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10 Fora and commerce in Roman Italy

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Approaches to urban commerce in the Roman world have become increasingly sensitive to the position of retail, manufacturing, and business in the urban environment. Long gone is the idea that commerce was an unwelcome or foreign element in urban space: whenever scholars have studied the spatial position of crafts and retail more closely, it has become clear that commerce not only could be integrated into urban space without much trouble, but often also developed a central presence throughout the urban landscape, and could be closely associated, physically and visually, with local elites and their urban residences (Laurence 1994; Wallace-Hadrill 1994; Flohr and Wilson 2016). Particularly the *taberna*, with its wide opening, and its proliferation along the thoroughfares of many cities in Roman Italy, made sure that commerce, already by the late Republic, had become a defining element of urban space. Yet it may be argued that scholarly discourse on urban commercial landscapes in the Roman world has focused to a significant degree on streets, and on the private buildings surrounding these. The public heart of the Roman city—the forum—has, perhaps surprisingly, played a much more marginal role in recent approaches to commercial space. Indeed, recent work on retail and *tabernae* by Holleran (2012, 2017) and Ellis (2018) acknowledges the existence of commerce in fora, but does not really elaborate on the topic. Conversely, recent discourse on fora tends to emphasize the role of the central urban plaza in politics and civic life. Gros, in what counts as the most authoritative discussion of Roman fora of the last decades, defines the forum, first and foremost, as a *lieu de mémoire*, where the community defined itself via civic and religious architecture, and through the many commemorative monuments and honorific inscriptions (Gros 1996, 207). In her discussion of the Republican fora of Roman Italy, Lackner (2008, 255, 271) acknowledges the role of commerce on fora, and highlights the presence of *tabernae* alongside many Italian fora, but offers very little reflection on the issue. Laurence, Esmonde Cleary, and Sears (2011, 170–202, esp. 186) define the forum (with Vitruvius) as a place for *negotium*—broadly defined—and observe that many Republican fora developed a strongly commercial character, but for the imperial period, they rather emphasize the role of the forum as an ‘imperial space’ and argue that it functioned to give cities a ‘truly impressive

monumental centre', even though they recognize the continued role of the forum as a key locus of *negotium*. Frakes, in a recent companion to Roman architecture, equally privileges the cultural position of the forum, emphasizing the symbolic ties between many urban fora and the Forum Romanum at Rome (Frakes 2014). The only recent study to address the role of commerce on the forum a bit more systematically is a brief, but well-documented 2003 article by Giulia Baratto, which emphasizes the proliferation of *tabernae* along the sides of fora, in the Republican as well as in the imperial period, but offers limited discussion beyond establishing this basic fact.

This chapter explores the commercial history of the forum from a variety of different angles in order to develop a clearer view on the way in which commerce shaped fora, and, conversely, on the way in which fora shaped commerce. It does so in four steps. Arguably, one way of analysing the commercial nature of fora is by looking at forum complexes that were purposefully constructed by the Roman authorities outside their natural place in the heart of an urban settlement: the practice of founding fora along consular roads and in the countryside sheds clear light on the way in which they were supposed to facilitate commerce. A second logical perspective on the commercial history of fora concerns the role of *tabernae*, which came to surround fora in Roman Italy from the mid-third century BCE onwards: the arrival of the *taberna* marked a significant change to the nature of urban retail and manufacturing, and its construction around fora transformed the nature of economic life on the plaza. Thirdly, it is relevant to consider the actual impact of the monumentalization of fora in the imperial period on the role of commerce on or around the plaza: the increased role of civic memory and imperial ideology on fora of the Augustan period and beyond at least potentially compromised the role of fora in commerce, but the extent to which this happened remains unclear. Finally, it is important to assess the impact of fora on their direct urban environment: the extent to which urban fora became a key locus of commerce and retail also had implications for the proliferation of those activities elsewhere in cities, and may have exacted a significant impact on the urban topography of cities. Taken together, these four perspectives not only confirm that fora were a key locus of commerce—a point that is widely acknowledged in scholarship, and does not need reiteration—but they also highlight how the commercial character of fora developed over time, and how fora contributed to the ways in which commerce and retail found their place throughout the city.

Commerce and the non-urban fora of Republican Italy

To understand the role of commerce in the planning of fora, it is relevant to consider the fora that were founded in Roman Italy outside urban centres. From the late republic onwards, the Roman authorities established a substantial number of such non-urban fora (Rouff-Väänänen 1978). Typically, these settlements were situated along major roads, in a central location in

micro-regions that did not have an urban centre, or adjacent to rural sanctuaries. The names of some of these settlements have survived through epigraphy and literary sources. It is clear that they were commonly known as fora, and following Festus, it is often assumed that they took their name from the magistrates who founded them. Otherwise, very little detailed information about the background of their foundation has been preserved, but Festus (*Gloss. Lat.* 74) explicitly defines these fora as *negotiationis loci*, thus directly associating them with business and trade. A closer reading of the position of some of these fora in their regional environment makes it possible to qualify this relation between non-urban fora and commerce. One of the best-known non-urban fora of Roman Italy is Forum Appii on the Via Appia between Rome and Terracina (Figure 10.1). Situated in the middle of the Pontine Plain, Forum Appii marked the point where a secondary road leading to the city of Setia branched off from the Via Appia. Setia (Sezze) was the leading urban centre of the area, but it was situated on top of a 300m-high foothill of the Monti Lepini, overlooking the Pontine Plain. While Setia had been a Roman colony since 382 BCE (Vell. Pat. 1.14.2), the city was hard to reach and barely an attractive place to go for traders unless they had a compelling reason to make the climb. The city did, however, have something to offer: wine from the region (*vinum setianum*) is mentioned by several Roman authors (Plin. *NH.* 14.52, 14.61, 23.36; Mart. 13.124). Interestingly, Pliny (*NH* 14.61) refers to wine from the region as *vinum setianum* growing *supra Forum Appii*, emphasizing the strong connection between the two places (on the *Ager Setinus*, see also Attema et al. 2014). While scholarship has tended to discuss Forum Appii as an independent settlement—a ‘minor centre’—this may be misleading (Tol et al. 2014). Rather, it may be suggested that Forum Appii was founded as an interface between the city on the hilltop, and the road in the plain—a place where local sellers could meet regional buyers, and vice-versa. Some ten miles farther towards the direction of Rome, the settlement of Tres Tabernae (cf. Urbini et al. 2010) may have performed the same role for the cities of Cora and Norba, which also were situated high up the hills. In northern Italy, a substantial group of fora was situated on the Via Aemilia (Figure 10.2). They include Forum Popilii, now Forlimpopoli; Forum Livii, now Forlì; and Forum Cornelii, now Imola. They seem to have performed a similar function: these fora are situated in direct relation to major valleys and at or close to the point where the roads from those valleys would meet the Via Aemilia: Forum Popilii is associated with the valley of the Bidente (Vecchiotti 2005, 4); Forum Livii with the Montone and Rabbi Rivers, which merge just south of the settlement; Forum Cornelii was situated at the end of the valley of the Santerno. These Apennine valleys were not empty: they offered ample opportunities for several forms of agriculture, and in the valley of the Bidente, the small town of Mevaniola would emerge in the late Republican period (Maria and Rinaldi 2012). Like Forum Appii, the three Republican fora on the Via Aemilia, thus, served as interfaces through which the valleys of the northern Apennines were connected with the larger Italian network of trade and transport.

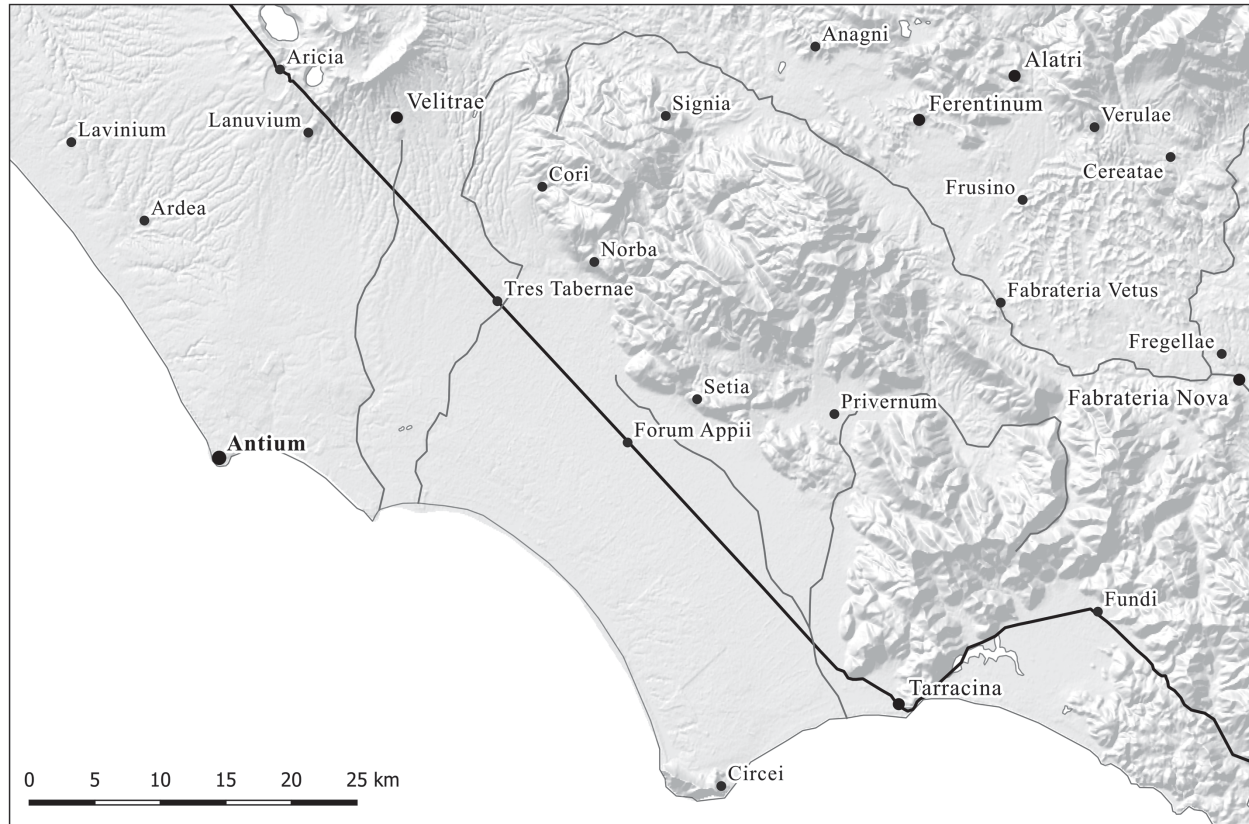


Figure 10.1 Location of Forum Appii on the Via Appia (M. Flohr).

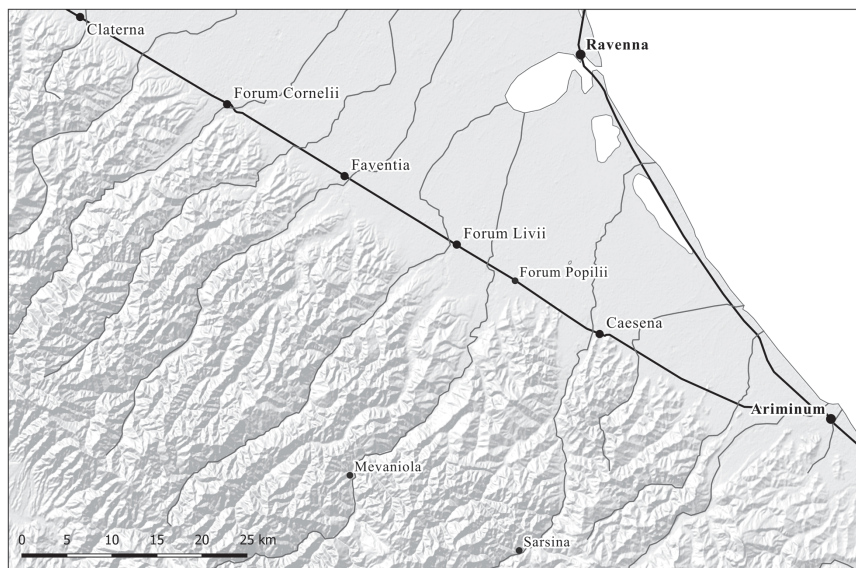


Figure 10.2 Location of Forum Popilii, Forum Livii, and Forum Cornelii on the Via Aemilia (M. Flohr).

It is not clear what these non-urban fora on the Via Aemilia and Via Appia actually looked like. It is possible that they were monumentalized plazas like the urban fora of Italy, but none of these fora has actually been excavated, and their earliest phases remain unknown. Probably, the foundation of a non-urban forum was normally accompanied by the construction of a real plaza. This is strongly suggested by the second-century BCE *Lapis Pollae* (CIL 10.6950), which records the foundation of a forum on the consular road from Capua to Rhegium, explicitly stating that the forum was constructed with a number of public buildings around it (*forum aedisque poplicas hic fecerit*; cf. Bernard et al. 2014; Adamo 2016). Elsewhere in Italy, archaeologists have recovered fora that were constructed in what otherwise seems to have been rural areas. Prominent examples include Veleia, in the Chero valley, south of Placentia, and Forum Novum, in the Sabina area north of Rome. Veleia (Figure 10.3) would eventually become a *municipium* in the imperial period, but it was initially founded as a forum and developed, organically, around the excavated *forum-basilica* complex that has been dated to the Augustan period (Ortalli 1995). Forum Novum is thought to have been founded in the Republican period, and became a *municipium* in the Augustan period, though the settlement essentially remained a dispersed semi-urban conglomerate throughout antiquity, loosely organized around the original forum, of which a first-century CE incarnation has been excavated (Gaffney et al. 2001, 76–77).



Figure 10.3 Forum square of Veleia (M. Flohr).

Still, from an economic perspective, these fora were more than just a plaza: their official character significantly reinforced their commercial role. In these places, business deals could be made that were protected under Roman law, and even if law enforcement was not perfect, it was much better than elsewhere. As a consequence, risky deals, or deals that involved credit, could be made more reliable by finalizing them in one of the fora, rather than in some random place in the middle of nowhere. Thus, to look at these fora from a neo-institutional perspective, their construction significantly brought down transaction risks and therefore reduced transaction costs (cf. Frier and Kehoe 2007) throughout Roman Italy. This strengthened regional economic networks, and facilitated supra-local trade. It particularly did so for buyers, and, by consequence, for those involved in serving the consumer market of the Roman metropolis: it made it easier, and much less time-consuming to find sellers that they did not already know, and it made it much easier to hold them accountable in case something went wrong. Having a network of non-urban fora throughout Italy was in the direct interest of the Roman elite: it served the stability of the Roman market and kept price levels relatively low. There can be no doubt that these fora very much were an economic phenomenon. The architecture of the few non-urban fora that have been found reflects this: these were very simple complexes with a plaza, often a few *tabernae*, and a relatively large *basilica*, but without any of the civic and religious monuments and buildings that characterized the larger urban fora

of Roman Italy—this is true at Veleia, at Forum Novum, and at Juvanum (Lapenna et al. 2006); outside Italy, it is also true for rural fora in places like Bavay (Balty 1989) or Ruscino (Marichal and Barruol 1987).

The argument made is not that these fora were built to create more perfect market conditions. Indeed, reasons for constructing them may have been more banal: for the Roman authorities responsible for their construction, a direct benefit offered by these fora was that transactions could be taxed more easily. Nevertheless, the effect of these fora on markets was clear enough. From an economic perspective, the roadside fora of Roman Italy can be seen as controlled economic interfaces between the local and the global—a place where supply could meet demand independent of existing social ties. In other words: these fora facilitated contact and interaction between relative strangers *outside* their networks of patronage and power—a trustworthy and recognizable environment for dealing with other people so that you do not automatically need to trust them yourself.

***Tabernae* and the urban fora of the later Roman Republic**

In cities, this core function of bringing together relative strangers was equally fundamental in the emergence of the forum as an element in Roman urbanism. Indeed, the very location of the quintessential Roman forum—the one in the centre of Rome—embodies this principle: the place where it emerged, at some point in the seventh or sixth century BCE, was not only closely connected to the river and, thus, to the world outside Rome, but it also was the natural point where people coming from the various hills would meet. The Roman forum was the official interface between local and global, and the central node that tied together the community. This role as central interface made urban fora ideal places for the construction of community identity and, later, also for the communication of imperial ideologies, and the material remains of fora of course attests to this, but it has to be emphasized that the role of the forum as a stage for shared identities was and remained epiphenomenal to and dependent on its practical role in everyday commerce, justice, and politics.

All of this does not mean that the commercial character of urban fora was expressed in architecture right from the start. Indeed, the Romans themselves appear to have thought of their own forum as having much more informal origins: according to Livy (1.35), it was not before the later stages of the regal period that the layout of the plaza was regularized and surrounded by architecture. This is also how many fora in Roman foundations appear to have started. For instance, the original, third-century BCE forum at Cosa is not thought to have been surrounded by any architecture—the oldest buildings that have been recovered belong to the refoundation of the city after the Second Punic War (Brown 1980, 14–31). At Paestum, the oldest buildings around the forum are thought to post-date the foundation of the colony (in 273 BCE) by several decades. At Rome, the forum seems to have been surrounded by *porticus* with *tabernae* before the middle of the third century

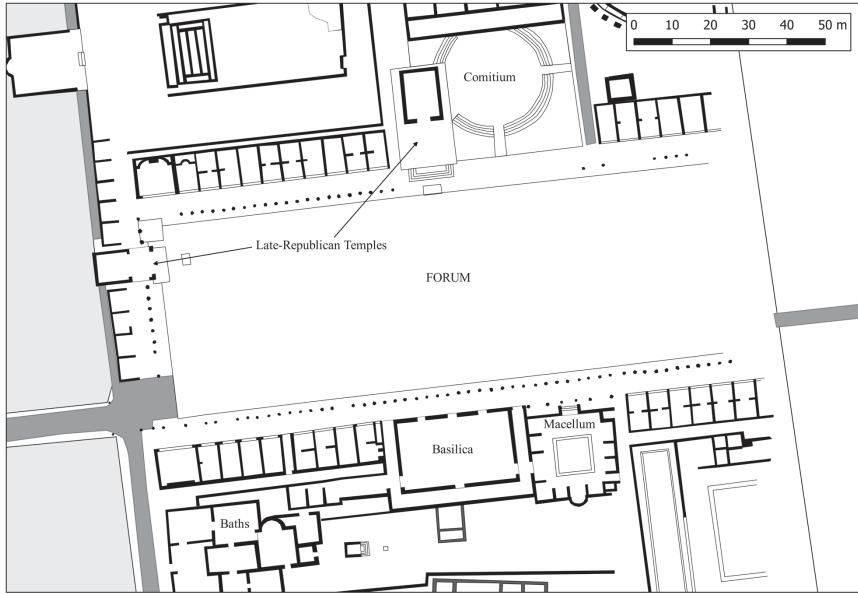


Figure 10.4 Paestum. Map of forum (M. Flohr).

BCE, but Livy's claim that the *tabernae* around the Forum Romanum go back to Tarquinius Priscus is not supported by any evidence (Flohr 2020, 67). In other words: the most explicitly commercial form of architecture that could be found around fora—the *taberna*—was not part of the original idea of what constituted a forum, but a secondary addition to an already established model. The spread of the *taberna* around the fora of the Italian peninsula in the third and second centuries BCE thus marks a significant change to the nature of fora, and to the nature of urban commerce: the commercial role of the fora became increasingly expressed in architecture, and this architecture increasingly began to dominate the plaza. At the very least, this development suggests an intensification of commerce on and around fora.

The precise dynamics of this development elude us. The case of Paestum suggests that by the second half of the third century BCE, the Roman authorities had developed the idea that it could make sense to surround a forum with *tabernae* (Figure 10.4). The forum of Paestum survived until late antiquity without any structural, large-scale alterations to its original layout except for the late-Republican two medium-sized temples, and the addition of *porticus* in front of the *tabernae* in the Augustan period (Greco et al. 1987; Greco and Theodorescu 1999). The forum of Paestum was a unique complex: it was the product of one design, and consisted of a large, rectangular plaza equipped with some basic civic buildings alongside its most central part, but otherwise completely surrounded by *tabernae*. Both its unified design, and the use of



Figure 10.5 Paestum. *Tabernae* along the south side of the forum (M. Flohr).

identical building materials and techniques for the *tabernae* and the *comitium* suggest the entire project was a public initiative by the Roman authorities (Figure 10.5). It is relevant to stress the numbers: not fewer than 44 *tabernae* can be identified in the excavated zone, but the layout of the forum suggests there may have been almost 70 in the original design—48 large two-room units along the long sides of the forum, and 20 smaller one-room *tabernae* along the short sides. The high number of *tabernae* is puzzling: the closest parallel is the forum of Falerii Novi, a city that was newly founded by the Romans in roughly the same period. GPR survey by the British School in Rome has suggested that Falerii Novi also got a forum that was completely dominated by *tabernae*, and its spatial organization suggests it belongs to the city's foundational period (Keay and Millet 2000). However, even here, the total number of *tabernae* alongside the forum did not exceed 40. The forum at Pompeii, in this period, also had *tabernae* along its east side, and may have had more along its south and west sides, as some have reconstructed, but the numbers are much lower—only seven *tabernae* have been excavated. Written sources suggest that the number of *tabernae* around the Forum Romanum in the later third century BCE cannot have been higher than 20 or 30. In terms of the sheer number of *tabernae* around the forum, Paestum thus appears to have been in a league of its own.

What is going on? On the one hand, it may be pointed out that fora like Paestum and Falerii Novi represent the early phase of a broader trend in

which the Roman authorities construct *porticus* with *tabernae* around fora in the cities of Roman Italy. Livy (41.27) reports three examples of urban fora to which the Roman *censores* of 174 BCE—Quintus Fulvius Flaccus and Aulus Postumius—added rows of *tabernae*. One of these cities was Auximum, which was situated on a side branch of the Via Flaminia connecting the Tiber Valley to Ancona; the other two were situated directly on the Via Appia: Sinuessa, on the coast between Minturnae and Capua, and Calatia, on the eastern edge of the *Ager Campanus*, between Capua and Beneventum. These were not the first cities with *tabernae* around their forum: Livy reports Roman officials' concern with *prodigia* related to *tabernae* around fora at Privernum (27.11) and Aricia (30.38) in the late third century, and at Minturnae (36.37) in 191 BCE. Yet the explicit interest of the early second-century BCE Roman *censores* in building these *tabernae* indicates an official desire to further strengthen the commercial character of the urban fora of Roman Italy. Early- to mid-second-century BCE fora in new foundations like Potentia (184 BCE; Vermeulen et al. 2006) and Luna (177 BCE; Rossignani 1995) attest to this principle: these fora were, from early on, equipped with *tabernae*.

On the other hand, it is also clear that by the time that these second-century BCE interventions were planned, ideas about the role of *tabernae* around fora had developed quite a bit compared to the 230s: *tabernae* were limited to the long sides of the fora, and the numbers were generally much lower. While the forum of Potentia still appears to have been built with around 40 *tabernae*, the forum at Luna was built with *tabernae* only on one side, and later fora in Italy rarely had more than 20 *tabernae* (cf. Baratto 2003; Lackner 2008). Seen from this perspective, the forum of Paestum may be thought to reflect a phase in the development of the architectural arrangement in which it had not yet been fully crystallized out how many *tabernae* would make up an ideal number for a regular urban forum. By the second century BCE, it had become clear that a forum with almost 70 *tabernae* was for many cities a bit exaggerated. The forum of Cosa, which, in the very early second century BCE was redeveloped (Brown 1980) and was the only urban forum of Roman Italy to be surrounded by *atrium* houses (possibly with *tabernae*) also suggests that the Romans in this period needed a bit of trial and error to find a canonical way of building an urban forum with *tabernae*. Thus, Sewell's idea (2010, 58–62) that Roman urban fora of the middle Republic were planned with space already reserved for rows of *tabernae* to be built at a much later moment needs to be treated with caution: there is no evidence that the practice of surrounding urban fora with *tabernae* had already fully developed when these fora were laid out. The situation at Paestum and Cosa rather suggests this may not have been the case.

Though the construction of *tabernae* around many urban fora in middle and late Republican Italy has been recognized in past scholarship, and has been duly taken to suggest that these fora developed a strongly commercial character, the practice of building rows of *tabernae* around fora actually was an innovation of the third and second centuries BCE, predating the arrival

of the *basilica* by about half a century (cf. Flohr, this volume, p. 77–78). As was true for the construction of non-urban fora, the reason behind these construction projects may have been related to the financial needs of the authorities, and the possibility offered by these *tabernae* to generate taxes, but, again, this does not diminish the practical effect of such complexes on the urban market. The construction of *tabernae* around fora marked a significant formalization and intensification of the commercial landscape of these plazas: the arrival of the *taberna* gave some of the commercial activities on fora a permanence and a predictability that they earlier could not have. This strengthened the character of these fora as economic interfaces, within the urban community, but also in relation to people coming from outside. Building *tabernae* around urban fora in Italy thus economically had an effect similar to founding non-urban fora: it intensified and improved the economic network of the peninsula, and made it easier for traders serving the Roman market to find people selling their wares.

Commerce and monumentalization in the Early Empire

With the emergence of the *tabernae* and the *basilica* in the late Republican period, the key elements of the Roman urban forum had become part of the Roman architectural vocabulary, and right until the third century CE fora would be constructed with the same set of ingredients: a central plaza, *porticus* with *tabernae*, and a *basilica*—particularly in Roman Europe, each of these three elements also seems to have remained canonical, and they did so more than the forum temple, which appears to have remained optional rather than obligatory. Fora in cities as diverse as Kaiseraugst, Silchester, and Xanten attest to this: the Augustan-period forum of Kaiseraugst was surrounded by *tabernae* on both sides, with potentially as many as 51 *tabernae* in the entire complex (Russell 1968; Schalles 1992). The forum-*basilica* complex at Silchester was surrounded by *tabernae* on three sides; at Xanten, the forum was an imperial donation under Antoninus Pius, and it was constructed with over 40 *tabernae*—half of these opened on the plaza, the other half were oriented towards the surrounding streets. Comparable examples abound—one can think of cities like Augusta Bagiennorum, Lutetia Parisiorum, Londinium, and, in peninsular Italy, Herdonia and Suasa (cf. Russell 1968; Schalles 1992; Mertens and De Ruyt 1995; De Maria and Giorgi 2013). In many other places—the example of Paestum has already been mentioned—*tabernae* from the Republican period simply continued to be used throughout the imperial period. It is clear that in key circles fora continued to be thought of as complexes with an important commercial function, and commerce generally played a central role in forum design. In many cases, it seems, this role was considerably more central than was suggested by Vitruvius (5.1-2), who only mentioned the commercial side of fora in passing, and rather emphasized their civic and political role, and the monumental qualities of their layout (Frakes 2014, 250–251).

At the same time, a number of new fora from the imperial period were constructed without *tabernae* or with a layout suggesting that commercial priorities had been of limited relevance to their planning; around some older fora, rows of *tabernae* were removed to make place for civic monuments. In some cases, the *tabernae* were transformed into decorated facilities with a more representative character. Some scholars have seen these developments as an indication that the character of urban fora changed, and that they lost part of their commercial function in favour of administrative, monumental, and religious functions. For instance, John Patterson has argued for an increasing functional specialization of public space in cities, with central fora developing a more ceremonial character (Patterson 2006, 177–178). Paul Zanker suggested that fora were increasingly dominated by religious architecture, and by allusions to the imperial authorities (Zanker 1998). These ideas have particularly been based upon the development of the Forum Romanum in the late Republic, the design of the first two imperial fora in Rome, and on the forum of Pompeii, which underwent substantial changes in the early imperial period. Particularly the Forum of Augustus, with its emphasis on communicating the historical and mythological roots of the new imperial regime, has been seen as an influential model for urban fora throughout Roman Italy, and the forum of Pompeii has repeatedly been discussed as a key example of this process (Patterson 2006, 177). The question remains, however, how the changing visual character of these fora transformed their commercial role. Moreover, in the light of the many fora with *tabernae* constructed both in Roman Europe and in the Italian peninsula, it is worth considering how widespread a phenomenon monumentalized, ‘imperial’ fora really became.

As for the Forum Romanum and the first two imperial fora, it is important to see these, spatially and functionally, as constituting one big interconnected complex that in practice came to divide the functions of one forum over three closely integrated spaces (see above, Figure 2.3). It is also important to see the construction of the fora of Caesar and Augustus as the next step in a process that had already begun in the late third century BCE, when a *macellum* was constructed directly next to the forum, and that had continued throughout the second century BCE through the construction of four *basilicas* along the north, south, and west sides of the plaza. These buildings offered accommodation for all kinds of civic and commercial processes that initially had taken place on or around the forum and therefore leavened the spatial pressure on the forum plaza. By their very nature, however, these structures were functionally aspecific: they offered accommodation for a variety of processes, official and less official in character, and their practical use was, and essentially remained, flexible. If there was, at some point, any specialization of functionality, it was imposed by custom, not by the architecture. As Rome grew from a large city into a true metropolis, the construction of a *macellum* and several *basilicae* gradually extended the Forum. The construction of the Basilica Iulia, which unlike its predecessor was not separated from the forum by a row of *tabernae*—instead, it had a row of *tabernae* alongside its



Figure 10.6 Rome. Forum Romanum. Basilica Iulia, with direct access from the forum square (M. Flohr).

back—further improved the logistics of circulation within this increasingly cluttered space (Figure 10.6). In this context, the fora of Caesar and Augustus essentially marked the next step in this process, in which, with different architectural means, a similar effect was achieved: more space for key civic and economic processes. More than a century later, the Forum of Trajan would once more, and for the final time, upgrade the capacity of the Roman city centre. Indeed, Suetonius (*Aug.* 29) emphasizes that the construction of the Forum of Augustus was legitimized for practical reasons: there was a clear need for more space around the forum for business and for juridical processes.

The question, of course, is how the role of commerce developed in this complex. Appian (*B Civ.* 2.102) suggests that Caesar intended his forum to offer space for business and jurisprudence more than space for retail, but he never lived to fully complete the project, and it is notable that the forum was designed with a row of *tabernae* along its south side (Figure 10.7). These *tabernae* simply were constructed in the space available between the forum and the slope of the Capitoline Hill, as their irregular form suggests. Some have argued that these *tabernae* cannot have served commercial purposes, but rather were used for offices. However, there is no clear indication that this actually was the case: these *tabernae* offer the same functional flexibility as other



Figure 10.7 Rome. Forum of Caesar. *Tabernae* along the south side (M. Flohr).

tabernae around fora; any commercial use would barely have interfered other processes going on in the forum. The forum of Augustus was built without *tabernae*, but it may be emphasized that this did not necessarily constitute a choice against commerce; rather, it was a consequence of the amount of space available. Suetonius (*Aug.* 56) states that Augustus made the forum narrower than he wanted to avoid having to disown certain people; the *tabernae*, which were an optional element anyway, were a logical victim. Moreover, whatever the intentions of Augustus, it is clear that the Forum came to play a central role in the commercial network of Rome's city centre. The best evidence for this comes from the Sulpicii Archive from Pompeii, which includes a number of *vadimonia* that were agreed upon on the Forum of Augustus in Rome. Some of these *vadimonia* record the exact location where the deal was finalized, such as 'in Rome on the forum of Augustus before the triumphal statue of Sentius Saturninus' (*TPSulp* 13, 14, 27), or 'on the forum of Augustus before the statue of Gracchus near the fourth column' (*TPSulp* 19). Additionally, several other *vadimonia* from Pompeii and Herculaneum refer to the Temple of Mars Ultor (*TPSulp* 15; *AE* 1951, 216). These *vadimonia* were, of course, juridical documents, but the people coming to the Forum of Augustus to agree on them were businesspeople. Thus, rather than giving the forum a ceremonial character, the statues of historical figures and the temple of Mars Ultor actively attracted businesspeople looking for a place to negotiate and finalize their deals—a process that has also been attested at the forum of Puteoli (cf. Broekaert 2017).

As far as the Forum Romanum is concerned, the cumulative changes point to a shift in the nature of commerce rather than to its disappearance altogether. The rows of *tabernae* that dominated the forum during the later Republic disappeared over the course of the second and first centuries BCE, but they were replaced by *basilicae*: Livy (39.44) notes that four *tabernae* and two *atrium* houses were destroyed to make space for the Basilica Porcia in 184 BCE, and a similar number of shops were destroyed to make space for the Basilica Aemilia fifteen years later (Liv. 44.16). The biggest change to the commercial landscape of the forum plaza itself undoubtedly was the destruction of the *Tabernae Veteres* during the construction of the Basilica Iulia in the mid-first century BCE (cf. Coarelli 2008, 81–82), but as has already been argued, they were replaced by *tabernae* along the south side of this *basilica*. It is clear from epigraphic sources that the direct environment of the forum—particularly the Via Sacra and the Vicus Tuscus, remained renowned hotspots of retail (Papi 2002). That the Forum Romanum itself also continued to be part of this is strongly suggested by the complex of *tabernae* in the south-west corner of the Forum, between the Temple of Vespasian and the Clivus Capitolinus (Figure 10.8). This building, probably dating to the first century AD, had a row of seven *tabernae* alongside a short dead-end road south of the Temple of Vespasian at the level of the forum Romanum, and a plaza surrounded on two sides by a *porticus* with eight *tabernae* at a higher level that



Figure 10.8 Rome, *Tabernae* along the Clivus Capitolinus in the south-west part of the Forum Romanum (M. Flohr).

could be accessed from the Clivus Capitolinus. The place is associated with the Dii Consentes through epigraphic evidence (*CIL* 6.102), but the architecture suggests commercial priorities also informed the design of this complex. Thus, even if the visual emphasis of the forum changed, and commercial priorities shifted, the Forum remained a key locus of commerce, and commerce remained a defining feature of the Forum Romanum throughout the imperial period.

At Pompeii, the third-century BCE *tabernae* along the east side of the forum disappeared from the Augustan period onwards except for in front of the *macellum* in the north-east corner of the plaza. While the central part of the forum indeed saw a loss of commercial function, the *tabernae* just north of the Via dell'Abbondanza were replaced by the *chalcidicum* of the so-called Building of Eumachia, which included, besides statues and inscriptions referring to the historical and mythological themes propagated by the Augustan regime, two *podia* with a small staircase (Figure 10.9; cf. Pesando and Guidobaldi 2006, 49–51). As has been observed by several scholars, the motivation behind the construction of these platforms was probably commercial—they offered ideal facilities for auctions (Fentress 2005). Moreover, the inscription commemorating the construction of the complex refers to it as consisting of not only a *chalcidicum* but also a *porticus*—again, these are the kinds of spaces that feature in wax tablets as places where deals were made, albeit in Puteoli rather than in Pompeii itself. Moreover,



Figure 10.9 Pompeii. Building of Eumachia (VII 9, 1). One of two *podia* in the *chalcidicum* in front of the main building (M. Flohr).

while the *tabernae* along the east side of the forum disappeared, a market building was constructed along the north-west side of the forum, between the Temple of Apollo and the Forum temple. Indeed, the forum temple itself was surrounded, on two sides, by permanent markets. Thus, again, the commercial landscape of the forum changed, but it cannot be credibly argued that the forum of Pompeii lost its commercial character—as is, of course, well attested by the forum scenes from the Praedia of Julia Felix, which date to the very last years of the city’s existence, and show traders offering their wares on the forum square itself, *between* the monuments that had come to populate the plaza (Olivito 2013).

Thus, there is no sign that urban fora, even if they became surrounded by prestigious public architecture and even when their squares filled up with civic monuments, lost their commercial functioning. On the contrary, some of these monuments played a very central role in commerce, offering an identifiable *locus* where deals could be fixed and contracts could be made. At the same time, it should be noticed that heavily monumentalized plazas like the imperial Fora or the Forum of Pompeii remained relatively exceptional. This is because they were a product of imperial benefactions, and of competitive construction by local elites. Close ties with the emperor, or the presence of a wealthy, competitive elite, willing and able to spend money on buying up land around the forum and using it for monumental complexes and imperial temples, were essential preconditions for this monumentalization to occur. Significantly, parallels for Pompeii remain few: the closest parallel is Cumae, which had a sequence of buildings along the south side of its forum similar to that of Pompeii. Possibly, the forum of Puteoli (Demma 2007, 169–179) went through a similar development, but here, possibilities for monumental construction around the plaza were limited because of the sloping terrain, and the archaeology of the area remains almost completely unknown. Yet beyond the wealthy Bay of Naples region, the layout of fora generally remained considerably more basic—if there were no *tabernae*, plazas generally were simply surrounded by uninterrupted porticoes, and otherwise dominated by a *basilica* and one or two temples. Developments at Rome and at Pompeii are not indicative of what was happening in Roman Italy at large, and it is perhaps inevitable, but certainly unfortunate that these cities play such a central role in the scholarly discourse on Roman fora: the emphasis on their monumentalization conceals the fact that for many urban fora in Roman Italy, the commercial function would have been much more dominant.

The echo of the forum: fora and the urban commercial landscape

One problem with studies of Roman urban fora is that there is a tendency to study the forum in isolation from its urban context. To some extent, this is a problem of evidence: in most cases, the urban context simply has not been excavated, and remains unknown. The only real exception is Pompeii, and there are a couple of places where the context of the forum is fragmentarily

known. In general, it is clear that fora were centrally located, and that the roads to and from fora were natural places for investment in retail. Thus, by default, one can expect *tabernae*, *macella*, and other buildings with a strongly developed commercial functionality to cluster in the neighbourhood of fora. For the *macella* of Roman Italy, this is clear enough—with few exceptions, these buildings stood on or near fora.¹ For *tabernae*, this is a bit more difficult to estimate, as one would not only need to have a good overview of a larger proportion of the urban landscape, but also a good understanding of the relative chronology. For instance, urban fora may result from developments at a later stage in a city's history, so that the commercial landscape had already developed its basic structure before the forum was built. To some extent, this was the case at Ostia, where the present forum results from a second-century CE enlargement of a small plaza from the Augustan period, whereas the basic structure of the commercial landscape was shaped from the republican period onwards, when the city began to grow organically beyond its initial walled core. Alternatively, a forum may have been built and surrounded by *tabernae* in an early period, leading to an ebb in demand for commercial space, and thus to a relative lack of investment in *tabernae* and other facilities. This may have been the case at Paestum, where the houses on roads between the Roman forum and the seaside gate have surprisingly limited numbers of *tabernae*.

At Pompeii, it is clear that the proximity of the forum had a decisive influence on the development of commercial facilities around the Via del Foro. The impact of the forum is particularly obvious along the west end of *insula* VII 4. This zone, south of the Temple of Fortuna Augusta, which was probably constructed in the Augustan period, saw significant development in the first century CE. What is relevant is not that the street was lined with shops almost without interruption—this is the case in other parts of Pompeii as well. More interesting is the nature of the buildings to which these *tabernae* belonged: they were all *taberna* rows. Immediately south of the temple of Fortuna Augusta was *taberna* row VII 4, 3–7 (Figure 10.10), which, tellingly, was the only *taberna* row in Pompeii to be equipped with its own *porticus*. On the corner of the *insula* was another building consisting solely of *tabernae*, partially oriented towards the Via degli Augustali. Together with the *tabernae* belonging to the forum baths, and the *tabernae* along the Via degli Augustali belonging to the *macellum*, these complexes form a unique cluster of larger-scale buildings with a predominantly commercial character. Such clusters of purpose-built commercial facilities can be encountered throughout the city centre of Ostia, but at Pompeii, there is only one, and it shows the transformative impact of the forum on the nature of commerce in its direct urban environment. Moreover, there also is the question of how these *tabernae* were used: centrally located, they may have been commercially very attractive, and this may have driven certain categories of craftsmen and retailers off the market. At Rome, where the space directly around the forum was limited, there is a clustering of trade and retail along the roads towards the Forum Holitorium and Forum Boarium, and along the Via Sacra. Here, however, the



Figure 10.10 Pompeii. Porticus with *tabernae* along the Via del Foro (M. Flohr).

evidence is mainly epigraphical, meaning that we know what could be bought in these shops: overwhelmingly, the people associated with this area are specialist traders dealing in exclusive goods. That they were commemorated, after their death, with reference to the place where they operated their shop, suggests these locations brought a bit of prestige to the people able to operate a shop there.

Discussion

As has been argued in this chapter, a crucial commercial characteristic of fora was the way in which they integrated local and supra-local economic networks. The forum constituted the primary economic interface of a city both for internal and external use: it was the place where locals who did not know each other could easily encounter, and where outsiders could come to meet locals, and locals to meet outsiders. Fora were planned to centralize, and this meant that by their very existence, they could play a defining role in urban commercial landscapes. Around the plaza itself, this could be capitalized upon by the authorities, who could decide to surround the forum with *tabernae*: these not only strengthened the commercial character of a forum, but they also generated a steady stream of income through the *vectigalia* paid by their users (Tran 2009; Monteix 2013; Flohr 2016). At the same time, the commercial character of fora did not depend on *tabernae*, and tendencies towards monumentalization in the early imperial period in some of the wealthier cities

in the peninsula did not drive commerce off the forum; rather, in the relatively few fora that became densely monumentalized, the statues, temples, and monuments could become commercial focal points themselves. Its central position also ensured that the commercial history of a city's forum had a significant impact on the development of the city's commercial landscape—including the extent and nature of investment in certain areas, and the distribution of certain forms of retail over the urban topography.

For discourse on fora, this all means that no credible narrative can be constructed about Roman fora without duly acknowledging the central role played by commercial priorities both in the planning and development of fora, and in their everyday functioning. This is true for regular urban fora throughout the Italian peninsula, for the fora built in the countryside, and for the imperial fora in the Roman metropolis. The nature of commerce varied, depending on the presence of *tabernae* and the regular occurrence of markets, but no forum was ever built without at least the notion that it might somehow play a role in urban commerce. Indeed, the explicit mentioning by Appian that the Forum of Caesar initially was not primarily built as a place for buying and selling confirms the extent to which these were thought to be central activities on fora. Similarly, the detailed iconographic program of the Forum of Augustus can only be fully understood in the context of the expected use of the forum for everyday urban processes: without users, the message of the regime would have been without audience, and while the exact ways in which the statues and monuments would be used by later generations was hard to foresee for the people planning the forum, they may very well have envisaged scenarios similar to those reflected in the wax tablets from Pompeii and Herculaneum.

More importantly, for scholars working on urban commerce and retail, the present chapter highlights the need to give fora and their direct environment their due place in the narrative on urban commercial landscapes. This goes beyond pointing out that fora were the commercial heart of the city—they obviously were, but more important than that basic fact is the implication that the history of the forum, as a phenomenon, reflects, and is indicative of the history of commerce: changes to the structure and scale of urban commerce found architectural expression on and around the forum, and developments in the layout of fora affected everyday commercial practice. Thus, the foundation of fora on the countryside, and the construction of *basilicae* and *tabernae* around increasing numbers of urban fora in the third and second centuries BCE reflected the increasing complexity of commerce in the later Republican period. Given the focus of many urban excavations on fora and their direct environment, fora also offer the most explicit source of information on the impact of commercial change on architecture and vice versa—particularly as far as the Republican period is concerned. At the same time, the developments around fora played a fundamental role in shaping investment possibilities elsewhere in cities, and thus, determined the role to be played by private property owners on the market for commercial space. For these people, it mattered

whether a forum was surrounded by rows *tabernae* and had a *macellum*, or whether it happened to lack such facilities. By consequence, any investment on or around the forum was going to have repercussions elsewhere in town—and the opposite was also true: the removal of *tabernae* from the forum of Pompeii in the Augustan period did not take away the commercial function of the forum, but it did create scope for *taberna* construction elsewhere in the city, and it is very well thinkable that this triggered (roughly) contemporary developments like the extension of the Stabian Baths, which included ten *tabernae* (Eschebach 1979, 69), or the construction of the porticus with 13 *tabernae* outside Porta Ercolano (Zanella, this volume). In other words, without understanding the history of fora, both at a general level, and in individual cases, commercial developments elsewhere in cities cannot be fully understood: the forum holds a significant key to assessing the history of commerce in Roman Italy.

Note

- 1 Exceptions include the Macellum Magnum and the Macellum Liviae in Rome, and the macellum at Puteoli. The precise location of the epigraphically attested macellum at Ostia remains unknown, but it was probably not in the direct environment of the forum. Cf. Kockel and Ortisi 2000.

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