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LA STRADA E LA CITTÀ

GENESI E TRASFORMAZIONE DAL RAPPORTO TRA VIABILITÀ E IMPIANTI URBANI NEL LAZIO E IN CAMPANIA
TRA ETÀ ROMANA E TARDA ANTICHITÀ

Atti della Giornata internazionale di studio, Cassino, 18 aprile 2024

a cura di

Cesare Felici, Roberta Sollo, Caterina Paola Venditti

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ISTITUTO CENTRALE PER L'ARCHEOLOGIA

THE ROAD AND THE CITY: SOME CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

FRANK VERMEULEN*

INTRODUCTION

This timely volume brings together a series of well-documented scholarly contributions focused on the interrelationship between road systems and urban settlements in the Roman world, with a primary geographic emphasis on *Latium* and *Campania*. The volume spans the Republican, Imperial, and Late Antique periods, tracing both the physical evolution of infrastructure and the shifting socio-economic and political dynamics underpinning it. The work is well framed within a historiography that has increasingly moved beyond seeing roads as static engineering feats, towards understanding them as dynamic agents in territorial integration, economic transformation, and urban change.

The book's regional focus allows for a long-term, diachronic approach grounded in detailed topographical and archaeological case studies. It also demonstrates the value of combining macro-scale perspectives on infrastructure with micro-scale analyses of individual communities. Across all contributions, three themes recur: the role of roads in urban foundations and planning; their economic and strategic functions; and their transformation over time in relation to broader historical processes. Methodologically, the volume highlights the benefits of integrating archaeological survey, geophysical prospection, epigraphic study, and historical geography.

URBAN FOUNDATIONS AND ROAD PLANNING

In multiple case studies – *Cales*, *Tusculum*, *Fabrateria Nova*, and *Ferentum* – roads appear not merely as adjuncts to urban life but as generative

frameworks for city planning. In newly founded colonies such as *Fabrateria Nova* (124 BC), political motives are clear: the Via Latina was deliberately rerouted to pass through the site, reinforcing Rome's control after the destruction of *Fregellae*. This diversion required major engineering works, including the construction of two bridges over the *Liris*, and served both practical and symbolic purposes. At *Cales*, founded in 334 BC to secure the southern Via Latina, the orthogonal street grid was aligned to the road, with gates positioned to control access along this major artery. *Tusculum* demonstrates adaptation rather than imposition: here, road alignments were integrated with an existing settlement on a hilltop, requiring the accommodation of earlier topography. In *Ferentum*, the *via publica Ferentiensis* – attested in a 2nd-century AD inscription – followed a much older route linking Tarquinia to the Tiber region, likely facilitating salt transport from coastal production sites to the interior. The orthogonal colonial grid anchored itself to this pre-Roman axis, illustrating the continuity of route function over centuries.

Roads also structured rural centuriation, fixing boundaries that defined land use and ownership for generations. In several chapters, the alignment of centuriated landscapes is shown to be inseparable from the geometry of major interurban roads. In a certain way the roads create a kind of urbanisation of the wider territory around the cities, creating a new reading and accessibility to the countryside that supports the urban centres. It is therefore very encouraging that in many case studies presented here strictly urban data are well correlated with data from the suburbs and from even more remote parts of

the landscape, giving rise to promising attempts to provide a unified reading of the city and its territory. This new reading also demonstrates that the relationship between urban development and the wider road system can be quite complex. In *Falerii Novi*, for example, it now appears that the primary road network of the newly founded city was clearly positioned to respect the Faliscan communication routes, while simultaneously integrating with the recently improved and better engineered route of the Via Amerina.

ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC FUNCTIONS

The book underscores the dual role of roads as conduits for commerce and instruments of military logistics. The Appian Way, Via Latina, and Via Domitiana linked agricultural producers, craft centres, and ports into integrated supply networks. Stefania Quilici Gigli's chapter on *Setia's vinum Setinum* highlights how road connectivity enabled the movement of high-quality wine – favoured by Augustus – from upland vineyards to *Tarracina*, where it was transferred from perishable leather wineskins to amphorae for maritime shipment. Nearby, Caecuban wine from *Fundi* followed a similar route. Archaeological evidence of amphora kilns (Dressel 1 and 2-4) near Fundi confirms local production for export.

In the Liri Valley, the Appian Way and associated river routes supported both bulk transport of common wines and the distribution of premium *Falernus* from the *Massicus* area, exported via *Sinuessae*. Michele Silani's study of Puteoli and the Via Domitiana situates the road within the grain-supply system for Rome, with the *ripa puteolana* connected to both maritime and inland transport routes. Even after the Claudian harbour complex was built at *Portus*, Puteoli retained a major role, and the Via Domitiana (AD 94) linked it directly to the Via Appia. Military imperatives are visible in the siting of colonies along strategic corridors, ensuring rapid troop movement and secure communications. Roads also functioned as instruments of Romanisation, facilitating the spread of urban cultural forms and administrative control into annexed territories.

CASE STUDIES SHOW VARIETY IN SOLUTIONS AND CONTEXT

Cales – Controlled the Via Latina's southern approach, with evidence for sustained investment in road surfaces and associated public buildings. The city's grid was a direct expression of its road-linked foundation.

Tusculum – Showed adaptive reuse of road alignments to suit local terrain. Major urban features such as the forum and theatre were sited to take advantage of passing traffic. Connectivity fluctuated as alternative routes developed, illustrating the vulnerability of hilltop centres to shifts in regional movement. The analysis demonstrates that urban developments sacrificed or modified roadways in the course of monumentalizing spaces.

Pompeii – Marco Giglio's analysis links the city's internal street network with its *suburbium*, where roads connected theatres, necropolises, craft areas, and villa estates. The suburban roads were not peripheral but integrated into the economic and social functioning of the city. His analysis allows for a diachronic reinterpretation of the city's urban development, which is not without its continuities and discontinuities.

Puteoli and the Via Domitiana – The road's construction enhanced the city's function as an *annona* hub, with a chain of *vici* and *horrea* along the coastal route to Portus Iulius. The blend of maritime and terrestrial transport exemplifies multi-modal connectivity.

Vicus Novanensis – Paola Carfora's chapter reconstructs a sizeable roadside settlement between *Capua* and *Calatia* on the Appian Way, with baths, cisterns, aqueduct connections, and possible entertainment buildings. Its complexity indicates that some *vici* functioned as small towns in their own right.

Ferentum – Marcello Spanu traces the transformation from a Gracchan land-distribution centre to an Augustan-era monumentalised city, with road alignments anchoring each phase.

Aquinum – Giuseppe Ceraudo (oral presentation at this conference) applies aerial and geophysical survey to map the colony's layout, identifying earlier phases beneath Augustan regularisation, and noting anomalies in street orientation that may reflect pre-colonial occupation. *Falerii Novi*

– Martin Millett uses geophysics to clarify the relationship between the Via Amerina and the city's orthogonal grid, contributing to debates about road access points and internal movement patterns.

Via Allifae–Beneventum Corridor – Giuseppina Renda documents the alignment of *Allifae* and *Telesia* to a branch of the Via Latina, with coordinated centuriation and road networks reflecting high-level state planning.

Setia and *Fundi* Wine Routes – Demonstrate how roads served as essential connectors between production zones and export nodes, integrating agricultural and transport economies.

TRANSFORMATIONS OVER TIME

The Republican era saw roads primarily as military-strategic assets, quickly adapted for economic integration. Colonial foundations often imposed new orthogonal grids that integrated interregional roads as central axes. By the late Republic and Augustan period, monumentalisation linked roads visually and functionally to civic centres, with processional routes leading into fora and temples. In the early Imperial period, the expansion of port facilities (e.g., *Puteoli*, *Tarracina*) and new road construction (e.g., Via Domitiana) reflect both economic growth and imperial policy priorities. Road maintenance inscriptions attest to ongoing local investment, often framed as civic benefactions. The mid-1st century AD earthquake at Pompeii illustrates the vulnerability of integrated road–city systems: damage to streets and related infrastructure altered traffic patterns and precipitated functional shifts in certain urban areas. In Late Antiquity, changing economic geographies and political instability reduced long-distance traffic on some routes, leading to the decline of roadside *vici* and certain towns. However, some corridors retained importance due to continued strategic or regional functions, and ancient alignments influenced medieval and modern road systems.

METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

One of the volume's strengths is its diverse and multi-layered methodological toolkit and the obvious demonstration that new approaches

to topographical research, using prospecting techniques such as remote and proximal sensing, underwater surveying, and geophysical surveys, are rapidly changing some of the previous assumptions. This has as direct consequence that new road sections can now be proposed, and that we obtain a much clearer idea of certain road/city relationships and of the complexity of road network dynamics. The intensive application of aerial photography, LiDAR and geophysical survey in sites like *Aquinum* and *Falerii Novi*, revealed buried street grids and centuriation patterns invisible at ground level, and identified subsurface anomalies corresponding to earlier street phases, building plots, and infrastructure, enabling diachronic reconstructions. Intensive topographical analysis, merging evidence from remote sensing data or underwater prospecting, with more traditional historical information, linked urban street orientations to regional road networks, clarifying issues of access, traffic flow, and integration with rural landscapes. In all this the use of epigraphy has not been forgotten as it provides crucial evidence for road administration, funding mechanisms, and civic identities tied to infrastructural maintenance, which all help to understand our topographical reconstructions. Thanks to the often well-institutionalised interdisciplinary integration that characterises our discipline of Ancient Topography, collaborations with historical geographers and Roman law specialists deepens interpretations of how legal frameworks and territorial organisation interacted with physical infrastructure. The ongoing archaeo-historical work here in the heartland of the Roman Empire convincingly demonstrates the potential of sound methodological approaches and the openness towards renewal and innovation.

CONCLUSION

The combined findings in this volume demonstrate that Roman roads and cities formed mutually reinforcing systems. Roads were not inert conduits but active shapers of urban morphology, economic opportunity, and territorial cohesion. The volume's case studies reveal a spectrum of interactions, from new colonial foundations built explicitly to control road corridors, to

older cities adapting pre-Roman routes, to roadside *vici* growing into complex service hubs. Patterns emerge: the enduring influence of early road alignments on later urban and rural organisation; the capacity of roads to integrate agricultural production with long-distance trade; and the susceptibility of road–city systems to disruption by environmental, economic, or political change. Yet variability is equally striking: the same road could anchor prosperity in one context and decline in another, depending on shifting regional dynamics.

By maintaining a balance between detailed local studies and broader thematic synthesis, the volume advances the study of Roman urbanism and infrastructure. Its integration of diverse methods provides a model for future research, underscoring that the relationship between roads and cities is best understood as a dynamic, evolving interplay shaped by both imperial policy and local agency.

*Ghent University
Frank.Vermeulen@ugent.be