

## The Faces of Pompeii and Herculaneum: A Study of Graffiti Drawings

How does one describe the drawing in the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii that appears under the text "*Rufus est*" (this is Rufus)? The *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* vol. IV explains it as a *caput viri vetuli et calvi ad sin. conversum, laureatum quasi imperatoris*, "head of an old and bald man facing left, crowned as (a head of) an emperor" (9226). Although this one may be the best known, this was just one of many drawings of a human face sketched onto the walls of Pompeii and Herculaneum. *CIL* includes brief mention of similar drawings, but it uses a variety of vocabulary to do so: *herma*, *caput*, *facies*, *protome*, *figura*, *imago*, *busta*, and *homo*. In our paper, we will present the evidence that remains for these types of drawings and examine the range of ways they have been documented. We will then suggest guidelines for creating standardized descriptions for figural graffiti so that they can be included alongside textual graffiti in epigraphic databases, can be searchable, and able to be studied more systematically.

Volume IV of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* and its supplements document the known wall-inscriptions from Pompeii and Herculaneum, including both *dipinti*, painted inscriptions, and the graffiti, or informal messages scratched into wall plaster. Although most are textual, about one-sixth of all graffiti are figural, hand-sketched drawings that appear either with text or as independent messages (Langner 2001). Figural graffiti were of less interest to the early editors of *CIL*; therefore, they were documented minimally, usually only with a brief Latin description of the drawing's subject that are often overly vague. Sometimes these descriptions are even misleading in details of age, gender, and facial features (Benefiel and Sypniewski, 2016). Since many wall-inscriptions have now disappeared as the plaster that once held them has crumbled, the subject matter of many graffiti drawings must be reconstructed from Latin

descriptions, which were written by a number of different excavators and editors of the *CIL* over the course of more than a century.

This presentation offers our initial findings on the reliability and utility of the *CIL*'s Latin descriptions of graffiti drawings for the study of the Campanian graffiti. We aim to tackle the most popular motif for figural graffiti and the most complicated: drawings of human heads. In our study, we systematically identified the primary Latin term used in the *CIL* to describe each graffito of a head and grouped images of the graffiti according to their designated Latin word category. We then compared these verbal descriptions with all known line-drawings and photographs of graffiti drawings of human faces and figures from Pompeii and Herculaneum found from early publications by Avellino (1841), Garrucci (1856), Della Corte (1958), as well as more recent collections by Langner (2001) and Varone (2012). Through our analysis, we will show how well the Latin terminology used by the *CIL* corresponds to the content of figural graffiti they describe. The value of figural graffiti lies in the comparisons that can be made between their content and function with other types of ancient artistic expression, the relative frequency of the various types of images, and the relationship between subject matter and location (Langner 2001, 11). A better understanding of Latin descriptions of figural graffiti in the *CIL* can provide a first step towards a more comprehensive picture of graffiti drawings in Pompeii and Herculaneum.

### Bibliography

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