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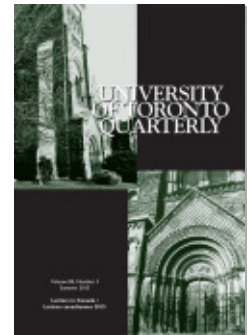
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## Platonic Myth and Urban Space: City-Form as an Allegory

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# Platonic Myth and Urban Space: City-Form as an Allegory

ABSTRACT

Shaping civilization across the ages, the myth of the Ideal City has reverberated through Western city-form from Plato to this day. While the intrinsic structure of Plato's Ideal City was mirrored in the perceived constitution of the human *soul*, the physical design of the Ideal City, as outlined in Plato's legend of Atlantis, corresponds to his vision of the *universe* at the very end of the *Republic*. The Platonic attempt to emulate universal perfection in the Ideal City has been manifest throughout the history of the city. It grew hand in hand with a companion allegory – that of the Grand Designer. Whereas the inherently masculine paradigms of the Ideal City and the Grand Designer have shaped Western city-form across historic times since antiquity, the feminine myth of the Garden has been all but excluded from a design expression in the city.

KEYWORDS: Ideal City, Karanovo seal, "Myth of Er," Argument from Design, Apollonian and Dionysian

INTRODUCTION: THE IDEAL CITY AS AN ALLEGORY

In *De Architectura*, a ten-volume treatise written about 15 BCE, the Roman architect and planner, Marcus Vitruvius Polio pointed to anthropometric scale as the source of ideal proportions in architecture, based on the association of the human body with the circle and the square. A millennium and a half later, sometime between 1487 and 1490, Leonardo da Vinci produced the famous drawing of the Vitruvian Man. Inscribed within a circle and a square, Leonardo's Vitruvian Man constitutes, in the words of Charles Mack, a universal projection of perfection: "In the iconography of the day the square was generally taken as symbolic of the earth while the circle was representative of the eternity of heaven. Thus, the Vitruvian Man of Leonardo's conception, as the earthly replica of the divinity, takes on the role of the medium by which heaven and earth are inseparably conjoined" (Mack 66). Setting the context to the present study is the presumption that it was Leonardo himself depicted in his own drawing as the Vitruvian Man (Mack 66; Lester 216).

Leonardo's drawing is based on three sentences from Book III of *De Architectura*:

... if in a man lying with his face upward, and his hands and feet extended, from his navel as the centre, a circle be described, it will touch his fingers and toes. It is not alone by a circle, that the human body is thus circumscribed, as may be seen by placing it within a square. For measuring from the feet to the crown of the head, and then across the arms fully extended, we find the latter measure equal to the former; so that lines at right angles to each other, enclosing the figure, will form a square.

Leonardo's Vitruvian Man had been preceded by an analysis of human proportions in the short tract *De statua* by Leon Battista Alberti, first published sometime before 1450 (Andrews Aiken). It is, therefore, of some interest to note that Alberti's publication seems to have also influenced the Tuscan architect, painter, and engineer Francesco di Giorgio Martini (1439–1502). Following on Vitruvius, Francesco in his *Trattati di architettura, ingegneria e arte militare* (1481), at least six years before Leonardo's Vitruvian Man, showed the circle and the square matching the outline of a human male body as a standard for the optimal layout of an ideal city:

I will describe the various parts of city areas and how they have the same structure and form as the human body. First, thinking of a human body stretched out on the ground, I will place a thread on the navel, and pull it in a circular motion around that body. Similarly, squared and angled the design shall be. Moreover, just as the body has all its parts and limbs with perfect measure and size, the same should be noted of those cities [*sic*]. (I:4, plate 1, qtd. in Friedman 252 n. 4)

The pictorial concept of the human body's bond with the circle and the square may have its origins in the ancient Chinese symbolism of heaven as a circle and the earth as a square (Lowe 52). In Hindu tradition, Carl Jung pointed out, both the circle and the square, unified in a mandala, are a universal "psychological expression of the totality of the self" (Jung, *Mandala* 20).

It is this universal perceptual imprint of the circle and the square that appears in urban planning throughout history. During Western antiquity perimeters of numerous planned cities had been often circumscribed by the circle and their internal layout by square grid. Defence considerations, but also observations of the sun or of paths of celestial objects, as well as continuing manufacture and use of round articles, may have been instrumental in the inclusion or outright preference of concentric or oval groundplans of several Bronze Age cities in the eastern Mediterranean

(Smith 38–43). The Early Bronze Age settlement of Al-Rawda (2400–2000 BCE), Syria, had circular concentric design with radiating streets carving the town into zones (Castel 601–16). In the Greek city circuit walls round the acropolis became quite frequent by the fifth century BCE, according to Wycherley (*How* 10). The city of Rhodes, founded approximately 408 BCE, was said to be “built in the form of a theatre,” and Lewis and Boardman, giving an account of excavations and aerial surveillance at the site, confirm that “from [the temple of Aphrodite] the ground rises gradually to west and south west, giving a theatre-like effect . . .” (Diodorus XIX: ch. 3).<sup>1</sup>

Many planned colonies in Classical Greece, such as Miletus or Thurii (both 440s BCE), however, were often laid out on a rectangular grid, following on some settlement plans from Egypt (Morris 29), but possibly also in deference to the belief in the Four Elements, as well as for ease of property assessment. Attributed by Aristotle to the planner Hippodamus of Miletus, the orthogonal grid plan had been also adopted in many European *new towns* throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Aristotle II: 8; Burns). At least two such new towns were in existence in the vicinity of Siena, Francesco’s birthplace: San Giovanni Valdarno and Terranuova, both founded by the Florentine Republic in the late thirteenth century. Their orthogonal plans likely had some perceptual impact on Francesco’s own urban thought.

During the 1470s Francesco worked as a military architect and engineer in the service of Lorenzo de’ Medici, a dedicated sponsor of the Platonic academy in Florence. Through the Medicis Francesco would have been familiar with and very likely influenced by the Platonism of the Florentine academy, at the time led by Marsilio Ficino (1433–99). It would have been likely due to the teachings of the Florentine academy that Francesco’s hominine urban conception appears to be also an adaptation of the very first Western concept of the Ideal City – one by Plato in the fourth century BCE.

In the *Republic*, a philosophical dialogue series, Plato had presented the social structure of his Ideal City as analogous to the makeup of the human soul (II: 368d–369a; IV: 434d–435c). His Ideal City, as the Platonic Form of a city, had launched Plato’s city-soul analogy as a universal standard shared by all humankind.<sup>2</sup> But except for brief descriptions of his two apocryphal cities – Atlantis, an ideal city on a mythical island by the same name, and Magnesia, a fabled city addressed in his very last book, the *Laws* – Plato did not elaborate on the Ideal City’s physical design. Francesco seems to have

1 See also Wycherley, “Hippodamus and Rhodes” 135–39.

2 In *Republic* (IV: 435) Plato writes: “And so of the individual; we may assume that he has the same three principles in his own soul which are found in the state; and he may be rightly described in the same terms, because he is affected in the same manner.”

filled this gap by extending Plato's city-soul analogy onto a city-body analogy (Akkerman, "Philosophical").

#### SKY PATTERNS AND EARLY SETTLEMENT GROUNDPLANS

In the *Critias* Plato purports to give a factual description of the island of Atlantis, with its elite seated at the very centre of its capital. In Plato's myth, the city of Atlantis was built by the god of sea, Poseidon, who

enclosed the hill in which [the maiden Cleito] dwelt all round, making alternate zones of sea and land larger and smaller, encircling one another; there were two of land and three of water, which he turned as with a lathe, each having its circumference equidistant every way from the centre... (117d)

The number of enclosed land areas among and outside the five zones in Atlantis has been shown to be seven (Golding), and radiating avenues in four cardinal directions have been inferred for Atlantis repeatedly (Saunders).

It has been pointed out that in Atlantis Plato had followed the concentric circular plan of Ecbatana, Persia,<sup>3</sup> as reported by Herodotus of Halicarnassus in *Histories* (Naddaf). The seven enclosed land areas of Atlantis seem to correspond to seven walls encircling Ecbatana, the capital of Media, while Poseidon and Cleito's dwelling place on a hill at the centre of Atlantis is located, similarly to the palace of the Median king Deiokes, on a hill at the centre of Ecbatana:<sup>4</sup>

[Deiokes] built large and strong walls, those which are now called Ecbatana, standing in circles one within the other... on a hill... all seven in number. And within the last circle are the royal palace and the treasure-houses... and of the first circle the battlements are white, of the second black, of the third crimson, of the fourth blue, of the fifth red: thus are the battlements of all the circles colored with various tints, and the two last have their battlements one of them overlaid with silver and the other with gold. These walls then Deiokes built for himself and round his own palace, and the people he commanded to dwell round about the wall. (Herodotus I: 98)

Five spheres of the known planets and the two spheres of the moon and the sun, accepted as a fact in early astronomy, confer cosmic harmony on the plans of both Atlantis and Ecbatana (James and van der Sluijs). The five concentric water canals and land zones circumscribing Atlantis could

3 Ecbatana is the biblical Achmetha (*Ezra* 6:2) and believed to be near the modern city of Hamedan, Iran.

4 See Gill.

be also easily interpreted as corresponding to the spheres of the five planets known at the time. In the *Republic* Plato writes that “we must use the embroidered heaven as a model to illustrate our study of those realities [of the pure, ideal Forms]” (VII: 529c). This has been interpreted as an intention to assimilate celestial patterns into a pure intellectual contemplation (Hetherington 11–28). Awareness of the sun disk, of circumferential apparition of the nightly skies, or of the surmise of planetary spheres as guides to ancient city plans, and to the Platonic Ideal City in particular, therefore, come to mind immediately as a likely rationale.

Yet save Herodotus, the only other known *literary* source to circular – concentric or radial – city plans, prior to Plato, is the Athenian dramatist Aristophanes (c. 448–385 BCE), who in one of his most renowned plays lampoons ideal city-plans, precisely, by linking them to sky patterns. It may have been a supposed mythical association with circular plans that Aristophanes had in mind in his comedy, *The Birds*, written sometime before 414 BCE – that is, at least six years *prior* to the founding of Rhodes. Since Rhodes could not have been the butt of his lampoon, Aristophanes was possibly satirizing some prevailing parable, attempting to mimic an ideal city according to the rules of geometry and the universe. In the play, the fifth-century Athenian astronomer Meton appears as a town planner trying unsuccessfully to peddle his skills to Pisthetaerus, one of two elderly runaways who fled the disorderly and corrupt Athens and who wishes to found Nephelokokkygia, an ideal city (Cloud Cookooland or City of Birds):

PISTHETAERUS: What are these things?

METON: Tools for measuring the air. In truth, the spaces in the air have precisely the form of a furnace. With this bent ruler I draw a line from top to bottom; from one of its points I describe a circle with the compass. Do you understand?

PISTHETAERUS: Not in the least.

METON: With the straight ruler I set to work to inscribe a square within this circle; in its centre will be the market-place, into which all the straight streets will lead, converging to this centre like a star, which, although only orbicular, sends forth its rays in a straight line from all sides.

PISTHETAERUS: A regular Thales! Meton... (995–96)

The play’s Meton provides the audience with a bird’s-eye view depiction of a city laid out on a circular plan divided into equal radial portions, with the *agora* at the centre, a representation close to the ideographic image of “city” (Castagnoli 68).

One of the protagonists in the play is a hoopoe, the metamorphosed mythical king of Thrace. Located in the southeastern region of the Balkans,

Thrace was referred by Plato in a context reminiscent of that of Meton in *The Birds* (Tomin). In the *Theaetetus* the Platonic Socrates engages in a dialogue with the mathematician Theodorus of Cyrene regarding a philosopher said to have

the outer form of him only in the city: his mind, disdainful of the littlenesses and nothingnesses of human things, is “flying all abroad” as Pindar says, measuring earth and heaven and the things which are under and on the earth and above the heaven, interrogating the whole nature of each and all in their entirety, but not condescending to anything which is within reach

THEODORUS:

What do you mean, Socrates?

SOCRATES

I will illustrate my meaning, Theodorus, by the jest which the clever witty Thracian handmaid is said to have made about Thales, when he fell into a well as he was looking up at the stars. She said, that he was so eager to know what was going on in heaven, that he could not see what was before his feet. This is a jest which is equally applicable to all philosophers. (173d–174b)

#### ATLANTIS: THE BALKAN CONNECTION

It is the very same region, Thrace, between today’s Greece and Bulgaria, that appears to be the origin of both accounts by Plato and Aristophanes. It is also Thrace where a pedigree could be sought to Plato’s cosmogony and to the layout of his Ideal City on the island of Atlantis, said to have vanished into the ocean some “9000 years” before Solon, a legislator who preceded Plato by two centuries (*Timaeus* 23d–e).

Several chalcolithic clay seals and whorls excavated in the Balkans throughout the twentieth century carry carvings variably presumed to be an early script, or ornamentation. One such clay disk is a roundel in cross-like division into four equal and inscribed parts, conjuring Meton’s groundplan in *The Birds*. About six centimetres in diameter and two centimetres in thickness, the roundel, perhaps a whorl-like seal, was unearthed in eastern Thrace, at Karanovo, Bulgaria, in 1968, and has been dated to about 4800 BCE (Makkay). The inscriptions have never been definitely deciphered, and the suggestion that they could, in fact, represent an asterism or some other pattern in the sky has been put forward as one possible interpretation (Pellar).

The rendering of carvings on the Karanovo disk as an allusion to asterism or some other related celestial pattern might suggest a possible background to Plato’s cosmogony as well as to his design of Atlantis. In his mythical account of creation by the demiurge, Plato traces the origin of the universe to a primordial compound. In what appears to be a reference to

the intersections of great circles of the ecliptic and the celestial equator, Plato says, inscrutably in the *Timaeus*:

The entire compound was divided by him lengthways into two parts, which he united at the centre like the letter  $\chi$ , and bent into an inner and outer circle or sphere, cutting one another again at a point over against the point at which they cross . . . and the one revolved horizontally to the right, the other diagonally to the left. (36b)

The unearthing of bisected disks in the geographic proximity of Plato's own whereabouts could indicate an early, primeval source to Plato's assertion regarding the crossed cosmic circles in the image of the letter  $\chi$ .<sup>5</sup> Rather illuminating, now, is the description of prehistoric Balkan settlements based on their configuration, as reported by Jane McIntosh:

By 4500 B.C. tell settlements were often substantial and carefully planned, with houses laid out in rows, concentric circles, or blocks. Defensive ditches and palisades, with entrances placed at cardinal points, surrounded the settlements . . . (McIntosh 40)

Corresponding to such a description could be many inscribed whorls excavated in the Balkans. If the Karanovo roundel points to some early source to Plato's cosmogony, in a similar vein it might constitute a further clue as to the origins for the physical layout of Plato's Ideal City. Whether a seal, or imitation of an amulet, the Karanovo clay disk could be construed as a symbolic map, or a real settlement plan, epitomizing the linkage between a sunwheel myth, the manufacture of disks, and the concept of an ideal city. It is Plato's esoteric conclusion of the *Republic* that buttresses such a supposed linkage.

At the very end of the *Republic* Plato launches an enigmatic, cosmogonic parable, the "Myth of Er" (X: 614–21). In the fable, the soldier Er, who is believed to have died, journeys to the afterlife and comes to life again to tell his story. In Er's account, the universe is shown to be a celestial spindle, the Spindle of Ananke, the goddess Necessity, assisted by the Fates, her three daughters, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. Placed on the Spindle of Necessity are eight whorls, constituting perfect disks:

The first and outermost whorl has the rim broadest, and the seven inner whorls are narrower, in the following proportions—the sixth is next to the first in size, the fourth next to the sixth; then comes the eighth; the seventh is fifth, the fifth is sixth, the third is seventh, last and eighth comes the second. The largest (or fixed

5 The interpretation of Plato's elocution as the crossing of the path of the ecliptic and the celestial equator has been prevalent since antiquity. See Berggren.



stars) is spangled, and the seventh (or sun) is brightest; the eighth (or moon) coloured by the reflected light of the seventh; the second and fifth (Saturn and Mercury) are in colour like one another, and yellower than the preceding; the third (Venus) has the whitest light; the fourth (Mars) is reddish; the sixth (Jupiter) is in whiteness second. (X: 615b)

The coloured seven inner whorls appear distinctly manifest against the coloured battlements of Ecbatana's seven circular walls, as described by Herodotus only a century before Plato, as well as seven enclosed land areas of Atlantis, as accounted for by Naomi Golding (359). The "Myth of Er" appears at the very end of the *Republic* and ought to be seen as the closing message to its intended readers, the legislators of the city-state. Plato's extension of the intrinsic city-soul analogy onto the *physical* city-universe analogy, emerging from the juxtaposition between the "Myth of Er" and the description of Atlantis, appears to be such a concluding precept.

The clockwork universe of Plato's cosmic whorls is regimented, somewhat masculine, much as a sunwheel, softened by its female deities. It was Friedrich Nietzsche who in *The Birth of Tragedy* suggested that Greek classicism had evolved from primordial gender facets that came to be expressed in the arts as Apollonian and Dionysian dispositions. Plato's "Myth of Er," quite consistent with Nietzsche's insight, presents femininity and masculinity as ontological features of the universe.

Nietzsche's discernment advances, furthermore, an evolutionary premise that follows from a standpoint presupposing two elemental environmental imprints: the myths of the Earthmother and the Sky Father. The two primordial paradigms were shown by Carl Jung as archetypes of the collective unconscious, originating in prehistory (Jung, *Archetypes* 81–84). The emergence at the dawn of history of city-form – the configuration of urban voids, edifices, and infrastructure – ought to be viewed, accordingly, as expression of ongoing allegories, rather than merely the strict product of reason.<sup>6</sup>

#### DESIGN OF AN IDEAL CITY AS A DESIGN OF THE UNIVERSE

Extrapolated deep into the archaic past, Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian drives could be seen as emerging from the Earthmother, giving rise to *two* gender-related myths – the Garden and the Citadel (Akkerman, "Femininity"). The primordial feminine myth of the Garden had emerged from the comfort of the nurturing Earthmother, embellished by the female gatherers of fruits and vegetables. Against the comfort and nourishment of the Earthmother, the menace of nature's ever changing fortunes as well as man-made violence gave rise to the masculine myth of the Citadel (Vico,

6 Cf. Boyer 214–15, 286–87.

Book II: 556). The pole star, as the perceived cornerstone upon which the sky vault rests and round which it revolves each night, often provided a mythical justification to the placement of temples, important structures in the centre of a citadel and a settlement, or an argument for its orientation in cardinal directions.<sup>7</sup> Such archaic traditions may have been at work during the design of the Vaikuntha Perumal Temple, a sanctuary dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu, built by the king Nandivarman II Pallavamalla (720–96 CE) in the city of Kanchipuram on the Bay of Bengal. The temple is aligned in cardinal directions, along an east–west axis (Hudson 5). Similar traditional alignment in churches is well-known. Dennis Hudson has suggested that the Vaikuntha Perumal Temple’s name in Sanskrit, as carved on the temple, has a threefold meaning: “Supreme Ruler’s Vishnu-house,” the “Emperor’s Vishnu-House,” and the “Vishnu-House of the Emperor’s Architect” (Hudson 28). In Hindu mythology, divine architect of the universe, Vishvakarman, fashioned the heavenly city of the gods (Eck 379). The inscription may have been deliberately ambiguous, intended to compare the human architect of the temple with Vishvakarman.

The rise of the myth of the Ideal City from that of the Citadel could be said, indeed, to have occurred through sky observations, with an attendant mythology sometimes related to the configuration of streets. Demonstrating a cosmogonic link is the earliest known attempt at systematic city planning, an orthogonal grid plan of straight streets at Mohenjo-daro, a city in the Indus Valley, founded in roughly 2600 BCE. At a prominent section of the city, three thirty-foot-wide avenues, along a north–south axis, and two streets crossing them at right angles from east to west, were constructed to carve twelve orthogonal city blocks each measuring twelve hundred by eight hundred feet (Hawkes 271). Such a streetscape was most likely intended to correspond to the twelve lunar months. The peculiar adherence to the compass in the layout of Mohenjo-daro repeats itself in other early cities as well, and the division into twelve blocks also appears in classical Greece. A historic antiquity report of Thurii, a Greek colony in southern Italy, as well as archaeological finds at the site, mention four avenues running in one direction and three streets at right angles to them:

The Sybarites who were driven a second time from their native city . . . received an oracular response from Apollo that they should found a city in the place where there would be water to drink in due measure, but bread to eat without measure . . . Having found not far from Sybaris a spring called Thuria . . . and believing this to be the place which the god had pointed out, they threw a wall about it, and founding a city there they named it Thurium after the spring. They divided the city lengthwise by four streets the first of which they named Heracleia, the second Aphrodisia, the third Olympias, and the fourth Dionysias,

7 Cf. McIntosh.

and breadthwise they divided it by three streets, of which the first was named Heroa, the second Thuria, and the last Thurina. And since the quarters formed by these streets were filled with dwellings, the construction of the city appeared good. (Diodorus, Book IV: 12:10)

In Roman colonies and military encampments the main street, called *cardo* (for *cardinalis partes*), was always oriented along the north–south axis. Lined with stores and vendors the *cardo* was the main commercial mall, with the *forum* town centre usually located at the right-angle intersection of the *cardo* and another major thoroughfare. Through concomitant built form the myth of the Ideal City has always given rise to continual, ongoing adaptation of city-form, thereby also transmuting in a perpetual feedback progression into new imprints of its own:

In the dream in which every epoch sees in images the epoch that follows, the latter appears wedded to elements of ur-history . . . Its experiences which have their storage place in the unconscious of the collective, produce, in their interpenetration with the new, the utopia that has left its trace behind in a thousand configurations of life from permanent buildings to ephemeral fashions. (Benjamin 46–47, trans. from Buck-Morss, *Dialectics* 114)<sup>8</sup>

Walter Benjamin, in the cited excerpt from almost a century ago, postulates a perennial feedback between the environment of the material culture and minds within it, commencing with the primordial origins of humankind, and ultimately yielding modern city-form. It is the internal dynamics within the composite of mind-city, as a perpetual interaction between an urban reality and visions of utopia, which stamps its mark upon contemporaneous urban contours and dispositions, “from permanent buildings to ephemeral fashions.” The myth of the Ideal City arises from, and continually moulds, the pre-rational, spatiotemporal hybrid of the mind-city composite, as a symbiotic fusion of human minds and city-form, mutating through historic time and geographic space (Akkerman, “Femininity”).

Setting orientation to aspiring ideal cities in early China as well as assigning a place of abode to a supreme molder of the universe had been the pole star. Imperial cities throughout China’s Bronze Age were aligned along a north–south axis, in deference to the mythical figure of the Jade Emperor (Yuhuang or Yudi), known also as the Heavenly Grandfather, who was said to reside in the pole star (Xu 4).

Similar to Vishvakarman, the Jade Emperor too is not an almighty deity. The yin–yang principle of duality in early Chinese thought, often represented as the contrast between femininity and masculinity, precedes the power of the Jade Emperor. In the West, quite similar to the myths of

8 See Buck-Morss, “Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk*: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution.”

Vishvakarman or the Jade Emperor, the Platonic myth of the demiurge as a cosmic artisan responsible for the moulding and maintenance of the universe has reverberated across millennia. In the demiurge, as well as in his two Eastern counterparts, the myth of the Sky Father and the archetype of the wise old man had transmuted into the allegory of the Grand Designer, an anthropomorphic driving force on a cosmic scale. Attempts at construction of an ideal city, and the ensuing feedback progression between minds and their built environments, have led to continuing transformations based upon the endeavour of an envisaged perfection. With new observations and embellishments, evolving city-form fed back not only to the myth of the Ideal City but also to the myth of the Grand Designer, as in the case of the Vaikuntha Perumal Temple's architect. Francesco's bodily standard for an ideal city likely reflects the same subliminal disposition.

#### THE IDEAL CITY AND THE GRAND DESIGNER

The parable of the Grand Designer is the pervasive myth associated with the Ideal City. This is also the gist of Leonardo's Vitruvian Man and Francesco's urban design: the projection of the designer's perceived grandeur of self, or of a revered other human being, on an ideal plan. According to Domenico Laurenza, Francesco and Leonardo likely discussed the Vitruvian Man during their presumed meeting at Pavia in 1490. Francesco's treatise that included the male body outline as a guide to his Ideal City was published about eight years prior to the alleged Pavia meeting with Leonardo (Laurenza). It seems, therefore, that the Vitruvian notion of male body proportions, projected by Francesco to inform the spatial features of an ideal city, may have been not only a source to Leonardo's own drawing of the Vitruvian Man but may have also expressed a masculine metaphor of correspondence between the faultless body, presumably Francesco's own, and the city.

The Ideal City and the Grand Designer appear as two companion masculine allegories that have shaped city-form in the West throughout history. The concept of the Grand Designer is the essence of a professed proof for the existence of God from the perfection of the universe. Known in the modern age as the argument for evidence of "intelligent design," historically the Argument from Design is traced to Cicero's *De natura deorum* (ii: 34). An ostensible inference for the existence of God, the Argument from Design claims evidence of a supreme, perfect being from the apparent perfection of the universe.

The first occasion where the *city* becomes a central notion in the Argument from Design is the account of Philo Judaeus in his treatise *De Opificio Mundi* (On the Creation of the World) in the first century CE:

It is manifest also, that the archetypal seal, which we call that world which is perceptible only to the intellect, must itself be the archetypal model, the idea of ideas, the Logos of God, already occupied in the creation of the world; for neither is a city, while only perceptible to the intellect, anything else but the reason of the architect, who is already designing to build one perceptible to the external senses, on the model of that which is so only to the intellect. (Philo 25)

Philo compares the universe to a perfect urban design and the architect of the city, to God: both are, in effect, seen as the Grand Designer – the Platonic demiurge – only at a different scale. In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, David Hume refutes the Argument from Design through a character by the name of Philo, showing the argument's fault in ignoring the existence of imperfection, pain, or ugliness (Part XXII). Extending this criticism Immanuel Kant had shown that the argument implies absolute determinism, leaving no possibility of contingency in nature (A:625–29; B:653–57). But the idea itself of the Designer of the universe, compared by the human being to the image of self or of another human being, is not only an erroneous association. Arguably, it is also a delusional and frenzied expression of imagined grandeur, projected upon self or upon another human being. As a psychoanalytic aspect of architecture and planning, the myth of the Grand Designer appears as a manic inversion of the Argument from Design.

There could be little doubt that the city in Philo's parable was his own hometown of Alexandria. Laid out on a regimented orthogonal grid plan some 400 years earlier by Dinocrates of Rhodes, the city was planned to become a showpiece for the eminence of Alexander the Great.<sup>9</sup> Ferro and Magli have shown recently that, at the time of Alexandria's founding in 331 BCE, the main longitudinal axis of Dinocrates's plan was orientated to the rising sun on the day of Alexander's birth while at sunset of the same day the axis was aligned in the approximate direction of the rising star Regulus, associated in Babylonian tradition with royalty (Ferro and Magli).

The pragmatic impetus for the founding of Alexandria is no less telling than its axial direction. In the account of Vitruvius in the Introduction to his Book II of *De Architectura*, Alexandria was built as an alternative to the proposal for a colossal statue of the Macedonian king that was to be sculpted in the flank of Mount Athos in northern Greece. In the account of Vitruvius, Dinocrates boasted that he had proposed a gigantic sculpture of Alexander in whose left hand a most "spacious city" was to be constructed. It was the outrageous folly of the gargantuan design scheme that had

9 Alexander saw himself as divine, and it was in Egypt where the oracle of Amun, the King of gods, declared Alexander as the son of Amun and the new Master of the Universe (Runia 104).

stopped Alexander from following on the bizarre proposal. But both Philo and Dinocrates in Alexandria exemplify how the myths of the Ideal City and the Grand Designer have been formative in the communal-cerebral progression of humans, and in the evolution of city-form.

Much as Dinocrates had stamped Alexander's sumptuousness on the plan of Alexandria, so too, centuries later, architects or planners such as Claude-Nicholas Ledoux, George-Eugène Haussmann, Robert Moses, or Frank Lloyd Wright, each saw himself as the Grand Designer of *his* own ideal city.<sup>10</sup> The all-too-telling photographs of three-dimensional urban models dwarfed by the designer-planners bending over them are nothing but a subtle, latter-day version of the fantasy that had engaged Dinocrates at Mt. Athos.

Most salient, in this regard, are the projects of the Radiant City of Le Corbusier and the Garden City of Ebenezer Howard. While Radiant City (*Ville radieuse*), a 1924 joint plan with Le Corbusier's cousin, Pierre Jeanneret, was never executed,<sup>11</sup> the Garden City scheme, some two decades earlier, had been a runaway commercial success. It is also due to the Garden City concept that Howard is considered one of the founders of modern urban planning.

Le Corbusier's plan of the Radiant City shows zoning in parallel bands, from offices at the top end of his blueprint, through housing in the centre, to industry at the bottom. In the words of the architectural historian and critic Kenneth Frampton, the plan of the Radiant City shows an "anthropomorphic metaphor . . . inserted into this model" (*Modern* 180). The resemblance to the allegoric setting of Francesco's ideal city five centuries earlier is unmistakable: in both cases the anthropomorphic metaphor recalls the Platonic myth even as the outline of a masculine super-creature, a Neoplatonic demiurge, permeates the plan of Le Corbusier's Radiant City.

A corresponding mechanistic myth appears to be behind the *Modulor*, Le Corbusier's version of the Vitruvian Man, showing human proportions as consistent with the Golden Section ratio in two different series of anthropometric scales. Both anthropometric series of the *Modulor* amount to the formal basis for the "ideal" design of Le Corbusier's urban dwellings (131). The impression that Le Corbusier, too, designed the *Modulor* in the image of himself is inescapable.

#### EBENEZER HOWARD'S GARDEN CITY AS A NEOPLATONIC MYTH

It was Jane Jacobs who, already in the early 1960s, qualified modern urban planning movements as "architectural design cults" (375). Frampton, more

10 See Friedland and Zellman 251–340, 543–61. On the self-centeredness and despotism of Baron George-Eugène Haussmann and Le Corbusier, see Evenson 199–219, 232–38.

11 See Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City*.

recently, bluntly judged the postmodernist movement of New Urbanism as “megalomaniac” (“The Work”). Originating in the southern United States, New Urbanism has little to contribute to the winter-cities of North America, and its idea of greenery, in particular, epitomizes possession and control more than an expression of the Garden as a feminine allegory of multitude and spontaneity. New Urbanism is a late spinoff of Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City movement, and its curtailing of the allegoric Garden as a publically accessible urban space follows Howard’s own, century-old Garden City plan, a forerunner of the North American suburb.

Howard’s proclaimed purpose of his Garden City project was to provide acceptable living conditions to the working class in England through a rationalist egalitarian scheme of urban co-operatives.<sup>12</sup> It was the brilliantly simple idea in his short handbook, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*,<sup>13</sup> to inject nature into the design of a small-size city, that almost immediately became a commercial real estate triumph. Not surprisingly, far from catering to the working class, the two garden city communities in England, Welwyn Garden City and Letchworth, as well as their later sequels elsewhere, had since their founding been rather elitist and anything but working class (Jacobs 17–25). Ultimately becoming an exclusionary manor development for the upper-middle class, on its own, the original Garden City concept can be seen as a nineteenth-century culmination of the intertwined progression of the masculine myths of the Ideal City and the Grand Designer.

Lewis Mumford in *The City in History* had pointed out that Howard’s Garden City carries semblance to Plato’s Atlantis (175–84, 516–20). Indeed, Howard charted his Garden City on seven concentric ring roads round the central square, the first six being “avenues” and the seventh ring being a railroad. Radiating from the central square were six major linear boulevards, dividing the Garden City into six equal sections.<sup>14</sup>

Howard begins his book with a picturesque symbolism of the Town, the Country, and the Town-Country as the “Three Magnets.” Howard’s metaphor of the Three Magnets would seem an innocent literary device had it not appeared in conjunction with his concentric plan and his own association with a Neoplatonic religious movement.

12 For an overall critical assessment of Howard’s work and its impact, see Beevers; Ramroth 73–92; Rutheiser.

13 The first edition of Howard’s book was published as *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*.

14 In a diagram entitled *No. 7, Group of Slumless and Smokeless Cities*, Howard shows a regional plan of several garden cities, with each garden city carved by *twelve* radiating avenues into twelve equal radial sections. The diagram *No. 7*, included in the first edition of Howard’s book, in 1898, was not included in the second edition, of 1902, but “was sadly omitted . . .” See Hall and Ward 23.

In his treatise, the *Laws*, Plato describes Magnesia as an ideal “city of Magnetes.” Built on the island of Crete by migrants from Magnesia, a region in northeastern Greece (*Laws* IV: 714a–722b), the ideal city of Magnesia has its land apportioned, according to Plato’s advice to Magnesia’s ruler, into twelve radial portions of land:

Then we divide the city into twelve portions, first founding temples to Hestia, to Zeus and to Athene, in a spot which we will call the Acropolis, and surround with a circular wall, making the division of the entire city and country radiate from this point. The twelve portions shall be equalized by the provision that those that are of good land shall be smaller, while those of inferior quality shall be larger. (V: 745c–811ce)

The semblance of Howard’s Garden City plan to Plato’s Atlantis and Magnesia is consistent with Platonic myths espoused by an esoteric religion with which Howard has been associated. In 1871 Ebenezer Howard arrived in America, and it was here where, as a church preacher, he came under the influence of the spiritualist movement, one of whose most celebrated séance mediums was Cora Richmond (also known as Hatch or Scott). On one occasion Cora is reported to have said to Howard:

“I see you in the centre of a series of circles working on something that will be of a great service to humanity.” That suggestion coming from a woman he regarded as a seer gave him confidence when he came to draw his plan of a Garden City in concentric circles. (MacFadyen 11)

Cora who, from all indications, saw herself as something of an oracle, reportedly told Howard during her visit to London in 1881:

“[Y]ou have a message to give the world.” Howard thereafter thought his purpose in life was “to put forward . . . practical proposals to uplift society.” Howard’s desire for reform rested on a solid belief in a God-given purpose of harmony and unity in the universe. In the world vision offered by ‘Modern Spiritualism,’ humanity needed to align itself with this divine order . . . This, he now believed, required the garden city. (Buder 63)

Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Plato’s myths had been central in the spiritualist movement of the northeastern US, and the story of Atlantis was among those that “trumped the finer points of rhetoric in the imaginations of Americans” (Guitierrez 8). It is noteworthy, in this regard, that after Howard’s book was repeatedly refused by publishers, its ultimate publication was secured through spiritualist financial support: “Mr. George Dickman, an admirer of Cora’s, and the General



Manager of Kodak, came forward with 50 pounds toward publishing costs of the book" (MacFadyen 22).

The association of Howard with Cora's psychic religion is beyond a doubt and could be of further concern in light of observations such as the one made by the novelist Henry James. Intrigued by Cora's charismatic personality, James characterized the contents of her trance messages as "a string of . . . arrant platitudes" (Buder 9 n. 11).

Howard's penchant for mysticism notwithstanding, the early success of introducing nature into urban residential space in the Garden City concept is unquestionable. Yet placing Howard's source in Plato's Atlantis and Magnesia gives support to a notion quite contrary to proclamations associated with the Garden City movement. Presenting his Garden City as a progressive co-operative addressing the plight of the working poor, and an egalitarian urban settlement whose design is founded on reason, Howard never mentioned Plato's elitist myth of Atlantis as his source. Yet projected into Howard's plan of the Garden City was, precisely, Plato's ancient predisposition for a rigidly stratified society, along with Howard's own spiritualist beliefs, rather than his avowed rationalist egalitarianism. The myths of the Grand Designer and the Ideal City, seminal in the history of city-form, have clearly been so in the forging of the Garden City concept, at the founding of modern urban planning.

#### CONCLUSION: URBAN ALLEGORIES AS TENETS OF URBAN DESIGN

Streets and squares are the paramount urban voids that had ensued from the need for public encounter of people with one another, securing also open air in the city as a perceptual connection of the earth with the sky. Edifices, arising from the initial necessity for a haven, assuaging mainly the need for privacy and family, had been the prime component as well as expression of citadels.

In Jung's archetypal theory, the Anima feminine trait is within the personality of each male, as is the Animus masculine quality inborn within each female (Jung, *Symbols; Two*). Analogously entwined with each other are urban voids and edifices within city-form. Interpreted as feminine and masculine urban features, respectively, the sources for embellishment of urban voids and edifices ought to be sought in the biblical myths of the Garden and the Tower of Babel, and in the Greek Dionysian and Apollonian attributes of art and material culture (Akkerman, "Femininity").

The sun god Apollo manifests the transition from citadels onto colonies in ancient Greece (Malkin 17–19). In *Scienza Nuova*, Gimabattista Vico had identified the myth of the Citadel as arising through the masculine outlook of warfare (IV: 982), and Erich Auerbach, subsequently, had pointed out Vico's predilection linking the myth of the Citadel with Plato's Ideal City. In the ongoing interaction of minds and city-form, the myth of the Ideal

City found a consort in the myth of the Grand Designer, a fusion of the Sky Father and Jung's archetype of the wise old man. It was the practical and the mythical that had conjoined in ideal city-form from antiquity through to the industrial age and beyond. Thus, compass directions and grid layout of streets have frequently addressed also the need for navigation, for protection from sun or wind, or for other thermal comfort, and for measurement of land in ownership. Modernity's heroic slogans, such as Le Corbusier's, "A city built for speed is a city built for success," or Daniel Burnham's, "Make No Little Plans," all the same, have been reflective of fanciful technological prowess reaffirming the same masculine myth. But the historically increasing regimentation of urban voids seems to constitute a masculine imposition upon an innately feminine urban feature. As a mythical contemplation, the Ideal City, the escort of the Garden by its own origins, has not only been an Apollonian expression of urban masculinity, but through modernity and postmodernity it has become masculinity's expression of dominion over city-form.

Still, against the Apollonian myths of the Ideal City and the Grand Designer, unassumingly throughout history, inefficiently and meekly, the Dionysian myth of the Garden has been perched, as if in a slumber. Romanesque streetscapes, and some of their Gothic and early Renaissance progenies exude organic ambience and an ongoing prospect for a fortuitous encounter.<sup>15</sup> Up until the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the masculine drive for the ideal, geometrically regimented city-form mirroring perceived perfection had to yield to topography, lack of advanced technology, intervention by property owners, and deliberate curvature of streets against armed intruders. Throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, this synergy cast the ancient and medieval city-form into a fascinating maze of lanes and open spaces.

The inability of authorities to exercise control over muddled lanes of poverty-stricken urban centres, and the technical capacity of the Industrial Revolution to eradicate them, marginalized the Romanesque streetscape in the early modern city-form, and all but expunged it from early twentieth century's European industrial metropolis. And yet again, in the face of the aspiring perfection of a plan, the spontaneity, contingency, and interaction of streetscapes and humans within them has kept fomenting new urban voids within the built form: from crooked, tortuous pathways between tenement buildings of the Industrial Revolution to seedy back alleys of the modern North American city.

In spite of a plan, the *un*planned place has endured in the contemporary metropolis. In time that is unstructured, immeasurable, and entirely

15 To John Ruskin, a nineteenth-century art critic, these historical styles were an expression of fluidity and spontaneity in man's material culture borrowed from nature and natural forms (167).

subjective, void of clock or calendar, but marked by accidental events and sporadic danger, the unplanned place has been the *other* face of the city. As a spontaneous, authentic urban trait it has repeatedly emerged and survived in forsaken and overlooked spaces in every city to this day: a place of decay and contempt, or “simply the reverse side” (Sartre 24–26). Rather than humbly learning from urban decay, the mythical aspiration for an ideal expressed in a plan, repeatedly proven false as a device for urban command and control, has led to one of urban policy’s main follies: the flat-out campaign to eradicate urban decay (Adams and Balfour 115).

In his *Place and Placelessness*, Edward Relph has called for an authentic, unmitigated and spontaneous sense of place “not mediated and distorted through . . . social and intellectual fashions . . . nor stereotyped conventions” (64). The outright expression of the allegoric Garden in city-form is, precisely, an unmitigated place for authenticity and spontaneity. In modern or postmodern city-form, however, there hardly is a public space that spurs such qualities. But should the unplanned place become an ingrained feature in the design of our evolving city-form, we just might be able to address the challenge Relph had posed decades ago.

The acumen of twentieth century automotive and automated city-form has been the fact that it had minimized, sometimes effectively eliminated, walking in the city. Perturbing an important kinetic–cognitive link in humans, mechanized, automotive, and automated city-form of the super-scale, has promoted and upheld automatism in human behaviour. The proclaimed rationality and technological eminence of the twentieth century’s metropolis may have, in fact, bolstered a course of severance of the cognitive process from the kinetic propensity in its occupants (Foster; Kwan 7–19).

It seems that automatism in humans is precisely what had been hailed early on in Plato’s ideal city, where in the *Laws* Plato envisions people in the ideal polis as if made out of waxwork (V: 746). As Karl Popper had pointed out, Plato’s designed, highly stratified society had become an inspiration to absolutist regimes later in history (51). But already at the dawn of civilization, failures of the high priest to bring about miracles would only reinforce cult among the folk, accompanied by rituals that became automatic, uniform, and universal. The twentieth-century myth of the Rational City, albeit repeatedly proven false, has been an attempt at the disciplined, surprise-free city – automated, uniform, and universal (Akkerman, “Philosophical”). The faith in a being behind the design of the universe found a manic and self-reflective correspondence in the high priest or the sovereign in his own role as the Grand Designer – or the umpire on behalf of one. It is this psychoanalytic imprint that has left its traces on the ongoing pursuit for a controlled, surprise-free city-form.

As a hybrid evolving in geographical space and historical time, the mind-city composite has given rise to modern urban planning movements, the Garden City or the City Beautiful, and to their twentieth century

earmarks that are with us still today: suburban sprawl and the urban superscale. As a culmination of mechanically structured time and space within the industrial and postindustrial city-form, these movements, expressions of the mechanistic myth of the Rational City, can be seen at the root of North America's urban ills in the late twentieth century and beyond (Boyer 175–78, 154–55).

Reintroducing Romanesque elements into our streetscapes could constitute a meaningful remedial amendment (Akkerman, "Reclaiming"). But curative response in urban planning and design will remain lacking without the humble recognition that as humans we cannot suspend our unconscious paradigms and the predispositions based upon them from our thoughts and our designs. Only so can human scale, human movement, and most of all allegories of the human mind find a just expression in city-form.

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