



Religion in Pompeii and Herculaneum

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About Religion

- Religion in Pompeii and Herculaneum was a crucial part of everyday life
- Many public holidays in Pompeii and Herculaneum were as a result of religion
- The fact that Pompeii and Herculaneum had so many religious beliefs (polytheistic religion) is evident in the various deities and ceremonies performed in public temples and in private homes
- Pompeii and Herculaneum's vast amount of religious beliefs and ideologies can be attributed to the city's religious freedom

Household Gods

- Pompeii and Herculaneum had a number of Gods and Goddesses for many aspects within life
- Many of the household Gods were influenced by the Gods of Greek mythology
- Household Gods were known as 'lares'. These 'lares' were often incorporated into artworks and statues around the house as the house was the most sacred place to individuals
- Religious activities within the household were typically conducted by the head male of the household
- The most commonly worshipped Gods and Goddesses included:
 - Minerva
 - Apollo
 - Venus
- Evidence for household Gods and Goddesses:
 - Wall fresco located in the House of The Vettii: 'Two dancing lares with a snake', The snake is symbolic of peace and prosperity.
 - Cicero primary written source: "The most sacred... place on earth is the home of... every citizen. There are his sacred hearth and his household gods, there the very centre of his worship, religion and domestic ritual"
 - Wall fresco: depicting the God of Jupiter (Zeus)

Temples

- Every Roman city had a variety of temples where offerings could be made to Gods in hope that worshippers would be rewarded
- The oldest temple in Pompeii which links back to 6th Century BCE: Whilst it is not entirely known, it is believed to have been dedicated to Minerva, goddess of arts and wisdom
- Temple of Apollo:
 - Temple shows both traditional Roman and also Greek architectural features
 - It has two statues depicting "Apollo shooting arrows" and "Diana"
- Temple of Jupiter (Capitolium)
 - This was the *main* centre of religious worship within Pompeii and was built in honour of the Jupiter, Juno and Minerva triad
 - The large "head of Jupiter" which originally resided in the temple is now housed in the Archaeological Museum in Naples
 - This temple was damaged by the earthquake in 62 A.D and is still yet to be restored to its original form
- Temple of the Public Lares
 - This temple was dedicated to the protector of the gods and was built by the Pompeians as a symbol of their gratitude for having escaped the earthquake
 - The lares were the tutelary (guardians) deities of the house and were assumed to be identified as deceased people: they protected one's property and family
 - In addition to the Temple of the lares, each household would often also have a small site or small temple within their house dedicated to them
- Temple of Isis
 - The building has various Greek architecture elements to it and is very well preserved
 - According to an inscription, the temple was restored as a result of the damage it suffered in the earthquake in 62 AD.
 - Adjacent to the temple there is also a space to accommodate the priests' houses and for the 'meeting of the faithful'

Foreign Cults and Religions

- Despite the main religions being Greek, Egyptian and Roman religions, Pompeii and Herculaneum also had foreign cults and religions including Judaism, Cult of Isis (Egyptian Goddess of the Sky) and the Cult of Dionysus (the Greek God of Wine).
- Sources for foreign cults and religions include:
 - Wall fresco from the House of the Vettii: of '1st Century Isis worship', which depicts Romans and Egyptians worshipping Isis. The source is important as it also depicts the objects, clothes colours and items that were present during these praying events.
 - Oracle Card of Isis: the source depicts the Goddess of Isis in a provocative stance in the typical colours of Egyptian religion and reveals how oracle deck cards were a feature of this foreign cult
 - Written source from Cicero: "There is in the sky a definite place where the blessed enjoy everlasting life". This source suggests that Cicero acknowledges that Pompeii and Herculaneum were places with multiple religious beliefs
 - Wall fresco of Isis: this source depicts the Egyptian Goddess Isis leaning back against another darker skinned Egyptian. The slave in the fresco has a snake wrapped around her arm, which is symbolic of divinity, peace, power and also of fertility. This may suggest that Isis is a powerful idol for women especially within Pompeii and Herculaneum

Tombs

- The splendor of someone's tomb and memorial was according to their wealth and status during their life. For some poorer people, they may not have even been buried in a tomb
- As a result of the unhygienic practices surrounding death it was illegal to bury or cremate bodies within the city and so tombs were lined outside the city of Pompeii
- Much like Greek religion, it was common to place a coin under a deceased person's nose in order to pay the 'Ferryman to the trip to the Underworld'
- It was the woman's job in Roman religion to wash, oil and preserve their family member's bodies
- Evidence for tombs
 - Family tomb outside Pompeii: this source reflects that the buried family members were wealthy as the architecture of the tomb was elaborate with arches and decorative stone, as well as the tomb being quite large
 - Written source from Trimalchio (a character in the play 'Satyricon' by Petronius: "Man's life, alas, is but a span. So let us live while we can". This source reflects that death in Pompeii and Herculaneum was widely discussed and that they had no fear of it as they believed death was a stepping stone to eternal life
 - Lecturer Per Steffen Hagen: "The reason for building a tomb was usually to commemorate oneself, a friend or a loved one... It could [also] be utilised to reflect political ambitions." This suggests that there may have been more than one use for tombs

Practice Questions

1. Outline the importance of religion to those in Pompeii and Herculaneum. Support your response with evidence (7 marks)
2. Explain the role of foreign cults and religions within the Campania region (5 marks)
3. Explain the practice of household religions (5 marks)
4. According to the extract provided and your own knowledge, outline the view of religion within Pompeii and Herculaneum (5 marks)
 - a. Extract from Cicero: "The most sacred, the most hallowed place on earth is the home of each and every citizen. There are his sacred hearth and his domestic gods, there the very centre of his worship, religion and domestic ritual".