DE PHILIBERT, DE L'ORME ET DE RABELAIS

ANALOGOUS TREATISES: A COMPANION

Jean-Pierre Chupin

School of Architecture
McGill University

June 25, 1990

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Architecture.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse étudie l'origine corporelle des formulations théoriques dans l'architecture française du XVI^{e} siècle. La comparaison des traités de Philibert de l'Orme et de l'œuvre du médecin François Rabelais permet de mettre en évidence une conscience de la matérialité qui s'articule très dynamiquement, à cette époque, sur des correspondances analogiques et des textes de la tradition hermétique. Or, qu'il s'agisse de la théorie des quatre Éléments, de la notion de Proportion, du rapport microcosme-macrocosme ou bien des Vertus cardinales, les références du discours sont toujours rapportées à l'expérience quotidienne du corps. Face aux conceptualisations qui dominent aujourd'hui sur des bases mécanistes et objectifiantes, ce travail soutient le rôle crucial que l'architecte doit jouer dans l'élaboration de lieux qui posent le rapport au corps en termes d'apprentissage plutôt que de domination.

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the corporeal origin of theoretical works in XVIth century French architecture. A comparison of Philibert de l'Orme's treatises and François Rabelais' work allows for a dynamic awareness of materiality to emerge. During the Renaissance, this awareness was based on analogical relationships and Hermetic texts. However, whether one looks at the theory of the Elements, the concept of Proportion, the microcosm-macrocosm interplay, or even the Cardinal Virtues, it appears that the references were always traced back to the everyday experience of the body. Confronted with the mechanistic and objectifying conceptualizations that dominate today, this thesis supports the crucial role the architect must play in the bringing forth of places that allow for a perception of the body closer to apprenticeship that to domination.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

From a corporeal point of view, any reflexion about Being in its globality – any direct interrogation of the very flesh of our embodiment – already implies a tacit acceptance of immersion in one of the most enigmatic examples of *simultaneity*. For with *Flesh* is named both the locus of all metamorphoses and the symbol of becoming, both the emerging point and the gathering-place of all experiences. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, while refining the notion in his posthumous work *The Visible and the Invisible*, was searching for something other than the sharp and reassuring boundaries of a concept:

> *The Flesh, he writes, is not matter, is not mind (esprit), is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term "element", in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a* general thing, *midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an "element" of Being. Not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to* location *and the* now.[1]

In his last working notes, disengaging himself from the forest of distinctions planted by the rationalist collectors of isolated facts, Merleau-Ponty was seeking "middle terms". However, his explicit invitation for re-questioning pre-Newtonian cosmologies is particularly ironic. By evoking the "elements", he was awakening ancient ways of "imagining matter", to use the words coined by Gaston Bachelard: ways that were usually believed to be totally obsolete.

Today, in architecture also, theoretical research begins to acknowledge more and more clearly its multiple origins, both ancestral and day-to-day, in bodily languages that at first sight very often seem Babelic. In this still fragile opening, however, in order to avoid a reversal of intentions which could lead to a perpetuation of the splits inherited from almost three centuries of mechanistic philosophies, one must be extremely vigilant. Indeed, to base any kind of exploration on dualisms is already to extoll the separations. On the contrary, when the notion of Flesh becomes the paradigm of the simultaneous, of the "at-once", when it acknowledges its "in-betweenness", then the question becomes to re-member, to re-collect and ultimately to re-

---

1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp.139-140.

invent ways of thinking that can take into account the intermediary terms between affirmation and negation. It is most certainly *through* the body that we can best define these emblematic concretions which constitute true hinges between sense and senses!

This thesis is an attempt to make a contribution to a general Hermeneutics of Architectural Poetics. Such a task demands a new understanding of the body and therefore encompasses medical texts. Starting from an historical point of view, this work is also seen as an architectual praxis, which could at once be a criticism of dividing dogmas and an invitatior. to consider "dwelling" as an everyday process of transformation.

....

Heeding Merleau-Ponty's hint, I set out to to acknowledge in this thesis the crucial role played by the theory of the four Elements with regard to the Vitruvian body image in Renaissance architectural treatises. The XVth and XVIth centuries have left us with a great number of texts richly built on analogical principles, always exhuberantly intertwined. Such an abundance, which often puts the modern reader in an unconfortable predicament, remains one of the major attributes of late mediaeval mentalities and needs to be put back in the context of the Elementarist understanding of materiality; otherwise, one risks to mistake the grotesque aspect of images of the body for mere coarseness. For these reasons, I chose to juxtapose Philibert de l'Orme's treatises and the works of his illustrious elder François Rabelais. Although such an association is suggested by most biographers, not much has been written on the subject. The pertinence of this comparison, in the hope of illuminating the early modern reality of architecture, is reinforced by the recent publication of a complete edition of the *Nouvelles Inventions pour bien bastir et à petits fraiz* (1561) and the *Premier Tome de l'Architecture* (1567). This edition is the first one to be correct from an iconographic point of view. Its editor Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos points out that most of the plates and the headbands were either borrowed from the successive editors' supplies, or altered and even put in the wrong place in the editions following the 1561 original. Unfortunately, most specialists on Philibert de l'Orme worked on the XVIIth-century editions.[2] Pérouse de Montclos himself set the tone for a new approach to Philibert's work when he calculated the architect's birthdate, until then uncertain, through an "astrological" analysis of the headband in Chapter three. He reconstituted de l'Orme's "horoscope" after the symbols of the four planets (Mercury, Jupiter, the Sun, and Venus)

---

2 Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos, "Horoscope de Philibert de l'Orme", p.16.

inscribed on the headband. His major hypothesis, i.e. that the architect was born under the sign of Gemini, is confirmed by the armillary spheres on both the headband and the frontispiece and by an engraving showing the two children symbolical of the sign carved on a wooded beam in Philibert's own house. However, concludes Pérouse de Montclos, all this shows first of all,

> *the interest [de l'Orme] had for Hermeticism, [...] and a private counsellor on this subject matter is Antoine Mizauld, Physician and Astrologer, who published his* Planetologia *in 1551 and collaborated to the writing of the* Premier Tome.[3]

There are many studies on the impact of so-called "occult practices" in the fields of Art History and History of Sciences, but rare are the works which analyze in detail the influence of *Hermes* on an architect's imagination.[4]

In the field of Rabelaisian studies, the amount of secondary sources is properly Gargantuan. However, the scientific approach initiated in the early part of the XXth century by Abel Lefranc, Jacques Boulenger and Henri Clouzot faced its major challenge with the publication of Lucien Febvre's *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVI^{e} siècle.*[5] This central work generated a movement away from rationalist interpretations of Rabelais's writings. But it is the recent publication of Claude Gaignebet's researches which definitely allows us to undertake a detailed study of de l'Orme's text, as well as representing a wonderful model of the hermeneutical approach. Published under the eloquent title of *A Plus Hault Sens: l'ésotérisme spirituel et charnel de Rabelais*, this masterpiece of erudition should not be seen as just one more contribution to the often condescending glances directed to the "Great Jester's" book. Carefully setting Rabelais' major characters in the old pagan origins of mediaeval popular rituals, Gaignebet extends with a lot more information and accuracy, the approach inaugurated by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World.*

---

3 Idem, p.18

4 The pioneering work is still: Panofsky, Saxl, Klibanski: *Saturn and Melancholy. Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art.* More specifically in the field of Architectural History and theory, there is René Taylor's "Architecture and Magic", in *Essays Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, which focuses on the particular case of the Escorial. See also Jan Van Pelt, "Philo of Alexandria and the Architecture of the Cosmos", in *AA Files*, n°4, July 1983.

5 Paris, 1942.

Originally conceived in French, this thesis seeks to be at once a companion to de l'Orme's treatises, which remain to be translated into English, and a search for "Pantagruelic companions" in the Rabelaisian sense of the term. If we consider the reading clues given in the Prologue to *Gargantua*, such a guide would be like a Silenus:

> *... a little box of the kind we see to-day in apothecaries' shops, painted on the outside with such gay, comical figures as harpies, satyrs, bridled geese, horned hares, saddled ducks, flying goats, stags in harness, and other devices of that sort, lighteartedly invented for the purpose of mirth, as was Silenus himself, the master of good old Bacchus. But inside these boxes were kept rare drugs, such as balm, ambergris, cardamum, musk, civet, mineral essences, and other precious things. Just such an object, according to Plato, was Socrates...*[6]

The hypothesis underlying this approach to the Hermetic undercurrent in de l'Orme's work will be that Rabelais' five books (if we include the posthumous Fifth Book) were an initiatory source of references for Philibert, and as such, they are still today the best key to open the Silenus. But this is not a mere metaphoric device, for "Bacchus" will happen to have a decisive role in de l'Orme's use of the myth of Hermes. Now, a "companion" in the mediaeval sense of the term is not only a friend or even a guide, it is also a builder: one never emphasizes too much the collective energy which is at the root of the making of architecture. The strong individualism which nowadays inhabits most architects and their productions has not always been the only alternative to the corporatism which lies as a trap for any institutionalized profession. Next to the mediaeval guilds, there were groups of people (for instance, brotherhoods) who recognized each other precisely by the importance that was given to *relationships:* often more valued than the acquisition of techniques, or even "secrets". As a prerequisite to their training, they had to move "physically" and travel on the roads as pilgrims, sometimes for long periods of time. This journey, which generally found its end in the "chef d'œuvre", had to do essentially with the development of ethics. Philibert de l'Orme was educated at the school of travel, and the proximity of his architectural sense of values with that of the "compagnons du tour de France" is so indubitable that it encourages further exploration. Rabelais' *savoir-vivre* and de l'Orme's living architecture have often been paralleled, but aside from Henri Clouzot, whose biography of de l'Orme remains

---

6 *François Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel.* A new translation by J.M. Cohen, p.37.

unsurpassed, rare are the historians who followed the Hermetic path that leads to the Rabelaisian Garden.

This thesis is articulated around four approaches which I believe essential for grasping the major emblems of de l'Orme's imagery. Although each part is a commentary on one specific engraving in Philibert's *Premier Tome*, all four will prove to converge towards the same cosmological implications.

• The first Chapter adresses the issues of the theory of the Elements as a formal and dynamic representation of matter. After Luca Pacioli, Leonardo da Vinci and Dürer, each of the four Elements became "concretely" associated to a Platonic Body, which gave a new impulse to architecture. Philibert's writings are a very good example of the futility of any attempt to reduce Elementarism to a set of prescriptive categories. More emblematic than conceptual, the four Elements and the "Fifth Essence" represented for de l'Orme a perceptual framework allowing him to inscribe the art of building into the natural processes of transformation. Keeping in mind that *Physis* was conceived as a living totality, we must remember that the Elements, flesh of the world and of all Beings, were symbolic *hinges*, sometimes more or less objectified, but always embodied in "proportions", waiting to be "learned" and recognized.

• Proportion having its etymological origin in the platonic understanding of the Greek αναλογια (analogia), it will be the purpose of the second Chapter to explore the notion of links. Indeed, I think that the various architectural uses of the geometrical "Body of Flesh" reveal first of all the existence of several nexuses far before their possible reduction to mathematical ratios. This way of considering Proportion allows for a new reading of the XVIth-century understanding of *Divine Proportions*.

• In the third Chapter, I will address a larger range of correspondances to understand why Philibert's contemporaries were able to move so freely between microcosm and macrocosm. Indeed, until the end of the XVIth century, although most analogical referents are clearly and almost systematically anthropocentric, they never exclude a cosmological dimension. Man and microcosm cannot be reduced to each other, for in the Renaissance, Man still saw himself in the midst of manifold correspondances, and not yet as an entity separable from the *Physis*. Despite a growing interest in dissection, the physical body was still considered as a divine *hinge*, and in the case of Paracelsus' astrobiology, as the "fifth element", the *fifth essence*. Paradoxically, it is the element of *Air* which allows de l'Orme to connect his theory of architecture with his care for the health of the body. Through an analysis of the "etheric" aspect of his animistic beliefs, one can best

understand the architect's interest in astrology, medicine and above all, alchemy. Not only does the visible not have absolute power, but the invisible is often supposed to bear more sense for de l'Orme, as for Rabelais. Stereotomic virtuosity is therefore the particular offspring of a living and, as such, symbolic perception, rather than a geometric reduction of space. One could even call it a representation of the invisible since, in the finest cases, the gestures of the hand which draws and cuts, seeks to imitate the internal dynamisms, the "elements" of matter.

• The fourth and last Chapter is a commentary on Philibert's architectural ethics" which is probably the great originality of his treatises, although there is still no study on this subject. For Manfredo Tafuri, de l'Orme's pragmatism, combined with his use of practical virtues, makes him an outstanding figure amongst cinquecento theoreticians such as Girolamo Cardano or Giambattista della Porta who are considered as "totally renunciatory at the level of values" or even Serlio's similar interest "too often deformed into a hedonistic scenographic tone".[7] Amongst the ancient Cardinal Virtues, it was *Prudentia* which must, for Philibert, constitute the ground for the practice of architecture. Prudence is not, however, synonymous with moral reticence. It rather points toward a certain awareness of temporality, and as such, it emphasizes the ephemereal character of the very flesh of an architecture celebrating metamorphoses. It is this truly *alchemical drive* of Philibert's statements on the Art of Building which reveals most clearly its origins in the Rabelaisian philosophy of mutations, monsters and "re-monstrances". Indeed, in the relationship between Pantagruel, great reader of "cosmic signs", and Panurge, little human being thirsting after "comic acts", Pantagruelism is a "jeu savant" of alterations and "des-altérations". If Panurge is the epitome of the human condition, Pantagruel, following the etymology of the name Gargantua gave him, is before anything else: "Le dominateur des alterez".[8]

Anagrams, homophonies, and sometimes *puns* and *spoonerisms* will thus be the necessary "instruments" if we are to read de l'Orme "*à plus hault sens*", which does not exclude, a priori, the possibility to rewrite parts of the promised, but missing, *Second Tome*. After all, in the same way that the writings of Hermes belong to the mythical origin of the Hermeneutics, the historians-theoricians of architecture are also the heirs of those companions who "freely" carved the stone alchemy of the cathedrals. In the same way, it is

---

7 "Discordant Harmony from Alberti to Zuccari" in *Architectural Design*, vol. 49, #5-6, p.42

8 *Book II*, 2,3, p.224.

interesting to remark that the engravers who prepared the plates for Philibert's books (the ones he calls "Tailleurs d'histoires"[9]) were sometimes those who re-invented the pictures, leaving him quite helpless! The fact that Philibert criticizes so severely the execution of the plates of the *Premier Tome*, is enough to show how seriously he took *images:* as guardians of his deepest intentions (even the most enigmatic). Therefore, in order to better undertake a research about Philibert's Hermes, it seemed particularly appropriate to write each Chapter as a commentary on an engraving taken from the *Premier Tome*. Doing so, it is hoped, will allow multiple analogical intertwinings in the "margin" left blank by Antoine Mizauld, the physician de l'Orme himself requested to comment his text. But this is a companion, not a scholarly paraphrase; it does not seek to recount the journey, nor does it want to be a substituuion, at the most would it like to be a *prudent alteration.*

.....

Acknowledgements

For all ancient philosophers and sages have reckoned two things to be necessary for safe and pleasant travel on the road of wisdom and in the pursuit after knowledge: God's guidance and the company of men.[10]

I would like to thank Dr. Alberto Pérez-Gómez for his insistance on the Art of Focusing, which helped me to clarify most of the issues developed in this thesis and as such, to understand how to relate the notions of microcosm and macrocosm. During the reading of the first draft, Dr. Marco Frascari provided laconic keywords and scholarly advise. He also insisted at a very early stage on the need to *Prudently* unveil the hidden dimensions of de l'Orme's images. Louis Brillant, Terrance Galvin, and Irena Murray have been very encouraging companions, particularly throughout the editing of the final document. Finally, many thanks to Sophie Voillot, who collaborated in a most valuable way with both her computer and her sense of humour.

---

9 212v°.

10 François Rabelais, *Livre 5*, ch.48, p.710. Translation by J.M. Cohen.

Frontispiece of the *Premier Tome de l'Architecture*

CHAPTER ONE

Inanimate Bodies or Elemental Gestures ?

Philibert de l'Orme's treatises do not fall into the category of what André Chastel called the "speculative trend", referring to Pacioli, Alberti or Filarete, whose writings anticipate action, thus giving the illusion that practitioners were following their instructions and recipes.[1] Both *Nouvelles Inventions* and *Premier Tome* appear as instructive amalgams of intentional "revelations" and "secrets", and if it is certain that they were written by a recognized practitioner who delivers his experience to a larger public, it is also clear that the author is very prudent in regard to the reader (an imaginary interlocutor who is encouraged to consult the master whenever necessary).[2]

Despite Philibert's advice, it is possible to enter his *philosophical garden* through an iconological analysis of the Frontispiece which opens the *Premier Tome* and epitomizes the major emblems of the architect's imagery. Balancing the composition of the plate, two characteristic Platonic solids are depicted, an icosahedron and a dodecahedron. Emerging like flames from the top of candelabras, both solids stand not on one side but, curiously, on one point, mirroring the armillary sphere and the terrestrial globe that can spin around their imaginary axes. The dodecahedron, most complete because it encompasses all the other regular solids, traditionally represents the Cosmos (Ether) while the icosahedron is associated to Water as an Element. Now, as suggested by their precarious balance, the regular bodies will reveal themselves to be signposts for a qualitative thinking of materiality, before sparkling like instrumental scepters of geometric domination. Although more cryptically disguised, the other three Elements are first represented by the armillary sphere whose openwork design indicates the lightness of Air, while the massive globe represents the sublunar realm of Earth. As for Fire, supreme and volatile, author of the most radical transformations, considered by Plato as the *quickest*, simultaneously coming from the heavens and partaking of earth – it has been depicted by Philibert with all the attributes of Hermes-Mercury. His bust is strangely surrounded if not burdened by

---

1 See André Chastel: *Renaissance méridionale*, p.49.

2 See for instance *Premier Tome* (referred to as *P.T.* in the following pages, while the *Nouvelles Inventions* will be referred to as *N.I.*), folio 282. But also folio 79: "If some desire to know more, they can come to me, I will share my little knowledge and experience as much as possible". See also folio 99.

cornucopias, the presence of which is not fortuitous, as a close reading of the treatise will show.

It would be erroneous to associate the regular solids with some vague geometrical quotations appreciated by XVI[th] century artists. De l'Orme gives them a major role in the invention of his architecture and as Pérouse de Montclos states,

> *The frontispiece raises again the question of Philibert's Platonic culture. If in Vitruvius he read Plato's means to measure the surface area of a field, it is very probable that the message of the* Timæus *has been found in some Italian treatise, perhaps the* de Divina Proportione *by Luca Pacioli (1509) whose ideas on Divine Proportions de l'Orme might have borrowed.*[3]

Indeed the reference to Pacioli seems to be confirmed by Philibert's numerous announcements, throughout the entire *Premier Tome*, of a second book devoted to the study of proportions. This promise which the Architect did not have a chance to keep seems to Pérouse de Montclos "one aspect of a spiritual conversion" following the disgrace which occurred on the death of Henry II and which he himself interpreted as a divine castigation.[4] But concerning the display of the two regular solids and with them all the hints at the theory of Elements, they cannot be so subject to historical circumstances for it is the characteristic sign, by the end of the Middle Ages, of a typically global cosmological thinking clearly summarized by Antoine Mizauld's commentary in the margin :

> *About the harmony and mutual agreement of the seven Planets for the conservation of the inferior world as for the Elements.*[5]

Philibert himself, in the "Epistre au lecteur" at the beginning of his treatise, sets in unambiguous terms the crucial importance of the four Elements in the generation of "all the things of this visible and inferior world" thus hinting implicitly at the making of Architecture.[6] It is, therefore, crucial to approach a

---

3 See J.M. Pérouse de Montclos, "Présentation des Traités", in Philibert De l'Orme's *Traités d'Architecture*, p.13.

4 Op. cit., p.19.

5 *P.T.* folio 3v°. Antoine Mizauld was a physician and an astrologer whose advices Philibert followed carefully. He is now understood to be the author of the subtitles which paraphrase de l'Orme's text in the "margin".

6 *P.T.* folio 3v°.

study of the Hermetic imagery in Philibert's work through the four Elements, the major arcana of pre-Newtonian mentalities.[7]

The Galilean Revolution inaugurated the obsolescence of classical cosmologies in which all changes, understood as transformations or metamorphoses, were always "sieved" by the notion of elementality and which always tended to unify Man, his world and the Heavens. Surprisingly, these notions reappeared, although in a transmuted form, in C.G. Jung's psychological concepts and Bachelard's epistemology.[8] Nevertheless, recent developments in the history of Hermeticism show that alchemical endeavours and their later Rosicrucian developments never dismissed elementarity as a dynamic understanding of mutability. Certainly, the fact that "scientific" inquisition forcefully kept these researches outside of the mainstream of the Enlightenment indirectly created an identification with obscure and occult practices. It is now possible to read again what appeared to Bachelard as types of imaginations, or to Jung as fundamental archetypes. This does not condemn history to psychological interpretation, but indicates a need for an open hermeneutic that would acknowledge the mutilations inflicted by rational and specialized writings which traditionally took the Elements as categories of an artificial system of correspondances.

In the XVIth century, the religious debate between trans-substantiation and impanation gave rise to a questioning of embodiment. De l'Orme, as a Catholic priest, could not help but be confronted by the most cruel and complex signs of the spiritual crisis which Europe was undergoing. But it seems more appropriate to delineate an understanding of his approach to

---

7 This last word refers to Brian Vickers's definition in the editorial introduction of *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*. See p. 6, "Yet although the issue was wrongly formulated by Frances Yates and her followers, it remains an important and challenging topic. The occult had a long and widely diffused influence, in parallel – as I see it – with the non-occult sciences, and it seems essential to anyone wanting to understand to try to evaluate what debts, if any, the two traditions owe each other. The title of this book, in the word "mentalities", places the emphasis where I believe it should be put: on two traditions each having its own thought processes, its own mental categories, which determine its whole approach to life, mind and physical reality."

8 Following Bachelard's pioneering work, see Gilbert Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*. Also Thomas Moore, *The Planets Within*, p.23 : "Besides our own imaginations freely playing (seriously nonetheless) with Ficino's , we fortunately have guides : C.G. Jung and James Hilllman. These specialists in matters psychological and symbolic will not be claimed as authorities so much as exemplars. Their writings show us how to dive deep into images without strangling them, without giving them a Midas touch transforming them into our favourite golden theories."

elemental matter in its primary philosophical aspects: In other words, locating his definition of the Elements between pure Platonic qualities[9] and Aristotelian substances. The question of the transcendance of God distinguished, in its mediaeval characteristics, the advocates of Plato from those of Aristotle, opposing the idea of matter as empty form (the Platonic definition of Form as Idea) to the formal actuality of substance. The ambiguous association between substance and matter often led to critical oppositions which tended to reduce the debate while considerably limiting the dynamic potentiality of the Elements. Although Aristotle understood substance as form *and* matter, his formulation opened the path to a split between matter and spirit in which it was easier to reduce the four Elements to four inanimated substances. Now ultimately, the Aristotelian conjunction of time and motion realizes an ethic of matter; there are therefore crucial practical implications behind an understanding of change and motion in the core of a cosmological perspective haunted by decay.

Regular bodies, and particularly the two chosen by Philibert, are not only emblems of potential movements, they are also symbols of *reciprocity* and *reversibility* inasmuch as they can inscribe onto or be inscribed in any of the others.[10] They can furthermore serve to evaluate the degree to which matter was being progressively *crystallized* and ultimately demystified. If the history of Science since the Renaissance can be interpreted as an endeavour of desacralization, it was also an increased effort to disengage philosophy from the Aristotelian motives of Form-Matter, Elements-Substances, Life and Motion which we nevertheless inherited through their transformation into dualisms. Philibert does not take part in this, for he still inhabits a deeply animistic universe or rather, as was the case for Paracelsus and Rabelais, explicitly vitalistic.[11] We must not forget that they were all fascinated by the multiplicity of what they saw as Unity. Their attitude towards matter was qualitatively opposed to our common understanding, according to which the

---

9 *Timæus*, 17.

10 Pérouse de Montclos notes that Besson, Cousin, Mauclerc also emphasized the primacy of these two bodies for the same reason, but he tends to reduce the regular bodies to formal exercises of virtuosity. *P.T.*, p.13.

11 See Gaignebet, *Tome III*, p.333, n.91. Rabelais was trained at the Montpellier School of Medicine, which was a center devoted to vitalistic theories. This doctrine, which understood phenomena and natural objects as only partly controlled by mechanical forces, and in some measure as being self-determined, did not explicitly refer to souls as did more animistic beliefs.

material substratum is dead when it is not externally animated.[12] While Philibert could perceive the world as alive and constantly changing, it is quite remarkable that he be aware of the nascent distinction as shown by a hint at a clarification in the Epistre :

> *This great Architect of the Universe, an Almighty God, represented it and showed it to us when he created the seven moving stars called Planets, as for the matter (if this the way we have to speak) or rather the form of the establishment, perfection and conservation of the most admirable building and theater of this inferior world.*[13]

The concert of the Heavenly Spheres which is the exact counterpart of the sublunar drama points to what is incidently raised by resorting to the Elements. There are of course prosaic necessities for the use of regular solids, but they are totally subsumed to divine origins.[14] The Architect's work is thus one moment in a perspective of sacralization. This "spiritual conversion", if late in its written expression, is still a reformulation of a carnal perception which always was at the center of Philibert's intentions. Beyond his religious faith, the architect can not avoid being confronted with addressing the totality and this explicit holistic attitude, as we would call it today, has its own particularities, if not requirements. The *Prima Materia* potentially contains all forms, but is a chaotic state of matter, which is not considered directly accessible in Nature. Furthermore, seeking and obtaining the *Massa Confusa* represents one of the most fundamental alchemical operations, even before the Great Work can begin.[15]

This eminently Hermetic way of opening the chaotic *liber* of the Elements can certainly be studied in the light of Pacioli's work, which although written from an essentially mathematical perspective, is not devoid of the dilemmas that an architect had to face in the XVIth century. De

---

12 For that reason, we will refer to the intermediary notion of *flesh* when talking about embodiment. Essentially dynamic in its ambiguous implications, it will be the purpose of the next chapter to clarify our understanding of the *carnal* for Philibert. Ultimately it is a meditation on Merleau-Ponty's use of the notion of Flesh "as an element of being" that will be suggested. See *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.139.

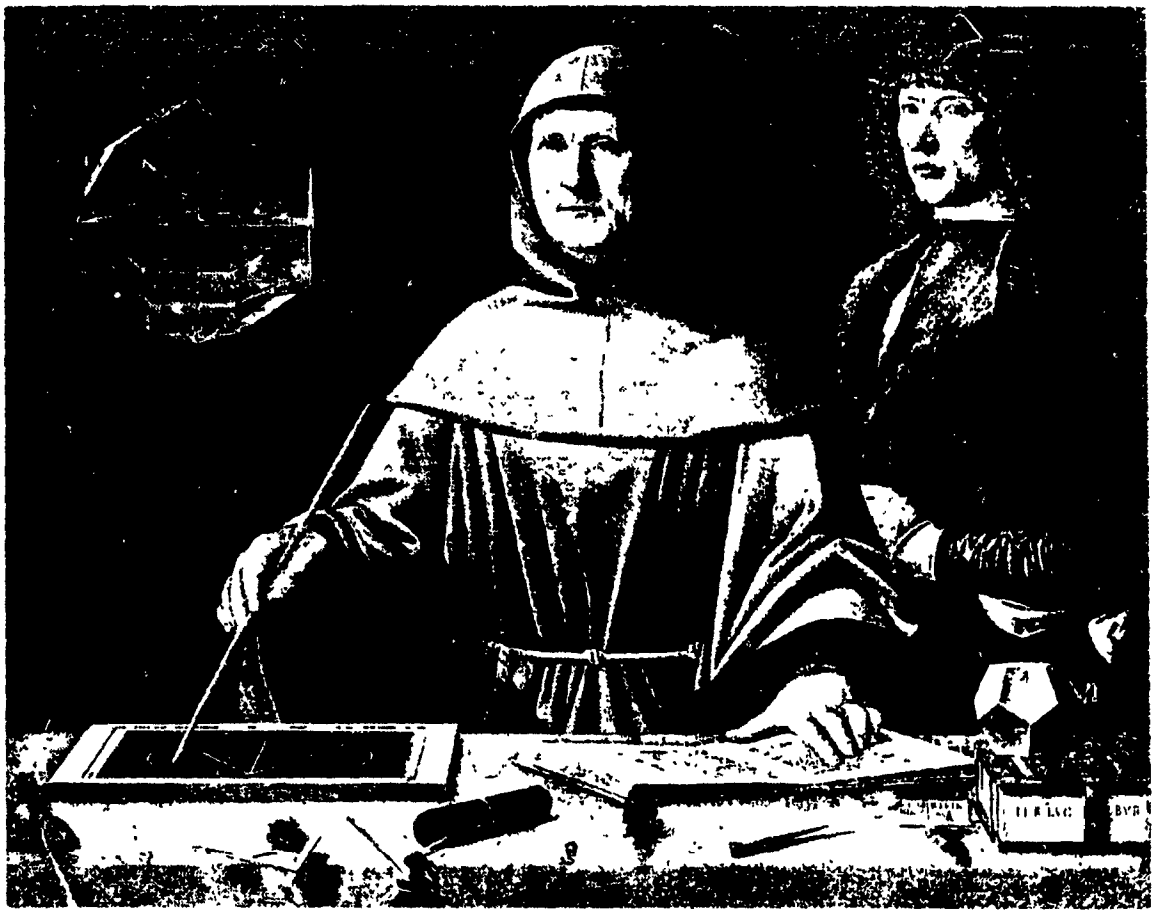
13 *P.T.* folio 2v°.

14 See the Epistle, folio 4v°, in which De l'Orme renounces a definition of Architecture if it does not refer to God.

15 Or to see it from Hillman's point of view in *Facing the Gods* : "They are, so to speak, the elementary modes of being affected = they give four styles to the working of the errant cause in our chaotic conditions. Or, in Alchemical language, the four Elements are modes of the Prima Materia and are experienced as four modes of our primal suffering... " p.35, n.38.

l'Orme's interest in Geometry and his fascination for the arcanes of Stereotomy are well known. One passage of the *Fourth Book* insists on the necessity of Mathematics in an eloquent manner that would have delighted the Paduan Master :

> *For there are neither Sciences, nor mechanical art nor any craft you can find, which are not assisted by nor profits from the use of Arithmetic and Geometry : which are so excellent amongst the other disciplines, that they make men subtle and ingenious in the invention of various singular and useful things for the public good.*[16]



Portrait of Luca Pacioli, signed by *Iaco. BAR. VIGENNIS. P.1495.*
Museo di Capodimonte (Naples)

---

16 *P.T.* folio 86 v°. Pacioli uses the same words in a Latin proverb which he introduces as an Alchemical sentence: "Aurum probatur igni et ingenium mathematicis." *Divina*, p.54.

For Philibert, mathematics, still understood musically, is a means of invention and nourishment of the imagination[17] because it allows an understanding of the various ways of imprinting "orders" which, as their homonymic columns, are five and correspond to the five regular bodies while, through Proportion, they respond to the seven Planets.

However, from Pacioli's standpoint, the subtlety of mathematics requires that it always be considered "out of sensible matter".[18] Abstraction, which by definition operates from an Apollonian distance, this founding paradox of neoclassical Art, must become a state of mind to be effective! For, as we mentioned earlier in this Chapter, the dynamism of true elementarism is always threatened by the notion of "substance", and Pacioli follows this path. He acknowledges at once the primacy of perception. But if he quotes Aristotle, he also establishes a hierarchy within the senses:

> *"Quod nihil est in intellectu quid prius fuerit in sensu"... And concerning our senses, the wiser and most noble appears to be sight.*[19]

Ultimately, Pacioli seeks a disengagement from the *materia sensibile* in order to reach the pure realm of Ideas proper to an original chaotic state. The mathematician also proved to be quite ambiguous in his understanding of Flesh as shown by his desire to have the solids built and represented by Leonardo da Vinci, at the end of his treatise on proportions. The transfer from Elements to bodies is of course a major characteristic of the *Timæus*, but the embodiment of Ideas into material cristallizations is due to Pacioli.[20] This is not to be taken lightly for it was a major step in the cosmological splitting of the traditional Form-Matter-Movement triad into impoverishing distinctions. Classical and mediaeval traditions had been, so to speak, "nimbler" to juggle with Elements, movements, bodies or senses and some, as Thomas Aquinas, carefully twisted Aristotelean substances from their theoretical foundations toward dogmatics. It is thus necessary to examine Pacioli's interpretation of the *Timæus* :

> *To the Element Earth, he attributed the cubic shape, the hexaedron, because no figure is more resistant to movement and, amongst all the*

---

17 Imagination understood as fantasy, but more probably in the sense of the word used by Plotinus and Ficino: *idolum* (see T.Moore, *The Planets Within*, p.51-54.)

18 *Divina*, p.54 & 147.

19 This is a recurrent platonic distinction. See *Divina*, p.50 & 145.

20 Although M.D. Davis in *Piero della Francesca's Mathematical Treatises* grants Pacioli with the mysticism of regular bodies but notes that it is Dürer who will draw the practical consequences in his anatomical drawings. pp 87, 88.

> *Elements, which one is more fixed, immutable and immobile than Earth? He attributed the form of the Tetrahedron to Fire, because in escaping upwards, it takes a pyramidal shape, a similitude that we will understand by watching our fire : we see it from the ground, with a base large and uniform, and progressively diminishing to the extent of ending in a point, like the cone of a pyramid. The form of the octahedron he gave to Air because in the same way that air accompanies fire when it moves slightly, the pyramidal shape accompanies the form of the pyramid by its aptitude to movement. And the Shape of the body of 20 bases, the icosahedron, he attributed to Water because, being surrounded by more bases than the others, it seemed to him more convenient, inside the Sphere, to the movement of what goes down pouring out, than to what goes up. And he attributed to the sky the shape of the 12 pentagonal bases as the receptacle of all the other regular bodies, as is shown by their inscription inside each other.*[21]

Pacioli's commentary is just another version, simultaneously more complex in its formulation and more literate in its content than the series of analogies suggested by Plato. But what is strikingly new is a growing difficulty to consider the notion of movement apart from its external manifestation : In doing so, the mathematician moves away from an essentially "virtual"[22] exploration of the world. He cannot include potential change which encompasses apparent motion because it is inherent in things, and often invisible. For Plato, on the contrary, the units of the elementary bodies are in fact not perceptible and they are not only movements but above all qualitative states of Chaos.[23] His philosophy was directed towards *all* the various elemental levels of metamorphosis :

> *There is in fact a process of cyclical transformation. Since therefore none of them ever appears constantly under the same form, it would be embarrassing to maintain that any of them is certainly one rather than another... Whenever we see anything in process of change, for example fire, we should speak of it not as* being a thing *but as* having a quality.[24]

---

21 *Divina*, p.110, 111.

22 Virtual is here understood in the sense of a contemplative philosophical distance. It eventually points to the intimate connection between the four cardinal Virtues and the four Elements, which is the object of Chapter 4.

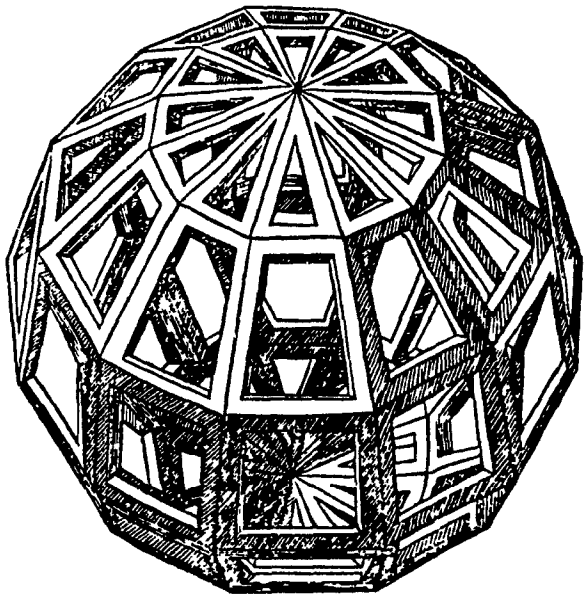
23 *Timæus*, p.79 (Stephanus 56)

24 *Timæus*, p.17.49B.

This is of course not enough to enable us to consider Pacioli as modern, neither in his mathematization nor in his understanding of practice : As he suggests, the regular bodies can be inscribed in the shape of a vault but they do not have to be imitated formally. In the same way, de l'Orme in his projects of domes never subjects their form to the crystallized bodies in a systematic use of their potential power. In his *Epistre* of the *Nouvelles Inventions*, he criticizes those

> *...who kept strictly to the letter, and geometric demonstrations, without applying them to the work which had for a result that they only followed the* shadow *of this beautiful body of Architecture, without ever reaching the true knowledge and practice of the Art.*

The question of formal cristallization is ironically epitomized by Luca Pacioli's portrait, in which can be seen a wonderful translucid body of 26 bases (icosahexahedron) hanging mysteriously while the dodecahedron appears as a simple wooden model resting on a book. The mathmatician considered them, with the body of 72 bases (hebdomecontadissahedron), particularly useful in the invention of cupolas or vaults, in other words as "quintessential skies"[25] and although acknowledging that Vitruvius does not mention it, he cannot resist the temptation of inviting architects to use them as bases or capitals for the columns! [26]



The body of 72 bases as drawn by Leonardo da Vinci in *De Divina Proportione.*

---

25 See *Divina*, p.106 & 108.

26 *Divina*, p 176.

De l'Orme, had he read Pacioli, seems paradoxically more respectful of the symbolic role of geometrical bodies and is far from associating them with the *Frozen Words* which Pantagruel's friends discover in the midst of the Ocean : Words that can not be understood, or rather *heard*, in the language of the XVIth century.[27] In fact, the stereotomical use of Platonic bodies is rather, in Philibert's context, analogous to the highly meaningful *gestures* of *Nazdecabre*, a very erudite but silent person encountered by travelers in their quest. Rabelais tells us that he was particularly fond of the number 5, also called "nuptial" by the Pythagorean,[28] before describing what the numeric signs of a wedding were for his contemporaries. About

Portrait of the Good Architect, folio 283, detail.

---

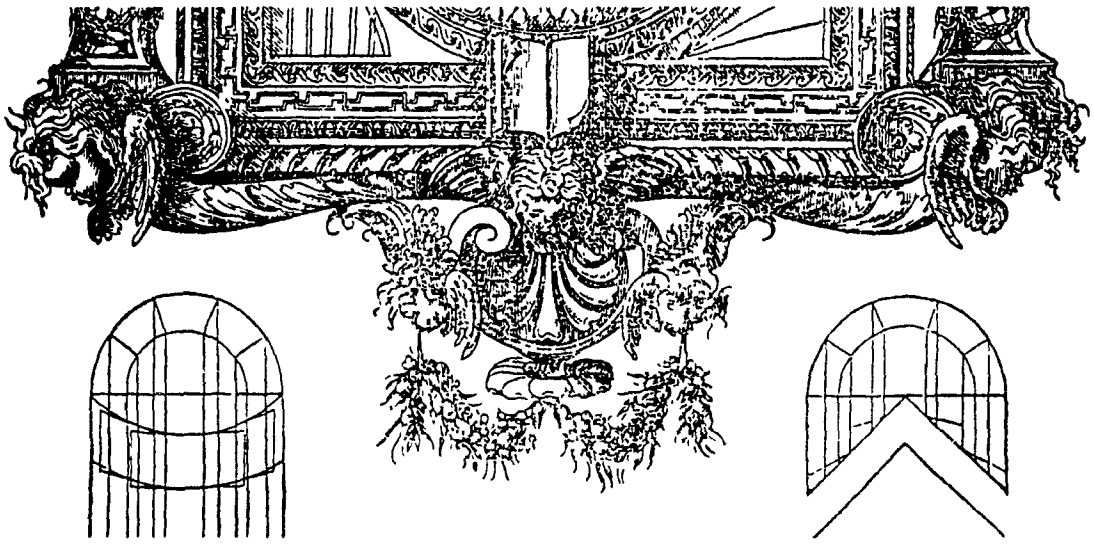
27 See Rabelais, *Book 4*, Ch.55, p.729. In Mediaeval French, *entendre* is synonymous to *comprendre*. This notion of Architecture as frozen word recalls Gœthe's definition of a frozen music which indirectly referred to the use of crystals in the understanding of form. See. E.A. Santomasso, *Origins and Aims of German Expressionist Architecture*, an essay into the Expressionnist frame of mind in Germany, especially as typified by the works of Rudolf Steiner. Ph.D. thesis, Columbia, 1972, p.215.

28 *Book* 3, Ch.20, p.442.

this symbolism, the mute's gesticulations to convey his message are as mysterious as they seemed accurate :

> Nazdecabre *looked at him curiously, then raised his left hand in the air, keeping all the fingers clenched like a bunch of nails, except the thumb and the finger which indicates, the two nails of which he softly laid together.*[29]

Although Pantagruel concludes that *Nazdecabre*'s gesture mean marriage, in this framework, the inclination is less towards a formal manipulation than towards a conjunction of elements in the deep sense of the chemical wedding. It is the union of the elmtree and the vine as represented in the background of the "Portrait of the Good Architect".[30]



Frontispiece, detail.

In the same way, the frontispiece which is "sustained" by five cherubs, portrays three of them working together like three principles ; and, still in the episode of the mute, Rabelais had defined how the quintessence of the number 5 had to be understood as an amalgam of a dyad united to a triad. In fact, the various emblems which articulate the frontispiece present the transformation of matter along with the geometrical traces that are left

---

29 *Book* 3, Ch.20, p.441. It is interesting to note that Cornelius Aggripa, in his *Occult Philosophy*, indicates exactly the same gestures – See *Tome* 2, *XVI*, p.74.

30 *P.T.*, folio 283.

behind. Even the open book indicates that after chaos, the substratum is shapable by the craftsman beyond the fact that it obviously points to the necessity of theoretical studies. E. Canseliet (with Fulcanelli) would probably have seen in the two books the dynamic polarity of mercury (on top) and sulfur (at the bottom!).[31] These two tomes depicted by Philibert are also analogous to the golden books described by Filarete, the discovery and delicate opening of which allows the architect to find a confirmation and a foundation for his forthcoming work.[32] Onitoan Nolivera, the anagrammatic author of those mysterious manuscripts, is another "Alcofribas Nasier, Abstractor of Quinte Essence" who has no regard for fortuitous things, and as de l'Orme, usually distrust the superfluous.[33] Concerning the triad of angels on the frontispiece, it is thus tempting to associate them with the three principles, but also to the three qualities of Platonic matter (subtlety, obtuseness and mobility) which makes the four Elements full modalities and not simply substances, as a superficial reading of Aristotle might often allow one to think.[34]

Returning to the icosahedron which corresponds to water, the only Element depicted as such in the frontispiece, Philibert is particularly careful in his treatise about the transformations it operates as a linking element :

> *Concerning waters, which are the third Element in the composition of mortar (for there is fire as lime, earth as sand, water for their agglutination, and in the smoke some sort of nubilous air, they correspond to the four elements of the world) I say that sea water is not good at all for mortar...*[35]

---

31 See *Demeures Philosophales*, Tome II, p.251. "Thus, the minerals extracted from their lodging, the metals after the smelting, are hermetically expressed by a closed or sealed book. In the same way, the bodies, subjected to alchemical work, (...) are monographically translated by an open book."

32 *Treatise on Architecture, XIV.* folio 101v.

33 See Filarete folio 139. "However, he writes, I believe there are few true alchemists " Concerning Philibert, his motto was "Ne quid nimis". Pérouse notes that he shared it with his friend the physician and astrologer A. Mizauld.

34 See A. Poisson, *Théories et symboles*, p.14. Poisson, who uses the term "modality", also gives a superb architectural analogy of materiality : "The Matter of the Stone has three angles in its substances (the three principles), four angles in its virtue (the Elements), two angles in its matter (fixed and volatile), one angle in its root (Universal Matter) " p 62 Also on the three Platonic qualities, see Proclus, *III*, 67.

35 *P.T.*, folio 28.

Water, which for Thales was the material cause for the sublunar world, is closer in Philibert's view to the sanction of the Flood that made Noah the first of the four archetypal builders to whom he refers.[36] But in the light of what is suggested in brackets, in the previous quotation, it also appears that the architect operates on a very dynamic display of qualities and does not reduce fire, for example, to its emblematic form, which, as we have seen earlier in this Chapter, Pacioli often does. From this point of view, the material of the *Nouvelles Inventions*, that is to say wood, also becomes an Element and its modalities respond to the place and orientation of its growth.[37]

Their understanding of the role of perception is the radical distinction between de l'Orme's and Pacioli's use of the Elements. In this respect, Lucien Febvre insisted specifically on some particularities that make our approach of the XVIth century more difficult:

> *The "emotional senses", as we call them, Taste and Touch, but also Hearing (in spite of Du Bellay's hymn to surdity) were much more exercised, much more developed (or less atrophied) than ours, keeping their thoughts in an atmosphere more blurred and less purified.*[38]

Is it necessary to stress the fact that when de l'Orme refers to understanding, he speaks of *entendement* ? This is why, in order to know, for instance, the qualities of a tree, he advises to knock it and sticking "the ear at the other end", to notice whether the sound is muffled or broken, or "clear and well resonant to the ear".[39] Moreover, Febvre considers that hearing generally predominates over sight in the XVIth century, paradoxically quoting historians of mathematics who only notice a radical change in the formalisation of Geometry with Kepler and Desargues in the XVIIth century.[40] It is thus particularly valid to carry on the concert of the so-called "inanimate" bodies by paying tribute to Philibert's ear who after studying waters, gives some very practical advice concerning quick-lime :

> *Doing so, I will tell you that the best lime is known to be the heaviest, and when knocked it sounds like an earthenware pot very well cooked... I have known for a long time by* hearsay *(ouydire)... that the lime from*

---

36 *P.T.*, folio 4.

37 *N.I.*, chapitre 1.

38 *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVI^{e} siècle*, p.462.

39 *N.I* , folio 4.

40 *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVI^{e} siècle*, p.467.

> *any place goes better with the stones from the same locality and quarry.*[41]

It is probably this same wonderfully erudite *ouydire* of whom Rabelais gives a memorable portrait in the *Fifth Book.*[42] This strange character had seven tongues, each of them split in seven parts, and

> *also had on its face and the rest of the body as many ears as long ago, Argus was full of eyes : for the rest of his body, he was blind and his legs were paralysed.*

This allegory [43] is not without recalling the profusion of ears, hands and eyes which characterizes the "Portrait of the Good Architect": a Hermes who, by a strange literary coincidence, would then be very similar to the real "Argiphontes" of classical mythology!

In any case, this quasi Bacchusian *abundance* is another entrance to the great banquet of the Elements. For how can we better interpret the many cornucopias which ornate not only the frontispiece, but various other engravings in the Premier Tome, than by convoking "Maître Alcofribas Nasier" who describes the incredible birth of Gargantua, following an everlasting banquet through his mother's left ear : Thus causing her to die at the end of the c y. It is because experience, even in its Aristotelian acceptation, is po ally and through the inherent dynamism of flesh, an open door to Bacchus' Spiritual exercises. Indeed, in the light of a transcendental quest, the Hermetic elation can be understood to seek the *divine* in the Spirit of the vine, for as Rabelais tells us homophonically : "de vin divin l'on devient".[44]

The presence of the cornucopias within a display of elementarity requires associating the frontispiece with the other plates which are articulated on this Dionysian feature. Ironically, it is again by the "ears" that

---

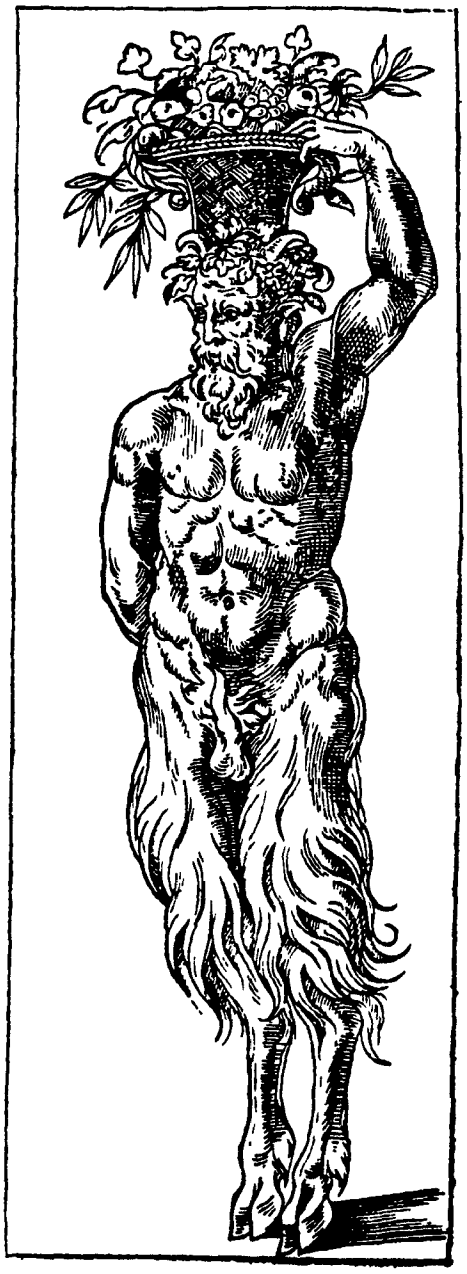
41 *P.T.*, folio 28.

42 *Book V*, 30. p.873.

43 Philibert's biographer, Henri Clouzot, also refers to this allegory as paradigmatic of XIVth-century use of mythology without, however, mentioning its relationship to Hermes. See *Philibert de l'Orme*, Paris, 1910, p.101.

44 On Rabelais' expression "du vin à une oreille", and on the symbolism of the ear for Rabelais and his contemporaries, see Gaignebet, *Tome I*, part IV, 3. p.403 to 412. For Gaignebet, it is in the neo-Pythagorean commentaries that Rabelais found the enigmatic expression : "In the same way (...) Rabelais brings together the Cabalistic doctrine of the neccessity of an oral traditional teaching and that of metempsychosis, as it is evokes by Gargantua's birth through the ear, and by the wine of Truth said to be "à une oreille", but also "psychogonique", and altogether "vin du Temple de la Dive". p.408.

we first recognize the satyr on the back of folio 221. Their characteristically pointed shape is traditionally the sign of an intermediary position between Gods and humans, where they can listen to the resonances that weave the Universe.[45] About this engraving of a canephore satyr, Pérouse de Montclos suggests a comparison with the statues that adorned the Palazzo della Valle at the time when Philibert stayed in Rome. However, using drawn records, he notes some differences that indicate a moving apart from the traditional attributes of satyrs. In particular, there are no lion's skins, usually symbols of virile strength, and the classical grapes have been replaced by flowers.[46] But such an adaptation is not surprising on the part of an architect who is then fully confident in the maturity of his creative genius. Furthermore, there is a major distinction to be made



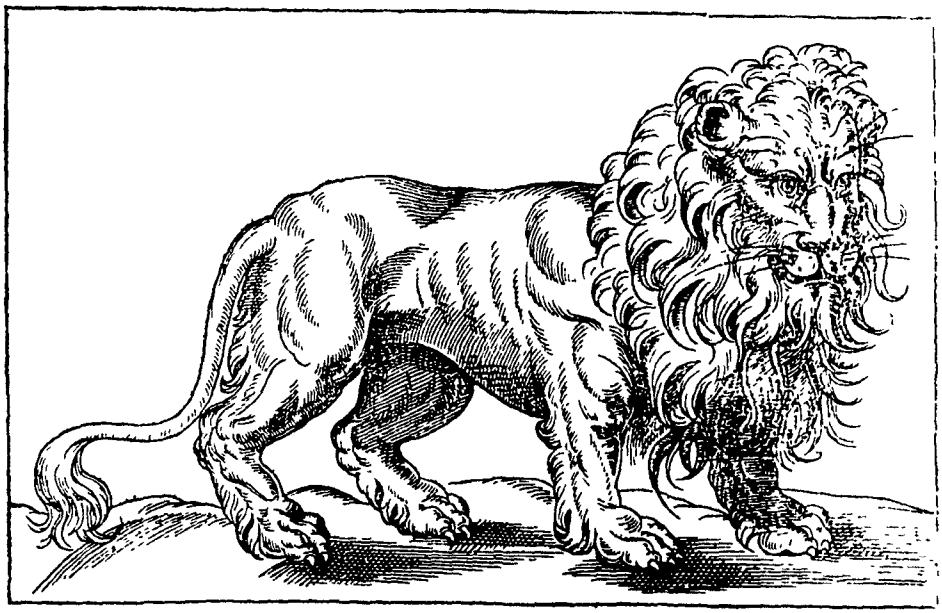
Portrait of a satyr, folio 221 v°.

---

45 Rabelais also tells us that they are the most important orifices, being the only one to remain permanently open! See *Book III* 16, p.429.

46 Presentation, *P.T* p 42.

concerning the symbol of the Lion. For de l'Orme, it is a crucial emblem which he portrays separately and carefully like the satyr on folio 215, and which is recurrent in most of his engravings. Along with traditional explicit references, there is a fascination for an animal which above all, is homonymous with his birthplace. It even seems that it is rather around the etymological root of *Lugdunum* (Lyons) which is *Lug*, that we can appreciate this symbol to its full extent. For *Lug* is the then well known Celtic equivalent of polytechnician Hermes. In another field of research, Pernety also recalls that for the Alchemists, the lion was a crucial product to be extracted out of rough matter.[47]



Philibert's Lyon, folio 315.

In the same way, one cannot state that the grapes have been left out in favor of flowers, for they appear in many cornucopias along with other beautiful fruit of knowledge. In the projects for fireplaces and entrances such as the plate on the back of folio 263, for instance, they are carried by two angels while a third one evokes ripening matter, by its transformation through fire.

---

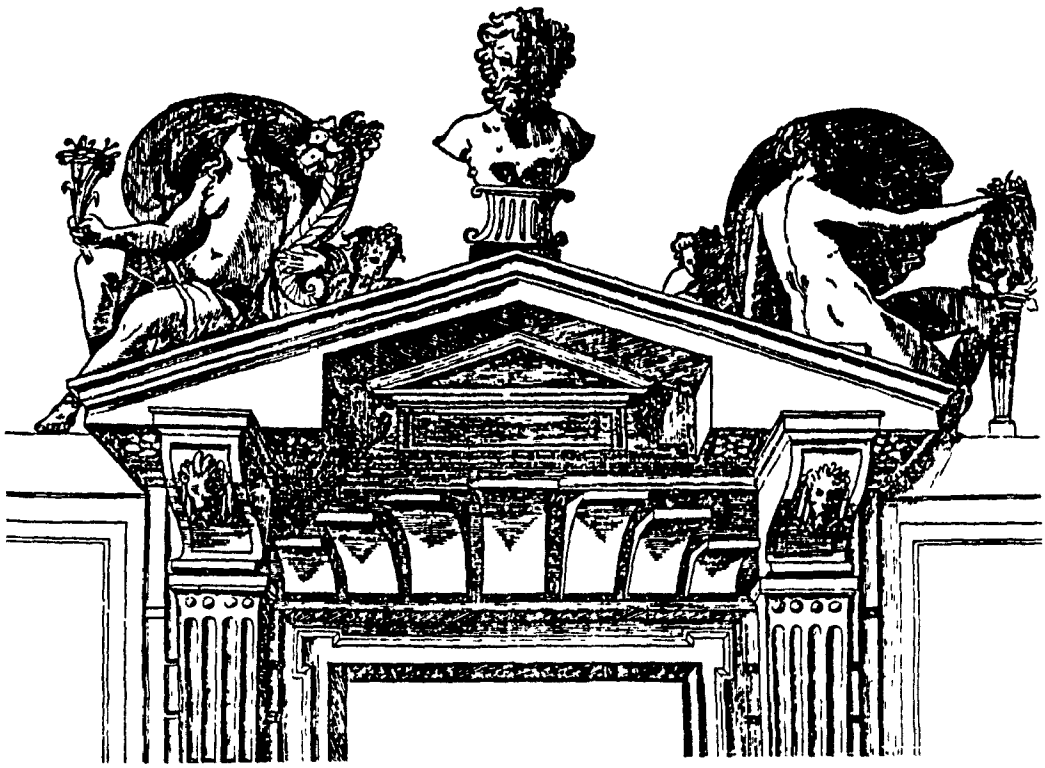
47 See for instance J. Van Lennep, *Alchimie*, p. 452. Without digging too far in complex Alchemical symbolism, it is interesting to note that when there are two lions on opposing features, for instance a red one and a green one or a dark one and a light one, they represent the traditional polarity between Sulfur and Mercury.

It is by seeking what René Alleau called the *gathering of symbolic groups* that it is possible to preserve the semantic unity of the images, for Philibert's reluctance to comment on the plates condemns any interpretation to mere speculation.[48] There is undoubtedly a recurrent Dionysian element linking the plates from the frontispiece to the *Portrait of the Good Architect* and it appears to be epitomized in two parallel compositions on the back of folios 265 and 266. The architect presents them as models of invention and the commentary in the margin stating that: "One invention carrying others and the finding of many more", one can be confident in their analogical power. Let us examine the composition of an ornamented frame for multiple uses, but designed around the thematic conjunction of Fire and Water: We find Lions and Lionesses closely watching each other and a satyr with his legs rolled up, showing his desire for the arousing caryatid on the opposite side. Angels armed with Neptunian forks hold an oar on which two water snakes coil down to form an inverted caduceus. But the more intriguing point is the discreet presence of two masks, in the shadow of the corniches, the expression of which is typical of the Bacchusian mischief and lasciviousness echoed by Rabelais. They seem to mislead the reader, recalling the Hermetic wink of the

Fireplace, folio 263 v°.

48 René Alleau, *Aspects de l'Alchimie traditionnelle*, p. 113-114.

Hermes-like bust which is accompanied by two Venuses carrying cornucopias (folio 243).



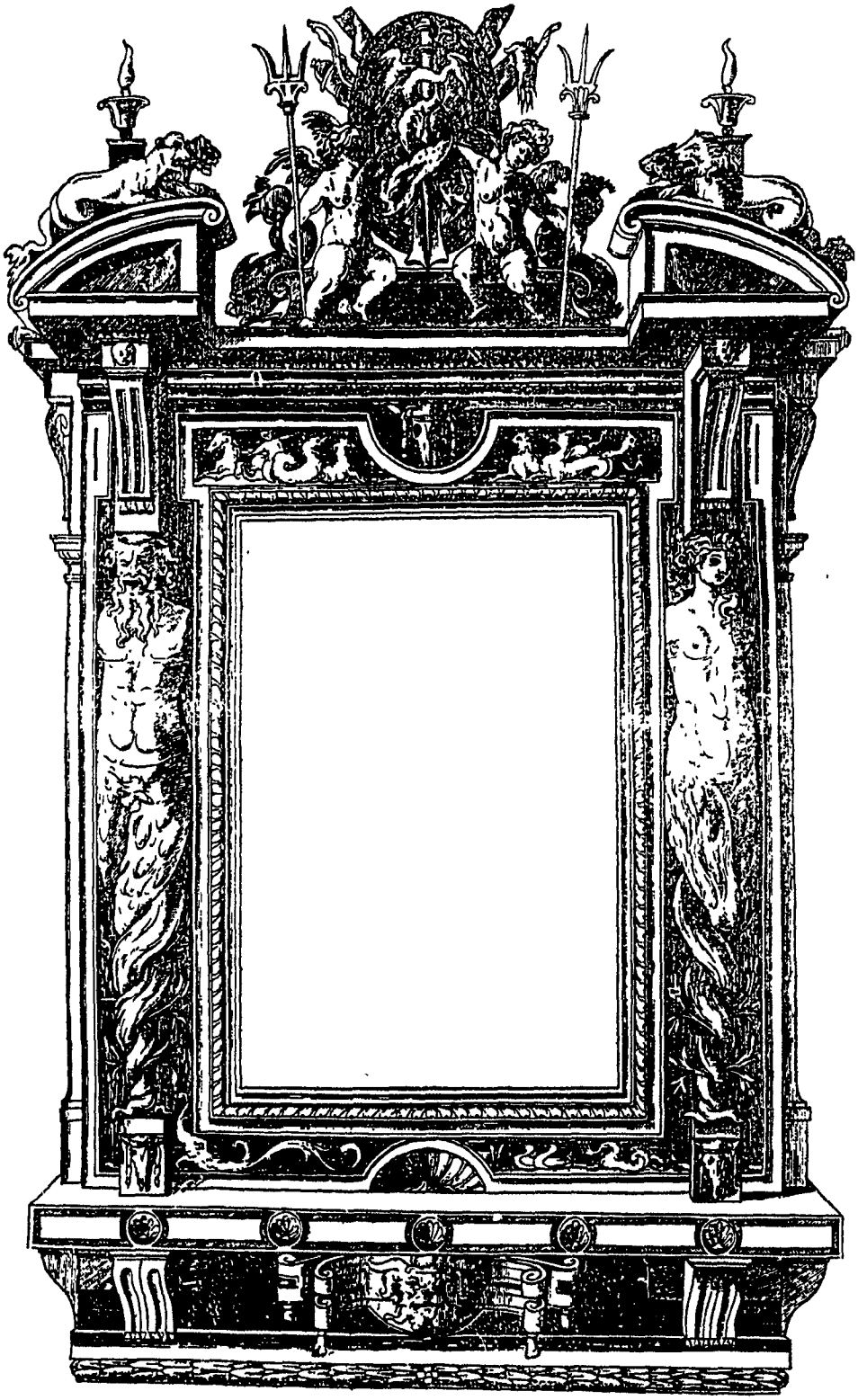
Detail of a composition, folio 243.

It is strangely similar to the God of Fire and Handicraft's creative laughter as described by Proclus:

> *It is Hephaïstos, indeed, who causes alterity in the world to be inscribed in Harmony and friendship, and is responsible for the intertwining of all the things here below, and doing so they interlace by the demiurgic links, identity and alterity, harmony and division, communion and vexation. And this is what Apollo laughs about, laughs Hermes, laughs each one of the Gods, and their laugh gives existence to the beings in the world and gives strength to the links.*[49]

---

49 Proclus, *III.* 27.20 p.53.



Composition of an ornamented frame with a satyr and a caryatid, folio 265 v°.

This excerpt from his *Commentary on theTimæus* brings us back to what appears to be the deep symbolism of the association Hermes-Bacchus as exemplified by de l'Orme's work in which they both embody the emblems of Form and Movement, like two aspects of the same reality. Mikhail Bakhtin was the first one to emphasize the importance of a regenerative cyclical understanding of Flesh in Rabelais' work. He clearly demonstrated how the carnival tradition embodied sacred rituals, inspired by the Roman Saturnalia, and which were ultimately a *mimetic* process of distillation, digestion and regeneration of the ancient orders. In other words, the carnal transition between Carnival and Lent is an excessive experience in which the turning upside-down of values coincides with the renewal of the Year while reenacting the reversibility of Matter and Spirit.[50] In Philibert's world view, Hermes and Bacchus cannot be separated and need to be understood together. Already in the *Timæus*, Plato instisted on the androgynous character of primordial matter, but the architect also knows that to hear the music of the Elements, it is necessary to follow the multiple reversions of their coagulation and dissolution. Now to walk in his step is probably to engage oneself in quicksands, analogical sediments, the gender of which he describes in Chapter XVI.

> *I want you to be warned that sands have diverse natures, some are male and some female, and they have different qualities...*[51]

.....

The Hermes who dominates the frontispiece with all his potentialities appears indeed as an invitation to join the powers of the interpreter, of the one who opens and reads with audacity, to the dynamism of the winged traveller, bringing with him the seeds of knowledge. But it is furthermore possible to refine a portrait which seems to have fascinated Philibert de l'Orme so much that it became a major arcane of his imagery. By his insistance to animate our imagination, he invites the reader to the great banquet of the Four Elements and if they can form the *substantifique moelle* of the world, it is because Ideas can inhabit Flesh without dying in it.

---

50 See M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. About the perennity of Saturnalia in Shrovetide, the author writes, "The medieval feast (...) was the drama of bodily life (copulation, birth, growth, eating, drinking, defecation) (...) it was the drama of the great generic body of the people(...) [in which] birth and death are not an absolute beginning and end, but merely elements of continuous growth and renewal(...) perfused with cosmic elements and with the earth which swallows up and gives birth." p.88.

51 *P.T.*, folio 28

Quicksilver is clearly the epitome of the general instability of things: an existential impression that often confined de l'Orme's contemporaries in obsession. The world was seen as a great "mixture" in which any creative work was a mimetic *Amalgam*: this operation was essential to Alchemists, for it consisted in an alloy of mercury with another metal. Amalgamation, on the other hand, was a process that allowed the extraction, with the help of mercury, of gold and silver from their gangue. The ambivalence and reversibility of Mercury is definitely the indispensable herald of exegesis and hermeneutics.

But what makes the reference to the Elements as echoed by Philibert so poetically revealing from our contemporary outlook is the fact that there is no theory of the Elements! They cannot be considered as categories and the minds directed towards positivism will not be fooled and will take them as their first target. The frame of any art, whether architectural, medical or mathematical, is not yet conceptual but rather eminently perceptual. The world of Philibert's work is a perfect example of the role played by personal experience in the "strengthening of analogical thinking" which constitutes the core of his r lationship with the world. Indeed, the very possibility and necessity of analogical thinking required not to be separated from a practical, if not physical, commitment. For de l'Orme, the Elements are the candelabras that ensure and steady the architect's experience through the refinement of his perceptual consciousness, in the same way that stereotomical traces are above all an operation of the hand, a learned gesture. They make the architect analogous to Rabelais's *Nazdecabre* because they are not reducible to geometrical abstractions, but are imprints of the founding movements of forms. They are complex volutes that have to respond to the immanent vivacity of Matter. In Philibert's world, water is quick, silver is quick, sand is quick and even lime is quick, for

> *It sometimes happened that after slaking lime, when the painter thought he had done some great work with all his skill, after some time, his colors died and perished. For the strength and vehemence of lime ate them and made them change differently than their original implementation.*[52]

---

52 *P.T.* folio 28v° and 28. On the *Éloge de la main*, see H. Focillon in *Vie des formes, p.103-128.*

CHAPTER TWO

The Human Body: Simulacrum or Silent Concert ?

The two famous plates which illustrate the conclusion of the *Premier Tome* constitute, so to speak, the last document of Philibert de l'Orme's bequest, and can be read as his theoretical testament. The architect must have felt his end coming closer and understood that there would not be a "Second Tome".[1] Surprisingly enough, biographers and historians, such as Blunt, do not pay enough attention to the obvious allegorical character of these two images, and they generally satisfy themselves with the evasive commentary given by the author.[2] In fact, these engravings, like most of the plates in the *Premier Tome*, still remain enigmatic. Philibert's succint interpretations should not overwhelm the reader any more than their position at the end of the book: For why would an author who refrains from analyzing most of his other symbolic compositions, because they are supposed to "speak for themselves", suddenly decide to comment on these two particular ones exhaustively ? It seems, on the contrary, that he never tried to limit their significance but wanted to suggest fundamental clues for a synthesis of his theories on Architecture, with the explicit intention of restoring his work to its true spiritual dimension. In that sense, the promise of the "Divine Proportions" which recurs on and on in his text, is altogether an invocation and the sign of a quest.

In this Chapter, I propose to reinvestigate *together* the images of the *Good* and *Bad Architects*[3] around the notions of corporeality and embodiment. For it is by insisting on Philibert's egotism, thus focusing on the idea that the *Good Architect* was an embellished self-portrait, that commentators have forgotten to compare the two figures in a complementary manner. It is necessary to complete Blunt's description of these images by assessing their ambivalent and ambiguous character, both qualities which the historian himself did not lack! First of all, it could be pointed out that de l'Orme is also, intentionally, very present in the first portrait. Of course, following his description, this picture depicts

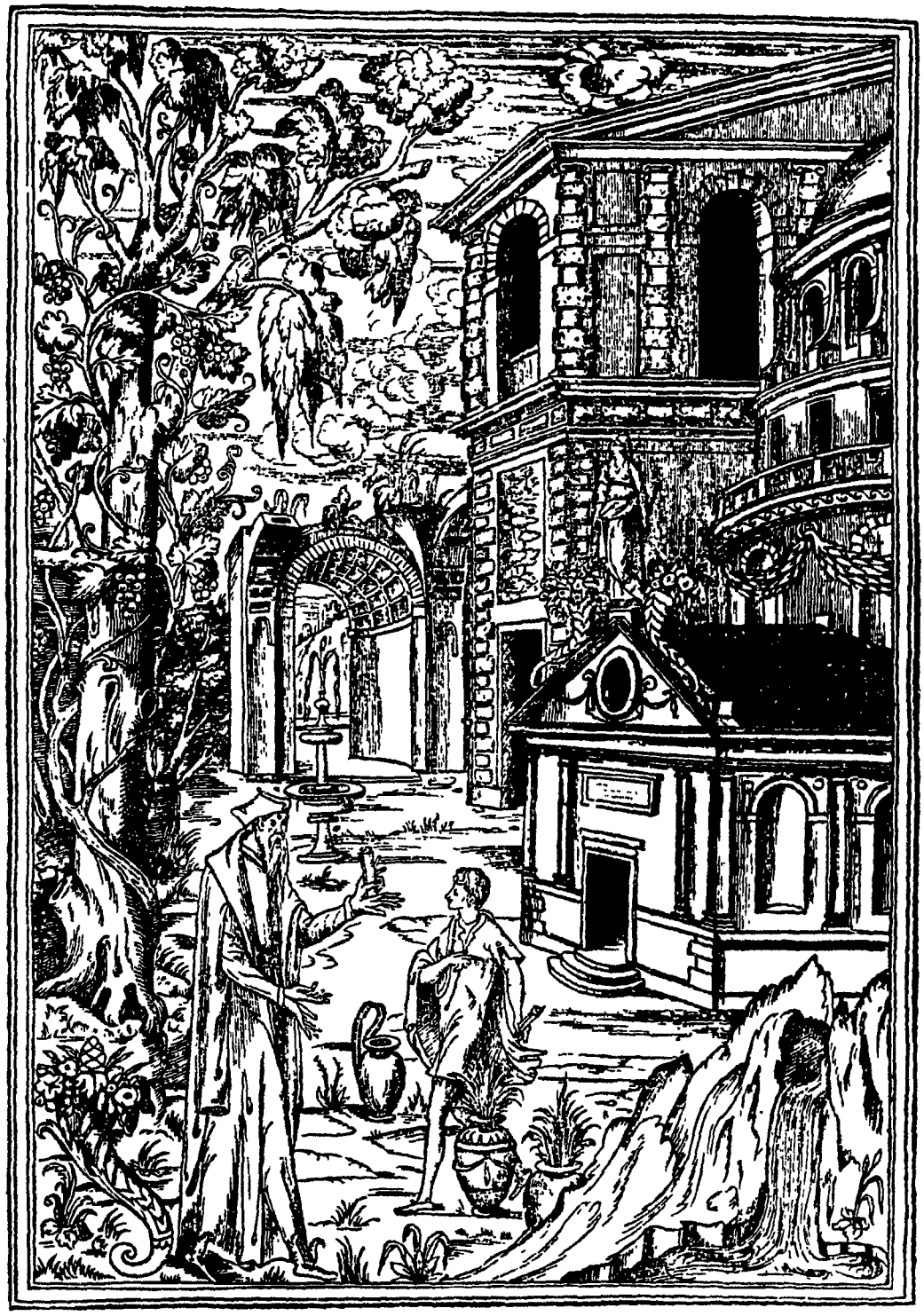
---

1 This is suggested by Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos in his "Présentation des traités", *P.T* p.8.

2 Anthony Blunt, for instance, takes very lightly the comparison between the two portraits, considering them in a traditional frame of meaning. See *Philibert De l'Orme*, pp.134, 135.

3 *P.T.*, folio 281 and 283.

Portrait of the *Bad Architect*, folio 281.



Portrait of the *Good Architect*, folio 283.

the Bad Architect [who] wears the dress of a wise and learned man, which will deceive the ignorant, [and] rushes along with unwise taste, catching in thorns, tripping over stones, and surrounded by skulls of dead bulls, which signifies coarseness of intelligence.[4]

But then, the impostor is particularly clever for he can imitate even the Good Architect's gait as it appears on a previous plate. Indeed a comparison of the amputated body (folio 281) with the architect rushing out of his retreat (folio 51v°) shows a striking similarity in the featuring of obstacles and in the movement of the body – as if, starting from a complete archetypal body of an enlightened architect, it had been carefully mutilated. And yet there were many other allegorical artifices to describe an absence of skill, such as binding the members or covering the senses. Moreover, the fact that the beard is identical on the three faces, although differing from the posthumous portrait added to the 1576 edition,[5] makes it very tempting to see another clue pointing to a single body image.

Folio 51 v°, detail

Philibert de l'Orme (1576 edition)

4 Blunt, op.cit., p.134.

5 See Pérouse de Montclos, "Présentation", *P.T.* p.45.

It would be rather prejudiced to establish an analysis of the two pictures on the assumption that de l'Orme was only giving himself over to self-glorification. Even if he did, he still reveals as much about himself in the *Bad Architect* picture as in the *Good* one. If Philibert implicitly discloses his own experience of the body when establishing his metaphors around the architect's body, the hypothesis will thus be that there is no reason why his understanding of Proportion would not be similarly affected. But more characteristic might be the fact that his conception of the role of proportions in architecture appears grounded on true "Rabelaisian" consciousness of the Body of Flesh. Besides, it would not be the first time an architect would operate a true symbolic transposition, a kind of migration of meaning, from his flesh to the concreteness of his architecture. The story of Dinocrates,[6] narrated by Vitruvius at the beginning of his second book, is particularly paradigmatic, but concerning the French architect, the comparison ends immediately. It is not so much a question of insisting on a certain form of narcissism as it is one of studying the specificities of the physical origins of Philibert's imagery.

It is interesting to compare de l'Orme's sense of Proportion with that of Luca Pacioli's. The differences involved here cast a greater doubt on the alleged influence that the Paduan mathematician might have had on Philibert, particularly when considering the issue of the *human* versus *divine* origins of Proportion. For Luca Pacioli, as illustrated in the very title of his first Chapter devoted to the architectural implications of the golden section,[7] the body is the *simulacrum* of architecture. It is outside the scope of this study to clarify the atomistic or even Lucrecian influences of the notion of simulacrum for Pacioli, but keeping to a very general definition, it can be stated that it is a substantial representation, a kind of material and external image referring to another reality: A primary representation which would be both an imitation and a model. In this respect, the relationship between Body and Proportion is disembodied and abstract in Pacioli's text, for as he states,

---

6 The architect who used his own physical appearance to demonstate his architectural talent to Alexander the Great.

7 *De Divina Proportione,* p.144 or folio 17. Ch. 1. "Della mesura e proportioni de corpo humano, della testa et altrisuoi membri *simulacro* del architettura".

> *It is necessary to presuppose in any case, as we said, the bones stripped of their flesh.*[8]

We have seen in the previous Chapter that the Franciscan mathematician already had the same hesitations in regard to the correlation between Form and Idea in the question of the practical use of regular bodies; in the issue of Proportion, the dilemma remains the same. This is not very surprising, in so far as during the Renaissance, people's understanding of the body was often an extension of a perception rooted in Elementarism. Rabelais' noisy, but well-informed medical advice also plays with this changing meaning of corporeal representations. As he writes,

> *Without health, life is only languidness, life is only the simulacrum of death.*[9]

Now Philibert de l'Orme is apparently less influenced by Paduan theatrical dissections, for as early as the Épistre of the *Nouvelles Inventions,* he writes:

> *But in the light of this, someone who would see me starting a book on architecture in this manner, would say that I am like the one who owns a beautiful statue made of gold or silver, and for the respect he bears to the Republic, only gives it an arm, an imperfect thing out of the body, which is not beautiful without the harmony of all its parts and members.*

Furthermore, because the "body is not much in itself, without the soul",[10] it would thus be a matter of considering a totality, the meaning of which would change radically if any part was missing or even mutilated, at is the case for the body of the *Bad Architect.* In that sense, the extent to which theories identified substance with matter is related to the lack of a clear relationship between corporeality and elementality. Following Plato, the four modalities are essentially identifiable, as changing entities, by the links that operate the transformations that weave bodies – and the most beautiful of all links, as stated in the *Timæus,* is *Proportion.* By examining to what extent the Portraits of the *Good and Bad Architects* refer to the same body-image, in the same way that the two children of *Gemini* are inseparable,[11] it is hoped to bring some light on the *dual* origin of Proportion.

---

8 *De Divina Proportione,* p.153.

9 *Book IV,* Prologue. p.570.

10 *Nouvelles Inventions,* Épistre.

11 See *P.T.*, "Présentation", p.22. Pérouse de Montclos has shown the importance of the double character of de l'Orme's dominant astrological sign in *Horoscope de Philibert De l'Orme.*

Reference to the external morphology of the human body is not so much a Renaissance particularity as a classical tradition in architecture,[12] but the most peculiar about Philibert de l'Orme's theory is its indispensable corollary which divinizes the system of proportions by invoking the Scriptures. Whereas for Luca Pacioli, it was rather the attributes of the *Golden Section* that made it divine, since they coincided with God's powers[13]: Unity, Holy Trinity, Mystery and Invariability, all converged towards the *Celestial Virtue*, the Fifth-Essence, thus allowing regular solids to embody the Elements.[14] On the other hand, Philibert de l'Orme's faith is less tinged with a demonstrative apparatus and more critical: his *Deuxième Tome* will display the proportions offered by God *as* they were recorded in the Bible.[15] For the *Abbé de Saint Serge les Angers*, the *Word* was first made flesh in Christ and since then, Man has been the terrestrial depositary of this aspect of the "concert of proportions". But in such a cosmological frame, the architect is entrusted with a particular role, for he must be able to listen to that musical harmony. However, it is only through a kind of *Divine inspiration*, which already distinguishes him from physicians, that he can grasp order, measure and generally speaking,

> *The architecture and design of the human body, I would not say in the composition and the "coagmentation" of its spiritual parts, moist and solid (as they are contemplated by the physicians) but really in the great harmony and more than admirable Proportion and symmetry which is between all the parts and members, external as well as internal, of this [body].*[16]

The architect must altogether admire and know the relationship that organizes the body in its totality. For Philibert, the physician concentrates his gaze on the intrinsic modifications of the Spiritual substratum, whereas the architect examines the coming together of the body, at once formally and dynamically, in an attempt to catch the formal mutations. The body is not yet

---

12 See J. Rykwert's introduction to R. Middleton's *The Beaux-Arts*, p.17. "In so far as a tradition in architecture can be called classical, it must rest on two analogies : of the building as a body, and of the design as re-enactment of some primitive or archetypal action to which our procedure must refer."

13 *De Divina Proportione*, p.59.

14 *De Divina Proportione*, p.60.

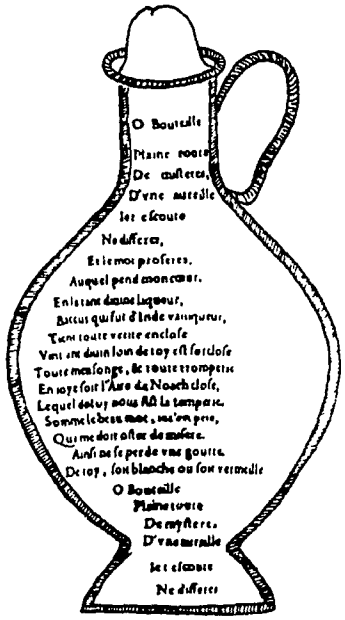
15 About the many hints of Divine Proportions, see for instance: folios 1, 3v°, 4, 47v°, 150v°, 168 etc.

16 *P.T.*, p.4.

an objectified simulacrum but still a theater of the sublime. In this subtle difference, it is easy to recognize the Aristotelian character of Philibert's attitude. The *Good Architect* will not have too much with his three eyes, four ears, and four hands when probing his own flesh.[17]

It is important to point out that de l'Orme makes a distinction about the *inside* and the *outside* which indicates that he sees the body as a Second Liber requiring to be opened and deciphered.

There are many transpositions of this book metaphor, already studied in the frontispiece, but they are now suggested less literally in the last plate of the conclusion. More than the rolls exchanged by the two protagonists, the beautiful amphoras filled with rich vegetation are eloquent in and of themselves. But less transparent is the apparently empty vase with one huge handle standing between the master and his disciple, embodying the hidden dimension of knowledge and the "secrets" mentioned by Philibert.[18] It can very easily be assimilated with the famous "Dive bouteille" in Rabelais' *Fifth Book*, the posthumous publication of which occurred circa 1565, two years prior to the printing of the *Premier Tome* in 1567.[19] On the *Good Architect* plate, the disciple has already understood that



Dive bouteille

(from Gaignebet's *A Plus Haut Sens*, p.405)

---

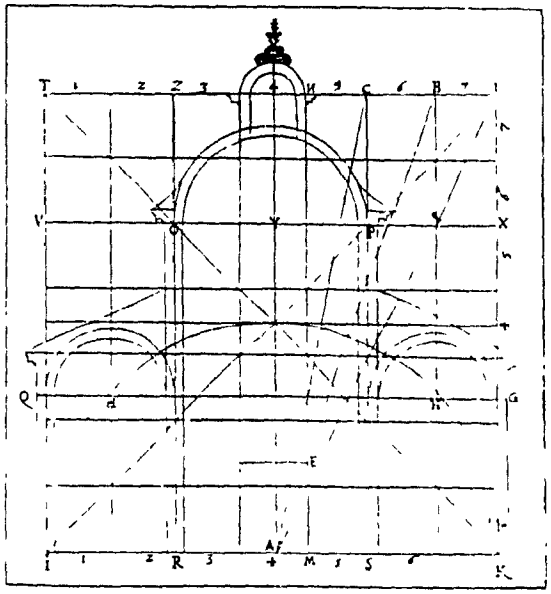
17 In another remark, Philibert appears even more clearly medieval : "So is it about proportions, measures and ornaments of the columns, and about many other things of architecture which will never be understandable through precepts and general rules but rather through manual examples." (folio 195)

18 *P.T.*, folio 282.

19 See for example the striking similarity with the plate in Gaignebet, op.cit, p.405. See also Ch. 1 n°42 of the present work for a discussion of the Hermetic meaning of the expression "Du vin à une Oreille". De l'Orme must have read the incantation printed on the Holy Bottle : "O Bouteille / Plaine toute / De misteres / D'une aureille / je t'escoute / ne differes... *Book V*, ch.44, p.906.

the inexhaustible spring he points to with his right hand is the epitome of the training, but he has not yet crossed over the invisible limit that symbolically connects the spring and the fountain through the three urns.

If Pacioli's influence on Philibert's use of the body appears too improbable, it has also been suggested that Francesco di Giorgio Martini's work could have played the same role. Concerning the engraving on folio 235 which depicts a "sacred" place, Philibert tells us that it was intended for the treatise on proportions. Louis Hautecœur has shown that it was strikingly similar to a plate found in the Italian Treatise.[20] Beyond historical speculation, there is another piece of text in the *Premier Tome* that could confirm such a hypothesis, for it inevitably recalls the marvellous superimpositions of bodies and architecture so characteristic of this Italian work.[21] For Philibert de l'Orme, Vitruvius was certainly the initiator of such practices, but



A "sacred building", folio 235

> *since then some [other architects] have also made use [se sont aidez] of the form of the human face, as for the nose and forehead, the eyes, lips, cheek and neck: following their proportions [taking] for example the human head which, when well proportioned, is divided into three parts for its height. By using the height of the forehead with the rest of the face, he can make a beautiful face or head of cornice, and with the height*

---

20 On this question, see Trattati, *Book II*, folio 41 tav.233. See also Pérouse de Montclos, Presentation, *P.T.* p.44, who seems convinced that Philibert, although he could not have seen the then umpublished original, must have seen a copy of it!

21 As shown by Marco Frascari in "Professional Use of Signs in Architecture", in *Journal of Architectural Education*, vol. 36, n°2, Winter 82, p.17. Also very particular about Di Giorgio Martini's features is that the "joints" of the body coincide with the joints of the building in this very elaborate image of the body.

> *of the nose, the crown of the same cornice, that has an eminent projection like the nose on the face.*[22]

In the margin, Antoine Mizauld's commentary throws light on Philibert's intentions, insisting on the fact that all the various mentions of body parts are mainly *aids* and that it is ultimately the architect's task to accomodate them into his work. These remarks also show that de l'Orme's image of the body does not serve a mere systematic anthropomorphism, the *Abbé* does not forget that the body is an incarnated Word. But then, the problem that immediately follows concerns again a question of understanding or "entendement": how can the architect listen to the body? The hermeneutical side of the architect's virtue is sollicitated in order to read this link between Earth and Sky, or to invoke Proclus' interrogation: "Where does the conception of such a link come from, what does it symbolize ?"[23]

On the origin of the "theme" of the Divine Proportions in de l'Orme's treatise, Anthony Blunt was the first to suggest Francesco Giorgi's influence. He quoted Rudolf Wittkower's publication of the Memorandum written in 1535, which clearly showed that the French Architect appropriated a bit too lightly the paternity of reference to the Scriptures.[24] Furthermore, Wittkower's celebrated work demonstrated the importance not so much of numbers but of mathematical *ratios*: "and that the cosmic ratios are to be regarded as binding for the microcosm".[25] For example, in Alberti's own words, it is plain that the three types of proportions, the "means", have rules which can be borrowed from the musicians in order to be applied to architecture in the manner of musical intervals.[26] But it is nevertheless inappropriate to follow the historian when he states so firmly that

> *while Francesco Giorgi used the Bible as a lever for the recommendation of the Pythagoreo-Platonic system of musical Proportion, the French Architect Philibert de l'Orme, who was in contact with the Venetian circle, proposed to apply* systematically *the proportions revealed in the Old Testament.*[27]

---

22 *P.T.* folios 15 & 150 v°.

23 *Commentaire sur le Timée*, vol. III, 16.14 p.39. About this translation, André Festugière notes that following the principle of *analogia*, all cosmic realities are "symbols" of supra-cosmic realities.

24 See A. Blunt in *De l'Orme*, pp. 153-154.

25 R. Wittkower: *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, London 1967, p.103.

26 Op. cit., p.110.

27 Op. cit., p.121. Emphasis mine.

Mizauld's previously mentioned commentary is absolutely unambiguous and supports a non-systematic intentionality through his understanding of the body and consequently of the proportions. De l'Orme is clearly seeking a metaphysical ground for his work. In his historical context, this could only be expressed in terms of a quest for origins in the Bible. For de l'Orme, mathematics still is a sacred endeavour. In the XVIth century, numbers have not yet lost their symbolic character and their *analogical* referents.[28] It is this very aspect of the etymological origin of Proportion that has been underestimated by historians who were still grounding their work on scientific systems of values, to the point of finding themselves confronting unbearable "contradictions" between ideal models and defective realisations. Wittkower, when he explicitly studies the ratios from a mathematical standpoint, does not work on the basis of *analogical thinking* about the world, which was nevertheless the vision shared by Humanists and Hermetists, whose ultimate keywords were not *distinction* and *identity* but *amalgam* and *reciprocity*.

It is necessary to review our interpretation of Ficino's commentary on the *Timæus*, indeed influential in Italy, with the insights of his major source, the last great systematizer of Greek philosophical traditions: Proclus. His *Commentary on the Timæus* was authoritative for most French Humanists, from Guillaume Budé to the more obscure Loys le Roy, who gave the first French translation of the *Timæus* in 1551.[29] Proclus himself insists on Plato's warning:

> *All this Plato himself saw clearly, this is why he added "as far as possible" (32B5) in order for you not to require the same absolute degree of precision in physical reasonings as in mathematics. Indeed, if you dare examine each of the Elements, you will see how much* melting *it contains. Air, for instance, is not only subtle, but it also has thickness, brumosity, moisture... For it is necessary that the top of the inferior Elements be linked to the base of the superior Elements.*[30]

---

28 See Alberto Pérez-Gomez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, particularly chapters 1-2 and 9. On De l'Orme's understanding of stereotomy, see p.227 : "The plates illustrating the use of projections in De l'Orme's *Architecture* did not constitute a method : they did not derive from a general geometrical theory capable of generalizing specific solutions for specific problems."

29 On this question, see Albert Rivaud, *La première traduction française du Timée de Platon*, in Revue du XVI^{e} siècle, vol. IX, Paris 1922, pp. 286-289.

30 *III*, 51.17, p.82.

Such a final precision is not without recalling the famous sentence of the *Emerald Table*, Bible of the Hermetists.[31] In the sense of a general weaving of things, an intertwining, Proportion becomes the vehicle of a qualitative mixture when it is understood, writes Proclus, in its full etymological acceptation:

> *Moreover, it must be observed that Plato here assumed and clearly indicated that he meant* mediety *or geometrical Proportion as we said (cf. op. cit.): The expression* ana ton auton logon *is more particular to this one, this is why some called it* analogia *in the proper sense.*[32]

This allows for a complete rethinking of both the questions of Proportion and of body image. For an analogy as an agreement of ratios is more than a mere correspondance, it is an agreement of one thing with another, a likeness of *relations* between Elements, forms, bodies, and ultimately between Beings and Gods.

And Philibert de l'Orme, as François Rabelais, participates in an analogical world in which the conceptions of his imagination are born and die, for they are considered to be alive, and are thus sacred.[33]

The analogy between Man and Tree is a well-known one. For XVIth century man, it could however lead to crucial openings of consciousness, especially when your own name was synonymous to that of a tree, as was de l'Orme's case. For Philibert, as exemplified in the plates of the Conclusion, the Elm-tree is doubly symbolical. Contrary to the two trees which seem to hamper each other's growth in an otherwise desolate landscape, the elm-tree and the vine are meant for each other. Jean Guillaume, referring to Virgil's *Bucolica*, was the first to identify this mirroring between the tree and the Good Architect.[34] But it is particularly fruitful to develop this hypothesis

---

31 See Fulcanelli, *Demeures Philosophales*, T.II, p.312: "Ce qui est en bas est comme ce qui est en haut et ce qui est en haut est comme ce qui est en bas : par ces choses se font les miracles d'une seule chose."

32 *III*, 52.5, p.82.

33 It is therefore very far from J.P. Sartre's "folle du logis" because it was still an art of relationships in which "there are no absolute contradictions but necessary levels in-between which circulates the meaning of the literal, of the "higher senses" and reciprocally. Following Roger Bacon's word, it is necessary to speak spiritually of carnal things, and carnally of the spiritual." See Gaignebet, *L'ésotérisme...* T.1,p26. See also Gilbert Durand: *L'imagination symbolique*, Paris 1989.

34 See Jean Guillaume : Philibert De l'Orme : un traité différent in *Les traités d'architecture de la Renaissance*, p.348. De l'Orme himself mentions the "rustic books" written by Virgil and others.

further, for it happens to confirm the Dionysiac element of the architect's use of Hermeticism. In a rare study on the origins of the cult of Hermes which sheds some light on the metamorphosis of a myth which animated the Roman Empire, J.R. Harris writes:

> *From the similitude of* Hermas *we learn that in Rome in his day, it was the custom to train the Vine upon the Elm. Hermes, then, is the Elm-tree. When we make that equation, we see a gleam in the direction of philology: for* Herm, *as we shall see presently, is the same word as Elm. In Latin and the Roman languages, we find the forms:* Ulmus *in Latin,* Orme *in French,* Urmo *in Italian, by the side of English* Elm. [35]

The decisive feature about the Good Architect's tree is definitely the notion of *Abundance* that appears explicitly, both in the text and in the engraving. In a totally different context, Harris establishes archeological evidences between Hermes and Dionysos. He shows that not only is the elm-tree the direct ancestor of the *Herm*, the symbolic Pillar of Roman crossroads, but it also incarnates the traditional tutor of the vine. For instance, Praxiteles' *Hermes Carrying the Infant Bacchus* and *Silenus Carrying Dionysos* from the Vatican Museum are two clear aspects of the same *sacralization* of spiritual *wine* which, not surprisingly, entered the Christian tradition.[36] Philibert could thus come back from his Italian initiation with both a fascination for Roman antiquity and a secret respect for ancient cults which merged, even phonetically, with his personality and religious convictions: an embodied amalgam, so to speak!

Silenus with infant Dionysos
Vatican Museum

---

35 Harris James Rendel, *The origins of the Cult of Hermes*, Manchester, 1929, p.9.

36 Id., p.52.

François Rabelais' work, which, as early as the prologue to *Gargantua*, he openly placed under the protection of the Silenus, allows us once more to unveil some aspects of Philibert's body image. In the story of *Messere Gaster*, Rabelais refers namely to another Italian "Monsieur" who is a well-known architect. But Gaster himself is above all the "first master *es Arts* in the world", the ultimate origin of any human creation which is to say the "*ventre*", both stomach and womb, simultaneously locus of Instauration and place of Restauration.[37] It is not superfluous to summarize *Gaster*'s story as it is narrated at the end of the Fourth Book, which happens to be Rabelais' last "recognized" work and already concludes Pantagruel's friend's quest.[38] It proves that there is more than a hypothetical friendship between Rabelais and de l'Orme, who not only knew the great Physician's work but must also have shared his sense of Hermetism.

The symbol of the demiurge, the human origin of sublunar Creation, is Gaster. Pantagruel lands on a wonderful but difficult island covered with mountains *very rough to the feet.* After overcoming the *problem of entering,* the travellers find themselves in a *garden,* i.e. a paradise, the manoir d'Arete or Rock of Virtue. Its Lord is "messere Gaster", more creative than Fire and more *inventive* than the *Celtic Mercury.*

> *With him lived in Peace the good dame* Penie, *also called Indigence, mother of the nine Muses: Her union with Porus, lord of Abundance, gave birth a long time ago to Love, the noble infant mediator of the Earth and Sky as stated by Plato in the* Symposium.[39]

One can only obey dictatorial Gaster, who does not *hear* anything else than himself, for he has no *ears* and only *speaks by signs.* When he gives his orders, he is more frightening than the *Lion* and the kingdom of *Somates* (the body) never manages to plot against him. When he feels good, he is very generous, *inventive* and *eloquent.*

> *So in reward, he invents all the Arts, all machines, all crafts, all artifices and Subtleties.*[40]

He can even command animals to become poets and snakes to spring up from the ground (!) He has only one big problem: He eats everything. Now about the disciples of such an *Ingenious master,* they can even transcend the best "artistic creations" of Nature, who however invented all the wonderfully

---

37 *Book IV,* 57 p. 733.

38 On this question, see for example A.F. Berry : *Rabelais : Homo logos,* p.120.

39 *Book IV,* 57 p.734.

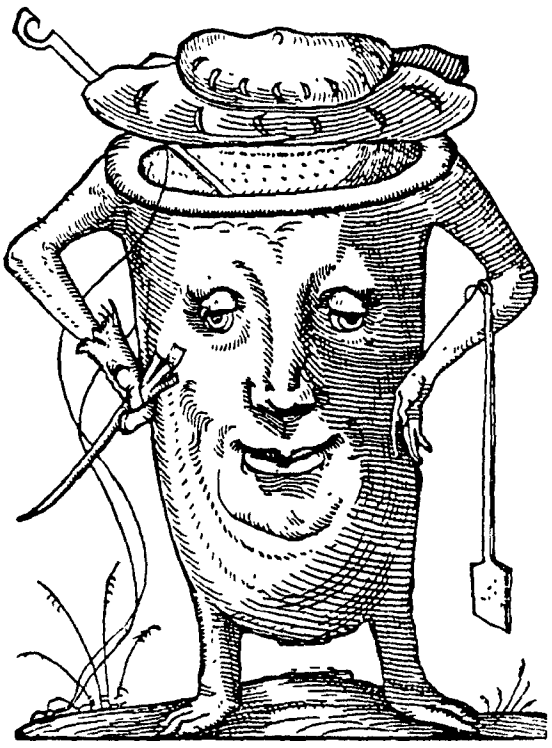
40 *Book IV,* 57 p.736.

diverse shapes of seashells.[41] Their carnivalesque appearances are monstruous and their orgy, *Bacchic*. From Nature, Gaster received "bread and its goods" along with the necessary skills for keeping them.

> *He invented military art and weapons to protect the grain, medicine and astrology, mathematics... clocks and sun dials... the art of carrying from one place to another... boats and ships (an invention which stunned the Elements)... he invented the art of building, fortifications and castles... (but also) the means to demolish fortresses and castles with machines, thus revealing their design (i.e. to mankind), very poorly understood by the* Ingénieurs du génie, *Vitruvius' disciples, as confessed by* Messire Philibert de l'Orme, grand architecte du roi Mégiste. [42]

The list of analogies between Gaster and Philibert does not end there, and already shows very explicitly a proximity with some elements of the architect's imagination, which is not in itself very astonishing. What is more striking is a sacralisation of Matter under the emblem of Flesh in a conception that emphasizes cyclical metamorphosis.

Now it is in fact this very profound embodied meaning of analogical thinking which lies in the mystery of nutrition. If, as I have shown, Proportion is above all an analogical



Les songes drôlatiques de Pantaguel
Plate XXII, Paris, 1565

---

41 *Book IV*, 57 p.739. On this question of the paradigmatic relationship between invention and seashells in Renaissance imaginations, see also De l'Orme folio 219, and on the contrary Palissy, who in the *Recepte Veritable* suggests imitating shells for the building of fortifications, p.115, 119.

42 *Book IV*, 61 p.748.

form of knowledge, one can only agree with René Alleau who writes in his celebrated work on symbolism:

> *When we want to ask where the consciousness of analogy that grounds the logic of symbols comes from, we often forget that the law of similitude or* action of the similar on the similar *can have experimental and existential origins, as given by the* assimilation of the living by the living, *that is to say nutrition. It is from the universality of nutrition and not only from sexuality that we have to question these paleopsychic depths.*[43]

René Alleau ascribes relational dynamism to nutritional processes in which the universe itself is like our Gaster. But he emphasizes an essential factor that distinguishes creative intentions seeking a mimetism by identification from those that are articulated on similitudes, i.e. an amalgam of resemblance *and* difference. For Alleau, the analogical drive owes its creative expressivity, embodied and allowing a concrete experience of multiplicity, to "its capacities for sliding through the stitches of the logical net in which struggle the living..."[44]

In view of all this, it must be emphasized that for Philibert de l'Orme, the question is not to imitate the external image of the body but to *hear* its proportions and order "which is in all the parts and members external as well as internal of this [body]."[45] The contemplation of analogical relationships transforms the body in an experimental mediator that is as unavoidable as the *Athanor* can be to an alchemist. In everyday cycles, in the sequence of years, in the generation, decay, and sometimes mutilation of this "ancient fortress" depicted in the background of the *Bad Architect*, Philibert seems to feel the need to transcend tradition, although belatedly, if we consider that it was only expressed in the conclusion. The analogical body of everyday experience is thus both ridiculed and venerated in its grotesque or monstrous manifestations. Bacchus, symbolizing the vitality of matter (quick), and the *di-vine* movement of the Elements, are only interchangeable terms covering the same hermetic understanding of flesh.

---

[43] René Alleau, *La science des symboles*, p.73. See also *La nutrition et les origines mimétiques de l'analogie*, p.77.

[44] Alleau, op.cit., p.80. See also Wayne Shumaker: *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance*, particularly p.193, "Mental habits: the importance of analogy" which emphasizes specific uses in Alchemy insisting on the nutritive element, p.196.

[45] *P.T.*, p.4.

When Philibert deals with the issue of the qualities of stones, he succeeds in formulating a poetic vision that corresponds exactly to the *nutritional* aspect of analogy:

> *This kind of mud is useless, for it is soft and tender like clay, it dissolves and can be soaked when it stays in water or is humidified. True, after being a long time inside the* ventre *of the Earth, in the already mentioned quarries, it becomes hard, and converts in the nature of Stone, as it is very well known and experienced by those who visit the quarries.*[46]

There is no doubt in the architect's practice that matter is not a petrified substance, for it lives, "is eaten and consumes itself with time".[47] It falls within the definition of *Festina lente*,[48] which became an ethical maxim during the Renaissance. The body on which the architect builds an image is a *silent concert*: A notion particularly well articulated in Ficino's neoplatonism. His astrological psychology distinguishes Mercury from Apollo, as shown by T. Moore, who writes:

> *Mercury's interpretative abilities add imaginative understanding to the Luna-Venus combinations, but his insight is moist, close to Earth, involved with experience, not distant like that of Apollo.*[49]

The flesh of the world will be shaped by the craftsman associating two types of creativity which, in the Renaissance, are not comparable to Nietszche's interpretation of Greek tragedy. It is not yet a dualism in a forest of distinctions, but a modality, both ethical and perceptual. A necessary polarity, Bacchus and Apollo are inseperable because the tension is solved (or coagulated) in Hermes.[50] It celebrates a sense of fertility, symbolized by the famous Rabelaisian "braguette", as it appears in folio 51v°, and which must have been "imitated" in the plate of the *Bad Architect* and surprisingly "transmuted", perhaps as a cornucopia by the Hermes-like architect. In fact, the imaginations mirroring Hermes are always eminently multiple and not only *double-* or *Tris-megistus* but by nature *heteronymous*.[51] Hermes is

---

46 *P.T.* folio 25v° and 26.

47 See folios 25v° and 26.

48 Literally, "Hurrying slowly".

49 T. Moore, *The Planets Within*. p.143.

50 Even in Antiquity, for Hermes was also Priapus.

51 This has been well studied by one of James Hillman's collaborators, W.G. Doty, who gathered an impressive documentation on the various qulaificatives that apply to Hermes. *Facing the Gods*, pp.115-133.

above all the symbol of a *heady* multiplicity of things and beings, an essentially demiurgical diversity which, in the way of vegetal life, blooms in the Spring and comes back to its dark winter retreat. The magical "Herb" in Rabelais' *Third Book*, that is to say the *Pantagruelion*, and Philibert's *Orme*, are both vehicles for the same notion of *Festina lente*. To Edgar Wind in his *Pagan Mysteries*,[52] such a philosophy of "hâte-toi lentement", of hurrying slowly, is a fundamental key to Renaissance imaginations. Ripening is an expression of vitality before representing a path to death. The man of the carnival still knows that filth is a potential fertilizer. In fact, in the same way that *Pantagruelion* allows the most amazing magical inventions, Philibert's *Orme* can sustain the growing of the vine, for man cannot control ripening but only allow it to happen and thus conform to it.

Festina lente is in that sense the deep secret of Nature, the one sought by medieval Alchemists and celebrated by Renaissance artists.

The wings on the feet of Hermes-Architect are clearly the sign of his vivacity, but not a source of agitation, his quickness has no comparison with the Bad one's panic: he knows movement in stillness.

Rabelais gives us his own vivisection of the body, at the apex of *festina lente*, in his famous description of *Quaresme-prenant*'s anatomy[53] of external *and* internal parts.[54] It is the ultimate Bacchus,

Aldine Emblem for *Festina Lente*
(from Edgar Wind, plate #52)

---

52 Chapter VI, "Ripeness Is All". Wind quotes Erasmus in his Adagia, p.98. See also A.F. Berry, op.cit. p. 50.

53 The three days of Shrovetide, before Lent.

54 *Book IV*. See chapters 29 to 33.

a full case of ripening that can only be turned upside down. He is monstrous like *Antiphysie* whose children are like an inverted tree and roll on their spherical heads.[55] About the issue of these inexhaustible metaphorical lists of body parts given in the *Quaresmeprenant* passage, Marie-Madeleine Fontaine has brilliantly shown their crucial role in the modification of medieval mentalities. The body images change with new perceptions even though the anatomical truth were not more absolute.[56] Rabelais criticizes the endless mimetic descriptions favored by the *Galenian* anatomists in order to memorize body parts in a true, but imaginative continuum. However, he does not reject the medium but rather its doctrinal subversion. He still believes in analogical thinking even after Vesalius' discovery that Galen dissected monkeys! In fact, he plays with the double "simiesque" side of his verve and compares *Antiphysie*'s children to apes. In the nascent debate between similarity and difference, analogy and identity, Rabelais shows that by definition a creative analogy is never realistic.

Referring to a *nutritional origin* is another way of saying that images have their foundation in the divine potbellied region of the body. However, this is also explicit in the many representations of the macrocosm on which the center of the microcosm fluctuates between the navel and the pubes (See Chapter 3, page 46). From this vortex, one imagines a world with all its hierarchies and Mizauld in his marginalia cannot refrain from exclaiming:

> *Beautiful comparison between a Kingdom and all its parts with the human body.*[57]

In Philibert's quest, the coincidence of the proportions given by the Scriptures and their modulation through the filter of the human body seems to be the path to a forthcoming architecture whose flesh has the ephemeral character of the Mercurial paradigm. It is important to remember that to his contemporaries, *Quicksilver* was still the miracle remedy for skin diseases, and most particularly for the incurable carnal illness called "Mal des Français", "Mal de Naples" or Syphillis.[58] A question of life and death in which everything can be suspected of concealing potential virtue, sometimes even intentionally. For example, analogies between stones, human beings and plants can be so strong that when our architect contemplates a wall and

---

55 Thus criticizing Plato's definition of Beauty and Order in the *Timæus*.

56 M.M. Fontaine : Quaresmeprenant : l'image littéraire et la contestation de l'analogie médicale, in *Rabelais in Glasgow*, pp.87-111.

57 *P.T.*, folio 3.

58 See Jackie Pigeaud, Médecine et médecins Padouans, in *Les siècles d'or de la médecine*, p.23.

sees ivy growing on it, he can only imagine it in terms of a relationship. For Philibert, ivy is another way of saying *Inimica Amicitia*, for it destroys the wall on which it spreads and grows excessively.

> *And doing so, it dies as it killed the wall. The same thing happens to men...*[59]

For Philibert de l'Orme, Filarete and even Alberti,[60] Nature is still manifesting its *Remonstrances* to the wandering alchemist [61] as well as to the builder.

The human body and the flesh of architecture are understood as two weavings of analogies with all the inherent reciprocities that this implies. But in order to fully embody this clearing of meaning, would not Hermes need Ariadne? *A fortiori* if he incarnates Dionysos, it is thus another dimension of femininity that arises under Venus - Diana's face. In classical mythology, Bacchus consoled Ariadne, had a sacred union with her and is said to have placed her among the stars, along with the crown he gave her at their wedding. The wings which ornate the hermetic shoes of the *Good Architect* are paradoxically what confirms this deep connection with Rabelaisian symbolism. Pantagruel is the one who gave the explanation while coagulating the un-solvable questions thrown at him by his thirsty friends, just after they met Gaster:

> *You know, do you not, that the Amycleans of old, who revered and worshipped Bacchus above all the other gods, gave him the most fitting title of* Psila *?* Psila *in Doric means wings. For as, by the help of their wings, birds fly lightly aloft into the air, so with the aid of Bacchus – of good, tasty, and delicious wine, that is to say – the spirits of humankind are raised on high, their bodies manifestly made nimbler, and what was earthy in them becomes pliant.*[62]

---

59 *N.I.*, folio 6.

60 See glossary at the end of Rykwert's edition of the *Ten Books*, p.425. About a type of stone called *redivivus*, Vitruvius uses it to mean "old stone" (7.13) but Alberti's usage is less specific. For the most part, he applies *redivivus* to a category of stone that exhibits a certain life or vitality about it, flint for instance.

61 This is the title of a very important book attributed to Jean Perréal and dating from 1516. It was illustrated by a wonderful miniature portraying "Les remontrances de Nature à l'Alchimiste Errant". Jean Perréal also drew the plan for François II and Marguerite de Bretagne's tomb in Nantes (1502). This work depicting the four cardinal virtues was sculpted by Michel Colombe (see A. Blunt, *Art and Architecture*, p.40.) Fulcanelli gives a commentary in the Second Tome of his *Demeures*. See also Van Lennep, *Alchimie*, pp.95-96.

62 *Book IV*, ch.65. J.M. Cohen's translation, pp. 591-592.

Whether Philibert identifies with Hermes' skills or Dionysos' virtues, he does not forget what he owes Ariadne who had the remedy for Labyrinthian issues:

> *We now have to thread, as one says, our needle in order to sew and correctly gather the body and the matter of this* Third Book *with the help of the compass and the ruler.*[63]

63 *P.T.*, folio 51v°.

CHAPTER THREE

Curing Ethereal Vertigo with Geometrical "Tours de Force"

Alike his herald Hermes, Philibert de l'Orme was a relentless traveller. From his native Dauphiné, then Italy where he studied Antiquity, he eventually moved to Brittany as Chief Surveyor of civil works and fortifications before building for the King in the Loire Valley and around Paris.[1] In his *Premier Tome,* Philibert describes the architect's luggage in which there is, of course, the unavoidable equilateral triangle, or more exactly one he invented, "and generally, going along with it, an astrolabe and Ephemerides, with other books and compasses..."[2] Unfortunately, although he explains in great detail the use of many geometrical instruments, he remains silent about the means to calculate astral motions. His attitude is similarly ambiguous about who to consult for a site analysis. What is certain is that an architect had to be an astrologer,[3] but Philibert states that it is mainly up to the client to embark upon the task of choosing the advisers, even before starting a design:

> *When all this will have been considered, and after listening to the wise men, the philosophers and physicians, who know the nature of places, Air, and Waters, as Hippocrates wrote in his book, then you will think of looking for an architect.* [4]

The commentary we find in the margin also insists on the need to be correctly advised, which is not really surprising if we consider that it was written by Antoine Mizauld, a Montluçon scholar (1520-1578), himself a physician and an astrologer.[5] Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos not only

---

1 For a survey of these aspects of his biography, see Blunt, *Philibert de l'Orme, appendix C.* This letter written by the architect and kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale is entitled, "Instruction de Monsieur d'Ivry, dict de l'Orme, Abbé de Sainct-Sierge, et cestui M^{e} architecteur du Roy". Pérouse de Montclos also suggests a second trip to Italy toward 1560, this time for an intellectual conversion. See "Présentation des Traités", p.5.

2 *Premier Tome,* folio 41 v°.

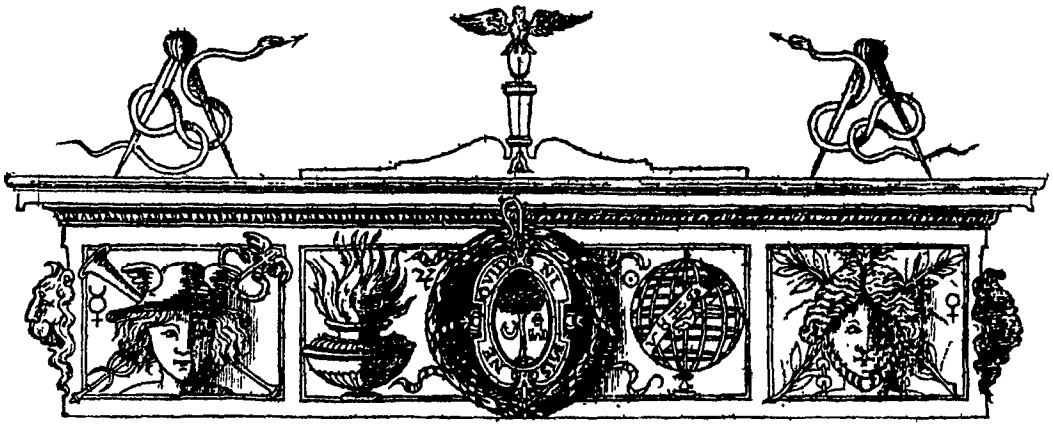
3 *P.T.,* folio 1 v° and more explicitly in folio 11.

4 *P.T.,* folio 9 v°.

5 This hypothesis was formulated by Henri Clouzot in *Philibert de l'Orme,* 1910, pp.88-89. It is developed by Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos in his *Presentation,* p.6. We know that he was Philibert's friend and that he shared with him the same motto: "Ne Quid Nemis". Mizauld dedicated to the architect one of his astronomical works, the *Nova et mira*

restituted the treatises in their original pagination with their genuine engravings, but by doing so he showed that most historians working with the 1626 and 1648 editions were using distorted documents.

86



LE QVATRIEME LIVRE
DE L'ARCHITECTVRE DE PHILIBERT
DE L'ORME, LYONNOIS, CONSEILLER ET
Aulmoſnier ordinaire du Roy, Abbé de
ſainct Eloy lez Noyon, &de
S. Serge lez Angers.

He specifically analysed the heading in *Book 4*, invented by de l'Orme after the printing of the first three books, and calculated the architect's birth date starting from astrological indications given by this picture. Beyond the issue of historical accuracy, Pérouse de Montclos recognizes that these new elements confirm Philibert's interest for astrology, astronomy and Hermetism in general.[6]

The importance of astrology and alchemy in all the arts of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance is no longer to be demonstrated. However, it is still

---

artificia comparandorum fructum, olerum, radicum, published in 1564, only three years prior to the *Premier Tome*.

6 See Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos, "Horoscope de Philibert de l'Orme", in *Revue de l'Art*, 1986, pp. 16-18. In fact, the real starting point of this astrological hypothesis comes from the coincidental position of the sign of Gemini on the armilliary spheres of both the frontispiece and the head band. Furthermore, this sign is represented along with Mercury on a carved beam from Philibert's house, as showed by the engraving in *Nouvelles Inventions*, folio 46.

necessary to study in detail the richness of these occult sciences, especially in their architectural transpositions and *imaginal* manifestations.[7] This knowledge was analogical in the proper sense, i.e. an interplay of the notions of macrocosm with microcosm. Therefore, it cannot be considered or even evaluated in the light of Modern Science, but belongs to an essentially and truly poetic realm.[8] It is a prerequisite to approach with respect the gnostic sense of mystery, indeed pregnant with meaning, which sustains these poetic endeavours, even more so if the issue is to understand how buildings could be qualitatively considered as loci, or places. In doing so, this critical attitude adresses the totality in a manner that should remain as non-specialized as those various hermetic standpoints. For example, to analyse the heading in *Book 4* and to focus exclusively on its astrological aspects could mean denying the necessary overlapping and intersubjective character of these frames of work. Philibert, of course, considers Ptolemy as a wise philosopher,[9] but he also refers to the "Thrice Great", rediscovered by the Florentines, when he wants to restate that "as Above, so Below":

> *In such a way that if one of the planets does not follow this occult harmony which keeps in accord the discordant elements, the already named building of this little world would be uninhabitable and useless. This is why, it seems to me, "Mercure Trimégiste" really wrote that the seven Planets have been created and ordered out of God, as sustainors, tutors and governors, after himself, of the inferior and sensible world.*[10]

It is thus in this perilous *triple* sense, i.e. medical, philosophical (alchemical) and astrological, that I would like to investigate and indeed join some theoretical aspects of Philibert's imagery, deliberately discarding the need to identify, thus leaving the door open to polysemic readings. It is

---

7 *Imagination* is here to be understood in the sense coined by Henry Corbin. See for instance "Mundus Imaginalis, or the Imaginary and the Imaginal", *SPRING* (Analytical Psychology Club of New York), 1972, p.16. The *Mundus Imaginalis* points to another reality that encompasses "normal" reality without being merely opposed to it. In that sense, it is very different from our understanding of imagination as fantasy. I believe that Philibert's sense of images was closer to the perception of an intermediary realm which like "memory", has its own substantial manifestations.

8 In the original meaning of *poiesis*, that is to say without any split between theory and practice, poetic creation and the poet himself. On this last point, see Hans-Goerg Gadamer, *The relevance of the beautiful*, pp. 117-118, and Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, p.10.

9 Folio 10v°.

10 *P.T.* folio 2v°.

perhaps interesting to start again from Pérouse de Montclos's own hypothesis. An examination of the engraving at the head of *Book 4* reveals the inscription of four planets which are made parallel with emblems, persons and attributes. On the top of the rectangular composition, two compasses and a plumb level are more familiar symbolical instruments. Concerning the bird which dominates the heading, Pérouse de Montclos sees it as Athena's owl, referring to Pallas' wisdom, here associated with the snakes who prudently master the compasses. In this hypothesis, the upper part of the picture would represent the qualities which the architect must acquire, superimposed on those given by the position of the Planets at his birth. It would also mean that Philibert de l'Orme considered astrology in its controversial judiciary aspect. As for the lions on both sides of the plate, they would thus only evoke Philibert's birth town. In the blazon, the moon would correspond to Philibert's patron Diane de Poitiers and the sun to Henry II. If Diane de Poitiers is the "chaste Venus" referred to in Philibert's text,[11] she is very difficult to recognize in the female figure Mercury strangely glances at.[12] However, such an indirect way of looking at things can be taken as an invitation to consider other explanations for the Priest-architect's Venus. As Robert Graves in his celebrated book, one can legitimately ask who this *White Goddess* is. Is she the Eros of Renaissance artistic drives, elliptically described by Mizauld as follows:

Venus signifying love and friendship
As Mercury signifies letters and commerce.

We have seen in the previous Chapters how important it is to ascribe the astrology / medicine / alchemy amalgam to an analogical mode of consciousness characteristic of pre-Scientific mentalities.[13] Each of these three ways of considering "being in the world" refers to a particular questioning but shares with the others the same global premises. Therefore, one has to acknowledge their specificities without opposing their poetic insights.

---

11 See folio 3: Philibert writes that in the ancient days, ambiguously enough, there was a chaste Venus and an immodest one.

12 On most plates of the *Premier Tome*, the gazes are often turned to the left, like sidelong glances, except for the angels on the frontispiece. But this engraving has "strangely" been reproduced, as shown by the inverted inscriptions in the armilliary sphere.

13 Or to quote Manfredo Tafuri, "Discordant Harmony from Alberti to Zuccari", in *Architectural Design*, vol. 49, n° 5-6, p.40: ["To this] possibility of knowledge by analogy of the innermost nature of the universe, given that the numerical ratios of music and architecture render the ultimate justifications of the creation perceivable."

Astrology

When applied to architecture, astrology considers a building like any other being, and is thus preoccupied with whatever invisible influences can affect its embodiment. In a way, it is concerned with *astrality* insofar as it reveals the motions of a soul, and in that sense, Ficino's astrology, to which Philibert explicitly refers, is for instance clearly grounded in animism. For Ficino and most astrologers of the Renaissance, it is through the notion of quintessence that this aspect of God's virtue reconciles Platonism with Christianity. Astrology could become an ally for geometry because it originally ackowledged the ubiquitous essence of the Soul. In the first Chapter of his book on the Heavens, Ficino writes:

> *Yet always remember that just as the power of our soul adheres to limbs through the Spirit, so the power of the* Anima Mundi, *through the quintessence which everywhere flourishes as if it were a spirit inside the wordly body, spreads out through all things that are under the* Anima Mundi... *The quintessence, however, can be taken inside more and more by us, if we know how to separate it from the other Elements with which it is heavily mixed, or at least if we know how to use those things which abound in it.*[14]

In this respect, it is interesting to note that Mars and Saturn, two planets generally considered as more agressive and less favourable for the development of Spirit and Soul, are strangely absent from the heading on which we are reflecting.[15] The question raised by astrology in its relationship to architecture adresses its capacities of *prediction*. The drawings are projections insofar as they are seen as instruments of divination. They are potentially cathartic devices subjected to an intentionality that considers architecture as a propitiatory endeavour.

Medicine

Philibert de l'Orme is totally clear about the influences of medical perceptions on his theory of architecture, although he is aware that the architect's task is essentially a *preventive* one. On this point, he follows Rabelais' criticism of Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim on the fact that any action was so much subjected to the need to predict its outcome that some

---

[14] *The Book of Life*, Book 3, "On Making Your Life Agree with the Heavens", Ch. 1, p.89.

[15] See for instance Ficino, Book 3, Ch.11, p.19. "It is nevertheless possible, even though it is rare, for the forces of Mars and Saturn to be of service to the Spirit as a kind of medicine."

magicians did not hesitate to resort to "astrology, geomancy, cheiromancy, metopomancy and other sciences of that Kidney."[16] In his typically contradictory way of thinking, the great physician nevertheless acknowledged that there should be as many means as there are vapours in the sky. He thus suggested to grasp the multiformity of becoming:

> *... by pyromancy, by aeromancy, much esteemed by Aristophanes in his clouds – by hydromancy, or by lecanomancy [...] catoptromancy [...] coscinomancy [...] astragalomancy [...] alectryomancy [...]* [17]

If medicine itself consists in predictions, the coincidental presence of the Caduceus in Hermes' attributes as favored by Philibert also shows how paradigmatic a science it was. One of the most intriguing but never realized project of de l'Orme was an "Hôtel Dieu", that is to say a public hospital operated by the clergy.[18] What seems to have literally fascinated Philibert, apparently inspired by Vitruvius and Alberti, but actually more stimulated by medical works, are the issues of decay and alteration, particularly in their "aerial" components. As will be analysed further in this Chapter, the *winds* are eminently meaningful as vehicles both for dreams and evil spirits. What they carry within themselves can make a place unliveable and dangerous for the health. And Mizauld adds in the margin:

> *Great inconvenients* (incomoditez) *will follow the design of a house when it has been badly thought out and executed.*[19]

Alchemy

Among all metamorphoses, *decay* is the form of change which alchemical minds are most specifically concerned about. For Paracelsus' contemporaries, even alchemy has therapeutic implications, to the point of fusing into a kind of medical astrobiology towards the end of the XVIth Century. Alchemy, we must remember, starts with the belief that not only is everything alive, but it is also animated by the same breath (or *pneuma*). What is seen as being truly the immanent interplay of two principles (Sulfur

---

16 *Book III.* In Cohen's translation, see p.356.

17 Cohen pp. 358-359.

18 Pérouse locates it in Lyon, where Rabelais also practised as a physician. See "Les éditions des traités de Philibert de l'Orme au XVII^{e} siècle", in *Traités d'architecture à la Renaissance*, p.363. See also "Présentation", p.47.

19 *P.T.*, folio 16.

and Mercury)[20] is only distinguished by its formal manifestations. With Paracelsus, it is through a new understanding of disease, brought about by considering that what cures and changes plants and minerals can equally affect human beings, that the limits of the body as dictated by the Galenian theory of the four Humors will be abolished. It is paradoxical that at the time when architecture was disengaging from its mediæval inclusion in the mechanical arts, medicine was revealing new mysteries which were going to renovate the architect's old thaumaturgic role.[21] This is another reason why Hermes was so stimulating and seductive for Philibert, as a dynamic messenger between the various counsellors who surrounded the architect's practice and ensured the accuracy of his graphic predictions. Similarly and from an alchemical vantage point, the two lions which protect the heading in Book 4, one dark and the other luminous, one red, the other one green, symbolize the opposition of *fixity* and *volatility*. This is also suggested by the confrontation of the snakes who embrace the compasses and face the bird. All forms are composed of joints and geometrical angles, of course, but in Philibert's imagination they are not isolated from the invisible movements that surround them and shape all the directions of his living perception of space. To summarize in his own terminology what we have introduced up to now:

> *This was very general: but more particularly to philosophize, and concerning the use of our architecture, it is not enough to know the already mentioned parts and angles of the world, but also the winds that come from them whether they are principal or cardinal, or even subprincipal and collateral (as they are called), that can help us or offend us, depending on their place and nature. Because they* alter *air, air and the humors of the body and the spirits within the blood, and therefore health – if this air is not corrected or stopped by its counterpart.*[22]

---

20 In fact, they were three in Paracelsus' theories, but Salt was seen as the offspring of the Mercury-Sulphur couple, and remained such in Mediæval understanding. See for instance René Alleau, "Aspects de l'Alchimie traditionnelle", p.145. There is no question that Salt represents the harmonizing principle between Mercury and Sulphur. Therefore, in Alleau's words, it is "not a principle but a consequence of their union".

21 Rudolf Allers, "Macrocosmus – from Anaximandros to Paracelsus", in *Tradition*, vol. II, New York, 1944, p.399. "Paracelsus defines man as an "excerpt" of the whole *machina mundi*, a microcosm: not in his shape and corporeal substance, but in his powers and virtues, he is like the big world," Allers insists that it is only after Paracelsus that some scientists categorized the notions of microcosm and macrocosm !

22 *P.T.*, folio 14.

Now, if we come back to astrology and attempt a more detailed study of this first aspect of Renaissance Hermetism, we must acknowledge that, indeed, a true symbolism of Air and Ether is hidden, or at least waiting, behind the cosmologies articulated on the macro-micro analogies. This "Poétique du songe", as Bachelard described it, was at the time an attempt to understand soul, spirit and body, but it simultaneously allowed a qualitative description of places. The question is thus to examine how it eventually led to a form of architectural animism in the case of Philibert's imaginary: How could the permanent solidity and presence of his architecture respond to the fluidity and evanescence of his ethereal imagination, whether it was moved by zephyrs or whirlwinds? One cannot undertake a study of the dialogue between astrology and architecture as experienced in the wake of the Medicis[23] without considering both the "psychological" content revealed by the stars and the fact that *soul* was synonymous with *breath*. From a contemporary point of view, which still is extremely positivistic, one risks reducing the more revealing analogies to some mere childishness of pre-scientific consciousness. It is unfortunately how one can explain Henri Clouzot's mistrust about Philibert's bizarre "comparison of the world being composed of seven planets, as architecture is of seven parts".[24] However, Philibert himself warns the reader as if some of his contemporaries already misunderstood such metaphors:

> *Concerning the seven necessary things for the construction and preservation of a body: one should not find this expression too strange.*[25]

One can eventually criticize de l'Orme for inhabiting so much this symbolic perception of Number that it prevented him from developing further its impact on architecture. However, this division seems more paradigmatic than prescriptive, for it disappears progressively in the rest of the treatise. The seven elements being wall, door, fireplace, window, floor, roof and ceiling, it is clear that what struck Clouzot was the apparent simplicity of this theoretical division. This is all the more amplified by Philibert's reluctance to examine its astrological implications, so convinced

---

23 See Janet Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art: Pontorno, Leo X, and the Two Cosinus*. Princeton, 1984.

24 Henri Clouzot: *Philibert de l'Orme*, p.100.

25 *P.T.*, folio 2v°. And we can add: because God is the only true demiurge who gave seven different lights to inform matter (in the Aristotelian sense) when He created the seven moving stars.

was he of the symbolic power of the number seven. It would be reductive not to recognize that in de l'Ormes's view, the parts are clearly less important than the whole, which must be "agglutinated and accomodated, according to the learned architect's spirit, invention and ordonnance".[26] The architect's mind is here understood as a particular symbolic imagination whose "ethereal vertigo", so to speak is in direct connection with the seven planets as described by Ficino.[27]

The Florentine Hermetist gave an interpretation which influenced the architect through his scholar friend Antoine Mizauld. It is thus necessary to look at the symbolic treatment of the four planets which have a particular role in the heading: i.e. Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and the Sun. There are already two hypotheses that seem to converge. Either the planets refer to an astrological portrait and in that case they can reveal what Philibert considered important to understand his work as an architect. Or the same planets had a magical, and why not, incantatory virtue, supposed to enhance and develop the gifts required to be an architect. In this second aspect, they would be meant for the reader, which could explain the strong recurring apparition of this image throughout the rest of the *Premier Tome.* Therefore, whether they speak of Philibert's intention or directly of his theory of architecture, these four *rubrics* received in Philibert's imagination an architectural value that must have been seen as equally instrumental as the depicted tools which dominate the heading.

It is important to remember that Ficino, if he refers to astrological influences, never limits them to planetary conjunctions. In *De vita cœlitus comparanda,* he writes:

> *If you want your body and spirit to receive power from some limbs of the world, for example from the Sun, learn which are the solar things among metals and stones, even more among plants, but among the animal world most of all, especially among men.*[28]

Amongst the planets invoked by Philibert, two of them received a particular treatment to the point of being personified. We already know the importance of Mercury, who was very probably the source of Philibert's fascination with Hermetism and of a certain obscurity, the sign of which reappears in the feminine aspect of Venus.

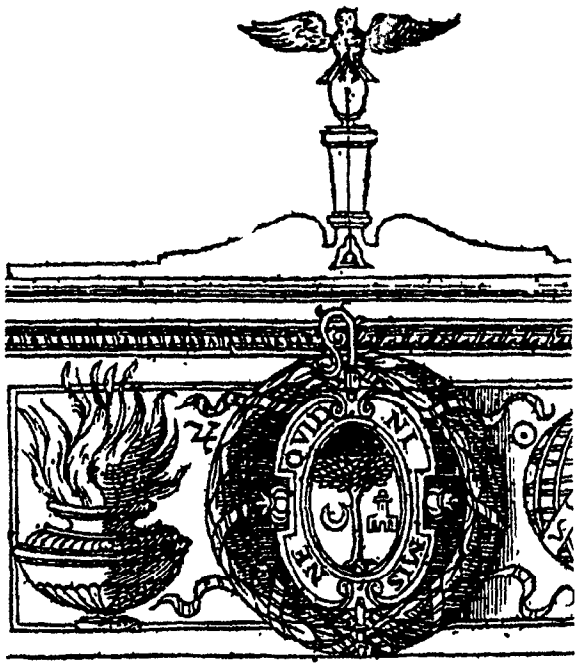
---

26 *P.T.*, folio 2v°.

27 Philibert refers explicitly to Ficino and implicitly to his *De Vita Triplici* (1489). See folio 32.

28 Translation by C. Boer, Dallas, 1980, p.90.

The Sun is associated with the cosmos in the form of the armillary sphere already present in the frontispiece. Jupiter, represented in the headband by a tin pot, constitutes the new and rather surprising element. It is of course very risky to propose one aspect of Ficino's commentary rather than another, unless we keep in mind some articulations of de l'Orme's imagery already explored in the previous Chapters. Thus, we find in Ficino a few analogies which deal with changes in terms of processes of nutrition and digestion, describing, although very enigmatically, the interplay between the Sun and Jupiter.



Heading in *Book 4*
(detail showing the tin pot and the symbol of Jupiter)

> *I hope you realize how much one must look to the general influx into everything. The proper and most accomodating influx is from Jove. There are, however, in the nature of the body, powers for attracting, retaining, digesting, and expelling – Jupiter himself helps all these, especially the power of digesting, of dividing, and likewise the power of generating, nourishing, and increasing, on account of his airy and large humor and his ample heat, mildly dominating the humor. Certainly, when the rays of Jove are diffused everywhere, the light of the Sun gets especially tempered for the health of man, and the rays of Venus and the Moon, too.*[29]

Such an emphasis on the airy emanations from Jupiter cannot of course solve the dilemmas that come from a purely emblematic standpoint.[30] However, it

---

29 Idem, p.103.

30 See for instance Pérouse de Montclos' wavering description of this symbolism in "Horoscope", p.16. Referring to the tin pot next to the astrological symbol of Jupiter, he writes: "The vase is more ambiguous: iconologies tell us that it means Intelligence, Reason

is true that Philibert, although he seldom categorizes, from time to time jumps to conclusions. For example, if farmers are ruled by Saturn, it also means that they represent the elementary necessities, the terrestrial source of balance for a body or a group of people, in the same way that

> *if a kingdom has no justice or religion, signified by Jupiter, how could the kings reign and in what state would the kingdom be ?* [31]

We have already seen that in Philibert's intentionality, the totality, here symbolized by the kingdom, is what eventually allows identification of the various organizing dynamisms. As with the four elements, the seven planets do not belong to independant categories but depend on a holistic referent, here clearly cosmological.[32] It is certainly the characteristic absence of the two agressive planets that pleads for a reappraisal of the heading. It cannot refer to a vague allusion to the French kingdom, as mentionned in the *Epistre*, but it rather converges toward a set of symbolic referents, the virtue of which must have been seen as deeply propitiatory. They favour invention but also the public commerce of this creativity since the major emblem is still the Mercury of "lettres et marchandises".[33] Philibert even uses the word "communication", which sounds so modern to us today.[34] In fact, in the XVIth Century, "commerce" was already a synonym for "relationship", and in this respect, Ficino gives some advice in order to correct, with the help of Jupiter, the influence of Saturn, which he feels bears ill luck and inhibits encounters:

> *To the spirit who inhabits sublime air (to speak Platonically), Saturn himself comes before Jove, just as Jupiter is the helpful father of those who live a public life.*[35]

This last excerpt opens a new understanding of the role of Jupiter and the Sun on both sides of the blazon. A central part in the composition of the

---

when flames come out of it; Religion, Piety, when perfume ascends from it." The historian however recognizes that both explanations could suit de l'Orme's portrait.

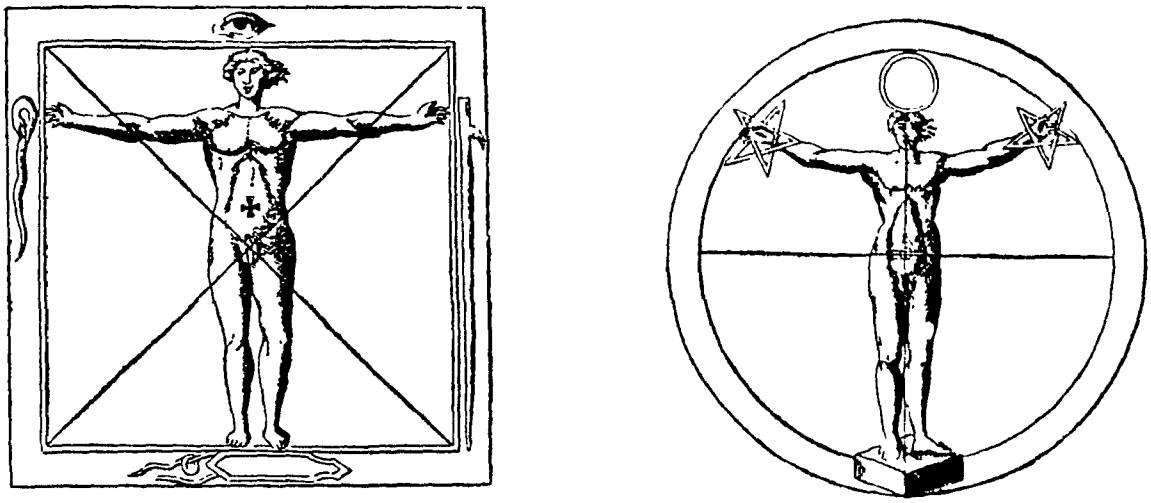
31 *P.T.*, folio 3.

32 This falls exactly into what Rudolf Allers calls *Elementaristic microcosmism:* "It generally assumes that not only is man composed of the same elements as exist elsewhere in the universe, but that they are also arranged in the same manner." See "Microcosmus - from Anaximandros to Paracesus", in *Traditio*, vol.II, New York, 1944, p.344.

33 *P.T.*, folio 3.

34 Ibid.

35 Translation C.Boer, Ch.22, p.165. Or if we use T. Moore's analysis of such a psychological device concerning Jupiter: "He is that form of imagination by which we transform our visions into the realities of collective living." See T. Moore, *The Planets Within*, p.176.



Microcosms from *La philosophie occulte ou la magie* by H.C Agrippa Paris, 1982, vol. 2, pp.116-117.

heading that almost naturally receives a protective power in the sense of the magical images designed by Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Ficino or even Paracelsus.

This hypothesis is furthermore reinforced when we remember the dramatic circumstances in which Philibert writes his treatise, with a strong desire to restore his integrity, endangered since Henri II's death. Paradoxically, the two personifications that balance the engraving appear more difficult to decipher. Pérouse de Montclos suggests a reference to Philibert's ascendant.[36] At the same time, it can certainly correspond, in a broad definition, to those potential qualities, the *rising skills*, which de l'Orme wanted any apprentice to acquire. The female aspect, either pagan Venus or christian Virgin Mary, as we already acknowledged, should actually be understood in the light of Philibert's ambitions within the Catholic hierarchy and the exploration of Ficino's text offers two passages, two seeds for an exploration centering on Venus as a symbol of the life of spiritual relationships between human beings. The duality of this deity is particular to Ficino's astrology, as exemplified by his Chapter 18, dealing with the ancient origins of the "images of the Heavens". This passage in which Ficino details the symbolism of the cross was known to Philibert, for he clearly mentions it in the "Prologue en

36 *Horoscope*, p.17.

forme d'avertissement" of the second Book.[37] Now it is precisely in Chapter 18 that the Florentine Hermetist brings together Mercury and Venus.

> *They say, therefore, that everything has been engraved with images. If somebody hopes, therefore, for some benefit that is Mercury's specialty, he should summon him in Virgo, or at least when the Moon there is with the aspect of Mercury, and make an image then, from a silver and lead alloy or from silver, on which is the entire sign of Virgo, its character, and the character of Mercury. And if you have used the first face of Venus, you should even add the figure which was observed in the first face, and likewise with the others.*[38]

Amalgamating Virgo with the feminine side of the chaste Venus (*Vierge* in French), invoked by the wise priest de l'Orme,[39] would then imply that Mercury and Venus are not only complementary but even inseparable. Or to use a Platonist feature, they would be *mutually hermaphrodite*, a notion developed by Ficino in Chapter 26 totally in accordance with his animistic and gendered cosmology:

> *I will pass over the fact that fire goes to air, and water goes to earth, like man to woman, because there is nothing surprising in the fact that the world's links, among themselves and all its parts, lust for copulation with each other. The planets are in accord with this, part of them being masculine, part of them, in fact, feminine, and Mercury in particular is both masculine and feminine, as the father of Hermaphroditus.*[40]

---

37 *P.T.*, folio 39.

38 Boer's translation, Ch.18, p.145.

39 In folio 3, Philibert writes: "estant le tout gouverné et moderé avecques une douceur et amour venerique, c'est à dire chaste, honneste et vertueuse (car les anciens ont fait une Vénus pudique, et une autre impudique)."

40 Boer's translation, Ch.22, p.179.

We have seen in the first Chapter how gendered Philibert's vision of materiality could be. It is thus perfectly valid to imagine that he saw the personification in the heading like a double portrait, a kind of Janus-like guardian for each Chapter of the *Book of Life.*

Between planetary signs and their personifications, the attributes and geometrical instruments appear as the complementary tools for a qualitative understanding of places. More than the Caduceus which is so common in Renaissance iconology, either medical or alchemical, the *horn* is quite surprisingly the crucial symbol in Philibert's imaginary. In the description of another engraving, Philibert gives some clues about these features:

> *We accompanied Mercury with his attributes which are the Caduceus and the Horn, only to signify that the architect will acquire fame and honor if he conforms to what we have already said.*[41]

This purely sibylline explanation is preceded by a sentence from the Gospels inviting us to follow the prudence of the serpent and the simplicity of the dove, drives us to reconsider not only the identitiy of the bird in the center of the heading but also to see again the symbol of the Christian Virgin behind Venus.[42] It is hard to be satisfied with the meaning de l'Orme gives to the horn in view of the importance of what can be called a *Symbolism of Winds* in the theoretical foundations of the *Premier Tome.* When we gather some elements of this complex game, it is not without recalling Rabelais' Neopythagorean understanding of Soul as breath.[43] To realize how far this special case of animism could go, one only has to consider the careful connection that Philibert establishes between the analysis of the winds and the understanding of places. If a building can share the *Anima Mundi,* it is not surprising that the laying of the foundation stone should be the symbolic act which conditions the *being* of an architecture. In the *Premier Tome,* this task also requires an investigation of the "astrological houses".[44] In the same excerpt from Ficino's third Book, about which we have seen how familiar it

---

41 *P.T.*, folio 51v°.

42 *P.T.*, folio 50v°.

43 In *À plus Hault Sens*, Paris, 1986, Claude Gaignebet shows the importance of the numerous "pneumatic games" combined by Rabelais "maître contrepéteur". See Tome 1, p.410. A curious example is given on p.12: "There is a motif that Rabelais knows very well: "le pet du mort", "le dernier pet", "mourir en pet". He reactivates the old scatological tricks of the joyful carnavalesque brotherhoods... But in his deep crazy wisdom, he goes further: the anal breath is for him the specific form of the soul."

44 Unfortunately, and as for the divine proportions, de l'Orme tells us that their description will occur in the forthcoming "Second Tome", see folio 47v°.

was to de l'Orme, one finds the source of a symbolism of the Cross that is fully developed in the *Premier Tome*. For Ficino, the influences from the stars *do* have geometrical patterns:

> *The effects of the heavens work especially well through a straightness of the rays and the angles. For then the stars are enormously powerful, when they hold the four angles of the sky, the very hinges, like East and West and both middles. Set up in this way, they cast their rays one unto themselves, so that they constitute a cross.*[45]

Philibert was so moved by Ficino's depiction of the ancient origins of the cross that he writes:

> *... I cannot go further without ackowledging what I learned from Ficino and other great philosophers: who say that the figure (of the cross) has been very honored and respected by the ancients (much before the Coming of Jesus Christ), that the Egyptians, who saw in it a holy, sacred and miraculous thing, engraved it on the chest of their god Serapis.*[46]

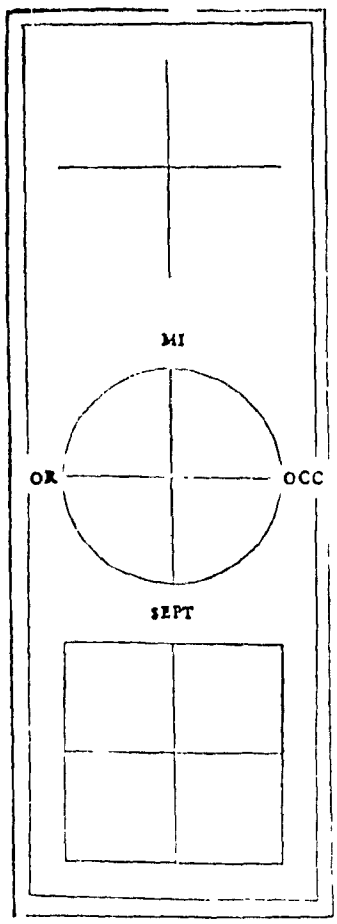
For the French architect, this passage certainly confirmed the possibility of qualifying practically the four cardinal orientations of a place. In folio 33, he gives a schematic summary that symbolizes the transmutation of heavenly patterns into earthly counterparts. First there is the archetypal cross, then its spherical inscription, the center of which is the earth, and finally its embodiment in a square. The last one refers to the terrestrial aspect while the former corresponds to the celestial movements. The square divided by a cross thus becomes the most symbolic way of starting the foundations of a building. It is important to remember that for Philibert, this metamorphosis from circle to square is actually the vehicle of influences and a real

---

45 Boer's translation, Ch.18, p.145.

46 *P.T.*, folio 32. On this question, Pérouse de Montclos mentions an article by A. Chastel, which unfortunately we did not not have the chance to read. See A. Chastel, "Il signum crucis del Ficino", in *Marsilio Ficino et il ritorno di Platone - studi e documenti*, Tome I, pp. 211-219.

astrological framework supposed to reconcile the building with its site. In that sense, he insists on the right astral positions, the ones which have creative powers and correspond to the four extremities of the Cross. What he calls the angles of the sky and the world are also special "maisons du ciel" and characteristic numerical devices (1,4,7,10).[47] Then, and this is a very special architectural interpretation, Philibert shows that the astro-geometrical foundations have to be understood in accordance with the *Winds*. De l'Orme read Vitruvius and Alberti, for he describes the four cardinal winds[48] with the classical advice about the orientation of the rooms. But in his own terms, he is more preoccupied than these writers about the health of the inhabitants and he strongly criticises those who do not ground their geometry on the analysis of the winds ! He thus invites the reader to actively consult the works of Cato, Varro, Virgil, Colunnell, Pliny, and Pallade (?).



Archetypal cross, folio 33

> *And of the physicians, the book of this great and unique Hippocrates, which he entitled: About the Places, Air, and Waters. In short [a subject on which] most of the doctors wrote, along with the philosophers, poets and architects.*[49]

Philibert's intuition about the special architectural role of the most immaterial among the four Elements, needs further examination. As Bakhtin showed in his work on Rabelais' world, the Physicians were familiar with the

---

47 *P.T.*, folio 32v°.

48 See *P.T.*, Book II, Chapter VII.

49 *P.T.*, folio 15, 15v°, 16. This list of great names is very characteristic of Philibert's artificial erudition and Pérouse de Montclos even considers in his "Présentation", p 11, that it is "feigned". It was probably either Antoine Mizauld, or even Rabelais, who whispered the references but this fact does not deny our approach of Philibert's intentionality

Hippocratic differences between the pneuma which inhabits bodies and the winds which move around. For Bakhtin, it explains what he calls the grotesque image of the body, in which "its exterior aspect is not distinct from the inside, and the exchange between the body and the world is constantly emphasized."[50] Likewise, in the Hippocratic tradition, Air became the main element of the body. It is not, of course, the depersonalized air of the chemist, but an active participant which manifests its concreteness by linking cosmic life to human life. Bakhtin even shows that such an understanding went as far as connecting the act of belching with the movement of the Sun ![51] Behind de l'Orme's understanding of architecture, there is the belief that the world of forms is somehow an "intertwining of winds". This makes the architect's role partly therapeutic and almost complementary to the physician's when his work takes into account even the light winds, the zephyrs, the exhalations and what he calls the "fumes". However, in the conclusion of the *Premier Tome*, the *Bad Architect* has "little nose, for he does not have the intuition of good things."[52] In other words, smell and consciousness are in an intimate dialogue, particularly when the issue concerns a place which, like a being, has its own breath, either fragrance or pestilential emanation.[53] This also ascribes a concrete meaning to the clouds which animate some of the most important plates in the *Premier Tome*.[54] In that sense, it is tempting to develop further the commentary on Philibert's tree: an Elm which extracts its essence of life from the earth and transforms its branches into rounded clouds, mirroring the actions of the good hermetic architect while, on the contrary, it is a storm which is created by the ignorant ! In Philibert's imagery, Air is *the flesh of movement* and the clouds are, so to speak, condensed souls.[55] As in Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera*, it is again

---

50 *Rabelais and His World*, p.356.

51 Bakhtin, p.356. See also Gaignebet, p.227, who articulates his interpretation of Rabelais' animism from a passage taken in macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* in which the soul is incorporated in a body after its coming down through the Milky Way.

52 *P.T.*, folio 28v°. The original text is worth quoting. Philibert writes, "Il n'a gueres de nez, pour n'avoir sentiment des bonnes choses."

53 As explained by Marco Frascari, the Italian talks of an architecture *di grande respiro*, while the French expression is *un lieu qui respire*.

54 Particularly in folio 51v°, 281 and 283.

55 This is very close to the Alchemical "récolte de la Rosée", a solsticial dew supposed to contain a strong energy essentially helpful in the first stages of the Great Work.

Mercury who looks at the clouds and thrusts his wand to the sky in order to decipher the mysteries hidden behind the fog.[56]

But although Philibert deeply respects traditional teachings, he also wants the apprentice to design his own instruments. Starting from the square, he decides to describe 16 winds and to the ones who would question such a number, he simply retorts in advance that while sailors use 32 winds, Vitruvius only mentioned 24 of them![57] For de l'Orme, it is enough to prove the validity of a certain theoretical freedom when the architect wants to know the winds and thus divides

> *the horizon of a place into as many parts as he wants to, since from all the points can come winds, which are nothing else than an exhalation, a vapor or smoke, driven and agitated laterally on the earth, and proceeding from various parts of the horizon.*[58]

In de l'Orme's theory, there is no latent fear, nor even a doubt, about the interplay between macrocosm and microcosm. His statements lack fixity precisely because he does not have to be reductive, he does not imagine the possibility of any architectural work outside these cosmological limits. Thus can we really talk about boundaries delineating macrocosm and microcosm in the XVIth-century cosmology? It seems that the contradiction often springs from our own difficulty in considering simultaneously the various analogies that linked man to his universe at the end of the Middle Ages. In the same way that the elements are not categories, the microcosm contains the macrocosm. This Hermetic Message is often misunderstood by commentators who simply conceive it as a kind of mathematical one-to-one relationship between planets and organs, without acknowledging its ultimate pantheistic foundations. In a remarkable study about the changes that occurred in medical mentalities in the early XVIIth century, Brian Vickers shows the importance of this paradigmatic notion of macrocosm in Hermetic practices and how it articulated the most profound metaphysical images. He insists on the fact that a disciple of Paracelsus such as Van Helmont tends towards a kind of quest for identities, and will thus be forced to question the very possibility of a link between the great and little worlds. In doing so, it is the entire occult system, and not only Paracelsus', which will become useless and

---

56 In *The Planets Within*, Moore considers that it is Mercury's special formal consciousness which makes him the confident of winds and clouds, mirrors of the dreams. See p.151. Already in classical mythology, Hermes was the guide of souls.

57 *P.T.*, folio 16.

58 *P.T.*, folio 16v°.

futile, the twelve zodiacal signs becoming concepts waiting for a new rule![59] Where Philibert's contemporaries were fascinated with the analogies between the various aspects of the living, some new scientists of the XVIIth Century will point out the radical differences between the disorder of things. This debate started in fact with the criticism of astrology undertaken by Pico della Mirandola and later revived by Savonarola. The distinction between "judiciary" astrology (genethliac),starting from astral determinism, and its opposition to a supposedly less dogmatic acceptance or astral influences, has paradoxically been made possible by the interposing of religious dogmatism. Savonarola even foretells the future exacerbation of the notion of free will:

> *Speculative astrology is therefore a true science, because it is to recognise the effects through the true cause... but divinatory astrology which consists entirely of effects which proceed indifferently from their own causes, especially in human affairs which proceed from free will, and in those which rarely come from their causes, is wholly vain and can be called neither art nor science...* [60]

But it would be erroneous to exaggerate the importance of cosmological determinism in de l'Orme's imagery. It seems more accurate to see how he constantly parallels his conception of architecture with the demiurgic process which recreates the world. The sky within answers to the sky without and any building, considered as a matrix, is a kind of Hermetic vessel in which the *Anima Mundi* takes on a specific shape. In that sense, buildings are analogous to the alchemical retorts described by Girolamo Cardano in his *De Subtilitate.* Philibert, along with Mizauld, speaks very highly of this work and particularly on the question of "fumes".[61] The various shapes of the retorts were supposed to induce movements and transformations and their names are very revealing: next to the *Mariæ balneum,*[62] we find the *Vas spirale,* the

---

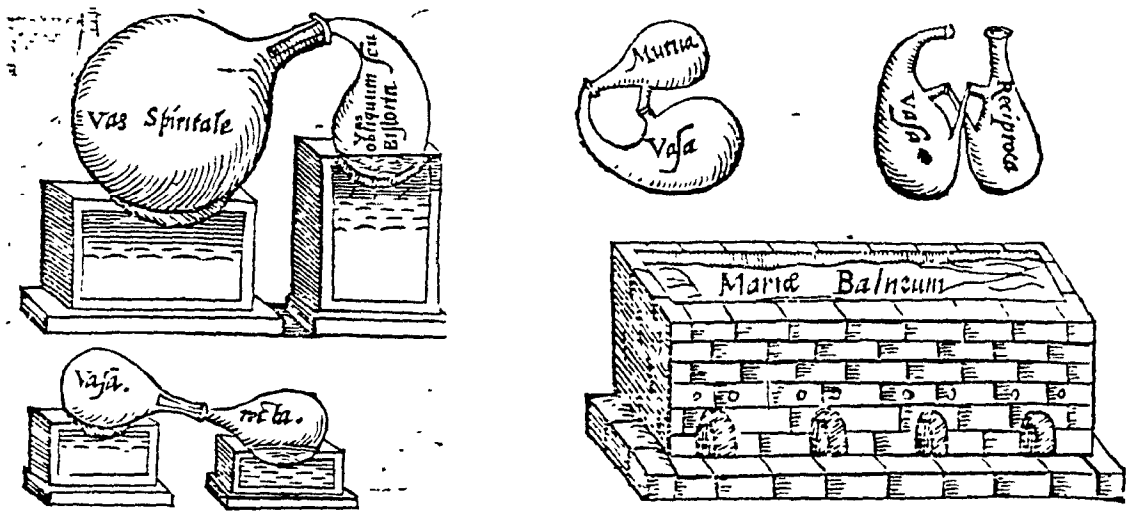
59 Brian Vickers, "Analogy versus Identity: the Rejection of Occult Symbolism, 1580-1680", in *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance,* Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp 95-163.

60 Quoted by Eugenio Garin in *Astrology in the Renaissance - the Zodiac of Life,* London, 1983, pp.84-85. With "Paracelse", in *Mystiques, Spirituels, Alchimistes, du XVI^{e} Siècle Allemand,* A. Koyré shows that the medical astrology developed by the German Hermetist was already opposed to the deterministic intentions of the magicians more preoccupied by the manipulative power of occult sciences. In *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance,* pp.16-27, Wayne Shumaker also sees the origins of Pico's rejection in the excesses of astrological predictions.

61 *P.T* , folio 272v°.

62 Or double-boiler.

Vasa recta, the *Vasa mutua* and above all, the *Vasa reciproca*. This last one being a real reenactment of the interplay and inside-out unfolding of macrocosm and microcosm.[63]



Alchemical retorts from Cardano's *De la Subtilité*, pp.397-398

However, Philibert's cosmology was more organic than intellectual, for as M. Tuzet writes:

> *It was an old doctrine, this parallel between microcosm and macrocosm. But we see its meaning changing. For the people in the XII^th Century, it was a question of intellectual correspondances: It was* in God's mind *that the scheme of Man could match the scheme of the world. But for the people in the XV^th and XVI^th Centuries, it becomes a* participation, *a deep substantial unity, an organic link, in which however man is not subordinated: He is the bond, the core of the world.*[64]

Therefore, in such a context, Man could not be simply understood as a reduction, a microcosm. Furthermore, the theories on the winds are perfectly in tune with this waxing understanding of the human body. When it became possible to overcome the old autonomy of Galenian Humors in favor of an *exchange between the inside and the outside*, the ancient theories of the soul as breath took a new foundation. In Paracelsus' understanding of disease, it will mean that the ingestion of a foreign agent must find its counterpart in

---

63 Philibert and Mizauld probably read the French translation of 1556. We found a reprint from 1578 entitled: *Les livres Intitulez de la Subtilité*, Paris, 1578. See pp 397-398

64 M. Tuzet, *Le Cosmos et l'imagination*, Paris, 1965, p.284.

the expelling of a similar entity. This conception is very close to the elemental theories about which we have seen, in the first Chapter, how they were articulated on the notions of Reciprocity and Reversibility. This is why, after quoting Hermes Trismegistus, our architect compares the world to a kingdom depending entirely on

> *the unity, conjunction, help, alliance and confederation of the seven parts or planets of this great and high kingdom called the Heavens, either by effect, participation, similitude, signification, or else. In such a way that if one of the planets does not follow this, as was the case for our comparison with the parts of a building, the body and state of any kingdom, will not have strength and will not last.*[65]

In order to approach this poetics of intermediary beings from an analogical side, one can suggest an image taken from Ovid, this great lover of Metamorphoses. In fact, it is in the *Fasti* that the Roman poet tells us of the encounter between Janus and Cardea, the future goddess of hinges. On one side Janus, god of doors and entrances, controls the movements between within and without (of either house, body, or year) and on the other side, Cardea allows the movement of the door itself. The story of Janus would then be incomplete without Cardea's intervention. Her name means "She of the hinges" and the myth is rich enough to shed some light on an understanding of flesh as we are attempting to delineate it since the beginning of this work. Flesh is an "articulated joint" in Renaissance cosmology, or to use again Tuzet's formulation, it is an *organic link.* Cardea is also associated to Carna [66] by Ovid, and he recalls that she was called Crane and was dedicated to virginity, indeed a supreme form of immutability.[67] It seems that this manifold ambiguity between a carnal approach of being and the pivotal meaning of flesh based on *Festina lente* allows another understanding of Man as a microcosm in these cosmological distinctions. De l'Orme's association of Mercury and Venus can be read in the light of this story of Janus and Cardea.[68] It is not a vain imaginary exercise to progressively

---

65 *P.T*, folio 2v°.

66 Latin for flesh.

67 See Ovid, *Fastorum Libri Sex* (the Fasti), translated by Sir James George Frazer, London, 1929. Vol.1, ch.VI, 101-182, pp.307-311. Ironically, Philibert's device on the seal is *Ne Quid Ne Mis*, but *Quid* reads beautifully as *Ovid* !

68 Another way of reconciling Venus, the Virgin and Cardea can be done by invoking a last analogy studied by Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*, pp.155-201. "Hestia: principle of permanency. Hestia: principle of impulsion and movement. In this

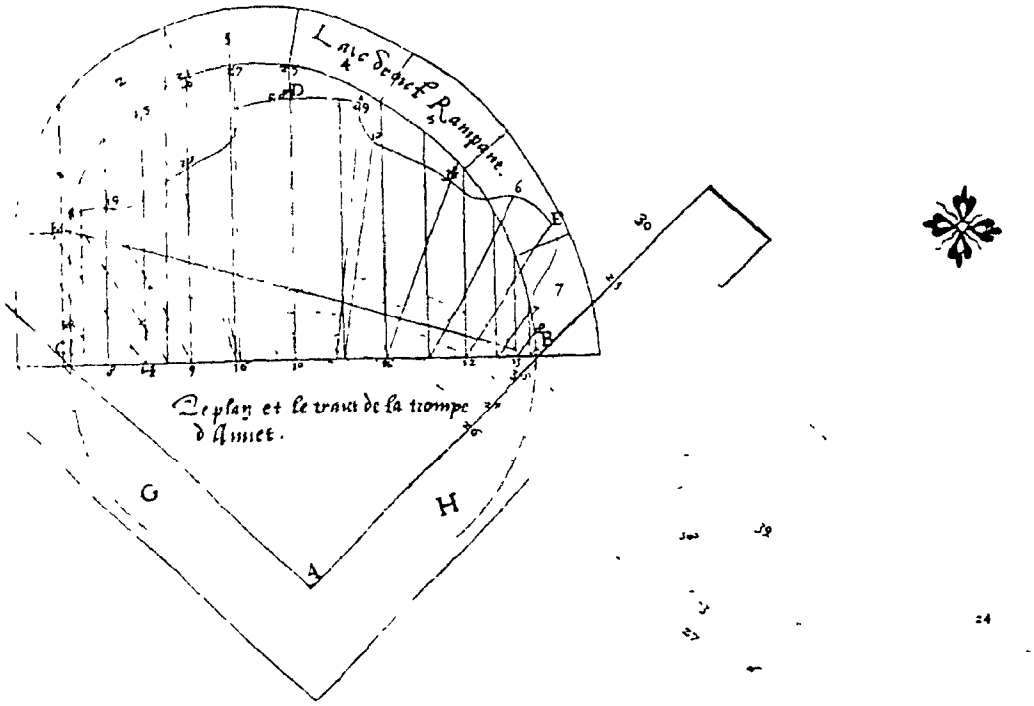
circumscribe the meaning of Philibert's imagery with other analogies. It seems on the contrary that it is the most fruitful way of suggesting the complexity of a theory which was being elaborated on sincere personal experience. In fact, beyond iconological analysis, the symbols on the heading appear as fundamental pivots of the architect's imagination as well as symbolic remedies. For example, the tower which, along with the rising moon, occupies both sides of the elm-tree in Philibert's blazon, is at once the Mediæval symbol of the "Tour de force" and the architectural embodiment of a hinge.[69] It is important to remember that Philibert's games of correspondances come from his experience and often return to his *praxis*. The case of the *Squinch* is probably the best example of an architectural transposition of his hermetic imagination. In de l'Orme's architecture, they certainly became at the same time towers and hinges, allowing a coming together of his Mediæval heritage with a new opening toward Italian influences. In some cases, they even reconcile contradictory programmatic requirements as exemplified by the paradigmatic "Trompe du château d'Anet". The squinches are perfect symbols of *Tours de force* that reveal the architect's skill in defying gravity. We have seen that in describing the winds, Philibert was attempting to qualify the meaningful horizon of a place, now in the design of the *Trompes* we can say that he was confronting the vertical essence of architecture. It is particularly striking to read his numerous associations of this architectural element with an exercise of virtuosity which pertains to an almost *acrobatic* building device. As he writes at the end of a careful stereotomical description: "Such a thing is proper to erect the *suspended ones* that we call squinches."[70]

---

double and contradictory interpretation of the name of divinity of the Hearth, we can recognize the very terms of a relationship that altogether unites and opposes in a couple of contraries, inseparably linked by "friendship", the goddess who immobilises extends around a fixed center and the god who makes her infinitely mobile in all the parts." This was perfectly understood in the symbol of the Herm, the pillar of Roman crossroads. In the same way, the snakes and the bird in their alchemical oppositions summarize "le fixe et le volatil".

69 Henri Clouzot, *Philibert de l'Orme*, mentions an intriguing early version of this blazon with two towers instead of one; see p.63. On the alchemical role of the *Tour de Force*, see the description of *Fortitude* given by Fulcanelli in the Second Tome of his *Demeures Philosophales*, pp.257-258: "On the other hand, the phonetic Cabala, which parallels the French word *tour* with the Greek ΤΟΥΟΣ, comes to complete the "signification pantagruélique du tour de force".

70 Folio 87.



Plan of the *Trompe d'Anet*, folio 93 (notice the black mark on right of picture)

Philibert was literally under the spell of such a possibility to confer *lightness* through geometric artifice.

> *Many different kinds of vaults can be made in the shape of a squinch, and all* suspended in the air,[71] *without having any foundation underneath, a part on the sides, and all this is being done through the use of a drawing method.*[72]

It is even more surprising to notice the resurgence of *aerial symbolism* which is so explicit and characteristic as to reappear in all the parts dealing with Squinches.[73] All this becomes even more consistent in Philibert's work, and in view not only of his active animism but also of his hermetic understanding of language. The Hermes Horn (*trompe* in French) is the double message given by the wind instruments, simultaneously means and signs of a quest for fame that nevertheless rest on good counselling. For as he writes, "without blowing the horn, that is to say without asking the advice of

---

71 Emphasis mine.

72 *P T.*, folio 89v°.

73 See for instance folios 87, 87v°, 88v°, 89v°. In all these cases, the same terms recur: "Les trompes sont suspendues en l'air".

many wise and learned men,"[74] it is impossible to succeed in a much complex task.[75] In order to get the full measure of this subtle mixture of poetic images, one could re-examine the frontispiece and its overlapping composition of stereotomical drawings of squinches with Hermetic devices. Philibert's text is sufficiently unambiguous, for he writes in folio 89v°:

> *But it is also true that some could ask what I mean and hear by this word* trompe, *since it is only used by craftsmen and therefore known of a few people and almost never by new workers. This is why I want to state, and tell the reader that it seems to me the term* trompe *came from, or has been derived from its similitude with the structure of the horn (*trompette *) called in many places* trompe. *For both of them being large in the front, get narrower from the inside the other end, in the shape of a vault.*[76]

The Trompes are also the emblems of these cardinal virtues necessary to become a good architect. It is ironic to notice that the printer, in order to respect the margins, often had to use this artifice consisting in the replacement of the "n" by an accent on the preceding letter, in particular with the word *trompe*, it makes it look as "trôpe". This is meaningful at many levels for the etymological origin of this rhetorical motif, abundantly understood by Rabelais, is *Tropos*, which meant *tower* and *manner* (*tour* in French). A *Trope de force*[77] which takes a lot of prudence, otherwise one risks confusing the strange necklace of the Venus in the heading with a narrow beard, and thus see again an androgynous Hermes reappearing ! All the more so if it looks like the winged mask which ornates the funerary altar on folio 147. Philibert himself "s'y trompe", for he describes it as a doric pedestal with a Mercury head, before correcting it into a medusa in the errata added to the *Premier Tome*.[78] This explains why we find so many ambiguities behind the analogical referents that are generated around the notions of macrocosm and microcosm. Indeed, the Latin origin of "ambiguous" being *ambo*,[79] it points

---

74 *P T.*, folio 7.

75 Mizauld adds that without the guidance of an architect, it is the art of building itself which has no foundations (*fondements*). See folio 7v°.

76 *P.T.*, folio 89v°.

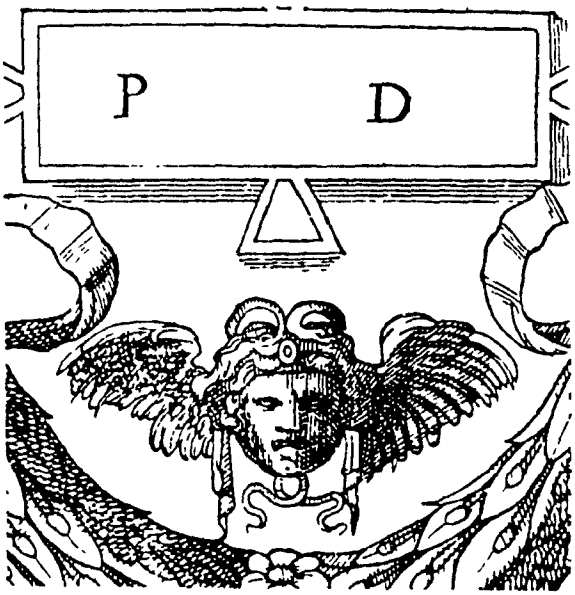
77 This is not all wind !

78 Pérouse de Montclos, *Présentation*, p.39, shows de l'Orme's double mistake in giving the right answer: it is a Gorgon! Yves Pauwels, a collaborator of Pérouse de Montclos, recognized this altar on a plate in Cesariano's edition of Vitruvius. (Côme, 1521, folio I.XV, v°.)

79 This was gracefully pointed out by Dr. Marco Frascari.

to a special kind of polarity, of doubleness (also typical of Philibert's sign, Gemini). As in the story of Janus and Cardea, it designates the realm of inside-out unfoldings.

At the beginning of this Chapter, we regretted Philibert's discretion on the astrological side of his architecture. It seems now that he was aware, not of introducing new sciences but of reminding the reader of their old importance in the *Art of Places*. The multiple emblems on the heading thus converge toward the building of an ethical system rather than being moral statements on building: for we have seen how deeply grounded they were in the architect's imagery. His intention was therefore not so much to identify a specific *praxis* but to find the instruments of its preservation in the core of a cosmology of equilibrium, in which Man was at the hinge of many influences. In that sense, he would have agreed with the founder of German mysticism, Meister Eckhart, for whom the movement of a door is the symbol of Man's exterior, while the immutability of its hinge is like man's interior, never attained in his upright posture.[80]



Winged mask on a funerary altar
folio 147

Venus in the headband

80 See *Œuvres de Maître Eckhart (Sermons et traités)*, Paris, 1987, p.25.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Thirst for Serapis and the Alteration of Prudence

The architectural formulation of "ethical guidelines" is definitely what distinguishes Philibert de l'Orme's theoretical ambitions from those of his contemporaries. Although his treatise is meant for architects and builders, it is also directed towards those who would build "without the advice of a "real" architect", for he writes:

> *Here I do not want to leave out the importance of judging the Lord's intelligence and wisdom through the works He orders, and His* prudence *in the choice of workers and in the general organisation of the whole...*[1]

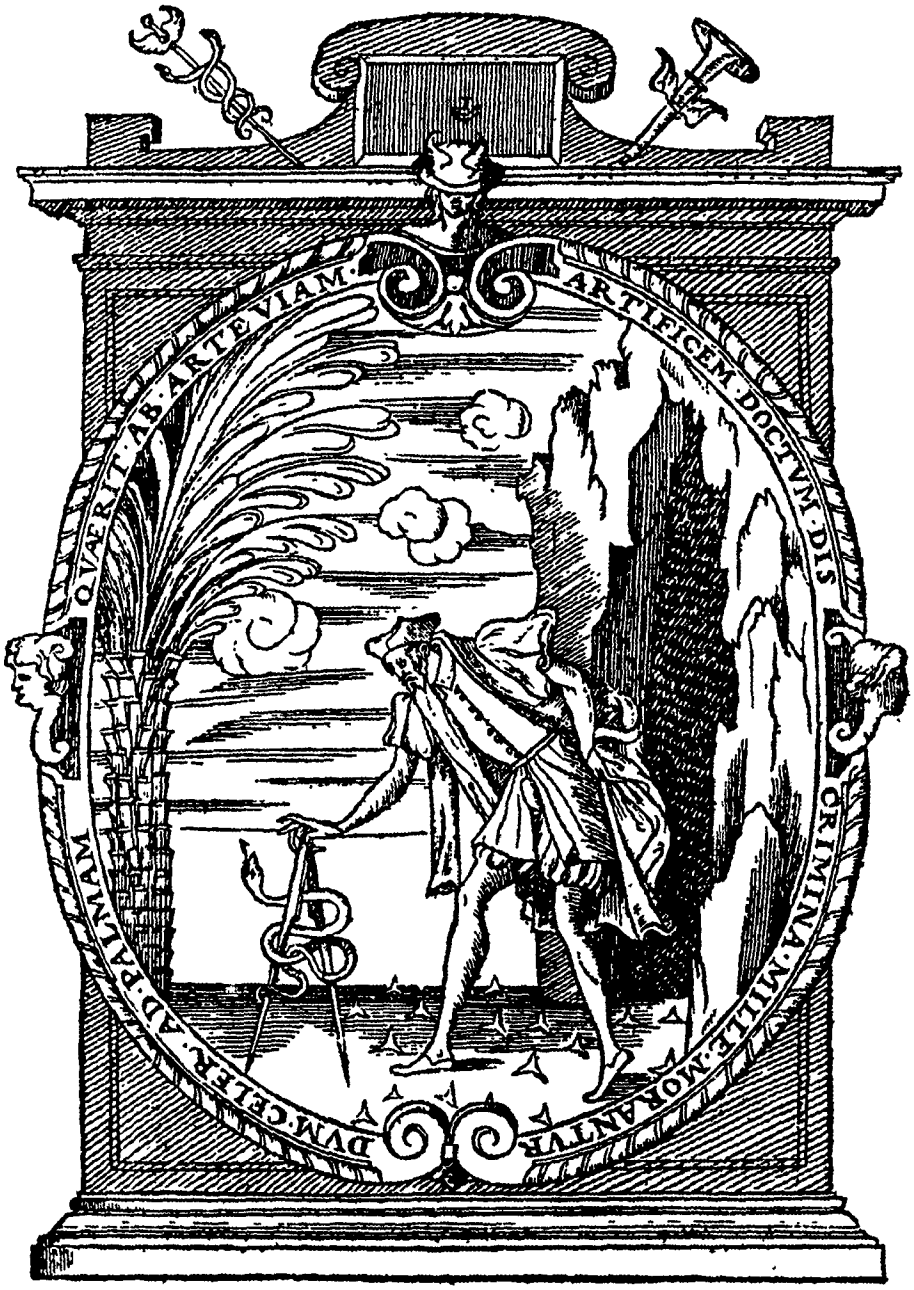
In fact, in the *Premier Tome,* Philibert explicitly reveals his preoccupation with integrity and the search for wisdom. That is surely why Anthony Blunt, before tackling the question of Philibert's influence on the architects of later generations, ends his biography by stating that "de l'Orme might well claim he had introduced *prudentia* into French architecture".[2] However, it is still useful to come back to this conclusive remark which, although laconic, ultimately points towards the ethical foundation of architecture.

In the first three Chapters, the purpose of this commentary has been to outline an understanding of Architecture absolutely subordinated to a living perception of matter; this theory struggling in the core of a cosmology which in the end appears to be less anthropocentric than "anthropo-dynamic". Intuitively, it seemed more judicious to approach Renaissance mentalities through the notion of *movement,* rather than *form,* in its elemental, corporeal and celestial aspects. But to do justice to Philibert's theoretical intentions is also to leave aside momentarily the question (certainly more historical than hermeneutical) of his role in the passage from the mechanical to the liberal arts. One cannot, on the one hand, attribute to de l'Orme the desire to make architecture an autonomous realm while on the other hand recognizing that he respectfully refers to the mediaeval heritage. By examining his injunctions for the formulation of a *Practical Wisdom,* it

---

1 *P.T.*, folio 7 (emphasis mine).

2 See Anthony Blunt, *Philibert de l'Orme,* p.135.



The *Prudent Architect* coming out of his retreat, folio 51 v°.

becomes possible to appreciate his way of thinking *Theoria* and *Pratica* in a "Poetics of Action" which tends to overcome the latent corporative restrictions, if not reduction, of architecture to building.

In the "Prologue en forme d'avertissement" of the *Livre III*, [3] one finds a beautiful iconographical epitome of the Hermetic devices already encountered in our study and which are gathered this time under the great banner of *Prudentia*. Philibert describes this engraving with extreme care, as if he wanted to ascertain a sense of ethics before "revealing" those wonderful geometrical treasures born from the compass. He thus shows an architect walking carefully toward the *Palm tree*, a symbol of "success", and coming out from a dark grotto in which he has been meditating. The animistic meaning of the three little clouds carefully rising in the background, or the role of the horizon line, which passes right through the architect's *palm*, and therefore through the articulation, the hinge of the compass, cannot be taken as a coincidence anymore.[4] In the tradition of mediaeval masons from which Philibert came, and as it will be further codified later on by Freemasonry, Man is the *hinge* between Earth and Heaven and is thus analogous to the Compass, instrument of symbolic transformations and vehicle of geometrical movements. Among the various emblems which ornate the engraving, more than the caduceus, the horn or even the head of Hermes, we are now invited to concentrate on the symbolic relationship between the compass and the snake: particularly if we wish to understand the kind of "Moral Precepts" the architect alludes to.[5]

---

3 *P.T.*, folios 50 to 51 v°.

4 *Palm* is written *Palma* in latin. Therefore it would certainly be necessary to study further the symbolism of the *Palm tree*, bearing in mind Philibert's concern for the *Elm* and for trees in general.

5 Concerning the various meanings of the image (folio 51v°), it is important to mention the strange "inscription" right on top of Hermes' bust, in the hatched frame: although the explanation that comes immediately points toward an engraver's personal mark, it remains open to creative speculation! See also Marco Frascari's article: "Professional Use of Signs in Architecture", in *Journal of Architectural Education*, vol. 36, n°2, Winter 1982, pp.16-23, particularly p.21. Frascari uses this same engraving to illustrate his analogical exploration of Medicine and Architecture: "The merging of the Aesculapian symbol (the caduceus) in the compass brings back to its original meaning the action of professional Medicine, for the Latin *mederi*, meaning 'to cure', is based on a root meaning 'to measure'. This reflects the view that a "healthy" architectural environment is to be regarded as the outcome of a state of right inward 'measure' in all production of signs involved in its 'making'."

The following quote comes from Philibert's own commentary on the image and clearly shows that the real frame of Architectural *action* is to be located within the ancient *Cardinal Virtues*: It is worth noticing in this excerpt that de l'Orme insists on the "non-human" character of these four pivots of human work as well as on the *Tripartite* meaning of *Prudence*.

> *Therefore in order to surely reach this Palm, it is necessary to be accompanied, in everything and everywhere, by Prudence, which is "portière" (as written by Saint Bernard) and "voicturière" of all other Virtues, for it is so sublime and heroic that it cannot dwell in a depraved and bad person. This is the reason why I wish our Architect to be sincere, not to lie, to abuse nor to be malicious. In that sense he will not be blamed for imitating the Serpent, i.e. for being prudent and well advised, in order to protect himself against the charm, mischief and trickery of bad people. This he will obtain through prudence, but not a human or vulgar one, which should rather be called shrewdness and guile (as one generally attributes the name of vice to virtue), but really through the one which occupies the main position between the four Virtues called* Cardinal *by philosophers, and which is nothing less that a "précogitation, discrétion et prévoyance" of what has to be done, in order to proceed well until the end.*[6]

The cardinal character of the practical Virtues (Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, Justice) can certainly be paralleled with the symbolism of the Cross as studied in the previous Chapter, but this time one can better appreciate how it reintegrates the everyday experience of the architect. Indeed, in the XVIth century, the cardinal Virtues do not yet refer to an abstract social structure of a moral kind, but they keep the concrete qualitative content still implied in the writings of Cicero and Macrobius; two authors who cannot be suspected of simplistic moralism. These four orientations of the incarnated soul certainly have ancient Roman origins and their integration in Christianity has only been possible through the addition of the three theological Virtues (Faith, Hope, and Charity). However, in the pagan traditions, the Cardinal Virtues already had a fundamental role in the understanding of embodiment.[7]

---

6 *P.T.*, folio 51.

7 About the crucial role played by Macrobius in the Mediaeval understanding of the Virtues, see Rosemund Tuve: "Notes on the Virtues and Vices, part one: Two fifteenth-century lines of dependence on the thirteenth and twelfth centuries", *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 26, 1963, pp. 263-303.

In the theoretical connection which Philibert suggests between the architect's work and the dwelling of Virtues in the soul, the French architect sounds close enough to Filarete's intentionality, particularly when one considers the project of a *House of Virtue* fully described in *Book 18* of his treatise. Filarete, when he deals with the issue of the training of the apprentice, advises him to carefully *experience* the Virtues:

> *He will know how to judge* justly. *He should be* prudent *and provide in advance for the things necessary to the building so that it is not harmed through any shortage... He should have* Fortitude *as well, because his craft is a public one... For this reason, he should be firm in his purpose and not be disturbed or cast down by this prattle... The architect should also have* Temperance, *for frequently in building, things are done that are not right.*[8]

After these apparent overlap of interest in the Virtues, we see Filarete praising the theological Virtues. Philibert, however, did not feel confined to the practical ones. In that sense, although de l'Orme was a priest, it is clear that he writes from the architect point of view, thus remaining closer to the classical meaning of Virtues, i.e. with a strong emphasis on qualitative action Where de l'Orme's understanding happens to have very direct material and practical implications, Filarete's activism, along with Alberti's, was more centered around civic life [9] We need to go back to classical *Ethics* in which the theory of Virtues encompasses all the dimensions of embodiment, through a belief in dissolution (in the sense of a purification) as the vehicle for changes and metamorphoses in Nature. This last aspect, which found a strong formulation in the teaching of Saint Bonaventure, has been studied by Kent Emery.[10] Although Philibert does not refer explicitly to the mediaeval thinker, it is a necessary roundabout if we are to understand how the cardinal Virtues should be interpreted as the "four poles of the created Universe". Kent Emery shows that there was a correspondance, then fully accepted, between the four Elements and the four cardinal Virtues justified by Bonaventure, among other reasons, through the parallel between the six days

---

8 Filarete: *Treatise on Architecture*, 2 vol., London, 1965, Book XV, folio 113 v°

9 This is very clear in Alberti's use of *Virtú*. See the glossary at the end of Rikwert's edition of the *Ten Books*, p. 426: "It was considered that *Virtú* shapes, conditions and directs to actions of men, once acquired through a well-rounded education: *Virtú* is 'nature itself, complete and wee formed'.

10 See Kent Emery, "Reading the world rightly and squarely. Bonaventure's doctrine of the cardinal virtues". *Traditio*, vol 39, 1983, pp. 183-200.

it took God to create the macrocosm and the "six stages" of contemplation necessary for the elaboration of the "minor mundus".[11] About this mirroring between the formation of matter and the perfection of the Soul in Virtues, Kent emery writes:

> *In collatio VI, Bonaventure establishes a series of correspondances pertaining to the Cardinal Virtues. Borrowing an analogy from Gregory the Great, he asserts that human life revolves around the axes of the four Virtues, just as the Sun manifests itself differently from the four dimensions of the Earth. The Virtues also correspond to the four effects of light, which cleanses, illumines, reconciles and confirms. Moreover, the cardinal Virtues, as in Grosseteste, correspond to the four Elements. Temperance, like the Earth, is dry and adorned with flowers. Prudence, the virtue pertaining to the practical intellect, like Water is translucent to light. Justice is sweet like the Air, and Fortitude, as a text from Lanticles (8-6) suggests, is like Fire.*[12]

Although Bonaventure rephrases Macrobius' teachings in terms of his own Christian doctrine, he still expresses the polymorphic and embodied aspect of the Virtues. From our architectural vantage point, the question thus becomes to understand to what extent the Virtues represented for de l'Orme a kind of *ethics* of *Matter*. Such an ethics, as we have attempted to introduce in the first Chapter, was believed to exist *within* the elemental perception of the world, i.e. immanently: All this while keeping in mind that the real moral order of the Virtues, their *ordo vivendi*, was also similar to the relationship between Light and the Elements, as in Bonaventure.[13]

If prudence represents for Philibert de l'Orme the Virtue that predominates over all the others, it will thus not be surprising to discover in the symbolism of *Prudentia*, not only a key to his ethico-geometrical transformation of matter, but also a unique synthesis of his theories on architecture. Already, in the *Epistre au Roy* of the *Nouvelles Inventions*, he refers to Salomon's wisdom, Plato's knowledge and Aaron's prudence. But with the *Premier Tome*, Philibert quotes the Scriptures more carefully while considerably refining the notion of prudence.

> *For, as Gavarre writes in his* Recueil des mots dorés: *"So high is the gift of prudence, that by its mediation one amends the past, orders the present and prepares the future. From this, one can infer that anybody*

---

11 Ibid, p. 186.

12 Ibid, p. 200.

13 Ibid, p. 203.

who lacks this beautiful virtue of prudence, will not recover what he has lost, maintain what he possesses, nor find what he is hoping for. This is the reason why I always depict the Architect holding the compass in his hand, in order to teach him that he must conduct his works (as we have said) through measure; and I also accompany the compass with a serpent, so that he remember (the architect) to be well advised, prudent and cunning, like the already mentioned serpent." [14]

The sermonizing tone which strongly marks the beginning of this excerpt could almost hide the recurrence of the tripartite character of Prudence. We have seen that Philibert knew it through Ficino's description of Serapis: It now reveals its full potential as the hinge between the three dimensions of Time: Past, Present, and Future. This makes Prudence a key to embodiment, and the most appropriate virtue with which to deal with *temporality*.[15]

The terms used by Philibert to fuse *work* and *temporality* (précogitation, discrétion, prévoyance)[16] have a strong fla

91 The Three Faces of Prudence Fifteenth-century Florentine relief Victoria and Albert Museum, London

14 *P.T.* 50 v°.

15 These three faces of prudence must have had very old origins. It is fully described by Macrobius in his *Saturnalia* (I-XX). See also Edgar Wind: *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, p. 259. Generally, Prudence was represented by three animal heads: a bear, a lion, and a dog. There is a beautiful example of this in Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1549). See Slatkine, Reprints, v. 2, Genève, 1981, pp.217-218.

16 See P.T, folio 91.

vor of alchemical recommendations as we can usually find them in the treatises that teach how to listen to the rhythms inscribed in matter. It is precisely in this sense that the mysterious Fulcanelli analyses the four guardians of François II and Anne de Bretagne's tomb kept in St. Peters Cathedral in Nantes (France). This wonderful sculptural masterpiece of mediaeval art was well known in the XVIth century. Its design combines the traditional late Gothic tomb with *gisants*, and four allegorical figures of the Virtues at the four corners: Justice holds a sword in her right hand and an open book with a balance in her left hand; Temperance carries a clock in her right hand and a bit and a bridle in the left; Fortitude is dressed in armour and holds a fissured Tower (the true Tour de force) out of which she extirpates a gigantic dragon. Finally, Prudence has two opposed faces: she holds a convex miror in her right hand and a compass in the left, just on top of a serpent coiling at her feet.

In his *Art and Architecture in France: 1500-1700*, Anthony Blunt locates the work of sculptor Michel Colombe at the crossroads between late Gothic, Italian works and French Renaissance. He also acknowledges the crucial role played by Jean Perréal, whose design allowed the sculptor to overcome the idealizations so typical of Italian influences.[17] In fact, when Blunt wrote this book in 1953, he could not fully appreciate the importance of Perréal in the history of alchemy, since the miniature which ornated his major work "Complainte de Nature à l'Alchimiste Errant" has only been found again in New York in 1963.[18] Fulcanelli's alchemical speculations on the Virtues are pertinent on many levels, precisely because they open on "polysemic values" certainly necessary, first to see through the modern moral surface attached to the Virtues, and secondly to reach an approach of *Techne* that can be truly symbolic. Indeed, as shown by Fulcanelli, aside from the Christian interpretation of the cardinal Virtues, there was what he calls: "A second

---

17 See Blunt, pp 40-41: "They are as far from the tortured Burgundian late gothic style, and belong in their calm to the style of Loire, in which Colombe had grown up.

18 This rediscovery had as a major result the correction of the classical error which attributed the paternity of the manuscript to Jean de Meung, thus driving many researchers to suspect the *Roman de la Rose* of having a purely hermetic content! On this very revealing issue, see Ch. Sterling: "Une peinture certaine de Perréal enfin retrouvée", *L'Œil*, juillet-août 1963. See also the detailed commentary given by Van Lennep in his first work *Art et alchimie· Étude de l'iconographie hermétique et de ses influences*, Bruxelles, 1966, particularly Appendice B.

Forti:ude with the Tour de Force in François II and Anne de Bretagne's tomb (Nantes, 1502). See Fulcanelli, *Demeures*, vol.2 p.247.

Prudence with the convex mirror in François II and Anne de Bretagne's tomb (Nantes, 1502). See Fulcanelli, *Demeures*, vol.2 p.283.

teaching, secret, profane, generally unknown, and belonging to the material realm of acquisitions, of ancestral learnings".[19]

This teaching is certainly obscure on many points, being a complex mixture of cabalistic dialectics and iconographic symbolism, and although it cannot be the purpose of this work to discuss either its value or its endurance, there is however no doubt in our own mind about its convergence in the "imagination of matter" already encountered in Philibert's treatises. Thus, focussing on Prudence, an alchemical description of Perréal and Colombe's work underlines the following elements: Prudence is represented wearing the great philosopher's mantle. The face is a Janus-like figure whose backside face is that of an old man with a beautiful beard (contemplating the past) while the front face has the physiognomy of a young woman looking toward the future. Prudence, as we already mentionned, mirrors herself in a *convex* surface while she holds an open compass in the other hand. The theme of the hermaphrodite is very characteristic of both the planetary aspects of Mercury and generally speaking, of Hermetic endeavors. It often corresponds to the *Rebis* (the double thing) which represents the apex of transmutation and the recollection of an original state. In Prudence, this symbol reappears strongly but it is important to point out its non-dualistic meaning. There is a close relationship between the three eyes of the *Good Architect*,[20] the three heads of *Serapis* and the Janus-like head made of two faces, plus the mirrored one. Or in Fulcanelli's own terms, it has been so:

> *Since the origins, and through an idea analogous to Dante's who gave three eyes to his* Prudence, *the mediaeval sculptors* [21] *gave two faces to this Virtue.*[22]

Perréal certainly knew the deep meaning of the convex lens mirror, the main propriety of which is to reduce the size of shapes while keeping their Proportions, explicitly connecting every macrocosm to its microcosms. Similarly, the snake, a classical attribute of Prudence, can be paralleled with the dragon, a representation of the Mercury of the early stages on the Great Work which is also extracted by Fortitude out of its protective gangue, as it

---

19 *Les demeures philosophales*, Tome II, p. 239.

20 P.T. folio 283. Philibert gives one eye for the past, one for the present and of course for the future!

21 Fulcanelli called them "imagiers". But it is ironic to notice that de l'Orme calls them "Tailleurs d'histoires" which is certainly difficult to translate, either by "story-cutters" or even "history-carvers".

22 See *Demeures Philosophales*, Tome II, p. 240.

happens in reality in the process of amalgamation. Since the Virtues belong to a homogenous whole, they must be analyzed in a dynamic manner, in order to follow the transformation of the emblems themselves. Thus the dragon of Fortitude is different from the serpent in Prudence writes Fulcanelli:

> *Already, the mirror told us about the* subject *of the Art, the double face about the necessary alliance of the subject with the chosen metal: the serpent on the fatal death and the glorious resurrection of the body, offspring of this union. This time, the compass will give us the necessary complementary indications about the Proportions.*[23]

When commenting on the intensive interplay between the compass and the serpent, Fulcanelli shows that Prudence is, among the other Virtues, the one which keeps the major secret of the Work: the artifice of *dissolution*. What he calls the *Secretum Secretorum* and which encompasses the enigmatic *Solve et coagula*, is there represented by an alternative between the absorption of light in the mirror, the digestion of images, and the rising of the serpent up towards the compass.

> *This is what the masters teach, Fulcanelli writes, when they order to* Kill the quick *(tuer le vif), to resurrect the dead (the still), to "incorporate" the Spirits and to reanimate the corporifications.*[24]

Such an esoteric dive leaves us with Prudence as an epitome of the alchemical Art on the one side, and on the other an architect who uses the same Virtue to summarize his theory of architecture. Now are we really so far from Philibert's intention when we invoke an alchemical commentary? If we remember the two famous engravings at the end of the *Premier Tome*, the allegories of the *Good* and *Bad Architects*, we have seen that Philibert wants the apprentice to dwell in the *Philosophical Garden* in order to gather the beautiful fruit of knowledge under the tutelage of the Hermetic elm (Orme), i.e. Hermes himself. But retrospectively, before acting, the apprentice as well as the confirmed architect must withdraw to a dark retreat or to the obscurity of a grotto, for it is only through refinement of Prudence that the wrong way can be perceived as well as avoided. (The *Tribola*, which jeopardize his movements, appear clearly on the ground.[25]) This seems to be the real ethical

---

23 *Demeures*, Tome II, p. 299.

24 *Demeures*, Tome VI, p. 285.

25 As pointed out by Dr. Frascari, the presence of these Roman war devices at the feet of the Prudent Architect here means that the architect's path is properly speaking, full of "tribulations"!

meaning of the engraving. De l'Orme, of course, does not explicitly refer to alchemy as a "science" among others. But this remains perfectly consistent: the Ouroboros snake eats its own tail and the first quality of the real Alchemist is to be prudent! Beyond speculation, there is still enough material and evidence that the Virtues must be considered outside the realm of abstract words.

However, since analogical games must open many doors, if they are fully justified, we should not hesitate to follow other hermeneutical paths if we are to understand *Prudence* as an architectural emblem. The symbolism of the hinge strangely reappears along with the pagan deities whom we already met, Janus and Cardea. *Cardo*, the ethymological root of *Cardinal*, meaning *pivot*, seems to confirm our hypothesis of the Virtues as representing four axes, four articulations of any embodied work. This same cardinality, of which the Cross is certainly the strongest symbol, represents for de l'Orme a way to qualify places and therefore to ground a building. As for the Elements themselves, it is important to perceive the Virtues as a *dynamism* rather than as static categories of inhibiting morality. Philibert himself uses St. Bernard's terms about Prudence: "portière et voicturière" for, as an opening and a vehicle, it points towards the four aspects of any true *virtuosity*,[26] the Virtues embodying the four qualities of any true poetic *Praxis*. The issue becomes now to clarify their concreteness through an understanding of the transition from Elements to Virtues. It might seem paradoxical, but *The Art of Memory*, on which Frances Yates produced a remarkable study, brings new insights on the crucial role of Prudence in the art of making places. The importance of the imagination of places for the ancient art of memory is well known, although, like architecture, it started to loose some of its roots within the body with the development of printing. One knows how carefully Roman and mediaeval orators used to prepare their speeches in specially designed places. As Frances Yates writes,

> *The formation of the* Loci *is of the greatest importance, for the same set of* loci *can be used again and again for remembering different material... The* loci *are like the wax tablets which remain when what is written on them has be erased and are ready to be written on again.*[27]

Many Roman rhetoricians have written on the subject of the relationship between images and places, but what Yates shows and which is of interest to

---

26 This relationship between Virtue and virtuosity was pointed out by Dr. Alberto Pérez-Gomez.

27 F. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p. 7.

us in the case of Philibert's ethics, is the debate around the issue of memory as part of *Prudentia*. Cicero, for example, in his *De Inventione*, describes this virtue as follows:

> *Its parts are memory, intelligence, foresight (memoria, intelligentsia, providentia). Memory is the faculty by which the mind recalls what has happened. Intelligence is the faculty by which it ascertains what is. Foresight is the faculty by which it is seen that something is going to occur before it occurs.*[28]

Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas will further develop the tripartite aspect of Prudence in their scholastic reappraisal of Aristotelian Ethics. In fact, behind a purely rhetorical debate, a vision of being was put in question. Thomas Aquinas adressed the duality which opposed memory as unique experience, to memory as reminiscences, a theory inspired by Aristotle. In other words: Artificial memory against natural memory. But when analyzing what differentiated him from Albertus Magnus, Yates shows that:

> *Thomas Aquinas states even more clearly than Albertus, that it is artificial memory,* memory exercised and improved by art, *which is one of the proofs that memory is part of Prudence.*[29]

This is the reason why one has to keep in mind the fact that Prudence describes before anything else a *Practical wisdom;* and its temporal character precisely comes from its power to mature the different stages of the *Vita Activa*. De l'Orme is not mistaken when he raises Prudence to the level of a guardian of architectural practice, because the body was to him not only a place and a mirror of memory, i.e. a "memory theater" but an immanent symbol. For Philibert, matter *is* memory and thus requires to be manipulated with a lot of care and respect. Again, one must remember that the architect's work was still part of a living *physis* in which any action could induce a natural but frightening re-action. In fact, de l'Orme did not "introduce" prudence in architecture, as Blunt states, but he rather felt the need to remind his readers that the art of building was still under the power of Prudence. His theory is very much rhetorical in this respect, for it deals with the ambiguous becoming of architectural building, in which action also means disruption.

Operating in a Nature whose abundance was still visible everywhere, the mediaeval artist often reacted by an explicit cult of the grotesque, of the monstruous. Frances Yates even suggested that the Art of Memory could be a

---

28 Quoted by F Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p. 20.

29 Ibid, p 74

possible explanation for the mediaeval love of the grotesque and the *idiosyncratic* in general.[30] It appears that the magical fascination for monsters was a direct consequence of the Graeco-Roman cosmologies of *Change*, more exactly of movement as qualitative change. As de l'Orme remarks, true prudence is not the "vulgar's guile", it is an orientation of the soul, and within the context of Architecture, it is the art of places insofar as it respects the presence of places, their own "individuality":

> *It is thus necessary never to do things which go against the nature of the place, which has such a strength, that even when constrained through human artifice and invention, it always finds its own way.*[31]

This animistic conception of *place* is a recurrent preoccupation in both treatises and Philibert's understanding of experience is not to be framed in the forthcoming empirism of XVIIIth-century Science. As he writes,

> *the architect must be "quick" (diligent) to note and see through experience what nature does by itself without being constrained, for in any place it is very difficult and almost impossible to fight against it.*[32]

We can certainly relate this last quote to de l'Orme's personal experience, for although he was Henri II's favorite architect, he also had many enemies, particularly the Bishop of Lorraine, a member of the de Guise family. Indeed, Philibert designed a project to raise the level of the Seine river up to the Bishop's property in Meudon. But in spite of a lot of expenses, this operation ended with a disappointing failure.[33]

As a corollary to such a fear of Physis, one finds the formulation of a philosophy of *alteration*. Aristotle, in his *Physics*, had already used an analogy with architecture when dealing with the definition of movement. For him, the act of building is only fully realized when the materials can be said to participate, in other words, when they are in "motion":

> *Since any kind of being may be distinguished as either potential or completely realized, the functionning of what is potential as potential, that is* being in movement: *thus the functioning of the alterable as alterable is* qualitative alteration.[34]

---

30 See F. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p. 104.

31 *P.T*, folio 8 v°.

32 *P.T.*, folio 20.

33 On this biographical point, see Henri Clouzot: *Philibert de l'Orme*, p. 69. The historian considers that it is the general explanation of the famous criticism of Philibert de l'Orme in his *Discours Admirables*.

34 *Physics III*, 201 a, p. 42. Richard Hope's translation.

In such a cosmological context, any action becomes a kind of *alteration*, of qualitative change, even more if the issue is the design of a place. Philibert insists on this last point many times when speaking about the Elements. We have seen his concern for winds: "which *alter* air, air and the humors of the body and the spirits within the blood,"[35] the intention and the words are similar about waters, which should be taken into account:

> *Otherwise in a few days, the water in which one cleans fish, meats, tripes, dishes and pots, will create such a putrefaction and stench that it will be difficult to live a long time in this place without catching an illness caused by the infections which corrupt the air and* alter *the humors of the body, with the spirit.*[36]

This introduction of the philosophy of alteration now enables us to summarize our journey within the engraving of the *Prudent Architect*. Philibert wants him to be so, because any action, being an alteration, is also a modification, the making of an otherness: the place with a construction has become an *"alter"* place. But in order not to take this ethical attitude for a kind of inhibition, a reticence, one must remember that for de l'Orme, *God* is ultimately the only true archetypal demiurge before Nature or even Dedalus.[37] At the same time, the very title of his first treatise, *Les Nouvelles Inventions*, along with the numerous encouragements to use creative geometrical artifice as they occur in the *Premier Tome*, can be taken as evidence that Philibert's intention is more to teach active Prudence than to refrain from action. Similarly, stating that Prudence *is* action, is no longer an *aporia* when we evoke the alchemical notion of Chaos, as we attempted to delineate it in Chapter One. In this cosmological horizon, *Physis* is by definition alive, in movement, and therefore always incomplete, never finished, porous and fissured, so to speak. Man becomes the link who can intervene in this "in-between" world of unsatisfied potential. This last point is crucial if we wish to get closer to the dominant state of mind as expressed by most of Philibert's great contemporaries, from Rabelais to Paracelsus. Some commentators even go so far as stating that Rabelais' work, for example, is entirely articulated and sustained by the notion of *alteration*[38]: A notion

---

35 *P.T.*, folio 14.

36 *P.T.*, folio 52 v°. Emphasis mine.

37 See *P.T.*, folio 4 v°.

38 See for example the most Hermetic of them all: Claude Gaignebet who shows in "*A plus hault sens*" that Panurge is another way of saying Hermes: since Πανουργοσ means "the one who puts everything into work" (Celui qui met tout en œuvre). But Gaignebet also refers

which it is crucial to see in parallel with de l'Orme's *thirst* [39] for prudence. Rabelais was certainly a proponent of such a philosophy of alteration. From his *Book II*, entitled *Pantagruel* (although written first), to the final discovery of the Holy Bottle, Panurge is the one who always *acts*, he is the dynamic aspect of Being. His giant "companion" obviously has a lot of power, but needs him for the same reciprocal character that unites macrocosm and microcosm. Rabelais writes that he was *Pantagruelique* from his special birth:

> *And because Pantagruel was born on that very day, his father gave him the name he did: for* Panta, *in Greek, is equivalent to* all, *and* Gruel *in the Hagarene language (Arab) is as much as* altéré: *by this meaning to infer that at the hour of the child's nativity, the world was all* changed *(altéré), and also seeing, in a spirit of prophecy, that one day his son would be ruler over the* thirsty *(altérés).*[40]

The interplay between a Demiurge who creates a chaotic insatisfaction and the one who operates in this space of desire becomes ironic with Rabelais' cynicism. With *Gaster* who eats to create, with the *Pantagruelion*, a magic herb regenerated in fire, Rabelais not only understood alteration as creation but he celebrated its embodied fertility. The entire human race becomes ruled by this *Alterare*, this thirst for change and otherness. On the other hand, "désaltérer" is to bring something or someone back to its original state, to "un-change" it.

Philibert de l'Orme's architectural projects also were inspired by a philosophy of alteration. The first example is probably the famous project for the transformation of an unfinished mediaeval castle through geometrical operations. It is described precisely in *Book III*,[41] which starts with the celebration of Prudence, and is eloquently entitled:

> *The artifice of geometry is useful when one wants to transform one or two badly started and imperfect houses into a beautiful and perfect*

---

to other works, particularly to a German thesis by Ludwig Schrader, "*Panurge und Hermes, zum urspring eines charakters bei Rabelais*". Bonn, Romanisches Seminar der Universitat, 1958.

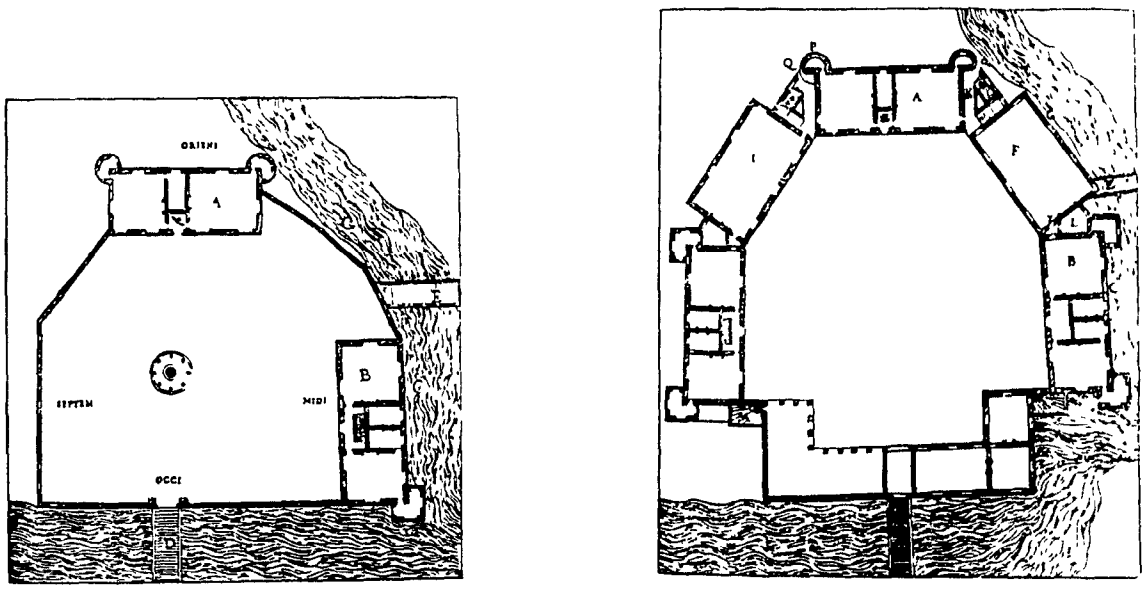
39 In French, *alteration* has two meanings: a) thirst and b) modification.

40 See Rabelais, *Book II*, 2-3, p. 224. I used part of Cohen's translation p. 176, but modified it where it fails to to take into consideration the dynamic ambiguity which makes the notion of Alterity so unique.

41 Folio 66-67.

house, accomodating all the parts and the members of the old building with the new.[42]

The original plan for Saint- Maur is an another example of cardinal foundation, not so much because of du Bellay's rank in the church hierarchy, but rather because the building was designed "in such a way that the four façades (faces) always looked at the four angles of the sky".[43] And finally the "Trompe d'Anet", the squinch, when considered in the sense of an *Architectural Trope* whose geometry is revealed by Philibert with the help of stereotomy, is probably his ultimate alteration. Indeed, it includes his own "error", its own falsification, through an alteration of meaning (tropism), a rhetorical trick which indeed put the engraver in great trouble when he had to reproduce it on folio 89. Ironically, it was to remain the only distorted memory of such a *tour de force.*



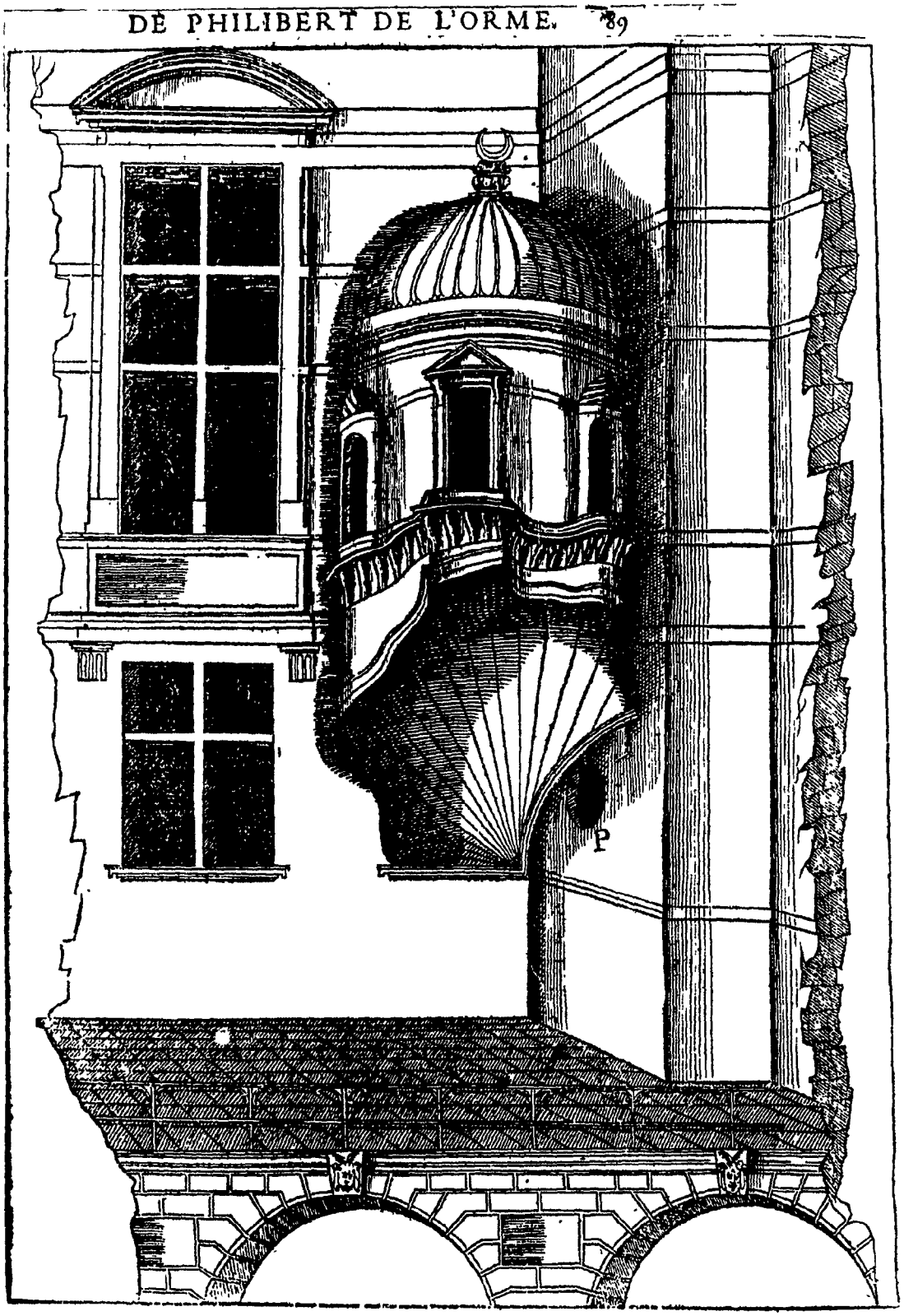
Transformation of a Mediaeval castle, folios 66 & 67.

Thus we can say that the marriage of Prudence and geometry is what prevented de l'Orme from abstract instrumentalism when he wrote his practical "guide". The stereotomical traces correspond practically speaking to

---

42 *P.T.*, folio 65.

43 See *P.T.*, folio 17 v°. Henri Clouzot describes it fully in "Saint-Maur, Paradis de Salubrité, Aménités, ... et délices". *Études rabelaisiennes*, n°VII - 1909, pp. 259-284. and shows very well that Philibert had to face the other negative side of alterations when he modified the façade for Catherine de Médicis.



Trompe du château d'Anet, folio 89.

fine lines executed with a *dry-point*. This is essential to remember, for it emphasizes that stereotomy represented the invisible, whether it responded to the elemental movements of matter or to ephemereal marks waiting to disappear in the cut. In fact, until the end, in the conclusion of the *Premier Tome*, he will multiply the ethical comments, eventually quoting Salomon's words:

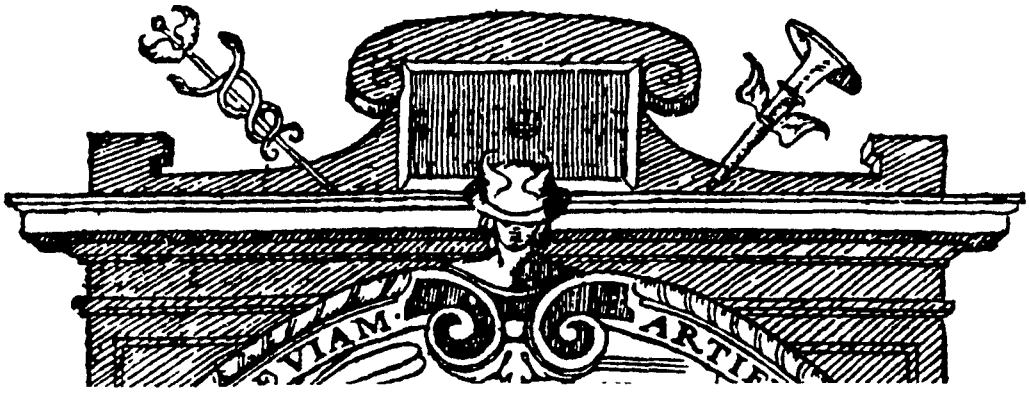
> *"Beatus homo cui affluit Prudentia, melior est acquisitio eius, negotiatone auri et argenti."*

In order words, Prudence is worth more than the acquisition of gold and silver. However, from Ronsard to Palissy, and of course the Guise, de l'Orme's contemporaries criticized him for his financial situation and sense of power, to the point of accusing him to live at the expense of the King and the Pope! The last lines of his conclusion can certainly puzzle the historian, but also the theoretician who lies dormant in every commentator. It is certain that de l'Orme favoured *vita activa* over *vita contemplativa*, and his quest for wisdom appears to be an extremely practical one. To him, Prudence did not restrain action, for it *was* the basis of action, its *fondement*, if not action itself. One can certainly regret that his insistence on Practical Wisdom made him forget the need for a Poetic Wisdom, thus leaving his followers with an amputated, or to use the precise term, an *altered* ethics, particularly experienced as such by following generations less versed in the mediaeval sense of globality. This is why we think that Anthony Blunt was incorrect in stating that Philibert *introduced* Prudence in French architecture As the English biographer himself concludes, de l'Orme's influence was going to be minor during the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, for I think that his sense of ethics must have been seen as uprooted and probably anachronistic.

Following Philibert, the exclusive concerns for the orders was to legitimate a new sense of Nature, and thus ground ethics in a reformulated understanding of primitive architecture. We cannot say that Laugier's understanding of the orders was as embodied in the Elements as de l'Orme. From the three heads of Serapis to the two faces of Prudentia, a strange lapse of memory made it almost natural to fall into dualism.

CONCLUSION

> *Pour qu'une montagne puisse jouer le rôle de Mont Analogue, concluais-je, il faut* que son sommet soit inaccessible, mais sa base accessible *aux êtres humains tels que la nature les a faits. Elle doit être* unique *et elle doit* exister géographiquement. *La porte de l'invisible doit être visible.*
>
> René Daumal, *Le Mont Analogue,* Paris, 1981, pp.18-19.



The purpose of this work was to study some of the major engravings wich ornate the *Premier Tome de l'Architecture.* However, much remains to be done if we are to understand the role of Hemeticism in Renaissance architecture. In de l'Orme's treatises only, numerous images need further exploration, and many plates bear cabalistic signs that cannot be interpreted as mere engravors' marks. [1] The fact that Philibert does not comment on them must not surprise us, for as he quotes just prior to a description of the *Prudent Architect:*

> *Omnia tempus habent (says the wise man) tempus tacendi, et tempus loquendi. Thus granting ourself, with this sentence, the freedom to speak at one time, and to remain silent at another.*[2]

---

[1] See for example Chapter 3 p. 66 of present work, folio 93. This plan of the *Trompe d'Anet* is marked with a black flower on the right-hand side. In the *Premier Tome,* see also the following folios: 79; 93; 98; 99 v°; 104; 105; 106; 139; 140; 143; 151; 153; 154; 159; 171v°; 210; 211 v°; 218; 219.

[2] *P.T.,* folio 51

The *Prudent Architect* was considered by Philibert as being ruled by Hermes When we look very carefully at the hatched frame above Hermes' head (see p. 89), there appears another of those mysterious signs, well hidden but well located. In the context of Renaissance mysticism, still an erudite amalgam of Christian beliefs an Gnostic texts, it is difficult to offer a rational explanation

• Is this sign the Iacchus of Dionysan mysteries, first associated with Bacchus and later, in the Middle Ages, to Jacques, patron saint of alchemists?

• Or is it rather the Ichtus, which along with the stylized representation of a Fish, was a symbol for Christ, and often the only distinctive mark that appeared on the pediment of Christian Catacombs.[3] Ichtus means *fish* in Greek, and for the alchemists (Hermes' sons), this fish was best represented by the Remora (*Echeneis Naucrates*).[4]

Rabelais evokes the strange powers of this litte fish in the famous Chapters on Gaster. One remembers that Philibert de l'Orme is symbolically associated to Gaster's creative genius, and is explicitly named in *Book 4* Rabelais tells us how Gaster invented an ingenious method of being neither wounded nor touched by cannonballs, through a way of making bullets turn back against the enemy!

> *Gaster did not find this a difficult invention (...) for does not the Echeneis, a very feeble fish, stop the mightiest ships afloat in spite of all the winds, and hold them back even when a hurricane is blowing? Furthermore, does not the* flesh *of this fish, preserved in salt, draw gold out of the deepest wells ever sounded?*[5]

Although Philibert probably never was a true alchemist, for we can doubt whether his busy life allowed him to devote much time to the Great Work, it is however clear that he viewed his task as analogous to the alchemical quest. The development of a dynamic awareness of materiality, which is an undeniable achievement of hermetic symbolism, comes from the

---

3 Ichtus is the Roman transcription of Jesus' Greek monogram *Iêsous Christos Theou Uios Sôtêr*, which means: Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Saviour.

4 On this issue, see René Alleau, *Aspects de l'Alchimie traditionnelle*, particularly the foreword by Eugène Canseliet, p. 20 He comments on Arthur Rimbaud's alchemical sonnet about the vowels: " Le dernier vers du sonnet fameux chante le petit poisson d'Hermes, l'*Ichthys* des catacombes chrétiennes, la rémore des vieux alchimistes, cette pastille, minuscule eu égard à la masse minérale engagée, qui en est la partie sulfureuse, purissime et spirituelle, recueillie, laborieusement, au cours du Second Œuvre, et dont la cassure s'offre superbement brillante et violacée·

O l'Oméga! rayon violet de ses yeux!"

5 Rabelais, *Book 4*, Chapter 62, Cohen's translation p.583, emphasis mine

fact that the referents were always traced back to the everyday experience of the body. This is particularly clear in Rabelais' works, the intentionality of which is openly thaumaturgic. A careful analysis of de l'Orme's text allows for the same ultimate intentions to emerge. The four Elements, conceived as emblems of movements — Proportion understood in the sense of *analogia* — the microcosm-macrocosm interplay — and even the Cardinal Virtues have little sense if they are not seen as deeply connected to embodied practical experiences. This pragmatism is not, however, to be understood as an early version of materialism, for matter is never devoid of spirit in the XVIth century.

This thesis was intended as a companion to some analogous treatises because distinctions cannot be made between various images which can only be connected within the framework of true analogical thought. Rabelais' work, for instance, can be seen as analogous to any of the other architectural treatises, not only because of the very explicit interest the physician manifested for architecture, but also because of the common goals existing between medicine and architecture. As we have seen, Rabelais never rejects the use of analogies, but always the institution of a dogma. His great lesson is to show how dogmatism is always a threat to spiritual endeavors when they lose their roots in the physical body.

Today, in a time when the very act of writing a treatise on architecture is obsolete, the only possible analogical treatise is the living body. Not the objectified substratum of mechanistic medicine, but the whole, dynamic body, which truly encompasses the world and can never be totally circumscribed nor limited. No wonder architects find themselves to be manipulators of dead matter, in a cultural environment dominated by the need to own or separate. But to deal with embodiment only in terms of taking over and control is not only reductive, but also fruitless, improductive, so to speak. Merleau-Ponty thought of solving this weakness of conceptualism by introducing the notion of flesh, which he saw as a chiasm, an intertwining.

> *In a sense, if we were to make completely explicit the* architectonics *of the human body, its ontological framework and how it sees itself and hears itself, we would see that the structure of its mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given in it.*[6]

---

6 *The Visible and the Invisible,* p.155.

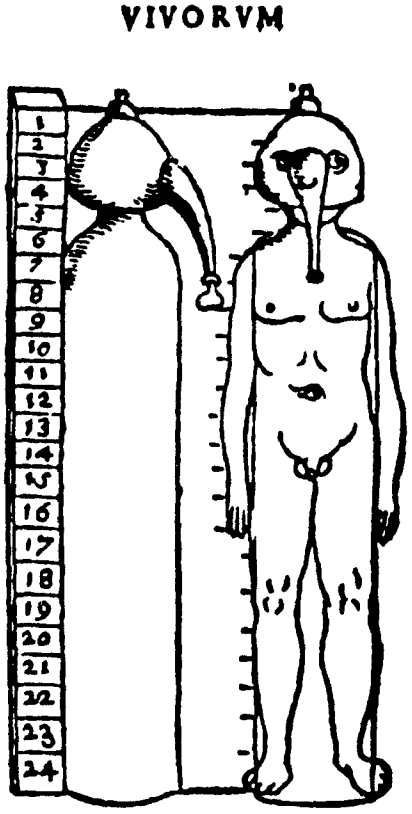
Rabelais, as de l'Orme, already knew that flesh is an ultimate analogy because of its reversibility and reciprocal character. Through the disturbed voice of Panurge, who as usual misunderstands the teaching of the Bible, Rabelais criticizes those who do not build:

> *As for your grand builders-up of dead stones, there is nothing written about them in my book of life. I only build up* live stones, *by which I mean men.* [7]

This strangely found an echo in de l'Orme's summary of his life:

> *And instead of building up castles and houses I will learn to build up people.* [8]

Indeed, both Panurge (de Rabelais), and l'Orme (de Philibert), knew that the body is never a static and finished substance but always a learning process, an apprenticeship, an athanor.



De fornace anatomica.
Fourneau anatomique, in:
G. DORN, *Aurora*, Bâle, 1577.

---

7 Rabelais, *Book 3*, Chapter 6, Cohen's translation pp.303-304.

8 See "Instruction de Philibert de l'Orme", a manuscript kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and reproduced in Blunt's biography, Appendix C, p.150.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alberti, Leon Battista. On the Art of Building in Ten Books. London, 1988.

Alleau, René. Aspects de l'Alchimie traditionnelle. Paris, 1986.

Alleau, René. La Science des symboles. Paris, 1982.

Allers, Rudolf. Microcosmus: From Anaximandros to Paracelsus, in "Traditio", New York, 1944.

Antonioli, Roland. Rabelais et la Médecine. Études Rabelaisiennes Tome IV, Genève,1980.

Aristotle. Physics. University of Nebraska Press, 1961.

Bachelard, Gaston. Fragments d'une poétique du feu. Paris, 1988.

Bachelard, Gaston. L'air et les songes, Essai sur l'imagination du mouvement. Paris, 1985.

Bachelard, Gaston. L'eau et les rêves, Essai sur l'imagination de la matière. Paris, 1985.

Bachelard, Gaston. La psychanalyse du feu, Paris, 1986.

Bachelard, Gaston. La terre et les rêveries de la volonté. Paris, 1986.

Bachelard, Gaston. La terre et les rêveries du repos. Paris, 1986.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. Rabelais and His World. Indiana University Press, 1984.

Beaudrillard, Jean. The Ecstasy of Communication. New York, 1988.

Blunt, Anthony. Art and Architecture in France: 1500-1700. London, 1953.

Blunt, Anthony. Philibert De l'Orme. Brionne, 1986.

Blunt, Anthony. Philibert De l'Orme. London, 1958.

Cardano, Girolamo. Les Livres intitulez de la Subtilité, Paris, 1578.

Cassirer, Ernst. The Renaissance Philosophy of Man. University of Chicago Press, 1948.

Castiglioni, Arturo. A History of Medicine. New York, 1947.

Catalogue De Architectura. Les traités d'architecture de la Renaissance, colloque de Tours 1981. Paris, 1988.

Catalogue Les Siècles d'or de la Médecine. Milan, 1989.

Chastel, André. The Myth of the Renaissance. Geneva, 1969.

Chastel, André. The Crisis of the Renaissance (1520-1600). Geneva, 1986.

Chastel, André. Renaissance méridionale: Italie 1460-1500. Paris, 1965.

Clouzot, Henri. "Philibert de l'Orme, grand architecte du roi Mégiste", in Revue du XIV^{e} siècle, vol.4, 1916, pp. 143-161; vol.5, 1917-1918, pp.75-81; Revue des Études Rabelaisiennes vol.8, 1921, pp.243-348.

Clouzot, Henri. Philibert de l'Orme. 1910.

Clouzot, Henri. "Saint-Maur", in Revue des Études Rabelaisiennes, vol. VII, 1909, pp. 259-284.

Couliano, Ioan P. Éros et magie à la Renaissance. Paris, 1984.

Cox-Rearick, Janet. Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art: Pontorno, Leo X, and the Two Cosinus, Princeton, 1984.

Crosland, Maurice. Historical Studies in the Language of Chemistry. London, 1962.

Davis, Margaret Daly. Pierro della Francesca's Mathematical Treatises. Ravenne, 1977.

De l'Orme, Philibert. Traités d'Architecture. Paris, 1988.

Debus, Allen G. Chemistry, Alchemy and the New Philosophy. London, 1987.

Debus, Allen G. The Chemical Dream of the Renaissance. Cambridge, 1978.

Dixon, Laurinda S. Alchemical Imagery in Bosch's Garden of Delights. Ann Arbor, 1981.

Duhem, Pierre Maurice Marie. Le Système du monde: histoire des doctrines cosmologiques de Platon à Copernic. Paris, 1913-1959.

Durand, Gilbert. Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire. Paris, 1984.

Durand, Gilbert. L'imagination symbolique. Paris, 1989.

Emery, Kent, Jr. "Reading the World Rightly and Squarely; Bonaventure's Doctrine of the Cardinal Virtues", in Traditio, Vol. 39, 1983, pp. 183-200.

Faivre, Antoine, et al. L'Alchimie. in "Cahiers de l'Hermétisme", Paris, 1978

Faivre, Antoine, et al. L'Astrologie. in "Cahiers de l'Hermétisme", Paris, 1983.

Faivre, Antoine, et al. Paracelse. in "Cahiers de l'Hermétisme", Paris, 1980.

Faivre, Antoine, et al. Présence d'Hermès Trismégiste. id., Paris, 1988.

Febvre, Lucien. Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVI^{e} siècle. Paris, 1942.

Febvre, Lucien. Life in Renaissance France. Harvard University Press, 1977.

Festugiere, André-Jean. Épicure et ses dieux. Paris, 1985.

Festugiere, André-Jean. La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste. 4 vol. Paris, 1944-1954.

Ficino, Marsilio. Liber de Vita - The Book of Life. Dallas, 1980.

"Filarete" (Averlino, Antonio Alie Piero.) Treatise on Architecture. London, 1965.

Fiola-Berry, Alice. Rabelais: Homo Logos. Chapel Hill, 1979.

Focillon, Henri, Vie des formes. Paris, 1984.

Fontaine, Marie-Madeleine. "Quaresmeprenant: l'Image littéraire et la contestation de l'analogie médicale", in Rabelais in Glasgow. University of Glasgow, 1984, pp. 87-111.

Frascari, Marco. "Professional Use of Signs in Architecture", in Journal of Architectural Education, vol.36, #2, pp. 16-23.

Fulcanelli. Les Demeures philosophales et le symbolisme hermétique dans ses rapports avec l'art sacré et l'ésotérisme du Grand Œuvre. 2 volumes. Paris, 1966-1979.

Gadamer, Hans Georg, The Relevance of the Beautiful, Cambridge, 1986.

Gaignebet, Claude. À Plus Haut Sens: l'ésotérisme spirituel et charnel de Rabelais. 2 volumes. Paris, 1986.

Garin, Eugenio. Astrology in the Renaissance: the Zodiac of Life. Boston, 1983.

Garin, Eugenio. Moyen Âge et Renaissance. Paris, 1969.

Garrison, Fielding Hudson. An Introduction to the History of Medicine: With Medical Chronology. Philadelphia, 1963.

Garver, Eugene. Machiavelli and the History of Prudence. Madison, 1987.

Giorgio Martini, Francesco di. Trattati di architettura ingegneria e Arte militare. Milan, 2 vol, 1967.

Graves, Robert. The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth. London, 1971.

Grenet, Paul. Les origines de l'analogie philosophique dans les dialogues de Platon. Paris, 1948.

Guillaume, Jean. "Philibert de l'Orme: un traité différent", in Les Traités d'Architecture à la Renaissance, Paris, 1988, pp.347-354.

Gusdorf, Georges. Les Sciences humaines et la pensée occidentale. Paris, 1966.

Harris, James Rendel. The Origin of the Cult of Hermes. Manchester, 1929.

Hermes Trismegistus. Corpus Hermeticum. Trad. A.J. Festugière, 4 vol., Paris, 1945-54.

Hillman, James, et al. Facing the Gods. Dallas, 1988.

Hillman, James. Re-visionning Psychology. New York, 1975.

Hutin, Serge & Caron, M. The Alchemists. New York, Grove Press, 1961.

Kerenyi, Karl. Hermes, Guide of Souls. Zurich, 1976.

Klein, Robert. La forme et l'intelligible. Paris, 1970.

Klibansky, Raymond. Panofsky, Erwin. Fritz, Saxl. Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art. London, 1964.

Koyre, Alexandre. Mystiques spirituels et Alchimistes du XVIe siècle allemand. Paris, 1971.

Kristeller, Paul Oskar. Renaissance Thought II: Papers on Humanism and the Arts. New York, 1965.

Kristeller, Paul Oskar. Renaissance Thought: the Classic, Scholastic, and Humanistic Strains. New York, 1961.

Levin, David Michael. The Body's Recollection of Being. London, 1985.

Macrobius, Ambrosius. Commentary on the Dream of Scipio. New York, 1952.

Macrobius, Ambrosius. The Saturnalia. New York, 1969.

Mallary, Masters, G.P. Rabelaisian Dialectics and the Platonic-Hermetic Tradition. New York, 1969.

Mansuy, Michel. Gaston Bachelard et les Éléments. Paris, 1967.

Mérigot, Léo. "Rabelais et l'Alchimie", in Les Cahiers d'Hermès n°1. Paris, 1947.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. The Primacy of Perception. Chicago, 1964.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. The Visible and the Invisible. Evanston, 1968.

Moore, Thomas. The Planets Within. Lewisburg, 1982.

Murray, Wright Bundy. The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Mediaeval Thought. Arbana, 1928.

Nietzche, Friedrich. La Naissance de la tragédie. Paris, 1978.

Nordenfalk, Carl. "The Five Senses in Late Mediaeval and Renaissance Art", in Journal of the Warburg and Courtland Institutes, vol. 48, 1985, pp.1-22.

Onians, Richard Broxton. The Origins of European Thought. Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988.

Otto, Walter F. Dyonysos, Myths and Cult. Dallas, 1989.

Ovid. Fastorum Libri Sex (The fasti) London, 1929.

Pacioli, Fra Luca. Divine Proportion. Paris, 1980.

Pagel, Walter. Paracelsus - An Introduction to Philosophical medicine in the Era of the Renaissance. New York, Basel, 1982.

Pagel, Walter. Religion and Neoplatonism in Renaissance Medicine. London, 1985.

Palissy, Bernard. Œuvres complètes. Edited by Paul-Antoine cap. Paris, 1844.

Panofsky, Erwin. Meaning in the Visual Arts. University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Paracelse. "Traité des trois essences premières", "Le trésor des trésors des Alchimistes", "Discours de l'Alchimie et autres écrits", Milano, 1980.

Perez-Gomez, Alberto, Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science, MIT Press, 1983.

Pérouse de Monclos, J.-M. "Horoscope de Philibert de l'Orme", in Revue de l'Art, 1986, pp.16-18

Plato. Timæus and Critias. London, 1977.

Poisson, Albert. Cinq traités d'Alchimie des plus grands philosophes. Paris,1893.

Poisson, Albert. Théories et symboles des Alchimistes. Paris, 1891.

Proclus. Commentaire sur le Timée. 5 vol. Paris, 1967.

Rabelais, François. Œuvres complètes. (Intégrale). Paris, 1973.

Reichler, Claude, et al. Le corps et ses fictions. Paris, 1983.

Schumaker, Wayne. The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: a Study in Intellectual Patterns. Los Angeles, 1979.

Secret, François. Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance. Paris, 1963.

Serres, Michel. Hermes 1. Paris, 1968.

Seznec, Jean. La survivance des dieux antiques. London, 1940.

Solmsen, Friedrich. Aristotle's System of the Physical World. New York, 1960.

Steiner, Rudolf. Mysticism at the Dawn of the Modern Age. New York, 1980.

Tafuri, Manfredo, "Discordant Harmony from Alberti to Zuccari", in Architectural Design, vol.49 #5-6, pp.36-44.

Taylor, René. "Architecture and Magic", in Essays presented to Rudolf Wittkower, New York, 1967.

Tervarent, Guy de, Attributs et symboles dans l'art profane, 1450-1600, 2 vol., Genève, 1958.

Toulmin, Stephen and Goodfield, June. The Architecture of Matter. Chicago, 1962.

Tuve, Rosemond. "Notes on the Virtues and Vices", in Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes. Part 1, vol.26, 1963, pp.263-303. Part 2, vol.27, 1964, pp.42-72.

Tuzet, Hélène. Le cosmos et l'imagination. Paris, 1965.

Valentin, Fr. Basile. Les douze clefs de la philosophie. Paris, 1956.

Van Lennep, Jacques. Alchimie: contribution à l'histoire de l'art alchimique. Bruxelles, 1985.

Van Lennep, Jacques. Art et Alchimie: étude de l'iconographie hermétique et de ses influences, Paris-Bruxelles, 1966.

Varro. On the Latin Language. 2 vol. Cambridge, 1967.

Vernant, Jean-Pierre. Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs. Paris, 1985.

Vickers, Brian. Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance. Cambridge, 1986.

Von Franz, Marie Louise. Alchemical Active Imagination. Dallas, 1979.

Walker, D.P. Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella. Warburg Institute, 1958.

Walker, D.P. "The Astral Body in Renaissance Medicine", in Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 1958, vol.21, 1958, pp.119-133.

Weinberg, F.M. The Wine and the Will: Rabelais's Bacchic Christianity. Detroit, 1972.

Westman, R.S. and McGuire, J.E. Hermeticism and the Scientific Revolution. Los Angeles, 1977.

Wind, Edgar. Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance. London, 1968.

Wittkower, Rudolf, Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism, London, 1967.

Yates, Frances A. Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition. Chicago, 1979.

Yates, Frances A. The Art of Memory. Chicago, 1966.

Yates, Frances A. "The Art of Ramon Lull: an Approach to it Through Lull's Theory of the Elements". In The Journal of the Warburg and Courtland Institute, vol. XVII, 1954.