

Brand New Restaurant in Pompeii

Archeologists have recently discovered a brand new thermopolium in the Regio V sector of Pompeii. The thermopolium appears to be quite similar to our fast food restaurants today! Counter pictured below.



The interior of the thermopolium includes a myriad of frescos depicting various animals or people, for example the dog depicted on the right. Other frescos included a rooster, which was later discovered to have been one of the animals served at the thermopolium.



The laboratory analysis conducted by anthropologist Valeria Amoretti provides more detailed information on the structural elements the objects found on the counter and the human and animal bone fragments discovered in the dolia jars. (Detailed laboratory analysis on page 2.)

As noted in the picture below, human bones were found behind the counter that were suspected to belong to the owner. After analyzing the bones, the individual was identified to be around fifty years old, confirming the archeologists assumption. Other human bones were discovered inside a large dolium (vase) that were likely moved by earlier excavators.



Not all the frescoes decorating the thermopolium were animals sold there, some included images from Roman myths (pictured below). The frescos remained incredibly well preserved, the bright yellow was applied to wet plaster ensuring the detailed depictions survived throughout the years.



The excavation of the thermopolium was led by head archeologist Massimo Osanna. Osanna used his Instagram to document first-hand pictures of the dig, with a brief description and analysis of the uncovered section as well as the archeologists that assisted with the dig. Pompeii Sites, a useful secondary source includes the research question posed by the archeologists: what was the function of this building? As the dig progressed, more research questions appeared (page 2).

Dive into Details

As the project continued, further research questions began to pop up. Among the questions that became asked were: what kind of food did the thermopolium serve? What did the frescoes on the thermopolium indicate? Who were the bodies left behind in the thermopolium? Does the thermopolium compare to anything in our modern world today? As the excavation continued, news segments began covering the thermopolium. A short clip in a [New York Times article](#) shows archaeologists excavating the site, specifically, the countertop. TV news segment from [CBS](#) covers Pompeii and the thermopolium, detailing what its function was.



[Image 5](#)

In the first [laboratory analysis](#), it was discovered that the animals depicted in the frescoes were in fact the animals that were sold in the thermopolium. In fact, a piece of duck bone was discovered inside one of the containers along with pieces of pig, goat, fish, and land snails, demonstrating the wide range of animal-derived ingredients utilized in the dishes' production. The first archaeobotanical analysis allowed for the identification of fragments of deciduous oak which belonged to the countertop. Discovered in the bottom of a dolium/dolia (jars that were used to hold wine) the presence of beans was detected that were broken apart or ground up, indicating that they were used to modify the taste and appearance of the wine. Further analysis discovered the skeleton of a dog that was found in the corner of the thermopolium; it did not have the same bone structure as the big dog that was depicted in the counter, but instead a small dog. Its size indicated that breeding/intentional selection occurred in Roman times, as it was the only way to obtain such a dog.

[Pompeii Sites](#) mentions a graffiti inscribed on a frame which contains a painting of a dog, with the words "NICIA CINAEDE CACATOR" which would translate to "Nicias Shameless Shitter!". This is thought to be in mockery of the owner or someone who worked in the thermopolium. On the other hand, a [Pink News](#) article translates "cinaede cacator" as "catamite s**tter; the word catamite does not have a modern translation but is referred to a teenage boy who was the sexual partner of a young man.



The thermopolium is quite comparable to our fast food restaurants today, as lower class people still rely on quick and cheap meals to feed themselves and their families. The thermopolium was evidently frequented by the lower class because it lacks the luxury and flare that higher status buildings in the Roman Empire had. This is comparable to our society today as it's still evident what places lower class people can afford to frequent based on the design and component of the building. Furthermore, many lower class citizens living in Pompeii did not have any form of cooking facilities, as they lived in small cramped homes known as insulae, usually of one or two rooms, hence relying on fast food establishments, such as the thermopolium, meanwhile the higher class Romans would hire chefs to cook or had some form of kitchen in their home.

Further information on the thermopolium can be found on [Pompeii Sites](#) and [Pompeii In Pictures](#). Academic sources include NPR, CBS, and the New York Times (also linked above). For original first hand information, one can look up Massimo Osanna's Instagram and Twitter.