

Civic cults (community religion)

Pompeii: The life, death and
rediscovery of a Roman town
(HPAH5078/HPAH6078)



Religious activity in the Roman world



lararium from a stable in Pompeii (IX.2.24)

- Orthopraxy (rather than orthodoxy?).
 - Transactions **and** beliefs.
- Appeasement of (local) deities.
 - Prayers, sacrifices, dedications.
 - Official cults and (approved) “foreign” cults.
 - Personal choice.
- Transactional vows and offerings.
 - “Sextus Pompeius Ruma, freedman of Sextus, willingly fulfilled his vow to Neptune” (*CIL* 10.8157) [found outside of the walls of Pompeii].
- The prominent (public temples) and pervasive (frescos, statues in gardens, graffiti on walls, etc.).

Religion and the community

- A social as well as personal dimension to religious activity.
 - Communal religious activity important in defining group identity and articulating social hierarchies.
 - Core social gradations: males vs. female; free, freed and slave.
 - Messier distinctions: wealth, formal and informal power (e.g., **Eumachia**).
- Models of communities
 - “city-state” (Imp. per., really city and hinterland).
 - e.g., **Pompeii and Herculaneum**.
 - Most cultural cachet.
 - Rural communities: villages / farmsteads, latifundia, etc.
 - Other forms: tribal associations, temple complexes, pastoralists, etc.



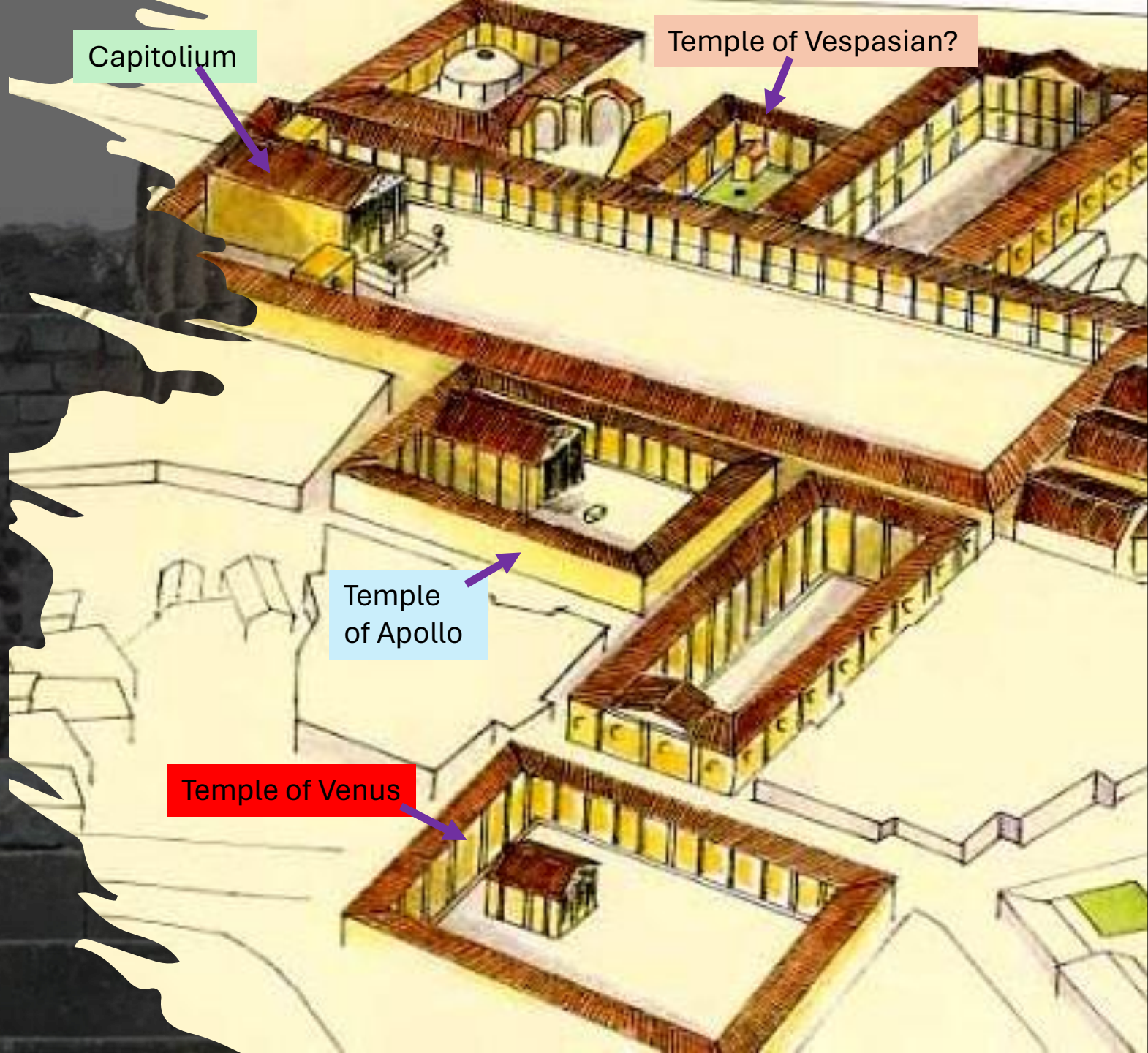


Before the Romans: civic cults

- Patron deity of a *polis*.
 - Focal point of community worship.
- 6th century BC temples at Pompeii.
 - Doric Temple.
 - Overlooking the Sarno River.
 - Dedicated to Hercules and Minerva?
 - Temple of Apollo.
 - “Ovius Cam[panius son of ?], *kvaisstur*, by decree of the assembly, with the money of Apollo [...] issued a contract and approved it.”
- Other deities.
 - Temple of Mephitis? [3rd century BC].
 - Temple of Bacchus at Sant’ Abbondio [2nd century BC].

The Roman Period

- Major temples and spatial organisation.
 - Roman model: temple(s) and associated forum.
- Temple of Jupiter (2nd century BC).
 - Converted into a Capitolium from 80 BC.
- Temple of Venus.
 - Built atop the earlier sanctuary of Mephitis?



The Imperial Cult

- Privately funded temples, alters and sacrifices.
 - e.g., Temple of Augustan Fortune – Marcus Tullius.
 - The so-called Temple of Vespasian?
- Statues of living members of the imperial family in public sanctuaries.
 - From AD 41: vows for the welfare of the emperor and the *Res Publica* (Pliny the Younger *Panegyricus* 67.3.5).
 - *Genius Augusti* .
 - Sacrifices on special occasions:
 - E.g., Nero's accession (13th October) and his first assumption of tribunician powers (4th December).
- A civic cult, but with supra-local dimensions?
 - Broadening civic participation.
 - Localised rather than top-down.



Marble altar at the centre of the so-called Temple of Vespasian



Wall-painting showing a procession in honour of the goddess Cybele (IX.7.1)

“...rites from abroad, she [Rome] celebrates them in accordance with her own traditions, after banishing all fabulous clap-trap. The rites of the Idaean goddess [Magna Mater] are a case in point... the priest and priestess of the goddess are Phrygians, and it is they who carry her image in procession through the city... no native Roman walks in procession through the city arrayed in a multi-coloured robe, begging alms or escorted by flute-players, or worships the god with the Phrygian ceremonies...” – **Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2.19.**