

Pompeii and herculanuem economy



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What does the available evidence reveal about your topic in Pompeii and Herculaneum? When discussing the economies of Pompeii and Herculaneum, it must firstly be considered that on the grand scale, neither of the towns were major centres of economic activity. Other towns such as Capua and Puteoli were far more economically active around the time of the eruption. However, due to the carbonised preservation of many objects in the cities, we are able to analyse a greater range of evidence in Pompeii and Herculaneum than in surrounding towns. This evidence provides us with the knowledge that the two cities were involved in structured and organised trade, markets, and overall commercial activity. It can be interpreted from the evidence that commercial life in Pompeii was relatively significant.

It has been estimated by historians and archaeologists that there were around 600 privately owned shops in the city, around 200 public eating and drinking houses, as well as graffiti evidence that a major mixed market was held on a weekly basis in the Forum. During the mixed market, temporary stalls (as indicated in wall paintings) that sold fresh fruit and vegetables, spices, perfume, shoes, flowers and prepared food, were set up alongside permanent structures, for example, the produce and fish markets and the Macellum. The market would allow the buying and selling of locally and imported goods. A Table of Measures which is ??? a stone table with 12 bowl-shaped depressions designed to hold liquid or dry substances in volumes corresponding to the weights and measures of the Roman standard ??? has been discovered in both Pompeii and Herculaneum. This table would have been used during the mixed market, where a city official would have

supervised the weighing and measuring of goods. Money and lending was an important part of commercial life in Pompeii and Herculaneum.

In Pompeii, 150 carbonised wax tablets containing the receipts of loans, rent payments and other business transactions were found on the house of Lucius Caecilius Jucudus. Such tablets, indicate commercial activity in Pompeii, which would have also taken place in Herculaneum, however possibly to a lesser degree. In the two cities Roman () coins were used for the buying of goods and services. The Bradford Team in the Anglo Forum Project discovered over 1000 coins in Pompeii, as well as wall inscriptions listing food prices. This indicates the significant level of organised commercial activity that took place in the city. Archaeologists have also discovered deep wheel ruts in the major streets in Pompeii, suggesting heavy commercial traffic in the city. Herculaneum was not as commercially active as Pompeii, wheel ruts are not as prominent in Herculaneum, suggesting less traffic and activity. It can be suggested that Herculaneum was more focused on local production and was self-sufficient, rather than taking part in the amount of trade took place in Pompeii.

That is not to say, that Herculaneum was not involved in trade. One can deduce, from the presence of an official table of measures in the cities, that both Pompeii Herculaneum took part in some trade. As Herculaneum's table of measures was standardised to the Roman empire, this suggests that Herculaneum would have taken part in trade with the Romans or cities that were connected with Rome. An official table of measures was discovered in the forum in Pompeii, outside the Temple of Apollo. This discovery in Pompeii reiterates our understanding that Pompeii was involved in trade.

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While Pompeii was not a huge economic centre, for its population, the town was rather well equipped economically. Pompeii exported mostly agricultural produce, – goods for which it was a major market. The economy of Pompeii and Herculaneum owed much to two factors, the incredibly fertile Campanian soil, that the town was situated on, and the town's position inside the harbour used by surrounding regions. The fertile soil of Pompeii and Herculaneum allowed the cities to be self sufficient, and even to produce an excess of goods which could be exported. Wine and olive oil were widely exported from Pompeii with evidence of Pompeian wine in as far as Britain. Land owners, who were generally partitions as land owning was the most respectable occupation at the time benefited substantially in an economic sense from such exports. Trade was an important part of life around the time of the eruption of AD 79, and was a substantial contributor to the state of the economy in Pompeii.

Strabo in his Geography states that Pompeii, on the River Sarnus, which takes goods both inland and away, is the seaport for Nola, Nuceria and Acherrae. Such a statement provides historians with evidence that supports the theory that Pompeii was a relatively important trading city. Herculaneum does not provide as much evidence for being as commercially established as Pompeii, perhaps this is due to the fact that only a small amount of the city has been excavated. But nonetheless general historical opinion that Herculaneum was a far less prominent commercial city than Pompeii, and had limited imports and exports.

Due to the lack of evidence and conflicting interpretations by historians, no definite conclusions can be made over the economic activities that took

place in Pompeii and Herculaneum before the eruption of 79 AD. However one can infer that economic activity such as commercial life, city markets and trade, played an important role in the lives of the inhabitants of the cities. Such activities were organised and advanced suggesting a highly civilised, bureaucratised society.