

To finish, it is interesting to note that the same punctuation is also found in the learned, old edition of Regius.¹⁰ According to Regius, the words *ars adeo latet* can be explained as referring to the living quality of the statue (*'ars adeo latet: ut uiua uideretur, non ex ebore confecta'*), and the words *arte sua* can signify the statue itself (*'arte sua miratur: statuam subaudiamus'*).

This repunctuation—it is not an emendation—gets rid of an Ovidian phrase famous in modern scholarship; but it is worth remembering that *ars adeo latet arte sua* is not cited by any indirect Latin or Greek witnesses, and its obscurantist character may well be out of place in anything other than modern scholarly imagination. If this solution is right, then what Ovid wrote was rather plain.

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LACTANTIUS BEFORE LACTANTIUS? A HEXAMETER FROM THE *CARMINA XII SAPIENTVM* IN AN INSCRIPTION ON SAMIAN WARE FROM BELSINON (HISPANIA TARRACONENSIS)

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a graffito written after firing on a Samian-ware bowl dated to the turn of the first and second centuries C.E., which seems to contain part of a hexameter included in the well-known anthology Carmina XII sapientum, the composition of which has recently been attributed to the Christian author Lactantius.

Keywords: Latin epigraphy; graffiti; Samian ware; *Carmina XII sapientum*

The review of an interesting group of inscriptions on Samian ware¹ from the ancient *mansio* of Belsinon (Mallén, Zaragoza), situated in the Middle Ebro Valley, in the interior of Hispania Tarraconensis,² has made it possible to document a sequence that seems to belong to one of the monostichs included in the *Carmina XII sapientum*, a collection of ludic poems perhaps assembled during the fourth century C.E. or a little earlier and included in modern times in the so-called *Anthologia Latina*.³ It has recently

¹⁰ R. Regius, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Metamorphoseon libri XV* (Venice, 1586 [first published in 1493]), 204; on this work, see the introduction to M. Benedetti (ed.), *Raffaele Regio, In Ovidii Metamorphosin enarrationes, I (libri I–IV)* (Florence, 2008).

¹ I. Aguilera Aragón and B. Díaz Ariño, 'Escritura cotidiana en el ámbito rural de la Hispania tarraconense. Grafitos sobre cerámica de época alto-imperial procedentes del Campo de Borja (Zaragoza)' (forthcoming). This study is part of the Project 'Everyday Writing. Literacy, Cultural Contact and Social Change in Hispania Citerior between the Roman Conquest and Late Antiquity', financed by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of Spain.

² Ptol. *Geog.* 2.6.57; cf. F. Beltrán Lloris, 'An irrigation decree from Roman Spain: the *lex riui Hiberiensis*', *JRS* 96 (2006), 147–97, especially 161–2.

³ Cf. R.J. Tarrant, 'Anthologia Latina', in L.D. Reynolds (ed.), *Texts and Transmission. A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford, 1986), 9–13.

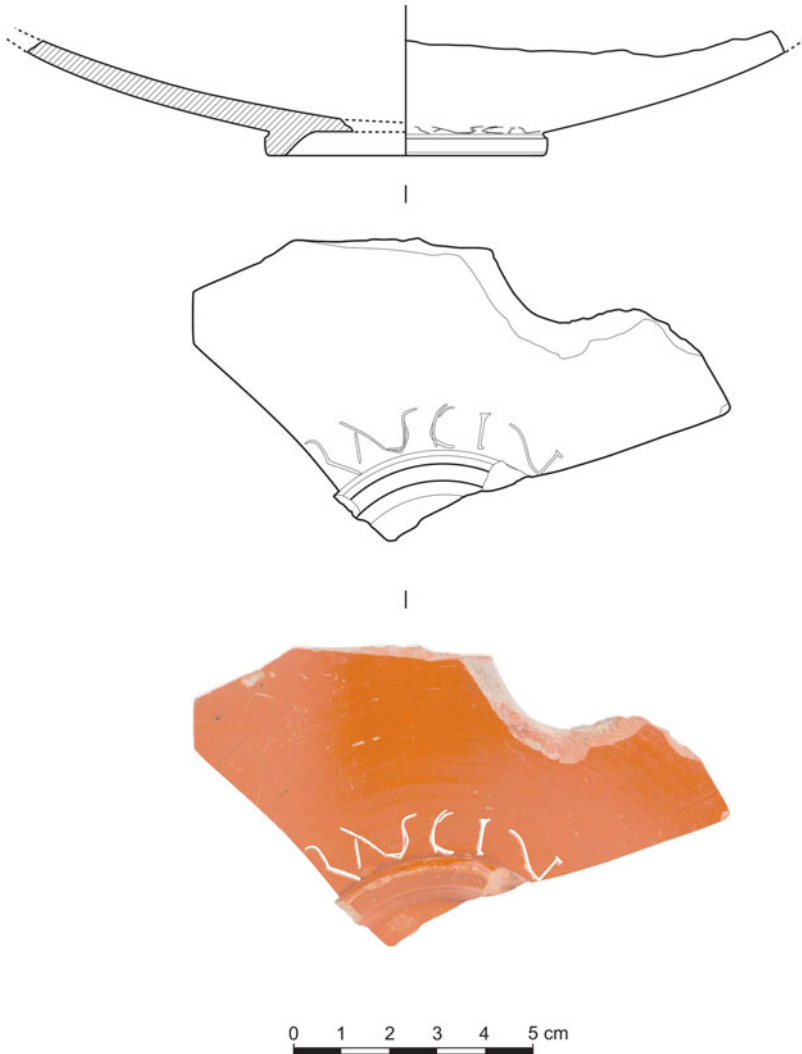


FIG. 1: Bowl of Spanish Samian ware, with inscription.

been identified by A. Friedrich as the first work by the Christian author Lactantius (c.240–320 C.E.) mentioned in Jerome's catalogue.⁴

The inscription was produced *post cocturam* on a bowl of Spanish Samian ware, form Ritterling 8. Only a fragment is preserved, which measures 6.3 x 11 cm. It was recovered around 1920. It is currently deposited in Zaragoza Museum (NIG 34644). It can be dated to the turn of the first and second centuries C.E.

⁴ A. Friedrich, *Das Symposium der XII Sapientes: Kommentar und Verfasserfrage* (Berlin and New York, 2002), 479–508; *contra*: M. Rosellini, 'Di nuovo sui *Carmina XII sapientum*', *RFIC* 30 (2002), 105–25, especially 115–25.

The inscription runs around the base, on the exterior of the vase. The letters show actuarial features and serifs. The A has been written with two diagonal strokes, as is typical in Old Roman Cursive.⁵ They measure *c.*1 cm. Its reading does not present problems, despite the first letter being incomplete:

[---]RASCIV[---]

The sequence, in *scriptio continua*, but with a slightly larger space between the fifth and the sixth letters, seems to belong to the hexameter:

[I]rasci u[ictos minime placet, optime frater.] (*Anth. Lat.* 498)

It is not possible to confirm whether the original text corresponded with the whole hexameter or perhaps only with the first part, owing to the limited space available.

The verse, composed of six words of six letters, is associated with the popular game of chance, *duodecim scripta*, considered an antecedent of modern backgammon, of which we know many *tabulae lusoriae*.⁶ Some of these include short poems such as the one studied here.⁷ It was recorded in the first section of the above-mentioned *Carmina* alongside other hexameters also related to this game (*Anth. Lat.* 495–506).⁸

The authorship of each of the poetic compositions included in the *Carmina* is attributed to each of the ‘twelve sages’ that lend their name to the book. In this case, the hexameter is assigned by the compiler to an undiscovered author called Pompilianus, Pompelianus, or Pompeianus, according to the different variations in the manuscripts.⁹ The inscription from Belsinon, however, earlier in date than the monostichs, reinforces the suspicion that this is a fictitious author. It is more appropriate, perhaps, to consider it an anonymous creation that may already have spread widely across the western Mediterranean more than a century and a half before the compilation of the *Carmina*. It is interesting to note, moreover, that this is the first evidence that confirms the popularity of the *duodecim scripta* in Spain, where no *tabulae lusoriae* have yet been discovered that are unequivocally associated with this game.¹⁰

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⁵ Cf. e.g. R.S.O. Tomlin, *Roman London's First Voices. Writing Tablets from the Bloomberg Excavations, 2010–14* (London, 2016), 19 and 21, fig. 13.

⁶ U. Schädlér, ‘*XII scripta, alea, tabula*. New evidence for the Roman history of backgammon’, in A.J. de Voogt (ed.), *New Approaches to Board Games Research. Asian Origins and Future Perspectives* (Leiden, 1995), 73–98.

⁷ N. Purcell, ‘Literate games: Roman urban society and the game of *alea*’, *P&P* 147 (1995), 3–37, especially 17–28; A. Ferrua, *Tavole lusorie epigrafiche. Catalogo delle schede manoscritte* (Introduzione e indici a cura di M. Busia) (Vatican City, 2001).

⁸ Friedrich (n. 4), 82–99.

⁹ Friedrich (n. 4), 426–9.

¹⁰ There is only one fragment of *tabula lusoria*, found in Conimbriga (Lusitania), that could very doubtfully be associated with this game: see S. da Ponte, ‘Jogos romanos de Conimbriga’, *Conimbriga* 25 (1986), 131–41; cf. C. Jiménez Cano, ‘Estudio preliminar sobre los juegos de mesa en Hispania’, *Antesteria* 3 (2014), 125–38.