

## Virgil and the Literary Graffiti in the House of M. Casellius Marcellus

This paper explores four quotations of Virgil found in the House of M. Casellius Marcellus in Pompeii (IX.2.26) by analyzing their spatial and performative context, including the literary contributions of a certain Zosimus, a poet in graffiti unknown beyond their verses in this house. Nearly 70 quotations of the *Aeneid* and *Eclogues* have been found in Pompeii, roughly half of which are one or two words from the first lines of *Aeneid* 1 and 2. The ‘Virgilian’ landscape of the House of M. Casellius Marcellus is especially intriguing first because the house contains more Virgilian quotations than any other domestic space and the second most of any space in Pompeii, after the Palaestra. Furthermore, the quotations break the trend of those found elsewhere: only one quotes *Aeneid* 1.1 (CIL 4.5002); two quote other lines of the *Aeneid* and are the only instances of these lines found in Pompeii (1.234, CIL 4.5012; and 2.14, CIL 4.5020); and the fourth ‘quotation’ is in fact an adaptation of *Eclogues* 3.1 into a new metrical line, erotic in nature (CIL 4.5007). The author of this adaptation identifies himself as Zosimus, the author of several other graffiti in the same location near the garden, including another line and a half in hexameter verse.

The House of M. Casellius Marcellus derives its name from a political programma found next to the front door, implying that the owner of this house, if not Casellius Marcellus himself, was politically active. Though evidence of rich decoration once existed, the house is not large and what has been named the ‘tablinum’ lies outside its familiar location on the central axis from atrium to garden. Most of the graffiti in this house are located in a pseudo-peristyle between the tablinum and the garden space at the rear. The pseudo-peristyle represents both a transitory and stationary space in the house: a passage from the tablinum to the garden, but also a place where

people lingered long enough to scratch graffiti into the walls and pilasters. A large cluster of graffiti, including the adaptation of *Eclogues* 3.1 and a quotation from *Aeneid* 1.234, appear on the garden-side pilaster opposite the doorway of the tablinum. The blended nature of this space is reflected in the graffiti, which range from full quotations of ‘canonical’ texts to erotic, but no less literary, compositions.

The quotation of *Aeneid* 1.1 (*Arma Virumque*) appears in the atrium, the more ‘public,’ *negotium*-focused part of the house. The adaptation of *Eclogues* 3.1, which reads, “*Det mihi Damoeta felicior quam Phasiphae haec omnia scripsit Zosimus*” (“May Damoeta give it to me, happier than Pasiphaë; Zosimus wrote all these things”), is written on a pilaster in the pseudo-peristyle before the garden, a more ‘private,’ *otium*-focused space. The literary transition from direct quotation of Rome’s national epic to erotic adaptation mirrors the house’s transition from ‘public’ to ‘private,’ from which we may draw conclusions about a Pompeian’s approach to Virgil and perception of domestic space. The self-named Zosimus was clearly a prolific creator of graffiti in the pseudo-peristyle. In addition to his adaptation of *Eclogues* 3.1, another metrical line (CIL 4.5009) is attributed to him: “--- *felices omnes frustra que vocantur quem sufferere postest nemo*” (“they are all called happy and in vain, he whom no can bear”). This appears to be an original composition and may be included in the “*haec omnia*” Zosimus proudly claims in his other line.

Rebecca R. Benefiel (2010) has emphasized the importance of reading ‘domestic’ graffiti as a dialogue between the inscribers and readers, but this approach has yet to be applied to quotations of ‘canonical’ literary texts. Likewise, Kristina Milnor (2009) recognized that many Virgilian quotations in Pompeii lend themselves to dialogue grammatically (using imperatives, vocatives, etc.) and contextually (by quoting speeches given in the poem). This paper aims to

build on this by discussing the dialogue between these quotations and other instances of graffiti nearby in the spatial context of the house. Zosimus likely did not hold an elite status, nor were they engaging in rote repetition of well-known Virgilian quotations. They seem to engage in the familiar opposition between epic and erotic precisely where the domestic space moves from *negotium* to *otium*, as if to underscore their poetic voice balanced against Virgil's.

## References

Benefiel, Rebecca R. 2010. Dialogues of Ancient Graffiti in the House of Maius Castricius in Pompeii. *American Journal of Archaeology* 114(1): 59-101.

Milnor, Kristina. 2009. *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.