

The Agora and the Forum

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Abstract

In this article on the agora and the forum, we search for the morphological and typological foundations of the public square.

Through a brief historical analysis of urban and social phenomenon in Greece and Rome, compositional and architectural aspects will be examined to determine the design of the agora and the forum in their various configurations.

The fundamental steps of the evolution of the two models of public space are determined, starting with their origins. We will follow the different phases that allowed the progressive affirmation of the agora as a public space designed *a priori* and delimited by a continuous and homogeneous architectural assemblage. Furthermore, all systematisation processes of the forum's implementation rules will be clarified, such as the foundational and civilizational landmarks of the Roman city.

This article's aim is to focus on the importance of public space typologies in the socio-economic context of the two civilizations, finding time to "merge the two models" for their final typological characterisation as a favoured place for the celebration and affirmation of imperial and colonial power.

Reading this short research is useful to open a field of analysis on the processes of transformation of the public square throughout history, and to understand how this model today represents a favoured public space that characterises Western urban culture.

Keywords: square, agora, forum, public space.

THE AGORA

Chronology of Greek Civilization

Ancient Period: VII century BC – half VII century BC

– The Doric Temple and the experience of contemplative architecture in dialogue with nature; the Ionian Temple.

Classical Period: Half way through V century BC – end of IV century BC

– Athens lives under the power of Pericles, the Athenian Acropolis and physics. [tr1]

– Hellenistic Period: end of IV century BC – I century BC

– End of the *polis* and Roman occupation. (Mazzariol; Pignati 1981: 20, 54, 89)

The city and Greek society

Greek civilization developed over eight centuries in a vast area of the Mediterranean Sea, bordered to the east by the coast of Turkey, encompassing the Greek and Italian peninsulas until the French coast.

From the VIII century BC, the foundational process of new cities coincides with the occupation of specific places, chosen for pre-existing Mycenaean settlements or in strategic places rich in natural resources that are geographically located in a dominant position. On the Greece peninsular, all cities lived in relative isolation and autonomy, being fed by religious worship, law and government. Alliances and momentary associations favoured common interests to define joint defence in view of the possibility of an external attack. “This is all the result of a social organisation in which religion establishes not only the relationship with the transcendent, but also represents the management elements of collective life: the gods govern men, decide alliances, wars and awaken love (...)” (Denti, 1985: 26).

In each city foreigner access to temples and deities was prevented, such was the law of hate and combat in force against them. After a victory, the losers from other cities never gained full citizenship status and were barred from participating in ceremonies and sacrifices for the celebration of the gods and the public home.

In this context, the political and administrative dimensions were exclusive to the cities, and the formalisation of a single State or empire did not exist; “this is because religion was formed from each city body, without the possibility of one associating with another other. Isolation was the law of the city” (Coulange 1988: 251).

To express the concept of city and State at the same time, the Greeks used the term “*polis*”, a concept associated with an organised society that is structured and autonomous from a politico-administrative and religious point of view.

Recent studies report that Greek and Roman society were once the most urbanised in the world. Hundreds of cities formed between VIII and IV century BC with an average of 5,000-10,000 inhabitants. “Some researchers said that, overall, in the Greek world in fourth century BC, three million lived in small clusters and villas” (Morachiello, 2011: 52). On the continent, peninsulas and the Aegean islands, cities developed without a predetermined pattern, following independent structures of irregular design. In this context, from a conservative principle, landmarks in the territory and pre-existing constructions were built on, such as platforms on terraces, paths and even sanctuaries, determining the rules of urban sprawl.

As a rule, the foundation of new cities took advantage of previously urbanised places, understood as privileged places from the point of view of geography (domain and control of the territory) and available natural resources (proximity to water and fertile plains). In other cases, where previous civilizations had not left marks, a careful analysis of geographical and natural resource conditions determined the choice of place (city of the Corinthians, for example). Let us follow some steps of Aristotle’s *Politics*: “(...) We have warned that the city must have links with the land and the sea; moreover, easy communication with all the territory should be made possible. It is desirable that the city has a high and prominent position, taking into account four key objectives: first of all, basic necessities, corresponding with conditions of hygiene (...) topographical conditions of the city, which should promote civil administration and strategic defence needs (...) have an abundance of springs to avoid the collection of rainwater in large tanks, avoiding water scarcity in times of isolation during periods of war (...)” (Aristotle, ed. 1978: 64).

For the design of new cities, the beginning was the subdivision of land into equal plots with regular geometry for urbanisation and cultivation. (Segesta, Selinunte, Taranto, Megara Hyblaea, o Agrigento) [fig. 1 and 2].

[tr1] check Portuguese version

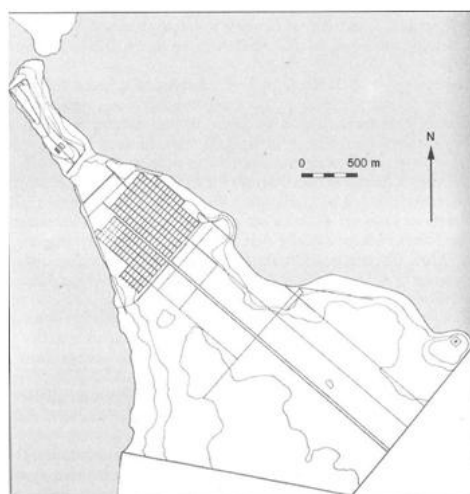


Figure 1. Restoration of the planimetric of Taranto (graphic elaboration from F. Rizzi, Da Greco, 1992), Morachiello, Paolo – *La Citta Greca*. Editori Laterza, Bari, 2011 p.167.

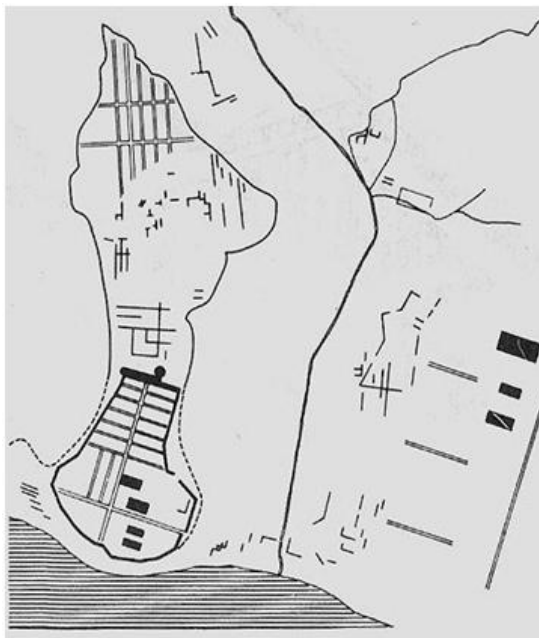


Figure 2. VI-V century BC Selinunte, from AAVV- *Lineamenti di storia dell'architettura*, Carucci Editori, Rome 1978, p.6.

Thus, the colonies in the VII and VI centuries BC witnessed the practice of designing cities in a fast and simple way, according to a rule that awaited systematisation.

The Agora

The agora in the Greek city was the heart of the *polis*, the favoured place for great assemblies, where the people took notice of the decisions of kings or chiefs of the aristocracy and deliberated over resolutions for full legitimacy, or where trade took place. “In almost every city an absolute necessity is the buying and selling of mutual necessities, being the most effective means for individual subsistence exchange, whose ultimate goal is the association of men in a political community”. This esplanade intended for business should then be “in a favourable position to the import of all products from land and sea” (Aristotle, ed. 1978: 65).

In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the term “agora” indicates an assembly and not the place where that assembly would take place. Homer uses this term to specify official meetings between the various components of a population to discuss the community’s destiny, the same that will later be called the ecclesial. After a few centuries, the term agora identifies the specific place where all people freely meet for many and various purposes, including to discuss and deliberate. Some steps of Herodotus’ book *Histories* describe the agora as the meeting place of citizens and foreigners, women and slaves, destined for the market and other events.

Up to the Hippodamian urban layouts, the location of the agora coincides with orographic and topographic choices (the choice of a flat surface with suitable dimensions for citizen

meetings together with an urban core, for example). Its design did not meet predefined geometric rules, and its form was of an irregular polygon.

The first agoras of the islands and the mainland were outdoor areas of the city bounded by lianas, mileposts or walls, near to sacred places like shrines in honour of the gods or founding heroes, and sometimes next to a pre-existing arcade, like in Assur or Corinth. Ephemeral timber structures occupied a part of the space and served daily vendors; the remaining space could be occupied by assemblies of citizens sitting on provisional wooden benches or on the side of a hill to watch festivities or poetry competitions in honour of a deity or hero. Often found in proximity to the most sacred and civil buildings: the prytaneum, a privileged place of the sacred fire of Hestia, patron goddess of the home. The prytaneum, consisting of one or more rooms for hosting distinguished foreign visitors, was a place for communal meals – the main ceremony of domestic and community services.

The first agora of Athens [fig.3] stretched along the north slope of Acropolis near the ancient prytaneum, consisting of a dirt road for racing and shows (*dromos*), an irregular plan without a pre-defined design. Other examples include Sparta, Corinth, Thebes, Tasso and many other cities of Sicily, Magna Graecia and North Africa. In all of them, the presence of representative buildings or areas with specific functions such as shrines, harbours, temples and tombs in honour of the a founder (*heroon*) or circular areas for dances (*orquestral*), mark the first signs of more complex and articulated structures. The agora gradually came to be defined by permanent stone buildings in order to host markets, cultural activities and even a council and judiciary that lead the city-state, near the heart of the community's public life of the *chorá* (the countryside surrounding the *polis*). This progressive occupation of the esplanade of the agora's limits was often significant, such as Megara Hyblaea, a free area of about 13,000 m² when founded, which was 4,700m² by the end of the process.

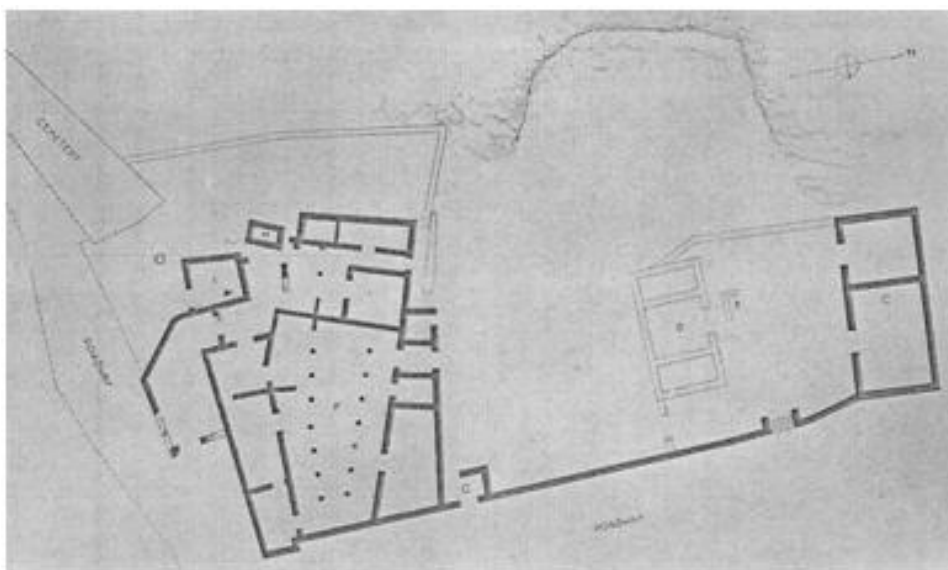


Figure 3. The Agora of Athens at the beginning of the IV century BC. From Roland Martin – *l'Agora Greque*, E. de Boccard, Paris, 1951, p. 262.

With the beginning of the VII century BC and the need to accommodate a variety of commercial and institutional activities, the Stoa arises (Megara Hyblaea) [fig.4], an elongated rectangular or L-shape gallery defined by a front elevation with a colonnade and masonry wall as well as by a continuous succession of square areas, covered by a wooden roof structure, which was able to receive cultural and economic activities. Some cases simply served as a cover for the protection of citizens from sun and rain, or as a Propylaea for access, as in the case of the northerly stoa of Megara Hybeia, where an opening with three stone columns is found, making it a crossing space of a north-south direction. Flexibility, adaptation to different locations and implementation of facilities were its main features.

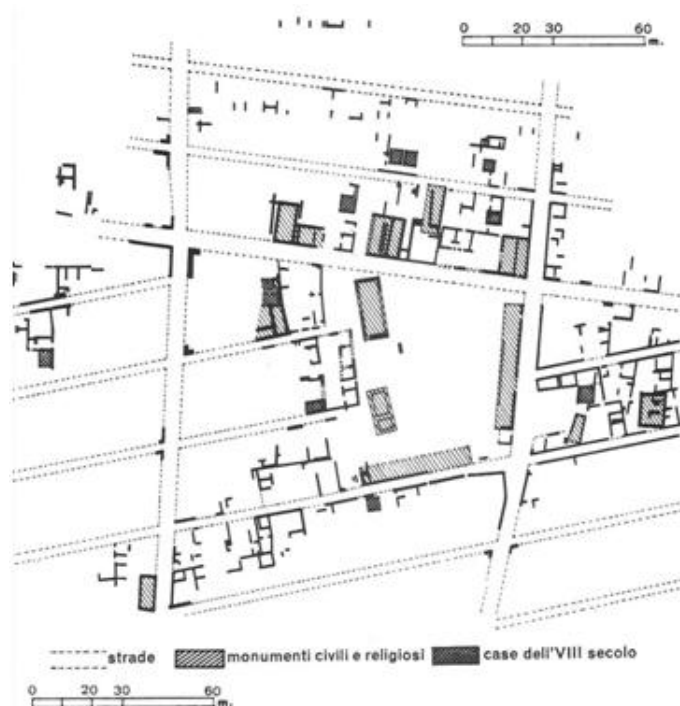


Figure 4. Megara Hyblaea, from Roland Martin, *Architettura Greca*, Electa, Milano, 2007, p. 144.

The new and progressive configuration of the agora, dictated by the presence of this set of new buildings, allowed the “empty” limits of the great esplanade to be redefined, establishing new relationships of scale, new visual references and new “tensions” between parties (Poseidon, Assos) [fig.5 and 6], making it more complex and articulated.

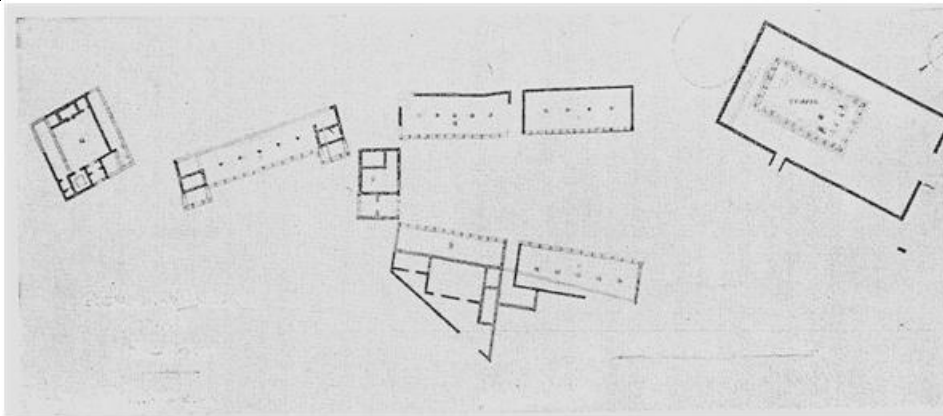


Figure 5. The agora and sanctuary in Poseidon, from Roland Martin – *l'Agora Greque*, E. de Boccard, Paris, 1951, p. 243.

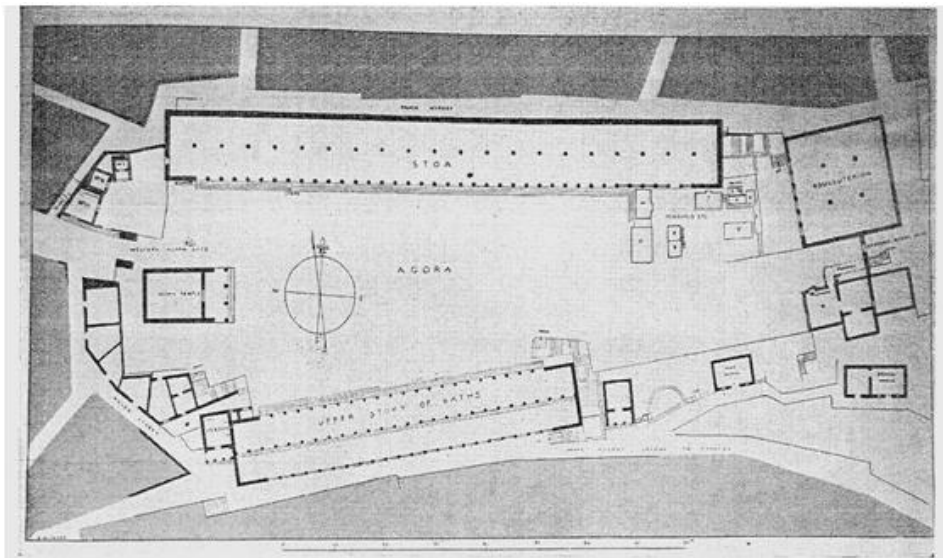


Figure 6. Agora of Assos, from Roland Martin – *l'Agora Greque*, E. de Boccard, Paris, 1951, p. 428.

The centroid of the main activities of the *polis* move about the empty esplanade to its boundaries. It is the beginning of a process of affirmation of a model of public space, responsible for the characterisation of all urban centres of Western cities.

The Agora of Athens

The Panathenaic ways were more than a simple urban route, and represented a regional link between some of Greece's most sacred places of worship. At the same time, they performed the function of a sacred route, an expression of reconciliation with the ancient forces and functioned as the main artery of Athens, where commercial and political activities took place. The position, the presence and size of the Parthenon on the top of Acropolis only made sense from the arrangement of the Panathenaic routes [fig.7].



Figure 7. The city of Athens and monumental centres of the V century BC, from AAVV– *Lineamenti di storia dell'architettura*, Carucci.

In the fifth century BC, with the building of the Temple of Hephaisteion in honour of the gods Athena and Hephaestus, protectors of the arts and crafts, one new process of defining a spatial and hierarchical order for the great esplanade of the agora was open, crossing diagonally with the Panathenaic routes. By building from 420 BC the Stoa of Zeus, the *bouleuterion* (Deliberative Council of Elders) and cylindrical Tholos at the base of the temple, we see a confirmation of the new geometric principle stated by the structural axis of Hephaisteion. Even after the construction of the temple of Apollo in the Hellenistic period, which further densified space at the base of the temple, the structural axis is left free, keeping all its catalysing presence in the empty space of the agora.

With the construction of the new South Stoa and the Stoa of Attalos in a rotated position in relation to the axis of the monumental complex of Hephaisteion, the general rules of complex composition were changed. With these two great colonnade structures, the agora takes on a new geometry of a more dynamic trapezoidal form that created great “tension” between its parts. (Bacon, 1956: 128)

It is therefore evident that we are facing a array that will define form over the ages; it is not a preconceived and stable structure from a geometric point of view, but it is something more dynamic and open to new relations “between masses” and sensitive in defining limits, an experience of public space very different from something that later features regular Hellenistic agoras and structured Roman forums.

The vast esplanade of the Athenian agora, surrounded by representative buildings of political power and other spontaneous occupations (Stoa), was the favoured place of the convergence of citizens for meetings, assemblies and markets. This space hosted all the civic activities of the *polis*: there they taught and discussed the main issues of the age. It was the place for the main processions, justice was administered there, it was the main market and place of exchange, as well as being where heroes were celebrated [fig.8].

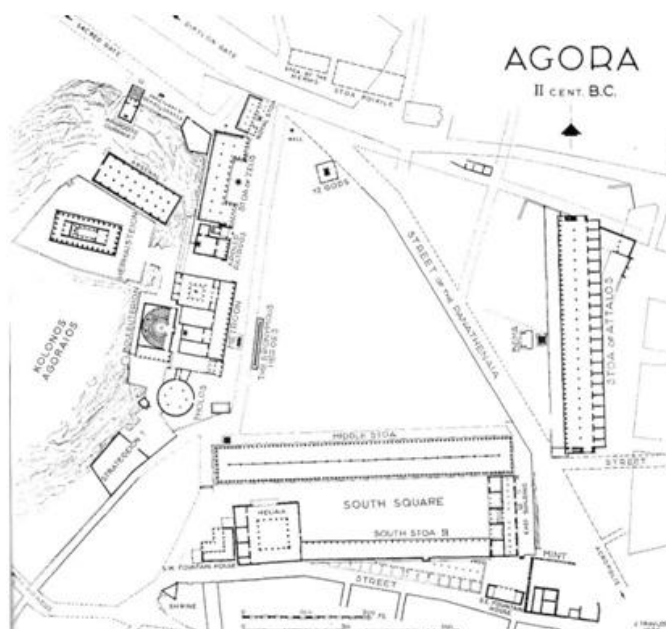


Figure 8. The Agora of Athens at the end of the II century BC, (from J.Travlos)de Gros Pierre e Torelli Mário, – *Storia dell'Urbanistica, il mondo romano*. Editori Laterza, Bari, 2010 p.423.

By the II century AD, Roman domination and pressures from the growth of civic life created the densification of agora space, determining a progressive misrepresentation of the great emptiness. The Temple of Ares, a series of fountains and statues, and the large Odeon of Agrippa now filled the agora space, creating dissonance and compositional imbalances as well as compromising the elegance and clarity of classical and Hellenistic structures.

With these new buildings, the Romans had broken the spirit of Athenian community life and their freedom [fig.9].

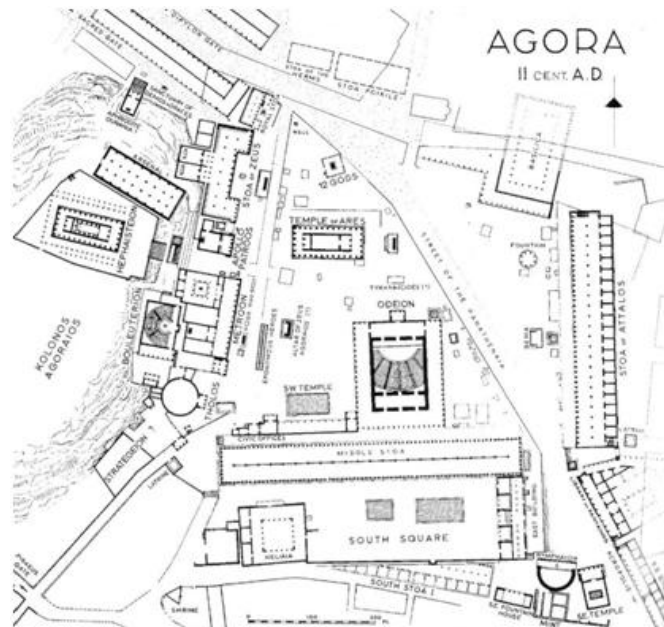


Figure 9. The Agora of Athens, from J.Travlos Gros Pierre and Mario Torelli – *Storia dell'Urbanistica, il mondo Roman*. Editori Laterza, Bari, 2010 p.424.

Miletus and Hippodamian layouts

In 494 BC, the city of Miletus is destroyed by Persians and is then rebuilt from the year 474 BC.

Taking advantage of the tripartite articulation of the Peninsula, and probably from the remains of previous layouts, citizens subdivided the area into three neighbourhoods, cut into square and rectangular blocks according to a regular grid, which were connected by an L-shaped central public area that established contact with the two ports.

The tradition of this orthogonal layout had already been in place in Amarna and El Lahun (Egypt), and Anatolia respectively.

It is in this context that the figure of Hippodamus – not directly as the author of the Miletus city plan, but as a central figure in urban design at the time, was described in *Politics* by Aristotle as a much evolved citizen – wise and an excellent speaker. He popularised the subdivision rule of urban areas into square blocks or in a rectangular plan. This planimetric system corresponds to the transposition in the physical space of fundamental principles of social order. “Order is for the good of nature” says Aristotle, so every law that seeks order in society is good.

Justice and governance in recognition of citizens’ right under the law promoted and fed social order.

The urban grid enabled a spatial order in the expanding cluster and at the same time allowed each citizen to have a plot of ground to build and cultivate equal to their neighbour, with access routes and salubrity guaranteed.

A fair, practical and elementary rule of easy application anywhere, a plan that is not limited to one place, but rather, something more ambitious and universal.

For the first time, the regular layout considers public space (the agora of excellence) not as a remnant place resulting from an *a priori* choice, but as a worthy autonomous entity to be treated independently, whilst being part of an extremely regimented complex system.

Following the evolution of the agora of Miletus over five centuries, the progressive “closure” of the limits of the empty space are witnessed with the introduction of a portico next to the stoa and suppression of the north-south road axis, creating a single closed gallery element with two access points next to the old axis [fig.10].

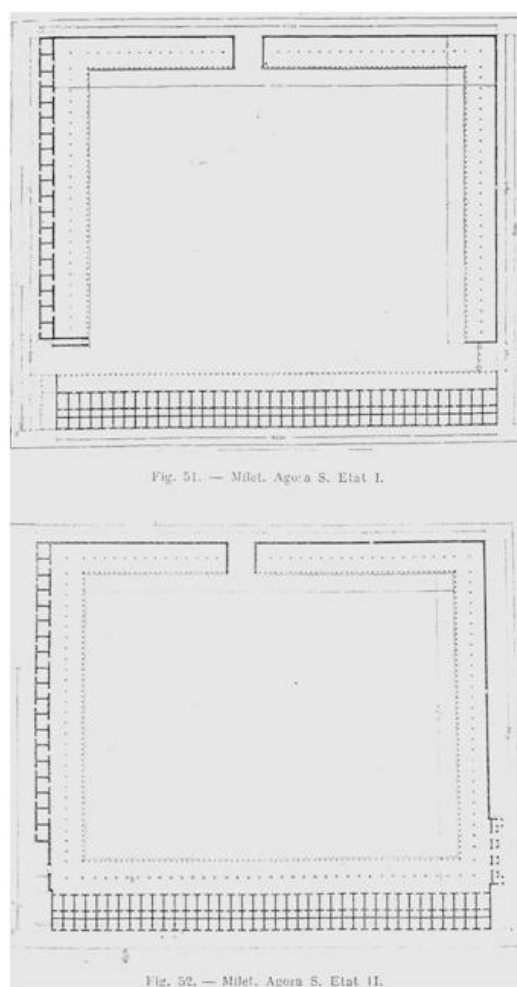


Figure 10. The Agora of Miletus, phase I and II, from Roland Martin – *l'Agora Greque*, E. de Boccard, Paris, 1951, p. 39.

From this moment, the agora leaves its space configuration defined by loose and independent elements of an irregular and open form, asserting itself as the central place of the most closed of cities, bounded by continuous galleries without changes of scale and volume, part of a dense and repetitive urban system, a fruit of the established social order.

In 444 BC under the will of Pericles, the colonies of Thurium and Crotona are founded, following Hippodamian principles and rules. And in 432 BC, the expansion of the city of Olinto was seen following the same principles.

In the cities that did not follow the Hippodamian plan, the stoas positioned themselves in an oblique or parallel way to the boundary of the agora. In the case of colonial cities that observed regular urban grid plans, stoas respected rigorous alignments defined by the plan, being placed as an alternative to private allotments and dense inhabited areas.

The agora in the Hellenistic era

In the Hellenistic period, the political reality of the *polis* disappears, leaving in its place a multicultural society: "For the first time in human history, we are facing a truly international and mixed civilization (...) this levelling of national cultures gives Hellenism its eminently modern character (...) The new state promotes the formation of a new bourgeois class, legitimised by its economic power, without distinguishing between race and caste" (Hauser, 1956: 128).

In this socioeconomic framework art institutionalises itself. New cultural centres are created that are able to receive different artistic and architectural currents coming from the east, and soon, with a progressive intellectualisation of artwork, new foundations are created for the revival of ancient styles. With the systematisation of compositional rules, architectural theory was born, where, from this moment, the designers accompany the process of experimentation "to exceed the limits set in classical times".

Earlier in this era, the composition of the surrounding group of monuments and the large *terreiro* of the agora of Athens suffer a fundamental change. In classical times, all public places and sacred buildings functioned independently and free space was organised between them without much regularity. With the affirmation of the new culture based on the aesthetic transformation that demanded pictorial and artistic[tr2] effects beyond monumentality, the contamination of the arts compete in search of a new concept to drive the architectural and urban organism.

The buildings lose their autonomy, joining and integrating with each other; new regular porticos redefine the empty space and unify the entire architectural complex like a single "closing" space of the agora, pre-announcing the formal and typological definition of the forum.

[tr2] "plásticos" – check my word usage.

THE FORUM

Chronology of Roman Civilization

- Roman Republic: 509 BC-27 BC
- Augusta period: 27 BC-14 AD
- Roman Empire: until 476 AD (78 emperors)

City and Roman society

Roman architecture and urban planning are closely linked to political developments and military empires.

The first examples of classical architecture feeling the proximity can be seen in Etruscan architecture; however, the expansionist needs of the empire will bring Roman art and Greek architecture together to the point that, from that time – and especially with the conquest of the Greek world in 146 BC after the victory at Corinth – they never cease to instil their linguistic code of architecture.

The expansionary process of Rome begins in the period of the Republic from 396 BC with the conquest of Veii. The occupation of new territories is planned using two types of colonies: colonies with Latin law (Alba Fucens, Luceria, Cosa and others), farther from Rome and with urban forms and more defined policies, and Roman law colonies, which occupy the shores of the Tyrrhenian and the Adriatic Sea near the city of Rome, without political and administrative autonomy. The first solemn act for the foundation of the new Latin colony is the *sulcus primogenius* (sulcus and plough marking a wall), accompanied by the subdivision of the sacred areas of the public and the *limitatio* (the subdivision of land with parallel axes), whose exact centre is used for marking *cardo maximus* (with an east-west orientation) and is defined from the use of a *groma* (Greco-Etruscan instrument, comprising a stick and a cross).

Roman colonies (Ostia, 426 BC, Pyrgi, 264 BC) [Fig.11] of a strictly military nature without political and administrative autonomy, have the same structure based on *cardo* and *decumanus*, with a rectangular perimeter plan of defensive walls, smaller in relation to Latin colonies.

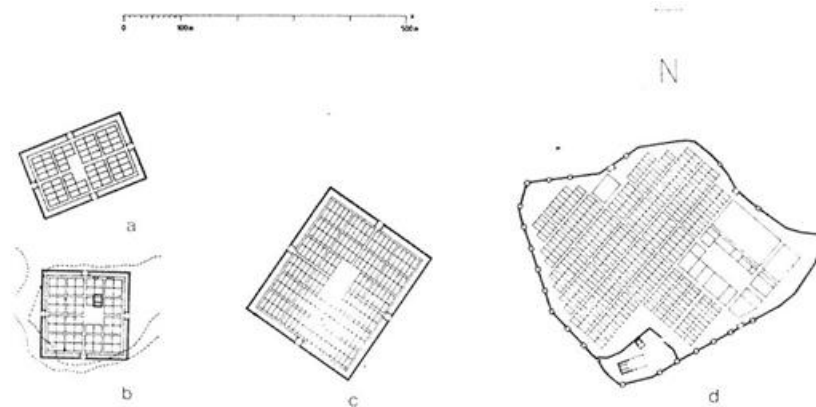


Figure 11. Structure of Ostia (a), Puteoli (b), Pyrgi (c) and Cosa (d), from von Hessbergde Gros Pierre and Torelli Mário, – *Storia dell'Urbanistica, il mondo romano*. Editori Laterza, Bari, 2010, p.159.

Urban layouts of Roman colonies confirm the theory of Frontino (*Strategemata IV*), and are in accordance with the Roman city, its rigid foundation and implementation of rules, which is the evocative model for the *castrum* (Roman encampment) and not the other way round. In fact, soldiers before camping and spending the night in lands of war did not dispense ceremonial rituals with the first act of placing the *vexillum* of the commander and the *groma*, which together would establish the *cardo maximum*, the first structuring axis of the system.

For the foundation of new cities in imperial-time provinces, the Romans used models that had already been used for Roman and Latin colonies, and adapted and scaled them according to need and topographical features. All new cities had a regular layout based on right-angled street grids, where architecture and urban planning were part of a single problem (Aosta and Timgad).

The forum, temple and basilica complex was a fixed and structuring element of the first imperial architecture in Western provinces.

The Roman Forum

The Latin word “*forum*” means completed space. The word “*foris*” is part of the same semantic family, and determines an external space “outside”.

In fact, Latin peoples called the forum a swampy area of ancient Rome, between Capitol and Palatine [Fig.12], outside of the small towns where the Romans used to meet for business activities and to exchange ideas. In this place the Via Sacra, a major route for sacred ceremonies and investiture of power exists. In the sixth century with the recovery of the area, and in the fifth century with the end of the monarchy, the big valley became the place for sacred religious spaces, meetings of people and senators, as well as for court sessions for the development of political and civil life. It was to be called the *Magnum Forum* (or the Roman Forum), which is distinguishable from other small

forums of the city and are designated as areas for markets. On the site, the buildings house present functions, as well as temples to confirm the sacredness of public acts.

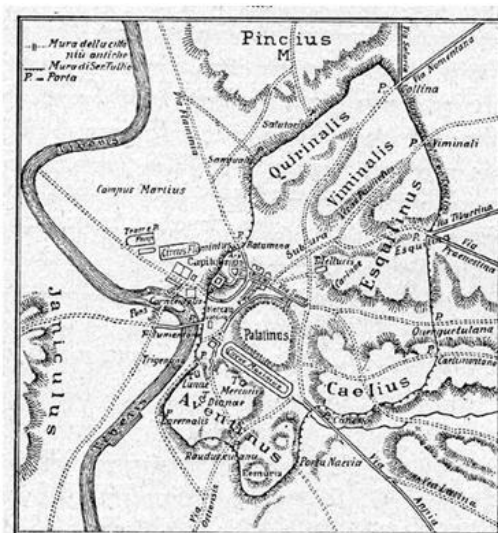


Figure 12. Rome in the VI century BC, <http://www.storiologia.it/universale/cronoroma/roma.html>

Its initial configuration included elongated trapezoids due to the initiative of independent judges and citizen who, in 179 and 170 BC respectively, promote the construction of the two main buildings of the forum: the Basilicas of Fulvia and Sempronia, intended for the administration of justice and trade [fig.13].

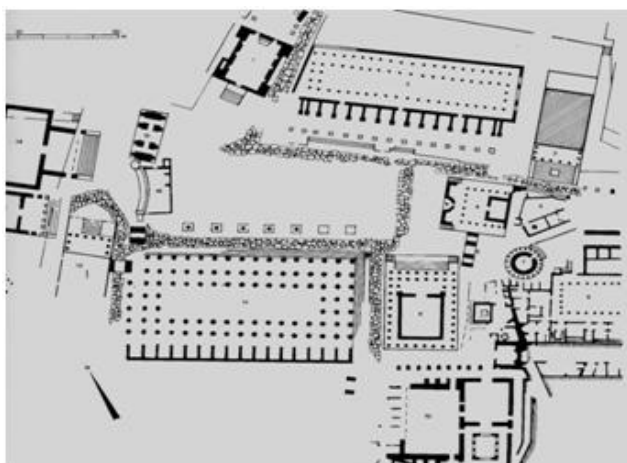


Figure 13. Rome, the Roman Forum, from Boethius and Ward-Perkins, 1970 – *Architettura Romana*, Electa, Milano, 2008, p. 45.

The Basilica from a typological point of view does not follow the array of the Greek stoa or basileios of the agora of Athens, but the large, open Regium atriumon which the basilica had been placed.

The monumental set left a large free area (*plateia*) designed to receive legislative assemblies with dignity.

With the dictatorial power of Silla and Cesar, the forum earns a new monumentality with the construction of Tabularium, which closes the large space to the north.

In the years following with the addition of a number of temples, the porticos that lined the renewed basilicas and the temple dedicated to Divo Giulio as a visual closure of the south side, foretell the typological structure of the imperial forums.

The Imperial Forums

In 54 BC, requirements from the planning of a new space next to the forum for the administration of justice determine the construction of the Forum of Caesar, consisting of independent buildings surrounded by a continuous colonnade, resembling the experiences of the Hellenistic agora.

Caesar's architects thought up a structure of symmetrical porticos along the two main sides of the large rectangular space, with the background along the axis of the space being dedicated to the temple of *Venus Genetrix*.

With the Forum of Augustus established in 2 AD, we witnessed an evolution of the whole typology of the previous Forum of Caesar: the rectangular layout is maintained, but this time flanked by two Hellenistic stoas, having at their ends two semi-circular spaces that dilate the gallery space in order to house the statues of the legendary heroes Romulo and Enea. This forum model earns a certain celebrative feeling and the architecture is shaped and designed to add magnificence and glory to the empire. References to Greek architecture are notorious, especially with regard to Pericleian art, which was understood by Augustus as the paradigmatic architectural lexicon to be exported throughout the empire.

The Forum of Vespasian, of a religious character, and the Forum of Nerva (or the Transitional Forum) from 97 AD were built for practical reasons, in order to complete the transitional area between the three forums and act as an entry passage to the Forum of Esquiline.

After the campaign against the Dacians, Emperor Trajan in 107 AD decided to build the largest and most sumptuous forum between Capitol and Quirinal, according to the project architect Apollodorus [fig. 14].

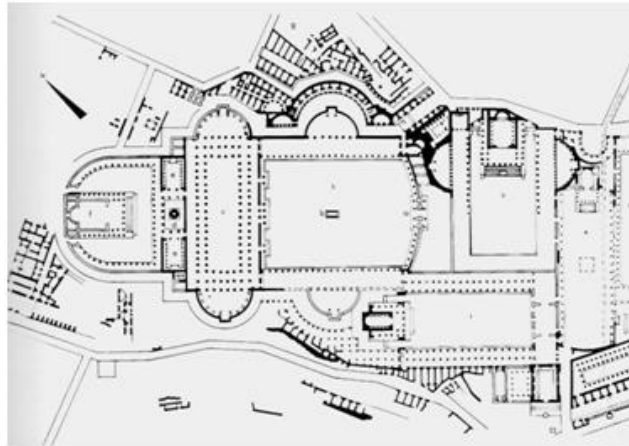


Figure 14. Imperial forums of Rome, from Boethius and Ward-Perkins, 1970 – *Architettura Romana*, Electa, Milano, 2008, p. 43.

The great Basilica Ulpia dominates the composition in a transversal direction, and serves as the background of the large, open marble space lined with galleries. This composition refers to the structure of the *principia*, the public squares of military encampments.

With the emperor's magnanimous act, two- and three-column rows were involved in the basilical space, intended for judicial acts and slave liberation ceremonies.

Four chambers were located along the lower sides of the basilica and the major longitudinal galleries respectively, enriching the spatial composition of the complex, expanding and enhancing the galleries with new semi-circular spaces for emperor statues.

The forum on the Italian peninsula and other provinces

The process of defining the forum outside of Rome and in the provinces as a sacred, multi-functional public space to service citizens and *civitas*, began with the consecration of the areas chosen as *atemplum*, subsequently the headquarters of large assemblies of citizens (*Comitium*), finalising their public-administrative vocation with the use of its spaces by the curia to house the headquarters of the local and regional senate (*Alba Fucens*) (Fontana; Morachiello, 2009: 90).

From the late II century BC, the Hellenistic model of the agora with porticos diffuses throughout Italy, with the typological origin of the forum *Locus celeberrimus*. This structure with porticos in single or double colonnades demarcates the vast esplanade, the *plateia* and rhythmically joins all administrative and religious buildings: the assembly, the curia, the administrative attachments, workshops and the basilica. This monumental complex annexes a temple placed by rule along the short side, and an array of statues and *monumenta* fulfil the politico-civic-administrative needs of the *civitas*.

The location of the forum in the urban areas of the provinces coincided as a rule with one of the focal points of the road routes, at the end or the intersection of the two main axes. Topographical features and the landscape relief determined, in other cases, the

location choice (Conímbriga, Amiens and Reims), favouring the raised level of the monumental complex in relation to the rest of the city.

The forums of the provinces, a symbol of municipal dignity as well as dependence on the central power, have a relatively closed structure to the outside, with gates set as access doors (Pompeii, for example). The large gallery that bordered the *plateia* on three or four sides played the role of a “filter”, ensuring shade and the necessary protection for the development of commercial and administrative activities of the *civitas*.

The Latin colony of Cosa, founded in 273 BC on the Tyrrhenian coast of the Italian peninsula, has a forum with unique characteristics that enrich and make an even more complex spatial system [fig.15].

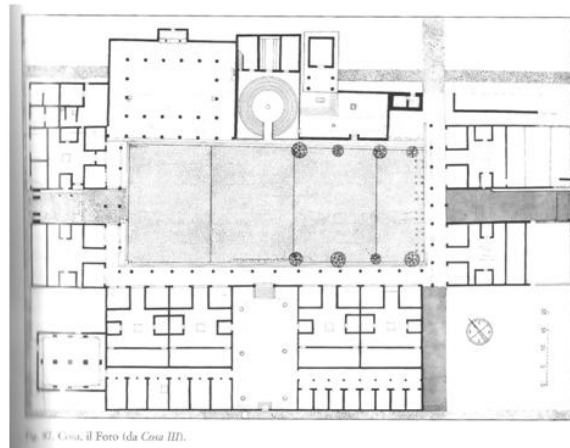


Figure 15. Forum of Cosa, from Gros Pierre and Torelli Mário – *Storia dell'Urbanistica, il mondo romano*, Editori Laterza, Bari, 2010, p.175.

“The excavations of the Forum of Cosa returned the image of atriums. It is, as the name implies, the real courts of a Tuscan type, flanked by two small workshops” (Gros, Torelli, 2010: 124). These atriums, built in ancient time, represent the first passage filter between the *plateia* and the spaces of neighbouring buildings. They then touch the colonnade gallery in the Hellenistic age, forming a double space filter for political, administrative and commercial activities.

In Pompeii, capitol (Temple Capitoline Triad Jupiter, Giunone and Minerva) dominates the composition of a rectangular elongated *plateia* with tripartite porticos, flanked by different buildings of worship and trade (*macellum*). The buildings have rotated longitudinal axes relative to the central space [fig.16].

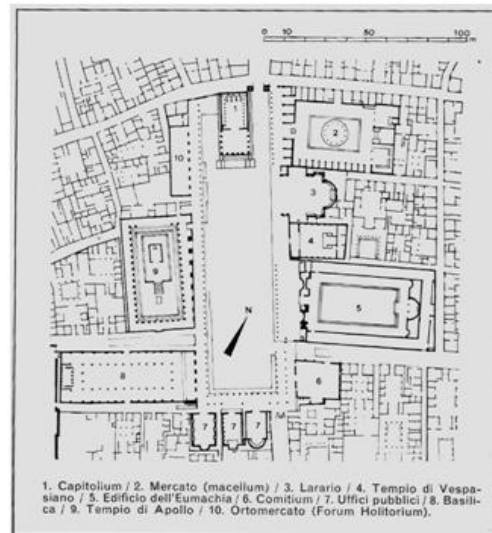


Figure 16. Forum of Pompeii from (Eschebaeh) of Gros Pierre and Torelli Mário, – *Storia dell'Urbanistica, il mondo romano*, Editori Laterza, Bari, 2010, p.175.

The fortified city of Timgad in North Africa, planned according to the *insulae* regular grid, formed a square divided in four sectors by *cardo* and *decumanus*.

The forum, located south of the intersection of two axes has porticos on four sides, a small temple, curia and basilica, respectively positioned against the covered walkway on opposite sides. A set of small workshops complete the rectangle [fig.17].

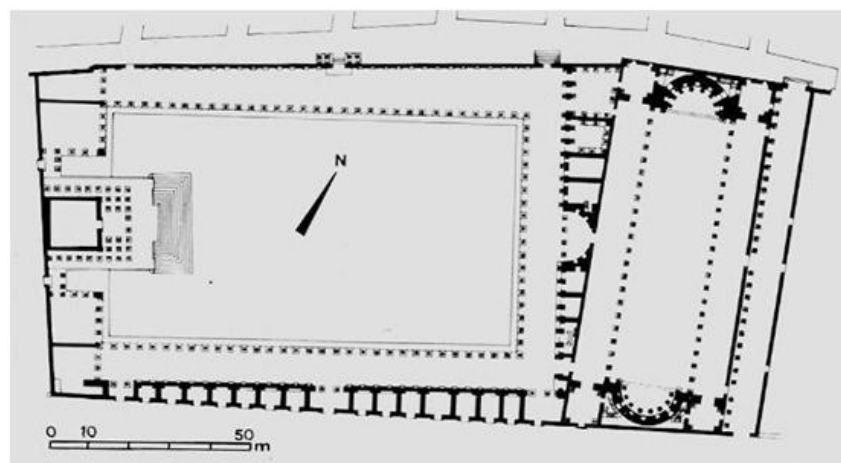


Figure 17. Basilica, forum and temple of Leptis Magna from Boethius and Ward-Perkins, 1970 – *Architettura Romana*, Electa, Milano, 2008, p. 142.

CONCLUSION

“Tracei in quadrato amplissimis et duplicibus porticibus fora constituunt crebrisque columnis (...) Italiae vero urbibus non eadem est ratione faciendum, ideo quod a

maioribus consuetudo tradita est gladiatorum munera in foro dari (...) Igitur circum spectacula spatiosiora intercolumnia distribuuntur circaque in porticibus argentariae tabernae maenianaque superioribus coactionibus conlocentur (...) Magnitudines autem ad copiam hominum oportet fieri (...) latitudo autem ita finiatur, uti, longitudo in tres partes cum divisa fuerit, ex his duae partes iugentur; ita enim oblonga eius formatum et ad spectaculorum rationem utilis dispositio, ("The Greeks usually plan their forums out on square surrounded by dense colonnades (...) on the contrary, in our Italian cities, the same cannot be done in view of the ancient tradition of organising the gladiatorial show forum (...) so the galleries are used spaces between larger columns and low galleries put up for the offices of bankers and on rooftop terraces (...) the dimensions are proportional to the number of inhabitants (...) set the width so that is two to three times of length. Thus the form of the forum will be lengthened, being usefulness for the organisation of spectacles") (Vitruvius, ed. 2002: 278-280).

This design of the Vitruvian treatise describes the architectural features of the forum and the agora of the Hellenistic period, with operating details for its application and execution. The similarity between the two types of public space is revealed in which the two "contaminate" models allow for more complex and closed structures, bounded by a continuous gallery that involves a large esplanade, from the succession of a number of stoas, which provides the "filter" between empty space and outbuildings, now in grand proportions and large scale.

It all began in the VII century BC in ancient Greece where the agora was a simple assembly of citizens. Over six centuries it becomes an excellent urban location of a continuous, closed and regular structure that is more complex from a typological standpoint, and capable of absorbing various functions and buildings along its perimeter.

The forum was from the beginning a centralised place of divine power. Its planimetric configuration was clarified over time, gaining pragmatism and geometric regularity, resulting from the contact with the Hellenistic agora (Cosa and Pompeii forums) that accompanies the process of new and complex urban foundations, structured along the *cardus* and *decumanus*.

In Miletus, thanks to a new planned city idea according to a regular and repeated rule, the agora purifies itself from all the buildings that surround it, becoming a simple esplanade surrounded by an elegant colonnade portico on one floor.

With this example one reaches the agora identified as a single entity, whose function is limited to its large empty status, with breaks of density of the Hippodamian layout, which is not exactly the result of a set of administrative and trade buildings that structured and delineated the new features of the agora.

A late example of the forum in the Carthaginian province in Leptis Magna reveals the consolidation of a model where the continuous and closed regular colonnades are placed in an opposed position along the lower side of the temple and basilica, now understood as a single homogeneous entity that could be repeated elsewhere. Rectangular porticos, basilicas and temples are the typological model for the forum in Roman provinces by the end of the empire.

In successive ages, with the end of empire and the consequent destruction of all cities, the agora and the forum were not continued as urban public spaces. New cities emerged and new more compact and irregular structures occupied urban layouts of a Roman origin. The medieval town square is born in this context as a response to functional needs: the administration of the civic, and for religious and trade power. Small *largos* and squares are created to allow civic functions. Its reference model is often the result of planimetric conditions and conformation, and are adjusted within dense urban areas.

Only in modern times with the rediscovery of classicism does the design, compositional and linguistic base of the forum recover, again as a model for structuring the new plazas of the Renaissance, thus perpetuating an example of public space that will energise and identify almost all European cities in every age to the present day.

Today one can only imagine the splendour of the agora and forum that the two civilizations created, since little remains of all that was done. What does remain are rigorous compositional and innovative processes for the time, which allowed the creation of unique spaces that are clearly identifiable from a typological point of view, and are able to perform numerous functions for the affirmation and administration of power.

After two thousand years, the elegance and the compositional rigor of the Miletus agora as a reference model, and the pragmatism and compositional complexity serving the forums of Pompeii and Cosa, still exist today as examples for the understanding of the most important typology of public space that the city generated: the town square.

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