

The Real Housewives of Pompeii
Jillian White
Majors in Classics and Cognitive Science
Dr. Adkins, Department of Classics

Introduction:

There is no shortage of stories about the great men of Ancient Rome. The words and deeds of elite men such as Vergil, Cicero, Augustus, and their peers have greatly shaped even modern literature, rhetoric, politics, and culture. Their voices ring clear and loud in the annals of history. Ancient women are, in comparison, nearly mute. Much of the extant literary evidence shows the lives of these women through the blurred lens of masculine voices in a patriarchal society. Because of the lack of literary evidence, it is necessary to turn to other sources, such as inscriptions and graffiti to find remnants of women's voices in the ancient world. In addition, this approach allows for the exploration of the lives and thoughts of women of different intersectional identities.

Because of the wealth of inscriptions and graffiti preserved in their original contexts there, the city of Pompeii is an ideal location for this project. Since the official commencement of excavations at Pompeii in the mid 18th century, the site has proved itself to be an archeological wellspring. By virtue of its burial under volcanic ash from the 79 CE eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, much of the town has been beautifully preserved. It leaves evidence of a world far more vibrant and diverse than the austere marble and grandiose monuments typically associated with Rome would lead one to believe. The people who lived so many hundreds of years ago were people all the same. Much like in modernity, they could not be perfectly placed into rigid models, despite attempts at such idealization from both the past and present.

Proposed Project:

I have selected four sites of interest to this project, each designed to reflect the life of a Pompeian woman of a different social standing. They are the estate of Julia Felix, a wealthy female entrepreneur; the Eumachia building, that of another wealthy woman heavily involved in the religio-political landscape of the city; the Lupanar, Pompeii's official brothel and the home and workplace of many sex workers; and House 6, the location of a controversial inscription (*CIL* iv.5296), argued to be one of the few extant writings expressing love between two women in the Roman world. In my analysis of these sites, I aim to explore the intersectional identities of these women, as well as the ways in which they asserted their own voices and power within the world of Roman Pompeii.

Literature Review:

In past centuries of excavation, Pompeii has fueled a lively stream of scholarship. The following sources have been of particular influence to this project. In her book, *Pompeii*, Alison Cooley has drawn upon historical and archeological evidence to rebut the notion of the town as a perfect time-capsule. Her work illuminates the significant impact past and present politics and shifting socio-cultural contexts upon the perception and study of the site (Cooley, 80-96). Such discussions of scholastic bias are crucial to our understanding of ancient peoples. By evaluating varying biases and viewpoints, we are better able to understand the impermanence of the social

constructs that shape current perceptions, and thus to conceptualize the many ways in which ancient peoples thought of themselves were both alien and similar to own on perceptions (Skinner, 3-19).

In my research on more specific sites and archeological analyses, the work of Paul Zanker has provided much insight. He examines the manners in which Pompeians may have used decor, architectural features, and the domestic arts to assert their ownership of and relation to public and private spaces, as well as their broader cultural identities (Zanker, 192-203). This style of analysis can be applied especially to the figures of Eumachia and Julia Felix, each marking her influence upon the city with, respectively, an imposing temple in the Augustan style, and an apartment complex decorated in pastoral splendor (D'Ambra, 401-409). Lastly, Kristina Milnor's analysis of the literary culture of Pompeian graffiti has illuminated the ways in which the denizens of the city recorded their thoughts on the walls and stones surrounding them. Of particular note is her chapter on *CIL* iv.5296, in which Milnor provides a close-reading of the epigraph, examining the subversive use of language by its author to assert the identities of both herself and her lover as women (Milnor, 191-232).

Methodology:

For each location, as previously described, I will examine epigraphic evidence prior to the trip, using the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (*CIL*). Once on the site, I intend to explore the relation of these graffiti in the context of their surroundings, including placement in the specific sites as well as the city as a whole, and other archeological and iconographic evidence found nearby and/or preserved in the Naples Archeological Museum.

Time Commitment:

I plan to conduct a large portion of the research for this project during Summer Session I, during which I will be studying abroad in Rome for the course CLSC 326, Rome on Site: The Archeology of the Eternal City. This class is lead by my project mentor, Dr. Adkins. By taking this class, I will gain a grounding in the use of on-site archaeological, iconographic, and epigraphic evidence in the study of classical civilizations. The course will also visit several sites in the Bay of Naples (including Pompeii), which will help me to become more familiar with the area, as well as providing a broad overview of the site's history. I have not had prior experience conducting on-site research, so this course will provide me with the necessary training for this project. On one of the course's free days, I intend to spend an additional day in the Bay of Naples, so that I am able to revisit Pompeii and the Naples Archeological Museum and finish my research. Prior to departing for the trip, I will spend more time reading scholarship on Pompeii, as well as examining inscriptions from the selected areas in the *CIL*.

Conclusion:

This project will develop my knowledge of research resources and methods that I am expected to demonstrate as a Classics major. It will allow me to gain experience with research within the field of Classical Studies, which I am considering potentially pursuing in my graduate studies. As pertains to the more immediate future, my mentor and I have discussed presenting my research at a Classical Association of the Middle West and South (CAMWS) conference. This would be an amazing opportunity for me to not only share and receive feedback on my work, but also to be exposed to more research and to network within the field.

Bibliography:

Cooley, Allison. *Pompeii*. Duckworth, 2003

D'Ambra, Eve. "Women in the Bay of Naples." *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*. Edited by James and Dillon. Blackwell, 2012

Milner, Kristina. *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii*. Oxford University Press, 2014

Skinner, Marilyn. "Feminist Theory." *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*. Edited by Thomas K. Hubbard. Blackwell, 2014

Zanker, Paul. *Pompeii: Public and Private Life*. Trans. Deborah Scheider. Harvard University Press, 1998

Budget:

Airfare (est):	\$1800
Meals (18 days x \$48/diem, est):	\$864
Entrance Fee to Pompeii:	\$15
Entrance Fee to Naples Archeological Museum:	\$20
Train and bus fare:	\$35
Hotel (1 night est):	\$80
Hiking boots (for safety on archeological site):	\$150
Research Books:	\$50

\$3014