

INTRODUCTION

AS FREDERICK I (“Barbarossa”) approached Rome for the first time in 1155, on his way to be crowned Emperor of the Romans by Pope Hadrian IV, he was met by Roman envoys at Sutri, a day’s journey north of the city. Nothing in the young German king’s prior experience, even among the recalcitrant city communes of northern Italy, had prepared him for the blithe insolence of his visitors, who proclaimed themselves representatives of something called the Roman Senate. From the parchments they read aloud upon entering Frederick’s presence, the majestically condescending voice of Rome personified rang out. Lady Roma spoke to the king as a mistress to a suppliant come to beg from her and the Senate the favor of an imperial coronation. The city, via the Senate that – this particular personified Rome suggested – embodied her will and incarnated her ancient glories, would deign to grant Frederick the imperial crown provided he obediently satisfy a long list of conditions, all punctually enumerated. He was to swear not to meddle with the ancient rights and privileges the Romans claimed to enjoy; to shed his own blood whenever necessary to prevent any injury befalling the Roman “republic”; and to pay the senators 5,000 pounds of silver for the trouble of acclaiming him emperor. This from a group of some fifty Romans who had first gathered in putatively sovereign assembly barely a decade before, without imperial consent, and in open defiance of the pope whom Frederick expected to anoint him emperor.

According to the German bishop and imperial chronicler, Otto of Freising, whose account we are following here, Frederick stressed to his importunate visitors that the key word with respect to Roman power and virtue was “former”

(*quondam*), and dismissed them with a trenchant lecture on their shameful dereliction of their duties as imperial subjects. Frederick then moved decisively to cut the Gordian knot of local politics by dispatching 1,000 select troops that same night to join forces with the pope's faithful and occupy the walls of the Vatican, the *civitas Leonina*, where Frederick appeared the following morning with the rest of his army. Within hours of his arrival, he was duly crowned before the high altar at St. Peter's by Pope Hadrian IV, who welcomed the coming of a ruler as hostile to the sovereign pretensions of the independent-minded Romans across the Tiber as he was. The German troops of the new "Emperor of the Romans," meanwhile, guarded Ponte Sant'Angelo, the bridge that connected the Vatican with the city center, lest the Romans themselves attempt to interrupt the proceedings.

At the close of the ceremonies, Frederick paraded his army back to its camp outside the Vatican walls, at which point partisans of the Senate, enraged at the *fait accompli*, stormed across Ponte Sant'Angelo. They went rampaging into St. Peter's, where they found some imperial grooms still lingering and tore them to pieces. When he realized what was happening, Frederick rushed his troops back inside the walls to fight a pitched battle against a swelling crowd of Romans now pouring into the Vatican from two sides, from Ponte Sant'Angelo and also from Trastevere on the Vatican side of the Tiber. The emperor's heavily armed veterans tore into the Romans, repaying their "Arab gold" with "Teutonic steel," as Otto of Freising put it. The June heat, said Otto, posed a greater inconvenience to the steel-clad Germans than the hometown rabble they spent the remainder of the day slaughtering.¹

And then, as everyone in Rome from the pope and the Roman senators on down knew would happen, Frederick headed back north after a few weeks, his army decimated by the usual afflictions

of northern Europeans in Roman summer – malaria and dysentery, fever and flux – leaving Rome once more to the Romans. The partisans of pope and Senate settled back into their standoff, glaring back and forth between the senatorial stronghold on the Capitoline and the papal enclaves at the Vatican and the Lateran cathedral, more or less as though Frederick had never come. Within a decade, Hadrian's successor, Pope Alexander III (r. 1159–80), whose election Frederick had strenuously opposed, would himself side with the northern Italian communes in their struggle to break free of imperial domination. He provided crucial support to the Lombard League in the years leading up to the pivotal Battle of Legnano in 1176, where the allied communes' shocking victory over Frederick ushered in an age of civic autonomy in north-central Italy that lasted until the eve of the Renaissance.²

While both popes and leaders of local aristocratic factions frequently collaborated with external powers, the alliances they formed were endlessly fluid and never absolute. When Pope Hadrian sought to curb the political autonomy of the nascent Roman Senate in the 1150s, he found a natural ally in Frederick, who also considered his sovereign prerogatives threatened by the upstart assembly. Yet in 1160, Hadrian's successor, Alexander III, would excommunicate Frederick less than a year after becoming pope. When Frederick next came to Rome in 1166, Church and Senate jointly opposed him. Frederick again beat the Romans in battle, only to retreat north with his army once again ravaged by disease. Pope Alexander survived and returned to Rome, his stature if anything enhanced, to spend the remainder of his long pontificate supporting the northern Italian communes opposed to Frederick.³

In their different ways, popes Hadrian and Alexander and the Roman Senate all asserted the primacy of local, Rome-centered agendas and interests. They did so by invoking an image

of Rome as an eternal and peerless capital, presenting themselves as the heirs to an unbroken tradition of Roman primacy rooted in the city's past glories. Papal claims to ecclesiastical preeminence throughout Christendom rested on the popes' special status as the apostolic successors of St. Peter, "Prince of the Apostles" and first bishop of Rome. Their assertion of temporal dominion over Rome and its environs derived from their claim to be the legal successors of the Roman emperors, a concept given lasting form in the Donation of Constantine, an 8th-century forgery purporting to represent emperor Constantine's (r. AD 306–37) cession to the papacy, in perpetuity, of all imperial lands in and powers over the western half of the Roman Empire. Meanwhile, the reborn Senate's competing claim to political autonomy and dominion over Roman territory derived from its self-identification as the rightful successor of the Senate of ancient Rome. It was the modern incarnation of "the indomitable Roman virtue that conquered all things," as the senatorial envoys put it to Frederick at Sutri.⁴

In topographical terms, too, Rome was as anomalous throughout the Middle Ages as it had been in antiquity, in ways directly connected to its erstwhile size and grandeur. From the 2nd century BC through the 4th century AD, Rome was the most populous city outside of China that the world had ever seen. No European metropolis would again rival imperial Rome in size and population until the 18th century. Its urban center, defined by jurists of the imperial era as the area covered by "contiguous roofs" (*continentia tecta*), housed close to a million souls. The 3rd-century walls begun by Emperor Aurelian (r. 270–5) were nearly 19 km (12 miles) long and encircled an area of some 1400 hectares, or 5.5 square miles, yet still failed to encompass all of its urban sprawl.⁵

This 'ancient' incarnation of Rome remained vibrant at the dawn of the 5th century AD,

though the city in 400, like the empire as a whole, had changed and evolved in important ways since the halcyon days of the 1st and 2nd centuries. The construction of the Aurelian Wall itself was a dramatic moment. Busy neighborhoods were suddenly bisected by an impermeable barrier; countless buildings were leveled; traffic headed in and out of the city was constricted by the choke points of the city gates, and so on. Rome subsequently consisted of 'inside' and 'outside,' with the former becoming far more desirable as living space than the latter, for obvious reasons. The gradual Christianization of the empire following the promulgation of the Edict of Milan in 313 brought further changes, most visibly in the form of Rome's first monumental churches, most sponsored by the imperial family. But these earliest grand churches were all in peripheral locations; and the city center in the later 4th century did not look, feel, smell, or sound much different than it had a century or two earlier. A Roman alive in AD 200 could have felt at home there still in 400. But transported two centuries farther forward in time to AD 600, that same Roman would have materialized in a place transformed beyond recognition, and wept to see it.

Yet throughout the Middle Ages, Rome was always the most renowned city in Europe, the place that mattered most. As the seat of the papacy and epicenter of Latin Christendom, it remained better connected to the wider world than anyplace else. Over the course of the medieval millennium, more foreigners experienced Rome than any other European city. Many came and stayed, both clerics in the service of the Church and also laymen drawn by the lure of ecclesiastical wealth and patronage. Far more still, over the long term, passed through as pilgrims and tourists. Rome's reputation and prestige, its legacy of emperors long dead and popes past and present, proved irresistible also to a long succession of European potentates, Charlemagne

and Barbarossa most famously among many others. From the 8th century on, rare was the Roman who lived to old age without seeing at least one foreign army camped outside the city, while its leader awaited imperial coronation at St. Peter's, or otherwise intervened more or less forcefully (and often disastrously) to assert some claim over the city and redirect the course of its local and ecclesiastical politics. Time and again, such outsiders underestimated the extent to which Rome was a world unto itself and overestimated their capacity to reshape Roman affairs in accordance with their ambitions.⁶

As in the case of Barbarossa's dealings with the Senate, and eventually also the papacy, ever-changing coalitions of urban power brokers passively resisted, balked, or outright foiled such *deus ex machina* attempts to meddle in the internal affairs of the city. (Native Romans tended to count the administration of the Church among the city's internal affairs, as did many popes, especially during the earlier Middle Ages.) The medieval Romans whose views appear in the surviving sources quite consistently considered themselves Romans first, and subjects of a usually distant sovereign at best a distant second. Civic patriotism and 'city-first' approaches prevailed in other Italian cities, too, particularly with the rise of independent-minded communal governments in the later 11th and 12th centuries, but at Rome the stakes were higher. It was the arena where the universalizing pretensions of popes and emperors collided most spectacularly with each other, and with the local agendas of Rome's perpetually restless and factionalized nobility and populace. These native Romans – very much the 'town' to the papal and imperial 'gown' – were emboldened by a persistent sense of Roman exceptionalism rooted in the city's imperial legacy and the physical remains of its staggeringly grandiose past. They were inspired by the cityscape itself.⁷

That cityscape lies at the heart of this book. Like urbanites everywhere, medieval Romans were products of their particular surroundings, but the experience of inhabiting medieval Rome was highly unusual insofar as the city itself was such an unusual place. Nowhere did the magnitude of past achievements more visibly surpass the scope of present capacities; nowhere was an urban population more dwarfed by the sweep and scale of the built environment. Within the 19 km (12 mile) circumference of the Aurelian Wall, several tens of thousands of people carved out an existence amid the crumbling hulks of a metropolis meant for many hundreds of thousands. They lived between ruins, inside ruins, on top of ruins. Even new buildings were mostly assembled with stones and bricks quarried from ancient piles. Lime for mortar was obtained by cremating marble and limestone building blocks, and countless thousands of marble sculptures besides. The intricate polychrome pavements of medieval churches were assembled with thousands of fragments of colored marbles that had once revetted ancient walls and floors; larger, round disks were harvested from thinly sliced columns. Other ancient columns and column capitals graced church interiors across the city, along with the porticoes and loggias of countless upscale houses. Meanwhile, enduring wonders such as the imperial palace on the Palatine, the Colosseum, the mausoleums of Augustus and Hadrian, the imperial bath complexes, the city walls, and even the sewers relegated the most ambitious efforts of medieval builders to comparative insignificance. Medieval Romans told fantastic stories about the original owners and builders of the city's architectural marvels, some of them real historical figures, others pure inventions. Monstrous, scaly things and demons were known to inhabit the darker recesses of these ancient piles.⁸

Monsters and myths flourish in the interstices between well-trodden paths, and Rome was full of such interstices from the 6th century on. Ancient landmarks and infrastructure sprinkled throughout the city continued to attract visitors and residents, subsisting as inhabited islands amid sweeping expanses given over to decay and abandonment, like the teeming pools left behind by an ebb tide. Many of Rome's most venerable churches, built during the 4th and early 5th centuries when much more of the intramural area remained thickly settled, stood distant from densely populated neighborhoods by the later Middle Ages, but they were rarely abandoned. The centrifugal pull of the Lateran cathedral on the eastern periphery, S. Maria Maggiore on the Esquiline, S. Stefano Rotondo on the Caelian, S. Sabina on the Aventine, and countless other churches, monasteries, and charitable institutions besides, as well as fortresses and residential compounds built into widely scattered ancient ruins, helps to explain why medieval Rome never fully contracted into a compact urban nucleus similar in size and shape to the other leading cities of medieval Italy. No attempt was ever made to create a smaller and more easily defended enceinte as an alternative to the walls of Aurelian, despite their being far too large to be defended in strength with the human resources available. From one end of the city to the other, there was too much of worth, materially and conceptually and symbolically speaking, to leave any of it out.

One result of Rome's diffuseness was a further diminution, or dilution, of the present in relation to the past. Medieval Romans were thinly spread across a sprawling landscape filled with resources and prizes over which to compete, which is in part why it became so difficult for anyone to control the whole city, especially from the later 9th century on. Various factions and families predominated in different regions, contributing to the gradual formation of discrete

neighborhoods often centered on prominent landmarks and local strongholds. Many residents of these neighborhoods rarely left them. So balkanized was the cityscape by the later Middle Ages that people from different neighborhoods might speak perceptibly different varieties of Roman dialect. Those living just across the river in Trastevere, meanwhile, were understood to be something other than the residents of the city center.⁹

Rome's unparalleled size, its peerless inheritance of ancient monuments and infrastructure, and its scattered population made the experience of *being* there unique. Hence, while our main remit is historical topography and urbanism, we will touch variously on ecclesiastical, political, social, military, economic, and intellectual history, insofar as they are all intertwined with Rome's peculiar urban environment. The mental horizons, and thus also the behaviors, of Rome's medieval inhabitants were powerfully conditioned by their awe-inspiring surroundings. Both consciously and insensibly, they reacted to the physical contours of the spaces and places they negotiated on a daily basis, and the myths and memories, ideals and ideologies encoded therein. The lived experience of a place medieval Romans rightly believed to be one of a kind, in turn, informed the choices they made about how to configure those surroundings: what to raze or dismantle, what to abandon or ignore, what to preserve or repackage, what to create anew and how to situate it in relation to what was already there. It is these endless recursive loops created between human agents and inanimate matter that comprise the 'cityscape' at the heart of this book, as I intend the term: the totality of the built environment, populated by the human actors who animated and (partially) shaped it.

Our understanding of that built environment is rapidly transforming in all sorts of exciting ways. Until the 1980s, the archaeology of medieval Rome was pitifully sparse. Earlier excavators

tended to rip through post-Classical remains in their haste to uncover the glories of the ancient city, often neglecting to make even a perfunctory pass at recording and processing the later materials they encountered. Cataclysmic visions of 'Dark Age' collapse following the dissolution of Rome's empire in the 5th century consequently, inevitably, became a kind of archaeological self-fulfilling prophecy: Excavators expecting nothing but desolation and a general impoverishment of culture, both material and otherwise, confirmed their expectations by failing to find what they chose not to seek in the first place. But the rapid growth of medieval archaeology in Rome over the past few decades has unleashed a flood of new information, and not a few outstanding discoveries. Archaeologists are steadily revealing layers of the city and facets of its medieval inhabitants' lives missing from the written sources and the preserved buildings and objects that underpinned older scholarship, in the process prompting historians, art historians, topographers, and others – themselves included – to return to the written sources with a more discerning eye.

As the most important synthesis of Rome's urban trajectory across the full sweep of the medieval millennium was published in 1980, before the revolution in postclassical archaeology began to bear fruit, it is high time for an update. That book is Richard Krautheimer's *Rome: Profile of a City, 312–1308*, surely the single most read work (in English and in translation into a number of languages) on medieval Rome written in the past century. It is a sweeping panorama of the city's material contours from the advent of Constantine until the papacy's temporary removal to Avignon, produced by a giant in the field who had already devoted some five decades to knowing Rome. Yet the discoveries made since its publication have expanded our understanding of the city in ways that would have been almost inconceivable to Krautheimer when he was writing his *Profile* in the 1970s. Krautheimer's Rome is basically a papal

Rome, its topography a collection of churches, in large part because (surviving) churches were far and away the best-known component of the medieval cityscape in his day. Krautheimer naturally knew perfectly well that most Romans were not clerics, and that Rome did not consist primarily of ecclesiastical buildings, but he lacked reliable information about how and where most people were living and working throughout much of the Middle Ages.

For the early Middle Ages, c. 400–1000, some of the most important advances of the past few decades relate to settlement patterns, infrastructure, and residential or otherwise nonecclesiastical architecture. Whereas Krautheimer accepted the prevailing consensus that population clustered in the southern Campus Martius and Trastevere from the 6th century, we now know that settlement was spread widely, albeit sparsely, across much of Rome's intramural expanse for at least another 500 years. Krautheimer, in other words, was wrong about where Romans were living across roughly half the period he covers. As for how they were living, Krautheimer could say little about the places they inhabited prior to the 12th and 13th centuries, when the earliest standing examples of medieval houses were built. We now know more about the dwellings inhabited by both wealthy and humble Romans in the preceding centuries, thanks to extensive excavations such as those undertaken in the forums of Trajan, Nerva, and Caesar in the 1990s and 2000s – all areas where, in Krautheimer's day, few would have expected to encounter dense early medieval settlement.¹⁰

Correspondingly great strides have been made in identifying and dating the most common forms of early medieval masonry. One result of these advances is the realization that the popes intervened in the infrastructure of the city in the 8th and 9th centuries on a surprisingly grand scale, conducting extensive repairs of the city walls and several of the aqueducts, for example. Such discoveries have capillary effects, too: That multiple

aqueducts were repaired into the 9th century and continued to function into the 10th and 11th helps to explain how and why relatively peripheral areas far from the Tiber, such as the Esquiline and Caelian hills, remained as frequented as they were at the time.¹¹

With regard to the Roman economy, monetary circulation, the production and distribution of luxury goods and other commodities, and the city's connections with the wider world, a single watershed excavation at the Crypta Balbi in the 1980s and 1990s overturned centuries' worth of conventional wisdom on the early Middle Ages, much of which – the 7th and 10th centuries in particular – used to be treated as a time of unrelenting poverty and squalor. The quality, quantity, and sheer diversity of the finds unearthed there was revelatory. A limited slice of a single, rather undistinguished Roman neighborhood turned up more money and precious metals, more raw materials, and more high-quality finished goods than anyone expected. On the assumption that this neighborhood was not unusually vibrant (and further discoveries elsewhere suggest that it was not), these finds point to the existence of a surprisingly robust economy, still characterized in most periods by frequent monetary transactions and always by the production and circulation of high-quality goods.

In 1980, even the chronology of the most distinctive ceramics produced in the city between c. 800 and c. 1200, 'Forum Ware' and the later 'Sparse Glazed Ware,' remained controversial, with proposals for the introduction of Forum Ware ranging from as early as c. 600 to as late as the 9th century. This uncertainty deprived medieval archaeologists of their most common and distinctive class of diagnostic ceramics, and consequently of their ability to date closely the layers at the many sites where such pottery had turned up. Careful excavations at San Sisto Vecchio, the Crypta Balbi, and around the Palatine Hill, among others, provided the

solution to the puzzle, and revealed in the process a resurgence of ceramic production in Rome from the later 8th century that reached quasi-industrial levels by the 11th. This pottery, moreover, traveled widely. Its presence in southern France, Sardinia and Corsica, and Byzantine southern Italy shows that Rome still participated in wide-ranging networks of trade and communications.¹²

It is probably fair to say that the past few decades have seen fewer revolutionary advances in our understanding of the later medieval cityscape, in part because it was better understood already in Krautheimer's day – structures and contours of the later Middle Ages persist more widely and visibly up to the present than those of the early Middle Ages. But real progress has been made in, for example, the study of construction techniques and the building industry. Étienne Hubert's now classic analysis of housing and settlement between the 10th and 13th centuries showed how much can be gleaned from Roman archival documents (simple contracts of sale and lease, etc.), anticipating a wave of studies by archaeologists and historians alike whose work is grounded in close study of the material remains. Architectural historians and 'archaeologists of architecture' (more on these later) have classified and dated characteristic types of masonry with greater precision than was possible only a few decades ago, in part via digital analysis and statistical sampling of medieval buildings. Studies of houses, towers and fortresses, shops and markets, and other forms of nonecclesiastical architecture have proliferated.¹³

Such material explorations have gone hand in glove with efforts by historians to open new vistas onto the social and economic structures of the city during the high and late Middle Ages. Landmark studies have appeared on the composition of the nobility and property-owning classes; networks of patronage and relations between laymen and the Church; the dynamics of land-

tenure and property ownership; production and the sources of wealth. The result has been not so much to downplay the role of the Church as to contextualize it; to see more clearly both the reach and the limitations of ecclesiastical institutions in a city that remained a relatively wealthy and dynamic place in its own right. In a sense, later medieval Rome has been ‘normalized’ and brought into nearer rapport with other Italian cities, which it resembles more closely in social, political, and economic terms than used to be thought. Later medieval Rome was not a city of the Church, but rather – like other places – a city with a Church, albeit an unusually wealthy and influential one.¹⁴

This brief overview of recent developments barely samples the pile of work on medieval Rome produced since Krautheimer’s *Profile of a City* and published in an endless array of monographs and papers. Syntheses are few and far between, and the best to appear so far, generally in Italian, rarely cover Krautheimer’s full thousand-year arc. Hence the need for a new profile of the ‘new’ medieval Rome now emerging through the combined efforts of hundreds of researchers, whose work is transforming the city Krautheimer knew into something yet more complex and fascinating. My profile is designed to supplant its illustrious predecessor, to be sure, insofar as it accounts for sweeping gains made in knowledge and understanding, but also to complement it. Where I explicitly take issue with Krautheimer, it is because his views still underpin so many prevailing conceptions, and misconceptions, of medieval Rome. By indicating where his immensely influential *Profile* has been superseded, I hope also to aid those readers who will continue to read it and profit from all it contains of enduring value. Krautheimer’s encyclopedic command of ecclesiastical architecture is still unsurpassed, and his mastery of the grand sweep of the Roman historical panorama remains a model of scholarly humanism to which all might aspire.¹⁵

In covering the years from 400 to 1420, I have chosen to begin and end roughly a century later than Krautheimer. In terms of Rome’s topography and urban development, this seems to me the period that best corresponds with the literal meaning of ‘medieval’ as the interval between antiquity and early modernity; between the dissolution of the structures and systems characteristic of the ancient world and the rise of those characteristic of the Renaissance. I start in 400 because I want to emphasize that 4th-century Rome is not medieval – or rather, can be conceived as such only on the premise that Constantine’s legalization of Christianity in 313 made Rome suddenly and profoundly ‘medieval,’ not only in religious or cultural terms but also in its physical configuration. This is not an argument I would want to make, implicitly or otherwise. Most Romans were not Christian for most of the 4th century, and intramural Rome in 400 was still in essence its ancient self: It looked, functioned, and bustled with life much as it had a century earlier. As systemic change occurred only from the early 5th century, we will begin there, after a glance at the ‘ancient’ city as it was around 400, on the cusp of the upheavals that would transform it into a very different sort of place.¹⁶

I close in 1420 in order to stress that ‘medieval’ Rome did not end when the papacy went off to Avignon at the beginning of the 14th century. To suggest otherwise is to imply that 14th-century Rome bereft of popes for seven decades was somehow no longer medieval. But the popes had largely avoided Rome for a century and more before Avignon, and even when present, their capacity to shape the city and the lives of its inhabitants was hardly absolute. The departure of the Curia depressed the local economy, to be sure, and seriously curtailed commissions for showy works of art and architecture; it also exacerbated an already worsening climate of political turmoil and civil strife, creating a partial power vacuum that left Rome’s preeminent

baronial families freer than ever to run amok in contending for wealth and influence. Yet these are recurring, even quintessential themes of Rome's medieval millennium. Time and again, the city traversed lengthy periods of sociopolitical – and material – entropy, when factional interests prevailed over centralized authority; when the putative leaders of the urban collective were too impoverished or ineffectual to steward the built environment or reshape it on a citywide scale; when control over existing monuments and infrastructure and the execution of new projects was left, if at all, to private individuals or local interest groups. Systemic change came only after the popes returned from Avignon, for good, as it turned out, and worked gradually but ultimately successfully to bring the nobility to heel, control municipal government, and exert a preponderant influence in the shaping of topography and infrastructure, architecture and the arts. This is the Rome of the Renaissance, the stable papal capital and magnet for artists and architects and humanists. As good a date as any for its inception is 1420, when Pope Martin V established himself at Rome after the close of the Great Western Schism.¹⁷

It is difficult and probably undesirable to try to impose a satisfying narrative, a cohesive plot, on a millennium of any city's history, much less a city so kaleidoscopically complex as medieval Rome. There is no one story, no unitary trajectory. If there is a guiding leitmotif in what follows, it is the persistence of the past. The material and ideological legacies of imperial and early Christian Rome loomed over the medieval present, ensuring the city's enduring centrality on the European scene but also creating constant *urbi et orbi* tension between Rome as city (*urbs*) and universal capital (*orbis*), between living place and transcendent ideal. The interests and ambitions of native Romans concerned with making their way in the only home they had kept butting up against the agendas of outsiders more

concerned with the idea of Rome than its messy quotidian realities. All, however, locals and resident foreigners alike, daily confronted, negotiated, and took inspiration from the world's largest ensemble of ancient monuments and ruins. The built landscape inherited from antiquity remained the firmament on which medieval Romans operated, physically and mentally. Faced with an endless, often baffling jumble of Very Old Things, they made choices about what to notice and how to notice what they did. They selectively ordered the chaos to make sense of what they saw around them, and to make statements about politics and genealogy and beliefs and belonging. But they also daily adapted and reused the bricks and stones, roads and walls inherited from antiquity, simply because these things were unavoidably there.

Like medieval Romans, this book also makes endless choices about what to notice and how to notice what it does. A distillation of the surviving textual and material traces of the medieval city, it makes no pretense of exhaustiveness. The great challenge in writing it was deciding what to leave out, which had to be far more than it includes in order for it to pass the bathtub test, devised when a distinguished Roman archaeologist complained that issues of a leading journal had grown too hefty to allow for comfortable reading in the tub. But I hope some virtue may result from the necessity of writing a wieldy book. Instead of trying to cover everything, I focus on a selection of topics, sources, sites, and materials that seem (to me) most helpful in illustrating how and why the cityscape evolved as it did in the period c. 400–1420. I pay special attention to the advances made in the four decades since Krautheimer wrote, but also to the problems and uncertainties that remain. As usual, the great questions are how we know what we think we know, and how, if at all, we might go about learning what we don't.