

Pompeii & Herculaneum

Local Political Life

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Overview

- In regards to the political system, Pompeii and Herculaneum were largely based off of Rome's main political system's customary and uniform laws which were established by Julius Caesar
 - They were loyal to Rome as reflected in their dedicatory statues, shrines, arches and buildings
- Their carrying out their town's political activities however were largely dealt with locally (self administering municipality)
- If Pompeii and Herculaneum did need to go to Rome to represent themselves however, the town Patronus (patron), Praetor Marcus Nonius Balbus was the reliable representative

Decuriones

- Decuriones were members of the city council who were freeborn citizens
- There were only 100 decuriones, who would obtain this title for life, however the list was revised every 5 years
- Their roles included to vote on administrative matters and instruct the Board of Four.
- Their meeting place was in the Curia Chamber

Magistrates

- Each year, there were four magistrates elected which were divided into duoviri and aediles
- Judiciary and law courts were held in the Basilica, where the judge (duoviri) was raised on the podium before the long central hall
- Duoviri (2): senior magistrates who elected electoral rolls, tried civil and criminal cases and carried out the sentence.
- Aediles (2): were in charge of the maintenance of sacred and public buildings, roads and sewerage, markets, public order and the sponsorship of spectacle
- Evidence includes:
 - Aediles: “aediles, marked out this road as far as the lower Stabian road...” - source from street graffito

Comitium

- Citizens over 25 who met annually to elect officials but otherwise played no role in the running of the town
- The Comitium met once a year around March in order to elect duumvir and aediles
- They met in either the Forum, or if that was too small, the theatre or amphitheatre

Election Process

- Prior to the March elections, there was often intense political activity:
 - Electoral slogans painted on walls
 - Political graffiti
- Voters were often swayed regarding who to vote to according to personal prestige and integrity the candidate could provide
- Those running for office would wear a white toga and were not allowed to write their manifestos, but only proclaim their worthiness for the position (not other achievements)
- In this case, manifestos were typically written by supporters including trade guilds; women; teachers and students
- Political graffiti could often be found on houses or on shop walls as it gave people and opportunity to have their voice heard (including women)
- Such examples of political graffiti support includes:
 - "I beg you to elect Satrius quinquennial"
 - "I beg you to elect Gaius Julius Polybius aedile. He brings good bread"
 - "The little thieves ask for Vatia as aedile"
 - "The fullers all ask for Holconius Priscus as Duumvir"

Political Buildings

Basilica:

- The “centre of administration of justice”
- Included a long rectangular hall with colonaded aisles on either side. Also had a raised podium where the judge would sit

Comitium:

- Voting place for men who were freeborn citizens (although some may have been deemed unworthy to vote)
- Magistrates would also preside over electoral proceedings in this building

Curia:

- Where town council would meet to discuss community matters
- Roofless building
- Heavy gates suggest private meetings were occasionally held there
- Also served as People’s Assembly for town meetings where citizens could speak directly to the government

Sample Questions

1. Describe the key features of political life in Pompeii and Herculaneum - 5 marks
2. What role did women have in the political life in municipal Pompeii and Herculaneum? - 3 marks
3. How did the role of *dumviri* and *aediles* differ? - 4 marks
4. Why were political buildings the centre of activity in Pompeii? - 4 marks
5. What spaces host the local political life? - 3 marks