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The Military Significance of Venus in Late Republican and Augustan Rome

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Abstract

The Roman goddess Venus is conventionally associated with love, sex, and beauty. However, these were only some of her areas of influence. In reality, her role within the Roman religious system was far more complex and multi-faceted, and was not confined to these associations. Venus, in the Roman mind, bore associations with warfare and military success that were just as prominent. On one hand, this is hardly surprising due to her divine status, especially as one of the *Dii Consentes*. All Roman deities could be thought of as ‘militaristic’ in some sense. However, even the Romans themselves made a sharp distinction between her role as the goddess of love, and her martial qualities. This indicates both her importance as a martial deity, and the surprising nature of her multi-faceted role in Roman religion.

In addition to analysing the development and political advantages of Venus’ martial attributes in Roman religion, this thesis will also offer a survey of the major temples dedicated to Venus in her capacity as a military goddess during the Republican and Augustan periods. An investigation of these temples is a particularly important step towards understanding her influence over military success. Whilst some of the temples have been investigated previously in scholarship, a comprehensive analysis of these sites as evidence for Venus’ role as a martial goddess is still lacking in many cases. Furthermore, such an investigation is essential in charting the significance of her martial attributes in the turbulent political environment of the Late Republic.

Venus’ ability to bestow martial favour became the subject of intense political competition in the Late Republic. In particular, the ‘great men’ of this period all recognised the power of her patronage and fought for control over the goddess’ martial attributes. Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar all engaged in a dialogue of competition, which saw each man seeking to outdo his predecessor’s claim to the goddess’ favour. During this competition, building projects became the ideal means through which individuals could advertise a personal connection with the goddess on a large public scale. Pompey’s famous theatre complex was constructed for this purpose, and explicitly evoked Venus’ martial attributes as the ‘bringer of victory’.

The Civil War between Caesar and Pompey, however, became an important turning-point in this competition, with Caesar emerging victorious as the unquestionable recipient of Venus’

patronage. The Julian claim to descent from the goddess played an important role in Caesar's eventual control over her martial attributes. His well-advertised lineage therefore surpassed any competing claims to her favour. Caesar's construction of the Forum Iulium and the Temple of Venus Genetrix was designed to broadcast this ancestral connection on an unprecedented public scale, but Venus' martial attributes were not ignored in this complex. Ultimately, the Forum Iulium and its Temple of Venus Genetrix functioned as a permanent reminder of Caesar's power and position in the state as the result of the goddess' patronage. The advertisement of Venus' patronage was continued under Augustus, especially through his construction of the Forum Augustum. The clear visual connection between the Temple of Mars Ultor in Augustus' forum, and the Temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum Iulium deliberately evoked Venus' martial qualities. This connection reinforced her role as consort of Mars, and also underlined the familial connection between Augustus and Julius Caesar. As such, the Forum Augustum functioned as a space through which Augustus could utilise Venus' military and political associations, in order to boost his public image.

It is undoubtedly true that Venus' military attributes were utilised for political purposes within this period, especially by figures such as Sulla, Pompey, and Julius Caesar. Venus' military characteristics were important for those in prominent political positions within the later Republic. Both literary and archaeological evidence attests to the goddess' perceived influence over military fortune. Maintaining her favour was therefore required, in order to ensure the safety of the state through success in battle.

Declaration by the author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

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None.

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venus, military, caesar, pompey, augustus, sulla, republic, landscape, forum, temple

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Introduction

The goddess Venus is one of the most significant deities in the Roman pantheon. Her associations with love, fertility, and beauty in particular remain recognisable to the modern day. However, her attributes did not remain limited to these areas of influence. In the Roman context, Venus possessed martial characteristics. This thesis aims to analyse the military significance of Venus Middle-Late Republican and Augustan Rome. Her influence over military success was particularly prominent during the Middle and Late Republic, and into the Augustan age. Venus' military characteristics became particularly influential in the careers of those who held political power in the later Republic. Her influence over military matters was certainly an incentive for those in prominent positions to maintain her favour as a divine patron.¹ Republican and Augustan temples, coinage, and literature all suggest that Venus' military attributes were regarded as highly influential during this period. Appeals to the goddess for assistance in warfare especially give an insight into her command over military fortune. Maintaining her favour was therefore desirable, in order to ensure the safety of the state through success in battle.

¹ This is especially evident in the cases of Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar. The relationship between each of these figures and Venus will be discussed throughout this thesis.

I. Ancient Sources

Undertaking an analysis of Venus' multi-faceted attributes in a Roman context requires consultation of a wide variety of ancient sources. Both literary and archaeological evidence provide valuable information regarding the reception of deities, and the function of religious ideas within Roman society. The literary works consulted throughout this thesis vary in their scope and focus, from biographies to histories. Likewise, a number of different types of material evidence will be utilised, including archaeological reports, numismatic evidence, and epigraphy. Material evidence offers a great deal of insight into the reception of deities on a broader scale, which is something that literature alone cannot always provide. This especially assists in understanding the reception of Venus' military attributes within the Republic and Augustan age amongst a wider audience, allowing her specifically 'Roman' identity to be distinguished.

A number of different genres of literature will be consulted. Not all Roman literature presented interaction with the gods in a favourable or uncritical manner. The works of Cicero, for example, display a certain level of scepticism towards some religious practices. In *de Natura Deorum*, Cicero claims that 'when we achieve some honour or some accession to our estate, or obtain any other of the goods or avoid any of the evils of fortune, it is then that we render thanks to the gods...Did anyone ever render thanks to the gods because he was a good man? No, but because he was rich, honoured, secure.'² Cicero's view that the gods were not consulted out of 'piety', but due to a desire for personal gain reflects the need for ancient literature to be read critically. His claim certainly does not accurately reflect the reality of all Roman interaction with religious practices.

Analysis of the works of biographers such as Plutarch and Suetonius will be required throughout this thesis. While there are often numerous concerns surrounding the accuracy of ancient biographical texts, these remain crucial to the investigation of prominent Roman individuals, and their interactions with religious practices. These texts will be used in conjunction with other works with a more 'historical' focus, such as Livy, Appian, Pliny, and Dio. The poetry

² Cic. *De Nat. Deor.* 3.87.

of Lucan and Ovid will also be consulted, in order to investigate the reception of Venus' martial patronage from a 'literary' point of view. These texts will be used in conjunction where possible, in order to minimise the concerns of historical bias or embellishment.

Archaeological evidence will play a significant role in the examination of this topic. Temples, coins, and inscriptions are all important sources of information on the interaction between the state, individuals, and the divine. They provide a great deal of insight into the 'official' advertisement of the personal connection between an individual and Venus. As the examination of Venus' presence in sites and monuments is one of the most important elements of this thesis, archaeological analyses will be crucial. Both Republican and Augustan temples to Venus in Rome itself will be investigated in chronological order. The temples of Venus Obsequens and Venus Erycina are examined in the first chapter of this work. Subsequently, the temples of Venus Victrix and Venus Genetrix will form focal points of the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3, with the Forum Augustum to be investigated in the final chapter. Whilst many of these structures no longer remain extant, a combination of literary evidence and archaeological theory can be used to determine their significance and likely original location. The location of monuments within the landscape of the city is integral to their interpretation. Reports of scholars such as Filippo Coarelli, Lawrence Richardson Jr., and Amanda Claridge will therefore be consulted throughout.³ The *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, a compendium of the significant sites and temples throughout the city of Rome, will play an important role in the investigation of these sites.

Other sources of material evidence play an important role in examining Venus' martial characteristics throughout Republican and Augustan Rome. Coins are particularly significant in examining Venus' associations with victory on a broad scale, due to the widespread circulation of coinage. The inclusion of her portrait on denarii issued by individuals such as Sulla, Caesar, and Augustus allows the relationship between Venus and the issuer to be assessed. This gives insight into both the political advantages of association with her image, and the emphasis placed on particular attributes of the goddess, due to the widespread circulation of coinage.

³ The work of Samuel Ball Platner and Thomas Ashby will also be consulted, however to a lesser degree. This is largely due to the fact that much of their work has been superseded, given the significant amount of time that has passed since the composition of their work *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (1929).

A comprehensive picture of the Republican and Augustan interactions with Venus' martial attributes can only be gained when both literary and material evidence are consulted. As a result, this thesis will employ a combined approach to this topic, using both elements, in order to develop a greater understanding of the goddess' military significance and patronage throughout this period of Roman history.

II. *Currents of Scholarship*

The study of Roman religion is a vast area of enquiry, with a great deal written on its features by numerous scholars. However, a comprehensive survey of Venus' multi-faceted role in Roman religion, especially concentrating on her influence as a military deity, has not been undertaken to date. In addressing this topic throughout this thesis, a survey of scholarship surrounding the function of Roman religion, and the role of conflict in its reception, is useful. The connection between Roman religion and politics has long been acknowledged, however the interaction of these two spheres has been a topic of debate. Franz Cumont offered a rather cynical view of the function of Roman religion. In 1806, he claimed that:

Perhaps there never was a religion so cold and so prosaic as the Roman. Being subordinated to politics, it sought, above all, to secure the protection of the gods for the state and to avert the effects of their malevolence by the strict execution of proper practices.⁴

Whilst his work is most certainly out-dated in modern scholarship, the idea that religion was employed above all for political purposes remained a prominent feature of many scholars' arguments even into relatively recent works. However, more recently, a greater appreciation of the wider function of religion in society has become evident within scholarship. The work of Georges Dumézil displays this shift towards thinking about the social function of religion, and the role that interaction with society played in its development. He argued that early forms of worship at Rome

⁴ Cumont 1806 (trans. G. Showerman 1911): 28-9, in Scheid 2003: 7.

were designed to fit around three major social functions – law, warfare, and agriculture.⁵ Furthermore, Dumézil placed three of the most important early Republican gods into this system: Jupiter as the ‘authority’, Mars as caretaker of ‘warfare’, and finally Quirinus representing ‘agricultural production’. Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price strongly criticise Dumézil’s over-simplification of early Roman society. They argue persuasively that his approach ignores the ‘true’ social fabric by implying that the society of early Rome solely comprised authority figures, soldiers, and primary producers.⁶

Mary Beard and Michael Crawford argue against approaching Roman religion from a purely political standpoint in their book *Rome in the Late Republic*.⁷ Notably, they claim that more consideration should be given to the role of religion within society as a whole when assessing its political aspects. They claim that religion within Republican Rome should be viewed as public, with the gods’ interest ‘perceived to lie above all in the business of the state, in political and military action.’⁸ Their argument, based on the social function of religion, nevertheless takes into account the inseparability of religion and the state in the Roman mind.

The complex role of deities within both the religious system and society itself is vital for this thesis. Beard, North, and Price discuss the multiplicity of divine roles within the Roman pantheon in their 1998 book *Religions of Rome*. They suggest that deities could oversee a number of different areas, with divine spheres of influence ‘shifting, multiple and often defined not in isolation, but in a series of relationships with other gods and goddesses.’⁹ They also investigate the relationship between conflict and religious life at Rome,¹⁰ and emphasise the landscape as an important indicator of the interaction between religion and society. The idea that the presence of

⁵ Beard, North, and Price (1998: 14-15) detail important aspects of Dumézil’s argument, and provide criticism of his approach.

⁶ Beard, North and Price 1998: 15.

⁷ Beard and Crawford 1999: 29-30.

⁸ Beard and Crawford 1999: 30.

⁹ Beard, North, and Price 1998: 16.

¹⁰ Beard, North, and Price 1998: 44.

temples and statues of the gods reminded the public of their presence on an everyday basis is integral to much of this thesis.¹¹

Rachel Kousser's 2008 book *Hellenistic and Roman Ideal Sculpture: The Allure of the Classical* on the martial qualities of Venus' Greek equivalent, Aphrodite, examines archaeological and literary evidence for Aphrodite's militaristic attributes. Kousser starts by examining Aphrodite's association with the 'spheres of athletic and military victory,' especially in Classical Corinth.¹² She draws particular attention to sites such as the goddess' sanctuary on the Acrocorinth, and argues that Aphrodite's martial attributes at this site are related to its strategic significance and its history of occupation and capture in a number of conflicts.¹³ Kousser's work provides important insight into Greek precedents for the multi-faceted nature of Venus' attributes and areas of influence.

Whilst a number of scholars have considered the Roman Venus' martial qualities in varying depth, a comprehensive investigation into this aspect of her religious role is lacking. Robert Schilling's *La Religion Romaine de Venus depuis les Origines jusqu'au Temps d' Auguste*, published in 1954, offers perhaps the most detailed investigation of the cult of Venus in Rome throughout the Republic. Among many valuable observations, Schilling noted that the dedication of Republican temples to Venus indicated that she possessed some considerable martial potential during this period.

Eric Orlin has advanced this observation by examining the dedication of Republican temples to Venus in response to Roman warfare. In his book, *Foreign Cults in Rome: Creating a Roman Empire*, Orlin investigates the cult of Venus Erycina, and considers the circumstances surrounding her arrival in Rome. He identifies the explicit military aspect of this Venus, and the advantages this gave Rome in the adoption of her cult for future campaigns.¹⁴ His investigation will underpin my own examination of how the goddess' martial qualities developed throughout the Late Republic, and whether these qualities can be reconciled with Venus' role as the goddess

¹¹ Beard, North and Price 1988: 39.

¹² Kousser 2008: 27.

¹³ Kousser 2008: 27.

¹⁴ Orlin 2010: 73.

of love and beauty. Ariadne Staples emphasises the complexity of Venus' role in her book, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and Category in Roman Religion*, in which she attempts to reconcile Venus' martial qualities with her better-known associations as the goddess of love and beauty. Her argument that Venus' role as the 'patron deity of sexual relationships was merely the most widely acknowledged manifestation of a much more complex role' aligns strongly with the position presented within this work.¹⁵ Venus' position within Roman religion should be understood as multi-dimensional. Her martial attributes do not exclude the other aspects of her worship, as she could retain power over multiple spheres of influence. However, her ability to bestow military victory became well acknowledged in the Republican period, and this resulted in the development of an intense dialogue of competition over her favour between the 'great men' of this period.

III. *The Argument of this Thesis*

The Roman goddess Venus is conventionally associated with love, sex, and beauty. However, these were only some of her areas of influence. In reality, her role within the Roman religious system was not confined to these associations. Venus, in the Roman mind, bore associations with warfare and military success that were just as prominent. On one hand, this is hardly surprising due to her divine status, especially as one of the *Dii Consentes*. All the Olympians were powerful, and they had come to power by defeating the Giants. Thus, all Roman deities could be thought of as 'militaristic' in some sense. However, even the Romans themselves made a sharp distinction between Venus' role as the goddess of love, and her martial qualities. This indicates both her importance as a martial deity, and the rather surprising nature of her multi-faceted role in Roman religion.

The influential role of Roman religion within society is central to this investigation. This thesis aims to combine both literary and archaeological evidence in order to argue that Venus' identification as a military deity played a significant role in the political events of the Late Republic

¹⁵ Staples 1998: 46.

and Augustan period in Rome. It will build and expand upon some of the previous scholarship on Roman religious practices, whilst filling the gap in scholarship that exists for a detailed survey of Venus' military attributes within the Republican and Augustan periods. Religion in the Roman world facilitated the promotion and construction of power relationships within society. However, deities such as Venus were not cynically employed as a political tool by leaders to influence fearful individuals among the general public. Instead, she occupied a more complex position in Roman religious thought. This thesis examines the role of Venus as a military deity in the Roman pantheon. Venus is most commonly perceived as a goddess similar to the Greek Aphrodite, concerned with love, beauty, and sex. Aphrodite could possess martial characteristics, and was depicted 'armed' in localised cults from Sparta, Cythera, and Corinth. However, in the Roman context, Venus' martial qualities were further developed, and took on political significance through her association with military success. This development became apparent during the Middle Republic, with these associations continuing into the Late Republic and Augustan age.

The first chapter of this thesis, entitled 'The "Roman" Venus: Development from the Middle Republic to Sulla', will concentrate on the early reception of Venus as a military goddess. Sections I and II investigate two of the most significant Early to Middle Republican temples to the goddess, those of Venus Obsequens and Venus Erycina. The analysis of these temples is crucial to the understanding of Venus' military characteristics, and the initial acceptance of these traits in the 'official' Roman state religion. Although the pre-existing military associations of Venus' Greek equivalent, Aphrodite, surely influenced her image to some extent, it was participation in external warfare that cemented her place as a uniquely 'Roman' martial goddess. This allowed for a greater connection to be made between Venus' martial attributes and the concept of 'good fortune' in battle within the Roman context.

Section III of my first chapter examines associations between Venus and prominent military figures, reasons behind such connections, and the benefits they provide. Venus' prominent position as a patron of generals in the Late Republic and into the early Imperial period was the result of a number of different factors – all of which serve to highlight the diverse nature of her identity. Her patronage surely owed much to a number of previous contexts, from her links with Aphrodite in the East, to her association with the Punic Wars, and especially her proven influence over military success in these conflicts. Sulla's adoption of the goddess as a patron deity was hardly

surprising, due to Venus' pre-existing associations with good fortune and prosperity, especially through her martial attributes. Individuals in the Republic would certainly have been well aware of the political advantages offered by an association with Venus, though it is likely that an underlying sense of piety also motivated those who wished to appeal to the goddess.

Chapter Two investigates Pompey's ties to Venus in light of her pre-existing appeal as a patron deity in the Middle Republic and under Sulla. There were benefits to Pompey's political career and Venus became integral to his public image, as an examination of the Theatre of Pompey and its connected Temple of Venus Victrix demonstrates. The construction of this temple suggests that Venus' military links remained a prominent component of her worship. This chapter will seek to examine why Venus in particular was sought by Pompey as a patron deity. It appears that several factors may have played into this decision. Although Venus' martial attributes were explicitly evoked in Pompey's temple to Venus Victrix, for instance, the ties between Caesar and Pompey at the time of its dedication must also be taken into consideration. Even so, Venus' associations with military success under Pompey still appear to go beyond the martial associations of most Roman deities.

The third chapter will build on some of the key points investigated in the preceding section. The initial focus here, however, is the ancestral connection promoted by Julius Caesar between his family and Venus Genetrix. Caesar publicly advertised his 'divine ancestry' by claiming descent from Aeneas, the son of Venus in popular mythology. This claim brought the Julian family into a close relationship with the *res publica* through the foundation legend of the Roman state and certainly demonstrated Caesar's political ambition. The Temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum Iulium is analysed as a reflection of this ambition, with consideration given to other reasons behind its construction and placement within his forum. There was competition between Pompey and Caesar for the favour of Venus, but their relationship was not always hostile. Examples of collaboration between the two will be compared to their individual use of Venus for political purposes.¹⁶

¹⁶ See Suet. *Vit. Caes.* 23 for the connection through Pompey's marriage to Caesar's daughter Julia, and subsequent respect displayed by Caesar towards Pompey. See also Suet. *Vit. Caes.* 27 for Caesar's attempt to retain this connection after the death of Julia. This will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

The final chapter will consider representations of Venus as a military goddess on public monuments of the Augustan period. Two major structures form the focus of this section: the Temple of Mars Ultor and the Forum Augustum. Both these works reveal a great deal about Augustus' relationship with Venus, and indeed his personal ancestry. The clear visual connection between the Temple of Mars Ultor and the Temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum Iulium deliberately evoked not only Venus' martial qualities, sometimes reinforced by her role as consort of Mars, but also the familial connection between Augustus and Julius Caesar. As such, it is evident that these monuments acted as a means by which Augustus could utilise Venus' military and political associations in order to boost his own public image.

It is undoubtedly true that Venus' military attributes and connection to good fortune were utilised for political purposes within this period, especially by figures such as Sulla, Pompey, and Julius Caesar. However, this is not to suggest that there was a lack of belief in the concepts being advertised. Venus' military characteristics were important for those in prominent political positions in the Late Republic. Both literary and archaeological evidence attests to the goddess' perceived influence over military success. Maintaining her favour was therefore required, in order to ensure the safety of the state through victory in battle. Furthermore, the dialogue of competition that arose between the 'great men' of the Late Republic ensured that Venus' patronage was used competitively, as a means to secure and legitimise individual power in the state.

Chapter 1 – The ‘Roman’ Venus: Development from the Middle Republic to Sulla

Venus’ position as a ‘martial’ goddess went beyond the associations with conflict that were expected of all deities. Monuments such as the Pergamon Altar, although not of Roman origin, demonstrate that divine figures were frequently expected to possess militaristic qualities. A frieze on this altar depicts the great battle between the Olympians and the Giants, in which a number of gods, including Venus’ Greek equivalent, Aphrodite, are portrayed directly engaging in the conflict.¹⁷ This monument suggests that most deities were thought to possess at least some martial potential, whilst maintaining other associations.¹⁸ However, it is important to distinguish Venus’ military characteristics. Whilst it initially appears surprising that the goddess of love could be connected to warfare, such an association was not unusual in the Roman mind. The introduction of her martial characteristics into Roman religious thought can be understood through the development of her attributes throughout the Republic and into the early Imperial period, and the numerous different contexts in which her image was used. Her native Italic background, connections to Aphrodite in the East, and her associations with foreign wars all assisted in constructing her identity as a multi-faceted goddess. As such, the development of her martial attributes is best understood as a gradual process, taking place largely within the Republic.

The multi-faceted nature of this goddess was recognised in several areas across the Mediterranean. Her initial reception as a martial deity was possibly influenced by other goddesses from the Near East, in particular Astarte and Ishtar. Both these goddesses could be depicted armed and possessed military potential, but, as Flemberg argues, they also had influence over love and fertility.¹⁹ As a result, it is not difficult to see the parallels between Aphrodite’s spheres of influence, and those of the Near Eastern goddesses. This connection is confirmed on the island of Delos, where Aphrodite was worshipped alongside Astarte, Isis, and Atargatis.²⁰ An inscription

¹⁷ See Ampelius’ *Liber Memorialis* (8.14) for a later, and very brief, description of this monument and the Gigantomachy scene.

¹⁸ See Bieber (1961: 114-18) and Stewart (2014: 107-8).

¹⁹ For an analysis of the connection between these goddesses and warfare, see Flemberg 1995: 110-11.

²⁰ Speidel 1984: 2236.

dating from around the 2nd – 1st Century BC identifies Aphrodite as ‘Venus Victrix’, and Speidel argues that this version of the goddess probably ‘corresponds to one of these oriental goddesses.’²¹ While this inscription is written in Latin and refers to her Roman counterpart, it surely drew upon some of the pre-existing traditions surrounding the worship of Aphrodite in this part of the Mediterranean.

There was a clear Greek precedent for the goddess’ portrayal with military attributes, and Roman contact with the Greek East must have assisted in Venus’ religious development. A number of ‘armed Aphrodites’ have been found across Greece, and these demonstrate that she was thought to possess some martial potential. Several dedications to the goddess, including figurines and weaponry, have been uncovered in sanctuaries on Naxos, Locris, and Gravisca.²² Aphrodite’s connection with military victory was also recognised in Corinth, where an armed statue of the goddess stood on the summit of the acropolis.²³ Pausanias mentions a wooden statue of Aphrodite located at the temple of Aphrodite Urania on Cythera, where the goddess is portrayed ‘armed’.²⁴ However, the most prominent martial incarnation of Aphrodite in Greece survives through iconography from Sparta. Several indications of her prominence as a martial deity in this area remain extant, and Flemberg argues that this representation of Aphrodite existed from at least the early Archaic period.²⁵ A temple to Aphrodite in Laconia contained an armed image of the goddess made of wood, which has been identified by Cyrino as ‘Aphrodite *Hoplismene*’.²⁶ Pausanias also discusses her worship in Sparta under the epithet Aphrodite *Areia*, or the ‘warlike’ Aphrodite.²⁷ A number of poems contained in the *Greek Anthology* confirm the presence of ‘armed’ images of the

²¹ CIL I, 2446 = I. Delos 2392; Speidel 1984: 2236.

²² For an overview of the dedications at each of these sites, see Budin 2010: 94-6. For a more detailed analysis of the martial dedications at Naxos and their connection with Aphrodite, see Schindler 1998: 206-8.

²³ See Pausanias (2.5.1) for a description of this image. Kousser (2008: 27) also discusses the associations between Aphrodite and military victory in Corinth.

²⁴ Paus. 3.23.1. Cyrino (2012: 51-2) notes that the statue that Pausanias describes at Cythera was probably Roman, since the city was razed in 146 BC. As a result, she claims that this statue was a later addition, and was intended to represent Venus Victrix.

²⁵ Flemberg 1995: 110.

²⁶ Paus. 3.15.10.

²⁷ Paus. 3.17.5.

goddess in this region, and underline the uniquely ‘Spartan’ nature of this portrayal.²⁸ While the surviving evidence indicates that this representation of Aphrodite was certainly not confined to Sparta, it appears that this region was a prominent centre for her connection with warfare.²⁹ Although Aphrodite’s martial characteristics in Greece do not appear to have been used in an overtly political manner, and were a comparatively minor aspect of her wider worship, they form a clear precedent for her Roman characterisation as a goddess who could bestow victory upon those whom she favoured. As a result, the Roman interpretation of Venus as a goddess of military potential must have been influenced to some extent by contact with existing Greek ideas.

Nonetheless, although the representation of Aphrodite’s military capacity in other areas of the Mediterranean was influential, the Roman goddess should be distinguished from her Greek counterpart. Venus’ martial qualities were not fully capitalised upon immediately. Worship of the goddess underwent several transformations throughout its history in Rome. Her earliest associations and religious functions vary quite significantly from those which became prominent in the Middle Republic and beyond. Venus did not retain permanently ‘static’ attributes in religious thought. Instead, she appeared in a number of different contexts, with each emphasising a different aspect. Evidence from the Early Republic suggests that she was believed to oversee elements of agriculture, though the chronology is difficult to pin down. Nevertheless, it appears that her agricultural associations overlapped with other attributes for a long time during the Republic. Varro, for instance, introduces his *De Re Rustica* by invoking the gods, including ‘Minerva and Venus, of whom one protects the olive-yard and the other the garden.’³⁰ This work, written in the Late Republic, shows Venus retaining some of her earlier Republican attributes.³¹

An inscription from Campania found on a wine cup dating to the Late Republic reads *Presta mi sincere(m), sic te amet que custodit (h)ortu(m) Venus*, which Eden translates as ‘offer me pure wine . . . , so may Venus, who protects the garden, love you.’³² The agricultural associations

²⁸ See *Anth. Lyr. Graec.* 16.173, 16.176.

²⁹ See also Cyrino 2012: 51.

³⁰ Varro *RR* 1.1.6.

³¹ See Varro *RR* 1.1.6. In this passage, Varro gives an indication that Venus still retained some agricultural attributes.

³² CIL IV 2776; Eden 1963: 449-50. Eden also notes the Greek influence present in its area of production, suggesting that this may have had an impact on the reception of Venus as a garden deity.

of this vessel extend beyond the inscription, as its handle appears in the form of a bearded man. Robert Schilling identifies this figure as Priapus, another divine figure connected with agriculture.³³ The date and provenance of the vessel affect its interpretation greatly. Eden states that by the time of the vessel's production in the Republic, its 'area of provenance, Campania, had a long tradition of Greek influence.'³⁴ This extended period of influence obviously makes it difficult to assign a specific date to the object.³⁵ The ties between Venus and agriculture were apparently long-lived, and the sentiment preserved on the wine cup probably points to a desire for some personal connection with the gods, rather than accepting an intangible, 'other-worldly' existence for them, whereby mortals and deities would operate separately from one another. Individual interaction with the goddess to maintain her favour in agricultural matters appears to have been an important component of her worship during the Republic.

Venus' role as a garden deity is far less prominent than her role as the goddess of love and beauty in literature from the Middle Republic onwards. Plautus' play *Rudens* stresses her role as the goddess of love. In lines 145-7, for instance, the character Plesidippus complains of hunger. Daemones says in response that 'it's better for you to follow Ceres than Venus; the latter takes care of love, but Ceres takes care of wheat.'³⁶ Venus' agricultural associations are substantially by-passed here, in favour of her associations with love and chastity. Certainly there is influence from Greek models, but it seems likely too that there had been a shift in Roman perceptions of Venus by this time. The character of Palaestra appears to be intentionally paralleled with the goddess herself. Leach states that the image of Venus within *Rudens* is one of exemplary Roman virtue, 'whose character is compatible with Palaestra's own sense of virtue and family duty', a representation that, in all probability, would have been familiar to Plautus' audience.³⁷ Yet even if Plautus' *Rudens* indicates that Venus was widely and perhaps primarily associated with love and

³³ Schilling 1954: 16-17; Eden 1963: 449.

³⁴ This Greek influence is worth noting, as Eden (1963: 450) does not believe that the connection between Venus and agriculture was native to Italy.

³⁵ Eden 1963: 450.

³⁶ Plaut. *Rud.* 145-7.

³⁷ Leach 1974: 925.

beauty, it is important to remember that, to the Romans, this was only one aspect of her complex religious function.

Venus' image could be connected to warfare in two distinct ways. The goddess could be depicted 'armed', with the attire and weaponry required to fight in battle.³⁸ Alternatively, she could be connected to fortune-related aspects of Roman religion, which became an important element of her worship as a military deity. However, an important distinction should be made between the ideas of *fortuna* and *felicitas* when discussing the reception of fortune in Roman thought. The ideas of prosperity and fecundity are prominent in the cults of Fortuna and Felicitas, and these elements were considered highly influential in Roman military ideology.³⁹ Both goddesses could provide good outcomes, and bore strong connections with successful military conduct. However, while both *fortuna* and *felicitas* could be the subject of heavy competition by individuals seeking to assert their power in the state, the two concepts had fundamentally different implications in their approach to fortune.⁴⁰ *Fortuna* was connected to luck and chance, and was naturally considered to play a significant role in martial contexts as a result. A general who had *fortuna* was thought to have had some distinct advantages in battle.⁴¹ However, as Kathryn Welch argues, *fortuna* did not carry an automatic guarantee of a good outcome.⁴² As a result, *fortuna* did not ensure individual success, due to its capricious nature. While Venus' favour was thought to have had the ability to influence the outcome of a battle, her martial potential and patronage did not rely on chance or luck.

³⁸ For example, Venus supposedly appeared to Sulla in a dream, dressed in armour and ready to fight in battle. See App. *Bell. Civ.* 1.97 for an account of this event. Coinage was also one of the most prominent methods of disseminating this representation of Venus within a Roman context. For earlier representations of Venus with martial attributes, see RRC 258/1; RRC 320/1. For Caesar's representation of Venus alongside martial iconography, see RRC 480/4; RRC 480/15; RRC 480/17. Some of these representations will be discussed in more detail below.

³⁹ Fecundity and female fertility are primary concerns of Fortuna Primigenia, who was worshipped at Praeneste. See Cic. *De Div.* 2.41. This sanctuary will be discussed in greater detail below.

⁴⁰ See Stevenson (2015: 266-8) for an analysis of the use of *fortuna* and *felicitas* in dialogues of competition and legitimacy between the 'great men' of the Late Republic.

⁴¹ See Cic. *Man.* 47. In this speech, Cicero claims that the presence of *fortuna* had assisted a number of generals in achieving success.

⁴² Welch 2008: 191-2.

Venus' ability to bring success in combat through her patronage was more strongly reinforced through an association with *felicitas* than with *fortuna*. While both *fortuna* and *felicitas* were tied to the idea of fate, only *felicitas* could bring a definitively good result. Venus' association with fortune carried positive overtones, and could extend beyond military matters. The term 'Venus throw' was used to describe the highest-scoring throw possible in games, and Cicero's discussion of this term confirms its association with good fortune.⁴³ However, the connection between Venus and *felicitas* extended beyond the guarantee of good outcomes. Felicitas was worshipped as a deity in Rome, and her cult was present from at least the 2nd Century BC, when L. Licinius Lucullus constructed a sanctuary to the goddess in the Campus Martius.⁴⁴ While Felicitas could undeniably guarantee a good result in battle, she also had influence over fecundity and fertility.⁴⁵ Felicitas' spheres of influence bear clear resemblance to those ascribed to Venus, and it is of little surprise that the two goddesses could be worshipped by individuals who sought to promote their own martial prowess. Sulla and Pompey each chose to connect themselves with these two goddesses through their religious programs. This was undeniably intentional, and the result of the link between their respective spheres of influence.

There was Greek precedent for the goddess Aphrodite's portrayal with militaristic attributes, and contact with the Greek East must have assisted in Venus' religious development. Yet her image took on a definitively 'Roman' character, as can be seen through an examination of the major temples dedicated to Venus during the Republican period.⁴⁶ The circumstances under which a temple was vowed, and indeed the sources of funding for the project, provide clues as to the range of Venus' perceived influence. As the literary evidence for Republican temples is by no means substantial, a combined assessment of literature and archaeological evidence is required in order to gain an insight into their function. Furthermore, the locations of these temples within the landscape of the city can reveal a great deal about their intended political and social messages. The temples of Venus Obsequens and Venus Erycina will be discussed, with this survey undertaken in

⁴³ Cic. *Div.* 1.13.23.

⁴⁴ See Strabo 8.6.23; Prusac 2011: 81.

⁴⁵ Sauron 1994: 287; Clark 2007: 228. Welch (2008: 184-5) also notes that the Latin term '*Campania felix*' clearly demonstrates this sphere of influence.

⁴⁶ For the purposes of this thesis, the temples to Venus in Rome itself will be the focus here, as opposed to those located in other areas of Roman Italy.

chronological order. Each of these temples trades heavily on Venus' martial characteristics during the Republic, and highlights the complexity of her position within the religious framework during this period.

I. *The First Roman Temple to Venus: The Temple of Venus Obsequens*

The first temple known to be dedicated to Venus in Rome was to her incarnation as 'Venus Obsequens', or the 'Obedient Venus'.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, very little is known about this temple and its associated cult. A fragment from Servius' *Commentary on the Aeneid* and an extract from Livy are the most detailed pieces of evidence.⁴⁸ The establishment of this temple was credited to Quintus Fabius Gurgus, with construction probably beginning in 295 BC, though it seems not to have been completed until after the conclusion of the Third Samnite War.⁴⁹ The dedication date of this temple, 19 August, coincided with the *Vinalia Rustica*.⁵⁰ This festival was connected with both Jupiter and the foundation legend of Rome.⁵¹ It is clear from later sources, such as Vergil's *Aeneid*, that Venus maintained a strong connection with the Trojan legend in her role as the mother of Aeneas into the Augustan period and beyond.⁵²

⁴⁷ This epithet appears in Servius' commentary on the *Aeneid*: *Serv. Aen.* 1.720; Staples, 1998: 51. Wiseman (2008: 154) claims that the conferral of the title *Obsequens* upon Venus may have been 'an attempt to control the goddess,' but it seems more likely that its meaning relates to her assistance with Gurgus' military endeavours, probably in response to his requests for her intervention. This interpretation is implied in *Serv. Aen.* 1.720.

⁴⁸ Ziolkowski (1992: 168) comments on the differences between these two accounts, which will be discussed shortly.

⁴⁹ Richardson 1995: 409; Orlin 1997: 127; Papi 1999: 118.

⁵⁰ Papi 1999: 118.

⁵¹ Pliny (*HN* 18.69) discusses the dates of the *Vinalia*, and distinguishes two different festivals. The 'Second *Vinalia*' that he discusses is of interest here. See Schilling (1954: 91-2) on the *Vinalia*, and the precedent for a connection between Jupiter and Venus.

⁵² Whilst Vergil's *Aeneid* is of Augustan, rather than Republican, date, it reflects a number of pre-existing religious ideas regarding the mythology surrounding Venus. Republican precedent for the connection between Venus and the Trojan legend is evident in Valerius Maximus' *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, which will be discussed in greater depth later.

The positioning of temples within the landscape of the city is crucial for understanding their intended meanings, but when little evidence of a building survives, problems can easily arise. Livy, for instance, indicates that the Temple of Venus Obsequens was located ‘near the Circus.’⁵³ Although Livy’s account is imprecise, it is likely that the circus he mentions is the Circus Maximus.⁵⁴ To date, no remains of the temple have been uncovered. This has not deterred scholars from speculating on the original location of the temple. Richardson and Coarelli claim that the temple probably stood either near or at the foot of the Aventine hill.⁵⁵ Further attempts have been made to locate this temple on the Aventine, but in the absence of more substantial evidence they represent mere conjecture. One suggestion is that it was positioned on ‘the south-east end of the circus on the Aventine side, near the shrine of Murcia.’⁵⁶ A more cautious approach, however, is preferable due to the lack of archaeological evidence. As such, Ziolkowski’s view that the precise location of the Temple of Venus Obsequens cannot be accurately determined is preferable.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, this temple offers the first indication of Venus’ connection to the military in a public Roman context. The advertisement of Venus’ favour for military assistance allowed for some expression of personal patronage on Gurges’ part, though this was not utilised for political gain to the extent that would be seen later in the Republic. An extract from Servius reveals that Quintus Fabius Gurges was indebted to the goddess, who appears to have assisted his victory in the Samnite War.⁵⁸ The text reads *dicitur etiam Obsequens Venus quam Fabius Gurges post peractum bellum Samniticum hoc nomine consecrauit, quod sibi fuerit obsecuta.*⁵⁹ Ziolkowski criticises the reliability of Servius’ account due to the resulting date ascribed to the temple. He argues that Servius suggests Gurges’ vow should be assigned to his ‘singularly unsuccessful first

⁵³ Livy 10.31.9.

⁵⁴ See Staples (1998: 51), who argues for this identification.

⁵⁵ Richardson 1992: 409; Coarelli 2007: 325. Cf. Humphrey 1986: 63; Oakley 2005: 342.

⁵⁶ Platner and Ashby 1929: 552. Richardson (1992: 409) suggests that the temple may have been positioned ‘just behind the seating of the circus toward the southeast end.’ Popkin (2016: 52) states that it stood ‘in the area of the Circus Maximus’ Aventine side.’ See also Humphrey (1986: 69), who argues that the temple was positioned ‘near the southeast end of the valley.’

⁵⁷ Ziolkowski 1992: 235-38; Papi 1999: 118.

⁵⁸ Serv. *Aen.* 1.720.

⁵⁹ Serv. *Aen.* 1.720.

consulate in 292, or to his sham triumph a year later, whereas we learn from Livy that the temple's *locatio* took place in 295.⁶⁰ Whilst the reliability of Servius' dating is questionable, there is no reason to doubt the explanation he gives for the temple's dedication as a thank-offering for Venus' assistance in conflict. This appears to be the first such recognition of Venus' martial power in Rome. This was certainly an example of self-promotion, even if Venus was probably not employed as 'competitively' at this early stage as she would be later in the Republican period. Gurges underlined his personal connection with the martial goddess through conferral of the epithet 'Obsequens'.⁶¹ Schilling questions whether 'Obsequens' was in fact an indication of Venus' action in response to the prayers and requests directed towards her,⁶² as seems to have been Gurges' intention.⁶³ The military connection, however, is clear. As Ziolkowski points out, Servius' account 'leaves no doubt that in his [Servius'] opinion, Gurges vowed the temple of Venus as a thank-offering for the victorious outcome of his *imperium*.'⁶⁴ The surviving evidence clearly suggests that the temple of Venus Obsequens served to acknowledge the goddess' favour on the battlefield during the Samnite Wars.

Gurges' decision to dedicate the temple specifically to Venus must be analysed further. Why was this goddess in particular thanked in the wake of his military success? In the absence of substantial evidence, this is a difficult question to answer. A combination of personal devotion and influence from Greek representations of Aphrodite's martial potential may have been at work. Moreover, Gurges' construction of this temple appears to have been the first step in the development of a competitive political process between the great families and their leaders.⁶⁵ Yet the circumstances in which the Temple of Venus Obsequens was vowed suggest that its influence

⁶⁰ Ziolkowski 1992: 168.

⁶¹ See Staples 1998: 51.

⁶² Schilling 1954: 28.

⁶³ Staples (1998: 113) argues that the title 'Obsequens' was conferred on Venus because she 'had proved propitious towards him during his campaign against the Samnites.'

⁶⁴ Ziolkowski 1992: 169. Oakley (2005: 343) disagrees, believing that Servius' account of the temple should be discounted in favour of Livy's description of its construction. This argument will be examined in more detail below.

⁶⁵ See Papi (1999: 118), who briefly discusses the connection between the Fabii and Venus as 'familial propaganda', and suggests that the introduction of her cult into Rome may have promoted the Trojan legend.

was not solely restricted to the political realm.⁶⁶ The temple also addressed concerns within wider Roman society. Livy notes that Gurgus imposed a fine on women who were found to have committed adultery, the proceeds of which were used to construct this temple to Venus.⁶⁷ At first glance, Livy's account might appear to contradict that of Servius, who suggests a strongly militaristic origin for the temple. As a result, Oakley does not believe that Servius' account of the temple's vowing should be accepted, instead claiming that its source of funding points to a desire to call upon Venus in her capacity as the goddess of love and sex, in order to restore morality to the state.⁶⁸ However this argument does not consider Venus' multi-faceted role in Roman religion, or the well-established connection between morality and military success.⁶⁹ It can hardly be a coincidence that the fines imposed on women found guilty of adultery were directed towards funding a temple specifically to Venus Obsequens.⁷⁰ Whilst Venus' military attributes were being evoked through this temple, morality remained one of her areas of influence, and in the Roman mind, moral failure within the state could and often did cause poor military performance.⁷¹ Livy's statement that the construction of this temple was funded with the proceeds of fines imposed on unchaste matrons is therefore unsurprising, and probably accurate. Certainly, Livy's narrative shows a primary concern with morality, but his account of the Temple of Venus Obsequens should not be regarded as contradictory to that of Servius for this reason. Roman success in warfare was strongly linked to morality in the state, and failures could be explained as the result of poor moral conduct. The fines imposed on the matrons would therefore have served a dual purpose. They

⁶⁶ Ariadne Staples (1998: 113) argues strongly for Venus' combined political and social importance in her role as 'Venus Obsequens'.

⁶⁷ Livy 10.31.9.

⁶⁸ Oakley 2005: 343. Latte (1960: 185-6) also believes that the money collected from women convicted of adultery indicates that Venus Obsequens was to be equated with Venus Calva, who acted in her role as a goddess of love and sex to uphold proper matronly conduct.

⁶⁹ Staples 1998: 51.

⁷⁰ It is possible that this epithet could take on additional meaning, recalling the expected behaviours of a Roman matron. As argued by Staples (1998: 113), however, it is likely that the term primarily referred to the willingness of the goddess to answer Gurgus' pleas for military assistance.

⁷¹ E.g. Valerius Maximus (2.7.2) details Metellus' reforms in the army during the Jugurthine War, designed to counteract the excesses of Sp. Albinus which had 'corrupted' discipline. Valerius states that Metellus' restoration of discipline 'produced frequent victories and many trophies.'

provided a source of funding for Gurges' vowed temple to Venus, whilst at the same time punishing those who hindered the Roman campaign through their moral 'deficiencies'. Edirisinghe extends the connection between Venus Obsequens' moral and military qualities, arguing that the temple served as a direct appeal to the goddess to 'bring order into [a] society plagued by post-victory chaos.'⁷² Rather than this temple acting simply as a one-dimensional attempt to invoke Venus' martial qualities, it is likely that it also reflected the complexity of the goddess' identity and influence.

II. *The Introduction of a 'Foreign' Cult: The Temple of Venus Erycina*

The emphasis placed on Venus' martial attributes by Gurges was not forgotten. Instead, her military associations were developed further through the second significant Roman temple dedicated to Venus in the Republican period. This Temple of Venus Erycina was constructed on the Capitoline during the Second Punic War, and the circumstances surrounding its dedication indicate a development in the goddess' martial attributes.⁷³ It is important to note that this incarnation of Venus was not of native Italic origin. Instead, it appears that external conflict faced by the Romans greatly influenced the decision to incorporate a 'foreign' version of Venus into Rome itself.⁷⁴ As her epithet suggests, this incarnation of Venus was originally worshipped in Sicily on Mount Eryx. The introduction of her cult into Rome through the construction of a temple on the Capitoline not only helped to reinforce her military attributes and advertise them on a more public scale than had previously occurred, but also assigned her a definitively 'Roman' identity.

⁷² Edirisinghe 2010: 33.

⁷³ This temple should be differentiated from the Temple of Venus Erycina at the *Porta Collina*. For the temple at the *Porta Collina*, see Strab. 6.2.6; Livy 30.38.10; 40.34.4; App. *B Civ.* 1.93. This second temple to Venus Erycina was dedicated in 184 BC, again with military connotations. Whilst this temple is not the focus here, Coarelli (1999: 114-16) gives a good overview of the circumstances surrounding its dedication and construction. Latte (1960: 186) discusses the connection between the Temple of Venus Erycina at the *Porta Collina* and the Ligurian War.

⁷⁴ For a discussion of the introduction of 'foreign' cults and deities into Rome, and their reception, see Ando 2003: 193-8.

The introduction of her cult as ‘Erycina’, therefore, can be contrasted with other examples of Roman *evocatio* of foreign deities.⁷⁵ Venus was a ‘Roman’ goddess who, under the name ‘Obsequens’, was already recognised for her martial abilities.

Venus Erycina became strongly connected to an evolving state identity. Diodorus Siculus emphasises the association between Aeneas, Venus, and her original cult in Sicily at Mt. Eryx.⁷⁶ He claims that Aeneas had ‘embellished the sanctuary, since it was that of his own mother, with many votive offerings.’⁷⁷ Diodorus then supports Rome’s rightful connection with the Sicilian sanctuary and adoption of the cult, insinuating that Rome was not introducing a ‘foreign’ goddess into the city in adopting Venus Erycina, but instead was returning an ancestral goddess to her rightful home. He states that the Romans:

when they had subdued all Sicily, surpassed all people who had preceded them in the honours they paid to her...it was with good reason that they did so, for since they traced back their ancestry to her and for this reason were successful in their undertakings, they were but requiting her who was the cause of their aggrandisement with such expressions of gratitude and honours as they owed to her.⁷⁸

Diodorus’ comments on Rome’s ancestral claim to Venus Erycina probably reflected a common view in the first century BC.⁷⁹ Due to its explicit ties to Rome’s Trojan descent, the Temple of Venus Erycina on the Capitoline, and its associated cult, occupied an important place in both the political and social spheres.⁸⁰ As Gruen argues, the construction of a temple to this particular incarnation of Venus was probably intended to invoke the Trojan associations of the legendary

⁷⁵ See Festus (*s.v. peregrinus ager* 284L) for cults which were categorised as ‘foreign’. Cf. Ando 2008: 129-30.

⁷⁶ Diod. Sic. 4.83.

⁷⁷ Diod. Sic. 3.83.4; 4.83. See also Latte (1960: 185-6), who briefly discusses the connection between Aeneas and Venus Erycina.

⁷⁸ Diod. Sic. 3.83.4-5.

⁷⁹ The dialogue of ‘Trojan descent’ was not new at this point. Sources such as Pausanias (1.12.1) point to the acknowledgement of this ancestry as far back as 281 BC. See Galinsky (1969: 169-73) for a good discussion regarding the acknowledgement of this legend in Rome prior to the construction of the Temple of Venus Erycina.

⁸⁰ See Kendall (2012: 100), who argues that this goddess was used to connect Rome with Sicily, and provide a link to the Trojan ancestry of the Roman people.

foundation figure, Aeneas.⁸¹ This would have had an impact on the state as a whole, and ensured that the goddess' identity would be merged with the Trojan foundation legend.⁸² As such, the claim that the dedication of this temple probably enabled public recognition of Rome's Trojan heritage to take place is convincing.⁸³ Despite the technically 'foreign' origins of the cult of Venus Erycina, it is clear that her pre-existing connection with the state was utilised as a means to legitimise her introduction into the religious landscape of Rome, and ensure that she was accepted as a 'Roman' goddess.⁸⁴

In her incarnation as Venus Erycina, the goddess both maintained and developed her connection with victory and military success, as previously observed in Gurges' dedication of a temple to Venus Obsequens. However, the contexts in which her martial qualities were being advertised varied significantly. During the conflict against the Carthaginian general Hamilcar Barca, the Roman forces engaged in a siege of the citadel of Mount Eryx, the location of the local cult of Venus.⁸⁵ Although Venus was believed to have favoured the Roman forces in their subsequent victory in this area, the strength of her assistance to the Carthaginians themselves also surely helped to prove the extent of her power. The Roman forces were unable to capture the goddess' native Sicilian location in Eryx easily. Polybius notes that the enemy strength was so great in this area that 'it seemed to them [the Carthaginians] that the fortune of war was inclining in their favour, while the Romans, on the contrary...relinquished the sea.'⁸⁶ It is important to note that Venus was being encountered by the Romans as an external, rather than internal, goddess at this stage. Although Gurges' earlier dedication was apparently the result of the goddess' assistance in conflict, she was responding as an explicitly 'Roman' deity. As Venus Erycina was thought to

⁸¹ Gruen 1992: 47; cf. Galinsky 1969: 175-6.

⁸² Orlin 2010: 74-6.

⁸³ Gruen 1992: 42. See also Orlin (2010: 74-6), who convincingly argues that a Trojan connection was not only implied, but actively sought out through the dedication of this temple.

⁸⁴ Robert Schilling (1949: 34-5) suggests that the introduction of Venus Erycina into Rome paved the way for the introduction of other 'foreign' cults, such as that of the Magna Mater, using the same connection with the Trojan legend. It seems that a link with the Trojan foundation legend was a key factor in establishing such cults as inherently 'Roman', rather than foreign.

⁸⁵ Polyb. 1.55; Schilling 1954: 245-6.

⁸⁶ Polyb. 1.55.

have wielded great power and influence over the course of the conflict, it is likely that a sense of *pietas* and genuine respect for this manifestation of Venus motivated her transferral to Rome, and facilitated her acceptance amongst other distinctly ‘martial’ deities.

The dedication of a temple in Rome to this incarnation of Venus did not eventuate until many years after the initial victory in Sicily. Livy suggests that there was a significant level of concern for the fortunes of Roman military forces involved in the dedication. He states that the dictator Quintus Fabius Maximus consulted the Sibylline Books in order to discover ‘how the displeasure of the gods might be appeased,’ following the disastrous Roman defeat in 217 BC at Lake Trasimene at the hands of the Carthaginians during the Second Punic War.⁸⁷ A number of sacred tasks were ordered as a result, including the vowing of the temple to Venus Erycina.⁸⁸ The Sibylline Books played a significant role in many decisions surrounding construction within the Republican period. Beard, North, and Price argue that their consultation provided ‘legitimation for what might otherwise have been seen as deviations from the ancestral tradition.’⁸⁹ Despite the potential resistance that the introduction of new religious ideas might bring, it is unlikely that any such concern was apparent with the introduction of this cult. There was a strong connection between the goddess and the foundation of the city. Furthermore, Venus had already proven her military power to Rome, both as ‘Obsequens,’ and through her perceived assistance in the victory at Eryx. Regardless of these factors, a legitimate basis for the dedication of a temple to Venus Erycina would still be of the utmost importance. The Sibylline Books offered an ideal means to achieve justification of religious change.

It is highly likely that the contemporary war against Hannibal was connected to that fought previously against his father Hamilcar Barca in the Roman mind. As Schilling infers, it would have been a sensible decision in Roman thinking to introduce Venus Erycina into Rome itself (through the dedication of a temple), as there was a historical precedent for her assistance against

⁸⁷ Livy 22.9.8. See Levene (2010: 51), who comments on Livy’s account of Fabius’ actions after Trasimene, and notes that he sought to regain the favour of the gods.

⁸⁸ Livy 22.9.9-10. Wissowa 1902: 290; Galinsky 1969: 174. See also Liebeschuetz (1979: 10), for a good analysis of this event in the context of ‘religious fear’.

⁸⁹ Beard, North and Price 1998: 62. See also Orlin (1997: 113-15), who examines the role of the Sybilline Books and their use in allowing the Senate control over the introduction of foreign cults.

Carthaginian enemies.⁹⁰ The assistance that Venus was believed to have given the original Roman forces in Sicily during the previous Punic War had not been forgotten, and acted as a strong incentive to appeal to her once again when a similar threat was faced. Furthermore, following the Roman military disaster at Trasimene in 217 BC, Q. Fabius Maximus Cunctator was appointed dictator and faced the task of restoring the Roman state. He emphasised a return to religious piety as a measure for the recovery of the state, recalling his ancestor Gurgus' use of Venus Obsequens as both a restorative figure and a symbol of Roman military victory. Plutarch claims that Fabius believed the military failure suffered by Rome at Trasimene was 'due to the neglect and scorn with which their general [Gaius Flaminius] had treated religious rites, and not to the cowardice of those who fought under him.'⁹¹ Plutarch's moralising concern is a product of his role as a biographer, but this does not discount its importance in the Roman mind when considering military matters. The Temple of Venus Erycina, at least partially, served as an attempt to remedy the situation.⁹² Following the precedent set by Venus Obsequens, it appears that the goddess' influence over both military victory and morality was being called upon once again. A lack of morality in Rome was being blamed for the military defeat at Trasimene, and the dedication of a temple to Venus Erycina offered a solution to the crisis by appealing to the goddess for reconciliation in the hope that she would lend her support to the state. It is clear that Venus' multi-faceted influence was once again acknowledged through the dedication of this temple.

The positioning of the Temple of Venus Erycina on the Capitoline offers a crucial insight into the widespread acceptance of her status as a military goddess. Whilst the remains of this temple on the Capitoline are no longer extant, Richardson suggests that it probably stood 'in the Area Capitolina... [as] one of a pair of temples, presumably twins, the other being to Mens.'⁹³ He

⁹⁰ Schilling 1954: 246.

⁹¹ Plut. *Fab. Max.* 4.

⁹² Furthermore, it seems that an attempt to secure positive foreign relations in the face of the rising threats of this war was one of the key factors in the dedication of this temple. Orlin (1997: 108-9; 2010: 74-6) has convincingly argued that the introduction of this cult into the religious landscape of Rome was an attempt to secure the goodwill of her native region in Sicily, to prevent them from expressing support for the Carthaginian enemy. This seems to have been the case, and fits in with the other concerns regarding the military fortune of the state surrounding the dedication of this temple.

⁹³ Richardson 1992: 408. Cf. Serv. *Georg.* 4.265; Coarelli 1999: 114.

notes that the two temples were probably destroyed in antiquity as the result of a fire in either AD 69 or 80.⁹⁴ Once again, the problem of survival significantly affects any in-depth analysis of this temple. Despite the lack of material evidence for these temples, however, they surely made a significant political and indeed visual impact, especially in the aftermath of Trasimene. The likely location of this temple in the Area Capitolina explicitly and very publicly placed Venus Erycina amidst a number of other important deities associated with military fortune. Pre-existing temples in this area to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Ops, and Fides all bore associations with conflict or military success.⁹⁵ Placing the Temple of Venus Erycina in this section of the Capitoline was hardly coincidental, and served as a clear public acknowledgement of her influence over successful military endeavours. It is clear that this temple, alongside that of Mens, was intended to be associated with the restoration of the state. Erskine argues persuasively that the ‘conjunction of the temple of Venus with that of Mens, the personification of good sense, signalled that under Fabius wise counsel would replace the recklessness of Flaminius, the commander at Trasimene.’⁹⁶ A boost to Fabius’ public image would certainly have resulted from this association. Whilst politics remain important in investigating Fabius’ dedication of this temple, however, this was not his only concern. It is likely that the dictator also considered the integrity of the Roman state to be under considerable threat as a result of external conflict. The crushing defeat at Trasimene would have had a significant impact on the stability of the state.⁹⁷ As a result, this temple provided the means to appeal to Venus in her capacity as a military goddess, in order that the state might be safeguarded against future disaster with her support.

⁹⁴ Richardson 1992: 251.

⁹⁵ See Livy’s account (45.39.11-12) of the role of the Capitoline temples in the triumph of victorious generals. Jennifer Rea (2007: 49-50) particularly emphasises the military significance of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, in that it served as ‘the depository for offerings made by victorious military generals, dedications, and trophies that commemorated military conquests.’

⁹⁶ Erskine 2001: 201. See also Galinsky (1969: 175-6) and Kendall (2012: 100), who discuss the association between Venus Erycina and Mens.

⁹⁷ The scale of the Roman losses was significant. Livy (22.7.2-3) claims that 15,000 men were killed in the battle.

III. *Patronage and Conflict: Venus as a Military Goddess under Sulla*

Venus' association with successful military conduct, and especially her proven influence over success in conflict, undoubtedly increased the appeal of her patronage. It is thus no coincidence that the tumultuous political period of the later Republic saw further developments in her reception and use by powerful members of society. In particular, the connection fostered by Sulla with Venus is hardly surprising, due to the goddess' pre-existing associations with good fortune, prosperity, and military victory. Sulla, however, chose a setting different from the temples of the Middle Republic. The idea that a god or goddess could be adopted by a *gens*, or even an individual, became more widespread in the Late Republic.⁹⁸ The political advantages of such a connection were apparent in circumstances where prominent men were keen to assert their power in the state. This concept would have significant implications in the struggle for power amongst the 'great men' of the Late Republic, allowing a dialogue of competition over the patronage of deities to emerge. Sulla's emphasis on Venus' personal patronage is an excellent example of how prominent individuals could exploit this system, in order to increase their own personal power through interactions with the divine.⁹⁹ Sulla was able to build upon Venus' existing associations with fortune and military endeavours by linking her qualities directly to his own undertakings, and sought to legitimise his success and position in the state through his personal connection with the goddess.

The military trophies set up by Sulla demonstrate the nature of his personal relationship with the divine. Whilst they no longer remain extant, literary evidence suggests that these trophies credited Venus, Mars, and Victory for their assistance in Sulla's campaigns. Plutarch states that following the Battle of Chaeronea against the general Archelaus, Sulla 'inscribed upon his trophies the names of Mars, Victory, and Venus, in the belief that his success in the war was due no less to

⁹⁸ T.P. Wiseman (1974: 153, 155) comments on the common practice of noble families advertising their own legendary genealogies in the Late Republic.

⁹⁹ This is not to say that the political and social advantages offered through this connection were the sole reason why one might choose to advertise divine links. The idea that genuine religious devotion was a motivating factor for these individuals cannot be discounted.

good fortune than to military skill and strength.’¹⁰⁰ Plutarch further indicates that the ‘trophy of the battle stands on the spot where the troops of Archelaus first gave way.’¹⁰¹ A desire to associate good fortune and military success with this campaign is clearly reflected in Sulla’s choice of these particular deities.¹⁰² The appearance of both Mars and Venus in the dedication indicates that Venus’ military power was now also reinforced by her position as the consort of the god of war. This connection had not previously been exploited in the Roman representation of her martial characteristics, suggesting that her association with Mars was a secondary element in her ability to bestow martial favour.¹⁰³ Keaveney argues that this was a deliberate attempt by Sulla to recall Rome’s Trojan origins, with Sulla able to secure Venus’ patronage because he was ‘fighting on...behalf of her descendants, the Roman people’, with Mars simply acting in his role as the god of war and not through any personal connection with Sulla.¹⁰⁴ Whilst Keaveney’s view has merit, Venus’ own influence over military affairs throughout the Republic indicates that Mars was not needed here to advertise the ‘martial success’ of Sulla’s campaigns, while Venus simply represented ‘the Roman people’. Sulla would have been fully aware of the connection between her image and the Trojan legend. Venus’ pre-existing associations with successful military endeavours, however, indicate that her Trojan associations were far from the only reason for her inclusion.¹⁰⁵

Sulla would have been well aware of Venus’ pre-existing Republican connections to military success. Appian recalls an incident in which he consulted an oracle on the matter of his future, and was exhorted to dedicate an axe to the goddess.¹⁰⁶ Sulla complied, and also sent an inscription in which he claimed to have seen Venus in a dream, dressed in armour and engaging

¹⁰⁰ Plut. *Sull.* 19.5.

¹⁰¹ Plut. *Sull.* 19.5.

¹⁰² For a note on the association between Venus and Sulla’s ‘luck’, see Wissowa 1902: 291.

¹⁰³ There is, however, some indication that Greek representations of ‘military Aphrodite’ could convey an association with Ares. See Cyrino (2012: 51) for a brief discussion of the Spartan cult of Aphrodite ‘Areia’.

¹⁰⁴ Keaveney 2005: 80.

¹⁰⁵ Sulla would have been aware of the military connections governing the dedication of Republican temples to Venus, especially those of Venus Erycina and Venus Obsequens.

¹⁰⁶ App. *Bell. Civ.* 1.97. See also Asmis (2015: 50), who indicates that this oracle ‘confirmed’ Sulla’s advertisement of the divine favour of the goddess, and ‘legitimised’ his actions.

in combat.¹⁰⁷ Venus' portrayal in this passage is undeniably militaristic. Rather than simply acting in a protective role, she appears as an active participant in conflict within Appian's account of the inscription.¹⁰⁸ All citizens could see the political advantages to divine patronage, and the increasing power of prominent individuals within the Roman state during the later stages of the Republic facilitated more frequent claims of divine support.¹⁰⁹ Venus was especially rich in associations. As Thein argues, Sulla's inscription was intended to set him apart as a recipient of her patronage, in addition to the descent that 'ordinary' Romans could claim from the goddess through their Trojan heritage.¹¹⁰ The content of this inscription is unable to be verified, and so Appian's account should be approached with caution. Nevertheless, his narrative reveals that Sulla's promotion of Venus' patronage transformed Roman interactions with her military powers from expressions of gratitude and appeals for assistance during times of conflict, to an explicit demonstration of personal patronage – a powerful tool in the political climate of the Late Republic.

Sulla could hardly have intended his connection with Venus to remain on a purely 'personal' level, and instead he sought to use his patron goddess for political gain. His adoption of the cognomen ἐπαφρόδιτος is a clear indication of his desire to be linked very publicly with Venus as his personal patron deity. This title, translated as 'beloved of Aphrodite', was commonly used by Sulla in his communications with the Greeks.¹¹¹ Plutarch states that Sulla, 'in writing to the Greeks on official business, styled himself Epaphroditus, or Favourite of Venus, [and did likewise on] his trophies in our country [Greece].'¹¹² Appian confirms Sulla's use of this epithet through his own research. He claims to have 'come across a document which relates that Sulla was styled Epaphroditus by a decree of the Senate itself.'¹¹³ There is no reason to doubt the claims of either Plutarch or Appian that Sulla used this title on an official basis. Indeed, this cognomen reveals a

¹⁰⁷ App. *Bell. Civ.* 1.97.

¹⁰⁸ Thein (2002: 21) also suggests that this militaristic portrayal went beyond Venus' expected protective qualities as the ancestress of the Roman people. Therefore, it seems clear that her martial attributes are being evoked here, and used to promote Sulla's 'version' of the goddess as his personal patron in military endeavours.

¹⁰⁹ Rowan 2012: 12.

¹¹⁰ Thein 2002: 21.

¹¹¹ Santangelo 2007: 204.

¹¹² Plut. *Sull.* 34.

¹¹³ App. *Bell Civ.* 1.97.

great deal about Sulla's intentions in advertising his connection to Venus. Santangelo views this title as a political tool. He argues that contact with the Greek East through military campaigns allowed Sulla to 'develop this aspect and to exploit it within the framework and the needs of the Roman imperial project.'¹¹⁴ There was undoubtedly an openly political element to Sulla's interaction with the goddess in such a public manner, especially in Greece.¹¹⁵ Aphrodite was Venus' equivalent in Greece, and also possessed martial attributes. While these were not as politically developed as Venus' martial powers, Sulla intended to utilise Aphrodite's name in a Greek context in order to call upon both manifestations of the goddess as his patron. Sulla's motives for advertising this title were probably influenced by an awareness of Venus' connection to *felicitas*, which is highlighted by his decision to use the cognomen '*Felix*' in Roman contexts.¹¹⁶ Both titles worked together, and were intended to reinforce the existing link between Venus and good fortune. Sulla's use of these *cognomina* suggests genuine elements of piety and personal acceptance of Venus as his patron deity, as well as awareness of the increased significance of her reception as a highly powerful and influential goddess. He was able to build effectively upon the goddess' pre-existing capacity to provide assistance in warfare, and aspire to claim sole 'ownership' over her patronage.

An examination of coinage minted by Sulla demonstrates not only his desire to be publicly connected with Venus on a large scale, but also suggests a development in his advertisement of her influence over military success. Venus is depicted on a denarius minted by Sulla in 84-83 BC, appearing on the obverse alongside her son, Cupid.¹¹⁷ The reverse of this coin portrays two military trophies, suggesting a personal connection to Sulla's own campaigns. The imagery on both the obverse and reverse is clearly connected, and Venus' military characteristics are prominent. In

¹¹⁴ Santangelo 2007: 210. Santangelo (2007: 213) further argues that Sulla's dealings with Greece were primarily to 'resume its exploitation, [while] at the same time compelling the local elites to get closer to Rome and to resume full cooperation with her.'

¹¹⁵ The Trojan connection shared between Greece and Rome is important in assessing the political implications of Sulla's link to this particular goddess. Santangelo (2007: 213) notes that Rome's claim of descent from both the daughter of Zeus and the Trojans permitted her the 'right to interfere in Greek affairs, and at the same time present herself as an independent power and an external force.'

¹¹⁶ For Sulla's use of the title *Felix* in Roman contexts, see Plut. *Sull.* 34; Livy 30.45.6.

¹¹⁷ RRC 358/2.

fact, the reverse may refer to the trophies set up by Sulla following his victory at Chaeronea.¹¹⁸ As such, this denarius indicates a desire on Sulla's part to acknowledge publicly Venus' role in his victories, and to claim explicitly her favour and personal patronage. This certainly suggests the continuation of the goddess' military influence from the earlier Republican precedent, though with a greater focus on the divine legitimisation that she could provide.

Numismatic evidence provides an excellent insight into the desired representation of the individual issuing a coin. As a result, it is clear that Venus' depiction on the obverse of Sulla's coinage was intended to advertise his personal relationship with the goddess on a very public scale. Wiseman notes the advantages of coinage in the examination of public image, in that its content was comparable to 'monumental sculpture: it used the same idioms and could be employed to convey the same type of visual message.'¹¹⁹ The visual message projected by Venus' inclusion on Sulla's coinage could not be clearer. The public would certainly have been aware of the goddess' status as a military patron through monuments such as her Capitoline temple, and also aware of her well-advertised role as a patron deity of Sulla. Whilst this would have borne a number of political advantages, the imagery probably reflects too Sulla's personal *pietas*, and his eagerness to advertise the connection between himself and the goddess.

Venus' complex role within the religious framework of the Republic undeniably included a strong militaristic element. The temples of Venus Obsequens and Venus Erycina in particular demonstrate the development of her image as a martial goddess as the result of a number of different influences. The dedication of these Republican temples to Venus acted as a direct means of appealing to the goddess for martial assistance. Her influence over warfare remained evident under Sulla, but the political implications of her associations with good military fortune were expanded during this period, due to an increased focus on personal patronage. Sulla's emphasis on the connection between Venus and his own military endeavours not only suggests that her influence over such undertakings survived from the Middle Republic, but also that they developed to benefit prominent individuals within the state through divine legitimisation.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Plut. *Sull.* 19.5.

¹¹⁹ Wiseman 1974: 160.

Chapter 2 – Changing Politics: The Significance of Venus in the Career of Pompey

Venus' military characteristics remained prominent into the Late Republic. However, whilst her assistance in conflict had been acknowledged already, her significance in the political landscape grew. Her favour was the subject of intense political competition. This period saw Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar all vying for her patronage and to be seen as the 'true' beneficiary of her power to bestow military victory. Their attempts to secure Venus as a personal benefactor were not only products of their desire for a boost to their public image. These men were also knowingly participating in a competitive dialogue with one another. Pompey challenged Sulla's existing and powerful claim to the goddess as a patron deity. Likewise, upon the breakdown of their planned joint dynasty under the protection of Venus, Caesar and Pompey fought for the legitimate claim to her favour.

Pompey's interactions with Venus reflect both a continuation in the Republican traditions surrounding her military power, and also a shift in her reception and importance to prominent individuals within the state. Pompey's use of Venus was not simply a product of convention, but instead was designed to develop his personal public image, and the military attributes of the goddess herself. Venus' role as Pompey's patron deity was a significant feature of his military career, and indicates that she was still thought to possess substantial martial power. Furthermore, Pompey's interactions with the goddess throughout his career indicate that he was eager to prove his claim to her favour. A competitive dialogue over Venus' support emerged first between Sulla and Pompey, with her assistance in battle a particular focus of contention. Pompey's initial triumph represents the first of his attempts to challenge Sulla's claim to Venus' patronage. This discourse would continue after Sulla's death, as Venus' ability to bestow victory became central to the interests of both Pompey and Julius Caesar. At first, it might appear that Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar sought to emulate each other's approach to the patronage of Venus in an attempt to establish a 'line of succession' for her favour. Instead, however, they engaged competitively with other uses of Venus. Each man struggled to prove that his own claim to her patronage was stronger than those of his predecessors.

Pompey sought to participate in the dialogue of competition by aligning his own successes in battle with the assistance of Venus as a patron. This was perhaps best displayed through the construction in 55 BC of his theatre complex, which incorporated a prominent temple to the goddess in her incarnation as Venus Victrix, the ‘bringer of victory’.¹²⁰ This temple reflected the very personal connection he maintained with the goddess, and her important martial assistance as his patron deity. Furthermore, Pompey’s inclusion of Venus Victrix’s temple in a larger monument to his own personal achievements suggests his desire to advertise openly the goddess’ influence on a public scale, engaging once more in the dialogue of competition over her favour. Pompey’s dedication of the temple to Venus Victrix demonstrated the development of Venus’ military characteristics in the unique political climate of the Late Republic. The aims of this temple were very different from those of the earlier Republican temples to Venus Obsequens and Venus Erycina, with the rise of individual power on the political scene prompting a heavier focus upon advertising the personal patronage of deities. The positioning of this temple at the top of the theatre complex created a very powerful image, intended to reinforce the connection between Pompey’s military achievements and the goddess’ patronage. As Gleason suggests, this temple had a visual relationship with other architectural features such as the *curia* and the *regia*.¹²¹ She argues that movement between these areas evoked the feeling of a ‘triumphal procession’, allowing the viewer to become absorbed in the intended messages of the complex.¹²² This conclusion is certainly supported by the location of the Theatre of Pompey in the Campus Martius, an area of public land dedicated to Mars, and used for military training purposes.¹²³ It is clear that the complex was designed to immerse visitors in an ‘experience’, allowing the effective broadcast of its intended messages. The theatre and its associated temples were directly related to Pompey’s own triumphs, and served as monuments to his successes in battle. As such, it is likely that the military

¹²⁰ Martial (*Epigrams* 2.14.10) writes that the complex was ‘the gift of Pompey.’ Despite the public nature of this complex, a clear personal connection with its benefactor was obvious. See Russell (2015: 153-4) for a discussion of the overlap between public and private spaces in the Theatre of Pompey and its surrounds.

¹²¹ Gleason 1990: 10. See also Kuttner (1999: 345-8), who investigates the interactions between the Temple of Venus Victrix and the other elements of this complex, including the porticoes, gardens, and artworks.

¹²² Gleason 1990: 10.

¹²³ This will be discussed in greater detail in Section 2 below. See Plutarch (*Public.* 8) for the dedication of this land to Mars.

associations of the Campus Martius offered the perfect opportunity to emphasise Venus' martial power through her temple within the theatre complex, and also provided a platform for Pompey to advertise his great military victories as a result of the goddess' patronage.

Pompey's choice to undertake a public building project of this scale was heavily associated with the promotion of individual power. It was not until the Late Republic that the incidence of privately funded public buildings began to rise, in conjunction with the rise in individual power and turbulent political situation in Rome.¹²⁴ Pompey was not the first to commission a project which would benefit the public, since the dictator Sulla had previously paved the Forum with marble.¹²⁵ This theatre complex, however, had an unprecedented impact on both the city of Rome itself, and Pompey's own public image. A permanent theatre had never been constructed in the city, let alone a structure on the same scale as the Theatre of Pompey. Plans for the first stone theatre in Rome were greeted with senatorial hesitation and questions about the complex's legitimacy. It is likely that the theatre's placement outside the *pomerium* was at least partially influenced by this factor. The unsettled political climate of the Late Republic, however, allowed Pompey to continue with his plans for a new type of public benefaction.

Despite the clear political advantages on offer, it would be incorrect to suggest that the connection between Pompey and Venus was purely a product of Pompey's desire to further his political ambition. Pompey's ties with Julius Caesar prior to the Civil War must also be considered when examining his relationship with Venus, who was the patron of both Pompey and the Julii. From the time of Pompey's marriage to Caesar's daughter, Julia, in 58 BC, it becomes evident that there was a plan to combine the two great houses into one dynasty, with Venus acting as the patron.¹²⁶ As the Theatre of Pompey was completed prior to Julia's death in childbirth in 54 BC, it is likely that Pompey also had dynastic ambitions in mind when dedicating the Temple of Venus

¹²⁴ Cornell 2005: 56. See also Claridge (2010: 64), who discusses the impact of military success, contact with the Hellenistic world, and political competition upon privately funded building projects in the later stages of the Republic.

¹²⁵ Platner and Ashby 1929: 232-3; Van Tilburg 2007: 7; Swain and Davies 2010: 347.

¹²⁶ The marriage of Pompey and Julia was clearly intended to tie the two men together in a political alliance. See Plut. *Caes.* 14.4; Cic. *Att.* 8.3.3.

Victrix.¹²⁷ As such, his use of the goddess in her military capacity was not merely a product of the religious convention evident in the earlier Republic, where a successful general might vow a temple to the goddess due to her assistance in a particular battle. Instead, Pompey apparently intended to credit Venus not only with his successful military career as a whole, but also to emphasise her importance to his individual dynastic ambitions and cement the legitimacy of his claim to her patronage. The reception of Venus' martial attributes in the Late Republic differed significantly from that witnessed in the earlier Republic. The turbulent political situation of this period saw Venus rise as a goddess of choice for the 'rising dynasts' – men of great power and potential. As such, it is hardly surprising that a dialogue of competition broke out, with each individual attempting to exceed the others' claims to her favour.

I. *Victory and Glory: The Military Career of Pompey 'the Great'*

The military career of Pompey 'the Great' was one of the most illustrious of the Late Republic. The success that he achieved during his campaigns allowed him to gain a great deal of esteem and respect in Rome, so that, even early in his career, he began to attract comparisons with Alexander the Great.¹²⁸ Pompey certainly encouraged this comparison himself, in order to boost his public image both in Rome and throughout the provinces. By the time his theatre complex was constructed in Rome in 55 BC, Pompey had already fought many significant battles, bypassed the usual age and office restrictions of the *cursus honorum* on two separate occasions, and celebrated three triumphs. Ultimately, Pompey's career was a product of military success, rather than political prowess. His victories allowed him to bypass the usual political ladder and attain a more prominent

¹²⁷ For the completion date and dedication of the theatre complex, see Cass. Dio 39.38.1-6; Coarelli 2007: 283; Gros 1999: 35-6; Richardson 1992: 384. Haley (1985: 55) argues that Julia was probably still alive at the dedication of the theatre.

¹²⁸ See Plutarch (*Pomp.* 2), where this comparison between Pompey and Alexander is discussed.

position in the Roman state.¹²⁹ The public recognition of his achievements in the form of triumphs was an integral part of his desired public image. Through investigation of Pompey's career, it is evident that he was fully aware of the advantages offered by a military background, especially in the initial stages of his career fighting under Sulla.

The three triumphs that Pompey celebrated in his career each highlight his desire to be remembered above all for great successes in combat. The first of these triumphs was celebrated in approximately 81 BC. The dating of this triumph is highly disputed.¹³⁰ Eutropius claims that Pompey received the honour 'while in his twenty-fourth year.'¹³¹ By contrast, the pseudo-Aurelius Victor, in his *De Viris Illustribus Urbis Romae*, gives Pompey's age as twenty-six.¹³² Whatever the reality, Pompey's attainment of this triumph was particularly notable, for he did not officially meet the requirements of Roman law that dictated who was eligible to receive a triumph.¹³³ Pompey requested a triumph upon his return from Africa. Sulla, however, as dictator at the time, did not want to bypass Roman law, which only allowed consuls or praetors to be given this honour by virtue of their *imperium*.¹³⁴ Plutarch claims that Pompey did not simply accept Sulla's refusal, but instead 'bade Sulla reflect that more worshipped the rising than the setting sun, intimating that

¹²⁹ As Erich Gruen (1974: 43-44) argues, Pompey's successful and quite extraordinary military career ensured that he could bypass the traditional route to the consulship with little concern, since 'it would have been unthinkable to ask Pompey to begin the *cursus honorum* and sue for the quaestorship!'

¹³⁰ As Southern (2002: 37) observes, the ancient sources which discuss this event are at odds with one another on the matter of Pompey's age, suggesting that 'he was anywhere between 23 and 26, which sets the date for the triumph between 82 and 79.' See also Badian (1955) for a more thorough discussion of the arguments surrounding the dating of the triumph.

¹³¹ Eutr. 5.9.1. As Eutropius was writing in the 4th Century, his account should be treated carefully on such details.

¹³² [Aur. Vict.] *De vir. ill.* 77.2. The reliability of this work is questionable at best, especially regarding such a precise detail as the year of Pompey's triumph. Badian (1955: 108) comments on two of the source's errors in recounting details of Pompey's military career, and concludes that 'it cannot be trusted on matters of detail in this part of the life of Pompey (if indeed anywhere).' As a result, the claim in the *De viris illustribus urbis Romae* is probably inaccurate.

¹³³ Roman law required the recipient of a triumph to be a senator, and Pompey had not yet entered the Senate. See Plutarch (*Pomp.* 14), who states that Sulla refused Pompey's request because he did not meet the prerequisite of holding the office of consul or praetor, and thus did not hold *imperium*.

¹³⁴ Plut. *Pomp.* 14.

his own power was on the increase, while that of Sulla was on the wane and fading away.’¹³⁵ Pompey was subsequently granted the triumph, supposedly as a result of his insistence. Pompey’s wish cannot have been solely the product of a youthful desire to gain recognition for his achievements.¹³⁶ As Leach argues, he would have been well aware of the unusual political situation in Rome. Pompey had capitalised on the opportunity to avoid working his way up the political ladder by the usual means, and ‘had the foresight to make himself indispensable [sic] to...the most powerful man in the Roman world.’¹³⁷

Pompey probably wished to align himself with Venus’ military qualities on a public scale from the time of his very first triumph. His original plan to be drawn in a chariot pulled by elephants instead of horses is significant here. Plutarch states that Pompey had ‘tried to ride into the city on a chariot drawn by four elephants, for he had brought many from Africa which he had captured from its kings’, but abandoned the idea when the gates were too narrow to fit through.¹³⁸ Whilst the elephants would have advertised Pompey’s exploits on a grand scale, there could well have been a more explicit political, and indeed religious, overtone to his planned appearance. Pompey might well have sought to connect his military achievements with those of Alexander the Great in the East.¹³⁹ A stater of Ptolemy I Soter demonstrates a precedent for Alexander’s

¹³⁵ Plut. *Pomp.* 14.

¹³⁶ Plutarch (*Pomp.* 14) states that Pompey could easily have used his triumph as a route to become a senator before the legal age, but claims that he ‘was not eager for this...since he was in the chase for reputation of a surprising sort.’ Note Greenhalgh’s (1980: 28) and Southern’s (2002: 37) agreement that Pompey did not desire any further power in demanding this triumph, but instead merely desired acclaim. Contrary to their arguments, it is likely that Pompey was fully aware of the potential for political advancement that the triumph would bring. His military achievements were ultimately the bedrock of his success and attainment of offices in the political realm, and were perhaps the most important feature of his projected public image. Therefore, the potential for further political power was a motivating factor behind Pompey’s desire for acclaim in his triumphs.

¹³⁷ Leach 1978: 33.

¹³⁸ Plut. *Pomp.* 14.

¹³⁹ Mader (2006: 398) argues that Pompey’s attempt to incorporate an elephant *quadriga* into his triumph was done in order to represent ‘the *triumphator* as incipient Alexander – the youthful hero in the ascendant.’ Pompey undeniably found such a connection with Alexander appealing, taking the cognomen *Magnus*, but it is likely that there was also a deeper religious significance intended through the employment of such a chariot. Cf. Scullard 1974: 193-4. For Pompey’s adoption of this title, see Plut. *Pomp.* 13.

connection with the elephant *quadriga*.¹⁴⁰ Beyond the political appeal of this connection, there was a deeper religious significance to Pompey's use of elephants in his triumph. John Leach states that Pompey's chariot was to be of the same 'type traditionally associated with the goddess Venus, bringer of victories and his own patron goddess, and with Dionysus and some of the Hellenistic monarchs.'¹⁴¹ Whilst the link between Dionysus and the elephant *quadriga* is well attested, this potential connection to Venus should be considered in greater depth.

A fresco in Pompeii provides a notable, albeit later, example of this chariot type being used in connection with Venus. This painting evokes some military themes, and indeed appears to combine Republican ideas of her power with new perceptions of her role as the patron goddess of the city. An image of Fortuna appears in the scene, 'standing on the globe of the earth, [while she] places one hand on a ship's rudder and holds in the other a cornucopia.'¹⁴² The fresco is certainly not contemporaneous with Pompey's triumph, dating from the end of Nero's reign.¹⁴³ Despite this, its distinctive imagery might attest to the development of some ideas surrounding Venus' power that were circulating in the Late Republic. Elephants feature very prominently in the fresco of Venus Pompeiana, and their presence potentially recalled some of the Republican military attributes of the goddess. The use of elephants in warfare was well attested in the Hellenistic

¹⁴⁰ Svoronos 126. For more detail regarding the connection between elephants and warfare, especially on coinage of the Hellenistic period, see Waelkens and Poblome 1995: 301.

¹⁴¹ Leach 1978: 32. Although a later example, Dio (78.7.4) notes that the emperor Caracalla 'took about with him numerous elephants, that in this respect, also, he might seem to be imitating Alexander, or rather, perhaps, Dionysus.' Katsari, Lightfoot, and Özme (2013: 34) comment on Dio's passage. They note that until the reign of Caracalla, 'chariots drawn by elephants were portrayed only in connection with deified emperors, because these animals were closely associated with divine honours.' This divine connection becomes particularly important here. It demonstrates that while Pompey might also have sought a link with Alexander, the religious associations of his elephant *quadriga* were ultimately inescapable and would have been obvious to a Roman audience. Scott (2015: 38-39) argues that Pompey solely intended to evoke Dionysus with the elephant chariot. It appears unlikely, however, that this was the case. The variety of divine and historical associations that this *quadriga* possessed suggests that both religious and political messages were evoked through its use.

¹⁴² Swindler 1923: 303. The presence of Fortuna in this scene links to the 'Sullan' Venus, and adds a martial element to the fresco.

¹⁴³ Brenk 1977: 171.

period.¹⁴⁴ As a result, the fresco must have evoked some military themes. Swindler offers a detailed analysis of this piece, and suggests that while the cult of Venus Pompeiana was initially quite ‘Sullan’ in nature, by Nero’s reign ‘she had taken on some of the pomp which the orient was accustomed to display in placing its gods in elephant-drawn chariots.’¹⁴⁵ Whilst this external influence brought changes to Venus’ physical depiction, the pre-existing military associations of elephants, and indeed Venus herself, remain important. Furthermore, the Sullan roots of Venus Pompeiana’s cult are crucial when investigating her position within the religious landscape of the city itself. King suggests that the *quadriga* of elephants within the fresco of Venus could have hinted at her role as the patron of the city, and represented ‘the town’s good fortune and long life.’¹⁴⁶ While the ‘Sullan’ Venus present in the early days of Pompeii had undergone a number of transformations, and taken on a slightly different role by this period, her use as a patron remained recognisably linked to the dictator. The fresco was found in a shop, which indicates that both her military power and her role as the goddess of love have been downplayed. This is perhaps a reflection of the shop owner’s personal connection with Venus, or indeed indicates a shift within her role in her cult at Pompeii.¹⁴⁷ Sulla’s well-advertised personal connection to the goddess probably inspired her continued reception as a powerful protector of both individuals and the city itself. Ultimately, however, this fresco cannot be read solely as a representation of Venus’ Republican power as a military goddess, nor as a ‘new’ interpretation of her role as the patron deity of the city. Instead, its imagery indicates that the two aspects were combined by the time of its production during the reign of Nero.

As Pompeii was a Sullan colony, it is likely that some aspects of her role as Sulla’s patron were retained into the Imperial period, despite being subject to development and transformation over time. Venus’ role as the patron deity of the city itself becomes particularly important when

¹⁴⁴ See Swindler (1923: 306-12) for a discussion of the association between elephants and warfare, and its applicability to the imagery of this fresco. Whilst Swindler’s report is somewhat dated today, it was produced not long after the fresco had been uncovered in excavations in Pompeii. It offers the most detailed analysis of the Venus Pompeiana fresco available, and Swindler makes a number of strong points throughout.

¹⁴⁵ Swindler 1923: 312.

¹⁴⁶ King 2002: 432.

¹⁴⁷ John Clarke (2003:106) suggests that the fresco might have been intended to evoke prosperity, and this seems likely.

considering the widespread knowledge and impact of Sulla's own personal connection to the goddess. A large temple in Pompeii was dedicated to the goddess as 'Venus Pompeiana'.¹⁴⁸ It occupied a commanding position overlooking the city, and therefore had considerable visual impact.¹⁴⁹ Archaeological surveys were undertaken in Pompeii by the University of Sheffield in 1998, 2004, and 2006, and were concentrated on this temple. The results of these excavations have provided a great deal of insight into the history of the site itself, and the likely impact of the temple on the landscape. In her report on the archaeological work undertaken on this site, Maureen Carroll claims that lead sling-shot and fragments of pottery found in the area of the temple indicate that it was completed after Pompeii's foundation as a Roman colony.¹⁵⁰ Unfortunately, the material evidence uncovered has distinct limitations for establishing a definitive *terminus post quem* of the site's use as the Temple of Venus Pompeiana. Carroll notes that the 'sling shot found mixed in with the building rubble in the temple terrace may point to the Sullan siege in 89 BC and the subsequent demolition of buildings in this incident,' but she goes on to date some of the ceramics to the mid-first century BC.¹⁵¹ Despite the difficulty in deciding upon an accurate date for the foundation of the temple, it is clear that the cult of Venus Pompeiana was established in the years after Sulla's successful colonisation of the city.¹⁵² The Temple of Venus Pompeiana could reasonably be considered an antecedent to Pompey's Temple of Venus Victrix in Rome. Pompey would surely have been aware of Venus' Pompeian cult and its Sullan associations, and there are some parallels between the two temples in respect of their prominent visual impact on the surrounding landscape.

It is a distinct possibility that Pompey sought to evoke such imagery traditionally associated with Venus' victorious qualities in order to connect himself directly and visually with the goddess' patronage. This would have been the first great public demonstration of Pompey's link with Venus

¹⁴⁸ The establishment of this cult was politically and culturally significant for the colony of Pompeii. As Maureen Carroll notes, 'the establishment of the Roman temple of Venus...played a formative role in the political, religious, and social transformation of Pompeii from a Hellenistic town to a Roman colony.'

¹⁴⁹ Carroll 2008: 37.

¹⁵⁰ Carroll 2008: 38.

¹⁵¹ Carroll 2008: 38.

¹⁵² Carroll 2008: 44.

as a martial goddess, had he managed to ‘fit’ through the gate.¹⁵³ When this event is contrasted with Pompey’s later representations of Venus’ martial favour through his theatre complex, it seems likely that he would have had little hesitation in using her martial attributes to achieve this on such a large public scale given the right opportunity.

Pompey’s attempt to advertise a connection with Venus on such a grand scale was not simply born out of a desire to boost his image. If the story is accurate, such an action on Pompey’s part would have presented a significant challenge to Sulla. Venus was *Sulla’s* patron goddess, and she granted him military fortune. It is clear that Pompey was eager to engage in competition over Venus’ favour, and was not opposed to doing so through public demonstrations of her favour.¹⁵⁴ Beard, North, and Price certainly believe that during Pompey’s first triumph he actively attempted to outdo Sulla in this regard.¹⁵⁵ Sulla’s insistence that Venus was his patron, who presented him with good fortune in his endeavours, was well attested.¹⁵⁶ As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Sulla was not hesitant to declare this connection openly. Coins, trophies, statues, and inscriptions all served to remind the public of Venus’ martial role, and her importance in his success.¹⁵⁷ As Sulla’s connection to the goddess was widely acknowledged, Pompey’s attempt to

¹⁵³ Some scholars, such as Leach (1978: 32), suggest that Pompey merely used this excuse to avoid incorporating the chariot and thereby angering Sulla further. He claims that it ‘seems unlikely that a planner of Pompey’s calibre would not have foreseen this difficulty.’ Pompey would certainly have been highly aware of further potential conflict between himself and Sulla over Venus’ favour, and Leach’s claim that a simple matter such as the width of the chariot would not have been overlooked by Pompey appears reasonable. It is possible that Plutarch (*Pomp.* 14) was unaware of the deeper religious and personal implications for Pompey in his statement that the elephant *quadriga* was unable to fit through the arch due to a logistical oversight. Alternatively, Plutarch might simply have believed the account that he presented, as it might have been the accepted version of events at the time of his writing in the 1st – 2nd Century.

¹⁵⁴ Pompey’s use of Venus in a triumphal context was probably influenced heavily by his exposure to the military power possessed by Sulla’s version of the goddess, and a desire to engage in competition for her favour. It is possible, however, that her appeal, harking back to older moral concerns, was also due to the ‘feminine’ element that she brought to the highly masculine realm of warfare and military success.

¹⁵⁵ Beard, North, and Price 1998: i.145.

¹⁵⁶ See App. *B Civ.* 1.97, and Plut. *Sull.* 34 for Sulla’s advertised connection to Venus.

¹⁵⁷ As discussed in greater detail above, see RRC 358/2 for a denarius of Sulla with an obverse depicting the head of Venus, and the reverse displaying military trophies with the *capis* and *lituus*. For Sulla’s trophies, see Plut. *Sull.* 34. Appian (*B Civ.* 1.97) details Sulla’s dedication of an inscription depicting Venus’ martial power, which accompanied a statue to the goddess.

challenge his claim to her patronage was a significant step in the turbulent political dialogue of competition in the Late Republic.

The second of Pompey's triumphs in December 71 BC again saw the general avoid the traditional route for attaining this honour. Once more, Pompey had not met the official requirements for receiving a triumph, though he met with little resistance from the Senate when he requested that his victories against Sertorius in Spain be recognised.¹⁵⁸ Whilst his successes in 71 did help him finally attain the consulship, it was Pompey's third triumph in 61 BC that formed one of the most memorable and significant events of his career. This extravagant, two-day event would serve to cement his place as one of Rome's most successful generals and provide a permanent reminder of his military prowess to the populace. Such a spectacle would not easily be forgotten, and would provide Pompey with an ideal opportunity to capitalise on his place as one of the great commanders, in order to promote his military feats later through his theatre complex. Dio's account of this event indicates that Pompey intended to use the opportunity to demonstrate publicly his history of military prowess, rather than simply to celebrate the success of his Eastern campaigns.¹⁵⁹ The procession was spectacular. Appian claims that it was unlike any triumph that had ever been performed before, with enormous quantities of captured spoils, prisoners of war, and treasure paraded through the streets.¹⁶⁰ Although Appian's writings date from the 2nd Century, there is no reason to doubt his description of the event as an unprecedented and elaborate experience.

¹⁵⁸ Greenhalgh (1980: 65) emphasises that while Pompey managed to obtain his second triumph reasonably easily, his election to the consulship was a different matter, for he did not meet the prerequisites of the *cursus honorum*. He argues nevertheless that this was not a major concern, since he 'had many friends in the Senate who were prepared to waive the law governing the stages of the senatorial career,' so that Pompey instead sought to secure his election through making promises which built upon the popularity associated with his victories.

¹⁵⁹ Dio (37.21) claims that Pompey's triumph was intended to celebrate every victory that he had ever won in battle, and contained 'many trophies beautifully decked out to represent each of his achievements, even the smallest; and after them all came one huge one, decked out in costly fashion and bearing an inscription stating that it was a trophy of the inhabited world.' Such a display was a clear reminder to Rome that Pompey himself wanted to be intrinsically linked with the idea of military success.

¹⁶⁰ App. *Mith.* 116-17.

Whilst this triumph was technically intended as a celebration of Pompey's victory in the war against Mithridates, the literary evidence indicates that there were many references in the procession to exploits of his entire career. Plutarch gives a list of nations that appeared on an inscription carried at the front of the entire parade, which 'indicated the nations over which he had triumphed... [and] among these peoples no less than a thousand strongholds [that] had been captured, according to the inscriptions, and cities not much under nine hundred in number.'¹⁶¹ Such claims, especially appearing at the beginning of the triumphal procession, would not only have set up the rest of the spectacle as evidence of Pompey's proven ability to reap the rewards of success in battle, but also have emphasised that his career was built upon a long list of military victories. This triumph proved that Pompey was willing and able to capitalise on this career, and enhance his public image through open demonstration of the benefits he brought Rome through his skill as a commander. The idea that Pompey's three triumphs represented victory over three continents became quite significant here. Plutarch emphasises this point, stating that other Romans before Pompey 'had celebrated three triumphs; but he celebrated his first over Libya, his second over Europe, and this his last over Asia, so that he seemed in a way to have included the whole world in his three triumphs.'¹⁶² Such a narrative certainly allowed Pompey to vie for a greater position of power in the state.

Pompey's attainment of three separate triumphs became a key feature of his career, and had a significant effect on his legacy. The poet Lucan, writing later in the 1st Century AD, recalled Pompey's triumphs a number of times in his works.¹⁶³ In Book 7 of the *De Bello Civili*, Lucan

¹⁶¹ Plutarch (*Pomp.* 45) also claims that these inscriptions detailed the positive impact of Pompey's campaigns on state revenue. Cf. Seager 2002: 80 for another inscription giving more detail about Pompey's successes and captured kingdoms. Seager (2002: 80) suggests that this was possibly displayed at the Temple of Venus Victrix dedicated some years later, which if true would highlight the importance of Venus' influence over Pompey's military success once again.

¹⁶² Plut. *Pomp.* 45. There is no reason to doubt Plutarch's assertion that Pompey's three triumphs equated to victory over three continents, for Velleius Paterculus (2.40.4) makes a similar claim. See also Deutsch (1924: 277) for an older, but still valid, discussion of the representation of Pompey's three triumphs.

¹⁶³ See particularly 7.658, where Lucan discusses the defeat of Pompey at Pharsalus. He paints the triple triumph as a product of Fortune (presumably aligned with the favour of the goddess Fortuna), whereas the Pharsalus campaign was a result of her abandonment of Pompey's cause.

discusses the defeat of Pompey at Pharsalus, and notably paints both Pompey's defeat at Pharsalus, and prior success in attaining a triple triumph, as the result of Fortuna's varying favour. He depicts Pompey in the moments before fleeing the battlefield:

he beholds Pharsalia; victory never saw him lifted up, and defeat shall never see him cast down; and treacherous Fortune, who found him her superior at the time of his three triumphs, is as far beneath him now in his fall.¹⁶⁴

Deutsch analyses Lucan's discussion of the triumphs of Pompey, and concludes that the poet intended for the text to be read 'in such a manner as to make one feel that the reference to three triumphs at once identified Pompey.'¹⁶⁵ Pompey was successful in stressing his military achievements as a major part of his public image, for they became the most recognisable element of his career. As such, it is hardly a surprise that Pompey chose to incorporate military themes so heavily into the construction of his theatre complex.

Lucan was writing in the Imperial period under Nero, and this naturally affects the interpretation of Pompey throughout his writings.¹⁶⁶ His imperial audience sees Pompey as a 'personification' of the Republic, and Lucan's portrayal of Pharsalus in the *Bellum Civile* certainly conforms to this interpretation of his character.¹⁶⁷ He probably intended for his audience to sympathise with Pompey, but also remain critical of the actions he took in fleeing from the battlefield.¹⁶⁸ Hardie claims that Pompey and Caesar appear as complementary figures, where

¹⁶⁴ Lucan 7.682-6.

¹⁶⁵ Deutsch 1924: 277.

¹⁶⁶ Holliday (1969: 52-6) argues that Lucan used Cicero's *Correspondence* as a source when writing the *Bellum Civile*, resulting in a decidedly sympathetic portrayal of Pompey within this work.

¹⁶⁷ If this Imperial connection between Pompey and the Republic itself is to be accepted, then Lucan probably intended Pompey's decision to turn and flee the battlefield to be interpreted as the 'death' of the Republic.

¹⁶⁸ See Matthew Leigh (1997: 156-7) on this point. Leigh claims that for an audience 'accustomed to Lucan's repeated assertion that to watch is to be complicit and that the dissenter must finally engage, Pompey's decision to abandon the spectacle only in order to run away is uncomfortable.' This argument appears sound, however it does bring into question whether or not Pompey was intended to be a sympathetic figure in the *Bellum Civile*, particularly when the imperial audience of the work is considered. Leigh (1997: 157) does not agree that the audience would have necessarily sided with the Pompeian cause, and instead claims that the poem was intended as a 'disillusioned, excoriating meditation on the experience of history.'

‘Pompey is the man of the past, Caesar is the man of the future...[and] as the poem progresses Pompey becomes more closely associated with the dying Republic, while Caesar is identified as the destroyer of the Republic and the first of the “Caesares,” the Roman emperors.’¹⁶⁹ Although Lucan intentionally painted Pompey as ‘weaker’ than Caesar in his narrative, it is important to note that Pompey’s crushing defeat at Pharsalus is not attributed to inferior morality. Instead, Lucan depicts Pompey as not only a great general, but a more morally upstanding individual than Caesar.¹⁷⁰ His writings do not support any suggestion that Pompey’s defeat was due to ‘abandonment’ by the gods as the result of a lack of piety or morals. Instead, Pompey appears as a victim of the whims of Fortune, unable to compete with the oncoming age of Caesar.

II. *Pompey’s Theatre and Temple of Venus Victrix: Piety or Convenience?*

Pompey’s interaction with Venus through temple-building substantially differed from that of the generals who sought to honour her martial qualities in the earlier Republic. Instead of dedicating a stand-alone temple to the goddess, he chose to incorporate one into a theatre complex. This ‘Theatre of Pompey’ was completed in 55 BC. It not only served as the first permanent theatre built in Rome, but was also a significant monument to Pompey’s achievements. Whilst its role as a place for performance was the most important aspect of this complex, there were numerous other features that should not be overlooked when examining its role in projecting Pompey’s desired public image. The representation of Venus in this monument through the Temple of Venus Victrix is particularly important.¹⁷¹ The inclusion of this temple was a direct attempt by Pompey to connect

¹⁶⁹ Hardie 2013: 231.

¹⁷⁰ See Holliday (1969: 78), who states that Lucan believed Pompey’s ‘true greatness...was in the realm of moral values.’ This might explain Lucan’s sympathetic manner of dealing with Pompey’s defeat, for Lucan does not attempt to explain this event through any dialogue of moral ‘deficit’ or ‘downfall’ on Pompey’s part.

¹⁷¹ Pompey was not the first to use this epithet for Venus. Speidel (1984: 2236) states that the term ‘Victrix’ to describe Venus may have been in use from the 2nd Century BC. He refers to an inscription from Delos (CIL I, 2246) in which Venus’ name partially survives as ‘*Veneri Vi[ctrici?]*’. Speidel further notes that during this period, the worship of Isis, Atargatis, and Astarte arose on Delos and, as a result, this version of Venus Victrix would probably relate to one

Venus with his personal achievements, and especially his success in warfare. Emphasis on her martial qualities was an integral part of accomplishing this goal. The representation of Venus within this complex as a goddess with considerable military potential suggests that she retained a great deal of the martial power that she possessed in the earlier Republic, despite the transformations in her image that were necessary in the political climate of the Late Republic. Furthermore, Pompey intended to promote Venus as the patron deity of the planned dynasty which would result from union between his own family and the Julii. This was an important step in establishing Venus' influence on a personal level for both Pompey and Caesar, and upon the breakdown of their alliance it would see her martial qualities invoked competitively by both sides during the Civil War.

The Theatre of Pompey was located within the Campus Martius, outside the *pomerium* of Rome. The positioning of the monument in this particular part of the city was by no means accidental. The Campus Martius had strong military overtones, as public land dedicated to Mars.¹⁷² It served as a training ground used by the military for drills, and was the starting point of triumphal processions.¹⁷³ Livy also details the use of the Campus Martius as a meeting-point upon the completion of the census, where 'all the citizens of Rome, knights and infantry alike, should appear... each in their centuries.'¹⁷⁴ It is clear that by placing his theatre in this particular location, Pompey wished to connect the pre-existing associations of the site with not only his public image, but also the reception of Venus as an influential military deity.

At the time of the theatre's construction in 55 BC, the Campus Martius was very underdeveloped. In fact, this section of Rome was not subject to any extensive construction efforts

of these Eastern goddesses. However, the Venus Victrix invoked by Pompey was primarily influenced by a Republican precedent for her martial potential, and the competition between the great men of the Late Republic over her patronage. Her cult, as Speidel (1984: 2226) notes, had 'fully romanized the originally oriental warlike aspect of the goddess.'

¹⁷² Dion. Hal. 4.22. Plutarch (*Public.* 8) also mentions that the Campus Martius was dedicated to Mars from an early stage in Rome's history.

¹⁷³ Dion. Hal. 5.13.

¹⁷⁴ Livy 1.44.

until the principate of Augustus.¹⁷⁵ However, the Augustan building projects did not make the area densely packed by any means. The geographer and historian Strabo offers a description of the Campus Martius as it appeared during his lifetime, in the reign of Augustus. He states that:

the size of the Campus is remarkable, since it affords space at the same time and without interference, not only for the chariot-races and every other equestrian exercise, but also for all that multitude of people who exercise themselves by ball-playing, hoop-trundling, and wrestling; and the works of art situated around the Campus Martius, and the ground, which is covered with grass throughout the year, and the crowns of those hills that are above the river and extend as far as its bed, which present to the eye the appearance of a stage-painting – all this, I say, affords a spectacle that one can hardly draw away from.¹⁷⁶

Perhaps the most pertinent feature of Strabo's description is the large amount of space that the Campus Martius offered to visitors. Since Strabo was writing in the Augustan period, the area would have been even more spacious before that time. This uncrowded setting played an important role in Pompey's decision to set his building project in this section of the city. A more open area was ideal, for it allowed Pompey to achieve the greatest possible visual impact for the theatre. The scale of the complex was immense – Coarelli estimates that the theatre itself had a diameter of 150 metres, and that a huge porticus of about 180 x 135 metres extended to the East from the rear of the stage.¹⁷⁷ A building of this scale would have had an extremely commanding presence, even if it was constructed in a more developed region of the city. Ultimately, Pompey's theatre managed to serve as an effective means of disseminating the desired public image of its benefactor through domination of the landscape. Pompey achieved this goal not only through the large scale of the

¹⁷⁵ As Platner and Ashby (1929: 93) claim, 'there was no public building of any note in the campus [sic] Martius proper before the end of the republic, when Pompeius built the first stone theatre in Rome in 55 B.C.' This would have greatly enhanced the theatre's visual impact on the landscape.

¹⁷⁶ Strabo 5.3.215-6.

¹⁷⁷ Coarelli 2007: 283-4. Coarelli's estimates take the remaining material evidence into consideration, and he has convincingly mapped out the likely scale of the theatre complex based on the extant archaeological evidence.

theatre complex, but also by cleverly positioning the structure in an underdeveloped area of the city, where it would have the most striking and politically engaging impact.

This theatre was not solely a place for performance, and should instead be considered a ‘complex’ comprising numerous buildings and features which should all be viewed in conjunction with one another. Very little archaeological material survives on the site, therefore literary evidence must be consulted when attempting to reconstruct the complex.¹⁷⁸ Fortunately, a significant amount remains extant. Literature suggests that porticoes, statues, a *curia*, and even a residence for Pompey himself were constructed as parts of the complex.¹⁷⁹ A number of temples and shrines were also present.¹⁸⁰ While the Temple of Venus Victrix was the most prominent of these, shrines to Honos, Virtus, Felicitas, and another unidentified deity were also located in close proximity.¹⁸¹ When taken together, this structure would have been visually impressive, and served to advertise effectively Pompey’s military achievements, his status and influence as one of the ‘great men’ of Rome, and also his connection with Venus. Jacobs and Conlin suggest that Pompey’s theatre complex ‘reminded residents and visitors to the city of the tangible munificence of Rome’s great generals, as well as the vagaries of political and military fortune, and that the

¹⁷⁸ The originality or antiquity of even the little archaeological evidence that does survive is under question. Claridge (2010: 239) argues that the reasonably good quality of the fragmentary walls and vaults might indicate that what survives is a reconstruction dating to 32 BC. Gagliardo and Packer (2006) offer a good overview of the excavations undertaken on the site, and discuss the architectural fragments that remain extant. For a more detailed discussion of the 2005 excavations of the theatre, see Packer, Burge, and Gagliardo (2007).

¹⁷⁹ Plutarch (*Pomp.* 40) states that when the theatre was under construction, Pompey ‘built close by it, like a small boat towed behind a ship, a more splendid house than the one he had before. But even this was not large enough to excite envy.’ Leach (1978: 147) believes that Pompey may only have been comfortable ‘to play the part of the great grandee’ at his Alban palace outside Rome. For the porticoes of the theatre, see Vitruvius *De Arch.* 5.9.1.

¹⁸⁰ Suetonius, in the *Life of Claudius* (21), suggests that these were located at the top of the theatre’s auditorium, and were approached by climbing the rows of seating. While Gellius (10.1.7) only discusses the Temple of Victory, he also claims that the rows of seating formed the steps of the temple. The temple’s steps will be discussed in greater detail shortly.

¹⁸¹ See *Inscr. Ital.* 13.2.493-94. Richardson (1992: 411) claims that the missing name is Victoria, as this group of deities ‘are a small pantheon of the political rallying cries of the Sullan period.’ Richardson’s interpretation is supported by ancient evidence, if Gellius (10.1.7) does not mistake the Temple of Victory for that of Venus Victrix in his account. Cf. Claridge 2010: 239.

Campus Martius itself was a large stage for the presentation of these themes.’¹⁸² At any rate, the complex was met with a largely positive reception. Dio indicates that Pompey maintained the favour of the Roman people through his construction of the theatre, and ‘in these matters afforded the populace no little delight.’¹⁸³ This would have boosted Pompey’s popularity, and as such assisted his goal of constructing the complex as a stage for positive representation of his feats.

The shrines sitting adjacent to the Temple of Venus Victrix should be examined in the context of the ongoing competition over Venus’ favour. These advertised the strength of Venus’ martial qualities, and complemented her temple.¹⁸⁴ The shrine of Felicitas perhaps stands out the most when considering the spirit of competitive political dialogue that surrounded the theatre complex. Temelini argues that the shrine of Felicitas ‘honoured Pompey’s good fortune as a military commander, and might even be a reflection of Sulla’s influence.’ There is, however, probably a deeper meaning behind its inclusion in such an important and highly visible monument.¹⁸⁵ It might initially appear as though Pompey chose to include the shrine of Felicitas in an attempt to represent himself as Sulla’s political and religious ‘successor’. Upon further examination of the theatre’s political significance, however, it is clear that the dialogue of competition between the ‘great men’ of the Late Republic would more accurately explain the inclusion of this shrine in Pompey’s theatre complex. Whilst Temelini is correct to suggest that Pompey’s own military fortune was evoked through this shrine, this primarily served as a means by which Pompey could engage in religious and political competition with Sulla.¹⁸⁶ Sulla’s strong link with Felicitas was well-advertised, and all in Rome would have been aware of Pompey’s direct challenge to Sulla in dedicating a shrine to this goddess within his theatre complex, which functioned as an advertisement of his own military achievements.¹⁸⁷ Pompey ultimately sought to gain control over divine elements that, until recently, had been the domain of his predecessors. It

¹⁸² Jacobs and Conlin 2015: 78.

¹⁸³ Cass. Dio 39.39.

¹⁸⁴ Temelini (1993: 61) comments on the association between Venus Victrix and the deities who occupied these shrines. He claims that the shrines ‘qualified her characteristics and emphasized strength and courage in war for Pompey, and expressed a unique quality of his military achievements.’

¹⁸⁵ Temelini 1993: 61.

¹⁸⁶ Temelini 1993: 61.

¹⁸⁷ For Sulla’s connection with Felicitas, see Plut. *Sull.* 34;

is clear that Pompey was willing to challenge directly Sulla's control over Venus' favour through this complex. While Pompey had previously attempted to assert the superiority of his claim to the goddess, the visual and political impact of the theatre complex allowed him to engage in this competitive dialogue with Sulla on an unprecedented scale.

The presence of two shrines to Honos and Virtus in the theatre further indicates that Pompey actively sought to engage in religious and political competition with his predecessors. Honos and Virtus were strongly associated with Gaius Marius, who had dedicated a temple to them using the proceeds of his successful campaigns against the Teutones and the Cimbri.¹⁸⁸ Unfortunately, there is nothing remaining of this structure in the archaeological record, but it probably stood close to Marius' own house near the Forum.¹⁸⁹ Despite the lack of substantial material or literary evidence for the temple, McDonnell argues that it served as 'the centrepiece of an architectural complex that also included an older temple to Febris, trophies from the Jugurthine and German victories, and, a bit later, probably Marius' house as well.'¹⁹⁰ If this was the case, parallels are certainly evident between Marius' complex and Pompey's theatre. It may initially appear strange that Pompey would choose to include shrines to deities who were heavily associated with Gaius Marius in his theatre complex, since he had fought under Sulla early in his career against Marian opponents.¹⁹¹ However, it would be incorrect to suggest that Pompey retained animosity towards Marius as a result of his actions in the 70s. Pompey's political ties were more

¹⁸⁸ For more detail regarding Marius' dedication of the temple, see CIL I², 18. This inscription indicates a connection between Marius' military endeavours and the deities to whom he chose to dedicate the temple. Whilst it may be tempting to see a parallel between Marius and Pompey's combination of martial themes and the divine, their respective building projects had entirely different aims. Most importantly, the intense period of political and religious competition which prevailed during the construction of Pompey's theatre complex was a key motivating factor for the shrines within it.

¹⁸⁹ For the location of Marius' house, see Plut. *Mar.* 32. Richardson (1992: 190) also sees the temple's location in close proximity to the house of Marius on the Sacra Via.

¹⁹⁰ McDonnell 2006: 275. See also Vitruvius (*De arch.* 3.2.5), who claims that the temple was 'near the trophy of Marius.'

¹⁹¹ McDonnell 2006: 295. Pompey played a crucial role in winning the war in Spain against Sertorius, a Marian general. For this conflict, see Plut. *Sert.* 19; Plut. *Pomp.* 18-20.

flexible, and he had developed affiliations with both the Marian and Sullan causes.¹⁹² Pompey was married to Caesar's daughter, Julia, during the construction of his theatre complex. Marius was Caesar's uncle by marriage, and therefore the inclusion of Marian cults in the Theatre of Pompey was probably intended to promote and advertise *concordia* between the two great families.¹⁹³ In fact, *concordia* was a concept that Pompey was eager to employ in the 50s, especially in dealing with Caesar.¹⁹⁴ The inclusion of these shrines certainly had a competitive military element, allowing Pompey to claim the favour of deities who were once associated with other 'great men' of the Late Republic. However, it is clear that the promotion of *concordia* was also a central focus in the religious dialogues of Pompey's theatre complex.

The competitive military themes of Pompey's theatre went beyond simply its location in the Campus Martius. Features within the complex itself indicate that explicit reminders of Pompey's success in warfare were prominent throughout.¹⁹⁵ Pliny the Elder claims that the theatre contained statues of fourteen nations.¹⁹⁶ It is generally agreed that these statues represented the territories conquered by Pompey through his campaigns,¹⁹⁷ and so the statues would have provided a very clear visual evocation of Pompey's military achievements. John Leach claims that the

¹⁹² Pompey had demonstrated a great deal of flexibility in his political alignment at a number of points throughout his career. Perhaps one of the most famous examples of Pompey's political flexibility was demonstrated in his decision to burn correspondence from the camp of Sertorius in order to quell any potential revolution, rather than use their contents for his own political gain. See Plut. *Sert.* 27; Osgood 2015: 1686-7.

¹⁹³ For Marius' relationship to Caesar, see Plut. *Mar.* 6.

¹⁹⁴ For example, see RRC 436.1. This coin was minted by L. Vinicius, and probably highlights the desired *concordia* between these two 'great men'.

¹⁹⁵ See Russell (2011: 109) for a discussion of the features of the complex, and its impact on the combination of private and public space throughout. She claims that its various features meant that political and leisure space were simultaneously at play in the theatre, with all activities 'carried out under the watchful eyes of the general himself, as represented by a monumental statue, and his protective deity, Venus Victrix.'

¹⁹⁶ Pliny *HN* 36.41.

¹⁹⁷ See Leach 1978: 147. Klar (2006: 171) claims that the sculptures decorating the theatre complex were intentionally designed to provide a visual connection to Pompey's triumph, and that Pompey 'was probably following the example of middle republican commanders', citing the actions of Nobilior and Paullus in decorating their wooden theatres. Cf. Russell (2015: 163-4), who discusses the Theatre of Pompey in the context of other votive dedications of Republican generals.

theatre acted as a ‘worthy symbol of Pompey’s new position of power’ in Rome.¹⁹⁸ Since this position was due primarily to his great career in the army, rather than to achievement on the political scene, it makes sense that Pompey would choose to emphasise heavily his victories in battle through a monument that was readily accessible to all in Rome.

The Temple of Venus Victrix itself is one of the most important elements of the Theatre of Pompey. It was placed in a very prominent position at the top of the auditorium, and was the largest of all the religious structures in the theatre. While this might indicate that the temple was positioned ideally to suggest that the goddess was ‘overseeing’ the rest of the complex, its inclusion has been viewed critically by both ancient and modern commentators.¹⁹⁹ Those who are sceptical of its inclusion claim that Pompey chose to include religious elements to avoid criticism for constructing Rome’s first permanent stone theatre. The 2nd and 3rd Century Christian author Tertullian is strongly critical of the temple’s presence in the theatre. His writings are largely interested in morality, and he claims that theatres were particularly responsible for vice.²⁰⁰ As Tertullian was a Christian author writing a considerable time after the theatre’s construction, who sought to expose the Romans as morally and religiously questionable, his voice should not be confused with those of moralising Republican authors.²⁰¹ As a result, his works cannot be used to determine the sentiment of Pompey’s contemporaries towards the theatre’s construction. It is hardly surprising that Tertullian should go on to claim that Pompey only constructed the Temple of Venus Victrix in order to escape criticism of his theatre, and to accuse him of using ‘superstition’ to skirt around issues of morality.²⁰² Some modern authors have also criticised Pompey in this vein, believing the Temple of Venus Victrix to have been employed simply to avoid condemnation.²⁰³ Whilst Pompey

¹⁹⁸ Leach 1978: 147.

¹⁹⁹ See Hanson (1959: 44-9) for a discussion of these criticisms.

²⁰⁰ Tert. *De Spect.* 10.

²⁰¹ See Phillips (2001: 209; 215-16) for a good analysis of Tertullian’s motives in defaming Pompey’s theatre and his inclusion of the Temple of Venus Victrix. Unlike a moralising Republican author, Tertullian was not concerned with traditional Roman values being upheld. Instead, he sought to condemn them.

²⁰² Tert. *De Spect.* 10.

²⁰³ See particularly Platner and Ashby 1929: 555. Southern (2002: 86) also claims that Pompey avoided protests against the theatre as he ‘surrounded the theatre with religious precincts and made it respectable.’ The types of plays performed here could indicate whether or not the theatre complex was successful in maintaining a ‘respectable’ image. Although

was surely aware that his theatre complex might raise the ire of conservative Romans, he did not seek to use religion insincerely to placate detractors.

Pompey was certainly not the first to combine theatrical and religious space. The Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia was visually similar to Pompey's theatre complex. This sanctuary was located outside Rome in Praeneste, and dated to the late 2nd Century BC.²⁰⁴ The sanctuary comprised numerous terraces, a theatre *cavea* of approximately 50 metres in diameter, and a circular shrine to the goddess which was positioned at the top, overlooking the entire monument.²⁰⁵ While this sanctuary did not have the same emphasis on individual political competition as Pompey's theatre complex, it nevertheless combats the notion that Pompey took an unprecedented step in dedicating a temple to Venus Victrix at the top of his theatre's seating in order to avoid condemnation. The worship of Fortuna in Praeneste was centred around fertility, which was highlighted by the theme of the cult statue. While this statue does not survive completely extant, Cicero claims that it depicted the goddess with two children in her lap, who can be identified as Juno and Jupiter.²⁰⁶ This emphasis on fertility, alongside some of Fortuna's pre-existing associations with 'good fortune' in warfare, suggests that there were some parallels between Venus and this goddess.²⁰⁷ Perhaps it was not entirely accidental that the designs of the Theatre of Pompey and the Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia were so visually similar, because the goddess' spheres of influence overlapped in a number of areas.

this is a difficult subject to discuss with any degree of certainty, Cicero (*Fam.* 7.1.2) provides an insight into some of the first performances given upon the opening of the theatre. He names two plays – Accius' *Clytemnestra*, and another entitled *Trojan Horse*. The playwright for *Trojan Horse* is somewhat uncertain, but Champlin (2003: 298) identifies the author as either Naevius or Livius Andronicus. It is important to note that both these plays are tragedies. As a result, their performance would probably have brought more 'respectability' and seriousness to the venue than would have happened if a comedic play was staged upon its opening.

²⁰⁴ See Coarelli (2007: 530), who ascribes this date to the temple.

²⁰⁵ Coarelli 2007: 530.

²⁰⁶ Cic. *De Div.* 2.41; Coarelli 2007: 526; Prusac 2011: 82. Coarelli (2007: 530) writes that a large marble head found in the excavations of the complex 'undoubtedly' formed part of this cult statue.

²⁰⁷ In a manner similar to the connection between Venus and Felicitas, discussed earlier. However, the positions of Fortuna and Felicitas should not be viewed as interchangeable, because they had fundamentally different roles in the fortune-related aspects of Roman religion.

It is difficult to determine whether there was any major opposition to Pompey's theatre complex when it was completed in 55 BC. There is certainly no contemporary literary evidence indicating that any serious protest against its construction took place, though the location of the complex might indicate that Pompey was eager to avoid any potential conflict. The theatre was notably constructed outside the *pomerium* of Rome, which could suggest that legitimacy was a concern. Rome was one of the last urban centres in Italy to establish a permanent stone theatre, with Pompey's complex in 55 BC the first to be constructed.²⁰⁸ Yet performances had long taken place in temporary, purpose-built theatres. Tacitus states that the 'games had usually been exhibited with the help of improvised tiers of benches and a stage thrown up for the occasion; or, to go further into the past, the people stood to watch: seats in the theatre, it was feared, might tempt them to pass whole days in indolence.'²⁰⁹ Whilst Tacitus wrote in the Imperial period, his account still offers valuable insight into the reasons behind Republican opposition to a permanent theatre complex. His account suggests that the senatorial elite were eager to prevent immorality, though this was probably not their primary concern when the Theatre of Pompey was constructed. Political competition was a major driving force behind the complex, and Pompey's advertisement of his own achievements on this, as yet, unprecedented scale presented a challenge to the established senatorial elite. This probably inspired some fear amongst the senators, who reacted with resistance to the monument as a result.²¹⁰

Public building projects were competitive by nature. They served as practical and functional spaces for all in Rome, and as such carried vastly different connotations to other privately funded works such as victory monuments. As Cornell argues, victory monuments and public building projects should be considered separately, because 'the oligarchy were suspicious of any permanent institutions or structures that would provide tangible benefit for the mass of the people.'²¹¹ As a result, it is likely that Pompey's decision to construct a public building was the

²⁰⁸ There had been previous attempts to construct a permanent stone theatre in 154 BC and 106 BC, but these were opposed before they came to fruition. For opposition to the theatre in 154 BC, see Livy *Per.* 48; in 106 BC, see App. *B Civ.* 1.28. Cf. Cornell 2005: 53-4.

²⁰⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 14.20.

²¹⁰ Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.20) explicitly states that 'Pompey had been censured by his elders for establishing the theatre in a permanent home.' Moral opposition, however, was surely masking political insecurity.

²¹¹ Cornell 2005: 53-4.

most likely source of discontent with the theatre, rather than its supposed links with ‘immorality’. The promotion of individual power presented a much more dangerous challenge to the authority and power of the Senate. The turbulent and unusual political climate of the Late Republic probably allowed Pompey to escape any serious opposition to its construction, since the building project went ahead unhindered.²¹² This is not to say, however, that Pompey was unaware of the serious implications for power that his theatre entailed. His decision to construct the complex outside the *pomerium* probably indicates that he sought to limit the amount of potential criticism for this expression of power. Ultimately, this theatre complex was a platform from which Pompey chose to boost his public image, and advertise his connection with Venus on a grand scale as part of the ongoing dialogue of competition for the goddess’ patronage.

The Temple of Venus Victrix was not placed in this complex by Pompey to avoid criticism, but instead served to demonstrate the goddess’ power as a military deity. Her epithet alone proclaimed her as the ‘bringer of victory’, a title that was very fitting for a temple placed atop the showcase of martial success that was the complex. Whilst the temple would certainly have added a more ‘serious’ element to the complex, the fact that its steps could act as the auditorium would undoubtedly have provided some benefit to Pompey in avoiding censorship, though this was by no means the only reason for the temple’s inclusion.²¹³ Jacobs and Conlin are notably sceptical of suggestions that Pompey faced any serious opposition to the complex at all: ‘had there been a serious attempt to thwart its construction, it would have been made before the concrete had set.’²¹⁴ Their approach combats the tradition that the Temple of Venus Victrix was added to avoid protest

²¹² See Taylor, Wentworth Rinne, and Kostof (2016: 36-7), who note that Pompey’s theatre was an exceptional case in the Campus Martius, and his theatre complex set a precedent for development in the area.

²¹³ Coarelli (2007: 283) raises a good point in discussing the issue of the seating. He notes that in Rome there was a precedent for performances in front of temples, in particular outside the temples of Magna Mater and Apollo *in Circo*. Therefore, it is possible that Pompey drew upon this pre-existing tradition when constructing the temple of Venus Victrix in order to prevent ‘the censors’ prohibitions – which had up to that time barred the construction of a permanent stone theater in Rome.’

²¹⁴ Jacobs and Conlin 2015: 77.

on the grounds of morality.²¹⁵ Therefore, any claim that Pompey was using the temple solely for this purpose does not consider fully the ideology behind the complex as a whole.²¹⁶

Plutarch supports the idea that the Temple of Venus Victrix was intended to be linked intrinsically to Pompey's military feats.²¹⁷ He claims that prior to the Battle of Pharsalus against Caesar, Pompey had a dream that 'as he entered his theatre the people clapped their hands, and that he decorated a temple of Venus Victrix with many spoils.'²¹⁸ This battle and its impact on the dialogue of competition for the goddess' favour will be discussed in greater detail later in this thesis, however Plutarch's story suggests that the complex had a lasting impact. While his account may not be an entirely accurate rendering of events, it is clear that the temple was still thought of in military terms, even a century later, at the time of Plutarch's writing. Other gods such as Jupiter were commonly given offerings of captured spoils at their temples by successful generals. Despite acknowledgement of Venus' military power in the Republic, however, the dedication of temples themselves to Venus as thank-offerings for her assistance in battle was more prevalent.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Following Tert. *De Spect.* 10. See also on this issue Platner and Ashby (1929: 555), who offer no alternative reason for the temple's positioning. Richardson (1992: 411) is less certain that the temple was employed to give the theatre legitimacy. Instead, he argues that suggestions of the theatre seating only being the temple's 'steps' were probably meant in jest, as 'by this time there can have been no persistent prejudice against the corrupting influence of the theater, even among the most old-fashioned Romans.'

²¹⁶ Cf. Eric Orlin (2007: 68) on this issue. He argues convincingly that the theatre should only be viewed as one element of the larger complex, which 'clearly placed primary focus on Pompey himself as a man who had achieved a significant number of "firsts": first to build a stone temple in Rome, first to conquer the specified territories.'

²¹⁷ This outcome was probably permanent. Gagliardo and Packer (2006: 95) agree that the scale and nature of the complex ensured that even 'after his [Pompey's] defeat and murder, it commemorated his vast personal, political, and military power.'

²¹⁸ Plut. *Pomp.* 68. The veracity of Plutarch's report of this dream is debatable, but its presence in the biography of Pompey is nevertheless significant. The dedication of spoils often took place at the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline. Therefore, Plutarch's inclusion of the event indicates that even at the time of writing, the extent of Pompey's promotion of Venus' military power was still acknowledged.

²¹⁹ As discussed previously, this is evident in the dedication of a temple to Venus Obsequens. See Serv. *Aen.* 1.720. It is unlikely that these dedications were ever seen as a challenge to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, who was traditionally the recipient of thank-offerings from successful generals. It is likely, however, that both Venus and Jupiter were simultaneously associated with military victory, albeit on a different level of state importance. For the dedication of

III. *Advantageous Attributes: The Political Potential of Pompey's Connection with Venus Victrix*

The Temple of Venus Victrix was never intended to function merely to appease those who might oppose Pompey's theatre. Nor was it constructed simply as an expression of Pompey's personal piety towards the goddess. Instead, this temple demonstrated the remarkable shift in the use of Venus' image by prominent individuals as a means to engage in the world of politics. Although Venus functioned as a patron deity for Sulla, he largely intended to use her 'favour' to boost his public image and legitimise his success by building upon Republican precedent for Venus' military qualities. Pompey was likewise aware of the pre-existing martial qualities of the goddess in adopting her as a patron. Unlike Sulla, however, he engaged in temple construction rather than the adoption of an epithet, in order to demonstrate publicly his connection with the goddess. Pompey was well aware that his theatre complex allowed him to engage in dialogues of political power. This was especially important in the unprecedented political situation of the Late Republic where, by the time of the theatre's completion in 55 BC, Rome had already witnessed the formation of the First Triumvirate between Pompey, Caesar, and Crassus. The connection between Pompey and Julius Caesar was also an important factor affecting developments concerning Venus during this period. The marriage between Pompey and Julia, the daughter of Caesar, in 59 BC signified the intent to form a joint dynasty between the two great houses. Since Venus was a patron of both Pompey and the Julii, she was integral to this new lineage. As such, it is likely that the Temple of Venus Victrix, at least partially, served as a visual reminder of her significance for both families.

Whilst Pompey's reasons for adopting Venus as his patron goddess are not detailed explicitly in any literary source, it is possible to speculate on factors that may have influenced this choice. His early career in the military serving under Sulla undoubtedly provided Pompey with grounding in the potential for individuals to draw upon Venus' martial qualities on a highly

spoils at the Capitoline temple of Jupiter, see Pliny *HN* 37.7, 37.9; Livy 40.51.3, 45.39.12. Cf. Latte 1960: 153, Dumézil 1974: 288, Orlin 1997: 38-9, Stamper 2005: 15, and Rea 2007: 49-50, for discussions of the military dedications made at the Capitoline temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus by victorious generals.

personal level.²²⁰ While Sulla might have been the first to proclaim her favour through the adoption of an epithet, his incorporation of Venus into the promotion of his public image varied significantly from that seen under Pompey.²²¹ Rather than simply utilising her name as a symbol of power, Pompey chose to make the connection between the goddess and his military achievements more tangible in the form of a temple. This permitted a much grander, visual demonstration.

The Temple of Venus Victrix functioned primarily as a claim to the goddess' patronage and assistance throughout Pompey's military career, but it also hinted at the intended combination of his own family with the Julii, whose descent from Venus was proclaimed proudly at the time. Gellius claims that Pompey's marriage to Caesar's daughter, Julia, had an important political impact in tightening the bonds between Caesar and Pompey, to the point where out of all senators, Caesar 'began to call on Pompeius first' during his consulship.²²² This marriage alliance was clearly important enough to Caesar that he broke off Julia's betrothal to Servilius Caepio to marry her to Pompey instead.²²³ It was essential to maintaining the bond between the two great men. Leach notes aptly that Julia's 'influence had preserved a personal friendship which political rivalry had not overcome.'²²⁴ Julia was still alive upon the completion of Pompey's theatre complex in 55 BC, but her death in August 54 BC was a major factor in the catastrophic breakdown of Caesar and Pompey's relationship.²²⁵ The eventual result was civil war, bringing with it further

²²⁰ Leach (1978: 238) suggests that Sulla was aware of Pompey's desire to draw upon Venus' military powers, at least from the time of Pompey's first triumph. He claims that Sulla would 'not have been overjoyed at the implication that she [Venus] was favouring Pompey as generously as himself.' If Pompey's intention to ride in a chariot pulled by elephants had been realised, it would have been very obvious to Sulla that Pompey sought to connect himself personally with Venus' power on a public scale. Of course, we cannot know for certain Sulla's true feelings on Pompey's use of the goddess.

²²¹ For Sulla's adoption of the epithet 'Epaphroditus', see Plut. *Sull.* 34; App. *B Civ.* 1.97.

²²² Gell. *NA* 4.10.

²²³ Suet. *Caes.* 14.

²²⁴ Leach 1978: 151.

²²⁵ Southern (2002: 113) argues that the relationship between Caesar and Pompey was not fractured immediately upon Julia's death, though the fact that there was no longer a familial link between Caesar and Pompey would have facilitated the escalation of conflict between the two.

competition over Venus' military favour, and ending the brief period of co-operation between the two 'dynasts' under the goddess' patronage.

Pompey initially challenged Sulla's pre-existing claim that he was the 'favourite' of Venus. After Sulla's death, Pompey's claim seemed incontestable. There was a brief period of co-operation with Caesar, during which the goddess was apparently intended to act as patron of both families. This was not to last. Upon the breakdown of their alliance, caused by the death of Julia, Caesar and Pompey set out once again to prove the legitimacy of their individual claims to Venus' favour, especially in relation to warfare. Pompey's involvement in this intense competition over Venus throughout his career reflects both his awareness of her pre-existing martial qualities, and his willingness to engage with them in a different manner than previously seen in the earlier Republican period. His use of Venus was not simply a product of convention, following on from the Republican traditions surrounding her reception as a goddess who wielded some martial power. Instead, during his lifetime, Pompey employed Venus in innovative fashion to participate in the dialogue of competition as effectively as possible. Ultimately, Pompey's claim to Venus' favour was outdone by Caesar. An examination of his use of the goddess' military attributes indicates that he was always eager to engage in the dialogue of competition over her patronage.

Chapter 3 – The Power of Ancestry: Caesar, Venus, and the Forum Iulium

The catastrophic breakdown of ties between Julius Caesar and Pompey ushered in a new era in the competition over Venus' favour. The competition between the two men became more intense, with both sides attempting to prove that they were the recipient of her military favour. The Battle of Pharsalus became a turning-point in this struggle, from which Caesar eventually emerged victorious. The long-standing ancestral connection between Venus and the Julii played an important role in Caesar's control over the goddess' martial attributes, and this factor gave him a political edge over Pompey's claim to her patronage. Ultimately, Caesar's victory at Pharsalus ensured that he was the last remaining contestant in the competition over the goddess, and allowed him the freedom to utilise her image to bolster his public persona in a manner that was not possible while Pompey was still alive. Caesar could not allow Pompey's public claim to Venus' favour through his theatre complex and Temple of Venus Victrix to remain uncontested. His construction of the Forum Iulium and the Temple of Venus Genetrix in the centre of Rome indicated his intention to broadcast his personal connection with the goddess on an unprecedented public scale, thereby proclaiming that his power and position in the state depended on her patronage.

An analysis of the Temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum Iulium allows for a deeper understanding of Venus' significance in Caesar's projected public image. As the goddess bore the epithet of 'Genetrix', her status as the ancestress of the Julii, and of Rome itself, was clearly evoked in the temple's construction. Yet this meaning does not require that her military attributes were ignored by Caesar, since these two elements were not mutually exclusive. Instead, this chapter will argue that the dialogue of competition between Caesar and Pompey was played out in the landscape of Rome itself, with the ancestral connection bolstering Caesar's claim to the goddess' favour over his opponent. The temple certainly served to link Caesar's personal interests with those of the state, since Venus was also considered the ancestress of the Roman people through her son, Aeneas. As such, the construction of this temple after the events of the Civil War indicated that Caesar's victory was the result of the goddess' bestowal of military favour upon the side with the best interests of the state in mind. Caesar had initially vowed this temple to Venus 'Victrix' on the battlefield, and it will be argued that his decision to dedicate it instead to Venus 'Genetrix'

demonstrates his desire to evoke the goddess' position as both the ancestress of his own family, and of the Roman people as a whole through Aeneas. Although this epithet is less explicit in its reference to Venus' martial characteristics, Caesar did not omit this element of her power in his temple. He dedicated a number of offerings to the goddess that were associated with warfare, including gemstones and a pearl cuirass. This indicated that the Temple of Venus Genetrix was intended to reflect her martial attributes, as well as her patronage of both the state and Caesar, who were intrinsically linked by the time of the temple's dedication in 46 BC.

I. Venus and the Julii: Caesar's Ancestral Connection with Venus

The strength of Caesar's connection to Venus would have been apparent to all, especially after his eventual victory over Pompey in 48 BC. Yet Caesar advertised a personal link with the goddess through his descent from Aeneas prior to the events of the Civil War. This was not unusual, and appears to follow the tradition of competition amongst aristocratic families during the Republic.²²⁶ Caesar's claim to Venus' favour initially adhered to the conventions of this typical noble competition, in which many families attempted to claim descent from Trojan royalty.²²⁷ The funeral oration that he had given upon the death of his aunt Julia in approximately 68 BC was a very public means by which Caesar sought to promote his position in the state through his 'divine' ancestry. Suetonius details the content of this speech, and claims that Caesar stood on the Rostra and recounted his aunt's ancestry. Julia's family, he asserted, was 'descended by her mother from the kings, and on her father's side is akin to the immortal Gods; for the Marcii Reges (her mother's family name) go back to Ancus Marcius, and the Julii, the family of which ours is a branch, to

²²⁶ See Rosenstein 1990: 256 on the importance of competition between elite families during the Republic. Cf. Wiseman 1974: 153-63; Rosenstein 1993: 313-38; Erskine 2001: 21.

²²⁷ Note the claim of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1.85.3) that there were approximately fifty families who claimed Trojan descent at the time he was writing. Both literary sources and coins advertising individual Republican families demonstrate great willingness to engage with the mythical Trojan ancestry to promote the position of a *gens* in the state. Cf. RRC 304; Serv. *Aen.* 5.117. For an analysis of the Trojan legend in Republican familial competition, see Galinsky 1969: 169; Wiseman 1974: 157-8; Evans 1992: 24-9; Erskine 2001: 21-2; Marsh 2013: 9-12.

Venus.²²⁸ Whilst Suetonius' writing is occasionally questionable in its reliability, there is no reason to doubt his indication that Caesar was eager to commemorate his aunt publicly by recalling his family's divine ancestry. Noble funerals often contained such public self-promotion, and they presented an opportunity for men to use their oratory skills in order to reinforce the status and ancestry of their family.²²⁹ It is hardly surprising that Caesar chose to emphasise the connection between his family and the Trojan legend at his aunt's funeral. This was a source of considerable power and prestige for the Julii, even prior to the intense political competition over Venus in the Late Republic.²³⁰ It provided the family with a direct link to Rome's foundation, and therefore with the state itself.

Caesar was also able to claim a direct connection with the Republican general Marius, through the latter's marriage to his aunt. This link was politically important to Caesar, and he chose to exploit his connection with the former 'great statesman' publicly by including Marius' image in Julia's funeral procession.²³¹ It is likely that Caesar was attempting to exploit Marius' popularity, but in addition Marius had gained a personal association with Venus which was highly beneficial to Caesar's rhetoric of divine favour. Plutarch claims that Marius 'got the reputation of being bold and fond of danger in fighting his enemies, and in the beginning was called a son of Mars; but his deeds soon showed what he really was, and he was called instead a son of Venus.'²³² Weinstock has analysed this statement, and suggests that Plutarch was making 'either a reference to Marius, the great warrior, and Iulia respectively, or to Iulia alone.'²³³ It is possible that Plutarch was influenced by Marius' marriage to Julia when discussing his connection with Venus, but his

²²⁸ Suet. *Caes.* 6. For an analysis of Caesar's funerary oration for his aunt, see Flower 1996: 143-5.

²²⁹ For detail on Republican funerary orations, see Steel 2006: 48-51; Favro and Johanson 2010: 16-23; Marsh 2013: 13.

²³⁰ A number of coin issues minted by members of the Julii in the second century BC refer to this familial connection with Venus through Aeneas. The discussion below will deal with this coinage and with Caesar's utilisation of his family's ancestry in the competition over Venus.

²³¹ Plut. *Caes.* 5.2. As Plutarch indicates in this passage, Caesar took a risk in displaying the images of Marius at his aunt's funeral, since on this occasion they were 'seen for the first time since the administration of Sulla, because Marius and his friends had been pronounced public enemies.'

²³² Plut. *Mar.* 46.6.

²³³ Weinstock 1971: 17.

account indicates that Marius' ability in warfare was at least partially due to his association with the goddess. Whilst Venus' patronage was already guaranteed to Caesar through his own ancestry, he would have been eager to exploit Marius' connection with the goddess' martial attributes, since this would have increased the legitimacy of his own claim to her ability to bestow victory.

Coinage issued in the Late Republic was an effective means by which stakeholders in the competitive dialogue over Venus could engage with her military attributes. While this method of advertisement had been used in the Republic to promote individual families, the dialogue of competition between the 'great men' of the Republic saw coinage being employed in a very different manner.²³⁴ The competition was no longer simply between noble families, but instead was between individuals who sought control over divine favour in order to justify their position in the state.²³⁵ A coin dated to 56 BC, issued by Faustus Cornelius Sulla, demonstrates clearly how the ongoing claims for the goddess' favour were advertised through this medium. This denarius displayed a bust of Venus on the obverse along with three military trophies on the reverse.²³⁶ It is likely that these trophies represented Pompey's famed achievement of being the first to claim victory over three continents, an achievement which explicitly linked him to Alexander the Great.²³⁷ It is hardly surprising that this coin issue should so strongly present Pompeian messages of the goddess' connection with military victory. Its issuer served under Pompey as a legate, and was his son-in-law through marriage to Pompey's daughter, Pompeia.²³⁸ Therefore, the imagery

²³⁴ For the use of coinage in familial competition during the Republic, see Wiseman 1974: 159-60.

²³⁵ See Evans 1992: 24-9 for more detail on the use of coinage in noble competition throughout the Republic.

²³⁶ RRC 426/3.

²³⁷ See Plutarch *Pomp.* 45 for the significance of Pompey's military achievement in conquering these territories, and the connection with his three triumphs. The Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies offers an excellent interpretation of this coin, and of other contemporary issues by Caesar which use imagery of Venus to engage in the competition for her favour. It is suggested that the trophies were 'reflecting Pompey's three triumphs,' and that this issue was indicative of support for the Pompeian cause. For the connection between Pompey and Alexander, see Plut. *Pomp.* 46; Rawson 1970: 32; Greenhalgh 1980: 171-3. For more detail on the impact of coinage on the competition over Venus, see the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies (2014). http://www.humanities.mq.edu.au/acans/caesar/Career_Venus.htm.

²³⁸ Meier (1982: 299) claims that Faustus Sulla's marriage to Pompeia was politically beneficial to both Faustus and Pompey himself, since the Senate 'wished to renew its link with the victor in the civil war who had re-established a solid senatorial regime.'

of this denarius was intended as an explicit proclamation of the strength of Pompey's claim to Venus' military favour.

Caesar himself did not advertise his connection with Venus on coinage until after Pompey's death in 48 BC, but he was not the first of the Julii to use this medium to broadcast her ancestral connection with the family. As Billows argues, other examples of coinage minted by members of the Julii a couple of generations before Caesar suggest that the dialogue of descent from Venus was already perpetuated prior to the struggle over the goddess' favour in the Late Republic, as a result of noble competition.²³⁹ The reverse of one particular denarius depicts Venus in a *biga*, crowned from behind by Cupid.²⁴⁰ This coin was minted in 129 BC by Sextus Julius Caesar (spelt 'Caisar' on the coin), and indicates that the Julii used their claim to the goddess to engage with noble competition from at least the second century BC. As such, Caesar's decision to advertise Venus' connection with his family openly was not unprecedented, since the power of her image had long been acknowledged by the Julii. However, the great political pressures of the Late Republic meant that his ancestral link with Venus became much more politically powerful.

²³⁹ Billows 2009: 33. For more on the use of Venus on coins minted by the Julii in the Late Republic, see Evans 1992: 28.

²⁴⁰ RRC 258/1.

II. *The Role of Venus in Civil War: Caesar vs. Pompey*

The relationship between Caesar and Pompey played a crucial role in the competitive dialogue that continued over Venus' favour. The marriage of Pompey to Caesar's daughter, Julia, in 58 BC served to quell the disputes over her patronage for a short time. A 'joint dynasty' was planned between the two families, and it was intended that Venus would act as the guardian of both houses. As discussed previously in Chapter 2, Pompey constructed his theatre complex during the period of this marriage alliance with the Julii. This monument served to promote the link between Pompey's military achievements and the favour of the goddess as the 'bringer of victory.' Furthermore, it also served to promote Venus in her new role of protector of the two families. This period of co-operation, unfortunately, was not to last. After Julia died in 54 BC, the relationship between Pompey and Caesar deteriorated. The ensuing Civil War saw Venus' martial qualities come to the fore yet again, and become the subject of competition. The Pharsalus campaign in particular saw both Caesar and Pompey vying for the favour of Venus, who was no longer seen as the combined patron of the two houses. Instead, both men claimed that she favoured their individual interests in the war.

Accounts of the Battle of Pharsalus indicate that the goddess' favour was a subject of significant competition. Both sides wanted to demonstrate that they were the 'true' favourite of Venus, and the outcome of the battle was to indicate the goddess' favourite. Appian details the events that took place in each camp on the evening prior to the battle. Caesar chose to offer a 'sacrifice at midnight and invoked Mars and his own ancestress, Venus...and he vowed that he would build a temple in Rome as a thank-offering to her as the Bringer of Victory if everything went well.'²⁴¹ Meanwhile, Pompey was beset with a number of religious misfortunes, including the appearance of bees on the altar, and the escape of a number of sacrificial victims.²⁴² According to Appian, Pompey quelled the unrest that subsequently broke out in his camp, and then slept, dreaming 'that he had dedicated a temple in Rome to Venus the Bringer of Victory.'²⁴³ Lucan also

²⁴¹ App. *B Civ.* 2.68.

²⁴² App. *B Civ.* 2.68.

²⁴³ App. *B Civ.* 2.68.

gives an account of Pompey's dream prior to the battle, where he was 'sitting in his own theatre and saw in a vision the countless multitudes of Rome; and that his name was lifted to the sky in their shouts of joy, while all the tiers vied in proclaiming his praise.'²⁴⁴ Plutarch gives a slightly different version, and claims that Pompey instead merely dreamed that he had dedicated spoils of the battle at the Temple of Venus Victrix, which he had previously constructed in his theatre complex.²⁴⁵ Whilst there is some disparity between each of these accounts, the theme of military victory under Venus' patronage is woven through each. John Leach has suggested that Plutarch's account of this 'dream' might reflect the relationship between Caesar and Venus, rather than Pompey's personal connection with the goddess. He claims that the Temple of Venus Victrix would have 'suggested to Pompey that he had been decking Caesar with spoils...[and he was] himself granting Caesar the victory.'²⁴⁶ This may indicate that by the time Plutarch was writing on the Battle of Pharsalus, Caesar had become intrinsically linked to Venus, to the detriment of other competing claims to her favour.

The watchwords taken by the respective forces of Caesar and Pompey on the night before the battle say much about the reception of Venus. Caesar's camp took the watchword 'Venus Victrix,' whereas Pompey's army took 'Hercules Invictus.'²⁴⁷ At first, it seems unusual that Pompey would choose to 'abandon' Venus at this crucial point in the Civil War. However, there seems to be a more complex reason behind his decision to forgo her name as a watchword here. Pompey was certainly trying to distance himself from Caesar by this time, both personally and ideologically. As a result, he turned to Hercules for protection and assistance in battle. Pompey's connection with Hercules was hardly a product of momentary necessity, and instead had a deep-rooted history, which solidified his connection with Alexander the Great.²⁴⁸ He had previously

²⁴⁴ Luc. 7.7-12. Lucan's account of Pompey's dream is perhaps the most detailed, and recalls Pompey's martial feats achieved in his youth. As Penwill (2009: 85) argues, Lucan probably did this to remind his audience of Pompey's acquisition of martial fortune earlier in his career. For an analysis of Lucan's account, see Penwill 2009: 83-7; Ahl 1974: 316. On Lucan's use of allusion in this passage, see Rose 1958: 80-4.

²⁴⁵ Plut. *Pomp.* 68.

²⁴⁶ Leach 1978: 203.

²⁴⁷ See App. *B Civ.* 2.76.

²⁴⁸ Alexander had famously connected himself with Hercules. His coins feature the god wearing the characteristic lionskin headdress, and numerous literary sources point to associations between the king and Hercules, e.g. Plut. *Alex.*

dedicated a shrine to Hercules in Rome, which probably stood near the Circus Maximus, and it appears that his connection with the god not only emphasised his link with Alexander, but was again based upon a dialogue of competition with other ‘great men’.²⁴⁹ Pompey had good reason to adopt Hercules Invictus at Pharsalus. Two coins issued in the 50s BC by his son-in-law, Faustus Sulla, had explicitly connected Pompey’s military achievements with Hercules.²⁵⁰ This indicates that this divine connection was already being exploited by Pompey before it was ‘necessitated’ by Pharsalus.²⁵¹ Beryl Rawson also examines Pompey’s early interactions with the god, and suggests that Pompey was aware of Hercules’ connection with military success from a relatively early point in his career under Sulla.²⁵² This was probably the case, as religious dialogues of competition between Pompey and Sulla over the martial favour of deities were ongoing, and not just restricted to the competing claims over the favour of Venus.²⁵³

Pompey’s decision to take ‘Hercules Invictus’ as the watchword for his camp on the night before Pharsalus does not indicate that he was questioning Venus’ military power. While it is likely that Pompey would have acknowledged the strength of Caesar’s claim to Venus’ patronage, he would have been reluctant to relinquish his own patron goddess to his opponent so easily. Plutarch claims that Caesar’s ancestry was a source of concern for Pompey, since ‘he feared lest the race of

2.1-2. Pompey was very eager to encourage this association with Alexander the Great, even taking the cognomen ‘Magnus.’ See Plut. *Pomp.* 13; Cass. Dio 37.21.2. For more detail on his adoption of the cognomen and its reception, see Cunningham 1971: 43-6.

²⁴⁹ See Vitruvius *De arch.* 3.3.5, and Pliny, *HN* 34.57 for detail on the temple. Richardson (1992: 187-8) examines this temple (as ‘Hercules Pompeianus’), and argues that multiple temples of Hercules were present in this area of Rome, though nothing survives of Pompey’s shrine. He suggests that Pompey’s temple might have been one of these, rather than another (as yet undiscovered) structure, but also acknowledges that there is little evidence to support this claim (1992: 188). Given the lack of evidence, it should be assumed that Pompey’s temple was a separate structure until convincing evidence to support Richardson’s suggestion is discovered.

²⁵⁰ These coins are RRC 426/4 and RRC 426/3.

²⁵¹ See Welch and Mitchell (2013: 84-5) for a discussion of these coinage issues in relation to Pompey’s connection with Hercules. They argue that these coins were intended to reflect his associations with Alexander the Great.

²⁵² Sulla was certainly aware of Hercules’ potential to bring military victory, and Plutarch (*Sull.* 35.1) details his offerings to the god at his triumph of 81 BC. Rawson (1970: 31-2) analyses Sulla’s dedications to Hercules, and concludes that these probably influenced Pompey’s perception of the god’s martial potential.

²⁵³ For the connection between Sulla and Hercules, see Plut. *Sull.* 35.1; Ov. *Fast.* 6.212; Luke 2014: 81-2.

Caesar, which went back to Venus, was to receive glory and splendour through him.’²⁵⁴ Whilst Caesar had explicitly staked his claim to the goddess’ favour by this point, it seems likely that Plutarch’s account is the product of a later author attempting to explain the outcome of Pharsalus.²⁵⁵ It does provide a platform, however, to question why Pompey might have sought the protection of another god through his chosen watchword. It seems that Pompey’s pre-existing connection with Hercules’ martial attributes provided him with some hope of divine assistance in battle against Caesar’s superior claim to the military attributes of his patron goddess.²⁵⁶ Whilst Venus might have been his goddess of choice for protection throughout the battle, Pompey was aware that he required further protection against her descendant at this stage of the Civil War. Whilst there is an undeniable level of ‘hindsight bias’ in Plutarch’s account of this battle, it is clear that Hercules offered the ideal means through which Pompey could ensure divine support against Venus’ descendant due to his pre-established connection with the god. However, this does not mean that Pompey abandoned Venus’ martial attributes, and conceded defeat to Caesar’s claim over her favour.

In the lead-up to Pharsalus, Caesar and Pompey both proclaim their intention to construct a temple to Venus, and in fact to the same incarnation of the goddess, with the epithet ‘Victrix.’²⁵⁷ It is unclear whether Pompey intended to build another, separate temple to Venus Victrix in Rome if he had been successful at Pharsalus, or whether Appian’s inclusion of his dream was simply a literary device to contrast the goddess’ influence over the two ‘sides.’²⁵⁸ At any rate, Appian’s account makes it clear that Venus Victrix’s military attributes had evolved not only to the point where she was explicitly linked to success in combat, but indeed to the point where she was a

²⁵⁴ Plut. *Pomp.* 68.2.

²⁵⁵ See Leach’s (1978: 203) comments on Plutarch as a source for this battle.

²⁵⁶ See Rawson 1970: 36 on Pompey’s decision to appeal to Hercules at Pharsalus as the result of Caesar’s claim to descent from Venus. Rawson appears to underplay the strength of Pompey’s connection with Venus, especially regarding the planned ‘joint dynasty’ with Caesar. His devotion to Hercules never overshadowed the connection that he maintained with Venus.

²⁵⁷ App. *B. Civ.* 2.68.

²⁵⁸ App. *B. Civ.* 2.68.

subject of competition between the two triumvirs.²⁵⁹ Whilst this temple was ultimately dedicated to Venus Genetrix instead, Caesar's vow to build a temple to the same manifestation of Venus who appeared in Pompey's theatre complex is indicative of the extent of the competition that emerged at this point. As Eric Orlin states, Caesar acted 'almost as if he were summoning Pompey's protectress to his side in the manner of an *evocatio*.'²⁶⁰ Caesar was evidently attempting to 'reclaim' definitively Venus' patronage and martial attributes for himself, and thus used the same epithet conferred upon the goddess in Pompey's theatre complex in order to accomplish this task. Pompey suffered his most famous defeat at Pharsalus, and was murdered soon after in Egypt on 29 September 48 BC. As the reality of defeat struck him, Dio claims that Pompey 'straightaway despaired of all his projects and no longer took any account of his own valour or of the multitude of troops remaining to him or the fact that Fortune often restores the fallen in a moment of time.'²⁶¹ If Caesar's intention was indeed to prove that Venus favoured him more than Pompey, he certainly achieved that goal. Perhaps, as Plutarch suggests, it would have been more fitting for the great commander to have died whilst at the peak of his career after achieving three triumphs, and still benefitting from the martial powers of his patron goddess.²⁶²

The Civil War against the Pompeian forces was not completed immediately upon the death of Pompey in 48 BC. After the dedication of his temple to Venus Genetrix in 46 BC, Caesar once again was forced to engage in warfare against Pompey's son, Gnaeus, at the Battle of Munda.²⁶³ Both sides were still eager to engage in political and religious competition, despite Pompey's death. Upon reaching Spain, Appian claims that Caesar 'drew up his forces for battle near Corduba,

²⁵⁹ Stevenson (2015: 262-3) discusses the theme of divine favour in Appian's account of the Pharsalus campaign. He argues that Appian intentionally depicts Caesar as the superior claimant to divine assistance, and notes that Pompey is not abandoned by the gods in this account of the battle. Pompey appears to have been portrayed by Appian as quite 'unlucky' in fighting against a man with such a strong command over divine martial favour as Caesar.

²⁶⁰ Orlin 2007: 69.

²⁶¹ Cass. Dio 42.1.

²⁶² Plut. *Pomp.* 46. While Plutarch's tone in this passage is indicative of his role as a biographer, he again compares Pompey to Alexander.

²⁶³ Appian (*B. Civ.* 2.103) claims that Caesar was 'in his fourth consulship' when he fought against Pompey's son.

and then, too, gave *Venus* for his watchword. Pompeius, on the other hand, gave *Piety* for his.²⁶⁴ The battle proved to be difficult for Caesar's forces, with many troops initially hesitant to fight due to their fear of the enemy.²⁶⁵ However, Caesar managed eventually to claim victory over the younger Pompey, effectively ending the Civil War.²⁶⁶ Caesar's decision to use *Venus*' name as his watchword for this battle indicates his continued participation in religious competition against his rivals. He was still eager to acknowledge *Venus*' ability to bestow military victory upon her descendants, in order to gain religious superiority over the Pompeians.²⁶⁷ The goddess' patronage was no longer actively contested. Instead, Caesar retained sole control over her martial attributes through the strength of his familial connection to the goddess. Eaton notes that he probably chose to use *Venus*' name as a watchword to encourage his soldiers, since they would have connected it to 'the victory at Pharsalus against the elder Pompey, as well as his own personal links to the deity in question.'²⁶⁸ Following Eaton's argument, it seems that the watchwords taken by competing sides in the civil conflict of the Late Republic were intentionally loaded with political meaning.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ App. *B. Civ.* 2.104. As Weinstock (1971: 254) argues, the watchword chosen by Gnaeus Pompey is significant, for it probably referenced piety towards his own father and was intended to contrast directly with Caesar's own *pietas*. For more detail on the battle and the use of *pietas*, see Welch 2012: 113-15.

²⁶⁵ Appian (*B. Civ.* 2.104) here states that upon being confronted with his soldiers' unwillingness to fight, Caesar 'took his helmet off his head and shamed them to their faces and exhorted them...[and] sprang forward in advance of his line of battle toward the enemy so far that he was only ten feet distant from them.' Appian's account of Caesar's actions in battle should probably be read somewhat sceptically, not least because he was not writing contemporaneously with the event. Appian's sources cannot be accurately ascertained. See Stevenson 2015: 266-72 for a discussion of the debate surrounding Appian's sources.

²⁶⁶ The losses suffered by Caesar's forces in this battle were apparently nowhere near as substantial as those of the enemy. See Caesar's account of the battle (*B. Hisp.* 31) for losses incurred by both sides. Goldsworthy (2005: 155) notes that approximately 1000 men from Caesar's camp were lost in the process, more than were killed in any previous victory, and he claims that this was indicative of the battle's difficulty.

²⁶⁷ Although Caesar was no longer directly competing with Pompey, the remaining Pompeian forces led by his sons still posed a considerable threat. As a result, the religious competition continued. For more detail on the religious dialogue of the remaining Pompeians, see Welch 2012: 107-15.

²⁶⁸ Eaton 2011: 60. Eaton (2011: 61) also writes that the Pompeian decision to use '*pietas*' as a watchword was 'perhaps in reference to the continuing ideals of their former general...[and] these examples indicate that some importance was attached to the term used for the watchword.'

²⁶⁹ See Eaton 2011: 60-3 for a summary of the political significance of watchwords, and their use as tools to communicate messages.

It makes sense that Caesar would choose to invoke Venus' martial qualities, for he was now the sole claimant to her ability to bestow fortune in battle. As she had already demonstrated her decision to favour Caesar's cause over Pompey at Pharsalus, it is likely that Caesar had much confidence that Venus would again assist him in this conflict against Pompey's son. Once Caesar had quelled this final act of Pompeian resistance, he was not only left in a powerful and unprecedented political position in Rome, but also proved that he was the unquestionable recipient of Venus' ability to bestow victory.

III. The Forum Iulium: Caesar, Venus, and Monumental Dialogues of Competition

Like Pompey, Caesar also engaged in public building projects in order to emphasise the strength of his personal connection with Venus. The Forum Iulium and its Temple of Venus Genetrix comprised Caesar's most significant building project, and functioned as a permanent reminder of not only his considerable power in the state, but also the strength of his claim to Venus' favour as the result of his heavily advertised divine ancestry. His forum was intended to engage in a visual dialogue with Pompey's pre-existing theatre complex, as part of the continued competition over Venus' favour. The Forum Iulium was located between the Capitoline and Palatine hills, next to the existing Forum Romanum. Its positioning in this particular part of the city indicates that Caesar was eager to exploit the considerable political and social significance of the surrounding landscape. A letter of Cicero to his friend Atticus detailing the acquisition of land for this project can be dated to July 54 BC. Caesar, who had entrusted this task to Cicero and Oppius, 'thought nothing of spending half a million...[approximately 60,000,000 sesterces] for that public work...the extension of the Forum and continuation of it as far as the Hall of Liberty.'²⁷⁰ The land for the Forum Iulium alone was considerably expensive, due to its prime location in the city centre and the reasonably large size of the complex.²⁷¹ Despite Cicero's suggestion that the new forum was

²⁷⁰ Cic. *Att.* 4.16. Shackleton Bailey (1979: 173) dates this letter to 'about 1 July 54.' See also Morselli 1995: 299.

²⁷¹ Pliny (*HN* 36.103) gives a different figure for the cost of the land, claiming that Caesar 'gave 100,000,000 sesterces merely for the ground on which his forum was to be built.' However, his account cannot have been as reliable as that of Cicero, who was himself charged with the purchase of the land. Amanda Claridge (2010: 164) gives the dimensions

simply an ‘extension’ of the Republican space, Caesar’s project should ultimately be considered in the same vein as the Theatre of Pompey.²⁷² It was privately funded by one of the ‘great men’ of the Republic, and was intended to promote its benefactor by broadcasting messages of his power and the military patronage of Venus. Caesar acquired the necessary funds from his military successes in Gaul, as Suetonius claims that the forum was constructed using ‘the proceeds of his spoils.’²⁷³ The use of war booty as a source of funding for public works was by no means unprecedented, though the Forum Iulium must have taken on further martial significance as a result. Consequently, Venus’ prominent presence in such a monument must be considered as an expression of her personal patronage over Caesar’s military endeavours, in line with the competitive political dialogue that characterised the Late Republic.

The dating of Caesar’s purchase of land for his forum raises some questions about his initial intentions for the complex in the dialogue of competition over Venus’ favour. Cicero’s letter to Atticus dates to approximately one year after the completion of Pompey’s theatre complex in the Campus Martius, and importantly predates the outbreak of the Civil War between Caesar and Pompey. Plans for the Forum Iulium were clearly well underway in 54 BC, by the time Caesar had

of the complex at approximately 115 metres long x 45 metres wide, and claims that the forum ‘evidently took its elongated shape, if not its precise dimensions, from the old Roman Forum.’ Senseney (2011: 438) argues that the Forum Iulium was not planned or constructed until after the Battle of Pharsalus, but this is unlikely to have been the case. While Cicero (*Att.* 4.16) does claim that Caesar’s initial plan was to use this land to extend the Republican forum, there is little doubt that this privately funded work was always intended to engage in the political dialogue of competition. The landscape of Rome itself provided the ideal stage for the ‘great men’ to engage in such competitive expressions of power, and Pompey’s theatre complex had set the ideal precedent for Caesar also to fund public building projects which broadcast his intended public image.

²⁷² See Cicero (*Att.* 4.17) for the claim that the Forum Iulium was intended simply to enhance the existing Republican forum. For a commentary on this source, see Ulrich 1993: 54-5. Ulrich argues that this letter suggests Caesar originally intended simply to extend the existing forum, rather than construct a privately funded monument in order to broadcast his own achievements. However, Ulrich’s view does not consider the ongoing political competition of the Late Republic, nor the fact that Pompey had recently constructed a theatre complex which publicly advertised his own military skill and patronage by Venus.

²⁷³ Suet. *Caes.* 26.

asked Cicero to begin buying up land for the project.²⁷⁴ As such, it is likely that during the initial stages of the Forum's planning, Caesar intended for the monument to promote his interests in the competitive political dialogue of the Late Republic. But what were his circumstances? Did the marriage alliance with Pompey influence Caesar's initial planning for his forum? Pompey was married to Caesar's daughter, Julia, until her death in August 54 BC.²⁷⁵ Whilst it is difficult to refine further the date of Caesar's purchase of land for the Forum Iulium, it is significant that this should coincide with the year of Julia's death. If Caesar had started acquiring the land before the death of his daughter, it is possible that his Forum was initially intended to complement Pompey's theatre complex, and reinforce the ties between the two men, allowing both families to project their leaders as 'dynasts.' Large public building projects were still unusual in Rome at this time, and both these monuments would have signposted the power and influence of these 'dynasts' to great effect. It seems more likely, however, that the marriage alliance between the Julii and the Pompeii had broken down by the time Caesar was completing his purchase of land and planning buildings for the complex. As a result, the monument was probably an attempt by Caesar to engage in political discourse on a grand scale, and present a challenge to Pompey from its inception.²⁷⁶ Caesar's decision to construct a new forum in the centre of Rome was indicative of his desire to make a more powerful impact on the civic life of the city than Pompey's theatre complex had done.²⁷⁷ Ulrich believes that Pompey's theatre complex probably had a great impact on Caesar's decision to initiate a project of this scale.²⁷⁸ Yet even if the marriage alliance between Caesar and Pompey through Julia still bound the great men together in this period, some competition between

²⁷⁴ Strong 1968: 102; Morselli 1995: 299. For an opposing view, see Ulrich (1993: 51-4), who believes that the main elements of the Forum Iulium were not planned before approximately 52 BC. Furthermore, he claims that building projects such as the Theatre of Pompey or the Forum Iulium were the result of the inadequacy of the existing Forum Romanum to hold public functions. This view does not take into consideration the extensive religious and political dialogue of competition between not only Caesar and Pompey, but the other 'great men' of the Republic. For the dating of this letter, see Shackleton Bailey 1979: 173.

²⁷⁵ See Plut. *Pomp.* 53; Meier 1982: 294-5; Southern 2002: 113; Billows 2009: 179.

²⁷⁶ See Orlin (1996: 197), who also believes that the Forum Iulium was constructed as a response to Pompey's theatre complex.

²⁷⁷ Pompey's theatre complex was located outside the *pomerium* in the Campus Martius. Therefore, Caesar's forum was able to have a greater impact on the civic life of Rome as a result of its location in the centre of the city.

²⁷⁸ See Ulrich 1984: 16.

the two was always to be expected. Caesar's construction of a new forum for the city was not only an unprecedented action for an individual, but would have provided the ideal opportunity to challenge Pompey's existing public building project effectively.²⁷⁹

The most prominent and significant feature of the Forum Iulium was the Temple of Venus Genetrix, located at the north-eastern end of the forum.²⁸⁰ Vitruvius states that the temple was constructed in *pyncostyle*, 'wherein the columns are only once and a half their thickness apart.'²⁸¹ The building was made of marble, and had a significant visual impact upon both the forum, and the surrounding landscape.²⁸² Coarelli states that the temple occupied a significant amount of space in the Forum Iulium, as it 'took up nearly the entire far end facing the entrance, [and it formed] the backdrop and unifying element.'²⁸³ Its positioning indicates that the temple was intended to be the major focal point for the entire complex, and visitors certainly would have been reminded of the strong connection between the presiding goddess of the forum, and its benefactor. The populace was clearly the intended audience for such messages. Appian claims that Caesar wanted the forum to function 'for the Roman people, not for buying and selling, but as a meeting-place for the transaction of public business, like the squares of the Persians, where the people assemble to seek justice or to learn the laws.'²⁸⁴ The civic focus of the space would have greatly assisted in the dissemination of the messages of Caesar's power broadcast by the complex. Caesar was the most powerful man in the Roman state by the time of the forum's inauguration in 46 BC, and the ideological significance of a temple to his patron deity placed within such a prominent public space could hardly have been ignored.²⁸⁵

²⁷⁹ For Caesar's status as the first individual to donate a forum as public space in Rome, see Ulrich 1984: 16-17.

²⁸⁰ On dating the present remains of the temple, see Richardson 1992: 166; Coarelli 2007: 107-8; Claridge 2010: 164; DeRose Evans 2013: 467-8. For an older study produced close to the time of the forum's excavation, see Grossi 1936: 216-20.

²⁸¹ Vitr. *De arch.* 3.2. Cf. Morselli 1995: 302.

²⁸² Ovid (*Ars am.* 1.81) identifies the material used in the temple's construction as marble.

²⁸³ Coarelli 2007: 108. For the size of the temple, see also Richardson 1992: 166-7 and Claridge 2010: 164-6. For the podium, see Ulrich 1993: 58-66.

²⁸⁴ App. *B Civ.* 2.102.

²⁸⁵ Coarelli (2007: 108) notes that both the Forum Iulium and the Temple of Venus Genetrix were fully intended as platforms for broadcasting Caesar's intended public image as the descendant of the goddess. This would have greatly

The epithet given to the goddess, ‘Venus *Genetrix*’ (‘Venus the Ancestor / Ancestral Venus / Venus the Begetter’), clearly points to her role as the ‘divine ancestor’ of the Julii. Her temple served as one of Caesar’s major public claims to the goddess’ patronage in the continued dialogue of competition over her favour, and his familial ties appeared at the forefront. It was precisely this factor that gave Venus *Genetrix* her martial power, since Caesar was able to explain his military fortune as the result of his divine descent from the goddess. Whilst this temple was initially vowed to Venus *Victrix* on the battlefield, the political significance of this tie explains Caesar’s decision to give her a different epithet which reflected his ancestry more definitively. Speidel has argued that the ‘change of name from Venus *Victrix* to Venus *Genetrix* is explicable only if...[they] are the same goddess: Venus *Victrix* gave victory in particular to her own offspring.’²⁸⁶ As such, Caesar’s public claim of descent from Venus not only served to highlight his strong connection with the goddess, but also demonstrated that the Julii alone were capable of receiving the full benefits of her capacity to bestow military victory.²⁸⁷ Both the Forum Iulium and the Temple of Venus *Genetrix* were intended to serve as an explicit public claim that Venus’ patronage of Caesar was a product of his ‘divine descent’ from the goddess. Venus was, however, widely thought of as the ancestress of the Roman people as a whole.²⁸⁸ By drawing on her ancestral ties to both the Roman people and the Julii themselves, Caesar linked himself intrinsically with the foundation of the state. This was an important step in Caesar’s control over his public image, especially following the Civil War with Pompey. Whilst the Julii had previously emphasised their descent from Venus in the past through coinage, the construction of the Forum Iulium offered an unprecedented and powerful platform from which Caesar could broadcast the connection between himself and Rome’s

influenced his reception amongst the people of Rome, and probably helped to justify Caesar’s unprecedented position in the state.

²⁸⁶ Speidel 1984: 2226.

²⁸⁷ Flory (1988: 500) claims that Venus *Genetrix* had the same military capacity as Venus *Victrix*, since ‘Venus’ particular gift to her family line was invincibility in war.’ See, however, Westall (1996: 89), who argues that this monument was constructed by Caesar in order to compete directly with Pompey’s pre-existing Temple of Venus *Victrix*, in order to demonstrate his pre-eminent claim to the goddess’ patronage.

²⁸⁸ Lucretius (1.1) refers to Venus as the ‘ancestress’ of Rome through the sons of Aeneas. Cf. Billows (2009: 177), who claims that Caesar’s use of Venus ‘*Genetrix*’ reflected the status of the Roman people as her descendants, but also highlighted her special patronage of the Julian family.

mythical history. Eric Orlin has similarly argued that Caesar intended to use this temple to advertise his familial connection to both Venus and the state. He states that:

In raising a private family connection to the level of a public cult and in claiming descent from a divinity in order to enhance his personal stature, Caesar laid the groundwork for further innovations...he followed in the footsteps of Pompey and the other late republican leaders of Rome, [but] Caesar sought to create a divine aura around himself more clearly than any of them.²⁸⁹

Caesar certainly drew a great deal of power from the connection between the Julii and Rome's foundation legend, and this explains his heavy use of Venus in an ancestral capacity. It does not mean that he chose to ignore her military attributes in favour of her status as the divine ancestress of his family, for the two elements were not mutually exclusive. Instead, Caesar needed to exercise control over both these areas of Venus' influence to maintain his position in the state. He had emerged victorious in the struggle over Venus' martial favour, and was now required to use her image in a manner different from the time when Pompey was still alive.

The Temple of Venus Genetrix was ultimately a product of the intense political competition between the 'great men' of the Late Republic. Since it was constructed after Caesar's victory over Pompey in the Civil War, however, the temple took on a greater significance than previous building projects such as the Theatre of Pompey. At the time of the temple's dedication in 46 BC, Caesar was the most powerful man in the Roman state. The Julian claim to descent from Venus not only trumped the competing claims to the goddess' favour by the other 'great men', but offered the ideal means through which Caesar could justify his unprecedented political position. As Tatum argues, the direct descent from Venus claimed by the Julii was powerful, and 'Caesar's fortune in war, his *felicitas*, now made his family's case indisputable, whereas Pompey's divine favour had obviously evaporated when he broke his friendship with Caesar.'²⁹⁰ Suetonius' *Life of Caesar* indicates that this new temple to Venus as the 'ancestress' at least gave him the confidence to assert his newfound power and status. Suetonius claims that when Caesar was conducting business in the Forum Iulium, presumably after his fourth consulship in approximately 46-45 BC, 'the

²⁸⁹ Orlin 2007: 69.

²⁹⁰ Tatum 2008: 93.

Senate approached him in a body with many highly honorary decrees, [and] he received them before the temple of Venus Genetrix without rising.’²⁹¹ The reliability of Suetonius’ account of this incident might be questionable, but his story raises questions about Caesar’s actions in political terms. The account of Nicolaus of Damascus certainly gives the impression that Caesar’s decision to remain seated in front of the temple was considered offensive. He says that ‘Caesar was seated while they advanced and because he was conversing with men standing to one side, he did not turn his head toward the approaching procession or pay any attention to it, but continued to prosecute the business which he had on hand.’²⁹² He goes on to assert that a number of conspirators against Caesar were present in this group, and they ‘filled the others with ill-will toward him, though the others were already offended at him because of this incident.’²⁹³ As Weinstock argues, Caesar was probably not breaking any official rules of etiquette in remaining seated, since he occupied the position of dictator at the time of this incident and therefore outranked the consuls.²⁹⁴ Instead, the implied offence was probably the result of later efforts to paint Caesar’s actions as those of a man who was becoming dangerously close to thinking of himself as a god.²⁹⁵ Ultimately, Caesar’s appearance in front of the Temple of Venus Genetrix was symbolic of his powerful position as the result of his status as the ‘true’ recipient of the goddess’ patronage, due to the Julian claim of her ancestry.

It might be initially tempting to suggest that the construction of the Temple of Venus Genetrix indicated that Caesar was not as eager to emphasise Venus’ martial qualities publicly as the other ‘great men’ of the Republic after his victory over Pompey in the Civil War. Yet this was

²⁹¹ Suet. *Caes.* 78. Although it is difficult to ascertain a precise date for this event, it is likely that it occurred in early 44 BC. Suetonius’ (*Caes.* 76) narrative places this incident after his discussion of Caesar’s fourth consulship, and Nicolaus of Damascus (130.22.78) claims that Caesar’s colleague as consul (i.e. Antony) led the procession, which is consistent with this dating.

²⁹² Nic. Dam. 130.22.79.

²⁹³ Nic. Dam. 130.22.79.

²⁹⁴ Weinstock 1971: 276. Coarelli (2007: 108) takes Nicolaus of Damascus’ account at face value, and argues that Caesar broke Republican norms of etiquette in remaining seated. This argument is less convincing than Weinstock’s interpretation.

²⁹⁵ Weinstock (1971: 276) argues this point, and cites the Lupercalia of 44 BC, when Caesar did not rise to meet Antony as his co-consul. For the Lupercalia incident, see Cic. *Phil.* 2.85. On the reception of senators, see Boëthius 1951: 27-30. On Caesar’s divinity and honours, see Carson 1957: 50-3; Gradel 2002: 54-61.

not the case. Although his temple in Rome was dedicated to Venus in her capacity as the ‘ancestress’ or ‘begetter’, rather than giving her the epithet ‘Victrix’ as Pompey had done in his theatre complex, there is no indication that Caesar sought to ignore her military characteristics. Literary evidence suggests that Caesar gave numerous offerings to the goddess at this temple, many with explicit military overtones. One of the most notable of these dedications is detailed in Pliny, who states that Caesar ‘during his dictatorship consecrated six cabinets of gems in the temple of Venus Genetrix.’²⁹⁶ His decision to gift gemstones to the goddess had a military precedent, for Pliny claims that such offerings were also made by Pompey after his success in the Mithridatic Wars, when he ‘dedicated in the Capitol among other offerings a ring cabinet that had belonged to King Mithridates.’²⁹⁷ Caesar was surely aware of the military significance that gemstones took on after Pompey’s dedication.²⁹⁸ Since Pompey had set a precedent for dedicating this type of offering after a successful campaign, however, it is possible that Caesar was using the opportunity to stake another claim to the goddess’ favour over his rival. Pliny claims that Caesar also offered a decorative cuirass to the goddess, stating that ‘small pearls of poor colour grow in Britain, since the late lamented Julius desired it to be known that the breastplate which he dedicated to Venus Genetrix in her temple was made of British pearls.’²⁹⁹ Caesar gave this cuirass to the goddess in approximately 46 BC, after he had celebrated the triumph for his victories in Gaul.³⁰⁰ It is undoubted that this gift was intentionally loaded with military significance, though there was also a strong political element to Caesar’s actions. Flory has convincingly argued that the dedication of a pearl cuirass to Venus was at least partially influenced by competition with Pompey, and was

²⁹⁶ Pliny *HN* 37.11. It is very difficult to establish a more exact date for this dedication, though it might have taken place upon Caesar’s return from Gaul in 46 BC, when he dedicated a pearl cuirass to the goddess.

²⁹⁷ Pliny *HN* 37.11. For more detail regarding the dedication of gemstones after military victory in the Imperial period, see Joseph. *BJ* 7.135-6; Vasta 2007: 114-15.

²⁹⁸ Pliny (*HN* 37.11) explicitly claims that Caesar was following Pompey’s example in dedicating the cabinet of gems to Venus. As such, the offering was probably intended to evoke martial themes.

²⁹⁹ Pliny *HN* 9.116. Flory (1988: 499) argues that the cuirass was not simply inlaid, but rather that it was made entirely from pearl. The colour of the pearls is particularly important, as this would have signified their British origins, thus explicitly linking the cuirass to Caesar’s British campaigns. For more detail regarding British pearls, see Tac. *Agr.* 12.6; Clausen 1947: 277-81.

³⁰⁰ See Flory (1988: 498) for the dating of the dedication, and its connection with Caesar’s triumph.

designed to highlight the superiority of Caesar's achievements over those of his former ally.³⁰¹ It is very likely that Caesar did intend for this offering to play a role in the dialogue of competition over Venus' martial attributes, since his gift of the gemstones to the goddess was also influenced by a desire to outdo Pompey.³⁰² Whilst Pompey was no longer alive by 46 BC, the pearl cuirass served as a tangible reminder that Caesar was the sole beneficiary of the goddess' ability to bestow military victory. Caesar's dedication of a cuirass and a cabinet of gems to Venus bore strong associations with warfare. It is undoubted that he intended for these offerings to reflect the goddess' patronage, and to serve as a reminder of his superior claim to Venus in the dialogue of competition over her military favour.

Militaristic themes also featured heavily in decorative elements throughout the complex, and it is clear that these were designed to advertise effectively Caesar's interactions with Venus as a martial patron who served both the Julii and the state itself. This decoration played a significant role in advertising the complex as a 'victory monument.' Several ancient authors indicate that an equestrian statue of Caesar riding his favourite horse was dedicated outside the Temple of Venus Genetrix.³⁰³ The strategic location of this statue further reinforces the complex's advertisement of the strong association between Venus and military victory. It seems probable that the remainder of the decoration in the Forum Iulium and the Temple of Venus Genetrix was thematically similar, in order to evoke the goddess' connection to the martial success of both Caesar and the state. This complex was undeniably intended to function as a manubial monument, and it contained numerous references to Caesar's military victories.³⁰⁴ However, Westall has argued that the defeat of Pompey

³⁰¹ Flory (1988: 499-500) suggests that this offering was intended to represent Caesar's victory over the ocean (Ocean) itself, achieved through his crossing into Britain. Therefore, Caesar was able to paint his military feats as rivalling even those of Pompey.

³⁰² Pliny *HN* 37.11.

³⁰³ For this statue, see Suet. *Caes.* 61; Pliny *HN* 8.155. For the identification of this work as an 'equestrian' statue, see Platner and Ashby (1929: 225), and Claridge (2010: 167). Claridge argues that the statue did not portray Caesar's famous cloven-hooved horse, but instead showed him riding Bucephalus, the war horse of Alexander the Great. Her interpretation of this statue, however, does not appear to be well supported in the ancient literature, despite the additional connotations of martial success that this identification might have brought.

³⁰⁴ For the forum as a manubial monument, see Suet. *Caes.* 26.

at Pharsalus was also alluded to carefully in the complex.³⁰⁵ He suggests that Caesar's decision to decorate his complex with a painting of Medea by Timomachus may have been intended to portray the defeat of Pompey, and the Pharsalus campaign.³⁰⁶ This initially appears to be a somewhat tenuous connection, but Westall suggests that Pompey was intended to be aligned with Apsyrtos, and Caesar with Medea, having played an instrumental role in the demise of his 'brother'. This argument appears reasonable, since any reference to Pompey's defeat in the Forum Iulium would have needed to be presented in a very coded manner. This complex ultimately became an arena for Caesar to advertise publicly his military feats and descent from Venus on a grand public scale. Given the politically competitive environment of the Late Republic, it is obvious that Caesar would choose to promote himself as the 'victor' of this competition through his monumental forum complex. Disguised claims to his defeat of Pompey should therefore be expected in the Forum Iulium, as a product of this dialogue.

Ultimately, the Forum Iulium was an innovative and politically unprecedented monument in the dialogue of competition over Venus' favour. While Caesar and Pompey had both engaged in grand projects of public munificence in order to demonstrate the strength of their personal connection with the goddess, the Theatre of Pompey and the Forum Iulium were constructed under different circumstances.³⁰⁷ The dissolution of the alliance between Caesar and Pompey, culminating in the Civil War, ensured that the political competition over Venus' martial favour became more intense than ever before. The longstanding ancestral link between the goddess and the Julii gave Caesar an advantage over Pompey, and allowed him to secure her military patronage as a result. Venus' status as the 'divine ancestress' of Caesar became a central feature of his public advertisement of her favour. Ultimately, the connection between the Julii and Venus became the crucial key that Caesar required to emerge effectively victorious in the dialogue of competition

³⁰⁵ See Westall 1999: 93-8.

³⁰⁶ Westall 1999: 97. For Caesar's decoration of the complex with these paintings, see Pliny *HN* 7.126, 35.26; Richardson 1992: 167.

³⁰⁷ As noted in Chapter 2 above, the Theatre of Pompey was partly intended to represent the combination of Caesar and Pompey's houses under one joint dynasty, since it was completed prior to the death of Pompey's wife Julia in 54 BC.

over the goddess' favour, a feat that none of the other 'great men' of the Republic had been able to achieve definitively.

Chapter 4 – Augustus and Venus: Ancestry, Public Image, and the State

Venus' position as the ancestral goddess of the Julii had been extensively promoted by Julius Caesar throughout his lifetime. He had effectively cemented his status as the 'true' recipient of the goddess' patronage, effectively surpassing the competing claims staked by the other 'great men' of the Late Republic. Whilst her ancestral role was integral to Caesar's projected public image, he did not ignore her well-attested martial qualities. Instead, her military power and ability to bestow victory became incorporated into the dialogue of descent promoted by Caesar, and were intrinsically linked to her status as the ancestress of the Julian family. Caesar's triumph over Pompey in the Civil War effectively demonstrated the favour that Venus would bestow upon her descendant, over the martial interests of other claimants to her patronage. The reception of Venus' military powers underwent further changes upon Caesar's death in 44 BC. Whilst a great deal of literature has been written regarding the political ramifications of this event, Caesar's well-advertised connection with Venus also ensured that the goddess' position in the religious landscape of Rome would remain central to the rise of Octavian, and the maintenance of his public image. This chapter will examine Octavian's interactions with the goddess, and will argue that Venus' martial attributes did not disappear after Caesar's death. Instead, the goddess retained military power throughout the Augustan period, and remained integral to the *princeps*' advertisement of legitimacy. Octavian was eager to engage with the divine ancestry of the Julii, which ensured continuity in Venus' support. An investigation of Octavian's engagement with the divine ancestry of the Julii, the representations of Venus in Augustan art and literature, and finally the presence of the goddess in the landscape of Augustan Rome will highlight the continued importance of her martial attributes and patronage in stabilising the *princeps*' control in the state following the turbulent period of civil war that dominated the Late Republic.

Octavian's claim of adoption by Julius Caesar in 44 BC allowed him to advertise descent from Venus through the Julii.³⁰⁸ Although the goddess was now also Octavian's ancestress as a

³⁰⁸ See Lindsay's (2009: 80-84) assessment of testamentary vs. lifetime adoption. Testamentary adoption would have presented numerous legal issues in the case of Octavian's adoption by Caesar, and would not have offered the same benefits as 'full' adoption. Appian (*B Civ.* 3.94) notes that Octavian sought the ratification of his adoption by Caesar

result of his adoption, there were some fundamental differences in his approach to her patronage. Most notably, he did not cultivate a close relationship with the goddess in the same vein as his adoptive father. Instead, Octavian primarily advertised Apollo as his personal patron. This attitude towards Venus might initially seem to indicate Octavian's desire to avoid explicit promotion of his inherited familial ties with Venus, in order to prevent any anti-Caesarian sentiment in Rome from destabilising his unprecedented position in the state. This theory, however, falls short when examining the archaeological, literary, and architectural evidence of the Augustan period. The extant material suggests that the dialogue of competition over Venus' military attributes remained evident into the Augustan period, though Octavian's approach to its advertisement differed from approaches adopted by his predecessors as a result of the altered political climate of this period. The need for explicit 'competition' over the goddess' favour was now diminished, and Octavian could instead focus on reinforcing his Trojan descent to legitimise his unprecedented level of sole power in the state. As a result of Venus' patronage, his political program and success in warfare were explicitly connected to the welfare of Rome itself, thus stabilising his extensive control over the state.

Paul Zanker has argued that Augustus' relationship with Venus can be broken down into several stages. He claims that in the initial phases of his rise to power, Augustus chose to exploit the ancestral connection between the Julii and Venus in order to emphasise his legitimacy, before choosing Apollo as his patron deity.³⁰⁹ Zanker then argues that it was 'only with the naming of his grandchildren as successors that the use of family mythology was revived, though not this time for personal self-glorification, as in the struggle with Marc Antony.'³¹⁰ While this argument considers the importance of continued family lineage to Augustus' political position in the state, there is

through a vote of the people, in accordance with the same law that was used to adopt orphans. Appian also notes that this granted the recipients the same rights as 'real' sons. Lindsay (2009: 84) argues that Octavian was probably aware of the problems associated with testamentary adoption, and intentionally sought this course of action to avoid encountering such issues. This conclusion is entirely likely, and it makes sense that Octavian would be eager to avoid any potential legal challenges to the legitimacy of his adoption by Caesar, which would otherwise destabilise his position in the state.

³⁰⁹ Zanker 1978: 193.

³¹⁰ Zanker 1978: 193.

plenty of evidence in Augustan art, architecture, and literature to suggest that Venus' influence never fell out of favour during the *princeps*' lifetime.

Apollo was indeed well-advertised as Augustus' preferred patron deity. Part of Augustus' own house on the Palatine was consecrated to Apollo after supposedly being struck by lightning, in a well-calculated attempt to create a visual connection between the two structures through the landscape.³¹¹ As a result, it is fair to argue that Venus did not occupy the same position of prominence in his personal religious program as she had held under Caesar. This does not mean, however, that her patronage and martial attributes were disregarded entirely by Augustus. The lack of competition for Venus' favour was a likely factor in the *princeps*' more subtle approach to her patronage, despite her role as Augustus' own 'divine ancestress' as a result of his adoption. The idea that Venus possessed martial power was still advertised during the *principate*, but there was no need for Augustus actively to defend his family's claim to her favour against another politically threatening competitor. Control over Venus' image remained an important element of Augustus' public image program. The manner in which he chose to engage with the goddess reflected both continuity and change from Caesar's interactions with Venus. Under Augustus, Venus' position in the religious landscape of the state changed appreciably from the position she occupied under Caesar as the mythical ancestress of the Julii. Her role as a 'founding figure' in Rome's mythical history became a central aspect of her reception. This role served to emphasise her importance to the state, and in so doing tied Augustus to Rome itself as a result of his adoption by Caesar. Robert Schilling argued that while Augustus engaged with Venus in an innovative manner, the fundamental influence of Caesar's dialogue of divine ancestry in this period is undeniable.³¹² Schilling believes that Augustus chose to introduce Mars into the dialogue surrounding Venus' reception, a move which added another dimension to his control over her image.³¹³ The addition of Mars, as shown by Augustus' construction of a temple to Mars Ultor in the Forum Augustum,

³¹¹ For ancient sources discussing the Temple of Apollo Palatinus and its dedication by Augustus, see Ov. *Fast.* 4.951-2; Vell. Pat. 2.81.3; Suet. *Aug.* 29; Cass. Dio 49.15.5. For more detail on the visual connection between the Temple of Apollo Palatinus, and the *Domus Augusti*, see Platner and Ashby 1929: 157; Kleiner 1992: 82-4; Gros 1995: 56-7; Welch 2005: 82-3; Dowling 2006: 134-5; Claridge 2010: 143; Wiseman 2012: 371.

³¹² Schilling 1954: 331.

³¹³ Schilling 1954: 331.

provided the *princeps* with an ideal means to explain his triumph over Caesar's assassins and his resulting unprecedented position in the state.

I. *The 'Son' of Caesar: Octavian's Engagement with the Divine Ancestry of the Julii*

After the death of Caesar, Octavian was aware that he needed to engage with the image and memory of his adoptive father cautiously. He was particularly eager to distance himself from the more unpopular actions of the former dictator, in order to preserve his own position in the state.³¹⁴ This helped to prevent any negative associations between Octavian's own political program and that of Caesar, and allowed him to maintain stability.³¹⁵ Octavian never sought, however, to sever the ties between himself and the dictator completely. In fact, Appian claims that Octavian asserted his status as the 'son' of Caesar after being advised to relinquish openly and publicly his adoption.³¹⁶ This familial connection instead proved useful in the immediate aftermath of Caesar's death, as Octavian sought to maintain his position in the power vacuum that resulted in the state. Whilst this course of action involved an element of risk for Octavian, it proved to be effective. Appian goes on to claim that he gained the support of the army as a result, and that the soldiers 'received him as Caesar's son...[so that] he took courage, offered sacrifice, and immediately assumed the name of Caesar.'³¹⁷ Octavian continued to emphasise his position as the son of Caesar throughout his lifetime, and could benefit from the Julian claim of divine descent from Venus.

³¹⁴ Octavian repeatedly refused to take the title of 'dictator' as Caesar had done, in order to avoid unwanted controversy regarding his position in the state. See *RG* 5; Vell. Pat. 2.89.5; Suet. *Aug.* 52; Cass. Dio 54.1 for accounts of Augustus' denial of the position.

³¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of Octavian's management of Caesar's memory, see Gruen (2005: 35), and Ramage (1985: 223-4). Gruen points out that Augustus' hesitance to avoid formally asserting his role in the state stemmed from his desire to avoid potential conflict amidst the senatorial elite.

³¹⁶ App. *B. Civ.* 2.11.

³¹⁷ App. *B. Civ.* 2.11. Appian goes on to claim that Octavian went further than this, and 'changed his own name and his patronymic completely, calling himself Caesar the son of Caesar, instead of Octavian the son of Octavius, and he continued to do so ever after.'

Venus' patronage of the Julii was well-advertised by the time of Caesar's death, and Octavian was in an ideal position to capitalise on the religious groundwork laid his predecessor.

While Octavian's interactions with Venus were generally more subtle than those of his predecessors, he was still eager to acknowledge publicly her connection with the Julii, and with Caesar himself. In 44 BC, Octavian provided games for Venus Genetrix, in a clear attempt to advertise his connection to the Julii through his adoption by Caesar.³¹⁸ Nicolaus of Damascus writes that Octavian 'gave some exhibitions on the occasion of the festival of Venus Genetrix which his father had established...[and] approached Antonius with a number of his friends, requesting that permission be given for the throne and wreath to be set up in his father's honour.'³¹⁹ Octavian's request was refused by the consul Antony, and Octavian made no further attempt to convince Antony to display the symbols, despite a senatorial decree already having been passed to grant these honours.³²⁰ Southern claims that Antony's actions were calculated 'to avoid stirring up popular feeling about Caesar, and so he refused permission for what he interpreted as an inflammatory gesture.'³²¹ Yet ancient evidence suggests that the popular reception of Octavian's proposal would have been overwhelmingly positive. Nicolaus states that upon entering the theatre, 'the people applauded [Octavian] loudly, and his father's soldiers, angered because he had been prevented from paying tribute to the honoured memory of his father, gave him, as a mark of their approval, one round of applause after another all through the performance.'³²² Octavian's adoption into the Julii worked in his favour in the aftermath of Caesar's death, since it allowed him to gain the favour of the general public, who remained supporters of the former dictator.

³¹⁸ Dio (45.6) makes it very clear that Octavian's provision of the games was motivated by his familial ties to the Julii, which would serve to boost his reputation amongst the populace who had supported Caesar.

³¹⁹ Nic. Dam. *Aug.* 28. Cf. Southern's (2014: 58) comment on the use of the word 'throne' here to demonstrate the item's significance in a modern context.

³²⁰ See Plut. *Ant.* 16; Cass. Dio 44.6.3.

³²¹ Southern 2014: 58.

³²² Nic. Dam. *Aug.* 28. See also Dio (45.6) for Octavian's relationship with the public around the time of this event, and his adoption by Caesar as a key factor in maintaining the good favour of the populace.

II. *Venus' Martial Powers in Augustan Art and Literature*

A great deal has been written about political messages conveyed by Augustan art and literature. As many scholars have noted, the art of this period was designed to advertise publicly messages about the legitimacy of Augustus' unprecedented power and position in the state. Kleiner summarises this process, and argues that Augustus 'combined politics, social policy, law, literature, religion, art and architecture, and even his own persona, in a seamless whole that reflected his ideology.'³²³ Republican works had a similar function, and a number of examples which bore rich religious and political significance have already been examined in this work. It is clear, however, that Augustan art and literature operated differently, and should be examined in the context of the unprecedented political world in which it was created. This is not to say that all works produced under Augustus were designed to fit only a 'narrative' approved by the *princeps*.³²⁴ Nevertheless, some common themes appear, especially in state-commissioned works which were designed to reflect Augustus' public image and political program positively. The representation of religious elements through visual imagery provided a powerful means through which Augustus could achieve this aim, and Venus became a central figure in this discourse.

Whilst Octavian was evidently eager to emphasise Venus' position as the divine ancestress of the Julii, portrayal of her martial characteristics throughout his lifetime remained intrinsically linked with his own projected public image. Literature, art, and architecture produced during the Augustan period attest to her continued reception as a goddess who could bring military victory to her descendants. Her martial attributes in these media were greatly influenced both by her central role in the mythical foundation of Rome as the mother of Aeneas, and her ancestral connections with the Julii during the Augustan period. This was the result of Augustus' desire to link his own political program to the foundation of Rome, in an attempt to preserve his unprecedented position in the state after the turmoil of the Civil Wars. Augustus' own military and political interests

³²³ Kleiner 1992: 113.

³²⁴ As Galinsky (1996: 225-6) argues, Augustan art and literature should not be treated as 'uniform', and instead should be examined in the context of its production, as an expression of 'the complexity of the times and of many dimensions of the Romans' view of themselves both as individuals and collectively.'

became synonymous with those of the state. Venus Genetrix was the ideal deity to emphasise this connection, as the divine ancestress of both the Julii and the Roman people.

Venus' ability to bestow martial favour on Augustus as a result of his familial ties was described in literature produced during his reign. The fifteenth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* offers an extremely detailed examination of the relationship between the goddess and Augustus, established through the ancestral claims of the Julii and Caesar. The *Metamorphoses* was completed near the end of Augustus' lifetime, and in it Ovid makes a number of references to Venus and her military power. Book fifteen discusses the deification of Caesar, and features a conversation between Venus and Jupiter on the subject of the dictator's impending murder at the hands of the conspirators. Venus is eager to prevent this event from occurring, but the gods are unable to alter fate.³²⁵ Jupiter consoles the goddess, and claims that Caesar's fate reveals that he is to be deified upon his death.³²⁶ Ovid engages heavily with Augustus' publicly advertised relationship with the Julii and Venus. Jupiter emphasises the connection between Augustus and Venus, before listing his future military victories achieved through the support of the gods. He claims that under Augustus, 'the conquered walls of leaguered Mutina shall sue for peace; Pharsalia shall feel his power; Emathian Philippi shall reek again with blood; and he of the great name shall be overcome on Sicilian waters.'³²⁷ Augustus' defeat of Antony is discussed in terms of his mistress Cleopatra, whom Jupiter claims 'will fall before him [Augustus], and in vain shall she have threatened that our Capitol shall bow to her Canopus.'³²⁸ Despite his well-known exile by Augustus soon after completion of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid here appears to promote

³²⁵ Ov. *Met.* 15.779-81. Simpson (2001: 465) argues that Ovid treats Caesar 'like a character in the *Iliad* and (perhaps) the *Aeneid* in this scene, which allows him to use elements of poetic wit and myth throughout the scene when discussing Caesar's deification. This in turn permits Ovid to approach the topic of apotheosis in an appropriate and accessible manner for his audience.

³²⁶ Ov. *Met.* 15.816-21.

³²⁷ Ov. *Met.* 15.822-25. Miller and Goold (1984: 423) claim that the man who bears 'the great name' should be identified as Sextus Pompey, who was defeated at the Battle of Naulochus by Agrippa in 36 BC. If the reference is to Sextus Pompey, it would recall the defeat of his father in the preceding Civil War fought against Augustus' adoptive father, Caesar. Ovid's juxtaposition of the military actions of Caesar and Augustus here must have been entirely intentional, and served to emphasise the familial ties between the two great men through their feats.

³²⁸ Ov. *Met.* 15.826-28.

Augustus' position in the state by advertising him as a 'protector' of Roman interests.³²⁹ The appearance of Venus strengthens this reading, and her concern for the welfare of her descendants was designed to reflect Augustus' political program, and promote the interests of the Julii as synonymous with those of the state.

A similar message was spread through sculpture produced in the Augustan period. The 'Prima Porta' statue is perhaps the most famous extant portrait of the *princeps*.³³⁰ It demonstrates Augustus' decision to engage subtly with the image of Venus. This statue has been subject to extensive research since its discovery in 1863 at the Villa of Livia, and remains one of the most recognisable pieces of Augustan art.³³¹ The surviving statue is a marble copy of a bronze original, which was probably set up in a public location in order to broadcast effectively the *princeps*' desired public image.³³² As Barbara Levick points out, the sculptor guided the viewer's engagement with the Prima Porta through several visual cues.³³³ Augustus is portrayed in a cuirass, with a cloak draped around his hips. Squire claims that the significance of this attire would have been acknowledged by a Roman audience, who 'would probably have understood the draped garment as a *paludamentum* – a military cloak worn by high-ranking generals on the field of battle, usually attached at the shoulder.'³³⁴ Most viewers would have at least recognised the statue's dress

³²⁹ Simpson (2001: 464-5) questions Ovid's political leanings in constructing this section of the poem, and notes that Ovid dealt with the matter of Caesar's deification through the actions of his adopted son. Little (1972: 399-401) argues convincingly that these passages in Book 15 were 'dedicatory in intent...[and] are expressions of loyalty which are practically judicious, but artistically irrelevant,' and as a result have little to do with the rest of the work. As the passage appears near the very end of Ovid's work, it appears that the author chose to include explicit 'praise' of the *princeps* and his family as a means of summarising the poem, rather than as an 'afterthought'.

³³⁰ This portrait famously took inspiration from the Greek 'Doryphoros'. It is, however, an undeniably 'Roman' work designed to convey explicitly political messages about Augustus' public image. For the Romanisation of Greek artistic elements in this statue, see Kleiner 2010: 63-7; Veltri 2010: 42-5.

³³¹ For more detail on the discovery of this statue, and its probable placement within the Villa of Livia, see Klynne and Liljenstolpe 2000: 125-27.

³³² Kleiner 2010: 68.

³³³ Levick 2010: 257.

³³⁴ Squire 2013: 249.

as an obvious connection between Augustus and martial success, even if some of the other references to the *princeps*' successful endeavours were less clear.

The figures depicted on the cuirass of the Prima Porta have been studied extensively over many years. Most scholars agree that they represent Augustus' successful military achievements, along with numerous references to his religious program, which ensured that the statue's advertisement of the *princeps*' desired public image was extremely effective.³³⁵ The figures in the centre of the cuirass were probably intended to depict Augustus' recovery from the Parthians of Roman standards which were lost by Marcus Licinius Crassus at the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC.³³⁶ The individual depicted on the left of this scene, which Zanker suggests is 'either a representative of the Roman legions or perhaps the embodiment of Mars Ultor himself,' is portrayed receiving the lost standards from the king of Parthia.³³⁷ Messages of retribution appear to have been continued throughout the remainder of the features on the Prima Porta statue. The small canine that appears next to the Roman figure in the central scene was probably intended to emphasise this point. Its identification has also been the subject of much debate amongst scholars, who either

³³⁵ See Galinsky 1996: 155-61. Kleiner (1992: 67) suggests unconvincingly that the figures on the cuirass were added by Tiberius when the original bronze statue was copied in marble, and feature the emperor himself as the 'hero' in the central scene. Kleiner also claims that, as a result, the breastplate of the original bronze statue was probably blank.

³³⁶ See Plutarch (*Vit. Crass.* 25) and Dio (40.22-7) for accounts of the losses suffered by the Roman forces at the disastrous Battle of Carrhae under the command of Crassus. Augustus' celebration of the recovery of these standards as a 'victory' was unusual, even within his own lifetime. Kathleen Shea has contrasted the representation of this event in the writings of Augustan authors with the narrative as it appears in Augustus' own public works. She concludes that the 'figure of the conquered Parthian king... was a feature that existed only in Augustan propaganda.' For more detail, see Shea 2011: 127.

³³⁷ Zanker 1978: 189. Holland (1947: 279) believes that the figures should be identified as 'not the god Mars and an abstract Parthia, but literally the king Phrates and a Roman general.' It is entirely possible that Augustus himself was being represented in this scene, perhaps embodying the ideas of just vengeance and the restoration of order that were associated with Mars Ultor himself. For more on this point, See Holland 1947: 279-80. The absence of a beard on the figure depicted on the Prima Porta is the strongest indication that Mars was not being represented here. Kleiner (1992: 67) argues that Tiberius is probably portrayed in this scene, and cites a desire for legitimacy as a fundamental reason behind this identification. This is not entirely unlikely, and would have helped Tiberius to connect his own public image with that of his adoptive father.

claim that it is a she-wolf, or simply an ordinary dog.³³⁸ Both identifications seem plausible, though they each bring different meanings to the scene. As Holland argues, the dog could be interpreted as a ‘warning’ of Rome’s military power, if the terms of Augustus’ negotiations were not accepted by the Parthians.³³⁹ Yet the she-wolf attribution seems more likely given the subject matter of the Prima Porta, as a tool to broadcast the *princeps*’ political and religious program. While any definitive identification of the canine is difficult, it appears to have been included in this scene to represent Roman intimidation of the enemy, which fitted in with Augustus’ desired dialogue surrounding the recovery of the lost standards from the Parthians. The other figures that appear on the cuirass surrounding the central scene enhance this reading, and Zanker argues that they were intended to be interpreted together, since ‘the victory over the Parthians is celebrated as the culmination of a perfect world order.’³⁴⁰ In this way, the Prima Porta statue was able to convey and solidify one of the key messages of the Augustan publicity machine – that the *princeps*’ martial prowess and intrinsic connection with the state were responsible for the restoration of order to the Roman world after the tumultuous events of the Late Republic.

Augustus’ recovery of the Parthian standards was clearly portrayed as a military victory, despite his use of diplomacy rather than violence to achieve this result.³⁴¹ Holland comments on this discrepancy, and suggests that the sculptor might have drawn inspiration from a scene in Book 12 of Vergil’s *Aeneid*.³⁴² Here, Aeneas appears at the treaty with Latinus in his armour, bare-

³³⁸ See Kleiner 1992: 67. For the argument that the canine is a she-wolf, see Galinsky 1996: 158. For its identification as a dog, see Holland 1947: 280; Buxton 2003: 373, n. 84.

³³⁹ Buxton (2003: 373, n. 84) also argues that the identification of this animal as a dog could affect the interpretation of the accompanying Roman figure. She notes that dogs were associated with ‘certain types of males: members of the minor *gens Antestia*’, and also suggests that this could be connected to the association between the *lares Augusti* and guard dogs. On this last point, see Buxton 2003: 378.

³⁴⁰ For more detail on this point, see Zanker 1978: 189. Zanker’s argument is convincing, since he considers the political program of the statue as a whole in reading the central scene.

³⁴¹ For further ancient evidence which presents Augustus’ ‘official’ account of the recovery of the Parthian standards, see *RG* 29, and *RIC* 288. Galinsky (1996: 155-6) offers a compelling interpretation of Augustus’ version of events in the recovery of the Parthian standards, both through the Prima Porta statue and in the *Res Gestae*. He claims that ‘the Augustan settlement was presented as anything but an agreement between equals,’ a view which is also supported in the accounts presented by the *Res Gestae* and coinage minted by the *princeps*.

³⁴² Holland 1947: 277-80.

headed and shouting out to his men.³⁴³ There is a clear parallel in the posture and stance of this statue, as the *princeps* appears in a pose which promotes his command and authority.³⁴⁴ Holland concludes that the ‘Prima Porta statue, stepping forward with head un-helmeted and right hand raised, is a literal enough illustration of this description to suggest a connection.’³⁴⁵ The representation of Augustus as a restorer of order was enhanced through the Prima Porta’s allusion to the divine ancestry of the Julii. A figure of a small winged child riding on a dolphin appears next to Augustus.³⁴⁶ It unquestionably represented Venus’ son Cupid. Many scholars have agreed that the inclusion of Cupid on this statue was intended to serve as a symbolic allusion to the *princeps*’ ancestral connection with Venus through Caesar.³⁴⁷ It appears, however, that this element of the statue was also intended to reflect the goddess’ martial patronage of Augustus as a result of his ancestral connection through the Julii. Galinsky has offered a similar interpretation, and suggests that Cupid’s dolphin was ‘an allusion to the sea victories of Augustus.’³⁴⁸ This argument is convincing in light of the militaristic overtones of the statue. Once again, this imagery directly connects Venus to the *princeps*’ martial ability, and indicates that his actions are divinely sanctioned in the interests of the state.

Venus’ appearance in Vergil’s *Aeneid* similarly used the ancestry of the *princeps* to legitimise his actions and position in the state, with the work containing numerous references to the goddess’ bestowal of martial favour upon members of the Julii. This epic poem was designed

³⁴³ Verg. *Aen.* 12.311.

³⁴⁴ For a discussion of the pose of the Prima Porta and Augustus’ *auctoritas*, see Galinsky 1996: 24-9.

³⁴⁵ Holland 1947: 278. Holland also combats the idea that the statue’s bare feet indicate that it was produced after Augustus’ death using this argument. She claims (1947: 279-80) that Aeneas would also have been depicted without boots, therefore indicating that Augustus is imitating his ancestor.

³⁴⁶ Kleiner (1992: 65) claims that this dolphin was intended to reflect Augustus’ victory at Actium. This seems possible, though there were other important naval victories.

³⁴⁷ For a discussion of the reference to Augustus’ divine descent from Venus provided by the Cupid figure, see Zanker 1978: 189, and Galinsky 1996: 160. Levick (1992: 65) claims that the inclusion of Cupid might have had ‘dynastic implications’ in addition to the obvious reference to the Julian ancestral connection with the goddess. Certainly, Augustus’ own grandchildren were still alive at the probable time of the statue’s production, but a more cautious approach is preferable. As Buxton (2003: 35) argues, the inclusion of Cupid on the Prima Porta is probably only indicative of Augustus’ descent from Venus, rather than an advertisement of his intended successors.

³⁴⁸ Galinsky 1996: 160.

to promote the power and authority of both Rome and Augustus, and Marsh has argued that the *Aeneid* effectively communicated messages about the *princeps*' importance to the functioning and continued success of the state. She claims that by 'portraying not only the foundation of Rome as divinely ordained, but also the rule and birth of its new leader Augustus, the *Aeneid* could show the Roman people the grandness of both state and emperor.'³⁴⁹ This seems to have been the case throughout the poem, and it is likely that audiences would have responded positively to its content. The eighth book of the *Aeneid* contains perhaps the most famous example of Vergil aligning the goddess' association with military victory with Augustus' own successes. Here, Venus gifts Aeneas armour and a shield, upon which appears imagery associated with the foundation of the state. The most prominent feature of the shield is connected with one of Augustus' most famous victories, and is described by Vergil in great detail:

...here in the heart of the shield: the bronze ships, the battle of Actium, you could see it all, the world drawn up for war, Leucata Headland seething, the breakers molten gold. On one flank, Caesar Augustus leading Italy into battle, the Senate and People too, the gods of hearth and home and the great gods themselves. High astern he stands, the twin flames shoot forth from his lustrous brows and rising from the peak of his head, his father's star.³⁵⁰

The centrality of this scene suggests that Vergil intended to draw attention to Venus' well-advertised ability to bestow victory upon her descendants. Augustus and Aeneas probably represent different recipients of this power in this scene, namely the Julii and the Roman people.³⁵¹ Vergil further strengthens the association between Venus' martial power and Augustus' victory at Actium in his contrast between the Roman and Egyptian forces on the shield of Aeneas. Cleopatra is notably singled out for this purpose, as Vergil describes the queen 'mustering her armada,

³⁴⁹ Marsh 2013: 26.

³⁵⁰ Verg. *Aen.* 8.790-98. See also Nethercut (1971: 127), who suggests that the twin flames mentioned in this section of the *Aeneid* could be connected to imagery of twin snakes earlier in the work. He suggests that this reading indicates that the *princeps* is being portrayed in 'triumph over the powers of unreason.'

³⁵¹ Vergil (*Aen.* 15.796-8) makes an explicit reference to Augustus' adoption by Caesar, which reflects his status as a descendant of Venus. Roman identity was strongly linked to descent from Aeneas, the recipient of Venus' shield. As a result, it is likely that Venus' favouring of both Aeneas and Augustus was highlighted within this scene, drawing comparisons to her role in the state at the time Vergil was writing the *Aeneid* during the Augustan principate.

clacking her native rattles...as Anubis barks and the queen's chaos of monster gods train their spears on Neptune, Venus, and great Minerva.³⁵² Such an explicit contrast between Roman and Egyptian forces could hardly have escaped the attention of the poem's audience, and this helped to draw a clear distinction between the Roman forces and their foreign enemies in the battle. Vergil's decision to paint Antony with the same 'othering' language helped to justify Augustus' participation in conflict against his own countryman, since Antony was no longer considered 'Roman'.³⁵³ The gods of both Egypt and Rome are brought into this dialogue, with the Egyptian gods being discussed in highly negative tones. Vergil explicitly draws a contrast between the two sets of deities, in line with the dialogue of martial superiority. Each of the Roman gods plays a crucial role in ensuring success in the battle. Venus' presence in this scene was clearly designed to reflect Augustus' religious dialogue. She bestows martial favour upon her descendant, and thereby ensures the continued safety of the Roman state against the 'foreign' threat posed by Antony and Cleopatra.

The Boscoreale treasure is one of the later examples of 'Augustan' art which refers directly to the *princeps*' command over Venus' martial power.³⁵⁴ A *skyphos* from this collection depicts Augustus seated, surrounded by several divine figures, including Venus, Cupid, Roma, and Mars.³⁵⁵ One of the central features of this scene is the image of Venus appearing next to Augustus, and presenting the *princeps* with a figure of Victory standing atop a globe. She carries a laurel wreath in her hand, which Kleiner suggests was to be used to crown Augustus.³⁵⁶ This scene undeniably promotes Augustus' personal ties to Venus, and his ability to benefit from her martial

³⁵² Verg. *Aen.* 8.817-20. For a good discussion of Vergil's representation (and misrepresentation) of foreignness at Actium as a means to avoid the negative connotations of civil war, see Toll 1997: 45-8.

³⁵³ For another example of Antony being characterised as 'Egyptian' rather than Roman, see Cass. Dio 50.27.

³⁵⁴ The Boscoreale treasure was probably produced either late in Augustus' lifetime, or during the reign of Tiberius, based on the iconography appearing on one of the cups depicting Tiberius in a triumphal procession. See Kleiner (1992: 152-4), Kleiner (2016: 136), and Tuck (2015: 147-51) for a discussion of the Tiberian imagery and subsequent dating to the emperor's reign. Tuck argues that the cups were intended to link Tiberius' accomplishments with those of the now-deified Augustus. For arguments supporting production during Augustus' lifetime, see Kuttner 1982: 51 and Dowling 2006: 148.

³⁵⁵ For an image of this scene, see Kuttner 1995: 12.

³⁵⁶ Kleiner 1992: 153.

favour. The precedent for Venus' association with Victory cannot be ignored, and this imagery might even recall her representation in Pompey's theatre complex as 'Venus Victrix'.³⁵⁷ The intended audience for this object, however, is very different from that of some of the other works discussed throughout this chapter. The Boscoreale cups were privately owned, and were uncovered in the remains of a house destroyed in the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79.³⁵⁸ Some scholars have suggested that the scenes on the cups were directly copied from a lost public monument in Rome, though this argument is difficult to prove without any surviving material evidence of the corresponding scenes.³⁵⁹ Despite the fact that they were never publicly displayed, these cups allow an insight into the reception of Augustus' connection with Venus on a more personal level. As Dowling argues, the Boscoreale cups were highly valuable items, and 'their worn condition and careful hiding indicate they were prized family possessions.'³⁶⁰ It is likely that they were owned by someone who was reasonably well-connected with the Imperial family.³⁶¹ Therefore, the messages presented on the scenes of the vessels concerning Augustus' divine descent, and his ability to benefit from Venus' martial favour, were probably already well accepted by their owners. The imagery of the Boscoreale cups matches Augustus' own narrative regarding his claim to the Julian ancestry, and demonstrates the continued role of Venus in the martial success of the *princeps*, and the state itself.

³⁵⁷ For a discussion of Venus on the Boscoreale Cup in relation to other iconographic representations of Venus, see Kuttner 1995: 22-5. Koortbojian (2013: 142-3) claims that her representation on the vessel follows Late Republican precedents, as though she 'would once again play the role of the "bringer of victory"' in this scene. Cf. Koortbojian 2005: 194-6.

³⁵⁸ Tuck 2015: 148.

³⁵⁹ For scholars who support this argument, see Kuttner 1995: 201-5, Ando 2000: 258, Dowling 2006: 148, and Levick 2010: 255-6. Kleiner (1996: 154) states that while this argument is valid, the lack of surviving material evidence to support it means that any 'identification of the monument to which the original reliefs belonged is purely speculative.' A cautious approach to this argument is therefore preferable, since no definitive proof that the monuments were 'copied' currently exists.

³⁶⁰ Dowling 2006: 148.

³⁶¹ Dowling 2006: 148; Levick 2010: 256.

III. 'A City of Marble': Venus' Influence in Augustan Building Projects

By the time of Caesar's assassination, Rome boasted a number of prominent public building projects dedicated to Venus as a result of her patronage of individuals.³⁶² Within Augustus' lifetime, the Forum Iulium and its Temple of Venus Genetrix were still relatively new, prominent features of the city's landscape.³⁶³ Augustus' decision to construct his own forum in close proximity to Caesar's complex is a clear demonstration of his intention to connect the two spaces visually and ideologically. It is difficult to determine an exact date for the initiation of construction efforts on the Forum Augustum, though Octavian's vow to consecrate a temple to Mars Ultor before the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC allows for a rough *terminus post quem* to be established for the initial planning of this complex.³⁶⁴ There is quite a significant gap between the date of Octavian's vow and the completion of the temple, which took approximately 40 years to plan and construct. Macrobius' *Saturnalia* gives some indication that the architect employed for the forum may have been to blame.³⁶⁵ Yet it is difficult to determine the cause of the delay with any certainty, for Macrobius was writing much later in the fifth century, and was using the incident to relay a joke supposedly made by Augustus himself regarding the rate of progress on the forum.³⁶⁶ At any rate, the Temple of Mars Ultor was not dedicated until the 12 May 2 BC, and it seems either that the construction did not begin until long after Augustus' original vow, or that complications arose

³⁶² See the earlier chapters of this work for a discussion of the goddess' prominence in other public monuments dedicated by citizens throughout the Republic, including the Theatre of Pompey and the Forum Iulium. Venus' presence within these complexes, which dominated the landscape of the city, was thanks to her military and personal patronage of the monuments' benefactors.

³⁶³ Caesar was killed before the construction of his forum was complete, and it was Augustus who saw the complex finalised. See *RG* 20; Cass. Dio 45.6.4; Richardson 1992: 146.

³⁶⁴ *Ov. Fast.* 5.569-78; *Suet. Aug.* 29.2.

³⁶⁵ *Macr. Sat.* 2.4.9.

³⁶⁶ See Coarelli 2007: 108. Geiger (2008: 55-9) assigns the planning date to a point close to 19 BC, since Augustus had abandoned the planned dedication of another shrine to Mars on the Capitol at this time. This seems to be a reasonable explanation, though there is no certainty. For the planned dedication of this temple to Mars on the Capitol, see Cass. Dio 54.8.3.

at some point in the building process.³⁶⁷ Augustus publicly commemorated its completion, and Dio claims that its official dedication was followed by equestrian competitions, which thereafter became an annual event.³⁶⁸ The public entertainment that these competitions provided helped to emphasise the munificence of the *princeps* in adding yet another forum space to the city for the public to enjoy, and reminded the populace of the connection between the temple and its benefactor.³⁶⁹

The Forum Augustum was designed to have an immense visual impact on the city, in order most effectively to advertise Augustus' connection with the state and the Julii. When completed, this complex measured approximately 125 metres long x 118 metres wide, slightly exceeding the dimensions of the adjacent Forum Iulium.³⁷⁰ The clear visual connection between these two complexes was undeniably intentional, and served to reinforce the Julian connection with Venus and the foundation of the state.³⁷¹ This is particularly significant when considering the martial messages presented by the Forum Augustum, and indicates that Venus' military power was still regarded as influential during this period. Although his forum was reasonably large, Augustus had originally intended to expand it even further. Suetonius claims that the *princeps* was forced to

³⁶⁷ The date of the temple's dedication has been subject to much discussion in recent years. Platner and Ashby (1929: 220) follow the original date of 1 August 2 BC, which was based upon the accounts of the *Res Gestae* (22.2), Velleius Paterculus (2.100.2), and Cassius Dio (50.10). Some scholars, however, have argued convincingly for 12 May 2 BC as the dedication date. Simpson (1977: 91-4) favours this revised date on the basis of a passage from Ovid's *Fasti* (5.545-98). Fantham (2002: 206) and Richardson (1992: 160) support the date of 12 May.

³⁶⁸ Cass. Dio 60.5.

³⁶⁹ Coarelli (2007: 108) argues that the 'function of the new monumental square was to relieve the congestion of the crowds that thronged the two older fora and to create new space for trials and commercial activities.' The construction of this forum would have won the favour of the public, and enhanced Augustus' public image. As a result, the populace was likely to have been more receptive to the religious and political messages being spread by the Forum Augustum. For ancient evidence of the activities that would take place in this space, see Cass. Dio 55.10.1-5.

³⁷⁰ Coarelli 2007: 110. Platner and Ashby (1929: 221) and Richardson (1992: 160) believe that the forum was 90 metres wide. As Coarelli (2007: 110) points out, however, the modern road running through the complex (the Via dei Fori Imperiali) alters the appearance of the forum, and makes it seem smaller.

³⁷¹ This is especially true when considering the visual alignment between Caesar's Temple of Venus Genetrix, and the Temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum Augustum. This point will be discussed in more detail below. For the connection between these two complexes, see Richardson (1992: 160); Claridge (2010: 177).

build the complex ‘narrower than he had planned, because he did not venture to eject the owners of the neighbouring houses’ for the purposes of this project.³⁷² Although Augustus would probably have been able to persuade these owners to give up their land eventually, he undoubtedly made the conscious decision to reduce the size of his complex to avoid dissent, in order to protect and enhance his public image. The land that he did manage to acquire was some of the most central and desirable real estate in the city. Augustus publicly advertised that he built the Temple of Mars Ultor ‘from the spoils of war’ in the *Res Gestae*, and it is likely that the costs included the purchase of the required land.³⁷³ This source of funding adds another dimension to the intended messages of the complex, and reinforces its already heavily militaristic themes. This would have had a positive impact on Augustus’ public image, and advertised his success in warfare on a grand public scale.³⁷⁴ The Forum Augustum was unquestionably a martial monument, which was fully intended to highlight the connection between the *princeps* and the continued stability of the state through his descent from Venus.

The surrounding landscape played a crucial role in effectively broadcasting the intended messages of this complex. The Forum Augustum was strategically positioned, located on what was almost a 90-degree angle to Caesar’s Forum Iulium.³⁷⁵ This ensured that there was an unquestionable visual alignment between the two complexes, which allowed Augustus to interact with the messages broadcast by the Forum Iulium and use them to his advantage. He had already demonstrated a desire to emphasise his adoption by Caesar, and his decision to engage with the memory and divine associations of his father on a grand public scale should hardly be surprising. Caesar’s temple of Venus Genetrix played a particularly crucial role in the dissemination of Augustus’ religious and political program in the Forum Augustum. The Temple of Mars Ultor visually aligned with the Temple of Venus Genetrix, and it is surely no coincidence that the two

³⁷² Suet. *Aug.* 56. See also Kockel 1995: 289; Coarelli 2007: 108. Richardson (1992: 160) is more sceptical, and questions whether this account was invented to explain the unusual dimensions of the space.

³⁷³ *RG* 21. Cf. Richardson (1992: 160), who argues that the land itself was purchased from the spoils of war.

³⁷⁴ Zanker (1978: 195) argues that Augustus was eager to ensure that he was recognised as the sole benefactor of both the forum and its associated temple.

³⁷⁵ For an excellent map of the clear visual connection between these two spaces, see Richardson 1992: 161.

structures occupied similar positions in their respective forums.³⁷⁶ Furthermore, Venus' continued influence over the military fortune of her descendants was prominent within the Temple of Mars Ultor. A statue to the goddess was placed inside, evidently broadcasting her aid in successfully avenging the death of Caesar. Ovid claims that it stood in a group alongside a figure of Mars, and this positioning considerably strengthens the ideological connection between the two temples.³⁷⁷ As a result, Augustus' construction of the Forum Augustum was not an attempt to challenge those of Caesar, but instead should be viewed as a collaborative effort to build upon his predecessor's established religious dialogue in order to strengthen his own position.

The explicit military associations of the Forum Augustum were heavily emphasised by its featured temple to Mars Ultor. Augustus made a very deliberate decision to highlight military achievement in this complex, both to explain his unusual position in the state, and to boost his own public image by claiming the favour of Mars, and Venus. Cassius Dio claims that the martial significance of the forum and temple was expanded beyond simply its prominent visual position in the landscape, and the promotion of Augustus' own public image and relationship with these gods. Dio's account indicates that the new complex played an active role in civic life and rituals. He states that Augustus dedicated his forum complex so that

...those who were sent out to commands abroad should make that their starting-point; that the senate should take its votes there in regard to the granting of triumphs, and that the victors after celebrating them should dedicate to this Mars [that is, Mars Ultor] their sceptre and their crown; that such victors and all others who received triumphal honours should have their statues in bronze erected in the Forum; that in case military standards captured by the enemy were ever recovered they should be placed in the temple.³⁷⁸

It is clear that Augustus' intentions behind the construction of his forum complex amounted to more than simply an expression of public munificence. Its incorporation into numerous military

³⁷⁶ See Coarelli (2007: 111) and Claridge (2010: 158), who note the similar positioning of the two temples and the intended connection between them.

³⁷⁷ *Ov. Trist.* 2.295.

³⁷⁸ Cass. Dio 55.10.

events suggests that he wanted his public image to be intrinsically linked with martial success. In so doing, he expressed a close connection with the gods present in this arena.

The two (perhaps four) *exedrae* present in the Forum Augustum were an unusual architectural feature of the complex, though they were crucial in enhancing its ancestral associations.³⁷⁹ These semi-circular colonnaded areas contained statues of famous Roman men, including members of the Julii, Aeneas, and Romulus.³⁸⁰ Karl Galinsky suggests that the area resembled a ‘Hall of Fame’, which emphasised the ideas of peace and war.³⁸¹ It appears that a more personal connection between the *princeps* and the foundation of the state was advertised within this part of the Forum Augustum. Suetonius claims that Augustus used the *exedrae* to honour ‘the memory of the leaders who had raised the estate of the Roman people from obscurity to greatness...[and says that] in the two colonnades of his forum [Augustus] dedicated statues of all of them in triumphal garb.’³⁸² The use of Suetonius’ account alone could raise questions about whether the statues were present in the Augustan period, or were instead a later Imperial addition. His account, however, is corroborated by the contemporary Augustan poet, Ovid. In the *Fasti*, Mars appears descending into the forum, and on one side of the *exedrae* he sees ‘Aeneas laden with his dear burden, and many an ancestor of the noble Julian line... [and on] the other side he sees Romulus carrying on his shoulders the arms of the conquered leader, and their famous deeds inscribed beneath the statues arranged in order.’³⁸³ Augustus’ intentions behind the inclusion of this area in the forum could not have been more clearly signposted. By including members of his own family into the ‘Hall of Fame’ alongside individuals such as Romulus and Aeneas, he explicitly advertised the integral role that his family played in the state, due to their descent from Venus. Coarelli has argued that the *exedrae* were designed to complement and contrast each other, in a ‘compromise between tradition and innovation... [in which] Republican history takes on a

³⁷⁹ It has been suggested that an additional two *exedrae* existed at the South-West end of the Forum Augustum. This theory remains plausible, especially given the shape of the twelve sacred *ancilia* (shields) kept in the Temple of Mars, but absolute proof is elusive. For more detail, see Southern 2014: 339.

³⁸⁰ Geiger (2008: 59-60) discusses the insertion of this decorative feature into the forum, and concludes that it is impossible to tell whether it preceded the planning of the Temple of Mars Ultor.

³⁸¹ Galinsky 1996: 199. For a comprehensive analysis of this ‘Hall of Fame’, see Geiger 2008.

³⁸² Suet. *Aug.* 31.

³⁸³ Ov. *Fast.* 5.551-60.

new life and is at the same time identified with the history of the Julian family.’³⁸⁴ His interpretation of these spaces is particularly convincing, since it is clear that the *exedrae* were used by the *princeps* to communicate the legitimacy of his unusually powerful position in the state.

While the Forum Augustum was clearly designed to advertise the military success of its benefactor, it also reveals a great deal about Augustus’ interactions with the state’s religious landscape after the death of Caesar. Davis has argued that the forum’s emphasis on the mythical ancestry of the Julii, combined with its references to the ‘great men’ of Rome, indicates that the complex was designed to broadcast the legitimacy of the *princeps*’ position in the state by sending the message that ‘Rome’s history is Julian history and it culminates in Augustus.’³⁸⁵ This appears to have been the case, and there is no doubt that the forum served as an extremely powerful tool in advertising Augustus’ political program. The visual interactions between the Forum Augustum and the Forum Iulium also emphasise the importance of Augustus’ adoption by Caesar in solidifying his position in the state. As Augustus was able to claim descent from Venus, he could utilise the explicit connection between his family and the state’s foundation in his public works. Venus’ patronage was integral to the *princeps*’ political program, and her martial favour remained a recurrent theme throughout Augustan art, literature, and architecture. This allowed her descendant to capitalise on the now-extinct dialogue of competition over her favour that characterised the Late Republic, and ensure that he became a symbol for the continued prosperity of Rome.

³⁸⁴ Coarelli 2007: 111. See also Rutledge (2012: 250-56), who comments on the impact of the undeniable militaristic themes throughout this complex, and argues that the ‘forum constituted the ultimate procession of the *imagines*...[where the] *summi viri* arguably acted as *imagines* exhorting the viewer to deeds of *virtus* in war, whose divine patron Mars stood overlooking the scene.’

³⁸⁵ Davis 1999: 435.

Conclusion

Venus' attributes were not simple or static in Roman religious thought. She possessed attributes associated with love, beauty, and sex. However, her martial attributes exceeded those that were expected of all deities. Her influence over success in warfare became particularly prominent in Rome during the Middle and Late Republic, and into the Augustan age. The patronage of this goddess was the focal point of an intense dialogue of competition between the 'great men' of the Late Republic. Her military characteristics were influential in the careers of these individuals, and were the incentive for those who held political power in the later Republic to maintain her favour and patronage. A number of Republican temples, coinage, and literature created during this period indicate that her ability to bestow military victory was recognised by successful Roman generals. A greater focus on personal patronage by the goddess was evident as the political climate developed, and this is symptomatic of the increased power of individuals in the state towards the end of the Republic.

Roman religion and interaction with the gods was often connected with the promotion and construction of power relationships within society. However, Venus was not cynically employed as a political tool by the 'great men' of the Late Republic to influence the public. Instead, the personal relationships that Sulla, Pompey, Caesar, and Augustus fostered with this goddess probably demonstrate a genuine sense of piety and respect for her martial potential. Whilst the competition over her martial power was the driving force behind many dedications to the goddess, it is clear that the patronage of Venus was considered to be immensely powerful. The goddess' martial attributes were not static, and were subject to a number of influences. The temples of Venus Obsequens and Venus Erycina particularly demonstrate the development of her martial traits in response to different threats faced by Republican forces, who appealed to her on the basis of her success in warfare. Venus' concern with warfare remained evident under Sulla, but the political implications of her associations with good fortune were expanded during this period. Sulla's emphasis on the connection between Venus' patronage and his own military endeavours indicates that her earlier associations with warfare remained prominent, and were applied in a new context.

The benefits that Venus' martial patronage could provide to powerful individuals in the turbulent Late Republic were effectively demonstrated for the first time under Sulla.

Gnaeus Pompey was the next of the 'great men' to attempt to gain control over the goddess' martial favour, and he was eager to challenge Sulla's existing claim that he was the 'favourite' of Venus. His entry into the 'dialogue of competition' over her military power and patronage demonstrated an acute awareness of her previous military associations, but was characterised by another major shift in Roman engagement with her attributes. The prominent inclusion of a theatre to Venus Victrix in Pompey's famed theatre complex publicly demonstrated her influence in his military career up to 55 BC, and also hinted at ties with the Julii, since at this time there was a brief period of co-operation between Julius Caesar and Pompey. The *Theatrum Pompeium* was constructed during the marriage of Pompey to Caesar's daughter, Julia. This indicates that the two men had intended to combine their houses in a planned joint dynasty, where Venus herself was to act as patron of both families. However, the plan did not come to fruition. Upon the breakdown of their alliance, caused by the death of Julia, Caesar and Pompey set out to claim Venus' patronage competitively once more.

Caesar's participation in the competition over Venus' martial attributes was greatly influenced by the Julian family's 'descent' from the goddess. This connection undeniably offered Caesar a stronger claim to her patronage than any of his other rivals were able to advertise. His construction of the Forum Iulium was an innovative and politically unprecedented means through which he could display his personal connection with Venus, and was designed to stake Caesar's definitive claim to her martial favour and patronage in the ongoing dialogue of competition. While Caesar and Pompey had each engaged in the construction of grand-scale public facilities which demonstrated the strength of their individual connection with Venus, these monuments were ultimately constructed under different circumstances. As the alliance between Caesar and Pompey had broken down, and Civil War had emerged between the two men, it is undeniable that the political competition over Venus' martial favour reached unprecedented levels. The pre-existing ancestral link between the goddess and the Julii gave Caesar a huge advantage over Pompey, and allowed him to secure her military patronage definitively upon the defeat of his adversary. Venus' status as the 'divine ancestress' of Caesar thus became a central feature of his public advertisement of her favour. Ultimately, his familial connection with the goddess became the crucial key that was

required for Caesar to emerge effectively victorious in the dialogue of competition over her martial favour and patronage, a feat that none of the other 'great men' of the Republic had been able to achieve.

Augustus' interactions with the goddess differed from those of the other 'great men' due to a shift in the political climate of the Roman state after Caesar's death. However, her martial favour and patronage of the *princeps* remained ever-present within numerous works of Augustan art, literature, and architecture. Augustus' construction of the Forum Augustum was largely focussed on broadcasting his legitimacy, and heavily advertised the Julian ancestral claims in order to achieve this goal. As a result, Augustus used Venus' familial connection and patronage of the Julii in order to make his political program synonymous with the welfare of the Roman state. The explicit visual interaction between the Forum Augustum and the Forum Iulium also indicates that Augustus was eager to use the Julian claim of descent from the goddess. Venus' patronage was integral to the *princeps*' political program, and her martial favour was not diminished after the death of Caesar. Her associations both with military victory and the foundation of the state allowed her descendant to capitalise on the now-extinct dialogue of competition over her favour that characterised the Late Republic, to ensure that his political program was received positively after a turbulent period of civil war.

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