Writing and Drawing on the Walls of Pompeii: How the study of *graffiti* relates to the HSC Ancient History Core Syllabus for 2006

*admiror, paries, te non cecidisse ruinis*, ‘I am amazed, wall, that you have not fallen in ruins, *qui tot scriptorum taedia sustineas.*’

When the teacher of Ancient History in New South Wales first scans the listing of examinable content relating to the Core Unit on the Cities of Vesuvius newly introduced for the 2006 Higher School Certificate, the usefulness of incorporating *graffiti*\(^1\) into a program of study as one of the range of available sources may not be readily apparent. This article aims to survey the nature of *graffiti* at the site of ancient Pompeii as a category of material culture incorporating written and archaeological features and as a useful primary and supplementary source for evidence about the economy, social structure, politics, religion and daily life in Roman Campania of the Republican and early Imperial historical period. This discussion will touch incidentally on issues regarding the limitations, reliability and evaluation of *graffiti* as a source and as evidence.

1. *Graffiti*: Text and Artifact

One of the enduring images many Sydneysiders associate with the 1999 New Years’ Eve ‘millenium’ celebration is that of the word ‘Eternity’ appearing in large illuminated letters on the Harbour Bridge. This word – also seen by over four billion people worldwide at the end of the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games in September of 2000 – represents a significant instance of how a single practitioner of *graffiti* writing can ‘speak’ to a vast number of the simple and the sophisticated alike about a variety of historical, social and cultural issues.

The graffitist in question, Arthur Stace, chalked ‘Eternity’ almost half a million times in handsome copperplate cursive writing on footpaths across greater metropolitan Sydney over a period of thirty-five years (1932-1967). For most of this time, Stace’s identity as author of the unvarying *graffito* remained unknown, unlike the widespread notoriety of his textual remainder. Though a ward of the state – a barely literate petty criminal and alcoholic whose sisters were compelled to prostitution and whose brothers died as derelicts – Stace was responsible for inscribing a message at once inspiring, cryptic and confounding to men and women of differing social identities across the developing urban landscape of twentieth-century Sydney.

In relation to the study of ancient *graffiti* (whether writing and/or drawing), what is important to note about the example of ‘Eternity’ and the person responsible for its inscription is how historical, cultural and sociological contexts can combine to inform an

---

\(^{1}\) Pompeian *graffito* incised on the walls of the basilica (*CIL IV.1904*), large theatre (*CIL IV. 2461*), and amphitheatre (*CIL IV. 2487*).

\(^{2}\) *Graffiti* are inscribed onto durable surfaces by means of a stylus or other sharp instrument, and can comprise writing, pictures, symbols, or markings of any kind. Another term used in relation to the study of wall inscriptions is *dipinti*. *Dipinti* are painted (usually in red and black), comprise official notices, and should be viewed as distinct from wall paintings in domestic spaces. This article will survey a variety of texts and images inscribed and painted in the urban spaces of Pompeii.
audience – at once historically contemporary with and distant from the writer and the writing – about the individual, society and a plethora of perspectives on the wider world. In this sense, graffiti can be described and evaluated as both textual and figurative remainders and cultural artifacts. When studying Pompeii, the usefulness of graffiti as part of the urban fabric of a city under the shadow of Vesuvius cannot be undervalued.

2. Graffiti in the Context of the Ancient Mediterranean

Writing and drawing graffiti was not exclusively the prerogative of the inhabitants of Pompeii. The practice was a significant and widespread feature of the ancient Mediterranean world across an extensive historical period. Twentieth-century scholarship catalogues instances of graffiti in such diverse places and times as the villages, cities, tombs and temples of pharaonic, Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, the agora of archaic, classical, Hellenistic and Roman Athens, the desert caves and cliff-faces of ancient Palestine and the Sinai, and the walls of buildings on the Palatine in imperial Rome.³

The subject-matter of graffiti outside Italy is just as wide-ranging as that found in Pompeii. It can be as prosaic as partial or complete alphabetic lists (referred to as abecedaria) or numerical notations (either acrophonic⁴ or alphabetic); these may be written from left to right, in reverse, upside down, or in some combination of one or more of these. There can be messages, urging some action or accompanying and/or explaining a variety of different objects, persons or ideas; or sometimes inventories, listing items, amounts, or other things in some kind of relation to each other. Names can be identified, often with an associated expression of admiration or distaste. Occasionally, graffiti notations can be identified as relating to commercial or taxation interests (the capacity, weight or contents of containers; the date of material produced, sold and/or delivered; probable prices); sometimes, the purpose is less clear.

Often, graffiti can be explicitly sexual in nature. For example, two erotic love-making scenes near a sixteen-line graffito⁵ may be found penned along the walls of a small cave high above the funerary temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri. Romer (1982: 157-60) thinks that these scenes depict Hatshepsut and her court favourite, the High Steward Senenmut, ‘engaged in a manner of sexual activity which is interpreted as a visual form of political satire by the artists’.⁶ In another historical context entirely, a variety of sexual insults has been identified in the Athenian agora, including texts using verbs to describe sexual proficiency and relationships, pledges of love, names of men admired or insulted in other texts, and even the picture and pet name of the male sexual organ.⁷

Graffiti-drawings (as opposed to painted dipinti), either in isolation or as part of a larger figurative and textual representation, are found in all regions of the Roman Empire. The

⁴ ‘Acrophonic’ means that the symbols for the numerals come from the first letter of the number name.
⁵ This graffito is written in the form of the htp-di-nsw offering formula usually found on tomb walls or funerary stelae.
⁶ For a brief overview of this graffito (with bibliographical note), see Peden (2001: 73).
phenomenon of drawing graffiti was common throughout antiquity. These can be pictures depicting ornaments and symbols, heads or busts, single figures (especially gladiators), single animals, ships and copied monuments or objects. Mythological and historical portrayals are rare; similarly uncommon are descriptions of occupation, craft skills and erotic scenes, apart from numerous phalli.  

3. Prerequisites and Assumed Knowledge for Writing and Drawing graffiti in the Roman Empire

Regardless of one’s gender, social status, civic position or economic condition, the first and foremost requirement for writing text as graffiti was to be functionally literate, or to be able to copy from a ‘script’ written by someone who was functionally or scribally literate. 

The next requirement was to possess the necessary tools and materials for writing text and/or drawing images. These included

- a cutting device of some kind: either the stylus or the graphium, or some other kind of incising tool made from stone or metal;
- a painting applicator: the penicillus or painter’s brush;
- an available assortment of pigments for painting, charcoal for writing, or inks for tracing.

In addition, one needed to locate an appropriate incising or painting surface, e.g., a wall, a doorway, a paving stone, a tombstone, even a piece of pottery.

The final requirements for participating in the practice of graffiti-writing and drawing were to have the time, the interest or motivation, the ability, and the opportunity to ‘make one’s mark’.

---

8 Langner (2001: 143).
9 Literacy experts do not agree about how to define literacy, and there are many possible interpretations of the word. Definitions of literacy differ depending on whether literacy is conceived of as narrow or broad, absolute or relative, fixed or dynamic, singular or multiple, autonomous or contextually specific. For the purposes of this discussion, literacy in early imperial Italy relates to the predominant language spoken and written by local populations (indigenous or migrant). In this context, functional literacy is determined by immediate, practical needs, and scribe literacy refers to the reading and writing of literary works. For the most extensive recent attempt to survey the subject of literacy in the ancient world, see Harris (1989); for reviews, see L'Année Philologique, and two collections of responses, Humphrey (1991) and Bowman and Woolf (1994).
10 According to Ovid (Met. 9.521) and Martial (14.21), the stylus was an iron instrument resembling a pencil in size and shape. It was sharpened to a point at one end, for scratching characters into waxed writing tablets, and flat and circular at the other, for smoothing the wax and erasing what had been written. The stylus was also referred to as the graphium (Ov. Am. 1.11.23; Suet. Caes. 82). For a clear photograph of a recovered iron stylus, see the thumbnail image in Tomlin (2004).
4. The Extent and Location of graffiti and dipinti in Pompeii

The major source of information relating to the study of graffiti in the Roman cities of Vesuvius is the fourth volume of the Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL), Inscriptiones Parietariae Pompeianae Herculaneenses Stabianae, and the accompanying supplement in three parts. These two collections (with corrigenda and addenda) comprise 9,821 Latin texts incised, painted or written with charcoal or pen on walls, pottery, metal objects, and waxed tablets. Of these, there are 3,292 wall inscriptions incised with a stylus or graphium and 1,738 painted texts.\(^{11}\)

All of the substantially intact (and a large number of fragmentary) painted inscriptions were the work of professionals, announcing games for the amphitheatre (edicta munera) and promoting the election of candidates for political office (programmata).\(^{12}\) They are often located or arranged in close physical proximity or related in some other way to an individual graffito or clusters of graffiti and/or other dipinti. As such, it will be helpful methodologically to consider this variety of textual and figural remainders as cultural artifacts in context.

4.1. A cluster of graffiti and dipinti in VI.xv

Figure 1: Cluster of graffiti writing and drawing in VI.xv (in order, CIL IV. 3529, 4615, 3527, and 4637)\(^{13}\)

\(^{11}\) CIL IV and its supplementary volume are almost entirely written in Latin. Additionally, these publications do not contain material recorded after 1956; inscriptions recovered after this year must be sought in L’année épiigraphique, an annual review of publications on Roman epigraphy. Nonetheless, the scrupulous notation and presentation of the parietal and other inscriptions in Pompeii, Herculaneum and Stabiae are useful visual markers of the scale and style of these texts and images. CIL IV suppl. 1-3 comprises a number of excellent line-drawings of the distinctive cursive writing characteristic of early imperial Latin graffiti. Moreover, the inscriptions are listed according to location by street (CIL IV) or by region, insula, and door number (CIL IV suppl. 1-3), providing for the enthusiastic student a template of the inscribing habit with which to overlay the variety of other social and cultural features associated with Pompeii specifically and the other preserved cities of Roman Campania more generally.

\(^{12}\) Cooley and Cooley (2004: 49-54, 114-127) is an accessible reference work for evidence from Pompeii relating to edicta munera and programmata. See section 5.1, below, for an example of the relationship between graffiti and edicta munera.

\(^{13}\) CIL IV.3529: M(arcum) Pupium Rufum II vir(um) et icundo dignum r(ei) || [p(ublicae)] o(ro) u(os) f(aciatis).|| Mustius fullo facit || et dealbat scribit unicis || s[in]e reliq(uis) sodalib(us) non(is); CIL
Here is an example of a *graffiti-dipinti* cluster. Note particularly how the two instances of *graffiti* (the second and fourth Latin texts) and the *dipinti*, in this case election *programmata* (the first and third texts), are associated by location (indicated by the arrow). This cluster of painted and inscribed parietal inscriptions provides us with an intriguing perspective on a well-known inhabitant of Pompeii that would not otherwise be available if the *graffiti* had not been inscribed.

As the excerpted section of the plan of Pompeii indicates, these inscriptions are located in region VI, *insula xv* of the city. Region VI is located in the north-western corner of the city, enclosed by walls to the north and west, and the first aspect of Pompeii encountered by the visitor via either the Herculaneum or Vesuvian gates. *Insula xv* is the long, narrow rectangular aggregation of buildings just south of Tower 10 in the city wall.

In order of appearance, the *programmata* can be translated as follows:

1. ‘I ask that you elect Marcus Pupius Rufus, a man worthy of the state, duovir *iure dicundo*. Mustius the fuller makes (this [election poster]), whitewashes (the wall), and writes alone without any other companions.’
3. ‘Appuleia, along with Mustius the fuller, her neighbour, and Narcissus, asks you that you elect Pupius duovir *iure dicundo*.’

If we take into account the fact that M. Pupius Rufus owns the house identified as VI.xv.4,5,24,25, we can learn quite a lot from these election posters. As candidate for duovir *iure dicundo*, Rufus is supported by persons living in the same *insula*. Mustius the fuller and his wife Ovia owned the small house (VI.xv.3) just south of Rufus’ much larger *domus*; the first *programmatum* appears on its façade (the eastern wall of the *insula*). Appuleia and Narcissus owned the larger house (VI.xv.2) a little further south, on which the second *programmatum* is painted.

These *dipinti* provide an opportunity for teachers to introduce or review a variety of important social and historical details about ancient Pompeii and the early Roman Empire. For instance, noting that Rufus is a candidate for duovir *iure dicundo*, one could

---

14 Unless otherwise indicated, all images of *graffiti* and *dipinti* can be found in *CIL IV* and *CIL IV suppl.1-3*. All regional sections of Pompeii are taken from the survey plan of Eschenbach and Müller-Trollius (1993).

15 The first *graffito* above (2) reproduces the *cursive* style found in informal written contexts (e.g., letters, business records, on waxed tablets); the *programmata* (1, 3) and the second *graffito* (4) depict the more formal *lapidary* style seen in formal civic contexts (e.g., building inscriptions, funerary memorials, altar dedications, election posters). Written and painted texts could be rendered in either style.

16 For the political details of this cluster of inscriptions, see Franklin (2001: 66-8).

17 VI.xv.4,5,24,25 is a large house with entrances on the eastern (4, 5) and western (24, 25) sides of the *insula*.

18 This was an important annual magistracy that looked after local law cases and presided at meetings of the local senate (*ordo decurionum*).
explore the elite municipal offices and associated areas of responsibility comprising the political structure of a city established with the constitution of a Roman colony (*colonia Veneria Pompeianorum*, set up in 80 BCE). From another angle, the unfamiliar occupation of Mustius the fuller could spark a survey of the service industries prominent in Pompeian life, including (naturally enough) details about the cleaning of cloth and clothing pertinent to the workplace of Rufus’ supporter.\(^\text{19}\) Additionally, Mustius declares that he, alone, is responsible both for preparing the wall’s surface with whitewash and for lettering the election poster itself. This informs us that our fuller also worked as one of the city’s professional letterers (*scriptores*), known to work usually as members of a skilled team (*sodalitas*).\(^\text{20}\) Finally, it is interesting to see a woman position herself as first among supporters of Rufus for political office. As noted above, Appuleia (as we might suspect Ovia, Mustius’ wife) was an owner of property; however, like her neighbour Mustius and her co-habitant Narcissus, she belonged to the non-elite population of Pompeii. Taking all these details into account, a discussion of the intersections and interdependencies of gender, social class, political status, and economic position within an Italian city of the early Roman Empire would prove useful.

The *graffiti* associated with these painted inscriptions (2, 4) provide tantalizing and suggestive additional information. Found respectively in the *tablinum* of Rufus’ house and a small store-room under the stairs of VI.xv.6 (the house of A. Caesius Valens and N. Herrenius Nardus), these *graffiti* can be translated as follows:

2. M. Pupius Ruphus; and


Recovered in the main reception room of Rufus’ *domus*, the first *graffito* reveals two aspects of Roman society. First, the phenomenon of inscribing *graffiti* would seem to have been tolerated in public domestic spaces. Scratched into the wall of a room used for the morning salutation and for entertaining guests by a member of the socially prominent population, the inscription of Rufus’ name is clearly visible and free of later defacement or attempts at obliteration or concealment. Second, writing *graffiti* was not confined to a particular ethnic group or social class. The use of –ph instead of –f in the spelling of the home-owner’s name suggests that the graffitist was a Greek-speaker. He or she may have been a slave living and working in the household, a slave of another owner visiting Rufus on business, a freed slave visiting his former master or mistress, a libertine or possibly a freeborn guest of the family.

The second *graffito*, found in the house just north of Rufus’, contributes three additional facets of Roman society. First, the statement explicitly announces an affectionate, probably sexual, relationship between the anticipated duovir and a certain Cornelia, possibly Helena. If her name conforms to late Republican practice, then it is possible that she was a freeborn citizen female. Second, the relationship between Helena and Rufus is

\(^{19}\) For a study (with bibliography) of the methods by which cloth and clothing were washed in ancient and medieval times (including the use of old urine and other alkaline solutions), see Beneke and Lagaly (2002).

\(^{20}\) For a brief study of letterers and their methods, see Franklin (1978).
expressed in a manner familiar to readers of the late Republican and early Imperial lyric poets Tibullus, Catullus, and Ovid. That is, the affective dynamics between Helena and Rufus are presented in terms of the female as the beloved partner of the adoring male lover. Third, the fact that the ‘news’ of this relationship is inscribed on the wall of a private space concealed from casual human traffic suggests that a network of gossip and hearsay was alive and well in this neighbourhood of Pompeii. Whether or not expressions of the relationship between Helena and Rufus (if an historical reality) were conducted within the walls of the house in which this graffito was inscribed cannot be known.

5. The Playfulness of the Pompeians

*Graffiti* reveal a number of interests held in common by a cross-section of the Pompeian population.

![Figure 2: Examples of graffiti relating to leisure activities (clockwise from upper left, CIL IV.8297, 4225, 1595, and 5215; proximate find-spots indicated by arrows).]

The inscriptions reproduced in Figure 2 above provide some indication of the more popular diversions. The first type (*CIL* IV.8297) is a better-known example of the diverse graphic games particularly favoured by the ancient Romans. It is a so-called ‘magic square’, comprising two words (*olim*: once; *amor*: love) and two names (*Roma*: Rome;
Milo: a male name) that may be read vertically in columns from top to bottom, horizontally in rows from left to right, or in reverse. The meaning is not necessarily coherent; pleasure is taken from the recognition, arrangement and alignment of word-patterns. In addition to the ‘magic square’ type (in Latin or Greek), palindromes imitating literary verses (e.g. *Roma tibi subito motibus ibit amor*) or pronouncing gnomic statements (e.g. *Roma summus amor*) were popular with local inhabitants.\(^{21}\)

The second and third inscriptions are examples of how graffitists in Pompeii sought to combine words and images to produce striking and appealing representations of familiar identities and activities. The second *graffito* (*CIL* IV.4225) comprises three words (identified by the *CIL* editor as *[th]alassae fusa optatus*) scratched into the surface of a wall in a private dwelling in imitation of a sea-going vessel of some kind, with oars, mast and a distinctive bow. In this instance, words and image combine to create a coherent whole. The first word is a Latinized version of a Greek term; the second and third words are adjectives. Though the grammar is poor, when declined and translated, the syntax of the *graffito* could give the meaning, ‘Of/to the sea, broad and longed-for’. Pompeii’s geographical proximity to the coastline of the Bay of Naples in ancient times would increase the likelihood of maritime imagery as a natural and recognizable means for expressing identity or sentiment. Another well-known *graffito* (*CIL* IV.4755) incorporates the name of a certain Crescens, whose occupation is registered as ‘architect’, within the picture of a ship.

The third inscription (*CIL* IV.1595) is a four-line Latin poem found near the entrance of a house close to the Nolan gate. It is a complex *graffito*, not only rendered in the curving shape of a snake, but conceived so that each line of the poem begins with a sibilant ‘s’. The Latin text reads: *[Ser]pentis lusus si qui sibi forte notauit,|| Sepumius iuuenis quos fac(i)t ingenio,|| Spectator scaenae siue es studiosus e[q]uorum:|| sic habes [lanc]es se[mp]er ubiq[ue pares]. The poem can be translated as follows: ‘If anyone by chance has noticed the snake game, in which young Sepumius has shown his skill, whether you are a spectator of the theatre or fond of horses, may you always have equal balance in any place whatever.’ Sepumius’ ‘skill’ would seem to have involved physical prowess of some kind, and may have required a display of virtuosity in completing a circuitous course of competitive activity requiring gymnastic balance. Whatever the nature of the ‘snake game’, Sepumius was clearly its rising star, admired and envied for his ability.

The fourth *graffito* (*CIL* IV. 5215) registers the activity and the identities dominating popular enthusiasms at Pompeii: public spectacles featuring gladiatorial combat. While it is difficult to decipher the text inscribed above the figures facing each other in the lower half of the *graffito*, one can clearly identify the helmets, short swords, shields, leg greaves and protective clothing of combatants in one of the gladiatorial entertainments regularly staged in the amphitheatre at Pompeii. *Graffiti* of this kind can be found in a variety of

\(^{21}\) For another example of the ‘magic square’ type, see *CIL* IV.8623 (ROTAS-OPERA-TENET-AREPOSATOR, with a Greek-alpha superscript and -omega subscript), thought by some twentieth-century scholarship to contain a hidden reference to *PATER NOSTER* and hence a post-Neronian Christian presence in Pompeii. For a brief discussion of ‘magic square’ and palindromic *graffiti* in the Pompeian context, see Castren (1972: 72-3); cf. Cooley and Cooley (2004: 76).
locations: the exterior facades of public buildings near the Forum, the religious and theatrical precincts, and the amphitheatre itself; the walls of the public (entrance-halls, atria and tablina) and private areas (the cubicula of domus-owners and cellae of house-slaves, and even the columns of peristyle courtyards) of elite and non-elite domestic residences; and the walls of gladiators’ quarters inside the training schools for combatants and hunters near the amphitheatre.\footnote{Other examples of graffiti depicting gladiatorial scenes and associated details (types of gladiator, names of the fighters, their affiliation, number of fights to date, the outcome of fights, and the reputations of favourite combatants) include CIL IV.1421, 1422, 1474, 1481, 1770, 1773, 2508, 4297, 4299, 4342, 4345, 10236a, and 10238a.}

5.1: How graffiti and dipinti add to historical knowledge

One of the more common types of dipinti found throughout Pompeii is closely linked with the gladiatorial graffiti: the announcement of games (edicta munera).

Figure 3: An edictum munera advertising gladiatorial games and a hunt (CIL IV.3884)\footnote{CIL IV.3884: D. Luc + scr(ibit) Celer + reti || Satri Valentinis flaminis Neronis Caesaris Aug(usti) fili || perpetui gladiatorum paria XX et D. Lucretio Valenti fili || + scr(ibit) Aemilius Celer sing(ularis) ad luna + gladiatorum paria X pug(nabant) Pompeis VI V IV III pr(idie) Idus Apr(ilis) uenatio legitima et uela erunt.}

These painted notices advertised the giving and organization of forthcoming games in the amphitheatre, including the date, the giver, the type of show to be exhibited (gladiatorial combat, wild beast fight, athletic show), and additional attractions for the audience (provision of awning, sprinkling of water). For example, the dipinto above (CIL IV.3884) informs the reader that

‘twenty pairs of gladiators belonging to Decimus Lucretius Satrius Valens, perpetual priest of Nero Caesar, son of Augustus [i.e., Claudius], and twenty pairs of gladiators belonging to Decimus Lucretius Valens, his son, will fight at Pompeii on the sixth, fifth, fourth, third and second days before the Ides of April [i.e., 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 April]. There will be a regular hunt and awnings.’

The Lucretii Valentes were a prominent family in Pompeii, and the father and son identified in this dipinto gave a number of lavish entertainments in the amphitheatre from
50 CE on. We can know the general timing of these (and subsequent) games from an incidental historical detail implied by the inscription. The father is identified as flamen perpetuus of Nero as Caesar, a position created by the emperor Claudius after Nero’s adoption, giving us the terminus post quem 50 CE.

Another historical detail can further revise our understanding of when these games might have taken place. Tacitus (Annals 14.17) records a riot taking place in the Pompeian amphitheatre in the year 59 CE. Subsequently, the Roman Senate prohibited gladiatorial shows at Pompeii for a period of ten years. As it is possible that Nero may have relaxed this judgement by 64 CE, we can note that the various games given by the Lucretii Valentes occurred between Nero’s adoption by Claudius and his assassination (50-68 CE), excluding those years during which the senatorial ban operated without imperial intervention (60-64 CE).

Interestingly, a graffito may provide some indication of how the local population felt about the events that transpired in and around the Pompeian amphitheatre in 59 CE.

Figure 4: A graffito possibly relating to the riot in the amphitheatre at Pompeii (CIL IV.1293)

Inscribed on the exterior wall of VI.ix.6 (the so-called ‘House of the Dioscuri’) as a drawing with related text, the graffito above (CIL IV.1293) depicts a man, probably a gladiator, equipped with a crested helmet and a light oblong shield, wearing a fighter’s waistband, and holding a palm in his right hand. To the man’s right is a larger palm. The writing below the stairs down which the triumphant gladiator is descending can be translated as ‘Campanians, by a single victory you have perished with the Nucerians’. If we read the account of the riot in Tacitus, we learn that rivalry between inhabitants of the colonies of Nuceria and Pompeii, attending a gladiatorial show (given by a reputed ne’er-do-well, Livineius Regulus), ‘led to abuse, stone-throwing, and the drawing of weapons’.

---

24 See CIL IV.1185, 7992 and 7995.
25 For the famous painting of this event, see Plate 1 below.
26 For the explanation that Nero revoked the prohibition on gladiatorial games in the Pompeian amphitheatre, see Franklin (2001: 123-125); for an alternative hypothesis, Cooley and Cooley (2004: 64).
27 CIL IV.1293: Campani victoria una || cum Nucerinis peristis.
According to Tacitus, the subsequent bloodshed and deadly violence resulted in a general prohibition on any gathering in the amphitheatre and the dissolution of illegal associations. Therefore, the graffitist may be observing, perhaps with more than a casual undertone of bitterness, how the slaughter of Nucerians may have been nothing more than a Pyrrhic victory for the Pompeians.

We also learn from the *edictum munera* about the type of entertainment to be exhibited: an extensive gladiatorial program of combat and a wild beast hunt (*uenatio*). We are also informed about attractions appealing to the audience’s desire for comfort in the warmer months: namely, the provision of cloth awnings (*uela*), designed to limit the effects of prolonged exposure to sunlight for the duration of the five-day *munera*.

There is also evidence of the professional who painted this poster, a *scriptor* like Mustius the fuller. Between the letters C and R of the name *LVCRETI* in the first line of the advertisement, one can see ‘Celer wrote (this)’. To the right of the inscription, one can also read in translation ‘Aemilius Celer wrote (this) on his own at night (lit. by means of the moon).’ Aemilius Celer is known to us from another official *dipinto* – a *programmatum* (on the exterior wall just to the left of IX.6.8) supporting L. Statius Receptus for duovir *jure dicundo* (*CIL IV*.3775) – and two brief painted inscriptions on the walls of the *insula* in the region adjacent to Receptus’ election poster (*CIL IV*.3790, 3792, and 3794). Celer not only informs us that he is a neighbour (*uicinus*) of the candidate; he also observes in no uncertain terms what will befall anyone who defaces his handiwork – ‘O you hateful person who erases (this), become ill.’ The private *dipinti* refer directly to Aemilius Celer, giving his *praenomen* as Publius, and indicating his place of residence (IX.8.7). Given Celer’s claim to local residence in the *programmatum*, these *dipinti* are likely painted by the *scriptor* himself.

6. *Eros* in the Colony of Venus

One of the most compelling yet confronting aspects of inscribed *graffiti* and painted images at Pompeii is the explicitly sexual content. The two volumes of *CIL IV* contain about five hundred or so *graffiti* conforming to a specifically erotic taxonomy. Given the challenging nature of some of this material, the following discussion will focus on examples of erotic *graffiti* displaying a selection of qualitative features. While it is possible that a few of these may cause the reader offence, the fact that a significant proportion of *graffiti* recovered or recorded at Pompeii (15.49% of surviving *graffiti*, 5.19% of inscriptions in general) reflects a sexualized vocabulary requires consideration.29

---


29 For the only comprehensive study of erotic *graffiti* at Pompeii, see Varrone (2001). That the Archaeological Museum at Naples only recently opened the so-called ‘secret room’ (*camera segreta*) – containing artifacts of a sexual nature recovered from Pompeii and Herculaneum – to the general public indicates how controversial this material remains. For an introductory survey of the Museum’s erotic art collection and the general significance of sexual representations in the ancient Roman world, see Grant (1975).
The first example of this graffiti-type was inscribed on the tomb of a certain Septumia, daughter of Lucius, located outside the Vesuvian gate. When restored, the graffitist’s composition can be seen to take a metrical form, that of the elegiac couplet.\(^{30}\)

**Figure 5:** Graffito inscribed on tombstone outside the Vesuvian gate (CIL IV.9171)\(^{31}\)

This metre, created by the early Greek lyric poets for a variety of themes, came to be associated with Latin love poetry.\(^{32}\) It is thus especially suited to the sentiments expressed in the graffito above (CIL IV.9171). It can be translated as follows: ‘So may you always flourish, Sabina. May you acquire beauty and stay a girl for a long time.’

The graffitist wanted this message to be seen, and not only by the subject of the expressed desire. Scratching a declaration into the stone façade of a tomb guaranteed a regular and diverse readership. The memorial’s surface was durable, the tomb abutted a well-travelled pedestrian thoroughfare close to one of the main entrances to Pompeii, and city-dwellers and visitors capable of reading Latin were used to reading funerary dedications and official notices as they approached any urban centre in the Roman Empire. During this historical period, burials were restricted by law to extra-mural plots, and consequently tombs lined all roads outside a city’s walls. If a person wished to draw the attention of a large audience to an inscription of any kind, placing it at eye level on a tombstone facing a main road was the next best thing to the exterior wall of a prominent building inside the city limits.

While it is not possible to determine the social class of the person who inscribed this statement, one can note that the individual in question had acquired some knowledge of Latin love poetry and possessed the ability to create a personal meaning within the metrical requirements of the literary form. Another graffito, found on the wall of a private chamber within the so-called ‘House of Sallust’ (VI.ii.4), displays a similar competence

---

\(^{30}\) In Greek and Latin poetry, the elegiac couplet (or distichon) consists of alternating lines of hexameter and pentameter; that is, two dactyls followed by a long syllable and a caesura (a dactylic hexameter catalectic), then two more dactyls followed by a long syllable (a double hemiepes or first half of a dactylic hexameter).

\(^{31}\) CIL IV.9171: Sic [ṭḅṛ]contingat semper florere, Sabina; | contingant formae sisque puella diu.

\(^{32}\) Greek poets used the elegiac metre in public and private contexts (1) in the archaic and classical periods: to exhort their fellow citizens to battle, to express political opinions, to commemorate the dead, and to accompany dedications made at holy places; (2) in the Hellenistic period: to canvass the subject of love, and to articulate a variety of other concerns in narrative form. Quintilian (Institutio Oratoria 10.93) informs us that the ancient canon of Latin elegists comprised Cornelius Gallus, Albius Tibullus, Sextus Propertius, and Ovid.
with elegiac lyricism. In this case, the graffitist makes use of a common form of trochaic verse, the *septenarius*, to express a familiar poetical conceit.33

**Figure 6: Graffito in cubiculum of VI.ii.4 (CIL IV.1234)**34

This can be translated as follows: ‘Girl, you are beautiful. To you I have been sent by one who is yours. Farewell.’

Like the first graffito, this inscription provides us with a snapshot of an affective relationship. Here, the composer negotiates generically with the epistolary mode favoured by a number of prominent Latin authors (Horace, Cicero, Propertius, and Ovid). The graffito is an explicit declaration of appreciation, designed to reproduce in style either what may have already been transmitted in a more private letter written to the object of attraction or an imitation of the same refashioned in poetic form. Whether the relationship implied is real or imagined, it should be clear that the apparent simplicity of an inscribed text like this belies a linguistic sophistication over and beyond traditional assessments of graffiti as a non-literary product and foregrounds the range of alternatives and possibilities in the practice of writing by elite and non-elite Romans during this historical period.

A third example confirms this evaluation. It was inscribed on an interior wall of Pompeii’s basilica. Constructed in pre-Roman times (ca. 120 BCE), the basilica served the administration of justice by appointed officials of the town council, and daily accommodated a variety of commercial transactions conducted by local individuals.35 Almost two hundred graffiti have been recovered from this single building, testifying to the intensity of activity here and to the acceptance and popularity of graffiti-writing and drawing in Pompeii.36

33 The trochaic measure consists of a strongly accented syllable followed by a weak (or unstressed) one.
34 *CIL* IV.1234: *Pupa quae bela es, tibi || me misit qui tuus es<↑>. Vale.*
35 The Pompeii Forum Project (http://pompeii.virginia.edu), an interdisciplinary collaborative research venture sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the University of Virginia, and private contributors, provides access to a QuickTime virtual tour of the basilica. The URL address for the Project’s interactive map of Pompeii is: http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Pompeii/map/Pompeii.html.
36 *CIL* IV records 172 graffiti inscriptions on the interior and exterior walls of the basilica at Pompeii. These walls have been cut into 32 sections (*tabulae*), presently conserved and stored in the National Archaeological Museum at Naples.
Like the preceding examples, the graffito above (CIL IV.1928) was composed in the form of an elegiac couplet, and speaks of the writer’s desire for a loved one. It reads as follows: ‘Love dictates as what I write and Cupid shows me. May I die if I wish to be a god without you.’ The inscription resonates with a variety of literary, epistolary and poetic references. It articulates for its intended readership the widespread cultural belief in the relationship between the creative impulse and divine inspiration, and expresses in cognate terms the intensity of feeling consuming the lover.

The comparatively elevated level of theme, tone, and style represented by these three inscribed texts can be balanced against a large number of graffiti displaying a limited thematic vocabulary, coarser expression of sentiments, and often a simpler grasp of the Latin language. Despite these differences, graffiti of this kind can be found in a variety of public and private spaces in Pompeii, including the basilica and other buildings in the Forum, a large proportion of the exterior wall surfaces of insula dwellings, and the multiplicity of surfaces inside the homes of elite and non-elite residents, including the work- and living-spaces of public and domestic slaves. In other words, just as the composition of verse-graffiti cannot be restricted to members of the elite class, so the phenomenon of writing and drawing sexually suggestive, derogatory or abusive graffiti cannot be confined to the non-elite.

Examples of sexually implicit or explicit graffiti can be identified:

- in the gladiators’ barracks (V.v.3): ‘Crescens the net-fighter, doctor … of girls in the night, in the morning, and at other times’ (CIL IV.4353)
- in one of Pompeii’s many brothels (the lupanar located at VII.ix.33): ‘Slowly, give a push’ (CIL IV.794)
- in the basilica (VII.i): ‘At one time, the Vibii were the most noble at Pompeii. For that reason, they did not hold the(ir) sceptre in hand like a penis, as you do

---

37 CIL IV.1928: Scribenti mi dictat amor mostratque Cupido || [ad?] peream sine te si dues esse velim. If the inscribed text (Figure 7) and the Latin transcription here are compared, the practice by Pompeian graffitists of using a combination of vertical strokes to represent certain letters can be seen. In this instance, two vertical strokes (in the words SCRIBENTI, PIIRIAM, SINII, TII, IISSII and VIIILIM) indicate the letter ‘e’. Other common abbreviations in Pompeian graffiti are a long vertical and two shorter verticals for ‘n’ (II) and a long vertical and three shorter verticals for ‘m’ (III).

habitually in the same manner every day, holding (your) member in your hand.’ (CIL IV.1939)\(^{39}\)

The first example (CIL IV.4353) neatly captures the swaggering braggadocio featuring in many of the graffiti that detail the sexual prowess of the composer. These texts (sometimes with accompanying drawings of phalli in a variety of sizes) are invariably inscribed by men, and conform closely to the model of normative sexuality in the Roman world. In simple terms, a man (\textit{uir}) was socially dominant, culturally active, and physically penetrative; a woman (\textit{femina}) was socially subordinate, culturally passive, and physically receptive.\(^{40}\)

The second example (CIL IV.794) expresses this hierarchy of social status explicitly in terms of sexual roles. To better understand the clarity of this representation, the graffiti must be viewed in context. In this case, the text forms part of a painted scene located on the longer wall of a chamber set aside for sexual activity inside a public brothel (Plate 2). The man is depicted as a penetrator, illustrative of his privileged masculinity and civic prerogatives; the woman, as a passive receptor, indicative of her constrained femininity and civic limitations. The Latin used in the graffiti explicitly underlines this sexualized ideology. Written in the active voice and the imperative mood (\textit{Lente implelle}), it explains the norms of sexual conduct illustrated in the painting, speaking directly to the brothel’s male clientele and to Roman conceptions of sex and gender.

Figure 8: Graffito on wall of the basilica (CIL IV.1939)

The third example above (CIL IV.1939) was inscribed on an interior wall of the basilica, in relatively close proximity to the verse (discussed above) referring to Cupid’s inspiration. It is similarly composed in poetic form; in this case, a couplet in trochaic \textit{septenarii}. However, the subject-matter (male masturbation) would seem at first glance far less refined. On closer inspection, this three-line graffiti neatly skewers the social pretensions of the person to whom the verse refers by contrasting the \textit{nobilitas} of the Vibii, one of the most famous families in Pompeii, to the \textit{indignitas} of his socially unacceptable conduct.\(^{41}\) The composer adeptly vilifies the unnamed (but surely known) local identity in much the same way as the satirical poetry of Horace and Persius treated men’s enslavement to money, power, glory, and sex.

deo tenuerunt in manu sceptrum pro mutuo || itidem quod tu factitas cottidie in manu penem tenes.\(^{40}\) For a comprehensive introduction to sexuality in Republican and Augustan Rome, see Skinner (2004: esp. ch. 7, 8).

\(^{41}\) For historical details of the Vibii, see Castren (1975: 240f, with references).
6.1: A Woman’s Voice on the Walls of Pompeii?

The case for the usefulness of Pompeian graffiti as sources of evidence for life in late Republican and early Imperial Rome requires little by way of extension. To conclude this introductory survey, consider one final inscribed text and what historical and socio-cultural questions it can suggest to the interested student.

**Figure 9: Graffito in the entrance of IX.ix.f (CIL IV.5296)**

The graffito above (CIL IV.5296) is a 9-line verse in cursive script, found on the right-hand side of the entrance to a private dwelling (IX.ix.f), scratched with the large stylus known as the graphium into the lime or clay of the house wall.

Readings for this inscription have varied considerably over the last 127 years, and will undoubtedly continue to perplex and stimulate the modern interpreter of epigraphic discourse. Matteo Della Corte (1960: 73-76) thought that the verse was written by ‘a cynic without scruple’, whom he identified as Marius quidam (scripsit), a certain Marius. Antonio Varrone (2001: 100-101) places the inscription under the rubric ‘Unrequited Love’ (rather than Della Corte’s ‘Bitter Mockery’), and describes it in the following terms:

‘… verses full of consuming melancholy … the lament of a woman who loves another, but at the same time hopes that her fortune may still change and the happy love-affair turn into smoke …’

He concludes by noting that ‘the alternating ebb and flow of human fortune can be compared with the subtle and perfidious game of love’.

The graffito can be translated as follows:

---

42 CIL IV.5296: o utinam liceat collo complexa tenere || braciola et teneris oscula ferre label(l)is. || i nunc, uentis tua gaudia, pupula, credes: || credo mihi, leuis est natura uirorum. || saepe ego cu[m] media uigilare[m] perdita nocte: || haec mecum meditari: multis Fortuna quos supstulit alte || hos modo proiectos subito praecipitique premit. || sic Venus ut subito coiunxit corpora amantium || diuidit lux et se || line 8 may read: parees qui[d] amant.

43 Antonio Sogliano’s original excavation report (in Notizie degli Scavi di Antichi (Rome: Accademie di Lincei): text, 519) is dated 1888.

44 Even the NSc report (1888: 519n.28) notes that ‘e_ una donna parla’ (‘a woman is speaking’).
'Oh if only it was permitted to grasp your little arms, clasped around my neck, and to bring kisses to your tender lips. Come now, little girl, entrust your sensual delights to the winds. Trust me: slight is men's nature. Often, when desperately in love I keep watch in the middle of the night, You should think on these things with me: “Many are they whom Fortuna has raised on high; These, suddenly thrown down headlong, she now oppresses. Just as Venus suddenly joined the bodies of lovers, day divides them and… you (sc. Fortuna) will separate those who love…”'

The resonances of this text with the motif of the *paroclausthynron* are evident enough. More pointed, however, is a gendered reading of this self-representation of a woman’s lost love: female homoerotic passion. This is a significant insight, especially in relation to the traditionally sexualized vocabulary of Roman social relationships – that is, active/passive and penetrator/penetrated – previously considered. If this interpretation is accepted, a constellation of possibilities arises, many revolving around questions of transgressive social action and deviant performance.

The critically aware student might reasonably ask, for instance, when this *graffito* could have been inscribed to best result: that is, before the cement had hardened, or at some stage subsequent to the building of the house wall. Similarly, in what ways might the content and intention of the verse have been apprehended by the inhabitants of the house – and the composer of the verse need not necessarily be identified with the occupants of the *domus* in question – and by those who passed within and by its walls. In this light, a variety of socio-linguistic matters arises, each of considerable importance. *Inter alia*, what does this inscription tell us about the degrees of discursive competency possessed by the female composer; that is to say, the varying capacities of our love-lorn interlocutor for literacy and the literary? These could include the extent of her vocabulary; her facility with the metrical requisites of the chosen medium of expression, her acquaintance with textual antecedents in the genres of *epitalamion, paroclausthynron*, and lyric of neoteric typology. As well, one might contemplate her level of participation in the inscriptive process. Here, should we imagine her manipulating the *stylus* herself, or must we interpose an intermediary *scriptor* (like Mustius or Appuleius)?

Unfortunately, the surface context of this lost same-sexed voice – a small house, at odds with the hierarchies of status, education, and gender usually associated with the

45 The motif of the *paroclausthynron* (the lover before the closed door) is extensively used in classical elegiac love poetry (Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid). See especially Catullus 64.138-44 and 169, the lament in the *epitalamion* (wedding song) of Peleus and Tethys. Cf. also line 8 and Lucr. *ND* 5.962; line 3 and Juv. 12.47. Zangemeister (in *CIL* 4 *suppl*: 589) thinks that this *graffito* is a *cento*, a patchwork conflation of diverse poetic fragments; and cites in support Virg. *Aen*. 10.652, Stat. *Silv.* 5.4.14-15, and Apul. *Met.* 6.16. The artificiality of this premise would appear self-evident.

46 Baldi (1982: 166) sees this *graffito* as recording ‘una passione omosessuale femminile’ (‘a feminine homosexual passion’).
absorption and production of elegiac verse – is now effectively only the CIL line drawing (CIL IV suppl.: 589) and the original note in Notizie degli Scavi di Antichi (1888: 519). Nevertheless, listening to the differences in this inscription – not simply choosing between its material and discursive traces; that is, the ‘reality’ of a woman or women, or the ‘representation’ of Woman – affords the advanced student a productive initial point of entry into elucidating potential sites of gender construction and analysis. The fact that this verse-inscription exists constitutes the beginnings of a constellation of ‘facts’ through which regulatory and transgressive discourses of gender identity, sexual preference, and status designation might be engaged in the classroom.

8. Conclusion

In the course of discussing aspects of spatial organization in Pompeii, Ray Laurence (1995: 72) observed that ‘the social relationship between the inhabitant and visitor was strong’. With this in mind, let us step back from the doorway of the small dwelling south-west of the Nola gate and – depending on our means and desire – partake of pastry and diluted wine in one of the nearby popinae (IX.9) or relax for a while in the small garden of the adjacent caupona (IX.8). Perhaps take note of the frescoed lares painted on the wall opposite, or the enshrined phalli in relief to the left. Amid the smells of oven and amphora, the sounds of singing and gambling, and the sights of resident and guest in this furnished place, it is possible to reflect imaginatively on the occurrence and distribution of these spatial and temporal intersections. Sacral contexts abut the social activities of domestic properties and establishments for the provision of food, drink, entertainment and accommodation. Proximities of consumption, habitation and worship point to another inter-subjective network of social relations characteristic of the late Republican and early Imperial urban experience in a Roman Campanian town like Pompeii. And the logic of this experience would appear mediated through the interactive syntax of graffiti and dipinti, a visual and kinaesthetic dialogue among inhabitants and visitors along one of the linear through-routes or irregularly configured streets of this regional centre of urban life.

Appendix: Other Examples of Graffiti recovered in Pompeii

This appendix contains a number of graffiti found on the walls of Pompeii, listed according to the numerical code given in CIL IV and the supplementary volume. It is hoped that these further examples of parietal graffiti (texts and drawings) will provide useful stimuli for classroom study of economic, social, political, cultural and religious aspects of the Roman world during the late Republican and early Imperial historical period.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CIL IV no.</th>
<th>Location/Type</th>
<th>Text and/or Description</th>
<th>Evidence Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>787</td>
<td>‘Road of the Isis Temple’ (wall of house opposite temple)/<em>dipinto</em></td>
<td>‘All the worshippers of Isis call for Cn. Helvius Sabinus to be aedile.’</td>
<td>Religious, political (<em>programmatum</em> displaying the relationship between local associations – in this case, a group professing a religious identity – and the electoral process; cf. 1011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1190</td>
<td>‘Street of the Brothel’ (on whitewashed tufa)/<em>dipinto</em></td>
<td>‘The gladiatorial <em>familia</em> of A. Suettius Certus, aedile, will fight at Pompeii on the day before the Kalends of June [i.e. 31 May]. There will be a hunt and awnings. Good fortune to all Neronian games.’</td>
<td>Social, cultural (the acclamation concluding this text seems to be in the same ‘hand’ as the <em>edictum munera</em>; the term <em>familia</em> refers to the troupe of gladiators belonging to the named local official; cf. 1177-1204)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1291</td>
<td>VI.10.19.1/<em>grafitto</em>-text with painted scenes</td>
<td>‘Give me a little cup of cold water.’ <em>The picture pertaining to this graffito contains two images: a male slave attending a soldier, and the soldier holding out a glass drinking vessel to the slave. ‘Bring a cup of Setinian wine.’ This is inscribed above the image of a togate male holding a drinking vessel. ‘Fare well.’ This is written above the image of a boy holding out a small drinking vessel.</em></td>
<td>Economic, cultural (two everyday scenes of commercial life in one of the many drinking and snack bars distributed throughout Pompeii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1292</td>
<td>VI.10.19.1/<em>grafitto</em>-texts with painted scenes</td>
<td>‘Faustus, slave of Ithacus, Neronian, at the Amphitheatre; Priscus, Neronian, 6 fights, won; Herennius, 18 fights, killed.’ <em>The drawing is divided into three columns: (1) a man sitting on an honorific seat (<em>bisellium</em>) located on a platform or podium, with steps to the right; to the right, a netfighter (<em>retiarius</em>) extending a trident, descending stairs; man in tunic, holding out a staff (adjudicator?); (2) Gladiator in Thracian armour (<em>Threx</em>), facing right over fallen shield to a gladiator with Samnite weapons (<em>Sannis</em>), left arm raised; (3) man in tunic, holding staff in right hand (adjudicator?)</em></td>
<td>Social, cultural (this descriptive graffito, reporting a memorable gladiatorial combat in the amphitheatre, is one of a number of simple and complex records of historical <em>munera</em>; the frequency of this theme in the corpus of recovered graffiti attests the popularity of human combat at Pompeii; cf. 10236a, 10237, 10238a, and Kyle (1998) for a recent study of Roman public spectacles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1421</td>
<td>VI.xi.10 (on peristyle column in ‘House of the Labyrinth’)/<em>grafitto</em>-text and drawing</td>
<td>‘Faustus, slave of Ithacus, Neronian, at the Amphitheatre; Priscus, Neronian, 6 fights, won; Herennius, 18 fights, killed.’ <em>The drawing is divided into three columns: (1) a man sitting on an honorific seat (<em>bisellium</em>) located on a platform or podium, with steps to the right; to the right, a netfighter (<em>retiarius</em>) extending a trident, descending stairs; man in tunic, holding out a staff (adjudicator?); (2) Gladiator in Thracian armour (<em>Threx</em>), facing right over fallen shield to a gladiator with Samnite weapons (<em>Sannis</em>), left arm raised; (3) man in tunic, holding staff in right hand (adjudicator?)</em></td>
<td>Social, cultural (this descriptive graffito, reporting a memorable gladiatorial combat in the amphitheatre, is one of a number of simple and complex records of historical <em>munera</em>; the frequency of this theme in the corpus of recovered graffiti attests the popularity of human combat at Pompeii; cf. 10236a, 10237, 10238a, and Kyle (1998) for a recent study of Roman public spectacles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CIL no.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Location/Type</strong></td>
<td><strong>Text and/or Description</strong></td>
<td><strong>Evidence Type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1679</td>
<td>VII.ii.45/graffito-text (on wall of bar left of VII.ii.45)</td>
<td>‘Beautiful Hedone, may anyone who reads this fare well. Hedone says: “For a single <em>as</em>, one can drink here; if you give a <em>dipondius</em> [= 2 <em>asses</em>], you will drink better; if you give 4 <em>asses</em> [= 1 <em>sestertius</em>], you will drink Falernian wine.’”</td>
<td>Economic (many establishments of this kind catered to local residents and visitors, offering a selection of wine; the <em>as</em> is the smallest denomination of bronze coin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1824</td>
<td>Basilica/graffito</td>
<td>‘Let anyone who loves come/perish; as for Venus, I want to break her ribs with cudgels and maim the goddess’ loins. If she can bore through my tender heart, why should I not dash to pieces her head with a cudgel?’</td>
<td>Religious, cultural (the relationship represented here between the intangible wound of the lover and the physical wounding of Venus reflects an expression of masculinity found sometimes in elegiac poetry; cf. e.g., Catull. 11.15-20, Prop. 2.1-15, Ov. <em>Am.</em> 1.1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3726</td>
<td>IX.vi.2-3/dipinto</td>
<td>‘Good fortune to the judgements of the Augustus, father of his country, and of Poppaea, Augusta’</td>
<td>Historical, political (one of eight <em>dipinti</em> – 2 in the <em>basilica</em>, the remainder scattered around Pompeii – acclaiming the ‘judgements’ (<em>iudicia</em>) of Nero alone or of the <em>princeps</em> and his wife, Poppaea Sabina, thought to have links with Pompeii and the villa at Oplontis; these political interventions may concern the revocation of the ban on gladiatorial games or honorific grants of colonial status to Puteoli, Antium, and Tegianum; cf. 528, 670,671a-b, 820a, 1074, 1612, and 10049)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4007</td>
<td>I.iii.30/graffito-text, afterwards painted in red and pale yellow (on peristyle column)</td>
<td>‘May you, girl, be well, and may Pompeian Venus be propitious.’</td>
<td>Religious, political (in 80 BCE, nine years after the Sullan siege, Pompeii became the Roman colony of <em>Colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeianorum</em>, reflecting the honour paid to L. Cornelius Sulla and his patron deity, Venus, invoked here for personal reasons; the colony’s guardian deity was known as Venus Pompeiana or Venus Fisica)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIL no.</td>
<td>Location/Type</td>
<td>Text and/or Description</td>
<td>Evidence Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4342</td>
<td>V.v.3/grafto-text (on peristyle column)</td>
<td>‘Girls’ “sigh” – Thracian gladiator, Celadus, belonging to Octavus (?): three fights, won three.’</td>
<td>Social, cultural (one of 143 graffiti inscribed on the walls of the atrium and the 24 columns of the peristyle within the so-called ‘House of the Gladiators’, a private dwelling converted into a training school for combatants in the amphitheatre; these graffiti provide information about gladiator types, names of masters at the school, numbers of combats, victories, defeats, and deaths, and acclamations like that for Celadus (suspirium puellarum); cf. 4280-4423)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5385</td>
<td>Lower section, Tower 10 (on plaster, near a window)/grafto-text</td>
<td>‘L. Sul(l)a.’</td>
<td>Historical (perhaps dating to 89 BCE, when Sulla attacked Pompeii; a defending soldier may have inscribed the name of the enemy commander)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7996</td>
<td>III.vii.1/dipinto</td>
<td>‘Good fortune to the priest of Nero Caesar.’</td>
<td>Religious, political (the painted acclamation appears to pertain to D. Lucretius Satrius Valens; cf. 7292, 7295)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8562</td>
<td>II.vii.column 18 (‘Large Palaestra’,/grafto-text and drawing</td>
<td>‘Whoever gave to me a fee for learning, may s/he have what s/he wants from the gods.’ Below this text, there is a drawing of two faces, that of a man looking forward and of a woman.</td>
<td>Commercial, cultural (one of a number of graffiti scratched on the columns of the Large Palaestra, located near the amphitheatre; these graffiti strongly suggest that this portico was used for the purpose of teaching; cf. 8565 (a list of young male students and a schedule of fees) and, for literary references to the payment of instructors and the practice of schooling under the Roman Empire, August. Conf. 5.12.22, Ep. 250.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 8863    | III.iv.1/grafto-text (on interior wall of shop, in 8 columns) | Columns 1-2:
Day: Saturn, Pompeii;
Sun: Nuceria;
Moon: Atella, Cumae;
Mars: Puteoli;
Mercury: Rome;
Jove: Capua;
Venus: Ruminalia;
Columns 3-5:
A list of dates between the day after the Ides of one month and the Ides of the next;
Columns 6-8:
A list of numbers between 1 and 30 | Commercial, cultural (in addition to indicating the regularity of regional market-days (nundinae) in Campania and Latium, this graffiti can be used to introduce or review the Roman dating and counting systems) |
| 9131    | IX.xiii.5/grafto-text (on façade of house owned by the fuller M. Fabius Ululitremulus) | ‘I sing of fullers and an owl, not of arms and a man.’ | Social, cultural (parody of the famous first line of Virgil’s Aeneid, one of 12 citations relating to Virg. Aen. 1.1; 79 literary citations are recorded in CIL IV; for a table showing these quotations, see Cooley and Cooley (2004: 220-221) |