



Pompeii: Front of a shop with frescoes and a balcony.

already found (chiselled flint and characteristic pottery) but it may be said, for the present at least, that an Etruscan *pagus* of the VI century B. C., perhaps, existed there. A *dromos* tomb has been found in fact, proving the existence of an Etruscan village, which may have lasted until the earliest

Roman period. And the excavations now in progress will certainly tell us a little of its life and history. Thus, archaeology has again last year served the history of Rome by illustrating both its origins and its decadence.

Rome, Italy.

TO A COIN OF ATHENS

To start, to wonder, yes, to love—
How cans't thou move me, tiny Disk?
What power is thine that wakes to life,
The hidden, the unborn?

So small—yet in thine image old,
Of Athene and Her Owl and Olive,
Bearest thou witness, little Coin,
To Her by whose deathless power,
Is wrested from the Unknown Dark,
The ore of human thought—
The rarest thing yet indispensable,
That makes Man's world!

GRACE W. NELSON.

THE AESTHETICS OF THE ANTIQUE CITY

BY GUIDO CALZA.

WHEN presenting to the readers of ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY these original and interesting reconstructions of antique houses, drawn from the ruins of Ostia by Prof. Gismondi, an architect, I propose a question that is new to all students of art and of archaeology; that is: did the Ancients, the Greeks and the Romans, adopt aesthetic theories in building their cities? And did they begin by first formulating a purely aesthetic plan for the disposition of their public monuments, now in sapient disorder, now in sapient harmony?

This is an interesting study and absorbing today, when we are witnessing the growth of all the old centers of population, and the building of new ones, since the war put a stop of rebuilding in the capitals and created the need of new cities.

But no one has ever before attempted to reconstruct an antique Greek or Roman city as a whole, or to restore its aesthetic form, either by consulting the ancient authors, or by examining the ruins of antique cities. So that, when a new quarter is being built in a city, or a new monument erected, the critics always cry that building is a lost art, and exalt the Acropolis at Athens, the Forum at Pompeii, and the streets of Ostia as examples of civic aesthetics.

Is it the mere charm of the ruins that lends a sensation of beauty when we visit antique cities, or is it, rather that they were artistic organisms, not created by the scientific knowledge of an engineer alone, but also by the soul of an artist?

Let us see: the plan of the most ancient centers of human life—the *terremare*—was a network of streets crossing each other at right angles and dividing the huts into regular blocks; and was, then, very similar to the plan of an American city, where the fundamental idea is to obtain a convenient system of streets.

But these prehistoric centers of human life were created at one time, by one impulse, and by one sole tribe, and in a position chosen by necessity. It was the same in those Roman colonies founded by soldiers, who transformed the military camp, modeling the new city in the regular form of the *castrum*. But cities like Athens and Rome, that grew little by little, as their population and their political importance increased, could not, and indeed, did not have such regular plans. The difference is that we think the regular plan of our cities detrimental to aesthetics, while the Ancients, the Greeks as well as the Romans, thought the city built on a regular plan beautiful, and preferred it to all others.

In fact, though Athens and Rome were famed for the monumental character of their public buildings, everyone deplored their narrow, tortuous streets and their wretched houses huddled together without order and without rule. The orator Lysias observes that the Athenian houses were small and miserable, and that the whole city of Athens was badly laid out, being inferior to Thebes, where the streets ran in straight lines. Moreover, the courtiers of Philip of Macedon, who were accustomed to the regular, systematic plan of the

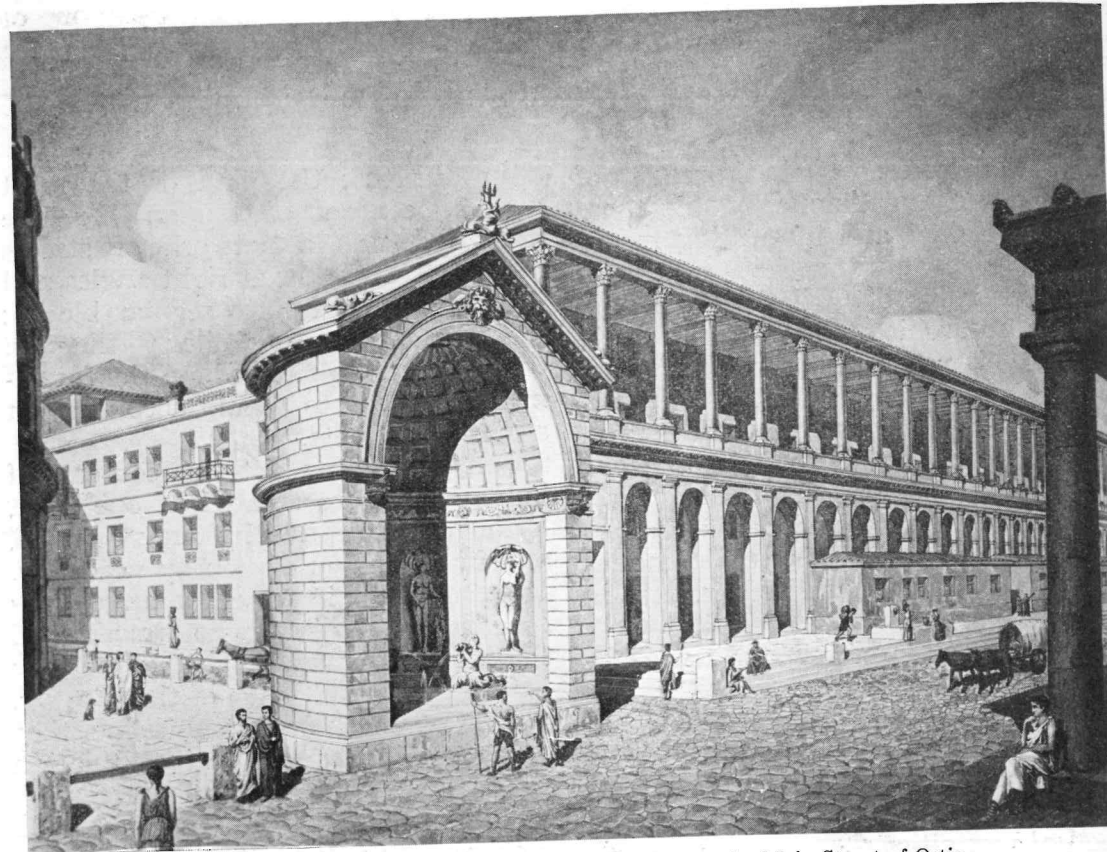


Fig. 1.—Reconstruction of the Decumanus Maximus, the Main Street of Ostia.

Grecian colonial cities, derided the miserable appearance of the city of Rome, whose political importance was never equaled by the beauty of her monuments, even during the Empire.

It is, then, a mistake to believe that the Ancients did not like the city built on a regular plan; they always preferred it, and realized it wherever possible.

The architect, Hippodamus of Miletus, won fame by introducing geometrical rules into the plan of the Greek city, so that it had regular streets and regular groups of houses, such as may be seen at Thuri, Rhodes and Piræus, which were constructed according to his regular plan.

Yet, although we have unqualified

admiration for the ruins of the Grecian and Latin cities, their aesthetic aspect must remain unknown, obscure, and uncertain, unless we succeed in reconstructing them before our mental vision. We even confound in one sole picture the three or four which the excavations have brought to light—Priene, Pompeii, Ostia, and Timgad. It is, on the contrary, necessary when comparing Pompeii and Ostia—to see clearly that the same difference exists between the city on the Tiber and the Vesuvian city as between any modern provincial city and any mediaeval one. However, our thoughts turn at once, as they have always turned, to Rome. But how many of us have in mind, and with some degree of correctness at least, the ap-

pearance of the Eternal City during various periods—during the age of Cicero, for example, then under Domitian, and later under Constantine? The public buildings, the imperial Fora are more or less known to all; but whether the Ancients had a greater and more developed sense of the monumental than we, I do not know, or whether the aesthetics of the city is expressed in her public monuments rather than in the whole mass of her buildings. In any event, even though we do know those centered in the Fora and on the Palatine, it is necessary to bring back to life two thirds of the city that we do not know, with shops, markets, *nymphaea*, gardens, and arcades. It is, in fact, necessary to restore her residence quarters to Rome with their streets and public squares. And we must not look for their type—as has always been done—among the ruins of Pompeii, which serves more adequately by restoring to us the typical house of the upper class—but at Ostia, which shared the very life of Rome during the great re-building period of the Capital.

The readers of ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY will recall some beautiful photographs, published by me and taken at a height of five hundred meters from an Italian dirigible. But now, these beautiful, interesting and faithful reconstructions shown here have given new life to the ruins of Ostia.

Figure 1 reproduces the Decumanus Maximus, the main street of Ostia, where it passes the theater, which just shows the profile of its mouldings in front of a private house. This characteristic house, with many windows and a balcony carried on consoles, fronts on the street leading from the Decumanus to the Tiber, and adjoins the enclosure which surrounds the Theater and which is shut in toward

*See Vol. x, No. 4, (Oct., 1920) pp. 148, 9.

the Decumanus by two houses; one of these has been reconstructed and is shown in the photograph. There are arcades on both sides of the Decumanus; one is insignificant and has Doric columns; the other is of greater height, and has travertine pilasters decorating the wall-space; and on the upper floor, a colonnade from which one enters the dwellings. Shops open on this arcade, which was intended as a public passage, taking possession of its outer arches also, just as in Piazza Castello at Turin. This abuse is not new and recalls the words of the poet Martial, who praises Domitian for placing a check upon the aggressiveness of the shop-keepers and street-vendors, who occupied the arcades and streets, transforming Rome into a *magna taberna*.

Figure 2 shows the crossing of two streets, the Via della Fortuna and the Via del Mercato. A handsome house fronts on the latter, displaying ornamental forms and motives that may well be called mediaeval, if not actually modern. The corner house has an arcade with masonry pilasters on the Via della Fortuna, and one on the Via del Mercato formed of arches supported on heavy travertine consoles. There are shops beneath the arcade and dwellings above, fronting on the street across a wide terrace, which has masonry columns and pilasters. The red brick walls are plastered over here and there with political and commercial posters, which were renewed every time they elected new deputies at Ostia, or which served to advertise the arrival and departure of Rome's merchant-vessels.

The effort demanded of the reconstructor's imagination here is minimum, because the very ruins of this house, that has its whole second floor perfectly preserved, speak to us in a clear, vivid language.

G. CALZA

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SCAVO E SISTEMAZIONE DI ROVINE

(A PROPOSITO DI UN CARTEGGIO INEDITO DI P. E. VISCONTI
SUGLI SCAVI DI OSTIA)

Estratto dal *Bull. della Comm. arch. comunale*
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ROMA

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Fig. 2. Reconstruction of the Crossing of Two Streets at Ostia, the Via della Fortune and the Via del Mercato.