

## INTRODUCTION

ROMAN CIVILIZATION WAS DISTINCTLY URBAN. NOT UNTIL THE Industrial Revolution would a comparable percentage of Europeans live in cities.<sup>1</sup> As centers of political, economic, and, therefore, social life, cities offered Romans the greatest opportunities for making their fame and fortunes – or losing them. This book examines how Romans came into contact, interacted, and sought to present themselves in the most used, yet least studied, of urban spaces: the street.

A brief look at three examples illustrates the vividness of the street and its centrality to city life. In his third *Satire*, written around 110 CE, the poet Juvenal imagines his friend, Umbricius, leaving Rome for a new life in Cumae. Amid a litany of complaints about the *caput mundi*, Umbricius targets the street:

carts thundering by through the narrow twisting streets and the swearing of drivers caught in a traffic jam would even snatch away sleep from an emperor – or a somnolent seal. When the rich man has an appointment, the crowd parts before him as he sails above their heads in his huge galley. While he moves along he can conduct correspondence or read or sleep inside, for a litter with windows closed is most soporific. But even so he will arrive first; though I hurry, I am blocked by a wave of people in front of me and the people in a huge rank jab my back. One man digs an elbow into me; another strikes me with a hard pole. One man bangs my head

<sup>1</sup> Maddison 2007, 40–43; Wilson 2011, esp. 191–193.

with a wood beam, another with a wine jug. My legs are plastered with mud. Then huge feet kick me on all sides, and a soldier plants his boot's nail right on my toe.<sup>2</sup>

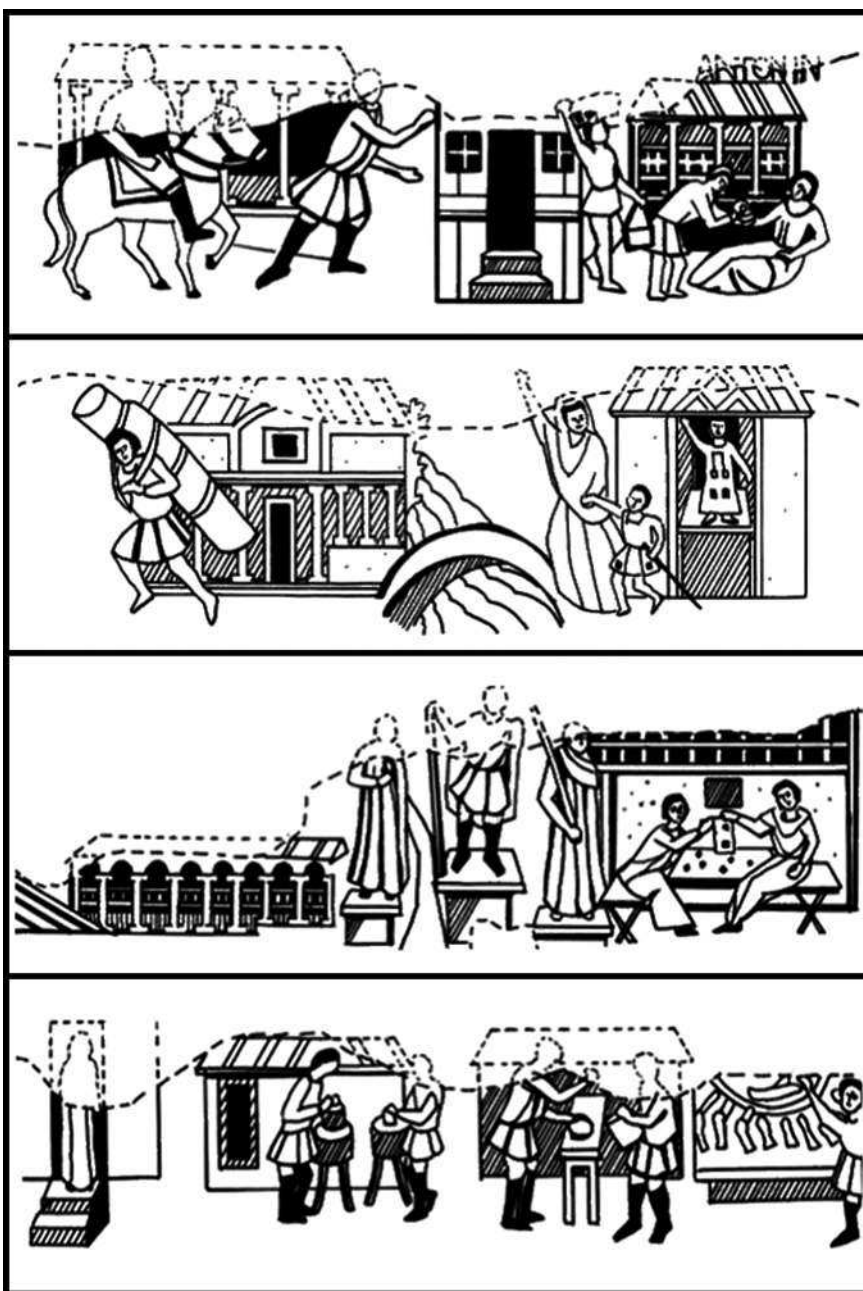
For Juvenal, the street was a place of chaotic passage, a space where all manner of goods and people moved through the city in tight quarters and where those possessed of above-average means had ample opportunity to rise above the rank and file.

As a nearly contemporary bilingual inscription from Ephesus shows, streets were also central to communal life and shared identity. The text dating to 103/104 CE commemorates a set of gifts made to the community by a local *eques* named C. Vibius Salutaris. His funds provided, first, for a lottery and cash distributions to many Ephesians, whose flocking together to the famed extramural temple of Artemis would have made for its own spectacle. But that paled in comparison to Salutaris's major benefactions – the creation of about thirty silver statues and their ritual procession through the city's streets. The statues exhibited Ephesus's sacred identity (Artemis appeared at least nine times), displayed personifications of a host of concentric civic bodies from the Ephesian boule to the Roman senate and people, and represented a historical timeline running from the city's origins up through the sitting emperor and empress. The silver participants took to the street about twice per month, accompanied by hundreds of living Ephesians. Highlighted above all were sacred personnel and the body of elite youths known as the *ephebes* who would one day hold the city's chief offices. After it departed from the temple of Artemis, the parade followed a prescribed route, snaking by major urban landmarks before reaching its culmination in the theater, where the text was inscribed; it then circled back to the Artemision.<sup>3</sup> These processions reminded Ephesians of their own history and traditions as well as their place in the empire, all on the street's stage.

Beyond serving as hosts for meaningful movement, streets were also imagined as key venues for many activities, to judge from a singular visual representation found in a Late Antique house in Antioch. Images of life on the city's streets abound in the border ringing the Megalopsychia hunt mosaic, a huge artwork named after the personification in its central medallion and the piece's predominant theme (Fig. 1). The border scenes constitute a topographical tour through

<sup>2</sup> Juv. 3.236–248: . . . *raedarum transitus arto / vicorum in flexu et stantis convicia mandrae / eripient somnum Druso vitulisque marinis. / si vocat officium, turba cedente vehetur / dives et ingenti curret super ora Liburna / atque obiter leget aut scribet vel dormiret intus; namque facit somnum clausa lectica fenestra. ante tamen veniet: nobis properantibus opstat / unda prior, magno populus premit agmine lumbos / qui sequitur; ferit hic cubito, ferit assere duro / alter, at hic tignum capiti incutit, ille metretam. / pinguis crura luto, planta mox undique magna / calor, et in digito clavus mihi militis haeret.* Translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own adaptations of the Loeb Classical Library.

<sup>3</sup> *IV*E 1a, no. 27. For extensive discussion, see Rogers 1991.



1. Sketches of street scenes from the so-called Megalopsychia Hunt Mosaic, discovered in Antioch, showcase the range of activities that unfolded along thoroughfares. Drawing: Ryan Cairns (modified from Matthews 2006, figs. 4.7, 4.8, 4.12, 4.13).

Antioch, moving from one city gate and continuing through the city proper before reaching springs near Daphne, the suburb where the mosaic was discovered. Along the way, an attendant clears the way for a dignitary entering the city on horseback, men in short tunics scurry along balancing bundles on their heads

and backs, another man delivers a refreshment to a reclining figure, a cart lugs timbers, a man drives donkeys, a child led by the hand looks back to wave at someone gazing out a second-story window, a board game occupies figures on folding chairs, two men chop meat atop three-legged butcher blocks, and vendors at tables hawk round bread loaves and other goods. The scenes play out against a long scroll of cityscape: churches, baths, bridges, houses, inns, statues, colonnades, a palace and its racetrack.<sup>4</sup> Overall, the mosaic suggests that, in preindustrial cities, streets were viewed and experienced not only as corridors for passage, but also as places of commerce, leisure, and socializing.

When we take these three sources together, urban thoroughfares emerge as extraordinarily vibrant and compelling spaces. Juvenal's street swarms with activity that besieges all the senses. At night, wagons clang while during the day elbows jab, mud splashes, and toes ache as a variety of individual actors wrangle to accomplish their own business. The resulting scene is chaotic, the sensations staccato. The confusion resulted partly from the people, animals, and vehicles trying to make their way, but the Antioch mosaic points toward the other tasks that competed for the street's space – butchering, eating, selling wares, loitering – as tables, chairs, and the like spilled into the roadway. Indeed, the diverse set of buildings shown on the mosaic emphasizes how many realms of urban life were connected by, and might clash in, the street. In comparison to the other Roman urban environments we could name, such as the forum or amphitheater, the street thus appears less predictable and more inclusive. It comprises a broad cast – from the enslaved to the moneyed, indeed, virtually everyone across society – brought close in a spontaneous and minimally regulated environment.

The effects of that contact were many and important. Amid the din of Juvenal's street, one thing is clear: an awareness of social distinctions ripples through the space. In his litter, the rich man is conspicuous and distinguished from the crowd, literally carried above the rest. All know that he enjoys a profoundly different experience. As he relaxes or dozes, free from the flurry of activity, he even arrives earlier at his destination. If we mentally set the mosaic's action in motion, we can similarly imagine urbanites seeing to their own concerns while also observing what others are wearing or doing; seeing with whom they conducted business or with whom they were on good (or bad) terms; and learning who was leading and who was riding, who hauling and who at leisure, who serving and who relaxing at table. "How do I stack up?" may well have been the question on their lips or in their minds.

Another factor in answering that question were the honorific statues and splendid façades portrayed on the mosaic. They make the point that buildings

<sup>4</sup> Levi 1947, 323–345; Downey 1961, 659–664; Dunbabin 1999, 180–183; Matthews 2006, 79–88. Cf. *Lib. Or.* 11.196–245.

and monuments were not faceless containers of the street's space, but were deployed to impress, mark privilege, and differentiate between literal insiders and outsiders. The Ephesus procession makes abundantly clear that the visibility afforded by the street also made it ripe for crafting personal, group, or civic personae – here through ritual movements, elsewhere through deeds, dress, and house decoration. Heritage is celebrated, future magistrates marked out for attention, consumption made conspicuous, and hierarchical relationships defined. Amid the wide-ranging crowd and its diverse activities, in other words, some sought to tame the chaos, mark out distinctions, and underline their own superior position. In front of the broadest audience possible, streets provided unparalleled opportunities for self-aggrandizing display, for scoring off others, and for the creation and resolution of social and political tensions. This is the fascination of watching Roman street behavior: it opens up to our view a vital realm of urban action and interaction.

#### STREETS PAST AND PRESENT

It is unlikely that this book's subject – the Roman street as a space of social contact and presentation – would have seemed odd to a Roman such as Juvenal. As we have seen, he was careful to draw attention to the street's dynamics, and, as we will see, when he wants to witness the absurdities of Roman life, he simply picks up his notebook and heads to a nearby corner to watch the passing crowd.<sup>5</sup> In a way, many other dwellers did the same when they went to the theater in hopes of some laughs, for the action of Roman comedy took place in front of the façades of two or three houses, in what theatergoers understood to be the street. The impromptu juxtapositions that this setting enabled – between slave and master, lovelorn youth and much-desired courtesan, or long-lost siblings – created the misunderstandings of class, identity, gender, and intentions that underlay Roman comedy. Yet, despite Romans' self-awareness of the street's social roles, the vibrant scenes that authors describe, and decades of studies of Roman streets, roads, and road systems, it is surprising how little has been written about what unfolded along thoroughfares and who used them. Until recently, work dedicated to streets has largely concentrated on how they were built, where they ran, and what sort of traffic they hosted.<sup>6</sup> While virtually every other space in the city – baths, shops, houses, and temples, to name a few – has received extensive attention, this locus of so much daily contact has remained distinctly underobserved.

<sup>5</sup> Juv. 1.63–64.

<sup>6</sup> Capelli 1991; Gesemann 1996; Chevallier 1997; Staccioli 2003; Poehler 2006, 2009; Ballet, Dieudonné-Glad, and Saliou 2008; Beard 2008, 53–80; Mertens 2008; Kaiser 2011a; Laurence and Newsome 2011.

We certainly cannot pin a lack of study on a lack of suitable subject matter. Pliny famously reported that Rome in his day had more than 60 miles of streets, just counting those that led from the forum's golden milestone to the edge of the built-up area.<sup>7</sup> The routes of some of these are fossilized in Rome's street plan today, as the same paths have been taken for millennia, simply paved over time and again. Because of Rome's continuous occupation, however, the Eternal City offers very few stretches that preserve their ancient form. Excavation at other sites throughout the empire has revealed well-preserved roadbeds that have survived thanks to their solid construction from humble (not to mention heavy) materials. We can walk some of the self-same streets as Salutaris's procession in Ephesus, for instance. On the Italian peninsula, we can prowl through portions of other cities: Ostia, Paestum, Minturnae, and Saepinum, for example. And, of course, there are the cities buried and thus preserved by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE that offer the primary material evidence for this book. Although only a portion of Herculaneum's urban fabric has been brought to light, Pompeii preserves roughly 7 kilometers of excavated streets, together with much of their bracketing streetfaces.

The issue, then, is not so much one of seeing streets as seeing people on, in, or moving through them. I want to tell the story of the excavation and subsequent presentation of one of Pompeii's chief thoroughfares because it illustrates, from its promising start to its frustrating conclusion, some of the obstacles facing the study of street life. In 1911, when Vittorio Spinazzola began his term as superintendent at Pompeii, he imagined an extremely ambitious course of action.<sup>8</sup> His predecessors, who tended to excavate city-block by city-block, had unearthed much of the western portion of the city but little in the east aside from the amphitheater (Fig. 2). Spinazzola proposed to connect the two areas and to do so by an innovative means – by tracing about a half-kilometer of just one street, the Via dell'Abbondanza, and by unearthing little beyond its bordering façades. That is, his intended locus of inquiry was not the standing remains per se, but also the space between them.

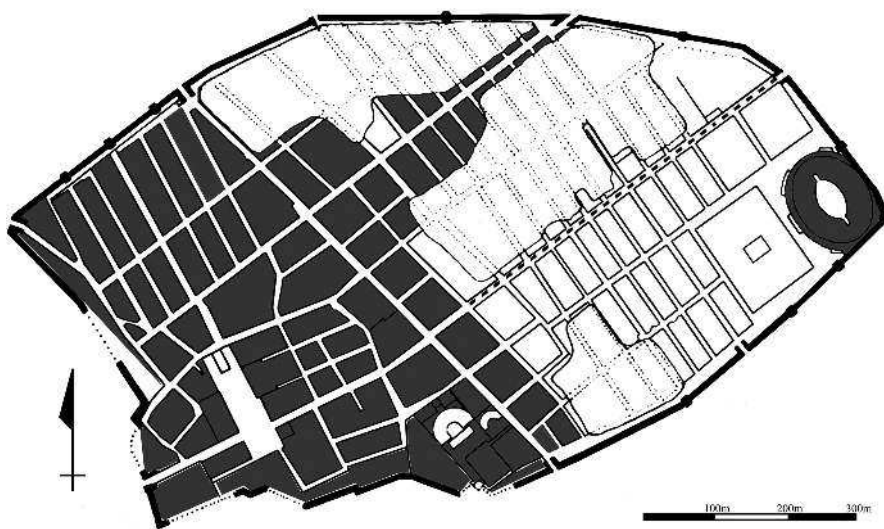
Spinazzola was well aware of the innovative and revisionist approach he brought to the street. In his publication of the excavation, he draws an explicit contrast with earlier attitudes, quoting August Mau and Johannes Overbeck's 1884 publication, which claimed, "Pompeii's streets neither present now nor did they present in antiquity the varied, vivid, and busy scene of medieval and modern cities."<sup>9</sup> Moving forward a generation, Spinazzola also points out how the city's streets were still, in his own time, being imagined as relatively actionless places; he cites the views of Antonio Sogliano, who likens Roman Pompeii to Muslim cities

<sup>7</sup> Pliny *NH* 3.67.

<sup>8</sup> Spinazzola's career: Delpino 2001. The following paragraphs draw on Hartnett 2011a.

<sup>9</sup> Spinazzola 1953, 12.





2. Plan of Pompeii, showing state of excavation before Vittorio Spinazzola's campaign to excavate the Via dell'Abbondanza. Shaded portions were excavated by 1911. Spinazzola's target area is indicated with dashes.

Drawing: Ryan Cairns.

of North Africa because its streets, like theirs, are *deserte*, deserted.<sup>10</sup> For his part, Spinazzola was confident, or would at least later claim to be, that much about a city and its inhabitants could be learned by studying the street and its elements – façade paintings, windows, and especially the balconies and overhangs that he recovered but had been missed by previous generations. Over the course of a dozen years, Spinazzola was largely successful in his endeavor, as his crew dug eastward along the Via dell'Abbondanza toward a gate in the city walls.<sup>11</sup>

Just as revolutionary as Spinazzola's excavation strategy was his approach to documenting and reconstructing his discoveries. To record his work, he deployed, to a degree unparalleled in previous excavations, the relatively new technology of photography.<sup>12</sup> And what he chose to show in the photographs of his campaign is revealing. First, he himself appears time and again, often standing next to one of the architectural features that he was proud to have discovered (Fig. 3). Second, the photographs seek to capture the thrill of discovery. At times, they show workmen frantically unearthing an object or architectural feature; at others, the subject of the photograph, such as a statuette, sits alone atop the volcanic debris without any workers, so the viewer is placed in the position of the one making the discovery (Fig. 4). Third, in Spinazzola's publication of his excavation, he regularly

<sup>10</sup> Spinazzola 1953, 13.

<sup>11</sup> It should be said, however, that Spinazzola did not always stick to his plan because, on occasion, he found the façade architecture compelling enough to excavate within buildings.

<sup>12</sup> On the intertwined histories of photography and archaeology: Lyons 2005, esp. 22–28. At Pompeii: Maffioli 1990; Cassanelli 2002; Desrochers 2003; Lyons 2005, 49–59.



3. Vittorio Spinazzola proudly poses next to a roof recovered from the Casa di Paquius Proculus at Pompeii.

Photo: Spinazzola 1953, Libreria dello Stato, Rome, fig. 34.

presents a series of images: one showing the unearthing of a particular architectural feature, a second photo documenting its reconstruction at the hands of workmen, and a third displaying the feature rendered intact once more and now devoid of people (Fig. 5). In other words, the photographs are characteristic of modern archaeological process: they document the intense human work of excavation that results, paradoxically, in a presentation stripped bare of human presence.

This is both important and odd for the study of streets, since Spinazzola's publication is notable for what it does not show: streets populated with workers, authorities, or just about anyone.<sup>13</sup> Populated images of the street were shot and even appeared in preliminary excavation reports, but what made it into the final volumes were typically antiseptic shots of the street scrubbed clean, reconstructed fully (at times, water even gushes in streetside fountains), and left empty (Fig. 6). We encounter the stage-set and none of the action. Spinazzola's images were captured at a time when archaeologists were still working out how to use photography as part of the archaeological process. On that count, it would be wrongheaded to condemn Spinazzola for not populating his street shots, even if

<sup>13</sup> The one notable exception is a splendid photo of the exhausted workforce splayed out in a shady alleyway late in the day, with Spinazzola and a colleague looking on: Spinazzola 1953, 31, fig 30.



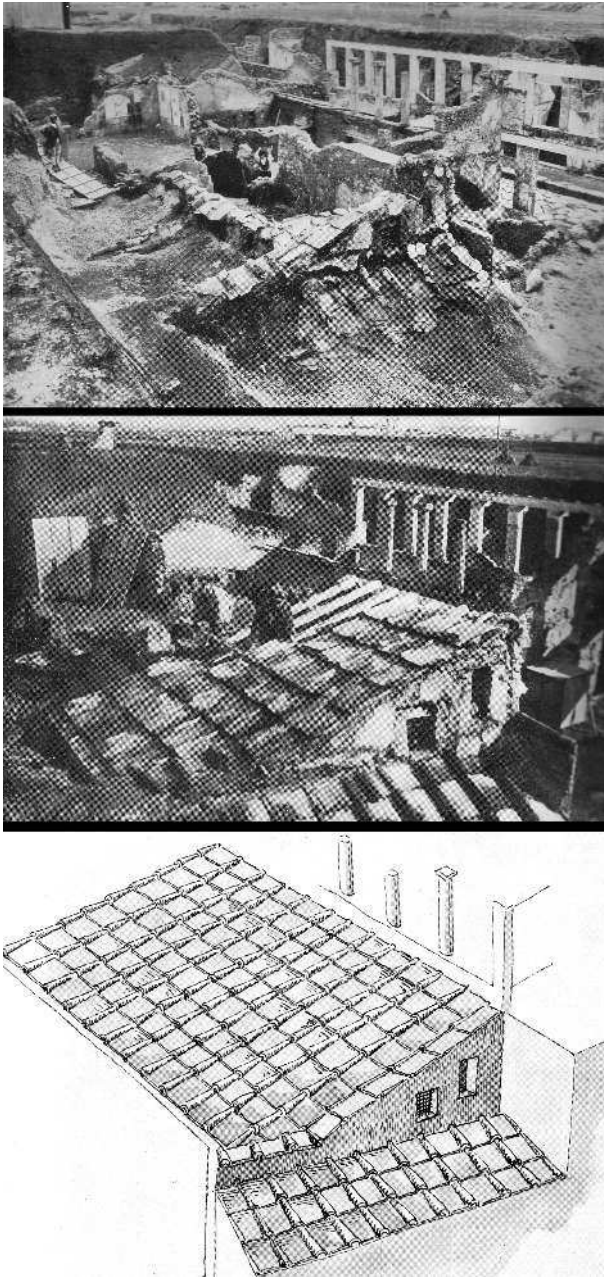


4. An archival photograph from Vittorio Spinazzola's excavations in Pompeii captures the excitement of discovery as workmen dig so frenetically in the Casa di Octavius Quartio that their movement is blurred.

Photo: Soprintendenza Speciale per Pompei, Ercolano e Stabia, Archivio Fotografico degli Scavi, B341.

he was deeply cognizant of the power of individuals in photographs and of the history of study of Pompeian streets. If he had chosen shots with many people for final publication, he might well have been criticized as unprofessional. Regardless, we should nevertheless consider the effect his choices may have had on what has or has not been studied.

The resources we use and the definitions we employ inevitably color our approach to any subject. I suspect that one reason street life has been largely ignored, for example, is the ingrained – and understandable – use of architectural plans. As tools for documenting and depicting the layout of a building or a city, ground plans are obviously indispensable in a field such as classical archaeology. Yet their specular perspective, providing essentially a bird's-eye view, separates users from the real, lived experience of urban space, flattening once noisy and bustling spaces into two-dimensional ghost towns. Something similar may be at work with Spinazzola's project. For the past century, the stretch of street that Spinazzola unearthed has been visited by countless archaeologists and historians interested in Roman urbanism, and, for the past sixty years, his publication has taken a prominent place on bibliographies on Pompeii and Roman urban life. (Is there a more well-known street from Roman Italy, aside from the Via Sacra in



5. In Vittorio Spinazzola's publication of the Via dell'Abbondanza, a regular feature is a grouping of three images documenting the discovery and restoration of architectural features. Photo: Spinazzola 1953, Libreria dello Stato, Rome, figs. 37–39.

Rome, than the Via dell'Abbondanza?) Spinazzola's text and images highlight the excavated (and restored) object, thus reducing the attention paid to interaction with and within that built environment. In the end, his project represents an ironic missed opportunity: it was devised in the belief that paying attention to