

THE URBAN IMAGE OF AUGUSTAN ROME

The Urban Image of Augustan Rome examines the idea and experience of the ancient city at a critical moment, when Rome became an Imperial capital. Lacking dignity, unity, and a clear image during the Republic, the urban image of Rome became focused only when the state came under the control of Augustus, the first emperor, who transformed the city physically and conceptually. Intervening in an ad hoc manner, he repaired existing public structures, added numerous new monuments, established municipal offices for urban care, and promoted an enduring aesthetic. Directed by a single vision, the cumulative results were forceful and unified. This book explores for the first time the motives for urban intervention, methods for implementation, and the sociopolitical context of the Augustan period, as well as broader design issues such as formal urban strategies and definitions of urban imagery.

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To my parents

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place.

T. S. Eliot, *Ash Wednesday*

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PREFACE

With good will one person can enter into
the world of another despite differences
in age, temperament, and culture.

Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia*, 5

Cities evoke strong responses. Each urban environment simultaneously projects hundreds of multifaceted, sometimes contradictory, impressions. A city can be friendly in one context, threatening in another, attractive or unappealing, inspiring or mundane. People respond to and remember the feeling and idea of a city more than its physical layout. The Architect Balkrishna Doshi succinctly articulated this phenomenon: “Forms are not as important as the experience. That is the memory we always carry with us.”¹ In any given period, people forge a common conceptual image based upon both physical interaction with an urban environment and shared ideas regarding urban content. It is this complex, experientially based response to cities that interests me.

My fascination with the urban image deepened while studying ancient Rome and teaching in Los Angeles. A sprawling city, Los Angeles lacks not only an obvious urban focus, but also a clear identity. Experienced usually at high speed from an automobile, the city evokes blurred, multivalent memories of great intensity, but of limited clarity. Even logos such as “the Big Orange” have not successfully defined the elusive image of this megalopolis. Rome, too, struggles to shape a clear contemporary identity, laboring under the added burden of innumerable diverse urban images piled up over an extensive history. A walk through this complex cityscape provides fleeting glimpses of different moments in Rome’s history. Faced with these two distinctive examples, I began to explore how an urban image is created, promulgated, and transformed. More specifically, I became concerned with modern applications. How might the admired cities of the past inspire

today's residents to demand richer experiences and more meaning from their cities? What lessons could they provide modern patrons and designers interested in creating more focused urban images?

Though an evolving construct, the urban image is best analyzed at specific periods and for specific cities. Historically, select cities projected forceful identities, usually by choreographing a positive urban experience. The explication of an individual example reveals the complex factors involved in the creation of a strong urban image, from the rhetoric accompanying patronage to the effective sequencing and distribution of projects, from the judicious use of materials for effect to the ceremonial choreography of urban events and messages. Only by looking at a city in a holistic manner can we understand why patrons and institutions funded urban projects or their choices of building types, materials, and placement. Reflecting specific cultural priorities, the conceptual content interwoven within any urban fabric likewise is in large part time-specific. Most important, examination of a cityscape at a particular period encourages consideration of how contemporary users actually experienced the urban environment. Evaluated together, these issues expand our understanding of cities and city processes. They explain why some urban environments are more memorable than others, why some attempts at formulating an urban image succeed while others fail.

I wrote this book for people interested in cities. Though the temporal range is succinct, the issues and concerns are broad. My wish is that historians, designers, and users of cities will all find parts of interest, while the whole retains its integrity as a period study. The body of the text is framed by recreated experiential walks through the ancient city accessible to general readers. The sections on the historical and cultural context analyze topics of concern to academic specialists. The evaluations of urban components and forms address urban designers and architects. Above all, I hope that the power and excitement of the Augustan example will underscore the importance of human experience and conceptualization in the evaluation of built environments.

I have been helped in this research by many. Above all, Spiro Kostof has taught me that buildings and environments are meaningless without people. His inspiration imbues every page. Through an unstinting belief in the project, valuable criticism, and emotional support, Fikret Yegül enriched the process as well as the product. I owe a debt to many other good friends who shared their ideas, patiently read and reread sections, and provided appreciated encouragement. Special thanks go to William L. MacDonald, Peter Holliday, Dana Cuff, Lionel March, and Murray Milne. Bernard Frischer and Barbara Kellum kindly commented on early versions of this work. I am indebted to Julie Dercle, Jocelyn Gibbs, Linda Hart, and Philip

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D.G.F.