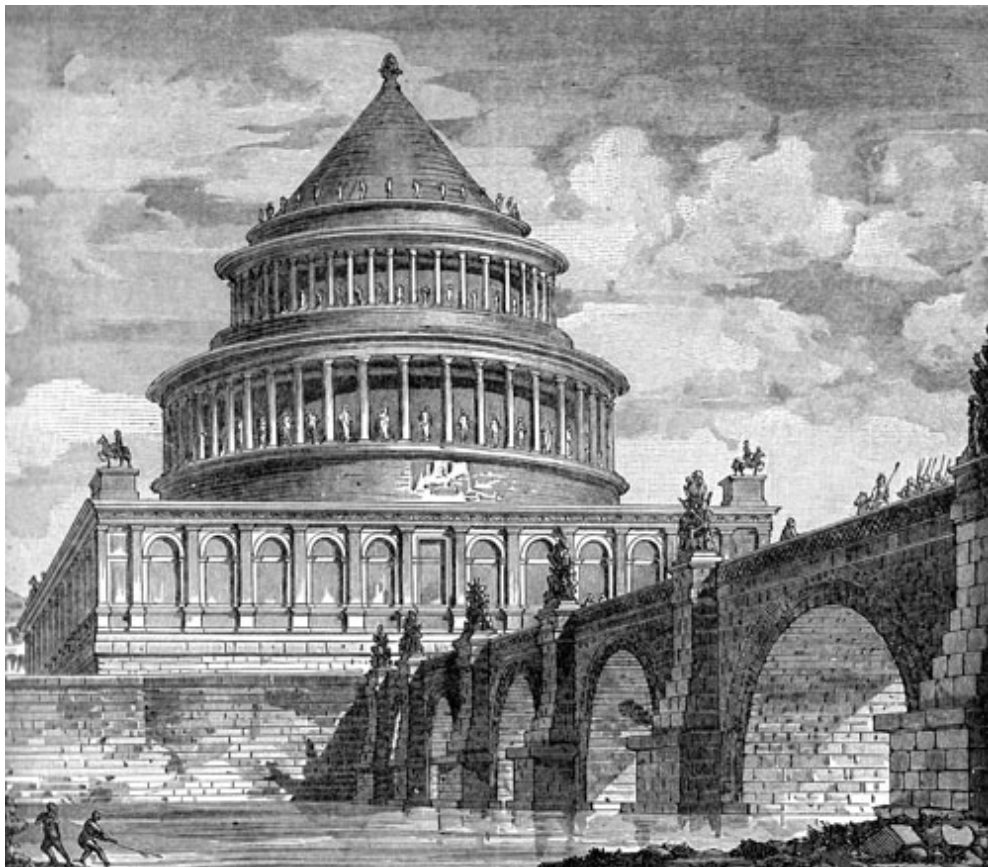


Old Romarth

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Incidental Illustrations: Dover Books copyright-free images

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"Some say it was the hub of an ancient trading empire, whose trade routes covered all points from Erze Damath to Kauchique. Others say that its ancient college was once the finest center of magical learning of the entire world. Whatever it once was, Old Romarth is now noted mostly for its pompous and ineffectual Collegium, its hoobrah fish, and the stench of its extensive violence-prone slum districts. Hooray for progress!"

Lesorix of Perne

This publication stands alone, and is also a necessary adjunct to 'And Thence to Almery' (the final installment in the Pelgrane Press 'Footsteps of Fools' advanced Cugel-Level adventure series.

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General Ambience

Old Romarth is an enormous sprawling city. Its central areas are not overtly licentious or corrupt in the same obvious way as Noval, and are well-maintained & clean. However, the city does not have the same edges of hauteur as Kaiin. Old Romarth outside the central area is a harsh city, and life here for most is cheap and grimy.

If you know of history, think of London or New York before any reforms, as we suggested for Erze Damath (only even more so). Jack London's book "The People of the Abyss" is a fine piece of inspiration for the social realists amongst you. People stay here because magic of old protects the entire city from incursions by half-men, and because every now and then someone from the lower classes manages to better themselves, thus providing (sadly mostly false) hope for the others.

The central city is a safe place during daylight hours, and relatively safe at night because quasi-military Watch squads patrol all areas where places of wealth and business might be targeted by thieves. The rest of the city cannot make these claims. The Central City focuses around the Old Romarth Collegium. This vast and sprawling place of learning has an enormous number of students and staff, but many of these are little better off than the poor. Their main benefit is that they spend their time toiling at education rather than in dingy warehouses, tanneries, backstreet breweries and the like. Nonetheless, a student, no matter how poor, is considered to be of at least minor social standing.

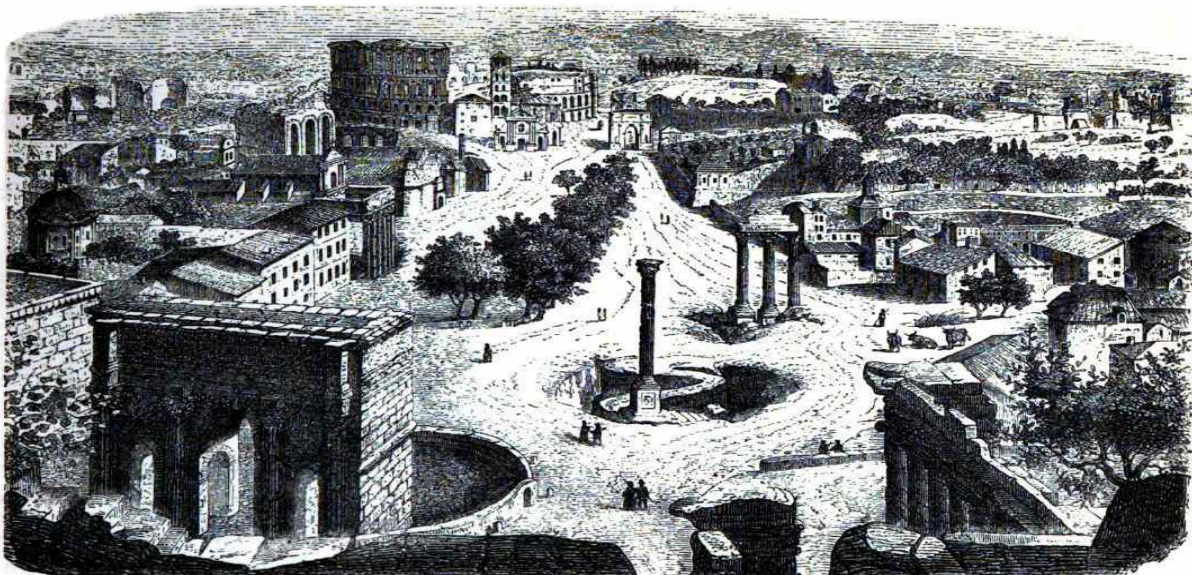
General Knowledge of Society

Businessmen and a guild of professional administrators run Old Romarth. Although they claim to be aristocracy, their titles are given out by the Council, which is (oddly enough) composed of businessmen and professional administrators.

Trade with the wealthy is conducted in fancy halls in the Council Buildings, and in these premises it is considered ill-mannered to talk of things like 'payment' and 'purchase' or even 'bargain' or 'money'. Instead the peculiar custom is maintained that real gentlemen only exchange gifts with persons of similar station. (It must be noted that sometimes these gifts are bags of antique coins or gems.) Thus, visiting merchants with some manner of ancient social pedigree do far better than those without. (Those lacking credible pedigree are forced to do their business with the middle classes!)

Many beggars and footpads roam the streets, and a massive working class labor for pitiful wages in the fields and gardens of the city's outskirts, and in the manufactories of the interior. Wealthy families consist of factory (sweat-shop) and business owners and the old rich, who resent the mercantile upstarts but have had no choice but to merge with them. Old Romarth is the grim, gray & severe northern sibling to Kaiin's indolent and cruel southern presence.

The fashion amongst the wealthy tends towards fringes and tassels on both men's and women's clothing. This is often emulated in an inferior fashion amongst the proud poor, but utterly neglected by the masses.



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City Overview

The Collegium District

At the heart of Old Romarth many manses and civic buildings stand, although they have been repaired and altered numerous times and now in general lack the high edge of grandeur they presumably once presented. Council Chambers, the City Administration Offices, the Courthouse & Watch Office, the Charity House, the Collegium itself, the finest city inns such as the Seven Lyres, the Bath House, and the City Library.

The Street of Gods

The Romarthis acknowledge many divinities. Near three dozen temples line this street, ranging from the stucco shed near the slums that houses the single priest of Meerou the Deity of Alley Cats to the grand converted manse dedicated Bampath the God of Wisdom, which stands by the Collegium. Yet few locals would say they were deeply religious. Divinities, Romarthi believe, are beings of power operating in their own plane, adjacent existence the human world. How and why the divinities interact with humanity is rightfully unfathomable. What is known is that divinities are powerful and sometimes grant favours. People routinely make small offerings, and every temple has at least one priest who lives from donations.



The Street of Artisans

Not just a street, but including many sidestreets and courts, such as Tailors' Row, Wheelwright's Crescent, Bakers' Yard, Tannery Lane (on the edge of town), and Blacksmiths' Walk. These are the professionals and specialists who make a living from what they do. In Old Romarth a living means they eat reasonably well and only work five-and-a-half days a week, not that they are comfortably wealthy. Only the very best of these artisans live a comfortable life and get the whole weekend off.

Inner Romarth

Those districts surrounding Tower Hill and the Collegium. These are the areas that the upper and middle class Romarthis consider to be 'their city' conveniently forgetting that their wealth is generated by the vast hordes of poorly-paid and poorly-housed textile workers, basic crafters, blacksmiths and furniture makers. The 'inner city' looks good from any of the main roads, but maintenance and general cleanliness deteriorates somewhat the further one goes inwards. Roads are broad, few, and well-paved. Alleys are few, wide and relatively clean, though occasional heaps or refuse are found further in.

Outer Romarth

Collections of small sub-districts surrounding the inner city. Bound together within the larger outer-suburbs where the poor majority of city residents live. Some areas are friendly and relatively well-kept, others are hideous, dangerous and stink to the skies. In some there is overcrowding but relative pride and cleanliness. In others dozens dwell festeringly in a building originally intended as a snug dwelling for a family of four. The GM decides on conditions of each sub-district depending on the atmosphere needed to best enhance any story elements. Roads are narrow, winding, many, and poorly cobbled, or sometimes merely surfaced with packed dirt and many potholes. Alleys are common, narrow and frequently semi-blocked by refuse.

Due Civic Process

The City Council is made up of a chamber of 'Lords' who historically were actual lords, but these days are persons of wealth elected by their fellows. A chamber of 'Deputies', elected from the educated class, act as advisors. The 'Lords' have the majority of power. This system profits mostly the wealthy, who care only for the common citizenry sufficiently to keep them alive and breeding. (Such is eminently good business sense.)

The common citizens defend themselves with what is called a 'Hue & Cry'. If a thief is thwarted or spotted and tries to flee, persons of standing or associated artisans (if it occurs in the artisans' area) will attempt to intervene and bring the thief down. Retribution is swift and varies. A small boy stealing bread for instance might even be ignored, leaving the angry baker to vainly attempt capture, whereas a well-heeled jewelry thief or a young woman running away with someone's purse might be given a thrashing there on the spot & left to crawl away. In the middling areas many folk make only the vaguest attempts to stop a thief who has stolen from someone of obvious wealth. In the poorer areas such a thief might be cheered or even assisted, and a person of obvious wealth set upon by a mob.

In a wealthier area, a rogue attempting to abscond with someone's takings for the day might well be beaten savagely and left bleeding and unconscious in the gutter. If a Watch Patrol happened by during this time and the plaintiff was especially vindictive they might lodge a formal complaint against the thief. If two independent witnesses of very good character supported the version of events lodged (or a large number of people of remotely good character) the thief might even be taken to the Watch Office and put on trial.

Major criminals are tossed into 'Bolenkue's Crystal Prism' in the basement of the City Hall. From which only once in history has anyone ever re-emerged! (What lies beyond the crystal prism is described in detail within the publication "*And Thence to Almerly*".)

Significant Laws

Theft of property (including attempted theft and trespass), and murder or assault against a person of property are the only real laws that are enforced. Fights between lowlives are ignored as a standard occurrence amongst the lower classes. Rarely a night goes by when some unfortunate (or more often thoroughly deserving) person isn't deprived of life and tipped into the sewers for immature leucomorphs to devour. Fighting with weapons on the streets is a crime, but only enforced in areas of wealth or if a Watch patrol stumbles over such an activity on a main street in a poorer area. For fights in daylight locals will gather (at a reasonable distance) to observe such activities, often laying wagers. Anyone attempting to help is seen as an inhibitor of entertainment and often stopped by the crowd. Fights at night are usually drunken brawls or imbalanced in numbers/force and therefore over quickly. Weapons may be carried in the city only if properly sheathed and tied shut. This ordinance does not apply to small fighting knives, which tend to have multiple other uses. Those found guilty of murder or causing grievous injury with an actual weapon are beheaded in the yard at the courthouse, which is not a public spectacle, but is overlooked from most cells. Those found guilty of lesser crimes are usually assigned to the city work gangs that are occasionally seen toiling at valuable restorational work, fixing roads whilst chained at the ankle in pairs or threes.

The City Watch

Old Romarth has a City Watch, but that august body's main duties are in protecting business premises and keeping an eye out for fires. They would intervene in fights only if a person of obvious wealth or standing was being attacked, or a brawl began between a shopkeeper and a thief. Watchmen travel in pairs in the wealthier areas during daytime, and in two co-operative pairs (staying in close proximity) during the hours of darkness. Known watchmen have been savagely attacked when off-duty, usually by relatives or friends of those who have been incarcerated or put on the work gangs.

The Watch is corrupt, and a tool of the wealthy. The highest levels of officers are all pawns of the city council. However, some lesser officers and a scattering of the actual watchmen are decent enough people simply doing the best they can to get by in a harsh world. The GM can if they wish create subtlety in any interactions with the Watch. Most will be bullying or at least unfeelingly officious, but occasional individuals (similar to Sean Connery's character in 'The Untouchables') are noble, or at least decent enough, specimens of humanity. Others are morally flexible in the usual ways, and can be bought or Persuaded.

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Civic Amenities

As in Erze Damath many city pumps still function (magically maintained) and in the wealthier areas all large buildings have at least one working pump and normally a handful of interior washrooms. In these better areas there are even small buildings that are public conveniences. But in most of the city the night-soil collectors (paid from the city coffers) empty the gutters and outhouses into their large odious mermelant-pulled barrows and return the resultant sordid ooze to the mulching pits on the edge of the city. They, and the corpse collectors (who travel in long cloaks with deep hoods and ornate face protectors) are the only folk who can wander the poorer areas unmolested, for they have an obvious benefit to all, and sensibly never carry anything of worth whilst engaging in their work. Such people are of course an obvious source of information for those in Old Romarth on 'business' or engaged in adventures.



Locations of Note

The Obtrank Normalcy

"The Obtrank Normalcy is north of Old Romarth where the Chaing cuts through the Land of the Falling Wall in a great arched tunnel. It is a vast but sprawling theological college, now much decayed. The savants of the city assess the scholarship of all who wish to apply. Proportionally few cityfolk do, as the ritual is deliberately tedious, to say nothing of the curriculum. The majority of students succumb to the many temptations deliberately laid on by the staff." (Summarized/extended from the DE Compendium)

1) The Old Romarth Collegium

The personnel structure is a pyramid. At the base are the many preparatory students who are unfounded and in exchange for attending huge lectures and being fed, and housed in vast dormitories must spend many hours each week copying texts within the Scriptorium attached to the City Library. Alongside them are the multitudes of junior staff who cook, clean and perform basic maintenance. Next in prestige are the lowly undergraduates and the infrastructure professionals (cooks, head groundsman, specialist labourers). Beyond them we reach the ranks of the truly prestigious in ascending order: post-graduates, researchers, junior academics, proven academics, and high pedants. At the apex of the pyramid beyond the pedants stand only the Collegium Council of Deans, the highest of which is of course the Senior Dean himself.

2) The Council Chambers & City Administration Offices

A nightmare place to visit if you have any claims to file, civic disputes to register, are seeking permits for any reason whatsoever, or even want to simply examine any civic records. Bribery and/or veiled threats, or possibly cunning Impostures are indispensable if you don't want to spend pointless aggravating days here in negotiation with self-important flunkies who require barrages of form to be filled out in quintuplicate!

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3) The Court House & Watch Office

An impressive ancient building, regularly kept spotless by lesser criminals whose sentences are commuted to this duty. In the evenings informants slip in and out by discrete rear entrances. As mentioned elsewhere the upper echelons of the Watch are entirely corrupt, and various portions of the huge rambling Watch Office are actually used for nefarious purposes. The upper floor of one wing in a brothel for the monied and perverse, whilst the adjacent lower floor is the venue for gambling games with high (and sometimes fatal) stakes, not to mention bloody bare-knuckle fights between those ruffians keen to avoid prosecution for major crimes. On top of all this, Evanthor 'Lord' Purvek (the most notorious & powerful crimelord and gangster of the city) actually has his base in three huge rooms at the back of the court building. (This fact is not common knowledge, but known to most amongst the city's worst villains.)

4) The Charity House

Sad indeed are those required, or forced, to take charity in the Charity House. Minor medical facilities, poor meals, abominable dormitory conditions, long working hours creating crafts for sale to the lower middle classes... Many of the most poor would rather die than take up residence here. And once you are inside the most common exit is via the corpse-takers' wagons. One entire wing of this building is for those marked as insane. To describe the conditions therein as inhuman and appalling is like describing Magnatz as 'tall'!

5) The Bath House

A huge complex of ancient grandeur, whose magics still operate almost fully. In the most expensive sections sylphs serves drinks & sweetmeats, and the favours of magical Nymphs can be procured. The comely staff are also available for extra services. Even 'public' sections cost more than most Romarthi can often afford.

6) The Ethodea Hospice

A rare oasis of calm and succor amongst the poverty. However, even the Ethodeans have to charge, as otherwise they would be swamped in endless waves of human misery. Many are allowed however to work off their payment after having been healed.

7) Tower Hill

Named after an ancient spiraling tower that apparently once housed a beacon that replenished the sun, this edifice is now little more than a blackened stump. However, all around it are the manses of the wealthy. These stand in their own walled gardens, and this area has its own private civic watch service, paid privately. Unlike in the other districts the Hill Watch actually work for a living and will question, and occasionally beat, neer-do-wells in the process of escorting them away from the area.

8) The Seven Lyres Inn

Anyone who is anyone wants to stay at the Seven Lyres: a premium establishment of the like rarely seen. Gaming rooms, continual entertainment, palatial suites... This huge manse quite probably has never been so well-appointed as it is right now. Its owner is the canny Sultherio of Perne: Lessorix's older sister

9) The Harridan Tavern

A tavern in the bad part of town, with a reputation for fights, stabbings, savage verbal abuse, over-enthusiastic kneecappings and a high quality 'Quiche Saskervoy made with aged Octurun Caviar'.

10) The Ghoul & Gibbet Inn

Despite its name, an inn of prestige and quality located near the Central City area. The faux-horror décor inside is designed to titillate the largely pretentious clientele.

11) The Noble Scholar Tavern

Another high-class establishment, also frequented by hopeful lower-class students wishing to emulate their peers. On the edge of the Collegium District, traveling pedants also stay here if they remotely value prestige.

12) Mercantile Administration Offices

The branch of the city offices that serves imports & exports via the lake and River Chaing.

A figurative map prepared by the Civic Board for the Popularization of Old Romarth. (CBPOR) Note that the central areas are not empty plots of land, but rather filled with manses and townhouses of greater & lesser size.

