

# Social structure of pompeii and herculaneum



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Many written and archaeological sources have revealed different information about the social structure in Pompeii and Herculaneum. Pompeii and Herculaneum housed over 10 000 to 20 000 people, all separating into three main social classes; Freeborn, Freedmen and Slaves. All people were either permanently born into a specific group or rarely had the ability to change their status.[1]Pompeii and Herculaneum consisted of a range of mixed social groups which included rich land-owners, merchants, artisans and slaves. Both towns were lead by men following the patriarchal system. All elite people were determined by their previous families.[2]Men and women were treated differently, as the women had less responsibility to the community than the men had.[3]

On the top of the social structure in Pompeii and Herculaneum was Freeborn. Freeborn men and women were classified as the high-class residents of Pompeii and Herculaneum, both politically and socially.[4]Freeborn people lived on altering their lives to satisfy and impress the people of Pompeii and Herculaneum.[5]It was important to publicly show that they were elite and important and in doing so freeborn men and women dressed with discrete details (toga for men and stola for women, (Refer to Appendix 9 and 10) that made them stand out amongst the rest of the public.[6]All freeborn people in Pompeii and Herculaneum came from either their ancestors or by property. [7]They included wealthy landowners and businessmen. Freeborn men had many advantages and satisfactions in being so highly ranked. Men had full legal rights and could become candidates for political office. They could become part of the council and dominate the community finances, spaces and religion. Freeborn men were very influential people who had statues

devoted to them and had honorary tombs made for them. Freeborn men had reserved seating in the amphitheatre.[8]

An archaeological fresco has shown a wealthy freeborn man and women in a banquet scene which indicates the social standing, where servants and slaves are typically displayed as smaller and lower people in the picture.[9]

( Refer to Appendix 5)

Women in Pompeii and Herculaneum were expected to run the household, take care of children and manage the finances.[10]High-class women unlike men could not be in the political office. They were under the legal administration of their fathers and husbands which meant that they would belong with whichever social class their husband or father were in[11]. Freeborn women could own their own property, have an education and become businesswomen and priestesses. An example of a woman was Eumachia who was both business woman and a city priestess.[12](Refer to Appendix 1). Another example is Julia Felix who was a very wealthy women who owned an entire block of land in Pompeii.[13](Refer to Appendix 4).

Like freeborn men, women received statues and tombs in their honour.

Women also helped with the construction of buildings and tombs.[14]Women in Pompeii and Herculaneum were not classified as citizens, education was a symbol of respect but motherhood was the most valued occupation.[15]They could not control the political office as they required particular characteristics such as power and rights which they lacked.[16]Unlike many other Roman women Pompeian women had more freedom and could participate in the public, religious and business life.[17]Several wall

paintings, inscriptions and frescoes have displayed Pompeian and Herculaneum women actively engaged in public activities and walking around the city freely.[18](Refer to Appendix 6 and 7).

Eumachia was a very influential women in Pompeii and Herculaneum. She owned a large building in the Forum of Pompeii which was the Fullers (Refer to Appendix 3). An inscription signifies that she built it with her own money, in honour of Augustan concord. Eumachia was the patron of the Fullers who worked in the building. The Fullers made a statue in her honour.[19]

Freed people were known as liberti who were formerly known slaves. In order to become a Freedmen one must buy their freedom or be granted it by their owner.[20]Freed men were men and women who were freed from slavery and no longer had to serve anyone.[21]The process and ceremony of being set free was called ' Manumission' and in this process the former slave was beaten for the last time to remind them that they were still in debt to their master.[22]Freed men's names gave evidence to the status they belonged to.[23]

The freed people had numerous restrictions on their rights as they owed duties and responsibilities to their previous owners. This is where the patronage system comes into action where the former slave has become the client for their master. Freedmen had low social status and were poor, but it was possible for them to succeed in trade and become wealthy.[24]Many freedmen became wealthy and influential; an example is the Vetii Brothers, 1895.[25]The Vetii Brothers Aulus Vettius Restitutus and Aulus Vettius Conviva were former slaves who had been freed and became wealthy

tradesmen. The House of the Vetii was owned by the Vettii brothers and one of the most well known and admired houses, it displayed a range of different frescoes which indicated their wealth through trade. Evidence has proven that they were wine merchants and became very well known and influential people in Pompeii and Herculaneum.[26]

A fresco in their home portrayed Hermes god of Trade, located in their triclinium trying to profess their thanks to him.[27](Refer to Appendix 8).

Another archaeological source was a poster which said: '[A VETTIUS] RESTITUTUS ROG[AT] VETTI CONIVA, AUGUSTALIS [FAC]'. This poster was used to help the former owners of the brothers in the political votes as they had gained many connections through trade. The House of the Vettii contained many archaeological sources which helped reveal information about the social structure in Pompeii and Herculaneum. (Appendix 11 shows a picture of Priapus weighing his phallus, which was located at the front door greeting the guests).

Freedmen participated in religious cults and could have their own businesses. Freedmen could not have political power like Freeborn men could but they could vote in the elections. Freed women like men could not hold formal political office and could also work for their former master through the patronage system.[28]

In Pompeii and Herculaneum little evidence has been found about the slaves and their lives.[29]Slaves came from a range of different countries and could be bought and sold by their masters.[30]Slaves had no rights, privileges[31]and no permanent home as their owners could sell and dispose

of them at anytime.[32]Many owners bought slaves for sexual intentions.

[33]Several slaves were educated sometimes more than their owner. Their duty was to clean and cook , some took on the role of doctors and teachers.

[34]

In Pompeii slaves came from debtors and prisoners from wars usually consisted of women and children.[35]Slaves made up for forty percent of the population in both Pompeii.[36]Slaves worked for Freeborn people, Freedmen and the town council.[37]A range of evidence identifies that some slaves lived with their owners as they were considered by law as part of the property.[38]The House of Menander and the House of the Centenary are some examples of houses where specific rooms were assigned only to the slaves.[39]Tombs that were owned by slaves was rare, seemingly as most slaves were buried in random unmarked places.[40]An example of a tomb that was owned by a slave is shown through inscriptions “ Conviva, slave of Veia, lived 20 years”.[41]

The main goal was to be granted freedom and no longer be a slave for anyone. In order to be free it was required by the slave to either pay off their freedom or be granted freedom by their owner. The freedom converted the slaves to Freedmen.[42]Freedom for the slaves came with a ceremony called “ Manumission”.[43]Many slaves resumed work with their previous owners but did not get the benefit of citizenship.[44]

The relationship between the client and patron was a very common characteristic in all social classes in Pompeii and Herculaneum. It was a patronage system where high status people became leaders to the lower

class people making them the client. In return the client was expected to support their master through political elections and any other services needed. In doing so the client was rewarded with a gift , free meal or guidance with their the legal affairs. Clients were supported politically, socially, economically and legally. After many years of serving the owner the slave is granted freedom and adopts the owners name and become their client.[45]

An example of this relationship was Eumachia and the guild of fullers. A statue of Eumachia was dedicated to her in her honour by the Fullers. (Refer to Appendix 1). Also there was an inscription on the statue that read ‘ The Fullers (dedicated this statue) to Eumachia, daughter of Lucius, Public priestess’.[46](Refer to Appendix 2).

In conclusion written and archaeological sources have created a wide range of knowledge about the social structure in Pompeii and Herculaneum. The social structure branched out into three main categories freeborn, freedmen and slaves, people were either born into the social class or rarely changed into another status.

Appendix

Appendix One-

[http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1058/739235616\\_e3e5b19055.jpg](http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1058/739235616_e3e5b19055.jpg)

Appendix Two-

[http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus\\_images/eumachia\\_inscript.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/eumachia_inscript.jpg)

<https://assignbuster.com/social-structure-of-pompeii-and-herculaneum/>

inscription on Eumachia's building

Appendix Three-

scan from book.

Appendix Four- Insulae of Julia Felix.

[http://wings.buffalo.edu/AandL/Maecenas/italy\\_except\\_rome\\_and\\_sicily/pompeii/ac880526.jpg](http://wings.buffalo.edu/AandL/Maecenas/italy_except_rome_and_sicily/pompeii/ac880526.jpg)

Refer to Appendix 5-

<http://www.scalarchives.com/scalopic/foglia1/b/AF00125b.jpg>

Appendix Six- Three women conversing in Herculaneum. (Fresco)

<http://www.corbisimages.com/images/67/8C223073-D171-4282-86AB-9CFCDFA59F18/MI001617.jpg>

<http://www.corbisimages.com/Images/spacer.gif>

Appendix Seven- Women playing the Lyre.

[http://www.the-romans.co.uk/g5/22.woman\\_with%20lyre\\_small.jpg](http://www.the-romans.co.uk/g5/22.woman_with%20lyre_small.jpg)

Appendix Eight- Hermes god of Trade.

Priapus-Hermes (Mercury), phallic fertility god, with caduceus | Roman fresco  
Pompeii

Appendix 9- Stola for Women.

<https://assignbuster.com/social-structure-of-pompeii-and-herculaneum/>



[http://www.fashion-era.com/images/all\\_greeks\\_romans/faustina-roman-flora2.jpg](http://www.fashion-era.com/images/all_greeks_romans/faustina-roman-flora2.jpg)

Appendix 10- Toga for Men.

Appendix 11-

<http://0.tqn.com/d/ancienthistory/1/0/0/l/2/HouseoftheVetii.jpg>