

Prostitution in Pompeii

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





The prevalence of prostitution

- Not illegal – no evidence of a “red-light district” at Pompeii.
 - Supposedly 35 brothels dispersed throughout the town (McGinn 2004)?
- Graffito by Marine Gate: “Anyone who sits here should read this first. Anyone who wants to fuck should ask for Attice for 16 asses” (*CIL* 4.1751).
- Lupanare or Brothel (VII.12.18) located on the Vicolo del Lupanare.
 - *cellae* with masonry beds and sexual imagery painted in the hallway.
 - 100 graffiti with allusions to customers, prostitutes, dates and payments.





Staff and clientele

- Names of people associated with the Lupanare (VII.12.18):
 - **Women:** Fortunata, Drauca, Murtis, Nice and Attice, etc.; **Men:** Hermeros, Phoebus, Hyginus, Victor, Arpocras and Felix, etc.
- Sample of the graffiti:
 - “I fucked many girls here” (*CIL* 4.2175).
 - “Felix, you fuck well (*CIL* 4.2176)
 - “I was fucked here” (*CIL* 4.2217)



Social stigma

- Meretrix (Latin, lit. ‘a woman who earns’) would be deemed *infamis*.
 - Taxes: Suetonius *Caligula* 40.
- “If a woman has Venus in her house, she will be full of vile lust, accessible for the pleasure of all, and always in thrall to the impulses of a meretrix; on account of the necessity of this life she will set up in the business herself, or contract to a leno.” – **Firmicus *Eight Books on Astrology* 3.6.22.**
- Likely enslaved or of lower status:
 - Vistilia and the aediles' list (Tac. *Ann.* 2.85).

domūs, *vernae* and prostitution

- Household slaves and supplementing income from prostitution?
- High-class brothel?
 - House of the Centenary (IX.8.6) and “private suite”.
- *Vernae* (house-born slaves) and prostitution.
 - the noun *verna* appears in connection with prostitution in 70% of the graffiti.
 - Tavern (I.3.1): “Chresimus, *verna*, for 4 asses” (CIL 4.3964).
 - House of the Unknown Matron (V.1.15) mention: “Felicla, *verna*, for 2 asses” (CIL 4.4023) and “Successa, *verna* with charming ways, for 5 [asses]’ (CIL 4.4025).”

