

*Street Life in Renaissance Italy*. Fabrizio Nevola.  
New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020. 320 pp. \$60.

---

All cities have streets, and all streets contain life. While modern life on the street has been well represented in art and scholarship, its counterpart in Renaissance Italy remained something of a mystery, until Nevola's expert study came out. There is an intrinsic difficulty in reconstructing a history (and microhistories) of such passing experiences as street life, especially when it involves not just ritualized actions, but also everyday interactions. Nevola meets the challenge by articulating the relationships of street life to its immediate physical setting, an approach initially inspired by a visual source: the Quattrocento Sienese painter Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco *The City at Peace*, whose underlying moral message also finds its way into the opening pages of *Street Life in Renaissance Italy*.

The overall approach of Nevola's book is interdisciplinary, a fitting choice for the subject, if we understand the nature of streets and piazzas as public spaces where different behaviors mingle. In his analysis, Nevola is able to knit together an impressive variety of fields, ranging from architecture and urbanism to anthropology and cultural geography, and he gives us a clear sense of the complex interplay of separate themes on the street. Architectural historians, Nevola notes, tend to focus on the designed features of the built environment, while urban historians are usually concerned with the social practice of urban life. Considering the street as a unit of the city and an ecosystem, the book argues that the streets of Renaissance Italy should be understood as carefully assembled, dynamic structures, whose meanings emerge through a dialectic between the centralized ordering of the street and the lived experiences of its users, from privileged citizens to marginalized people, and everyone in between.

The book is divided into two parts, each comprised of three chapters, and each chapter opens with a vignette chosen from primary sources—an architectural treatise or a novella—that directs our attention to a particular aspect of street life within urban space. Part 1 presents a panorama of the city and its street cultures, while part 2 examines specific architectural elements and their meanings. Together, they make up a richly layered picture of street life that is played out at multiple scales, collectively as well as individually. In addition to conspicuous city centers and neighborhoods, Nevola also keeps a close eye on the much-neglected interstitial locations—the notorious street corners, taverns, and specialty shops—and brings to light the vibrant life that revolves around these places.

Traditionally, architectural historians writing about cities have preferred to keep a tight focus on a single urban center, but Nevola decides to go beyond that comfort zone and attempts to cover multiple Italian cities, adopting a comparative approach to reveal both shared features in the practice of urban life and distinctive behaviors. This presents another challenging task, as the commonalities or differences displayed in street life in these cities can be so subtle that one may be puzzled over where to

find comparative points. But Nevola meets the challenge through painstaking archival work and engaging narrative. In so doing he not only achieves his goal to open up a new field, but also offers us the gratifying experience of an intellectual grand tour across the Italian peninsula.

In treating a Renaissance subject, the book innovatively builds on some influential modern theories in urban studies—for example, Spiro Kostof's definition of the street as both *container* and *content*, and the five key elements used by Kevin Lynch in his analysis of urban form, which Nevola aptly borrows for the framework of the second part of his book. However, not every modern theory can be easily applied to premodern studies; while Henri Lefebvre's idea of the social production of space and Michel de Certeau's concept of practiced space sound straightforward, Lefebvre's specific elaboration on the distinction between *representation of space* and the *representational space* seems to make things more complicated than necessary when applied to Renaissance cases. But all this may remind us that the intrinsic nature and ultimate purpose of urban life has barely changed since the Renaissance, and demonstrates that street life as an area of study has an alluring prospect.

Chen Liu, *Tsinghua University*

doi:10.1017/rqx.2022.383

*Surviving the Ghetto: Toward a Social History of the Jewish Community in 16th-Century Rome.* Serena Di Nepi.

Trans. Paul M. Rosenberg. Studies in Jewish History and Culture 65. Leiden: Brill, 2021. x + 273 pp. €144.

---

Serena Di Nepi's *Surviving the Ghetto* is the highly anticipated English translation of her book *Sopravvivere al ghetto*, originally published in 2013. It is a study of the birth of the Roman ghetto in 1555 and its first fifty years of existence. Why was the ghetto established? How did the local Jews respond? How did the ghetto shape communal, social, and economic structures? Di Nepi approaches those and similar questions from the vantage point of a social historian. Arguing that the founding of the ghetto cannot be attributed solely to anti-Jewish sentiments and told through "lachrymose descriptions" (4), Di Nepi turns to a more nuanced approach and links both local and global processes in her account. To better understand the dynamics and sociocultural developments within the ghetto, one needs to investigate beyond the walls of the ghetto and the Roman city, Di Nepi suggests.

Indeed, the point of departure of her study is neither Rome nor Italy, but fifteenth-century Iberia. The expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula eventually brought some hundreds of refugees to the gates of Rome. Their arrival sparked tension among the local Jews, who were concerned that the influx of Sephardic Jews might