

## For the Favor of Venus Pompeiana: A Gendered Analysis of Venus Inscriptions

Recent scholarship on Pompeii highlights separately expressions of the city's tutelary deity, Venus Pompeiana, and graffiti authored by women. To be specific, Venus Pompeiana studies concentrate primarily on her temple and frescoes and are set apart from discussions of gendered graffiti, though Venus Pompeiana is invoked frequently by female authors (Carroll, 2010; Brain, 2018). Further, while innovative in its study of gender, graffiti scholarship still usually apportioned women's writings implicitly at dichotomous ends of the Pompeian sociocultural spectrum: faithful women occupying private homes and debaucherous agents of the public brothel, the Lupanar. Yet, in Pompeii, women's roles were more intricate than this, as Venus Pompeiana inscriptions and graffiti – some of which constitute an important expression of women's lived experiences – may attest. Scholarship considering gender and Venus Pompeiana writings simultaneously, however, is somewhat sparse. Therefore, this poster applies a gendered analysis to a modest corpus of Venus Pompeiana inscriptions and graffiti – some of which cross the traditional lines of space, class, and gender – and argues that by examining this subset, we can attain a richer understanding of women's experiences and identities in Pompeii.

The poster illustrates these findings in three parts, each comprising two subsections. First, the poster explores Venus Pompeiana's presence in Pompeii and the methods employed by current graffiti scholars (e.g. Benefiel, 2011; Keegan, 2014; Levin-Richardson, 2019). It then turns to the writing itself, construed along two axes: public/private and upper/lower class. These axes are analyzed first in a grouping of graffiti of which women were the likely audience and subsequently in a set where they were the likely authors. Suggestions for further reading are offered alongside a conclusion, where it is proposed the realities of Roman women do not fit the

archetypes assigned to them, and their identities instead occupy – at least in Pompeii – a vast spectrum expressed abstractly in their invocation of the divine, and lived concretely throughout the Roman world.

### Bibliography

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