

## The circulation of traffic in Pompeii's *Regio VI*

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Streets are one of the principal components in the structure and organization of cities, yet as a specific object of inquiry they have been under-appreciated and understudied. The scenes of street life depicted by authors such as Juvenal and Horace are well known, but archaeological evidence has rarely been marshalled in the same way that evidence for housing<sup>1</sup> has been in order to compare it to the writings of Pliny and Vitruvius. Even at Pompeii, where ruts have an almost iconic status, the streets have been largely overlooked and the traffic that plied them largely ignored. A rare exception was the pioneering study published in 1991 by S. Tsujimura, who detailed the depth of ruts on every street and the evidence they offer for the movement of vehicles. Despite the novelty of her approach and the richness of the data she collected, her article has not inspired further research on the organization of Pompeii's traffic, even though a few scholars would attempt to employ her findings. A focused examination of the actual circulation of traffic can offer new insights into the town as a dynamic, functioning whole, rather than a collection of disarticulated parts.

### Street as an object of inquiry

What can a study of streets and traffic tell us about an ancient town? Those scholars who have used the street as a unit of analysis have attempted either to extract a view of Roman society and its values or to determine the particular character of Pompeii's built environment, its 'urban fabric'. Most notable is the work of R. Laurence and A. Wallace-Hadrill published in the 1990s. Laurence's dissection of Pompeian streets into statistical clusters of use, based upon the frequency of doorways and painted messages, served to illustrate some fundamental but not yet fully articulated ideas about the organization and use of the urban space.<sup>2</sup> Current scholarship is still influenced by Laurence's research model; a case in point is A. Kaiser who has explored through statistical analysis and the use of Geographic Information Systems the social fabric of Roman cities as it draped over the urban design.<sup>3</sup> Wallace-Hadrill's earlier research on houses in Pompeii was also quantitatively minded, a perspective which he partly preserved in his examination of a stretch of the *via dell'Abbondanza*. Bolstered by reference to ancient sources, he tied the absence of traffic to the absence of morally suspect establishments such as inns and taverns. "Roman ideology", he asserted, could be seen "inscribed on the ground, down to the wheel-ruts in the paving stones".<sup>4</sup> Still, it was the ideology and not the ruts that were in question.

The paradigm advanced by Laurence and Wallace-Hadrill, of using the built environment to explore the social character of Pompeii, has had a strong influence upon other researchers. J. Hartnett and S. J. R. Ellis, for example, are concerned with the physical interaction of the

1 For a critical example, see E. W. Leach, "Oecus on Ibycus: investigating the vocabulary of the Roman house," in R. Jones and S. Bon (edd.), *Sequence and space in Pompeii* (Oxford 1997) 50-72.

2 R. Laurence, *Roman Pompeii: space and society* (New York 1994); id., "The organization of space in Pompeii," in T. J. Cornell and K. Lomas (edd.), *Urban society in Roman Italy* (London 1995) 63-78.

3 A. Kaiser, *The urban dialogue. An analysis of the use of space in the Roman city of Empúries, Spain* (BAR 5901, Oxford 2000). See also P. Goodman's review in *Digressus* 1 (2001) 4-7 (<http://www.digressus.org/reviews/2001pp04-07-rev-goodman.pdf>). Kaiser's work at Pompeii ("Brothels and the organization of urban space at Pompeii") was presented at the 105th Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America. The methodology of my own early work (*Narrowing stones and the traffic system in Pompeii* [AM thesis, Univ. of Chicago 1999]) was heavily influenced by R. Laurence's distribution patterns.

4 A. Wallace-Hadrill, "Public honor and private shame: the urban texture of Pompeii," in Cornell and Lomas (supra n.2) 57; A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton 1994).