

PRIESTESS OF POMPEII

THE INITIATE'S JOURNEY
BOOK I



SANDRA C. HURT

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To my first and final storytellers
My parents
Rufilla Istacidia

The task is to give birth to the ancient in a new time.

—Carl Gustav Jung, *The Red Book*

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MAIN CHARACTERS

ITALY

Istacidii Family:

Numerius Istacidii, Rufus husband, father, vintner and landowner of numerous farms outside Pompeii

Aridela, his wife

Cil, (pronounced Kyle) their son

Rufilla, their adopted daughter (a.k.a. Arianna)

Lucius Marcus Philippus, Aridela's brother, Roman Senator

Cassia, his wife

Zosimus, their son

Key Servants of Istacidii Household:

Melissa, Rufilla's nursemaid

Theo, Roman freedman, head of household servants, tutor to Istacidii children

Junia and Selene, their servants

Friends of the Istacidii Family

Victor Bucci, a vintner, landowner

Clodia, his wife

Titus, their son

Aula, their daughter, married to Aper Melissaei

Marcus Arrius Polites, import/export business, landowner

Aricia, his wife and Aridela's best friend

Gnaeus Melissaei, ship builder, importer and exporter

Aper, his son and commander of his family's merchantman ships.

Hostia, Rufilla's best friend

MAIN CHARACTERS

GREECE

Epidaurus

Camilla, a girl from Praeneste that Rufilla befriends

Kharis, Greek priestess at Epidaurus Sanctuary

Athens

Kallistê, friend of Aridela, Arianna's aunt

Stephanos, her husband

Dionne, Kallistê's maid

Timo, head servant

Delphi

Nikolaos, friend of Aridela and Stephanos

The Pythia, Priestess to the Oracle of Apollo

HISTORICAL Characters

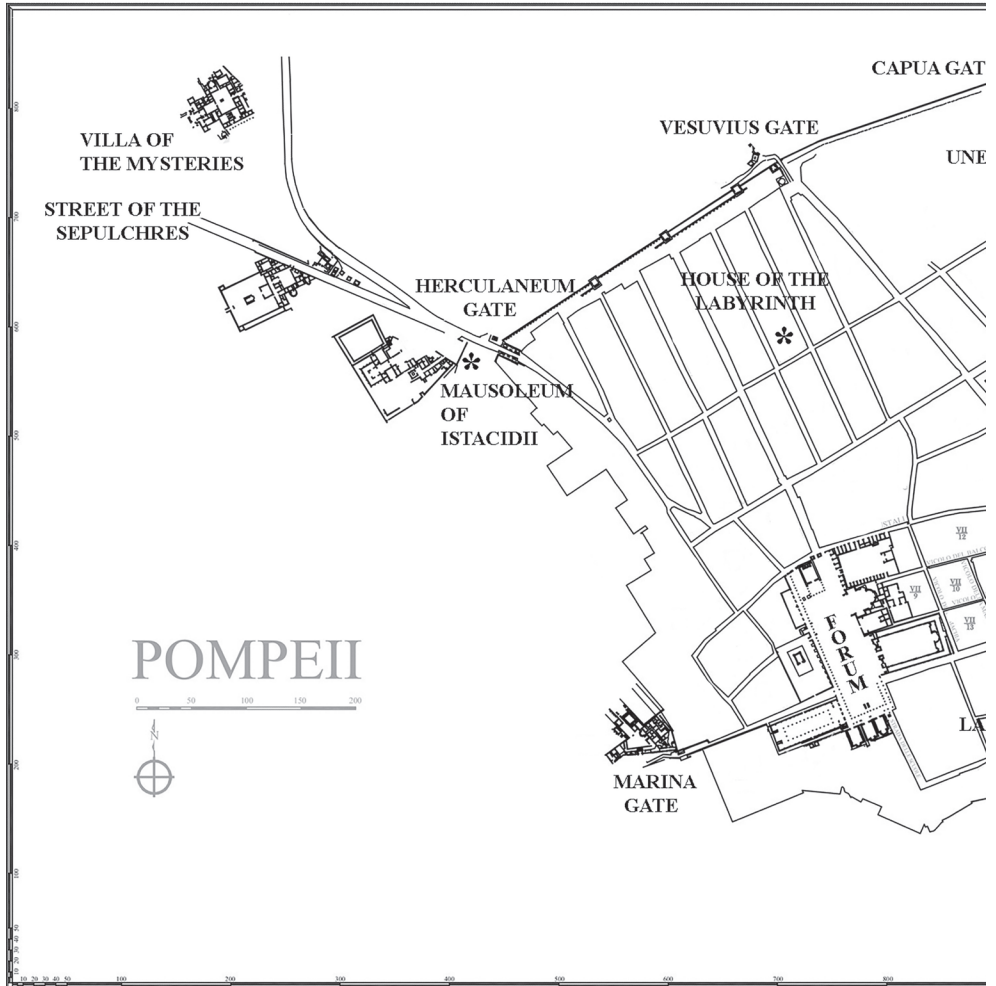
G. Julius Caesar, Roman military general, statesman, Roman Consul

Julia, his sister

Atia, Julia's daughter

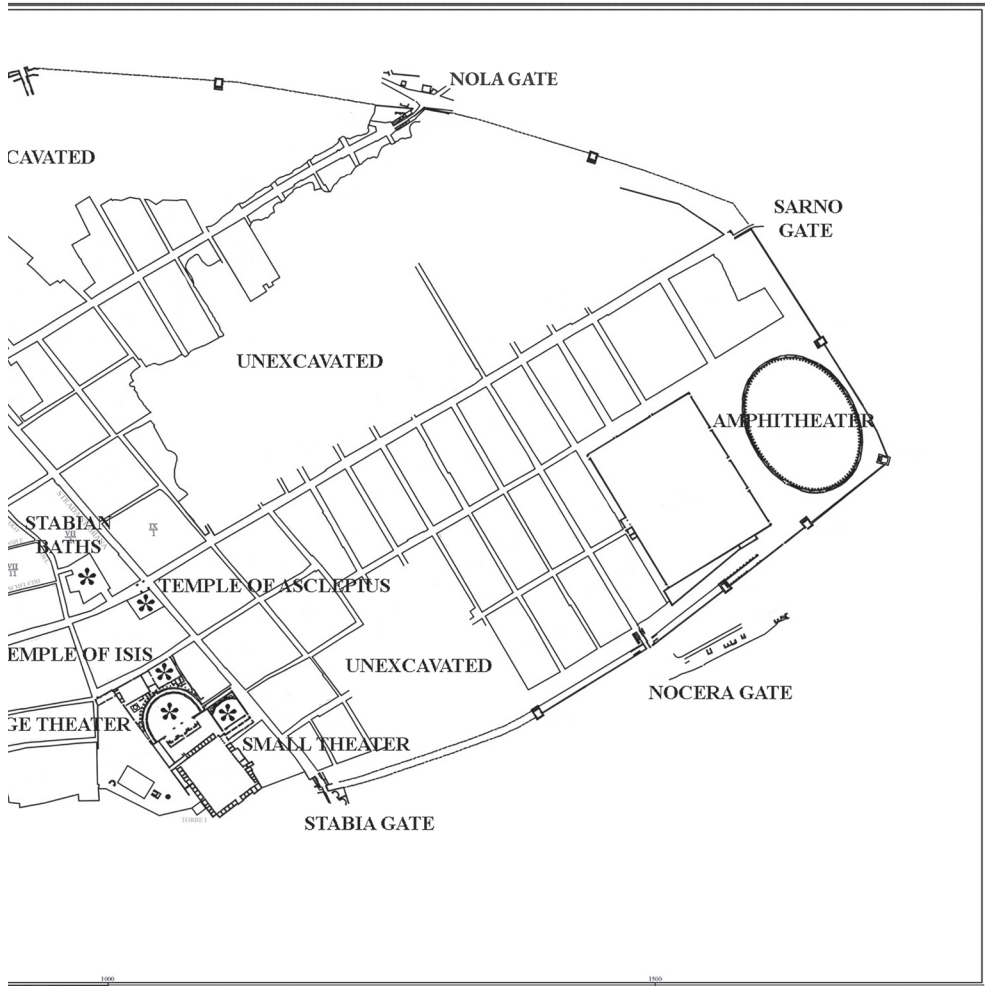
G. Octavius, Atia's son and grand-nephew of Julius Caesar

PRIESTESS OF POMPEII



**Plan of Pompeii: Gates, Public Buildings,
Structures related to the book**

POMPEII MAP



PROLOGUE

1991

I am listening to a lecture about women and art when an image flashes on the giant screen behind the speaker's head—it is a fresco of a woman who lived in Pompeii first century BCE. She resides in the Villa of the Mysteries. It is an image that my mind says I have never seen before, and yet I recognize. I am suddenly no longer in the room. In my mind's eye, I am in a dark place, can feel cold stone beneath me, and when I look up, she is looking right at me, chin in her hand as if she has all the time in the world. I leave the lecture shaken. Days, weeks, years go by. I can't get her image out of my mind.

1994

My first trip to Greece and Italy.

Pompeii was a destination for me. I'd read up on the art and architecture of the town, including the Villa of the Mysteries. The Villa housed the room where megalographic frescoes filled the walls. The fresco of the woman I had seen in the lecture three years ago was there. I had to see her.

I arranged for a tour guide and took friends with me. The guide finished his well-rehearsed tour and thanked us for our attention.

"But we haven't seen the Villa of the Mysteries," I said.

"Signora, we have seen all the important things. And, anyway, it is not open."

I was irritated that he did not think the Villa was important.

"But I came thousands of miles to see the woman in the frescoes," I said. "I will not be turned away."

My outspoken Italian companion says something to him in dialect, and suddenly, we are off.

Of course, the Villa is open. She is waiting for me, has been for millennia.

PROLOGUE

I take my place once again on the cool stone of the ancient floor. Painted crimson walls are the backdrop for the frescoes of life-size women who envelop the room. The entombed silence allows for memories to surface, images to arise for which I have no words.

2004

A new millennium is underway.

I have spent years doing research, cultivating the classics, finding my way into her story, the story I know I am meant to write. It is a long and sometimes difficult journey.

A book I am reading falls open onto this passage:

“The way.....is a blind waiting, a doubtful listening and groping. One is convinced that one will burst. But the resolution is born from precisely this tension and it almost always appears where one did not expect it.

“But what is the resolution? It is always something ancient and precisely because of this something new, for when something long since passed away comes back again in a changed world, it is new. The task is to give birth to the ancient in a new time.” —Carl Jung, *The Red Book*

2020

Her journey is mine. Her journey is yours.

Initiation. Ritual. Wisdom.

I am a daughter of the Priestess of Pompeii.

There are things worth knowing.



Corona Borealis

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND DEATH

OUTSKIRTS OF ROME, 60 BCE

According to ancient myth, Ariadne, a princess of Crete, wore the diadem given to her by the Greek god Dionysus during their wedding ceremony. Afterward, he threw the crown into the night sky, where it formed a semicircle of stars, the Corona Borealis. From that time forward, those who gazed skyward witnessed it as a tribute to their love.

On a frigid night in the era of Julius Caesar, the crown of stars glowed in the nighttime sky. Cosmus, a stocky Roman freedman, paced the barnyard, the crown of his balding head reflecting the moonlit sky. Despite the winter chill he was sweating. His wife Lucilla had started labor, and the cries of her pain had driven him into the slap of winter air. As he made his way from the kitchen fire to the barn lot, he peeked into their bedroom. She looked at him with a torment in her eyes that he hadn't seen in the other two births. He kissed her brow, just as another pain gripped her stomach.

Outside, the hushed countryside seemed oblivious to his wife's suffering. Cosmus appealed to Zeus to grant Lucilla safe passage, but he saw nothing. No stars streaked across the sky in response to his plea.

At the barn, he lit a lantern and busied himself with farm equipment. The racket he made succeeded in drowning out his wife's cries of pain, but when he paused, out of breath, the cold air brought her suffering to his ears once again.

Hours earlier, as soon as the midwife arrived, he had taken his two sons to his master's villa. His mistress had made it clear that when Lucilla's time came, she would take care of the boys.

The trusted midwife was the same woman who had delivered his younger son eight years before. She had assessed his wife's condition and declared that tonight would be the night for the birth. Of his third son, he thought to himself.

Three sons! He would be a rich man, indeed.

The crisp night air cleared his mind as he surveyed the vineyards of the aristocrat who had hired him. He tried to divert his attention by plotting his dream of owning his own vineyard one day, imagining that it would not be long before all three of his sons were old enough to help him work the land he would soon purchase.



Lucilla had worked for her mistress for several years when Cosmus and his father came to work for her master. When his father died, Cosmus took over as foreman. Lucilla had never wanted to marry but was attracted to the brawny man with his witty ways. Encouraged by their patrons, the two married after a brief courtship. She ran both the household and her family with a keen eye for what was required. She loved her boys dearly, but secretly longed for a girl who she could love and teach womanly life lessons.

For hours, Lucilla sat in a birthing chair in excruciating labor. Then her water broke, and instead of helping the labor, it seemed to stop it. After more than an hour and many supplications to Lucina, the goddess of Childbirth, her labor resumed with even more fervor. She sighed as the pain of a contraction subsided. The midwife wiped Lucilla's brow with a damp sponge. "You have a generous mistress," said the midwife. "She not only made sure I was here for you, but also instructed me to bring the birthing chair."

"Yes, yes, I only wish she could have been here," she whispered. "I must think of a gift for her—Ack!" Lucilla screamed. "It is coming!"

The midwife bent over, her nimble fingers feeling the baby's head start to emerge. Her face paled for a moment at what she felt next. Gently, she said to Lucilla, "I must make an adjustment here, and then you must push very hard."

Unable to speak, Lucilla nodded and her eyes closed.

The midwife placed one hand on Lucilla's belly and felt the uterus relax. She knew she did not have much time. She spoke softly to her apprentice, a hesitant girl standing nearby, but her fierce look revealed the urgency of the situation. "Help me get her to bed."

The two women put Lucilla's arms around their shoulders. They paused, raised her from the chair, and with all their strength, moved her

dead weight back to the bed.

This time, with Lucilla on her back, the midwife could now clearly see what she had felt—the head with the cord wrapped around it.

As Lucilla screamed and pushed, she heard the midwife's raised voice command: "Lucilla, listen to me. It is very important now that you breathe and do not push."

By the next contraction, the midwife had oiled her hands and placed them on either side of the baby's bloody head, urging its release from the entanglement of the cord.

Lucilla made an effort to sit up again, her body swaying on the edge of her bed. "Support her," the midwife cried to her apprentice as she slid her feet under the bed and sat on the floor beneath her.

The midwife moved with expert hands to facilitate the birth. The shoulders popped out. The arms and the back slid through, and then the buttocks, legs, and feet followed in quick succession. The baby's body glistened in the light of the oil lamp as the midwife held her upside down, quickly removing the cord from around her neck.

Lucilla raised her head. "It is a girl," she cried, raising her arms, giving thanks to the goddess for granting her covert wish.

"It is a miracle," the apprentice proclaimed.

The midwife gently lowered the baby into her lap and turned her on her side, firmly stroking the length of her spine. The baby choked a cough and took her first breath. With the second breath came a cry.

The midwife measured the cord from the baby's belly—four finger widths. She reached into her basket of medical tools to find the piece of glass fashioned into a sharp knife, and with one swift movement, severed the cord, separating the baby from placenta and mother, tying the cord with a strand of wool twine. She used her apron as a blanket and gently laid the baby on the floor beside her, awaiting the father, who would pick up the newborn as a gesture of acceptance.

Cosmus had already entered the room. He started toward the bed and the infant lying on the floor, but was stopped short by the sight of the placenta emerging from Lucilla. With it came a gush of blood. As Cosmus watched in disbelief, the gush turned into a torrent.

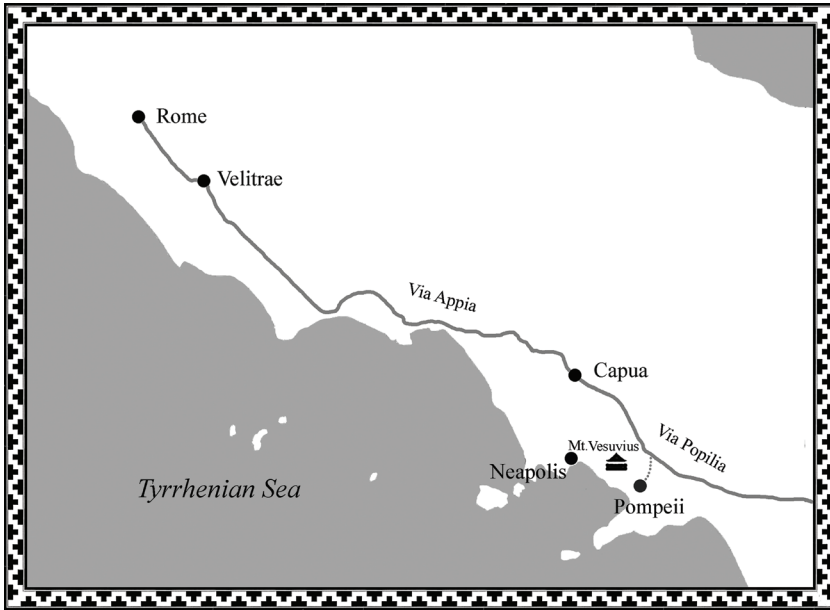
"Help me," the midwife shouted to the apprentice. "Take these sponges and apply pressure between her legs. Hurry!"

Cosmus staggered and fell back against the wall as he watched the midwife and her assistant work feverishly to contain the bleeding.

As quickly as it had started, the bleeding ceased. The bed was soaked. The smell of fresh blood filled the small room. It was silent, save for Lucilla's shallow breathing and the baby's whimpering. Cosmus moved to Lucilla's side, nudging the baby out of the way with his foot, and kneeling next to her bed, taking his wife in his arms he cried, "Lucilla, my love, by all the gods above, you cannot leave me!"

She slowly opened her eyes and a faint smile crossed her lips. Then her eyes closed, and her breathing ceased.

"Take the baby away," Cosmus howled. "Because of her, my wife is dead. Expose it!" He shoved the bundled baby across the room, collapsing over his dead wife's body.



Pompeii to Rome