

The Singularity of Rome. The Sumptuary City

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Rome's Commercial Topography. The Firsts Markets in Rome: The Republican Market of the 3rd Century BC and the Market of *M. Fulvius Nobilior*

We do not know the exact date of construction of the first market in Rome, but literary sources do mention that it was already functioning during the 3rd century BC. We know from Varro that it was built around the same time as the stairs of the Penates Temple,¹ and it is more than likely that both were part of the same construction program. Livy situates this market northeast of the Via Sacra, between the *Argiletum* and the *Carinae*. The same author alludes to the fire of 210 BC, which destroyed a *macellum* or *forum piscarium* with a new one rebuilt the next year.² This episode provides an *ante quem* date for the physical existence of the structure. The mentioned market is placed in the same space, between the *Septem tabernae*, located next to the *Lautumiae* and the *Atrium Regium*. Therefore, the *macellum* of the 3rd century BC was east of the Forum, flanked by a series of private rooms and preceded by the stores along the Via Sacra. This *macellum*, as most of those studied by Cl. De Ruyt, has the particularity of being very close to the administrative center of the city, next to the Forum. It could have been attached to it or separated by a street, a series of stores, administrative premises, or a building. It is also likely that one of its entrances was in the same direction as the Forum.³

This market had to be already functioning in the second half of the 3rd century BC. At this time, the area north and east of the Roman Forum was filled with big houses and stores, which together with the *macellum*, the *Septem tabernae*, and the *Atrium Regium* were reformed during the following years. This resulted in the addition of new buildings, while the area south of the same region was left untouched until a later remodeling.⁴

Livy relates the construction of the new *Basilica Fulvia-Aemilia* with the construction of the new *macellum* of 179 BC by *M. Fulvius Nobilior*.⁵ This commercial complex was further away from the Forum than the previous market, filling an area more to the northwest with respect to the other, leaving room for the *Basilica Fulvia-Aemilia*,⁶ and was located below the emplacement of the later *Templum Pacis*.⁷

This market, in the very center of the Urbs, worked until the first half of the 1st century AD. Thus, it was contemporary with the former Republican *macellum* during the latter's last years, and with the new *macellum Liviae* of the Imperial era. It would be eventually replaced by the construction of the *Templum Pacis*, built between 71–75 AD, under the rule of Vespasian. It could be possible that the fire that burned through the city in the year 64 AD, during Nero's rule, affected the structure of this *macellum*.⁸ This episode has been viewed by some as an opportunity to move the food-related businesses away from the historical and administrative center of the city.

The Markets of the Imperial Era: The *Macellum Liviae* and the *macellum Magnum* or *Augusti*

A direct consequence of the increase in population during the reign of Augustus was the urban expansion of Rome, with new buildings, both private and public,⁹ being built, as well as entire new neighborhoods. In this context, a market was built on the Esquiline Hill, which would be popularly known as the *Macellum Liviae*.¹⁰

Likewise, Emperor Nero ordered the construction of the *macellum Magnum* or *Augusti* in 59 AD near the Caelian Hill.¹¹

There is clearly a decentralization process taking place in terms of the food markets from the center of Rome with respect to the Republican markets. This is also seen in other lesser sites, such as the *forum piscarium*, *forum cuppedinis*, *forum coquinum*, or even the *forum boarium* and the *holitorium*, which seem to move to other areas of the capital. The urban landscape was ever changing during this early Imperial age. This process seems to be promoted by the Imperial administration, which in its intent of embellishing and modernizing the political center of the capital, moved these commercial complexes to other parts of the city from their original location.

The market was not engulfed by the increasing monumentality of the neighboring *Domus Aurea*, and it remained in its original location until the 4th century AD.

The Via Sacra. Sumptuary Rome

Taverns were the central axis of the Imperial capital's artisan and retail activity. These locales moved around the city as part of its urbanistic and architectonic evolution, and also as a result of their moving away from their original emplacements in the city-center to the periphery. This latter movement was also related to the establishment of these stores in the new commercial centers of the time. We must not forget that next to the structure of these new buildings, there is evidence for the existence of rooms, probably used for retail purposes. This concentration of commerce would attract other merchants, who would place their businesses in the available locales closest to these buildings.

In parallel, we see how the movement of the commercial locales from the progressively more monumentalized center to a further away area, did not stop commercial activity from continuing to spread throughout most of the city. In this way, tied to the economic boom of the early Imperial age, there was an unprecedented commercial growth within the city, with Rome becoming a sort of 'Grand Bazaar'.¹²

The accumulation of locales with a similar commercial activity stimulated the appearance of specialized avenues and/or neighborhoods. This resulted in some streets being referred to on the basis of the commercial activity that occurred there.¹³ Some examples of this are the *vicus Materiarius*, *vicus Frumentarius*, *vicus Turarius*, *vicus Mundi-
diciei*, *vicus Sandaliarius*, etc.¹⁴

The center of Rome went from housing the food and animal markets during the Republican era, to accumulating a high number of sumptuary stores during Imperial times. Evidence of this comes from the inscriptions of the artisans and merchants, who stated the placement of their workshop/store in the center of Rome, especially in the case of the *margaritarii*,¹⁵ the *aurifices*,¹⁶ the *vestiarii*,¹⁷ and the *purpurarii*,¹⁸ among others.¹⁹

Analyzing the inscriptions found in the Roman Empire that mention characters related to the trade of luxury goods, allows us to remark two main points. First, Rome was singular as a center of attraction for the sumptuary trade with respect to the other Italic regions and Roman provinces²⁰ (fig. 1); secondly, there was the notable interest of the urban elites for jewels, fabrics, and ointments.

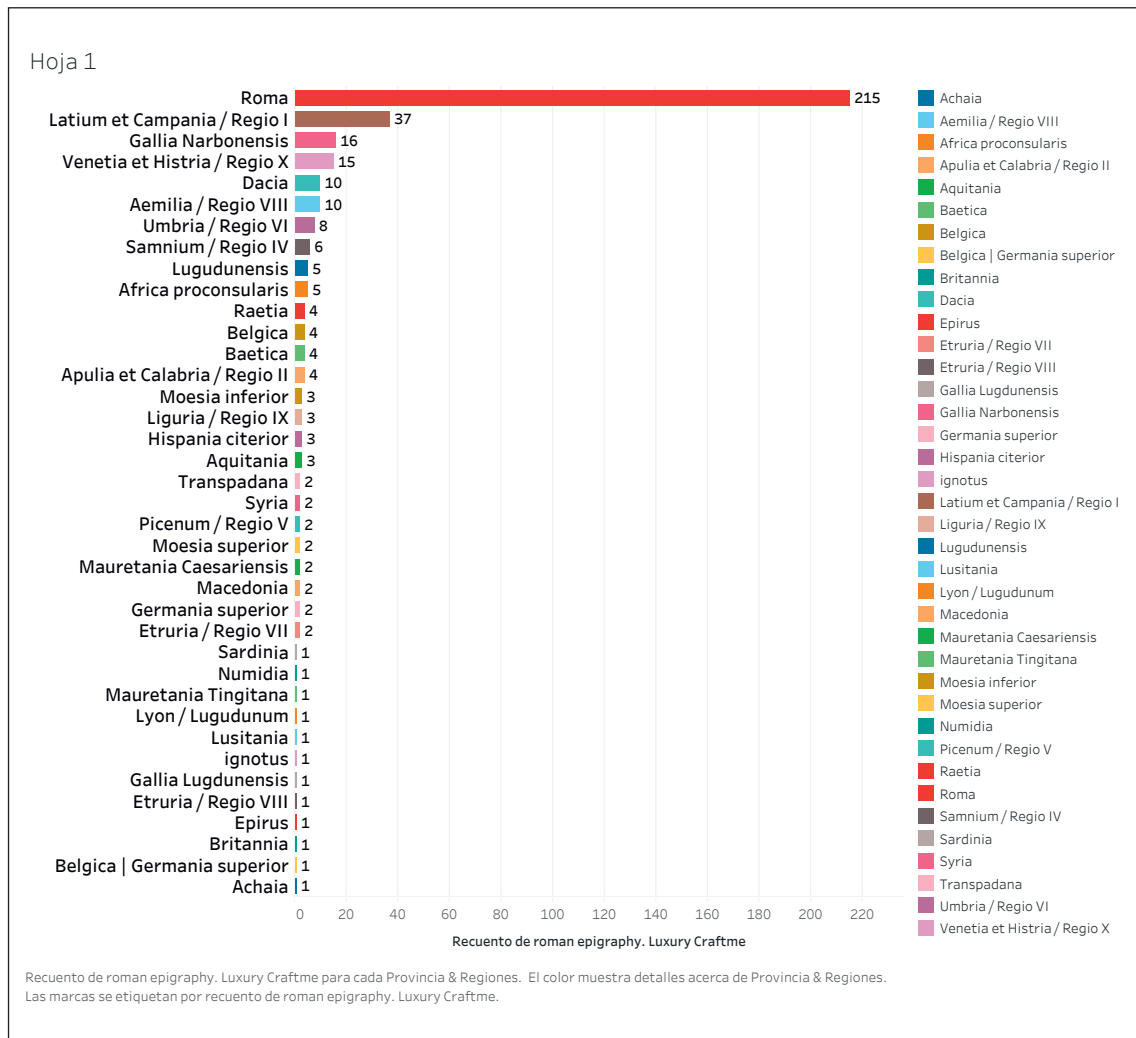


Fig. 1: Graph showing the number of inscriptions found both in Rome and outside the capital (regions and provinces) that mention merchants dedicated to luxury commerce.

In this respect, around 90% of the merchants in these inscriptions devoted themselves to the making and selling of gemstones, pearls, precious metals, dresses, silk, purple, and ointments (fig. 2). The capital had a higher number of professionals dedicated to making and selling jewels and other objects made of precious metals such as gold and silver (fig. 3).

Those artisans and merchants that could acquire a tavern/workshop in the very center of the capital preferred to place their businesses as close as possible to the center. The most coveted area of the center was the *vicus Tuscus*, the *vicus Iugarius*, and the area of the *Velabrum*.²¹ In order to determine the multiple dispositions of the rooms where these artisans and merchants were located, J.-P. Morel defined some neighborhoods as “*quartiers situés, précisément, à la périphérie immédiate du centre*”.²² Coarelli had already

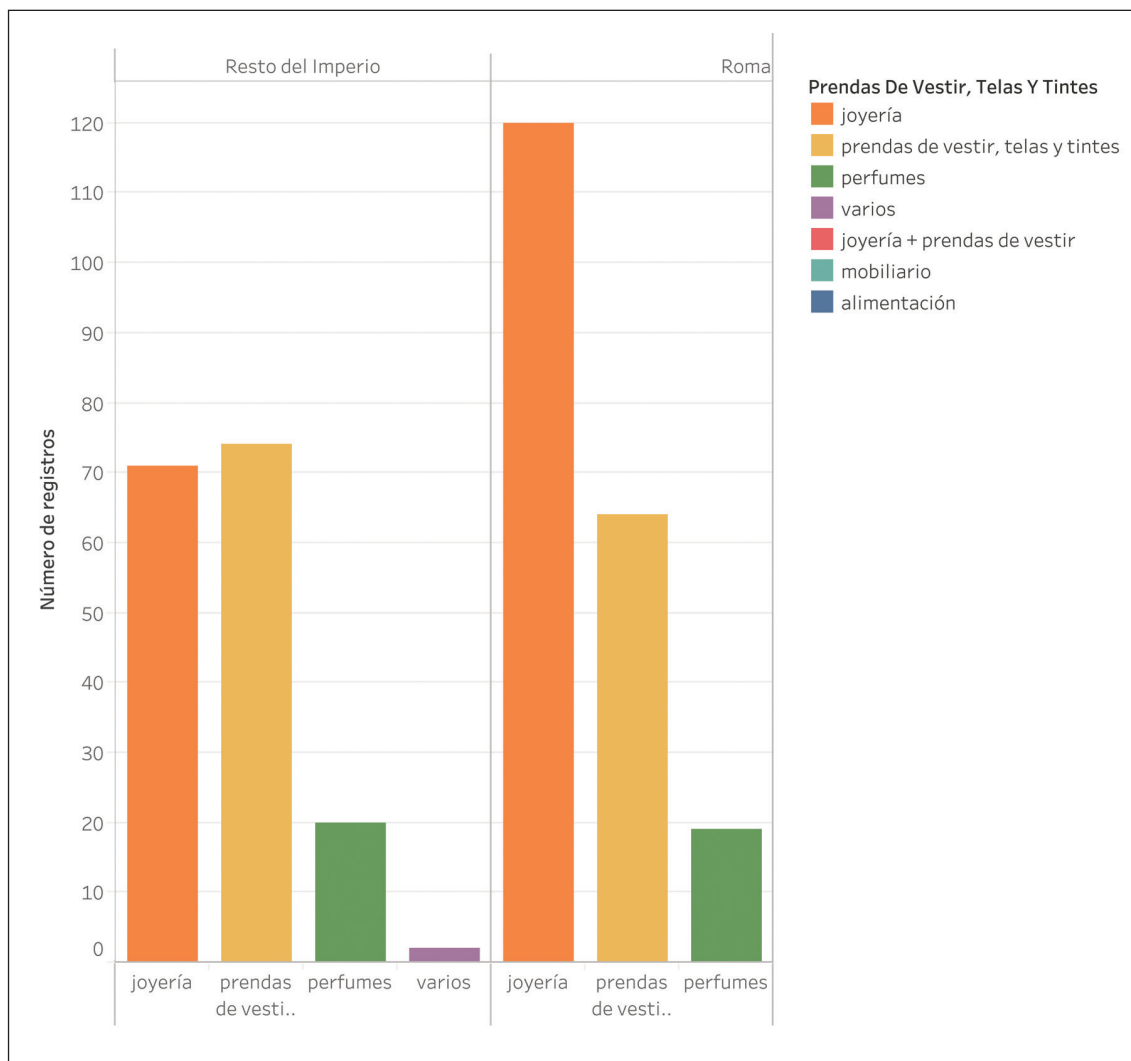


Fig. 2: Types of sumptuary commerce in Rome and the rest of the Empire.

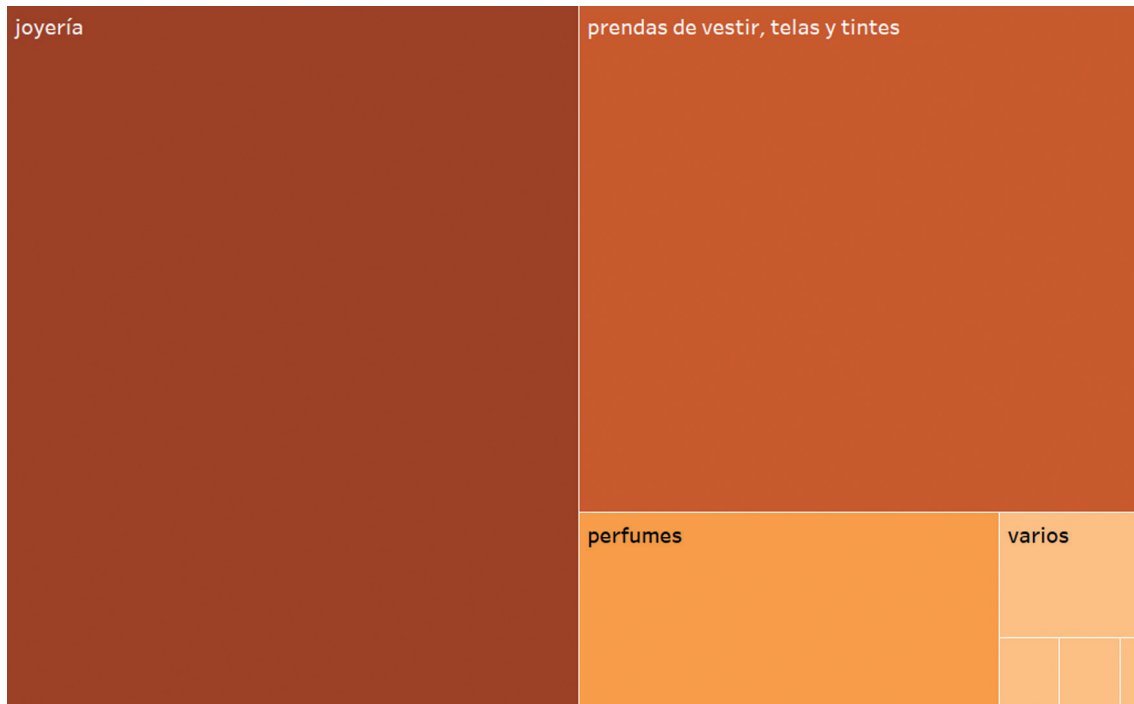


Fig. 3: Types of sumptuary commerce according to the study of the Latin epigraphy in the Roman Empire.

defended the articulating role of the *vicus Iugarius* and the *vicus Tuscus* in the area, the point of union of the *regiones* VIII–XI, which saw a constant transit of people and merchandise between the Roman Forum, the *Forum Holitorium*, and the *Forum Boarium*. Its proximity to the prestigious *Via Sacra* made the two streets coveted by the most ambitious merchants.²³ Since the end of the Republican era onward, these streets were notable for their high concentration of sumptuary establishments.²⁴

Just as it nowadays, the location of a store was and is one of the determinant factors of its commercial success. If today, the *Upper 5th Avenue* (NY-USA), *Causeway Bay* (HK-China), or the *Avenue des Champs-Élysées* (PAR-France) are the streets with the highest rents in the world, in the Roman Empire no street could compete in importance with the *Via Sacra*.²⁵

The improvement of the monumental character of the political and administrative center of Rome resulted in food-selling businesses being moved out to other parts of the city. These were subsequently replaced by other businesses that specialized in luxury goods. This symbiosis between the center of Rome and businesses that specialized in selling the most exotic goods, which came from all parts of the known world, caused the *Via Sacra* to be known for several centuries for its sumptuary nature. In this way, to the Roman people of the 2nd century AD, the commercial nature of the avenue was clearly defined by the kind of commerce located there. As a result, they forgot that the

same street (and the neighboring ones) has been home to lower-rank commerce three centuries before.

In this respect, we have to wonder whether the acknowledgement of this kind of street is due to their location within the urban topography, or to the commerce located there. On our side, and after analyzing these kinds of avenues in two time periods that are so distant and different, we believe that it is the commerce that determined the nature of the avenue, and not the other way around. Consequently, it is the accumulation of commerce considered to be at a luxury-level that determines the street's function as sumptuary within the urban landscape. The movement of this commerce to another place will result in this new area being considered the place of reference for the trade of this kind of goods.

Notes

¹ Varro. *Hum.Rer.* 121.

² Liv. 11, 16; 27. 1–4. For the first *macellum* in Roma: De Ruyt 1983, 158–160. García Morcillo 2005, 195. See also, Pisoni Sartorio 1996, 202–204.

³ Cf. *Bulla Regia, Thurburdo Maius, Djemila y Philippes, Belo Claudia, Alba Fucens, Sepino, Timgad, Thibilis*, and *Aquincum* in De Ruyt 1983, 328.

⁴ De Ruyt 1983, 246 f.

⁵ Liv. 40. 51, 4–6.

⁶ Varro. *Ling. Lat.* 5.147. Cf. Coarelli 1985, 151; De Ruyt 1983, 160 f.

⁷ Carettoni 1948, 111–128.

⁸ De Ruyt 1983, 163; García Morcillo 2005, 195. Last mention of republican *macellum* (179 B.C.) Hor. *Serm.* 2, 3.

⁹ De Ruyt 1983, 163. 329. Cf. Suet. *Aug.* 28 on the reconstruction and modernization of Rome.

¹⁰ Morel 1987, 137.

¹¹ Dio Casio. 61, 18, 3. Mentioned in the *Notitia urbis Romae*, where the location of this building is located between the *Templum Divi Claudii* and the *Lupanares*, cf. Valentini – Zucchetti 1940, 92 f.

¹² Marc. *Epig.* 7. 61.

¹³ Morel 1987, 143.

¹⁴ Aguilera Martín 2002, 116 f.; Goodman 2016, 320 f.; Droß-Krüpe 2016, 346 f.

¹⁵ Sevillano López – Soutar Moroni 2012; Pérez González 2014a, 267–282; Pérez González; 2014b, 1413–1415; Pérez González 2017b, 251–279; Schneider 2018.

¹⁶ Di Giacomo 2010; Di Giacomo 2012; Di Giacomo 2016; Pérez González 2017d, 37–70; Pérez González 2018, 5–16.

¹⁷ Pérez González 2017e, 149–194.

¹⁸ Pérez González 2017e, 149–194. For the *unguentarii*: Pérez González 2017c, 82–110.

¹⁹ Papi 2002, 50 f.; Holleran 2012, 55–57; Monteix 2012, 333–352; Laurence – Newsome 2012; Courier 2014, 202–252; Wilson – Flohr 2016; Pérez González 2017a, 143–175.

²⁰ The Dataset is distributed under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International Licence. The source code of the model is licensed under a GNU General Public Licence; both can be downloaded from <<https://github.com/JordiPerezGonzalez/Roman-Epigraphy.-Rome-vs-Empire.git>> (accessed 14 October 2018). The Figures 1–3 use this Dataset. A dynamic visualization of the dataset, in Tableau public: <<https://public.tableau.com/profile/jordi2068#!/vizhome/luxusall05allg/Dashboard1>>

²¹ Coarelli 1980, 405 f. (2008 edition). Cf. *LTUR*, s.v. *vicus Tuscus*, 195–197; s.v. *vicus Iugarius*, 169 f.

²² Morel 1987, 139 f.

²³ Baratta 2007.

²⁴ CIL XIV, 2433 = ILS 7597 = Franchetti 11 = AE 2001, 110 = SupplIt Imagines – Latium 1, 237 = EDCS-05800400 = EDR153123: *L(ucio) Plutio L(uci) l(iberto) Eroti / purpurario de vico Tusco / Plutia L(uci) l(iberta) Auge / fecit sibi et / Veturiae CC(aiorum) l(ibertae) Atticae*.

²⁵ Pérez González 2017a, 143–175.

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Fig. 1: Pérez González 2017a, 155 fig. 1. – Fig. 2: Pérez González 2017a, 159 fig. 2. – Fig. 3: Pérez González 2017a, 170 fig. 5.1.

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