

The distribution of bars at Pompeii: archaeological, spatial and viewshed analyses

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“Taverns near temples ... are not useless”: so suggested Karl Weber¹ in his mid 18th-c. description of some Pompeian street-side buildings at II.3, II.4, III.6, and III.7. Though clearly not intending a discussion on the matter — at this early stage in the clearance no more than 4 bars had been discovered — he noted the location of two bars in his argument for the presence of a temple at III.6 or III.7.² By analogy with the Greek practice of offering food and libations of wine at sacrifices, a custom followed by Roman priests and the Pontifex Maximus, Weber thought that retail outlets for food and drink in the vicinity of temples would have been of considerable use. The distribution of bars would not be reconsidered for another two centuries, influenced as much by the clearance of long stretches of the street frontages as by T. Kleberg’s seminal work (1957) on Roman inns and taverns and by R. A. Raper’s subsequent approach to urban space.³ Today a string of archaeological and historical contributions exists on the whereabouts of the town’s many bars,⁴ but they evince a remarkable unanimity in their methodology and, as a result, in their conclusions.

I begin with a brief overview of some recent approaches to the spatial arrangement of Pompeii’s food and drink outlets. Scholars have relied on literary sources not only to develop criteria for identifying the various types of outlets, but to explain their locations. I hope to show that the considerable corpus of archaeological data is the best measure. Close attention to the archaeology permits a more precise understanding of the number, rôle, and place of the outlets through the town. I will argue that the configuration of their retail service counters, combined with their locations, shows that bars were established in places for greatest profitability. Lastly, because bars and their counters were aligned towards areas of bustling activity, viewshed analyses shed light on the directional movement of ambulatory traffic in the town.

Definitions, labels, and lists: the traditional approach to bars and their distribution

After 250 years of Pompeian scholarship, there exists no consistent explanation for how a food and drink business might be recognised in the archaeological record. Instead, buildings thought to have served food and drink are identified and sorted into types on the basis of the Latin names assigned at their discovery.⁵ Thus Pompeian bars are commonly labelled *tabernae*, *popinae*, *cauponiae*, or *thermopolia*. Kleberg was the first to scrutinise the meanings of these terms. His interest was in the semantics and etymology of each term, rather than the appropriateness of their application to Pompeian buildings. His literary survey of the *sens* of how each type of establishment functioned informed his classification: *tabernae* were considered, very generally, as shops and taverns; *cauponiae* as restaurants and hotels; *popinae* as restaurants and bars; and *thermopolia* as bars.⁶ These literary classifications, however, cannot be reconciled

1 K. Weber, *The axonometric plan of the Praedia Iuliae Felicis* (MN. ADS 73) nn. 1-3 (reprinted in Parslow 1998, 291). For a discussion on the context of Weber’s statement in relation to temples, fountains, and the Praedia Iulia Felicis, see Parslow *ibid.* 173-74.

2 The two properties were at II.3.5 and III.7.2, the latter since reburied. Weber’s temple never appeared or it has still to be found.

3 Kleberg 1957; Raper 1977 and 1979.

4 Packer 1978; Gassner 1986; Gulino 1987; De Simone 1988; La Torre 1988; Laurence 1994 and 1995; Wallace-Hadrill 1994 and 1995; DeFelice 2001.

5 Especially Fiorelli 1875; Kleberg 1957; Della Corte 1965; Eschebach 1970; Raper 1977; Packer 1978; La Torre 1988; Laurence 1994, 70-87; DeFelice 2001.

6 On *tabernae*, see Kleberg 1957, 19-23; on *cauponiae*, 1-6; on *popinae*, 16-18; on *thermopolia*, 24-25.