Reconstruction and the Historic City:

Rome and Abroad - *an interdisciplinary approach*

edited by

Chrystina Häuber, Franz X. Schütz and Gordon M. Winder

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Contents

Cities in Roman Art: The city as a stage for human activities

Stefan Ritter

When we talk about the reconstruction and visualization of historic cities, it might be interesting to immerse ourselves in history and take a look at how these cities were visualized at the time when people used to live in them. In Imperial Roman art, the city featured prominently in various different genres, especially in relief sculpture and wall painting.

The vast majority of these representations show human figures either inside or outside the city. This fact has usually been neglected in studies on cities in Roman art because interest has almost exclusively concentrated on the representation of architecture and space. That's why I will try to assess whether the presence of human beings influences the representation of the city itself. The answer will be decidedly positive.

General rules in representing cities in Roman art

In any period, the methods of visualizing are determined by specific interests, by generally accepted standards of representation and, behind all this, by specific habits of visual perception and imagination. Before I take a look at the role of human figures, I will briefly demonstrate in which respects Roman representations of cities differ from modern ones in general.

The differences become apparent if we take, for example, a watercolour by Jean-Claude Golvin showing a view of Ancient Pompeii from a bird's eye perspective as an example of a modern reconstruction of a Roman city[1], and compare it with two, quite detailed Roman representations: first, the representation of a city and its countryside in a fragmentary marble relief belonging to the so-called 'Torlonia reliefs' found in the Fucino lake (fig. 1)[2], and secondly, the representation of a city in the background of Scene 33 on Trajan's column in Rome (fig. 1)[3].

All these cities have some features in common. Each of them is enclosed by city walls, and the buildings inside stand very close to each other and are arranged in linear order. In the 'Torlonia relief', the internal structure is characterized by rectangular blocks of houses separated from each other by long straight streets, whereas on Trajan's column there is only one row of several small but relatively high buildings. The Roman representations, however, differ from the modern one in some respects:

I am very grateful to Henry Heitmann-Gordon for proofreading my text.

[1] J.-Cl. Golvin, Metropolen der Antike (Stuttgart 2006) p. 96–97.

[2] Celano, Mus. Naz.: E. La Rocca, "L'affresco con veduto di città dal colle Oppio", in E. Fentress (ed.), Romanization and the city. Creation, Transformations, and Failures (Portsmouth 2000) 64–65, fig. 10; D. Faccenna, "I rilievi", in A. Campanelli (ed.), Il Tesoro del Lago. L'archeologia del Fucino e la Collezione Torlonia (Pescara 2001) 34–40 no. 2, fig. 2 (with bibliography).

[3] Rome, Trajan's Forum: F. Coarelli, The Column of Trajan (Rome 2000) 76, pl. 32; E. Wolfram Thill, "Civilization Under Construction: Depictions of Architecture on the Column of Trajan", American Journal of Archaeology 114 (2010) 29, 36, fig. 2 (with further literature).

1) In both reliefs, the city is shown from a closer distance so that more details are visible. This allows us to see, for example, that the city walls consist of ashlar masonry, and that the houses have up to two (Trajans's column) or three storeys (Torlonia relief).

2) The number of houses (Trajan's column) or blocks (Torlonia relief) is quite small. Each city is reduced to a small number of significant features: the city walls, and a few houses or blocks of them. In each case, the intention of the sculptor, obviously, was to show that this is a large and rich city, protected by impressive city walls, and equipped with well-built and multi-storey houses. In the 'Torlonia relief', these are even neatly organized within the rectilinear grid typical of the internal structure of many Roman cities.

3) The city as a *whole* is seen from a bird's eye perspective but both the buildings themselves and the front of the city walls are depicted in frontal view, and in the 'Torlonia relief' the houses in the distance have the same size as those in the foreground. This multiplicity of perspectives is one of the reasons why the sculptor was able to represent so many details.

The most striking feature of Roman representations is the fact that the geometrically unified, one-point perspective, universally accepted since the Renaissance, did not exist as a comprehensive formal principle in Antiquity. Instead, sculptors and painters used different types of perspective that could be combined within the same picture; this is especially evident in the architectural drawings in Roman Second Style wall painting[4]. The underlying principle that all representations have in common is that there was no concept of a consistent, all-encompassing image space. The individual elements (buildings, landscape motifs etc.) are more important than their arrangement. Each element can be regarded from its own point of view because it has its own, largely autonomous value. These characteristics are based on specific ways of seeing and perceiving, testified in written sources on ancient theories of vision[5].

Open questions

However, a look beyond these general rules at the great variety of representations of cities and urban environments in Roman art soon shows that some questions are as of yet unanswered.

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[4] On this topic recently: P. Stinson, "Perspective Systems in Roman Second Style Wall Painting", American Journal of Archaeology 115 (2011) 403–426. – One of the most complex examples is a mural in Room 14 of the Villa of Oplontis, dating to about 60/50 BC. As Stinson (op. cit., 411–415, fig. 7; 420, fig. 15) has pointed out, there are two different main types of architectural perspective that were used in different zones of the painting. In the lower part of the picture where the usual socle with pedestals appears and which is closer and more tangible to the viewer, the painter used parallel perspective for small details throughout. In the upper part of the mural, however, where the very elaborate architecture opens into greater distance the details are all organized in convergence perspectives. There are three different convergence systems at work at the same time.

[5] The most thorough recent study on this topic is B. Hub, Die Perspektive der Antike. Archäologie einer symbolischen Form (Frankfurt 2008) (esp. 302–321 on the dominance of the visual ray theory in Antiquity).

Representations of cities in Roman art have attracted special interest in recent years. Most of these studies are focused almost exclusively on assessing the realism of such representations. So, in a book entitled "Imaging Ancient Rome. Documentation – Visualization – Imagination" (a title somewhat similar to the title of our symposium), some contributions are summarized by the programmatic heading "Re-creating urban realities from paintings, coins, and water-supply" and here the article by Umberto Pappalardo, dealing with representations of cities in Roman wall-painting, is fully focused on whether the paintings are fantastic visions or architectural realities[6]. In the same vein, Eugenio La Rocca, by adopting ancient terminology in order to classify the images, makes a distinction between representations of real places ("*chorographia*"/"*topographia*") and imaginary ones ("*topothesia*")[7].

However, these oppositional categories are not well suited to aid our understanding of the images because the intention of an artist to represent a certain 'real' city is not necessarily reflected in iconography. Cities that are situated in a mythical past can be equipped with Roman podium temples[8] or amphitheatres[9] so that they do not differ from contemporary cities, such as in the 'Torlonia relief' or on Trajan's column. A prominent wall-painting from the Casa del Sacerdos Amandus in Pompeii shows the story of Daedalus and Icarus before a detailed depiction of a city[10], and this city, probably Cnossus, is enclosed by towered and gated city walls consisting of ashlar masonry which are very similar to the city walls in the 'Torlonia relief'.

As Annette Haug has convincingly argued in a recent article, the large majority of city representations refer to specific realities (architecture, topography) only on a very general level because they mainly consist of typified ("topisch") visual elements whereas specific elements are quite rare[11]. That's why, instead of classifying a

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[6] U. Pappalardo – A. Capuano, "Immagini della città nella pittura romana: visioni fantastiche o realtà architettoniche?", in L. Haselberger – J. Humphrey (eds.), Imaging Ancient Rome. Documentation – Visualization – Imagination (Portsmouth 2006) 75–90.

[7] E. La Rocca, Lo spazio negato. La pittura di paesaggio nella cultura artistica greca e romana (Milano 2008) esp. 16–27 ("La *chorographia*"), 28–61 ("La *topothesia*").

[8] As, for example, in the representation of Troy in the ,Tabulae Iliacae', see below (with n. 12).

[9] See n. 10 below.

[10] Pompeii, Casa del Sacerdos Amandus (I 7,7), room (b), *in situ*: E. W. Leach, The Rhetoric of Space. Literary and Artistic Representations of Landscape in Republican and Augustan Rome (Princeton 1988) 346–347, fig. 32; Faccenna, op. cit. (n. 2) 39, fig. 14; Pappalardo, op. cit. (n. 6) 83–84, fig. 10; La Rocca, op. cit. (n. 7) 51, fig. 42. – Pappalardo, op. cit. 84 argues that the generic character of this representation is clear from the fact that Cnossus, as far as we know, had no city walls. However, we cannot expect topographical realism in this case, or in other mythological scenes. The reason why Cnossus has city walls in the painting is simply that the painter used the topos of a fortified city, which was the usual way to represent a city in the background of mythological paintings. For other examples see J. Hodske, Mythologische Bildthemen in den Häusern Pompejis (Ruhpolding 2007) 205 cat. 740, pl. 99.1 (Achill and Polyxena: Troy); 207 cat. 823, pl. 101.4 (Daedalus and Icarus: Cnossus, with an amphitheatre inside); 207 cat. 758, pl. 102.1 (Daedalus and Icarus: Cnossus).

[11] A. Haug, „Spätantike Stadtbilder. Ein Diskurs zwischen Topik und Spezifik", in F. Hölscher – T. Hölscher (eds.), Römische Bilderwelten. Von der Wirklichkeit zum Bild und zurück (Heidelberg 2007) 217–249. The only point that has to be questioned is Haug's distinction between "Allgemeinbildern von Stadt" (220), which do not refer to any specific topographical

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representation as a whole as 'real' or 'imaginary', it is much more in accordance with the character of the representations as visual constructions to look within the single representation for typified, unspecific elements and specific ones. This can, however, only be the first step of analysis.

The crucial, underlying question is to what extent and, above all, for what reasons painters or sculptors deviated from physical realities; a question that has to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

The integration of human figures

The cities in the 'Torlonia relief' and in Scene 33 of Trajan's column contain no human figures. In many cases, however, the arrangement of the image space *cannot* be understood by considering phenomena such as architecture or landscape separately, because the most common characteristic of the vast majority of compositions is their focus on human activity. As soon as the scenery is animated with mythological, divine, or mortal figures, the surroundings become increasingly more varied.

A quite prominent example is a miniature marble relief now in the Capitoline Museum in Rome, which is the best preserved example of a series of similar tablets from early Imperial Roman times which are known as the 'Tabulae Iliacae' because they show episodes from the myth of Troy (fig. 1)[12].

The central section shows what happened after the capture of Troy. The city is characterized by impressive city walls with a gate on the front side and several towers, giving it an appearance similar to the city of the 'Torlonia relief'. But the whole interior of the city is structured in a completely different way than in the 'Torlonia relief' or in Scene 33 of Trajan's column.

The city area is dominated by two large, trapezoid squares each of them defined by a three-sided portico. The upper square has a temple in the centre and is flanked on each side by small clusters of houses behind the lateral porticoes. On the square itself, we find, among other scenes, the wooden horse and the rape of Cassandra. The lower square is smaller and has an altar in the centre where the murder of Priam is depicted. Behind the lateral porticos, there is a temple on each side. Unlike the two reliefs

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situation, and "singulären Bildern von spezifischen Städten" (222), because it is difficult to separate these categories from each other on the basis of iconographical criteria, as the author herself rightly remarks: "Häufig genug ist eine Stadtdarstellung durch eine Beischrift zwar als singuläre Darstellung ausgewiesen, im Bild werden aber allein unspezifische Topoi eingesetzt" (222). This applies, for example, to the 'Torlonia relief' and to the 'Forum scenes' from the Praedia of Iulia Felix in Pompeii (below, with n. 28).

[12] Rome, Musei Capitolini, Inv. 316 (height 25 cm, width 30 cm): Leach, op. cit. (n. 10) 81–84, fig. 11; N. Valenzuela Montenegro, Die Tabulae Iliacae: Mythos und Geschichte im Spiegel einer Gruppe frühkaiserzeitlicher Miniaturreliefs (Berlin 2004) 116–133, pls. 1, 3, 5, 8.1, 10; La Rocca, op. cit. (n. 7) 20, fig. 5; M. Squire, The *Iliad* in a Nutshell. Visualizing Epic on the *Tabulae Iliacae* (Oxford 2011) 148–176 esp. 158–165, pl. I; 387–390 (with list of figures and bibliography).

mentioned above, this city has large squares as well as temples – all of them temples of the Roman podium type – but, on the other hand, the domestic areas are reduced to a minimum.

Scholars have tried to identify the two main building complexes by referring to information provided by written sources: The upper square has been identified as the sanctuary of Athena where the rape of Cassandra is said to have taken place, and the lower square where Priam's murder is shown has been regarded as the palace of the king[13].

These identifications, however, raise difficulties. Not only are several episodes combined with each other on the upper square as well as in the other sections of the city, but the central building complexes are also so similar to each other that their iconography makes it quite difficult to see a distinction between a "sanctuary" and a "palace". This city is a highly artificial construction: Its whole interior is structured according to a strictly symmetrical principle. The composition of the buildings and squares has no topographical plausibility whatsoever, and the small size of the domestic areas in relation to the squares is far from any reality. Each built-up area has its own, independent value.

The autonomy of the architectural motifs has its correspondence in the fact that some of the protagonists can appear more than once. Aeneas, who, as the future founder of Rome, is the most prominent figure, can be seen in three different places: On the lower square, he receives the *Penates*; a second Aeneas, with rest of his family, emerges from the city gate to move towards the shore; and in the foreground of the composition, a third Aeneas boards one of the ships.

The fact that this city has such large squares can only be explained by the sculptor's need to provide sufficient space for the numerous figures he wanted to show.

The same practical necessity is apparent in the famous wall-painting from Pompeii showing the riot in the city's amphitheatre in 59 AD (fig. 1)[14]. The topographical realities in the south-east corner of Pompeii are significantly modified in order to create enough space for the numerous figures; this is particularly evident in the insertion of a huge open area between the amphitheatre and the city wall that doesn't exist in reality.

As soon as human figures appear, the city can fundamentally change its face. The cities in the 'Torlonia relief' as well as in Scene 33 of Trajan's column do not provide much space for human activities because there are no people who would need it.

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[13] Leach, op. cit. (n. 10) 81; Valenzuela Montenegro, op. cit. (n. 12) 117, 121. – Only one of the temples is identified by an inscription; the sanctuary outside of the lower square to the right, where Menelaos captures Helen, is named "*hieron Aphrodites*".

[14] Naples, Mus. Naz., Inv. 112222 (found in Pompeii, Casa I 3,23, Peristyle n): Th. Fröhlich, Lararien- und Fassadenbilder in den Vesuvstädten (Mainz 1991) 241–247, pl. 23,2; J. R. Clarke, Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans: Visual Representation and Non-elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C.–A.D. 315 (Berkeley 2003) 152–158, fig. 89; Pappalardo, op. cit. (n. 6) 84, fig. 11; La Rocca, op. cit. (n. 7) 20–21, fig. 7.

The city as unspecific urban scenery

Studies on the visualization of cities in Roman visual art are focused almost exclusively on those examples where cities or parts of them are clearly defined by means of distinctive urban features such as city walls or specific urban buildings. This applies, for example, to the 'Tabula Iliaca' and the painting of the riot in the amphitheatre of Pompeii. In both cases, the city is shown from a greater distance, animated by a large number of small figures inside.

There are, however, several mythical as well as non-mythical depictions where the human figures are shown from less far away and are accordingly larger. In some of these images, the fact that the scene is localized in an urban context becomes evident mainly from the character of the activities.

This applies, for example, to a marble relief from the middle of the 1st century AD, now in Florence (fig. 1), that was found together with another, very similar relief in Rome and probably once decorated the façade of a tomb[15].

It shows the vending of cloth. The most important figures are two seated clients, both of whom are male and wearing the toga, accompanied by a standing attendant in a tunica, who might be a slave. They are looking at a large piece of cloth that is held out for inspection by two tunicate men, and in the centre, another male figure, probably the shop owner, is seen supervising the sale. What makes this scene special is the strongly elaborated social distinction between the figures, as is indicated by their positions, gestures, and garments: There is not only a strict status distinction between buyers and sellers but also within each of these groups.

The scene takes place before a quite elaborate architectural façade. It consists of four carefully fluted pilasters with richly decorated bases and Corinthian capitals, two of which flank the scene whereas the two central ones occupy the background. The epistyle carries a wall made of ashlar masonry with four rectangular windows with open shutters. The whole construction is covered by a roof of carefully laid tiles.

This architecture has usually been interpreted as the exterior of a shop[16] but it is quite a strange structure: The upper part with the row of windows indicates the upper floor of a domestic setting, whereas the lower part seems a little too prestigious for that. The carefully rendered pilasters carrying an epistyle rather remind us of representations of

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[15] Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Inv. 315 (found in Rome, Vigna Strozzi; height 48 cm, width 78 cm): G. Zimmer, Römische Berufsdarstellungen (Berlin 1982) 28, 125–126 cat. 39, with fig.; M. George, "Social Identity and the Dignity of Work in Freedmen's Reliefs", in E. D'Ambra – G. P. R. Métraux (eds.), The Art of Citizens, Soldiers and Freedmen in the Roman World (Oxford 2006) 24–26. – The second relief (Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Inv. 313: Zimmer, op. cit. 28, 124–125 cat. 38, with fig.; George op. cit. 24–26, fig. 4) has a less elaborated architectural façade, without an upper floor.

[16] George, op. cit. (n. 15) 24 ("The monumental structural frame of the shop exterior… has an internal portico which is suggested by two additional columns in the background").

public architecture, as can be seen, for example, in the so-called 'Anaglypha Traiani', which show the south façade of the Forum Romanum, including the Basilica Iulia[17].

Furthermore, it is difficult to understand how the protagonists are related to the architecture. The position of the figures *before* the pilasters might suggest that the activities take place *in front* of the building. But it can hardly have been intended to show that the sale of such precious cloths to sitting clients takes place in a street instead of inside a shop, which would be much more suitable for this kind of business.

The mixture of architectural elements in the façade obviously has to do with the character of the *activities* going on. The sculptor seems to have intended to set an appropriate stage for these figures in order to signal the prestige of the cloth merchant: by emphasizing the noble wares, the upper-class-clients, and the grand architectural setting.

The fact that the scene takes place in an urban context is made evident here not primarily by the architectural background but primarily by the character of the activities.

Mythological pictures: Cities identified by human interactions

The phenomenon that the scenery does not lend itself to identification with any particular location is especially common in mythological representations.

This is – to return to the myth of Troy – the case with one of the three central pictures in the *ala* of the Casa del Menandro in Pompeii, all of which show episodes of the capture of Troy: on the south wall we have the death of Laocoon, on the east wall the dragging of the wooden horse, and on the north wall the fate of Helen and Cassandra, which we will now have a closer look at (fig. 1)[18].

On the left side, Menelaos, in full armour, grabs Helen, seizing his adulterous wife by the hair before an audience of Greeks and Trojans. In the middle Priam is helplessly watching what happens to the right: Ajax' attempt to drag Cassandra away from the statue of Athena. In the background, there are two walls obviously positioned at right angles to each other. Light falls through a gap between these walls and illuminates the figure of Cassandra.

The question is where exactly these scenes take place[19]. The presence of a statue of Athena might indicate a sanctuary but there is neither a temple nor an altar. Above all,

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[17] Rome, Curia Iulia: T. Hölscher, „Bilder der Macht und Herrschaft", in A. Nünnerich-Asmus (ed.), Traian. Ein Kaiser der Superlative am Beginn einer Umbruchzeit? (Mainz 2002) 141–142, figs. 128, 129.

[18] Pompeii, Casa del Menandro (I 10,4), Ala (4), *in situ*: R. Ling – L. Ling, The Insula of Menander at Pompeii II: The Decorations (Oxford 2005) 74–75, pl. 67; 192–194, col. pl. 7.

[19] Ling – Ling, op. cit. (n. 18) 192: "Both episodes take place within an interior, illuminated by light that comes through a lofty central doorway and round a corner at the left". Other authors do not go into detail, so K. Lorenz, Bilder machen Räume. Mythenbilder in pompeianischen Häusern (Berlin 2008) 291–294, fig. 137 b (292: "Stadtszenerie").

the position of the walls, both of them apparently leading into the background, makes it difficult to identify the interior of a building or building complex. The height and width of the walls might suggest city walls but there are essential features missing: The walls lack the battlements we would have to expect in this case, given that they appear in the central picture of the east wall of the same room where we can see the wooden horse being brought into the city through a breach in city walls crowned by battlements[20].

Furthermore and even more strangely, what seems to be a doorway is not covered by any kind of lintel but is completely open at the top. It thus seems that this is neither a proper city wall nor a proper city gate. It is *not* shown how, if at all, the two walls are related to each other, let alone what kind of building they might belong to.

Nevertheless, the viewer could very easily see that the city depicted is Troy. What enabled him to identify the location was not the very unspecific background architecture but the scenes themselves which are represented in well-known figural compositions, established by a long iconographic tradition[21].

Instead of specifying the location, the painter has given the scene a certain atmosphere by inserting single elements into the picture. The statue of Athena might point to a sanctuary that, however, is not shown, and only alludes to the fact that Ajax, by trying to rape Cassandra in a sanctuary, commits sacrilege against the gods. On the same, very general level the two high and massive walls, separated from each other simply by an open space and probably pointing to city walls without going into detail might have been intended to indicate that these episodes happen after a city has been seized: a city whose massive walls have now lost their former protective function.

A touch of urban atmosphere: The mixture of urban and other elements

The last phenomenon I would like to mention applies to representations in which single elements established in city depictions are combined with motifs from *other* sources so that the scenery intentionally remains inconclusive, gaining only a touch of urban atmosphere.

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[20] Ling – Ling, op. cit. (n. 18) 74, pl. 66; 194–195, col. pl. 10.

[21] There are several other, similar cases in Pompeian wall-painting. A painting in the Casa di M. Lucretius Fronto (Pompeii, Casa V 4,a, room [5], *in situ*: Lorenz, op. cit. [n. 19] 85–86, fig. 11) shows Theseus taking his weapons and Ariadne handing him the ball of wool. The figures stand before some architecture consisting of two adjoining walls whose corner is accentuated by a pillar. In the foreground, at the right edge of the painting, stands an isolated column on a base. The location is so unspecific that the viewer does not get any hint to the fact that the story took place in Cnossus. – Similar examples can easily be found in publications on mythological paintings from Pompeii, such as Hodske, op. cit. (n. 10) or Lorenz, op. cit. (n. 19).

An interesting case are the so-called 'Icarios reliefs', a series of marble reliefs that show Dionysus visiting a banqueter before a rich architectural background, a scenery that appears fully developed for the first time in an Augustan relief now in Naples (fig. 1) [22].

In the left half of the relief, a young man, clad only in a mantle around his waist, reclines on a couch accompanied by a woman stretched out behind him. In front of the couch is a table which carries drinking vessels and food. The man turns round to Dionysus and raises his hand in a greeting to the god; between the figures is a second couch, obviously prepared for the god. The bearded Dionysus, wrapped in a large mantle and ivy-crowned, is supported by a little satyr and obviously drunk. A second satyr bends down to remove his master's shoes, as was the custom with guests before sitting down to a banquet. The god is accompanied by his usual followers, satyrs and maenads.

In the background are two buildings, a large and a small one, both with gable roofs carefully covered with tiles. The large building has double windows in its front and side, whereas the small one has a broad rectangular opening in its front, bordered by a profiled frame. The small building is continued to the right by a wall followed by another, lower wall behind the followers of Dionysus. The connection between these walls is concealed by a pillar supporting a votive tablet, and on the left side is a column on a square plinth which in turn supports a large water basin, behind which appears a Doric column with a figure on top.

Finally, there is a large curtain attached to the front of the small building and to the pillar. The curtain, which serves here as the immediate background for the couple on the couch and Dionysus, is a well-known standard motif in Roman visual art, the function of which was to indicate that the scene in the foreground takes place indoors. This is further emphasized by the furniture, which is typical of a triclinium. What the sculptor obviously wanted to show here is that Dionysus enters a room coming from outside.

It is, however, difficult to understand why the curtain covers the opening – probably a door – of the building behind, and, what's more, why the curtain, though clearly indicating an indoor setting, is attached to the *outer* wall of a house. This is the same contrast between indoor-activities and outside-architecture as in the vending relief in Florence [23].

The question is how all these elements fit together. The pillar with the votive tablet points to a sanctuary; the column with the water basin rather suggests a garden; the furniture indicates a domestic banquet room, and the two houses standing close together might suggest an urban context rather than a villa somewhere in the countryside.

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[22] Naples, Mus. Naz., Inv. 6713: E. Pochmarski, Dionysische Gruppen. Eine typologische Untersuchung zur Geschichte des Stützmotivs (Wien 1990) 105–106, 299 cat. R 14, pl. 33,1. – For the 'Icarios reliefs' in general: Pochmarski, op. cit. 105–108, 297–301 cat. R 1–32, pls. 30–34.

[23] see above (with n. 15 and fig. 1).

The sculptor did not specify the location but, quite the contrary, created an entirely fictitious environment where all borders are crossed: the borders between inside and outside as well as the borders between different locations, and the same applies to the figural scene itself where the border between the human and the divine sphere is crossed.

The activities are set in an entirely inconclusive environment, intended to inspire the viewer's imagination by offering him *diverging* visual incentives. The banquet scene indicates an urban lifestyle and that's why the two houses in the background, despite having no real function here at all, might have been intended to emphasize this aspect by adding a certain urban touch to the scene.

Human activities as a crucial factor in identifying cities

Studies on Roman representations of cities are traditionally based on the premise that the iconography of the city itself is the only and crucial factor in its identification. This assumption has to be questioned.

1) There are, of course, many representations where distinctive architectures, building arrangements or topographical settings give a direct hint towards identifying the city. Examples are the 'Anaglypha Traiani' from the Forum Romanum[24], the Pompeian wall-painting showing the riot in the local amphitheatre[25], or the famous 'Earthquake relief', a frieze slab from a Pompeian household shrine depicting the Capitolium and several monuments in the forum of Pompeii shaken by the earthquake in 62 AD[26].

In other representations, however, the artist obviously intended to show a certain city but did not make this clear in the iconography. The city in the fragmentary 'Torlonia relief'[27], for example, is only part of a greater composition and embedded into a spacious landscape that has probably to be identified with the region of the Fucino lake. The city itself, however, is depicted in a quite unspecific manner. It is not the iconography of the city itself that may have enabled the viewer to give it a name but only its individual surroundings.

Iconographical distinction can help to identify a city, but is only one among several factors (see fig. 2).

2) Another factor that should be taken into account is the location of the painting or relief. Whether or not the representation was situated in this same city or nearby, must certainly have played a role in identifying a depicted city, and modern analysis of city

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[24] see above (with n. 17).

[25] see above (with n. 14 and fig. 1).

[26] Pompeii, Casa di L. Caecilius Iucundus (V 1,23.26), atrium (b), lararium: I. Colpo, *Ruinae... et putres robore trunci*. Paesaggi di rovine e rovine nel paesaggio nella pittura romana (I secolo a.C. - I secolo d.C.) (Rome 2010) 165–167, fig. 119.

[27] see above (with n. 2 and fig. 1). – The identification of this city has been controversially debated: La Rocca, op. cit. (n. 2) 64 (Alba Fucens); C. F. Giuliani, "Note sulla composizione dei rilievi Torlonia", in A. Campanelli, op. cit. (n. 2) 40–41 (Marruvium).

representations in Roman art would accordingly do well to pay more attention to this factor.

The famous 'Forum scenes' on the frieze from the Praedia of Iulia Felix in Pompeii show the local forum filled by a lot of figures involved in commercial and other public activities[28]. The place is characterized only by a colonnade running behind all scenes and by several equestrian statues on bases. This setting is reminiscent of the forum of Pompeii but is so unspecific that the same representation could have decorated, without modification, a house in any other city and have represented the local forum there. The viewer was enabled to recognize the forum of Pompeii only because this painting was situated in Pompeii. In other cases, too, the location of a representation in the same city must at least have facilitated the identification, as in the above-mentioned representations from Rome or Pompeii where the location is characterized by means of a distinctive iconography.

3) In those cases, however, where the representation was situated at a place far from the city shown in the picture, the identification can hardly have been possible without some sort of additional help, irrespective of whether or not the city or/and its surroundings appear to be depicted in an individual manner that might refer to a specific topography. This applies, for example, to the cities on Trajan's column[29] or the cities in the great panels from the arch of Septimius Severus in the Forum Romanum whose identification has caused very controversial discussions[30]. If identification was really intended, the viewer who saw these representations in Rome could hardly identify such a city, situated far from Rome, without the help of an inscription giving a name.

4) In mythological scenes that are set in distant cities and in the past, this help was given by the figural scenes themselves. The cities of Troy (as in the painting in the Casa del Menandro showing Helen and Cassandra[31]) or Cnossus (as in the painting in the Casa di M. Lucretius Fronto showing Theseus and Ariadne[32]) cannot possibly have been distinguished by their iconography, which varied from picture to picture. Those cities could, however, be easily identified by everyone who recognized the myth and knew where the story had taken place. In these cases, the identification is made possible solely by the distinctive human activities visualized in well-known iconographical schemes.

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[28] Naples, Mus. Naz., Inv. 9057–9070. From Pompeii, Praedia di Iulia Felix (II 4,3), atrium (24): S. C. Nappo, "Fregio dipinto dal 'praedium' di Giulia Felice con rappresentazione del foro di Pompei", Rivista di Studi Pompeiani 3 (1989) 79–96, with figs.; Clarke, op. cit. (n. 14) 96–98, fig. 50.

[29] see above (with n. 3 and fig. 1).

[30] Rome, Forum Romanum: S. Lusnia, "Battle Imagery and Politics on the Severan Arch in the Roman Forum", in Sh. Dillon – K. E. Welch (eds.), Representations of War in Ancient Rome (Cambridge 2006) 275–283, with figs. (and bibliography).

[31] see above (with n. 18 and fig. 1).

[32] see above (with n. 21).

The character of the human activities also plays an important role in several non-mythological representations. In the vending relief in Florence[33], the fact that the scene is situated in an urban context is indicated by a combination of urban architecture and urban activities, and in the 'Icarios relief'[34] the scenery gets its urban flair from the combination of the two houses in the background and the banquet scene.

Roman city depictions have traditionally been analyzed without taking into account whether or not there are people in the town. This aspect is, however, absolutely crucial if one wants to understand the representations against the background of the intentions of their producers. The iconography of the city itself and its surroundings is, of course, most important, but the character of the activities going on is an equally crucial factor because the figural scenes determine the appearance of the city to a very high degree.

Representations of cities in Roman art are much too diverse to be classified in simple oppositional categories, such as 'real' vs. 'imaginary' cities. These cities are characterized by *different* factors which can be combined in very different ways (fig. 2).

Conclusion

I therefore suggest that one should look at representations of cities in Roman art from a broader perspective by comparing explicitly identified cities with other urban arrangements of image space, which can only be explained by recourse to the artist's intention to give the figural actions an adequate setting.

In many cases the question "Is this a city or not?" cannot be answered because the sculptor or painter has intentionally left it open by *not* specifying the location. In Roman visual art, "*the* city" is *not* a coherent, distinctive and exclusive entity that is clearly separated from other locations but is rather a starting point from which it was possible to move, step by step, into a completely fictitious world (fig. 1). How far one could move away from physical realities becomes particularly evident in those cases where the distinction between inside and outside, which is usually clearly marked by a city wall in representations of whole cities, is intentionally abandoned by combining in- and outside settings, side by side, within the same picture. When talking about "cities" as a topic in Roman art, we should *not only* think of cities in the sense of physical entities but also, and more generally, of the visualization of urban atmosphere.

When we talk about visualizing Roman cities, we should keep in mind that what we see in Roman cities is not what the Romans saw in them. The enormous variety in Roman visual art is based on the fact that the construction of spatial contexts is not intended to show what an *outside* viewer could see from his single observation point but to match the needs of the protagonists acting *within* the picture.

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[33] see above (with n. 15 and fig. 1).
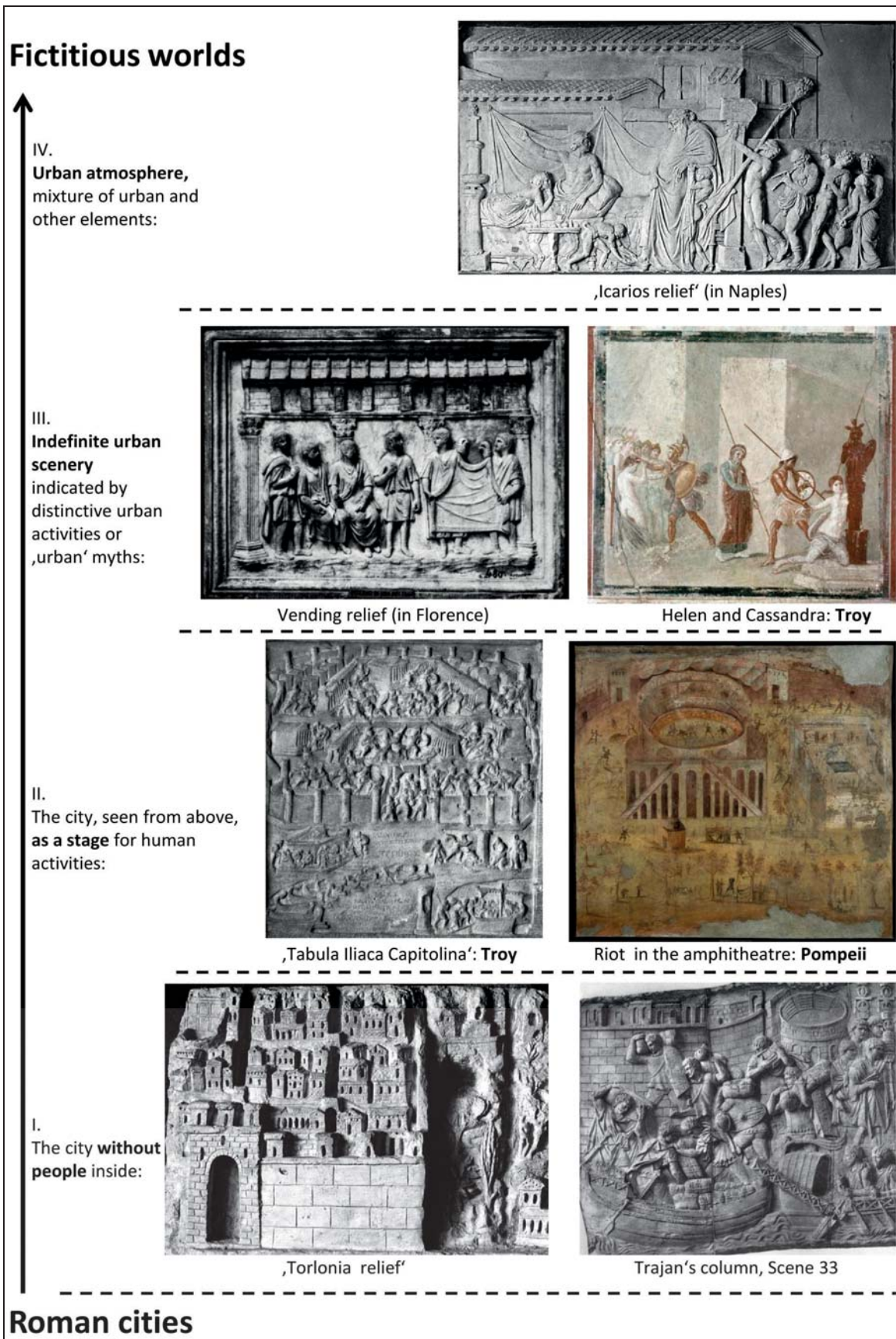[34] see above (with n. 22 and fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Different ways of visualizing cities in Roman art.

Fig. 1: by Stefan Ritter. – Photograph credits: 'Icarios relief' (Naples): Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke München, Fotothek. – Vending relief (Florence): ullstein bild / Alinari Archives. – Wall-painting with Helen and Cassandra, from Pompeii: © Photo SCALA, Florence. – 'Tabula Iliaca Capitolina' (Rome): ullstein bild / Alinari Archives. – Wall-painting with riot in the amphitheatre, from Pompeii: ullstein bild / Alinari Archives. – 'Torlonia relief', from the Fucino lake: Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke München, Fotothek. – Trajan's column in Rome, Scene 33: C. Cichorius, Die Reliefs der Traianssäule (Berlin 1896) pl. XXV.

Fig. 2: by Stefan Ritter.

Representation and its (former) location:	Relation between the location of the representation and the represented city:	Iconography of the city:	Figures inside the city:	Identifying factors:
	representation situated in the same city or nearby:	distinctive building ensembles:		- the location of the representation and…
Wall-painting 'Riot in the amphitheatre", Pompeii (n. 14 and fig. 1)	Pompeii, area around the amphitheatre	"	many small figures, involved in a historical event	+ distinctive building ensemble
'Anaglypha Traiani', Rome (n. 17)	Rome, Forum Romanum	"	several large figures, involved in official ceremonies	+ distinctive building ensemble
'Earthquake relief', Pompeii (n. 26)	Pompeii, Forum area	"	one figure (sacrificial activity)	+ distinctive building ensemble
		no distinctive architecture:		
'Torlonia relief', from the Fucino lake (n. 2 and fig. 1)	probably a city somewhere in the area of the Fucino lake	"	-- (only small figures *outside* the city)	+ distinctive landscape
'Forum frieze', Pompeii (n. 28)	Pompeii, Forum	"	many large figures, involved in commercial and other public activities	-- (only by the location of the frieze)
	represented city far away:			
Trajan's column, Scene 33, Rome (n. 3 and fig. 1)	anonymous city	" (city in greater distance)	-- (figures only *outside* the city)	--
			mythological scenes:	- distinctive activities and…
'Tabulae Iliacae' (n. 12 and fig. 1)	Troy	"	many small figures	+ inscriptions
Wall-painting with Daedalus and Icarus, Pompeii (n. 10)	Cnossus	" (city in greater distance)	-- (figures only outside the city)	-- (only by the activities (in the foreground)
		scenery not specified:		
Wall-painting with Helen and Cassandra, Pompeii (n. 18 and fig. 1)	Troy	"	large figures	-- (only by the activities)
Wall-painting with Theseus and Ariadne, Pompeii (n. 21)	Cnossus	"	two large figures	-- (only by the activities)
	Indefinite scenery:			
Vending relief, from Rome (n. 15 and fig. 1)	", unspecific urban scenery	"	several large figures, involved in *commercial* activities	+ urban architecture
'Icarios reliefs' (n. 22 and fig. 1)	", mixture of urban and other elements	"	large figures	+ two urban buildings

Fig. 2. Human activities and other factors in identifying cities in Roman art.