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VITRUVIUS AND THE PROGRAMMATICS OF PROSE

JOHN OKSANISH

This paper reconsiders Vitruvius's attitude toward literary *auctoritas* ("authority") in the context of two related types of historiographical writing: so-called "universal" or "world" history and chronography. In short, I want to know what it means that *de Architectura* shares so many of the alleged aims, benefits, and programmatic features of these particular kinds of history writing, especially when Vitruvius's architectural subject matter is neither clearly universal nor traditionally historical.¹

NON UTI HISTORIA

The preface to Book 5 of *de Architectura* begins with something of a complaint. According to Vitruvius, his technical subject matter resists the sonic bells and whistles of poetic texts and lacks the sequences of events that are natural to narrative historiography:

Those who have revealed their ingenious thoughts and teachings in more sizeable books (*amplioribus voluminibus*), imperator, have added exceptionally immense authority to their writings ("maximas et egregias adiecerunt suis

1 The author wishes to thank the conveners and fellow presenters for their comments and questions and the editors at *Arethusa* for many helpful suggestions. Christina S. Kraus and Katherine Clarke generously read earlier drafts; I remain grateful for their remarks and suggestions, which have greatly improved the final version. The remaining omissions, errors, and infelicities are, of course, my own.

scriptis auctoritates”).² I wish the subject of my pursuits was also accessible, so that size would increase authority even in these writings (“ut amplificationibus auctoritas et in his praeceptis augeretur”). But this is hardly as easy as people think. You see, you don’t write about architecture [*About Architecture*] as you write history or poems. History automatically holds onto readers because it offers changing expectations of new things. And the meter and rhythm of the songs of poetry, the elegant arrangement of words, and the articulation of ideas among the individual characters of the verses—they lead the reader’s senses all the way to the end without offense. But this is not possible when composing architectural writings, since terms derived from the peculiar needs of the art dull the senses with their strange language. Therefore, since these terms are not obvious by themselves and their meanings are not evident in usage, the wide-ranging writings of the authorities in the field will only give readers vague ideas in dense and clumsy language unless they are condensed and explained in a few, crystal-clear sentences (“late vagantes scripturae, si non contrahentur, et paucis et perlucidis sententiis explicentur”). And so, when I give obscure terms and proportions from the parts of buildings, I will explain them briefly so that they can be committed to memory; the mind will be better able to recall them this way (“ut memoriae tradantur, breviter exponam; sic enim expeditius ea recipere poterunt mentes”). Likewise, because I realized that the city was swelling with public obligations and private business (“distantam occupationibus civitatem publicis et privatis negotiis”), I judged it best to write on a small scale so that those who read it could quickly understand it in the small space of time available (“paucis iudicavi scribendum, uti angusto spatio vacuitatis ea legentes breviter percipere possent”).³

2 Distributive plurals of abstract nouns are common in *de Architectura* (compare, e.g., *auctoritates* at 9 pref. 17–18). For the usage in 5 pref., see Gros 1997 and Saliou at Vitruvius 2009a ad loc. with Kessissoglou 1993.19. Morgan 1906 rebuts Ussing’s claim that the abstract plurals indicate *de Architectura*’s later date.

3 “Qui amplioribus voluminibus, imperator, ingenii cogitationes praeceptaque explicaverunt, maximas et egregias adiecerunt suis scriptis auctoritates. quod etiam vel in nostris

Vitruvius may seem at first blush to admit to the kinds of literary failure of which his stylistic detractors have often accused him. To write about architecture (and thus *About Architecture*), he implies, is to forsake the *auctoritas* that writers of other works enjoy. However, we should proceed cautiously in the face of this apparent diffidence: Isocratean echoes in the passage imply that Vitruvius's modesty is false—or at least highly qualified.⁴ That is, if Vitruvius employs the truism that writing about architecture differs from writing poetry and history, he does so with good reason. To what end, then?

Vitruvius's remarks on poetic rhythm and historiographical narrative are important, but will not be treated here,⁵ as they are locally subordinate to “bigger” problems of literary authority and *amplificatio*, a rhetorical term of art that denotes the addition of grandeur and impressiveness in two, related, respects: “vertical” *amplificatio* suggests the addition of loftiness (i.e., qualitative grandeur); “horizontal” or “broadening” *amplificatio* implies, for all intents and purposes, a quantitative increase in length (Lausberg 1998 §400–09). Vitruvius evidently sees both kinds of *amplificatio* as off-limits. His explanation for why history and poetry differ from architectural literature, for instance, suggests qualitative differences in style and the nature of content. However, a series of etymological puns makes it clear that *amplificatio* qua size or length is his primary concern. The authority (*auctoritas*) of a work in history and poetry, he

quoque studiis res pateretur, ut amplificationibus auctoritas et in his praeceptis augeretur, sed id non est quemadmodum putatur expeditum. non enim de architectura sic scribitur uti historia aut poemata. historiae per se tenent lectores. habent enim novarum rerum varias expectationes. poematorum vero carminum metra et pedes ac verborum elegans dispositio et sententiarum inter personas distinctas ad versum pronuntiatio prolectando sensus legentium perducit sine offensa ad summam scriptorum terminationem. id autem in architecturae conscriptionibus non potest fieri, quod vocabula ex artis propria necessitate concepta inconsueto sermone obiciunt sensibus obscuritatem. cum ergo ea per se non sint aperta nec pateant eorum in consuetudine nomina, tum etiam praeceptorum late vagantes scripturae, si non contrahentur et paucis et perlucidis sententiis explicentur, frequentia multitudineque sermonis inpediente incertas legentium efficient cogitationes. itaque occultas nominationes commensusque e membris operum pronuntians, ut memoriae tradantur, breviter exponam. sic enim expeditius ea recipere poterunt mentes. non minus cum animadvertissem distentam occupationibus civitatem publicis et privatis negotiis, paucis iudicavi scribendum, uti angusto spatio vacuitatis ea legentes breviter percipere possent.” All translations are my own unless noted.

4 Compare *Evag.* 8–10 with Gros 1997.1.592 n. 1. Similar claims of (false) modesty in historiography are also size related: e.g., Tac. *Ann.* 4.32–33.

5 I have presented material on Vitruvius's remarks about history's narrative advantages elsewhere. Results of this research will be published in future work.

says, generally increases (*augeretur*) when the writer applies *amplificatio* to produce bigger books (*amplioribus voluminibus*); the reverse, again, is true of architectural writings: “I wish the subject of my pursuits was also accessible, so that size would increase authority even in these writings.”⁶

Vitruvius does not aim to forgo the *auctoritas* that well-trained architects deserve and to which he apparently aspired (1.1.2 and 1.1.18). He must therefore set an alternative, if ultimately paradoxical, path to that authority by means of a “smaller” text. The Hellenistic poets would seem to have met similar challenges by emphasizing refinement; one thinks, for example, of Callimachus’s reply to the Telchines and his remark that a big book is equal to a big evil (*Aet. frag.1, 465 Pf.*). Vitruvius, however, takes a slightly different tack by correlating modest size (cf. “*paucis . . . sententiis; breviter* exponam; *paucis* iudicavi scribendum,” etc.) with memorability and utility. That smaller, not bigger, books would be best for a subject as vast and important as *architectura* is striking, however. Not only did Augustus, according to Vitruvius (1 pref. 2), recognize that architecture would bring *auctoritas* to the city and enlarge its *maiestas* (just as provinces enlarged the *civitas: provinciis aucta*), but a “less is more” mentality, as we will see, distinguishes Vitruvius from contemporaries and near contemporaries such as Livy (in Latin prose), Strabo, and Diodorus Siculus (in Greek).⁷

Vitruvius soon reveals that the principle of brevity (*brevitas*) governing *de Architectura* derives from a “Pythagorean” notion that any text in excess of three “cubes” of lines (750 lines by Vitruvius’s definition) exceeds the reader’s mental capacity.⁸ Scholars note problems with Vitruvius’s mathematical explanation for the cube, but its relevance to *de Architectura* is simple enough: the cube confirms brevity’s legitimacy as a textual virtue in the service of comprehension and utility.⁹ Vitruvius’s contrafactual desire that architectural writings, like history and poetry,

6 For a complementary view of *amplificatio* in Vitruvius, see Kessissoglu 1993.17–33.

7 On architecture’s vastness: 4 pref. 1 and 6 pref. 6. On bringing *auctoritas* to the state: 1 pref. 2–3. See below on Livy’s *monumentum*. Strabo (another “universal” writer) envisioned his work as a colossal statue (κολοσσουργία, 1.1.23); see Clarke 1999b and esp. 315.

8 5 pref. 4: “is numerus versuum, uti cybus . . . innotam efficiat ibi memoriae stabilitatem.” Vitruvius’s *cybica ratio* of 250 is properly the double of one cube, since $250 = 2 \times 5^3$. Giocondo emended the Vitruvian text to 216 (the sum of three cubes: $3^3 + 4^3 + 5^3 = 216$), but Saliou’s edition (Vitruvius 2009a), with excellent commentary, rightly preserves the text of the manuscripts. The function and definition of *brevitas* varies considerably in the rhetorical tradition; see the many relevant entries in Lausberg 1998.

9 E.g., 5 pref. 2: “sic enim expeditius ea [praecepta vel sim.] recipere poterunt.” For utility as a function of brevity in chronography, see below. For brevity’s place in technical writing,

grow in *auctoritas* as they grow in size should therefore be taken with a grain of salt. The civic value of his work lies *precisely* in the clarity that brevity provides, and so Vitruvius prescribes small-scale writings for a city “swelling with public obligations and private business” in which time is of the essence (cf. *angusto spatio vacuitatis*).

Within this framework, Vitruvius’s play on literary *auctoritas* and *brevitas* directly challenges the ethos of more monumental contemporary texts in history and poetry.¹⁰ In the Latin literature of the 20s B.C.E., one thinks of Livy, whose colossal subject matter (Pref. 1.1: “a primordio urbis res populi Romani,” “the matter of the Roman people from the beginnings of the city”) results in an incalculable work (*immensum opus*) struggling under its own weight.¹¹ Already an architectural metaphor, the *immensum opus* echoes Livy’s better known metaphor of the *monumentum*, defined by its commemorative durability no less than its didactic and civic utility (Moles 1993, Jaeger 1997, Kraus and Woodman 1997, and Chaplin 2000).¹² Instruction and usefulness are goals to which Vitruvius also aspired, but his raw material and, consequently, professed strategies of achieving those goals differ substantially from those of Livy. According to the polemical standpoint of *de Architectura* 5, the twin enormity of Livy’s Roman subject and text makes his road to *auctoritas* easy, if not effortless (cf. also 5 pref. 1: “historiae per se tenent lectores”). But *auctoritas* that is so easily gained is commensurately problematized by *de Architectura*, since this work’s civic value lies precisely in Vitruvius’s sensitivity to readers’ other obligations. Nor is length the only issue. As its title suggests, *ab Vrbe Condita* tells the history of one city and people; that Livy often blurs the line between *urbs* and *orbis terrarum* will not have diminished this titular conceit in the eyes of a polemical Vitruvius.¹³ Unlike architecture, whose

Fögen 2009. On Vitruvius’s civic orientation, see inter alia Novara 1994 and Gros 1994b, esp. p. 84.

10 *De Architectura* as a whole was most likely published in the early or middle 20s B.C.E. For a summary of the arguments, see Fleury at Vitruvius 1990a.xvi–xxiv. Vitruvius will not be the only writer to challenge this ethos of monumental texts in the early empire; see below on Velleius Paterculus.

11 Liv. 1 pref. 4. Moles 1993 is best on this image. The possible range of dates for publication of Livy’s first pentad (33–25 B.C.E.) overlaps substantially with the range of dates considered probable for the publication of *de Architectura*. For a similar point, see Kessissoglou 1993.32–33; for Livy in the context of universal histories, Clarke 1999a.251.

12 For Vitruvius’s narrow application of *monumentum*, Meyers 2012.

13 For Livy’s title, Horsfall 1981.105, 112 n. 50. For the *urbs* as *caput orbis terrarum*, see, e.g., Liv. 1.16.7. Luce 1977.284–87 notes Livy’s [Catonian] “tendency . . . toward exclusiveness and isolationism.”

disparate elements Vitruvius aims to unite in his text, Livy's subject matter is already unified, while the passage of time provides its (annalistic) structure.¹⁴ Vitruvius's subject, moreover, is universal. As a field of knowledge, *architectura* touches on many, if not all, other disciplines (1.1.3: philosophy, music, medicine, etc.). Similarly, the texts on which Vitruvius claims to rely come from diverse genres and subjects (above, 5 pref. 2: *late vagantes scripturae*; see below on 4 pref. 1) in both Greek and, albeit less so, Latin.¹⁵ Finally, like speech or the use of fire, architecture distinguishes human beings throughout the known world from animals (2.1.1–5).¹⁶

In light of the demands on his readers' time, it may seem curious that Vitruvius mentions peoples whose architectural practices he deems underdeveloped. The Gauls, who still build huts of straw and mud (2.1.4–5), are a case in point. On the surface, they furnish a viable account of the Romans' architectural past, but this cannot be their only function since the "hut of Romulus" offers an indigenous example (2.1.5). It is, however, no small irony that the Gauls, who once sacked Rome, still build huts in the manner of Romulus. And so, by writing them into *de Architectura*, Vitruvius confirms that they (and their architecture) are "subject" to Rome in more than one sense.¹⁷ For as Vitruvius reveals in his fulsome dedication of the treatise, writing *de a/Architectura* became possible only when Augustus had extended Roman *imperium* throughout the *oikoumene* (1 pref. 1):

Since your divine intelligence and power, emperor Caesar, were gaining rule over the world ("divina tua mens et numen . . . imperio potiretur orbis terrarum"), and the citizens were rejoicing in your triumph and victory after all enemies had been laid low (*cunctis hostibus stratis*) by your unconquerable strength, and all the subject peoples (*gentes omnes subactae*) were awaiting your command . . . I did not dare—in the midst of those

14 But organization was important for Livy too. See, e.g., Luce 1977 and Vasaly 2002.

15 References to specific writers are more plentiful in the prefaces in the second half of the treatise; Book 8 includes several Greek epigrams. For extensive discussion, see Novara 2005.

16 Compare the "anthropologies" in Lucretius 5.771–1457 and Cicero's *de Inventione* 1.2–3. For Vitruvius, imitation, innovation, and ornamentation distinguish the human impulse to build from, say, that of a bird building its nest.

17 Cf. Strabo 6.4.2 and Polybius 1.6.1–2 with Clarke 1999b.257.

great commitments—to publish my writings and long-considered revelations about architecture . . .

This address to Augustus (as *imperator Caesar*) is no perfunctory panegyric. Midway through *de Architectura*, we learn that Rome's ideal geographic position—an auspicious freak of *natura*—had made world conquest a matter of destiny (6.1.11): “Thus the divine intelligence (*divina mens*, cf. 1 pref. 1) placed the city of the Roman people in an exceptional and balanced region so that it could possess *imperium* over the world” (“uti orbis terrarum imperii potiretur”; cf. 1 pref. 1). For Vitruvius and many other authors of the period, it is Augustus who marks destiny's arrival.¹⁸ Strabo, for example, in Book 6 of his *Geography*, enumerates Rome's many geographic advantages and credits Augustus for bringing that empire to unprecedented levels of peace and plenty (Strabo 6.4.2).¹⁹ But Vitruvius implies much more strongly than Strabo that Augustus has provided the necessary conditions under which he can (and, importantly, *should*) publish on his subject (1 pref. 2), and he effectively attributes the work of defining architecture (i.e., the marking of its *terminationes*) to the *pax Augusta*. A complete account of architecture requires the unified, Augustan *oikoumene* no less than it requires the unifying Vitruvian text (4 pref. 1):

Since I had realized, emperor, that many people had left behind teachings and books of commentaries on architecture in disarray and incomplete like wandering particles (“non ordinata sed incepta uti particulas errabundas”), I long considered it a worthwhile and very useful thing to bring the body of the discipline to a perfect arrangement and to unfold the characteristics of its individual areas within individual books (“dignam et utilissimam rem putavi antea disciplinae corpus ad perfectam ordinationem perducere et praescriptas in singulis voluminibus singulorum generum qualitates explicare”).

18 See below on “qualitative” universalism. The sympathy of Augustus and *natura* in *de Architectura* recalls that of Rome and Tyche in Polybius.

19 For discussion of the passage in Vitruvius, see the various commentaries ad loc. with Clarke 1999b.89, 217, and 295; for discussion of Strabo 6.4.2, see Clarke 1999b.228, 257, 287, and 288.

In discussing this passage, many scholars rightly point to Vitruvius's interest in arrangement, integrity, composition, or systematicity, with the *corpus* as a formal, rational structure to contain, organize, and refine the *commentarii* and *praecepta* that he has consulted.²⁰ But Vitruvius's corporeal metaphor, particularly when taken in conjunction with his description of *praecepta incepta* ("inchoate rules") as *particulae* ("tidbits" or, with atomic resonance, "particles"), also has ontological implications. The commentaries to which Vitruvius refers are no doubt the same writings that "wander widely" in their natural state at 5 pref. 2 (*late vagantes scripturae*), but which Vitruvius succinctly brings together (*contrahentur; breviter exponam*, etc.). In the preface to *de Architectura* 7, too, Vitruvius identifies a need to harvest from (mostly Greek) specialist writings on a range of topics, but only insofar as that material meets his criterion of *utilitas* in architecture (7 pref. 14). Vitruvius, in part, aims to redress a cultural imbalance. But unlike other, "bigger books" that appeared simultaneously with Roman world rule, *de Architectura* aims at the authority, utility, and permanence that come from an ability to explain an "ecumenical" discipline (i.e., of the *oikoumene*) sufficiently but not entirely.²¹

THE "ECONOMIC BENEFITS" OF UNIVERSAL WRITING: DIODORUS AND POLYBIUS

Vitruvius effectively elides synopsis and invention, so that the former supplants the latter as the most beneficial activity. In this respect, and despite his declaration in Book 5 that historiography and architectural writings differ substantively, Vitruvius draws heavily on the rhetoric found in the *ampliora volumina* of the universal historians Diodorus Siculus and Polybius. John Marincola helpfully sketches two ways in which ancient historians "wrote universally."²² The first and most capacious is when an

20 Gros at Vitruvius 1992.xiii–vi, cited by McEwen 2003.7, where it is presented as a fundamental passage; also Riggsby 2006.137–38. Similar images of *de Architectura* as a body recur at 5 pref. 5, 7 pref. 14, etc.

21 Greek and Italian cultures receive far more emphasis than others, but this speaks (to some degree) to the subjectivity of "universalism." The "whole world" of the *oikoumene* is rarely whole except rhetorically; see Clarke 1999b. For a comparable need to redress Roman deficits (specifically in history), consider the discussion at Cic. *Leg.* 1.5.18: "Abest enim historia litteris nostris."

22 Marincola 2007.1.171, duly noting the fluidity of ancient generic boundaries. The present study hardly offers a full account of universalism in historiography; for further reading, see Marincola 2007.1.179.

author “covered the entire known inhabited world (*oikoumene* or *universon*) from earliest recorded times to the author’s own day, i.e., [the history is] universal in time and space” (Marincola 2007.1.171). Examples of this sort include Diodorus’s forty-volume *Bibliothēke*, composed from the 60s to 30s B.C.E., and Velleius Paterculus’s presumptuously titled (and much smaller) *Historia Romana* in two volumes, dedicated to Marcus Vinicius probably in 30 C.E.²³ The second kind of “universal” writing is “universal only in space,” i.e., writing that treated known events within a restricted time period. Polybius is a well-known example of this type (from 264 to 146 B.C.E. in forty books), and his focus on Rome and its development makes him particularly important here.

All historians are likely to confront organizational difficulties, but the problem of arrangement (*oikonomia*) has been called “particularly severe” for universal writers, who regularly treated events that occurred simultaneously (or nearly so) in widely differing places (Clarke 1999a.278). Unsurprisingly, the universal writers themselves seem to cultivate their readers’ sense of this difficulty by regularly linking the challenge of *oikonomia* with the unique utility and benefits of a universal work.²⁴ For although historians since Herodotus had declared evergetistic, didactic intentions, the capacious nature of world history meant that universal historians could claim benefits proportionate to their scope. The authorial function of the universal historian is thus not simply “to relate what happened” at a given place and time, but to collect and select persons and events *separated* by time and space, and to make them part of a representative and essential whole. Diodorus Siculus, active in Rome in the 60s–30s B.C.E. and a contemporary of Vitruvius, suggests that universal writers are especially valuable because they draw their lessons not from one state or epoch but from across time and space, bringing them “to one and the same *arrangement*” (Diod. Sic. *Bibl.* 1.1.3: σύνταξιν).²⁵ He adds: “[universal] historians, in recording the common affairs of the inhabited world as though of a single state, have made of their treatises a single reckoning of past events and a common clearing-house of knowledge concerning them.”²⁶

One can already detect some basic similarities between Diodorus’s rhetoric of utility through a unifying collection and Vitruvius’s

23 The year of Vinicius’s consulship. For the more capacious definition of universal history, see also Alonso-Núñez 2002.117; for Velleius see further below, n. 34.

24 For the notion of benefit in Diodorus, with notes for further discussion, see, e.g., Sacks 1990.

25 They are doing “gods’ work,” so to speak: Diod. Sic. *Bibl.* 1.1.3.

26 Trans. Oldfather, with slight modifications.

claims to have synthesized disparate material. But Diodorus also uses a corporeal metaphor to underscore the essential correspondence between his synoptic subject and authoritative text. The Greek verb συντάττω and related nominal forms (cf. 1.1.3) often describe the arrangement of bodies and parts in various concrete and abstract senses,²⁷ and so C. H. Oldfather in his Loeb advisedly translates ὑπὸ μίαν καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν σύνταξιν as “into one and the same orderly body.” A more direct invocation of the body as subject and text, however, occurs near the midpoint of the *Bibliothēke*, in the prooemium to Book 20. There Diodorus explains that history as a kind of writing is “on the whole very much like a living body.” He criticizes those who deploy excessively long speeches in history, “making all of history an appendage (προσθήκη) to oratory,” which conflicts with history’s natural unity (*Bibl.* 20.1.5): “The genus of history, you see, is straightforward, naturally coherent, and, on the whole, very much like a living body. When you tear it apart, it is deprived of its lifelike beauty, but in its essential arrangement, it is properly preserved and, through its naturally coherent definition, makes reading pleasant and clear.”

Likening texts to bodies was not new, nor was it exclusive to universal history. Plato had emphasized the body’s completeness and arrangement as a metaphor for speeches (not, however, for written texts) in *Phaedrus* (e.g., 264c), whereas Aristotle famously suggested that tragic plots were like bodies and “living creatures,” defined by completeness, appropriate size (i.e., ideal for dramatic competition), and beauty (*Poetics* 1450b35–51a6).²⁸ Such a plot was “ideally synoptic” (εὐσύνοπτον), perceivable at a glance, and easily remembered (εὐμνημόνευτον).²⁹ It should be said, however, that Diodorus and Polybius alike depart from the

27 E.g., the human body, “bodies” of troops, or to characterize the arrangement of speeches and texts, which are also described as bodies. Both concrete and abstract senses occur in close proximity in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, where the body-text metaphor is fundamental and influential. Compare Pl. *Grg.* 504a, *Phdr.* 263e, 264c2–5. Note that συντάττω may be rendered in Latin by *ordino* (cf. [*non*] *ordinata*; “corpus ad perfectam ordinationem perducere” in 4 pref.; cf. Vit. 1.2.1: “architectura constat ex ordinatione, quae Graece τάξις dicitur, et ex dispositione”). McEwen 2003 identifies the importance of the body-text metaphor to Vitruvius’s work, but passes over much of its heritage in the rhetorical and historiographical traditions. For the association of *syntaxis* and *soma*, see Birt 1882.36–43.

28 Heath 1989.18–19 rightly emphasizes that Plato does not “use the term ‘unity’ [i.e., as a sort of *Lebensprinzip*] or any close equivalent.” See also the previous note.

29 Cf. συνορῶντα at *Phdr.* 265d3–5; the notion is linked to definition (ὀριζόμενος). With the Aristotelian example, we should surely connect the Vitruvian interest in the memorability that comes from *brevitas* (5 pref. 1–5, etc.)

Aristotelian bodily allegory insofar as their desire to provide a complete and unitary history of the world necessarily forecloses reading their works in a single sitting or day.³⁰ For example, Diodorus at *Bibliothēke* 1.2.5 suggests that the power of history extends “over the whole inhabited world,” and his claim to aggregate and order this *oikoumene* in the text (i.e., to create *syntaxis*) implies that the best universal history would encompass as much of the world as possible. As Marincola (1997.1.242–43) puts it: “more is, in fact, more” for Diodorus. Likewise Polybius, albeit much narrower in chronological scope and purpose, admits that his work is long, despite a scrupulous avoidance of amplifying devices, given the size of his undertaking (29.12.11).

Polybius had also criticized writers whom he saw as violating history’s natural uniformity through excessive augmentation (Polyb. 29.12). Anticipating both Diodorus’s remarks and Vitruvius’s gentle jab at writers of “bigger books,” Polybius attributes his own desire for brevity to the unique and “universal” nature of his work, as well as to his sensitivity toward readers and their needs. Whenever he treats briefly or omits what other writers have exaggerated in order to increase the fullness of their books (cf. 5 pref. 1: *amplioribus voluminibus*), his terseness and lacunae should confirm his propriety and trustworthiness (29.12.6). In *de Architectura*, the correlation of reliability with brevity is more oblique but no less important: such *brevitas* testifies to what we might call Vitruvius’s civic ethos, his assertion that his work meets a technical need that no other text or person can address. Thus whereas Polybius presents brevity as a means to guarantee the reader’s trust (i.e., by omitting sensational details), Vitruvian brevity *compels* the reader’s trust by isolating a pressing and unattended civic need in the new, Augustan world.³¹

The notion of “simple” unity was no less important for Polybius’s second-century image of history as a complete body than it would be for Diodorus roughly a century later. But since these writers do not share the same aims or scope, there are different wholes to look through. Diodorus begins at the beginning, with the gods and Egypt (*Bibl.* 1.1.6). Polybius, although he claims the 140th Olympiad (220–16 B.C.E.) as his starting point (i.e., when the war with Hannibal took place), actually begins when “the

30 Diodorus and Polybius, presumably, aimed to rebut Aristotle’s assertion that history’s focus on particulars is “less philosophical” than tragedy’s interest in universals, *Poet.* 1451b3–8.

31 The importance of this claim is strengthened by the tacit nature of much of Vitruvius’s architectural knowledge; see the discussion by Serafina Cuomo in this volume.

Romans first left Italy,” i.e., 264 B.C.E. (Polyb. 1.5.1). Polybius’s temporal limits reflect his desire to address the historical anomaly of Rome’s world conquest. He and Vitruvius are therefore particularly alike in their pursuit of a unifying principle, what Kenneth Sacks (1981.96–121) calls “qualitative” universalism. Both writers claim that Roman hegemony (which, in Vitruvius’s case, is realized by Augustus) brought their subject into existence and catalyzed their writing. Polybius, in a variation on the standard anthropology in which a primeval community coheres around particular individuals, claims that the peoples of the world were scattered until the definitive arrival of Rome on the world stage (1.1.3); only then did world events become interwoven and turn toward one τέλος; only then did history itself gain bodily coherence (σωματοειδῇ . . . τὴν ἱστορίαν).³² When Polybius in the next sentence envisions historiography as a body, his insistence on the wholeness of history entails the same Roman teleology (1.4.7–8):

It seems to me that those who are convinced that they are more or less experiencing the whole through piecemeal history are much like people who, in looking at the scattered limbs of a body that was once alive and beautiful, think that they have become suitable witnesses of the creature’s function and beauty. Now if someone could suddenly put the creature back together completely in both appearance and majesty of soul and then show it to those same people, I think they would probably all agree that in their earlier thinking they were far from the truth, and that they were mostly just dreaming.³³

Here “big books” are not at issue. Like Diodorus, Polybius adds special emphasis to the life or “soul” of the whole body (cf. *Bibl.* 20.1.5) to the Platonic doctrine of unified arrangement and its Aristotelian corollary of digestible size. True, Aristotle’s tragic plot was the body of an animal (ζῷον), but Polybius, like Diodorus after him, goes well beyond this: the body of universal history is not simply greater than the sum of its parts, it is qualitatively *different* from those parts. This is the difference between movement and stasis, life and death, truth and falsehood. In Polybius in

32 More typical anthropologies include Pl. *Protag.* 322a, Isoc. *Paneg.* 39, etc.; see Walbank 1957.1.43 n. 4.

33 This calls to mind Vitruvius’s opposition of *res* and *umbræ* at 1.1.2.

particular, it is all of these things and much more: it is the difference between history with Rome and history without it. Just so should we understand Vitruvius's image of inchoate and disconnected *commentarii* awaiting a well-ordered body of architecture in the preface to *de Architectura* Book 4.

UNO IN CONSPECTU: ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD

Thus far I have concentrated on two Greek examples of universal historiography, partly out of necessity (there are simply more extant examples of this genre in Greek than in Latin), and partly with an eye to context (Diodorus is Vitruvius's contemporary, while Polybius provides a distinctively Romanocentric view of the world). However, at least one relevant example of Latin universal historiography survives in sufficient quantity to demand our attention. Published some sixty years after *de Architectura*, Velleius Paterculus's *Historia Romana* is instructive not only as an example of universal history in Latin, but also as a likely reflection of the late republican Roman chronography that was contemporary with Vitruvius but which has not survived.³⁴ Denis Feeney, for example, quite reasonably asserts that the first book of Velleius provides us with a plausible guess at the general appearance of Cornelius Nepos's three-book *Chronica* (published in or before 54 B.C.E.) and, one may cautiously infer, the evidently similar *Liber Annalis* of Atticus.³⁵ Velleius not only shares with Atticus and Nepos the goal of capturing world history in a synchronistic fashion in just a few books (i.e., synoptic *brevity*), but if extant testimonia are any indication, he also shares with them a programmatic—and possibly technical—language of synoptic disclosure in the verb *explicare*, a verb also strongly favored by Vitruvius (Novara 2005.112–26).

As we saw with Polybius and Diodorus, a concern for synopsis (in the basic sense of “seeing together”) is often related to universal history's special aim to collect disparate particulars in hopes of adumbrating the essential, corporeal unity of history (Polyb. 1.4.1, 1.4.7; cf. Diod. Sic. *Bibl.* 1.1.3). That is, concerns about brevity are in general related to history's truthfulness and essential unity, not to memorability or comprehension.³⁶

34 Of Velleius's two books, most of the second and a significant portion of the first have survived; see above p. 271.

35 Feeney 2007.22, with references to Woodman 1975 and Gowing 2005. The *Liber Annalis*, published in 47 B.C.E., was said to be inspired by *de Re Publica* (Cic. *Brut.* 19).

36 At *Bibl.* 16.1.1 unity, not brevity, is what makes history easiest to remember.

Velleius and our testimonia on the chronographers, however, suggest that in chronography, synopsis and utility *were* closely related to brevity in its quantitative sense, just as they are in Vitruvius (Vell. Pat. 1.14.1):

Since the outline of any subject is fixed in the mind's eye more easily when it is brought together in one place rather than divided by time ("in unum contracta species quam diuisa temporibus oculis animisque inhaereat"), I decided to separate the first part of this book and the second with a useful summary of affairs ("non inutili rerum notitia in artum contracta"), and to weave in here what colonies were established and when by decree of the senate after Rome was captured by the Gauls.

Here Velleius seems to view synopsis (as its etymology suggests) as a visual phenomenon, i.e., he emphasizes the material layout of his work as a function of memory and clarity. Like Vitruvius, but unlike, say, Diodorus, Velleius would seem to value perceptible size ("in unum contracta species") at least as much as he values the mere aggregating of material, since it is the former virtue that makes that material likely to "stick" (*inhaereat*): "non inutili rerum notitia in artum contracta."³⁷

A similar valorization of synopsis (versus sheer aggregation) seems also to have characterized the work of Nepos and Atticus. Catullus's first poem, for example, famously praises Nepos for "unfolding an entire age on three sheets" (Cat. 1.1.6–7). Although there has been some debate on the subject, I am inclined to agree with A. J. Woodman (2012.124, with further references) that Catullus's poem legitimately compliments Nepos through an allusion to his work, particularly if, as is plausible, Nepos pursued the same virtues in his *Chronica* that were important to Catullus: novelty, polish, unadorned style, learning, labor, succinctness, brevity, etc. And as scholars have noted, Cicero, in his dialogue *Brutus* (14–15), praises Atticus's *Liber Annalis*, a slightly later chronographic effort, in strikingly similar terms:³⁸ "Then [Brutus] said, 'No doubt you are talking about that [book] in which he succinctly (*breviter*) and, it seems to me, most scrupulously, embraced all of history ('omnem rerum memoriam . . . complexus est')." 'That's the one I mean, Brutus,' I said. 'It saved me . . . It had much that was novel

37 Cf. the Aristotelian plot that is εὐσύνοπτον and εὐμνημόνευτον (*Poet.* 1451a4–5).

38 See Woodman 2012.124 = Woodman 2003.193, Feeney 2007.21–23, 26–28, and Habinek 1998.94–95.

and helped me see everything in one synoptic view, the march of time set out before me, which is exactly the benefit that I was looking for.”

Common to these two testimonia is an interest in a brief and useful snapshot of “everything” (Cat.: *omne aevum*, Cic.: *omnem rerum memoriam, omnia*). The ideal text according to these criteria would therefore aim at a particularly *concise* kind of synopsis—a Greek word that Cicero cleverly calques in his compliment to Atticus, *uno in conspectu* (cf. Polyb. 1.4.1). Cicero’s remark, therefore, does not so much praise Atticus’s laconic *style* (e.g., his is not an obscure *brevitas Sallustiana*), but a kind of concision that directly challenges “horizontal” *amplificatio*, the kind reflected in the length of the physical text itself.³⁹ This sort of brevity is, in part, a function of the material papyrus roll and even, perhaps, the columnar layout of some chronological works.⁴⁰

The verb *explicare*, appearing in the passages from Cicero on Atticus, Catullus on Nepos, as well as in Velleius and Vitruvius, may itself imply precisely this sort of material concision and/or arrangement. A. J. Woodman, followed by Denis Feeney, suggests that *explicare* probably had “an almost technical sense” in the chronographic writers, adding that “scholars have long pointed out . . . that *explicare* is a favorite word of Nepos in his extant work,” which is, notably, a side-by-side comparison of prominent Greeks and Romans.⁴¹ In earlier work, Woodman also noted that the universalizing Velleius used *explicare* to disclose (reductively) items that were “too big to handle” (Woodman 1983.70–71 on Vell. Pat. 2.46.1). Since what remains of Velleius’s two volumes frequently suggests the need for *brevitas* (e.g., Vell. Pat. 2.29.2; see Lobur 2007.214–15 n. 11), it is likely that *explicare* remained strongly associated not with expatiation (a sense the *TLL* captures s.v. *explico* as *tractare fusius*, “to treat rather expansively”), but a literary interest in concise summary (cf. Woodman 1975.278–80).

It has been noted that Vitruvius uses *explicare* and related nominal forms no fewer than 103 times in *de Architectura*.⁴² As in extant Velleian usage, the verb does not seem to have implied a tabular format; how then

39 Sen. Mai. *Contr.* 9.1.13 and Quint. 4.2.45, where Sallustian brevity is associated with an *abruptum sermonis genus*.

40 For a similar point about Atticus’s *Liber Annalis* and the possibility that it was arranged in parallel columns, see Feeney 2007.28 on *Brut.* 15.

41 Note Cicero’s complimentary use of it at *Brutus* 14–15 to characterize the utility of Atticus’s book. See Woodman 2012.124 = 2003.193; cf. Feeney 2007.28 and Habinek 1998.94–95. The collocation of *explicare* with the notion of *ordo* (which, as Feeney suggests, may imply a military metaphor) is also important to Vitruvius.

42 Including substantive use of the participle and the noun *explicatio*; see Novara 2005.112–26.

may we account for its prevalence? Antoinette Novara proposes that *explicare* may, together with its abstract sense of “to reveal,” suggest Vitruvius’s “unrolling” of his ten books (i.e., qua *volumina*) at a formal *recitatio* to Augustus. At least one prominent Vitruvian scholar has expressed reservations about this highly specific sort of concretization (Callebat 2006). Nonetheless, it seems that *explicare* may well draw attention to the physicality of its medium, the papyrus roll, through association with the characterizations of the similarly “brief” chronographic writings of Nepos, Atticus, and Velleius. In these writers, synopsis (and utility) are closely related to what one can see before one’s eyes (Cic. *Brut.* 15); similarly, the Vitruvian “civic ethos” does not seek to provide a panoptic ideal of Diodoran proportions, but a quasi-Cornelian *labor* (cf. Cat. 1.6–7) of synoptic brevity.

A distinction between synopsis and “panopsis” may seem like hairsplitting, but is important in light of increasing emphasis on the comprehensive ambitions of Vitruvius’s text. If Vitruvius’s universalizing rhetoric leads us to think of his text as comprehensive or totalizing, we should consider what the different “wholes” that contribute to *de Architectura* mean in light of Vitruvius’s apparent Augustan commitments. Nepos and especially Atticus, it has been argued, took up an almost Sallustian position insofar as they avoided politics in its more traditional senses and sought to embody a new kind of *virtus* through political writing (e.g., Conte 1994.210 on Atticus). That is, they pursued the same, evergetic goal in their chronologies that Diodorus had praised in the opening to his *Bibliothèque* but on a much smaller scale. But if, say, Atticus’s *Liber Annalis* sought to provide a synoptic vision of history that Cicero found restorative and full of *utilitas*, who was to benefit from Vitruvius’s efforts?⁴³ On the surface, the answer is Augustus, of course, whose *cura* for buildings and their commemorative power represent the *raison d’être* of the treatise (1 pref.). But Vitruvius’s evergetism—his devotion to Augustus, his ethic of service—is likely more two-edged than it appears.

CUI BONO?

Vitruvius’s aim is comprehensibility, not comprehensiveness. Synoptic *brevitas*, *explicatio*, and the celebration of these efforts allow him not only to assert a kind of presumptive expertise through epitome, but also to

43 For an important discussion of this question, see, especially, Gros 1994b and 1997.

delimit the world of architectural material that lies *outside* the ten books: *de Architectura* represents, so to speak, only a small sliver of an *immensum opus*, but it is not the *opus* itself. In the busy *civitas* of Augustan Rome, this means that *de Architectura*, despite its rhetoric of perfect sufficiency through synopsis, is insufficient by design. For in order to be truly complete and useful, architecture must be embodied—albeit not by the busy Augustus (cf. 1 pref. 1: *tantis occupationibus*). Vitruvius reserves much of his knowledge of architecture, so crucial to constructing the memory of the principate, for himself and himself alone. Thus although Wallace-Hadrill is clearly right to talk of Augustus as the supreme agent who, for his own political purposes, “creat[ed] a new order [of knowledge-professionals] and deprived the nobility of anything but the vestige of authority,” the timely act of definitive synopsis that Vitruvius accomplishes with *de Architectura* represents a complementary, which is not to say ancillary, act of asserting his own *auctoritas*.⁴⁴

A final point. Often scholars view the desire to synthesize knowledge in the late republic and early empire as part of a widespread, but generalized, antiquarian impulse, endemic in all aspects of the intellectual culture of the period (e.g., Moatti 1997 and Saliou at Vitruvius 2009a.99 n. 2). At the same time, scholars have tended until very recently to situate Vitruvius’s work, and even his comprehensive outlook, exclusively alongside more solidly “technical” (i.e., marginal) authors and genres: antiquarian works, encyclopedias, medical writers, military treatises, etc.⁴⁵ We should perhaps be wary of overestimating Vitruvius as a literary scholar, but we should also be wary of underestimating him. To deny the evident commerce between other, non-technical, kinds of writing and *de Architectura* is to impose arbitrary limits on what sorts of discourse are “allowed” to influence one another, and thus to deny the basic nature of intertextuality. This seems particularly problematic, if, as some maintain, Vitruvius aspired to join the cultural elite.⁴⁶ By focusing on Vitruvius’s intertextuality with universal history and chronography, we add important nuance to the general

44 Wallace-Hadrill 2005.58. The necessary embodiment of *architectura* is central to my monograph on Vitruvius, currently under preparation. König 2009.52 makes a similar point as to Vitruvius’s assertion of authority in relation to Augustanism: “[*de Architectura*] reflects not only the official rhetoric but also the underlying uncertainty and ongoing negotiations of the age.”

45 Noteworthy exceptions include Nichols 2009 a and b. Vitruvius, it may be noted, predates most extant “technical” or “scientific” comparanda in Latin apart from Varro.

46 Modern discussions of an “aspirational” Vitruvius begin in earnest with Brown 1963.

notion that *de Architectura* is a sort of “intellectual” or “textual” example of Roman imperialism in the Augustan period. Cases have already been made for Vitruvius as the emperor’s “double,” one who conquers the world with Roman *ratio*, with the Roman body, with a Roman “rule” (McEwen 2003.92–102, 194–95). But the notion that Vitruvius’s Rome and universal history share a “subject” in the world is a beginning, not an end, of inquiry.

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