

From Hermogenes to Apollodorus of Damascus: Architects and Urbanists between Hellenism and Late Antiquity

The eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, mainly those of the Syro-Palestinian area, have preserved eminent and important architectural evidence, especially within the second and third centuries AD. This was the period during which the most important towns of the region renovated their looks, both for a great economic growth and for their often integral rebuilding interventions (with imperial funds) after disastrous earthquakes. One of the most evident examples is, undoubtedly, Jarash: from Trajan's period on, it offers a very new palaeography. It does not only modify the development of the plan of the urban quarters, but also the exploitation of the public areas and, consequently their significance in the plan design. The colonnaded streets with tetrapylons at the crossings and the oval piazza are the formal terms of a new town, which, I think, is the product of the Syrian architectural school of the middle Imperial period, during one of the most creative phases of the building culture from middle Hellenism to late Antiquity.

Asiatic Hellenism was deeply rooted in local tradition between the second and third centuries AD, combined with eastern contributions from behind the *limes*. This resulted in a very original architectural culture which entered Rome with one of the most famous members of that school, Apollodorus of Damascus. It offered building features and patterns with a space interpretation very similar to what we intend today for a present town.

For these reasons, I think that in the case of Jarash the usual identification of the colonnaded streets as *cardines* and *decumani* are completely incorrect. The regularity of the plan cannot be related, except for the general geometric form, to the Roman *limitatio*. This is aimed at the best area division for settlements or productive fields; the dimensions and modulation of the colonnaded arteries bring attention to such definite space which is typical of the town, intended as a place for meetings, exchanges and relationships. All these activities are independent from the production of the area occupied by the town and

especially of that of the surrounding land. Still today we can use a lucky expression born in the storiography some decades ago: "caravan towns"; it is valid only if we want to underline the new idea of the urban space intended mainly as "relational" space. I mean the space expressed and articulated for the demands and needs of the city and for all the activities of the citizens. It concerns the relationships with other people and, more generally, with the outside world.

As I said, Jarash offers one of the most significant examples and also, at least in the planning if not in the execution, one of the more ancient. The project to which, I think, the inscription of the North Gate refers, can go back to the Trajanic period, although many decades passed before its fulfilment.¹

The plan is the manifestation of an architectural culture that, I think, is the same as the great Trajanic project concerning Rome,² which by cutting the saddle between Capitolium and Quirinal, gave the definite solution to the political and economical centre of the town (FIG. 1). It did not only solve the problem of the directional structures, the s. c. Markets, and of the new dwelling typologies, the *insulae*, but it also offered a new organisation of the exploitable spaces, both for streets and, particularly, for the relational and economic activities. It represented the tissue of the town as a meeting and living place for the citizens, instead of the forum, or better the forums, crowded with political, civil and ceremonial activities.

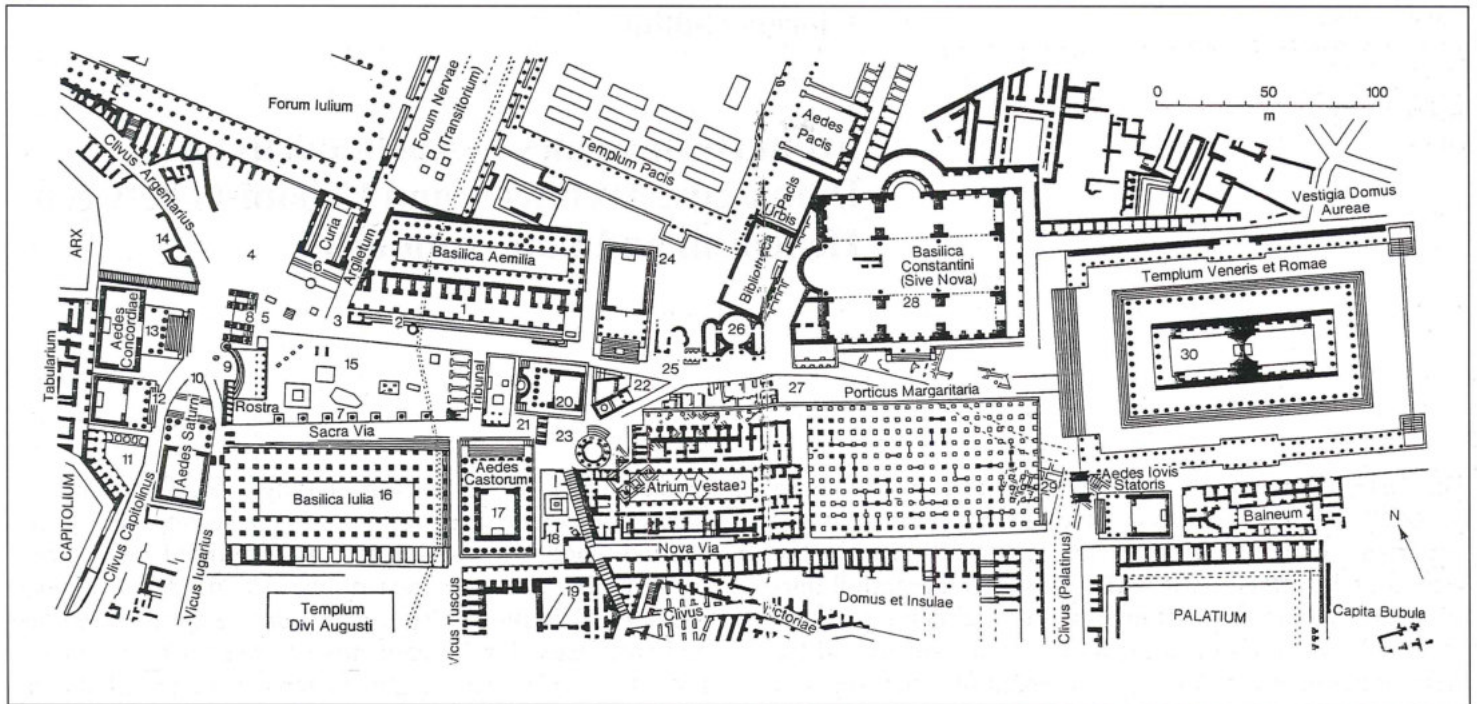
Before illustrating the Trajanic project and linking it to the school of Apollodorus, the great architect and urbanist, I would like to explore the origins and the development of the above-mentioned architectural school.

During the Imperial period that school had great importance in transforming the ancient Greek civilization (Classical and Hellenistic) as well as its Republican and first Imperial continuity, towards performances which, even if they do not deny those roots, are coherent with the new world; it is the origin of our present culture.

¹ *Mesopotamia* 18-19 (1983-84).

² G. Gullini, 'L'architettura e l'Urbanistica', in *Princeps Urbium*, Milano

1991, pp. 645-704, FIGS. 549-557, TAV. LXXVII-LXXX.



1. Plan of the *Foro Romano* (after F. Coarelli, *Guida archeologica di Roma*, Roma 1980, pp. 50-51).

I think that these origins should be found in that very interesting period of middle Hellenistic architecture connected by the most recent historiography to Hermogenes and to his school, at least in Asia Minor and in the Aegean area. This school is famous thanks to Vitruvius, who lived in the Augustan period, about two centuries later than Hermogenes, but still declaring himself a Hermogenes pupil. And Vitruvius, in spite of his limitations, is still the most important ancient source and the greatest reference for any research about the history of ancient architecture up to the Augustan period.

Hermogenes' personality and his contribution to the trend of the Hellenistic architecture of Asia Minor were recently studied during a dedicated symposium.³ After determining his activity between 220 and 150 BC, his contribution was recognized as the most original concerning the study and expression of the dimensional relationships between plan and construction. The building is not intended as an independent block within the infinite space, but as an artifact inserted into the portion of this space that is defined and made appreciable by the suitably foreseen structures enclosing the main monument.

These structures were primarily the first performance in architecture of a new problem not faced up till that period: the relationship between the built artifact and the immediately surrounding space. As far as we are concerned, we can speak of the first essay to express the *objectivation of the space* by the enclosing structures. This

meaning starts from the middle Hellenism and becomes increasingly more important later on. The space till then had only a mental category, even if meant through the synthesis of the three dimensions represented by the three segments converging in a vertex, each one being the abstraction of any possible movement on a surface.

The completely changed meaning, which I consider to be the reflection on architecture of the Euclidean geometry, reaches out of Asia Minor, with different expressions in Greece and in the Western Countries. I think it really began in Alexandria. The Alexandrian school, which is very little documented, had a fundamental function in the expression of this new space meaning: the most important evidence, beside the "Palace of Columns" of Ptolemaid Cyraenaica, is in Sicily at the times of Hieron II. The culture of the island in that period was very much influenced by that of Alexandria. This culture entered Rome after the first Punic war (266-241 BC) and it was developed in the city before the impact of the other Hellenistic schools at the end of the second century BC.

The early attention in the western countries, Italy and Sicily, to the large interior spaces of the "relational" type, intended mainly as civil spaces, can be confirmed through the description given by Diodorus of the majestic dining room with 60 *klinai*, built by Agatokles toward the end of the fourth century BC in his Syracuse palace, and of the big Gymnasium hall in Posidonia which may be dated to the time of Alexander the Mo-

³ W. Hoepfner and E. L. Schwandner (eds.), *Hermogenes und die hochhellenistische Architektur*. Internationale Kolloquium in Berlin vom 28 bis 29 Juli 1988, Mainz a. R. 1990

lossus.

This formula, expressed by the typologies of enclosed areas, and cut out in the tissue of the town, seems to be preferred by the Roman architects who proposed original solutions from the end of the third century BC onward. A significant example is given by the *Macellum*, the first building for a public market designed for food transactions (last decade of the third century BC) and in the extended type of *horrea*, storehouses surrounding an interior courtyard (first half of the second century BC).⁴

The calculated implementation of the axial relationship of orientation and of the points of view revealed by the Hermogenes' design of Magnesia, both in the Artemision and in the Agora, did not inspire the creations of Roman architecture between the third and last quarter of the second century BC, which seems to be more connected to the Alexandrian school. In fact, it brings to full realization in architecture of the perspective illusionism, such as in the upper Sanctuary of the Fortuna Primigenia at Palestrina, 39 kms from Rome.⁵

The series of colonnades on the ramps and on the terraces make a fusion of the space defined by the construction with the landscape space, in a double meaning of representation of fiction and reality. Following the fundamental Greek idea of art intended as reproduction of reality, it brings at around 150 BC, as said in the famous Plinian expression: *cessavit deinde ars* (the art ceased), followed by a more reassuring *ac rursus revixit* (and immediately was revived). This could be said by a later writer (first century AD) who saw the reminiscence to the simple spatial objectivation which followed the illusionism of the third quarter of the second century BC. The meaning of the expression of Plinius, or better of his late Hellenistic source, became very important in the history of architecture thanks to the effects of such a critical attitude.

This is the origin of a space defined by a portico intended to put in the foreground the main building on the short side, opposite the entrance of the architecturally organised enclosure. It is the new meaning of the old Forum in Rome with the *Tabularium*, built as a facade of the Capitolium, overriding the axis of the Via Sacra. The same formula marks the plans of the Forum of Caesar and of the Forum of Augustus, while the porticoes behind the theatre at Pompey, in the Campus Martius, are even closer to the original Hermogenes idea of the objectivation of the enclosed space.

The idea of the monumental square, historically born as a reaction to the perspective illusionism, becomes a planned expression of the commitment as one of the most intelligible media. The cultural dedicacies follow a political aim and become part of the State organisation's language and, above all, of the Emperor's will.

In the eastern provinces, and particularly in the Syro-Palestinian area where the radiation of the Hellenistic culture from Alexandria and later on mainly from Antioch were deeply influenced by cultural contacts from behind the eastern *limes*, the formula stimulates, in terms of grandiose architectural expression, the development of a space as a place for the people who enter and exploit it. Its perimeter, or better the facades enclosing it, help to suggest, through their layout, the possible way of exploiting the defined space.

This is a new formula of the meaning of the space I called, as mentioned above, "relational", in opposition to the "tridimensional" one, which is defined by lines corresponding to the three dimensions; these are expressed by the structures which are thought to be significant to the perceptibility of the space.

The continuity of the Hellenistic culture in the Syro-Palestinian imperial architecture can be proved by the fronts modulated by the colonnaded curtains and intended mainly as structures finalized to a spatial definition. So the space gets its specific "human", especially "urban" dimension, becoming a protagonist of a new meaning and image of the town. That is exactly what we wanted to perceive at Jarash and, in general, in the monumental manifestations of many towns of the Syro-Palestinian area.

These manifestations illustrate a real school of architects to which Apollodorus belongs by right of birth. He was lucky to meet Trajan and, after being the main officer of his engineers army in the Dacian campaign, he became his great planner and architect. It is him who elaborated the project Trajan became able to afford, thanks to the financial resources coming from the gold mines of the newly acquired province. This project represented the final urban frame of the capital of the Empire; in fact it does not concern only the Forum and the Markets, realized by cutting the saddle between Capitolium and Quirinal, but also the organisation of a larger area in the north, at the foothill of the Quirinal. This became a model quarter of the new idea of the town, which I explained above and which is well documented up till now by the area of the Markets.

To this project we also have to add the baths on the Oppio hill with their revolutionary plan and the architectural design linked with a strict technological logic of the new port at the mouth of Tiber, which should definitely assure all the supplies to a town with a population of more than one million.

I think it was useful to illustrate this project for Rome, inquiring for the roots of this meaning in the monuments of the Syro-Palestinian area in the early and middle Imperial periods.

Gullini 1991, TAV. XIX; LIX,3

⁵ Gullini 1991, TAV. VIII-XI; FIGS. 457-466.