THE CLEARING HOUSE

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SCRIBBLERS, SCULPTORS AND Scribes

Scribblers, Sculptors and Scribes: A Companion to Wheelock's Latin and Other Introductory Textbooks (ISBN 0061259187) is an outstanding new anthology of thoroughly authentic, unaltered classical texts, selected and annotated for students who are just beginning to read Latin. Expertly edited by Richard A. LaFleur, the content of Scribblers, Sculptors and Scribes is divided into forty chapters specifically linked to corresponding lessons in the Wheelock curriculum, but may be used as an ancillary with any entry-level Latin course. LaFleur's introduction provides the context for this reader, which is to provide students with an understanding and appreciation for the writings of everyday Roman men and women, as well as the "movers and shakers" of the Empire. Scribblers, Sculptors and Scribes includes inscriptions by the common Roman armed only with a stilus or paintbrush (graffiti, electoral programmata), formal engravings on durable materials (such as architectural ruins, funerary monuments, coins, and artifacts) by amateur and professional workmen, as well as "quotable quotes" and excerpts from literary texts preserved by Roman secretaries and monastic copyists. Each chapter includes Grammatics, so that students know what morphology and syntax to concentrate on as they read and comprehend the Latin, plus helpful notes and vocabulary glosses.

The first chapter, CAPVT I, opens with "The ABC's of Latin" which introduces the new reader to two abecedaria, or Latin inscriptions consisting of the letters of the Roman alphabet, most likely scribbled by young schoolchildren, followed by some simple one line readings transcribed from Pompeian graffiti. Line art reproductions and black and white photographs of many inscriptions are interspersed throughout the book, so that the student can examine the originals and compare them to LaFleur's edited texts, which provide "corrections" to the "mistakes" often made by the ancient writers. Inclusion of these preserved jottings give the reader a real sense of the language as once living, sometimes imperfectly used, yet still conveying understandable meaning. LaFleur emphasizes that these "mistakes" often give us clues as to how the Romans pronounced and used their language, either individually or regionally, at different times. I appreciate that he included them because I think it is good for beginning Latin learners to see that even the Romans made occasional, and sometimes even frequent, blunders in their native language. I think it takes some of the pressure off the beginning student to produce perfect Latin, and challenges them to try harder and not worry so much about the risk of making a mistake.