

Spatial Cultures

Towards a New Social Morphology
of Cities Past and Present

Edited by

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1 Ancient Rome

Mobility in Europe's first metropolis

Ray Laurence

Introduction

Ancient Rome has been largely omitted from recent work on mobility in geography and the social sciences (e.g. Urry 2007). Rome as a growing metropolis from 300 BCE became a location for the development of new forms of mobility that developed in response to the size and continuing growth of the city. Urban journeys of several miles could be taken without seeing the countryside – so different from the urban–rural experience found for example in Pompeii, where within twenty minutes you could cross the city. Rome is one of the first documented cities that was detached from nature. Walking on Rome's paved streets shifted the urban experience towards 'clean' streets and the avoidance of dirt associated with nature. This chapter seeks to engage the study of mobility in the city of Rome with some recent developments in the study of space and movement.¹

Rome and conceptions of space

Mobility is a human practice that is culturally specific and, when we focus on ancient Rome we are examining mobility in a large preindustrial metropolis. Understanding mobility in its historical context involves engaging with theories of society and space, using the theory to recognise how Rome produced new concepts of space, new technologies of mobility, new urban spaces, a new language of space, new critical genres of urban discourse, new ideas on the nature of walking, new systems of traffic flow, and a gradation of space (from an *angiportus* or alleyway to a *locus celeberrimus* or famous place). Thus, David Harvey's (2006) definition of space as a keyword provides a basis for considering how ancient Rome might be conceived within the systemic mode of thought at the heart of the Lefebvrian spatial turn: 'material space', that is experienced representations of space, such as maps, and spaces of representation, that refer to the psychological or *mentalité* of space. Lefebvre's triad can be used in conjunction with Harvey's own tripartite scheme: absolute space, relative space and relational space to create a conceptual grid that has implications for understanding our sources on the city of Rome (cf. Table 1.1; see also Laurence 1997).

We would place our textual evidence for movement in the category of relative space. These are all textual creations with complex literary and linguistic structures to them, that have a linkage to the material through the deployment of strategies of subjective realism- causing readers to feel that the fictional text might correspond to a lived experience. The material evidence from Rome has major limitations when

Table 1.1 'Space' as a keyword

	<i>Material space (experienced space)</i>	<i>Representations of space (conceptualised space)</i>	<i>Spaces of representation (lived space)</i>
Absolute space	Walls, bridges, doors, streets, buildings, cities, mountains, etc.	Cadastral maps, landscape description	Feelings of contentment at home, empowerment
Relative space (time)	Circulation and flows of water, people, information, etc.	Antonine Itineraries Exchange value = value in motion	Anxiety of congestion, exhilaration of time-space compression
Relational space (time)	Social relations, rental, odours, pollution	Surrealism = 2nd/3rd style wall painting	Visions, memories, dreams, stories, etc.

Source: Harvey (2006)

Table 1.2 Principal foci of the spatial turn

<i>Dimension of socio-spatial relations</i>	<i>Principle of structuration</i>	<i>Observable patterns</i>
Territory	Borders, boundaries, parcels, enclosure	Inside/outside (e.g. pomerium)
Place	Proximity, areal differentiation, area	Core to periphery (forum to <i>angiportus</i>)
Scale	Hierarchy	Dominant to marginal (elite to <i>plebs sordida</i>)
Networks	Interconnectivity	Nodal points and their connections

Source: author

compared to Pompeii, a site that has become a laboratory for the study of urban space over the last two decades (e.g. Poehler 2006). Moving across the category of relative space in Table 1.1, evidence for the exchange value of movement can be located in the measurement of distance by milestones and within a mentality of space-time that relates journey time to distance (for example, in Martial's *Epigrams* or in the Antonine Itineraries, cf. Laurence 2011). The dependency on evidence from literary texts for movement, of, say, itinerant traders, causes our sources to be categorised in the Lefebvrian sense as either representations of space or spaces of representation. Actual practice eludes us, however much historians and archaeologists may attempt to reconstruct 'daily life' from these texts. Thus, we can only ever expect to have a history of the *conception* of mobility, as opposed to a history of mobility as a lived experience. We can say though, that the conception of mobility was spatially varied across the city of Rome, according to whether you viewed the city from a litter or sedan chair carried on the shoulders of others, or made your own way through crowded streets.

The relationship between space and society has become a major area of debate in social theory as each reformulation of the spatial turn attempts to add another dimension. The original focus on territory was followed by a greater interest in place which was then supplanted by new foci; first on scale and then on networks (see Table 1.2). Each refocusing of the spatial turn privileged one aspect of space–society

Table 1.3 Integrating approaches to space and society

Structuring principle	Field of operation			
	<i>Territory</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Scale</i>	<i>Networks</i>
Territory	Past and present Emerging frontiers, borders, boundaries	Places in territory	Multilevel government	Interstate system
Place	Core-periphery, borderlands, empires	Locales, cities, localities, globalities	Differentiation of empowerment	Local/urban governance partnerships
Scale	Division of political power within the state	Scale as area rather than level	Vertical ontology of nested or tangled hierarchies	Parallel power networks
Networks	Origin-edge Ripple effects	Global city networks, polynucleated cities	Flat ontology with multiple entry points	Networks of networks, spaces of flows

Source: after Jessop *et al.* (2008)

Table 1.4 Application of the intersection of territory, place, scale and networks to ancient Rome

Structuring principle	Field of operation			
	<i>Territory</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Scale</i>	<i>Networks</i>
Territory	Relational content to the past – static continuities	Relational content in the present	City prefect Neighbourhood Magistrate	Metropolis to empire (Urbis–Orbis relationship)
Place	Edge of the city, extension of the city	Constitution of place through monumentality	Alleyway to famous place	Locale to emperor
Scale	Fragmentation of Rome into regions and neighbourhoods	Competing famous places Decentring of place	Neighbourhood to forum	Paved streets Regions
Networks	Relationship between neighbourhood and emperor	Creates many competing famous places	Communication forum to crossroad	Movement of knowledge and rumour

Source: author

relations while causing the others to be neglected. Theoretical developments emanating from the core disciplines of the spatial turn (principally geography) gradually found their way into archaeological thinking, which has witnessed equivalent shifts in emphasis from territory, to place, to scale and networks.

Recently, Jessop *et al.* (2008) have developed a toolkit to cross-reference all four foci, so that the distinctive contribution of each approach is embedded within the

context of the other three approaches (see Table 1.3). This integrated approach is of use not just in the study of contemporary cities, but also in the exploration of historical forms of urbanism. It is a system that can be readily adapted to the study of ancient Rome and the work of historians and archaeologists and integrated with the new toolkit of Jessop *et al.* (see Table 1.4).

Territory and space: four regions and, then, fourteen regions

The size of Rome meant it was an entity difficult to measure or conceptualise except via breaking it down into constituent territories (Haselberger 2007, 18–23, 224–237). There appears to have been a register or even a census of the people from the time of Julius Caesar based on the *vici* (neighbourhoods) and information derived from the owners of the blocks of apartments (*insulae*). The area within the republican walled circuit of Rome had been divided into four regions by Servius Tullius: the Subura (NB nothing to do with suburbs), the Esquiline, the Hills (Collina) and the Palatine. Yet, there was a hierarchy of tribes, Palatine being the highest, the Hills (Collina) the second, with the Subura and the Esquiline being distinctly inferior (Taylor 1952–4, 229). In 7 BCE this system was replaced by fourteen regions, including the fourteenth across the Tiber (Favro 1996, 135–140). These new regions were disconnected from the voting units and would seem to have been a system for enumerating the city, but also were a means to allocate resources to the city – for example, a cohort of *vigiles* (firefighters) was assigned to every two regions of the city (Nicolet 1991, 194–198). Each person was located by the census in a region and within a neighbourhood of that region. The territorial relationship, for the inhabitant, was mediated through neighbourhood magistrates and was focused on the altar(s) of the local gods known as the *Lares Augusti*. The territorial division of Rome created knowledge of the city, as much as administrative function, and it was with the measurement of the population of the city and its division into neighbourhoods that gave the emperor the power to ‘control’ Rome.

Place-territory interfaces – seven hills and the expanding city

There are, however, other competing territorial divisions in Rome. A conception of the city as comprised of seven hills (Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiline, Palatine, Quirinal and Viminal) that were a real and imagined territorial definition of Rome focused on those hills bounded by the Servian Wall (Figure 1.1).

The hills as raised ground create a sense of territory, but also can be named and thus become places in the city. Whilst at the same time, the phrase ‘seven hills’ can substitute as a metaphor to signify the whole city. There is a link between hills, walls and territory in the definition of Rome that can also be found in the establishment of *Roma Quadrata* defined by a wall around the Palatine Hill. Interestingly, the city extension under Servius Tullius, re-told by Livy, involved a growth in population and inhabited area that was to be defined by a wall and/or sacred boundary – the *pomerium* (Vout 2012, 77).

Intriguingly, these accounts from the end of the first century BCE imagine an expanding Rome from earlier times in which the city defied definition or required definition as comprised of fourteen regions – an increase not just from the four regions of the republic, but also a doubling of *seven* hills defining the city to *fourteen*

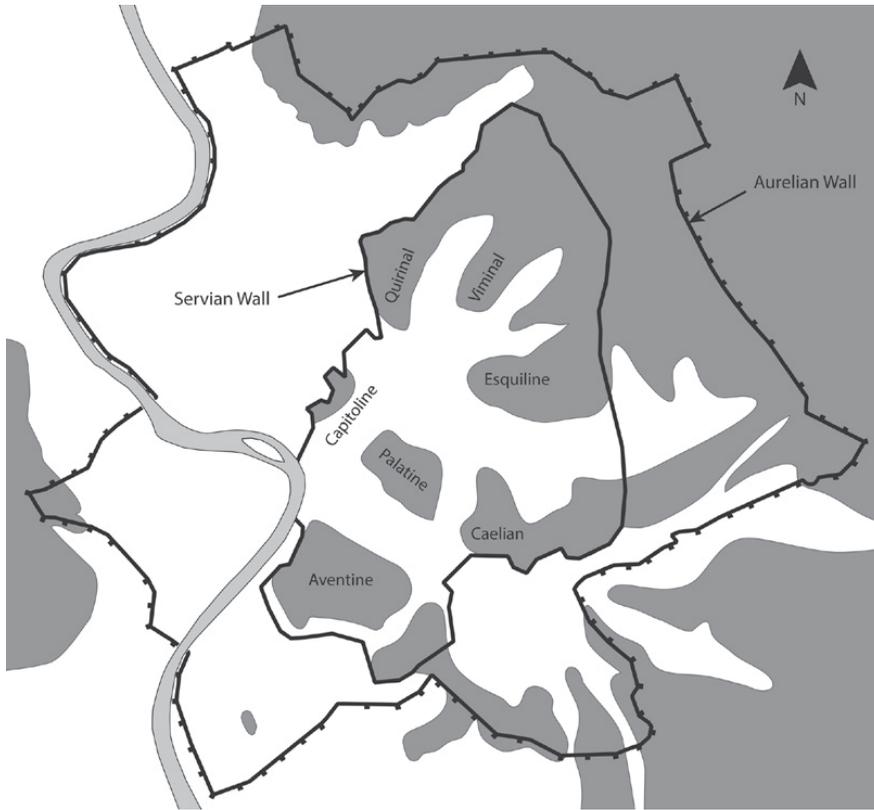


Figure 1.1 The seven hills of Rome and the Servian and Aurelian Walls
 Source: Lloyd Bosworth

regions. The principle of division is by seven: a magic number associated with seven celestial bodies known to the ancients. Just as the seven hills could be used to denote the whole of Rome, so could the fourteen regions. More importantly, there is a sense in which the regions that were at the edge of the built-up area of Rome could expand and become bigger, whereas the seven hills developed a canonical or fixed territorial short-hand for the city of Rome.² The city as an expanding space was in many ways legally undefinable, causing the jurists to define the territory of the city by the term *continentia* (see Frézouls 1987 for discussion of definition of Rome's territory) or as an agglomeration.

The great fire of Rome in 64 CE is an example of how the city's territory included both the enumeration of space by the hills and by the regions. Tacitus measures the destruction with reference to the fourteen regions: four remained intact; three were levelled to the ground and in the other seven nothing survived but half-burned relics of houses.³ The linkage between regions and fire prevention in the distribution of the seven cohorts of fire brigade (*vigiles*) causes Tacitus' linkage of regions to destruction by fire to invert the order of the city into disorder under Nero (Sablayrolles 1996, 245–289). The spread of the fire though was written with reference to the hills: it

begins in the Circus abutting the Palatine and the Caelian and is stopped at the foot of the Esquiline six days later. The regions measured the territory of the city (and by implication the inhabitants in their homes), whereas the hills provided a definition of the beginning and the end of the story of the fire with reference to place.

Place: movement to monuments

The absence of a single obvious centre to the city Rome from the time of Augustus (27 BCE – 14 CE) caused places in the city to compete for attention with one another. The geographer Strabo saw how monumental buildings created centres in the Campus Martius and the three forums of the city and caused the rest of the city to become an appendage or of little consequence.⁴ At the same time, the older narrow crooked streets of the city were regarded as the opposite to the wide straight streets that were developed after the fire of 64 CE. In Rome we can find a dialectical relationship between the use of, or movement to, places in Rome and their celebrity – these are each defined by the term ‘a famous place’ or *locus celeberrimus* (Newsome 2011, 20–26 developed from Trifilò 2008). This definition of place in Rome depends less on the actions of the emperor and much more on the use of space by the inhabitants of the city – causing Pierre Gros (2005) to see a *locus celeberrimus* as a *lieux du consensus*. Place in Rome is founded on use and movement to a place, creating that place as a point or node in the city. What is difficult for us to conceive of is how often and how far the inhabitants of Rome travelled to use these famous places in their city. Perhaps it is not actual usage that constitutes a *locus celeberrimus*, but knowledge of its availability and memory of using a place in the city in the past.

The constitution of place through ‘movement to’ causes the issue of boundaries (and territory) to become less important, since it was the movement of people itself that created the sense of *locus celeberrimus* – and such movement included a journey through streets that led to the destination. The definition of place through spatial boundaries varied from the enclosed space of the Forum of Augustus to the space defined by structures built around or within its confines that defined the *Forum Romanum*, and onto the less defined spaces such as the Sacra Via (Sacred Way) with its associated monuments. Interestingly, today we see these places as plans or in reconstructions that create empty spaces defined by monuments. However, it was the people moving, stopping, chatting within these spaces that constituted them as places of fame, as much as the monuments and the images of those who did not move – the statues that needed occasionally to be cleared out to create greater space for movement (Stewart 2003, 136–140).

Scale: time and movement

Rome was the first city in which urban journeys could be made over a number of miles, rather than a 15–20 minute stroll across the city. Travel through its streets created a particular form of urban living not found in other cities. In Rome time spent traversing city space could be measured as a burden and resulted in places within the city being seen as distant from one another. Unlike in other cities the speed of travel in Rome was disrupted by crowded streets narrowed by the encroachment of shops. This meant the metropolitan journey time was slower than expected – producing a different urban speed than found elsewhere in Italy (Laurence 2011). The

combination of scale, distance and slow travel speeds to be found in Rome must have restricted the desire to travel from place to place in the city and the increased the potential for locating individuals in neighbourhoods. As a result, we may describe Rome as a city with a greater friction of distance than the smaller cities found across Italy, such as Pompeii.

This conception of Rome as a city with a higher friction of distance is important for the historical understanding of Rome as a specific form of urbanism. It causes us to recognise a need for the elite to be near the forum, but not too near in order to ensure that they are seen to cross at least part of the city followed by their clients and supporters. It also helps to explain the location of the emperor's bodyguards in the praetorian camp on the edge of the city. The camp is located out of the sight of most of the population, whereas the earlier billeting of soldiers across the city was more prominent, yet the inhabitants of Rome would have been aware of the presence of the Praetorians and their camp (Busch 2011, 31–72). The concentration of soldiers at the edge of the city caused them to move across the city to be deployed in their role as the emperor's guards or for policing within the city itself. The appointment of Claudius as emperor involved the removal of the future emperor from the palace to the praetorian camp and a movement across the city of the *locus* of power (Levick 1990, 21–40). The separation of military power to appoint an emperor from the location of the emperor in the palace clarifies the role of urban space in creating a sense by which the emperor in the palace was first amongst equals; whereas Claudius in the praetorian camp was an emperor backed by the military might of these soldiers – even if in some ways a hostage of the soldiers. Movement to and from different locations in Rome could restructure how the emperor's power was seen by those watching his gestures, listening to his words, and subject to his power.

Networks: streets and their surfaces

Scholars have used many techniques to elucidate the development of Rome, from simple demographic estimation of population growth through to recording the emergence of public buildings and the development of the public city. However, there is an alternative history of the city that can be written to chart the development of paved surfaces beginning with the creation of the forum as a level public space in the city. The paving of the forum in limestone can be seen as the first creation of a space for walking, in which walking was not disrupted by pot holes, puddles, mud and other filth. The extension of surfaces of this type created a network of paved streets that extended across the city and into the countryside. This process was stimulated not by the simple extension of streets into the countryside but by a change in Rome's approach to space encapsulated by the construction of the Via Appia from Rome to Capua in 312 BCE as a public space of over 100 miles (see Laurence 2001, 2013c). Five years later, in 307 BCE, roads were built into the public land of the city (*ager publicus*). The Via Appia was paved initially from the Porta Capena to the Temple of Mars in 295 BCE and then to Bovillae in 292 BCE. Individual streets in Rome were paved over the course of the third century, for example to allow vehicles to gain access to the Aventine Hill (via the *clivus Publicus* – so called because its paving in 238 BCE was publicly funded). The process was somewhat slow with more or less a century passing before all the streets of the city were paved in a standard hard stone and the roads extending into the public land were upgraded to compacted gravel in 174 BCE. The



Figure 1.2 Excavated street (Via Biberatica – Trajan’s Markets) – this street appears to have been pedestrianised with game-boards found in the middle of the paved surface

Source: Lloyd Bosworth

effect was to cause movement in the city to be of a quite different nature to that found on the roads into the countryside, but equivalent to that on the Via Appia. The result by the middle of the second century BCE was a city that had paved streets and was connected to its rural hinterland by roads of compacted gravel, with longer-distance highways (Via Appia and Via Flaminia, etc.) forming corridors of movement from the city (as discussed by Witcher 2005).

The importance of the surface of Rome’s streets is highlighted in the bronze tablet known as the *Tabula Heracleensis* that is one of the few surviving town charters from the first century BCE and provides detailed information on the upkeep of public space (Crawford 1996, 355–391). The charter refers to the repair of urban streets and of roads up to a mile from the city as a duty of annually elected magistrates. These magistrates could require those residents or owners of buildings adjacent to the street to maintain the roadway and above all to ensure that standing water did not occur and the roadway could be used for movement. For streets that were in front of public buildings, there was a requirement to let a contract for their maintenance. In addition, magistrates were responsible for cleaning the streets in the city and *duumviri* were responsible for cleaning the roads up to a mile from the city. The powers and responsibilities of the magistrates extended not just to the streets themselves, but to another milieu for walking: the porticoes. The emphasis on ease of movement is clear in that the porticoes were not to be blocked off and heavy wagons (*plaustra*) were not permitted to utilise the streets of the built up area of Rome between dawn and the tenth hour of the day (Kaiser 2011). These laws were drafted to ensure that mobility in

the city was maintained; the secure surface on which feet trod was a feature of the city of Rome. We encounter in literary sources throughout the period of the Empire that good emperors repaired the streets of Rome that had become neglected (Robinson 1992, 59–82).

Rome – territory-place-scale-network

The streets of Rome formed the most extensive urban network of smooth surfaces in the whole world as understood in antiquity. Pliny the Elder opens his description of Rome in the *Natural History* (3.66–67) not with an account of the public monuments of the city but with an account of the extent of the city: 13 miles and 200 yards in circumference, divided into 14 regions, with 265 *compita Larum* (crossroad shrines), with roads leading to its gates measured at 20 miles and 765 paces and a total length of all roads leading through the neighbourhoods coming to 60 miles (Figure 1.3).

Rome, for Pliny, was a city of road surfaces that was more extensive and of greater magnitude than any other city in the world for this reason.⁵ It was the roads that defined the city and only as an afterthought does Pliny add to this two-dimensional



Figure 1.3 The fourteen regions of Rome
 Source: Lloyd Bosworth

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Figure 1.4 The network of paved streets in Rome

Source: Lloyd Bosworth

aspect the third dimension of the greater height of Rome's buildings. Similarly, Strabo in the *Geography* (5.3.7–8) notes the regulation of the height of buildings to no higher than seventy Roman feet and also that the talent of the Romans was in building roads, aqueducts and sewers – all items associated with movement that were either surfaces or sub-surface features. It was the networks of roads, sewers and aqueducts that provided these authors with a means to demonstrate that Rome was a city with a different scale from other cities in the ancient Mediterranean. The streets were punctuated by networked places such as the crossroad shrines that were places of worship in the neighbourhoods the roads traversed.

So far, the discussion has separated the four structuring principles of space and it is now time to set out how these principles intersect with each field of operation (Table 1.4). Territory obviously has a present-past aspect, revealed in the actions of creating territorial space. In terms of place the *vici* develop a monumental aspect as foci for religion and administration. The intersection between territory and scale can be seen by the nesting of people within a neighbourhood and a neighbourhood within a region. The network radiating from a neighbourhood was symbolically represented as a relationship with the emperor and the worship of the *Lares Augusti* at the crossroad shrines. A famous place (*locus celeberrimus*) was defined territorially as a core element of the city, but was a place in its own right – which in turn was scaled with reference to other places right down to the alleyway (*angiportus*) or perhaps

even to the brothels and bars of the city. Inevitably, a famous place became a *locale* for the expression of power and was subsequently enhanced through the building of monuments that included the writing of the elite or the emperor onto that space. The issue of scale revolves around the role of time that fragments and separates the places of and territories of power (senate, praetorian camp, palace, and people in neighbourhoods), but unified around the figures of the emperor and the city prefect. The intersection between scale and place causes the city to be defined by 265 *compita Larum* (crossroad shrines) and a series of competing famous places that cause us to view Rome as a tangled series of spatial hierarchies that were underpinned by a variety of power networks leading from the local to the elite with their property (wealth) held outside city and often at a distance from the city. The expanding street network created new nodes (even becoming famous places), not least of these were the crossroads of the city that were formally constituted as sacred places. However, we should also allow for the possibilities of the development of new nodes through usage or informal spaces that could become formal places associated with elements of monumentality (Trifilò 2013). Across the city of Rome networks of information flowed and conceptualised as rumours spread not to the major houses from where it was disseminated to clients, but, to the crossroads (Laurence 1994). This overview of the intersection of territory, place, scale and networks in ancient Rome points to the polyvalency of all socio-spatial activities within Rome that, inevitably, were underpinned by movement.

Rome – the moving city

The exploration of Rome via the overlapping themes of territory, place, scale and networks alerts us to the many meanings that space can acquire or have projected onto it – multiplying its meanings through cross-referencing each of the four themes with each other. This allows a greater analytical depth to be maintained and also suggests how the meaning of space can alter. A city the size of Rome refuses to be defined or for the meaning of its space to be fixed. As a result, a sense of place could be subject to movement and change – especially in texts. More importantly, the scale of Rome – like the new scale of empire – needed to have a network of all-weather surfaces to facilitate the creation of physical networks of movement, both in the city and outside, that allowed for travel to and from a person/person's home. Movement, in this context, should not be seen as entirely focussed on the forums at the centre, but also include movements through space to other places set at a distance from the centre. It was the scale of Rome that created a different form of urbanism, in which the city can become differentiated with movement defining the nature of segmentation. The building of new monuments, perhaps, *responds* to movement and, certainly, redefines the places of movement (for example building the Colosseum in the middle of the city – *in media urbe*), but is not perhaps a *cause* of the reconfiguration of movement within the city. Thus, when Rome burnt down and was rebuilt, parts of the city were altered, for example with wider or straighter streets, but many of the places of the city remained in the same locations and continued to have movement to them – and to sustain relationships to the earlier buildings on the same sites. Thus, place may be adjusted through the addition of new monuments or the alteration of the physical fabric of the streets in Rome, but the changes to the network of streets or network of competing famous places remains hidden and difficult to recover. However, it is

perhaps the changes to these networks of people and places, as well as the changes in scale associated with the growth of Rome that may be the most interesting phenomenon in Rome.

Notes

- 1 The chapter builds on earlier work and is particularly influenced by the work of David Newsome. I was privileged to supervise his PhD thesis and I owe him many debts of gratitude – not least his enthusiasm for addressing difficult subjects and resolving loose ends (see Newsome 2011, 4–9). This chapter is intended for readers outside of Classics and Ancient History; with this readership in mind I have included for the most part references to accessible modern studies of antiquity. For those working in Classics and Ancient History wishing to access full references to ancient texts, etc., I refer them to Laurence (2015).
- 2 Note that there were 425 hectares within the Servian Walls compared to 1,400 hectares within the Aurelian Walls – the latter a reduction of the urban area of the city.
- 3 The narrative can be found in Tacitus *Annals* 15.38–40, compare Suetonius' *Life of Nero* 38 and Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 62.16–18. The latter creates a narrative without reference to hills or regions, but notes that two-thirds of the city was destroyed, including the Palatine and the amphitheatre of Taurus (no other specific places are mentioned). Suet. *Ner.*38 provides no topographical indicators. Compare the linkage between regions and hills in Varro *On the Latin Language* 5.45–54.
- 4 For text see Strabo *The Geography* 5.3.7.
- 5 *Fateaturque nullius Urbis magnitudinem in toto orbe potuisse ei comparari.*