

Preface: Roma Perduta

In this age of postmodern fragmentation and Derridian deconstruction, our ability to grasp urban complexes such as the city of Rome is effectively impeded by a number of disparate physical factors. Lines of heavy traffic divide the city into island sectors. Equally obstructive are closely spaced parked cars and delivery vans, with the interstices between them filled in by parked motor scooters. Double-parked cars along the streets, and piazze filled with more parked vehicles, add to the separation and fragmentation of urban space. No less intrusive are restaurant and café tables that nearly fill many piazze and side streets. But these are only the physical obstacles. There is also a fragmented mental attitude toward the city encouraged by both scholarly texts and popular guidebooks.

In the past we have been accustomed to studying cities using what might be described as a monumental rather than an urban approach: examining them monument by monument or, at best, area by area. Thus in Rome we look upon the Trevi Fountain and the Roman Forum as two unrelated entities, separated not only in time, which they are, but also in space. They may as well be in two different towns for all the connection we find between them, and texts on Rome have always treated them as such. In our own time this abstract (in the literal sense of selective) way of representing buildings goes back to illustrations in such classic books as Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture* (1897, last edition 1987), in which surrounding buildings are carefully airbrushed out in order to make the subject building stand alone. This leads to a way of looking at a building as a two-dimensional unit, resembling the way one would look at a painting, and effectively negates both the building's three-dimensionality and its relationship to the urban context.

Even the best of guidebooks take this approach. Buildings and squares are described in great detail (though rarely in relation to one another), but the intervening city texture is not given much attention. Streets are treated as mere conveniences for getting from one monument to another. Itineraries through the city, often illustrated with a colored line on a small sectional map, consist of tortuous paths linking the "points of interest," a term that in itself is dismissive of the intervening elements.

This snapshot approach to the city is also evident in books on the architecture of Rome. In these books, illustrations of the Palazzo Farnese, for example, rarely show more than its plan or façade. In the past twenty years or so, some attention has been given to the setting or the immediate context of this famous building, but not to its broader urban context, its place in the city fabric. Those few books dealing with the urban planning of Rome tend to concentrate on new streets and squares of the Renaissance and modern periods, thereby giving only a partial picture of the whole urban complex. The sectional approach to the city is typified by the famous exhibition of 1979 titled *Roma Interrotta*, in which twelve world-famous architects each recast a rectangle of Rome based on one of the twelve sheets of the Noli map of 1748.

During the Fascist period, the monumental approach departed from theory and moved into practice with a dramatic physical effect upon Rome. In an effort to cast himself as the new Augustus (who was said to have claimed that he found Rome built of brick and left it made of marble), Mussolini literally excised a number of ancient monuments from their urban context by demolishing all surrounding postclassical accretions. Thus the Mausoleum of Augustus, the theater of Marcelus, and the Campidoglio, to name a few, were isolated (or "freed," in Mussolini's words) from their immediate surroundings by means of wholesale destruction of entire neighborhoods.

Apart from, or perhaps even including, these relatively recent and massive interventions, one can argue that the physical city is a continuum both topographically and historically, that is, physically and temporally. The two are intertwined, of course. To understand one, we need to study the other, or better, we need to examine them together: topography and history; solid/voids and the effects of time. One way, and by no means the only way, to do this is to examine the city in the light of its historic pathways. Pathways in this sense can be thought of as city definers, parts connectors, experiential organizers.

We can find a series of such pathways linking distant parts of the city, different monuments, distinct neighborhoods; pathways that therefore also traverse multiple historical periods. Such pathways through space and time have the beneficial effect of linking the most disparate monuments such as the Trevi Fountain and the Forum, mentioned above, in an urban sequence that the viewer can experience, or perhaps read in the way one reads a book. If buildings are the words, then streets are the sentences. Pathway-streets then take on a certain logical progression. Starting at Point A, one does not merely wander; one directs one's steps toward Point B along a historically significant pathway. In this essay we examine nine such pathways.

In this manner one may get a comprehensive sense of city, as opposed to the fragmented impression (*Roma perduta*, or lost Rome) produced by many texts about the city. The urban morphology or structure may be rendered more comprehensible, and perhaps even the historical development of that structure may be deduced. This could be one way of untangling the daunting complexity of this unique city.

Another way of analyzing urban morphology is to observe how streets and buildings interact over time. Perhaps nowhere better than in Rome is this phenomenon so clearly noticeable. Alignments and nonalignments, symmetries and asymmetries, parallelisms and nonparallelisms occur throughout the long development of the city and often reveal the reasons for urban decisions, some formal, some not. In this essay we propose six examples of this type of urban interaction, all of which occur along the nine pathways under discussion.

Historic maps, with which Rome is well endowed, are the principal tools for the analysis proposed above. Chief among these is the remarkably accurate 1748 *Nuova pianta di Roma* by Giambattista Nolli (fig. I-1), the famous *Pianta grande*, from which much of the information discussed will be drawn by careful examination of its detailed building plans and axial alignments. As we work backward and forward in time from Nolli, other maps provide the basic information for other periods of the city's development, but the pre-Nolli maps lack the precision needed for detailed urban analysis, so that they frequently need to be reinterpreted through Nolli in order to throw some light on the evolution of Rome's urban texture.