



# 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

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## Biographical note

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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

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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).

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