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GAMES AND A *LUPANAR*: PROSOPOGRAPHY OF A NEIGHBORHOOD IN ANCIENT POMPEII*

At first glance, *CIL* IV. 1190*a*, an announcement of games to be presented at ancient Pompeii, seems to have been recovered in the wrong place:¹

A Sueti Certi
aedilis familia gladiatoria pugnabit Pompeis
pr(idie) k(alendas) iunias venatio et vela erunt
omnibus Nero(nianorum mun)eribus feliciter.

Whereas most advertisements of public events at Pompeii were posted along major streets or near public structures where large numbers of people would see them, this notice was painted on an apparently insignificant wall near the corner of the “Via degli Augustali” and the “Vico del Lupanare” in the most cramped region of the city (Fig. 1).

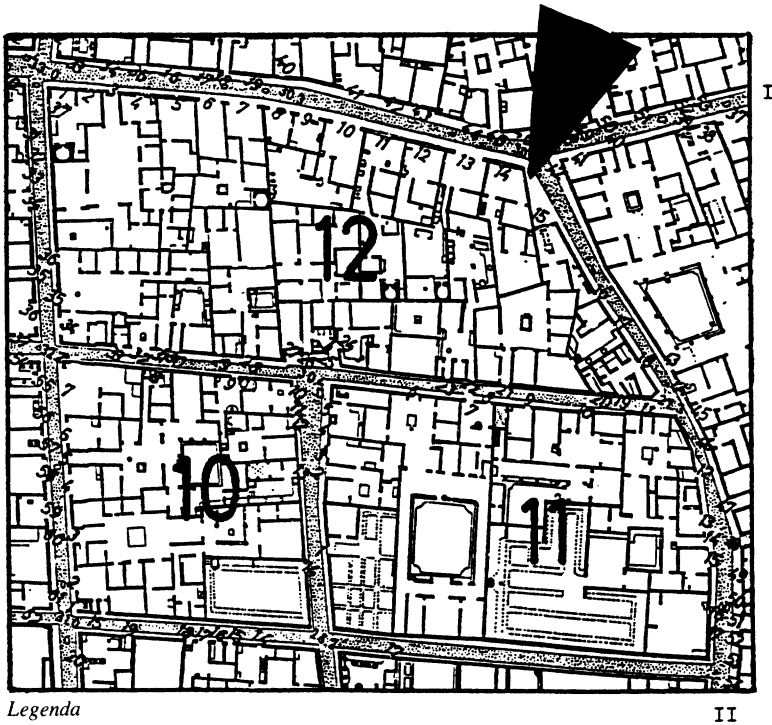
At this location the sign would seem likely to have drawn little attention. Yet nine electoral programmata (*CIL* IV. 817–25), four other painted notices (*CIL* IV. 820*a*, 1190*b–c*, 2166), and five graffiti (*CIL* IV. 2167–70, 3101) were crowded on the same stretch of wall, vying for the eye of the passer-by. This was a billboard of importance.

In fact, the “Vico del Lupanare” here turns south from the “Via degli Augustali” at an obtuse angle (Fig. 2). Rather than following the line of the street as usual, the east wall of block 7.12 was built at a less obtuse angle, and a plot of open land in the shape of a right-angle triangle was set back from the street. Along its base on the south the short wall in which doorway 15 opens rejoins the street on the east; the signs and graffiti accumulated on the east wall of the block opposite the hypotenuse of the triangle.

Here the notices were readily visible to anyone passing the corner, prominent to someone moving west along the “Via degli Augustali.” Although not one of Pompeii’s major thoroughfares, the “Via degli Augustali” must have served as a significant passageway between the “Via Stabiana” and the north end of the forum. Indeed, concentration of electoral programmata along the street apparently indicates that it was among the city’s

*An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the annual convention of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, 10–13 April, 1985. I wish to thank an anonymous reader for comments helpful in revising the manuscript for publication.

¹Most recently discussed by P. Sabbatini Tumolesi, *Gladiatorum paria: annunci di spettacoli gladiatorii a Pompei*, Tituli: Pubblicazioni dell’ Università di Roma I (Rome 1980) 52–53, whose restoration I follow. For convenience I have numbered the three inscriptions recorded at *CIL* IV. 1190 as *a–c*.



Legenda

I: "Via degli Augustali" (E–W street)

II: "Vico del Lupanare" (N–S street)

Arrow marks wall outside *caupona* of Paris

Fig. 1: Plan of Pompeii. Region 7, Blocks 10–12 Shaded. (Eschebach, *Die städtebauliche Entwicklung des antiken Pompeji*)

most trafficked.² Contrary to first impression, *CIL* IV. 1190a was well placed to attract the attention of passers-by.

More important for all the writing on this wall, however, was the triangular plot of land itself. Offering the only open space in which people could gather in this tightly built region of the city, this tiny *piazzetta* will have served as a social center of the neighborhood. Along its south side stood the *caupona* of Paris, at the main entrance to which (7.12.15) a service counter opened directly onto the *piazzetta* to serve clientele there as well as in the back and, perhaps, upper rooms of the establishment.³ One can envision a withdrawn

²On the postings of programmata, see J. L. Franklin, Jr., *Pompeii: The Electoral Programmata, Campaigns and Politics, A.D. 71–79*, *PMAAR* 28 (Rome 1980) 87–92.

³The *caupona* was identified and its upper floor termed a *hospitium* by M. Della Corte, *Casa degli abitanti di Pompei*, 2nd ed. (Naples 1965) n. 393.

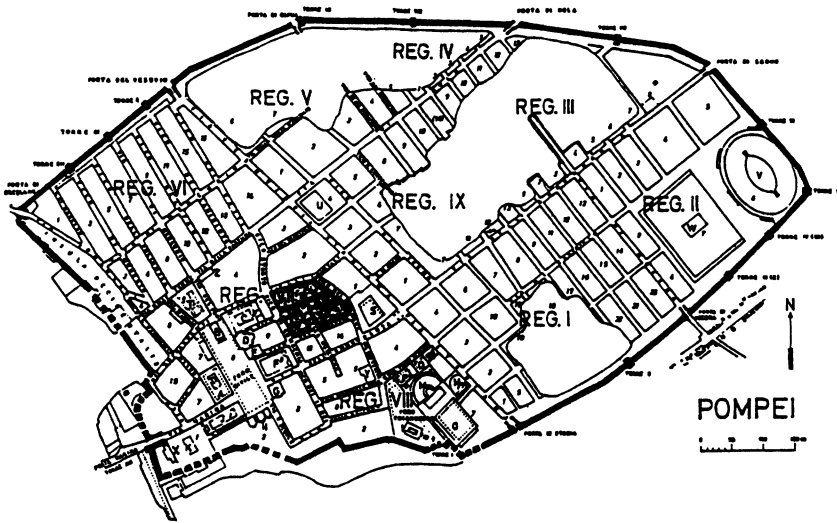


Fig. 2: Pompeii, Region 7, Blocks 10–12. (Eschebach, *Die städtebauliche Entwicklung des antiken Pompeji*)

but busy corner enlivened by a steady flow of traffic, much of it pausing for refreshment.

The *caupona* will have attracted its clientele not only from the “Via degli Augustali,” but also from the immediate environs. Only two doorways from its rear entrance stood the famous *lupanar* (7.12.18–20) today visited by nearly all tourists, and the region was dotted with *cellae meretriciae*. At the corner of the next block was the city’s largest *hospitium* (7.11.11,14), the capacity of which has been estimated at over fifty; across the street to the east stood a second *hospitium* at the sign of the Red Elephant (7.1.44–45).⁴ Loitering became such a problem that nearly opposite the Red Elephant the painting of a giant serpent and the legend of *CIL* IV.813 invited the slow of foot to move along:

otiosis [*sic*] locus hic non est discede
morator.

While the announcement of the games to be offered by Suettius was addressed to this neighborhood as well as to passers-by, the other notices and graffiti on the wall outside the *caupona* of Paris refer almost exclusively to local residents. Working with these latter we can explore the area, examining a little-known but intriguing stratum of society.

⁴On these properties, see Della Corte (above, n. 3) nn. 389–99 and 402–3.

Vesbinus

Painted alongside *CIL* IV. 1190*a* was a second inscription which was lettered by the same sign-painter (*scriptor*) and described the posting of the announcement of games.⁵

CIL IV. 1190*b*:
 scr(ipsit)
 Secundus
 de albante Vic(tor)e
 adstante
 Vesbino
 . em . . . tore
 . . ri . . . o⁶

Secundus and Victor were named as letterers of other signs scattered around town and presumably were professionals.⁷ Vesbinus, however, is nowhere else referred to as a sign-painter and does not belong to the team, as the simple *adstante* of line 4 indicates.⁸

A Vesbinus was named again in an electoral programma directly across the street and has been identified as a cobbler along with Menecrates in the shop (7.1.41–42) just outside of which the poster was found.⁹

CIL IV. 636:
 (A) Vettium Caprasium
 Felicem aed(ilem) v(iis) a(edibus) s(acris) p(ublicisque) p(rocurendis) o(rant)
 v(os) f(aciatis) Menecrates
 et Vesbinus rog(ant) scribit Ascaules¹⁰

Rather than a nondescript member of a troupe of sign-painters, Vesbinus the cobbler was the person standing by when the announcement of games was painted. Sign-painters generally worked at night, presumably to avoid daytime traffic that endangered their ladders and paints, and the presence of Vesbinus was hence apparently unusual enough to provoke comment, although a more colorful scenario might develop if the final two lines of *CIL* IV. 1190*b* could be interpreted adequately.

Vesbinus' partner Menecrates was also named on the rear wall of the *piazzetta*. Just below *CIL* IV. 1190*a* was a programma describing him as asleep to his duty to support his patron for the office of aedile.¹¹

⁵*CIL* IV. 1190: "Illa scr. *Secundus* et q.s. eadem manu qua 1190 v. 4 iuxta adscripta esse testatur Fior(elli)." On *scriptores* and their *modus operandi*, see J. L. Franklin, Jr., "Notes on Pompeian Prosopography: *Programmatum Scriptores*," *CPomp* 4 (1978) 54–74.

⁶Although the reading of line 3 is unequivocal, it is clear that "*dealbante*" should be taken as one word.

⁷Franklin (above, n. 5) 69–72.

⁸Cf. E. Magaldi, "Le iscrizioni parietali pompeiane con particolare riguardo al costume," *AttiNapoli* n.s. 11 (1920–30), parte 2, 63; and Sabbatini Tumolesi (above, n. 1) 52.

⁹Della Corte (above, n. 3) nn. 352–53.

¹⁰On the formulaic abbreviations in this programma, see Franklin (above, n. 2) 19–20.

¹¹On the image of sleep and awakening in the programmata, see Franklin (above, n. 2) 23.

CIL IV. 822:

M Holconius Priscum aed(ilem)
Menecrates cliens b dormis

Between the rear entrance to the *caupona* of Paris and the *lupanar* at the southeast corner of the block opened a side door (7.12.17) to a fullery or *lanifricaria*, the main entrance to which was around the corner at 7.12.21. It was to the owner of this establishment, also slow to announce his political allegiance, that the last of the inscriptions recorded at CIL IV. 1190 was presumably addressed.¹²

CIL IV. 1190c: lanifricari
 dormis

Africanus

Two other programmata found on the wall near the announcement of games named another resident of the neighborhood, Africanus.

CIL IV. 817:
 m Sabin(um)
aed(ilem) p(rocurandis) a(edibus) Africanus rog(at)¹³

CIL IV. 818: M Cerrinium aed(ilem)
 Africanus rog(at) cum Victore
 [h]ic [et ubique]

On the basis of a notice recording his death in the first *cella* to the right of its door, Africanus has been identified as the owner of the famous *lupanar* at the southeast corner of the block (7.12.18–20).¹⁴

CIL IV. 2258a: Africanus moritur
 scribet puer Rusticus
 condisces cui dolet pro Africano¹⁵

The Victor named in the second programma seems to have been the same *scriptor* who helped Secundus letter CIL IV. 1190a and may as well have been the visitor to the *lupanar* referred to in five graffiti (CIL IV. 2209, 2218, 2258, 2260, 2294) found there, one directly above the notice of Africanus' death.¹⁶

¹²Cf. Della Corte (above, n. 3) n. 394, who believed the phrase indicated that the woolworker refused to stop his work when the announcement of games was being posted.

¹³*Aedilis procurandis aedibus* is apparently a shortened version of the proper title, *aedilis viis aedibus sacris publicisque procurandis* (see above, n. 10).

¹⁴Della Corte (above, n. 3) n. 395. H. Eschebach, *Die städtebauliche Entwicklung des antiken Pompeji*, Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung, Ergänzungsheft 17 (Heidelberg 1970) 142, considers Victor a second owner, but see below and n. 16.

¹⁵On final "e" for "i" in *scribet*, line 2, see V. Väänänen, *Le latin vulgaire des inscriptions pompéiennes*, 2nd ed. (Berlin 1959) 21. On *condisces* for *condiscens*=*condiscipulus* in line 3, see Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *doleo* B (α).

¹⁶*Scriptores* often added their names to programmata in this manner (Franklin [above, n. 5] 55). If correctly restored, *hic et ubique* also refers to Victor the *scriptor*; it was formulaic for *scriptores* lettering signs for a candidate all around town (Magaldi [above, n. 8] 57–58).

CIL IV. 2258: Victor cum Attine
hic fuit¹⁷

Over 120 graffiti were transcribed in this *lupanar*, although few have been studied.¹⁸ For the most part, they were straightforward and quickly defined the nature of the establishment.

CIL IV. 2175: hic ego puellas multas
futui

CIL IV. 2176: Felix
bene futuis

Yet several named persons who can be traced elsewhere as well and who take on interesting personalities.

Hermeros

Two graffiti here named a Hermeros.

CIL IV. 2192: X V I I K I V L
Hermeros
cum Phile
tero et Caphi
so hic futu
erunt¹⁹

CIL IV. 2195: Hermeros hic futuit

A number of men who carried this cognomen are known at Pompeii. In labels on amphorae both C. Cornelius Hermeros, producer of garum (*CIL* IV. 2583, 5569, 5578, 5597, 5638, 5651, 5716 [=2588]), and L. Iunius Hermeros (*CIL* IV. 5653 [=2650]) are attested, while from graffiti Q. Vettius Hermeros is known at the amphitheatre (*CIL* IV. 1109 cf. *Add.* p. 696), a simple Hermeros (*CIL* IV. 3969) in the house of Epidius Fortunatus (1.3.3), and a Hermeros or Hermes (*CIL* IV. 5082–83) in the house at 9.5.6.²⁰ Yet neither of the first two of these men is known to have written graffiti, while the last three simply scratched up their names, the last two in the houses in which they lived. The Hermeros in the *lupanar*, to the contrary, was flamboyant and fond of detail; he therefore seems likely to be the man who left the similar graffiti on the side of the “Casa del Poeta Tragico” across from the “Terme del Foro.”

¹⁷See J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London 1982) 121, who believes that *Attine* should be *Attide* and that the graffiti records two men’s diversions with unnamed partners, as in *CIL* IV. 2192 below. Mau (*CIL* IV. p. 748) and Väänänen (above, n. 15) 86 more simply take *Attine* for *Attide*, the ablative of *Atthis*.

¹⁸Copies of many graffiti were also made and reproduced in the *Tavolae* at the end of the first volume of *CIL* IV, although the practice was discontinued in later supplements. Not enough were published to allow study of the hands in which they were written, and analysis therefore must proceed on the basis of content alone.

¹⁹Line 1 is the date, 17 days before the kalends of July, or 15 June. Väänänen (above, n. 15) 114 notes that all the names in this graffiti are to be taken as the subjects of the plural verb.

²⁰Della Corte (above, n. 3) n. 523 identified the house of Epidius Fortunatus.

- CIL IV. 1254: Iucunda Hermeros va(le)
 CIL IV. 1256: Sabine calos Hermeros te amat
 Sabine calos Hermiroeteamata [sic]²¹

He was perhaps also named in the scribblings just left of the doorway to the women's wing of the baths.

- CIL IV. 1466: ερσμας ερμτωι
 ερμας
 ζωτας
 ερμερωσ

Sollemnis

The name *Sollemnis* is more unusual; it appeared three times in the *lupanar*. The first two of these graffiti were nearly duplicates, the third a simple record of his presence.

- CIL IV. 2185: S(ol)lemnes
 b(e)ne futues²²
 CIL IV. 2186: Sollemnes
 (b)ene futues
 CIL IV. 2218b: Sollemnes hic

Although differently spelled, the name recurs only one place in all Pompeii, in a fragmentary graffito nearby at 9.2.23–24, where it is nevertheless clear that sex is again the issue.

- CIL IV. 4995: Sulemnis
 cun(n)u(m) ling(it)²³

Sollemnis is likely to have lived in this latter area, although 9.2.24 was another *hospitium* in which he may have been staying only temporarily.

Syneros

A *Syneros* was twice named in the *lupanar*, once in Greek and once in Roman script.

- CIL IV. 2252, 2253: Syneros Κυνερωσ [sic]
 καλος βινεις

The name recurs only one place in all Pompeii, just around the corner at 7.12.14 in one of the back rooms of the school of the Corneli, where he apparently worked and lived.²⁴

²¹A second line (*I . . mni . . tii*) is recorded at CIL IV. 1254, but Zangemeister noted, "Eum verum alienum a priore nec terminatum esse putaverim." No Hermeros has ever been traced in this part of town. I read CIL IV. 1256 as salute and greeting rather than indication of Hermeros' sexual interest.

²²On final "e" for "i" in this name and the verb *futuo*, see Väänänen (above, n. 15) 21.

²³On the variant spelling, see Väänänen (above, n. 15) 26–27, who suggests that *Sulemnis* may reflect Oscan influence.

²⁴The *ludus* was identified by Della Corte (above, n. 3) nn. 350–51.

CIL IV. 1700: dīced nobis Sīneros et sopio
 ut merdas edatis (q)ui scripseras
 sopionis²⁵

Although the end of line 1 is unclear, the tone of the whole is certain. The end of line 2 and all of line 3 appear to have been added by a second hand to turn the graffito back on the original writer.²⁶

Ikarus

With the mention of Ikarus the evidence grows more interesting, for the theta following his name seems to record his death.²⁷

CIL IV. 2177: Ikarus Θ

Again the name is little known at Pompeii. There are only six attestations, and three are nearby, one (*CIL* IV. 2350) in the “Casa di Sirico” (7.1.25), and two slightly more distant in the “Casa del Citarista” (1.4.5). The Ikarus of the “Casa del Citarista,” however, was almost certainly the man named in the *lupanar*, for the Salvius who signed the second graffito in that house can be traced at the *lupanar* as well:

CIL IV. 2369: Ikarus

CIL IV. 2375: Ampliate
 Icarus
 te pedicat
 Salvius
 scripsit

Salvius

There seems, first of all, to be a reference to Salvius’ daughter in the *lupanar* on the same wall as the apparent notice of Ikarus’ death.²⁸

CIL IV. 2173: Salvi (f)ilia

Given the subject of *CIL* IV. 2375 and Salvius’ prominent signature, it may well be that these graffiti are intertwined, perhaps traces of hurt pride and argument. If so, *CIL* IV. 2177 may be more Salvius’ angry threat against the man responsible for the reference to his daughter than a notice of death. *CIL* IV. 2375 would then represent his attempt to blacken Ikarus’ character with his master, L. Popidius Ampliatus.²⁹ Assuming that Ikarus left his own name in the *lupanar* and in *CIL* IV. 2369 in the “Casa del Citarista,” the theta—added later in the *lupanar*—and the variant spelling of *CIL* IV. 2375 can be attributed to Salvius.

²⁵In line 1 *dīced* stands for *dicit*; the rare *sopio* = “penis” (see *CIL* IV. p. 464). On the variant “i” for “y” in this name, see Väänänen (above, n. 15) 33; an apparently separate Synoris was connected with the *officina vestiaria* at 6.11.13 (*CIL* IV. 1397, 1398, 1408).

²⁶See at *CIL* IV. 1700.

²⁷See R. G. Watson, “Theta Nigrum,” *JRS* 42 (1952) 56–62.

²⁸This was a casual graffito; Zangemeister at *CIL* IV. 2173: “Ceterum nec eo loco nec iis litteris scriptus est, ut meretricis vel cellae titulus esse cum Fiorellio putandus sit.”

²⁹Identified by Della Corte (above, n. 3) nn. 497–498e.

At any rate, Salvius was at other times a boon companion. On the far side of the block from the *lupanar* he was twice hailed in graffiti left in the *hospitium/caupona* at 7.12.34–36 by his pal Pyrrichus.

CIL IV. 2154: (P)yrri-chus Salvio sodali sal(utem)

CIL IV. 2155: C Cominius Pyrrichus et
L Novius Priscus et L Campius
Primigenius fanatici tres
a pulvinar Synethaei
hic fuerunt cum Martiale
sodale Actiani Anicetiani
sinceri Salvio sodali feliciter³⁰

Musaeus

One last man, Musaeus, can be traced from the *lupanar*. He was first mentioned in the Greek *CIL* IV. 2216:

Μουσα(ο)ς [sic]
ἐνθαδε
βεινει.

Zangemeister noted that a sigma was intended where there was an omicron in the middle of the first line; the correct spelling and Greek script lead back to the wall outside the *caupona* of Paris, where the name is garbled in *CIL* IV. 3101:

Ερμουσαους [sic]
Ερμα Μουσαους [sic].

Ismenus

Here, too, there are nearly duplicate references to one last man, Ismenus, whose name recurs nowhere else in all Pompeii:

CIL IV. 2169: Ismenus
fellator

CIL IV. 2170: Ismenus
felator [sic].

As might have been anticipated from the physical characteristics of the neighborhood, these Pompeians were not among the city's notables. Their very names—never more than a single element and variously spelled—indicate just the opposite. Yet they and their like throughout the ancient world have generally disappeared, leaving little or no evidence.

At Pompeii, where such evidence is preserved, prosopographical study has preferred to concentrate on grander figures who were recommended in electoral programmata or whose elegant townhouses spurred interest. The

³⁰While lines 3 and 4 remain cryptic, the *Actiani Anicetiani* of line 6 were members of a local fan club of the pantomimist Actius Anicetus (see J. L. Franklin, Jr., "Pantomimists at Pompeii: Actius Anicetus and His Troupe," forthcoming in *AJP* 107 [1986]).

focus has been either on the entire corpus of inscriptions or on a circumscribed few found in conjunction with a specific property. In either case, lesser individuals have attracted only passing interest—if by chance they left any record of their existence at all.

On the wall outside the *caupona* of Paris, a semipublic location bordering a tiny *piazzetta* where people could gather and relax, abundant and intriguingly blended evidence was recorded. Mingled with a public announcement of games and political notices were private graffiti studded with names and references that allow the careful student to begin to re-populate the region. While the prominent A. Suetlius Certus doubtless anticipated fame from his games, the idling graffiti-writers did not expect to be tracked around the city nearly two thousand years later. Their trails are nevertheless clear, first to the *lupanar* down the street and then into the neighborhood at large.

Their graffiti reflect a barely literate class, uncertain of spelling and weak in grammar, but fully involved in the passions of life. Sexual concerns, insults, and banter figure prominently, although they are perhaps emphasized here by the centrality of the *lupanar* in this study. Enthusiasms for games lie behind the announcement of Suetlius' presentation, and Salvius and his pals even displayed a fondness for pantomimes. There are traces of argument, and good companionship as well.

To a degree, the writing on the walls of this cramped and heavily populated region of the city attests intense personal interaction which the more spacious regions of the city lacked. It also exposes those localized activities that took place within the walls. Yet the glimpse of humanity that analysis of these graffiti offers is too common to go unrecognized anywhere.

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