

# Minerva, urban defenses, and the continuity of cult at Pompeii

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The religious landscapes of Republican-era urban communities in central and southern Italy were built on complex relationships between the inhabitants and their sacred spaces. The critical need to defend sacred sites such as temples, shrines and altars contributed directly to the shaping of urban centers and the formation of their cultural identities. Many urban centers had a separate citadel where communities protected their sanctuaries behind fortifications. In a reciprocal process the gods protected settlements.<sup>1</sup> Some city gates (e.g., Volterra, Perugia, Falerii Novi) still carry prominent adornments in the form of busts and reliefs that evoke implicit civic and religious associations. The deities' presence implies a complex political and social interaction between the population, protective gods, and fortifications. As tutelary deities, their manipulation whether by a local élite or by a power such as Rome was an important part of the definition and appropriation of local identity.

No other Republican-era site preserves as much information on this topic as Pompeii, even if our understanding of its presiding deities has suffered on account of the piecemeal recovery of, and engagement with, the relevant material. If the colonial cult of Venus Fisica Pompeiana and her temple built onto the defenses plainly makes a reference between a protective deity and the town, surviving evidence from the gates points especially to Minerva as the protectress of the fortifications. Recent discoveries allow for a fresh look at this topic. In particular, an altar at the Porta Stabia points to a continuity of cult that extended from the first construction of the gate in the late 4th c. B.C. until the final eruption. This article aims to contextualize the discovery at this gate by connecting it to ongoing investigations at the Temple of Minerva and Temple of Venus and work on the Porta Marina statue. This will not only show a close connection between the fortifications and two of the town's principal tutelary divinities, but also highlight their developing presence and rôles within the community. It points to a religious and political connection between cults, fortifications, and civic identity that changed over time and was subject to élite manipulation.

The walls of Pompeii form an elliptical circuit c.3.2 km in length. Their layout is based upon the third of three major circuits. The first two, known as the Pappamonte and the Orthostate fortifications, were built in the 6th and early 5th c.; they foreshadowed the existing course but their state is fragmentary. The third main circuit, also known as the Limestone enceinte or the first Samnite wall, dates to the turn of the 3rd c. B.C. The full reconstruction of this circuit is debated; suffice to say that it probably was an *agger* in which large ashlar blocks acted as a containment wall for a heavy earth embankment. It formed the basis for the fortification system that is presently visible, which is essentially

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1 Y. Garlan, "Fortifications et histoire grecque," in J.-P. Vernant (ed.), *Problèmes de la guerre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1968) 245; M. J. Rowlands, "Defense: a factor in the organization of settlements," in R. Tringham, G. W. Dimbleby and P. J. Ucko (edd.), *Man, settlement and urbanism* (London 1972) 448; A. Gat, "Why city states existed? Riddles and clues of urbanisation and fortifications," in M. H. Hansen (ed.), *A comparative study of six city-state cultures* (Copenhagen 2000) 131 and 138-39; M. Torelli "The Etruscan city-state," in M. H. Hansen (ed.), *A comparative study of thirty city-state cultures: an investigation conducted by the Copenhagen Polis Centre* (Copenhagen 2000) 195-99; also M. H. Hansen, "The Hellenic polis" in id. 2000 (ibid.) 168-69.