Transcription: Mary Beard on Venus and military conquest

We talk about Venus as the goddess of love, and in a way she was, it's not wrong, but she's also the goddess of passion, of desire, of sex and of all kinds of other emotions and drives in a world that really make a difference. She's behind conquest. She's behind violence. She's behind why we want to do what we do. It's very easy to walk past coins and not to pay much attention to them.

But look, Roman coins very often have an image of a goddess of desire stamped right on them. So here we have, yeah, these brutal, militaristic Romans with the image of Venus clanking around in their pockets. Well, why's that? The ancestors of the Romans, the mother of their founder Aeneas, is the goddess Venus. And it's Venus and the power of desire, the unswayable, unstoppable power of desire that brings Rome its military victories.

We don't really know whether passion and desire, is that something that ‘destroys’ civilised values, in inverted commas, or is passion and desire absolutely central to civilisation? That's a question that many different theological traditions have faced and answered in different ways.