



ARTS & CULTURE

Dig of Pompeii Fast-Food Place Reveals Ancient Tastes

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Scientists in Italy have uncovered a fast-food eatery in the ancient Roman town of Pompeii. The remains help in the understanding of foods that were popular among Pompeii's citizens.

Pompeii Archaeological Park's chief Massimo Osanna said Saturday that about 80 such fast-food eateries have been found at Pompeii. But the latest find is the first time such a hot-food-drink eatery — known as a thermopolium — was completely uncovered.

Plant and animal specialists are still examining remains from the site.

Some of the thermopolium's counter area was partly dug up in 2019 during work to repair Pompeii's ruins. Since then, archaeologists have kept digging. They uncovered a large counter area with wide holes on its top. The counter held deep containers for hot food.

The front of the counter included works of art showing ducks and chickens. The images brightened the eatery and also likely served as food advertisements. Another painting shows a dog on a **leash**.

Valeria Amoretti is an **anthropologist** at Pompeii. She said early studies confirm “how the painted images represent, at least in part, the foods and **beverages** effectively sold inside.”

She noted that small pieces of duck bones were found in one of the food containers. Remains from goats, pigs, fish and snails also were found. At the bottom of a wine container were remains of ground fava beans. In ancient times, the beans were added to wine for taste and to lighten its color, Amoretti said.

Massimo Osanna added, “We know what they were eating that day.” He was talking about the day of Pompeii’s destruction in 79 A.D. The food remains are examples of “what’s popular with the common folk,” Osanna told Italy’s Rai state TV. He added that wealthy Romans did not eat at such street-food businesses.

One surprise find at the dig was the complete skeleton of a dog. The scientists involved in the dig noted it was not a “large muscular dog like that painted on the counter. Instead it was a very small adult dog, whose height at shoulder level was 20 to 25 centimeters, Amoretti said. She added it is rare to find remains from ancient times of such small dogs. The find may show that Romans at the time were carrying out “selective **breeding**” of dogs.

The scientists also found a bronze serving device, nine food containers, a couple of drink containers and a container for oil at the site.

Successful restaurant owners know that a good location is important for business. The operator of this ancient fast-food eatery seemed to have found a good place for doing business. Osanna noted that right outside the eatery was a small square with a **fountain**. Another thermopolium was nearby.

Pompeii was destroyed by the volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which is near present-day Naples. Much of the ancient city still lies uncovered. The site is one of Italy’s most popular areas for visitors.

I’m Ashley Thompson.

The Associated Press reported this story. Ashley Thompson adapted it for VOA Learning English. Katy Weaver was the editor.

Words in This Story

leash - *n.* a long, thin piece of rope, chain, etc., that is used for holding a dog or other animal

anthropologist - *n.* a scientist who studies the human races, origins, societies, and cultures

beverage - *n.* something you can drink

breeding - *n.* the activity of keeping and caring for animals or plants in order to produce more animals or plants of a particular kind

fountain - *n.* a device or structure that sends a stream of water into the air in a garden, park, etc.
