

**Teachers Notes**

***Pompeii and Herculaneum***

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# Pompeii and Herculaneum

## INTRODUCTION

On the morning of August 24, in AD79, the long dormant volcano of Vesuvius erupted, and by the evening of that day Pompeii, Herculaneum and the nearby coastal resort of Stabiae disappeared from the face of the inhabited world. Buried by the rain of ash, pumice and volcanic mud, they were to lie entombed for more than sixteen centuries. The first real excavation conducted along scientific lines took place in 1748, during the reign of Charles of Bourbon, at which time excavations at Herculaneum had already begun. More systematic excavations were conducted in 1860 under the direction of Giuseppe Fiorelli, who developed the technique of pouring liquid plaster into the spaces left in the layer of solidified ashes, thus obtaining casts of the victims who died during the eruption.

Pompeii lies some 200 kilometres south of Rome, in a region known as Campania of which Naples is today the capital. The eruption of 79AD pushed the coastline outwards by more than one kilometre and today much of this area is occupied by modern Pompeii. Pompeii was a busy seaport and coastal resort on the Bay of Naples in Southern Italy and under the Romans was prosperous. Maritime trade gave Pompeii a cosmopolitan flavour and boats would bring cargoes up the Sarno River. Many wealthy Romans holidayed in Pompeii in the magnificent villas they built on the hillsides overlooking the sea. Estimates of the population of the city before the eruption vary from about 10,000 to 20,000.

Herculaneum lies closer to Naples. The town is believed to have had a population of around 5000, and with its position near the sea and its many fine residences was a popular resort for wealthy Romans. Only a small part of Herculaneum has been excavated, whereas about eighty percent of Pompeii has been excavated.

Archaeological evidence, inscriptions, plaques, graffiti, mosaics, paintings and sculptures continue to bring to life the mystery and magic of the former flourishing centres of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

### *Understanding the issues*

1. Explanation of terms: Pumice; lapilli; mosaics; frescoes
2. Map Study: On a map of the region of Campania, locate Misenum, Naples, Herculaneum, Mount Vesuvius, Pompeii, Stabiae, Bay of Naples
3. Discussion: Why did so many people perish in Pompeii following the eruption? What is the difference between the ways in which Pompeii and Herculaneum were destroyed?
4. Research: Impact of the severe earthquake that badly damaged Pompeii in AD62.
5. Source study: Read the two letters written by Pliny the Younger to the historian Tacitus in AD104, in which he recalls the death of his uncle Pliny the Elder, Admiral of the Mediterranean Fleet based at Misenum at the time of the eruption.

## PLANS AND STREETSCAPES OF POMPEII AND HERCULANEUM

Pompeii was a fortified town with eight gates that closed every evening. Fiorelli had discovered that an irregular network of streets dominated the oldest precincts. Subsequent

expansion of the city followed the standard Hellenistic pattern, a strict grid of elongated blocks known by the Romans as *insulae*, or islands. Five or six main routes crisscrossed the city. The Via Stabiana was a principal thoroughfare, accommodating overland trade with cities to the north and almost constantly noisy with the rumble of carts. Vehicles travelling southbound would cross the Via di Nola and the Via dell'Abbondanza, both about eight metres wide. Centuries of hard use had worn ruts as deep as twenty five centimetres in the paving stones of these broad boulevards. In other areas of the city, vehicular traffic was restricted and many side streets were for pedestrians only. The narrow streets of Herculaneum had much less traffic and were not rutted by wheeled traffic. In addition to the absence of wheel ruts, there were no stepping stones across its avenues, suggesting they were cleaner and better drained.

The western end of the Via dell'Abbondanza led into the main forum, a rectangular space measuring about 150 metres long by 45 metres wide. The Forum in both Pompeii and Herculaneum functioned as the heart of the city, although the Forum at Herculaneum is still buried under the town of Resina, now known as Ercolano. The Forum was a meeting place, a place for business transactions, a place for debates and religious performances. Places of worship were integral elements in the Forum complex. On the western boundary was the Temple of Apollo and on the northern side an imposing temple dedicated to Jupiter. The Forum also had key secular buildings, the most impressive being the huge Basilica, the place of judicial power.

In Herculaneum there were two important roads running east to west, Decumanus Maximus and Decumanus Inferior. These were crisscrossed by three routes running north to south, Cardo III, Cardo IV and Cardo V.

*Understanding the issues:*

1. Explanation of terms: Fora; Hellenistic; *insulae*
2. Using a plan of Pompeii, locate the following: Vesuvius Gate; Stabian Gate; Forum; Basilica; Amphitheatre; Stabian Baths; Temple of Jupiter; Great Palaestra; Large Theatre; Macellum; Temple of Apollo; Building of Eumachia, Via dell'Abbondanza; Via Stabiana.
3. Discussion: The nature and importance of Fiorelli's grid system.
4. Research: Construction and use of roads in Pompeii and Herculaneum.
5. Film Study: What does the film reveal about the making and use of roads and footpaths?

## **THE ECONOMY**

The economy of Pompeii owed much to two factors, the fertility of the Campanian soil and the town's position as the harbour for the surrounding region. Wall paintings indicate that a wide range of fruits and vegetables were grown in the region. In these, as in grain the city would have been self-sufficient. The two most significant agricultural products were undoubtedly wine and olive oil. Both of these were widely exported and they must have contributed greatly to the wealth of the rich landed families.

The one exception to this predominantly agricultural economy was the production of woollen goods. The wool was produced in the highlands of Samnium and Lucania. The widow Eumachia built the large courtyard building in the Forum to serve as the

headquarters of the trade association of wool traders and fullers. Election posters that were found refer to many other trade associations such as transport, dealers in poultry, fruit and vegetables, fishermen, bakers and goldsmiths.

Pottery was another flourishing local industry, both for domestic use and to supply the containers in which wine, oil, garum and other local products could be stored and shipped. Many small one roomed workshops are found throughout Pompeii.

In the Mensa Ponderaria, weights and measures were examined to ensure they were uniform with the official Roman units or weight checking equipment.

Commercial establishments in Herculaneum seem to have been small scale, perhaps sized to meet local demands. Fullers were well represented, though not nearly as extensively as in Pompeii. With the exception of net making businesses that catered to fishermen, other trades in the town paralleled those in Pompeii.

Wall paintings, inscription, graffiti, mosaics, frescoes, various artefacts and studies of excavation sites, provide an insight into the various industries and occupations at both Pompeii and Herculaneum.

#### *Understanding the issues*

1. Explanation of terms: Garum; Fullers; Goldsmiths.
2. What have the excavations revealed about: Taverns; brothels; mills and bakeries?
3. Discussion: What range of activities might you expect to see and hear at the markets in the Forum?
4. Research: The use of coinage and barter in Pompeii and Herculaneum.  
The importance of fishing to the economy in both regions.
5. Film Study: How does the film contribute to your understanding of the workings of fulleries? What evidence does the film present for other trades?

### **SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

In both Pompeii and Herculaneum, there was a diverse mix of social classes including wealthy landowners, merchants, artisans and slaves. Society was based on a patriarchal system. The socio-political structure was determined by the *familia*, which included all relatives of the oldest male of the clan, as well as free born or freed former slaves, who depended on the head of the *familia*. The head of the *familia* is the *paterfamilias* who has almost unlimited power (*patria potestas*) over its members.

Closely related to the concept of *familia* was the patronage system where a person of modest wealth and influence, placed himself under the protection of a powerful patron (*patronus*), thus becoming his client (*cliens*). It was the duty of the patron to assist his clients in legal and business matters. In return they gave him political and public support. Clients would come to the patron's house to greet him and publicly demonstrate their loyalty to him. This is known as the *salutatio* ritual.

Women in Pompeii and Herculaneum while they had no political rights, appeared to have more freedom than women in Rome and actively participated in the public, religious and business life. Many women were extremely wealthy and influential.

Slaves in both Pompeii and Herculaneum may have made up forty percent of the population. Slaves could be bought and sold and were part of a persons property. Freedom could be bought or granted through the patronage of their owner.

### *Understanding the issues*

1. Explanation of terms: Patronus; Paterfamilias; Salutatio
2. Outline the role played by one prominent woman, such as the rich landowner Julia Felix, or Eumachia, the businesswoman and priestess.
3. Discussion: Everyday life for rich and poor citizens of Pompeii or Herculaneum.
4. Research: The role and position of slaves in Pompeii and Herculaneum
5. Film study: What evidence does the film present about the role and status of women?

### **POLITICAL LIFE**

At the time of the so called Social Wars 91-88 BC, Pompeii and Herculaneum were made *municipiums*, provincial towns dependent on Rome, and their inhabitants became Roman citizens. Around 80BC, Latin becomes the official language and the town constitutions Romanized. Such constitutions tended to follow a broadly uniform pattern, with relatively minor variations to meet local conditions.

The government of Pompeii, the executive body, consisted of two *duumvir*, and two *aediles*, annually elected by the *comitium* the people's assembly, of which all male citizens were members. The annual election of these four magistrates was the *comitium's* only function, and as numerous slogans painted on house facades indicate, the elections created a great deal of interest. Of the four magistrates, the two *aediles* were in charge of public buildings, including temples, the two *duumviri* were in charge of justice.

Every five years, the *duumviri* were also responsible for organizing the census of all citizens and of revising the *ordo decurionum*, the legislative council (or senate). This body had 80-100 members, among them former magistrates and other citizens appointed by the *duumviri*. They had to be free born citizens and wealthy enough to be able to spend considerable sums on the community. Some professions such as gladiators, actors and innkeepers were excluded from membership.

### *Understanding the issues*

1. Explanation of terms: Municipium; comitium; duumvir; aediles; decuriones.
2. List the main features of the Roman Constitution.
3. Discussion: Why were certain professions such as actors, gladiators and innkeepers excluded from membership of the Senate?
4. Research: Examples of primary sources used to document political life in Pompeii and Herculaneum.
5. Film Study: From your viewing of the film outline the structure of the political system in Pompeii and Herculaneum.

### **EVERYDAY LIFE AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES**

The citizens of Pompeii and Herculaneum had access to a wide range of food. While the poor had to content themselves largely with porridges of wheat, split peas or broad beans, the rich could indulge themselves with more lavish fare. At dinners and banquets men and women reclined on broad, sloping couches arranged around a low, central table. A dinner of three courses could go on for hours. A banquet could have several kinds of birds such as doves, partridges, pheasants, peacocks and ostriches. Fish could also be

served. After the meat course came fruit. This was followed by varieties of wine. The people of Pompeii and Herculaneum did not neglect their leisure activities. There was an amphitheatre, exercise grounds, public baths and two theatres. The city also had a multitude of taverns, *thermopoliums*, inns and brothels.

Many people would have spent afternoons at the public baths. In Pompeii people had access to a number of baths. The oldest of these was the Stabian baths, with facilities for both men and women. The Forum Baths were smaller than the Stabian Baths. In Herculaneum patrons could use the Central Baths, while the Suburban Baths were frequented only by the wealthy classes. Patrons of the baths could bathe, exercise, have massages, socialize, and in winter could keep warm.

Many people also used the Pompeii's largest exercise ground, the Great Palaestra at the city's eastern end. Patrons could involve themselves in a number of activities such as weightlifting, discus, javelin throwing and boxing. They could also watch cockfighting. East of the Great Palaestra was the Amphitheatre which had seating capacity for 20,000 people. Admission to the upper tiers was free. Gladiatorial performances would take place with gladiators specializing in different modes of conflict. The bareheaded *retarius* carried a fisherman's trident, a dagger and a net. The helmeted *thrax* bore a short sword or curved dagger and a round shield. The *equites* fought on horseback. Gladiators might also be pitted against wild boars or bears. .

Next to gladiatorial combat, the citizens of Pompeii seemed to enjoy attending the theatres to watch plays, musical performances, poetry recitals and other forms of entertainment. The larger of the two theatres could hold 5000 spectators, while the smaller Odeon Theatre was covered and could hold 1200 patrons. At Herculaneum, the theatre had a capacity of 2500, half that of Pompeii's larger theatre, but significant considering the size of the town's population of about 5000.

#### *Understanding the issues*

1. Explanation of terms: Thermopolium; gustatio; fercula; mensae secundae; retarius
2. Design a three course menu for a Roman feast.
3. Research: The reasons why Nero had the amphitheatre closed in Pompeii for ten years in 59AD.
4. List the types of sport and entertainment available to citizens of Pompeii and Herculaneum.
5. Discussion: The operation and use of the public baths in Pompeii or Herculaneum
6. What does the film reveal - Foods, food preparation, utensils
  - Health and diet of the people
  - Water supply and sanitation
  - Clothing

#### **PUBLIC BUILDINGS (Architecture and influences)**

The Forum was the centre of life in both Pompeii and Herculaneum, and was the location of many of the more important buildings. Pompeii's Forum is an outstanding example of its kind, both in its architecture and in its grandiose nature. The Basilica was pre-Roman, a magnificent building, monumental in its proportions and serving as the seat of the tribunal and the centre of the city's life.

Temples in Pompeii were based on the great Hellenistic models. They consist of a *cella*, where the statue of the god was housed, enclosed in a larger structure usually rectangular in shape. Doric, Ionic and Corinthian columns were used.

The Temple of Apollo is an integral part of the Forum area. The building shows Italic and Greek architectural features and has a rectangular plan with the perimeter surrounded by 48 columns.

The Temple of Jupiter (Capitolium), dating back to the Samnite era, was the centre of religious life in Pompeii and was situated on the northern side of the Forum.

The theatres in both Pompeii and Herculaneum show the features of Greek models in that they exploit the natural inclination of the terrain. The Great Theatre at Pompeii was a place where performances of comedies and tragedies were held. It had a semi-circular *cavea*, and a stage (*scena*) where the actors performed. The Odeon or Small Theatre was a covered theatre used for mime, musical performances, poetry recitals and theatrical events less suited to a large audience.

The Amphitheatre in Pompeii is an elliptical structure in a depression in the ground and backing onto embankments. It consists of a large *cavea*, around which are the steps, divided into sections, which cover the entire perimeter of the construction. The seats in the lower central area were reserved for dignitaries. It was capable of holding up to 12,000 spectators and was equipped with a cover which was stretched over the complex. The Large Palaestra was built at the time of Augustus, when the Small Palaestra dating back to the Samnite period, had become insufficient for the city's needs. It became the centre in which the Collegium Juvenum, the young men of the city, exercised. It consisted of a vast square area, surrounded by walls, inside which is a portico with 118 columns along three sides and a pool in the centre. The Palaestra had efficient sanitary systems. The Palaestra in Herculaneum was about 100 metres by 80 metres, with a cross shaped swimming pool. Spectators watched competitions from a portico running around three sides of the games area, while dignitaries watched from a special box.

#### *Understanding the issues*

1. Explanation of terms: Palaestra; cella; cavea; scena.
2. List the names and features of the temples in Pompeii and Herculaneum.
3. Research: Greek influences on public buildings in Pompeii and Herculaneum
4. Discussion: The significance of the forum in Roman life.
5. Film Study: In what ways does a study of public buildings enhance our understanding of life in Pompeii and Herculaneum?

#### **PRIVATE BUILDINGS**

Exhumed from layers of pumice and ash, houses in Pompeii and Herculaneum suggest what life was like for the people of these towns. In Pompeii there were no separate residential or industrial areas and homes, shops, taverns and workshops were situated alongside each other. In Herculaneum there was a distinct upper class quarter, an elegant waterfront terrace of mansions arranged on different levels. Houses in both towns ranged from simple workmen's houses to the elegant residences of wealthy merchants and the nobility.

While the houses bordered on each other, they nevertheless guaranteed the inhabitants privacy and peace. Tall, generally windowless walls kept out the noise of the street. With openings of various sizes in the tiled roofs, even the smallest townhouses had good light. From the street entrance there was an atrium which led into the *tablinum*, or principal reception room, then to a sunlit peristyle and a colonnaded garden. Along the longer sides of the atrium could be small bedrooms (*cubicula*). A dining room (*triclinium*), so named from the arrangement of the three couches, could be found alongside the tablinum. A shrine (*lararium*) would often be in the atrium. Terracotta spouts would channel rainwater from the inward sloping roof gables into the shallow impluvium in the centre of the floor. Furnishings within the houses would have included little more than wooden couches, cupboards, small tables and screens. Shutters, doors and curtains closed rooms against the cold. Tallow candles or oil lamps would be used at night. Charcoal braziers would be used for warmth. Colourful murals and intricate mosaics would enhance the rooms.

A house excavated in Pompeii in 1895, the House of the Vettii, is one of the best known and admired houses. It was the property of the Vettii brothers, who were not of noble birth, but rich merchants. While the house is somewhat ostentatious, every object found during the excavation was left in place and it gives a good indication of the manner in which a rich citizen lived.

The House of the Mosaic Atrium exemplifies the gracious domestic style enjoyed by Herculaneum's wealthy householders. Laid out to take maximum advantage of the sea breezes and vistas, it was effectively two houses in one. Besides the original atrium house, a later extension incorporated a colonnaded garden with a fountain, a glass enclosed portico, a solarium or sun deck with a small shaded room at each end, where residents could relax during the heat of the day.

On many of the street frontages, rooms of houses had been converted into single room shops (*tabernae*) opening directly onto the street. Along the Via dell'Abbondanza in Pompeii there were numerous workshops joined to the houses of their owners.

#### *Understanding the issues*

1. Explanation of terms: Tablinum; lararium; impluvium; triclinium.
2. Draw floor plans of a villa and an artisan's house, marking in significant features.
3. Research: What is revealed about the people by the variety of frescoes and mosaics found in villas in both Pompeii and Herculaneum?
4. Discussion: What would be the benefits of living in a Roman villa compared with a house today?
5. Film Study: From the film make a list of the features shown in the House of the Faun and the Villa of Mysteries.

#### **RELIGION (Household gods, temples, foreign cults and tombs)**

At home or in the street, in private or in public, the people of Pompeii and Herculaneum were always in the presence of the gods. They worshipped them at regular hours in the many shrines and temples of the city, but they also devoted a time to them in the intimacy of their own homes. Hercules, Bacchus and Venus, based on the Greek gods Heracles, Dionysus and Aphrodite, were often found in the *lararium*, the shrine at which the head

of the household would worship his ancestors, along with members of his family and his slaves. The *lararia* tend to feature paintings of Hercules, the legendary founder of Pompeii, while in small domestic shrines and courtyard gardens, theatrical masks and busts of Bacchus glorify the god of wine.

The people also rendered homage to Venus, who as the city's official god, was expected to bring them luck and prosperity. Venus occupied a place of honour in the *lararia* and reigned over a large sanctuary close to the Forum.

Jupiter, Juno and Minerva enjoyed great popularity from the time of Sulla's founding of the Roman colony of Pompeii. The Temple of Capitoline Jupiter dominates the Forum. In the temple a triple pedestal was designed to hold the three divine statues. Priests administered the official cult, but the gods were also worshipped in private houses.

Roman religion had always proved very tolerant of foreign deities and Egyptian gods were introduced into Campania through trade links. Their cult was particularly popular amongst the lower classes freedmen and slaves. The cult gradually took hold amongst wealthier classes, becoming a semi-official religion. Many houses contained a shrine dedicated to the goddess Isis and other Egyptian deities. In the Temple of Isis, daily ceremonies were performed in her name.

The imperial cult transcended all other cults, and all divine qualities were attributed to the emperor. The emperor offered every citizen the opportunity of worshipping him, regardless of ethnic or social differences. Freedmen formed the College of *Augustales*. They took on the responsibility for the street shrines known as the Augustan Lares. An elaborate hierarchy composed of priests and priestesses, *augustales* and *ministry*, pledged themselves to the emperor. The forum celebrates this imperial glory through its statues and triumphal arches.

The roads leading to Pompeii are lined with tombs. Shops, inns and country villas stand alongside the tombs. The inscriptions on the tombs of the nobility or wealthier classes perpetuate the memory of their high offices and provide a source of information about Pompeii. The architecture of the funerary monuments is extremely varied. In the necropolis by the Herculaneum Gate the Tomb of Umbricius Scaurus, a wealthy dealer in garum, exhibits a decorative scheme inspired by the games held at the amphitheatre, showing gladiators and wild animals.

### *Understanding the issues*

1. Explanation of terms: Lararium; augustales; necropolis
2. Make a list of the main Egyptian, Greek and Roman gods.
3. Discussion: Why did the people of Pompeii and Herculaneum place so much emphasis on various forms of religion?
4. Research: What do the tombs reveal about the people of Pompeii?
5. Film Study: What does the film reveal about the worshipping of different gods?