

The Age of *Ruinenlust*

An Exploration of Tourism and Ruins in the Urban Context, in Rome, during the Grand Tour

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Introduction

Ruinenlust, a term of German origin, embodies the allure of abandoned and decayed structures, buildings, and sites.¹ This concept is primarily associated with Romanticism in European art, during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the latter coinciding with the zenith of the Grand Tour and the nascent stages of modern tourism. This “Age of *Ruinenlust*” significantly influenced the perception and reinterpretation of antiquity,² leading to the emergence of modern archaeology, and profoundly impacting the understanding of urban heritage and the evolution of cities. These rich fields of intersection are a long way from being exhausted in the scholarly literature that explores these areas from an urban perspective, involving the perceived, conceived, and experienced city.

This study focuses on Rome during the Grand Tour, particularly in the middle and late 18th century. It employs a mixed-methods approach that aligns the changing human geography of influential travelers with evolving cultural trends and adaptations of the city’s identity. Rome’s long standing role as a cornerstone of urban heritage integration and preservation and its importance as the archetypical “palimpsest city” in urban theory justifies this selection. The perspective relies mainly on British travelers because of the abundance of written accounts and studies providing a rich foundation for analysis. Called for by the need to narrow the breadth of the study, this methodological option is also justified by the British occupying a prominent role among the various participants in the tour.³ Within this scope, the study poses two key objectives: to identify pivotal phases in the evolution of the Tour and to examine the city’s physical and conceptual transformations in parallel.

Ruins, Tourism, and the City: A Theoretical Review

The allure of ruins has perpetually captivated the human imagination through eras and cultures.⁴ Disciplines such as archaeology, architecture, history, and psychology have extensively explored their aspects, which remain prominent themes both in contemporary art and in

1 From *Ruinen* (ruins) and *lust*; its anglicized form, “Ruinlust,” was introduced by British scholar and novelist Rose Macaulay in her *Pleasure of Ruins* in 1953.

2 Inspiring works such as Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1789).

3 Compared to France, whose connection with Rome supposes more complicated, geo-political interests, the English case may also be considered straightforward.

4 Classical Greeks, for example, showed a deep interest in their own “ancient civilizations,” including early Helladic, Minoan, and Mycenaean cultures, already a millennium old by then. This is reflected in many concepts like the views of Cyclopean Walls, the archetypal mythological Arcadia, and the fall from the golden and heroic ages of man, which was usually associated with hubris and moral decline.

popular culture.⁵ Ruins uniquely serve as physical embodiments of memory,⁶ with exploration through heritage tourism or emotional journeys to gaze at them, having been dissected from numerous perspectives.

Sociological approaches have linked ruins and tourism to concepts, such as *cultural capital* and *structuration*.⁷ Cultural and humanistic geography and anthropology have systematically examined their role in shaping the identities and senses of places,⁸ as they have underscored the liminal aspects of bridging geographical and temporal distances.⁹ Art and philosophy have focused on their aesthetics,¹⁰ and their role in expressing authenticity or critiques of modernity.¹¹ Interdisciplinary perspectives have also emerged, highlighting ruins as multifaceted frontiers holding aesthetic, symbolic, and political meaning.¹²

On the other hand, historians have exhaustively researched the Grand Tour, owing to its rich written records and its role in shaping aesthetics and education during early modernity.¹³ Although still lacking a precise definition, the Tour generally pertains to secular cultural travel, primarily to Italy, before the formal emergence of the tourism industry with Cook's first transport travel service (1851-1871).¹⁴ Traditionally, the focus has been fixed on the travelers, most of them aristocrats, although researchers have started to expand on more diverse narratives, itineraries, and experiences of specific traveler groups.¹⁵ Merging historical and geographical analysis to reconstruct flows, routes, and demographics, John Towner's approach has been instrumental in interpreting the Tour as early tourism, injecting nerve into a mostly "armchair-by-the-fireplace" cultural topic until then.¹⁶

In architectural history and theory, the influence of the "Age of *Ruinenlust*" is obvious in neoclassical architecture. More interestingly, during the latter part of the 20th century, Rome

5 Póra Pétursdóttir, "Concrete matters: Ruins of modernity and the things called heritage," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 13, 1 (2013): 31-53.

6 Which is not necessarily celebratory. For example, "urbicide" refers to the deliberate destruction of cities or urban spaces due to war, disaster, or urban planning, often resulting in loss of cultural identity and social fabric. Yet, in Rome and this paper, "ruins" mostly refer to classical heritage.

7 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard University Press, 1984) and Anthony Giddens, "The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration," *In Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*, ed. Gabrielle M. Spiegel (London: Routledge, 2005), 121-142.

8 Carlos López Galviz et al., "Reconfiguring ruins: Beyond *Ruinenlust*," *GeoHumanities* 3, 2 (2017): 531-553; Work in the "sense of place," in general, like Sassen's.

9 Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

10 Robert Ginsberg, *The aesthetics of ruins* (Brill: Rodopi, 2004).

11 Examples may be Walter Benjamin's *aura*, Norberg-Schulz's *Genius Loci*, or Huyssen's analysis of the "transformative" ruins of modernity or indicating ambiguous transitional zones "betwixt and between" categories and cultural norms. See also Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process Structure and Anti-Structure* (Cornell University Press, 1969).

12 Aude Le Gallou, "From urban exploration to ruin tourism: a geographical analysis of contemporary ruins as new frontiers for urban tourism," *International Journal of Tourism Cities* 4, 2 (2018): 245-260 and C. DeSilvey and T. Edensor, "Reckoning with ruins," *Progress in human geography* 37, 4 (2013): 465-485.

13 Jeremy Black and Rosemary Sweet, in particular, have advanced understandings of the Tour's evolution, motivations, and perceptions of destinations as places. Sweet focuses more on the sense of "place" regarding the major cities of the Tour, but still focusing on travelers rather than the impact on destination cities. See Rosemary Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Jeremy Black, *The British and the Grand Tour* (London: Routledge, 2010).

14 Definitions vary widely, with some viewing it as early tourism, while others focus more on its zenith in the 18th century, defying it more narrowly mostly with cultural criteria. as early tourism versus a -mostly aristocratic- cultural rite with more specifically defined aspects, like national aspects, itineraries, etc.

15 Like visualization of routes of British architects in Italy in the 18th century. Giovanna, Ceserani et al., "British Travelers in Eighteenth-Century Italy: The Grand Tour and the Profession of Architecture," *The American Historical Review* 122, 2 (2017): 425-450.

16 John Towner, "The grand tour. A Key Phase in the History of Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research* 12, 3 (1985): 297-333.

of the Grand Tour re-emerged as a prominent case study of the interplay between urban design, urbanity, and fragmented collective memory. This was particularly evident in the context of postmodern urban iconography from the 1960s to the 1980s, with key publications by a new breed of Grand Tourists, such as Edmund Bacon's *Design of Cities*, Christian Norberg-Schulz's *Genius Loci* or Colin Rowe's *Collage City*, all using the city's rich urban fabric as a starting point for the construction of their respective theories. In the wider context, the 1970s marked a pivotal phase in heritage preservation as well as in the rise of urban tourism.¹⁷ This would lead in time to the ongoing discussions and debates about the benefits and criticism of heritage exploitation, power imbalances within tourism, and the commodification of history,¹⁸ — all heavily relevant to cities like Rome to this day.¹⁹

In conclusion, while scholarly literature has been consistently considering pre-modern, Grand Tour-era Rome as a major reference, the intricate dynamics of the original period are often obscured and usually presented with uncritical nostalgia.²⁰ This study aims to bridge this gap by providing a more solid background to this discourse while focusing on the urban dimension. However, such an endeavor invariably carries its own complexities and limitations.

Materials, Methods, and Limitations

As argued, several theoretical angles can be used to address the questions at hand. However, at their intersection, these questions consistently reveal two core elements: the “visit” and the “experience.” While the experience can be a social or individual process, the visit invariably involves two parts, the visitor and the host. Accordingly, this study employs a dual approach. It uses data from British travelers' itineraries to sketch macro-trends and integrates this with an analysis of physical transformations and changing representations of the host-city to establish parallels. In this context, the role of the “ruins” is central and mostly overlaps with the classical heritage of the city.

The first component relies on secondary data from 108 Grand Tour journeys between 1547 and 1840, originally compiled by Towner (1985) for his Ph.D. thesis and subsequent publications.²¹ It includes detailed insights into 222 tourists' itineraries, duration, group size, occupation, and demographics of the most influential travelers, whose travel logs could be practically traced to the pre-digital age. To complement these patterns, a parallel examination is undertaken, one that focuses on how Rome and its ruins have changed, and how the city's representation has developed. More emphasis is placed on the proto-touristic industry evolving around ruins and its impact on local creators, well versed in architectural theory.

This approach helps reconstruct a more spherical picture of this age in Rome. Admittedly, there are also limitations to such an undertaking. Although extensive, the dataset is predominantly British and selective for participants who published their experiences. However, in the context of this study, this limitation offers an unexpected advantage: it effectively filters influential travelers of the era in a seemingly “unbiased” manner, prioritizing the conceptual or phenomenological aspect of the tour. Similarly, the cultural component leans heavily towards urban depictions and an understanding of ruins in their urban setting rather than a broader spectrum of ruins as autonomous cultural objects and artifacts.

17 As with the establishment of the World Heritage Convention in 1972.

18 Iban Diaz-Parra and Jaime Jover. “Overtourism, Place Alienation and the Right to the City: Insights from the Historic Centre of Seville, Spain,” *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 29, 2-3 (2021): 158-175.

19 Anna Laura Palazzo and Antonio Pugliano. “The burden of history: Living heritage and everyday life in Rome,” in *Theory and Practice in Heritage and Sustainability: Between past and future*, eds. E. Auclair and G. Fairclough (Routledge, 2015).

20 With some recent work, starting to address this, like Anna Laura Palazzo, “The Early Global Vocation of Rome. Worship, Culture and Beyond,” *Humanities* 10, 3 (2021): 103.

21 John Towner, “The European Grand Tour,” Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1985.

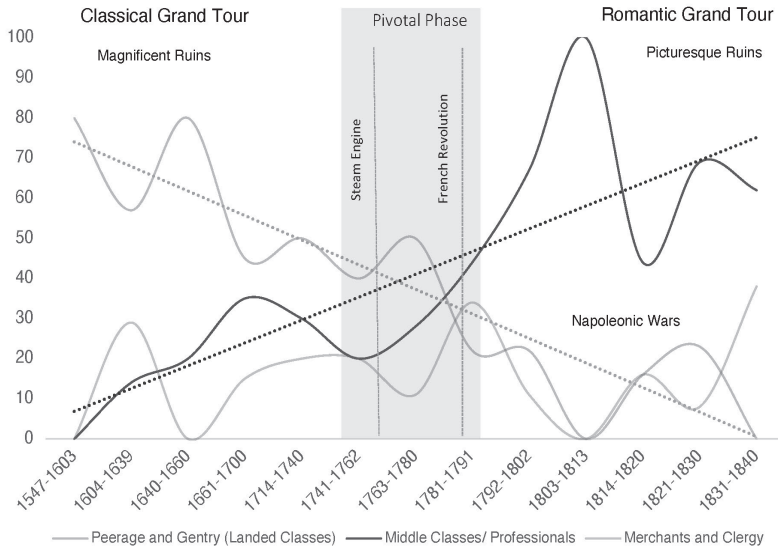


Fig. 1. Traveler sample and evolution of social / occupational status over time. The chart illustrates the number of Grand Tour trips and tourists to Rome across various periods, highlighting the popularity and growth in the number of influential British tourists engaging in the Grand Tour from 1547 to 1840. Line graphs depicting the demographic shift, with percentage representations of the peerage and gentry (landed classes), merchants and clergy, and commoners, set against historical events such as the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars

Analysis

Seeds of modernity: scholars, tourists, and writers

The origins of the Grand Tour²² align with a transformative period in Britain marked by significant socioeconomic and technological advancements.²³ This era spurred productivity, leading to wealth accumulation initially among the aristocracy and later extended to the emerging middle class. A leisure class emerged,²⁴ characterized by ample income and free time, the two most important prerequisites of tourism. Concurrently, there was a renewed focus on personal culture, taste, and scholarship, influenced by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Simultaneously, post-Reformation and Counter-Reformation reshaped the international travel dynamics between Italy and Britain. What was once a journey of religious pilgrimages transformed into secular tourism centered on education, art, and leisure. Within this context, the Grand Tour emerged as a structured process exposing participants to celebrated art, architecture, classical education, and social prestige, or even libertinism.²⁵ Initially undertaken by a select few, by the late 18th century, the number of British individuals touring Italy surged to tens of thousands, bringing about diversification in experiences and perspectives.

22 Usually set in the late 16th century, or even earlier by some authors.

23 Such as the British Agricultural Revolution. According to David Harvey, this was the initial accumulation of modern capitalism. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

24 In Veblen's terms.

25 For example, a primary form of sub-culture derived from the journey and the adventure abroad rose, deemed as "Macaroni." Named from the pasta dish, the term was used during the mid-18th century to refer to fashionable men who dressed and spoke in an outlandishly affected and epigone manner. Essentially, a Macaroni was an Englishman who adopted foreign, often Italian, mannerisms and styles, after returning from the Grand Tour. The "Macaroni" trend became so popular that it was satirized consistently in contemporary popular media. Amelia Rauser, "Hair, authenticity, and the self-made macaroni," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, 1 (2004): 101-117; Jeremy Black, "Love, Sex, Gambling and Drinking," in *The British and the Grand Tour* (Routledge, 2010), 75-85.

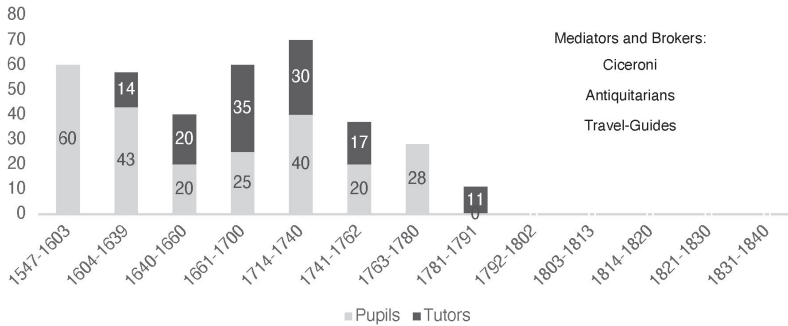


Fig. 2a. Chart showing the percentage of pupils and tutors among Grand Tour travelers, demonstrating the decline of tutors and the emergence of new roles such as cicerones, travel guides, and antiquarians as the Grand Tour evolved

Adhering to Towner's original methodology of clustering travelers per decade — for which Rome always remained a central destination²⁶ — reveals a steady decline in traditional aristocrats compared to rising professionals, with the latter overtaking the former from the mid-18th century onwards (Fig. 1).²⁷ Based on this, Towner identifies two key phases, the classical (17th century to mid-18th century) and the romantic from the early 19th century onwards. In between, the transitional era of the mid-18th century proved pivotal and, as will be argued here, it deserves its periodization (Fig. 1) and will be central to this study, with a special focus on its key actors.

As human geography changed, so did the structure and duration of the tours.²⁸ The journey decreased from an average of three years in the 17th century to a few summer months in the early 19th century.²⁹ This change is probably linked to the financial constraints of less wealthy tourists, and perhaps a better appreciation of the value of the time spent, in a society transitioning to the wage-working model, instead of one of "work to be done."³⁰ This shift was also reflected in the inner composition of the travel groups. Since the middle of the 18th century, tutors traveling alongside young aristocrats became rarer,³¹ and this was also linked with the emergence of locally based players, such as the cicerones (Fig. 2a). Named after the Roman orator and father of *urbanitas*,³² Cicerones were local or foreign individuals, knowledgeable about local culture, history, and art, who acted as leased tutors, guides, and later brokers of art and antiquities.³³

26 Which in contrast to other destinations like Venice or Naples, it maintained its "serious" character throughout the Tour, probably both because of the heritage and religious character.

27 With a symbolic date of transition set in 1762, just two years before the invention of the steam engine by James Watt (1764). During times of political upheaval, the number of visitors decreased. However, the Tour sustained its appeal amid the French Revolutionary Wars and after the Napoleonic Wars, particularly among lower-class travelers. Simultaneously, aristocrats pivoted towards more exclusive and exotic sites, as Italy increasingly became mainstream. Towner, "Grand tour. A Key Phase," 297-333.

28 In the sample, there is a notable overlap between the burgeoning professional class and traveler-writers, particularly Romantics, in later years. These writers, akin to today's travel bloggers, journeyed for inspiration and publication, while their income and ability to independently travel primarily came from their work or patronage. Though bearing specific characteristics, this group exemplifies the widening accessibility of secular travel across broader social strata, a trend inconceivable a few centuries earlier. Towner, "European Grand Tour," 176.

29 See Towner thorough analysis in Towner, "European Grand Tour," 271-272.

30 Patricia A. Stokowski, *Leisure in society: a network structural perspective* (Mansell Publishing, Cassell plc, 1994).

31 Many of whom were "Clergy" by the sample, highlighting again the evolution of religious paths into secular. Towner, "European Grand Tour," 173-176.

32 Pierre Maréchaux, "Urbanitas against Urbanism: a Latin Paradox," *studies in History and Theory of Architecture* 3 (2015): 22-33.

33 Jeremy Black, *The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (St. Martin's Press, 1992), 148.

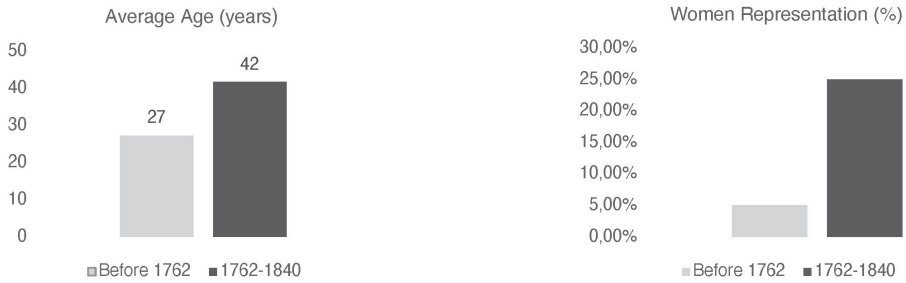


Fig. 2b. Chart comparing the average age of tourists and the participation of women in the Grand Tour before and after 1762, signifying changes in the demographics and gender dynamics of travel during this period

For those who could not afford even a cicerone, more targeted systematic printed travel guides began to become popular in the 18th century, providing an affordable and less personal but still instructive alternative. These changes also allowed for artists, craftsmen, and antiquarians involved, to reach an expanding audience and to build international fame.

A similar interesting marker of the changing micro-cosmos of the Tour is the participation of women, who start to appear in the sample in the late 17th century, initially as family members (wives and daughters), and occasionally as leading figures (Fig. 2b). Although it is too much to talk about clear signs of gender consciousness at that point in history,³⁴ in the later phases of the Tour, women such as Elizabeth Craven, Hester Lynch Piozzi, and Mary Shelley could practically travel independently, something that was inconceivable before the late 18th century.

Overall, as travelers' backgrounds diversified and trips shortened, their motivations and interpretations of destinations evolved, transitioning from an extended educational process to a much more targeted emotional sightseeing. In turn, this led to a much condensed and systematic experience, where culture had to be absorbed and consumed more efficiently, despite the core itinerary remaining mostly the same.³⁵ As a result, a primary but thriving tourism industry adapted, reshaping not only the perceptions and experiences of tourists but also the city itself.

A city adapting

Rome's significance as the Tour's central destination stemmed from its religious prominence, unique urban landscape, and burgeoning interest in classical antiquities. The city began attracting pilgrims in significant numbers during the jubilees in the Middle Ages, and its evolution into a visitor-friendly destination began early. In the 16th and 17th centuries, ambitious projects initiated by popes, like Sixtus V's "Rome in the shape of a star" plan, aimed to enhance connectivity and accessibility to key destinations in the city.³⁶ Subsequent more focused "regeneration" efforts in the 17th and early 18th centuries expanded on this plan, involving the redesign of squares with heavily decorated fountains, the creation of monumental structures like the Spanish Steps, and the enforcement of normative building codes and typologies for aesthetic purposes, such as the unification of facades.³⁷ By the middle of the 18th century, the restructuring of the city, oriented towards visitors, was almost complete, and *Roma antica, sacra e moderna* competed with each other. Yet, further intervention occurred at a more thematic level, one coming from the underground.

34 Which is certainly a debated issue. Anna P.H. Geurts, "Gender, Curiosity, and the Grand Tour: Late-Eighteenth-Century British Travel Writing," *Journeys* 21, 2 (2020): 1-23.

35 Rosemary Sweet, "The Changing View of Rome in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, 2 (2010): 145-164.

36 As well studied in architectural theory and exemplified on the analysis of Bacon in his *Design of Cities*.

37 By Pope Gregory XIII.

In Rome, public excavations commissioned by popes and private ones, undertaken by local families and prominent tourists, flourished. In 1719, Pope Clement XI commissioned architect Alessandro Specchi to create a Palazzo to display statues, leading to Rome's first public museum, the Museo Capitolino, established by Pope Clement XII in 1733.³⁸ From 1775 to 1799, Pope Pius VI sponsored over one hundred excavations³⁹ and projected to redesign the Vatican antiquities complex to showcase the recent discoveries. Thematic museums, such as Sala della Biga, further attracted notable visitors, as privileged access to the new museum was turning into a tool of public relations for an increasingly weak papacy seeking to strengthen its soft power and appeal to the now distant Protestant elite of the north.⁴⁰

As ruins and the tourism market thrived, the private sector also flourished. In the new secular urban core created by Sixtus, new land uses such as pensions, cafes, and hotels began to emerge more systematically. Initially, travelers lodged in guesthouses and inns, but eventually Renaissance and medieval palazzos, particularly those owned by recently impoverished local aristocrats,⁴¹ were repurposed. The Spanish Steps area gained popularity owing to its central location, proximity to the main sights, and easy access to various itineraries of touristic walks around the main sights of the city. Establishments such as *Antico Caffè Greco* and *Caffè degli Inglesi* served not only as accommodation, mail, and meeting spots, but also as hubs for the tourist market that evolved around classical antiquities and art collections, and most notably, freshly excavated ruins. Such places aimed to allure and capture the imagination of wealthy visitors and cater to emerging and further exotic trends, such as Egyptomania, which gripped British intelligentsia from the late 18th century onwards,⁴² and would lead to the archeological fever of the next century. Gradually, the area became potentially the first dedicated "tourist zone" in Europe, whereas areas used by locals since the medieval times, like Trastevere, attracted less interest due to safety concerns and an observed lack of antiquities, sights, or other interesting things to gaze at.⁴³ Overall, the plan of Sixtus V was a success.

In addition to lodging and sightseeing, tourism also maintained an expansive ecosystem of art producers, guides, and antiquities traders and brokers.⁴⁴ Fueled by a fascination with all things ancient and marble, affluent visitors and scholars were inspired to amass as many trophies as possible, which not only served as mementos but also as symbols of intellectual achievement upon their return home. This laid the foundation for the birth of systematic collections in major museums in Northern Europe, such as the British Museum in London (1753) and the Louvre Museum in Paris (1793).⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the escalating demand for ruins led to a predicament in which supply could not keep up with demand. This resulted in various outcomes, including increased excavations at more remote sites, brut extractions of artifacts or whole building parts,⁴⁶ up to the proliferation of

38 Stephen L. Dyson, "Rome in the Eighteenth Century," in *Archaeology, Ideology, and Urbanism in Rome from the Grand Tour to Berlusconi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 8-32.

39 Ibid., 28.

40 Ibid., 12.

41 Probably similar to other reported cases like in Genoa or Venice. Towner, "The grand tour. A Key Phase": 297-333.

42 The Etrusco-Egyptian-themed Caffè Degli Inglesi was designed by Piranesi himself in an awkward mannerist style of both neo-classical, Etruscan and Egyptian styles. It was a popular spot for British artists in Rome, but its design was controversial even in its time. It only lasted around 20 years but remained "legendary" due to Piranesi Etchings and styles. This mannerism cannot be read separately from the widespread trends of the time. Although critical, Shelley's Ozymandias is such a product, as well.

43 Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour*, 146.

44 Vicky Coltman, "The Spoils of Roman Grandeur," in *Classical Sculpture and the Culture of Collecting in Britain since 1760* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2009), 49-83.

45 Margarita Díaz-Andreu, *A world history of nineteenth-century archaeology: nationalism, colonialism, and the past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

46 Like for example, the Elgin Marbles in Parthenon, Athens, roughly at the same period, or excavations in Egypt and exports that had started already across the Mediterranean during the "Archaeological Fever."



forgeries.⁴⁷ Moreover, it led to new and more efficient forms of capturing the city's character and aura, like various forms of capturing the aura of the city, including maps and perspective views. In this context, somewhere between lust and gluttony, the 1740s and the 1750s present some of the most interesting depictions of the actual and imaginary city, as the ones produced by the notable interlinked trio of Giambattista Nolli, Giuseppe Vasi, and Giovanni Battista Piranesi.⁴⁸

A city represented.

The transitional phase of the 18th century transformed not only both the everyday city and its historical avatar located underground, but also the conceived and the represented city.⁴⁹ Guides and maps dedicated to visitors probably best capture this change for both the visitor and the host, serving as valuable media changes.

Within Rome's long tradition of cartographic representations, Giovanni Battista Nolli's (1692–1756) *La Grande Pianta di Roma* or “Nolli Map” stands out. Commissioned by Pope Benedict XIV in 1736 and completed in 1748, the map, comprising 12 detailed copper plates at a 1/2,750 scale, meticulously demarcated the borders of Rome's historic neighborhoods (Rioni). Its orientation towards Magnetic North, diverging from the traditional sacred East direction, indicated a growing reliance on emerging technological tools like the compass.⁵⁰ The map

47 Nancy H. Ramage, “Restorer and collector: Notes on eighteenth-century recreations of Roman statues,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome. Supplementary Volumes* 1 (2002): 61–77.

48 For every architectural paper that deals with Nolli and Piranesi, it is tempting to leave everything aside and focus on the two prominent architects and geometers. However, this paper does not focus on the individual work of evocative -or genius- players of the time, but rather in the context their work is unfolding. Thus, their work will only be referenced from the lenses for the depictions of the city they produced.

49 For a closer look at maps and guides preceding this era: Anna Blennow and Stefano Fogelberg Rota, *Rome and The Guidebook Tradition: From the Middle Ages to the 20th Century* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019).

50 Beyond this, the map innovatively incorporated enclosed public and semi-public spaces like St. Peter's Peristyle and the Pantheon, thereby presenting Rome as a complex interplay of public spaces nestled



Fig. 3. Multiview postcards from Rome: Imaginary galleries of Roma Antica and Moderna, between 1754-1759 (by Giovanni Paolo Pannini), with gentlemen viewing and buying artwork depicting the ancient (facing page) and / or contemporary monuments of the city (above)

remained in use for nearly two centuries, constituting a significant technical leap forward, a testament to the Enlightenment's scientific methods.

Contrastingly, tourist-oriented maps often emphasized aesthetics over practicality, being viewed as “traveler’s furniture”⁵¹ for their visual charm rather than navigational use. However, from the late 18th century, a shift towards functional mapping for tourists emerged as well, as the Grand Tour became more self-guided, personal, abbreviated, direct, and driven by exploration. This shift is evident in Giuseppe Vasi’s innovative fusion of *veduta* (city views) with the Nolli map. As a renowned *vedutista* in Rome, Vasi’s ten-volume work *Delle Magnificenze di Roma Antica e Moderna* (1747-1761) immersed viewers in the city’s “architectural grandeur,” leveraging the topographical foundation of the Nolli map to build realistic perspectives upon. In 1763, Vasi published his *Itinerario istruttivo di Roma* [Instructive Itinerary of Rome], a practical and foldable guidebook version of his work, structured the itinerary around eight main routes, each representing a day’s tour, allowing visitors to explore Rome’s sights over eight days.

As such, the novelty of these guides lies in their ability to provide a historical context for the city’s ruins and sights, offering an on-the-go visit, gaze, and reading of history, with updated styles and trends aligned to visitors’ expectations.⁵² Alongside depictions, the guidebook included historical explanations and insights from “the most accredited writers and antiquarians.”⁵³ The preface however, also featured a preemptive apology, cautioning travelers to

within private structures. This was in turn its main allure, in later post-modernist architectural thinking.

51 A sentiment echoed in John Chetwode Eustace’s “Classical Tour.” Sweet, *Grand Tour*, 117.

52 The guidebook success led Vasi’s son Mariano to release updated editions until the mid-nineteenth century, though the themes and the style needed to keep update with changing trends and tastes. Characteristic is the emerging appreciation for the British version of the “picturesque” traveling back and forth from Italy to Britain, demonstrating the channels early tourism created as we all as the local adaptability amidst changing expectations. Thomais Kordonouri, “Picturesque Features in Sir John Soane’s Museum,” *studies in History and Theory of Architecture* 8 (2020): 185-196.

53 Giuseppe Vasi, “Itinerario Istruttivo,” 2-3, bit.ly/49DbqSf, accessed March 2023.



Fig. 4. Maps and guides and evolving tastes and sights to be seen. On the left, G. Vasi, “Itinerario istruttivo” (1763); On the right, later editions of Vasi’s son, Marianno, translated in English up to the final days of the Tour (1841). In the middle, Pianta di Roma e del Campo Marzo, Giovanni Battista Piranesi (c. 1774).

take nothing for granted, as *omnis homo mendax*⁵⁴ — likely serving as a nuanced underscoring of genuine misinterpretations of the past,⁵⁵ as ciceronis’ and antiquarians’ extravagant narratives. Put differently, the once-disconnected spaces of Rome,⁵⁶ featuring sights, ruins, and monuments, are progressively transforming into a “conceived place.”

Speaking of extravagance, the shift from the literal city to the conceived experience is even better illustrated by the work of the most renowned apprentice of Vasi, Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778). An early pioneer of archaeology, both real and imagined, Piranesi also collaborated with Nolli on *La Piccola Pianta Di Roma*, a compact version of the *Grande Pianta*, targeted to the tourist market. Besides being foldable, this map also included hundreds of classical antiquities marked, setting the stage for Piranesi’s reputation as a leading antiquarian in Rome and abroad.

A notable example of the interaction and the contested nature between the host and the travelers, the past and the present, and the grandiose vs. the critique is the renowned *Le Antichità Romane* series. This was initially conceived with modest ambition by Piranesi but expanded in the promise and opportunity of sponsorship from a prominent tourist, James Caulfield, Earl of Charlemont, who, however, pledged support after leaving Rome. Expressing his frustration, Piranesi published a scathing letter against Charlemont, subsequently removing the dedication and revising the frontispiece — an act aligned with the Roman tradition of erasing condemned individuals from monuments.⁵⁷ Moreover, his writings turned to a defensive stance in the evaluation of the Roman Legacy, as the tourist’s preferences had turned mostly to new excavations and discoveries, in Greece.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the successful series escalated Piranesi’s acclaim, earning him recognition from esteemed institutions like London’s Society of Antiquities, though the power imbalance between the travelers and the hosts had completely reversed since the early stages of the Tour.

54 Ibid., 4 (which is Latin for “every man is a liar”).

55 Which was not uncommon. Monique Webber, “Created Memories: (Mis)identification of Monuments in Early Modern Rome,” *studies in History and Theory of Architecture* 3 (2015): 34–47.

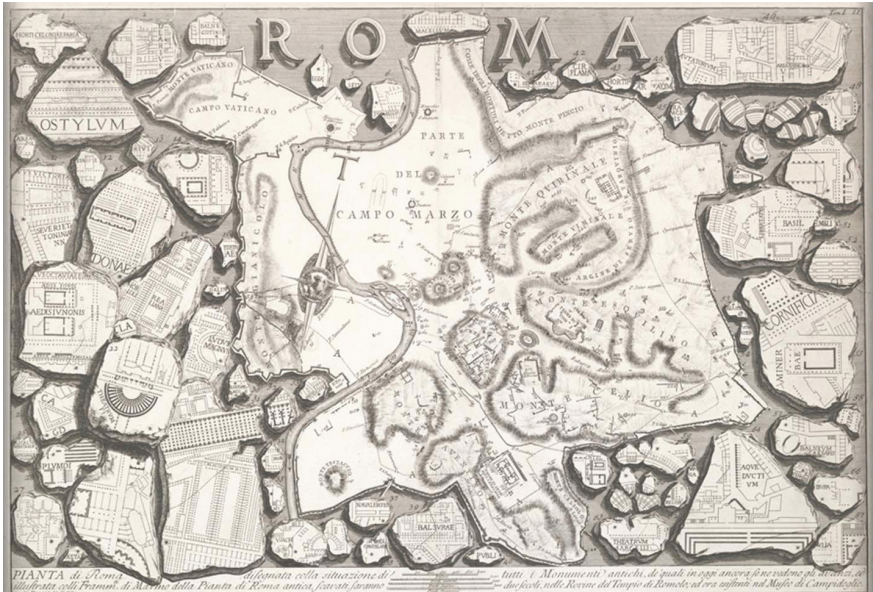
56 Between which, the transport was traditionally by carriages from spot to spot.

57 Giovanni Battista Piranesi, “Lettere di giustificazione scritte a Milord Charlemont ... ultimamente soppressa,” Preface, 1:10; Carolyn Yerkes and Heather Hyde Minor, *Piranesi Unbound* (Princeton University Press, 2020).

58 A heated debate, based on Winckelmann views acceptance over Europe.



Fig. 5. Top: a sweeping panoramic engraving by Giuseppe Vasi, offering a wide-angle perspective of Rome. The etching, based on the topographic foundations of the Nolli map, showcases the city's expansive landscape. Center: a detailed, color-enhanced version of Nolli's map, created in collaboration with Piranesi. This representation is merged with notable locations and landmarks sourced from the urban iconography of L. Bufalino. Bottom: Piranesi's intricate layout of "Urbis Formae." This patchwork-like representation offers an antiquarian architectural study of the city's remnants and fragments of the Severian marble plan, with specific reference to the Ostia district and the Campus Martius.



Reaping the harvest

This gradual shift from concrete urban depictions to the conveyance of meaning and imagination might initially seem like an individual artistic oddity. However, it can also be understood as a developing detachment from the tangible realities of the era⁵⁹ (or even a critique thereof), expressed in the intermediate space of art, urbanism, and ideas exchange. By the late 18th century, a critical perspective towards the material city, and Rome itself, began to emerge, reflected both in the writings of travelers and the portrayals of the city.

Turbulence with social and national characteristics swept the southern shores of Europe,⁶⁰ before eventually moving northward. As the 19th century began, travelers' focus shifted from grand symbols to advocating for urban transformation and resource reallocation to improve living conditions. From the traveler's perspective, writings start to undertone imperialism and budding nationalism suggested by a growing self-assesses superiority stemming from the rising power of the travelers' home countries.⁶¹ On the other spectrum, many Romantic travelers began expressing social critiques targeted at both the host city and their homelands, often conveying revolutionary ideas.⁶²

Overall, the shift from the admiration of grandeur towards an interest in the daily life of cities was again inextricably intertwined with the interpretation of ruins. Early archaeological excavations, such as those in Campo Marzio, associated the ruins of ancient Rome with remnants of a monumental and idyllic city of "Caesars and legions," as depicted in fragments like the *Forma Urbis Romae*.⁶³ However, subsequent excavations at sites such as Herculaneum (1738) and in the Pompeii mid-18th century unveiled more intact vestiges of a harsher city, characterized by common people living in poverty.⁶⁴ Consequently, the reading of the ancient ruins evolved beyond grandeur and resonated with critical views of urbanism, that later, would mostly correspond to the industrial cities emerging. Furthermore, the type of reading had changed as well.

For example, the emphasis of most writers since the late 18th and early 19th century on the "health" aspect^{65,66} reflects this departure from earlier criteria to assess urbanity and urban living conditions. In the final days of the Tour, set around the 1830s, we stand only a few years away from groundbreaking developments regarding city awareness and a new type of urban and social analysis emerging, with health mostly resembling the root from which the social sciences emerge in general. In these, health, sanitation, and infrastructure resemble the closest "thing" to urban calls for reforms.⁶⁷ As a result, the cultural impact of this era, typically interpreted as the

59 A thesis that Andreas Huyssen has developed in depth.

60 Like the multiple waves or Revolutions from both the 1810s and the 1820s.

61 Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour*, 297-99.

62 Like Byron's links with the *carbonari* during his stay in Italy, and his later involvement and death in Greece. Daryl S. Ogden, "Byron, Italy, and the poetics of liberal imperialism," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 49 (2000): 114-137.

63 And studied thoroughly by Piranesi.

64 Charlotte Roberts, "Living with the Ancient Romans: Past and Present in Eighteenth-Century Encounters with Herculaneum and Pompeii," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78, 1 (2015): 61-85.

65 Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour*, 153-154, 282.

66 Many British authors attribute the characteristics of the period to its "Englishness," but they may overlook the broader European context. Both Britain and Switzerland, unlike other European countries, remained largely unaffected by the turmoil leading up to the 1847-1848 revolutions. Travelers often describe these nations as "cleaner," "organized," and "reliable," thus associating them with a sense of prosperity. Interestingly, studies on the history of public health have emerged not only from history but also from the realm of public health sciences. For instance, the debate surrounding the McKeon Thesis sheds light on this topic.

67 Examples include Engels' 1844 analysis of the working classes in Manchester, R. Virchow's promotion of social medicine and calls for reforms in Germany, Louis René Villermé's studies on working conditions, the sanitarian movement in Britain and Europe, and notable technocratic examples of making "healthier" cities, like Cerda's Plan for Barcelona, which is often regarded as the birthplace of modern urban planning.

pinnacle of a classicist era beginning with the Renaissance, can also be seen as the starting point of 19th century European modernity, its self-reflection and criticism.

Considering 1840 as the symbolic culmination of the data sample and journey, the “transitionary phase” this study has argued for has been completed, the seeds have been already planted, and the long 19th century is well on track.

Discussion: The Enduring Allure of the Past

This study sought to examine the dynamic conjunction of *Ruinenlust* and the Grand Tour, focusing on both travelers and hosts and centering on the urban dimension of the interpretation of history.

As argued, from the travelers’ perspective, Rome’s ruins initially ignited imaginations with visions of magnificence, located not that much in Italy, but rather in the past. From the late 16th century onwards, ruins morphed from symbols of splendor and authority to the Romantic lament of a “world lost under industrialization, urbanization, and modernity,”⁶⁸ in the final days of the tour.

Accordingly, Rome’s 16th and 17th century identity as the undisputed cultural capital of Europe began to wane under the growing influence of Northern powers. The allure of tourism and its soft power prompted Rome to willingly adapt to new concepts and motivations, aligning with changing expectations and cultural trends. First, the city physically adapted through ambitious projects and then its classical past was showcased via extensive excavations and heritage displays. Ultimately, the city’s ruins and sites transitioned from physical entities to more abstract and creative representations, though within this interplay, the evolving shifting power imbalance between travelers and hosts became clearer.

As such, while power relations and projections of expectations are clear in the case study, treating the Tour solely through the lens of a cultural capriccio, or power imbalances, is probably also problematic and short-sighted. According to Tobler’s first law of geography, “everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things.”⁶⁹ Although this law of friction refers to space, it can also work for places as well, underscoring the non-zero-sum nature of physical, cultural, and ideas exchange. Accordingly, the Tour, as early tourism, served as a conduit for spurring ideas in space and time, while the interpretations of Rome as an archetypical city, and its ruins as urban memory, embodied the added layers of meaning as perspectives evolved.

As a result, the main contribution of this study lies in its synthesis of the stories of both visitors and the host city, a reading that elucidates links revolving around memory, experiences, and placemaking. While expansive in breadth for the same reasons, the study recognizes limitations, particularly regarding the predominantly British perspective and its focus on “high culture.” Further studies incorporating diverse viewpoints and everyday experiences could enrich understanding based on more detailed tourist samples⁷⁰ or expand in other relevant urban contexts, such as Athens⁷¹ in the early 19th century. Nonetheless, this synthesis underscores some insights relevant to current issues that can be gleaned.

First, the perception of heritage, much like memory and symbols, is not fixed. Rather, it evolves to reflect broader cultural, social, and historical forces, and the case of the original Age of

68 Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 2.

69 Waldo Tobler, “On the first law of geography: A reply,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, 2 (2004): 304–310.

70 Like for example, through the “Dictionary of British and Irish Travelers in Italy, 1701–1800,” by Brinsley Ford (Yale University Press, 1997).

71 And the “French Expedition” (*Expédition de Morée*) right after Greek Independence.

Ruinenlust underscores this emphatically. Second, the emergence of tourism not only reflected societal changes but also spurred them. Today's criticism of mass tourism, often decried as vulgar or unenlightening, frequently replicates elitist attitudes toward self-proclaimed cultural superiority. On the contrary, commodification and uncritical adaptation to tourism demand mirrors imbalances and perpetuates dependencies.

Overall, these insights underline that interpretations of the past are neither static nor absolute but reflect deeper historical and socioeconomic forces. As cities evolve, so do their ruins, accruing layers of meaning. As such, their charm lies in their ability to encapsulate memory. However, their enduring power stems from their ability to serve as touchstones, allowing societies to constantly redefine their understanding of the world around them.

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ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

Fig. 1: Data derived from John Towner, "The European Grand Tour," Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1985. Visualization by the author.

Fig. 2a: Ibid.

Fig. 2b: Ibid.

Fig. 3: Left: Wikimedia Commons, Pannini, Giovanni Paolo - Gallery of Views of Modern Rome – 1759; Right: Wikimedia Commons, Pannini, Giovanni Paolo - Gallery of Views of Ancient Rome – 1758.

Fig. 4: Left: G. Vasi and Marco Pagliarini, *Itinerario Istruttivo [...] e castelli suburbani* (Nella stamperia di Marco Pagliarini, 1763), <https://books.google.gr/books?id=qYlhCTeWsC>, accessed December 15, 2023. Middle: Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Della Magnificenza Ed Architettvra De' Romani* (Rome, 1761), doi:10.11588/diglit.1662. Right: M. Vasi and A. Nibby, *New Guide of Rome, Naples and Their Environs* (Naples: Montaldini, 1841), <https://books.google.gr/books?id=UkgQAAAYAAJ>, accessed December 15, 2023.

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