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Katz Contest Winner

Divina Mens: Imperial Propaganda in *De architectura* 6.1¹

ALEX-JADEN PEART

Abstract: This paper, framed by “racecraft” theory (Fields and Fields 2012), argues that the first chapter of Book VI of Vitruvius’ *De architectura* positions the Roman state led by Augustus—established at the temperate middle of the ecumene by the “divine intellect” (*divina mens*)—as imbued with the tools to expand its territory at this critical point in the nation’s history. Exploring Vitruvius as a transitory figure, existing within both the late Republic and the early Principate, I argue that we can understand how his reception of environmental determinism theory placed Italy and its people between racial and climatic extremes.

Keywords: Vitruvius, *De architectura*, environmental determinism, pre-modern critical race studies, Roman empire, propaganda

Taken as a whole, Vitruvius’ *De architectura* has had a substantive impact on the Western architectural tradition as a foundational text of the discipline.² The treatise, however, has

¹ I would like to give the greatest thanks to my friend and mentor Professor Jacques Bromberg for guiding my thoughts through this paper, sharing the most insightful observations, and listening to my ramblings for what has certainly amounted to many hours. Truly, I would not be here without him. I would also like to thank Professors Ellen Lee, Maggie Beeler, and Andrew Wein for their most gracious generosity with their time and expertise in our colloquium and far beyond that in their respective classes. Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank Professor Drew Armstrong for being a wonderful interlocutor who has introduced me to invaluable scholarship and the anonymous commenters for their generous feedback. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

² See architectural terms such as “Vitruvian scroll,” “Vitruvian opening,” “Vitruvian module,” etc.; also, see Leonardo da Vinci’s famed drawing *Vitruvian Man* and excerpts from its accompanying text: Vitruvio, architecto, mecte nella sua op(er)a d’architectura, chelle misure dell’omo sono dalla natura distribuite in questo modo... Tanto ap(r)e l’omo nele b(r)accia, qua(n)to ella sua alteza. Dal nascimento de chapegli al fine di sotto del mento è il decimo dell’altez(z)a del(l)’uomo. Dal di socto del mento alla som(m)ità del chapo he l’octavo dell’altez(z)a dell’omo. Dal di sop(r)a del pecto alla som(m)ità del chapo fia il sexto dell’omo. Dal di sop(r)a del pecto al nasscime(n)to de chapegli fia la sectima parte di tucto l’omo. Dalle tette al di sop(r)a del chapo fia la quarta parte dell’omo. – (“Vitruvius, architect, says in his architectural work that the measurements of man are in nature distributed in this manner... The length of the outspread arms is equal to the height of the man. From the hairline to the bottom of the chin is one-tenth of the height of the man. From below the chin to the top of the head is one-eighth of the height of the man. From above the chest to the top of the head is one-sixth of the height of the man. From above the chest to the hairline is one-seventh of the height of a man. From the chest to the head is a quarter of the height of the man”) (trans. Magazù, Coletta & Migliardo 2019, 759-60). Cf. *De arch.* 3.1.2: Corpus enim hominis ita natura composuit, uti os capitis a mento ad frontem summam et radices imas capilli esset decimae partis, item manus pansa ab articulo ad extremum medium digitum tantundem, caput a mento ad summum verticem octavae, cum cervicibus imis ab summo pectore ad imas radices capillorum sextae, a medio pectore ad summum verticem quartae. ipsius autem oris altitudinis tertia est pars ab imo mento ad imas nares, nasum ab imis naribus ad finem mediū superciliorum tantundem, ab ea fine ad imas radices capilli frons efficitur item tertiae partis. pes vero altitudinis corporis sextae, cubitum quartae, pectus item quartae – (“Indeed, just as nature arranged the human’s body, thus, too, is the face—from the chin to the top of the forehead and from the bottom roots of the hair—a tenth portion of the head; likewise, a splayed-out hand from the joint (wrist) to the end of the middle finger is just the same; the head from the forehead to the crown of the head is

been conspicuously absent from analyses of ancient texts engaging in the phenomenon that Fields and Fields term *racecraft*, which are the “practical, day to day actions that reproduce the imaginary, pervasive belief in natural distinctions between the groups.”³ This absence can be understood as arising from its seemingly benign subject matter, and that Vitruvius’ insertion of the racecrafting theory of environmental determinism into *De architectura* 6.1 comes after a digression-laden *praefatio* that meanders through a discussion of Greek philosophy, the significance of education, Vitruvius’ own broad and liberal education, and the subject of architecture itself.⁴ As such, despite its peculiarity, or, possibly, because of it, the more controversial contents of the chapter, and of the work as a whole, have been largely occluded from the scrutiny of pre-modern, critical race studies.⁵ The *praefatio* is crucial, however, for providing us with key insight into how Vitruvius edifies and frames his arguments. As seen in *De architectura* 1.1.5, Vitruvius asserts that architects must acquaint themselves with the contexts (*historiae*)⁶ in which the *ornamenta* of many works are constructed since “they are obligated to express why they were built to those asking.”⁷ Hence, it is imperative that an architect be educated not only in, and

an eighth; at the bottom of the neck from the top of the chest to the bottom roots of hairs is a sixth; from the middle of the chest to the crown of the head is a fourth. Moreover, of the face’s height itself, it is a third from the bottom of the chin to the bottom of the nostrils; the nose from the bottom of the nostrils as far as the middle of the eyebrows is just the same; from the end to the bottom roots of the hair—that is, the forehead—is worked out just like a third portion. In particular, the foot is a sixth of the height of the body; the elbow (forearm) is a fourth, just like the chest is a fourth.”) For further reading on Vitruvius’ influence on Renaissance artisans and their thought, see Panofsky 1937, Wittkower 1940; 1944, Aiken 1980. And, though it is neither meant to be classical nor scientific, Hildegard of Bingen’s *Universal Man*, an illustration of the human form as a microcosm of the divine cosmos, from her *Liber Divinorum Operum* (c. 1172/4 C.E.) is an earlier representation of corporal idealism that predates da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man* by more than three centuries (c. 1490 C.E.).

³ Fields, Karen E. and Barbara J. Fields. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. Verso, 2012, 18-19.

⁴ On Greek philosophy: *De arch. 6.praef.1-3*; on the significance of education: *De arch. 6.praef.3-4*; on Vitruvius’ own education: *De arch. 6.praef.4-5*; on the subject of architecture: *De arch. 6.praef.7*.

⁵ Isaac 2006 cites the term “proto-racism” (5, 15, 36, 38), derived from Yoyotte 1978 in Poliakov 1978 on Egypt (there appearing in French as “proto-racisme”), preface 7-22, and Frederickson 2002, 8 (there in the context of the Middle Ages), as racism in its infancy, when it “remained a fairly moderate doctrine, based on environmentalism and preoccupied with various evaluations of the relationship between the non-Europeans and their European masters” (5). I disagree with Isaac on the need for a distinction between an ancient “proto-racism” and a “(modern) racism” since race *qua* race arises concomitantly with identity formation—both between and within groups—as a categorizer, classifier, typifier, stratifier, grouper of descent, etc. As such, when understood as a transhistorical and fluid phenomenon, “race” can be mapped onto societal phenomena (e.g., citizenship, nationality, social class, ethnicity, etc.) that are, in abstraction, racist (insofar as they can/are used to create categories of difference which enact, and are enacted by, prejudice). On race as a causal, organizing principle, see Sheth 2009 (in particular, 22) and Sulosky Weaver 2022 (in particular, 46); on the racialization of citizenship in classical Athens which precipitated the μετοικία (a legal, taxed category of “those who have changed (dwelling)” (μετοικοί), i.e., resident aliens), see Kennedy 2014, Lape 2010, and Watson 2010; on race and ethnicity existing on a “continuum of okayness” (Reed 2000, 139) that predicates social stratification and unequal interactions between Gramscian subalterns (who have alienable/alienated humanity) and their hegemon (whose humanity and rights are inalienable), see Murray 2021 on racecraft in Homer’s *Odyssey*. Thus, Isaac’s prevarication of “proto-racism” is unnecessary, though I acknowledge that 1) much of the scholarship I cite in this footnote had not yet been written when Isaac wrote his own text, and 2) the wider movement within the discipline to analyze and discuss race and racism in the ancient world (and in those terms) is largely a product of the 2010s.

⁶ On “contexts” (*historiae*) in *De architectura*, see Romano 2011 and Oksanish 2016, 2019.

⁷ *De arch. 1.1.5*: cur fecerint quaerentibus reddere debent

for, their area of expertise, but also to possess almost encyclopedic knowledge of other disciplines,⁸ if they should ever need to act as a reliable reference.⁹

Along with ‘reference’, the making of an ‘allusion’ to something extratextual is the other of the two distinct modes of intertext—that is, dialogues between texts, or any other cultural manifestations that are decipherable as ‘texts,’ according to Stephen Hinds.¹⁰ While the latter typically has an implication of subtlety, the habit of Latin authors to deliberately draw attention to the fact that they are alluding to something—using what David Ross coined the ‘Alexandrian footnote’¹¹ to describe the practice—is well-established. Signal words and phrases such as *fama est* (“the saying is”), *ferunt* (“they recount”), and *dicitur* (“it is called”) all induce the reader to perceive the writer as scholarly and learned.¹² Vitruvius himself repeatedly engages with variations of the *dicitur* footnote throughout *De architectura*,¹³ especially when dealing with specialized terminology—which he frequently codeswitches into Greek to render.¹⁴ Such a linguistic performance, when bracketed by the framework of Ross’ Alexandrian footnotes, serves to remind us that Vitruvius is a trustworthy writer, and that *De architectura* is as well-informed as one could desire. Thus, when he declares that the “divine intellect” (*divina mens*, 6.1.11) has placed the Italian peninsula in the middle of the ecumene and imbued it with the means to conquer the whole world,¹⁵ why should anyone blink an eye?

⁸ *De arch.* 1.1.3: et ut litteratus sit, peritus graphidos, eruditus geometria, historias complures noverit, philosophos diligenter audierit, musicam scierit, medicinae non sit ignarus, responsa iuriconsultorum noverit, astrologiam caelique rationes cognitae habeat – (“And (the architect) should be learned, skilled in writing, educated in geometry, acquainted with many contexts, have diligently paid attention to philosophers, have knowledge of music, not be ignorant of medicine, be acquainted with the opinions of lawyers, and have acquaintance with astrology—that is, the conduct of the heavens”).

⁹ *De arch.* 1.1.4: litteras architectum scire oportet, uti commentariis memoriam firmiorem efficere possit – (“It is proper for an architect to know the literature, so that (the architect) may be able to produce commentaries of more enduring memory”). On Vitruvius’ usage of *commentarii*, see Fleury 1990, 94–5; McEwen 2003, 17–31; Romano 2011; Oksanish 2016, 2019.

¹⁰ Hinds, Stephen. *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry*. Cambridge University Press, 1998, xi–xii. On such “cultural manifestations decipherable as texts,” Nichols 2017 cites Wesenberg 1984 on the episode in *De arch.* 1.1.5 (concerning the city of Caryae’s pillage and destruction by their fellow Greeks after they took the side of the Persians early in the Persian Wars) being included as a potential allusion to Augustus’ construction of a row of caryatids (robed women), replicating those found in the Erechtheion at Athens, in the Forum. Such a connection would be Vitruvius’ way of connecting the art of Augustus’ Rome with that of the glorified “Periclean Athens” (Nichols 99) by showing the Caryans in subjection and defeat, “in an eternal example of enslavement” (*aeterno servitutis exemplo*, 1.1.5)—portending what will happen to those who continue to resist Roman rule.

¹¹ Ross, David O. *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry: Gallus, Elegy, and Rome*. Cambridge University Press, 1975, 78.

¹² Hinds, Stephen. *Allusion and Intertext*, 2.

¹³ Phrases such as *quod Graece dicitur* (“Which, in Greek, is called”), *Graeci dicunt/vocitant/appellant* (“The Greeks call (it)”), and a *Graecis appellatur* (“By the Greeks, it is called”) occur as a “[s]téréotype de haute fréquence” (Callebat 2013, 351) and in approximately a fifth of the Greek terms in *De arch.* (351).

¹⁴ The following is a list of Greek codeswitches in *De architectura* I alone: 1.1.7: quae graece φυσιολογία dicitur, philosophia explicat; 1.1.9: quae Graeci ἡγεῖα appellant; 1.1.10: quae Graeci κλίματα dicunt; 1.1.16: qui graece λόγος ὀπτικός appellatur; 1.2.1: quae graece τάξις dicitur... hanc autem Graeci διαθέσιν vocitant... quae graece οἰκονομία dicitur; 1.2.2: quae graece ποσότης dicitur... quae graece dicuntur ἰδεαί; 1.2.4: quod Graeci περίρθητον vocitant... quae διπηχυαία dicitur; 1.2.5: quod graece θεματισμῶι dicitur; 1.4.5: quae Graeci στοχεῖα appellant; 1.4.10: quod etiam Cretenses ὀσπληνον vocitant; 1.6.6: qui graece σκιοθήρης dicitur; 1.6.11: ab Graecis εὖρος videtur esse appellatus... αὐριον fertur esse vocitatus; 1.6.12: uti Graeci dicunt, σχήματα duo explicare

¹⁵ *De arch.* 6.1.11: Namque temperatissimae ad utramque partem et corporum membris animorumque vigoribus pro fortitudine sunt in Italia gentes. quemadmodum enim Iovis stella inter Martis ferventissimam et Saturni frigidissimam media currens temperatur, eadem ratione Italia inter septentrionalem meridianamque ab utraque parte mixtionibus temperatas et invictas habet laudes. itaque consilii refringit barbarorum virtutes, forti manu

His framework—the theory of environmental determinism—posited that human difference could be explained by looking at one’s geographic location and the accompanying climate with respect to their position within the ecumene, giving rise to the conclusion that a group’s physical and mental capabilities were determined by such factors.¹⁶ And, with texts as canonical and varied as the Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places*,¹⁷ Isocrates’ *Panegyricus*,¹⁸ Plato’s *Timaeus*,¹⁹ Xenophon’s *Ways and Means*,²⁰

meridianorum cogitationes. ita divina mens civitatem populi Romani egregia temperataque regione conlocavit, uti orbis terrarum imperii potiretur – (“For indeed, in Italy, the people are the most temperate of both parts—in the limbs of their bodies and of their spirits with respect to their activity for courage. For just as Jupiter’s planet, travelling midway between very hot Mars and very cold Saturn, is divvying them up duly, by the same reason, Italy is between north and south. From the mixtures of both together, it has the glories of being temperate and invincible. Therefore, by means of its strategies, it breaks the strength of barbarians’ (? northerners’) designs; and, with a strong hand, (it breaks) the schemes of the southerners. And so, the divine intellect settled the Roman people in an eminent and moderated region so that it might obtain dominion over the whole world”). Vitruvius’ juxtaposition of the words “barbarorum” and “meridianorum” presents a translation dilemma that is difficult to reconcile. Whatever the natural analogue to “meridianorum” may be (e.g., “septentrionalium”), it is not used, and “barbarorum” connotes a hostility towards northerners that is seemingly absent for southerners. It is worth noting that the most plausible date for the publication of *De architectura* is thought to be the early or middle 20s B.C.E. (for a survey on the debate, see Fleury 1990, xvi-xxiv; also, Baldwin 1990), by which time the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt had been annexed to the Roman Republic (30 B.C.E.). Thus, if we assume a pacified south, then all that remains is a barbarous, unsubdued north—a potential explanation for the incongruous terms

¹⁶ McCoskey, Denise Eileen. “race.” *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 3.

¹⁷ *Airs, Waters, Places* 24.36-40: ὅκου γὰρ αἱ μεταβολαὶ εἰσι πυκνότεραι τῶν ὥρέων καὶ πλείστον διάφοροι αὐταὶ ἐώντησιν, ἐκεῖ καὶ τὰ εἶδεα καὶ τὰ ἥθεα καὶ τὰς φύσεις εὐρήσεις πλείστον διαφερούσας – (“For wherever the changes of the seasons are very frequent, and are, themselves, very different from one another, you will find the most varying appearances, customs, and dispositions there”).

¹⁸ *Paneg.* 187: τὴν δ’ εὐδαμονίαν τὴν ἐκ τῆς Ἀσίας εἰς τὴν Εὐρώπην διακομίσαμεν – (“(if ever we made war,) we could carry over Asia’s prosperity into Europe”). On the earlier Greek delineation of Europe and Asia arising from the Persian Wars (see Edith Hall 1989, 56-100) that preceded the north-south divide in Roman literature, compare this passage with that of *Airs, Waters, Places* 12.1-3: βούλομαι δὲ περὶ τῆς Ἀσίας καὶ τῆς Εὐρώπης δεῖξαι ὅκόσον διαφέρουσιν ἀλλήλων ἐς τὰ πάντα καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐθνέων τῆς μορφῆς, ὅτι διαλλάσσει καὶ μηδὲν ἔοικεν ἀλλήλοισιν – (“Concerning Asia and Europe, I desire to explain how much they differ from one another in all things; and, concerning the appearance of the peoples differs, that they are different, and looks not at all like the other”).

¹⁹ *Timaeus* 24c-d: τὴν εὐκрасίαν τῶν ὥρων ἐν αὐτῷ κατιδοῦσα, ὅτι φρονιμωτάτους ἄνδρας οἴσοι. ἅτ’ οὖν φιλοπόλεμός τε καὶ φιλόσοφος ἡ θεὸς οὕσα τὸν προσφερεστάτους αὐτῇ μέλλοντα οἴσειν τόπον ἄνδρας, τοῦτον ἐκλεξαμένη πρῶτον κατέκτισεν – (“She (Athena) observed in it (Attica) a good mixture of the seasons that would bring forth the most prudent men. Therefore, seeing that the goddess is both a lover of war and a lover of wisdom, she chose the location likely to bring forth men most like herself, and this (place) she established first”).

²⁰ *Ways* 1.6: οὐκ ἂν ἀλόγως δέ τις οἰηθεῖ τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ πάσης δὲ τῆς οἰκουμένης ἀμφὶ τὰ μέσα οἰκεῖσθαι τὴν πόλιν. ὅσῳ γὰρ ἂν τινες πλέον ἀπέχωσιν αὐτῆς, τοσούτῳ χαλεπωτέροις ἢ ψύχεσιν ἢ θάλαπσιν ἐντυγχάνουσιν – (“Anyone could, not unreasonably, conjecture that the city (Athens) is settled about the middle of Greece and of the entire, inhabited world. For the farther any people are away from it, the more difficult it is for them to agree with either the cold or the heat”).

Aristotle's *Politics*,²¹ and the Hellenistic²² era *Histories* of Polybius²³ having recourse to the theory, its reception by *De architectura* seems entirely appropriate. Likewise, as a tradition that privileges southern Europe and its inhabitants as the ideal between extremes, it is the most apt *topos*²⁴ by which to justify the imperialist pretensions of the work's dedicatee: the *princeps* Augustus. For this reason, aligned with the theory's enduring afterlife as a *lieu de mémoire*²⁵ in the Western racial consciousness,²⁶ I claim a place for Vitruvius as another figure in the tradition of racecraft apologetics. *Racecraft* is a distinct valence of race, which can be defined as the hypothesis or belief that humanity can be organized into differentiable categories, or 'races,' predicated on certain heritable, phenotypic phenomena, such as epidermal pigmentation, hair texture, and facial features.²⁷ These characteristics—known as *biorace*—are physiognomies frequently employed in the

²¹ *Pol.* 1327b.27-34: τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ψυχροῖς τόποις ἔθνη καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν Εὐρώπην θυμοῦ μὲν ἐστὶ πλήρη, διανοίας δὲ ἐνδεέστερα καὶ τέχνης, διόπερ ἐλεύθερα μὲν διατελεῖ μᾶλλον, ἀπολίτευτα δὲ καὶ τῶν πλησίον ἄρχειν οὐ δυνάμενα: τὰ δὲ περὶ τὴν Ἀσίαν διανοητικὰ μὲν καὶ τεχνικὰ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἄθυμα δέ, διόπερ ἀρχόμενα καὶ δουλειόντα διατελεῖ: τὸ δὲ τῶν Ἑλλήνων γένος, ὥσπερ μεσεύει κατὰ τοὺς τόπους, οὕτως ἄμφοιν μετέχει. καὶ γὰρ ἐνθυμον καὶ διανοητικὸν ἐστὶν: διόπερ ἐλεύθερόν τε διατελεῖ καὶ βέλτιστα πολιτευόμενον καὶ δυνάμενον ἄρχειν πάντων, μᾶς τυγχάνον πολιτείας – (“For, while the people in cold places and about Europe are full of spiritedness, they lack more in discursive thinking and cunning; therefore, while they live with more freedom, they are not civically-minded and not able to rule those nearby them. About Asia: while its inhabitants are intellectuals and artisans with respect to temperament, they are also without spirit—therefore, they continue being ruled and enslaved. The descent group of the Greeks, as it stands midway in relation to these places, partakes of both accordingly. For [the group] is both spirited and discursive; therefore, it continues to be free, the best governed, and able to rule over all others—if chancing upon a single commonwealth”). Cf. Isaac 2006, 84-85 on Vitruvius’ reception of the environmental determinism theory as closely mimicking Aristotle’s own (i.e., the effects of climate on the quantity of blood in the body and on mental aptitude), but with key differences (the geographic polarities shifting from East and West (Aristotle) to North and South (Vitruvius); Aristotle’s wistful desire of “μᾶς... πολιτείας” having been fulfilled by the *imperium Romanum* of Vitruvius’ time).

²² The Hellenistic period (323 B.C.E.—31 B.C.E.) must be understood as an era in which there was a vast expansion in the scope of influence of Hellenic culture and ideals resulting from the conquests of Alexander III of Macedon. With the establishment of colonies and dozens of eponymous urban centers, the imposition of Greek culture and customs occurred rapidly as they syncretized with local traditions to herald a period that saw an enmeshment of cultures in tandem with a movement of people, goods, and ideas that was much more dynamic and pluralistic than ever before (Chaniotis 2018, 5); thus, an impetus was provided for qualifiers of identity to change (McCoskey 5). For a survey on multiculturalism in the Hellenistic period, see Dorothy J. Thompson 1988; on the dynamics between native Egyptians and Greek *κληροῦχοι* (“lot-holders”) in Memphis specifically, see 82-105. On the contested ethnic identity of Alexander III, see Jonathan M. Hall 1997 and Borza 1996. Though it is important to note that the Hellenistic era was not the beginning of discourse pertaining to identity politics (see *Hdt.* 8.144.2 on the importance of being *ὁμαίμων* (“of the same blood”) for Greekness; also, *Hdt.* 1.143.3 on Herodotus’ convoluted explanation of the “ethnic opposition” (Munson 2014, 345) of the Spartans and the Athenians).

²³ *Polyb.* 4.21: θεωροῦντες δὲ τὴν τῶν ἡθῶν αὐστηρίαν, ἥτις αὐτοῖς παρέπεται διὰ τὴν τοῦ περιέχοντος ψυχρότητα καὶ στυγνότητα τὴν κατὰ τὸ πλεῖστον ἐν τοῖς τόποις ὑπάρχουσαν, ᾧ συνεξομοιοῦσθαι πεφύκαμεν πάντες ἄνθρωποι κατ’ ἀνάγκην· οὐ γὰρ δι’ ἄλλην, διὰ δὲ ταύτην τὴν αἰτίαν κατὰ τὰς ἐθνικὰς καὶ τὰς ὁλοσχερεῖς διαστάσεις πλεῖστον ἀλλήλων διαφέρομεν ἡθεσί τε καὶ μορφαῖς καὶ χρώμασιν, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων τοῖς πλείστοις – (“Indeed, the austerity which attends upon [the Arcadians] for the most part on account of the coldness of the environment and the gloominess that pertains; for on no other account, but on account of this cause—in conformity with nationalities and, in large part, with spatial separations—we differ most from one another in customs, appearances, and complexions, as well as in most of our pursuits”).

²⁴ Hinds, Stephen. *Allusion and Intertext*, 34-40.

²⁵ Nora, Pierre. *Rethinking France = Les Lieux de Mémoire*. University of Chicago Press, 2001. See also Boym 2001.

²⁶ McCoskey, Denise Eileen. “race.” *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3. See also Livingstone 2002.

²⁷ Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. Oxford University Press, 1992, 13.

creation of racial fictions that perpetuate inequality.²⁸ *Racism*—the social practice that creates race—is a theory and ideology that employs civil and judicial double standards based on descent and origin, equipping those who perceive others through racialized lenses with rationale for doing so.²⁹ Thus, when race is configured through phenotype and physiognomy, the human body becomes a site for the analysis and scrutiny of conceived difference(s).³⁰

In the opening sections of *De architectura* 3.1, Vitruvius conditions that, if the arrangement (*compositio*) of a building is to be considered proper, it must be analogous to “the limbs of a well-formed human being” (*hominis bene figurati membrorum*, 3.1.1). Andrew Riggsby notes that this posited correlation between buildings and the human *corpus* thematizes proportionality in the treatise, and that man-made structures are fabricated by-and-for humans with physical *corpora*.³¹ The proportions of the “well-formed” body thus function emblematically of what *can* and *should* be done by the *corpus architecturae* which mimics them in accordance with how “nature so arranged the human’s body” (*hominis ita natura composuit*, 3.1.2).³² And, though it is not explicitly stated, the emphasis on the *homo* being *bene figuratus* is laden with physiognomic and racist implications that imply the existence of a *homo* who is *male figuratus*—implications that will be explicated in *De architectura* 6.1. There, Vitruvius asserts that, just as buildings follow the human body metrologically, the formation of public houses is also predicated by their position within the ecumene, proximity to the angle of the Zodiac, and the climate of the place in which they can be found.³³ As such, houses appear different in southerly Egypt, differently in occidental Spain, not at all the same in easterly Pontus, and likewise dissimilarly at Rome. Although Vitruvius’ appeal to episteme outside of the

²⁸ Kennedy, Rebecca Futo. “Talking about Race and Ethnicity in Greco-Roman Antiquity.” *Classics at the Intersections*, 1 Dec. 2021, rfkclassics.blogspot.com/2021/12/talking-about-race-and-ethnicity-in.html. The blog post is based on an in-progress monograph by Kennedy for Johns Hopkins University Press (*Ancient Identities/Modern Politics: Race and Ethnicity in Greco-Roman Antiquity*). Kennedy’s conception of biorace is itself derived from the “bio-racism” innovated by Fields and Fields 2012.

²⁹ Fields, Karen E. and Barbara J. Fields. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. Verso, 2012, 17.

³⁰ See Shelley P. Haley’s “Be Not Afraid of the Dark: Critical Race Theory and Classical Studies,” in Nasrallah, Laura Salah, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (eds.), *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies*. Fortress Press, 2009. Therein, Haley asserts that color terms *albus* and *candidus* not be translated “white” but “pale brown” and “bright brown” and *ater* and *niger* as “dark brown” and “bright black,” in consideration of Lloyd Thompson 1989’s claim that skin colors in the ancient Mediterranean fell along a continuum of shades of brown. Likewise, Murray 2021 states that, insofar as skin color was remarked upon by ancient authors, it was in relation to their own “somatic norm” as so different that it was worth mentioning—i.e., pale or dark (137-8).

³¹ Riggsby, Andrew. “Vitruvius and the Limits of Proportion.” *Arethusa*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2016, 281–97.

³² Oksanish, John. *Vitruvian Man: Rome Under Construction*. Oxford University Press, 2019, 96.

³³ *De arch.* 6.1.1: Haec autem ita erunt recte disposita, si primo animadversum fuerit, quibus regionibus aut quibus inclinationibus mundi constituentur. namque aliter Aegypto, aliter Hispania, non eodem modo Ponto, dissimiliter Romae, item ceteris terrarum et regionum proprietatibus oportere videntur constitui genera aedificiorum, quod alia parte solis cursu premitur tellus, alia longe ab eo distat, alia per medium temperatur. igitur, uti constitutio mundi ad terrae spatium inclinatione signiferi circuli et solis cursu disparibus qualitatibus naturaliter est conlocata, ad eundem modum etiam ad regionum rationes caelique varietates videntur aedificiorum debere dirigi conlocationes – (“If, therefore, these things (public houses) are to be arranged correctly, it will be noticed before all else in which regions or in which climes of the heavens they are being constructed. For types of houses seem to be built differently in Egypt, differently in Hispania, not the same way in Pontus, differently in Rome—just as it is proper for parts of the earth and regions to have other peculiarities because, in one part, the Earth is covered by the course of the sun, another (part) stands far away from it, another (part), by means of the middle, is tempered duly. Therefore, just as the arrangement of the universe, in relation to the extent of the earth, is naturally arranged, according to disparate characteristics, by the angle of the Zodiac [lit., ‘sign-bearing orbit’] and the course of the sun; in the same way, the arrangements of buildings seem to ought to be derived from the nature of the regions and varieties of climate.”)

direct scope of what *De architectura* is supposed to be discoursing upon harkens back to his assertion at 1.1.5 that the onus rests upon architects to be broadly and widely educated in an array of disciplines, his choice of locales coincidentally situates Rome as the middle point among them. And this middle part—which is tempered duly (*medium temperatur*, 6.1.1) by neither being too close nor too far from the sun—is all in accordance with *natura*. So, when Vitruvius declares that the said effects of climate and geography on architecture must *also* be perceived in the limbs and bodies of people, does it not read as being perfectly aligned with legitimate, deductive *ratio*?

For, in some places, the sun gives out its heat moderately (*mediocriter*, 6.1.3) and thus maintains ordered bodies (*corpora temperata*, 6.1.3). In those that are nearest to the sun, the people burn (*deflagrat*, 6.1.3) as a result of their bodily moisture being drawn *out* by its heat; in cold regions that are far removed from the south, on the other hand, the moisture of the people in those regions is drawn *from* the atmosphere. Being so suffuse with it, these people—pale-complexioned, blue-gray eyed, and red-haired—have larger bodies, deeper voices, and hold a substantial quantity of blood within themselves, as accords with the *natura* of their climate.³⁴ Likewise, those who are nearest to the southern clime and subjected to the sun's course are smaller in body, of dark complexion, curly-haired, black-eyed, strong-legged, and, by the intensity of the sun, caused to have a paucity of blood within their bodies.³⁵ This lack of blood, while making them more fearful of battle, renders them fearless of heat and fever because they are brought up in such conditions. This is the opposite of northerners whose bodies, replete with blood from the *natura* of their clime, falter in the presence of fever, but face battle without fear. These two groups are not only juxtaposed with respect to their physiques and martial prowess, but also their mental faculties.³⁶ The inhabitants of southern nations, thanks to the "thinness of the atmosphere" (*tenuitatem caeli*, 6.1.9), are more disposed to discursive thinking and planning than northerners who, because of the thickness of the atmosphere and the cooling effect of moisture, have "stuttering minds on account of the obstruction of the

³⁴ *De arch.* 6.1.3: roscidus aer in corpora fundens umorem efficit ampliores corporaturas vocisque sonitus graviores. ex eo quoque, quae sub septentrionibus nutriuntur gentes, immanibus corporibus, candidis coloribus, directo capillo et rufo, oculis caesis, sanguine multo ab umoris plenitate caelique refrigerationibus sunt conformati – ("... dewy air, pouring moisture into bodies, brings about larger body parts and deeper sounds from the voice. Likewise, people who are below the north clime are nourished by it: with their huge bodies, pale complexions, straight, reddish hair, blue-gray eyes, a great deal of blood from the abundance of moisture (in the atmosphere), and are formed by the coolness of the weather.")

³⁵ *De arch.* 6.1.4: sunt proximi ad axem meridianum subiectique solis cursui, brevioribus corporibus, colore fusco, crispo capillo, oculis nigris, cruribus validis, sanguine exiguo solis impetu perficiuntur – ("... those who are nearest to the southern clime, and are subjected to the course of the sun—with respect to their bodies—are smaller, dark-complexioned, curly-haired, black-eyed, and strong-legged; they are, from the intensity of the sun, caused to have an inadequate amount of blood.")

³⁶ *De arch.* 6.1.9: Item propter tenuitatem caeli meridiana nationes ex acuta fervore mente expeditius celeriusque moventur ad consiliorum cogitationes; septentrionales autem gentes infusae crassitudine caeli, propter obstantiam aeris umore refrigeratae stupentes habent mentes. hoc autem ita esse a serpentibus licet aspicere, quae, per calorem cum exhaustam habent umoris refrigerationem, tunc acerrime moventur, per brumalia autem et hiberna tempora ab mutatione caeli refrigeratae, inmotae sunt stupore. ita non est mirandum, si acutiores efficit calidus aer hominum mentes, refrigeratus autem contra tardiores – ("Likewise, on account of the thinness of the atmosphere amongst southern nations, with their keen intellect from the intense heat, they are more readily and more swiftly stirred toward thinking of courses of action; whereas northern people, having been spread over a thick atmosphere and cooled by moisture, have stuttering minds on account of the obstruction of the air. Moreover, it is possible to observe snakes in this manner, who, when their coolness from moisture has been depleted by means of heat, are then most vehemently stirred to action; whereas, during the winter solstices and wintry times, they are chilled by the change of weather, being inert from numbness. Therefore, it is no wonder that, if hot air brings about keener minds in human beings, then chilled air (brings about) the opposite—that is, duller minds.")

air” (*propter obstantiam aeris... stupentes habent mentes*, 6.1.9). Vitruvius then provides an analogy of how snakes, when it is cold, are torpid, but when it is warm, they are “most vehemently stirred to action” (*acerrime moventur*, 6.1.9). Thus, by appealing to the *natura* of non-human animals, Vitruvius thinks it obvious (*non est mirandum*, 6.1.9) that a hot climate brings about people with keener minds (*acutiores mentes*, 6.1.9) than those in a cold one, where their *mentes* are the opposite (*tardiores*, 6.1.9).

And, though they are intellectually superior to those in the far north, southerners falter when they advance towards force because they have the “courage of their souls drawn out by the sun” (*exsuctas ab sole animorum virtutes*, 6.1.10). Northerners, on the other hand, possess great courage and enthusiasm for combat, but their lack of intellect causes the frustration of their own ambitions (*suis consiliis refragantur*, 6.1.10). Amidst these extremes, which are all configured “from the nature of things” (*ab natura rerum*, 6.1.10), is the land possessed by the *populus Romanus*: Italy. This land, as it turns out, rests in the middle of the universe (*medio mundi*, 6.1.10). It travels, just as the planet Jupiter does between “very hot Mars and very cold Saturn” (*Martis ferventissimam et Saturni frigidissimam*, 6.1.11), between “north and south” (*septentrionalem meridianamque*, 6.1.11). Thus, it and its inhabitants partake of all the virtues of those places—having the “glories of being temperate and invincible” (*temperatas et invictas habet laudes*, 6.1.11)—but none of their imperfections. Therefore, with its eminent and moderate positionality—settled there by the “divine intellect” (*divina mens*, 6.1.11)—Augustus’ Rome has both the *numen* and the *ius* to extend its “dominion over the whole world” (*orbis terrarum imperii*, 6.1.11).

At face value, Vitruvius’ survey of two geographically and culturally disparate regions of the ecumene seems more apt for ethnography than it does for an architectural treatise. However, as he reveals in his opening encomium to Augustus, the *corpus architecturae* could only now be brought about with Augustus having spread Roman *imperium* throughout the *orbis terrarum* (1.*praef.*1).³⁷ As Indra Kagis McEwen notes,

Vitruvius presents Augustus’s conquests not as a territorial expansion but as an increase of the *provinciae* of the Roman *civitas*... [b]uildings are the “eminent guarantees,” the evidence and proof, of the majesty of *imperium* so augmented. They localize *imperium* and make it spatial. They also, as Vitruvius tells it, localize the achievements of Emperor Caesar. *De architectura*... is Vitruvius’s single schema or diagram for situating both.³⁸

With *De architectura* framed as a diagrammatic text, we are better equipped to understand Vitruvius’ role as architect-cum-writer, and its function as a *commentarius* on both architecture and the organization of the *corpus imperii* as the *telos* of Augustus’ own *corpus*.³⁹ Such an ambitious agenda requires impetus and motive—causes which are readily laid out in the *praefatio* to the first book of *De architectura*. There, Vitruvius declares that the treatise came into being as a result of the Augustan building

³⁷ Oksanish, John. *Vitruvian Man: Rome Under Construction*, 108.

³⁸ McEwen, Indra Kagis. *Vitruvius: Writing the Body of Architecture*. MIT Press, 2003, 279.

³⁹ Within the Introduction (8-9), McEwen 2003 notes that the usage of the word *corpus* in reference to a “‘body’ of written work” supervenes the Augustan age; therefore, as Vitruvius innovates it, architecture as a coherent, proportional *corpus* must be seen as his integration of Augustus’ body as the model: the ideal *homo bene figuratus* by which all others are measured and through whom the *corpus architecturae* and the *corpus imperii* is realized.

program,⁴⁰ and that his intentions are purely didactic,⁴¹ emphasizing that by “studying such works as they were made before and how they will be (made), [Augustus] would be able to have knowledge for [himself].”⁴² “Such works,” as it turns out, are those which are to be found across the Mediterranean, and are not necessarily unique to Rome.⁴³ A sweeping survey of this magnitude once again illustrates Vitruvius’ extensive knowledge and assures the reader of his intellectual authority on the topic on which he discourses. And, even though such exempla are not solely of Roman origin, and are primarily rooted in Greek episteme, their appropriation is entirely for Roman ends.⁴⁴ This avenue of intellectual expression is not unique to Vitruvius, but, rather, is one that is quintessentially Roman; for, by the distinctive nature of its homogenizing and syncretizing imperialism, knowledge and its dissemination were polyphonic and multicultural by necessity—with Romans simultaneously possessing full awareness that the sites of epistemological origin were, frequently, not themselves Roman.⁴⁵ Thus, with Rome as both receptacle and filter of information, Vitruvius is able to construct his own literary space that is at-once Roman, yet also Greek and Other by its underpinnings,⁴⁶ because they are all ultimately subject to the same ruler of the same world: Augustus.⁴⁷

Towards the final decades of the 1st century B.C.E., the role of an advisory *amicus* (“friend”) had become firmly enshrined as a *topos* in the Roman literary world⁴⁸ thanks to a passage in Ennius’ *Annals*.⁴⁹ It represents an archetype that scholars now term the *amicus*

⁴⁰ *De arch.* 1.praef.3: haec tibi scribere coepi, quod animadverti multa te aedificavisse et nunc aedificare – (“I began to write these things for you because I took note that you have built, and are now building, many things”). Cf. Suet. *Aug.* 28.3: Urbem neque pro maiestate imperii ornatam et inundationibus incendiisque obnoxiam excoluit adeo, ut iure sit gloriatus marmoream se relinquere, quam latericiam accepisset – (“Since the city was not ornamented as befitting the prestige of the empire and subject to floods and fires, [Augustus] adorned it to such an extent that he could rightfully say, “I left it made of marble rather than how I received it—that is, in brickwork”).

⁴¹ On *De arch.* as a didactic text, see Hutchinson 2009; also, Sharrock 1998 and Gibson 1998 in Atherton 1998

⁴² *De arch.* 1.praef.3: ut eas attendens et ante facta et futura qualia sint opera per te posses nota habere

⁴³ Vitruvius’ only mention of, for example, amphitheaters occurs when he discusses what building sites are the most suitable for temples, fora, and other communal spaces (*De arch.* 1.7.1). Likewise, domes and vaults seem to have been of minute importance.

⁴⁴ The literature on the Greek world’s influence of the Romans’ own is extensive. Feeney 2016 describes the nature of the Romans’ method for doing so culturally; also, see Feeney 1998 on the same phenomenon, but regarding religion.

⁴⁵ See Wallace-Hadrill 2008 on Roman identity formation in the late Republic and early Principate as a composition of various factors. For an exploration of traditional dress (i.e., the toga) as a marker of Roman identity in opposition to that which as Other, see 3-37; on bilingualism as code-switching, see 38-70.

⁴⁶ McIntosh, Gillian. “*Amor et Roma*: Understanding Vitruvius through Eryximachus’ Erotic *Logos* in Plato’s *Symposium*.” *L’Antiquité Classique*, vol. 83, 2014, 26.

⁴⁷ *De arch.* 1.praef.1: Cum divina tua mens et numen, imperator Caesar, imperio potiretur orbis terrarum invictaque virtute cunctis hostibus stratis triumpho victoriaque tua cives gloriarentur et gentes omnes subactae tuum spectarent nutum populusque Romanus et senatus liberatus timore amplissimis tuis cogitationibus consiliisque gubernaretur – (“While your divine intellect and sway, Emperor Caesar, were acquiring command of the whole world, and with all enemies cast down by your unconquered courage, your subjects were glorying in your triumph and victory, and all subdued nations were watching for your beckoning; the Roman people and senate, freed from their fear, were being governed by your most esteemed designs and plans.”)

⁴⁸ Oksanish, John. *Vitruvian Man: Rome Under Construction*, 50.

⁴⁹ *Attic Nights* 12.4 = *Annales* 8 fr. 268-86: Haec locutus uocat quocumque bene saepe libenter / Mensam sermonesque suos rerumque suarum / Consilium partit, magnam quom lassus diei / Partem fuisset de summis rebus regundis / Consilio indu foro lato sanctoque senatu; / Quoi res audacter magnas paruasque iocumque / Eloqueretur tēt cuncta† malaque et bona dictu / Euomeret si qui uellet tutoque locaret; / Quocum multa uolup / gaudia clamque palamque; / Ingenium quoi nulla malum sententia suadet / Ut faceret facinus leuis aut mala: doctus, fidelis, / Suavis homo, iucundus, suo contentus, beatus, / Scitus, secunda loquens in tempore, commodus, uerbum / Paucum, multa tenens antiqua, sepulta uetustas / Quae facit, et mores ueteresque nouosque ttenentem / Multorum ueterum leges diuomque hominumque / Prudentem qui dicta loquiuē tacereue posset. / hunc inter pugnas conpellat Seruilius sic – (“So saying he calls on a man with whom he very

minor, “a friend of lower status who speaks frankly and gives useful advice” and serves, according to Thomas Habinek, a function analogous to literature itself.⁵⁰ This person is ever willing to offer advice (*consilium*) and is satisfied with their station in life; whatever their ambitions may be, they are firmly subordinate to those of their superior advisee. Their learning is extensive, their word dependable, their conduct and mien faultless, and their discretion admirable.⁵¹ Vitruvius expresses these qualities primarily as an inferior advisor to Augustus, approaching him almost proskynetically, for he “did not venture” (*non audebam*, 1.*praef.*1) to publish his plain writings on architecture out of fear that he would prove an annoyance to Augustus,⁵² but, as befits the role, he does know *when* to speak.⁵³ Likewise, his wide-ranging knowledge is transhistorical (1.*praef.*3) and always enables him to have some counsel for Augustus in support of his extensive ambitions, both domestic and foreign, and his *auctoritas*.⁵⁴ Thus, if he sees a way to make himself useful to his *princeps*, Vitruvius as *amicus minor* will do so with all the resources at his disposal.

Returning to Fields and Fields, *racecraft* are “the practical, day to day actions that reproduce the imaginary, pervasive belief in natural distinctions between the groups.”⁵⁵ Vitruvius’ *racecraft* is “practical” in its appeals to the theory of environmental determinism, a widely accepted, time-honored tradition that has been present for nearly half a millennium and run the gamut of literary genres. And therein lies the danger. With its normative status, its racist and eugenic overtones are diluted and become “natural distinctions”—*ex natura*, if one pleases. And, in that normativity, Vitruvius’ racialized usage of it in *De architectura*, at the behest of an imperialist regime, renders its racism benign and almost unnamable. Its reception in a text as artificial as this one, therefore, highlights how race is a multivalent phenomenon that can be mapped onto nearly any anthropological construct—real or imagined, physical or immaterial—that can be molded by *racecraft*.

often gladly shared his dinner, conversations, and counsel about his own affairs after a long day of directing matters of the utmost importance with counsel in the forum and in the sacred senate had tired him. To this man he could spiritedly address matters great and small or a joke and, if he wanted to, could [be] blurt[ed] out [anything at all] whether or good or bad to say, and have it safe. With him he could share many pleasures... joys, private and public. A character for whom no thought advocates a harmful deed lightly or with malicious intent, the man is learned, trustworthy, charming, pleasant, content and happy with what he has, knowledgeable, says the right things appropriately and at the right time, sparing with his words, comprehending many things that antiquity conceals. Comprehending also customs old and new, the laws of many ancient gods and men, knowing how to speak or keep quiet about what had been said—this man does Servilius address in the middle of battle like so)” (trans. Oksanish 2019, 50).

⁵⁰ Habinek 1998, 50-2; for the definition, see Roller 2001, 113.

⁵¹ Oksanish, John. *Vitruvian Man: Rome Under Construction*, 51.

⁵² De arch. 1.*praef.*1: ... non audebam, tantis occupationibus, de architectura scripta et magnis cogitationibus explicata edere, metuens, ne non apto tempore interpellans subirem tui animi offensionem – (“... with duties of such size, I ventured not to publish my extensive meditations and plain writing on architecture, fearing that I am not adapting to the state of the times—lest I was drawing near to the offense of your sensibility, an annoyance.”)

⁵³ De arch. 1.*praef.*2: Cum vero attenderem te... curam... non putavi praetermittendum, quin primo quoque tempore de his rebus ea tibi ederem – (“When I was paying attention to you—in particular, your administration... I did not think [*De architectura*] would be permitted... but in fact, at the appropriate time, before all else, I would publish it on these matters (i.e., architecture) for you.”)

⁵⁴ Oksanish, John. *Vitruvian Man: Rome Under Construction*, 53; also, see Oksanish 2016 on the how Vitruvius conceives of *auctoritas* through two modes of historiographical writing: “world” history and chronography.

⁵⁵ Fields, Karen E. and Barbara J. Fields. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, 17.

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