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GREEK MODELS AND LITERARY SOURCES ON THE IMPORTANCE
OF ITALY AS SIGN OF ITS BENT TO UNIVERSAL RULE IN *DE*
ARCHITECTURA OF VITRUVIUS (VI 1, 1-11)

At the beginning of book VI of *De architectura*, mainly dealing with the rules for the construction of private buildings, country houses and with the types of Greek houses, therefore within a technical and specialised analysis, Vitruvius dwells on considering *quibus regionibus aut quibus inclinationibus mundi constituantur*, as, based on their geographical position, buildings need different features: in the north, in fact, they must be closed and protected, while in the south they are open and *haec autem ex natura rerum sunt animadvertenda et consideranda atque etiam ex membris corporibusque gentium observanda*¹

Chapter 1 of book VI arranges the various topics in the following way: buildings need to be suitable to the various peculiarities concerning geography, latitudes, and climate of the different regions, determined by the relative positions against the zodiac and the course of the sun (paragraphs 1-2), outline of a general theory of environmental determinism according to which the geographical locations of the various populations determine their body and temper peculiarities (3-4), the voices of populations are also different (5-8) with a reference to the theory of the musicality of cosmos in the neopythagorean tradition and with an evident suggestion of a lucretian origin (V 691), variety of mental attitudes (9-10), a thesis according to which due to the fact that Italic populations and roman people lived in the centre of the world in temperate areas, they evidence the right balance between the opposite tendencies of northern and southern

¹ As it is known, Vitruvius is the author of the only treaty on architecture that reached us in its integral version from ancient times. *De architectura*, a ten-book work written in the last decades of I century BC., (30-20 BC), dedicated to Augustus, is an imposing treatment of all the fields of architecture, also involving civil and military engineering. Vitruvius meant to write a treaty that could define architecture first of all as an autonomous knowledge in its systematic categories and that connected the Latin technical tradition (however with the evident obstacle of the lacking of written sources) with the cultural heritage of Greek origin and, above all, of the Hellenic age. The vitruvian idea is essentially encyclopaedically and from hence the frequent use of *excursus* of a various kind where specialised technical knowledge merges with remarks ranging from law philosophy to geometry, to music, undoubtedly in a global humanistic sense foreshadowing the spirit of the work by Pliny the elder. The passage concerning a climatic-anthropologic subject falls within this context.

populations, and this *status* explains why Rome conquered the world (11). Italy enjoys a privilege territorial and climatic position and a fortunate *divina mens* allowing it to gain the predominance on populations, as well as a *fatale imperium*. In brief, nature claims that buildings are diversified based on latitudes and regions (12).

This passage introduces a geo-ethnographical *excursus* of a great interest, focused on the direct influence on these peoples by climate based on different latitudes, where we can recognise the presence of a long and consolidate Greek scientific and philosophic tradition leading to the scientist, philosopher and historian Posidonius of Apamea as closest chronological source to Vitruvius, as well as collector of numerous previous reflections and theories (Traina, 1988, pp. 303-349 and Gros, 1997, pp. IX-LXXVII)². In fact, the posidonian theses enjoyed a great success and spread in the late republican and Augustan roman culture. Cicero was an attentive auditor of Posidonius at the panetian stoic school of Rodi (Plut., *Cic.*, 4), while Pompeus was his great admirer (Plut., *Pomp.* 42). Vitruvius states that where the sun spread its heat with a greater moderation, in this same place also bodies are maintained temperate; where, instead, it burns the earth by passing closer to it, it also consumes the right degree of humidity. In the colder areas of the north, on the contrary, humidity is not absorbed by the sun, being too weak, but the light and dewy air, letting the humidity from the sky flow through the bodies, creates *ampliores corporaturas vocisque sonitus graviores*. Due to this climatic reason, *ex eo quoque*, the populations living in the north are characterised by *inmanibus corporibus, candidis coloribus, directo capillo et rufo, oculis caesis, sanguine multo ab umoris plenitate caelique refrigerationibus*³. Instead, the populations living nearer the equator and under the orbit of the sun, due to the intensity of the solar heat, evidence a *brevioribus corporibus, colore fusco, crispo capillo, oculis nigris, cruribus validis, sanguine exiguo*⁴.

Namely, the scarcity of this latter makes them more timorous when they have to resist weapons. In fact, they are *timidiores ferro resistere*, though being able to strongly stand great heats and fevers, as it is from heat that their limbs seem to be nurtured; northern populations, on the contrary, are characterised by *timidiora et inbecilla a febris* bodies, but thanks to the quality of their

² VITRUV., *De arch.* VI 1, 1-10 = *FGrHist.* 87 FF 120,121,122. Posidonius is one of the most important promulgators of the Greek knowledge in the roman world. His contribution to the geographic and ethnographic fields proves to be critical, as it can be inferred by the numerous fragments of his works, among which the main are his *Histories* (a continuation of the polibian History) and the treaty *On the Ocean*, also rich in anthropological remarks. For a fundamental reconstruction of the figure of Posidonius see Pauly-Wissowa (Reinhardt, 1953, pp. 653-690). Note that in the collection of the fragments by Jacoby, paragraph 11, chapter I, book VI is excluded from the attribution to Posidonius.

³ VITRUV., *De arch.* VI 1, 3.

⁴ VITRUV., *De arch.* VI 1, 4.

blood they can resist weapons *sine timore*⁵. Due to this *tenuitas caeli* and with a mind enhanced by heat, the southern populations prove to be swifter and more ready in designing plans and evidence *animis acutissimis infinitaque sollertia consiliorum*, while northern ones, owing to the thick atmosphere they live in, are chilled by the stillness of humid air and are characterised by *mentes stupentes*, that is they evidence a torpid intelligence⁶.

However, southern populations are not able to face deeds that require energy and diligence, as it is as if the sun had sucked their *animorum virtutes*; on the contrary, the northern populations *ad armorum vehementiam paratiores sunt*, are endowed with great courage and act valiantly without fear, even though they attack *irruentes sine considerantia*, that is without reflecting due to their *tarditas animi* that, therefore, frustrates and discourages their plans⁷.

The main element standing out from the reading of the text by Vitruvius, is the revival, following the centuries old Greek scientific-philosophic tradition, of the aristotelic qualitative polarity courage/stupidity and cowardice/intelligence harmoniously inserted between the two climatic extremes and clearly referred to the nature of blood that determines, in a close relationship to the influence of climate, the behaviour of the various populations. Aristotle dealt with the features of blood only in connection to animal psychology and did not directly link the physical and structural build of man with the environmental conditions he lives in.

We can state that this union of elements, once scattered, reported by Vitruvius occurred thanks to the contribution provided by the scientific and ethnographic speculation of Posidonius of Apamea (Truedinger, 1918, pp.89-118, Norden, 1920, pp. 105-114, Pohlenz, 1948, pp. 424.425, Dihle, 1962, p. 229, Mueller, 1980, p.329, Sassi, 1985, pp.123-124, Stok, 1985, pp. 65-111 and for a thesis, instead, opposed as for the paternity of posidonian see Ferrary, 1988, pp.382-394)⁸. In

⁵ SEN., *De ira* II 19, 5 that connects anger, extremely similar to the *thymos* attributed by Posidonius to men and animals with a wide chest and a higher body heat, due to the quantity of blood, in the passage quoted by Galen in F. EK 169, to a prevailing of body heat that makes the bloody stir and boil, as opposed to shyness that, instead, is naturally linked to cold and states that the *iracundissimi sint flavi rubentesque, quibus talis natura color est, qualis fieri ceteris inter iram solet; mobilis enim illis agitatusque sanguis est.*

⁶ VITRUV., *De arch.* VI 1, 9. The example described by Vitruvius, as for the action of hot air that makes human spirit more subtle and that cold air makes it slower, concerns the animal kingdom and namely snakes that move with agility when the refreshing humidity is dried by the sun while they remain still and dazed when, in the season of winter solstice, they are cooled and numbed for the change of climate.

⁷ VITRUV., *De arch.* VI 1, 10.

⁸ In Vitruvius the presence of the platonic-aristotelic theme of the perfection of the central element of the geoclimatic model is evident. In fact, in the system proposed in *De architectura*, the central space of the world is occupied by the roman population that, in this intermediate position, as Greece in the aristotelic system of *Politica*, can boast on all other population the privilege of an unrivalled balance able to break the ardour of the barbarians of the north, with the intelligence and the subtleties of the southern ones with physical strength. As accurately reported (Sassi 1988, p.118): "In the vitruvian passage we find, then, the valorisation of the centre balanced between two climatic extremes, to which the two contrasting pairs courage/stupidity and cowardice/intelligence correspond. Nothing new, at first sight, though at the same time everything is new: as these elements had never been merged in a unique treatment of such cohesiveness. A powerful unification of ethnographic science is clearly intervened from Aristotle

fact, as a geographer but also as a philosopher, he focused his attention on the study of climatic areas as well as on the anthropologic features of the populations, namely of Celts (to whom he dedicated a wide essay in his *Histories*) and he tried to outline a scientific picture, centred on the identification of a psychic and behavioural category of the character of *thymos*.

On the other hand these reflections derive from an elaborate cultural path starting with the thesis of Hippocratic *De aeribus* that are occasionally found also in some herodotean places. In fact, as for the differential gaps between the various populations, Hippocrates claims that the difference between Asia and Europe was wide and that Asia proved to be more civilised and that its inhabitants, due to the level of civilisation they had reached, were milder and meeker, though on the contrary, they were not endowed with value, stamina, diligence and short temper⁹.

As far as Asian populations are concerned, Hippocrates strongly underlines the sharp contrast between the lack of courage and bravery and the most civilised habits when compared to the European ones, claiming that this was mainly due to the following two factors: the substantial uniformity of climate that, not evidencing remarkable changes neither towards hot nor cold temperatures, did not produce shocks for the mind and strong alterations to the body leading to activity and political institutions that, being tyrannical, made men live in a condition of subjection and dependence on a master due to which they would not have been able to evidence a reactive and warlike spirit and would have not been led to think to war¹⁰. The climate, then, *physis* and institutions, the *nomos*, interacted to suppress and repress the element connected to the short temper¹¹. After the Scythian *excursus*¹², then, Hippocrates outlines the features of European populations, particularly subject, unlike the Asian ones, to remarkable seasonal and climatic changes, violent heat, inclement winters, heavy rains and prolonged draughts.

Savageness, lack of sociability and irascibility, or a fit of *thymos*¹³ were the typical traits of the populations living in European regions. The Hippocratic analogy is simple: seasonal changes,

and Vitruvius: it is no surprise that also this work was written by a Greek, that is a stoic philosopher (as well as geographer and historian) Posidonius of Apamea⁷.

⁹ HIPP., *de aer.* 12.

¹⁰ HIPP., *de aer.* 16.

¹¹ HIPP., *de aer.* 16, in fact, he claims that even if an Asian person has a courageous and brave nature, his mind is distorted by the institutions under which he must live and the condition of subjection to a master means that every action is for the interest of the master and not to the personal benefit of the individual: this is an evidence of the situation that could be created when in Asia Greeks or barbarians do not depend on any master, then, in their free state, they work for themselves and only in this way they can become more warlike than all the others, as they must defend their properties and every risk they run is run for themselves and not for a master mortifying their personality. The interaction between laws, customs and nature clearly confirms the remoteness and the deviation of barbaric populations from the positive model built by the democracy of the *polis*, as acutely observed (Sassi, 1988, p.102).

¹² HIPP., *de aer.* 17-22.

¹³ HIPP., *de aer.* 23.

typical of Europe, lead to savageness, and impulsiveness and like the Asian idleness is due to the climate uniformity, the struggle out of necessity and the efforts made to adapt to changes generate, on the contrary, brave deeds. Therefore, this is the reason why Europeans were more aggressive and were not subject to authoritarian or dyspotic kings or regimes, like Asian populations: in fact, independent populations always acted of their own free will and faced the dangers to their benefit thus winning the reward of the victory. Instead, if dominated, enslaved, they refused to run risks and it is therefore evident how political institutions could remarkably influence valour.

Plato, taking inspiration from the reflections contained in the treaty by Hippocrates, introduces the ethnographic theme in his *Repubblica*, though abstracting it from a systemic vision to use it, instead in the political and philosophical discussion on the ideal model of state.

Starting from the reflections of Hippocrates on the need to analyse seasonal changes, climate characteristics, and political institutions, as well as the interaction, that is, the *physis-nomos* to recognise the features of the populations of Europe and Asia, Plato roughly categorises populations based on their moral characters, following the ideal model of the soul, divided in three parts, each of them, as it is known, endowed with specific laws (elementary passions for the so called appetitive law, courage and reason respectively for the irascible and rational ones). The general laws characterising the three classes making up the ideal city, producers, wardens or warriors, and rulers-philosophers, are found in the individual, within his soul, thus implying the need to acknowledge that the general laws and the features of an individual are also those of the *polis* and, as explicitly stated by Plato, it would be ridiculous if someone thought that the irascible element was not derived by individuals, for those who have a reputation for this, that is the populations of Thrace and Scythia and, in general, northern ones; or the one willing to learn, typical of Greece, or dedicated to earning, evident in Phoenicians and Egyptians¹⁴.

Thus, in Hippocrates the irascible element is basically connected to bravery and valour, already typical of European populations, among which we should also include Greeks, while in Plato it is firmly attributed to northern populations always being aware of the fact that Greeks are able to make a more rational use of it, and this passage has a critical ethnographic connotation, meant to heavily impact on the subsequent tradition.

Plato uses the climate element in a way which is instrumental to his own political theory, in order to elaborate a clear definition of the seasonal balance that coherently matches intelligence

¹⁴ PLAT., *Resp.* 435e-436a.

and will¹⁵. The association of population traits to the theory of soul tripartition was to evidently lead to a first approximate, though explicit hierarchical structure among the populations themselves, as if Greeks represent the rational law and would roughly coincide with the balancing feature of this faculty, then, as a consequence, they correspond to the philosophers of the platonic utopic *politeia*. Egyptians and Phoenicians, due to their materiality, would represent their own appetite and desire properties, typical of producers, and therefore northern population would find their natural correspondence in the irascible element, typical, instead of state warriors. In Plato this hierarchy is only inferred by the comparison with the ethical-political theory and it is in no way presented as a precise anthropology.

However, a more defined hierarchic classification appears only with Aristotle that, in his *Politica* proves to be a wise elaborator of Hippocratic theories and platonic intuitions when it illustrates the nature of ethnical characters as a function of the general, but mainly ethical, concept of *mesotes*. In fact, the populations living in cold regions and in Europe, Aristotle claims, are full of energy, though quite lacking intelligence and technical ability. Therefore, they live more freely, though without a political organisation and are unable to dominate the neighbouring populations¹⁶. The populations of Asia, instead, are endowed with great intellectual and technical skills that allowed them to establish civil institutions. However, they are void of courage and therefore, are continuously subject and dominated by others¹⁷.

¹⁵ PLAT., *Leg.* 747d-e, referring to the climatic influence on the birth of better or worse men in their body and soul and to the difference between the individuals the laws of the state must face, being able to efficiently adapt. As we can read in *Timeo* (24c-d), the divinity has purposely chosen Attica as, benefiting from a perfect seasonal balance, which is the cause, it consequently produces, and this is the direct effect, wiser men. From this we understand that the cultural superiority of Greece, expressed by Socrates in *Repubblica*, falls within an attempt to create a model of harmony that goes beyond the Hippocratic contradiction, for which eastern populations were endowed with shyness and beauty due to the seasonal balance, but they were also characterised by indolence and idleness and that simply offers a clear example of full balance between temperate climate and moral virtues that is only achieved in Greece, namely in Attica. For the temperate climate of Attica, that is perfectly in accordance and favour the greater intelligence and culture of the inhabitants of Athens, also see Plato in *Critone* (109d, 110e, 111e), *Menesseno* (237b) and *Timeo* (25b-c) and Isocrates in *Areopagitico* (74), where the attic culture is praised, despite the climate, as in Thucydides (II 41) e Isocrates in *Panegirico* (50).

¹⁶ ARISTOTLE, *Pol.* 1327b 20. The correspondences with the Hippocratic treaty are evident: the northern populations are characterised by courage and bravery, therefore proving more active and belligerent. They live more freely; in fact, as Hippocrates had affirmed (*de aer.* 23) they are *autonomoi*, Aristotle states that they live without the civil institutions of Asia and this is confirmed in lack of sociability that Hippocrates (*de aer.* 23) acknowledged as one of the distinctive traits of European populations, deeply linked to irascibility and savageness. ARISTOTLE, though, declares that northern populations lack the intelligence of the southern ones along with technical skill. Hippocrates (*de aer.* 12) admitted the superior civilisation of Asia and the mildness, then the correctness of customs, but, in general, always in *de aer.* 24 acknowledged that the populations living in territories tormented by winter and burnt by the sun are by nature active, independent in judging, more clever and intelligent as far as arts are concerned, despite they are nearer to savageness, associated, as we have seen more to *thymos* than to shyness.

¹⁷ The typical indolence and idleness of Asian populations, as we have seen, was indicated with the same term by Hippocrates (*De aer.* 16) and the influence of tyrannical political institutions suffocating the spirit of autonomy, freedom and belligerence was equally underlined.

Only the Greek nation, as it is geographically located in the middle, shares both characters and, therefore, it is at the same time a brave and intelligent race, leading a free life, like the northern populations, but it also has the best political organisation, outdoing these latter as well as the populations of Asia, finding itself in the condition to dominate and not to be subject. In fact, Aristotle affirms that Greece can dominate "the whole mankind provided that it finds the unitarian form of state organisation". The idea that a population, namely the Greek one is excellent because it is geographically located in the middle between the territorial areas inhabited by populations endowed with strength, but void of intelligence of the cold regions and populations characterised by intelligence, but without bravery of the southern ones had already been stated by Aristotle.

The ending of the passage proves to be meaningful, as the ethnographic-anthropologic analysis serves to exemplify an ethical-political model of the moral qualities of the individuals belonging to a community. In fact, it underlines the need that those who want to follow the orientation of the *polis* legislator towards virtue must be brave and intelligent at the same time and this is a further conceptual development when compared to the thought expressed by Plato¹⁸.

The Hippocratic antithesis Europe/Asia located along a north-south line, the reflection by Plato referred to, with a hint to the privileged position of Attica, widens in the *Politica* by Aristotle, in correspondence with the definition of *mesotes*, because, as acutely noted, "the individual virtue, identified in the *Etica nicomachea* in the balance between two equally negative underestimated or overestimated extremes, is here projected on a cosmic scale, in the idea that a Greek nation must be able to mix in the right proportion the elements that other populations own unilaterally: that is a certain amount of impetuosity and bravery – that do not degenerate in irrational vehemence – along with an intelligence that does not lead to mere astuteness, but it is turned to the correct use of freedom"¹⁹. Moral averageness is present in a geographical contest and the spatial centrality occupied by the Greek population, when compared to the northern and southern populations alike, allows to outline a unity ordered according to a scheme characterised by a number of climate, ethical-behavioural and political coordinates.

The populations of Northern Europe live, then, in a cold climate, tend to freedom and show bravery and courage, are poorly intelligent and lack a solid and stable political organization that

¹⁸ ARISTOTLE, Pol. 1327b 20.

¹⁹ See M.M Sassi (Sassi, 1988, p. 107). ARISTOTLE., *E.N.* 1106b - 1107a affirms that, as far as actions are concern, we always find excess, default and the middle course . Virtue has passions and actions as aim, in which excess is a mistake and default is also blamed, while only the middle course is praised and successful: therefore, virtue is a sort of middle element, as it tends towards the middle, that is it manifests as a middle course when compared to man, determined by the rule, the way a wise man would determine it.

could ensure them the possibility to dominate the other populations. The populations living in the regions of Asia and Africa, in a hot climate, are basically faint-hearted, they do not tend to action, show a lively intelligence and limited political skills, as their institutions suffocate their freedom and enterprise. The Greek population, instead, living in a temperate and balanced climate, shows a perfect match between the emotional element and the rational one, it is brave and free, but also intelligent and reflective, endowed with a solid political organisation and all this leads, theoretically, to legitimately aspire to universal dominion (Sassi, 1985, pp. 268-270).

As well in the biological treaty *Parts of Animals* Aristotle affirms that in the animal kingdom, blood can be thinner or thicker, purer or murkier, and so, colder or hotter. Animals with hot and dense blood, due to these characteristics, produce a greater strength, show an ardent nature and are often excitable to rage, while animals with a blood void of solid fibres, where the liquid, cold and light element prevails, show a more evident sensitivity and a finer intelligence.

The strictly biologic aristotelic picture is coherently completed when we think that the middle position among the animals with hot and dense blood, impetuous and strong though stupid and those with a cold and loose blood, fearful, though intelligent, is occupied by man who, among all other animals finds himself in a position of ideal balance, as, having a looser blood, is more intelligent, though, tempering the heat of the heart with the cold fluid of the brain, he is neither too irascible nor too frightful²⁰.

The remarkable analogies with the reflections contained in the previous passage of *Politica*, are therefore evident: the extent of these considerations in the aristotelic thought would have certainly been greater if ethnologic classifications, as a function of climates and characters, would be strictly related to the categorisation made based on the quality of animal bloods, but Aristotle never proceeded to this direct connection. It is clear, though, that the ethnographic-moral reflection of *Politica* along with the biological studies on animal behaviour, due to the nature of blood, with identifiable affinities, have, however, contributed to the formulation of the aristotelic universalistic theory based on the natural bent to domination and command of the world and on the natural inferiority of barbarians, slaves by nature. Cfr. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1252a 28, 1252b 6-9, 1254a 15, 1333b 5.

Posidonius, heir to this solid speculative tradition, mainly focusing his own attention to the analysis of the anthropologic features of Celts and Cimbrians (as reported by Diodorus Siculus, Athenaeus and Strabo), tried to create a scientific picture that saw in the *thymos* the main and distinctive trait of the populations of Northern Europe. These reflections fall within the theory of

²⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Hist. anim.* 521a 3 e *Gen. Anim.* 744a 25.

human behaviour at large set and analysed in the philosophic treaty *Peri Pathon*, duly demonstrated in the commentary by *De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* and philologically recreated in its fundamental structure (Reinhardt, 1953, coll. 731-746).

A unique, explicit evidence clearly states that psychology, founded on the action of the three forces, had to have, in the philosophical-anthropological elaboration by Posidonius, a close connection with climatic-environmental factors. In fact, Galen affirms that, as for those phenomena relative to physiognomic, Posidonius aptly claimed that between animals and men those with a wider breast and hotter were by nature braver, while the ones with wider hips and colder, where more coward²¹.

The specific reference to the importance of geographical areas and climate allows to outline a connection of this type: affections and temper follow the physical dispositions of the body and its nature, but these dispositions and features are influenced by the climate and by environmental and geographical conditions. Therefore the geographical location and the type of climate obviously influence the setting of character.

The belief of Posidonius that the nature of men is conditioned and altered "according to the places", combined with the quotation by Aristotle, relative to the quality of blood leads to the determination of a picture strongly defined by the presence of physiognomic ideas, as the fragment quoted by Galen explicitly confirms. Moreover, in exposing the theory by Posidonius of the five climate areas, we can also find another reference to the environmental conditioning carried out on some populations²².

After the description of the division of areas determined according to the celestial bodies, Posidonius explains that they are also indicated in connection with human geography, defined by such factors as climate, temperature and topography. The interaction between climatic conditions and psychophysical features, with the identification of a specific cause and effect relationship, generally present as an element of philosophic anthropology²³, is part of the common knowledge

²¹ F 169, 84-106 EK. This consideration is widened by the reference to the fact that, in general, according to places, the characters of men are highly different as for behaviour, so that some show a greater cowardice or bravery, others a tendency towards pleasures or they adapt to fatigue. Moreover, also the temperature of the climatic area intervenes, along with the environmental conditions, to alter the physical status and the emotional-behavioural impulses as also confirmed by F. 49, 71 EK. This is the first clear reference to the theories stated by Hippocrates in his treaty *de aeribus, aquis, locis*. Another important reference, reported in the same passage of Galen (93-96), concern the revival of the aristotelic theory of the characteristic of blood in animals, with a brief outline of the different qualities of heat and cold, rarefaction or density that are present in the above mentioned examples and drawn from *De partibus animalium*.

²² F 49, 49-61 EK = STRAB., II 2, 3.

²³ PLAT., Resp. 435c, Tim 24c, Leg. 747d, *Epinom.* 987b-e; ARISTOTLE, *Pol.* 1327b 20.

of any learned person,²⁴ and can be documented by the post thucydidean historians (Truedinger, 1918, pp. 43-63)²⁵. At this complex Greek cultural tradition becomes an invaluable heritage of references and comparisons, upon which also Vitruvius, the “humanist” technician of roman architecture, extensively drew with a particular attention paid to the posidonian doctrine that, as known, had a remarkable influence on many intellectuals in Rome through the I century BC, due to the known familiarity with important members of the roman senatorial *nobilitas*.

In his treaty *On Ocean*, Posidonius inherits the aristotelic thesis of systematic relationships between climate areas and physical, vocal and psychic peculiarities of populations and he may have been the intellectual who suggested to approaching of Greece to Rome as optimal and privileged places as located in a central position when compared to other populations with opposite attitudes. Moreover he offered the category system suitable to a set of unitary explanations for all the natural and anthropic phenomena of a region, linking the various enquiry sectors typical of various disciplines that coincided with the need of a unitarian encyclopaedic knowledge, a trend that was customary both at the time of Varro and during that of Vitruvius.

However, as for the excellence of the temperate part of the inhabited world on which to base an ideological explanation for said excellence, the contribution by Vitruvius from another remarkable source should not be underestimated: the learned Varro Reatinus, who, in *De Re Rustica* I, 2,3-10 illustrates the primacy of Italy for its latitude located not too north and not too south, making it temperate and fertile. Italy and then Rome in their central and temperate position prevail over all the populations due to the excellence of the territory.

Through the cultural contribution of Posidonius, the fortune of this *topos* is confirmed in the early Augustan age in Varro (37 BC) and Vitruvius, in the ‘20s of the I century BC and it is functional to the known exaltation of the fertile Italy *Saturnia tellus* and of Rome destined to lead the empire and its hegemonic universal mission.

The celebration of Rome and Italy in Varro (I 2,3-10) finds a clear correspondence in Virgil (*Georg.* II 173-176 and *Aen.*, III 521-524) and the text of Varro can be usefully compared with the remarks contained in Strabo, VI 4,1 and Dionysius of Halicarnassus I 36-37.

Finally, it is not unlikely that Vitruvius, for the central collocation of Italy between the northern and southern sectors of the inhabited world knew about such pictorial representations *picta Italia*

²⁴ See Isocrates (*Areop.* 74) that proudly claims that in other countries undoubtedly unrivalled and typical fruits, trees and animals exist, but that only in Greece men are born not only extremely gifted for arts, action, speech, but far better than all the others as far as bravery and virtue are concerned. The similarities with the considerations of Aristotle and derived from the Hippocratic reflection, through the praise of the middle course of Attica, already present in Plato, seem to be evident.

on the wall of the *Tellus* temple in Rome, valorised and made famous by the memory of Varro (*Rust.* I 2,1) in 37 BC (Nicolet, 1989, pp. 91-121). Moreover, the interest in the roman culture of the early Augustan age for the geographical coordinates where the various *gentes* are located was the basis for the creation of the *orbis pictus* of Agrippa completed after his death, that is after 12 BC., the cartographic work Pliny the younger makes reference twice, the well-know map of *Porticus Vipsania* in Campo Marzio (*N.H.* III 16-17)²⁶.

Finally, the last and decisive passage regards the concept of *divina mens* regulating and disposing the universe, a Latin reformulation of the theory of the stoic providence (*pronoia*) in the posidonian version. Here Vitruvius (VI 1, 11): “*Namque temperatissimae ad utramque partem et corporum membris animorumque vigori bus pro fortitudine sunt in Italia gentes. [...] Itaque consiliis refringit barbarorum virtutes, forti manu consiliis meridiano rum cogitationes. Ita divina mens civitatem populi Romani egregiam temperatamque regionem conlocavit, uti orbis terrarum imperii potiretur*”.

This idea is expressed as functional to the ideological thesis of the Augustan culture connected with a divine will that favours and determines the course of history through the imperial mission of Rome, as we read in Virgil (*Aen.* VII 756-892) and Ovid (*Met.* XV 431-879).

The *divina mens* placed Rome at the centre of the inhabited world so as to determine its domination on the said world. This idea was foreshadowed by Posidonius and through the various intellectual contributions, conveyed within the Augustan cultural circle. In Virgil (*Aen.* IV 229) Italy *gravida imperiis* and l'*imperium* of Rome is *fatale*, the roman *civis* has the divine mission to *regere imperio populos* (*Aen.*, VI 851) and the same concept is expressed by Horace (*Carm.* III 2-3, 5-6, 8,14).

The centrality of Rome in the period of the conflict between Octavianus and Marc Antony, that is that Rome meant as centre of *imperium* had to remain in the city of Rome, then geographically and physically, was not foregone and Augusto worked since the beginning to strongly affirm that the centre of the power had to be politically maintained in the same *Urbs*. In fact, as it is known, Nicolao Damasceno, close friends to Augustus, (*Vita Caes.*, 20) and Svetonius (*Caes.*,79,3) report the rumours circulating just before the Ides of March about the Caesar's intentions to move the seat of power (*basileion* in Nicolao and *translatis opibus imperii* in Svetonius) in Alexandria of Egypt or Troy (as a function of the founding myth of Aeneas as ancestor of the Julia family and then of the romulean Rome).

On the other hand we should underline that with the peace of Brindisi between Octavianus and Marc Antony, the *provincia* of this latter is determined based on a very precise geographical

caesura, that is the meridian of Skodra, appearing as a remarkable cartographic symbol of the world division, as we can read in Appianus (*B.C.* V 264). Even if Marc Antony does not obtain the approval of this division in Rome, the roman public opinion was highly shocked when a triumph in Alexandria was celebrated, as testified by Velleius Paterculus (II, 88,4), as the ptolemaic metropolis could represent a dangerous rival for Rome and an excellent candidate as the seat of an empire aiming with decision and ambition to the West. However, Octavianus made a clear choice and the evident symbology of his political and official work, through the systematic restoration of the State, ancient customs and religion, was heading to another directions. The whole artistic and urbanistic plan by Augustus, along with the cultural one promoted by the circle of Mecenate, strongly reaffirmed the undisputable imperial centrality of the city, naturally appealing to the strong tradition of italic patriotism.

Therefore, the vitruvian excursus of book VI of *De Architectura* taken into consideration, reaffirms with efficiency and a great number of Greek models, just in the early phase of the Augustan principality, the idea according to which Rome, as once Greece, due to its optimal climatic position and a providential plan, evidences in its spatial centrality an indisputable bent to the universal rule under the form of a fatal imperial mission.

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Abstract - The subject of importance of Italy, at the beginning of book VI of *De Architectura* of Vitruvius (30-20 B.C.) shows a significant change from a geo-climatic conception to a political and ideological one. With the contribution of Greek thought it is possible to say that in Vitruvius we can read about a *traslatio* of an idea of a country (Rome and no longer Greece) localized in the middle, privileged by climatic conditions, inhabited by an excellent people with an imperial mission in the world. Aristotelic thought and stoic *pronoia* join with the Augustan propaganda in particular way thanks to posidonian conception that wants to justify Roman imperialism. Posidonius, very influential thinker in the Roman culture of Late *Respublica*, put beside Rome and Italy to Greece and he was one of the most important philosophers who spoke to Roman *nobilitas* with Greek arguments. He thought that *Pronoia* (*providentia* or *divina mens* in Vitruvius) put Rome to play a leading role in the known world and to exercise power over other nations. Vitruvius, in

his *excursus* of VI 1, 1-11, is the heir to an old cultural tradition between philosophy of history and political thought from Greek *paideia* inside of Mecenate's circle.

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