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# *The Ancient Roman City*

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# Seventeen

# Pompeii

Pompeii is world famous because of its paradoxical preservation through destruction, the result of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius on August 24, A.D. 79. We can grasp the human dimensions of the eruption by wandering through the ruins, seeing the plaster casts of human and animal victims, and reading the eyewitness accounts by Pliny the Younger (*Letters* 6.16, 20; cf. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 66.21–23). In addition to a sense of immense human tragedy, the ruins of Pompeii give us insights into the social, political, and commercial life of a small ancient Italian city. Pompeii is a city whose history we can trace, sometimes in great and intimate detail, and because of its sudden destruction it also gives us a glimpse of events that occurred at one specific moment of intense activity.

## *Samnite Pompeii*

Four major roads crossed at the site of Pompeii: northwest along the coast to the important Greek cities of Cuma and Neapolis (Naples); south along the coast to Stabiae and the Sorrento Peninsula; north along the east side of Vesuvius to Nola; and east across the river plain to Nuceria. The agricultural products of the rich volcanic soil in the Sarno River valley were easily brought to market at Pompeii, where the coast road crossed the river and the river flowed

into the eastern corner of the Bay of Naples at a small but useful harbor.

From scattered archaeological remains, we know that Etruscans and Greeks spent time on the site in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., and that during the fifth century, Oscan-speaking mountaineers, the Samnites, became dominant throughout Campania. Under the influence of the urbanized Greek cultures, the Samnites organized the city under a magistrate called a *meddix tuticus,* supported by quaestors and aediles. Agriculture—especially the production of olives for oil and grapes for wine—and sheep-herding were major sources of wealth, and a local aristocracy was able to expand the city and build beautiful homes for itself.

At the top of the hill on which Pompeii was built, irregular streets around the Forum suggest paths leading to an early commercial center. Near the center stands a temple built in honor of Apollo in the sixth century B.C., reflecting Etruscan and Greek influence. A tomb, and deposits of Etruscan bucchero vases, have been found under the later Stabian Baths, and show that in the sixth century this site was still outside the inhabited portion of the city. Just southeast of the old core of Pompeii is the Triangular Forum, with its sixth-century Doric temple, which may have functioned as an acropolis and place of refuge.

Walls may have been built around Pompeii as early as the fifth century B.C., but it was after the Samnite Wars in the fourth century and the coming of Roman domination that the walls that still survive were built, along with the grid of main streets and the large space devoted to the Forum, apparently in the third century B.C.[1]

In the second century B.C., Samnite Pompeii consolidated its prosperity. The Forum took on the look of a formal Hellenistic piazza (Pl. 16); a new temple was built on axis at its northern end, a tufa colonnade was added, and public buildings for offices and meetings were built at the southern end. (The basilica at the southwest corner of the Forum, the oldest preserved basilica anywhere, reminds us that it was in the second century B.C. that the Forum Romanum was expanded with basilicas.) At the eastern edge of the built-up part of town, at the junction of roads to Nuceria and Stabiae, the Stabian Baths were constructed. To the south, the old Tri-

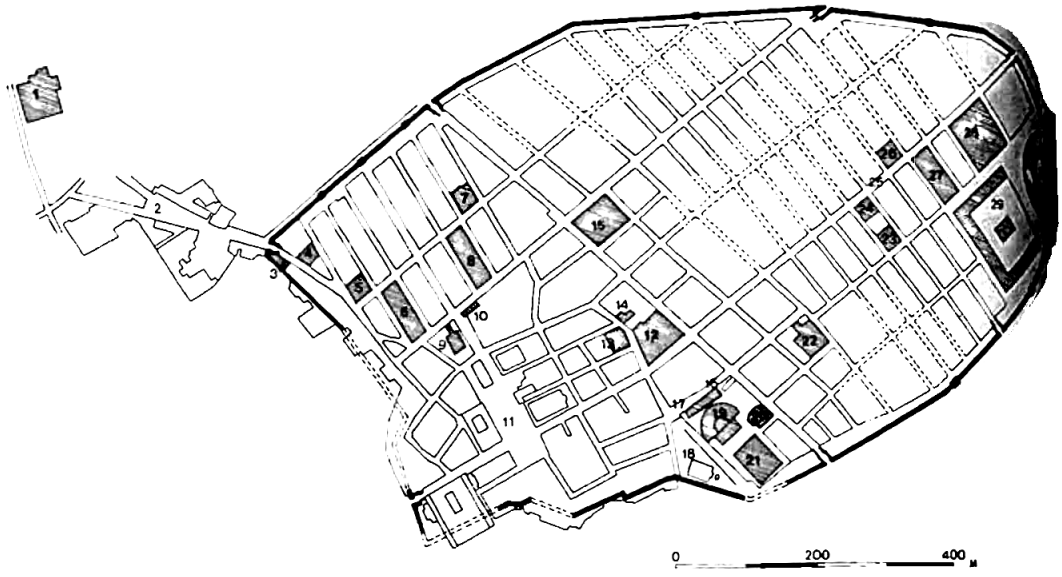


*Fig. 25.* Pompeii: **1** Villa of the Mysteries, **2** Street of the Tombs, **3** Inn of Albinus (*Ins. Occ.* 1–2), **4** House of the Surgeon (VI.i.10), **5** House of Sallust (VI.ii.4), **6** House of Pansa (Insula Arriana Polliana, VI.vi.1), **7** House of the Vettii (VI.xv.1), **8** House of the Faun (VI.xii.2), **9** Forum Baths, **10** Temple of Fortuna Augusta, **11** Forum, **12** Stabian Baths, **13** Inn (VII.xi.11–14), **14** Inn of Sittius (VII.i.44–45), **15** Central Baths, **16** Temple of Isis, **17** Samnite Palestra, **18** Triangular Forum, **19** Theater, **20** Odeum, **21** Gladiators' Barracks, **22** House of Menander (I.x.4), **23** Garum shop (I.xii.8), **24** Bakery (I.xii.1), **25** Via dell'Abbondanza, **26** House of the Moralist (III.iv.2–3), **27** House of Loreius Tiburtinus (II.ii.2), **28** Estate of Iulia Felix (II.iv.2), **29** Palestra, **30** Amphitheater.

angular Forum received a touch of monumentality, an Ionic entrance porch and colonnade, which framed in good Hellenistic style a vista out to the bay and mountains. East of this, a new theater, a colonnaded square, and a gymnasium (the Samnite Palestra) reinforced the Pompeiians' taste for Greek culture. The road leading from the Forum eastward toward Stabiae developed into a busy commercial street, called by modern visitors the Via dell' Abbondanza (Pl. 17).

Prosperity allowed the Pompeiians to rebuild their homes. New houses were built in the open parts of town; the street plan shows a slightly different orientation of streets in the area north and east of the Forum. Some of these houses were large and elaborate. With

their First Style decoration, their floor mosaics inspired by Hellenistic paintings, their spacious columned atria, and their axial vistas into colonnaded peristyles, mansions like the House of the Faun and the House of Pansa (Fig. 13) rivaled the palaces of Hellenistic princes.

*Roman Pompeii, 80 B.C.–A.D. 62*

In the Social War (90/89 B.C.) the Pompeiians joined with other Campanian cities to demand full Roman citizenship, and in the war's aftermath Sulla, in 80 B.C., occupied Pompeii and settled 4,000–5,000 of his veterans there. He gave the name "Colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeianorum" to the new colony, memorializing both his own family, the Cornelii, and his patron goddess, Venus. The colonists filled new, Roman-style magistracies (two *duoviri* and two *aediles*). The old Samnite aristocracy thus lost its political power, but not its economic influence, and within a generation or so Samnite families gained Roman citizenship, held magistracies, and joined the families of the colonists as members of the Curia. In the Augustan period a new set of family names appeared in the list of magistrates and decurions, which shows that new Roman families were moving to Pompeii and quickly rising to political, social, and economic prominence.[2]

The Roman colonists instituted a building program that gave shape to a more thoroughly Roman expression of city life. The Temple of Jupiter at the north end of the Forum was remodeled to evoke the Capitoline temple in Rome, with separate cellas for Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva; dominating the Forum, this Capitolium gave physical expression to the colony's political role as an extension of Rome (Pl. 16, 20). In the southeast corner of town, which seems to have been fairly free of buildings, the Romans constructed an amphitheater for gladiatorial performances, and they also improved the town's bathing facilities: the Stabian Baths were modernized and the new Forum Baths were built just north of the Forum (Fig. 22). They also completed some of the unfinished plans of the Hellenistic city—for instance, the building of a new small theater (Odeum). In the next century and a half, the physical de-

velopment of Pompeii continued to reflect the city's integration into the mainstream of Roman urban life. The Palestra was built west of the Amphitheater as headquarters of the collegia iuvenum, the bands of young men organized under Augustus for athletic and quasi-military activities and for patriotic indoctrination in service to the Augustan political settlement. A temple in honor of Fortuna Augusta occupied the corner of a busy intersection north of the Forum, dedicated to the cult of the emperors. The Building of Eumachia, on the east side of the Forum, was dedicated to Concordia and to Augusta Pietas.

The wealthy woman who paid for that building offers us an interesting glimpse into the upper levels of society in Roman Pompeii. Eumachia was born into a Campanian family, the Eumachii, which can be traced back to early Greek settlers who grew rich on the land; wine jars bearing their name have been found in southern France. She was married to M. Numistrius Fronto, a Lucanian who served as duovir in A.D. 2/3, and whose family wealth was based on sheep and the wool trade. Eumachia served as priestess of Venus (patron goddess of the colony) and as patroness of the fullers, who presumably used her building as guild hall and wool market (*CIL* 10.810).

In general, Pompeii ran its own affairs. Samnite and Greek names appear in the lists of magistrates and candidates, which means that under the principate the old native Samnite aristocrats received citizenship and were entitled to hold office, and that descendants of manumitted slaves with Greek names had become prosperous enough to assume the financial obligations of magistracies. The central imperial government did not interfere in the local political or economic affairs of the city, with one important exception. In A.D. 59 a riot broke out in the amphitheater between Pompeiians and visitors from Nuceria—evidence that the amphitheater served a regional audience, not just a local one. People were killed in the melee, and as a result the Roman Senate decreed that the Pompeiians could hold no public gatherings for ten years (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.7).

*The Earthquake and Its Aftermath*

The most vivid period in the urban life of Pompeii began in A.D. 62, when a serious earthquake inflicted catastrophic damage on the city, and ended in A.D. 79, when the eruption of Vesuvius finally destroyed, buried, and preserved the city. A relief carving in the atrium of the House of Caecilius Jucundus illustrates the first earthquake's damage (Pl. 20): temples, arches, and statues lean crazily on their foundations. Interestingly, the demography of the city seems to have changed significantly between the two eruptions. For various reasons—including, surely, simple fear that more earthquakes would follow—the old landed aristocracy tended to move out of town following the quake of 62. Some private houses were converted to reasonably elegant inns.[3] Others were put to more common uses, which indicate a decline in genteel living standards and a quickened pace of urban life. Gardens were paved over (I.xii.3). Messy, smelly fullers' establishments, and bakeries (Pl. 18), moved into noble houses. The luxurious suburban Villa of the Mysteries (Fig. 21) became a working farm, its elegant chambers divided up into very ordinary spaces. Among Pompeii's total population of between 15,000 and 20,000 there still were wealthy people, of course, but those about whom we have the clearest knowledge were freedmen. With their showpiece of a house (Fig. 15), the Vettii brothers, both freedmen, are a good example of the upper economic class at the time of the eruption in A.D. 79. Another example is the old Samnite family of the Arrii, which is known to have had a major farm in the area, as well as a brick factory. One of their freedmen, C. Arrius Crescens, seems to have lived in House III.iv.2. Another, T. Arrius Polites, is known from a wine jar bearing his name, found in the House of the Moralist (III.iv.3), and from an inscription (*CIL* 4.3152) which records him as a benefactor of the city. It seems likely that both of these freedmen were involved in the wholesale wine business that operated out of the House of the Moralist. The family's old mansion was the Insula Arriana Polliana (VI.vi.1; Fig. 13), but it had become the property of one Cn. Alleus Nigidius Maius, himself a member of an important local trading family, and also known as the sponsor of a pair of gladiatorial spec-

tacles of which he was very proud (*CIL* 4.1177, 1179). By the time the city was destroyed Nigidius no longer lived there. He had entrusted the family mansion as rental property to a slave, Primus (*CIL* 4.138).

At the moment of the eruption in A.D. 79, the Pompeiians were still repairing the damage from the earthquake of A.D. 62, and the progress they had made in those seventeen years gives a remarkable impression of their urban priorities.

In the Forum, they had restored the most necessary buildings first (Pl. 16). At the south end, the Basilica and municipal offices had been thoroughly restored, though the Comitium received more cursory treatment. All the statues had been removed from the Forum, presumably to be repaired, and had not yet been replaced; several new bases had been erected at the southern end, but the statues were never installed. The paving and colonnading of the Forum was only partially completed by 79. Considerable attention had been devoted early on to the eastern side of the Forum. Some repairs had been carried out, no doubt at private expense, on the Building of Eumachia, and two new public precincts, usually identified as the Temple of Vespasian and the Temple of the Lares, were being built to the north, along the east side of the Forum. Both of these were nearing completion in 79, although neither had yet received the final paving and wall decoration. The Market at the northeast corner of the Forum had been thoroughly repaired and was in operation. On the west, the precinct of Apollo was receiving repairs to colonnade, temple, and cult statues, but much remained to be done. The Capitolium temple at the north end of the Forum also was undergoing extensive repairs, but had not yet received its new roof; the cult may have been moved to a temporary site at the smaller and more easily repaired Temple of Jupiter Melichius near the theaters—which would have made it less urgent to finish what in theory should have been the city's most important temple.

In fact, the temple that had been most efficiently and speedily repaired, and even enlarged and elaborated, was the temple of the Egyptian goddess Isis.[4] The devoted activity focused on this Oriental cult contrasts with the more desultory construction work on some of the official cults of the state.

Elsewhere, the top part of the cavea of the large Theater which had collapsed in the earthquake of 62 had not been rebuilt, although the lower rows of seats, along with the stage and the scene building, had been repaired. The collapsed substructures of the Amphitheater had been reconstructed, evidence that the Pompeiians were once more able to enjoy gladiatorial games, and on a more enthusiastic scale than ever. The porticoed square behind the Theater had been converted into a barracks and training ground, and a house close by (V.v.3) into a lodging, for gladiators. The walls of the Palestra had collapsed, and had been quickly repaired; an elaborate swimming pool had been added in the center of the courtyard, although the pipes to supply it with water had not yet been hooked up at the time of the eruption in 79.

An aqueduct had supplied the city—its public fountains, its baths, and many of its private houses—with water ever since the Augustan period, but the earthquake of 62 had severely damaged it. Operations were under way in 79 to expand the system, and the new pool in the palestra was one indication that a better supply was being planned. The new Central Baths, still under construction to serve the growing northeastern residential district, were another. The old Stabian Baths also were being repaired. But while the Pompeiians were waiting for the new water system to be completed, they had to rely on the cisterns and wells that had served the city before the construction of the aqueduct in the first place. As a result, only the Forum Baths (Fig. 22) had been put back into service by 79—partly because they had been less damaged than the Stabian Baths, and partly because they were smaller and could be adequately supplied from the cisterns.