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**Roman Political Graffiti and “Hidden Transcripts”**

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**Roman Political Graffiti and “Hidden Transcripts”**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

To my parents, Natalie Guarascio and Arthur Barnett, for their unconditional and unceasing love and support.

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## **Abstract**

### **Roman Political Graffiti and “Hidden Transcripts”**

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This report examines literary accounts and archaeological evidence of political graffiti in and around Rome from the late Republic onwards. Within Scott’s framework of hidden transcripts of the “dominated” that combat “dominant” discourse, this report addresses issues of authorship, intent, and impact, with consideration of both linguistic and visual-spatial elements of graffiti. It argues for a nuanced, flexible understanding of “dominated” and “dominant” groups, both in the groups’ composition and in their contributions to hidden transcripts and “dominant” discourses.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Graffiti is beautiful; like a brick in the face of a cop.” -Hunter S. Thompson

Such an assessment should not come as a surprise to those who are familiar with Thompson, counterculturist and founder of Gonzo journalism, fervent Nixon-hater, and author of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. The sentiment expressed by Thompson, however, is one widely held by observers of both contemporary and ancient graffiti: graffiti are intrinsically tied to dissent, and specifically dissent of the disadvantaged. From Banksy to the graffiti on the Israel-Gaza border, modern graffiti are often viewed as forms of resistance. Graffiti-writing is an act that capitalizes on place and spatial communication and is easily accessible, especially when many similar modes of dissemination of one’s ideas are restricted. For many, graffiti are the voice of the disenfranchised and the mode of popular expression.

The belief that graffiti are popular and dissident in nature is present among scholars of ancient Roman graffiti as well. August Mau, of course, famously advocated for the assumption that graffiti were “little representative of the best elements of society.”<sup>1</sup> MacMullen, too, characterized certain politically-inclined graffiti, like those from Suetonius’ *Life of Nero*, as from a “lower order.”<sup>2</sup> The political involvement of the Roman lower classes has only recently emerged as a topic of focus, with Yavetz’ 1969 book on the relationship between the principate and the masses. Following this, MacMullen, Millar, Mouritsen, and Morstein-Marx have contributed greatly to our understanding of the socio-

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<sup>1</sup> Mau (1899), p. 482.

<sup>2</sup> MacMullen (1966), p. 40.



political role of the masses.<sup>3</sup> Horsfall, too, has demonstrated that the Roman *plebs* was an amalgamation of diverse economic, social, and political groups, as well as, to various extents, exposed to and capable of interacting with literary, musical, and performative cultures traditionally thought of as exclusively elite.<sup>4</sup> Because of this recent interest in the Roman lower classes, graffiti have received more nuanced attention and evaluation as scholars have attempted to triangulate the relationships between the people, politics, and graffiti.<sup>5</sup> This topic is especially in need of nuanced focus and scholarship; graffiti alone are complex and multifaceted combinations of various spatial, literary, and performative messaging, each category complex enough within itself. Graffiti and descriptions of graffiti must be examined from both literary and archaeological perspectives to understand the communication they attempt.

In this vein, my paper will explore the literary, spatial, and political elements of graffiti in attempts to elucidate authorship, audience, and intent of graffiti documented primarily in the literary record. It will by necessity also discuss and complicate the authors of these graffiti. I will address questions of who (non-elite? elite?) and what (charcoal, incised, or painted graffiti? *Libelli?*), as well as why (active dissidence?) and how (“upward” or “outward” communication?). Before I discuss the graffiti themselves, it is necessary to address first, how I define the Roman people and elite and, second, the framework with which I will be approaching discussions of these graffiti.

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<sup>3</sup> See MacMullen (1974), Mouritsen, Millar, and Morstein-Marx (2004), in order of publication date.

<sup>4</sup> Horsfall, *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> For work on the *plebs*, politics, and graffiti, see Morstein-Marx (2012), Hillard, and Zadorojnyi.

Both Horsfall and, before him, Yavetz, note the many issues with sorting out who exactly ‘the people’ are. Many terms are used to describe the people, sometimes interchangeably, and sometimes without (negative) implication, but not always.<sup>6</sup> The people are often called *populus*, *plebs*, *turba*, *vulgus*, and *multitudo*, with various adjectival additions that range from neutral to derogatory.<sup>7</sup> Of course, this variation is undoubtedly calculated at times, but there is no clear pattern to how an ancient Latin writer used these words, and one cannot assume there was one.<sup>8</sup> In Greek, the issue is similar. Οί πολλοί, ὄμιλος, πλῆθος, and δῆμος, among other terms, are used to describe the people.<sup>9</sup> Because even across the *corpus* of one author many different terms are used to describe the people in seemingly similar circumstances, this paper will consider popular writers that fall under the broad umbrella of these terms instead of examining the involvement of one particular group (e.g., only the “*oi polloi*”).

Though Horsfall writes about the Roman *plebs*, the term “plebeian” and its complement, “patrician”, are no longer significant distinctions by the period of the late Republic in which I focus. Instead, I would like to think about the people and the elite in hierarchical distinctions. The elite are a group that can effect political and social change from the top down, and are, as a whole, wealthier than the people. This is not a group exclusively made of traditional social elite, either, as *novi homines*, for example, were

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<sup>6</sup> See Yavetz, p. 141-155 (Appendix) and Horsfall, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> See Yavetz, p. 141 for detailed classification of which author uses what, when. For instance, just in the *corpus* of Tacitus’ work, the *plebs* are *ingenua* in Tac. Ann. 16.13, in Tac. Hist. 1.4 and 3.74 they are *plebs sordida*, and in Tac. Ann. 2.77 they are referred to as *vulgus imperitum*.

<sup>8</sup> See Horsfall, p.26, and Yavetz, p. 144-151.

<sup>9</sup> Yavetz, p. 141.

capable of creating institutional change in a direct way, too, despite some of the criticism they received from elite groups. Conversely, the people, or non-elite, are a group that can perhaps effect political or social change, but can really only do this from the bottom up. The non-elite are probably not as wealthy, but this is not to say that financial status is a certain indicator. Horsfall notes that one could be wealthy and also from a lower social class and “there were vast distinctions of wealth, standing, and permissible activity in public life [for the lower class].”<sup>10</sup> Additionally, we should not understand this non-elite group as homogenous in opinion. One’s political involvement and social or cultural background were influenced by many factors; “no two Roman citizens were likely to be subject to exactly the same sets of pressures.”<sup>11</sup> Instead, we must understand the Roman people not as a uniform body, but as a diverse body of various sub-groups, malleable even within themselves and, similarly, though not to the same extent, the Roman elite. This paper will refer to groups identified by any of these general terms authors use to describe the people as non-elite or ‘the people’, but also, when applicable, to the terms specified by authors when discussing those particular literary passages.

Roman political history is not without its theory. In his 2012 article, Morstein-Marx applies James C. Scott’s anthropological theories about infrapolitics and hidden transcripts to the discussion of political graffiti in Rome. According to Scott, the official, “dominant”

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<sup>10</sup> Horsfall helpfully points us toward Millar, p. 203 and an epistle of Horace’s, who proclaims: *sed quadringentis sex septem milia desunt; plebs eris* (but if six or seven thousand [sesterces] are missing from your four hundred thousand; you will be a plebeian) [Hor. Epist. 1.1.58]. See Horsfall, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Horsfall, p. 27. Horsfall discusses various factors like loyalties to *collegia*, occupation, and neighborhood. See also n. 44.

transcript does not exist to reinforce the oppressing of the “dominated”. Rather, it is crafted to dispel anxiety among the “dominant”.<sup>12</sup> The “dominated” in part contribute to the official, “dominant” transcript, but this shouldn’t be seen as complicity on their part. Rather, Scott argues, the “dominated” can contribute to the “dominant” transcript while also operating in infrapolitics, various types of resistance that exist unnoticed by the “dominant”. Hidden transcripts are instances of tangible surfacing of these infrapolitics into a discourse of the “dominated”, in conflict with the “dominant” discourse.<sup>13</sup> Scott discusses various categories of these infrapolitics that we can discern: “material domination” (e.g., squatting), “status domination” (e.g., anonymous gossip), and “ideological domination” (e.g., “myths of social banditry and class heroes”).<sup>14</sup> Scott is responding to the Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony: the idea that a ruling class manipulates and redefines cultural values and social concepts to justify a socio-political domination of the ruling class over all, rooted in cultural ideology.<sup>15</sup> Scott attempts to point out that complete manipulation of cultural values by the ruling class does not entirely happen; “dominated” groups do not explicitly accept the dominant discourse and instead operate in a world of infrapolitics. As such, Scott asserts that this domination is a much more physical display than an ideological one.<sup>16</sup> Morstein-Marx challenges this assertion. Scott assumes a uniform body of the “dominated”, each individual capable of seeing right through this “dominant” discourse. In reality, Morstein-

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<sup>12</sup> Morstein-Marx brilliantly cites *Vir. Aen.* 1.148–56, a simile wherein a smooth-talking orator is able to calm an angry rabble, an idea not unknown to Roman literature. See Morstein-Marx (2012), p. 193.

<sup>13</sup> See Scott, p. 87; Morstein-Marx (2012), p. 192ff.

<sup>14</sup> Scott, p. 198ff.

<sup>15</sup> Scott, p. 70ff; Morstein-Marx (2012), p.193ff.

<sup>16</sup> Scott, p. 183ff.

Marx argues, dominated/dominant relationships are more complex than this. Individuals and smaller groups within the “dominated” react differently to dominant discourse and are able to resist cultural hegemony on a sliding scale. Further, we must understand that domination of the ruling class exists through more than intimidation or physical threat, and the “dominated” sometimes avoid resistance of the “dominant” discourse for other reasons besides fear of violent retaliation.<sup>17</sup>

Morstein-Marx rightly complicates Scott’s ideas on the dominated, but I wish to add a point that is especially relevant given the diversity of the Roman non-elite. I contend that we can have layers of hidden transcripts amongst different groups of the “dominated”, especially within contentious and tenuous social and political situations. These layers are both horizontal and vertical; x group can be dominant over y group, but dominated by z group, and x group and y group can develop different hidden transcripts in response to the domination of z group. Morstein-Marx argues for a complex understanding of the “dominant” discourse and the “dominated” response to the “dominant” discourse. We can’t stop there. As Horsfall notes, the Roman non-elite are economically, socially, and politically diverse. To acknowledge that this diversity could have extended to the non-elite’s infrapolitics and informed various levels of “hidden transcripts” is to understand the complex political interactions of the Romans with nuance.

I must also briefly clarify the types of graffiti in antiquity and in the literary sources that I will be discussing in this paper. Graffiti could have been incised with a stylus or sharp

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<sup>17</sup> Morstein-Marx (2012), p. 194-5.

object, painted (dipinti), or written with charcoal onto a surface, usually a wall of a structure.<sup>18</sup> I use the term ‘graffiti’ to refer to incised graffiti, charcoal graffiti, and dipinti generally, but I am more precise when able. The literary sources in this paper do not specify types of graffiti, but do indicate that something is a graffiti by verb use. Similarly, verbs distinguish graffiti from pamphlets, βιβλία or *libelli*, documents attached to a monument or dispersed.<sup>19</sup> Pamphlets often have a similar “hidden transcript” function to graffiti, and thus will be discussed in this paper, along with other circulated “hidden transcripts” whose medium is unclear.<sup>20</sup>

With Scott’s and Morstein-Marx’s work on hidden transcripts, I will explore these various methods of dissidence and how they inform relationships between the Roman non-elite and the elite, and among the non-elite themselves.

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<sup>18</sup> There is archaeological evidence of all three of these techniques in Pompeii, see CIL 4. For evidence of charcoal graffiti in literary sources, see Mart. 12.61.7–10; Lucr. *Metr.* 10.4. It may be that charcoal was preferred for these “hidden transcript” graffiti; in Pompeii, paint is usually used for *programmata*. Charcoal has a faster application time and is less material-heavy than paint (one needs to purchase dye or pigment and maybe even white-wash a wall, see Franklin).

<sup>19</sup> Plutarch uses compounds of the verb γράφω (Vit. Ti. Gracch., 8.7; Vit. G. Gracch., 17.6) when referring to graffiti. Though Plutarch uses the verb γράφω when describing Gaius’ pamphlets in the life of Tiberius (Vit. Ti. Gracch., 8.7), the phrase ἔν τινι βιβλίῳ makes the medium abundantly clear. See Harris (1989) for discussion of *biblia* and *libelli* (the Latin equivalent), as well as Morstein-Marx’s (2012) note, p. 201, where he explains that *libelli/biblia* are distinguished from bullitens, more formal, government-issued versions of pamphlets, by forms of the verbs proponere/ἐπιτιθέναι.

<sup>20</sup> For example Suetonius writes in his *Life of Nero* (Nero 39.2) “Multa Graece Latineque proscripta aut vulgata sunt”, but not enough information is given to indicate if these are graffiti, *libelli*, or something else entirely.

## EXTANT “HIDDEN TRANSCRIPT” GRAFFITI

The archaeological record provides very little straightforward evidence of hidden transcript graffiti, though there is no ultimate way to discern elaborately coded hidden transcripts from graffiti that were not representative of hidden transcripts. I suspect many graffiti exist whose dissident intent remains largely unnoticed by scholars. Political *programmata*, painted electoral endorsements, make up a significant portion of graffiti in Pompeii, a city that is one of the biggest sources of Roman graffiti.<sup>21</sup> Some of these *programmata* could arguably be hidden transcripts, particularly graffiti which seem to parody common *formulae* or the tradition itself. I am thinking particularly (but not exclusively) of CIL 4.576: the bandits ask [you to vote for] Vatia for aedile.<sup>22</sup> There is potential for dissident meaning, but whether *furunculi* is indeed an attempt on the part of Vatia’s political enemies to associate Vatia negatively, or perhaps instead a *collegium* name,<sup>23</sup> is unclear. If these are hidden transcripts, they are too hidden to allow even tentative assessments. They deserve their own treatment situated within the tradition of *programmata* of Pompeii, and thus are out of the scope of this paper especially because of the well-established authorial practices and *formulae* of the genre.<sup>24</sup> Beyond these

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<sup>21</sup> See CIL 4 and its supplements. For an introduction to these graffiti, see Keegan, p.173-83. For a thorough treatment of *programmata*, see Franklin.

<sup>22</sup> “Vatiam aed(ilem) furunculi rog(ant).” See also CIL 4. 7851 for a similar sentiment.

<sup>23</sup> c.f. CIL 4.7240; the followers of Priapus refer to themselves as *codatis* (tailed).

<sup>24</sup> *Programmata* used *formulae* very similar to epigraphic *formulae*. They were also sometimes signed by both those endorsing a candidate and by those who painted the graffito. See Franklin for further discussion.

*programmata*, extant graffiti are largely incised and record a variety of expressions of daily life.<sup>25</sup>

One expects the critical language and persistence of hidden transcript graffiti in the literary record to have extant parallels,<sup>26</sup> but the few hidden transcript graffiti we have aren't nearly as dissident or confrontational as the literary sources lead us to believe. For example, a graffito from Terracina, located on a wall over the theater entrance and dated to around 52 BCE, reads: *Publi progenies Appi cognomine Pulchri/occubuit letum* ( Publius, descendant of Appius from the cognomen Pulchrus, met his death) [CIL I<sup>2</sup> 3109 A-E].<sup>27</sup>

Solin initially interprets this graffito as actively ironic and anti-Clodian, whereas Tatum and Morstein-Marx characterize it as pro-Clodian.<sup>28</sup> Tatum argues for a connection between the town of Terracina and Clodius through a certain Cloelius, close friend to Clodius. Tatum seems to imply less ancient anonymity. Cloelius was a rich, well known man in Terracina, he says, and known for his support of Clodius. Cloelius probably did not write this graffito, but Tatum proposes it was a popular reproduction of some sort of *elogium* or memorial to Clodius orchestrated by Cloelius.<sup>29</sup> Tatum additionally remarks that

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<sup>25</sup> See Keegan for an introduction to Roman graffiti.

<sup>26</sup> The anti-Caesarian graffiti targeting Brutus, for instance, is both copious (Plutarch writes that men *κατεπίπλασαν* (fill up) the room with graffiti), and challenges Brutus directly, *οὐκ εἰ Βρούτος* (you are not Brutus!), Plut. Vit. Caes., 62.7.

<sup>27</sup> See Morstein-Marx (2012)'s note on the translation of *Publi*, p. 200. The use of the (intransitive) verb *occumbo* with the accusative noun *letum* is also attested in Enn. Ann, 15.389 and Sil., 13.380.

<sup>28</sup> See Morstein-Marx (2012), p. 200; Tatum, and Solin. Solin's argument is largely based on his identification of Clodius as having exclusively popular support and his belief that Clodius has no connection to Terracina. Tatum refutes both of these arguments convincingly, see p. 299-301.

<sup>29</sup> Tatum argues that the influence of funerary verse on this graffito suggests a parroting of an original (oral) *elogium* written by Cloelius, primarily because of his close relationship with Clodius and his scribal experience, p. 301-4.



this graffito “would’ve found a receptive audience” as well, due to the allegiance toward Cloelius and Clodius from the people of Terracina.<sup>30</sup> If we take Tatum’s theory that this graffito is based on an *elogium* or memorial for Clodius, would residents of a city necessarily support Clodius based on his relationship with Cloelius? Would they even necessarily support Cloelius, just by virtue of his connection with Terracina? Or, more likely, could there be varying levels of support within Terracina? Though authorship remains unclear, I contend that this graffito was written to be seen and interacted with, and this happened for a significant amount of time. Despite being incised, so probably not visible from further distances, it was located above an entrance to the theater of Terracina, a high traffic area, and remained visible and not plastered over for a surprisingly long time.<sup>31</sup> Not only was it intended for circulation, it was also consciously preserved. The message of the graffito was important to the residents of Terracina, but what exactly was this message? Unfortunately, the nature of the graffito directly informs its classification as hidden transcript or dominant transcript in Terracina. If Tatum is correct and this graffito is pro-Clodian *because* he was widely supported in Terracina, then we cannot consider this a hidden transcript, something subversive to the “dominant” discourse, at least one working against the “dominant” discourse of Terracina itself. That this graffito remained above the

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<sup>30</sup> Cloelius, according to Cicero, led the riots that burned the Curia after Clodius’ death in 52 BCE. See Cic. Mil, 30, 90; Tatum p. 303. Sextus Claudius is S. Cloelius; see Damon for this translation issue. Tatum deduces that the residents of Terracina would be invested in the fate of Cloelius (and, through him, Clodius), and associate Clodius’ death with Cloelius’ exile for his part in the burning of the Curia. Cloelius is not recalled until 44 BCE (by Marc Antony), so Tatum dates this graffito from around 52 BCE to 44 BCE.

<sup>31</sup> See Solin, p. 361, who discusses that, for an established graffiti location, this spot has surprisingly few graffiti and layers of plaster. Solin believes there is a negative correlation between the ancients’ willingness to plaster over something and the intrigue of the graffiti in that space.

theater entrance, largely untouched for some time, should tell us that it was accepted into the “dominant” discourse of Terracina, or so subtly subversive that it could have been interpreted as a contribution to the “dominant” discourse and thus remained untouched. If we consider it in relation to the “dominant” discourse at Rome, though, where opinion about Clodius Pulcher was potentially more divided, it could certainly be considered as a hidden transcript. All of this is tenuous conjecture, however, as the fact remains that we do not (and most likely cannot) know the author or intent.

Zadorojnyi cites another ancient extant graffito that merits attention: futu(e)batur inquam futu(e)batur civium Romanorum a(t)tractis pedibus cu(n)nus in qua (re) nul(la)e aliae veces erant nissimei [sic] dulcis(s)im(a)e et pi(i)ssimae (fucked, I say, fucked, with legs held up, was the pussy of the Roman citizens, in which act there were no other but the sweetest and most honest cries)<sup>32</sup> [CIL 4.1261].

This graffito is located on the exterior of the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii in Reggio 6, *insulae* 8, 3 and 5, on the intersection of Via delle Terme and Via della Fullonica. It is across from the forum baths and in close proximity to the forum. Not only does it get a fair amount of foot traffic because of its location on a corner, but its close relationship to the forum and the forum baths undoubtedly ensured sustained pedestrian traffic. It was thus significantly visible to passersby, and one can assume that CIL 4.1261 had a sizeable audience. As for the content of the graffito, both Milnor and Zadorojnyi acknowledge the style of public oratory in words such as *inquam* and the repetition of

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<sup>32</sup> This graffito has numerous spelling issues. Veces= Voces, nissimei= nisi si, see Varone p. 84-5.

*futuebatur*, as well as the feminization of Rome and the use of rape as metaphor for military domination.<sup>33</sup> Some scholars also see this graffito as an imitation of Cicero's *Verrines*.<sup>34</sup> Still, as Milnor and Zadorojnyi note, it is unclear whether this graffito is mournful or satire and beyond that, whether it is a criticism of oratory or the state of Rome because of its vagueness.<sup>35</sup> Authorship is also a question; is this an internal, Roman critique, in the same vein as Cato the Elder condemned Roman elite luxury, or a critique from a non-Roman person (Oscan?) after the Roman capture of the city in the Social Wars?

Again, this is unfortunately conjecture; identity and intent are very hard to discern from anonymous extant graffiti. Are Vatia's political enemies attempting to spread libel against him in the political *programma* from Pompeii? Is the Clodius graffito a hidden transcript, in direct conflict with the "dominant" discourse at Terracina or at Rome? Is an anonymous resident of Pompeii expressing frustration at Roman "dominant" discourses in the city, grumbling about the state of affairs, or amusing himself with a play on Roman oratory? The graffiti discussed thus far are all potentially hidden transcripts, but one cannot come to a definitive conclusion.<sup>36</sup>

Literary sources, however, give us rich accounts of possible hidden transcripts.

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<sup>33</sup> See Milnor (2014), p. 122-24; Zadorojnyi, p. 112-3.

<sup>34</sup> Cic. Verr. 2.5.162, wherein Verres orders the wrongful torture of a Roman citizen whose only words while being tortured are of his love for Rome. See Zadorojnyi, p. 112-3; Milnor (2014), p. 122-3.

<sup>35</sup> See Milnor (2014), p. 122-24; Zadorojnyi, p. 112-3.

<sup>36</sup> For a thorough treatment of political graffiti in Pompeii and Terracina, see Cugusi's article, from which I discussed a few more grounded examples. See also Zadorojnyi, p. 111-3.

## PLUTARCH'S ACCOUNT OF GRAFFITI IN THE LIFE OF TIBERIUS GRACCHUS

For Plutarch, graffiti play a role in influencing the actions of politicians and in foreshadowing political events. He often categorizes these anonymous, public comments as the popular opinion and uses graffiti as a tool to put groups of people in conversation with each other, not just in the more famous examples of the *Lives* of Gaius Gracchus and Julius Caesar, but also in many of his other Roman *Lives*, including Tiberius Gracchus and Brutus.

When discussing Tiberius Gracchus' political motivations, Plutarch notes that the graffiti written by the people entreating Tiberius to support popular land rights influence Tiberius more than anything:

τὴν δὲ πλείστην αὐτὸς ὁ δῆμος ὄρησιν καὶ φιλοτιμίαν ἐξήψε,  
προκαλούμενος διὰ γραμμάτων αὐτὸν ἐν στοαῖς καὶ τοίχοις καὶ  
μνήμασι καταγεγραμμένων, ἀναλαβεῖν τοῖς πένησι τὴν δημοσίαν  
χώραν (The people themselves especially ignited [Tiberius'] ambition  
and desire, calling on him through words written on stoas and walls and  
tombs, to support the cause of public land for the poor) [Plut. Vit. Ti.  
Gracch., 8.7].

Plutarch's assertion is interesting for a number of reasons; 1) Plutarch specifies that the people (ὁ δῆμος) are the writers of these graffiti and these non-elite entreaties are more successful in stirring up Tiberius' popular ambitions than his close family, orators, and enemies,<sup>37</sup> and 2) the graffiti are all over the city on a variety of monuments (public, private, and funerary).

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<sup>37</sup> Plutarch lists as other influences Diophanes, a rhetorician, Blossius, a philosopher, Cornelia, his mother, Spurius Postumius, his rival, and observations of the poor in the Italian countryside, as told through the circulation of pamphlets written by his brother, Gaius [Plut. Vit. Ti. Gracch., 8.4-7].

1) Plutarch pointedly mentions that the writers of these graffiti are the *demos*. Plutarch's identifying of an author, especially when graffiti are usually an anonymous genre, serves his own purposes to some extent and provides a foundation for or explanation of Tiberius' eventual political alliances. Readers should be questioning the degree of accuracy (if any) of his claim that the *demos* wrote these graffiti all across the city, but that this practice happened, that it happened frequently enough to be a somewhat common sight, and that the *demos* could be believed responsible for it should not be in question. Plutarch notes that the graffiti influence Tiberius τὴν δὲ πλείστην (especially), more so than anything else. The people are, it seems, the ultimate motivation for his popular career and capable of manipulating him into action.

2) This dispersal of graffiti isn't surprising; the archaeological record preserves graffiti in public places, on the walls (both inward and outward facing) of private homes, and on tombs.<sup>38</sup> But these graffiti are by-and-large incised with a stylus and would probably not be easily noticeable in the way Plutarch's description of the graffiti suggests; we perhaps have an instance of charcoal or painted graffiti, here.<sup>39</sup> What do the people accomplish by this widespread campaign? Graffiti throughout the city do not only address Tiberius, they also convey the *demos*' message to both elite and non-elite groups. Morstein-Marx notes that these graffiti serve two purposes: they reveal the hidden transcript (non-elite support for a Tiberian popular political platform) to elites and they disperse a non-

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<sup>38</sup> Again, see CIL 4 and Supplements. Keegan is recommended for a more general introduction.

<sup>39</sup> See Morstein-Marx (2012) p. 200 for a similar discussion.

elite opinion to other non-elites to garner support.<sup>40</sup> Certainly, quantity of graffiti is important to show Tiberius that he has sizeable support for his popular agenda, but it is equally, if not more important, to ensure that the support is sizeable by circulating one's message given the (ever-present) possible repercussions inherent in subverting "dominant" discourse.

The reader gets a nice juxtaposition of *libelli* and graffiti when Plutarch describes Gaius' circulation of his own pamphlets to spread a populist political rumor about his brother: ὁ δ' ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ Γάιος ἔν τινι βιβλίῳ γέγραφεν... (but his brother Gaius wrote in a certain pamphlet...) [Plut. *Vit. Ti. Gracch.*, 8.7]. As this reference to Gaius' pamphlets occurs just before Plutarch's mention of the *demos'* graffiti, one cannot help but notice the change in both the medium and the author of the respective political messages. This makes the reader wonder about the correlation between the two and, specifically, if the ancients might have associated charcoal graffiti with lower social classes and *biblia* with the elite. The idea that certain materials were more available to certain groups of people is an attractive theory, especially when one considers the degree of mobility associated with each; it is far easier and less time consuming for a group of people to scribble a message (possibly a premeditated message) directly onto the built surfaces of Rome with a readily accessible material than to purchase papyri, write out one's message, and circulate it. We must be careful in this characterization, though, as we are already

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<sup>40</sup> Morstein-Marx (2012), p. 202-3.

disadvantaged from the elite biases of our sources, but there seems to be some sort of division between medium and writer.

## PLUTARCH'S ACCOUNT OF THE GRAFFITO ON THE TEMPLE TO CONCORDIA

In 133 BCE, Tiberius Gracchus was murdered on the capitol by senators; an unprecedented act of political violence in Rome. Tensions were high in the Republic. They soon came to a head again when Gaius, Tiberius' brother, began introducing land reforms, grain laws, and extending citizenship during his tribunate. In 121 BCE, the senate had finally had enough of Gaius' popular ambition. After the slaughter of many and the murder without trial of Gaius and Fulvius, Gaius' ally, Plutarch relates that the people were angry, specifically at the consul Opimius, who had orchestrated the slaughter. The restoration of the Temple to Concordia thereafter, under Opimius, angered the *polloi* more than anything:<sup>41</sup>

διὸ καὶ νυκτὸς ὑπὸ τὴν ἐπιγραφὴν τοῦ νεῷ παρενέγραψάν τινες  
τὸν στίχον τοῦτον· "ἔργον ἀπονοίας ναδὸν ὁμονοίας ποιεῖ"  
(Therefore, at night, certain people wrote under the inscription of the  
temple [to Concordia] this verse "a work of discord makes the Temple  
of Concord") [Plut, Vit. C. Gracch. 17.6].

Plutarch specifically mentions that this particular graffito was written under cover of night. That the author should want to safeguard their anonymity is unsurprising, considering Opimius' (illegal) slaughtering of what Plutarch later totals as 3,000 citizens and supporters of Gracchus.<sup>42</sup> None of the ancient authors in this paper identify a perpetrator of the political graffiti they discuss. They, of course, allude to specific socio-

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<sup>41</sup> And specifically the *polloi*: οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ τούτου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων μᾶλλον ἠγίασε τοὺς πολλοὺς τὸ κατασκευασθὲν Ὅμονοίας ἱερὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ὀπιμίου (But the construction of the temple of Concordia by Opimius frustrated the people more than this or anything else) [Plut, Vit. C. Gracch. 17.6].

<sup>42</sup> Plut, Vit. G. Gracch. 18.1



political groups, but never to individuals.<sup>43</sup> We cannot expect that the Roman people, as a whole, agreed with the sentiment of this graffito, or were directly responsible for it. Plutarch's comment about the nocturnal nature of this graffito highlights two things about the practice of political graffiti.

First, Plutarch implies here that there are degrees of anonymity. A graffiti writer could certainly be spotted in the daytime as he wrote his message, especially in highly-trafficked areas, though clearly his authorship wouldn't survive past the contemporary gossip (if someone did see him and spread this information). As modern readers, we assume anonymity from the initial scratch or paint onto the wall. But our graffiti reflect our society. At least in the western world, modern graffiti are often anonymous from the start simply because our populations are larger and free-speech mechanisms make political graffiti less subversive. Thus, modern citizens of a western city are less likely to know a graffiti writer (and preserve their identity socially) and less likely to care. In ancient Rome, especially in a tumultuous late Republic, these modern factors are not at play. I propose that Plutarch's specification of the time of day alludes to spheres or degrees of anonymity; perhaps a graffiti writer would have been spotted and remembered in the social consciousness, if only for a couple of days or a week, much like modern 24-hour news cycles, then eventually forgotten or abstracted to a socio-political group. Plutarch's graffito writer was careful to avoid being recognized at all. This leads to my second point: clearly,

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<sup>43</sup> Usually the Roman people, as discussed previously. Cass. Dio 55.27.1 mentions a specific man, Publius Rufus, but reports that this was probably not planned by him, instead by those looking to use his name to incite a rebellion or by the people.

graffiti could be a subversive, dangerous mode of communication if one needed the cover of night to disseminate one's message.

This graffito is all the more effective, arguably only effective, because of the way it manipulates place to communicate with many discourses.<sup>44</sup> The temple of Concordia was originally vowed (and subsequently built) around 367 BCE by M. Furius Camillus, amidst intense Plebeian-Patrician strife.<sup>45</sup> Rome was roughly ten years into serious social turmoil, with the *plebs* continually *in acie adversus optimates* as described by Livy through Sextius and Licinius.<sup>46</sup> Eventually, Sextius' and Licinius' pro-plebeian laws passed and remained in place because of Camillus' conciliatory efforts, and Camillus vowed a temple to commemorate this agreement.<sup>47</sup> From its inception, the Temple of Concordia was an homage to plebeians in Rome and their political and property rights in the burgeoning empire. This pro-plebeian discourse was altered, though, with Opimius' rebuilding of the temple in 121 BCE (coupled with his building of his basilica nearby), contemporary with Gaius' death and the murder of Gaius' supporters.<sup>48</sup> The same Opimius who had decimated the Gracchani and exercised particular cruelty on the town of Fregellae, was now charged by the senate to effectively rewrite the meaning of this temple.<sup>49</sup> As Davies notes, this was a hasty decision; projects like these were usually contracted to censors in the following

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<sup>44</sup> Place is different from space, understood as a set of places. See Riggsby, who gives the helpful example of Texas (place) versus the United States (space).

<sup>45</sup> Platner and Ashby, "Concord, Temple"; Ov. *Fast.* 1.641-644; Plut. *Vit. Cam.* 42.

<sup>46</sup> Liv. 6.39.6.

<sup>47</sup> Liv. 6.35-42.

<sup>48</sup> Platner and Ashby, "Concord, Temple"; Morstein-Marx (2004), p. 103.

<sup>49</sup> See Vell. 2.6.4 for the destruction of Fregellae.

year.<sup>50</sup> Now, the temple was rewritten as a *monumentum* of elite victory, though “it reeked of irony: the outcome it celebrated resulted from violence and suppression, not equitable consensus.”<sup>51</sup> The years following, senate meetings were not infrequently held in the temple.<sup>52</sup>

This discussion of the history of the Temple of Concordia is all to say: there was already a highly political history of symbolically claiming this particular temple starting with its erection. The graffito mentioned in Plutarch was yet another one of these attempts to reclaim the place that represented the ever-present conflict between the non-elite and the elite. Its location was essential so as to directly place it in communication with the prior discourses of the temple. Consider if the graffito were placed on a street corner, or on stoas, walls, or tombs, as Plutarch described earlier. The message, at its core, would certainly be apparent, but the true dissident flair of the graffito is achieved only through its placement on the temple itself: a direct, plucky challenge amidst a tumultuous time.

Plutarch specifies that the graffito was placed ὑπὸ τὴν ἐπιγραφὴν (under the inscription), i.e., of the original Temple of Concordia. This inscription presumably was some variation on ‘*L. Opimius fecit*’, following the traditional dedicatory formula.<sup>53</sup> Thus ποιεῖ (understood, εποιεῖ) in the graffito was Plutarch’s translation of *fecit*, according to Morstein-Marx.<sup>54</sup> In both his treatments of the graffito, Morstein-Marx posits that it was

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<sup>50</sup> Davies, 155.

<sup>51</sup> Davies, 155.

<sup>52</sup> Platner and Ashby, “Concord, Temple”.

<sup>53</sup> See Hillard, p. 111. This formula would have included other elements like the consulship or full family name. The Pantheon’s infamous inscription is a good comparandum.

<sup>54</sup> Morstein-Marx 2004, p. 102 n. 159.

originally written in Latin, based on its proximity to the temple's inscription and the play of ἀπονοίας and ὁμονοίας, which could reflect a similar word play in Latin with *vecordia* and *concordia*. He suggests that the graffito originally read “*exemplum vecordiae templum concordiae fecit*”.<sup>55</sup> Hillard agrees with a graffito originally in Latin, suggesting, instead, the graffito read “*aedem concordiae discordia fecit*”, or even “*discordia fecit*”.<sup>56</sup> When one of the major purposes of this graffito is to put itself into direct conversation with the temple, communicating in the same language (not only in Latin, but the vocabulary and grammatical construction of the inscription) is necessary.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Hillard, p.111.

<sup>57</sup> Though it is not entirely outside of the realm of possibility that this graffito was originally in Greek; the puns between discord and concord also exist in Greek (as recorded in Plutarch) and graffiti authors often switched between Greek and Latin (see Suet. Nero 39; 45.2 for a literary example, and Benefiel's article for graffiti that use both Greek and Latin within the House of Maius Castricius).

## PLUTARCH, APPIAN, CASSIUS DIO, AND SUETONIUS: ACCOUNTS OF ANTI-CAESARIAN GRAFFITI

Anonymous graffiti play a large role in spurring Brutus into action against Caesar in the literary sources; Appian, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius treat it, and Plutarch treats it twice.<sup>58</sup> In all accounts, graffiti on either the tribunal and the chair of Brutus when he was praetor, the statue of L. Brutus,<sup>59</sup> or both are posted by similar parties in the various versions of the incident.

Plutarch narrates the same instance of political graffiti in both his *Caesar* and *Brutus*, with varying degrees of detail. In his *Life of Caesar*, supporters of Brutus urge him to pursue change through graffiti written on his praetor's chair:

οἱ δὲ τῆς μεταβολῆς ἐφιέμενοι καὶ πρὸς μόνον ἐκείνον ἢ  
πρῶτον ἀποβλέποντες, αὐτῷ μὲν οὐκ ἐτόλμων διαλέγεσθαι,  
νύκτωρ δὲ κατεπίμπλασαν γραμμάτων τὸ βῆμα καὶ τὸν δίφρον,  
ἐφ' οὗ στρατηγῶν ἐχρημάτιζεν, ὧν ἦν τὰ πολλὰ τοιαῦτα·  
„καθεύδεις ὦ Βρούτε“ καὶ „οὐκ εἶ Βρούτος“ (Those men, desiring  
a change and looking to this man either because he [Brutus] was the  
only one or the first one for the job, though not daring to engage with  
him directly, by night kept filling his tribunal and seat, the place where  
he had dealings with magistrates, with writings, many of which were of  
this sort: “you are sleeping, Brutus” and “you are not Brutus”) [Plut.  
Vit. Caes., 62.7].

Plutarch's Brutus is conflicted about his participation in the conspiracy; his close relationship with Caesar is incongruous with his allegiance to the Republic.<sup>60</sup> Plutarch notes through Cassius that the graffiti especially stir Brutus' desires to participate: ὑφ' ὧν ὁ

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<sup>58</sup> App. B. Civ., 2.112; Cass. Dio, 44.12.3; Suet. Caes., 80.3; Plut. Vit. Caes., 62.7; Plut. Vit. Brut., 9.6-8.

<sup>59</sup> In Plutarch's *Caesar*, the graffiti are written solely on the tribunal, in Appian and Cassius Dio, they are written on both the tribunal and the statue of L. Brutus, and in Suetonius they are written only on the statue of L. Brutus.

<sup>60</sup> Plut., *Vit. Caes.* 62.2-6.

Κάσσιος αισθόμενος διακινούμενον ἡσυχῇ τὸ φιλότιμον αὐτοῦ (When Cassius noticed that Brutus' conflicted ambition was calmed by these [graffiti]...) [Plut.Vit.Caes 62.8]. Plutarch writes that the authors of these graffiti are supporters— either publicly or privately—of Brutus, but earlier suggests to the reader that they are also members of the people during his introduction to the graffiti incident: Οὕτω δὴ τρέπονται πρὸς Μάρκον Βρούτον οἱ πολλοί (Thus, the people turned their attention to Marcus Brutus) [Plut. Vit. Caes 62.1]. Plutarch clearly sees the graffiti as a product of the *polloi*, calling Brutus to action. Brutus' ambition is ignited here by the *polloi*, much like Plutarch's description of Tiberius Gracchus.

Plutarch echoes this sentiment in his *Life of Brutus*:

τῷ μὲν γὰρ ἀνδριάντι τοῦ προπάτορος Βρούτου, <τοῦ> καταλύσαντος τὴν τῶν βασιλέων ἀρχήν, ἐπέγραφον· "εἶθε νῦν ἦς [Βρούτος]", καὶ "ὄφελε ζῆν Βρούτος." τὸ δ' αὐτοῦ Βρούτου βῆμα στρατηγούντος εὐρίσκετο μεθ' ἡμέραν ἀνάπλεων γραμμάτων τοιούτων· "Βρούτε καθεύδεις", καὶ "οὐκ εἶ Βρούτος ἀληθῶς." (For on the statue of his forefather, Brutus, the one who overthrew the reign of the kings, [they] kept writing "Would that you were here, Brutus!" and "Would that Brutus were alive!" Also, the tribunal of Brutus, as he was praetor, was daily found full of such writing: "You are sleeping, Brutus" and "You are not truly a Brutus.") [Plut. Vit. Brut., 9.6-8].

Plutarch makes it clear prior to this passage from *The Life of Brutus* that the graffiti are written by *hoi politai*:

Βρούτον δὲ πολλοὶ μὲν λόγοι παρὰ τῶν συνήθων, πολλαῖς δὲ φήμαις καὶ γράμμασιν ἐξεκαλοῦντο καὶ παρώρων ἐπὶ τὴν πρᾶξιν οἱ πολῖται (but the many opinions from his friends urged him on and with shouts and writings the citizens urged him toward action) [Plut. Vit. Brut., 9.5].

He reveals that they are responding to an earlier instance in which Caesar's statue on the new *rostra* was decorated with diadems secretly at night by Caesar's men. Plutarch writes that they are to blame for the subsequent graffiti, though they are not the actual authors of the graffiti:<sup>61</sup>

αἵτιοι δὲ τούτων οἱ Καίσαρος κόλακες, ἄλλας τε τιμὰς  
ἐπιφθόνους ἀνευρίσκοντες αὐτῷ, καὶ διαδήματα τοῖς ἀνδριάσι  
νύκτωρ ἐπιτιθέντες, ὡς τοὺς πολλοὺς ὑπαξόμενοι βασιλέα  
προσειπεῖν ἀντὶ δικτάτορος (But those responsible for these deeds  
were the henchmen of Caesar, who, inventing other odious honors for  
him, also placed diadems on his statues at night, so as they might  
convince the people to name [Caesar] king instead of dictator)  
[Plut.Vit.Brut 9.8].

Plutarch notably describes the perpetrators of the graffiti first as *hoi polloi* (Plut. Vit. Caes 62.1) and then as *hoi politai* (Plut. Vit. Brut, 9.5). Though this is an interesting inconsistency, as Yavetz and Horsfall note, discussed earlier, this is unfortunately not an unusual circumstance in descriptions of the people.<sup>62</sup> Yavetz does not mention the word *politai*, but it is plausible that Plutarch is using them interchangeably or near interchangeably, as his two accounts of the graffiti incident are very similar. The traditional meaning of the word *politai*, too, does not immediately exclude an identification with the Roman people, as non-elites could also be free Roman citizens. Though Plutarch places the blame with Caesar's supporters, whom he thinks are the ultimate instigators of this tension between Caesar and his supporters, Brutus, and the people, the power of the *politai's* graffiti is, again, an undeniable influence on Brutus' ultimate decision.

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<sup>61</sup> See Morstein-Marx (2012), p. 208-9.

<sup>62</sup> See Horsfall, p.26, and Yavetz, p. 144-151.

This association between Brutus and the people is further underscored by the juxtaposition of the characterization of Cassius. Plutarch describes Cassius' unyielding devotion to the republic; he is and always was resolute in his hatred of Caesar and all tyrannical power. Even as a boy, Plutarch recounts, Cassius assaulted Faustus, the son of Sulla, for bragging about his father's absolute power. When brought to Pompey at the insistence of Faustus' family, Cassius even threatened Faustus again.<sup>63</sup> This impassioned description immediately precedes the characterization of Brutus. After Cassius' description, it is apparent to the reader that Brutus is not at all the agent of his own ambition. Whereas Cassius is motivated internally, against tyranny, and anti-Caesarian by nature, Brutus must be urged on by the people and his friends. The passivity of Brutus is seen in Plutarch's *Caesar*, as well. When Cassius notices that the graffiti on Brutus' tribune have stirred something in Brutus, he escalates his efforts to recruit Brutus to the conspiracy:

ὕφ' ὧν ὁ Κάσσιος αἰσθόμενος διακινούμενον ἠσυχῆ τὸ  
φιλότιμον αὐτοῦ, μᾶλλον ἢ πρότερον ἐνέκειτο καὶ παρῶξυνεν  
(When Cassius noticed that Brutus' conflicted ambition was calmed by  
these [graffiti], he pressed into him more than before and urged him on)  
[Plut. Vit. Caes 62.8].

Again, Plutarch paints Brutus as not only open to manipulation (by both Cassius and the people) but reliant on it to ultimately conspire against Caesar. The people play a large role in this manipulation through their anonymous display and Cassius capitalizes on it and repurposes it; it is no longer a hidden transcript of subversive discourse because it is

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<sup>63</sup> "ἄγε δὴ ὦ Φαῦστε, τόλμησον ἐναντίον τούτου φθέγξασθαι τὸν λόγον ἐκείνον ἐφ' ᾧ παρῶξύνθην, ἵνα σου πάλιν ἐγὼ συντριψῶ τὸ στόμα" (come now, Faustus, dare to utter, in the presence of this man, the same speech by which I was provoked, and I will break your face) [Plut. Vit. Brut 9.4].



used by the “dominant”. In Plutarch’s account, the hidden transcript of a “dominated” group (the people) appeals to another group (the conspirators), “dominant” to the people, but “dominated” by sections of the elite.

Similarly, Appian attributes these graffiti to the *demos*, noting that their graffiti are primarily what convince Brutus to take action:

ἐρεθιζόμενος καὶ ὀνειδιζόμενος μάλιστα ἐς τοῦτο ὑπὸ τοῦ δήμου  
πολλὰ γὰρ τοῖς ἀνδριάσι τοῦ πάλαι Βρούτου καὶ τῷ δικαστηρίῳ  
τοῦδε τοῦ Βρούτου τοιάδε ἐπεγράφετο λάθρα: ‘Βροῦτε  
δωροδοκεῖς; Βροῦτε νεκρὸς εἶ;’ ἢ ‘ὄφελές γε νῦν περιεῖναι’ ἢ  
‘ἀνάξιά σου τὰ ἔκγονα’ ἢ ‘οὐδ’ ἔκγονος εἶ σὺ τοῦδε’, ταῦτα καὶ  
τοιουτότροπα ἄλλα πολλὰ τὸν νεανίαν ἐξέκαυσεν ἐπὶ τὸ ἔργον  
ὡς ἑαυτοῦ προγονικόν ( He was provoked and shamed into this deed  
principally by the people, for many things were written on the statues  
of the older Brutus and in the office of this Brutus secretly, such as  
these, ‘are you taking bribes, Brutus? Are you dead, Brutus?’ or ‘would  
that you were alive now’ or ‘your offspring are unworthy of you’ or  
‘you are not the descendant of that man’, these and many other similar  
things drove the young man to a deed similar to his own ancestor’s)  
[App. BC 2.112.4].

Appian leaves no room for interpretation, here; the *demos* is both unquestionably responsible for these graffiti and for motivating Brutus to action. Appian’s *demos* is considerably more detailed in their language, dwelling specifically on the connection between Brutus and Lucius Brutus, the first liberator of Rome. Curiously, though, in a later conversation between Cassius and Brutus that Appian details, Cassius suggests that the *demos* is not responsible for these graffiti:

καὶ ὁ Κάσιος αὐτὸν ἀσπασάμενος ‘τίνα δ’,’ ἔφη, ‘οὐ προσλήψη  
τῶν ἀρίστων οὕτω φρονῶν; ἢ σοι δοκοῦσιν οἱ χειροτέχναι καὶ  
κάπηλοι καταγράφειν σου τὸ δικαστήριον ἀσήμως μᾶλλον ἢ οἱ  
Ῥωμαίων ἄριστοι, παρὰ μὲν τῶν ἄλλων στρατηγῶν θέας  
αἰτοῦντες ἵππων ἢ θηρίων, παρὰ δὲ σοῦ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ὡς σὸν

προγονικὸν ἔργον;’ (And Cassius, receiving [Brutus’] response well, said ‘who of the elite are you thinking you will include [in the conspiracy]? Do you think that artisans and shopkeepers secretly wrote on your tribunal, instead of the elite of Rome? That [the artisans and shopkeepers], while asking for horse races and beast fights from the other praetors, asked from you freedom, such a deed fitting for your ancestry’) [App. BC 2.113.5].

Cassius uses the same word, *προγονικὸν*, to describe the conspiracy against and murder of Caesar that the graffiti uses (as Appian reports to us). His suggestion that the elite of Rome are in fact responsible for the graffiti is fascinating; it is evidence enough for a willingness of the elite to reappropriate mediums of communication used by “artisans and shopkeepers”. If Cassius is being untruthful and the people are responsible for the graffiti, it is evidence against popular support for Caesar, but more so, I would argue, evidence against a homogenous view of the people, who were traditionally considered by-and-large proponents of Caesar.<sup>64</sup> Cassius’ comment does not indicate that we should assume the elite regularly, or even at all, participated in this medium of communication. Rather, it showcases that it was an effective means of communication (the only thing that really stirs up Brutus’ ambition, says Appian) and so effective as to be susceptible to manipulation by the elite, whether by real imitation or imagined social retelling. Though these types of graffiti began as hidden transcripts of the “dominated”, elite cultural hegemony now extends to and appropriates these infrapolitics.

An almost identical authorial implication is supplied in Plutarch’s *Life of Brutus*:

καὶ ὁ Κάσσιος ἐπαρθείς, "τίς δ'" εἶπε "Ῥωμαίων ἀνέξεται σοῦ προαποθνήσκοντος; ἄρ' ἀγνοεῖς ὦ Βρούτε σεαυτὸν; ἢ τὸ βῆμά σου δοκεῖς καταγράφειν τοὺς ὑφάντας καὶ τοὺς καπήλους, οὐχὶ

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<sup>64</sup> Morstein-Marx (2012), p. 211.

τοὺς πρώτους καὶ κρατίστους ταῦτα ποιεῖν, παρὰ μὲν τῶν ἄλλων στρατηγῶν ἐπιδόσεις καὶ θέατρα καὶ μονομάχους, παρὰ σοῦ δ' ὡς ὄφλημα πατρικὸν τὴν κατάλυσιν τῆς τυραννίδος ἀπαιτοῦντας..." (and Cassius, excited, said "but who will choose you to defend the Romans? Or do you not know yourself? Do you think that the weavers and shopkeepers wrote on your tribune, and the foremost and the most prestigious did not do these things? While from the other praetors they asked for gifts and spectacles and gladiator games, but from you they sought, as an ancestral debt, freedom from tyranny...)  
[Plut. Vit. Brut, 10.5-6].<sup>65</sup>

Cassius seems to attempt to draw a connection between liberation and the elite, a sort of road map for Brutus to realize that his interests are felt the most by Cassius and the conspirators.

Cassius' comment about "artisans and shopkeepers" echoes a formula common in Latin literature to describe crowds in and around the forum at Rome.<sup>66</sup> This is arguably more a rhetorical attempt at characterization, as Morstein-Marx argues, than a genuine attribution of the crowd, so we shouldn't assume that actual artisans and shopkeepers exclusively made up these groups of Roman people.

Cassius Dio, too, attributes the graffiti to the *polloi*:

οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ τοῦτό τε οἱ πολλοί, ὅπως ὡς καὶ γένοι προσήκων αὐτῷ ἐς ὁμοιότροπα ἔργα προαχθεῖη, ἐπλάττοντο, καὶ συνεχῶς ἀνεκάλουν αὐτόν, 'ὦ Βροῦτε Βροῦτε' ἐκβοῶντες, καὶ προσεπιλέγοντες ὅτι 'Βρούτου χρῆζομεν.' καὶ τέλος τῆ τε τοῦ παλαιοῦ Βρούτου εἰκόνι ἐπέγραψαν 'εἶθε ἔξης,' καὶ τῷ τούτου βήματι 'ἐστρατήγει γὰρ καὶ βῆμα καὶ τὸ τοιοῦτο ὀνομάζεται ἐφ' οὗ τις ἰζόμενος δικάζει ὅτι 'καθεύδεις, ὦ Βροῦτε' καὶ 'Βρούτος οὐκ εἶ' (Nevertheless the people pretended to believe that he was

<sup>65</sup> As Morstein-Marx (2012) notes, this similarity is probably because of their reliance on Asinius Pollio, but Morstein-Marx posits other sources (accounts from friends of Brutus) as possibilities. He notes that Appian's language is a more obvious interpretation of the "artisans and shopkeepers" formula, while Plutarch's use of the word ὑφάντας, 'weavers', seems outdated and inaccurate.

<sup>66</sup> See Morstein-Marx (2012), 210-11; Morstein-Marx (2004), 128-129; Cic. *Flacc*, 18.

related to that man [Lucius Brutus], so that he [Brutus] might be led towards similar deeds, and altogether they called on him again and again, shouting ‘Brutus, Brutus’ and saying that ‘we need Brutus.’ And finally on the statue of the ancient Brutus they wrote ‘would that you were living’ and on the tribunal of this Brutus, for he was a praetor and this name is given to the seat on which someone, sitting, judges, ‘you are asleep, Brutus’ and ‘you are not Brutus’ ) [Cass. Dio, 44.12.2-3].

Dio presents the *polloi* as not only responsible for the graffiti, but also as strategic; they maintain that there is a familial connection between Brutus and Lucius Brutus not because they genuinely believe it, but because they believe this will spur Brutus to action. The people’s circulation of their own political messages is juxtaposed to Dio’s description of a group of men who, after voting in the consular election for the very tribunes who were removed from office for taking down the diadems from Caesar’s statues,<sup>67</sup> approach Brutus and other magistrates, incite them publically, and post their own political pamphlets claiming Brutus was not a descendant of L. Brutus, presumably to shame Brutus into action:

γράμματά τε γάρ, τῆ ὁμωνυμίας αὐτοῦ τῆ πρὸς τὸν πάνυ Βροῦτον  
τὸν τοὺς Ταρκυνίους καταλύσαντα καταχρώμενοι, πολλὰ  
ἐξετίθεσαν, φημίζοντες αὐτὸν ψευδῶς ἀπόγονον ἐκείνου εἶναι  
(For these men, making use of the similarity in name of this Brutus to  
the famous Brutus, the one who deposed the kings [of Rome], set up  
pamphlets, saying that it was false that he was born from that Brutus)  
[Cass. Dio, 44.12.1].

This group seems to have a considerably more focused course of action; they attempt to promulgate their anti-Caesarian sentiments through multiple venues (direct

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<sup>67</sup> Cass. Dio 44.11.4; A group of men vote for the previous tribunes, Marullus and Falvius, who were removed from office after taking down the diadems put on Caesar’s statue (this angered Caesar, as commonly suspected, because he wanted to the people to concede to giving him the title of King).

approach, pamphlets, and public incitation). The implication is that they are a smaller group of people than the graffitists. Are they part of the *polloi*? If so, the approach to Brutus and his colleagues at the elections of new consuls is quite a transgressive move, and they must be a part of the *comitia centuriata* to have voted for the old tribunes as consuls. Dio relates that this group specifically argues that Brutus cannot be a descendant of L. Brutus because L. Brutus killed his only two sons.<sup>68</sup> This seems to be a different sentiment, one more focused on genealogy, than the one the people demonstrate. Dio writes that they maintain the connection between the Bruti. As such, we can perhaps interpret their critiques of ‘Βροῦτος οὐκ εἶ’ (‘you are not Brutus’) as more of a moralistic assessment than a genealogical assessment. How these two groups appeal to Brutus (and their general audience) is indicative of their own characterization of the issue with Brutus’ inaction; for the people, there is a moral incongruity between the two Bruti, and for the smaller group, an inherent incongruity. The people assert that Brutus is not living up to his full, ancestral potential. The small group asserts that there was never an ancestral potential to begin with. Dio’s juxtaposition of these two kinds of political dissent shows some thoughtful planning, both on this small, I think more elite group’s part, and on the people’s part, who are both equally responsible for Brutus’ participation in the conspiracy.<sup>69</sup> Here, we see two hidden transcripts,<sup>70</sup> representing two different groups of the “dominated” (to the elite, but their relationship to each other is unclear).

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<sup>68</sup> Cass. Dio 44.12.1.

<sup>69</sup> Cass. Dio 44.13.1.

<sup>70</sup> Because the smaller group participates in less anonymous ways, their message is arguable less of a hidden transcript. Scott, however, does not require anonymity as a quality of hidden transcripts. Because popular

Suetonius does not specifically identify the perpetrators of the graffiti on L. Brutus' statue (as Appian and Cassius Dio do), but the implication of the involvement of the people is plausible; he notes that they joined the conspirators in their plans when conditions worsened:

Consilia igitur dispersim antea habita et quae saepe bini ternive ceperant, in unum omnes contulerunt, ne populo quidem iam praesenti statu laeto, sed clam palamque detrectante dominationem atque assertores flagitante (therefore the plots, previously having been conceived of separately and which were often undertaken in groups of twos and threes, united everyone into one group, as not even the people were happy with the present condition, but both secretly and publically were refusing his rule and demanding restorers of liberty) [Suet. Caes, 80.1].

Following this, Suetonius lists many of the resistances to the rule of Caesar. As such, it seems that the *populus* is ultimately responsible for the graffiti on L. Brutus' statue.<sup>71</sup> Beyond that, the *populus'* outrage contributes to the momentum of the conspiracies, ultimately helping convince the conspirators to act on their plots.

In the varied accounts of the graffiti incident in Brutus' tribunal and on Lucius Brutus' statue, a few themes become apparent. First, all of the sources implicate the people as having written these graffiti. Beyond this, the people are masterful manipulators of their target and their political climate; Plutarch's *demos* is alone responsible for stirring Brutus' ambition, and Dio's people recognize and capitalize on the political value in maintaining a

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resistance can often escalate from a hidden, slightly subversive transcript to formal public resistance quickly, I think we need to understand infrapolitics (actions that produce hidden transcripts) on a sliding scale with and not divided from Scott's category of "public declared resistant." See Scott, p. 198.

<sup>71</sup> Subscripsere quidam Luci Bruti statuae: "Utinam viveres!" (Certain people wrote on the base of the statue of Lucius Brutus: "If only you were alive!") [Suet. Caes, 80.3].

connection between Lucius Brutus and Brutus. Appian states that the *demos* is chiefly responsible for spurring Brutus to action, despite comments made later by Cassius (and echoed in Plutarch) that claim the elite were responsible for the graffiti. As a whole, the people are politically alert and proactive. Their use of ‘sleeping’ words as a metaphor for Brutus’ inaction reflects shared vocabulary with the elite, present in Roman oratory and in the electoral *programmata* of Pompeii.<sup>72</sup> Their use of place, too, is strategic. Plutarch, Appian, and Dio document the presence of graffiti in two places; Brutus’ tribunal and on the statue of the elder Brutus. Not much work is needed on the people’s behalf to put these two Bruti into public conversation with each other; with rumors circulating about the contemporary Brutus’ relation, or lack thereof, to the elder, the liberator of kings, and with the Bruti historically encouraging this connection, to write a simple ‘would that you were alive, Brutus’ would undoubtedly summon this connection to mind for passersby.<sup>73</sup> Supporters of Caesar set up a statue of him among statues of the Kings and Lucius Brutus around 45 BCE, thus aligning graffiti on Brutus’ statue with contemporary politics even more.<sup>74</sup> Suetonius suggests even further consideration of space when he describes graffiti of popular origin on the base of Caesar’s statue:

‘Brutus, quia reges eiecit, consul primus factus est; Hic, quia consules eiecit, rex postremo factus est’ (Brutus, because he threw out the kings,

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<sup>72</sup> See Zadorojnyi, 125, n. 40, 41. Cicero and Sallust employ sleep and sleepiness as a metaphor for inaction. *Programmata* in Pompeii use this language quite frequently, see CIL 4. 7614 “Trebi Valens dormis”, 4. 575 “dormientes / universi cum”, and more, noted in Zadorojnyi. It is unclear if this is popular or elite language in origin, though used seemingly universally.

<sup>73</sup> See Morstein-Marx (2012), p. 205; Plut, Vit. Brut, 1.8, for reference to the Bruti of the Late Republic encouraging this connection.

<sup>74</sup> Suet. Caes. 76.1; Dio 43.45, See Zanker, p. 292. See also Evans and Della Corte. The statues were somewhere in the Area Capitolina, perhaps at its entrance.

was made the first consul; this man, because he threw out the consuls,  
was finally made king) [Suet.Caes 80.3].

Caesar's new statue in the *area capitolina* provides the people with an opportunity for sophisticated spatial interactions, and they certainly capitalize on it. From these accounts, we get a picture of a politically engaged, active, and knowledgeable populace that is well-informed and a skillful manipulator.

Cassius' suggestion to Brutus about the authorship of the anti-Caesarian graffiti in Plutarch's and Appian's accounts ought to make us pause. Ancient graffiti have for so long been considered unworthy of focus because they were viewed as the voice of the lower classes and have only recently been the subject of nuanced study, in conjunction with emerging interests in the culture and political participation of the Roman plebs. Wrestling with Cassius' comment is especially hard when one regards Roman graffiti as an "authentic, autonomous voice of the *plebs*".<sup>75</sup> Morstein-Marx dismisses Cassius' remarks as "disingenuous", primarily because Appian specifies that the *demos* are the ones responsible for the graffiti prior to his account of this encounter between Cassius and Brutus.<sup>76</sup> Clearly Appian, and likely Plutarch as well,<sup>77</sup> are attempting to communicate something about Cassius and the conspirators, emphasizing the top-down nature of their endeavor, especially considering their disconnect with the people following the murder of

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<sup>75</sup> Morstein-Marx (2012), 214. Morstein-Marx stresses that he is not claiming graffiti as *the* authentic voice of the plebs, rather *an* authentic voice. This difference doesn't eliminate the dichotomy of medium and author, though, especially considering the options available to the non-elite for the circulation of their message, as compared to the options available to the elite. See Morstein-Marx (2012) p. 215; Morstein-Marx (2004).

<sup>76</sup> Morstein-Marx (2012), p. 210.

<sup>77</sup> Their accounts are incredibly similar, and as such are probably attempting to accomplish similar things. See Morstein-Marx (2012) p. 210.



Caesar.<sup>78</sup> Whether Cassius' comment is factual should not be the question, though, as he has his own complex political reasons for saying this to Brutus, as do, it is important to remember, Plutarch and Appian for recording this sentiment through Cassius. If Cassius' statement is false, this doesn't eliminate the possibility of the elite being involved in a practice that might normally be considered one of "artisans and shopkeepers". Cassius' question, ἢ σοι δοκοῦσιν οἱ χειροτέχνη καὶ κάπηλοι καταγράφειν σου τὸ δικαστήριον ἀσήμως μᾶλλον ἢ οἱ Ῥωμαίων ἄριστοι (do you suppose that artisans and shopkeepers secretly wrote on your tribunal, or rather the elite of Rome), implies that Brutus was of the opinion that artisans and shopkeepers were responsible prior to Cassius' remarks. It also suggests that the involvement of the elite in graffiti has happened because the concern is predominantly an elite one:

παρὰ μὲν τῶν ἄλλων στρατηγῶν θέας αἰτοῦντες ἵππων ἢ θηρίων,  
παρὰ δὲ σοῦ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ὡς σὸν προγονικὸν ἔργον; (asking for  
horse races and beast fights from the other praetors, but from you  
freedom, such a deed fitting with your ancestry) [App. BC 2.113.5].

According to Cassius, the content of the graffiti is what helps determine the author; how could a populus asking consistently for entertainment suddenly want freedom and liberation, elite concerns?<sup>79</sup> It seems clear, though, that through Cassius' acknowledgement of Brutus' supposition of "artisans and shopkeepers" being involved, Cassius thinks this can be a popular agenda.

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<sup>78</sup> Plut. Vit. Brut, 18.7-14. The conspirators are, at first, met with horror. After the tumult dies down, some senators and *oi polloi* gather around them on the Capitol, but this quickly turns when the people are outraged and disgusted at Cinna's speech denouncing Caesar.

<sup>79</sup> Zadorojnyi, p. 127 writes that Appian and Plutarch, through Cassius, express the sentiment that "the banausic commoners are not—cannot be—entitled to such a lofty agenda."

In close, I wish to talk about the authors themselves; though they relate incidents from the Republic, all of them are born and write well into the Empire and, some, away from Rome.<sup>80</sup> Can we trust that they are reporting Republican incidents accurately, because they are so far removed? This is an important question, but a question that would be no less relevant if geographically and temporally closer sources existed. Bias is inherent in any historical source. Even sources that are contemporary in space and time with their subject matter still exhibit bias; do we take Augustus' *Res Gestae* as a word for word account of his reign? I think our concerns about the authenticity of these authors' accounts can be somewhat quelled by their utilization of older sources. Most of these men spent time in Rome and had access to earlier historical works.<sup>81</sup> In some cases, like Cassius claiming the anti-Caesarian graffiti in Plutarch and Appian, accounts are incredibly similar and appear to share a source.<sup>82</sup> Language contemporary to the Republic is also a good sign; Appian refers to artisans and shopkeepers, a formula common in Republican political contexts to refer to the masses.<sup>83</sup>

We need ultimately to understand that these sources will always come with a certain amount of a bias, but the reliance on older sources and use of contemporary Republican language should point out at least an attempt at an accurate portrayal of the Republic.

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<sup>80</sup> Cassius Dio, for instance, was born in Bithynia and spent time in Smyrna, Africa, and Pannonia (OCD, "Cassius Dio").

<sup>81</sup> See entries on "Cassius Dio", "Appian", and "Suetonius" in OCD.

<sup>82</sup> See Morstein-Marx (2012), p. 210-11. Appian and Plutarch share Asinius Pollio as a source quite frequently, and perhaps here even share an account of a more intimate relation of Brutus.

<sup>83</sup> See Morstein-Marx (2012), p. 210-11, Cic. Flac. 18.

## CASSIUS DIO'S ACCOUNT OF POPULAR *BIBLIA* UNDER AUGUSTUS

When the authors in this paper distinguish between graffiti and *biblia* or *libelli*, they write that the people largely communicated by graffiti, despite the similarity in political function between the two.<sup>84</sup> Did the ancients see a divide between classes in the medium of political critique? Dio, when discussing the circulation of revolutionary pamphlets prompted by the effects of a famine under Augustus, notes that political pamphlets are associated specifically with the *homilos*.<sup>85</sup> Notably, he specifies that the crowd communicated by *biblia*, not graffiti, as we might expect from prior accounts. Dio complicates this authorship, though, when he relates the rumors surrounding these pamphlets:

καὶ ταῦτ' ἐλέγετο μὲν ἐκ παρασκευῆς Πουπλίου τινὸς Ῥούφου γίγνεσθαι, ὑπωπτεύετο δὲ ἐς ἄλλους: ὁ μὲν γὰρ Ῥούφος οὔτε ἐνθυμηθῆναί τι αὐτῶν οὔτε πράξαι ἐδύνατο, ἕτεροι δὲ τῷ ἐκείνου ὀνόματι καταχρώμενοι καινοτομεῖν ἐπιστεύοντο ( and it was said that this happened because of the planning of a certain Publius Rufus, but suspicion was thrown onto others: for Rufus was not able either to think up or to do any of these things, but others were believed to have come up with plots, using Rufus' name to their benefit) [Cass. Dio 55.27.2].

It is unclear from this passage if Dio means to imply that these ἕτεροι are the ὄμιλος from earlier. I think not; it seems that Cassius Dio is giving us a range of opinions

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<sup>84</sup> The accounts indicate that these messages are graffiti by compounds of the verb γράφω that indicate writing onto/into something (Plut. Vit. Ti. Gracch., 8.7; Plut. Vit. C. Gracch., 17.6; Plut. Vit. Caes., 62.7; Plut. Vit. Brut., 9.5-8; App. BC 2.112.4), or specify writing on a place that is inconsistent with the practice of *biblia* (Cass. Dio, 44.12.2-3, and Suet. Caes., 80.3).

<sup>85</sup> ὁ δ' οὖν ὄμιλος...βιβλία νύκτωρ ἐξέτιθεσαν (Now, the crowd... set up [revolutionary] pamphlets at night) [Cass. Dio 55.27.1].

(what actually happened, according to him, and what other groups of people suspected or claimed). It is interesting that Dio sets up a dichotomy of opinion about the pamphlets. People either accept the rumor that Publius Rufus was responsible for these pamphlets,<sup>86</sup> or that a group of people used his name to garner support for an eventual revolution. Dio establishes a popular author, but does not mention that anyone else thinks this is plausible, despite giving his readers alternate opinions. Perhaps Dio is suggesting that the people do not often use pamphlets as their political messaging, or pamphlets are not commonly thought of as a popular medium, otherwise someone might have attributed these to the people. In the same vein, President Donald Trump communicates primarily via Twitter, despite the medium being a more acceptable mode of communication for non-political elite.

If we take Dio's authorial identification, the people's use of *biblia* demonstrates that patronage plays an important role in the diversity of the Roman people. I understand Roman patronage as Saller does in his 1982 book; it is a sustained "reciprocal exchange" between socially asymmetrical parties.<sup>87</sup> In Dio's account, perhaps a group within the *homilos* relied on their patron, a person of higher socio-economic status within the non-elite, for the expense of papyrus, the actual writing of the documents, or the act of circulating these *biblia*. The people are attempting to masquerade their hidden transcript, their subversive opinion that challenges the "dominant" discourse. The medium they

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<sup>86</sup> Publius Suillius Rufus, husband to the step daughter of Ovid, perhaps? Publius Plautius Rufus is a better possibility, as he is referenced by Suetonius in revolts Augustus quelled (Suet. Aug. 19).

<sup>87</sup> Saller, p. 1.

choose, perhaps with help from their patron, is able to successfully convey different authorship, though not necessarily elite authorship, as it directly challenges the “dominant” discourse. Dio tells us that informers are employed by the principate to determine the identity of these dissidents,<sup>88</sup> so one can understand the disguising of this hidden transcript as a preemptive way to deal with the informers. It is, in a sense, another degree of anonymity (disguising one’s identity as someone else entirely), similar to the graffito on the Temple of Concordia.

If Dio’s implication is that the people- and no one else- set up these *biblia*, this could also demonstrate that medium can sometimes be chosen for circumstantial reasons. Dio relates that the people’s frustration was heightened, and, *καὶ πολλὰ μὲν καὶ φανερώς νεωτεροποιᾶ διελάλουν* (and they talked about many revolutionary things openly) [Cass. Dio. 55.27.1]. Perhaps the desperation of the situation drove the people to communicate their message such that it might be received as more of a threat by the elite.

Though it is uncertain who is making and distributing these *biblia*, the author is trying to express a political message through the manipulation of medium and how the author is received.

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<sup>88</sup> Cass. Dio 55.27.3.

## SUETONIUS' IMPERIAL GRAFFITI

That the elite could and did participate in graffiti, particularly political graffiti, is a takeaway of Appian's and Plutarch's account of the anti-Caesarian graffiti. But to what extent? Zadorojnyi argues that graffiti, particularly Imperial graffiti, are an outlet for the elite to express their political feelings while maintaining anonymity, concepts not only unachievable in, but incongruous to elite culture in the Empire. The "socio-cultural and political otherness", Zadorojnyi argues, prevents Imperial writers from attributing the graffiti to elite authors, despite Zadorojnyi's claim that "the sparkle and stylistic apparatus of the quoted inscriptions align rather well with competent literacy" - for him, the elite.<sup>89</sup>

Indeed, the graffiti recorded in literature from the Empire, primarily by Suetonius, have certain elements of literacy not seen in the graffiti from the Republic. Suetonius relates three political critiques from Augustus' time, the first a criticism of Augustus' private dinner party of the twelve gods:

...sed et sine auctore notissimi versus; 'Cum primum istorum conduxit mensa choragum,/Sexque deos vidit Mallia sexque deas,/Impia dum Phoebi Caesar mendacia ludit,/Dum nova divorum cenat adulteria:/Omnia se a terris tunc numina declinarunt,/Fugit et auratos Iuppiter ipse thronos' (...but also verses very well known, without an author; 'when first that table of scoundrels hired a costumer and Mallia saw the six gods and six goddesses, while Caesar played impious lies as Apollo, while he dined among strange atrocities of the gods, then all of the gods turned away from the earth, and even Jupiter himself fled his golden throne) [Suet. Aug. 70.1].

Immediately after this, Suetonius notes a graffito that was written on Augustus' statue: *Nam et proscriptionis tempore ad statuam eius ascriptum est: 'Pater argentarius, ego*

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<sup>89</sup> Zadorojnyi, p. 128-129.

Corintharius’ (And even in the time of his proscriptions it was written onto his statue: my father dealt in silver, I deal in Corinthian wares) [Suet. Aug. 70.2].

Lastly, Suetonius relates an epigram:

et deinde bello Siciensi epigramma vulgatum est: ‘Postquam bis classe victus naves perdidit, Aliquando ut vincat, ludit assidue aleam’ (and even during the Sicilian war, an epigram was known: ‘After he twice lost his ships, conquered at sea, so that he could win at least something, he played dice regularly) [Suet. Aug. 70.2].

Already, we see indicators of cultural competent literacy;<sup>90</sup> the first instance is written in elegiac couplets, the second engages in inventive wordplay, and the third employs witty humor to deliver its abuse. The second example must be a graffito<sup>91</sup>, and the first and third examples suggest aspects of graffiti or *libelli*, anonymity, and circulation.<sup>92</sup>

Suetonius records similar graffiti for Nero and Domitian, respectively:

Multa Graece Latineque proscripta aut vulgata sunt, sicut illa: ‘Νέρων Ὀρέστης Ἀλκμέων μητροκτόνος.’ ‘Νεόψηφον Νέρων ἰδίαν μητέρα ἀπέκτεινε’ ‘Quis negat Aeneae magna de stirpe Neronem? /Sustulit hic matrem, sustulit ille patrem’ ‘Dum tendit citharam noster, dum cornua Parthus./ Noster erit Paeon, ille Hecatebeletes’ ‘Roma domus fiet; Veios migrate, Quirites./ Si non et Veios occupat ista domus’ (Many things in Greek and Latin were inscribed or circulated, such as these: ‘Nero, Orestes, Alcmaeon, mother-killer’ ‘a new calculation, Nero = killed his own mother’ ‘who would deny that Nero came from the great stock of Aeneas?/ This one took care of his mother, the other took care of his father’ ‘while ours plucks at his cithara, so the Parthian plucks at his bow, ours will be Apollo the musician, theirs Apollo the far-shooter’ ‘Rome will become one big

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<sup>90</sup> Competent literacy, as I (and it seems, Zadorojnyi) use it, is a nuanced command of a language (or languages) that goes beyond proficiency. This command is rooted in, among other things, socio-cultural or linguistic understanding of a language, especially in social situations.

<sup>91</sup> “ad statuam eius ascriptum est”, Suet. Aug. 70.2.

<sup>92</sup> “Sed et sine auctore notissimi versus”, Suet. Aug. 70.1; “epigramma vulgatum est”, Suet. Aug. 70.2.

house; relocate yourselves to Veii, Quirites, unless that damned house extends into Veii, too) [Suet. Nero, 39.2].

Ianos arcusque cum quadrigis et insignibus triumphorum per regiones urbis tantos ac tot exstruxit, ut cuidam Graece inscriptum sit: ‘arci’ (and he set up so many passageways and arches with quadrigae groups and symbols and triumphs throughout so many areas of the city, that on one of them was written in Greek ‘it is enough’) [Suet. Dom. 13.2].

Here, we see further cultural literacy indicators: criticisms in Greek and Latin,<sup>93</sup> as well as some sophisticated invention and punning both within the language and between the two languages<sup>94</sup>, mythological and historical references,<sup>95</sup> and nuanced understanding of meanings of words.<sup>96</sup> Beyond this, the “new calculation” graffito is an example of isopsephy, equating the numerical values of the one word or phrase to another so as to express something more meaningful about the original term, a practice common in actual extant graffiti.<sup>97</sup>

These graffiti are clearly examples of competent, cultural literacy, as Zadorojnyi argues. But does this necessitate an elite attribution? In his analysis of these graffiti, Zadorojnyi makes two claims that I wish to contest. Firstly, he argues that the graffiti are presumed to have an elite author by Suetonius and his audiences, or perhaps that they were written by the elite, and are actually used as an elite outlet to express anonymous opinion

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<sup>93</sup> Νέρων Ὀρέστης Ἀλκμέων μητροκτόνος, besides being in Greek, could also be a pun on the Roman trinomina.

<sup>94</sup> The new compound word, Νεόψηφον, to pun on Nero’s name; the punning of the greek ἄρχει with the Latin arcus.

<sup>95</sup> The mythological matricides committed by Orestes and Alcmaeon; references to book 2 of the Aeneid; epithets of Apollo; and reference to the *quirites*’ attempts to take cover in Veii in response to the invasion of the Gauls, as told in Livy’s *Ab Urbe Condita* (Livy, 5.53).

<sup>96</sup> The sustulit/sustulit double meaning in the comparison to Aeneas.

<sup>97</sup> See Puglia’s article on isopsephy which mentions countless extant examples from Pompeii, as well as this particular literary case which he calls “l’esempio classico”.



through “socio-cultural and political otherness”. This argument seems to be based primarily on the important cultural role of literacy for the Imperial elite.<sup>98</sup> As I will discuss, literacy and cultural knowledge should not be thought of as exclusively elite. Secondly, because of this, Zadorojnyi does not make a distinction between the graffiti from the Late Republic and the graffiti from the Empire, under the presumption that Imperial readers of Republican graffiti would have understood them only within an Imperial context.<sup>99</sup>

Questions about the literacy of the Roman non-elite inevitably arise. For my purposes, I do not wish to address the degree of literacy of the non-elite, or establish some cut-off point for literacy and cultural knowledge between the elite and non-elite. This suggests that there is an objective way to determine an individual’s social status and bulldozes through any sense of nuance in literacy and cultural knowledge.<sup>100</sup> What Milnor says in her 2009 article about Pompeian graffiti rings true here: “it cannot be forgotten that each text is unique, written by a single hand, in a single place, at a single moment in time.”

<sup>101</sup> Education is a product of many different socio-cultural factors that extend far beyond the ‘classroom’, even in antiquity.<sup>102</sup> With the idea of literacies (in place of *a* literacy) in mind, I wish to reassess these Suetonian graffiti.<sup>103</sup> Zadorojnyi does state that we cannot rule the

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<sup>98</sup> Zadorojnyi, p. 128-129.

<sup>99</sup> See Zadorojnyi generally for this argument, but specifically his conclusion, p. 128-30.

<sup>100</sup> See Woolf and Wallace-Hadrill.

<sup>101</sup> Milnor (2009), p. 309.

<sup>102</sup> See Horsfall, generally.

<sup>103</sup> See Woolf for the concept of “literacies”.

non-elite out as potential authors, citing Horsfall, but nevertheless implies elite authorship.<sup>104</sup>

Many of the literacy indicators discussed earlier can be products of a non-elite hand. Mythological and historical references can easily be picked up through *circulatores*, ancient buskers who drew a crowd by reading poetry or prose, singing, reciting a myth, dancing, or playing music, among other things.<sup>105</sup> The theater was equally an opportunity to learn mythology and explore moral and ethical dilemmas, and a wide range of the public, from ex-soldiers to slaves, attended both comedic and tragic performances.<sup>106</sup> The public crowds of the late Republic and the early Empire were also interested in moral maxims similar to the graffiti about Augustus as purveyor of Corinthian wares or Nero and the Parthian as Apollo Paeon and Hecatebeletes. This interest is evidenced through various descriptions of popular reactions over ethical matters in theaters or popular applause for *sententiae* in the theater and on the street.<sup>107</sup> The isopsephy from the “new calculation” graffito criticizing Nero has many extant parallels in Pompeii.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, Horsfall discusses the complex mastery of math some individuals had, especially if their occupation demanded it.<sup>109</sup> Competency in Greek ought not to distinguish non-elite from elite, either; Horsfall points out that Greek could be acquired in a variety of ways from military service,

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<sup>104</sup> Zadorojnyi p. 123-4; 128-29.

<sup>105</sup> Horsfall, p. 57; 98.

<sup>106</sup> Horsfall, p. 58-60.

<sup>107</sup> Horsfall, p. 55, 60 and notes. For example, in Cic.Off, 1.97, Cicero describes a crowd applauding sentiments spoken by Atreus on the stage not because they agree with them, but because they fit well with their ethical assessment of the character.

<sup>108</sup> See Puglia.

<sup>109</sup> Horsfall, p. 11.

to proximity to Greek speakers (often slaves) in the *Subura*, to the theater, to buskers in the forum, to one's occupation (*negotiatores*, for instance).<sup>110</sup> Finally, consider the (intentionally or not) ways the graffiti themselves present cultural knowledge and literacy, and the constant onslaught of messaging wherever one went in Southern Italy: on the toilet, at the bar, on prominent buildings, and in one's own house.<sup>111</sup> One can only assume that Rome was similarly covered in text. Clearly, these incidents described by Suetonius all have the potential to be written by some member or group of the people.

Zadorojnyi seems to be skirting around the assertion that these graffiti cited in literary sources and even some on the walls of Pompeii may have elite authors; instead of the idea that graffiti are evidence for literary humor and knowledge amongst the Roman non-elite, he argues, why not suppose that they are evidence for different authorship? Should we believe our sources' attribution of political graffiti to the Roman people, or understand it, as Zadorojnyi does, as a mechanism by which to deal with political dissent amongst the elite under the Empire?

Horsfall's work on the culture of the Roman *plebs* elucidates our need to understand the people not as a collective, but as groups within this collective with varied levels of educational histories and cultural knowledge. Status was not always directly proportional to education and wealth, among other factors, varied wildly among the Roman people.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Horsfall, p. 48-53.

<sup>111</sup> So many graffiti fall under these categories, but take for example CIL 4.10619, the bathroom from the House of the Gem at Herculaneum; CIL 4.8258,9, 8297, graffiti from the bar of Prima; CIL 4.2048 on the Eumachia building; CIL 4.5092, from the peristyle of the House of Poppaeus Sabinus.

<sup>112</sup> Horsfall, p.27.

Zadorojnyi certainly attributes a correlation, but given the diversity within the Roman non-elite, I am not convinced that this indicates elite authorship, or even that elite audiences might read these graffiti as elite. As Horsfall demonstrates, groups of the Roman people were clearly culturally literate; no doubt the elite were aware of this. Competent literacy cannot be evidence towards an elite author or a reading as such.

Further, would Republican graffiti be written or read for the same reasons as Imperial graffiti? Zadorojnyi paints graffiti as a tool for the elite to navigate the political and social quagmire that was the empire, part of a “counter-hegemonic transcript” that offers various written and oral mediums.<sup>113</sup> If Zadorojnyi is right, these “elite” graffiti indicate levels of hidden transcripts. Members of the elite are responding to dominant (Imperial) discourse in their critiques of the emperors, but still create a dominant discourse over the non-elite, whom we would expect to create their own specific hidden transcripts targeting the elite, the principate, or both.

Because Zadorojnyi does not make a distinction between Republican and Imperial graffiti, he implies that these elite authors (or the interpretation of elite authors) extends to the Republic, as well. But were “counter hegemonic” graffiti necessary for the elite under the Republic? Are these limitations of power on the elite, largely a product of the empire, also present in the Republic? And if the argument is that Imperial readers of these authors simply interpret these graffiti as an elite “counter-hegemonic transcript” because it is how they understand their own contemporary graffiti, ought we to be convinced that an Imperial

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<sup>113</sup> Zadorojnyi, p. 129.

elite reader wouldn't understand the distinction between Republican and Imperial graffiti and more broadly, Republican and Imperial socio-political culture?

Graffiti, their authors, and their audiences are subject to change based on various major and minor socio-political factors within a society. In roughly a ten year span from the 1970s to the 1980s, New York City's criminal policy on graffiti drastically changed. What started as "a harmless youthful novelty" that could, at most, earn one a summons from the Transit Police, became "the largest lawsuit ever brought against graffiti writers", along with a complete overhaul of the city's subway facilities. By the mid 1980s, graffiti became a symbol for what was wrong with New York and a linchpin for first John Lindsay's and later Ed Koch's mayoral campaigns. Because of this political change, graffiti writers were influenced to change locations, from the subways to the streets, and, because of the by then thoroughly engrained social stigma of graffiti, to prioritize quicker, less artistic, and more spatially prominent graffiti pieces, both to further their social capital and, now, to challenge authority.<sup>114</sup> The case of 1980s New York City is an example of the *pointed* influence of politics on graffiti practice, authorship, and audience, though there were no explicit laws or rhetorics targeting graffiti in the Roman Republic or Empire.<sup>115</sup> Still, this example showcases the cognizant response of graffiti to reception, a point I think should be emphasized in light of the distinction Zadorojnyi does not make. Graffiti respond to and interact with socio-political stimuli, often in extremely nuanced ways. This dialogue

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<sup>114</sup> Mitman.

<sup>115</sup> Though Tiberius' expansion of the maiestas laws could certainly fall under this category.

is not unilateral either; the reception of graffiti changes based on similar socio-political stimuli, and participants in this reception are cognizant of this change.

The present day understanding of graffiti from 1980s New York is a good refutation to Zadorojnyi's presumption that elite Imperial readers would not have thought differently about Republican graffiti (as opposed to Imperial graffiti). Graffiti is now largely appreciated as a form of art, and "street art", the category graffiti fall under, is often included under the many attractions New York City has to offer.<sup>116</sup> This reframing of graffiti does not mean that present-day residents of New York City wholly understand the graffiti from the 1980s within this new framework. In fact, there seems to be a conscious remembrance of the 1980s graffiti culture and its relationship with politics and culture in the cultural memory of the present-day.<sup>117</sup> This reflects, of course, a drastic change in use and function of graffiti over time, and I am not suggesting a similar change over time from the Roman Republic to Empire. Rather, I mean to convey that graffiti can influence and be influenced by various social, cultural, and political factors, and that residents are capable of thinking about graffiti within their separate social and political contexts, despite their understanding of graffiti contemporary to them. It seems that these Suetonian graffiti demonstrate the potential for a politically engaged and culturally informed non-elite, as well as an elite, particularly in the Imperial period, that readily co-opts the hidden transcripts from different groups of the "dominated" to use within their own infrapolitics.

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<sup>116</sup> For an example, see Estiler.

<sup>117</sup> Nielson, for example, writes about the overwhelmingly negative feelings for graffiti artists in the 1980s and the backlash of this conflict with the city. Consider, also, television shows like "The Get Down", which disseminate and perpetuate information about the graffiti culture in New York, though largely fictional.

## LANGUAGE AND MEDIUM

### LANGUAGE

Zadorojnyi draws attention to the language of specifically Imperial graffiti attested in literary sources, but the language of the entire *corpus* of literary (mostly Republican) graffiti discussed thus far is worthy of note, insofar as it is significantly dissimilar to the *corpus* of extant Roman graffiti. What we do have is strikingly lewd and direct, compared to the graffiti from the literary sources previously discussed.<sup>118</sup> Given the corpus of erotic graffiti at Pompeii and Herculaneum, one cannot help but wonder if *Caesar fellator* graffiti or something similar were on the Capitoline statues, too.<sup>119</sup> Instead, we get these graffiti that are, as Zadorojnyi describes, an example of “competent literacy”.<sup>120</sup> I propose that this is an intentional choice. This is not to say that the popular authors of these graffiti are normally accustomed to write in a voice similar to the breadth of language in Pompeian graffiti; rather the reason we see inconsistencies between our sampling in the literary record and in the archaeological record is because the writers of these graffiti are being concertedly conscious of their audience. That is to say; there is communication happening both “outward,” among popular peers, and “upward”, addressing the individuals involved (Tiberius Gracchus, Caesar, etc.).<sup>121</sup> And clearly, accommodation is made for this “upward” movement through language; as Zadorojnyi notes, many aspects of these graffiti have

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<sup>118</sup> See, generally, CIL 4 and supplements, as well as Varone’s book on erotic inscriptions at Pompeii.

<sup>119</sup> C.f., CIL 4.1825, *Narcissus fellator maximus* on the basilica at Pompeii; Milnor (2014), p. 124.

<sup>120</sup> Zadorojnyi, p. 129.

<sup>121</sup> See Morstein-Marx (2012), p. 204 for the terms “upward” and “outward”, as well as Scott, generally, for hidden transcripts of resistance.

parallels in other literary sources.<sup>122</sup> What he takes as strong indication of elite involvement could also be evidence of a plebeian dissident transcript that is not only willing to communicate “upward”, but also very much capable of doing so in similar language.

### **MEDIUM: PAMPHLETS AND GRAFFITI**

The material the ancient authors mean by ‘pamphlets’ is papyrus. *Biblion*, the word often used to describe these pamphlets,<sup>123</sup> is sometimes a diminutive, otherwise a synonym of the Greek word βύβλος, which can refer to the actual papyrus plant, or more usually a roll (sometimes blank), a sheet, or a written book. A *libellus* is the Latin equivalent of a *biblion*.<sup>124</sup> In literary accounts, the people as a collective whole do not exclusively produce graffiti, if we consider Cassius Dio’s account of the people circulating *biblia* under Augustus,<sup>125</sup> but there seems to be a clear correlation between the people and graffiti, not pamphlets, in the literary evidence presented thus far. I wish to briefly delve into the archaeological evidence surrounding the usage and expense of papyrus in the late Roman Republic to better explore the relationship between the medium and the author of these dissident and propagandistic messages. I will argue that circulation of political dissent via papyrus pamphlets is more accessible to those better disposed economically, and reflects

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<sup>122</sup> Zadorojnyi, p. 123-124. Cicero points out, among many examples, the bilingual wordplay of *bini/binei*, similar to the graffito on the arch of Domitian punning on *arci* with *arkei*. (Cic. Fam. 9.22.3). Puns are used commonly as rhetorical devices in the Republic (Corbeill), and perhaps even incorporated onto coins. RRC 487/2a, for example, is part of a series of Jupiter Capitolinus coins minted by a certain Pettillius Capitolinus in 41 BCE.

<sup>123</sup> For example, Cass.Dio 55.27.1, discussed earlier.

<sup>124</sup> Lewis (1974), p. 78-9.

<sup>125</sup> See the previous section titled ‘Plutarch’s Account of Graffiti in the Life of Tiberius Gracchus.’



levels of hidden transcripts among the non-elite. That is, in concordance with Horsfall's characterization of the Roman plebs, certain groups within the Roman non-elite communicate in different ways.

The price of papyrus is a long-debated issue, based predominantly on scanty evidence and, historically, on the misinterpretation of terminology.<sup>126</sup> Recently, Naphtali Lewis has argued for a relative understanding of the price of papyri. Whereas a less well-off Egyptian farmer who supports himself and his family on his daily wage might not find even cheaper papyri within his means (Lewis notes that a “roll of papyrus [could] cost the equivalent of one or two days' wages, and it could run as high as what the labourer would earn in five or six days”), those of wealthier status might have considered these costs “comparable to that of our ‘incidentals’, or ‘petty cash’”.<sup>127</sup> This analysis is limited because of the nature of the archaeological record and distribution of extant papyri; it is unclear if Lewis' relative cost extends outside of Egypt. It is possible that the relative cost was higher in Rome because of import factors like transportation cost and third party distributors. The daily wage of laborers in and around Rome (as compared to Egypt) presumably played a role in the relative cost of papyrus as well. Non-elites were diverse in Rome, and employed in many occupations. Where the cost of papyrus may have been unjustifiably expensive to some, others may have considered the expense tolerable or integral to one's business.<sup>128</sup> It

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<sup>126</sup> See Skeat (1995) and Lewis (1974), p. 129-134, who both enumerate the issues of previous scholarship.

<sup>127</sup> Lewis (1975), p. 133-4.

<sup>128</sup> For those regularly engaged in sales and loans, papyrus could be an important aspect of conducting business (though wax tablets served similar purposes). Recycled papyrus was also used as wrapping paper for goods, bandages, and incense (sometimes scavenged, often purchased). See Lewis (1974) p. 95-7.

was a fairly common practice to erase and write over previous writing or write on the back of a papyrus sheet, so cost could potentially be reduced in this way. Skeat remarks, though, that this might not have been a common practice. Erasing the previous text on a papyrus sheet was difficult and often not successful, creating palimpsests.<sup>129</sup> Skeat argues that palimpsests and documents with writing on both sides would have been seen negatively, as the majority of the papyri from Oxyrhynchus had writing only on one side when discarded.<sup>130</sup> Skeat also points us toward an epigram of Martial's:

Scribit in aversa Picens epigrammata charta, Et dolet, averso quod facit  
illa deo (Picens wrote his epigrams on the back of the papyrus sheet,  
and he suffered, because the god turned his back when he wrote them)  
[Mart.8.62].

For a community of non-elites who were politically motivated, among other things, by issues of fair land distribution and representation, it is not far-fetched to imagine the Roman people, as a whole, as more money-conscious than their elite peers because of explicit fiscal constraint. There seems to be no financial factor that might motivate a person of lower social strata to employ papyrus in circulating political messages. True, the circulation of *biblia* and the use of papyrus itself is culturally important to the Romans. But again we must ask, which Romans? Papyrus is a medium much more integral in the cultural fabric of the Roman elite than in that of the Roman people at large. It is the medium that poems, epic, and history are written on, the means by which to interact with other elites.<sup>131</sup> That is not to say that some of the Roman people would not interact with it or require its

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<sup>129</sup> Skeat, p. 80-1.

<sup>130</sup> Which indicates, for Skeat, that the ancients were reluctant to use it again, p. 82-3.

<sup>131</sup> Zadorojnyi discusses literature and reading culture's important role for the elite.

use on a daily basis (in fact quite the opposite),<sup>132</sup> but it is to say that there may be an ancient association between medium and author. Consider the situation that Cassius Dio describes in Cass.Dio 44.12.2-3, where two groups attempt to incite Brutus to action against Caesar in very different ways: One group (*hoi polloi*), are those responsible for the graffiti in Brutus' tribune, and another approaches Brutus and his friends, posts pamphlets, and attempts to manipulate the crowd.<sup>133</sup> Here, we see medium distinguished, possibly as an indication of difference in social standing, especially considering the approach the second, smaller group makes to Brutus and his friends. Plutarch's juxtaposition of pamphlets and graffiti in his account of Tiberius Gracchus, too, underscores the medium and author relationship; it is Gaius, a wealthy elite, who uses pamphlets, and the people scratch their graffiti all over the built environment of Rome.<sup>134</sup>

Beyond the basic factors in convenience discussed previously,<sup>135</sup> graffiti rely on the circulation of their viewers to successfully convey a message, whereas papyrus pamphlets rely on their own circulation. To insure that one's message is successfully seen by many people through the medium of graffiti, one doesn't need to think very far beyond careful placement of one's message. The highly trafficked areas of Rome were undoubtedly common knowledge, by virtue of its residents working and living in the city. By contrast, the circulation of pamphlets required significantly more engaged participants, who were

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<sup>132</sup> Horsfall, p. 26-28.

<sup>133</sup> See p. 26ff.

<sup>134</sup> Plut. Vit. Ti. Gracch., 8.7. See also p.10.

<sup>135</sup> That papyrus must be purchased, written on, and then circulated, whereas charcoal can be easily procured and the message can be written directly onto a built environment. See p. 12ff.

responsible for physically passing them along. In the end, there was no guaranteed way to gauge the reception of one's message (how does one ascertain if a document has passed through a certain number of hands?) in the same way one can through estimating how trafficked an area is during a given amount of time. Thus, the circulation of graffiti requires a significantly less organized plan with the near guaranteed result of exposure (but, of course, not necessarily positive reception) of one's message.

In a world where literacy was not as frequent as it is in the 21st century of the United States, the medium one uses to convey one's message is especially important.<sup>136</sup> The Roman non-elite were professionally and culturally diverse, especially in the late Republic. The granting of citizenship to Italian allies after the Social War, combined with the rapid, ongoing expansion of the Roman Republic, led to an influx of people in Rome. Beyond the undoubtedly varying degrees of literacy (a result of various factors such as their upbringing, profession, etc.) among the Roman non-elite, some probably were bilingual or trilingual, such as scribes, slaves or freedmen, or primarily literate in languages that were not Latin and Greek.<sup>137</sup> The varied literacy levels, occupations, and ethnicities, among other factors, can account for difference in medium, but more generally underscore the fact that spatial communication might have been one of the better ways to disseminate one's political message.

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<sup>136</sup> Though there are varying opinions on the degree of literacy in the ancient world, one can generally agree that rates of literacy were lower in the ancient world, as compared to the present day United States. For a conservative estimate of literacy, see Harris. For an understanding of various literacies, see Woolf; Johnson and Parker.

<sup>137</sup> See Horsfall, p. 48ff. See also Woolf.

In a Rome with a sliding scale of literacy based on a number of factors, and in a city which housed speakers of many languages, space and place were one of the more effective modes of communication. As scholars interested in examining the relationship between architecture and viewer like Favro and Davies maintain, spatial messages are perhaps some of the most poignant political propaganda, especially to a *populus* that is illiterate, functionally literate, or communicates in a variety of languages.<sup>138</sup> The graffito on the temple to Concordia after Gaius Gracchus' untimely murder is effective precisely because of its spatial relationship to the temple. This political graffito interacts both with the physical place and the symbol of the place (a clear message about the control of the senatorial elite) to convey its dissidence. The graffiti addressing Brutus consider placement, as well; graffiti on the statues of L.Brutus convey a connection between the two Bruti, and the nearby statue of Caesar contextualizes who exactly Brutus ought to be liberating Rome from. Beyond this, placement among wider spatial systems is important. Graffiti calling for a liberation are one thing if placed on a street corner in Rome, but received completely differently if placed within the *area capitolina*, in conversation with one of the oldest spaces of Rome which was filled with some of the most important *monumenta*. It becomes a more urgent message, arguably lent more authority because of its environs.

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<sup>138</sup> Harris, p. 175ff. See Favro, *passim*, and Davies, *passim*.

Placement is, above all, one of the more important factors in the success of the circulation of political propaganda for the non-elite precisely because of the different forms of “hidden transcripts” among an often divided and diverse people.

## CONCLUSION

Though I have argued many points over the course of this paper, I have sought to illustrate one common theme: the complexities of authorship, intent, and usage of Roman political graffiti. Specific points within this theme are as follows:

The “dominated”, as Scott terms it, or the Roman non-elite, are complex. Thus, layers of hidden transcripts can exist both horizontally and vertically. We see, for example, two different hidden transcripts of two different groups of the “dominated” Roman non-elite, one that is perhaps more elite but not explicitly dominant over the other group, in Cassius Dio’s description of the Brutus graffiti.<sup>139</sup> If Cassius from Appian’s and Plutarch’s accounts is right, and the Brutus graffiti are a product of the elite, this is an example of vertical hidden transcripts. Cassius’ group of conspirators are elite, but still need to communicate in appropriated hidden transcripts both to capitalize on their perceived effect of hidden transcripts amongst the dominated (i.e., to garner “dominated” supporters), and because they are the “dominated” group to Caesar and his supporters and cannot contribute to the “dominant” discourse. They are still considered as dominant over the people, though; that much is clear by Cassius’ aside to Brutus about liberation as an elite concern.

The people, as categorized in varied terms from the literary accounts, are capable of and skilled at manipulation. At times they directly manipulate the “dominant” discourse, perhaps through exploitation of patronage networks to disseminate their hidden transcripts safely. For instance, Cassius Dio tells us that the people are responsible for pamphlets

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<sup>139</sup> Cass. Dio, 44.12.2-3.

criticizing Augustus during a famine, though people attribute the pamphlets to a separate group or to a man, Publius Rufus. In this instance, the people use *biblia*, with help from a patron, to manipulate collective understanding of the author for their audience to secure their anonymity. The people also skillfully manipulate “dominant” figures through their hidden transcripts. For instance, Plutarch’s Tiberius Gracchus and Brutus are highly influenced by popular graffiti, at the expense of everything else, and are prompted to act and join the conspirators after their encounter with these graffiti.

There seems to be a common medium of communication for political messaging; the elite are associated more frequently with pamphlets, whereas the people are associated with types of graffiti. This is not a hard and fast line, though. Association does not necessitate a monopoly on medium. Indeed, we see non-elite members using pamphlets and capitalizing on this association and elite members claiming graffiti for similar purposes.<sup>140</sup> But this association seems to be there, at least, and used to one’s political advantage.

Place is one of the more important ways to communicate hidden transcripts among non-elites, particularly in a socially, politically, culturally, and linguistically diverse Rome. Spatial placement pivotally conveys the hidden transcripts of the Temple of Concordia graffito and the anti-Caesarian graffiti directed toward Brutus.<sup>141</sup> Sophisticated language

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<sup>140</sup> See Cass. Dio, 55.27.1; App. BC 2.113.5 and Plut. Vit. Brut., 10.5-6.

<sup>141</sup> Suetonius’ account, Suet. Caes., 80.3, underscores this placement even more by mention of Caesar’s statue in close proximity and the popular graffiti written there.



also may have been a way to communicate, especially to successfully communicate both outward *and* upward hierarchically.

There were levels of anonymity within specific infrapolitical practices, as the Temple of Concordia's graffito highlights when Plutarch specifies that it was written at night. The need for more specific kinds of anonymity indicates the possible effectiveness of graffiti as a hidden transcript to effect political dissent or revolution.

Suetonian graffiti demonstrate that popular writers of graffiti could and often did have sophisticated cultural and political knowledge. Lastly, the new reception of a type of political messaging does not always dictate how one perceives older examples, as revealed through a discussion of the 1980s New York City graffiti culture.

"Graffiti," says Hunter S. Thompson, "is beautiful; like a brick in the face of a cop." In many ways, Thompson does a disservice to associate graffiti with this homogenous dissidence of the non-elite versus the elite, if we are to understand the police as hierarchical superior (as they are). Roman graffiti showcase that the people's hidden transcripts went far beyond a claiming of space; they communicated with sophistication visually, spatially, and linguistically. They appropriated mediums, they disguised their hidden transcripts within dominant ones and manipulated dominant figures with their hidden transcripts. This wasn't a unilateral practice, either; the dominant also manipulated hidden transcripts for their own benefit. Especially, the idea that there was "a" non-elite and "an" elite needs to be reconsidered; the literary examples demonstrate many layers of "dominant" and "dominated" with many groups, dependent on time and place. Graffiti are defiance, certainly, but very much more than that in ancient Rome.

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