

**Source: The Ten Books on
Architecture by Vitruvius (Translated
by Morris Hicky Morgan 1914)**

BOOK II

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INTRODUCTION

1. **DINOCRATES**, an architect who was full of confidence in his own ideas and skill, set out from Macedonia, in the reign of Alexander, to go to the army, being eager to win the approbation of the king. He took with him from his country letters from relatives and friends to the principal military men and officers of the court, in order to gain access to them more readily. Being politely received by them, he asked to be presented to Alexander as soon as possible. They promised, but were rather slow, waiting for a suitable opportunity. So Dinocrates, thinking that they were playing with him, had recourse to his own efforts. He was of very lofty stature and pleasing countenance, finely formed, and extremely dignified. Trusting, therefore, to these natural gifts, he undressed himself in his inn, anointed his body with oil, set a chaplet of poplar leaves on his head, draped his left shoulder with a lion's skin, and holding a club in his right hand stalked forth to a place in front of the tribunal where the king was administering justice.

2. His strange appearance made the people turn round, and this led Alexander to look at him. In astonishment he gave orders to make way for him to draw near, and asked who he was. "Dinocrates," quoth he, "a Macedonian architect, who brings thee ideas and designs worthy of thy renown. I have made a design for the shaping of Mount Athos into the statue of a man, in whose left hand I have represented a very spacious fortified city, and in his right a bowl to receive the water of all the streams which are in that mountain, so that it may pour from the bowl into the sea."

3. Alexander, delighted with the idea of his design, immediately inquired whether there were any fields in the neighbour-

hood that could maintain the city in corn. On finding that this was impossible without transport from beyond the sea, "Dinocrates," quoth he, "I appreciate your design as excellent in composition, and I am delighted with it, but I apprehend that anybody who should found a city in that spot would be censured for bad judgement. For as a newborn babe cannot be nourished without the nurse's milk, nor conducted to the approaches that lead to growth in life, so a city cannot thrive without fields and the fruits thereof pouring into its walls, nor have a large population without plenty of food, nor maintain its population without a supply of it. Therefore, while thinking that your design is commendable, I consider the site as not commendable; but I would have you stay with me, because I mean to make use of your services."

4. From that time, Dinocrates did not leave the king, but followed him into Egypt. There Alexander, observing a harbour rendered safe by nature, an excellent centre for trade, cornfields throughout all Egypt, and the great usefulness of the mighty river Nile, ordered him to build the city of Alexandria, named after the king. This was how Dinocrates, recommended only by his good looks and dignified carriage, came to be so famous. But as for me, Emperor, nature has not given me stature, age has marred my face, and my strength is impaired by ill health. Therefore, since these advantages fail me, I shall win your approval, as I hope, by the help of my knowledge and my writings.

5. In my first book, I have said what I had to say about the functions of architecture and the scope of the art, as well as about fortified towns and the apportionment of building sites within the fortifications. Although it would next be in order to explain the proper proportions and symmetry of temples and public buildings, as well as of private houses, I thought best to postpone this until after I had treated the practical merits of the materials out of which, when they are brought together, buildings are constructed with due regard to the proper kind of material for each part, and until I had shown of what natural elements those materials are composed. But before beginning to explain their

natural properties, I will prefix the motives which originally gave rise to buildings and the development of inventions in this field, following in the steps of early nature and of those writers who have devoted treatises to the origins of civilization and the investigation of inventions. My exposition will, therefore, follow the instruction which I have received from them.

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGIN OF THE DWELLING HOUSE

1. THE men of old were born like the wild beasts, in woods, caves, and groves, and lived on savage fare. As time went on, the thickly crowded trees in a certain place, tossed by storms and winds, and rubbing their branches against one another, caught fire, and so the inhabitants of the place were put to flight, being terrified by the furious flame. After it subsided, they drew near, and observing that they were very comfortable standing before the warm fire, they put on logs and, while thus keeping it alive, brought up other people to it, showing them by signs how much comfort they got from it. In that gathering of men, at a time when utterance of sound was purely individual, from daily habits they fixed upon articulate words just as these had happened to come; then, from indicating by name things in common use, the result was that in this chance way they began to talk, and thus originated conversation with one another.

2. Therefore it was the discovery of fire that originally gave rise to the coming together of men, to the deliberative assembly, and to social intercourse. And so, as they kept coming together in greater numbers into one place, finding themselves naturally gifted beyond the other animals in not being obliged to walk with faces to the ground, but upright and gazing upon the splendour of the starry firmament, and also in being able to do with ease whatever they chose with their hands and fingers, they began in that first assembly to construct shelters. Some made them of green boughs, others dug caves on mountain sides, and some, in imitation of the nests of swallows and the way they built, made places of refuge out of mud and twigs. Next, by observing the shelters of others and adding new details to their own incep-

tions, they constructed better and better kinds of huts as time went on.

3. And since they were of an imitative and teachable nature, they would daily point out to each other the results of their building, boasting of the novelties in it; and thus, with their natural gifts sharpened by emulation, their standards improved daily. At first they set up forked stakes connected by twigs and covered these walls with mud. Others made walls of lumps of dried mud, covering them with reeds and leaves to keep out the rain and the heat. Finding that such roofs could not stand the rain during the storms of winter, they built them with peaks daubed with mud, the roofs sloping and projecting so as to carry off the rain water.

4. That houses originated as I have written above, we can see for ourselves from the buildings that are to this day constructed of like materials by foreign tribes: for instance, in Gaul, Spain, Portugal, and Aquitaine, roofed with oak shingles or thatched. Among the Colchians in Pontus, where there are forests in plenty, they lay down entire trees flat on the ground to the right and the left, leaving between them a space to suit the length of the trees, and then place above these another pair of trees, resting on the ends of the former and at right angles with them. These four trees enclose the space for the dwelling. Then upon these they place sticks of timber, one after the other on the four sides, crossing each other at the angles, and so, proceeding with their walls of trees laid perpendicularly above the lowest, they build up high towers. The interstices, which are left on account of the thickness of the building material, are stopped up with chips and mud. As for the roofs, by cutting away the ends of the crossbeams and making them converge gradually as they lay them across, they bring them up to the top from the four sides in the shape of a pyramid. They cover it with leaves and mud, and thus construct the roofs of their towers in a rude form of the "tortoise" style.

5. On the other hand, the Phrygians, who live in an open coun-

try, have no forests and consequently lack timber. They therefore select a natural hillock, run a trench through the middle of it, dig passages, and extend the interior space as widely as the site admits. Over it they build a pyramidal roof of logs fastened together, and this they cover with reeds and brushwood, heaping up very high mounds of earth above their dwellings. Thus their fashion in houses makes their winters very warm and their summers very cool. Some construct hovels with roofs of rushes from the swamps. Among other nations, also, in some places there are huts of the same or a similar method of construction. Likewise at Marseilles we can see roofs without tiles, made of earth mixed with straw. In Athens on the Areopagus there is to this day a relic of antiquity with a mud roof. The hut of Romulus on the Capitol is a significant reminder of the fashions of old times, and likewise the thatched roofs of temples on the Citadel.

6. From such specimens we can draw our inferences with regard to the devices used in the buildings of antiquity, and conclude that they were similar.

Furthermore, as men made progress by becoming daily more expert in building, and as their ingenuity was increased by their dexterity so that from habit they attained to considerable skill, their intelligence was enlarged by their industry until the more proficient adopted the trade of carpenters. From these early beginnings, and from the fact that nature had not only endowed the human race with senses like the rest of the animals, but had also equipped their minds with the powers of thought and understanding, thus putting all other animals under their sway, they next gradually advanced from the construction of buildings to the other arts and sciences, and so passed from a rude and barbarous mode of life to civilization and refinement.

7. Then, taking courage and looking forward from the standpoint of higher ideas born of the multiplication of the arts, they gave up huts and began to build houses with foundations, having

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