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A NOTE ON THE NEW GRAFFITO FROM POMPEII: *PORCULUS* (*CASA DELLA DIANA ARCAIZZANTE*, VII, 6, 3)¹

The Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando has been conducting ongoing excavations in Pompeii since 2007 in the lot catalogued as VII, 6, 3. The insula VII, 6 was excavated for the first time in 1760. The area between the Triangular Forum and the necropolis of the Herculaneum gate (including the insula VII, 6) belonged to the so-called “masseria de Irace”, which is the former name that appears in the excavation diaries. The area VII, 6, 3 was an ancient *domus* known as *casa della Diana Arcaizzante*, as well also known as the house of M. Spurius Saturninus and D. Volcius Modestus on account of the property signet seals found there. The name comes from the discovery of a statue of the Roman goddess. It was found in the *viridarium* on 10th July 1760, during the Bourbons excavations of the 18th century (Fiorelli 1860: 114), overseen by Karl Weber. Modern investigations that have been conducted by our research team are studying not only the historical materials from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, but also the material recovered in the new excavations (Luzón *et al.* 2009: 117–124; Luzón 2010: 92–103; Alonso *et al.* 2011: 107–121; Alonso *et al.* 2012: 166–187). In the 2010 campaign, we decided to dig in some untouched parts of the house. An archaeological trial pit (1800-B) was made under the courtyard with the altar dedicated to Diana (fig. 1). We were able to document 13 archaeological strata here. The strata in which the short inscription was found is the so-called 1804-B in the section that we provide (fig. 2).



Fig. 1. *Viridarium* of the house VII, 6, 3 with the archaeological trial pit 1800-B (José María Luzón)

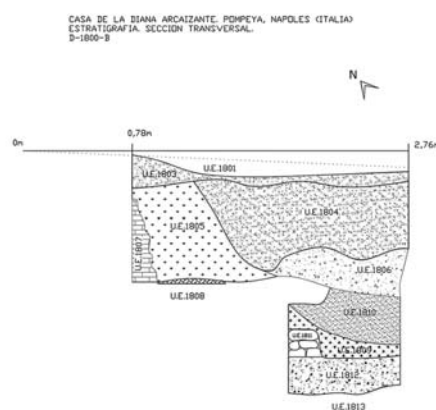


Fig. 2. Stratigraphy of the sector 1800-B (María José Calvo)

This level was composed of debris made up by ceramic material and a huge quantity of wall decorations of stucco fragments, both figurative and monochrome (vermilion, cinnabar red, yellow, green, black, blue and white). All this has allowed us to date the strata to the third quarter of the first century BC (Castillo Ramírez 2012: 113–114). The study of these materials has revealed an early decoration of the house and a renovation that occurred in the first century BC. This affected the architectonic structure and its internal distribution. The only inscription found in the modern excavations of the city block VII, 6 was a piece of one of these stucco fragments, with the exception of the ceramic seals. The fragment with the graffito is a small piece of lime stucco decorated with vermilion and white colour paint. The reconstruction of the wall painting allows us to extrapolate a bicolored horizontal stripes decoration by comparison with other Pompeian examples with the same chronology. The epigraphic document is inscribed on the vermilion segment at the joining point with the white section (around m.1.5 high from the pavement).

The epigraphic document is termed a graffito because it was inscribed on the wall instead rather than painted. Its letters are written in Pompeian cursive and are quite small (from 4 to 2 millimetres). The text has only a single word: *PORCVLVS*

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According to the Munguía dictionary as well as the Oxford Latin Dictionary, the term *pōrcūlus* comes from *pōrcus*, -ī and it means “little pig”, “piglet”, or “suckling pig”. Therefore, it ought to be assumed to be a diminutive. This word is documented in classical sources with this meaning in Plautus (*Rud.* 1170 and *Men.* 314–315), Cato (*Agr.* 19, 2, 1 and 3) and Aulus Gellius (4, 11, 6). Pliny the Elder (9, 45, 4) uses this word with the sense of “sea pig” or “porpoise”. Notwithstanding, it is the first time that the word has been documented in an epigraphic source.

The graffito is undoubtedly a private inscription. It was inscribed on a wall surface of an internal room within the *domus*. It was made between the second century BC and the beginning of the first century BC. This information yielded by the study of the stratigraphic context ties the inscription directly to the decoration of the Hellenistic house before its division and remodelling. The tiny dimension of the letters denotes that the author’s aim was to complicate the visibility of the word from any considerable distance. This leads us to think that the graffito was made in secret because of its meaning (perhaps a nickname or even an insult). It is curious to find the term in this context because it is probably an epigraphic hapax due to its nature; it appears in literary sources several times, as we have shown, but it is a bizarre word to use in public epigraphy.

The study of the epigraphic documents of the insula VII, 6 (Calderón 2012; Calderón 2015: 122–130)² does not reveal any similar graffito in either size or content. The information processed in this research includes 174 documents with writing, classified in tables and with individual and independent information. Most of the documents are wall inscriptions and this shows the importance of this kind of writing in the domestic private context. The new graffito of *Porculus* reflects a mischievous aspect of the private daily life.



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² The material has been compiled from the excavation diaries, publication of the fourth volume of the *CIL* and from the latest findings in the excavation works directed by J. M. Luzón. This research has revealed 50 documents in the group of *instrumenta domestica* (engraved -ceramic seals and others- and painted -*tituli picti*-), 3 inscribed signet seals, 2 inscribed weights, 107 wall inscriptions (titles engraved on marble, graffitos -engraved- and *dipinti* -painted-), 10 brick and tile inscriptions (engraved and painted) and 2 quarry marks on stone.