



# Power, Architecture and Community in the Distribution of Honorary Statues in Roman Public Space

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## *Introduction*

While the study of *fora* has long enjoyed a privileged place in traditional archaeological research, a recent approach framed around Giddens's structuration theory has outlined the crucial importance of investigating daily routines within the civic spaces (Revell, 1999). In this analytical context honorary statues constitute privileged tools for the interpretation of practices of social display and their interaction with Roman public space.

An honorary statue was composed of three key elements, all of which are intended to enhance its visual prominence. The first is that of the statue itself, which represented individuals, gods or personifications. This is supported by a pedestal, built to elevate the statue above the line of sight and to make it more visible. The final element was the inscription carved on the base. This detailed names, reasons for the erection of the statue, accomplishments and contributions for which the worthiness of the subject was being celebrated. As Smith observes, 'these statue monuments shared more with poster hoardings than the gallery objects we think of as art' (Smith 1998: 56).

The role of honorary statuary in public space lies in its setting and subsequent relationship with the space itself and its users. Since honorary statuary is intimately connected with display, and has a direct relationship with the built environment, questions relating to display itself must not be limited to the objects alone. Therefore, fundamental to the understanding of honorary statuary is its setting, which is no less important than its physical appearance and its inscriptions. Mouritsen (2005: 61) outlines this to some degree by describing how statues of *decuriones* and *liberti* in Ostia come to be spatially separated from those of other groups. Likewise, Condrón (1997) emphasises the importance of spatial setting in her work on inscriptions (including those on statue bases) in public spaces at Leptis Magna.

Honorary statuary as a practice was reserved for the Roman elite: emperors, high officials, local officials and wealthy benefactors. Honorific statues were, however, designed to be seen by a wider audience when making use of the space in which the statues were erected. In this respect statue setting must have depended at least to some extent on how that audience viewed and used such space. By exploring the relationship between honorary statuary and lived space we will

increase our understanding of how the space itself was perceived and included in the context of daily life. Key to this understanding is the study of statue distribution and its relationship to the use of space.

In order to address these points, I will illustrate a number of specific aspects concerning the setting up of honorary statuary as a practice. I will analyse patterns in the distribution of statues in a number of key *fora* dated mainly from the beginning of the second century A.D. I will identify and compare groups of statues which can be identified as such by being either in close proximity or within specific parts of a *forum*. I will also define groups by subject and epigraphic theme. By outlining patterns and describing key shared features, I will highlight how honorary statuary developed in accordance with general and local trends. Furthermore, I will identify the importance of *celebritas* as a fundamental criteria driving statue distribution in Roman *fora*. Finally, I will show how my findings stress the importance of public space in providing a context for the definition of social hierarchy.

Key to this article will be the reconsideration of the role of honorary statuary in *fora*, as I will show that the distribution of statues in civic space also depends on how the latter's spatial articulations are perceived through everyday use. This will allow me to underline a key analytical potential of honorary statues in the study of *fora* as lived spaces.

### *Defining Honorary Statuary*

The dedication of statues in Roman public space was a practice limited to a few selected subjects. These were essentially representations of the divine, of members of the Imperial family and of members of the elite, including local officials and benefactors (Zaccaria 1995: 98). These would mainly be rich citizens who belonged to the municipal council (or parallel institutions) and benefactors of the town (including rich *liberti*). Such exclusivity was not just dictated by the high prices of statue erection and dedication but also by the law. *Liberti*, for example, were subjected to restrictions in erecting honorary statues that *ingenui* were not (Bergemann 1990: 14; Alföldy 1984: 66). Mouritsen (2005: 55) has recently suggested the existence of a direct relationship between such limitations from patterns observed in Ostia and Pompeii. These patterns show an imbalance in the surviving evidence for *liberti* and *ingenui* that results in the former being mainly celebrated in funerary contexts. He suggests that while municipal authorities limited *liberti* in erecting their own statues in *fora*, *ingenui* would increasingly emphasise this division by limiting their own self representation in funerary contexts. Honorary statuary is, in short, one important manifestation of competition amongst members of the Roman elite.

Following Augustus Mau's (1896) seminal work on the *forum* of Pompeii, two separate works have more recently underlined the importance of the contextual interpretation of honorary statues. Zimmer's (1989) work in Numidia has concentrated on statues in the *forum* of Timgad and in Cuicul's Northern (or Old) *forum*. In addition, Piso and Diaconescu (1999) have researched the statues within the civic space of Sarmizegetusa, in Dacia. The authors' combined work represents an advance in research conducted on two levels: the first, as already mentioned, concerns the focus placed on the analysis of the statues *in situ*. The second relates to the value of statues as archaeological material, even when the statues and their inscriptions are missing. All three authors stress the importance of the size of surviving statue bases and of their groupings. They all acknowledge that statue bases can provide information on statue subjects and hierarchical distribution. Moreover, evidence for the existence of statue groups allows us to overcome problems deriving from poor preservation and unreliable reconstruction. These are, in fact, distinguished

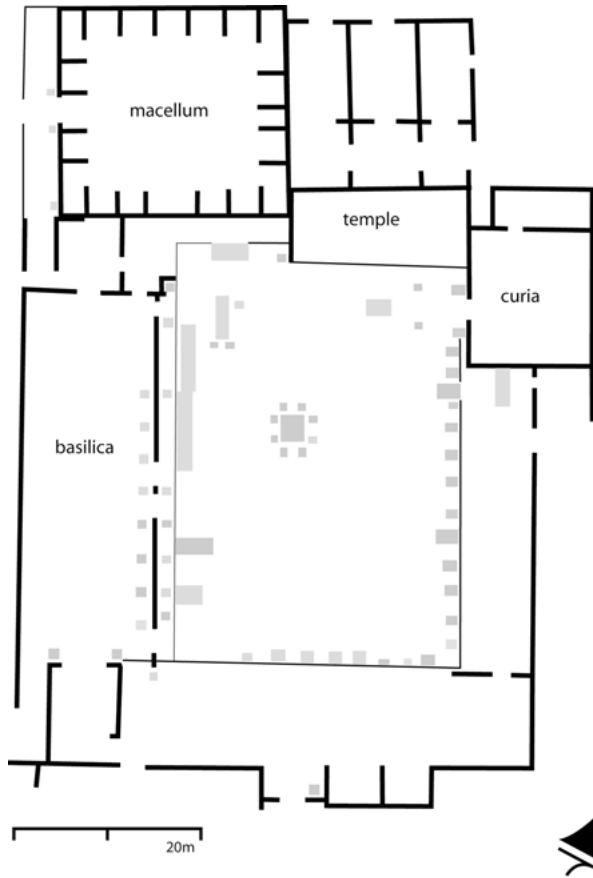


Figure 1. Statues in the forum of Cuicul (after Zimmer 1989).

by similar form (outlining statue types) in addition to common location. This approach allows us to determine hierarchical groups separating emperors and their families, higher elite (such as provincial governors and town patrons) and the municipal elite.

### *Groups, Identification and Spatial Association*

The *fora* at Cuicul and Timgad show distinct groups of statue bases. These will be divided according to three criteria; the first is that of common location within a given space or building; the second is that of size similarity and the third is concerned with the specific association of a group with a particular building or sector of the *fora's areae*. Poorly preserved groups will be excluded.

The statue population of Cuicul's Northern *forum* (Fig. 1) may be divided into five discrete groups on the basis of its location. The first group is found within the *basilica*. Most of the statue bases found within the interior of the *basilica* are inscribed with imperial dedications. The

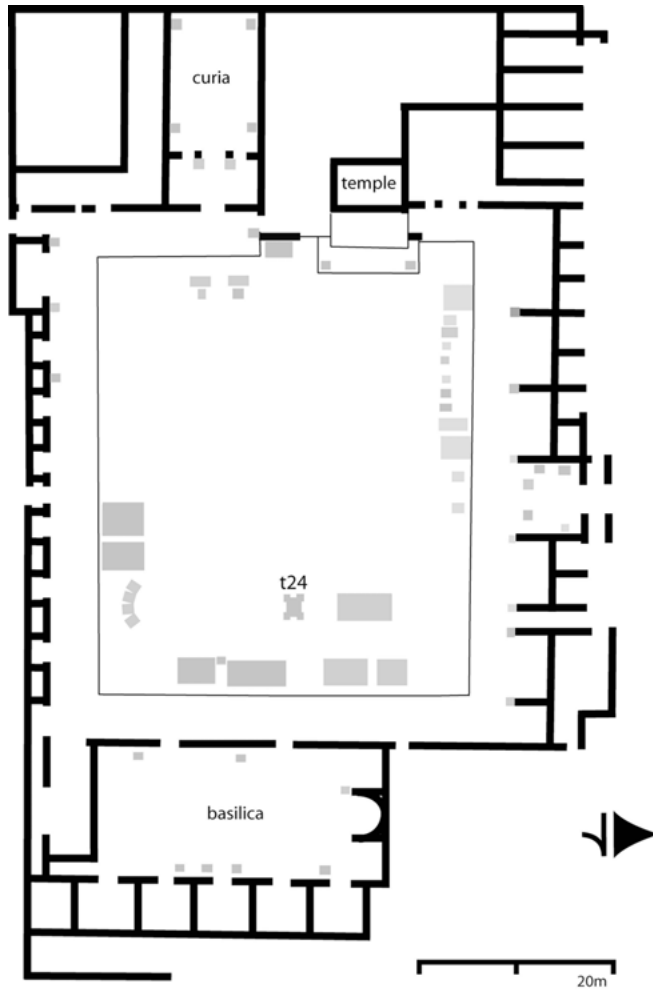


Figure 2. Statues in the forum of Timgad (after Zimmer 1989).

second area is formed by the half of the *area* closest to the *basilica*. The predominantly large statue bases in this area are mainly dedicated to emperors and members of the imperial family (Zimmer 1989: 20). The section of the *area* facing the Eastern *porticus* contains, in the main, representations of gods and personifications dedicated by individuals. Meanwhile, the statues along the Southern *porticus* are distinguished by being dedicated mainly by priests and *aediles* (Zimmer 1989: 34). Common to both the Eastern and the Southern *porticus* is the fact that all their statue bases are dedicated by individuals. The last area, in front of the *curia* entrance, contains statue bases with dedications made by local magistrates to the emperors Diocletian and Constantius and to personifications of the *genius senati* and the *genius populi cuiculitanorum* (Zimmer 1989: 34).

The *forum* of Timgad (Fig. 2) can be similarly subdivided into six areas. The internal part of

the *basilica* contains a large majority of imperial statue bases. The area in front of the *basilica*, as in Cuicul, is dominated by the largest statue bases in the entire *forum*. These are almost exclusively dedicated to emperors or members of the Imperial family by senior members of the Roman élite, mainly provincial governors (Zimmer 1989: 41). The third group of statue bases is formed by those positioned between the *forum* temple and its main entrance, along the Northern *porticus*. This group is made up of the *ordo*'s dedications to senior officials, governors and patrons of the city (Zimmer 1989: 70–75). The statue bases inside the *curia* mirror the pattern found in Cuicul where the dedications are imperial in character or closely linked to the municipal administrative system (Zimmer 1989: 83–84). The ones just outside the *curia* reflect the same patterns and can be associated with those inside (Zimmer 1989: 76–77). The final group, placed in and around the main entrance to the *forum*, is formed by a group of five statue bases that provide a rather heterogeneous group in which the only constant element appears to be the absence of any dedication to members of the civic elite (Zimmer 1989: 81–82).

At Sarmizegetusa it is possible to observe the distribution of statue bases in both the *colonia*'s *Forum Novum* and *Forum Vetus*. The beginning of the so-called phase III in the life of the *Forum Vetus* also marks the beginning of a contemporary monumentalizing process which affects both *fora*. In this phase both share the role played by a Roman town's *forum* in the context of social display (Étienne, Piso and Diaconescu 2004: 96–101). Within this arrangement, the display of honorary statuary follows a strict demarcation involving mainly imperial subjects, high officials and the local municipal elite (Fig. 3). Statues dedicated to emperors and their families were all placed in the *area* of the *Forum Vetus*, while statues of the higher elite erected in the *area* of the *Forum Novum*. Statues dedicated to local magistrates were all placed in the *porticus* of the *Forum Novum* (Piso and Diaconescu 1999: 131–134). Another important group of statue bases has been found in front of the *curia*. The three statue bases which form the group are dedicated to the *concordia ordinis*, the *genius ordinis* and to *minerua augusta* respectively (Piso and Diaconescu 1999: 128–129). In addition, the excavation of the *basilica* has produced a statue base dedicated to *fortuna augusta* (Étienne, Piso and Diaconescu 2004: 154).

Zimmer, and then, Piso and Diaconescu have demonstrated how hierarchy was reflected in the distribution of honorary statuary. The comparison between the Numidian examples and that of Sarmizegetusa offer the chance of acquiring further insight. Although the statue base dedicated to *fortuna augusta* from the *basilica* of Sarmizegetusa's *Forum Vetus* is not sufficient on its own to demonstrate a pattern, it is undoubtedly imperial in character. This is consistent with the arrangement of statue bases in the *basilicae* of both Cuicul and Timgad. Furthermore, the imperial statue bases in the Numidian towns' *basilicae* date largely to the early phases of the *fora* (Zimmer 1989: 66–68, 82–84). Archaeological evidence of an important, if not predominant, imperial character in statue dedication in *basilicae* is well documented on sites such as Velleia, Oriculum and Corinth. Here, early excavations uncovered statues representing imperial subjects. The statues, placed, in each case, along one of the internal walls of their *basilicae*, mainly represent members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The presence of later portraits demonstrates that this pattern was followed for several generations and was not limited to a single dynasty (Saletti 1968; Pietrangeli 1943; Swift 1921: 142–157, 248–265, 337–363). Similarly, the statues found in the *curiae* of the three *coloniae* provide evidence of a constant repetition of themes linked with the imperial family and with concepts or personifications linked to the municipality. The recurrence of such patterns and their establishment since the beginning of the Empire can be linked to a greater degree of institutionalization in the dedication of statues in *curiae* and *basilicae* of the three towns. This is not only shown by the archaeology, but is a deeply rooted

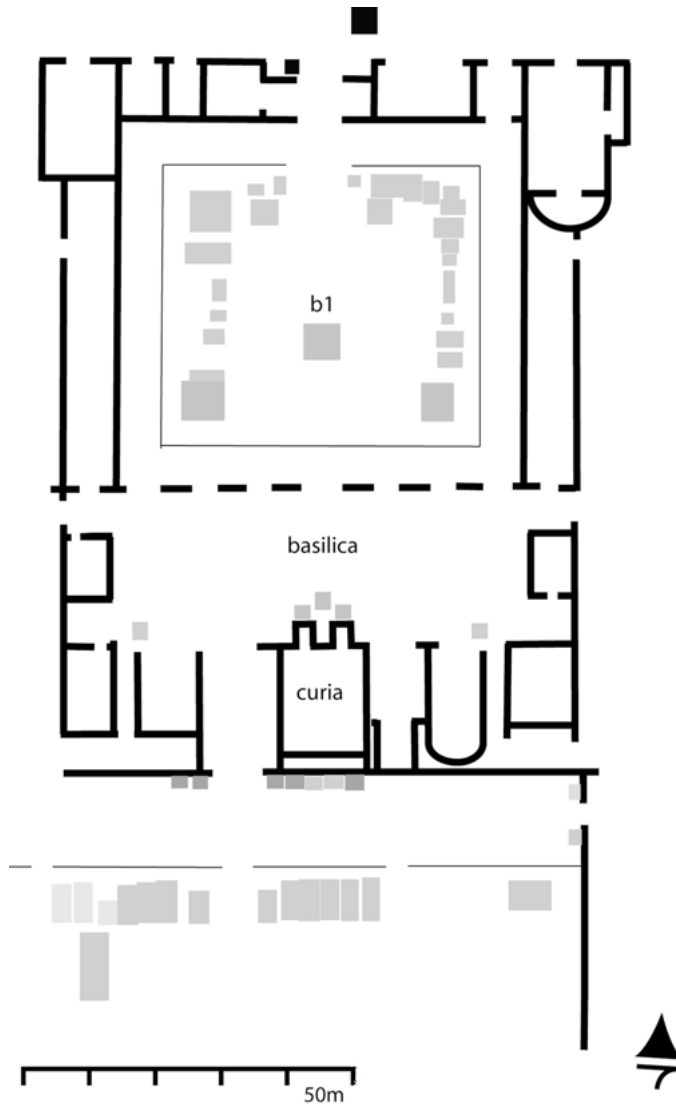


Figure 3. Sarmizegetusa's forum novum and forum vetus (after Zimmer 1989).

notion in research on imperial symbolism and propaganda (Häussler 1999: 5–6). Two bases dedicated in the *basilica* of Cuicul and dated to the third and fourth centuries A.D. confirm that the *basilicae* retained such a role (Zimmer 1989: 67).

The situation regarding the *area* is different. In this space the association with prominent features such as the *basilicae* and sectors of the internal *porticus* creates visible divisions. Changes in these patterns suggest dependence on both widespread institutional standards and the variations created by local decision-making. The influence of the latter is reflected by the

presence of dedications made by private citizens. Patterns observed in the three analyzed *fora* show a tendency for statue groups in the *area* to not follow the constant repetition observed in *basilicae* and *curiae*. In Cuicul, the second most easily discernible group of statues is the one located along the Eastern and Southern *porticus*. Other than the average size of the bases, which are smaller than those of the group in front of the *basilica*, this group is defined by the fact that the dedications are made by individual citizens. In Timgad, the second most consistent group, after the one consisting of large bases in front of the *basilica*, is defined in part by the fact that the great majority of bases carried statues dedicated to provincial governors. In Sarmizegetusa there is a similar pattern spread across two separate *fora*. Here the division is even clearer, with different dedicatees being confined to specific areas on the basis of a strict hierarchical division. It is also important to note that most of the dedications along Cuicul's Eastern and Southern *porticus* are to subjects directly connected with imperial authority, such as *Victoria augusta*, *Concordia augustorum* and *Mars augustus* (Zimmer 1989: 55–63).

The relative absence of dedications to higher and local elite creates an anomaly in the *forum* of Cuicul, which has had an active functional life lasting at least two centuries. Evidence does not allow us to verify whether the town's Severan *forum* may have acted as an alternative space in which higher and local elite were represented (Kleinwächter 2001: 109–110). Therefore, another hypothesis must be taken into consideration. Mouritsen (2005: 61) observes how freed parents commemorated deceased young *decuriones* in funerary contexts in Ostia, whereas at Volubilis freed parents commemorated their decurion offspring in the *forum*. In parallel with this, the pattern of dedications in the *area* of Cuicul's northern *forum* may reflect a local practice which privileged the representation of imperial themes. In turn, this demonstrates a degree of autonomy of the town's elite resulting in local variation. These examples show that social differences, reflected by statue dedication within the *forums' areae*, were less homogenous in these contexts when compared to patterns observed in *basilicae* and *curiae*. It is in the *area* that the practice of honorary display assumes patterns that are relevant to autonomous, local decision-making. While it is possible to demonstrate recurring patterns in all three of these examples, there is no way of proving that there were specific programmes in place for the erection and distribution of statue populations in *fora*. The possibility that there were specific programmes, as proposed by Zimmer (1989: 12, 32, 53) for example, which revolved around established visual schemes linked to imperial propaganda, is unlikely. Observed patterns describe, instead, a practice in which, while there certainly is an association of selected space and imperial portraiture, the same does not apply to all represented subjects. Much of the analysed space is instead occupied by groups of statues created through criteria linked to hierarchy and dependant on local decision-making.

### *Loci Celeberrimi*

While it is therefore clear that local choices may determine how and where some statue types are associated, it remains to assess why these associated groups are located where they are. Representations of the emperor are placed in spaces of particular symbolic importance. In this context, however, we need to establish what were the factors that determined where statues of other individuals were positioned. In more general terms, the expression used to describe a prominent position for the erection of an honorary statue is *locus celeberrimus*. This term, commonly found in literature and on statue dedications, refers specifically to a statue's location. The term literally means 'the busiest place' and links the visual prominence of a statue to status.



The more visible the statue the greater its *celebritas* and the more prominent its subject appears (Stewart 2003: 136–140). The relevance of the term to *fora* from the imperial period has not yet been acknowledged. Statuary in *fora* from this period is evaluated by its close connections with imperial propaganda. These rules might appear to reduce the scope of the local elite enjoyed for locating their statues in areas that would win them the greatest attention (Stewart 2003: 130–131, 136). The available evidence, however, suggests that this was not the case.

Two inscriptions of the imperial period illustrate the perception of the term *locus celeberrimus* in *fora*. One is an inscription from Tergeste commonly known as the *Decretum Tergestinum*. The inscription is dated to the period of Antoninus Pius and refers to the erection of an equestrian statue to the senator Fabius Severus (*CIL* V 532). On it, the location of the statue is specified as follows:

...statuam ei auratam equestrem primo  
quoque tempore **in celeberrima fori**  
**nostri parte** poni...

...that a gilded equestrian statue should be erected to him,  
and at the earliest opportunity,  
**in the most frequented part of our forum...**

The second is an inscription from Verona (*CIL* V 3332) dated to 380 A.D. The inscription refers to the transfer of a statue to the *forum* from the *capitolium*, where it had long been lying, apparently having fallen from its pedestal:

...statuam in capitolio  
diu iacentem **in**  
**celeberrimo fori**  
**loco** constituti iussit...

...a statue which had been lying for a long time in the capitolium  
ordered to be placed  
**in the most frequented part of the forum...**

Both inscriptions demonstrate that there is a *locus celeberrimus* in a *forum* and, indirectly, that within the *forum* there are a number of other spaces in which honorary statues could be erected that did not have the same status. When we consider this information in the light of the three *fora* analysed above the conventions employed become clearer.

The particular association of Imperial statues with institutional buildings, such as the *curia* or the *basilica*, plays a key role in delineating the *locus celeberrimus*. Both the *curia* and the *basilica* are spaces which have great institutional importance in a *forum*. Furthermore, the multiple role played by the *basilica* as a place for business and administration would have literally meant it was the ‘busiest space’, in addition to its symbolic importance. The constant association of imperial statues with the spaces of the *curia* and of the *basilica*, in all of the above examples, is crucial to this argument. This connection to civic architecture and to the symbolic presence of imperial power is, therefore, fundamental in the selection of the most prestigious spot for the dedication of statues in Roman *fora*. This means that the *locus celeberrimus* is reserved for imperial representation. The apparent exception seen in the *Decretum Tergestinum* emphasises the value of the *locus celeberrimus* by highlighting that the honour bestowed upon Fabius Severus was a rare one indeed.

The analysis of the distribution of honorary statues of members of the municipal elite offers key parallels to the picture presented thus far. The two *fora* of Cuicul and Timgad offer insufficient evidence for the representation of local elite. However, the distribution of statue bases in Sarmizegetusa shows that statues of the local elite were restricted to the *porticus* of the *Forum Novum*. This indicates that different areas were regarded as appropriate for the representation of different social groups within the community. One distinct parallel for the strict division operated in Sarmizegetusa can be seen in the *forum* of Pompeii (Fig. 4). Here it is possible to observe a clear distinction between groups of honorary statues. The first group is represented by large statues commemorating members of the imperial family. The second group are equestrian statues located at the southern end and the eastern side of the *area*. Finally, there are two distinct groups of bases for standing statues located in front of the entrance to the *macellum* and the building of Eumachia. This general arrangement dates from the Augustan period and represents a partial reworking of the original composition (Mau 1896). Despite the geographical and chronological distance between Dacia and Italy, the arrangement of the statues of local magistrates in Sarmizegetusa suggests that similar processes were at work in both *fora*. As outlined above, statues of local magistrates in this Dacian *colonia* were located in the *porticus* of the *Forum Novum*, and in particular around the main access point between this complex and the *Forum Vetus*. The importance of this access point is further highlighted by the statue bases in the *Forum Novum*'s *area*. Here the connection between the *Forum Novum* and the *Forum Vetus* is marked by a gap in the line of statue bases and is visually enhanced by the presence of statue bases for seated figures at its immediate sides (Piso and Diaconescu 1999: 132, 137). Within this setting the number and close proximity of the bases for the statues of local magistrates cannot be accidental or due to overcrowding. This group of bases, confined to the less visible space of the *porticus*, reveals a constant desire to obtain maximum visibility within the limitations imposed by hierarchy and the architectural setting. It is also possible that the proximity of this entrance to the *basilica* would have increased the desire of the local elite to be represented in this space. Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence from the overall plan of the *Forum Novum* to be able to discuss this in any greater depth. In the case of Pompeii, the location of the statue bases in front of the *macellum* and of the building of Eumachia must be seen as an important parallel to the pattern observed in Sarmizegetusa. These groups of statue bases do not, as Zanker (1988: 327) claims, reflect the setting of the statues of the *summi viri* in the *Forum Augusti*. Instead, this arrangement reflects the need to find a sufficiently prominent space to display the commemorative statues of the town's local elite.

The patterns of representation of municipal elite in both *fora* emphasise the importance of visual prominence in determining the location of statues, even in less prestigious parts of the civic spaces. The fact that particular patterns are discernable, even in areas which are distant from key structures such as *basilicae*, suggest that local factors may have driven the choice of location. The comparison between Sarmizegetusa and Pompeii demonstrates that the criteria driving such choice are connected to the notion of *locus celeberrimus*. In the analyzed settings, hierarchy and the desire for visual prominence are fundamental in determining the location of honorary statuary. Hierarchy established a spatial division between groups of honorary statues of different social groups. Within this division members of each social group sought the best available location for their statue. It would be inappropriate to identify *loci celeberrimi* in all parts of a *forum* that are occupied by the statues of specific elite groups. However, within the relative division of social groups it is reasonable to suggest that each one of these had its own *locus celeberrimus* for which each social group competed.

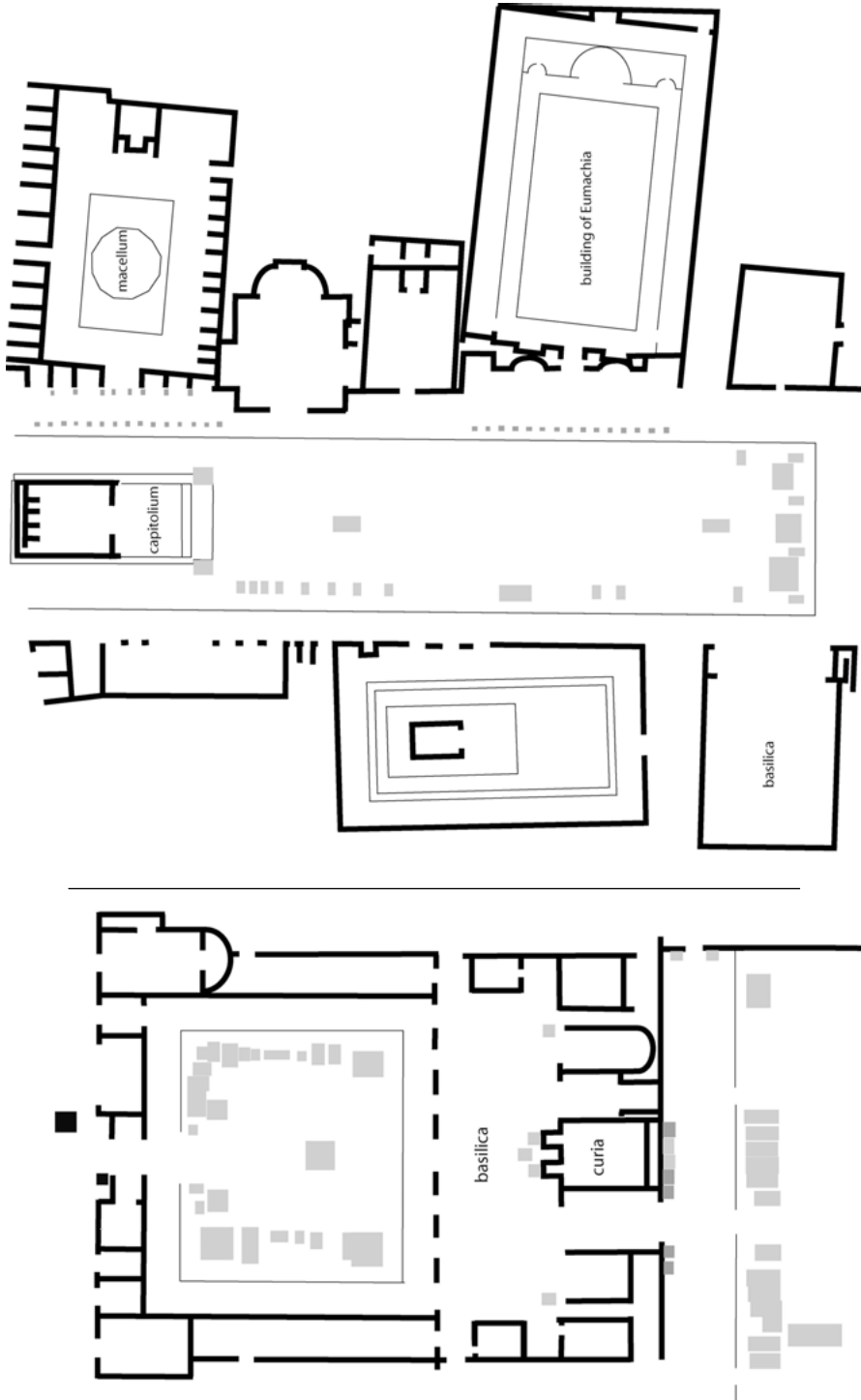


Figure 4. Statues in the fora of Sarmizegetusa and Pompeii (after Zimmer 1989).

## Conclusion

Honorary statuary provides key visual evidence of hierarchic relationships in Roman society. The value as evidence of honorary statues extends from the objects alone to their inextricable connection with the space in which they were erected. The spatial analysis of honorary statues is therefore fundamental to their interpretation. Key to this is to link their attributes to their spatial context. This can be extended from single examples to identifiable groups, more useful in representing overall patterns. When applied to the study of *fora* of the imperial period, this approach provides us with a complex and dynamic picture that puts in question established interpretations linking statue distribution exclusively with the symbolism of imperial propaganda. Outlining groups defined by statue subjects has alone emphasised the key input of local and independent decision-making together with general verifiable trends. Analysing the spatial traits of honorary statues has helped us determine why some locations were chosen. More generally this analysis has shown the equal influence of Empire-wide and local hierarchies in determining the setting of the statue population of a *forum*. The dates of the observed contexts have also outlined the permanence of a strong element of competition in the statues of *fora* of the imperial period. The prominence of imperial representation is re-affirmed, but competition among other social groups is shown not to diminish, but to thrive. From a methodological point of view, these results outline the analytical potential of the remains of statue bases even when poorly preserved. While the exceptional quality of data from the *fora* of Timgad and Cuicul make both obvious candidates for these considerations, use of the evidence from Sarmizegetusa demonstrates our ability to acquire key knowledge on honorary statues even when preservation is limited. Evidence of this type has been found on other sites such as that of the *forum* of Conimbriga (Alarção and Étienne 1977: 99 ff.), yet other encouraging but limited finds (Fulford and Timby 2000, 55–56) reveal how more work needs to be done in order to acquire a full understanding of the degree of survival of such evidence. It is therefore only by acknowledging their full informative potential and implementing research aimed at comprehensively recording their remains, that we can allow statue bases to find their rightful place among the features describing the lived space of Roman *fora*.

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### Abbreviations

*CIL Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

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