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The College of the Augustales of Herculaneum

The College of the Augustals, one of the main places of worship for the ancient inhabitants of Herculaneum, was buried under a thick blanket of mud during the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD.

And it was only found in 1740 during archaeological excavations carried out by Roque Joaquin de Alcubierre.

During the eruption, Herculaneum was completely buried with more than 20 meters of volcanic material that solidified as a result of the powerful pyroclastic flow that invested the city and the Herculaneans.

It was not until 1700 years later, as a result of the accidental excavation by execution of a shaft, that the first remains of the ancient city of Herculaneum were found. Excavations that after a short time also unearthed the famous College of the Augustals.

What is the College of Augustals

The college of augustales of Herculaneum is located in insula VI. It is believed, on the basis of a dedication by two brothers to Augustus engraved on a marble slab, still preserved inside the college, that the latter may have been the seat of the college of the Augustales.

This thesis is further confirmed by the discovery of a series of graffiti engraved on one of the columns that made up the structure, bearing the words: "I invite you to vote in the Augustan curia".



Sacellum of the Augustales

The sacellum was probably only built after the earthquake of 62 and became one of the places of worship of the inhabitants of Herculaneum. The sacellum of the Augustales was paved with polychrome African marble and a marble plinth was built around the three walls. Only partly visible today because it was torn away during the Bourbon excavations.

What is most striking about the Augustal sacellum are the marvellous frescoes in the fourth style depicting mythological scenes. Such as that of Hercules looking towards Achelooos who has abducted Deianira his future bride, and in another, the apotheosis of Hercules with Minerva and Juno against the backdrop of a rainbow.

Most probably, after the earthquake of 62 in the Augustal college of Herculaneum, a room was built adjacent to the sacellum, which was used by the custodian as a host cell.

Inside the cell during excavations carried out by Maiuri, a bed was found partly in wood and partly in masonry, where the charred body of the custodian was found face down.

The college of the Augustales of Herculaneum has left various artefacts to history, including: a round wooden table with feet depicting greyhounds, a tankard, a shell and a series of statues, some of them reproducing members of the family of Marcus Nonius Balbus, probably used for political propaganda.



