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## At home with the Lares: lived religion rematerialised at Pompeii

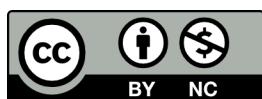
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# AT HOME WITH THE LARES: LIVED RELIGION REMATERIALISED AT POMPEII

Emma-Jayne Graham

## Abstract

*This article posits that Pompeian religious knowledge which characterised Lares and serpents as gods of place was a consequence of lived religion. It argues that this religious knowledge arose from personal experiences of religious agency as it was produced during encounters with these deities in different material and locational contexts, namely household kitchen shrines and street-corner altars. It suggests that because of the unique ways in which ritual caused humans to assemble with the mutually affective material qualities available in these particular contexts, these experiences and the religious knowledge they produced were grounded in ritualised actions incorporating the immediate material world, rather than involving purely cognitive or pre-existing intellectual understandings or beliefs. Adopting a broadly posthumanist position that combines elements of material religion and lived religion, the essay therefore highlights how religious knowledge at Pompeii was the product of ritualised relationships between human and more-than-human things (e.g. places, objects, divinity). Applying these concepts to ancient Pompeian religion for the first time, the discussion demonstrates how lived religion produced proximal forms of religious knowledge concerning personal and communal understandings of ancient Lares and serpents that effectively substantiated them as gods of place.*

**Keywords:** Lares, *lararium*, senses, material religion, lived religion, place, religious

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## Biographical note

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Banner image: Detail from a garden painting, from the House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. (Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

# AT HOME WITH THE LARES: LIVED RELIGION REMATERIALISED AT POMPEII

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In the years immediately before 79 CE, the kitchen area of the large house at Pompeii known today as the House of the Epigrams (V.I.18; Fig. 2.1) was located at its most northerly corner. The natural light that entered this small space through two narrow, funnel-shaped windows on the eastern wall was most likely at its brightest during the morning and, perhaps with the help of artificial lighting, illuminated an almost square room with a doorway in its south-west corner (Staub, 2016) (Fig. 2.2). As was typical for Roman kitchens (Ault, 2015, p.210), a masonry counter built against the east wall beneath the windows was probably used as the hearth area, on top of which braziers for cooking could be placed. At the northern end of the counter was the arched doorway of a small brick and tile-lined oven built into the wall that separated the kitchen from a latrine (Staub, 2016).

A little over half a metre (0.68 m) above the kitchen counter, and slightly to the left of its centre, a small arched niche (measuring  $0.51 \times 0.44 \times 0.18\text{m}$ ) was set into the wall, with both its sides and the tile used to create its base covered with a thick layer of plaster (Staub Gierow, 2017b; Haug & Kreuz characterise these features as a form of domestic religious 'microarchitecture' in this volume) (Fig. 2.3). At least two statuettes could be inserted into holes cut into the plaster base of the niche, while the wall beside it and above the counter was painted with a now lost fresco (Boyce, 1937, p.32, n.75; Giacobello, 2008, pp.162–3; Staub Gierow, 2017b; for discussion of the better-preserved paintings from the house see Jones in this volume). Analogous arrangements can be found in houses across the city of Pompeii, where frescoes accompanying kitchen niches frequently portray the image of a libation-pouring Genius flanked by two large Lares, above a lower register depicting a rocky and verdant landscape in which one or two snakes approach an altar. For these reasons, it can be supposed that the traces of the fresco in the kitchen area of the House of the Epigrams, which were already faint when reported nearly a century ago by George Boyce (1937, p.32, n.75), once represented a version of the same scene, or at least one with similar religious

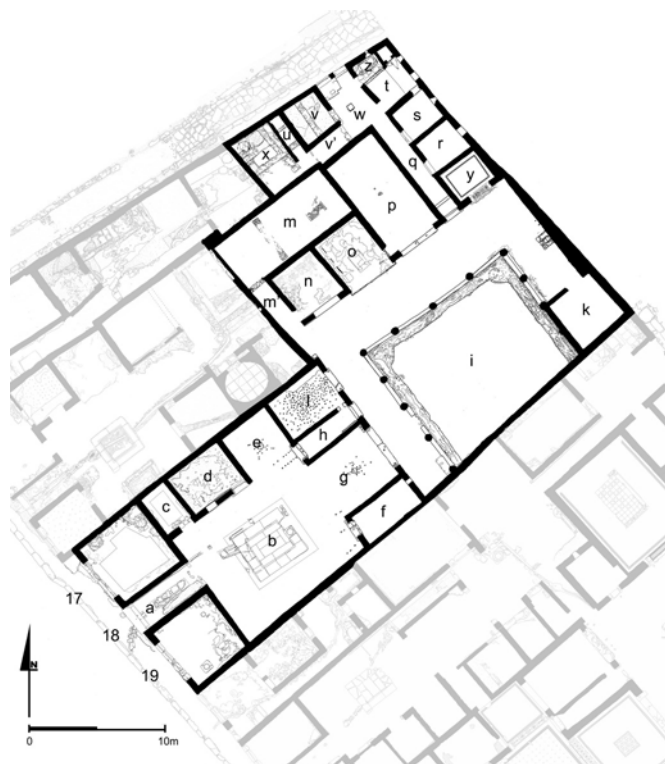


Figure 2.1: Plan of House of the Epigrams, showing the relationship between the kitchen area (t), the adjacent latrine (z) and the open space through which they were accessed (w). North is towards the top of the image. (Drawing by Ezequiel M. Pinto-Guillaume and Henrik Boman, used with permission of the Swedish Pompeii Project and the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali - Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

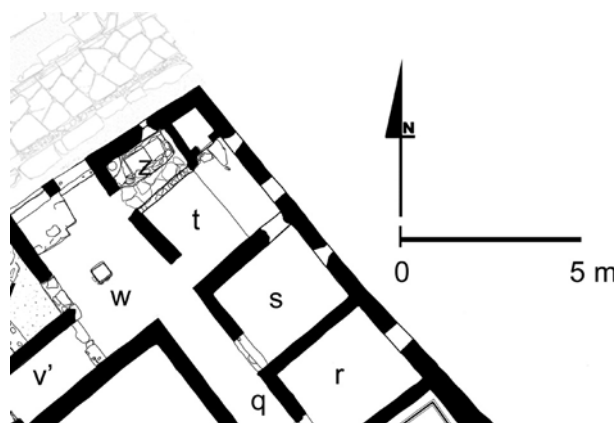


Figure 2.2: Detailed plan of the kitchen area of the House of the Epigrams, showing how the small square oven situated behind the latrine opened onto the long masonry bench of the kitchen. The kitchen dimensions are:  $2.78 \times 2.2 \times 2.71 \times 2.15\text{m}$ . North is towards the top of the image. (Drawing by Ezequiel M. Pinto-Guillaume and Henrik Boman, used with permission of the Swedish Pompeii Project and the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali - Parco Archeologico di Pompei)



Figure 2.3: The *lararium* niche in the kitchen of the House of the Epigrams. (Photo by Hans Thorwid, used with permission of the Swedish Pompeii Project and the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali - Parco Archeologico di Pompei)

connections. Together, then, the niche and fresco most probably provided a focus for ritual activities associated with honouring the divine figures known as the *Lares familiares*.

A person leaving this same house through its main entrance and walking a few hundred metres to the south along the street now named the Via del Vesuvio, would have reached the largest, and one of the most busy, crossroads in the city (Poehler, 2017, pp. 147, 182; Poehler, Roggen & Crowther, 2019, p. 255). The pavement of the Via del Vesuvio considerably widened where it joined the junction of the Via della Fortuna, Via Stabiana, and Via di Nola, especially in the area immediately outside a *caupona* (VI.14.16) and a shop (VI.14.17) associated with the large House of L. Numisius Rarus and his wife Oppia (VI.14.12, the main entrance to which was around the corner on the Via della Fortuna). Here, where the pavement was much more spacious than in most streets of the city, our wanderer from the House of the Epigrams would have encountered another shrine adorned with similarly familiar iconography. Between a public fountain and

a tall water tower stood a masonry altar (measuring 1.10 × 1.16 × 8.5m), built against a taller and slightly wider flat pillar, on which was painted a scene depicting a religious ceremony involving four togate men and a flute player, accompanied by the *Lares compitales*, the pair of divinities charged with the protection of the street corner (Van Andringa, 2000, p. 50; Flower, 2017, pp. 152–3) (Fig. 2.4).

It would have been clear to our ancient Pompeian what the difference was between these interior and exterior places with otherwise comparable religious iconography, as well as between the divine characters with whom they were connected, and the different nature of their own relationship with each of them. From their perspective, each set of images, and the material things with which they were connected, was closely entwined with an individual and localised form of divinity and a discrete set of ritualised practices. The *Lares* honoured through those practices were, according to Harriet Flower (2017, p. 158), unique to each individual shrine. In other words, the ancient *Lares* were the protectors of the immediate spaces with which they were visibly and physically associated through the presence of the frescoes, niches, and altars just described and, most importantly, also through the activities that occurred in conjunction with them. Accordingly, the *Lares*, who existed ‘perhaps almost [as] an infinite number of pairs, instances and local variants’ (Flower, 2017, p. 159), were unquestionably gods of place.

Elsewhere I have argued that the ways of rationalising, thinking about, and continuing to act in the world which derive from lived religion can be described as constituting ‘religious knowledge’ (Graham, 2021, pp. 21–2; *forthcoming*). In this article, I therefore suggest that this knowledge of the *Lares* as gods of place was, correspondingly, a consequence of lived religion. That is, that it was a form of religious knowledge which arose from personal experiences of religious agency as it was produced during encounters with *Lares* in different material and locational contexts. Most importantly, I suggest that because of the unique ways in which ritual caused the thingly qualities of humans to assemble with the mutually affective material qualities that were available in particular contexts, these experiences were grounded in ritualised actions incorporating the immediate material world, rather than involving purely cognitive or pre-existing intellectual understandings or beliefs (on the concept of ‘things’ and ‘thinginess’, see Graham, 2020; Morgan, 2021). The broadly posthumanist position that underpins this argument therefore combines elements of material religion and lived religion. It highlights how religious agency (i.e.





Figure 2.4: Drawing of fountain, street altar and water column. (Source: Breton, 1855, p.307).

the difference that ritualised acts make to the world that humans perceive and characterise as ‘religion’) and religious knowledge are the product of ritualised relationships between human and more-than-human things (e.g. places, objects, divinity) (Graham, 2020; 2021; *forthcoming*). In this paper, I apply these concepts to ancient Pompeian religion for the first time, by examining how the assembling of worshippers with the divergent material qualities of a household kitchen *lararium* and a street-corner shrine produced diverse, dynamic, and often individualised forms of lived religion. In turn, I demonstrate how these forms of lived religion produced what I shall describe as both ‘distal’ and ‘proximal’ forms of religious knowledge concerning understandings of ancient Lares that effectively substantiated them as gods of place.

### Lares and *lararia* at Pompeii

Scholarship on Roman Lares and *lararia* is already substantial. This is especially true for studies of Pompeii, which, thanks to the almost unparalleled survival of *in situ* frescoes, altars, other types of shrine, and bronze or terracotta statuettes, has provided a wealth of iconographic and material evidence for the pervasive presence of Lares within the public and personal lives of the inhabitants of the city (key works include: Boyce, 1937; Orr, 1978; Fröhlich, 1991; Van Andringa, 2000; Kaufmann-Heinimann, 2002; Giacobello, 2008; Van Andringa, 2009, pp.217–69; Flower, 2017; Flower and DiLuzio, 2019; see also Haug & Kreuz in this volume). It is neither possible, nor necessary, to provide a comprehensive survey of centuries of observations regarding the *lararia* of Pompeii here, but it is useful to draw attention to those which are most relevant to the following investigation of Lares cult as lived religion.





Figure 2.5: A fourth style (55–79 CE) *lararium* painting from Pompeii, with an uncertain find-spot. MANN 8905. (Photo: Sailko, Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 3.0)

Indeed, it is crucial to begin by acknowledging that the majority of studies of the Pompeian Lares and their *lararia*, including those which do not explicitly adopt an art-historical focus (e.g. Flower, 2017; Rogers, 2020), are nonetheless concerned with, or take their lead from, iconographic evidence. This is to be expected, given that surviving wall paintings present the primary means of identifying the locations at which Lares might be encountered, as well as making it possible to distinguish the particular characteristics of the Lares and their cult from those of the many other deities, heroes, and otherworldly beings who were part of Pompeian life. Accordingly, it has been established that visual representations of the Lares will conventionally depict them as a pair of giant young men, dressed in short tunics, shown pouring wine from a *rhyton* raised above shoulder height into a *situla* held in their opposing hand. Sometimes they appear to be in the act of moving or dancing, and they regularly flank the image of a togate Genius (and sometimes other divine or mortal figures) shown pouring a libation or making an offering at a small altar. In a lower section, beneath the line of the ground on which the Lares and Genius stand, can often

be seen one or two snakes and a (usually circular) altar, set within a landscape of plants and rocks. An indicative and very well-known example, the exact find-spot of which remains uncertain, can be seen in Fig. 2.5 (the details of this painting are discussed by Jones in this volume; see also the additional examples of *lararia* in Haug & Kreuz). Studies have revealed a strong preponderance of these scenes within the kitchen areas of many Pompeian houses (Foss, 1997; Giacobello, 2008; Van Andringa, 2009, pp. 236–40; Brandt, 2010). This repeated iconographic scheme has consequently been instrumental in distinguishing between what might be considered a true *lararium*, and other types of household shrine found elsewhere within the *domus*, at which were honoured the Penates and deities with special or personal significance to the head of the household (most commonly referred to in related scholarship as the *paterfamilias* or *dominus*) and his family (Giacobello, 2008, pp. 35–6). Federica Giacobello (2008, p. 60), for instance, has conclusively demonstrated that the long-held assumption that Lares were worshipped exclusively by the family in the so-called ‘areas of representation’ of the house, while

'a separate, parallel track of domestic worship' (Bodel, 2008, p.266) took place among enslaved people and servants in other areas such as kitchens, is in fact not supported by the material evidence for 'true' *lararia*.

Identifying the presence of shrines for the worship of the *Lares compitales* at street corners and in other street-side locations has also relied heavily on visual and iconographic evidence, although the existence of archaeologically verifiable altars of all types has considerably widened the evidence for community Lares worship beyond exclusively iconographic testimony. These open-air altars and shrines are generally understood to have formed the focal point for the annual winter festival of Compitalia, involving sacrifices and offerings made in the company of the community of the surrounding neighbourhood, and led by local freedmen elected to act as presiding *vicomagistri* (Giacobello, 2008, pp.45–7; Van Andringa, 2000, pp.73–6; Flower, 2017, p.147; Rieger, 2020; the relevance to Pompeii of the Augustan reform of public Lares cult remains a matter of debate that is beyond the scope of this paper). Although the depiction of a pair of anthropomorphic Lares, accompanied by one or two serpents, remains dominant within the surviving paintings associated with street-corner shrines, other elements of their iconography differ from that found in domestic *lararia*. More than one cult official (*vicomagistri*) might be shown in place of the single Genius pouring a libation; serpents appear on their own without any other figures; and, in at least two examples, images of twelve Olympian gods are also incorporated into the broader scene (for a full discussion, see Flower, 2017, p.150; also Fig. 2.7). William Van Andringa's (2000) study of street-corner shrines ('autel de carrefour') remains the most comprehensive survey of the location and form of these open-air places of cult. He catalogued 38 examples, although Flower (2017, p.147) has since observed that evidence exists for at least 58 street shrines of all types across Pompeii 'including many niches, as well as possible sites of former shrines,' many of which may have been used during the Compitalia. Amongst these, humble or poorly preserved structures often appear part way along narrow streets, well away from junctions. Examples include the small altar made of two vertical stone slabs located between VI.12.6 and VI.12.7, and the single stone altar below a brick niche at IX.4.14, both of which are located in streets surrounding the more substantial shrine at the junction described above (Pompeii in Pictures, n.d.). These may have been associated with celebrations of Lares or with other (or indeed multiple) ritualised activities.

Recent work by Flower (2017) offers the most comprehensive study of Lares and Roman religion, not only at Pompeii but also at Rome, Delos, and in relation to Roman culture more widely. Among other things, Flower offers a significant new reading of the iconography discussed above, asserting that the youths and snakes are not in fact alternative ways of visualising what were essentially the same divinities as some have supposed. Instead, the giant anthropomorphic figures of Lares depict the gods responsible for protecting the house, whereas the images of snakes shown inhabiting a subterranean environment of plants, trees, and rocks evoke an entirely separate pair of protective deities. Accordingly, she argues, like Lares themselves, the serpents should also be identified as 'gods of place', not least because they often 'receive their own distinct offering of either eggs or pinecones on a separate altar within their garden', a detail which 'stresses their status as divine figures in their own right' (Flower, 2017, pp.63, 65). Flower goes on to note that, as a result of this understanding, 'the Lares themselves gain a deeper meaning as "gods of place" in the home when they are combined with the quite different "gods of place" who inhabit their own sphere in nature' (2017, p.67). Later in the same study she describes the serpents more specifically as gods 'of the natural environment that existed before, beneath, around, and in harmony with the communities built by men' (p.151). The implications of Flower's observations therefore appear to be that the serpents shown in *lararia* paintings in the home and the street should be understood as the gods of the physical setting in, on, and within which the house or street altar was constructed, that is, of the very ground beneath its foundations and of the fundamental materialness of the location itself. If this is indeed the case, their distinctive visual pairing with both the *Lares familiares* and the *Lares compitales* further strengthens the case for understanding all Lares-related cult activities as intimately entwined with the physical qualities of a particular location. This extends from the qualities of the physical material world as it was constructed and experienced by worshippers and shared with anthropomorphic Lares, to those of the 'natural' environment of the serpents that humans had appropriated, and for which they must continue to give thanks.

Despite this new characterisation of Lares and serpents as distinct divinities who were both intimately entwined with place in the Roman (or at least the Pompeian) imagination, no investigation has yet explored very far beyond the visual qualities of *lararia* shrines to consider how their material qualities as

real-world places were implicated in lived religion. Questions remain to be asked, for instance, about how emplaced ritualised experiences that directly invoked and materialised this complex pair of ‘gods of place’ might produce, sustain, rework, or reinforce very specific forms of religious knowledge concerning the fundamental ‘placely’ nature of Lares and divine serpents. In other words, despite acknowledging the importance of the *idea* of place, we have yet to fully consider the significance of the materialness of the *actual* places where people encountered these divine beings. To do this, it is necessary to approach the materialness of Lares cult through the lens of lived religion.

### Lived religion, materialness, and religious knowledge

Adopting a material-focused approach to ancient lived religion involves shifting our analyses of evidence such as the iconography discussed above away from questions about *what* it means, towards a new focus on *how* it means (Boivin, 2008; Mol & Versluys, 2015; Van Oyen & Pitts, 2017; Graham, 2020; 2021). That is to say that, what differentiates ancient material religion from other (primarily text-based) approaches to ancient religion is its emphasis not on recovering the underlying meaning of material symbols, but on the potentialities of materially situated experiences and their role in the continual production of religion. This essentially involves spotlighting the role played by the qualities of the material world in shaping the physical and cognitive experiences of human ritual participants in such a way as to actively *produce* religion (Graham, 2021). Approached from this standpoint, religion can be understood as emerging primarily from the ways in which people do things with other things in ritualised contexts and, crucially, the ways in which the qualities or affordances of those things affect difference or do something to them in return (Graham, 2020, pp.228–9; 2021, p.201). In other words, by engaging in particular ways with material things and their mutually affective qualities, including aspects of the more-than-human world, such as objects, animals, places, trees, foodstuffs, divinities, and so on, distinctive differences are made to the world (Boivin, 2008, p.50; Graham, 2021, pp.29–30). In ritualised contexts which prompt the assembling of certain things, such as the performance of a sacrifice, those differences are experienced by human participants as lived religion (Graham, 2021, pp.38–9). Hence, it was not through the mere existence of the *ideas* connected with pouring libations or performing sacrifices that ancient deities were successfully worshipped, appeased, or honoured, and lived religion

consequently ‘achieved’, but through the real-world action of a person assembling in a particular way with wine, a *patera*, an altar, a place, a divinity, a moment in time, and so on. Lived religion arises, then, in the *doing* of ritual, and the mutually affective relationships that ritualised activities forge between humans and the more-than-human material world.

All forms of religious knowledge can thus be defined as profoundly personal and experience-based understandings of what religion entails, and as knowledge that emerges from the ongoing accumulation of a person’s experience of lived religion as it has been described here. However, this definition must be further refined before we proceed, since different types of experience might also lead to subtly different forms of religious knowledge. For instance, the most basic distinction might be between: (1) knowledge acquired through membership of a particular cultural world such as that of Roman Pompeii, and the consequent possession of an overarching understanding of its norms, expectations, and broadly shared religious concepts acquired through everyday experiences of being in that world; and (2) the type of knowledge that was acquired by actively engaging on a personal, embodied level in particular ritualised activities. To more accurately distinguish between these types of knowledge and the ways in which they are acquired I adopt terms commonly used in anatomy to describe locations relative to the centre of the human body: ‘distal’ (i.e. ‘away from’) and ‘proximal’ (i.e. ‘near to’) (Graham, 2020, pp.212–3; 2021, pp.22–5; *forthcoming*).

Broadly shared knowledge of the cultural norms and customs that dictate how, when, where, and why particular rituals should be performed, can be described as distal religious knowledge. This sort of knowledge is most commonly attained and sustained at a distance, through the representation or communication of shared ideas, or through regularised witnessing of public or civic ritual acts such as annual festivals. Distal religious knowledge in Roman Pompeii was therefore shared across the community. It was high-level knowledge that was sustained by regular communal gatherings at which people witnessed repeated acts of sacrifice, the making of offerings, or the uttering of prayers, while shared expectations concerning the apparent necessity of those actions was perpetually communicated by being visibly sedimented within the fabric of the city (e.g. memorialised in dedicatory inscriptions, sculptural reliefs, and the provision of facilities such as altars and temples). Distal religious knowledge, then, essentially concerned what Pompeians generally understood they were expected to do, as well as where, when, and how. It was distal



religious knowledge which caused them to ritually assemble with certain material things on specified days of the year, and to perform quite specific types of action at both the kitchen and street-corner *lararia*. These repeated acts, and a wider awareness that they occurred, served to reinforce and sustain the validity and authority of that shared knowledge, indeed of what we might think of as 'Roman religion' more generally.

However, distal knowledge was also paired with the more deeply personal or proximal knowledge acquired through different embodied experiences of actively engaging in those ritualised activities – experiences which inevitably varied from individual to individual because of the differing types of material engagement that were required, either by the distally informed expectations that shaped that particular ritual or by a person's personal role within it. Proximal knowledge is therefore acquired by doing and typified by its autobiographical or individual character. We can think of this in terms of the difference between understanding that the act of sacrifice is important after you have read or heard about it or simply grown up in a world that values it, compared with the experience of being the presiding priest responsible for performing it, for touching the sacrificial victim, pouring the wine, burning the incense, and smelling the blood at close range. Proximal religious knowledge is therefore temporal and context-specific, arising from direct embodied and sensory engagements with the physical world during ritualised activities (Graham, 2021, p.24). Framing religious knowledge as a reflexive combination of proximal and distal ways of knowing therefore 'offers a way of understanding the relationship between what might be considered to be a collection of religious activities that characterise a broad cultural phenomenon (i.e. "Roman religion") and the personal experiences that engagement with these produced ("lived Roman religion")' (Graham, 2021, p.27).

Adopting a material-focused approach to lived religion, Pompeian Lares, and religious knowledge therefore compels us to ask new questions. Instead of being concerned with identifying or demystifying the ideas about place that were *symbolised* by depictions of Lares and serpents, our questions must necessarily be re-focused onto the lived experiences and religious knowledge that might potentially be produced by human engagements with the material qualities of *lararia* under certain ritualised circumstances. As noted above, distal religious knowledge concerning the Lares asserted their intimate and unique connection with specific physical and material places, rather than merely with a broader or more ill-defined concept of 'place', but they were also encountered in proximal ways via

the different material settings of household and street-corner *lararia*. It is therefore possible to suggest that when it came to Lares cult, lived religion was produced and rationalised as much through ritualised experiences of assembling with these gods *in place*, as it was through generalised cognitive understandings of their role as gods *of place*.

## A Pompeian house and street-corner shrine

To explore this further, we can consider the potential material engagements that were available in relation to the examples with which this paper began: the niche *lararium* in the kitchen area of the House of the Epigrams (V.I.18), and the nearby street-corner shrine of the *Lares compitales*. These were selected as the basis for the following case study for two main reasons: first, they each offer comparable levels of archaeological evidence for the potential material contexts in which ritualised activities were experienced; second, they are located within a short distance of one another. It can be reasonably supposed that residents of the House of the Epigrams who participated directly or indirectly in the rituals of the Compitalia festival made use of this particular local shrine, since it was the closest (known) compital altar to the house regardless of which of its entry/exit points was used (importantly, there is no archaeological or iconographic evidence for a shrine at the crossroads immediately adjacent to the house). The relative positions of the kitchen *lararium* and the street-corner shrine therefore allow for a comparison of lived religion at each, on the grounds that at least some members of the household will have encountered or engaged with both. To supplement these primary examples, I will also make occasional reference to other houses in the immediate vicinity where there is clear evidence for the presence of a *lararium* in the kitchen area. For the same reason, the households of each of these are also likely to have been involved in ritualised activities at the same street-corner shrine. Although these houses come from separate *insulae*, these 'addresses' remain a modern construct and are therefore not a factor in the analysis of ancient lived experience as it is presented here.

## Meeting the Lares in the kitchen

Let us begin by investigating the material context for lived religion at the kitchen *lararium* (Fig. 2.3). To do this, it is necessary to think through the potentially varied ways in which ritualisation may have caused particular aspects of the material qualities of the kitchen and its *lararium* to affect lived religion. This includes considering who these participants were and how the materialness of this location might on

occasion constitute a particular type of religious place. The most significant point to bear in mind in terms of the latter, is that because religion is actively brought into being through ritualisation, and since nothing innately 'possesses' religious agency, ancient kitchens did not exist as permanently religious places. As with all types of place, religious ones are best understood as constantly in the process of becoming, or as 'time-space events' (Moser & Feldman, 2014, p.6) that are situation- and assemblage-specific (Graham, 2021, pp.45–8). As a result, on its own, the presence of a *lararium* shrine and/or fresco depicting Lares or serpents was not enough to make a place inherently 'religious': religion could only be affected, or in other words performed into existence, in that location when the shrine was assembled with certain other things in the course of ritual.

To identify what those things were, we can think about what characterised the ritualised activities involving Lares: 'Garlands would be hung on and around the household shrine, incense would be burned, a variety of different types of food and drink such as spelt, grain, fruit and wine would be offered, and on occasion animals such as cows, sheep and pigs would be sacrificed' (Draycott, 2017, p.169; Ovid, *Fasti*, 2.636–38; Petronius, *Satyricon*, 60.8; Plautus, *Aulularia*, 24; for more details see Haug & Kreuz in this volume). Not all of these activities necessarily took place in the small space of the kitchen (e.g. large animal sacrifice), nor were they definitely always performed by one individual alone. Nonetheless, the *lararium* niche in the vicinity of the kitchen hearth was probably the focal point for the culmination of these activities and the giving of offerings, making it a key component within that assemblage. To this, we should also add the objects that were required to accomplish the actions just described: jugs and *paterae*, baskets and other vessels, specific knives, and braziers or incense burners. These were, of course, things that might exist within the kitchen when it was not actively incorporated into a ritualised assemblage, such as when the counter was being used for food preparation and when that food and drink was to be consumed by the household rather than given as an offering to the Lares. It was, however, only when ritual caused them to become assembled in a particular configuration with certain people, divinities, and other things that their qualities combined to make the kitchen the setting for lived religion.

We must also consider who these people were, since an additional factor in the 'of-the-moment' character of lived religion might be the varied composition of the group of humans who were participating. It might be assumed that, as the head of the household, the

*paterfamilias* was responsible for performing rituals focused on honouring the *Lares familiares* of the house and the serpent gods of the place on which it was built (Tybout, 1996; Bodel, 2008, p.261; Flower, 2017, p.73). After all, it was most likely his Genius who was shown performing a similar act in the accompanying paintings. This is nevertheless far from certain, and it has also been suggested that it was servants and the enslaved who formed the primary human component of these ritualised assemblages (Foss, 1997; Bodel, 2008, pp.248–9; Draycott, 2017). It remains possible that both the *paterfamilias* and other free and enslaved members of the household congregated in order to honour these two pairs of gods. An Augustan-period fresco from the kitchen of the House of Sutoria Primigenia (I.I3.2) certainly depicts what appears to be a large household gathering at an altar, with the family and a crowd of slaves flanked by two Lares (see Fig. 1.5 in Haug & Kreuz in this volume; Giacobello, 2008, pp.156–8; Flower, 2017, p.58, pls. 9, 10). This scene can be put forward in support of the argument that the whole household might gather on these occasions, although there is nothing in the image itself to suggest that the setting is the (very small) kitchen in which the fresco was located, and even a cursory glance at the evidence for most kitchens in Pompeian houses of all social levels reveals that the majority were also small spaces that in all likelihood could not have held the full household.

This was almost certainly the case for the kitchen of the House of the Epigrams, which was a comparatively small, enclosed space of around 6m<sup>2</sup> (2.78 × 2.2 × 2.71 × 2.15m; Staub, 2016) but with an actual floor area of closer to 2.8m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 2.2). It therefore seems very unlikely that the entire household ever assembled together in this space in order to participate in ritualised activities encompassing the *lararium* niche. The materialness of the space itself therefore implies that proximal religious knowledge produced by the performance of ritualised activities in conjunction with the materialness of the kitchen was restricted to a small number of people. It remains possible that the space immediately outside the kitchen accommodated a larger gathering of members of the household who witnessed – or who at least heard and possibly smelled – the activities performed at the niche above the hearth (this space is marked as 'w' in Fig. 2.1, and has been identified as a possible hallway with a staircase to an upper floor; Staub Gierow, 2017c). In this case, the material qualities of the kitchen also contributed to the production and maintenance of distal forms of knowledge concerning the worship of the *Lares familiares* and the serpent gods of that place.

The people who did assemble with the materialness of the kitchen *lararium* and the other material things described above, most probably did so in quite different ways and under a variety of ritual (and non-ritual) circumstances. Probably only one person could perform the main ritualised act of pouring a libation onto a brazier, or placing the offerings into the niche and any garlands around it, and they may have done so in a location and with objects that they only ever assembled with on that occasion (i.e. with things that were not part of their everyday lives, including perhaps the space of the kitchen itself in the case of the *paterfamilias* who might be expected not to spend much time or to be overly familiar with kitchen areas). In other words, we must not assume that it was always, or only, the people who spent much of their time in this location who ritually assembled with the *lararium* shrine. If and when they did, their experiences of lived religion must have contrasted significantly with that of the *paterfamilias*, largely because of their differing levels of familiarity with the material affordances of that location and the objects with which they assembled. To understand the significance of the connection between Lares and the materialness of place in the production of lived religion we therefore need to pay greater attention to the realities of the physical places with which they were connected and the types of religious agency that these did and did not facilitate. Thus, the next logical question must be: what did the material or thingly qualities of the kitchen *lararium* afford in terms of the specific nature of those religious experiences and subsequent religious knowledge concerning the Lares?

The material and sensory qualities of the kitchen area were likely dimly lit, with the two small windows providing limited light and ventilation. Light levels were almost certainly low, even with the use of oil lamps or other lighting, which would have flickered and cast shadows at all times of day. The kitchen of the House of the Epigrams was also potentially a very hot space with, unusually, an oven opening at one end of the counter in front of the *lararium* niche. Even if this was not lit at the moment when offerings were placed in the niche, when libations were poured, or when other items were placed onto a brazier on the counter, the residual heat in the bricks and masonry surrounding it will likely have made this part of the house noticeably warm (see Platts, 2019, pp. 195–6). A recent survey of this kitchen area, its oven, and the adjacent latrine was unable to identify for certain whether the oven had a vent, but even if it did, its efficiency may have been low (Staub Gierow, 2017a). Either way, the small, poorly ventilated kitchen was most probably smoky, or at may at least have smelled smoky due to the residual

aroma of burning wood from the oven. Relatedly, reaching to place any offering in the niche required a person to stretch over the counter and any braziers or other kitchen equipment placed on it. Indeed, it is commonly proposed that offerings to the Lares involved the pouring of libations directly on to the hearth, so it is likely that a lit brazier was placed either on the counter or on the floor of the kitchen for this purpose, increasing the risk of scalds or burns as a person leaned over to place offerings inside or remove previously dedicated items from within the niche. A small latrine was also located immediately adjacent to the kitchen. This was separated from the cooking area by a narrow wall, and although the latrine itself had a separate doorway, smells emanating from it are likely to have permeated the kitchen and surrounding spaces (see Jansen, 1997).

Most studies of Roman kitchens, including those that have adopted a primarily sensory approach to their analysis, have asserted that these were strong smelling locations, with the mix of pungent herbs, spices, and garum used as flavourings, along with the scent of freshly butchered or roasting meats, and the co-location of drains and latrines, producing a distinctive aroma (Platts, 2019, pp. 111–12, 196–7; Jansen, 1997). One recent study (Platts, 2019, p. 112) has maintained that this unpleasant smell was the primary reason for locating kitchens away from the areas of the house where food might be served and eaten by the *paterfamilias*, members of his family, and guests, arguing that as a ‘bad smell’ it was associated with the enslaved population of the house. Hannah Platts (2019, p. 230) describes in no uncertain terms the combination of kitchen and latrine as ‘stench-producing’. She also characterises kitchen smells as ‘foul’, ‘particularly unpleasant’, ‘pungent’, and despite acknowledging that at times ‘the scent of herbs and spices, fruit and cooking meat, fish and vegetables’ might be pleasant, goes on to emphasise how these were ‘intermingled with that of the cloying and sickly-sweet scent of rotting food waste and human excreta’ (p. 196). These are, nevertheless, observations which require some unpacking in the context of the present study.

First, it is not entirely clear why kitchens must only ever have been equated with ‘bad’, strong, or otherwise unpleasant smells. Although Roman culinary tastes were certainly different from those of the modern world, and ancient sewage systems were comparatively basic, the scent of cooking food, the aroma of fresh herbs and spices, and the smell of baking bread or roasting meat need not always be actively unpleasant, even if it is sometimes powerful. Given the confined floor space of the kitchen, it seems unlikely that the sort



of large-scale butchery activities that might saturate a room with the scent of animal blood and faeces occurred in this specific food preparation area, even if they perhaps took place in an adjacent space. The same might be true for food waste, which need not have been left to rot within the kitchen itself. So, rather than imagining that the *Lares familiares* and the serpents of the House of the Epigrams were connected with a cramped, stinky, unpleasant place it is perhaps more accurate to assume that the small kitchen area had a complex but also probably highly varied smellscape, one which potentially changed throughout the day. This was nonetheless a smellscape associated predominantly with the scent of food and food preparation, perhaps of the dinner enjoyed the evening before, or the herbs and vegetables being freshly prepared for a meal later that day. This sensory experience would undoubtedly have distinguished it as a place that was materially and sensorially different from many others in the house, but it was not necessarily loaded with purely negative associations. These very sensory qualities consequently contributed to the manifestation of an especially distinctive religious place for the *Lares* and serpents.

Second, and relatedly, some members of the household must have been more accustomed than others to the complex 'sensescape' of the kitchen (Howes, 2005). For the *paterfamilias*, as someone who might not be expected to spend long periods of time there during an ordinary day, the sensory affordances he encountered during ritual activities at the *lararium* were perhaps more immediately obvious or distinctive than they were to other members of the household. The affective properties of the kitchen environment might therefore have contributed to his knowledge of the kitchen as a religious place, and by implication also of the protective divinities as gods of that place. For him, the *Lares* and the serpents were gods of a place that smelled and felt a particular way, as well as of a place that was not reproduced in the same way elsewhere in the house, even when he made offerings at one of its other shrines. His proximal religious knowledge concerning the *Lares* as gods of place – and as gods *in* place – might therefore be subtly different compared with that of more regular kitchen workers for whom these material and sensory affordances were less noticeable.

Most other Pompeian houses had similarly small kitchens that excluded the possibility of large gatherings. This was not the case for all houses however, including one nearby home (V.I.23) where the area of the kitchen was slightly larger (with a floor area of approximately 18m<sup>2</sup>). Here the arched *lararium* niche (0.60 × 0.58 × 0.22m) was located 1.10m from the

ground, above the counter built against the centre of the north wall (Giacobello, 2008, p.163). Boyce (1937, pp.32–3, no. 79) reported traces of a fresco bearing the images of a serpent entwined around an altar, a sacrificing Genius and a Lar, and two further serpents moving towards an altar bearing offerings in a scene below. The latter scene also included a depiction of the river god Sarnus set within a landscape of plants (Boyce, 1937, p.33, no.79). Here too, the kitchen was associated with a latrine, again segregated by a thin wall, although it was much closer to the masonry counter than in our first example, and by opening directly onto the kitchen area there were far fewer barriers to smells from the associated drain. Smells nevertheless perhaps dispersed more quickly in the larger kitchen space. Another two nearby houses with *lararia* in their kitchens (VI.14.25 and VI.14.43) also both have either a niche or a painting immediately above the counter, suggesting once again that part of the lived experience of encountering gods of place in place involved particular movements prompted by the materialness of that location: stretching up and over (Giacobello, 2008, p.178, no.60, p.180, no.63). At the time of the eruption of Vesuvius the house at VI.14.39, on the other hand, had a kitchen which occupied a subterranean space, making it much darker and more cave-like than those already discussed (Giacobello, 2008, p.179, no.61; Boyce, 1937, pp.53–4, no. 206). Here, the fresco accompanying a square niche featured at least three serpents, including 'in the lower zone two huge serpents [which] rise more or less vertically, one on each side of a small cylindrical altar' (Boyce, 1937, p.54). In effect, ritualised acts in this below-ground kitchen were transposed to the subterranean domain of those serpents. We can only speculate about how rituals focused on these deities as protectors of the very earth on which the house was constructed (and where the participants currently stood), may have produced an immediate, proximal form of religious knowledge that individualised any shared distal understanding of serpents as gods of place.

Only a few aspects of the materialness of the Pompeian kitchen have been touched on in the limited space available here, but what begins to emerge is a picture of lived religion that emphasises the specific particularities of the ritual activities which caused people and things to assemble with the material qualities of a location, perhaps at different times and in subtly different ways. At the same time, although similarities emerge in terms of the material qualities of Pompeian kitchens and the sensory experiences that they might afford, it is also evident that no two were exactly the same. Each had the potential to affect

discrete senses of both 'kitchen place' and 'religious place' that remained unique to that location. Although this will ultimately have led to the production of multiple personalised forms of proximal religious knowledge concerning *Lares familiares* and their serpent partners as gods of place, in each case it is clear that these experiences were deeply entwined with the material qualities of the kitchen and could not have been produced or replicated in another setting. Pouring a libation in a brightly lit atrium or placing an offering on a burning brazier in a shady garden could never result in experiences of the same sort of religious place as was experienced in the small, dim, smoky, strongly scented, cramped, hot kitchen. The *Lares* were therefore not just gods of place, since lived religion actively served to construct them as gods of *this* place in *this* moment. Seen this way, it may be no coincidence that Giacobello (2008, p.66) was able to observe in her survey of Pompeian domestic *lararia* that the surviving form of almost all of them can be dated to a period between 62 and 79 CE, most probably following damage caused by the earthquake of 62 CE. This may be connected with a change of ownership and the introduction of a new Genius into the household cult, one whose image needed to be incorporated into the iconography of the house's shrines. However, we might consider whether the earthquake also prompted a need to reassert the importance of the gods of the very place on which the house had been built, or in other words to placate with a freshly painted shrine the serpents who resided within the subterranean land which had caused so much destruction.

When the kitchen *lararium* became part of a ritualised assemblage it was the affordances and qualities of that distinctive place that were brought to the fore, not only reinforcing distal forms of knowledge concerning *Lares* as gods of place, but actually substantiating and materialising that knowledge. Proximal religious knowledge concerning the *Lares familiares* and the serpents was therefore created out of the very material essence of place, as much as they were themselves considered to be gods of place. The discussion so far has therefore started to reveal how experiences of lived religion, and the proximal knowledge that arose from them, might materially substantiate both *Lares* and serpents as divinities deeply entangled with material places. This is even more evident when we compare lived religion in the kitchen with lived religion at the open-air *lararia* shrines of the Pompeian street corner.

## Out and about with the Lares

The damage that Vesuvius wrought to the upper storeys of the buildings surrounding our chosen street-corner shrine, at the busy junction of the Via del Vesuvio, Via della Fortuna, Via Stabiana, and Via di Nola, has almost certainly exacerbated the extent to which this location is experienced today as much brighter and more open than any Pompeian kitchen would ever have been (Fig. 6). Although current conditions may therefore have diminished our ability to assess the potential shadows that once fell across the junction at different moments throughout the day, it is undeniable that lived religion at the street-corner shrine was most likely experienced in relation to the full brightness of the day. This open-air context also afforded a host of other material and sensory potentialities not encountered in the kitchen: the changeability of weather conditions and the seasons meant that its qualities must have been different on hot, wet, windy, or cloudy days, or even on one of Pompeii's occasional snowy days. As modern visitors to the site continue to learn, easy movement along what is at one moment a dry and dusty street can be transformed very quickly by a rain shower that renders the basalt paving of the town's paths and streets slippery and rapidly fills their drainage channels.

The specific calendar date of the Compitalia varied each year because it was one of a few *feriae conceptivae* (or moveable festivals), although it was conventionally celebrated in the winter between 17 December and 5 January, after Saturnalia (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 4, 14). On these occasions the nature of Pompeii's subtropical Mediterranean climate meant that days would be short, with limited sunshine, and the air would be cool, possibly damp, especially when compared with the warmth of a small kitchen. Similarly, although the street-corner was not devoid of odours, these were certainly different and potentially more varied and changeable than those encountered in the kitchen, depending upon what types of commercial and hospitality businesses operated from surrounding buildings, who was using the street, how many draft animals had recently passed along it, prevailing wind direction, and levels of humidity. Sound would also travel differently in the open-air compared with the enclosed kitchen space, potentially making sounds or words spoken at the altar audible to those some distance away, even if the effects might sometimes be countered by the noises of the street itself (see Veitch, 2017; also Mungari & Wyslucha in this volume).

In addition, the Pompeian street-corner had the capacity to accommodate a much larger gathering than any of the household kitchens described above and, if they chose, participants and onlookers could



Figure 2.6: The street corner at the junction of the Via della Fortuna and Via del Vesuvio, with a public fountain and shrine to the *Lares compitales*. (Photo: robertharding / Alamy Stock Photo)

congregate on all four sides of the altar rather than only being able to arrange themselves directly in front of a fresco or niche set into a kitchen wall. Undoubtedly the size of any assembled group will have varied on different occasions, but Van Andringa (2000, p.76) estimates a typical crowd for a Compitalia celebration of around 50 to 100 people. Larger groups may have meant that a person's view of events was restricted, but the material nature of the street-corner shrine nevertheless ensured that considerably more people could congregate than could ever be the case in a small kitchen.

As before, it is important to consider who the individuals involved in ritualised activities at the street-corner shrine were, especially with regards to those who engaged directly with the shrine as part of the performance of annual Compitalia rites, and those who experienced those rites from a distance as part of the assembled crowd. Compitalia rituals were most probably performed at the altar by the real-life equivalents of the figures painted on the pillar directly behind it: four men shown performing sacrifice *capite velato* (i.e. with their heads covered by a fold of the toga) in the company of a flute player (*tibicen*) (the fresco is now lost, but see Mau, 1902,

p.234; Flower, 2017, p.153). The human figures in the image were flanked by two large Lares in the typical pose of pouring wine from a *ryhton* into a *situla*. The scene appears to have effectively commemorated the actions of individual men at a particular moment in time, when the *Lares compitales* were being honoured. Multiple layers of paint have been detected on similar shrines at Pompeii, including at least seven layers on an altar located at the south-west corner of insula IX.11, opposite the junction between the Via dell'Abbondanza and the Vicolo di Pacquio Proculo (Van Andringa, 2000, pp.54–6, no.14; Fig. 2.7). This strongly suggests that the iconography of street-corner shrines was regularly and repeatedly refreshed as 'successive office holders continually updated the painting and made it their own,' in some cases including their individual names (Hartnett, 2017, p.265). It is also very likely that these men were either freedmen or, in some instances, enslaved members of nearby households (Van Andringa, 2000, pp.77–8; Flower, 2017, p.149), whose experiences of playing a central part in the rituals at the street-corner shrine perhaps contrasted quite significantly with a more reduced role within Lares celebrations in the home.





Figure 2.7: Fountain, street altar and fresco at the south-west corner of insula IX.11, Pompeii. To the right, immediately above the masonry altar, the painting depicts a sacrifice to the *Lares compitales* (above) and a snake and altar (below). To the left it shows a gathering of twelve Olympian gods. (Photo: Mikko Mattila – Travel, Italy, Pompeii / Alamy Stock Photo)

For the same reasons, it is probable that the scene itself depicts the type of events that occurred regularly at that shrine: the gathering of local *vicomagistri* (possibly after a procession around the local streets, although that is not directly attested by iconographic evidence) and the performance of a sacrifice, or perhaps the giving of offerings, pouring of libations, or hanging of garlands directly onto the altar, in the company of the *Lares* of that specific place (see Van Andringa, 2000, p.76). Anna-Katharina Rieger (2020, p.122) has recently observed, in a similar vein, that the individualised iconography of altars to the *Lares Augusti* at Rome also betray highly localised functions and practices, noting that ‘they strongly related to the people of the *vicus* they belonged to.’ The actions of the people gathered at the altar or shrine were additionally accompanied by sounds from the flute that would have been familiar from the use of this instrument at other public or civic religious rituals, such as the sacrifices held at the Capitolium in the forum, or at other nearby temples such as those dedicated to Apollo and Venus.

In this way, the iconography of our street-corner altar alerts us to the potential for the production of

particular forms of proximal religious knowledge for the four real-world *vicomagistri* who engaged with the altar and the other things that they were required to assemble with in order to perform the ritual (e.g. cult instruments, food and drink, garlands, possibly animals). What is less clear from the standardised image – which like all sacrifice scenes in Roman art inevitably captures one static and rather schematised moment of what must have been a more protracted event (Elsner, 2012) – is whether only one of these *vicomagistri* was charged with making the sacrifice or offering required on that day. It is possible that the men successively performed the same gestures, one after the other, on behalf of the inhabitants of each of the four *insulae* that met at that four-way junction (on the uncertainties around the relationship between street altars and surrounding *insulae*: Van Andringa, 2000, p.71; Flower, 2017, pp.148–9). It is equally possible that the responsibilities of the ritual were shared across the group, with each man taking on a different role dependent upon their status, age, or factors that remain hidden from us, or possibly even as part of a rota system. If so, each potentially engaged with material things that were quite different

from those of their peers, despite participating in the same ritual (perhaps a knife, a *patera*, a jug, garlands, incense, or food offerings). The personal material engagements that the ritual compelled will therefore have produced variations in the lived religion that they collectively produced and individually experienced and understood (for a comparable example concerning Rome's Vestal Virgins see Graham, *forthcoming*).

What is more, these were material engagements which echoed, but which could never precisely repeat, those that they might have experienced during similar rituals in the kitchens of their homes. Aspects of the two ritual performances certainly remained comparable, along with the use of particular types of objects. Nevertheless, engaging with the *Lares compitales* and the serpents of that place at their street-corner altar involved an entirely different locational experience and, most probably, different *actual* objects that may have offered subtly different affordances from those experienced in other contexts (such as differential weight, tactile or reflective properties, odours, etc.). It was also an actively communal activity, shared with an audience of family, friends and potential strangers alike, and perhaps also with certain responsibilities shared across the group of *vicomagistri* rather than being concentrated in one individual's hands, as they might be in private homes. Lived religion therefore affirmed that these ritualised activities were distinct, and that they involved different sets of people, objects, *Lares*, and serpents, and it did so by grounding experiences in the material world.

At the same time, the presence of the real-world flute player deserves more attention than is typical in assessments of these scenes. His personal experience of playing, producing, and hearing sounds, feeling the vibrations of the flute in his body, standing close to the centre of the action but not engaging with the same material things as the *vicomagistri* or holding the same status within the altar group, will have resulted in lived religion that was once again experienced in subtly different ways from the men who accompanied him. In turn, this will have prompted alternative forms of proximal religious knowledge concerning that particular celebration of the *Lares compitales* (see Graham, 2021, pp.83–6). All the same, the proximal religious knowledge that resulted for each of these five men was also produced in a sensory atmosphere that they shared with everyone else in attendance. The sounds of the *tibicen*, for instance, reproduced and reaffirmed distal knowledge concerning the nature of the activities as 'religious' and their connection with the wider practices of Roman religion, for both performer and onlooker alike.

Lived religion at the street-corner also incorporated the material qualities of the wider city. The Compitalia does not appear to have been considered as one of the Roman calendar's *dies nefasti* (Varro, *On the Latin Language*, 6.29), meaning that ordinary business activities were most probably permitted to continue as usual during the festival, even if some people perhaps took a break from them in order to participate in processions to their local altar, and to witness or perform the appropriate ceremonies. As previously noted, this particular four-way junction was one of the busiest for traffic in the whole city, meaning that the ritualised activities that occurred there during Compitalia festivities almost certainly took place against the usual backdrop of noisy cart traffic, the sounds and smells of draft animals, and all the other chaos that was typical of the Roman street (for a comprehensive study of Roman street life see Hartnett, 2017). Almost every Pompeian street might be expected to be noisy and busy, but each also had its own individual character due to the presence of economic establishments, the proximity of water fountains (introducing the sound of water splashing into a basin, but also the voices and movements of those collecting it), and even the nature of the road surface itself (Fig. 2.8). Studies of the road at this junction have revealed, for example, how at least part of it had been subject to resurfacing work, with evidence for considerable wear in the form of wheel ruts indicating quite how difficult it was for wheeled traffic to negotiate its sharp corners (Poehler, Roggen & Crowther, 2019). No doubt the air at this particular junction was regularly filled with raised voices, the sound of unruly or stressed animals, and vocal disagreements over right of way. Ritualisation therefore actively assembled the compital shrine, and anyone engaged in ritual activities, with the discrete material and sensory character of this specific area of the city (see Van Andringa, 2000, p.76). This was true for other occasions, separate from the formal festivities of the Compitalia, when people may have ritually assembled with the shrine. Excavations have revealed that some Pompeian street altars had offerings on them at the time of the eruption, indicating that they formed part of ritualised assemblages throughout the year (e.g. Van Andringa, 2000, p.77). Jeremy Hartnett (2017, p.67) suggests, for example, that we should 'imagine neighbourhood residents regularly [making] offerings of food, drink, or flowers amid the street's hustle-bustle,' and according to Suetonius (*Augustus*, 31.4) Augustus ordered that in Rome 'the *Lares* of the Crossroads should be crowned twice a year, with spring and summer flowers.'





Figure 2.8. The junction of Via della Fortuna and Via del Vesuvio showing its fountain with a relief of Silenus resting on a wineskin and wheel ruts in the road surface. (Photo by Carole Raddato, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Our road junction was also a place through which people were constantly moving, meaning that the *Lares compitales* and their serpent companions belonged to a very particular type of place. Indeed, Hartnett (2017, p.85) has drawn attention to the characteristic ‘unpredictability’ of the Roman street, and how the ‘flurry of sensations, mix of activities, minimum of regulation, mélange of users, and, especially, the constant movement of people, goods, and animals made for an ever-shifting, destabilising scene.’ Although some individuals or groups perhaps paused temporarily at the fountain, or used the junction of major roads as an opportunity to stop and check their sense of direction, the material properties of the street corner actively encouraged and supported movement. As an experience, this was place that was therefore constantly in flux, that was vibrant and dynamic, with people and things endlessly coming and going and forming new, temporary relationships with one another. Indeed, the atmosphere of movement was sustained by the ways in which people engaged with the location of the street-corner shrine on other, non-ritualised occasions – when they came to collect water (and perhaps to meet friends to chat and gossip), when they

moved around the altar on their way to the caupona and shop located just behind it, when workmen visited to maintain the water tower immediately adjacent to it, when people hawked their wares on the street, when electoral notices were painted on walls or graffiti scratched onto buildings, and when the crowd paused to watch a funeral procession pass by (see Campbell in this volume). It was a living place of movement, of temporary and fluctuating gatherings, and of the sights and smells of the city as a complex agglomeration of people and things. As Hartnett (2017, p.36) notes, ‘[i]t was not just “the stage” or “the actors” that determined a street’s character, but also the interaction of the two’. This makes the street-corner an excellent example of the ‘time-space event’ definition of place noted earlier in this essay and reveals quite how far it must have contrasted with how religious place was produced and experienced in the kitchen, where movement was cramped and constrained, and where access in and out might have been considerably more restricted. These were detectable placely qualities that belonged perfectly to the world of the *Lares compitales* and the serpents of the ground on which their altar was constructed: these were the gods of *that* public



place, including all those who were part of it at any one moment.

## Conclusions

As a result of its discrete material and sensory qualities, lived religion at the Pompeian kitchen *lararium* was quite distinct from lived religion produced in relation to other contexts or locations, such as that connected with the street-corner altar. This was true despite the fact that distal religious knowledge concerning how to properly honour deities, such as the Lares and the serpent gods, meant that ritual activities at both shared broadly comparable elements. By examining ritualised assemblages encompassing the material qualities of both the kitchen *lararium* and the street-corner shrine, this article has argued not only that lived religion was intimately entwined with the materialness of place but that this in fact worked to produce forms of religious knowledge concerning Lares and serpent gods as gods of place. It has shown, moreover, that this knowledge was about more than shared ideas or beliefs. Instead, it was knowledge that was actively produced in relation to the very materialness of place itself. Ritualised activities and lived religion therefore did much more than merely reinforce pre-existing ideas, they also affected divinities out of and within place itself. Adopting a material religion approach to the Lares and serpents of Pompeii consequently makes it possible to better understand what might seem to be a confusing overlapping set of deities connected with a rather loose concept of 'place' by revealing how far they were quite literally gods *in* as well as *of* place.

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