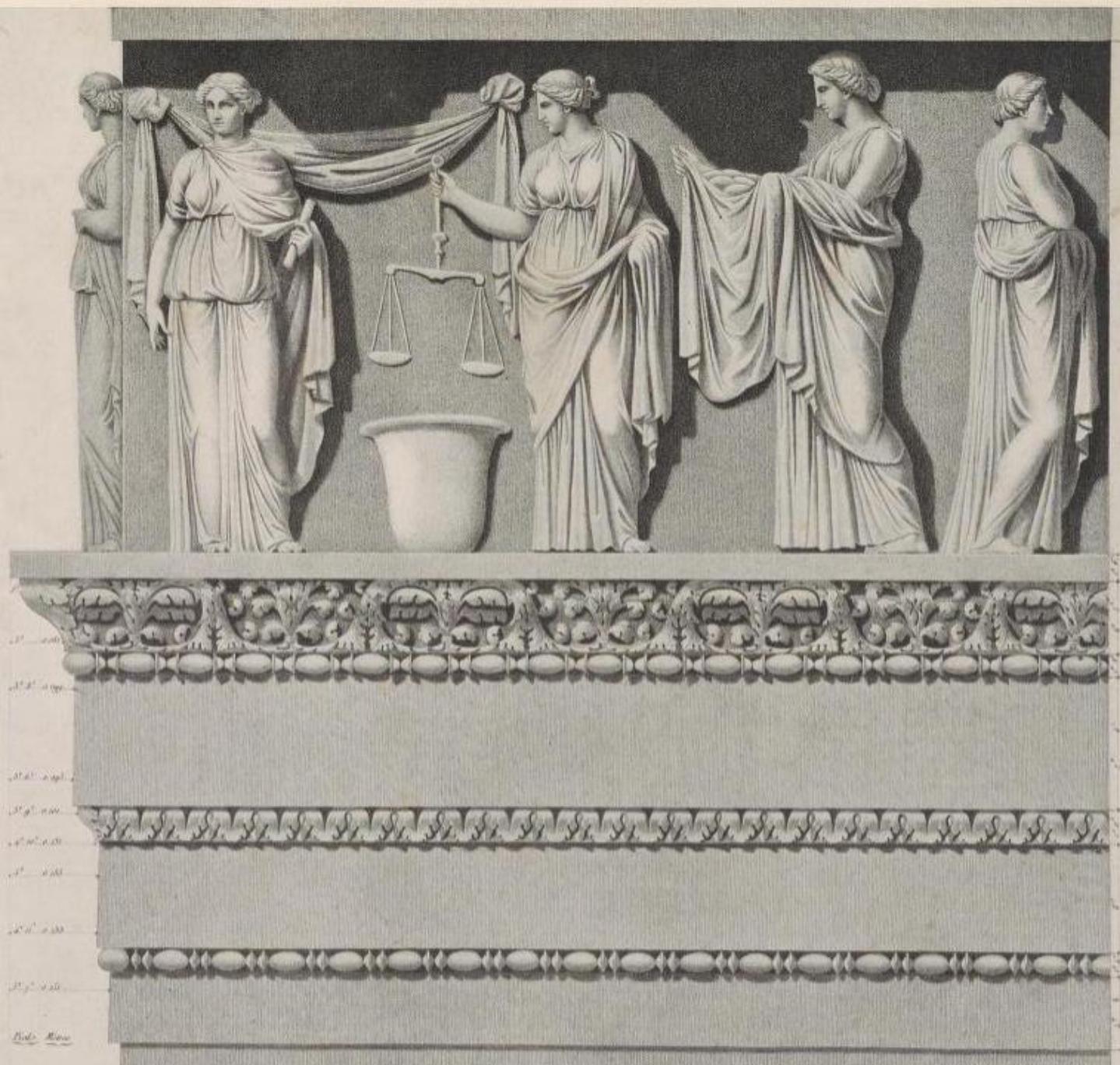
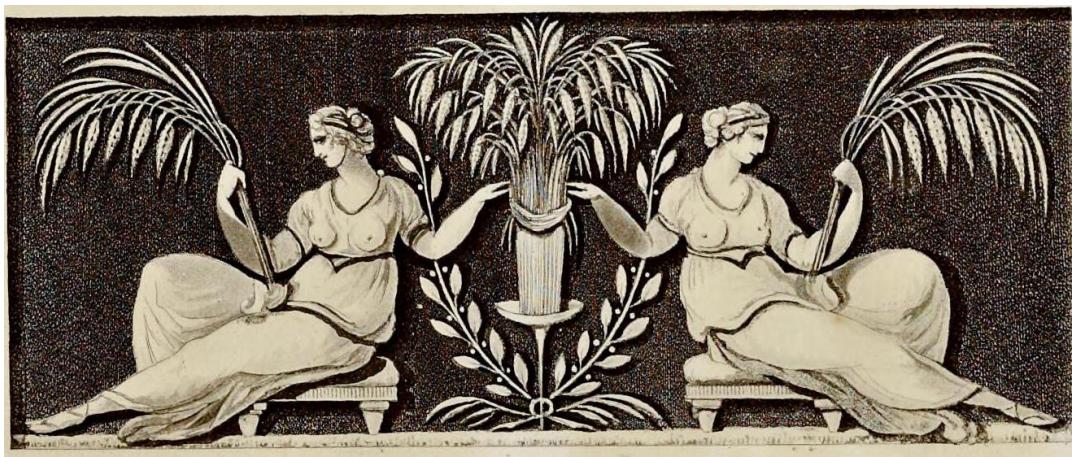
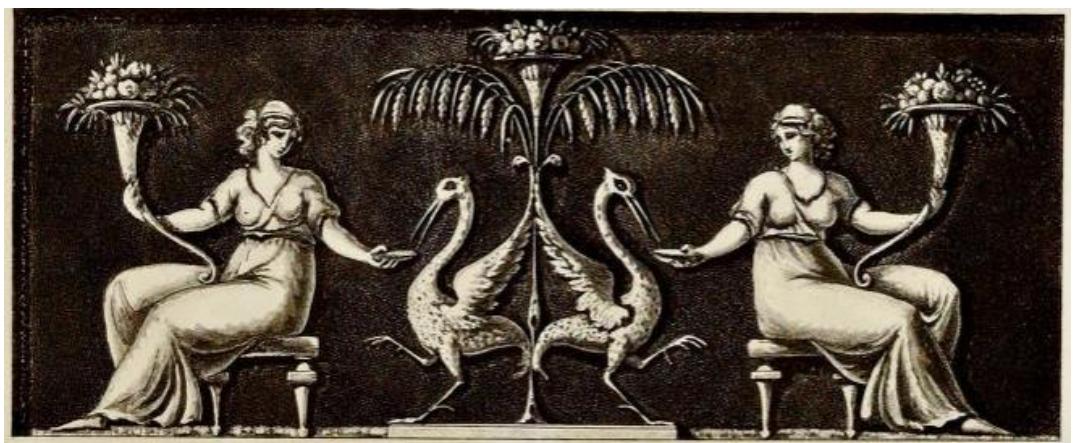
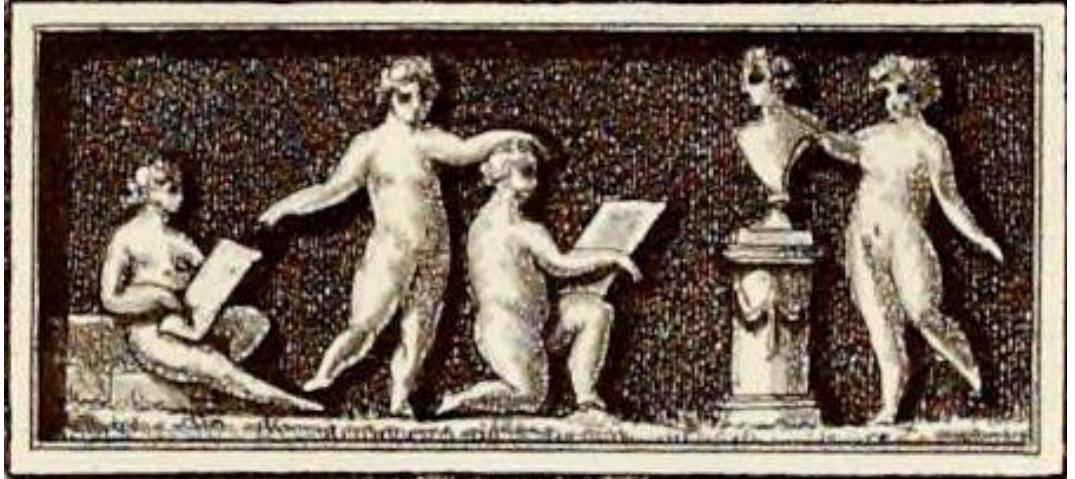
“...the language of ornament, like the languages of speech and music, **must be nourished by active procedures of renewal and education**. There is simply not enough time within each successive generation of designers and artisans to reinvent the complex grammar and visual eloquence that are manifest in the most outstanding projects from the past.”

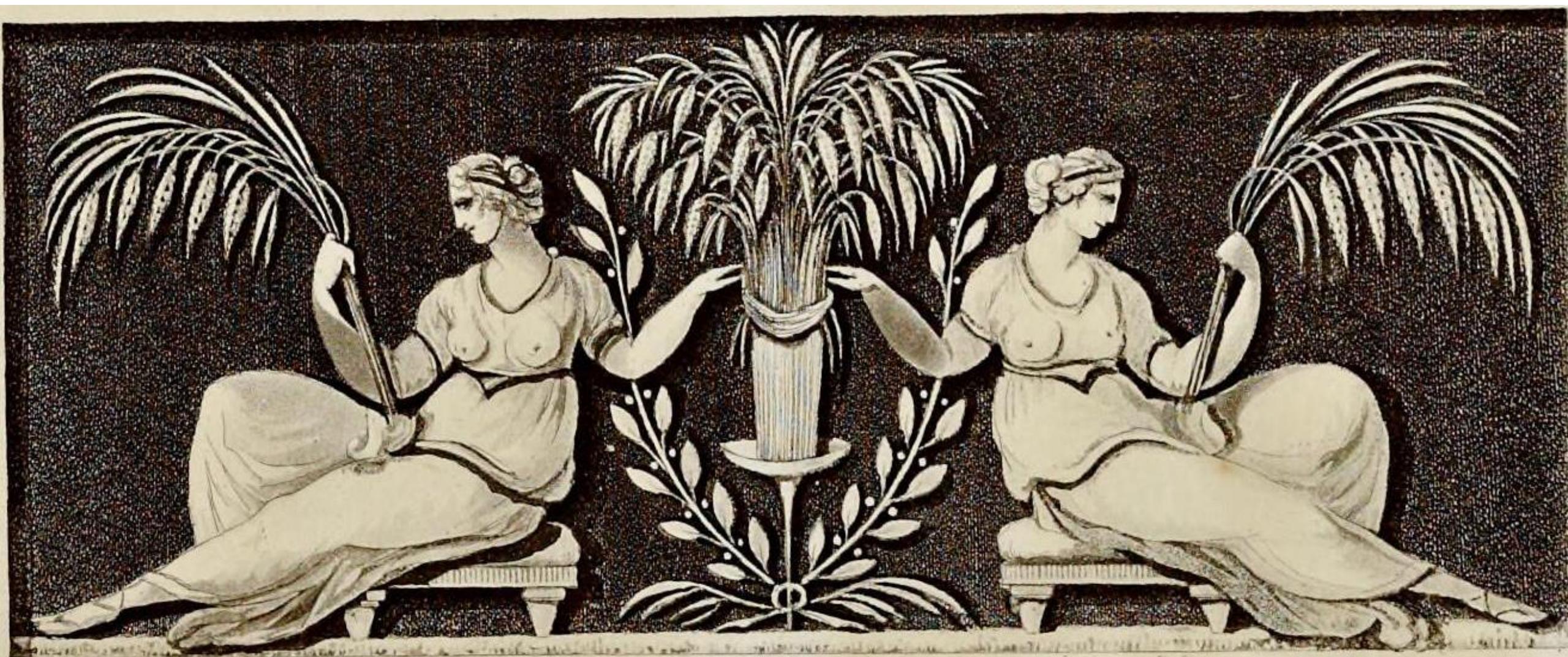
- Kent C. Bloomer, *The Nature of Ornament: Rhythm and Metamorphosis in Architecture*, p.205

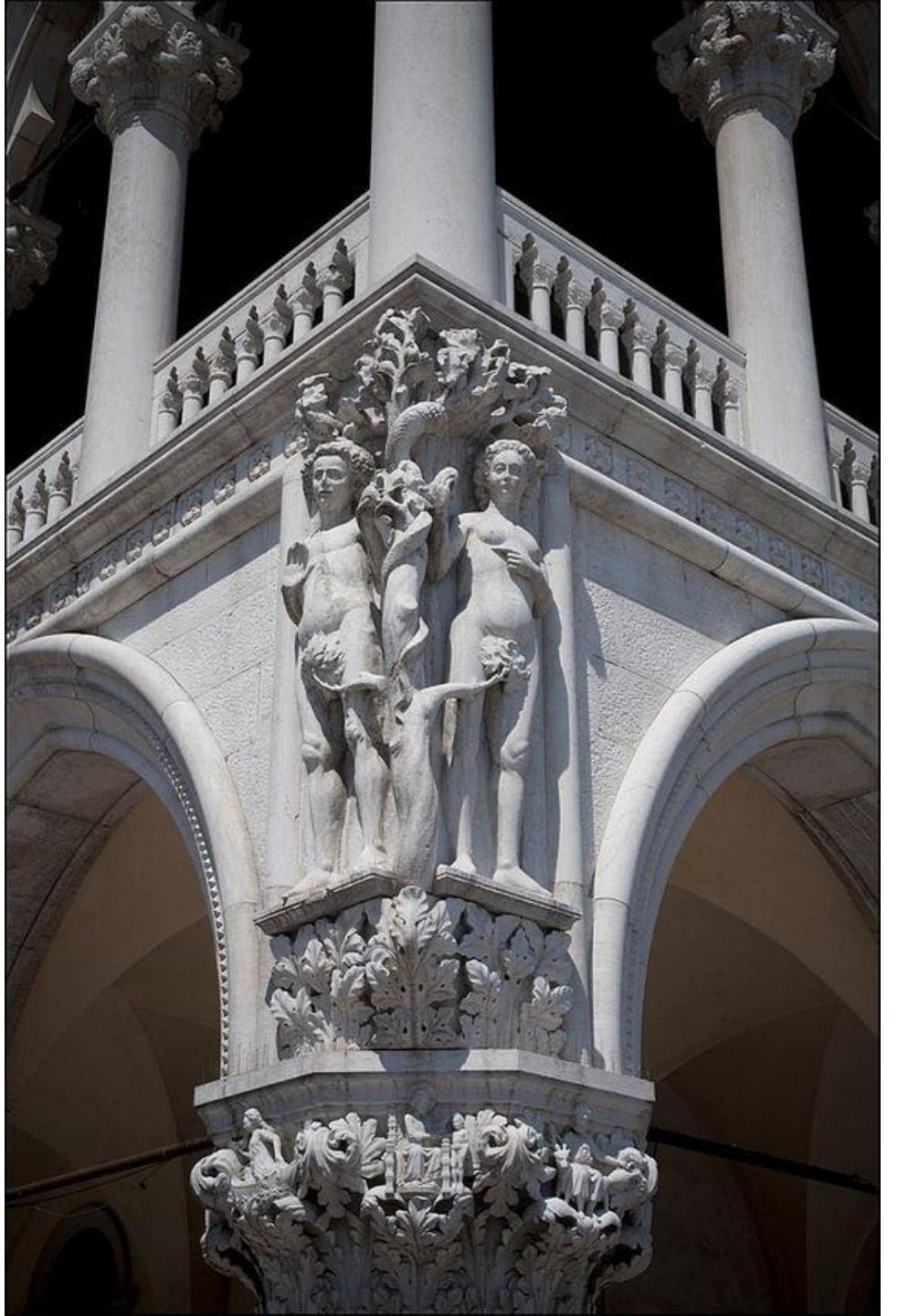
# CATEGORIES OF ORNAMENT

- HUMAN
- ANIMAL
- BOTANICAL
- MANMADE
- GEOMETRIC
- TYPOGRAPHY
- HYBRID (+2)

HUMAN

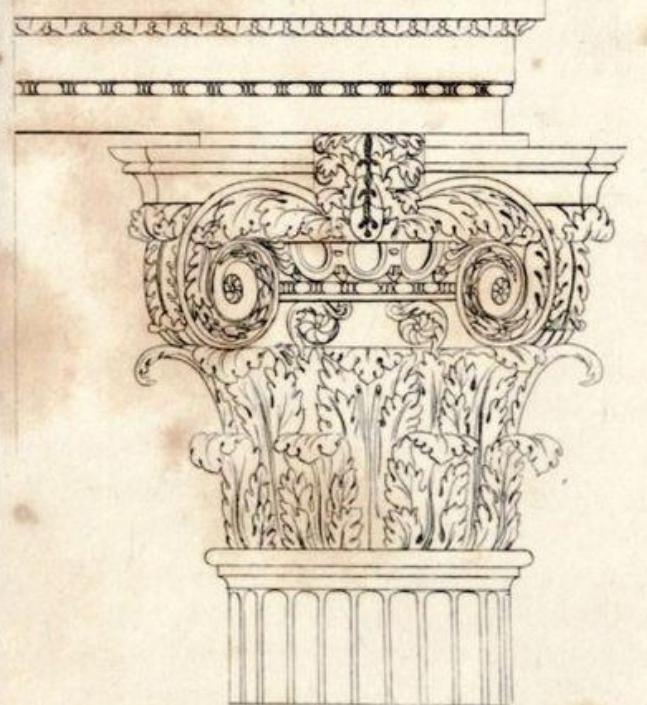
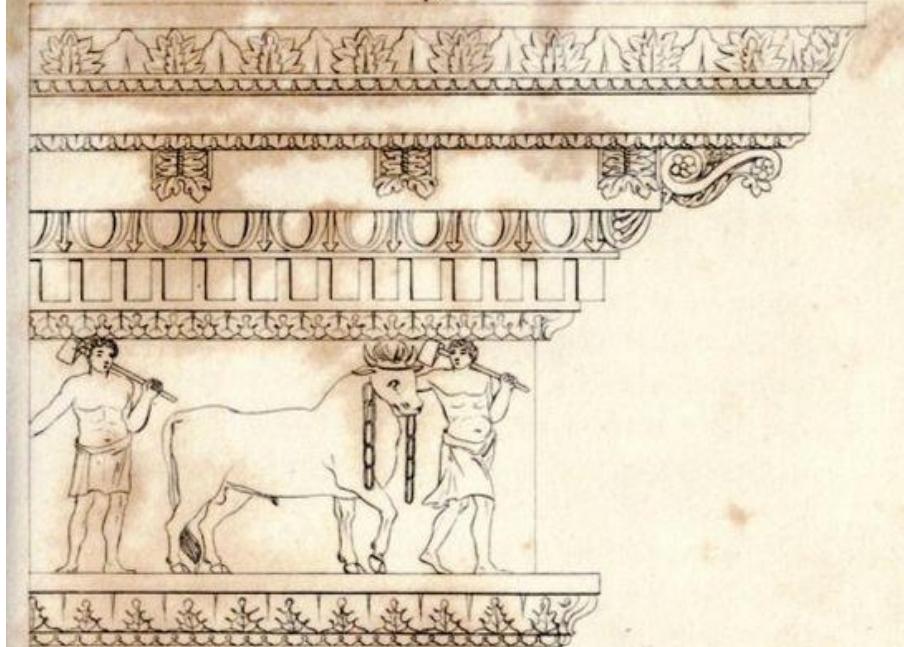


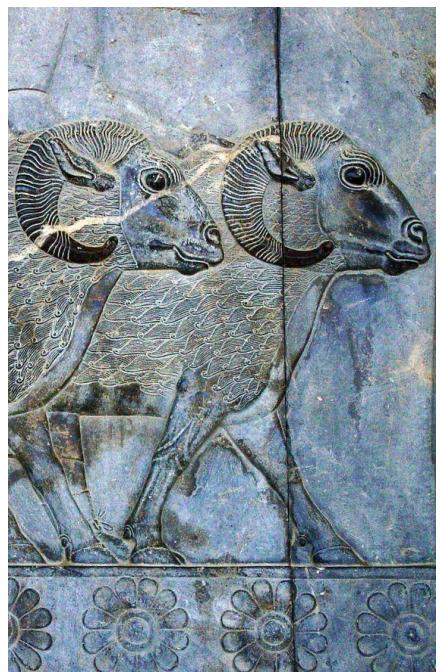


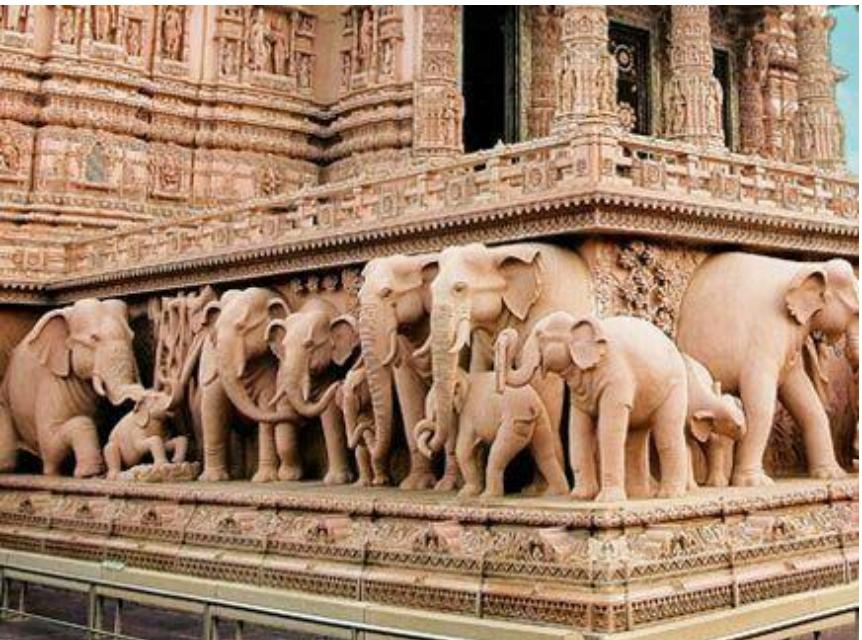




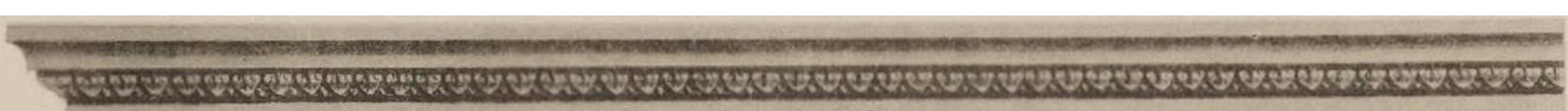
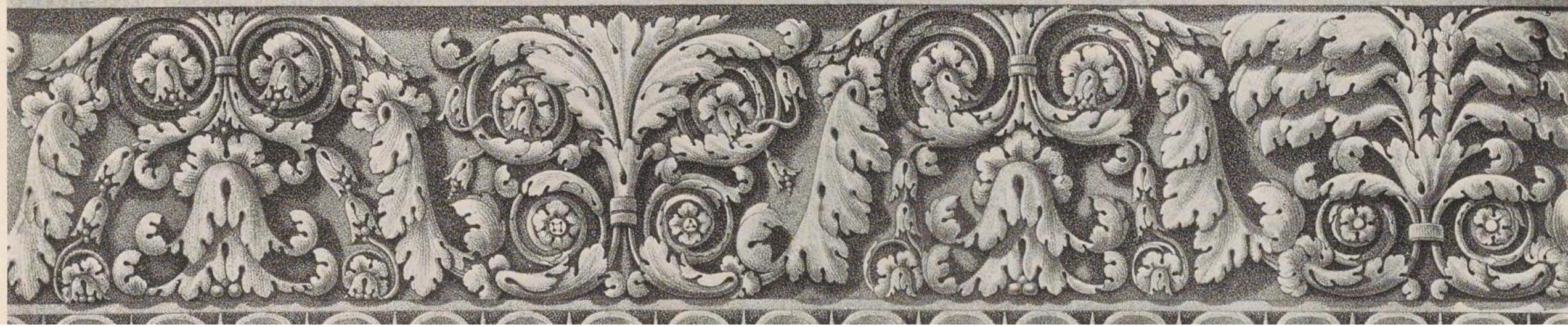
ANIMAL

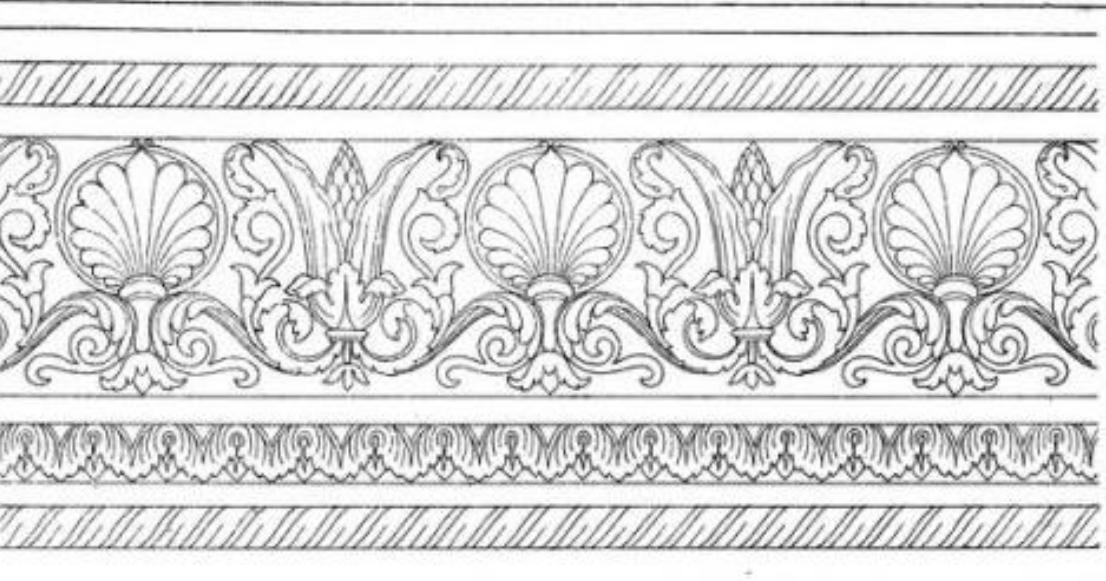
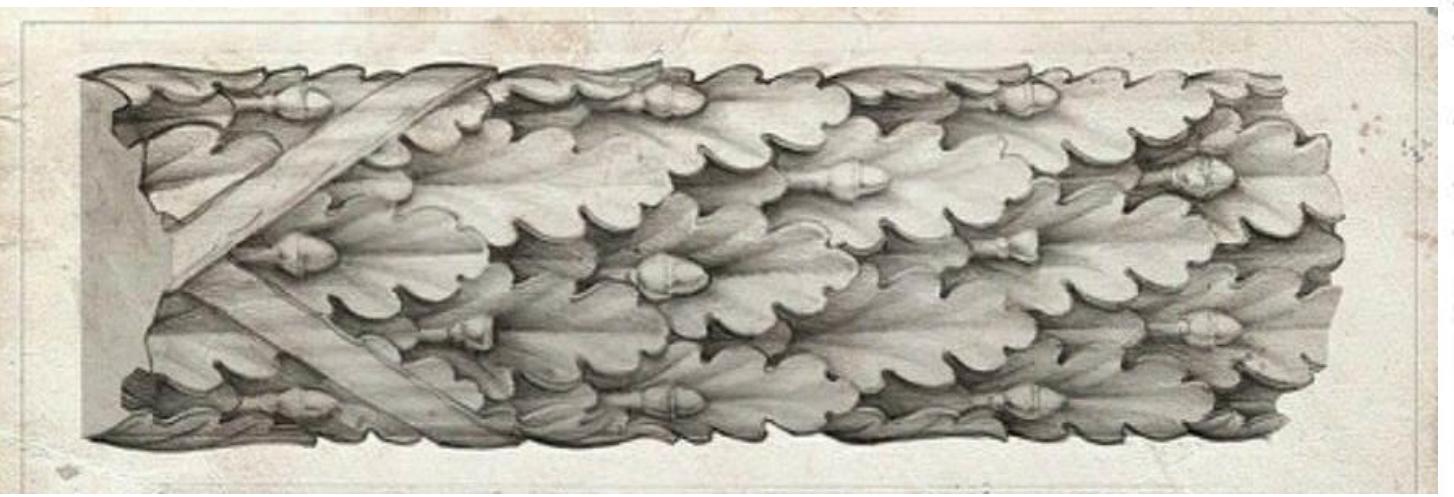
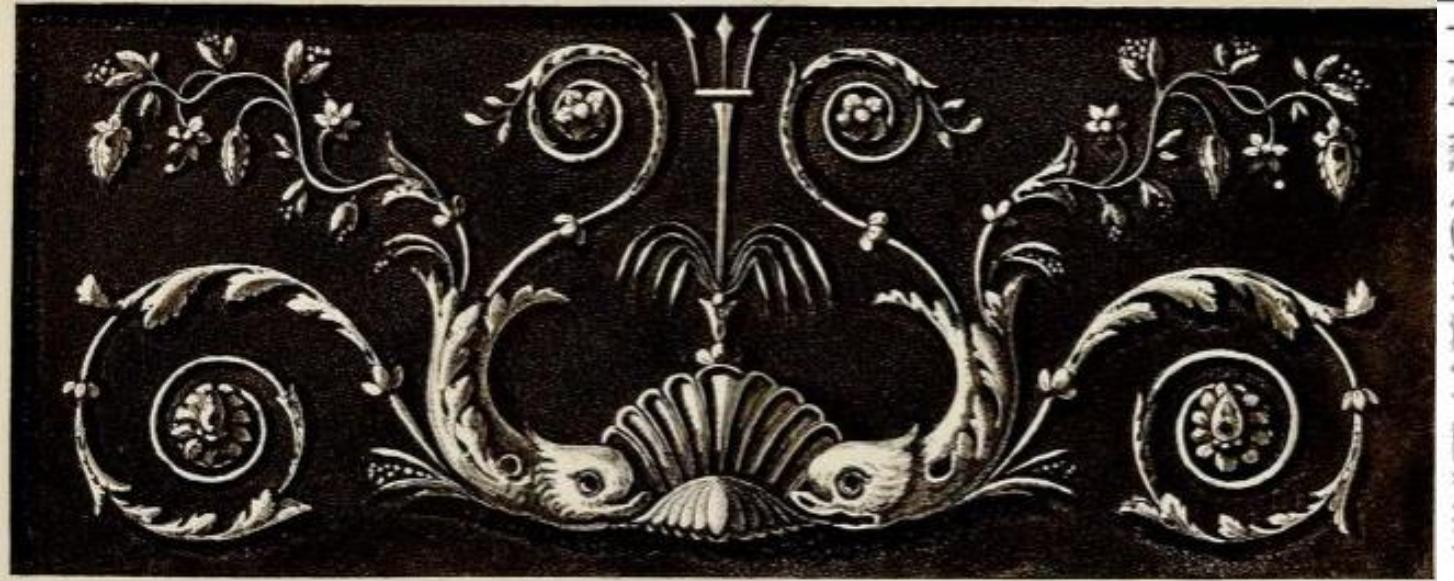




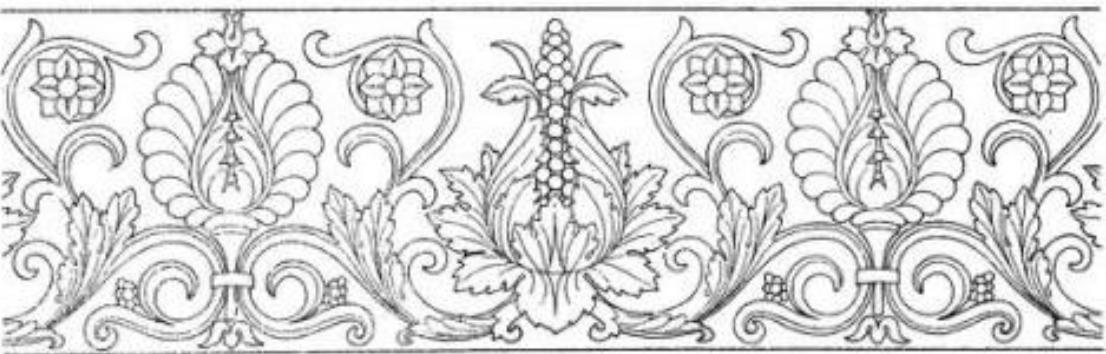


BOTANICAL

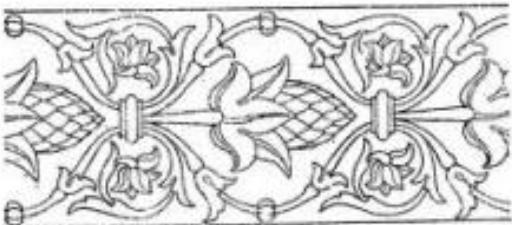




*A*



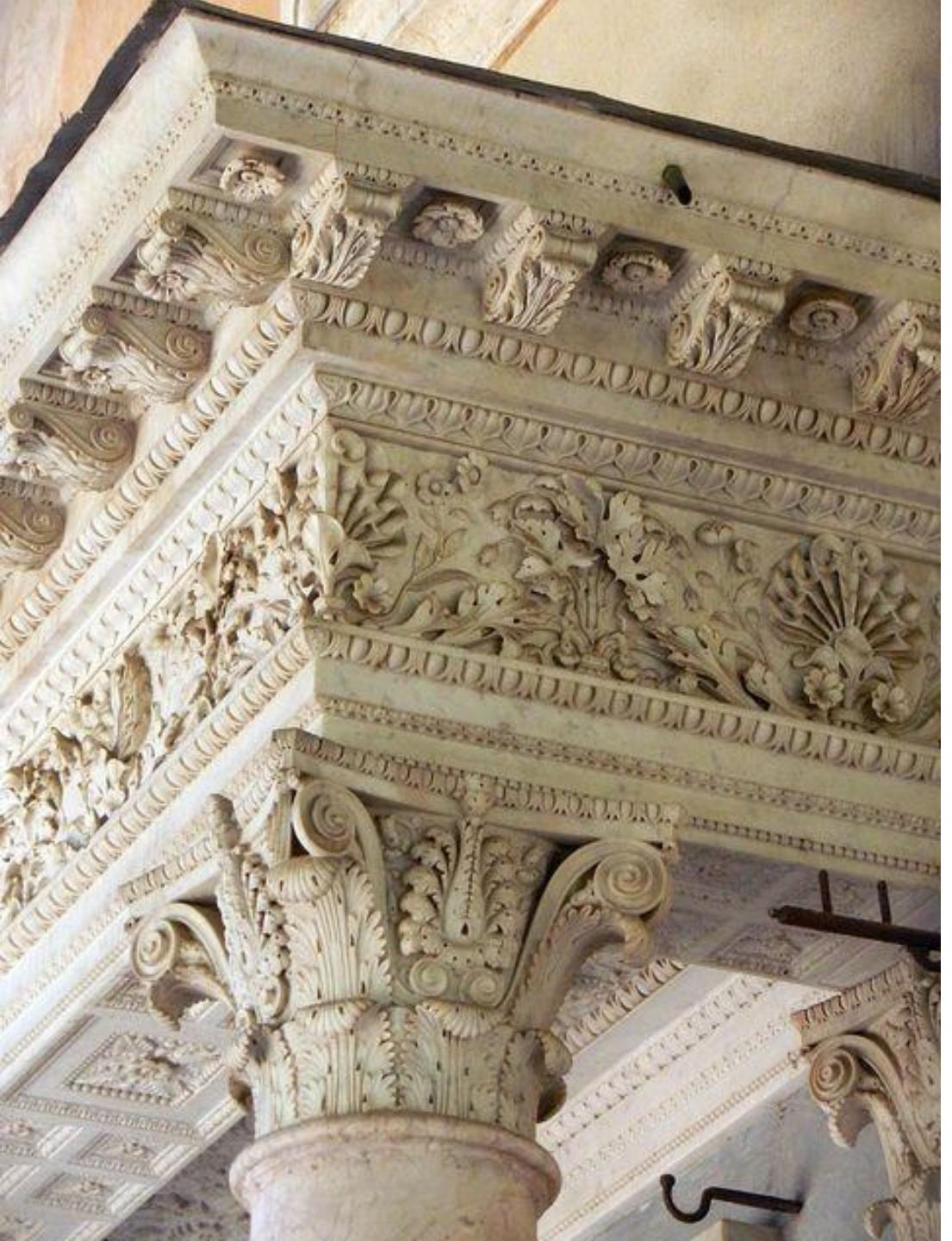
*B*



*C*



*D*



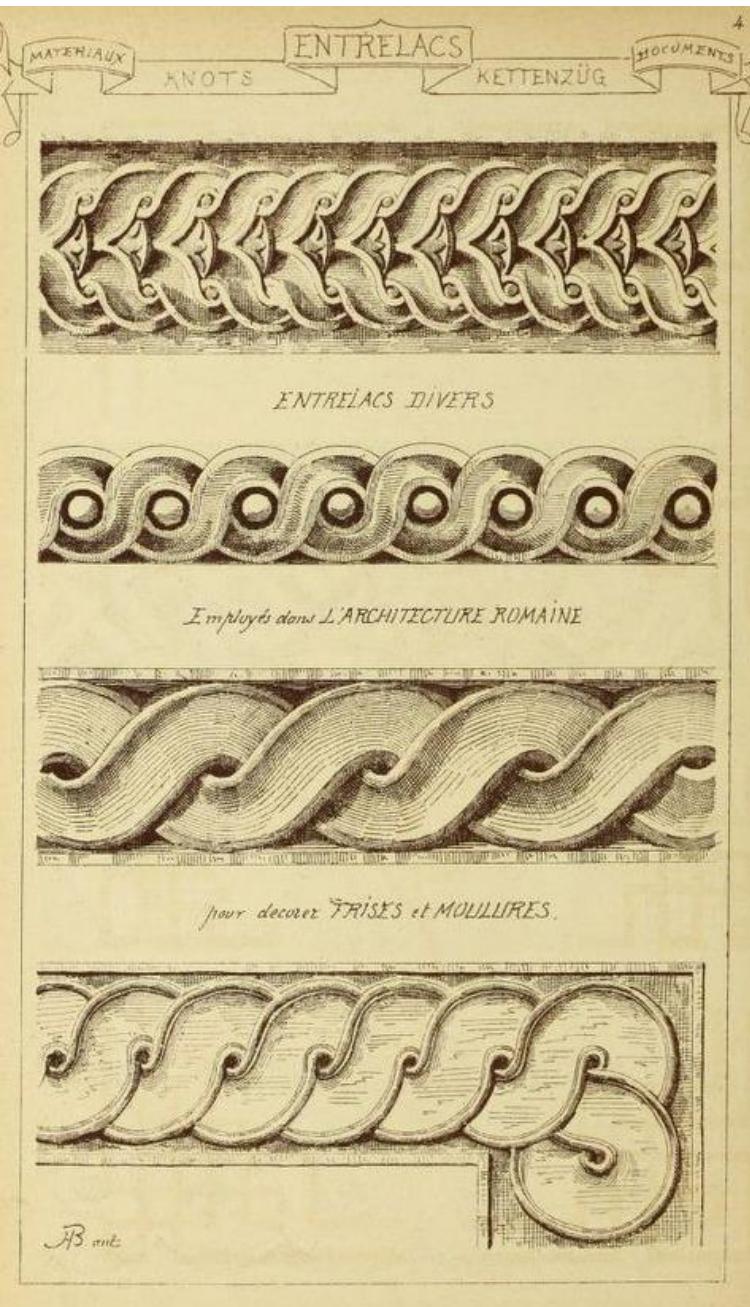
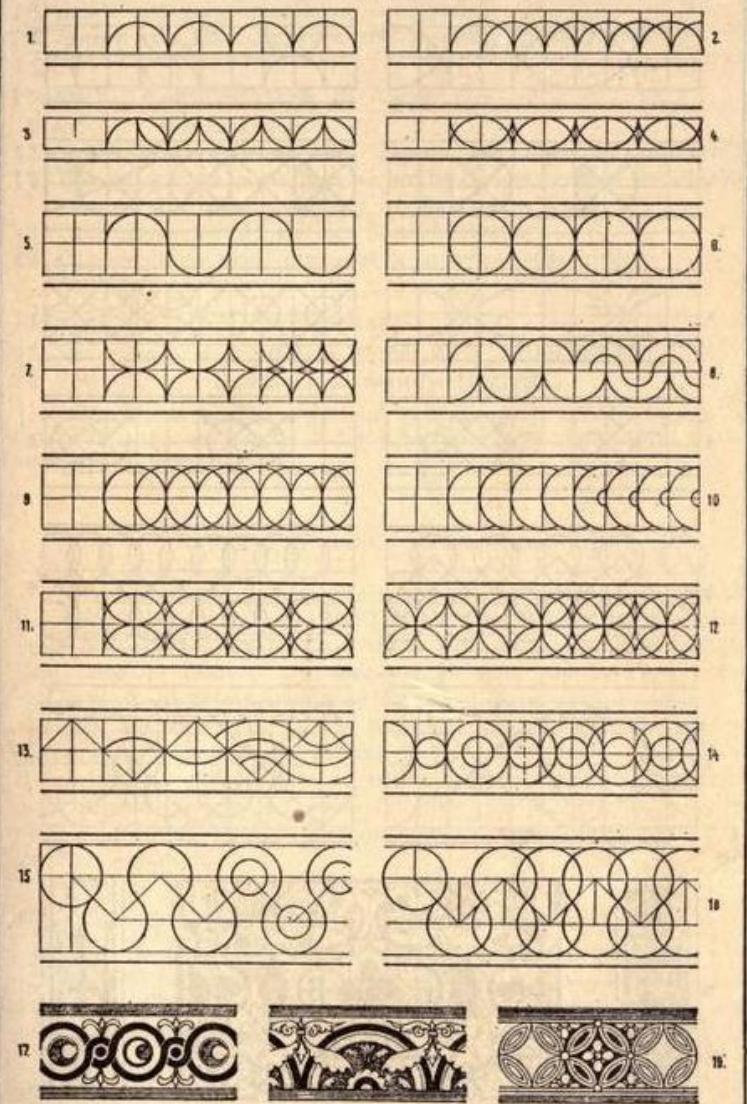
MANMADE

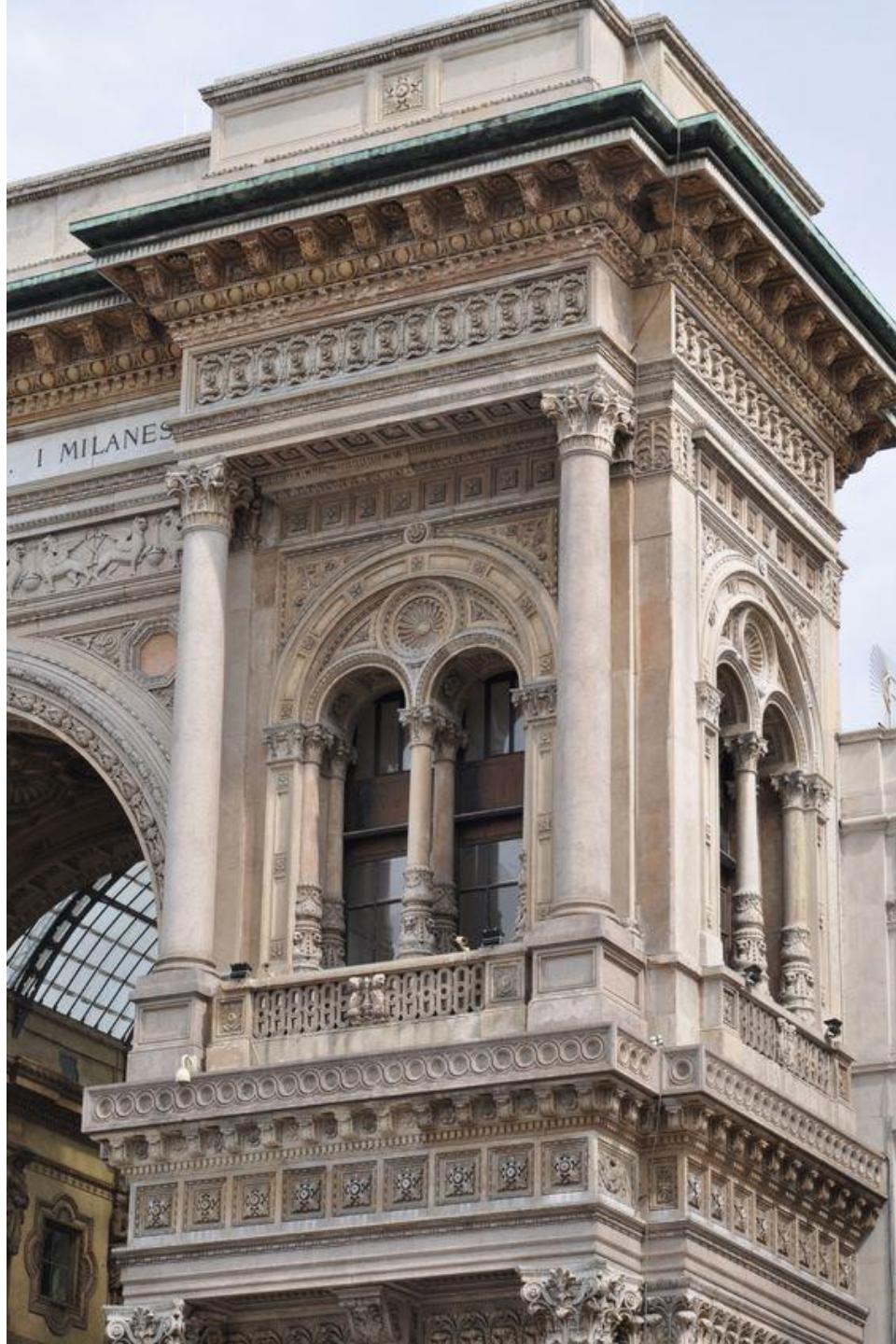


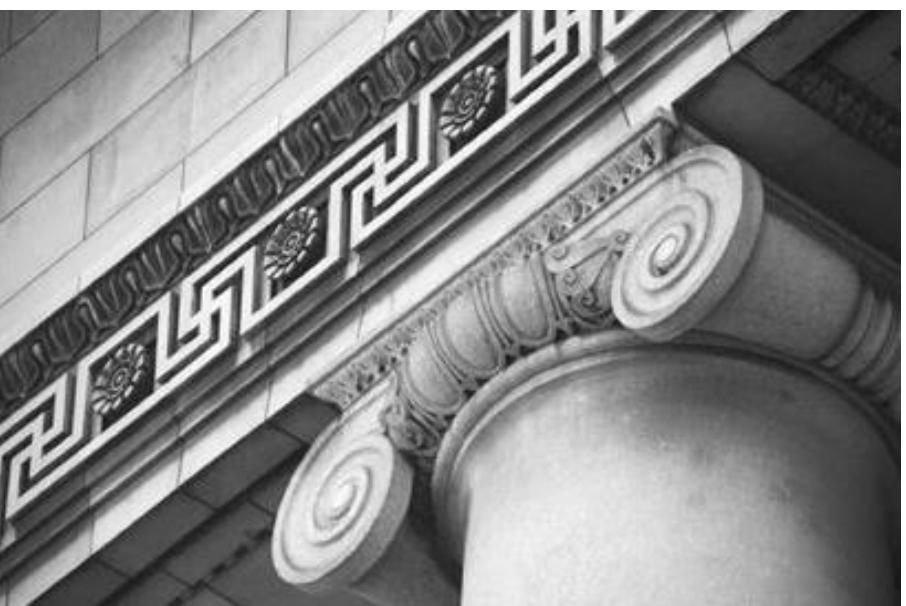
*N. Langlois rue St Jacques*



GEOMETRIC





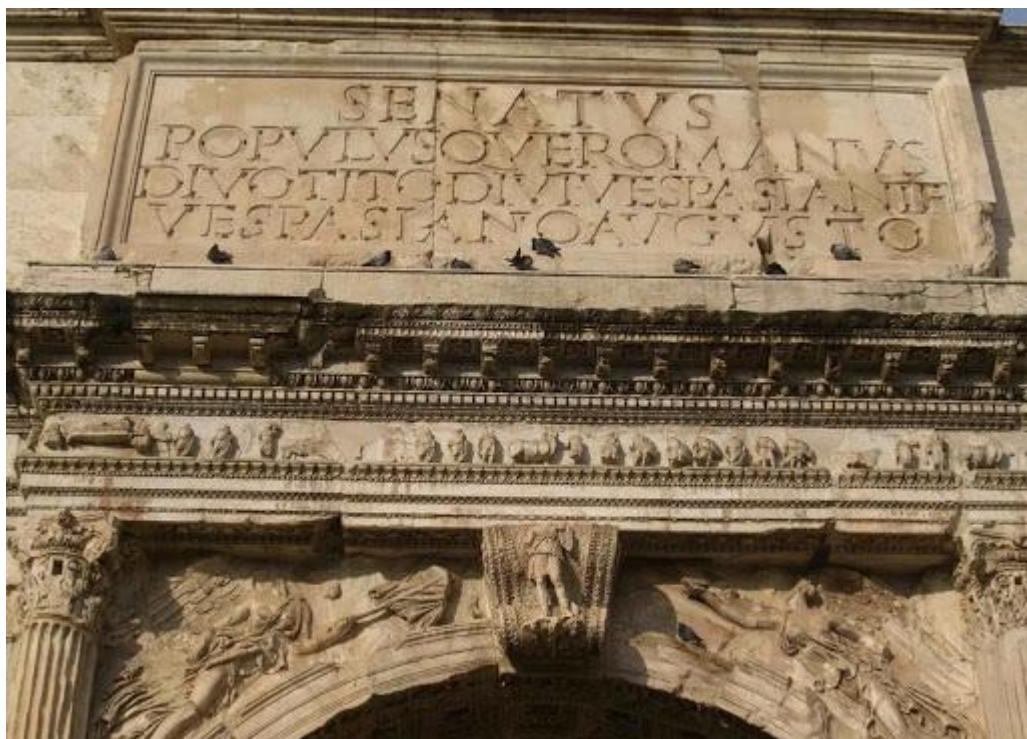


# TYPOGRAPHY

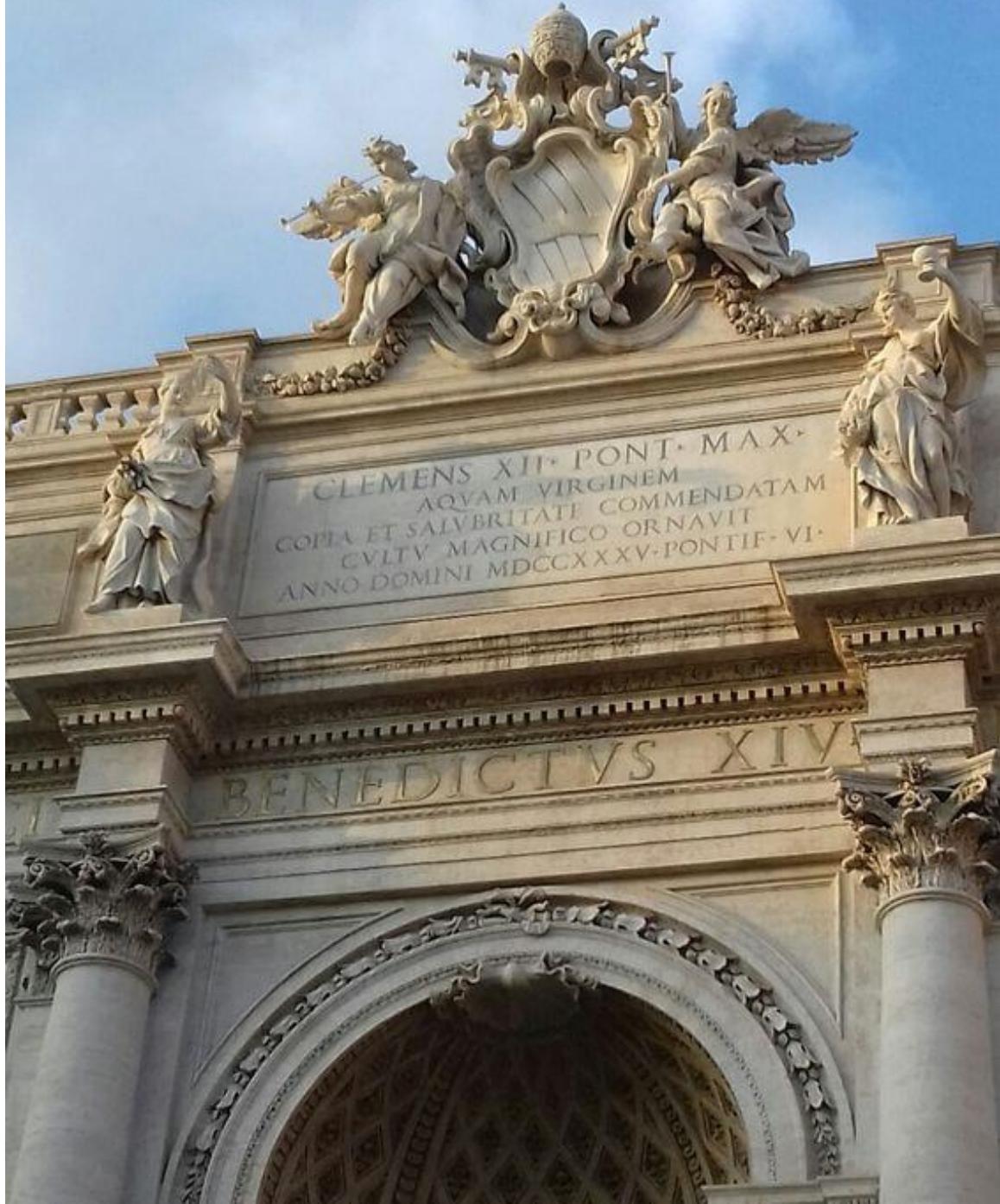
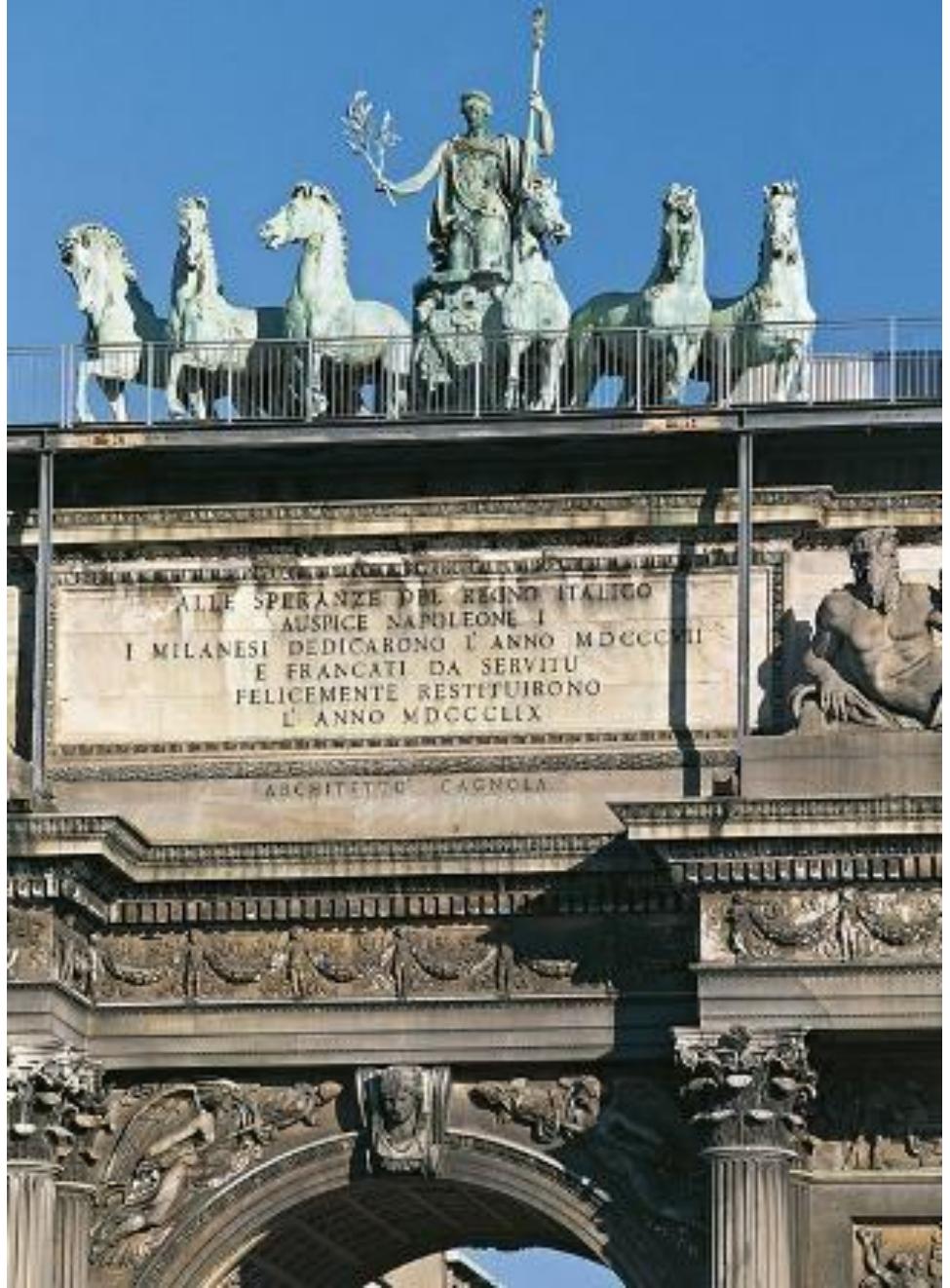
A B C D  
 E F G H  
 I J K L  
 M N O P  
 Q R S

A B C D E F G H I J  
 K L M N O P Q R S  
 T U V W X Y Z & ;  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0  
 a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s  
 t u v w x y z  
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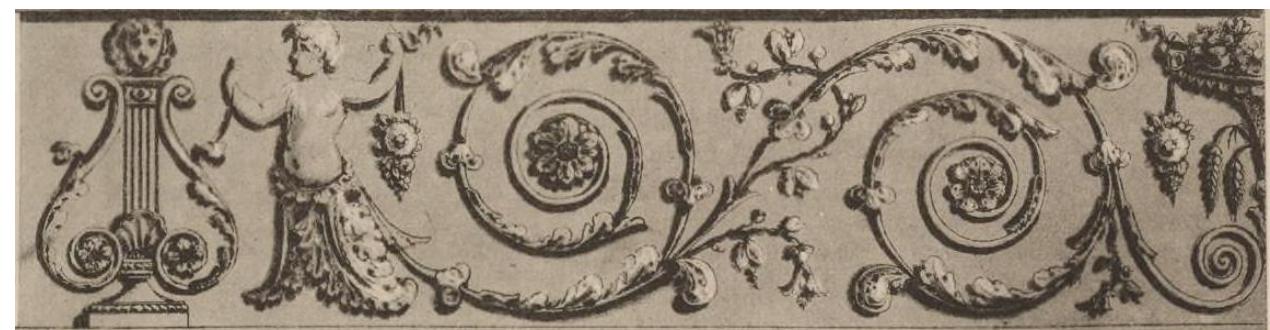




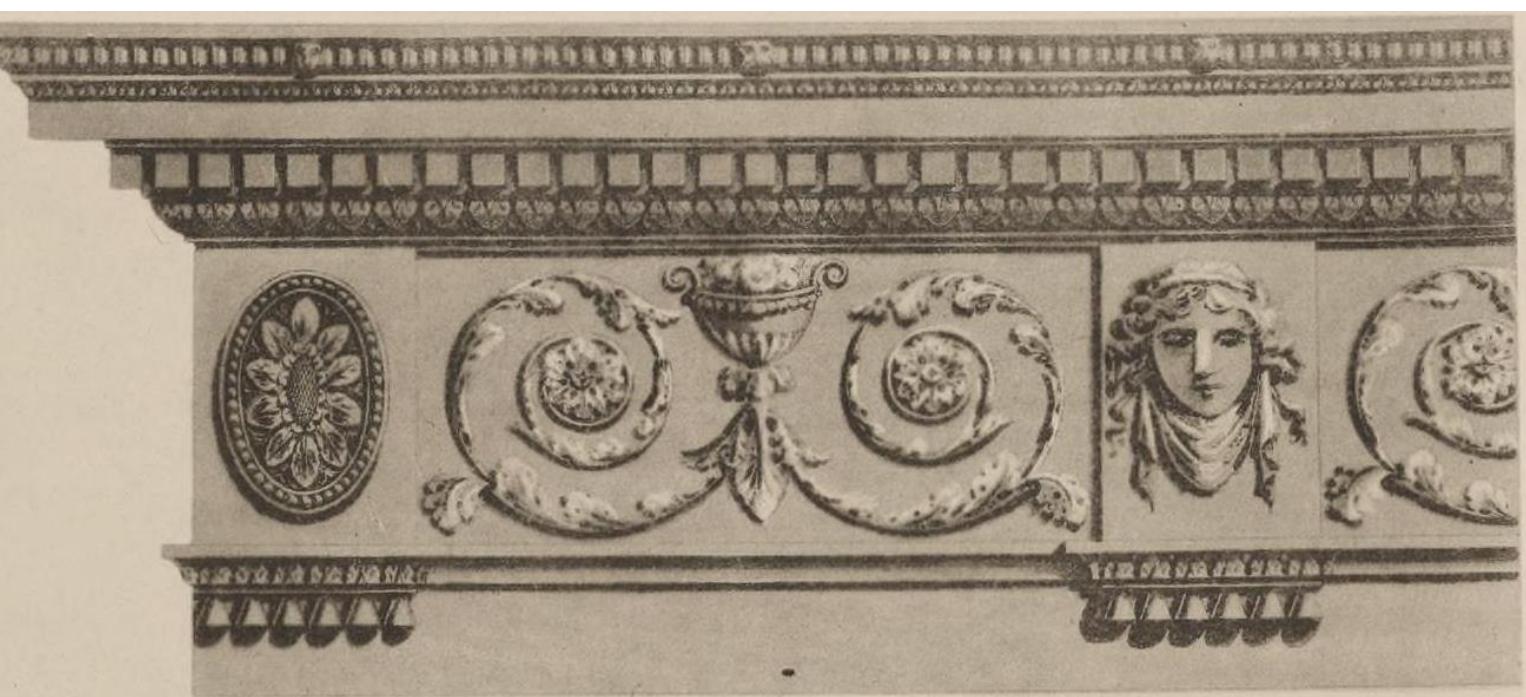
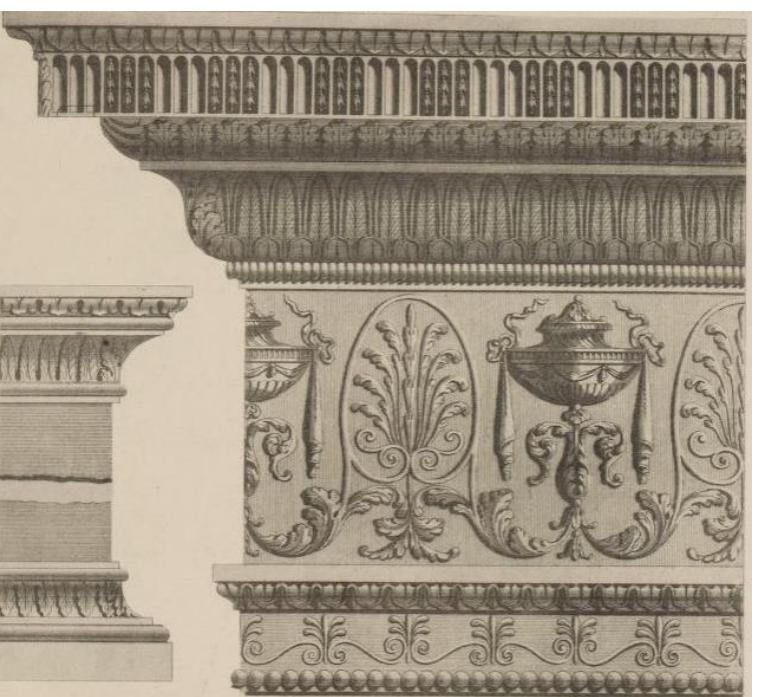
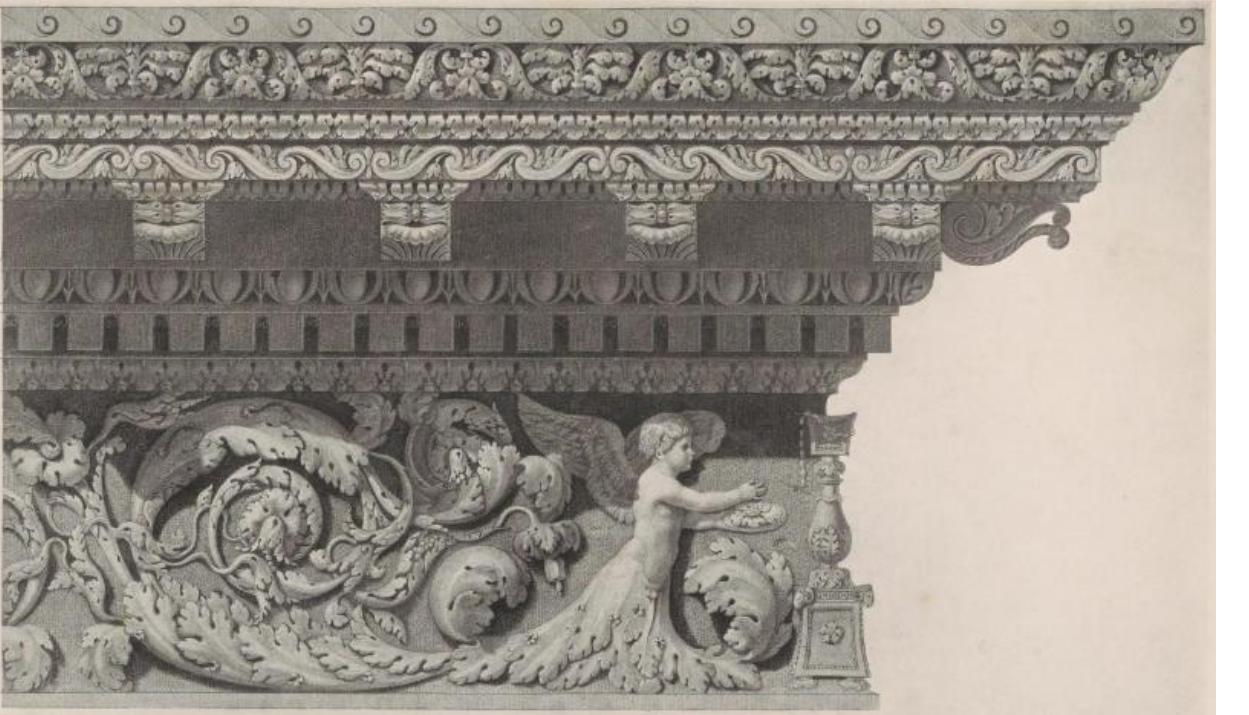


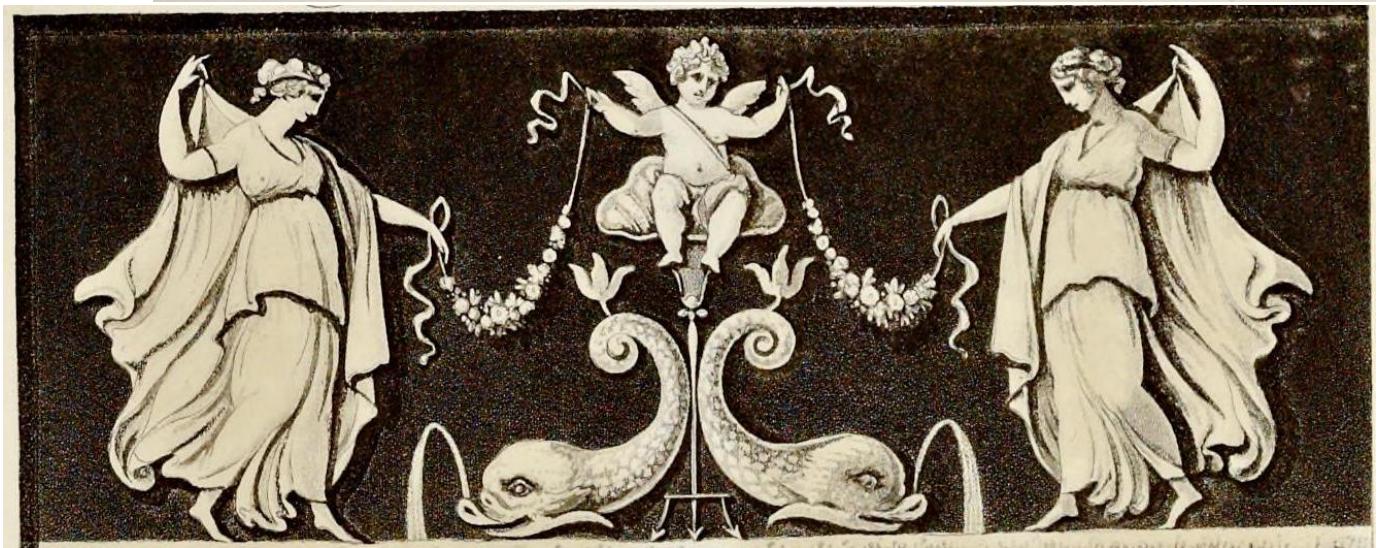


HYBRID (+2)











“A building without ornament, is  
like the heavens without stars.”

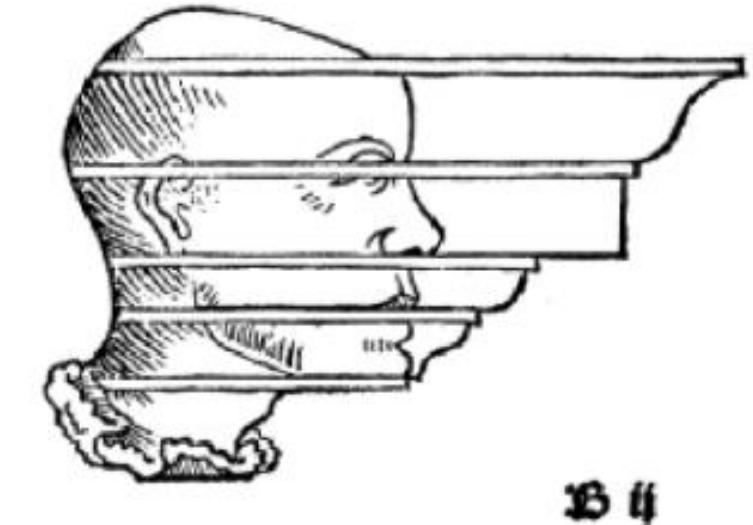
- George Santayana

PLACING  
ORNAMENT

## ANTHROPOMORPHIC NATURE OF MOLDINGS

“Having measured very many other cornices I have found plenty which do have the proportion of a head.”

- Francesco di Giorgio Martini



# Classical Molding Elements

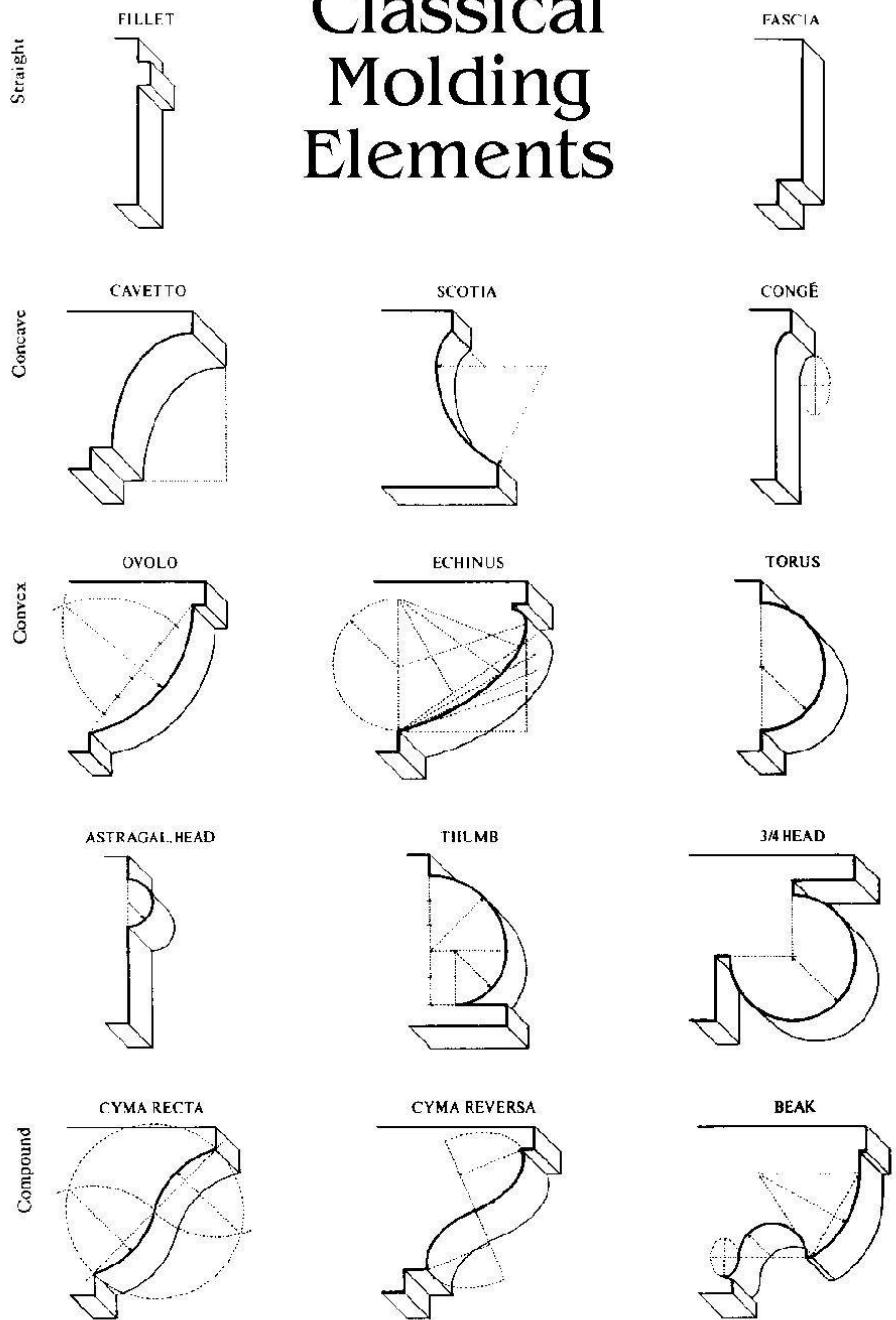
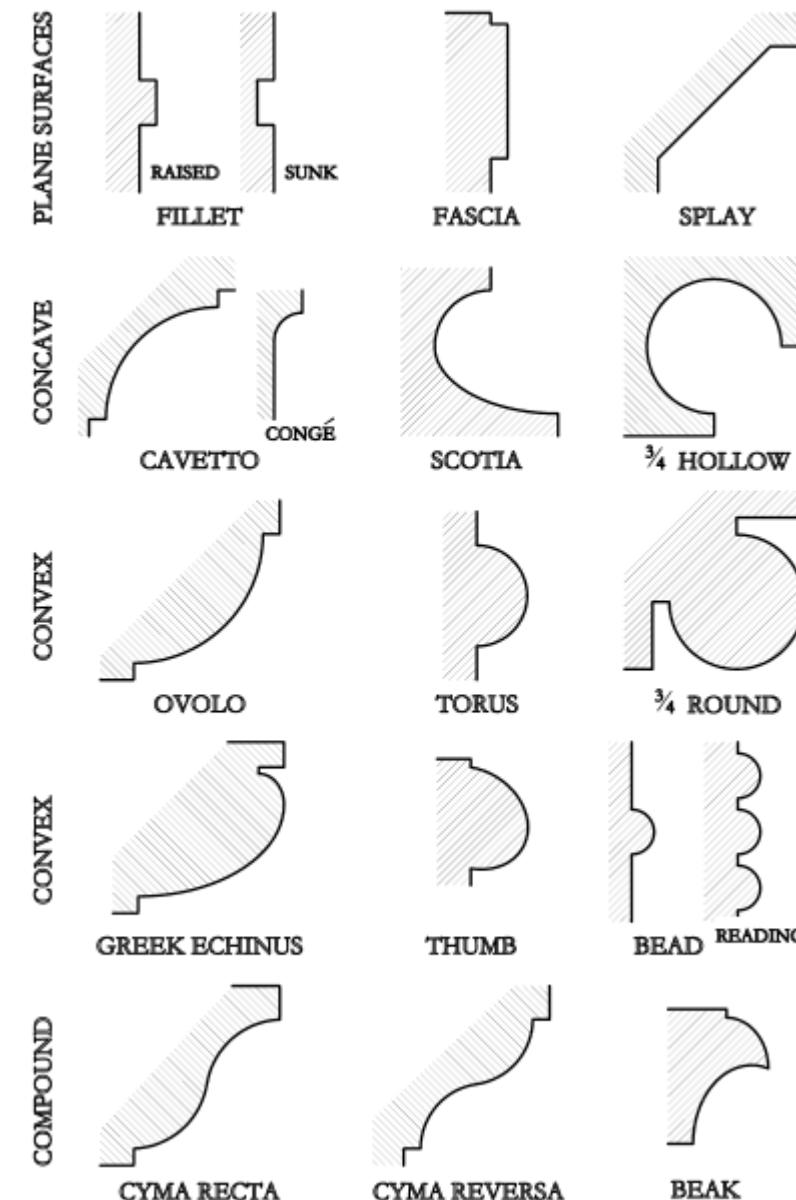
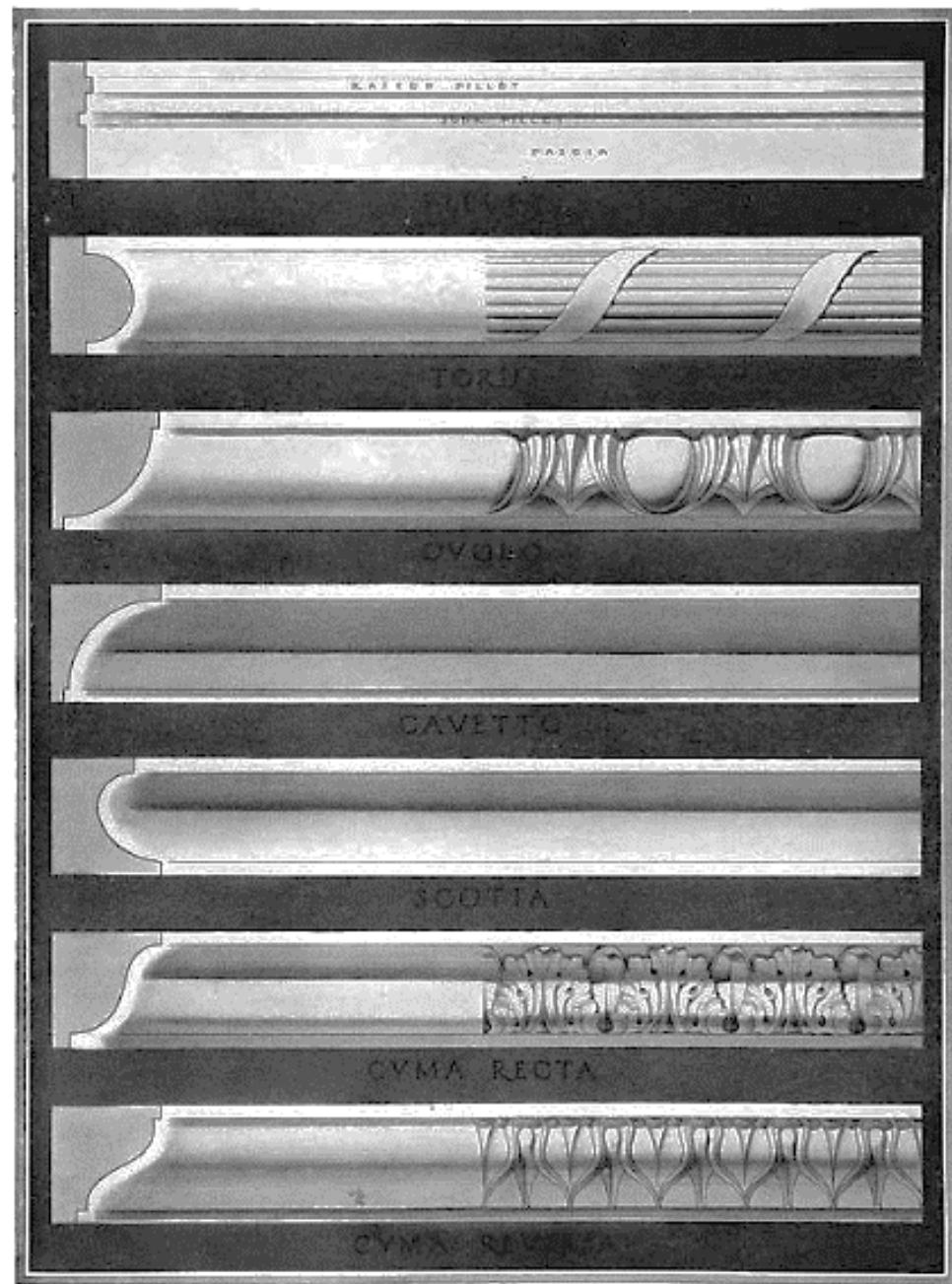
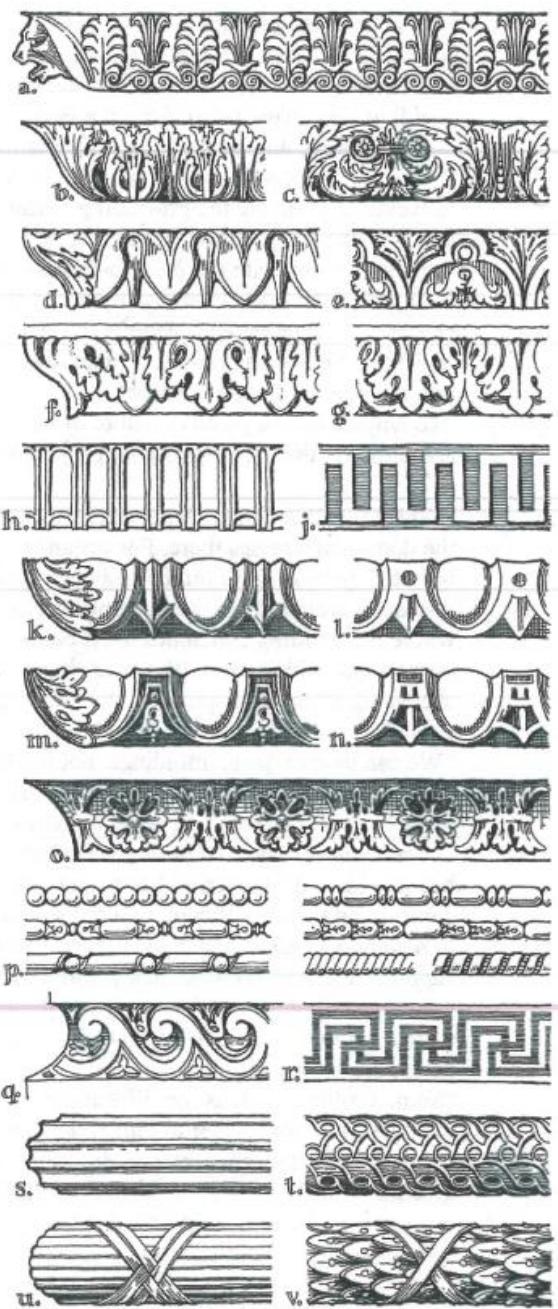
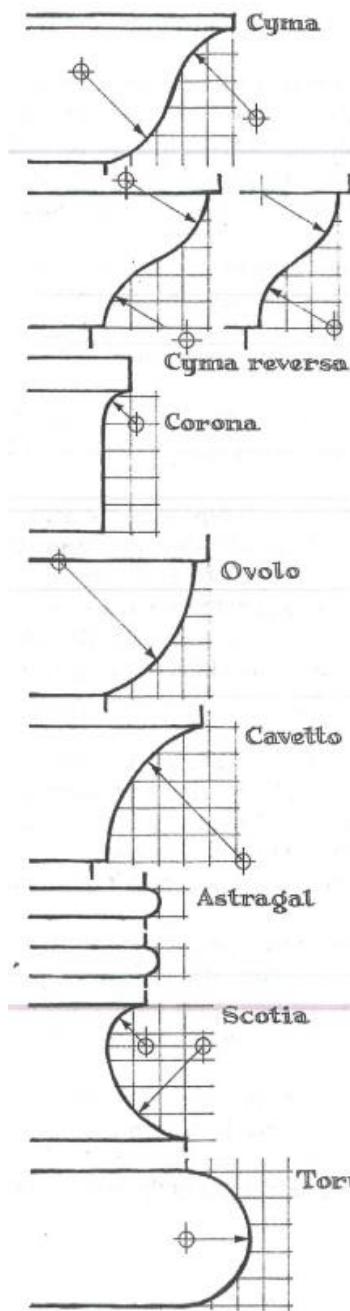
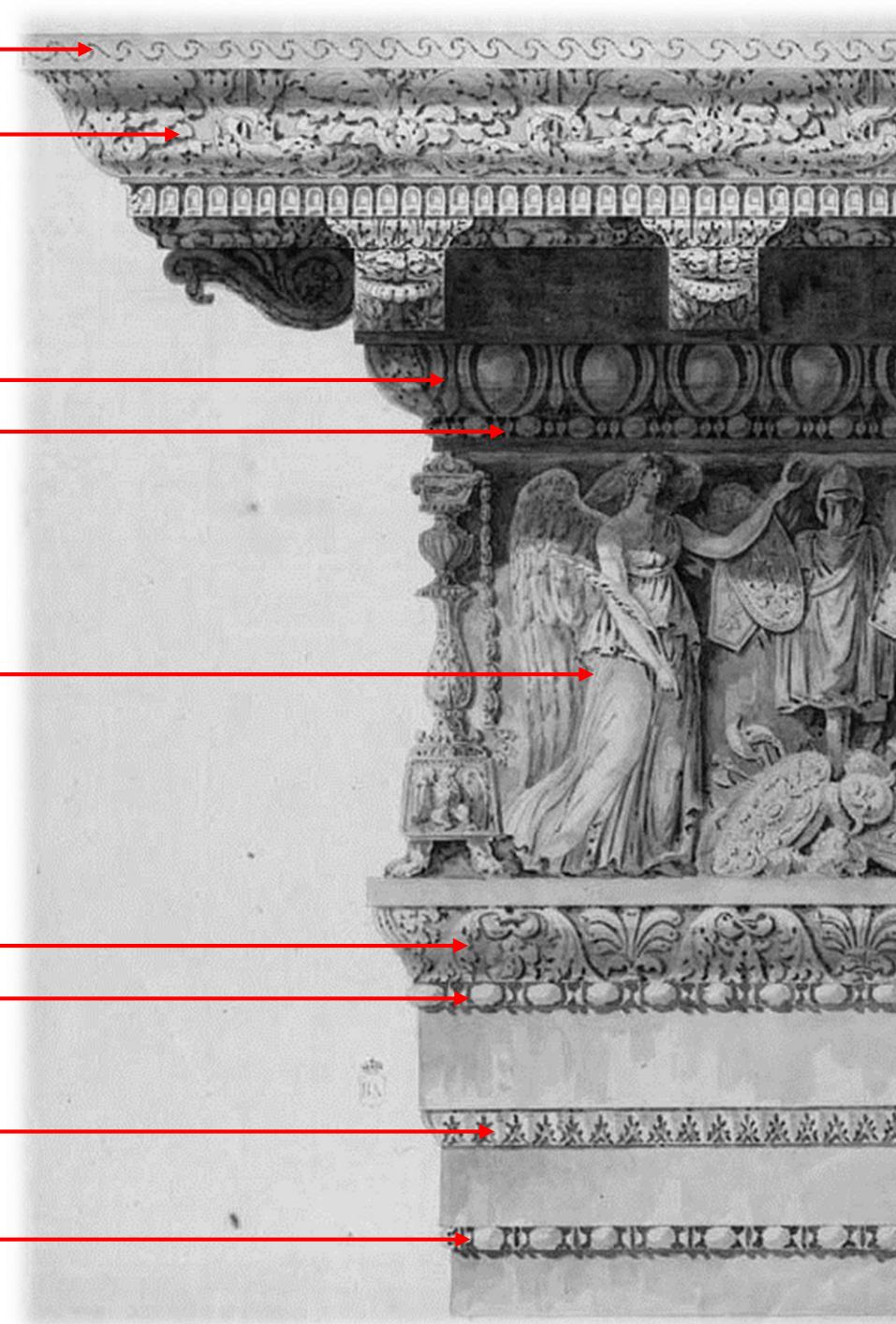


Figure I

## MOULDING PROFILES







Running wave

Vegetal motif (cyma recta)

Egg and dart

Bead and reel

Sculptural relief (Humans, manmade objects)

Vegetal motif w/anthemion (cyma reversa)

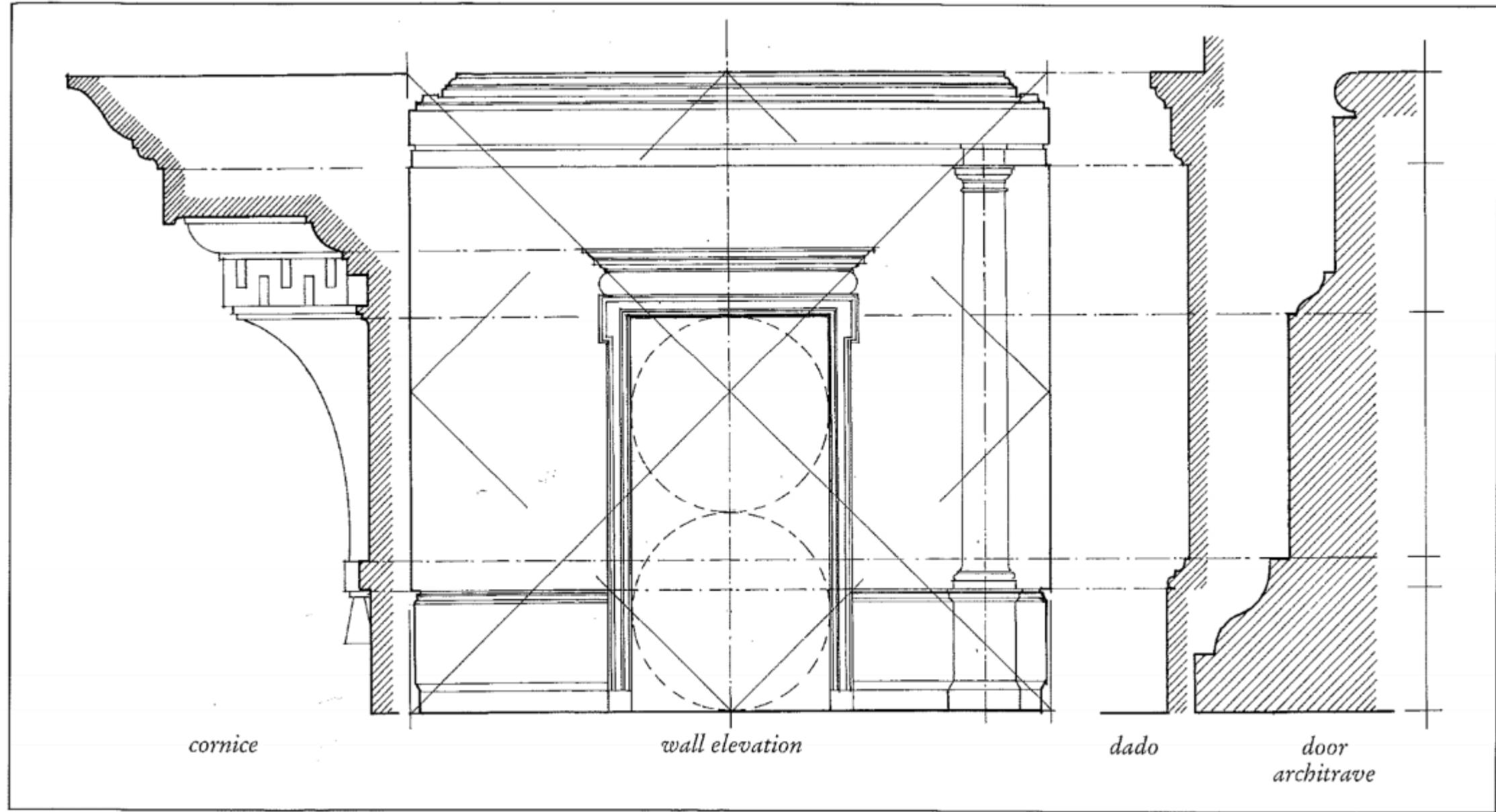
Bead and reel

Leaf and dart

Bead and reel

“I shall define **beauty** to be a **harmony** of all the **parts**, in whatsoever subject it appears, fitted together with such proportion and connection, that nothing could be added, diminished or altered, but for the worse.”

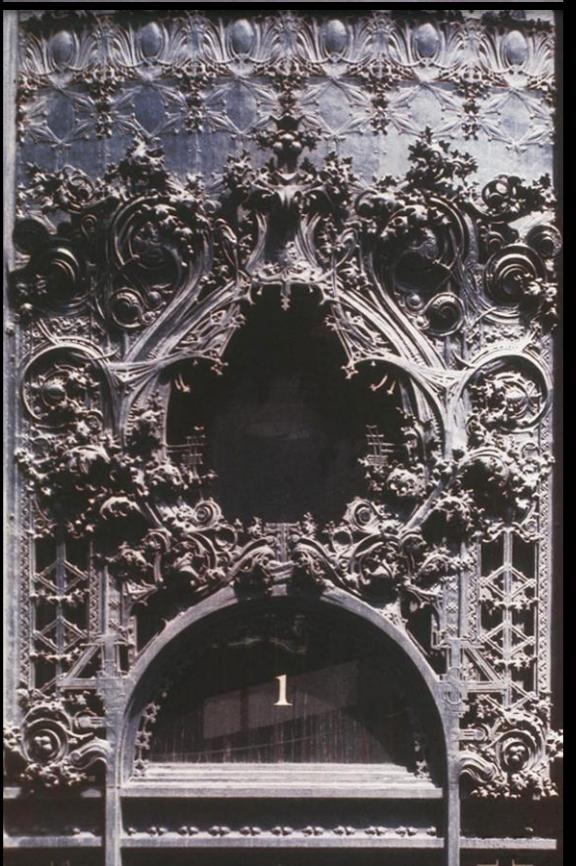
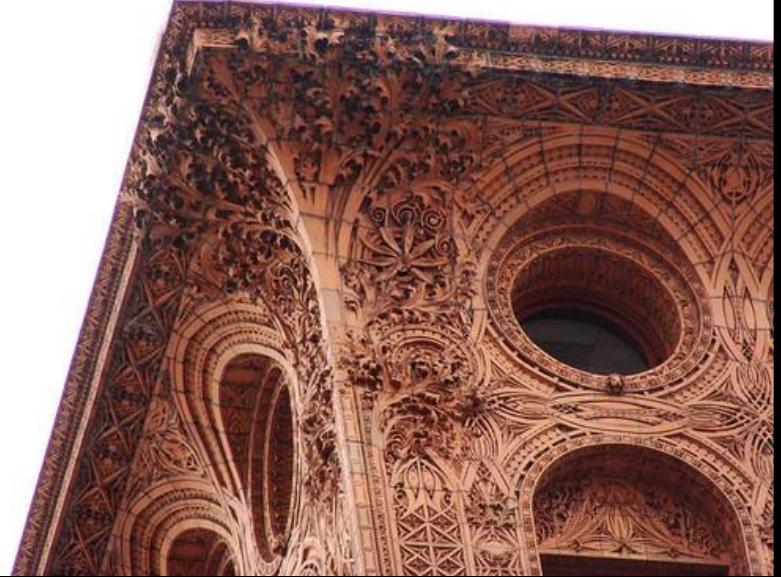
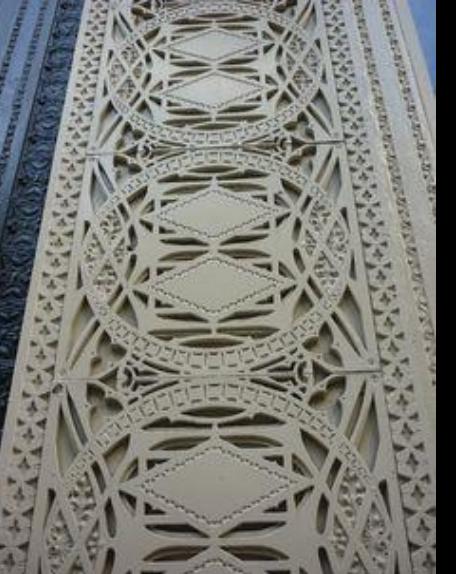
- Leon Battista Alberti, *The Ten Books of Architecture*, bk VI, ch II, p.113



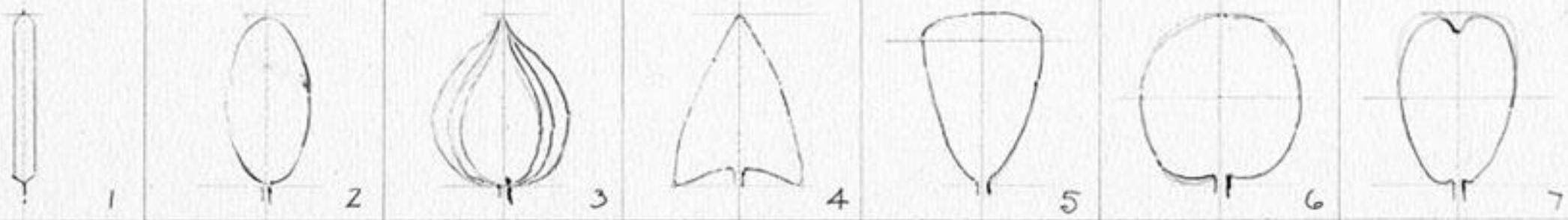
Proportional relationships are important at all scales – including ornament.

*Design by Richard Sammons, 2003*

# DESIGN PROCESS



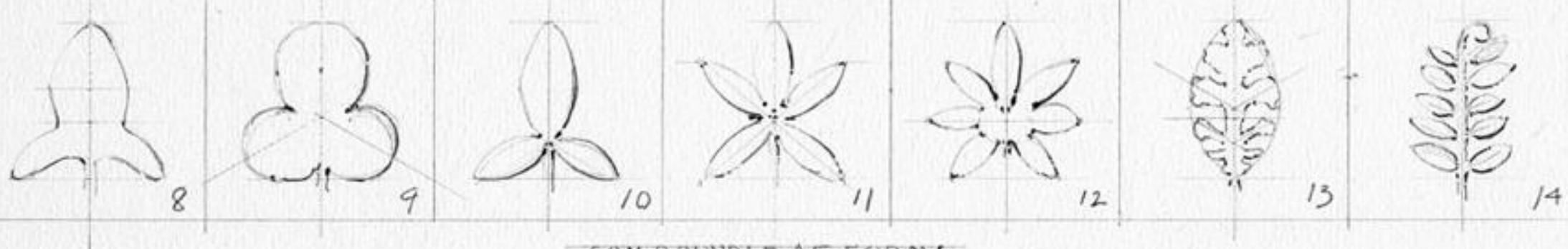
# MANIPULATION OF THE ORGANIC.



## Simple Leaf-forms.

By manipulation any of these forms may be changed into any of the others through a series of systematic organic changes known technically as

### MORPHOLOGY



## COMPOUND LEAF-FORMS

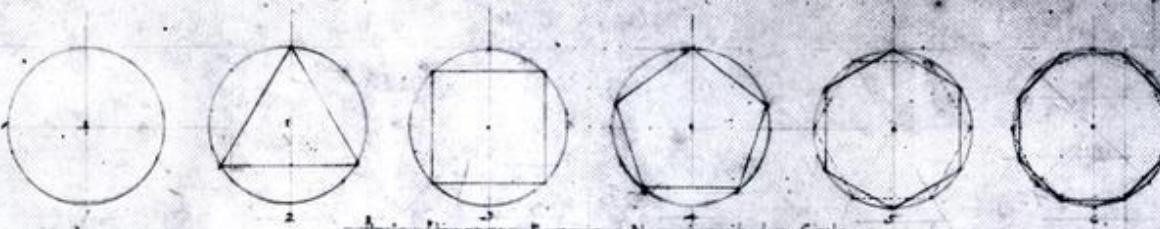
Derivatives of the above technically, but  
organically, expressions of differing identities of seed-germ.



Technical Morphology of 7 into 12: Plastic changes following Nature's method of liberating energy

\* Same method \*

THE INORGANIC:  
MANIPULATION OF FORMS IN PLANE-GEOMETRY  
MOBILE GEOMETRY



Basic Elemental Forms : Shown inscribed in Circle.

These simple forms, of ancient discovery and use, were given esoteric meaning and occult powers by the men of old; day, in an effort to control, by means of formulas and secret ritual, the mystery of MAN amidst the powers of NATURE. With mystic numbers, and other phenomena, performed by the elaborate system of MAGIC, which the world passed its FAITH.

Here however is NEW FAITH, an advanced faith in MAN, an unwavering faith that MAN, with his natural powers, developed and FREE, may and shall control his DESTINY through the inner magic of his enlarged vision, and of his will to ATTAIN.

Men of the Inorganic and the Organic, know, when he has FOUND himself, become MASTER OF HIMSELF. (See the PRELUDE to this work.)

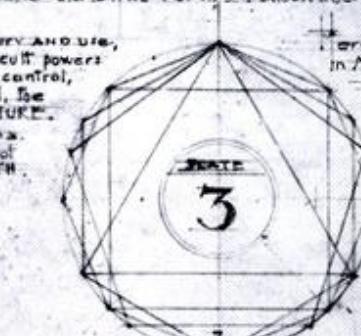
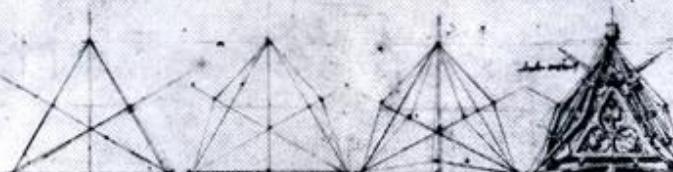
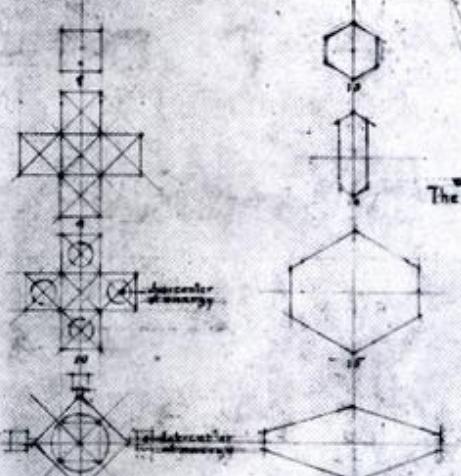


Diagram of CIRCLE  
with inscribed regular POLYGONS.  
The circle is assumed to be the PLURAL  
FORM.

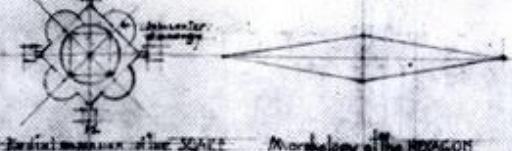
TECHNICALLY, as an item in the progress of our demonstration, the above forms, rigid in their quality, are to be considered, in our philosophy, as CONDUCTORS of radial energy; expansive and intensive. That is to say: Extension of form along lines or axes radiating from the center, and/or Intention of form along the same or other, radials, from the periphery toward the Center. There then appears the Will of Man, because the Inorganic and Rigid is to become FLUENT, through his power.

Note also that we assume energy to be resident in the PERIPHERY, and that all lines are Energy-lines. This may be called PLASTIC GEOMETRY.

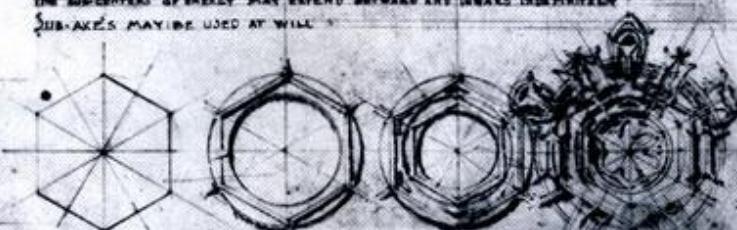


One example of plastic development of regular polygon.  
More sub-divisions in use.

The sub-centers of energy may expand outward and inward indefinitely.  
Sub-axes may be used at will.



Geometrical extension and intention, conserving the idea of AXES. MORPHOLOGY is a process whereby an original form gradually changes into ANOTHER form.



Further treatment of the Hexagon. Seen shown above for the triangle.

Our forms are gradually becoming MOBILE, and the sub-centers and the sub-axes of energy are becoming flowing.

PLATE 10. COROLLA TYPES

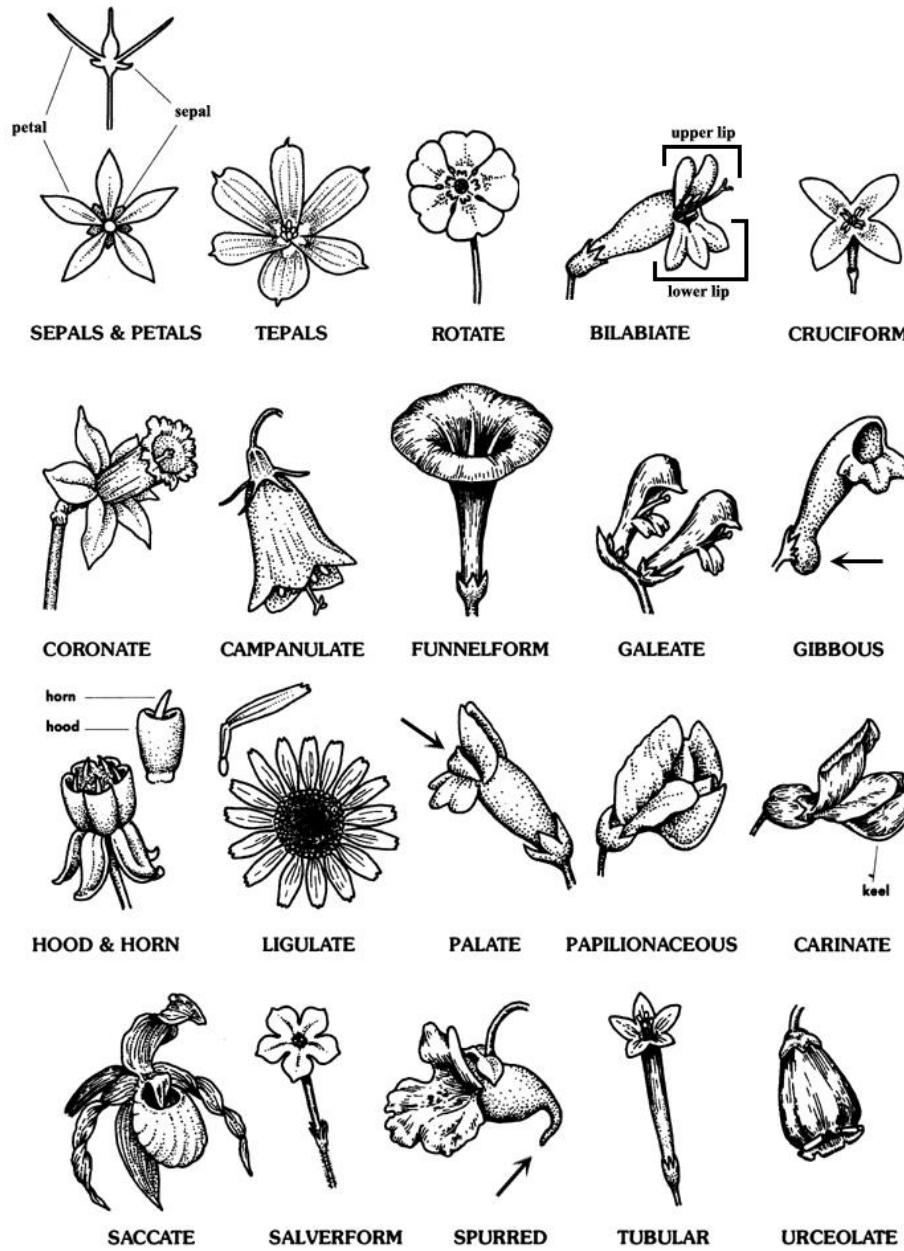
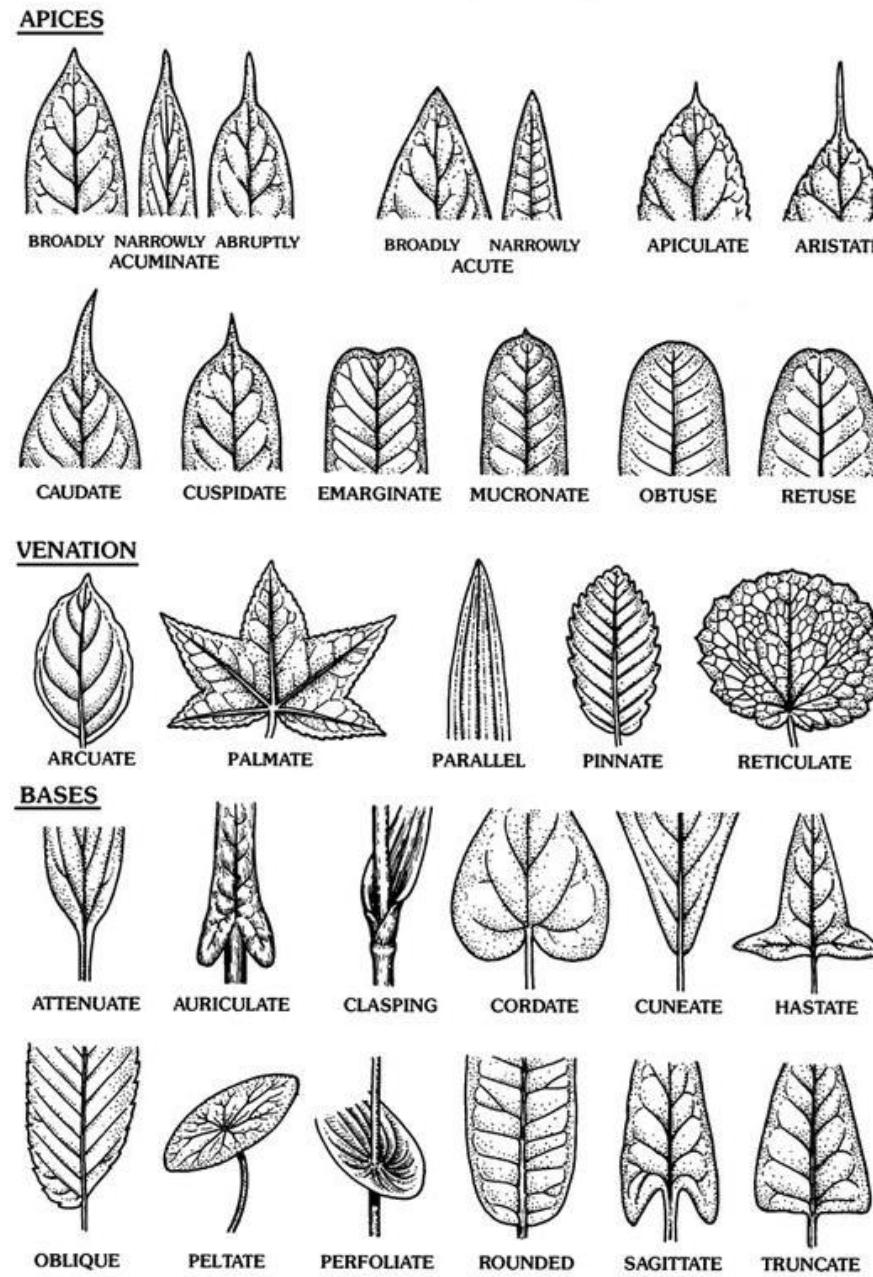
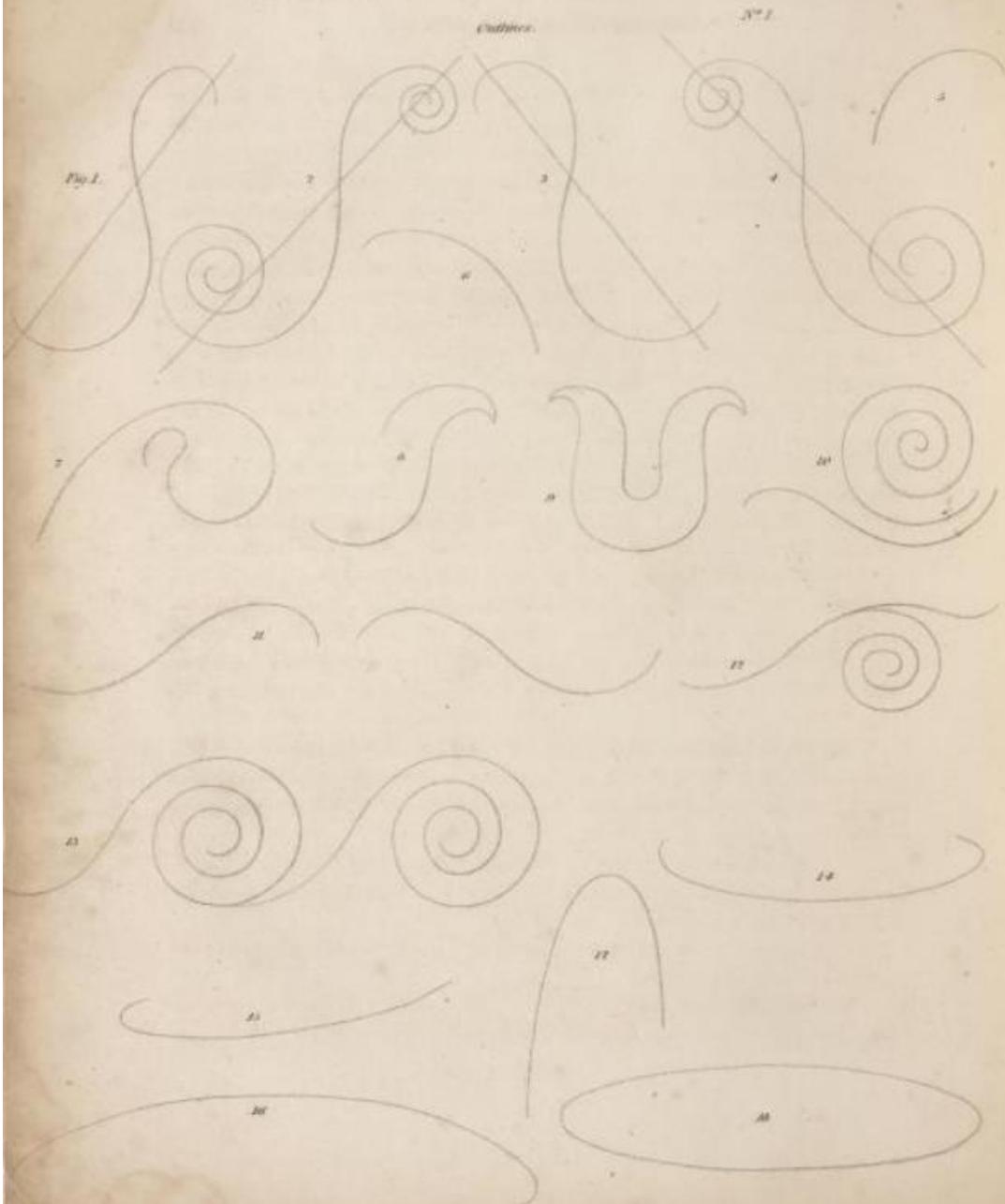


PLATE 5. LEAF APICES, VENATION, AND BASES

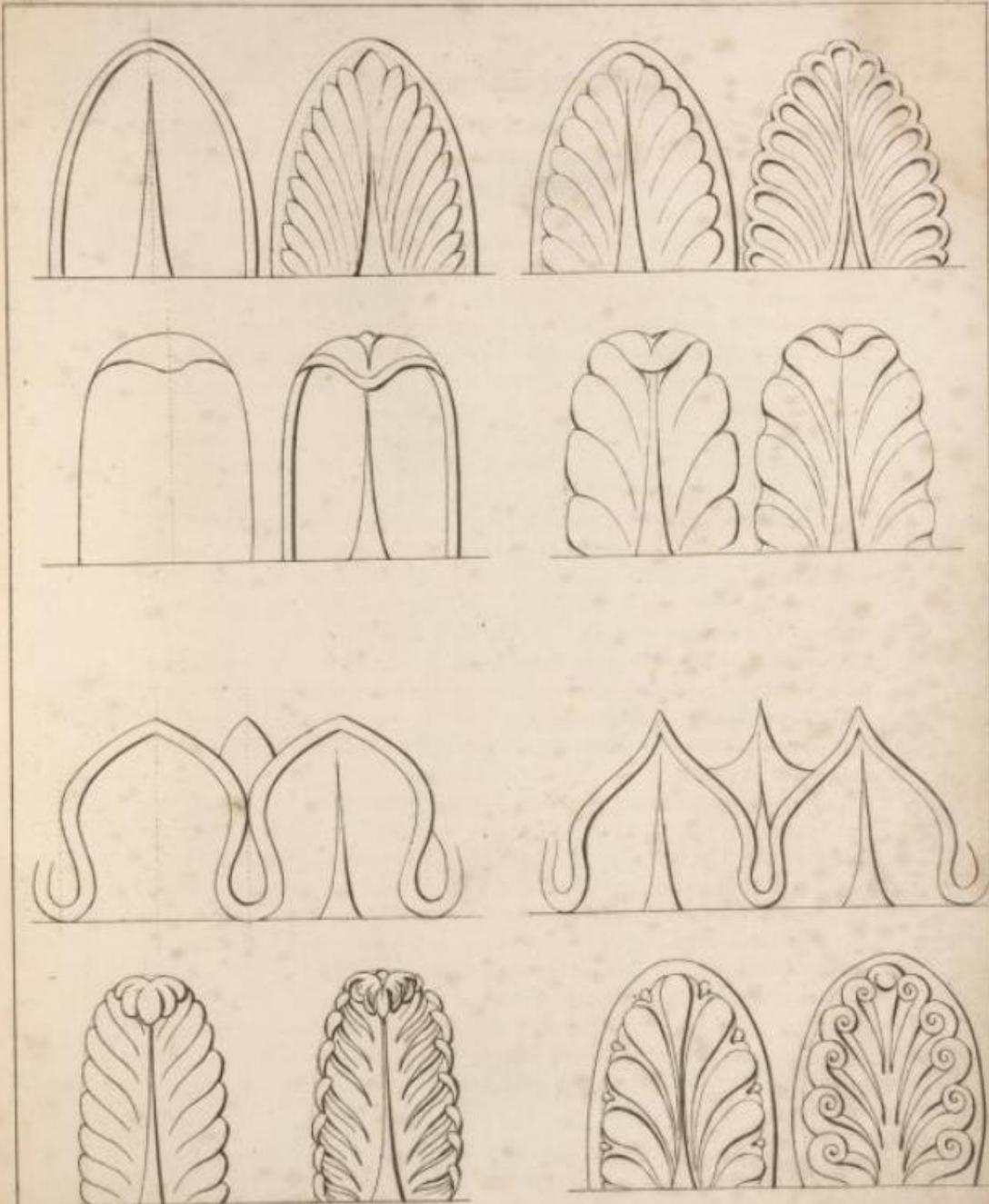


ELEMENTS OF ORNAMENTAL DRAWING.

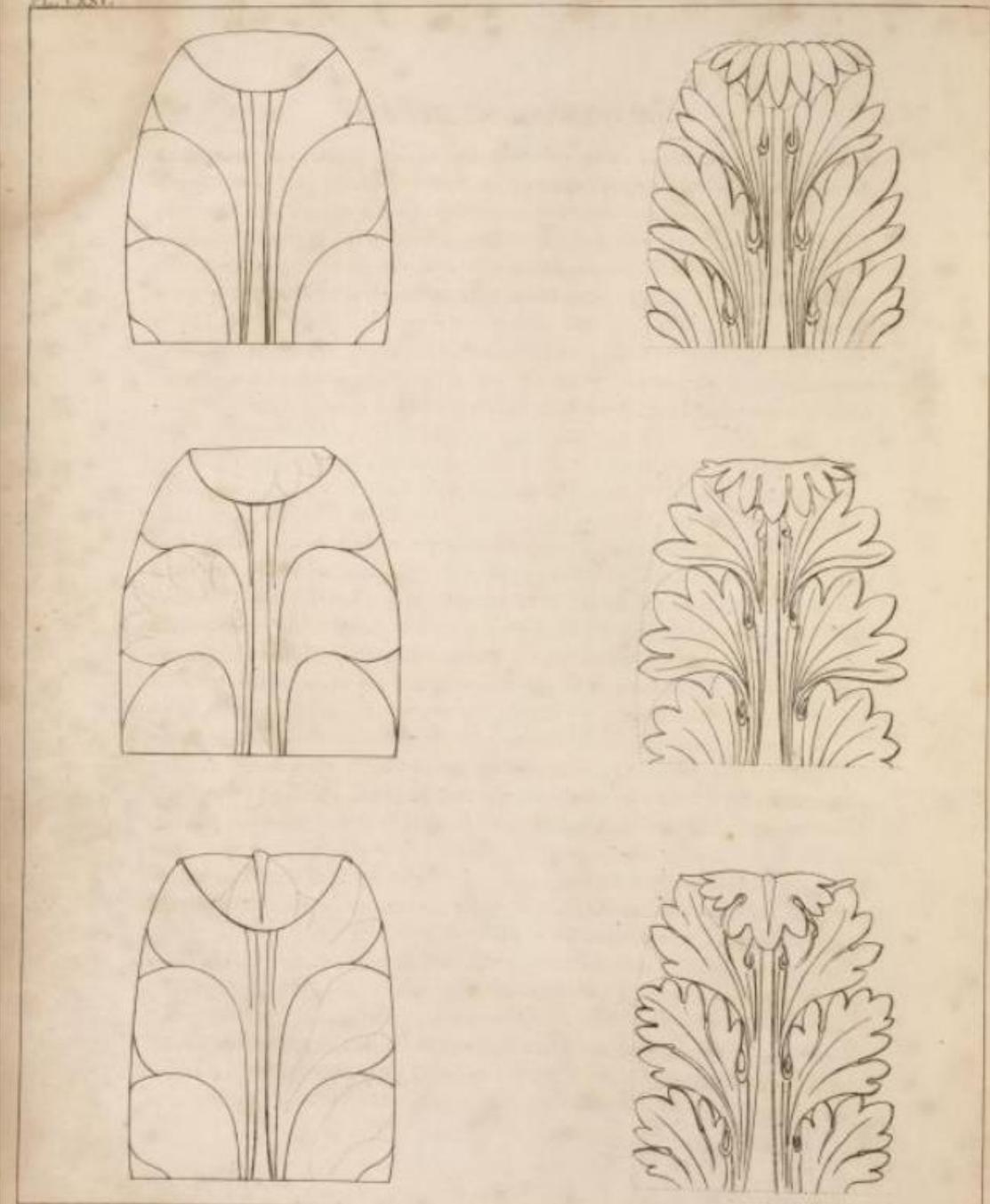


ELEMENTS OF ORNAMENTAL DRAWING.

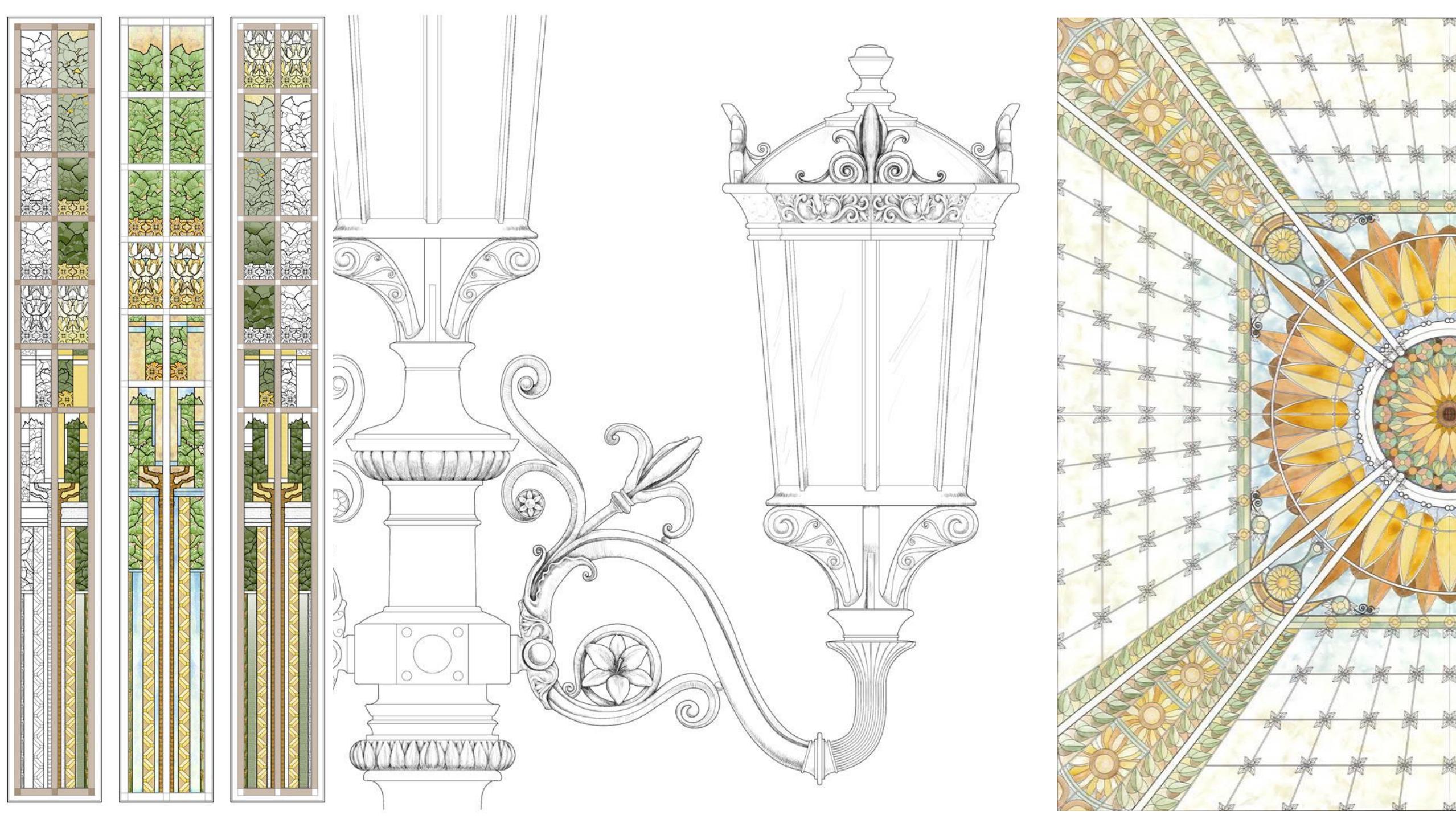




Elements of Ornament, exemplified in the forms and method of drawing divers kinds of leaves, employed in that branch of Art.



ORNAMENTAL DRAWING LEAVES, II.



“It is virtually impossible to invent a new system of ornament, just as it is virtually impossible to invent a new language. Ornament works like grammar, its forms drawing life from their repetition and subtle variation while remaining grounded in memories and recognizable models.”

- Steven Semes, *The Architecture of the Classical Interior*, p.74