

## THE TEMPLE AND BIRTHPLACE OF DIVA POPPAEA\*

On detection of the Pisonian conspiracy, in April 65, Nero promptly despatched a tribune to order Seneca's suicide. Hardly by coincidence, it is on this occasion that Tacitus has Poppaea<sup>1</sup> make her final live appearance as vigilant member of the emperor's 'intimate council of cruelties'. An officially grateful, in fact terrorized, Senate subsequently voted that the month witnessing these cruelties henceforth be named *Neroneus*. From the height of such glories, the fall was sudden. Only a few months later the House was summoned to vote more sombre honours, the public burial and subsequent deification of Poppaea herself.<sup>2</sup>

Scornful of the recipient, Tacitus dwells on the perfumed excess of Poppaea's burial and wastes little time on the particulars of her, in any case short-lived, status as a *diua*. For this latter aspect the main evidence comes from a strangely neglected excerpt from Dio that will be the centre of focus here.

According to this passage, Diva Poppaea was posthumously venerated in a temple that Nero officially inaugurated in the spring of 68, little more than two months before his fall. As its pedimental inscription declared, the shrine had been financed and dedicated by the 'women', possibly Rome's *ordo matronarum* or some such body; in any case Poppaea was here receiving homage as 'the goddess Sabina-Venus' (Σαβίνα ... θεά Ἀφροδίτη), Dio (who persistently refers to Poppaea as Sabina) here probably offering a Greek-style rendering of a Latin dedication to VENVS POPPAEA.<sup>3</sup>

For the moment leaving aside where this temple was located, Dio's note is, when seen on its own, variously instructive, firstly, because it shows that there was a close link between Poppaea and Venus, perhaps while she was still alive, but certainly when deified. The only other source<sup>4</sup> showing direct awareness of

\* I am grateful to *CQ*'s editor and anonymous referee for helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> On her life, see F. Holztrattner, *Poppaea Neronis Potens* (Graz, 1995) and K. Wachtel, 'Poppaea Sabina', *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 850.

<sup>2</sup> Poppaea and Tigellinus *saeuienti principi intimum consiliorum*: Tac. *Ann.* 15.61.2; April called *Neroneus*: Suet. *Nero* 55, 'mensem ... Aprilem Neroneum appellauit'; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.74; 16.12.2. Graffiti from Pompeii date according to this new style: *CIL* IV.8092, 'OL(lympica) III K(alendas) NER(oneas)'; 8078a, 'NONIS NERON(e)IS SAL.'; Poppaea's death and burial: Tac. *Ann.* 16.6.

<sup>3</sup> *Excerpta Valesiana* 257b = Dio Cass. 63.26.3; for the formulaic Σαβίνη ... θεά Ἀφροδίτη, cf. e.g. *AE* 1983, 910 [Λιουβίαν] θεὰν Δήμητρ[α]. For the evidence concerning the posthumous temple (ignored by Holztrattner [n. 1]), see Wachtel (n. 1) and E. Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 298 n. 51, both adducing a provincial coin from c. 65–8 (Corinth/Patrae, *RPC* 1, 4846) portraying Diva Poppaea and showing a temple, but there are no means of determining whether this bears any resemblance to the actual sanctuary.

<sup>4</sup> A provincial bronze coin from 62–5 (Laodicea, *RPC* 1, 2924) has a draped bust of ΠΟΠΠΑΙΑ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΗ on the obverse and a standing Aphrodite/Venus on its reverse – but such configurations were not uncommon (cf. n. 7). The Pompeian *CIL* IV.9137, SCRIPSI VENEREM POPPAE[AE] TRIQVINIA S(alutem) need not refer to the empress; its meaning is in any case uncertain.

such a link is the presumably near-contemporary *Octavia* that depicts Poppaea as a latter-day Helen, strongly favoured by Venus and her son Amor;<sup>5</sup> in the drama's apocalyptic vision of the Iron Age evils embodied by Nero and his consort, he is identified with tyrannical Libido and she with 'immoral Venus' herself.<sup>6</sup>

The emphasis on such links – otherwise of an infinitely more positive and decorous kind – between Venus and Rome's *diuae* were of course common.<sup>7</sup> Drusilla, Livia and the Flavian Iulia – to name only Poppaea's first-century colleagues as *diuae* – were all somehow assimilated with Venus. In the case of Poppaea – and perhaps also Drusilla – the identification seems very explicit. Given the dramatist's anti-Neronian bent, it is suggestive, therefore, that he, in what looks like deliberate denigration,<sup>8</sup> emphatically casts the goddess from whom the Iulii descended, and with whom Poppaea posthumously was equated, as the source of all the evils that befell the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

Furthermore, the passage in Dio throws new light on the close links between Rome's and Italy's womanhood and the women of the dynasty. Between Livia and Rome's *matronae* contacts had been frequent. Livia participated, obviously in a leading capacity, in their sacred functions. After her death, the Senate ordered the women to mourn the deceased Augusta for a whole year.<sup>9</sup> When she was proclaimed a *diua*, Rome's Vestals and ordinary women were in various ways made responsible for upholding her cult. Similar (but more short-lived) honours had already been voted to Caligula's sister when proclaimed Diva Drusilla.<sup>10</sup> Under the Flavians, it certainly fell to Rome's *matronae* to venerate Diva Iulia.<sup>11</sup> Given this continuity, it

<sup>5</sup> Poppaea owes her marriage to Nero to *genetrix Amoris, maximum numen, Venus*, [Sen.] *Oct.* 697. R. Ferri (ed.), *Octavia: A Play Attributed to Seneca* (Cambridge, 2003), 324 claims that 'the special place assigned to Venus and Amor in the winning over of Nero's affection is a motif not developed in the play'. *Contra*, P. Kragelund, 'History, sex and scenography in the *Octavia*', *SO* 80 (2005), 68–114, at 78–86, pointing to the dramatist's repeated references (*Oct.* 258; 432; 540–6; 806–19) to the dire and fatal influence of Venus and her son; similarly A.J. Boyle (ed.), *Octavia Attributed to Seneca* (Oxford, 2008), 207–8; 241–2.

<sup>6</sup> [Sen.] *Oct.* 432, *turpi Libido Venere dominatur potens*; Nero's illicit affair with Poppaea is pointedly described as *in Venere turpi*, 191; the chorus of Romans quotes the *dira libido* (299) of Appius Claudius as the classic manifestation of tyrannical oppression.

<sup>7</sup> For Livia and Venus, see A.A. Barrett, *Livia, First Lady of Imperial Rome* (New Haven, London, 2002), 193–4; E. Bartman, *Portraits of Livia: Imaging the Imperial Woman in Augustan Rome* (Cambridge, 1999), 83; 95; 135 (with bibliography); Diva Drusilla: Dio Cass. 59.11.2–3 (statue of the same size and with the same cult as the goddess' in the temple of Venus Genetrix); in the East, Diva Drusilla was celebrated as the 'New Aphrodite': *ILS* 8789. Diva Iulia: Mart. 6.13 (a statue of the diva resembling Venus).

<sup>8</sup> For the *Octavia* as central for understanding the workings of Roman memory sanctions, see H. Flower, *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace & Oblivion in Roman Political Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006), 202–8.

<sup>9</sup> Livia sacrificing with Rome's women: Hor. *Carm.* 3.14.5–12; Ov. *Tr.* 4.2.11–4 ('cum bonis nuribus ... matres'); entertaining the 'women' at banquets: Dio Cass. 55.2.4; 55.8.2; restoring their main temple, the Fortuna Muliebris: *CIL* VI.883 with Barrett (n. 7), 205; the 'women' mourning Livia's death for a year: Dio Cass. 58.2.2; similar honours had previously been voted to Brutus, Publicola and Sulla: Liv. 2.7.4; 16.7; Gran. Lic. p. 33.4. On Livia and Rome's women, see further M. Flory, 'Sic exempla parantur: Livia's shrine to Concordia and the Porticus Livia', *Historia* 33 (1984), 309–30; and N. Purcell, 'Livia and the womanhood of Rome', *PCPhS* 32 (1986), 78–105 (both with bibliography).

<sup>10</sup> As had been the case with Drusilla (Dio Cass. 59.11.3; Suet. *Cal.* 24.2), Rome's women were expected to invoke Livia when making an oath: Dio Cass. 60.5.2.

<sup>11</sup> On her death, Diva Drusilla had been voted the same honours as Livia (Dio Cass. 59.11.2) presumably including the obligation of the women (id. 58.2.2) to mourn Livia for a year; for the Flavian Diva Iulia (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 426), cf. Mart. 9.1.7 (a *matrona* sacrificing to her at the *Templum gentis Flaviae*).

seems plausible that there also were attempts to forge such (likewise short-lived) links between Poppaea and Rome's womanhood. After the Fire of Rome in 64, when the *matronae* became involved in appeasing the gods, it is, for instance, a reasonable assumption that the Augusta participated; in any case, a passage in the *Octavia* suggests that the *matres Latinae* had been official mourners at her funeral.<sup>12</sup> In addition to mourning Poppaea, Dio shows that the women dedicated a temple to the deified Augusta – a gesture, which later (when history was rewritten) was said to be due to Nero's coercion. Whatever the truth, pious (or enforced) contributions from Rome's womanhood are not without precedent.<sup>13</sup> Now, they offered – or were forced to offer – such funds for the building of a sanctuary for Venus-Poppaea, a cult which, once again, assimilated old and new: since time immemorial Rome's *matronae* had been assiduous in venerating Venus.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, there is no basis for determining in what form Poppaea was assimilated with Venus, let alone whether such niceties mattered. Whether she was venerated alongside Venus, with statues of similar size and status (as had been the case with Diva Drusilla), or as a New Aphrodite/Venus, in a form similar to that goddess (as had been the case with Livia, the Flavian Iulia and also Drusilla), what really mattered may well have been the emphasis on the link between the two.<sup>15</sup>

But, to return to the question hitherto postponed: where did Nero and the women place Poppaea's shrine? Scholarly interest has been minimal, but if one may judge from silence it is commonly assumed not to have been in Rome. In standard handbooks on Rome's topography – all recording so many lost glories – there are for instance no relevant entries, not even of the negative kind.<sup>16</sup> And taking a hard look at the primary evidence one can easily appreciate why this is the kind of information that, as it were, has fallen between stools.

It is to the so-called *excerpta Valesiana* published by Henricus Valesius in 1634 that we owe the story concerning the temple of Venus-Poppaea. The story is ultimately based upon Dio, but to understand the peculiarities of its character it is important to keep in mind that it was quoted, abridged and partially rephrased in the tenth century at the behest of the emperor Constantine IX Porphyrogenetus

<sup>12</sup> To judge from Tac. *Ann.* 15.44 the female rites of propitiation after the fire in 64 were steeped in tradition; participation by Poppaea is not mentioned, but the omission hardly proves anything; *matres latinae* at Poppaea's funeral: [Sen.] *Oct.* 720. As a parallel, Ferri (n. 5), 329 adduces the legendary *matres Latinae* in Verg. *Aen.* 7.400. But surely, the real women involved in Poppaea's cult (n. 3) as well as at Caesar's funeral (Suet. *Iul.* 84.4), the *Ausoniae matres Ausoniaeque nurus* at the funeral of Drusus (*Cons. Liu.* 204) and the local *matronae* mourning Gaius Caesar (*CIL* XI.1421, 24) are more relevant.

<sup>13</sup> For enforced contributions from the *ordo matronarum*, see Val. Max. 8.3.3; App. *B Civ.* 4.32–4 (42 B.C.).

<sup>14</sup> Venus and Rome's *matronae*: Verrius Flaccus *apud* Macrobi. *Sat.* 1.12.15; *Fasti Praen.*, *Inscr. Ital.* 13.1, 127, MVLIERES; Ov. *Fast.* 4.133, 'Latiae matresque nurusque' (both on 1<sup>st</sup> April); similarly, Val. Max. 8.15.12; Plin. *HN* 7.120; Plut. *Num.* 19.2; Serv. *ad Verg. Aen.* 1.720.

<sup>15</sup> For the range, see n. 7 (Livia and Diva Drusilla venerated as New Aphrodites and Diva Drusilla venerated alongside Venus Genetrix in her temple; a statue of the Flavian Diva Iulia resembling Venus).

<sup>16</sup> Despite U.P. Boissevain, *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani Historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt* (Berlin, 1895–1926), vol. 5, 575, the temple has no entry in L. Richardson, *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore, 1992) and E.M. Steinby (ed.), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* (Rome, 1993–2000); the articles in *RE* 22.1 (1953), 84–91 at 88 and *PIR* 2 P 850 quote Dio, but without suggesting where the temple was located.

to become part of a handbook of deeds exemplifying virtues and vices. It is with such a view that Porphyrogennetus quotes from the clearly detailed section in Dio's history covering the events reaching from the end of March 68, when Nero, then in Naples, first heard of the revolt of Vindex, till mid April, when he, now in Rome, heard that Galba and his Spanish legions had joined the revolt that less than two months later led to his fall. As to the when and where of the temple's dedication, Porphyrogennetus is not explicit, but in view of the story's position within the narrative time frame there are but two options: it either belongs to the initial part of Dio's narrative, taking place in Naples, or to the final part, taking place in Rome. In order to determine which is the more plausible option, one needs to look carefully at the way Suetonius as well as the relevant epitomes of Dio treat the events of this crucial period.

Xiphilinus is in this section very basic, omitting all reference to Naples and leaving it completely undetermined where Nero heard of Vindex's revolt. By contrast Porphyrogennetus, as well as the far more detailed Suetonius, stresses that he was, and at first remained, in Naples watching athletics – all three agreeing, however, that he pursued a life of luxury. Porphyrogennetus further mentions a letter that Nero sent to the Senate excusing his absence with reference to a sore throat (the epitome then affirming how such self-indulgent concerns influenced his whole behaviour), but Suetonius has nothing on this letter, instead claiming that Nero at dinner, no doubt later that day, received *tumultuosioribus litteris* ('a more alarming letter') and in response cursed the rebels threatening them – be it verbally or in writing – with a *malum* ('punishment', 40.4). Suetonius then continues that Nero *per octo continuos dies* ('for eight successive days', 40.4) – the count probably beginning on the day following this initial angry outburst – pretended nothing was seriously wrong, even choosing *non rescribere cuiquam non mandare quid aut praecipere* ('not to respond to incoming letters and not to give out orders or recommendations'). Since Nero is said to have learnt of Vindex's revolt 'on the very day' on which he had murdered his mother nine years before (i.e. on one of the days between 19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> March), this would mean that he took no initiatives but remained in Campania until one of the days between 28<sup>th</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> April – and, on either count, probably a few days more.<sup>17</sup>

As for the next stage, where Xiphilinus once again has nothing, Suetonius (41.1) records how Nero, in response to a stream of propaganda in the form of abusive edicts from Vindex, instead of leaving Naples sent the Senate a letter, officially asking that body to take action on behalf of himself and the *res publica*. Given the brevity of Porphyrogennetus' epitome it is not entirely clear whether this is the same as the letter mentioned above, but since Nero also here uses the sore throat as an excuse, the letters are probably one and the same. In any case, this missive would, by Suetonius' computation, belong to the ninth day (one of the days between 28<sup>th</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> April) – but there is no sign that sending the letter made Nero realize that returning to Rome was imperative.

Far from it, Nero's sending of the letter is followed in Suetonius by a phase of uncertain duration, with Nero still not departing and *urgentibus aliis super alios nuntiis* ('messengers following messengers begging', 41.2) that he should return,

<sup>17</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.4 dates the murder of Agrippina to the festival of the *Quinquatria*, i.e. to days between 19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> March, Suet. *Ner.* 40.4 adding that Nero heard of the revolt 'in Naples ... on the very day on which he <nine years before> had murdered his mother' (*Neapoli ... die ipso quo matrem occiderat*).

thus finally persuading him to leave Campania for Rome (be it briefly before or after 1<sup>st</sup> April) where all three sources come together in highlighting the truly surreal episode with 'leading senators and knights' (in Suetonius simply *primoribus uiris*, 'leading men', 41.2) being summoned to a meeting with the emperor in his residence to learn – about a new water organ.

As opposed to Suetonius, Porphyrogenetus as well as the other epitomes of Dio never mention that Nero actually returned to Rome. Suddenly, he is simply there, but *prior* to that Nero has, so Porphyrogenetus affirms, had time to dedicate the Temple of Poppaea, a gesture that certainly illustrates his dedication to a life of luxury – or, as others observers would have said, his failure to realize the gravity of the situation. The dedication may well therefore have been part of Dio's story about Nero's continued refusal to leave the pleasures of Campania and face reality. Time is not an issue. On Suetonius' evidence Nero would, in total, have had at least nine days – and probably more – in which to finish the business that was perhaps one of his chief reasons for being in Naples at all.

Add to this that the manner in which Porphyrogenetus links the dedication with the ensuing, on his own evidence, undoubtedly Roman episode (συχνὰ δὲ δὴ καὶ ἤθυρεν, ὧν ἐγὼ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα παραλείψω, ἐν δὲ εἶπω, 'he still had his little jokes of which I, omitting the others, shall but mention one ...' etc.)<sup>18</sup> seems far more likely to confirm that it is *after* rather than *before* the story of the dedication that the excerpt has 'omitted' something about Nero's leaving Naples and going to Rome.

And finally, if one turns from what Dio wrote to what Nero might have done, a dedication in Campania is at this stage definitely more credible than a necessarily full-blown official affair after his arrival in Rome, where all the sources portray a Nero at first suffering from an inability to meet the Senate and public with sufficient panache, only later, and not altogether auspiciously, addressing the assembled House on the punishments awaiting Vindex.<sup>19</sup>

To summarize: concerning the date of the dedication of Poppaea's temple (before or after Nero's leaving Naples?) there are two separate issues to consider, one being the place of the episode within the narrative of Porphyrogenetus (and, ultimately, Dio), the other a synoptic view of the relevant sources. As it has been argued here, analysis of both issues points to Campania rather than to Rome as the context for the dedication. Even if we conclude that negotiating the relationship between excerpts and lost originals is notoriously tricky, this seems the most attractive solution. It should be noted, however, that although the question previously seems to have been discussed only in passing, there are scholars, and among them the magisterial editor of Dio, U.P. Boissevain, who favour seeing the passage as referring to a temple in Rome.<sup>20</sup> The fact that Boissevain presents the order of the fragments according to this reading has of course influenced subsequent discussions

<sup>18</sup> Dio Cass. 63.26.4.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Suet. *Ner.* 41.4, *ac ne tunc quidem* (i.e. after his return to Rome) *aut Senatu aut populo coram appellato ...*; later, but prior to the news of the defection of Galba, his speech to the Senate on the punishments awaiting Vindex and his associates (46.3) was ominously received as referring to the punishments awaiting himself.

<sup>20</sup> Boissevain (n. 16), 575 locates the temple in Rome; similarly, J. Edmondson (ed.), *Dio: The Julio-Claudians. Selections from Books 55–63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio* (London, 1992), 247 ad 63.26.3 and Champlin (n. 3), 298 n. 51, the latter rightly noting that topographical studies (n. 16) ignore the suggestion.

of the issue, but even when accepting Boissevain's proposed sequence, it seems doubtful that there is any basis for accepting his proposed chronology.

Briefly put, Boissevain splits Porphyrogennetus' narrative in two parts, letting the former (63.26.1–2) take place in Naples, the latter (63.26.3–5) in Rome; between these two narrative strands, he – perhaps rightly – assumes that Dio related how Nero set a bounty of ten million sesterces on Vindex's head (63.23.2), with Vindex wittily replying that anyone bringing him Nero's head could have Vindex's own for free. Boissevain assumes that Nero made this offer in the speech to the Senate mentioned by Suetonius (46.3), but rather than in Rome, it may just as well have been made while still in Naples, for instance when angrily threatening Vindex with punishment (40.4) or when addressing the Senate in the letter mentioned by Porphyrogennetus (63.26.1) and Suetonius (41.1). The very promise of a bounty is indeed more likely to have been early – before Nero realized the seriousness of the challenge. An in itself splendid anecdote with the reply showing that *τοιούτος μὲν τις ὁ Οὐίνδιξ ἐγένετο*, 'this was the kind of man Vindex was' (thus Xiphilinus and perhaps Dio<sup>21</sup>), it may well have been inserted according to the demands of narrative coherence rather than according to strict chronology.

Whatever the right answer, Boissevain's repositioning the bounty episode is no cogent reason for assuming that the rest of Porphyrogennetus' narrative (= Dio 63.26.3–5) should take place in Rome. Read on its own terms, it seems much more plausible that the break between Dio's Campanian and Roman section (as reflected in Porphyrogennetus) fits somewhere *between* the episode with the temple and the incident with the water organ which is the first clearly taking place in Rome.

For the dedication of the temple, Campania thus remains the stronger candidate. But in the absence of decisive evidence, be it from there or from Rome – which of course may some day turn up and settle the case – the question arises whether there are further circumstances of relevance. In fact, there are.

As is well documented, Poppaea had strong links with Campania. These links she owed to her mother and maternal grandfather, the consular C. Poppaeus Sabinus – her father Titus Ollius apparently leaving little to speak of. In fact, Ollius never made it beyond the quaestorship before fading away in the aftermath of the fall of his patron Seianus in 31.<sup>22</sup> Not even his name lived on. Whether being opportunistic or otherwise,<sup>23</sup> there is no sign that Poppaea Sabina ever acknowledged her patronymic, choosing instead to flaunt the proud name of her maternal grandfather

<sup>21</sup> Dio Cass. 63.23.2.

<sup>22</sup> Poppaea's wealth and family: Tac. *Ann.* 13.45.2; similarly, [Sen.], *Oct.* 200, *opibus superba* (sc. Poppaea) and 545 (Nero praising her *genere*). *honoribus nondum functum* (sc. Ollium): Tac. *Ann.* 13.46.1; Suet. *Ner.* 35 claims her father was *quaestorius*; his family is obscure: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> O 96; a link to Ollii in Picenum (*CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 1919) seems plausible: R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1986), 178; others would, more dubiously, canvass the Pompeian Ol(l)i: P. Castrén, *Ordo Populusque Pompeianus* (Rome, 1975), 199.

<sup>23</sup> The move dictated by her grandfather's greater prestige: *T. Ollio patre genita, sed nomen aui materni sumpserat, inlustri memoria Poppaei Sabini consularis et triumphali decore praefulgentis*, Tac. *Ann.* 13.45. Ollia's becoming Poppaea is in accordance with aristocratic precedent: cf. Syme (n. 22), 260 on Cn. Cornelius Cinna Magnus (cos A.D. 5), the first aristocrat taking his *cognomen* from his *maternal* grandfather, Pompey the Great; later generations went even further, adopting the *gentilicia* as well as *cognomina* of prestigious maternal ancestors: P. Kragelund, 'Shadows of a great name', in P. Kragelund, M. Moltesen and J.S. Østergaard (edd.), *The Licinian Tomb – Fact or Fiction?* (Copenhagen, 2003), 18–45, at 24.



C. Poppaeus Sabinus, an eponymous consul whose name also figured in Rome's *fasti triumphales*.<sup>24</sup>

Everything suggests that her grandfather hailed from Picenum,<sup>25</sup> but numerous inscriptions confirm that the family had property, slaves and freedmen in Oplontis,<sup>26</sup> Pompeii<sup>27</sup> and, as recently revealed, Stabiae too.<sup>28</sup> In Pompeii, graffiti saluting Nero and/ or his consort are, moreover, common;<sup>29</sup> two celebrate gifts offered by Poppaea to Venus as well as gold brought by Nero to the goddess's shrine.<sup>30</sup> In a city of which Venus was the divine patron, the event to which the graffiti writer refers may well have been local.

It has been much debated whether any of this proves that Poppaea had relatives in the city or surrounding area.<sup>31</sup> The number of Pompeian graffiti applauding Nero and Poppaea – some perhaps alluding to *ludi* in her honour<sup>32</sup> – is, to be sure, remarkable, but even without local relatives such enthusiasm would probably have

<sup>24</sup> Sabinus (cos. A.D. 9) earned the *triumphalia* in 26: Tac. *Ann.* 4.46; K. Wachtel, 'Poppaeus Sabinus', *PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 847.

<sup>25</sup> The dedications from Interamnia in Picenum by 'Q. C. POPPAEI Q. F.' (*ILLRP* 617) and to 'Q. POPPAEO Q. F.', the patron of the city (618) probably refer to the consuls of A.D. 9: T.P. Wiseman, *New Men in the Roman Senate* (Oxford, 1971), 254; U. Vogel Weidemann, *Die Statthalter von Africa und Asia in den Jahren 14–68 n. Chr.* (Bonn, 1982), 227–30, at 228; by contrast, Wachtel (n. 24) argues that the inscriptions refer to the father and uncle of Poppaea's grandfather – the inscriptions in any case confirming that Interamnia was their *patria*.

<sup>26</sup> A. de Franciscis, 'La villa romana di Oplontis' in B. Andreae and H. Kyrieleis (edd.), *Neue Forschungen in Pompeji* (Recklinghausen, 1975), 15–16 (quoting the inscriptions on an amphora (SECVNDO POPPAEAE) and a dolium (C. ARRIANI [A]MPHIONIS), the latter a name known from a Pompeian brickyard (cf. n. 28) belonging to Poppaea Augusta.

<sup>27</sup> ...] C. POPPAEO SABINO COS: *CIL* X.963 (*Pompeiana uidetur*); a *signaculum* found at Pompeii probably refers to one of the Sabinus brothers: POTITI/ POPP(aei) SABINI/ P P S: *CIL* X.8058,71.

<sup>28</sup> For the discovery at Stabiae of a small suburban necropolis that in the reign of Tiberius was used for the burial of slaves and freedmen belonging to Poppaea's grandfather and his brother (once again featuring as a pair, cf. n. 25), see M.M. Magalhaes, 'Le iscrizioni e l'area funeraria dei Q. e C. Poppaei a Stabiae (loc. Clacarella di Privati)', *RSP* 10 (1999), 224–35 = *AE* (1999), 431–9 (Castellamare di Stabia); freedmen of C. Poppaeus (sc. Sabinus): 435 and 438; freedwoman of Q. Poppaeus (sc. Sabinus): 436 (married to 437); further Poppaei: 432; 434; unaligned: 431; 433 and 439. Freedmen of Poppaea Augusta: *CIL* X.1906 (pipeline from near Lake Avernus); X.6787 (dedication from Ischia to Apollo and Nymphs); *AE* (1955), 199 (brickyard near Pompeii); n. 26 (from Oplontis); *CIL* IV.3340 no. 154–155 (a POPPAEA PRISCI LIB(erta) NOT[H?]E, probably from the *familia* of the soon-to-be empress).

<sup>29</sup> Salutations to Poppaea, alone or with Nero, from Pompeii: *CIL* IV.1074 (AVGVSTI AVGVSTAE) *cum add.* p. 199; p. 461; IV.1545 *cum add.* p. 208; 1744 *cum add.* p. 211; 3038a (?); 3726; 6817 (?); 9137 (?); 10049.

<sup>30</sup> 'MVNERA POPPAEA MISIT VENERI SANCTISSIMAE ...': *AE* (1977), 217. *AE* (1977), 218 (same find spot) is a companion graffito recording a *Caesar* and *Augustus* (no doubt Nero) bringing 'most sacred Venus' (VENEREM SANCTISSIMAM) golden gifts.

<sup>31</sup> For a link between Poppaea and the Pompeian *gens Poppaea*, see A.W. van Buren, 'Pompeii – Nero – Poppaea', *Studies presented to D.M. Robinson* (St. Louis, 1953), 970–4; M. Della Corte, *Case ed Abitanti di Pompei* (Napoli, 1965), 245; Castrén (n. 22), 209; M. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (London, 1985), 102; Holztrattner (n. 1), 7 ('vermutlich'); A. Lós, 'Les intérêts de Poppée à Pompéi', *Eos* 79 (1991), 63–70; A. Butterworth and R. Laurence, *Pompeii: The Living City* (London, 2005), 79–80 ('a daughter of Pompeii'; 'a ... branch of Poppaea's family'); more cautiously, H. Mouritsen and I. Gradel, 'Nero in Pompeian politics', *ZPE* 87 (1991), 145–55, at 153 and Champlin (n. 3), 297 n. 48 (perhaps her native town).

<sup>32</sup> Of the well-preserved *CIL* IV.6682 only its beginning survives: POPPAEENSES / FACIMVS ...; in the light of this find, Mau re-examined *CIL* IV. 1499 *cum add.* p. 704, now (*satis clare*) reading NIIRO POPPAIIIIIS (II indicating an illegible letter); similarly, the commentary on p. 696 to *CIL* IV.259 gives the reading NIIRO POPPAEE(n)SES and re-examining *CIL* IV.2413i,

been natural. The couple often resided in Campania; the empress had, moreover, inherited property there. Rather than being kinsmen, the local Poppaei may simply have been her family's freedmen and their descendants. In short, *familia* rather than family.<sup>33</sup> What matters here, however, is the clear evidence for strong links, some certainly based upon property, others perhaps on kinship, because this is where the excerpt of Dio may be relevant.

In Rome, imperial cult commonly focussed on places of birth. Suetonius knew of a *sacrarium* at Augustus' birthplace on the Palatine; at Fundi, he mentions a statue of Felicitas believed to mark where Tiberius had been born. In an outpost in Germany, Pliny the Elder had come across altars dedicated OB AGRIPPINAE PVERPERIVM – 'because of Agrippina's childbirth'. When the latter's daughter became empress she would, *quo uim suam ... ostentaret* ('to show off her power') to people in the provinces, ensure that her birth in Cologne was suitably commemorated. The outpost fortress was given the coveted status of a Roman *colonia* (which in her honour was called *Agrippinensis*). In a similar manner, her son Nero honoured his native Antium – and Domitian continued the custom when turning his birthplace into the *Templum* (and Mausoleum) of the *gens Flauia*.<sup>34</sup>

Given this background, it seems reasonable to combine the two strands of evidence, on the one hand for strong links between Poppaea and Campania and, on the other, for an epitome of Dio suggesting that this was where the temple of Nero's deified consort was located. According to this reading, the question whether or not she had relatives in the area is not what truly matters. Rather than with such local namesakes (not perhaps the sort with whom one imagines Poppaea would have wished to be associated), her links may indeed first and foremost, and perhaps exclusively, have been with the region. To the extent that the locals and Poppaea recognized a special bond, for instance when Pompeians praised the imperial couple for benefactions,<sup>35</sup> this would amply have been justified by the fact that it had been on a family property in trendy Campania that the Diva had been born.

In a symbolic order, time and place are often intertwined, raising the question whether Nero's well-documented reluctance to leave Naples had anything to do with the date he had scheduled – and doubtless announced – for dedicating the Temple of Venus-Poppaea. Dedications of Roman temples were grand affairs, heavy with archaic ritual; since the temple's *natalis* became the day of its annual festival, such days were often chosen to coincide with dates of symbolic import.<sup>36</sup>

Mau (*add.* p. 704) tentatively read NIIRO POPPAE(en)SIS. *CIL* IV.1499 was close to a graffito with pair of gladiators: *in eadem columna gladiatorum par stilo repraesentatum est*.

<sup>33</sup> Wachtel (n. 1) suggests (*ad P* 850) that the Campanian Poppaei might be 'freedmen and their descendants' (*liberti fortasse posterique eorum?*); similarly, Magalhaes (n. 28), 231. H. Mouritsen, *Elections, Magistrates and Municipal Elite: Studies in Pompeian Epigraphy*, *ARID, Suppl.* 15 (Rome, 1988) lays bare the highly problematic nature of Della Corte's (n. 31) identifications and inferences about the owners of houses in Pompeii; similarly, K.S. Painter, *The Insula of the Menander at Pompeii* iv (Oxford, 2001), 36–8.

<sup>34</sup> Augustus: Suet. *Aug.* 5; Tiberius: *Tib.* 5 (the – perhaps mistaken – inference that Fundi was Tiberius' birthplace illustrates that one expected such places to be honoured); Agrippina: *Calig. 8*; *quo uim*: Tac. *Ann.* 12.27; Antium: Suet. *Ner.* 6; 9 and 25; Domitian: *Dom.* 1.

<sup>35</sup> It is debatable whether the *iudicia* for which Pompeian inscriptions praise Nero (cf. *CIL* IV.670; 671a–b; 1074 (with Poppaea); 1612; 3525; 3726 (with Poppaea) and 7625) refer to the grant of colonial status, to the permission to resume holding gladiatorial contests – or whatever.

<sup>36</sup> K. Keyssner, 'Natalis templi', *RE* 31 (1933), 1800–2.



As for the previously acknowledged *diuae*, Drusilla and Livia, neither obtained her own separate temple by the state; instead they were venerated in already existing sanctuaries, Drusilla on the *dies natalis* of herself and Augustus, Livia on her *natalis*, but also on the day of her consecration, her wedding day with Augustus.<sup>37</sup> In the case of Poppaea, we have no knowledge of a birthday, but whatever the details, they may well in her case have been outweighed by the fact that her temple *expressis uerbis* was dedicated to Venus-Poppaea, because when looking at the relevant section of the Roman calendar one finds there is a date of profound resonance that meets the eye.

To the Romans, April was the month of Venus; the first sometimes described as her *natalis*. In Romulus' primitive calendar, Venus' consort Mars opened the year, then the *genetrix* herself came along, with spring, pleasure and plenty. Hence Aeneas A QVO P(opulus) R(omanus) ORTVS E[ST] ('Aeneas ... from whom the Roman people') – and from whom, of course, its dynasty descended. On the Kalends, *Latiae matresque nurusque* ('Latium's mothers and daughters'), old and young, high and low, joined in celebrating the goddess at the Temples of Fortuna Virilis and Venus Verticordia, the *matronae* solemnly washing and decorating the goddess' sacred image,<sup>38</sup> while prostitutes and low-born women would resort to more basic rituals such as rushing into bathhouses 'because there men without fail are naked thus revealing the very part of their body by which female beauty is desired'.<sup>39</sup>

This lively day in April, with its female festivity and dynastic associations, would certainly have been an ideal *dies natalis* for a temple dedicated by Nero and the women to the goddess Venus-Poppaea – all the more so, since the month, in Nero's honour, some years back had shed its old name *Aprilis* in favour of *Neroneus*,<sup>40</sup> the proposed date thus in a sense reuniting the dedicator and dedicatee.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> For the cult of Diva Drusilla, which quietly withered away after the fall of Caligula, the *dies natalis* was central (Dio Cass. 59.11.3; 13.8); whether by accident or design it seems to have coincided with that of Augustus on 23<sup>rd</sup> September: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> I 664. Drusilla shared a temple with Venus Genetrix; there is no sign that she ever received the temple vowed to her on her death: Dio Cass. 59.11.2–3. Livia's 'official' *natalis* 30<sup>th</sup> January was already in her lifetime (Tac. *Ann.* 6.5.1) and later also in her cult honorifically observed; from 42 she shared the temple of Divus Augustus: Dio Cass. 60.5.2; for the day of her consecration, see n. 41.

<sup>38</sup> Venus' month: Ov. *Fast.* 4.14; *kalendis Aprilis natalis est Veneris*: schol. ad Hor. *Carm.* 4.11.15. Romulus: Ov. *Fast.* 4.23–30; [AENE]AE: *Fasti Praen.* (n. 14) introducing April; *Latiae*: Ov. *Fast.* 4.133, Ovid continuing to describe the washing and decorating of the goddess's statue on the Kalends of April (a ritual not involving the lower orders).

<sup>39</sup> For the same day's ritual of gatecrashing, see the *Fasti Praen.* (n. 14), 'FREQUENTER MVLIERES SVPLPLICANT FORTVNAE VIRILI HVMILORES ETIAM IN BALINEIS QVOD IN IIS EA PARTE CORPOR[IS] VTIQVE VIRI NVDANTVR QVA FEMINARVM GRATIA DESIDERATVR'; Ov. *Ars am.* 1.405–6 may further indicate that this was a day for giving 'Valentines' (as it were).

<sup>40</sup> cf. n. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Caligula made his own *natalis* the *natalis* of the Temple of Augustus (Dio Cass. 59.7) and Claudius reconsecrated this temple, now of Augustus and Livia, on the day which was the first of the *ludi Palatini* instituted by Livia (Dio Cass. 56.46.5) as well as the anniversary of her wedding day to the *diuus* whose temple she now shared: Dio Cass. 60.5.2; *Acta fratrum Arvalium* (ed. Henzen), LV, 'XVI K(alendas) FEBR(uarias): [OB CONSECR]RATIONEM DIVAE AVG(ustae) I[N] TEM[PLO] NOVO] ...' with Barrett (n. 7), 222–3; I. Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford, 2002), 180.

Was this the date Nero refused to forego? When performing tragedy wearing masks bearing the features of the late empress and carousing in Greece – as well as in Rome’s street markets – in the company of his Poppaea ‘lookalike’, the eunuch lover boy Sporus, Nero had, in his own ostentatious way, made his devotion to her memory amply clear.<sup>42</sup> Now, her temple had been completed. At a similar juncture in the preceding autumn, with all Judaea in open revolt, when Nero’s all-powerful freedman Helius had sent his master letter after letter, begging him to shorten his tour of Greece and return quickly to Rome, Nero had high-handedly insisted that his Greek projects came first. In the end these refusals had forced Helius to go to Greece, at record speed, bringing warnings of conspiracies brewing, thus finally making Nero abandon his Greek merry-go-round.<sup>43</sup> Now Nero was once again experiencing how government trouble might disturb his grand enterprises; and once again he at first refused to heed the summons from Rome, everything suggesting that he postponed his return until, somewhere in Campania, on a date between the end of March and the beginning of April – a fair guess being the *Kalendis Neroneis*, he had honoured his sacred vow to Venus-Poppaea.

Meanwhile, in Spain, the governor Galba had by edict announced that on *III Nonas Neroneas* he would make himself available for the solemn ritual of the manumission of slaves. In an atmosphere of mounting tension the provincials responded with enthusiasm. On 3<sup>rd</sup> April 68 a large crowd gathered in the forum of Carthago Nova, there to see Galba appearing on a tribunal adorned with ‘as many images of those exiled or murdered by Nero as could be found’. To the cheers of the audience he announced his long-awaited decision to join Vindex in ‘freeing mankind’<sup>44</sup> – thus adding weight and ‘legitimacy’ to a movement that within little more than two months brought down the consort of Diva Poppaea.

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<sup>42</sup> Tragic masks with the features of Poppaea: Dio Cass. 63.9.4–6; Sporus: Suet. *Ner.* 28; for further references, see *PIR*<sup>2</sup> S 805 with discussion by Champlin (n. 3), 56; 71; 105 (Poppaea); 145–150 (Sporus).

<sup>43</sup> Helius’ summons: Dio Cass. 63.19.1; Suet. *Ner.* 23 quotes from Nero’s reply: ‘ac ne quid circa haec occupatum auocaret detineretue cum praesentia eius urbicas res egere a liberto Helio admoneretur, rescipsit (sc. Nero) his uerbis: Quamuis nunc tuum consilium sit et uotum celeriter reuertere, tamen suadere et optare potius debes, ut Nerone dignus reuertar’; cf. Griffin (n. 31), 180–1.

<sup>44</sup> For the date see Dio Cass. 64.6.5<sup>2</sup>; for the edict, images (*propositis ante se* (sc. Galbam) *damnatorum occisorumque a Nerone quam plurimis imaginibus*) and ceremony, Suet. *Galb.* 10; Plut. *Galb.* 5; for the slogans (LIBERATOR, ADSERTOR, LIBERTAS P(opuli) R(omani) RESTITVTA) and imagery (the *uindicta*, *pilleus* and daggers of Brutus) in the coinage of the Galban revolt, see C.M. Kraay, ‘The Coinage of Vindex and Galba, A.D. 68, and the Continuity of the Augustan Principate’, *Num. Chron.* 1949, 129–49; P.H. Martin, *Die anonymen Münzen des Jahres 68 n. Chr.* (Mainz, 1974), *passim* and R. Ash, *Ordering Anarchy: Armies and Leaders in Tacitus’ Histories* (London, 1999), 74–7.