

## The Impact of Shop Environment on Buyer-seller Relationships in Ancient Rome

Roman shop architecture was fairly uniform by the 1<sup>st</sup> c AD: one to two rectilinear rooms located on a ground floor, typically fronting a street or portico with a wide, open entryway and long grooved threshold (Holleran 2012, 100-105). This standard design, easily recognizable in the archaeological record, proliferated in urban centers across the Roman empire (Purcell 1994, 661). One needs only to walk down the *Via dell'Abbondanza* in Pompeii or the *Decumanus* in Ostia to appreciate how prolific shops were in a Roman town. Despite their prominence in the urban fabric and important distributive role in the economy, very few systematic studies of the Roman shop exist; those that do exist focus primarily on typology, categorizing shops according to variations in size and plan, which does little to advance our understanding of the socio-economic activities that took place within the walls (*e.g.* Zicans 1941; Girri 1956; Gassner 1986).

Through an interdisciplinary analysis of textual sources, archaeological and art historical evidence, comparative historical materials, and modern retail theory, this paper seeks to move beyond identifying the architectural type to exploring how the structural design of a shop might have influenced the buyers and sellers who once occupied the space. For the last 40 years, marketing researchers have acknowledged that shop environment has a significant impact on consumer behavior (Kolter 1973; Donovan and Rossiter 1982; Bohl 2013). Atmospheric cues within a retail setting, such as layout, décor, color, lighting, music, and smells, affects a consumer's emotional state and determines shopping behavior (Mehrabian and Russel, 4; Donovan and Rossiter 1982, *passim*; Bitner 1992, 85). As a result, retailers today manipulate environmental stimuli within their shops in order to attract consumers and increase sales (Bitner 1992, 65; Lewis and Weitz 2011, chapter 17). This study investigates how less ephemeral

environmental stimuli, including layout, décor, and lighting, preserved in the remains of shops from Rome, Ostia, and Pompeii, may have shaped buyer-seller relationships, affected consumer perceptions of store image and product quality, and determined purchase and patronage intentions. In doing so, this paper not only promotes a more holistic approach to the ancient Roman shop, but also contributes to an emergent trend in the field which addresses the obvious lacuna of scholarship concerning the retail trade in the ancient economy.

#### Work Cited

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