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## **The Pompeian Bar: archaeology and the role of food and drink outlets in an ancient community**

‘But I ask you, good men, how can anyone live without the occasional snack?’

Suetonius, *Claudius* 40

So interrupted the emperor Claudius when a heated debate erupted among the Senate regarding the virtues of butchers and barmen before, as Suetonius continued, the emperor “rambled off into a speech about the abundance of city bars in his youth and how he often used to visit them himself”. Claudius’ audience would have found his outburst absurd. The élite perspective on the role of food and drink outlets, or bars, in an urban society was clear: these were retailers in gluttony, and morally reprehensible haunts suited only to the lowest strata of society. But to what extent is this image of Roman food and drink outlets reflected in the archaeological remains, and how essential were they to an ancient society? Pompeii, buried by the catastrophic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79, preserves the greatest collection of bars of the Roman period from which to ask these questions. Scattered about the city are 158 food and drink outlets, recognisable in the archaeological record by their distinctive display and sales counters. The vast majority of these counters were constructed of masonry, a number of which were faced with coloured fragments of reused marble; some wooden counters existed also. These service counters were patently constructed to facilitate the retail sale of food and drink: they were placed at the street front of the property for public display and access; were equipped with storage containers, some of which retained identifiable foodstuffs when excavated; and usually contained an in-built hearth for the heating and cooking of food and drink (fig. 1).

This paper will demonstrate the fundamental importance of food and drink outlets to the urban community of Pompeii. There is an imbalance of information concerning the daily consumption of food and drink in the Roman world. The tendency for scholars to focus on the ancient literary record, itself concerned mainly with the dining habits of the patricians, has limited our understanding of this element of Roman quotidian life. When attempts have been made to understand the broader social spread of consumption, scholars have tended to follow the perceptions of the past, choosing to imagine bars solely as places of impiety and limiting their discussions, and conclusions, as to where in the city such activities were accepted. A fuller appreciation of the intrinsic value of food and drink outlets is warranted. The available archaeological evidence can demonstrate not only their importance to the everyday operation of the city – social interaction, vocation, accommodation and, of course, the provision of food and drink – but as a consequence the value in examining these types of establishments.

### Traditional approach, traditional values: Roman bars as dens of iniquity

Virtue is something elevated, exalted and regal, unconquered and unwearied; pleasure is something lowly, servile, weak and unsteady, whose haunt and dwelling-place are the brothel and the bar. You will meet virtue in the temple, the forum, the Senate house; standing in defence of the city walls, dusty and sunburnt, with calloused hands.

Seneca, *De vita benta* 7.3

Send your Legate to Ostia, O Caesar, but search for him [Lateranus] in some big bar! There he will be, lying cheek-by-jowl beside a cut-throat, in the company of sailors, thieves, and runaway slaves, beside hangmen and coffin-makers, or by some eunuch priest passed out. Here is Liberty Hall! One cup serves for everybody; no one has a bed to himself, nor a table apart from the rest.

Juvenal, *Satires* 8.168-6

As a contrast to *virtue*, and all it encompassed – not merely a set of sought after values, but its embodiment in estimable institutions and their buildings – Seneca chose the brothel and the bar to symbolise *pleasure* – itself standing for vice, vulgarity and all that was wretched about the city. To complete the picture, Juvenal portrayed the quality of clientele one would most likely encounter among the dives. These were the scallywags and drunkards, the unsophisticated and unrefined, seeking neither respect nor dignity, but instead gluttony and loose companionship.

What is there to learn from the ancient sources about the retail sale of food and drink? Of the 174 references to bar-like activity found among the ancient texts, most overstated the moral turpitude of such establishments, and of those who hung about them.<sup>1</sup> It was common to defame another's character by placing them among the bars and taverns, to all hours, with certain emperors not beyond reproach: Gaius Caligula (A.D. 37-41), Claudius (A.D. 41-54), Nero (A.D. 54-68), Vitellius (A.D. 69), Lucius Verus (A.D. 161-169), Commodus (A.D. 177-192), and Gallienus (A.D. 235-268) were all known to have loitered, at times in disguise, among the city bars.<sup>2</sup> But apart from portraying the bars as dens of iniquity, as colourful and entertaining as the image may be, the sources offer but a limited scope for inquiry into the role of bars in an ancient and urban community. None consider the civic needs of the urban indigents, nor of how these were satisfied through the retail sale of staple foods, cooked meals and even boiled water. The lack of useful information offered by the texts is exacerbated by the fact that, since Tönnes Kleberg's seminal work of almost half a century ago, the study of Roman bars has been firmly rooted in the use of literary sources.<sup>3</sup> This has limited the study to themes of terminology and etymology, yet at the same time Pompeian scholarship remains without a clear understanding of how a food and drink business might be recognised in the archaeological record. The texts were also concerned with the megalopolis of Rome, while Pompeii was a small South Italian city which, although under the administration of Rome after the Social Wars of the early first century B.C., developed under separate social and localised traditions. So how are we to identify, in a city such as Pompeii, these dens of iniquity, or develop any clearer understanding of their activities and social function?

While it is generally agreed that the familiar masonry bar counters served food and drink, no listing of properties with counters has been estab-

<sup>1</sup> This tally was taken from a search of Latin words most commonly associated, either very generally or specifically, with bar-like establishments in the *Packhard Humanities Institute Latin Database*. This database lists virtually all known works from Latin authors up to the second century A.D., along with a number of later texts. The following words were searched, returning 174 meaningful instances: *tabernae*, *popinae*, *cauponae*, *ganeae*, and *thermopolia*.

<sup>2</sup> Caligula (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Verus* 4.5-8); Claudius (*Suetonius*, *Claudius* 40); Nero (*Tacitus*, *Annals* 13.25; *Suetonius*, *Nero* 26-27; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Verus* 4.5-8; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 62.14.1-3; Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana* 4.39-42); Vitellius (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Verus* 4.5-8; *Suetonius*, *Vitellius* 13.3); Verus (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Verus* 4.5-8); Commodus (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Commodus* 2.6 – 3.7); Gallienus (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *30 Pretenders (Celsus)* 29.1; *30 Pretenders (Ingenuus)* 9.1; *30 Pretenders (Marius)* 8.9; *30 Pretenders (Postumus)* 3.4; *Gallieni* 21.6). For Otho getting about the taverns as a youth (*Suetonius*, *Otho* 2.1).

<sup>3</sup> Tönnes KLEBERG, *Hôtels, restaurants et cabarets dans l'antiquité romaine: études historiques et philologiques*, Uppsala, 1957.

lished to systemise their study. Instead, various Latin terms generally associated with bar-like activities have been applied to an array of building types at various Roman cities.<sup>4</sup> For Pompeii this translates into an urban network of buildings labelled *tabernae*, *popinae*, *cauponae* and *thermopolia*. Attached to these literary terms are a host of activities, in spite of the fact that these references never offer any suggestion of the specific functions or physical characteristics that might be recognisable in the archaeological record today. Moreover, these properties share few common characteristics: some have counters, others do not; some are equipped with hearths and ovens, others are without; and some are large complexes with many rooms, while others are small one-room joints. There is no pattern. Yet in spite of these problems, the traditional approach has been to accept such designations, along with their suggestion of specific activities, as though they were primary evidence. What is needed is a more clearly defined recognition that considers all of the available evidence, especially that which actively contributed toward the operation of each establishment.

### Reading Roman Ruins: An archaeological definition of the food and drink outlets

An on-site survey of Pompeii, conducted by the author between 2000 and 2003, located 158 properties that were once furnished with a bar counter.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Established by Giuseppe FIORELLI, *Descrizione di Pompei*, Napoli, 1875. Inveterated thereafter (most notably for the purposes of this study): August MAU, *Pompeii, Its Life and Art* (Trans. By F.W. KELSEY), New York, 1899; Tönnes KLEBERG, *Hôtels...*, op. cit.; Matteo DELLA CORTE, *Cose ed abitanti di Pompei*, Napoli, 1965; Hans ESCHEBACH, *Städtebauliche Entwicklung des antiken Pompeji*, Heidelberg, 1970; James PACKER, "Inns at Pompeii: a short survey", *Cronache Pompeiane*, vol. 4 (1978); R.A. RAPER, "The Analysis of the Urban Structure of Pompeii: A Sociological Examination of Land Use (Semi-micro)", in David L. CLARKE éd., *Spatial Archaeology*, London, 1977, pp. 189-221; Verena GASSNER, *Die Kaufläden in Pompeii*, Wien, 1986; Ray LAURENCE, *Roman Pompeii: space and society*, London, 1994; John DE FELICE, *Roman hospitality: the professional women of Pompeii*, Warren Center, Penn., 2001. On recent alternate approaches to textual nomenclature see: Elly LEACH, "Oecus on Ibycus: investigating the vocabulary of the Roman house", in Sara BON and Rick JONES édd., *Sequence and space in Pompeii*, Oxford, 1997, pp. 50-72; Andrew M. RIGGSBY, "'Public' and 'private' in Roman culture: the case of the *cubiculum*", *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, vol. 10 (1997), pp. 36-56; Penelope M. ALLISON, "Approaches to Roman domestic space at the turn of the millennium: using the material and the written sources", *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 105 (2001), pp. 181-208.

<sup>5</sup> For permission to conduct this survey I warmly thank Pietro Giovanni Guzzo and Antonio d'Ambrosio of the *Soprintendenza archeologica di Pompei*, both of whom extended unbounded courtesy and assistance along the way. To finance the research I am especially grateful to the following: the Italian government (for a research scholarship); the University of Sydney (for several Grants-In-Aid and postgraduate research scholarships – the W.C. Wentworth Travelling Fellowship, the James Kentley Memorial Scholarship, the Kath O'Neill Scholarship, and the Hellenic Club Research Scholarship in Classical Archaeology); and not least the committee of the Carlyle Greenwell Research Bequest.

Because several of the counters no longer exist, or have since needed significant reconstruction, the survey combined information gleaned from the earliest excavation reports.<sup>6</sup> Others remain covered with débris left over from the initial excavations, while some properties reveal just slight traces of where the counter once stood. There is evidence for just three wooden counters, though it is certain more would have existed. The absence of their survival and identification fortifies the arguments below that such a considerable amount of properties with counters be identified as without them.<sup>7</sup>

The layout of each bar differed remarkably: some were simple, comprising a single room with a wooden staircase to an upstairs mezzanine for storage and accommodation; others had separate ground-floor rooms set out specifically for the storage of commodities, eating areas, or as accommodation; while a number were large complexes with many rooms set aside for the clients to eat and drink. Most had upper floors, though because of the lack of surviving evidence it is difficult to determine precisely the sorts of activities conducted for each example. They were, however, generally considered to have served as the living quarters for the managers and their families, or as guest accommodation, gaming dens, or dining rooms.

Of the counters that can be viewed and analysed, their arrangements have the potential to reveal certain activities, in this case, the retail sale of food and drink. This is not to say that every counter in Pompeii defines a bar. The very utilitarian nature of a sales counter suggests that any number of goods might be sold from one. Were the history of archaeological excavations at Pompeii more thorough, the various artefacts found at these shops might have facilitated clearer interpretations about their specific type. However this is clearly not the case.<sup>8</sup> From the earliest excavations (especially) up till the more recent post WWII clearance, there has been minimal interest in the detailed recording of the artefacts recovered from

<sup>6</sup> These were found among the *Giornale degli Scavi* housed at the *Soprintendenza archeologica di Pompei*.

<sup>7</sup> Wooden counters are known for the properties at I.6.8, II.2.3, and IX.2.25.

<sup>8</sup> The situation is now known as the ‘Pompeii premise’. See Lewis BINFORD, “Behavioural archaeology and the ‘Pompeii Premise’”, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol. 37 (1981), pp. 195-208; Michael B. SCHIFFER, “Is there a Pompeii Premise?”, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol. 41 (1985), pp. 18-41; and Penelope M. ALLISON, “Artifact Assemblages: Not ‘the Pompeii Premise’”, in Edward HERRING, Ruth WHITEHOUSE, and John WILKINS edd., *New Developments in Italian Archaeology, Papers of the Fourth Conference of Italian Archaeology*, vol. 3, London, 1992, pp. 49-56.

the shops and bars, especially in contrast to the domestic assemblage.<sup>9</sup> Interpretations of activity and function may only be determined by the overall structural arrangement of each property and, in particular, by the types of instillations which, fortunately because of their enduring construction, reveal information about their use.

No less than 130 of the counters were equipped with cooking arrangements and storage facilities for food. This was generally in the form of a cooking hearth attached to the end of the counter, of which 78 examples are known. The remainder of the hearths, or *foculi* as they were known in antiquity, were just a short distance away.<sup>10</sup> It is likely that more hearths existed, but the evidence is lost. Those that survive were simple masonry-built hearths with a tiled burning surface enclosed by a U-shaped small wall that supported a metal grill or tripod for the cooking vessel.<sup>11</sup> That these in-built hearths were placed at the ends of the counters raises questions about the expulsion of smoke. Of all the hearths attached to counters, only one retained some sign of an attached chimney. A small terracotta tube was found protruding from the top of the in-built hearth of the counter at IX.11.2.<sup>12</sup> However, it is possible that this terracotta tube was used as a means for smoking foods. In any case, this is an unusual example as none of the other hearths show any visible *comparanda*. Without the use of chimneys it would seem that these types of hearths, located generally two to three metres from the threshold, were reliant upon the spaciousness of the room and the relative proximity to the open façade for circulation. It is equally likely that charcoal was burnt in these hearths which, apart from occupying less storage space (without rotting) and needing but a small area for burning, allows for a very controllable heat while producing consider-

<sup>9</sup> The best example of how to interpret activity and the use of space from the available finds records of Pompeii, as far as the domestic assemblage is concerned, remains the seminal study by Penelope M. ALLISON, *The distribution of Pompeian house contents and its significance*, (Ph.D. Diss., University of Sydney) Sydney, 1994.

<sup>10</sup> For a survey of the terminology see Pedar FOSS, *Kitchens and dining rooms at Pompeii: the spatial and social relationship of cooking to eating in the Roman household*, (Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan) Ann Arbor, 1994, pp. 62-68.

<sup>11</sup> The seminal work on Pompeian cooking instillations remains L. FULVIO, "Delle fornaci e dei forni pompeiani", in *Pompei e la regione sotterranea dal Vesuvio I*, Napoli, 1879, pp. 273-291. For the best recent study of the types of cooking arrangements found in Regio I at Pompeii, see Pedar FOSS, *Kitchens and dining rooms at Pompeii...*, op. cit. On the types of cooking pots and other cooking arrangements found throughout the Roman world, see Joan LIVERSIDGE, "Roman Kitchens and Cooking Utensils", in Barbara FLOWER and Elisabeth ROSENBAUM édd., *The Roman cookery book: a critical translation of 'The art of cooking', for use in the study and the kitchen*, London, 1958, pp. 29-38.

<sup>12</sup> Described by the excavators as a chimney, *Notizie degli Scavi*, 1912, p. 114.

ably less smoke.<sup>13</sup> The isolated cooking hearths were better equipped for smoke expulsion: these were usually opposite the counter, adjacent to the front entrance, and might also be serviced by a chimney projecting through the front wall so that smoke and accompanying odours – whether fragrant or foul – could waft onto the street. These were larger cooking structures and may have burnt wood as a cheaper fuel.

Further evidence for the function of these counters is seen in their storage provisions, found among most of the extant examples. These were in the form of rectangular or arched voids below the counter, small storage shelves at one end of the counter against the wall, and ceramic vessels built into the top surface of the counter (generally called *dolia*). But while the storage facilities might be easily recognisable in the structural form of the counter, the sorts of items that were once held by these are much less easy to detect. No finds were reported from the storage voids below the counters, and the explosive nature of the A.D. 79 eruption destroyed any chance of items being found *in situ* on the shelves.<sup>14</sup>

As for the inset earthenware vessels, the popular assumption is that they held wine, though no archaeological evidence corroborates this function.<sup>15</sup> Packer suggested that the vessels were ill equipped to contain liquids on account of their porous linings and unsuitable shape for cleaning and preserving.<sup>16</sup> Fixed into the counter, any left over wine could not be tipped out. It is possible the vessels may have served as storage bays for other more portable vessels filled with liquids, though none have ever been reported in the excavation records. Another likelihood is that skins were placed inside as a non-porous lining, but again no evidence is forthcoming. It seems likely that the inset containers were reserved primarily for dried goods, and that liquids were kept in nearby portable containers, such as attested by the piles of amphorae stacked by the counter at the best preserved bar in Pompeii.<sup>17</sup> Archaeological evidence for the types of goods held by these vessels is rare, but always consists of dried foods, and usu-

<sup>13</sup> John W. HUMPHREY, John P. OLSEN, and Andrew N. SHERWOOD, *Greek and Roman technology: a sourcebook: annotated translations of Greek and Latin texts and documents*, London, 1998, pp. 41-42.

<sup>14</sup> Take, for example, the counter at I.10.2-3 which was destroyed by the collapsing upper floor. See the *Giornali degli Scavi*, 21, July 1932.

<sup>15</sup> August MAU, *Pompeii, Its Life and Art...*, op. cit., p. 394. Followed by Helen TANZER, *The Common People Of Pompeii: a study of the graffiti*, Baltimore, 1939, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> James PACKER, *Inns at Pompeii...*, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

<sup>17</sup> IX.11.2. The most complete account remains the *Notizie degli Scavi*, 1912, pp. 111-120.

ally recorded at the better-preserved city of Herculaneum.<sup>18</sup> Here a number of inset vessels contained grains, nuts, legumes, beans, and chick-peas.<sup>19</sup> The only known example of a Pompeian bar counter retaining evidence of food, in this case lentils, comes from the bar at IX.7.21-22.<sup>20</sup> Pompeii does, however, offer epigraphic evidence for the types of food and drink on offer. Listed for sale on the wall of the bar at IX.7.24-25 were various commodities and their prices, but without quantities: cheese (1 – 2 asses, though soft cheese was 4 asses); bread (8 asses, or 2 asses for ‘slave’ bread); oil (3 – 7 asses); wine (2 – 3 asses, but ‘champion wine’ was considerably more expensive starting at 1 denarius); onions (5 asses); wheat (1 denarius); cucumbers (1 ass); dates (1 ass); and sausages (1 ass).<sup>21</sup> One of the words listed, extremely odd as it is the only known instance in Latin, was ‘*HXERES*’. The term is believed to have originated from the Greek, meaning “dried foods”.<sup>22</sup> A well-known wall painting from Ostia, found in the bar on *Via di Diana*, I.2.5, illustrates further.<sup>23</sup> It shows the various foods that would have been sold here: olives, turnips, hard-boiled eggs, and cheeses hanging from a nail in the wall. The painting was significantly located above a set of display shelves on which some of these foods would have shared space with plates, bowls and cups. This setting is known from a number of grave reliefs from the Roman world that illustrate bar counters with storage and display shelves stacked with plates and cups, foods and drinks (fig. 2).<sup>24</sup>

All too often the theme of eating in the Roman world is overshadowed by the habits of the socially privileged, and represented archaeologically by lavish dining rooms with fine wall paintings, spacious gardens and

<sup>18</sup> Although buried by the same eruption event as Pompeii, the mud-slide that engulfed Herculaneum, up to 20 metres in depth, carbonised much of the organic material.

<sup>19</sup> See Amedeo MAIURI, *Ercolano. I nuovi scavi (1927-1958)*, Roma, 1958, p. 402 (beans and chick-peas in the counter at V.6); and p. 434 (grains and legumes discovered in the counter at IV.15-16). See also Ernesto DE CAROLIS, “Il recupero di due impianti commerciali ercolanensi”, *I Beni Culturali*, vol. 4.2 (1996), pp. 34-37; James PACKER, *Inns at Pompeii...*, op. cit., pp. 47-48; K.D. WHITE, *Farm Equipment of the Roman World*, Cambridge, 1975, p. 145.

<sup>20</sup> *Notizie degli Scavi*, 1887, p. 244.

<sup>21</sup> CIL IV, 5380. On costs and values in the Roman world see Richard DUNCAN-JONES, *Money and government in the Roman empire*, Cambridge, 1994, ch. 2; more generally see Kevin GREENE, *The archaeology of the Roman economy*, Berkeley, 1986, ch. 3.

<sup>22</sup> F.W. CLEAVES, “Hxeres”, *Classical Philology*, vol. 29 (1934), p. 68.

<sup>23</sup> For the discovery see *Notizie degli Scavi*, 1916, p. 143; pp. 399-428.

<sup>24</sup> The oft cited grave stone from the Isola Sacra, outside Ostia, displays several drinking vessels stacked on the shelves. Isola Sacra Necropolis, Tomb 90. Museo delle Navi, Fiumicino, inv. no. 1340.

fountains. In Pompeii this image is familiar among the countless grand homes and villas. Their value was measured in the expanse of private space they offered away from the din of city life, space being the great determinate of social class. But what of the poorer classes and those who were without dining couches and reception halls, areas for private socialising, kitchens or even the most basic cooking facilities? Their small and humble living spaces have not been preserved to any great degree; these were sheared off with all the upper floors of Pompeii during the final pyroclastic surge.<sup>25</sup> Had they survived it is likely they would have displayed similar living arrangements, albeit less dense, to the lower class living blocks in Rome. The apartments in Rome were found without even the most basic cooking arrangements.<sup>26</sup> That the many urban indigents of the various Roman cities relied on food and drink outlets for their daily supply of staple foods, cooked and prepared, along with seemingly simple services like boiling water – whether for diluting wine or for any other number of cooking needs – is patently recognisable in the archaeological record of Pompeii.<sup>27</sup> What is more, the very amount of these establishments about the city ought to have drawn a more balanced consideration of their role. The 158 Pompeian bars represent the highest proportion, about 27%, of the various shops in Pompeii, 577 in total.<sup>28</sup>

*The role of bars as demonstrated by their distribution:*

While determining the amount of food and drink outlets in Pompeii is useful for assessing their role, these numbers cannot be fully appreciated without plotting their distribution on a plan of the city (fig. 3). Much has been said about the spatial arrangement of the ancient city, particularly the organization, or not as the case may be, of building types and activities, especially since Raper's pioneering paper published in 1977.<sup>29</sup> In

<sup>25</sup> See most recently Ernesto DE CAROLIS, *Vesuvio 79 d.C.: La distruzione di Pompei ed Ercolano*, Roma, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> James PACKER, "La casa di Via Giulio Romano", *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica comunale in Roma*, vol. 81 (1968-69), pp. 127-148.

<sup>27</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 60.6.7-8. On the consistent imperial attacks against the liberties of food shops, from the mid first century A.D., see Gustav HERMANSEN, *Ostia. Aspects of Roman City Life*, Edmonton, 1981, pp. 196-205; Olivia F. ROBINSON, *Ancient Rome: City planning and administration*, London, 1994, pp. 135-137; Tönnes KLEBERG, *Hôtels...*, op. cit., pp. 101-107.

<sup>28</sup> Verena Gassner counted 577 shops – see Verena GASSNER, *Die Kaufläden in Pompei...*, op. cit., p. V. The number of known shops is likely to change, however, once more thorough measures of identifying the use of space, particularly commercial, are employed.

<sup>29</sup> R.A. RAPER, *The Analysis of the Urban Structure of Pompeii...*, op. cit.

regards to Pompeian bars, it has been duly recognised that many were located along the main thoroughfares, and that the general picture was one of a jumbled arrangement.<sup>30</sup> Indeed the primary routes were littered with food and drink outlets, the busiest sections being the access routes into and out of the city: no less than 94 (59% of the total) bars can be counted along these roads.<sup>31</sup> It is not without significance that food and drink outlets occupied the commercially viable and high-rent street-fronts, a situation suggestive of the level of investment placed in them by their owners and tenants.<sup>32</sup>

That high-profit land was given over to the retail sale of food and drink is further attested by their regular incidence at intersections, the busiest confluence of people and traffic for any urban network. Of the 96 known intersections that connected the vast Pompeian street system, not less than 60 (about two thirds) were bordered by a bar.<sup>33</sup> For almost every bar located at one of these bustling intersections, the counter was placed on the optimum side of the façade to allow an unobstructed viewshed for those on the street (fig. 4).<sup>34</sup> These were obvious and eye-catching façades designed to attract the attention of passers-by, and their regular occurrence about the city would have been a familiar sight to any Pompeian.

But is this pattern of bars found all over the city, and in full view of areas of greatest activity, consistent with what we read among the ancient

<sup>30</sup> Tönnes KLEBERG, *Hôtels...*, op. cit., pp 49-53; Gioacchino F. LA TORRE, “Gli impianti commerciali ed artigianali nel tessuto urbano di Pompei”, in Antonio DE SIMONE éd., *Pompeii: l'informatica al servizio di una città antica*, Roma, 1988, pp. 77-78.

<sup>31</sup> This figure is drawn from the roads that originate from an entrance gate into the city.

<sup>32</sup> On land value see R.A. RAPER, *The Analysis of the Urban Structure of Pompeii...*, op. cit., pp. 194-195. For issues of tenancy in Pompeii see Felix PIRSON, “Rented accommodation at Pompeii: the evidence of the *Insula Arriana Polliana VI.6*”, in Ray LAURENCE and Andrew WALLACE-HADRILL, *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and beyond*, Portsmouth, 1997, pp. 165-181. On the huge investments in commercial and retail property, and the running of it, see Henrik MOURITSEN, “Roman freedmen and the urban economy: Pompeii in the first century A.D.”, in Felice SENATORE éd., *Pompei tra Sorrento e Sarno: Atti del terzo e quarto ciclo di conferenze di geologia, storia e archeologia. Pompei, gennaio 1999 - maggio 2000*, Roma, 2001, pp. 1-27.

<sup>33</sup> The 60 intersections had 79 of the 158 (50%) Pompeian bars. This represents a remarkably higher proportion than seen by Hermansen at Ostia where just 8 of the 38 bars were located at an intersection – see Gustav HERMANSEN, *Ostia. Aspects of Roman City Life...*, op. cit., p. 185. He found this to be a high proportion for any single profession. It ought to be noted that the figures from Pompeii exclude, quite obviously, the approximate one-third of the city that is yet to be exhumed.

<sup>34</sup> The few exceptions to this pattern seem to be those for which the free-placement of the counter was prohibited by the internal or structural arrangement of the front room.

commentaries? On the distribution of bars there exists but a few snippets of information in the texts, all subtle in detail. The most revealing are the few that tell of the weary traveller arriving in town to find a bar nearby the city gate, a situation clearly consistent with the archaeology.<sup>35</sup> Only a single reference tells of a bar being hidden away from the main thoroughfares: Martial's *Epigrammata* has a drunken gambler being yanked out of a 'secluded' bar (*popina*).<sup>36</sup> Yet in spite of the relative silence of the ancient sources on the distribution of bars, their united stance on the amoral role of the urban bar pervades this area of inquiry. In an attempt to identify the 'deviant zones' at Pompeii, Ray Laurence cited a number of ancient authors to demonstrate that the presence of bars could determine a zone of the city as unacceptable to the socially élite.<sup>37</sup> This approach might at first seem reasonable given the weight of polemic aimed squarely at the urban bar. These were havens of abnormal behaviour, such as "prostitution, 'excessive' alcoholic consumption and gambling"; in general, anything that "contravene[d] the rules of [Pompeian] society."<sup>38</sup> Persuaded by this premise, and erroneously following the custom of identifying property types by the labels attributed to them in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Laurence found that Pompeian bars were located away from the largest houses so that the élites could "shelter their wives and children from contact with deviants."<sup>39</sup> In support of this theory, John De Felice insisted "this was not the result of voluntary placement by business owners nor was it simply a result of businesses simply locating in the busier areas of town. It was a result of civic authority engaging in a type of moral zoning to exclude certain types of people and business from the parts of town more likely to [sic] the domain of Roman matrons and children."<sup>40</sup>

This premise contradicts the archaeology. With the abundance of bars along all through routes, and at two out of every three intersections, any attempt at exclusion from such zones would have been not just impractical, but impossible. What is more, many bars can be found nearby, opposite,

<sup>35</sup> For example Plautus, *Pseudolus* 658.

<sup>36</sup> Martial, *Epigrammata* 5.84.4 - translated by Walter C.A. KER, The Loeb Classical Library.

*...et blando male proditus fritillo,*

*arcana modo raptus e popina,*

*aedilem rogat uodus aleatory...*

<sup>37</sup> Laurence defined 'deviant behaviour' as that being "condemned by a substantial proportion of the population, but is not considered to be beyond the limits of toleration by many people" – see Ray LAURENCE, *Roman Pompeii...*, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>38</sup> Ray LAURENCE, *Roman Pompeii...*, ibid., p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> Ray LAURENCE, *Roman Pompeii...*, ibid., p. 87.

<sup>40</sup> John DE FELICE, *Roman hospitality...*, op. cit., p. 129.

neighbouring, and structurally attached to several of the large and grand homes in Pompeii.<sup>41</sup> To so faithfully follow the ancient moralists is to ignore not least the wealth of archaeological remains, but also the intrinsic civic value of retail food and drink outlets, as well as the forces of economic rationality that governed their operation and placement about the city.

### In Summary

The intention of this paper was not to negate the use of literary sources. Instead, I have wanted to highlight the traditionally imbalanced approach to the study of food and drink outlets in Pompeii. Of course a number of bars would have served as urban dens of iniquity, appealing to the common classes and earning strict condemnation from the socially privileged. But to reduce the study to a single means of inquiry, itself concerned with but a single aspect, denies the broader social function of food and drink outlets and the true value of their study. The archaeological evidence clearly demonstrates that these were essential features of the urban landscape. The retail sale of staple foods and drink, the provision of a cooked meal and/or cooking facilities, as well as a gathering place to facilitate social conviviality were essential needs of the ancient community. That outlets for these services were in such great number, and so openly displayed at pivotal locations about Pompeii, demonstrates their intrinsic role in the social and economic operation of the city.

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<sup>41</sup> Some notable examples include the House of the Vestals, The House of Pansa, the House of Menander, and the House of the Vettii.

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Fig. 1: L-shaped counter with attached hearth, display shelves and two inset storage vessels at property VI.16.40, Pompeii. Photo: Steven Ellis



Fig. 2: Marble relief from the Isola Sacra (tomb 90), outside Ostia. Fiumicino, Museo delle Navi; inv. 1340 (Natalie KAMPEN, Image and Status: Roman working women in Ostia, Berlin, 1981, fig. 18)

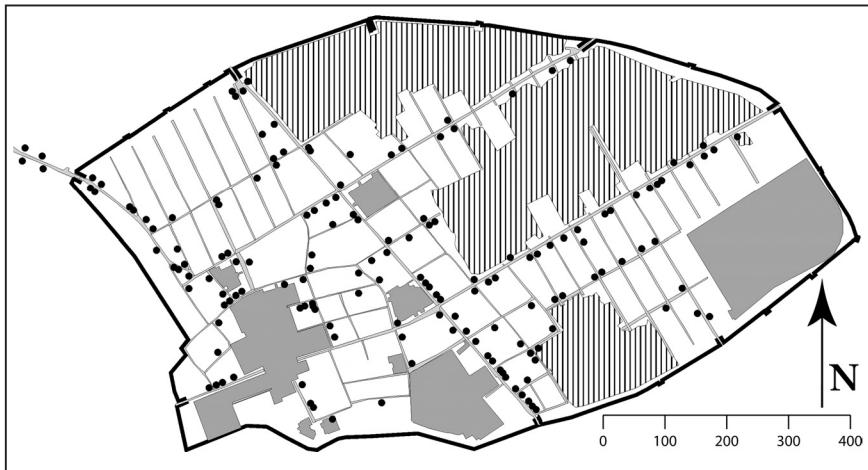


Fig. 3: Distribution of the 158 food and drink outlets in Pompeii



Fig. 4: Intersection of Via del Vesuvio/Via Stabiana (North-South) with Via della Fortuna/Via di Nola (West-East), Pompeii. Facing onto the intersection is the bar at V.1.1/32. Photo: Steven Ellis