SOCIAL SPACE IN LATE ANTIQUITY

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FORA/AGORAI

Whilst there are some new fora/agorai of 4th–5th c. date, and much archaeological evidence of structural repair to porticoes and paving, it is difficult to relate this evidence to their everyday function. Some rare traces do survive—of market stalls (Iol Caesarea and Sagalassos), a price list (Aphrodisias) or topos inscriptions (from Sagalassos and Aphrodisias) indicating what sold. There are no late antique depictions to compare with the forum scene from Pompeii. We have only an early 4th c. view of the northern side of the Forum Romanum, with Constantine giving an oration, and a distant, schematic early 5th c. view of the Forum of Constantine in the Eastern capital. Usually one is obliged to rely on literary sources, which are especially rich for the fora/agorai of Antioch and Constantinople, although Arles, Alexandria, Gaza, Emesa and Rome receive significant mention. When this evidence is combined with epigraphic evidence and the archaeology of repair, a picture emerges of the continuity of fora/agorai as political, social and commercial centres to the early 5th c. in the West, and into the 6th in the East, wherever cities were still flourishing. However, beyond this time, agorai often ceased to be the main focus of city life. Salesmen, customers, market stalls and their produce are described by texts, and the occasional inscription. The only stalls to have produced associated archaeological traces seem to be those of moneychangers from the destruction of the Basilica Aemilia in Rome in A.D. 410, and the small change of stall-holders, that slipped down between paving cracks at Iol Caesarea.


