

LET'S RAISE A ROOF FOR CAECILIUS !

Margaret-Anne Gillis



The small, and seemingly insignificant house of the Pompeian Banker, Lucius Caecilius Iucundus was first excavated in 1875. It was not as large as the House of Menander, nor as ornate as the house of Marcus Lucretius. But, it is far more significant for many reasons. From the ruins of Caecilius' house came 153 wax tablets detailing his many different business ventures in Pompeii, yielding a great deal of information about commerce in the city itself. As well, a definitive identification of the owner of the house was made possible by the bronze bust located in the *atrium*. His *lararium* provided two splendid marble reliefs commemorating the great earthquake of 62 CE and the frescoes of his *tablinum*, and other areas of his house, gave up several vignettes which made their way to the National Museum of Naples. In short, Caecilius is an important part of the fabric of Pompeii.



To Latin teachers of the Cambridge Latin Course, and their students, however, he is far more than an unfortunate victim of Vesuvius. We are a part of his family. Caecilius is the very first Pompeian we meet when we begin our study of Latin. We meet his wife Metella, his son Quintus, now his daughter, Lucia (though she is not included in the British version of the text), Clemens, the brave and faithful slave, the beautiful Melissa, and the sly Greek cook, Grumio. They even have a family pet: Cerberus, the dog. When we travel with our students to Pompeii, the first place we try to visit is, of course, Caecilius' house. Sadly, however, permission is intermittently granted depending entirely on the state of decay and restoration of the house. And this is what is so troubling. The house is suffering the effects of exposure to the elements: rain, wind, blistering heat in the summer, plant material which is destroying the very fine mosaic of the atrium and the walls from the tops down. In short, Caecilius' house could be spared further destruction if it had a roof.



And in fact, this is what my tour guide, Susanna Vanderkroon, said when she took us into the house in 2006. The house needs a roof. When I returned from that trip, I began to make inquiries of the superintendents of the site. But, as with all things in Pompeii, progress was slow. Superintendents changed. Funding models changed; Caecilius' house was not a high priority. Finally, things began to turn around in 2012 when a suggestion from Dr.



Nigel Spivey at the University of Cambridge led me to his colleague, Dr. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Director of the Packard Institute at Herculaneum who lent his support to our cause. With a new superintendent, Dr. Massimo Osanna, and Dr. Wallace-Hadrill's kind endorsement, the superintendency, represented by our liaison, Dr. Alberta Martellone –it was destiny: she has the name of one of our provinces!– agreed to my request on August 7th 2015. There was, however, one small catch: the project was mine to organize — from fundraising to the construction. It is not a small task for this Latin teacher by any means but it is what you do for a member of the family.

Our group is called the *Familia Caecilii*. I turned to one of my former students, Andrew Choptiany, who is a very talented young architect with Carmody Groarke based in London. He and I visited the house this past July so that he could refine his design; the plans are currently awaiting approval by the superintendent. As well, I have asked two of my former students, His Worship, the Mayor of Barrie, Jeff Lehman, and Professor Nergis Mazid of Georgian College to help with the proposal writing for the funds to pay for materials and construction. Another of my former students is taking over responsibility for the social media campaign and is designing an replica of the bust of Caecilius for the house. Currently, I am preparing presentations to seek funding. Our small group is growing and the project is taking shape. If all goes well, I hope to see the roof raised within a year.



Thank you to the Classical Association of Canada for awarding me the Grace Irwin Award this past year. It was a most appreciated bit of subvention on what has been a personally funded venture thus far. But, it is important for all Classicists to help maintain the archaeological sites which have excited our imagination and enriched our lives. I am always grateful for advice and support from the Classical community of Canada as we work toward successful completion of this venture. Thank you again!

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