Thanks to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD, which buried Pompeii in layers of volcanic ash, the city has been particularly well preserved. To date, about 5600 wall graffiti have been excavated in Pompeii. The majority of these inscriptions consist of or contain names, but a substantial part is also made up of other words and texts, drawings, numbers, and alphabets. These diverse kinds of graphic, numeric, and textual graffiti were incised into the plastered walls of public buildings, commercial units, and private residences where they occupied the central and most heavily frequented spaces. Current research has therefore emphasized the difference between ancient (and, more generally, historical) graffiti and modern graffiti/art. Pompeian graffiti were not only located inside houses and incised into the wall-paintings, but also named their writers (and addressees) openly, a fact which makes them seem more like a public form of social interaction rather than a covert or illicit act; they neither reveal political or subversive intentions, but instead deal with daily-life issues: they name friends, enemies, lovers, and clients; depict gladiator fights; manifest love stories and erotic wishes; record business transactions and prices; and recall famous poems, slogans or sayings.

It is characteristic of Pompeian graffiti to phrase greetings and messages in the third person, e.g., “Alogiosus wrote this: good luck to Carus!” or “Chryseros greets Crescens: how is your right eye?” This style of writing (together with the use of formulaic salutations) was also used in letter writing in order to make clear who the sender was. Simple name tags revealed the true identity of their authors just as explicitly. Names occurring in Pompeian graffiti, especially as name tags, cover the usual spectrum of Roman names which Ilpo Kajanto has collected for Rome: in the capital of the Roman Empire, the most common male names are Felix, Secundus, Saturninus, Fortunatus, and Primus – all of which we also find multiple times on the walls of Pompeii. The popularity of certain names, however, and the conventions of Roman names bring certain methodological problems for studying Pompeian tags.

Roman citizens of the 1st century AD, to which a major part of the Pompeian tags date, carried three names, the tria nomina: a first name (praenomen), a family name (gentilicium), and a personal name (cognomen). Officially, the tribus (voting tribe) and the patronymic (“son of...”) belonged to the nomenclature, too. Whilst the gentilicium was inherited, the cognomen was introduced in order to differentiate persons bearing the same first name and surname; originally a descriptive name or nickname, it could refer, among other things, to physical traits (Barbatus – bearded, Caecus – blind, Celsus – tall, Crassus – corpulent, Flavus – blonde, Naso – big nose), intellectual qualities (Brutus – dull, Celer – quick, Prudens – prudent, Severus – earnest), certain habits (Bibulus – drunkard), personal predilections, or the birth order in a family with multiple children (Primus – the first, Secundus – the second, etc.). Although the fasti Capitolini (lists of consuls and triumphators) suggest that it must have been in use earlier, the cognomen appears in funerary inscriptions only from the 3rd century BC onwards, and seems not to have become common until the 2nd and 1st century BC. As the repertoire of attributes was not unlimited, the same names were used frequently. Since the cognomen was used for calling and writing to a close person in daily life – and also in graffiti –, it must have been clear to those reading which of the many persons called Felix or Fortunata in Pompeii were meant. For modern scholars, however, who lack the insider knowledge of the city’s interpersonal connections and local gossip, and of the members of a household or neighbourhood, these single names make it difficult to trace the individuals behind the tags.

Matters are further complicated by the fact that slaves carried a single name, which could sometimes refer to their tasks or capacities (Domesticus – belonging to the house, Fidelis – loyal, Utilis – useful, Acceptus – agreeable), origin or skin colour (Fuscus – dark, Cinnamus – cinnamon-like, Hispanus, Africanus), but which usually corresponded to the individual names given to Roman freeborn citizens. Here, again, the same names reappear frequently. When we find the tag of, e.g., a Felix on a Pompeian wall, we therefore do not even know if he was a Roman citizen (freeborn or a freedman, i.e. a former slave), or a slave. In some cases, not even the gender is clear, because some personal names (communia) were used for men and women alike, such as Aprilis, Cerialis, and Spes. Only in texts that give more information than simple name tags, do we have the chance to acquire information about the gender and status of a person implicitly, e.g. by grammatical indicators, or explicitly, by attributes and descriptions like “the slave girl Iris”, who appears in a series of graffiti on a façade in region I in Pompeii (cf. tab. 1).

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2 - CIL IV 8347, 8098.
3 - Take, for example, the letters of Cicero to his friend Atticus.
4 - Kajanto 1965b, 29 f. See also Castrén 1975, 262 f. for Pompeian cognomina (based on epigraphic evidence). See Lohmann 2017, 335 tab. 5 with appearances of single names in Pompeian graffiti only, and Kajanto 1965a, 448 f.
5 - Cf. Solin 2009, esp. 252 f. For the history of the Roman naming system in general, see Solin 2017a; Solin 2017b.
6 - Kajanto 1965b, 19.
7 - In some families, cognomina were inherited too, thus creating different family branches, so that additional cognomina had to be applied (Solin 2012, 138 f.).
8 - Cf. Castrén 1975, 21 f.
9 - Kajanto 1965b, 133 f. Often Greek names were chosen for slaves, without necessarily indicating a Greek/Eastern origin of the name bearers; cf. Heikki Solin’s comprehensive study of the slave names from Rome: Solin 1996. For the examples listed here, male names have been chosen; female forms existed for most of the examples.
10 - See Kajanto 1965b, 23 f. on this issue.
11 - CIL IV 8258–8259.
In addition to the difficulties of Roman names as indications of the social status (and sometimes even the gender) of a tagger, we are also unable to trace certain writers within Pompeii, because (for example) we do not know how many of the thirty-one to thirty-seven tags by Secundus were written by the same Secundus: did one Secundus write all of them, or was it an unidentifiable number of different Secundi? We might be able to give at least a partial answer to this question had the tags survived until the present day. But because many Pompeian graffiti were not adequately protected after having been recorded by their excavators, a considerable number are now lost, having disintegrated or fallen off the ancient walls together with the wall-plaster which bore them. The Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL IV) lists the graffiti and their locations more or less precisely, but we lack photographs and drawings for the majority of them and can therefore not even compare the handwriting of each of the tags; only in rare cases of extant graffiti on the same wall is it at least possible to attribute several of them to a single writer (fig. 1). Sometimes, concentrations of the same names reappearing within a small radius make it likely (but not demonstrable) that the same persons were meant, provided they were not acting as the taggers themselves. For those graffiti which were documented at the time of the excavation, but which are lost today and which the CIL IV records in printed block letters rather than reproducing in detail, there is no chance of verifying the text, either; sometimes – depending on the epigraphist – the interpretation is dubious: did, for example, the editor Matteo Della Corte make “Severus” out of the graffito “Se” (CIL IV 8530b), “Rarus” out of “Rar” (8382), “Fulvius” out of “Fu/l” (8595), “Campanus” out of “Camp” (8287), “Fortunatus” out of “Fortu[,]” (8699), and “Secundus” out of “Secu[n?]” (8710). Not all of these combinations of letters must necessarily have been abbreviations of names, nor of male names, for that matter, nor the male names which Della Corte chose. Some of the entries in the CIL IV must therefore be treated with caution.

The Romans wrote personal texts and business accounts on wax tablets, lead tablets, or papyrus in cursive script; the so-called “Old Roman Cursive” was also used in graffiti: unlike modern graffiti and street art, ancient graffiti were neither technically nor formally distinct from texts in other media, but instead reflected the style of handwriting commonly in use at the time of writing. Even if some writers tried to create unique tags by, e. g., drawing a ship around their name (Buchstabenschiffe, cf. fig. 2), and even if some tags stand out from the rest because they were written backwards, most Pompeian tags are just common names in standard handwriting. Writing a name on a wall therefore did not make someone distinct from others, as there were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin tag</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albanus Pompon(i) Severi servus</td>
<td>Albanus, slave of Pomponius Severus</td>
<td>CIL IV 2038. Castrén 1975, 206 no. 315,10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amianthus Coeli Caldii serv(vus) fullo</td>
<td>The fuller Amianthus, slave of Coelius Caldius</td>
<td>CIL IV 8288. Castrén 1975, 156 no. 221,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antiochus Liviae ser(vus)</td>
<td>Antiochus, the slave of Livia</td>
<td>CIL IV 3123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermes verna</td>
<td>The home-born slave Hermas</td>
<td>CIL IV 4512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iarinus serv(u)s</td>
<td>The slave Iarinus (?)</td>
<td>CIL IV 1638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanus libertus?</td>
<td>The freedman (?) Romanus</td>
<td>CIL IV 10055b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soterius libertus?</td>
<td>The freedman (?) Soterus</td>
<td>CIL IV 8052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q(uintus) Sempronii Q(uinti) libertus</td>
<td>Quintus Sempronius, freedman (of Quintus)</td>
<td>CIL IV 1429. Castrén 1975, 218 no. 362,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statius Benni P. serv(u)s, Hispani(s?)</td>
<td>Statius, slave (?) of P. Bennius [...]</td>
<td>CIL IV 1848. Castrén 1975, 143 no. 71,1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Tags containing indications of social status (i.e. just names + attributes, without any verbs being included).

12 - Cf. Kajanto 1965a, 448 f.
13 - More comprehensively on this phenomenon: Lohmann 2017, 266–270.
many of the same tags likely to be seen around; Pompeian
tags, do – at least to us – not appear as specifically individual
signs, even if they were meant to be.

Of the almost 4000 names appearing in Pompeian graffiti,
about 50% consist of name tags; the other 50% belong to
messages, greetings, love letters, etc. The tags contain over
1600 cognomina or personal names, 440 family names
gentilicia), and 250 first names (praenomina); the numbers
alone make clear that the majority of the tags contain only
one part – usually the cognomen/personal name – of the
full name; only 15% indicate tria nomina or duo nomina,
I.e. full Roman names, or combinations of praenomen and
gentilicum or gentilicum and cognomen usually. Among
the full tria nomina can be found some individuals familiar to
us from other epigraphic evidence: the magistrates Tiberius
Claudius Verus (CIL IV 5229), Cnaeus Helvius Sabinus (CIL
IV 10183), Caius Iulius Polybius (CIL IV 10051), Marcus
Lucretius Fronto (CIL IV 6796), Marcus Satrius Valens (CIL
IV 5364), Publius Vedius Sirius (CIL IV 3952), and maybe
Cnaeus Alleius Nigidius Maius (CIL IV 1483), Quintus
Bruttius Balbus (CIL IV 3159), Quintus Caecilius (CIL IV
8667), Cnaeus (?) Clovatius (CIL IV 1442), Marcus Fabius
Rufus (CIL IV 4994), Quintus Lollius Rufus (CIL IV 8128),
Numerius Popidius Rufus (CIL IV 4989), Publius Vettius
(Celer?) (CIL IV 9006).

Methodologically, we cannot be entirely sure that the
individuals named in the tags are also their authors, but
since the habit of leaving one's mark is as old as humankind,
and since we also find the explicit phrase "so-and-so-was-
here" in graffiti, it is legitimate to extrapolate authorship
of the tags from the names. Most of the tags name only
one person, while one sixth give lists of several different
persons. In the latter cases, it is unclear which one of
the named persons was the writer, and we again have
difficulties in verifying the number of different writers
from the records in the CIL IV (I.e. verifying whether the
lists were each written by one person, or if they are simply
clusters of tags by different persons subsumed under one
entry in the CIL). In a few cases, attributes were added to
the names, such as "Pelagia, wife [of L. Clodius Varus]" (CIL
IV 2321); "Anthus the fuller" (CIL IV 8108); "the hairdresser
Aristus" (CIL IV 8619a); "the Thracian [gladiator] Celadus"
(CIL IV 4341); "the teacher Q. Antonius" (CIL IV 8686b).

Name tags are distributed all over the city, and they form
37% of all known Pompeian graffiti. 31% of them come
from building façades, 16% from inside public buildings, 6%
from shops and workshops (type 1 and 2), and 47% from
large and very large residences (type 3 and 4 according to
Andrew Wallace-Hadrill). But even though (in absolute
numbers) the largest part of tags come from the inside
walls of houses, the percentage of name tags is, compared
to other types of graffiti, larger for the façades and public
buildings; the smallest number of tags (in absolute numbers
and regarding their proportion) appears in the commercial
units, i.e. smaller shops and workshops.

The practice of leaving tags – and graffiti in general – inside
houses appears strange to us, because the perception of
unofficial wall-writing has apparently undergone drastic
changes over time. The Pompeian evidence suggests
that graffiti were not perceived as disturbing, and the
texts, numbers, and drawings were often relatively small,
thus allowing them to blend in with their surroundings.
With a number of different persons frequenting the
larger residences – family members, slaves, freedmen,
guests, clients, and, depending on the wealth of a family,
private tutors –, the presence of graffiti becomes more
understandable, when one considers that the Roman house
was less "private" than most modern residences.

It is, unfortunately, impossible to differentiate between
inhabitants and visitors, but we can assume that the persons
named in graffiti must have been familiar to the household
members, otherwise it would not have made sense to tag
the wall with no additional indications of who was the
writer (or who the intended addressee). If we look at the
number of tags in non-private buildings, i.e. small shops
(type 1), workshops (2), large houses (3), and very large
houses (4), the number of graffiti rises with the size of the
building unit, as does the number of tags (fig. 3), which, as
mentioned above, form a larger subset of the graffiti within
large and very large houses than in shops and workshops.

Concentrated in the large and central rooms, and primarily
the entrance areas, atria and peristyles, of houses, the
incised inscriptions reflect the movement of the people
within the building. The fact that they were left in the most

15 - For the offices of the named magistrates and a compilation of
electoral inscriptions, see Mouritsen 1988, 125–159.
16 - For more numbers of Pompeian graffiti cf. Lohmann 2017, 136 f.
18 - Cf. Lohmann 2015, 73.
frequented spaces shows that graffiti-writing and tagging in Pompeii were neither secret nor illegal acts, but rather common practices that were performed in both public and “private” spaces. By focussing on Pompeian tags, we can circumvent the terminological problems of the word graffiti, but the same focus opens up other methodological difficulties. Being reduced to single names, most of the tags do not offer much information about their authors apart from their gender, if at all. Single tags therefore represent less productive sources for us, but by contextualizing them with their spatial surroundings and comparing them to other graffiti and tags, we are able to glean insights into the use and perception of spaces, and into certain writing trends. The fact that more than one third of the Pompeian graffiti consist of name tags reveals the popularity of this habit, while there seem to have been no need to individualise the tags: by leaving just one name, even taggers, who, as Roman citizens, officially carried three names, were apparently sure to be recognized by potential readers; this was equally true for the authors of personal messages and greetings. As scholars, however, we are dealing with people who have left an individual mark by using very formulaic and standardised forms. To us, the personal tags therefore appear simply as small elements in a large and uniform mass.
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