



## GODS, MEN, HEROES

From the Naples National Archaeological Museum  
and the Archaeological Park of Pompeii.

*St. Petersburg. The State Hermitage Museum April 18- June 23 2019*

On 19 April 2019 the exhibition “**Gods, Men, Heroes. From the Naples National Archaeological Museum and the Archaeological Park of Pompeii**” opens at The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. The remarkable exhibition “Gods, Men, Heroes” is indeed an internationally prestigious event for both Naples and Saint Petersburg Museum.

The sudden end of the Pompeii, along with Herculaneum and many villas in the surrounding area (at Boscoreale and Stabiae) were destroyed and buried under volcanic ash and pyroclastic flow in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius on August 24 or, according to recent theories, in October AD 79, end result of several cases frozen scenes, situations and people, were caught off-guard at moments of tragedy while carrying on their usual activities – volcanic ash buried inhabitants who did not escape from the lethal effects of the earthquake and eruption. Perfectly preserved under the ash, the excavated cities offers a unique snapshot of Roman life, frozen at the moment it was buried and providing an extraordinarily detailed insight into the everyday life of its inhabitants.

Pompeii remained mostly untouched until 1748 when a group of explorers connected with Charles III of Bourbon the king of Naples and Two Sicilies since 1734, and his cultural policy. The king carried on the excavations of the Vesuvian towns buried by the eruption mining operations were conducted in search of masterpieces to feed the royal collections. The first explorers found that the ashes had acted as a marvellous preservative: Underneath all that dust, Pompeii was almost exactly as it had been 2,000 years before. Its buildings were intact. Skeletons were frozen right where they'd fallen. Everyday objects and household furnishings littered the streets. The greatest merit of the Vesuvian excavations in the cities of Pompeii, Herculaneum and Stabiae, was a valuable gift to us with an unprecedented cross-section of the everyday life of the ancient Romans, which was almost unknown until that moment; in this respect, the section of the exhibition devoted to the “Men”, displays sculptural and pictorial representations of the cities' elites, get significant importance.



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The installation is the product of a collaboration among **The National Archeological Museum of Naples**, the **Archaeological Park of Pompeii** and **The State Hermitage Museum** and consists of up to 200 objects including different styles and techniques of mural paintings displayed in the **Manege of the Small Hermitage** (a two-storey building was erected next to the Winter Palace, the former imperial residence of The Romanovs, and The New Hermitage, the first building in Russia specially constructed to house the museum collections). For the first time, world-famous masterpieces such as **frescos and mosaics, bronze and marble sculptures, practical examples of applied arts** illustrated ancient household items, the quality of social and private life of ancient Roman society as well as the religious side of Roman life, will be presented to the Russian audience. The exhibition also presents many never-before-seen works from the Museums storages. Popular subjects included scenes from mythology, played an integral part in Roman civilization, legends tell the stories of the gods, supernatural beings (satyrs, nymphs, mermaids) and heroes with super-human, usually god-given, powers (as in the case of Heracles or Perseus), gods and heroes cults, gladiator contests, sports, agriculture, hunting, food, and sometimes they even captured the Romans themselves in portraits.

The exhibition “Gods” and the “Heroes” presents the decorations and the artworks in the public buildings as the majestic “**Herm of Mercury**” from the Temple of Apollo or the “**Bust of Jupiter**” from the Capitolium, dedicated to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, from MANN – but also first and foremost in the private houses. Exquisitely preserved by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, architectural remains provide us with stunning insight into the domestic patterns of Romans in Italy in the first century AD. One of the most well-known features of the decoration of a Roman house is wall painting.

Roman interiors of all description were very frequently sumptuously decorated using bold colours and designs. Different styles and workshops and differences in the repertoire are recognisable throughout the Empire. Wall paintings, fresco, and the use of stucco to create relief effects were all commonly used by the first century BC in public buildings, private homes, temples, tombs, and even military structures. Significant subjects included scenes from mythology, gladiator contests, sports, agriculture, hunting, food, flora and fauna, and sometimes they even captured the Romans themselves in detailed and realistic portraits. Roman wall painters or most likely their clients preferred natural earth colours such as darker shades of reds, yellows, and browns. Blue and black pigments were also popular. The largest body of evidence comes from the Campanian cities and suburban villas destroyed by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79. The presentation provides a great opportunity to demonstrate the various possible types of Roman wall painting.

The magnificent frescoes such as “**Jupiter seating on his throne**” from the House of the Dioscuri and “**Achilles and Briseis**” from the House of the Tragic Poet (MANN), the “**Dionysus and Ariadne**” and “**Alexander and Roxana**” from the House of the Golden Bracelet, “**Heracles and Deianira**” and “**Juno and Hebe**” from the Stabiae villas of the Archaeological Park of Pompeii and also, the exceptional marble intarsia with the “**Dionysiac scene**” reemerged from the House of the Colored Capitals, preserved in the collections of the National Archeological Museum of Naples, narrating the accomplishments of the divinities and the heroes, and representing them as it was custom at the time simply on their own or accompanied by the features that make them has immediately recognizable. The habit of decorating the gardens with depictions of divinities is testified by statues like the ones coming from the Villa A in Oplontis – the small and sophisticated **Venus** realized around the end of the first century BC and that still has faint traces of colour, or the statue of **Nike** – while the Neo-Attic reliefs in the exhibition, which used to be inserted all along the house walls in Pompeii, remind of the manner of the time and of the interest of the owners for Greek artworks.

The **mosaic decoration** was **not restricted to the floors of Roman houses**. Ceiling and wall mosaics, often of glass, were sometimes employed, used mostly in between columns or in vaulted niches. Many Roman mosaics are geometric in the manner of rugs and carpets, but a vast range of figurative subjects was produced, ranging from mythological and religious scenes to landscape and marine mosaics to scenes of gladiatorial combat and wild beast fights and realistic portraits. Over time the mosaics became ever more realistic in their portrayal of human figures, and accurate and detailed portraits become more common. Mosaic used **sophisticated colouring and shading** to create an effect similar to a painting which is illustrated by spectacular masterpiece Portrait of a woman from The National Archeological Museum of Naples.

All spectacular works express **ancient identities through art**. All items are on display in the Hermitage to evoke every day life of Romans living 2,000 years ago in Pompeii – **bronze craters, vessel glass, ceramic, pots and jars, everyday furnishings**,– examples of significant interest, organized by type and material, have been selected for the St. Petersburg’s exhibition and they allow to reconstruct the Romans lifestyle and habits, everyday activities from education to eating habits, the trade, artisanal manufacturing, urban crafts and services.

The exhibition shows a **brazier** from the now abandoned Stabian thermae, a bronze **liquid heater** from the Villa of Ariadne in Stabiae, with a faucet with a lion head and three swan with outspread wings on the edge of the burner, high **candelabra** to light the triclinium or a **crater** such as the **Giulio Polibio**’s damascened one, with a polychromatic effect; and again, the beautiful **strongbox** in iron and bronze with complex and ingenious closing systems, usually showcased in the atrium, where the householder “introduced” himself,

and – also – **marble tables** rich in decorations (such as the beautiful loan from the Archaeological Park of Pompeii, with a diameter of almost 80 cm ) telling us a lot about Pompeian habits.

**The house-builder (a foreman) in the Diogenes' relief** shows the construction tools employed at the time – a plumb bob, a masonry trowel, an orthogonal edge mallet, a chisel and a plumb rule – and the **4 frescoes from the house belonged to rich Pompeian lady Giulia Felice**, take the close up overall view on any facts taking place in the Forum, during a market day with scenes: “Pottery selling”, “Fabric selling”, “Edict reading”, “The punishment of a pupil”.

The installation also present fine examples of the minor Roman arts such as masterpiece **“Blue Vase”** was made of blue glass from The National Archeological Museum of Naples (discovered by the Bourbons in the Pompeii necropolis in 1837), and **cameo**, the gem carved in relief depicts the scene with **Dionysus and Ariadne** from the Archaeological Park of Pompeii.

Special mention deserves **the theatre and the Gladiator games**. The marble reliefs with theatre scene and Roman theatre masks which were an extremely important part of Roman theatre selected for the occasion are a testimony of the passion of the inhabitants of Pompeii for theatre performances, while **frescoes and the bronze helmets and reaves** (the leg armor that went from ankle to just below the knee) decorated with mythological scenes telling about the Gods and Heroes remind visitors about the essential role of the fighters of the gladiators, the complex social and psychological role of the figure of a gladiator in the minds of Romans of early Empire.

Without doubt, **the excavation of Pompeii played a major role in the neo-Classical revival of the 18th century**. Europe's wealthiest and most fashionable families displayed art and reproductions of objects from the ruins, and drawings of Pompeii's buildings helped shape the architectural trends of the era. The **Russian Czars**, as well as Russian aristocrats, were not only well-known for Pompeii but also testified by the presence of items of Pompeii antiques at the Hermitage and by the overwhelming **“Pompeii-style” taste** diffused in the decorations of the palaces, interior design and even in literature. It is no secret the Russian people and Russian culture have always demonstrated an interest in the Vesuvius towns, the Amalfi coast and the Campania islands, especially Capri, starting from the Russian painters of vedute captured Italian landscapes in their works. This love demonstrated since the times of Empress of Russia Catherine the Great when the music by Cimarosa and Paisiello livened up at the theatres and at the Russian court. Nowadays the links between Saint Petersburg and Naples, with the Vesuvius on the horizon, are getting even more close.

The exhibition is organised by the **Department of Classical Antiquities the State Hermitage Museum** under the guidance of **Dr Anna Trofimova**, Head of the Department.

The exhibition **curators** on behalf of the Italian curators are **Valeria Sanpaolo, Paola Rubino de Ritis and Luana Toniolo**, with the **scientific direction of Paolo Giulierini**, Director of MANN and **Massimo Osanna**, Full professor at Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II and **Alfonsina Russo**, interim Director of the Archaeological Park of Pompeii; on behalf of the State Hermitage are **Dr Anna Trofimova**, Head of Classical Antiquities, and **Andrey Kuznecov**. Alexander Butyagin, Head of the archaeology sector, Yana Radolitskaya and Nadezhda Novoselova from the Department of Classical Antiquities the State Hermitage Museum took part in the organization of the exhibition.

The unique exhibition comes to life thanks to the support of **Lavazza**, partner of The State Hermitage Museum since 2016, which has always expressed itself in a favour of artistic and cultural promotion at an international level.

The exhibition marks the fourth stage of a multi-year collaboration between Lavazza and The Hermitage and confirms the company's constant commitment to promoting the artistic and cultural heritage at an international level. Supporting art has a strategic value for a company that always paid deep attention to cultural initiatives and artistic expressions, both because they represent an opportunity to make the brand and product known to a committed international public, and because it facilitates the promotion of Italian culture and values worldwide.

The exhibition is the result of the Agreement subscribed in 2017 by the two Campania's institutions and the Hermitage Museum, organizational support from **Villaggio Globale International**, collaboration with **Ermitage Italia, Ambasciata d'Italia at Moscow, Consolato Generale d'Italia** and **Istituto Italiano di Cultura di San Pietroburgo**.

**Electa** is the publisher for the **Italian catalogue**. For the exhibition the Electa Publishing House has produced an illustrated scholarly catalogue in Italian. The authors of the catalogue texts are Luigi Gallo, Massimo Osanna, Federica Rossi, Valeria Sampaolo, Luana Toniolo and Anna Trofimova.

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