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BETWEEN REPUBLIC AND PRINCIPATE: VITRUVIUS AND THE CULTURE OF TRANSITION

ELISA ROMANO

This paper aims to locate Vitruvius more precisely within the historical and cultural contexts of his time, building on important critical studies that have appeared in the past decades. More specifically, I will contribute to the outline of the physiognomy of Vitruvius as a man of the “transition”: he was educated in late republican times and worked in the cultural climate of the first years of the principate. Given the broad scope of this topic and the limited space allowed, I will analyze a small number of sample passages of *de Architectura* that I find especially important in illuminating this aspect of the author and his work. I intend to examine in greater depth elsewhere the comparison with other authors living in the period from the late republic to the Augustan age.

SOME REMARKS ON METHOD AND THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH

Let us begin by allowing the author himself to speak (1 pref. 2):

I thought that I should not let slip the opportunity to publish my writings on this subject, dedicated to you, as soon as possible, particularly since I was initially known to your father (*parenti tuo*) for my work in this field and was a devoted admirer of his courage. When, therefore, the heavenly council had consecrated your father in the residences of immortality and had passed his power into your hands, my enduring devotion to his memory was transferred to you and found favour with you (“idem

studium meum in eius memoria permanens in te contulit favorem”). And so, with Marcus Aurelius, Publius Minidius and Gnaeus Cornelius, I was put in charge of the supply and repair of *ballistae*, *scorpiones* and other types of artillery, and, with them, I received my reward: and it was you who granted it to me first and who continued it on the recommendation of your sister.¹

As is well known, this is one of the few autobiographical comments in *de Architectura*. The remark occurs in the preface to the first book and thus in the preface to the whole treatise; it briefly sketches the major stages of Vitruvius’s career, from his work as a military engineer and follower of Caesar, to his subsequent service under Octavian, his retirement during the first years of the principate, and the renewal of the benefits granted to him for providing and repairing military machinery.

Vitruvius’s professional life ran its course between Caesar and Augustus, but this trajectory is not limited to his professional life: the continuity, which he emphasizes, between military service under Caesar and his decision to serve Octavian is the key feature of both his biography as a historical figure and his self-representation as a literary author. In other words, we may term him a man of the transition, to use the cultural and chronological periodization that is commonly applied to the last decades of the republic and the first years of the new system of institutions, the principate. This profile, which Vitruvius himself emphasizes by selecting it as his first self-presentation in the treatise, remains important throughout.

However, another aspect of this self-representation also emerges from this same first preface. Indeed, from the first words of this famous prefatory passage—with its excessive apostrophe to the *imperator Caesar* and the reference to his divine qualities (“*divina tua mens et numen*”; see below pp. 338ff.)—Vitruvius’s first description of himself is that of a writer closely associated with Augustus. Vitruvius thus authorizes the construction of an image that is mainly, if not exclusively, Augustan, and it is this image that has prevailed in recent scholarship, especially that of the last decade. A distinctive feature of the new wave of interest in Vitruvius in the first decades of the twenty-first century has been the strong emphasis given to the Augustan component of *de Architectura*, i.e., to those aspects

1 The English translations of the passages of *de Architectura* are taken from Vitruvius 2009b.

of the treatise that can be linked to the cultural climate of the early years of the principate and, more particularly, to the author's relationship with Augustus. To cite just two examples of such an approach in recent scholarship, Indra McEwen locates the most serious level of Vitruvius's work in the correspondence between, and interdependence of, the *corpus* of architecture and the *corpus imperii* ("the body of architecture and the body of empire"), though she acknowledges that Vitruvius's training and professional activity fall in the period of the civil wars and the transition from republic to empire,² while Antoinette Novara focuses on the author's relationship with Augustus, in whose presence Vitruvius is supposed to have given a reading of the treatise in the year 24 B.C.³

If this critical perspective threatens to shift the axis of recent Vitruvian studies toward the beginning of the Augustan age,⁴ one may also observe, in a contrary movement, that Andrew Wallace-Hadrill productively returns the emphasis to Vitruvius's formation during the last years of the republic, while also naming him as one of the protagonists of the so-called Roman Cultural Revolution (Wallace-Hadrill 2008.144–210). This recent contribution is both fruitful and thought provoking as regards the representation of Vitruvius as "a man of the transition," though the most fundamental point of reference in the scholarship still remains the monographic synthesis presented in Pierre Gros's prefatory essay to the Italian edition of *de Architectura*, published in 1997.⁵

Here I would like to raise two methodological points. First, any attempt to place Vitruvius in his intellectual setting must address the loss of a great part of the intellectual production that he most likely read and that influenced him. To borrow Mireille Courrént's useful term, there are two Vitruvian libraries, one consisting of the authors and works that are explicitly cited, and a second one, "une deuxième bibliothèque," of works

2 Cf. McEwen 2003. While the essential thesis of this study is the correlation between the birth of architecture as a well-defined discipline and the Roman project of world domination, McEwen also stresses Vitruvius's ties to the theme of "transition" (see, e.g., p. 12 and p. 299).

3 Cf. Novara 2005: the relation with the princeps is reconstructed through an analysis of the prefaces to the ten books of *de Architectura*.

4 König 2009, too, focuses on the relationship with Augustus, arguing that Vitruvius's self-presentation as an Augustan author was more for the purpose of self-promotion than a celebration of the princeps.

5 Vitruvius 1997; on the late republic as the setting of Vitruvius's intellectual formation, see Rawson 1985.185–93.

that he probably used but which are never mentioned (Courrént 2011a.46–50). We no longer possess many of the works from either library, notably those of Varro and authors such as Nigidius Figulus, whose veiled presence seems to lie behind several references to eastern beliefs, as well as the astrological-astronomical digression in Book 9. Second, if we aspire to an objective assessment of the composite and heterogeneous cultural elements present in *de Architectura*, which at times seem to contradict each other, we must accept the idea of an “expanded composition” of the treatise: its planning, drafting, final version, and publication over a period of several years. Such a long chronological span in the conception and production of the work, ranging from the years of Vitruvius’s own training (in the 60s/50s B.C.?) to the beginning of the principate, is matched by a real compositional stratigraphy: these layers are what explain the simultaneous presence of clusters of related content: clusters of historical and literary references, and of varied sources and material—accumulated over time in what often seems to be a disorderly way (Vitruvius 1997.xxviii ff.).

THE *PRAEFATIO* AND AUGUSTAN IDEOLOGY: VITRUVIUS AND HORACE

The presentation of an Augustan ideological and rhetorical discourse represents the final layer within this complex stratification. Let us therefore return to the text of the *praefatio* to Book 1 and the treatise as a whole, a few phrases of which we read above, and which is generally agreed to be an important example of “Augustan rhetoric” (1 pref. 1–2):

Caesar, Supreme Ruler: while your divine intelligence and supernatural power were acquiring the mastery of the whole world and Roman citizens were glorying in your triumph and your victory, once all your enemies had been obliterated by your indomitable bravery, and all the peoples you had conquered awaited your command, and the Roman People and Senate, freed from fear, began to be governed by your far-ranging plans and decisions (“cum divina tua mens et numen, imperator Caesar, imperio potiretur orbis terrarum invictaque virtute cunctis hostibus stratis, triumpho victoriaque tua cives gloriarentur et gentes omnes subactae tuum spectarent nutum populusque Romanus et senatus liberatus timore amplissimis

tuis cogitationibus consiliisque gubernaretur”), I did not dare, when you were so occupied with such important matters, to publish my writings on architecture and the ideas I had developed after long reflection, for fear that by interrupting you at an inopportune moment I might incur your displeasure.

When, in fact, I realized that you have taken in hand not only the everyday lives of all our citizens and the organization of the state, but also the development of public buildings so that not only has the state been enriched, thanks to you, with new provinces, but also the majesty of its power is already being demonstrated by the extraordinary prestige of its public buildings (“de opportunitate publicorum aedificiorum, ut civitas per te non solum provinciis esset aucta, verum etiam ut maiestas imperii publicorum aedificiorum egregias haberet auctoritates”), I thought that I should not let slip the opportunity to publish my writings . . .

This is directly followed by the passage already cited (1 pref. 2).

The content of this prooemium presents a web of propagandistic themes that were commonplace in and around 27 B.C., the year of the institutional reforms that marked the turn towards the new regime. The *praefatio* should thus be set in the initial phase of the development of the so-called “ideology of the principate”; it presents a dense web of correspondences with passages in works by other authors of the Augustan period, with Augustus’s own autobiographical work, and with historiographical testimony about the princeps, all of which confirm that the Vitruvian text is deeply imbued with an Augustan atmosphere. These ideological themes can be listed briefly: the divinity of the princeps;⁶ the attribution of the title *imperator* (which recurs also in the prefaces to Books 2, 3, 4, 5, and 10, but is linked to the name *Caesar* nowhere else in Vitruvius or, indeed, in the whole of Augustan literature, and which presupposes the grant to Augustus in January 27 B.C. of *imperium proconsulare* in the “imperial” provinces); the image of a pacified world and the reference to subjugated

6 Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 1.2.41ff. (on which see below 341) and 3.5.2f.; Ov. *Trist.* 5.3.45, *Pont.* 1.10.42, 3.1.163, and 4.6.10; and Dio Cass. 51.21.2. In this regard, see Mazzoli 2014.108ff.

enemies;⁷ the allusion to Octavian's triple triumph in 29;⁸ release from the fear of a return to civil war (cf. Hor. *Carm.* 1.2.1ff.); the explicit reference to the renewal of urban development and building projects promoted by Augustus;⁹ the increase in the number of provinces (cf. Aug. *Res Gest.* 26); the concept of *maiestas imperii* (cf. Hor. *Carm.* 4.15.15); the hint at Octavian's new cognomen, *Augustus*, through the etymological figure in *civitas aucta*; Augustus viewed as Caesar's heir;¹⁰ and, finally, as we have seen in the passage cited in the previous paragraph, Caesar's deification (cf. Verg. *G.* 9.46ff., Ov. *Met.* 15.745ff., Manil. 1.7ff., and Suet. *Iul.* 88).

There are parallels in content with Vergil, Propertius, and Livy that can be explained by the fact that all of these authors were exposed to the same general environment and by their sharing in discourses that circulated widely at the time; it is not by chance that we find some of them again in the *Res Gestae*, in which Augustus himself recorded his autobiography many years later. However, the parallels with Horace merit more attention. The first three books of Horace's *Odes* were published in 23 B.C., but the period of their development and composition partially overlaps with the period during which Vitruvius's treatise was most likely written. In an interesting recent contribution, Marden Nichols attempts to set the relationship between Vitruvius and Horace on a new foundation, noting especially that they were both members of the *ordo* of *apparitores* and shared the social-professional status of *scriba* (*armamentarius* in the case of Vitruvius, *quaestorius* in the case of Horace; Nichols 2009a). Scholars have long focused on just three instances of intertextuality: Vitruvius's *praefatio* and the first lines of Horace's "Epistle to Augustus" (2.1); Vitruvius's polemic against hybrid figures in painting and the opening lines of the *Ars Poetica*; and a passage on Numidia in Book 8 of *de Architectura* and a stanza of Horace's Ode 1.22.¹¹

7 Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 3.14.14ff., 4.15.17ff., 4.5.25ff.; *Carm. Saec.* 53ff.; Prop. 4.6.77ff.; Verg. *Aen.* 8.722ff.; and Aug. *Res Gest.* 25–33.

8 Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 8.714: *triplex triumphus* and Suet. *Aug.* 22.

9 Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 3.6.1ff.: "delicta maiorum immeritus lues, / Romane, donec templa refeceris / aedisque labentis deorum et / foeda nigro simulacra fumo" ("Roman, though you're guiltless, you'll still expiate your father's sins, till you have restored the temples and tumbling shrines of all the gods, and their images, soiled with black smoke"); Ov. *Fast.* 2.57–64; Liv. 4.20.7; Aug. *Res Gest.* 19–21; Suet. *Aug.* 28–30; and Dio Cass. 53.2.4.

10 Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 1.2.44 (cf. below, 341); Aug. *Res Gest.* 1.10, 2.25, 3.8, and 4.14; Suet. *Aug.* 10; and Dio Cass. 53.4.

11 Cf. Vitr. 1 pref. 1 (quoted above) ~ Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.1ff.; Vitr. 7.5.3 ~ Hor. *Ars* 1–5; Vitr. 8.3.24 ~ Hor. *Carm.* 1.22.13–16.

Nichols rightly observes that it is more useful to relate these parallels to a “common cultural milieu” rather than to insist on a conscious allusion by one author to another. But there is more to it than this. Beyond merely sharing the same cultural environment, Vitruvius and Horace held the same social status, must have been about the same age, and had played an active part in political life at the end of the republic (one with Caesar, the other with Brutus). Both had also witnessed the civil wars. All this may have created the conditions if not for an actual meeting (which would be impossible to prove), then at least for contacts within the same circles and access to the same readings and the same debates.

In addition to Nichols’ persuasive comparative reading of Horace’s Satire 1.6 with the preface to Book 6 of *de Architectura*, one could include other significant comparisons, beginning with the *praefatio* to the treatise as a whole, which, in fact, shares elements with some odes datable slightly before or after the constitutional turning point of 27 B.C. These similarities reveal a shared cultural climate. Firstly, the connection with Caesar, which Augustan propaganda will emphasize less after 27, is clearly being accentuated. Further, after the year 27, the idea of Augustus’s apotheosis after death will be reinforced, while in Ode 1.2, he is identified with the god Mercury (lines 41–44: “sive mutata iuvenem figura / ales in terris imitaris almae / filius Maiae, patiens vocari / Caesaris ultor;” “Or you, winged son of kindly Maia, changing shape on earth to youthful human form, and ready to be named as Caesar’s avenger”), just as Vitruvius attributes divine power to him. Above all, Vitruvius’s phrase *liberatus timore* presupposes that the senate meetings of January 27 B.C., which ratified the new constitutional settlement, had already occurred, as well as presupposing the experience of the preceding state of uncertainty and the dread of a return to civil war as described at the start of Horace’s Ode 1.2 (lines 1–5: “iam satis terris nivis atque dirae / grandinis misit pater et rubente / dextera sacras iaculatus arces / terruit urbem, / terruit gentis,” “Jupiter sent enough snow and dread hail to earth already, striking sacred hills with fiery hand, scared the city, scared the people”).

The noun *timor* in Vitruvius and the verb *terreo* in Horace are lexical hints of the fear of civil war which both authors had witnessed. The memory of the civil wars was still fresh among the generations that had been involved in them, as is demonstrated also by Vitruvius’s rule that temples of Mars be located outside city walls (1.7.1): “Martis vero divinitas cum sit extra moenia dedicata, non erit inter cives armigera dissensio, sed ab hostibus ea defensa a belli periculo conservabit” (“And when a temple

is dedicated to the divinity of Mars outside the walls, there will be no armed struggles between the citizens, but he will defend the city from its enemies and save it from the dangers of war”). In this brief notice, there is an echo of the dramatic events witnessed by the author, which echo is strengthened by the contrast set up between internal wars and the wars against foreign enemies—a topos of Augustan poetry condemning civil wars, as often in Horace (e.g., 1.2.21–24: “audiet civis acuisse ferrum, / quo graves Persae melius perirent, / audiet pugnas vitio parentum / rara iuventus,” “Our young people, fewer for their fathers’ vices, will hear weapons sharpened, better destined for the hard Persians, and will hear of battles, too”). Such a topos is a mark of the uncertainties and preoccupations that were distinctive features of the political and cultural climate during the years of the transition.

THE ARCHITECT’S TRAINING AND LUXURY ARCHITECTURE: VITRUVIUS AND CICERO

Whereas Vitruvius’s relationship with Horace can be traced to a consonance arising from both authors’ involvement in the same cultural milieu, his relationship with Cicero rests on his own intellectual formation in the late republican period. Vitruvius himself reminds us of this when he includes Cicero, along with Lucretius and Varro, in the short list of authors mentioned in the preface to Book 9: “So, too, many born after our generation will feel as if they are disputing the natural world with Lucretius as though he were in front of them or the art of rhetoric with Cicero; and many of our successors will hold conversations with Varro about the Latin language” (9 pref. 17).

Scholarship on Vitruvius has always noted a Lucretian influence on the history of human civilization presented in 2.1 (cf. Vitruvius 1999a. xxxi–xxxv); his relation with Varro will be considered in the next section. Cicero’s presence in *de Architectura* is considerable, as can be observed, for example, in the following passage (1.1.7):

Philosophy in fact makes the architect *high-minded* (*animo magno*) and ensures that he will not be *arrogant* (*adrogans*), but rather *flexible* (*facilis*), *fair* (*aequus*), and *trustworthy* (*fidelis*) and *without greed* (*sine avaritia*), which is the most important quality, since no work can be carried out satisfactorily without *loyalty* (*fide*) or

integrity (castitate); and [philosophy also ensures] that he will not be *avaricious (cupidus)* or preoccupied with receiving rewards, but will safeguard his own *standing (dignitatem) rigorously (cum gravitate)* by maintaining his own good name; this is what philosophy teaches us.

We are in Book 1 of the *de Architectura*, where Vitruvius is explaining why the architect must also be familiar with philosophy, especially ethics. The reason is that ethics are an essential foundation for the *virtutes* listed in this passage (emphasized above), which we would call ethical values.

Among the *virtutes* we find the values (*magnitudo animi, facilitas, aequitas, fides, castitas, gravitas, dignitas*) and opposing negative values (*adrogantia, avaritia, cupiditas*) of an ethical model developed in the culture of late republican Rome; this model combined features of the Roman tradition with more modern elements that answered to the needs of a wealthy, expanding society that was open to the influence of Greek culture. More specifically, the list succinctly synthesizes a number of echoes of Cicero's reflections on virtue in his final work, *de Officiis*.¹² Even the phrasing in the form of a list recalls some of Cicero's summarizing prescriptions, such as those directed to the men who govern the state ("qui res publicas regant") (Cic. *Off.* 1.92; trans. W. Miller):

Only let it [property], in the first place, be honestly acquired, by the use of no dishonest (*turpi*) or fraudulent (*odioso*) means; let it, in the second place, increase by wisdom, industry, and thrift (*ratione, diligentia, parsimonia*); and, finally, let it be made available for the use of as many as possible (if only they are worthy) and be at the service of generosity and beneficence (*liberalitati et beneficentiae*) rather than of sensuality (*libidini*) and excess (*luxuriae*). By observing these rules, one may live in magnificence, dignity, and independence (*magnifice graviter animoseque*), and yet in honour, truth, and charity toward all ("simpliciter, fideliter, vere erga hominem amice").

12 The relevant attestations are numerous. Some examples: Cic. *Off.* 1.15ff., 1.61ff. (*magnitudo animi*), 2.64 (*facilitas*), 1.72 (*gravitas*), 1.69 (*dignitas*), 1.30, 1.26, 1.50, 1.64, 1.80 (*aequitas*), 1.23, 1.121, 1.124, 2.33f. (*fides*), 1.90 (*adrogantia*), 2.58, 2.75ff. (*avaritia*), 1.68, 1.92, 2.38, 2.55ff., 2.58ff., and 2.75ff. (*cupiditas*).

Vitruvius's attempt to define an ethical model for a profession would necessarily have taken as a point of reference *de Officiis* where Cicero linked the *virtutes* to *negotia* ("activities") and defined the virtues of practical action: a system of values with the aim of constructing a professional ethics.

In addition to creating a system of values linked to the professional world, the *de Officiis* seems to have had a particular influence on Vitruvius in other respects as well. Two well-known passages of *de Architectura* (1.2.9 and 6.5.1f.) present various typologies of dwellings in relation to the stratification of society. The analogies between these two passages, especially that of Book 6, and Cicero's treatment of the *domus* of a "man of rank and station" (*Off.* 1.138ff.) have been noted and analyzed a number of times (cf., e.g., Gros 1978.81–85, Romano 1987.45–153, Coarelli 1989.179, and Courrént 2011b). The passages' main ideas are analogous, and these correspondences in content are also underlined by verbal parallels: the buildings are intended for *potentes principes civitatis* ("the most powerful citizens"), the criterion of utility is of importance, there is both a relation between the *dignitas* of the building and that of its inhabitants, and a need to provide large reception areas (cf. Romano 1994.68f.).

But these parallels only make clearer Vitruvius's distance from the Ciceronian conception, because now libraries and the like are to be reserved for *nobiles*, the important dignitaries who hold high office and magistracies and are obliged to serve the state: "Lofty and regal vestibules, grand *atria* and colonnaded courtyards should be built, as well as plantations of trees and broad avenues finished off so as to match their social standing; not to mention libraries, picture galleries and basilicas prepared with a splendour consonant with that of great public buildings, since public councils as well as private trials and arbitrations are often held in their houses" (6.5.2). Vitruvius thus allows room for *nobiles* to enjoy the *magnificentia* that Cicero had denied even to the *principes civitatis* (Cic. *Off.* 1.138–40; trans. W. Miller):

I must discuss also what sort of house a man of rank and station ("hominis honorati et principis") should, in my opinion, have. Its prime object is serviceableness. To this the plan of the building should be adapted . . . The truth is, a man's dignity may be enhanced by the house he lives in, but not wholly secured by it; the owner should bring honour to his house, not the house to its owner ("ornanda est dignitas domo, non ex domo tota quaerenda, nec domo

dominus, sed domino domus honestanda est”) . . . One must be careful, too, not to go beyond proper bounds in expense and display (“extra modum sumptu et magnificentia”), especially if one is building for oneself.

Vitruvius’s distance from Cicero’s theoretical model reflects the contradiction present and still unresolved in the late republic between traditional Roman values and the new values of a refined urban culture—between the needs of the collective and the political necessity of demonstrating prestige through conspicuous consumption (Coarelli 1989, Romano 1994, and Masterson 2004.413). In addition to this conflict, another element deserves attention: the traditional values of the senatorial aristocracy, challenged by the elite themselves, appear not only embedded but also reinforced, at a distance of just a few years, in a social model outlined by someone of lower status, an *apparitor*.

Vitruvius’s debt not only to *de Officiis* but also to *de Oratore* is well known with respect to both the construction of architecture as a technical discipline and the encyclopedic program for the architect’s training that is set out in the first chapter of Book 1 (1.1.3): “He should have a literary education, be skilful in drawing, knowledgeable about geometry and familiar with a great number of historical works, and should have followed lectures in philosophy attentively; he should have a knowledge of music, should not be ignorant of medicine, should know the judgements of jurists and have a command of astronomy and of the celestial system.”¹³

As has long been recognized—hence I mention it just briefly here—Vitruvius’s educational concept is modeled on the encyclopedic training of the orator that was detailed, above all, in Book 1 of *de Oratore* in 55 B.C. and reprised by Cicero in summary fashion in 46, in the *Orator* (cf. *de Orat.* 1.16–20, 1.45–73, 1.158ff.; *Orat.* 119ff.). Yet we can add a further observation that may help complete our picture of Cicero’s influence on Vitruvius. There is a dense web of parallels between chapter 1.1 of *de Architectura* and Messalla’s speech in the *Dialogus de Oratoribus* attributed to Tacitus,¹⁴

13 “et ut litteratus sit, peritus graphidos, eruditus geometria, historias complures noverit, philosophos diligenter audierit, musicam scierit, medicinae non sit ignarus, responsa iuriconsultorum noverit, astrologiam caelique rationes cognitas habeat.”

14 Tac. *Dial.* 31.7: “et iuris civilis scientiam veteres oratores comprehendebant et grammatica musica geometria imbuebantur.” That the *Hortensius* was a source of the *Dialogus de Oratoribus* is based on 16.7: “si, ut Cicero in Hortensio scribit . . .”; cf. Romano 2013.

and we can identify their common source in one of Cicero's philosophical works that has not been considered in relation to Vitruvius's treatise before now, namely, the *Hortensius*. In this lost Ciceronian dialogue, Vitruvius would have found a scheme in which each of the *artes* needed for educational advancement (in philosophy, in this case) is given a specific motivation and an explanation of its particular usefulness (Cic. *Hortensius* frag. 89 Grilli = Lactant. *Div. Inst.* 3.25.8–11; trans. W. Fletcher):

Instruction in many arts is necessary for an application to philosophy. Common learning must be acquired on account of practice in reading, because in so great a variety of subjects it is impossible that all things should be learned by hearing, or retained in the memory. No little attention also must be given to the grammarians, in order that you may know the right method of speaking. That must occupy many years. Nor must there be ignorance of rhetoric, that you may be able to utter and express the things which you have learned. Geometry also, and music, and astronomy, are necessary, because these arts have some connection with philosophy.¹⁵

This is the same scheme adopted by Vitruvius in 1.1.4:

These are the explanations for all this. The architect must have a literary education so that he can leave a more dependable record when writing up his commentaries (“*litteras architectum scire oportet uti commentariis memoria firmiorem efficere possit*”). Then he must have the expertise in drawing which will enable him to represent more easily the appearance of the work he wishes to design. Geometry as well is extremely helpful in architecture . . . (5) He should also have a wide knowledge of history

15 “*multis artibus opus est ut ad philosophiam possit accedi. discendae istae communes litterae propter usum legendi quia in tanta rerum varietate nec disci audiendo possunt omnia nec memoria contineri. grammaticis quoque non parum operae dandum est, ut rectam loquendi rationem scias: id multos annos auferat necesse est. ne oratoria quidem ignoranda est, ut ea quae didiceris proferre atque eloqui possis. geometria quoque et musica et astrologia necessaria est, quod hae artes cum philosophia habent aliquam societatem.*”

because architects often devise a great deal of ornament for their buildings, the meaning of which they must be able to explain to those who ask why they have made them . . . (8) The architect should also understand music so that he is conversant with the system of harmonic relationships and mathematical theory . . . (10) The architect should also have some knowledge of medicine, because of the problems posed by the latitude.

The setting up of specialized disciplines was a topic of debate in late republican culture, which, in its turn, was picking up the elements of a Hellenistic discussion. In *de Oratore*, *Orator*, and, in so far as we can reconstruct it, the *Hortensius*, Cicero had reflected on the roles of oratory and philosophy, respectively, as two forms of knowledge that had by this time been constituted as autonomous *artes* within the cultural framework of the Hellenistic *enkyklopaidia*. In his attempt to legitimize architecture as an autonomous specialist discipline, Vitruvius sets himself squarely within this late republican debate.

ANTIQUITY: VITRUVIUS AND VARRO

Vitruvius would not have joined in the sarcasm with which Horace, in his “Epistle to Augustus,” attacks the taste for the antique—so common in his time as to have become merely fashionable: “Your people despise and hate all things that they do not see as having vanished from the earth or passed away in their time” (Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.18ff.: “sed tuus hic populus . . . nisi quae terris semota suisque / temporibus defuncta videt, fastidit et odit”). Although, as we have seen, Vitruvius shared some attitudes and modes of expression with the Augustan poet, he differed in being a *fautor veterum* (“admirer of ancient things”), to use Horace’s own phrase (line 23). We have also seen that one of his *auctores* (in addition to Cicero) was Varro, and Varro will probably have played a role as intermediary in Vitruvius’s relationship with tradition and the past.¹⁶

In the long excursus on the history of architecture in Book 2, when discussing primitive construction, Vitruvius recalls the hut of Romulus on the Capitol and the thatched roofs of the sanctuaries in the citadel: they

16 On the links between Vitruvius and Varro, cf. Gros 1997.lxvi and Wallace-Hadrill 2008.150.

are evidence of practices in earlier times, and they function as clues from which it is possible to draw inferences about the building techniques discovered by the ancients (2.1.5f):

Again, the hut of Romulus on the Capitol and the sacred buildings covered with thatch in the citadel can provide us with significant evidence of practices in ancient times (“*commonefacere potest et significare mores vetustatis*”). So after a consideration of these remains (*his signis*), we can reasonably infer (*rationantes iudicare*) that these were the ancient innovations in construction (“*de antiquis inventionibus aedificiorum*”).

The function ascribed to the dwelling of the first king of Rome is thus that of a visible sign within a group of other signs whose reconstitution is able to restore the past. The remark on the hut of Romulus points to Varronian inspiration, though this is likely to be a generalized inspiration in regards to a method of research rather than a direct borrowing (no such reference is, in fact, found in Varro’s surviving works). The hut of Romulus on the Capitol and the thatched roofs of the sanctuaries in the citadel are witnesses to a distant past and, at the same time, a network of evidence for reconstructing ancient practices. They may also be regarded as a meaningful symbol within that ideal topography of memory that was one of the most important achievements of the antiquarian research undertaken in Rome in the preceding decades—research which largely came together in Varro’s *Antiquitates*.¹⁷

What seems to be common to Varro and Vitruvius is an idea that is repeatedly found at the end of the republic at a time of crisis in its institutions: the idea that memory, understood as a collective memory and a foundational element in the identity of a social and political community, is a hazy, vanishing memory (cf. Moatti 1997.39ff.). The cultural patrimony accumulated by the preceding generations is at risk: much of it had already been lost and much was in danger of being lost; cults and rituals had disappeared, as had even the ancient street network and the city’s original topography. Antiquarian activity—what we would today call philology and

17 McEwen 2003.81f. underlines the importance of this passage, but interprets Romulus’s hut as an element of significance in a technique of memorization based on spatial associations.

archaeology—made it possible to “recognize,” and so rediscover, the past. In this activity, a central role was played by those traces of the past that Vitruvius calls *signa* and Varro calls *vestigia*. To give just two examples:

The name of the Aventine is referred to several origins . . . I am decidedly of the opinion that it is from *advectus*, “transport by water”; for of old (*olim*) the hill was cut off from everything else by swampy pools and streams. Therefore they *advehebantur*, “were conveyed,” thither by rafts; and traces (*vestigia*) of this survive, in that the way by which they were then transported is now called *Velabrum*, “ferry” (Varr. *LL* 5.43; trans. R. G. Kent).

The very centre of the Circus is called *ad Murciae*, “at Murcia’s” . . . from the *urcei*, “pitchers” . . . others say that it is derived from *murtetum*, “myrtle-grove,” because that was there: of which a trace (*vestigium*) remains in that the chapel of Venus *Murtea*, “of the Myrtle” is there even to this day (*etiam nunc*) (ibid. 5.154).

Vitruvius considers antiquity to be an ensemble of models to be imitated or restored, a repertoire of aesthetic patterns that suggest an idea of art that is close to the truth of nature (Romano 2011). In brief, he always regards the ancient as preferable to the modern. His preference for the antique is directly connected to a broader interest in the past which he shares with the intellectual circles and prominent figures of the years of his own education and training.¹⁸

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF DOMINATION: VITRUVIUS AND MANILIUS

The Vitruvian discourse was developed in the late republican era, but nonetheless it operates within the ideological coordinates of Augustan culture. Indubitable proof of this is provided not only by his direct relationship with the princes (see pp. 338ff. above), but also by the fact that some ideological

18 On the so-called “second heyday of antiquarianism” that flourished in the years of Vitruvius’s intellectual formation, cf. Rawson 1972/1991.

commitments are made explicit here and there in the course of Vitruvius's account of technical matters. Of special significance is the ethnographic excursus in Book 6, introduced in relation to the need to adapt the construction of buildings to the climatic conditions of different regions. The difference between dwellings in northern regions, which are exposed to the south and provided with few apertures, and those of southern regions, which are exposed to the north and well ventilated, prompts a digression on the influence of climate on people. Climate, Vitruvius observes, determines their physique, character, and morals. Occupying a central position between north and south, Italy (above all, Rome at its center) receives beneficial influences from the opposed climatic areas equidistant from it. Its inhabitants combine northern strength with southern intelligence, and are consequently invincible (6.1.10–11):

Since, therefore, things in the world are arranged like this by nature and all nations vary because of their highly dissimilar temperaments, it is certainly true that the Roman people occupy the territory right at the centre of the earth in relation to the total extent of the lands of the world and of its regions (“veros inter spatium totius orbis terrarum regionesque medio mundi populus Romanus possidet fines”). (11) In fact, people in Italy are the most balanced with respect to both north and south in terms of bodily form and the spiritual rigour required for decisive action. For exactly as the planet Jupiter is temperate, running in the middle between the sweltering planet Mars and the freezing planet Saturn, so, for the same reason, Italy has the unbeatable advantage of being balanced between the southern and northern regions, but with admixtures from both. And so she shatters the courage of barbarians by intelligent planning and foils the plots of southerners by force of arms. Thus the divine mind allocated to the city of the Roman people a superb, temperate region in order that it could acquire governance of the whole world (“ita divina mens civitatem populi Romani egregia temperataque regione conlocavit, uti orbis terrarum imperii potiretur”).

This idea is probably not new and derives from the Stoic philosopher Posidonius's adaptation of the Aristotelian concept of the *mesotes* (“median status”) of the Greeks. However, the ideological force of the

passage here belongs wholly to Vitruvius. As the geographic, climatic, and ethnic center of the world, Rome is, consequently, also the center of power; her very location predestines her supremacy. This imperial destiny is identified with the trajectory of Augustus's own rise to power with the repetition of the terms that were applied to Augustus at the start of the *prae-fatio* (1 pref. 1: "cum divina tua mens et numen, imperator Caesar, imperio potiretur orbis terrarum"). Further, the physical and moral advantages of the Roman people are paralleled by the superiority of Jupiter's planet over the other planets, and this correspondence between heaven and earth places the necessity of Rome's dominion within a predestined cosmic plan.

It is not by chance that the same proud affirmation of the superiority of Italy and Rome over other regions and cities is found in a poet such as Manilius, who, despite uncertainty over the exact chronology of his poem the *Astronomica*, is certainly Augustan in intellectual formation (Manil. 4.686–95; trans. G. P. Goold; cf. Volk 2009):

It (*sc.* Europa) is the continent most renowned for heroes and most productive of learned arts. There is Athens, distinguished by its sovereignty over eloquence; Sparta, pre-eminent for its feat of arms; Thebes, for the gods it bore; and Pella, for but a single king of its royal house, return for help it gave in the Trojan war; Thessaly, Epirus, and the contiguous Illyrian littoral, powerful lands all three; Thrace, who counts Mars a citizen, and Germany, who stands struck with wonder at the stature of her sons around her; Gaul unrivalled for her wealth, Spain for her bellicosity; and finally Italy, which Rome, capital of the world, has made mistress of the earth, herself made one with heaven.

To conclude: setting Vitruvius in the context of the culture of the transition may help us gain a better understanding of the coexistence in his treatise of disparate elements dating from different periods of Roman cultural history; it may also help us to understand that apparent inconsistencies or contradictions in the text are the result of a range of cultural influences and of experiences gathered during the long years of his education and training, of his professional activity, and of the composition of his treatise.