The Non-Architectural Side of Vitruvius*

B. Baldwin

Even with the architecture, Vitruvius does not always get his due. Mainly an anglophone sin; Europeans have been more attentive. Not always flatteringly, though. Koch\(^1\) denied that he had any influence on Roman architecture. Archaeologists have not yet found his basilica at the Italian colony of Fanum\(^2\). Granger\(^3\) detects Vitruvianism in the towns of Africa, notably the circle of the winds and capitol at Dugga. He is a source for the elder Pliny,\(^4\) whilst Frontinus\(^5\) remembered him as a plumbing expert, and his name is dropped by Servius\(^6\) and Sidonius Apollinaris,\(^7\) albeit an alleged Byzantine allusion in Tzetzes is chimerical.\(^8\) It was Vitruvius' book which Faventinus\(^9\) chose to abridge in a form which Palladius would later exploit. Wren and Inigo Jones wrote about him,\(^10\) Hitchcock and Johnson based their notorious 1932 'International Style' essay on his principles, and he is the only Roman to make

* The first version of this paper was written for the Classical Association of the Canadian West, Vancouver, 1989: some topical frivolities have been excised, and basic documentation added.

3 F. Granger in the Loeb edition, 1, xv, with his note on 1.7.1.
4 In the indexes to *NH* 16, 35, 36.
5 *Aq.* 1.25.
6 On Aen. 6.43, though the passage there cited from *Vitruvius qui de architectonica scripsit* does not come from our man. It could derive from the (to us) obscure Vitruvius Rufus whose notes survive in an epitome *Epaphroditii et Vitruvii Rufi architectonis*; cf. Thielscher *PW* IXA, cols. 463-4. Vitruvius never uses the noun *architecton*, and the cognate *architectonicus* only once, at 9.1.1.
7 *Ep.* 4.2.
8 Granger 1, xv, adduces Tzetzes on Lycophron, *Alexandr.* 1024, but there is no such passage in the edition of E. Scheer (Berlin, 1958), 317, nor is Vitruvius in his index of authors cited by Tzetzes.
9 M. Cetius Faventinus may belong to the third century; Plommer, 40-111, provides a text, translation, and commentary.
10 See the survey of Granger 1, xxxiv-v.
the glittering pages of Tom Wolfe's *From Bauhaus to Our House*. Yet he gets only four lines in that largely futile titan, *The Cambridge History of Latin Literature*, the bibliography to which cites no secondary literature. And though she features him in her *Intellectual Life in the Late Republic*, Rawson still remains cruelly dismissive of his "unclassical style, awkward syntax, and uncertain genders."

Vitruvius *sans* architecture sounds like Hamlet without the Prince. In fact, his book is polymathic. The infamous style is partly the result of *patrii sermonis egestas* (the poverty of his native tongue). He says (7 pref. 14) that he only had three Latin predecessors: Fuficius, Varro, and Publius Septimius. The first might conceal Fufidius, Cicero’s friend and aedile at Arpinum. Varro is the Varro; Septimius was his quaestor. Thus Vitruvius was a parent to Roman architectural writing, not heir to a long tradition. He had largely to create his own professional vocabulary, a thing of fascination rather than repulsion. And he had an ear for words and capacity for epigram, as I shall duly explicate.

Since I am plotting a study elsewhere, I here spare you most of the controversy over when he composed and published his work. There is no external evidence. Estimate range from the early thirties to c. 14 B.C., around 27 being the favourite with Syme amongst others. The issue comports a bigger one:

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12 *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature* 2 (Cambridge, 1982) 493-4, 867. To avoid bibliographical overload of this short paper, I direct readers to the excellent surveys of P. Gros and L. Callebat in *ANRW* 2.301 (Berlin & New York, 1982), 686-95, 720-2, adding more recent items where relevant in subsequent notes. Older studies are covered by Granger, xxxiv-vi. A good bibliography is also attached to the Concordance to Vitruvius by Callebat and others (Hildesheim-Zurich-New York, 1984), 1, vii-xii.
14 I have no patience with the cynics who claim he pilfered from unacknowledged lost works.
19 The strange idea of J. L. Ussing, *Betrachtninger over Vitruvii de architectura* (Copenhagen, 1896), that Vitruvius wrote in the third or fourth century AD is refuted by the reference (8. 3. 17) to Cottius’ kingdom in the Alps, an impossible description after Nero’s conversion of it into a province (Suet. *Nero* 18).
should we consider Vitruvius a Republican or Augustan author? I mention one aspect on the *multum in parvo* principle. Many plump for early dates since he fails to mention Augustus’ greatest buildings. That looks cogent. Yet he is unspecific about Augustan matters, save his own appointment in charge of military machines. His Latin is far from clear, hence also the posts he held. He owed renewal of tenure to the imperial sister, a unique glimpse of her influence.

His praises of Augustus are more formal than keen; he is warmer towards Julius Caesar. As he tells us with foolish pride he did not seek out commissions but waited for them - You phone me, I won’t phone you (6 pref 5)! No wonder he had made little money or repute. The Fanum basilica, on his own words *conlocavi curavique faciendam* (I sited and saw to its construction) smacks more of the bureaucratic than the artistic side (5. 1. 6). More than once (3 pref. 3; 6. 7. 6-7; 8. 3. 25), he writes for fellow *philologi* rather than as engineer. Also, though sensibly patriotic, he was not purblind. One may smile at his assertion (6. 1. 11) that Rome owed her empire to the effects of temperate climate on character, but when it comes to the world’s finest buildings (7 pref 16-7), not one is Roman.

We don’t know his date; we also don’t know who he was! Manuals register him as L. or M. Vitruvius Pollio, suppositions based on homonyms in inscriptions from Italy and Africa. The manuscripts give plain Vitruvius, as do Pliny, Frontinus, Servius, and Sidonius. Pollio comes from the opening of Faventinus’...

21 E. g. the *Cambridge History.*
23 At 1 pref. 2, Vitruvius writes *ad apparationem* (sc. of weapons) *fui praesto et cum eis commoda accepi, quae, cum primo mihi tribuisti recognitionem, per sororii commendationem servasti.* Granger translated *recognitionem* as ‘surveyorship’, a sense not recorded by Lewis & Short and only here in the OLD. In his version (New York, 1960), M.H. Morgan rendered the noun as ‘bestowal’, understanding Vitruvius to refer throughout to just the one job.
24 The absence of name and epithet makes me think this was written before Octavia’s death in 11 B.C.; cf. Dio Cassius 54. 35. 4. Back in 33 (Dio 49, 43. 8), Octavian built the porticoes and libraries named for her; did Vitruvius have anything to do with these?
25 Although his parents had been rich enough to educate him (6 pref. 4), the imperial benevolence had removed *inopiae timorem* from his life (1 pref. 3). Had he suffered in the turmoil of the thirties, a period conspicuously absent from his reminiscences as Rawson 87, n. 14, observes, albeit drawing the wrong conclusions?
26 It should be recalled that some older scholars dismissed the Fanum section as a late interpolation; cf. Granger, 1 xxxi and xxxv, for bibliography and refutation.
27 Vitruvius’ Oscars go (in his sequence) to the temple of Diana at Ephesus, the temple of Apollo at Miletus, the sanctuary of Ceres and Proserpina at Eleusis, and at Athens not the Parthenon but the Olympieion.
28 For instance, *CIL* 5. 3464 (Verona), 8 18913 (Thibilis). The texts of these and others are gathered by Thielscher, *PW* IXA, cols. 420-5; cf. Rawson 86-7.
epitome, Vitruvius Pollio aliique auctores scientissime scripsere (Vitruvius Pollio and other authors have written most expertly); but there may be something in Granger’s neglected notion 29 that Pollio denotes Asinius; I suspect it is better Latin to precede aliique (and others) by two individuals rather than one.

In PW IXA, not normally a source of fun, Thielscher30 came up with a daring equation. The architect was Mamurra, Caesar’s praefectus fabrum and pet victim of Catullus. This notion, equally unknown to the Cambridge History and Catullan editors, 31 is variously acclaimed and ridiculed.32 It would be delicious to find in our sober architect, the poet’s prodigal debauchee. Of course, if Shackleton Bailey33 is right in dating Mamurra’s death to 45, that puts the kaibosh on it! I, alas, find the equation unlikely for a panoply of reasons, e.g. Vitruvius’ own statement (1 pref. 2) that he was only notus (an acquaintance) to Caesar, whereas there was favour between himself and Augustus, 34 also the failure of Pliny and Suetonius to make the connection when discussing Catullus’ lampoons.35

Rawson weighs the odds of a link with the Vitruvii of Formiae or Vitruvius Mamurra in Africa. An African pedigree comports an extra dimension: Granger 36 found Africitas (Africanism) in some of his more curious turns of Latin. But Italy is the better bet. The first Vitruvius in history, Vitruvius Vacca, commanded the army of Fundi against Rome in 330.37 And the architect writes from an Italian perspective, spreading himself on the Pozzolana-producing districts, Appennine sands, Amiternum stone quarries, Ardea’s curative springs,

29 Granger 2, xvii-111, a suggestion apparently unknown to Plommer, Rawson, and the Cambridge History.
31 It appeared in 1961, too late for Fordyce but nine years before Quinn.
32 It was criticised at length by P. Ruffel & J. Soubiran, 'Vitruve ou Mamurra?' Pallas 11 (1962), 123-79. The notion is rejected by R.E.A. Palmer, 'On the Track of the Ignoble,' Athenaeum 61 (1983), 343-61, and thought unlikely by Rawson 86 (conceding that the architect might have been a relative). Purcell, loc. cit., found it "convincing"; T. P. Wiseman, Catullus and his World (Cambridge, 1985), 198, leaves it an open question, but seems sympathetic.
33 On Cicero, Att. 13. 52. 1, from Puteoli, Dec. 19, 45. The Latin is ambiguous: tum audivit (sc. Caesar) de Mamurra, vultum non mutavit.
34 Granger translates in te contulit favorem "found favour with you", whereas Morgan takes it to mean "inclined me to support you."
35 Pliny, NH 36. 48: Suet., Jul. 73.
36 Granger 1, xxxi, along with his note on 2. 1. 8.
37 Livy 8. 19; Vitruvius Vacca was well known at Rome, and had a house on the Palatine, later demolished and his land confiscated, but the area remained known as the Meadows of Vacca.
Velia's acid waters, Altinum's shrewd use of sea water to kill off mosquitoes, and the sinister Campus Coretus where the bones of birds and lizards littered around its deadly spring. He can seem obsessed with aqueous properties. But they were a matter of interest to the sickly Augustus, and the theme was trendy enough to provoke a poem (Ep. 1. 15) from Horace. Vitruvius is also eloquent on the wines of Italy, though omitting Setinum, said by Pliny to be the favourite imperial tipple because it did not induce bradypepsy. There are some signs that Romans read and acted upon his observations. Thus in a sequence (2. 9. 16) on towns rich in larch, he wishes this good building wood could be brought to Rome; by Pliny's time it is being used there with no mention of it being hard to get. And when he chats (8. 3. 20) about Alpine waters producing goitre, a condition known in England as Derbyshire neck, we recognise an affliction acknowledged in the Digest and see the point of Juvenal's quis tumidum guttur miratur in Alpibus (who marvels at a swollen throat in the Alps?) (13. 162).

Rome herself is outshone in this Italian panorama. Vitruvius gives out titbits of no interest to aesthetes or tourists, notably the location of cinnabar factories (7. 9. 4), but he does not puff the metropolis, not allowing its gnomon to be better than Greek ones (9. 7. 1), and emphasizing its lack of theatres with acoustical vessels (5. 5. 8). As to Africa, we shall see that it provides his best epigram, also that he is a colonial old buffer towards the natives he met.

Though remembering his parents with affection (6 pref. 4), and eloquent on his own looks, age, and health (2 pref 4) - how many Roman prose writers do this? - he betrays little of his own career. Many say he was with Caesar at the siege of Massilia, but this French connection (10. 16. 11-2) is mere conjecture and in that he ends with Caesar's setback it might be thought an odd way to recollect the episode, albeit Caesar himself (BC 2. 6. 1) commends Massiliot courage. The real motive was that it gave him a chance to end his book with a self-advertising flourish - Marseilles was saved architectorum sollertia! (by the ingenuity of its architects).

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38 After 23 BC, thinking of his serious illness and Antonius Musa's celebrated cold water treatments.
39 NH 14. 61.
40 NH 16.43, for its damp proof qualities.
41 Dig. 21. 1. 12. 2.
42 Between the temples of Flora and Quirinus.
43 Cf. Rawson 87, n. 14, and 192.
But he may have been at the siege of Alpine Larignum (2. 9. 15-6), being the only source for this Caesarian operation. His description of the local larch woods includes the *hapax larignus* (of larch wood), an attestable link between a Roman writer's experiences and vocabulary. Rawson doubts he ever set foot in the East, but I fancy he was at Ephesus, for which he shows great enthusiasm. It is good for stucco marble (7. 6), the first provenance of cinnabar (7. 8. 1), in a list of Greece's greatest cities (7. 8. 1), and (10 pref. 1) its ancestral law punishing architect's cost overruns is commended as hard but fair, Vitruvius using this fine piece of Thatcherite monetarism for an attack on building costs at Rome. His remarks could reflect service in the Eastern campaigns; Caesar twice (BC 3. 33, 105) mentions saving the Temple of Diana's monies.

Vitruvius was a Roman renaissance man, to judge from his prefatory panoply of subjects required by the perfect architect, prerequisites that would make a modern student swoon in horror! As a scientist, his experiments with hollow bronzes (1. 6. 2) anticipate Watt and the kettle, and he understood mosquitoes as the cause of malaria. Less happy is his notion (5. 3. 1) that theatre crowds are prone to wind-borne infections, unless he thereby explains English soccer hooligans. Above all, his casual acceptance of the water mill (10. 5. 1-2) contrasts with the excited Greek epigram (AP 9. 418, by the contemporary Antipater of Thessalonica) which provokes Marxists to characteristic nonsense.

One source of his art and science is Lucretius' *De rerum Natura*, singled out (9 pref. 17) with Cicero's *De oratore* and Varro's *De lingua Latina* as a work for posterity: his mentions of the title (cf. 1. 1. 7) are neglected in recent Lucretian scholarship. Vitruvius echoes the poet on architectural order (1. 2. 1), the

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44 See Rawson 87, n. 14, and 192 where Larignum is forgotten and Massilia said to be the only military reference in Vitruvius!
45 Rawson 188, n. 14.
46 Nobili et ampla civitate...dura condicione sed non iniquo...a maioribus - Vitruvius sees Ephesus in very Roman terms.
47 After Varro, R. 1. 12. 2.
48 Cf. L. Casson, *Ancient Trade and Society* (Detroit, 1984), 134-5, 150, n. 3, on Vitruvius' "off-hand remarks".
origins of man (2. 1. 1), and atoms (4 pref. 1). One observable debt is the epithet *versabundus*, (revolving), only in these two writers.\(^\text{52}\)

He was not alone in admiring Lucretius, also in the *grande galerie* of Velleius Paterculus (2. 36. 2). Without succumbing to Roman canards about Epicurus and hedonism, Rawson's claim \(^\text{53}\) that pleasure was an alien concept to Vitruvius must be marked wrong. Sentiments such as *si non blandimur voluptati* (if we do not smile upon pleasure) (3. 3. 13) and praise of high apartments (what would Juvenal think!) for their nice views (2. 8. 17; cf. 5. 1. 10; 10. 7. 4) show the opposite.

The man of science was also a man of the arts. Vitruvius shows off a bit with his Greek, giving the full text of three epigrams on springs (8. 3. 20-2), mentioning the obscure Chionides in a register of Old Comedy (6 pref. 3), quoting Euripides' *Phaethon* (9. 1. 13-4), and anecdotal on the Homeric critics Aristophanes and Zoilus (7 pref. 5-9). Obtrusive praise of Ennius and Accius (9 pref. 16) reflects the literary battles of his day, whilst his diatribe against impressionist art (7. 5. 3-7, *nunc iniquis moribus inprobantur* (now repudiated by prejudiced fashions) has contemporary moral and polemical point - I fancy he would have relished Stassinopoulous-Huffington's recent hatchet job on Picasso!\(^\text{54}\)

Rawson is not the only one to spurn Vitruvian Latin. To Teuffel-Schwabe he was in turn diffuse, brief, affected, plebeian - a no-win situation! Similar onslaughts plague Varro and the *De bello Hispaniensi*, dubbed by its Loeb editor "the most illiterate book in classical literature." I sometimes think Vitruvius, who (5 pref. 1) was interested in historiography and who knew (2. 3. 4) the obscure Spanish town of Maxilua, knocked off this pamphlet with its obtruded liking for Ennius, love of sieges, interest in machines and buildings, and shared linguistic features, but that is another paper for another day.

Two criticized usages are nocetur (2. 7. 3; 2. 9. 14), called by Granger "a striking solecism," \(^\text{55}\) and *credo* with the accusative *rationem* where editors have been quick to emend case or verb\(^\text{56}\) (2. 1. 8). Granger calls it *Africitas*, but why not take *credo* to mean give as in give money, on the strength of Plautus, *Pseud.*

\(^{52}\) Vitruvius 9. 5. 4; Lucretius 6. 438, 582 - in the same form *versabunda* in the second passage.

\(^{53}\) Rawson 190-1.


\(^{56}\) Reddam is commonly substituted for *credam*; Vitruvius elsewhere has *rationem* once (3. 5. 9) and *credo* three times (1. 1. 12, *credent*; 3 pref. 1, *credetur*; 8. 1. 3, *credendum*).
506, ne quisquam credat nummum? (Is no one to loan money?). Despite his own signalled interest, the archaic element in Vitruvius is undervalued. And we are too quick to know better than the Romans what was good Latin. Moreover, he may be boldly experimenting in prose, as Tacitus would do and as contemporary poets were doing, e.g. Catullus' illum deperit (35. 12) and Horace's pontum palluit (Odes 3. 27. 26.)

French critics are more appreciative. Thus Bayet, 57 "un modèle de rédaction precise et claire, non sans élégance même," and Callebat, 58 "l'instrument à la fois fonctioneel et artistique d'une oeuvre littéraire." Vitruvius had his own fads, e.g. fondness for nouns ending in -tio and -entia, of which he may have coined the unique concrescentia (8. 3. 18) and decrescentia (9. 2. 2). Apart from the predictable technical terms (Greek rarities as well as Latin ones), 59 his prose is studded with unusual words. 60 He also helped to extend prose vocabulary, being the first to exploit such poeticisms as amnis and pelagus. He was also alert to the effect of literary device. The man who could write ubique avium et lacertarum reliquarumque serpentium ossa iacentia (everywhere the bones of birds and lizards and other creeping creatures lying about) in horripilatory context (8. 3. 7) had no tin ear; Vitruvius was an architect with words.

In finale, one passage with a confluence of issues. It is his one extended sequence on Africa (8. 3. 24-5). Mention of Juba's Zama buildings evokes his tastiest epigram, Africa parens et nutrix ferarum bestiarum (Africa, the Parent and nurse of wild animals). This surely helped to shape Juvenal's mot on Africa as nutricula causidicorum (nursing mother of barristers). (7. 149-50). And it strikingly resembles Horace's nec Jubae tellus generat, leonum/arida nutrix (nor does Juba's parched land breed them, that nurse of lions)(Odes 1. 22. 15-6, published in 23 BC). Callebat thinks Vitruvius modelled his aphorism on Horace, with obvious dating consequences. Likewise, his prefatory praise of Augustus suggests the Horatian cum tot sustineas, etc. of Ep. 2. 1. 1 ff. (published in 14/13BC). Now I can't envisage Horace conning the pages of Vitruvius for serviceable phrases. But the converse need not apply; sentiment and style could be commonplace. 61

58 L. Callebat, 'La prose du 'De Architectura' de Vitruve, ANRW 2. 30. 1, 719.
60 For easy instance, abiegneus, abstantia, agrammatus, alveolatus, contricare. Callebat's article gives an excellent general account, and precise statistics can be got from his Concordance (see n. 12 above) as well as from H. Nohl, Index Vitruvianus (repr. Darmstadt, 1977) - this latter is unknown to the Cambridge History!
61 It should be noticed that Vitruvius' panegyrical use of numen (1 pref. 1) can be used to support numen in Horace, Ep. 2. 1. 16, iurandasque tuum per numen ponimus aras, against nomen which is in the majority of mss. This has been a matter of editorial dispute since Bentley; Wilkins' elaborate note on the passage did not mention Vitruvius.
Vitruvius reports a conversation with Gaius Julius, son of Massinissa, who had fought *cum patre Caesare*. Julius, obviously. Is *pater* a simple term, or does it hint at Julius' *pater patriae* title, over which there is modern doubt? And is it *the* Massinissa? If so, meeting the son would be a marvellous link with the heroic past. Could Gaius Julius be a Latinisation of Gulussa? Not the Gulussa who helped Scipio Aemilianus as father had Africanus, for he was dead by 148, but another one - since Massinissa left at least 44 sons, we are spoiled for choice! However, Massinissa may here devolve into Masintha whom Suetonius (Jul. 71) mentions as an African protégé of Caesar.

There is a touch of condescension in Vitruvius' attitude to the son - the fellow owned lots of local land, so could be invited home. Their talk was *de philologia* (on the pursuit of learning), a term expanded to cover waters with strange powers. It looks like a medley of science and superstition, but Vitruvius' examples largely consort with those of Ovid, *Met.* 15. 313 ff. and he had probably been reading more poetry on the subject than the three acknowledged Greek epigrams.

Such, such are the joys of Vitruvius. Try him and see. As he himself remarked (1. 1. 12), "It will seem amazing to the inexperienced that human nature can master and remember so many subjects."

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63 See P. G. Walsh, 'Massinissa,' *JRS* 55 (1965), 149-60.
64 Ovid has the Clitorius spring and the Proetides, also sharing with Vitruvius Lyncestis, Arcadia, Crathis, and Salmacis - notice the architect's obtruded correction of common Salmacis tales at 2. 8. 12.