

# Religion in pompeii and herculaneum religion essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Archaeologists in the past and today have recovered and excavated sources to reveal aspects and facts of past societies. The two main cities of Vesuvius, Pompeii and Herculaneum have undergone such excavations, enabling historians of today to reveal facts, in particular, about religion in the cities. Religion was an important part of an individual's life in both Pompeii and Herculaneum. The religion of the time was polytheistic, meaning that the civilisation believed and worshipped spirits of the Gods. Religion was an active part of everyday life and the worship of offerings was performed in order to keep the Gods satisfied, to ensure the prosperity and safety of all aspects of one's life, and one's family. A number of sources both written and archaeological have provided today's society with facts and evidence of the household Gods and foreign cults of that civilisation. The sources and what they reveal about religion, household Gods and foreign cults, will be explained below.

" Most sacred, the most hallowed place on earth is the home of each and every citizen. There are his sacred heart and his household Gods, there the very centre of his worship, religion and domestic ritual" Cicero. This written source clearly identifies and reveals that the citizens of Pompeii and Herculaneum were intertwined both mentally and emotionally with their religion and spirituality. Cicero describes the religion to be most sacred, revealing that religion played an important, central and significant role in the daily lives and households of an individual and their family. Not only does this source emphasise the importance of religion, but it shows its importance and passion of worship and action within the home. This is revealed through the use of the words, ' most hallowed place on earth.' The worship and

rituals of the Household Gods were central and essential within the household and home of an individual. Hence the household Gods were a major and significant aspect of religion in Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Many religious practices were celebrated by citizens in their home and household shrine known as the Lararium. Larariums have been found and excavated all over Pompeii and Herculaneum, by modern archaeologists such as Giuseppe Fiorelli. Household Gods sought to save the family from any misfortune or negativity that may enter the door; a spiritual place of the home that needed to be protected by the guardian spirits (Lares) of the households, from incoming evils that may try and enter the home.

A lararium excavated in the House of the Vetti, containing a wall painting of the lares (household Gods), a genius (the god of the male line of descent), the Mercury God of commerce and the Dionysus God of wine, depicts and reveals aspects and facts of such household Gods and their importance to an individual and their family. The lararium was found in the atrium, at the entrance of the house. This source is structured and built depicting the front of a temple with columns. This observation revealed to archaeologists that the source has a religious meaning. A wall painting within the infrastructure depicting a temple is an image of the spirit family of genius, Lares, household Gods and other deities. The figure on the furthest left of the image is the genius. The genius wears a toga, in purple symbolising its high ranking and importance, as it's the line of male descent to the paterfamilias of the household; prospering fertility for the families continuation. On either side, the Lares of the household are holding a drinking horn in one hand and a wine bucket in the other.

<https://assignbuster.com/religion-in-pompeii-and-herculaneum-religion-essay/>

The drinking horns and wine buckets symbolise the offerings of worship and praise towards the Mercury God of commerce (right) and the Dionysus God of Wine (centre). The depiction of drinking horns and wine buckets also symbolise the household prayers and worship that were led by and was a responsibility of the paterfamilias and the offerings of fruit, incense and special cakes were made at the shrine. The snakes below the Lares, which move towards a small altar, have been interpreted as a protective spirit of the Lares and the offerings made to them. The snakes were protectors of prosperity.

Pompeii and Herculaneum contained a society that was tolerant and accepting of the worship and rituals brought about by foreign Gods and imported cults. Pompeii and Herculaneum were bombarded with influences from Egypt and Eastern Mediterranean, which affected the structure, traditions and rituals of their religion. Two cults that had a significant affect and presence in Pompeii were the Egyptians cult of Isis and the cult of Bacchus.

The cult if Isis, was the goddess of life, fertility and rebirth; A temple of Isis was excavated in Pompeii, revealing that such a cult was worshipped among many in the civilisation as the temples structure proved to be complex and extravagant compared to other temples eg. Surrounded by high walls, initiation hall and an underground chamber storing a basin of holy water retrieved from the Nile River. The worshippers of the cult performed daily rituals and ceremonies carried out by priests at dawn and in the afternoon.

Source four, a fresco found in Herculaneum depicts and reveals the

ceremonies that took place for the cult of Isis. The fresco shows the high  
<https://assignbuster.com/religion-in-pompeii-and-herculaneum-religion-essay/>

priest standing at the entrance of the temple, looking down on the ceremony beneath. One priest tends to the sacred fire and another priest leads the followers of worship in two rows. In the foreground of the source there are two ibises, sacred to Isis. This source also reveals that women in Pompeii were drawn to this cult, as most worshippers in the fresco appear to be women. It reveals that this cult was widespread, worshipped daily and extremely influential. It also reveals that foreign cults in Pompeii and Herculaneum were accepted and prominent within the civilisation.

There is also evidence suggesting the presence of other foreign cults in the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Through the excavation of archaeological sources, cult objects found in Pompeii and the cult of Sabazius has been suggested. There is also various evidence of the existence of Judaism including graffito of Judaic names, frescos and the presence of Jews nearby. Till today, there is much speculation as to whether or not Christianity was present in the cities, as evidence of the crucifixion was found.

Religion in Pompeii and Herculaneum was an important and significant part of each individual's homes and daily lives. From the archaeological sources excavated and the written sources produced, it is revealed that the household Gods of each home were the central aspect of living and worship. Each individual lived to favour and fulfil the Gods wants and needs. The sources also reveals facts about the foreign Gods that were brought about to Pompeii and Herculaneum through external influences, like Egypt (cult of Isis), and the significance of such worship for the civilisation. The sources that have been excavated and brought about to today's society reveals facts and helps modern archaeologists gain insight to the unknown of the past.

<https://assignbuster.com/religion-in-pompeii-and-herculaneum-religion-essay/>

With reference and study of the sources provided in this explanation, the religion of Pompeii and Herculaneum has been revealed.

The lares themselves were painted in the lararium. In the lararium painting from the house of the Vetti shown below, the genius is depicted wearing the toga praetexta , bordered in purple, the garment of high-ranking Roman magistrates. The Thermopolium of the Lares in Pompeii shows a typical painting including the snakes associated with protection of food from vermin below the group. The group contains the two lares, the genius of the house, and two further figures – Mercury god of commerce and Dionysus god of wine.

The paterfamilias was responsible for leading the household prayers at the lararium, and offerings of significance such as first fruits of crops and special cakes, were made at the shrine. The shrine was also garlanded with flowers so there are hooks nearby for this purpose. Of particular importance were family occasions such as birth, marriage and the coming of age of a young man.