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Fighting For Space in Augustus' City; Reading Contest and Conquest in Vitruvius' De Architectura

Vitruvius' *De Architectura* has been long plundered as an historical source. Students of ancient Roman building practices, analysts of Rome's physical topography, even modern academic architects have, to varying degrees but with remarkable regularity, repeatedly turned to the treatise to identify material remains (for example), or to fill in some of the technical background to their own investigations. However, while it has been thus frequently referred to, Vitruvius' architectural manual has, to date, been relatively little read; that is to say, while much use has been made of the facts and figures contained in the treatise, very little attention has (yet) been paid to the literary-ness, to the textual dynamics, to the rhetoric of Vitruvius' *De Architectura*.

This paper seeks somewhat to redress this imbalance. Rejecting the more usual approach (that adopted primarily by fact-finders, who tend to isolate fragments of Vitruvius' treatise and ignore the rest), it attempts a holistic reading of the text, and, in doing so, teases out not only some of the overriding themes that unite the ten books of the *De Architectura* but also several subtexts that underpin the work. Beginning at the beginning, for example, it investigates the power of Vitruvius' prefaces (Vitruvius introduces each book with a preface), exploring the way in which they impose a textual order upon Vitruvius' text and, simultaneously, elevate his treatise from the (relatively lowly) status of an informative manual to that of a/the definitive architectural encyclopaedia, structured by and concerned with the loftiest of scientific/philosophical principles: with ratio, with reason. In the process of examining the literary ambitions of Vitruvius' *De Architectura*, this paper investigates too Vitruvius' professional aspirations; it reads Vitruvius' description/prescription of architects' qualifications [DA I 1-18] and his theory on the origin of building [DA II 1-9] alongside each other, and suggests that Vitruvius' career manoeuvring (which represents architects/architecture as the forces of civilisation) places his profession in the topmost stratum of both social and cultural spheres. Vitruvius' personal ambition and, specifically, his exploitation of his own authorship are also considered in the course of this paper, which compares (with other passages) Vitruvius' opening lines and his conclusions, and suggests that the initial impression which Vitruvius creates, of humble subservience to Octavian, is undermined throughout the *De Architectura* by Vitruvius' insistence upon his own authority and is finally challenged at the very end by Vitruvius' claim that the architect is the ultimate general.

While the assertion of the rewards involved in and, indeed, the importance of reading Vitruvius' *De Architectura* is the primary concern of this paper, it is not its only objective. A secondary, and much broader, aim is to involve Vitruvius' *De Architectura* (and the themes and subtexts which, my paper contends, underpin it) more deeply than has been done to date in the study of Augustan building work; and, in doing so, to introduce to that (already voluminous) field of research a fresh slant on the politics of Roman (re)construction. It is this paper's argument that Vitruvius' architectural manual does not attempt to realign literary, social, cultural and personal space in a vacuum, but in direct relation to, and along the same lines as, the manipulation of physical and conceptual

space undertaken by the foremost Romans of the Late Republic and by Augustus himself, once he became princeps. Thus contextualised, Vitruvius' *De Architectura*, this paper suggests, offers an importantly different perspective (from that of Augustus himself, from which angle "Augustan" Rome is most frequently studied) on the dynamics of spatial negotiation in "Augustan" city. Indeed, as a textual monument designed to survive the ravages of time [DA IV Pref. 5: *sed tamen his voluminibus editis, ut spero, etiam posteris ero notus*], this treatise not only offers an alternative angle, but continues actively to compete with (and conquer?) alternative (Augustan) angles on/of "Augustan" space; and is, therefore, crucial to historians not only as a source of technical information but also as a rhetorical construction with a voice of its own. Vitruvius' *De Architectura*, this paper contends, fights for space in our history of Augustus' city; and, this paper hopes, achieves it, contesting, if not conquering, more monolithic representations.