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The House of Menander in Pompeii

The House of Menander is one of the domus in Pompeii that remained buried by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD.

It was brought back to light only in 1928 after intense years of excavations begun in 1748 by Charles III of Bourbon.

That brought to light part of the city of Pompeii that had been imprisoned for centuries under ash and lapilli like other Vesuvian cities.

The eruption of 79 AD was violent, devastating and gave Pompeians no time to escape.

Suddenly, on a day that began like so many others, first ash and then lapilli began to pour out of Vesuvius; it was the plug that had formed inside the volcano and was escaping under the thrust of the magma.

Within hours Pompeii was inundated with more than 3 meters of lava rock and ash that destroyed everything and buried many of its inhabitants. Later came the pyroclastic flow that invaded Pompeii and devastated everything.

Pompeii and the house of Menander remained imprisoned for centuries under the blanket of ash and lapilli, and it was not until 1748 that work began to bring the ancient Roman city back to life.

To whom did the house of Menander belong

The House of Menander in Pompeii stands in regio I. And is located exactly halfway between the entrance to Piazza Esedra and the entrance to Piazza Anfiteatro.

Belonging to one of the wealthiest families in Pompeii, it is named not after the owner of the house but after the painting found in the portico depicting the playwright Menander.

It is believed that the owner of the domus may have been Quintus Poppaeus. As a bronze seal was found in one of the rooms of the house, engraved with precisely this name. According to the traditions of the time, bronze seals could only bear the names of the owners of the houses because of their importance.



The structure

The House of Menander was one of the largest domus in Pompeii, covering an area of 1800 m² and structured on two levels.

Like all typical Roman houses in Pompeii, the domus was entered from the atrium. Which had a marble impluvium in the centre and was frescoed with many small paintings depicting scenes from the Trojan War.

From the atrium through a long and narrow corridor one then reached the peristyle, which was colonnaded on all sides and in the centre there was a beautiful garden.



Peristyle house of Menander

The peristyle was painted in the classical Pompeian colours, red for the lower part and yellow ochre for the upper part, and was paved with a black and white mosaic in geometric patterns.

In the peristyle of the House of Menander there was also a lararium. Here one can still see the casts of the ancestors of the owner of the domus, obviously now eroded by time and lava, probably made at the time either of wax or of wood.



The caldarium

Menander's house also had a caldarium. Paved with a black and white mosaic depicting a large acanthus surrounded by fish, dolphins and other sea animals.

Below the caldarium was a cellar, inside which a case was found containing 118 pieces of silverware. Including plates and cups probably used during banquets, now in the National Museum in Naples.