

# The Social Functions Carried by Roman Forum

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**Abstract:** Roman Forum is an important symbol of the city of Rome, an important vehicle for the construction of the ancient Roman city, and carries multiple social functions. In view of the important position of ancient Rome in world history, it is of great significance to study the social functions of ancient Roman Forum. Unfortunately, there is not much research on its social functions. Therefore, this paper focuses on its economic function, religious function, legal function, political function and memorial function, aiming to provide more abundant information for people to further understand the forum of ancient Rome, and provide a diversified research perspective for future scholars.

## 1. Introduction

As the center of the construction of Rome, Ancient Roman Forum is an important carrier of the construction of ancient Rome, carrying various urban functions. As an important place for commerce, religion and justice, the openness of ancient Roman Forum brings great advantages. In the late Republic, the rulers made full use of its unique advantages to develop it into a place to express political discourse. In addition, it also has special memorial and legal functions. Roman Forum grows in number and size with the construction of various functions and is called the "center of public activity".

Although the study of the social function of ancient Roman Forum is of great significance, there is not much literature available. The author searched on CNKI on March 29, 2022, and only 3 articles were retrieved using "Ancient Roman Forum" as the title of the article, and only 1 article was retrieved using "Ancient Roman Forum" and "social function" as the title of the article. Given the current academic research on social function of the forum's there are a lot of blank, this paper focuses on Ancient Roman plazas' economic function, religious function, legal function, political function and commemorative function analysis, aims to further understand the forum for people to provide more abundant information, for future scholars to provide a variety of research perspectives.

## 2. Economic Function

From the economic aspect, Ancient Roman plazas as a public space, are important places for commerce and trade. Varro pointed out that a plaza is a place where people carry goods for trading [1]. The plaza is a place of economic exchange and lending [2]. Weber also believes that the Ancient Roman plazas is "economic" [3]. In Saturno Temple, which locates in the southwest corner, there were agricultural sacrificial activities held, the state treasury also moved to it. During the Republican period, the economic activity in Roman Forum intensified, not only with general market transactions, but also with trade fairs. The southeast route to the forum is lined with evidence of early Roman commerce, such as engravings of stalls and recognizable floor plans. As the road was paved and expanded in size, new plazas emerged to provide more space for the increased demand of the market. Every day, merchants and buyers can be seen everywhere there, and floating traders are everywhere. All kinds of people wander in different plaza areas to conduct business activities according to their own needs. At the same time, it is an excellent place, which can often shorten the distance between people. Without the obstacle of space, the communication between people is more direct, and some group behaviors are relatively easier to organize.

### **3. Religious Function**

In early human society, information was blocked and traffic was relatively underdeveloped, while open areas like plazas provided convenient conditions for the spread of religion. For the ancient Roman people, religion influenced the birth and development of Rome, and religion has become one of the common consciousness of the Roman people. Therefore, regular religious sacrificial activities and related ceremonies became an essential behavior. Poplicola was the first to enter the sacrificial assembly and the leading officials swore against the Tarquins family, thus unifying the Opposition of the Romans to the royal government [4]. Sacrificial activities and ceremonies were essential and important activities in ancient times. Activities such as waiting for the announcement from heaven and making predictions according to rituals affect people's production and life. Political power and religion are often inseparable. In ancient times, the divine right of Kings at home and abroad provided religious support for the legitimacy of political power. Ancient Roman plazas served as a public medium for important sacrificial events and ceremonies, recording legends such as the Romulus and The Lemos brothers.

### **4. Legal Function**

In Roman times, one of the most special functions of Roman Forum was the legal function. Here it is important to mention the Law of the Twelve Bronze Tables, the earliest written Roman legal code, inscribed in the western part of Roman Forum. The general framework of Rome's most widely known laws was almost always built on this code. The engraving of the code on the plaza was a sign of the Romans' emphasis on law, and also helped to consolidate their legal status. In the Plaza complex, the Basilica-style Assembly Hall served as an arbitration court. During the Republican period, trials were held in public in the plaza, as were public legal matters and the drawing of lots for jury matters [5]. From time to time, people with nothing to do could be found in Roman Forum gathered around the trials to watch them. In the process of watching, people became naturally familiar with the process of the trials. The people became more familiar with the functions of the law through communication and public trials, which contributed to the establishment of a good rule of law in Rome. The public nature of plazas had been eliminating the strangeness between people, thus promoting direct and open communication between people, and the law appears to be approachable. However, as the population grew, so did the lawsuits, and the two existing Roman plazas became overwhelmed, forcing the rulers to increase the number of plazas. This also reflects the importance of law and people's life in Rome.

### **5. Political Function**

Since the late Republic period, people carried out political activities in plazas. Plazas became an important place for people to carry out political activities and express political discourse. Their open space made it easy for citizens to congregate and, in turn, they were influential. As a result, Roman Forum was often used for the election of officials, such as the election of consuls, which took place there. The Senate had a high degree of political power and met at irregular times, but the Curia of Roman Forum, was often the meeting place for them. The early Campus Martius was set up for electoral competition and military action of the Roman nobility, while the elections for consul and watchdog bodies were always conducted here. The manifestation of its political function can also be seen in the fact that the two most important elections were conducted in Roman Forum. Since the middle of the 2nd century, the Assembly of the Hundred has also held elections here. People gathered in the plaza either to discuss the election of consuls, to erect statues in honor of certain people, to hold funerals, or to participate in public events such as political speeches ..... The influence of Roman Forum on the citizens was profound, as they gained a real sense of political experience through their participation in public events. They were able to clearly realize that they were a collective with a common feeling and a common tradition. Cicero's second anti-Catilianian

speech juxtaposes the Campus Martius and Roman Forum with the Senate and the people, referring to the entire city of Rome, which also reflects the political importance of Roman Forum.

Plazas are also an important tool for rulers to strengthen their rule. Rulers used plazas to project a political image. Throughout Roman history, the link between religion and power was demonstrated by political leaders and emperors who emphasized authority by building temples and Roman Forum were key sites for displaying this symbolism of power [6]. Caesar's construction of the temple of the god of war in the square and Augustus's construction of the temple of Mars and the square of Augustus were both expressions of the political image of the "divine blessing of kings".

## 6. Memorial Function

With the increase of population and the expansion of the city, the Roman plaza was gradually endowed with a new memorial function. During the reign of king Numa, bronze statues of Archibiades and Pythagoras were erected in the Ancient Roman plazas to commemorate these two wisest and most heroic Greeks [4]. The first was a general, Gaius Julius Caesar, who created the piazza Giulia, named after his family. His successors later built their own piazzas. Finally built trajan plaza, built triumphal arch, temple, emperor bronze statue, and many monuments, the most can reflect its purpose, is Trajan's Column. Through the display of achievements in the plazas, the plaza space was endowed with more symbolic color. The plazas were no longer simple plazas, but had become a memorial for the king and his family.

## 7. Conclusion

In ancient Rome in the past, due to limited technological conditions and transportation conditions, Roman plazas were used for information dissemination, public activities, and political services, and played an important role in Roman society. It is worth mentioning that with the accumulation of wealth and the continuous improvement of the quality of life, Roman people have more pursuit of entertainment, the entertainment color of the plazas is also constantly deepened. It can be seen that the functions of ancient Roman plazas are not single, but diversified, with a certain degree of modern flavor. Its influence is far-reaching. Until the Middle Ages and modern Times, European cities were still affected by its appearance. To this day, the plazas are an embodiment of social life. The Roman plazas embody the economic, religious, political and commemorative functions, which is an epitome of the spirit of Roman civilization.

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