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Vergil at Pompeii: A Teacher's Aid

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## VERGIL AT POMPEII: A TEACHER'S AID

**L**ike most teachers of Latin, I have passed now numberless class sessions leading students through various parts of the first six books of the *Aeneid*. And—again, I suspect, like most—I must admit that not every class was enthusiastically received by all attendees. Yet in recent years I have inserted toward the end of term one segment that regularly seizes everyone's attention: Vergilian quotations in the graffiti of ancient Pompeii.

Of course such quotations do not come exclusively from the first six books of the *Aeneid*, the current focus of most high-school and college courses on Vergil; class structure simply forces me to focus attention on these alone. There are also fragmentary (or incorrectly remembered) quotations of 7.1, 9.269 (twice), 9.404, and perhaps fifteen citations from the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*. Caution must be exercised in several cases, however, since often a single word (or less!) has been taken by an eager editor as a fragmentary citation, when a quite different explanation of the graffito is possible.

Scholars have collected and studied this corpus repeatedly over the years,<sup>1</sup> and further analysis is not my intention here or in the classroom. Rather, in the classroom I use slides of the graffiti,<sup>2</sup> first for group identification of the lines and then for discussion of the many issues that can arise from the mere presence of these quotations on the walls of Pompeii (on which more below). Here I provide in textual order the best images of the most usable graffiti. They can be easily photocopied, enlarged, and photographed to produce reusable slides; photocopied, enlarged, and transferred to transparencies for overhead projection; or photocopied and prepared as handouts for class use. But reproduce only the graffiti, their catalogue numbers, and findspots; leave identification and completion of the lines to the class, with reference to their texts as necessary. Most of the images come from the fourth volume of the

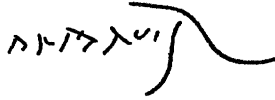
<sup>1</sup>Most recent and thorough is M. Gigante, *Civiltà delle forme letterarie nell' antica Pompei* (Naples 1979) 163–83, where earlier bibliography is carefully traced.

<sup>2</sup>I do not include all examples, only the most usable. There are in fact seven-teen citations of 1.1 and fifteen of 2.1; all other lines appear only once.

*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*,<sup>3</sup> one from a survey of the material excavated previous to 1940 by Matteo Della Corte,<sup>4</sup> one from Carlo Giordano's original publication of the inscriptions of the house of M. Fabius Rufus, which is still undergoing excavation.<sup>5</sup>

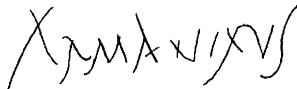
First some editorial explanations. Pompeians regularly interchanged the letters "q," "qu," and "c." In graffiti they sometimes wrote two upright strokes for the letter "e." Like all of us, they made mistakes, and incorrect or excess letters that need to be removed are marked in transcription with curved brackets, for example {s}.

CIL IV.10059 (found in the atrium at I.13.1, house of T. Crassius Crescens):



*Aeneid* 1.1: "Arma vir(umque cano Troiae qui primus ab oris)"

CIL IV.1282 (found in the peristyle at VI.7.20, house of L. Laelius Erastus and L. Laelius Trophimus):



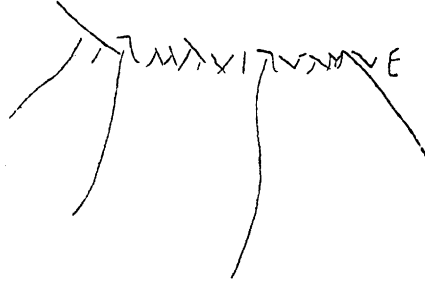
*Aeneid* 1.1: "Arma viru{s}(umque cano Troiae qui primus ab oris)"

<sup>3</sup> Volume 4 of the *CIL* has been laboriously assembled over the years by a series of editors in a series of fascicles. The first, by Zangemeister, included drawn reproductions of hundreds of graffiti gathered on plates at the end of the volume, and printed versions of the remainder. The second, by Mau, provided only printed versions, and for the most part reproductions are unavailable elsewhere. The third fascicle, by Della Corte, included reproductions when the editor thought they would be of value, and printed versions of the remainder. Hence the necessary variety of formats that follows.

<sup>4</sup> M. Della Corte, "Vergilio nell' epigrafia pompeiana," *Epigrafica* 2 (1940) 171–78.

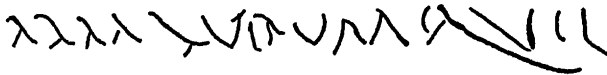
<sup>5</sup> C. Giordano, "Le iscrizioni della Casa di M. Fabio Rufo," *RendLinc* n. s. 41 (1966) 73–89.

CIL IV.5002 (found in the atrium at IX.2.26, house of M. Casellius Marcellus):



*Aeneid* 1.1: "Arma virumque (cano Troiae qui primus ab oris)"

CIL IV.10086 (found outside the doorway at II.1.10, an unidentified private house):



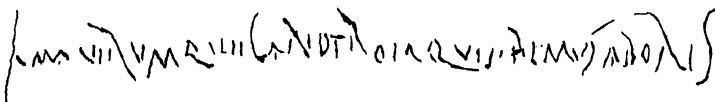
*Aeneid* 1.1: "Arma virumque (cano Troiae qui primus ab oris)"

CIL IV.2361 (found outside the doorway at XI.1.4, a shop):

A R M A · VIRVMQVE CANO TRO

*Aeneid* 1.1: "(A)rma virumque cano Tro(iae qui primus ab oris)"

CIL IV.4832 (found in the atrium at VII.15.8, an unidentified private house):



*Aeneid* 1.1: "(A)rma virumque cano Troiae qui primus ab oris"

CIL IV.4409 (found in an exedra at V.5.3, a gladiator school):

QVOS EGO SED

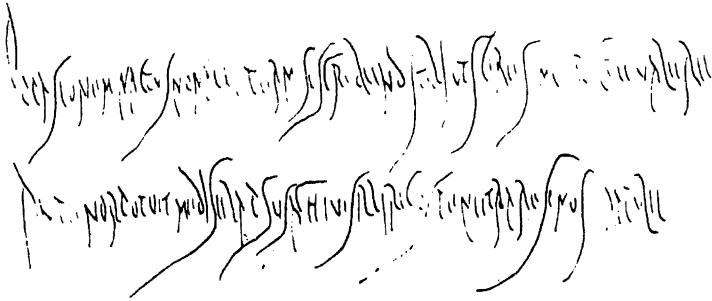
*Aeneid* 1.135: "quos ego—sed motos praestat componere fluctus"

CIL IV.5012 (found in the porticus in front of the garden at IX.2.26, house of M. Casellius Marcellus):

CERTE HINC ROMANOS OLIM  
VOLVENTIBVS ANNIIS

*Aeneid* 1.234: "certe hinc Romanos olim volventibus annis"

Giordano, 11 (found in the area east of the triclinium at VII.Occ.17, house of M. Fabius Rufus):



Occasionem nactus non pr(a)etermisi tibi scribendi  
ut scires me recte valere

*Aeneid* 1.242–43: "Antenor potuit mediis elapsus Achivis  
Illyricos penetrare sinus atque (intima tutus)"

CIL IV.4675 (found on a wall at VI.15.16, a tavern):

CONTIQ

*Aeneid* 2.1: "Contiq(uerere omnes intentique ora tenebant)"

CIL IV.4665 (found in the atrium at VI.15.9, an unidentified private house):

CONTIQVIRE

*Aeneid* 2.1: "Contiquere (omnes intentique ora tenebant)"

CIL IV.1672 (found in the atrium at VII.2.35, residence and shop of Clodius Nymphodotus):

(ONTICUER)

*Aeneid* 2.1: "Conticuer(e omnes intentique ora tenebant)"

CIL IV.2213 (found in a room at VII.12.18–20, *lupanar* of Africanus and Victor):

CONTIQVIRE

*Aeneid* 2.1: "Contiquere (omnes intentique ora tenebant)"

CIL IV.6707 (found outside the doorway at V.3.9, house of Cosmus and Epidia):

CONTICVIRE OMNIB

*Aeneid* 2.1: "Conticuer(e omnes intentique ora tenebant)"

CIL IV.3889 (found in the atrium at I.2.6, inn of Hermes):

CONTICVEPE OMNE S  
 OMN  
 INTENTI Q, \ S

*Aeneid* 2.1: "Conticuere omnes  
 {omn}  
 intentiqu(s)(e ora tenebant)"

*CIL* IV.5020 (found in the porticus in front of the garden at IX.2.26,  
 house of M. Casellius Marcellus):

DVCTORES  
 DANAU

*Aeneid* 2.14: "ductores Danau(m tot iam labentibus annis)"

*CIL* IV.1841 (found in the basilica):

A hand-drawn sketch of a stone inscription. The text is arranged in three lines. The first line reads "QUISQUIS ES AMISSOS HINC IAM". The second line reads "OBLIVISCERE GRAIOS". The third line reads "SCRIBIT NARCISUS". The drawing shows the irregular shape of the stone and some shading to indicate depth.

*Aeneid* 2. 148: "quisquis es, amissos hinc (iam)  
 obliviscere Graios."  
 scribit Narcissus

CIL IV.1251 (found somewhere along the east side of VI.5):

A handwritten Latin inscription in capital letters: VENIT SUMMA. The word 'VENIT' is written in a slightly larger, more prominent script than 'SUMMA'. There is a small mark above the 'V' and a horizontal line below the 'M'.

*Aeneid* 2. 324: “venit summa (dies et ineluctabile tempus)”

Della Corte 49 (= CIL IV.8768, found in the Palestra Grande):

A handwritten Latin inscription in capital letters, arranged in four lines: VADE, ASENATE, VOCASZE, PIRIKS. The script is somewhat stylized and appears to be a graffiti. There is a long diagonal slash below the word 'PIRIKS'.

*Aeneid* 4.223: “vade age, nate, voca {s}Zep(h)iros (et labere pennis)”

CIL IV.8379 (found in the atrium at I.10.8, house of the Minucii):

ENTELLE HEROU M

*Aeneid* 5.389: “Entelle, heroum (quondam fortissime frustra)”

In my presentations I have found it best to begin with the graffiti quoting Book Two. This allows me to explain the interchange-



ability of “q,” “qu,” and “c,” as well as to point out the varieties of “e” in the first few examples. From there, I work through the graffiti in textual order, noting the book involved and leading the class to the exact line identification with increasingly telling clues, when necessary. It can, however, be surprising how readily most of these lines can be identified. I end with Book One, but save the many citations of line 1 for last, progressing from the most fragmentary to the complete citation in *CIL* IV.4832.

Discussion can be quite far-ranging. First, why these lines? The openings of Books One and Two were perhaps memorized in antiquity just as the first seven or eleven of Book One are by nearly all students today; to R. G. Austin they are probably “school ‘tags’”<sup>6</sup>—and it is somehow reassuring to see the error of our second example, *CIL* IV.1282. Other lines are memorable for individual reasons and could easily become favorites of the appropriate ear: the powerful aposiopesis of 1.135, the rolling prophecy of 1.234, the reassuring hopefulness of 1.242–43. From Book Two, line 14 is more difficult to explain; it is perhaps the resolution of the Greeks—or their guile if the line should instead be taken as Lucretius’ ironically scornful 1.86 (*ductores Danaum delecti prima virorum*), which Vergil is here adapting—that made it so memorable. In 2.148 it is surely the compassionate humanity of the Trojans and in 2.324 the knell of death that explain their attraction. The playful jingle of 4.223 immediately suggests itself as the reason for favor, but why the hectoring 4.389 should have stuck in anyone’s ear is less easy to say. In contrast to these apparently straightforward quotations, 1.242–43 appears to have been cleverly adapted by coupling it with the line preceding in this graffito to reflect on the writer’s own situation. He apparently reported on the end of long tribulations: “Having obtained the opportunity of writing to you, I did not pass it by, so that you could know that I was really well [after all. Even] ‘Antenor was able, having slipped from the midst of the Greeks, to reach Illyrian bays and’ . . . .” Heroic perseverance, indeed.

Graffiti appear on walls for a number of reasons. At times, they serve as comment on or advertizement of the activity in the surrounding area. Often one graffito will elicit another. At other times, they are simply left by an idler who has been offered both time and space. This last seems to be the case with nearly all these Vergilian graffiti, found scattered around town in a variety of contexts.

<sup>6</sup>R. G. Austin, ed., *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Secundus* (Oxford 1964) 27.

However, three (*CIL* IV.5002 = 1.1, *CIL* IV.5012 = 1.234, and *CIL* IV.5020 = 2.14) were found in the same house at IX.2.26, the house of M. Casellius Marcellus, a candidate for aedile in the last years of Pompeii's existence. Some sixty graffiti (a large but not unparalleled number) were found in this house, including an apparent allusion to *Eclogues* 3.1,<sup>7</sup> and it is this abundance of Vergilian matter that makes it more likely that *CIL* IV.5020 (*ductores Danaum . . .*) is a citation of Vergil than of Lucretius. Clearly someone in this house was very fond of our author.

Students normally wonder at the quality of the writing in those examples in which it has been preserved. Perhaps it is most important to remember that this was not writing in our sense of the word at all. These letters were scratched into plaster, and making any but straight lines was extremely difficult. A look back at the examples will also show how long, undulating strokes helped to compensate for the lack of short, curving lines. Nevertheless, some Pompeians seem to have been especially fond of exaggerated uprights (*hastae*).

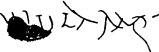
For each graffiti, I have included notation of findspot. These can be exploited first for an introduction to (or better, personal recollection of) the extent of the ruins and the necessity for the numbering system (*Regio.Insula.Ianua*) developed under Giuseppe Fiorelli in the mid-nineteenth century. Then, specific names of rooms can be used to lead to study of the atrium-style house, so familiar from these ruins. Be sure, too, to note the wide dispersal of the graffiti from the atria and peristyles of private houses to public buildings as diverse as the basilica, a gladiator school, and a brothel. Vergil seems to have come to mind in a surprising variety of circumstances.

Finally, these graffiti, all written before the destruction of Pompeii in A.D. 79, suggest the rapidity with which Vergil's work became "classic." Indeed, so well known was 1.1 that it was even adapted to honor some fullers (cleaners) and their tutelary goddess Minerva in the form of her owl.

*CIL* IV.9131 (found outside the doorway of IX.13.5, house of Fabius Ululitremulus):

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<sup>7</sup> *CIL* IV.5007.

FULLONES  ULULAMQUE CANO, NON ARMA VIRUMQUE

“Fullones ululamque cano, non arma virumque”

*Indiana University*

JAMES L. FRANKLIN, JR.