

Fabrizio Nevola, *Street Life in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 320 pp. incl. 160 colour and b&w ills, ISBN 9780300175431, £45
doi:10.1017/arh.2021.17

Reviewed by DEBORAH HOWARD

In this ambitious book, Fabrizio Nevola explores the interaction between buildings and people in the thoroughfares of the Italian Renaissance city. Street life, like musical performance, is ephemeral and its recovery is a challenging task for the historian. In architectural history, streets have usually been studied as empty spaces, while the flanking buildings have been viewed as individual monuments. Yet the street is, in effect, an open-air room or corridor enlivened by the activities of its occupants. Its character needs to be discussed as an integrated whole, determined by the lighting, the materials of the walls and paving and the ratio of height to width, and reanimated by its occupants: men and women, young and old, rich and poor, pilgrims and pedlars, soldiers and priests, not to mention animals, barrows and carts. To illustrate the artificiality of the separation between people and the cityscape, the book takes Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco of *Good Government* (1338–39) in Siena and stratifies it into two layers: first with the figures replaced by black silhouettes, and second with the choreography of the figures seen against a black background.

The book focuses on the period 1400–1600, ostensibly spanning the whole of Italy, although the Mezzogiorno to the south of Naples is largely omitted. Its arrangement falls into two halves: the first half takes a top-down approach, considering street networks as they were organised by authorities and planners; the second half considers the agency of the activities of ordinary people, with particular reference to specific elements in the townscape such as street corners, palaces and piazzas. Among the theoretical works that have inspired the research in general are the studies of spatial practices by Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau. In the second half, Nevola also acknowledges the fundamental influence of Kevin Lynch's book *The Image of the City*, published in 1960 at the height of post-war modernism to remind planners of the importance of small-scale personal interactions in the townscape. Working within this theoretical framework, Nevola draws on an impressive range of sources, including documents, chronicles, reports by travellers and ambassadors, *novelle*, maps, paintings, prints and public inscriptions, and he animates the imagery of urban life by starting each chapter with an anecdote or an extract from a *novella*.

Nevola observes that streetscapes from the period rarely depict people going about their everyday life. Events in the street were more often recorded for their memorability, such as the scene of Savonarola being burnt at the stake on the front cover of the book. Quotidian uses of the street often escaped chroniclers and artists: for example, the amount of urban renewal in the period would have led to a profusion of building sites, but these are rarely depicted or described. By contrast, executions, weddings, sacred rituals and street theatre were performative occasions, viewed by both bystanders and the occupants of surrounding buildings. Most visual images of

streetscapes portray specific events such as ceremonial entries, or even religious subjects located in recognisable cityscapes. Some ex-voto scenes represent miraculous escapes from mishaps, such as the amusing panel commissioned by the humanist Tommaso Inghirami to give thanks for his survival of a traffic accident. An image that breaks the mould by depicting everyday life, and acquires significance as a consequence, is a fresco from the demolished Palazzo Pontano in Perugia.

The famous Urbino panel of *The Ideal City* depicts an empty stage with no sign of human habitation apart from a few potted plants at the windows. That the ideal townscape should be depicted unoccupied reflects the concern of treatise writers such as Alberti and Filarete to remove the paraphernalia of everyday life from the streets. It might also be a reflection of the attitudes of the civic authorities, who saw inhabitants and visitors as purveyors of disorder, bringing illegal stalls, litter, crime and prostitution. Thus, in many cities, brothels were confined to specified areas, and dirty or polluting trades were relegated to marginal sites.

Urban improvements, such as the creation of new arteries to facilitate the free movement of merchandise, pilgrims, troops or processions, involved the appropriation of private property, and as such were assertions of power, often signalled by a monument at the end of the route such as an obelisk or triumphal arch. Stone or brick paving also highlighted public authority, as Nevola discusses in the case of Mantua, a low-lying city surrounded by lakes and subject to stagnant air, mud and frogs. Through both public encouragement and private initiative, porticoes and arcades ennobled cities such as Bologna, providing welcome shelter from the elements. The walls of the buildings signalled a semi-permeable transition between public and private space, penetrated by arcades and porticoes, shops and balconies. In Quattrocento Rome, however, porticoes were systematically removed in an attempt to prevent clutter and disorder.

Streets are dynamic arteries along which people move through both time and space. In Renaissance Italy, they were lines of communication of goods, news, pedestrians, horses and wheeled traffic. Street intersections provided sites of encounter — for the exchange of commodities and conversation. Nevola devotes a whole chapter to such ‘nodes’ of interaction on street corners, often occupied by apothecaries and barbers’ shops, or marked by inscriptions or coats of arms. Streets could address the passers-by directly through posters, denunciations, commemorative plaques and public edicts inscribed on stone tablets. In his discussion of the Rijksmuseum’s anonymous *Florentine Street Scene*, Nevola points out that men and women tended to socialise separately. The need to reinstate the time dimension not only requires reanimation of the spaces, but also demands consideration of the changing appearance of the buildings, which usually outlived their inhabitants. Unseen archaeological traces could be preserved for centuries in the alignment of streets, as in the curved perimeters of former Roman amphitheatres. New streets such as those of papal Rome or the Strada Nuova in Genoa provided high-prestige sites for elite palace building. Powerful private individuals could also extend their power into the public realm by framing or dominating a space, exemplified by the Rucellai in Florence and the Farnese in Rome.

When Walter Benjamin developed Baudelaire’s concept of the *flâneur*, the inhabitation of the street by pedestrians had become a nostalgic concept, reflected in Impressionist

paintings of 'modern life'. Yet streets have always staged the daily life of the city, and in this beautifully produced and richly illustrated book Nevola seeks to revitalise the inhabitation of the streets of Renaissance Italy.

William E. Wallace, *Michelangelo, God's Architect: The Story of His Final Years and Greatest Masterpiece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), xi and 279 pp. incl. 57 colour and 33 b&w ills, ISBN 9780691195490, £25
doi:10.1017/arh.2021.18

Reviewed by DAVID HEMSOLL

Michelangelo is arguably the greatest artist of the Renaissance, and also the most studied. William Wallace is unquestionably Michelangelo's most dedicated and accomplished modern-day scholar. So, what does his new book contribute to our modern-day understanding of Michelangelo, especially in view of the fact that, during the final two decades of his life (which is what this book covers), he worked principally as an architect?

Wallace's own view of his contribution is that he is correcting the widespread perception that Michelangelo was 'less prolific' towards the end of his life than he had been previously. His method is to draw on his prodigious knowledge about Michelangelo amassed in his previous studies, and to rely extensively on the documentation of Michelangelo's life that is provided mainly by his biographers Giorgio Vasari and Ascanio Condivi and by a wealth of letters, so as to build up a picture of Michelangelo's intertwining professional and private worlds, dating from the time his tomb of Pope Julius II was finally installed in 1545 until his death in 1564. The book deals with all this in eight themed and chronologically arranged chapters, which mingle together the routine goings-on of his daily life, his dealings both with his family in far-away Florence — such as their gifts of wine and food — and with his friends and associates in Rome, his late activities in painting, sculpture and drawing, his professional relationships with Marcello Venusti and Daniele da Volterra as proxy artists for commissions he was overseeing, and his increasing involvements in architecture that followed in the wake of his appointment as architect of New St Peter's in 1547.

This task is accomplished mainly by paying renewed attention to primary sources, but with the addition of various semi-fictionalised excursions, such as descriptions of Michelangelo's transportation of the Moses statue to the Julius tomb in San Pietro in Vincoli, or of his journey to work on the St Peter's site, or of a typical week in his busy life. Along the way, Wallace describes how Michelangelo's approach to artistic production gradually changed, from the 'micromanaging' that so often typified his previous practice to an engagement with colleagues that was increasingly collaborative, while presenting Michelangelo not as a cantankerous loner (as he is sometimes characterised) but as a congenial companion whose presence was sought after by many from the