VITRUVIUS, BOOK 1, CHAPTER 7
On the sites of public buildings

Source:  http://www.vitruvius.be/boek1h7.htm

1. Divisis angiportis et plateis constitutis arearum electio ad opportunitatem et usum communem civitatis est explicanda aedibus sacris, foro reliquisque locis communibus. Et si erunt moenia secundum mare, area ubi forum constituatur, eligenda proxime portum, sin autem mediterraneo, in oppido medio. Aedibus vero sacris, quorum deorum maxime in tutela civitas videtur esse, et Iovi et Iunoni et Minervae, in excelsissimo loco unde moenium maxima pars conspiciatur, areae distribuantur. Mercurio autem in foro, aut etiam ut Isidi et Serapi in emporio; Apollini Patrici Libero secundum theatrum; Herculi, in quibus civitatis non sunt gymnasia neque amphitheatra, ad circum: Marti extra urbem sed ad campum; itemque Veneri ad portum.

Id autem etiam Etruscis haruspicibus disciplinarum scripturis ita est dedicatum, extra murum Veneris, Volcani, Martis fana ideo conlocari, uti non insuescat in urbe adulescentibus, seu matribus familiarum veneria libido, Volcanique vi e moenibus religionibus et sacrificiis evocata ab timore incendiorum aedificia videantur liberari. Martis vero divinitas cum sit extra moenia dedicata, non erit inter cives armigera dissensio, sed ab hostibus ea defensa a belli periculo conservabit.

Translation

1. After apportioning the alleys and settling the main streets, the choice of sites for the convenience and common use of citizens has to be explained; for sacred buildings, the forum, and the other public places. And if the ramparts are by the sea, a site where the forum is to be put is to be chosen next the harbour; but if inland, in the middle of the town. But for sacred buildings of the gods under whose protection the city most seems to be, both for Jupiter and Juno and Minerva, the sites are to be distributed on the highest ground from which the most of the ramparts is to be seen. To Mercury, however, in the forum, or also, as to Isis and Serapis in the business quarter; to Apollo and Father Bacchus against the theatre; to Hercules, in cities which have no gymnasia nor amphitheatre, at the circus; to Mars outside the walls but in the parade ground; and also to Venus near the harbour.

Now with Etruscan haruspices in the writings of their disciplines, the dedication is as follows: that the shrines of Venus, Volcanus, Mars are therefore to be situated outside the wall, so that veneral pleasure may not be customary to young men and matrons in the city, and, by summoning the power of Volcanus outside the rampart with ritual and sacrifices, the buildings may seem to be freed from fear of fires. But since the divinity of Mars is dedicated outside the ramparts, there will not be armed quareels among citizens, yet he will keep the ramparts defended from the danger of war.
2. Item Cereri extra urbem loco, quo nomine semper homines, nisi per sacrificium, necesse habeant adire; cum religione, caste sanctisque moribus is locus debet tueri. Ceterisque diis ad sacrificiorum rationes aptae templis areae sunt distribuendae. De ipsis autem aedibus sacris faciundis et de arearum symmetriis in tertio et quarto volumine reddam rationes, quia in secundo visum est mihi primum te materiae copiis quae in aedificiis sunt parandae, quibus sint virtutibus et quem habeant usum, exponere, commensus aedificiorum et ordines et genera singula symmetriarum peragere et in singulis voluminibus explicare.

Translation

2. So also to Ceres, in a place outside the city, under which name (i.e. Ceres extra urbem) men (unless by sacrifice) must always approach her; since that place must be kept religiously, purely and with strict manners. And to the other gods sites fit for temples with a view to the methods of sacrifice are to be arranged. Now about building temples and about symmetrical arrangements of sites I will give an account in the third and fourth books, because in the second I purpose, first, with reference to the supplies of material which are to be prepared in buildings, to set forth of what virtues they are possessed, and what uses they have; subsequently to treat of the dimensions of buildings, the orders and the several kinds of symmetry and to explain them in the several books.

COMMENT

In this last chapter of the first book Vitruvius allows us once again a glimpse of his character and of his position in the surrounding of the emperor. His precepts about the location of the temples of Venus, Mars and Vulcanus go back on Etruscan tradition. Once again we find here a proof of his austere traditionalism which was against all forms of innovation. Indeed, by placing the temple of Venus outside the city he - maybe unconsciously - rubbed Augustus, whose favor he was desperately seeking, up the wrong way. Augustus did everything to prove his descendence from Venus and in the forum Iulium the central temple was dedicated to Venus Genetrix, progenitress of the Gens Iulia.

That the Vitruvian approach on city building was completeley hypothetical and theoretical is maybe proved by his mention - without any further comment - of the temple of Venus in the forum Iulium in the third chapter of book III. Here he forgets completely his theories about the layout of a city.

We even can find here an indication of his unworldly way of thinking. Indeed: he associates the cult of Venus only with sensual pleasure, while in his lifetime in the centre of Rome he could find many temples dedicated to Venus where there was no provocation whatsoever to the pleasures he disapproves. We name only Venus Calva, Venus Erucina, Venus Libitina, Venus Obsequens, Venus Verticordia and Venus Victrix.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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