

THE TRADITION OF VITRUVIUS' CONCEPT OF SYMMETRY IN THE RENAISSANCE ARCHITECTURAL THEORY

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One of the most important sources of the Renaissance symmetry and proportion theory is De architectura by Vitruvius (1st century A.D.). Influenced by Vitruvius' concept Book III, Chapter 1) the Renaissance theoreticians of architecture

- treated symmetry and proportions as aesthetical values and looked upon them as parts of the definite connection between parts and the whole;
- discussed symmetry and proportions in connection with the church, since a church meant the top in the value hierarchy of buildings;
- accepted the principle of anthropomorphism, according to which the human body was regarded as the model of symmetry and architectural proportions

The views can be observed in L.B. Alberti's treatise De re ædificatória (1452) and Filarete's Trattato di architettura (1461-64), where they became the theoretical fundamentals of the central plan churches. In Francesco di Giorgio's treatise who worked at the end of the century the emphasis was put on the basilical and cruciform plan and its medieval symbology has survived. So beside the humanist principles we can observe that the medieval exegetical tradition had lived on: on the one hand the church signified Christ's mystical body (Corpus Christi mysticum), while on the other hand it represented the proportions of Noah's Ark. The arguments of the exegetical tradition turned out to be compatible with Vitruvius' principles: with anthropomorphism and concrete proportions (the ratio of 1/6 of width and length). The philosophical basis of proportion principles is formed by Plato's ideas. The thought of imitating nature was based on Aristotle's imitation principle, while the principle of the connection between the divine macrocosm and the human microcosm had got a Platonic interpretation (although it had already been present in the medieval exegetical and mystical tradition). The teaching of the relation between visible and

audible (i.e. musical) harmonies is a Platonic-Pythagorean one as well. In architectural theory this neoplatonic proportion doctrine is present in the most explicit way in Francesco Giorgi's Promemoria (1535) which was written in Venice.

The theory of the circular plan had developed at the end of the 15th century which was based mainly on the Vitruvian proportion principles and the neoplatonic cosmology. The circle was regarded as the most perfect form because it signified God's unity and infinity. At the same time the basilical and cruciform's symbology of medieval origin remained in parallel existence. This dichotomy can be observed in Palladio's treatise Quattro Libri (1570).

After the Council of Trent the Jesuit architectural concept had preserved some elements of the Vitruvian proportion doctrine, first of all the anthropomorphism. Since the idea of the circular church had been driven out by the basilical and cruciform, the elements of the medieval tradition strengthened which were supplemented by hermetic elements. This tendency is peculiarly depicted by Villalpando's work In Ezechielem Explanationes (vol.II, 1604).