

Dining in the Gardens of Herculaneum and Pompeii

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The inhabitants of Herculaneum and Pompeii dined outside in gardens, surrounded by flora and fauna. Men and women reclined on masonry or wooden couches, arranged around a central table or fountain, eating and drinking from vessels that rested nearby. The diners were shaded by a pergola, often covered in vines invoking the god Bacchus, whose wine they may have also enjoyed. Scents of flowers, fruit trees, and other vegetation of the garden wafted through the air, interrupted only by the smell of food cooking on the hearth. Conversation took place both with other diners on the couches, and also with those who may have sat on neighboring benches. As they spoke, their attention shifted from the decorative water fountains, to frescoes of a hunt or of an extended garden scene, or to the altars, niches, and statues of the gods that adorned the space. These are the 'Garden Dining Spaces' created by the inhabitants of Herculaneum and Pompeii [Figures 1, 2, and 3].

My project focuses on these Garden Dining Spaces, examining their context, construction, and decoration, and exploring how their design and use enhance our understanding of ancient Roman social behavior, economic activity, and religious and ritual practice. Dining outdoors in the garden was common in antiquity, but little focused attention has been paid to the subject and the spaces created to support the habit. Most often, scholars interpret the practice and the spaces as commonsense or in keeping with Roman social performance and competition. Few, however, have examined the evidence holistically. With the support of the American Friends of Herculaneum Society Scholarship, I have nearly completed the data collection for my comprehensive study of the Garden Dining Spaces at Herculaneum and Pompeii. I have selected these two cities as primary sites for my research, not only for their level of preservation, but also for the number of Garden Dining Spaces they have. A total of seventy-one have been identified at Herculaneum and Pompeii and are currently under investigation. Outside of the Bay of Naples region, evidence of outdoor or garden dining spaces in the Roman world is lacking.

Thanks to the American Friends of Herculaneum Society, I have now gained access to and studied forty-seven of the Garden Dining Spaces in Herculaneum and Pompeii. For each property with remains of a Garden Dining Space, I conducted an on-site investigation to record information about the context, architecture, decoration, and overall design of the Garden Dining Space within. Because Garden Dining Spaces were often left exposed to the elements after their initial excavation and are now rapidly disintegrating and disappearing, I also rely on excavation reports, publications, and archival materials to augment the *in situ* remains. My next steps are to catalogue this information in a database and, when completed, run queries to illuminate patterns

among Garden Dining Spaces. Common or disparate sizes, construction materials, design, decoration, and distribution across the sites in which they appear, considered in concert with artistic, literary, and epigraphic evidence related to Garden Dining Spaces, will elucidate the use and social, economic, and religious and ritual significance of these deliberately-constructed spaces.

Preliminary conclusions indicate that the Garden Dining Spaces of Herculaneum and Pompeii reveal complexities of Roman dining not addressed in existing scholarship, with a more demographically diverse population participating in reclined dining, as well as a wider range of motivations for and meanings behind dining. Garden Dining Spaces are found in many contexts – elite and non-elite domestic, commercial, and funerary settings – and demonstrate that reclined dining on couches was practiced by a larger part of Roman society, challenging the standard dichotomy of elite and non-elite dining, reclined and seated respectively. Furthermore, despite the traditional interpretation of these spaces in non-elite contexts as emulative of elite behavior and culture, the evidence suggests instead a more widespread practice of the activities held in the spaces across the social and economic strata of Roman society. The practice was so widespread that common restaurants and inns invested in permanent Garden Dining Spaces to meet the needs of their clientele. The similarity in the design of Garden Dining Spaces in domestic, commercial, and funerary contexts suggests the Garden Dining Space was used not simply for pleasure or as part of Roman social performance and competition, but as a sacred space integral to the worship of one's ancestors, family gods, or personal deities, by kin, community, or a diverse and unrelated group of people, to promote and ensure continued fertility and prosperity for the individual or group.

A cursory investigation of the disparity in archaeological evidence at Herculaneum, which has only two Garden Dining Spaces (0.5 GDSs/hectare), and Pompeii, which has sixty-nine (1.08 GDSs/hectare), revealed two things. First, that the architecture and arrangement of space in Herculaneum is different from Pompeii. There are few *hortus* or peristyle gardens in the excavated remains of Herculaneum, where paved and fountain courtyards seem to predominate instead. At Pompeii, *hortus* and peristyle gardens are common, and many of the southern and southeastern *insulae* of the city were dedicated to agricultural production, the gardens or vineyards of which often served as the setting for Garden Dining Spaces. Second, the socio-economic differences of each settlement may have also played a role in the frequency of Garden Dining Spaces. Pompeii was a trade center and farming settlement that looked to and was connected with its rural hinterland, whereas Herculaneum looked more to Neapolis and the luxury villas on the littoral. This difference in 'orientation' may have affected how the people of Herculaneum and Pompeii related to their urban environment, perhaps resulting in the disparity of evidence of Garden Dining Spaces between the two sites.

The Garden Dining Spaces of Herculaneum and Pompeii are understudied, but preserve important evidence of ancient daily life. The disparity of evidence for these spaces in Campania and in the wider Roman world suggests that dining in the garden was motivated for more specific reasons than pleasure and more profound reasons than social performance and competition. The disparity also suggests that the practice of or the evidence for dining in the garden changed over time, perhaps demonstrating a change in building materials or a change in the significance of the practice and the spaces, resulting in their removal and less-common construction during the first century AD. With the support of the American Friends of Herculaneum Society, I am breathing new life into these long-neglected Garden Dining Spaces, and expanding our conception of Roman daily life and society.



Figure 1: Casa di Nettuno ed Anfitrite, V, 6-7, Herculaneum (Photograph by author, 2018)



Figure 2: Domus of Sutoria Primigenia, I.xiii.2, Pompeii (Photograph by author, 2018).



Figure 3: Casa dell'Efebo, I.vii.10-12,19, Pompeii (Photograph by author, 2017).