Romans on the Right: The Art and Archeology of Traffic

Eric Poehler

This paper[1] deals with the streets of Pompeii from the point of view of an archaeologist. The goal is to demonstrate one facet of that ancient city's pattern of traffic, namely that Pompeians, and Romans in general, drove on the right-hand side of the road. The argument focuses on real objects: from paving stones and curbstones to works of art and literature. However, these objects are marshaled in support of such intangibles as 'mindset,' 'preference,' and *habitus*.[2] By combining the varied but interconnected methods by which the Romans habitually ordered and reordered their world towards a preference for the right hand side with the archaeological evidence collected from Pompeii, I will demonstrate that Romans not only *did* drive on the right but would have *preferred* and *expected* to do so.

Before exploring the Roman preference for the right side, it is necessary to examine the manner in which the archaeological analysis of direction is accomplished. At the intersection of Vico di Mercurio and Via Consolare (Figure 1 [1]) the combination of rutting and curbstone wear provides an archetypical example. In Figure 2, a pair of parallel ruts can be seen curving into the intersection. The sets of wheel rims that made these ruts also eroded the northern curbstone and the southern side of the stepping-stone. Figure 3 is a detail of the curbstone wear and diagrams how that wearing occurred, revealing that traffic could only have been moving west and turning north. As the cart moved west and began the turn to the north, the wheel came into contact with the curbstone. It remained in contact as it rotated downward, increasing the surface area of wear and marking a diagnostic curve. Moreover, the wearing depth increases as it advances west, further demonstrating a tight northward turn.

This parabolic pattern is found across the ancient city and its distribution indicates that the Pompeians consistently drove on the right. For example, farther to the east in Region VI, where Via della Fortuna meets Via Stabiana,[3] a worn narrowing stone (Figure 1 [2])[4] reveals that vehicles were passing along the north curb to the west. Complementary evidence is found at the southwest corner curbstone at the intersection of Via Stabiana (Figure 1 [3]) demonstrating that carts moved to the east and turned to the south. It is possible to trace the diagnostic evidence all the way to the eastern end of the city on Via dell'Abbondanza, the city's largest and most traveled street. The northeast corner curbstone of Via Tempio d'Iside (Figure 1 [4]) is worn in the same manner as at Vico di Mercurio, indicating a right turn to the north.[5] Following this right turn onto Via del Teatri the cart reached Via dell'Abbondanza (Figure 1 [5]) where the evidence-ruts and curbstone wear-indicates another right-hand turn. Past the intersection with Via Stabiana[6] at the intersection of I.xi / I.xii and dell'Abbondanza (Figure 1 [6]), the familiar pattern of wear indicates an east-to-south turn. Westbound traffic is located by strong wearing on the northeast corner curbstone at

1 This paper would not have been possible without the help of many individuals. I must thank first the Superintendency of Pompeii and the custodians who made the site available to me and allowed the archaeological research to take place. A veritable army of colleagues, too numerous to mention, read drafts of this paper and saved me from untold mistakes. Finally, a depth of gratitude is owed to the Florida State University Department of Art History for inviting me to present my ideas at their graduate symposium and for their astute observations.

2 Here I follow the theoretical model of Pierre Bourdieu of the *habitus* as explained in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990) 54: "The *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices—more history—in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms. This system of dispositions—a present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices, an internal law through which the law of external necessities, irreducible to immediate constraints, is constantly exerted—is the principle of continuity and regularity which objectivism sees in social practices without being able to account for it…"

3 Via di Nola and Via Vesuvio, from the east and north, respectively, intersect here as well.

4 The Narrowing Stone is located specifically in front of a shop at VI.xiv.14. I defined the term 'Narrowing Stone' in my Master's Thesis (Eric E. Poehler, "Narrowing Stones and the Traffic System in Pompeii," University of Chicago, 1999, 7-8) as follows: "Descriptively, they are "irregular shaped stones of various size standing by the side of the curbstones" (Tsujimura 1990:60.). They nearly all consist of approximately 0.3m high blocks of basalt rounded on top. I will suggest that these stones, serving perhaps several related functions, cause the roadway to be slightly narrowed thereby directing the street traffic away from the curbstones against which they are set and towards the other side."

5 A rare splitting and curved rut here further indicates a west to north turn. Also, at the opposite end of Via Tempio d'Iside, where it intersects Via Stabiana, the curbstone wear is consistent with driving on the right. Thus, as on Via della Fortuna and Via dell'Abbondanza, the pattern of right-hand driving can be demonstrated on another two-way street.

6 It is important to note that Abbondanza west of Stabiana was blocked from the eastern section by a raised curb that barred wheeled traffic.

Vico di Tesmo (Figure 1 [7]), demonstrating that carts often turned to the north here from the right side of the street.[7] Thus, the entire length of Via dell'Abbondanza was a two-way street with eastbound traffic passing along the south curb and westbound traffic traveling along the north curb.

But the fact that Romans in Pompeii *did* drive on the right is not to say that they were required to do so. All the archaeological evidence marshaled to describe an activity cannot prove conclusively why that activity was undertaken.[8] Without other forms of physical evidence such as art, inscriptions, or literature, there is insufficient cause to say that there was any institutional structure governing the practice of driving in Pompeii. Precious few of these kinds of evidence concern themselves, even indirectly, with wheeled traffic.[9] However, the marble panels from a first-century BC cinerary Urn in the British Museum[10] are particularly intriguing (Figure 4). Here a solemn funeral proceeds from left to right while a group of bystanders witness the event. The horses pull the funeral wagon and overlap the bystanders who stand facing in the opposite direction**.** We, too, are made witness to the event and must be standing on the curb, looking across two lanes of the street. These panels, and others like them,[11] represent a scene of traffic and the directions relative to each side of the road.

Also indicative of this right hand preference is the fact that the Romans, like the Greeks before them,[12] employed the metaphor of life as a forked path in which the right path was naturally more virtuous. In the Latin Anthology (fifth century, AD) virtue is paired with the right path leading to a lofty summit.[13] Prudentius (fourth century, AD) uses a similar metaphor to describe the avenue prescribed by God.[14] However, Virgil's (first century, BC) description of the two roads in Hades—the right fork leading to Elysium, the left fork leading to Tartarus—was the most accessible story to use the metaphor and likely, too, the most popular.[15] The allegory survived into modern parlance by way of the Christian moral and theological writings.[16]

The relief panels and the evidence from literature are compelling. However, a few visual examples and symbolic literary uses are not sufficient to confirm that, as a rule, Romans preferred to drive on the right. Instead, we must turn to other areas of Roman life to provide parallels of analogous behavior. One such analogy is found in the chariot race of the circus, and in particular the Circus Maximus in Rome. Not only is the chariot race a specialized form of driving but it also constitutes—as part of the circus as a whole—an element of a larger idiom within the Roman culture and conscience. This larger idiom is the Roman preference for the right hand and the right-hand side. Subset within this is a predilection for circular motion in a counter-clockwise direction. In fact, counter-clockwise direction is the necessary outcome of right-hand preference, and the expression of one implies the other. The way these two aspects of the Roman *habitus* link together and conjoin with the issue of traffic is expressed in the design of a roundabout. Consider the pattern that results when traffic moving along the right curb meets a circular intersection.[17] The vehicle must turn slightly to the right upon entering the traffic circle to begin a continuous leftward arc around the center until the desired intersection is reached. The vehicle finally ends its counter-clockwise motion with another right

7 There is evidence at Vico di Balbo one block north that traffic was moving southbound through this section as well, making the overall pattern of this section of Vico di Tesmo one of alternating one-way traffic.

8 The archaeological evidence is indicative of intentionality (the decision to turn at one particular place) only at the level of the individual act, for a single but repeated turning event. What is lacking, however, is any evidence of an institutional overlay that connects the intentionality of such individual acts across space and over time.

9 The evidence that does exist is indirect. The Lex Iulia Municipalis, recorded on the Tabula Heraclenesis (mid-first century BC), restricted the largest carts (*plaustrae*) from the streets of Rome during the daylight hours. This restriction may have been in place already in the early second century AD. Juvenal in his fourth satire caustically communicates that "here in town the sick die from insomnia mostly" and complains about the constant creaking of wagon wheels outside his window. Decimus Junius Juvenalis. *The Satires of Juvenal* trans. by Roffe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1958) IV.v.232-259.

10 British Museum number GR 1925.6-10.1 (Sculpture D 87).

11 These reliefs are part of a genre of funerary art, more examples of which can be found in Volterra and Florence. Museo Archeologico Guarnacci (Nazionale dell'Umbria) in Volterra, #136. This is illustrated in L.B. Van der Meer, *The Bronze Liver of Piacenza Analysis of a Polytheistic Structure* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1987) 161, fig. 74. Several other urns, in both terracotta and marble, in the Museo Archeologico of Florence depict a similar scene. Specifically, numbers 5515 and 5561 are of interest.

12 As early as the eighth century BC one finds this in Hesiod, *Works and Days,* 287ff.: "It is easier to take the path of baseness and abundance. This path is short but it is nearby. But the gods who are immortal set up the toilsome path of virtue before it. The road to it (virtue) is long and straight and rough at first. Nevertheless, it comes to a high point and then becomes easy, although it was difficult (earlier)." Translation by Michael Decker. For a discussion of the analogy in both Greek and Roman literature see Anthony Pelzer Wagener, *Popular Associations of Right and Left in Roman Literature* (Baltimore: J. H. Furst, 1912) 43-44.

13 *Nam via virtutis dextrum petit ardua collem* | *Difficilemque adytum primo spectantibus offert,* | *Sed requiem praebet fessis in vertice summo* (*Anthologia Latina* 148, 1. 3).

14 *Simplicis ergo viae dux est Deus: ille per unam* | *ire iubet mortale genus, quam dirigit ipse* | *sublimem dextro celsa ad fastiglia clivo* (*Symm*. 2, 882).

15 Vergil, *Aeneid* 6, 540-43. R.A.B. Mynors, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969): *hic locus est partis ubi se via findit in ambas* | *dextera quae Ditis magni sub moenia tendit,* | *hac iter Elysium nobis; at laeva malorum* | *exercet poenas et ad impia Tartara mittit.*

16 Wagener, 43. See also Otto Nussbaum, "Die Bewertung von Rechts und Links in der romishen Liturgie," *Jahrbuch fur Antike und Christentum* 5 (1962): 158-171.

17 Roundabouts, in our current state of knowledge, do not exist in Pompeii. They do, however, exist in the Eastern cities of Antioch, Gerash, and Palmyra.

turn. In just the same way, the charioteer must drive his *quadriga* around the *metae* until he exits the circus.

John H. Humphrey in *Roman Circuses* states that the chariot race was run in a counter-clockwise direction because the driver was expected to be right-handed and because it was more natural for the horse.[18] The mosaics and relief sculpture that depict the circus support his assertion. Although the Ostia Circus relief is the most famous, one of the clearest representations is found on a terracotta panel in the British Museum (Figure 5).[19] In fine detail, the panel shows one *quadriga* in full motion, perhaps rearing in preparation for the sharp turn, while another charioteer is disappearing around the *meta* with its three pylons. Likewise, reliefs from the Castel S. Elia and Vienna, in marble and terracotta, show the race in progress. In all examples the race is moving counter-clockwise.[20]

In other media, mosaics in particular, the chariot race is depicted from an overhead position and the counter-clockwise motion can be discerned even more easily.[21] The circus mosaic at Piazza Armerina shows a race in progress and includes the standard architecture of the *spina*. Another mosaic from Carthage shows three racers still finishing the race as the winner begins a reverse victory lap while carrying a palm. On the topographical border of the Megalopshychia mosaic from Daphne, a mounted figure rides counter-clockwise in the hippodrome.[22] Circus scenes in wall painting from Pompeii also illuminate the Roman *habitus*. A scene from the House of the Quadrigae shows the factions each in their colored garb.[23] The House of Loreius Tiburtinus once contained a chariot race scene, identified by Spinazzola as the funeral games of Patroclus.[24] Unlike the scenes of the Roman circus, the two-horse chariots (*bigae*) race around a course delineated by human officials. In this scene the preference for the right-hand side and its corollary, counter-clockwise motion, are expressed in the combination of religion and sport.

These preferences are even more manifest in Roman religious practice. Penelope Davies has convincingly demonstrated that circumambulation was an important component of Roman religious ritual. The magical properties they attributed to the circle held preventative, protective, sanctifying, and even cathartic effects.[25] Her examination of imperial funerary monuments such as the Mausoleum of Hadrian and the Column of Trajan show how, by design, the architecture compelled the viewer to recreate a ritual circumambulation.[26] It is this kind of ritual that is depicted on the Decoursio scenes from the column base of Antoninus Pius (Figure 6). Moreover, the counter-clockwise motion of the cavalry is the visual parallel to Statius's description of Opheltes's funeral.[27] In this elegy, seven squadrons revolved around the pyre, *ab orbem sinsitra*, evoking the seven known planets and interweaving religion, cosmology, and right-hand preference.

This conjunction of the celestial, religious, and the quotidian is only one example of the way these elements combine and compound to reify Roman expectations and notions of apposition. Another concurrence is found in the calendar and the turn of the seasons, illustrated here by a lost mosaic from Carthage (Figure 7). The astronomical calendar defined the itinerary of the religious year and provided "the temporal framework within which the never-ending cycle of labours of the farmer's year" were undertaken.[28] Each season was the sum of its festivals and chores, one recalling the other, whose

18 John H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses Arenas for Chariot Racing*, (Berkeley and Los Angles: U of California P, 1986) 5. Today the vast majority of people are right handed and this was certainly the case in ancient times. Recent theories posit that language skills developed in the left hemisphere of the brain, thus coupled with right-side motor skills.

19 Ostia Circus relief, also known as Ex-Lateran relief, in Humphrey, 178, fig. 78; British Museum Terracotta, BM Cat. Terracotta D 627; also illustrated in Stefano Tortorella, "Le Lastra Campana. Problemi di produzione e di iconografia" in *L'Art Decoratif a Rome*, (Rome: Ecole Francais de Rome, 1981) 91, fig. 22; A fragment in the Antiquarium Comunale at Rome is nearly identical to the British Museum piece (Tortorella, 92 fig. 23).

20 Castel San Elia and Vienna reliefs illustrated in Tortorella, 92, fig. 24, and 93, fig. 25 and in Humphrey, 194, fig. 95 and 181, fig. 81.

21 Of the twenty circus mosaics I have surveyed that show the race in progress, eight provide directional information and all of these show a race in a counter-clockwise direction.

22 Piazza Armerina, Katherine Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1999) 134-135, figs. 135-136; Carthage, Katherine Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 89, PL. 77; Daphne Christine Kondoleon, *Antioch, the Lost Ancient City* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000) 114.

23 John Ward-Perkins and Amanda Claridge, *Pompeii AD 79*, vol. 1 (Rochester: Case-Hoyt, 1978) 71, fig. 299. It is also interesting to note in this image that the horse farthest right, except for the red faction's *quadriga*, is black while the rest are brown or gray.

24 Vittorio Spinazzola, *Pompei alla luce degli scavi degli scavi nuovi di via dell'Abbondanza (anni 1910-1923)* Vol.2 (Rome: La Liberia dello Stato, 1953) 999-1001.

25 Penelope J.E Davies, "The Politics of Perpetuation: Trajan's Column and the Art of Commemoration" *AJA* 101 (1997): 54-56, see also L. Hautecoeur, *Mystique et architecture: Symbolisme du cercle et de la coupole* (Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1954).

26 Penelope Davies, *Death and the Emperor* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2000) 120-128.

27 Statius, *Thebaid* 6.213-16. trans. by J.H. Mozley (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1982).

28 J.H.W.G Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 7; also Michele Renee Salzman, *On Roman Time the Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990) 9: "These unofficial *parapegmata* and the abbreviated agricultural calendars, or *menologia rustica*, were regularly illustrated. Most often, they depicted the astrological signs. The *parapegmata* from the Baths of Trajan, for example, included an astrological circle as well as illustrations of the seven planetary gods. The first-century *Menologium Rusticum Colotianum* depicts, at the head of a column of festivals and agricultural activities for each month, the appropriate astrological sign: thus January is illustrated by the sign Capricorn, February by that of Aquarius, and so on."

image became solidified as a synoptic personification in a genre of mosaic art.[29] Moreover, when the seasons were portrayed-each in a corner of the mosaic and invested with attributes-they most often[30] show a counter-clockwise progression through the year, echoing the path of the planets across the zodiac.[31] Indeed, astrology received popular support from the general belief that the constellations were the very causes of seasonal changes in the weather.[32] Thus, the motion of the universe defined time[33] and the Roman calendar, a translation of astronomical observations into human terms, imposed an echoed order upon the terrestrial events occurring within that time.

Furthermore, Romans chose to perform, or at the very least chose to depict, those terrestrial activities based upon the very same proclivities for the right-hand side and counter-clockwise motion that they observed in the natural world. Representations of human or animal powered machinery, such as grain mills, olive presses, or capstans,[34] illustrate their operation in a counter-clockwise direction. Like the planets, these machines were observed moving in a particular direction and their repeated observation engendered an expectation for further encounters. Such a connection of heaven and earth is less surprising when we envision religion as an elaborate form of symbolism,[35] a complex but comprehensible model of what humans perceive of the unfathomable diversity of the universe. Moreover, Romans thought religion had practical applications[36] and believed that the best laws were those which were in accordance with the laws of nature.[37] Therefore, Roman institutions—likely including the traffic system—were consciously engineered to recreate the heavens on earth.

Finally, the nightly repetition of heaven's image, the power of ritual, and the reflexive influence of the terrestrial environment found their confluence in the structure and use of the Circus Maximus. Translating the moving picture of the sky into a working model on the ground, the Circus Maximus and its races were a reaffirmation of Roman belief and a recreation of the observations upon which that belief was based. Twelve gates, matching the gods of the Roman pantheon and months of the year,[38] lined the northwest end of the course. Out of these charged groups of four, eight, or twelve chariots, each signifying its alliance to a faction by the color of its flying cape. As early as the mid fourth century BC, these factions were associated with seasons of the year: reds to summer, whites to winter, greens to spring, and blues to autumn.[39] Crashing almost as often as not, they made seven revolutions around the central *spina* before a winner was declared. These seven laps, like the seven groups of riders at Opheltes funeral, enacted the course of a year for each of the seven planets, complete with the factions as seasons.[40] Moreover, the laps were counted by great eggs symbolizing fertility[41] and the re-

29 See for example, Michele Blanchard-Lemee, Mongi Ennaifer, Hedi Slim, Latifa Slim, *Mosaics of Roman Africa Floor Mosaics from Tunisia,* (London: British Museum Press, 1996) 20, fig. 3; 38, fig. 13; 42, fig. 17; 52-5, figs. 25-27; 132, fig. 90; and 231, fig. 172; and Dunbabin, (1999) 165, figs169-170.

30 There was some confusion on the part of the artists as to whether the personified seasons were moving through the year or the year was passing through them. Roger Beck (*Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras* [Leiden: J. Brill, 1988] 34-35) shows that a similar misunderstanding affected the reading of zodiacal representations, apparently illustrating the constellations moving in either a clockwise or counter-clockwise direction.

31 Aveni, Anthony, *Conversing with the Planets* (New York: Times Books, 1992) 24: "The star-studded corridor that circles the sky-the one the sun follows in a year and the moon treads in about a month—is called the *zodiac*, a word that means 'circle of animals'."

32 J.H.W.G Liebeschuetz 120.

33 However, according to Plotinus, time was not thought equal to the motion of the universe, but rather occurred within time. See John F. Callahan, *Four Views of Time in Ancient Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1948) 100.

34 Grain Mills (Vatican Relief), K.D. White, *Greek and Roman Technology* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984) 51 fig. 39; (Ostia Relief) Russell Meiggs, *Roman Ostia;* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) PL. 28b (Sarcophagus of L. A. Octavius Valerianus); Robert Curtis, *Ancient Food Technology* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) PL. 30; Capstan, K.D. White, fig. 38; *Mola Olearia* (Rondanini Relief) K.D. White, fig. 64-65.

35 Religion here is like the symbol for infinity; we can conceive of the abstraction, but cannot grasp what it represents, the totality of the universe around us. Marshall Sahlins, introducing Gregory Schrempp (*Magical Arrows. The Maori, The Greeks, and the Folklore of the Universe* [Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1992] x) discusses cosmology in a similar manner: "cosmology thus expresses in the most abstract terms, which is also to say the most logically productive terms, the principles that organize other dimensions of social existence, such as kinship and political relations, or even economic practice."

36 D.S. Potter, D.J. Mattingly, *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1999) 120.

37 Jerzy Lindersky*, Roman Questions* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995) 470: "Since Scipio offered in the *De re publica* a clear proof that the early Roman state was the best in the world, it had also to be provided with the best laws (*Leg.* 1.20; 2.23). The best laws are such laws as are congruous with the law of nature (*Rep.* 3.33), and that law is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting."

38 Humphrey, 136. *Anthologia Latina* (1.1973-8).

39 D.S. Potter, D.J. Mattingly, 292 quotes Tertullian, *On the Public Shows*, 9.5. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark,1866-72) 8-35.

40 On the days of week: Thus, the Calendar of 354 follows its antecedents in recording a seven-day week including astrological information in the text; not only is the position of Sol in the astrological firmament noted every month, but the unlucky days (*dies aegyptiaci*) are also recorded." (Michele Renee Salzman, *On Roman Time the Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity* [Berkeley: U of California P, 1990] 9).

41 Humphrey 260.

volving spheres which carried stars and planets. By the Byzantine period, the circus was used explicitly as a metaphorical microcosm of the greater universe.[42]

Interwoven with these cosmic associations were religious connections threaded through the very architecture of the Circus Maximus.[43] Exemplifying this was the temple of Sol,[44] central on the *spina*, metaphorically anchoring the orbit of these wheeled planets and the cycle of their seasons, its symbolic gravity directing the motion of its symbolic satellites. Other gods were also intermediaries between the immutable course of the universe and the cycle of individual human events. The chthonic deity Consus, a very ancient god of the harvest and fertility, had an altar buried in the Circus Maximus which was unearthed at an annual festival ordained by the season and the calendar.[45] The ritual exhumation reveals the threads of cosmology, religion, and *terra firma* which comprise the complex tapestry of Roman cultural practice and belief. Finally, considering the strong Roman concern for propinquity,[46] this fabric must have included the counter-clockwise motion which is apparent in all three.

This includes the opening ceremonies when the entire pantheon arrived at the Circus Maximus as statues carried on litters and chariots.[47] The Circensian parade descended from the Capitoline hill, crossed the Forum Romanum, and wound its way to the Circus Maximus,[48] entering to the cheers of the crowd. The course of the deities sanctified the event as it mirrored both the eternal cosmos above and its reenactment about to take place. Those who witnessed (by the first century AD the Circus Maximus was said to hold 250,000 spectators[49]) or participated in the races or rituals generated an ingrained expectation of what *was* done that complimented their understanding of what *should* be done (although they likely would not have distinguished the difference).[50] Their expectation of the direction that the chariot race was conducted, clockwise or counter-clockwise, is analogous (and connected) to which side of the street, left or right, we moderns expect the approach of on-coming traffic. They looked left first, as do we.

To this point we have tread a great distance over broad fields of analogy and it might seem that the objective of this paper has been left behind. However, not surprisingly, the path to the traffic system of Pompeii is a circular one. In fact, it leads into a revolving door (Figure 8). This is because these devices, designed for a pedestrian form of traffic, express the modern predilection for the right-hand side and counter-clockwise motion in much the same way that is found in ancient art. Instinctively, we know which side to expect people to enter and which side they will exit. Moreover, the use of a revolving door actually imposes an order upon one's behavior and prefigures one's expectations for later encounters. Counter-clockwise motion and traveling on the right come together perfectly in the act of walking through a revolving door.[51] And if readers find that their familiarity with the subject, revolving doors, makes this line of argumentation more plausible than the artistic, cosmological, and religious connections of the Circus Maximus, then the assertions of this paper are most appropriately ensured.

The power of expectation is paramount when one views images. Riding the coattails of the visual language—the colors, shapes, and spatial devices that make the image intelligible—is what might be called idiomatic information that makes the image meaningful. Alluding to habitually encountered social facts, themselves cemented by a tradition of repetitive representation, these idioms dovetail so elegantly with the scene that the viewer may only notice them by their absence. In fact, as Gombrich explained in *Art and Illusion*, "the starting point of a visual record[52] is not knowledge but a guess conditioned by habit and tradition."[53] This is equally true for the scenes one encounters everyday. The direction one looks first when attempting to cross the street, a reflex of habit, is an expression of such an expectation. As we have seen, this kind of expectation, as part of a much larger preference for the right-hand side, is embedded in Roman art and, albeit indirectly, similarly offers evidence for the Roman order of traffic.

42 Katherine Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa. Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 89.

43 Indeed, the games themselves began as religious ritual. Maurice Pellison, *Roman life in Pliny's time* trans. Maud Wilkinson (Meadville, Pa.: Folld and Vincent, 1897) 192.

44 This may have been a joint temple to Sol and Luna, symbolically governing day and night. See discussion in Humphrey, 91-95.

45 The altar of Consus was one of the oldest elements of the Circus Maximus. According to Humphrey (61-62), the first games were called the Consualia, making Consus the father of Circuses. At this early stage the festivals were ordained by the initial calendar, which was "kept secret by kings and priests, as a part, so to speak, of the science of government." W. Warde Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1899) 8.

46 Fowler 8.

47 On the Circensian Parade see Pellison, 192-193.

48 It is interesting to consider the transition of systems that the Circensian parade makes when it exits from the Roman streets to the Circus track. Crossing into the Circus unites these two forms of driving, the smooth transition from one system to another suggests that both were based upon driving on the right.

49 Pellison, 191; Pliny *Nat. Hst* xxxvi. 102.

50 Ton Derks explained this conflation of observation and expectation in *Gods, Temples, and Religious Practices*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 1998) 19 in the following manner: "In general, the members of a group are not aware of this self-created, symbolic construction of reality. They believe that this reality presents itself in the form in which they observe and classify it. Their own particular classification is a self-evident, natural order of things."

51 Consider also the act of throwing a discus. The hand with which one chooses to throw the discus determines the direction of the wind-up and release.

52 Or the archaeological record.

53 Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1960) 89.

Although the subject of this endeavor is unique (the directionality of ancient traffic), it is not trivial. Such examinations remain valuable as attempts to surpass the banal matching of the material worlds of art and archaeology with literature in order to explore a subject that neither explicitly informs. One hopes that the evidence has been pushed to the very limit of its value and the reader has found it intriguing to peer into the shadows of what evidence *implies* rather than what it proves. If successful, this selective tour of Roman art, literature, religion, cosmology, and entertainment has both illuminated facets of Roman experience—such as the fact that Romans drove on the right—as well as demonstrated that those shadows of implication appear deeper only for the bright light of evidence behind us.

University of Virginia

Figure 1. Map of Pompeii with locations of the evidence discussed. (Author's diagram.)

Figure 2. Intersection of Via Consolare and Vico di Mercurio, facing east. (Author's photograph.)

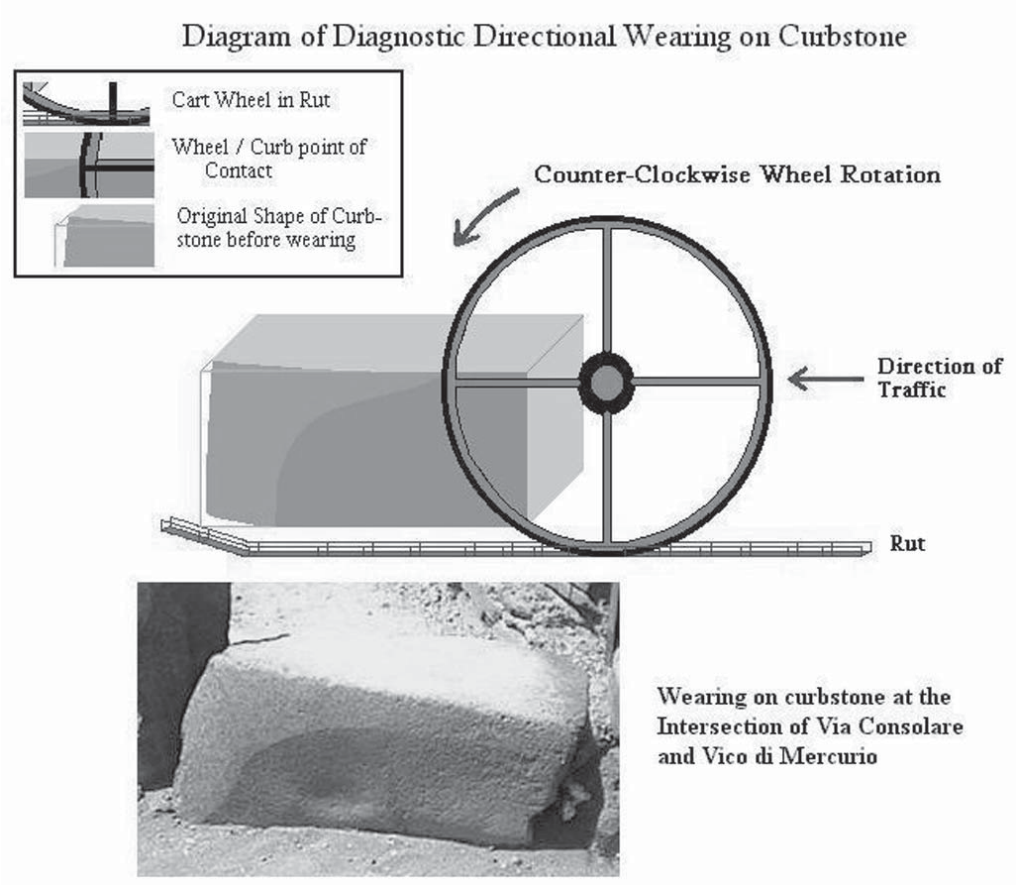

Figure 3. Diagram of Diagnostic Wearing with inset of actual worn Curbstone. (Author's diagram and photograph.)

Figure 4. Relief Panel from Cinerary Urn in British Museum. (Author's photograph.)

Figure 5. Terracotta Relief in British Museum with Circus Scene. (Author's photograph.)

Figure 6. Decorsio Relief from the base of the Column of Antoninus Pius. Photo courtesy of Fototeca Unione.

Figure 7. Lost Calendar Mosaic from Carthage. Cagnat, Rene Mosaique de Carthage Bulletin et Memoires de la Societe Nationale des Antiquaires de France 1896, pp. 251- 270, Plate IV. (Fr. T. LVII. 1896)

Figure 8. Mirrored revolving doors from the Cheesecake Factory Restaurant in Chicago. Photo courtesy of Crane Door, Inc.