

Ancient History

Social Structure within Pompeii and Herculaneum

Men, women, freedman & slaves



Gabby

Classes within society

1. Freeborn men
2. Freeborn women
3. Freedmen; liberti (both men and women)
4. Slaves
5. Women

* Note there could also be some movement between classes e.g. slaves could become freedmen.

Freeborn - elite within society

Men	Women
Had full legal rights (Senatorial elite)	Still under legal control of their fathers/husbands
Could engage in politics	Could not hold public office but could support electoral candidates
Often wealthy landowners and businessmen	Could still own their own property and conduct businesses
Power to control city (public finances, spaces & religion)	Constructed buildings and tombs
“Best seats” in amphitheatre/theatres	Did not have best seats (still better than slaves)
Received honorary statues and tombs	Held priesthoods

Freeborn Sources

- Villa of Papyri owned by father-in-law of Julius Caesar
- Statue erected to freeborn man, Marcus Holconius Rufus
- ‘Holiday’ type villas on the outskirts towards the sea, were predicted to be owned by the wealthiest
- Statues of Marcus Nonius Balbus who built a second public bath and received various statues in his honour

Freedmen (Liberti)

- Men and women who were freed from slavery
- Often had former masters who were eventually 'set free'
- Had great potential to become wealthy and influential within society

Men	Women
Voted in elections	Could not vote
Owned businesses and could trade their crafts	Women would often continue to work for their former masters
Were able to participate in religious cults	Women were also able to participate in cults
Opportunity to become an Augustalis (Priest of the Cult of the Emperor) - but could not reach any higher political position	Wealthier freedwomen could become Priestesses
Could not conduct formal political office	Also could not hold formal political office

Liberti Sources

- Vetti brothers (freedmen who became winemakers) house which was quite opulent as a result of their successful winemaking business
- “For a deserving freedman his patron erected this monument”- inscribed on a freedmen’s grave epitaph

Slaves

- 40% of the population were slaves
- Less evidence about slaves lifes
- Some slaves were actually owned by Pompeii's council
- Few slaves had tombstones (possibly because they couldn't afford to pay for a tomb stone)
- Common jobs included: domestic work (e.g. handmaiden slaves), tutors, labourers, cooks, cleaners
- A few houses were found to even have a separate slave quarter
- Gladiators were actually slaves yet were highly respected

Slaves Sources

- Wax tablet inscriptions reading tradings of slaves
- Shackles at Villa of Agrippa Postumus
- Prison cells at Villa of Agrippa Postumus
- Iron block (to chain slaves to) at Villa Regina
- “Convia, slave of Veia, lived 20 years” - inscribed on a marble plaque outside of the Nucerian Gate
- “Helle, slave-girl, lived 4 years” - inscribed on a herm
- “Poppea Note, a freed woman of Priscus... had her own slaves” - Pamela Bradley (Contemporary Historian)

Women within society

- Typical role in Roman society involved running a household, bringing up children and controlling finances
- Female slave jobs included: prostitution, cooks, cleaners, wet nurses and household servants
- Pompeian women had greater freedom compared to women in Rome
- Women could not vote but they still made declarations about their political opinions (inscriptions)

Women Sources

- Julia Felix's frescoes: depict Pompeian women engaging in public life and moving around the city
- Businesswoman Eumachia: building in the Forum that states her name, “The Eumachia Building”
- Evidence of freedwomen enjoying a life of privilege include jewellery and coins found with a skeleton in Pompeii.
- Evidence for women as prostitutes: frescoes found within the Inn of Salvius
- “Women could own property, do business, pay for construction, hold honorific and cultic office, and go about in public” - Elaine Fantham (Contemporary Historian)

Patron-Client Relationships ('Classes Mixing')

- Elite freeborn families often acted as 'patrons' to those in the lower-class, meaning they had a responsibility of the client to support their patron at political elections and enact any favors they may need.
- In turn, the patron may assist his client in legal matters or provide him with food or a gift.
 - An example of this relationship was in Pompeii with Eumachia's statue from the guild of fullers