

Vitruvius human scale influences generations



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The classical antiquity period was a host to mythology, arts and influential rulers of the era. The first and most well documented treatise analysis of architecture in the 1st Century was De Architectura. Vitruvius, author and military architect, dedicated to his commander Augustus Caesar these 10 volumes encompassing a corpus relating to aspects of Greek and Roman architecture (McEwen. 2003). From analysing Book IV, Chapter 1 this essay makes a clear correlation in terms of how Vitruvius presented these mythological origins of the Greek and Roman orders. It will show how Vitruvius's account of the orders was influential in understanding Greek Architecture and finally how De Architectura influenced the styles, buildings and architects of Italian Renaissance period.

In this essay it will be argued that he had a profound influence on architects of the Italian renaissance and his symbolism of human form and scale was defining factor in understanding Greek architecture and mythology. These three orders, discussed by Vitruvius, benchmarked architecture from classical antiquity to the present. 'The Origins of the Three Orders and the Proportion of the Corinthian Capital' is a broad overview of the 3 categories of columns, which are segregated by size, form and mythological symbols, relating to human form. The chapter examines the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian with firstly the origins and basic mapping of where the names originated. Basic dimensioning of the orders is explained in terms of measurements, which pertain to human form. According to the mythology of each order, their relationships are linked to characteristics symbolising human form. When constructing the temple of Apollo Panionios, a

proportional system of measurement needed to be used for structural integrity (Vitruvius. 2009).

Similarities and symbolic meaning were made in relation to proportion, strength and grace of the male body in the structure. This was calculated by the measurement of a man's foot being $\frac{1}{6}$ th of his height, and applying this same ratio to the diameter of the bottom of the shaft and capital. Second to the Doric order, and sometime later, initial treatise were still prevalent. The Ionic order was spawned with the construction of the Temple of Diana. Architects made the diameter of the column, an $\frac{1}{8}$ th of the height, making it taller in appearance. A shoe replaced the base, and on the capitol, volutes were placed on either side.

Columns were decorated with fruit around the convex moulding, and flutes led vertically to the shaft of the column (Vitruvius. 2009). The column, slender in comparison to the Doric column, depicted the shape of a woman. Volute and fruit moulding, symbolised the curls of long hair draping the column. Flutes portrayed the folds of robes, worn by married women (Vitruvius. 2009). The Ionic order represents the feminine grace, modularity and elegance in deference to its masculine Doric profile.

With the establishment of the two main orders, Doric and Ionic, the third order was invented. The Corinthian progression, from the embellished features of the Ionic order, resulted in slender features of proportion to diameter, but with more aesthetic detail to the capital and abacus. Rows of leaves and stalks occupied the majority of the capital, with the introduction of four flowers at each side of the column, creating its definitive form. The

columns symbolism is in correlation to a virgin female. Mythology of the Corinthian, order relates to a virgin citizen of Corinth, dying at a young age. Her grave is bestowed with her treasured loving cups. The cups are so situated, that they sit directly on the top of an acanthus root.

A tile is placed on top to protect them. The root splits at the base of the cup, growing leaves and flowers around the base. These flowers grow up to the tile, splay outwards, and form spirals like the volutes of the Ionic capitals. Callimachus, a skilled masonry, passes the grave and discovers the natural phenomenon. Using the idea, he builds columns with the same natural properties of the engulfed cup. Designing and erecting these columns in Corinth, resulted in the Corinthian order being spawned (Vitruvius. 2009). A progression of ideas and basis of symbolism, aided in creating the 3 orders.

The mythology behind each order holds precedence in effectively relating the orders to human form and scale. As with Vitruvius's three orders, the process of knowledge that he attained, by analysing and interpreting structures, gave the following generations, wisdom in understanding Greek architecture. By studying these three orders, his accounts of the Temple of Diana and Apollo Panionios, give us direct reference to the structures of Greek architecture and what of orders are used. The accounts of the location and societies that governed them, inform us of historical details relevant to these structures. It is unsure that Vitruvius actually visited Greece, however his justification of Greek classical architecture, in southern Italy and Sicily, instigates a wide range of knowledge (Chitham. 1985).

This cardinal knowledge, passed down through the text of *De Architectura*, is also expressed through terminology of architectural features and symbolism through structures. This terminology helps develop an original dialect of pronunciation of the era, and relates structural elements with correct terms. Symbolic reference of structure relating to human form, as mentioned, is an alternative influence educating a higher meaning of learning. McEwen suggests "The historical remnant tends to be read as part of a continuum, a source of metaphors and insights that are, or should be for architects - perennially informative. Of these, the metaphor of architecture as a reflection of the human body is fundamental." (McEwen. 2003, p 5) As well as relating to human form, 3 principles stated in the 3rd chapter must be attained when conducting architectural design. *Firmitas* (strength), covering construction and structural integrity, *Utilitas* (utility) covering functioning of a building and *Venustas* (beauty) the aesthetic appearance involving symmetry and proportion (Kruft. 1994).

These factors together effectively encourage the development of historical studies into classic antiquity, and further influence the understanding of Greek architecture. Although his influence was not acknowledged in the imperial era, he was influential in the understanding of architecture, and also a major influence for the Italian architects of the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries. As with the 3 principles of architecture, adaptation is widespread in his works, influencing Andrea Palladio's planning of architectural structures (Palladio. 2007).

3 epistyle, frieze and pediment of the gable roofs that protrude from its four porticos. Also good representation of precise symmetry is established

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(Palladio. 2007). Such works of Leone Battista Alberti, have incorporated renaissance style works, with integration of a network of fluted Corinthian columns, at the San Andrea Church, Italy (Anon. 2012).

The first renaissance treatise of his *De Re Aedificatoria*, is a ten book series strongly related to, and modelled on, Roman architecture and influence of Vitruvius. Another major influence was Leonardo Da Vinci, an influential figure and Polymath of the renaissance period. Profoundly inspired by Alberti and Vitruvius treaties he constructed a detailed scale drawing of the Vitruvius Man, 1490 (Anon. 2012B). This anatomical drawing, in reference to using human form and scale, was a direct reverberation of Vitruvius literatures. Brunelleschi's Pazzi chapel, used parallel forms of columns and entablatures, all unified proportional height and symmetry. However proper segregation of orders were not in use. These came later with the publishing of such text as Alberti's *Ten Books of Architecture* (Ching. 2011B). It's important to state that, development of such treatises and ideas relating to the orders of classic antiquity, were greatly inspired by the translation of Alberti's ten books, making the knowledge accessible, not only for architects, but for enthusiast alike.

The Italian renaissance was captivated by Roman antiquity and the basic principles of architecture evolving from *De Architectura*. Image 3: Vitruvian Man In conclusion, comparative evidence verifies, that Vitruvius had a paramount influence on the Italian renaissance. He helped us better understand Greek architecture through symbolism of human form and scale. It is still considered to be the basis for architectural knowledge in the present. The three orders, as previously mentioned, was a manual

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encompassing all methods of architecture, based on Greek architecture. It created systems to categorise the orders, and relate to scale and human form. It is without doubt, this profound accumulation of knowledge, helps us understand the architecture of the past and gave influence to Italian architects treatise of the renaissance. De architecture was an important testament to antiquity, renaissance and will continue to be a benchmark for future generations to come.