

Promoting Women in the Latin Classroom through Graffiti

As has been noted often, many high school and college-level Latin textbooks are decidedly male centric (Churchill 2006, Harwood 1992, Sebesta CAMWS 2013). Churchill proposes many remedies for this problem including revising current textbooks and materials, augmenting vocabulary lists to include women's activities, and including written sources by or about women. She advocates using medieval works from authors such as Egeria, instead of Pompeian inscriptions to introduce the study of women to the classroom. In this paper, I will show that Pompeian inscriptions and graffiti can be used in the Latin classroom in order to emphasize and examine the role of women in antiquity. I demonstrate practical applications of graffiti and inscriptions, common pitfalls, and useful pedagogical materials I have used in my own classroom. Finally, I argue that graffiti and inscriptions can be used to explore much more about the role and lives of women than has been previously advocated.

In this paper, I present three sources of material that can be used to highlight the role of women in antiquity: *programmata*, graffiti written by women, and epitaphs. These three sources vary in style and substance and thus introduce Latin students to a variety of syntactical and grammatical structures. Students gain familiarity with Latin inscriptional language and the colloquial language used in everyday graffiti.

One source of pedagogical material about women is the *programmata*, political posters which proliferated the towns of Pompeii. Although they were not able to vote, women sometimes appear as the *rogatores* for such political posters and ask their fellow citizens to vote for their supported candidate.¹ These posters can be used to begin discussion about the civic roles of women and men in Roman political life and the ways in which, even without many civic privileges, women were active in the political sphere. I pair these posters with a discussion of

¹ Examples include CIL IV 207, 7873, 3678, 6610 and others

several inscriptions found in Pompeii that highlight the ways in which women were able to participate actively in political life within the town.² These inscriptions show how women were able to use and navigate a system that inherently discriminated against them.

Latin students benefit greatly from a discussion of literacy in the ancient world. As they strive to become literate in Latin, they are interested to find out who was literate in the Roman world and to what degree. The literacy levels of women in antiquity is still a debated point, but the large amount of graffiti written in Pompeii from a woman's viewpoint may prove that literacy was not restricted to men and was much more widespread than was previously imagined.³ Further, these graffiti provide opportunity for discussion about Roman naming patterns, daily life, and education in antiquity.

A further source of information about women in antiquity is epitaphs. Beyond the name and age of the deceased, epitaphs frequently discuss or depict her occupation.⁴ Further, the dedicator of the epitaph may reveal information about family relations. Epitaphs offer an occasion to discuss the different status levels of women in Pompeii and allow students to imagine what life might have been like for women in each circumstance.

In conclusion, I show three ways in which graffiti and inscriptions from Pompeii may be used to promote the study of women in the Latin classroom. The graffiti allow students to glimpse at and associate with the everyday woman of Pompeii. They shed light on the occupations, desires, and roles of women in antiquity and give a voice to the women who have for too long been forgotten in many Latin textbooks.

² Examples include CIL X. 801 (Eumachia), CIL X. 1030 (Naevolia Tyche); CIL IV 1136 (Julia Felix); CIL X 816 (Mamia)

³ Examples of graffiti written from a woman's point of view or to a woman include CIL IV 1881, 1951, 3117, 4066, 4498, 4637, 5358, 8364,8792b and many others.

⁴ Examples include CIL I 1219, CIL VI 4.25808 and many others

Works Cited

Churchill, Laurie. "Is there a Woman in This Textbook? Feminist Pedagogy and Elementary

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