

Religion and Sicily Questions

What does this passage of Cicero suggest about which deities were important to Sicily?:

“Oh, but Caius Verres has done you such an injury as might afflict the minds of all the rest of the Sicilians also, though the grievance was felt only by another. Nothing of the sort. For I think it is material also to this argument to consider what sort of injury is alleged and brought forward as the cause of your [Caecilius'] enmity. Allow me to relate it. For he indeed, unless he is wholly destitute of sense, will never say what it is. There is a woman of the name of Agonis, a Lilybaean, a freedwoman of Venus Erycina; a woman who before this man was quaestor was notoriously well off and rich. From her some prefect of Antonius's carried off some musical slaves whom he said he wished to use in his fleet. Then she, as is the custom in Sicily for all the slaves of Venus, and all those who have procured their emancipation from her, in order to hinder the designs of the prefect, by the scruples which the name of Venus would raise, said that she and all her property belonged to Venus. [56] When this was reported to Caecilius, that most excellent and upright man, he ordered Agonis to be summoned before him; he immediately orders a trial to ascertain “if it appeared that she had said that she and all her property belonged to Venus.” The recuperators decide all that was necessary, and indeed there was no doubt at all that she had said so. He sends men to take possession of the woman's property. He adjudges her herself to be again a slave of Venus; then he sells her property and confiscates the money. So while Agonis wishes to keep a few slaves under the name and religious protection of Venus, she loses all her fortunes and her own liberty by the wrong doing of that man. After that, Verres comes to Lilybaeum; he takes cognisance of the affair; he disapproves of the act; he compels his quaestor to pay back and restore to its owner all the money which he had confiscated, having been received for the property of Agonis. [57] He is here, and you may well admire it, no longer Verres, but Quintus Mucius. For what could he do more delicate to obtain a high character among men? what more just to relieve the distress of the women? what more severe to repress the licentiousness of his quaestor? All this appears to me most exceedingly praiseworthy. But at the very next step, in a moment, as if he had drank of some Circaean cup, having been a man, he becomes Verres again; he returns to himself and to his old habits. For of that money he appropriated a great share to himself, and restored to the woman only as much as he chose.” (Civ. Div. Caec. 55-6; divination: pre-trial hearing to determine who should lead the prosecution)

- Cicero *Verrines*: read these passages and think about the questions.

Verres supported worship of Venus Eryx and had links with the shrine in NW Sicily. How might this be problematic for Cicero? How/why does Cicero link Verres with Venus?

“So that he confined himself to the mere statement that, when Sacerdos was praetor, Sthenius had tampered with the public documents. He had scarcely said this when Verres gives sentence “that Sthenius seems to have tampered with the public documents,” and, moreover, this man so devoted to Venus, added this besides, with no precedent for, no example of, such an addition, “For that action he should adjudge five hundred thousand sesterces to Venus Erycina out of the property of Sthenius.” And immediately he began to sell his property; and he would have sold it, if there had been ever so little delay in paying him the money.” (Cic. Verr. 2.2.93)

“When he was still at Rome, he heard that a very great inheritance had come to a certain Sicilian named Dio; that the heir had been enjoined by the terms of the will to erect statues in the forum; that, unless he erected them, he was to be liable to forfeiture to Venus Erycina. Although they had been erected in compliance with the will, still he; Verres, thought, since the name of Venus was mentioned, that he could find some pretext for making money of it.

[22]Therefore he sets up a man to claim that inheritance for Venus Erycina. For it was not (as would have been usual) the quaestor in whose province Mount Eryx was, who made the demand. A fellow of the name of Naevius Turpo is the claimant, a spy and emissary of Verres, the most infamous of all that band of informers of his, who had been condemned in the praetorship of Caius Sacerdos for many wickednesses. For the cause was such that the very praetor himself when he was seeking for an accuser, could not find one a little more respectable than this fellow. Verres acquits his man of any forfeiture to Venus, but condemns him to pay forfeit to himself. He preferred, forsooth, to have men do wrong rather than gods;—he preferred himself to extort from Dio what was contrary to law, rather than to let Venus take anything that was not due to her.” (*Verr.* 2.2.21-2)

“Then, when for a while he had dispensed the laws for bribery, and not out of considerations of justice, he thought that now the rest of his time was due to Venus and to Bacchus” (*Cic. Verr.* 2.5.11)

- Claudian and the Eleusinian mysteries: evoked in preface but no coverage (unfinished): closed in 390s (rise of Christianity): might this have roused extra interest or less interest?