

VITRUVIUS

who vitruvius was?

An Eye for Architectural Theory

"DE ARCHITECTURA" IS A TREATISE ON ARCHITECTURE WRITTEN BY THE ROMAN ARCHITECT VITRUVIUS AND DEDICATED TO HIS PATRON, THE EMPEROR CAESAR AUGUSTUS. AGRIPPA WAS READY TO BE AUGUSTUS'S RIGHT-HAND MAN. HE DEDICATED BOTH HIS ORGANIZATIONAL TALENT AND HIS HUGE FORTUNE TO THE CITIES AND BUILDINGS OF THE EMPIRE. IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO IMAGINE LIKE COULD NOT AGREE DURING THE "PRODIGIOUS DECADE" OF THE TWENTIES OF FIRST CENTURY B.C. TWO AS EXCEPTIONAL ARCHITECTS AS VITRUVIUS AND AGRIPPA. IN THE SAME CITY OF ROME AND UNDER THE PROTECTION OF AUGUSTUS. AND WHO WHILE ONE WROTE THE BEST AND MORE COMPLETE TREATY ON CLASSIC ARCHITECTURE, THE OTHER PROJECTED AND EXECUTED HUGEST WORKS OF CONSTRUCTION AND URBANISM OF THE ROMAN WORLD.

AN ARCHITECT OUGHT TO BE AN EDUCATED MAN SO AS TO LEAVE A MORE LASTING REMEMBRANCE IN HIS TREATISES. SECONDLY, HE MUST HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF DRAWING SO THAT HE CAN READILY MAKE SKETCHES TO SHOW THE APPEARANCE OF THE WORK WHICH HE PROPOSES. GEOMETRY, ALSO, IS OF MUCH ASSISTANCE IN ARCHITECTURE, AND IN PARTICULAR IT TEACHES US THE USE OF THE RULE AND COMPASS, BY WHICH ESPECIALLY WE ACQUIRE READINESS IN MAKING PLANS FOR BUILDINGS IN THEIR GOUNDS, AND RIGHTLY APPLY THE SQUARE, THE LEVEL, AND THE PLUMMET. BY MEANS OF OPTICS, AGAIN, THE LIGHT IN BUILDINGS CAN BE DRAWN FROM FIXED QUARTERS OF THE SKY. IT IS TRUE THAT IT IS BY ARITHMETIC THAT THE TOTAL COST OF BUILDINGS IS CALCULATED AND MEASUREMENTS ARE COMPUTED, BUT DIFFICULT QUESTIONS INVOLVING SYMMETRY ARE SOLVED BY MEANS OF GEOMETRICAL THEORIES AND METHODS.

A. Propriety is that perfection of style which comes when a work is authoritatively constructed on approved principles. It arises from prescription (Greek *θεματισμῶ*), from usage, or from nature. From prescription, in the case of hypaethral edifices, open to the sky, in honour of Jupiter Lightning, the Heaven, the Sun, or the Moon: for these are gods whose semblances and manifestations we behold before our very eyes in the sky when it is cloudless and bright. The temples of Minerva, Mars, and Hercules, will be Doric, since the virile strength of these gods makes daintiness entirely inappropriate to their houses. In temples to Venus, Flora, Proserpine, Spring-Water, and the Nymphs, the Corinthian order will be found to have peculiar significance, because these are delicate, divinities and so its rather slender outlines, its flowers, leaves, and ornamental volutes will lend propriety where it is due. The construction of temples of the Ionic order to Juno, Diana, Father Bacchus, and the other gods of that kind, will be in keeping with the middle position which they hold; for the building of such will be an appropriate combination of the severity of the Doric and the delicacy of the Corinthian.

Propriety arises from usage when buildings having magnificent interiors are provided with elegant entrance-courts to correspond; for there will be no propriety in the spectacle of an elegant interior approached by a low, mean entrance. Or, if dentils be carved in the cornice of the Doric entablature or triglyphs represented in the Ionic entablature over the cushion-shaped capitals of the columns, the effect will be spoiled by the transfer of the peculiarities of the one order of building to the other, the usage in each class having been fixed long ago.

B. ECONOMY DENOTES THE PROPER MANAGEMENT OF MATERIALS AND OF SITE, AS WELL AS A THRIFTY BALANCING OF COST AND COMMON SENSE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF WORKS. THIS WILL BE OBSERVED IF, IN THE FIRST PLACE, THE ARCHITECT DOES NOT DEMAND THINGS WHICH CANNOT BE FOUND OR MADE READY WITHOUT GREAT EXPENSE. FOR EXAMPLE: IT IS NOT EVERYWHERE THAT THERE IS PLENTY OF PITSAND, RUBBER, FIR, CLEAR FIR, AND MARBLE, SINCE THEY ARE PRODUCED IN DIFFERENT PLACES AND TO ASSEMBLE THEM IS DIFFICULT AND COSTLY. WHERE THERE IS NO PITSAND, WE MUST USE THE KINDS WASHED UP BY RIVERS OR BY THE SEA; THE LACK OF FIR AND CLEAR FIR MAY BE EVADED BY USING CYPRESS, POPLAR, ELM, OR PINE; AND OTHER PROBLEMS WE MUST SOLVE IN SIMILAR WAYS.

A SECOND STAGE IN ECONOMY IS REACHED WHEN WE HAVE TO PLAN THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF DWELLINGS SUITABLE FOR ORDINARY HOUSEHOLDERS, FOR GREAT WEALTH, OR FOR THE HIGH POSITION OF THE STATESMAN. A HOUSE IN TOWN OBVIOUSLY CALLS FOR ONE FORM OF CONSTRUCTION; THAT INTO WHICH STREAM THE PRODUCTS OF COUNTRY ESTATES REQUIRES ANOTHER; THIS WILL NOT BE THE SAME IN THE CASE OF MONEY-LENDERS AND STILL DIFFERENT FOR THE OPULENT AND LUXURIOUS; FOR THE POWERS UNDER WHOSE DELIBERATIONS THE COMMONWEALTH IS GUIDED DWELLINGS ARE TO BE PROVIDED ACCORDING TO THEIR SPECIAL NEEDS: AND, IN A WORD, *THE PROPER FORM OF ECONOMY MUST BE OBSERVED IN BUILDING HOUSES FOR EACH AND EVERY CLASS.*