



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

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Flohr, M.; Lytle, E.

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CHAPTER THREE

Work and Workplaces

MIKO FLOHR

In classical antiquity, as in many premodern societies, much everyday work could be done anywhere: basic productive activities such as wood-working, bone-carving, pot shaping, spinning, or weaving could be done inside, in rooms also used for other practical and social purposes, or outside, in the open air, anywhere affording appropriate sun or shade. Many of these processes are in principle relatively mobile, too, allowing workers to easily change locations depending on weather, season, or other circumstances. In many premodern societies, key manufacturing processes took place without any formal places for work—in Bourdieu's Berber houses the weaving loom was placed right opposite the main entrance to the house in the primary living room, and weaving was done amidst other domestic activities; in traditional communities in Africa and Asia, use of portable pottery wheels was common until well into the twentieth century, and spinning could be, and often was, done wherever one wanted to be at that specific moment in time.¹

Formal, dedicated work environments are not natural phenomena in human history, but a historical feature. The degree to which everyday work is concentrated in such places depends on the structure and performance of a society's economy, and particularly on the extent to which it is common that everyday consumer goods are made and sold by professionals specializing in their production or distribution and earning income from it. The daily recurrence of certain activities makes it more feasible to reserve a fixed place for them and to invest in a work environment adapted to the needs of everyday practice. This is especially true when specialized manufacturing processes become technologically more complex and require special, nonportable equipment, or when they begin to take place on a larger scale. Such developments towards professionalization and specialization, in turn, tend to be fostered by the emergence and growth of cities, both because of the size of consumer markets and the relative internal integration of urban economies.

Obviously, in the very long run, the history of urbanism in the ancient world is characterized precisely by the gradual emergence and subsequent growth of urban communities—a process that continued from the Greek early Iron Age until well into the Roman imperial period, and that went hand in hand with increasing levels of economic complexity, even if there existed substantial differences between different regions of the Greco-Roman world. Unsurprisingly, in cities these developments were paralleled by the emergence of an increasingly wide range of spatial scenarios for manufacturing and retail and in some places even the emergence of what can be called “commercial architecture.” This was a key development in the history of work in antiquity, the significance of which has not always been fully appreciated by modern scholarship.

It is the aim of this chapter to roughly sketch how this increasingly formal commercial architecture developed from the classical Greek world to the Roman imperial period, and how it spread over the ancient Mediterranean and beyond. Scholars have traditionally been satisfied with the observation that most shops and workshops from the Greco-Roman world were small.² To some extent, this is an undeniable truth: while no reliable quantitative analysis exists, anyone familiar with partially or fully excavated urban sites from the Greco-Roman period will notice that a very large majority of the identifiable commercial facilities are very modest in size—this will also become clear in the following pages. Yet it should be emphasized that this truism conceals two historically much more significant issues, namely, first, that there *were* spaces identifiable as having a primarily commercial function—quite a few of them—and, second, that not all shops and workshops were so small—some actually were exceptionally large compared to preindustrial standards. In other words, this chapter will emphasize that two of the most significant developments in the history of work in antiquity are the proliferation of commercial facilities and a substantial increase in the maximum scale on which commerce took place. As will be argued, both developments had a significant impact on the position of work in urban space and in the urban community.

EVIDENCE AND APPROACHES

There are several reasons why it is historically relevant to consider the physical and spatial contexts in which everyday processes in commerce and manufacturing took place. First of all, these were environments in which people spent considerable amounts of time and which were constituent factors in individual and group identities for those involved in the work. If the classical world saw, for the first time, the emergence of public occupational identities, these identities were, to a considerable extent, shaped in the place where everyday work took place.³ Second, it is impossible to understand the position of work in the social and cultural landscape of Greek and Roman cities without exploring the way in which shops, workshops, and other professional environments were embedded in urban space. The extent to which the architectural commercial vocabulary developed from the classical Greek period to the Roman imperial period had a defining impact on the socioeconomic position of those involved in the work.

It is obvious that the archaeological record is privileged when it comes to discussing these issues, and this is particularly true for sites where larger sections of the urban area have been excavated. Such sites are common throughout the ancient Mediterranean, but there are major differences in the quality and quantity of the evidence and in the extent to which the remains of shops and workshops have been studied. Certain regions have been better served by archaeologists than others and this generally is related to the political realities and cultural priorities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries rather than to the intrinsic importance of these regions for our understanding of the history of urbanism in antiquity. In practice, most of the archaeological sites with larger numbers of shops and workshops are clustered in three regions: the Greek Aegean and its coastal plains, central and southern Italy (including Sicily), and, roughly, the area occupied by the Roman province of Africa Proconsularis. Unsurprisingly, most of the early evidence is to be found in the first of these regions and Africa is particularly indicative for the Roman imperial period. Italy, however, offers to some extent a diachronic picture. Obviously, there are important archaeological sites outside these regions but they are generally somewhat more isolated, and often less well understood, with the partial exception of

Roman Europe. This chapter will therefore particularly focus on the three regions with the best evidence, and briefly discuss some evidence from Roman Europe.

There exists, of course, some evidence in addition to the archaeological record, but it is scattered and fragmentary. Most important is the corpus of depictions of work on several kinds of media: some of these scenes reveal basic properties of the places where work took place, though often only in a very partial and indirect way.⁴ There are a few literary texts, both from the Greek and the Roman period, that offer glimpses of the spatial position of work within the urban environment, but they are generally too vague or imprecise to be of much use (see below). There are some important exceptions, particularly a number of Roman juridical texts that address directly the spatial context of shops and workshops, but these texts primarily concern situations that are exceptional and therefore more likely to result in legal conflict.⁵ Similarly, there are some interesting snippets of information in the papyrological record, but it is very hard to correlate this data with evidence from outside Egypt. The epigraphic record, although obviously affording key evidence related to other aspects of the history of work in the Greco-Roman world, preserves relatively little information relevant to the spatial context of everyday work. All in all, the material remains of shops and workshops constitute the only set of evidence that has the broad geographical and chronological coverage needed to serve as a starting point for the present overview.

None of this is intended to suggest that making sense of the archaeological evidence is straightforward. Arguably, in terms of theoretical concepts and heuristic models, the historiography of work and workplaces in antiquity is trapped between two extremes. On the one hand, there is a tradition of scholarship on everyday work in cultural anthropology, but anthropologists generally have tended to privilege societies and communities operating on a level of economic complexity that is substantially lower than should be assumed for most of the Greco-Roman world.⁶ On the other hand, there is an entire tradition in the field of sociology that, starting with Marx and Durkheim, has developed ways of thinking about the meaning of work in the modern, industrial world. For most of the Greco-Roman world, both approaches are only partially relevant.⁷ In some respects, parallels from the early modern world are helpful, but this is less so when workplaces are concerned, as they have rarely been on the agenda of scholars in a way convergent with the ancient evidence.⁸

To a certain extent, this problem is ameliorated by developments in the study of Roman urbanism. Beginning in the 1990s, archaeologists began to explore the possibilities, approaches, and concepts developed in the study of modern cities. In what has been called the “spatial turn,” scholars are using strategies that are in varying degrees formalized in order to understand the urban environment of Roman cities in a more integrated way, particularly looking at how the built environment conditioned human perception, movement, and communication.⁹ This has shifted the focus in Roman urban studies from builders to users and from architectural intentions to the urban experience. In recent years, this has also fostered the emergence of sensory approaches to cities, highlighting issues like smell, sound, and the intensity of light.¹⁰ While most scholars working in this paradigm have tended to focus on the analysis of public urban landscapes at the level of the street, some have also explored the internal spatial logic of buildings and spaces. Underlying all of these approaches is the notion that humans are defined by interaction—both with other humans, and with the environment in which they live.

The relevance of such approaches to the understanding of work in the Greco-Roman world is beyond doubt: if shops and workshops are to be seen as social environments

in which people defined themselves through interaction among each other and with outsiders, the spatial conditions under which this happened are of key interest. To some extent, recent approaches to work environments in the Roman world have started to acknowledge this theoretical model and have begun to use the spatial properties of Roman shops and workshops to assess the everyday working lives of the people involved in the work. Besides the work of the present author on the *fullonicae* of Pompeii and Ostia, there is the work by Joshel and Hackworth-Petersen on the work environments of Roman slaves, while Elizabeth Murphy has explored the spatial configuration of places of pottery production.¹¹ From this literature, several issues emerge as relevant for understanding the spatial configuration of shops and workshops. First, there is the possibility for communication on the shop floor, which is basically a function of the size of the work space, the size and nature of the work group, and the spatial disposition of the work equipment. Second, there is the relation between the workplace and the external urban environment, which is basically conditioned by the presence or absence of direct communication lines and issues of (mutual) visibility. In what follows, focus will therefore mostly be on the size and context of places identifiable as “workrooms” and on the relation of these spaces with the outside world. The discussion will proceed from classical Greece to the Roman imperial period, and from the eastern Mediterranean to the western Mediterranean to Roman Europe.

CLASSICAL GREECE AND THE HELLENISTIC AEGEAN

Olynthus in northern Greece is the earliest place where we can get a relatively detailed view of the position of work in the city. The area of the city best documented by excavation essentially postdates the extension of the city in 432 BCE, and most structures in the area can be dated to the late 430s and the 420s.¹² The city was completely destroyed by the Macedonians in 348 BCE, imposing a precise *terminus ante quem*. The classical city was constructed on a grid plan and the excavated houses, organized in blocks, are situated immediately north of the agora and mostly to the west of the major road leading to the northern city gate. The sudden abandonment of the city and the quality of the twentieth-century excavations have produced unusually rich archaeological data, including a range of artifacts that make it possible to identify how buildings, and spaces within them, were used.

The houses at Olynthus are square and, like many ancient Greek houses, organized around a central courtyard. They typically feature a long room, the *pastas*, open to the courtyard along one side. As Nicholas Cahill has shown, some evidence for market-oriented manufacturing is found in the houses of Olynthus, but it is mostly limited to moveable artifacts: no permanent work installations have been identified. This may, to some extent, be due to the nature of the evidence—in Olynthus very little has survived above floor level. The spread of relevant artifacts generally suggests that, especially in smaller houses, work was spatially almost completely integrated with everyday domestic life. While in some houses it appears that there were dedicated workrooms, these were generally part of the domestic core. For instance, house A v 9 had three dedicated weaving rooms around the small courtyard that served as a light-well for the people at work; typically, however, the *pastas*, which was also lit by the courtyard, had a loom too.¹³ In other houses, evidence for stone-working¹⁴ and the shaping of terracotta figurines was found in similarly integrated contexts.¹⁴ Some rooms opening directly on the main through-road have been interpreted as shops, but it should be noted that they are few in number, and their interpretation is not secure: many of these spaces were very small

and had a relatively narrow entrance, which means they were very badly lit and poorly connected to the outside world. Perhaps, they served for storage rather than for retail or manufacturing.

It should be noted that little or no evidence for metalworking and no kilns have been found at Olynthus, which emphasizes that the overall picture remains incomplete. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests an economy organized around small-scale family businesses and work groups consisting of only a few people. Typically, this also means that crafts were not very well visible in the city: the *pastas*-houses of Olynthus were inwardly oriented and the rooms where evidence for manufacturing was found were not generally situated close to the entrance. While there is evidence suggesting that some retail took place on the street, particularly close to the agora, the narrow entrances of the possible shops along the main road mostly concealed from passersby what was happening inside these spaces.

Most other cities from the classical Greek period are less fully known than Olynthus, but what evidence we have—from sites such as Locri Ephizephyrii, Halos, and Priene—generally conforms to this picture. Evidence for manufacturing is commonly found in a domestic context and generally with very little formal separation between spaces devoted to manufacturing and spaces with a predominantly domestic function.¹⁵ Potting seems to have been a partial exception: while kilns are attested in houses, most known pottery workshops do not seem related to domestic spaces.¹⁶ In general, however, very little building activity was undertaken to accommodate workshops. As a rule, use was made of existing spaces within the traditional domestic core of the house.

Things may, to some extent, have been different in Athens, but the domestic model was widespread here, too.¹⁷ For instance, the so-called house of Mykion and Menon, southwest of the Agora in the valley between the Areopagus and the Pnyx, combined domestic and commercial functions throughout its existence from the early fifth to the third century BCE, as is clear from the deposits found in the two cisterns in the house's central courtyard; at least at some point in its existence the building housed a sculptor and his workshop. While the evidence does not allow for a discussion of room use, it is clear from the finds that living and working were very closely integrated, and workrooms were small in size.¹⁸ Slightly different is the case of two houses in the so-called "Industrial District," in the same quarter, where in the fourth century two houses were merged and the smaller of the two subsequently turned into a metal workshop. Here, the separation between working and living was a bit more pronounced.

Crucially, however, for Athens there is evidence for other scenarios as well, albeit textual rather than archaeological. Aeschines, in his speech against Timarchos, highlights the existence of workshops, *ergastêria*, along the streets that could be (and were) used for any sort of commercial purpose—thus suggesting the widespread existence of purpose-built commercial facilities.¹⁹ There is also evidence for workshops operating on a larger scale. Well-known is the shield factory owned by the family of Lysias, though the number of 120 slaves it is traditionally thought to have employed may have been inflated.²⁰ Timarchos is presented by Aeschines as deriving income from an *ergastêrion* in which nine skilled shoemakers, all slaves, worked under the supervision of one boss; this suggests they worked together in a place of considerable size, though this need not have been a purpose-built facility.²¹ This is more likely to have been the case with the two *ergastêria* Demosthenes inherited from his father: these workshops, which Demosthenes himself describes as "no small affairs," included a couch factory employing twenty slaves and a rather lucrative sword factory with thirty-two or thirty-three skilled slaves.²² Work

groups of twenty people or more arguably were too big for a normal house. Thus, though they remain invisible in the archaeological record, it is likely there were at least some larger, purpose-built workplaces in Athens.

During the Hellenistic period, small-scale workshops situated in domestic contexts remained the norm throughout the Greek-speaking world. At Kassope, a small pottery workshop was installed in one of the houses in the third century; in Morgantina, on Sicily, there is evidence suggesting similar arrangements for the first century BCE.²³ In general, most cities were still dominated by internally oriented domestic complexes, so that even where the identification of workshops is difficult, it is true there are few alternative locations for craftsmen to work than in their own houses. At late Hellenistic Delos, however, the picture is quite different. It is true that there were workshops in domestic contexts too. For instance, in the House of Kerdon, next to the sanctuary of Apollo, a marble workshop was installed, and in one of the houses in the stadium quarter a perfume workshop has been identified.²⁴ Yet, crucially, there is significant evidence for purpose-built commercial facilities: many houses, throughout the city, had multi-functional commercial spaces attached to them that were directly (or only) accessible from the street, and some of these spaces show traces of work installations.²⁵ More importantly, over the course of the second century BCE, the so-called Quartier du Lac, immediately north of the Panhellenic sanctuary, transformed into a massive commercial quarter dominated by several large complexes containing many small units used for retail and manufacturing, including the “Agora of the Italians” and the so-called Monument of Granite, essentially a block-sized building consisting entirely of small shops (Figure 3.1). Some of the sanctuaries in the city also invested in small-scale facilities.²⁶

The commercialization of the urban landscape at Delos appears to have been a new phenomenon in the Aegean region and cannot be viewed apart from what happened to Delos after it was turned into a free port by the Romans in 166 BCE. Indeed, the commercialization of the Quartier du Lac and the southern harbor front probably is related directly to the pivotal role that Delos played in the late republican supply system of Roman Italy. This is less obviously true for the proliferation of commercial facilities elsewhere in the city, many of which may primarily have served the local population. It is possible that these facilities were similar to the *ergastêria* mentioned in literary texts for Athens, but the facade architecture of some of the houses with shops surrounding a somewhat monumentalized entrance corridor bears more resemblance to the *atrium* houses of central Italy.

ITALY FROM REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE

The emergence of an increasingly explicit architectural language for commercial facilities is most pronounced in Italy, and it can also be traced back longer than in the Greek-speaking world. A key element in the commercial landscape of the cities of Roman Italy is the *taberna*—a large rectangular room with a wide opening towards the outside world that could be used for a wide variety of commercial purposes, including retail and manufacturing. The *taberna* emerged in the republican period as the most common work environment in Roman Italy and it had a defining impact on the urban landscape. In contrast to almost all cities of the Greek and Hellenistic world, in Roman Italy a great deal of work was taking place in spaces that were not only directly accessible but also plainly visible from the street.



FIGURE 3.1 Delos, aerial view to the north, with a commercial structure, the Monument of Granite, at lower left. Photo: Alamy.

The early history of the Roman *taberna* is very hard to reconstruct and has not been well researched. Carandini has suggested that the sixth-century BCE *domus* on the Palatine had *tabernae* around the main entrance, but the evidence is inconclusive.²⁷ Similarly, Livy's anecdote that Tarquinius Priscus surrounded the Forum Romanum with *tabernae* is impossible to verify.²⁸ Yet it is clear that at some point during the middle republic onwards, the *taberna* became a common feature of Roman urbanism and was partially propagated by the Roman state, which invested massively in building long rows of *tabernae* along the *fora* of colonies—for example, the foundation of the colony at Paestum in 273 BCE probably was the starting point for the construction of not fewer than sixty *tabernae* around the four sides of the city's new forum.²⁹ From the late republic onwards there is a clear proliferation of *tabernae* in all known cities, particularly along urban thoroughfares, and *tabernae* begin to appear in a larger variety of contexts—around public buildings and in purpose-built commercial complexes consisting of rows of *tabernae*.

The emergence of the *taberna* made everyday work part of the public urban environment, but even though *tabernae* tend to be bigger in size and with better lighting than comparable facilities in the Greek and Hellenistic world, they are too small for workshops operating on a larger scale. However, at Pompeii, such larger workshops did eventually emerge and were predominantly situated in houses. Yet in contrast to the small domestic workshops at Olynthus, Athens, or elsewhere in classical and Hellenistic Greece, the construction of these workshops was much more capital-intensive and sometimes went hand in hand with major structural changes to houses. This is particularly clear in the case of some of Pompeii's large bakeries. For instance, the construction of bakery VI 3, 3.27–8 (Figure 3.2) necessitated the construction of a roof above the former back yard, and, probably, a reduction of the size of the *tablinum* (g) and the room south of it.³⁰ The house did not lose its domestic function, but was completely reorganized to accommodate the

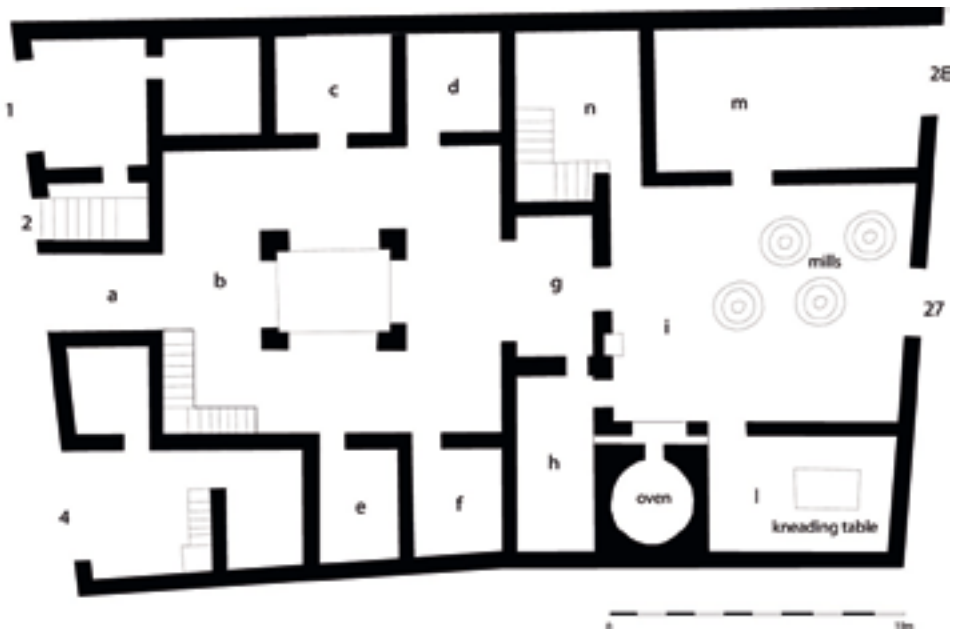


FIGURE 3.2 Plan of House VI 3, 3.27–8 with bakery, Pompeii. Image: Miko Flohr.

workshop. These large workshops, which had to be carefully planned due to constraints given by the space available, also appear rather well organized. In bakeries, there often is a rudimentary operational sequence where the flour, the dough, and the bread moved from room to room in a more-or-less logical order.³¹ In Pompeii's medium-sized fulling workshops, there was a linear sequence from fulling tubs to rinsing basins to finishing equipment. These traces of, albeit rudimentary, spatial rationalization also point to an increasingly formal division of labor, though work groups remained relatively small and seemingly consisted of people belonging to the same household.³²

Unfortunately, large domestic workshops are only known from Pompeii. This may be due in part to the quality of the Pompeian evidence, but perhaps the size of the Pompeian economy and the scale of urbanism at Pompeii also played a role. Nevertheless, the proliferation of *tabernae* along urban streets seems to have become the norm in Italy by the early imperial period. A case in point is the very small city of Saepinum in Samnium, which is perhaps the smallest well-known urban settlement in Roman Italy. The two streets of Saepinum are lined with *tabernae*, but the houses to which these *tabernae* belong are much smaller and mostly have just one *taberna*, rather than two or more. In size, they resemble the strip-buildings common in Roman Europe (Figure 3.3).³³ The only parallel to the large domestic workshops at Pompeii is a tannery, which is part of a small *atrium* house, the main workroom being directly connected to the *atrium*. Unfortunately, the complex has not been fully excavated, so essential information about the context of the production process is unknown, but in general, the complex seems to be on a much smaller scale than is the norm at Pompeii. Like at Pompeii, however, work was a highly central and visible component of urban life. In other words, even in very small cities in early imperial Italy, the spatial environment in which work took place was fundamentally different from what prevailed in the Greek world of the classical and Hellenistic periods.



FIGURE 3.3 Saepinum, small *atrium* house with *taberna* on the street. Photo: Miko Flohr.

Urbanism at Ostia and Rome was of an entirely different order than anywhere else in Roman Italy, and to some extent, it had been from rather early on. From the late republic onwards, the harbor area of Rome and the urban periphery of Ostia saw the construction of large public warehouses, *horrea*, which, though primarily devoted to storage, also were everyday work environments for traders and, to some extent, retailers. Complexes like the vast second-century BCE Porticus Aemilia at Rome, or the early imperial *horrea* of Hortensius at Ostia with its many small storage rooms, were beehives of commercial activity throughout the year, though they were workplaces characterized by people on the move rather than by static work groups. The late first-century upgrade of Rome's harbor system led to developments that multiplied the number of such buildings in Ostia and increased their scale. Crucially, the following building boom of the Trajanic and Hadrianic period led to large projects of commercial investment that created a number of workshops on a scale and of a complexity unparalleled in the Mediterranean before the Industrial Revolution. The large fulling workshops and bakeries of imperial Ostia occupied anywhere from thirty to a hundred people, who spent their days in large production halls away from the street.³⁴ These purpose-built structures were rationally organized, with different parts of the hall devoted to different phases in the production process. In the fulling workshops of Ostia (Figure 3.4), relatively advanced water technology was used to guarantee the efficiency of the work flow. In the multi-basin rinsing complexes, clothes to be washed out went stepwise from one side of the complex to the other, while water flowed in the opposite direction, so that the clothes moved from relatively dirty to fresh water. Rudimentary finishing facilities were concentrated around the mouth of the water supply; treading stalls, where clothes were soaped with chemicals, were placed in long rows around the remaining three sides of the rinsing complex so that these stalls were very close to the "dirtiest" basin.³⁵ It would seem that these large-scale workshops

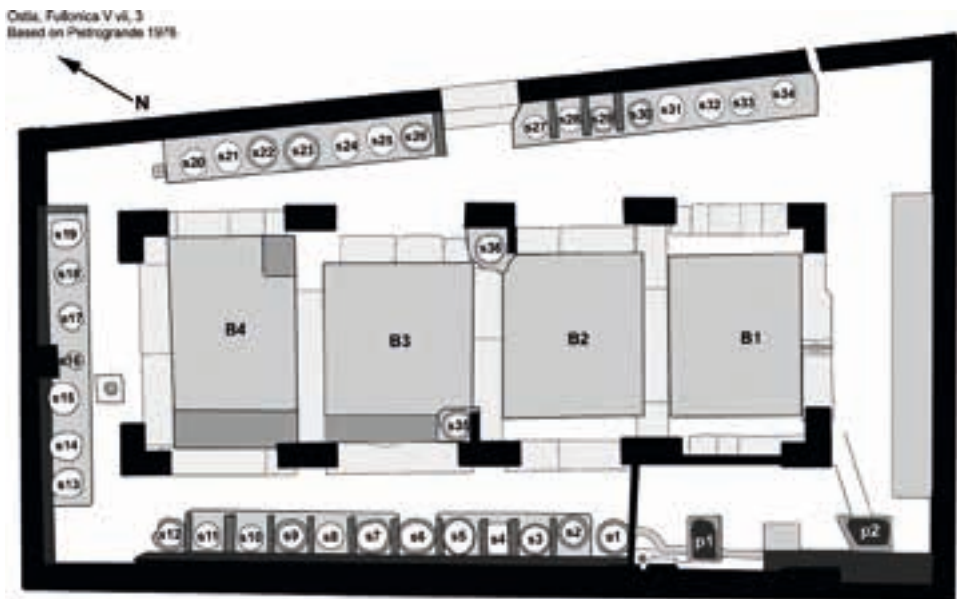


FIGURE 3.4 Plan of workshop for fulling wool on the Via degli Augustali, Roman Ostia. Image: Miko Flohr.

had a factory-like social atmosphere on the shop floor, in sharp contrast to most other work environments in the classical world: most people would do easy, repetitive tasks; they barely could develop a relation with the product they were making; and their daily work was mostly invisible to the outside urban community. As these workshops lacked living accommodations, these large work groups were probably recruited from numerous different places and did not belong to the same household. The dark, loud work environment would have prohibited easy social interaction. Some of the models developed by Marx and Durkheim for the industrial world appear easily applicable to these production halls.³⁶

These large workshops are significant in that they highlight the degree to which the upper limit of investment and complexity had increased in the Roman imperial period. Yet at the same time, workshops on this scale do not seem to have spread significantly beyond Rome and Ostia, though a relatively large fulling workshop of the Ostian type has been found underneath the Piazza della Signoria at Florence.³⁷ There may have been more “production halls” in the other large cities of the imperial period, but we have no evidence for them—either in Italy, or elsewhere in the Roman Empire—and in general nothing about the architecture and urbanism of these cities suggests there were ever people investing in manufacturing on this scale. This is not necessarily surprising; rather, it confirms that the Roman metropolis was exceptional.

ROMAN AFRICA IN THE IMPERIAL PERIOD

Moreover, what is true for Rome, may, on a different level, be true for Roman Italy as a whole. A case in point is the evidence from Roman Africa. Though the cities of Africa Proconsularis and Mauretania have not been excavated and published to the standard of Pompeii and Ostia—particularly in respect to their less monumental remains—several cities have been excavated down to ancient levels and while the quality of recording and reporting is problematic some basic features of their architecture are known. In most of these cities, it is therefore possible to discuss, in very general terms, their commercial landscapes, and some of these appear to be strikingly different from the cities of Roman Italy.

One of the best-documented cases is the city of Sabratha, which was excavated beginning in 1911 by Italian archaeologists and studied by a British team after the Second World War. More recently, Andrew Wilson analyzed the commercial landscape of the city, with a particular focus on the many fish-salting establishments that can be identified throughout the city’s urban area. His case study of *insula* II.10 aptly highlights both the limited dimensions of these workshops and their relatively secluded nature—they were accessible, but not easily visible from the street.³⁸ Moreover, what is notable from the plan of the *insula* is the almost haphazard nature of the architectural context: these workshops were not part of neatly structured domestic buildings or of well-designed commercial complexes, but more or less organically grown conglomerates of small, mostly nondescript units. The dating of these workshops is problematic, but nevertheless their remains make clear that while the public monumental landscape of Sabratha saw significant growth in the imperial period, this development was not matched by an increase in scale of the city’s commercial landscape.³⁹

Particularly notable is the relative paucity of *taberna*-like facilities in many excavated cities of Roman Africa. Contrary to Italy, there were no *fora* in Roman Africa that were surrounded by long rows of *tabernae*. While this has sometimes been explained

as reflecting a difference in the nature of the *forum* between Africa and the rest of the Roman West, it more probably reflects the less overtly commercial character of the public landscape of African cities in general.⁴⁰ A good example is the Grande Rue which connected the two *fora* of Cuicul, and which arguably was the busiest road of the city.⁴¹ Surrounded by porticos on both sides, it was heavily monumentalized, a highly attractive location for any form of commerce. Yet of the two houses on the northeast side of the road only the house of Castorius had one possible *taberna*, and the House of the Duck had none.⁴² No *tabernae* were built along the street near the Temple of Genetrix, south of the *forum*, and while there was a market building on the north side of the *forum*, it was completely inwardly oriented and did not have any *tabernae* along the street. Further down the road, the House of Europa had three *tabernae* around the main entrance of its baths, but these take up only a small proportion of the long facade of the complex. On the opposite side of the road, the picture is roughly similar, and this relative lack of *tabernae* is not made up for along the other roads of the city. In Thugga, the main road leading up to the city's monumental *forum* also was surrounded by closed walls rather than by *tabernae*. Neither of these cities had anything resembling production halls or larger domestic workshops, though admittedly, especially at Thugga, a large part of the urban area remains unexplored.⁴³

In summary, the nature of workplaces in the known cities of Roman Africa is best explained by a model of limited risk and low levels of investment, which led to workshops operating on a very small scale. This also was the case in Timgad, a Trajanic foundation famous for its large concentration of presumed fulling workshops in the northeastern quarter of the city (see Figure 3.5). These workshops were generally situated in a room the size of a *taberna* and the



FIGURE 3.5 Aerial view of the Trajanic colony of Timgad in Algeria. The commercial quarter with workshops is visible at the bottom and a number of *tabernae* are visible along the colony's main streets. Photo: Brian Brake / Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images.

layout of the work installations suggests they were operated by small work groups of at most only five people, if not fewer.⁴⁴ They were clustered in a relatively remote part of the city in places where land prices presumably were relatively low and therefore these shops were not very visible. At the same time, however, *tabernae* were more common at Timgad than they were in the other African cities discussed here, and though the *tabernae* of Timgad often had a narrower opening than their counterparts in Italy, some of the streets appear to have been rather densely commercialized. Particularly striking is the difference with Cuicul, since both cities share similar origins as veteran settlements. Perhaps these shops emerged simply because Timgad had a larger consumer market.

A remarkable exception to the general picture in Roman Africa is Volubilis in the far southwest of Mauretania Tingitana. Volubilis not only has private architecture on a much larger scale than is visible in the cities of Africa Proconsularis and Numidia, but also contains long rows of shops along the city's main north–south road, most of which were part of the domestic buildings in the adjacent house-blocks.⁴⁵ Moreover, many of the peristyle houses on both sides of the road included workshops, mainly oil mills and bakeries (see Figure 3.6). Most of these domestic workshops were very small, but others rivalled the examples of Pompeii in size and complexity. For instance, the oil mill in the House of the Columns consisted of no fewer than four rooms. The house of the Bronze Herms included a large oil mill in its northern part and a two-room bakery in its west corner. It is unclear why the picture at Volubilis is so different from elsewhere, but it may be noted that the association of so many houses with workshops related to food processing suggests that the people to whom these houses belonged based their wealth on landownership and used their urban houses to process their yields.



FIGURE 3.6 Reconstructed installation for pressing olives in a house at Volubilis, Roman province of Mauretania Tingitana (Morocco). Photo: Juergen Ritterback / Getty Images.

ROMAN EUROPE

Beyond the Mediterranean, in Roman Europe, small-scale workplaces appear to have remained the norm, both in cities and in smaller settlements. Of course, Roman Europe is a different world from the Roman Mediterranean and known to us in a very different way. Cities were smaller and fewer in number and were generally dominated by relatively small domestic buildings. There have been few large-scale excavations and almost nothing remains visible in situ. This is largely made up for by both the much higher standards of recording and reporting and a longer tradition of interest in the evidence for crafts and trade than in the Mediterranean. All in all, we are reasonably well informed about what the workshops of Roman Europe looked like and how they were positioned in their urban context.

There are a few places where we can get an especially good view of how work was situated in the urban environment and in what kind of contexts it took place. Of the larger cities, Augusta Raurica (Kaiseraugst, Switzerland) is perhaps best known. Here, house blocks in several parts of the city have revealed evidence for metal manufacturing and glass working. Most workshops appear to have consisted of only one room and were generally part of small- to medium-sized buildings, though there are no direct links between workshops and houses, as in Pompeii. For instance, the bronze workshops in *insulae* 30 and 31 close to the *forum* were situated in medium-sized commercial rooms on the corner of a house block and presumably took light and fresh air from the street, thus exposing everyday work to outsiders in the public space.⁴⁶ A monumental peristyle was constructed at a later date next to the bronze workshop in *insula* 30, suggesting that the workshop did not pose so great a nuisance as to prevent this from happening. Both in these workshops and in the glass workshops elsewhere in the city, the size of the work installations was modest, suggesting they were operated by very small work groups organized around a single master craftsman.⁴⁷ An important difference between the larger cities of Roman Europe and those of Roman Africa is that *taberna*-like facilities are considerably more common, particularly around *fora*, but also elsewhere in the city. This is also true for Augusta Raurica, which had long rows of *tabernae* along the two long sides of its forum, and a row of shops along the city's main street belonging to the so-called *Frauenthermen*.⁴⁸

In smaller settlements, the picture is for the most part similar. For instance, in Gaul, the (improvised) *forum* at Alésia had a row of *tabernae* along its north side and the artisan quarter east of it consisted of very small buildings that combined domestic and artisanal functions—particularly metalworking.⁴⁹ The very well-excavated *vicus* at Oberwinterthur consisted mostly of strip-buildings which combined a small shop or workshop on the street with living accommodations behind it, and sometimes an additional workshop in the back.⁵⁰ MacMahon has evoked a similar picture for the shops and workshops of cities like Verulamium, Silchester, and Caerwent, suggesting that retail and manufacturing were very central in the urban landscapes of Roman Britain.⁵¹ In general, it appears that dedicated workplaces became common in cities and settlements throughout Roman Europe and that living and working were a bit more rigidly separated, but in the urban context, there is no evidence of workplaces on the scale found in Italy.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a rough overview of the historical development of workplaces in antiquity. Not all regions have been given equal coverage, particularly in the Roman east, but

this also reflects the state of the debate and of the evidence. For (Roman) Asia Minor, very little is known beyond pottery production, and only at a limited number of sites.⁵² For Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, it has been shown that the papyri contain relevant information about the location and context of workshops, but little that is specific to the spatial setting of everyday work.⁵³ However, the few glimpses that we get do not seem to contradict the overall picture sketched here. Surveying the evidence, two trends can be highlighted. On the one hand, there appears to be a trend towards an increasingly formal articulation of workplaces and an increasingly rich architectural vocabulary for commercial space. Pivotal, in this respect, is the emergence of the *taberna* in (probably) Roman Italy, and its subsequent spread over larger parts of the Roman world, though it remains less common in Roman Africa than in Roman Europe and its diffusion in the Roman east is essentially unknown. On the other hand, there is the appearance of work environments on an increasingly large scale in domestic contexts, but also in the shape of purpose-built production halls with a relatively streamlined operational sequence. On the whole, the second development is geographically and chronologically considerably more restricted than the first—there is very little direct evidence for medium- to large-sized urban workshops outside Roman Italy, with the exception of Athens in the classical period.

The question, of course, is what this all meant for the people involved and their place in society. First of all, it is important not to underestimate the effect of the *tabernae* on the social landscape of Roman cities. While it is in the first place true that *tabernae*, because of their locations on the street fronts of houses and their wide openings, facilitated commercial interaction between professionals and potential customers, they also provided craftsmen and retailers with an immensely powerful social platform on which they could publicly negotiate their position in the community. In the many small workshops within *tabernae*, craftsmen could be *seen* while at work and so could be associated (and associate themselves) with their craft and their professional skills. Moreover, even what remained unseen could be visualized on the facade, and some of the preserved facade paintings at Pompeii and Herculaneum show that this possibility was actively acted upon. A public professional identity was something that, in large parts of the Roman world, could be, and often was, negotiated on the shop floor. In the Greek world of the classical and Hellenistic periods, this had been much more difficult, as the work process was often invisible.

It is also important to note that in the large majority of cases throughout antiquity work groups remained very small in size, especially outside the largest cities. The size of archaeologically identifiable workshops in the smaller sites strongly suggests that work groups of ten people or more were exceptional, and the spatial layout of many workshops in just one or two rooms meant that communication lines on the shop floor remained very short. This fostered a socially cohesive and communicative atmosphere in which it was easy for work groups to function socially as a group. It also made it easy to organize the internal group hierarchy around the central figure of the master craftsman, who would easily be able to manage directly the everyday work process himself, without the need for more complex shop floor hierarchies—though that does not mean that such hierarchies did not or could not exist. To some extent, then, the central role assigned in the textual evidence to such master craftsmen was firmly rooted in the everyday spatial circumstances in which work took place.

All in all, this leaves the large production halls in Rome and Ostia, and perhaps the large workshops in Athens, too, in a quite exceptional position, but this does not make them irrelevant for this history of work in antiquity. Quite to the contrary, these

workshops highlight that under specific economic circumstances, even in the otherwise decidedly preindustrial world that was antiquity, work arrangements could arise that in scale, rationalization, and contextualization have no closer parallel than the factories of the early industrial period, even if, in general, no source of energy was used other than muscle power. Arguably, this highlights that the history of work in antiquity was, in the end, dependent on investment strategies, and these differed according to the needs, challenges, and opportunities of specific local economies; even if cultural values and social structures played a role in how the economy was shaped, the system as a whole certainly was flexible enough to accommodate variation and innovation if circumstances warranted.