

# Trading between Judicial, Political, Religious and Social Requirements. Mercantile Aspects linked to the Forum Romanum

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Public spaces did not function as static areas, but as dynamically changed, heterogeneously animated and multisensory experienced spaces with an amount of different functions, which led to a heavy functional concurrence. Therefore, flexible constructions organised and structured such areas and supported specific needs. Because of this, the aesthetic perception of spaces like the Forum Romanum continuously differed.

This paper focusses on the economic aspects of the Forum Romanum, in which or close by trading and commercial structures belonged to the visual experience, but were always competed by the divergent functions.<sup>1</sup> During the Republican period, economic functions were partly displaced to alternative areas, focused on precious objects, or transferred to the inner parts of monumental buildings. The ancient sources did not describe pragmatic reasons but they mentioned e.g. annoying by-products of commercial activities, like dirt and smell, which was not appropriate for the aesthetic perception of this outstanding urban space.

The Forum Romanum was a vivid square with activities of all parts of the daily Roman life: continuously court hearings, political speeches, elections and assemblies took place, despite the splendid religious, triumphal and funeral processions. Some aspects of the forum's various functions can be connected to the commercial factor. However, the scientific research has mainly focused on the political and representative functions. That is why it seems quite unclear to what extent commercial activities were part of the daily life on the Forum Romanum and how this has influenced the aesthetic perception of this square.

According to ancient sources the Roman forum had mercantile rooms since the reign of the Etruscan kings.<sup>2</sup> As it is described during the Republican period the forum was surrounded by numerous atrium houses, often preceded by shops, the so-called *tabernae* (fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> But already at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC the attested butchers were gradually displaced by the *argentarii*<sup>4</sup>, explained by the demand of the dignity of the square.<sup>5</sup> However, at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, the forum did not seem to have been a place of pleasant stay.<sup>6</sup> This may have been one of the reasons why the Forum Romanum was redefined by large-scale construction projects: four large basilicas were erected on the former atrium houses,<sup>7</sup> partly including the old *tabernae*, which were mainly used for financial purposes.<sup>8</sup>

That trade existed very close to the forum, is often shown on the basis of the podium of the Temple of the Dioscuri, where *tabernae* were constructed inside its podium.<sup>9</sup> But it is not clear whether those rooms have been used commercially<sup>10</sup> or only for the purpose of the temple, which functioned as a kind of strong room for the properties of

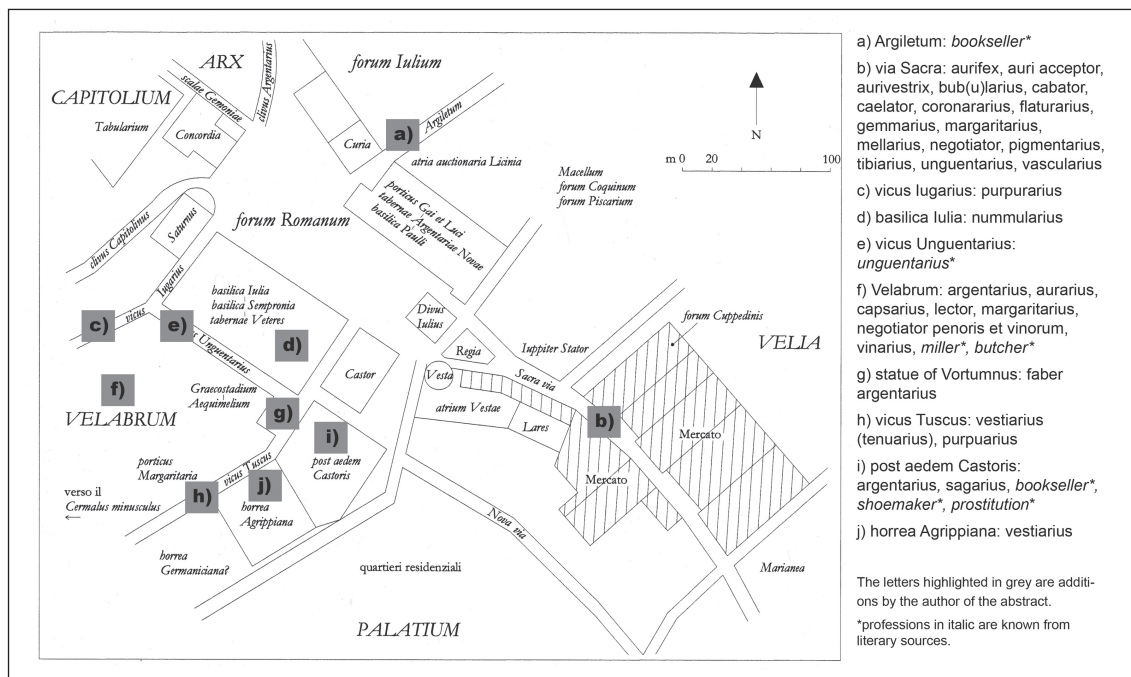


Fig. 1: Roman professions and their topographical context.

Roman citizens.<sup>11</sup> Other sources mentioning businesses or shops have to be located in the vicinity, like *post aedem Castoris*.<sup>12</sup>

In general, the accessing roads around the forum are lined with numerous local traders (fig. 1)<sup>13</sup>: E.g. regarding to the area behind the Basilica Julia and the Temple of the Dioscuri a high density of inscriptions of the textile or purple production sector has survived;<sup>14</sup> along the *via Sacra* numerous individuals were involved in gold or metal craftsmanship.<sup>15</sup> But the exact meaning of the epigraphically mentioned professions remains unclear, as those workers could have produced, sold and/or stored their products there. Therefore, is not possible to decide who or which kind of profession needs to be connected with the architectures along those roads, like e.g. the *horrea*,<sup>16</sup> and how their activities have been perceived from the Forum Romanum.

Only one kind of traders could have been seen directly on the forum, which generally served as a place for spectacles.<sup>17</sup> For public games temporary grandstands have been used since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC,<sup>18</sup> which raised up to the amphitheatre-like building of Caesar in 46 BC.<sup>19</sup> Analogous to the wall painting of house I, 3, 23 in Pompeii with the city's amphitheatre and small market stands in front of it, one could imagine mobile traders at the Forum Romanum during such events, even if they – because of their temporality – did not manifest themselves in archaeological records.

Focusing on the visual perception of mercantile functions a shift of this daily life aspect can nevertheless be observed. During the early and middle Republican period, the different *tabernae* could certainly have been seen, the access roads, such as the *via*

*Sacra*, were also visible from the forum. This changed radically during the late Republican and Imperial period. The *tabernae* were demolished or integrated into the basilicas, temporary events were moved to permanent buildings, why the assumed mobile traders vanished, and the end of the accessing roads to the forum were occupied by the honorary monuments of the Imperial family, such as the Parthian Arch or the Porticus of Gai et Luci. A visual perception of economic functions was successively closed off.

The Forum Romanum never seemed to have been a trading centre<sup>20</sup>, even if several trading activities must be located in the vicinity. No temporary or periodical markets are attested, there are no traces on the pavement that would indicate market stalls, even the epigraphical and literary sources only allow the conclusion that various goods have been available mainly along the accessing roads. The forum itself was deliberately freed from mercantile functions, despite its importance for the financial sector of the city.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This essay focusses primarily on the question of possible traders or trading structures directly cognisable on the Roman forum which is important for an understanding of aesthetic perception of the square. Areas, such as the Macellum Magnum, the forum Piscarium/Piscatorium, the forum Coquinum (?), the forum Cuppedinis, as well as a detailed discussion of the stored and/or sold goods in the various warehouses (horrea Agrippiana, horrea on the *via Sacra*, horrea Piperataria/horrea Vespasiani) nearby the Forum Romanum, however, had to be left out. For the most outstanding summary of all economic buildings around the Forum Romanum see Papi 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dionys. 3, 67, 4; Liv. 1, 35, 10; Plin. nat. 7, 182.

<sup>3</sup> The so-called *tabernae Lanianae* on the north side have been used by butchers. Cf. Liv. 3, 48, 5 (ca. 449 BC); Varro frg. Non. 853 L (ca. 310 BC). For the *tabernae Veteres* and *Novae* see Cic. ac. 2, 70, 2; Liv. 26, 27, 1–4; Liv. 44, 16, 10; Varro ling. 6, 59. In the vicinity of the Forum Romanum other sellers of goods could be assumed until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, cf. Ter. Eun. 255–259. But it is not clear, whether they used *tabernae* directed to the forum's square or must be located elsewhere nearby. Cf. also Val. Max. 9, 7, 4. Furthermore, see Holleran 2012, 105 f.; Muth 2018; Nawracala 2011, 86–89; Papi 1999a–e.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Liv. 9, 40, 16 (ca. 305 BC); Liv. 26, 11, 7 (ca. 211 BC); Ulp. Dig. 18, 1, 32. Furthermore Papi 2002, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Varro ling. 6, 91; Vitruv. 5, 1, 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> An episode from a comedy of Plautus mentions the disturbing smell from the close fish-market and that strange people were loitering around, cf. Plaut. Curc. 470–485 (ca. 193 BC). For prostitution nearby the forum see Plaut. Truc. 66.

<sup>7</sup> Cato bought two houses with four *tabernae* (Liv. 39, 44, 7). In 169 BC Ti. Sempronius Gracchus overbuilt the house of Scipio Africanus, including its *tabernae* (Liv. 44, 16, 10). See further Bartz 2018a–b; Bartz – Horacek 2018a–b; Holleran 2012, 106; Steinmann 2011, 90–96; Welin 1953, 111–120.

<sup>8</sup> For the shops of the *argentarii* within the basilica Fulvia cf. Liv. 40, 51. Monetary aspects have been a central aspect of the forum also during the Imperial period. Some inscriptions mention *nummularii*, who

worked within the basilica Iulia. Cf. CIL VI 9709; CIL VI 9711; CIL VI 9712 (?). Another *nummularius* or a different profession is attested in CIL VI 32296.

<sup>9</sup> Probably since the Augustan phase several *tabernae* have integrated into the podium. See Köb 2000, 54 f.; Nilson et al. 2008, 53–58; Poulsen 1992, 56 f. 110 f. Cf. also App. BC 1, 54; Catull. 37, 1–2.

<sup>10</sup> During current excavations, a dentist's surgery or a barber's shop might be attested in one room. Cf. Fejerskov et al. 2012; Nielsen 1993, 244 f. For all other rooms no functional indications have been found – except that they had a complicated locking system and were frequently visited, as the traces on the stepping stones illustrate.

<sup>11</sup> Several professions closely connected to the temple and its primary functions are attested epigraphically: CIL VI 2202; CIL VI 2203; CIL VI 8688; CIL VI 8689. Divergent professions, which might indicate used offices within the *tabernae* are missing.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Plin. nat. 10, 121; Sen. dial. 2, 13, 4. Several professions are attested “*post aedem Castoris*”: CIL VI 363; CIL VI 9177; CIL VI 9872. Even prostitution is attested in the vicinity of the temple, cf. Catull. 37, 1–5. See also Papi 2002, 47.

<sup>13</sup> The following inscriptions and ancient sources were used to create the overview of the professions and their topographical context: a) Cic. Phil. 2, 21 (*tabernae librariae*); b) AE 1971, 43; AE 1991, 106; AE 1991, 287; CIL I 3005 = AE 1971, 41; CIL I 3021; CIL I 3058; CIL VI 1974; CIL VI 5287 (unknown profession); CIL VI 9207; CIL VI 9212; CIL VI 9214; CIL VI 9221; CIL VI 9239; CIL VI 9283; CIL VI 9418; CIL VI 9419; CIL VI 9434; CIL VI 9435; CIL VI 9545; CIL VI 9546; CIL VI 9547; CIL VI 9548; CIL VI 9549; CIL VI 9662; CIL VI 9795; CIL VI 9935; CIL VI 37824; CIL X 6492; c) AE 1923, 59; d) CIL VI 9709; CIL VI 9711; CIL VI 9712 (probably referring to the Basilica Julia); e) Hor. sat. 2, 260–230; f) AE 1907, 129; AE 1946, 128; CIL VI 9184; CIL VI 9671; CIL VI 9993; CIL VI 33933 (insecure profession); CIL VI 37803 (second part with insecure profession); g) CIL VI 9393 (first part with insecure profession); h) CIL VI 9976; CIL VI 33923; CIL VI 37826; CIL XIV 2433; i) CIL VI 363 = CIL VI 10042 (uncertain addition); CIL VI 9177; CIL VI 9872; j) CIL VI 9972; CIL VI 10026 (unknown profession); CIL XIV 3958. Insecure topographical attribution: CIL VI 298 (maybe Basilica Julia); CIL VI 9178 (ab sex areis?); CIL VI 9848; CIL VI 37804 (found next to the Temple of Romulus). The Latin names of the professions are not translated, because the meaning of the specific terms is arguable to translate without interpretation.

<sup>14</sup> See also note 13 and cf. Holleran 2012, 57; Papi 2002, 48–50.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. note 13. See Holleran 2012, 56 f.; Palombi 1990, 66.

<sup>16</sup> On the basis of precious types of goods one could state that a permanent, stabile construction – at least for storing – must be assumed. Moreover, if someone decides to record the locality of his or her profession in an inscription, a permanent and not changing activity there might be convincingly.

<sup>17</sup> Vitr. 5, 1, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Aemilius Paulus set up benches on the forum during his triumphal procession in 167 BC. Cf. Plut. Aem. 32. Around 120 BC, when wooden grandstands were erected at the forum by magistrates for rent, C. Gracchus complained about hierarchisation and commercialisation of sitting and watching those games. He decided that the grandstands should be demolished so that everyone could attend the games equally. Cf. Plut. C. Gracchus 12, 3–4.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Cass. Dio 43, 22, 3. See also Welch 2007, 38–71.

<sup>20</sup> In contrast to Boss 2011, 85; Kreuz 2014.

## Image Credits

Fig. 1: Papi 2002, 46 fig. 1.

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