

## Greetings, Salutations, and Warnings: The Role and Dynamism of Mosaic Inscriptions at Pompeian Thresholds

From the friendly “*Have*” of the *Casa dei Vettii* [VI.12.2] to the cautionary “*Cave canem*” of the *Casa di Poeta Tragico* [VI.8.5], mosaic inscriptions dot the city of Pompeii, greeting or confronting visitors at the thresholds of several private homes. These mosaics have often been compared to modern welcome mats, and while this comparison is apt, these mosaics functioned as far more than areas to wipe one’s feet before entering a home. Rather, they worked as dynamic nodes of interaction between viewer and image that were utilized to safeguard the house.

Doorways, thresholds, crossroads, and other points of transition were closely tied to ambiguities in the ancient world and were spaces that were often associated with danger (Clarke, 2007). Acknowledging the uncertainties associated with doorways, this paper studies the mosaic inscriptions found at the thresholds of Pompeian homes to investigate how the inscriptions responded to ideas of spatial vulnerability. This presentation combines visual, textual, spatial, and archival analysis to examine three lesser-known mosaic inscriptions in Pompeii: “*Cras credo*” at the *Casa del giardino d’Ercole* [II.8.6] (Jashemski, 1979; Stefani, 2005); “*Salve*” [CIL X 873b] of the *Casa del Salve* [VI.1.25] (Breton, 1869), and “*Salve lucru*” [CIL X 874] from the *Domus Vedi Sirici* [VII.1.47] (Curtis, 1984; Della Corte, 1965). Ranging from simple greetings to enigmatic phrases, these three examples demonstrate the range of approaches taken to formulating mosaic threshold inscriptions and their potency as tools of viewer address and control.

Given the dual function of the inscriptions as words and decoration, this paper examines every case study as both text and image to suggest that their visual elements complemented and underscored the ideas expressed through their words and phrases. In so doing, this paper

proposes that the presence of mosaic inscriptions in domestic passageways worked to alert viewers to the transitional nature of the space, while engaging onlookers through visual, textual, and physical interactions. Spatial analysis of the plans and locations of the *Casa del giardino d'Ercole*, *Casa del Salve*, and *Domus Vedi Sirici* reveal that the presence of these mosaics may have been a direct response to a structure's surroundings within the topography of the city. Finally, this paper addresses the fleeting nature of these inscriptions, two of which have disappeared since they were last documented in the mid-to-late twentieth century (Jashemski, 1979; Carratelli and Baldassarre, 1990). Thus, the mosaic inscriptions that decorate domestic thresholds in Pompeii were not simply passing greetings or opportunities to beautify one's entranceway, but active locales for safeguarding transitional spaces, which can provide key insights into the function of text, image, and cultural belief in Pompeii and the wider Roman world.

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