CHAPTER TWELVE

PREGNANT COLUMNS. FROM WORD TO SHAPE

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Questa tale Entasis acompagnandosi come vedi in la littera M con epsa columna quale pare come uno corpo di femina prægnante, vel de homo che patisse la præssione de uno grave carico

Cesare Cesariano

The association between Architectura civilis and Architectura navalis has long fed the imagination of historians. From the times of Noah’s ark—house-building-world, when architecture became amphibious, thus becoming a saviour—metaphors, inferences and conjectures have persistently merged with historiographical interpretation. Their proliferation has constantly coincided with a hasty, often bizarre, analysis of sources available, giving rise to hypotheses which are sometimes rashly mistaken for theses. Entasis has played a marginal, though significant, role in this phenomenon.

Elsewhere I considered the interpretation of the Vitruvian passage on entasis, as it appears in the major architectural treatises published between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, by examining the association between quaestio adiectionis and quaestio diminutionis. In the present paper, however, I focus on the geometric constructions that have been proposed to convey the curvature assigned to a column’s profile.

The few lines dedicated by Vitruvius to entasis in the third volume of his De architectura have led interpreters to ‘fabricate’ images from words and find a satisfactory means of translating them into ‘built architecture’. Before the publication of the editio princeps of Vitruvius’s De

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1 See [7].
2 See ([37], book III): “De adiectione quae adicitur in mediis columnis quae apud graecos Entasis appellatur: in estremo libro erit formata ratio eius quemadmodum mollis et conveniens efficiatur subscripta”. See also ([37], book IV) about doric columns: “De adiectione eius quae media adaugetur uti in tertio volumine de ionicis est perscripta ita & in his transferatur”. 
Fig. 12.1: The entasis in one of the images presented by Cosimo Bartoli ([3], p. 198) in his Italian translation of Leon Battista Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria* [1].

Fig. 12.2: Examples of entasis in Luca Pacioli’s *De Divina Proportione* [29].