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TELL ME A CURIOUS (HI)STORY. HISTORICAL CONTENT IN VITRUVIUS' *DE ARCHITECTURA*¹

ABSTRACT. Kołoczek Bartosz Jan, Tell me a curious (hi)story. Historical content in Vitruvius' *De architectura* (*Opowiedz mi ciekawą historię. Treści historyczne w „De architectura” Witruwiusza*).

The article examines the significance of history-themed passages (*historiae*) in Vitruvius' architectural treatise *De architectura* and assesses their veracity vis-à-vis their rhetorical impact. The article's particular focus lies on Vitruvius' reflections on history, since the sound knowledge of it—as the author claims—is vital for any competent architect. It asserts that Vitruvius tends to stretch the historical truth whenever he makes an attempt at self-promotion (as an author or an architect) or seeks to win the approval of his patron emperor Augustus, to whom he dedicated his work.

Keywords: Vitruvius; Roman erudite literature; Greek history; architecture

Scholars who study the ancient Roman attitudes towards the past chiefly derive their material from Roman historiographers, whereas very few have examined how and why Roman non-historical writers (grammarians, agronomists, rhetors and engineers) engaged with Rome's past in their texts. The following analysis considers an example of such a non-historical work that nevertheless frequently reflects on history—*De architectura libri decem* by Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, a military engineer constructing war machines under Julius Caesar and Augustus. Vitruvius' architectural treatise neither discusses specific problems nor provides

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readers with solutions; instead, it compiles an encyclopedia of knowledge to be mastered by a prospective architect.²

The thoroughly original Vitruvian approach transcends generic constraints on ancient literature on engineering, mathematics and physics, pioneered by oft-quoted Hellenistic constructors like Ctesibius, Archimedes and Eratosthenes.³ An erudite writer of great ambition, Vitruvius interspersed his treatise with asides, digressions and excursions on a variety of topics, including historical matters. Although Vitruvius' highly rhetorical prose visibly draws from the oratory practice of the day, A. König observes that surprisingly few modern scholars parse *De architectura* for rhetorical influences,⁴ even though studies on other Roman texts have illuminated historiography's debt to rhetoric.⁵

The following article simultaneously aims to examine Vitruvius' concept of history, discuss his rationale for introducing historical asides in *De architectura* and appraise the veracity of given information to facilitate its use as a historical source. Although scholars frequently touched upon historical content in *De architectura*, they mostly discussed select passages.⁶ Whereas E. Romano's brief yet seminal study (2011) did analyze Vitruvius' historical content and its terminology,⁷ it also indicated that *De architectura* demands a lengthier analysis, focused specifically on Vitruvius' historical veracity and his links to rhetoric.⁸ This article intends to be such an analysis, examining a selection of historical reflections in *De architectura* and tracing the author's ostensibly ambivalent stance towards historical truth.

²Cf. Gros 1982: 670–671 and André 1987: 268, 280 (who stresses that both Vitruvius and Columella ideologize their chosen fields). Some draw parallels between Vitruvius and Varro's encyclopedic approaches: see Della Corte 1978: 51; Mazzoli 2004: 188–189; however, if Varro beheld architecture as the last of *disciplinae*, then Vitruvius calls architecture the greatest of them. Vitruvius' treatment of his subject matter notably blurs the traditional divide into theoretical and practical approaches. Cf. Callebat 2000: 204–205 on Vitruvius' encyclopedism.

³On Vitruvius' Greek predecessors writing literature on mechanics, see in particular Fleury 1994: 195–201.

⁴See König 2009: 30–33. J.M. André (1987: 267, 270–271) has already drawn attention to scholars dismissing Vitruvius' debt to rhetoric, but only a select few engaged with this topic (Callebat 1994; Geertman 1994: 16–30). Similarly, Formisano (2016) and Oksanish (2019: *passim*) exhorted their colleagues to analyze Vitruvius' text as a literary whole, in lieu of cursory readings of selected book introductions and authorial asides.

⁵See André 1987: 265; cf. Rambaud 1953: 9–12. For details, see Woodman 1988; Damon 2007; Laird 2009.

⁶See e. g. Fraser 1970; Berthold 1978; Plommer 1979; Lesk 2007; King 2008. One exception is Oksanish' recent work (2019).

⁷Romano 2011: 2–3. The scholar illuminatingly traces Vitruvius' debt to Varro's antiquarian output (6–9): Vitruvius frequently quotes Varro, uses the so-called Varronian etymologies and borrows Varro's nomenclature on past happenings (*antiquitas/antiquus, vetustas/vetus, maiores*), although without Varro's subtlety.

⁸Romano cursorily reads Vitruvius' *historiae* as etiologies (*storia d'origine*) for architectural practices (2011: 3–5, 10), skimming the most obvious references in the text.

At the very beginning of this analysis, we must stress the importance Vitruvius gives to history, one of key cultural competencies of a good architect, enumerating history right after draftsmanship and mathematics and before philosophy, music, medicine, law and astrology:

To be educated, he must be an experienced draftsman, well versed in geometry, familiar with history, a diligent student of philosophy, know music, have some acquaintance with medicine, understand the rulings of legal experts, and have a clear grasp of astronomy and the ways of Heaven.⁹

Further on, Vitruvius develops his point, showcasing that *historiae* may justify using particular ornaments:

He should know a great deal of history [historias autem plures novisse oportet] because architects often include ornaments in their work, and ought to be able to supply anyone who asks with an explanation why they have introduced certain motifs.¹⁰

After discussing two origin stories for using statues as building supports—of which more anon—Vitruvius reiterates the importance of *historiae* in an architect's skillset:

There are other histories of the same type, with which the architect is obliged to have some acquaintance.¹¹

Relevantly, Vitruvius' *historiae*, always in plural, denote short stories, architect's tools meant to educate, entertain and endorse one's decisions. Although Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, written about a century later, also mentions *historiae* as explanatory anecdotes,¹² he also employs the word to denote other meanings, whereas Vitruvius remains faithful to a single definition. Vitruvius' sole use of *historia* in singular denotes stories of very remote, mythological past:

⁹Vitruv. *De arch.* I 1, 3. On Vitruvius' view on cultural and intellectual competencies of a good architect, see Goguy 1978 and Oksanish 2019: 119–143. All translations of *De architectura* in this paper come from Rowland's edition (2001).

¹⁰Vitruv. *De arch.* I 1,5.

¹¹Vitruv. *De arch.* I 1,6.

¹²The encyclopedist uses phrases such as *res, historiae, observationes* or [*exempla*] *historica* to refer jointly to: (1) accounts on historical events; (2) anecdotes (e. g. index to Plin. *Nat. hist.* VII 15: *Historica circa dentes. Historica circa infantes*); (3) historical *exempla/precedens* (e. g. index to Plin. *Nat. hist.* II 25: *exempla historica*; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* XXXI 41: *de salis auctoritate historica*, with *historica* connoting a slightly different context than the preceding anecdotes); (4) scholarly divagations in the Herodotean spirit, in agreement with the title of Pliny's entire work (e. g. Plin. *Nat. hist.* VII, 72: *sed mox plura de hoc, cum membratim historia decurret*; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* XI 121: *Nunc per singulas corporum partes praeter iam dicta membratim tractetur historia*). In turn, *res* denotes facts and singular pieces of information (Pliny in *Nat. Hist. Praef.* 17 claims to have collected over twenty thousand *res*), to be contextualized and legitimized by aforementioned *historiae* and *observationes* (Pliny's own musings). See Locher 1986: 23–28; Naas 2002: 180–181; Carey 2006: 31.

Likewise, if statues of male figures hold up mutules or cornices, we call them telamones – the reasons for this or why they are so called are not to be found in the history books – and the Greeks call them atlantes. For Atlas is portrayed in history as holding up the cosmos, because he was first to see to it that, because of his vigorous intellect and his cleverness, the course of the sun and the moon and the principle of the revolution of all the stars would be passed on to humankind; because he bestowed this favor, he is depicted by painters and sculptors as holding up the firmament, (...) ¹³

Even though mythical Atlas appears to have little to do with history, Vitruvius rationalistically reimagines Atlas as a legendary benefactor of humanity, allegorizing away Atlas' depictions having him hold up the heavens. Vitruvius' omission of supernatural elements shows parallels with a definition formulated by a 4th-century grammarian Servius; having used late Republican and early Imperial authors to comment on Virgil's texts, Servius distinguishes between myth and history in the following manner:

A fable (fabula) and an argument (argumentum), that is, history: they differ inasmuch as fables speak of events against nature, no matter if they truly happened or not (facta) (for example, the story of Pasiphae), whereas histories speak of events in accord with nature (such as the story of Phaedra), no matter if they truly happened or not. ¹⁴

Hence, Vitruvius' excursus on Atlas fits the paradigm of a past event 'in accord with nature' (*secundum naturam*)—that is, probable. Not only does Vitruvius equate history with a captivating tale but also (apparently) does not care about its veracity. Similar views appear in Vitruvius' numerous authorial asides, in which he frequently and openly speaks of his aims and methods, providing material for this analysis.

Accordingly, Vitruvius' preface to Book Five contains the following statement:

For writing about architecture is not like a history, or poems. Histories, of themselves, hold the reader. For they offer the varied prospects of novelty. Again in poems, the measures and feet of the music and the nice arrangement of words and opinions, the recital of verses distributed among the several characters, entice the thoughts of the reader and, without hindrance, lead him on to the very close of the book. But in architectural compositions this cannot take place. For the terms, used by the special necessity of the craft, by their unfamiliar sound seem obscure to the perception. ¹⁵

Architectural treatises, technical and complicated, cannot by nature attain the elegance and relatability of historical prose and lyric. Thus, Vitruvius strives to attain maximal clarity and brevity yet occasionally embellishes his lecture with

¹³ Vitruv. *De arch.* VI 7, 6.

¹⁴ Serv. *Ad Aen.* I 235. My translation.

¹⁵ Vitruv. *De arch.* V *Praef.* 1–2.

digressions: *historiae*. A Vitruvian architect is not to look for truth (no reference to truth surfaces in *De architectura*!), but to present his points in such a manner that will propagate his ideas and appeal to the broadest possible audience. To captivate his readers' attention, Vitruvius relates anecdotes, war stories, trivia and famous deeds to entertain and edify.¹⁶ Sharing Cicero and Quintilian's proclivity to use historical material to prop up one's arguments,¹⁷ Vitruvius nonetheless never openly refers to *exempla* in that manner, since his anecdotes (as we shall see) are more than exemplifications of simple points.

Before we examine Vitruvius' longer historical asides, I would like to briefly consider how Vitruvius programmatically selects and adapts his sources. Book Eight of *De architectura* enumerates authors who contributed to Vitruvius' knowledge on natural history:

I have seen some of these things myself, and I discovered the rest recorded in Greek books, and these are the authors of those texts: Theophrastos, Timaeus, Posidonios, Hegesias, Herodotus, Aristides, and Metrodorus, who, with great powers of observation and boundless zeal declared in their writings that the properties of places, the characteristics of waters, and the qualities of the regions of the heavens have been distributed in this fashion because of the inclination of the cosmos.¹⁸

The preceding list of authorities on natural history is the only one in *De architectura*. Puzzlingly, although Vitruvius appears to value an architect's historical competency more than knowledge on natural matters, his historical asides never give their sources. Yet, the ostensibly haphazard ordering of the preceding list fits well into the Vitruvian pattern of quoting *historiae* with little or no apparent regard for their chronological and cultural context. The text of *De architectura* does not follow a chronological order, with its author juxtaposing archaic, Classical and Hellenistic Greek edifices with Persian and Roman buildings. Yet, this seemingly anachronistic approach conveys Vitruvius' belief in the universal genius of humanity, independently expressed through timeless canons of beauty, function and proportion. The choice of authorities in the quoted

¹⁶ Cf. Gros 1982: 675; André 1987: 277. See Oksanish 2019: 88–93 on Demetrius I Poliorcetes' siege of Rhodes and the citizens' attempts at appeasing engineer Diogenes (*De arch.* X 16, 2–8): Oksanish convincingly connects this episode to Vitruvius' upholding the public image of the architectural profession. Similar motifs abound in 1st and 2nd c. compilations by Valerius Maximus, Sextus Julius Frontinus, Polyaeus and Plutarchus of Chaeronea (*Sayings of Kings and Commanders* and *Sayings of Spartans*). Pace Callebat (2000: 206), it seems improbable that Vitruvius purposefully introduced so many asides in his text merely to expose difficulties faced by architects. In fact, *exempla* were commonly used by Roman authors (historiographers and orators above all). See Chaplin 2000: 5–31 as a general introduction to the topic; also Roller 2009.

¹⁷ See in particular Cic. *De orat.* II 62–66 and Quint. *Inst.* X 1, 31, 34: Quintilian, most likely alluding to Cicero, compares history to poetry: *est enim proxima poetis, et quodam modo carmen solutum*.

¹⁸ Vitruv. *De arch.* VIII 3, 27.

passage also reflects Vitruvius' implicit methodology. Enumerating naturalists who also delved into historical matters, Vitruvius lists Herodotus (known for his predilection for the fantastic), Posidonius of Apamea and Timaeus of Tauromenium (both of the Hellenistic era). Since very little survives of texts by the latter two writers, it is difficult to appraise their literary skill and draw useful parallels. Nonetheless, surviving ancient testimonies praise Timaeus' beautiful style but criticize his inclination towards embellishing his accounts to capture his audiences' attention,¹⁹ an inclination shared by Herodotus. It is likely that Vitruvius grouped authors who valued style more than substance and strayed from truth in order to tell a good story.

Surprisingly, Vitruvius neither mentions Roman historians nor relates anecdotes on Roman history (excluding emblematic legends on Romulus and Numa), in stark contrast to other Latin erudite authors (*e. g.* Varro, Pliny the Elder and Aulus Gellius). Several possible explanations exist for Vitruvius' avoidance of referencing Roman historians and histories. First, Vitruvius wrote his work for an educated Roman audience, dedicating the text to Augustus and frequently referring to matters of art, esthetics and ethics; as such, he expected his readers to be conversant with both the Roman and Greek cultural repertoire. Accordingly, to reference less-known trivia on Greek history not only falls into the Hellenistic pattern of prizing the obscure and rare but also speaks of an architect's competency to entertain his audiences by novel and exciting *historiae*. Second, the Roman historiography of the Republican period by and large followed the dry annalistic paradigm, not yet subject to influences of epideictic oratory that profoundly shaped Hellenistic historiographers like Timaeus. Livy's was still a work in progress, whereas texts by Lucius Cornelius Sisenna, Sallust and Gaius Asinius Pollio spoke of recent civil wars and other political conflicts Vitruvius may have wanted to gloss over, since to describe such matters would not interest his readers and could complicate Vitruvius' political standing with his benefactors. Third, since Vitruvius did not show any marked interest in sustained historical inquiry, he probably could not find any captivating examples on Roman history that his audiences would not know of. He did, however, refer to Julius Caesar's campaigns²⁰—drawing not from Caesar's well-read memoirs, but from personal experience of campaigning and conversing with Caesar. Reminiscing about the best days of his life, Vitruvius simultaneously seeks to gain favor with Augustus.²¹

However, Vitruvius' surprising omission of Roman historical material and his recasting texts of Greek historians as mere containers for interesting trivia can be

¹⁹ Polybius severely criticized Timaeus' style in Book XII of his *Histories*; nonetheless, Polybius' opinion appears prejudiced. See Baron 2013: 52–88.

²⁰ Vitruv. *De arch.* II 9, 15–16; VIII, 3,25; also X 16, 11–12 (on the siege of Massalia).

²¹ See Milczanowski 2013 on employing Caesar's memory in the political upheaval following his death.

explained in yet another manner. If Vitruvius did not need specific references to Roman historians to spin intriguing and edifying tales, then he certainly did not refrain from citing late Republican authors representing other literary genres.²² The architect draws from and praises the learning of Lucretius, the exemplar of poetry, Cicero, the master of prose, and Varro, the authority on specialist literature, situating his own work in relation to their erudition and writing skill.²³ Vitruvius' predilection for archaizing Varro, as E. Romero has convincingly argued,²⁴ comes from Varro's laudable deference to the Roman antiquity—customs, building practices, inventions, etymologies—and his avoidance of inflammatory political content. Most relevantly, Vitruvius selected his sources not according to their genres but rather according to rare and intriguing content he could employ to exemplify his points.

At this point, we turn from the general to the specific and consider the construction and veracity of Vitruvius' *historiae*. The author gives two examples to further his argument about architects' need to recall many *historiae*, respectively concerning supports shaped like caryatids and barbarians.²⁵ Relating to caryatid supports, Vitruvius claims that they commemorated the Greek victory over the Peloponnesian city of Caria, who sided with the Persian enemies against the Spartans. The Greeks retaliated by slaughtering all men and forbade women from ever taking off their heavy adornments as a form of punishment; holding a great burden for being traitors, Vitruvius has these traitorous women depicted in Greek architecture as supports, forever bearing the load of their betrayal. Regarding supports shaped like barbarians, Vitruvius provides an extended account: ostensibly, they were first placed in a portico commemorating the Laconian victory over the Persians at the Battle of Plataea:

Non minus Lacones, Pausania Agesilae filio duce, Plataeeo proelio pauca manu infinitum numerum exercitus Persarum cum superavissent, acto cum gloria triumpho spoliorum et praedae, porticum Persicam ex manubiis, laudis et virtutis civium indicem, victoriae posteris pro tropaeo constituerunt. Ibiq̄ue captivorum simulacra barbarico vestis ornatu, superbia meritis contumeliis punita, sustinentia tectum conlocaverunt, uti et hostes horrescerent timore eorum fortitudinis effectus, et cives id exemplum virtutis aspicientes gloria erecti ad defendendam libertatem essent parati.²⁶

²² For ties between Vitruvius and late Republican and Augustan literary circles, see Romano 2016.

²³ Vitruv. *De arch.* IX *Praef.* 17; See Sadurska 2004: 13–14.

²⁴ Romano 2011: 6–9; see also 2016: 347–349.

²⁵ Vitruv. *De arch.* I 1, 5.

²⁶ Vitruv. *De arch.* I 1, 6: “The Spartans, too, led by Pausanias son of Agesilas, with only a handful of troops defeated an endless number of Persian infantry at the Battle of Plataea, and after they had won decisively, they set up the Portico of the Persians as a trophy of victory for posterity – after, of course, a triumphal celebration glorious for its spoils and booty. This portico was financed by the prizes of war in praise of the citizens' courage and as a monument of their victory for future generations. There they placed images of the Persian captives, decked out in their ornate

In the preceding passage, the author erroneously claims that the Greeks held a “triumphal celebration” (*acto cum gloria triumpho*) over their enemies: he does not specify the portico’s location (most probably, the Persian Stoa in Sparta, described by Pausanias²⁷) and Romanizes the event by classifying it as a triumph. Furthermore, Vitruvius wrongly alleges that the Greek force at Plataea consisted only of the Spartans and misnames Pausanias as the son of Agesilaos, whereas a more reliable authority on that matter, Herodotus, claims that Pausanias descended from Cleombrotus.²⁸

Vitruvius’ account on caryatids poses further interpretive problems. The author probably refers to Caryai, a Laconian town also mentioned by Pausanias,²⁹ razed by the Spartan force under Archidamus III in 369/368 BC in retaliation for their siding with Thebes during their invasion of Laconia.³⁰ No obvious thread links this event to the Persian Wars;³¹ similarly, no ancient authority save Vitruvius links Caryai to caryatids. T. Homolle strived to connect Vitruvius’ caryatids to Praxiteles’ *Thyiades* and *Caryatids*, created circa the destruction of Caryai.³² However, these Praxitelean works of art, free-standing depictions of dancing females in short dresses, bear little resemblance to load-bearing static supports depicting adorned women.³³ Apart from their name, no obvious similarity exists between two types of depictions. Likewise, female support figures of the *Erechtheion*, nowadays commonly known as the *Caryatids*, received their name only in the modern era and precisely due to Vitruvius’ identification.³⁴ It remains unknown whether this was their original appellation. H. Plommer rightly suggests that Vitruvius referred to some actual female-shaped supports in Sparta; however, the architect relates a falsified origin story, perhaps made up by a local guide,

barbarian dress, holding up the roof, their pride punished with well-deserved outrage. In addition, by this means enemies might shrink back, terror stricken at the results of Spartan courage. At the same time, the citizens, looking upon this example of battle courage, uplifted by pride, would be prepared to defend their own liberty.”

²⁷ Paus. III 11, 3 reveals that some Persians, such as Mardonius, were depicted as columns.

²⁸ See Hdt IX 64 (*cf.* VII, 205).

²⁹ Paus. III 10, 7 relates that Caryai boasts of the only free-standing statue of Aphrodite *Caryatis*, a site of yearly ritual dances for the Laconian maidens.

³⁰ Xen. *Hell.* VI 5, 25; VII, 1, 28. See Plommer 1979: 100; King 2008. *Cf.* McEwen 2003: 30.

³¹ T. Homolle (1917: 16) and other scholars such as G.L. Huxley (1967) tried to connect the razing of Caryai and slaughter of its inhabitants with a concurrent rise of Greek nationalist sentiment, fanned by Caryai collaboration with pro-Persian Thebes. For other views on Vitruvius’ account of the Persian Wars, see Vickers 1985: 4–5; 2014: 120–123, 130–131.

³² Homolle 1917: 18.

³³ See Plin. *Nat. Hist.* XXXVI 23; Plommer 1979: 98–100; *cf.* Corso 2004: 165; King 2008. For *Caryatid* depictions, see Fleury 1990: 74–80; Rykwert 1996: 129–138, and, most importantly, King 2008.

³⁴ See Plommer 1979: 101; Vickers 1985: 27–28; Fleury 1990: 75; Lesk 2007; King 2008 and, most significantly, Vickers 2014.

who fabricated a link between the supports, the renowned Persian Wars and the illustrious Persian Stoa.³⁵

No matter the exact source of Vitruvian historical content, Vitruvius' stories have a very tenuous grounding in concurrent sources. Nevertheless, one needs to acknowledge that Vitruvius meant not to write a detailed and comprehensive historical treatise but to support his architectural designs with *argumenta* ("Historias autem plures novisse oportet, quod multa ornamenta saepe in operibus architecti designant, de quibus argumentis rationem, cur fecerint, quaerentibus reddere debent"), requiring a quick wit and practice in spinning fascinating and edifying yarns.³⁶

Also relevant is the manner in which Vitruvius comments on the Lacaedemonian victory at Plataea and their commemorative trophy. First, he praises the Spartan mettle in face of overwhelming odds, pitting *pauca manus* (a handful of troops) contra *numerus infinitus* (an endless number), an abstract yet rousing image. The triumphal celebration abounds in spoils and booty (*cum gloria spoliiorum et praedae*), whereas the monument praises its glory and pride (*laudis et virtutis index*). Concentrating on the monument's symbolic significance, Vitruvius reveals his views about architecture as the commemorative medium: expressing humanity's greatest achievements, propagating virtues and edifying the society. In other words, it is the edifice and its figurative glory that contextualize the distant past, not *vice versa*.

The analyzed examples position history in an ancillary position to architecture: history complements and explains architecture, embedding it in symbolic axiologies of the past and future. Vitruvius writes about barbarians holding up the roof, "their pride punished with well-deserved outrage." The monument commemorates the event, so that "by [its] means enemies might shrink back, terror stricken at the results of Spartan courage, [whereas] [...] the citizens, looking upon this example of battle courage, uplifted by pride, would be prepared to defend their own liberty." This carefully crafted discourse sets out to edify and stir up patriotic sentiments, deftly spinning a story abounding in lofty abstract nouns such as glory (*gloria*), courage (*virtus*), freedom (*libertas*) or fear (*timor*).

Another of Vitruvius' historical asides concerns the invention of the three orders of architecture.³⁷ Nonetheless, its very beginning indicates that Vitruvius does not aim to present reliable data on architectural forms: instead, his aim

³⁵ See Plommer 1979: 100; cf. King 2008.

³⁶ This Vitruvian excursus, as I. McEwen (2003: 30–31) observes, could have referred to their recent installation in the Corinthian portico at the Forum of Augustus. However, McEwen probably treads too far when she reads the punishment of the Caryatids vis-à-vis the vengeance exacted by Augustus on Caesar's murderers. Similarly, Oksanish 2019: 70–85 reads the Vitruvian tale in light of the conflict between Octavian, Antonius and Cleopatra.

³⁷ Vitruv. *De arch.* IV 1, 3–12.

is to produce a delightful piece of oratory, drawing from myths, allusions and symbols attached to particular orders. The architect limits the historical content about Asia Minor and its Athenian colonies to bare necessities; furthermore, he mixes and matches diverse traditions with no regard for chronology and cultural context.³⁸ For example, we learn that:

the Athenians, spurred by an oracle from Delphi, founded thirteen colonies in Asia at one time with the approval of all the rest of Greece. They chose leaders for each of the colonies, and gave supreme authority to Ion, the son of Xuthus and Creusa. Apollo of Delphi had proclaimed Ion as his own son in oracular responses.³⁹

Vitruvius goes on to enumerate the said thirteen colonies and records changes in their roster, only then proceeding to discuss the three orders of architecture. Inconsequentially, the author misrepresents the political organization of the League: he first depicts Ion as the eponymous archon and leader of all Athenian colonists,⁴⁰ only to claim that every city in the Ionian League possessed a right to vote (*suffragium*), offer communal sacrifices (*sacra*) and jointly decide about matters of importance to the entire league (*commune consilium*). Perhaps Vitruvius imprecisely alludes to the temple precinct at Panonium (mentioned by Herodotus) and the regional worship community around it.⁴¹ Another puzzling aspect of Vitruvius' narration concerns the Athenian colonists reportedly erecting the temple of Apollo Panionios after the fashion of those they have seen in Achaia (perhaps a reference to the Roman province) and Dorian cities (*in Dorieon civitatibus*) instead of following their own order.

³⁸The list of thirteen Athenian colonies in Asia Minor almost parallels the list of twelve colonies given by Herodotus (Hdt I 142; cf. Strab. VIII 7,1). The first reference to a league of thirteen cities surfaces in an honorific decree for Milesian strategos Hippostratus (189/188 BC). Neither Herodotus nor any other ancient authority refers to the thirteenth lost city, Melite (perhaps Vitruvius refers to the Carian city of Melia, razed by the Ionians). Vitruvius' list shows no geographical or ethnic order; see Kleiner, Hommel, Müller–Wiener 1967: 78; Ragone 1986: 188; Fleury 1990: 55, 58. Another shortcoming of Vitruvius concerns Smyrna, who, he claims, became a part of the Ionian League thanks to benevolence of Attalus and Arsinoe. Most commentaries emend Attalus to Lisymachus, husband of one Arsinoe who indeed succeeded at joining Smyrna to the league circa 290 BC (see Fleury 1990: 59–60; Gros 1993: 2). According to G. Ragone (1986: 190), Vitruvius used lost historical accounts to legitimize Smyrna (and Colophon's) allegiance to the Attalid dynasty. No matter which interpretation we choose, Vitruvius evidently prioritizes composition and imagery over historical veracity.

³⁹Vitruv. *De arch.* IV 1, 4.

⁴⁰No Greek historical source corroborates this account, whereas the sole piece of supporting evidence comes from Velleius Paterculus (Vell. Pat. I, 4), who might have copied Vitruvius. Herodotus specifies that the colonization of Ionia began from Athens, but not all colonists came from that polis (Hdt I 146). It was Thucydides who claimed that the Athenians spearheaded the colonization effort (Tuc. I 12); see Fleury 1990: 55–56; cf. Gros 1993: 10. About Ion in the context of the Greek colonization in Asia Minor, see Kuciak 2013.

⁴¹Panonium appears in Hdt., I 142 and 148, also see below.

The author never elucidates his point and abruptly concludes the historical excursus, with the remainder of the passage abstractedly examining the genesis and makeup of the Ionian and Corinthian orders. Likely, Vitruvius echoes the Herodotean tradition that the Ionians came to Ionia via the Peloponnesus,⁴² with Strabo tracing their migration from Attica to Achaia to Asia Minor.⁴³ Vitruvius' slipshod presentation of facts showcases that the author concentrated on style and engagement rather than content: the mythologically-tinged excursus does not explain the genesis of the architectural orders but rather obfuscates the matter. I postulate that Vitruvius' meandering presentation and allusions to Ion meant to draw parallels between the Greek founder hero and Augustus, to whom *De architectura* was dedicated. Vitruvius' description of Ion abounds in Romanized phrases applicable to the Roman princeps (*summa imperii potestas*), underscores Ion's divine-sanctioned authority and likens Ion to his (and Augustus') patron deity, Apollo. Consequently, the Vitruvian allusion to the temple of Apollo Panionios has no basis in fact (the Ionian League's sanctuary in Panionium belonged to Poseidon Heliconius),⁴⁴ but it resonates with Augustus' worship of Apollo,⁴⁵ strengthening correspondences between the Greek hero and the Roman princeps.

Another Vitruvian excursus of dubious historical veracity relates to the Rhodians, who attacked Halicarnassus after the death of Mausolus and ascension of his sister-wife Artemisia II of Caria. Vitruvius narrates that the queen ordered her subjects to let in the Rhodian ships and soldiers. What they did not know was that Mausolus had built a secret harbor and another navy. When the Rhodians began exiting their ships, Artemisia sailed her fleet and captured empty ships. She then ordered her forces to kill the Rhodian men, seize their ships and sail back to Rhodes: the returning ships, adorned with flower garlands, were welcomed in the Rhodian harbor and disgorged Artemisia's soldiers, who seized control over the unprepared island. Artemisia reportedly commemorated this event by

⁴²Hdt. I 145.

⁴³Strab. VIII, 1,2 and VIII 7, 1–4.

⁴⁴See Hdt., I 148; Strabo, XIV 1 20; Pomp. Mela, *Chor.* I 17; Plin., *Nat. Hist.* V 113; see Ragone 1986: 179; Fleury 1990: 58–61; Gros 1993: 2, 15; Rykwert 1996: 249. About the temple precinct in Panionium, see Kleiner, Hommel, Müller-Wiener 1967, who explained away Vitruvius' shortcoming by claiming that he mistook Panionium for Apollo's sanctuary in Didyma (1967: 9). *Contra* Fleury 1990: 60. Other scholars—Ferri (1960: 141); Plommer (1970: 182), Fogazza (1973: 161) and Ragone (1986: 184–186)—draw our attention to an Athenian inscription of the 1st c. BC which, dedicated to Apollo, calls the god *Pythios, Klarios, Panionios* (*JG* III 175). They argue that Vitruvius referred to Apollo's sanctuary in Claros; *cf.* Gros 1993: 13–16. Perhaps, as Gros muses, the growth of the Apollonian center in Claros under the Attalids overshadowed the memory of the older sanctuary in Panionium, but all evidence we have in that matter remains circumstantial.

⁴⁵The significance of Augustus' devotion to Apollo stands out clearly when we realize that Augustus erected a sumptuous Palatine temple for a god who, in Asconius Pedianus' words (*In toga cand.* 97, 25 – 98, 5), previously had a single temple in Rome, *in Circo Flaminio*.

erecting a statue on Rhodes that showed a woman branding the personification of Rhodes with a mark of slavery.⁴⁶

R. M. Berthold derides the entire episode as an improbable tall tale fabricated to satisfy the Roman curiosity about an untypical Rhodian monument that was shielded from foreigners' eyes in an inaccessible (*abaton*) place; nonetheless, many scholars have accepted the Vitruvian tale as recording a historical event.⁴⁷ The scholarly dispute concerned not the veracity of the passage or its significance to Vitruvius but the chronology of the described event and its putative historical context.⁴⁸ Appropriately, the following paragraph examines evidence against the historicity of the Rhodian episode as narrated by Vitruvius.

Notwithstanding the reasoning given by Vitruvius for the attack—the alleged Rhodian outrage at a woman ruling over Caria⁴⁹—the purported chronology of the episode does not match other sources on that period. According to Demosthenes, Mausolos seized and maintained a garrison on Rhodes (355/354 BC) before his death (353/352 BC), exploiting the fact that the Rhodians overthrew their democratic governments, became an oligarchy under Agesilaos and broke away from the Second Athenian League.⁵⁰ To attack Halicarnassus, any putative Rhodian party would have had to overrun the island and dispose of the Carian garrison and sympathizers—and in a relatively short window of time, since Artemisia appears to have quickly seized the control over Rhodes. No historical source associates the very brief interregnum with any trouble or turmoil on Rhodes. The island's small navy could not have engaged Caria. In the naval force of Aegean city-states that turned against the Athens, Chios, Byzantium and Rhodes have jointly provided about 100 vessels: a fraction of that number would not suffice to overcome the Carian navy.⁵¹ Internally divided and dependent on Caria, the Rhodians could neither attack nor besiege nor control Halicarnassus. No other authority on war stratagems speaks of Artemisia's ploy;⁵² moreover, the idea of letting one's enemies into the city appears impractical. Artemisia could have simply closed the gates and

⁴⁶ Vitruv. *De arch.* II 8, 14–15.

⁴⁷ See e. g. Ruzicka 1992: 109–111, who, despite doubts about Vitruvius' veracity, accepts the story about the Rhodian excursion as true; Bryce 2009: 278; Pennington, Higham 2003: 28; in particular Sebillotte Cuchet 2015: 233–235, who focuses on Artemisia's gender and asserts that Vitruvius' veracity is commonly accepted.

⁴⁸ Berthold 1978: 129–130. See in particular Momigliano 1975: 518, 520–521.

⁴⁹ Vitruvius appears to have disparaged and distrusted women, especially those in power; cf. Sadurska 2004: 11–12.

⁵⁰ Dem. XV, 15; see Hornblower 1982: 127.

⁵¹ See Diod. XVI 7, 3; 21, 2.

⁵² Cf. e. g. Polyæn. (VI 8; VII 23, 1–2; VIII 53. 4), who enumerates other ruses of Artemisia. However, even the ancient authorities have frequently made no distinction between two historical queens of Halicarnassus of the same name—Artemisia I, the supporter of Xerxes during the Persian Wars of 480 BC and Artemisia II, the sister-wife of Mausolos of the Hecatomnids (353/352–351/350 BC).

left the Rhodians outside, since, as Vitruvius claims, her citizens obeyed her every order and the Rhodians came unprepared for the siege. Finally, no archeological survey around Halicarnassus discovered any traces of the second harbor or an outlet that linked it with the sea and could let through an entire fleet.⁵³

The majority of those who examined the Rhodian episode, as underscored by A. Momigliano, ignores a chronological discrepancy that seriously undermines Vitruvius' veracity in that excursus. Demosthenes' speech of 351/0 BC, *On the Liberty of the Rhodians* (according to Dion. Hal., *Ad Amm.* I 4) does not refer to any political upheaval on Rhodes, whereas the orator would have certainly mentioned it when pleading with the Athenians to help the democratic opposition on the island. In fact, Demosthenes claims that Artemisia remained thoroughly uninterested in the Rhodian matters and does not see Rhodes as a threat—a statement that cannot mesh with Vitruvius' claim that she had just thwarted the Rhodian attack on Halicarnassus and seized control over the island.⁵⁴ Even after Artemisia's death in the same year, the Athenians did not support the Rhodians, whereas Artemisia's successor, Idrieus, took part in the Persian expedition of Artaxerxes III against Cyprus, since Phoenicia, Anatolia and Cyprus declared their independence from Persian rule. Halicarnassus, within the Persian sphere of influence, remained unassailable by foreign powers. Fittingly, Demosthenes' speech of 346 BC, *On the Peace*, in favor of the Peace of Philocrates, names Rhodes as subject to Caria. I acknowledge that an argument *ex silentio* cannot prove once and for all that no anti-Carian revolt took place on Rhodes; however, it remains suspicious that only a Roman architect, writing over 300 years after Artemisia's day, would record such a daring deed by the Rhodian fleet and an even more outstanding counter-maneuver by Artemisia. Nevertheless, despite his doubts, even Momigliano does not reject Vitruvius' vision and painstakingly attempts to reconcile Vitruvius' account with other sources. In the end, he states that the Persian campaign against Egypt, the Rhodian legation to Athens, the Rhodian rebellion, the thwarted attack on Halicarnassus, Artemisia's death and the rebellion of Cyprus, Anatolia and Phoenicia against the Persian rule all took place within a few months sometime in 351/350 BC, an impossibly short window of time. Curiously, Momigliano prefers to disregard the precise chronology of Demosthenes' speeches (dated thanks to detailed remarks by Dionysius of Halicarnassus) rather than to doubt Vitruvius, for whom the Rhodian episode was only a minor digression within a larger whole.⁵⁵

As Berthold has convincingly argued, the entire story could be a legend fabricated around the mysterious monument on Rhodes, who possibly depicted

⁵³ See Berthold 1978: 130–134; *cf.* Hornblower 1982: 129; Gros 1999: 141–142. Consider the topographical discrepancies in this description: Bean, Cook 1955: 89 and Bean 1971: 112–113.

⁵⁴ Dem. XV 11–13.

⁵⁵ Momigliano 1975: 517–520; *cf.* Berthold 1978: 130–131.

not Artemisia, well-known to the islanders, but another character or even some personification. The Rhodians might have wanted to depict themselves as intrepid freedom fighters who dared to defy powerful Halicarnassus and paid the terrible price.⁵⁶ Although Berthold's remarks ring true, I postulate that the Vitruvian story about Artemisia's ploy reveals yet another programmatic aspect of *De architectura*, elucidating the Vitruvian approach to *historiae*.

The Rhodian anecdote begins and concludes with an architectural description: Vitruvius carefully considers the construction of an artificial harbor that purportedly allowed the Carian queen to outmaneuver the Rhodians. At the surface level, Vitruvius appears to shape his historical content in order to focus on a curious work of engineering.⁵⁷ However, the architect proceeds to encapsulate a story within a story: first, he examines the urban planning of Halicarnassus, only to digress about techniques of fortification. This careful programmatic arrangement of *architectura* musings comments upon the role Artemisia's story plays with the entire *passus* and draws our attention to its oratorical aspects.

In Vitruvius' eyes, Halicarnassus becomes a monument to Mausolus' intelligence and ingenuity (*acumen et sollertia*): acting not unlike a good architect, Mausolus built a city both beautiful and livable. The Vitruvian preoccupation with proper urban planning resonates in yet another anecdote found in *De architectura*, in the preface to Book II (which, *inter alia*, described Halicarnassus). The parabolical introduction speaks of architect Dinocrates, who reportedly promised Alexander the Great to carve all Mount Athos into Alexander's image that would hold a stone city in his left hand. Initially delighted with the idea, Alexander rejected Dinocrates' proposal when he had learned that a stone city would not subsist without adjacent farmland. Campaigning in Egypt, Alexander stumbled upon rich farmlands in the coastal part of the country and ordered Dinocrates to build a beautiful and livable city to bear the king's name—Alexandria. In the Vitruvian story, Dinocrates the architect reflects and stands for a perfect blend of beauty and function: a ruggedly handsome man, Dinocrates had both the necessary architectonic skill (*cogitationibus et sollertia fretus*) and the physical attractiveness to advertise it. Concluding this excursus, Vitruvius (perhaps aiming to capture Augustus' goodwill) decries his own unsightliness yet hopes to attain approval

⁵⁶ Cf. Berthold 1978: 133–134. Hornblower (1982: 129) argues that Vitruvius might have cited Posidonius, who lived on Rhodes and had a vested interest in depicting the island in the best manner possible.

⁵⁷ Cf. Gros 1999: 141–142, who argues that Vitruvius could not have simply made up an entire story with its topographical detail. Perhaps, the Rhodians daringly attempted to scare newly-ascended Artemisia into submission by attacking the heart of her domain—however, as I argued, no evidence exists to corroborate this story.

through his expertise and literary skill.⁵⁸ These two qualities, as we remember, Vitruvius required from any good architect.

Vitruvius' digression about Halicarnassus flows from the architect's reflections about bricklaying and its role in constructing secure fortifications. Although he mentions some other examples, Vitruvius clearly prioritizes Mausolus' palace. After a brief description of the palace's brickwork, Vitruvius proceeds to assure his readers that Mausolus chose bricks not because of their relative inexpensiveness, since "he was glutted with endless tribute money because he ruled over the whole of Caria."⁵⁹ At this point Vitruvius strays from his discussion on masonry to present Mausolus' innate skill (*acumen*) at construction,⁶⁰ since the ruler instinctively preferred to develop a well-fortified and -connected port city of Halicarnassus to his familial seat of Mylasa. Vitruvius' precise diction characterizes Mausolus' design through pairing adjectives with toponyms: "Cum esset enim natus Mylasis et animadvertisset Halicarnasso locum naturaliter esse munitum, emporiumque idoneum portum utile, ibi sibi domum constituit."⁶¹ Relevantly, Vitruvius' diction in this passage closely parallels his wording in the abovementioned excerpt on Alexandria and its construction by Dinocrates: "Ibi Alexander cum animadvertisset portum naturaliter tutum, emporium egregium, campos circa totam Aegyptum frumentarios, inmanis fluminis Nili magnas utilitates, iussit eum suo nomine civitatem Alexandriam constituere."⁶² Indeed,

⁵⁸ Vitruv. *De arch.* II *Praef.* 1–4; cf. McEwen 2003: 234; Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 147–149; McGill 2012: 45; Formisano 2016: 155–159, who draws our attention to Vitruvius' skillful juxtaposition between the attractiveness of Dinocrates and the alleged ugliness of the Vitruvian literary persona. Building on this juxtaposition, J. Oksanish (2019: 149–169) reads Dinocrates as anti-Vitruvius and Alexander the Great as anti-Augustus, perhaps taking this analogy a step too far. E. Gabba (1980: 49–52) notes that Vitruvius' text theoretically complemented Augustus' numerous architectural developments, seen as ideological proclamations of Augustan might and glory. The topic of Augustus' building program appears to have been popular at the time (*De arch. Praef.* 2: "ut maiestas imperii publicorum aedificiorum egregias haberet auctoritates"). Public construction programs notwithstanding, the entire Italy experienced a surge in construction in the late Republican period (between the end of the civil war and the reign of Augustus). The surge came about due to several reasons. The Italian people grew richer and rebuilt their properties after civil wars. The swelling citizenry, Romanized through their cultural contacts, aspired to newer and more lavish abodes (preferably resembling traditional Roman architecture), using them to vaunt their status; cf. Gros 1994: 88–90; Novara 1994 (about *utilitas* as an architectural virtue); König 2007: 179. The latter scholar observes (2009: 40–41) that Vitruvius glosses over contemporary constructions to focus on older edifices. For an analysis of Augustan ideology reflected in *De architectura* see Romano 2016.

⁵⁹ Vitruv. *De arch.* II 8, 10.

⁶⁰ For Mausolus as the proverbial constructor, see Gros 1999: XLVI and *passim*.

⁶¹ "Although he was born in Mylasa, when he perceived that Halicarnassus had a naturally fortified site, a suitable marketplace, and a handy port, he established his residence there."

⁶² "There, when Alexander had noticed a naturally secure port, a thriving marketplace, wheat-fields all around Egypt, and the great usefulness of the immense river Nile, he ordered Dinocrates to lay out the city of Alexandria in his name."

even the Alexandrine Nile finds its complement in the Halicarnian spring of Salmacis, mentioned by Vitruvius among the chief sights within the city.⁶³

The spring of Salmacis, reputed to make men effeminate and soft,⁶⁴ provides Vitruvius with an excuse to ponder the rules of founding cities through another *historia*, a symbolic rationalization of a myth. The author claims that the spring's waters symbolically sweetened, by means of culture, the coarse barbarian souls of the Carians and Leleges—the autochthones once exiled by Greek colonists led by Melas of Argos and Areuanias of Troezen and then returning to their fatherland, attracted by lucrative opportunities offered by Halicarnassus. Vitruvius exegetically rationalizes the myth about the spring's waters: the Carians and Lelegs became civilized, as Vitruvius asserts, not by its supernatural power but by commerce, since the spring area became an attractive market place. As such, Vitruvius stresses the importance of topography and natural resources to any newly-founded settlement and its economic wellbeing.⁶⁵ The lesson of the story not only matches the earlier anecdote about Dionocrates' plan for Alexandria but also lauds Mausolus' perspicacity, since the king instinctively founded his city in an environment that would provide for all its needs.

The tale of Artemisia's ploy, to follow the Vitruvian descriptions of Mausolus' building developments, stands for but a part of a greater excursus on Halicarnassus—a city founded and built according to the most exacting standards of architectural art. Introducing Artemisia as an afterthought, through a conjunctive construction (*Itaque post mortem Mausoli...*), demonstrates its subordinate place in the excursus. I have drawn attention to all glaring discrepancies in Artemisia's story, yet these shortcomings and omissions stand out only when we juxtapose this story with its historical context. Since Vitruvius gives very few details to anchor his story in a specific context (save Halicarnassus and the Rhodian monument), perhaps we should not attempt to do so and read the story against the grain. For an average Roman, Rhodes might have believably engaged Halicarnassus at sea, since Rhodes of the late Republican and early Principate periods remained famous for its navy, whereas few Romans knew about Rhodes' earlier destitution and its dependence on Caria.⁶⁶ Likewise, Vitruvius' misogynistic remark concerning the Rhodian unwillingness to live under a queen falls into a recognizable literary pattern

⁶³ Cf. Gros 1999: 130.

⁶⁴ Ovid narrates the most elaborate version of the myth of naiad Salmacis and her love to Hermaphroditus; Salmacis merges bodily with Hermaphroditus and Hermaphroditus curses her fountain to have the noxious effect on others (*Met.* IV 185–388).

⁶⁵ Cf. Gros 1999: 138 and esp. Appel 2001: 76 who argues (78–81), that the Vitruvius' description of Salmacis spring could have been the result of his stay in Halicarnassus and therefore another display of his erudition, for it is very similar to the Salmacis eulogy preserved on the inscription found in the area in 1995.

⁶⁶ For Roman stereotypes about the Aegean, see Kołoczek 2020.

Vitruvius might have wanted to emulate.⁶⁷ Indeed, the masculinist undertones also surface in Vitruvius' pointed mention of the spring of Salmacis, rumored to make men effeminate.

Notably, Vitruvius' *De architectura* abounds in similar moralizing stories, relayed always with an edifying end in mind. When Vitruvius speaks of Aristophanes of Byzantium, he reveals his attitude towards plagiarism.⁶⁸ Writing about the conflict between grammarian Zoilus and Ptolemy II Philadelphus, Vitruvius captivantly muses about respecting one's predecessors.⁶⁹ Mentioning the story about Archimedes and Hiero's crown, Vitruvius praises the inventor's genius,⁷⁰ whereas Vitruvius' recounting of mathematician Licymnus' critique of theatrical decorations furnished by Apaturius of Alabanda leads the architect to consider the abstractness of the modern art.⁷¹ All such *historiae* were written as epideictic allegories,⁷² directly framed by Vitruvius' programmatic remarks. Eloquent and carefully crafted, Vitruvian *historiae* begin with a contextualizing exposition and end with a moralizing denouement.

Perhaps the most didactic *historia* by Vitruvius concerns one Zoilus Homeromastix (Homer's Scourge). As the architect relates,

in later years Zoilus, who took a nickname so that he would be called Homeromastix (Homer's Scourge), came from Macedonia to Alexandria and gave a reading before the king from the books he had composed *Against the Iliad* and *Against the Odyssey*. But when Ptolemy had learned that the father of poets and forerunner of all literature was being abused in absentia, and that he whose works were admired by all nations was being subjected to criticism by this man, he indignantly withheld any reaction to the reading. When Zoilus, meanwhile, had stayed on for a time in the kingdom, he was pressed for money; he finally applied to the king, asking whether something might be granted him. The king is said to have replied that Homer, who had died a thousand years before, had nourished many thousands of people all through time, and likewise anyone who claimed to have a superior talent should be able to sustain not only themselves but many others besides. And, in short, various traditions report that he was condemned to death as a parricide, for some writers say that he was crucified by Philadelphus; others say that he was stoned in Chios, still others that he was burned alive on a pyre at Smyrna. Whichever of these fates he actually met, it was a well-deserved punishment. For no one

⁶⁷ See e. g. Xen. *Hell.* III 1, 14, who narrates the murder of the Phrygian dynast Mania by her son-in-law Meidias, 'disturbed by certain people saying that it was a disgraceful thing for a woman to be the ruler' (ἀναπτερωθεὶς ὑπὸ τινῶν ὡς αἰσχρὸν εἶη γυναικᾶ μὲν ἄρχειν).

⁶⁸ Vitruv. *De arch.* VII *Praef.* 4–7.

⁶⁹ Vitruv. *De arch.* VII *Praef.* 8–9. On Zoilus, refer to Pauly–Wissowa RE Suppl. XV: 1531–1554.

⁷⁰ Vitruv. *De arch.* IX *Praef.* 9–12. Vitruvius lauds scholars and inventors to claim that science matters more than sports, since athletes contribute very little to the wellbeing of the society (IX *Praef.* 1–3). The author complements these remarks by alluding to Cicero's *Pro Archia poeta* and *De oratore*, also mentioning the emporium in Halicarnassus and organizational prowess of king Numa; cf. André 1987: 287.

⁷¹ Vitruv. *De arch.* VII 5,5–7.

⁷² Cf. André 1987: 283.

seems to deserve otherwise if they bring charges against those who cannot explain in person what they meant when they were writing.⁷³

Due to the weighty moral judgement expressed in this anecdote, we perhaps should not appraise its veracity, since Vitruvius, casual with his sources, provides his audience with three separate versions of Zoilus' death.⁷⁴ From the perspective of rhetorical efficacy, the multitude of ignominious deaths served to captivate and stir up readers. The presupposed patricide either refers to some actual crime by Zoilus or simply likens his anti-Homeric sentiment, for greater dramatic effect, to metaphorical murder of the father of the Greek literature. No matter if Zoilus actually murdered his father or not; to insinuate that it had been so portrays the anti-Homerist as a man of both a wicked mind and wicked deeds. Also significant is the selection of Smyrna and Chios, with both localities touted as birthplaces of Homer. Vitruvius cares very little about actual events; his focus is on the poetic justice, done to an impudent upstart who posthumously slanders the greatest authorities of literature.

Some scholars postulate that Vitruvius made an example of Zoilus within the framework of the discourse on plagiarism,⁷⁵ not unlike the story of Artemisia, a part of the greater whole on Mausolus; nevertheless, Zoilus' faults do not stem from his plagiarizing Homer. Even though Vitruvius juxtaposes the ignominious tale of Zoilus with a story of Aristophanes of Byzantium, who discovers that revered Ptolemean poets have recited others works, no semantic link appears to exist between two passages, with Vitruvius emphatically separating two tales through paratactic negation (*neque, neque*): "But I, Caesar, have neither substituted my name on a text while altering the indications that it is another person's property, nor have I sought approval for myself by slandering another's work."⁷⁶ Stories of Zoilus and Aristophanes illustrate divergent points and another factor has to link them.

Taking into consideration my preceding remarks, it seems that Zoilus and Aristophanes become Vitruvius' literary personae, employed to present his artistic program, promote his skill and attain Augustus' approval. Despite his declared humility, Vitruvius has no qualms to see himself as an equal to the greatest

⁷³ Vitruv. *De arch.* VII *Praef.* 9.

⁷⁴ Fraser 1970: 115, 121–122 showcases why the Vitruvian story of Zoilus could not have happened as-is, pointing out that the architect confuses his chronologies, facts and sources to forcedly yoke the story of Zoilus to that of Aristophanes of Byzantium, of no relation to the preceding one. However, Fraser does not examine why Vitruvius might have wanted to juxtapose Zoilus and Aristophanes.

⁷⁵ See e. g. Fraser 1970: 118.

⁷⁶ Vitruv. *De arch.* VII *Praef.* 10. Vitruvius proceeds to characterize his own writing through a metaphor of drawing from the wellspring of knowledge produced by other authorities on the subject, admitting his dependence on their works, however, without the intention of attributing to oneself their achievements.

scholars of antiquity, likening Augustus to Ptolemy II Philadelphus, a learned ruler who appreciated finer arts and sciences and supported great minds.⁷⁷ Within such a framework, the example of Zoilus would serve to praise Augustus' literary discernment; to decry patricide would please Augustus, who publicly vowed revenge against the murderers of Julius Caesar.

De architectura examines both the glories of the past and the expected wonders of Rome's future under Augustus. The treatise grounded in theory and preoccupied with practical considerations of architecture reveals its author's artistic inclinations and employs oratorical techniques to spark and sustain the audience's interest in the dense subject matter.⁷⁸ For Vitruvius, history is but a means to an end: the author freely shapes, rewrites, selects and deforms it to support his arguments. He strives not to reveal the truth about past events but to spin an inspiring story that would dazzle his readers. Although *De architectura* nominally teaches aspiring architects how to employ *historiae* to explain their decisions, it primarily works as an extended authorial self-promotion piece to flatter Augustus. The architect uses historical facts and factoids in many fashions: to explain the genesis of the orders of architecture, to edify his readers, to demonstrate the work of invention in practice. Not unlike rhetoric, Vitruvius' history became edutainment, projected to shape his audience's beliefs as Vitruvius saw fit. Bearing all that in mind, I restate that, among other erudite authors of ancient Rome, Vitruvius stands out as a writer whose work may be used for its historical content only with the greatest discernment.

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⁷⁷ Cf. André 1987: 270–271; Cam 1995: 56–57; McGill 2012: 42–46.

⁷⁸ Cf. Callebat 1994: 32–33, who underscores Vitruvius' ambition to popularize knowledge among the masses; such intent indicates that Vitruvius followed the same impulse that guided Pliny the Elder to compile his *Natural History*; Fleury 1994: 203–207; Geertman 1994: 10.

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TELL ME A CURIOUS (HI)STORY
HISTORICAL CONTENT IN VITRUVIUS' *DE ARCHITECTURA*

Summary

The following article simultaneously aims to examine Vitruvius' concept of history, discuss his rationale for introducing historical asides in *De architectura* and appraise the veracity of given information to facilitate its use as a historical source. The paper suggests that for Vitruvius, history is but a means to an end: the author freely shapes, rewrites, selects and deforms it to support his arguments. He strives not to reveal the truth about past events but to spin an inspiring story that would dazzle his readers. Although *De architectura* nominally teaches aspiring architects how to employ *historiae* to explain their decisions, it primarily works as an extended authorial self-promotion piece to flatter Augustus. The architect uses historical facts and factoids in many fashions: to explain the genesis of the orders of architecture, to edify his readers, to demonstrate the work of invention in practice. Not unlike rhetoric, Vitruvius' history became edutainment, projected to shape his audience's beliefs as Vitruvius saw fit.