

Grammar and Graffiti: Using Inscriptions in the Intermediate Latin College Classroom

Latin epigraphy, long recognized as an invaluable aspect of historical studies, is often underappreciated as a potential tool in the teaching of the Latin language, particularly at the intermediate level. In this paper, I will present a case study of a new course created for the fall 2009 term: third-semester college Latin taught primarily with inscriptions, graffiti, and dipinti. This is the first time that such a third-semester course has been attempted at the University of Vermont, and it takes place in the larger context of collegiate Latin instruction that commonly reads prose or poetry (e.g., Cicero or Catullus) in the third semester. The course forms a bridge between the artificial grammar-driven Latin commonly found in introductory-level textbooks and the full complexity of literary Latin, while also teaching students about the use of Latin among actual Romans from different walks of life, location, and time periods, thus taking Latin “out of the textbook” and into the wider context of Roman civilization. This presentation considers some practical, pedagogical applications of epigraphy as a teaching and organizing tool not only for language skills, but also for the opportunity to enrich the class experience with topics ranging from art and architecture to history to politics to archaeology and more. Specifically, this paper covers three field-tested modules of the course : an introduction to Latin epigraphy and thorough review of grammar via widely assorted inscriptions organized by grammatical and historical content, with materials drawn from Hartnett (2008), Courtney (1995), *CIL*, and the Vindolanda letters; inscriptions, graffiti, and dipinti specifically from Pompeii (Wallace 2005) as a means both to teach language and to understand better a Roman city through its epigraphical evidence, accompanied by selections of Latin prose from Seneca, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger; and the complete text of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* as the culmination of the course, with a postscript on epigraphy in the city of Rome (Lansford 2009). The course goal is for students to go into the fourth semester better prepared for Latin literature both in terms of language skills and a grasp of Roman civilization and history.