

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Material Religion in Pompeii

### Edited Book

How to cite:

Hughes, Jessica ed. (2021). Material Religion in Pompeii. Open University: Open Arts Journal.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2021 The Open University



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<https://openartsjournal.org/issue-10/>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's [data policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](https://oro.open.ac.uk)



# MATERIAL RELIGION IN POMPEII

Edited by Jessica Hughes

## CONTENTS



### MATERIAL RELIGION AND POMPEII: INTRODUCTION

Jessica Hughes



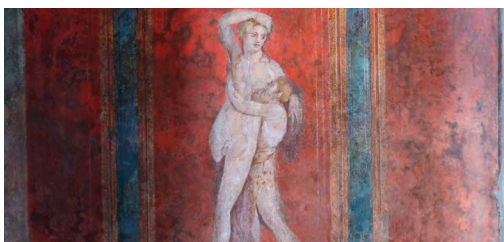
### THE DIVERSITY OF POMPEII'S DOMESTIC CULT ACTIVITY

Annette Haug and Patric-Alexander Kreuz



### AT HOME WITH THE LARES: LIVED RELIGION REMATERIALIZED AT POMPEII

Emma-Jayne Graham



### MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL RELIGION IN POMPEIAN PAINTING

Nathaniel B. Jones

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

Banner image: Detail from a garden painting, from the House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. (Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

## CONTENTS (CONTINUED)



### **SENSING HERMAPHRODITUS IN THE DIONYSIAN THEATRE GARDEN**

Brittany DeMone and Lisa A. Hughes



### **MATERIAL MUSIC IN RITUAL SOUNDSCAPES OF POMPEII**

Mirco Mungari and Kamila Wyslucha



### **GUARDIANS OF THE THRESHOLD: THE IMAGE OF THE GLADIATOR AND ITS PROTECTIVE FUNCTION IN POMPEII**

Joe Sheppard



### **TRACING PROCESSION ROUTES FOR THE PRINCIPAL CULTS IN POMPEII**

Ivo van der Graaff and Eric Poehler



### **POMPA IN POMPEII: EXPERIENCING A FUNERAL PROCESSION IN THE ANCIENT CITY**

Virginia L. Campbell

Images in this issue are intended for personal use only. Every effort has been made to contact copyright holders. If any have been inadvertently overlooked the editors will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.



# MATERIAL RELIGION AND POMPEII: INTRODUCTION

Jessica Hughes

## Abstract

*This opening essay introduces the term 'material religion' and gives a brief account of this academic field and its history. It considers how and why classicists and classical archaeologists have not yet fully engaged with the debates around material religion and indicates some of the reasons why it might be important to do so.*

**Keywords:** material religion, Pompeii, classical archaeology, senses, embodiment, lived religion

**Full text:** <https://openartsjournal.org/issue-10/article-0/>

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2021s00>

## Biographical note

Jessica Hughes is Senior Lecturer in Classical Studies at The Open University. Her research focuses on aspects of material religion, memory studies, classical reception and the changing religious landscape of Campania, Italy. Her publications include *Votive Body Parts in Greek and Roman Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2017) and *Sensual Religion: Religion and the Five Senses* (Equinox, 2018, co-edited with Graham Harvey).

Banner image: Detail from a garden painting, from the House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. (Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

# MATERIAL RELIGION AND POMPEII: INTRODUCTION

Jessica Hughes, The Open University

This themed issue of the *Open Arts Journal* takes a fresh look at the relationship between religion and material culture in the ancient city of Pompeii – our most comprehensively preserved archaeological site from any period of antiquity. The time is ripe for a reassessment of Pompeian religion, and not only because of the new evidence that has been unearthed in the EU-funded excavations of Region V of the city ('The Great Pompeii Project') – things like the extraordinary collection of gems and amulets found in the House with the Garden in 2019, and the paintings and mosaics depicting mythological scenes of Leda and the Swan and the metamorphosis of Orion (Figs. 0.1–0.3; Osanna, 2019). While these new discoveries have certainly reinvigorated discussions about, for instance, the relationship between our concepts of 'religion' and 'magic', and the roles played by narrative, intimacy and violence in the construction of ancient deity, an even more urgent stimulus for this study is found in the great range of theoretical approaches and debates that have been unfolding outside of classical archaeology for the past two decades, which have the potential to add a richer texture to our understandings of Pompeii and of ancient Mediterranean religion more widely. The central aim of this themed issue, then, is to use the case study of Pompeii to bring our work on Greco-Roman religion into conversation with some key theoretical movements in the disciplines of religious studies, anthropology and art history, and particularly the set of approaches grouped under the title of 'material religion'.

What do we mean by material religion? The term tends to be used in two broad and overlapping ways. Firstly, it is often used to refer to the 'physical stuff' of religion – candles, rosaries, ex-votos, souvenirs of holy sites, as well as those sites themselves, and the many human, animal and plant bodies with which all this 'stuff' interacts and assembles (on assemblage theory and Roman religion, see Graham, 2021). In many ways, this is a relatively clear and uncomplicated definition, although it does require some clarity about exactly what is included in the category of 'religion'. Religion is often taken as a self-evident category by classicists, but in the fields of anthropology and religious studies its characteristics and boundaries have been subject to lengthy consideration. Definitions have ranged from

'the belief in Spiritual Beings' (Tylor, 1871, p.383) to 'confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries' (Tweed, 2006, p.54). In this journal issue, the word 'religion' is used to refer to *the everyday work that is done to create and sustain the network of relations that exist between humans and a range of 'other-than-human' persons* – a description which draws on the work of Graham Harvey (2013, 2017) and, through him, Irving Hallowell (1960). Such a characterisation encompasses all the usual types of material culture that appear in existing literature on Pompeian religion (household shrines, wall-paintings, temples, altars and so on), but also leaves space for things like wax masks of ancestors, paintings of snakes, weapons and the blood and body parts of gladiators. The inclusion of the word *everyday* puts deliberate emphasis on the mundane and the vernacular, implicitly acknowledging that acts like, say, sweeping a temple floor or pruning a grapevine, are just as much part of religion as more dramatic and obviously numinous moments like cutting a bull's throat in a sacrificial ritual. The emphasis on *relations*, meanwhile, is intended to forefront the idea that 'religion is a way in which humans engage with our other-than-human relatives in the larger-than-human world' (Harvey, 2017, p.494).

The second dominant way that the phrase 'material religion' is employed is in reference to the academic *study* of the religious material culture described above. In this case, material religion indicates a set of approaches and debates which grew out of a broader material turn in the humanities, and which intersects with work on the body, sensory studies and 'lived' and 'vernacular' religion (Primiano, 1995; Bowman & Valk, 2012). Much of this research has been centred on the publication *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief*, which was founded in 2005 by a group of scholars working in and across the disciplines of visual culture studies, film studies and museum studies (David Morgan, Brent Plate, David Goa and Crispin Paine). The journal's first editorial described its aim 'to consider religion through the lens of its material forms and their use in religious practice', which in turn entailed a broadening of focus to include more than just the conventional topics of 'narratives, or documents such as sermons and doctrinal statements...', its institutions, or its leading figures, or in the way in which it takes shape in such social forces as revival, revolution, urbanization, or migration' (Editorial Statement, 2005, p.5). This new attention to material things went beyond traditional art-historical analyses of iconography and style to consider 'what the images or objects or



Figure 0.1: A selection of beads and other small objects excavated from the House with the Garden, Region V, 2019. (Photo: with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

spaces themselves do, how they engage believers, what powers they possess, and in what manner a community comes to rely on them for the vitality and stability of belief' (p.7). Again, this required a widening of scope to embrace vernacular, low-status objects such as clothes, car bumper stickers, cheap devotional icons and so on; perhaps most importantly, it involved a genuine commitment to the interdisciplinary, multi-strand approach necessary for a full understanding of the complex relationship between materiality and belief.

Over the past fifteen years since the *Material Religion* journal was founded, the field has grown exponentially, pushing forward these initial debates as well as sparking new ones. Landmark publications have included monographs like Manuel A. Vasquez's *More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (2010), David Chidester's *Religion: Material Dynamics* (2018), the earlier book *Material Christianity* by Colleen McDannell (1995) and now David Morgan's *The Thing about Religion* (2021). Numerous cross-disciplinary edited volumes have appeared with titles like *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (Morgan, 2009), *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality* (Houtman & Meyer, 2011) and *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of*

*the Sacred* (Hutchings & McKenzie, 2018). Dozens of conference panels as well as entire conferences over the past decade have been devoted to material religion, and a new book series, *Bloomsbury Studies in Material Religion*, was launched in 2018. The field has matured to such an extent that we are now seeing the publication of introductory handbooks like *Key Terms in Material Religion* (Plate, 2015), and of retrospective accounts outlining the field's genealogy and its internal diversity, as well as its limitations (e.g. Engelke, 2012; Hazard, 2013). All in all, while the study of things like murals, internet memes or even printed photographs might once have been relatively peripheral to religious studies, they are now firmly part of the scholarly mainstream, where they are brought into lively dialogue with broader theoretical ideas, such as object biographies and object agency, as well as posthumanism and the 'new materialism'.

Yet, in the midst of all this activity, voices from classical studies have been rather quiet. Until recently, 'material religion' was not a commonly heard phrase in conversations about the Greco-Roman world (which instead referenced 'the archaeology of ritual', 'the archaeology of religion' or similar), and

the cross-disciplinary, edited volumes and journal issues mentioned above contain very few (if any) contributions by researchers working on ancient Greco-Roman religion. This separation of classical studies from wider developments in religious studies has already been noted by other scholars of ancient religion, amongst them the members of the five-year 'Lived Ancient Religion' (LAR) project. This project was based in Erfurt between 2012 and 2017, and its activities form an important part of the background for this current journal issue, alongside those of people working in ancient sensory studies (e.g. Betts, 2017). The LAR team have commented, for example, on the tendencies of many classicists to focus on civic, collective, institutionalised religious practices rather than individual lived experience, and to study ancient paganism as something that is entirely separate from ancient Christianity and Judaism, concluding that 'the long-term price of these commitments has been to uncouple the ancient world from shifts of approach that have long since been established in the mainstream or global study of religions, to the extent that it no longer has a place in many standard works, and is at best confined to its own safe little corner' (Albrecht et al., 2017, p.569). Insofar as materiality is concerned, this 'uncoupling' has meant that studies of Greco-Roman religion have remained focused on traditional issues of iconography, artistic style and chronological dating, and have been less attentive to the body, senses, lived experience or material affordances (to name just some of the key themes of work in material religion). In other words, at Pompeii and elsewhere in the ancient Mediterranean, the accurate identification of subjects in mosaics and paintings and the construction of a solid chronology for temple buildings are often still implicitly taken as the end-goals of analysis, rather than as a foundation for asking further questions about the manifold ways in which 'religious formations [...] emerge under material conditions' (Chidester, 2018, p.xi).

Iconography and chronology will always be central to work on Roman religion and may even remain the most valued types of knowledge, of most interest to the greatest number of people. It is crucial to state here that adopting a material-religion approach does not in any way entail the erasure or even the marginalisation of these deep-rooted archaeological and art-historical methods, which, after all, give us the means to make sense of a world that exists only in and through fragments. At the same time, there is no denying that these approaches tend to push the body and lived experience into the background, for instance by retrospectively gathering evidence from a vast

range of times and places, or by highlighting changes over timescales that far exceed the human lifespan. So what happens if we take a Pompeian temple, and instead of asking (only) which god it was dedicated to, or when it was built, renovated or destroyed, we *also* use it to explore issues like how 'religious meanings are created and experienced by specific, embodied individuals endowed with sensorimotor and cognitive capacities and limits, as they encounter the world practically, as they shape and are shaped by the natural and social environments, and as they enter into power relations with other individuals with whom they share spaces of livelihood' (Vasquez, 2010, p.84)? What would it mean to consider a mosaic or a painting or glass gem – not only from the perspective of who or what it represented or to whom it belonged – but also in terms of how the object's material affordances were combined with the human sensorium (and with other objects) to make divine beings present in culturally specific ways? Ancient Pompeii is exceptionally well-positioned to help us address these questions, and not only because of the enormous volume of material evidence that was preserved by the 79 CE eruption of Vesuvius. The excavations already bring together trained scholars from across a number of humanistic and scientific disciplines, with archaeologists, art historians and epigraphers working alongside volcanologists, archaeobotanists, organic chemists, microbiologists and many others. This multi-strand, decades-long, cross-disciplinary research programme thus gives us a firm platform on which to build our own contributions to the debates around material religion – debates which have the enormous benefit of putting classical studies into new global and transhistorical perspectives.

### Plan of the journal issue

This issue of the *Open Arts Journal* starts, then, from a conviction that looking at Pompeii through a material-religion lens can add something important to our understanding of this ancient city. The essays contained here build on earlier studies of Pompeian religion (e.g. Van Andringa, 2009; D'Alessio, 2009) to explore different aspects of the dynamic relationship between bodies, matter and senses in a range of Pompeian spaces, including bedrooms, kitchens, gardens, streets, temples, bars and theatres. While each essay adopts different methods, all contributors were encouraged to focus on the materiality of objects, bodies and senses, and to think about how these things worked with (or against) the literary texts which have often been the starting point for the study of Roman religion. What does our Pompeian evidence suggest about how webs of relations were created between

human and other-than-human persons? How were the qualities of material objects activated through the senses? How might some of the emergent ‘key terms in material religion’ (Plate, 2015) – amongst them ‘time’, ‘emotion’, ‘space’, ‘ritual’, ‘food’, ‘maps’ and ‘magic’ – be brought to bear on our ancient data? Although some essays address these questions more explicitly than others, and not all authors are in agreement, we hope nonetheless that this *Open Arts Journal* issue will provide an impetus for further explorations of the vibrant relationship between religion and materiality in Greco-Roman antiquity.

Annette Haug and Patric-Alexander Kreuz set up the overarching chronological framework of the whole collection, outlining some of the ways in which Pompeian household religion developed between the second century BCE until the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE. They draw on a wide selection of archaeological evidence from houses across Pompeii to paint a picture of gradually increasing diversity and eclecticism, from the simple wall niches of the earliest period (‘cultic micro-architectures’) to the rich array of mythological paintings, statuettes and other movable objects that were used in and after the Augustan era. Throughout their essay, the authors highlight the vital importance of contextual analysis, particularly in relation to how images and objects were positioned in space — something which is difficult to appreciate when paintings or other objects are accessed via two-dimensional photographs, detached from their wider assemblages. They introduce the concept of multidirectional inter-visibility, explaining, for example, how niches containing painted images of the Lares (the protective deities of the Roman household) were positioned not only so that the Lares could be seen and acknowledged by the house’s inhabitants and visitors, but also so that these gods themselves could keep watch over all these human comings-and-goings. Alongside these spatial and kinaesthetic considerations, the authors also introduce other sensory aspects, for instance by noting the olfactory potential of burnt offerings of fruit, plants, animal bones, grains, vegetables, nuts and pinecones, accessed via fossilised remains found *in situ* on domestic altars. Another important theme highlighted in this essay is the continued use in the later periods of much older ritual objects – probably family heirlooms – which provided an ‘atmosphere of antiquity’ and which, we might suppose, strengthened connections with ancestors as well as gods. This conscious archaising impulse resurfaces in later essays, too (e.g. with the processions discussed by Ivo van der Graaff and Eric Poehler), and pinpoints a significant advantage of using Pompeii as a case study:

that is, the city’s long history of occupation, which enables us look at material religion over the *longue durée*, tracking the biographies of objects and buildings as well as the evolution of materially based traditions.

Haug and Kreuz’s essay demonstrates the wide range of material choices that were available to Pompeian households by the time of the eruption. The next essay by Emma-Jayne Graham looks at two particular constellations of cult objects, space and bodies, in the form of two shrines dedicated to the Lares, which were located close to one another in Regions V and VI of the city. The first of these shrines was located in a kitchen inside the House of the Epigrams, named after the lines of Greek poetry painted on the walls of its interior. The second shrine was situated just a few hundred metres to the south, in the open air, and at a large and busy crossroads. In her essay, Graham provides a detailed comparison of these two shrines and the way in which they engaged human bodies in sensory activity. Although both of these cult places belong to the same overarching category of Lares cult, she shows how there were nonetheless stark differences in how people experienced each shrine, for instance, in relation to space, movement, temperature, scent, light and the proximity of other bodies. This sensually engaged comparison is then used as the basis for exploring two different forms of religious knowledge – ‘distal knowledge’ (the shared, generalised knowledge gained from being part of a broad cultural context) and ‘proximal knowledge’ (based on unique personal and embodied experiences of particular rituals). As her essay demonstrates, an investigation of proximal knowledge is particularly helpful when it comes to making sense of the pair of large snakes depicted in the bottom half of many of Pompeii’s *lararia*, winding through plants and rocks and receiving offerings of eggs and pinecones on their own personal altars. Harriet Flower and other scholars have convincingly interpreted these snakes as ‘gods of place’ who look after particular locales, encouraged by the offerings and attention of the people who lived there (2017, p.67). By emphasising the unique qualities and experiences of particular locales, their affective properties and material affordances, Graham demonstrates the extent to which these snakes were not only gods of place, but also ‘gods in place’ – whose worship increased and consolidated the embodied and emotional links with a particular locale, at the same time as they protected it.

Next, Nathaniel Jones takes a fresh look at Pompeian wall paintings – perhaps the best-known and most definitive genre of material culture from the Bay of Naples. Wall paintings appear very frequently in book chapters and articles about religion in Pompeii, but





Figure 0.2: Fresco depicting Leda and the Swan, discovered in the Region V excavations, 2018. (Photo: with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

their analysis there is often quite limited – in general, they are used to illustrate the range of divinities that were worshipped in Pompeii or to extrapolate details of ‘real-life’ rituals (the most famous example perhaps being the Dionysiac frieze from the Villa of the Mysteries). Here Jones adopts a more nuanced and theoretical approach, using ‘meta-paintings’ of ritual objects (altars, votive paintings, divine statues and so

forth) to explore a wider theme that has resounded through the material-religion literature, that is, the boundary between the material and immaterial. As Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer noted in 2011, “material” and “immaterial” are not *given* categories that echo a commonsense definition of matter and things. Instead, what features as material or immaterial depends on socially shared, authorized discourses or, to invoke

Keane's felicitous expression, "semiotic ideologies" (p.7). Jones demonstrates how the boundary between materiality and immateriality in Pompeian painting is closely connected with the widespread ancient discourses around artistic illusion and mimesis, noting the tendency of these paintings to invite the viewer into these scenes, with their painted garden walls, uncannily suspended masks and 'stone' altars which 'simultaneously affirm and deny their purported materiality'. This essay also draws our attention to the sheer variety of sculptural and other materials that are represented in Pompeian paintings, from shining white limestone and variegated marbles to bronze, silver objects and a wide range of colourful textured fabrics. We know from ancient writers that the materials of sculpture were central to Greco-Roman 'semiotic ideologies': Pliny the Elder, for example, organised the art-historical chapters of his *Natural Histories* according to the materials of sculpture, while Pausanias, in his *Guide to Greece*, shows at least as much interest in the materials from which statues are made as in their subjects, artists or dates of creation. All this confirms that we need to give far more attention to the properties, histories and affordances of ancient artistic materials, if we are to better understand how they worked to structure the 'socially shared, authorized discourses' around materiality and religion.

The essay by Brittany DeMone and Lisa A. Hughes moves us from the Pompeian house out into the garden – specifically the 'Dionysian Theatre Garden', a term which the authors use to signify gardens with a mixture of characteristics including (amongst other things) peristyles, stage platforms, dining areas and fragrant plants, in which conviviality and cult were brought together. DeMone and Hughes focus their discussion on the figures of Hermaphroditus and Dionysus. (As an aside, it is interesting to note that Dionysus appears more than any other god in the pages of this journal issue – is this sheer chance or does the overtly sensual and liminal nature of his cult make him a particularly attractive subject for material-religion analyses?) The authors begin by scrutinising images of Hermaphroditus (the dual-sexed or 'inter-sexed' child of Hermes and Aphrodite) in Pompeian frescoes, drawing attention to the powerfully sensual elements of these representations – the bright yellow colour of saffron robes, the strong spicy scent which that colour evoked, the imagined sound of the drum and lyre depicted near to the god, and the taste of the wine or aphrodisiac in his cup. Each of these attributes or sensations, they point out, has some connection with Dionysus. Moreover, they observe that Hermaphroditus frequently appears with other members of Dionysus's

retinue (his maenads, satyrs and Silenus). A detailed discussion of the Hermaphroditus episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* draws out further links with Dionysus and leads onto an investigation of Hermaphroditus' role in the Dionysian Theatre Garden. Twenty-four of the thirty-three representations of Hermaphroditus in Pompeii were found in Dionysian Theatre Gardens – a statistic which has previously been explained with reference to the contemporary Augustan marriage laws and Hermaphroditus' literal embodiment of male-female union. DeMone and Hughes, however, point out the logical problems with that interpretation, and instead explore alternative readings, including the associations of Dionysus and Hermaphroditus with Venus, patron deity both of Pompeii and of gardens. They present the intriguing hypothesis that sculptures of Hermaphroditus may have been incorporated into live pantomime performances in gardens, which may sometimes have been based on the story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. If this hypothesis is correct, it would be a particularly clear example of how objects could become animated and temporarily combined into new dynamic relationships with human bodies and their surroundings. Even without the pantomime element, this essay reaffirms the value of putting sculptures and other artworks back into their original contexts, to consider where gods were placed and where their lines of sight might lead (in this case, we see Hermaphroditus gazing out towards Venus). This enables us to notice new connections between deities and other beings, again highlighting aspects of their characters which are not necessarily communicated by ancient texts or modern books or websites.

One key aspect of studying material religion in historical contexts is the widening of scope to include senses other than vision. The essay by Kamila Wyslucha and Mirco Mungari explores the role of music and sound in Pompeian ritual landscapes. Studying sound in Pompeii has its obvious challenges, but here the authors highlight the rich diversity of our surviving evidence, which comprises not only the visual imagery of wall paintings and mosaics, but also the archaeological remains of real instruments *and* of the spaces in which these instruments would have been sounded, whether temples, streets, theatres or rooms within houses. Drawing on Raymond Murray Schaefer's concept of soundscapes, and introducing the notion of 'soundclouds', Wyslucha and Mungari take us through three different contexts for ritual music: sacrifices, processions and the mystery cults dedicated to Cybele and Dionysus. Their essay thus provides important additional background for the material discussed in several other essays in this issue, particularly

the previous essay by DeMone and Hughes on the Dionysiac Theatre Garden, and the final two essays by Poehler and van der Graaff and by Virginia Campbell, which address ritual and funerary processions. With the help of ancient literary sources and some ethnographic comparisons, the authors sharpen our awareness of how music and other types of sound differed across Pompeian cults, helping to create unique religious soundscapes. For instance, while sacrifices would always have included the distinctive sound of the flute, the mystery cults were characterised by the combined sounds of a standard instrumental trio: the double-pipes, cymbals and the frame drum. The example of Pompeian processions is used to show how modern reconstructions of ancient instruments played by trained musicians can nuance and even challenge the knowledge received from ancient texts. We know from literary and epigraphic sources that Roman processions included brass instruments (*aenea*), but new experiments with playable replicas suggest that these instruments had a much wider harmonic range than indicated by ancient authors, who use the instruments and their sounds as semiotic markers to construct ritual spaces within their texts. Finally, the essay also highlights the multi-functionality of musical instruments – for instance, by drawing attention to their use as ‘non-playable’ votive offerings or as participants in Dionysiac initiations.

In the next essay, Joe Sheppard continues down the Pompeian street, pausing at the thresholds of several bars, shops and houses to explore a series of wall-paintings showing gladiatorial duels. Previous interpretations of these paintings have seen them as ‘speaking signs’ or visual indicators of a building’s function – denoting, for instance, a bar frequented mainly by gladiators. Instead, Sheppard argues that these images are better understood in reference to the logic of apotropaism, as talismanic images that could protect a building and ward off evil. His argument hinges on two crucial factors. First, there is the physical location of most of these images next to entryways or points of access, which parallels other more explicitly talismanic images of Pompeian tutelary divinities or *Schutzgötter* (including Roma/Minerva, Priapus and the Lares). Secondly, there is the narrative content of the paintings themselves, most of which represent the tense, liminal moment at the very end of the duel when the victorious gladiator is awaiting the audience’s judgement about whether he should kill or spare his fallen opponent. Sheppard argues that the depiction of this specific narrative moment worked as an apotropaic device because it implicated the viewer in a moment of extreme uncertainty and also reminded them of



Figure 0.3: Mosaic from the House of Orion, discovered in the Region V excavations, 2018. (Photo: with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

potential dangers ahead. His interpretation gains additional support from considering other ‘boundary objects’ found elsewhere in Pompeii and beyond, and from looking at other ways in which the body of the gladiator was co-opted into magical, medical and ritualistic thinking. Although Sheppard stresses that gladiators were never the object of formal worship at Pompeii, he shows how they were nevertheless attributed with supernatural powers, partly on account of the violence of their deaths and their perceived restlessness in the afterlife. The gladiator’s ‘hot blood’, his liver and other body parts, his weapons and even the ground on which he had died – these might all thus

become animate, dynamic substances which had the power to protect, but also to threaten and destabilise. Overall, the essay reveals the gladiator as a ‘fascinating, monstrous, and curious individual, who paradoxically combined vulnerability and power within a single entity’, and whose painted image – with its split skin, spurting blood and potentially polluting presence – could be exploited to assert ownership of space in a heavily contested urban environment.

While the preceding essays focus in detail on individual sites around Pompeii (specific houses, gardens, street shrines, bars and so forth), the final two essays look at what happens when these places are brought into dynamic relations with one another, particularly through the movement of human bodies. Ivo van der Graaff and Eric Poehler look at the ritual processions that were held in honour of Pompeii’s principal gods, reminding us how frequently the streets would have been animated by crowds of people moving in untidy union towards a deity’s temple (perhaps on as many as 71 days every year). The evidence for these Pompeian processions is not extensive – it consists of a handful of visual representations and brief mentions in marble inscriptions. Nonetheless, the authors show how it is possible to piece together some likely routes and use these to consider ancient lived experience, combining iconographical evidence and spatial analysis with material qualities of the street itself, including qualities like texture, gleam and colour. They focus on festival processions held in honour of Apollo (the *Ludi Apollinares* commemorated in a funerary inscription dating from the very end of the first century BCE – on which see also the essay by Wyslucha and Mugnari) and processions of Isis and Hercules, both of which may have had the temple of Venus as their destination. These latter two examples demonstrate how processions could create an invisible network of connections between Pompeii’s gods – links that would have been reified through the movement of human bodies on festival days, which in turn fixed these routes in the everyday collective memory of the city’s inhabitants. Similar links might also be materialised in the movement of objects between temple sites, and here the authors make the novel suggestion that the cult statue of Venus which normally resided in her temple on the Via Marina may have been moved for safekeeping to the temple of Asclepius on the Via Stabiana after the earthquake(s) of 62/63 CE, whilst her own home was being renovated. The final example of the processions in honour of Minerva points towards some further significant functions of these ceremonial walks: firstly, to forge links with particular historic periods or moments – something that was achieved by reviving

older processional routes that were still preserved in collective memory – and secondly, to purify and protect the city, via the lustral circumambulation of the city by human and animal bodies.

Virginia Campbell also looks at processions in Pompeii, this time those held in honour of ancestors. Her essay begins with a broad overview of funerals in the city of Rome, which highlights material and sensory aspects such as mourning garb, wax ancestor masks and spoken funeral orations. We then move back to Pompeii, where again some plausible funeral routes can be assembled from an assortment of fragmentary evidence, including inscriptions, mosaics and analysis of the built environment. The most tangible of these processions is that of the famous garum (fish-sauce) manufacturer Aulus Umbricius Scaurus. Following the thread of this procession enables us to start particularising the experience of the Pompeian funeral procession, for instance by noting changes in the relative width of the streets that the parade passed through, which would have variously channelled and clustered bodies, affecting factors like light, movement, gesture and the relationship between walkers and the modulating road surface. This essay, like the previous one, reminds us that cognitive perceptions of the Pompeian landscape would have altered on a daily basis, with different routes and monuments fading in and out of awareness. For mourners awakening on the day of Scaurus’ funeral, the city would have had a new and different shape, with familiar sites like his house, shop and ancestral sepulchre looming much larger than they had previously. In turn, the various ‘nodes’ on the procession’s route – which included the deceased’s house, shop and funerary monument – would now be experienced both in terms of uncanny absence (that of Scaurus himself) and unfamiliar presence (that of the gathered onlookers or mourners). Thus, in closing, we are reminded that the city of Pompeii – arguably the most dynamic and material of all archaeological sites in the ancient Mediterranean – was a highly charged, ever-changing environment, brought to bristling life via human motion and emotion.

A brief note on editorial conventions – house names have been given in the English versions, and we have provided translations of ancient texts and glosses or definitions of most ancient terms, in an attempt to make the essays as accessible as possible. In line with the current debate over the date of the earthquake(s) which preceded Vesuvius’ eruption, both 62 and 63 CE are used, according to the individual authors’ preference. Finally, where abbreviations for ancient texts are used, these conform to the list in the Oxford Classical Dictionary (2021).

## Bibliography

- 1 Albrecht, J., Degelmann, C., Gasparini, V., Gordon, R., Patzelt, M., Petridou, G., Raja, R., Rieger, A.-K., Rüpke, J., Sippel, B., Urciuoli, E. R. and Weiss, L. (2018) 'Religion in the making: The Lived Ancient Religion approach', *Religion*, vol.48, no.4, pp.568–93.
- 2 Betts, E. (ed.) (2017) *Senses of the Empire: Multisensory Approaches to Roman Culture*, London and New York, Routledge.
- 3 Bowman, M. and Valk, Ü. (eds) (2012) *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*, London and New York, Routledge.
- 4 Chidester, D. (2018) *Religion: Material Dynamics*, Oakland, University of California Press.
- 5 D'Alessio, M. T. (2009) *I Culti a Pompei: Divinità, Luoghi e Frequentatori (VI Sec. a. C. - 79 d. C.)*, Rome, Ist. Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato.
- 6 Editorial statement (2005) *Material Religion*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp.4–8.
- 7 Engelke, M. (2012) 'Material religion' in R. Orsi (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp.209–29.
- 8 Flower, H.I. (2017) *The Dancing Lares and the Serpent in the Garden: Religion at the Roman Street Corner*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press.
- 9 Graham, E.-J. (2021) *Reassembling Religion in Roman Italy*, London, Routledge.
- 10 Hallowell, A.I. (1960) 'Ojibwa ontology, behavior, and world view' in S. Diamond (ed.) *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, New York, Columbia University Press, pp.19–52.
- 11 Harvey, G. (2013) *Food, Sex and Strangers*, Sheffield, Equinox.
- 12 Harvey, G. (2017) 'If not all stones are alive ...: Radical relationality in animism studies', *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, vol. 11, no.4, pp.481–97.
- 13 Hazard, S. (2013) 'The material turn in the study of religion', *Religion and Society: Advances in Research*, vol.4, no. 1, pp.58–78.
- 14 Houtman, D. and Meyer, B. (eds) (2011) *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, New York, Fordham University Press.
- 15 Hutchings, T. and McKenzie, J. (eds) (2018) *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*, London and New York, Routledge.
- 16 Jashemski, W.F. (1979) *The Gardens of Pompeii: Herculaneum and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius*, New Rochelle, Caratzas Brothers.
- 17 McDannell, C. (1995) *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, New Haven, Yale University Press.
- 18 Meyer, B. and Houtman, D. (2012) 'Introduction: Material religion – how things matter' in D. Houtman and B. Meyer (eds) *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, pp. 1–26.
- 19 Morgan, D. (2009) *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, London and New York, Routledge.
- 20 Morgan, D. (2021) *The Thing About Religion: An Introduction to the Material Study of Religions*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.
- 21 Osanna, M. (2019) *Pompei. Il Tempo Ritrovato*, Milan, Rizzoli.
- 22 Oxford Classical Dictionary (2021) 'Abbreviations', *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, <https://oxfordre.com/classics/page/ocdabbreviations/abbreviations>, accessed 19.7.2021.
- 23 Plate, S.B. (2015) *Key Terms in Material Religion*, London, Bloomsbury.
- 24 Primiano, L. N. (1995) 'Vernacular religion and the search for method in religious folklife', *Western Folklore*, vol.54, no. 1, pp.37–56.
- 25 Tweed, T. (2006) *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- 26 Tylor, E.B. (1871) *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, 2 vols, vol. I, London, John Murray.
- 27 Van Andringa, W. (2009) *Quotidien des Dieux et des Hommes: La Vie Religieuse dans les Cités du Vésuve à l'Époque romaine*, Rome, Écoles françaises de Rome.
- 28 Vasquez, M.A. (2010) *More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.



# THE DIVERSITY OF POMPEII'S DOMESTIC CULT ACTIVITY

Annette Haug and Patric-Alexander Kreuz

## Abstract

*Theories of material religion encourage us to grasp religious acts in their materiality and to examine their physical and sensual implications. This article takes up this challenge, tracing the material and sensual aspects of the domestic cult in Pompeii. Its scope is deliberately broad and inclusive. Most previous research on Pompeian domestic religion focuses on the last phase of the ancient city's life, from the earthquake of 62 CE to the eruption of 79 CE, and implicitly positions the Lares cult as 'the' standard form of domestic cultic activity. In contrast, this chapter adopts a much longer diachronic perspective (from the second century BCE to 79 CE), and moves beyond the Lares cult to address many other elements of domestic material religion. These elements range from painted images of the gods, cultic micro-architectures and their broader settings, ritual objects, and the documented remains of plant and animal offerings. All this evidence testifies to a much broader diversity of material religion within the Pompeian home than has previously been recognised.*

**Keywords:** domestic cult practices, cultic diversity, Lares, visibility, sensuality

**Full text:** <https://openartsjournal.org/issue-10/article-1/>

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2021s01>

## Biographical note

Annette Haug is Professor of Classical Archaeology at the Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel. Her research addresses visual culture studies on the one hand, and questions of urban life and urban design on the other. She studied Classical Archaeology, Art History and Prehistory for a binational PhD (2003) in Heidelberg and Paris-Sorbonne, and has held posts of Assistant Professor in Leipzig (Habilitation 2009) and Heisenberg Fellow, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (2010–12).

Patric-Alexander Kreuz is Professor of Urban Archaeology at the Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel. His research focuses on architecture and urbanism, especially in Roman Italy and the Roman Near East. He studied Classical Archaeology, Ancient History and Archaeology of the Roman Provinces in Freiburg and Cologne (PhD 2004) and has held posts of Assistant Professor in Bochum (Habilitation) and DAAD-Lecturer at the University of Jordan, Amman (2016–18).

Banner image: Detail from a garden painting, from the House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. (Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

# THE DIVERSITY OF POMPEII'S DOMESTIC CULT ACTIVITY

Annette Haug and Patric-Alexander Kreuz,  
Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel

## Introduction

Most cult activity happens within a concrete, defined place and is connected with a specific material setting. Cult sites are often defined by installations or microarchitectures (e.g. niches), which themselves often contain specific ritual objects (e.g. altars or statuettes of gods) and images (e.g. paintings of deities). Such arrangements are usually permanently visible; they inform us about the nature of the cult practised at the site and keep the cult 'present' beyond the moment of the ephemeral ritual activity. In the context of the cult, they also provide a 'pre-structuring' of perceptions and actions. Cult actions refer to the available material objects which guide the actions, organise the cult and make it 'manageable' (on the interdependence of agency and materiality, see Reckwitz, 2002, p.249; 2003; 2008, p.112; Schatzki, 2002, p.xi). During the ritual, further items are embedded and/or consumed, which in turn contribute to a multi-sensory 'densification' of the event. Material culture is a profoundly important agent within such arrangements (Latour, 2000).

When looking at historical and archaeological contexts, the arrangements which result from the interaction of material setting and action can only be described plausibly when all available information – texts, wall-paintings, installations, spatial settings, objects, excavation results – is brought together to provide a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). Inevitably, much information is lacking – yet this lack can often be compensated for by a broadening of perspective. For instance, if we broaden our chronological scope, it may become clear that ritual arrangements are not immutable, but instead are characterised by a high degree of dynamism and variability, which can be described in terms of structural dynamics, historical dynamics and social dynamics (Harth & Michaels, 2003, p.7).

Broadening our perspectives on the domestic cult in Pompeii has some significant advantages. This chapter will show how far the visual design and furnishing of cult areas changes over time – and with

it, the 'presence' of the divine within domestic space. These material changes go hand-in-hand with changes in the cult actions. The domestic cult of Pompeii is therefore a particularly suitable case study for analysing the interdependence of material setting, experiential qualities and options for action. At the same time, variance does not only arise from a diachronic perspective, but also from looking synchronously across the evidence. As we shall see, even within one single time period, individual homeowners choose quite different cult addressees, cult practices and material settings.

## Cultic diversity: The literary evidence

To set the scene for our exploration of Pompeian domestic cult, we will begin by discussing the literary sources that give us insights into domestic cult practice in the Roman world more broadly. These sources are particularly revealing with regard to the venerated deities, the actors, the ritual acts and offerings, and – importantly – the variety of options for action that were available.

A large number of textual sources dating from the Roman Republic to late antiquity provide us, often *en passant* and from a first-person perspective, with references to domestic cults. Amongst the most prominent testimonies are those of the comic poet Plautus (late third to early second century BCE), Cato the Elder, the poets of the Augustan period and satirists of the second half of the first century as well as the grammarians of late antiquity. Archaeologists often use these texts as a homogeneous group. However, all these authors differ in terms of their knowledge, concerns, genre-specificity, and, most importantly, were writing in different periods. At the same time, most of these texts are centred on the city of Rome and mostly come from the Roman elite milieu. Taken together, they bear witness to a variety of cult recipients, ritual occasions, offerings, cult actions and ritual locations from the earliest period onwards, as the following discussion will summarise.

The household gods venerated in Roman times were the Lares, who protected the house and family (Flower, 2017, pp.6–17), the Genius of the *pater familias* and the Penates, the various gods to whom the family was particularly attached (Fröhlich, 1991, pp.37–48; Foss, 1997, pp.198–9). These household gods received offerings on a variety of ritual and cult occasions. Early written sources (late third to first half of the second century BCE) reveal a core of common ritual practice in everyday domestic life. Sacrifices for the domestic deities happened on the *calends*, *nonae* and *ides* of a month, as well as on other festive days (Cato, *Agr.*

143,2), weddings (Plaut. *Aul.* 385–6), upon departure for a journey (Plaut. *Mil.* 1339) as well as upon return (Plaut. *Stich.* 534–5). Cult actions could be performed by different members of the household. Our sources emphasise the role of the *pater familias* in conducting the regular rituals of domestic worship, acting on behalf of the *familia* (Cato, *Agr.* 2, 1 and 143, 1). For the celebration of the Compitalia alone, the steward (*vilicus*) was obliged to make sacrifice at the *compita* or at the domestic hearth (*in foco*) (Cato, *Agr.* 5:3). Sacrifices and vows were made by individual members of the *familia*, including men, women, children and also slaves. In addition to the ‘official’ dates mentioned above, this could happen on other occasions, depending on the individual. For instance, Plautus mentions the excessive piety of one family’s daughter who made offerings to the Lar on a daily basis (Plaut. *Aul.* 23–5). With regard to the offerings, literary sources refer to practices that are difficult to prove archaeologically but which are highly relevant for our understandings of ritual procedures and their sensual qualities. One important component of the ritual act was the prayer (Cato, *Agr.* 141, 143). Incense rose up into the noses of those present, garlands of flowers were attractive not only visually but also haptically and olfactorily (Plaut. *Aul.* 385–6; *Trin.* 39), while an animal sacrifice – unblemished lambs and pigs (Plaut. *Rud.* 1206–8) – must have been a real spectacle, even on a reduced domestic scale. Meanwhile, according to some texts, the place of offering was the hearth of the house (*in focum*: Plaut. *Aul.* 385–6). Specific built installations and images are not explicitly mentioned.

Information about domestic cult is more extensive from the early imperial period onwards, and, in many respects, it also offers a more multi-faceted picture. The domestic deities are still regularly involved on various occasions. For example, Tibullus mentions monthly sacrifices (1, 3, 33–4). Rites took place at important biographical stages of life, such as birthdays (Prop. 5, 12, 19; Tib. 1, 7, 49–54; Tib. 2, 2, 1–8; Ov. *Tr.* 3, 13, 13–8; Pers. 5, 2–5; Mart. 10, 24, 4–5; Censorinus, *DN* 2) or at weddings (Mart. 10, 24, 4–5). When meals were held, the domestic gods may have been imagined as present at the table and received ritual offerings (Petron. *Sat.* 60, 8–9, Fröhlich, 1991, p.24; Flower, 2017, p.10). Domestic cult thus took place in regular and quite dense succession in the form of ritual acts.

In accordance with the multitude of potential occasions, concerns and sacrifices, the offerings took many forms. Traditionally, incense, wine, garlands, wreaths and flowers are mentioned until late antiquity, but also fruit and cakes (e.g. honey-cake) or bread and other items (Hor. *Carm.* 3, 17, 14–5; Ov. *Fast.* 2, 631–3;

Tib. 1, 3, 33–4; 1, 10, 21–4; 2, 1, 59–60; Pers. 5, 2–5; Mart. 10, 24, 4–5; Juv. 9, 137–8). It is noticeable how often cakes are now mentioned (e.g., Tib. 1, 7, 49–54, Mart. 10, 24, 4–5). Horace (*Carm.* 3, 17, 14–5) and Tibullus (1, 10, 27–9) talk about animal sacrifices (piglets) in connection with the veneration of the Genius and the Lares. Tibullus refers to Arabian spices (Tib. 2, 2, 1–8) as well as incense, cakes and wine, and Ovid mentions food offerings on platters (Ov. *Fast.* 2, 631–4). The spectrum of offerings seems to be more diverse in this later period, although it is difficult to know whether this is the result of an actual development and differentiation of domestic cult or only a ‘side effect’ of a larger number and variety of sources surviving for this later period. Tibullus’s exhortation ‘from his glistening hair let the ointment drip, and on his head and neck let soft garlands hang’ can be understood as a reference to a (toreutic?) statue (tte?) and its concrete integration into ritual action (Tib. 1, 7, 49–54). Installations that point beyond the domestic hearth are now also explicitly mentioned as sites of ritual action, be they shrines (Tib. 1, 3, 33–4.) or altars as places of sacrifice (Prop. 5, 12, 19: ‘garlanded altar’; Mart. 10, 24, 4–5; Ov. *Tr.* 3, 13, 13–8). In the absence of altars, the hearth fire continues to be the place of ritual offering (Ov. *Tr.* 1, 3, 43–4). In contrast, the term *lararium*, which is often used in research in an undifferentiated way for these domestic cult installations, is only documented later, in the *Historia Augusta* (SHA *Aurel.* 3, 5; SHA *Alex. Sev.* 29, 2–3; 31, 4–5).

With the beginning of the Imperial era, the worship of the emperor was added as a new occasion and concern (Hor. *Carm.* 4, 5, 29–35).

### Archaeological contexts: The second and first centuries BCE

The literary sources discussed above give us a solid initial indication of the diversity of Roman domestic cult. However, the materiality of Roman domestic cult and its historical transformation become far more tangible when the archaeological contexts and findings are integrated into the analysis (Boyce, 1937, pp.10–18; Orr, 1978, pp.1575–7; Krzyszkowska, 2002; Bassani, 2008, pp.23–33). It is true that for the early period of Pompeii there are only scarce references to domestic cult activity, and that these have therefore rarely been specifically addressed in earlier research; nevertheless, this early evidence is particularly significant for the question of the material (non-)staging of cult.

#### *Niches – ritual functions?*

In houses of the second and first centuries BCE, cultic activities are usually associated with niches embedded





Figure 1.1: House of M. Papius Rufus (VI.15.5), sacellum with First Style decoration. (Photo: Annette Haug, with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei).

in the walls. In principle, however, niches can fulfil various functions. Since they are a common feature of Pompeian houses, most of the known niches lack evidence of a religious function and they may have served simply as a 'convenient storage place' (Allison, 2004, pp.48–51, tab. 4.2). For example, the lamps sometimes found in them may have served for the daily household purpose of illuminating domestic spaces (Van Andringa, 2009, p.318). There are some additional signs that can help to confirm a ritual use of niches, such as (1) when they are associated with a portable or permanently installed altar (Krzyszowska, 2002, pp.34–5), (2) when a spectrum of cult objects or votives has been found in or associated with them or (3) when they are combined with a characteristic cult iconography. While we do have some isolated examples of built altars, there is virtually no evidence for votive finds from this period. Above all, however, a characteristic cult iconography is lacking for the period of the First Style, which is characterised by the imitation of marble veneering, and was popular

in Pompeii in the period from c.200 to c.90 BCE. This leaves only a few cases for which a ritual use can be assumed with greater probability.

An important but not very representative insight into early domestic cult sites is provided by the House of M. Papius Rufus (VI.15.5), which has a *sacellum* (Fig. 1.1). The small, almost cramped room, which opens onto the atrium, is located to the right of the *fauces* (narrow entrance corridor). On its rear wall, stucco pilasters and entablature frame three irregular niches. Two masonry altars placed together on a two-stepped pedestal in front of them attest to their ritual function. The entire ensemble – cult room with two altars and three niches – can be dated back to the time of the First Style (Bassani, 2008, p.113). The multiplication of altars and niches suggests the worship of several deities in this separate place within the house but does not reveal whether they all enjoyed the same cultic attention.

In the House of the Faun (VI.12), two First-Style niches in the rear wall of the northern peristyle are connected with several objects – though these objects are of later date (Fig. 1.2). On the floor in front of the niches 'were found two bronze tripods, two bronze candelabra, two terra-cotta lamps, two iron fire tongs and a branch of laurel' (Boyce, 1937, pp.51–2, no.189, pl.5.4; Giacobello, 2008, p.273, no.V49). It is likely that these niches were originally used for rituals. Similarly, a fragmentary incense burner of the early first century BCE in the (presumably later redesigned) niche in House V.4.9 (Pompeii, Mag. 54032; D'Ambrosio & Borriello, 2001, p.40, cat.38) as well as another early incense burner in the garden-*lararium* of the House of the Cenacle (V.2.h) (Naples, NM 121605; D'Ambrosio & Borriello, 2001, p.42, cat.47), which was redesigned in the Fourth Style (which was in use in Pompeii from c.50 CE until the destruction of the city), also hint at a presumably older cult function. These cult objects testify to the olfactory quality of the cult; beyond the moment of the ritual itself, their material presence and visibility also ensured that the cult remained present within the household. Nevertheless, these mobile objects do not provide reliable information about the location of early cult acts.

For other niches of the First Style, a cultic use is less certain, especially since other characteristics contradict that possibility. For example, the niche in the *fauces* of the House of the Ship Europa (I.15.1.3) is located at a height of 2.43m (Aoyagi, 1977, p.110, fig.41 as *lararium*; De Simone & Sampaolo, 1990, p.956, fig.2; Giacobello, 2008, p.230, no.F3). Only with difficulty could this niche have been involved in regular ritual activity – rather, it should be understood as a 'cultic show-niche'.



Figure 1.2: House of the Faun (VI.12), cult niches with First Style decoration. (Photo: Nils Hempel, with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

So far, we have discussed the architectural setting, which is ambiguous. When we turn to look at the ritual ‘furniture’, we see that this is characterised by a high degree of diversity. In addition to the examples mentioned above, we might refer to the terracotta altars with Doric friezes from the third and second centuries BCE from the House of Sutoria Primigenia (I.13.2) (Pompeii, Mag. 11669; D’Ambrosio & Borriello, 2001, pp.30–1, cat.25) and the House of Ceres (I.9.13) (Pompeii, Mag. 7997; D’Ambrosio & Borriello, 2001, p.33–4, cat. 29), a stone altar from the early third century from House I.2.24 (Pompeii, Mag. 19869; D’Ambrosio & Borriello, 2001, p.35, cat.32) or a clay *thymiaterion* from the House of the Labyrinth, dating to the second century BCE (Pompeii, Mag. 21642; D’Ambrosio & Borriello, 2001, p.21, cat.9). These finds make it clear that some very old objects were still in use right up until the destruction of the city in 79 CE. Their location and ritual embedding might have changed, but their advanced age must have given the cult an atmosphere of antiquity.

#### *Ritual structures*

In this early phase (second and first centuries BCE), the evidence for installations and cult objects is too

isolated and fragmentary for us to draw any far-reaching conclusions about the ritual structure of early houses. The example of the House of the Faun (VI.12), however, seems to suggest that even in these early times a house could have had several ritual foci – here, the eastern atrium with its small altar and the northern peristyle with its niches. This contrasts with the situation in houses like that of M. Pupius Rufus (VI.15.5), where we find several cult installations centralised in one spatially confined configuration.

In all cases, however, the cults had obviously been established in the area of the vestibule or atrium or in the peristyle courtyard (Simelius, 2018, pp.48–9). In this period, then, cult practice appears to have been bound to the courtyard areas of the house. One may assume that there were practical reasons for this, as these courtyards had enough space to accommodate a relatively large number of people. Cult is often a moment of social interaction, and this certainly seems true for early domestic cult in Pompeii. The material focal point of cult was made permanently visible and constituted a deliberate ‘display of piety’ (Lipka, 2006, p.330). A placement on a peristyle back wall was often chosen for the cult niches, thereby ‘staging’ the cult site for the inhabitants and guests of the house. During

ritual activities, the presence of such cult installations temporarily transformed the domestic spaces in which they were situated into sacred places. One can expect different uses of such domestic areas and a certain variance of corresponding domestic actions performed from an early stage. It cannot be ruled out, however, that kitchens as places of hearth fires were originally a cult focus (Foss, 1997, p. 198) – long before the household gods received ‘specific’ cult niches.

### *Recipients of cult*

Our evidence for the recipients of cult is even sparser than that concerning the location of cult sites. For example, we do not have images of Lares or other gods painted into these structures, nor any offerings that can be attributed to particular deities. The altar of the House of the Faun (VI.12) is known to have been consecrated to Flora, but this remains an isolated example. In this early period, then, all our information about the venerated deities comes from the literary sources.

### *Ritual practice*

While much of the potential ritual significance of domestic cult during the second and first centuries BCE cannot be proven archaeologically, recent archaeobotanical analyses have contributed important insights into the nature of the offerings made in domestic contexts. Of particular value in this respect are the contexts of small pits containing high concentrations of carbonised remains of plants and animal bones that have been recovered from some houses. Older excavation reports tend to refer only to the carbonised remains of the last offerings before the 79 CE eruption, and do not specify their identity (Van Andringa, 2009, p.246); however, such remains have been analysed and classified in more recent excavations, such as at the House of Amarantus (I.9.11–12) and House VI.16.27 (Robinson, 2005). In both houses, numerous small pits were excavated in the gardens (some less than 25cm deep, one of them even lined in the manner of a cist), which can be dated to the second century BCE (VI.16.27, eleven pits) and the first half of the first century BCE (House of Amarantus, nine pits) respectively. Each of these pits contained remains of burnt fruit and plants as well as animal bones.

The plant species amongst these remains belong predominantly to commonly used crops such as grains, vegetables, fruits and nuts, plus myrtle or pine cones (Robinson, 2002, p.95, tab.1); they find parallels among deposits known from other houses, such as the House of the Wedding of Hercules (VII.9.47; Ciaraldi & Richardson, 2000). Prominent among the animal

bones are those of piglets and cocks; in the latter case, it is the heads and shanks that are found, with the remainder ‘presumably being used in the kitchen’ and then eaten (Robinson, 2002, p.97). An exception is the House of the Epigrams (V.1.18.11.12), where the burnt remains of two whole hens were found. The composition of the individual deposits within each house varies slightly, so each of them represents a discrete event. Between the two houses, the deposits also differ in terms of the frequency of certain plant and fruit species or animal bones. For example, in the House of Amarantus (I.9.11–12) poultry bones are well represented, while the deposits in VI.16.27 are rich in pig bones and eggshells. Such remains have been interpreted as disposed burnt offerings to the domestic gods, since some of them, such as grains, beans, grapes, pigs and cocks as well as flowers or herbs, are also mentioned in literary sources as appropriate offerings for them (Robinson, 2002, p.97; 2005, p.115; 2019, pp.239–41). Notably, the range of species represented in this archaeological evidence is much broader than the relatively narrow spectrum of species that are mentioned in the textual sources.

The ritualised actions that might be inferred from these objects comprise a range of performative activities and reflect a certain degree of complexity within the domestic ritual ‘household’. They also offer insights into potential sensory stimuli and other qualities of the ritual performances. The pine cones attested in some of the deposits are known to give a ‘strong scent when burned’ (Robinson, 2002, p.97), and the same may be assumed for flowers or herbs (be they burnt on the altar or simply arranged as decoration). Meanwhile, the offering of piglets and cocks would have recalled, albeit on a smaller scale, the publicly staged blood sacrifices, which included the separation of animals into distinct body parts. These offerings might have been connected to special occasions, and probably involved several (or even all) members of the household in activities of preparation, conducting, and attendance at the rituals. These remains also imply different auditory stimuli, whether the clucking of birds or the grunting of pigs. At the same time, burnt offerings like grapes, some grains or other items which leave no obvious (or documented) remains may also be embedded in less elaborate individual, even daily, ritual expressions of piety by different members of the household. However, the small number of such deposits found in the peristyle gardens, especially compared with the long history of the buildings, might deter us from interpreting them as the material remains of daily ‘routine’ worship (Robinson, 2005, p.118). In a similar way, we need to be cautious in



Figure 1.3: House I.12.16, niche showing Bacchus under a pergola. (Photo: Jashemski archive, no. J64f1719)

assuming that burnt offerings on small portable altars inside the niches are connected with a common, or even daily, ritual procedure. As Robinson (2005, p.17) has emphasised, the upper parts of the interior of the niches conspicuously lack traces of soot. This indicates that most offerings were burnt elsewhere, probably on the domestic hearth. Yet, this lack of soot traces also raises the question of potentially different places or contexts of those offerings which were burnt on portable altars, as attested by the traces on the top of some of these altars.

### Archaeological contexts: The Augustan period (32 BCE – 14 CE)

Cult areas decorated in the Second Style, which would thus be dated to the mid-first century BCE, are absent. Signs of an iconographic – and perhaps also cultic – reinterpretation fall into the Augustan period. At this time, the Third Style introduced a new form of interior design, comprising slim, sometimes vegetal columns, providing an ornamental frame for figurative images. Depictions of myths – and thus also deities – now played a prominent role in domestic space.

### *Divine iconography and ritual niches*

Images of deities were often chosen as decorations for niches in atria and peristyles – albeit without narrative context. In House I.12.16, for example, the niche on the south wall of the atrium shows Bacchus under a pergola, while a snake occupies the lower portion (Menotti & de Vos, 1990, p.841, fig.5; Giacobello, 2008, p.233, no.A3) (Fig. 1.3). However, the niche is about two metres above floor level, so it seems to have been less a cult niche than a ‘visually staged area of gods’. In other cases, a cultic use is at least conceivable. For example, in the atrium of House IX.1.7 Venus and Cupid on a *ketos* (sea-monster), or perhaps a dolphin, appear in stucco relief on the rear wall of the conch niche (Boyce, 1937, p.79, no.381, pl.6,1; Gallo, 2001, pp.41–2; Giacobello, 2008, p.247, no.A33). This iconography makes a ritual use seem possible, but this is not necessarily the case, since Venus and Cupid often appear on wall paintings that are not associated with niches. Images of gods are not *per se* an indication that a niche had a ritual function.



Figure 1.4: House of Obellius Firmus (IX.14.4), kitchen (18) with cult niche and Third-Style ritual iconography. (Photo: Annette Haug, with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

#### *Ritual niches with representations of the Lares*

At the time of the Third Style, then, more images of gods appeared within Pompeian houses. Moreover, for the first time, individual cult niches now also housed a unique cult iconography, that is, the images of the Lares, which would subsequently become even more widespread in the period of the Fourth Style.

A niche in the kitchen of the House of Obellius Firmus (IX.14.4; Fig. 1.4) is framed by a painted aedicule with a pediment (Fröhlich, 1991, pp.69–70, cat.L111; Sampaolo, 2003, pp.453–9, fig.167, 168; Giacobello, 2008, pp.218–9, no.114). The rear wall of the niche shows a Genius with a *cornucopia*, later flanked by a newly painted Lar. Below the niche there was a snake and an altar, on the right a banquet scene, on the left a pig (now lost). In the kitchen of the House of Sutoria Primigenia (I.13.2; Fig. 1.5), too, a *lararium* iconography dated to the Augustan period is combined with a niche (Fröhlich, 1991; Giacobello, 2008, p.156 – 8, no.28; Flower, 2017, pp.58–9). Under the niche, which is framed by roughly painted sausages, meat skewers and ham, a snake winds its way to an altar. The two cult niches, painted at about the same time, each create a

visual framework of their own; here, a Genius stands in the centre of the niche (Fig. 1.4), there it is a flower tendril (Fig. 1.5). The cult focus at eye level is thus designed differently in each case. The visual framing of the niche is also different. Although in both cases there is a snake at an altar under the niche, different additions are made. In the House of Obellius Firmus, a banquet scene and a live pig are added; meanwhile, the niche of the House of Sutoria Primigenia is surrounded by a veritable collection of already prepared sacrificial meat (Fig. 1.5).

Despite their differences, these paintings attest to the appearance of a ritual iconography – one that relates to the cult of the Lares, and which introduces elements that become typical of their later iconography. These few cases do not allow us to draw any far-reaching conclusions; however, it is perhaps no coincidence that the early paintings of the Lares are found in kitchens (Fröhlich, 1991), while the niches in atria and peristyles were given a different decoration. It is possible that the iconography of the Lares was originally based on the specific pictorial needs of the domestic servants before it was adopted in the Fourth Style as the decoration of the atrium shrines.

#### *Statuettes of the gods*

Alongside the development of a domestic ‘iconography of gods’, the Augustan era also witnessed a considerably increased interest in small statues and statuettes: these included numerous images of gods, which were used to furnish atria and peristyle gardens. In the House of the Camillus (VII 12.22-23-24; Figs. 1.6 and 1.7) the niches in the rear wall of the peristyle were furnished with statuettes – a small copy of the ‘Venus Anadyomene’ (height: 63cm), a statue of a young man (height: 75cm), and a statuette of a child with a rabbit (height: 40cm). The Venus statuette appears to have been displayed here alongside the other figures, which were not images of gods, as a pictorial element of the back wall of the courtyard. As in the case of the wall paintings of the same period, it is therefore not possible to conclude from the subject matter of the statues or statuettes whether an image-object was used for ritual purposes. Statuettes only became cult objects through a specific ritual integration.

Indeed, in several cases statuettes of gods have been found in connection with cult niches. Their dating to the Augustan period is often uncertain; moreover, the same statuette may have been incorporated into different contexts of use over time. For the majority of the statuettes of gods, their contextual integration into ritual contexts in 79 CE does not necessarily imply their ritual use in earlier periods. One exception is possibly



Figure 1.5: House of Sutoria Primigenia (I.13.2), kitchen (17) with Third-Style ritual iconography. (Photo: Annette Haug, with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)



Figure 1.6: House of the Camillus (VII.12.22-23-24), niches at the rear wall of the peristyle. (Photo: Jashemski archive, no.



Figure 1.7: Venus Anadyomene from one of the niches in the House of the Camillus; First Century CE. (Photo: Jashemski archive, no. J71f0287)

the shrine of the House of Fortuna (IX.7.20; Fig. 1.8) which contained a seated female figure, perhaps a Fortuna or a Concordia Augusta with the portrait features of Livia, and, perhaps belonging to the same ensemble, two bronze Lares (Boyce, 1937, p.88, no.439, pl.5, l; Orr, 1978, pp.1115–17; Giacobello, 2008, p.250, no.A39; Giglio, 2017, p.98, fig.56; Palmentieri, 2017, p.221). Due to their early dating, this set might have been presented as such already in the Augustan period.

#### *Ritual practice*

Ritual changes that took place since the Augustan period are particularly manifest in the offerings. This is illustrated by a second group of deposits from the House of Amaranthus (I.9.11–12), which is dated to the early to middle First Century CE. A comparison of these later ritual deposits from the House of Amaranthus shows interesting differences and changes to those of the earlier period, for instance, in the composition of the deposits of burnt plants and animal bones. In the case of the animal remains, for example, there is a change in the spectrum of species attested, while the



Figure 1.8: House of Fortuna (IX.7.20), ensemble of statuettes from the domestic lararium. (Niccolini, 1890, pl. 3)

range of plants broadens to encompass ‘significant new plant species’, including ‘ornamental plants’ (Robinson, 2002, pp.95–6, tab.1-2). The latter, ‘ornamental’ ones might even, considering their olfactory qualities when burnt as offering or simply used as decoration, indicate a new tendency towards a valorisation of the domestic ritual act by sensory enrichment and/or a refinement of cult installations and ritual actions.

It is worth emphasising that most of the plants and animals known from the deposits of the houses mentioned here are neither distinctive nor even specific to domestic ritual (Robinson, 2002, p.98). They can also be found among the remains uncovered on kitchen floors (VIII.4: Van Andringa, 2009, p.246), from foundation rites connected to the building of houses (e.g. the House of the Vestals, VI.1.7; Ciaraldi & Richardson, 2002, pp.79, 81), and are also known to have been used as offerings in public sanctuaries. August Mau (1900, p.160) mentions that the remains of burnt figs, pine nuts and cones, as well as other nuts and dates, were found in a small pit next to the

main altar of the sanctuary of Isis, while other burnt fruits were found in a lined pit in the corner of the temple courtyard (Ciaraldi & Richardson, 2000, p.80; Robinson, 2002, p.98). Comparing the material from foundation rites, sanctuary deposits and domestic rituals, then, suggests that there was no specific genre of 'household offerings', and that offerings made in domestic contexts were not distinct from offerings used in the context of other rites. Instead, we can trace a widespread contemporary use of a wide spectrum of plant-based food offerings (Ciaraldi & Richardson, 2002, 80; Robinson, 2002, p.95, tab. I), below the level of the big public sacrifices; this was the result of individual choice(s), yet it must also have been guided by a shared understanding of 'appropriateness', in terms of religious practice, tradition and occasion. One side-effect of this shared spectrum of offerings, as well as the haptic and other sensory qualities of the associated rituals, may have been an affirming quality of each occasion as a 'sacral experience' – whether this be in a large public sanctuary or at a small domestic shrine.

### The final phase (62 – 79 CE)

With the advent of the Fourth Style, the visual setting of the houses again changes gradually. Architectural vistas now present a frame and stage for mythical images that remain popular. In the gardens, the number of sculptures increases significantly. With regard to the staging of the domestic cult sites, three factors are significant against this background:

- 1) The (once again) sharply increased popularity of the cult of the Lares.
- 2) The increased number of statue(tte)s of gods.
- 3) The resulting significant increase in the number of securely identifiable cult areas in a house, which makes it possible for modern scholars to analyse houses and their 'ritual structure'.

#### *The new popularity of the Lares*

In the period after the earthquake in 62 CE, a large number of Pompeian houses feature a cult site with depictions of the Lares; this cult site is emphasised with figurative and ornamental decoration, but often also by micro-architectures (Fröhlich, 1991, pp.68–109; Bassani, 2008, p.114). It is true that the depictions are still found in connection with kitchens. Now, however, the worship of the domestic gods also appears in the atria and peristyles, primarily in the form of built installations in the form of elaborate open aediculae on podia, the so-called 'Tempellararien' (temple lararia). These miniature architectures attract attention and become the 'optical pivot' of the atrium. Unlike the niches

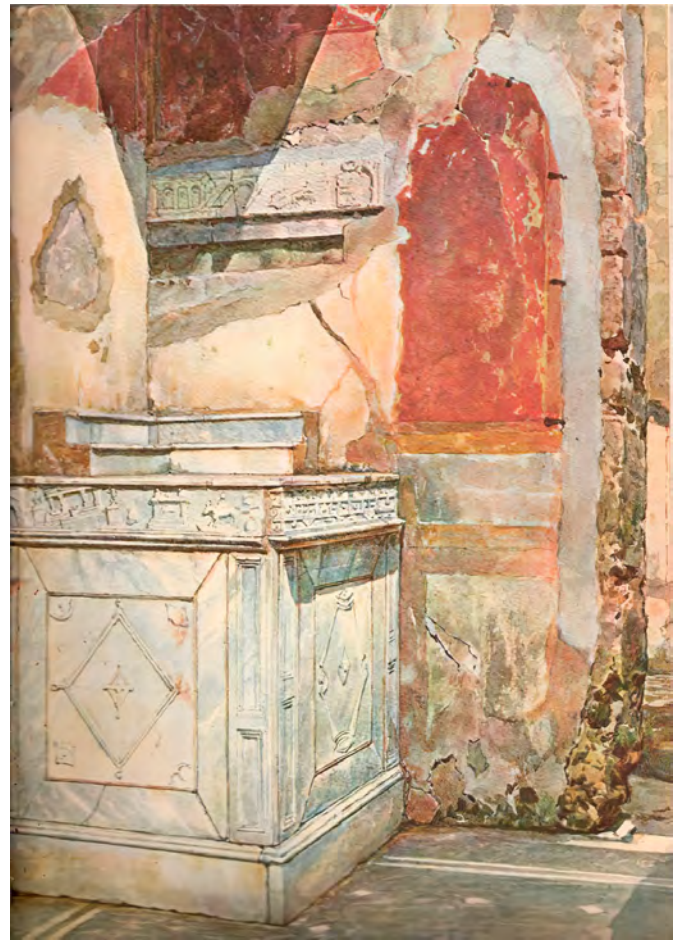


Figure 1.9: House of L. Caecilius Lucundus (V.I.26), atrium with Fourth-Style 'temple lararium', after 62 CE. Watercolour by Luigi Bazzani, published in 1929. (Photo: Luigi Bazzani, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons / <http://www.romeinspompeii.net/bazzani.html>)

that are recessed into the wall, they take up space by being set mostly, though not always, in the corner of a courtyard. Consequently, one could experience them from different perspectives, walking around them, and accessing the cult area from at least two sides.

This chronological concurrence provokes the question of whether the cult of the Lares in Pompeii gained popularity just after 62 CE – as an emotional effect of the earthquake destructions (Flohr, *forthcoming*). The constellation of the House of L. Caecilius Lucundus (V I,26; Fig. 1.9) suggest this hypothesis (see Trinacit, 2019, pp.102–10; Giacobello, 2008, pp.236–7, no.A39). Here a magnificent *lararium* was erected in the atrium after the earthquake. It consisted of a high podium with marble veneer which was surmounted by an aedicule supported by three wooden columns. Two marble reliefs decorated the shrine – one of them showing the earthquake of 62 CE (Touati & Boman, 2015). The unique constellation with explicit reference to the earthquake can illustrate that it was the domain of the Lares to protect the house.





Figure 1.10: House V.4.3, niche representations of Fortuna, Venus, Bacchus, Jupiter, Mercury, Victoria, Hercules and Minerva. (Photo: German Archaeological Institute Rome, Nachlass Hofmann, Neg. D-DAI-Rom 31.2696)

Especially in a phase in which the city was presumably affected by earthquakes several times in succession, the cult may have regionally received special attention.

#### *Cultic contexts with other iconographies (without Lares)*

In addition to *lararia* that are identifiable via their specific iconography, there are niches whose ritual purpose is attested by other 'religious' paintings. One example is the aedicule-niche in the atrium of House V.4.3, which is surrounded by various representations of gods: Fortuna, Venus, Bacchus, Jupiter, Mercury, Victoria, Hercules and Minerva (Boyce, 1937, pp.39–40, no.118, pl.25,1; Giacobello, 2008, pp.240–1, no.A15; Van Andringa, 2009, p.260, fig.200; Fig. 1.10). This proves that the wall paintings in and around such niches did not necessarily have to refer to the Lares, and that domestic cult could also focus on other deities.

#### *Statuettes of the gods*

The great variety of domestic cults is even more evident in the large number of statuettes of gods found

in connection with niches or aedicule shrines – here mostly in the cult areas in the courtyards (Lipka, 2006, pp.332–3). Although such statuettes (which were mainly made from bronze and terracotta) were found in only forty-six of the shrines from Pompeii and Herculaneum recorded by Fröhlich (Van Andringa, 2009, p.218), there is nevertheless a great deal of variety in the deities who were represented and worshipped (Fröhlich, 1991, p.31; Van Andringa, 2009, pp.256–60). For instance, in the *lararium* at the court of the House of the Cenacle (V.2.h; Boyce, 1937, p.37, no.108; Giacobello, 2008, p.264, no.V30), which was redesigned in the Fourth Style, four figures of deities were found: Mercury (bronze), Minerva (terracotta), a kneeling figure and a Bacchic head (terracotta). The Lares were absent here. The aedicule of the House of the Gilded Cupids (VI.16.7.38; Boyce, 1937, pp.57–58, no.221; Giacobello, 2008, p.277, no.V58) instead contained two Lares, the Capitoline Triad and Mercury (all bronze), i.e. 'ancestor/family cult, state cult, and personal cult combine seamlessly within this shrine' (Hackworth Petersen, 2012, p.328),

and in the House of the Red Walls, the set consisted of two Lares, Hercules, Asclepius, Apollo and Mercury (all bronze), with a Genius painted on the back wall (VIII.5.37; Boyce, 1937, p.77, no.371, pl.31; Bragantini, 1998, pp.620–2; Giacobelli, 2008, pp.202–3, no.94; Flower, 2017, pp.50–2). There are plenty of overlaps between these different sets of figurines (Mercury and Fortuna are common, for example); nevertheless, the divine constellations of each household were quite unique. The ensemble of gods represented and worshipped in a domestic shrine clearly ‘lay in the vicissitudes and preferences of the homeowner’ (Lipka, 2006, p.333).

The House of the Cenacle (V.2.h) illustrates another aspect of domestic cult places. On the back wall of its shrine was a representation of Hercules (Parise Badoni and Sampaolo, 1991, figs. 47–9), who is not among the statuettes of gods found here. This did not mean, of course, that the (painted) iconography was insignificant for the cultic activities (Lipka, 2006, p.331). Rather, one must assume that cult recipients were represented in different media – in this case wall-painting and statuettes (Van Andringa, 2009, p.219).

The potential diversity of the deities venerated in the household shrines is also reflected in the material heterogeneity of their ensembles. Different sizes, materials, varying artistic qualities and technical features of the statuettes show that such groups may often have been formed successively and over long periods of time. This can be assumed for the bronze Mercury and the terracotta Minerva of the House of the Cenacle (V.2.h), or the set from the House of the Gilded Cupids (VI.16.7.38) (on both sets, see Lipka, 2006).

In these cases, we can assume that not all of the statuettes were acquired on occasion of the establishment of a household as a complete ‘group of gods’. Instead, the ensembles are the result of a successive, cross-generational, ‘household-specific’ genesis: as Lipka writes, ‘the group of divine figures which constituted the household gods was not invariably fixed, but could be adjusted to the (changing) predilections of the house-owner’ (2006, p.343). According to our textual sources, the statuettes were probably not kept permanently on display at the place of the ritual activities, but instead were stored in cabinets (Boyce, 1937, pp.17–8; cf. Bassani, 2008, pp.31–2; Allison, 1992, p.43; 1997, pp.334–5; Van Andringa, 2009, p.219). Occasionally, this storage of statuettes is also documented archaeologically, for example at House V.4.3 (Krzyszowska, 2002, p.24). The case of the House of Sutoria Primigenia (I.13.2) is particularly significant. In the atrium there was a cupboard in which a miniature altar, a lamp and a terracotta figure

of a reclining deity were kept. Apparently, the cultic ‘set’ of a household was only taken out of storage on certain occasions and could therefore be used flexibly. Consequently, one can expect not only a certain cultic diversity in the houses, but also a particularly flexible staging and performance of cultic practices.

#### *Houses with several cult foci*

Despite all this flexibility, most of the ‘ritual features’ of a house were permanently visible. And by this late phase of the ancient city’s life, some houses incorporated several cult sites. The example of the House of the Gilded Cupids (VI.16.7, 38) may show that the cult areas of a house were often very diverse in appearance (Boyce, 1937, pp.56–58, no.220–1; Seiler, 1994, pp.758, 764–8, figs. 82–4, 93–100; Lipka, 2006, pp.335–7; Bassani, 2008, pp. 220–221.). Here, we find a magnificent, richly stuccoed aedicule in the north wing of the peristyle, and a second, simpler shrine for the worship of Egyptian gods in the south-east corner of the peristyle. Holes in the wall and a rectangular recess in the pavement indicate a large wooden shrine of unknown design for the latter (Sogliano, 1907, p.556; Lipka, 2006, p.337). The House of the Cenacle (V.2.h) had three places of domestic cult activity: the above-mentioned niche with the depiction of Hercules in the passage to the courtyard with its manifold god figures, another niche in the vestibule and a snake representation in the kitchen (Boyce, 1937, pp.36–7, no.106–8, pl. 8, l. 10, l. 17, 2; Parise Badoni & Sampaolo, 1991, fig.2. 4. 47–9. 58; Giacobelli, 2008, p.165, no.38; p.231, no.F5; p.264, no.V30). Based on such findings, Thomas Fröhlich and subsequent scholars have postulated a ‘ritual differentiation’ within the Roman household (e.g. Fröhlich, 1991, p.40; Foss, 1997, pp.211–6; Flower, 2017, pp.48–9). A ‘complete’ iconography of the Lares is most often found in kitchens and service quarters, whereas, in particularly splendid houses, images of the Genius and the Lares are missing in prestigious and easily accessible areas (Fröhlich, 1991, pp.28–9). Instead, in the atria of these buildings, statuettes of various gods important to the household are found. This differentiation in the iconography of the wall paintings and the distribution of the statuettes is seen as reflecting a social differentiation of domestic cult practice. Anna Krzyszowska (2002, pp.29, 47–8) also sees differences in the worship of Lares and Genius, and argues that it was primarily the *dominus* who sacrificed to the Lares in the atrium, while slaves in the kitchens sacrificed to the Genius. Similarly, John Bodet attributes the multiplication of cult areas in the house to the presence of different groups (nuclear family, slaves) who would each have

sacrificed to their own gods. The difference between the ideological concept of a united household (the *familia*) and the socially plausible reality of multiple 'households' within the same physical house building would result in separate and parallel tracks of domestic worship among slave and freeborn members (Bodel, 2008, p.265). Thus, the cult differentiation in the case of larger houses would reflect the social differentiation of the *familia*, with several shrines within the house serving different groups of the household (Foss, 1997, p.217; cf. Van Andringa, 2009, pp.229-32, who assumes a duplication of the cult for the slaves). Only Michael Lipka postulates that the domestic cults were shared by all members of a household: 'In principle, all members of the household alike would have equal access to the ceremonies conducted by the head of the family at the various household shrines' (2006, p.343). This is also because it is by no means clear whether, in the case of houses which have several shrines, these were used simultaneously on festive days, i.e. the rites were celebrated by the different groups of the household in parallel (Lipka, 2006, p.332).

If one brings these various observations together, it seems that in this late, archaeologically well-documented phase of Pompeii, larger houses had several cult areas that were spatially, medially and iconographically differentiated. This differentiation presumably also correlated with different groups of actors. However, the extent to which this ritual differentiation was actually directed at different cult recipients cannot be clarified on an archaeological basis.

#### *Localisation and setting of the cult areas*

The domestic cult sites were concentrated in two foci that were, spatially and architecturally, very different: that is, the courtyards (atrium and peristyle/garden) and the kitchens. Five of the shrines compiled by Boyce in his corpus of Pompeian *lararia* are located in the vestibule, sixty-one in the atrium, fifty-nine in the peristyle and forty-nine in the garden, while eighty-six are located in kitchens (Van Andringa, 2009, p.220, n.12).

Courtyards function as spaces of transition, meeting, work and representation. Due to their spaciousness, larger groups of people could assemble there, and their illumination and ventilation provided an 'open' atmosphere. Kitchens, on the other hand, were often located in remote areas of the house, 'shielded' from communal life, and were dark. Even if kitchens with *lararia* are located in a courtyard area, as in the House of the Lovers (I.10.10,11; Giacobelli, 2008, pp.148–9, no.21), they are lockable and therefore 'closed' rooms (Kastenmeier, 2007, pp.132–3). Meanwhile, the hearth fire made the kitchen one of the warmest rooms in

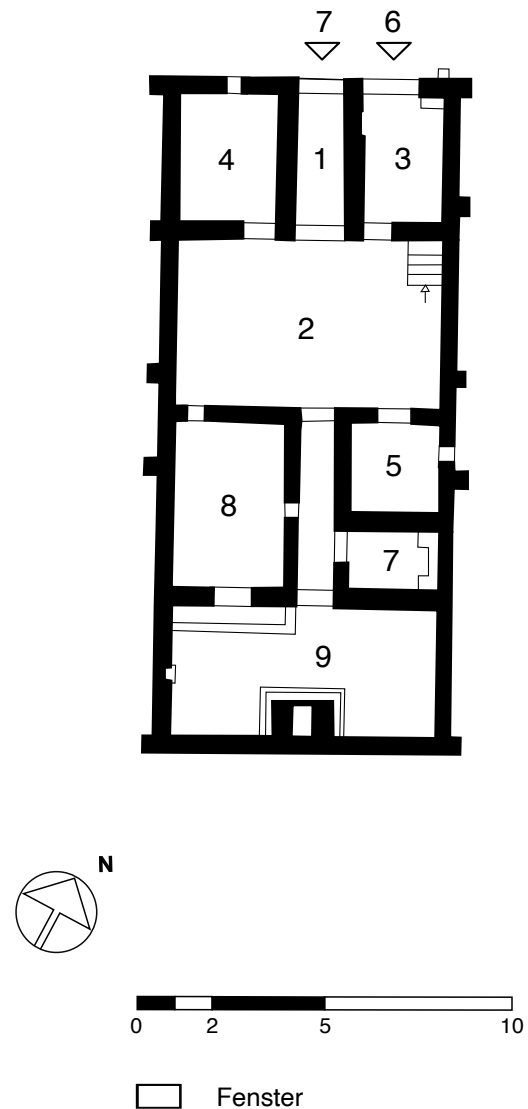


Figure 1.11: House of the Sarno Lararium (I.14.7), plan. (Lotta Böttcher on the basis of Morichi, Paone and Sampaolo 2017)

the house. Kitchens therefore have an atmosphere of intimacy which contrasts with the open atmosphere of the courtyards. Depending on whether they were located in a courtyard or a kitchen, the cult sites were thus integrated into very different ambient-atmospheric settings (for further exploration of this issue, see Graham's essay in this issue). This implies a different intensity and immediacy of sensory experiences, as well as different audiences. Openness and visibility play an important role for the cult places in the courtyards, while the kitchens, in contrast, are hidden from the eyes of outsiders. In what follows, the forms of visual staging of cult in court areas will be examined in more detail.

In court areas, visibility seems to be a main guiding principle for the localisation of the cult places – in a multidirectional sense: Shrines were visible from different positions within the house; vice versa, the



Figure 1.12. House of the Sarno Lararium (I.14.7), view towards the niche (9) from the entrance area of the house (Photo: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Casa\\_del\\_Larario\\_Sarno\\_2.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Casa_del_Larario_Sarno_2.JPG); CC BY-SA 3.0)

occupants of those shrines – the Lares themselves – were provided with a multidirectional overview. This is especially significant when we consider that one of the main roles of the Lares was the protection of the household (Van Andringa, 2009, pp.226–7). In some houses, the location of shrines was obviously strategic, and they are placed on a visual axis which cuts across most parts of the house. This is the case, for example, in the House of the Sarno Lararium (I.14.7; Fröhlich, 1991, pp.262–3, cat.L33, pl.5, l. 6; Clarke, 2003, pp.78–79, fig.41; Figs. 1.11 and 1.12; Giacobelli, 2008, pp.159–160, no.30). Here the bright-red-painted shrine is visible from the entrance, through a small atrium, narrow corridor and garden. The Lares in this house are thus able to keep watch over the entrance.

Meanwhile, in the House of L. Caecilius Iucundus (V.1.23,26; Boyce, 1937, p.33, no.80, pl.30.4) the open aedicule is placed in the north-west corner of the atrium, i.e. at the entrance side of the atrium. Indeed, altars of the Lares are often found in positions which are not visible from the entrance, and thus did not

allow the Lares a direct view of the person entering. This suggests that the cult of the Lares was not explicitly directed or ‘staged’ towards the outside, and the entering guests, but rather towards the inhabitants of the house and their domestic space. As already suggested above, one guiding idea behind such placements may have been not only the view *from* the domestic space towards the cult installation, but also the view *of* this space from the perspective of the Lares themselves. This hypothesis brings together two aspects that are often separate in research on domestic cult: the visibility of the cult and the gods on the one hand, and the visual perspective that the gods themselves have, on the other. The gods watch over the house and are thus able to protect it – in this way, they become ‘watchful Lares’ (Foss, 1997; Van Andringa, 2009, pp.227–8). Visibility becomes a mode of power.

In the case of the House of the Gilded Cupids (VI.16.7, 38), the two shrines of the peristyle were quite different from one another, with regards to their visibility (Lipka, 2006, pp.335–7; Fig. 1.13). The aedicule

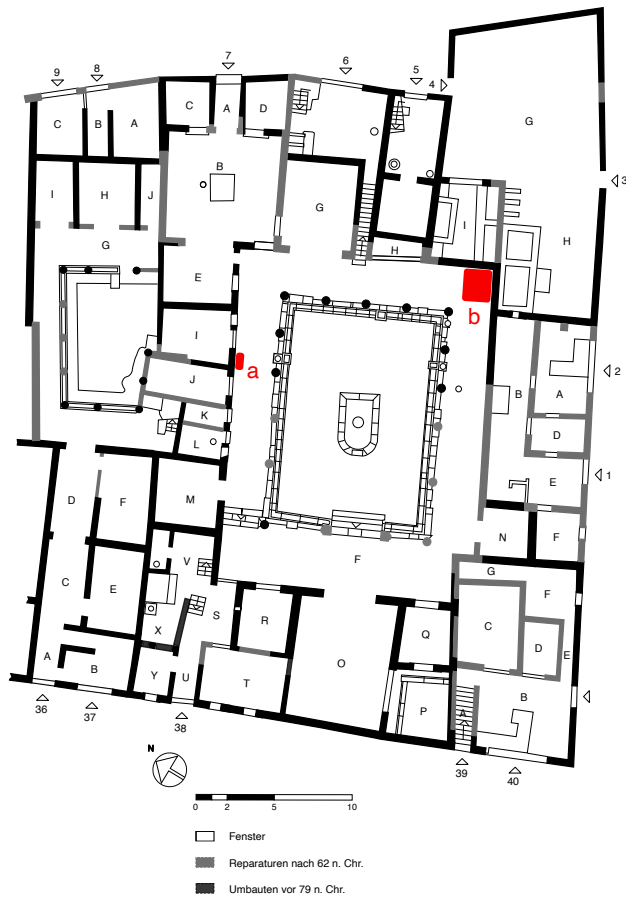


Figure 1.13: House of the Gilded Cupids (VI.16.7, 38), plan of the house in its last phase with locations of the two cult installations (a: aedicule, b: shrine for Egyptian gods). (Lotta Böttcher on the basis of Seiler, 1992, fig. 96)

with its ensemble of Roman deities was not only located in a central and visible position in the peristyle; it was also close to a small, yet splendid room complete with alcoves, a mosaic floor and tapestry-style walls with four golden plaques covered with glass medallions. The (wooden) shrine for the Egyptian gods was also placed prominently in the peristyle, and was clearly visible as well; however, not only was this shrine located at significant distance from any private quarters, but it was also deliberately separated from the cult of the traditional household gods.

However, even in courtyards the idea of closeness and intimacy could become a guiding principle for the location and design of a cult site. In a corner of the side atrium of the House of the Centenary (IX.8.6; Boyce, 1937, pp.89–90, no.448, pl.40,2; Fröhlich, 1991, p.65; Fig. 1.14; Bassani, 2008, p.198; Giacobelli, 2008, pp.211–2, no.108) in front of a niche with a marble aedicule façade, two low walls (each 80cm high) formed a precinct of 1 x 1.80 metres. In the centre of this precinct stood a small altar, while outside its walls were two masonry benches. The character of this precinct

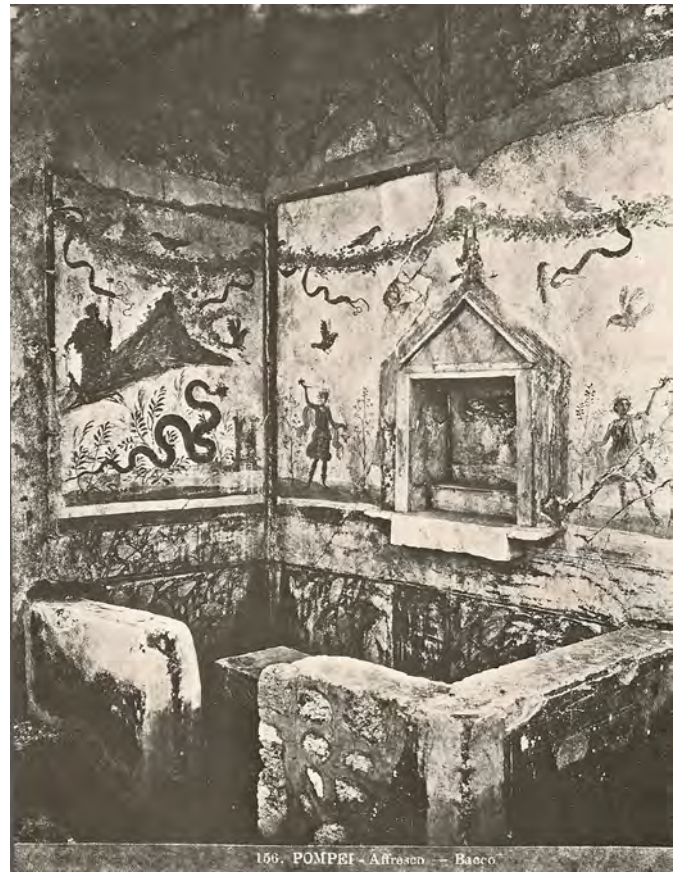


Figure 1.14: House of the Centenary (IX.8.6), niche and precinct in the side atrium, nineteenth-century postcard. (Photo courtesy Jackie and Bob Dunn / www.pompeiiinpictures.com)

as a discrete, yet visible domestic space is underlined by the painting of the low walls: their outer sides are uniform black, while the inner sides imitate precious yellow marble, highlighting the enclosed space (and the activities performed in it) as a domestic locale of special value. The diversity of ritual is thus also expressed in different forms of placement and design of the cult setting in the court-yard areas.

#### *Ritual practice*

In this last phase of the ancient city's life, we finally grasp a range of activities that allows more concrete insights into the material dimensions of domestic cultic action. Objects documented in some of the household shrines can be connected confidently with the respective domestic cult activity and even specific actions. Thus, for example, a 'basic ritual set' might be hypothesised, which in turn might point to ritual practices and acts that were similar across households. But here, too, a diverse picture emerges. For example, in the *lararium* of the House of the Cenacle (V.2.h), in addition to the four statuettes already mentioned,



Figure 1.15: House of the Sarno Lararium (I.14.7), niche with Lares statuettes, bronze bowl and bronze lamp. (Source: Excavation photograph, De Vos, 1990, fig. 4)

the ritual set comprised a portable terracotta altar, a terracotta lamp, two coins and an amulet (?) in the shape of a dolphin (Boyce, 1937, p.37, no.108). Another ensemble from Domus V.4.9 was composed of two terracotta altars of different sizes, three statuettes and two small terracotta dishes of different diameter (10cm and 12cm) (Boyce, 1937, p.41, no.123). Meanwhile, the deep niche of the House of the Sarno Lararium (I.14.7), with its painted depiction of the sacrificing Genius on the back wall, included two statuettes of the Lares, a bronze lamp and a bronze bowl (Fröhlich, 1991, pp.262–3, pl.6; Clarke, 2003, figs.42–43; Van Andringa, 2009, fig.201; Fig. 1.15).

Overall, the known ensembles of domestic ritual objects are not very extensive and speak against complex, multi-stage procedures. Often, they include – besides the occasional statuettes – lamps and bowls or small dishes as well as the small portable altars known already from older contexts, some still with remains of burnt offerings on top of them. The ensembles also appear to be composed of individual pieces of different ages. There is no typical ‘sacrificial set’ or

‘standard equipment’ in the sense of a canonical set of objects that can be found everywhere (or at least not frequently), and which would potentially serve as an indication of a binding, equally standardised ritual. This means that it is not possible to reconstruct a general, or even uniform sensory quality of a specific ‘domestic’ cult practice. Yet, within the contexts of the domestic cult foci and their installations that have been described in this chapter, some facets of sensory qualities may be tentatively suggested. For instance, the lamps would have provided light of only limited intensity, especially within the limiting spatial setting of framing niches or aedicules that already necessitated the physical closeness of the actors. This spatially confined intensity, in turn, must have helped to focus the attention of the ritual actors and attendees, as well as to create a shared, temporal experience of a ritual locale that was different from the surrounding domestic setting. This focussed attention must have been especially enforced by the small scale of the statuettes on display and, above all, the commonly found, small, portable altars, which were used to burn offerings. The low height of these altars – sometimes less than ten centimetres – and the small volume of offerings that could fit onto their tops, again indicates the potential (or sought after?) intimacy of the temporary cultic event – although the resulting scent may have lingered in the air for some time after the ritual’s completion. In contrast, we have no traces of the possible acoustic elements of these rituals. Was there any background noise? Was sound used to deliberately mark specific moments of the ritual, emphasising the rhythm or sequence of actions? Or was the acoustic experience limited to the incidental sounds that arose from the performance of ritual actions?

Finally, some objects with obvious connections to cult nevertheless defy a concrete functional interpretation, such as the marble ball from VIII.2,16 (Boyce, 1937, p.74, no.344) or the bronze object in the shape of a sea snail which was found placed on a travertine plate on the floor under the niche in V.2,15 (Boyce, 1937, p.35, no.94). In such cases, it would seem likely that these objects had a specific meaning and value for their individual owners.

The general impression is that the collections of objects found in the domestic shrines of Pompeii were eclectic and idiosyncratic and ‘regularly intermingle valuable objects with cheap ones, figurines of a certain scale and workmanship with others of different size and quality, portrait busts with household objects’ (Bodel, 2008, p.261). The character of each collection is clearly individualised and highly personal, with each object in

the collection having its own specific, intrinsic value (Bodel, 2008, p.262).

## Conclusion

Our knowledge of the domestic cults of Pompeii is fragmentary, but this article has shown that it is possible to reconstruct some facets of this complex world by considering locations and settings, installations, imagery, objects and the organic remains of ritual acts – and, crucially, by adopting a diachronic perspective. The visual staging of domestic cult installations in the house, their intrinsic value as places and foci of cultic attention, as well as the sensory experience of ritual actions shows that domestic religion was rich and nuanced – and attest to considerable change between the second century BCE and the first century CE.

In the second century and beginning of the first century BCE, household cult sites had no specific visual design and were not prominently embedded in the everyday domestic topography. Deities were not represented visually, and cult happened at simple places / installations, as is indicated, in particular, by specific ritual objects such as altars and thymiateria, which were relatively small and therefore mobile. Remains of burnt plant and animal species indicate that a variety of items were seen as appropriate offerings for the different occasions of domestic cultic activity.

A first profound change took place in the Augustan period. Images of deities were now omnipresent in the houses, in the form of mythical images as well as statues and statuettes. The design of cult areas was not unaffected by this boom. For the first time, we can discern the furnishing of niches with a specific cult imagery: pictures of the Lares and other gods. Cult areas were now clearly set apart from their surroundings and gained inherent value in their respective household topography. This new prominence was also reflected by the cult installation's setting and design – and possibly even by greater ritual sophistication, as seems to be indicated by the wider variety of fruit and plant species known from domestic ritual deposits.

The new prominence of domestic cult became even more apparent during the last years before the eruption of 79 CE. Pictures of the Lares were now omnipresent, and magnificently decorated 'Tempellararien' were set up in prominent locations within the domestic space. Meanwhile, a great density of cult statuettes testified to the variety of cult recipients – and simultaneously made the gods tangible. Yet, despite all these shared features and trends, there was still an enormous variety within the landscape of

Pompeian domestic cult. We find different locations, different types of decoration and offerings, as well as heterogeneous ensembles of cultic objects which had often been formed over several generations. All of this shows that the Pompeian world of domestic material religion was not one of high, traditional formalisation. Instead, it was dynamic and diverse, and characterised by an impressive range of material settings, ritual actions and sensory experiences.

## Acknowledgements

The production of the text was partly financed by the ERC Grant DECOR (No. 681269). We are very grateful to the student assistants Katrin Götttsch and Lotta Böttcher for supporting research and for preparing the graphics of Figures 1.11 and 1.13. Furthermore, we would like to thank Daria Lanzuolo (German Archaeological Institute Rome) and Jackie and Bob Dunn (pompeiiinpictures.com) for providing us with photographs.

## Bibliography

- 1 Albiach, R., Ballester, C., Escrivà, I., Fernández, A., Huguet, E., Olcina, M., Padín, J., Pascual, G., Pedroni, L. and Ribera A. (2008) 'Estudios estratigráficos y geofísicos entre la casa de Ariadna y el Vicolo Storto (VII, 4)' in P.G. Guzzo and M.P. Guidobaldi (eds) *Nuove ricerche archeologiche nell'area vesuviana (scavi 2003–2006). Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Roma 1–3 febbraio 2007*, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider, pp.249–64.
- 2 Allison, P.M. (1992) *The Distribution of Pompeian House Contents and Its Significance*, vol. I, Sydney, University of Sydney.
- 3 Allison, P.M. (2004) *Pompeian Households. An Analysis of the Material Culture*, Los Angeles, University of California.
- 4 Aoyagi, M. (1977) *La Casa della Nave Europa a Pompei*, Tokyo, University of Tokyo.
- 5 Bassani, M. (2008) *Sacraria. Ambienti e piccoli edifici per il culto domestico in area vesuviana*, Antenor Quaderni, vol.9, Rome, Quasar.
- 6 Bodel, J. (2008) 'Cicero's Minerva, penates, and the mother of the Lares. An outline of Roman domestic religion' in J. Bodel and S.M. Olyan (eds) *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, Malden and Oxford, Blackwell, pp.248–75.

- 7 Boyce, G. (1937) 'Corpus of the lararia of Pompeii', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, vol.14, pp.5–112
- 8 Bragantini, I. (1991) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.3, pp.1047–1054 s. v.V 4,3.
- 9 Bragantini, I. (1996) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.6, pp.380–458 s. v.VII 1,40, Casa di M. Caesius Blandus.
- 10 Bragantini, I. (1998) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.8, pp.619–647 s. v.VIII 5,37, Casa delle Pareti rosse.
- 11 Bragantini, I. (1999) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.9, pp.128–140 s. v. IX 3,2, Fabbrica di prodotti chimici.
- 12 Ciaraldi, M. and Richardson, J. (2000) 'Food, ritual and rubbish in the making of Pompeii' in G. Fincham, G. Holland and R. Rodgers Holland (eds) *TRAC 99. Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference*, Oxford, Oxbow, pp.74–82.
- 13 Clarke, J.R. (2003) *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans: Visual Representation and Non-Elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C. – A.D. 315*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- 14 D'Ambrosio, A. and Borriello, M.R. (2001) *Arule e bruciaprofumi fittili da Pompei*, Naples, Electa.
- 15 De Simone, A. and Sampaolo, V. (1990) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.2, pp.954–962 s. v. I 15,1.
- 16 De Vos, A. (1990) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.2, pp.938–944 s.v. I 14,7 Casa del Larario del Sarno.
- 17 Dwyer, E.J. (1982) *Pompeian Domestic Sculpture. A Study of Five Pompeian Houses and their Contents*, Rome, G. Bretschneider.
- 18 Flohr, M. (forthcoming) 'Spatial archaeologies of religion at Pompeii', draft based on a paper given at the conference 'An urban archaeology of religion', Copenhagen, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333670549\\_DRAFT\\_Spatial\\_archaeologies\\_of\\_religion\\_at\\_Pompeii](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333670549_DRAFT_Spatial_archaeologies_of_religion_at_Pompeii), accessed 31.3.2020.
- 19 Flower, H.I. (2017) *The Dancing Lares and the Serpent in the Garden: Religion at the Roman Street Corner*, Princeton, Princeton University.
- 20 Foss, P.W. (1997) 'Watchful Lares: Roman household organization and the rituals of cooking and dining' in R. Laurence and A. Wallace-Hadrill (eds) *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*, *JRA Suppl. Ser. vol.22*, Portsmouth, s.n., pp.196–218.
- 21 Fröhlich, T. (1991) *Lararien- und Fassadenbilder in den Vesuvstädten: Untersuchungen zur 'volkstümlichen' pompejanischen Malerei*, Mainz, P. von Zabern.
- 22 Gallo, A. (2001) *Pompei. L'insula I della Regione IX. Settore occidentale*, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- 23 Geertz, C. (1973) 'Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture' in *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays*, New York, Basic Books, pp.3–30.
- 24 Giacobello, F. (2008) *Larari Pompeiani: Iconografia e culto dei Lari in ambito domestico*, Milan, LED.
- 25 Giglio, M. (2017) 'Edificio IX 7, 20 o Casa della Fortuna' in F. Pesando and M. Giglio (eds) *Rileggere Pompei 5. L'insula 7 della Regio IX*, Studi e ricerche del parco archeologico di Pompei, vol.36, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider, pp.90–130.
- 26 Grimal, P. (1984) *Les jardins romains*, Paris, Fayard.
- 27 Hackworth Petersen, L. (2012) 'Collecting gods in Roman houses: The House of the Gilded Cupids (VI.16.7, 38) at Pompeii', *Arethusa*, vol.45, pp.319–32.
- 28 Harth, D. and Michaels, A. (2003) 'Ritualdynamik. Soziokulturelle Prozesse in historischer und kulturvergleichender Perspektive', *Forum Ritualdynamik*, no.1, <https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/ritualdynamik/article/view/361/344>, accessed 29.3.2020.
- 29 Jashemski, W.F. (1979) *The Gardens of Pompeii. Herculaneum and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius I*, New Rochelle, Caratzas.
- 30 Kastenmeier, P. (2007) *I luoghi del lavoro comestico nella casa pompeiana*, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- 31 Krzyszowska, A. (2002) *Les cultes privés à Pompéi*, Breslau, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.
- 32 Latour, B. (2000) 'When things strike back: A possible contribution of "science studies" to the social sciences', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.51, pp.107–23.
- 33 Lipka, M. (2006) 'Notes on Pompeian domestic cults', *Numen*, vol.53, pp.327–58.
- 34 Marmora Pompeiana 2008. *Marmora pompeiana nel Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Gli arredi scultorei delle case pompeiane*, Studi della Soprintendenza archeologica di Pompei 26, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- 35 Mau, A. (1900) *Pompeji in Leben und Kunst*, Leipzig, Wilhelm Engelmann.
- 36 Menotti, E.M. and de Vos, M. (1990) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.2, pp.838–841 s. v. I 12,16.
- 37 Morichi, R., Paone, R. and Sampaolo, F. (2017) *Pompei. Nuova cartografia informatizzata georiferita*, Rome, Arbor Sapientiae Editore.
- 38 Niccolini F. (1890) 'Casa nell'Isola VII Regione IX', in *Le case ed i monumenti di Pompei disegnati e descritti*, vol.3, Napoli, s.n.
- 39 Orr, D.G. (1978) 'Roman domestic religion: The evidence of the household shrines' in W. Haase (ed) *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, Band II. vol.16.2, Berlin and New York, De Gruyter, pp.1557–91.



- 40 Palmentieri, A. (2017) 'L'arredo scultoreo. Il sistema decorativo degli edifici' in F. Pesando and M. Giglio (eds) *Rileggere Pompei 5. L'insula 7 della Regio IX*, Studi e ricerche del parco archeologico di Pompei, vol.36, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider, pp.213–23.
- 41 Parise Badoni, F. and Sampaolo, V. (1991) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.3, pp.650–675 s. v.V 2, h, Casa del Cenacolo.
- 42 Pernice, E. (1932) *Hellenistische Tische, Zisternenmündungen, Beckenuntersätze, Altäre und Truhen*, Die hellenistische Kunst in Pompeji, vol.5, Berlin, De Gruyter.
- 43 Reckwitz, A. (2002) 'Toward a theory of social practices: A development in culturalist theorizing', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol.5, pp.243–63.
- 44 Reckwitz, A. (2003) 'Grundelemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken. Eine sozialtheoretische Perspektive', *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, vol.32, no.4, pp.282–301.
- 45 Reckwitz, A. (2008). *Unscharfe Grenzen: Perspektiven der Kultursoziologie*. Bielefeld, transcript.
- 46 Robinson, M. (2002) 'Domestic burnt offerings and sacrifices at Roman and pre-Roman Pompeii, Italy', *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany*, vol.11, no.1/2, pp.93–99.
- 47 Robinson, M. (2005) 'Fosse, piccolo fosse e peristili a Pompei' in P.G. Guzzo and M.P. Guidobaldi (eds) *Nuove ricerche archeologiche a Pompei ed Ercolano*, Studi della Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei, vol.10, Naples, Electa, pp.109–119.
- 48 Robinson, M. (2019) 'Houses, gardens and feeding the household gods' in P. Roberts (ed.) *Last Supper in Pompeii*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, pp.227–243.
- 49 Sampaolo, V. (1994) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.5, pp.580–621 s. v.VI 15,5, Casa di M. Pupius Rufus.
- 50 Sampaolo, V. (2003) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.10, pp.361–500 s. v. IX 14,4, Casa di Obellius Firmus.
- 51 Schatzki, T. (2002) *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*, Pennsylvania, Penn State University Press.
- 52 Seiler, F. (1992) 'Casa degli Amorini dorati (VI 16, 7.38)', *Häuser in Pompeji*, vol.5, Munich, Hirmer.
- 53 Seiler, F. (1994) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.5, pp.714–846 s. v.VI 16,7.38 Casa degli Amorini dorati.
- 54 Simelius, S. (2018) *Pompeian Peristyle Gardens as a Means of Socioeconomic Representation*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Helsinki, <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-51-4432-4>, 21.10.2019.
- 55 Sogliano, A. (1907) 'VI. Pompei – Relazione degli scavi fatti dal dicembre 1902 a tutto marzo 1905', *Notizie degli scavi di antichità*, vol.4, pp.549–93.
- 56 Von Stackelberg, K.T. (2009) *The Roman Garden: Space, Sense, and Society*, London, Routledge.
- 57 Staub Gierow, M. (1994) 'Casa del Granduca (VII 4,56) und Casa dei Capitelli figurati (VII 4,57)', *Häuser in Pompeji*, vol.7, Munich, Hirmer.
- 58 Staub Gierow, M. (1997) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.7, pp.63–92 s. v.VII 4,57, Casa dei Capitelli figurati.
- 59 Touati, A.-M. L. and Boman, H. (2015) 'V 1,26 Casa di Caecilius Lucundus - South House, Room b (atrium) – Lararium', *The Swedish Pompeii Project*, [http://www.pompeijiprojektet.se/feature.php?hid=13&hidnummer=6388183&hrubrik=V%201,26%20Casa%20di%20Caecilius%20lucundus%20-%20South%20House&rid=74&ridnummer=5214600&rrubrik=Room%20b%20\(atrium\)&fid=52&fidnummer=4968890&frubrik=Lararium](http://www.pompeijiprojektet.se/feature.php?hid=13&hidnummer=6388183&hrubrik=V%201,26%20Casa%20di%20Caecilius%20lucundus%20-%20South%20House&rid=74&ridnummer=5214600&rrubrik=Room%20b%20(atrium)&fid=52&fidnummer=4968890&frubrik=Lararium), accessed 17.3.2020.
- 60 Trinacity, C. (2019) 'Fear and healing: Seneca, Caecilius Lucundus, and the Campanian earthquake of 62/63 CE', *Greece & Rome*, vol.66, no.1, pp.93–112.
- 61 Van Andringa, W. (2009) *Quotidien des dieux et des hommes: La vie religieuse dans les cités du Vésuve à l'époque romaine*, Rome, École française de Rome.
- 62 Wohlmayr, W. (1991) *Studien zur Idealplastik der Vesuvstädte*, Buchloe, Obermayer.



# AT HOME WITH THE LARES: LIVED RELIGION REMATERIALISED AT POMPEII

## Emma-Jayne Graham

### Abstract

*This article posits that Pompeian religious knowledge which characterised Lares and serpents as gods of place was a consequence of lived religion. It argues that this religious knowledge arose from personal experiences of religious agency as it was produced during encounters with these deities in different material and locational contexts, namely household kitchen shrines and street-corner altars. It suggests that because of the unique ways in which ritual caused humans to assemble with the mutually affective material qualities available in these particular contexts, these experiences and the religious knowledge they produced were grounded in ritualised actions incorporating the immediate material world, rather than involving purely cognitive or pre-existing intellectual understandings or beliefs. Adopting a broadly posthumanist position that combines elements of material religion and lived religion, the essay therefore highlights how religious knowledge at Pompeii was the product of ritualised relationships between human and more-than-human things (e.g. places, objects, divinity). Applying these concepts to ancient Pompeian religion for the first time, the discussion demonstrates how lived religion produced proximal forms of religious knowledge concerning personal and communal understandings of ancient Lares and serpents that effectively substantiated them as gods of place.*

**Keywords:** Lares, *lararium*, senses, material religion, lived religion, place, religious

**Full text:** <https://openartsjournal.org/issue-10/article-2/>

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2021s02>

### Biographical note

Emma-Jayne Graham is Senior Lecturer in Classical Studies at The Open University. Her research focuses on aspects of material religion, the archaeology of Roman Italy, mortuary practices, and ancient disability. She is the author of *Reassembling Religion in Roman Italy* (Routledge, 2021) and co-founder of [TheVotivesProject.org](http://TheVotivesProject.org).

Banner image: Detail from a garden painting, from the House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. (Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

# AT HOME WITH THE LARES: LIVED RELIGION REMATERIALISED AT POMPEII

Emma-Jayne Graham,  
The Open University

In the years immediately before 79 CE, the kitchen area of the large house at Pompeii known today as the House of the Epigrams (V.I.18; Fig. 2.1) was located at its most northerly corner. The natural light that entered this small space through two narrow, funnel-shaped windows on the eastern wall was most likely at its brightest during the morning and, perhaps with the help of artificial lighting, illuminated an almost square room with a doorway in its south-west corner (Staub, 2016) (Fig. 2.2). As was typical for Roman kitchens (Ault, 2015, p.210), a masonry counter built against the east wall beneath the windows was probably used as the hearth area, on top of which braziers for cooking could be placed. At the northern end of the counter was the arched doorway of a small brick and tile-lined oven built into the wall that separated the kitchen from a latrine (Staub, 2016).

A little over half a metre (0.68 m) above the kitchen counter, and slightly to the left of its centre, a small arched niche (measuring  $0.51 \times 0.44 \times 0.18\text{m}$ ) was set into the wall, with both its sides and the tile used to create its base covered with a thick layer of plaster (Staub Gierow, 2017b; Haug & Kreuz characterise these features as a form of domestic religious 'microarchitecture' in this volume) (Fig. 2.3). At least two statuettes could be inserted into holes cut into the plaster base of the niche, while the wall beside it and above the counter was painted with a now lost fresco (Boyce, 1937, p.32, n.75; Giacobello, 2008, pp.162–3; Staub Gierow, 2017b; for discussion of the better-preserved paintings from the house see Jones in this volume). Analogous arrangements can be found in houses across the city of Pompeii, where frescoes accompanying kitchen niches frequently portray the image of a libation-pouring Genius flanked by two large Lares, above a lower register depicting a rocky and verdant landscape in which one or two snakes approach an altar. For these reasons, it can be supposed that the traces of the fresco in the kitchen area of the House of the Epigrams, which were already faint when reported nearly a century ago by George Boyce (1937, p.32, n.75), once represented a version of the same scene, or at least one with similar religious

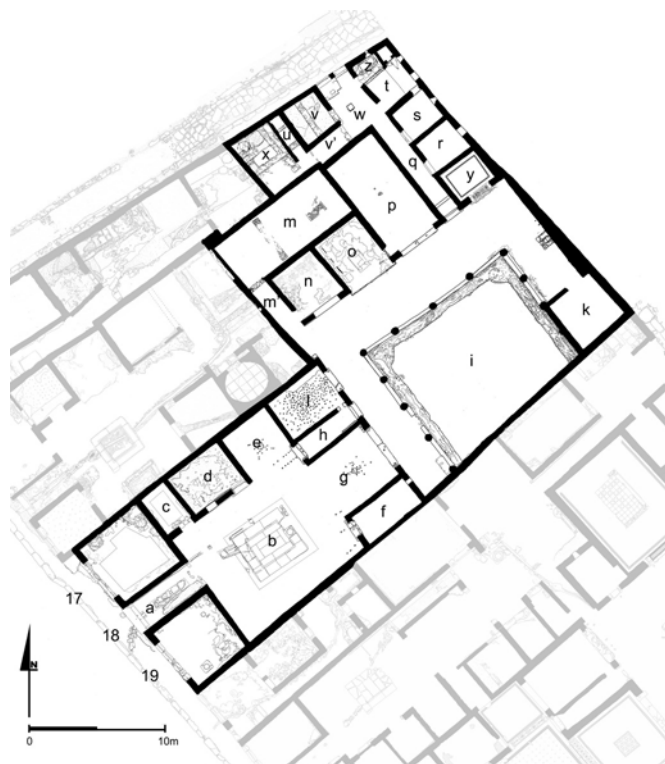


Figure 2.1: Plan of House of the Epigrams, showing the relationship between the kitchen area (t), the adjacent latrine (z) and the open space through which they were accessed (w). North is towards the top of the image. (Drawing by Ezequiel M. Pinto-Guillaume and Henrik Boman, used with permission of the Swedish Pompeii Project and the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali - Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

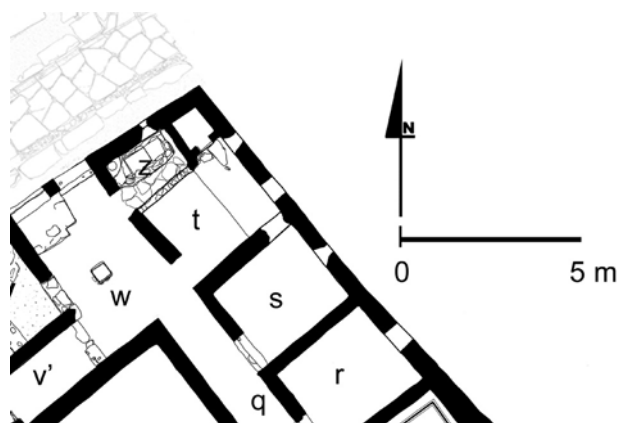


Figure 2.2: Detailed plan of the kitchen area of the House of the Epigrams, showing how the small square oven situated behind the latrine opened onto the long masonry bench of the kitchen. The kitchen dimensions are:  $2.78 \times 2.2 \times 2.71 \times 2.15\text{m}$ . North is towards the top of the image. (Drawing by Ezequiel M. Pinto-Guillaume and Henrik Boman, used with permission of the Swedish Pompeii Project and the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali - Parco Archeologico di Pompei)



Figure 2.3: The *lararium* niche in the kitchen of the House of the Epigrams. (Photo by Hans Thorwid, used with permission of the Swedish Pompeii Project and the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali - Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

connections. Together, then, the niche and fresco most probably provided a focus for ritual activities associated with honouring the divine figures known as the *Lares familiares*.

A person leaving this same house through its main entrance and walking a few hundred metres to the south along the street now named the Via del Vesuvio, would have reached the largest, and one of the most busy, crossroads in the city (Poehler, 2017, pp.147, 182; Poehler, Roggen & Crowther, 2019, p.255). The pavement of the Via del Vesuvio considerably widened where it joined the junction of the Via della Fortuna, Via Stabiana, and Via di Nola, especially in the area immediately outside a *caupona* (VI.14.16) and a shop (VI.14.17) associated with the large House of L. Numisius Rarus and his wife Oppia (VI.14.12, the main entrance to which was around the corner on the Via della Fortuna). Here, where the pavement was much more spacious than in most streets of the city, our wanderer from the House of the Epigrams would have encountered another shrine adorned with similarly familiar iconography. Between a public fountain and

a tall water tower stood a masonry altar (measuring 1.10 × 1.16 × 8.5m), built against a taller and slightly wider flat pillar, on which was painted a scene depicting a religious ceremony involving four togate men and a flute player, accompanied by the *Lares compitales*, the pair of divinities charged with the protection of the street corner (Van Andringa, 2000, p.50; Flower, 2017, pp.152–3) (Fig. 2.4).

It would have been clear to our ancient Pompeian what the difference was between these interior and exterior places with otherwise comparable religious iconography, as well as between the divine characters with whom they were connected, and the different nature of their own relationship with each of them. From their perspective, each set of images, and the material things with which they were connected, was closely entwined with an individual and localised form of divinity and a discrete set of ritualised practices. The *Lares* honoured through those practices were, according to Harriet Flower (2017, p.158), unique to each individual shrine. In other words, the ancient *Lares* were the protectors of the immediate spaces with which they were visibly and physically associated through the presence of the frescoes, niches, and altars just described and, most importantly, also through the activities that occurred in conjunction with them. Accordingly, the *Lares*, who existed ‘perhaps almost [as] an infinite number of pairs, instances and local variants’ (Flower, 2017, p.159), were unquestionably gods of place.

Elsewhere I have argued that the ways of rationalising, thinking about, and continuing to act in the world which derive from lived religion can be described as constituting ‘religious knowledge’ (Graham, 2021, pp.21–2; *forthcoming*). In this article, I therefore suggest that this knowledge of the *Lares* as gods of place was, correspondingly, a consequence of lived religion. That is, that it was a form of religious knowledge which arose from personal experiences of religious agency as it was produced during encounters with *Lares* in different material and locational contexts. Most importantly, I suggest that because of the unique ways in which ritual caused the thingly qualities of humans to assemble with the mutually affective material qualities that were available in particular contexts, these experiences were grounded in ritualised actions incorporating the immediate material world, rather than involving purely cognitive or pre-existing intellectual understandings or beliefs (on the concept of ‘things’ and ‘thinginess’, see Graham, 2020; Morgan, 2021). The broadly posthumanist position that underpins this argument therefore combines elements of material religion and lived religion. It highlights how religious agency (i.e.



Figure 2.4: Drawing of fountain, street altar and water column. (Source: Breton, 1855, p.307).

the difference that ritualised acts make to the world that humans perceive and characterise as ‘religion’) and religious knowledge are the product of ritualised relationships between human and more-than-human things (e.g. places, objects, divinity) (Graham, 2020; 2021; *forthcoming*). In this paper, I apply these concepts to ancient Pompeian religion for the first time, by examining how the assembling of worshippers with the divergent material qualities of a household kitchen *lararium* and a street-corner shrine produced diverse, dynamic, and often individualised forms of lived religion. In turn, I demonstrate how these forms of lived religion produced what I shall describe as both ‘distal’ and ‘proximal’ forms of religious knowledge concerning understandings of ancient Lares that effectively substantiated them as gods of place.

### Lares and *lararia* at Pompeii

Scholarship on Roman Lares and *lararia* is already substantial. This is especially true for studies of Pompeii, which, thanks to the almost unparalleled survival of *in situ* frescoes, altars, other types of shrine, and bronze or terracotta statuettes, has provided a wealth of iconographic and material evidence for the pervasive presence of Lares within the public and personal lives of the inhabitants of the city (key works include: Boyce, 1937; Orr, 1978; Fröhlich, 1991; Van Andringa, 2000; Kaufmann-Heinimann, 2002; Giacobello, 2008; Van Andringa, 2009, pp.217–69; Flower, 2017; Flower and DiLuzio, 2019; see also Haug & Kreuz in this volume). It is neither possible, nor necessary, to provide a comprehensive survey of centuries of observations regarding the *lararia* of Pompeii here, but it is useful to draw attention to those which are most relevant to the following investigation of Lares cult as lived religion.



Figure 2.5: A fourth style (55–79 CE) *lararium* painting from Pompeii, with an uncertain find-spot. MANN 8905. (Photo: Saillko, Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 3.0)

Indeed, it is crucial to begin by acknowledging that the majority of studies of the Pompeian Lares and their *lararia*, including those which do not explicitly adopt an art-historical focus (e.g. Flower, 2017; Rogers, 2020), are nonetheless concerned with, or take their lead from, iconographic evidence. This is to be expected, given that surviving wall paintings present the primary means of identifying the locations at which Lares might be encountered, as well as making it possible to distinguish the particular characteristics of the Lares and their cult from those of the many other deities, heroes, and otherworldly beings who were part of Pompeian life. Accordingly, it has been established that visual representations of the Lares will conventionally depict them as a pair of giant young men, dressed in short tunics, shown pouring wine from a *rhyton* raised above shoulder height into a *situla* held in their opposing hand. Sometimes they appear to be in the act of moving or dancing, and they regularly flank the image of a togate Genius (and sometimes other divine or mortal figures) shown pouring a libation or making an offering at a small altar. In a lower section, beneath the line of the ground on which the Lares and Genius stand, can often

be seen one or two snakes and a (usually circular) altar, set within a landscape of plants and rocks. An indicative and very well-known example, the exact find-spot of which remains uncertain, can be seen in Fig. 2.5 (the details of this painting are discussed by Jones in this volume; see also the additional examples of *lararia* in Haug & Kreuz). Studies have revealed a strong preponderance of these scenes within the kitchen areas of many Pompeian houses (Foss, 1997; Giacobello, 2008; Van Andringa, 2009, pp.236–40; Brandt, 2010). This repeated iconographic scheme has consequently been instrumental in distinguishing between what might be considered a true *lararium*, and other types of household shrine found elsewhere within the *domus*, at which were honoured the Penates and deities with special or personal significance to the head of the household (most commonly referred to in related scholarship as the *paterfamilias* or *dominus*) and his family (Giacobello, 2008, pp.35–6). Federica Giacobello (2008, p.60), for instance, has conclusively demonstrated that the long-held assumption that Lares were worshipped exclusively by the family in the so-called ‘areas of representation’ of the house, while

'a separate, parallel track of domestic worship' (Bodel, 2008, p.266) took place among enslaved people and servants in other areas such as kitchens, is in fact not supported by the material evidence for 'true' *lararia*.

Identifying the presence of shrines for the worship of the *Lares compitales* at street corners and in other street-side locations has also relied heavily on visual and iconographic evidence, although the existence of archaeologically verifiable altars of all types has considerably widened the evidence for community Lares worship beyond exclusively iconographic testimony. These open-air altars and shrines are generally understood to have formed the focal point for the annual winter festival of Compitalia, involving sacrifices and offerings made in the company of the community of the surrounding neighbourhood, and led by local freedmen elected to act as presiding *vicomagistri* (Giacobello, 2008, pp.45–7; Van Andringa, 2000, pp.73–6; Flower, 2017, p.147; Rieger, 2020; the relevance to Pompeii of the Augustan reform of public Lares cult remains a matter of debate that is beyond the scope of this paper). Although the depiction of a pair of anthropomorphic Lares, accompanied by one or two serpents, remains dominant within the surviving paintings associated with street-corner shrines, other elements of their iconography differ from that found in domestic *lararia*. More than one cult official (*vicomagistri*) might be shown in place of the single Genius pouring a libation; serpents appear on their own without any other figures; and, in at least two examples, images of twelve Olympian gods are also incorporated into the broader scene (for a full discussion, see Flower, 2017, p.150; also Fig. 2.7). William Van Andringa's (2000) study of street-corner shrines ('autel de carrefour') remains the most comprehensive survey of the location and form of these open-air places of cult. He catalogued 38 examples, although Flower (2017, p.147) has since observed that evidence exists for at least 58 street shrines of all types across Pompeii 'including many niches, as well as possible sites of former shrines,' many of which may have been used during the Compitalia. Amongst these, humble or poorly preserved structures often appear part way along narrow streets, well away from junctions. Examples include the small altar made of two vertical stone slabs located between VI.12.6 and VI.12.7, and the single stone altar below a brick niche at IX.4.14, both of which are located in streets surrounding the more substantial shrine at the junction described above (Pompeii in Pictures, n.d.). These may have been associated with celebrations of Lares or with other (or indeed multiple) ritualised activities.

Recent work by Flower (2017) offers the most comprehensive study of Lares and Roman religion, not only at Pompeii but also at Rome, Delos, and in relation to Roman culture more widely. Among other things, Flower offers a significant new reading of the iconography discussed above, asserting that the youths and snakes are not in fact alternative ways of visualising what were essentially the same divinities as some have supposed. Instead, the giant anthropomorphic figures of Lares depict the gods responsible for protecting the house, whereas the images of snakes shown inhabiting a subterranean environment of plants, trees, and rocks evoke an entirely separate pair of protective deities. Accordingly, she argues, like Lares themselves, the serpents should also be identified as 'gods of place', not least because they often 'receive their own distinct offering of either eggs or pinecones on a separate altar within their garden', a detail which 'stresses their status as divine figures in their own right' (Flower, 2017, pp.63, 65). Flower goes on to note that, as a result of this understanding, 'the Lares themselves gain a deeper meaning as "gods of place" in the home when they are combined with the quite different "gods of place" who inhabit their own sphere in nature' (2017, p.67). Later in the same study she describes the serpents more specifically as gods 'of the natural environment that existed before, beneath, around, and in harmony with the communities built by men' (p.151). The implications of Flower's observations therefore appear to be that the serpents shown in *lararia* paintings in the home and the street should be understood as the gods of the physical setting in, on, and within which the house or street altar was constructed, that is, of the very ground beneath its foundations and of the fundamental materialness of the location itself. If this is indeed the case, their distinctive visual pairing with both the *Lares familiares* and the *Lares compitales* further strengthens the case for understanding all Lares-related cult activities as intimately entwined with the physical qualities of a particular location. This extends from the qualities of the physical material world as it was constructed and experienced by worshippers and shared with anthropomorphic Lares, to those of the 'natural' environment of the serpents that humans had appropriated, and for which they must continue to give thanks.

Despite this new characterisation of Lares and serpents as distinct divinities who were both intimately entwined with place in the Roman (or at least the Pompeian) imagination, no investigation has yet explored very far beyond the visual qualities of *lararia* shrines to consider how their material qualities as

real-world places were implicated in lived religion. Questions remain to be asked, for instance, about how enplaced ritualised experiences that directly invoked and materialised this complex pair of ‘gods of place’ might produce, sustain, rework, or reinforce very specific forms of religious knowledge concerning the fundamental ‘placely’ nature of Lares and divine serpents. In other words, despite acknowledging the importance of the *idea* of place, we have yet to fully consider the significance of the materialness of the *actual* places where people encountered these divine beings. To do this, it is necessary to approach the materialness of Lares cult through the lens of lived religion.

### Lived religion, materialness, and religious knowledge

Adopting a material-focused approach to ancient lived religion involves shifting our analyses of evidence such as the iconography discussed above away from questions about *what* it means, towards a new focus on *how* it means (Boivin, 2008; Mol & Versluys, 2015; Van Oyen & Pitts, 2017; Graham, 2020; 2021). That is to say that, what differentiates ancient material religion from other (primarily text-based) approaches to ancient religion is its emphasis not on recovering the underlying meaning of material symbols, but on the potentialities of materially situated experiences and their role in the continual production of religion. This essentially involves spotlighting the role played by the qualities of the material world in shaping the physical and cognitive experiences of human ritual participants in such a way as to actively *produce* religion (Graham, 2021). Approached from this standpoint, religion can be understood as emerging primarily from the ways in which people do things with other things in ritualised contexts and, crucially, the ways in which the qualities or affordances of those things affect difference or do something to them in return (Graham, 2020, pp.228–9; 2021, p.201). In other words, by engaging in particular ways with material things and their mutually affective qualities, including aspects of the more-than-human world, such as objects, animals, places, trees, foodstuffs, divinities, and so on, distinctive differences are made to the world (Boivin, 2008, p.50; Graham, 2021, pp.29–30). In ritualised contexts which prompt the assembling of certain things, such as the performance of a sacrifice, those differences are experienced by human participants as lived religion (Graham, 2021, pp.38–9). Hence, it was not through the mere existence of the *ideas* connected with pouring libations or performing sacrifices that ancient deities were successfully worshipped, appeased, or honoured, and lived religion

consequently ‘achieved’, but through the real-world action of a person assembling in a particular way with wine, a *patera*, an altar, a place, a divinity, a moment in time, and so on. Lived religion arises, then, in the *doing* of ritual, and the mutually affective relationships that ritualised activities forge between humans and the more-than-human material world.

All forms of religious knowledge can thus be defined as profoundly personal and experience-based understandings of what religion entails, and as knowledge that emerges from the ongoing accumulation of a person’s experience of lived religion as it has been described here. However, this definition must be further refined before we proceed, since different types of experience might also lead to subtly different forms of religious knowledge. For instance, the most basic distinction might be between: (1) knowledge acquired through membership of a particular cultural world such as that of Roman Pompeii, and the consequent possession of an overarching understanding of its norms, expectations, and broadly shared religious concepts acquired through everyday experiences of being in that world; and (2) the type of knowledge that was acquired by actively engaging on a personal, embodied level in particular ritualised activities. To more accurately distinguish between these types of knowledge and the ways in which they are acquired I adopt terms commonly used in anatomy to describe locations relative to the centre of the human body: ‘distal’ (i.e. ‘away from’) and ‘proximal’ (i.e. ‘near to’) (Graham, 2020, pp.212–3; 2021, pp.22–5; *forthcoming*).

Broadly shared knowledge of the cultural norms and customs that dictate how, when, where, and why particular rituals should be performed, can be described as distal religious knowledge. This sort of knowledge is most commonly attained and sustained at a distance, through the representation or communication of shared ideas, or through regularised witnessing of public or civic ritual acts such as annual festivals. Distal religious knowledge in Roman Pompeii was therefore shared across the community. It was high-level knowledge that was sustained by regular communal gatherings at which people witnessed repeated acts of sacrifice, the making of offerings, or the uttering of prayers, while shared expectations concerning the apparent necessity of those actions was perpetually communicated by being visibly sedimented within the fabric of the city (e.g. memorialised in dedicatory inscriptions, sculptural reliefs, and the provision of facilities such as altars and temples). Distal religious knowledge, then, essentially concerned what Pompeians generally understood they were expected to do, as well as where, when, and how. It was distal



religious knowledge which caused them to ritually assemble with certain material things on specified days of the year, and to perform quite specific types of action at both the kitchen and street-corner *lararia*. These repeated acts, and a wider awareness that they occurred, served to reinforce and sustain the validity and authority of that shared knowledge, indeed of what we might think of as ‘Roman religion’ more generally.

However, distal knowledge was also paired with the more deeply personal or proximal knowledge acquired through different embodied experiences of actively engaging in those ritualised activities – experiences which inevitably varied from individual to individual because of the differing types of material engagement that were required, either by the distally informed expectations that shaped that particular ritual or by a person’s personal role within it. Proximal knowledge is therefore acquired by doing and typified by its autobiographical or individual character. We can think of this in terms of the difference between understanding that the act of sacrifice is important after you have read or heard about it or simply grown up in a world that values it, compared with the experience of being the presiding priest responsible for performing it, for touching the sacrificial victim, pouring the wine, burning the incense, and smelling the blood at close range. Proximal religious knowledge is therefore temporal and context-specific, arising from direct embodied and sensory engagements with the physical world during ritualised activities (Graham, 2021, p.24). Framing religious knowledge as a reflexive combination of proximal and distal ways of knowing therefore ‘offers a way of understanding the relationship between what might be considered to be a collection of religious activities that characterise a broad cultural phenomenon (i.e. “Roman religion”) and the personal experiences that engagement with these produced (“lived Roman religion”)’ (Graham, 2021, p.27).

Adopting a material-focused approach to lived religion, Pompeian Lares, and religious knowledge therefore compels us to ask new questions. Instead of being concerned with identifying or demystifying the ideas about place that were *symbolised* by depictions of Lares and serpents, our questions must necessarily be re-focused onto the lived experiences and religious knowledge that might potentially be produced by human engagements with the material qualities of *lararia* under certain ritualised circumstances. As noted above, distal religious knowledge concerning the Lares asserted their intimate and unique connection with specific physical and material places, rather than merely with a broader or more ill-defined concept of ‘place’, but they were also encountered in proximal ways via

the different material settings of household and street-corner *lararia*. It is therefore possible to suggest that when it came to Lares cult, lived religion was produced and rationalised as much through ritualised experiences of assembling with these gods *in place*, as it was through generalised cognitive understandings of their role as gods *of place*.

### **A Pompeian house and street-corner shrine**

To explore this further, we can consider the potential material engagements that were available in relation to the examples with which this paper began: the niche *lararium* in the kitchen area of the House of the Epigrams (V.I.18), and the nearby street-corner shrine of the *Lares compitales*. These were selected as the basis for the following case study for two main reasons: first, they each offer comparable levels of archaeological evidence for the potential material contexts in which ritualised activities were experienced; second, they are located within a short distance of one another. It can be reasonably supposed that residents of the House of the Epigrams who participated directly or indirectly in the rituals of the Compitalia festival made use of this particular local shrine, since it was the closest (known) compital altar to the house regardless of which of its entry/exit points was used (importantly, there is no archaeological or iconographic evidence for a shrine at the crossroads immediately adjacent to the house). The relative positions of the kitchen *lararium* and the street-corner shrine therefore allow for a comparison of lived religion at each, on the grounds that at least some members of the household will have encountered or engaged with both. To supplement these primary examples, I will also make occasional reference to other houses in the immediate vicinity where there is clear evidence for the presence of a *lararium* in the kitchen area. For the same reason, the households of each of these are also likely to have been involved in ritualised activities at the same street-corner shrine. Although these houses come from separate *insulae*, these ‘addresses’ remain a modern construct and are therefore not a factor in the analysis of ancient lived experience as it is presented here.

### **Meeting the Lares in the kitchen**

Let us begin by investigating the material context for lived religion at the kitchen *lararium* (Fig. 2.3). To do this, it is necessary to think through the potentially varied ways in which ritualisation may have caused particular aspects of the material qualities of the kitchen and its *lararium* to affect lived religion. This includes considering who these participants were and how the materialness of this location might on

occasion constitute a particular type of religious place. The most significant point to bear in mind in terms of the latter, is that because religion is actively brought into being through ritualisation, and since nothing innately ‘possesses’ religious agency, ancient kitchens did not exist as permanently religious places. As with all types of place, religious ones are best understood as constantly in the process of becoming, or as ‘time-space events’ (Moser & Feldman, 2014, p.6) that are situation- and assemblage-specific (Graham, 2021, pp.45–8). As a result, on its own, the presence of a *lararium* shrine and/or fresco depicting Lares or serpents was not enough to make a place inherently ‘religious’: religion could only be affected, or in other words performed into existence, in that location when the shrine was assembled with certain other things in the course of ritual.

To identify what those things were, we can think about what characterised the ritualised activities involving Lares: ‘Garlands would be hung on and around the household shrine, incense would be burned, a variety of different types of food and drink such as spelt, grain, fruit and wine would be offered, and on occasion animals such as cows, sheep and pigs would be sacrificed’ (Draycott, 2017, p.169; Ovid, *Fasti*, 2.636–38; Petronius, *Satyricon*, 60.8; Plautus, *Aulularia*, 24; for more details see Haug & Kreuz in this volume). Not all of these activities necessarily took place in the small space of the kitchen (e.g. large animal sacrifice), nor were they definitely always performed by one individual alone. Nonetheless, the *lararium* niche in the vicinity of the kitchen hearth was probably the focal point for the culmination of these activities and the giving of offerings, making it a key component within that assemblage. To this, we should also add the objects that were required to accomplish the actions just described: jugs and *paterae*, baskets and other vessels, specific knives, and braziers or incense burners. These were, of course, things that might exist within the kitchen when it was not actively incorporated into a ritualised assemblage, such as when the counter was being used for food preparation and when that food and drink was to be consumed by the household rather than given as an offering to the Lares. It was, however, only when ritual caused them to become assembled in a particular configuration with certain people, divinities, and other things that their qualities combined to make the kitchen the setting for lived religion.

We must also consider who these people were, since an additional factor in the ‘of-the-moment’ character of lived religion might be the varied composition of the group of humans who were participating. It might be assumed that, as the head of the household, the

*paterfamilias* was responsible for performing rituals focused on honouring the *Lares familiares* of the house and the serpent gods of the place on which it was built (Tybout, 1996; Bodel, 2008, p.261; Flower, 2017, p.73). After all, it was most likely his Genius who was shown performing a similar act in the accompanying paintings. This is nevertheless far from certain, and it has also been suggested that it was servants and the enslaved who formed the primary human component of these ritualised assemblages (Foss, 1997; Bodel, 2008, pp.248–9; Draycott, 2017). It remains possible that both the *paterfamilias* and other free and enslaved members of the household congregated in order to honour these two pairs of gods. An Augustan-period fresco from the kitchen of the House of Sutoria Primigenia (I.13.2) certainly depicts what appears to be a large household gathering at an altar, with the family and a crowd of slaves flanked by two Lares (see Fig. 1.5 in Haug & Kreuz in this volume; Giacobello, 2008, pp.156–8; Flower, 2017, p.58, pls. 9, 10). This scene can be put forward in support of the argument that the whole household might gather on these occasions, although there is nothing in the image itself to suggest that the setting is the (very small) kitchen in which the fresco was located, and even a cursory glance at the evidence for most kitchens in Pompeian houses of all social levels reveals that the majority were also small spaces that in all likelihood could not have held the full household.

This was almost certainly the case for the kitchen of the House of the Epigrams, which was a comparatively small, enclosed space of around 6m<sup>2</sup> (2.78 × 2.2 × 2.71 × 2.15m; Staub, 2016) but with an actual floor area of closer to 2.8m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 2.2). It therefore seems very unlikely that the entire household ever assembled together in this space in order to participate in ritualised activities encompassing the *lararium* niche. The materialness of the space itself therefore implies that proximal religious knowledge produced by the performance of ritualised activities in conjunction with the materialness of the kitchen was restricted to a small number of people. It remains possible that the space immediately outside the kitchen accommodated a larger gathering of members of the household who witnessed – or who at least heard and possibly smelled – the activities performed at the niche above the hearth (this space is marked as ‘w’ in Fig. 2.1, and has been identified as a possible hallway with a staircase to an upper floor; Staub Gierow, 2017c). In this case, the material qualities of the kitchen also contributed to the production and maintenance of distal forms of knowledge concerning the worship of the *Lares familiares* and the serpent gods of that place.

The people who did assemble with the materialness of the kitchen *lararium* and the other material things described above, most probably did so in quite different ways and under a variety of ritual (and non-ritual) circumstances. Probably only one person could perform the main ritualised act of pouring a libation onto a brazier, or placing the offerings into the niche and any garlands around it, and they may have done so in a location and with objects that they only ever assembled with on that occasion (i.e. with things that were not part of their everyday lives, including perhaps the space of the kitchen itself in the case of the *paterfamilias* who might be expected not to spend much time or to be overly familiar with kitchen areas). In other words, we must not assume that it was always, or only, the people who spent much of their time in this location who ritually assembled with the *lararium* shrine. If and when they did, their experiences of lived religion must have contrasted significantly with that of the *paterfamilias*, largely because of their differing levels of familiarity with the material affordances of that location and the objects with which they assembled. To understand the significance of the connection between Lares and the materialness of place in the production of lived religion we therefore need to pay greater attention to the realities of the physical places with which they were connected and the types of religious agency that these did and did not facilitate. Thus, the next logical question must be: what did the material or thingly qualities of the kitchen *lararium* afford in terms of the specific nature of those religious experiences and subsequent religious knowledge concerning the Lares?

The material and sensory qualities of the kitchen area were likely dimly lit, with the two small windows providing limited light and ventilation. Light levels were almost certainly low, even with the use of oil lamps or other lighting, which would have flickered and cast shadows at all times of day. The kitchen of the House of the Epigrams was also potentially a very hot space with, unusually, an oven opening at one end of the counter in front of the *lararium* niche. Even if this was not lit at the moment when offerings were placed in the niche, when libations were poured, or when other items were placed onto a brazier on the counter, the residual heat in the bricks and masonry surrounding it will likely have made this part of the house noticeably warm (see Platts, 2019, pp.195–6). A recent survey of this kitchen area, its oven, and the adjacent latrine was unable to identify for certain whether the oven had a vent, but even if it did, its efficiency may have been low (Staub Gierow, 2017a). Either way, the small, poorly ventilated kitchen was most probably smoky, or at may at least have smelled smoky due to the residual

aroma of burning wood from the oven. Relatedly, reaching to place any offering in the niche required a person to stretch over the counter and any braziers or other kitchen equipment placed on it. Indeed, it is commonly proposed that offerings to the Lares involved the pouring of libations directly on to the hearth, so it is likely that a lit brazier was placed either on the counter or on the floor of the kitchen for this purpose, increasing the risk of scalds or burns as a person leaned over to place offerings inside or remove previously dedicated items from within the niche. A small latrine was also located immediately adjacent to the kitchen. This was separated from the cooking area by a narrow wall, and although the latrine itself had a separate doorway, smells emanating from it are likely to have permeated the kitchen and surrounding spaces (see Jansen, 1997).

Most studies of Roman kitchens, including those that have adopted a primarily sensory approach to their analysis, have asserted that these were strong smelling locations, with the mix of pungent herbs, spices, and garum used as flavourings, along with the scent of freshly butchered or roasting meats, and the co-location of drains and latrines, producing a distinctive aroma (Platts, 2019, pp.111–12, 196–7; Jansen, 1997). One recent study (Platts, 2019, p.112) has maintained that this unpleasant smell was the primary reason for locating kitchens away from the areas of the house where food might be served and eaten by the *paterfamilias*, members of his family, and guests, arguing that as a ‘bad smell’ it was associated with the enslaved population of the house. Hannah Platts (2019, p.230) describes in no uncertain terms the combination of kitchen and latrine as ‘stench-producing’. She also characterises kitchen smells as ‘foul’, ‘particularly unpleasant’, ‘pungent’, and despite acknowledging that at times ‘the scent of herbs and spices, fruit and cooking meat, fish and vegetables’ might be pleasant, goes on to emphasise how these were ‘intermingled with that of the cloying and sickly-sweet scent of rotting food waste and human excreta’ (p.196). These are, nevertheless, observations which require some unpacking in the context of the present study.

First, it is not entirely clear why kitchens must only ever have been equated with ‘bad’, strong, or otherwise unpleasant smells. Although Roman culinary tastes were certainly different from those of the modern world, and ancient sewage systems were comparatively basic, the scent of cooking food, the aroma of fresh herbs and spices, and the smell of baking bread or roasting meat need not always be actively unpleasant, even if it is sometimes powerful. Given the confined floor space of the kitchen, it seems unlikely that the sort

of large-scale butchery activities that might saturate a room with the scent of animal blood and faeces occurred in this specific food preparation area, even if they perhaps took place in an adjacent space. The same might be true for food waste, which need not have been left to rot within the kitchen itself. So, rather than imagining that the *Lares familiares* and the serpents of the House of the Epigrams were connected with a cramped, stinky, unpleasant place it is perhaps more accurate to assume that the small kitchen area had a complex but also probably highly varied smellscape, one which potentially changed throughout the day. This was nonetheless a smellscape associated predominantly with the scent of food and food preparation, perhaps of the dinner enjoyed the evening before, or the herbs and vegetables being freshly prepared for a meal later that day. This sensory experience would undoubtedly have distinguished it as a place that was materially and sensorially different from many others in the house, but it was not necessarily loaded with purely negative associations. These very sensory qualities consequently contributed to the manifestation of an especially distinctive religious place for the *Lares* and serpents.

Second, and relatedly, some members of the household must have been more accustomed than others to the complex 'sensescape' of the kitchen (Howes, 2005). For the *paterfamilias*, as someone who might not be expected to spend long periods of time there during an ordinary day, the sensory affordances he encountered during ritual activities at the *lararium* were perhaps more immediately obvious or distinctive than they were to other members of the household. The affective properties of the kitchen environment might therefore have contributed to his knowledge of the kitchen as a religious place, and by implication also of the protective divinities as gods of that place. For him, the *Lares* and the serpents were gods of a place that smelled and felt a particular way, as well as of a place that was not reproduced in the same way elsewhere in the house, even when he made offerings at one of its other shrines. His proximal religious knowledge concerning the *Lares* as gods of place – and as gods *in place* – might therefore be subtly different compared with that of more regular kitchen workers for whom these material and sensory affordances were less noticeable.

Most other Pompeian houses had similarly small kitchens that excluded the possibility of large gatherings. This was not the case for all houses however, including one nearby home (V.I.23) where the area of the kitchen was slightly larger (with a floor area of approximately 18m<sup>2</sup>). Here the arched *lararium* niche (0.60 × 0.58 × 0.22m) was located 1.10m from the

ground, above the counter built against the centre of the north wall (Giacobello, 2008, p.163). Boyce (1937, pp.32–3, no. 79) reported traces of a fresco bearing the images of a serpent entwined around an altar, a sacrificing Genius and a Lar, and two further serpents moving towards an altar bearing offerings in a scene below. The latter scene also included a depiction of the river god Sarnus set within a landscape of plants (Boyce, 1937, p.33, no.79). Here too, the kitchen was associated with a latrine, again segregated by a thin wall, although it was much closer to the masonry counter than in our first example, and by opening directly onto the kitchen area there were far fewer barriers to smells from the associated drain. Smells nevertheless perhaps dispersed more quickly in the larger kitchen space. Another two nearby houses with *lararia* in their kitchens (VI.I4.25 and VI.I4.43) also both have either a niche or a painting immediately above the counter, suggesting once again that part of the lived experience of encountering gods of place in place involved particular movements prompted by the materialness of that location: stretching up and over (Giacobello, 2008, p.178, no.60, p.180, no.63). At the time of the eruption of Vesuvius the house at VI.I4.39, on the other hand, had a kitchen which occupied a subterranean space, making it much darker and more cave-like than those already discussed (Giacobello, 2008, p.179, no.61; Boyce, 1937, pp.53–4, no. 206). Here, the fresco accompanying a square niche featured at least three serpents, including 'in the lower zone two huge serpents [which] rise more or less vertically, one on each side of a small cylindrical altar' (Boyce, 1937, p.54). In effect, ritualised acts in this below-ground kitchen were transposed to the subterranean domain of those serpents. We can only speculate about how rituals focused on these deities as protectors of the very earth on which the house was constructed (and where the participants currently stood), may have produced an immediate, proximal form of religious knowledge that individualised any shared distal understanding of serpents as gods of place.

Only a few aspects of the materialness of the Pompeian kitchen have been touched on in the limited space available here, but what begins to emerge is a picture of lived religion that emphasises the specific particularities of the ritual activities which caused people and things to assemble with the material qualities of a location, perhaps at different times and in subtly different ways. At the same time, although similarities emerge in terms of the material qualities of Pompeian kitchens and the sensory experiences that they might afford, it is also evident that no two were exactly the same. Each had the potential to affect

discrete senses of both 'kitchen place' and 'religious place' that remained unique to that location. Although this will ultimately have led to the production of multiple personalised forms of proximal religious knowledge concerning *Lares familiares* and their serpent partners as gods of place, in each case it is clear that these experiences were deeply entwined with the material qualities of the kitchen and could not have been produced or replicated in another setting. Pouring a libation in a brightly lit atrium or placing an offering on a burning brazier in a shady garden could never result in experiences of the same sort of religious place as was experienced in the small, dim, smoky, strongly scented, cramped, hot kitchen. The *Lares* were therefore not just gods of place, since lived religion actively served to construct them as gods of *this* place in *this* moment. Seen this way, it may be no coincidence that Giacobello (2008, p.66) was able to observe in her survey of Pompeian domestic *lararia* that the surviving form of almost all of them can be dated to a period between 62 and 79 CE, most probably following damage caused by the earthquake of 62 CE. This may be connected with a change of ownership and the introduction of a new Genius into the household cult, one whose image needed to be incorporated into the iconography of the house's shrines. However, we might consider whether the earthquake also prompted a need to reassert the importance of the gods of the very place on which the house had been built, or in other words to placate with a freshly painted shrine the serpents who resided within the subterranean land which had caused so much destruction.

When the kitchen *lararium* became part of a ritualised assemblage it was the affordances and qualities of that distinctive place that were brought to the fore, not only reinforcing distal forms of knowledge concerning *Lares* as gods of place, but actually substantiating and materialising that knowledge. Proximal religious knowledge concerning the *Lares familiares* and the serpents was therefore created out of the very material essence of place, as much as they were themselves considered to be gods of place. The discussion so far has therefore started to reveal how experiences of lived religion, and the proximal knowledge that arose from them, might materially substantiate both *Lares* and serpents as divinities deeply entangled with material places. This is even more evident when we compare lived religion in the kitchen with lived religion at the open-air *lararia* shrines of the Pompeian street corner.

## Out and about with the Lares

The damage that Vesuvius wrought to the upper storeys of the buildings surrounding our chosen street-corner shrine, at the busy junction of the Via del Vesuvio, Via della Fortuna, Via Stabiana, and Via di Nola, has almost certainly exacerbated the extent to which this location is experienced today as much brighter and more open than any Pompeian kitchen would ever have been (Fig. 6). Although current conditions may therefore have diminished our ability to assess the potential shadows that once fell across the junction at different moments throughout the day, it is undeniable that lived religion at the street-corner shrine was most likely experienced in relation to the full brightness of the day. This open-air context also afforded a host of other material and sensory potentialities not encountered in the kitchen: the changeability of weather conditions and the seasons meant that its qualities must have been different on hot, wet, windy, or cloudy days, or even on one of Pompeii's occasional snowy days. As modern visitors to the site continue to learn, easy movement along what is at one moment a dry and dusty street can be transformed very quickly by a rain shower that renders the basalt paving of the town's paths and streets slippery and rapidly fills their drainage channels.

The specific calendar date of the Compitalia varied each year because it was one of a few *feriae conceptivae* (or moveable festivals), although it was conventionally celebrated in the winter between 17 December and 5 January, after Saturnalia (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 4,14). On these occasions the nature of Pompeii's subtropical Mediterranean climate meant that days would be short, with limited sunshine, and the air would be cool, possibly damp, especially when compared with the warmth of a small kitchen. Similarly, although the street-corner was not devoid of odours, these were certainly different and potentially more varied and changeable than those encountered in the kitchen, depending upon what types of commercial and hospitality businesses operated from surrounding buildings, who was using the street, how many draft animals had recently passed along it, prevailing wind direction, and levels of humidity. Sound would also travel differently in the open-air compared with the enclosed kitchen space, potentially making sounds or words spoken at the altar audible to those some distance away, even if the effects might sometimes be countered by the noises of the street itself (see Veitch, 2017; also Mungari & Wyslucha in this volume).

In addition, the Pompeian street-corner had the capacity to accommodate a much larger gathering than any of the household kitchens described above and, if they chose, participants and onlookers could



Figure 2.6: The street corner at the junction of the Via della Fortuna and Via del Vesuvio, with a public fountain and shrine to the *Lares compitales*. (Photo: robertharding / Alamy Stock Photo)

congregate on all four sides of the altar rather than only being able to arrange themselves directly in front of a fresco or niche set into a kitchen wall. Undoubtedly the size of any assembled group will have varied on different occasions, but Van Andringa (2000, p.76) estimates a typical crowd for a Compitalia celebration of around 50 to 100 people. Larger groups may have meant that a person's view of events was restricted, but the material nature of the street-corner shrine nevertheless ensured that considerably more people could congregate than could ever be the case in a small kitchen.

As before, it is important to consider who the individuals involved in ritualised activities at the street-corner shrine were, especially with regards to those who engaged directly with the shrine as part of the performance of annual Compitalia rites, and those who experienced those rites from a distance as part of the assembled crowd. Compitalia rituals were most probably performed at the altar by the real-life equivalents of the figures painted on the pillar directly behind it: four men shown performing sacrifice *capite velato* (i.e. with their heads covered by a fold of the toga) in the company of a flute player (*tibicen*) (the fresco is now lost, but see Mau, 1902,

p.234; Flower, 2017, p.153). The human figures in the image were flanked by two large Lares in the typical pose of pouring wine from a *rhyton* into a *situla*. The scene appears to have effectively commemorated the actions of individual men at a particular moment in time, when the *Lares compitales* were being honoured. Multiple layers of paint have been detected on similar shrines at Pompeii, including at least seven layers on an altar located at the south-west corner of insula IX.11, opposite the junction between the Via dell'Abbondanza and the Vicolo di Pacquio Proculo (Van Andringa, 2000, pp.54–6, no.14; Fig. 2.7). This strongly suggests that the iconography of street-corner shrines was regularly and repeatedly refreshed as 'successive office holders continually updated the painting and made it their own,' in some cases including their individual names (Hartnett, 2017, p.265). It is also very likely that these men were either freedmen or, in some instances, enslaved members of nearby households (Van Andringa, 2000, pp.77–8; Flower, 2017, p.149), whose experiences of playing a central part in the rituals at the street-corner shrine perhaps contrasted quite significantly with a more reduced role within Lares celebrations in the home.



Figure 2.7: Fountain, street altar and fresco at the south-west corner of insula IX.11, Pompeii. To the right, immediately above the masonry altar, the painting depicts a sacrifice to the *Lares compitales* (above) and a snake and altar (below). To the left it shows a gathering of twelve Olympian gods. (Photo: Mikko Mattila – Travel, Italy, Pompeii / Alamy Stock Photo)

For the same reasons, it is probable that the scene itself depicts the type of events that occurred regularly at that shrine: the gathering of local *vicomagistri* (possibly after a procession around the local streets, although that is not directly attested by iconographic evidence) and the performance of a sacrifice, or perhaps the giving of offerings, pouring of libations, or hanging of garlands directly onto the altar, in the company of the *Lares* of that specific place (see Van Andringa, 2000, p.76). Anna-Katharina Rieger (2020, p.122) has recently observed, in a similar vein, that the individualised iconography of altars to the *Lares Augusti* at Rome also betray highly localised functions and practices, noting that ‘they strongly related to the people of the *vicus* they belonged to.’ The actions of the people gathered at the altar or shrine were additionally accompanied by sounds from the flute that would have been familiar from the use of this instrument at other public or civic religious rituals, such as the sacrifices held at the Capitolium in the forum, or at other nearby temples such as those dedicated to Apollo and Venus.

In this way, the iconography of our street-corner altar alerts us to the potential for the production of

particular forms of proximal religious knowledge for the four real-world *vicomagistri* who engaged with the altar and the other things that they were required to assemble with in order to perform the ritual (e.g. cult instruments, food and drink, garlands, possibly animals). What is less clear from the standardised image – which like all sacrifice scenes in Roman art inevitably captures one static and rather schematised moment of what must have been a more protracted event (Elsner, 2012) – is whether only one of these *vicomagistri* was charged with making the sacrifice or offering required on that day. It is possible that the men successively performed the same gestures, one after the other, on behalf of the inhabitants of each of the four *insulae* that met at that four-way junction (on the uncertainties around the relationship between street altars and surrounding *insulae*: Van Andringa, 2000, p.71; Flower, 2017, pp.148–9). It is equally possible that the responsibilities of the ritual were shared across the group, with each man taking on a different role dependent upon their status, age, or factors that remain hidden from us, or possibly even as part of a *rota* system. If so, each potentially engaged with material things that were quite different

from those of their peers, despite participating in the same ritual (perhaps a knife, a *patera*, a jug, garlands, incense, or food offerings). The personal material engagements that the ritual compelled will therefore have produced variations in the lived religion that they collectively produced and individually experienced and understood (for a comparable example concerning Rome's Vestal Virgins see Graham, *forthcoming*).

What is more, these were material engagements which echoed, but which could never precisely repeat, those that they might have experienced during similar rituals in the kitchens of their homes. Aspects of the two ritual performances certainly remained comparable, along with the use of particular types of objects. Nevertheless, engaging with the *Lares compitales* and the serpents of that place at their street-corner altar involved an entirely different locational experience and, most probably, different *actual* objects that may have offered subtly different affordances from those experienced in other contexts (such as differential weight, tactile or reflective properties, odours, etc.). It was also an actively communal activity, shared with an audience of family, friends and potential strangers alike, and perhaps also with certain responsibilities shared across the group of *vicomagistri* rather than being concentrated in one individual's hands, as they might be in private homes. Lived religion therefore affirmed that these ritualised activities were distinct, and that they involved different sets of people, objects, *Lares*, and serpents, and it did so by grounding experiences in the material world.

At the same time, the presence of the real-world flute player deserves more attention than is typical in assessments of these scenes. His personal experience of playing, producing, and hearing sounds, feeling the vibrations of the flute in his body, standing close to the centre of the action but not engaging with the same material things as the *vicomagistri* or holding the same status within the altar group, will have resulted in lived religion that was once again experienced in subtly different ways from the men who accompanied him. In turn, this will have prompted alternative forms of proximal religious knowledge concerning that particular celebration of the *Lares compitales* (see Graham, 2021, pp.83–6). All the same, the proximal religious knowledge that resulted for each of these five men was also produced in a sensory atmosphere that they shared with everyone else in attendance. The sounds of the *tibicen*, for instance, reproduced and reaffirmed distal knowledge concerning the nature of the activities as 'religious' and their connection with the wider practices of Roman religion, for both performer and onlooker alike.

Lived religion at the street-corner also incorporated the material qualities of the wider city. The Compitalia does not appear to have been considered as one of the Roman calendar's *dies nefasti* (Varro, *On the Latin Language*, 6.29), meaning that ordinary business activities were most probably permitted to continue as usual during the festival, even if some people perhaps took a break from them in order to participate in processions to their local altar, and to witness or perform the appropriate ceremonies. As previously noted, this particular four-way junction was one of the busiest for traffic in the whole city, meaning that the ritualised activities that occurred there during Compitalia festivities almost certainly took place against the usual backdrop of noisy cart traffic, the sounds and smells of draft animals, and all the other chaos that was typical of the Roman street (for a comprehensive study of Roman street life see Hartnett, 2017). Almost every Pompeian street might be expected to be noisy and busy, but each also had its own individual character due to the presence of economic establishments, the proximity of water fountains (introducing the sound of water splashing into a basin, but also the voices and movements of those collecting it), and even the nature of the road surface itself (Fig. 2.8). Studies of the road at this junction have revealed, for example, how at least part of it had been subject to resurfacing work, with evidence for considerable wear in the form of wheel ruts indicating quite how difficult it was for wheeled traffic to negotiate its sharp corners (Poehler, Roggen & Crowther, 2019). No doubt the air at this particular junction was regularly filled with raised voices, the sound of unruly or stressed animals, and vocal disagreements over right of way. Ritualisation therefore actively assembled the compital shrine, and anyone engaged in ritual activities, with the discrete material and sensory character of this specific area of the city (see Van Andringa, 2000, p.76). This was true for other occasions, separate from the formal festivities of the Compitalia, when people may have ritually assembled with the shrine. Excavations have revealed that some Pompeian street altars had offerings on them at the time of the eruption, indicating that they formed part of ritualised assemblages throughout the year (e.g. Van Andringa, 2000, p.77). Jeremy Hartnett (2017, p.67) suggests, for example, that we should 'imagine neighbourhood residents regularly [making] offerings of food, drink, or flowers amid the street's hustle-bustle,' and according to Suetonius (*Augustus*, 31.4) Augustus ordered that in Rome 'the *Lares* of the Crossroads should be crowned twice a year, with spring and summer flowers.'





Figure 2.8. The junction of Via della Fortuna and Via del Vesuvio showing its fountain with a relief of Silenus resting on a wineskin and wheel ruts in the road surface. (Photo by Carole Raddato, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Our road junction was also a place through which people were constantly moving, meaning that the *Lares compitales* and their serpent companions belonged to a very particular type of place. Indeed, Hartnett (2017, p.85) has drawn attention to the characteristic ‘unpredictability’ of the Roman street, and how the ‘flurry of sensations, mix of activities, minimum of regulation, mélange of users, and, especially, the constant movement of people, goods, and animals made for an ever-shifting, destabilising scene.’ Although some individuals or groups perhaps paused temporarily at the fountain, or used the junction of major roads as an opportunity to stop and check their sense of direction, the material properties of the street corner actively encouraged and supported movement. As an experience, this was place that was therefore constantly in flux, that was vibrant and dynamic, with people and things endlessly coming and going and forming new, temporary relationships with one another. Indeed, the atmosphere of movement was sustained by the ways in which people engaged with the location of the street-corner shrine on other, non-ritualised occasions – when they came to collect water (and perhaps to meet friends to chat and gossip), when they

moved around the altar on their way to the caupona and shop located just behind it, when workmen visited to maintain the water tower immediately adjacent to it, when people hawked their wares on the street, when electoral notices were painted on walls or graffiti scratched onto buildings, and when the crowd paused to watch a funeral procession pass by (see Campbell in this volume). It was a living place of movement, of temporary and fluctuating gatherings, and of the sights and smells of the city as a complex agglomeration of people and things. As Hartnett (2017, p.36) notes, ‘[i]t was not just “the stage” or “the actors” that determined a street’s character, but also the interaction of the two’. This makes the street-corner an excellent example of the ‘time-space event’ definition of place noted earlier in this essay and reveals quite how far it must have contrasted with how religious place was produced and experienced in the kitchen, where movement was cramped and constrained, and where access in and out might have been considerably more restricted. These were detectable placely qualities that belonged perfectly to the world of the *Lares compitales* and the serpents of the ground on which their altar was constructed: these were the gods of *that* public

place, including all those who were part of it at any one moment.

## Conclusions

As a result of its discrete material and sensory qualities, lived religion at the Pompeian kitchen *lararium* was quite distinct from lived religion produced in relation to other contexts or locations, such as that connected with the street-corner altar. This was true despite the fact that distal religious knowledge concerning how to properly honour deities, such as the Lares and the serpent gods, meant that ritual activities at both shared broadly comparable elements. By examining ritualised assemblages encompassing the material qualities of both the kitchen *lararium* and the street-corner shrine, this article has argued not only that lived religion was intimately entwined with the materialness of place but that this in fact worked to produce forms of religious knowledge concerning Lares and serpent gods as gods of place. It has shown, moreover, that this knowledge was about more than shared ideas or beliefs. Instead, it was knowledge that was actively produced in relation to the very materialness of place itself. Ritualised activities and lived religion therefore did much more than merely reinforce pre-existing ideas, they also affected divinities out of and within place itself. Adopting a material religion approach to the Lares and serpents of Pompeii consequently makes it possible to better understand what might seem to be a confusing overlapping set of deities connected with a rather loose concept of 'place' by revealing how far they were quite literally gods *in* as well as *of* place.

## Bibliography

1. Ault, B.A. (2015) 'Kitchens' in J. Wilkins and R. Nadeau (eds) *A Companion to Food in the Ancient World*, Malden, Blackwell, pp.206–11.
2. Bodel, J. (2008) 'Cicero's Minerva, penates, and the mother of the *Lares*: an outline of Roman domestic religion' in J. Bodel and S. M. Olyan (eds) *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity*, Malden, Blackwell, pp.248–75.
3. Boivin, N. (2008) *Material Cultures, Material Minds: The Impact of Things on Human Thought, Society, and Evolution*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
4. Boyce, G.K. (1937) *Corpus of the Lararia of Pompeii*, Rome, Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome.
5. Brandt, J.R. (2010) '*Sacra privata* in the Roman *domus*: private or public? A study of household shrines in an architectural context at Pompeii and Ostia', *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia*, vol.23, pp.59–117.
6. Breton, E. (1855) *Pompeia, décrite et dessinée*, Paris, Baudry.
7. Draycott, J. (2017) 'When lived ancient religion and lived ancient medicine meet: the household gods, the household shrine and Regimen', *Religion in the Roman Empire*, vol.3, no.2, pp.164–80.
8. Elsner, J. (2012) 'Sacrifice in late Roman art' in C.A. Faraone and F.S. Naiden (eds) *Greek and Roman Animal Sacrifice: Ancient Victims, Modern Observers*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp.120–63.
9. Flower, H.I. (2017) *The Dancing Lares and the Serpent in the Garden: Religion at the Roman Street Corner*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
10. Flower, H.I. and DiLuzio, M.J. (2019) 'The women and the *Lares*: A reconsideration of an Augustan altar from the Capitoline in Rome', *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol.123, no.2, pp.213–36.
11. Foss, P.W. (1997) 'Watchful Lares: Roman household organization and the rituals of cooking and dining' in R. Laurence and A. Wallace-Hadrill (eds) *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*, JRA Suppl. Ser. vol.22, Portsmouth, s.n., pp.196–218.
12. Fröhlich, T. (1991) *Lararien- und Fassadenbilder in den Vesuvstädten: Untersuchungen zur 'volkstümlichen' pompejanischen Malerei*, Mainz, P. von Zabern.
13. Giacobello, F. (2008) *Larari Pompeiani: Iconografia e Culto dei Lari in Ambito Domestico*, Milan, LED.
14. Graham, E.-J. (2020) 'Hand in hand: Rethinking anatomical votives as material things' in V. Gasparini, M. Patzelt, R. Raja, A.-K. Rieger, J. Rüpke and E. Urciuoli (eds) *Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean: Approaching Religious Transformations from Archaeology, History and Classics*, Berlin, De Gruyter, pp.209–36.
15. Graham, E.-J. (2021) *Reassembling Religion in Roman Italy*, Abingdon, Routledge.
16. Graham, E.-J. (forthcoming) 'The haptic production of religious knowledge among the Vestal Virgins: a hands-on approach to Roman ritual' in B. Misic and A. Graham (eds) *Sensory and Cognitive Approaches to Roman Religious Rituals*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
17. Hartnett, J. (2017) *The Roman Street: Urban Life and Society in Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Rome*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
18. Howes, D. (2005) *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, Oxford, Berg.

19. Jansen, G. (1997) 'Private toilets at Pompeii: Appearance and operation' in S. Bon and R. Jones (eds) *Sequence and Space in Pompeii*, Oxford, Oxbow, pp.121–134.
20. Kaufmann-Heinimann, A. (2002) 'The evidence of statuettes in closed finds for private and public cults' in C.C. Mattusch, A. Brauer and S.E. Knudsen (eds) *From the Parts to the Whole (Volume 2)*, JRA Suppl. Ser. vol. 39, Portsmouth, s.n., pp.106–33.
21. Mau, A. (1902). *Pompeii: Its Life and Art*, London, Macmillan.
22. Mol, E. and Versluys, M. J. (2015) 'Material culture and imagined communities in the Roman world' in R. Raja and J. Rüpke (eds) *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion*, Malden, Wiley-Blackwell, pp.451–61.
23. Morgan, D. (2021) *The Thing About Religion: An Introduction to the Material Study of Religions*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.
24. Moser, C. and Feldman, C. (2014) 'Introduction' in C. Moser and C. Feldman (eds) *Locating the Sacred: Theoretical Approaches to the Emplacement of Religion*, Oxford, Oxbow, pp.1–12.
25. Orr, D.G. (1978) 'Roman domestic religion: The evidence of the household shrines' in W. Haase (ed) *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Band, II, vol.16.2, Berlin and New York, De Gruyter, pp.1557–91.
26. Platts, H. (2019) *Multisensory Living in Ancient Rome: Power and Space in Roman Houses*, London, Bloomsbury Academic.
27. Poehler, E. (2017) *The Traffic Systems of Pompeii*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
28. Poehler, E.E., van Roggen, J. and Crowther, B.M. (2019) 'The iron streets of Pompeii', *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol.123, no.2, pp.237–62.
29. *Pompeii in Pictures* (n.d.) <https://pompeiiinpictures.com>, accessed 20.7.2021.
30. Rieger, A.-K. (2020) 'Short-term phenomena and long-lasting places: The altars of the *Lares Augusti* and the *Compita* in the streets of Ancient Rome', *Journal of Urban Archaeology*, vol.2, pp.113–38.
31. Rogers, D. (2020) 'The hanging garlands of Pompeii: mimetic acts of ancient lived religion', *Arts*, vol.9, no.65, pp.1–19.
32. Staub, T. (2016) 'V I,18 Casa degli Epigrammi greci, Room t', *The Swedish Pompeii Project*, <http://www.pompeijoprojektet.se/room.php?hid=7&hidnummer=9374584&hrubrik=V%20I,18%20Casa%20degli%20Epigrammi%20greci&rid=40&ridnummer=3181473&rrubrik=Room%20t#>, accessed 25.8.2020.
33. Staub Gierow, M. (2017a) 'V I,18 Casa degli Epigrammi greci, Room t – hearth', *The Swedish Pompeii Project*, <http://www.pompeijoprojektet.se/feature.php?hid=7&hidnummer=9374584&hrubrik=V%20I,18%20Casa%20degli%20Epigrammi%20greci&rid=40&ridnummer=3181473&rrubrik=Room%20t&fid=35&fidnummer=8173528&frubrik=Hearth>, accessed 25.8.2020.
34. Staub Gierow, M. (2017b) 'V I,18 Casa degli Epigrammi greci, Room t – lararium', *The Swedish Pompeii Project*, <http://www.pompeijoprojektet.se/feature.php?hid=7&hidnummer=9374584&hrubrik=V%20I,18%20Casa%20degli%20Epigrammi%20greci&rid=40&ridnummer=3181473&rrubrik=Room%20t&fid=34&fidnummer=4407581&frubrik=Lararium>, accessed 25.8.2020.
35. Staub Gierow, M. (2017c) 'V I,18 Casa degli Epigrammi greci, Room w', *The Swedish Pompeii Project*, <http://www.pompeijoprojektet.se/room.php?hid=7&hidnummer=9374584&hrubrik=V%20I,18%20Casa%20degli%20Epigrammi%20greci&rid=44&ridnummer=6247180&rrubrik=Room%20w>, accessed 25.8.2020.
36. Tybout, R.A. (1996) 'Domestic shrines and "popular painting": Style and social context', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, vol.9, pp.358–74.
37. Van Andringa, W. (2000) 'Autels de carrefour, organisation vicinale et rapports de voisinage à Pompéi', *Rivista di Studi Pompeiani*, vol.11, pp.47–86.
38. Van Andringa, W. (2009) *Quotidien des dieux et des hommes: La vie religieuse dans les cités du Vésuve à l'époque Romaine*, Rome, École française de Rome.
39. Van Oyen, A. and Pitts, M. (2017) 'What did objects do in the Roman world? Beyond representation' in A. Van Oyen and M. Pitts (eds) *Materialising Roman Histories*, Oxford, Oxbow, pp.3–9.
40. Veitch, J. (2017) 'Soundscape of the street: Architectural acoustics in Ostia' in E. Betts (ed.) *Senses of the Empire: Multisensory Approaches to Roman Culture*, Abingdon, Routledge, pp.54–70.



# MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL RELIGION IN POMPEIAN PAINTING

**Nathaniel B. Jones**

## **Abstract**

*Painting was an essential part of the material religion of Pompeii. Executed in a broad range of styles and across the chronological span of the city's life, Pompeian frescoes both depicted religious activities and decorated religious spaces, ranging from grand public temple structures to intimate household shrines. More than merely documenting a strikingly broad array of religious practices, paintings in Pompeii also deliberately played on their dual status as both powerful attestations of the divine and works of human ingenuity and craft. This essay focuses on one way in which this apparent paradox was explored: the depiction of religious artworks, especially statues and panel paintings, within Pompeian murals. It argues that such paintings simultaneously erect and blur boundaries between the sacred and the profane, the mythological and the everyday, and the real and the represented. In so doing, they expose both the affective and aesthetic power of ancient painting itself.*

**Keywords:** Pompeii, religion, fresco, votive, metafiction, epiphany, Dionysus, epigram

**Full text:** <https://openartsjournal.org/issue-10/article-3/>

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2021s03>

## **Biographical note**

Nathaniel Jones is Associate Professor of Art History and Archaeology at Washington University in St. Louis. He has published on Greek and Roman painting, ancient collecting practices, the development of Greco-Roman art-historical thought, and the reception of the Classical world in Early Modern Europe.

Banner image: Detail from a garden painting, from the House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. (Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

# MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL RELIGION IN POMPEIAN PAINTING

Nathaniel B. Jones, Washington University in St Louis

Pompeian painting is rife with material attestations of religious practice. Whether in the city's ubiquitous *lararia* and street shrines, the decoration of its temple complexes, the depiction of religious rites, or even the representation of moralising mythological narratives, the painted environment of Pompeii attests to the religious life of its inhabitants in what seem to be direct and unmistakable ways. As this essay explores, however, the materiality of religious experience promised by Pompeian painting frequently threatens to dissolve into the immaterial play of fiction. The essay examines this tension by focusing on one particularly complex mode of pictorial reference to religion: the depiction of religious artworks, especially statues and panel paintings. It proposes that such representations of representations worked, at least in part, to expand the religious world of the Pompeians, offering access to ideas and rituals from a broad historical span and throughout the Mediterranean basin. But the matter is complicated by the ways in which the historicity and materiality of these depicted objects, and thus their status as human-produced works of art, is often overtly emphasised. The essay will argue that such meta-paintings were neither just powerfully affective religious images nor simply cultured allusions to precious works of art. Rather, they self-reflexively commented on their role as both a material point of access to the divine and the product of human ingenuity and craft. On the one hand, the paintings conceal the mechanisms of representation through techniques of illusion; on the other, they lay bare the artifice of such representation by self-consciously breaking those illusions. Pompeian murals featuring representations of religious artworks simultaneously erect and blur boundaries between the sacred and the profane, the mythological and the everyday, and the real and the represented. In so doing, ultimately, they point to the duality of ancient painting as a site of both affect and aesthetics.

The materiality of painting is never quite as simple as it seems. A painting is, of course, a material product, a suspension of pigment and binder on a surface. But in the case of Pompeian painting, the final product – the resulting material object – is also typically representational. It depicts, by techniques of imitation

that could rise to the heights of extreme illusionism, something else: another object, body, or more frequently a collection of bodies and objects arrayed in a spatial organisation which has both a real order on the surface and an imagined order in the pictorial world that the painting constructs.

Unlike the representational act of sculpture, that of painting does not typically physically intrude into the world of the viewer, no matter how persuasive its illusions. Rather, it creates another, notional world, a hypothetical as-if alternative to reality which is only ever ambiguously related to the living body of the viewer (Grethlein, 2017). This may seem like a simple point, but it is an important one. Such an essential ambiguity lies at the heart, for example, of Platonic philosophy's discomfiture with the potentially deceptive craft of painting (Vernant, 1991, pp. 164–85). And it may help explain the fact that, although statues of deities were often simply referred to as the deities themselves by Greek and Roman writers, this kind of elision seems to have been less common in the case of painting (Gordon, 1979, pp. 7–8; cf. Stewart, 2003, pp. 20–8). Put in another way, painting is never fully able to shake off its status as a medium, a go-between or point of inflection, and thus never quite presumes to deliver reality in a fully transparent, immediate fashion. Perhaps one way of accessing this point lies in an example in which painterly skill does transcend medial status: the contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius. The two artists, embodying different traditions of producing pictorial illusions, sought to outdo one another by persuading bodies to act through paint alone. Zeuxis' painting of grapes, according to Pliny, was so lifelike that birds attempted to eat the fruit, while Parrhasius painted a curtain with such subtle precision that Zeuxis asked that it be pulled back to reveal the painting lying behind it (Plin, *HN* 35.65). But this is precisely meant to be a limit case, an extreme of illusion achieved by some of the greatest painters in history, and even here painting does not deliver reality: in the disconnect between the perceiving and acting body not only painterly skill but the medium of painting as such is revealed (Bann, 1989, pp. 27–31; Bryson, 1990, pp. 30–32; Elsner, 1995, pp. 16–17). This acknowledgment of its own medial status, what Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin have called hypermediacy (1999), stands as a constant corrective to illusionism's pretenses of real presence.

There is thus an inevitable duplicity to the material of figural painting. Aristotle makes this point almost in passing in his discussion of the function of memory. In Aristotelian epistemology, all acts of cognition depend upon the use of internal images (Arist. *De an.* 431a16, 432a8; Polansky, 2008, pp. 481–9, 497–500). In his



Figure 3.1: Lararium painting, Pompeii VII.6.3, MANN 8905. First century CE. (Photo: Vanni Archive / Art Resource, NY)

theory of memory, the philosopher further asserts that memory and recollection are also image dependent, and that the act of recollection is a kind of viewing of a mental image of a prior experience. But to recollect is not to simply re-live that prior experience, nor is it the same as to engage in an act of imagination or fantasy. Instead, a memory image is a representation, an object (albeit a mental one) with its own existence, which depicts a previous experience through a relation of likeness or similarity. It is characterised by an inherent duality. Aristotle explicitly compares the duality of the memory image to that of a painting (*Mem.* 450b21–24): 'Just as a figure painted on a panel is both a figure and a likeness, and though one and the same, is both, yet the essence of the two is not the same, and it is possible to behold it as both a figure and a likeness' (translation adapted from Hett, 2000, pp.294–7). An apparent paradox is involved in this formulation, an ability for the painting to be two things at once, both independent entity and conduit to something else. The implications of this point for our conception of painting as material religion are significant. It suggests that a painting is never simply an irruption of transcendence into the

world, but also never simply just a human fiction.

The double nature of representational painting can appear even in what seem to be straightforward cases of popular religious paintings in Pompeii, which problematise their status as material points of access to the divine through the ambiguous representation of material objects. Let us take as an example a painting from one of the Pompeii's many lararia, now housed in the archaeological museum in Naples, which may have come from House VII.2.03 (Fig. 3.1) (MANN 8905; Bragantini and Sampaolo, 2009, pp.428–9, cat.222; Fröhlich, 1991, pl.10; Flower, 2017, pp.54–7). For discussion of the materiality of religion articulated by this painting I am especially indebted to a lecture delivered by Jennifer Trimble at King's College London in June of 2017. As the decoration of a shrine to household gods, it seems to present simply and without pretense the key elements and actors in this sphere of domestic religion. The painting is divided into two registers. In the upper register the two *lares* stand holding *rhyta* that pour out wine into *situla*, flanking the *genius* of the house, who in turn holds out a *patera* over an altar in the presence of an *aulos* player, a *victimarius*,

and an altar attendant. In the lower register two snakes, like the Lares probably also representing protective deities of place (Flower, 2017, pp.63–70), wind sinuously through tall grasses, tails pointing out and heads facing a round altar topped with eggs. The altars at the centre of both registers focalise and complicate the picture. The site of sacrifice, the altar is one of the most significant loci of religious practice, a place where human and divine meet through the act of offering. Both altars have an emphatically material presence within the picture; they sit on ground lines and, even in the spare and sketchy technique of this painting, both are equipped with a sense of three-dimensionality. The altar on the top register appears to have been made from a variegated, and thus implicitly imported, marble. The material of the bottom altar is less legible from the painting, though it may, conceivably, be a white stone such as limestone or marble. But both altars are also curiously dematerialised. That on top sits in front of a leafy bush, whose branches spread out around it and frame it. This compositional device is presumably designed to isolate the altar, demarcating it as worthy of visual as well as ritual attention. But it has the added opposite effect of causing the branches of the bush to blend together with the variegation of the stone, dissolving the boundaries between the objects and thus the integrity of the altar.

On the bottom register, material indeterminacy is produced through the application of figural decoration. At least three high-relief human figures are visible on the surface of the altar: one central and frontal and two flanking figures in profile. Yet, as Trimble (2017) has articulated, how we are to imagine those figures were actually produced is left underdetermined in the painting. On the front, we see an outline, as though the figure had been painted, or were a raised relief. On the sides, however, are only dark silhouettes. Do we see them in shadow? Have they been produced from a different material than the body of the altar? Or have we simply reached the limits of the artists' ability to render other media in paint? Given the finely rendered scales of the snakes and the bright white highlights gleaming off their underbellies, this latter option seems unlikely. Regardless of the reason, the material status of the relief figures is simply not decipherable from the painting, and the added visual effect is to once again blur the border between altar and surrounding grasses. This is all to say: even in the most apparently direct attestations of painted material religion, immateriality and indeterminacy find their way in.

Similar modes of indeterminacy appear elsewhere in Pompeii. In the well-known Room of the Mysteries in

the Villa of the Mysteries, for example, we encounter a dynamic tension between the representation of a divine epiphany and the disclosure of a purely fictive artificiality (Fig. 3.2). Verity Platt has demonstrated that epiphany is frequently a fluid, uncertain process, in which questions of representation can be subject to as much concern as those of divine presence itself (2011). As Platt articulates, the dynamic tension between the idea of epiphany as an '*unmediated* visual encounter with divinity', and the reality that the gods could only be perceived through human acts of creation was an animating force in Greco-Roman religious culture (2011, p.48). In the Room of the Mysteries this fact is highlighted through the unstable relationship between figures – both real inhabitant of the room and painted figure on the wall – and their material environment (Jones, 2019a, pp.67–9). As we move around the room, we seem to follow along with an initiation scene into a Dionysiac cult, in which human and divine figures, including the god Dionysus himself, intermingle, and in which, according to an interpretation which sees the room as the locus of actual initiation rituals, the painted bodies on the wall provide a model for the living bodies within the space (Maiuri, 1931; Nilsson, 1957, pp.66–76, 123–30; Brendel, 1980; Sauron, 1998). The painted figures are carefully modelled in light and shadow. They move with a clarity of purpose and their gestures and expressions highlight the drama of the depicted events. They have been painted at an almost life-size scale, and the fact that they are set against a bright red backdrop pushes their bodies out vertiginously into the space of the room's inhabitants. The living body of the viewer is further incorporated into the unfolding drama when depicted actions break into real space by taking place across the room's corners, as in the flagellation scene in the back right, or when figures turn to look directly out of the picture plane, as the woman with a silver offering tray on the left wall does. The techniques of illusionism are employed to epiphanic effect; they produce the sensation of real presence (Grau, 2003, 25–9; cf. Zanker, 1998). Yet, at the same time the figures are also posed in obviously artificial groups, and the shallow green platform and bright red backing wall make it seem as though we were looking at a kind of stage building. The activities of a rustic mystery cult, which should be taking place at an outdoor woodland shrine, as they do in the stucco decorations of the Villa della Farnesina in Rome (Wyler, 2006; 2019), are instead presented as though they were a part of a theatrical performance. The materialism of the painted environment, as illusionistically persuasive as it is, serves above all to dislocate us from a full sense of immersion, that is,



Figure 3.2: Room of the Mysteries. Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii. First century BCE. (Photo: author, with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

from the idea that we are genuine participants in the depicted actions, and thus witnesses to the presence of Dionysus himself.

If this kind of play of dualities – presence and absence, epiphany and artificiality, material religion and immaterial fiction – is a feature of a broad swathe of religiously oriented Pompeian painting, it is especially concentrated in the pictorial representation of other representational media. An illusionistic painting has a nearly unique ability to figure other media within itself. Yet, Roman paintings rarely do so in simplistic or straightforward ways. We have seen this already in the case of the altars of the *lararium* painting or in the paradoxes of figure and environment in the Room of the Mysteries. But the duality of figured media is heightened even further when paintings represent other forms of religiously oriented representational art within themselves. In the remainder of this article, we will examine how paintings of figurative religious artworks from Pompeii engage with issues of format, medium, historical and regional style, literary gloss, and metafictional reference in order to both expand the religious world of the Pompeians and to call attention to their own artificial status, and thus to simultaneously

offer access to the divine and draw upon an august art-historical tradition, marked above all by a sense of human achievement.

The painted decoration from Room 4 from the Villa of the Mysteries accentuates this point (Clarke, 1991, pp.94–7; Scheibler, 1998, p.5; Wyler, 2008; Jones, 2019a, pp.52–4). The architectural conceit is largely the same as in the nearby Room of the Mysteries: a narrow stage sits in front of a red backing wall, with vibrantly coloured, dramatically posed figures highlighted against it. In one corner of the room, a satyr stares out aggressively toward the viewer and leaps in dance, with cymbals poised as though to add the clamour of music to the scene (Fig. 3.3). Next to him a woman in a mantle and a long garment is shown with body in profile but head turned to look out directly into the space of the room's living inhabitants. In another corner a drunken, stumbling Dionysus shows the after-effects of revelry and indulgence (Fig. 3.4). His muscles are loose, his body almost entirely without tension, and his gaze is vacant, as though his divine presence had been spent in the ecstatic release which must have preceded this moment. As the god lifts his right arm up above his head, we see in this conventional iconography of





Figure 3.3: Leaping Satyr and Woman in Mantle. Room 4, Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii. First century BCE. (Photo: author, with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

drunkenness just how fleeting a moment the painting captures. Were it not for the satyr vigorously grasping Dionysus, we might imagine that he would simply slump to the floor.

What we initially appear to be confronted with, accordingly, is something very much like the scene in the Room of the Mysteries: a Dionysiac scene of celebration involving divine actors, including the god himself, who have been brought into the confines of the house and made present to its inhabitants through the virtuosic skill of the painters. And, as in the Room of the Mysteries, despite the artificiality of the conceit, the stark contrast between red background and light flesh only accentuates the painting's relief effect, blurring the border between the spaces of the viewer and the painting. But the situation is more complicated than that initial impression might lead us to think, for the figures are placed not just on the stage but on individual, elevated green bases. This pictorial device, already in use during the archaic period, is almost

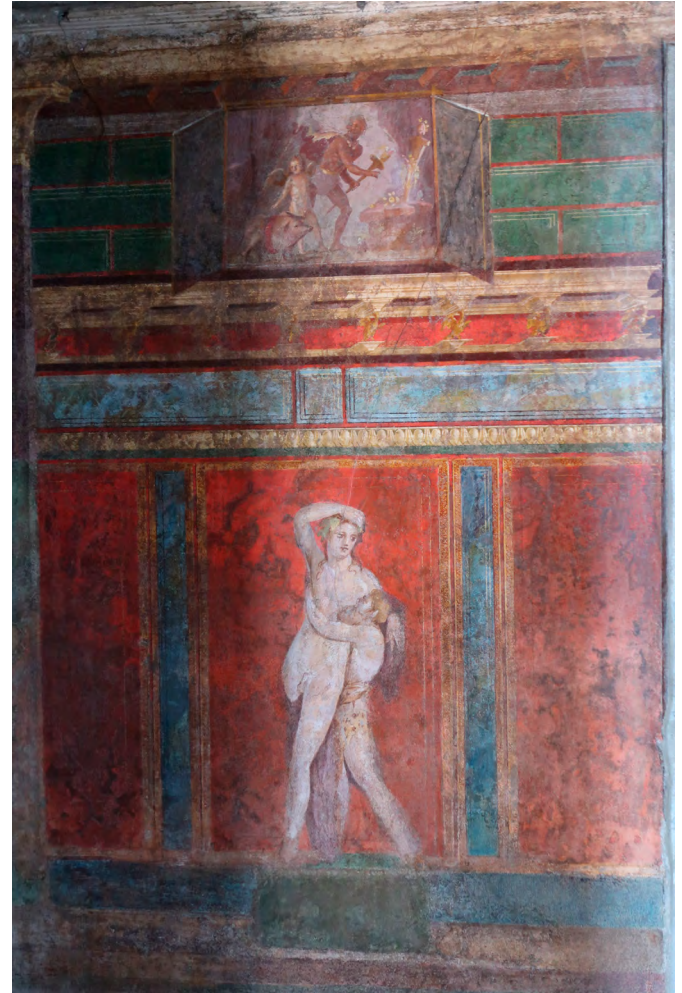


Figure 3.4: Dionysus and Satyr. Room 4, Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii. First century BCE. Photo: author, with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei.

certainly meant to indicate that the figure standing on the base is a statue (Moormann, 1988, pp.224–5). What we must infer, accordingly, is that despite the depth of illusionism, and despite the vibrancy of the mural's affective appeal, we have not been made party to the epiphany of the god in private, such as in the series of so-called Ikarios reliefs, in which a drunken Dionysus and his ecstatic retinue are shown visiting the outdoor garden space of a man and woman reclining on a couch (Pollitt, 1986, p.197; Moreno, 1999; Ridgway, 2002, pp.236–9). Instead, we are just looking at still, immobile statues, mere matter.

The primary fiction of the mural is, therefore, the representation of representation, and not the godhead itself. But this fiction is riddled with deliberate contradictions, and rather than a kind of prim abeyance, a deferral from the challenges of making the divine present in favour of the mere make-believe of artistic fiction, it points instead toward the importance of both. For the figures are self-evidently not mere

statues. We would have to imagine, for the sake of logical consistency, that they are painted marble, a phenomenon for which we have an abundance of evidence, and which appears as an object of overt artistic reflection already in fourth-century BCE South Italian vase painting (de Cesare, 1997, pp.103–5; Marconi, 2011). Yet, we also cannot imagine that marble could actually be made to behave like this, that it could support the extreme ponderation and louche languor of the Dionysus and satyr, nor that it could hold the dancing satyr just in the moment before an explosive spring into the air. These are statues, in other words, which could not exist, or which more accurately could only exist in paint. What the painters of the room have managed to accomplish, accordingly, is to display their ability to both create and resolve paradox, to give the viewer both an epiphanic irruption of the divine into the everyday and an urbane, witty meta-commentary on art, mediality, and, of course, the superiority of painting over sculpture.

But we cannot stop there, for these statues are also not the only meta-pictures in the room. Resting on a cornice above the Dionysus and satyr group, with shutters open at oblique angles to the picture plane, is a small, rectangular, horizontally oriented panel painting of a type which was known in Hellenistic temple inventories as a *pinax tethurōmenos*, or a panel with doors. The painting is meant to exist within the same fictive spatial reality that contains the painted statues and their immediate environs (Vallois, 1913; Scheibler, 1998; Jones, 2014). The bravura of its open shutters and the precariousness with which it rests on the cornice make this point clear: it is a representation of a material object in space. But it is a material object which dissolves its own material surface into the stage for another fictive space, another imaginary world, in which a man and a winged boy lead a large pig to sacrifice at an altar set in front of a herm within a kind of grotto. This is not the only such panel in the room, and one above the woman in the mantle is even depicted from the side, such that we largely see the wings of its shutters and only a small portion of its painted surface, at an extremely oblique angle. But the sacrifice panel most clearly exposes the complexities of the game the room's decorators have played. It is both an object of representation and a representing object, both a part of the depicted world and an opening onto somewhere else. The explicit idea of a painting as a window is an early modern one (Alberti *De Pictura* I.19), but the painters of the Villa of the Mysteries have made something like that claim, a point emphasised by the fact that elsewhere in the room, above the dancing satyr and mantled woman, the courses of green wall

behind the sacrifice panel drop away, and the resulting view gives onto the upper portion of a portico and an expanse of blue sky, and thus the promise of a larger world beyond what we can strictly see. And it can be no accident that the scene depicted on the panel takes place in precisely the kind of outdoors, rustic environment in which we would expect all of the Dionysiac activities depicted in these two rooms to have occurred.

But the relationship between this Dionysiac environment, which is only a second-order fiction, and the world in which the statues have been erected remains unresolved, just as does the relationship between the first-order fiction of the mural as a whole and that of the real house. Where does religious experience happen, then? And when are these actions occurring? I would propose that they are here and there, then and now, and that this dual existence must have been a part of the appeal of the meta-pictorial conceit. I would further suggest that at least part of the purpose of the ecstatic worship of Dionysus was precisely to blur the boundaries between worlds that, on the surface, seem discrete and immiscible. Both framing devices and iconographic content, on this view, are working in tandem to emphasise the importance of both the aesthetic and affective in religious experience.

Underlying the play of epiphany, reality, and representation in the Villa of the Mysteries is a further game of medium and materiality. What kind of matter we see, in both absolute and representational terms, is at once acknowledged and denied. Such a game is taken to a further extreme in a painting recovered from the House of the Golden Bracelet in Pompeii (VI.17.42) (Fig. 3.5) (PPM 6.117–128; Moormann, 1998, pp.202–3; Ciardiello, 2006; Bergmann, 2014, pp.264–72; Carroll 2015, pp.540–1; Jones, 2019a, pp.156–7). The setting here is at once more immersive and more theatrical than the Villa of the Mysteries. The decoration of the room combines the broad colour fields and quasi-abstract patterning typical of mid-to-late first century CE painting with the depiction of a garden. A deep blue background places us distinctively elsewhere, yet, we are prevented from visually entering that elsewhere by a series of screening devices: a thicket of foliage punctuated by bright flowers and birds, and a series of human-made artifacts. A white marble fountain sits in the central foreground, bright white theatrical masks hang from decorated cords, and herms are topped with panels displaying figural scenes, both of which appear to be Dionysiac in subject – on the left a reclining woman, perhaps Ariadne on Naxos, and on the right a lounging maenad who has set aside her thyrsus and tympanum.

Where the frescoes of the Villa of the Mysteries, in



Figure 3.5: Garden painting, House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42) First century CE. (Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY)

both the Room of the Mysteries and room 4, flirted with the idea of bringing the divine into the world of the human, here the pre-occupation hinges more overtly on liminality and borders. Herms traditionally serve as boundary markers, and masks, *personae*, articulate the point of transition between the living body of the actor, a real human with a mundane life, and the fictional life of the character. This liminality is overtly religious; we should not forget the traditional association of the theatre with Dionysus, and it is noteworthy that the rectangular format, stone material, framing, and mode of display of the panels resting on top of the herms seem to evoke votive plaques. The votive is a powerful device of material religion (Weinryb, 2015, 2018; Hughes, 2017). It announces that contact has been made, or that it is expected to be made, between human and divine, that what is at least nominally a border has been crossed, and that the human world has been materially changed in the process.

The subject matter of such plaques, moreover, often reinforces the effect of boundary crossing by picturing a meeting of mortal and immortal, one which could be dreamed or imagined but not actually grasped with the senses. We may think of the votive plaque of Archinos from the sanctuary of Amphiaros at Oropos (Fig. 3.6), which characterises the interaction between human and divine – in the form of healing – in multiple ways

(Sineux, 2007; Platt, 2011, pp.44–8; Barrenechea, 2016, pp.268–70; Elsner, 2018, pp.11–13). On the far right of the plaque we witness a standing figure, presumably Archinos, dedicating a votive plaque of roughly the same proportions as the object as a whole. The other two vignettes in the relief further attest to the human-divine interaction in which the votive plays such a key part. The middle scene shows the process of incubation, with the devotee, again seemingly Archinos, asleep, visited by a sacred snake that licks or bites his arm. The leftmost scene, which proportionally takes up the greatest amount of space, shows the divine hero Amphiaros himself standing before Archinos, binding that same arm with a bandage. Yet, although the meeting between the devotee and the divinity occupies the foreground of the relief and is in some sense metaphysically primary, we cannot mistake that this direct encounter between deity and human is the dream representation of the physical event depicted in the background (regardless of the documentary veracity of that depiction). In this vein the liminal focus of the mural from the House of the Golden Bracelet is accentuated by the fact that the plaques seem to document moments on either side of the human-divine interaction: Ariadne on Naxos just before her discovery by Dionysus, and the exhausted maenad, whose ritual implements have been set aside and whose return to the world of everyday life has already begun.



Figure 3.6: Votive plaque of Archinos, from the sanctuary of Amphiaros at Oropos. Fourth century BCE. National Archaeological Museum, Athens 3369. (Photo: Vanni Archive / Art Resource, NY)

The theme of the liminal is accentuated through the mural's articulation of medium. None of the depicted objects are unambiguously one medium or another. The panels, evidently made of stone, would initially appear to be relief sculpture, but the fact that the bevels of their raised frames are alternately in shadow and highlight would suggest that the rest of their surfaces are otherwise flat. The actual figural scenes on the plaques, moreover, are executed in a highly painterly technique, and that they feature multiple indications of depth in space that would be difficult, although not impossible to achieve in stone. Likewise, the heads of the herms would seem, a priori, to be a hard, permanent material such as stone or perhaps bronze. But in practice these faces are the most lifelike and vivid aspects of the painting, and, taken in isolation, they would certainly be interpreted as belonging to living bodies (Stewart, 2003, p.40). The theatrical masks, finally, take this liminal mediality to an extreme, as they counterpoise the living material of vivid green wreath, auburn hair which seems as though it belonged to a real human head, and shining white stone with an exaggerated but immobile expression. Just as the painting as a whole marks out a space between human

and divine, the materiality of the depicted objects is likewise present and absent, fixed but mutable. Part of the purpose of this painting, it seems, is to demonstrate the inherent fluidity of the gods' place in the material world.

At the House of the Epigrams in Pompeii (V.I.18), the dynamic of epiphany and fiction is set within a human history of artistic achievement through the combination of meta-pictorial device and literary gloss. The paintings from a small room at the back of the house (*exedra*) have captured scholarly attention in particular thanks to the presence of accompanying Greek epigrams, some of which were composed by well-known poets and preserved in the Greek Anthology (PPM 3.539-573; Dilthey, 1876; Strocka, 1995; Bergmann, 2007; Prioux, 2008, pp.29–64; Squire, 2009, pp.176–89). The basic structure of the murals in *exedra* combines a sense of immersion within a pavilion with a series of stage fronts punctuated by what appear to be large panel paintings embedded into the backing walls, what are called *pinakes embletoi* in Hellenistic temple inventories (Vallois, 1913; Jones, 2014). The overall effect is intensely immersive. In the centre of the west wall, to the left of the entrance, Pan and



Figure 3.7: East wall, Exedra γ, House of the Epigrams, Pompeii (v.l. 18). First century BCE. (Photo: author; with permission of the Ministero della Cultura Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

Eros wrestle in front of a circular *tholos* shrine while Aphrodite looks on. To the right of the central scene is another large, vertically oriented panel, which eschews any suggestion of depth in favour of a flat, monochrome background, against which a winged woman, perhaps Autumn, stands on a green base, holding fruits gathered in the folds of her robe in between her hands (Moorman, 1988, pp. 162–4). The composition of the east wall of the room closely mirrors that of the west wall (Fig. 3.7). Two narrow monochromatic panels, each framing and displaying a single figure standing on a statue base, Psyche on the left and a priestess on the right, flank a central *aedicula* framing a vertically oriented, rectangular panel. In this instance the panel shows a figure standing next to a rustic shrine, topped by a gilded statue group of Dionysus and a panther.

On the north wall, all three panels show multi-figure scenes, and all were accompanied by epigrams (Fig. 3.8). The left-most scene shows two men standing before a rustic shrine to Pan, which includes a statue of the god on a dedicatory column. In the middle panel of the wall, we see two men approach Homer, identified in an inscription, who is seated before a dedicatory column topped by a statue of Neptune. Finally, on the far right of wall is a fragment of a third

panel. Here two figures lead a goat to sacrifice at an outdoor shrine to Dionysus; a second goat eats at the vine wrapped around a dedicatory column. The epigrams accompanying the paintings both complement and complicate their visual iconographies. As the three figures in the left panel offer dedications to a shrine of Pan, the text lays out the hoped-for reciprocity embedded in the votive act:

Οἱ τρισσοὶ τοι ταῦτα τὰ δίκτυα θῆκαν ὄμαμοι,  
 ἀγρότα Πάν, ἄλλης ἄλλος ἀπάγρεσίς  
 ὧν ἀπὸ μὲν πτανῶν Πίγρης τάδε, ταῦτα δὲ Δάμις  
 τετραπόδων, Κλείτωρ δ'ὁ τρίτος εἰναλίων.  
 ἀνθ'ῶν τῷ μὲν πέμπτε δι'ἠέρος εὐστοχον ἄγρην,  
 τῷ δὲ διὰ ὄρυμῶν, τῷ δὲ δι'ἠλίονων.

(CIL IV.3407.2)

Huntsman Pan, the three brothers dedicated these nets to you, each from a different chase: Pigres placed these from fowl, Damis these from beast, and Clitor his from fish. In return, send them easily caught game, to the first through the air, to the second through the woods, and to the third through the shore-water.

(trans. adapted from Paton, 1916, p.305).



Figure 3.8: North wall, Exedra y, House of the Epigrams, Pompeii (V.I.18). First century BCE. (Photo: author, with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

But the apparent directness of the scene and equivalence of art and text is in fact filtered through a screen of literary history, as this is not a spontaneous gloss on the painting but an epigram of Leonidis of Tarentum, which long pre-dated the decoration of the Pompeian house (*Anth. Pal.* 6.13). Not just records of rustic communion between hunter and god, both image and poem traffic in intertextual reference and urbane, sophisticated distance from the actions they depict. Elsewhere on the wall, the seriousness of the act of dedication is undercut by humour. The scene of goats being prepared for sacrifice is accompanied by an epigram by Evenos of Ascalona (*Anth. Pal.* 9.75), which gives voice to a grapevine addressing the goat eating it:

Κῆν με φάγῃς ἐπὶ ρίζαν, ὅμως ἔτι καρποφορήσω,  
ὄσον ἐπισπείσαι σοί, τράγε, θυομένῳ.

(CIL IV.3407.6)

Though you may eat me to the root, goat, I will still bear fruit, enough to provide a libation for you when you are sacrificed.

(trans. adapted from Paton 1917, p.39).

These paintings and their epigrams place us directly within the votive scenario. Perhaps more than any other aspect of Greco-Roman religion, the process of dedicating a votive acts a bridge. This bridge works in both directions. The votive memorialises a fleeting human moment by giving concrete physical form to an invisible wish or vow. But it also serves as a locus for the accretion of divinity itself, which, it is hoped, can be made to draw near by the physical object. The fact that *exedra y* in the House of the Epigrams features paintings of paintings, which themselves represent acts of dedication, points to the potential instability of the votive as a hinge between human and divine, material and immaterial world. And the ludicrousness of Evenos' epigram, moreover, which is marked not least by the petty glee of the vine's revenge, reminds us that not every religious interaction need have been characterised by total seriousness of purpose.

By way of conclusion, let us turn now to an example which is noteworthy perhaps less for the success of its execution than for the audacity of its conception. On the back wall of the garden of the House of the Marine Venus in Pompeii (II.3.3) is a tripartite painting, framed by a lattice fence and square pillars (Fig.



Figure 3.9: Back wall of garden, House of the Marine Venus, Pompeii (II.3.3). (Photo: author, with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

3.9) (PPM 3.137–143; Moormann, 1988, pp.159–60; Stewart, 2003, pp.38–40; Bergmann, 2008, pp.65–7; De Carolis et al., 2012; Carroll 2015, pp.541–2; Jones, 2019a, p.157). On the right and left are garden views, punctuated by both wading and song birds, which seems to expand the actual space of the garden into a lush, exotic elsewhere. The presence of two large marble objects – a fountain flowing with water on the right and a statue of Ares on the left, reinforces the point that this is a cultured, cultivated space. But the central scene belies this premise. It depicts a woman, nude but for jewellery, reclining on a conch shell in the midst of waves, attended to by a cupid on the right and a boy on a dolphin on the left. A maritime scene, this is assuredly not taking place in the same space as the garden views. Nor does it appear to be occurring at the same time, for what we are presented with is a distinctly mythological narrative: the birth of Aphrodite in the sea and her arrival on Cyprus, one of the most venerable traditions about the goddess, attested already in Hesiod's *Theogony* (173–206).

We are transported in time and space, accordingly, to a far-away land and a distant past. But there is another element involved here, for this scene also supplied the subject matter of the single most famous painting in the ancient world: Apelles' *Aphrodite Anadyomene*, which had been executed in the fourth century BCE, purchased by Augustus in the first century BCE, and subsequently stood in the Forum of Caesar until the reign of Nero, when it was determined to be in such disrepair that it was replaced with a picture by the otherwise unknown Dorotheus (Strab. 14.2.19; Ov. *Tr.* 2.521–528; Plin. *HN* 35.91). The pronounced red-and-white border of the scene in the House of the Marine Venus indicates that its origin as a discretely

conceived panel painting (albeit likely on a smaller scale) has at least been acknowledged. But what do we imagine the relationship to the 'original' painting, so to speak, really was? Was this mural perhaps meant to serve as a kind of local substitute for a prestigious and authoritative artwork, something like what modernity would come to call a copy, and what antiquity seems to have called an *antigraphos* or *apographos* (Lucian *Zeuxis* 3; Plin. *HN* 35.125) (Bergmann, 1995; Jones, 2019a, pp.180–97; Jones, 2019b)? Would visitors to the house have actually mistaken this painting for the original, as Encolpius seems to do in the Petronius' *Satyricon* (83.1) when he identifies paintings which were highly unlikely to be products of the fourth century BCE as having been executed by Apelles and Zeuxis (Elsner, 2007, pp.177–99; Dufallo, 2013, pp.177–205)? The quality of the execution of the painting in the House of the Marine Venus, to be frank, is not especially distinguished, and a viewer expecting Apelles should have been sorely disappointed.

Perhaps we need not fixate on the original-copy dichotomy, however. References to images in Rome that melded the aesthetic, political, and religious were not beyond the scope of Pompeian painting. As Susan Walker (2008) has proposed, a painting from the House of Marcus Fabius Rufus (VII.16.22) may represent a statue of Cleopatra VII in the guise of Venus Genetrix that also once stood in Caesar's Forum. At the House of the Marine Venus, more significant is the directness of the garden painting's appeal to its viewer. Aphrodite, presented at life size or even larger scale, is made present at a moment of crowning glory which highlights her power and ineffability. The idea that we might be witness to the mythological event itself, however, is complicated by the statue of Ares. In

the conception of his body, he is more persuasive than his lover, who fails to capture his attention, and from whom he is separated by numerous compositional boundaries. Yet he is also clearly a statue, made from shining white stone, whose pigmented hair and cloak only highlight his fixed immobility. It is left entirely up to the viewer to think through the narrative relationships between the two figures that would lead to Aphrodite's husband, Hephaistos, capturing them *in flagrante* in an unbreakable net (Hom. *Od.* 8.267–369). But the painting also articulates for the viewer that such narratives are always only presented in artistic terms, whether in poetry, performance, or through the medium of statue or painting. In this humble garden space, Pompeii has been brought into contact with Cyprus and Olympus, and with several moments from a far-off, mythical past. It has also been put into touch with a literary and artistic tradition, stretching back nearly a millennium, which acts as the primary mediator between past and present, human and divine. Epiphany and fiction are given as equals, so to speak, and the painters of the mural have apparently refused to choose between the two. What this and the other murals discussed in this article attest to, ultimately, is the fact that religion's materiality and immateriality are often inextricable from one another, and that the dynamic tension of affect and aesthetics need not be resolved in favour of one or another.

## Bibliography

- 1 Bann, S. (1989) *The True Vine: Visual Representation and the Western Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 2 Barrenechea, F. (2016) 'Sanctuary influence in classical representations of incubation: The motif of the witness awake', *Phoenix*, vol. 70, no. 3/4, pp. 255–73.
- 3 Bergmann, B. (1995) 'Greek masterpieces and Roman recreative fictions', *Harvard studies in classical philology*, vol. 97, pp. 79–120.
- 4 Bergmann, B. (2007) 'A painted garland: Weaving words and images in the House of the Epigrams in Pompeii' in Z. Newby and R.E. Leader-Newby (eds) *Art and Inscriptions in the Ancient World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 60–101.
- 5 Bergmann, B. (2008) 'Staging the supernatural: Interior gardens of Pompeian houses' in C.C. Mattusch (ed.) *Pompeii and the Roman Villa: Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples*, Washington, National Gallery of Art, pp. 53–69.
- 6 Bergmann, B. (2014) 'The concept of boundary in the Roman garden' in K. Coleman (ed.) *Le jardin dans l'antiquité*, Vandoeuvres, Fondation Hardt, pp. 245–300.
- 7 Bolter, J.D. and Grusin, R. (1999) *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MIT Press.
- 8 Bragantini, I. and Sampaolo, V. (eds) (2009) *La Pittura Pompeiana*, Milan, Electa.
- 9 Brendel, O. (1980) 'The Great Frieze in the Villa of the Mysteries' in O. Brendel (ed.) *The Visible Idea: Interpretations of Classical Art*, Washington, Decatur House, pp. 90–138.
- 10 Bryson, N. (1990). *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- 11 Carroll, M. (2015). 'Contextualizing Roman art and nature' in B. Borg (ed.) *A Companion to Roman Art*, Malden and Oxford, Wiley Blackwell, pp. 533–551
- 12 Ciardiello, R. (2006) 'VI 17 Insula Occidentalis 42 Casa del Bracciale d'Oro' in M. Aoyagi and U. Pappalardo (eds) *Pompeii (Regiones VI-VII) Insula Occidentalis*, Naples, Valtrend, pp. 69–256.
- 13 Clarke, J.R. (1991) *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 BC – AD 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- 14 De Carolis, E., Esposito, F., Falcucci, C. and Ferrara, D. (2012) 'Riflessioni sul quadro della "Venere in Conchiglia" di Pompei: dal mito al lavoro dei pictores', *Rivista di Studi Pompeiani*, vol. 23, pp. 7–24.
- 15 de Cesare, M. (1997) *Le Statue in Immagine: Studi sulle raffigurazioni di statue nella pittura vascolare greca*, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- 16 Dilthey, C. (1876) 'Dipinti pompeiani accompagnati d'epigrammi greci', *Annali del Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica*, vol. 48, pp. 294–314.
- 17 Dufallo, B. (2013) *The Captor's Image: Greek Culture in Roman Ecphrasis*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- 18 Elsner, J. (1995) *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.



- 19 Elsner, J. (2007) *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- 20 Elsner, J. (2018) 'Place, shrine, miracle' in I. Weinryb (ed.) *Agents of Faith: Votive Objects in Time and Place*, New Haven, Yale University Press, pp.3–25.
- 21 Flower, H. (2017) *The Dancing Lares and the Serpent in the Garden: Religion at the Roman Street Corner*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- 22 Fröhlich, T. (1991) *Lararien- und Fassadenbilder in den Vesuvstädten: Untersuchungen zur 'volkstümlichen' pompejanischen Malerei*, Mainz, P. von Zabern.
- 23 Giacobello, F. (2008) *Larari Pompeiani. Iconografia e Culto dei Lari in Ambito Domestico*, Milan, LED.
- 24 Gordon, R.L. (1979) 'The real and the imaginary: Production and religion in the Greco-Roman world', *Art History* vol.2, no.1, pp.5–34.
- 25 Grethlein, J. (2017) *Aesthetics Experiences and Classical Antiquity: The Significance of Form in Narrative and Pictures*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 26 Grau, O. (2003) *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*, Cambridge, MIT Press.
- 27 Hett, W.S. (2000) *Aristotle. On the Soul; Parva Naturalia; On Breath*, Loeb Classical Library 288, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- 28 Hughes, J. (2017) *Votive Body Parts in Greek and Roman Religion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 29 Jones, N.B. (2014) 'Ancient painted panels: Terminology and appearance', *Mnemosyne* vol. 67, pp.295–304.
- 30 Jones, N.B. (2019a) *Painting, Ethics, and Aesthetics in Rome*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 31 Jones, N.B. (2019b) 'Truth from fiction: Connoisseurship in Greco-Roman antiquity', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, vol.71/72, pp.229–40
- 32 Maiuri, A. (1931) *La Villa dei Misteri*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato.
- 33 Marconi, C. (2011) 'The birth of an image: The painting of a statue of Herakles and theories of representation in ancient Greek culture', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* vol.59/60, pp.145–67.
- 34 Moormann, E.M. (1988) *La pittura parietale romana come fonte di conoscenza per la scultura antica*, Assen, Van Gorcum.
- 35 Moreno, P. (1999) 'Visita di Dioniso. Rilievo Maffei al British Museum' in *Sabato in museo. Letture di arte ellenistica e romana*, Milan, Electa, pp.86–94.
- 36 Nilsson, M.P. (1957) *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age*, Lund, CWK Gleerup.
- 37 Paton, W.R. (1916) *The Greek Anthology: Books 1–6*, Loeb Classical Library 67, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- 38 Paton, W.R. (1917) *The Greek Anthology: Book 9*, Loeb Classical Library 84 Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- 39 Platt, V.J. (2011) *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Greco-Roman Art, Literature, and Religion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 40 Polansky, R. (2008) *Aristotle's 'De Anima'*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 41 Pollitt, J.J. (1986) *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 42 PPM = Carratelli, G.P. (ed.) (1990–2003) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, 10 vols. and suppl., Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana.
- 43 Prioux, É. (2008) *Petits musées en vers: épigrammes et discours sur les collections antiques*, Paris, CTHS.
- 44 Ridgway, B.S. (2002) *Hellenistic Sculpture III: The Styles of ca. 100–31 BC*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press.
- 45 Sauron, G. (1998) *La grande fresque de la villa des Mystères à Pompéi: mémoires d'une dévote de Dionysos*, Paris, Picard.
- 46 Scheibler, I. (1998) 'Zu den Bildinhalten der Klapptürbilder römischer Wanddekorationen', *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts: Abteilung Rom*, vol.105, pp.1–20.
- 47 Sineux, P. (2007) 'Dormir, rêver, montrer. À propos de quelques "représentations figurées" du rite de l'incubation sur les reliefs votifs des sanctuaires guérisseurs de l'Attique', *Kentron: Revue Pluridisciplinaire du monde antique*, vol.23, pp.11–29.
- 48 Squire, M. (2009) *Image and Text in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 49 Stewart, P. (2003) *Statues in Roman Society: Representation and Response*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- 50 Strocka, V.M. (1995) 'Das Bildprogramm des Epigrammzimmers in Pompeii', *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts: Abteilung Rom*, vol.102, pp.269–90.
- 51 Trimble, J. (2017) 'Dimensions of presence and absence on domestic and street shrines at Pompeii', paper at *New Antiquity V*, King's College London, London.
- 52 Vallois, R. (1913) 'Les πίνακες déliens' in M. Holleaux (ed.) *Mélanges Holleaux: recueil de mémoires concernant l'antiquité grecque offert à Maurice Holleaux en souvenir de ses années de direction à l'École française d'Athènes (1904–1912)*, Paris, Picard, pp.289–99.

- 53 Van Andringa, W. (2009) *Quotidien des dieux et des hommes: La vie religieuse dans les cités de Vésuve à l'époque romaine*, Rome, École française de Rome.
- 54 Vernant, J.-P. (1991) *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, ed. by Froma I. Zeitlin. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- 55 Walker, S. (2008) 'Cleopatra in Pompeii?', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, vol.76, pp.35–46.
- 56 Weinryb, I. (ed.) (2015) *Ex voto: Votive giving across culture*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- 57 Weinryb, I. (ed.) (2018) *Agents of Faith: Votive Objects in Time and Place*, New Haven, Yale University Press.
- 58 Wyler, S. (2006) 'Roman replications of Greek art at the Villa Farnesina', *Art History* vol. 29, no.2, pp. 213–32.
- 59 Wyler, S. (2008) 'Des images dionysiaques aux limites du religieux: le cubiculum 4 de la villa des Mystères' in S. Estienne, D. Jaillard, N. Lubtchansky and C. Pouzadoux (eds) *Image et religion*, Naples, Publications du Centre Jean Bérard, pp.449–59.
- 60 Wyler, S. (2019) 'Images of Dionysus in Rome: The archaic and Augustan periods' in F. Mac Góráin (ed.) *Dionysus and Rome: Religion and Literature*, Berlin, De Gruyter, pp.84–110.
- 61 Zanker, P. (1998) *Eine Kunst für die Sinne: Zur Bilderwelt des Dionysos und der Aphrodite*, Berlin, Wagenbach.





# SENSING HERMAPHRODITUS IN THE DIONYSIAN THEATRE GARDEN

**Brittany DeMone and Lisa A. Hughes**

## Abstract

*This essay highlights new perspectives on the deity Hermaphroditus' role in select Pompeian garden settings. In particular, it suggests that Hermaphroditus needs to be seen as a convivial participant in Dionysian ritualistic and theatrical performances. Situating the deity in Dionysus' cultic retinue (e.g. alongside maenads, satyrs/pan, and Silenus) opens the way for a multivalent, lived, sensory approach to these intersexed representations. Hermaphroditus' role as a convivial participant is especially evident within the contexts of Pompeian dining and the theatrical performances (pantomime) that took place in or near garden settings known as the 'Dionysian Theatre Garden'. These theatre gardens contained architectural features, visual imagery, and botanical remains that were well-suited to the Dionysian style performances which often featured as part of the Roman dining experience. Ovid's narrative of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis in *Metamorphoses* (4.274–388), possibly staged for theatrical performances in these houses, provides a useful case study to demonstrate a performative fusion of role-playing and theatrical narratives, which relied heavily upon visual, aural, and olfactory responses.*

**Keywords:** Pompeii, Dionysus, Hermaphroditus, garden, pantomime, theatre

**Full text:** <https://openartsjournal.org/issue-10/article-4/>

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2021s04>

## Biographical note

Brittany DeMone is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Classics and Religion, University of Calgary. DeMone is currently finishing her PhD dissertation on *Roman Hermaphroditus: Visual Representations, Role-Playing, and Garden Spaces in Campania*. Other research interests include gender and sexuality, queer and feminist theories, visual representations of myth, and Roman theatrical performances in garden spaces.

Lisa A. Hughes is an Associate Professor in the Department of Classics and Religion, University of Calgary. Hughes' current project, 'The art of performance along the Bay of Naples (44 BCE–79 CE)', explores the role of small-scale theatrical performances in the gardens of ancient Roman houses.

Banner image: Detail from a garden painting, from the House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. (Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

# SENSING HERMAPHRODITUS IN THE DIONYSIAN THEATRE GARDEN<sup>1</sup>

**Brittany DeMone and Lisa A. Hughes,  
University of Calgary**

This essay explores select visual representations of the deity Hermaphroditus that may have served as theatrical props in Pompeian domestic garden settings. It demonstrates the benefits of a more multivalent, lived, sensory approach to these representations, especially when they are set in or near the 'Dionysian Theatre Garden'. Here, ritually themed theatrical performances included Hermaphroditus, Dionysus, and Dionysus' cultic retinue (e.g. maenads, satyrs/Pan, and Silenus). Within the 'Dionysian Theatre Garden', Hermaphroditus' intersexed characteristics were fused with sensorial Dionysian attributes such as the *tympanum*, *kithara*, and saffron robe. Alongside the material evidence from Pompeian houses, the essay draws on Ovid's story of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis in *Metamorphoses* (4.274–388), teasing out both a ritualistic explanation and a performative fusion of role-playing and theatrical narratives (e.g. pantomime) that rely heavily upon the senses.

To better ground Hermaphroditus' sensorial relationship with Dionysus, it is necessary to identify Dionysus' cultic presence in Pompeii. In general, Dionysus' ancient Mediterranean presence had a connection with fertility festivals and mystery rites, which in its early stages included men, women, and children, who engaged in rites under the influence of wine and dance (Konstantinou, 2018, pp. 120–1; Nilsson, 1953, p. 179; Dodds, 1951, p. 76). These rites likely came to southern Italy during the fourth century BCE (Burkert, 1987, p. 22; Nilsson, 1953, p. 193). In contrast to the cult's large-scale appeal in the Hellenistic period, during the Roman empire worship seems to have changed to appeal to smaller groups (Gordon, 2017, pp. 281–2; Jaccottet, 2003, pp. 123–46).

Evidence for smaller-scale Dionysian worship at Pompeii is found in a sanctuary setting outside the southern wall. The sanctuary includes a Doric-style temple with dining areas and garden plantings

in honour of deities related to Dionysus' local manifestations, Liber and Libera (Bielfeldt, 2007, pp. 323–9). Initially excavated in 1947–48, near the chapel of Sant'Abbondio, the sanctuary seems to have flourished from the third century BCE until the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE (Van Andringa, 2013, p. 1). Wilhelmina Jashemski's findings revealed masonry benches and vine plantings at the forefront of the temple, which had been used for dining purposes (1979, pp. 157–8, fig. 244, Carroll, 2003, p. 70). In 2008, further archaeobotanical analyses exposed plantings associated with Dionysus. These plantings included vines, pomegranates, and figs near the masonry benches at the forefront of the temple and the *schola* (horseshoe-shaped bench) on the temple's southern end (Zech-Matterne & Oueslati, 2013, p. 1). Visual representations strongly suggest that the temple was dedicated to Dionysus and Venus/Ariadne/Libera (the city's patron deity). For example, the pediment of the temple bears a relief sculpture depicting the convivial reclining figures of the deities (Bielfeldt, 2007, pp. 322–8). In this polychromatic relief (Fig. 4.1), Dionysus/Liber holds the *kantharos* in his right hand and a bunch of grapes in his left hand. To his right (the viewer's left), there appear a *thyrsus* and tambourine which allude to the ritualistic dances associated with Bacchic rites. Moving further to the viewer's right, Venus/Libera appears, with her (now-damaged) head veiled. This convivial scene may represent the marriage of the two deities (Swetnam-Burland, 2000, p. 61, fig. 7.3). Through a comparison of other marriage scenes between Dionysus and Venus in Etruscan and Greek worlds, Stéphanie Wyler (2013) dates the relief to between the fourth and third centuries BCE. Eros/Priapus (on the viewer's bottom right) and Silenus and a panther (on the viewer's bottom left) also figure in the scene. In this instance, cultic practice in the form of ritual dining went hand in hand with a sacred landscape in a rural setting. The placement of a Dionysian sanctuary within a rural context, also fitted well with the region's primary agricultural product: the grape. In turn, this product was a staple in convivial settings (Swetnam-Burland, 2000, p. 65).

Although no sanctuary of Dionysus has yet been found within the city walls, it is safe to say that conviviality, wine, and Dionysian imagery set the stage for the deity's presence within Pompeii's residential settings. The standard reference for residential representations of Pompeian Bacchic rites and performances is the mid-first century BCE fresco cycle in Room 5 of the suburban Villa of the Mysteries (see Jones' essay in this issue). On the room's eastern central panel appears a damaged fresco representation

<sup>1</sup> This essay draws on research supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Reference 435-2018-0285.



Figure 4.1: Dionysus and Venus/Ariadne, Tuff, third century BCE, S. Abbondio. (Author's photo, with permission of the Ministero Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

of seated male and female figures, who have been attributed to Dionysus and Ariadne. Staged on a low platform, mythological figures of Dionysus' retinue (Silenus, satyrs) also find themselves amongst a Roman bride and her entourage. Scholars have traditionally maintained that this scene marked the performance of a Bacchic rite (e.g. Gazda, 2000, pp.1–4), although this interpretation is not without its problems. No artefacts found *in situ* suggest that rites in honour of Dionysus took place in this area (Swetnam-Burland, 2000, pp.68–9). A more recent identification sees the room as an *oecus* or *triclinium*, reserved for guests to view theatrical performances (Longfellow, 2000, p.33). Additionally, Molly Swetnam-Burland (2000, p.69) argues that the cycle evoked 'reflection and contemplation of the nature of the god, his retinue, and local religious practices associated with the worship of the deity'. Such a setting could have appealed to a small group which may have practiced Dionysian rituals, enjoyed the

theatrical performance, or engaged in a combination of the two practices.

These themes of reflection and contemplation serve as useful points of departure for considering how sensory perception plays out in cultic, convivial, and theatrical contexts. Central to this is a recognition that the body as a whole, not just the brain, is integral to reflection and contemplation (Day, 2013, p.6). Moreover, multisensory approaches acknowledge that not only the body, but also 'animals, objects, architectures, spaces, and landscapes' play formidable collective roles in understanding the ancient world (Betts, 2017, p.2).

To tease out the possible sounds, smells, tastes, and sights audience and ritual participants may have experienced as part of the convivial experience, it is important to have some understanding of both the 'Dionysian Theatre Garden' and Hermaphroditus' role within it. The term 'Dionysian Theatre Garden' does not figure in the ancient literary sources, but is a term



(Ed. Alinari) N.° 11994. POMPEI – Casa detta degli Amorini d'Oro.

Figure 4.2: Archival Photo, House of the Golden Cupids (VI.16.7,38), first century CE Pompeii. (Photo: Alinari Archives/Art Resource, NY (ART39880))

constructed out of convenience to demonstrate the following six features in select Pompeian homes.<sup>2</sup>

The first feature is a garden peristyle; the second, dining areas<sup>3</sup> located in or near the garden; the third, a stage/raised platform (temporary or permanent) which could have hosted theatrical performances; the fourth, sculpture (relief, in the round), frescoes, mosaics, and other artefacts related to the Dionysian mythic cycle in or near the garden; the fifth, fragrant and visually pleasing plantings (Draycott, 2019) or representations of plantings symbolically associated with Dionysus, and finally water features. Twenty-two of the twenty-four residences analysed for this study exhibit at least any three of the six features (most commonly the peristyle garden, Dionysian decoration, and water features) of the Dionysian Theatre Garden.<sup>4</sup> Secondary scholarship has tended to opt for single rather than multivalent functions of space in these garden areas. For example, Katharine T. von Stackelberg (2009b, p.88) has noted that the inclusion of Dionysian imagery is not indicative of cult practice per se; rather, she sees it as having a more practical, convivial function that ties into activities within the home. Alternatively, scholars have pointed to the suggestive theatrical nature of Dionysian visual representations that are primarily cultic (Tronchin,

2012, p.269). It is safe to argue that one function does not surpass the other: instead, because of the nature of ancient theatre, cultic and theatrical performances go hand in hand.

The visual representation of Dionysus and his retinue in or near Pompeian dining areas could also do more than act as a subtle reference to the theatre. This Dionysian cultic and theatrical relationship also invokes a highly sensorial performance that enabled pantomime performers to take on the roles of deities who spoke and sang (Lada-Richards, 2013, pp.111–13). The audiences of these performances would likely understand traditional Dionysian doctrine and enjoy theatrical production, primarily through the lens of *mimesis* (Fernández, 2013, p.194–7; Huskinson, 2008, pp.91–2). *Mimesis* in theatrical contexts involves the projection of oneself into an adopted persona through imitation in a type of performance (acting, dancing) (Mueller, 2016; Lawler, 1927, pp.74–5). For example, dancing figures engaging in a dramatic performance of Dionysian ritual appear on Etruscan *cistae* as female performers (*mimae*), who imitate the roles of Dionysus' *thiasy* (satyrs, nymphs) (Wiseman, 2000, pp.283–6). Similar representations of ritualistic dramatic performances that connect multivalently to Dionysus' *thiasus* appear in other areas of Italy and in Greece (Håkansson 2010, pp.132, 134–5). Through the performers' vivid gestures and postures, these mimetic dances can contribute to a sensorial understanding of select Pompeian homes' interior landscapes. It could be argued that the Dionysian representations serve as props in the garden backdrop for actual cultic and theatrical performances. A multivalent approach, like that adopted by Albert Henrichs (2013, p.57), identifies 'the various provinces of Dionysus – the wine, ritual madness, the theatre, and afterlife'; taking account of the god's role in each of the areas 'is not only the safest course of action but arguably also the most productive.' Dionysus, therefore, takes on both cultic and theatrical personae. This multifaceted reading has a vital impact on other mythological figures, in this case, Hermaphroditus, who figure into the Dionysian narrative and pantomime performances.

### Dionysus and Hermaphroditus

While other scholars have superficially commented on Hermaphroditus' correlation with Dionysus and his entourage in the material record, they often fail to pursue how this relationship is interpreted (von Stackelberg, 2014; pp.408–9; Oehmke, 2004, pp.19–20; Delcourt, 1961, pp.57–8; Kieseritzky, 1882, pp.266–71). Visual depictions of Hermaphroditus date from as early as the fourth century BCE (Ajootian, 1997, p.221;

2 These six features derive from the following houses: II.2.2 House of Octavio Quartio/Loreius Tibertinus; III.4.b; House of Iphigenia/Pinarius Cerialis; V.1.26 House of L. Caecilius Iucundus VI.9.6,7, House of the Dioscuri; VI.7.18 House of Adonis; VI.9.2, 13 House of Meleager; VI.15.1 House of the Vettii (x2); VIII.4.4 House of Holconius Rufus; IX.1.22, 29 House of M. Epidius Sabinus, IX.8.6 House of the Centenary.

3 For example, these include rooms such as *triclinia*, *oeci*, *cenationes*, *cenacula*. We acknowledge the problematic nature of these terms concerning function and space; see Leach (2004) and Allison (1993).

4 It is vital to acknowledge that based on the lack of documented or preserved remains, examples such as the House of Euxinus (I.11.12) and the House of Diadumenus (VI.12.26) are included in the analysis. The following residences feature Hermaphroditus in the Dionysian Theatre Garden: House of Apollo Citharist (I.4.5), House of the Fruit (I.9.5), House of Menander (I.10.4), House of Octavio Quartio/Loreius Tiburtinus (II.2.2), House of Pinarius Cerialis/Iphigenia (III.4.b), House of the Epigrams (V.1.18), House of Caecilius Iucundus (V.1.26), House of M. Lucretius Fronto (V.4.a), House of the Vestals (VI.1.7), House of the Wounded Adonis (VI.7.18), House of Meleager (VI.9.2), House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6), House of the Vettii (VI.15.1), House of Tryptolemus (VII.7.5), House of Holconius Rufus (VIII.4.4), House of M. Epidius Rufus (IX.1.20), House of M. Epidius Sabinus (IX.1.22), House of M. Lucretius/Suonatrici (IX.3.5), House of Poppaeus Primus (IX.5.11, 13), House of the Centenary (IX.8.3), Villa Matrone/Villa Contraro Bottaro, Villa of Diomedes (HGW24).



Oehmke, 2004, p.15). This date also coincides with the emergence of both the display of the female nude body (i.e. Praxiteles' Aphrodite Knidos) and the iconographic transformation of the effeminate beardless Dionysus (Berg, 2007 pp.67–8). Notably, the intersexed god Hermaphroditus is not introduced into Dionysus' entourage until the second century BCE (Oehmke, 2004, pp.19–20). It is during this later period that we begin to see marble and terracotta figurines of the dancing Hermaphroditus (Oehmke, 2004, cats.104–7, 109–13, 117, 119), as well as marble relief sculptures and marble kraters that depict Hermaphroditus dancing among Dionysus' *thiasus* (Oehmke, 2004, cats.102, 103, 114–16, 118). In first-century BCE Pompeian wall paintings we see a continuation of the display of Dionysian iconographic features. The wall paintings of Hermaphroditus preserve these juxtapositions that would have likely been visible in sculptural groups, before the sculptures were separated and decontextualised. In the frescoes, Hermaphroditus shares many Dionysian traits – namely the *thiasus*, attire and attributes – which reminded the viewer of the intersexed deity's link to Dionysus and Dionysian space.

Members of Dionysus' entourage who frequently accompany Hermaphroditus include satyrs/Pan, Silenus, and maenads. In two very similar wall paintings found in *triclinia* from the House of the Vettii (VI.15.1) and the House of Epidius Sabinus (IX.1.22) (Fig. 4.3) Silenus appears in the company of Hermaphroditus. In both scenes, Hermaphroditus is seated with Silenus positioned directly behind him. Hermaphroditus lifts up his<sup>5</sup> yellow chiton to expose an erect phallus. Silenus, wearing vibrant red and a wreathed crown grasps Hermaphroditus' left wrist and extends his own right arm with an open palm. In both scenes, the inclusion in the scene of foliage and a background architectural feature indicates a sacro-idyllic Dionysian landscape. Foliage and sacro-idyllic architecture also appear in a fresco from the House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6) (Fig. 4.4). In the fresco from the House of Epidius Sabinus, we see the addition of a maenad identified by her *nebris* (animal skin) draped around her torso and ivy crown. She stands slightly off to the side of Hermaphroditus and Silenus, observing their interaction. Her Dionysian association is reinforced by the *kantharos* cup which she holds in her right hand, as well as by the *thyrsus* and

*tympanum* in her left. Another *thyrsus* appears atop of the architectural feature in the background. The *thyrsus* is a clear Dionysian symbol, which makes Dionysus present in the scene, even though the god's body itself is not represented. The *kantharos*, distinguished by its high handles extending above the lip of the vessel, was a type of drinking cup commonly used to hold wine for drinking and rituals. The *kantharos* could also symbolise banqueting and is often held by Dionysus or his representatives. Moreover, these cups frequently bore Dionysian themes.

Returning to the fresco from the House of Epidius Sabinus, Helbig (1868, nr.1371) suggests the *kantharos* contained *satyrion* (an aphrodisiac drink), which was to be used as a sexual stimulant by either Hermaphroditus or Silenus. Given the Dionysian nature of the scene, however, the cup might also have been understood to contain wine and to indicate either ritual or banqueting. The maenad, as an observing participant holding Dionysian implements, is also found in wall paintings from the House of Holconius Rufus (VIII.4.4), where she holds a *thyrsus* and *tympanum*, and from the House of the Centenary (IX.8.6) where the maenad is again seen in the background holding a *tympanum* standing next to an ithyphallic herm.

The *tympanum* leads us back to the theme of aural sensory perceptions, discussed in this journal issue by Kamila Wyslucha and Mirco Mungari. The image of the *tympanum* evokes the drumming that took place during Dionysian ritual dances (e.g. Euripides *Bacchae* 120–34). Ovid emphasises the noise of the *tympanum* in two passages in Book Four of the *Metamorphoses*. At the beginning of Book Four (*Met.* 4.28–30), Ovid highlights the noise of the festivities: '...glad shouts of youths and cries of women echo round, with drum of tambourine (*tympanum*), the cymbals' clash, and the shrill piping of the flute'.<sup>6</sup> Then, when Alcithoë finishes her story of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, we again see the emergence of Bacchic clamour, which signals the arrival of Dionysus: 'Alcithoë, was done...when suddenly unseen timbrels (*tympana*) sounded harshly in their ears, and flutes, with curving horns, and tinkling cymbals...' (*Met.* 4.388–92). Intriguingly, in artworks depicting Hermaphroditus, the *tympanum* is never played by Hermaphroditus. Rather, it is either displayed on the ground as if Hermaphroditus has just concluded a ritual activity and has placed the instrument down as he rests. The fresco from the Ixion room of the House of the Vettii, for example, presents Hermaphroditus reclining and leaning on a rectangular architectural

5 Following von Stackelberg (2014) and Åshede (2020), gender-neutral pronouns (ze/hir) refers to Hermaphroditus, except for when discussing the god's pre-transformation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. For a discussion on using gender-neutral pronouns for Hermaphroditus, see Surtees & Dyer (2020, pp.19–20).

6 All translations are from Miller (1977).



Figure 4.3: Hermaphroditus, Silenus and Maenad, c.50–79 CE, fresco, 50 × 50cm. House of Epidius Sabinus (IX.1.22,29), Pompeii. Now MANN 27874. (Photo:Vanni Archive/ ArtResource, NY (ART383521))



Figure 4.4: Hermaphroditus and Satyr/Pan, c.62–70 CE, fresco, 91 × 143cm. House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6), Pompeii. Now MANN 27700. (Photo:Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY (ART383521))



Figure 4.5: Fresco depicting Hermaphroditus and Silenus, mid-late first century CE, 44 × 38cm. House of Caecilius Iucundus (V.I.26), Pompeii. Now MANN 111213. (Photo: Giorgio Albano, with permission of the Ministero Cultura – Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli)

feature (Oehmke, 2004, cat.162). A *tympanum* is placed at the end below Hermaphroditus' elbow, where water vessels commonly appear on reclining nymph motifs. Alternatively, if the *tympanum* is being played, it is held by Silenus. This is demonstrated in the fresco from the House of Caecilius Iucundus (Fig. 4.5).

A second instrument that features prominently in the wall paintings of Hermaphroditus in Pompeii is the *kithara* (lyre). Three wall paintings from the House of the Centenary (IX.8.6) (Oehmke, 2004, cat.187), the House of Holconius Rufus (VIII.4.4), and the House of M. Lucretius Fronto (V.4.a) (PPM III, fig.110.) display similar scenes where Silenus, recognisable by his potbelly, bald head, beard, and the red drapery (cf. BM inv. 1899,0215.1, discussed below) wrapped around his waist, actively strums the instrument as he accompanies Hermaphroditus.

These scenes are reminiscent of the Dionysian frieze from the Villa of Mysteries where Silenus also plays the

lyre (Ling, 1991, pl.IXB) and a fresco from Boscoreale now housed in the British Museum (inv.1899,0215.1) that shows Dionysus/Bacchus pouring wine for a panther at his feet and leaning on Silenus, who plays a *kithara*. The fresco from the House of Holconius Rufus includes a small Eros playing the *aulos* (double flute). Athenaeus (*Deip.* 14.618) quoting Ephippus (*Merchandise* fr. 7) comments on the pairing of the lyre and flute: 'For the music produced on the pipes and the lyre, by boy, is an integral part of the entertainment we provide...'. The *kithara* adds an aural element to the fresco scenes. Music was an essential part of festivals, rituals, and religious ceremonies as well as theatre and banqueting. The multiple scenes of cupids and psyches at an outdoor garden banquet from the triclinium of the House of M. Lucretius (IX.3.5 – a house filled with Dionysian and theatrical themes) include a series of performative scenes where a psyche is playing the *kithara* (MANN inv.9206), two scenes that feature

dancing cupids and psyches (MANN inv.9207, 9208), and another scene of Cupid playing the *aulos* (MANN inv.9191).

One type of performance singled out by Lucian was pantomime dance (*De Salt.* 26, 63, 68, 72, 83) because it featured the *kithara* for musical accompaniment. Karl Toepfer (2019, p.133), in his examination of the lyre, describes the instrument as ‘feminine’, as it was primarily studied by Roman women and was a favoured instrument of Greek *hetaerae*. Referring to Sallust’s first-century BCE criticism of Sempronia for her skills in dancing and playing the lyre (*Cat.* 25.2), Toepfer notes that the lyre was an appropriate instrument for pantomime because of its ‘implied “feminization”’ (2019, p.133). An ivory plaque (c. fifth-sixth century CE) found in Trier (now in Berlin SMB inv.2497) portrays a female performer identified as a pantomime dancer who wears a belted chiton, and holds a lyre in the left hand, and three masks in the right.

The inclusion in Pompeian frescoes of Silenus playing an instrument, whether the *kithara* or *tympanum*, indicates that these scenes relate to both an auditory imagination and lived space where the instruments were performed. The frescoes from the House of the Centenary, Holconius Rufus, M. Lucretius Fronto, and House of Caecilius Iucundus were all found in identifiable dining spaces, the last three of which were all situated directly off a peristyle garden. Although Hermaphroditus is not traditionally considered a member of Dionysus’ *thiasus*, these images indicate that Hermaphroditus was a participant. Furthermore, Hermaphroditus occupies the central space of the scene, indicating his importance and authority in these performative settings.

One attribute that has yet to be linked to Hermaphroditus, and which has ties to Dionysus, is the saffron (*crocus/krokotos*) robe. This object has strong sensorial allusions of sight and smell. Saffron yellow was perceived as a feminine colour in antiquity, in part because of its associations with young unmarried women, seduction, female ritual, and, by extension, a change of identity (Juv., *Oxford Fragment* 21-25, 271; Medda, 2017, p.139, n.8; Benda-Weber, 2014, pp.132–33; Goff, 2004, pp.110–11, 113; Perusino, 2000, pp.521–6). Meanwhile, when worn by men, the colour often signalled effeminacy (Ar. *Thesm.* 138. 940–45; Olson, 2014, p.198, n.115; Olson, 2008, pp.12–13). Dionysus was often associated with both the sights and scents of saffron (Ov. *Met.* 4.393) and wore a saffron-coloured robe (Ar. *Ranae*, 42–56; Sen. *Oed.* 421; Nonnus, *Dion.* 14.159–60; Cole, 2007, p.328). Theatres and performers also utilised saffron. For example, the spice was sprinkled in the Greek theatre (Prop. 4.1.6; Mart.

5.25.7–8; Jones, 1991, p.186, n.2), and Apuleius (*Apol.* 13.5) associates the saffron robe with pantomime. Erika Simon (1961, pp.111–72) links saffron-coloured robes with a blue/purple hem worn by several female figures and the Dionysian mysteries in her examination of the Dionysiac frieze from the Villa of Mysteries. A fresco from the Farnesina Villa now in the Museo Nazionale Romano depicts similar clothing on Leucothea, the nymph who breastfed the infant Dionysus (National Museum of the Terme inv.1118). Saffron, therefore, had semantic ties to both the theatre, cult of Dionysus, and effeminacy.

While it has often been noted that Dionysus and his followers wear a saffron robe, this has not been the case with Hermaphroditus. The most striking juxtaposition of this display appears in the House of the Vettii. One of the fresco panels in the Ixion Room depicts Ariadne’s discovery by Dionysus and his *thiasus* (Fredrick, 1995, fig.4). Here, Ariadne wears a saffron yellow garment with a blue hem. In turn, a second panel from along the same wall above a doorway shows the reclining Hermaphroditus in a similar yellow garment with a blue trim that frames his upper exposed torso and legs (Oehmke, 2004, cat.162). Hermaphroditus also wears a saffron yellow garment in several other Pompeian wall paintings. The semantic meanings of saffron yellow discussed above indicate why this might be an appropriate colour for Hermaphroditus, both because of his links to Dionysus, and the androgynous gender-blurring traits which connect him to both women and men.

One further link between Hermaphroditus and Dionysus is found in the most frequently portrayed *thiasus* member – the satyr/Pan (hybrid goat-man). Three Campanian black-glazed terracotta Caledonian *phialai* (bowls for pouring liquid offering) from the third century BCE provide evidence that Hermaphroditus struggling with a satyr or youthlike figure was already adopted in the local Italic tradition. This appearance, moreover, coincides with the period of adoption of Hermaphroditus into the Dionysian sphere. The *phialai* (British Museum inv.1873,0820.431; MFA 2000.843; Dresden SKD inv. Dr.496) portray reliefs of Hermaphroditus kneeling on a cushioned rocky plinth and pulling a muscular figure, often interpreted as a satyr, towards him. The raised right arm behind the muscular figure’s head and the left knee already raised on the bed is synonymous with the depictions of the later sculptural Berlin-Torlonia motif types (*LIMC* nos. 64c-j; Museo Torlonia inv.151) of Hermaphroditus and a satyr. In the background of these *phialai* cups (viewer’s left) appears a small statuette of Dionysus standing on a pedestal holding a *kantharos* in the right

hand, a *thyrsus* in the left and a wreathed crown. No sculptural group of Hermaphroditus with a satyr has been found in Pompeii. However, a marble statue of Hermaphroditus reclining on his back does appear in the garden of the House of Octavius Quartio/Loreius Tiburtinus (II.2.2). The lifted robe pulled away above Hermaphroditus's phallus, suggests that the viewer replaces the role of the satyr. This piece is an example of where performers could easily adapt sculpture within their theatrical narrative and use the artwork as a prop. In the larger corpus of Hermaphroditus sculptural groups, Hermaphroditus can play either the role of the 'victim' or 'sexual aggressor'. In the wall paintings from Pompeii, however, this is not always crystal clear. Pompeian wall-paintings reveal two categories of Hermaphroditus imagery, which we might refer to as concealed or revealed. For example, frontally depicted representations of Hermaphroditus are easily identifiable because of the exposure of female breasts and male phallus. Scenes such as the one found in the Ixion Room of the House of the Vettii (Oehmke, 2004, cat. 162) clearly outline Hermaphroditus in the role of the sleeping figure being revealed by a satyr/pan figure who raises his arm in the gesture of discovery. This image is even more striking when contrasted with the scene of the discovery of Ariadne (Fredrick, 1995, fig.4) to the left of the image of Hermaphroditus. As noted earlier, there is a sartorial similarity between the yellow and blue-trimmed dresses that both figures wear. Further comparisons and contrasts can be made: for instance, the fact that both figures are reclining (the distinction being Hermaphroditus is portrayed frontally and Ariadne from behind); a satyr lifts up its robes and raises its arm; and, finally, the addition of the *tympanum* located in both of the scenes.

Von Stackelberg (2014, p.405) categorises scenes of the satyr/pan figure either approaching a sleeping Hermaphroditus or wrestling with him as 'discovery/awakening' scenes. She focuses on five of these discovery scenes which all portray Hermaphroditus frontally. The expansion of this corpus includes depictions where Hermaphroditus' identity is also concealed. These discovery scenes portray a satyr either approaching a sleeping 'female' figure or wrestling with a 'female' figure whose frontal torso and pubic region are hidden. Instead, the buttocks or backside of the figure are revealed to the viewer. In sculpture such as the Dresden motif type, particularly the Villa of Oplontis example (Fig. 4.6), the viewer visually and physically interacts with the piece by circumambulating the artwork. However, this is not feasible with a wall painting. A fresco from an unknown location in Pompeii (MANN I 10878) (Clarke, 1998,

p.52, fig. 13) is a pictorial representation of the sculptural Dresden motif. Hermaphroditus wrestles with a satyr but the scene emphasises the backside of Hermaphroditus rather than the front. In this example, because there is a sculptural tradition that coincides with the fresco, we can be confident that the figure represents Hermaphroditus. However, in not all cases is there such clarity. Other artworks that conceal the sleeping 'female' identity ask the viewer to question and imagine the identity of the 'female' as Hermaphroditus or a maenad. The ambiguity of the scenes implies that this is the very point of the representation. The emphasis is not on the ithyphallic nature of Hermaphroditus' identity. Rather, the allure for both satyrs and the imagined Roman viewer is the 'shapely bottom', which the sculptural depictions of the Sleeping Hermaphrodite emphatically demonstrate (Oehmke 2004, p.55; Groves 2016, p.339–40; Åshede, 2020, p.90). The concealing of the reclining 'female's' identity is present in eleven images<sup>7</sup>, while seventeen artworks reveal Hermaphroditus' identity.<sup>8</sup> The ambiguously concealed displays of these sleeping 'women' discovered by a satyr are performative in the same sense that theatrical presentations rely on concealing the performer's identity.

7 House of Apollo Citharist (I.4.5) (destroyed), House of the Fruit Orchard (I.9.5) (in-situ), House of the Greek Epigrams (V.1.18) (MANN 27705), House of the Vestals (VI.1.7) (destroyed), House of Diadumenus (VII.12.16) (destroyed), House of Lucretius/Soutrixes (IX.3.5) (in-situ), House of Poppaeus Primus (IX.5.11) (destroyed), Villa of Diomedes (HGW24) (MANN27703), Pompeii-Unknown (MANN I 10878), Pompeii-Unknown (MANN 27693), Pompeii-Unknown (MANN27685).

8 House of Euxinus (I.11.12) (in-situ), House of Pinarius Cerialis/Iphigenia (III.4.b) (in-situ), House of Caecilius Iucundus (V.1.26) (MANN I 11213), House of M. Lucretius Fronto (V.4.a) (in-situ), House of the Wounded Adonis (VI.7.18) (in-situ), House of Meleager (VI.9.2) (MANN 9264), House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6) (MANN 27700), House of the Vettii (VI.15.1) – two frescoes (both in-situ), House of Siricus, (VII.1.25) (destroyed), House of Tryptolemus (VII.7.5) (destroyed), House of M. Epidius Rufus (IX.1.20) (MANN 109620), House of M. Epidius Sabinus (IX.1.22) (MANN 27875), House of the Centenary (IX.8.6) (in-situ), House of Holconius Rufus (VIII.4.4) (destroyed), House of Octavius Quartio/Loreius Tiburtinus (II.2.2) (Pompeii Antiquarium inv.3021), Villa Contrada Corrado/Villa Matrone (MFA 1981.754).



Figure 4.6: Hermaphroditus and Satyr, mid-late first century CE, marble, height 1m, plinth 91 × 58cm. From the Villa of Poppaea, Oplontis. Now in the MANN OP 2800. (Author's photo, with permission of the Ministero Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

### Hermaphroditus and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (4.285–388)

The theatrical disguise and voyeuristic nature of Hermaphroditus in Pompeian art is evident in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Hermaphroditus, in broader mythological contexts, maintains connections with Dionysus' cultic and theatrical personae. These connections are particularly apparent in Ovid's tale of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis (*Met.* 4.285–388), which itself has a distinctive Dionysian framework. Alison Keith's 2010 article on Dionysian themes in Book Four of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* highlights the fact that Minyas' daughters' stories are part of the larger Theban cycle of myths that spans *Metamorphoses* (3.1–4.603). Hermaphroditus and Salmacis is the last tale that the impious Minyads narrates. The daughters intentionally reject and avoid Bacchic celebrations, which results in the epiphany of Dionysus in four ways: firstly, through the sounds of instruments (*tympanum*, *aulos*, cymbals); secondly, through the smell of saffron and myrrh; thirdly, by the sight of the growing vines of ivy; and lastly, the shaking of the earth and howling of beasts (*Met.* 390–404; Keith 2010, p.198). Ovid also employs several

literary conventions to play on Dionysus' relationship with Hermaphroditus. For instance, Robert Groves (2016, pp.343–54) has suggested that Ovid presents a riddle for his readers by disguising Hermaphroditus' name until line 383, after his transformation. Keith (2010, p.207, n.66) also notes Ovid's use of name play. According to a second century BCE inscription found at the Spring of Salmacis in Halicarnassus, known as the *Salmakis Inscription*, Salmacis was not always the sexual assailant that Ovid makes her out to be, but, rather, was the nurse of Hermaphroditus celebrated in Halicarnassus for her role as *kourotrophos* (Sourvinou-Inwood, 2004, pp.64–6). Ovid instead has the naiads of Mount Ida raise the deity (*Met.* 4.289). At this point, Roman readers may well have recalled the story of Dionysus, who was also raised by nymphs in Asia Minor, specifically the naiads of Mount Nysa (*Met.* 3.314). Ovid also describes Hermaphroditus as a *puer* (4.288, 4.329, 4.360), and then as an *iuvenus* (4.360) of the age of fifteen (4.292), a description (*puerem iuvenes*) used to refer to Dionysus himself, firstly in book 3.655 in the episode with the Lydian sailors, and again in 4.17–20 where he is not only praised for his eternal boyhood

(*puer aeternus*), but also for his feminine face (*virgineum caput*). The ambiguous identity of Hermaphroditus is further reported when Salmacis mistakes the youth for Cupid (4.320–21). Keith also observes that Ovid makes use of Dionysian sensorial elements through allusion in the following passage:

But the boy blushed rosy red: for he knew not what love is. But still the blush became him well. Such color have apples hanging in the sunny orchards, or painted ivory; such as the mood, eclipsed, red under white, when brazen vessels clash vainly for her relief.

(Met.4.329–333)

She suggests that the clashing of the brazen vessels was a further allusion to the cymbals familiar in Bacchic rituals and cited in Ovid's 'Thebaid' (3.532–3, 4.30, 4.393) (Keith, 2010, p.213). Ovid's simile likening Hermaphroditus' blushing red cheeks to apples in an orchard has been linked to Sappho's fragment 105a (Krier, 1988). Apples were used as gifts for marriage and as aphrodisiac symbols to elicit sexual desire (Longus *Daphnis and Chloe* 3.33–34; Verg. *Ecl.* 8; *Greek Anthology* 5.79; Faraone, 1990; Littlewood, 1968). The apple, furthermore, is linked to Aphrodite, the mother of Hermaphroditus. Here, there is a role reversal as Hermaphroditus plays the blushing maiden (compare Diana blushing when spied by Acteon: *Met.* 3.181–5). The use of the simile of apples also links Hermaphroditus to Dionysus. Dionysus himself was not just the god of wine but his patronage extended to various fruits, gardens, and orchards. For example, Theocritus references 'the apples of Dionysus' in his *Idylls* (2.120) and later writers claim that apples were discovered by Dionysus (*Ath. Deip.* 3.82d; Nonnus *Dion.* 42.307). Furthermore, apples were a reference for female breasts in Greek and Roman literature (Theoc. *Id.* 27.50; see Littlewood, 1968, p.157). Breasts will eventually distinguish the body of Hermaphroditus, alongside the male phallus, as Ovid reminds the viewer when Salmacis' physical touch draws attention to these areas through her physical assault when she 'fondles him [from below] and touches his unwilling breast' (*Met.* 4.359).

Further Dionysiac imagery appears in similes when Salmacis succumbs to her desire and sexually assaults Hermaphroditus after entering the pool (Keith, 2010, pp.213–14). Ovid writes:

...she wraps him round with her embrace, as a serpent, when the king of birds has caught her and is bearing her on high: which, hanging from his claws, wraps her folds around his head and

feet and entangles his flapping wings with her tail; or as the ivy oft-times embraces great trunks of trees, or as the sea-polyp holds its enemy caught beneath the sea, its tentacles embracing him on every side.

(Met. 4.361–7)

Snakes and ivy were both associated with the cult of Dionysus. For example, Greek vase paintings show examples of maenads holding snakes. Furthermore, Euripides' *Bacchae* (101–2) has Dionysus crowned with snakes. Dionysus as the god of wine and the grapevine by extension is associated with ivy. Ovid uses ivy to signal the god's epiphany during his encounter with the Lydian sailors (*Met.* 3.663–7) and in his punishment of the daughters of Minyas (4.395).

### Viewing Ovid's Hermaphroditus as a pantomime

Pantomime performers were highly celebrated by the masses, aristocrats, and emperors alike (Lada-Richards, 2003, p.25). This has important implications at Pompeii, which had two large stone theatres that attracted famous pantomime dancers like Pylades and Paris (Lada-Richards 2016, pp.136–7). Additionally, many scholars have linked examples of Pompeian wall paintings to pantomime performance (Hall, 2008, p.12–13; Dunbabin, 2004; Clarke, 2003, p.139–41; Elia, 1965; Kondoleon, 1994; Morrman, 1983; Bieber, 1961; for additional links to pantomime and domestic art in Antioch, see Huskinson, 2003).

Mythological paintings, mosaics, and sculpture that decorated homes included themes that echo popular pantomime performances (Lada-Richards, 2016, p.137; Bieber, 1961, pp.231–3) that itinerant troupes could have performed (Hughes, 2014, p.231; Sick, 1999). Theatrical overtones in domestic spaces appear in both sculptural collections and, in particular, in the fourth-style wall paintings around the late first century CE. The emperor Nero may have influenced the taste for theatrical performances in domestic settings (Hughes, 2014, pp.229–32). His performances on the public stage were also recited in the home or gardens (*Tac. Ann.* 15.33). Smaller-scale performances of theatrical productions such as pantomimes were well-suited for homes and gardens (Hughes, 2014, p.231; Jones, 1991; *Plin. Ep.* 7.24).

Pantomimes were often a solo dancer of either male or female sex, enacting multiple roles in succession. Lucian describes a single dancer embodying multiple characters, first as Athamas in a frenzy, then Ino in terror, then Atreus, Thyestes, Aegisthus, and finally Aerope (*De Salt.* 67). The roles of Hermaphroditus

and Salmacis are well-suited for the polymorphism of a single pantomime dancer. Additionally, nudity did not pose a problem for the pantomime genre and was likely central to it (Fountoulakis, 2000, pp. 144–5). In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (10.31), a female dancer impersonating Venus during a performance of the Judgement of Paris appeared naked with a sheer silk tunic (*palla*), while Marc Antony played the role of the Nereid Glaucus at a banquet while performing in the nude with blue body paint (Vell. Pat. *Hist. Rom.* 2.83). Nudity may have posed an interesting challenge for the performer of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, however, through the aids of gesture and masks this could have assisted in differentiating the transitions between the characters being danced.

Pantomime was befitting for dining since it corresponded with the overall nature of the event's emphasis on leisure and pleasure. Entertainment was a major component of the banquet ritual itself (on the spectacle of the Roman banquet see D'Arms, 1999; Jones, 1991, pp. 185–98). Frederick Naerebout (2015, p. 107) reminds us that the act of dance itself a ritualized behavior where, 'they *do* ritual through their bodies.' Furthermore, Dionysus himself was interwoven figuratively through the entertainment, act of drinking and dining, as well as through the iconography that decorated the walls, floors, as well as eating apparatuses and drinking vessels that reminded the banqueter of the ritual connection (Dunbabin, 2003, p. 8).

While no ancient literary evidence states that the story of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis was adapted and performed as pantomime, there does appear to be a broad connection between the *Metamorphoses* and imperial pantomime (see Ov. *Tr.* 2.519; 5.7.25; Lada-Richards, 2013; Ingleheart, 2008). Several scholars have observed a link between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and pantomime performance (Galinsky, 1975, p. 68; Ingleheart, 2008, pp. 199–217). Ovid's use of similes in his characterisation of Hermaphroditus not only provides allusions to Dionysian elements but also serves as an added benefit for performers. As Marie Louise von Glinski states: 'Such similes alert the reader to the "staged" quality of the text, but not only in pointing to the provenance of Ovid's material from tragedy, but also in foregrounding the transition of representation into reality' (2012, p. 144). Ovid's 'simile chains' slow down his text, indicating the complexity of 'major moments of transition, entrances, and metamorphoses' (von Glinski 2012, p. 155), as well as creating specific descriptors for body language making it suitable for the adaptation of pantomime. Lucian's *De Saltatione* (19) describes the first mimetic dancer

in myth, Proteus, who, as Helen Slaney observes (2017, p. 169), blended both inanimate elements and animals into the dancer's repertoire. Ovid's similes of entangled serpents, ivy, and tentacles follow this visual pattern, which a dancer would be able to kinaesthetically adapt (Slaney 2017, pp. 159–63).

The sensorial and corporeal descriptions found in the tale of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis could easily have been tailored to pantomime. Slaney (2017) provides a useful framework for thinking about pantomime and multisensory modes of engagement, outlining three key characteristics which make texts highly suitable for the adaptation of pantomime. These three key characteristics include emphasis on metamorphosis, erotic or sexualised topics, and bodily movements and emotions. Ovid's myth of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis embodies all three of these features and would thus have been suitable as a story adapted for the use of pantomime performance.

The first case for the link between Ovid's story of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis and known pantomime myths is the subject matter. Popular themes involved the loves of the gods and mythic metamorphoses (Lucian *De Salt.* 57, 59; for a full list of pantomime libretti see Hunt, 2008; Molloy, 1996). One such popular form of transformation, which Lucian (*De Salt.* 57) highlights, included the transition from one gender to another, such as the stories of Tiresias (*Ov. Met.* 3.314–36) and Caeneus (*Ov. Met.* 12.171–209). The metamorphic plotline of Hermaphroditus' transformation into an inter-sexed being follows this trend.

Another characteristic of Ovid's myth of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis that makes it well-suited for pantomime is its emphasis on sensorial bodily movement and discourse (Lada-Richards 2013, p. 114). In Ovid's description of the Spring of Salmacis, he describes the nymph bathing her finely formed (*formosus*) body in the pool while gazing into the mirror-like waters, combing her hair (*Met.* 4.310–12). The imagery sparks images of Aphrodite or a bride at her toilette, and even recalls the frescoes of the depictions of Hermaphroditus seated at his toilette (Figs. 4.7–4.8). After bathing, Salmacis then puts on a transparent robe (*perluceol/perlucenti*) (*Met.* 4.313), similar to a costume that pantomime dancers may have worn (Jory, 1991, p. 19; 2004, p. 149).

Various tactile references are emphasised, such as when Salmacis lies in the soft grass to pick flowers (4.314–5). Ovid also describes the sensory details of Hermaphroditus' delight at the spring. Hermaphroditus walks through the grass along the spring and then tests the waters with his feet. After noting the alluring



(*blandus*) temperature of the water with his toes, he throws aside his garments and dives into the pool, swimming with alternating strokes (*Met.* 4.340-55). Water features such as *nymphaea*, small scale fountains and large pools found in peristyle gardens of Pompeian houses, such as those found in the House of Meleager and the House of Octavius Quartio, could have served as added props for performances such as these. Using evidence from Antioch, Janet Huskinson (2003, p.153) envisages these types of performances as 'aquatic pantomime'.

Further tactile and bodily descriptors by Ovid describe Hermaphroditus' body as soft (*mollis*) and delicate (*tenero*) (*Met.* 4.345), even before his transformation. When Hermaphroditus swims in Salmacis' spring, his body is described as 'glittering' (*candido*) (*Met.* 4.355); thus, he begins to assume similar descriptors of Ovid's visualisation of the spring itself as *stagnum lucentis* (juxtaposing the adjectives *clear* and *shiny* pool of water) (*Met.* 4.297). Ovid presents Salmacis' desire for Hermaphroditus as the archetype of female desiring of the effeminate male. It is interesting to note that in Lucian's *Dialogue of the Gods* 6, Zeus and Eros discuss how Dionysus' effeminate body attracts women (Konstan, 2002, pp.345-8). When Salmacis' desire becomes irrepressible she is described as casting off her garments and diving into the waters to begin her sexual assault by stealing kisses and fondling the god. After Salmacis prays to never be separated from Hermaphroditus, Ovid uses another simile to describe the joining of their bodies,

For their two bodies, joined together as they were, were merged in one, with one face and form for both. As when one grafts a twig on some tree, he sees the branches grow one, and with the common life come to maturity, so were these two bodies knit in close embrace: they were no longer two, nor such as to be called, one, woman, and one, man. They seemed neither, and, yet, both.

(*Met.* 4.373-79)

After this metamorphosis, Hermaphroditus is no longer a *puer*, nor a female (*femina*); rather, he has a double form (*forma duplex, biformis*) (4.378, 387) that is neither and yet both (*neutrumque et utrumque*). Further descriptions include terms associated with effeminacy (*semimas, mollis*), and as possessing a 'non-manly voice' (*non voce virili*).

The androgynous and effeminate characteristics of both Hermaphroditus and Dionysus (Surtees, 2014, pp.281-94; Bremmer, 1999; Csapo, 1997) carry over into the representations of theatrical

performers. Hermaphroditus is the visual embodiment of androgyny displaying both female physiognomy (female breasts) and masculine sexual characteristics (male genitalia). This parallels the pantomime dancer's body that transforms into characters of varying sexes. Furthermore, the garden space in which Hermaphroditus' transformation takes place is considered a transgressive space, where von Stackelberg observes is a common place where gender norms are broken down (2009a; 2009b pp.96-100).

### **Hermaphroditus' performative roles in Pompeii's Dionysian Theatre Gardens**

Hermaphroditus is neither a stranger to the theatre, nor to dance. A third century BCE comedy by Poseidippus (of which only a fragmentary sentence survives) was entitled *Hermaphroditos* (Ἑρμαφρόδιτος) (PCG (VII fr. 12; Groves, 2016, p.323; Robinson, 1999, p.214, n.17; Romano, 2009, p.553, n.36; Edmonds, 1957, p.233). Pliny (*HN* 7.34) suggests that Hermaphroditus' images were considered appropriate marvels for Pompey the Great's theatre in Rome. Fragmentary remains of Hermaphroditus/satyr groups have also been found in Hellenistic/Roman theatres at Daphne (Stillwell, 1938, pp.173-4, nos.161-8, pls.13, 14; Retzleff, 2007) and Side (Inan, 1975, pp.123-25, no.56; Retzleff, 2007). A fragmentary relief which depicts Hermaphroditus dancing while holding a *thyrsus* staff was displayed at the Theatre of Dionysus on the Athenian Acropolis (Acropolis Museum, Athens inv.3356; Kieseritzky, 1882, p.267; Oehmke, 2004, p.126, cat.102; Retzleff, 2007, p.468). Fragmentary reliefs and kraters that date between the first century BCE and early first century CE also depict Hermaphroditus dancing among Dionysus' *thiasus* (Oehmke, 2004, cats.114-15, 118; Grassinger, 1991, cats.26, 30, 55).

As discussed above, Hermaphroditus undoubtedly had some connection to Dionysus, and was at times incorporated into his *thiasus* and performative sphere. Hermaphroditus' associations with Dionysus, theatre, and performance – particularly dance – were adopted and integrated into Pompeian imagery of the dual-sexed god; this, together with this mythical figure's similarities with the often-androgynous characteristics of performers, actors, and pantomime dancers, makes it plausible that Hermaphroditus could have been used as a visual signpost for performative space in the Roman *domus* of Pompeii, linking dining and garden spaces. In what follows, we explore how Hermaphroditus' cultic and theatrical connections with Dionysus play out sensorially within Pompeii's Dionysian Theatre Gardens.

The House of Pinarius Cerialis/House of Iphigenia (III.4.b) is of interest for its representation of Euripides'



Figure 4.7: Detail of a fresco showing Hermaphroditus, from the House of Pinarius Cerialis/Ifigenia (III.4.4), Pompeii, mid-late first century CE, unknown dimensions. In-situ. (Catalogo generale dei Beni Culturali, I500569759, CC BY-SA 4.0)

*Iphigenia in Tauris* and its link with Hermaphroditus. A frieze that runs the space of an entire room, which is located across the colonnaded garden, depicts an elaborate *scaenae frons* with Iphigenia flanked by two attendants, appearing in a central aedicula on the north wall (Fig. 4.7). On the stage platform below, the Taurian king Thaon and a guard appear to the viewer's left, while Pylades and Orestes stand on the right. Lucian (*De Salt.* 43) includes the stories of the descendants of Pelops (Iphigenia's great-grandfather) amongst his list of pantomime libretti (Hall, 2013, p. 117). John Clarke (2003, p. 141) observes the omission of masks and the nudity of Pylades and Orestes as potential indications of a pantomime performance, rather than a tragic play. However, discussions of this room do not mention a figure depicted on the south wall of the room between the doorway leading to the garden and a window opening onto the garden space. The figure stands in a three-quarter profile with the left leg raised upon a small rectangular pedestal or stone. A light blue/green and purple-trimmed cloth is draped over the raised left thigh. The figure holds a round hand-held mirror in the left hand, while the right arm is raised at the shoulder so that they may play with their hair. The figure wears earrings and sandals, and aside from

the draped cloth is otherwise naked. The figure could easily be mistaken for Aphrodite *Anadyomene* but is, in fact, Hermaphroditus (Oehmke, 2004, cat. 38). The portrayal of Hermaphroditus in this particular wall painting blurs multiple masculine and feminine characteristics. The raised arm playing with the hair, the jewellery and the mirror are all feminine attributes, while the physique and posture are aligned with more masculine traits (e.g. the 'subdued' breasts and the more defined musculature around the abdomen). Galen describes the ideal dancers' body types as 'graceful and muscular and sturdy and compact and toned' (*Hygiene* 2.11), while Lucian compares dancers' bodies to Polykleitan sculpture (*De Salt.* 75). Lada-Richards (2008, pp. 289–91) provides a list of bodily descriptors relating to the dancer's bodies which include terms such as 'metamorphic', 'soft', 'fluid-like water', and 'luxuriously adorned'.

Pompeii has the highest concentration of preserved depictions of Hermaphroditus, totalling thirty-three artworks, with approximately twenty-four depictions of the deity situated in Dionysian Theatre Gardens. Representations of Hermaphroditus are often situated in or near dining spaces situated adjacent to a garden. Von Stackelberg (2014) identifies nine artworks from Pompeii and contextualises them either within the garden itself or in high-status rooms (*tablina*, *triclinia*), which have either direct physical or visual access to garden space. She argues that the Roman garden was regarded as 'hermaphroditized space', used by both men and women, and where both sexes were easily susceptible to crossing gender-boundaries (2014, p. 398). Von Stackelberg's premise for the semantic interrelationship between Roman gardens and the depictions of Hermaphroditus links the artworks found within these domestic contexts to Augustus' vegetative symbolism, which was tied to his propagation of domestic harmony (2014, pp. 418–22). This, in turn, was based on assigned male-female gender roles linking Hermaphroditus to fertility and matrimony (Von Stackelberg, 2014, p. 422). Part of the general assumption around Hermaphroditus being a patron of marriage and fertility is connected to the *Salmakis Inscription* mentioned above (see Sourvinou-Inwood, 2004). Yet the picture is more complicated. As already noted, Hermaphroditus was included in the Dionysian sphere by the second century BCE. Furthermore, the notion that Hermaphroditus symbolises fertility and matrimony is problematic, since it assumes that Hermaphroditus is a symbol of heteronormative relationships, even though he did not give birth to any children, and also rejected Salmakis' marriage proposal (*Met.* 4.327). It has been argued that Hermaphroditus,

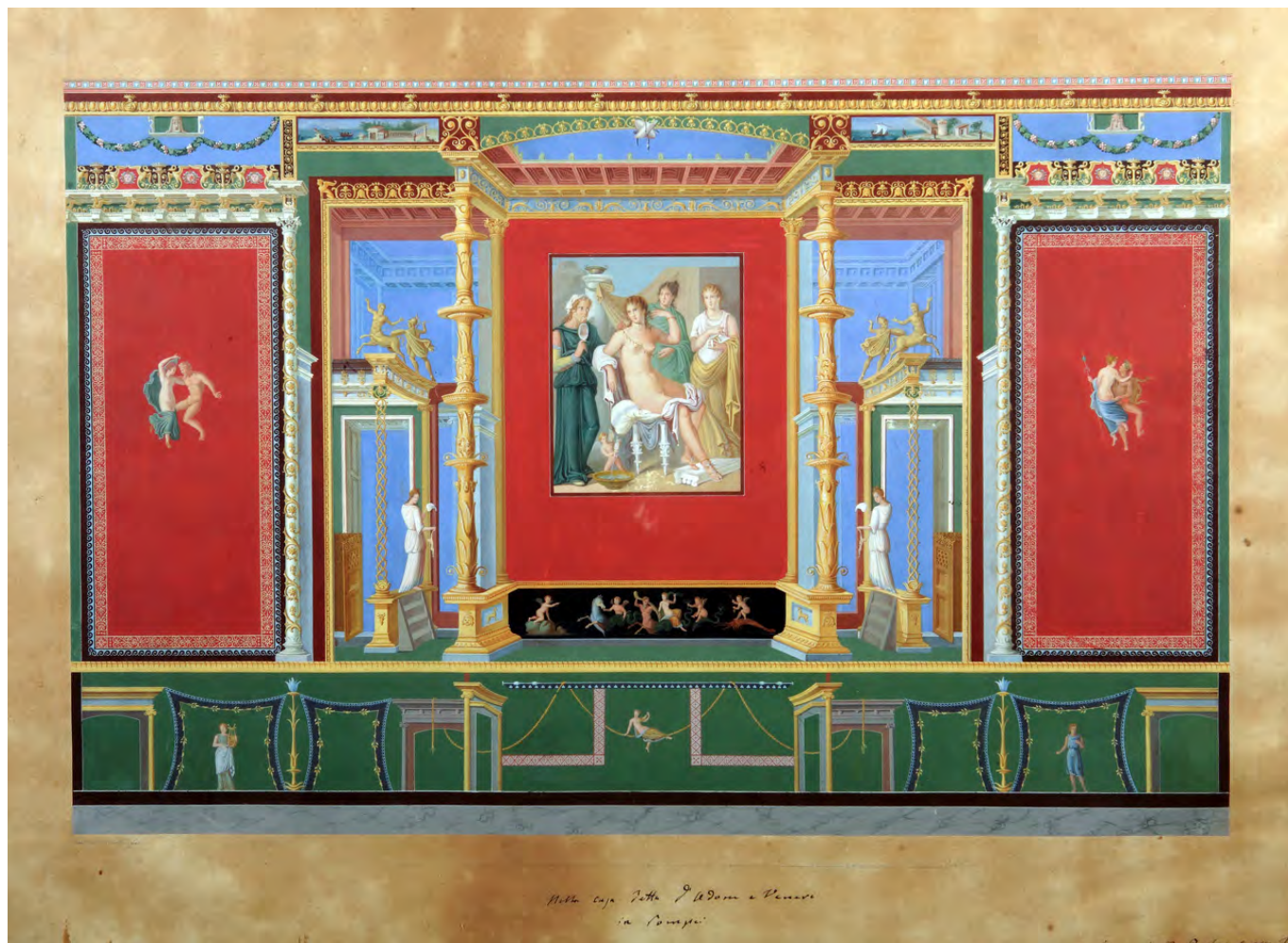


Figure 4.8: Fresco depicting the *Toilette of Hermaphroditus*, from the House of the Wounded Adonis (VI.7.18), Pompeii. mid-late first century CE 79 × 60cm. In-situ. (Catalogo generale dei Beni Culturali, I500569754, CC BY-SA 4.0)

as neither man nor woman, is ‘not considered a functional erotic partner for anyone, and [that] any erotic encounter thus must end in mutual frustration’ (Åshede, 2020, p.82; see also Oehmke, 2004, pp.35–7, 69–70; Cadario, 2012, pp.237, 293). Only by situating Hermaphroditus back into a Dionysian sphere, can the deity be understood within his Pompeian socio-cultural settings in the late Julio-Claudian period.

The majority of Pompeian frescoes depicting Hermaphroditus belong to the fourth Pompeian style of the mid-late first century CE. One such fourth-style fresco from the House of the Wounded Adonis (VI.7.18), painted in an *oecus* (11) situated directly across a colonnaded *viridarium* (14), depicts Hermaphroditus seated among three attendants – two female and one bearded male in female dress (4.7–4.8). Hermaphroditus’ head turns to his left, seemingly to look at his reflection in a mirror held by the bearded male attendant in female attire. However, when we look more closely, we see that the hand-held mirror is below the line of his gaze, which actually points out of the picture towards a ‘real’ open-air colonnade in

the garden of the house, in which a large wall-painting depicts Venus with Adonis. Venus was a patron of gardens in Campania (Jashemski, 1979, p.93, l:125–31; von Stackelberg, 2014, p.408; von Stackelberg, 2009b, p.27, n.39; see also Varro *Rust.* 1.1.6; *Ling.* 6.20; Plin. *HN* 19.19.50; 36.4.16). One inscription from Pompeii bears the petition: ‘...may Venus, who guards the garden love you.’ (*CIL* 4.2776; trans. Petersen, 2012, p.330). Two large-scale paintings of Venus are situated in Pompeian peristyle gardens. The first is found in the House of Venus in the Shell (II.3.3), which has a large wall-painting of Venus reclining in a shell on the south wall of the peristyle; the second is from the House of the Wounded Adonis. Venus’ relation to the Roman garden is linked to the perception of the garden space as a *locus amoenus*, as well as a space devoted to fertility, leisure (*otium*), and eroticism (von Stackelberg, 2014, p.408–9, 2009b, pp.27, 97–8). Von Stackelberg notes that ‘the sexual experience of the Roman garden was also referenced by the predominance of nude or partially nude images of Venus within it’ (2009b, pp.97–8). These would include the popular motifs of Venus *Callipyge* and

Venus *Anadyomene* that appeared in or around garden spaces and water features in Pompeii. By extension, it is no surprise that we see the attempted sexual encounters between Hermaphroditus and a satyr/Pan, either visually or physically aligned with the peristyle gardens of Pompeii.

Venus was not alone in her gardens. Dionysus and members of his Bacchic entourage were also popular motifs of decoration for these spaces. Both Dionysus and Venus had sacred groves associated with their sanctuaries in Pompeii (for the sanctuary of Venus, see Carroll, 2010, p.63). The House of the Prince of Naples (VI.15.8) has paintings of both Venus and Dionysus. In a summer *triclinium/lexedra* located in the garden's portico, there is a fourth-style wall painting with large framed central panels depicting a nude ephebic Dionysus holding a *thyrsus* staff and a nude Venus *Anadyomene* wearing jewellery and parting strands of her hair. Like Venus, Dionysus also had strong associations with Roman gardens (Neudecker, 1988, pp.47–51). Returning to the fresco of Hermaphroditus from the House of the Wounded Adonis, it is essential to note that the fourth-style wall painting of Hermaphroditus is set within a scenographic architecture, framed by floating maenads, dancing satyrs, garlands, and theatrical masks decorating the upper frieze (Fig. 4.8). The theatrical nature of the surrounding decoration of the central scene of Hermaphroditus reminds the viewer of both Hermaphroditus' association with Dionysus as well as spatially evoking Dionysus' association with dining and garden spaces.

The predominance of androgynous and gender-ambiguous imagery in Roman gardens suggests that garden space blurred the distinction between masculine and feminine just as it blurred the distinction between the categories of interior and exterior, and between public and private. This dichotomy is visually displayed by the dual-sexed nature of Hermaphroditus' body. The effeminising power of the spring of Salmacis is similar to the effeminising power of garden spaces. The visual display of Hermaphroditus in association with garden spaces that included water features (e.g. pools, fountains, nymphaeum, etc.) could bring to mind the mythical pool of Ovid's narrative. Furthermore, Ovid's description of the spring of Salmacis is no ordinary wild landscape with 'marshy reeds', 'swamp-grass', or 'spikey rushes' (*Met.* 4.298–9). Rather, it is a cultivated *locus amoenus* with crystal clear water, fresh soft grass, and green herbage which borders the spring and place where Salmacis can pick flowers (*Met.* 4.297–301, 314–15). Frescoes depicting Hermaphroditus from Pompeii, such as the example from the House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6.7; Fig. 4.4), nearly always portray the

god in a similar sacro-idyllic landscape with pruned foliage, architectural features, and the occasional herm.

## Conclusion

Recontextualising images of Hermaphroditus in Pompeian domestic spaces reveals a strong sensorial association with Dionysus and by extension with the 'Dionysian Theatre Garden'. This contextualisation has important implications in terms of how the two figures have traditionally been viewed. Dionysus and Hermaphroditus are intrinsically linked to each other as ritual and theatrical performers within or near garden settings. In this essay, we have argued that the two figures' visual representations are dependent upon one another to serve as theatrical props for diners who either practiced Dionysian rituals or would have enjoyed viewing small-scale ritual centric performances offered by pantomime performers. Actors and audience alike, moreover, would have drawn on the visual, olfactory, and audial clues provided by the role-playing Hermaphroditus within garden settings to bring the performances to life.

## Bibliography

- 1 Ajootian, A. (1997) 'The only happy couple: Hermaphrodites and gender' in A. Koloski-Ostrow and C. Lyons (eds) *Naked truths: Women, Sexuality, and Gender in Classical Art and Archaeology*, London and New York, Routledge, pp.220–42.
- 2 Allison, P. (1993) 'How do we identify the use of space in Roman housing?' in E. Moormann (ed.) *Functional and Spatial Analysis of Wall Painting: Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Ancient Wall Painting*, Amsterdam, Leiden, Stichting BABESCH, pp.1–8.
- 3 Åshede, L. (2020) 'Neutrumque et utrumque videntur: Reappraising the gender role(s) of Hermaphroditus in ancient art' in A. Surtees and J. Dyer (eds) *Exploring Gender Diversity in the Ancient World*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, pp.81–94.
- 4 Benda-Weber, I. (2014) 'Krokotos and crocota vestis: Saffron-coloured clothes and Muliebrity' in C. Giner, M. Tellenbach and J. Ortiz (eds) *Production and Trade of Textiles and Dyes in the Roman Empire and Neighbouring Regions*, Actas del IV Symposium Internacional sobre Textiles y Tintes del Mediterráneo en el mundo antiguo (Valencia, 5 al 6 de noviembre, 2010), Valencia, University of Valencia Press, pp.129–42.
- 5 Berg, R. (2007) 'Ermafrodito e il gioco delle varianti iconografiche nella pittura pompeiana' in C. Guiral Pelegrin (ed.) *Circulaci3n de Temes y Sistemas Decorativos en la Pintura Mural Antigua*. Zaragoza, Actas del IX Congreso Internacional de la Association Internationale pour la Peinture Murale Antique, Zaragoza – Calatayud, Spain, September 21, 2004, Gobierno de Aragon, Departamento de Pol3tica Territorial, Justicia e Interior, pp.67–75.
- 6 Betts, E. (2017) 'Introduction, senses of empire' in E. Betts (ed.) *Senses of the Empire: Multisensory Approaches to Roman Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, pp.1–12.
- 7 Bieber, M. (1961) *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- 8 Bielfeldt, R. (2007) 'Der Liber-Tempel in Pompeji in Sant'Abbondio', Oskisches Vorstadtheiligtum und kaiserzeitliches Kultlokal, *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts – Römische Abteilung*, vol.113, pp.317–71.
- 9 Bremmer, J. (1999) 'Transvestite Dionysos', *The Bucknell Review*, vol.43, no.1, pp.183–200.
- 10 Burkert, W. (1987) *Ancient Mystery Cults*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- 11 Cadario, M. (2012) 'L'immagine di Ermafrodito tra letteratura e iconografia' in I. Colpo and F. Ghedini (eds) *Il Gran Poema delle Passioni e delle Meraviglie: Ovidio e il repertorio letterario e figurativo fra antico e riscoperta dell'antico*, Padova, Padova University Press, pp.235–46.
- 12 Carroll, M. (2010) 'Exploring the Sanctuary of Venus and its sacred grove: Politics, cult and identity in Roman Pompeii', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, vol.78, pp.63–106.
- 13 Carroll, M. (2003) *Earthly Paradises: Ancient Gardens in History and Archaeology*, London, British Museum Press.
- 14 Clarke, J.R. (1998) *Looking at Lovemaking: Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art 100 B.C. – A.D. 250*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- 15 Clarke, J.R. (2003) *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans: Visual Representation and Non-Elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C. – A.D. 315*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- 16 Cole, S.G. (2007) *Finding Dionysos*, Malden, Wiley-Blackwell.
- 17 Csapo, E. (2010) *Actors and Icons of the Ancient Theatre*, Chichester and Malden, Wiley-Blackwell.
- 18 Csapo, E. (1997) 'Riding the Phallus for Dionysus: Iconology, Ritual, and Gender-Role De/Construction', *Phoenix*, vol. 51, no. 3/4, pp. 253-295.
- 19 D'Arms, J.H. (1999) 'Performing culture: Roman spectacle and the banquets of the powerful' in B. Bergmann and C. Kondoleon (eds) *The Art of the Ancient Spectacle*, London, Yale University Press, pp.301–19.
- 20 Day, J. (ed.) (2013) *Making Senses of the Past: Toward a Sensory Archaeology*, Southern Carbondale, Southern Illinois University.
- 21 Delcourt, M. (1961) *Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity*, London, Studio Books.
- 22 Dodds, E. (1951) *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- 23 Draycott, J. (2019) *Roman Domestic Medical Practice in Central Italy: From the Middle Republic to the Early Empire*, London and New York, Routledge.
- 24 Dunbabin, K. (2003) *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 25 Dunbabin, K. (2004) 'Problems in the iconography of Roman mime' in C. Hgonyot, F. Hurllet and S. Milanezi (eds) *Le Statut de l'Acteur dans l'Antiquité Grecque et Romaine: Actes du Colloque qui s'est tenu à Tours les 3 et 4 mai 2002*, Tours, Presses Universitaires François Rabelais, pp.161–82.

- 26 Edmonds, J. (1957) *The Fragments of Attic Comedy*, vol.3A, Leiden, Brill.
- 27 Edwards, C. (1993) *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 28 Elia, O. (1965) 'Rappresentazione di un pantomimo nella pittura pompeiana', *Gli Archaeologi Italiani in Onore di Amedeo Maiuri*, Cava dei Tirreni, Di Mauro, pp.169-179.
- 29 Faraone, C. (1990) 'Aphrodite's ΚΕΣΤΟΣ and apples for Atalanta: Aphrodisiacs in early Greek myth and ritual', *Phoenix*, vol.44, no.3, pp.219-43.
- 30 Fernández, Z.A. (2013) 'Maenadic ecstasy in Rome: Fact or fiction?' in A. Bernabé, M. Herrero de Jáuregui, A.I. Jiménez San Cristóbal and R. Martín Hernández (eds) *Redefining Dionysos, MythosEikonPoiesis*, vol.5, Berlin, de Gruyter, pp.159-84.
- 31 Fountoulakis, A. (2000) 'The Artists of Aphrodite', *L'Antiquité Classique*, vol.69, pp.133-47.
- 32 Fredrick, D. (1995) 'Beyond the atrium to Ariadne: Erotic painting and visual pleasure in the Roman house', *Classical Antiquity*, vol.14, no.2, pp.266-87.
- 33 Galinsky, K. (1975) *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basis Aspects*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- 34 Gazda, E. (2000) 'Introduction' in E. Gazda (ed.) *The Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii: Ancient Ritual, Modern Muse*, Ann Arbor, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology and the University of Michigan Museum of Art, pp.1-13.
- 35 Goff, B. (2004) *Citizen Bacchae: Women's Ritual Practice in Ancient Greece*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- 36 Gordon, R. (2017) 'Projects, performance and charisma: Managing small religious groups in the Roman empire' in R. Gordon, G. Petridou and J. Rüpke (eds) *Beyond Priesthood: Religious Entrepreneurs and Innovators in the Roman Empire*, Berlin, de Gruyter, pp.277-316.
- 37 Grassinger, D. (1991) *Römische Marmorkratere*, Mainz, P. von Zabern.
- 38 Groves R. (2016) 'From statue to story: Ovid's Metamorphosis of Hermaphroditus', *Classical World*, vol.109, no.3, pp.321-56.
- 39 Håkansson, C. (2010) 'In search of Dionysos: Reassessing a Dionysian context in early Rome', PhD Dissertation, University of Gothenburg.
- 40 Hall, E. (2008) 'Introduction: Pantomime, a lost chord of ancient culture' in E. Hall and R. Wyles (eds) *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp.1-40.
- 41 Hall, E. (2013) 'Pantomime: Visualising myth in the Roman empire' in G. Harrison and V. Liapis (eds) *Performance in Greek and Roman Theatre*, Leiden, Brill, pp.451-73.
- 42 Helbig, K. and von Richter, O. (1868) *Wandgemälde der von Vesuv verschütteten Städte Campaniens*, Leipzig, Breitkopf und Härtel.
- 43 Henrichs, A. (2013) 'Dionysos, one or many?' in A. Bernabé, M. Herrero de Jáuregui, A.I. Jiménez San Cristóbal and R. Martín Hernández et.al. (eds) *Redefining Dionysos, MythosEikonPoiesis*, vol.5, Berlin, de Gruyter, pp.554-82.
- 44 Hughes, L. (2014) 'Sculpting theatrical performance at Pompeii's Casa Degli Amorini Dorati', *LOGEION: A Journal of Ancient Theatre*, vol.4, pp.227-47.
- 45 Hughes, L. (2020) 'Performing blended gender lines: Revisiting Omphale and Hercules in Pompeian Dionysian theatre gardens' in A. Surtees and J. Dwyer (eds) *Exploring Gender Diversity in the Ancient World*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, pp.143-56.
- 46 Hunt, Y. (2008) 'Roman pantomime libretti and their Greek themes: The role of Augustus in the Romanization of the Greek classics' in Y. Hall and R. Wyles (eds) *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp.169-84.
- 47 Huskinson, J. (2008) 'Pantomime performance and scenes on sarcophagi' in E. Hall and R. Wyles (eds) *New Directions Ancient Pantomime*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp.87-109.
- 48 Huskinson, J. (2003) 'Theatre, Performance, and Theatricality in Some Mosaic Pavements from Antioch' *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, vol. 46, pp. 131-165.
- 49 Inan, J. (1975) *Roman Sculpture in Side*, Ankara, Turk Tarih Kurumu Baismevi.
- 50 Ingleheart, J. (2008) 'Et mea sunt populo saltata poemata saepe (Tristia 2.519): Ovid and the Pantomime' in E. Hall, R. Wyles (eds) *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp.198-217.
- 51 Jaccottet, A.-F. (2003) *Choisir Dionysos. Les Associations Dionysiaques ou la Face Cachée du Dionysisme*, 2 vols, Kilchberg/Zurich, Akanthus.
- 52 Jashemski, W. (1979) *The Gardens of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius*, New York, Caratzas.
- 53 Jones, C. (1991) 'Dinner theatre' in W. Slater (ed.) *Dining in a Classical Context*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, pp.185-98.

- 54 Jory, E.J. (1991) 'The drama of the dance: Prolegomena to an iconography of Imperial pantomime' in W. Slater (ed.) *Dining in a Classical Context*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, pp.1–27.
- 55 Jory, E.J. (2004) 'Pylades, pantomime, and the preservation of tragedy', *Mediterranean Archaeology*, vol.17, pp.147–56.
- 56 Keith, A. (2010) 'Dionysiac themes and dramatic allusion in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 4' in I. Gildenhard and M. Revermann (eds) *Beyond the Fifth Century Interactions with Greek Tragedy from the Fourth Century BCE to the Middle Ages*, Berlin, de Gruyter, pp.187–218.
- 57 Kieseritzky, G. (1882) 'L'ermafrodita constanzi', *Annali dell'Instituto di corrispondenza archaeologica*, vol.54, pp.246–73.
- 58 Kondoleon, C. (1994) *Domestic and Divine: Roman Mosaics in the House of Dionysos*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- 59 Konstan, D. (2002) 'Enacting Erōs' in M. Nussbaum and J. Sihvola (eds) *The Sleep of Reason: Erotic Experience and Sexual Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp.345–99.
- 60 Konstantinou, A. (2018) *Female Mobility and Gendered Space in Ancient Greek Myth*, New York, London, Bloomsbury.
- 61 Krier, T. (1988) 'Sappho's apples: The allusiveness of blushes in Ovid and Beaumont', *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol.25, no.1, pp.1–22.
- 62 Lada-Richards, I. (2003) 'A worthless feminine thing? Lucian and the "optic of intoxication" of pantomime dancing', *Helios*, vol.30, no.1, pp.21–75.
- 63 Lada-Richards, I. (2008) 'Was pantomime "good to think with" in the ancient world?' in E. Hall and R. Wyles (eds) *New Direction in Ancient Pantomime*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp.285–313.
- 64 Lada-Richards, I. (2013) 'Mutata corpora: Ovid's changing forms and the metamorphic bodies of pantomime dancing' *Transactions of the American Philological Association* vol.143, no.1, pp.105–52.
- 65 Lada-Richards, I. (2016) 'Dancing trees: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the imprint of pantomime dancing', *American Journal of Philology*, vol.137, no.1, pp.131–69.
- 66 Lawler, L. (1927) 'The maenads: A contribution to the study of dance in ancient Greece', *Memoirs of the American Academy*, vol.6, pp.69–112.
- 67 Leach, E. (2004) *The Social Life of Painting in Ancient Rome and on the Bay of Naples*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 68 Ling, R. (1991) *Roman Painting*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 69 Littlewood, A. (1968) 'The symbolism of the apple in Greek and Roman literature', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol.72, pp.147–81.
- 70 Longfellow, B. (2000) 'A gendered space? Location and function of room 5 in the Villa of the Mysteries' in E. Gazda (ed.) *The Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii: Ancient Ritual, Modern Muse*, Ann Arbor, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology and the University of Michigan Museum of Art, pp.24–37.
- 71 Medda, E. (2017) "'O saffron robe, to what pass have you brought me!": Cross-dressing and theatrical illusion in Aristophanes's *Thesmophoriazousae*' in D. Campanile, F. Carlà-Uhink and M. Facella (eds) *TransAntiquity: Cross-Dressing and Transgender Dynamics in the Ancient World*, London and New York, Routledge, pp.127–51.
- 72 Miller, F.J. (1977) *Ovid: Metamorphoses. Books 1–8* (rev. by G.P. Goold), Loeb Classical Library 42, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- 73 Molloy, M. (1996) *Libanius and the Dancers*, Hildesheim, Olms-Weidmann.
- 74 Morrmann, E. (1983) 'Rappresentazioni Teatrali su Scaenae Frontes di Quarto Stile a Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae. Bollentino dell'Associazione Internazionale Amici di Pompeii', vol.1, pp.73–117.
- 75 Mueller, M. (2016) 'Dressing for Dionysus: Statues and material mimesis in Euripides' *Bacchae*' in A. Coppola, C. Barone and M. Salvadori (eds) *Gli Oggetti sulla Scena Teatrale Ateniese: Funzione, Rappresentazione, Comunicazione*, Padua, Cooperativa Libreria Editrice Università di Padova, pp.57–70.
- 76 Naerebout, F. (2015) 'Dance' in R. Rubina and J. Rüpke (eds) *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World*, Malden, Wiley Blackwell, pp.107–19.
- 77 Neudecker, R. (1988) *Die Skulpturen-Ausstattung römischer Villen in Italien*, Mainz, P. von Zabern.
- 78 Nilsson, M. (1953) 'The Bacchic mysteries of the Roman age', *Harvard Theological Review*, vol.46, no.4, pp.175–202.
- 79 Oehmke, S. (2004) *Das Weib im Manne: Hermaphroditos in der griechisch-römischen Antike*, Berlin, Willmuth Arenhövel.
- 80 Olson, K. (2008) *Dress and the Roman Woman: Self-Presentation and Society*, London and New York, Routledge.
- 81 Olson, K. (2014) 'Masculinity, appearance, and sexuality: Dandies in Roman antiquity', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol.23, no.2, pp.182–205.
- 82 Petersen, L. (2012) 'Collecting gods in Roman houses: The House of the Gilded Cupids (VI.16.7,38) at Pompeii', *Arethusa*, vol.45, no.3, pp.319–32.

- 83 Perusino F. (2000) 'Indossando la veste di croco' in M. Cannatá Fera and S. Grandolini (eds) *Poesia e religione in Grecia*, Naples, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, pp.521–6.
- 84 Retzleff, A. (2007) 'The Dresden type Satyr-Hermaphrodite group in Roman theaters', *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol.111, no.3, pp.459–72.
- 85 Robinson, M. (1999) 'Salmacis and Hermaphroditus: When two become one (Ovid, *Met.* 4.285-388)', *Classical Quarterly*, vol.49, no.1, pp.212–23.
- 86 Romano, A. (2009) 'The invention of marriage: Hermaphroditus and Salmacis at Halicarnassus and in Ovid', *Classical Quarterly*, vol.59, no.2, pp.543–61.
- 87 Sick, D.H. (1999) 'Ummidia Quadratilla: Coney businesswoman or lazy pantomime watcher', *Classical Antiquity*, vol.18, no.2, pp.330–48.
- 88 Simon, E. (1961) 'Zum Fries der Mysterienvilla bei Pompeji', *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologisches Instituts*, vol.76, pp.111–72.
- 89 Slaney, H. (2017) 'Motion sensors: Perceiving movement in Roman pantomime' in E. Betts (ed.) *Sense of the Empire: Multisensory Approaches to Roman Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, pp.159–75.
- 90 Sourvinou-Inwood, C. (2004) 'Hermaphroditus and Salmakis: The voice of Halikarnassos' in S. Isager and P. Pedersen (eds) *The Salmakis Inscription and Hellenistic Halikarnassos*, Odense, University Press of Southern Denmark, pp.59–84.
- 91 Stillwell, R. (1938) *Antioch-on-the-Orontes II: The Excavations of 1933–1936*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- 92 Surtees, A. and Dyer, J. (2020) 'Introduction' in A. Surtees and J. Dyer (eds) *Exploring Gender Diversity in the Ancient World*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, pp.1–25.
- 93 Surtees, A. (2014) 'Satyrs as Women and Maenads as Men: Transvestites and Transgression in Dionysian Worship' in A. Avramidou and D. Demetriou (eds.) *Approaching the Ancient Artifact: Representations, Narrative and Function*, Berlin: De Gruyter, pp.281–293.
- 94 Swetnam-Burland, M. (2000) 'Bacchus/Liber in Pompeii: A religious context for the Villa of the Mysteries frieze' in E. Gazda (ed.), *The Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii: Ancient Ritual, Modern Muse*, Ann Arbor, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology and the University of Michigan Museum of Art, pp.59–73.
- 95 Toepfer, K. (2019) *Pantomime: The History and Metamorphosis of a Theatrical Ideology*, San Francisco, Vosuri Media.
- 96 Tronchin, F. (2012) 'Roman collecting, decorating, and eclectic practices in the textual sources', *Arethusa*, vol.45, no.3, pp.333–45.
- 97 Van Andringa, W. (2013) 'Introduction', *Melanges de L'École française de Rome – Antiquité*, vol.125, no.1, pp.1–6, <https://journals.openedition.org/mefra/1256>, accessed 22.7.2021.
- 98 von Glinski, M. (2012) *Simile and Identity in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 99 von Stackelberg, K.T. (2009a) 'Performative space and garden transgressions in Tacitus' Death of Messalina', *The American Journal of Philology*, vol.130, no.4, pp.595–624.
- 100 von Stackelberg, K.T. (2009b) *The Roman Garden: Space, Sense, and Society*, New York and London, Routledge.
- 101 Von Stackelberg, K.T. (2014) 'Garden hybrids: Hermaphrodite images in the Roman house', *Classical Antiquity*, vol.33, pp.395–426.
- 102 Wiseman, T. (2000) 'Liber: Myth, drama and ideology in Republican Rome' in C. Brunn (ed.) *The Roman Middle Republic Politics, Religion, and Historiography c. 400–133 B.C. (Papers from a conference at the Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, September 11–12, 1998)*, vol.23, Rome, Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae, pp.265–99.
- 103 Wyler, S. (2020) 'Images of Dionysus in Rome: The archaic and Augustan periods' in F. Mac Góráin (ed.) *Dionysus and Rome: Religion and Literature*, Berlin, de Gruyter, pp.85–110.
- 104 Wyler, S. (2013) 'An Augustan trend towards Dionysus: Around the "Auditorium of Maecenas"' in A. Bernabé, M. Herrero de Jáuregui, A.I. Jiménez San Cristóbal and R. Martín Hernández et.al. (eds) *Redefining Dionysos, MythosEikonPoiesis*, vol.5, Berlin, de Gruyter, pp.541–53.
- 105 Zech-Matterne, V. and Oueslati, T. (2013) 'Déchets erratiques et vestiges rituels: Les macrorestes végétaux et les os animaux', *Melanges de L'École française de Rome – Antiquité*, vol.125, no.1, pp.1–6, <https://journals.openedition.org/mefra/1248>, accessed 22.7.2021.







# MATERIAL MUSIC IN RITUAL SOUNDSCAPES OF POMPEII

Mirco Mungari and Kamila Wyslucha

## Abstract

*Few excavation sites have yielded such meaningful evidence for Roman music culture as the Vesuvian area. What has been unearthed there attests to the extensive use of musical accompaniment in ritual contexts, both of Greco-Roman and Eastern provenance, associated with multiple cults thriving in the region during the first century BCE and the first century CE. The Vesuvian sites are uniquely well-equipped for investigating soundscapes, not only on account of the abundance of iconographic depictions, but also because of the preserved spaces of ritual performances, which enable us to embed musical practices within the topography of the ancient city and recreate, at least partially, a multisensory experience of a ritual in its original setting. Building on the findings of Roberto Melini, this essay attempts to characterise the sonorous reality of cults around Vesuvius with a particular focus on the significance of music and its material manifestations for religious ritual.*

**Keywords:** Pompeii, soundscape, music, religion, processions, sacrifice, mystery cults, votives

**Full text:** <https://openartsjournal.org/issue-10/article-5/>

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2021s05>

## Biographical note

Mirco Mungari is an archaeologist, archaeomusicologist and musician, living in Bologna, Italy. He studied Classical Archaeology at the University of Bologna, specialising in Roman Vesuvian sites. He also works on Middle Eastern music, frame drums and lutes. His current research is focused on Roman soundscapes and musical instruments, and on early Bronze Age Italic soundscapes.

Kamila Wyslucha holds a PhD in Classics from the University of Wrocław. She is the author of several articles and chapters on musical motifs in Augustan poetry and Latin rhetorical writing. Her research interests include issues associated with the performance of ancient Greek and Roman music, with a particular focus on *aulos* making and playing techniques.

Banner image: Detail from a garden painting, from the House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. (Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

# MATERIAL MUSIC IN RITUAL SOUNDSCAPES OF POMPEII

Mirco Mungari and Kamila Wyslucha,  
independent scholars

## Introduction

In ancient cultures, instrumental and vocal music was a fundamental component of cult practices.<sup>1</sup> Even Philodemus of Gadara, who criticised the use of music in all other social contexts, reluctantly acknowledged its indispensability for worship (*de Mus.* 2; 22). It has often been observed that within the framework of ritual activities, musical performance served as a means of communication between worshipper and deity (Bellia & Bundrick, 2018, pp.15, 89). As an act of offering from a worshipper to a deity, it validated their symbiotic relationship, itself acquiring a sacred character in return. Thus, ritual songs composed of sacred formulas sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments are frequently perceived as a form of ritualised speech – a religious ‘language’ in which every sound, word and noise has a ritual significance. Meanwhile, instrumental accompaniment often creates a distinct nonverbal code, which is assembled not only from pitches aligned with rhythm, but also from components of time and place. From the perspective of worshippers, the combination of all these performative aspects shapes the experience of the sacred. This combination, often referred to as ‘soundscape’, is intrinsically related to the performance of sacred rituals (Jiménez, Till & Howell, 2013; Bellia, 2014).

Pompeii and its environs are uniquely well-suited for an exploration of the links between ancient music and ritual, on account of the sheer volume of evidence that was preserved by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE. Firstly, the site has yielded a vast inventory of musical instruments which may be studied as everyday use objects, material reminders of lost cultic soundscapes in their native environment. Secondly, in Pompeii it is possible to identify with a considerable degree of

certainly the venues in which ritual performance occurred. Finally, on the basis of the abundant iconographic evidence of wall paintings and sculpted reliefs, not only can we reconstruct some of the ways in which the instruments were employed in ritual practices, but also appreciate their symbolic meanings. All of this brings us closer to understanding the overall significance of musical accompaniment for ancient religious experience, despite the irretrievable loss of the music itself.<sup>2</sup>

This essay will be organised thematically around three main ritual contexts: sacrifices, processions and mystery cults. The musical accompaniment used in each of these contexts differed in terms of the instruments it involved and the character of music that was produced. The first section of the essay will evoke the soundscape of sacrifices at the altar in the temple of the Genius of Augustus (also known as the Temple of Vespasian), while the second section will address the solemn atmosphere of ritual processions. The last section will explore the ‘ecstatic’ music which characterised the cults of Bacchus and the goddess Cybele (the ‘Magna Mater’ or ‘Great Mother’).

## Sacrifices

Many studies of ancient music begin, not with the material evidence, but with literary texts. One frequently invoked passage is Pliny the Elder’s discussion of ‘sacrificial sound’ in Book 28 of his *Natural History*. In this passage, Pliny considers the question of whether the pronunciation of certain words could have a concrete effect on material things, that is, ‘whether words, charms, and incantations, are of any efficacy, or not’ (*polleantne aliquid verba et incantamenta carminum*, 28.3.10). In order to exemplify contemporary Roman beliefs about the power of words, Pliny turns to the procedures for animal sacrifice. The passage that follows in Pliny’s text is one of the most complete and detailed sources about Roman sacrificial ritual. It also contains a wealth of information about the role of sound in cult practice. We hear, for example, about how the correct pronunciation of words is a matter of vital importance: a wrongly pronounced word or an ill-timed whisper could make the whole ritual invalid, and might (even worse) cause offence to the recipient deity (cf.

1 We would like to thank Laura Noviello, a local activist of the Vesuvian area, for providing us with great photos of Pompeian monuments. We are also grateful to Anna Pizza of the photographic archive in the Naples National Archaeological Museum for her help in obtaining images from the archive to illustrate our article. Last but not least, we wish to express our gratitude to Jessica Hughes who generously assisted and guided us throughout the entire process of creating this contribution.

2 The foremost scholar of ancient Roman music was Roberto Melini. His seminal research, which focused primarily on the Vesuvian sites, was sadly interrupted by his early death, but not before he had established a frame of reference for music archaeologists. For a broad survey of music in Pompeii, see in particular Melini (2008a). A summary with some specific case studies can be found in Mungari (2018a).

Ov. *Fast.* 1.179–82). We also hear that a double-pipes player (*tibicen*) was often present in order to exclude noises and unwanted sounds by producing a continuous musical accompaniment (28.3.11). Overall, the text clearly shows how the soundscape of rituals was carefully constructed, both through a deliberate choice of sounds, and through the exclusion from the ritual space of unwanted, extraneous noises.

Another literary source that is commonly invoked in studies of ritual music comes from the first-century BCE historian Livy (*History of Rome* 9.30). Livy records how, during the fourth century BCE, the Roman censors banned the city's *tibicines* from celebrating their traditional banquet in the temple of Jupiter. As a consequence, the musicians decided to strike, and moved to the nearby town of Tibur (modern Tivoli), a decision which effectively impeded all ritual celebrations, including sacrifices. This situation was so dangerous that the Senate sent ambassadors to persuade the striking *tibicines* to come back to Rome, where they were allowed to celebrate their usual banquet, and to institute a new annual celebration to commemorate their return to the city (a different version of this event is narrated in Ov. *Fast.* 6.657–92).

These literary passages are often cited in studies of Roman religion, and indeed, both are useful reminders of the centrality of music to the performance of sacrifice and other rituals. However, material culture – and particularly that of Pompeii – can add a great deal to our understanding of ancient ritual soundscapes. As already mentioned above, at Pompeii it is possible to study the sonorous aspects of public rituals in their original spatial settings, while also comparing the many depictions of rituals, not to mention the unique finds of musical instruments.<sup>3</sup>

For a striking example of how much we can learn from the material record by means of a joint examination of sites, visual depictions and archaeological discoveries of instruments, we can turn to the Temple of the Genius Augusti (also known as the Temple of Vespasian), which is located on the east side of Pompeii's Forum (Fig. 5.1). This sacred space consisted of a small *cella* (enclosed chamber) on a podium surrounded by a wide courtyard and a porch;

3 Depictions of sacrificial rituals with *tibicines* are numerous in Pompeii: extant images include a wall painting in the *lararium* of the House of the Epebe (I, 7, 10), a similar one in the House of Sutoria Primigenia (I, 13, 2), a strange depiction of a *tibicen* playing *tibiae frigiae* in a sacrificial context in VIII, 2, 1 and another depiction in the *lararium* of the house IX, 6, 3. Other depictions – now lost – are documented in the wide *corpus* of excavation diaries composed in the last three centuries.

the altar was located in the centre of the court, directly in front of the *cella*. Rituals took place in the courtyard, which was surrounded by a high wall that delimited the sacred space and divided it from the other public open spaces around it (the Forum, the Eumachia building, the Lares temple), which would have undoubtedly impinged on the acoustics of the rituals performed within the enclosed area.<sup>4</sup>

The altar at the centre of the courtyard is richly decorated (Fig. 5.2). The relief on the front depicts a sacrificial scene, which would have provided a visual model for the 'real' sacrifices that took place around the altar (see Dobbins, 1992, for detailed discussion of the altar). In the centre of the scene, we see a small tripod-shaped altar (*foculus*) on which lighted embers are visible; in the background, the front side of a temple with four Corinthian columns (perhaps the Pompeian temple itself?) is adorned with a garland. On the upper side of the relief a sort of curtain (*velum*) is depicted, with a round *oscillum* hung in the middle; the fabric seems to be tied to the upper corners of the slab and to lie on the roof of the temple in the background (a probable hint at the *dedicatio* of the sanctuary; Dobbins, 1992, p.254). Around the altar, a group of ritual participants is gathered: each one has a part to perform, like actors on stage. On the right side, a majestic bull – the unwitting protagonist of the ceremony – is brought to the altar by two *victimarii*; one of them wields a big hammer (used to stun the victim immediately before killing it). The left side of the scene appears more crowded: in the centre, close to the altar, is the lead celebrant (a *sacerdos* or a magistrate in charge of the public cult), dressed in a formal toga whose hem covers his head (*velato capite*), indicative of the Latin character of the sacrifice. He is followed by a young acolyte (*camillus*) who brings *patera* (a libation plate) and *urceus* (a jug for pouring a libation of wine), while another attendant brings some incense. In the background, we see two lictors, whose presence was customary at public sacrifices, and – most importantly for the current study – a young *tibicen*, whose inflated cheeks indicate that he is in the act of playing.

4 The analysis developed in this essay introduces the complex topic of soundscapes. Although this is not the central topic of the essay, a brief review of the debate about the definition and critique of this concept may be useful here. The term 'soundscape' was coined and explained by Raymond Murray Schaefer (1977) and has been widely accepted and used by other scholars; however, over the past decade a lively debate has yielded new useful definitions and points of view. A rich overview can be found in Vincent (2015, pp.10–29) and in Zerouali (2015, pp.42–53); see also the short treatment in Vendries (2015, pp.210–14).



Figure 5.1: Temple of the Genius Augusti, VII 9.2 Pompeii. Looking towards the east wall with cella and podium. (Photo courtesy of Laura Noviello with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)



Figure 5.2: Altar in the Temple of the Genius Augusti, VII 9.2 Pompeii. Sacrificial scene on the West side of the altar. (Photo courtesy of Laura Noviello with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

This scene raises several questions. First of all, is the whole depiction itself a precise, realistic representation of a moment of the ritual or is it a symbolic, compendious narration of the whole event? Related to this, is the *tibicen* (whose role in Roman sacrifice was essential) a ‘real’ actor who was present at this particular rite or does he symbolise the aural dimension of the rite more generally? Thinking more broadly about Roman depictions of sacrifice, we might also ask why the musician depicted most frequently in these scenes is a *tibicen*? Does this mean that *tibiae* were indeed the favourite instrument to accompany sacrifice – and if so, why?<sup>5</sup> How were they played?

5 *Tibicines* were the most requested – and represented – musicians at sacrifices, but not the only ones: *fidicines* (lyre players) and *tubicines* (lip-reed instrument players) were also employed during rituals (see Podini, 2010, pp. 178–82); however, as discussed above, *tibicines* seems to be more essential than other musicians.

The first of these questions has been addressed by a strand of research, which began in the 1990s, investigating the nature of symbolic representation in Roman art. In his seminal 1993 study of *Römische Bildsprache als Semantisches System*, Tonio Hölscher demonstrated that the Roman artistic language was based on a specific ‘semantic system’ which transmitted precise meanings to its viewers; his conclusions can be profitably applied to the analysis of scenes in which musicians were involved in particular sacrifices (for previous discussions of this issue, see Fless & Moede, 2007, pp. 249–53; Podini, 2004, pp. 224–31). Adopting this semantic approach, we might propose that the Pompeian altar relief (Fig. 5.2) depicts, not a frozen image of a single moment of the ritual, but rather an incisive diachronic summary of the entire ritual – one which is focused on its first phase (the celebration of the *praefatio* by the priest, who offers wine and incense and declaims the required prayers), but which includes a symbolic narration of the later stages, too – for

example, through the depiction of the three *victimarii* in the background of the relief, who stun and slaughter the victim (see Podini, 2004, pp.224–5).

Turning to the representation of the *tibicen*, we might note that he is depicted as a younger boy gazing off to the right, while diligently blowing into his double instrument (cf. Podini, 2004, pp.227–31; Fless, 1995, pp.79–84). His presence can be interpreted as a face-value representation of a real situation,<sup>6</sup> but it simultaneously has a deeper semantic function – that of communicating to the viewer the particular soundscape that characterised the ceremony. The penetrating voice of the two double reeds of the *tibiae* has been reconstructed in some pioneering recent studies, based on archaeological evidence (cf. Hagel, 2008; 2012; Sutkowska, 2012). Pompeii has provided the greatest volume of relevant finds, ranging from small fragments of *tibiae* to complete instruments. As first recognised by Roberto Melini, we have approximately seventy finds from Pompeii which can be related to *tibiae*, including fifteen complete instruments (Melini, 2008a, pp.22–7; Fig. 5.3).

Roman *tibiae* (their Greek name – *auloi* – is often used as a technical term) were double-reed instruments. To get an idea of their sound we might turn to the oboe, English horn, bassoon or the Armenian duduk with its cylindrical shape and velvety, penetrating timbre. *Tibicines* probably often used circular breathing, a technique which allows players to obtain a continuous sound without stopping to inhale air, by using their cheeks and mouth. This technique, which is still used to play some traditional reed instruments (Sardinian *launeddas*, Armenian *duduk*, Turkish *zurna*), results in a smooth and pulsating sounding background, moved by the rhythmic phrasing of the two pipes, possibly alternating static drones and wavy melodies.

A fruitful ethnomusicological comparison can be made here with the *zampogna* – the Italian bagpipes often used in sacred music (cf. Baines, 1957, pp.200–8; for a detailed organological description of the variety of *zampogna* bagpipes, cf. Baines, 1960, pp.95–102; more thoroughly, Guizzi, 2002, pp.224–51, and Ricci & Tucci, 2004, pp.21–5 for Calabrian *zampogna*). Like the *tibiae*, the *zampogna* is also a double-reed instrument, which has two chanters (the right one for melody, the left one for bass accompaniment). In the *zampogna*, the smooth, constant sound of droning is produced by

air from a large leather sack. When played in a group, these instruments generate a dense sound mass, thick with the uninterrupted sound of the drones and moved by the rhythmic pulse of the chanters. This sort of ‘sound cloud’ defines a precise space and an excluding soundscape; in other words, playing a bagpipe in open space creates a sounding situation in which an in-out dynamic takes place. For example, in several small villages in Calabria during the Christmas period, it is quite common to see bagpipers (*zampognari*) playing and walking through the streets at night. When a player is invited to enter a house and crosses the doorstep, the inner space becomes suddenly and completely filled by the strong sound cloud of the instrument; this transformation in the quiet soundscape of the house is felt to be akin to a blessing. When the player exits the house, he is still surrounded by this ‘divine sound cloud’, and every thing and person included within it is considered as blessed. In Roman ritual, the music of the *tibicen* would have provided a similar sound cloud – a delimited space in which every inauspicious noise was avoided. Within this ‘safe’ sound environment, the *sacerdos* could declare the correct prayers and formulas, avoiding any extraneous sounds which might jeopardise the whole ritual (cf. Pliny, cited above). While sacrifices often took place in an open and public area, the comparison with the *zampogna* suggests that these rituals may nevertheless have made use of a sound barrier, which circumscribed the space of the ritual using the sense of hearing. To return to our case study of the temple of the Genius of Augustus, we might note that the wall which surrounded the courtyard of the sanctuary separated it from the other public spaces (the Forum, the Sanctuary of Lares, the Eumachia building) in much the same way as the music played by the *tibicen* separated the sacred space from the noises of the crowded places around.

### Processions

Nowadays, a walk around the site of Pompeii offers a variety of auditory events. Within a generally soft soundscape, the visitor might hear the bustle of groups of tourists, the occasional raised voice of a tourist guide and perhaps the noises of building restoration in progress (for a thorough discussion of the soundscape of Pompeii, cf. Melini, 2012, pp.361–5). The ruined city is, we would argue, an immobile cadaver, and nothing of its original voice is preserved and, mostly, only imaginable. It might, then, appear overly ambitious to try and reconstruct the sound dimensions of one of the complex and loud events of Roman public life: the *pompa* (procession); nonetheless, if we combine all our different types of evidence, we can start to make some valid observations.

6 The question of whether we are watching a depiction of a real ritual rather than an imaginary representation of an ideal one, is closely connected with the semantic interpretation of iconography, see Podini (2004, pp.223–4).



Figure 5.3: Pipe of an aulos made of bone and bronze (MANN I29589) at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples. (Courtesy of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali – Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli)

Roman parades took place on several types of occasion. In a small town like Pompeii, public processions were enacted during festivals, before public sacrifices or when magistrates took their office; processions were also frequently organised for upper class funerals, and also public celebrations and festivals (*ludi*) were usually opened by a procession (*pompa circensis*) (see van der Graaff & Poehler and Campbell in this issue). In Pompeii every procession might have been a prominent event for the audience, in which the rather monotone soundscape of the streets was suddenly filled with the bright, strong timbre of the *aenea* (wind instruments made of bronze). Bronze

wind instruments (*tubae, cornua, buccinae, litui*<sup>7</sup>) were employed in military contexts, public games and official events (Podini, 2004, pp.231–42). They always had a strong symbolic meaning, as markers of a precise ritualised situation: far from an amphitheatre or a

---

7 The discussion about the right nomenclature of these instruments is still open. Apart from *lituus*, the identification of *cornu*, *tuba* and *bucina* as distinct instruments or, in some cases, the synonymousness of some of them (in particular *cornu* and *bucina*) is an unsolved matter. In this paragraph the interpretation given by Melini, who described *tuba* as a straight trumpet, and *cornu* and *bucina* as two possible names of a bent bronze horn, is assumed as the most plausible (2008a, pp.56–7).



circus, the sound of a *cornu* could only mean that a battle was happening or a procession coming.<sup>8</sup>

Although these events were ephemeral, they did leave some material traces. For example, the long funerary inscription of the *duumvir* A. Clodius Flaccus, who lived in the Augustan period, celebrates three sumptuous *Ludi Apollinares* (public games for the feast of Apollo) with a careful list and tally of how many gladiators, actors, players and animals were employed (and paid) in each *ludus*:

Aulus Clodius Flaccus, son of Aulus, from the *tribus Menenia*, *duumvir iure dicundo* for three times, *quinquennalis*, *tribunus militum* for people's will, to celebrate his first *duoviratus* for the *Ludi Apollinares* provided in the Forum a procession, bulls, bullfighters, *succursores*, three couples of *pontarii*, *pugiles*, *catervarii* and *pycti* [different types of gladiators], musical entertainment and theatrical plays with Pylades, and distributed ten thousand *sextertii*; to celebrate his second *duoviratus* for the *Ludi Apollinares* provided in the Forum a procession, bulls and bullfighters, *succursores*, *pugiles* and *catervarii*, the following day, by himself, in the amphitheatre thirty couples of athletes, five couples of gladiators and then more thirty-five couples, and hunting games with bulls, bullfighters, boars, bears, and another hunting game together with his colleague, and to celebrate his third *duoviratus* provided high class theatrical performances with music together with his colleague.

A. Clodius A F Men Ilvir i.d.ter.quinq.tri.mil. a populo primo duoviratu apollinarib.in foro pompam tauros taurocentas succursores pontarios paria III pugiles catervarios et pyctas ludos omnibus acruamatis pantomomisq.omnibus et Pylade et HS N CCIIO in publicum pro duoviratu secundo duoviratu quinq.apollinaribus in foro pompam tauros taurarios succursores pugiles catervarios poster die solus in spectaculis athletas par.XXX glad.par.V et glad.par. XXXV et venation.taurus taurocentas apros ursos cetera venatione varia cum collega tertio duoviratu ludos factione prima adiectis acruamatis cum collega

(CIL X 1074d; Gregori & Nonnis, 2017, p.246).

8 A clue of the double nature of 'brass' instruments is in Ov. *Fast.* 1.716: *Canteturque fera nil nisi pompa tuba!* 'may the fierce trumpet blare for nothing else but a solemn pomp' (all translations of Latin are based on the Loeb editions, unless otherwise stated). A parody of the official use of *cornua* and *tubae* is in the famous *Coena Trimalchionis* (Petron. *Sat.* 78.5) where they are employed to simulate a solemn funeral.

This detailed epigraphic document served to exalt the memory of the deceased by commemorating his generosity; it also provides a short but colourful summary of the typical ingredients of the *Ludi Apollinares* as they were celebrated in a small town like Pompeii. Significantly, for each *ludus* the first event recalled in the list is the *pompae*, the opening procession in which all the performers would have paraded in front of the population, together with the sponsor (the magistrate himself) and the *aneatores*. Like most of the subsequent events of the *Ludi Apollinares* in Pompeii, the procession would have taken place in the Forum and in the adjacent sanctuary of Apollo, and it is relatively easy for us to imagine the boisterous soundscape of this crowded procession. It would have been framed by shouting people; and punctuated by the bright sounds of *cornua*, *tubae* and *bucinae* that opened the parade. As in triumphal processions, the players were able to produce different melodies, suitable either for solemn walking or for military purposes (cf. Plut. *Vit. Aem.* 32). Their sounds both marked and created space, as well as indicating the beginning of the parade (Podini, 2004) and announcing the presence of a magistrate.

Contrary to the stereotypical idea popularised by Hollywood films, the archaeological evidence suggests that *aneatores* were able to modulate quite complex melodies on their instruments, using a wide range of notes and dynamics. During the nineteenth-century excavations, five beautiful and well-preserved *cornua* were found in Pompeii at an unrecorded location (Fig. 5.4). These magnificent instruments are now stored in the Archaeological Museum of Naples, and a playable replica based on them has been made for the European Music Archaeology Project (Melini, 2008a, pp.56–8).<sup>9</sup> When played by professional musicians, the replica demonstrates the full potentiality of a melodic instrument, with a malleable and controlled dynamic and timbre. Assuming that *cornicines* and *tubicines* were professional players, educated within the context of the *collegia*, it is reasonable to imagine the musical frame of Clodius' *pompae* as more akin to a horn solo

9 The European Music Archaeology Project is a multidisciplinary research project which aims to reconstruct ancient Pompeian instruments, see [www.emaproject.eu](http://www.emaproject.eu).

Unfortunately, the find context of these beautiful instruments is unknown; for sure they belong to a type of bronze instruments employed in military contexts as well as in official parades, high-class funerals and gladiatorial games in the amphitheatre. Significantly, in Pompeii there is only one depiction of a lip-reed instrument player, a *cornicen* playing during a *ludus gladiatorius*, portrayed on a now-lost wall painting from the amphitheatre (Melini, 2008a, p.57).



Figure 5.4: Fragments of a *cornu* at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples (MANN 5652). (Courtesy of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali – Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli)

of the Mannheim orchestra rather than the *Ben Hur* soundtrack. Curiously, this experimental statement seems to differ from the usual description of the sound of *aenea* found in the written sources: for example, Virgil (*Aen.* 8.1–2) describes the voice of a *cornu* as ‘husky’: ‘When Turnus raised a war banner on the Laurentine fortress, and the trumpets roared with a husky sound’ (‘Ut belli signum Laurenti Turnus ab arce / extulit et rauco strepuerunt cornua cantu’). In general, however, *cornua*, *bucinae*, *tubae* and *litui* are used in Latin literature as symbols of war and battle signals (Tintori, 1996, pp.46–53). Again, their presence is strongly symbolic, and connected to their use for signals and giving orders to soldiers. When they are mentioned in the context of a parade (as in the above-mentioned passage by Plutarch, *Aem. Paul.* 32), their capacity to produce different types of tunes is emphasised; some of these tunes are apt for military purposes, while others are more suitable for processions and other solemnities.

### Mystery cults

When we look across all our ancient visual and literary evidence for musical performances, the so-called ‘Mystery Cults’ loom large. The cults of Dionysus and Cybele (the ‘Magna Mater’, whose cult is referred to here both as ‘Cybelan’ and ‘Metroac’) are particularly prominent.<sup>10</sup> In some ways, this wealth of evidence is surprising, since mystery cults by definition were usually practised away from the public eye, by worshippers who were systematically overlooked in the state

<sup>10</sup> In order to avoid all pitfalls of having to define which Roman cults may be classified as mystery ones, we have approached this classification from the perspective of music. Dionysian and Magna Mater cults are characterised by means of fairly similar musical imagery, both in iconography and literature, while hardly any references to music of other mystery cults survive. Isiac worship, although certainly often considered a mystery cult, involved a different kind of music which, in turn, has already been a subject of extensive archaeomusicological research, see Mungari (2018b).



Figure 5.5: Procession bearing a statue of Cybele, formerly at Pompeii IX 7.1. (Photo courtesy of Laura Noviello with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

religion – women, slaves and foreigners. In this section, we will give some background for the mystery cults as described in literary sources, before moving to look at some of the evidence for the Dionysiac and Metroac cults in Pompeii.

The evidence of the Cybelan cult and its form in this region is ambiguous. According to some scholars, a potent matriarchal cult previously thriving in Campania might at some point have been identified with that of Magna Mater, but the extent of this identification eludes us (Virgili, 2008, pp.76–82). Suffice it to say that the few extant iconographic depictions seem to imply the Roman version. One of the best-known examples is a fresco from the Via dell'Abbondanza (IX, 7, 1, *in situ*) which depicts what is often interpreted as a Megalesian procession (Fig. 5.5). Since the fresco is situated on one of the main streets, and since the surrounding area has yielded several finds related to the cult of Cybele (Vermaseren, 1978, no.25–9), it is tempting to conclude that Magna Mater *pompae* might have taken this route (cf. Cicirelli, 1995, pp.13–14). But these iconographic depictions of the deity cannot be treated

as a firm proof of her *in situ* worship, particularly since the presence of the Cybelan cult in Pompeii – unlike in Herculaneum and Puteoli – is not attested by any epigraphic finds (cf. CIL X 1406; on Metroac cult in the Bay of Naples, cf. CIL X 3698, 3699, 3700, 1786).

The fresco's current state of preservation prevents us from perceiving some of the details that were still visible at the beginning of the twentieth century. For instance, the statue of Cybele seated on a *ferculum* on the right-hand side of the fresco has almost entirely decayed (cf. Melini, 2008b, p.2; 2014, pp.354–5). The section on the left, however, was restored during the conservation works of 2004–6 (Concina, 2007, pp.237–41), enabling us to identify the instrument played by a piper in the goddess's train as a Phrygian *aulos* (De Crescenzo & Fantini, 2007, p.134). Amongst the devotees – both men and women – there seem to be *tympana* and *cymbala* players as well as singers and *dendrophori* (tree-bearers) or *cannophori* (cane-bearers). The barely visible figure of a *syrinx*-playing boy in the bottom left corner of the scene is perhaps a reference to Attis, as it is unlikely that *syrinx* players

participated in the procession. The scene depicted on the fresco closely corresponds to Ovid's account of the Megalesian festival (celebrated 3 – 4 April) in the *Fasti* (4.181–4), which conveys many important details of the rites (cf. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.19.4–5; cf. Borgeaud, 1996, pp.95–100). On the basis of Ovid's text, we are able to reconstruct what the visual representation fails to record, namely the character of music that was produced by the three instruments which accompanied the procession. The passage opens with references to music that announced the beginning of festivities: first, a signal was given by the *Berecynthia tibia cornu inflexo* which was then followed by a procession of *semiviri* accompanied by the thumping sounds of frame drums and clinking cymbals:

Straightway the Berecynthia *tibia* will blow a blast on its bent horn, and the festival of the Idaean Mother will have come. Eunuchs will march and thump their hollow drums, and cymbals clashed on cymbals will give out their tinkling notes.

*protinus inflexo Berecynthia tibia cornu / flabit, et  
Idaeae festa parentis erunt. / ibunt semimares et  
inania tympana tudent, / aeraque tinnitus aere  
repulsa dabunt*

(Ov. *Fast.* 4.181–4)

Importantly, this very trio of instruments – the *tibia*, drum and cymbals – are frequently connected to both the Cybelan and Dionysian cults in written sources and iconography from the Late Republican period well into the Imperial times. It is therefore perhaps interesting to have a closer look at each of the instruments. Their musical characteristics can be envisioned primarily on the basis of descriptions found in contemporary texts, which variously describe the frame drums (*tympana*) as 'tense' (*tenta*), 'hollow' (*inania*), 'harsh' (*saeva, rauca*) and 'deep' (*gravia*), using verbs like 'resound', 'thud' and 'roar' (*reboant, tudent, tonant*). Meanwhile, the sound of concave ([*con*]cava) cymbals (*cymbala, aera*) is usually described as 'jingling' or 'ringing' (*tinnitus, recrepant*) (cf. *FPL* [Morel–Büchner] 71.10; Varro, *Sat. Men.* 132; *Lucr.* 2.18–19; *Catul.* 63.21, 29; *Hor. Carm.* 1.18.13–14; *Ov. Ib.* 456; 4.391–3; *Apul. Met.* 8.30.19; cf. Wille, 1967, p.57). These contrasting tone qualities produced by ringing cymbals and thumping drums are joined by an entirely different sonority – the one produced by the Phrygian *aulos* (in the text called *Berecynthia tibia*) – the most elusive and exciting of the trio. Many aspects of this instrument are puzzling to modern scholars, in large part because there are no archaeological finds that allow us a glimpse into its peculiar construction (cf. Bélis, 1986, pp.24, 28–9; Vendries, 2001, p.203).

Apparently, its most prominent feature was a flared extension, often perceived as a horn, at the distal end of the left pipe, (*Phrygius per ossa cornus, tibia curvalotos adunca, adunco/inflexo/Berecynthia tibia cornu, curvo grave calamo* – 'Phrygian horn made of bone; bent *tibia*, Berecynthia *tibia* of a curved horn; deep-sounding hooked pipe'; cf. Varro, *Sat. Men.* 132; *Catul.* 63.22; *Hor. Carm.* 1.18.13; *Tib.* 2.1, 86; *Ov. Met.* 3.533; *Fast.* 4.190, 392; *Stat. Theb.* 6.120–1). The addition was no doubt responsible for acoustic effects seen by the ancients as a hoarse, deep, roaring tone (cf. *Catul.* 63.22; [Sen.] *Ag.* 689; *Stat. Theb.* 6.120). Interestingly, many, though not all, depictions of the instrument portray it as furnished with mysterious mechanisms that might have enabled modulations between modes, thus extending the instrument's harmonic capacity (cf. MANN 8905, also mentioned below). Many scholars believe that the trance (or *enthousiasmós*) associated with mystery cults was induced by the mystifying low drones that were emitted from the horn on the left pipe. However, this view is not confirmed by the ancient evidence, which instead suggests that the ritual music primarily stimulated the worshippers, while spectators uninitiated in the rites did not respond in the same way (cf. e.g. *Prop.* 2.22a.15–16; *Mart.* 11.84.3–4; *Sen. Ep.* 108.7; *Ov. Fast.* 4.189–90; *Liv.* 39.8.8). In this respect, Christophe Vendries' (2001, pp.213–14) doubts about the ecstatic character of this music seem entirely legitimate, as does his remark that the Phrygian *aulos* was not an inherently ecstatic instrument – an argument which finds support in its depictions, albeit rare, in contexts unrelated to mystery cults; for instance, sacrificial scenes depicted on Pompeian frescoes (MANN 8905, Pompeii I, 8, *in situ*).

While the locations of the Cybelan cult are unknown to us, one centre of Dionysian worship has been identified with a considerable degree of certainty – that is, the extra-urban sanctuary in the Sant'Abbondio quarter (cf. *CIL* IV 3508; D'Alessio, 2009, pp.90–8, 105; cf. DeMone & Hughes in this issue). Beyond this shrine, the popularity of the cult is also attested by the ubiquitous Dionysian motifs which are found around the city, in domestic houses and gardens. Just as in the Metroac cult, the instrumental trio of drum-cymbals-*tibia* also featured in various Dionysian rituals. Not only did these two cults employ the very same instrumental ensemble, but their musical accompaniment also provoked similar reactions in Roman audiences (cf. *Ov. Met.* 3.528–37; *Catul.* 64.261–4; cf. Fantham, 1998, p.127). Moreover, instances of joint representations combining elements of both traditions are not uncommon both in Rome and Pompeii (e.g. MANN 8845; cf. Vermaseren, 1977, no.338), and in many cases



Figure 5.6: Pompeii V 4. I 1a: The triumph of Dionysus, fresco from the house of M. Lucretius Fronto. National Archaeological Museum of Naples (MANN 26424). (Photo: ©Manuel Cohen/Scala, Florence)

it is impossible to distinguish between the musical attributes of the two cults. This may be an indication that from the Roman perspective their music sounded all the same: Phrygian, which might have meant dauntingly unfamiliar (e.g. Eur. *Bacch.* 123–34; Lucr. 2.620; Tib. 1.4.70; Ov. *Ib.* 454; *Fast.* 4.214; *Ars. am.* 1.508; cf. Melini, 2008b, p.5, Hagel, 2019, p.101).

The wealth of iconographic representations of drums, cymbals and double-pipes in Pompeii gives us some important insights into their different functions. These instruments were used in three main ways: (1) as actual sound-producing objects, (2) as ritual objects (that were often not played) and (3) as hermeneutic signs, which were sometimes only tenuously linked to the first two functions (cf. Mungari, 2018b, p.82; Saura-

Zieglmeyer, 2013, pp.380–1). With regard to the role of the instruments as soundtools (1), we must rely on the literary descriptions of their sound qualities, since – at least in the case of drums and the Phrygian *aulos* – no archaeological finds have yet emerged. Within the ample MANN inventory of *aulos* fragments, none may be firmly identified with a religious context, let alone with a specifically Dionysian or Metroac ritual. Fortunately, the Pompeian sites have yielded a considerable number of *cymbala* – six pairs and three separate instruments, to be precise. On this basis it is possible to conclude that most pairs took the form of two concave discs cast in bronze, with the larger finds having a diameter of c.10cm, and the smaller finds – a diameter of c.5cm. Interestingly, most of the



Figure 5.7: Fresco depicting ritual paraphernalia, MANN 8795. Found most likely at Pompeii II 4.2, the House of Julia Felix. (Courtesy of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali – Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli)

preserved pairs are linked by a chain, which led Melini (2014, p.342) to interpret this fact as indicative of their symbolic, most likely votive function (on votive musical instruments in antiquity, cf. Bellia & Bundrick, 2018). This is a valid remark, especially in the face of iconographic evidence that usually includes depictions of concatenated *cymbala* in use, not as soundtools, but rather as part of symbolic object compositions, pointing to a more figurative signification. One extremely interesting fresco depicting the triumph of Dionysus from the House of M. Lucretius Fronto (MANN 26424; Fig. 5.6) shows *cymbala* being used in two different ways: both as an instrument played by a maenad accompanying the *thiasos*, and as a votive gift

suspended together with a *tympanum* from Silenus' belt. Melini (2014, p.342) also records another meaningful discovery context: a pair of *cymbala* (MANN 10159) found in the House of Julia Felix, in a *biclinium* that had been decorated with a fresco depicting – amongst other Dionysian attributes – a concatenated pair of *cymbala* (MANN 8795, Fig. 5.7). The 'real' *cymbala* might also have been linked by a chain, which, according to Melini, would suggest their votive character, and would have meant that both pairs of instruments – the actual and the depicted – did not perform their primary role, that of sonorous objects.

It is important to note that the portrayals of ritual instruments in this role are usually restricted to



Figure 5.8: Cymbal, *cista mistica* and a mask hanging from a floral garland. Found at the villa rustica of Publius Fannius Synistor in Boscoreale, Room L. (Metropolitan Museum of Arts, New York. Public domain)

mythological scenes and may not reflect contemporary ritual practices. One of the very few representations of Dionysian rites including music, albeit ambiguous and interlaced with mythological figures, is the famous fresco cycle that adorns the walls of Room 5 in the Villa of the Mysteries (cf. Jones and DeMone & Hughes in this issue). The four musical instruments (*cymbala*, *tympanum*, panpipes, lyre) that appear on the fresco are, however, related to its mythological dimension and do not seem to participate in the depicted ceremony, which is sometimes interpreted as an initiation into mystery rites (cf. Sauron, 2001).

In other cases, the paintings in which these instruments appear seem otherwise devoid of explicit religious connotations (cf. Melini, 2008a, p.75). This is especially true for the schematically drawn *tympana*, occasionally *cymbala* and *syrinx*, (more rarely) *auloi* and other instruments, which are portrayed hanging down among architectural details from the Pompeian walls decorated in the third and fourth style. One example is found on the western wall of *cubiculum* 7 in the House of the Lovers (*in situ*), and the eastern wall of

*tablinum* 11 of the House of Sutoria Primigenia (*in situ*) (Carratelli and Baldassarre, 1990, pp.469, 869). More elaborate depictions make frequent references to the Dionysian cult mainly in the form of vine garlands from which various ritual objects are suspended. A stunning example of hanging *cymbala* and a *tympanum* painted meticulously on a second-style fresco comes from the villa rustica of Publius Fannius Synistor in Boscoreale (Room L, now dismantled and dispersed across various museums, Fig. 5.8). These instruments are accompanied by other objects with distinct Dionysian overtones fastened to a lavish vegetal festoon (cf. Bergmann et al., 2010, pp.18–20). Given that this villa, just as many others in the Vesuvian area, thrived mainly on viticulture, its pronounced adherence to the Dionysian cult is unsurprising. A room on the other side of the peristyle sometimes referred to as the Room of Musical Instruments (Room D) featured an *aulos* suspended from a pine tree garland (now in the Louvre Museum) and presumably other instruments that have not been preserved (Bergmann et al., 2010, p.21; cf. Vermaseren, 1977, no.226, 233, 357, 447). A very similar

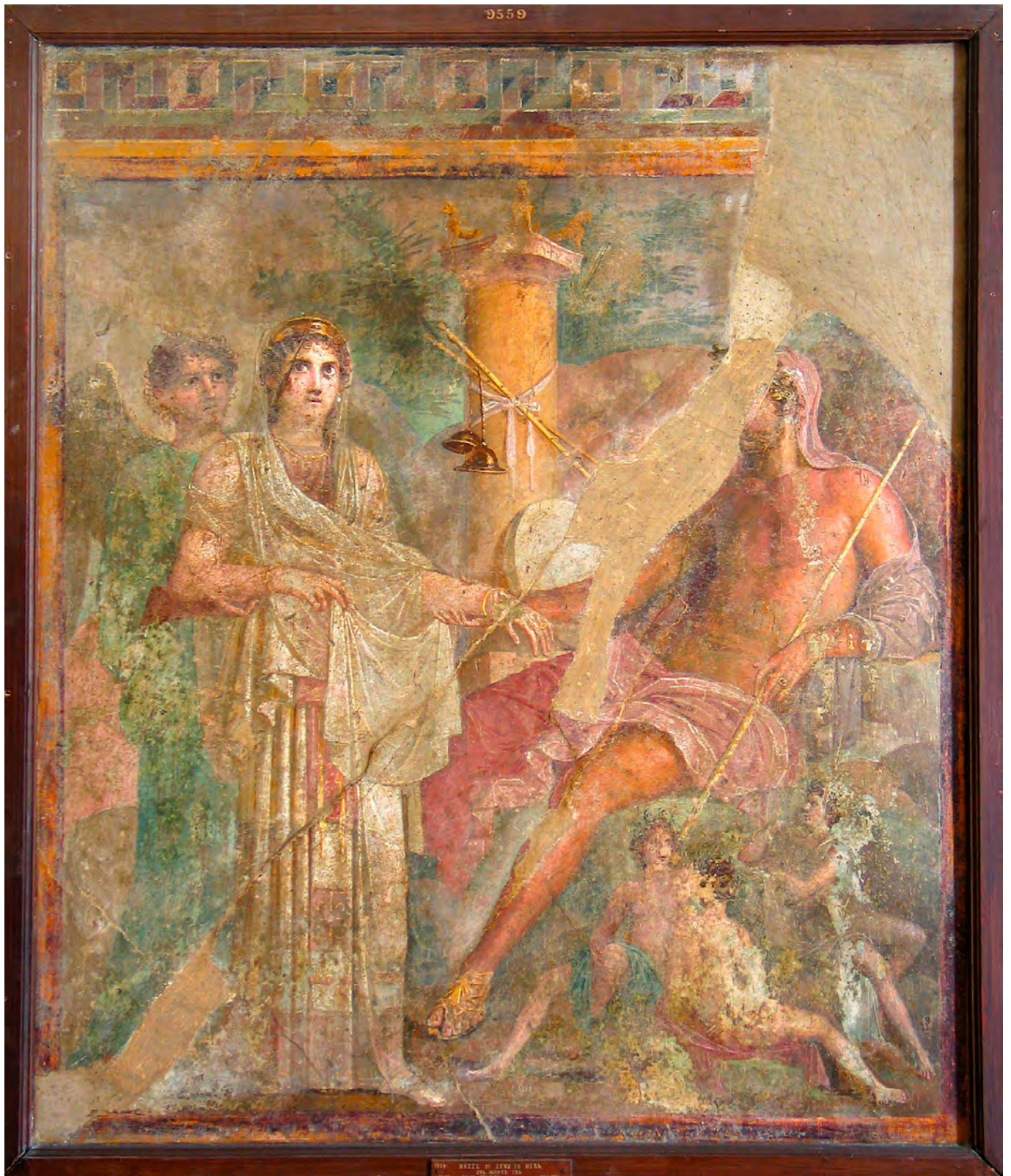


Figure 5.9: Pair of pipes, cymbals and tympanum fastened to a column amidst a mythological scene, MANN 9559, National Archaeological Museum of Naples. Found at Pompeii VI.8.3 – the House of the Tragic Poet. (Courtesy of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali – Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli)

representation of a pair of pipes tied to a column together with a *tympanum* and hanging *cymbala* is found on a fresco from the House of the Tragic Poet (MANN 9559, Fig. 5.9). Although the depicted scene poses a considerable interpretative challenge, the familiar trio

of instruments has usually been identified as symbolic of the Metroac cult (cf. Bragantini & Sampaolo, 2009, pp.326–7). Similarly, the famous mosaic attributed to Dioskourides Samios (MANN 9985, Fig. 5.10), shows masked musicians that play the double-pipes, tympanum





Figure 5.10: Mosaic with a group of musicians, most likely a scene from Menander's comedy. Found at the Villa of Cicero in Pompeii (near Herculaneum Gate). National Archaeological Museum of Naples, MANN 9985. Attributed to Dioskourides of Samos. (Courtesy of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali – Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli)

and cymbala, which is often perceived as a scene from Menander's comedy accompanied by instruments related to the cult of Cybele (Ciarallo and De Carolis, 1999, p.266). We need to bear in mind, however, that, contrary to instrument finds, these representations do not actually record any rituals practised by wealthy Pompeians. Rather, they may merely point to the fashion and taste for Dionysian imagery inspired no doubt by Greek Hellenistic art, especially in the two

earlier styles, as is the case with MANN 9559 and 9985 which are apparently modelled on Greek paintings from the third century BCE (cf. Fleischauer, 1964, pp.96–7; Vermaseren, 1978, pp.14–15).

In contrast, the last group of depictions that will be considered may relate more closely to Dionysian rites of initiation. Certainly the most representative work of this group is the aforementioned fourth-style fresco presumably from *cubiculum* 91 of the House of Julia



Figure 5.11: Mosaic *emblemata* with Dionysian symbols. National Archaeological Museum of Naples, MANN Collezione Santangelo. (Courtesy of Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali – Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli)

Felix (MANN 8795, Fig. 5.7). Apart from the pair of concatenated *cymbala*, the assembly of ritual attributes also includes a *tympanum* furnished with jingles placed on the top of the staircase (for a similar representation, cf. Niccolini & Niccolini, 1854–96, fasc.53, tav.1). Next to it, there is a basket resembling *cysta mystica* from which emerges a *rhyton* draped in panther skin, another drinking vessel, *thyrsus* and ivy leaves. A *skyphos* stands to its right. At the bottom of the stairs, a snake fights a panther. Several of these objects may be identified as Dionysian paraphernalia symbolic of various phases of male initiation rites – in particular drinking vessels, the *thyrsus*, *cista* and *tympanum*. The use of the instrument during the second phase of initiation is well attested to by other iconographic sources (cf. Sauron, 1998, pp.123–6; Turcan, 1993). On the other hand, even though the employment of *cymbala* in these rituals is not equally firmly documented, these instruments appear on two mosaic *emblemata* that display a similar assemblage of Dionysian attributes, including a rhyton, thyrsus, fig tree and a panther (MANN Collezione Santangelo, Fig. 5.11), and a *rhyton*, *thyrsus*, *cista* and a panther (Casa Sannitica from Herculaneum, *in situ*)

(Esposito, 2014, tav.65). Undoubtedly, these depicted objects were carefully selected not only because of their symbolic connotations, but also in order to evoke sensory aspects of a multifaceted ritual experience: drinking vessels – the taste, *tympanum/cymbala* – the sound. The strong cultic purport of these images invites questions regarding their connection to rituals occurring within the immediate space. Were the members of the households initiates? Did initiation rites take place in these rooms?

### Conclusions

What does this multifarious body of evidence tell us about Pompeian ritual soundscapes? First of all, there can be no doubt that music accompanied all the rites mentioned in this essay as well as many other religious festivals celebrated in Pompeii. At the same time, however, the evidence is ambiguous. For example, the prevalence of Dionysian iconography suggests that the cult was widespread in Pompeii, but the particulars of the rites themselves, such as the scenario of initiation rites and the identity of initiates, have not been so far revealed. Similarly, the

presence and form of the Megalesian festival is only attested to by the fresco from the Via dell'Abbondanza. Moreover, fluctuating boundaries between the real and mythological representations of rites often prevent us from distinguishing between the imagined and authentic cult practices. Fortunately, other groups of evidence provide us with a wider scope for study. For instance, in the case of sacrificial soundscape we can observe the interplay of place, ritual and music embedded within sacred conventions of aural experience which consists of silence, noises, spoken ritual formulas and instrumental music. In this respect, the music of the *tibia* serves as a powerful symbol of a ritual language, a medium of communication between deities and worshippers, while the instrument itself emerges as a material testimony of this elusive relationship. As we have also seen, the strong association between rituals and their aural dimension reflected in the worship-related iconography is a clear attempt to record perishable musical sound and evoke it by means of material representations. In this way, depictions of musical instruments among ritual paraphernalia – both as votives and actual sonorous objects – serve to re-enact the indispensable aural aspect of sacred rites. Uniquely in Pompeii, we can also explore the overlap between the iconography and organological finds unearthed side by side, as is the case of the pair of *cymbala* and their visual depiction, which were found in the house of Julia Felix.

## Bibliography

- 1 Baines, A. (1957) *Woodwind Instruments and Their History*, London, Faber.
- 2 Baines, A. (1960) 'Bagpipes' in T.K. Penniman and B.M. Blackwood (eds) *Occasional Papers on Technology*, no.9, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- 3 Bélis, A. (1986) 'L'aulos phrygien', *Revue Archéologique*, no.1, pp.21–40.
- 4 Bellia, A. (ed.) (2014) *Musica, culti e riti nell'Occidente greco*, Pisa, Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali.
- 5 Bellia, A. and Bundrick, S.D. (eds) (2018) *Musical Instruments as Votive Gifts in the Ancient World*, Pisa, Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali.
- 6 Bergmann, B., Mertens, R.J., De Caro, S. and Meyer, R. (2010) *Roman Frescoes from Boscoreale: The Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor in Reality and Virtual Reality*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- 7 Borgeaud, P. (1996) *La mère des dieux. De Cybèle à la Vierge Marie*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil.
- 8 Bragantini, I. and Sampaolo, V. (eds) (2009) *La pittura pompeiana*, Naples, Electa.
- 9 Carratelli, G.P. and Baldassarre, I. (eds) (1990) *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, vol.2, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana.
- 10 Ciarallo, A. and De Carolis, E. (1999) *Homo Faber: Natura, scienza e tecnica nell'antica Pompei*, Milan, Electa.
- 11 Cicirelli, C. (1995) *Vita religiosa nell'antica Pompei*, Pompeii, Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompeii.
- 12 Concina, E. (2007) 'I dipinti murali: studio e intervento conservatorio' in S.A. Curuni and N. Santopuoli (eds) *Pompei, Via dell'Abbondanza. Ricerche, Restauri e Nuove Tecnologie*, Milan, Skira.
- 13 D'Alessio, M.T. (2009) *I Culti a Pompei. Divinità, Luoghi e Frequentatori (VI secolo a.C. – 79 d.C.)*, Rome, Libreria dello Stato, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato.
- 14 De Crescenzo, F. and Fantini, M. (2007) 'Dal modello reale alla copia fisica alcuni casi studio' in S.A. Curuni and N. Santopuoli (eds) *Pompei. Via dell'Abbondanza Ricerche, Restauri e Nuove Tecnologie*, Milan, Skira.
- 15 Dobbins, J. (1992) 'The altar in the sanctuary of the Genius of Augustus in the Forum at Pompeii', *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts – Römische Abteilung*, vol.99, pp.251–63.
- 16 Esposito, D. (2014) *La Pittura di Ercolano*, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- 17 Fantham, E. (ed.) (1998) *Ovid, Fasti, Book IV*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 18 Fleischhauer, G. (1964) *Musik des Altertums Etrurien und Rom*, *Musikgeschichte in Bildern*, vol.2, Leipzig, Deutscher Verlag für Musik.
- 19 Fless, F. (1995) *Opferdiener und Kultmusiker auf stadtrömischen historischen Reliefs. Untersuchungen zur Ikonographie, Funktion und Benennung*, Mainz, P. von Zabern.
- 20 Fless, F. and Moede, K. (2007) 'Music and dance: Forms of representation in pictorial and written sources' in D.S. Potter (ed.) *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, Chichester, Wiley.

- 21 Gregori, G.L. and Nonnis, D. (2017) 'Culti pubblici a Pompei: l'epigrafia del sacro in età romana' in E. Lippolis and M. Osanna (eds) *I Pompeiani e i loro dei. Culti, riti e funzioni sociali a Pompei, atti della giornata di studio, Sapienza – Università di Roma, 15 febbraio 2016*, Rome, Quasar.
- 22 Guizzi, F. (2002) *Guida alla musica popolare in Italia. Vol. 3: Gli strumenti*, Lucca, Libreria Musicale Italiana.
- 23 Hagel, S. (2008) 'Re-evaluating the Pompeii auloi', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol.128, pp.57–71.
- 24 Hagel, S. (2012) 'The Pompeii auloi: Improved data and a hitherto unknown mechanism' in R. Eichmann, J. Fang and L.-C. Koch (eds) *Studien zur Musikarchäologie VIII: Klänge der Vergangenheit. Die Interpretation von musikarchäologischen Artefakten im Kontext*, Orient-Archäologie, vol.27, pp.103–14.
- 25 Hagel, S. (2019) 'Shaping character: An ancient Science of musical ethos?' in R. Eichmann, M. Howell and G. Lawson (eds) *Music and Politics in the Ancient World: Exploring Identity, Agency, Stability and Change through the Records of Music Archaeology*, Berlin Studies of the Ancient World, vol.65, Berlin, Topoi, pp.87–103.
- 26 Hölscher, T. ([1987] 1993) *Il linguaggio dell'arte romana: un sistema semantico*, Turin, Einaudi.
- 27 Jiménez, R., Till, R. and Howell, M. (eds) (2013) *Music & Ritual: Bridging Material & Living Cultures*, Berlin, Ekho.
- 28 Maiuri, A. (1973) *Alla Ricerca della Pompei Preromana*, Naples, Associazione Internazionale Amici di Pompei.
- 29 Melini, R. (2008a) *Suoni Sotto la Cenere*, Pompeii, Flavius.
- 30 Melini, R. (2008b) 'Possessed by the Great Mother: Music and trance in ancient Pompeii and in the popular tradition of Southern Italy' in I. Finkel and R. Dumbrill (eds) *ICONEA 2008, Proceedings of the International Conference of Near Eastern Archaeomusicology held at the British Museum*, London, ICONEA.
- 31 Melini, R. (2012) 'The Soundscape of Pompeii' in R. Eichmann, J. Fang, and L.-C. Koch (eds) *Studien zur Musikarchäologie VIII: Klänge der Vergangenheit. Die Interpretation von musikarchäologischen Artefakten im Kontext*, Orient-Archäologie, vol.27, pp.361–72.
- 32 Melini, R. (2014) 'Sounds from under the ashes: The music of cults and mysteries in the ancient Vesuvian land' in J. Goodnick Westenholz, Y. Maurey and E. Seroussi (eds) *Music in Antiquity: The Near East and the Mediterranean*, Berlin, de Gruyter.
- 33 Mungari, M. (2018a) 'Clues of Roman soundscapes around Vesuvius: Some case studies' in A. Gracia Ventura, C. Tavolieri and L. Verderame (eds) *The Study of Musical Performance in Antiquity: Archaeology and Written Sources*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars, pp.207–226.
- 34 Mungari, M. (2018b) 'Isiac sistra in Pompeii: Ritual objects, status markers, soundtools?' in A. Bellia and S.D. Bundrick (eds) *Musical Instruments as Votive Gifts in the Ancient World*, Pisa, Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali.
- 35 Murray Schaefer, R. (1977) *The Tuning of the World*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart.
- 36 Niccolini, F. and Niccolini, F. (1854–96) *Le Case ed i Monumenti di Pompei: Disegnati e Descritti*, Naples, s.n.
- 37 Podini, M. (2004) 'Musica e musicisti nel rilievo storico romano', *OCNUS*, vol.12, pp.223–46.
- 38 Podini, M. (2010) 'La rappresentazione dei suonatori di strumenti a corda o fidicines nell'arte ufficiale romana: spunti di riflessione', *OCNUS*, vol.18, pp.177–90.
- 39 Ricci, A. and Tucci, R. (2004) *La Capra che Suona*, Rome, Squilibri.
- 40 Saura-Ziegelmeier, A. (2013) 'Le sistre: un exemple d'élément culturel polysémique', *Studi Materiali di Storia delle Religioni*, vol.79, no.2, pp.379–95.
- 41 Sauron, G. (1998) *La Grande Fresque de La Villa des Mystères à Pompéi. Mémoires d'une dévotion de Dionysos*, Paris, Picard.
- 42 Sauron, G. (2001) 'La musique dionysiaque sur la grande fresque de la villa des Mystères à Pompéi' in P. Brulé and C. Vendries (eds) *Chanter les Dieux: Musique et Religion dans l'Antiquité Grecque et Romaine: Actes du Colloque des 16, 17 et 18 Décembre 1999 (Rennes et Lorient)*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- 43 Sutkowska, O. (2012) 'One of nine tibiae from a villa rustica in the Vesuvian area re-discovered' in R. Eichmann, J. Fang and L.-C. Koch (eds) *Studien zur Musikarchäologie VIII: Klänge der Vergangenheit. Die Interpretation von musikarchäologischen Artefakten im Kontext*, Orient-Archäologie, vol.27, pp.115–25.
- 44 Tintori, G. (1996) *La Musica di Roma Antica*, Lucca, Akademos.
- 45 Turcan, R. (1993) 'Les petites frises du cubiculum M dans la Villa dite de P. Fannius Synistor à Boscoreale (New York, Metropolitan Museum)', *Comptes Rendus des Séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, vol.137, no.3, pp.701–22.

- 46 Vendries, C. (2001) 'Pour les oreilles de Cybèle: images plurielles de la musique sur les autels tauroboliques de la Gaule romaine' in P.Brulé and C. Vendries (eds) *Chanter les Dieux: Musique et Religion dans l'Antiquité Grecque et Romaine: Actes du Colloque des 16, 17 et 18 décembre 1999 (Rennes et Lorient)*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- 47 Vendries, C. (2015) 'Du bruit dans la cité. L'invention du "paysage sonore" et l'Antiquité romaine' in S. Emerit, S. Perrot and A. Vincent (eds) *Le paysage sonore de l'antiquité. méthodologie, historiographie et perspectives. Actes de la journée d'études tenue à l'École Française de Rome, le 7 janvier 2013*, Le Caire, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, pp.209–258.
- 48 Vermaseren, M.J. (1977) *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attisique (CCCA) III. Italia – Latium*, Leiden, Brill.
- 49 Vermaseren, M.J. (1978) *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attisique (CCCA) IV. Italia – Aliae Provinciae*, Leiden, Brill.
- 50 Vincent, A. (2015) 'Paysage sonore et sciences sociales: sonorités, sens, histoire' in S. Emerit, S. Perrot and A. Vincent (eds) *Le paysage sonore de l'antiquité. méthodologie, historiographie et perspectives. Actes de la journée d'études tenue à l'École Française de Rome, le 7 janvier 2013*, Le Caire, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, pp.9–40.
- 51 Virgili, A. (2008) *Culti Misterici ed Orientali a Pompei*, Rome, Gangemi.
- 52 West, M. L. (1992) *Ancient Greek Music*, Oxford, Clarendon.
- 53 Wille, G. (1967) *Musica Romana: Die Bedeutung der Musik im Leben der Römer*, Amsterdam, Schippers.
- 54 Zerouali, B. (2015) "'Paysages sonores": Au croisement de l'ethnomusicologie et de l'histoire' in S. Emerit, S. Perrot and A. Vincent (eds) *Le paysage sonore de l'antiquité. méthodologie, historiographie et perspectives. Actes de la journée d'études tenue à l'École Française de Rome, le 7 janvier 2013*, Le Caire, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, pp.41–62.



# GUARDIANS OF THE THRESHOLD: THE IMAGE OF THE GLADIATOR AND ITS PROTECTIVE FUNCTION IN POMPEII

Joe Sheppard

## Abstract

*This essay draws on recent archaeological research into domestic religion and magic throughout the Roman Empire in order to explain the significance of a handful of paintings and statues of gladiators in Pompeii from locations beyond the amphitheatre. I demonstrate that these images are limited to transitional spaces – immediately next to front doorways or in the corridor leading to the apodyterium of the Suburban Baths – often in combination with a household shrine. Like the phallic, animal, and martial imagery decorating other entrances in Pompeii – or many less conspicuous rituals around Mediterranean doorways, which I briefly survey – I argue that these figures must be understood in the context of a desire to prevent intruders from crossing the threshold. The particular scene of the end of the gladiatorial combat was suitable for placement near doorways, as opposed to other images of gladiators, precisely because it implicated viewers in a moment of uncertainty. The protective power of these images was reactivated by pedestrians recalling past experiences at the arena, when the life of a gladiator had been spared – or not – and being briefly reminded, even if only subconsciously, of the potential for danger and threats ahead.*

**Keywords:** Pompeii, gladiators, apotropaism, material religion, magic, protection

**Full text:** <https://openartsjournal.org/issue-10/article-6/>

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2021s06>

## Biographical note

Joe Sheppard graduated from Columbia University in Spring 2019 with a dissertation entitled *Mass Spectacles in Roman Pompeii as a System of Communication*. From Fall 2020, he is a joint postdoctoral teaching fellow in Classics and Art History and Archaeology at Washington University in St. Louis. He is also Assistant Field Director for the excavations at the Villa Adriana near Tivoli, Italy, undertaken by the Advanced Program in Ancient History and Art (Columbia University and La Sapienza – Università di Roma).

Banner image: Detail from a garden painting, from the House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. (Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

# GUARDIANS OF THE THRESHOLD: THE IMAGE OF THE GLADIATOR AND ITS PROTECTIVE FUNCTION IN POMPEII

Joe Sheppard, Washington University in St. Louis

## Gladiators and taverns

In October 2019, archaeologists working in the north of Pompeii uncovered a very well-preserved fresco facing an interior wall (V.8), which quickly made international headlines due to its colourful representation of that most sensational of subjects: the gladiatorial duel. By the end of the year Massimo Osanna, the archaeological superintendent of Pompeii, had already published a brief analysis of the painting in his monograph surveying the many extraordinary finds recently discovered in the ancient city. Noting that excavations in the area were still incomplete, Osanna suggested that the location of our painting can explain its original significance: 'To judge from the image depicted, placed under the stairs, immediately visible by whoever entered the structure, it must have been a meeting-place frequented by gladiators, perhaps an infamous tavern, where games of dice were played, people drank, and an evening was passed in merry cheerfulness' (2019, p.167; all translations by the author, unless otherwise credited).

This conclusion was based on three elements from the surrounding neighbourhood: first, the doorway into the room where the fresco was found is wider than usual for a household entrance, resembling rather the many establishments offering food or drink dotted across Pompeii and other Roman towns. These broad openings invite customers inside from the street, thus extending the public space. Osanna's second observation was that this bar is located just off a small piazza formed by the slight misalignment of the crossroads. The popularity of this intersection among locals is indicated by the enlargement of public space, the dense cluster of electoral advertisements in the vicinity, the Roman practice of worshipping the spirits of the crossroads, and the sophisticated provision of water, with a fountain and cistern fed by an adjacent water tower that regulated the hydraulic pressure. Finally, Osanna proposed that the proximity of this image to the 'gladiator barracks' (V.5.3), less than a

hundred metres away, could be no coincidence. Perhaps the graffito of a gladiator, he suggested, scratched into a nearby façade was inspired by the 'continuous comings and goings of gladiators in the area, between the barracks and the tavern' (2019, p.167).

Since only one corner of the room has been unearthed at the time of writing – that is to say, only two walls of this interior space have only been partially excavated, with even its basic dimensions remaining unknown for the time being – detailed analysis of this important new discovery within its context is still impossible. It is nevertheless important to ask, how we move from necessarily imperfect information about a particular material artefact, in this case a painting of two gladiators on the wall, to sound conclusions about its precise purpose or meaning, especially when those conclusions depend on ephemeral practices that might not have survived in the archaeological record, such as socialising. A century ago, for example, a second painting of a gladiator duel in a different bar (IX.9.8), 'almost in front of' the gladiator barracks, was also explained by Antonio Sogliano with reference to the gladiators who frequented the premises (1921, pp.24–5). He even suggested that this painting functioned as a kind of 'speaking sign' for the establishment, which 'could well have been called' colloquially something like 'the bar of the gladiators' (p.25). Matteo Della Corte has likewise applied this idea of a shop sign to a third fresco of duelling gladiators, also contained within a thick red border, but this time painted onto the exterior doorpost of yet another bar (IX.12.7), the so-called Tavern of Purpurio, which apparently alluded to 'the special clientele who frequented' it (1965, p.323).

These interpretations, however, should invite scepticism for several reasons. First of all, the emphasis on targeted marketing, brand awareness, and commercial signposting sounds suspiciously anachronistic. Moreover, the message communicated by any 'speaking sign' is hardly obvious, since yet another painting of duelling gladiators (VII.5.14–15) has elsewhere been interpreted not as a nod towards the clientele but rather as 'the shop of an armourer' or as 'the banner' for the 'office of a gladiator-trainer' (Angelone, 1989, pp.342, 357). The subject matter depicted could easily be explained by some other reason, such as the general popularity of local gladiatorial spectacles. In fact, Thomas Fröhlich has rejected Della Corte's interpretation, for example, because the gladiators were unambiguously integrated into a larger composition of sacred imagery including a compital altar and two sacrificial scenes, one performed by the neighbourhood magistrates (*vicomagistri*) and another by the spirits who protected the crossroads,



Figure 6.1: Fresco depicting gladiatorial combat, discovered in the recent excavations in Region V. (Photo with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei / Courtesy of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali – Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli)

namely the *genius loci* and *Lares compitales* (1991, p.339, n.176 = F71).

Above all, what warrants further interrogation is the assumption connecting the people who might have used or frequented a particular space to the subject matter represented in its decoration. It is not immediately clear why a gladiator would wish to look at a painting that highlights both the glory and extreme bloodshed of martial combat. Such an interpretation belongs to a long tradition of positivism in Pompeian studies, where unusually vivid and eloquent materials, quite unparalleled elsewhere in the Roman Empire, have often invited explanations that rely more on engaging narratives or modern analogies than a systematic approach to highly complex archaeological contexts based on comparable evidence.

Moreover, the identification of the gladiator barracks (V.5.3) is not entirely straightforward: it is possible that the site was repurposed during its final years, with scholars traditionally assigning the same function to another, much larger structure on the other side of the city – the so-called Quadriporticus (VIII.7.16) – not least of all due to the impressive cache of specialised

armour found there (Beard, 2008, pp.270–2, 275). Even if one accepts the relevance of the gladiator barracks, however, the building is actually three blocks away from Osanna's newly discovered bar (V.8), while the third example mentioned above (IX.12.7) is more than 240 metres away from both the barracks and the Quadriporticus. Precisely how close or far apart should two sites be, in order for a link to be established between them? And why are the many other bars nearer the gladiator barracks and Quadriporticus not decorated with similar imagery?

The most immediate spatial context for the newly discovered painting of gladiators is not the piazza outside the building, but the interior area that it occupies: in the southwest corner of a room, in what appears to be a lower band of decoration beneath a staircase, whose course is still visible in section, evidently limiting the size and shape of the plaster surface available for the painter. Very little attention has been paid so far to the fragmentary panel on the other side of the interior corner, however, where the lower half of a figure is depicted wearing sandals and a tunic cinched at the waist, also on a white background



and within a red frame. In fact, the clothing identifies this figure as the *summa rudis* or umpire of the arena – typically represented with a staff and belted, knee-length garment marked by two vertical crimson stripes (Dunbabin, 2016, p.228) – which the Pompeians must have recognised from the generic example painted conspicuously on the central axis of the interior wall of their local amphitheatre, according to a recent reconstruction (Hufschmid, 2009, vol. I, pp.259–66). The content, scale, and style of these two adjacent panels thus suggest that a larger scene related to the arena extended around the corner from these gladiators and eastwards in the direction of the wide doorway leading outside, approximately two metres away.

Although the fresco of gladiators from the bar IX.9.8 was badly damaged even at the time of excavation, it is clear from the earliest reports that at least one figure there of about the same height (60cm) was also painted on an interior wall with a whitened background immediately to the east of the entrance from the street, albeit behind a low countertop (Mau, 1889, pp.28–9; Sogliano, 1899, p.126). This scene, too, appears to have represented the very end of the duel, when the victor steps forward, stretches out his shield, pulls back his right hand along with his sword next to his side, as if to strike, and twists his head towards the spectators, in order to find out their decision concerning the fate of his fallen adversary (Mau, 1889, p.29). The same climactic ritual was also depicted in the scene from the Tavern of Purpurio (IX.12.7), which was painted at a similar scale (75cm high) on a white background inside a thick red border, but this time onto the exterior face of the building, more specifically on the plastered doorpost immediately to the right of someone entering. Finally, the fourth example mentioned, on the pier next to a bar (VII.5.14–15) before it was destroyed during the war, rather unusually shows two separate moments of the duel, but the larger scene in the foreground once again depicts ‘the final phase of combat: the loser has fallen and is being threatened by his opponent with a sword in his right hand. An umpire in a white tunic, who holds a stick or rod in his hand, runs in between the fighters’ (Fröhlich, 1991, p.326 = F50).

In this essay, I shall argue that the locations and subject matter of these four paintings are not coincidental, but rather consistent with several other frescoes in Pompeii depicting gladiators. The scholarly treatment of such paintings has so far been concerned chiefly with questions of style or their relationship to literary and documentary sources, when they are not being analysed in isolation from one another, taken out of context, or neglected altogether. The frescoes with

gladiator duels should be understood instead as part of a larger pattern already well documented in Pompeii for other motifs, namely the image of a *Schutzgott* or ‘tutelary divinity’, often painted onto the façade of a building but also found in houses, shops, and bars, either alone or else accompanied by scenes of sacrifice, sacred procession, or occupation, in a ‘direct expression of private religiosity and superstition’ (Fröhlich, 1991, p.13). Perhaps the most familiar and quotidian expression of this protective logic is the masonry *lararium* or household shrine, usually located in the atrium, kitchen, or peristyle of a dwelling, and near street corners, and typically decorated with images of local spirits, such as the aforementioned *genius loci*, twin Lares, or large serpents (see essays by Haug & Kreuz and Graham in this issue).

The paintings of gladiators here should not be understood as objects of worship, however, and certainly not as part of any official religious practice approved by the authorities. Instead, there is fairly good evidence for such liminal spaces – where domestic and commercial properties are accessed from the street, particularly in Pompeii but also throughout the ancient Mediterranean more widely (Porstner, 2020) – as being sites for a range of behaviours that may be characterised as superstitious, from stepping carefully to suspending elaborately sculpted bells or activating phallic amulets (Parker, 2018; Wilburn, 2018). After establishing a spatial pattern with a brief survey describing all paintings of gladiators found so far in Pompeii, I shall argue that these highly conspicuous, heavily armed, and socially stigmatised swordsmen – who performed before enormous audiences at ritualised games (*munera gladiatorum*) and religious festivals (*ludi*: e.g. *CIL X 1074d*, which is discussed in detail by Mugnari & Wyslucha and van der Graaff & Poehler in this issue), and were believed to possess supernatural powers, and even drafted as personal bodyguards during emergencies – were ideally suited as the choice for subject matter to decorate the spaces around doorways in Pompeii.

### **A taxonomy of paintings with gladiatorial combat**

The contexts and compositional schemes of all paintings of gladiatorial combat found so far in Pompeii have been summarised below (Fig. 6.3) and described in the ‘Appendix’ section of the essay. The frescoes from the interior wall of the amphitheatre (II.6) and the tomb of Vestorius Priscus from the Porta Vesuvio necropolis (Jacobelli, 2003, pp.58–62, 92–4) have been excluded from this survey, because the function, audience, and context for each differ fundamentally

from the images painted on the walls of houses, shops, bars, and bathing complexes. There are so few examples of gladiators attested as part of the decoration of public buildings that it is difficult to treat the topic (Flecker, 2015, pp. 132–5), whereas the many well-documented funerary monuments in Italy showing scenes from the arena, particularly in relief sculpture, must be understood in the tradition of aristocratic self-representation as an effective strategy for memorialising one of the most generous but otherwise ephemeral benefactions that local notables lavished on their community.

This selection leaves seventeen specimens from Pompeii, a sum that seems relatively small considering the overwhelming popularity of gladiatorial *munera* and their ubiquity as the subject for other inexpensive forms of visual media. There is good evidence both for large-scale spectacles being staged with some regularity in Pompeii and for Campanians travelling between towns in the region in order to watch games (Benefiel, 2016, pp. 446–56). Gladiators were consistently among the most frequent figures in pictorial graffiti across every kind of location in Pompeii (Langner, 2001, pp. 143–4), as well as ‘the most common single subject’ on moulded ceramic vessels from early imperial Gaul and the northern frontier provinces during the second and third centuries (Dunbabin, 2016, p. 223). This paucity of gladiators in the local wall-painting repertoires warrants explanation no less, say, than the taste for mosaics depicting specific scenes of gladiators and especially hunts from prior games hosted by the owners of North Africa villas in the following centuries (Dunbabin, 2016, pp. 188–208).

This scarcity is due in part to the values and practices of early-modern archaeologists, who were, on the whole, more interested in preserving, collecting, and documenting materials related to literature, mythology, or the imperial family than what was viewed as a violent form of entertainment for an unsophisticated crowd. Of the seventeen paintings from Pompeii, only two examples have survived well enough to allow comprehensive study in their original contexts (Fig. 6.1 and the fresco depicting duelling gladiators from the so-called Tavern of Purpurio, IX.12.7) either in person or working from clear photographs, with scholarly interest in the rest waning soon after each new discovery had been unearthed and described cursorily. Nevertheless, it is possible to make sense of such an incomplete set of variable data and even detect patterns by separating the examples of positively attested variables (Appendix, Group 1) from pieces of evidence that are more ambiguous or unclear (Appendix, Group 2), and of course anomalous (Appendix, Group 3). Implicit within

this distinction is the recognition that a single, unifying explanation or monolithic function is highly unlikely to hold true for all paintings of gladiators across Pompeii. In theory the paintings from Group 2 could have originally possessed the same characteristics that define Group 1, but for the purposes of this argument it suffices to note merely that they are not contradictory.

The pattern of painting images of gladiators at points of access, where individuals transition from one defined space to another, has been noted in passing (e.g. Langner, 2016, p. 137) but never explored systematically, perhaps because of a tendency in Roman archaeology to categorise places in other ways, such as public / private or domestic / commercial. In a similar way, Roman thresholds and boundaries more generally have long been established as sites where ritual practices concerned with protection often took place (e.g. Ogle, 1911; Kellum, 1999, pp. 284–5) and classicists have also connected gladiators to similar superstitions about defending against charms or spirits (e.g. Coulston, 2009, pp. 197, 204–6), but the possibility of these gladiatorial paintings also serving this purpose at points of access in Pompeii is yet to be explored in detail. (The relevant pieces of information are still, for all intents and purposes, practically buried in old and often recondite excavation reports.)

As a rule, the inner face of a narrow doorjamb was not decorated by Pompeians in the same way that a marble threshold or change in mosaic pattern often marked the point separating two different spaces on an otherwise level and continuous floor surface, nor does it make sense to define too narrowly the precise location where a graduated process of transition takes place, so the word *entryway* and phrase *point of access* have been selected since they are flexible enough to encompass both the interior and exterior faces of the wall on either side of a door. In the case of a bar or shopfront, whose doorway was usually much broader than the entrance to a household, there was no other conspicuous space available to decorate. This flexible concept also applies to paintings in a vestibule however, since this narrow corridor, which typically ran from the pavement in front of a property into the atrium, occupied an even lengthier distance than a stone threshold, and indeed implicitly acted as a kind of buffer zone between inside and outside. The differences between a household, bar, and shop or between luxurious and more modest buildings break down when faced with this idea of the entryway, since every edifice that can be entered is by definition exposed to risk: everyone has something to lose. This inclusive quality is appropriate for paintings of gladiators since *munera* were attended by people from all backgrounds, even if

the subject was largely banished from the more refined literary and artistic products favoured by respectable society.

The second pattern to emerge from these paintings is the specific moment of each gladiatorial duel represented, most often the final phase of combat, after the winner has been determined but before the consequences of that victory have been decided by the spectators and sponsor: either execution (*iugulatio*) or respite (*missio*) for whoever lost the contest (Ville, 1981, pp. 410–24; Junkelmann, 2000, pp. 136–42; Fagan, 2011, pp. 222–3). Since duels with no quarter (*sine missione*) were illegal in Italy from the time of Augustus (Suet. *Aug.* 45.3–4), this resolution process for each match – which guaranteed the active engagement of all parties in attendance, especially the spectators – soon developed its own system of communication, including the gesture of raising an index finger in order to ask for clemency – ‘a hand gesture so well attested in the textual and material sources that its meaning seems beyond doubt’ (Corbeill, 2004, p. 54).

In Pompeii this motif appears in many paintings, funerary reliefs, graffiti, and lamps, but it is also not uncommon for two equally matched gladiators to be shown in the middle of a contest (Flecker, 2015, nos. A55–56; Langner, 2001, pp. 51–2), and since the surviving evidence and excavation records are not always entirely clear and detailed in this regard, the entries in the appendix have been separated according to how securely they fulfilled this compositional criterion. The more explicit possibility of death in such images adds a certain frisson to the context of protection from superstitions, but the narrative logic of both compositions is ultimately teleological: the eternally uncertain future may bring surprising changes in fortune, which nothing can prevent. This idea brings us to the mechanisms through which these paintings of gladiators functioned.

### Tutelary divinities in Pompeii

The word *apotropaic*, perhaps best known by the example of the so-called evil eye, typically refers to the ritual practice of seeking to avert (ἀποτρόπαιος) envy, malice, danger, and bad fortune, whether through visual symbols, speech, gestures, or other means. In a recent monograph on Roman laughter, Mary Beard criticised ‘that overused term apotropaic’, since ‘this word is sufficiently technical to appear to be explanatory while also being agreeably primitive – as if we were going back into the deepest wellsprings of earliest Roman tradition’, but in fact such a term only ‘shelves the problems rather than solves them’ if scholars simply invoke the concept as a way of explaining particularly

unusual or challenging pieces of evidence (2017, p. 58). In addition to this potentially hermeneutic cul-de-sac, another central problem with the concept of apotropaic images or objects is demonstrating that a particular specimen was actually believed by an individual to provide protection, since there is rarely any accompanying inscription or direct testimony by witnesses.

There are, however, ample literary and documentary sources for Roman superstitions connected to crossing a threshold to enter a building, which can help frame the material evidence from Pompeii, in order to reconstruct some of the specific mechanisms and practices through which such magical thinking was expressed. I shall argue that the gladiator duels in Pompeii, painted in several contexts that are quite literally liminal, are in certain ways analogous to the images and shrines of deities often found in similar spaces, such as the protective spirits that inhabited households, shops, and public crossroads (i.e. the *Lares* and *genius loci*), not to mention representations of the traditional Roman pantheon of gods, as well as more minor figures like *Fortuna* or *Priapus*. Of course, the Pompeians did not sacrifice to gladiators at altars or worship them in any sense that resembled the official state cults, but the selection of these painted scenes, which depict the most intensely charged moment of what was a highly ritualised and public form of bloodshed in the arena, may nevertheless be explained best in the context of popular traditions linking gladiators and arena spectacles to magical thinking about violence and protection: specifically the supernatural powers supposedly possessed by those who died violently (*biothanati*) and the practice of spectators at the games communicating to the sponsor whether or not the defeated combatant should be spared from being executed (*missio*).

The boundary separating a household from the outside world was the site of a particularly durable set of superstitions in Roman literature (Weidlich, 1893; Ogle, 1911; Wilburn, 2018, pp. 110–11). It was considered a bad omen, for example, to trip up on the threshold (e.g. *Ov. Am.* 1.12.3–4), which may help explain in part the practice of new brides being carried over this short distance (e.g. *Plaut. Cas.* 815–17). A punchline about guests needing to enter the dining room ‘with the right foot first’ (*Petron. Sat.* 30.6) depended on extending to a domestic (albeit fictional) context the concept of ritual precision from religious spaces, where architects helped to ensure that anyone approaching a temple set their right foot first on the podium by building an odd number of steps (*Vitr. De arch.* 3.4.4). Moreover, the doorway

of a household was also the location for folk rituals designed to protect or harm residents: according to Pliny the Elder, the head of a snake buried beneath the threshold might bring good luck to the household (HN 29.20), while doorposts greased with fat from wolves ‘prevented any enchantment entering’ a new bride’s house (28.34: *ne quid mali medicamenti inferretur*) – including those caused by iron pins, nail clippings, barley, blood, chameleons, and other magical devices fastened there (Ogle 1911, pp. 255–6). The logic of the protective amulet was explained by Macrobius with the example of the goddess Mania, mother of the Lares, whose image, hanging in front of doorways (*effigies Maniae suspensae pro singulorum foribus*) during the Compitalia festival, replaced the human sacrifice that had apparently been necessary originally in order to ensure the safety of the rest of the household (Macrobius Sat. 1.7.35).

From the long corridor leading into the House of the Tragic Poet (VI.8.5) in Pompeii comes perhaps the best-known image of a guarded entryway in the Roman archaeological record, where the mosaic of a large, fierce dog faces the visitor, who is instructed to ‘beware of the dog’ (*cave canem*: CIL 10.877). In a recent close analysis of this mosaic in its context, Andrew Wilburn has argued that the image of the dog was a ‘power object’ that acted to separate and protect the household against human intruders, the evil eye, and other unseen threats, perhaps being symbolically animated or activated through repeated actions such as sweeping and walking around it (2018). In addition to three further houses where dogs guarded the threshold either in the form of a mosaic (I.8.1; V.1.6) or a wall painting (IX.2.26n), the small mosaic at the end of the long entrance corridor leading into the House of Orpheus (VI.14.20) was complemented by a real dog, who was still chained to the nearby post during the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius (Porstner, 2020). This detail further emphasises interactions between the inanimate material remains and the population that inhabited a particular space, while also reminding us that even within a small sample the specific context remains important.

But it was not only the entryways of houses in Pompeii where the material remains and ritualised practices were carefully designed in a way that protected private property. Also, in the Caupona of Sotericus (I.12.3) can be found the painting of a dog, glowering across the front room at the visitor from its position on the far pillar, which marks the division between the large commercial area – with its bar, tables, and massive *dolia* jars – and the rear part of the property, where the garden, kitchen, and additional

storage facilities were located. This time the dog is merely standing at attention, without any accompanying inscription, but anyone visiting would also have to walk past it in order to access the staircase against the eastern wall, which led upstairs to an apartment. The western half of the wide entrance to the building was blocked by a masonry counter that allowed customers to be served directly from the street. Painted against the red background of the pillar immediately next to this counter, just below the lintel of the door, was the large bust of a female divinity, typically identified as Roma (or perhaps Minerva) with a helmet, shield, and spear (Fröhlich, 1991, p.310 = F10). At 90 centimetres in height, this bust was larger than life, and its position on the façade of the building made it highly conspicuous. The eyes and spear of Roma are turned towards the east, as if watching over the doorway.

At least forty similar ‘tutelary divinities’ (*Schutzgötter*) were painted near entryways on Pompeian street façades, overwhelmingly (85%) at the entrances to shops, bars, and workshops rather than houses (Fröhlich, 1991, p.48). These images, clearly identifiable from each god’s unique iconographic attributes, have been described as more talismanic than cultic in character, because they are lacking any of the apparatus associated with sacrifice or worship. Since the locations are privately owned but publicly conspicuous and frequented by the less wealthy and powerful members of society, the divinities have commonly been interpreted as either an expression of the owner’s personal identity or a tool to attract attention to the business there (Fröhlich, 1991, p.49). This latter explanation is unsatisfactory – even if there are images of Bacchus and Minerva painted on taverns and fulleries respectively – since many divinities were never associated with trade in general nor any profession in particular (e.g. Venus or Romulus), not to mention again that the concept of a shop sign is culturally contingent and anachronistic. It is true, however, that the most commonly depicted divinity by quite some way was Mercury, whose connection to trade and prosperity is well documented. Along with Fortuna and Hercules, the next most commonly depicted tutelary divinities, it seems likely that Mercury was able to function as an ‘all-purpose tutelary divinity’ (*universeller Schutzgott*: Fröhlich 1991, p.50).

The apotropaic potential of these painted tutelary divinities is clear from several specific contexts. For example, on the wall of the corridor leading to the latrine at the back of the bar IX.7.21–2 was painted the figure of Fortuna along with her usual attributes (rudder, cornucopia, globe, and modius), who has turned to face the legend *cacator, cave malu(m)* written

in black paint above the image of a nude man squatting on the ground (CIL 4.3832; Fröhlich, 1991, p.296 = L106). This message is reinforced by two serpents, rising from the ground to attack the head of this individual who would defile such a space by defecation. At the time of excavation 'a terra-cotta monopodium stood against the wall, perhaps serving as an altar' beneath this painting (Boyce, 1937, p.88 = no. 442) – a salient reminder that the rituals practised in relation to images are all but impossible to detect without the good fortune of durable objects and accurate excavation records.

The same *cacator* text was also painted at least three times in the alleyway between insulas III.4 and III.5, each with enormous red lettering more than one by three metres in size, one of which appended a threat: 'or if you don't care, you'll endure the wrath of Jupiter' (CIL 4.7714-16; Varone, 2016, p.122). Antonio Varone has connected the latter text, along with three more similar threats daubed onto Pompeian façades (CIL 4.6641, 7038, 8899), with the images of serpents immediately adjacent, based on a passage in Persius (I.112-14), where the satirist recommends painting two snakes on the wall in order to communicate the message: 'Guys, this place is sacred. Piss somewhere else' (2016, pp.124–5). Indeed, the snake should be considered the most commonly depicted deity in Pompeian painting, appearing in many different domestic spaces as well as on the streets (Flower, 2017), and is best understood as a protective spirit that guards over each location (Fröhlich, 1991; cf. Graham in this issue). A desire to protect vulnerable bodies against unregulated human waste may also help explain two fragmentary wall paintings of gladiators beyond the scope of this article: one found in the corridor next to the changing room of the Suburban Baths just outside Pompeii (Jacobelli, 2005); and another in a latrine on the Palatine hill, also dated to the early Flavian era and possibly connected to a bathing complex (Tomei, 1991).

The other figure in Pompeii often characterised as a tutelary divinity is Priapus, whose figure was painted in the entryways of the House of the Vettii (VI.15.1), the Complex of the Magic Rites (II.1.12), and now the newly excavated house at V.6.12 (Kellum, 2015). This interpretation stems from the apotropaic function of phallic representations, which is well documented in both Roman literary sources and archaeological remains (Levi, 1941; Adams, 1987, pp.3–6, 63–4). Perhaps the clearest demonstration of this concept is the *fascinum* – a phallic amulet, suspended from the necks of children (Varro, *Ling.* 7.97) and from triumphal chariots (Pl. *HN* 28.39) in order to protect against the evil eye (Whitmore, 2017). In the literary tradition,

moreover, the figure of Priapus threatens intruders with sexual penetration, but there he is usually characterised as the more rustic guardian of garden spaces, in contrast to his more urbane counterpart in Pompeii (Hallett, 1977; Kellum, 2015).

Not unlike the dual role played by Fortuna – able both to bring wealth and good fortune in the form of a cornucopia, even as she protects against the wickedness of defecation – Priapus is characterised by a degree of ambivalence in these paintings, since the bounteous fruits at his feet and his enormous phallus, weighed on scales against a bag of coins, signal the fertility and prosperity associated with the deity (Fröhlich, 1991). In other words, the flip side of the mosaic warning intruders 'beware of the dog' is another floor in *opus signinum* that greets the concept of profit itself at the threshold of the atrium (VII 1, 47): *salve lucru* (CIL 10.874)! The ambivalence of tutelary divinities seems especially relevant to our images that depict both the victorious and vanquished parties at the end of a gladiator duel, immediately before either the final punishment or merciful reprieve has been issued.

The tutelary figures considered so far on the mosaics and paintings in Pompeian entryways were only the most conspicuous, durable, and eloquent expressions of what was also communicated through other media less immediately legible or accessible to the modern eye, such as portable objects and symbolic architectural features. For example, statuettes of tutelary divinities were placed inside the niches on street façades or onto the masonry shrines built into the wall or floor of a household's atrium, alongside the figures of snakes and Lares typically painted there (Fröhlich, 1991). According to a recent study (Parker, 2018) the elaborately sculpted bells known as *tintinnabula* were intended to produce apotropaic sounds precisely because they were typically phallic in form and functioned best as wind chimes if suspended at open but accessible boundaries of the house such as doorways, windows, and gardens. Two particularly notable specimens from the Vesuvian area include an ithyphallic Mercury and a gladiator attacking his own zoomorphic phallus. The twelve small plaques set into the street façades of Pompeii, with phallic designs sculpted from tufa, were also probably intended to protect or act as 'good-luck charms' for the nearest entryway, corner, or property (Ling, 1990, p.62).

As a final example of a tutelary divinity, it is worth examining the tufa statuette of a gladiator (107cm tall) resting his small, round shield on the head of a shorter Priapus figure, found in the so-called Inn of the Gladiators (I.20.1) at the end of the entrance corridor

leading into an enormous vineyard complete with its own outdoor dining area (Eliä, 1975). The conjoined figures of gladiator and Priapus straddled the line between guardianship and revelry, for the safety and pleasure of visitors as they dined, drank wine, and passed the time at leisure, perhaps even after a day at the nearby arena. The ithyphallic figure of Priapus, perhaps about to be executed by the victorious combatant, hints at the erotic character of gladiatorial combat, well documented in both literary sources and local graffiti (Jacobelli, 2003; Coulston, 2009). The word 'sword' (*gladius*) was a euphemism for the phallus (Adams, 1987, pp.20–1), yet the vulnerable flesh of the gladiator, for the most part visible to the spectators, was subject to penetration by his opponent. The logic of this fascinating, monstrous, and curious individual, who paradoxically combined vulnerability and power within a single entity, thus resembled the mechanisms of the *fascinum* that was able to puncture the harmful gaze of the evil eye (Barton, 1993).

### The gladiator as guardian of the threshold?

Needless to say, a gladiator was not the same thing as a phallus or a Priapus, even if the first public paintings of an actual gladiator duel, probably in the mid-second century BCE, were evidently deemed worthy of dedication to Diana Nemorensis (Pl. *HN* 35.51–2). It was nevertheless believed that the violent death suffered by many gladiators would have prevented the spirit from returning peacefully to its source (Tert. *De Anim.* 57; Serv. ad Verg. *Aen.* 4.386). The restless afterlives of these individuals who were 'dead by violence' (βιοιοθάνατοι or *biothanati*), not unlike 'those dead before their time' (ἄωροι) and 'those deprived of burial' (ἄταφοι), supposedly explained the manifestation of ghosts and supernatural phenomena (Waszink, 1954; Ogden, 2009, p.146). The author Tertullian remained sceptical about such apparitions, which he considered the work of demons, yet hinted at an otherwise obscure trope of exorcisms, whereby the creature 'claims sometimes to be one of the host's ancestors, sometimes a gladiator or beast-fighter, and at other times a god' (*De Anim.* 57.5). For our purposes, the great magical papyrus of Paris is particularly salient at this point (PGM IV.1390-9 = Betz, 1986, p.65), since the lovesick reader was advised to enlist the help of 'heroes or gladiators or those who have died a violent death' and to throw 'some of the polluted dirt' from the place where they had been slain 'inside the house of the woman' who is desired. Here the domestic doorway is the target of secret attacks, and the gladiator is once again understood to possess some kind of supernatural powers after death.

In early-imperial medical literature, the 'hot blood' from an executed gladiator (Cels. *Med.* 3.23.7) was also mentioned as a way to relieve epilepsy, albeit with disdain and incredulity (Pl. *HN* 28.2). For Scribonius Largus it was the liver of a slain gladiator that possessed special healing powers, which he categorised along with drinking blood or eating from the skull of a deceased person as treatments that 'fall outside the profession of medicine, although they have seemed to benefit some patients' (*Compositiones* 17). Celsus likewise distinguished between the remedies of the doctor and those of 'the peasants' (*rustici: Med.* 4.3.13, 5.28.7b) and 'common crowd' (*vulgus: 4.7.5*). We should expect such details about the defiled bodies of legally and socially stigmatised gladiators (*infames*) to lie otherwise beyond the scope and beneath the dignity of most Roman authors, but the material evidence from Pompeii does not share the same bias against the beliefs and practices of the 'common crowd'.

Indeed this ambivalent position of the gladiator as both despised outcast yet brave, skilled, and popular performer may help explain superstitions about his special potency, in particular the gladiator's power to protect and harm (Jahn, 1855, pp.95–6). The clearest visual representation of an unequivocally apotropaic gladiator appears on the Woburn marble relief (Fig. 6.2), where a *retarius* is shown aiming his trident at a large eye, which a lion, snake, scorpion, crane, and corvid are also attacking, along with a man wearing a Phrygian cap and squatting in an act of defecation (Jahn, 1855, pp.30–1, pl.3.1). The subject matter of this sculpture seems to be unique, although the image of gladiatorial weapons directed at a large eye appears in other media, such as the trident in a mosaic near Antioch (Levi, 1941). The logic of transferring a gladiator's protective powers onto another creature or object through physical contact was also described by Scribonius Largus (*Compositiones* 13), since the stag's blood able to treat epilepsy had apparently been shed by the same blade used to kill a gladiator. Another example of such magic was the 'bridal spear' (*coeliberis hasta*) mentioned by Festus, whereby the bride's hair was combed with a weapon removed from the corpse of a gladiator, in order to bind her just as tightly to the groom (Jahn, 1855, p.95, n.278).

The gladiators themselves were not immune to such superstitions either, as might be expected from such a dangerous occupation. The tombstone of Victor from Philippopolis claims that it was 'the divine power' (δαίμων) that slew him, not his treacherous opponent Pinnas, before noting that his comrade ultimately avenged his death by killing Pinnas (Robert, 1940, no.34). No graveyard for gladiators has been unearthed



Figure 6.2: Sketch of a marble relief now in Woburn, England, depicting a gladiator aiming his trident at a large eye. (Source: Jahn, 1855, pl.3)

yet at Pompeii and their social lives are still poorly understood locally beyond the remains of architecture, weaponry, and scores of very chatty graffiti found at the old barracks (V.5.3) or the Quadriporticus (VIII.7.16). It seems plausible, however, that some of the local fighters will have practised a bitter antagonism similar to their counterparts from other provinces and later centuries, even if, for example, there was no shrine to the avenging goddess Nemesis inside the Pompeian amphitheatre – as would become common (Kyle, 1998, p. 100; Pastor, 2011). Nor have any lead tablets scratched with curses against one's adversaries (*defixiones*), yet surfaced locally, even though gladiators and charioteers were the most commonly cited occupations in such documents, apparently followed by the proprietors of taverns (Gager, 1992, p. 153) – a fact that once more highlights in passing the need to protect public establishments in Pompeii, such as the property at V.3.

The gladiators of Pompeii instead left behind scratched texts and images that are difficult to interpret but may yet reveal some local evidence for protective superstitions or ritualistic thinking more broadly. One bronze shoulder guard, for example, embossed with fine busts of Hercules and two Cupids, was also lightly incised afterwards – first with crude engravings of leaves and branches, perhaps intended to

represent a victor's crown, and then a secondary image of a duel between *retarius* and *secutor* (Junkelmann, 2000, pp.85, 254 = G2). The faintness, inferior quality, and different technique of these incisions suggest that they were not created as part of the original design by a skilled artisan, with the intention of being viewed on parade or in the arena but were rather a later product of the person owning, storing, or wearing the armour, presumably in order to increase their perceived capacity for symbolic protection and thereby the likelihood of success. Such activity makes sense given that finely sculpted images both of victorious gladiators and protective divinities (e.g. Minerva, Mars, Gorgoneion) already dominated the main decorative fields on several other helmets and greaves from the same armoury (e.g. Junkelmann, 2000, nos. B5–6, 13–14, 16, 18; H11, 13–15), and can be understood as a kind of defensive corollary to writing curses on lead tablets or casting slingshot projectiles with sexually aggressive messages of abuse (Gager, 1992; Hallett, 1977). According to this reading, the figures of gladiator and divinity are both experienced at least in part as individuals able to provide protection – not unlike what I have claimed about these subjects in the local wall-painting repertoire.

Also found in the Quadriporticus of Pompeii, but scratched into a column this time, was a textual graffiti in which a *provocator* called Mansuetus promises to bring Venus his winner's palm (or, less likely, his shield) once victorious (CIL 4.2483). This inscription may well have been intended as a literal vow to the town's patron divinity, since the erotic graffiti ascribed to gladiators elsewhere in Pompeii speak in the language of forthright boasts rather than double entendres (Jacobelli, 2003, pp.48–9).

The figure of the armed gladiator in Roman culture was in its most basic sense someone who was required to protect himself from attacks while delivering blows to an adversary. The protective aspect of the gladiator is highlighted in the painted panels that flanked the small doorway exiting the arena in Pompeii to the west, which two life-sized gladiators appeared to be guarding, according to a recent reconstruction of the now-lost frescoes (Hufschmid, 2009). Like the gladiators actually fighting in the arena, these highly conspicuous paintings were also intended to attract the gaze of the spectators, which is to say that they too functioned as a kind of *fascinum*. In the generic gladiator duel painted onto the wall of establishment V.8, the victorious gladiator was able to pose as a protective figure who met this gaze and threatened any potentially hostile party, even as the defeated combatant could insulate the owner or proprietor from harm by standing in

as a replacement for them, according to the logic of symbolic magic. In other words, the scene just inside the entrance of this establishment could function at once like the *cave canem* mosaic as well as the effigy of Mania during the Compitalia, both of which were placed on the threshold between public and private space.

Furthermore the precise moment of combat shown – just after the victor has been determined but before the audience has decided the fate of the defeated gladiator – highlights both the power over life and death enjoyed by the spectators in the arena and a sense of uncertainty about the future. At this key ‘moment of truth’ (Ville, 1981, p.410), when the excitement of the contest had reached its climax (Hufschmid, 2009), the will of the audience dramatically manifested itself, first communicated through formulaic acclamations and predetermined gestures and then enacted by the sponsor of the games and his staff (Aldrete, 1999; Corbeil, 2004). The detailed accounts of specific gladiatorial duels recorded in Pompeian graffiti clearly demonstrate that many defeated combatants were in fact spared to fight another day (Sabbatini Tumolesi, 1980). With few exceptions, this active involvement by the audience in determining the final outcome of the duel seems to have taken place consistently both in Rome and smaller towns like Pompeii and, far from capricious or chaotic, such a highly ritualised decision-making process probably contributed to a wider sense of cultural integration and political consensus within the community (Flaig, 2007).

This particular moment of gladiatorial combat may have been selected for placement near doorways – as opposed to, say, the image of gladiators standing at guard or in the middle of a fight – precisely because it implicated them in a moment of uncertainty. The protective power of these images was reactivated by pedestrians recalling past experiences at the arena, when the life of a gladiator had been spared – or not – and being briefly reminded, even if only subconsciously, of the potential for danger and threats ahead. This genre of paintings from Pompeii, forever suspended in dried plaster at transitional spaces that symbolised both vulnerability and changes in fortune, thus appears to be designed to maximise engagement with the viewer qua spectator – be they friend or foe – before inviting them to reconsider what exactly was going to happen next.

## Appendix: Paintings of gladiatorial combat in Pompeii

The entries below provide a catalogue of all gladiatorial paintings unearthed so far in Pompeian buildings,

along with a brief description of the spatial contexts and compositional schemes of each specimen. (The frescoes from the amphitheatre and from tombs are not included because their contexts are completely different, and they have been studied in greater detail.) This list builds on the detailed catalogue from Jacobelli’s 2003 monograph (pp.72–89), updated with supplementary material (e.g. Fröhlich, 1991, p.312; Osanna, 2019, pp.162–7) and several reinterpretations. Each entry records the location and the type of building if clear, with any traditional nomenclature, before summarising the position of the painting within each location, which moment in the gladiator duel is represented, and any further salient details about the surrounding decoration. For the sake of brevity, any establishment serving food or drink from a countertop with a wide doorway is referred to as a bar and readers are pointed in each case to the reference source with the most detailed description or complete bibliography, as well as one high-quality image where possible. The entries have been divided into three groups according to spatial and compositional criteria in common, as summarised below in tabular form (Fig. 6.3), then topographically by the conventional numbering system.

*Group 1: Paintings certainly near an entryway and showing the final phase of combat*

### **V.8 (bar with fresco of gladiator contest):**

originally beneath a staircase, in the interior corner on the walls immediately to the left as one enters, were painted at least two scenes in adjacent panels, each within red borders: a victorious gladiator and a defeated combatant, who has lost his shield and is signalling for clemency (*missio*); an umpire, probably attending to another duel (Osanna, 2019, pp.162–7, figs.7–9).

**VI.1 / VI.17? (house):** in the early nineteenth century Francesco Morelli painted in tempera a composite scene with a *lararium* on the left and two panels with gladiators to the right, labelling the whole page ‘at the northern gate of Pompeii’ and ‘in the atrium not far from it’ (i.e. the Porta Ercolano, since other gates to the north of the city had not been excavated yet). The larger painting is a figure with helmet, shield, and sword lunging towards another helmeted figure, who has lost his shield and is turned away, holding up his left hand in a signal of *missio*; it is difficult to discern details in the smaller panel, but a figure in a loin cloth is lunging forward, armed either with sword, shield, and helmet or with net and trident but no helmet (Baldassarre & Bragantini, 1995, p. 120).



Location of building	Type of building	Type of space	Near entryway?	Final phase of combat?	Grouped by category
I 3, 23	house?	peristyle	x	✓	3
I 4, 27	bar	?	?	?	2
I 7, 7	house	vestibule	✓	x	3
II 1, 13	house	façade	✓	?	2
II 2, 2-5	house	façade	✓	?	2
V 8	bar	front room	✓	✓	1
VI 1 / VI 17?	house	atrium	✓	✓	1
VII 4, 26	shop, house	cubiculum	x	?	3
VII 5, 14-15	shop, bar	façade	✓	✓	1
VIII 4, 4-49	house	peristyle	x	x	3
VIII 5, 37	house	atrium	✓	x	3
VIII 7, 24	house	peristyle	x	✓	3
IX 3, 13	shop, house	front room	✓	?	2
IX 9, 8	bar	front room	✓	✓	1
IX 9, d	house	façade, atrium	✓	?	2
IX 12, 7	bar	façade	✓	✓	1
VII 16, a	baths	vestibule	✓	✓	1

Figure 6.3: Summary of Pompeian buildings with paintings of gladiatorial combat.

**VII.5.14-15 (shop and bar; now Autogrill):** on the pier separating two entrances were painted two scenes from the same duel, long since lost: (1) two gladiators in the foreground at ‘the end of the duel’; (2) the same pair, only smaller, preparing for battle in the background, with the names *Tetraites* and *Prude(n)s* painted above (Fiorelli, 1861, pp.236–7 = *CIL* 4.538, no image). In still larger letters above were written again the same names, along with further information about the careers of these gladiators, who were evidently renowned throughout the Empire. In small red letters, Venus Pompeiana is invoked in a curse against anyone who would deface ‘this thing’ (*hoc*) – presumably the property more broadly, if not the mural, and another strong connection between tutelary divinities and a painting of gladiatorial combat.

**VII.16.a (Suburban Baths):** in the corridor connecting the changing rooms (*apodyterium*) to the rest of the bathing complex, several paintings of gladiators were found on either side of the doorway immediately to the west of this *apodyterium*, including a frieze with smaller figures and at least two larger duels, one of which must have taken place at the end of the battle because the figure is lying on the ground

(Jacobelli, 2005, pp.163–7; figs.1–6). The *apodyterium* was decorated with frescoes showing a great variety of erotic scenes, although the highly fragmentary nature of the gladiator paintings prevents reconstructing securely the composition of each duel and the overall decorative scheme.

**IX.9.8 (bar):** behind the marble counter on the left as one enters were painted two gladiators, apparently on an earlier layer of plaster that had been gouged with a pick in order to facilitate adhesion of a later layer: the victor, perhaps named in a fragmentary black text to the left, ‘holds out his shield, lowering it almost down to the ground, draws back his right hand next to his side, as if to strike the final blow, and turns his head back, no doubt towards the audience, to find out their decision concerning the fate of his fallen opponent’ (Mau, 1889, pp.29 = *CIL* 4.3789, no image).

**IX.12.7 (Tavern of Purpurio):** immediately to the right of the entryway was painted a ‘monochromatic red depiction of the final phase of a gladiatorial duel’, where the defeated combatant is shown disarmed, bleeding from his knee, and gesturing with his right hand (Fröhlich, 1991, pp.176, 339 = F71; Spinazzola, 1953, vol.1, figs. 211–14). The scene was one of a series

of panels belonging to a larger composition, each within a thick red border, including two large snakes flanking a circular altar and a sacrifice attended by the *Lares compitales* and Genius, as well as five figures immediately above a masonry altar immured at the intersection (probably the *vicomagistri* and a musician).

*Group 2: paintings perhaps near an entryway and showing the final phase of combat*

**I.4.27 (bar):** at the time of excavation no precise information was given about whether the image was from the bar, the smaller room at the rear, or the façade. The only description mentions 'a pair of gladiators fighting against each other', with spare details about their armature (Jacobelli, 2003, pp.73–4, 118, after Sogliano, 1879, no image).

**II.1.13 (house attached to bar II 1, 1):** on the exterior face of the wall to the left of the entrance was painted a scene on a brownish baseline against a white background: one person apparently with a long stick advancing towards two other people who were armed, i.e. the compositional schema of the umpire intervening at the end of a gladiatorial duel. Above the scene was a painting of four red shields (Fröhlich, 1991, p.312, no image).

**II.2.2-5 (House of Loreius Tiburtinus):** on the façade to the right of the rear entrance to a large garden, where the street broadens on the north side of the grand palaestra (II 7), was painted a long frieze against a yellow background, separated into panels by thick red borders, apparently including a victorious gladiator and a fallen combatant who had lost his shield, as well as other figures marching, perhaps in parade. Now all but lost (Spinazzola, 1953, vol. I, p.415; fig.479, of context only).

**IX.3.13 (shop and house):** on the western wall of the front room, on the left as one enters and just before a door leading from the shop into the residential atrium, the plaster had been painted with 'a genius flanked by Lares, the caricature of a man's head, and two gladiators in the act of fighting', all beneath a staircase leading up to a mezzanine (Fiorelli, 1861, pp.375–6, no image). No traces of decoration have survived.

**IX.9.d (house):** 'near the entrance, to the left, was painted on the outer wall, above a layer of lime, two gladiators fighting, now vanished', while in the atrium itself were apparently painted three further pairs of gladiators: 'two gladiators fighting' on the wall of a small chamber that extends into the western part of the atrium; 'another pair was painted higher up'; and 'another pair, completely armed and in the act of fighting, was painted on the north wall against a black

background on the northern wall' (Sogliano, 1889, p.130, no image). The specimens from inside the atrium appear to be on either side of the doorway leading to a triclinium, although excavation records differ and are not detailed enough to reconstruct precisely which moments from a duel or duels were portrayed. No traces of decoration have survived.

*Group 3: paintings in other locations and / or showing other compositions*

**I.3.23 (House of Anicetus):** on the western wall of the courtyard (N) were two paintings of gladiator duels, now lost, one on either side of the large riot scene. In each painting the contest has been decided, with the defeated combatant on their knees (Jacobelli, 2003, pp.72–4, 118; fig.60a–b).

**I.7.7 (House of the priest Amandus):** beneath the plaster facing on the right-hand wall of the long vestibule leading from the street to the atrium was a badly damaged frieze painted in monochromatic red, including a figure blowing a long horn; two combatants on horseback, armed with shields and lances; two combatants on foot, armed with helmets, shields, and swords; and labels in Oscan, most legibly '*Spartaks*' – all of which suggests a historical or military scene rather than the arena (Jacobelli, 2003, pp.75–6, 118; fig.62).

**VII.4.26 (shop and house):** a chamber off the atrium was evidently decorated at the time of excavation 'with the scene of a gladiatorial combat and more animals grappling with each other', although the fact that no trace remains today, along with the uncharacteristically brief description, may suggest that it was already badly damaged at the time of discovery (Fiorelli, 1861, p.216, no image).

**VIII.4.4-49 (House of Holconius Rufus):** on a pilaster at the intersection of the tablinum and peristyle was painted 'in red the name *P(rimigenius)*, followed by some letters almost completely erased, and below was a ship crudely painted in the same colour, and still lower a crude figure of a gladiator with rectangular shield, helmet, and sword' (CIL 4.728, no image). There is some ambiguity in the word 'dipinto', and this coarse ('rozza') and monochrome figure may not even have been a genuine fresco, painted onto fresh plaster by an artist, but rather added informally to the dry plaster at a later moment, not unlike a spontaneous graffiti (hence Langner, 2001, no.897), perhaps influenced by nearby images of animals in flight. Likewise, the description of the two pairs of gladiators recorded in room D of house V.3.4 reads more like a crude dipinto than a true fresco (pace Fröhlich, 1991, p.66, n.388).

**VIII.5.37 (House of the Red Walls):** painted on the tympanum of a lavishly decorated masonry lararium

in the atrium were 'gladiator weapons', including a crested helmet, greaves, shield, and a dagger, but no figure of a gladiator (Fröhlich, 1991, pp.291–2; Boyce, 1937, figs.31.1–2). At the time of excavation, six bronze statuettes (two Mercuries, two Lares, Apollo, and Hercules) were found on the lararium, along with a lamp.

**VIII.7.24 (House of the Sculptor):** on the eastern wall of a large peristyle garden area adjacent to the small theatre were paintings of a naval battle, various Nilotic scenes, and a duel between two gladiators armed with swords and rectangular shields, although the top half of the latter image had already been destroyed by the time of excavation (Maiuri, 1955, pp.65–80, pl.8.2). The figure at right appears to be unbalanced, which suggests a moment towards the end of the fight. The garden setting and exaggerated phalluses of the pygmies recall the tutelary guardian Priapus.

### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Jessica Hughes and the anonymous readers for invaluable suggestions. The Columbia University Center for Archaeology and Lance Jessup greatly improved earlier drafts of this work, but all errors remain the author's.

### Bibliography

- 1 Adams, J.N. (1987) *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, London, Duckworth.
- 2 Aldrete, G.S. (1999) *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome*, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- 3 Angelone, R. (1989) 'L'agenzia di un lanista in Pompei all'insegna di un famoso combattimento gladiatorio', *Atti Dell'Accademia Pontaniana*, vol.38, pp.339–59.
- 4 Baldassarre, I. and Bragantini, I. (1995) *Pompei: Pitture e Mosaici. Vol. 9: la documentazione nell'opera di disegnatori e pittori dei secoli XVIII e XIX*, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana.
- 5 Barton, C.A. (1993) *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- 6 Beard, M. (2008) *The Fires of Vesuvius: Pompeii Lost and Found*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- 7 Beard, M. (2015) *Laughter in Ancient Rome: On Joking, Tickling, and Cracking Up*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- 8 Benefiel, R.R. (2016) 'Regional Interaction' in A.E. Cooley (ed.) *A Companion to Roman Italy*, Wiley, pp.441–58.
- 9 Betz, H.D. (1986) *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- 10 Boyce, G.K. (1937) 'Corpus of the Lararia of Pompeii', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, vol.14, pp.5–112.
- 11 Corbeill, A. (2004) *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- 12 Coulston, J. (2009) 'Victory and defeat in the Roman arena: The evidence of gladiatorial iconography' in T. Wilmott (ed.) *Roman Amphitheatres and Spectacula: A 21st-Century Perspective: Papers from an International Conference Held at Chester, 16th–18th February, 2007*, Oxford, Archaeopress, pp.195–210.
- 13 Della Corte, M. (1965) *Case ed Abitanti di Pompei* (3rd edn), Naples, Faustino Fiorentino.
- 14 Dunbabin, K.M.D. (2016) *Theater and Spectacle in the Art of the Roman Empire*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- 15 Elia, O. (1975) 'La scultura pompeiana in tufo', *Cronache Pompeiane*, vol.1, pp.118–43.
- 16 Fagan, G. (2011) *The Lure of the Arena: Social Psychology and the Crowd at the Roman Games*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 17 Fiorelli, G. (1861) *Giornale degli Scavi di Pompei*, Naples, Stamperia della R. Università.
- 18 Flaig, E. (2007) 'Gladiatorial games: Ritual and political consensus' in R.E. Roth, J. Keller and E. Flaig (eds) *Roman by Integration: Dimensions of Group Identity in Material Culture and Text*, JRA Suppl. Ser., vol.66, Portsmouth, s.n., pp.83–92.
- 19 Flecker, M. (2015) *Römische Gladiatorenbilder: Studien zu den Gladiatorenreliefs der späten Republik und der Kaiserzeit aus Italien*, Wiesbaden, Ludwig Reichert.
- 20 Flower, H. (2017) *The Dancing Lares and the Serpent in the Garden: Religion at the Roman Street Corner*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- 21 Fröhlich, T. (1991) *Lararien- und Fassadenbilder in den Vesuvstädten: Untersuchungen zur 'volkstümlichen' pompeianischen Malerei*, Mainz, P. von Zabern.
- 22 Gager, J.G. (1992) *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

- 23 Hallett, J.P. (1977) 'Perusinae glandes and the changing image of Augustus', *American Journal of Ancient History*, vol.2, pp.151–71.
- 24 Hufschmid, T. (2009) *Amphitheatrum in Provincia et Italia: Architektur und Nutzung römischer Amphitheater von Augusta Raurica bis Puteoli*, 3 vols, Augusta Raurica.
- 25 Jacobelli, L. (2003) *Gladiatori a Pompei: protagonisti, luoghi, immagini*, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- 26 Jacobelli, L. (2005) 'Pitture con scene gladiatorie dalle Terme Suburbane di Pompei', in T. Ganschow and Matthias Steinhart (eds) *Otium: Festschrift für Volker Michael Strocka*, Remshalden, Greiner.
- 27 Jahn, O. (1855) 'Über den Aberglauben des bösen Blicks bei den Alten', *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-Historische Classe*, vol.7, pp.28–110.
- 28 Junkelmann, M. (2000) *Das Spiel mit dem Tod: So kämpften Roms Gladiatoren*, Mainz, P. von Zabern.
- 29 Kellum, B. (1999) 'The spectacle of the street' in B. A. Bergmann and C. Kondoleon (eds) *The Art of Ancient Spectacle*, New Haven, Yale University Press, pp.283–99.
- 30 Kellum, B. (2015) 'Weighing the Priapus painting at the House of the Vettii, Pompeii' in D. Dutsch and A. Suter (eds) *Ancient Obscenities: Their Nature and Use in the Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, pp.199–224.
- 31 Kyle, D.G. (1998) *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome*, London and New York, Routledge.
- 32 Langner, M. (2001) *Antike Graffitizeichnungen: Motive, Gestaltung und Bedeutung*, Wiesbaden, Ludwig Reichert.
- 33 Levi, D. (1941) 'The evil eye and the lucky hunchback' in R. Stillwell (ed.) *Antioch-on-the-Orontes III, The excavations 1937–1939*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, pp.220–32.
- 34 Ling, R. (1990) 'Street plaques at Pompeii' in M. Henig (ed.) *Architecture and Architectural Sculpture in the Roman Empire*, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph, vol.29, Oxford, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, pp.51–66.
- 35 Maiuri, A. (1957) 'Una nuova pittura nilotica a Pompei', *Atti della reale Accademia dei Lincei. Memorie della classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, pp.65–80.
- 36 Mau, A. (1889) 'Scavi di Pompei 1886–88. Insula IX, 7.' *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts* 4, pp.3–31.
- 37 Ogden, D. (2009) *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- 38 Ogle, M.B. (1911) 'The house-door in Greek and Roman religion and folk-lore', *The American Journal of Philology*, vol.32, no.3, pp.251–71.
- 39 Osanna, M. (2019) *Pompei. Il Tempo Ritrovato: Le Nuove Scoperte*, Milan, Rizzoli.
- 40 Pastor, S. (2011) 'The divinities of the world of the amphitheater in the Balkan-Danubian provinces: archaeological, epigraphic and iconographic evidences of the cult of Nemesis' *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol.62, pp.75–89.
- 41 Papini, M. (2004) *Munera Gladiatoria e Venationes nel Mondo delle Immagini*, Rome, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei.
- 42 Parker, A. (2018) 'The Bells! The Bells!' Approaching tintinnabula in Roman Britain and beyond' in A. Parker and S. McKie (eds) *Material Approaches to Roman Magic: Occult Objects and Supernatural Substances*, Oxford, Oxbow, pp.57–68.
- 43 Porstner, L. (2020) 'Boundaries, magic and popular religion in two mosaics from ancient Thysdrus' *New Classicists*, vol.2, pp.15–78.
- 44 Robert, L. (1940) *Les gladiateurs dans l'Orient grec*, Edouard Champion, Paris.
- 45 Sabbatini Tumolesi, P. (1980). *Gladiatorum Paria: Annunci di Spettacoli Gladiatorii a Pompeii*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.
- 46 Sogliano, A. (1879) *Le Pitture Murali Campane Scoperte negli Anni 1867–79*, Naples, F. Giannini.
- 47 Sogliano, A. (1921) 'Il primitivo ludo gladiatorio di Pompei', *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, ser.5, vol.30, pp.17–29.
- 48 Spinazzola, V. (1953) *Pompei alla luce degli scavi nuovi di Via dell'Abbondanza (anni 1910–1923)*, Rome, La Libreria dello Stato.
- 49 omei, M.A. (1991) 'Domus Tiberiana. Pitture con scene gladiatorie', *Bollettino di Archeologia*, vol.10, pp.57–64.
- 50 Varone, A. (2016) 'Newly discovered and corrected readings of iscrizioni "privatissime" from the Vesuvian region' in R. Benefiel and P. Keegan (eds) *Inscriptions in the Private Sphere in the Greco-Roman World*, Leiden, Brill, pp.113–30.
- 51 Ville, G. (1981) *La gladiature en Occident des origines à la mort de Domitien*, Rome, École française de Rome.
- 52 Waszink, J.H. (1954) 'Biothanati', *Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum*, vol.2, pp.391–4.
- 53 Weidlich, T. (1893) 'Aberglaube' in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, vol.1.1, coll.29–93.

- 54 Whitmore, A. (2017) 'Fascinating *fascina*: Apotropaic magic and how to wear a penis' in M. Cifarelli and L. Gawlinski (eds) *What Shall I Say of Clothes? Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Study of Dress in Antiquity*, Boston, Archaeological Institute of America, pp.47–65.
- 55 Wilburn, A. (2018) 'The archaeology of ritual in the domestic sphere: Case studies from Karanis and Pompeii' in A. Parker and S. McKie (eds) *Material Approaches to Roman Magic: Occult Objects and Supernatural Substances*, Oxford, Oxbow, pp.103–14.



# TRACING PROCESSION ROUTES FOR THE PRINCIPAL CULTS IN POMPEII

Ivo van der Graaff and Eric Poehler

## Abstract

*Pompeii preserves vivid representations of religious processions in frescoes painted on the Shop of the Carpenter's Procession and in the House of the Wedding of Hercules. Announcements for gladiatorial games as well as a funerary relief recovered from the necropolis at the Stabian gate attest to the presence of processions associated with festivities in the Amphitheatre and the Forum. A further inscription placed inside the Stabian gate describes a Via Pumpaiiana, presumably named for its role as a possible processional route (Greek pompé, procession). These glimpses into processional events suggest that vibrant displays were common in Pompeii, yet the routes that such processions took remain virtually unknown. Using evidence from inscriptions, visual culture, spatial analysis, and Roman religious traditions, this chapter is a preliminary attempt to gather the evidence for processional routes related to the principal cults in Pompeii. From this evidence, it proposes to chart a few tentative routes taken by public religious processions.*

**Keywords:** Pompeii, religious processions, Roman religion, urban layout, *ludi*, public cults

**Full text:** <https://openartsjournal.org/issue-10/article-7/>

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2021s07>

## Biographical note

Ivo van der Graaff is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of New Hampshire, Durham. He received his PhD in Art History from the University of Texas at Austin and a combined BA and MA degree in Mediterranean Archaeology from the University of Amsterdam. He co-directs and collaborates on projects examining the ancient Bay of Naples and Etruria.

Eric Poehler is Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He received a PhD and MA in Art History at the University of Virginia, an AM in Social Science (Anthropology) from the University of Chicago, and a BA in History and French at Bemidji State University. Poehler is co-director of several digital and fieldwork projects, including at Corinth, Pompeii, and Tharros (Sardinia).

Banner image: Detail from a garden painting, from the House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. (Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

## TRACING PROCESSION ROUTES FOR THE PRINCIPAL CULTS IN POMPEII

Ivo van der Graaff,  
University of New Hampshire  
and Eric Poehler,  
University of Massachusetts

In the last months of 1844, Francesco Avellino recovered a marble relief more than four meters in length that once belonged to a tomb façade just beyond Pompeii's Stabian gate (Fig. 7.1) (Emmerson, 2010, p.78; Avellino, 1845, pp.81–8). Rightly famous for the lower registers of this frieze showing both gladiatorial contests and animal hunts, the top register depicts the procession that preceded these events, en route, in all likelihood, to the Amphitheatre. Avellino identified the parade as a *pompa funebris* (a funerary parade) that would have carried the deceased to their tomb. The absence of a funerary bier, however, makes this assumption unlikely. Rather, it seems that the parade as depicted shows a *pompa* associated with the opening of gladiatorial *ludi* (games). In this procession, two lictors bearing staves walk before a pair of trumpeters, announcing the procession. Behind another attendant, four figures carry a *ferculum* with the image of two seated statues one of which is in the act of beating

an anvil. Next, a sign bearer, or perhaps two, precede a togate man who gestures back to a line of seven figures, six of whom appear to be carrying gladiator helmets, perhaps identifying them as combatants. A final trumpeter signals the end of the processional group, followed by a pair of fine horses and their grooms.

This picture of a noisy civic parade, which perhaps belonged to a tomb honouring Gnaeus Alleius Nigidius Maius outside of the Porta Stabia (Osanna, 2018, pp. 320–2), is complemented by an image of a religious procession painted on a narrow facade beside the Shop of the Carpenters' Procession (VI.7.8), discovered in 1825 (Fig. 7.2). The fresco is remarkable because it is a specific commission that depicts an idealised moment in a procession. The image depicts four men carrying a *ferculum* bearing a statue of Minerva, identified by the partial remains of the shield at her side. Other representations accompany Minerva on the *ferculum*, including two men using a planing tool on a board and an effigy of Daedalus overlooking his dead nephew, Perdix. The occasion depicted alludes to a moment in a procession to Minerva, perhaps during the *quinquatria*, her principle festival (Clarke, 2003, pp.85–7).

These two images provide diverse information on the character of processions and therefore are valuable for different reasons. The funerary relief not only offers specific details of the various individuals who participated, but also provides the Amphitheatre as an identifiable destination. It may even be possible to date the event to the last decades before the eruption. Based on size and find spot, Osanna (2018, pp.317–18) connects this relief to a recently discovered tomb with an inscription, the text of which leads him to date the

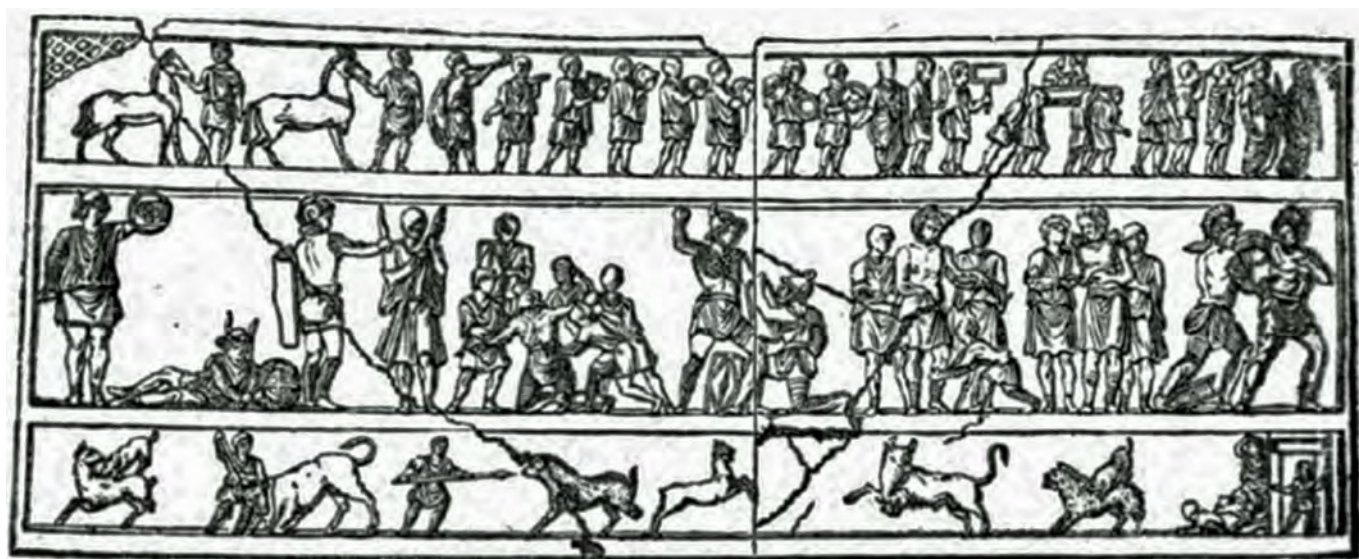


Figure 7.1: Relief showing procession from a tomb façade near to the Stabian gate. The *pompa* is in the upper register. The middle register shows a scene of gladiatorial combat whereas the lowest register shows an animal hunt. (Museo Archeologico Nazionale Napoli, Inventory number 6704. After Fiorelli, 1875, p. 401)



Figure 7.2: Procession of carpenters fresco from the façade of shop at VI.7.8–11. The partial statue of Minerva stands on the left identified by the shield by her left leg. (Museo Archeologico Nazionale Napoli Inventory number 8991. Photo: © Mondadori Portfolio / Bridgeman Images)

events depicted to immediately prior to the riot of 59 CE. More importantly, both images offer a glimpse of the paraphernalia associated with processions. They seem to have occurred mostly on foot with the only large, unwieldy objects being the *ferculum* or a cult image. Presumably, processions would have taken place on the wider roads along which viewers could gather to watch the parade. However, the relative lack of unwieldy paraphernalia in the images also suggests that patrons could choose smaller streets as part of their routes.

The images gesture towards the myriad civic processions that must have occurred in the daily life of Pompeii, but are invisible to us: wedding ceremonies and funeral cortèges (discussed by Campbell in this issue), *pompae teatrales*, *compitalia* processions, the

wagon trains of the *nundinae*, and voting day, when the population came to crowd the Forum, then filing out as individuals through the northeast exit of the *comitium* (Hartnett, 2017, p.67; Coarelli, 2000). In contrast, the fresco on the Shop of the Carpenters' Procession reveals the deity who was honoured, and perhaps those who celebrated her, but little about where this procession would have taken place. One might assume, by featuring Minerva, that her temple would be the festival's destination, and, by facing onto one of the broadest streets in the city (Via di Mercurio), that the fresco commemorates this spot as part of its route. Similarly, the frescoes on the Shop of the Four Divinities (IX.7.1), one depicting a crowd gathered around a *ferculum* carrying the goddess



Cybele and another with an image of Venus Pompeiana, have occasioned the identification of processions for the goddesses passing on the eastern tract of Via dell'Abbondanza (Hartnett, 2017, pp.277–8, following Spinazzola, 1953). These are, unfortunately, only educated guesses.

Despite the richness of evidence at Pompeii and the multitude of events that must have occurred annually, representations of actual processions from Pompeii and their routes are rare. Nevertheless, because many temples and sanctuaries and related performance spaces are identified within a nearly complete network of streets, it is possible to speculate with some confidence about the origins, destinations, and routes of religious processions at Pompeii even if we cannot 'see' them take place in the archaeological record. These opportunities for speculation, however, are circumscribed in time almost entirely to the final century of Pompeii's existence, since it is this period that provides the majority of the evidence to consider. This article examines the landscape of possibilities that Pompeii provided for the movement of religious

festivals, by first briefly discussing the basic information for sites of veneration, then taking up three specific examples in which the evidence for a particular route can be explored. In each instance, Pompeii's changing architectural and sacred landscape alters the possible routes, adding nuance – and clarity – to the image of these religious processions. Finally, the essay concludes with a brief discussion of the religious calendar.

### Primary cults at Pompeii

By the time of the eruption in 79 CE, several cults were well established at Pompeii. Some cults were present at the inception of the city and their sanctuaries remained linchpins in its urban development (D'Alessio, 2009). The sanctuaries of Athena/Minerva in the Triangular Forum and Apollo in the Forum are the oldest, with evidence of their presence stretching back to the sixth century BCE. Although the final architectural layout of these sanctuaries is relatively late in the spectrum of the history of the city, the temples and cult locations barely moved in centuries, thereby influencing the organisational layout of the city. It seems appropriate

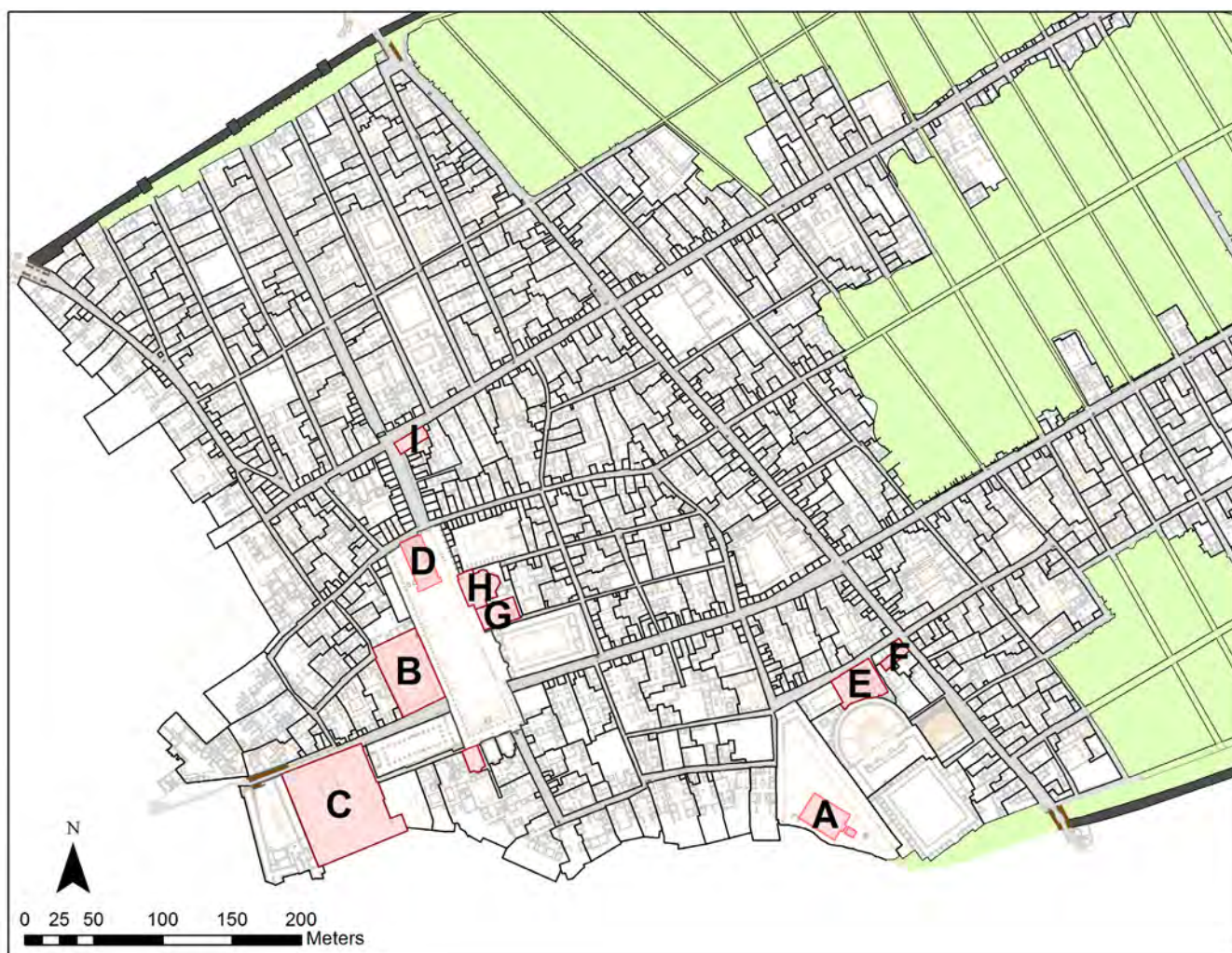


Figure 7.3: Map of sanctuary locations within Pompeii with locations marked: Sanctuary of Minerva (A); Temple of Apollo (B); Temple of Venus (C); Temple of Jupiter (D); Temple of Isis (E); Sanctuary of Asclepius (F); Sanctuary of Augustus (G); Imperial Cult Building (H); Temple of Fortuna Augusta (I). (Map by Eric Poehler and Ivo van der Graaff)

to assume that the main public cults would have had large-scale festivals associated with them. Indeed, this assumption is born out by evidence at Pompeii for *ludi* and processions for Venus, Minerva, Apollo, Jupiter, Isis, and possibly Cybele. The following section discusses the main cults found in the city and delineates their principle celebrations, but excludes Cybele both because her shrine remains unidentified and because her primary depiction, the fresco at the Shop of the Four Divinities (IX.7.1), shows a statue of Cybele resting on a *ferculum* surrounded by an entourage, suggesting a procession about to begin or having just ended rather than in motion (cf. Fig. 5.5 in Mungari & Wyslucha's essay in this issue).

### Athena/Minerva and Hercules

The locus of the sanctuary of Athena/Minerva and Hercules is amongst the oldest in the city. It lies perched at the southern end of the Triangular Forum, on the edge of the rocky spur that defines the city's southern edge, overlooking the sea (Fig. 7.3, A). Pompeians built the first temple in the sixth century BCE, laying out a peripteral edifice in the Doric order largely inspired by Greek prototypes. The building was subsequently overhauled and redecorated multiple times between the fifth and second centuries BCE (D'Alessio, 2009, pp.22–32). The temple hosted a hybrid cult that included both Minerva and Hercules in a pan-regional cult that found similar sanctuaries on the coast of the Sorrento peninsula and even as far away as Paestum (van der Graaff & Ellis, 2017, pp.292–9; van der Graaff, 2018, pp.213–18).

According to the Roman calendar that was presumably in use at Pompeii in the first century CE, the principal festival for Minerva was the *Quinquatria* which occurred for five days between 19 and 23 March to celebrate the construction of her temple on the Aventine in Rome. The exact features of this festival are obscure, though it seems that school children had five days off. The last four days featured gladiatorial contests. Another festival, the *Quinquatrus Minusculae*, featured a procession of flute players (Scullard, 1981, pp.91–2, 153, 186). Other minor festivals occurred on 19 June, marking the restoration of her temple on the Aventine, and 13 September in conjunction with Jupiter and Juno. Hercules, as one of the oldest foreign cults in Rome, had a celebration in his honour on 12 August that included a public banquet (Scullard, 1981, p.171).

### Apollo

The sanctuary dedicated to Apollo located on the western side of the Forum is another of the earliest cult sites at Pompeii (Fig. 7.3, B). Unlike the Greek style adopted for the Temple of Minerva, the Temple of Apollo had a distinct Italic character with a typical high podium and frontal axial design. The recovery of bucchero pottery in votive pits associated with the sanctuary suggest an Etruscan origin to the cult that must have formed in the area during the sixth century BCE. Pompeians built a new temple in the third century BCE with further refinements including construction of a portico that regulated access from the Forum in the second century BCE (De Caro, 1986, pp.8–13, D'Alessio, 2009, pp.8–20; disputed by Carroll & Godden, 2000, p.753). In its final form, the precinct featured a principal access point from the Via Marina to the south, a street that connected the Forum to other principal public buildings in the area such as the temple of Venus and the Basilica. At the time of the eruption, the pavement of the Via Marina featured marble inserts, suggesting its importance in the religious and administrative landscape of Pompeii.

The *Ludi Apollinares* feature as the principal festival dedicated to Apollo which took place for eight days between 6 and 13 June. The games were among the most popular in Rome, featuring two days of chariot races and six days of theatrical performances. The festival does not seem to have included gladiatorial contests except for *venatio* games (animal hunts), presumably held in conjunction with the chariot races (Scullard, 1981, p.160). Another sacred day for Apollo occurred on 23 September in conjunction with the dedication of his temple in Rome.

### Venus

The shrine dedicated to Venus is another landmark in the urban layout of Pompeii, standing on the southwestern corner of the city, overlooking the port on the estuary of the river Sarno from a cliff some thirty metres high (Fig. 7.3, C). Cult traces stretch back to the Samnite period (fifth to early first century BCE) when Pompeians identified her with the goddess Mefitis Fysica, who had strong indigenous associations. The foundation of Pompeii as a colony under Sulla (c.80 BCE) marks her metamorphosis into Venus, when a new sanctuary, later expanded by Augustus and again in the post-earthquake period, would take up a large portion of Pompeian real estate (D'Alessio, 2009, pp.39–41;

see Carroll, 2010, p. 74; as well as Battiloro & Mogetta, 2018, pp. 1–6, who dispute this chronology).

The main Roman festival dedicated to Venus was the *Veneralia* which occurred on 1 April. Ovid describes how the festival included the ritual washing of her cult statue and its ornamentation with myrtle garlands. The festival also included the men's baths, where women would wash and purify themselves (Ovid *Fasti* 4, 155). In Rome, Venus found further associations with the *Ludi Victoriae Caesaris*, from 20 to 30 July, which were initiated by Julius Caesar after a vow made at the battle of Pharsalus. Venus in her guise as *Victrix* associated with her temple at the Theatre of Pompey had a festival on 12 August. She also featured prominently at the *Vinalia* on 23 April and 19 August. The completion of the temple of *Venus Genetrix* gave the goddess a festival day on 26 September. However, there is no suggestion of an elaborate procession involving Venus associated with these festivals (Scullard, 1981, pp. 96–7, 106, 167, 177).

## Jupiter

The Temple of Jupiter located at the northern end of the Forum housed a key public cult in the city (Fig. 7.3, D). According to Filippo Coarelli and Fabrizio Pesando, the cult of Jupiter was introduced to Pompeii in the sixth century BCE, as evidenced by a Tuscan column embedded into a later wall of the House of the Etruscan Column (VI.5.17) (2011). This cult would find its final home in the Temple of Jupiter in the Forum, built in the late second century BCE and remodelled with the arrival of the colonists (D'Alessio, 2009, pp. 44–55; Richardson, 1988, pp. 138–45). We have no direct evidence for any processions related to Jupiter, but a road named *Via Iuviana* (Jupiter's street) known from the inscription recovered at the Stabian gate suggests that it may have played a role in a related procession. It is likely that the space of the Forum would have acted as the background for any processions associated with the cult.

The *Ludi Romani* dedicated to Jupiter occurred between 5 and 19 September. The celebrations were among the most elaborate in Rome featuring a long procession between the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline Hill and the Circus Maximus. The procession is too long to describe in detail here, but it featured youths on horseback, charioteers, and multiple cult statues of divinities carried on *fercula*. The games included both *Ludi Circensis* (chariot races and gladiatorial games) as well

as *Ludi Scaenici* (theatre performances) (Scullard, 1981, pp. 183–5). The *Ludi Capitolini* (Capitoline games) in honour of Jupiter began on 14 October and lasted for sixteen days, but their staging seems somewhat inconsistent. Another festival day in honour of Jupiter was set on 13 November during the *Ludi Plebei*.

## Isis

The Temple of Isis stands in the theatre district, not far from the sanctuary of Minerva (Fig. 7.3, E). The Egyptian cult arrived at Pompeii around 100 BCE, presumably finding a location for rituals at the current site. Its final architectural form is the result of post-earthquake reconstruction (D'Alessio, 2009, pp. 72–78; Richardson, 1988, p. 282, n. 17). The location of the shrine adjacent to the theatre has occasioned the theory that it was part of a major temple-theatre complex like those dedicated to Fortuna at Praeneste and Hercules at Tibur (Gasparini, 2013, p. 194). Although direct evidence that the shrine played an analogous role in the religious landscape in Pompeii is missing, the temple was undoubtedly in an important position, located just east of the Triangular Forum where spectators approaching the theatre district from the northwest would have seen it, even if in passing.

The cult of Isis was a mystery religion and not a public cult, meaning that we know relatively little about the festivals associated with the goddess because many rites were known only to the initiates. Romans were at best ambivalent toward Isis, with her cult outlawed in the late Republic and early Empire. Her principal festivals were the *Navigium Isidis* held on 5 March, the *Lychnapsia* held on 12 August, and the *Inventio Osiridis* celebrated between 28 October and 3 November. The *Navigium Isidis* relates to Isis as protectress of navigation. The festival marked the beginning of the sailing season and it involved carrying a model ship loaded with offerings from her temple to the sea where it was then set to the waves. The *Lychnapsia* was a celebration held on the birthday of Isis where worshippers would turn on lights at night to mark the five epagomenal days of the Egyptian calendar. The details of the festival are obscure, but it seems that celebrations occurred on the fourth day to mark the birthday of Isis. It was adopted in the Roman calendar in the first century BCE. The *Inventio Osiridis* celebrated the death and resurrection of Osiris with apparent festivities also taking place in the streets (Petersen, 2016, p. 6; Salem, 1937, pp. 165–7).

## Asclepius

A sanctuary dedicated to Asclepius lies along the Via Stabiana just to the northeast of the Large Theatre and adjacent to the Temple of Isis (Fig. 7.3, F). The small shrine was composed of an *aedes* located at the back of a rectangular precinct. A large altar was erected in the sanctuary's front room and a public fountain (without basin) stood on the curb, on axis with the altar and *aedes*. The style of its construction – blocks of *opus vittatum* quoining stones in *opus quasi-reticulatum* – has led Stefano De Caro to date in the sanctuary to not earlier than the end of the second century BCE (2007, p.79; D'Alessio, 2009, pp.58–64).

In Rome, Asclepius had a festival on 1 January that celebrated his arrival and the construction of a temple on the Tiber Island. The details of this festival remain obscure perhaps because this was also inauguration day for new consuls and people took less notice of it (Scullard, 1981, pp.55–6). The limited size of the building at Pompeii might suggest that Asclepius was a private rather than a public cult. Nevertheless, its prominent location and public amenities indicate that it was an important feature in the religious landscape.

## Imperial cult

A dramatic shift in the religious landscape of Pompeii occurred in the imperial period. The eastern side of the Forum would become the site of imitation and veneration of the imperial family. The Eumachia building, for example, is argued to mirror the form of the Porticus Liviae (Richardson, 1978), while the next two buildings to the north – the sanctuary of Augustus (Fig. 7.3, G) and the so-called Imperial Cult Building (Fig. 7.3, H) – are generally agreed to be dedicated to the emperor's veneration, even if they have resisted secure identification. Even the Macellum features a *sacellum* with statuary of the imperial family (Small, 1996). Undoubtedly, these buildings functioned as the locus for festivals related to imperial birthdays and any associated processions and games that may have taken place, likely also utilising the ample space that the Forum provides.

The imperial cult would also feature prominently in the temple dedicated to Fortuna Augusta commissioned by Marcus Tullius in the Augustan period (Fig. 7.3, I). The structure stands on private land at the busy intersection of the Via della Fortuna and the Via del Foro, putting it on axis with the cult buildings erected on the eastern side of the Forum (CIL X 820;

CIL X 821). Indeed, a brick colonnade, which may have preceded the temple, extends the porticoed space of the Forum up to the temple. Additionally, the wide, paved area of Via del Foro, although somewhat narrowed by the new temple, could easily have accommodated a large congregation attending festivals (Westfall, 2007, p.139, n.11; Van Andringa, 2015, pp.110–112). Presumably this was also the locus for the departure or arrival of processions dedicated to the emperor Augustus in a route that probably included the nearby Forum. Any festival connected to the imperial cult must have occurred on days important to the ruler in power. The birthday of the emperor was generally considered a public holiday. The extent of any associated celebrations remains unclear, but it seems safe to assume that processions took place in his honour.

## Processions

Although there is ample evidence for cult activity, there is almost no evidence for the particular routes that religious processions took across Pompeii. In fact, despite knowing the potential origin and/or destination of many hypothetical processions, we lack any source that tells us how a religious group traversed the city between these points on the map. On the other hand, the evidence we do have – a funerary inscription, a fresco, a marble relief, and an evolving architectural landscape – does permit us to speculate with some confidence and circumscribe some possible paths for processions. Like the marble relief and painted fresco that introduced this essay, the following discussions both offer opportunities to consider the specific, if incomplete, evidence for three religious processions at Pompeii and stand in for those many processions for which there is no evidence at all.

## Festival of Apollo

The first procession we can locate is a series of parades held in honour of Apollo and commemorated on the funerary inscription of Aulus Clodius Flaccus, who held his political offices in the final decade of the first century BCE (Castrén, 1975, p.155; Franklin, 2001, p.45; see also Mugnari & Wyslucha in this issue). According to his funerary epitaph, Flaccus celebrated the *Ludi Apollinares* twice in association with his election to *duumvir* (CIL X 1074d (ILS 5053 (4)):

A CLODIVS A F  
 MEN FLACCVS II VIR I D TER  
 QVINQ  
 TRIB MIL A POPVLO  
 PRIMO DVOMVIRATV APOLLINARIB IN FORO POMPAM  
 TAVROS TAVRO<sub>CE</sub>NTAS SVCCVRSORES PONTARIOS  
 PARIA III PVGILES CATERVARIOS ET PYCTAS LVDOS  
 OMNIBVS ACRVAMATIS PANTOMIMISQ OMNIBVS ET PYLADE ET  
 HS n ((I)) IN PVBLICVM PRO DVOMVIRATV.  
 SECVNDO DVOMVIRATV QUINQ APOLLINARIBVS IN FORO  
 POMPAM TAVROS SVCCVRSORES PVGILES  
 CATERVARIOS POSTERO DIE SOLVS IN SPECTACVLIS ATLETAS  
 PAR XXX GLAD PAR V ET GLADIAT PAR XXXV ET  
 VENATION TAVROS TAVRO<sub>CE</sub>NTAS APROSVRSOS  
<sub>CE</sub>TERA VENATIONE VARIA CVM COLLEGA.  
 TERTIO DVOMVIRATV LVDOS FACTIONE PRIMA  
 ADIECTIS ACRVAMATIS CVM COLLEGA

Aulus Clodius Flaccus, son of Aulus, Tribe Menenia, Duovir three times (once as Quinquennial), Military Tribune elected by the People. In his first term, at the Apollo Games (first half of July) in the Forum (he presented) a Procession, bullfights, bullbaiting, ..... boxers and games with all the usual appurtenances and pantomimes and Pylades, and (spent) 10,000 HS on the public for his duumvirate. In his second (Quinquennial) term, at the Apollo Games in the Forum he presented a procession, bullfights,....boxers ; on the next day he alone put on at the spectacles 30 pairs of athletes, 5 pairs of gladiators, and with his colleague he presented 25 pairs of gladiators and the animal hunts, bullfighting, bull-baiting, wild boars, bears and other animals in various hunts. In his third term along with his colleague he presented games with the appropriate accompaniments? in the first round?

(Adams, 2010)

The *ludi* would almost certainly have taken place during the official festivities dedicated to Apollo on the Roman calendar and we should imagine that Flaccus organised the processions to be highly visible events. They must have included all of the actors, athletes, animals, and, in its second iteration, gladiators that participated in the subsequent athletic and theatrical events (Sabbatini Tumolesi, 1980, pp.18–21).

Although the inscription does not reveal the route, there are some architectural clues to follow including the Forum as a specific location where a procession occurred (Fig. 7.4, blue line). For example, because the Temple of Apollo is a likely destination for the procession, its position at the south end of the Forum should suggest that the procession's origin was somewhere to the north, allowing the length of the

Forum to be used as a parade route. Certainly, the wide surface of the Via del Foro (Fig. 7.4, A) arriving at the Forum from the north would have provided an ample staging ground, if not a route of its own, supporting Carroll William Westfall's supposition that processions occurred on this street. Conversely, the Temple of Fortuna Augusta (Fig. 7.4, B) was not yet completed, or perhaps even started, when Flaccus first held his celebrations, the date of which we can estimate to have been in the last decade(s) of the first century <sub>BCE</sub> based on this third duumvirate having been in 2/1 <sub>BCE</sub> (Franklin, 2001, pp.23–5, 45); Ball & Dobbins, 2017, pp.487–93).

This final point reminds us that the architectural arrangement of the Forum at this time would have afforded different opportunities than we see in the plan of 79 <sub>CE</sub>. The most recent research from the Pompeii

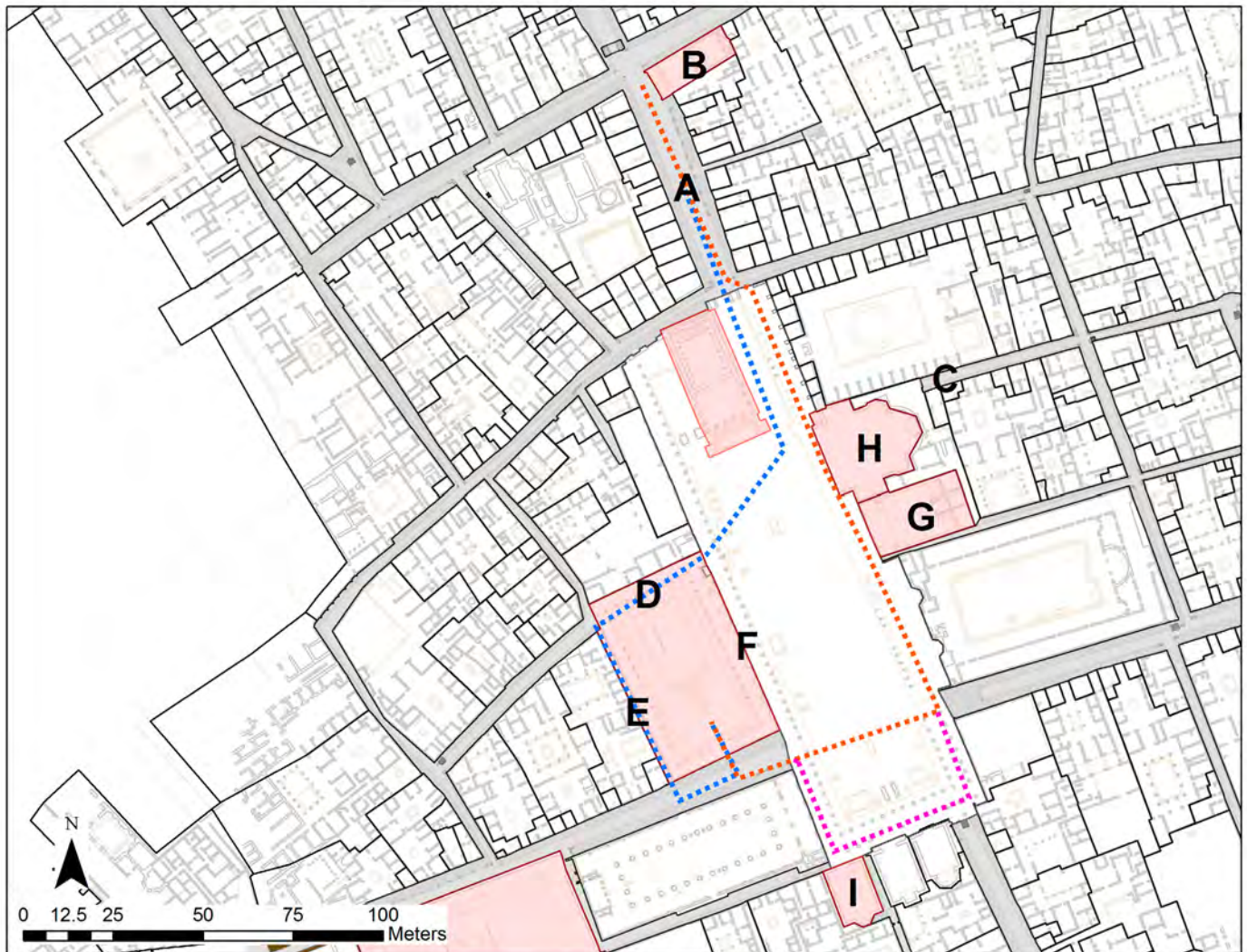


Figure 7.4: Possible routes of the Ludi Apollinares procession. The blue line shows a possible early route before the expansion of the Temple of Apollo. The red line, and its pink extension, mark possible routes after the expansion of the Temple of Apollo and the construction of the Sanctuary to Augustus (G), the Imperial Cult Building (H), and the possible Augusteum (I). Architectural landmarks are marked: Via del Foro (A), Temple of Fortuna Augusta (B), Vicolo del Balcone Pensile (C), closed portion of the Vicolo del Gallo (D), street closed by the extension of the temple of Apollo (E), openings between the Temple of Apollo and the Forum (F), Sanctuary to Augustus (G), Imperial Cult Building (H), and Augusteum (I) (Map by Eric Poehler and Ivo van der Graaff)

Forum Project describes the changes to the Forum in the imperial period, which includes the occlusion of several streets by new buildings on three sides of the Forum. For example, when Flaccus staged his first procession, at least one of the streets on the east side of the Forum, Vicolo del Balcone pensile (Fig. 7.4, C), was still connected to the Forum, offering another point from which a procession (or parts thereof) might have entered. The final occlusion of Vicolo degli Scheletri at the Forum seems to have occurred after the 63 CE earthquake, though the street was narrowed significantly already in the Augustan era by the sanctuary of Augustus (Fig. 7.4, G) and the Eumachia Building, which seems to have been closed only after the earthquake of 63 CE (Dobbins, 1994, pp. 661–8). Across the Forum, Larry F. Ball and John J. Dobbins

hypothesised another street once met the space from the west (Ball and Dobbins, 2013, p.477; 2017, pp.470–72, 476–78), extending the Vicolo del Gallo (Fig. 7.4, D). The subsequent expansion of the Apollo sanctuary to the north and west at c.10 BCE came at the expense of this street to the north of the sanctuary, as well as another street along its western side (Fig. 7.4, E), the southern extension of Vicolo Storto Nuovo. The prior existence of these streets offered the possibility for Flaccus' first parade to partially circumambulate the sanctuary before entering from the southern entrance on Via Marina (Dobbins et al., 1998).

Although only a hypothetical route, its existence was surely foreclosed by the expansion of the Apollo sanctuary. But, when Pompeian architects close a door, they open a window: the sanctuary's new eastern

wall was rebuilt in the Augustan era as a series of widening piers that would have permitted a large number of spectators in the Forum to see into the sanctuary without having to crowd the space itself (Fig. 7.4, F) (Ball & Dobbins, 2013, p.477; 2017, pp.470–2, 476–8). Later celebrations of the *Ludi Apollinares*, if they continued to feature processions through the Forum (Fig. 7.4, red line), would have had new opportunities to structure their route based on new developments in and around the area. For example, after its construction c.3 CE (Franklin, 2001, p.28), the Temple of Fortuna Augusta (Fig. 7.4, B) marked an appropriate starting point for processions during the late Augustan age (and later), solidifying the origin point suggested earlier. Moreover, the addition of the sanctuary of Augustus (Fig. 7.4, G) and, two generations later, the Imperial Cult Building (Fig. 7.4, H), might have drawn any procession down the eastern colonnade. From here,

the procession would turn west across the Forum, or possibly continue around the southern colonnade (Fig. 7.4, pink line), if Lawrence Richardson, Jr. (1988, pp.269–73) is correct in identifying one of the buildings along the Forum's southern end as an *Augusteum* (Fig. 7.4, I). By either route, the procession would next meet Via Marina's broad, decorative pavement, likely resurfaced as part of the Venus temple's renovation, and the door to the Apollo sanctuary.

### Venus, Hercules, and Isis

Another glimpse of religious processions at Pompeii comes from a fresco within a large triclinium facing the peristyle in the House of the Wedding of Hercules (VII.9.47). The upper register of this Fourth Style fresco shows the arrival of a procession led by the goddess Isis at the Temple of Venus and the departure of a procession for Hercules on the occasion of his

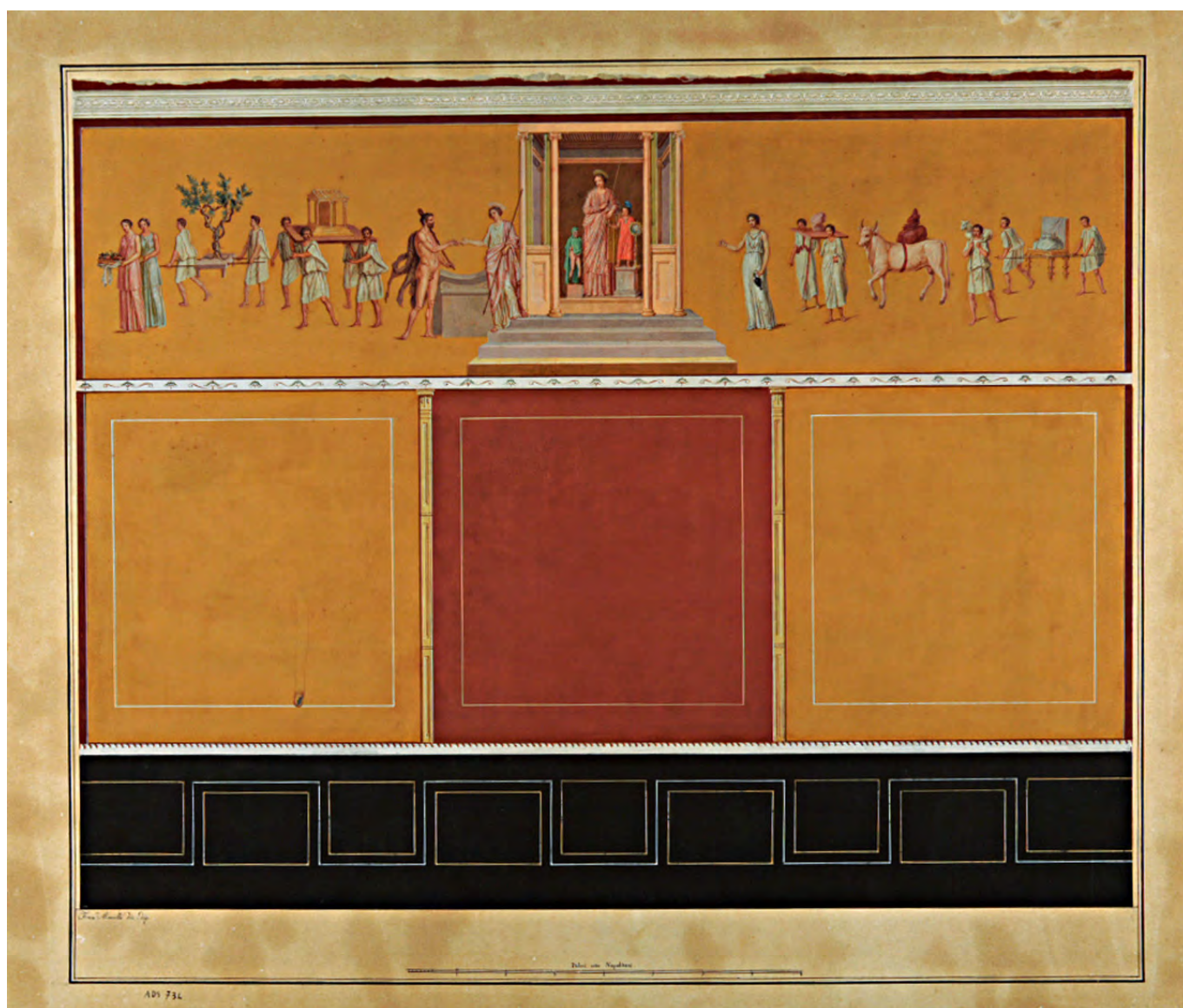


Figure 7.5: Francesco Morelli, Fresco of the Wedding of Hercules procession from House VII.9.47 (Parete IV Stile), mid-19th century, tempera drawing, 56.5cm x 67.3cm. (Source: Archivio dei Disegni della Soprintendenza Archeologica di Napoli 734. Retrieved from CulturalItalia on 03/12/2020 under Creative Commons Licence oai:oaicat.iccd.org:@ICCD3725544@)

Wedding to Hebe (Fig. 7.5). Venus is identifiable within the *aedes* by her disposition and attendants (Eros and Priapus), while Hercules and Isis are identified by the attributes they carry with them, a club and sistrum, respectively. Elements borne by their entourages also implicate these deities (Marcattili, 2002, pp.320–2; 2006, pp.56–8). Accordingly, these processions can be identified as the festival of *Hercules Invictus* and *Venus Victrix* as well as the *Lychnapsia*, a nighttime celebration of Isis' birth, both of which occurred on the 12 August (Marcattili, 2002, pp.320–1). Gasparini connects these events to similar celebrations in Rome, which further commemorated the dedication of Pompey's theatre and the rededication of Hercules' temple in the Forum Boarium (Gasparini, 2013, p.191).

With a temple attested at Pompeii to each of the deities, it seems possible to identify not only the points of origin and destination for these processions, but also their sequence in time (Fig. 7.6). Thus, the procession of Hercules (Fig. 7.6, blue line) would likely begin at the so-called Doric Temple in the Triangular Forum (Fig. 7.6, A) during the day, while the procession of Isis (Fig. 7.6, red line) would start from her temple (Fig. 7.6, B), only 150 metres walking distance to the northeast, later that night as part of the ritual associated with the *Lychnapsia* (a festival of lamps). Once reaching the entrance to the Triangular Forum, both processions would have taken the same route to the Venus temple: north along the wide *Via dei Teatri*, then west along *Via dell'Abbondanza* (Fig. 7.6, C), finally crossing the Forum onto *Via Marina* (Fig. 7.6, D) to enter the sanctuary of Venus (Fig. 7.6, E). Along this route in 79 CE, the processions would have encountered surfaces of increasing quality, from the rough and worn pavement of *Via dei Teatri* to the smooth paving stones on *Via dell'Abbondanza*, to the new travertine slabs in the Forum, and finally to the fresh, marble flecked surface of *Via Marina* ending at the sanctuary of Venus. Indeed, the western section of *Via dell'Abbondanza* was identified by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill as a processional route by the quality of its road surfaces and supposed moral character of its architectures, which not only included a monumental gateway and fine tufa facades, but also lacked bars, brothels, and noxious industries (1995, pp.46–51; 2008, p.281). Although the chronological (e.g. recent repaving) and economic (e.g. real estate values) factors likely had a greater impact on the character of this street than deliberate efforts at moral zoning, few streets could better serve the needs of religious processions than western *Via dell'Abbondanza* (Poehler & Crowther, 2018, pp.590–4; Ellis, 2018, pp.95–8).

Whatever the moral status of this route, in 79 CE the Temple of Venus was undergoing substantial renovations

following the earthquake(s) of 63 CE, and any processions at this time would have entered a builder's yard (Carroll, 2010, pp.90–2) rather than a place of veneration. Indeed, the cult statue was never found in the excavations. Where, then, did the processions find Venus in the final years of the city, if not at her temple by the Marina Gate? The answer may lie in the statuary recovered from the sanctuary of Aesclepius (Fig. 7.6, F). The main sculptures, a bearded male figure and a draped female one, have been conventionally identified as Asclepius and Hygeia since their examination by Johann Joachim Winckelmann in the eighteenth century (D'Alessio, 2009, pp.65–7). Stylistically, however, these statues are notably asynchronous, with the male figure dating to the third century BCE and the female to the Sullan era. In addition, it is often overlooked that these were not the only statues recovered from the sanctuary: Fiorelli recorded finding a small bust of a child wearing a *bullā* (Fiorelli 1860 I, I, p. 195), and Bonucci reports that a statue of Priapus stood between the figures identified as Asclepius and Hygeia (Bonucci 1825, p. 37). For De Caro (2007, pp.78–9) this incongruence suggests that the statues representing Jupiter, Juno, and Athena were moved here after the earthquake, the former two presumably from the Capitolium and the latter from the Triangular Forum. Careful scrutiny of the statuary by Francesco Marcattili may suggest another answer, though not exactly the one he arrived at. For Marcattili, the smaller sculptures suggest a reinterpretation of the female figure, which together demonstrate the presence of Venus and her attendants at the Asclepius temple on the *Via Stabiana*. He goes on to argue that the *aedes* was a second shrine to Venus where Sullan colonists fused the cult with an earlier shrine to *Magna Mater*. The *aedes* in the fresco in the House of the Wedding of Hercules is also critical to his argument because the Temple of Venus and the Temple of Asclepius have a nearly identical footprint, despite their difference in size (Marcattili, 2002, p.328; 2006, p.58). While it is impossible to ignore the evidence of additional statuary, it is equally difficult to overlook the coincidence that the female figure's Sullan date is equivalent to the colonial reconstruction of her temple near the Forum. That coincidence therefore suggests that the Venus statue was produced in order to stand in her temple by the Forum. One also cannot ignore the presence of the statue of Asclepius, which is equally out of place if this were Venus' temple alone. Therefore, it seems best to suggest that Venus and her attendants were moved to the Asclepius temple for safekeeping during her temple's renovation prior to 79 CE.



Although either temple matches the depiction in the House of the Wedding of Hercules' fresco, if our theory about the temporary movement of Venus to the Temple of Asclepius on the Via Stabiana were correct, then the subsequent processions of Hercules and Isis after the earthquake of 63 CE would have been significantly truncated. Instead of a parade more than 500m in length along grand streets and across the Forum, these annual processions would have been reduced by more than half in distance along a single wide street, arriving at a sanctuary that could allow only a fraction of the spectators possible at the Venus temple, even when overflowing into the street beyond.

### Minerva and Hercules

The Asclepius temple has acted as a cornerstone in a series of earlier debates about a procession involving Hercules and his shared cult space with Minerva. The reconstruction of this procession relies on an

inscription and various authors who, writing in late antiquity, describe how Pompeii received its name from the triumph (*pompé* in Greek) which Hercules celebrated as he led Geryon's cattle to Eurystheus from Spain (Servius ad Aen. 7.662; Solin. 2.3; Mart. Cap. 7.642; Isid. Etym. 15.1.51). During the trek, Hercules chose to rest the cattle at the site that worshippers would later mark with the Temple to Hercules and Minerva built in the Triangular Forum. To honour these deities, the Pompeians held a yearly procession that presumably proceeded to the temple at the Triangular Forum (Fig. 7.7, A). In 1851, the so-called Road Maker's tablet was recovered inside the Porta Stabia (Fig. 7.7, B) and revived interest in this procession by not only giving a name to the processional route, *Via Pumpsaiiana*, but also by making reference to Jupiter Meilichios, who was at that point identified at the Asclepion on Via Stabiana (Fig. 7.7, C).

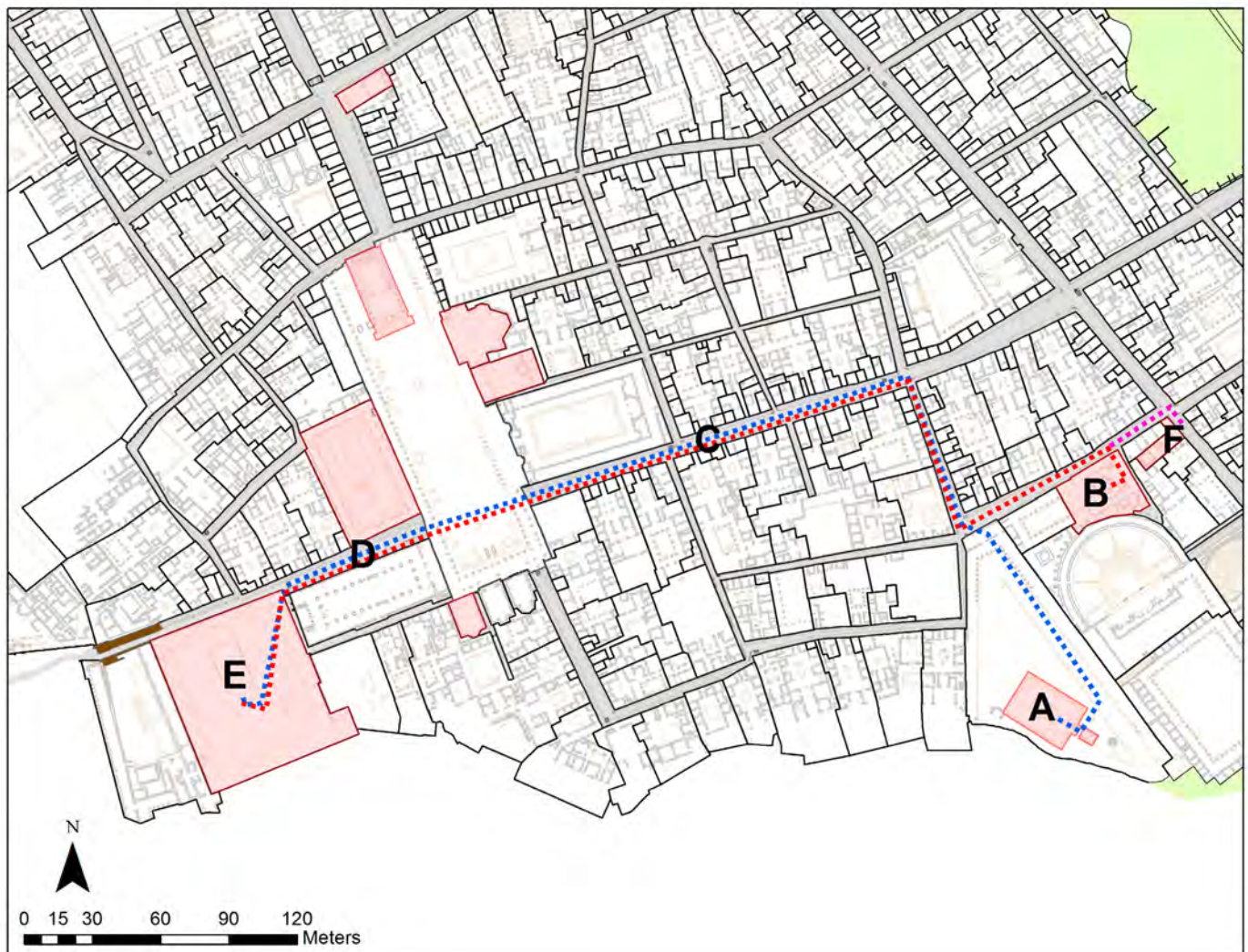


Figure 7.6: Possible routes of the Hercules (blue line) and the Isis (red line) processions. The pink line denotes the possible new route after the earthquake of 63 CE. The architectural landmarks are: Sanctuary of Minerva-Hercules/Triangular Forum (A), Temple of Isis (B), Via dell'Abbondanza (C), Via Marina (D), Sanctuary of Venus (E), and Sanctuary of Asclepius (F). (Map by Eric Poehler and Ivo van der Graaff)

The most recent translation is as follows:

M (?). Suttius, son of M (?), N (?) Pontius, son of M (?) [?], aediles, demarcated this street until the Lower [street] of Stabiae. The street has been demarcated by ten perticae. The same [men] have demarcated the street of Pompeii by three perticae, until the Temple (?) of Jupiter Milichius. These streets and the street of Jupiter and the dekkviarim [-street], they have built [them] on the behalf of the magistrate of Pompeii, imaden. The same aediles have approved.

(Dupraz, 2011, p.103)

Fixing these points in the landscape encouraged Antonio Sogliano (1918, pp.178–80; 1937, pp.170–2), Italo Sgobbo (1942, pp.26–7), and later others (e.g. Onorato, 1951, pp.251–2, D’Alessio, 2009, pp.65–7) to propose a processional route from outside the city gate up to this temple, then turning west toward the temple in the Triangular Forum (Fig. 7.7, blue line).

A counterargument to this route for the procession came from Stefano De Caro who pioneered the argument that the Temple of Jupiter Meilichios is not inside the city but rather an extramural sanctuary located at the Fondo Iozzino (De Caro, 1991, pp. 39–41). If this is correct, then one is inclined to make the *Via Pumpaiiana* an external road (see Poehler & van der Graaff, 2022, *forthcoming*). The extramural location of the sanctuary, however, does not necessarily impact the idea that the *Via Stabiana* is an important street *within* Pompeii, and one that could have been part of a processional route for Minerva in the third century BCE. Recently, Eric Poehler and Benjamin Crowther (2018) have documented the *Via Stabiana*’s history of paving, demonstrating the existence of a stone pavement dating to as late as the first century BCE, slightly further north than the Temple of Asclepius (Fig. 7.7, D). They argue not only that *Via Stabiana* was the *Via Pumpaiiana*, but also that the inscription documents the paving of the entire length of this street, from Porta di Stabia to Porta del Vesuvio (2018, pp.588–90). For the present discussion, it is enough to note that one of the first stone-paved streets in Pompeii, if not the first, demonstrates the elevated status of the route between the Porta Stabia and the street leading to the Temple of Hercules and Minerva.

While these factors present *Via Stabiana* as a route of some importance in the city, the shrine to Minerva inside the Porta Stabia demonstrates the presence of the goddess along this route and supports the idea that a procession between the gate and the temple occurred, but was (or had evolved to be) in celebration of Minerva rather than Hercules. Two niches were carved into the blocks on the eastern side of the corridor that cut through the earthen defensive agger and undoubtedly accommodated a prophylactic cult

dedicated to protecting this dangerous and liminal space. At the time of excavation, the upper of the two niches preserved plaster with a graffito mentioning PATRVA in an apparent reference to Minerva Patrua (CIL IV, 5384; also Fiorelli, 2001, p.29; Calderini, 1924, p.87). Recent excavations indicate that traces of the cult stretch back into the late fourth century BCE, demonstrating these activities were associated with the first construction and each subsequent modification of the gate (van der Graaff and Ellis, 2017, pp.283–92; van der Graaff, 2018, pp.205–13).

The presence of the cult of Minerva at the Porta Stabia suggests that it was the locus or a point of passage for a single or even multiple processions. One such route may have involved a circumambulation of the city in a lustral procession to cleanse the city that left shrines and references to Minerva at the Porta Nola, Vesuvio, and Porta Marina. The Osco-Sabellic Iguvine tablets, dating between the third and first centuries BCE, describe a similar kind of procession at the city of Gubbio, which journeyed to every gate to perform specific animal sacrifices in an effort to purify the city (tablet Ia 1–34 as translated in Poultney, 1959, pp.158–62). A second scenario for this shrine emerges if one considers the theory that the *Via Pumpaiiana* was the performance space for a *pompé* directed toward the Temple of Minerva in the Triangular Forum. The Porta Stabia may have operated as the staging point for this procession in a manner that echoes the role of the Dipyron gate as the gathering and starting point for the Panathenaic procession as it would head to the Athenian Acropolis.

Further evidence that such a procession did exist can be recognised in the decision to fix a direct and monumentalised pathway up to the Temple of Minerva (Fig. 7.7, red line). When the theatre and its quadriporticus were built in the second half of the second century BCE, Pompeians chose to construct a grand stairway (Fig. 7.7, E), approximately 25 metres in length, to negotiate the 9-metre change in elevation between the floor of the quadriporticus and the temple plateau. At nearly 3.5 metres wide, these stairs could easily accommodate five people walking abreast, who,

as they ascended, would have seen the temple's roof and portico slowly and dramatically rise up before them. The scale and performativity of this architecture clearly links the temple to the movement toward it, but there are further clues that suggest processional routes extended beyond the theatre complex. In its original form, the quadriporticus' northern colonnade appears to have taken a more stoa-like form, the roof of which may have continued over the stairs on a series of arches that climbed along with the stairs (Poehler and Ellis, 2012, pp.5–9). At the east end of the colonnade stood an Ionic Propylon (Fig. 7.7, F) that marked the entrance to the theatre district, welcoming those who approached from the *Via Stabiana* 40 metres to the east. Thus, by the late second century BCE, a monumentalised route was fixed between the Temple of Minerva and the ancient *Via Pumpsiana*. Christopher

Parslow and Paolo Carafa have argued that processions also likely descended these stairs (Fig. 7.7, pink line), turning northward at the quadriporticus' Ionic Propylon along another colonnade toward the entrance to the theatre, within which a variety of activities could be performed before an enormous audience (Fig. 7.7, G) (Parslow, 2007, p.212; Carafa, 2011, p.98).

In Pompeii's final years, this monumental stairway was interrupted by an enfilade of rooms, which significantly reduced the width of the stairs and bifurcated all movement into the quadriporticus or into the theatre's post-scaenae area. Processions were still possible, of course, but the character of the spaces to be traversed would seem to undermine the solemnity of their purpose. Ironically, or perhaps with conscious, archaising intent, the processions to the Minerva temple just prior to 79 CE would have had to return

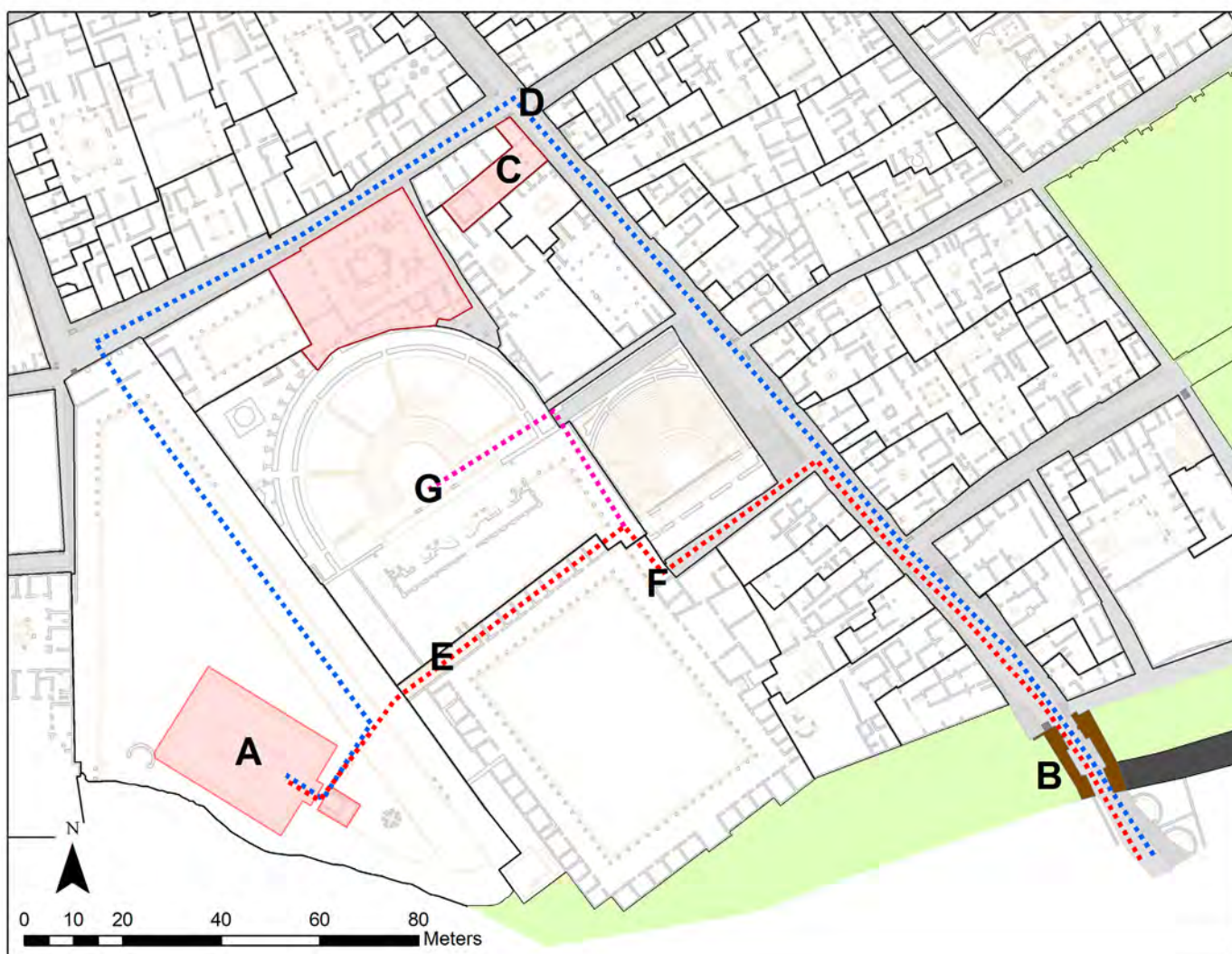


Figure X.7: Possible routes of the Minerva processions. The blue line marks the procession route from the Porta Stabia (B) to the Temple of Minerva-Hercules (A). The red line marks a proposed new route connected to the construction of the Theatre (G) in the second half of the second century BCE. The pink line marks a possible route from the Temple of Minerva-Hercules (A) to the Theatre (G) after its construction. The architectural landmarks are: Temple of Minerva-Hercules (A), Porta Stabia (B), *Via Stabiana* (C), Temple of Asclepius (D), Grand Stairway (E), Ionic Propylon (F), and Theatre (G). (Plan by Eric Poehler and Ivo van der Graaff)

to the ceremony's original path of the third century BCE, proceeding up the Via Stabiana to the Temple of Asclepius, then travelling west until the entrance to the Triangular Forum.

## Conclusion

To be clear, we do not claim these routes to be necessary, to be exclusive, and certainly not exhaustive. The discussion of these three potential processions, however, does begin to put some lines – if dotted lines – on the map of Pompeii's religious topography. Moreover, the examination of these routes in the context of the changing shape, or changing place, of sanctuaries over time provides an opportunity to think through changes in practice those new landscapes might have afforded. Paradoxically, although time changes the physical organisation of processions, the religious calendar might be one of the most fixed elements of their practice. That is, we may not know exactly *where* a procession was led, but we can be more confident in *when* that event took place. This information, provided below as a list and Fig. 7.8, not only allows us to see how processions clustered or

spread across the year, but also to consider the festivals of cults known only obliquely at Pompeii:

January 1, Asclepius.  
 March 5, Isis, *Navigium Isidis*.  
 March 19–23, Minerva, *Quinquatria*.  
 April 1, Venus, *Veneralia*,  
 April 23, Venus *Vinalia*.  
 June 6–13, Apollo, *Ludi Apollinares*.  
 July 20–30, Venus, *Ludi Victoriae Caesaris*.  
 August 12, Hercules.  
 August 12, Isis, *Lychnapsia*.  
 August 12, Venus, *Venus Victrix*  
 August 19, Venus, *Vinalia*.  
 September 5–19, Jupiter, *Ludi Romani*.  
 September 23, Apollo.  
 September 26, Venus, *Venus Genetrix*.  
 October 14–28, Jupiter, *Ludi Capitolini*.  
 October 28–November 3, Isis, *Inventio Osiridis*.  
 November 13, Jupiter, *Ludi Plebei*.

## Annual Festival Calendar

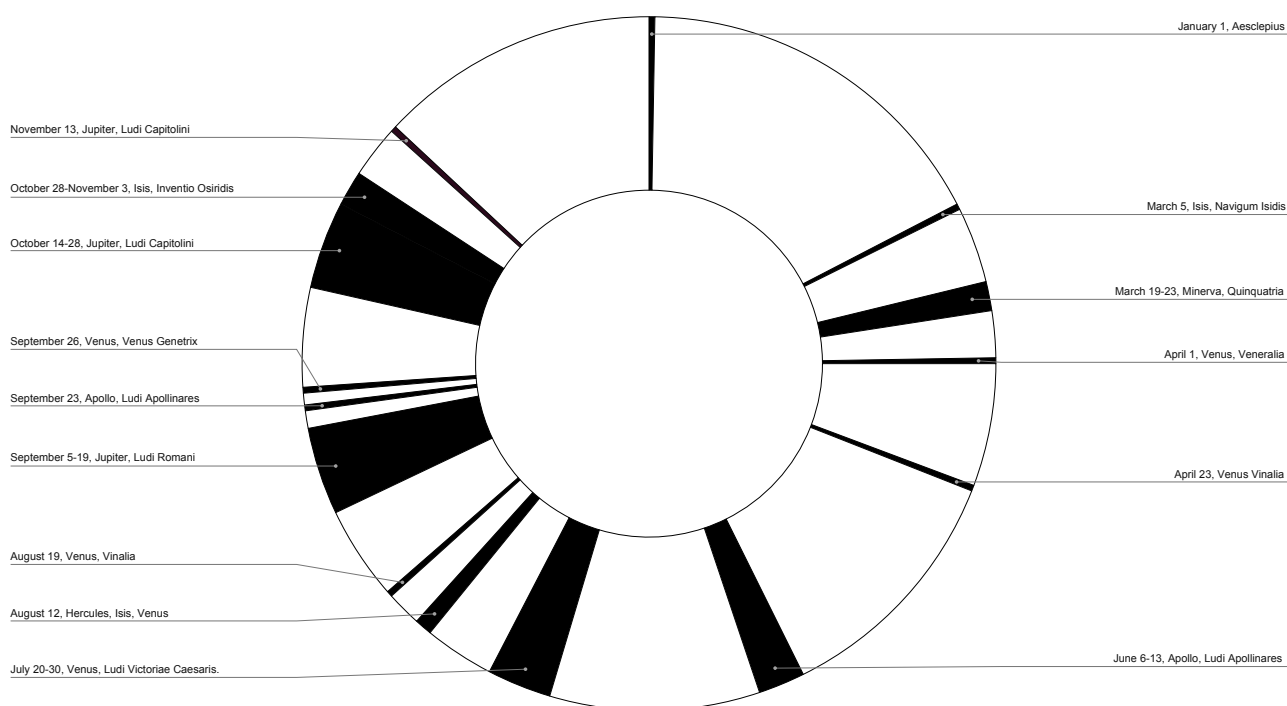


Figure 7.8: Calendar of likely annual religious festivals. (Figure by Eric Poehler)

If these festivals were celebrated at the same time as their Roman counterparts, and certainly at least the *Ludi Apollinares* were, then Pompeii's streets would have been witness to 71 days of religious festivals and any attendant processions, totalling nearly one-fifth of the year. It also allows us to imagine further routes embedded in the layout of the city. A particularly prominent example might be the *Navigium Isidis*. If such a procession did take place, it must have departed from the Temple of Isis to reach the sea either using the Via Stabiana to exit the Stabian gate to the south, or to the west along Via dell'Abbondanza through the Forum and out through the Porta Marina. Similarly, if the *Ludi Romani* occurred at Pompeii in a fashion that mimicked those in Rome, then one can imagine a procession that began at the Temple of Jupiter in the Forum and then headed toward the Amphitheatre in lieu of the Circus Maximus in the capital.

It is the gaps between celebrations, however, that should draw equal attention for these are the periods when other events might seem more likely to have been scheduled. Two *dipinti* recovered on house façades suggest that festivals and parades might have conflicted on the same calendar day. The painted inscriptions announce games financed by Gnaeus Alleius Nigidius Maius in the final decades of the city (Sabbatini Tumolesi, 1980, p.38 n.11, p.40 n.12 CIL IV 7993, n.13 CIL IV 3883; Franklin, 1997). Although it has now faded, inscription CIL IV 7993 was once on the facade of the House of Trebius Valens (III.2.1):

Dedicazione  
operis tabularum Cn(aei) Allei Nigidi Mai Pompeis idibus iunis  
pompa venatio athletae vela erunt

At the dedication of (Ocella)  
of the opus tabularum of Gnaeus Alleius Nigidius Maius, at Pompeii on the 13 June,  
there will be a procession, hunt, athletics, and awnings.  
(Cooley & Cooley, 2004, p.54)

A few details supply a location and rough year date for the procession: the awnings are presumably those used to shade spectators at the Amphitheatre, whereas the lack of gladiator contests suggest that the celebration occurred after the ban on such games after 59 CE.

More important is the 13 June date, which falls on the last day of the *Ludi Apollinares*. The question then arises if the two events were mutual or exclusionary, and if they would have interfered with each other. The answer is elusive since the identification and translation of the *opus tabularum* to which the games

were dedicated has occasioned various translations including: a display of paintings, the dedication of a new stage at the Theatre, or a restored public archive (Franklin, 1997, p.442). It might be reasonable to connect the first two theories with the *Ludi Apollinares*, given Apollo's patronage of the fine arts. One may thus envision scenarios where parades advertised for both events may have featured a single united procession. On the other hand, the events may have featured two separate processions on the same day. They need not have obstructed each other, if the processions were localised events staged at opposite ends of the city, for example if one were in the Forum (*Ludi Apollinares*) and the other at the Amphitheatre. Similarly, the evidence suggests that multiple processions may have occurred in separate events associated with the same festivities.

At the same time, one can equally imagine the dedicators of the tomb relief that opened this article as well as Maius desired to have the many processions, games, and spectacles they provided neither compete with nor be overshadowed by the movement of the gods across the city. On the other hand, the question arises if other, more spontaneous activities, such as funerals, would have been equally delayed. Moreover, if the day could not be avoided, perhaps a funeral cortege would take a different route than a religious procession or travel across the city at a different hour. If none of these solutions were possible, we are left with a fascinating image of two processions of a varying solemnity passing each other in the space of a Pompeian street. We hope that thought experiments such as these, however speculative they must necessarily be, will provoke further interest in and debate on Pompeii's religious processions and spur the search for evidence and arguments not present in this essay.

## Bibliography

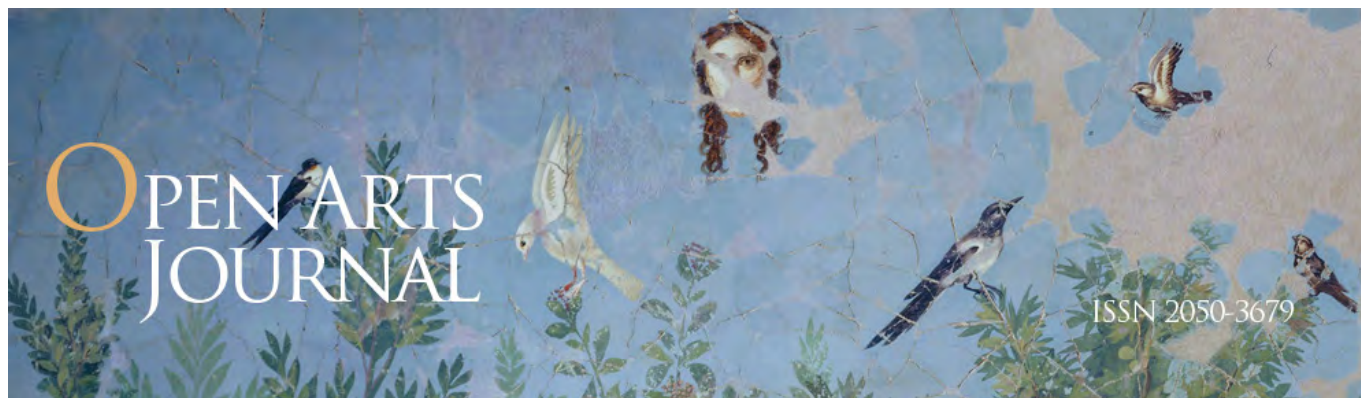
- 1 Adams, J.P. 'Pompeian Inscriptions', CSUN, <https://www.csun.edu/~hcfll004/pompinsc.html>, accessed 1.12.2020.
- 2 Avellino, F.M. (1845) 'Scavi di Pompei de' mesi di novembre e dicembre 1844', *Bullettino Archeologico Napoletano*, vol.3, no.46, pp.81–5.
- 3 Ball, L.F. and Dobbins, J.J. (2013) 'Pompeii Forum Project: Current thinking on the Pompeii Forum', *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 111, no.3, pp.461–92.
- 4 Ball, L.F. and Dobbins, J.J. (2017) 'Pompeii Forum Project: Excavation and urbanistic reappraisals of the sanctuary of Apollo, Basilica, and Via della Fortuna neighborhood', *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 121, no.3, pp.467–503.
- 5 Battiloro, I. and Mogetta, M. (2018) 'New investigations at the sanctuary of Venus in Pompeii: Interim report on the 2017 season of the Venus Pompeiana Project', *The Journal of Fasti Online*, vol.425, pp.1–37.
- 6 Bonucci, C. (1825) *Pompei*, Naples, Raffaele Miranda.
- 7 Calderini, A. (1924) *Saggi e studi di antichità*, Milan, Vita e Pensiero.
- 8 Carafa, P. (2011) 'Minervae et Marti et Herculi aedes doricae fient (Vitr. 1.2.5): The monumental history of the sanctuary in the Triangular Forum' in S.J.R. Ellis (ed.) *The Making of Pompeii: Studies in the History and Urban Development of an Ancient Town*, JRA Suppl. Ser., vol.85, Portsmouth, s.n., pp.89–111.
- 9 Carroll, M. (2010) 'Exploring the Sanctuary of Venus and its sacred grove: Politics, cult and identity in Roman Pompeii', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, vol.78, pp.63–106.
- 10 Carroll, M., and Godden, D. (2000) 'The Sanctuary of Apollo at Pompeii: Reconsidering chronologies and excavation history', *American Journal of Archaeology* vol.104, pp.743–54.
- 11 Castrén, P. (1975) *Ordo Populusque Pompeianus: Polity and Society in Roman Pompeii*, Rome, Bardi Editore.
- 12 Clarke, J.R. (2003) *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans: Visual Representation and Non-Elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C.-A.D. 315*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- 13 Coarelli, F. (2000) 'Pompeii. Il foro, le elezioni, le circoscrizioni elettorali', *Annali di Archeologia e Storia Antica. Istituto Universitario Orientale. Dipartimento di studi del mondo classico e del Mediterraneo antico*, vol.7, pp.87–114.

- 14 Coarelli, F. and Pesando, F. (2011) 'The urban development of NW Pompeii: The Archaic period to the 3rd c. B.C.' in S.J.R. Ellis (ed.) *The Making of Pompeii: Studies in the History and Urban Development of an Ancient Town*, JRA Suppl. Ser., vol.85, Portsmouth, s.n., pp.37–58.
- 15 Cooley, A. and Cooley, M.G.L. (2004) *Pompeii and Herculaneum: A Sourcebook*, New York, Routledge.
- 16 D'Alessio, M.T. (2009) *I culti a Pompei: Divinità, luoghi e frequentatori (VI sec. a. C. – 79 d. C.)*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato.
- 17 De Caro, S. (1986) *Saggi nell'area del Tempio di Apollo a Pompei. Scavi stratigrafici di A. Maiuri nel 1931–32 e 1942–43*, Naples, Istituto Universitario Orientale.
- 18 De Caro, S. (1991) 'La città sannitica. Urbanistica e architettura', in *Pompeii*, ed. by F. Zevi, Naples, Banco di Napoli, i, pp. 23–46
- 19 De Caro, S. (2007) 'The first sanctuaries' in J.J. Dobbins and P.W. Foss (eds) *The World of Pompeii*, New York, Routledge, pp.73–81
- 20 Dobbins, J.J. (1994) 'Problems of chronology, decoration and urban design in the forum at Pompeii', *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol.98, no.4, pp.629–94.
- 21 Dobbins, J.J., Ball, L.F., Cooper, J.G., Gavel, S.L. and Hay, S. (1998) 'Excavations in the sanctuary of Apollo at Pompeii, 1997', *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol.102, no.4, pp.739–56.
- 22 Dupraz, E. (2011) *Sabellian Demonstratives: Forms and Functions*, Leiden, Brill.
- 23 Ellis, S. J. R. (2018), *The Roman Retail Revolution: The Socio-Economic World of the Taberna*, New product edition (New York, NY: Oxford University Press)
- 24 Emmerson, A. (2010) 'Reconstructing the funerary landscape at Pompeii's Porta Stabia', *Rivista Di Studi Pompeiani*, vol.21, pp.77–86.
- 25 Fiorelli, G., *Pompeianarum antiquitatum historia* (Naples, 1860), i.
- 26 Fiorelli, G. (1875) *La descrizione di Pompei*, Naples, Tipografia Italiana.
- 27 Franklin, J.L., Jr (1997) 'Cn. Alleius Nigidius Maius and the Amphitheatre: "Munera" and a distinguished career at ancient Pompeii', *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte*, vol.46, no.4, pp.434–47.
- 28 Franklin, J.L., Jr (2001) *Pompeis Difficile Est. Studies in the Political Life of Imperial Pompeii*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.
- 29 Gasparini, V. (2013) 'Staging religion: Cultic performances in (and around) the temple of Isis in Pompeii' in N. Cusumano, V. Gasparini and J. Rüpke (eds) *Memory and Religious Experience in the Greco-Roman World*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner, pp.185–212.
- 30 Hartnett, J. (2017) *The Roman Street: Urban Life and Society in Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Rome*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 31 Marcatili, F. (2002) 'Il cosiddetto Tempio di Giove Meilichio nel fregio della Casa delle Nozze di Ercole (VII 9, 47): immagini di culto e topografia sacra' in Colpo, I., Favaretto, I. and Ghedini, F. (eds) *Iconografia 2001. Studi sull'immagine*, Rome, Antenor Quaderni.
- 32 Marcatili, F. (2006) 'Un tempio di Esculapio a Pompei: Strutture, divinità e culti del cosiddetto tempio di Giove Meilichio' in L. Romizzi (ed.) *Contributi di Archeologia Vesuviana II*, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- 33 Onorato, G.O. (1951) 'La sistemazione stradale del quartiere del Foro Triangolare di Pompei', *Rendiconti della Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche*, vol.6, pp.250–64.
- 34 Osanna, M. (2018) 'Games, banquets, handouts, and the population of Pompeii as deduced from a new tomb inscription', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, vol.31, pp.310–322.
- 35 Parslow, C.C. (2007) 'Entertainment at Pompeii' in J.J. Dobbins and P.W. Foss (eds) *The World of Pompeii*, New York, Routledge, pp.212–23.
- 36 Petersen, L. H. (2016) *The Places of Roman Isis*, Oxford, Oxford Handbooks Online.
- 37 Poehler, E. and Crowther, B. (2018) 'Paving Pompeii: The archaeology of stone-paved streets', *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol.122, no.4, pp.579–609.
- 38 Poehler, E. and Ellis, S.J.R. (2012) 'The 2011 Season of the Pompeii Quadriporticus Project: The Southern and Northern Sides', *FOLD&R FastiOnLine Documents & Research*, no.249, pp.1–12.
- 39 Poehler, E. and van der Graaff, I. (forthcoming) 'The Via Pumpaiana and the Kaila of Jupiter Meilichios' n.d.
- 40 Poultney, W.J. (1959) *The Bronze Tables of Iguvium*, Baltimore, American Philological Association.
- 41 Richardson, L., Jr (1978) 'Concordia and Concordia Augusta: Rome and Pompeii', *La Parola Del Passato*, vol.33, pp.260–72.
- 42 Richardson, L., Jr (1988) *Pompeii: An Architectural History*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- 43 Sabbatini Tumolesi, P. (1980) *Gladiatorum Paria. Annunci di Spettacoli gladiatorii a Pompei*, Rome, Edizione di Storia e Letteratura.

- 44 Salem, M.S. (1937) 'The "Lychnapsia Philocaliana" and the Birthday of Isis', *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol.27, no.2, pp. 165–7.
- 45 Scullard, H.H. (1981) *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- 46 Sgobbo, I. (1942) 'Un complesso di edifici sannitici e i quartieri di Pompei per la prima volta riconosciuti,' *Memorie della Reale Accademia di Archeologia, Lettere e Belle Arti*, vol.6, pp. 15–41.
- 47 Small, A.M. (1996) 'The shrine of the imperial family in the macellum at Pompeii' in A.M. Small (ed.) *Subject and Ruler: The Cult of the Ruling Power in Classical Antiquity: Papers Presented at a Conference Held in the University of Alberta on April 13–15, 1994, to Celebrate the 65th Anniversary of Duncan Fishwick*, JRA Suppl. Ser., vol. 17, Ann Arbor, s.n., pp. 115–35.
- 48 Sogliano, A. (1918), 'Porte, Torri e Vie Di Pompei Nell'epoca Sannitica', *Rendiconti Accademia Di Archeologia Lettere e Belle Arti Di Napoli*, vol. 6, pp. 153–80
- 49 Sogliano, A. (1937) *Pompei nel suo sviluppo storico. Pompei preromana (dalle origini all'a. 80 av.C.)*, Rome, Athenaeum.
- 50 Spinazzola, V. (1953) *Pompei alla luce degli scavi nuovi di Via dell'Abbondanza (anni 1910–1923)*, Rome, Libreria della Stato.
- 51 Van Andringa, W. (2015) "'M. Tullius... Aedem Fortunae August(Ae) Solo et Peq(Unia) Sua". Private foundation and public cult in a Roman colony' in C. Ando and J. Rüpke (eds) *Public and Private in Ancient Mediterranean Law and Religion*, *Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten*. vol.65, Berlin and Boston, De Gruyter, pp.99–114.
- 52 van der Graaff, I. (2018) *The Fortifications of Pompeii and Ancient Italy*, London and New York, Routledge.
- 53 van der Graaff, I. and Ellis, S.J.R. (2017) 'Minerva, urban defenses, and the continuity of cult at Pompeii', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, vol.30, pp.283–300.
- 54 Wallace-Hadrill, A. (1995) 'Public honour and private shame: The urban texture of Pompeii' in T.J. Cornell and K. Lomas (eds) *Urban Society in Roman Italy*, London, Routledge, pp.39–62.
- 55 Wallace-Hadrill, A. (2008) *Rome's Cultural Revolution*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 56 Westfall, C.W. (2007) 'Urban planning, roads, streets, and neighborhoods' in J.J. Dobbins and P.W. Foss. (eds) *The World of Pompeii*, New York, Routledge, pp. 129–39.







# POMPA IN POMPEII: EXPERIENCING A FUNERAL PROCESSION IN THE ANCIENT CITY

Virginia L. Campbell

## Abstract

*The pompa funebris, the funeral procession, was a fundamental part of the rituals enacted upon the death of a Roman, especially those of the aristocracy. A public event, the funeral procession was part performance, part entertainment, and part commemoration, designed to engage both the family and friends of the deceased as well as members of the general populace. The route of the funeral procession had specific aims for memorialisation of the dead and his or her ancestry in addition to inviting participation from the multitudes. The unique archaeological and epigraphic evidence preserved in Pompeii allows potential routes of funeral processions for individuals to be recreated, linking house, tomb, civic space such as the Forum, and other significant locations to be mapped. This provides the opportunity to consider the lived experience of the pompa funebris more fully as a kinetic religious ritual integrated into the urban landscape.*

**Keywords:** Pompeii, funeral processions, Roman tombs, epigraphy, urban topography

**Full text:** <https://openartsjournal.org/issue-10/article-8/>

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2021s08>

## Biographical note

Virginia L. Campbell is a lecturer and researcher in Roman history and archaeology, and has worked at multiple universities across the UK including a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship at the University of Oxford, and posts at The Open University, the University of Exeter, and the University of St. Andrews, where she is a member of the Centre for Ancient Environmental Studies. She earned her PhD in Classics and MA City of Rome from the University of Reading, and a BA in Anthropology and History from The American University, Washington, D.C. Her research utilises the epigraphic and archaeological evidence of Pompeii to examine different aspects of life and death including funerary commemoration, politics, and social networks.

Banner image: Detail from a garden painting, from the House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. (Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

# POMPA IN POMPEII: EXPERIENCING A FUNERAL PROCESSION IN THE ANCIENT CITY

Virginia L. Campbell,  
University of Birmingham and  
The Open University

Whenever any illustrious man dies, he is carried at his funeral into the Forum to the so-called rostra, sometimes conspicuous in an upright posture and more rarely reclined. Here with all the people standing round, a grown-up son, if he has one left who happens to be present, or if not some other relative mounts the rostra and discourses on the virtues and successful achievements of the dead. As a consequence the multitude and not only those who had a part in these achievements, but those also who had none, when the acts are recalled to their minds and brought before their eyes, are moved to such sympathy that the loss seems to be not confined to the mourners, but a public one affecting the whole people.

(Polybius 6.53)<sup>1</sup>

As illustrated by the ancient historian Polybius, the aristocratic Roman funeral was not only an occasion for the deceased and their family, but one that became woven into the fabric of the city itself. This was a participatory event in large part because of the public procession that escorted the deceased from the family home to the grave site via the Forum. The *pompa funebris* is arguably the most public portion of the rituals surrounding death and burial, and as such, intersects with the general population and the urban topography in a manner that makes it one of the more tangible aspects of Roman religious practice. Despite this, there have been few attempts to contextualise the experience of a funeral procession, either within an urban space, or in relation to the funeral itself. Polybius' description places emphasis on the use of *imagines*

<sup>1</sup> Translations of ancient texts are taken from the digital editions of the Loeb Classical Library. Translations of the funerary inscriptions from Pompeii are the author's.

(wax death masks) and the parade of ancestors who served as exempla for the living generation.<sup>2</sup> He asks (6.53): 'For who would not be inspired by the sight of the images of men renowned for their excellence, all together as if alive and breathing? What spectacle could be more glorious than this?' His statement demonstrates the importance of this aspect of the funeral, evoking the memory of one's ancestors in the most public setting possible. What Polybius fails to record, unfortunately, are the logistical details such as the route the funeral procession took, the length of time such a display would have required, or the size of the crowd this type of event would attract. The lived experience of the funeral procession is lacking.

Some attempts have been made to reconstruct aspects of the funeral procession within Rome itself (see Favro & Johanson, 2010), but what of Pompeii? This city offers a unique perspective because, unlike Rome, it preserves three elements that allow for funeral processions to be recreated: houses and tombs that are identifiable by specific occupants, mappable street directionals, and a largely intact urban topography that allows for visualisation of the experience. In Pompeii, there are at least two men, Marcus Obellius Firmus and Aulus Umbricius Scaurus, for whom both house and tomb are firmly attested. This knowledge, in conjunction with probable traffic patterns, allows the mapping of the *pompa funebris*, from house to Forum to tomb. Additional routes can also be projected, taking into account known locations for tombs and structures for other illustrious inhabitants such as those of Eumachia, Marcus Tullius, and Arellia Tertulla, the only person in Pompeii who had a 'public' funeral (that is, one which was paid for and organised by the state). Once potential routes are established, it will be possible to consider the experience of the funeral procession in more detail: the sights, sounds, smell of incense, and density of the crowd as it wound through the streets from one site to the next, inevitably picking up more participants as it progressed. Integrating aspects of the human experience with urban topography on a specific route will allow a deeper

<sup>2</sup> Wax masks, unfortunately, have not survived antiquity. Beyond literary descriptions of their use, there are some representations of the masks in their wooden cupboards, most commonly in funerary reliefs. One example of this in Pompeii is found on the tomb of Naevoleia Tyche (Campbell, 2015, pp. 126–7, 172–4). Wooden portrait busts that may have been used to display masks were also found in the House of Menander in Pompeii and in the House of the Wattlework in Herculaneum (Pollini, 2007, p. 247; Flower, 1996, pp. 42–6).

level of understanding for the practices surrounding death and burial, and go towards developing a clearer conception of the phenomenology of religious ritual in the Roman world.

The rituals and procedures of death and burial in the Roman world are well documented, but it is important to consider a number of elements in relation to the experience of a funeral, and more specifically, the funeral procession (Campbell, 2015, pp.2–30; Carroll, 2006; Toynbee, 1971). When someone of high status died, arrangements for a funeral were begun immediately, usually to be held within a few days of death. The family would hire *libertinarii* (undertakers), who would oversee the entire event (AE 1971: 88, cf. CIL 5.5128 = ILS 6726; Sen. Ep. 99.22; Tac. Dial. 9.11.0; Pliny HN 7.176; Bodel 1994). The funeral itself required a number of specific jobs, including the *pollinctor*, who prepared the body, the *dissignator*, who choreographed the procession, and *preficae*, who sang laments (*nenia*) (Varro Ling. 7.70; Sen. Ben. 6.38; Flower 1996, pp.98, 115–16). Unlike funerals for the poor and children which were held at night, the elite funeral took place during the day, and as the procession made use of public space, required permission in order to take place (Flower, 1996, p.96; Bodel, 1999, p.261; Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 9.54.5; Tac. Ann. 3.76; Gisborne, 2005, p.247). Aediles, the lower of the two magisterial positions in cities like Pompeii, were tasked with regulating funerals and tombs, and would have been responsible for granting such requests (Cic. Phil. 9.7.17; Ov. Fast. 6.663; CIL 6.1375b = ILS 917b; Flower, 1996, p.95). Because the funeral made use of the Forum, and in the case of magistrates, lictors participated – one could even be assigned to escort the *dissignator* – any funeral taking place during the day would require civic business (i.e. political meetings) to be suspended (Gisborne, 2005, p.247). Depending on the size and arrangements of the funeral, this could include using a large amount of public space, such as when *triclinia* were set up in the Roman Forum for the funeral of the pontifex maximus P. Licinius Crassus (Livy 39.46.2–3). Once the date of the funeral was determined, heralds would publicise it during the days leading up to the event, inviting all citizens to attend. Elite funerals with a *laudatio* (funeral speech) and procession of *imagines* were open to the public, and indeed, the procession and funeral orations were considered integral parts of the process, without which a leading man would not be viewed as having a proper burial (Flower, 1996, p.101; Bodel, 1999, p.260). There was an inherent expectation that the public would act as spectators to a funeral, and that the people themselves ‘looked to funerals for entertainment, and the holders of funerals, in a

society that prized public displays of piety and status, depended on the people to attend and thus justify their performances’ (Bodel, 1999, p.259). As Plutarch wrote ‘wealth loses all radiance without an audience’, and this is evident in the displays of the funeral (Mor. 528a).<sup>3</sup>

The public displays of funeral rites were not necessarily limited to the very elite, since in Roman Italy and the western provinces, who was celebrated in this manner was quite different from elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote, that unlike the Athenians who arranged funeral orations solely for those who died in war, the

Romans, on the other hand, appointed this honour to be paid to all their illustrious men, whether as commanders in war or as leaders in the civil administration they have given wise counsels and performed noble deeds, and this not alone to those who have died in war, but also to those who have met their end in any manner whatsoever, believing that good men deserve praise for every virtue they have shown during their lives and not solely for the single glory of their death.

(Ant. Rom. 5.17.5–6)

This opens up the possibilities for far more people to be eulogised in this manner and demonstrates that ‘[e]ven at humbler social levels, the funerary parade provided an opportunity for public display and an occasion for the show of popular support’ (Bodel, 1999, p.261). As has been demonstrated elsewhere, there is no real difference between rich and poor in the desire to commemorate their dead, simply in the financial ability to do so (Campbell, 2015, pp.142–5; Bodel, 1999, p.261).

Although writers such as Polybius and Virgil both portray the *pompa funebris* as an event that emphasises themes of dedication to the state, personal sacrifice, and a strong sense of community, others, such as Lucian, demonstrate the pageantry of it, suggesting that the ostentatiousness of the grief on display was for the spectators, not the family or the deceased (Virgil Aen. 6.756–886; Lucian Luct. 10–20; Flower, 1996, p.110; Bodel, 1999, p.265). Lucian describes the ‘drama’ (13) of the event, led by ‘actors’ (20), as a performance of grief:

<sup>3</sup> This sentiment, of course, leads to the luxury laws of the late Republican period, placing limits on the expenditure permitted for a funeral. Cic. De Leg. 2.22–6.

The women wail; men and women alike weep and beat their breasts and rend their hair and lacerate their cheeks; clothes are also torn on the occasion, and dust sprinkled on the head. The survivors are thus reduced to a more pitiable condition than the deceased: while they in all probability are rolling about and dashing their heads on the ground, he, bravely attired and gloriously garlanded, reposes gracefully upon his lofty bier, adorned as it were for some pageant.

(*Luct.* 12)

Indeed, the funeral was a noisy, raucous affair with hired musicians, actors, and professional mourners, that fits into a 'carnavalesque' model of comportment (Sumi 2002, p.578). Valerie Hope describes the sounds of mourning as a highly staged manifestation of the liminality of the corpse and the bereaved, stating that 'from the deathbed to the pyre, the bereaved were to be heard' (2019, pp.61–2; 2017, pp.90–1). The sound of mourning was also highly gendered, as women and men were expected to express their grief differently, with women singing dirges (*neniae*) and crying out with sorrow (*eiulatio*, *lessus*), and men groaning (*gemitus*) (Virgil *Aen.* 2.487–488, 4.337–338, 6.220, 9.499; Stat. *Silv.* 2.6.5; Šterbenc Erker, 2011, p.44; Hope, 2019, pp.61–2). Regardless of prescription, ancient authors describe the oral manifestations of grief as indistinguishable between men and women, particularly in a large crowd of the common people who were expected to join in the public components of the funeral (Apul. *Met.* 8.7; Lucian *Luct.* 12–13; Tac. *Ann.* 3.1.5; Šterbenc Erker, 2011, pp.44–5). The actors hired to wear the *imagines* of a family's ancestors did not just appear in masks and the clothing of the highest office an individual achieved, but also assumed the physical characteristics or movements of the deceased, what Geoffrey Sumi refers to as a 'funerary mime' (2002 pp.559–61; Diod. Sic. 31.25.2). This seems to evolve over the years from Republic to Empire, and by the time of the emperor Vespasian's death in 79 CE, the mime impersonating the deceased also spoke, changing the role from mute and sombre to vocal and light-hearted (Sumi, 2002, p.574). Suetonius relays the story of Vespasian's impersonator asking the cost of the funeral, and upon hearing it, suggests a lesser sum could have been paid and the remains of the emperor thrown in the Tiber (*Vesp.* 19.2). This is presented as a display of Vespasian's character, demonstrating both his wit and his frugality (Sumi, 2002, p.565). Comic dancers (*sicinnis*, who were also associated with games) were in attendance, along with musicians, particularly flautists (Dion. Hal.

*Ant. Rom.* 7.72.12; Flower, 1996, p.105; Gisborne, 2005, p.244).<sup>4</sup> In essence, the funeral could range markedly from a solemn display of *pietas* by grief-stricken relatives, to a festive party with elements of self-parody and hilarity (Flower, 1996, p.106). In all likelihood, the less distinguished aspects of the funeral may have had an apotropaic quality that not only lent protection against jealousy evoked by the display of wealth and status, but also formed part of the standard rituals associated with death and purification (Sumi, 2002, p.581).

As for the procession itself, it was only one of the many performed movements that permeated Roman culture, ranging from the daily escorted walking of leading men on their way to the Forum to the three major *pompae*: *triumphis* (triumph), *circensis* (circus), and *funus* (funeral) (Östenberg, 2015, p.15). There were many parallels with other processions, particularly the triumph, which could have significant overlap with the funeral procession if the deceased had had a successful military career (Bodel, 1999, p.261). It was not uncommon for the same props designed for military triumphs such as floats with exhibits, weapons, and even the veteran soldiers, to be re-used in funeral processions (App. *B Civ.* 1.105–6; Flower, 1996, p.109).<sup>5</sup> There was an element of public entertainment in the funeral procession, just as there was in those for a triumph or games, comic elements to lighten the mood, music, and play acting (Flower, 1996, p.106). This is, as Harriet Flower suggests, an understandable development, since by the late Republican period each of the three major processions had absorbed elements of the others, with every procession offering 'a full pageant of Roman history accompanied by various entertainments' (Flower, 1996, p.107). Funeral processions were so popular that there was even one held for a raven during the reign of Tiberius (Pliny *HN* 10.43; Bodel, 1999, p.262). It is unsurprising, therefore, that a procession was 'a ritual experienced holistically and performatively by Romans,' not simply one of visual impact but a cumulative sensory experience comprising all aspects of sight, sound, and smell (Popkin, 2016, p.10). Order was important in any procession, but especially in the funeral where ancestors walked in diachronic sequence, giving a visual form to the family line. This same order was used in

4 Livy (9.30.5) reports a backlog of funerals occurring in 311 BCE after flautists went on strike, suggesting that they were considered a necessary component of the event. See Mugnari & Wyslucha in this issue.

5 In the *Consolatio ad Marciam* 3.1 Seneca refers to the funeral of Drusus as 'very much like a triumph.'

positioning on the rostra and for the orations, starting with the most distant ancestor and moving forward chronologically (Östenberg, 2015, p.21). The procession functioned as a means to illustrate, and thus define, the interconnectedness of ancestors, Roman citizens, and the living family (Flower 1996, p.104). For the funeral procession of leading men, there was a parallel in the manner in which public life was entered and death was celebrated, in the form of the escorted walk from the house to the Forum, which Ida Östenberg suggests demonstrates an 'interactive symbolic play between the morning walk and the funeral' (2015, pp.19–20).

Funeral processions (in any city) began at the house of the deceased, where relatives, friends, actors wearing *imagines*, musicians, dancers, and professional mourners would assemble before moving to the Forum by torch light (Cic. *De. Or.* 2.341; *Leg.* 2.61; Flower, 1996, pp.92–3; Gisborne, 2005, p.116).<sup>6</sup> The ancestors of the family appeared dressed in garb deemed correct for the highest office held in life, complete with lictors and any other appropriate symbols of office. Any member of the family or friend accompanying the dead would appear in mourning garb, either reversing their toga so to render the purple border of office invisible, or in dark colours. Further alterations to appearance such as dirtying clothing or leaving the hair or body unwashed could occur (Hope, 2017, p.91). Lictors wore black and carried the *fascēs* in reverse (Hor. *Epist.* 1.7.5; Tac. *Ann.* 3.2; Flower, 1996, p.102). The deceased was carried on a *lectus vitalis*, a funeral couch. How exactly this was conveyed was likely dependent on financial abilities and office, since only magistrates could use a wheeled vehicle in the city during the day. Upon entering the Forum, the *pompa funebris* crossed the central open space to the rostra, where the deceased was put on display, and various family members (alive and dead) took their place in the prescribed order, facing the crowd of mourners and onlookers from a row of ivory chairs (Favro & Johanson, 2010, p.16). Here, the heir to the deceased would give the *laudatio*, the funeral speech, that would incorporate venerable deeds of ancestors as well as of the recently departed. This act, of a eulogy delivered from the rostra in the heart of the city, was reserved for the most outstanding of individuals. For most, even if their funeral procession transversed the civic centre of the city, the funeral speech would be given at the grave side (Ramage, 2006, p.40). Speeches concluded, the funeral procession would exit the city for cremation or immediate burial,

typically only in the presence of family and close friends. There is little evidence as to when this would occur during the day, but it has been estimated most were begun by mid-morning to allow for completion of the funeral rites before daylight was lost (Plut. *Sull.* 38; Favro & Johanson, 2010, p.36, n.84).

Our best surviving archaeological evidence for a funeral procession is a late Republican relief from Amiternum (Fig. 8.1). Arranged in multiple stacked registers in order to show the linear progression of the procession, the relief depicts flautists, horn players, and professional mourners holding torches walking in front of the funeral couch on which the deceased (or an effigy thereof) is propped up on his left elbow facing the viewer. A *dissignator* with his right hand on a litter pole directs the eight men carrying the couch, who are followed by nine mourners, the last of which is a male attendant carrying a palm frond and a pail of incense (Bodel, 1999, pp.264–5; Flower, 1996, pp.98–9; Toynbee, 1971, pp.46–7). The relief from the Tomb of the Haterii of the late first century CE, although it depicts the funeral rituals that took place in the home in the form of the *collocatio* (calling the name of the dead) and lying in state before the funeral procession began, presents similar numbers of attendants and mourners, including the ongoing presence of musicians, demonstrating relatively corroborative evidence for funeral rites (Flower, 1996, pp.93–4). More to the point, however, the Amiternum relief originates outside of the city of Rome and depicts a funeral procession without the use of *imagines* (Bodel, 1999, p.265; Flower, 1996, p.98). This indicates that funeral processions were not exclusive to Rome, nor to the very elite with long and distinct lineages, but were in fact available to a much wider sector of society even if one did not desire such a spectacle.<sup>7</sup>

There are very few specific details left by ancient authors regarding the precise route of a funeral procession, whether in Rome or elsewhere, particularly before the Forum itself was entered by the deceased. One of the primary reasons for this is that the procession would have originated in the family home and continued through the city to the Forum before heading to the family tomb, located beyond the city walls. For each family then, the route would per force be different, and at least partly determined by the location of the house in relation to the Forum and then the ancestral sepulchre (Gisborne, 2005, p.278).

<sup>6</sup> Torches were used in funerals regardless of time of day. See Ochs (1993, p.90) on the significance of fire as part of the rhetoric surrounding death.

<sup>7</sup> For discussion on the inhabitants of the tomb the Amiternum relief likely belonged to see Hughes (2005). Propertius famously states that he wants no procession, trumpets, or corpse on a couch when he dies (2.13.17–20).



Figure 8.1: Amiternum Relief, late first century BCE, showing a Roman funeral procession, Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, L'Aquila, Italy. (Copyright Creative Commons)

One purpose of the procession was to gather a crowd of onlookers, engaging the passers-by, prior to the oration in the Forum, in order to display the status of the family. In Rome, where many aristocrats lived in streets around the Forum or on the Palatine Hill, most processions must have begun only a few hundred metres from the rostra; thus, processions must have diverted down side streets or taken an indirect route as a means of extending the pageantry and attracting more participants (Favro & Johanson, 2010, p.16; Gisborne, 2005, p.70): the more circuitous the route, the better. Additional factors such as structures to which the family was associated such as a temple or honorific statue could be included in the procession, altering the route further. Diane Favro has stated, in regards to the military triumph:

Each triumphator designed his parade to provide the greatest propagandistic benefit for his personal agenda. For example, he might direct the parade to pass by a monument erected by his family or himself. Due to this variability, the improvised street formed by the triumphal parade remained always new and vital, redefined periodically with each ceremonial event.

(1994, p.157)

There is no reason to conclude this was any different for the *pompa funebris*, and indeed, the sole surviving textual evidence for a processional route is one that is specific to a family for this precise

reason. After his death in 183 BCE, the wax mask of Scipio Africanus was placed in the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill. From that point on, a funeral procession for any member of the Cornellii family would proceed from their house near the Forum to the temple in order to collect this mask before moving back into the Forum (Val. Max. 8.15.1–2; Flower, 1996, p.98; Favro & Johanson, 2010, p.18). This no doubt had a substantial impact on the public perception of the family, as onlookers watched them visit the most important temple in the Roman world to retrieve one of their ancestors. Further alterations to these associations could be made during a funeral procession by passing through an ancestor's triumphal arch, or past a temple or other building dedicated by a relative, allowing each procession to be 'tailored to suit the individual' (Gisborne, 2005, pp.71–2). In essence, by including secondary locations of importance as part of the processional route, multiple sites are linked into a virtual map that illustrated a family's topographic network across the city (Iara, 2015, p.127).

Favro and Christopher Johanson were amongst the first scholars to consider the experience and route of the *pompa funebris* in Rome, making use of interactive and immersive digital models to do so (2010). In addition to a precise route, they consider how the funeral procession would be seen and heard from a distance, the sight and smell of smoke, the sound of music and chanting, and the various static and kinetic viewpoints available to the observer along the route

and in the Forum itself (Favro & Johanson, 2010, p.22). The impact on the city and the populace was ever-changing as the procession moved through the city, taking up space and generating noise (Flower, 1996, p.98). The landscape and the soundscape intersected: 'The acoustical volume, and experience of this by those present, would have been affected by both the built and natural environment: factors such as the width of the streets, the height of buildings, the weather and the seasons' (Hope, 2019, p.73). Funeral processions, whether they included a rostra-based oration or not moved through the Forum, which was the busiest part of any Roman city, and would have undoubtedly caught the attention of anyone nearby.<sup>8</sup> The mere fact that a procession was not enclosed in any building, but open and moving through the city made it more accessible to larger numbers of people from different locations.<sup>9</sup> It invited participation from all, regardless of status or origin. Multiple ancient authors refer to the participation of all kinds of people, men and women, all classes, from every part of the city, joining in processions and escorted walks, for various purposes (Livy 38.50.10; Cic. *Pis.* 52; Suet. *Calig.* 4; Östenberg, 2015, p.18). Not only did the people serve as witnesses of a procession, thus embedding a specific event in the collective memory, but they could also influence the tone and direction of such an event (Gisborne 2005, p.247). Caesar's funeral, for example, was attended by such a crowd that all order and the planned route were lost, with the crowd moving from the Forum to the Campus Martius for cremation by all available roads (Suet. *Iul.* 84.1–2; Östenberg, 2015, p.21).

Away from the capital, it becomes more difficult to determine potential routes for funeral processions, in part because there is even less literary evidence than for the city of Rome, and with the exception of Pompeii, in few places enough of both the cityscape and funerary architecture remain to be able to plot a path. In Pompeii, the evidence is archaeological and epigraphic in nature, but even so, has limitations. The difficulty inherent in identifying the route of a funeral procession, whether in Rome or Pompeii, lies in the ability to identify both the house and the tomb of any specific individual. Although today many houses in Pompeii bear the names of prominent Pompeians, the means by which ownership has been identified is often quite circumstantial, based on names found in

<sup>8</sup> In Cic. *De Or.* 2.225 Crassus points out the disruption to a trial caused by a procession; Horace complains about the traffic caused by a funeral (*Sat.* 1.6.42–4).

<sup>9</sup> Gisborne (2005, p.4) compares this, I think accurately, to the street-side viewers of a race in the Tour de France.

electoral programmata on the façade of a *domus*, or on portable items such as seals.<sup>10</sup> One such example which demonstrates how problematic this can be is the House of Paquius Proculus, which is also known as the House of Cuspius Pansa (I.7.1) because programmata for both men were found on the exterior of the property. For the same reason, the name Pansa is also associated with another house (VI.6.1) which is shared in attribution with Gnaeus Alleius Nigidius Maius. The result of this is that there are only two men for whom we have tombs that have had their houses identified with some authority. However, there are other individuals, both men and women, for whom there is funerary or other epigraphic evidence that suggests they may have possessed the status that could have predicated an elaborate *pompa funebris*.

Whilst all funeral processions took place in the public eye, accessible to anyone and everyone, a public funeral was one that was paid for and organised by the state, and is therefore the most conclusive evidence indicating an individual would have a large funeral procession. The earliest evidence of a public funeral in Rome is that of Sulla in 78 BCE, but after his death the practice became common for most members of aristocratic families (Plut. *Publicola* 23.2; *Fabius Maximus* 27.2; Livy 2.16.7, 2.33.10–11, 3.18.11; Pliny *HN* 21.10; App. *B Civ.* 1.105; Flower, 1996, pp.96, 101). Organised by a magistrate rather than the family, a public funeral was more elaborate as the state was not beholden to the same luxury laws as private citizens (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.96; Val. Max. 5.1.1c; Flower, 1996, p.101; Gisborne, 2005, p.61). In Pompeii, the evidence for any kind of public funeral is limited to one attestation, in the form of the funerary epitaph of Arellia Tertulla (NSA 1910, 405):<sup>11</sup>

[A]relliae N(umeri) f(iliae) Tertullae / Vei Frontonis.  
Huic decurion(es) / locum sepulturae  
post mortem / dederunt et funus ex p(ecunia)  
p(ublica) / decre[verunt].

To Arellia Tertulla, daughter of Numerius, (wife) of Veius Fronto. To her the decurions gave the place for burial and a funeral with public money by decree after her death.

<sup>10</sup> This is largely the approach taken by the primary attempt of identifying houses undertaken by Matteo Della Corte (1965), which, despite being discredited by current scholars, is still used due to lack of a subsequent study.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the tomb see Campbell (2015, pp.41, 49–51, 74, 94–5, 97–8, 104, 155, 203–5, 300, 302, 320–2).



It is not unusual for women of aristocratic families to be given public funerals (Cic. *De or.* 2.11; Suet *Calig.* 10; Livy 5.50.7; Tac. *Ann.* 3.76). Caesar delivered a *laudatio* for his wife and aunt in 67 BCE from the rostra, for which the people of Rome viewed him as 'a gentle person and one of high character' (Suet. *Iul.* 6; Plut. *Caes.* 5.4–5; Ramage, 2006, p.48). Undoubtedly this was a means to greater political ends, as he used the speech to outline his ancestry and to provide lineage to the gods. As Suetonius records (*Iul.* 6.1):

When quaestor, he pronounced the customary orations from the rostra in praise of his aunt Julia and his wife Cornelia, who had both died. And in the eulogy of his aunt he spoke in the following terms of her paternal and maternal ancestry and that of his own father: 'The family of my aunt Julia is 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 Venus. Our stock therefore has at once the sanctity of kings, whose power is supreme among mortal men, and the claim to reverence which attaches to the Gods, who hold sway over kings themselves.'

The husband of Arellia Tertulla was making the same political power play as Caesar, but it is impossible to determine his identity with any certainty, since due to issues of nomenclature, there are two different men within the Veii family who could have been the husband responsible for the monument (Campbell, 2015, p.56, n.48). As there is no further information about Arellia Tertulla, nor any identifiable location for a house belonging to her or any of the Veii, it can only be speculated that a full *pompa funebris* was held in her honour.

There are, however, five individuals to whom public funds are awarded as a contribution to the cost of their funeral (Campbell, 2015, p.97). Although this was certainly an honour, as in each case it is specified in their epitaph, it does not have the same distinction as a public funeral. Two of these individuals were aediles, one was a woman of unknown status, and two served the higher magisterial office of duovir. The two aediles, Titus Terentius Felix and Caius Vestorius Priscus (Fig. 8.2), and the woman, Septumia, were awarded the same sum of two thousand sesterces, which seems to be the standard contribution.<sup>12</sup>

12 For more information on these tombs see Campbell (2015, pp.39, 41–4, 46–7, 56, 58, 62, 64, 69–70, 75, 85–6, 94, 97–8, 104–5, 133, 137, 191, 197–8, 201–5, 318–22).

#### CIL X 1019

*T(ito) Terentio T(iti) f(ilio) Men(enia tribu) / Felici Maiori aedil(i). / Huic publice locus / datus et HS (duo milia) / Fabia Probi f(ilia) Sabina uxor.*

To Titus Terentius Felix maior; son of Titus, of the Menenian tribe; aedile. He was given this place and two thousand sesterces by the people. Fabia Sabina, daughter of Probus, wife.

#### AE 1913: 71

*Septumiae L(uci) f(iliae) / d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) / locus sepulturae publice / datus et in funere HS (duo milia). / Antistia P(ubli) f(ilia) Prima filia / fecit.*

To Septumia, daughter of Lucius, by decree of the decurions she was given publicly a place for burial and two thousand sesterces for her funeral. Antistia Prima, daughter of Publius, her daughter, made this.

#### AE 1911: 72 = AE 1913: 70

*C(aio) Vestorio Prisco aedil(i). / Vixit annis XXII. / Locus sepulturae datus et in / funere HS (duo milia) / d(ecreto) d(ecurionum). / Mulvia Prisca mater p(ecunia) s(ua).*

To Gaius Vestorius Priscus, aedile. He lived twenty-two years. The place of the burial and two thousand sesterces for the funeral were given by decree of the decurions. Mulvia Prisca, his mother, paid (for this) with her own money.

That there was public contribution to funerals, even though not the entire sum was covered, could suggest a more public spectacle was expected at the time of death. The epitaph of Vestorius Priscus reiterates this, as his mother Mulvia Prisca specifically states that she paid for the tomb herself, thereby indicating that the public funds were used for components of the funeral such as a procession, not the construction of the monument. Unfortunately, there is no further evidence for any of these individuals. But the fourth person to receive two thousand sesterces from the city for the cost of his funeral is another matter entirely, since he is one of the only inhabitants of Pompeii whose residence is unequivocally identified. Aulus Umbricius Scaurus, duovir and famed garum manufacturer, had a large house located in the *Insula Occidentalis* (VII.16.12–16) to the northeast of the Forum, overlooking the sea. It was thanks to his role as one of the most prolific



Figure 8.2: The funerary inscription of Caius Vestorius Priscus, Porta del Vesuvio, Pompeii. (Photo: the author with permission of the Soprintendenza speciale per i Beni archeologici di Napoli e Pompeii)

garum producers in the first century CE that his house was easy to find: surrounding the impluvium of the house is an unusual black-and-white mosaic that depicts the small jars that contained garum, complete with inscriptions naming the contents and manufacturer (Fig. 8.3) (Curtis, 1984).

His tomb is a few minutes' walk from his house, outside the Herculaneum Gate.<sup>13</sup>

*CIL X 1024 = ILS 6366*

*A(ulo) Umbricio A(uli) f(ilio) Men(enia tribu) / Scauro / Ilvir(o) i(ure) d(icundo). / Huic decuriones locum monum(enti) / et HS (duo milia) in funere et statuam equestr(em) / [in f]oro ponendam censuerunt. / Scaurus pater filio.*

To Aulus Umbricius Scaurus, son of Aulus, of the Menenian tribe, duovir with judicial powers. The decurions decreed him the space for this monument and two thousand sesterces for the funeral and an equestrian statue to be erected in the Forum. Scaurus senior, for his son.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the tomb, and the misplaced funerary inscription, see Campbell (2010; 2015, pp. 39, 42, 45, 47, 64, 85–6, 93, 97–8, 163–4, 181, 304–5).

The inscription states that an equestrian statue was awarded to him in addition to money for the funeral, but no trace of it remains. The only other location in Pompeii that can be tied to Umbricius Scaurus is a shop, believed to be the main centre for distribution of his garum within the city (Curtis, 1979). Located in the southeast sector of the city (I.12.8), including the shop in a funeral procession would allow for a longer and more circuitous route, providing greater opportunities for visibility and increasing the number of participants. This route would, for the most part, make use of broader streets within the city grid, the majority of which have been shown to be used by two-way traffic throughout the Roman period of Pompeii (80 BCE–79 CE).<sup>14</sup>

Leaving the house of Aulus Umbricius Scaurus (Fig. 8.4), the funeral procession would head east on the Via delle Terme / Via della Fortuna. Running parallel

<sup>14</sup> For determining traffic patterns, I have relied as much as possible on the conclusions of Eric E. Poehler (2017). He shows that in all periods major internal roads and those leading to the city gates, including the Via Consolare, Via Terme/Fortuna, Via Stabiana/Vesuvio, Via di Nola, Via dell'Abbondanza, Via di Nocera, and the Via del Foro/Mercurio, supported two-way traffic systems (2017, pp. 172–3, figs. 6.5–6.8).

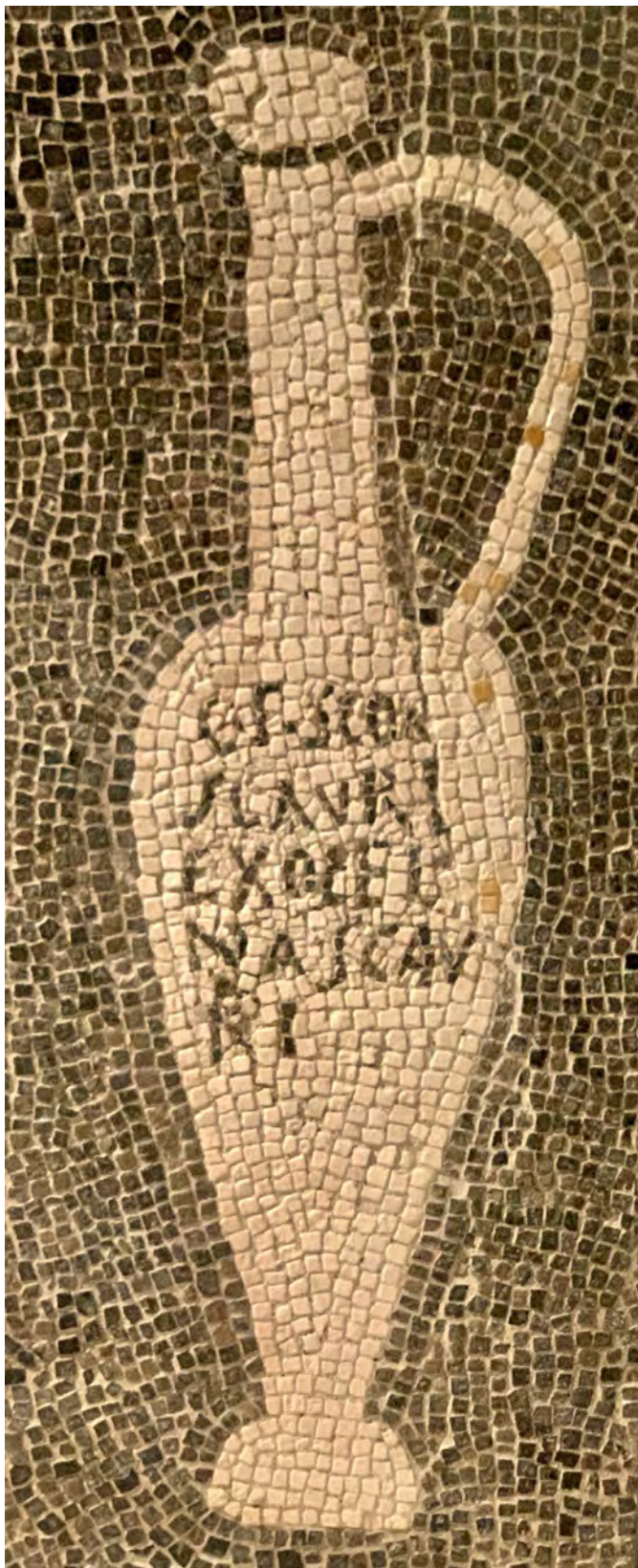


Figure 8.3: Mosaic *urceus* from the impluvium of the House of Aulus Umbricius Scaurus. The inscription states *G(ari) F(los) Sco(mbri) Scauri Ex Offi(cina) Scauri* ('The flower of garum, made from mackerel, a product of Scaurus, from the shop of Scaurus.') MANN inv. 15190. (Photo: the author with permission of the Soprintendenza speciale per i Beni archeologici di Napoli e Pompei)

to the northern end of the Forum, past the Forum Baths and a number of large houses on the border of Region VI, the noise of the mourners and musicians would have immediately attracted the attention of those in the area and beyond. Smoke from the torches and incense would have drifted on the air ahead of the party, contributing to the sensory cues that would alert those further away before the procession was seen (Hope 2017, p.92). Turning south on the Via Stabiana, the *cardo maximus* of Pompeii, one can imagine residents coming to the door at the sound of the clamour, either watching the procession stream pass or joining in. From there, it would proceed east on the Via dell'Abbondanza, before turning south again on the first available southbound street leading to the Via di Castricio, which would take the growing group past the garum shop (Poehler, 2017, p.166). This would be the most constricted area, narrower and necessitating more turning back and forth, than at any other point along the route. At this point, the procession might have become scattered to accommodate crowds and spectators, using the streets around the garum shop as a network of public spaces in which they could move about freely. This use of nodal spaces, such as open areas on corners or large entryways rather than remaining in one street, would provide the space needed (Popkin, 2016, pp.24, 45). The purpose of including the garum shop in the procession route was largely symbolic: emphasising the success of the deceased's family, whilst simultaneously providing greater potential for display. From there, the procession would turn north again to the Via dell'Abbondanza by way of the Via di Nocera and then west back to the Forum for the funeral oration. Where exactly in the Forum this would be held is unclear, as unlike Rome, Pompeii did not have a dedicated rostra. There was a speaker's platform in the Comitium at the south end of the Forum which is the most likely spot for a *contio* (public speech) of any kind – political or funerary – to be held. If not, an alternate location could have been near the equestrian statue of Umbricius Scaurus, once it had been built.<sup>15</sup> At the conclusion of the *laudatio*, in which the virtues and achievements of the family would have been extolled, the remainder of the procession would have moved north out of the city along the Via Consulare, potentially passing Scaurus' house

<sup>15</sup> As mentioned above, no archaeological trace of the equestrian statue included in his epitaph has ever been identified. If it had not yet been erected at the time of Scaurus' funeral, it may not have been visited in the context of his procession but would be included in the route of any descendants.

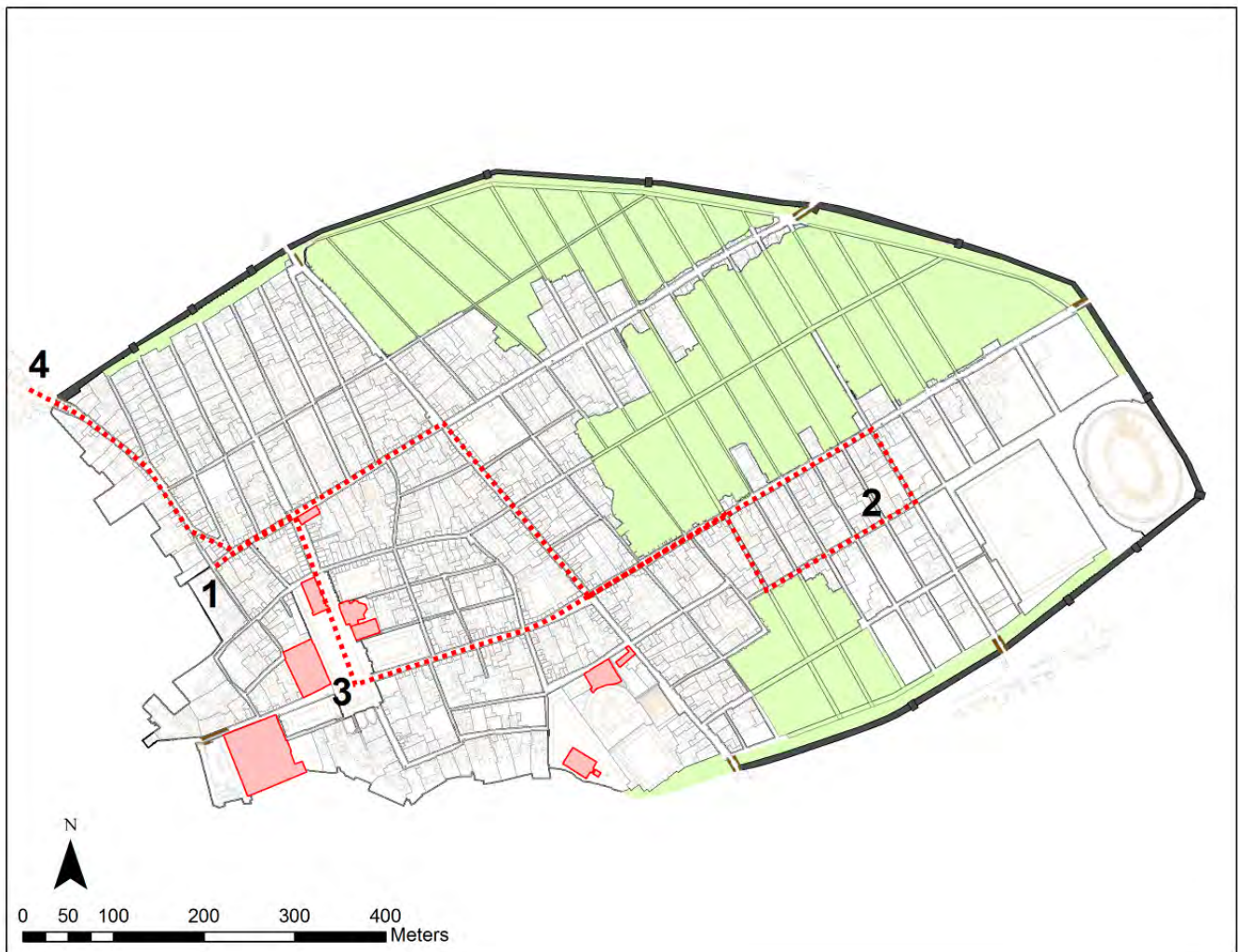


Figure 8.4: Map indicating potential route for the funeral procession of Aulus Umbricius Scaurus. The focal points of his house (1), garum shop (2), the Forum (3), and tomb (4) are indicated. (Map by Eric Poehler)

once again, on the way to the necropolis outside the Herculaneum Gate. Here, the body of the deceased would have been cremated in an *ustrinum* before the ashes were deposited within the tomb, concluding the events of the day.<sup>16</sup>

Marcus Obellius Firmus is another good candidate for determining the route of his funeral procession. Like those already mentioned, he too received public money towards the cost of his funeral, but the gifts bestowed upon him exceed all others (De Franciscis, 1976).<sup>17</sup>

*M(arco) Obellio M(arci) f(ilio) Firmo aedili / Ilvir(o)  
i(ure) d(icundo) huic decuriones loc(um) / sepulturae  
et in funer(ibus) (sestertium) (quinque milia)  
censuer(unt) Pagani / thuris p(ondera) XXX et*

<sup>16</sup> Many cities, including Pompeii, had permanent public *ustrinum* for use as funeral pyres, see Noy (2000) and Campbell (2015, pp. 42, 188, 205, 207, 220, 278, 298).

<sup>17</sup> For more information on his tomb see Campbell (2015, pp. 42, 85, 94, 97–8, 206–7, 282, 335).

*clupeum ministr(i) eor(um) in odorib(us) HS (mille)  
et clupeum.*

To Marcus Obellius Firmus, son of Marcus, aedile, duovir with judicial powers to whom the decurions gave this place for burial and five thousand sesterces for the funeral and the pagani gave thirty pounds of incense and a shield and the ministers gave one thousand sesterces for scents and a shield.

In addition to five thousand sesterces, he receives thirty pounds of incense (estimated to cost between 360 and 720 sesterces), two shields of silver, and a further one thousand sesterces for scents from members of various *collegia* (Pliny HN 12.65; Jongman, 1978–79, p.63). The funerary inscription strongly indicates a man of great esteem, although there is little other epigraphic evidence to support his standing. Regardless, Obellius Firmus was also likely to have had a *pompa funebris* when he died. Two conjoined houses linked to his family (IX.14.4 and IX.14.2) have

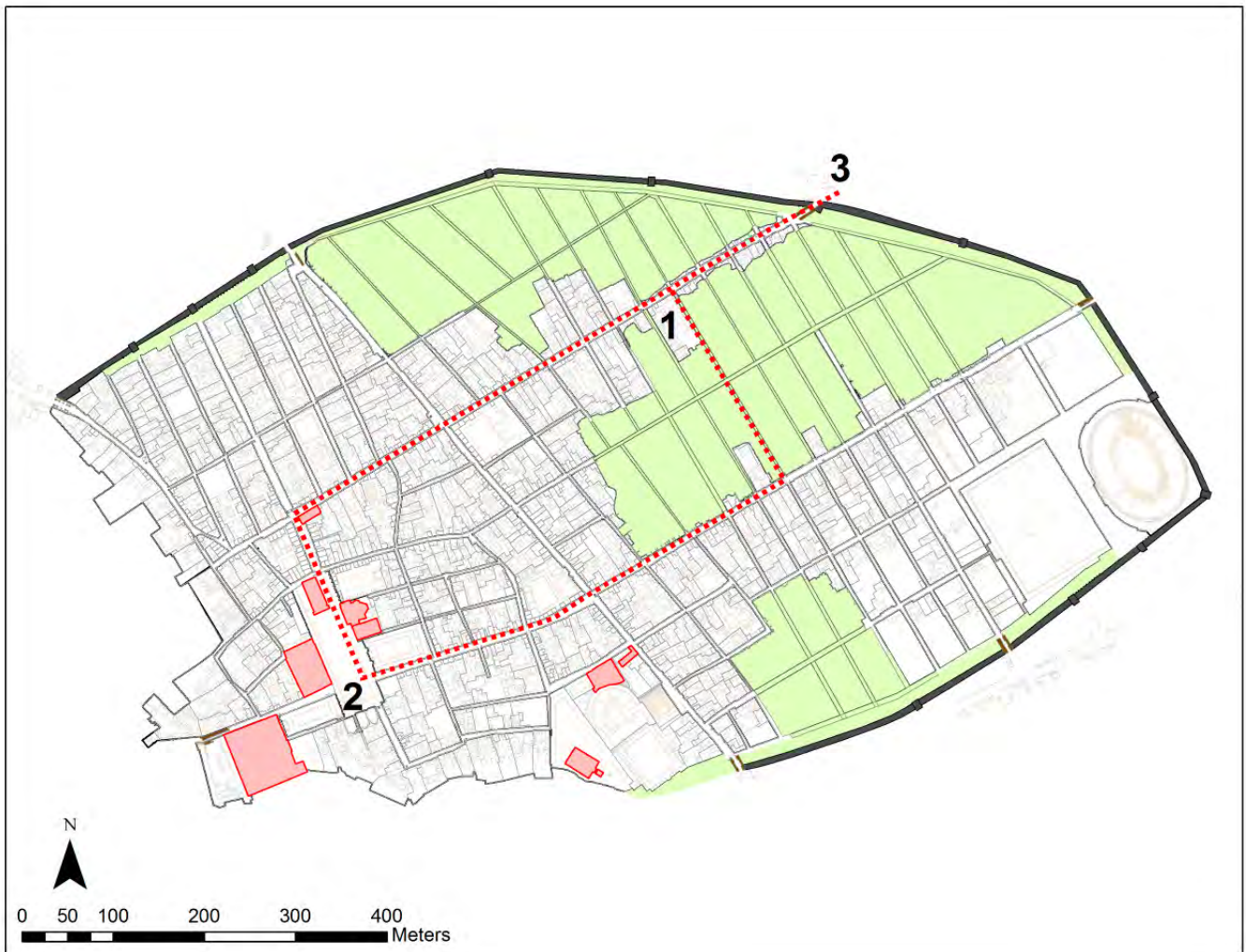


Figure 8.5: Map indicating potential route for the funeral procession of Marcus Obellius Firmus. The focal points of his house (1), the Forum (2), and tomb (3) are indicated. (Map by Eric Poehler)

been identified by Matteo Della Corte based on three graffiti inside the structures, and a series of electoral programmata on the façade of this and neighbouring houses (1965, pp.13ff; *CIL* IV 8970, 8971b, 8996, 7806, 3829, 6621, 3828). Like Aulus Umbricius Scaurus, the residence and tomb of Obellius Firmus are within a few hundred meters of each other. With no further evidence concerning honorific statues or sponsored buildings, the funeral procession would consist of three focal points of his house, the Forum, and his tomb (Fig. 8.5).

Because his house is located on the edge of the unexcavated portion of the site, it is impossible to determine which of the nearest side streets would have allowed the procession to travel south, but assuming it was possible, the most logical route would be to leave the residence on the Via di Nola, head south to the Via dell'Abbondanza, turning west towards the Forum, before completing a large loop by exiting the north end of the Forum onto the Via del Fortuna, and continuing east to the tomb site on the Via di Nola,

passing his house again on the way out of the city. Processing down the Via dell'Abbondanza must have been a desirable route: with so many shops and bars lining the streets, the potential for an audience and new recruits to the procession would have been high. It is easy to imagine patrons of one of the *cauponae* (inns) after a few cups of wine, eagerly and vocally joining in with the musicians and mimes leading the way. The funeral procession was, after all, a common occurrence that would have been regularly witnessed by the populace and as such, became part of learned religious knowledge, both distal through observation and proximal through personal engagement (see Graham in this issue).

Beyond these examples, there is not enough extant evidence to project routes for other residents of Pompeii who are likely candidates of an elaborate *pompa funebris*. At best, specific locations of importance can be identified as nodal points that would determine part of the route. Eumachia, the great benefactress of the building in the Forum that bears her name,

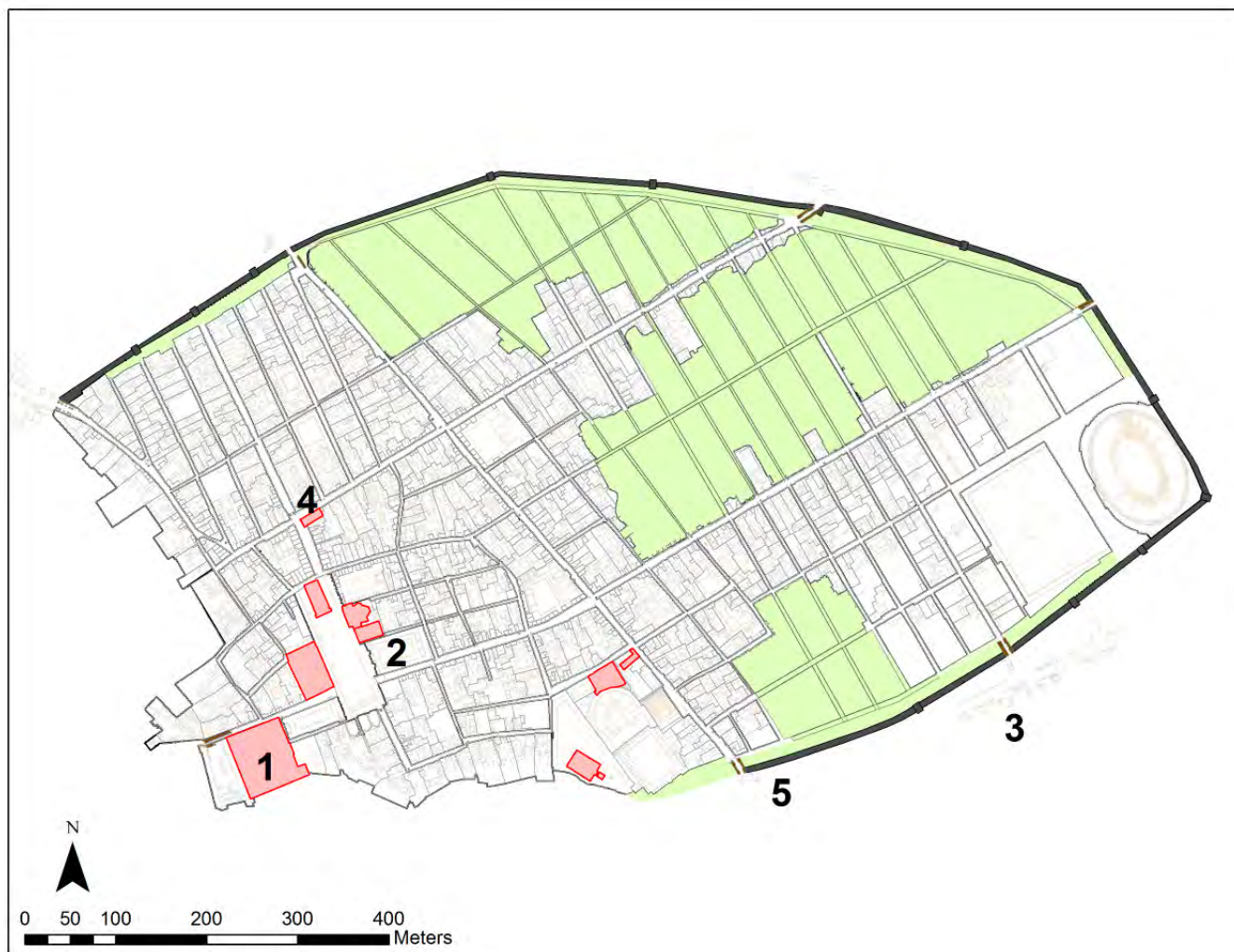


Figure 8.6: Map indicating locations to be included in the processional routes of Eumachia and Marcus Tullius. The focal points of the Temple of Venus (1), the Building of Eumachia (2), the Tomb of Eumachia (3), the Temple of Fortuna Augusta (4), and the Tomb of Marcus Tullius (5) are indicated. (Map by Eric Poehler)

was a public priestess (most probably of Venus, the patron deity of Pompeii), and had the largest tomb in the city outside of the Noceran Gate (*CIL X 810 = ILS 3785 = AE 2001: 793*).<sup>18</sup> Her funeral procession would have thus ranged all over the city, from the unknown location of her house to the Temple of Venus, through the Forum, and down the length of the Via dell'Abbondanza before leaving the city on the Via di Nocera. In a similar vein, Marcus Tullius, who built the Temple of Fortuna Augusta on his own land just north of the Forum (VII.4.1–2), is known from the dedicatory inscription on the temple and from a separate fragment of inscribed marble to have served in the highest elected offices as *duovir* with judicial powers three times, *quinquennalis*, and was an augur and military tribune of the people, and was buried in a large *schola*

tomb outside the Stabian gate (*CIL X 820–22*).<sup>19</sup> His funeral procession would have incorporated the temple he built as well as whatever statue or structure the fragmentary inscription belongs to, before exiting the city (Fig. 8.6).

The *pompa funebris* was a fundamentally important aspect of the rites and rituals carried out when a Pompeian citizen died. For the vast majority, this would have been a small affair comprised of family and a few friends, perhaps one or two hired attendants, and would have processed from the home via the Forum to a necropolis with little fanfare. For the wealthy and political classes, the funeral procession was based on the premise of demonstrating ancestry, showing wealth and status, and validating the family's place in the hierarchy of Roman life. The funeral procession was multi-functional, incorporating mourning and

<sup>18</sup> For more information on both her building and tomb see Campbell (2015, pp.32, 44, 49, 110, 114–19, 132–3, 143, 150, 259, 275–9).

<sup>19</sup> For more information on his tomb, see Campbell (2015, pp.41, 49, 94–5, 101, 299–302, 306).

grief, music and satire, and mimicry and display. Above all, it was a public spectacle intended to be seen and heard, enticing the public to become a part of the experience. Status and achievement, of the recently or long deceased, was physically incorporated into the procession by including significant locations into the route of the procession. This was also multi-functional, not only allowing greater demonstration of the importance of the family, but by lengthening the duration of the procession, forcing the creation of a larger audience, and therefore, a greater level of participation. Reconstructing the route of any particular family is very difficult because they were so individualised, but the uniqueness of the evidence from Pompeii allows some attempts to be made for a few of the leading figures of the city for whom both tomb and house is identifiable. This can be taken further, if remaining quite speculative, in considering certain locations of significance to specific individuals that would have been incorporated in a procession's route. Knowing the potential route of a *pompa funebris* allows for a greater ability to consider the full, multi-sensory experience of watching or participating in such an event. It is possible to trace the route taken, to imagine the throngs of people navigated when turning a corner, or how the sound of flutes and horns, wailing and chanting, would carry into the Forum, disrupting the day's business as the cortege approached. This enhances the historian's conception of funeral proceedings, permitting a greater understanding of how intertwined public and private, grief and laughter, and ritual and urban topography were for the ancient Romans, and indeed, the Pompeians.

## Bibliography

- 1 Bodel, J. (1994) *Graveyards and Groves: a study of the Lex Lucerina*, *American Journal of Ancient History*, vol. 11, Cambridge, E. Badian.
- 2 Bodel, J. (1999) 'Death on display: looking at Roman funerals' in B. Bergmann and C. Kondoleon (eds) *The Art of Ancient Spectacle*, Washington, National Gallery of Art.
- 3 Campbell, V.L. (2010) 'The epitaph of Aulus Umbricius Scaurus (CIL X 1024): a reconsideration', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, vol. 174, pp.229–36.
- 4 Campbell, V.L. (2015) *The Tombs of Pompeii: Organisation, Space, and Society*, London, Routledge.
- 5 Carroll, M. (2006) *Spirits of the Dead: Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- 6 Curtis, R.I. (1979) 'The garum shop of Pompeii', *Cronache Pompeiane*, vol.5, pp.5–23.
- 7 Curtis, R.I. (1984) 'A personalized floor mosaic from Pompeii', *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol.88, no.4, pp.557–66.
- 8 Della Corte, M. (1965) *Case e Abitanti di Pompei*, Naples, Faustino Fiorentino.
- 9 De Franciscis, A. (1976) 'Sepolcro di M. Obellius Firmus', *Cronache Pompeiane*, vol.2, pp.246–8.
- 10 Favro, D. (1994) 'Rome – the street triumphant: The urban impact of Roman triumphal parades' in Z. Çelik, D. Favro and R. Ingersoll (eds.) *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- 11 Favro, D. and Johanson, C. (2010) 'Death in motion: Funeral processions in the Roman Forum', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol.69, no. 1, pp. 12–37.
- 12 Flower, H.I. (1996) *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- 13 Gisborne, M.R. (2005) *'Pompae' and Circumstances: Triumphs, Funerals and Circus Processions as Spectacles in the Roman Republic*, D.Phil. dissertation, University of Oxford.
- 14 Hope, V.M. (2017) 'A sense of grief: The role of the senses in the performance of Roman mourning' in E. Betts (ed.) *Senses of the Empire: Multisensory Approaches to Roman Culture*, London, Routledge, pp.86–103.
- 15 Hope, V.M. (2019) 'Vocal expression in Roman mourning' in S. Butler and S. Nooter (eds) *Sound and the Ancient Senses*, London, Routledge, pp.61–76.
- 16 Hughes, L. (2005) 'Centurions at Amiternum: notes on the Apisius family', *Phoenix*, vol.59, no. 1/2, pp.77–91.

- 17 Lara, K. (2015) 'Moving in and moving out: Ritual movements between Rome and its *Suburbium*' in I. Östenberg, S. Malmberg and J. Bjernebye (eds) *The Moving City: Processions, Passages and Promenades in Ancient Rome*, London, Bloomsbury, pp.125–32.
- 18 Jongman, W. (1978–79) 'M. Obellius M. f. Firmus, Pompeian douvoir', *Talanta*, vol.10/11, pp.62–5.
- 19 Noy, D. (2000) 'Building a Roman funeral pyre', *Antichthon*, vol.34, pp.30–45.
- 20 Ochs, D.J. (1993) *Consolatory Rhetoric: Grief, Symbol and Ritual in the Greco-Roman Era*, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press.
- 21 Östenberg, I. (2015) 'Power walks: Aristocratic escorted movements in Republican Rome' in I. Östenberg, S. Malmberg and J. Bjernebye (eds) *The Moving City: Processions, Passages and Promenades in Ancient Rome*, London, Bloomsbury, pp.13–22.
- 22 Poehler, E.E. (2017) *The Traffic Systems of Pompeii*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- 23 Pollini, J. (2007) 'Ritualizing death in Republican Rome: Memory, religion, class struggle, and the wax ancestral mask tradition's origin and influence on veristic portraiture' in N. Laneri (ed.) *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, Oriental Institute Seminars, vol.3, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp.237–86.
- 24 Popkin, M.L. (2016) *The Architecture of the Roman Triumph: Monuments, Memory, and Identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- 25 Ramage, E.S. (2006) 'Funeral eulogy and propaganda in the Roman Republic', *Athenaeum*, vol.94, no.1, pp.39–64.
- 26 Šterbenc Erker, D. (2011) 'Gender and Roman funeral ritual' in V. Hope and J. Huskinson (eds) *Memory and Mourning in Ancient Rome*, Oxford, Oxbow, pp.40–60.
- 27 Sumi, G.S. (2002) 'Impersonating the dead: Mimes at Roman funerals', *The American Journal of Philology*, vol.123, no.4, pp.559–85.
- 28 Toynbee, J. (1971) *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, London, Thames and Hudson.