

Beings are like Buildings are like Beings:
Plautus and Vitruvius on Identity and Architecture

Exploration of the ancient world tends to fall into two camps, the archaeological and the literary. And generally these camps remain separate. (One need only think of the nation's largest Classics conference, which struggles to unite and keep distinct the APA and the AIA.) This paper attempts to synthesize the camps by working with three otherwise-disparate threads of scholarly research, as well as with two ancient texts –Vitruvius' *de architectura* and Plautus' *Mostellaria*. The texts are of particular interest in this sort of synthetic investigation since neither of them was intended to be only literary: both involved, to one degree or another, production of, and in physical space. By uniting the material with the literary, the mutually-formative relationship between architecture and identity is more discernible, and its importance more manifest.

The scholarly threads involve, (1) Vitruvian Studies, wherein scholars are finding not only purely architectural structures, but also social and rhetorical (Callebat), philosophical (Gros), as well as biological, cosmological, and other structures. (2) Identity Studies: some scholars (Habinek, Gruen) are interested in notions of identity in antiquity—from the formation of identity, to the private and public performance of self, to the interplay between the processes of being and belonging. (3) Social Space is also a popular investigative avenue. Some (Wallace-Hadrill, Hales, Grahame) have explored the ways in which the organization and use of domestic space affected behavior, controlled relationships, and informed identities. These threads, whose interests rest in different fields and on different methodologies, involve analyses where the principal resources are either literary (1 and 2) or architectural (3).

Yet there is an important point of intersection between all three: in each, we see that both 'building' and 'being' (as nouns and as processes) are central. Whether one reads social being into Vitruvius' structures (Callebat), or examines how beings construct and present their identities so as to exist ('be') in society (Habinek), or identifies how buildings structure the way beings experience space and social interaction (Grahame), there is readily identifiable a correlation between architecture (building) and identity (being) in the literary and archaeological records. And this correlation is presented in two extant texts that have, pleasingly enough, a physical aspect to them as well.

In Plautus' *Mostellaria* the wayward Philolaches has a maudlin and surprisingly philosophical revelation –that the life of a man is like that of a house (l. 84-156): (1) parents are like architects, building a baby instead of a house; (2) the compliments afforded to, and the promising potential of the newborn are the same as for a new house; (3) despite the care taken by parents or architects, a child or a house can crumble if the character of the 'dweller' (the 'person' who develops in/as the child, or the person who moves into the house) is irresponsible and negligent; and (4) external and unpredictable forces can take a negative toll on a person (love!) and on a house (a storm). For Philolaches, beings are like buildings.

In *de architectura*, Vitruvius discusses the house, from its 'birth' in nature (Book II) to its physical and social development (VI), as well as its 'aging' process (VIII), he presents what might be called the house's biography. Vitruvius thus constructs and presents a building that becomes a complex entity, that closely resembles humans, even as it houses them. In Vitruvius, buildings are like beings.

In both texts, we see a correlation between architecture and identity. But the relationship in one is the inverse of the relationship in the other. What are we to make of this? Are people shaped by/like/in architecture, or the other way around? What is there to gain by asserting one over the other? How do our scholarly threads help with this complex correlation? Additionally, since we are working primarily with texts, What role does language play in constructing and negotiating the relationship between architecture and identity, especially when that language constitutes a presentation of words initially meant to exceed the confines of the page, and find heftier physical production in buildings or on stage? These are some questions that I address in this talk which synthesizes scholarly methodologies, and which reflects on the representation and use of buildings and beings in two pieces of writing about beings and buildings.

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