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Small gods

Miniature Images of Deities and Material Religion in 1st-century CE Campania

Abstract

This paper will investigate how the miniaturisation of images of deities brings them into intimate relationship with the body, mediating communication between divine referent and believer. These artefacts serve individual religious praxis by creating personal, accessible divine images; their diminutive size invites touch and close contact. This paper takes as a case study the miniature images of gods found on the bone beads from the House of Lucius Helvius Severus (I, 13 2) at Pompeii. In the case of the jewellery and hairpins of late Hellenistic Campania, the portability of divine images creates a specific relationship between the body of the believer and the figural representation of the god. This representation is in turn transformed by the autological factors of its production – scale, material, and wearability all altering the recognisable image of the god. These miniature figures not only mediate communication between the individual and the divine, but they also serve to mediate the individual's relationship with institutional religion as the personal 'appropriation' of public religion, shaped by the motivations, beliefs, and needs of individual religious agents.

Keywords

Religion, Miniature, Gods, Jewellery, Pompeii, Campania

To understand the construction of Roman religion, scholarship has often turned to theoretical frameworks which centre the material aspects of religious praxis.[1] This focus has become even more prominent in recent years, as demonstrated by the rich scholarship produced by the Max Weber Center of Erfurt University on the ERC project on "Lived Ancient Religion" and the continued work of the Baron Thyssen Centre for the Study of Ancient Material Religion at the Open University.[2] Within this scholarly

1 I would like to acknowledge the help of my supervisor, Professor Michael Squire in preparing this paper, as well as my funding body the London Arts and Humanities Partnership for supporting my PhD project. Thanks also to Thomas Gavin and Jenyth Evans for proofreading. Greatest thanks to the University of Tübingen for allowing me to speak at the 2022 "Materialität und Medialität" conference for SFB 1391 *Andere Ästhetik*, and to the conference attendees who offered support and advice for this paper.

2 For an overview of the "Lived Ancient Religion" project (2013–2017), see Gasparini et al. 2020; for the Open University research centre begun in 2018, see https://www.openmaterialreligion.org/ (last accessed: 4 October 2022).

 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110988413-014

movement, the study of ancient religion coalesces around archaeological evidence, precipitated on an understanding of the effects of religious images, objects and spaces as inextricable from religion itself.[3] These approaches allow us to investigate the interrelationship between human and non-human things as a site for the production of meaning, affording objects agency within the human-object relationship where bodies and minds engage and combine with material things.[4] However, a gap has emerged in the focus of the ancient material religion project. Recent scholarship has predominantly focused on the grand and gigantic aspects of religious materiality – how cult statues, large-scale processions and rituals, and monumental temples shape religious experience.[5] This has often neglected the vast evidence for a smaller-scale, more personal, more private religious practice within the archaeological record, constructed within the daily lives and habits of individuals.[6]

This paper seeks to address one category of objects mediating religious practice that has been excluded from previous scholarly discussion, that of miniature god images made to be worn or carried, existing in close contact with the worshipper's body. These tiny objects offer a unique insight into the role of personal divine representations as mediators in the construction of informal individualised religious praxis, outside of the institutionalised sacred spaces of Roman religion. These images, often found on items of jewellery or personal adornment, have historically been considered only from an artistic, ornamental, or value-focused point of view – as trinkets or 'treasure'.[7] This paper instead approaches them as personally owned, miniaturised god images that channelled communication with the divine, allowing for the construction of an intimate relationship between believer and deity. The miniaturisation of the divine figure contributes not only to an altered practice, but to a significantly different aesthetic of divine representation to the one presented by modern art historical scholarship. Speaking to the aims of the CRC 1391 *Different Aesthetics*, I hope to reframe these small gods, looking specifically to a case-study from the House of Lucius Helvius Severus at Pompeii, one assemblage from the wide range of miniature deities found in the area of Campania destroyed and preserved by the eruption of Vesuvius.[8] I will examine these objects through their different entanglements – with the body, the hand, the assem-

3 Houtman / Meyer 2012, pp. 1, 6–10; Bräunlein 2016, p. 366; Gasparini et al. 2020, p. 3.

4 Mol / Versluys 2015, p. 452; Graham 2021, pp. 5 f.

5 Platt 2011, p. 26; Barham 2018, p. 288; Graham 2021, pp. 49 f.

6 Scholars such as Sofroniew, Himmelmann and Bassani have addressed small-scale objects in the archaeology of personal or domestic religion, nonetheless, these categories of objects are often excluded from new materialist discussions of ancient religion which focus on temple spaces and public ritual: Himmelmann 1983, p. 69; Sofroniew 2015, p. 28–35; Bassani 2021, pp. 101 f.

7 D'Ambrosio 2001, p. 30; Berg 2002, pp. 15 f., 18.

8 For the House of Lucius Helvius Severus, Gallo 1994; Berg 2020. For methodology and approach to Vesuvian deposits, see Allison 2004, pp. 15–18.

blage, as well as with wider cultures of visual and material religion – and I will offer some preliminary explorations of the importance of these miniatures in mediating personal and informal religious action.[9]

1. The case-study: The House of Lucius Helvius Severus, Pompeii

In the excavations of Domus I.13.2 in 1953 and 1955, a collection of over forty beads was found in a cupboard in the atrium.[10] Alongside beads in a variety of materials (including mother of pearl, rock crystal, amethyst, and amber) depicting miniature symbols or objects, there was a small set of eight bone beads that depicted different Roman and Egyptian deities in miniature.[11] These tiny carvings of gods and accompanying beads were found collected together with bronze olive-headed probes, bronze and glass *unguentaria*, and oil lamps, indicating that this 'kit' was likely collated for the purpose of personal grooming or medicine.[12] Depicted in the group of beads are Isis, Priapus, Minerva, Heracles, Venus Anadyomene (who appears twice), as well as two other highly damaged anthropomorphic figures. Each of the miniature figures has a height between 1.9–3.8 cm.[13]

While I will focus primarily on the anthropomorphic, divine miniature representations in this brief survey, these particular objects were found in a group of 'amulets' of various shapes and materials (including bone, glass, amber, amethyst, rock crystal) and it is important to consider them within this context, as existing in a dialogue and network with a range of other religious and non-religious symbols.[14] Alongside the figures representing deities there are numerous beads depicting shrunken symbols or objects – four mother of pearl fish, two walnuts made of rock crystal, two phallus beads, a *manus impudica*, a bead in the shape of an outstretched hand, a baby elephant, a slipper, a seat, a miniature comb, and a miniature *unguentarium*.[15] It is possible that these beads all belonged to the same piece of jewellery – from other contexts in Pompeii and Herculaneum we have several instances of bead collections numbering between 40–50, suggesting this may have been a regular amount of beads for one necklace (and too long for a 'charm bracelet').[16] In this preliminary discussion of the material, I will focus on

9 For the concept of the entanglement, see Hodder 2012, especially pp. 88–90.

10 Gallo 1994, pp. 134 f.

11 Catalogue of finds in Gallo 1994, pp. 144–148, nos. 148–166.

12 Berg 2020, p. 89.

13 All heights in cm: Priapus, 3.5; Isis, 3.2; Venus I, 3.8; Venus II, 3.4; Minerva, 2.5; Fortuna, 1.9; Heracles, 2.2; unidentified female figure, 2.7.

14 Berg 2021, p. 124.

15 Berg 2020, pp. 89 f.

16 Scatozza Höricht 1989, N. 276, E3671; Hackworth Petersen 2021, p. 19: four necklaces found in the house and fullery of Stephanus (I,6,7).

the beads which clearly represent specific deities, excluding the two beads that have suffered such high levels of damage that the figures depicted are not recognisable.[17] While it is likely that both depict goddess figures on the basis of the surviving detail and the nature of the wider collection, they are not securely identifiable and thus discussion would be highly speculative.

2. The miniature as a worn object

Assemblages like the one found in the house of Lucius Helvius Severus are regularly characterized as 'collections of amulets' rather than as elements of a unified piece of jewellery, connected by a thread or string that has since degraded and disappeared.[18] Their discovery, often in the remains of boxes and cupboards that imply storage rather than active use, also serves to distance these objects from the bodies that wore them, making them clandestine 'hoards' or 'troves' of semi-magical objects rather than openly displayed and worn items of jewellery. In his publication of the *domus*, Gallo characterises these beads as small statuettes or figurines, likely because those object categories are more commonly understood as constituting religious material, in contrast with the historic reception of jewellery in scholarship.[19] While this motivation is not unreasonable given Gallo's desire to foreground the magical and apotropaic nature of the material, it is clear from the drilled holes in each of these figurines that the ability to wear them was central in their use-life, generating a different kind of embodied relationship to that of free-standing figurines. Their nature as beads is key to our understanding. The association of jewellery solely with ornament forms an unhelpful aesthetic judgment, where these objects are aligned with feminine adornment and therefore frivolity, allowing their position as representations of deities to be elided.[20] As decorative objects they contribute to individual self-fashioning and the communication of a relationship with the deity which is projected outwards, but they also enable a personal, private religious praxis.[21]

17 Two broken beads are Gallo 1994, no. 159 (female figure with cornucopia sitting on a rock) and no. 161 (too damaged for secure identification).

18 A clear example of this trend is provided by the publications around the 2019 discovery of the 'sorcerer's treasure trove' at Casa del Giardino in Pompeii: "La fortuna e la protezione contro la malasorte nei monili della Regio V. Pompeii Sites", Parco archeologico di Pompei, 12 August 2019. http://pompeiisites.org/comunicato-stampa/la-fortuna-e-la-protezione-contro-la-malasorte-nei-monili-della-regio-v/ (last accessed: 18 April 2023).

19 Gallo 1994, p. 135.

20 Squire 2018, p. 20.

21 Berg 2002, p. 16; Allen 2016, p. 4.

The central importance of the embodied relationship between religious actor and miniature god, and the role of the body in engagement with these objects, is indicated in a particular episode from Plutarch's *Life of Sulla*, where the general Lucius Cornelius Sulla calls on the god Apollo for aid in battle:

> It is said that he had a little golden image of Apollo from Delphi, which he always carried at his breast when going into battle, and in this moment he kissed it and said "Oh Pythian Apollo, you have led the lucky Cornelius Sulla through so many struggles to greatness and brilliance, did you lead him here to the gates of his hometown to be cast down and to die in shame together with his countrymen?"[22]

This passage shows how a miniaturised ἀγαλμάτιον (*agalmátion*) becomes the focal point for prayer for the general, activated by haptic engagement (the touch, the kiss). The scene frames Sulla's appeal around the miniature Apollo, demonstrating how the wearing of the figure enables a flexible and portable religious practice, bringing the individual and the god both physically and spiritually closer. There is an intimacy, a closeness, an invitation to action and touch evoked by wearing that is not seen when we view these as objects stored in a box or a case. Most of the divine miniatures from Campania preserve signs of being worn – either with a suspension loop or fixing on the back, or a hole drilled through the centre, as with the beads from the House of Lucius Helvius Severus – demonstrating that they were designed to be held close to the body.[23] Thus, as 'things ready to hand' these image-objects are consistently accessible to the wearer for action, gesture, or prayer.[24]

It is this proximity to the body that allows these miniatures to take on amuletic and protective powers, as in the terminology used to describe amulets in both the Greek and the Roman tradition – in Greek, a common name for them is *periamma* or *periapta*, referring to the tying or binding of these objects to the body, a sense that is preserved in the Latin terms *ligatura* and *alligatura*.[25] The body and the amulet are entangled, and their protective power is generated through the specific interrelationship of individual human body, belief, and protective object.[26] This is best demonstrated by the beads from

22 Plut. Sulla 29,6: λέγεται δὲ ἔχων τι χρυσοῦν Ἀπόλλωνος ἀγαλμάτιον ἐκ Δελφῶν ἀεὶ μὲν αὐτὸ κατὰ τὰς μάχας περιφέρειν ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τότε τοῦτο καταφιλεῖν οὕτω δὴ λέγων: 'ὦ Πύθιε Ἄπολλον, τὸν εὐτυχῆ Σύλλαν Κορνήλιον ἐν τοσούτοις ἀγῶσιν ἄρας λαμπρὸν καὶ μέγαν ἐνταῦθα ῥίψεις ἐπὶ θύραις τῆς πατρίδος ἀγαγών, αἴσχιστα τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ συναπολούμενον πολίταις. All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated, C.H.

23 Main catalogues of comparative material can be found in Siviero 1954; Scatozza Höricht 1989; D'Ambrosio / De Carolis 1997.

24 Bailey 2005, p. 151.

25 Bohak 2015, p. 88; Dasen 2015, p. 183.

26 Raja and Rüpke 2015, p. 11; Bohak 2015, p. 84.

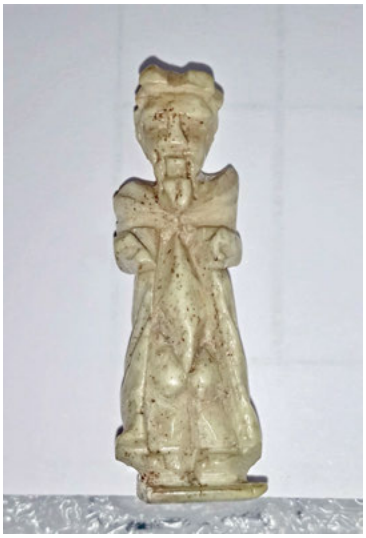

Fig. 1. Bead with Priapus figure, House of Lucius Helvius Severus (I.13.2), Pompeii, 1st century CE, bone, height 3.5 cm, Naples, Parco Archeologico di Pompei, inv. no. 11597

the collection which make use of apotropaic and protective imagery: most notably, the bead which depicts a frontal confrontation with the god Priapus, who faces the viewer and opens his cloak to reveal his exaggerated erect phallus (Fig. 1).[27] His pose and the resulting genital exposure motif has some parallels with another miniature figure from Pompeii which shows Baubo squatting naked, exposing her own genitalia.[28] The gesture of skirt-lifting or genital exposure is often associated with 'apotropaic' or protective imagery that makes it particularly appropriate for this category of miniatures as portable, worn objects projecting amuletic power.[29] The force of the genital exposure as an apotropaic gesture generates an imagined layer of protection, which in the case of these objects can be tied to the body, offering divine support in the movement and habits of daily life.[30]

27 P. Stewart 1997, p. 576.

28 Scatozza Höricht 1989, N. 144 E2582H.

29 The apotropaic force of genital exposure is predominantly understood to come from the shock produced by the action, though scholarship is split on whether the force is meant to be either comical or threatening. For phallic exposure as apotropaic and Priapus, see Moser 2006; Blanton IV 2022, pp. 172 f. For Baubo and the skirt-lifting gesture, see Bonfante 1989, p. 559, footnote 91.

30 Corti 2001, p. 73; Rieger 2020, pp. 77 f.

3. The production of the miniature

It is important to note how both the material and scale (as well as other autological factors of their production) shapes these objects. The bone amulets from the House of Lucius Helvius Severus exist at one end of the spectrum of scale for the wide range of divine images found in Campania and are shaped by the material properties of bone, a relatively soft material that is easily abraded and hard to carve in sharp detail – these factors both contribute significantly to an increased abstraction and impressionism in the style of their carving, adapted to the qualities of bone as the base material and to the tiny scale of the beads themselves.[31] The divine representation is transformed by the autological factors of its production – scale, material, and creation as a wearable object.

Within the collection, there is notable variation in the stylistic choices made when carving these miniature objects – the levels of abstraction vary considerably, for example as between the Priapus figure which is highly schematic and impressionistic (particularly in the shape of the head and detailing of the body) and the Venus Anadyomene figures which are modulated with gentle curves and where the shape of the eyes and nose are carefully picked out even at minute scale (Figs. 2a and b). However, the combined effect of their scale and material on their appearance is clear when the beads are contrasted with the ivory statuette of Heracles found within the same assemblage, which shows a much higher level of detail and naturalism (Fig. 3). I will return to this ivory figurine later, but for now I will focus on the bead which best shows the interplay of miniaturisation and abstract carving – the bead depicting Minerva (Fig. 4). This bone bead is one of the smallest in this collection at a height of 2.5 cm, and the most abstract in its style of carving – detail is expressed predominantly through straight cuts to the bone of roughly the same depth, with little variation or modulation. The body of the figure is not rendered naturalistically and instead has a very rectangular shape; the neck is also far too thick for the head, which in turn is oddly-shaped and with a barely legible face. The suppression of detail is of such a level that it is difficult to tell whether the diagonal cuts across the head indicate hair, a helmet, or even facial features such as eyes. The triple pointed object on top of the head is likely part of a helmet or helmet plume but this is not entirely clear.[32]

This focus on its abstract craftsmanship is not to criticize the effectiveness of the bead in representing the deity but to understand the different effect produced – the face on the breastplate seems a clear indicator of the goddess' identity, representing the aegis, and she also carries a spear in her right hand. She may have carried a shield or other attribute on her left, where breakages have now made the original appearance of

31 Cutler 1985, p. 6; Biró 1994, p. 9; St. Clair 2003, p. 2.

32 From the details preserved, it is possible that the goddess is depicted in the Promachos type, which was popular in Roman glyptic, as Gallo suggests – however, the lack of second attribute makes this very hard to confirm; Gallo 1994, p. 145, no. 152; Dasen 2019, p. 56.

Fig. 2a. Bead with Venus Anadyomene figure, House of Lucius Helvius Severus (I.13.2), Pompeii, 1st century CE, bone, height 3.8 cm, Naples, Parco Archeologico di Pompei, inv. no. 11599

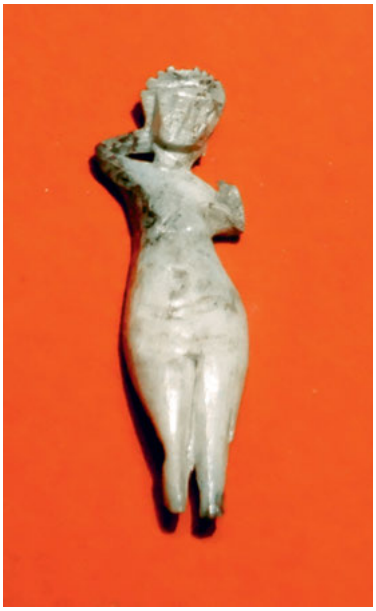

Fig. 2b. Bead with Venus Anadyomene figure, House of Lucius Helvius Severus (I.13.2), Pompeii, 1st century CE, bone, height 3.4 cm, Naples, Parco Archeologico di Pompei, inv. no. 11600

the bead unclear. The figure successfully fulfils the purpose of representing the divinity, within a collection of beads which share the same representational aim, though taking different stylistic choices in pursuit of that intention. The production of images at this scale in many ways disrupts normal craft conventions, forcing the craftsperson to make choices that differ from standard practice[33] – for example, small cuts are used for fine details rather than more complex modelling, and iconography is altered to fit the form, as in this case where Minerva's aegis becomes an expanded abstract face that fills her torso. The miniature by its nature depends on 'abstraction and compression of details' that is evident in these beads – it is possible that through their abstraction they become more purely symbolic, more broadly representational and draw attention more to the thing represented, rather than the quality of craft in making it realistic. Abstraction and non-naturalistic representational styles in religious images may serve to direct the focus of the viewer or emphasise certain elements, as seen in the painting

33 Kohring 2011, p. 36.

Fig. 3. Statuette of Heracles as a child, House of Lucius Helvius Severus (I.13.2), Pompeii, 1st century CE, ivory, height 6.5 cm, width 4 cm, Naples, Parco Archeologico di Pompei, inv. no. 11596

of Christian icons.[34] Frontality can be a way of simulating direct confrontation with the deity; changes in scale and levels of detail point the eye to the important elements of the image, as seen with the rendering of the deities' attributes at a higher level of detail and exaggerated scale compared to their bodies.[35] Autology in production meets heterology, as the miniaturisation of the god constructs a new aesthetic of representation that is radically differentiated from the wider visual culture of deity representation to further the function of the object. For these miniatures, artistic production seems to have prioritised effectively communicating the identity of the deity, summoning their support or divine presence through visual reference to a commonly understood semiotic network of divine symbols, rather than through naturalism. The scale of the miniature itself also serves to distance it from notions of 'realism' and the familiar forms of the world by shrinking these figural representations far from any natural scale for the human (or divine) body, a distance which is only enhanced by the abstract style of these divine representations. We can thus see the schematic style of these figural beads as also contributing to one of the key effects of the miniature, as a representative of an 'alternative world', operating according to different scalar and stylistic rules and thus conjuring an enchantment with the tiny object.[36] Instead of dismissing these representations according to the aesthetic criteria that privilege naturalism, we should

34 Elsner 2007, p. 22.
35 Elsner 2007, pp. 20–22.
36 Bailey 2005, p. 34; Langin-Hooper 2015, pp. 61 f.; Cometa 2020, p. 147.

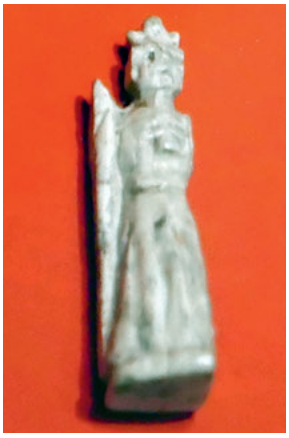

Fig. 4. Bead with Minerva figure, House of Lucius Helvius Severus (I.13.2), Pompeii, 1st century CE, bone, height 2.5 cm, Naples, Parco Archeologico di Pompei, inv. no. 11601

acknowledge how this (miniaturised and abstracted) mode of representation constructs understanding in different ways.

The potential for the miniature to draw the viewer into this alternative medial space seems to be particularly effective for miniatures depicting a divinity, who exist both alongside and at a remove from the mortal world.[37] We often think about the power of scale when gods are represented in colossal or larger-than-life-size cult statues, but the distancing effect is also in action when the god is shrunk far from the human body, which appears as the closest scalar comparison when these miniatures are worn. Abstraction and miniaturisation are two modes which lead to a similar effect – instead of 'staging an illusion of presence within the visual and spatial sphere of the viewer', they offer a window into another world by failing to fit with the scalar expectations and naturalistic forms of the human body, creating a sense of the 'unreal'.[38] We may think of divinity as manifested through cult statues in terms of the grand, the enormous, the powerful, but these objects offer access to a different form of divinity: the small god, a divinity where a diminutised scale produces a different sense of strangeness, rarity, and distance from the everyday world through scalar norms. Even as the objects themselves sit within daily life, the juxtaposition with the body produced by the wearing of these beads draws attention to the oddness of these tiny divine representations. In the case of this Minerva bead, which in pose and attributes mirrors cult statue types such as the Athena Promachos and Athena Parthenos (upright, long tunic, helmet, spear), the bead both replicates and recalls the power of the cult statue through an abstract rendering of these details while transforming the effect of it through miniaturisation of the rec-

37 Gordon 1979, p. 7.
38 Hulin 2004, p. 91; Platt / Squire 2018, p. 96.

ognisable image.[39] The viewer no longer looks up in awe at the colossal cult statue, but down at the small bead which they can hold in the palm of their hand or wear attached to their body.[40] In the case of the other beads, the stylistic choices made can even be seen as enhancing the efficacy of the image; for example, in the case of the Priapus bead, the miniature scale of the god requires the viewer to lean in or hold the bead close to view it, at which point they are confronted with his cape-opening gesture. The frontality of the image and the enlarged scale of his erect phallus (taking up almost half of the bead's total height) create a more direct sense of confrontation with the god, and potentially stronger apotropaic force through the unexpected encounter.[41]

The choice of bone in the production of these miniature deities likely had multiple reasonings and resonances – first and foremost, it was a cheap and plentiful material due to bone's status as a waste product from the rearing and slaughter of animals. In the production of miniatures, the use of larger bones for these tiny objects would be limited by the perforated central core of animal bones formed by cancellous tissue, requiring the use of smaller bones that might not otherwise find many uses in object production.[42] Bone as a carved material is stronger and more plastic than ivory, its more expensive counterpart, with greater resistance to stress-fractures and cracking due to its 'collageneous matrix'; these material properties make it more resistant to breakages when used for worn objects making it a cheap and hardy material for the making of beads.[43] As St. Clair has demonstrated in his survey of Roman bone and ivory carving, it is likely that for many viewers bone and ivory were relatively indistinguishable from one another.[44] Thus there was likely some fluidity between how these materials were viewed; bone might act as a plausible stand-in for the more expensive material of ivory. The softness of bone (especially if pre-soaked in water) would allow for greater ease in the physical act of carving at a miniature scale, helpful in the rendering of anthropomorphic figures, though this ease to some degree works against the production of sharp or detailed carving.[45] This collection of bone beads has many parallel examples across Campania, as bone seems to have been a popular choice for depicting the gods at this

39 The image of the Athena Parthenos was likely one of the most widely distributed miniaturised divine types, especially due to its popularity in glyptic carving – for example, two cornelians with images of the statue are found in Arch 12 of the Herculaneum boat house (Inv. E3125); in a recent publication Popkin also demonstrates how miniaturised terracotta versions of the shield of Athena Parthenos acted as souvenirs for religious pilgrims: D'Ambrosio / De Carolis 1997, p. 100; Van Andringa 2012, p. 90; Allen 2016, p. 145; Popkin 2022, p. 3.

40 S. Stewart 1984, p. 46.

41 Blanton IV 2022, p. 172.

42 Cutler 1985, p. 6; Biró 1994, p. 9; St. Clair 2003, p. 2.

43 Biró 1994, p. 9; St. Clair 2003, p. 2.

44 St. Clair 2003, pp. 13 f.

45 Biró 1994, p. 9.

scale: many examples of miniature divinities in bone were found in the large collection of beads from Insula Orientalis II.10 in Herculaneum, while another bone charm necklace from Pompeii is recorded in Fiorelli's 1861 volume of the "Giornale degli scavi di Pompei", with a collection of beads depicting Isis alongside other Egyptian deities and their attributes.[46] Other individual bone pendants representing the gods are recorded in the collections from Pompeii and Herculaneum, but without excavation data that allows for a full understanding of their context.[47]

The use of bone for these and other examples of divine miniatures may also be particularly generative of meaning – the materials chosen for images of gods, including small-scale representations, are an important point of debate, as demonstrated by Apuleius' testimony in his *Apology*, where he insists on wood for his Apollo figurine following Plato's *Laws*.[48] These concerns demonstrate the different resonances materials might hold in the production of divine images – for Plato and seemingly Apuleius, bone or ivory as an organic material from a dead animal would not necessarily lose its association with that origin even if it was carved into an object with a new function; bone does not lose a particular charge from its relationship with the animal body. The choice of material may also indicate a link between these miniaturised god images and larger-scale divine representations – the popularity of bone and ivory in the Campanian corpus of miniatures may recall chryselephantine cult statues, a form of divine representation that was exalted throughout the ancient world.[49] Outside of this collection of bone beads, bronze is also a common choice for pendants or earrings depicting miniature gods popular across the Bay of Naples in the 1st century CE.[50] Use of bone and bronze serves to make these small gods physically resemble the larger-scale statuary encountered in temple spaces – using the same or similar materials gives these miniatures the look and feel of statues, shrunken and made into personal possessions, and perhaps reconstructs the feeling of touching statues that would have been physically inaccessible in life. These materials are not only practical choices for jewellery and small-scale carving and casting, but they also

46 Fiorelli 1861, pp. 16–18; Scatozza Höricht 1989, p. 56; Hackworth Petersen 2021, p. 21.

47 Scatozza Höricht 1989, N. 164, 167, 168; D'Ambrosio/De Carolis 1997, N. 276,29. Bone is also the most prevalent material for hairpins surviving from the Bay of Naples, as discussed in Berg 2021.

48 Apul. apol. 65,7–8. Apuleius adopts Plato's logic that precious metals may attract envy, iron and bronze are used for weapons, and ivory 'comes from a body without a soul', Plat. leg. 12, 955E–956A; Elsner 2020, p. 156.

49 Chryselephantine statues in Rome included the statues of Jupiter Stator and Jupiter Capitolinus; evidence discussed in St. Clair 2003, pp. 9f.; Heinemann discusses the Roman cultural reception of ivory and its use in cult statuary in Heinemann 2020, pp. 303–308.

50 Catalogues of material are Museo nazionale 1986; Scatozza Höricht 1989; D'Ambrosio/De Carolis 1997, a sample of the bronze miniatures can be seen in the pendants of Harpocrates in Scatozza Höricht 1989, N. 64–65, N. 83, N. 86–88.

function in some ways as a material gesture to something larger than themselves, almost becoming a fragmentary piece of a larger whole through their material concurrence.[51]

4. The miniature and the statue

It is not only through their materials that these objects form a relationship with larger-scale divine representations – it has been widely discussed how popular statue types are replicated at smaller scales: in the form of figurines, gems, and (as here) in miniature beads and pendants.[52] The popularity of recognisable cult statue types in miniature divine representations can be seen in this collection with the Minerva and the two Venus Anadyomene beads, and has been widely demonstrated in glyptic carving, another form of miniaturised god image.[53] Within the temples of Pompeii, similar Minerva figures (standing armed and helmeted) were found in the temple of Aesculapius and a shrine at the Porta Marina, both in terracotta, while the image of Venus Anadyomene is not known from statuary, but appears across a wide range of other media, on wall-paintings, hairpins, decorative attachments for furniture.[54] These beads refract popular cult image types into a different scale and context. In addition, there is an active decision made in the production of these beads to frame the deity as a statue in miniature: several of the beads which preserve the full height of the figure show them as standing on small bases.[55] Though he does not address the inclusion of these bases, they may have contributed to Gallo's framing of these objects as *statuine*.[56] However, these are not functional bases: the surfaces created are irregular and have not been uniformly smoothed. The bases instead seem to be included as a deliberate visual framing motif through which they become miniaturised cult statues, extracted from the temple and appropriated into the world of personal religious praxis but with a visual reference to the public sphere in which larger-scale divine statuary stood. The charm necklace becomes

51 This point was suggested by A.C. Duncan in response to this paper as given at the University of Tübingen SFB 1391 *Andere Ästhetik* conference, "Materialität und Medialität" 2022.

52 P. Stewart 2003, p. 206; Rüpke 2010, p. 192; Rüpke 2016, p. 61.

53 Zimmer 2014, p. 160; Allen 2016, p. 145; Faraone 2018, p. 85. Zimmer has produced a relevant investigation of the replication of the image of Aphrodite Cnidos, drawing attention to how it was important to give a ‚sense' of the original statue in small-scale copies rather than replicate it closely, allowing for a flexibility in the details of the image.

54 For the terracotta Minervas see Van Andringa 2009, p. 9; Van Andringa 2012, p. 90; for a comprehensive survey of Venus in Pompeii, see Brain 2018; for a survey of Venus hairpins in Campania, see Berg 2021; for two Venus Anadyomene statuettes from Pompeii, see LIMC 1981–1999, s. v. "Venus" (Evamaria Schmidt), vol. 8.1 (1997), pp. 192–230, here p. 202, nos. 84–85.

55 These are visible on the beads of Priapus, Minerva, and Heracles – each of the other beads is damaged at the base meaning their original appearance is unclear.

56 Gallo 1994, p. 135: see also the paper by Sarah Al Jarad within this volume, p. 391-409.

a scaled-down version of a temple's statuary collection.[57] These mixed collections of divine representations are common across the ancient world and can be seen within the preserved sanctuary contexts of Pompeii – in the temple of Apollo alone, there are two fragmentary statues of Venus and Hermaphroditus, herms of Mercury and Maia, a bronze bust of Diana, and fragments from a bronze statue of Diana firing an arrow.[58]

However, a new dynamic is introduced to the framing of these 'mini statues' by the inclusion of unusual deities, not commonly represented among full-size statuary, and examples which do not mirror known cult statue types. Within the range of miniature gods retrieved from this area, minor deities appear far more regularly – in this collection, Priapus is the key example, while bone beads of Baubo, Janus, and tripartite Hecate are examples from other assemblages in Campania.[59] In Herculaneum in particular, bronze and iron pendants of Harpocrates are hugely popular – an Egyptian child god associated with Isaic cult, he is represented far more prominently at the miniature scale than in statuary.[60] This particular type of Priapus, opening the cloak to flash his genitalia at the viewer, wearing a garland and with a long droopy beard and moustache, seems to be replicated almost entirely in decorative elements from furniture, but is here given a small base that seems to suggest a larger statue type.[61] Within the collection, the Priapus is actually greater in scale than the Minerva, which mirrors the extremely well-known cult statues of the goddess. The inclusion of these bases plays with the idea of these as 'rescaled' cult statues, where the protective rustic god Priapus can operate on a greater comparative scale than Jupiter's own daughter, with the miniaturised realm constructed by these collections of beads seeming to offer more flexibility for the personal wants and needs of the worshipper who can select a range of deities as totems for their religious practice. The cult statue form is refracted, shrunk down, and subordinated to personal need and use.

5. The miniature as a site for haptic engagement

The miniature also diverges from the cult statue at the level of its accessibility to touch and haptic engagement: while we know cult statues were touched, washed, and dressed

57 P. Stewart 2003, p. 201; Mylonopoulos 2010, p. 7.

58 Van Andringa 2012, p. 94.

59 Scatozza Höricht 1989, E 2582C, E 2582 H.

60 Mol 2015, p. 126, 131; Abdelwahed 2019, p. 10.

61 For the cape opening gesture see LIMC 1981–1999, s. v. "Priapos" (Wolf-Rüdiger Megow), vol. 8.1 (1997), pp. 1028–1044, here p. 1036, no. 92: marble cistern from the House of Dionysos in Delos, Hellenistic Period; LIMC 1981–1999, s. v. "Priapos", p. 1033, no. 54: statuette in Basel Antikenmuseum 1st century CE; for the older Priapus, see BM Inv. No. 1982,0406.8; LIMC 1981–1999, s. v. "Priapos", p. 1040, no. 156: unprovenanced from the Hellenistic period, held by Tübingen University.

as part of religious practice, we can understand these treatments of the divine body as tightly controlled rituals. The construction of ritual touch through highly structured action serves to keep it safe and appropriate, and so haptic experience of these images becomes inaccessible to most believers; a bit too dangerous, a bit too powerful.[62] Here, the divine image is removed from the highly ritualised temple context and scaled down – there is no longer a need for purification, or formalised ritual approach, bringing the god into a more private, personal sphere.[63] This does not mark a de-ritualisation but rather a shift in the *habitus* formed around these objects.[64] The barriers to touch are removed and so the human-object experience becomes transformed. The Isis bead (Fig. 5) in this collection illustrates this dynamic shift – here the image of the goddess that would have been highly protected and rarefied in the temple becomes accessible to the viewer's hand, making it so that you can run your fingers over the sistrum which identifies her, touch her drapery, and hold her whole form in your hand. Recent scholarship has indicated how magical gems can represent and replicate cult statue types, framing them as portable cult images, but these miniature figures offer a fully dimensional, albeit shrunken, form which in many ways more closely recreates the impression of a miniaturised statue to be grasped. The feel of the object, its physical properties, shape, and texture become part of viewing; the process of holding and bringing them closer intensifies the relationship between the two bodies – that of the viewer, and that of the god. The different forms of miniature god would have produced different haptic experiences – collections of beads, like our bone beads, or those made of glass and ceramics from Casa V 3,11, invite the viewer-wearer to run their hands over them (beads are common aids in prayer across many cultures, historical and contemporary) while the pendant might be grasped or cupped in the hand.[65] The feel of metal pendants would be very different to bone, ivory, or amber in texture, temperature, and weight – though all might be warmed by the body through wearing, in a sense furthering the impression that they are 'extensions of the Self' as defined by Cometa.[66]

62 Gordon 1979, p. 16; Mylonopoulos 2010, p. 2; Platt / Squire 2018, p. 85: the story of the Knidian Aphrodite shows both the power of the cult statue as a seductive object, and the danger of engaging with these representations outside of ritual expectations – the conclusion of the story in Pseudo-Lucian's *Amores* 13–18 is that the young man who amorously embraces the statue hurls himself into the sea and drowns; see also Plin. nat. 36,21.

63 Rieger 2020, p. 65, 75.

64 Rieger expresses how Bourdieu's habitus can help us to break up rituals and religion 'as static concepts', allowing for the highly repetitive, casualised actions of daily life to also be understood as a key part of religious ritual interaction: Rieger 2020, p. 55; see also Bourdieu 1990, pp. 25 f.; Kohring 2011, p. 31.

65 Gallo 1994; Berg 2021, p. 129.

66 Cometa 2020, p. 142.

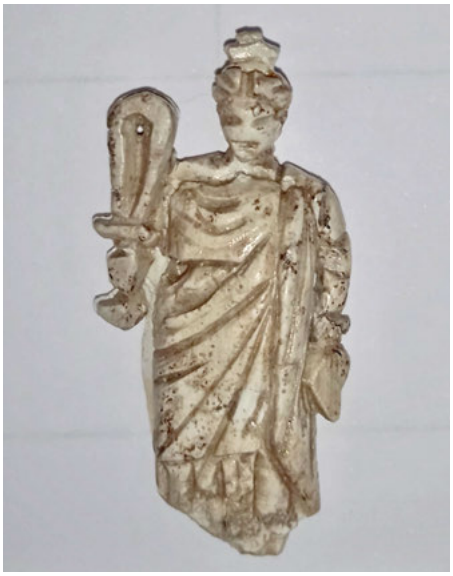

Fig. 5. Bead with Isis figure, House of Lucius Helvius Severus (I.13.2), Pompeii, 1st century CE, bone, height 3.2 cm, width 1.6 cm, Naples, Parco Archeologico di Pompei, inv. no. 11598

The phenomenon of the miniaturised companion god figure as an accessible focal point for worship also appears in Roman literature, as when Apuleius describes how he brings a "little image of Mercury" with him so that he might "carry with [him] the image of some god hidden among my books and [...] pray to him on feast days with offerings of incense and wine".[67] It is not particularly likely that these worn miniatures were the focal point for the offerings of wine and sacrifice that Apuleius' little Mercury statuette received, but the 'low amplitude' religious acts of touch, holding, and prayer – mentioned earlier – are invited by their nature as miniature divine representations.[68] Rieger defines these type of gestures as in line with Bourdieu's *habitus*, as routines and habits that can break up a static conception of religious ritual into repeatedly enacted habits grounded in daily-life and environments, aided by objects which become the focal point for these habits.[69] Their portability and attachment to the body enables religious practice to become more mobile and flexible – even when kept in jewellery boxes or other storage contexts, there is an accessibility for more casual but secluded religious practice.

A degree of fascination with the potential offered by miniatures for haptic interaction with powerful deities, shrunk down to be held in the palm of the hand, is reflected in the type of hairpins where the finial shows a bust of a deity held in a small, disem-

67 Apul. apol. 63 (tr. Butler, p. 106).
68 Rieger 2020, p. 65; Graham 2021, pp. 3 f.
69 Rieger 2020, p. 55.

bodied hand. This type is found across the empire – in Pompeii, and likely contemporary with these beads, one example of a bone hairpin shows a bust of Serapis held in the outstretched fingers of a tiny hand, the whole head of the pin measuring no more than a couple of centimetres high.[70] These depictions of gods in-hand acknowledge the body, and in particular the hand as the 'intermediary physical-material thing' which interacts and entangles with miniature divine representations, drawing greater attention to the scalar distinction between the viewers own body and the miniature god.[71] The image becomes a mimetic and self-referential reflection of the hand holding the miniature god, to then be held in the hand of the wearer, drawing attention to the miniaturisation of the god and the way haptic engagement is manipulated by the scale of the divine image.[72] The hand represents the individual, and shows a consciousness of the power of haptic engagement with these small gods in constructing the relationship between worshipper and deity.[73]

6. The miniature as an inversion of hierarchy

As indicated by the mimicry of the hand hairpins, the fact that these items are mostly worn means that the miniature consistently exists in proximity to the body as a scalar contrast, a relationship in which the human body becomes enormous by comparison. If, as Steven Millhauser said, "under the enchantment of the miniature we are invited to become God", what does this mean for miniature images which represent the gods themselves?[74] The diminutive size of these figures does something to destabilise normal hierarchies, in the same way that miniatures themselves are said to 'disrupt bigness'; the shrinking of a god into a tiny object you can hold and manipulate might make them seem less threatening, while your awareness of your own greater size in comparison creates feelings of empowerment.[75] In wearing or holding the image of a god made tiny, an individual might gain a sense of greater agency and control, wielding the power or favour of the god. In a culture of religious mythologies which highlight the brutality of the gods and their fierce protection of their own image, this sense of diminution might

70 Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, Inv. no. 119433; Berg 2021, p. 126.
71 Platt / Squire 2018; Root 2018, p. 193.
72 Swift 2018, pp. 151–152.
73 Platt / Squire 2018, p. 96; Hughes 2018, p. 64.
74 Millhauser 1983, p. 132.
75 Bailey 2005, p. 33; Langin-Hooper 2015, p. 68; Root 2018, p. 193: this point is also made in later Christian attacks on pagan idolatry – criticising the creation of a god-image that is made and manipulated by the human hand, empowering the worshipper as a result; cf. Sap 14,8 (Biblia Sacra Vulgata).

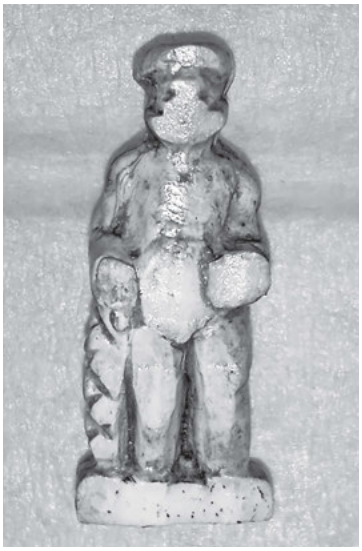

Fig. 6. Bead with Heracles figure, House of Lucius Helvius Severus (I.13.2), Pompeii, 1st century CE, bone, height 2.2 cm, Naples, Parco Archeologico di Pompei, inv. no. 11610

also be welcome.[76] However, likely more important is the sense that in controlling the tiny god-image, the wearer might gain a sense of wielding this divinity's power – of carrying the god with them, on their side, in support of their ventures, enhancing their own sense of agency. In the case of the bead that likely depicts Fortuna seated on a rock, the miniaturisation of the goddess of good luck might allow the worshipper to feel they are holding fortune in the palm of their hand.[77] This motivation may speak to the popularity of gods associated with good fortune and protection; in Pompeii and Herculaneum, both Fortuna and Harpocrates are among the most common deities represented at this scale.

An interest in playing with ideas of scale and power is evident in the Heracles bone bead and ivory statuette from the House of Lucius Helvius Severus collection. The former (Inv. 11610; Fig. 6) is quite extensively damaged, with breakages to the face, lower arms, chest, and left leg, but is still identifiable as the deity due to the club held in his left hand and the lion-skin that covers his head and shoulders. The carving and finishing of this bead are rougher and more schematic than the twin Venus beads, as visible in the cross-hatching of the club and the more superficial level of polishing and finish on the undamaged surfaces of the bead. The body (or, at least, the parts that remain) does not follow naturalistic patterns but rather is rendered in a blocky, rectangular manner, evident in both the legs and the torso, though the shoulders and upper

76 Allen 2016, p. 150.
77 Gallo 1994, p. 146, no. 159.

arms do preserve some attempt at curve and modulation. In contrast, the ivory statuette (Inv. 11596, Fig. 3) is sculpted in an extremely high-level of naturalistic detail at a miniature scale: Heracles, shown as a child but wearing the same costume (club, heroic nudity, lionskin) of Heracles Kallineikos, is shown standing in a contrapposto stance, leaning on his club, with two snakes coiled around his club and left foot. The snakes are clearly meant to indicate the strength of the divine child, through visual allusion to the popular myth of Heracles strangling the snakes sent by Hera to kill him.[78] The level of detail in the carving can be seen in the individually incised strands of hair, while the commitment to naturalism is visible in the soft rolls of fat on his legs and body, clearly marking this figure of Heracles as a young infant. Both play with scale and power in enticing ways; there is something destabilising about the shrinking of Heracles, a powerful, almost colossal hero, into a tiny object.[79] The ivory statuette in particular seems to capitalise on this contradiction by depicting Heracles as a child – the diminution of the powerful figure comes both from the shrinking of his scale and his representation as an infant.[80] The iconography of the hero in the Roman period did have this dual-sided nature, offering the representation of Heracles, as a mature, bearded, almost excessively muscled figure, or separately as a young infant, his muscles replaced with the soft fleshy face and body of a young baby, marking two ends of a spectrum of age and strength.[81] At Pompeii, both iterations are visible – Heracles the infant appears wrestling snakes in a wall-painting from the House of Vettii, and the more mature Heracles is seen in the Heracles Epitrapezios statuette from a villa outside Pompeii.[82]

78 For Heracles as an infant wrestling the snakes, see LIMC 1981–1999, s. v. "Herakles" (John Boardman et al.), vol. 4.1 (1988), pp. 728–838, and vol. 5.1 (1990), pp. 1–192, here vol. 4.1, pp. 827–830, nos. 1598–1647: most famous is no. 1634, the 2nd-century CE sculpture (Antonine period) now in the Capitoline Museum shows the infant Heracles strangling a snake; the myth is recorded in Diodorus Siculus Book 4 (Diod. 4,10,1), but its earliest appearance in extant literature is Pind. N. 1, 35–72: also relevant here is the regular appropriation of Heracles as a symbol of power and heroism for various political figures – not only Alexander the Great but also by later Roman figures such as Sulla and Pompey: Ritter 1995, pp. 56–66.

79 Martial's Epigram 9,43 (or 9,44, depending on the edition) also shows an interest in contrasting the strength of Heracles the hero and his diminuition in miniature forms, describing the famous Heracles Epitrapezios as *exiguo magnus in aere deus* (Mart. 9,43,2; tr. Shackleton Bailey, vol. 3, p. 265: "a great god in a small piece of bronze"); Gordon 1979, p. 14.

80 Gallo 1994: the bone bead of Heracles is no. 160 in the catalogue (p. 147) and the ivory statuette is no. 166 (p. 148).

81 Coralini 2021, p. 153.

82 Wall painting from House of the Vettii (VI 15,1), LIMC 1981–1999, s. v. "Herakles" (John Boardman et al.), vol. 4.1 (1988), pp. 728–838, and vol. 5.1 (1990), pp. 1–192, here vol. 4.1, p. 831, no. 1656; statuette of Heracles Epitrapezios, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. no. 136683.

However, the presence of the snakes, looping around his ankles and club, act as a visual reminder that small does not mean unpowerful[83] – that even as a little child, the hero destroyed the snakes that threatened him and asserted his power. The statuette shows a consciousness of the power of scale, and how the image of the deity is altered by scalar shifts (which mirror the representation of the young, undeveloped Heracles), and uses this diminuition to play with notions of power and heroism. While the bone bead does not play with age in the same way as its ivory counterpart, it operates at an even smaller scale, thus even more potently demonstrating how the shrinking of the figure inverts the hierarchy between mortal and deity by empowering the wearer who becomes bigger and stronger than Heracles by comparison.[84] The shifts in scale and power are only intensified by the proximity to the human body as a point of comparanda for these miniatures; as S. Stewart says, "the hand [acts] as the measure of the miniature", and Heracles' miniature scale is established by the contrast with the body of the viewer-handler.[85] Suddenly the famous hero-deity is not only small (and in the case of the statuette, childlike), but he is disempowered by comparison with the larger human body which controls and manipulates his image, even if only within the limitations of this specific object relationship. The same can be said of the other beads in the collection. As miniaturisation is effected by the viewer's stance, the viewer's perception of their own scale and power is altered by the miniature.[86] We can see these images not only as mediators for divinatory exchange, but also as conferring a very real sense of agency upon their owners.

7. The miniature as socio-religious mediator

These collections of personal miniature divinities also demonstrate many points of entanglement between religious and social identity – in recent scholarship, the case has been made many times for religion as entirely enmeshed into almost all aspects of Roman lived experience.[87] These miniatures not only mediate religious communication and behaviour, but the wider social experiences and identities of their owners. One way in which they do this is as focal points for memory and emotional object histories

83 Platt / Squire 2018, p. 97.

84 Key to thinking about this 'inversion' is Gordon's reading of Greco-Roman religious art, where 'the exact boundary between permissible and impermissible' is of constant interest. Just so here – the god (not just Heracles, but each of the other deities in the collection) is made tiny and their relationship with the mortal body of the wearer must be renegotiated, which in turn creates a space for play in the mortal-divine relationship: Gordon 1979, p. 9.

85 S. Stewart 1984, p. 46.

86 S. Stewart 1984, p. 55; Davy 2016, p. 14.

87 Raja / Rüpke 2015, p. 4; Sofroniew 2015, p. 2; Rieger 2020, p. 75.

for an individual or family – each bead collection recorded from Campania seems to contain charms that span different materials and levels of wear, indicating that the different components of these necklaces and bracelets may have been collected at different times.[88] In the case of the collection from the House of Lucius Helvius Severus, the bone beads show different levels of abrasion, and with different stylistic choices made in their production regarding their exact size and level of abstraction or naturalism in carving – the result is a slightly mismatched set of images which give the impression of having been collected together at different times and from different workshops or craftsmen, perhaps over the course of a life or several generations. Our object histories for jewellery often centre on the potential for these items to be given between individuals at important life junctures such as coming of age, marriage, birth of a child, or similar.[89] A charm bracelet might map such life histories, with the symbols or deities chosen mirroring the needs for each life-phase. In other examples of Campanian miniatures, the popularity of Harpocrates among god-images at this scale may speak to the protection of youth in childhood.[90] The Isaic charm bracelet from the House of Holconius Rufus might mark an individual's initiation into the cult of Isis – a religious allegiance that was felt so strongly that the charm necklace was included in a box of items that she carried as she tried to flee the destruction of the city.[91] The ability to collect together these charms, both those anthropomorphic divine figures I have focused on in this paper and the other beads depicting fish, phalli, walnuts, and other non-anthropomorphic objects and shapes, may be seen as part of the self-fashioning of an individual's personal and social identity – especially if the jewellery was linked with important life events.

The closeness or intimacy between these objects and individuals' life-courses is one facet of their social context; another is how these objects mediate between individual and institutional religion, acting as an accessible and personal focal point for those who might have more limited access to the spaces and rituals of large-scale Roman religion. A great deal of ancient religion scholarship has focused on this public world of religious practice, on processions, sanctuary sites, public-facing rituals, and sacrifices – but this world would not be accessible to everyone to the same degree.[92] The official structure of religious life was dominated by magistracies, priesthoods, and positions that were ring-fenced by wealth, class, and gender. Elite women did not have total agency over appearing in public life, while official sacred spaces might have been more alienating or exclusionary to members of poorer or more disenfranchised groups, who in literary sources are

88 For other bead collections see Scatozza Höricht 1989, p. 56; Hackworth Petersen 2021, p. 21. For these miniature objects as centres of memory, see Popkin 2022, p. 9; Swetnam-Burland 2022, p. 83.

89 Berg 2002, pp. 52 f.; Plautus: Menaechmi 801.

90 Scatozza Höricht 1989, N. 83 E3121: found in Arch 3 of the Terme area, with skeleton no. 11 – a child of 7 months.

91 Fiorelli and Scuola archeologica di Pompei 1861, pp. 16–18; Hackworth Petersen 2021, p. 21.

92 Platt 2011, p. 26; Barham 2018, p. 288; Graham 2021, pp. 49 f.

often denigrated for their preference for rituals or objects associated with folk religion or 'magic'.[93] In light of this, personal and domestic religion offers an alternative space for religious expression. The ability to own and carry your own personal god figure was likely appealing for its ease and accessibility and potentially even more so for those who were more alienated or excluded from the spaces and rituals of large-scale organised religion. This category of objects speaks not only to a wider range of needs and more individualised religious practice, but also to the importance of individual actors in building Roman religious culture. Halperin's analysis of the social role of Mayan figurines shows how such small-scale, widely available religious artefacts contribute to the construction of a 'multi-authored' religious system, inclusive of personal practice and belief.[94] In a similar way, the miniatures not only mediate communication between individual worshipper and divine referent, but also mediate the relationship between the individual and institutional religion. By appropriating aspects of wider religious practice, imagery, structures of belief for this smaller-scale, more private, more personal practice, they warp these images and structures in the process. These beads demonstrate how the formation of a miniaturised divine aesthetic (required by the tiny scale and materials of these objects) enables the transformation of the relationship between believer and divine referent, as mediated and moderated by the material qualities of the object of divine representation.

8. Concluding remarks

This collection from the House of Lucius Helvius Severus is just one example from an extensive network of miniature god-images in assemblages and individual finds across Campania. They speak to a different aesthetic of divine representation that is defined both in production and in use by the miniaturisation of the familiar god-image, moderating experience and praxis through their material qualities. These oft-overlooked objects offered opportunities not just for self-fashioning and adornment, but also allowed individuals a focal point for their everyday religious practice, responsive to personal need: they mediated not only their relationship with the deity but also their place within the wider culture of Roman religion. In our study of material religion, we acknowledge the value of the temple, the cult statue, the large-scale rituals, and processions, but we must not overlook the small objects of everyday engagement. As miniaturised god images, these objects make the deity accessible for informal patterns of prayer, gesture, and touch, mediating a personal relationship between believer and divine referent in a manner that is impossible with larger statuary.[95] In many ways, they are the closest many people would get to the gods.

93 Parker 2015, p. 74.
94 Halperin 2014, p. 186.
95 Rieger 2020, p. 64.

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