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Polly Lohmann (ed.), *Historische Graffiti als Quellen. Methoden und Perspektiven eines jungen Forschungsbereichs*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2018. Pp. 330. ISBN 9783515122047. €58,00 (pb).

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[Preview](#)

[Authors and (translated) titles are listed at the end of the review.]

The volume under review is the result of a conference on historical graffiti held at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich in 2017. The aim of this book is to analyse — for the first time — graffiti from the ancient, medieval and modern periods in their historical and geographical contexts from an interdisciplinary point of view. Following this comparative approach the authors show the tremendous potential of this nascent area of research by investigating epigraphic material that has been neglected and underestimated by scholars for a long time.

The editor Polly Lohmann, who has broken new ground on Pompeian graffiti,^{[1](#)} first classifies and explains the significance of these wall inscriptions. By her definition, which prefaces the volume, a graffito is a graphical sign scratched or painted on a surface that was not intended for such a modification (p. 10). Furthermore, she defines graffiti writing as a cultural phenomenon and a product of social dynamics in physical space.^{[2](#)}

The following twelve chapters, which focus on the graffiti of single buildings, whole cities or (supra)regional clusters, are arranged in chronological order and all begin with a brief introduction of the historical and geographical context, followed by the presentation of epigraphic evidence with a demonstration of its potential as a historical source, and end with a conclusion and an English abstract. All papers provide useful pictures, maps, transcriptions or catalogues of the mentioned graffiti. A bibliography concludes the volume (pp. 311-330).

The case studies begin with an analysis of graffiti in Egyptian temples in chapter 2. Julia Dorothea Preisigke reflects upon which persons had access to which rooms within temple areas, and why people put their signs, pictures or inscriptions on the walls. She interprets the temple graffiti as the product of highly elite worship or practices exercised by priests or authorized visitors trying to come as close as possible to the sacred places of the official religion. Unfortunately, this chapter mainly comments on previous research developed by Cruz-Urbe and doesn't seem very innovative or independent from its model.^{[3](#)}

The next three chapters are concerned with ancient cities from the Roman period: Polly Lohmann (chp. 3) elaborates on the perception of wall inscriptions and the creators' self-awareness during the act of graffiti writing. Looking at the materiality and agency of Pompeian graffiti, she provides examples that address the wall itself, while others address their reader directly. In cases of decorative graffiti, the visual

appearance dominates the text. Another Roman example is the graffiti of the city of Old-Virunum in the ancient province of Noricum (Austria). The graffiti examined by Kordula Gostenčnik (chp. 4) are close to the Pompeian graffiti chronologically (1st century AD) and show the contemporary epigraphic habit in the Roman world as it relates to graffiti.⁴ According to the author, the merchants'-graffiti containing notes with dates, payment information, destination of delivery, wholesale quantities and (above all) customers' names give a direct insight into the economic life of the city. By contrast, the Aphrodisian graffiti that Angelos Chaniotis considers (chp. 5) date to the 4th and 7th century AD. The epigraphic evidence of Aphrodisias, one of the most important cities of Asia Minor, shows a diverse graffiti landscape with texts and images of high quality, perhaps owing to the artistic and craft activities of a large part of the population (p. 79). The two groups presented here are concerned with pictorial graffiti representing buildings and works of art (a fountain, a pool, the city wall, statues) and obscene texts, including one that aimed to humiliate the governor Dulcitus.

While extensive editions of inscriptions such as the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL) are available to scholars of ancient history, systematic and comparative research on medieval inscriptions is still at its beginning. The next five chapters investigate medieval graffiti; two on epigraphic evidence of specific churches in Germany (chps. 6 and 9), two on travellers' graffiti (chps. 7 and 10), and one on the graffiti found in the region of Tirol (Austria) as a source for local social and economic history (chp. 8).

Ulrike Heckner presents — after a slightly prolix introduction — the graffiti of the craftsmen who were working on the reconstruction of the roof of St. Katharina (Wenau, Germany) towards the end of the 15th century (chp. 6). They are mostly pictorial graffiti showing hammers, rosettes or crests, and seem to have been exercises of the craftsmen. Later, more spontaneous drawings were added. Thomas Wozniak follows with graffiti representing knights, riders, horsemen and men-at-arms from different places throughout Europe (chp. 7). The author underlines the motif of leaving one's mark for posterity and the function of votive offerings of people who were able to travel. The graffiti also portray the style of contemporary armour. This chapter ends with an impressive catalogue of the selected pictorial graffiti mentioned in the text (pp. 132-141). Romedeo Schmitz-Esser (chp. 8) underlines the religious dimension of the graffiti found in Tirol in the late medieval and early modern periods. Some graffiti show the visitors' intention to prolong their presence in sacred spaces by leaving their names behind. Apotropaic ideas, magical thinking and superstition are also present in this kind of graffiti. Simon Dietrich (chp. 9) focuses on the some 1300 late medieval and early modern graffiti discovered inside and outside of St. Elizabeth's church in Marburg (Germany). They show us not only members of the Teutonic Order and medieval noble travellers who through their graffiti hoped for secular honour and the celestial intercession of St. Elizabeth, but also students of the University of Marburg who left their mark. Detlev Kraack (chp. 10) takes a broader approach, analysing the aristocratic and patrician practise of attaching one's coat of arms or leaving a graffiti of one's coat of arms, encoded devices or names and dates, in order to memorialise one's pilgrimage. These graffiti are an important source to understand the medieval noble mentality and the desire for representation and immortal honour. In the appendix the author presents the Latin text and German translation of Felix Fabri's "Evagatorium", which is an important reflection on the practice of graffiti writing in the Middle Ages (pp. 213-219). The following two chapters are concerned with graffiti mainly dating to the 18th century. On the one hand, Ulrike Götz (chp. 11) gives an intriguing insight into the graffiti of students of the Episcopal academy of Freising (Germany, 1697-1803). As they were made during the students' stay in the detention room of the building complex, they are related to prison graffiti and show different kinds of images, symbols, and dates, and one is even in Latin. The graffiti depict everyday school life and speak of difficult aspects of the

students' life. On the other hand, Daniel Schulz (chp. 12) presents his research on the Ludwigsburg Castle (Germany). Architects, craftsmen, artists, inhabitants, staff, soldiers and visitors left their marks and immortalized themselves on the castle walls. Their graffiti “not only provide information about what certain persons did or thought, but also how they dealt with the castle as their built environment” (p. 264, translation mine).

In the final chapter (13) Werner Jung treats the 1800 graffiti found in the Gestapo prison of Cologne, where we can see touching words of farewell, expressions of protest, desperation, hope, desire and love in the last moments of the lives of the victims — mostly women. The graffiti give important information about the names, origin, personalities, attitudes and opinions of the prisoners, the conditions of their imprisonment and the behaviour of their aggressors.

The chapters tend to be descriptive, but nevertheless give a marvelous insight into the thoughts, emotions and mentalities of individuals who in the historiographic tradition usually remain silent, and who, for various reasons, wished to leave a trace of their existence. With this, the volume offers an outstanding contribution to our understanding of historical graffiti for what they are: a cultural constant throughout all eras of European history, representing an authentic and promising source for the culture and daily life of their authors.

Authors and translated titles

1. Why Occupy Oneself with Historical Graffiti — and What Are Graffiti Anyway? A Preface to the Classification and Significance of the Inscriptions / Polly Lohmann (pp. 9-16)
2. Graffiti in Egyptian Temples. Evidence of the Population's Access to the Temples and the Problem of their Dating / Julia Dorothea Preisigke (pp. 17-36)
3. “Whoever reads this is stupid” — Materiality and Agency of Pompeian Graffiti / Polly Lohmann (pp. 37-50)
4. The Merchants-Graffiti from the Early Roman City “Old-Virunum” on the Magdalensberg in Carinthia / Kordula Gostenčnik (pp. 51-76)
5. Everyday Sketches from Aphrodisias / Angelos Chaniotis (pp. 77-92)
6. Late Gothic Craftsmen-Graffiti in the Former Convent Church of St. Katharina in Wenau (Kreis Düren) / Ulrike Heckner (pp. 93-110)
7. Knights, Riders and Men-at-arms in the Context of Medieval Graffiti / Thomas Wozniak (pp. 111-131, catalogue 132-141)
8. Tyrolian Graffiti as Sources for the Social History of Late Medieval and Early Modern Times / Romedio Schmitz-Esser (pp. 143-168)
9. The Late Medieval and Early Modern Graffiti in St. Elizabeth’s Church in Marburg. Evidence, Methodological Challenges and Value as a Source / Simon Dietrich (pp. 169-192)
10. Noblemen and Patricians on Journeys: Graffiti of the 14th – 16th Centuries / Detlev Kraack (pp. 193-212)
11. “Nomina stultorum” — 18th Century Graffiti in the Detention Room of the Former Episcopal Academy at Freising / Ulrike Götz (pp. 221-238)
12. Talking Walls — Graffiti from Ludwigsburg Castle / Daniel Schulz (pp. 239-266)
13. Witnesses of the Victims: Graffiti of Prisoners in the Cologne Gestapo Prison / Werner Jung (pp. 267-310)

Notes:

[1.](#) Lohmann, P., *Graffiti als Interaktionsform. Geritzte Inschriften in den Wohnhäusern Pompejis*, Berlin; Boston 2018.

[2.](#) For this recently developed concept in ancient epigraphy, see Baird, J. A. and C. Taylor, (eds.) *Ancient Graffiti in Context* (Routledge Studies in Ancient History 2),

London 2010; Benefiel, R. and Keegan P. (eds.), *Inscriptions in the Private Sphere in the Greco-Roman World* (Brill Studies in Greek and Latin Epigraphy 7) Leiden; Boston 2016; Milnor, K., *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii*, Oxford 2014.

[3.](#) Cruz-Uribe, E., *Hibis Temple Project. vol. 3: The Graffiti from the Temple Precinct*, San Antonio 2008.

[4.](#) Cooley, A., *The Cambridge Manual of Latin Epigraphy*, Cambridge 2012, 111-116; MacMullen, R., "The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire," *AJP* 103.3 (1982), 233-246.