

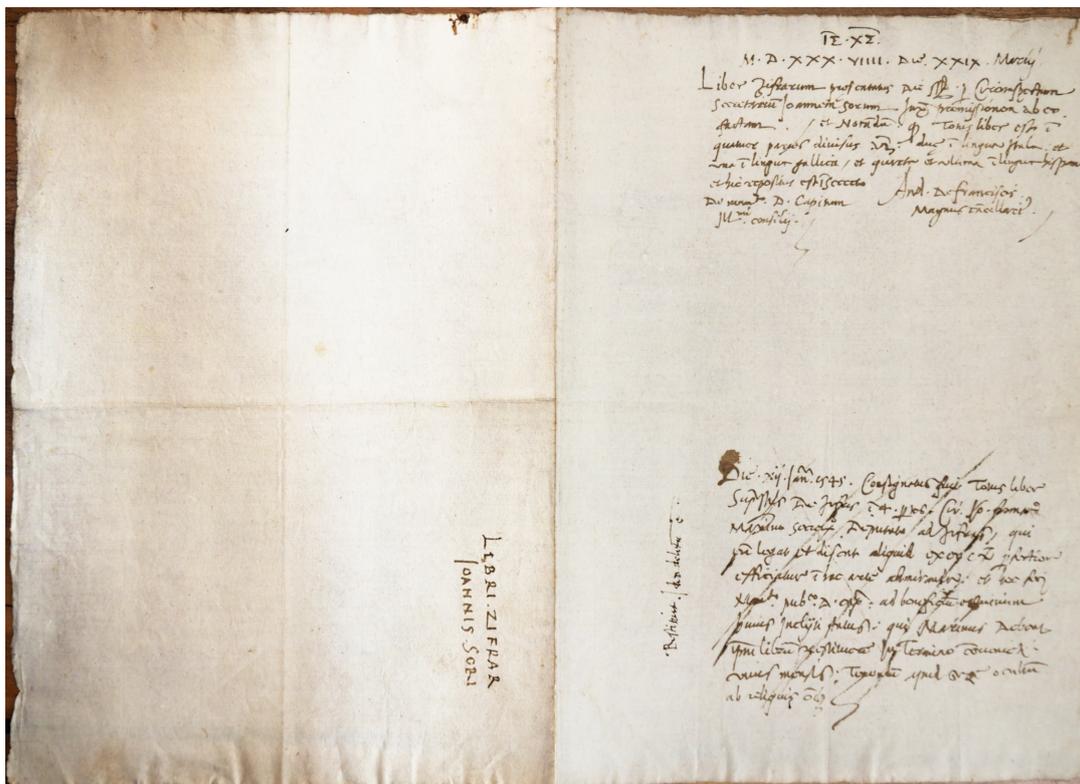
Venetian Cryptanalysis Treatises  
of the Renaissance  
Posters on show on June 21, 2022  
by Paolo Bonavoglia

HistoCrypt2022

Amsterdam  
Het Trippenhuys

# Zuan Soro *Conditor et Scriitor Zumi-Soro*

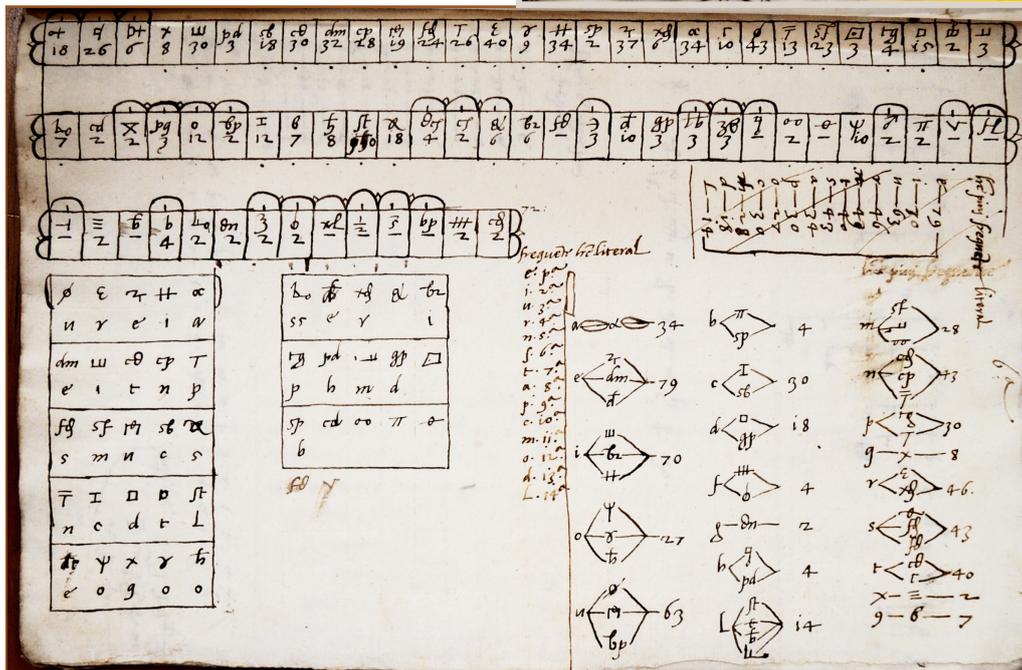
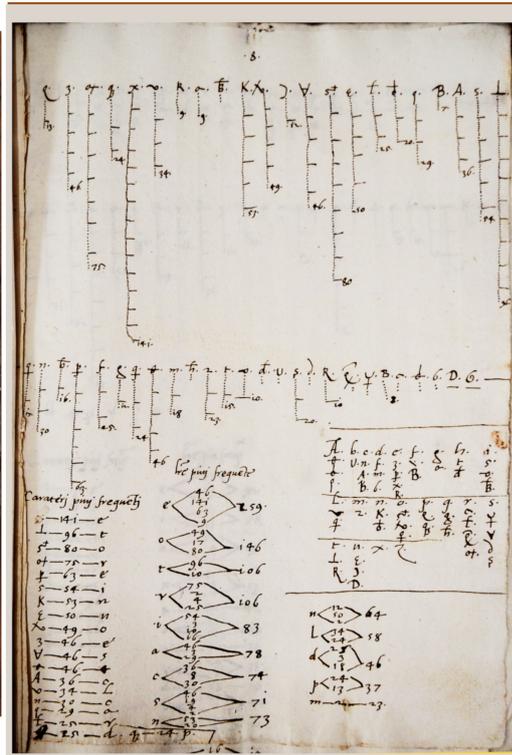
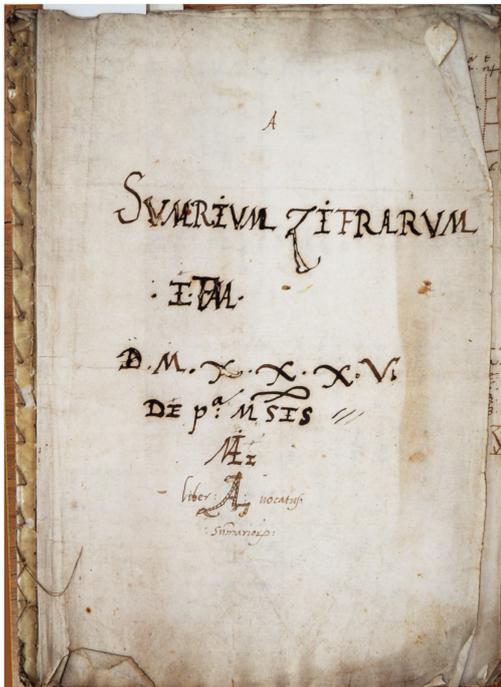
## The founding father and his lost book



Zuan Soro, alias Giovanni Soro, was elected secretary of the **CX** (Council of Ten) in 1505, and became soon a master code breaker; he is the first secretary officially named as "Deputy of ciphers". In 1511 he announced his purpose to write a treatise about code breaking. 28 years after, on 29 March 1539, he delivered the book to the great chancellor Andrea di Franceschi, as one can see in the receipt her on the top of this sheet. Below another writing dated 12 January 1545 (1546 modern style) telling us the book had the title *De Ziphris* and was lent to the circ. Io. Franc.<sup>o</sup> Marino secretary and deputy of ciphers, under the condition to give back it within a month, and do not show the book to anyone else. Marino later returned the book, the receipt was crossed out, and no other information was found about the book, that in 1871 was mentioned as lost by Pasini. *ASVe, Consiglio di Dieci (shortly CX), Cifre, chiavi e scontri di cifra ... b.5.2 loose sheet.*

# Soro or Ludouici?

## Cryptanalysis of a homophonic cipher



Cover page of the *Summarium Ziphrarum* a 1535 booklet having pages written in a fair style, clearly a summary of a decryption. Here it is evident the decryption of a cipher with homophones and nulls. Soro was still in office but Ludouici was on the rise. But how could this solution be reached? Likely examining digraphs; vowels make digraph with most letters, consonants with a few other letters. And one can guess much trial and error work. ASVe, CX: *cifre, chiavi e scontri di cifra ...* b.4.5

# Zuan Batta Ludouici *di me uambr' di Lodouici*

The pupil who surpassed his teacher

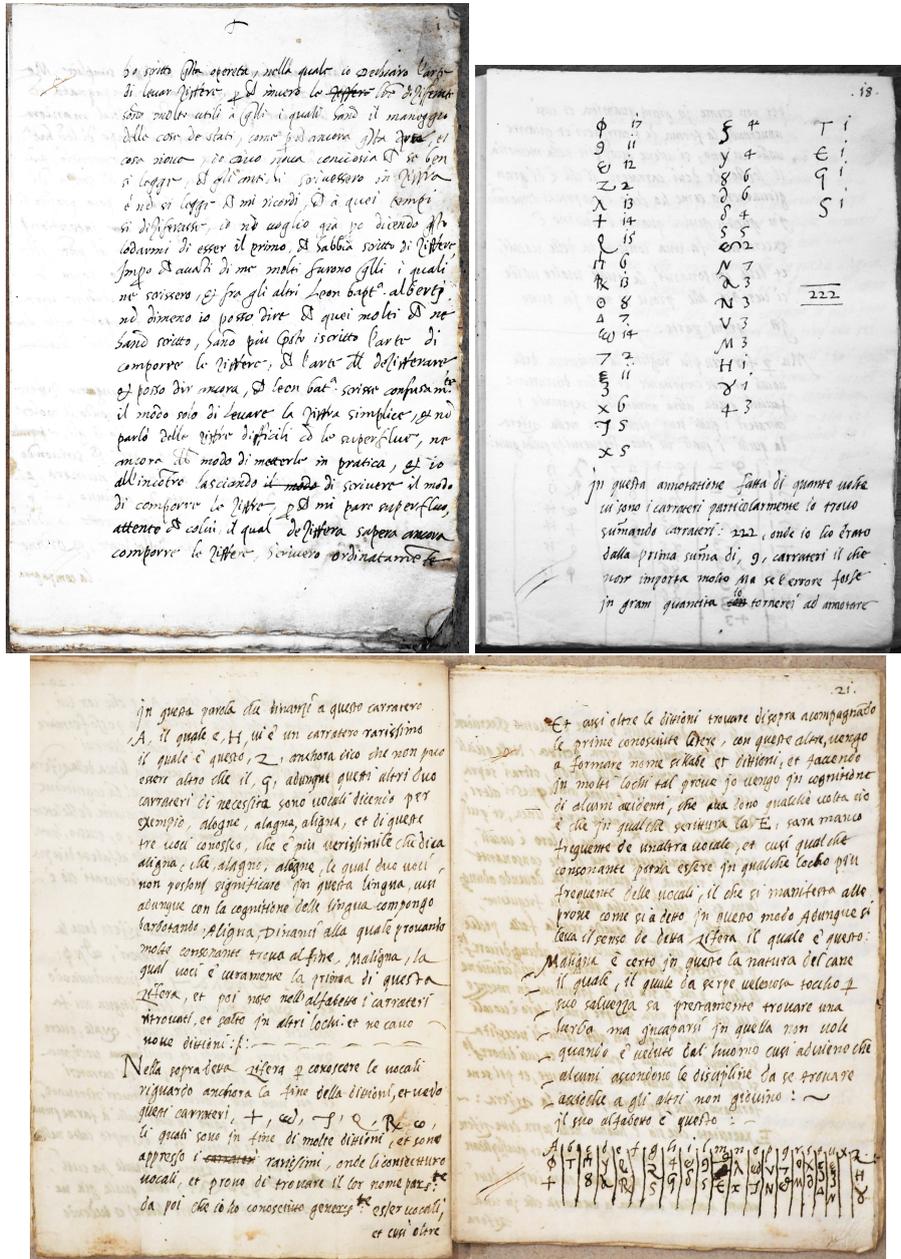


Zuanbatta Ludouici (Latin de Lodouicis), alias Giambattista Ludovici became deputy of ciphers in 1518, the second after Soro. He and later Alvise Borghi surpassed Soro, being able to decrypt not only homophonic ciphers, but also syllables and nomenclators, in many languages. By GB Ludovici we have only fragments bound in two booklets, dated 1569; page with tables of frequency for the French language: on the left frequencies of single letters; on the right the first page of the tables for digraphs, beginning with the most frequent that is E; the first row gives frequencies of digraphs ending with E, the second for digraphs beginning with E; and so on for other letters R V T N ... ASVe, CX, Cifre, chiavi e scontri di cifra ... b.6.2 f...

# Anonymous

## Soro or Borghi? Or who else?

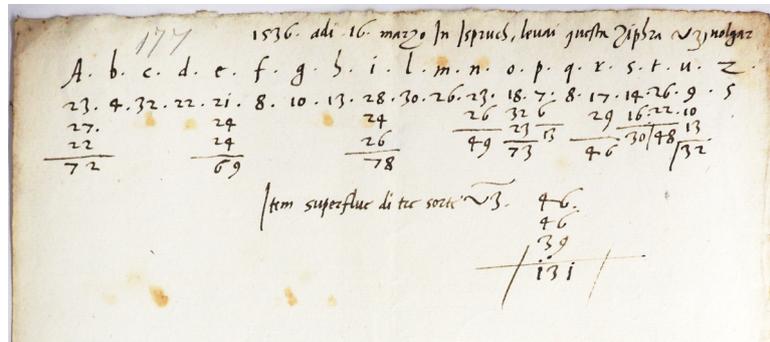
### An anonymous treatise about code breaking



Sample of pages of an anonymous booklet about the art of *leuar le ziffere senza scontro* using today's language, cryptanalysis. The author says he is not the first to write about ciphers, but, as far as he knows, the first to write about this art. Below, two pages of this *operetta*, about difficult ciphers, those with homophones and nulls. The manuscript is listed in the inventory of Z.F. Marin, as written by hand of Marin himself in the first part, of his son Ferigo for the rest. The transcription of the work of someone else, someone writing in the first half of the 1500's, someone believing to be the first to write about codebreaking, someone knowing Alberti's *De Zifris*, someone having to do with homophonic ciphers of signs. Who is the author? A first hypothesis was Soro, his lost book, fascinating but without any evidence. Reading Borghi's supplications to the CX, strong analogies, even identical locutions suggest Borghi as a plausible author of this nice *operetta*, but one must presume he didn't know already the secret book of Soro, when he wrote it. An open question. ASVe, CX, *Cifre, chiavi e scontri di cifra ... b.6.2 f.6*

# Aluise Borgi *Jo Aluise Borgi*

## The Polyglot



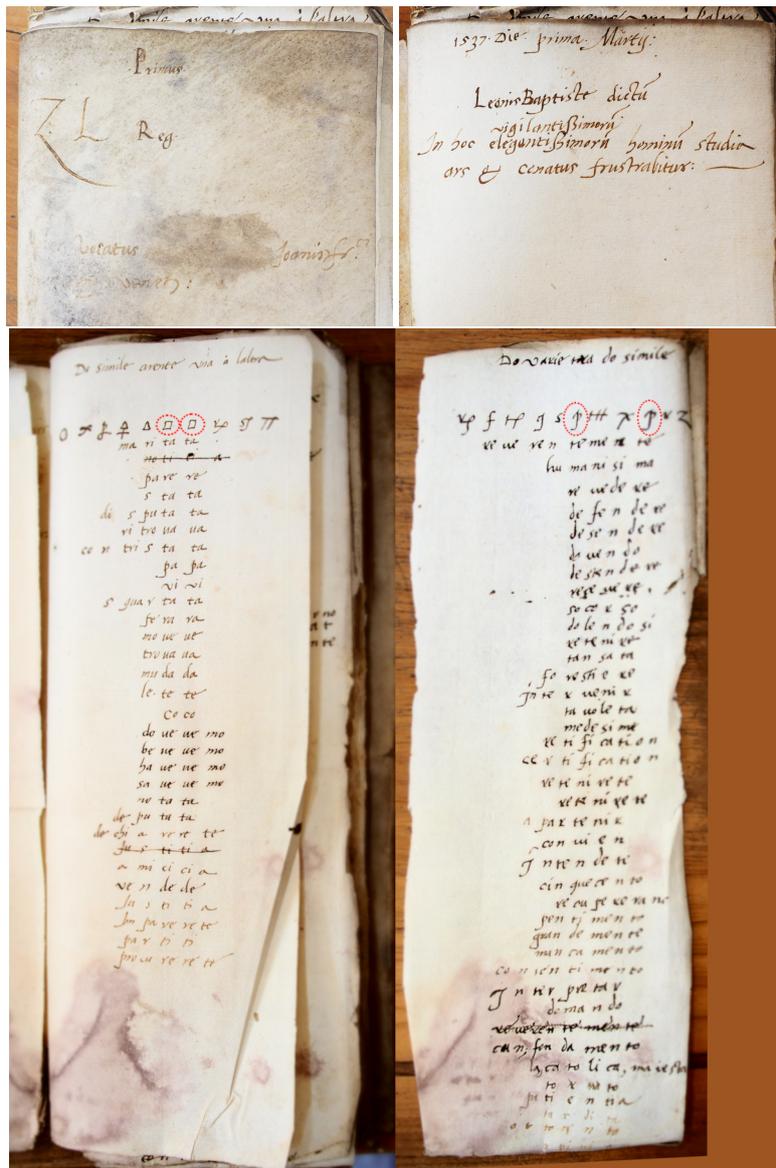
Aluise Borgi, alias Alvise Borghi. A master of codebreaking, learned it in Germany while he was secretary of the ambassador to the Emperor. He left no writings with his name except for a few supplications to the Council of Ten, like the following, and this leaflet. A homophonic cipher decrypted in Innsbruck, 1536, March 16, only a diagram of frequencies is given. The codebreaker was almost surely Alvise Borghi, that those years worked as a secretary of the Venetian embassy to the Holy Roman Empire. It was mistakenly archived as a cipher key, so it is, among other cipher keys, in *ASVe, CX Cifre, chiavi e scontri di cifra ... b.3 c. 177*.

mie. p. et fino al .37. son stato con soli duct. 16. all'anno di sat. senza alcuna utilita. / *Liceum* dt. 1535. In  
 Alemagna il principio di teare le cifre aliene senza sconto, nella qual arte hauendomi piu che di si possi dilettato, subito  
 citato de qui conuersai tanto con il Sr. Soto et l'anno 1537. hauea cauate tutte le cifre in lingua Latina, et in  
 lingua Italiana. se haueudo poi imparato benissimo la lingua Francese in Francia, et la spagnola habendo solamente libri  
 spagnoli, ho cauate tutte le cifre in dite lingue estere et hauea il Sr. Soto, et ho studiato il suo libro de cifre prese-  
 rato da lui al Sr. Soto di X. et ho mandato ogni giorno da simile rarissimo et laudatissimo exercitio. Il quale in vece  
 ha in se piu di Angelico et del humano Imperio et con la rinuncia del in regno nro scoprimo li secreti degli rebelli et inimici  
 di nro Sr. et li altri Principi et no hanno simili profittari hanno spesse volte mandato alla Sr. Soto le cifre intercate  
 accio siano cauate de qui. Son per tornare a proposito dt. 1537. fino al 43. so stato co. 40. so. et 69. Ducati di salario  
 et da Duogo in qua p. elemidine di nro Sr. Soto. ne ho / 101 / delli quali ne scordo se no / 31 / per et no sconto. X. all'anno p.  
 souention haueua da mettermi ad ordine p. andare in Francia a seruire la Sr. Soto et mi restano piu di 4. anni anchora a  
 scontare, si et rea il salario et la casseta uengo hauez. X. Ducati al mese solamente. I quali se ben sono piu di quel  
 et merito. Lasso tamen pensar alle sapient. Sr. Soto. non tanto alta sustantia al mondo, ne haueudo officio ne speranza  
 comendo pagar fitto di casa, sustentar la madre vecchia, la famiglia, et me stesso in una citta doue ogni cosa e  
 cara et tanto da pagar debiti, a che termine mi attouo / Supplio adunq. humilmente lo Sr. Soto. Et cosi come

An extract from the 1548 supplication to the CX where he asks for a salary increase, in a city where everything is so expensive ... he also tells of his career first as an embassy secretary and then as a skilled codebreaker. *ASVe, CX parti secrete f7 1547-52*.

# Zuan Francesco Marin

the last Venetian code breaker

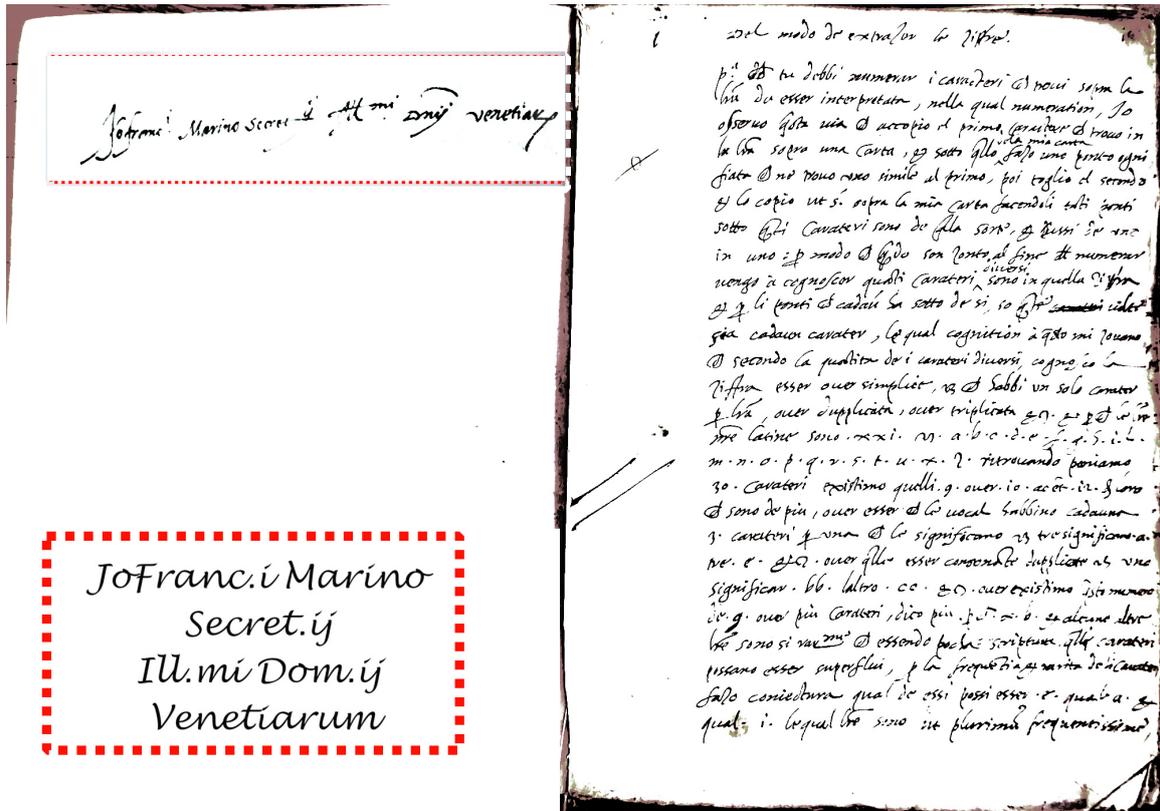


Zuan Francesco Marin, Gianfrancesco Marino, the last great Venetian code breaker. A booklet about decryption of syllabaries dated 1537, March 1.

The name Joanis Fr<sup>ci</sup> refers surely to the one of Zuan Francesco Marin, the last great codebreaker of Venice. On the right the dedication to Leon Battista Alberti. Bottom: A pair of pages showing some pattern matching trials. ASVe, *CX Cifre, chiavi e scontri di cifra ... b.6.1 f.1*

# Zuan Francesco Marin

## Del modo di estrazer le ziffre



Z.F. Marin's book, "Del modo di estrazer le ziffre" "About the mode to decrypt the ciphers", a treatise about the methods used by Marin and his predecessors. The book is rich of frequency tables of many kinds, relative to Latin, Vulgar(Italian), French and Spanish languages. Apparently nothing really new compared to Ludovici's fragments. ASVe, CX: cifre, chiavi e scontri di cifra ... b. 6.2 f.2.

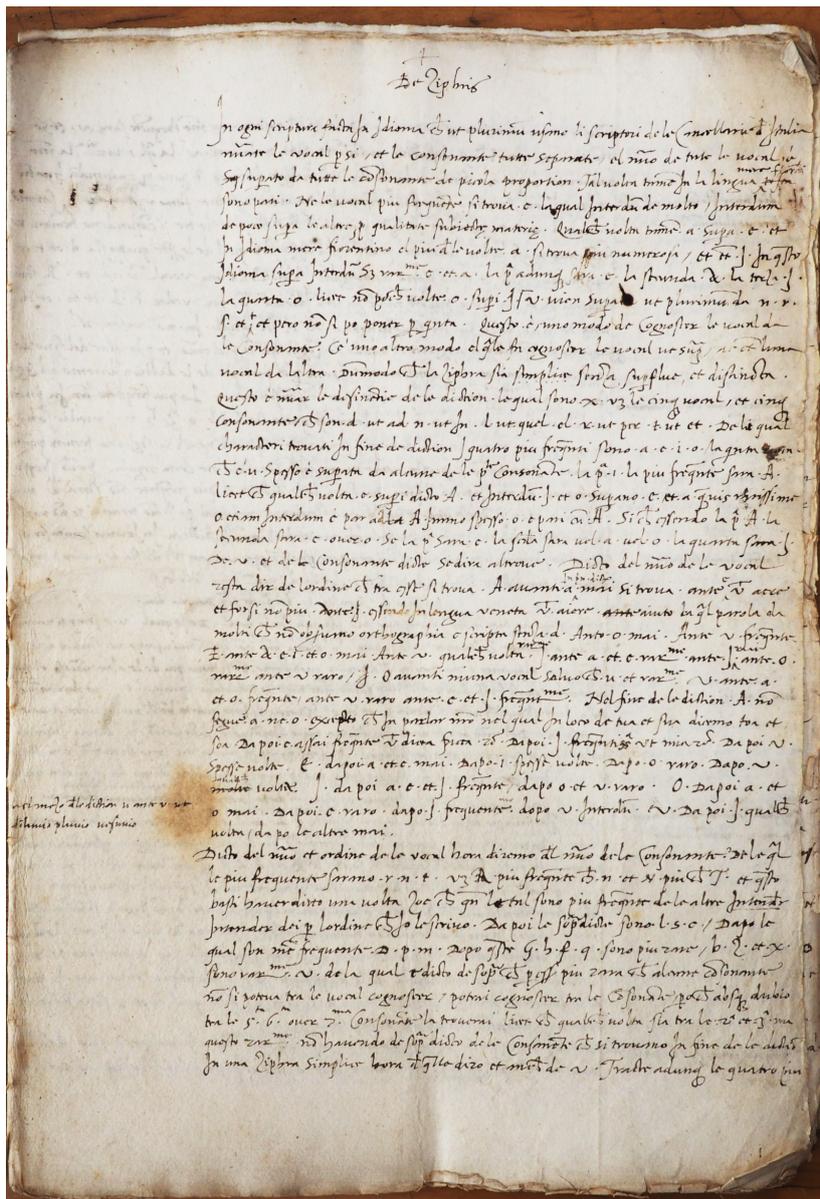
# Zuan Francesco Marin

Pages by Marin inside *Del modo di estrarer le ziffre*



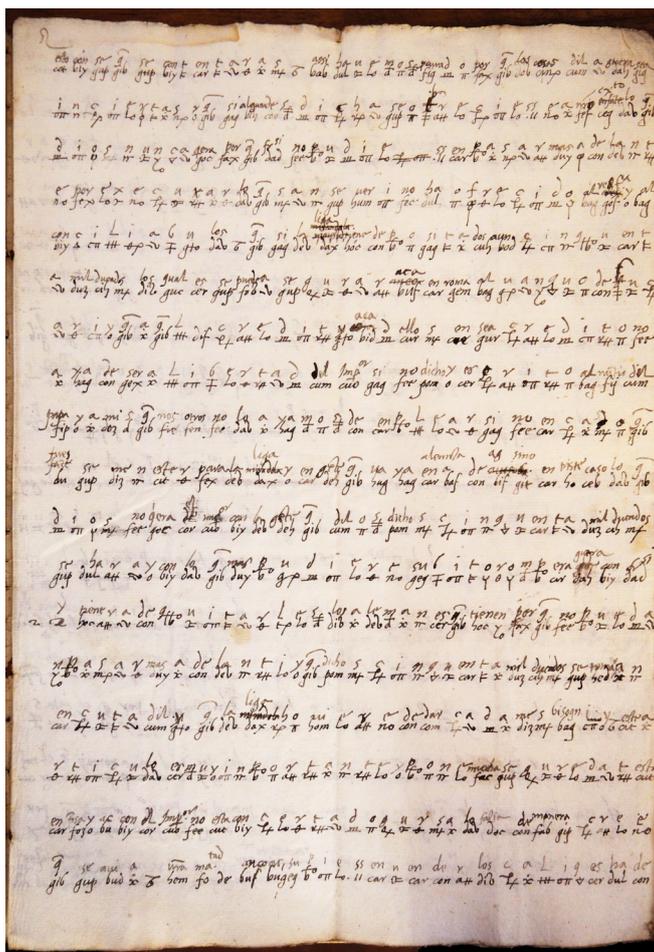
A couple of pages of Marin's treatise, with frequencies of pair of letters near a given letter, starting with A: groups like a\*, \*a\*, \*a that is as a first letter (*in principio*), as a letter in the middle *In mezo*, as the second letter (*in fin*). Very useful for decrypting homophonic ciphers also. ASVe, CX: *cifre, chiavi e scontri di cifra ... b. 6.2 f.2.*

# Yet another anonymous De Zyphris



This anonymous booklet has a title "De Zifris" borrowed by Alberti, but no name of the author. Could it be Soro's De Zifris? It looks very unlikely. ASVe, CX: *cifre, chiavi e scontri di cifra ... b.7.1 f.1*

## Lot of Spanish ciphers decrypted



Among the archive papers Spanish decrypted messages outnumber a few French ones and the fewer German ones. Was Spanish cryptography weak? Maybe, but one must remember that since 1535, the duchy of Milan was under Spanish rule, and Spain plotted to size Venice too, so Spain was the nearest menace for Venice. ASVe, CX: *cifre, chiavi e scontri di cifra ... b.6.misc.*

