

Campanian Lovers or Phallic Pun?

Room e of the Suburban Baths of Herculaneum contains some of the best known ancient graffiti from the site (*CIL* 4.10674-10683), including witty boasts of sexual exploits, a message from a lover to his beloved, and a list of snacks for sale. This paper investigates two ancient drawings of human heads among this exuberant collection of graffiti. Using Matteo Della Corte's original field notebooks, I will show how Della Corte's problematic documentation in 1958 and his subsequent publication of the drawings has led to fanciful misinterpretations, linking them to Primigenia, a famous Campanian courtesan and Hermeros, one of her lovers, who are named in a textual graffito on the same wall (*CIL* 10676). By tracing the publication history of these graffiti heads, I will demonstrate the dangers of biographical readings of graffiti and how a visual phallic pun in the form of two drawings of human heads came to be known as illustrations of two ancient Campanian lovers.