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# Historical Graffiti
# The State of the Art

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*Abstract*

The article summarises the current situation in relation to projects and approaches to the study of wall graffiti from all periods of history, referring particularly, but not exclusively, to the conference 'Historical Graffiti as Sources, Munich, 20-22 April 2017'. It argues that graffiti act as valuable sources in a variety of ways and a multitude of contexts – e.g. recording business transactions in the Roman town of Virunum, following the trails of medieval pilgrims, offering a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of a building, or passing down the names of prisoners killed in the Gestapo prison in Cologne. The comparison of ancient, medieval and modern graffiti shows that the majority of such inscriptions consist of name tags often combined with specific identity markers. They could function as representatives of their authors and guaranteed a longer lasting symbolic presence in, or in connection to a place. Long neglected as supposedly products of the lower classes, graffiti seem rather to have been made by members of society who possessed at least basic literacy; and to have often been left even by the *élite* of a given society, including ancient Egyptian priests and medieval/early modern European nobles.

Keywords: *Epigraphy, Graffiti, Materiality, Memory, Pompeii*

## 1. *Introduction: Leaving Marks on Walls*

Leaving one's mark on a wall seems to reflect a desire as old as humankind. Whether names (tags), hand prints, portrait sketches, coats of arms or professional symbols, personal identifiers – though differing in type and technique – have come to us from all periods of time. The earliest such identifiers are negative hand prints made in prehistoric times (figure 1),[1] whilst

[1] García-Diez *et al*. 2015. I would like to thank Raffaella Sarti for inviting me to take on both the honour and challenge of representing German-speaking graffiti scholars at the conference *Pietre, castelli e palazzi da leggere nell'Europa medievale e moderna*, 15-17 May 2017 at the Università di Urbino Carlo Bo, and to outline the 'state of the art' of graffiti scholarship for the present issue of

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the earliest examples of what we consider to be actual graffiti date back to Pharaonic Egypt (Old Kingdom).[2] Although historical graffiti largely consist of names and the ubiquitous message that 'so-and-so was here', they offer posterity much more than just this and preserve personal messages, love letters, reports of business transactions and local events, individual experiences, wordplay, poems, alphabets and numbers and a great variety of drawings, all of which enrich our knowledge of past cultures.

Figure 1 – Prehistoric hand prints in the Cueva de las Manos, Argentina, Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cueva_de_las_Manos-Santa_Cruz-Argentina.JPG>, accessed 10 January 2020

In 2017, no fewer than three conferences – in Munich, Urbino, and Berlin – were devoted to the topic of graffiti. Although the individual focus of each conference differed, all three considered the full chronological span of wall-writings from ancient to modern times.[3] Two more workshops on graffiti took place in Karlsruhe and Lisbon in 2018, and the larger part of the papers held at the Symposium Campanum 2019 *Inscriptions of the Bay of Naples* focus on ancient graffiti-writing.[4] However, (historical) graffiti have not always been appreciated as

*JEMS*. My sincere thanks also go to Dr Emrys Schlatter (Berlin) for correcting my English, and to PD Dr Thomas Wozniak (Stuttgart) for his comments.

[2] See e. g., Ragazzoli and Frood 2013 (on graffiti from the New Kingdom); Preisigke 2018.

[3] *Historische Graffiti als Quellen. Methoden und Perspektiven eines Jungen Forschungsbereichs*, 20-22 April 2017 at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (see Lohmann 2018a, from which the present article derives); the Urbino conference mentioned in note 1; and *TAG: Name Writing in Public Space. A Conference about Tagging, in History and Today*, 14-15 September 2017 at the Free University of Berlin (publication in preparation).

[4] *Graffiti als Gegenstand der Forschung*, 22-23 June 2018 at the Institut für Technologie Karlsruhe; *Lisbon Street Art & Urban Creativity Conference. Changing Times: Tactics and Resilience*, 5-7 July 2018 at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon; *Reading the City: Inscriptions of the Bay of Naples*, 23-27 October 2019 at the Villa Vergiliana, Cumae.

an object of study and these events mark an important change – or a new high point – in the history of graffiti scholarship. This sub-area of epigraphy has, in fact, only emerged within the past ten years, even if earlier works exist which are crucial to the field of study (see below). The number of scholars who specialise in graffiti is still relatively limited and individual studies on it relatively few; but, in recent introductions to ancient epigraphy and history, graffiti are increasingly being granted individual chapters as a separate category of inscriptions and textual sources (Cooley 2012; Bruun and Edmonson 2015; Rhode and Wawra forthcoming).

It should be noted here that, when speaking of historical graffiti, this article will not consider 'contemporary' graffiti and urban art, even if these most recent forms are historical themselves in their beginnings (i.e. if one considers history to include the past up to one second ago, even the most recent graffiti could be considered historical; however, these largely sophistic musings are not relevant to the present article). Contemporary graffiti-writing emerged as – and still often is – part of social subcultures which can be broadly defined as young and male. As a matter of (often political) expression, contemporary graffiti have developed their own forms and styles, and are nowadays perceived as art by supporters and outsiders. Meant as civic dissent, graffiti have been deemed illegal in urban spaces, apart from spaces explicitly provided for colourful murals. Historical graffiti-writing as dealt with here is represented by regular forms of (hand) writing executed on walls. There were no textual sources which generally declared writing on walls illegal in antiquity, for example. Only in relation to specific spatial or functional contexts, such as Roman graves or medieval churches, do we know of explicit bans. Historical and contemporary graffiti, therefore, differ both in the intentions of their authors and their perception by the public (Lohmann 2017a, 19-37).

The present article outlines the current work on graffiti primarily by German-speaking scholars as represented at the Munich graffiti conference, even if the studies and projects referred to are not all based within the geographical borders of Germany, Austria and Switzerland.[5] The article also aims, however, to give a broader overview of the history of graffiti scholarship up to and including current projects and methodological approaches. It should also be borne in mind that, as a Roman archaeologist, I invariably see graffiti and graffiti research against the background of this field, which may at times come through in my following observations.

## 2. *Graffiti Scholarship: A Difficult (Hi)Story*

The two most pioneering works of graffiti scholarship in German are Martin Langner's study of all known ancient (Greek and Roman) graffiti drawings and the comprehensive bibliography on graffiti by Detlev Kraack and Peter Lingens.[6] Both works were published in 2001 and, independently of each other, define graffiti as graphic signs (i.e. letters, numbers, and images) made on a surface not primarily designed for this purpose, a definition which is still crucial for our understanding of graffiti (Langner 2001, 12; Kraack and Lingens 2001, 9). As early as 1997, Detlev Kraack published his dissertation for the Christian Albrechts University of Kiel as a monograph on the epigraphic evidence of princely pilgrimage. Whilst his observations about the striving for honour and the memorial character of noblemen's graffiti complemented earlier works on aristocratic travel (Kraack 1997 and 2005, 148), Martin Langner's work was ground-breaking for its methodology and represented the first systematic study not only of

[5] This focus derives from the Urbino conference, to which I was invited as a referee of the Munich conference.
[6] Langner 2001; Kraack and Lingens 2001, on graffiti from 1500 to 1900.

motifs and styles, but also of the distribution of (ancient) graffiti. Nonetheless, these works stood alone as relatively isolated publications on the subject for several years before the field attracted further attention.

Only within the past years – and primarily within the fields of archaeology and ancient history[7] – have graffiti seen a kind of renaissance as objects of study. One hundred years earlier, and from the first discovery of graffiti at the newly excavated site of Pompeii since the end of the nineteenth century, the etched inscriptions had been regarded as illicit scribbles left by the young, poor and uneducated (Lohmann 2017a, 39-44). It was this site which initiated the term 'graffiti' (Garrucci 1856, 8). Cesare Lombroso, in his work on prison graffiti from 1899, generalised graffiti as mostly the products of children who, more than any other demographic group, share characteristics of primitive humans (301, fn. 1). German archaeologist August Mau underlined his interest exclusively in *élite* culture by arguing: 'The people with whom we should most eagerly desire to come into direct contact, the cultivated men and women of the ancient city, were not accustomed to scratching their names upon stucco or to confide their reflections and experiences to the surface of the wall' (1899, 481 ff.). The bulk of the approximately 5,600 graffiti from Pompeii had therefore long been neglected, in spite of being seen by early excavators and Victorian Romantics as offering a unique glimpse into the simple everyday life of Pompeians: 'One of their favourite ways of amusing themselves', wrote Helen Tanzer in her book *The Common People of Pompeii*, 'was idly scribbling on any convenient surface' (1939, 83). Only smaller samples, mainly from erotic texts or consisting of metric sentences and literary quotes, either attracted scholarly interest[8] as sources for the study of oral poetry and literary reception, or satisfied the Romantic imagination of 'the city of sin' on the eve of its downfall.[9]

Beginning in 2010 and 2011 with the works by Rebecca R. Benefiel (2010 and 2011) and Henrik Mouritsen (2011), however, the scholarly perception of this previously unrecognised genre of ancient inscription has changed. In 2011, a conference was held in London with the title *Ancient Graffiti in Context*.[10] Case-studies of the distribution of graffiti within private houses showed that graffiti were concentrated in the most central and accessible rooms, suggesting that they were neither made in secret nor prohibited;[11] since then, further analyses have confirmed this observation (Lohmann 2015 and 2017a). With this renaissance of ancient graffiti, new questions arose: what influenced graffiti? How were they integrated into the surrounding (man-made) environment? Did their makers work around or respect wall-decorations? Can their location tell us anything about their authors and readership? How do graffiti address their readers? How did authors and audience perceive graffiti?

A book by Peter Keegan, published in 2014, compares graffiti from ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome (Kegan 2014); Kristina Milnor focusses on literary graffiti within their urban context (Milnor 2014); in 2016, a volume edited by Rebecca R. Benefiel and Peter Keegan brings

[7] For a brief history of the (limited) scholarship on medieval and modern graffiti (state: 2001), see Kraack and Lingens 2001, 14-17.

[8] Kruschwitz and Halla-Aho 2007, 31. When Kraack and Lingens (2001, 14) wrote that graffiti had long been an object of interest in Classical studies, this was in fact true only for a small portion of the graffiti; see e. g., Gigante 1979; Ferraro 1982; Wachter 1998 on literary graffiti; Della Corte 1976 and Varone 1994 on the subject of erotic graffiti.

[9] Foss 2007, 32-34; Blix 2009, 78-84. More contextual approaches were limited to exceptional cases, such as the early case-studies by Solin 1975 or Moormann and Wynia 1993.

[10] See the conference proceedings by Baird and Taylor 2011.

[11] On 'public' and 'private' in the Roman house, see Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 17-37; in Roman society, see Winterling 2005.

together papers from a section of the *14th International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy* on graffiti and other types of inscriptions from ancient private spaces (Benefiel and Keegan 2016); and a new volume by Chloé Ragazzoli, Ömür Harmansah, Chiara Salvador, and Elizabeth Frood addresses graffiti-writing throughout history (up to and including contemporary writings; the majority of the papers, however, deal with ancient graffiti (Ragazzoli *et al.* 2018). These recent English publications demonstrate a new dynamics of ancient, or 'classical', graffiti on an international level. Furthermore, the latest editions of graffiti from current field projects offer a careful analysis of the epigraphic material thanks to high quality images and drawings provided for specific sites, such as Ephesus and Smyrna.[12]

## 3. *The State of the Art*

### 3.1 *Projects and Preconditions*

The material basis for graffiti scholarship is uneven and varies largely according to the time period in which the inscriptions originated, which affects not only their survival rate, but also their documentation. Graffiti executed in charcoal or chalk fade away over the centuries; although we can assume that they were once numerous, only very few have survived from antiquity. The survival rates of engraved graffiti depend largely on the surface which bears them, with wall-plaster being a comparatively delicate material: not only ancient graffiti, but even graffiti from the twentieth century, written on the wall-plaster of buildings in the Jewish ghetto/concentration camp at Terezín/Theresienstadt (Czech Republic, figure 2) are threatened with decay.[13]

Ancient graffiti, especially on plaster, have survived in greater numbers in very few places; in Pompeii, Herculaneum and Ephesus they have been preserved under destruction layers (figure 3). In contrast, graffiti from medieval and early modern times are known from multiple building complexes in Germany alone, although only a small number of them have been thoroughly investigated, such as the graffiti in the late-antique basilica in Trier (Binsfeld 2004 and 2006), the cathedral in Aachen,[14] the church of St. Katharina in Wenau (Heckner 2010 and 2018), that of St. Elisabeth in Marburg (see Dietrich 2018), the cathedral in Magdeburg (Wozniak 2014) or the church of St. Mary in Quedlinburg (Wozniak 2013 and 2016). It is not by chance that medieval and early modern graffiti are known predominantly from churches: these buildings have either been under continuous use or at least been protected as sacred spaces and cultural heritage.[15] For this reason, we must bear in mind that the graffiti we know represent an arbitrary selection.[16]

[12] For the slope houses in Ephesus, see Hans Taeuber's contributions in the series 'Forschungen in Ephesos' (2005; 2010a; 2010b; 2014); for Smyrna, see Bagnall *et al.* 2016.

[13] See Uta Fischer's documentation and conservation project: <https://ghettospuren.de/> (Ghetto Theresienstadt 1941-1945), especially her online contributions 'Poterne III' (<https://ghettospuren.de/project/poterne-3/>); 'L 237 – Kriegsbeschädigte, Ordonnanzen' (<https://ghettospuren.de/project/l-237/>); 'Q 414 - SS-Kommandatur' (<https://ghettospuren.de/project/q-414/>), accessed 10 January 2020. See also Fischer 2018.

[14] Heckner and Heckes 2002, and recently Pieper and Schindler 2017.

[15] See also Weniger 2016, 132. At the same time, many churches were renovated or rebuilt, which is why we find fewer graffiti in Germany than in France, the UK or Italy, where buildings would more often remain unchanged for several centuries (Kraack and Lingens 2001, 24). See Champion 2012, 104-106, with a short comment on the situation in England.

[16] The production of graffiti differed according to surface/material: sandstone buildings, for example, were more likely to attract graffiti as the stone is soft and therefore easy to engrave (see Kraack and Lingens 2001, 21).

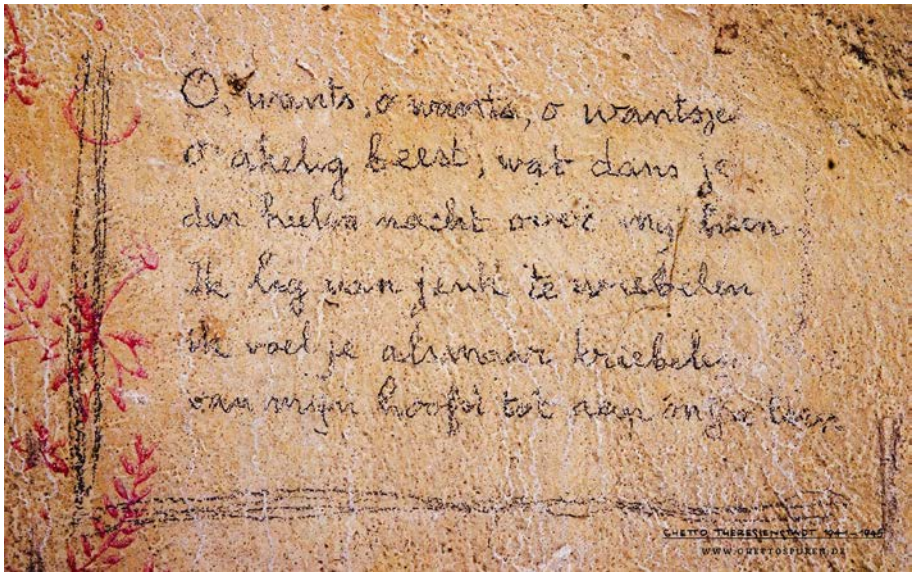



Figure 2 – Dutch verse from Terezín about a sleepless night due to bedbugs.
Photo by Roland Wildberg/Uta Fischer. Courtesy of the Author

Figure 3 – Graffiti in slope house 2 at Ephesus.
Photo by Polly Lohmann, with permission of the Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut

A special group of the historical graffiti in Germany are those from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth-century detention rooms ('Karzer') of educational institutions, such as the universities of Heidelberg, Marburg, Tübingen and Göttingen. The names, jokes, anecdotes

and reports left there are, as Ulrike Götz states, related to prison graffiti, but have their origins in a more 'modest', i.e. educational context and were authored by students who were 'imprisoned' for only short periods of time because of (moral) misbehaviour (2018, 221). With the exception of the eighteenth-century graffiti at the episcopal academy in Freising, scholarship has not yet been conducted on these epigraphic samples (Götz 2001 and 2018). The popularity of these kinds of graffiti, which, in the case of Heidelberg (for example), are accessible to tourists visiting the detention rooms (figure 4), stands in sharp contrast to the wish for systematic scientific study.

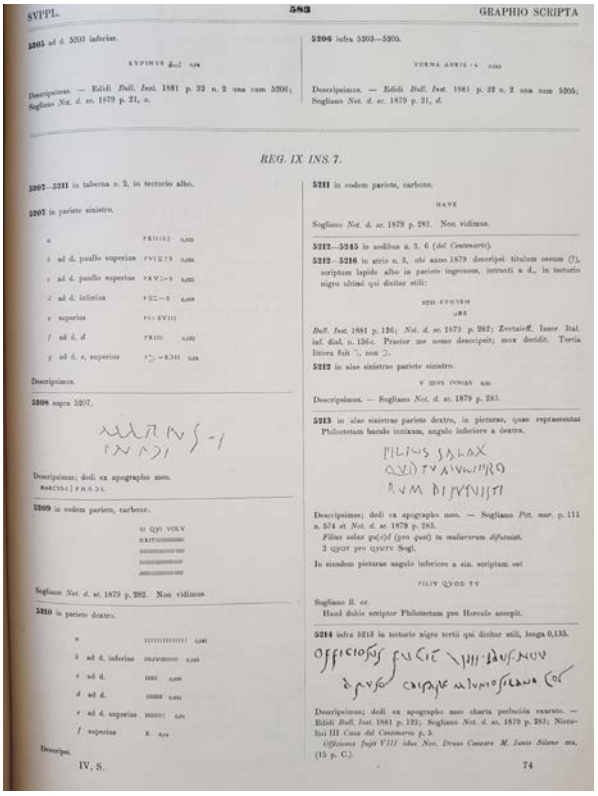

Figure 4 – Graffiti in the Heidelberg Karzer.
Photo by Polly Lohmann. Courtesy of the Universitätsmuseum Heidelberg

Despite the loss of many excavated Pompeian graffiti due to weathering, we are fortunate that, after excavation, they were at least recorded in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* IV (CIL IV, figure 5).[17] The CIL IV, therefore, constitutes the most important source for studying Pompeian graffiti, and can now also be digitally accessed via the 'Electronic Database of Greek and Latin Epigraphy' (EAGLE). Unfortunately, epigraphic corpora offering the same breadth of material as the CIL and IG (*Inscriptiones Graecae*) do not exist for all periods of time. The co-operative project 'Die Deutschen Inschriften', established in 1934, offers a variety of medieval and early modern inscriptions from present-day Germany, Austria and the South Tyrol, but does not systematically collect graffiti.[18] A project such as the 'Norfolk

[17] For the history of the excavation of Pompeii, and the survival rates of graffiti after excavation, see Lohmann 2017a, 123-128.

[18] Kraack 1997, 19-21; Weniger 2016, 129. See, however, the graffiti from the Mariental monastery at Helmstedt published online (*Deutsche Inschriften Online, Die Inschriften und Graffiti des Klosters Mariental*, <http://www.inschriften.net/kloster-mariental/einleitung.html>, accessed 10 January 2020); I would like to thank PD dr. Thomas Wozniak (Stuttgart) for this reference.

Medieval Graffiti Survey', including a database providing online access to graffiti from a particular region and era, does not, unfortunately, exist for Germany, Austria or Switzerland. For later graffiti, like those found in the castle at Ludwigsburg (Schulz 2018 and the article in this volume), the Gestapo-prison ('EL-DE House') in Cologne (Jung 2014 and 2018) or the Reichstag building in Berlin (Felix 2015 and 2018), the situation is similarly poor, as there is no consistent approach to comprehensive documentation and collective publication, but only projects by individuals or institutions, if at all. The reason for this neglect may be the relatively recent date of the graffiti: the twentieth century marked the beginning of graffiti writing as part of a youth subculture and the polarization of opinions on graffiti, which may in turn have contributed to a diminished public awareness of their historicity.[19] And so it is that the Classics – perhaps unexpectedly – have played a pioneering role in the documentation of graffiti, even though there remains a large body of material from antiquity that has neither been properly recorded nor published.


SVPPL. 583 GRAPHIO SCRIPTA

5205 ad d. 5203 inferius.

Descripsimus. — Edidi *Bull. Inst.* 1881 p. 32 n. 2 una cum 5206; Sogliano *Not. d. sc.* 1879 p. 21, o.

5206 infra 5203—5205.

Descripsimus. — Edidi *Bull. Inst.* 1881 p. 32 n. 2 una cum 5205; Sogliano *Not. d. sc.* 1879 p. 21, d.

*REG. IX INS. 7.*

5207—5211 in taberna n. 2, in tectorio albo.

5207 in pariete sinistro.

Descripsimus.

5208 supra 5207.

Descripsimus; dedi ex apographo meo.

5209 in eodem pariete, carbone.

Sogliano *Not. d. sc.* 1879 p. 282. Non vidimus.

5210 in pariete dextro.

Descripsimus.

5211 in eodem pariete, carbone.

Sogliano *Not. d. sc.* 1879 p. 282. Non vidimus.

5212—5245 in aedibus n. 3. 6 (*del Centenario*).

5212—5216 in atrio n. 3, ubi anno 1879 descripsi titulum oscum (?), scriptum lapide albo in pariete ingressus, intranti a d., in tectorio nigro ultimi qui dicitur stili:

*Bull. Inst.* 1881 p. 126; *Not. d. sc.* 1879 p. 282; Zvetaieff, Inscr. Ital. inf. dial. n. 156c. Praeter me nemo descripsit; mox deciit. Tertia littera fuit ?, non ?.

5212 in alae sinistrae pariete sinistro.

Descripsimus. — Sogliano *Not. d. sc.* 1879 p. 283.

5213 in alae sinistrae pariete dextro, in picturae, quae representat Philoctetam baculo innixum, angulo inferiore a dextro.

Descripsimus; dedi ex apographo meo. — Sogliano *Pitt. mur.* p. 111 n. 574 et *Not. d. sc.* 1879 p. 283.

*Filius salax qu(o)d* (pro quot) *in maleorum difficultate.*

2 QVOT pro QVOTV Sogl.

In eiusdem picturae angulo inferiores a sin. scriptum est

Sogliano l. c.:

Haud dubie scriptor Philoctetam pro Hercule accepit.

5214 infra 5213 in tectorio nigro tertii qui dicitur stili, longa 0,135.

Descripsimus; dedi ex apographo meo; charta perbenigne exarato. — Edidi *Bull. Inst.* 1881 p. 122; Sogliano *Not. d. sc.* 1879 p. 283; Nicolini III *Casa del Centenario* p. 5.

*Officiosus fugit VIII idus Nov. Divus Caesare M. Iunio Silano cos.* (15 p. C.).

IV, S. 74

Figure 5 – A page from CIL IV

[19] See Bogerts 2017, 7 on the perception and use of street art as a political tool. On the difference between contemporary graffiti-writing/urban art and historical graffiti/visitors' inscriptions, see Lohmann 2017a, 19-37.

### 3.2 *Questions and Methods*

The renaissance of graffiti within the field(s) of Classics, as outlined above, cannot be seen independently from recent development in cultural studies. Firstly, from the late 1980s, the 'spatial turn' has drawn attention to the perception of natural and built spaces and to the interaction of human beings with their environment.[20] The sociology of space, and especially of architecture, is built upon the idea of a reciprocity: whereas a space is designed to fulfil a specific function, it can itself – by its size, building material, decoration, lighting, etc. – evoke a certain atmosphere or prompt specific actions not necessarily intended by its builders, as well as fulfil different functions over time.[21] As informal inscriptions produced and placed without the permission of any 'authority' (even just the owner of the property on which an inscription is found), graffiti are direct reactions to the built environment and thereby reflect the use and perception of a space (Lohmann 2017b, 69 ff.) This does not, of course, apply to graffiti on movable objects such as ceramic vessels or coins which were used outside the radius of one specific building or building complex. Secondly, the 'material turn' takes things, or 'objects', as starting points, and regards them as agents or 'subjects' in and of themselves: objects can carry and constitute meaning, provoke actions, and even have their own biography, which begins at the time of production and includes different phases of use, re-use, disposal, destruction or deposition.[22] *Inscribed* objects can communicate explicit information on behalf of their producer or author and inscriptions constitute objects, too, because they are not just mere texts (content), but texts expressed in a physical medium with material characteristics. The materiality of texts and inscriptions has more recently been adopted as an approach in literary, historical and archaeological studies (Lohmann 2017a, 57-59).

Bearing in mind the theoretical concepts briefly (and admittedly superficially) summarised above, we might use graffiti as historical sources in several ways – or from different angles: as texts (or images), graffiti can provide information about local events and people, ritual or magic practices, business transactions (see e.g., Gostenčnik 2018), currency systems (see e. g., Taeuber 2002), political issues,[23] etc. The language and style of graffiti can reveal different levels of literacy, local dialects, common forms of orthography or the relation between oral and written language. Form and text layout (or motifs and iconography in graffiti drawings) can offer insights into the reception of other media or even provide us with an idea of ancient texts or artworks which have been lost. By re-contextualising graffiti, we are also able to analyse their accessibility and visibility, the way they interact with their surrounding space and with the wall as a surface, and, occasionally, the circumstances of their production. Graffiti can sometimes even offer clues to the construction process and dating of a building.[24]

[20] See Döring 2011 for the background on the spatial turn, with further references, and especially p. 94 on the adaption of the sociology of space to the cultural sciences.

[21] See, for example, Schäfers 2010, 30, for a brief definition of architecture sociology. On social space, see Kajetzke and Schroer 2011, 193: 'Architectural sociology focusses on the ways space is constructed and given meaning by social actors but also on the role which space takes in structuring individuals'. Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.

[22] For an introduction to this subject, see Bräunlein 2012 and Knoll 2014; the latter defines the material turn as 194; Schroer argues that the different 'turns' in the social and cultural sciences, including the social turn and the material turn, are interconnected (2009, 144).

[23] See, for example, the ancient author Suetonius referring to graffiti mocking the emperor Nero (*Nero*, xxxix and xlv [Suetonius 1914, 157-161 and 168-171]).

[24] See, for example, Weniger 2016, 135-137, with medieval examples.

By focusing on graffiti on architectural surfaces, it is possible to investigate the habits of graffiti-writing over time with regard to the use of space, patterns of movement, spatial hierarchies within one space; the motivation and intention of graffiti writers, intended readers and function of graffiti and ways of self-commemoration and self-display. The samples can, however, vary considerably: they can be of a commercial and touristic nature, from sacred or profane spaces, by travellers, guards and prisoners. Methodologically, epigraphic samples from the projects represented here can be divided into graffiti from single buildings,[25] graffiti from whole city areas,[26] and graffiti comparing different spots within one region[27] (or an even broader geographical context).[28]

## 4. *Diachronic Observations and Conclusions*

The term 'graffiti' covers a wide range of inscriptions (not to mention contemporary graffiti/tags) from all periods of time, made by diverse groups of people with different intentions in various types of places. On the other hand, the term has not been applied to one of the most recent groups of samples, i.e. the graffiti from the Gestapo prison in Cologne, because it seemed inappropriate in view of the cruel living conditions, the torture and murder of prisoners to use a term predominantly associated with funny doodles or riddling scribbles.[29] Not all informal, unauthorised inscriptions are called graffiti, and not everything we call graffiti was informal and unauthorised. The variety of epigraphic material being called graffiti shows that no strict criteria can be applied to all the material presented, but that each scholar has to position his or her material individually within a large framework of extremes: spontaneous and planned, ephemeral and permanent, legal and illegal, individual and formal.[30]

Graffiti often seem to have been doodles arising in moments of boredom or spontaneous inspiration – by something just experienced or seen, e. g. a famous place, other visitors' inscriptions or both.[31] Numerous graffiti left by tourists in ancient sites in the context of nineteenth-century Grand Tours can, for example, be found on the Roman aqueduct in Pont du Gard (France, figure 6), the amphitheatre in El Djem (Tunisia, figure 7), the Gate of all Nations in Persepolis (Iran, figure 8) or left by Napoleon's soldiers at the temple in Edfu (Egypt).[32] In some cases, graffiti functioned as provisional markers and placeholders, or notes to be later executed in a different medium, thereby indicating, for instance, the

[25] Dietrich 2018 (see *supra*, p. 1); Götz 2018 (see *supra*, p. 1), Gostenčnik 2018, on the graffiti from the Roman town of Virunum (Austria); Jung 2018, on the above-mentioned Gestapo prison in Cologne; Heckner 2018 (see *supra*, p. 1); Schulz 2018 and in this volume, on the graffiti from the Ludwigsburg castle (Germany), mentioned above.

[26] Chaniotis 2018, on graffiti from the ancient city of Aphrodisias (Turkey); Lohmann 2018c, on all (known) graffiti from the city-area of Pompeii.

[27] Preisigke 2018, on graffiti from Egyptian temples; Schmitz-Esser 2018 and in this volume, on late medieval and early modern graffiti in the region of Tyrol.

[28] Kraack 2018, on the medieval and early modern aristocratic pilgrims' graffiti in Jerusalem, Sinai, and elsewhere; Wozniak 2018, on medieval graffiti representations of men-at-arms from all over Europe.

[29] Jung 2018, 267 ff. Werner Jung's publication of these graffiti (2014) is therefore titled 'The wall inscriptions in the Cologne Gestapo Prison in the EL-DE House'. The application of the term graffiti to this collection of inscriptions was a much-discussed topic of debate during the Munich conference.

[30] See Lohmann 2017a, 15-19 and 2017b on these ambiguities.

[31] See Kraack and Lingens 2001, 20-25, on the conditions for graffiti-writing, with the importance of a place, its accessibility and building material as primary criteria; the function of a space and the duration of visits influenced the making of graffiti as well.

[32] For the graffiti at Edfu, see Effland 2009 and 2010.

original locations of former altars or graves in churches or transmitting events like baptisms and weddings (Weniger 2016, 138). But however ephemeral they may seem as spontaneous expressions, they sometimes have a long life of many hundreds of years. The graffiti from the EL-DE House in Cologne even express the wish to last in order to preserve the names of those murdered by the National Socialists for posterity. In this case, some of the graffiti left behind, in fact, reveal the names of prisoners about whom we would otherwise not know anything (see Jung 2014, 344 no. 435). The later medieval graffiti by princely pilgrims which Detlev Kraack has studied were even considered a form of monument; they were part of an aristocratic tradition (and competition) charged with passing on the memory of the family and gaining immortal honour for the long, dangerous and expensive journey undertaken (figure 9). The coats of arms and emblems of chivalric orders were, apparently, not necessarily made by the noble travellers themselves, but by professional stone cutters. Literary evidence proves that pilgrims even carried little wooden tablets or pieces of parchment or paper with them which had been prepared in advance and painted with the individual heraldic symbols (see Kraack 1997, 314 ff. and 2018, 200 ff.).


Figure 6 – Graffito at Pont du Gard (1831).
Photo by Polly Lohmann. Courtesy of the Author

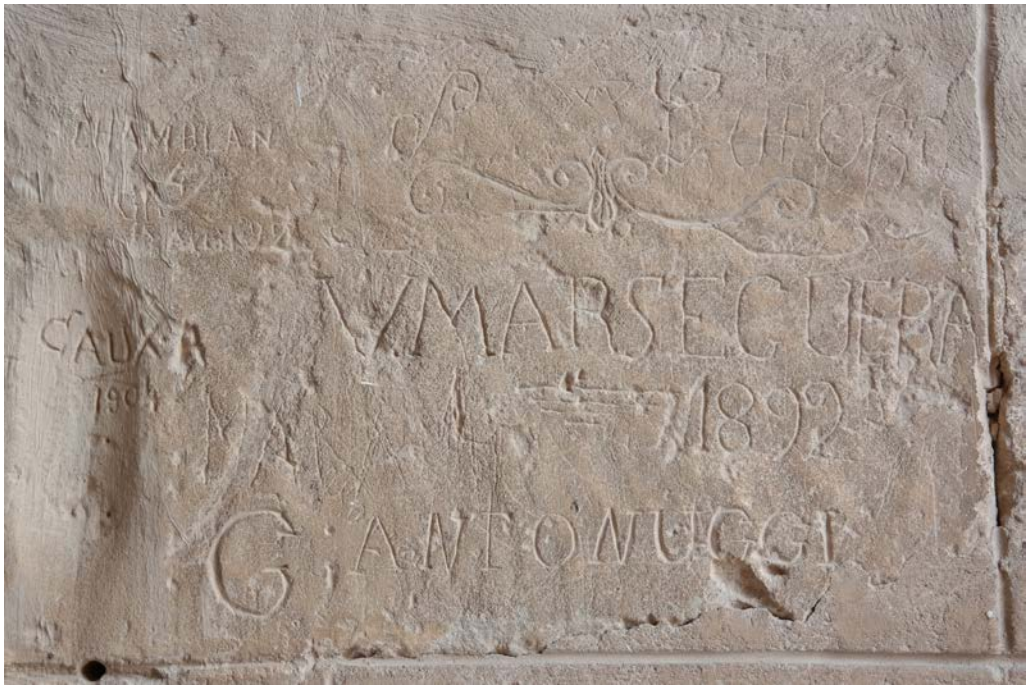



Figure 7 – Graffiti at El Djem (1899). Photo by Polly Lohmann.
Courtesy of the Author


Figure 8 – Graffito at Persepolis (1810). Photo by Polly Lohmann.
Courtesy of the Author

Figure 9 – Late medieval coats of arms of Alex Gradner and his travelling fellow at the Monastery of Saint Catherine on the Sinai (Egypt). Photo by Detlev Kraack. Courtesy of the Author

The thousands of graffiti found in the Roman town of Pompeii, predominantly inside its houses (figure 10), suggest that graffiti were at least tolerated,[33] even though some public inscriptions announce a ban on graffiti from graves or sacred spaces (see e.g. CIL IV 538). We also know of prohibitions related to graffiti-writing from medieval times, but the epigraphic evidence tells us that travellers did not comply with the rules (see e.g. Kraack 1997, 415 no. 22c). In ancient Egypt, certain graffiti can only have been made by priests, because they are located in areas of temples which were not accessible to the public (Preisigke 2018, 24 ff.), whereas, during the Napoleonic period, soldiers showed no compunction in leaving behind memorial inscriptions in Egyptian temples (see n. 32). In the detention rooms of universities, graffiti seem not only to have been a kind of tradition or ritual among the imprisoned, but also to have been accepted by their respective institutions. This becomes clear when one considers that the colours, brushes and pencils used to create graffiti were apparently readily available at Freising (as at Heidelberg, see figure 4), as Ulrike Götz has pointed out (2018, 236). Writing on the wall, as she suggests, may have been thought to act as a psychological outlet.

[33] See Benefiel 2010, 2011, 2014 and 2016; Mouritsen 2011; Lohmann 2015, 2017a and 2017b.

Figure 10 – Map indicating Pompeian buildings containing graffiti (from Lohmann 2017a, 130, figure 31)

Graffiti were usually, though certainly not always, left at central, highly frequented places.[34] They were left by inhabitants or prisoners/guards, visitors (such as pilgrims, worshippers, tourists and guests) or professionals working on site (such as craftsmen, builders, tradesmen and sellers). Independently from their authors and historical time-frame, graffiti consist largely of names, which are frequently combined with personal symbols and images. Expressing individual identity is one of the main characteristics of historical (and modern?) graffiti-writing, which, paradoxically, developed standardized forms such as the ubiquitous 'hic fuit'.

It comes as no surprise to find graffiti originating from specific groups of people in certain places when that place attracted or allowed only a specific group: in churches, we find marks of socially heterogeneous pilgrims and believers, whilst detention rooms bear only those of (male) students. In state prisons, on the other hand, we find a mix of people of different ages and social groups, origins and genders who were forcibly thrown together and would otherwise have no connection to each other. The epigraphic evidence from entire cities, such as Pompeii or Aphrodisias, is similarly heterogeneous. Nonetheless, – generally speaking – only rarely do women appear as authors of graffiti. This could be due to their lower literacy levels in antiquity, medieval and early modern times, or to their restricted access to certain buildings, events or communities (Lohmann 2018b, 15).

However heterogeneous their creators, graffiti often attracted other graffiti, and graffiti clusters developed over time. This could sometimes result in competitions for the best position on a wall or within a room, with one graffito overlapping another. Sacred spaces were particularly hierarchised: the closer to the sacral centre, the more meaningful a graffito, both in symbolic (visual)[35] and practical terms, not only in terms of self-display but also of a possible apotropaic, magical or votive function of the inscription.[36] As representatives of their producers, graffiti

[34] See Kraack and Lingens 2001, 22 ff.

[35] See Kraack 1997, 310 ff. on the lack of space in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the competitive struggle for the 'best' place.

[36] Medieval graffiti in particular suggest such 'practical' functions; see Kraack and Lingens 2001, 31-33; Schmitz-Esser 2018, 165. Predominantly studies from England suggest that graffiti could also function as votives: see i.a. Champion 2012.

guaranteed their permanent 'physical' presence in a place and thereby also the connection to the divine power (Champion 2012, 122). That ships were one of the most popular motifs in ancient graffiti may be explained with a diachronic comparison with medieval ship graffiti, which are thought to have served as votive offerings in order to secure safe travels.[37] The ships could, however, also be simple repetitions of everyday scenes, just as the gladiators engraved in Pompeian walls were perhaps just expressions of a fan culture.

The fact that ancient and medieval literary sources tell us about the contemporary practices of scratching or writing on the walls not only proves that the phenomenon was widely spread, but also that it was a matter of debate.[38] Graffiti writers themselves clearly thought about their creations as well: amongst the ancient graffiti which do not seem to possess a clear function or deeper meaning as identity markers, there are graffiti addressed to the wall which, ironically, reflect upon the acts of reading and writing graffiti, thereby revealing glimpses into a history of mentality of informal writing.[39] Graffiti are not, at any rate, thoughtless marks by the uneducated, but range from doodles by those who had at least rudimentary writing skills to conscious creations by priests and noblemen who belonged to the literary *élite*.[40] Prominent graffiti-writers such as the English poet Lord Byron and his German contemporary Johann Wolfgang von Goethe provide the best examples to counter the assumptions made by the early scholars referred to at the beginning of this article.[41] By containing personal identifiers, self-reflective jokes, personal messages and statements, graffiti represent the individual rather than the whole of society, microcosms more than macrocosms, emotions rather than facts and therefore have a specific value as historical sources.

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[37] See e. g., Peake 2012; Westerdahl 2013; critically Champion 2015, 350 on a monocausal explanation of the ship graffiti. See also Demesticha 2015, 113 for a short overview of scholarship of ship graffiti.

[38] See the sources collected by Kraack 1997, 391-474, and a short overview in Lohmann 2017a, 8-11.

[39] On this topic, see Lohmann 2018c.

[40] This is also stressed by Weniger 2016, 133.

[41] See Kraack and Lingens 2001, 27-29 on Goethe recording his own graffiti.

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