



ROMA RIPERCORSA

REDEFINING LOST URBAN CONNECTIONS

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December 2005

INTRODUCTION

I. TRAFFIC vs. PEOPLE

Few will argue against the statement that traffic in the center of Rome has reached a crisis point in terms of vehicles impeding pedestrian circulation. This in spite of the valiant efforts by the city government to limit vehicular traffic within the area known as ZTL (Zona Traffico Limitato). Unfortunately, permits to circulate within that zone are not very difficult to obtain, so that the historic center is still overwhelmed by too many vehicles. Coupled with this is the increasing size of delivery vans, many of which should be termed “trucks” rather than “vans”. The same increase in size can be noted in private cars, SUVs being the latest fad. These outsized vehicles, both commercial and private, persist in passing through the narrowest streets in Rome, causing tight traffic jams which often block passage to even the slimmest of pedestrians .

The city has certainly made some effort to cater to pedestrians. The “Cento Piazze” project for the Jubilee year of 2000 has produced some redesigned squares aimed at providing pleasant oases for the harassed walker. But little has been done to provide pedestrian-friendly connections between these squares, or indeed for getting from any point in the center to another, on foot. There are exceptions: the Piazza Navona-Piazza di Trevi pedestrian path is one, but even this route crosses two heavily trafficked streets (Corso Rinascimento and Via del Corso). The recent closure to vehicles of Via dei Cestari has yet to be perfected because vehicles still use it.

The general attitude toward the pedestrian is summed up rather astonishingly by Eugenio Borgia in a book discussing projected pedestrian bridges.¹ These bridges were apparently designed “to provide continuity for some of the principal Jubilee itineraries, where these interfere with major arteries of vehicular traffic!” [“... per dare continuità ad alcuni dei principali itinerari giubilari, laddove essi interferiscono con arterie stradali ad alto traffico veicolare!”]. Seemingly pedestrians interfere (“interferiscono”) with vehicles, and not vice versa. A clearer statement of the preference given to vehicles would be hard to find. The bridges in these competition projects were designed for pedestrians to climb up and over vehicular traffic at Piazza S. Giovanni in Laterano, while the vehicles remained comfortably at ground level (Fig. 2). Considering the ease with which vehicles change level and the difficulty which many pedestrians have making that effort, perhaps the program for these projected bridges should have been reversed: viaducts or tunnels for cars instead of bridges for pedestrians. Despite the quality of some of the designs, no bridge was built at S. Giovanni, whereas the favoring of vehicular traffic was evident in the amounts spent to prepare Rome for the Jubilee: most of the funds allocated to circulation went

¹ Tonelli, C., *I ponti del Giubileo*, Roma 1999; p.39

into providing parking and improved movement for tour buses and automobiles; very little was dedicated to pedestrian circulation.

II. TRAFFIC AWAY FROM PEOPLE

Separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic is a tautology of modern urban design. Yet little has been done in this direction in recent years for the area within the urban walls of Rome. For examples of this, we have to turn to the earlier years of Roma Capitale. Two arcades Galleria Sciarra (1885-86) and Galleria Colonna (1915-22) provided some facilitation of pedestrian movement, segregated from vehicular traffic. A bridge over Via del Muro Torto (1908), and connecting the Giardino del Pincio to Viale delle Magnolie in Villa Borghese, took advantage of the level difference and provided a major pedestrian link between these two green areas. However vehicular traffic also used this link until about 1970. The Traforo Umberto I° (1902), a tunnel through the Quirinal hill, removed some vehicular traffic from that hill, allowing freer use by pedestrians of the axial Via del Quirinale, though vehicular traffic still remains on the latter street. Less successful from this point of view was the tunnel through the Janiculum hill (1937) because it was entirely aimed at vehicles: no gain in pedestrian movement resulted from this. In fact, a new impediment to that movement was created there by the spacious traffic node of Piazza della Rovere which cut a former connection between the Salita S. Onofrio and Via di Porta S. Spirito.

In the 1960s, traffic tunnels built along the Lungotevere river roads benefited only vehicles, allowing them to travel on two levels instead of one. The same occurred as recently as 1999 at Piazza della Rovere: the tunnels built there provided facilitation only for vehicles. Crossing the piazza or the Lungotevere at that point is, if anything, harder for the pedestrian today than it was before that “improvement” was begun.

III. THE PROJECT

A possible, and only partial solution to the problem of pedestrian circulation could be the reestablishment of some of the urban connections which have vanished since 1860. Taking advantage of the difference in levels existing in specific locations, pedestrian movement would be improved not only by reopening lost sections of important streets, but also by segregating pedestrians from vehicles. At the same time, parts of the city which have lost the basic element of social activity, thereby becoming urban backwaters, would have a chance to become active parts of the city once more.

Following is a selection of only a few sites where reestablishing lost connections would benefit pedestrian circulation. There are numerous others which need to be examined in the future, especially if this first sampling bears fruit. Except for the Forum crossings, the selected sites occur along some of the group of historic pathways through the city discussed by this author in the article “Roma Attraversata.”² The nine paths discussed in that article form the basis for a

² in the exhibition catalog: Calzolari, Vittoria, ed., *Storia e natura come sistema*, Roma, (Argos) 1999; pp.172-191

course³ designed to analyse the historical development of the city's complex urban plan. Four of these paths will be discussed briefly in order to provide context for the suggested re-connections along their course.

The locations in the following list will each be examined separately and in detail. [in square brackets is the name of the historic pathway along which the selection occurs]

1. Via Garibaldi/Via di Porta S. Pancrazio [Via Aurelia Vetus]
2. Via Zanardelli/Via Tor di Nona/Via Monte Brianzo [Via Trinitatis]
3. Piazza S. Pietro in Vincoli/Via degli Annibaldi [Via delle Sette Sale]
4. Roman Forum
 - a) Basilica di Massenzio/Palatine hill/Coelian hill
 - b) Via del Foro Romano/Via della Consolazione
5. Forum of Augustus (Via Bonella)
6. Via del Portico d'Ottavia [Via Peregrinorum]

The reestablished connections would have to be carefully calibrated to encourage pedestrian and bicycle usage and to exclude all motor-vehicular traffic. For this purpose a study would have to be made of the area surrounding each site to ascertain how the new connections could benefit from, and improve existing circulation patterns. Ramps, tunnels, elevated walkways, bridges, stairs and *cordons* (stair-ramps) would be used where deemed necessary, both to reestablish old connections and to link the new sites with existing streets.

The Studium Urbis plans to sponsor a competition for architecture students which will provide ideas for developing these urban reconnections. The collaboration of the University of Rome (La Sapienza) and of the Comune is invited.

³ "Roman Cartography as Imago Urbis" for Pennsylvania State University's Rome program