

ARTICLE

Christianos in CIL IV, 679: The Possibility of an Image

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Abstract

There are good warrants for believing that either the word *Christianos* or the word *Christiani*, a reference to the Christians, was probably in a graffito on the wall of the atrium of the house now identified as VII.11.11 in Pompeii when Giuseppe Fiorelli excavated it in 1862. Karl Zangemeister edited it in 1871 as CIL IV, 679 and included two divergent transcriptions. In 1995, Paul Berry published a book in which he claimed that he had made an image of the word *Christianos* using an industrial microscope and high-intensity light. A research project to investigate that claim could be potentially useful for verifying or falsifying Berry's results.

Keywords: CIL IV; 679; *Christianos* or *Christiani*; Paul Berry

One fears to venture writing an article on an inscription that has generated – at a conservative estimate – well over a thousand pages of comment – separating the maximalists (who argue that Christians were present in Pompeii) from the sceptics.¹ A similar issue is the presence or absence of Jews in Pompeii. Giancarlo Lacerenza has argued effectively: ‘the material available today does not document a Jewish community in Pompeii. At most we can speak of some single or occasional presence: “Pompeian Judeo-Christianity” referred to by some, is (if it ever existed) still safely under the ashes of Vesuvius’.² I believe one can make a good case that either the word *Christianos* or *Christiani*, a reference to the Christians, was probably on the wall of the atrium of the ‘shabby hotel’ now identified as VII.11.11 in Pompeii when Giuseppe Fiorelli excavated it in 1862 – despite the doubts of some later scholars.³ If that thesis is correct, then one can nevertheless

¹ For the work of a maximalist see, e.g., B. Longenecker, *The Crosses of Pompeii: Jesus Devotion in a Vesuvian Town* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016) 152–66 (on CIL IV, 679) and idem, ‘Pompeian Artifacts and Jesus-Devotion: The Contours of the Issue in the Early Twenty-First Century’, *VC* 73 (2019) 271–96 (the presence of Christians in Pompeii); for a sceptic cf. H. Hofmann, ‘Satorquadrat’, *PWSup* 15 (1978) 478–565, esp. 549–50. See the extensive updated bibliography of V. Weber, *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum ... Voluminis quarti supplementum. Partis quartae fasciculus primus: Inscriptiones parietariae Pompeianae ... Supplementi pars quarta* [abbreviated as CIL IV Supp. 4.1] (ed. V. Weber, A. Varone, R. Marchionni, and J. Kępcartová; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011) 1245. Below I will refer to the sources that I have found most useful – with no aspersions on the rest of the literature. Cf. H. Solin, CIL IV Supp. 4.2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020) 1559 (two more sources). I have made liberal use of AI for the translations of several modern languages, which I have checked.

² G. Lacerenza, ‘Per un riesame della presenza ebraica a Pompei’, *Associazione italiana per lo studio del giudaismo* 6 (2001) 99–103, esp. 103.

³ Cf. G. Fiorelli, *Gli scavi di Pompeii dal 1861 al 1872* (Napoli: Tipografia Italiana, 1873) 97 (no transcription of the inscription). See idem, *Descrizione di Pompei* (Napoli: Tipografia Italiana, 1875) 278–81 (the *caupona*), esp. 279 (on 276, he dates the excavation of VII.11 to ‘1 ott.–13 nov. 1862 + 15 dec. 1862 –22 lgl. 1863’ – which contradicts

draw no conclusions about the presence or absence of Christians in pre-Vesuvian Pompeii. Besides attempting to clarify some of the details of the discovery, it is time to do a serious evaluation of the work of the amateur scholar Paul Berry who claimed to have produced an image of the word *Christianos* using an industrial microscope and high-intensity light.⁴ Berry published his book in 1995, and the microscopic traces of carbon might still be available for a qualified researcher using a stringent methodology and modern photographic equipment – who starts out with no pre-conceived notions or at least with as few pre-conceived notions as possible. In this article, consequently, I wish to argue for two results: that, in a reference to the Christians, either the word *Christianos* or the word *Christiani* was probably on the wall of the house's atrium, and that a research project to investigate the claim that Paul Berry made an image of the word *Christianos* could be potentially useful – whether the result is positive or negative.

1. Ad Fontes: Revisiting the Original Publications

Rebecca Benefiel writes this cautionary note, '... charcoal is a very difficult medium with which to write. The various line-drawings show that it was hard for anyone to be sure of even the strokes that were there'.⁵ At the risk of reinventing the wheel, it is worthwhile to dedicate the necessary pages for a precise account of the discovery before arguing for the presence of the word *Christianos* (or *Christiani*) in the inscription and before going into the possibility of further photographic research on what might remain of the carbon particles of the letters of the word.

The house is at the corner of what is now called the Vicolo del Balcone Pensile (street of the overhanging balcony) and the Vicolo del Lupanare (street of the brothel), directly across the street from the brothel. For details of the discovery, and they are few, one has to consult the article of the dean of nineteenth-century Italian epigraphers, Giovanni Battista de Rossi, written two years later. He did not see the graffito.⁶ Adolf Kiessling, however, was the first to publish two lines of the inscription in a one-page discussion in May of 1862 (lines four and six: PG · VI GAVDI ..HRISTIANI / 8 x SICV . SO ..ORIIS). He briefly located the fading words: 'The first floor contains some workshops, and in one of them an inscription marked with charcoal was discovered, unfortunately largely vanished'.⁷ De Rossi commented that 'an announcement of such a new and

Kiessling's publication of the graffito in May 1862; probably Fiorelli forgot to include the spring date for the partial excavation; on 281, e.g., he mentions '26 mgg. – 31 Igl. 1862' as one of the dates for the excavation of VII.12). To my knowledge Fiorelli never published a precise chronological account of the excavation. See A. Kiessling, 'Scavi di Pompeii', *Bullettino dell'Istituto di corrispondenza archeologica* (No. v, Maggio 1862) 92–8, esp. 92 ('not yet entirely excavated'). For an image of Kiessling's page, see <http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/buchseite/688976> A set of superb photographs of the house is available (last accessed 25 Sept. 2023) on the site: <https://pompeiiinpictures.com>. There is also an entrance now identified as VII.11.14 on the Vicolo del Lupanare. I will mention some of the doubts about the inscription below in §2. For the characterisation ('shabby') of the *caupona*, cf. J.-P. Cèbe, *La caricature et la parodie dans le monde romain antique des origines à Juvénal* (BEFAR 260; Paris: De Boccard, 1966) 340.

⁴ P. Berry, *The Christian Inscription at Pompeii* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1995) v–vi – a poor description of the apparatus and methodology used, to be discussed in § 3 below. Cf. C. Osiek, review of Berry, *Christian Inscription*, *CBQ* 59 (1997) 570–1.

⁵ Communication of 2 July 2023. Professor Benefiel is the director of the Ancient Graffiti Project and past president of the American Society of Greek and Latin Epigraphy.

⁶ G. B. de Rossi, 'Una memoria dei Cristiani in Pompeii', *Bullettino di archeologia cristiana* 2.9 (Settembre 1864) 69–72. Digitized at <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.17351.31>

⁷ Cf. Kiessling, 'Scavi di Pompeii', 92.

such an important discovery did not at all affect archaeologists and scholars of church history. The manner of that announcement left so much doubt in the minds of the readers, that it did not seem that any reliance could be placed on such an uncertain matter'.⁸ Neither Kiessling nor Fiorelli made photographs of the charcoal graffito which due to exposure to the air disappeared a few days after Fiorelli excavated the house.⁹

Giulio Minervini, however, made a transcription which de Rossi published – and which de Rossi stated was made before that of Kiessling.¹⁰ To my knowledge, Kiessling never published his transcription. However, in 1871, Karl Zangemeister republished Minervini's transcription and published Kiessling's in the venerable *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. The accuracy of his reproduction of de Rossi's version of Minervini's transcription is certain because one can check it against de Rossi's publication – but one cannot check it against Minervini's at first hand since Minervini never published it.¹¹ One can only rely on Zangemeister for the accuracy of his reproduction of Kiessling's transcription—since it is impossible to check (see Figure 1: CIL IV, Table 16, transcriptions: 16.2 (Kiessling) and 16.3 (Minervini)).¹² Zangemeister made the important observation that the inscription was in the atrium of the house, written in charcoal on white stucco, but he unfortunately did not specify which wall it was on.¹³ It is impossible now to construct a precise timeline of the excavation and transcriptions but Table 1 provides a relative picture.

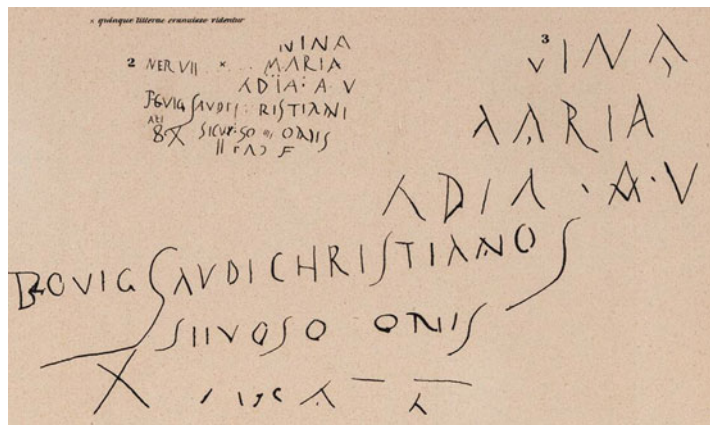


Figure 1. Two Transcriptions as Published by Zangemeister.

⁸ De Rossi, 'Una memoria', 70.

⁹ Fiorelli, *Gli scavi*, 97.

¹⁰ De Rossi, 'Una memoria', 71 (the claim and Minervini's transcription). But see the critical question about de Rossi's claim by A. Varone, *Presenze giudaiche e cristiane a Pompei* (Naples: n.p. (Portosalvo), 1979) 72 – to be discussed below.

¹¹ T. A. Wayment and M. J. Grey, 'Jesus Followers in Pompeii: The *Christianos* Graffito and "Hotel of the Christians" Reconsidered', *JJMJS* 2 (2015) 100–46, esp. 105 refer to a non-existent source: 'Giulio Minervini, "Collected Works (1854–1862)," published in *Bullettino Archeologico Napoletano* (Naples, 1862)'—that journal ceased to exist in 1860. H. Solin, *CIL IV Supp. 4.2*, 1559 comments on their article: Wayment and Grey 'have recently discussed it at great length but with little fruit'. There are pearls to be found within, however.

¹² *CIL IV*, 679, Plate 16, § 2 (Kiessling) and 3 (Minervini). Digitized at : <http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/buchseite/555185>

¹³ *CIL IV*, 679.

Table 1: Relative Timeline of Individuals who Saw, Transcribed, and Published the Graffito

1862: Excavation by Fiorelli (date of the graffito's excavation unclear)
The graffito seen by: Fiorelli, Kiessling, and Minervini; dates unclear but before May of 1862
Transcription by Minervini (according to de Rossi); date unclear
Transcription by Kiessling (allegedly after Minervini's according to de Rossi); date unclear
Transcription by Fiorelli (never published); date unclear
May 1862: publication of the graffito, lines 4 and 6, by Kiessling who did not include his transcription; describes the discovery as part of a 'recent excavation'
Sept. 1864: publication of the graffito by de Rossi who included Minervini's transcription and who transmitted the views of Fiorelli and Minervini
1871: publication of the graffito by Zangemeister with Kiessling's and Minervini's transcriptions
1873: publication by Fiorelli of a few words in the graffito; he notes the graffito disappeared 'after a few days'

The two transcriptions as published by Zangemeister (Figure 1) could not be more frustrating. Antonio Varone comments judiciously in a study that I have found to be one of the most useful pieces written on the inscription: 'A transcription, if made by a competent person with all due caution, can nevertheless be as valuable as the most perfect of photographs. The problem with our text is precisely this: The two transcriptions disagree with each other and precisely in the most remarkable points; this suggests at least that the reading was by no means easy.'¹⁴

It is worthwhile to start with Zangemeister's observations written in what has become somewhat inaccessible nineteenth-century scholarly Latin which has subsequently caused some confusion.¹⁵ He writes that Kiessling drew the inscription and that he (Z.) strove to reproduce his transcription in the printed text as CIL IV, 679 – although Kiessling himself only published lines 4 and 6.¹⁶ He notes that the other transcription is taken from Minervini, as edited by de Rossi, including things that he (de Rossi) records Fiorelli saying.¹⁷ One of Zangemeister's crucial comments is this, 'The reading of the inscription, which all have seen in a faded state, is extremely uncertain.' For Zangemeister's printed text, see Figure 2: CIL IV, 679 p. 41; edition of Karl Zangemeister.¹⁸

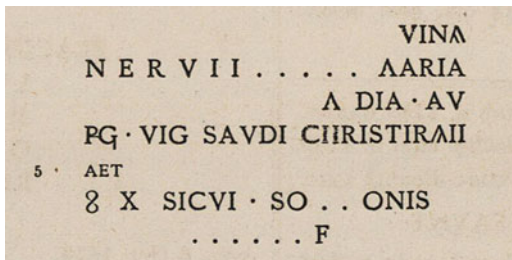


Figure 2. Zangemeister's Printed Text.

¹⁴ Varone, *Presenze*, 72.

¹⁵ Everything below comes from Zangemeister's remarks in CIL IV, 679 (K. Zangemeister, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum ... Volumin quartum ... Inscriptiones parietariae pompeianae herculanenses stabianae ...* (Berlin: Reimer, 1871) 41). I thank Robert Kaster for his very generous translation of much of the material that follows. Any errors are my own.

¹⁶ Kiessling, 'Gli scavi', 92 states he only could read those lines.

¹⁷ For which see de Rossi, 'Una memoria', 70–2.

¹⁸ Cf. <https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/2186247/image/2192119>

He makes another observation whose importance has apparently been overlooked by many: Fiorelli and Minervini omit the beginning of the second line (NER VII). This is a particularly crucial comment because de Rossi writes that Kiessling saw the inscription *after* Minervini and Fiorelli – and that has led some to privilege Minervini’s transcription, but that is unjustified.¹⁹ De Rossi, however, does not explicitly say when Kiessling made his transcription. But if de Rossi is correct, one wonders how Minervini could have failed to see letters that apparently were quite visible. The last word in the second line is M (or V) ARIA according to Fiorelli. The last two letters on the third line are either A (or AM) V according to Fiorelli.²⁰ De Rossi concluded that the first three lines are quite different from what follow and decided that perhaps A · D · K · A²¹ was to be read above the last word of line 4. De Rossi restored the rest as *s audi Christianos sevos olores* (I heard the Christians, cruel swans), so that the sentence might pertain to the Neronian persecution – an ‘ingenious but insufficiently certain conjecture’. With regard to Kiessling’s edition of line 4 as PG · VI GAVDI ..HRISTIANI and his interpretation of the scrawl as *igni gaude Christiane* (Christian, rejoice in the fire), Zangemeister comments that the suggestion was ‘against his (i.e., Kiessling’s) own transcription’. He notes that instead of Kiessling’s words in line 4 Fiorelli had nothing, only HRISTIANOS (or HRISTIANVS), and Minervini had BOVIGS (or G) AVDI CHRISTIANOS. He notes that only Kiessling has line 5 (*aet*). Kiessling edited line 6 as 8 x SICV · SO ..ORIIS, but Fiorelli had nothing, only SORORIIS; and Minervini had SIIVOS ORIIS (or ONIS). Kiessling and Minervini have vestiges of line 7, but Fiorelli has nothing. These variations, noted by the only individuals who saw the fading words, are enough to drive one to scepticism.

Zangemeister’s conclusions are worth reflecting on after 150 years in which little progress has apparently been made:

In [the case of] inscriptions of this sort I have learned very well from too many examples how unreliable it is to seek to read more than the author of the transcription could himself, when transcriptions are our only guides, however carefully they were made. Who could restore from Minervini’s transcription a [text] written in charcoal, like inscription [CIL IV,] 760, which was then [i.e., when Minervini saw it] certainly better preserved than when I saw it eight years later.²² We might grant this one point as not unlikely, that [the letters] .HRISTIAN.. were on the wall (though that is quite inconsistent with Kiessling’s transcription); this indeed, which could scarcely be restored as anything other than CHRISTIAN.., is not the *cognomen* ‘Christian’, i.e., Chrestianus ...,²³ but instead pertains to the Christian faith.

A simple but useful conclusion in what later resulted in baroque speculations.²⁴ Several other scholars have opted for the view that Christiani, or rather Chrestiani, is a

¹⁹ De Rossi, ‘Una memoria’, 72—a point emphasized by Varone, *Presenze*, 72 who notes the problem: ‘Minervini in fact in his transcription in the second line does not write: NER VII and in 5 and 6 AET/8’, as reported by Kiessling. This would suggest that ‘when Minervini made his transcription already some letters had dissolved compared to the time when Kiessling made his’.

²⁰ For Fiorelli, in addition to de Rossi’s article, cf. also Fiorelli, *Gli scavi*, 97 as noted above.

²¹ That is, *A(nte) d(iem) K(alendes) A(priles)*—before 1 April—the number of days (such as *tertium*) before 1 April is missing.

²² CIL IV, 760 is an obscene inscription that includes – in its midst – the letters *tloftorgc*. On some theories about the meaning of those signs (namely, another language), cf. Varone, *Presenze*, 75 n. 98. He rejects the hypothesis of another language, ‘it is better, however, not to believe any such interpolations in other languages, and to judge that line is simply uninterpretable, in that it is not well readable’. Cf. the edition and trans. of R. Wachter, *Pompejanische Wandinschriften: Lateinisch – deutsch* (Sammlung Tusculum; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019) § 1195.

²³ Zangemeister, in a parenthesis, notes that de Rossi conceded the possibility and refers to ‘B.[A.]N. 1860 p.24’, which is CIL x, 3149, a funerary stone dedicated to *Ursenae Crist(a)e*, to be corrected to *Crestae*.

²⁴ For an extreme example of the speculations that will never end, cf. E. Tuccinardi, ‘Christian Horrors in Pompeii: A New Proposal for the Christianos Graffito’, *JJMJS* 3 (2016) 61–71.

cognomen.²⁵ One argument in favour of that thesis fails, however. Herman Schiller contends that the ‘puzzling’ inscription contradicts Tertullian, *Apol.* 40.7 who asserts that during the destruction of Pompeii there were no Christians in Campania.²⁶ Tertullian, however, did not have a census of the religious proclivities of all individuals in Campania before the eruption of Vesuvius, and even if there were none in the town, a pagan could still be aware of the Christians and could have scrawled something about them on a wall. It probably is not a *cognomen*, because the plural form is not found anywhere else in Latin literature or inscriptions as a *cognomen* – as opposed to the plural use of the term for Christians in literature.²⁷ In addition, there is no accompanying *nomen* or *cognomen* (present in all other uses of the *cognomen* ‘*Chrestianus*’ in the inscriptions).²⁸ Jean-Pierre Cèbe opts for scepticism since ‘we have no solid basis for interpreting the text’ and settles for a ‘*non liquet*’.²⁹ Fiorelli himself, in an observation published in 1873, wrote these intensely sceptical words:

But those traces vanished after a few days, and from the diversity of the transcriptions, obtained then from Minervini, from Kiessling (*Bull. Inst.* 1862. p. 92), and from myself, there now remains only doubt, for that matter quite justified, whether, that is, there were not instead mentioned in that epigraph VINA VARIA; all the more so since from the remains of the entry AETatis(?), and numerical notes, it might be inferred that there the age, name, and price of the wines were mentioned, which in that great caupona were to be found displayed at the request of patrons.³⁰

Varone clarifies this result: VINA / VARIA / ...A(mphoras) V (quinque) and AET(atis) on line 5 (different wines ... five amphorae ... of great age).³¹ And Varone notes of Fiorelli,

²⁵ H. Schiller, ‘Ein Problem der Tacituserklärung’, in *Commentationes philologicae in honorem Theodori Mommseni scripturunt amici* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877) 41–7, esp. 46 argues, ‘Its meaning is quite uncertain; even if one admits that *Christiani* was written, and by that word the Christians were intended, so it still proves nothing for our place and for this time (the Neronian persecution), but it is indeed unproved that *Christiani* was written here and not some surname (*cognomen*) *Chrestianus* was spoken of here.’ Cp. the similar views of V. Schultze, ‘Die Christen-Inschrift in Pompeiji’, *ZKG* 4 (1881) 125–30, esp. 129–30 and D. Mallardo, ‘Le questioni dei cristiani a Pompei’, *Rivista di Studi Pompeiani* 1/2 (1934–35) 116–65, esp. 157–9. Cèbe, *La caricature*, 339 considers the possibility that *christianos* is ‘the accusative plural of the *cognomen* *Christianus*’.

²⁶ Schiller, ‘Ein Problem’, 46.

²⁷ For the plural *Chrestiani*, cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.2, Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.3.9 (cp. *Apol.* 3.5).

²⁸ See CIL vi, 24944 (i ce): *Faustus Antoniae Drusi ius / emit lucundi Chrestiani oll(arum)* (Faustus, slave of Antonia (dead 1 May 37 ce) wife of Drusus, bought the right of the funerary urns from Lucundus Chrestianus). Lucundus could have been a *libertus* (freedman) of Chrestus – a possibility noted by Heikki Solin. See also *Epaphroditus Chrestianus* in CIL x, 6638 B (38–39 ce) and *Herenni Chrestiane (Herennius Chrestianus)* in CIL vi, 1056 (205 ce). Cf. J. G. Cook, ‘*Chrestiani, Christiani, Χριστιανοί: A Second Century Anachronism?*’, *VC* 74 (2020) 237–64, esp. 256–7, J. Bremmer, ‘Ioudaismos, Christianismos and the Parting of the Ways’, in *Jews and Christians – Parting Ways in the First Two Centuries CE?: Reflections on the Gains and Losses of a Model* (ed. J. Schröter, B. A. Edsall, and J. Verheyden; BZNW 253; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021) 57–88; J. L. Moles, ‘What’s in a Name? *χριστός/χρηστός* and *χριστιανοί/χρηστιανοί* in the First Century AD’, in *The Collected Papers of J. L. Moles* (2 vols.; ed. J. Marincola; Leiden: Brill, 2023) 1.937–79; and E. Castelli, ‘La nascita del termine ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΣΜΟΣ. Un nuovo punto di partenza e alcune considerazioni sull’uso della parola in Ignazio di Antiochia’, *REAug* 68 (2022) 233–58. On individuals with two *cognomina*, cf. H. Solin, ‘Name’, *RAC* 25 (2013) 729–95, esp. 757.

²⁹ Cèbe, *La caricature*, 339: ‘In our opinion, it is foolhardy, to say the least, to build an entire theory on a document whose only surviving reproductions do not agree with each other. How can we be sure that it actually contained the word *christianos*? If it did, how can we be sure that it actually referred to Christians?’

³⁰ Fiorelli, *Gli scavi*, 97. Where Fiorelli’s transcription is, is a mystery. In fact, de Rossi, ‘Una memoria’, 71 writes, ‘But the air having soon made the letters fade, he (Fiorelli) did not come in time to make an exact drawing of them’ – presumably that does not preclude that he later did some kind of transcription. Antonio Varone (communication of 27 June 2023) writes, ‘the transcription Fiorelli says he made has never been found, nor did he ever publish it. It is possible that he actually never did one or otherwise did not consider it preferable to the others’.

³¹ De Rossi, ‘Una memoria’ 71 argues that there were two inscriptions – the upper (the top three lines) with bigger letters with more space between them. For *aetas* used with wine, cf. OLD s.v. § 4b: Celsus 2.26.1 *vinum cui nihil adhuc aetatis accessit* (wine that has not as yet reached great age).

'and although on the fourth line he read exclusively "HRISTIANOS" or "CHRISTIANUS", he did not think the name of Christians was mentioned in it'.³²

One conclusion, however, seems reliable. Three researchers (Fiorelli, Kiessling, Minervini) asserted that they saw the inscription including the excavator of the house, Fiorelli. Kiessling was as dispassionate an observer as one could wish – an editor, translator and commentator on many Greek and Latin authors.³³ The same can be said for Fiorelli. De Rossi, who in Varone's words was 'of an authority equal to that of Mommsen', did not see the graffito but transmitted the views of Fiorelli and Minervini.³⁴ This is a good *prima facie* case for excluding the hypothesis that the charcoal words were the work of modern visitors.³⁵ These conditions would have to be met to warrant the conclusion that the graffito is a forgery (that is, a modern product): Fiorelli, Kiessling, and Minervini were either consummate liars or profoundly mistaken in what they claim to have seen. A precise archaeological report (with dates) of the excavation and inspection of the graffito does not exist – other than Fiorelli's comment that after encountering the inscription (*una leggenda incontrata*) 'the traces' of the graffito 'vanished after a few days'.³⁶

De Rossi could not see the inscription: 'but however much I fixed my eye to discern some trace of it, all my efforts were in vain: no more vestige of it remains'. Then he describes what Fiorelli could tell him: 'The learned discoverer told me that he saw and knew that the letters in three lines were written at one and the same time (1) VINA, (2) MARIA (or VARIA), (3) ADIA A V ; and below in two longer lines he read at the end of the first line ... HRISTIANOS or ... HRISTIANVS, at the end of the second SORORIIS (*sorores*)'.³⁷ Then he makes an observation that some later scholars have neglected:

Therefore in so much difficulty and perhaps given the impossibility of drawing from this epigraph an entire and not arbitrary sense, only one thing remains to be looked for, and it is worth looking for carefully, – that is, at least if it is certain that Christians are spoken of here: in a word, if the reading of the word CHRISTIANOS is well founded. Three different witnesses saw the letters HRISTIAN. Fiorelli also saw the last S, which was manifest; Minervini discerned the entire entry CHRISTIANOS; Kiessling who came after the first two saw only HRISTIANI³⁸

³² Varone, *Presenze*, 75. Longenecker, *Crosses*, 164–5, using both transcriptions for the fourth line, conjectures *pro vicis audi Christianos* (listening to the Christians would be good for neighborhoods). *audi* would be bad Latin for an active infinitive (i.e., 'heed the Christians for the neighborhood's sake' is all Longenecker could get out of that phrase). Volker Michael Strocka (review of Longenecker, *Crosses*, in *Early Christianity* 8 (2017) 523–8, esp. 526) responds: 'I do not know if a Pompeian could understand this. However, it is true that the presence of Christians in Pompeii is not proven by this line, but the Christians as a group were definitely present in the public opinion (after the Neronian persecution).'

³³ There are 509 entries for Kiessling in the WorldCat—<https://www.worldcat.org>. Consulted on 26 June 2023. Of course, not all are different books.

³⁴ Varone, *Presenze*, 74. Cf. de Rossi, 'Una memoria', 70–2.

³⁵ For such a view, cf. C. Carletti, *Epigrafia dei cristiani in occidente dal III al VII secolo: Ideologia e prassi* (Bari: Edipuglia, 2008) § 15 (145–6): 'There are many serious suspicions that, as in the case of some graffiti in the *Paedagogium* (see n. 12 (SEG 47:1512: the crucified man with a donkey head)) ... it is a subsequent intervention, the work of visitors, educated and uncultured, who penetrated the buried city.' Carletti's student, epigrapher Professor Antonio Felle, also believes that the graffito is a 'modern writing' (communication of 7 July 2023). H. Solin, *CIL IV Supp.* 4.2, 1635–6 (on *CIL IV*, 1227) argues against attributing Pompeian inscriptions to 'clandestine diggers'.

³⁶ Fiorelli, *Gli scavi*, 97.

³⁷ de Rossi, 'Una memoria', 70–1.

³⁸ de Rossi, 'Una memoria' 72.

Despite de Rossi's warning about trying to find a meaning in the epigraph that was not arbitrary, he then makes a suggestion that Zangemeister above called 'ingenious but very uncertain': AVDI CHRISTIANOS SEVOS OLORES (*audi Christianos s(a)evos olores*) (I heard the Christians – savage swans). De Rossi's last comment is, 'If we cannot clearly understand all the malice or wit of this mockery, everyone knows, however, that it is not without sense, and that it is the spontaneous reading of the epigraph.'

One, however, who engages Kiessling's transcription dispassionately (see Figure 1: Table 16.2 above) can see that de Rossi's suggestion contradicts what Kiessling saw in line 6 (beginning with the symbol '8' and x) – certainly not the Arabic numeral '8'.³⁹ In addition, Kiessling in line 4 has AVDI followed by a larger vertical line and space for two letters – one which might have been C. Ninety-eight years later, Margherita Guarducci speculated that the lines instead should be read, BOVIOS AUDI(t) CHRISTIANOS / S(a)EVOS O[s]JORES (Bovios hears the Christians, cruel haters).⁴⁰ It is ingenious, and it is unconvincing for the same reasons that de Rossi's conjecture is unconvincing. It does not cohere with Kiessling's transcription. Guarducci failed to include Kiessling's PG at the beginning of line 4. Her conjecture is missing the AET in line 5 and the 8 and X in line 6, and the next word of Kiessling's transcription (SICV) definitely contradicts the transcription of Minervini.

2. The Presence or Absence of *Christianos* or *Christiani* in the Inscription

At the beginning of the article, I mentioned the adversarial relationship between the extreme sceptics and the maximalists with regard to the inscription. The question arises whether any scholar can claim to be completely objective and willing to approach a subject without any dogmatic pre-conceived beliefs. A typical *ad hominem* argument is: people see what they want to see in the inscription – especially religious believers. One can turn that argument on its head: the extreme sceptic does not see what (s)he does not want to see. A longstanding problem in the philosophy of science is whether there are any theory-neutral observations – it is hard to establish that there are.⁴¹ One can well doubt that there are any observations that are not theory-laden in some sense. Although clearly not a philosopher of science, Rudolf Bultmann wrote a seminal essay entitled 'Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?'⁴² For example, one of the very sceptical critics of the alleged appearance of *Christianos* in the inscription is the classicist Mary Beard who writes, 'The charcoal graffito which was said to include the word "Christiani", but faded almost instantly, is almost certainly a figment of pious imagination.'⁴³ Her conclusion does not appear to be based on the literature surveyed above. For example, Beard seems to assume

³⁹ For an excessively speculative interpretation of a possible Christian reference for these marks, cf. Longenecker, *Crosses*, 176–86.

⁴⁰ M. Guarducci, 'La più antica iscrizione col nome dei cristiani', *RQ* 57 (1962) 116–25, esp. 122–3. Cf. also Varone, *Presenze*, 76.

⁴¹ Cf. the very interesting entry: N. M. Boyd and J. Bogen, 'Theory and Observation in Science', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/science-theory-observation/>>

⁴² R. Bultmann, 'Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?', in *New Testament Mythology and Other Selected Writings* (ed. S. Ogden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 145–54 (originally published in *TZ* 13 (1957) 409–17).

⁴³ M. Beard, *Pompeii: The Life of a Roman Town* (London: Profile, 2008) 302. Cp. E. Dinkler, 'Älteste christliche Denkmäler – Bestand und Chronologie', in idem, *Signum Crucis: Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament und zur Christlichen Archäologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1967) 134–78, esp. 138–41: 'The reading of the scribble, presumably blurred by the effects of the weather, was characterized from the beginning by wishful thinking, which alone can explain the diversity of the transcriptions.' That is an *ad hominem* argument also (i.e., the accusation of 'wishful thinking'). Hofmann, 'Satorquadrat', 549–50 notes the existence of three different transcriptions (for the primary word in question) and concludes that the 'inscription cannot be used as a witness for or against' the

that a revered classicist like Adolf Kiessling was a victim of his ‘pious imagination’ along with the epigraphers Fiorelli and Minervini. Her statement, taken at face value, is an example of the type of *ad hominem* arguments that abound in the discourse about CIL IV, 679. Brent D. Shaw comments, ‘Lampe... states that “the text obviously speaks of Christians”. In the face of no other supporting evidence, I remain rather sceptical. “Lectio inscriptionis, quam omnes viderunt evanidam, incerta est” [the reading of the inscription, which all have seen in a faded state, is extremely uncertain], the editors of CIL wisely remarked. It is (rightly I think) rejected as having anything to do with Christians.’⁴⁴ Shaw bases this conclusion on one footnote in an article of Jobjorn Boman. Shaw has no *grounds* for concluding that the inscription has nothing to do with Christianity.⁴⁵ Only that it might not, or probably does not, have a connection – based on the following reasoning. One has to ask what would count as supporting evidence – presumably something like five inscriptions in the house that mention Christians. If *Christianos* (or the like) were in the inscription, it would militate against Shaw’s views that *Christiani* is a second-century word.⁴⁶ In the beautiful garden of VII.11.11, there is a lararium. In the niche is a large image of Jupiter and a Genius – each holding the patera.⁴⁷ Twelve inscriptions were found in the house, none of which have the remotest connection to Christianity.⁴⁸ That piece of evidence alone would caution one from trying to read too much into the graffito – if the word *Christianos* were written on the first floor, that would not justify any grand conclusions about the presence of Christianity in Pompeii.

Thomas A. Wayment and Matthew J. Grey appear somewhat mystified by Zangemeister’s edition (see Figure 2 above) of the inscription in which the word CIIRISTIRAI appears, ‘For example, Zangemeister introduced the second “R” into the word, despite that fact that neither of the previous editions suggested the word’s ending was in doubt (both read it as “IAN”).’ They make this somewhat surprising claim, ‘Through this and other alterations, Zangemeister changed the word *Christianos* into *ceristira* or *christira* (depending on how one renders “II”).’⁴⁹ Zangemeister made *no* alterations to Kiessling’s transcription (Figure 1) in his *edition*⁵⁰, however. One should consult Zangemeister’s chart of cursive forms for Pompeian charcoal inscriptions.⁵¹ The lambda-

presence of Christians in Pompeii and that one suspects that ‘for the reading CHRISTIANI the wish has been the father of the thought’. That is an *ad hominem* argument which is a logical fallacy.

⁴⁴ Cf. B. D. Shaw, ‘The Myth of the Neronian Persecution’, *JRS* 105 (2015) 73–100, esp. 89 n. 76 with reference to J. Boman, ‘Impulsore Cherestro? Suetonius’ *Divus Claudius* 25.4 in Sources and Manuscripts’, *Liber Annuus* 61 (2011) 355–76, 355 n. 3 (who dismisses it in one apodictic sentence: ‘the Pompeian inscription HRISTIAN, cannot be said to refer to Christians at all’ – with no argument whatsoever) and P. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians in Rome in the First Two Centuries* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 7–8. On the historicity of the Neronian persecution, cf. also Shaw, ‘Response to Christopher Jones: The Historicity of the Neronian Persecution’, *NTS* 64 (2018) 231–42, C. P. Jones, ‘The Historicity of the Neronian Persecution: A Response to Brent Shaw’, *NTS* 63 (2017) 146–52, B. van der Lans and J. N. Bremmer, ‘Tacitus and the Persecution of the Christians: An Invention or Tradition?’, *Eirene. Studia Graeca et Latina* 53 (2017) 299–331, and Cook, ‘*Chrestiani*’.

⁴⁵ I take this formulation from Senior Reader Ian Morton.

⁴⁶ Cf. Shaw, ‘Myth’, *passim* and Cook, ‘*Chrestiani*’, 237–64.

⁴⁷ Cf. the images at <https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/> and Wayment and Grey, ‘Jesus Followers’, 146.

⁴⁸ See CIL IV, 2012–24. Cf. IV, 2016 (west wall of the atrium) *Mulus hic muscellas docuit* (here a mule taught young she-mules). Wachter, *Pompejanische Wandinschriften*, § 1260 (p. 443) attributes a sexual meaning to the saying (cf. G. Ustrnul, ‘*muscella*’, *ThLL* VIII.1697.20–26). In CIL, IV, 2203 *mula* refers to a prostitute (CIL IV, 2204 *Μολα*—the same reference). Cp. Cèbe, *La caricature*, 339.

⁴⁹ Wayment and Grey, ‘Jesus Followers’, 108–9.

⁵⁰ Kiessling’s transcription is marked with a ‘2’. One cannot check Kiessling’s transcription, as presented by Zangemeister, against the original (as I have remarked above).

⁵¹ CIL IV, Table 1. Digitized at <http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/buchseite/555155> Reproduced by V. Väänänen, *Le latin vulgaire des inscriptions pompéiennes* (ADAW.S 3; Berlin: Akademie, 1966³) 147.

shaped cursive letter can be either an ‘R’ or an ‘A’ as one clearly sees in Zangemeister’s chart.⁵² That is why Zangemeister writes (of Kiessling’s transcription), *supraque exhibere studui* (and I strove to reproduce it above) – in other words, he based his printed edition on Kiessling’s version, and clearly he interpreted the lambda shape in that transcription as an ‘R’ and the ligature after the lambda as ‘AI’. Heikki Solin writes, ‘As to 679, a mention of the Christians is extremely improbable. Kiessling wanted to read CIIRISTIRAI. That can be everything. It is useless to continue the discussion.’⁵³ Solin’s position is certainly a live option.

Epigrapher John Bodel comments on the word in question:

The writing in the graffito is partly cursive, partly block capitals which explains the different letter forms for ‘R’. Yes, the form in CIL IV, Plate 16.2 (Figure 1) could be a cursive R, but it could also be an A. The form after it, however, looks like an AN or possibly ANI in ligature, so the form could be read [CH]RISTIRIANI or [CH]RISTIRANI. By a simple (and common) transposition of letters this could become ‘CHRISTRIANI’, perhaps.⁵⁴

However, he believes CHRISTIRANI is more probable than CHRISTRIANI and that the ligature is either AN or ANI.

The difference in the transcriptions is of course highly problematic.⁵⁵ Erich Dinkler – I believe correctly – argues that one should privilege that of Kiessling (as Zangemeister does in his edition): ‘Further one would have to ask whether Kiessling’s transcription proves to be not only substantially more complete in the comparison with that of Minervini.’⁵⁶ That is the same argument used by Varone mentioned above.⁵⁷ Kiessling’s transcription, seemingly, is more careful not only because he saw more scrawls than Minervini did but also because of the shapes of some of the letters. In the word in question (last word of line 4), after the lambda symbol, there is a ligature which is better formed in Kiessling’s transcription than in that of Minervini. The ligature clearly has an extra vertical stroke that extends from the diagonal line on the left side of the symbol (see Figure 1). Minervini’s depiction of the ligature appears more careless.

Varone, in a thought experiment, refers to the third letter from the end of the fifth line that is often interpreted as an ‘R’ (i.e., Guarducci’s O(s)ORES (haters) or de Rossi’s O(I)ORES (swans)). It is identical with the second sign from the end of the last word in line 4. So that word could end in RII. Then he writes, ‘Wanting then paradoxically to push such an analysis to its extreme limits, it might not be entirely excluded that, again on line 4, the sign that in both transcriptions is reported as S in RISTIA in reality might have been a simple vertical stroke and precisely the second vertical stroke of an E.’⁵⁸ This analysis results in the word RETIARII (net fighting gladiators). He states, however, that ‘it is absolutely not his intention to advance this new interpretive proposal’ but only to show that it is possible.⁵⁹ In the end,

⁵² Rebecca Benefiel comments, ‘they (R and A) can be quite close in form so that a character might be read one way or the other. The R can have more of a diagonal than a loop (e.g. row 5, 12 (of Zangemeister’s table; section iv)) and the A of course can be written without a horizontal bar (e.g. row 4 (of section iv))’ (communication of 2 July 2023).

⁵³ Communication of 18 July 2023. Solin reads the cursive letter (lambda-shape) as an R and the ligature as AI (as Zangemeister). Kiessling, ‘Scavi’, 92 interpreted both differently.

⁵⁴ Communication of 26 June 2023.

⁵⁵ Cf. A. von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten Dreihundert Jahren* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1924) 625 n. 8: ‘the reading (CHRISTIAN) is completely uncertain. If the word “Christian” really appeared in it, it would only prove that people in Pompeii knew about the Christians, not that they lived there.’

⁵⁶ Dinkler, *Signum*, 141. Cp. Varone, *Presenze*, 72.

⁵⁷ In § 1.

⁵⁸ Varone, *Presenze*, 77.

⁵⁹ Varone, *Presenze*, 77.

he decides that Guarducci's reading is the best proposal so far, but cautions that it is still uncertain: 'Needless to say, such a reading is undoubtedly the best of those proposed so far, as well as being difficult to refine; concomitantly, however, it cannot, like any other for that matter, offer any guarantees, precisely because it is based on a transcription, which we have well seen is tainted by flaws.'⁶⁰ Crucially, Varone argues, 'those few letters that seem sure lead back to the name of Christians alone, better than any other word'.⁶¹

Giuseppe Camodeca, like Varone, another master of Campanian epigraphy, is not so sanguine about Guarducci's reading, "'the sense" reconstruction (*la ricostruzione 'a senso'*) of Guarducci is very suspect'.⁶² Guarducci's deep faith may have affected her critical faculties in this matter – which is *ad hominem* – but possibly quite true. On the other hand, Camodeca is willing to concede the possibility of knowledge in Pompeii of the Christians' existence in 79⁶³: 'the confirmation of the word would not be an extraordinary fact: that in 79 Christians were known in Pompeii cannot be surprising'.⁶⁴ The remark on Guarducci's fideism may be relevant in this case because she ignored Kiessling's transcription in her conjecture. The same cannot be said about Karl Zangemeister, however. His explicit conclusion bears repeating – namely, that the word 'could scarcely be restored as anything other than CHRISTIAN..' and is not the *cognomen* Chrestianus, 'but instead pertains to the Christian faith'. His argument is reasonable.

Table 2: Proposed Reconstructions by Selected Epigraphers/Historians

Epigrapher/historian	Transcription	Edition/Interpretation
Kiessling	RISTIλANI (see Figure 1: Table 16.2; AN, ANI, or AI in ligature after λ; traces of a letter before R)	HRISTIANI/CHRISTIANE
Fiorelli	HRISTIANOS (or HRISTIANVS)	(apparently) omitted ⁶⁵
Minervini	CHRISTIλNOS (see Figure 1: Table 16.3)	CHRISTIANOS
De Rossi		CHRISTIANOS
Zangemeister		CIIRISTIRAI (see Figure 2) cCHRISTIAN
Aubé		CHRISTIANOS
Guarducci		CHRISTIANOS
Varone		RETIARII (only a conjecture) CHRISTIANOS (his edition)
Bodel		[CH]RISTIRIANI or [CH] RISTIRANI (Second R could be an A)

⁶⁰ Varone, *Presenze*, 76.

⁶¹ Varone, *Presenze*, 78.

⁶² Communication of 26 June 2023. (he praises her as a powerful and famous scholar and notes she was a devout Catholic).

⁶³ One can concede this and remain agnostic whether Christians actually *were* in Pompeii.

⁶⁴ Communication of 26 June 2023.

⁶⁵ Cf. the quote above (Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 97).

My conclusion is that the word *CHRISTIAN*.. probably was on the wall. But the longer reconstructions of de Rossi and Guarducci are highly suspect – too much in those reconstructions contradicts what I take to be the most careful transcription – that of Kiessling. There is a small but highly intriguing possibility that Paul Berry made an image of the word.

3 The Image of Paul Berry

In 1995 Berry published his book on the inscription and included an image that he wrote he made from the southwest wall of the atrium (see [Figure 3](#): atrium of VII.11.11; southwest wall;



Figure 3.

photograph courtesy of Jackie and Bob Dunn; su concessione del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività - Culturali - Parco Archeologico di Pompeii). His book, while fascinating, is characterised by a nearly complete lack of technical detail and would be difficult (but not impossible) to subject to any kind of serious peer review for a variety of reasons to be sketched below. Berry, in his retirement, made 'architectural drawings' for the 'Historical American Buildings Survey in Washington, D.C.' In addition, in his study of nineteenth-century structures, 'an archaeological approach was also required' including 'reading wall surfaces'. Then he makes an important claim: 'At Pompeii, a random search in this matter was not called for, since the location of the Christian inscription was described in the accounts written at the time of its discovery.' That is precisely what is missing in the accounts, which only have vague indications such as 'in the atrium'.⁶⁶ The following is the only technical account of the methodology he used:

Nonetheless, the actual reading of the letters proved to be a slow task; the script resembled the track of a pale design across some gossamer fabric. A small area of the wall, no larger than the size of a man's open palm, would be lighted by high intensity illumination. At that point nothing would be revealed to normal viewing. Yet under magnification to the 100th power by the use of an industrial microscope traces could be detected and vestiges that had become imperceptible could be discovered. The wall surface on which the letters were written had been troweled flat to a moderately coarse texture. The facing (of the wall surface) was ideally grained for the retention of scattered particles of carbon embedded along the baseline of the stucco coat. A transparent film was inserted below the lens, and on it, an outline of the trace could be produced.⁶⁷

This excessively brief account of his methodology leaves more questions than it answers. Berry claims, for example, that the inscription 'was discovered on the southwest wall of the atrium by Alfred Kiessling in 1862', however Kiessling never mentioned 'the southwest wall'.⁶⁸ Berry also claims Benjamin Aubé stated that the inscription was on a wall 'that ran only in general alignment with the wall of the atrium', but Aubé does not write that. What he does write is, 'In 1862, on the wall of a vast room located in the street that runs along the Stabian baths, characters were found that were lightly traced in charcoal in a flowing hand that apparently mentions Christians.'⁶⁹ Berry read that line to mean that Aubé was locating the orientation of the inscription, but Aubé provides no orientation.⁷⁰ Aubé concludes that de Rossi's interpretation is the result of fantasy and that the only probable result is that the word 'Christians' was on the wall.

⁶⁶ Berry, *Inscription*, iv–v.

⁶⁷ Berry, *Inscription*, v.

⁶⁸ Berry, *Inscription*, vi. See Plate 7 for Berry's plan of the house (with the atrium) and wall he identifies as 'location of the Christian inscription'. He (24) claims 'Kiessling's miners first uncovered the southwest wall of the atrium in the House of the Christian inscription' – but Fiorelli excavated the house – not Kiessling.

⁶⁹ B. Aubé, 'De la Légalité du christianisme dans l'Empire romain pendant le 1^{er} siècle', *CRAI* 10 (1866) 184–205, esp. 189. Berry, *Inscription*, 29 also errs in his claim that Johannes Overbeck (*Pompeji in seinen Gebäuden, Alterthümen, Kunstwerken für Kunst- und Alterthumsfreuden* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1875³) 437) 'was the first of the nineteenth century archaeologists to designate the wall surface as running in tandem in the Vico Lupanare' (i.e., on the west wall of the atrium in vii.11.11). All Overbeck writes is, 'Completely isolated, but hardly to be doubted, is the mention of Christians in an inscription written with charcoal in the house Number 26 in the Vico dei Lupanari'. Berry (ibid., 29) also claimed Overbeck saw the faded inscription – which is surely an error since de Rossi a few days after its discovery could not see it himself.

⁷⁰ Berry, *Inscription*, 27.

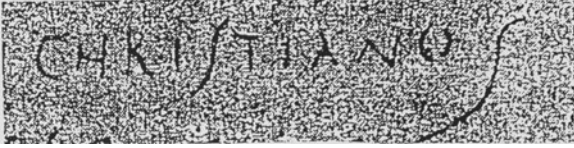


Figure 4.

Berry – somehow (given his vague description of the methodology used) – produced an image of the word *Christianos*, although it has to be approached with extreme caution (see Figure 4: Paul Berry’s alleged image of *Christianos* from atrium of VII.11.11; southwest wall; used by permission).⁷¹ To my knowledge, no one has forensically analysed Berry’s image, which is not a photograph in the normal sense of the word. One reason caution has to be exercised is that Berry’s image does not cohere with that of Kiessling but with that of de Rossi. The lambda shape is missing (which both Kiessling and de Rossi recorded in their transcriptions), and the ligature that Kiessling recorded (immediately before the I at the end of the word in question) is also missing. Varone writes,

No trace of coal can be found on the wall, and I highly doubt that Paul Berry could ever have photographed any traces of the inscription with a high magnification microscope. The air, the wind, and the rains have carried away in a hundred and fifty years of history every last trace of coal. Also. On which wall of the atrium was the inscription read? And again. On what part of the wall? Everything eludes us, and there is unfortunately no tool whatsoever that can help us go back in time and retrieve the data.⁷²

Even more confusing is the fact that Berry included two images of the inscription: one which he identified as seen ‘at the time of the first wall cleaning’ (Plate 9), which corresponds precisely to the transcription of Kiessling, and the second (Plate 10) which he identified as the letters ‘seen at the time of the second wall cleaning’ which correspond precisely with the transcription of de Rossi.⁷³ However, there is no evidence of two wall cleanings in any of the original literature.

Paul Berry died in 2018, so there is no possibility of any further clarifications on his part. Varone’s scepticism is well justified. Camodeca’s comment is also appropriate,

Berry is the only one who has attempted to document at least the word *Christiani*; this is the ground I am familiar with, and the only one that allows scientific discussion; the problem is that it leaves the method and result of the investigation in doubt. Those who wish to prove something *a priori* believe they have proved it in the end. It would take a new investigation done without thesis to prove and with the refined means now available; if it was readable (as Berry states) still in 1995 it should still be readable today. But, as I have already said, even the confirmation of the word would not be an extraordinary fact: that in 79 the *Christiani* were known in Pompeii cannot be surprising; quite different is the question of understanding the entire graffito...⁷⁴

As far as the physics of the problem go, it is possible that there are microscopic elements of carbon left on the wall. Physicist Kevin Ludwick comments,

⁷¹ Image from Berry, *Inscription*, Plate 1; overleaf of page one.

⁷² Communication of 27 June 2023.

⁷³ Plates 9 and 10 are in overleaves from Berry, *Inscription*, 25.

⁷⁴ Communication of 26 June 2023.

Carbon in this form will not decay to anything, and when it has been scratched onto a bumpy wall, I am sure you could get remnants that absorb bright light while the other parts of the wall specularly reflect light in all directions. So it seems plausible that a blown-up image could be made that has the absence of light forming the shape of these letters.⁷⁵

This could be checked under the sceptical assumptions laid out by Varone and Camodeca. Berry claimed to have made his image using microscopic bits of carbon on the ‘southwest wall’. Some of the stucco is left on that wall (see [Figure 3](#)). Bruce Longenecker comments on Berry’s method in general, ‘It is hard to know what to make of his claim. It seems highly dubious.’⁷⁶ In my view, the importance of the question might well warrant a serious modern investigation. Even if one were to come to a negative result concerning the modern presence of *Christianos* on the atrium walls that would be worthwhile.⁷⁷ Even if something were to be revealed, one would not know whether the inscription is complete or which parts might have disappeared since the earlier efforts. Although it is an *ad hominem* (and *argumentum ab auctoritate*) argument, the integrity of Paul Berry has not been questioned.

4 Conclusion

The two transcriptions of Kiessling and Minervini are contradictory in crucial details. Consequently, one cannot produce a global interpretation of the graffito. Guarducci’s conjecture, while brilliant, has to be rejected for those reasons. After critical examination, however, it is reasonable to believe that CHRISTIANOS or CHRISTIANI, a reference to the Christians, was present in the graffito. Although ‘dubious’, as Longenecker writes, Berry’s images could potentially be verified. If one fails to find evidence of them on the wall, the case against Berry’s entire investigation would be strengthened even if not settled once and for all.

5 Lemmas to the Conclusion

If, as seems probable, CHRISTIANOS or CHRISTIANI was on the wall of the atrium of VII.11.11, then scholars will have to consider more seriously Luke’s claim about the early use of the word in Acts 11.26.⁷⁸ In addition, if the word occurs on the wall of the

⁷⁵ Communication of 27 June 2023. He does note that ‘one isotope of carbon could convert to another carbon isotope, and that would not change the character of charcoal on the wall’. And with regard to Berry’s lens apparatus, he comments, ‘I believe he meant that the transparent film was placed “after” the lens system (could have been aimed physically below the lens) of the microscope so that the focused light would travel through the transparent film, and the absence of light would form the trace of the charcoal letters’.

⁷⁶ Longenecker, *Crosses*, 155 n.4. Longenecker’s comment that the inscription is ‘tantalizing’ is accurate (idem, ‘Pompeian Artifacts’, 276). Longenecker (ibid.) argues that the agreement of Fiorelli, Kiessling, and Minervini that ‘the graffito made reference to the Christians’ settles the debate—a faulty claim since Fiorelli doubted the reference (see § 1 above).

⁷⁷ Cp. the negative result on the authenticity of Chicago ms 2427: M. M. Mitchell and P. D. Duncan, ‘Chicago’s “Archaic Mark” (ms 2427): A Reintroduction to its Enigmas and a Fresh Collation of its Readings’, *NovT* 48 (2006) 1–35 and M. M. Mitchell, J. G. Baraba and A. B. Quandt, ‘Chicago’s “Archaic Mark” (Ms 2427): II. Microscopic, Chemical and Codicological Analyses Confirm Modern Production’, *NovT* 52 (2010) 101–33.

⁷⁸ R. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008) 295, e.g., states that since neither Paul (nor any other writer of the first two generations) used the term ‘Christian’, it is ‘unlikely that the label ‘emerged in Antioch during the 30s and 40s CE’. That is an argument from silence and a *petitio principii* (begging of the question)—surely, one can claim that the Petrine author may have been second generation (1 Peter 4.16). Cf. J. H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AYB 37b; New York: Doubleday, 2007) 135: ‘the earliest date before which 1 Peter was written is 92 CE’—due to the twenty-year period mentioned

atrium, then Shaw's position that *Christianus* first occurs in the second century is decisively refuted. The use of the word also does not indicate the presence (or absence) of Christians in pre-Vesuvian Pompeii. All that is necessary is a knowledge of the Christians' existence by some pagan or other who scribbled their name on a wall.

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in Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.6 by apostates. He (*ibid.*, 138) opts for the period between 72 CE and 93–96 CE. Luke's sources may well have used the term in their description of what some outsiders called Christ's followers. Cf., e.g., R. Bultmann ('Zur Frage nach den Quellen der Apostelgeschichte', in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson 1893–1958* (ed. A. J. B. Higgins; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959) 68–80, esp. 77–8) 'If we go further backwards, it is very likely that the main body of 11:19–26 also comes from this source [the Antiochene]. The author has edited it, however, especially by sending Barnabas from Jerusalem to Antiochia as inspector'. Cf. also J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AYB; New York: Doubleday, 1998) 83, 86. In addition, we do not have Tacitus' (*Ann.* 15.44), Pliny's (*Ep.* 10.96), and Suetonius' (*Nero* 16.2) first-century sources. Cf. Cook, 'Chrestiani', 240–8. *χρηματίσαι*, used in Acts 11.26, indicates an official public (and not a self-) designation according to the research of Van der Lans and Bremmer, 'Tacitus', 319–20.

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