



Venus: The Patron of Pompeii

- Many cities in the ancient world chose a particular god to be their "patron deity". The patron deity of Pompeii was Venus Pompeiana.
- Because Venus Pompeiana was the patron of Pompeii, people may have believed that she would take special care of them and their town.
- Venus Pompeiana had her own temple in Pompeii since at least the 2nd century BC - well before the town became a Roman colony.
- Venus Pompeiana was a love goddess, but in Pompeii she was also worshipped as a goddess of ships and sailing, and as the protector of the town.
- Although Venus was worshipped throughout the Roman Empire, there is no evidence that Venus Pompeiana was worshipped anywhere but in Pompeii.



This painting depicts Venus Pompeiana in a parade. She is standing on the prow (front) of a boat, being pulled by four elephants. The two winged figures on either side of her are Cupids (gods of love).

What kind of impression do you get of Venus Pompeiana based on this image?

This painting was found on the wall of a fuller's (laundryman's) shop. What does this suggest about the fuller's feelings towards Venus Pompeiana?



Isis: An Egyptian Goddess

- Isis was a very popular deity in Pompeii, but she wasn't from Italy originally. Isis was the queen of the Egyptian gods, and the idea of her as rituals honouring her would have been brought to Pompeii from overseas. (stretch question: how do you think this could have happened?)
- In Egyptian mythology Osiris (king of the gods) had been torn to pieces by his jealous brother Set. Isis used her healing magic to revive Osiris. This myth was connected to the idea that Isis could offer her worshippers eternal life after their deaths.
- The worship of Isis was a mystery cult, which means that all worshippers had to undergo a rite of initiation. Not everyone would choose to do this, and the rituals worshipping Isis had to be kept secret from non-initiates.



Model of the Temple of Isis



Fresco from the Temple of Isis showing worship

There is evidence to suggest that many Romans, including the Emperors, did not like the worship of Isis. Apparently they thought that this foreign cult was a threat to Roman values.

And yet the cult of Isis was very popular in Pompeii – what does this suggest about the relationship between Rome and Pompeii?

The Temple of Isis in Pompeii was badly damaged by an earthquake. It was rebuilt with money donated by Numerius Ampliatus, a freedman. In thanks, his son was made a member of the town council, despite the fact that his son was only 6 years old at the time!

Why do you think Numerius Ampliatus donated the money to rebuild the temple?



A Statuette of Yakshi

- This statuette (a small statue) of Yakshi was found in a private home in Pompeii.
- Yakshi is a goddess of fertility, beauty and wealth.
- Yakshi was not a part of the Roman pantheon of gods. She was more commonly worshipped in India, and she was sacred to Hindus, Jains and Buddhists.
- During the first century AD there were trade routes between Rome and India.



It was common for Pompeiian families to have statuettes of gods in their household shrine (lararium) like the one pictured (above left).

Does a statuette of a goddess in a home mean that the people who lived in that home were worshippers of that goddess?

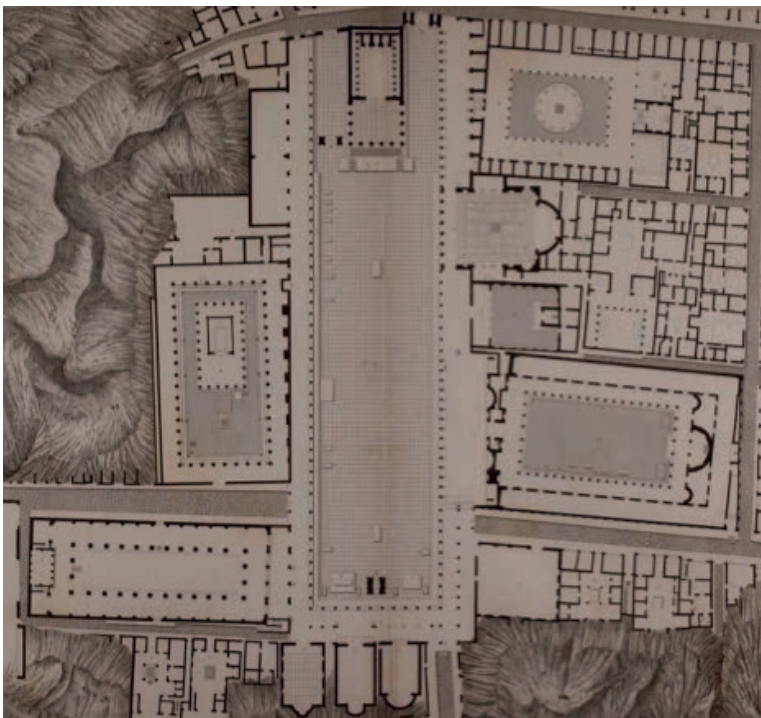
Some scholars have suggested that the statuette of Yakshi (above right) is a part of a larger object. They suggest that it could be a decorative handle for a mirror.

What do you think the statuette was used for?



The Imperial Cult

- Many towns throughout the Roman Empire had priests and temples dedicated to worshipping the Emperor and his family. This is known as the Imperial Cult.
- In Pompeii, the priests of the Imperial Cult were called the Augustales, a title that comes from the name of the first Emperor of Rome: Augustus.
- It was very common for freedmen to be Augustales. This could be because freedmen were not allowed to have jobs in politics, and this was one way that they could be involved in public life.
- Pompeii became a Roman colony in 80 BC, in a time when Rome did not have Emperors. Rome's first Emperor (Augustus) came to power in 30 BC, and the Imperial Cult appeared in Pompeii some time after that.
- A temple to the Imperial Cult was found to the north of the Forum, indicated on this plan.



An inscription from the temple says: "Marcus Tullius, son of Marcus, duumvir... built the temple... on his own land and at his own expense".

Why do you think Marcus Tullius used his money and land for this temple?

The Senate (government) in Rome passed a decree that said that libations (offerings, usually of wine) should be poured in honour of the Emperor every time someone had a dinner party.

What can this tell us about the relationship between religion and the politics of the Roman Empire?