

Back from the edge, a de-centred approach to ancient graffiti in Brazilian research

De vuelta desde las periferias, otro enfoque posible de los grafitos antiguos desde la investigación brasileña

Periferietatik bueltan: grafiti zaharrei buruzko beste ikuspegi posible bat Brasilgo ikerketa batean oinarrituta

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Recibido / Noiz jaso den: 11/01/2024

Aceptado / Noiz onartu den: 21/03/2024

Abstract

The paper starts with the trajectory of ancient graffiti study since the 19th century. This study was well inserted in the scholarly context, paying particular attention to the differences of language use in relation to standard learned Latin (or Greek). In the 20th century, beyond scholarship, there was an overwhelming normative and historical perception that graffiti represented most of all unlearned people, those who were unable to have access to learned culture. This improved the knowledge about graffiti, but it continued to focus on distance from the rule. In the late 20th century there was a growing critical approach, considering that graffiti may produce evidence about people's daily lives. In this context, the edge has been able to produce a plethora of innovative interpretation. Brazil produced a critical approach, centring on a couple of subjects: popular culture and female agency. Popular culture means highlighting the originality of ordinary people culture. Then, within this approach, female agency. The authors then discuss some graffiti, enabling to discuss popular culture and female agency. The paper concludes by stressing how graffiti may be a way of promoting life, fostering living together, against hatred and destruction.

Keywords

Roman graffiti; ordinary people; popular culture; women.

Summary

1. ANCIENT GRAFFITI IN MODERN CONTEXT. 2. ANCIENT GRAFFITI IN THE PERIPHERY: BRAZIL AND THE UNDERDOGS. 3. WOMEN OF ANTIQUITY: A PERSPECTIVE FROM BRAZILIAN STUDIES. 4. CONCLUSIONS: ANCIENT GRAFFITI FOSTERING DIVERSITY AND LIVING TOGETHER. BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES.

* The authors owe thanks to Alfredo González-Ruibal and Carlos Magno Guimarães. We also mention the institutional support of Brazilian National Science (CNPq), São Paulo Science Foundation (FAPESP), Unisağrado, Federal University of Paraná, Unicamp and Proyecto de I+D+i La Antigüedad modernizada: Grecia y Roma al servicio de la idea de civilización, orden y progreso en España y Latinoamérica, PID2021-123745NB-I00, MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 y FEDER as Renata S. Garraffoni is member of the project. The responsibility for the ideas is solely our own.

Resumen. El artículo parte de la trayectoria del estudio del grafito antiguo desde el siglo XIX. Se inserta en el contexto académico, y presta especial atención a las diferencias en el uso de la lengua en relación con el latín (o griego) culto aprendido. En el siglo XX, más allá de la tradición académica, ha habido una abrumadora falsa percepción de que el grafito representaba, sobre todo, a las personas incultas, a aquellas que no podían tener acceso a una educación culta. Esto mejoró el conocimiento sobre el grafito, pero continuó centrándose en la distancia respecto a la norma culta. A finales del siglo XX ha habido un creciente enfoque crítico, que considera que el grafito puede ofrecer evidencias sobre la gente común. En este contexto, la periferia ha sido capaz de producir una plétora de interpretaciones innovadoras. Brasil adoptó un enfoque crítico, destacando dos temas: la cultura popular y la perspectiva de género. La cultura popular se centra en resaltar la originalidad de la cultura de la gente común. A partir de esta perspectiva, se aborda la cuestión de género. A continuación, las autoras y el autor analizan algunos grafitis, lo que facilita la discusión sobre la cultura popular y la perspectiva femenina. El artículo concluye destacando cómo el grafito puede promover la vida, fomentar la convivencia y contrarrestar el odio y la destrucción.

Palabras clave: grafitis antiguos; gente común; cultura popular; mujeres.

Laburpena. Artikuluak antzinako grafiti zaharren XIX. mendeaz geroztiko ibilbidea aztertzen du. Testuinguru akademikokoa da, eta arreta berezia jartzen du hizkuntzaren erabilera desberdinetan, erreferentziatzat hartuz ikasitako latin (edo greko) kultura. XX. mendean, tradizio akademikoaz haratago izugarri zabaldutako uste oker batek esaten zuen grafitiak batez ere kulturarik gabeko pertsonen adierazpide zirela, hezkuntza jasoa izateko aukerarik ez zutenena. Horrek grafitiei buruzko jakintza zabaldu zuen, baina azpimarra arau kultuarekiko distantzian jartzen zuen oraindik ere. XX. mendean amaieran, gero eta gehiago hazi zen grafitiek jende arruntari buruzko ebidentziak eman ditzaketela dioen ikuspegi kritikoa. Testuinguru horretan, periferiak interpretazio berritzaile ugari sortzeko gaitasuna izan du. Brasilek ikuspegi kritikoa hartu zuen, eta bi gai nabarmendu zituen: herri kultura eta genero ikuspegia. Herri kulturaren muina jende arruntaren kulturaren originaltasuna azpimarratzea da. Ikuspegi horretatik abiatuta, generoaren gaia jorratzen da. Egileek, artikulu honetan, grafiti batzuk aztertzen dituzte, eta horrek bide ematen dio herri kulturari eta emakume ikuspegiari buruzko eztabaidari. Artikuluaren amaieran, ondorioztatzen du grafitiek nola sustatzen ahal dituzten bizitza eta bizikidetzeta eta nola indargabetzen ahal dituzten gorrotoa eta suntsipena.

Gako-hitzak: antzinako grafitiak; jende arrunta; herri-kultura; emakumeak.

1. Ancient graffiti in modern context

Ancient monumental inscriptions were never absent from the landscape, particularly in Greek and Latin languages. At least they were reused from ancient monuments to build churches and other mediaeval buildings. Since the late mediaeval period, there was an increasing interest in them, leading to both collecting them and to copying them for study and publication. The humanist thrust was thus key to this new lure to inscriptions in several European countries. Ordinary inscriptions were included in this general move, as with brick or amphora stamps, even if they were not considered as important as monumental epigraphy for several reasons, starting by their abstruse character, such as abbreviations difficult to grasp. Collection of antiquities and curiosities contributed to this move, as

the *instrumentum domesticum* was easy to gather and store¹. Graffiti were thus known even if not so often worth of attention. The discovery of ancient Pompeii since the mid-18th century coincided with a new intellectual move, as the Enlightenment fostered innovative scholarly approaches, grounded on ordering (*Ordnung*) the world, as if taking (*nehmen*) something and classifying (*ratio*, reason) it enabled to tackle with it and understand (*Vernunft, verstehen*) it. In the 19th century beyond collection, as in the previous centuries, there was a push for scholarly composing corpora of inscriptions, classified and studied in order to grasp their meaning. Pompeii produced thousands of graffiti and enabled a whole new window to ancient social and cultural life of ordinary people, or at least well beyond the elites². This led to the development of a much-improved knowledge of the Old Roman Cursive, used in Pompeii and in the apex of literacy in the ancient world in the first couple of centuries of the common era. It was also possible to a much-better understanding of vulgar Latin or *sermo humilis*, beyond the artificial language of the *Satyricon*³. Artificial, for it was a literary devise, not direct utterings as in the case of contemporary graffiti in Pompeii. The publication of thousands of graffiti in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL), volume IV, since 1871, opened new avenues to a series of issues, particularly in relation to language use, social and cultural matters, among others.

The 20th century witnessed meaningful societal and scholarly changes. Social actors, such as workers, women, colonized peoples increased their demands and activities. On the other hand, nationalism, imperialism and fascism led to a clash of perceptions reaching the humanities and the social sciences, in contradictory ways. Among the scholarly trends some are particularly relevant to the study of graffiti, such as the interpretive frameworks of acculturation and social cohesion normative models, notably patriarchy as universal and so supposedly natural. Acculturation was grounded on the understanding that societies are bounded, homogeneous and stable, whilst people are considered as gregarious and law-abiding⁴. So social norms and rules are accepted by a majority and resisted by those with deviant behaviour. Those normative models opposed different sets of homogenous entities, first and foremost civilised superior societies, facing inferior and barbarian ones. Acculturation was thus the flux from lower and deviant people towards upper class and behaved elites, in a process of passage from a lower setting to a superior one. As a consequence, ordinary people scribbling on the walls in ancient Pompeii tended to be perceived as aspiring to reach elite

¹ Funari, 1998/9.

² Funari, 2012.

³ Funari & Garraffoni, 2008.

⁴ Funari & Garraffoni, 2018.

norms and values, and failing miserably to do so. Normative models mean that people were prone to adhere to social norms, so that when graffiti, as often was the case, did not follow them, they were deviant. Patriarchy was the third tenet affecting graffiti: female agency was taken as a sign of unadjusted behaviour, most often considered as hysterical, due to the uterus: *la donna è mobile* translated as a scientific, hormonal phenomenon⁵.

From the mid-20th century there were significant societal and scholarly changes, opening new avenues to people in general and to scholars in particular. Ordinary people were taken more seriously as social agents, including peripheral (or colonized) and gender excluded people, as women. At the same time, all these changes also led to contrary forces, so that there was no one direction. Scholarship followed thus mixed avenues, such as cultural and anthropological moves, but again sometimes taken in nationalist or imperialist nuances. After WWII (1945) and the demise of nazi-fascism, followed by decolonization, despite the Cold War (1947-1989), a series of social movements were increasingly important: civil rights, feminist, anti-war, gay, youngster, among others. Each of them implied the existence of contrary ones, such as racist, sexist, imperialist, homophobic, or middle age and middle class. It is in this mixed context that history from below developed, as well as the study of popular history, subaltern studies, decolonial approaches among others⁶. Graffiti, first modern, then ancient, came to be seen as legitimate cultural expressions. Graffiti spread among urban buildings, monuments and other public contexts as part of the social tensions in open societies, such as the famous May 1968 inscription: *faites l'amour partout* (make love everywhere). Graffiti do surface also in other circumstances too, such as in Prague in August 1968: солдаты идут домой, soldiers, go home. In Brazil there is one that became symbol of resistance against dictatorship «Abaixo a ditadura»⁷, down with the dictatorship. However, graffiti tend to be suppressed in non-open societies context. In any case, graffiti gained a fresh attention and they started to be taken as symptomatic of social issues rather than simply contemptible. In this regard, we highlight the Brazilian project «Acervo epigráfico paulistano», which cataloged the names of architects, engineers and builders found on facades of buildings in the Historic Center of the city of São Paulo with the intention of highlighting the professional importance of these, «ordinary» people, for the history of the city⁸. Contemporary graffiti opened the way to a renewed approach

⁵ Funari, 2023.

⁶ Funari, 2021.

⁷ For the iconic photo, see: <https://jornal.unesp.br/2022/10/21/com-trabalho-exposto-na-sede-da-onu-ascensao-de-kobra-reflete-jornada-do-grafite-em-sao-paulo/>

⁸ Gouveia, Farias & Gatto, 2010. See: https://www.academia.edu/26494983/Acervo_epigr%C3%A1fico_paulistano_etapas_e_procedimentos

to Pompeian graffiti, as was the case in Brazil, in the 1980s⁹. It is symptomatic that this move was taking place in the context of the struggle against a military dictatorship (1964-1985) and for the rule of law, as stated in a new Constitution (1988).

2. Ancient graffiti in the periphery: Brazil and the underdogs

Brazil and Pompeii have crossed paths since the beginning of the ancient city excavation. As one of the authors has recently argued¹⁰, it is part of Brazilian cultural history that is yet to be studied deeply and Reception studies can be a powerful tool for a better understanding of the encounter between ancient Romans and modern Brazilians. It is an instigating challenge because it can highlight how people connect themselves with Roman material culture and also how Classical Archaeology flourished in the country.

The first important meeting of the kingdom of Naples and Brazil was in 1843, resulting from the marriage of D. Pedro II, emperor of Brazil, to Tereza Cristina. Tereza Cristina was born in Naples in 1822, daughter of the Duke of Calabria, Francis, who later became King Francis I of the Two Sicilies. His mother was infanta Maria Isabel de Bourbon, daughter of King Charles IV of Spain. Because of her connections, Tereza Cristina played a very important role in organising the exchange of Greco-Roman artefacts to native Brazilians ones throughout the museums of the two nations. This policy was the basis to form an important Greco-Roman collection that, until the terrible fire that destroyed the Brazilian National Museum in 2018, was considered the biggest Classical collection in Latin America. Her efforts were fundamental in awarding Brazilians unprecedented contact with Roman cultural material in the 19th century; they enabled a broader base of access to Classical past in general and the Pompeian one in particular and made an impact on the elite's artistic and cultural background. One way in which we are able to perceive the magnitude of this phenomenon is through the newspapers of the time. There were many different types of notices in 19th century Brazilian newspapers on the excavation like, for instance, news that described archaeological findings at Pompeii or that provide information on it, news referring to Vesuvius's volcanic activity, references to literary narratives in which Pompeii appears and played important role, advertisements of products that make direct reference to Pompeii, travel accounts of trips to Pompeii made by important figures, including the royal couple, and also debates on graffiti. Following a very

⁹ Funari, 1987.

¹⁰ Garraffoni, 2023.

conservative approach, the news discussed the sexual contents of the graffiti, debated on how gossip could destroy the reputation of noble men or the danger of this habit of writing on the wall¹¹.

These news interests us here because they highlight graffiti were known by the Brazilian audience almost at the same moment they were discovered and reported. But, as with most parts of scholarly perception of the time, they were understood as immoral or curiosity, as the written Latin on the walls became known as *sermo humilis*. This means the news followed the main normative discourse that was challenged only by Marxist approaches that were developed in the early 20th century. As Marxists seek evidence that could aid their study of popular culture and foment ways to approach Roman History from a non-elitist perspective, graffiti emerged, for the first time, as sources of Roman daily lives. Although Abbott¹² and Tanzer¹³ wrote pioneering Marxist contributions, only in late 20th century graffiti turned to be considered as important evidence for access to non-elite culture (slaves, poor persons who were not slaves, those who were not considered citizens, women, children, people from urban and rural areas), thereby joining in the notion that material and visual culture are fundamental for a more varied study of Roman society. This could be considered the second important encounter between Brazil and Pompeii, but not from elites' perspective, as in the 19th century, but from middle class scholars who fought for freedom of speech in the end of Brazilian dictatorship. A very different Brazilian political context that was also important to reshape Brazilian scholarship approach to Classical Archaeology and Epigraphy.

The struggle against the military dictatorship led to several liberalizing measures, starting with amnesty (1979), enabling the return of exiles, state elections (1982), the return of the civilians to power (1985), crowned by the issuing of a constitution (1986) establishing the rule of law. Scholarly and cultural life was burgeoning and graffiti interest was part of that. This move was part of a counter-culture interest flourish, including innovative moves such as *concretismo* (concretism), armorial (*armorial* in Portuguese, a cultural initiative grounded on people's culture), *tropicália* (mixed tropical culture), among others, so that graffiti in the present was taken as part of culture, challenging traditional, conservative or even reactionary tenets, excluding the different or deviant. Political graffiti were part of the struggle against discretionary rule, but also other expressions, interested in broader social and cultural issues. All this move led to a renewed historical interest in graffiti as counter-culture, a concept then in vogue, try-

¹¹ *O Correio da Tarde*, 1856, issue, 156.

¹² Abbott, 1912.

¹³ Tanzer, 1939.

ing to address a series of behavioural challenges. Counter-culture was a potent way of addressing the challenges of modernity or postmodernity, and it was an opportunity to classicists in Brazil. Whilst in Europe and the USA there were strong traditional strands, in this new world of classics, forced to interact with local issues, such as counter-culture, Brazilian style, classics was invited to think anew what could be taken as counter-culture in the ancient world. Graffiti was a natural response to this challenge. This means that Pompeian graffiti came to address a couple of subjects: ordinary people, in a social or Marxist approach, but also a cultural, or post-modern one. Ordinary people are a most relevant issue, considering social inequalities in the past and in the present. Then, there is the cultural aspect: culture as a way of addressing the challenges of behaviour. In the wake of 1968 and the challenges to prohibition, a series of new habits and attitudes were gradually tolerated. Both aspects influenced historiography, from the 1970s¹⁴, worldwide, but also in Brazil. Since 1979 and amnesty it was increasingly possible to study and publish on both fronts¹⁵, including explicitly on graffiti¹⁶. In a way, Brazilian context, within a larger Latin America and Third World (now Global South), fostered innovative, counter-narrative approaches to everything, including a most unexpected subject: the ancient world, and their graffiti. This looks for some explanation for a worldwide audience.

The ancient world, classics and ancient history are most obvious potentially conservative or even reactionary topics, as manipulated to produce evidence of high culture and class right to rule. Defending the status quo often has included the argument of tradition or authority, even if Thomas Aquinas, the epigone of the establishment, emphasized its weakness:

ST 1,1,8,1: *licet locus ab auctoritate quae fundatur super ratione humana, sit infirmissimus*

the argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest

In Brazil this was no different, as if latifundia were a good inheritance of the ancient Romans, as well as patriarchy, clientelism, or patronage. However, this context, on the edge, enabled to an innovative Classics to bloom. In 1984, classicists gathered to discuss the future of the field, established a critical Classical Association (Brazilian Society for Classical Studies, 1985), ground-breaking in different aspects, starting by mixing senior scholars and young students, from different scholarly disciplines, gathering to foster cooperation and challenging

¹⁴ Foucault, 1976; Burke, 1978; Gurevich, 1981.

¹⁵ Arantes, 1981; Guimarães, 1988.

¹⁶ Vallauri, 1985.

received ideas and in tune with most contemporary cultural trends¹⁷. This meant the study of non-canonical ancient authors, ordinary archaeological artefacts (*instrumentum domesticum*) or non-western cultures, such as indigenous Brazilian, Indian (Sanskrit), or African (Egyptian). In the mid-1980s this was in tune with the World Archaeological Congress, but well in advance of the classics in general¹⁸. All of this may contribute to explain the study of ancient Latin graffiti in Brazil in the late 1980s and its appeal to the overall public, being used in secondary education and reaching a wider audience, including the daily press. A couple of issues were put in action: popular culture and different ways of living, far from normative contemporary standards, putting both, ancient and modern, as contingent, historical, contextual, arbitrary, prone to criticism. Several decades on, it is possible to say that a series of Brazilian scholars have been studying Latin graffiti, such as Feitosa¹⁹ and Garraffoni²⁰, co-authors of this paper. From the edge, a new approach to ancient graffiti is innovative mainly in gender studies as we shall argue.

3. Women of Antiquity: a perspective from Brazilian studies

The study of Antiquity by women has intensified in the last decades, with extensive academic production, both in Brazil and abroad²¹. This significant advancement in research is part of an ongoing social and academic movement and it is crucial to understand its trajectory, its temporal and spatial locus, and its importance. The feminist and gender epistemologies have been decisive in the redefinition of the theoretical/methodological approaches of the research about women, with a prominent female protagonism.

The relevance of this process is significant. The first aspect is that History is written in the present, amidst power struggles, whether for the maintenance of the status quo or its changes, and women are part of this debate²². Historically, women had barriers imposed to their social participation, particularly with the supremacy of the nationalist, imperialist, and scientist European model of the 19th century and the invention of a Western tradition based on a classical heritage, particularly Latin and Greek, idealised as a model of civility and culture. The background of technological and industrial development of the 19th century, as

¹⁷ Funari, 2020.

¹⁸ Funari, 2006.

¹⁹ Feitosa, 2001; 2013.

²⁰ Garraffoni, 2004.

²¹ Garraffoni & Funari, 2019.

²² Feitosa & Funari, 2022.

well as the development of medical sciences in that period, defined the organisation of the public space as belonging to a male, white, and elite «nature».

The employment of this classical past on an identitary perspective was also part of the project of the Brazilian imperial elites of the 19th century to connect the new country called Brazil to the bases of the «cult and modern civilization» brought by the Portuguese: the speaking of a neo-Latin language; the jurisprudence based on the Roman law; the neoclassical cultural tradition and the judaic/christian religious heritage. A new nation was born, guided by men connected to their European origins, but with enslaving roots and alien to the contributions of the remaining social groups. Such aspects were characteristic of the mentality of that time but must be reconsidered in the Brazilian reality of the 21st century, in a country ruled by elites still averse to recognizing women, indigenous peoples, and those of African descent as legitimate members of this nation, and resistant to their participation in social organization²³.

Therefore the importance of rewriting History²⁴ and a «new ancient history»²⁵, critical to the vision of a greco-roman history as universal, justified by a supposed superiority in relation to others. An Antiquity attentive to the perspectives of minorities, that is, women, workers, among others, in their conditions of enslaved, freed, and poor free people; and Antiquity that deals with discursive representations, gender inequalities, and power relations²⁶. An Antiquity that emanates from the continuous dialogue between past and present, in which the current world changes its acuity about Antiquity and in which Antiquity also influences the world we live in²⁷. In this scenario, the gender and feminist approaches have been crucial to evince the power relations present in the production of the male academic discourse and in the generalization of images about women of Antiquity as uneducated, subordinate, repressed, excluded from the social space and limited to domestic life²⁸.

One must also pay attention to the conservative ideas stemming from interpretations based on the transference of contemporary perspectives to the past and on readings uncritical to male vision of the ancient authors who wrote about them. The analysis of those normative models demands care towards how the authors portrayed themselves and others and registered the marks of tensions, conflicts, contradictions, and differences in sex and gender. Our agenda, in the last decades, consists of confronting sexist discourses to identify how were so-

²³ Andrade, Feitosa & Funari, 2021.

²⁴ Mattoso, 1988.

²⁵ Guarinello, 2020.

²⁶ Beard, 2018.

²⁷ Silva *et al.*, 2020.

²⁸ Katz, 1995.

cial and gender differences built and to revise traditional paradigms, as universal subjects – man and woman, with fixed, biological, ahistorical, and atemporal natures²⁹.

New approaches based on gender studies demanded new methods to rethink historical evidence and in Brazil Greco-Roman material culture and inscriptions were understood, in early 1990's on, as an important tool to challenge normative models that transposed current values and situations to Antiquity and created a debated that urged to rethink various forms of past appropriation, interpretation, and exclusions³⁰.

In this context, graffiti became singular evidence to discuss women daily lives in Pompeii and supported an important historiographical shift in the country, considering social space as a plural and dynamic field, with conflicts and partnerships, where women have agency in their different ethnical and regional singularities; in their cultural³¹, political³² and economical³³ roles. Those new forms of knowledge approximate us to the multiple conditions and practices of everyday life, to the sensibilities, to gender relations, and the numerous conditions and places occupied by women and common people in Antiquity. There is an expressive number of texts on the subject produced by female and male Brazilian academics. We highlight, particularly, the release of tomes 1 and 2 of the first volume of the book *Compêndio Histórico de Mulheres da Antiguidade (Historical Compendium of Women of Antiquity)*, which presents feminine biographies from the archaeological artefacts and/or the written records, historical or literary, that reference them. It discusses how women were presented and represented in the selected documental set and the way they were interpreted in academic approaches and the reception and use of these narratives in literary and artistic works of various periods, including the current one. The second volume is dedicated to Roman Women and is in press.

As example of this particular aspect, we detach some wall inscriptions met in Roman Pompeii: Aegle, Maria, Smyrna, Asellina, Pollia, Pherusa, Iunia, Epidia, Cornelia, Caprasia, Vaccula, Iphigenia, Anthusa (like in the original). We don't know so much about their status differences, if they were free, *libertas* or enslaved, but considering only the cognomen or epithet was mentioned, this signalises the distance from the aristocratic tradition (Salomies, 2001). The simplicity of the name emphasises the modest precedence as well as the foreign origin of

²⁹ Funari, 1995; Feitosa, 2012.

³⁰ Bond & Gilliam 1997; Rovere, 2019.

³¹ Funari, 2020.

³² Feitosa & Favarsani, 2003.

³³ Gaia, 2023.

these women: greek, jews, arable, «oriental», and also included them in the hand-craft world, considered exclusive male not so long ago.

These evidence also help us to recognize female signatures and their support for two administrative positions elected each year: two *Duunviro*s and two aldermen. These functions were occupied by elite citizens and some honour profession, in accordance with aristocratic view. These functionaries had as attribution the *ordo decurionum* (local council for the justice and finances administration, provision of food, constructions, and public order maintenance)³⁴.

Secundumaed(ilem) Pherusa rog(at) (CIL IV, 7749)

Ferusa requests for the election of Secundo as alderman.

Poor people and perfumiest association supported Modesto:

Modestum aed(ilem)[unguen]tari et pauper[es] facite (CIL IV, 9932a)

Perfumiest and poor people ask that Modeto be elected as edil.

Asellina, the leader of a group of meretrices, had as employers Aegle (Grecian), Maria (Jew), Smyrna («exotic»). All of them supported the same candidate (Cn. Helvius Sabinus) in two distinct inscriptions (CIL IV, 7862 e 7866). Palmyra («oriental») supported Hermes. Asellina supported two candidates for the *duumviro*; Smyrna also (CIL IV, 7863, 7864 e 7873). Each one of them could choose the candidates they decided to support (CIL IV, 7494). Also tavern owners indicated them as candidates. Pollia supported Cn. Cerinus Vatia for the council (CIL IV, 368) and Pherusa decided for L. Popidius Secundus (CIL IV, 7749). Other women supported candidates for the election of 79, but it is not possible to identify their activities: Iunia (CIL IV, 1168), Epidia (CIL IV, 6610) and Sutoria Primigenia (CIL IV, 7464).

These graffiti stresses women's support for the candidates, even without the possibility to vote in them. This attitude can indicate active political participation in the community via support for candidates and in attention to those that should take care of collective issues, even without the possibility of participating in the electoral contest as is currently the case³⁵. By legal limitations no women could vote, but Pompeiian walls challenge us to discuss female agency and how evidence survived from past to present. We are aware that there is a long tradition of studies that defines male elite as the major source of our understanding of Roman culture, policy and society.

³⁴ Castrén, 1983.

³⁵ Savunen, 1995.

From this limited perspective, these memories of rulers and their worldviews exclude many aspects of the Empire's daily lives. Although we selected just a few inscriptions, they can challenge this perspective as they show how women of different ethnic origins could take part in Pompeiian political life. Through them we can argue Pompeiian walls are evidence of local political debate and negotiation. Those inscriptions were made to be read/commented on by other ancient pedestrians. By destiny they reached us and in doing so, we gain insights on women and people of different humble origins worldviews. Finally, as evidence, they give us the opportunity to discuss what type of Roman History we ourselves want to write.

4. Conclusions: ancient graffiti fostering diversity and living together

Ancient graffiti reveal a lot about people, ancient and modern. Ancient graffiti do not escape from showing the social and cultural contradictions in an ancient context of inequalities, brutality, violence, exclusion, slavery, misogyny, among other features. Conflict, insult, tension, vituperation are common features and reveal a society riven by inner strife, as it is the case in any class society and even more so a slave-owning one. These are relevant to our own contemporary world riven also by wars, imbalances, violences and discriminations. As some would say, we live in a time do destroy³⁶. At the same time, ancient graffiti, as stressed in this paper, also reveal companionship and female agency. We emphasised those aspects for different reasons, not least for the fact that they were long-time dismissed as unimportant or taken as simple ahistorical natural human features, in a conventional wisdom approach. We tried to show how those feelings and social practices were potent sign of agency and cooperation. This may be a most relevant message for living together in the present and in the future. The past may foster a time to live together, instead of destruction. Graffiti are trivial and for this very reason they may contribute to put commonality back from the edge, in the centre of social life.

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³⁶ González-Ruibal, 2008.

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