

A Snake's Tale: A Pompeian Figure Poem (CIL IV 1959) and the Tradition(s) of Pattern Poetry

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The extant corpus of ancient pattern poetry in Latin includes a fragment of the figure poem *Phoenix* by the notorious first-century BC experimentalist Laevius and a collection of ultra-elaborate encomiastic poems for Constantine the Great by Optatian Porfiry – both clearly indebted to equally refined and learned Greek *technopaegnia*, both strike one as iconic examples of the sophisticated, bookish poetry of the Roman elites. A fascinating epigraphic pattern poem also survives: snake-shaped graffito poem found on a Pompeian wall, which presents itself as composed by a Sepumius (CIL IV 1595). In the talk, it will be demonstrated how in view of its content and form, this poem at once exhibits ties with the tradition of the elaborate bookish figure poems in Antiquity and stands out by belonging to another strand of simple pattern poems that are attested across centuries in various cultures. All in all, it will be discussed how the Sepumius poem can be categorized as an emphatically epigraphic variation on the emphatically bookish game of pattern poetry.

