Verba Volant, Scripta Manent: The Archaeology of Writing in Roman Britain

by

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Abstract:

Cultural change brought about in Britain by the Roman invasion and occupation is a much-discussed topic in Roman archaeology, but although many individual studies have evaluated the information provided by physical artifacts like brooches, hairpins, food, and interior decor, no similar evaluation has been made of the most significant cultural import of the period: the presence of an entirely new language and of the option for a permanent written record. By looking at the presence of Latin documents and other artifacts associated with the production of writing as evidence of cultural change on the island, I will demonstrate that the adoption of Latin and writing across Britain was the most substantial paradigm shift in British life until the Norman invasions almost 1000 years later, taken up at multiple levels of society and in many different communities, and ultimately shaped not only Britain in the Roman period, but also Britain as the keystone of the later western world.

Keywords: *Latinization, Romanization, language change, Roman Britain, epigraphy, literacy, cultural exchange, Roman imperialism*

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Iam vero principum filios liberalibus artibus erudire, et ingenia Britannorum studiis Gallorum anteferre, ut qui modo linguam Romanam abnuebant, eloquentiam concupiscerent.

"Likewise he provided education in the liberal arts to the sons of princes, and gave preference to the natural talent of the Britons ahead of the diligence of the Gauls such that those who had previously disdained the language of Rome now coveted its eloquence."

Tacitus, *Agricola* 21.2-3

Introduction:

The establishment of a common language is a critical tool used by colonizing powers to gain leverage over the newly conquered. Delays in linguistic assimilation impede the effective integration of the colony, and hinder its productivity. Government, trade, and the major processes of exchange that govern the process of colonization depend on the ability of all parties involved to communicate with each other. Beyond its utilitarian applications, language is also a fundamental feature of identity, especially in multilingual societies such as the Roman Empire. Language is culture; one's language draws explicit and implicit links to one's cultural identity. Aside from mere communication, the act of choosing one language over another carries individual and social symbolism.[1] In the context of Latin and the Roman Empire, these connections and this symbolism is even more important. 'Latinization' and 'Romanization' have been used relatively interchangeably in past studies to explain the integration of provincial cultures into the Roman imperial system, obliquely highlighting the fact that 'Latin' and 'Roman' were intertwined in the imperial project.[2] This connection was known even by the Romans themselves: by the early Imperial period, the terms *Romanus* and *Latinus* were synonymous, and the phrases *lingua Romana* and *lingua Latina* were all but interchangeable.[3] The Latin language was not just the language of the city of Rome or the plains of Latium, but of all territory over which Rome held sway.

The study of this landscape of linguistic choice and language change in the Roman world is distinguished by the fact that, in contrast to the study of more modern languages, it exists

[1] Mullen 2011, 528
[2] See Mullen 2016, 574
[3] Adams 2003b, 195

exclusively in the realm of written evidence.[4] This may seem to be a limiting factor, in that languages that were not written are therefore mostly lost; but it affords a useful opportunity to evaluate the adoption of Latin not just as a language but as a cultural symbol. It is true that the majority of the evidence for writing is biased towards particular groups within the community, especially in the case of monumental inscriptions. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the cultural role played by writing in these communities cannot be meaningfully assessed. The physical artifacts that preserve written words: monumental inscriptions, religious dedications, and personal documents, demonstrate the deep association between the Latin language and the Roman system. The creation of written records in Latin speaks to the symbolic authority which was given to the Roman system and the tools of its implementation. The fact that written Latin was able to eventually dominate most of western Europe to the extent that preexisting ethnic languages disappeared entirely, is a great testament to its force as a unifier of multiple diverse cultural groups. Latin was part and parcel of Roman culture, a social unifier that held together a linguistically diverse empire. Written Latin was a ubiquitous visual reminder of the cultural role played by the language, and was a major force in both the exposure of Latin in the Roman world and the emphasis on it as a cultural tool.

Where many examinations of cultural change in the Roman provinces concentrate on physical artifacts, some more recent theories have started to incorporate discussions of cultural change relying on less concrete manifestations of cultural identity, such as language use, historical narrative, and self-conceptualization. Publications such as Hingley's and Wallace-Hadrill's recent evaluations of Roman culture and cultural transmission have examined the more abstract features of the Roman cultural identity package as vectors for cultural change, identifying language as an important one, especially in the case of Roman colonialism in a

[4] Bowman 1991, 121

newly-acquired area of the empire.[5] Sociolinguistic studies of the acquisition and use of Latin in colonial and provincial areas of the empire also elaborate on the importance of language as an element of cultural change; Häussler's study of language acquisition and abandonment, focusing on Italy and Gaul, is an example of such a sociolinguistic study.[6] Häussler concludes that the choice to use Latin as opposed to other local languages in public contexts, namely inscriptions, was a question of individual cultural identity and communication, a question that is demonstrated quite effectively in the linguistic landscape of Italy, with numerous local dialects being used in inscriptions for a considerable length of time in the history of the province.[7] Britain, however, has little to no evidence of the same kind of written linguistic diversity found in Roman Italy, and so the question of Latin use and its connection to cultural self-identification needs to be addressed as its own phenomenon. More recently, Mullen's chapter in the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Roman Britain* has opened the discussion on linguistic and cultural assimilation in Britain, an important step in the evaluation of the province's unique approach to the adoption of Latin and writing.[8]

The most extensive exploration of this aspect of ancient languages is Adams's *Bilingualism and the Latin Language*,[9] which focuses on multilingualism as an aspect of cultural identity in the Roman world and the use of multiple languages as statements of identity. The conceptualization of language choice as a deliberate one that may be adopted to reflect particular self-identification is an interesting one, and provides another facet to the traditional utilitarian explanations of language choice that have been advanced in other scholarship. Adams's otherwise exhaustive discussion of multilingualism in the majority of the different regions of the

[5] Hingley 2005, Wallace-Hadrill 2008
[6] Häussler 2002
[7] Häussler 2002, 73
[8] Mullen 2016
[9] Adams 2003a

Roman Empire lacks an examination of Roman Britain in similar detail. Some of his conclusions regarding bilingualism in Gaul may shed some light on the question of Britain, but a detailed study of the socio-cultural foundations of multilingualism and language choice is still lacking for the province of Britain in its own regard. This may be due to the lack of alternate languages in Britain that exist alongside Latin in the written record; the record in Britain being demonstrably different from that of North Africa or southern Italy, where archaeological evidence of the Punic and Oscan written languages, respectively, exist alongside Latin. This is not to say that the language landscape of Britain has nothing to reveal about the use of Latin and writing, far from it; it simply indicates that a different methodology is called for when attempting a sociolinguistic evaluation of the province's written record. Rather than exploring the choice between written languages, as one could in other parts of the Roman world, it may be necessary to examine instead the choice of contexts in which the use of one language or another makes similar statements about identity.

The province of Britain is an especially intriguing place in which to study how Latin and writing helped to ingrain Roman culture into an imperial possession. Prior to contact with Rome, Britain was preliterate, having no written language of its own.[10] In the case of Roman Britain, the Latin language provided the avenue of standardization necessary for administrative and economic stability. Through the study of archaeological artifacts that demonstrate the proliferation of written Latin in Britain following the Roman conquest, the changes to the political and economic state of the province brought about by the Roman occupation can be illuminated. There are several categories of archaeological finds that attest to literacy and writing in Britain, from major monumental dedicatory inscriptions in stone to small quotidian writing tablets of wood. In addition, there are many objects associated with writing, such as styli and

[10] Bowman 1991, 120

document seals. These artifacts have been addressed in numerous individual publications, either as elements of an excavation report on a particular site, or in independent research. The profusion of literary artifacts and items associated with writing during the Roman period is particularly significant in Britain, where there is little to no surviving evidence of a pre-Roman written language. The archaeological evidence for writing in Roman Britain is broad, diverse, and widely studied.

The best-known publications on the physical archaeological evidence of writing from Britain are the collected volumes of the *Roman Inscriptions of Britain* corpus[11] and the Vindolanda Tablets volumes[12] which, though vital, represent only a small fraction of the available material attesting to writing and literacy in Roman Britain. Monumental inscriptions in stone seem to have been a primarily Roman import to the province, following the tradition of monumental inscriptions in Rome and other provinces. The vast majority of recorded stone inscriptions found in Britain can be attributed to soldiers or to military communities, a distribution that Mattingly's evaluation of Britain under Roman imperialism attributes to the "epigraphic habit", the tendency for communities with higher levels of Roman cultural practices to produce more Latin inscriptions on stone.[13] It is important to remember, therefore, that inscriptions as evidence of literacy speak to the choices of a select group of people rather than the population as a whole. Stone inscriptions are also more numerous in the early part of the Roman occupation, before 260 A.D, which omits the fourth century CE and evidence of early Christianity in Britain from the literate record. In essence, stone inscriptions, which have been thoroughly and intensely studied since the inception of the *Roman Inscriptions of Britain* series of summary volumes, represent only a small and highly Romanized part of the population of

[11] Collingwood & Wright 1965; Frere & Tomlin 1990*ff*; Tomlin et. al. 2009
[12] Bowman & Thomas 1994 & 2003
[13] Mattingly 2007, 199. For the epigraphic habit more generally see MacMullen 1982.

Roman Britain, that were operating under the conventions of Roman imperial culture and especially of military identity. On the other hand, the focus on the small sector of the population that produced monumental inscriptions in such large quantities tends to overlook the literate activities of the rest of the population of Roman Britain. Tomlin theorizes that the corpus of known inscriptions in Britain represents the literary activities of only ten to fifteen percent of the total population.[14] Even before the official publication of the *RIB* compendium, a great deal of early excavation and scholarship from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was focused on the recovery and analysis of inscriptions. This imbalance between the depth to which inscriptions are studied and the narrowness of the cultural experience they represent is perhaps both one of the major difficulties and one of the most intriguing aspects of sociolinguistic study of the writing on Roman Britain. Epigraphic evidence is especially useful for analyzing expressions of literacy associated with Roman imperial cultural identities, as well as the role of Latin as the primary language of public and private self-expression. The object of such monumental inscriptions as tombstones and votive altars is to create a lasting record of a particular person's life or religious devotion, in much the same way that a dedicatory inscription on a large public building is intended to create a lasting record of the building's funding and construction. The use of written Latin in personal contexts such as religious devotions or memorialization introduces that element of Roman identity into the record of the person's actions: the dedicant is choosing to define their lasting record of themselves or their loved one along Roman lines. The fact that the majority of these inscriptions come from the highly-Romanized contexts of military sites and urbanized areas, in contrast to the more rural areas where inscriptions are rarer, further emphasizes the connection between literacy and a form of cultural expression and Roman identity.

[14] Tomlin 2011

The association of Latin literacy with the military establishment is further underscored by the collections of wooden writing tablets that have illuminated the importance of written records and communication to the military operations of Britain. Bowman's work on the Vindolanda tablets emphasizes how literacy was critically important to the army's efficiency and success, as written communication enabled it to maintain control over large areas of territory with limited manpower.[15] The sheer volume of documentation produced by the military, from daily duty rosters, pay stubs, and accounting ledgers to personal correspondence, is evidence of the wide range of contexts in which literacy was necessary in the military system. Writing was evidently not limited to the upper echelons of military society either; the tablets from Vindolanda demonstrate evidence of several hundred different handwritings, most notably in the requests for leave written by rank-and-file soldiers themselves. In contrast to the standard practice in Egypt, for example, where a pre-written request would simply be filled in with the soldier's name and unit, the requests from Vindolanda all appear to have been written out in full by the individual soldier submitting the request. The technology of the tablets themselves is as interesting as the writing they contain; production of the thin leaves of wood used in place of papyrus in Britain was seemingly simple and widespread in the Roman world. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to suppose that, although the majority of the wooden tablet documents that survive relate to the military establishment, access to similar tablets for writing by non-military people would not have been restricted by their availability or cost. Indeed, the number of letters addressed to Vindolanda and originating elsewhere seems to suggest that such writing tablets were commonplace, and that they were available for personal as well as official use. Considering the fairly small percentage of official military communication represented by the surviving Vindolanda tablets, it is perhaps possible to extrapolate the amount of correspondence being

[15] Bowman 2003

written on similar wooden tablets throughout the province as being much larger than it currently appears; and therefore to suppose that literacy and written communication may have been more widespread than the archaeological material would seem to suggest. Studies of literacy in the military in general,[16] and of the British writing tablets in particular,[17] are numerous; though the majority of these analytical studies appear to focus on establishing levels of literacy and highlighting its importance as an aspect of military function, rather than approaching the use of language and writing as an aspect of imperial and military culture itself. Latin, both spoken and written, was one of the primary unifying features of the Roman imperial culture package. Latin was the official language of the army, in the western provinces in general and in Britain in particular. While the army was demonstrably polyglot, incorporating speakers of multiple different native languages into the army, Latin functioned as a lingua franca among the soldiers, facilitating communication and enabling the army to function as a coherent unit despite its cosmopolitanism. There is ample evidence of native speakers of other languages learning Latin as part of their service in the army, while at the same time retaining their native languages. Latin, as the tool that allowed these soldiers from multiple different language backgrounds to work effectively together in a military unit, became closely associated with military identity, and the use of Latin underlines the user's status as a member of the military community, especially in instances where his own native language is different. A notable example of the cosmopolitan backgrounds in the military that were unified by the use of writing in Latin is the tombstone of Regina from South Shields, set up by her Palmyrene husband Barates.[18] The Latin text of the epitaph is relatively standard, but the carving also includes a short line of Aramaic, recording Barates's personal lament in contrast to the formulaic text of the Latin inscription. In addition to

[16] See Phang 2011
[17] See Pearce 2004
[18] *RIB* 1064

memorializing his wife in the traditional Roman way, he also refers to his own identity as a Palmyrene speaker of Aramaic, creating a lasting record of that aspect of his identity, despite the likely fact that few people who saw the monument would be able to read the Aramaic line.

Other evidence of multilingualism in Britain, whether within or outside the military establishment, is less easy to come by than the evidence of other provinces, since it more often combines Latin and other languages from elsewhere in the Roman world, rather than Latin and the pre-Roman language of Britain itself. If a pre-Roman Celtic written language in Britain ever existed, the overwhelming spread of written Latin in the Roman period has all but obliterated any archaeological evidence of it. Evidence for Latin existing alongside the native Celtic language of Britain comes primarily from syncretic religious dedications to Romano-British deities, and even these are more likely to be Latinized transliterations of the deity's Celtic name than a true representation of the Celtic written language itself. Latin seems to have dominated the written landscape of Britain even before the official conquest of Rome; much of the late Iron Age coinage issued by the southern British client kingdoms features Latin legends, demonstrating that the association between written Latin and contact with the Roman imperial sphere, and therefore sociopolitical power was established prior to the official invasion of Britain in the first century CE.[19] Further exploration of these coin legends and the earliest evidence of written Latin in Britain, in the context of language adoption as a statement of cultural self-identification can only serve to add contextual depth to these artifacts by incorporating them into the historical record of the adoption of Latin and the process of cultural change in Britain.

The evidence for writing and literacy in contexts outside the military and urban spheres has been subject to highly interesting and valuable—but less-conclusive—studies, likely due to the relative lack of hard evidence for writing and literacy compared to the military and urban

[19] Williams 2001, Creighton 2000

spheres. Some possible non-military counterparts to the wooden writing tablets of Vindolanda and Carlisle are the lead curse-tablets recovered from religious sanctuaries at Bath and Uley.[20] These texts are especially interesting in that none of them appear to have been explicitly written by someone identifying themselves as a Roman citizen or a Roman soldier, in contrast to dedicatory inscriptions from the sanctuary at Bath where several soldiers are explicitly mentioned by rank. It cannot be said with certainty that soldiers did not dedicate curse tablets, though it does seem that if they chose to do so, they did not specify their identity as soldiers in these documents. The curse texts themselves represent not only new religious applications of writing to Romano-Celtic worship in Britain which had not previously employed written dedications, but also a source of text written by people who either were not part of the official governmental or military community, or who for whatever reason did not wish to express their association with it in this context. A few of the lead curse tablets found at Bath may exhibit writing in a non-Latin Celtic language, but their texts are inscribed in the Latin alphabet, potentially demonstrating that the basic elements of Latin writing could be applied to other languages as well.[21] Lead curse-tablets are found elsewhere in the Roman world, but the material from Britain appears to be unique in that their writers refer mainly to crimes of theft as the injury the curse is intended to redress, as opposed to similar material from elsewhere which focus on legal, commercial, or amatory issues. Mattingly interprets this difference in content as evidence that curse-tablets were used by their authors in an attempt to find justice from the deity that they could not find from the authorities, either because of the lack of an established police system, or, more interestingly, because Roman law provided little recourse for non-Romans.[22] This interpretation casts these tablets in an interesting light in terms of the cultural applications of

[20] Described by Tomlin 1998, Tomlin 1993, and Tomlin 2002
[21] See Tomlin 1987.
[22] Mattingly 2007, 315

Latin literacy. If they were being used as a judicial option by the locals, it would demonstrate the appropriation of a particularly Roman practice (i.e, the making of curse-tablets) as well as the appropriation of the language in which they were written (typically Roman quasi-legal terminology) into a religious context where the practitioners were most likely non-Roman Britons. The fact that the majority of the tablets at Bath address Sulis, the Celtic deity, rather than the Roman Minerva or the syncretic Romano-British Sulis Minerva, makes a statement about the way that the dedicants identified themselves with regard to their religion. Even the few illiterate examples, where the inscription consists not of letters but of random scratches made to look like letters, demonstrate the association of writing with power in religious contexts. The locations of the shrines where the largest collections of tablets have been found also indicates that literacy was not necessarily limited to highly urbanized or military contexts, and the wide variety of handwritings displayed suggests that people were literate enough to write their own messages.

Besides the established corpus of texts that the Bath and Uley tablets represent, there are also other bodies of evidence that speak to writing in areas where monumental texts, such as inscriptions, are lacking. These alternate bodies of evidence are useful for redressing the imbalance between the literary corpuses of the military and urban spheres and the literary corpus of the more rural areas of Britain. Studies of writing implements and other utensils have recently been employed in Britain to evaluate the literacy of the rural community in comparison to the military and urban communities.[23] Metal *styli* in particular, used to incise letters into wax writing tablets, have been subjected to careful studies that have shown them to be evidence of writing in rural areas where other literate artifacts, such as stone inscriptions and written documents are very rare. A more in-depth and culturally focused exploration of the evidence of literacy from

[23] See Hanson & Connolly 2002.

rural sites in Roman Britain is worth a great deal in the discussion of the permeation of literacy through areas of Britain that may not have had the heavy exposure to the Roman cultural identity package found in military or urban sites. Patterns that can be discerned in the spread of these writing-associated artifacts provides evidence of how writing and Latin diffused through the province, and how the acceptance of the Roman literacy system was not confined to the elite or highly-Romanized strata of Romano-British society.

More support for such diffusion patterns, as well as evidence for the means by which language might have moved around the countryside of Roman Britain can be found in *collyrium* stamps, or dosages and application instructions that were impressed into discs of eye medication.[24] The existence of these stamps, which presume that both parties involved in the transaction (the prescriber and the user) were literate, as well as their distribution through the more rural areas of Britain, support the idea that literacy was more widespread through the province than the disparity of the archaeological evidence would seem to suggest. A more thorough and comprehensive examination of the evidence from the rural community has a great deal of potential in exploring the cultural background and use of writing in the parts of Britain for which the evidence is less monumental or lasting than the better-documented military and urban communities. The difference in the very nature of the evidence itself (the lack of inscriptions and documents, but the presence of writing utensils and other objects that evince literacy), is itself worthy of discussion when attempting to evaluate the sociocultural aspects or writing and language in the province.

While public display and official communication form the bulk of inscribed artifacts and other items associated with writing from Britain, there are other aspects of literacy that are evident in other types of artifacts as well. These artifacts are perhaps less biased toward the

[24] See Boon 1983, Jackson 1996, and Voinot 1999.

provincial elite or the military, as they demonstrate ways in which writing was used in everyday Romano-British life. Literacy was evidently required in the large manufacturing industries of Britain, such as lead mines and tile works, where tiles and ingots were stamped with identifying information to keep accounts of the manufacturing.[25] This is perhaps an example of how Roman imperial ideas about written record-keeping and accounting influenced non-military industries within the province. In the case of many major industries in Britain, particularly the ore and mineral mines, the army was initially heavily involved in their management and the extraction of their resources; it would therefore make sense that the civilian lessees who took over production at the industrial centers would maintain the careful record-keeping initiated and expected by the imperial establishment. Even outside of military or industrial contexts, evidence of literacy among the general population appears in the form of inscriptions or labels on consumer goods, which were not required by the manufacturing process (as may be said of ingots and tiles), but nevertheless show that both the producer and the consumer to some degree subscribed to social conventions regarding literate exchange. Maker's marks on ceramics, painted or incised *tituli* on imported amphorae, and especially prestige goods such as the Rudge Cup and bracelets from the Hoxne hoard with words worked into the design all attest to the relatively widespread convention that Latin writing governed a wide array of methods of exchange. Even if the people involved in the object's use could not understand the written language, the inscribed letters would have made an impact by virtue of their ubiquity if nothing else. The military was not the only vehicle for the spread of Latin and writing through the empire; it was employed in commercial trade as well, increasing the ways in which non-speakers and the illiterate would be exposed to language and the written word.

[25] e.g. RIB 2463

Despite the numerous publications that have addressed the presence and quality of the bodies of archaeological evidence, there are still gaps in the knowledge base and areas where the archaeological evidence can be reorganized on a more cohesive theoretical framework to better understand the introduction of writing to Britain and how this new cultural system affected the imperial project in the province. Previous publications have been closely focused on individual artifacts or groups of artifacts rather than on a more comprehensive analysis of the wide range of evidence available to address the question of reading and writing in Roman Britain, and though they are important to the scholarly discussion, the fragmentary nature of these individual, closely-targeted works still obscures the more thorough narrative of literacy in the province. These artifacts and their scholarly interpretations are the smaller pieces that make up a larger puzzle of how Roman culture was adopted and adapted in Roman Britain and how it was affected by Roman culture and Roman ideas. Taking these smaller pieces into account and using them to build a more holistic picture of how learning to read and write Latin changed the people of Roman Britain is critical to understanding life in the province. Writing offered the people of Britain a vector for individual cultural expression that had not existed prior to the Roman period, and the expressions of the written word are important to the analysis of cultural change in Britain in the Roman period.

Chapter 1: Language, Literacy, and Roman Imperialism

Language choice might be influenced by a variety of factors. In the modern world, these factors may be easier to elucidate, given that modern languages still have surviving speakers of whom such questions can be asked. With the ancient languages such as Latin where there are no surviving native speakers, the picture is cloudier. What is certain is that a difference in language, or even in accent, is noticeable; one that immediately establishes two people as being from two different groups or origins. It may be very difficult to tell at a glance where two different people come from, but if one of them speaks a language with which you are familiar and the other does not, the distinction is immediately clear. What the speakers of a particular language choose to do with that knowledge is up to them, and probably changes depending on their perspective and the situation. A native speaker might feel a particular way about their birth language, prizing it for its familiarity or esteeming it for its connection to their ethnic or national identity. A non-native speaker might feel differently, wishing to learn the language for various social, economic, or cultural reasons, or even disdaining to learn it out of preference for their original language.[26] The example of English in the modern world is an apt illustration of such perspectives, having asserted itself (whether actively or passively over the many centuries of its use) as the linguistic successor to Latin in the sense of a language that crosses multiple geographical and ethnic boundaries while providing a common tongue for many daily encounters the world over. There are English-speakers who actively push for other people living in English-speaking places to learn the language (certain communities in the modern-day United States and their perspectives

[26] Adams 2003b, 184

on languages other than English come immediately to mind), and there are English-speakers who have no interest in compelling others to speak English. There are non-English-speakers who have no desire or need to learn more than a few words and stick to their own native language out of necessity or habit (rural outlying areas that have little contact with the wider English-speaking world may have no need to rely on secondary or tertiary languages like English), and there are non-English-speakers who actively try to acquire skills in writing and speaking English for a variety of reasons (the proliferation of English Language Learner programs in various countries is a strong example). The approach to Latin cannot have been much different.

The linguistic concept of *diglossia* provides a useful framework for describing the role of Latin and writing in the Roman world. Diglossia describes a specific mode of bilingualism in which two languages coexist in common usage, one of them usually taking on a 'high' status role and the other a 'low' status role. The high status language might be associated with official functions, such as military or government applications, whereas the low status language might be used for more personal matters.[27] While describing the relationship between languages under the Roman Empire as a strict binary one is an oversimplification, the notion of different languages possessing different statuses and being used for different purposes is nevertheless applicable to the study of multilingualism in the Roman world.[28] The broader notions of a high status and low status language are evident in the treatment of Latin and other languages within the Roman system.

At the potteries in La Graufesenque, for example, a Latin/Gaulish diglossia can be detected in the inscriptions applied to the vessels. Although the inscriptions cannot reveal the nature of spoken language in the community, they can attest to the difference in status assigned

[27] Mullen 2011, 535
[28] Mullen 2011, 529

to written language: Latin inscriptions are more often found on the vessels destined for export, and Gaulish for the vessels that remained within the community.[29] Written Latin can therefore be interpreted as the high-status language, used for broader and more global contexts, and Gaulish as the low-status language used in private and personal contexts. The use of Latin connotes a particular distinct identification that was more associated with the external community of the empire at large, as opposed to the internal community of the Gaulish potters themselves. The higher status of Latin in multilingual contexts may not have been officially enforced, but it was still present and affected the language choices of those who spoke and wrote in it. The language situation in most of western Europe under Roman control would seem to be fairly similar to the situation at La Graufesenque, with Latin (as well as Greek in limited contexts) occupying the role of H (high-status) language, and the various non-Latin indigenous languages occupying the role of L (low-status) language.[30] The way this scheme appeared in practice must have been more complex than a simple dichotomy, though in the absence of evidence it is difficult to theorize exactly how these nuances would appear. In most contexts, however, the employment of Latin as a language associated with high-status situations where records are kept, like politics or commerce, and the relegation of native languages as they are subsumed into more private contexts that are less likely to leave a lasting archaeological imprint, seems to be a consistent condition across many of the western provinces. The fact that there was some flexibility in the system, and indeed potential resistance to adopting the high-status language in favor of the lower-status language, can also be seen in the persistence of indigenous languages that survived Latinization and are still spoken today, such as Basque and Welsh.[31]

[29] Mullen 2011, 539
[30] Mullen 2011, 535
[31] Mullen 2011, 536

Latin, Greek, and Roman Authority:

> *Magistratus uero prisci quantopere suam populique Romani maiestatem retinentes se gesserint hinc cognosci potest, quod inter cetera obtinendae grauitatis indicia illud quoque magna cum perseuerantia custodiebant, ne Graecis umquam nisi Latine responsa darent.* "Truly, the magistrate is able to perceive how greatly the ancient people of Rome conducted themselves so as to retain her majesty, and that which, among other methods of preserving respect, they took heed of with the greatest diligence; namely, never to give a response to Greek unless in Latin."
>
> Valerius Maximus, 2.2.2

The above quote from Valerius Maximus would seem to point to a rigid and standardized language policy at work in Roman thought and practice. Indeed, Maximus goes on to further describe how the magistrates of old would require Greek-speakers to use an interpreter in Rome and even in Greece and Asia, where Latin was no doubt a minority spoken language if it was spoken at all. All this was intended, Maximus asserts, to boost the status of Latin as a respectable and venerated language.[32] By Maximus's reasoning, the act of speaking a language other than Latin for official matters is tacitly linked to reducing the status and respectability of the Roman state, and therefore Latin must take a conscious preeminence in public situations. Cicero himself was criticized for speaking Greek in an official capacity, even though he was addressing Greek-speakers in Sicily.[33] Maximus's imperial contemporary, Tiberius, also seems to have upheld this distinction, preferring that Greek terms be translated into appropriate Latin ones for public documents and even forbidding a soldier to give testimony in Greek.[34] Tiberius's nephew Claudius also expressed some potential antipathy toward Greek in politics, having a respectable Greek man not just stricken from jury duty, but also stripped of his Roman citizenship upon

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[32] '*…quo scilicet Latinae vocis honos per omnes gentes venerabilior diffunderetur.*'

[33] *In Verr.* 2.4.147, '*ille enim vero negat et ait indignum facinus esse quod ego in senatu Graeco verba fecissem; quod quidem apud Graecos Graece locutus essem, id ferri nullo modo posse.*'

[34] Suet. *Tib*. 71 "*militem quoque Graece testimonium interrogatum nisi Latine respondere uetuit*." See also Dio. 57.15.12 for a similar description.

discovering that the man could not speak Latin.[35] Cicero states that the ability to speak Latin correctly should not only distinguish orators and other public figures, but all Roman citizens, implicitly linking the Latin language with the notion of being a Roman.[36] Latin is promoted above even the widely-spoken and understood Greek in these evaluations, to the extent that prominent Roman officials, especially in the second and first centuries BCE, refused on principle to speak Greek in politics or business even though they, as highly-educated literati, probably had a good command of the language themselves.[37] However, as with so many aspects of life in the Roman Empire, other evidence than the assertions of intellectuals must be examined in order to reach a holistic interpretation. It is known, for example, that educated Romans were perfectly happy to speak and write Greek themselves; Suetonius highlights Tiberius's behavior toward the Greek-speaking soldier giving testimony as an incongruity given the emperor's own refined grasp of the language.[38] It is in fact much more difficult than one might expect given the above attitudes to define what, if any, official language policy existed with regard to Latin in the Roman world.[39]

Greek was already deeply embedded in the societies of the Mediterranean by the time Rome began to expand its interests beyond Italy. Southern Italy itself had been extensively colonized by the Greek city-states, and Greek continued to be the language of government in the eastern Mediterranean and the Hellenistic kingdoms. Greek was also a language with a strong written record by the time it came into contact with Latin, and was also a language of literature

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[35] Suet. *Claud*. 16.2, "*splendidum uirum Graeciaeque prouinciae principem, uerum Latini sermonis ignarum, non modo albo iudicum erasit, sed in peregrinitatem redegit.*"
[36] Cic. *Brut*. 140, "*non enim tam praeclarum est scire Latine quam turpe nescire, neque tam id mihi oratoris boni quam civis Romani proprium videtur.*"
[37] Lomas 2008, 128
[38] Suet. Tib. 71: '*sermone Graeco quamquam alioqui promptus et facilis, non tamen usque quaque usus est abstinuitque maxime in senatu…*'
[39] Adams 2003b, 185

and culture.[40] This long literate history behind the Greek language may have contributed to the simmering sense of insecurity that some Romans seem to have felt regarding their Latin in comparison to Greek.[41] Native Greek-speakers were apparently just as quick to ridicule improper Greek as Latin-speakers were to poke fun at improper Latin. Dionysius of Halicarnassus relates a particularly ill-fated diplomatic mission to Tarentum, a former Greek colony, where the Roman ambassador's Greek was apparently so laughably bad, and the Tarentines so irritated by it, that he was driven from the theater.[42] Romans and other Latin-speakers are much more likely to refer to Latin as 'our language' when discussing comparisons with Greek, perhaps in an effort to connect Latin to the strength of Rome as opposed to the otherness of Greek.[43] The poet Lucretius refers to Latin as lacking the necessary words to describe Greek philosophy, casting Latin as unsuitable for purposes mastered by Greek.[44] Cicero is quick to counter Lucretius's assessment, stating that Latin is in fact the more diverse and descriptive language.[45] This diversity of opinion is detectable in the ambiguous integration of Greek into the Roman imperial system's approach to languages. Greek was at once a language that conferred urbanity as a sign of higher education, (hence its widespread use in private communication and literary treatises) and at the same time something over which Latin must assert itself as a more dominant language suitable to positions of authority (hence the near-mandate that Latin be used in public speech and other official discourse). While Latin-speakers were happy to accommodate Greek in private, it was still necessary to periodically establish the primacy of Latin over Greek in public.

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[40] Adams 2003a, 290
[41] Adams 2003b, 205
[42] *Rom. Ant.* 19.5. As a final indignity, the ambassador was even urinated on by a drunk attendee.
[43] Adams 2003b, 202
[44] *De Re. Nat.* 1.136-139, '*Nec me animi fallit Graiorum obscura reperta difficile inlustrare Latinis versibus esse, multa novis verbis praesertim cum sit agendum propter egestatem linguae et rerum novitatem…*'
[45] *Fin.* 1.10, '*sed ita sentio et saepe disserui, Latinam linguam non modo non inopem, ut vulgo putarent, sed locupletiorem etiam esse quam Graecam.*'

Because of Greek's long-standing history as a written language, the governments of Greek-speaking territories employed written documents in the same way as the Roman government, and the culture of writing in Greek was similarly embedded into its territories as writing in Latin was embedded in Roman territories. By necessity, the Roman government had to interact with Greek in an administrative capacity; publishing documents, agreements, and legislation that could be understood by both Latin-speaking and Greek-speaking parties.[46] That this accommodation was made is clear in the existence of Greek-language translations of the legislative decisions of the Roman government, especially the Senate. The survival of Greek-language inscriptions listing senatorial proclamations provides ample evidence that the administration included the use of Greek; if only in the heavily Greek-speaking eastern provinces, and not the more Latinized western provinces.[47] However, even in the Greek texts, there is evidence of Latin's primacy in the Roman mind; the texts are translations of Latin into Greek, rather than being written in Greek themselves, and the Greek language used in these translations is clearly different from the language that would have been used in a fully Greek phrasing of the document.[48] The Greek translation of the *Res Gestae*, for example, maintains the Latin idioms of the original text rather than making an effort to replace the idiom with an appropriate Greek version.[49] Despite the fact that Greek held a special position in administrative matters, as evidenced by the fact that official translations into languages other than Greek were not made by the Roman government, Latin is the official language of formulating the policy, and the conversion of the Latin idiom into the Greek text is an afterthought.

[46] Kaimio 1979, 103
[47] Kaimio 1979, 108
[48] Kaimio 1979, 319
[49] Adams 2003b, 204

That Greek occupied an important place in the Roman language landscape is clear, though the exact relationship between Latin and Greek in the minds of the people whose lives were governed by both languages is ambiguous. A large part of the Mediterranean had adopted Greek as its *lingua franca*, and as Rome expanded its sphere of influence and encountered Greek as the predominant language of a large number of important territories, it was only natural that the state make some allowances for Greek as a functional language to facilitate the smooth administration of the empire.[50] The imposition of Latin as the only language of the Roman administration would have created more problems than it solved. Rome therefore found itself in a somewhat awkward position in the Greek East that it did not necessarily face in western Europe; in need of a way to assert the power and primacy of Rome over the Greek-speaking territories, but confronting a long and well-established literary and documentary culture that was not as susceptible to being subsumed by Latin writing as some Italic and European languages were.

The evidence of the interactions of Greek and Latin in the eastern provinces does not do much to conclusively illuminate the solution to this problem of language interaction, but it does highlight some instances in which Latin was more emphatically established as a language of power and status in comparison to Greek. One instance is in documents directly associated with Roman citizenship: birth certificates and wills. These documents were significant in that a birth certificate was required to confirm citizen status and the benefits thereof, and wills were only permitted to Roman citizens as a way of bequeathing their property to their relatives.[51] Both documents were required to be written in Latin in order to be valid, even if the person or persons

[50] Kaimio 1979, 321
[51] Adams 2003a, 563

concerned did not know Latin themselves.[52] This led to a rather convoluted process of translation: the Greek-speaking citizen had to have his words translated into Latin for the purpose of the document, necessitating the use of bilingual translator who could speak and write in both languages.[53] The citizen would probably have had to dictate the content of the document in Greek, then have it translated into Latin, and then, if necessary, have a translation done back into Greek of the properly formulate Latin text to ensure that he had knowledge of the official contents.[54] This set Latin on a level above Greek: the Greek language spoken by the majority of citizens in the East was not suitable for the documents that confirmed their citizenship, and so Latin had to be employed even by people who might have had no further use for it. Examples from the papyrological record written in mixed Latin and Greek, perhaps composing the official legitimate text and an unofficial copy, also demonstrate this language mingling and stratification.[55] Even in places where written Greek was likely to be much more common than written Latin, documents in Latin took legal and social precedence in the documentation that governed the lives and deaths of citizens. Practical needs were not the only determining factor in the use of language by the Roman state; the goal of promoting Latin as the language of power in the Mediterranean and giving it a higher status than other languages with which it might come into contact was clearly a priority when navigating language choice and identity.[56] Using Latin preferentially in not only broad governmental business but also in personal legal affairs made Latin not just the language of politics but also of family law, even without any kind of official policy or requirement of learning Latin.

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[52] Adams 2003b, 186
[53] See BGU 1.326, for a translator (referred to as Ῥωμαικὸς) of a Greek-speaking soldier's will.
[54] Adams 2003a, 564
[55] E.g. *P. Oxy.* 38.2857 and *P. Oxy*. 9.1201
[56] Kaimio 1979, 110

Despite the assertions of Roman writers such as Valerius Maximus and the other authors who promoted Latin as the language in which all official business ought to be conducted, it is clear that Greek was still accepted as an official language in much of the empire.[57] It is noteworthy that this statement in particular and others in a similar vein refer primarily, if not exclusively, to Greek, rather than to Celtic, Punic, Dacian, or any of the other myriad languages that surely existed alongside Latin in both the Republican and Imperial periods. Indeed, while Greek-speakers might learn Latin and Latin-speakers might learn Greek, almost no effort seems to have been made to learn the languages of other civilizations that Rome encountered, and knowledge of these languages seems to have been irrelevant to Roman imperial governance.[58] The special relationship between Latin and Greek as the dual languages of the Roman Empire is especially important to a discussion of language use and policy. The use of interpreters in political discussions is not unheard of, but the employment of Greek interpreters seems to have been much more of an *ad hoc* decision depending on the competency of the group hearing the discussion; and was certainly less frequent than the use of interpreters for other languages, such as Punic.[59] From this, it might be deduced that Greek was a much more widely-understood language in the upper echelons of society than any of the other non-Latin languages of the Mediterranean, and that even though the more educated Romans disparaged the use of Greek in political business, they nevertheless could speak and understand it. Nevertheless, despite the functional ability to use Greek, it still occupies a lesser status to Latin. Even the Latin descriptor *utraque lingua eruditus*, 'schooled in both languages', which might be taken to indicate that both languages carried equal weight in the evaluation of education levels, more appropriately

[57] Rochette 2011, 551
[58] Adams 2003b, 197. Other languages may have been studied academically (as emperor Claudius's work on Etruscan, for example), but they were not actively used or spoken in daily life.
[59] Kaimio 1979, 105

emphasized the fact that the person had studied enough to learn more than one language, not that Greek and Latin were of equal value.[60] Latin was expected as the base level of language fluency, and Greek was more of a useful, but not required, bonus on top of the person's Latin schooling.

In situations that entail the dual use of Latin and Greek for the same official purposes, it is apparent that the understanding of the message is secondary to the use of Latin to present it; and that the status of Latin is implicitly higher than the status of the language into which it is translated.[61] Direct communication is not paramount in these political contexts, but rather the elevation of Latin as a symbol of authority and of Roman power.[62] In situations where demonstrating the authority of Rome over another subject people was paramount, Latin was always the language given the highest status. Latin versions of official statements were given first, regardless of the native language of the audience, and the translations of Latin statements into a language that could be understood by the local people was considered of secondary importance.[63] From the use of Latin in these contexts, and the way in which it was presented in contrast to Greek, it is clear that Roman policy, whether intentional or not, was to elevate the status of Latin, and to connect the status of Latin with the status of Rome as the head of the empire. The Romans needed to retain Greek as a language of convenience, since it was already widely spoken and understood in a large proportion of their territory, but they also needed to promote Rome as the superior power both politically and militarily.[64] The promotion of Latin as superior to Greek accomplished both tasks, allowing easy communication by permitting Greek to persist, but making it clear that Latin carried more status and more weight as a symbol of Rome. Rome was a globalizing power, bringing multiple diverse cultural backgrounds together under

[60] Kaimio 1979, 316
[61] Rochette 2011, 551
[62] Levick 1995, 396
[63] Rochette 2011, 551
[64] Rochette 2011, 557

the umbrella of Roman authority; and the sublimation of multiple native languages into the broader purview of the globalizing language was both a pragmatic action and a cultural artifact. The sphere of air traffic control in the modern day operates by a comparable paradigm: despite the variety of native languages associated with different flights to different countries, English is mandated as the language of air traffic control and communication between pilots and airport personnel. The ease of communication enabled by the use of a single language in this arena stands alongside the symbolic presence of English as the language of the world, connecting multiple different principalities into a single vernacular community for the purposes of communication.

Latinization and Roman Imperialism:

That Latin was closely associated with Roman identity and status is illuminated by a passage from Livy, describing an envoy from the town of Cumae in c. 180 BCE:

> *Cumanis eo anno petentibus permissum, ut publice Latine loquerentur et praeconibus Latine vendendi ius esset.*
> "In that same year, the citizens of Cumae were seeking permission that they might speak Latin publicly, and that it might be the law for their auctioneers to make sales in Latin."
>
> Livy 40.42.13

Cumae at the time was designated a *civitas sine suffragio*, a community that did not yet possess the right to vote in Roman elections.[65] The Cumaeans recognize Latin as a language to be used in official public matters and in commerce, and also recognize that it is linked to Roman identity, so much so that they seek official permission from the government of Rome to begin using it in the public sphere. Latin had presumably already been well-established in Cumae by the time of the envoy, or else the transition to using it in public and commercial contexts could not have been effectively executed, but the official petition for its use is still significant.[66] While this may be an excessively obsequious demonstration of deference to Roman authority on the part of Cumae (the idea of gaining the right to vote by buttering up Roman authority might have been an ulterior motive), it nevertheless demonstrates that Latin had become one of the keystones of Roman imperial authority.[67] Inclusion in the fold of Rome meant being able to speak Latin, and to speak it well, judging by the somewhat disparaging attitude displayed by Roman *litterati* toward dialectical diversions from proper Roman Latin.[68] By 180 BCE, Rome had eliminated much of its competition around the Mediterranean; major rival Carthage and the

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[65] Adams 2003b, 189
[66] Adams 2003a, 114. Likely alongside both the Greek of the original colonists and the Oscan of the surrounding territory.
[67] Adams 2003a, 113
[68] Adams 2003b, 192. Cicero advises against 'rustic harshness and provincial strangeness' in public speaking (*De Orat.* 3.44), and Plautus (e.g. *Truc*. 688-692) and Lucilius (see Quint. *Inst. Orat*. 1.5.57-58) both poke fun at the 'rusticated' Latin of non-Roman Italians.

empires of the Greek East had been mostly subjugated and Rome's territory was beginning to expand in earnest. The petition of the Cumaean delegation makes a statement about how the peoples of these Roman territorial possessions viewed the language of the conquerors in regard to their own languages. Equally, it shows the effect that Rome's *laissez-faire* language policy had on the development of the linguistic culture of its territories. There had clearly been no active effort by the Romans to replace the Italic languages with Latin; rather, the driving force was the agency of local communities in taking on the language as a way to associate themselves with Roman power.

The patterns that can be discerned in the eventual sublimation of local indigenous languages to Latin are very consistent with the methods by which Roman imperialism overtook new territories. Essentially, Rome was less of a centralized imperial power than it was a small city-state gradually expanding its influence; and as such, it had comparatively basic administrative and governmental structures that could not, on their own, cope with increasing amounts of land and people coming under its control. The strategy, therefore, was to bring these territories under the general oversight of the Roman central authority (primarily in the area of military treaties) while leaving the minutiae of its governance to their own rulers and officials.[69] This *laissez-faire* attitude towards managing new conquests both removed the obligations of daily managements from the Roman government by allowing existing political and economic structures to continue working to Rome's benefit, while it also allowed for at least some autonomy on the part of the conquered people.

With the grant of universal Roman citizenship to all the peoples of Italy following the Social Wars, Latin begins to overtake the local indigenous languages in the archaeological record. Prior to this legal and cultural gesture of unification, Latin in epigraphy is virtually

[69] Lomas 2008, 111

dwarfed by other Italian scripts, like Etruscan and Oscan, and only appears in the vicinity of Rome itself.[70] The incorporation of other Italian groups into the Roman sphere increased not only their participation in the Roman system, but also their access to the various sociocultural trappings that accompanied Roman identity.[71] Citizenship gave access to more than just political participation; it introduced the cultural patterns that Roman citizens were expected to follow, such as speaking Latin.[72] The civic and legal benefits conferred by citizenship were balanced by the expectation that the new citizens would act according to the cultural customs of a Roman citizen. The fact that the Latinization of Italy was complete in only a hundred years or less following the Social Wars speaks to the desire for association with Roman culture following the attainment of citizenship.[73] The political rights and freedoms granted by citizenship were associated with being socially and culturally Roman, and so the adoption of these rights by the Italic peoples facilitated the adoption of other elements of Roman culture, like the production of Latin writing. As more inhabitants of Italy were exposed to the benefits of citizenship, the cultural norms associated with citizenship, like the use of Latin, became more attractive and more valuable.[74] The indigenous languages of Italy were no longer the best symbol of social power; since the power of Roman citizenship and its associated tools was now available, the language that symbolized those powers became more important and more widely-used. When new communities in southern Roman Spain were granted citizenship under Augustus, the preexisting indigenous script, language, and artistic traditions disappeared relatively soon afterward, and the material culture of the region became almost wholly Roman.[75] Bilingual

[70] Häussler 2002, 61
[71] Lomas 2008, 112
[72] Lloris 1999, 133
[73] Kaimio 1979, 328
[74] Bradley 2006, 166
[75] Lloris 1999, 134

inscriptions are extremely rare in the Roman West (with the exception of North Africa), in direct contrast to the Eastern part of the Empire, and the few bilingual examples that do exist seem to be dominated by the Latin script.[76] The abandonment of particular aspects of indigenous culture, namely language, in the wake of achieving Roman citizenship is further evidence that it was more profitable to identify with the new ruling power in the area than it was to publicly maintain indigenous traditions. Citizenship can hardly have been the only reason for these cultural changes, but it was undoubtedly a prominent factor.

Under Roman imperialism, Latin was directly linked to political power. Latin was the language of the military and of the civil government, making it a language of power both during the conquest of a new territory, through military operations, and also during the day-to-day operation of the pacified province. In essence, an official language policy on the part of the Roman conquerors was not necessary: the status afforded to Latin as opposed to other languages naturally encouraged its adoption among the peoples of a new territory. The use of Latin, and by extension written Latin, in official spheres in a new province promoted it as a language connected to the ruling power of the empire. Even in epigraphy in the non-Latin languages of Italy and southern Gaul, Roman-influenced titles and nomenclature make an appearance.[77] A Lepontic inscription from northern Italy refers to "*Kuitos lekatos*", possibly a transliteration of "Quintus *legatus*".[78] Further, an inscription from southern Gaul using the Gallic language represented by Greek script, refers to a πραιτωρ, perhaps an adaptation of a Roman title for a different type of local magistrate.[79] The Tabula Bantina, written entirely in Oscan and comprising the municipal charter of the city of Bantia, also translates the Oscan *meddix* into the

[76] Häussler 2002, 64
[77] Häussler 2002, 66
[78] RIG 2.1.E1
[79] RIG 1.G108

Roman *praetor*.[80] There was no need for an official law mandating Latin as the common language of the empire: the desire for the prestige and political power that Latin commanded were encouragement enough to adopt it as a spoken and written language.[81] The Roman conquerors seemed to take for granted that Latin would be adopted by local peoples of their own volition, and did not so much actively erase pre-existing native languages as passively assume that those languages were irrelevant in light of the utility and power of Latin.[82] Those who learned Latin were able to make greater societal gains than those who did not, and the fact that many subject peoples therefore wanted to learn Latin of their own volition meant that official political measures that forced them to do so were unnecessary.[83]

In addition to the social and political prestige that was attached to Latin in colonial spheres, use of the language provided more concrete opportunities for advancement as well. As the language of government, law, and the military, Latin was firmly entrenched as the language in which people were expected to conduct themselves in order to further their own goals and increase their own status.[84] The connection of Latin to status, both official and personal, created the incentive for non-speakers to learn the language and adopt it for their own purposes. They were not officially obligated to learn Latin, as it was not in any way legislated as the primary language of a new territory, but its advantages were so obvious that voluntary uptake was much more likely. Creating this aura of status around Latin, whether intentionally or merely as a side effect of its use in particular contexts can be taken as another astute measure by the Romans in their approach to colonization. Language is a strong emblem of cultural identity, and the emphasis on Latin as a cornerstone of *Romanitas* brought with it a natural transition to Roman

[80] FIRA 1.16
[81] Rochette 2011, 552
[82] Adams 2003b, 197
[83] Kaimio 1975, 101
[84] Rochette 2011, 554

culture through the use of Latin in common parlance. This created a self-replicating system whereby Latin was presented as a status language that brought both tangible and intangible benefits, which inspired more and more people to take up the language in an effort to associate themselves with that status, which in turn increased the visibility of Latin as a symbol, and cemented it as a primary component of Roman cultural exchange.

The preferential treatment shown to Latin as an element of power display by both the Romans and their non-Latin-speaking subjects appears to be unique among the imperial powers of the Mediterranean. The Persians, Carthaginians, and the Hellenistic monarchs all employed more minor local languages in their official matters alongside the primary language of government.[85] While Rome would occasionally show deference to Greek in written documents, Latin was clearly the language to which the Romans wished to attach more prestige in the context of imperialism. Cato the Elder not only disparaged the affinity for Greek expressed by some of his contemporaries, but also addressed the citizens of Athens (arguably the birthplace of Classical Greek) in Latin, delegating an interpreter to translate his words into Greek.[86] In the case of other languages, particularly those found in the western provinces, Rome seem to have been largely uncaring.[87] It made no effort to maintain those languages or keep them from being abandoned, but also made no effort to eradicate them. The basics of Latin literacy were clearly made available to people throughout Rome's territories, as is evidenced by the presence of documents in other Italic and European languages that have been written in Latin script; but whether instruction in Latin writing was directly offered by the Roman establishment or was simply a result of the Latin language being more freely used in these areas after the coming of

[85] Rochette 2011, 558
[86] Plut. *Cat*. 12.4-5. Plutarch explicitly points out the spurious claim that Cato delivered the speech in question in Greek, which is the version he seems to expect to be circulating along with the text.
[87] Adams 2003b, 204

Rome is unclear.[88] Ultimately, Rome relied on the natural prestige that had been accumulated by Latin as their language of power and status to foster its adoption and development among the peoples taken under the aegis of the Rome Empire.

Latin was undoubtedly one of the more powerful cultural forces that unified the expansive and multinational territories under Rome's control, and evidence of an implicit goal on the part of the Roman Empire, whether consciously realized or not, to "make them all Latins who speak the Latin language".[89] Despite the apparent value placed on Latin by its literati, however, there was definitively no active language policy in place to mandate that the inhabitants of newly conquered territories take Latin on as a primary language. There was no official legislation mandating the use of Latin, nor does there seem to be any active oppression or discouragement of indigenous languages. Indeed, the implementation of such a policy in a linguistic environment as diverse as the ancient Mediterranean would have been considerably more difficult and cause considerably more logistical headaches than it was worth. The Roman state evidently had no real interest in dictating the languages spoken by provincial inhabitants, and there are no concrete decrees or documents suggesting otherwise.[90]

The power of Latin as a keystone element of imperial culture did not come from official government policy or from dictating that subjects of the empire were required to learn Latin at the expense of their native languages. Instead, the Romans relied on indirect promotion of their language through display. It was so closely associated with the fundamental nature of being Roman, and with the most powerful institutions of the Roman system (the army and the provincial government), that it became a marker for the power wielded by the Romans in their

[88] Adams 2003b, 204
[89] Virg. *Aen*. 12.837
[90] Kaimio 1979, 328

provinces.[91] The prestige attached to Latin and to the Roman state was a strong motivator in the adoption of Latin as an official language, and the importance of this prestige is reinforced by the fact that native Latin speakers almost never relied on other languages than Greek for official purposes.[92] The status is attached to Latin, and not to other languages, so the motivation to learn them does not exist.

[91] Rochette 2011, 562
[92] Adams 2003a, 151

Literacy and Written Latin:

If Latin was the vector by which Roman culture was promoted and given status over the languages and cultures of non-Latin-speaking peoples, then writing was the way in which that elevation of status and prominence was present in the daily experiences of average imperial subjects. It is clear that Latin and writing had a fundamentally interconnected relationship, and that writing was a primary mode of expression for Latin speakers.

Much has been made in prior scholarship of possible literacy rates in the ancient world, and the extent to which literacy skills penetrated down the social order. It is evident, not surprisingly, that the highest levels of society also possessed the highest levels of literacy, and that the majority of written content produced by the Roman system was produced by the upper classes.[93] Mass literacy rates comparable to what exists in the modern world were very unlikely to exist in the Roman period, and literacy rates in the provinces were probably even lower than those found in the imperial heartland.[94] While the lack of evidence for mass literacy may not necessarily represent the whole picture, as much of the written material of the ancient world has no doubt been lost, it is clear that writing was a skill that was primarily available to a very narrow spectrum of society. It is also important to consider that literacy is most appropriately thought of as a spectrum, rather than a simple binary of literate/illiterate. Just as in the modern world, there are different competencies within the broader scope of 'literacy', from those who can only manage to write their name and read rudimentary texts to those who can write and read at very high artistic and academic levels. Literacy in the Roman world surely was governed by the same spread of skills, from the simpler necessities of signing one's name to a legal document,

[93] Harris 1989, 337
[94] Harris 1989, 272. Estimates place the highest likely literacy rates in the western provinces at ≈10%

to the more elevated skills that produced the canon of classical literary texts.[95] Competence in literacy in the Roman world is a quality that is difficult to quantify. Even in light of the likely rarity of advanced literacy in the humbler social strata, however, it is important to consider that the percentages of people who could read and understand the written texts were not the only people affected by the prominence of writing in Roman culture. Writing permeated virtually all aspects of Roman culture, and the government and economy that oversaw the lives of Roman of all social backgrounds were founded on written records.[96]

It is clear that a "documentary mentality" pervaded most of the functions of Roman imperialism, and that writing was expected to go hand-in-hand with political action.[97] Roman legislation often included clauses referring to the publication of the text in writing, suggesting that a written document that could be read by passersby was intrinsic to the functioning of the law in practice.[98] Official projects produced a great deal of texts, and even though many of the texts do not survive today, the assumption existed that they would be produced as a natural and necessary side effect of conducting official business.[99] Publication of a written text, therefore, was meant to ensure that everyone had access to the information contained in it, whether or not they could actually read it themselves. In the example of legislation, its prominent posting in public places was meant to proclaim it to all those who might be under its jurisdiction, and the assumption that they could understand it is demonstrated by the Roman legal principle *ignorantia legis non excusat*, 'ignorance of the law does not offer an excuse'. The inability to read would not have been a legitimate reason for being ignorant of the contents of these

[95] Bowman 1991, 120
[96] Hopkins 1991, 144
[97] Woolf 2009, 49
[98] Woolf 2009, 49
[99] Woolf 2009, 62

publications.[100] Even those who were illiterate needed to be able to participate in a literate method of exchange, lest they find themselves on the wrong side of the law with no excuse for their ignorance.[101] If they themselves could not read, they would need to secure the assistance of someone else who could, and therefore depend upon that person's translation or interpretation of the written text.

As the empire grew and overtook more new provinces, the expansion of the governmental bureaucracy needed to manage those new territories also affected the usage and spread of writing. Bureaucracy by necessity demands written communication between satellite and central authorities, written record-keeping of day-to-day operations, and other forms of official documentation; so the imposition of a fully literate government bureaucracy was bound to increase the exposure of new provincials to writing in Roman contexts.[102] One notable example of this is census and taxation procedure in Egypt. Written receipts issued by governmental authorities served as evidence that the tax burden of a particular household had been paid, and guaranteed that they would not be charged tax again, whether intentionally or unintentionally.[103] Egypt may be a special case in terms of its relationship with writing and record-keeping, since its record-keeping tradition significantly predates the Roman occupation, but it nevertheless provides important evidence about the nature of government records and how regular civilians could be expected to interface with them. Written receipts issued for each household's tax payments were important government documents, intended to prove that the necessary duties had been paid, and that the people were in good standing.[104] It was expected that the head of the household would be able to read the receipt and understand its contents, or, if

[100] Bowman 1991, 122
[101] eg. *P. Oxy.* 34.2075
[102] Woolf 2009, 49
[103] Hopkins 1991, 148
[104] Hopkins 1991, 148

they themselves were not literate, that they would have access to someone who could read and interpret it for them.[105] If they could not read their receipts, they risked being penalized by being unfairly charged for their tax burden, and the ignorance of the document's content would have presumably offered little in the way of excuses.[106] The documentary mentality of the government led to an expectation of available literacy among the governed. The macrocosm of the state and its use of writing cannot be separated from the microcosm of daily life under the state's governance.

The vital role of writing in the system of government also influenced the participation of the governed people. The documentary mentality that framed the government's interaction with its civilians also characterized the citizens' reciprocal interactions with the government. One of the most evident ways in which this happened was through the use of written petitions to Roman officials. These documents form a large proportion of surviving governmental correspondence, and demonstrate that the governed populace was equally invested in documenting their relationship with the government.[107] Those who addressed their grievances by means of written petitions were voluntarily participating in the expectation of literacy and written records demonstrated by the government as a whole.

The evidence for the significance of writing throughout the various social strata of Roman society is widespread, in contrast to what one would suspect given the generally low levels of literacy in the ancient world, and the subsequent supposition that it was a niche skill possessed by a narrow group of elites. While what we as modern readers would consider mass literacy, that is, the possession of a uniform level of literate skills imposed through public school systems, is indeed completely absent from the archeological record, nevertheless there are bodies

[105] Hopkins 1991, 150
[106] Hopkins 1991, 139
[107] Hopkins 1991, 137

of evidence that suggest that not only was the spectrum of literacy much wider than the narrow definition that is sometimes applied to it, but also that literate skills reached much more thoroughly into society than might be expected.

One way to account for the different levels of literacy is the concept of special kinds of literacy, differentiated skills associated with specific applications of writing, such as scribal literacy, craftsman's literacy and others.[108] These paradigms characterize literacy as a set of compartmentalized skills that apply to particular groups within society, and assume that the types of literacy associated with these sectors would be isolated from other types of literacy and other groups or professions. Archaeological evidence does not always support the idea that only the few elite members of a society would have access to reading and writing. For example, a fairly large component of the epigraphic corpora from the Roman provinces consists of basic graffiti, names, and short phrases produced on a variety of objects and surfaces, suggesting that a respectable number of people could at least grasp enough of the rudiments of writing to label their personal possessions. The scholarly impulse to compartmentalize literacy partly stems from the disconnect between the literary sources, produced by the upper classes, and the many and various types of literate expression found in other contexts. Graffiti show that literate skills were not isolated at the top of the social pyramid, and the notion of special literacies is one way to explain the discrepancy, albeit an inadequate one that characterizes literacy as a more holistic skill set than it evident in the archaeological record.[109]

The propensity to keep subdividing literacy into more and more specialized sets obscures the true nature of the issue: that literacy is more accurately described as a spectrum of varying skill levels that people from all social classes and walks of life had access to in one way or

[108] Bowman 1991, 123
[109] Bowman 1991, 123

another. The fluidity of literacy in the Roman system and its nature as a unified skill set available to, if not the majority, then certainly a large proportion of Romans is demonstrated by the example of the army. Literacy was an important skill in the military, and the military was an important force for change within provincial communities.[110] The collections of letters and other writings from Britain and Egypt demonstrate that a large proportion of soldiers were literate and were writing fairly regularly. It is demonstrably unreasonable, therefore, to assume that the literacy expressed by Roman soldiers was a specialized technical skill associated only with military operations, as these soldiers were employing their writing skills in business interactions and personal letters as well as official military documents.[111]

The economy under the empire also benefitted from the breadth of literacy skills and their availability across multiple contexts. In the case of amphorae, which provide perhaps the most substantial body of evidence for trade and commercial exchange, the painted *tituli* and impressed stamps intended to guarantee the contents were only able to function effectively due to the prevalence of literacy as an aspect of economic exchange.[112] The conventions of amphora labeling are highly technical, and the ability to read and understand these technical abbreviations and connect them to the information about the contents of the amphora that they were intended to convey was critical to the smooth functioning of trade.[113] The commodities shipped in amphorae traveled far and wide across the empire, so the ability to read and understand their labels must have been shared across the empire, at least in certain circles.[114] Even if the ultimate end user purchasing the shipped goods at market could not decipher the labels on the containers, the merchants and workers who handled them needed to be familiar with them in order to keep track

[110] Bowman 1991, 126
[111] Bowman 1991, 128
[112] Woolf 2009, 57
[113] Woolf 2009, 59
[114] Woolf 2009, 59

of what was being shipped where. The continued smooth functioning of trade in these commodities, and the majority of the international economic system in general, relied on the possession of literacy skills by a broad and diverse population of readers. The use of literacy cannot effectively be confined to one or a few special cases; it must be diffused through multiple strata of society. In effect, specialized literacies could not really exist within the Roman system, or if they did at first, they did not remain specialized for long. Literacy became a general skill that was available to those who acquired it in all situations, not only those limited contexts in which they might have made use of it previously.[115]

The integration of writing into the social and political structures of new territories mirrors the integration of the Latin language itself. Written Latin as an element of imperial identity is intertwined with the development of Latin itself as the unifying language of the empire, both of which can be detected in the gradual conquest of Italy. Since much of the surviving evidence comes via the epigraphic record, it is illustrative to trace the scripts of the native Italian languages and their relationship to Latin script as well as the evidence for the spoken languages and their relationship to spoken Latin. The script of a language is as much a cultural artifact as the language itself, and changes in written form speak to cultural change as well as changes in oral expression.[116] In fact, the changes in script from an indigenous one to the Latin one in Italy generally predate the corresponding change from indigenous language to spoken Latin, showing that cultural change in writing could precede more fundamental changes in spoken language.[117] The use of the Latin alphabet to write indigenous languages shows fundamentally that literacy was an important quality to have, and that the indigenous peoples were willing to take the

[115] Woolf 2009, 53
[116] Lomas 2008, 114
[117] Lomas 2008, 125

initiative to become literate as a way of expressing their identity.[118] The use of their native language is an element of their identity as an indigenous Oscan, or Etruscan, for example, but the use of the Latin alphabet also shows some identification with Rome and Roman culture. The conversion of scripts is one of the first steps in language adoption, as the letters themselves and the languages that they represent are intrinsically connected, and acquiring literacy in a language's script is the most basic form of acquiring fluency in that language. It is possible that instruction in Latin literacy functions as a factor of Romanization, since the use of Latin letters naturally leads on to the use of Latin words.[119]

The use of Latin and writing in public contexts demonstrates a close association with Roman power and cultural *Romanitas*. The written Latin language was a critical part of Roman political dominance, and carried with it a great deal of social prestige. It is perhaps this feature of the language that plays the most important role in the adoption of Latin by indigenous communities, especially in Italy. Social interaction in Italy, both in Rome and elsewhere, was characterized by competitive elite status display, garnering support and reverence from a visible display of status and power within the community.[120] Displays of writing, whether in an indigenous language or in Latin, were a clear and visible way to assert one's social dominance, since the production of writing was an elite pastime and suggested high levels of skill and high prestige.[121] As Rome began to become a dominant power in Italy, so too did Latin begin to become the language most closely associated with power and prestige. Thus, there was significant social pressure to acquire the use of Latin as both a spoken and written language in order to hold on to the prestige it represented. The transition from indigenous languages and

[118] Adams 2003a, 290
[119] Adams 2003a, 184
[120] Lomas 2008, 129
[121] Lomas 2008, 128

scripts to Latin almost universally across Italy fit neatly into preexisting paradigms of status display: indigenous languages no longer carried the most weight in the social power game, whereas Latin clearly did, so the adoption of Latin as a power symbol was virtually guaranteed by the existing nature of social interaction within Italy.[122] Presumably, if Rome had not been so successful as a colonizing power, Latin might not have gained the reputation as a tool of elite status display that it did, and indigenous Italic languages might have continued to be used in public contexts, but that question is outside the scope of the current discussion.

Equally, a strong preexisting epigraphic culture might help a non-Latin language to survive the process of Latinization, at least in some instances. The survival of Punic, particularly Punic inscriptions, in Roman North Africa is a prime example of this. Although North Africa became a Roman province early on, the Punic language resists complete subordination to Latin in public inscriptions, surviving throughout the Roman occupation, and appearing in the epigraphic record even in the third and fourth centuries CE.[123] Literary evidence also supports the continued use of Punic: Augustine refers to the language being common in rural North Africa well into the fourth century CE.[124] Oscan similarly survives contact with Latin much better than its neighboring languages, and similarly has a long-standing epigraphic tradition. Oscan coin inscriptions from the time of the Social Wars show that the language was still considered an important marker of identity in the face of the Latinization of Italy, and surviving inscriptions in Oscan from Pompeii show that the language was still in use in public contexts into the first century AD.[125] The example of Greek has already been mentioned as a language with a significant pre-existing literate culture, both in epigraphy and in literary publications, and this

[122] Lomas 2008, 129
[123] Adams 1994, 89
[124] eg. *Epist*. 17
[125] Kaimio 1975, 97

undoubtedly factors into the special place of Greek within the Roman language system. Languages with no preexisting epigraphic tradition, like British Celtic, were much easier to supplant with Latin writing, as there was no tradition of a permanent written record of the language to sustain its use.

Differences in the culture of public writing also contributed to script changes in Italy in the middle Republic. In northern Italy, for example, inscriptions in the non-Latin indigenous languages are normally personal or religious, rather than public or political. By contrast, in the areas around Rome and the rest of central Italy, inscriptions were much more likely to be public records of government activity or commemorative inscriptions set up by private individuals referencing their service to the state.[126] In both these cases, Latin has a unique role to fill in the epigraphic culture of the region. In northern Italy, the lack of public and state inscriptions in favor of funerary and religious ones associates the indigenous language with personal issues, and Latin with public and professional issues. As the importance of public status grows with the increased adoption of Roman culture, the use of the Roman language for public inscriptions becomes more acceptable. In central Italy, written Latin is already associated with status and political prestige, and so the adoption of the script to express publicly-minded sentiments has precedent from the indigenous language itself. The transition between indigenous languages and Latin in inscriptions also appears to be fairly abrupt; pre-Roman inscriptions stop suddenly, and then Roman inscriptions show up, often associated with different types of monuments than those of the indigenous inscriptions.[127] The links between written Latin and social power influence the adoption of the Latin language as a symbol of status, and the adoption of the Latin script as an

[126] Lomas 2008, 117
[127] Benelli 2001, 9

artifact of new cultural priorities.[128] Equally, other elements of indigenous material culture are also subordinated to Roman material culture; in Etruria, for example, there are numerous examples of Latin inscriptions on Etruscan-style monuments, but no comparable instances of Etruscan inscribed on Roman monuments.[129] The Latin language has overtaken monuments that were originally associated with the language and culture of the indigenous people, but the indigenous language has not made a similar conversion, due to the status imbalance in favor of Latin.

Roman colonization in Italy also played a prominent role in the spread of both Latin and writing. From the fourth century BCE onward, Rome was the only power founding colonies in Italy, as opposed to previous foundations undertaken by coalitions of other Italian city-states.[130] The colonies so founded would therefore have been primarily, if not entirely, Roman in terms of culture and society. It is not unreasonable to assume that colonies placed by Rome would have been expected to use Latin in official matters, regardless of where the colony was situated, and the advent of a Latin-speaking and Latin-writing colony seems to have influenced the adoption of Latin script in areas where there was heavy Roman colonization, like Umbria.[131] The colonial settlements, first in Italy and later in the western provinces, served as one of the first waves of the spread of Roman culture, initiating contact with indigenous inhabitants and promulgating Latin and other aspects of living under Roman governance.[132] The early Roman poet Ennius, who famously spoke of his multilingualism in Greek, Latin, and Oscan may potentially have learned Latin as a resident of an early Roman colony.[133] The exposure of neighboring indigenous

[128] Lomas 2008, 117
[129] Kaimio 1975, 227
[130] Bradley 2006, 171
[131] Lomas 2008, 119
[132] Kaimio 1975, 99
[133] Adams 2003a, 153

peoples to Roman culture in the areas around a Roman colony was clearly a goal of the process; colonies were not intended to be insular and exclusive of non-Roman inhabitants. This is supported by the evident inclusion of indigenous populations in the colony itself, such as Etruscan and Umbrian populations being incorporated into Roman colonies in northern Italy.[134] While these native populations undoubtedly occupied a subordinate position to the Roman colonists, their inclusion in the colonial process is still remarkable, and demonstrates that the mentality of absorbing foreign peoples into the Roman system, as opposed to destroying and replacing their cultures whole-cloth with Roman culture, was in place even in the early stages of Roman imperialism.[135]

The loss of the indigenous scripts along with their respective languages clearly is not a result of active suppression by the Roman state, but rather a response to cultural change within the societies that had developed those scripts and their interactions with Roman power.[136] Many of these indigenous languages survived for some time after Latin began to be the preeminent language of the region, but they fall noticeably out of use as public prestige languages and become more private, personal ones.[137]

The aim of the discussion that follows is not to attempt to quantify literacy rates or literate production from the Roman occupation of Britain, as that topic has already been widely discussed. In truth, the focus on numerical literacy rates and the characterization of writing as a practice that only the elites engaged in misses out on some other, more important and more

[134] Bradley 2006, 173
[135] Bradley 2006, 179
[136] Lomas 2008, 109
[137] Kaimio 1979, 320

significant features.[138] Rather, this work addresses the contexts in which the people of Roman Britain produced writing, and the symbolic meaning that it held as one of many cultural artifacts brought to the island by the Roman conquerors.

The exhaustive inventory of written material compiled from Britain in the volumes of the *Roman Inscriptions of Britain* series provides a unique opportunity to evaluate all of the many and various types of artifacts associated with writing that existed within the Roman system. The nature of the volumes themselves shows how saturated Roman culture was with writing, and how an average citizen might have experienced the written word and its symbolism. The very functioning of the government was built on literacy and written documents, and even if the levels of literacy were low compared to the modern day, the experience of the average Briton living under Roman governance would have been framed by literate experience. The placement of Latin as a high-status language associated with the military and the civil service, as well as the importance of written documents to that high-status language initiated a self-perpetuating system of the acquisition of Latin and writing skills in an effort to adopt the skills that offered elevated status and efficiency within the Roman system. The expansion of literacy grew out of increased interest in literacy by the governed populace, and the increased use of these skills and their positive side effects then in turn generated more availability and more access, and more interest in acquiring literate skills throughout Roman society.[139] Even in relatively rural areas, there is significant evidence of the functioning of the state stimulating the development of literacy, and Roman Britain can have been no exception.[140] The introduction of a literate culture, especially a flexible literate culture that had been constructed in such a way as to perpetuate itself through the individual agency of its members rather than through direct imposition by its rulers, to an area

[138] Bowman 1991, 119
[139] Hopkins 1991, 135
[140] Hopkins 1991, 156

where no literate culture had previously existed brought about as much significant social and cultural change in Britain as the introduction of Roman government altogether.

Chapter 2: Pre-Roman Britain and Writing

The Roman conquest of Britain in 43 CE, although it represented a significant transformation for the Britons, can hardly be represented as an abrupt and unexpected incursion with no prior contact. Even before Caesar's abortive incursions in 55-54 BCE, the island had long-standing and broad relations with the European continent in general and with the Roman world in particular. The names of the individual ethnic groups on both sides of the channel, many of which are consistent or even identical between northern Gaul and southern Britain speak for themselves, showing that links between the two territories existed almost from their very early beginnings.[141] Archaeological evidence of trade between southern Britain and northern Gaul dates back several thousand years, so the island was already integrated into the complex trading networks of northwestern Europe well before the expansion of the Roman Empire into the area.[142] Periodic movements of populations back and forth across the channel seem to have been the norm, right up until Gaul became a fully Roman possession in the latter half of the first century BCE.[143] Continuity and contact between the peoples of Britain and those of Gaul especially can be traced in a number of different interactions throughout the centuries preceding Roman interest in the island, leading to readily developed avenues for cultural change as Roman influence grew in northwestern Europe. The Romans themselves noted this cultural continuity: Caesar refers many times to the similarities between Gallic and British culture and to direct

[141] Fleuriot 1978, 76
[142] Cunliffe 2004, 1
[143] Cunliffe 1978, 76

political affiliations.[144] Allegiances between the two regions were strong enough in Caesar's time that British territories supplied military aid to the Gauls during Caesar's campaigns.[145] Commius, the military leader and later ruler of the Atrebates, served for a time as an ally of Caesar in Gaul before switching sides at the siege of Alesia.[146] Tacitus also remarks on connections between Gaul and Britain, more than a hundred years after Caesar's observations.[147] It seems as well that the Roman establishment was quick to exploit these preexisting connections between Britain and Gaul in its efforts to expand Roman power north of the channel.

Caesar's conquest of Gaul was a pivotal turning point, even if military conquest of Britain itself would not occur for roughly another hundred years. The treaty relationships established by Caesar offered the proverbial foot in the door to both the Romans (in order to return to Britain in a more imperial capacity in the future) and the native Britons (in order to more fully benefit from the trappings of elite Roman society).[148] In the period between 54 BCE and 43 CE, the importation of Roman luxury goods to Britain intensified in both volume and scope.[149] The unification of Gaul under Roman control stabilized trade throughout the province and beyond, and the resulting economic boom was not restricted to the continent; consumer goods from the Roman world were now much more easily accessible in southern Britain as well.[150] Strabo comments both on the variety of trade routes moving people and goods between the river deltas of Gaul and the British coast in the late first century BCE, and also on the variety

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[144] Caes. *BG* 2.4.7 (Divitiacus of the Suessiones as king of both Gaul and Britan), *BG* 3.8.1 (the Veneti using their ships to sail to and from Britain regularly), *BG* 5.12 (coastal Britain being inhabited by Belgic immigrants), *BG* 6.13 (British origins of the druidic courts in Gaul)
[145] *BG* 3.9.10
[146] *BG* 7.76. Whether these military links were the ultimate reason for Caesar's invasion is debatable; Strabo's description suggests that Caesar had already been planning a venture into Britain in 56 BCE (4.4.1)
[147] Tac. *Agri*. 11
[148] Cunliffe 2004, 6
[149] Cunliffe 1978, 79
[150] Cunliffe 1984, 5

of goods carried by those transports.[151] Dressel 1A and 1B amphorae, associated with Italian vintages of wine, along with Arretine and Samian ware pottery and other Mediterranean consumables like olive oil and *garum*, appear to have been popular in the southern regions of Britain, such that the cultural assemblages of wealthy areas in non-Roman Britain appeared almost indistinguishable from those in similar areas of Roman Gaul.[152] There is even evidence for communities of particularly enterprising Roman or Gallo-Roman traders settling in Britain itself to facilitate the movement of these luxury goods.[153] Through the influx of new goods from Roman Gaul, the elite populations of Britain especially were exposed to some of the trappings of Roman luxury and society, both tangible and intangible, and were evidently quick to embrace them.

The relationship between Britain and Gaul in the mid-first century BCE to the mid-first century CE follows a familiar pattern in the systems of contact between different societies, and is very neatly explained by an interlocking chain of core/periphery interactions that affected the majority of Roman relations with other territories.[154] While this model, like all models of ancient cultural exchange, may oversimplify the full picture to some extent, it is still clear that trade and economic relationships between Rome and Britain were long-standing and had a lasting effect on the formulation of the province in which the Roman Empire arrived in the mid-first century CE.[155] The heartland around Rome related to the province of Gaul along these lines for many years prior to the incorporation of Britain, and a similar system of relations was imposed on Britain by its own interactions with Gaul. Rome imported raw materials and human labor (in the form of slaves and subjects and, to a lesser extent, mercenary soldiers) from Gaul and exported

[151] Strab. 4.1.14, 4.3.4, 4.5.2
[152] Cunliffe 1978, 159
[153] *BG* 7.42 for a community of Roman merchants settling in a native British *oppidum*.
[154] Nash 1984, 93
[155] Burnham 1996, 129

luxury goods and material wealth in return. The core community thereby became synonymous with stores of wealth and prestige, and the exchange of raw materials for finished goods was a hallmark of Roman provincial relations.[156] In the situation of Britain, things were almost identical. Gaul (and by extension Rome), functioned as the stronger core community, relating to Britain as a less-developed periphery community. Gaul imported and forwarded to Rome raw materials and resources from Britain; ore, hides, and bulk agricultural produce and exported to the island a complement of high-status luxury goods. Some of the earliest Classical sources to address trade between Gaul and Britain mention tin ore explicitly, of which Britain had an abundance.[157] Strabo particularly highlights grain, cattle, hides, and raw metal ore as products which were received from Britain, in exchange for ivory, amber, and glass vessels.[158] The Thames valley is especially rich with archeological finds connected to the importation of Italian luxury goods, as is the surrounding countryside of Kent and Essex, to a lesser extent.[159] The local elites of the peripheral community in Britain embraced the luxury goods arriving from the continent, using them to increase their prestige within their own communities. Associating with the wealth and development of the core community increased the status of the peripheral elites, and the expression of this relationship is borne out by the archaeological evidence.

One of the most critical intangible luxury goods that crossed the channel from Gaul was undoubtedly writing. Knowledge of writing and the linguistic landscape of Britain prior to the Roman conquest is necessarily limited by lack of surviving evidence, and confined to secondhand accounts in Classical authors.[160] These one-sided accounts naturally focus more on the Roman and Latin perspective rather than that of the non-Roman peoples involved, and so the

[156] Nash 1984, 94
[157] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 5.1-4
[158] Strab. 4.5.2-3
[159] Cunliffe 1984, 15
[160] Jackson 1953, 31

nature of language contact and language adoption in Britain depends on archaeological evidence more heavily than historical texts.[161] Nevertheless, it is clear that linguistic development in Britain was fostered by the development of trade with Latin-speaking Gaul as much as cultural development in the form of ceramics, foodstuffs, and other goods.[162] The introduction of writing as a concept is easily traced from pre-Roman Britain to Gaul; Julius Caesar mentions the Gauls writing their own languages using Greek letters, and there is widespread evidence from the second century BCE to the first century CE of writing in Gaul, in Greek, Latin, and native Gallic.[163] Coins produced by independent and semi-independent ethnic groups in northern and central Gaul show the use of Greek and especially Latin lettering very strongly, often in preference to the native Gallic scripts from the later second century BCE onwards.[164] Although some northern Gallic coins do show a rare commingling of Greek and Latin legends, the predominant language and script of coins was Latin, creating a clear link between the social prestige of the language and the identities of the ruling families in Gaul in the pre-conquest period.[165] This connection between coins as prestige goods and writing as a necessary component of them, and by extension of elite status display in Celtic communities, was already well-developed by the time Britain inherited it from the greater Roman world. Knowledge of Latin and writing practices clearly increased in Britain (especially in the south and in elite contexts) in the late pre-Roman Iron Age, and a few settlements in southern England have yielded pens, inkwells, and other writing tools.[166]

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[161] Evans 1983, 957
[162] Evans 1983, 954
[163] *BG* 6.14
[164] Allen 1980, 115
[165] Allen 1980, 120
[166] Creighton 2000, 158

While it may be unclear exactly how and when Latin writing arrived in Britain, it was quite readily put to use in the province by the elite strata of society who had the most exposure to Roman luxuries. The most prominent collection of writing from the pre-conquest period in Britain exists in the form of coin legends from the southern dynasties.[167] Coinage as a concept had evidently existed in Britain prior to contact with Rome, as Caesar mentions the Britons using metal as money (both coins and currency bars) in his description of the island.[168] The earliest actual coins that turn up in Britain are those from Belgic Gaul (both copies and originals), likely employed as part of the preexisting social customs of gift-giving, tribute, and elite self-promotion.[169] The coin legends displayed by later British-made coinage are yet another aspect of early British writing which is heavily borrowed from other European Celtic peoples, fitting into the tail end of a Celtic coin-making tradition of roughly two and a half centuries, between the second century BCE and the mid-first century CE.[170] Coin legends are the first public texts produced in Britain, as far as is known, and their importance to the linguistic development of Britain is clear.[171] The texts of these coin legends seem to have arrived as one complete, fully-developed package, in contrast to Gaul where a longer period of development and change can be detected in the formulae, contents, and scripts of the coins.[172] Also in contrast to Gaul, Latin letters were never used to write British words other than personal and place names.[173] Latin therefore represented the only script to ever be used in Britain; whereas in other Celtic areas of

[167] Terminology for these dynasties is problematic, partly due to lack of direct information on the social structure of pre-Roman Britain, and partly due to the relatively short timeframe within which they appear in the archaeological record (between Caesar's invasion and Claudius's conquest). Caesar refers to the rulers of southern Britain as '*reges*' or kings (*BG* 5.22 etc.), but whether this is an accurate description of the role of the ruling families in society or merely Caesar's own interpretation is unclear.
[168] *BG* 5.12.4
[169] Cunliffe 2004, 3
[170] Nash Briggs 1996, 244
[171] Creighton 2000, 165
[172] Creighton 2000, 146
[173] Jackson 1953, 99

Europe like Gaul and Iberia, Latin letters were first adopted to convey in words the local language, and the use of the Latin language in writing followed thereafter. British Celtic was never a written language; Latin and writing arrived on the island inextricably linked, since there was no written British to be replaced by written Latin. In roughly 30 BCE, the first British monarch to use writing on his coins, Commius, had at his disposal a fully developed outlet for literacy on coins, and was well-positioned to take advantage of it as a tool of dynastic power.

Coins and coin legends are another of the artifacts of early Roman influence on Britain that are linked to the network of core-periphery dynamics that shaped Rome and its relations with its allies and dependent territories. Rome, after all, did not invent the idea of using coins as easily-disseminated symbols of power and vectors of globalization. This particular sociopolitical role of coinage, and the tradition of its use to shore up the power of the reigning authority can be traced back to Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic kingdoms that arose from his campaigns. The last quarter of the fourth century BCE saw Alexander's distinctive personal coinage (backed by the material wealth of the recently-conquered Persian Empire) proliferate throughout the Near East in vast quantities, to such an extent that the local coins previously employed in many towns were completely abandoned in favor of the new standard.[174] In addition to emphasizing the wide reach and unfathomable wealth of Alexander's empire, the coins were hugely influential in developing the now-recognizable format that ancient coins followed thereafter: a portrait on one side (usually of the ruler or issuer), another image, perhaps of a deity on the other, and the presence of a written legend describing who was responsible for the production of the coin.[175] Alexander's successors, the rulers of the Hellenistic kingdoms, clearly recognized both the usefulness of widespread dynastic coin dissemination as a tool for cementing their own power

[174] Thoneman 2015, 16
[175] Thoneman 2015, 18

(especially in the context of paying the soldiers necessary to maintaining that power), since most of them continued to mint coins bearing Alexander's portrait for a short time before transitioning to their own imagery, and also the versatility of the basic coin format.[176] The imitation of this format was not strictly limited to the successors of Alexander either: numerous minor rulers, satraps, client kings, and even the rulers of the contemporary Greek city-states adopted this tradition and the connotations of royalty and power it bestowed.[177] The language of coins developed by Alexander and maintained by his successors spread throughout the Near East, and even into the western Mediterranean as well.[178]

Republican Rome, during its period of contact and conflict with the Hellenistic rulers, may not have had the same personally-oriented tradition of coin production intended to glorify one ruling individual, but it still recognized the utility of coins as methods for spreading ideals and sociopolitical discourse in the service of the state. The Roman general Titus Flamininus clearly had no qualms about minting coins in the Hellenistic ruler tradition following his defeat of Phillip V in 197 BCE: a series of gold *staters* bearing his portrait on the obverse and name in Latin on the reverse was a definite imitation of previous Hellenistic coins, replacing the glorification of the monarch with the glorification of the Roman conqueror.[179] The tactic may not have caught on in Rome itself until much later, due to the notoriously anti-monarchical sentiments of the Republican upper-class, but the language and syntax of Hellenistic-style ruler-oriented coins was well-understood even before the age of the Roman emperor and came easily to Roman nation-building. Even though the iconography of early Roman coins replaced the

[176] Thoneman 2015, 23
[177] Thoneman 2015, 160. See especially the coins minted by Areus of Sparta (309-265 BCE), a notable departure from Sparta's coinless Archaic and Classical periods.
[178] The coins minted by the Sicilian tyrant Agathocles are mostly imitations and direct copies of Alexander's types, and Hieron II's coins mimic Ptolemaic issues. (Thoneman 2015, 162-163)
[179] Thoneman 2015, 170

ruler's portrait with one of the goddess Roma, ostensibly to reinforce the state as the highest authority, by the mid-second century BCE, Republican moneyers seemingly could not resist sneaking their own personal names or initials onto the coins and attaching themselves to the prestige of the state coinage. Especially in the later years of the Republic, moneyers often opted to apply not only their names to the coins, but to add details and reverse scenes commemorating themselves or their ancestors.[180] The elevated status of being associated with the production of coinage, even in the capacity of public service to the state, was an important element of social climbing in the Republican period, and one that the moneyers were eager to exploit.

Gallic coins were the closest neighboring examples on which British monarchs could model their coins, and some of the earliest coins to be found in Britain were likely made in northern Gaul and brought over to the island through trade or payment to British mercenaries.[181] Gallic rulers made use of valuable coinage in much the same way as the Mediterranean kings and officials they inherited the tradition from: maintaining elite status through control of precious commodities.[182] Coins were, after all, a convenient and portable source of wealth, as well as being a visible statement of the ability to bestow that wealth on one's friends and dependents. The first-century BCE historian Posidonius notes that the Gallic chieftain Luernius cultivated favor among his subjects by strewing gold and silver coins behind his chariot as he rode.[183]

For the most part, Gallic legends are a complex mishmash of scripts, languages, and naming conventions governed by the cultural milieu of Gaul in the pre-Roman and Roman periods. Greek, Roman, and Lepontic (a dialect of Alpine Gaul and northern Italy) scripts all appear on the coins of Gaul, and in some cases both Greek and Latin letters appear on coins in

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[180] e.g. an issue by Minucius Augurinus in 135 BCE where the reverse depicts a commemorative column honoring his consular ancestor.
[181] Nash 1984, 100
[182] Nash Briggs 1996, 246
[183] Athenaeus, *Deip*. 4.37

order to render a Gallic name.[184] The contents of the coin legends, however, are still relatively uniform: personal names, occasional ethnic or place names, and sometimes an official title.[185] Even with the variety of languages and scripts to hand, the orthography of Gallic coins is in keeping with established traditions from both Hellenistic and Roman coinage. This is not to suggest, however, that Gallic coins were completely slavish copies of Roman ones—the choice of scripts and languages makes it clear that they were not—but rather that Gallic moneyers were operating in a similar pattern of coin-making, governed by similar culturally established rules. It is clear that in the same way that the Gallic coins were adaptations of Roman ones (produced along similar lines but with individual style), British coins inspired by their contact with Gaul were developed along the same lines. Some of the earliest British coinage, the types that may have been imported from Gaul by British merchants or soldiers, owe more to the coin styles and dialects of the Gallic coins than to Roman issues.[186] The first coins that were issued in the names of the late first century BCE British dynasts, however, mark a significant change in coin culture in Britain. It is definitely no coincidence that Commius, a former Roman ally and comrade of Caesar, with experience in the Roman methods of nation-building and power dynamics, was the first British ruler to mint coins on the recognizable Classical pattern. Tincomarus, one of Commius's successors, seems to have embraced Roman-style coin legends even more fully than his predecessor; the imagery of his coins is relatively abstract and stylized compared to the more artistically rendered Roman imagery, but the lettering and the script is meticulously Roman.[187]

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[184] Williams 2001, 7. The Greek letter Θ appears to be a common substitution for a sound in Gallic dialects that the Roman alphabet could not represent.
[185] Williams 2001, 4
[186] Williams 2001, 8. The so-called "Belgic" or "Gallo-Belgic" types of roughly the mid-second century BCE are a notable example.
[187] Williams 2001, 10. Especially the use of the patronymic COM F (*Commi filius*), which is almost contemporary with the appearance of DIVI F (*Divi filius*) on the coins of Augustus.

The major components of the British coin legends are frustratingly limited, consisting only of some varied personal and place names from the southern dynastic territories of southern Britain. The coins therefore follow the established pattern of late Republican and early imperial Roman coinage almost exactly; and though the legends include very little in the way of useful information, their chosen contents and arrangement are still informative.[188] The spellings of the names of the British dynasts do vary considerably over time and between different issues, as well as in comparison to the spellings as presented in Classical authors.[189] The spellings must naturally have been phonetic rather than conventionally established in writing, since the native British languages had no standardized writing systems of their own and therefore no way to consistently render the sounds of Celtic names into written script. The closest to standardized spelling found in names is in Kent, where the names Dubnovellaunus, Eppillus, Ammius, and in rare cases, Cunobelinus, all use the variant ending *–us*, rather than the more common *–os* found in regions further north or in Gaul.[190] This variant has much in common with traditional Latin names, and the use of it in preference to the more British spelling suggests a closer relationship with Roman traditions, and a desire to associate with the Roman style of naming rather than the Celtic style. This would make an obvious statement about the relative prestige of these naming choices to those other elites that had enough experience with Latin script to know the difference. The more Roman spelling choices made by the southeastern rulers of Kent and the Thames region form an interesting contrast with coins issued in the surrounding territories of East Anglia, the Midlands, and Dorset. Coins from these regions often make use of non-Roman scripts and spelling and less standardized orthography and images, in contrast to the classicized coins of the

[188] Williams 2001, 2
[189] Allen 1980, 122
[190] Allen 1980, 124

southeastern kingdoms.[191] Some issues of the Corieltauvi of the East Midlands, which evidently circulated as far north as Yorkshire, are marked with the name ESVPRASV or IISVPRASV, which could certainly not be mistaken for a Romanized name in the slightest.[192] The transliteration of a non-Roman name into Roman script on these issues becomes even more interesting when considering a particular hoard in West Yorkshire, where coins of this type were found commingled with more Roman-looking gold issues of Cunobelinus, suggesting that they circulated at roughly the same time.[193] The choice of whether or not to conform to the established Latin language or to the structure of coin inscriptions was clearly up to the individual, rather than the time period in which the coins were produced. Using Latin script, spelling, and orthography was a choice, and one that was associated very closely with cultural identification, even at this early stage of Roman influence upon the future province of Britain.

The use of Latin as a marker of social prestige was already demonstrable in the elite social strata of Gaul, so these naming conventions would appear to be yet another aspect of Latin and cultural identity that Britain inherited from across the channel. Close relationships between the populations of the two countries necessitated close relationships between their elites, and similar forms of elite status display on both sides of the channel.[194] The archaeological goods being shipped out from northern Gaul to southern Britain demonstrate this clearly. The high-status social strata of both societies were adopting similar displays of prestige goods, one of which was the use of Latin. One of the side effects of the ongoing development of the relations between Gaul, and later Roman Gaul, and the southern regions of Britain in the latter half of the first century BCE was the standardization of language. The British rulers were attempting to

[191] Williams 2001, 12
[192] Williams 2001, 13
[193] Williams 2001, 13. The hoard found in Silsden contained a number of different issues of different rulers, all relatively contemporary, from the first half of the first century CE.
[194] Burnham 1996, 131

convey their status to each other and to their Gallic and Roman counterparts using the same elements of display, one of which was writing. They all were drawn to using the same written language, Latin, because it already carried connotations of status and power through the luxury goods and wealth that its parent civilization provided, and if the dynastic rulers of Britain were going to communicate effectively with their peers, they needed to use the same high-status language.[195]

The coins, in effect, functioned as an outward display of the issuing ruler's association with the prestige and power attendant upon the Latin language, and the method by which the ruler's own elevated social status would be communicated around his domain. The importation and consumption of luxury goods and foods was limited, but coins with writing traveled farther through a broader cross-section of the population, and therefore made a more demonstrative statement of the ruler's identity and dynastic status.[196] The British rulers were using the coins in a similar way to how they were originally used in Roman contexts: as distributable symbols of the issuing authority's power. The use in many dynastic kingdoms of a tripartite gold, silver, and bronze coinage reinforces this association: the tri-metallic coinage was a direct imitation of Roman coins, issued in precious and base metals from 23 BCE onwards.[197] Writing was inherently tied to that power display, both as an inextricable element of 'proper' coinage, and as a further demonstration of the commissioner's grasp of the high-status language and communication method. The formatting of the coins and legends themselves also closely followed pre-established Roman patterns, in contrast to the coins of continental Celtic societies.[198] The first issues of coins in the late first century BCE were limited to the name of the

[195] Creighton 2000, 160
[196] Creighton 2000, 164
[197] Morris 2013, 61
[198] Allen 1980 129

issuer alone, but the complexity of the inscriptions developed quickly and formulaically within the pattern of legends found on Roman coins.[199] The inclusion of the patronymic and the abbreviation 'f' for '*filius*' in British dynastic coins, and the identification of particular towns as mint marks are uniquely found in British coins, as opposed to Gallic or Iberian coins where such Romanized language is rare.[200] The amount of information included in the inscriptions also increased quickly, within two or three generations. Including the name of the issuer, his patronymic, and the place-name of the mint on one coin condensed three different ideas into a small package, as opposed to a single idea or association. The issuer was therefore not only expecting people to be familiar with him and his family's prestige, but also with the whole idea of a coin as a method for communicating a range of ideas and concepts.[201] Not only was writing being utilized as a status symbol, but it also carries a whole system of cultural allusions through the use of writing on publicly-issued documents. The fact that this assumption of understanding, both of the language, script, and communication dynamic was demonstrated on coins of just two or three generations from the beginning of Roman influence on the province, shows that the British dynasts were willing and eager to adopt the Roman cultural practices that they saw as useful, and that these practices were being actively spread throughout southern and central Britain even before the official invasion.

The question of just how many people living in the dynastic kingdoms were actually able to read and understand these legends is often raised in discussions of their sociopolitical function in British culture. The fact that inscriptions were being used on coins is not necessarily an indication that literacy was widespread, certainly not as early in the linguistic development of

[199] Creighton 2000, 164
[200] Allen 1980, 130
[201] Creighton 2000, 165

Britain as the coins appear.[202] Some minor evidence of writing, such as ceramic graffiti, a few styli, and one inkwell has been dated to the pre-conquest period between the production dates of the first coins in roughly 40-30 BCE and around 10 BCE, so writing was clearly not limited only to the central core towns of the monarchs or to their coin legends.[203] This relatively small corpus of material, however, is limited to a few sites in southern Britain and so it is difficult to assume that it represents a substantial literate population. While the legends themselves may not have been very complicated in terms of their literary content, the novelty of writing and of a foreign language definitely limited the audience which could properly understand their meaning and significance. But understanding of the content is not the only benefit to be found in the use of writing in public contexts. Writing as a method of elite status display among the dynastic leaders of Gaul and Britain is well-attested, and the use of written legends on the coins served not only to communicate the ideas contained within it, but also to emphasize to the people who saw the letters that the issuer of the coin had access to high-status goods and skills. This in turn emphasized the divisions in social status; those who could read the coins knew the dynastic messages of them, and those who could not saw the letters as further indications of their lower status compared to the issuers.[204] To the readers, the coin issuer was communicating the information of the script, and to the non-readers, he was communicating writing as a tool of the wealthy, and that access to writing gave access to other luxuries as well.[205] Literacy was thereby introduced to the people of pre-Roman Britain as not only a tool for storing and disseminating information, but also a way of signifying one's membership in the upper classes of society.[206]

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[202] Allen 1980, 107
[203] Williams 2001, 5. Graffiti from Colchester and Skeleton Green, styli from Hertfordshire and Silchester, and an ink-pot from Stanway near Colchester
[204] Creighton 2000, 166
[205] Allen 1980, 107
[206] Creighton 2000, 173

This dual symbolism was critical to the uptake of writing during the Roman period. In essence, the question of how widespread literacy in Latin script was in Britain in the pre-conquest period is immaterial to the role played by the dynastic coins in the proliferation of Latin writing within Britain in later centuries. The coins were a visible symbol of the power held by the dynasts, politically, economically, and socially. The presence of the legend, whether it could be read or not, reinforced the fact that writing came with the trappings of power, and offered access to it through a new form of expression. Even if the letters could not be understood by the average Briton, the intention behind them and the goals represented by them could.

The distributions of the coins around the traditional dynastic territories further support the idea of their role in displaying literacy as a tool of power and status. In keeping with the debt Britain owed to Gaul in terms of contact with writing, the use of coins to reinforce and spread different messages to different groups or regions appears similar in both provinces. In northwestern Gaul and southwestern Britain, areas which were closely linked by trade and culture, the distribution of coins appears to be governed by similar factors, and displays similar deposition patterns limited to well-defined and centralized geographic areas.[207] The patterns in northeastern Gaul and southeastern Britain are likewise similar to each other and different from those of northwestern Gaul and southwestern Britain; with coins traveling further afield and spreading more widely.[208]

Traditional models of coin distribution in Britain have assigned the deposition patterns of dynastic coins to different 'tribal' areas similar to those mentioned in classical literary accounts, limiting the use of coins to local areas and smaller groups of people.[209] More recent analysis, however, taking the political and display functions of the coins into account, reveals a more

[207] Nash 1984, 98
[208] Nash 1984, 100
[209] Morris 2013, 45

nuanced and complex picture of coin distribution based on communication and dynastic legitimization. This is not to say that regional territories played no role in the agenda of the coins and their distribution; the areas of circulation for many types of both precious and base metal coinage do seem to broadly correspond to the areas traditionally identified as tribal lands in the classical sources.[210] Geographic region is simply not the only criterion governing the usage of the coins and their legends. This is demonstrated by the coins themselves: Cunobelinus's coinage made use of different legends within the same territory controlled by his family dynasty, depending on what was being communicated to the people of different places in his domain. In the eastern part of Cunobelinus's kingdom, the abbreviated name of Camulodunum is an important component of both precious and base metal coinage.[211] Through the use of the site in the legends of gold coinage, with a wide circulation rate and broad distribution, Cunobelinus acknowledges the significance of the site to southern Britain as a whole, whereas with the bronze coins with a more limited circulation, he emphasizes its regional significance to the eastern part of the territory under his control. Cunobelinus's connection to Camulodunum is communicated in both his 'home turf', so to speak, and in a more globalized way within the same territorial region. Cunobelinus's relationship to the previous ruler, his father Tasciovanus, is similarly deployed in coin legends in the western part of the kingdom, thereby legitimizing his right to succeed his father as ruler of the region.[212]

Writing in pre-Roman Britain may be mostly confined to coin legends, but the prevalence of the Latin language also seems to have affected the pre-existing British languages in lasting

[210] Morris 2013, 48
[211] Morris 2013, 53
[212] Morris 2013, 54

ways.[213] The lack of written British should not be taken as evidence that the language died out, however; writing was simply not an element of the British linguistic landscape, and so the majority of surviving writing is represented by Latin.[214] As Jackson puts it, it would not have occurred to any native British speaker to attempt to write in British, and there was likewise no method in place to do this even if so desired.[215] The pre-Roman British languages likely survived mainly as forms of oral communication, in contrast to the native languages of continental Europe, which were almost completely subsumed into Latin during the Roman period.[216] Gaul especially, despite its unique relationship with Britain in the early pre- and post-conquest periods, lost its native non-Roman languages by the fourth century CE; and the only remaining speakers of one dialect were likely British immigrants from the island.[217] Perhaps the relatively lower level and shorter duration of contact with the Roman system gave the British languages more leeway to survive through the occupation period. Whatever the reason, it is clear that the non-Latin languages of Britain were coexisting quite well with Latin even if they themselves were not written, so it is probably not surprising that they survive through the Roman period to become the spoken languages of the sub-Roman period, and by extension, the modern-day languages of Welsh, Cornish, and Breton.[218] The non-Roman British languages were probably considered less prestigious than Latin, as they carried fewer connotations of status and power and were therefore not put to use in any kind of lasting monumental writing, but they were by no means erased.[219]

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[213] Evans 1983 963
[214] Evans 1983, 978
[215] Jackson 1953, 100
[216] Evans 1983, 981
[217] Wild 1970, 126
[218] Creighton 2000, 147
[219] Evans 1983, 979

The Romanization of the British languages is well-established, as may be expected alongside the sweeping changes made to the more general culture of Britain as a result of Roman occupation.[220] The transfer of words from Latin to the British languages is also not limited to place names. The surviving British languages also seem to have picked up a number of everyday words from the Roman occupation.[221] Roughly 1,000 Latin loanwords seem to have been incorporated into the Celtic languages of Britain, and survived through into the medieval and modern iterations of these languages.[222] Likewise, loanwords from the Celtic languages seem to have been borrowed by Latin, albeit in much smaller numbers, roughly 150 compared to over 1,000.[223] Even the Romans themselves were not unaware of this phenomenon: Pliny comments on it briefly in the context of wool-processing in Gaul and the origin of the Latin term for 'cushion' or 'mattress', *tomentum* a word he claims is of Gallic origin.[224]

Pliny's commment in particular has sparked academic discussion in that it seems to acknowledge that objects could be borrowed along with their loanwords. The types of loanwords acquired from Celtic languages by Latin would seem to bear out this hypothesis, as they pertain to specific objects like Pliny's cushions: vehicles (*essedum*, 'war-chariot' and *petorritum*, 'four-wheeled wagon') and types of clothing (*birrus*, 'hooded cloak' and *sagus*, 'tunic') are common.[225] This makes sense in that the word for an object which does not exist in a given culture must also be borrowed if that object is to be used in the new culture, but it is still a significant statement about the nature of language exchange in the Roman world. The adoption of Latin loanwords into British Celtic languages would really only be necessary if the adopted

[220] Evans 1983, 967
[221] Jackson 1953, 76
[222] Mullen 2016, 577
[223] Mullen 2016, 578
[224] *HN* 8.73.192
[225] Mullen 2016, 578. These words were almost certainly acquired from continental Celtic languages rather than British ones, however.

object was itself new, since the British language would have no word for it, and useful, since otherwise, there would be no need to adopt either the object or the word.[226] Further, the establishment of Latin as the language of prestige was more likely to encourage these adoptions, as lower-status languages tend to rely on higher-status languages to fill lexical gaps, especially in fields where the civilization associated with the higher-status language is technologically innovative or superior.[227]

Latin words for building and construction are particularly susceptible to this type of borrowing in Britain, as are words pertaining to education.[228] Jackson identifies roughly 28 education-related Latin words borrowed by the British languages, 11 of which, interestingly, pertain to literature, writing, or other associated concepts.[229] The example of Medieval Welsh is most striking: here the collection of Latin loanwords that can be identified all seem to involve writing. The Welsh words *agwyddor* (alphabet), *gramadeg* (grammar), *papur* (paper), and *ysgriffenu* (to write) all have close associations to similar words in Latin.[230] The introduction of such words into the British languages, in addition to being purposeful additions describing items and concepts that did not previously exist, also carried some social connotations. The adoption of loanwords emphasizes the change in language and the relationships between languages in the vocabulary itself, and the social implications of using a Latin word in a native British language would call attention to the new term and the language it was borrowed from.[231] The effect is not only to introduce a new word, but to establish the fitness of one language over the other for discussing certain items and concepts. Latin was more preferred for discussing writing and

[226] Wild 1970, 129
[227] Evans 1983, 971
[228] Evans 1983, 968
[229] Jackson 1953, 77
[230] Evans 1983, 968
[231] Wild 1970, 127

literacy education than British, and so Latin loanwords made their way into the British languages in those contexts.

The origins of the Latin language and writing in Britain may be obscure, but the development of the language within the province once it had been adopted is hardly so. Britain in the imperial period produced a vast quantity of written documents, monuments, and records, a collection all the more remarkable for the relatively short timeframe of its creation and the completeness with which the necessary skills overtook British society. This collection of writing comes from a province which had a multitude of different applications for writing and a diverse population that deployed writing skills in different ways according to their individual needs and the statements they desired to make. Mattingly proposes that the province of Britain and its adaptation to Roman culture should be considered in the context of three different communities: military, urban, and rural, all of which had different levels of contact with Roman culture and different approaches to adopting its elements.[232] This tripartite division applies equally well to writing and Latin as to any other element of the Roman cultural package. The military community, an omnipresent force in the province, was most closely associated with Roman culture, as might be expected, and the influence of Latin and Roman literary culture would be most strongly felt in this sector of the province.[233] The municipal centers and towns would also have close ties to Romanitas, and evidence from these towns and their surroundings suggests that people were making an effort to learn Latin and writing; there are a number of examples of writing practice, such as a graffito found in Silchester comprised of part of a line from the

[232] Mattingly 2006, 18
[233] Evans 1983, 976

Aeneid.[234] Evidence for the rural areas of Britain is less concrete, there are fewer permanent monuments and written documents to be found in the hinterland communities outside towns and military establishments, but there are indications that people in the rural community were interested in using writing for their own purposes. The varying goals and commitments of people in all three of these areas contributed to the complex literary tapestry of Britain discussed in the following chapters, and there is still a wealth of cultural information to be gleaned from examining the documents they left behind.

[234] Evans 1983, 977

Chapter 3: Writing and the Roman Military

The military community in Roman Britain encompasses not just the active-duty soldiers, but also retired veterans, and military families. This community in general seems to be highly literate, as evidenced by the collections of military documents that form the majority of non-monumental writing samples in Roman Britain. This is not surprising, as its efficacy as a fighting force depended on clear and consistent communication. Britain was one of the most heavily and consistently garrisoned provinces in the Roman world; 10-12% of the entire standing military strength of the Roman Empire was stationed in a province accounting for 4% of its territory.[235] Even though this community of soldiers may have been a relatively small group compared to the entire population of Britain, its impact was huge.[236] The army was highly visible, ubiquitous, well-paid, technologically advanced, privileged in ways that provincials were not, and possessed of the elevated power and status that accompanies a conquering military force. The development of garrison towns, or *vici*, that developed around military installations across Britain demonstrate the impact that the military presence had on the growth of settlements, and the changes that military demand and culture wrought on the province as a whole. Latin was the operating language of the Roman Empire, especially of the military administration, and in a province as heavily-militarized as Britain, written Latin was necessarily closely associated with the imperial government and Roman cultural identity in Britain. Because of this close association, studying the contexts in which writing was used as self-expression in the military community can illustrate the contexts in which non-Latin-speaking inhabitants of the province may have been exposed to the language and to writing. The movements of the military led to the movement of

[235] Mattingly 2007, 166
[236] Estimates vary, but roughly 55,000 men is taken as an approximate figure for the total number of soldiers in Britain, amounting to less than 3% of the total population (Mattingly 2006, 166)

Latin and written documentation around the province, and the dedication of altars and monumental inscriptions by military units further reinforced the use of writing as a tool for demonstrating one's identity as a member of the commanding classes of Britain. The effect of this highly literate military community on language acquisition throughout the province makes the question of the cultural aspects of writing even more interesting; Adams characterizes the army as the most important factor in the spread of the Latin language to other provinces and in the learning of Latin by native speakers of other languages, and this must certainly have been the case in Britain as well.[237] As the community with the highest level of contact with the Roman imperial system and central government of the three communities studied, the military community (composed of both official military outposts and the civilian settlements which sometimes surrounded and supported them) is an important factor in the spread of language and literacy, as well as a source of the cultural applications of writing.

Latin is often characterized as the predominant operating language of the army, and this certainly seems to be the case for the western provinces in general and for Britain in particular. Loyalty oaths were sworn in Latin, commands were given in Latin, and official documents were produced in Latin.[238] Adams counters the idea of Latin as official by demonstrating that Greek was often used in official capacities in the eastern provinces, but this model would be less applicable to Britain, where Greek was not commonly used in any official capacity.[239] The army was demonstrably polyglot, as speakers of multiple different native languages were incorporated into the army, so too were their languages; though Latin functioned as a *lingua franca* among the soldiers, facilitating communication and enabling the army to function as a coherent unit despite

[237] Adams 2003a, 761
[238] Mattingly 2007,199
[239] Adams 2003a, 599

its cosmopolitanism.[240] There is ample evidence of native speakers of other languages learning Latin as part of their service in the army, while at the same time retaining their native languages.[241] Latin, as the tool that allowed these soldiers from multiple different language backgrounds to work effectively together in a military unit, became closely associated with military identity, and the use of Latin underlines the user's status as a member of the military community, especially in instances where his own native language is different.[242] The ethnic names of units stationed in Britain point to origins all over the empire, and so, at least at first, the soldiers serving in Britain would have had little to unite them other than their identities as members of the Roman army.[243] Latin, as a keystone of that cultural identity, linked the soldiers under the aegis of Rome, despite their diverse origins. Even if, as is likely, the ethnic composition of the units became less distinct over time as new recruits were drawn from Britain itself rather than from other far-flung territories, Latin still functioned as a strong tie to the military community and all that it represented.

[240] Hingley 2005, 98
[241] Adams 2003a, 760
[242] Adams 2003a, 760
[243] Mattingly 2007, 168. Most of the units seem to originate in Gaul, Germania, and Hispania, with a few units hailing from further afield in Africa and the Danubian and eastern provinces.

Documents and the Roman Army:

Documents and literary bureaucracy followed a Roman soldier almost from the moment he enlisted. The Roman establishment kept track of its vast numbers of soldiers spread throughout the empire by a highly organized system of military records. New recruits were entered into the lists of both the military more generally and of the individual unit once they had been assigned to one.[244] Vegetius refers to these rolls both in the context of training new recruits and as a more general form of military recordkeeping.[245] A recruit might see the names of previous owners on his issued equipment, scratched into the metal itself or affixed with small metal tags.[246] Daily and yearly and other interim reports were collated that numbered all members of the unit both present and absent, to what duties they had been assigned, and any casualties suffered by the unit since the last report.[247] Military pay stubs were issued three times a year, noting the soldier's total owed salary and any deductions that had been made for his gear, food, clothing, and other supplies.[248] A soldier also had to submit written requests for leave, and probably received written confirmation that it had been granted, and for how long he was permitted to be away.[249] If a soldier died during his term of service, the military recorded his death; if he survived, he would be issued official documentation of his completed service upon discharge.[250] Even if the average Roman soldier never interacted with any of these record-

[244] Pliny's letters contain references to this process (*Epist*. 10. 29-30), and *RMR* 87 (a letter from the governor naming six recruits to be enrolled) and *RMR* 1 (a roster of the Cohors XX Palmyrenorum. From Dura Europos) further document the enrollment of new recruits.
[245] *De Re Mil*. 1.26, 2.5, 2.7. See also 3.25 for the suggestion that these lists could be regularly updated
[246] Tomlin 2011, 144
[247] *Renuntia* (daily reports) and *pridiana* (yearly reports) are the most common forms of these rosters, though the terms are assigned by modern scholars, and Romans soldiers may not have known them as such.
[248] Tomlin 2011, 142. The army in Britain would have produced roughly 20,000,000 of these documents over the course of the occupation, and *Tab. Vindol*.1.154 refers to soldiers being sent to collect the payroll from York.
[249] *Tab. Vindo*l. 2.166-177 for requests, and *O. Florida* 1 for a confirmation
[250] e.g. *RMR* 34 for a list of dead from the Legio III Cyrenaica (115-117 CE), *RMR* 8 for a similar record from the Cohors XX Palmyrenorum (222-228 CE), and *RMR* 63 for the Cohors I Hispanorum veteranae (c. 100-105 CE)

keeping procedures or documents himself, the pervasiveness of written records dominated his service within the Roman military bureaucracy.

Polybius notes the importance of documents to even as quotidian a task as assigning the watchwords for nighttime guard duty. The chosen phrase is distributed by the unit commander to a selected few soldiers by means of written tablets which circulate through the ranks back to the commander.[251] The tablets thus serve not only as documentation of the proper password, but also as a means of tracking its disbursement and ensuring that all soldiers assigned to guard duty knew the correct words: once all the distributed tablets had arrived back to the commander's tent, he could be certain that they had been passed around satisfactorily. It is worth noting that Polybius is describing the bivouacking procedures of the Republican army, a few hundred years prior to the permanent military forts of Roman Britain.[252] The uniform shape and arrangement of the military forts in Britain suggest that the permanent outposts followed Polybius's outline of entrenchment and camp geography very closely, however, and so perhaps the differences in structure and camp life were not as pronounced as the time difference would lead one to believe. This particular practice shows the microcosm of literacy in the military, and how a soldier's daily life would be ruled by it. While it would be unlikely that every single man would be expected to read the word himself (the tablet may simply have been intended to ensure that the designated men remembered the word correctly and that it was passed on in a regular manner), this scene still reinforces the ubiquity of the written word within the army and its necessity for military operations.

The sheer volume of documents that must have been generated by this bureaucratic system certainly required dedicated personnel who could organize, catalog, and compile them for

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[251] *Hist.* 6.34.7-12

[252] Polybius covers c. 264-146 BCE, versus the 1st-4th century CE army of Britain

use. In light of this omnipresent need for literate clerks to operate the various administrative departments of the military, Vegetius recommends recruiting new soldiers who could read and write and do math for service in these offices.[253] An inscription from the legionary fortress at Lambaesis in modern-day Algeria records the membership of 44 individuals in a *collegium*, or professional association, of military clerks.[254] The actual number of clerks working within a given legion may be higher than this, as membership in the Lambaesis collegium was voluntary, and there may have been other clerical workers who were not members.[255] In addition to other technical professions, soldiers who were literate or had experience in clerical work were considered *immunes*, to be exempted from regular duties if they could work in the clerks' offices.[256] This does not mean, however, that the clerical grades were completely removed from actual military service; on the contrary, administrative personnel were often assigned to other military or civilian tasks outside the clerks' office.[257] During the peak of the empire's power, clerks could be promoted to *signifer*, *optio*, or centurion, among other posts, and so were probably kept integrated into the unit and expected to maintain their combat readiness.[258] In Britain, there is at least one example of a soldier being promoted from *cornicularius*, or head clerk, to commanding tribune of a unit.[259] It is not unreasonable to imagine that the literate soldiers serving as clerks and accountants would be intermingled with their comrades rather than segregated in a specific bureaucratic headquarters. Access to literacy would have been scattered throughout a given unit, and found at multiple levels of the army's organizational structure.

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[253] *De Re Mil*. 2.19. The word "notae" as used here to refer to writing is a bit ambiguous; it may mean generally normal letters or written characters, or more specifically a specialized military shorthand or cipher.
[254] *ILS* 9100
[255] Phang 2011, 296
[256] Phang 2011, 296
[257] Phang 2011, 297
[258] Phang 2011, 296. It is only in the third century CE that clerical posts begin to be segregated from the ordinary military command and promotion structure into their own separate career track.
[259] *RIB* 989

Education and literacy were highly prized skills in the army, offering not only more respectable duties but also an avenue to climb in the ranks. Apion, a new recruit to the fleet in Egypt, writes to his father of his hopes that his middle-class literate education will give him an opportunity for a quick promotion.[260]

Ascending in the ranks and acquiring favorable assignments and postings from one's commanding officers also necessitated a proper level of literacy and grasp of literary culture.[261] Letters of recommendation seem to have been a common aspect of military literate culture, whether in reference to a recruit's preferred posting, transfer to another unit, or possible promotion. and several examples of such letters have been found across the empire.[262] These letters are relatively technically complex, with a required precise, polite phraseology that necessitated a higher level of literate mastery than the average military document. Because these letters were often directed to high-ranking officials of the senatorial and equestrian upper-class, the letter writer needed to communicate with them along the same advanced literary lines that governed elite interpersonal relations. Within the military community itself, then, the elevated status conferred by an advanced command of written language and complicated grammar was reinforced, and recognized by the soldiers themselves. Letters written by Cerialis, the commander at Vindolanda, show that he wrote multiple drafts of correspondence in order to perfect the phrasing.[263] This attention to exacting literary detail becomes more notable in light of the fact that Cerialis himself was a native Batavian from the lower Rhine, and not an ethnic Italian Roman. He is still a societal elite, a member of the equestrian class and a military officer,

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[260] *BGU* 2.423
[261] Phang 2011, 300
[262] e.g. P. Oxy 32, *P. Ryl* 608 & 623, *P. Berl* 11649, *P. Hib*. 276, *P. Strasb*. 1.36, *Tab. Vindol*. 2.250 & 2.225
[263] e.g. *Tab. Vindol*. 2.231 & 2.232, with evidence of deleted words and phrases. A probable literary reference to Virgil's *Aeneid* (*interea pauidam uolitans pinnata per urbem*, 9.473) appears in another fragment, though this may be more appropriately attributed to Cerialis's children and their writing practice. (*Tab. Vindol.* 2.118)

but is himself of provincial origins, like many of the soldiers producing documents at Vindolanda.

The devotion both to literate communication and to elite literary culture evinced by Cerialis's letters shows the readiness with which provincial elites would take up Latin writing both as a means to achieve high status within the Roman system and as a means to maintain it. Cerialis embraces Latin writing and its conventions and an important element of not just his military identity, but of his Roman identity as well. This attention to written communication seems to have extended to other members of Cerialis's family as well: two letters addressed to his wife Sulpicia Lepidina by Claudia Severa, wife of the commander at the neighboring outpost of Briga, are composed in eloquent Latin.[264] Even civilians wishing to communicate or otherwise interact with the military establishment needed to be literate, either in an economic capacity as a supplier or merchant, or in appealing to military commanders for justice in resolving offences committed by soldiers.[265]

The script that appears with remarkable consistency in imperial documents in Latin from the eastern provinces all the way west to Britain, Old Roman Cursive, attests to the uniformity of literacy skills that were expected in the Roman army.[266] A literate soldier was expected to be able to recognize the writing and read it no matter whether he was in Syria or Sussex. Even soldiers who were only basically literate or illiterate had to operate within a system governed by the importance of written documents.[267] Illiterate soldiers or those with only a faint grasp of reading and writing were still expected to engage with military documentation on a regular basis.

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[264] *Tab. Vindol*. 2.291 & 2.292
[265] *Tab.Vindol*. 2.343, one of the longest and best-preserved texts, discusses grain and hides to be purchased, perhaps on behalf of the military, while *Tab. Vindol*. 2.344 & 2.322 both appear to be fragmentary appeals letters to a high-ranking official in reference to military abuses.
[266] Mattingly 2001, 201
[267] Mattingly 2007, 201

A collection of papyri from Egypt, albeit written in the more Eastern-oriented Greek language, show cavalrymen receiving written receipts for hay money, and even the ones who cannot write must get the assistance of their literate comrades to obtain their proper receipts and document their purchase.[268] The literate are distinguished in the accounts by formulaic phrases indicating whether they wrote for themselves or on behalf of an illiterate comrade.[269] Although this distinction may have been intended mainly for record-keeping purposes, it still confers a special status on the writers, as they represent only one-third of the named men, compared to two-thirds who cannot write for themselves. The writers can interact with the military bureaucracy more easily than the non-writers, they can obtain their resources on their own without help, and they can navigate the documentary process of what would have been a regular occurrence in military life, i.e. the purchase of necessary rations or supplies. The usefulness of literacy and the requirements for it that were built into daily life in the military must have been impressed on the illiterate cavalrymen who had to ask their more educated comrades for writing assistance.

The association of Latin literacy with the military establishment is further emphasized by the collections of wooden writing tablets that have illuminated the importance of written records and communication to the military operations of Britain. Literacy was critically important to the army's efficiency and success, as written communication enabled it to maintain control over large areas of territory with limited manpower.[270] The sheer volume of documentation produced by the military, from daily duty rosters to pay stubs, accounting ledgers, and personal correspondence, is evidence of the wide range of contexts in which literacy was necessary in the

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[268] *P.Hamb.* 1.39

[269] "I (*name & unit designation*) have written for them (*the man for whom the receipt is being issued*) on request because of their not knowing how to write." Some of the soldier seem to be basically literate, as in one instance of the formula "because of (*name*) writing slowly" (*P Hamb*. 1.39.33), i.e. not expertly enough to complete the entire receipt himself, only to sign it with his name at the end.

[270] Bowman 1994, 24

military system. The army of Britain, a relatively distant province with its comparatively recent introduction of writing, must have produced tens of millions of individual documents throughout the period of the Roman occupation.[271] Writing was evidently not limited to the upper echelons of military society either; the tablets from Vindolanda demonstrate evidence of several hundred different handwritings, most notably in the requests for leave written by rank-and-file soldiers themselves.[272] In contrast to the standard practice in Egypt, for example, where a pre-written request would simply be filled in with the soldier's name and unit, the requests from Vindolanda all appear to have been written out in full, whether by the soldier himself or by someone writing on his behalf, though notably, the tablets do not preserve similar attestations of one man writing in place of another, as in the Egyptian grain receipts.[273] Differing handwritings in the few reports that have survived indicate that the *optiones* of each unit might have written the reports out themselves rather than just filling in and signing a premade form.[274] Even at a distant outpost of the empire in northern Britain, a relatively advanced literate competence was on display, associated closely with the soldiers that garrisoned the frontier.

The technology of the tablets themselves is as interesting as the writing they contain; production of the thin leaves of wood used in place of papyrus in Britain was seemingly simple and widespread in the Roman world.[275] It is not unreasonable, therefore, to suppose that, although the majority of the wooden tablet documents that survive relate to the military establishment, access to similar tablets for writing by non-military people would not have been restricted by their availability or cost. This impression is strengthened by the numbers of draft documents and discarded copies that appear in the Vindolanda archive: surely if the tablets were

[271] Mattingly 2007, 200
[272] Mattingly 2007, 201
[273] Bowman 1994, 88
[274] Bowman 1994, 88. Approximately 27 different hands have been identified among the *renuntia* that survive.
[275] Hingley 2005, 99

costly or difficult to obtain, the writers would not have used them so cavalierly. Indeed, the number of letters addressed to Vindolanda and originating elsewhere seems to suggest that such writing tablets were commonplace, and that they were available for personal as well as official use. A collection of military writing tablets roughly contemporary with the Vindolanda material (though smaller in quantity and less well-preserved) has been found at the important outpost at Carlisle, suggesting that the use of these ink-written wooden leaves was a standard means of communication in the frontier region.[276]

Considering the fairly small percentage of official military communication represented by the surviving Vindolanda tablets, it is perhaps possible to extrapolate the amount of correspondence being written on similar wooden tablets throughout the province as being much larger than it currently appears; and therefore to suppose that literacy and written communication may have been more widespread than the archaeological material would seem to suggest. Looking beyond the tablets themselves to the other small finds of Vindolanda confirms this possibility; writing is found almost everywhere in the material culture of the garrison. Personal names have been added to ceramics, knives, and other personal possessions, jewelry, seals, metalware, cooking utensils, leather goods, and even wooden barrel staves and lids were all marked in some way or another with Latin writing.[277] Writing was everywhere in Vindolanda, and the rest of the forts in Britain can have been no different. No matter where a Roman soldier in Britain looked during his duties, even at his daily bread, there would be words there.[278]

The ubiquity of written documents and the multiple different areas in which they were put to use in Britain takes on another interesting aspect when considering the provincial origins

[276] See Tomlin 1998.
[277] Mattingly 2007, 203
[278] Two lead stamps from Caerleon and one from Chester attest to the practice of stamping bread with century designations, presumably to keep a unit's bread ration organized during baking. A corresponding stamp on a carbonized loaf from Herculaneum shows that this was a fairly common Roman practice.

of many of the serving soldiers at Vindolanda in particular and in Britain more generally. As mentioned above, Cerialis and the soldiers stationed at Vindolanda were auxiliaries from the region of the *civitas Batavorum* in the Netherlands, not legionaries and not ethnically Italian. Given their differing cultural background, it might be expected that Batavian soldiers had differing approaches to literacy and documents. Archaeological evidence, however, suggests that the people in the area embraced Roman ideas of literacy and documentation more fully than their neighbors did. Monumental inscriptions from Batavian territory greatly outnumber inscriptions from neighboring areas, though whether this is due entirely to differing perceptions of literacy or to a combination of literacy and other factors remains to be conclusively determined.[279] Besides the evidence of monumental inscriptions, other implements associated with writing seem to attest to the value of literacy and document production in the area. Small metal seal boxes, casings used to protect the wax seals affixed to folding *stilus* tablets, have been found on a variety of sites both military and civilian, and on rural sites as well as urban.[280] It would seem that sealed documents were regularly circulating around the Batavian countryside, perhaps as correspondence between Batavian soldiers stationed elsewhere in the Roman world and their friends and relatives at home. The Batavians contributed large numbers of auxiliary soldiers and units to the Roman military, in addition to being another heavily garrisoned part of the northern Roman frontier.[281] Whether Cerialis and his fellows at Vindolanda learned how to write and the value of producing documents at home before beginning their military careers or whether they acquired their literacy skills as part of their military service is unclear, but it appears at least in this instance, fellow provincials from elsewhere in the Roman empire made up a large proportion of the literate military population in Britain.

[279] Derks & Roymans 2002, 89
[280] Derks & Roymans 2002, 96
[281] Derks & Roymans 2002, 88

The Vindolanda tablets and other collections of military documents from the province, while they do represent a useful index of literacy in the military ranks and its critical importance to military effectiveness, circulated mainly within the close community of the military establishment. These were internal records meant for the use of the garrison only, or occasionally personal communications between members of the community that accepted the importance of writing as a given, and had embraced it fully as both a tool for communication and as an intrinsic element of the social context in which they were operating. These documents were unlikely to circulate far outside the military sphere of influence, and as such would have had less of an impact on the non-Latin-speaking non-literate members of British society. In order to examine the sociocultural applications of writing in depth, it is necessary to delineate writing from contexts with sociocultural bases from writing intended to serve a mainly communicative or record-keeping purpose. The writing tablets, with their limited circulation, represent functional writing intended mainly for communicative purposes, and while they are important evidence of how inextricably linked the military sphere and writing were, they are not as strong of an indicator of cultural identity as other examples of writing from the military community. Writing in the military community was more than simply a tool by which the system could function; it was an important element of being associated with the Roman ruling infrastructure.

Some military documents, however, did have a role outside of the military community, and represented further the inseparability of writing from military identity. Perhaps the most influential of these was the military diploma, a soldier's personal copy of the legal text in Rome that granted citizenship to himself and his descendants.[282] A few examples, whole or fragmentary, of diplomas survive from British contexts, issued to auxiliary soldiers serving in Britain: a total of twelve from within the province, and a further two found in continental Europe

[282] Tomlin 2011, 144

that have been linked to soldiers from Britain who may have emigrated after completing their service.[283] They are especially significant in considering how military service and the associated literacy skills developed during that time offered new opportunities for social advancement once a soldier had left the military. Because these documents were issued to non-citizen auxiliaries, they represent not just proof that a soldier had completed his service as the law required, but also that he had been granted a number of new privileges and a new role in society as a result of his service to the state. Diplomas were issued at regular intervals and documented a grant directly from the emperor himself, connecting veterans in the distant provinces with the Roman heartland itself.[284] The diplomas had an effect not just on the soldier himself, but also on his immediate family and descendants: his children were also granted citizenship status, meaning that they also had been legitimized in the eyes of the Roman state.[285] The soldier's marriage would be considered legal (though Septimius Severus seems to have made it easier for soldiers to contract legal marriages with civilian women while they were still serving[286]), and his children would be able to inherit, as well as take advantage of the privileges accorded to Roman citizens: voting, tax exemption, and legal representation. More importantly, the diplomas were clearly intended to be a much more lasting record than the day-to-day wooden leaf tablets; they were inscribed into bronze plates and fitted with the official seals of multiple witnesses to confirm the legality of the document. They also referred to the large-scale documentation of the citizenship grant that was posted in Rome; the text itself was a copy of the original law that referred to all soldiers throughout the empire who were eligible at the time, itself inscribed on a bronze tablet like the

[283] Hassall 1984, 269
[284] Mann & Roxan 1996, 30. The bronze diplomas are the most formal discharge document a soldier could receive, and some examples of less formal letters issued by the commanding officers of individual units also appear to have sufficed for some veterans. (e.g. *ILS* 9060, *P. Hamb*. 31)
[285] One citizenship grant of Hadrian, known from three individual diplomas, extends these rights to the soldier's parents and siblings as well.
[286] Herodian 3.8.4-5

smaller diptychs granted to individual soldiers.[287] That soldiers valued these documents quite highly is evident in the likelihood that acquiring a bronze diploma required the soldier to pay an additional fee for it.[288] If this was common practice in the auxiliary units, it shows that the soldiers had not only invested fully in the documentary culture of the Roman army and were willing to pay for official copies of their papers, but also that they understood enough of the value of the written document to find it worth paying for. They recognized that the content of the document provided them and their families with citizenship rights and privileges, and that keeping a permanent copy of the document on hand would ensure that they retained those rights and could legally prove them in the document-heavy world of Roman law and administration. These documents were also all the more important to soldiers and veterans who were stationed in or moved to distant territories where access to a centralized bureaucracy office was difficult and having one's own copy of a necessary document made proving one's status easier. An auxiliary veteran with a diploma had tied his identity to a written document, internalizing the importance of writing to daily life in the Roman world. Diplomas for auxiliary soldiers become almost unheard of after Caracalla's grant of universal citizenship in 212 CE,[289] as they were no longer necessary to distinguish citizen and non-citizen soldiers; but up until that point they had been important representations of a former auxiliary's new status under the law and the social elevation of himself and his family. It is somewhat fitting that the last official military document issued to or about an auxiliary soldier would be not only the formal record of his membership in the military community, but also a stepping-stone to becoming a fully privileged member of civilian society as well.

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[287] As noted by the formula "copied and confirmed from the bronze tablet which is posted in Rome…" appearing at the end of many diploma texts.
[288] Mann & Roxan 1996, 30
[289] Though diplomas continued to be issued for certain military units, namely the fleet and *cohortes urbanae*, up to the 3rd century CE.

Military Epigraphy in Britain:

Monumental inscriptions in stone, comprising collections of religious altars, personal tombstones, and dedicatory building inscriptions, seem to have been a primarily Roman import to Britain, following the tradition of monumental inscriptions in Rome and other provinces. These stone inscriptions are a strong indicator of the introduction of Roman culture throughout the empire, and their adoption in various provinces of the empire has been rightly interpreted as evidence of the ongoing processes of Romanization.[290] Indeed, Roman society seems to have had an even stronger attachment to the establishment of monumental inscriptions than any contemporary neighboring society.[291] The vast majority of recorded stone inscriptions found in Britain can be attributed to soldiers or to military communities, a distribution that is likely due to the "epigraphic habit", the tendency for communities with higher levels of Roman cultural practices to produce more Latin inscriptions on stone.[292] That soldiers dominate the narrow swath of the population that would have been producing monumental stone inscriptions is worth noting. The region around Hadrian's Wall alone has produced almost 40% of the total number of individual items of inscription from Britain, all of which must have been produced by the military community; and almost 80% of the inscribed material from Wales is associated with military sites.[293] The military, after all, had the time and disposable income necessary to produce large carved stones and the proper appreciation for these carvings as commemorative statements was instilled by the Roman desire to create permanent written records. Some military men in Britain were so dedicated to this habit that they erected multiple inscriptions in their names: the centurion Marcus Cocceius Firmus set up five altars at Auchendavy on the Antonine Wall, and

[290] MacMullen 1982, 238
[291] MacMullen 1982, 239
[292] MacMullen 1982, 238
[293] Tomlin 2011, 140

the prefect Silvius Auspex dedicated three altars at the Scottish fort of Birrens.[294] The fact that the majority of these inscriptions come from highly Romanized contexts in contrast to the more rural areas where inscriptions are rarer, further emphasizes the use of literacy as a form of cultural expression and Roman identity. The notion of commemorating oneself in a lasting stone inscription in the Latin style as a permanent monument intended to remind people of one's existence and service is deeply ingrained in Roman society, and the military embraced this practice most wholeheartedly of all the various communities of Roman Britain.

Roman military installations have their place in the epigraphic record as well, alongside the soldiers that staffed them. Forts and milecastles along Hadrian's Wall and throughout Britain were routinely crowned by monumental inscriptions commemorating the emperor, the provincial governor and the unit.[295] These inscriptions functioned in the same way as the common dedicatory inscriptions of public buildings, associating the named individuals with both the extensive financial resources necessary for the construction, and with a certain level of public-spiritedness that had inspired the commission. In the case of the military inscriptions, however, the honoree was the Roman state rather than any one individual (in the person of the emperor and his appointed governor, to whom the unit dedicated their construction), and the desire to augment the community as a whole was probably replaced by the priority of asserting Roman command of power and wealth in frontier territories. It is likely that all military installations had these inscriptions, and some may have had more than one, even though only a few examples survive to this day.[296] Inscriptions made by the legions were clearly the finest and the best made, both in terms of the professional quality of the writing and of the decoration of the slabs

[294] *RIB* 2174, 2175, 2176, & 2177; and *RIB* 2100, 2104, & 2108. The tradition of dedicating inscriptions clearly followed the army even as far north as Scotland.
[295] Hassall 1984, 270
[296] Hassall 1984, 270

themselves where it appears, as the legions were the highest-status units within Britain specifically and the army more generally.[297] The dedication slabs for milecastles could also be of very fine workmanship, using proper Latin capitals, abbreviations, and orthography, despite the fact that the milecastles were often quite remote compared to the other Wall constructions.[298] Even the turrets, the smallest and simplest Wall outposts, were probably fitted with inscriptions naming the unit responsible for their construction.[299] The importance of including these inscriptions on military installations was not outweighed by a lack of suitable materials: a rare fragment of an oak plank from Milecastle 50 at High House preserves a neatly-lettered dedicatory inscription in the same format as many stone examples, naming the emperor Hadrian and the governor Aulus Platorius Nepos.[300] The use of wood in this area rather than stone is sensible; much of the western half of the wall was built primarily out of turf and wood. The use of a wooden slab in this context in the same way that stone slabs were used farther east indicates that the dedicatory inscription was a significant component of a military installation. Despite the fact that stone was scarce, the inscription still had to be appended to the milecastle, and the adaptation to wood both ensured that the construction could be completed along the same lines as stone forts and cut down on the costs of importing stone to cut the inscription. It is also possible that these inscriptions were more common than the surviving stone evidence would suggest: if more examples of these wooden slabs did appear in the Roman period, it is possible that they simply have not survived as part of the archaeological record. Regardless, it is clear that a dedicatory inscription was considered to be a necessary part of military construction. When the ubiquity of military establishments in Britain is considered, especially in the remote northern

[297] e.g. a pair of elaborately adorned inscriptions from Corbridge, set up by the *Legio II Augusta*.
[298] e.g. *RIB* 1637 & 1638, probably from milecastles between Housesteads & Great Chesters, the central section of the Wall occupying the most difficult and forbidding terrain
[299] e.g. *RIB* 1443, mentioning the *Legio II Augusta*, and probably originating from the turret at High Brunton
[300] *RIB* 1935

zones where other examples of public literacy were scarce, the impact that must have been made by these inscriptions is evident. They were the only collection of monumental written documents available in the area for some time, and were closely associated with military buildings and military operations, as well as being more distantly linked to Roman power and authority in the person of the emperor.

The centurial stones and distance slabs of Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall are a unique type of military inscription in Britain; taking the place of the more traditional dedication inscription that would normally appear on a large-scale building project while also making a statement about the participation of the army itself. The stones mark completed sections of the stone wall, built by soldiers from the legions; and of the defensive earthworks, built by auxiliaries.[301] All three legions stationed in Britain participated in the construction, as attested by a number of distance slabs that were incorporated into the wall itself to mark the roughly five- to six-mile sections constructed by each legion.[302] Where the distance slabs name the full legion responsible for the full section, inscriptions mentioning cohorts within the legion indicate that construction of a section was subdivided among the legion's individual cohorts as well.[303] Further, cohort sections seem to have been subdivided even further by century, as attested by the centurial stones bearing the names of individual centurions. Centurial inscriptions from Hadrian's Wall vary in quality and content: some are rather rudimentary, inexpertly carved and simplistic in their content, and others are more clearly and evenly carved, enclosed by an ansate panel or another simple framing device.[304] The variability in the inscriptions suggests that the

[301] Hassall 1984, 207
[302] Breeze 2006, 72-73
[303] See *RIB* 1388, 1390 & 1391. Hassall theorizes that the panels naming both the parent legion and the individual cohort were used to mark the beginning and end of each cohort's assigned section, in contrast to the centurial stones that marked individual centuries' work.
[304] Compare *RIB* 1658 and *RIB* 1943, for example.

soldiers themselves were producing the inscriptions, rather than any kind of centralized production facility. It is impossible to tell whether these stones were carved before being added to the wall or after, but they were probably inscribed at the construction site by the men who were working at the time that the assigned section was completed. A few of the auxiliary distance markers from the earthworks have also survived, showing that the rest of the wall system abided by similar conventions to the construction of the stone wall.[305] These auxiliary inscriptions take a similar form to the centurial stones of the wall, listing the centurion's abbreviated name accompanied by the character 'Ↄ', typically used as an abbreviation for '*centuria*'. These markers also show variation in quality; very simple inscriptions consisting of only a few letters appear, as well as a more complicated example providing more information about the builders.[306] This is significant in that the auxilia who would have been constructing these sections were the units of the Roman army composed of non-citizens, in contrast to the citizen legions at work on the wall. Their adherence to the conventions of literacy used by the legionary builders emphasize the importance of writing and written documentation as a component of military identity across many different units.

The inscription situation on the Antonine Wall is similar to that found further south, with some slight variation. Distance slabs along the length of the wall were set up in much the same way that they were on Hadrian's Wall, but centurial stones do not appear, perhaps due to the shorter length of the wall or to a difference in how the work was distributed.[307] The Antonine distance slabs are distinguished both by the fineness of their lettering and by the elaborate level of decoration which was applied to them, in contrast to the simpler slabs of Hadrian's Wall. This may have to do with the different construction techniques employed on the Antonine Wall;

[305] *RIB* 1361-1365
[306] Compare *RIB* 1361 "Ↄ VA FL" with *RIB* 1365, "COH I DACOR Ↄ AIIL DID"
[307] Hassall 1984, 273

because the curtain wall itself was built primarily of turf and timber rather than dressed stone, the time and effort that would otherwise have been spent on cutting and shaping construction stones could be spent instead on the distance slabs, the few monumental stones that were incorporated into the wall. Inscriptions recovered from Bar Hill, Old Kilpatrick, and Duntocher are all intricately adorned with animals, floral patterns, and other decorative carving to augment the relatively simple inscriptions.[308] Considerable effort went into the production of these slabs, and their purpose as a display of wealth and power should not be understated, nor should the fact that the written information they bear about the construction of the associated section of the wall was an important component of that display. The famous Bridgeness slab is the most notable of these, featuring a remarkable pair of images flanking the neatly carved central text: on the left side, a Roman cavalryman rides down four fleeing enemies, and on the right, a *suovetaurilia* sacrifice takes place.[309] These images are unambiguous references to Roman culture, the cavalryman defeating enemies has already been discussed as a popular image from military tombstones, and the *suovetaurilia* is one of the most venerated sacrifices in Roman religion.[310] The most significant quality of the Bridgeness slab, however, is its position. Based on the location where it was found and its relationship to other dressed stones in the same area, it is likely that the Bridgeness slab faced north, into unconquered territory, rather than south toward Roman-controlled Britain.[311] The most elegant and complete distance slab on the wall, displaying clear Roman imagery and obvious Latin writing, was directed to the north of the wall, not to the areas of the Roman-controlled province where literacy in Latin might be more reasonably expected. The text of the slab was not only meant to be informative, as the distance slabs on Hadrian's

[308] *RIB* 2173, 2208, 2203 & 2204
[309] *RIB* 2139
[310] Commentary in the *RIB* connects these two images to the construction of the Wall itself: military campaigning first to pacify the territory, and then a *suovetaurilia* to consecrate the construction process.
[311] See *RIB* 2139 commentary, pg. 658

Wall, but was also meant as a symbolic statement, showing the power of Roman culture through military, religious, and literary supremacy.

The purpose of these inscribed records from both the British walls is debatable. It is possible that they were connected to the assignments of particular units to complete predetermined sections of building, perhaps as an accounting measure, or one designed to keep the soldiers on-track to completion of the whole project. While this is an important aspect to consider, given the Roman military's attachment to bureaucracy and documentation, it does not account for the entire significance of the stones and their accompanying inscriptions. Accounting for completed progress cannot entirely explain the presence of these stones, nor the sheer number of them that are associated with Hadrian's Wall and the forts, milecastles, and turrets along its length. The *RIB* lists a total of almost 430 individual stones of this type attributed to various points on the wall, and only seven of these make any reference to a completed distance.[312] It may be that the records of distances assigned were kept elsewhere and simply have not survived, but given the high variability between the listed distances (the shortest is 19 Roman feet and the longest is 112 Roman feet), it seems that any separate records necessary to track the building assignments must have been complex and voluminous indeed. In itself that idea leads to the question of why such a massive accounting would be necessary: surely soldiers would not lie about having completed the work when they hadn't, and even if they did, checking would have been a simple matter of going out to the assigned section and finding it shorter than necessary. There would be no need to record the unit's presence on the wall itself as a benchmark to correspond with central records of the construction: either all units had finished their sections and the wall was complete, or they hadn't and it was not. Another point against the use of the slabs as a bureaucratic measure is that lack of uniformity to the stones and their inscriptions.

[312] *RIB* 1653 (22 ft.), 1813 (30.5 ft.), 1814 (20 ft.), 1816 (100 ft.), 1818 (112 ft.), 1822 (19 ft.) & 1917 (30 ft.)

Aside from the fact that only seven stones mention a length of wall that was built, some of them do not even mention a centurion's proper name, seemingly a necessity if accounts were to be attributed correctly.[313] The difference in the amount of information included on the stones would also complicate their use as accounting assistants, since a lack of uniformity in the inscriptions would make tabulating the completed sections more difficult unless one already knew the information that was omitted. The relative visibility of the stones within the wall would also have complicated their use in any kind of official recording. Few of the stones still remain *in situ*, given the fragmentary nature of the wall and the tendency for stones to have been removed over the intervening centuries, but some of the ones that do remain are quite difficult to see unless one knows where to look.[314] Locating one particular stone with a shallow short inscription in a wall face that was some three to four meters tall would have been quite the undertaking. The ornateness of the Antonine distance slabs is also a mark against their use as mere accounting benchmarks. While the comparatively simpler centurial stones of Hadrian's Wall might have been produced quickly and easily as construction progressed, the sophisticated artistry of the Antonine slabs shows that they must have been made purposefully grand. These inscriptions clearly had some intention of display behind them, impressing upon the viewer the technical skill and material wealth of the Roman establishment. It makes sense that the distance slabs would fulfill this purpose; since the turf-and-timber Antonine Wall must have been somewhat less imposing than the stone-built Hadrian's Wall, the distance slabs functioned as the impressive element of the wall's construction.

What is more likely is that these slabs represent yet another example of Roman soldiers being invested enough in Roman-style literary culture to want to document their presence

[313] *RIB* 1373 refers only to the "century of the primus pilus", with no cohort given, and *RIB* 2032 mentions a "hastatus prior", rather than a personal name.
[314] e.g. *RIB* 3434, a lightly incised "Ↄ TIIRTI" on a stone of roughly 46 cm. long by 7.5 cm. tall

permanently in writing. These inscriptions are not critical to the structural integrity of the wall or to the construction process itself; they are ornamentation added independently and expressed in writing. The practice of attributing large-scale building projects is readily apparent for military installations in Britain, and the walls can have been no different. The formatting of the inscriptions may have differed, since no one unit would be responsible for building the entire wall as would have been the case with forts or other important military buildings, but the purpose was the same: to create a permanent record of the construction and the people responsible. The individual centuries documented their contribution to the massive undertaking with writing, the method that they were so used to using for documenting their existence. In the same way that a modern person might write their name or press their handprint into freshly-poured cement, the soldiers working on the wall documented their presence with carved notes on the structure itself. One centurial stone from between Wallsend and Newcastle refers not only to the centurion in command, but also to two others, presumably individual soldiers engaged in the work.[315] The army's "Kilroy was here" mentality naturally permeated even the most massive military undertaking in the province.

Roman soldiers and their dependents were also prolific dedicators of inscribed funerary monuments and tombstones; even in the relatively small corpus of monuments from Britain, the military community is overrepresented, responsible for the establishment of roughly 85% of the inscribed funerary monuments.[316] Despite the copious military presence in the epigraphic record, funerary monuments in Britain are still relatively rare. The entire British corpus of funerary monuments, including both soldiers and civilians, is tiny compared to much more impressive

[315] *RIB* 1315: "From the century of Julius Numismianus, Ulpius Canalius and Lucius Goutius"
[316] Of about 675 individual artifacts from the *RIB* which can be securely identified as tombstones, 563 of them were dedicated by soldiers or their families.

collections from other provinces, and even from individual military bases.[317] The rarity of good building stone in Britain may be a factor in the lack of inscriptions; the province has no good marble, only a little bit of granite, and is mostly composed of sandstone and limestone with occasional deposits of slate and other metamorphic rocks.[318] This dearth of materials cannot be the only factor however, since those British residents who did commission inscriptions seem to have been perfectly happy to use the available resources rather than either spending great sums of money to import proper stones, or giving up on the notion of an inscribed monument entirely.[319]

As impressive as these monuments are, they also present some problems to the investigation of literacy in the province. Most of the excavated epigraphic monuments from Roman Britain were either removed from their original contexts in antiquity, or have since been relocated in the intervening centuries, and have therefore been stripped of much of their chronological and archaeological context. Dates included in the texts of the monuments themselves are vanishingly rare, and though there are a few places where the inclusion of an imperial or consular name can help to narrow down the timeframe of certain monuments, many more of them lack any hints to their respective period. This lack of established chronology complicates the process of making assertions regarding the process of Latinization in the province, since while there almost certainly was a difference in how literacy was expressed in monumental inscriptions in 50 CE as opposed to 350 CE, it cannot be easily deduced from epigraphic material itself. Nevertheless, the stones themselves are extremely relevant and clear

[317] Hope 1997, 247
[318] See Williams 1971, 166-167
[319] Inscriptions around Bath are carved into local oolitic limestone, and Purbeck "marble" (actually a fossiliferous limestone) is a common decorative stone.

markers of the social and personal uses of literacy, and therefore should be exploited for all the information they hold.

The object of such tombstones and votive altars is to create a lasting record of a particular person's life or religious devotion, in much the same way that a dedicatory inscription on a large public building is intended to create a lasting record of the building's funding and construction.[320] The concept of *memoria*, the veneration of the dead and their connection to the living, was an important basis for the dedication of funerary monuments in Roman culture, and Latin writing was tied to this concept as it was to so many aspects of Roman civilization.[321] Even in places like Roman Egypt, where Latin was not a commonly used written language, Latin was used in epitaphs for members of the military community. Epitaphs of soldiers in Egypt are almost overwhelmingly written in Latin, despite the predominance of Greek in other monumental inscriptions.[322] A remarkable bilingual monument demonstrates the connection between Latin and military service in particular: former legionary legate Claudius Claudianus's family commissioned a grave marker for him where most of the basic text of the epitaph is in Greek, except for his rank, which is written out in Latin letters and abbreviations.[323] The mixture of text is significant. Despite the predominance of Greek in the region, and the conventions for Greek funerary epigraphy that came with the language, Claudianus's family chose to have the military rank written in Latin, calling attention to the connection between written Latin and perceptions of Roman identity. Further examples of this choice appear in other places in the Greek-speaking East, for example; a soldier from Apamea is commemorated by a Latin

[320] Mattingly 2007, 202
[321] Anderson 1984, 12
[322] Adams 2003b, 200
[323] *CIL* 3.125. The Greek text also includes the Greek term οὐετρανὸς, a transliteration of the Latin *veteranus*.

inscription in Galatia, and in Cappadocia, a former centurion's epitaph is carved in Latin while his wife's and his son's are done in Greek.[324]

The use of written Latin in personal contexts such as religious devotions or memorialization introduces that element of Roman identity into the record of the person's actions: the dedicant is choosing to define their lasting record of themselves or their loved one along Roman lines.[325] There are what seem to be some interesting numerical differences present in the epigraphic corpus pertaining to military tombstones as well. There appear to be more funerary epitaphs erected for the rank-and-file than for the brass.[326] Of some 104 tombstones from Britain where the military rank of the deceased is specifically mentioned, a scant 6 of them are attributed to any higher than a centurion.[327] In fact, for the higher ranks of tribune and legate, it is far more common for lower-ranking soldiers to be noted as having been *beneficiarii*, soldiers specially delegated for service under a senior officer, than it is to have the officers mentioned themselves.[328] Ordinary soldiers are also listed as having performed special duties or having achieved elevated non-officer status: non-ranking titles and even mentions of increased pay rates also appear on the tombstones of soldiers.[329]

These discrepancies may be due to mere probability. There were simply more ordinary soldiers and lower-ranking officers than higher-ranking officers, and so the balance of preservation favors the more common tombstones over the rarer ones. Additionally, the terms of service for ordinary soldiers were typically much longer than those of an officer: twenty years

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[324] Levick 1995, 400
[325] Adams 2003a, 617
[326] Hope 1997, 255
[327] 67 "soldier"s, 19 "trooper"s, 4 "optio"s, 25 "centurion"s, 2 "decurion"s, no "tribune"s, 6 "prefect"s, no "legate"s
[328] e.g. *RIB* 532, 545, 3005 & 3258 for "*beneficiarius tribuni*"; *RIB* 1619 for "*beneficiarius praefecti*"; and *RIB* 293, 505, & 3098 for "*beneficiarius legati*"
[329] e.g. *RIB* 2003 for a "custos armorum" (a unit's armorer or weapons specialist), *RIB* 1618 for a "medicus ordinarius" (a military surgeon), *RIB* 1742, for a "cornicularius" (chief clerk), *RIB* 907 for a "sesquiplicarius" (pay-and-a-half), *RIB* 201 for a "duplicarius" (double-pay)

for a legionary and twenty-five years for an auxiliary, versus between one and three years for tribunes, prefects, or legates.[330] Higher-ranking officers therefore had more mobility within the army itself, and could be regularly reassigned to command other units in other provinces. It may be that the officers were simply less likely to die in Britain than the enlisted men they commanded, and so their monuments would be necessity not be located in the province.

Even with the balance of probability tilting the odds of preservation in favor of the lower ranks, it is important not to rule out possible alternative or complementary factors. If the ordinary rank and file had the money and the desire to commission large and complex monuments, then the better-paid, higher status, and more literarily-inclined officers were if anything more likely to put up inscribed monuments. Indeed, it might be expected that the monuments of senior officers would be larger and grander than the funerary stele of common soldiers, perhaps following the example of imperial procurator Julius Classicianus's funerary altar from London.[331] Large monuments such as this one are rare to nonexistent in Britain, however, and there is no evidence for the large and elaborate tombs and mausolea that characterized elite burials elsewhere in the Roman world.[332] It may be that senior officers had other outlets for their desire to write, and had to rely less often on their own inscribed stone monuments to make a statement about their identity. Although auxiliary tribunes are underrepresented in their own epitaphs, they do appear several times in funerary dedications made to others.[333] It may also be that superior officers did not feel the same desire to make strong lasting statements about their connection to the Roman state and its power; since they were already deeply embedded in Roman culture by virtue of their rank (and by extension, their social status, as senior officers were almost always drawn from the

[330] Southern 2007, 99 (legionaries, at least as of the 1st century CE when Augustus increased their mandatory term of service); Southern 2007, 122 (auxiliaries); Southern 2007, 125-127 (officers)
[331] *RIB* 12
[332] Hope 1997, 247
[333] e.g. *RIB* 937 & 1291 (by tribunes to a foster child), *RIB* 1482 & 1919 (by tribunes to a child)

higher echelons of society), they did not have as strong of a need to make a visible attestation of their conformity to Roman standards of commemoration. This difference in sociocultural attachment may also account for the preponderance of centurions in the funerary record. Since that was the highest rank to which a common soldier could conceivably aspire without some intervention from a social superior, it would make sense that soldiers who made it that far would consider it a notable enough achievement to mention on their monuments. It is nevertheless clear that the rank-and-file were eager to celebrate their achievements in writing whenever they could, even if they had not yet officially occurred. A cenotaph from Chester commemorates an unnamed *optio* in line for a promotion to centurion, who was sadly lost at sea before it could be finalized.[334]

Simple military tombstones in Britain rely only on writing to commemorate the dead, rather than writing paired with a visual representation, entrusting their identity completely to the permanent written record.[335] Whether because this style of epitaph was less expensive than a figural carving, or simpler to make or some other reason, the dedicator memorializes their military relative in a way that only those who could read the slab would be able to appreciate. This expectation of a literate audience demonstrates in itself the degree to which writing was embedded in the military community as a part of identity and procedure. The written monument is considered sufficient testament to the deceased because the dedicator expects that those viewing the monument will be able to read the epitaph properly and derive the necessary information from it. The writing itself is enough to preserve the memory of the deceased and ensure that his identity as a Roman soldier is apparent.

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[334] *RIB* 544
[335] e.g. *RIB* 255, 294, 357, 403, 525, & 2142

More complex tombstones include both the written inscription and an accompanying image. Though most of the portrayals are fairly generic and were probably not intended to be true-to-life depictions of an individual person, their iconography still helps to contextualize the writing and offer a more complete picture of the intention behind the monument's creation.[336] The distinctive military dress of Roman soldiers is depicted on their tombstones, either their full armor, or military-style cloaks and belts, and often other accessories symbolizing their rank and role, given the significance of higher office in the military.[337] The tombstone of the centurion Marcus Favonius Facilis from Colchester is an exceptionally well-made example, featuring a detailed depiction of legionary armor and the centurion's staff as a sign of his rank.[338] The imagery thus complements the written message: the deceased occupied a powerful position as a member of a powerful institution, symbolized by both their dress and their command of Latin writing. Both visual and textual elements of the tombstone work together to communicate the person's group identity. The image of the person complements the written inscription and elucidates the person's identity for those who could not read the writing, and the writing specifies the person and their individual importance, conveying more nuanced ideas than could be represented by a single formulaic image.[339] In some military tombstones from Britain, the image itself is associated with the deceased's command of the written word: the tombstone of Caecilius Avitus depicts the legionary *optio* in military dress and holding a writing tablet case, showing the importance not only of his military status, but also of the implicit link between his status and his literacy.[340]

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[336] Hope 1997, 251
[337] Mattingly 2007, 208
[338] *RIB* 200
[339] Woolf 1996, 28
[340] *RIB* 492. Another example of a soldier with writing tablets comes from the so-called Camomile Street Soldier statue from London. Though no inscription is preserved, the posture, dress, and accoutrements of the soldier are very

The adoption of these engraved tombstones was especially significant in the auxiliary troops of frontier areas. These monuments further demonstrate that the army was the gateway to Roman cultural practice, not just in the establishment of a tombstone in general, but also in the inclusion of written descriptions specifically. A number of the most impressive tombstones from Britain are dedicated to auxiliaries, especially from the mounted units in the first century CE.[341] They share a similar iconographic type: that of a cavalryman on horseback riding over a dead enemy or about to spear a defeated one, which seem to have been inherited from auxiliary garrisons on the Rhine frontier.[342] The imagery of these tombstones establishes the deceased as a powerful conqueror of the enemies of Rome, a connection all the more important to the non-citizen auxiliaries from provincial populations.[343] Their identity as non-Romans is confirmed by their names and the units in which they served, making the claim to Roman status and culture signified by the tombstone itself and the specific triumphant iconography all the more important. Although these men are themselves not Roman, they are still being linked with the Roman establishment through their military service, their use of a written inscription, and a memorial. Their aspiration to an elevated status over other non-Roman peoples is revealed in the active choice to relate their identity as auxiliary soldiers with their success as members of the military community. The tombstones and their inscriptions may have been their strongest claim to have been a part of the Roman establishment, since the figures listed for years of service on these tombstones suggest that the cavalrymen did not live long enough to complete the 25 years of

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similar to Caecilius Avitus's tombstone. (Bishop, M.C. 1983: "The Camomile Street Soldier Reconsidered." *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society* 34, pp. 31-48)

[341] e.g. *RIB* 108, 109, 121, 159, 201, 291, & 1172

[342] Hope 1997, 252. These tombstones are particularly common in Germany, whence many auxiliary regiments came to Britain.

[343] Hope 1997, 256

service that would have earned them their diploma and citizenship.[344] These auxiliary soldiers would probably have had no contact with the core of the Roman world, situated as they were on its exterior borders, but their tombstones still celebrate the sense of being Roman bestowed by service in the military.

The imagery of tombstones, in connection with the written description, shows not only how the deceased was viewed in life, but also how his descendants wished others to view him in death. After all, the old adage that "the dead do not bury themselves" holds true regardless of time or location. The dead person would probably not have had much of a say in what their tombstone looked like, and it would have been up to their family members to design or commission the monument.[345] There is the possibility that a person could have designed or described their monument before they died or left instructions in their will as to how they were to be commemorated, as occasionally happened in the Roman world, but evidence of this practice in Britain has so far not appeared.[346] The attachment to the military community, then, and by extension to the power and status of Rome, does not die with the soldier, it continues on into his descendants. Those responsible for putting up the monument often add their names to the inscription as well, making an explicit connection between themselves and their ancestor as part of the written commemoration required by proper Roman cultural ritual. Tombstones were not only employed by soldiers; military families also make use of them to honor members that did not serve in the military, such as wives and children.[347] A cavalryman at Ribchester for example, commemorates his wife, son, and mother-in-law; a centurion at York honors his wife and son,

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[344] The only potential veteran using this type is Lucius Vitellius Tancinus (*RIB* 159), who completed 26 years of service.
[345] Hope 1997, 251.
[346] See *Plin*. Epist. 6.10, describing the ante-mortem requests of a friend whose heirs have not carried them out. Trimalchio's ostentatious description of his own tomb to his dinner guests also provides a satirical example of pre-mortem tombstone design (Petronius, *Sat*. 71-72)
[347] Mattingly 2007, 202

and Barates of South Shields memorializes his British-born wife Regina.[348] In these instances, the relationship is reversed: instead of a civilian family member commemorating a soldier, the soldier is commemorating a military family member, demonstrating the uniformity of this type of honorary monument across the military community.

Wives seem to be especially involved in funerary commemoration in the military community: dedications to military husbands made by their wives outnumber dedications to wives made by their husbands by almost two-to-one, in contrast to civilian situations where the reverse is true.[349] This imbalance may be a reflection of potentially higher mortality rates for serving soldiers versus for their non-combatant wives, but takes on further significance in light of the official regulations against marriage that governed military relationships until the reign of Septimius Severus. This did not mean that soldiers did not conduct relationships with women, of course, merely that marriages could not be legally recognized until the soldier completed his military service. In many instances of Romano-British tombstones, this lack of legal status has led to the assumption that tombstones that make mention of "wives" must all be Severan or later in date, since this is when legislation officially recognizing marriages during service was passed.[350]

There is reason to question this assumption, not least because firm dates of Romano-British inscriptions are rare and difficult to determine. The gradual decline in the number of inscriptions over time also has a bearing on the question of wives in the epigraphic record. Septimius Severus became emperor near the beginning of the third century CE, whereas stone inscriptions in Britain begin to tail off around the middle of that same century.[351] This is a fairly

[348] *RIB* 594, *RIB* 3202, *RIB* 1065
[349] Scheidel 2011, 420
[350] Scheidel 2011, 419
[351] Tomlin 2011, 140

short window within which the sudden boom of inscriptions dedicated by wives could occur, and while the collection of inscriptions that name military wives is relatively small in comparison to the total number of inscriptions from the whole of Britain, it gives no indication that these monuments were all erected in the same 50 years. It is evident that the "marriage ban" was in itself not as stringent as the term would suggest: no punishments were meted out for soldiers engaging in intimate relationships while serving, and these relationships doubtlessly went on throughout the imperial period regardless of whether they were legally recognized or not.[352] Soldiers often contracted marriage-like relationships, if the mentions of dowries in some texts are any indication.[353] There is also no evidence of any official governing body or institution that would dictate the usage of specific words or phrases on a tombstone, other than widely-held convention. In essence, there was nothing that would prevent an unofficial wife of a military man from referring to herself as such on her husband's funerary monument, whether or not the Roman state considered their marriage valid.

The term that is almost overwhelmingly used on Romano-British tombstones (whether to describe the dedicator themselves or the deceased), *coniunx*, has a more flexible interpretation than might originally appear, especially in the context of military inscriptions. This is one of the several Latin terms that refers to a married woman, but this term did not always refer to a woman who was legally married.[354] In the *RIB*, 79 examples of the term *coninux* appear to describe married relationships on funerary monuments (27 of which explicitly mention military service), and only 2 examples of *uxor* (both associated with civilians). This would seem to be in keeping with epigraphic traditions from other frontier provinces: wives of both active duty soldiers and veterans seem more likely to be referred to by the term *coniunx* than by any other Latin term for

[352] Scheidel 2011, 418
[353] Scheidel 2011, 418
[354] Jeppesen-Wigglesworth 2010, 229

"wife" or "spouse".[355] Other Latin terms for wives besides *coniunx* and *uxor* (*marita*, *concubina*, etc.) do not appear in the inscription corpus of Britain.

The term *coninux* is also connected to social status. It is more likely to be used in connection with lower status burials, whereas other terms like *uxor* were associated with higher-status burials.[356] This distinction would seem to be borne out by the British evidence: one of the two surviving examples of the term *uxor* in British funerary inscriptions refers to the wife of Classicianus the procurator, probably the highest-ranking woman in the province.[357] In the use of the term that was more commonly employed by people of more modest socioeconomic status, one can see in the wives of soldiers a similar disparity evident in the soldiers themselves: lower-ranking soldiers were more likely than senior officers to have funerary monuments dedicated to them, and the wives of these lower-ranking soldiers were more likely to dedicate those monuments than the wives of officers. These lower-ranking military families were embracing the permanent written record as a way of making a claim to Roman identity and Roman authority, even if they could not command that authority themselves by virtue of their socioeconomic status. The wives of Roman soldiers, whether they were considered legal or not, were still invested in the display of Roman status and Roman power represented by a military epitaph. They advertised their marital status alongside their husband's military career and accolades, claiming an identity as members of the military community. Literary display was not only employed by the soldiers themselves, but also by their extended families, who adopted the idea of writing as a statement of *Romanitas* as much as the soldiers did.

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[355] Roxan 1991, 462

[356] Jeppesen-Wigglesworth 2010, 232. This is seen mainly in the context of husbands referring to their wives, rather than wives referring to themselves, but the distinction is still apt.

[357] *RIB* 12

It is perhaps not surprising that soldiers produced a number of honorary altars for the variety of deities worshipped in Britain, nor that these altars are relatively uniform in appearance and literary content throughout the province. In fact, the majority of surviving inscriptions from Britain are religious altars.[358] Moreover, the vast majority of these surviving altars from Britain are associated with the military community.[359] These altars represent both communal dedications on behalf of entire units, and private dedications by individual soldiers, reflecting the complexity of religion in the greater Roman world more generally and in the military in particular.[360] The diverse array of attested gods and worshippers is held together by one specific common practice: the use of writing on the monumental altars and dedication slabs presented to all deities in the province. This suggests something remarkable: not only were the people seeing the inscription literate, but so were the gods to whom the written monument was dedicated. The dedicant expects that both their mortal and divine audience is literate, and that a written commemoration of their devotion to the deity will be understood by both audiences. The levels of literacy thus ascribed could be very advanced, as demonstrated by a poetic inscription dedicated to Virgo Caelestis, inscribed in literary iambic *senarii*.[361]

The practice of making religious dedications to the state gods of Rome was an important aspect of the unifying military identity, and one to which writing was naturally appended. The Roman taste for bureaucracy penetrated this aspect of military life as well: the Feriale Duranum, a copy of the official military religious calendar that prescribed standard festival dates, sacrifices, and other dedications to be made to the gods of Rome as well as the emperor and his tutelary deities, demonstrates that military religious practices were standardized across the empire and

[358] Woolf 1996, 24
[359] Mattingly 2007, 215
[360] Stoll 2011, 452
[361] *RIB* 1791 (possibly referring to a divine persona of Julia Domna)

that soldiers in Britain would have been celebrating much the same festivals as their counterparts in Syria.[362] Military identity would be reinforced not just through dedications to the state gods, but to protective spirits of individual units as well, fostering a collective sense of being not just Romans, but Roman soldiers.[363] Though the majority of altars from religious sites in Britain have probably been lost over the intervening centuries, the original numbers of these monuments must have been vast indeed.

At the Roman garrisoned town of Maryport, for example, 25 individual altars have been discovered, mainly dedicated to Iuppiter Optimus Maximus, though there are a few other deities represented.[364] It is possible that the garrison dedicated a new altar every year, likely as part of the annual celebration of the emperor and the renewal of the loyalty oath to him made by soldiers across the empire.[365] The place in which these altars were displayed in antiquity is still somewhat unclear, given that they were likely removed from their original location at some point and reused as raw construction material for other buildings, but it seems that at least some of them were associated with a small rectangular temple in the extramural settlement of the fort.[366] The dedications were therefore not limited to the precinct typically controlled by the garrison, i.e., the interior of the fort, but were accessible in a public building in town. What is more, given the extensive weathering exhibited by some altars, the older altars probably remained on display indefinitely after newer ones were dedicated, offering a semi-permanent attestation to the presence of the unit and its commander even after the garrison changed.[367] If this was common practice for other military garrisons throughout Britain, (and it may well have been, given

[362] *P. Dura* 54. See also *RIB* 1270, commemorating the celebration of the founding of Rome.
[363] e.g. *RIB* 327, to the Genius Legionis; *RIB* 1262, to the Genius Signorum; *RIB* 1334 to the Genius Alae
[364] *RIB* 813-834, 837 & 838 (dedicated to Mars Militaris), 842 & 843
[365] Stoll 2011, 462
[366] Breeze 1997, 70
[367] Hill 1997, 95

comparative evidence from other sanctuaries at Osterburken, Mainhardt, and Sirmium, as well as nearby Birdoswald[368]) then the annual altars alone represent a significant corpus of written material within the sanctuary, to say nothing of other altars that were dedicated by individual soldiers for individual reasons. Official religious buildings and ceremonies among the military outposts of Britain were no less immersed in writing than any other aspect of military life.

Private religion gave even more opportunity to court various deities through inscribed stone dedications. The myriad cultural backgrounds that were unified under the aegis of the Roman military is evident from dedications in Britain as well: the military community accounts for a much more diverse group of deities than are encountered elsewhere in Britain.[369] Imported foreign deities were treated in the same way as established Roman cults, including the dedication of written inscriptions. Mithras is probably the most famous import to Britain, especially in the context of the military, but a number of other less well-known gods also appear to have traveled with incoming military units.[370] Not only foreign gods received this treatment in Britain: local deities were incorporated into the literate military religion as well. The Roman religious practice of adopting various deities from other places and other cultures no doubt played a role here, though the notion of local Britons serving in the military and continuing to make dedications to their local gods in the fashion of their Roman colleagues cannot be discounted. The British deity Antenociticus is attested on altars set up by soldiers in Benwell, and Dea Conventina at Carrawburgh received several personal and collective dedications from local soldiers.[371] A range

[368] Hill 1997, 98
[369] Mattingly 2007, 215
[370] see *RIB* 1782 for Dea Syria at Carvoran, *RIB* 2096, 2107, & 2108 for Germanic gods at Birrens, and *RIB* 1593 & 1594 for another Germanic deity at Housesteads
[371] For Benwell: *RIB* 1327-1329; for Carrawburgh: *RIB* 1523, 1524, 1529, 1534, & 1535

of deities could even appear together in the dedications of the same soldier; Marcus Cocceius Firmus's altars from Scotland are dedicated to a range of divinities both Roman and British.[372]

A certain numerical disparity can also be detected in the altar dedications as it is in military tombstones; but interestingly, the imbalance in regard to rank seems to be reversed. While the lower ranks are prevalent in the dedication of funerary monuments, a much larger proportion of higher-ranking officers (above centurion) seem to be responsible for the dedication of altars. In the collection of some 260 altars in the *RIB* where military rank of the dedicator or dedicators is explicitly listed, 167 refer to a rank higher than centurion.[373] Tribunes and prefects seem to especially dominate the landscape of epigraphic altars, accounting for 62% of the total number of altar inscriptions. Auxiliary commanders seem to represent a much wider proportion of the dedicated altars than of tombstones: of altars where a regiment is given, auxiliary officers higher than centurion account for 122 individual inscriptions, compared to only 20 dedicated by centurions or below.[374]

A possible explanation for this imbalance seems to lie in the fact that a number of altars dedicated to Iuppiter Optimus Maximus list the commanding officer's name alongside the unit title, especially in the case of units commanded by tribunes or prefects.[375]. The unit as a whole is the dedicator, and the name of the commander is given as a descriptor of the unit, rather than the dedicator himself. This is probably not the only explanation, however, as altars do not exclusively list the commander alongside the unit he commanded.[376] Several dedications are

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[372] *RIB* 2174 (to Diana and Apollo), 2175 (to the Genius of the land of Britain), 2176 (to Iuppiter Optimus Maximus and Victory), & 2177 (to Mars, Minerva, the goddesses of the parade ground, Hercules, Epona, and Victory)
[373] 21 "soldier"/"soldiers", 1 "trooper"/"troopers", 5 "optio"s, 60 "centurion"s, 6 "decurion"s, 66 "tribune"s, 96 "prefect"s, 5 "legate"s
[374] 30 auxiliary tribunes and 92 auxiliary prefects, compared to 3 auxiliary soldiers, 5 auxiliary optios, 6 auxiliary centurions, and 6 decurions. All legates are legionary.
[375] e.g. the Maryport altars, naming the unit under the command of the officer as the dedicator of the altar.
[376] compare *RIB* 817, which lists the unit (*cohors I Hispanorum*) and the commanding tribune (Gaius Caballius Priscus), and *RIB* 818, which lists Priscus alone with no mention of the unit.

made in the commander's name alone, though it is not possible to discern whether this is for practical purposes (i.e. the first altar in a series may have borne both designations, but subsequent altars were limited to the commander's name only to save space, time, or money) or for some other reason. Unit commanders also dedicated in their own name, rather than in a collective dedication by their unit: to Iuppiter Optimus Maximus and to other deities.[377] The practice of collective unit dedications cannot, therefore, completely explain the preponderance of unit commanders present in the corpus of inscribed altars, but the fact remains that higher-ranking officers are much better attested in these altar collections than the rank and file.

In this bias toward higher officers in the official altars, a possible explanation for the lack of higher-ranking military tombstones may also be found. Officers likely had more money to spend on dedications and could fund more of them over their careers than could a soldier with less disposable income.[378] This notion is supported by examples of officers dedicating multiple altars, as well as dedicating altars for unofficial, personal purposes.[379] Those less well-off soldiers, then, might be expected to save up for their funerary monument, rather than spending more money on multiple altar dedications. If the officers were more regularly commemorated in inscribed altars, the impetus to spend more on an engraved tombstone as a final marker of the person's life might not have been as great as it was for a more common soldier who could only afford one engraved monument. While it is certainly probable that officers had the more abundant financial resources to erect multiple dedications in their name compared to the lower ranking soldiers, the cost of engraved altars cannot have been the only determining factor. A

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[377] e.g. *RIB* 1300 (an auxiliary prefect to Iuppiter Optimus Maximus), *RIB* 1221 (a tribune to Mars Victor) *RIB* 1578 (an auxiliary prefect to Silvanus),

[378] see Hill, 1997, 92 for the suggestion that the commanders at Maryport paid for the official unit altars out of their own pockets.

[379] e.g. Cocceius Firmus and Silvius Auspex, mentioned above (pp. 15); *RIB* 1041, set up by a cavalry prefect to commemorate an especially successful boar hunt.

number of official altars naming commanders seem to have been quite low-quality in terms of materials and carving, while altars dedicated by enlisted men could be very fine.[380] Based on the existing evidence, however, it nevertheless seems that enlisted men were more likely to put up funerary monuments than officers, where officers were more likely to invest in inscribed altars instead. This in itself demonstrates the differing priorities that writing could be used to express within the military community itself: commemoration of oneself as a soldier of Rome, or as a dutiful servant of gods both Roman and foreign. The venue through which one chose to leave a permanent written record of one's existence made as great a statement of identity as the text itself.

[380] e.g. *RIB* 1885, a clumsily recarved altar from Birdoswald dedicated by an auxiliary tribune vs. *RIB* 2109, dedicated by an auxiliary soldier at Birrens

Writing in Industrial Contexts:

Literacy was evidently an aspect of the large manufacturing industries of Britain, such as quarries, lead mines and tile works, where rough stones and quarry faces, tiles, and ingots were often etched or stamped with collections of names or simple sentences.[381] In the case of many major industries in Britain, the army was initially heavily involved in their management and the production or extraction of their resources; as both a readily available source of fit labor, and as the only existing administrative infrastructure capable of managing vast quantities of input and output. The military would also have been the biggest consumer of these new industrial products, hence their desire to oversee the production and distribution of cut stones, metal ore, and ceramic tiles throughout the province. Members of the military community appear in all the newly intensified industrial production zones of the province, leaving behind written evidence of their presence.

The boom in building and epigraphy across Britain kicked off by the arrival of the army and its installations would have demanded a great quantity of quarried stone, unlike any quantity ever used in the pre-Roman period. Quarry faces across Britain bear dozens of different offhand names, sentences and other engravings connected to the extraction of stone resources. The simplest are mere Roman numerals, presumably incised on the cut stones to document batch totals of a particular quarry or to assist in organizing the stones when they arrived at their destination (either for building or for shaping into altars or other elements).[382] Soldiers were also evidently seconded to these quarries to cut stones or to supervise the work. Legionaries of both the Second and Twentieth Legions are mentioned in *in situ* quarry graffiti from Cumberland.[383]

[381] Tomlin 2011, 143
[382] e.g. *RIB* 1379, 3160, 3363 & 3373
[383] *RIB* 998, 1001, and 1008 for Legio II; *RIB* 999, 1005, and 1014 for Legio XX

The forts at Vindolanda and Chester appear to have had their own dedicated quarrying sites to keep up with the demand for stone resources to build the new military installations, and the inclusion of soldiers at these places would have been sensible given the eventual destinations of the cut stones.[384] Some of these inscriptions seems to be records of the work, further evidence of the Roman army's obsession with documentation.[385] Others are more examples of the desire to add one's name to an undertaking for posterity, such Condrausisius of the Twentieth Legion, or Eustus from the Sixth Legion, who documented his work on an inset altar carved further down the quarry face.[386] One particular inscription mentions the soldiers involved in the work of cutting stones themselves: the Third Cohort and the Fourth Cohort of the Twentieth Legion are represented in the same graffiti, mentioning that the soldiers were making stones there.[387] The letters are interspersed with crude figure drawings and lines of tally marks, suggesting that the soldiers were there for some time, doodling on the quarry face and perhaps keeping a running total of the stones they had cut. One might even imagine the neighboring cohorts passing their time engaged in a friendly competition over which of them could cut the most stones, documenting their progress on the stone face. The appearance of these graffiti further reinforces the ubiquity of literacy in both the military community itself, and in the spheres within which the army and civilians coexisted. Not all the names linked to quarry face inscriptions are explicitly soldiers, and the presence of civilian workers in the operation is probable, though not certain. The cooperation of soldiers and civilians in this particular industry provides a good example of how Britons not associated with the military system might experience Roman views of literacy

[384] Pearson 2006, 47 & 51
[385] eg. *RIB* 1008, which mentions a legionary detachment and their commander as responsible for the working face in question
[386] *RIB* 1005 & 1016
[387] *RIB* 1001

and written records. The overlap of these different attitudes toward writing is an important sphere in which the written record of Roman Britain developed.

Ceramic building materials like bricks and tiles were initially a Roman import to the province and, like most Roman imports, were linked with the written word in the form of identifying tile stamps pressed into the wet clay before firing.[388] The military's demand for these tiles must have been vast, given that roughly 5,000 tiles would be required for every fort's *principium* and *praetorium*, to say nothing of any other buildings within a fort that might have had tiled roofs.[389] It makes sense, then, that the army would have established its own tile works in order to support the needs of its building projects, especially given that pre-Roman Britain had neither a need for ceramic tiles nor the facilities necessary to produce them. The legions especially were heavily involved in the production of industrial products, and left their marks on ceramic bricks and tiles throughout the province. The variability in the stamps from brick to brick suggests that each cohort of a particular legion may have had its own die for stamping the ceramic products it was involved in making.[390] Auxiliary cohorts were also involved in the production of ceramic building materials as well; a very fragmentary duty roster from Vindolanda lists men that have been sent to the kilns and to get clay, though it is not clear from the surviving text what kind of clay or what kind of kilns.[391] Stamps from auxiliary cohorts appear occasionally alongside stamps from the legions: The *cohors IIII Breucorum* stamped tiles at Slack, and also seems to have supplied them to Manchester, Castleshaw, and Castleford.[392]

The purpose of these identifying stamps is debated. Taken at face value, it would seem that they were intended to mark army property and to avert theft, a technique comparable to the

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[388] Mills 2013, 454
[389] Warry 2010, 143
[390] Warry 2010, 132
[391] *Tab. Vindo*l. 2.155. The numbers of men dispatched to each do not survive.
[392] Warry 2010, 145

early 20th century British army whitewashing its coal supplies.[393] While this is an appealingly simple explanation for their existence, it doesn't account for the entirety of the situation. Tiles may be specialized products, certainly, but one can hardly argue that they were the type of high-value, readily portable item that would be routinely targeted by civilian theft from military bases. If theft prevention were the only explanation, one would expect to find a great many more stamps than currently exist, given that each tile would presumably need to be stamped in order to be identified properly. The practice of stamping tiles comes to Britain relatively late compared to other military sites on the continent, only at the end of the first century CE, and there is no evidence for military tile stamping after the mid-third century CE.[394] If the stamps were an important safety measure, presumably they would have been employed for a longer period of time. Additionally, the current evidence of surviving tile stamps suggests than not only did some production kilns never stamp their tiles, but also that stamped tiles may only account for 1 out of every 50 produced.[395] This would be useless for deterring civilian theft, but suitable for an internal accounting measure: a few tiles in each batch would be stamped, and then the completed batch would be shipped out as a unit. The practice of accounting for tiles in batches or totals is well-attested in Britain, with daily quotas, total orders for particular building projects, and individual production tallies.[396]

While it is not possible to discern from the tile stamps of Britain whether the legionaries themselves were responsible for the production of the tiles, there are a few references to personal names in the tiles of the Twentieth Legion specifically. Seven examples of a die mentioning a "Viducius" as someone involved with the production of tiles at the Twentieth's tile works in

[393] Tomlin 2011, 143
[394] Warry 2010, 145
[395] Warry 2010, 144
[396] Tomlin 1979, 233

suburbs of Chester.[397] Personal names on legionary tile stamps are rare in Britain, despite being fairly common in military tile works on the continent.[398] Only one other complete stamp from Britain offers the possible name of an individual brickmaker: seventeen tiles preserve another Twentieth Legion stamp mentioning a "Logus".[399] It is possible that Viducius was a civilian contractor in charge of tile production for the legion, managing a factory that produced tiles for the military installations of the region. It may be equally likely that he was a soldier himself, as soldiers inscribing their names on tiles from the official works seems to have been common on the continent.[400] Viducius's tiles, however, mostly originate from a separate rural site in Tarbock rather than the official legionary works at Holt, and so it would be odd to find a soldier working at a shop other than the Holt works.[401] The name itself is also a fairly unusual Gallic one, and seems to be connected to Britain: another example of the name comes from a civic dedication in York, and a third example from the Rhine Delta, where the man in question refers to himself as a "negotiator Britannicianus".[402] The level of detail included in this particular stamp compared to other legionary stamps may also point to Viducius's identity as a civilian contractor: the stamp refers to the third consulship of Verus, presumably the year in which it was produced.[403] Tiles on the whole were almost never dated in Britain, either as individual tiles or as production batches.[404] Given that most of the military stamps consist only of the legion's name and no other information, the inclusion of extra information on this particular stamp is interesting. While the mention of a particular date is rare in a tile stamp (this is the only example in the northwestern provinces), it appears relatively regularly on lead ingots, which are often marked with a consular

[397] *RIB* 2463.59
[398] Warry 2010, 137
[399] *RIB* 2463.58
[400] Kurzmann 2005, 407
[401] Warry 2010, 137
[402] Kurzmann 2005, 406
[403] Warry 2010, 136. Either the year 126 CE (Marcus Annius Verus) or 167 CE (Lucius Verus) have been suggested.
[404] Tomlin 1979, 239

date, and which were often produced by civilian contractors.[405] If the legions were producing their own tiles, presumably they would have no need to record any additional identifying information on the stamp, since the tiles would go straight from military production to military use without ever leaving the administrative control of the unit. However, if civilian contractors were involved, the need for further documentation would presumably be greater, since the military would need to account for the incoming tiles and the quotas assigned to external civilian outfits. Arrangements between the military and civilian contractors or lessees for large-scale production evidently existed on the continent, possibly as temporary measures while the soldiers themselves were otherwise occupied.[406] Perhaps Viducius's tilery had been contracted to produce tiles for the legion on a short-term basis when the official military tile works at Holt were non-operational for one reason or another.[407] Production work at Holt seems to have decreased after about the mid second century CE, with only a minor military presence on site, represented by a soldier from an auxiliary unit, the *cohors I Sunicorum* who scratched his name into an unfired tile with a legionary stamp.[408]

Civilian contracting for industrial production is an important part of the interface between the military community and non-military inhabitants of the province, and also the transfer of the value and purpose of literacy to other aspects of life in Britain. This relationship is one of the many ways in which Roman imperial ideas about written record-keeping and accounting influenced non-military industries within the province. It makes sense that contractors and lessees would maintain the careful record-keeping initiated and expected by the imperial

[405] Swan & Philpott 2000, 59
[406] Warry 2010, 139
[407] Swan & Philpott 2000, 62
[408] *RIB* 2463.15

establishment.[409] The military establishes the record-keeping procedures at industrial works by employing its already well-developed literacy in recording output and quotas, the military leases the industrial operations to civilian managers (in order to free up military manpower to be put to use elsewhere), and the lessees keep up with the recording efforts because that is expected of the operations of the industry (and probably also how the military and governmental establishments kept tabs on their civilian contractors to ensure nothing went amiss). In addition to ad hoc civilian contracting, large-scale municipal production for the needs of the settlement went hand-in-hand with large-scale military production, and municipally controlled tileworks in civilian settlements also made use of stamping, in keeping with the tradition set by the military.[410] Just as the military had demand for large quantities of tiles for Roman-style fort buildings, towns and cities had demand for tiles to construct new civic buildings along the same Roman lines. Roman London, Gloucester, and Silchester all evidently had tile-making centers tasked with supplying the needs of the city and the surrounding areas, all with unique tile stamps that can be linked with the settlement and with villas in the neighboring countryside.[411] The fact that these stamps run contemporaneously with many of the legionary tile stamps from elsewhere in the province demonstrates that civilian industries were quick to take up similar operational systems to those employed by large-scale military infrastructure, including the use of written markers on industrial products.[412]

While the official stamps are themselves a useful metric for the role of literacy in military accounting, the tiles also occasionally preserve scratched graffiti and personal names not

[409] Mattingly 2007, 130
[410] Darvill & McWhirr 1984, 247
[411] Darvill & McWhirr 1984, 257
[412] Darvill & McWhirr 1984, 249

required by any manufacturing or accounting process.[413] Some tiles show what seems to be writing practice; sets of individual letters, copied personal names, and half-finished alphabets.[414] A particularly famous example from London, arranged in a rather poetic set of couplets, announces that Austalis has been wandering by himself for thirteen days.[415] A comparable poetic line can be found at Binchester, and a short excerpt from *Aeneid* 2.1 appears on a tile from Silchester.[416] Much like the quarry face inscriptions, these texts demonstrate casual literacy by the people involved in these manufacturing industries. Rather than being an important component of the tile, like the identifying stamp, these graffiti represent people involved in the tile-making process employing their literacy not as a grand demonstration of their education or social status, but as a simple personal act. The wide range of quality in the incised graffiti shows that multiple levels of literacy were represented, and that people with broadly differing competencies with written Latin all took advantage of the drying ceramics as opportunities to write.[417] Most of these writers were probably employees of the tile works, though the drying barns for tiles awaiting firing may have been open to access by people not connected with the tilery, as evidenced by the presence of cat, dog, goat, and human footprints found on numerous tiles within Britain and elsewhere.[418] Either way, the graffitists are clearly taking advantage of whatever writing materials are to hand to demonstrate and practice their literacy skills. The importation of these ceramics to the province by the military invasion, and the development of the kind of large-scale production of them that was necessary to feed the military machine offered not just an opportunity for civilians to make money supplying tiles to the army, but also

[413] Tomlin 2011, 143
[414] Tomlin 1979, 239
[415] Tomlin 1979, 238
[416] Tomlin 1979, 238
[417] Tomlin 1979, 240
[418] Tomlin 1979, 237

an opportunity for the expression of literacy on a personal scale. The military was providing not just the types of written expression that were considered important under the Roman system (epigraphy, accounting, and official documentation), but also new areas for writing to develop on its own within the civilian community.

The military presence in Britain went hand in hand with a system within which literacy developed and flourished throughout the province. The focus on literacy as a keystone of effective operations in the Roman military establishment enforced the need for reading and writing in its soldiers, both by passive exposure to writing in their environment and active demand for these skills in their daily duties. The levels of literacy necessary for soldiers to complete their daily duties were clearly taken for granted by the Roman establishment, and the soldiers themselves were eager to demonstrate their grasp of literacy both in the course of their military duties and in personal contexts such as the dedication of votive altars and tombstones. The ubiquity of soldiers in Britain and the high levels of military garrisoning that the province was subject to throughout its inclusion in the Roman Empire further heightened the impact of this literate environment.

The Roman army and power in the province of Britain were inextricably linked. The military was an omnipresent part of life in the province, and the uniting community identity of being a Roman soldier and employing Roman cultural practices such as composing documents and commissioning monumental inscriptions was clearly put into practice by the soldiers serving in Britain. Roman cultural identity was not limited to foreign soldiers serving in Britain, however. It is likely that native Britons were exposed to literacy and Roman literate culture through military service as well. British military units were being recruited to the Roman army

within twenty years of the conquest, and inscriptions from overseas attest to the presence of British auxiliary troops serving abroad.[419] Tacitus mentions Britons serving in the army of Agricola at Mons Graupius, and though this is perhaps intended more to heighten the dramatic impact of Calgacus's exhortations to the native Britons opposing Agricola than to describe the composition of the army in detail, it is still an important indicator of Britons being incorporated into the Roman military community in the province fairly early in its history.[420] Evidence for later British soldiers is scarce, depending mainly on whether a soldier decided to list his place of origin or ethnicity in a surviving inscription. The fact that it was common practice for the Roman military to recruit locals into the units garrisoning a province rather than continue to draw from overseas pools of recruits suggests that native Britons were present in the ranks whether they left evidence behind or not.[421] Some corroborating tombstones have been found; one of an auxiliary soldier from Gloucester serving in a unit stationed in Britain when he was recruited, legionary recruits to the XI *Victrix* and the XX *Valeria Victrix*, another auxiliary from Mumrills in which the man is explicitly identified as being a Brigantian.[422] It is also possible that soldiers who were local did not feel the need to specify their origin if they were native Britons, since it might be easily inferred, in contrast to more exotic locations that would need to be specified.[423] Though this evidence is sparse, it still demonstrates that British soldiers were enrolled in units stationed in Britain, perhaps in larger numbers than existing sources demonstrate. They were thus inducted into the heavily literacy-oriented mindset of the Roman military, and learned to value its connection to Roman power and advancement in society. When these native Britons completed

[419] vis. a *cohors I Brittanica* in *CIL* 16.26, 16.30 and 16.31, a *cohors I Brittonum* in *CIL* 16.31 (clearly a different unit from the *coh. I Brittanica*), and a *cohors II Brittonum* in *CIL* 13.12124. See also the 'numeri Brittonum' of the Upper German *lime*s in the Antonine period.
[420] *Agr*. 29, 32
[421] Dobson & Mann 1996, 49
[422] *CIL* 16.130, serving in the *cohors I fidelis Vardullorum*; *RIB* 369 (from Camulodunum) and *RIB* 156 (from what is probably the *civitas Belgarum* around Winchester), and *RIB* 2142, serving in the *cohors II Thracum*.
[423] Dobson & Mann 1996, 51

their terms of service, they probably settled down with their foreign-born comrades in the military enclaves of Britain, enjoying the benefits of their elevated status as members of the military community. Mattingly puts it quite nicely when he says "To join the Roman army…was nonetheless an opportunity to shift sides from defeated enemy to powerful winner."[424]

The military, then, was an important contributor to the epigraphic environment of Britain, but it was not the only vector for the spread of Latin and writing through the empire. Writing and literacy skills were heavily employed throughout the civilian areas of the province as well, increasing the ways in which non-speakers and the illiterate would be exposed to language and the written word. Roman attitudes toward literacy, after all, were not just limited to the military establishment. The populations of the large urban centers of Britain and their suburban areas were also active consumers and producers of written records, and the importance of the urban centers as diverse communities of exchange and development should not be understated. The next chapter addresses the uses of writing within the civilian urban and suburban community, and its contribution to the literate landscape of the province outside the centers of military influence.

[424] Mattingly 2007, 167

Chapter 4: Civilian Writing in the Urban and Quasi-Urban Areas

Exploring the nature of literacy in the urban and suburban communities of Britain is a rather more piecemeal undertaking than doing the same with the military community. The military community, despite its established commingling of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, was relatively homogenous in its overarching identity, with a more unified view of the usefulness and purpose of writing. The urban and suburban communities, by contrast, applied writing in more various ways depending on their own purposes and needs. The types of evidence are different; for example, monumental epigraphy is somewhat less common in urban, suburban, and rural contexts than in military ones. The analysis of this evidence is therefore more multifarious and patchwork. Nevertheless, there are some significant collections of the various types of writing associated with both the urban and rural communities, and it is these which the next two chapters address.

The urban and suburban communities of Britain are likely to have had much in common with the military areas of the province in terms of attitudes toward and uses of literacy.[425] The civilian centers of Britain were not only places where Roman-style administration ruled, but also where architecture, landscapes, and exchanges based on Roman models would flourish. Closer associations with Roman modes of living would naturally lead to the adoption of Roman cultural practices, even outside the regimented unity of the military itself. Urban centers in Britain were also likely to house large communities of current or former soldiers, especially in the military

[425] Mattingly himself acknowledges this similarity in his delineation of the three communities present in the province. (2007, 272-273)

coloniae of Gloucester, Lincoln, and Colchester.[426] In addition to this military component, however, urban areas were also likely to attract non-military locals and foreigners from elsewhere in the Roman Empire, both as administrators of the province and as regular inhabitants of the new cities and towns. Some urban centers were less closely associated with a military presence than the *coloniae*, given the tripartite division of provincial city status conferred by Roman law. The inhabitants of *coloniae* were Roman citizens governed by a Roman constitution, and therefore had the strongest ties to the imperial system (not surprising, given their military basis). However, the *coloniae* appear not to have been as uniform as that status may suggest; these settlements could also encompass populations of non-citizen inhabitants, who, though they did not have access to the same perks and privileges of Roman citizenship, nonetheless participated in and contributed to the cultural milieu of the urban area.[427] This non-military urban population, both native and immigrant, represented a source of alternate experiences of Latin and writing from elsewhere in the empire, further adding to the implementation of the new cultural systems of writing in Britain. Other cities could also be formally promoted to *colonia* status, as were York and London, so military character was by no means the only factor in the development of major cities in Britain.[428] Romano-British cities also grew out of preexisting population centers as well, and a number of these designated *civitas* capitals were incorporated as Roman urban centers. These settlements represent a level of continuity between pre-Roman and Roman power structures, and the local elites of the area would no doubt have been closely involved in the development of these cities.[429] Though lower in legal status than *coloniae* or *municipia* (the intermediate stage between a non-citizen town and a citizen one), these centers

[426] Mattingly 2007, 260
[427] Mattingly 2007, 261. Tac. *Ann*. 14.31 notes the abuses of the veterans of Colchester against the locals as an inciting event to the Boudiccan rebellion.
[428] Mattingly 2007, 261
[429] Jones 2007, 162

were nevertheless instrumental in the governing of large areas of associated territory, and could be promoted in the legal hierarchy depending on their success.[430]

Where the military establishment and the imperial civil service centered in the urban areas represented the official use of Latin and writing within the highly-structured governmental system, the non-military urban populations of Britain represented how that use of language governed the daily lives of civilians. An examination of the differences in contexts and applications of writing that occur in urban spheres as opposed to military ones will demonstrate how the use of Latin and writing were adapted from the schema established and introduced by the military system to ones that served civilian purposes. This speaks to the question of how and how thoroughly Latin and writing spread through the province, and the relative speed and efficiency with which the Roman imperial system was able to transform Britain from a preliterate culture to a literate one.

Urban and suburban communities, much like military ones, are heavily represented in the epigraphic record, particularly in the area of monumental inscriptions. The Latin language and the written word were not the exclusive tools of the military, after all, but were universal elements of Roman empire-building, and thoroughly permeated Roman society throughout the provinces. Delineating inscriptions produced by military personnel from those produced by non-military civilians is almost never a straightforward process, though some distinctions can be made between the two collections. Elucidating the identities and backgrounds of those who dedicated monumental inscriptions, both religious and commemorative, is difficult, as is any attempt to deduce demographics from archaeological evidence. Outside the military community, the occurrence of the *tria nomina* is rare, and limited to men from urban areas with a strong

[430] Mattingly 2007, 261

Roman character.[431] As these areas are the ones in which one would expect to find the greatest proportion of Roman citizens, who both had the *tria nomina* and understood its role in public commemoration, this is perhaps not surprising. Latinized Celtic names can also be helpful in deducing the identities of those who commissioned inscriptions, though these are rare in civilian areas, and in some instances belong to Gallic traders from the continent rather than homegrown Britons.[432] The presence of these foreigners, though, provides another important way in which civilian townspeople may have come into contact with Latin and writing. The military community, though it predominates in the epigraphic record, was clearly not the only group producing large-scale epigraphy in public areas.

The presence of a military rank or unit affiliation is one clear defining feature of epigraphic records, though these elements are by no means required for all inscriptions made by those in the military. Dedications to Jupiter found in the forts at Newcastle, Chesters, and Castlesteads make no mention of rank or unit, though their locations make it clear that they were official altars made by members of the military.[433] While those inscriptions dedicated in an official capacity, such as a tombstone or altar might more commonly provide this identifying information, it may not have been seen as necessary for more personal objects.[434] The close associations between military outposts and their attendant civilian communities further blurs the distinction; as the two populations commingled, relocated, and restructured themselves, the differences between military and non-military would no doubt have become less pronounced. There is also the possibility that the same person might apply writing in different ways according to different social or cultural priorities, as there was certainly no requirement to identify oneself in a

[431] Raybould 1999, 100
[432] Mattingly 2008, 62
[433] *RIB* 1316 & 1317, 1432, and 1984 respectively.
[434] Raybould 1999, 26

particular way in every context. These areas of contact themselves are crucial nexuses of cultural diffusion.

Given the information currently available, however, it is impossible to theorize about which non-specific dedications were erected by soldiers or civilians. The presence or absence of military rank or unit is the most definitive criterion available for distinguishing epigraphic collections, but it still provides only a general, and by no means mutually exclusive, impression of the division between the two populations. Nevertheless, it is still a useful element of epigraphic choice when discussing the cultural applications of writing and how their use differed among the various communities of Roman Britain. Those who included their military affiliations on their inscribed monuments had different social and cultural priorities than those who did not, and those with no military affiliation had different priorities still. For the purposes of delineating these different priorities and their applications, the inscriptions discussed in this chapter will be primarily those which neither mention military ranks or units, nor are closely associated with official military institutions. This civilian epigraphy, as distinct from the inscriptions of the military, displays some unique features worthy of comment.

Religious dedications are common among members of the non-military community, but the deities to whom these dedications are made are different. The proportion of Celtic deities in the civilian corpus of monumental public dedications is much higher than that of the military corpus, and the proportion of Romano-Celtic syncretisms is likewise higher among civilians than soldiers.[435] Official dedications to non-Roman deities in the military are comparatively rare, focusing as they do on solidly Roman deities such as Jupiter.[436] The preponderance of Celtic and syncretized deities in the civilian inscriptions demonstrates both the diversity of Romano-British

[435] Raybould 1999, 24. 42% of civilian inscriptions address Celtic deities, versus only 15% of the military corpus. Romano-Celtic syncretic deities represent 9% of the civilian corpus and 5% on the military.
[436] See above, pgs. 109-118

religious beliefs and the readiness with which writing was put to use by devotees of non-Roman Celtic deities from Britain and elsewhere. Written dedications were not only limited to Roman deities; the idea of creating a permanent written record of one's devotion to a god or goddess could translate very easily from the cultural practices of Rome into preexisting British religion.

Funerary monuments are likewise common in the civilian areas of Roman Britain. The proportions of military and civilian tombstones from military or military-adjacent sites that can be securely identified as such are roughly equal; although some tombstones attributed to civilians are likely to belong to the family members of soldiers, rather than to others not affiliated with the military.[437] The connection between the military community and the civilian community is further emphasized by a particular quirk of civilian funerary epigraphy demonstrated by the British material: tombstones from civilian sites that did not have a strong military presence are surprisingly rare.[438] The *civitas* capitals based on the urban centers of pre-Roman tribal territories have an especially sparse epigraphic record, and almost one-third of those sites have produced no inscribed tombstones whatsoever.[439] This is in direct contrast to military sites, where tombstones are fairly ubiquitous, and other urban centers with a more overt military character, such as the *coloniae* of Gloucester and Colchester.[440] This divergence from military practice as seen in the civilian epigraphic corpus is interesting. The rarity of inscribed tombstones at civilian urban centers, though it may in part be due to removal of the stones in intervening centuries or the use of more perishable markers like wood plaques, reveals that the use of a carved tombstone carried particular social connotations that may not have resonated with all residents of an urban center. Those that embraced this method of commemoration were mainly those associated with the

[437] Mattingly 2008, 60
[438] Mattingly 2008, 61
[439] Mattingly 2008, 62
[440] Mattingly 2008, 60

military community, with their highly Romanized notion of public commemoration; or high-status people from both Britain and the continent who embraced an inscribed tombstone as a sign of their elevated social position or unique cultural origin. These memorials were unmistakable signs of association with Roman culture, and though they may have been used only by a small minority of urban residents, the impact of their use was by no means diminished.

Dedication of public buildings and structures is another mode by which civilian inscriptions propagated. Monumental civic architecture was yet another transformative factor imported to the province by Roman ideologies, and the construction of public buildings in Romano-British urban centers entwined the sociopolitical ideals of Roman governance with the development of the new urban areas.[441] The notion of civic monumental construction seems to have been in place since the inception of Roman official influence in Britain, as Tacitus mentions the governor Agricola providing encouragement and aid to the construction of Roman-style public and private buildings in urban areas (albeit as a fairly heavy-handed way of 'civilizing' the barbarous Britons).[442] This is unlikely to have been any kind of official policy (and the support for construction may not even have been as explicit as Tacitus would have us believe), but the fact that monumental civic architecture was connected not only to concrete benefits to daily life —indoor bathing, central heating and the like— but also to the more intangible benefits of association with Roman imperial power must have had a noticeable impact on the experience of the citizens. Local tribal centers that predated the Roman invasion were among some of the first to adopt new Roman forms, many of them within the first 25 years post-invasion.[443] St. Albans, Chichester, London, Cirencester, Winchester, Silchester, and Colchester all had

[441] Revell 2016, 767
[442] Tac. *Agric*. 21, *"namque ut homines dispersi ac rudes eoque in bella faciles quieti et otio per voluptates adsuescerent, hortari privatim, adiuvare publice, ut templa fora domos extruerent…*"
[443] Jones 2007, 171

monumental public buildings by the end of the first century CE.[444] Clearly, there were some members of Romano-British society that needed very little imperial encouragement to embrace these new architectural options.

For most of the first and second centuries CE, the only stone buildings that could be found in an urban center were monumental public structures, usually built to Roman specifications.[445] The contrast of Roman-style municipal structures like the *forum-basilica* with preexisting and contemporary timber buildings would have been striking. Although the construction of these buildings seems to have proceeded at irregular intervals depending on the civic center, by the end of the second century CE, most major settlements in Britain could boast at least one monumental public building.[446] This was a fairly impressive level of construction given that Roman Britain possessed only about twenty-five major urban settlements, around five percent of the number found in other more centralized provinces.[447] Nevertheless, it would seem to be in keeping both with the trends observed in other northwestern peripheral provinces compared to the central Mediterranean and Rome itself.[448]

Despite this important role in transforming the lived space of many British urban centers, civic buildings and entertainment structures, themselves strong symbols of Roman-style government and leisure, seem to have been remarkably rare in the epigraphic record of Britain, accounting for less than 10 percent of total building inscriptions.[449] This is somewhat perplexing given the amount of investment in urban construction that was clearly taking place according to the archaeological record. Construction levels of civic buildings (forum-basilicas etc.) and

[444] Williams 1971, 168
[445] Burnham 1996, 133
[446] Burnham 1996, 134
[447] Jones 2007, 162
[448] Burnham 1996, 133
[449] Blagg 1990, 16

entertainment venues (theaters, arenas, baths, etc.) were both especially high in the second century CE, and the importation of fine building stone for their ornamentations was also underway, adding to the costs of building.[450] It seems quite unusual, from the standpoint of Mediterranean euergetism, that the levels of dedicatory inscriptions would appear not to have kept up.

The reasons behind this relatively low level of both extensive civic architecture and of inscriptions attesting to its construction are unclear. It may have to do with the relatively late arrival of the Roman state on the island compared to other provinces, or to the relatively short time that the island was a part of the established empire, or to the distance between the peripheral northwestern provinces and the more established Roman core areas. It may equally be evidence of differing social dynamics in Romano-British society. Public benefaction and euergetism in the funding and construction of massive public buildings was a traditional facet of Roman elite society, but it may be that this was one sociocultural element that did not translate as well to the existing social structure of Britain. The epigraphic record for urban centers in Britain demonstrates an imbalance that favors military sites and the *coloniae* of former military members, who account for the majority of inscriptions both personal and communal.[451] The tribal *civitas* centers, which, in addition to representing in many cases preexisting settlements of native Britons, constituted a larger percentage of urban habitation in Britain, furnish comparatively few inscriptions.[452] Intraurban competition among the high-status citizens may not have been as important as it was in the Roman heartland, and so the impulse to fund and construct large testaments to individual wealth was not as strong.[453] The proliferation of new

[450] Jones 2007, 180
[451] Hope 207, 287
[452] Hope 2007, 287
[453] Burnham 1996, 134

Roman-style villas in the countryside around the town of Verulamium in the late first century CE would seem to offer evidence of an alternative method of elite investment in buildings.[454] Perhaps the Romano-British upper classes saw the construction of new private homes as a more effective display of their status than a large public building. Whatever the reason behind the dearth of civic architecture and inscriptions attesting to the creation of monumental urban structures might be, it is another interesting facet of the British urban landscape, and of the province's written record.

As with many facets of British writing in the Roman period, the military contributed many of these dedicatory inscriptions.[455] Non-military dedicants do also make appearances in the records as well, so architectural benefaction was not the sole preserve of the military or of imperial staff.[456] Sacred buildings such as temples and shrines dominate the record in terms of new constructions that had inscribed identifications added to them, which is perhaps unsurprising in and of itself, as the importation of Roman gods and syncretic creation of new deities would have demanded new religious structures tied to them.[457] Epigraphic attestations of sacred structures in Britain actually outnumber those from other western provinces such as Gaul and Germany, suggesting that adding written documentation to a new or restored temple or shrine was, for whatever reason, more imperative for British builders than for their counterparts on the continent.[458] Taken together with the evidence for individual religious dedications mentioned above, this preference for adding inscriptions to sacred buildings seems to suggest that writing came to play a prominent role in the religious landscape of Britain as a result of the Roman occupation. Committing one's relationship with a deity to a permanent written record, whether as

[454] Burnham 1996, 135
[455] Blagg 1990, 18
[456] Mattingly 2008, 63
[457] Blagg 1990, 15
[458] Blagg 1990, 17

a private individual or as a public figure, was an attractive proposition to the inscription-making classes of Romano-British society. Religious dedications made by groups or associations, such as the townspeople of Vindolanda or the *collegium* of foreigners living at Silchester, provide a civilian parallel to the comparable group dedications made by military units such as those at Maryport.[459] The creation and reinforcement of group identity was as important to city dwellers as it was to soldiers, and that identity was mediated through participation in Roman-style religious dedications. In fact, group dedications seem to have been more prominent in Britain than in other parts of the empire.[460] Individual dedications of public works were more often than not made by people closely associated with the Roman imperial system: government officials, military officers, and members of the imperial household; dedications by individual Britons are almost nonexistent.[461] For urban residents not closely associated with the Roman government, then, dedication of public works and the appending of inscribed testaments thereto seems to have been of lesser importance than collective dedications made by groups of citizens. It is possible that this was due to the high cost of monuments; perhaps the only way funds for a public building and inscription could be raised was by clubbing together and chipping in small amounts of money collectively.[462] The presence of other similarly expensive forms of artistic construction, such as the mosaic floors and wall paintings found at many high-status civilian sites throughout Britain would seem to contradict this notion, though: the elites of British urban centers clearly did have money to spend, but they chose to commit those funds to private art rather than to public building.[463] Alternatively, the preponderance of group dedications among

[459] *RIB* 1700, an altar dedicated to Vulcan by the "*vicani Vindolandeses*"; and *RIB* 69, 70, and 71; associated with a temple at Silchester and mentioning the "*collegium peregrinorum constitentium Callevae*"
[460] Mattingly 2008, 63
[461] Mattingly 2008, 67
[462] Mattingly 2008, 63
[463] Mattingly 2008, 68

the urban civilians of Britain may reveal slightly different attitudes toward the purpose of these inscriptions. Roman attitudes toward public benefaction and inscribed evidence for it are clearly established by the wealth of epigraphic contributions from the Mediterranean, documenting illustrious lives and careers of notable individuals in meticulous detail. The absence of these accounts from the epigraphic record in Britain would seem to suggest that these cultural notions were less important to the wealthy civilian residents of Britain, who were more interested in beautifying their private residences than their larger urban community.

The recently published Bloomberg tablets from London are an invaluable source of urban written material pertaining to a fairly early stage in the development of Roman Britain, between c. 50 and c. 80 CE. Found in the same general area as the famous third-century-CE Walbrook Mithraeum, the tablets are among an assortment of artifacts recovered during the excavation of what used to be a small stream in the Roman period (now a paved road in central London.)[464] A few early artifacts and texts from the Flavian period onward have turned up in this area in previous excavations, notably a singularly well-preserved *stilus* tablet concerning the purchase of a slave girl by a slave of the imperial household.[465] The Walbrook valley occupied an important central location on the Thames for some time, and by the second century CE, the valley was part of the core of the Roman settlement of Londinium.[466] This collection, mainly composed of rare stylus tablets, presents a civilian counterpoint to the famous ink-written Vindolanda texts, and reveals that writing in Roman Britain entered the non-military mindset almost immediately following the Roman invasion. Roman Londinium was already an important commercial center by the time of Boudicca's rebellion in c. 60 CE, and its eventual role as the provincial capital

[464] Tomlin 2016, 3
[465] Tomlin 2003
[466] Tomlin 2016, 2

only increased its importance.[467] Despite its importance as an administrative and commercial center, however, London is notably lacking in public monumental inscriptions.[468] The Bloomberg tablets are therefore all the more important to the understanding of literate London.

Stylus tablets were easier to reuse for other documents than the ink-written wooden leaves of Vindolanda and Carlisle, since erasing the text was a simple matter of smoothing down the incised wax with a spatula and reinscribing it. These stylus tablets were fairly distinctive technology, requiring a specialized set of skills to produce (in contrast to ink-written tablets, which seem to have been much easier to come by), so the impetus to reuse them as much as possible would have been all the stronger.[469] The reuse of the tablets does not exclusively determine the types of documents they could be used for, however. In contrast to the ink-written wooden leaves of Vindolanda, stylus tablets seem to be used more often for documents that needed to be kept on file and referred to for some length of time, rather than read once and disposed of as an ink-written letter might be.[470]

Unfortunately, this propensity for reuse makes the stylus tablets very difficult to read. The rewritten texts pressed through the wax coating into the wood grain over previous words makes the wood itself a jumbled palimpsest of partial phrases which may or may not derive from the same document. Only about 20% of the recovered tablets bear any trace of legible text, and many of them contain only faint traces of letters that cannot be definitively organized into words.[471] Nevertheless, the sheer volume of tablets recovered from one single site, almost 405 individual samples, both more than doubles the total number of documents recovered from Roman London

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[467] Tac. *Ann*. 14.33, "*...copia negotiatorum et commeatuum maxime celebre…*"
[468] Holder 2007, 18
[469] The majority of the London tablets were made out of silver fir, an imported material that was perhaps cut from recycled barrel staves (see Tomlin 2016, 8-15)
[470] Pearce 2004, 44
[471] Tomlin 2016, 1. More modern imaging technology is currently showing some promise in resolving this issue.

as a whole, and demonstrates the floods of documents that would have flowed into, out of, and around the early commercial hub and eventual provincial capital during the Roman period.[472] Even if the texts themselves cannot be deciphered, their presence in the archaeological record is still a significant contribution to the study of literacy and writing in the province, especially in such a concentrated urban center. Furthermore, the fact of reuse in itself reveals that writing was common enough the be trafficked across Roman London and beyond, and that the skills of both reading and writing were expected by the composers of the texts, not only by the recipient of the letter, but also by the person or persons who were charged with its delivery.

One particular stylus tablet stands out from the collection as evidence of the acquisition of literacy skills, tablet WT79.[473] The text of the tablet consists solely of two incomplete block-capital alphabets, one inscribed on the inner face and one on the outer.[474] While it is impossible to tell if the tablet had previously been used for some other documents, it is clear that this iteration was intended as writing practice, rather than as any kind of meaningful document. A similar tablet, WT78, consists of numerical writing exercises (as opposed to sensical accounting), adding to the small collection of practice writing found in several media throughout the province.[475] Stylus tablets were often employed as school notebooks for writing practice, since the easily erasable surface would have lent itself easily to repeated copying and drafting exercises, in much the same way that early modern schoolchildren would have used slates and chalk for their work. The tablet itself dates stratigraphically to around 60 CE, showing that education in Latin and literacy was taking place in London at a very early phase in its development as a Roman capital.

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[472] Tomlin 2016, 1
[473] Tomlin 2016, 240
[474] A through G on the inner face, and A through T on the outer.
[475] See above, pgs. 113-114

It is also possible that the text on WT79 was not only intended as practice for writing, but also for the use of these specialized stylus tablets. Inscribing on the inner face, where the wax was contained, makes sense; it is where the majority of the writing was done. The inner face of the tablet has clearly been inscribed over multiple times, and the partial alphabet that is now legible seems to have been the last thing written on a tablet that had been written and rewritten several times. Whether the previous texts also represented practice alphabets or other writing exercises is impossible to determine conclusively. The outer face, however, would have had no wax for inscribing, and would not therefore lend itself especially well to writing practice, especially if the tablet was intended to be reused. The only writing that is typically applied to the outer faces and edges of these stylus tablets is an address or other identifying information concerning the content of the tablets or the person for whom the text was intended.[476] The inscribed alphabet on the outer face of WT79 is therefore incongruous with typical practice for the use of these stylus tablets. It might make more sense if one were to consider this tablet as a kind of demonstration of how stylus tablets were to be inscribed, sealed, and addressed. The user would, after all, need practice not only in writing on the smooth wax of the inner face, but also on the rougher, grained texture of the outer face if the document was to be properly deployed. These practice alphabets might, therefore, represent not only literacy practice, but also some kind of training in the use of new writing technologies imported to the province along with Roman ideas on documentation, correspondence, and record-keeping. The importation of writing was not only the introduction of an abstract concept, but also of all the physical objects and tools needed to produce it.

The most informative texts are those which concern financial or legal matters. These tablets are much more easily deciphered than those used for personal correspondence, since they

[476] See WT1-WT25 for examples of addressing on the outer face.

appear to only have been written on once, rather than subjected to continual reuse. This suggests that the documents were to be kept as evidence of the transaction, and formed a more permanent record than the personal correspondence tablets did. A number of the most legible tablets are promissory notes or records of debts and payments, demonstrating that writing and commerce in London went hand-in-hand, and participating in the latter required at least some knowledge of the former. This practice also demonstrates the Roman attitude towards putting agreements in writing rather than relying on oral contracts; writing came along with a host of cultural connotations and backgrounds that were imported to Britain alongside the letters themselves. The legal dispute between two men with obvious Celtic names being adjudicated by an unnamed legal functionary in WT51 gives a glimpse into another arena that required literacy.[477] While the surviving text contains only the beginning of a pre-trial judgement by the official (itself a document that would have needed to be kept until the trial date and referred to as part of the proceedings), the legal dispute would doubtless have produced further documentation regarding the official decision in the matter, according to which both litigants would have been expected to abide.[478] Literate record-keeping was not limited to the higher social echelons of Roman London, as one document refers to two freedmen contracting between themselves on the subject of money owed for merchandise.[479] Slaves, too, were involved in the production of documents at London. The slave deputy Vegetus purchased a slave girl for the considerable sum of 600 *denarii* (more than two years' wages for a legionary) and receives a written contract of sale from the dealer

[477] The litigants are named Litugenus and Magunus, both of which are Celtic-derived names found elsewhere in the empire. It is unclear whether these men were Roman citizens, but the absence of the *tria nomina* in this official document seems to indicate that they were not. (Tomlin 2016, 170)
[478] One cannot, of course, discount the possibility that either or both of the litigants may have had a mediator or other official who read and wrote on their behalf. If, however, the documentation produced by the court case needed to be consulted again in the future, it would certainly streamline the process if the litigants themselves were literate.
[479] WT44, Tomlin 2016, 152

attesting to the quality of the slave girl and the provenance of her ownership.[480] Florentinus, a slave of Sextus Cassius, makes a note of rent payments made to his owner on an unknown date in 64 CE, explicitly stating that he was drawing up the document at his master's behest.[481] Whether this was because Sextus Cassius was unable to write himself is unclear, but it need not be the case, as there is evidence from the rest of the empire and from Britain itself of slaves acting as agents for their owners in financial or legal matters.[482] Writing in Roman London, therefore, even in the early days of its formation, was something that might be encountered at all levels of society, not just among the high and mighty. The average Roman Londoner might interact with freedmen or slaves who could read and write and produce documents. Cassius's unnamed renter, for example, might never have met the landlord himself, but evidently interacted with his literate slave clerk whenever the payments were due, and had his discharged obligation documented in writing. The system by which awareness of and exposure to literacy propagated across the province was clearly not limited to the upper levels of society, even from the first days of the province's Romanization.

It would be impossible to discuss the cultural milieu of writing in Romano-British urban areas without making mention of the collections of curse tablets that have been found at several sites around the province. These collections themselves demonstrate the problematic and heterogenous nature of writing use in the urban centers and surrounding areas; curse tablets are scattered across both urban and rural landscapes in Britain, and occur in a variety of contexts. This style of writing is by no means one isolated to the urban areas, however, one of the major

[480] Tomlin 2003, 45
[481] WT 50, Tomlin 2016, 168
[482] Tomlin 2016, 168. See also WT27 for correspondence referring to a slave producing documents on behalf of the owner.

collections from Bath is associated with a fairly heavily-trafficked town site, and some few tablets outside Bath have been found in other cities such as London. The as-yet unpublished collection from the suburban sanctuary of Uley in Gloucestershire further complicates matters, as the sanctuary itself and the settlement from which many of the curse text originate may be more appropriately categorized as rural rather than urban. The curse texts, then illustrate the difficulty in delineating Romano-British society into separate groups, while at the same time illuminating how those groups might intersect and influence each other. In general, it is helpful to view the curse texts as a type of writing that linked both urban and extra-urban communities, and which could be employed by residents in many places around Roman Britain.

Curse texts from Britain comprise more than half of all existing Latin-language curse tablets, [483] and are a critical element in the study of the adoption of the Latin language in Roman Britain. Some thirty-five different sites across the province have produced at least one curse text, though the fragility of the thin, corroded lead and their usual rolled or folded state has hampered decipherment in many cases.[484] The majority of the tablets come from non-military contexts, making them an interesting counterpoint to the collections of internal military documents such as those from Vindolanda and demonstrating the growth of writing skills and Latin literacy beyond the military or provincial bureaucracy. They should be interpreted not just as a collection of important primary sources or as a compendium of provincial Latin philology; but also as a symptom of the larger, more fundamental changes that were taking place in the lives and experiences of average Britons during the Roman occupation, as the Latin language and writing as a daily tool spread throughout the province.

[483] Tomlin 1988, 59
[484] Hurst 2016, 100

The largest collections of curse tablets come from the urban sanctuary of Sulis-Minerva at Bath and from the rural temple of Mercury at Uley, although a few other isolated examples have been found at other sites, such as Carlisle and London. Almost all of the sites at which curse tablets have been found are located in the southern half of the country: no tablets have yet been located in the more militarized areas of northern England. Given the roughly 300-year span over which the existing curse tablets were written,[485] it is intriguing that the practice apparently never flourished on the northern frontiers or in the military communities as it did in the south. There are only a few examples of curse tablets that can be directly associated with a military site; one from Caerleon, [486] and two from Leintwardine.[487] These tablets were not associated directly with the military structures, however; the Caerleon tablet was deposited in the town's amphitheater and the Leintwardine tablets were found in the drains of the town bathhouse outside the military enclosure.[488] The literacy of the military is evident in the archaeological record in other ways, such as the Vindolanda tablets and collections of altars from military sites, so the discrepancy in the distribution of curse tablets is unlikely to be due to differences in literary abilities. Differing goals and applications to which writing was turned are more likely explanations for the disparity. Writing was adopted in certain ways in the urban and rural areas in the south of the province as distinct from the overwhelmingly militarized northern frontier. The curse tablets, therefore, can serve the same purpose in illuminating the cultural frameworks that supported the use of writing in the southern peripheral areas as collections of inscriptions or writing tablets do for central cities and military communities.

[485] Based on the styles of handwritings, ranging from the late first to early fourth centuries A.D., Tomlin 2002, 166
[486] *RIB* 323, Tomlin 2002, 163
[487] Wright 1969, 241
[488] The identification of the Leintwardine tablets as curses is still uncertain, see Wright 1969, 241

The greatest number of transcribed and translated tablets comes from the sacred spring at Bath, where the texts were preserved by the sandy bottom of the hot spring into which they were cast by their dedicators. The majority of the Roman-era building at Bath that converted the marshy area around the natural hot springs into a monumental and important religious complex dates to the Flavian period, some thirty or forty years after the initial landing under Claudius.[489] The temple itself is an anomaly in Roman Britain; it is highly classicized in style, matching continental examples (such as the Maison Carrée in Nîmes) more closely than typical Romano-Celtic style temples from within the province.[490] That the site was developed so quickly after the conquest with such a clearly Roman style of building perhaps speaks to the importance of the site in the pre-Roman period; transforming a well-known indigenous site into a visibly Roman one would fit with the policy of appropriating pre-Roman religious sites that is evident in Gloucestershire and more generally throughout the province of Britain.[491]

The pre-Roman character of Bath is difficult to conclusively determine, as various engineering works and continuous habitation from the Roman period onward has obscured much of the Iron Age evidence from the area. It is likely that the site and hot springs of Bath held a similar religious significance to earlier Britons as it did to the Romano-British inhabitants, and the worship of the Celtic deity which became Sulis-Minerva in the Roman period may date back at least to the Bronze Age.[492] A small collection of 18 Celtic coins (the majority of which are local Dobunnic tribal issues) recovered from the sacred spring, however, shows some of the types of dedications that may have predated the curse tablets.[493] Uncertain stratigraphy complicates the exact dating of finds from the spring, but comparative evidence from other sites

[489] Cunliffe 1969, 3
[490] Cunliffe 1969, 35
[491] Woodward & Leach, 305
[492] Cunliffe 1969, 1
[493] Sellwood in Cunliffe 1988, 279

suggests that these coins date from c. 39 BCE to c. 40 CE, making them all pre-conquest issues.[494] While a few coins do bear rough partial inscriptions of a few Latin letters or fragments of names in Latin script, they are both a different medium of writing entirely, and far from the articulate and well-executed writing of the curse tablets. The nature of the dedication is different as well; the coins consigned to the spring are a preexisting possession with its own separate purpose, whereas the curses are purposefully made specifically to be dedicated. The use of writing has introduced an entirely new type of dedication to the shrine, one that seems not to have existed in the pre-Roman Iron Age. While the dedication of objects into sacred springs and other bodies of water as a religious practice predates the Roman presence in Britain, the nature of the dedications has changed from relatively mute objects to inscribed petitions.

The full collection from Uley, though still largely untranscribed, is comparable in size to that from Bath, [495] demonstrating the longevity and relative popularity of the practice in the region in the Roman period. The tablets at Uley also appear to have been out in the open for some time prior to their deposition, possibly because there is no spring at Uley into which to cast the tablets, as there is at Bath. [496] Perhaps the rolled and folded lead sheets were on display as a record of curses being made, and as a deterrent to further criminality. Uley, as a rural shrine, has a somewhat different character than the urban temple at cosmopolitan Bath. The evidence of pre-Roman occupation at Uley is somewhat clearer than at Bath, despite the fact that the shrine at Uley also remained in use for a considerable length of time. Archaeological investigation of the site has detected evidence of pre-Roman Iron Age religious activity, providing the kind of confirmation of continuous use before and during the Roman occupation that is more difficult to

[494] Sellwood in Cunliffe 1988, 279
[495] Tomlin 1993, 113
[496] Tomlin 1993, 114

detect at Bath.[497] The geographical area surrounding the Uley shrine also comprises several significant pre-Roman sites; such as the hill-forts at Uley Bury and Downham Hill, as well as an assortment of long and round barrows.[498] The surrounds of the shrine site are densely populated with farmsteads, some of which were evidently quite wealthy.[499] The largest sum of money mentioned in any curse text, 100,000 *denarii*, is mentioned in a text from Uley,[500] a further indicator that the rural communities in the area were highly prosperous. Uley is also the source for a highly unique text among the British curse tablets: a Latin language petition written in Greek letters, showing not just a high level of economic prosperity in the region, but perhaps also a certain level of bilingualism.[501] The curse tablets at Uley also represent a new type of dedication at the shrine; the pre-Roman votives from the site consist of mute objects and a few locally-produced Celtic coins,[502] and there is no evidence of the type of textual votives to compare with the curse tablets of the later Roman phases. Inscriptions and dedicatory altars are also rare at Uley,[503] though this is perhaps more reflective of the general lack of inscriptions in less urbanized areas than anything particular to the site itself. Some parallels to the curse tablets may be found in the few votive plaques which bear inscriptions, but their content suggests that their texts are more similar to those commonly found on dedicatory inscriptions than on curse tablets.[504]

The curse tablets represent a new form of dedication that is intrinsically connected to the Roman occupation and does not exist prior to Roman contact. The nature of the worshippers'

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[497] Woodward & Leach 1993, 13
[498] Woodward & Leach 1993, 2
[499] Woodward & Leach 1993, 5
[500] Uley 78, see Tomlin 1993, 130
[501] Uley 52, see Tomlin 2002, 175
[502] Sellwood in Woodward & Leach 1993, 82
[503] Henig in Woodward & Leach 1993, 94
[504] See Henig in Woodward & Leach 1993, 103-104. At least one example is almost certainly a military belt fitting, rather than a purpose-made inscription for the deity.

interactions with their deities has been fundamentally changed by the presence of writing: though curses and similar imprecations may have existed in the pre-Roman period as oral prayers that accompanied the dedication of objects to the shrine, there is no lasting record of them. The introduction of the curse tablets provides the dedicators with a concrete means of recording their presence at the site, their communication with the deity, and the conditions which they hoped the communication would remedy.[505] Writing as a lasting record of religious devotion has a long tradition in Roman worship, as the massive volumes of dedicatory altars and other inscriptions from sanctuaries throughout the Roman world can attest, and the adoption of this tradition into British cult worship, where no written records of vows or prayers had previously existed, shows the influence that the idea of a written expression of religious identity had on those who attended the site. Even if no other mortal worshippers were able to read the curse tablet, the permanence of its existence in the shrine and the record of worship that it provided to the deity were still important elements of the interaction; a written contract between the person and their god. While the introduction of curse tablets into Romano-British religion did not completely overhaul the nature of religious worship at preexisting cult sites (oral prayers no doubt continued to be made, and mute objects without written entreaties are still dedicated to the shrines throughout the Roman and post-Roman periods), it provided another option for addressing the deities and creating a lasting account of the worshippers and their prayers. The presence of curse tablets at particular sites may also demonstrate the ways in which the worshippers conceived of their deities; i.e., that the gods in question had an association with punishing theft.[506] That the worshippers at important religious sites in Britain chose to exercise this new option of creating

[505] See Beard 1991 47-48
[506] Gager 2003, 176

written records of their attendance and prayer shows the degree to which they valued writing in a religious context and identified it as an important part of their religious experience.

Though the exact identities of the dedicants are nearly impossible to determine clearly, some inferences can be made about the possible demography of the petitioners. The personal names that occur in the tablets fall into two broad groups: single Latinized names of Celtic origin and single Latin cognomina. The names are occasionally accompanied by patronymics (or in some rare cases, possibly matronymics[507]), but not by other names in the forms of the traditional Roman *duo nomina* or *tria nomina*.[508] A single name with a patronymic is a common format for Celtic names in the Roman period, and is likely a holdover from the pre-Roman period.[509] The use of Celtic names even as a part of the *duo nomina* or *tria nomina* is rare in all instances in which such names would be used, and the curse tablets support that distinction between Roman-style names and Celtic ones.[510] At Bath, the Latinized Celtic names are slightly more predominant than the Latin cognomina, at a ratio of about 77 Celtic names to 70 Latin ones.[511] At Uley, the proportion seems to be roughly equivalent: half Celtic names and half Latin, though the collection has not been read to the same extent as Bath.[512] In general, the proportion of names included in tablets from elsewhere than Bath or Uley also seems comparable, though with Latin names slightly predominating.[513] The dedicators of the tablets, then, identified themselves differently than would be expected of a traditional Roman. They seem to be from a social stratum that had less direct contact with Roman imperial authority, and thereby the official conventions of naming.

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[507] Mullen 2007b, 44
[508] Mullen 2007b, 50
[509] Mullen 2007b, 40
[510] Mullen 2007b 42
[511] Mullen 2007b, 47
[512] Tomlin 1993, 117
[513] According to the author's own calculations based on published tablet texts.

The altars and other dedicatory inscriptions from Bath would seem to confirm this social separation. The names from the curse tablets reflect a wider population of worshippers from those setting up grand public inscriptions. The inscriptions, for the most part, are dedicated by those who used either the *duo nomina* or the *tria nomina* format, composed of names of Latin origin, rather than single names or names with patronymics. Only five examples out of thirty legible names preserve single names with patronymics: Priscus Touti, a mason from Gaul; Peregrinus Secundi, from Trier; the son of Novantus whose own name is lost; and Sulinus Bruceti and Sulinus Maturi, whose first names closely match that of the deity at Bath, Sulis, and suggest these dedicants may be local.[514] These patronymic names are also common in the nomenclature of non-citizens prior to 212 CE, when universal citizenship was granted to all residents of the Roman Empire.[515] The dates of the curse tablets, however, and therefore whether they predate or postdate universal citizenship, are difficult to establish beyond a very broad approximation based on the vocabulary and the formation of the handwritings. They may be broadly divided into Old Roman Cursive texts, of approximately the late second to late third centuries CE; New Roman Cursive of the late third to early fifth centuries CE; and a few texts in non-cursive capital letters, which seem to appear in all periods.[516] Some texts are a mixture of multiple types of writing, which may show the evolution of writing over time, but also further complicates dating of the texts.[517] The dominant script at both Bath and Uley is Old Roman Cursive, accounting for some 58% of the combined total;[518] and the theoretical timeframe within which Old Roman Cursive was being used would be concurrent with the establishment of universal citizenship. Patronymics, however, are rare in the curse tablet collection as they are in

[514] *RIB* 149, *RIB* 140, *RIB* 153, *RIB* 151, and *RIB* 150 respectively.
[515] Tomlin 1988, 97
[516] Tomlin 1988, 73
[517] See Tomlin 1988, 87
[518] Tomlin 1993, 115

the inscriptions: single Celtic or Latin names predominate.[519] This suggests two things: first, that the majority of the texts postdate the grant of universal citizenship in 212 CE,[520] and second, that even though the dedicators may have been citizens, they chose to keep using their singular names in the curse tablets instead of opting for the two or three names used by those more closely associated with the Roman system.

The persistence of the pre-Roman Celtic naming tradition in the curse tablets, as well as the persistence of names with Celtic etymology, provides evidence for a corresponding persistence of identity in the petitioners who dedicated curse tablets. The dedicators, for the most part, appear to have been either of Celtic origin or at least identified with some perceived Celtic heritage. They chose not to dedicate monumental inscriptions or stone altars as did the worshippers at Bath who, based on their nomenclature, seem to have adopted the more official and traditional markers of Roman identity. This may in part be due to the marked difference in cost between an expensive inscribed monument and a relatively cheap curse tablet,[521] which in itself shows something about the curse tablet petitioners as well. They represent the social stratum that may not have had access to the more ostentatious epigraphic displays of religious allegiance that the upper echelons did. Presumably, they were the middle- to lower-class inhabitants of the area. Nevertheless, they still respected the institution of writing enough to invest in a curse tablet, even if they could not afford a monumental inscription. The dedicators of the curse tablets seem to be a distinctly different population than is commonly associated with written Latin in Britain, and their use of written Latin in this context shows its adoption by people outside the traditional military and governmental spheres within which written

[519] *Tab. Sul.* 9, 10 (both capital-letter texts), & 30 (ORC) Tomlin 1988, 87; Uley 62 (ORC), Tomlin 1993, 117
[520] See Tomlin 1988, 97
[521] Tomlin 1988, 98. The tablets at Bath are surmised to be off-cuts or waste from local pewter industries, and therefore readily available and cheap.

communication was traditionally employed. While it would be premature to consider the curse tablets as evidence for mass literacy in Britain in the Roman period, they certainly do show that a wider segment of the population could take advantage of the availability of writing. Likewise, it shows that the lower echelons of society were willing to engage in writing and accept it as a useful tool in certain contexts.

The repetitive, often formulaic nature of some of the texts raises the question of the use of professional scribes with regard to the creation of the tablets. Professional scribes who could compose curses to order were known from the ancient world even as early as the fourth century BCE.[522] The diverse body of handwritings represented in the British curse tablets, however, would seem to speak against the prospect of official scribes: the overwhelming majority of the texts are each written in a different hand. There is only one possible instance of duplication at Bath, and the pair of tablets in question there are likely two parts of the same document.[523] There is also a wide range of handwriting quality present, ranging from quite well-executed, as in Uley 2, to rather clumsy, as in Tab. Sul. 15. It would seem more likely that a wide range of different worshippers were completing their own tablets, rather than relying on professional help. The presence of illiterate texts, comprised only of nonsensical scribbles, also addresses the idea that the composer of the text and the writer of the words were one and the same.[524] If professional scribes were available at the shrine to write tablets for people, presumably there would be no need for an illiterate person to make a curse tablet with no actual text; they could instead dictate their composition to a scribe, and have it written in proper letters and language. The cost of a scribe's services would be the only other barrier to obtaining a written text, and if the tablets

[522] Plato, *Rep*. 2.364c
[523] *Tab. Sul* 95 & Tab. Sul. 96, Tomlin 1988, 228-29
[524] *Tab. Sul.* 112-116

were indeed as cheaply available as they have been reckoned to be,[525] the price cannot have been too great of a barrier to the dedicants. Even if those who dedicated the illiterate tablets could not have afforded professional writing services, the presence of their pseudo-texts demonstrates that the value of writing was known and accepted even by those who could not produce it themselves.

Additionally, none of the extant tablets explicitly indicate that they were written by someone else on behalf of the complainant. An example of the explicit identification of a scribe may be found in a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus where Aurelius Theon writes out a petition on behalf of the illiterate Aurelius Eudaemon;[526] and in the petitions of the Abinnaeus Archive (the papers of Flavius Abinnaeus, a military commander in Egypt), where Aurelius Demetrios writes on behalf of the illiterate Aurelius Sakaon.[527] While this may be a regional eccentricity of Egyptian clerical practice, it still speaks to the role of scribes in what were considered more official matters. Only one British tablet, from Ratcliffe-on-Soar, can be fairly definitively attributed to a writer other than the injured party (whether a professional scribe or simply a more literate assistant is not specified); the petitioner makes his or her dedication "in the name of Camulorix and Titocunia".[528] This is the closest thing to a definitive identification of scribal activity that can be discerned in the corpus, and one definite example out of some 200 or so identifiable individual documents greatly reduces the probability of scribes working on a large scale where the tablets are concerned.

More ambiguous evidence for scribal activity can be found in a few other tablets. Uley 2 internally identifies itself as a "commonitorium", a kind of 'memorandum' to the god concerning

[525] See Tomlin 1988, 80
[526] Αὐρήλιος Θέων Ἀρπάλου ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ αὐτου μὴ ἰδότος γράματτα. *P. Oxy* 9.1201
[527] Abinnaeus Archive 44, Αὐρήλιος Σακάων ἐπιδέδωκα. Αὐρήλιος Δημήτριος ἔγραψα ὑπὲρ αὐτου ἀγραμμάτου.
[528] Hassall & Tomlin 1993, 310

the lost property, which has been taken as evidence that it was written by a third party.[529] This is not the only tablet given a heading that suggests an official petition, however; Tab. Sul. 9 includes a similar formal heading that identifies it as a "*pet(it)io*" to Sulis.[530] The term 'commonitorium' has particularly legal connotations, and the rest of the text follows along very legalistic lines, with the liberal use of "supradicta" (aforesaid) and "suprascripta", (written above).[531] Additionally, the word "commonitorium" is not common before the fourth century CE, and indeed, this is the only known occurrence of it in a curse tablet; but the handwriting in this particular example is not the clerical New Roman Cursive typical of later tablets, but rather 'bookhand' capitals. An alternative interpretation of this text suggests that it is more a highly affected and overly formal petition written by the dedicator, rather than a text produced by an official scribe. Two tablets from Bath, 5 and 66, appear to consist of a name written by one hand, and a text written by another, interpreted potentially as the work of a third-party scribe.[532] These are perhaps comparable to Claudia Severa's letter to Sulpicia Lepidina found at Vindolanda, where the majority of the text is written out by an anonymous scribe, but the closing sentiments are written in Severa's own hand.[533]

The contention that copying errors or corrections are evidence of scribes copying another text for a petitioner is also only one way to interpret the texts.[534] Even those writers who are highly literate and are not copying an example text may accidentally transpose or skip over a letter when writing a text out by hand; especially in emotional circumstances (the circumstances in which people decided to make a curse). Transposition errors in the enciphered or reversed

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[529] See Tomlin 1993, 121
[530] Tomlin 1988, 120
[531] *res supradictas* (Line 7), *fanum supradictum* (Line 7), *deo supradicto* (Line 10), *res quae suprascripta sunt* (Lines 12-13), Tomlin 1993, 121
[532] See Tomlin 2002, 170
[533] Tab. Vindol. 2.291
[534] See Tomlin 1988, 98

examples are also more easily explained as an unfamiliar writing style causing a problem for the writer.[535] A reference in Tab. Sul. 8 to a text having been copied is likewise ambiguous.[536] If another original text was copied onto the curse tablet by a professional scribe on behalf of a petitioner, it still raises the question of the origin of the text. The scribe copying a preexisting text given by the petitioner would make little sense, as the petitioner could simply dedicate their own copy without needing to consult the scribe. The scribe copying a predetermined text from a more authoritative source is also not strongly supported by the existing evidence. While magical textbooks instructing a practitioner how to perform particular spells and incantations are known from Egyptian and Greek magical traditions,[537] a similar master text for British curse tablets has not been found. Indeed, the variability and nuance of the texts, even within a fairly formulaic structure, would seem to suggest that the knowledge required to write a curse text was transmitted more organically than through a predetermined set of rituals or spells as would be found in a textbook, and the British tablets deviate enough from the prescribed rules of the Egyptian and Greek magical texts that they seem to be operating in their own unique tradition.[538] The influence of international migration, both military and civilian, to Britain in the Roman period (especially to cosmopolitan urbanized areas like Bath) must have had some effect in bringing the tradition of the curse tablets to the province from the wider Greco-Roman world,[539] but the adaptation of the tradition to serve particularly British needs is still evident in the texts. A more likely origin for Tab. Sul. 8 would seem to be that the dedicator copied the text of someone more literate (given the somewhat awkward block capitals of the writing), but he or she

[535] See Tomlin 1988, 98
[536] *carta picta perscripta*, Tomlin 1988, 118
[537] E.g. the *Greek Magical Papyri (PGM)*
[538] Tomlin 1988, 62
[539] Versnel 1991, 91

presumably would still have to be at least basically familiar with the alphabet and language in order to execute the curse effectively.

There is also a small corpus of evidence within the collections for writing in some other language than Latin. Tab. Sul. 14 and Tab. Sul. 18 have been interpreted as being rendered not in Latin, but British Celtic written with the Latin alphabet. Uley 7 and Uley 35, though currently un-transcribed, also appear to be non-Latin writing, and Uley 33, though mostly made up of names, also contains the strange form 'aexsieumo', which is certainly no recognizable Latin word.[540] The more legible pair of transcribed texts from Bath have elements and phrases in common with Celtic-language texts from the continent, and their grammatical features strongly suggest that the language is Celtic.[541] There is still some question as to whether these texts represent specifically British Celtic, or if they are attributable to visiting Celtic-speakers from outside the province; but the issue is difficult to resolve based on the texts themselves.[542] Curse tablets from the continent were written in Gallic and other continental Celtic offshoots until roughly the third century CE, so the practice was not unique to Britain.[543] Bath was certainly cosmopolitan enough to have attracted Celtic-speaking travelers from elsewhere in the empire, as is attested in the inscriptions from the temple site which identify visitors from Gaul and Lusitania alongside local dedicators.[544] The tradition of transcribing Gallic Celtic in Latin script does exist on the continent, though these examples are rare and short, consisting of personal names or other graffiti.[545] Parallels to the Bath and Uley material may be found at Amélie-les-Bains and Chamalières in France, where lead curse tablets is what may be Gallic Celtic written with Latin

[540] See Hassall & Tomlin 1995, 378-79
[541] Mullen 2007a, 37
[542] Mullen 2007a, 42
[543] Mullen 2016, 582
[544] *RIB* 140, *RIB* 149, *RIB* 157, *RIB* 159
[545] Tomlin 1987, 24

characters were deposited into similar hot springs.[546] A further text from Larzac, the longest lead tablet text written in Gallic Celtic, would also seem to represent a curse, as it was deposited in a grave, though the exact content has yet to be translated.[547] Clearly there was a precedent for representing curses in a continental Celtic language written out in Latin characters, and for the transcribing of spoken Celtic into written Latin in the context of curses. This technique need not be limited to continental residents, however; it is equally possible that continental Celtic languages, with their preexisting written traditions, may have influenced the adoption of the practice in Britain.[548]

If these texts do in fact represent British Celtic as opposed to a continental variant, it would significantly broaden the scope within which writing was applied in Romano-British contexts. By the time of the earliest curse tablets, a relatively short time after the concept of writing had been introduced to Britain with the Roman occupation, the knowledge of it at places like Bath and Uley was advanced enough to separate the letters from the language and reinterpret them in a uniquely British way. They were able to use the technique of writing, which was linked to the Latin language of the occupying power, and refashion it to serve an aspect of their own cultural identity as non-Latin speakers. The use of writing was no longer exclusively associated with the Latin language; at least two, and possibly more, dedicators chose to employ the letters of a new language to write the words of a familiar one. This further speaks to the relative sophistication of the texts; transcribing a language with little to no written alphabet of its own in the letters of another language requires a high level of competency in both, and an understanding of how writing corresponds to non-written language. Such conceptual facility might be expected in Gaul, for example, where there had been contact between the indigenous Celtic languages and Latin

[546] Tomlin 1987, 25
[547] See Lambert 2003, 152-174
[548] Mullen 2007b, 42 refers to the written tradition of Gaulish, Britain's closest continental Celtic neighbor.

for considerably longer; and indeed, this same kind of bilingualism was being displayed in the potteries of La Graufenesque with the writing of Gaulish words in Latin script.[549] Its relatively rapid development in Britain, however, would speak to the adoption of writing by Celtic-speaking Britons as distinct from Latin, and their willingness to apply those tools to personal religious interactions. The question of why these tablets were written in this mysterious language remains open, at least until the texts themselves can be translated. It may perhaps have to do with Sulis-Minerva's pre-Roman Celtic identity, or with the relative linguistic allegiances of the inhabitants, or with some other aspect all together. If these few examples are indeed Celtic texts written in Latin letters, not only would they thoroughly disprove the longstanding notion that Celtic was never written down, but they would also indicate flexibility in the use of the written word in Britain, as well as the degree to which the concept of writing was embraced within British culture. Writing did not necessarily have to be limited to expressing Latin; Celtic-speaking Britons could, perhaps for the first time, draft communication with their deities in writing in their own language.

As is to be expected with any literate or semiliterate population, there is evidence for a broad range of literary competencies to be found in the curse tablet collections. On the whole, however, the tablets seem to suggest a relatively high degree of literacy and competency within the population of worshippers, and that petitioners were capable of drafting and writing their own texts without the interventions of third-party scribes. Both the handwriting and the language itself would seem to confirm this; numerous spelling and grammatical usage anomalies in the content of the texts speak against their having been written by someone who was formally educated to a high degree.[550] The quality of the Latin owes more to colloquialism and common

[549] Adams 2003, 689
[550] Adams 1992, 24

usage than to the formal codified rules of spelling and grammar that are evident in the texts of the highly educated.[551] While this does not rule out the possibility of writing assistance from those who were more literate but still not formally educated, it does make the involvement of professionally trained and educated scribes in the production of the curse tablets seem less likely. The variety of handwriting and language also suggests that the value of written texts in that particular context was widely accepted, and that they were viewed as important elements of religious interaction.

The question of who was actually drafting and writing the texts and how they identified themselves is as yet unresolvable, given that the existing transliterated tablets are only a small percentage of the ones that likely remain unexcavated or would have existed in the Roman period. Putting that question aside and addressing the existence of the texts themselves, however, allows more comprehensive and inclusive assertions to be made about them. Though the exact levels of literacy or writing skills are in doubt, the new proliferation of written texts compared to previous evidence from the same locales, and the apparent value placed on them in their religious contexts still make an important statement regarding the role of writing in Roman Britain. Even if, as unlikely as it seems from the current evidence, professional scribes were on hand to write out the texts of petitioners who could not do so on their own, the very fact that the petitioners chose to consult these scribes shows the value that they were placing on a written curse. The circumstances surrounding the creation of these texts were emotional and personal; one can easily imagine the frustration of having one's property stolen and having little recourse for the theft. That the authors of the tablets turned to writing in these emotional circumstances says much about their identification with the written word and their absorption of literacy into their daily lives.

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[551] Tomlin 1988, 74

The texts themselves, though they are conveniently referred to as 'curse tablets' can be more specifically defined as 'judicial prayers', petitions made to a deity in order to seek redress of a grievance.[552] The forms of address to the deity, which are remarkably consistent throughout the collections, have much in common with petitions made to military or civic administrators. Entreaties similar in content and form to those found in the lead tablets also appear in the collections of Vindolanda, addressed to the garrison commander Cerialis.[553] The role of the military as a police and judicial force, and of military commanders as judicial arbitrators, is well-attested in the absence of an official standing police force and a dearth of available provincial administrative officials relative to the size of the general population.[554] Britain would have been no exception. Parallels from outside Britain are evident as well: the Abinnaeus Archive contains similarly phrased appeals for justice.[555] The conformity of the curse texts with the standards prescribed by *Digest* 47.2.19 for bringing accusations of theft has been highlighted in previous study, and it still remains notable.[556] The type and metallic composition of stolen vessels are given, clothing and jewelry are described by specific type and style, and sums of money are enumerated.[557] In essence, the petitioners of the British sanctuaries are proceeding as if they are bringing formal legal charges before a divine authority in the same manner as one would appeal to a mortal authority. The authors of the curse tablets operate by the convention of Roman legal practice and present their appeals in writing.

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[552] Versnel 1991, 61
[553] *Tab Vindol*. 2.344.4-7, *Tab. Vindol*. 2.322.3-4 (which seems to deal with the theft of a belt), *Tab. Vindol*. 2.257.3-6
[554] Fuhrmann 2011, 202
[555] E.g. Abinnaeus Archive 44, Tomlin 2002, 167
[556] See Tomlin 1988, 71, Tomlin 1993, 116, Tomlin 2002, 168
[557] Tomlin 1988, 71

Despite the differences in location of the Bath and Uley shrines, and therefore the communities of worshippers who would have been patronizing them, the texts of the curses from both sites are remarkably similar. In terms of content, the British tablets are almost all inspired by thefts, a stark contrast to tablets from the rest of the Greco-Roman world.[558] The majority of curse tablets from outside Britain deal with legal disputes, athletic competitions, or matters of love or commerce; usually in the context of invoking supernatural powers to afflict a rival or opponent.[559] Curses for theft comprise a very low proportion of the tablets from outside Britain, some 20 securely translated examples out of roughly 1300 total texts (1.5%); in contrast to the very high proportion from within the province. [560] The emphasis on theft, therefore, appears to be a peculiar British idiosyncrasy; curses were seen by the authors of the British curse tablets as more appropriate for recovering stolen goods or punishing the unknown thief, rather than any other curse-worthy concern. This imbalance in reasons for cursing is interesting in that it reveals the priorities of the dedicants and the way that they applied written curses to their own circumstances. The other three categories of curse tablets require the curser to be taking proactive action against their opponent: the cursed individual has not committed a crime against the curser *per se*, but is seen as a rival that must be removed from contention before the putative result of the contest. Curses inspired by theft, however, are reactionary by nature. The crime has already been committed, and the curser is reacting to it by seeking redress through their curse tablet. This further cements the nature of the British curse tablets as judicial prayers for divine intercession and justice; the cursers are not resorting to nefarious means to further themselves at the expense of the cursed person, but rather they are attempting to rebalance the situation after

[558] Tomlin 1988, 60. See however *Tab. Sul*. 94, a sanction against perjury, *RIB* 6 & 7 from London, and *RIB* 221 from Hertfordshire. These examples are unique in the corpus.
[559] Versnel 1991, 62
[560] See Tomlin 1988, 60-62

someone else has committed a misdeed against them. The motives of the British cursers are may then appear to be more righteous than those of cursers dedicating other kinds of tablets: they are seeking fairness rather than personal advancement. Writing in the curse tablets is conceptually entwined with the idea of restoring judicial balance to the universe by asking for the intercession of a deity, and a written petition is the tool by which one obtains justice from both mortal and divine administrators.

The stolen items mentioned in the Bath tablets are predominantly individual articles of clothing, small amounts of money, and the occasional piece of jewelry. The presence of the baths at the site would seem to explain this handily: the danger of one's possessions being stolen while bathing is well-attested in Latin literature.[561] The clauses of Digest 47.17 deal specifically with bathhouse thieves, *fures balnearii*, but the punishments prescribed seem rather toothless compared to punishments for other crimes, so perhaps these were considered rather petty, low-priority crimes not worthy of strenuous prosecution. A confessional inscription from Lydia, an interesting view into the other side of the curse exchange (that of the cursed person suffering the curse and making amends for it to the deity in question), deals with the theft of a cloak from the baths and the thief's divinely-sanctioned disposal of the property.[562] No such confessional inscription has yet been found in Britain, however, so it may be that these responses are a Near Eastern peculiarity.[563] At Uley, the complaints mainly concern draught animals and farm equipment, though there are one or two mentions of burglary as well. Presumably, these entreaties represent the type of rural brigandage that plagued the Roman countryside and which military delegations were often expected to prevent.[564] Though the items mentioned in the tablets

[561] Tomlin 1988, 81
[562] Gager 2003, 176
[563] See Versnel 2002, 63-67
[564] Fuhrmann 2011, 204

differ somewhat between the two largest collections (as might be expected given their differing locations and groups of petitioners), the nature of the stolen articles at both Bath and Uley suggests petty theft; pocket change and portable chattels.[565] The fact that the response to the thefts is to invest the time and effort in creating a curse tablet speaks to the value placed on these articles by their rightful owners. The writers of the curse tablets may have lost comparatively small amounts of money and relatively low-value possessions, but they seem to have missed them comparatively more, as evidenced by the sometimes quite violent language used against the unknown thief. The contents of the tablets and the stolen articles mentioned support the characterization of the worshippers as people from the less-wealthy levels of Roman society who had been robbed of minor possessions that nevertheless held a great deal of value, and who responded to that loss not by simply resolving to replace the stolen item, but by inflicting the thief with "greatest death",[566] demanding restitution in blood,[567] or any number of other passionate threats.

The level of compliance with general Roman legal principle apparent in the curse texts raises the question of how the worshippers might have been expected to acquire this knowledge and the ability to apply it correctly to their curse petitions. The language is remarkably consistent throughout both the British collection and collections of curse tablets from elsewhere in the Roman world, and is consistent with the use of these tablets as judicial prayers.[568] The language of the curse tablets seems to reflect popular ideas of legal procedure rather than formally established statute, however,[569] which in itself seems to confirm the idea that the knowledge necessary for the making of curse tablets was orally or otherwise organically transmitted, either

[565] See Tomlin 1988 79-81
[566] Tab. Sul. 10, Uley 43
[567] E.g. Tab. Sul. 44, Uley 76
[568] Versnel 1991, 72: regarding a collection of Greek judicial prayers from Cnidus.
[569] See Tomlin 1988, 70

by the community of worshippers itself or by the officials of the sanctuaries. If the knowledge of legal language and the processes by which one was expected to make a legal petition were being orally transmitted, then it signifies a further influence of writing within the context of judicial prayers. Not only were the petitioners given access to divine justice through writing, they were also being exposed to the ideas of Roman law through the creation of their curses. The petitioners were therefore becoming not only functionally literate, in their use of writing, but also judicially literate in the language and phrasing that they applied to their curses and absorbed into their vocabularies.

The fact that curses seem to have been dedicated by worshippers of a relatively more humble social class than dedicants who erected stone altars, for example, provides evidence for an interesting asymmetry in the provincial judicial system. If the theoretical date range of the curse tablets can be accepted, it would seem that the majority of the petitioners are likely to have been Roman citizens by the time they were making their dedications, and so would theoretically have had access to provincial law and the systems of Roman justice that applied to citizens. Despite this theoretical availability of official legal process, the dedicants seem to have resorted to curse tablets rather than to whatever official legal proceedings may have existed in Roman Britain. In the cases where the thief is unknown, the barrier to legal proceedings is obvious: the perpetrator cannot be named. However, tablets that contain lists of names, such as Tab. Sul. 9, 30, and 51; or the tablets in which someone is named directly as the culprit, such as in Uley 1 or Silvianus's dedication to Nodens from Lydney,[570] would seem to indicate that the petitioner had at least some suspect that they could accuse formally and bring to court if they wished. The reasons why a petitioner might resort to a curse tablet rather than to the law courts are not evident from the texts themselves, but the apparent social status of the petitioners would seem to

[570] *RIB* 306

suggest that their relatively low socioeconomic standing may have prohibited it. While it is possible that the plaintiff might have tried to bring a formal legal accusation against the suspected party, and then dedicated a curse tablet when official legal means had failed, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to confirm directly.[571] The preponderance of evidence from the Roman world, however, would seem to suggest that magical solutions, like the invocation of deities and the making of curse tablets, was the only option for those who were unable to seek or receive sufficient institutional justice.[572] Formal curses were the tools of a parallel or substitute judicial system, in which matters that could not be handled by the mortal civic justice system (for whatever reason) were handed over to deities and divine justice.[573] The deity takes on the roles of all legal personnel that might be involved in the case: judge, bailiff, debt collector, witness to the crime, and prosecutorial attorney, in response to the plaintiff's written petition.

The tablets are pleas for justice in an under-policed society, incorporating the deity's divine justice in an arena where mortal civic justice is unavailable or not applicable. Indeed, these tablets may represent the only legal recourse available to the worshippers. In the absence of mortal justice, the worshippers must entreat divine powers instead; often by promising the stolen goods as a donation and thereby incentivizing the deity to help recover "his" or "her" property. The tablets therefore are not only judicial petitions, but also legal contracts, a written expression of the "do ut des" relationship with Roman deities. The curses represent the first half of the agreement: the gift of the donor in exchange for the deity's retribution, though it is unknown whether the second half ever came to fruition. The tablets may also be taken as evidence that the belief in the power of the deity to bring the matter to light and resolve it to the satisfaction of the petitioner was stronger than the corresponding belief in the civic justice system. The secretive

[571] See Versnel 1991, 90
[572] Fuhrmann 2011, 48
[573] Versnel 1991, 83

nature of the tablets and the methods of their deposition show that public accusations were not considered necessary in these circumstances: rather the power of the deity to discover and punish the criminal could be brought to bear without open display of the texts.[574] Not only were the deities of the shrines thought to be capable of delivering true justice when the mortal judicial system fell short or was otherwise unhelpful, but they also were expected to respond to written petitions.

In contrast to other demonstrations of writing that might be associated with religious sanctuaries and cult worship, such as monumental inscriptions, the curse tablets are examples of literacy that were concealed, rather than displayed. They are rolled up or folded with the inscribed side hidden, sometimes pierced with a nail, and then immersed in bodies of water or else buried, where they would be inaccessible to human readers. Some of the texts are encoded, or written backwards, further obscuring their contents from any prying eyes.[575] These texts were not intended to be read publicly; rather they were private communications between the worshipper and the deity. Writing in this context, therefore, was not a demonstration of wealth or education, as dedicatory altars were, for example, but a personal interaction that happened to be framed in writing. The writers of the curse tablets were not showing off their command of writing for social prestige, or merely to conform to the conventions of Roman literate culture; they had internalized written Latin as an important element of their private lives, suited to correspondence with their deities. The illiterate texts demonstrate the value of writing in these circumstances as well; even though there are no words, the act of writing a "petition" is equally important to the dedicator. The lead curse tablets demonstrate the interconnection of writing and religious observance in Britain, showing the significance that Latin and writing more generally

[574] Versnel 1991, 90
[575] Tomlin 2002, 174

held in the most important aspects of the daily lives of Britons in the Roman period. Written texts had been elevated to the same status as votive objects, and the dedication of writing in a religious context had deep personal significance to the dedicator.

The curse tablet collections are remarkable in many ways, but primarily the simple fact of their creation and existence places them in a broad context of the acceptance of writing and language adoption. The texts, through the use of written Latin, intersect with numerous different aspects of life in the province of Roman Britain, demonstrating the ways in which the inhabitants came into contact with, and subsequently redeployed, writing and language as a part of their identity and experience. That the practice of writing curses was thoroughly entrenched in the fabric of Roman Britain is evident in its recurrence into the modern period some 1500 years later: holy wells in Wales, such as St. Aelian's Well and St. Cybi's Well were used for much the same purpose as the shrines of Bath and Uley.[576]

The texts of the curse tablets demonstrate not just a sophisticated understanding of Roman religious and legal practice—as well as the role played by writing in those contexts—but also that this sophisticated knowledge was present in a sector of the British population whose experience of writing and levels of literacy have often been overlooked in previous dealings with the subject. The worshippers at Bath and Uley, and the dedicators of curse tablets at other sites as well, came to conceptualize their deities as highly literate judicial powers with the ability to intercede in human affairs in response to written petitions. The writers, themselves identifying less with the elite, highly Roman cultural package than with their perceived Celtic identity, nevertheless appealed to their deities as though to Roman administrative officials, according to the prescriptions of Roman legal discourse, and with the highly developed writing skills of formal Latin petitions. The acquisition of these skills is a crucial aspect of the cultural change

[576] Jones 1992, 118-119

that marked Britain in the Roman period, and the curse tablets are a fundamental example of how that cultural change shaped the experiences and practices of average Britons.

The villas of suburban Britain represent an important transition point between the urban and rural contexts of the province. These complexes were both influential centers of economic production and visible symbols of social status and success; as well as being closely associated with Roman attitudes toward housing, personal display, and socioeconomic prestige.[577] Much analysis of Roman villas and housing throughout the Roman world more generally has already been conducted, especially in the context of how a house reflects the personal choices and values of the inhabitants. The houses of Pompeii and Herculaneum have served as the basis for much of this research, and the general standards developed from those studies are often applied to provincial villas as well.[578] In Britain, the attitudes toward and situations of villas seem to correspond well to evidence from elsewhere in the Roman world, and the archaeological evidence from villa sites in Britain demonstrates very similar practices were in place with regard to construction and décor. Villa mosaics were a fairly early import to the province, as evidenced by the grand pavements at Fishbourne and their relationship to the polychrome traditions of Gaul and northern Italy.[579] Particularly in the second to fourth centuries CE, mosaics become much more common in the provinces than in Rome itself, and Britain is no exception.[580] Painted wall-plaster and mosaic pavements have been found in private homes in urban and rural areas across

[577] Burnham 1996, 135
[578] E.g. A. Wallace-Hadrill's volume on the houses of Pompeii & Herculaneum in general, (Princeton University Press, 1994); or D. Perring's work on Romano-British houses specifically (Routledge, 2002)
[579] Dunbabin 1999, 89;
[580] Cookson 1984, 100

the province, and were evidently popular domestic amenities for those who could afford their expense.[581]

It is important to recall, however, that villas, like most substantial archaeological finds within Britain, represent only the highest stratum of society and a heavily culturally Romanized one at that. These constructions, as impressive and informative as they are, reflect a limited collection of values and choices. Nevertheless, the imposition of Roman-style townhomes onto the cityscapes and of Roman-style villas onto the countryside of Roman Britain no doubt made just as much of an impression on the contemporary inhabitants as they have on modern archaeologists, and their symbolism was important in the adoption of Roman cultural norms in the province. An interesting development in the decoration of villas is the inclusion of written legends, labels, or signatures in mosaic pavements. While rare and at times too fragmentary to clearly interpret, these examples of writing are nevertheless illustrative of the level to which writing was incorporated into the daily lives of the inhabitants of Roman Britain.[582] These writings take a number of forms that run the gamut of literacy skills, from simple monographs to extensively poetic compositions, reflecting the diversity of readers that would encounter them.

The same mindset of commemoration and self-representation that governs the epigraphic habit also appears in examples of mosaic art in Britain as well as in stone inscriptions. Whether the personal references name the artist or the commissioner of the mosaic is often unclear from the surviving fragments, though the names of those who commissioned and paid for the mosaic to be laid seem more likely. The signatures of artists are difficult to definitively identify in mosaic art of the Roman period, and seem to have been rare additions to the decorative

[581] Davey & Ling 1982, 46
[582] Ling 2007, 63 singles out only 11 examples of relatively intact legible texts in interior décor.

scheme.[583] Some examples from Gaul and North Africa stand out as attestations of individual artists or collective ateliers, but nothing so distinct has yet been found in Britain.[584] There is some slight evidence (consisting mainly of stylistic similarities) for possible mosaic workshops, for example those situated around Colchester and Verulamium in the second century CE and at Cirencester in the third century CE, so it seems trained mosaicists were to be found in Britain, though they did not seem to have ever signed their work.[585]

One short and much-discussed example of a possible signature from Britain comes from Bignor in West Sussex. It seems to preserve an artist's monogram, possibly the first three letters of 'Terentius' or some similar name, though it is difficult to say for certain whether the letters present do in fact represent a signature or are instead some part of the decorative scheme.[586] Another equally uncertain example of a potential name comes from Hawkesbury, Gloucestershire; where four large letters may partially compose the name 'Reginus'.[587] Whether this is an artist's signature or (more likely) the name of the mosaic's commissioner is unclear from the context, and like Bignor, it has been suggested that these letters as well are part of the decorative scheme of the flooring (perhaps part of a quotation rather than a name). The size of the letters may offer further indication, however: the letters at Hawkesbury are a massive 30 cm tall, whereas the letters of the other uncertain signature at Bignor are only 5 cm. tall.

The names of commissioners or those who provided the funds for mosaic pavements do appear relatively unambiguously in the corpus of Roman Britain, however. These texts are often longer, providing rather more context for the names included, and generally keeping to the unofficial formulae of a dedicatory inscription. An example from Lydney, though found in a

[583] Cookson 1984, 4
[584] Cookson 1984, 4
[585] Cookson 1984, 45
[586] "TƎR" (Room 26) *RIB* 2448.11
[587] Ling 2007, 69

temple rather than a villa, provides an example of how commissioners of mosaics could commemorate themselves.[588] The content of the text is drafted in much the same way as stone inscriptions; mentioning the resident deity Mars Nodens (a Romano-British syncretism), the name of the dedicator, and the indication that temple funds were used to pay for the pavement of the temple's *cella*.[589] A mosaic of uncertain provenance from London, which survives only in a 19th century sketch, was probably laid in a similar vein, since it contains the votive abbreviation DSPD, or "*de sua pecunia dedit*".[590] It is unclear whether this mosaic came from a villa or not, but it appears unlikely, given the content of the inscription. One example that can be directly linked to a private villa, rather than a public building, comes from Thruxton.[591] This inscription is shorter than the previous examples, limited only to names (though the inscription probably continued on the now-lost lower register), but is remarkable for the size and fineness of its lettering. These qualities, along with the prominent position occupied by the names, emphasize their importance to the composition of the mosaic. Whether they are the names of the villa's owners or residents is unknown, but their desire to commemorate themselves in the mosaic flooring is nevertheless evident.

Informative labels on mosaic pavements, like most textual additions, are rare in Britain. The most likely candidate (in Latin at least) is found at Rudston, as part of the so-called "Venus" mosaic.[592] Of the four animals that appear around the outside of the mosaic pavement, two are labeled with what appear to be names or epithets, the lion is labelled *flammefer*, or 'fiery' while

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[588] *RIB* 2448.3
[589] "*D(eo) M(arti) N(odenti) T(itus) Flavius Senilis pr(aepositus) rel(igionis) ex stipibus pos(s)uit* | *o[pitu]lante Victorino interp(r)[e]tiante*"
[590] *RIB* 2448.13. "*[…]ωmani[…]* | *[…]niis Egnatius […]* | *[…pav]iment(um) tessel(latum) strat(um)* | *[…]sedstd*"
[591] *RIB* 2448.9. "*Quintus Natalius Natalinus et Bodeni*"
[592] *RIB* 2448.7. One other informative mosaic label in Greek is known from Aldborough in Yorkshire; this is discussed below at pg. 244

the bull is labeled *omicida*, 'man-killing'.[593] Such labels are in keeping with Roman mosaic traditions, particularly in North Africa, where scenes of animals exhibited in gladiatorial contests are a popular motif, sometimes including labels that name the animals in question.[594] The epithet *omicida* of the Rudston bull also appears in a mosaic from Carthage (though in that instance it is applied to a bear rather than a bull).[595] It is interesting that only the lion and the bull are labeled, however, whereas the deer and leopard on the other two sides of the scene are not.

Much has been made of the seemingly crude execution of the Venus mosaic, the source of the motifs used, and potential connections to North African pattern-books or mosaic schools.[596] It is possible that the mosaic pavements at Rudston were based at least in part on North African referents, in both the use of chariot and amphitheater motifs popular in contemporary North Africa and in the tradition of giving names to notable arena animals.[597] Amphitheaters where such beasts might have appeared are known in Britain, though the closest amphitheater to Rudston would likely have been at Aldborough, some 100 km or so east of the villa.[598] This is not an insurmountable distance, but perhaps a long enough one that attendance at the amphitheater would have been a rare treat, to say nothing of the likelihood of seeing such exotic animals as lions and leopards in northern Britain. Regardless of the basis or contextual background of the mosaic, the addition of the labels demonstrates an attention to the pervasiveness of literary expression in the higher echelons of Romano-British society. Adding the written labels to a scene already heavily based on Roman pursuits and imagery would have only heightened the cultural connections of the commissioner. Whether the mosaic in fact pays

[593] For the discussion of *flammefer* vs. *frammefer*, see Wilson 2003
[594] Wilson 2003, 289
[595] Wilson 2003, 288
[596] Dunbabin 1999, 99
[597] Ellis 2000, 130
[598] Revell 2016, 780

tribute to animals that the villa owner himself paid for or games he sponsored, or is simply an attempt to evoke links to the exotic mosaicism of distant North Africa, the link between the informative labels and the Roman attitude toward literary commemoration makes the cultural choices of the commissioner even more relevant.

Another example of labelling may be present in a mosaic from Woodchester, where two figures holding a basket of fruit are captioned '*bonum eventum*'.[599] The exact intention of this inscription is debatable; Bonus Eventus was a well-known agricultural deity in Roman Italy, associated with the success of the harvest, and received dedications alongside Fortuna at York and Caerleon.[600] Whether the legend is meant to be an informative label depicting Bonus Eventus or his associated attributes of agricultural success, or (as the commonly-held explanation goes) a more abstract exhortation wishing good luck to the viewer is unclear.

Two especially well-preserved examples of advanced literary content come from villas at Frampton in Dorset and Lullingstone in Kent.[601] The phrases from both sites are not direct quotes from Latin literature, at least not from any surviving canonical texts, but rather appear to be original compositions that make erudite allusions to Classical myth and literature. The Frampton Neptune mosaic, the largest and most ornate example surviving from the site, contains poetic couplets referring to the imagery within the mosaic.[602] The lines were obviously intended to be metrical, but either the composer or the copyist in charge of laying the mosaic seems to diverge from the expected poetic meter, leaving out some syllables necessary for a complete rhythm.[603] Nevertheless, the composition is evidence of the relatively advanced literacy skills necessary to

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[599] *RIB* 2448.2
[600] *RIB* 642, & *RIB* 319, respectively. See also Var. *Rust*. 1.1.4-6
[601] *RIB* 2448.8(b) & *RIB* 2448.6, respectively. The Frampton Neptune mosaic unfortunately survives only in a series of 19th century engravings.
[602] "*Neptuni vertex reg(i)men* │ *sortiti mobile ventis* │*scul(p)tum cui c(a)erulea es(t)* │ *delfinis cincta duob(us)*" and "*[nec mu]nus ullum* │ *[si di]gnare Cupido*"
[603] Ling 2007, 81

make a stab at poetry, despite the metrical anomaly. The Lullingstone mosaic manages to top the one from Frampton in terms of its literary competence. A scene of the abduction of Europa is accompanied by a neat elegiac couplet that manages to allude to the *Aeneid* with its content, and to Ovid's poetry with its structure.[604] The placement of the couplet further emphasizes its literary erudition: situated so as to be visible from a dining couch, presumably to incite educated dinner conversation in visitors who could grasp the literary allusions.[605] The commissioner of this pavement clearly had not only a close familiarity with classical mythology and literature (or wanted to appear to do so), but also with Roman dining practices and the proper forms of entertainment to employ during a high-class dinner party. Both the Frampton and Lullingstone mosaic legends, adding information though they do to the imagery of the pavements, may be considered distinct from simple informative labels in the elevated style and phraseology of their content. Rather than simply captioning the scenes with one- or two-word indicators of identity, the legends opt for lyrical lines of allusive original poetry, going above and beyond what would be required by a simple label, and further displaying the literate pretensions and cultural associations of the commissioners.

It is also probable that writing was added to painted wall decorations as well, but these are rather more fragile and less likely to survive in any kind of intact state, whereas stone and tile mosaics fixed to the floors of buildings are often better protected and preserved. It is known that wall plaster provided a popular medium for both painted and incised graffiti added after the fact, though many examples are so fragmented as to be illegible.[606] These graffiti in and of themselves are powerful indicators of the literate community that existed in and around villas, and of the ease with which the inhabitants of Roman Britain adapted Latin writing to their own purposes.

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[604] Barrett 1978, 311. "*Invida si tau(ri) vidisset Iuno natatus* | *Iustius Aeolias isset adusque domos*"
[605] Ling 2007, 78
[606] *RIB* 2447.15-2447.43

The most legible surviving example of writing intentionally included in a wall painting, rather than added after its completion, is in the same literary vein as the mosaic legends from Lullingstone and Frampton. Part of a villa excavated in Otford, Kent seems to have been decorated with scenes from the *Aeneid* accompanied by lines of the poem written out above the figures.[607] Scenes from the *Aeneid* are common in the wall plaster decorations of Italy, specifically in Pompeii where they are most well-preserved, but notably, labels describing the action or giving quotations from the text are absent.[608] While it is perhaps overreaching to extrapolate a literary-themed program of scenes and quotes to the entire room from just a few small fragments, the inclusion of the literary reference is still significant. The *Aeneid* is alluded to several times in the written corpora of Roman Britain; in fact, references to this one poem comprise almost all the literary allusions found in writings from the province.[609] The poem was evidently a standard instructional text, as there are many examples from outside Britain demonstrating lines of the poem used for copying practice, as far afield as Egypt and the Near East.[610] Fragments from the poem seem to have been used as writing practice in at least two instances in Britain: an unfired tile from Silchester bears a graffito of a list of names followed by the Vergilian tag "*conticuere omnes*"; and a fragmentary tablet from Vindolanda preserves a nearly complete line from Book 9 on the back of a discarded letter draft.[611] A quarry inscription on a partially carved altar from near Hadrian's Wall demonstrates enough familiarity with the text to extemporize an original line of poetry similar to the one used for copy practice at Vindolanda.[612] Knowledge of the *Aeneid* in Britain therefore might be closely connected with

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[607] Ling 2007, 76. The clearest surviving fragments preserve part of an armed figure and the words "*bina manu*".
[608] E.g. the painting from the House of Scricus in Pompeii (Room 7, 1.25)
[609] Barrett 1978, 307
[610] e.g. *Doc. Masada* 721, *O. Claud*. 190, *P. Hawara* 24, *P. Oxy*. L3554, *PSI* 13.1307
[611] *RIB* 2.2491.148, *Tab.Vindol*. 2.118
[612] *RIB* 1954, possibly associated with work being done by *Legio* VI, see *RIB* 1953.

acquiring the skills of literacy, and with being a highly educated and literate member of Roman society. The use of references to the poem in the decorative program of the villa at Otford is especially significant in terms of the adoption of Roman culture in the suburban landscape. The commissioner's or commissioners' choice of literary décor demonstrates their adherence to Roman cultural paradigms both in the area of the national epic of imperial Rome and in the display of the literary skills and references that poem provided to other areas of cultural expression. The timeframe in which these cultural artifacts were put on display at Otford is likewise significant. Most of the figural mosaics that refer to the *Aeneid* or incorporate scenes from the poem date to the fourth century CE, a later development in the adoption of Roman cultural paradigms in Britain.[613] The fourth-century mosaic pavements at Low Ham, for instance, are composed of scenes from Books 1 and 4.[614] Otford, however, can be dated back to the second century CE, showing that the use of poetic referents in villa décor was not only a late development, but had perhaps been going on for a few hundred years prior.[615] This is in keeping with a similar tradition of literary captioned wall paintings going back to the late Republic and early Empire in Roman Italy, and connects a relatively far-flung villa in the British countryside with an artistic tradition drawn from the center of Roman culture and power.[616] The phrases from the *Aeneid* found at Otford assume a high-functioning pre-existing knowledge of Latin literature, both in those who chose and paid for the designs and in those others (whether visitors or residents) who would see them.

The lettering of these art forms would have introduced a considerable amount of additional work on the part of the artists and technicians, especially in the context of mosaics, where the

[613] e.g. Low Ham and Lullingstone
[614] Dunbabin 1999, 97
[615] Ling 2007, 84
[616] *viz*. the House of the Epigrams and the House of Fronto in Pompeii

words would have to be meticulously planned out and laid tile by tile. In the case of signatures and commemorations, this could perhaps be understood as a necessary or at least desirable component of the artistic process: the signer or commissioner wished to attach their name to the expensive, elaborate, and time-consuming work which they had produced or paid for. Following the same rationale as dedicatory inscriptions and other commemorative epigraphy, the artist or commissioner wished to attach a record of themselves to the marker of economic and social status that was a complex mosaic. In the case of labels, however, the addition of writing follows perhaps a little less naturally. The inclusion of labels implies a particular didactic aim, to elucidate for the viewer some aspect of the image that would otherwise be unclear. The tradition of labeling figures in mosaics and wall paintings is common from the second century CE onwards, perhaps reflecting both an increase in the numbers of people who could afford such decorative elements, and the diffusion of the mythological and allegorical scenes that would need such labels to be clear to people from other backgrounds.[617] The intention to edify viewers about the contents of the mosaic scene itself reveals the ubiquity of the expectation of literacy: the viewer could only obtain this helpful information by reading it. Not only was the use of written labels spreading knowledge of reading and writing, but also the cultural referents that required labels to be understood.

The complex literary allusions, however, are another kind of communication than didactic labels. Such advanced poetic lines were obviously not required by the manufacturing process of the mosaic, and in fact, made its completion more difficult by requiring additional technical skills both in the drafting of the lines and the proper arrangement of the tesserae.[618] In these examples, the writing was an end unto itself. Lullingstone's smooth elegiac couplet works on

[617] Ling 2007, 86

[618] Such advanced skills, in fact, that they were not always fully understood, as in the case of the seemingly awkward metrical flow of the lines on the Neptune mosaic at Frampton.

several levels: it seems to be an original composition, since it does not appear in existing works of literature, and it manages to refer to not one, but two Golden Age Latin writers. The Neptune mosaic at Frampton, though not as expertly phrased, still evinces the literary pretensions of the commissioner, perhaps preserving one of his own compositions, and demonstrates a clear grasp of the conventions of Roman mythology and poetry. The Otford wall paintings show advanced literary pretensions concerning one of Rome's most well-known poems.[619] All in all, the decorative programs of some Romano-British villas were highly literary, referring to both Roman culture and art as well as the importance of literacy to understanding those artistic paradigms.

Writing was being used not only as a form of communication, but also as a decorative element of the home, and one that would signal to other likewise literate and educated visitors that the resident was suitably chic enough to add writing to their décor. When taken with the fact that many of these scenes, even ones without written phrases or labels such as the pavements depicting scenes from the *Aeneid* found at Low Ham and Frampton, expected advanced knowledge of Latin literature. The inclusion of writing in villa decoration shows that villas in the Romano-British landscape retained the close associations with literacy and writing found elsewhere in the province. While these complexes may represent only a narrow segment of the population, the broader cultural context that led to their construction and to the decorative choices of their owners suffused through much more of the province and its inhabitants. Even more than the adoption of the villa itself, the adoption of traditional villa décor, including literary embellishments, speaks to the attachment of provincial elites to the Roman system and to its tangible and intangible benefits.

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[619] A fragmentary mosaic from Lion Walk in Colchester may be of a similar style, consisting possibly of figural scenes with labels (see Ling 2007, 82)

The social expressions of writing produced in urban areas in Britain clearly have much in common with writing produced by the military and in military centers. This is most definitively demonstrated by the case of funerary epitaphs, since these were rare outside areas with a strong military presence even in civilian contexts. This is not to say, however, that civilian writing did not develop its own character and its own social purpose. The development of the Bath and Uley curse tablets is a unique British application of an existing Roman tradition, and demonstrates both the idiosyncrasies of the British literate community, and the reinterpretation of preexisting relationships into ones based on written communication. The urban elite, as well, seem to have been less concerned with large-scale epigraphy than with elaborate literary floor mosaics and wall paintings, demonstrating perhaps less peer-to-peer competition and more personal elevation than is seen in other parts of the Roman Empire. These villas and their surroundings formed an important bridge between the urban areas of the province and more outlying rural ones, and their appreciation of literacy would no doubt have traveled among their neighbors and subordinates.

The third of the communities of Roman Britain, that of the rural areas of the province, has often been taken by archaeologists as writing-poor, and therefore either illiterate or uninterested in applying Roman language and written culture to daily life in the same ways as the military and city-dwellers. While it is true that monumental forms of writing such as inscriptions are rarest in the rural community, this does not necessarily mean that literacy was not practiced; only that it was practiced in ways that leave less of an archaeological trail. Documents composed on perishable materials, for example, would not survive, though it is likely that there were many of them scattered throughout the countryside. The tools used to compose them are somewhat more lasting in the archaeological record (being made as they usually are of metal), and recent studies

have focused primarily on these as examples of how writing moved outside the spheres of monumental epigraphy and structural décor. It is some of these less archaeologically-visible traces of literacy that the next chapter will examine, and which demonstrate that writing as a tool and expression of cultural identity was not limited to the carved records of the great and the good, but evinces itself in myriad smaller ways throughout areas of Britain which have been traditionally overlooked.

Chapter 5: Rural Literacy and Writing

The rural community is paradoxically the one about which the least is known and the one in which there is the most interest in the exploration of cultural change and language diffusion. The majority of monumental inscriptions and examples of personal documentation that have been thoroughly studied are concentrated on military or urban sites, and the corpus of literate artifacts associated with rural sites is comparatively much thinner and more imperfectly understood. The absence of written documents from rural sites would seem to give the impression that neither literacy nor Latin was widely used among the inhabitants of the British countryside, and that it was confined to the elite military, urban, and suburban areas where Roman culture dominated.[620] This impression naturally lends itself to the theory that because the Roman language did not penetrate much beyond the sphere of military and administrative dominance, neither did Roman culture or appreciation of Roman introductions penetrate the life of the province.[621] The famous empirical maxim holds true here as well, however: absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

In the absence of lasting literate monuments or records such as those found on military or urban sites, more recent archaeological investigation has turned to evaluating the more oblique evidence for literacy in the rural areas of Britain; namely, collections of artifacts associated with writing, rather than examples of writing itself. Monumental inscriptions and permanent written documents are but one aspect of literacy and Roman literate culture. The bias toward evaluating monumental forms of writing as the base markers for literacy and the acceptance of writing and Roman culture makes sense, as these are easy to recover and interpret, but epigraphy, whatever

[620] Hanson & Conolly 2002, 151
[621] See Harris 1989, 269-270

its significance to Roman culture, was only ever a minority practice, in Britain and elsewhere in the empire.[622] Many other forms of evidence are connected with writing, and it is through these types of writing and literacy that the majority of Roman Britons would have experienced writing and the aspects of Roman culture that demanded it. The Uley curse tablets already demonstrate how writing could be highly significant to a non-elite, middle-class rural agricultural settlement, and that fairly advanced conceptions of literacy and writing existed outside the heavily centralized Roman military and urban centers.[623] A more in-depth and culturally focused exploration of the evidence of literacy from rural sites in Roman Britain is worth a great deal in the examination of how literacy permeated through those areas of Britain not as heavily exposed to the Roman cultural identity package as were military or urban sites. Patterns that can be discerned in the spread of these writing-associated artifacts provide evidence of how writing and Latin diffused through the province, and how the acceptance of the Latin language and writing was not confined to the elite or highly-Romanized strata of Romano-British society. A more thorough and comprehensive examination of the evidence from the rural community is very useful in exploring the cultural background and use of writing in the parts of Britain for which the evidence is less monumental or lasting than the better-documented military and urban communities. The difference in the very nature of the evidence itself—the lack of inscriptions and documents, but the presence of writing utensils and other objects that evince literacy—is itself worthy of discussion when attempting to evaluate the sociocultural aspects of writing and language in the province.

Numerous smaller artifacts that display written legends appear on rural sites throughout the province, demonstrating a complementary picture of literacy to the one offered by monumental

[622] Hanson & Conolly 2002, 153
[623] See above, pgs. 137-138

inscription evidence. It is worth restating that literacy is a spectrum rather than an all-or-nothing skill, and while monumental inscriptions like those seen in the military and urban areas of the province represents one place on the spectrum, the points represented by things like graffiti and other smaller examples of writing are of equal value in determining the spread of the Latin language and writing throughout the province. The numbers of people possessing a basic level of literacy were likely to be higher than the numbers of those with the advanced literacy skills necessary for inscribed public monuments, and they are also involved in the transmission of the Roman cultural ideas that were conveyed by writing. These basic literacy skills are important to understanding the permanence of literacy and writing beyond the Roman occupation as well, since the evidence would seem to suggest that while the use of monumental inscriptions dropped off sharply across the province in the third and fourth centuries CE, the types of basic literacy demonstrated by graffiti and other more minor inscriptions persisted relatively unchanged.[624] These basic forms of literacy would therefore be perhaps more important to the acculturation of Britain and its transformation into a literate culture than the monumental inscriptions about which so much has already been written.

The most common types of writing that demonstrate basic literacy are those of personal names applied to objects, usually as graffiti made after the production of the item. Ceramics are the best medium for this type of graffiti, though examples do occasionally survive on metal objects, and even on a few rare examples of bone, wood, and leather.[625] The names of the owners added to ceramic vessels in Britain demonstrate a wide range of potential origins, inasmuch as place of origin can be determined by nomenclature in Britain.[626] As is to be expected from

[624] Raybould 1999, 126
[625] Raybould 1999, 126
[626] That is to say, names can be a decent indicator of potential ethnicity among the inhabitants of Roman Britain, and can be helpful in distinguishing Romans citizens from foreigners, but determining exact geographical origin is next-

Roman Britain, all the names are written in Latin script, and even uncommon names are likely to be transliterated, since no non-Latin script predated this way of writing.[627] The owners of the names and the articles therefore had enough familiarity with the Latin alphabet to convert their names into the proper script, and to write intelligibly therein. Names that appear to be Celtic in origin are well-represented in both urban and rural areas of the province.[628] Even comparatively low-value coarseware ceramics were evidently of enough importance to be marked on rural sites, such that coarseware vessels with graffiti outnumber the fineware examples.[629] The absence of finewares may be accounted for by the difficulty of procuring these items outside of commercially-active urban centers, but this lack of availability clearly did not limit the practice of inscribing ceramics with graffiti in rural areas. After all, the transportation of such heavy, bulky, and fragile goods as ceramics was likely to be a difficult and time-consuming process, so access to all types of wares, fine and coarse, would likely have been limited both by the attendant pricing necessary to account for the transportation costs and by the frequency with which one might be able to purchase or trade for such items in the first place.[630] The need for inscriptions on a variety of vessels in the first place is a further example of how writing was integrated into Romano-British society. The most obvious reason for inscribing a piece of property with a personal name is to reduce confusion in a communal setting by properly attributing the ownership of the property in question. Roman soldiers all over the empire routinely added name marks to their equipment and tools to ensure that they were not mixed up with those of their comrades.[631] This use of writing evidently transferred to the non-militarized parts of the province

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to-impossible. Names which appear to be Celtic in origin may just as well be those of Gallic or Germanic immigrants as of native Britons.

[627] Raybould 1999, 127

[628] See *RIB* 2501 (*fineware*) & *RIB* 2503 (*coarseware*) for examples.

[629] Evans 1987, 197

[630] Raybould 1999, 129

[631] Raybould 1999, 128

easily, and people all over Britain embraced the utility of identifying their possessions with inscribed names, even those who would have had to render their non-Roman names into Roman script.

The existence of these name graffiti and the social contexts which influenced their production further emphasizes the universality of writing in Roman Britain. Basic literacy was evidently common through more social strata than the presence of monumental inscriptions would suggest, and even those who could not read the specialized inscribed stones found in military and urban centers would have needed to be able to write their own name and read the names of others in their community. The very practice of inscribing one's possessions with a personal name implies quite strongly that one expected others to be able to read or at least recognize the markings. If there was no expectation of literacy there would consequently be no need to use written characters as markers of identification. Even in the rural areas of Britain, relatively far from the military and urban areas dominated by Roman culture, it was impossible for a person not to encounter the written word, even on such everyday objects as the ceramics used in their homes. In fact, these types of written name marks continue to be used uninterrupted through the fourth century CE, when the production of monumental inscriptions drops off abruptly.[632] This level of basic literacy is therefore perhaps even more important to the retention of writing and the Latin language than the more specialized, Roman-associated types represented by other more impressive texts.

Writing tools are another aspect of writing culture that appear even where the documents themselves do not. Reusable wooden *stilus* tablets appear on rural sites as well as urban ones, though their survival is subject to a very narrow range of special conditions. Despite their

[632] Raybould 1999, 128

relative rarity, however, they still offer themselves to interesting conclusions about the prevalence of writing outside the areas of the province where monumental stone inscriptions and other types of writing were common. The majority of recovered *stilus* tablets from Britain come from the northern part of the province: between Carlisle and Vindolanda, a total of roughly 300 have been recovered.[633] Tablets from London are also common, and the importance of this collection is discussed in the previous chapter.[634] This is not to say that *stilus* tablets are limited to military or urban contexts, however, merely that the vicissitudes of preservation and excavation have favored those sites. Heavily stratified sites that were continuously inhabited for a longer period of time seem to be more likely to offer the rare, waterlogged, anaerobic conditions that would favor the preservation of wood and other biological artifacts. Despite this quirk of preservation, a handful of Roman *stilus* tablets have been recovered from rural sites as well, both villas and non-villa settlements.[635] The Roman villa at Chew Stoke in Somerset has produced a handful of fragmentary writing tablets, though only one is in good enough condition to be legible. This text takes the form of a legal document, perhaps pertaining to the ownership of the villa or some of its contents, demonstrating the importance of both literacy and the wax writing tablets themselves to legal exchange in the Roman countryside.[636] A handful of slivers representing ink-written tablets like those found at Vindolanda were also found at Chew Stoke, although these were too badly worn to be read.[637] Nevertheless, their presence speaks to both the availability of specialized writing utensils on rural sites and to their common use in rural areas. Fragmentary wax writing tablets have also been recovered from Romano-British non-villa

[633] Tomlin 2011, 151
[634] See above, pgs. 128-133
[635] Hanson & Conolly 2002, 154
[636] *RIB* 2443.13
[637] Rahtz & Greenfield 1977, 369

settlements at Claydon Pike in Gloucestershire and Cookham in Berkshire.[638] The Claydon Pike fragments were also accompanied by a few small slivers of ink-written tablets, though these slivers were frustratingly too small to interpret, and did not preserve any complete letters.[639] Nevertheless, written documents were clearly employed on the rural site of Claydon Pike (whether they were generated there or brought in from somewhere else is still a mystery), a small scale Romano-British farmstead that had existed back into the pre-Roman Iron Age, and seems to have been repurposed as a small-scale Roman farm sometime in the first century CE.[640] A further fragmentary *stilus* tablet from Wales, a unique find for that part of the province, also seems to be a Roman-style document associated with a fairly rural site.[641] The remaining partially legible text seems to suggest that the tablet is part of a will, though it only represents one of what would have probably been a collection of such tablets bound together in a codex, so as to contain the necessarily larger volume of text that a legal document such as this would demand.[642] The exact date or stratification of the tablet was not recorded, as it was excavated during turf-cutting work in the nineteenth century, but it has some similarities to other *stilus* tablets that can be roughly dated to the mid-first to mid-second century CE.[643] The findspot is worth noting; it would appear to be associated with a small rural farmstead in the hills outside the Roman military fort of Tomen-y-Mur.[644] This in itself represents another interesting intersection of different literate communities in Britain. The testator, whose name is unfortunately lost along with those of his designated heirs, must have been a Roman citizen,

[638] Hanson & Conolly 2002, 154
[639] The texts are mentioned in summaries of archaeological activity in *Britannia* 11, 1980 (384) and *Britannia* 13, 1982 (377-378), but no transcript is provided.
[640] Rankov et al. 1982, 378
[641] Tomlin 2004, 143
[642] The original discoverer mentions "10-12 leaves…joined together with wire", but only one of the pages has survived in legible condition. (Tomlin 2004, 145)
[643] Tomlin 2004, 147
[644] Tomlin 2004, 145

because the making of a legal will was both a privilege and an obligation of citizenship.[645] The nearby military outpost probably provides an explanation for this status: at the time, the only Roman citizens in the area were likely to have been soldiers.[646] However, the location of the find on a small farm some five kilometers away in the Welsh hills would seem to suggest that the document is more closely associated with the rural areas than with the military fort. The will might have mentioned the allocation of the property of a military veteran, including the small farm to which he retired after his term of service was complete.[647] The text is unfortunately too fragmentary to confirm this theory one way or the other, but it remains a thought-provoking demonstration of how the literate, documentary mindset cultivated by the Roman army might be imposed on the rural landscapes around military establishments. It also raises the possible existence of even more such documents that have not been found or have not survived, and suggests that the rural areas of the province may have had larger collections of documents to hand than the current state of the archaeological record would suggest.

One of the most well-preserved and legible *stilus* tablets from London nevertheless refers to an area of the rural countryside, despite its findspot in a busy urban center.[648] The document pertains to the deed of ownership of a small area of woodland located in the Kentish countryside, detailing the purchase history that led its current owner to possess it.[649] The ownership of the grove appears to have been disputed, and this document preserves part of the official judgement made in the matter (mainly the identification of the territory in question and the complainants involved), but breaks off before the official decision is described.[650] The official boundaries of

[645] Tomlin 2004, 150
[646] Tomlin 2004, 150
[647] See Tomlin 2004, 152
[648] *RIB* 2443.19
[649] Tomlin 1996, 211
[650] Tomlin 1996, 211

the area are described fairly specifically, suggesting large-scale survey of the area and assiduous record-keeping regarding the ownership of the various plots and patches thereof.[651] In addition to this, the woodland itself is given a proper name, *Verluconium*, so it seems to have had an identity beyond merely being a patch of rural landscape, and may have held a greater importance to previous inhabitants of the area than simple area of forest.[652] All of the names mentioned in the text: that of the defendant in the land claim, the previous owner from whom he purchased the woodland, and the other landowners whose property borders the disputed area, are Roman, and suggest origins in Italy and Gaul, so the fate of the Romano-British countryside is evidently now in the hands of immigrants or the descendants of immigrants rather than the locals themselves.[653] What is perhaps the most important bit of information preserved in this dispute is the price paid for the woodland: 40 *denarii*, seemingly a reasonable price for land of this type and quality.[654] The inclusion of the price in this text, and the existence of the text itself, further implies that records of ownership were kept for the majority of land in the province, and that urban records archives contained information on the price, ownership, and allocation of land all over Britain, rural areas included. Writing tablets, then, even if they are scarce on rural sites, can still be pertinent to the lives of rural Britons. Even if the locals had no need for writing tablets themselves, their access to land and resources could still be governed by such written documents prepared or archived in neighboring urban areas. Access to the resources of this particular woodland, for example, which might comprise fuel, food, or building materials, would be controlled by this written deed of ownership, and anyone hoping to exploit them would have to

[651] Tomlin 1996, 214
[652] Tomlin 1996, 213. The suggestion that the woodland was part of a pre-Roman Celtic sacred grove is, of course, impossible to prove with certainty given the surviving text, but nevertheless is an interesting supposition.
[653] Tomlin 1996, 214. Lucius Julius Bellicus (the buyer) and Titus Valerius Silvinus (the seller) may be Gallic or Spanish, whereas Caesennius Vitalis (whose heirs own some neighboring property) may be Italian.
[654] Tomlin 1996, 214. Compared to land prices for highly productive farms in Egypt, the only other province for which reliable price figures are known.

contend with the written record before availing themselves of those resources, or risk likewise persistently-documented legal retribution. Regardless of location, it seems to have been impossible to exist in Roman Britain without having to confront some kind of written document almost every day.

Written documents themselves may be rare in the rural areas of Roman Britain, but they are not the only means by which the presence of literacy might be assessed. The tools necessary to write such documents are an equally important body of evidence that speaks to literacy in areas where documents are rare, and studies of these *instrumenta scriptoria* have recently begun to reveal interesting information about who was writing and where.[655] Metal stili, for example, the tools with which the biodegradable wooden tablets were inscribed, are somewhat more common in the archaeological record, given the taphonomically stable materials with which they were produced. Vindolanda alone has produced over 200 examples, and the urban site of Silchester has yielded over 160.[656] These objects are made from a variety of materials, including bone, bronze, and iron, and are common finds on Romano-British sites of all descriptions, including those in the countryside.[657] Villas tend to produce the majority of rural *stilus* finds, which is to be expected, since villas were primarily inhabited by wealthy elites who could be expected to have advanced literacy skills and the tools to employ them. Artifacts firmly identified as *stili* turn up at 70 individual villa sites from across the areas of southern Britain where villas are common.[658] However, non-villa rural sites are also well-represented in the collection of *stilus* finds. 50 individual non-villa sites have produced at least one *stilus*, and they

[655] Mullen 2016, 579
[656] Hanson & Conolly 2001, 155
[657] Frere & Tomlin 1992, *RIB* 2443
[658] Hanson & Conolly 2002 158-159 (Table 2)

have been found not just in southern Britain, but also as far afield as Wales and Scotland.[659] The ratio of villas to non-villas in the category of *stilus* finds is therefore a respectable 1.4:1, much more even than preconceptions of literacy rates on non-Roman sites would suggest. The presence of *stili* at relatively modest rural farmsteads indicates that at least one person at each of these sites would know enough about reading and writing to own writing utensils, and that neither the knowledge nor the attendant technology was limited to the wealthy or urban. Furthermore, *stili* are distributed on Roman sites throughout a range of chronological periods (sometimes even predating the official Roman occupation), so the introduction of writing technology may in fact have happened much earlier in rural areas than previously assumed. A handful of rural sites in Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire have yielded *stili* from pre-Roman contexts, so writing utensils had clearly been introduced to Britain as early as c. 20 BCE, well before the Empire took possession of the island.[660] The same trade and social networks that brought the concept of inscribed coinage to the island from Gaul would also have served to ferry over the concept of writing and the tools necessary to produce it, along with a variety of inscribed goods like *amphorae* and other ceramics.[661] Even if these writing tools belonged to foreigners, rather than to native Britons, as is possible, the language they would have been used to write would most likely have been Latin, and their distribution into rural areas of the province is therefore a significant stage in the introduction of writing and Latin to Britain. The continued presence of *stili* at rural non-villa sites throughout the period of Roman occupation is strong evidence that the use of writing continued to be valuable in the countryside of Britain from the earliest days of contact

[659] Hanson & Conolly 2002, 157 (Table 1)
[660] Hanson & Conolly 2002, 156-157. Braughing, Skeleton Green, Silchester, and Wakerley have all produced *stili*, from contexts ranging from c. 20 BCE to c. 45 CE
[661] See above, pgs. 47-50 for a discussion of these exchanges. The tools themselves are also likely to have been imports, at least for the earlier pre-Roman period.

with the Roman world all the way through the period in which Latin writing and Latin literacy were important cultural components.[662]

In addition to complete *stili*, metal pen nibs used for ink-writing have also been found. These would likely have been attached to a wooden or reed handle to make a complete writing implement.[663] These pens would have been used alongside simpler split-nib reed pens or brush pens for composing ink-written texts such as the Vindolanda and Carlisle tablets. A handful of ceramic inkwells necessary for ink-written documents have also been found on rural sites in Britain, though their number is dwarfed by those found in military and urban contexts.[664] Nevertheless, the range of available writing utensils may therefore have been even wider than the available evidence would suggest, since complete purpose-made *stili* were not necessarily required for writing, and the technology could be adapted quite easily to available methods and materials. The versatility of writing technology available to the people of Roman Britain suggests that, far from being a limited and inaccessible technology, it was something that a wide variety of people could make use of in a wide variety of circumstances.

The *stili* themselves are not the only tool that can attest to the presence of wax writing tablets on rural Romano-British sites. The wax that formed the writing surface for these specialized documents needed to be smoothed down if the tablet were to be reused, for which purpose the specialized spatulas found at a number of rural British sites were employed.[665] *Stili* were often fashioned with a spatulate end that would facilitate erasure of the text during composition, (much like a modern pencil has both a writing end and an erasing end), but in order to erase the full text or to add wax to a worn tablet either before the first use or after many re-

[662] The latest contexts from which *stili* have been recovered in Britain are from the late 4th to early 5th centuries CE, the transitional period between Roman and post-Roman Britain (Hanson & Conolly 2002, 157-158)
[663] Frere & Tomlin 1992, *RIB* 2443
[664] Willis 2005, 104-105
[665] Tomlin 2011, 149

inscriptions, these larger spatulas were heated and used to spread the wax in the recessed wood faces.[666] While the handles of simpler *spatulae* ended in a plain knob, others seemingly were often decorated with sculpted figures, including that of the goddess Minerva.[667] Over forty examples of these figureheaded *spatulae* have been recovered, in addition to those with simpler designs.[668] The figure of Minerva seems to have been popular in Britain; as roughly twenty such sculpted *spatulae* have been recovered from rural sites in the province.[669] The British finds are for the most part isolated to the southeastern and southwestern parts of the province, but sculpted examples of this type are not limited to Britain; many have been recovered from sites in Germany and Gaul.[670] The connection between Minerva and writing implements is not in itself surprising, as she was considered a goddess of wisdom and reason alongside her role as a war deity, but the exportation of that association to provincial Britain is interesting. It suggests that not only had the physical tools of writing been imported to the provinces, but also the cultural connotations associated with the practice. One British example from Silchester may have been manufactured locally, so a homegrown industry concerned with producing these objects rather than simply relying on their importation to the province from elsewhere may potentially have existed.[671] The predominance of Minerva in Britain is also interesting; a handful of examples from continental Europe feature a bust of Mercury rather than Minerva, though the rationale behind the choice is unclear.[672] It may be that Minerva, for whatever reason, connected more strongly with the pre-Roman religious traditions of Britain, as is also demonstrated by her prominence in the shrine at Bath. Regardless, the use of her image on these writing utensils

[666] Božič & Feugère 2004, 9
[667] Tomlin 2011, 149
[668] Portable Antiquities Scheme Database (https://finds.org.uk/database)
[669] Tomlin 2001, 149
[670] Feugère 1995, 334
[671] Feugère 1995, 326
[672] Feugère 1995, 332 suggests that the choice of Mercury may be connected to mercantile bookkeeping as opposed to other types of writing.

shows the broader cultural associations of writing beyond the mere creation of texts. The practice of writing and creating literature was deeply entwined with Roman identity, and the addition of a Roman deity's image to the utensils used on rural sites in the province provided further connections to the Roman imperial system beyond the language itself. The users of these tools were not only adopting the language and the utensils, but also the cultural background of the activity.

The spread of Latin text through rural areas of Britain is also indicated by *collyrium* stamps; short identification texts impressed into premade cakes or sticks of medications prescribed for various eye ailments. A number of the dies used to impress these stamps have been found both in Britain and throughout continental Europe, and they seem to be a particular feature of the northwest provinces especially.[673] Of the roughly 300 examples of this type of stamp found throughout the Roman Empire, 228 of them come from northwestern Europe, specifically Germany, Gaul, and Britain.[674] The stone dies used for creating the impressions are more commonly found, since stone is more likely to survive in the archaeological record, but a few small fragments of stamped medication have also been recovered.[675] One especially noteworthy grave site in Lyon contained some twenty different samples of dried medication sticks, protected by a bronze container, all stamped with various impressed labels, though the stamp stone itself was not recovered.[676] Eye problems certainly appear in the archaeological record as a particular health concern in Britain: ten soldiers of the First Cohort of Tungrians at Vindolanda were excused from their duties due to suffering an eye infection, and their ailment is

[673] Frere & Tomlin 1992, *RIB* 2446
[674] Boon 1983, 3
[675] Frere & Tomlin 1992, *RIB* 2446
[676] Jackson 1996, 178

listed alongside the standard generic categories of 'sick' and 'injured', suggesting that eye infections were a common enough problem to warrant their own section of the duty roster.[677] *Collyrium* stamps from across the empire reveal a wide range of conditions that were purportedly treated by the medicines onto which they were impressed.[678] Eye infections naturally received medical prescriptions; the *lippitudo* of the Vindolanda soldiers (an unspecified ailment characterized by inflamed eyes) and another infection known as *aspritudines*, or granulations of the eyelid (now thought to be the bacterial infection trachoma, which can lead to blindness if left untreated) are the two most commonly attested pathologies in the British *collyrium* examples, representing half the total recovered texts.[679] Prescriptions were also likely made for things like allergic conjunctivitis, cataracts, and also for defects of vision that are now treated by eyeglasses or corrective surgery.[680] While it is unlikely that eye impairments were limited to the military sphere, there does appear to be some relationship between the physicians prescribing these eye remedies and military encampments.[681] Soldiers living in close quarters would have been susceptible to a variety of infectious pathogens, as well as other health problems brought on by poor diet and lack of sanitation. Vitamin A and vitamin C deficiencies both cause eye issues, and it can be inferred from ancient writers that these deficiencies occurred regularly in the military and civilian populations.[682] The use of *collyrium* stamps and their associated preparations in military hospitals would certainly have simplified both record-keeping and dosing for soldiers

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[677] *Tab. Vindol*. 2.154. The Latin term *lippientes* used in the text is rather generic, suggesting watery or inflamed eyes rather than a particular pathology. It is possible that the ten soldiers mentioned were suffering from a variety of infections rather than one singular disease.
[678] Medical texts reveal even more; Galen comments on no fewer than 124 different eye afflictions and their potential treatments. (*Comp. Med. Sec. Loc.* 12.766-777)
[679] 8 of the 32 British examples mention *lippitudo*, while a further 8 mention *aspritudines* (*RIB* 2446)
[680] *reumatica* "runny eyes" may refer to seasonal allergy symptoms; *cicatrices* "scars" may be a description of the lens clouding characteristic of cataracts; and both *caligo* and *claritatem* "dim sight" and "clarity of vision" almost certainly refer to visual impairments rather than eye infections. (*RIB* 2446)
[681] Pérez-Cambrodí et al. 2013, 92
[682] Boon 1983, 11

under the care of military physicians.[683] It would also have ensured access to the necessary ingredients for medication as the army traveled further and further away from where the medications could be easily prepared on site. Given that the majority of *collyrium* stamps from the northwestern provinces originate at civil urban and rural sites rather than military ones, however, it seems that the production and use of these premade medications was, like monumental epigraphy, something that the non-military population learned from example and inherited from the military sphere for its own use.[684]

The preponderance of these texts in northwestern provinces is interesting, however, since eye problems were certainly not unknown in the east, and in fact may have been more of an issue there in the Roman period, as they are today.[685] One letter from Mons Claudianus in Egypt specifically mentions a need for eye medication, so the conditions treated by the *collyrium* formulae were certainly not unknown in the East.[686] While the exact reason for this imbalance is unknown, it may be due to the differences in the availability of professional doctors and medical facilities: the Eastern provinces were better supplied with both medical knowledge (most of the medical formulae attested in the western European *collyrium* stamps are Greek or Eastern in origin) and therefore with practicing doctors, so someone suffering from an eye infection could find a doctor in person and have their condition treated in the doctor's practice.[687] The pre-made cakes and sticks represented by the *collyrium* stamps, therefore, would have been a natural solution to the relative lack of these medical professionals and facilities in the western provinces, as they could be distributed to those needing them a good distance away from where they were made. Pliny himself comments on the easy availability and common sale of these pre-made

[683] Pérez-Cambrodí et al. 2013, 92
[684] Boon 1983, 5 comments on the frequency and location of stamps in Gaul.
[685] Boon 1983, 4
[686] *O. Claud*. 174
[687] Frere & Tomlin 1992, *RIB* 2446

medications, so they clearly were a well-known part of Roman medical practice, and it makes sense that they would have traveled to the provinces along with other types of Roman goods and knowledge.[688] The 31 distinct individual stamps found in Britain are distributed fairly evenly across military and civilian sites, suggesting that these objects and their users traveled widely among various different communities. The findspots of almost every stamp in Britain are also closely linked to the Roman road network in the province, further suggesting the ease with which they traveled.[689] Town sites account for the majority of the finds, though some few examples of the stamps have also turned up at military sites and on both villa and non-villa rural properties.[690]

These texts seem to have functioned in a similar way to stamped pottery, and in this way, the stamps may also represent a particular idiosyncrasy toward the labeling of a wide range of goods in the northwestern provinces.[691] The impressions made by the stamps would give the name of the person responsible for the creation of the item, and sometimes include additional information, such as ingredients, dosage instructions, or the particular ailment for which the medication was intended.[692] It was also possible to have more than one stamp inscribed per stone die, as each edge could be etched with a different inscription. One example from Spain is hexagonal, describing six different preparations for six different conditions, all formulated by the same physician.[693] The examples from Britain are mainly square or rectangular, as are the majority of examples from the rest of the empire, so it would seem that this hexagonal die is an outlier, or at the very least a fairly uncommon take on the *collyrium* stamp.[694] Carving on multiple faces, however, is common in Britain, and most of the recovered dies feature texts on at

[688] *NH* 34.108.
[689] Jackson 1996, 179
[690] Frere & Tomlin 1992, *RIB* 2446
[691] Pérez-Cambrodí et al. 2013, 92
[692] i.e., *crocodes*, 'saffron' (*RIB* 2446.15); *bis…ex ovo* 'twice a day, diluted in egg' (*RIB* 2446.11); *lippitudo*, 'inflammation' (*RIB* 2446.2)
[693] Pérez-Cambrodí et al. 2013, 93
[694] Frere & Tomlin 1992, *RIB* 2446

least two edges, if not on all four.[695] This is probably a sensible cost-reducing measure, since the production of *collyrium* stamp dies would necessarily have been a specialist activity, requiring a skilled engraver to deal with the small size of the lettering and the fine grain of the stone.[696]

The identities of the physicians involved in the production of these stamps are difficult to determine from their stamps alone, but they appear to have been quite diverse. The names included in the stamps suggest a broad range of potential origins for the named individuals, from Greek (perhaps expected given the concentration of medical theorists and practitioners in the Greek-speaking East) to Celtic and German.[697] A variety of potential social statuses is also represented; almost half of the names are *tria nomina* designations that would connote Roman citizenship.[698] The rest of the named practitioners give either a *nomen* and *cognomen* pair (making their citizen status somewhat more ambiguous), or a *cognomen* only, indicative of peregrine or even possibly servile status.[699] It is not certain, however, that the names presented on the stamps were in fact the names of the practitioners who distributed the medication. It has been suggested that stamps were often passed between different individuals, and that the names included are possibly those of the inventor of the particular formula of medication rather than the person involved with distributing it to the patients.[700] In essence, these *collyrium* stamps may represent a similar distance between formulator and deliverer as exists today between prescribing physicians and pharmacists; and the names included were perhaps meant more as brand

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[695] *RIB* 2446.2 features four inscribed edges, as well as some hurriedly scratched graffiti on the larger square faces, probably intended to help the practitioner locate the appropriate stamp.
[696] Frere & Tomlin 1992, *RIB* 2446. The majority of the British examples are neatly carved, with properly aligned and sized letters, pointing to specialist production.
[697] Aurelius Polychronius (*RIB* 2446.21) and Iulius Alexander (*RIB* 2446.1) could be Greek in origin, Flavius Litugenus (*RIB* 2446.13) may have Celtic ancestry, and Titus Vindiacus Ariovistus (*RIB* 2446.3) is almost certainly Germanic.
[698] Frere & Tomlin 1992, *RIB* 2446
[699] The sole *cognomines* Atticus (*RIB* 2446.4) and Maurus (*RIB* 2446.17) could indicate geographical origin (Athens and Africa respectively); though Marinus (*RIB* 2446.15, 2446.22) and Minervalis (*RIB* 2446.19) are more ambiguous.
[700] Frere & Tomlin 1992, *RIB* 2446

recognition than as indicators of the direct relationship between doctor and patient. Two British examples bear evidence of different names, and even different types of medication, suggesting that dies could be both reused or shared between two different physicians. One of Lucius Iulius Juventinus's dies, which referred to both a balsam-based medicine for clear sight and one made from myrrh for inflammation, was broken up and recarved to become a die for Flavius Secundus's medication for scars.[701] Another die for Lucius Iulius Salutaris's formula for inflammation was inscribed with a secondary legend referring to a salve made by Marinus.[702] The reuse of stamps need not necessarily indicate that the named individual was not the one distributing the medication, however. Gaius Valerius Amandus and Gaius Valerius Valentinus both appear to have shared one stamp, suggesting that they were also sharing a practice and recipes.[703] The variety of names in the British material and the differing ingredients being applied to the treatment of the same condition would seem to point to the operation of a number of different physicians with their own formulae and concoctions, rather than any kind of authoritative recipe being followed by multiple dispensers. Since the medical profession was considerably less centralized and empirical in the Roman period than it is today, the existence of many different practitioners of varying skill levels and treatments of varying effectiveness is certainly not outside the realm of possibility. Notably, the practitioners mentioned in medical texts of the period as having very effective or famous formulae for certain eye issues are not attested in the collyrium stamps of northwestern Europe. For example, Galen refers to a famous eye doctor to the military in Britain (though not by name) and his formulae against certain afflictions, though despite his apparent notoriety and the success of his formulae, his name does

[701] *RIB* 2446.11
[702] *RIB* 2446.22
[703] *RIB* 2446.2

not appear on any of the collyrium stamps from Britain.[704] The presence of an eye-doctor in the military would be entirely in keeping with the usage of doctors by the military in Britain more generally (as attested by tombstones for and altars put up by these men), and with the Vindolanda duty roster that mentions eye disease as keeping men off-duty. This further suggests the independent operation of many different physicians using the resources they had to hand to compound their own medical recipes, rather than to a more eminent centralized authority developing the formulae and the individual dispensers using the name of the formulator for branding purposes.

Collyrium dies were not only used by other physicians; there are a number of rather puzzling instances where the imprint of a *collyrium* stamp has been applied to a ceramic vessel.[705] Two Samian ware vessels from London and one from Caerleon bear the stamp of Lucius Iulius Senex's saffron-based medicine for granulations of the eyelid, impressed into the center of the interior base of the vessel in the same way that Samian ceramics would normally be stamped with the potter's name.[706] A slightly different die bearing the same name and information is recorded on vessels from Germany and the Samian works at La Graufesenque, while another stamp from a different physician appears on a mortarium rim from Glanum.[707] The reasoning for the use of these stamps in such anomalous conditions is a mystery, though a few explanations have been offered. The stamps probably did not identify the contents of the vessel, not only because their usual position at the bottom of the inside face would render them unreadable until the vessel was empty, but also because the shapes of the vessels (wide-mouthed

[704] Galen, *Comp. Med. Sec. Loc*. 4.451. *Κινναβάριον ἀξιου ὀφθαλμικοῦ Στόλου Βρεττανικοῦ…*
[705] *RIB* 2446.25
[706] Frere & Tomlin 1992, *RIB* 2446
[707] Boon 1983, 2

dishes) are unsuitable for long-term storage of their contents.[708] It has been suggested instead that the vessels were commissioned by the physician as "free gifts" for the promotion of his business, though this explanation may be colored with rather too-modern views of how businesses promote themselves.[709] It is also telling that this does not seem to have been a tactic used by other eye-doctors.[710] If self-promotion is in fact the cause, though, it evinces a shrewd grasp of the importance of the written word to commercial advertising in the arenas of both pottery and medicine. Another possibility is that the stamps were being reused by a completely different individual, a potter rather than an eye-doctor, who stamped the vessels with a recycled or purchased die. The fact that the die itself has not yet been recovered and the only evidence for it is the impressions left on pottery may point to that explanation. The vessels are stamped in the conventional places for those types (the interior bottom face for the Samian and the rim for the *mortarium*), though whatever reason the potter had for using a *collyrium* stamp specifically is probably lost.

Another, perhaps more likely, explanation for the production, purpose, and spread of these stamps is that of itinerant doctors who, having purchased their medicines and tools in the cities, traveled the hinterland providing services to those communities that were not well-served by a permanent supply of doctors or medicine.[711] Lucius Iulius Senex, at least, may have traveled quite widely; if we assume that all the stamps bearing his name originate from the physician himself, he would seem to have ranged from central Germany, to southern Gaul, to southern Wales.[712] The *collyrium* examples in Britain are similarly broadly distributed. Dies are scattered

[708] Boon 1983, 2
[709] Boon 1983 doubts that the physician would have surrendered his stamp to the potter for making these 'gifts', which makes sense given the likely expense of such stamps and the effort needed to acquire one.
[710] The other individual from Glanum, Gaius Duronius Cletus, seems to be the only other physician to have had his stamp used on pottery, though on a relatively coarse mortarium rather than fine Samian tableware.
[711] Frere & Tomlin 1992, *RIB* 2446
[712] Boon 1983, 3

across the province at a variety of sites, even reaching as far north as Scotland and as far west as Ireland.[713] The concentration of the stamps at urban sites combined with the small scattering of stamps from villas and rural areas suggests regular countryside visits by urban-based doctors.[714] An entry in the *Digest* from the time of the Antonines references the presence of traveling doctors in urban areas, so the notion is not without precedent elsewhere in the Roman world.[715] This practice would be easily implemented in an urban area where doctors from abroad might gather and which had a sufficiently inhabited surrounding area to require semi-professional medical interventions. In Britain, however, no evidence of the same stamp has yet been found in both an urban area and also the outlying countryside, so this theory must remain exactly that.[716] The hobbyist practice of medicine was also possible among the elite literati who would have inhabited the villa estates of rural Britain, at which three examples of *collyrium* stamps have been found.[717] A number of medical practitioners were likely to have been homegrown dabblers caring for their own households, given the rarity of established medical training, and the owners of the villas were well-positioned in terms of education level and money for books and supplies to take on this role.[718] An epitaph of a villa owner from France refers to his possessions of both medicines and medical instruments, suggesting that he was one of these wealthy medical hobbyists.[719] The authors of established medical texts may themselves have been the educated dabblers: Pliny lists the medical author Celsus as a 'writer' in his table of contents of the *Natural*

[713] *RIB* 2446. 12, from Tranent in East Lothian; and *RIB* 2446.28, from Co. Tipperary
[714] Boon 1983, 6
[715] *Digest* 27.1.6.1, specifically mentioning "physicians who are called 'travelers'", *ἰατροὶ οἱ περιοδευταὶ καλούμενοι*
[716] With the possible exceptions of *RIB* 2446.5 and 2446.6, both of Clodius or Clodianus (one from Watercrook and another of unknown provenance), and those of Lucius Iulius Senex, discussed above, on ceramics from London and Caerleon.
[717] *RIB* 2446.13, from Landsdowne; *RIB* 2446.17, from Shakenoak in Oxfordshire; and *RIB* 2446.30, from Dorchester.
[718] Boon 1983, 6
[719] *CIL* 13.5708

History, in contrast to others who he has listed as 'doctors'.[720] The situation may not have been unlike the studies of Edward Jenner, who, though he had received formal medical training and his doctorate, refined the practice of vaccination through observations of and experiments on the staff of his country estate.

Though they represent relatively specialist information that would likely make the most sense to only a narrow segment of the population, *collyrium* stamps are nevertheless an important element of the rural British literate landscape. The ability to read, especially the ability to decipher the highly-specialized, abbreviation-dense texts of the stamps (which in addition to being small and containing relatively many letters for their size, were also carved retrograde) was vital to the proper dispensation of the medication. The very existence of the stone dies themselves and the specialized nature of their production suggests that the stamping of medication was a common practice that was repeated regularly, so the texts as imprinted onto the medication itself may have been much more numerous than the number of stone dies would lead us to believe. After all, it makes very little sense to have an expensive, intricate, and specialized stone stamp carved if it is only going to be used once or very infrequently. If the stamps do represent traveling medical practitioners making frequent tours of the surrounding countryside, as seems likely, then the intersection between the literate urban-dwelling physicians and the rural people to whom they ministered is even more significant. The ability of the eye-doctors to read, and the privileged position it gave them in society, would likely have made an impression on the people of the countryside whose exposure to monumental written Latin or to official documents was minimal. The inclusion of dosage and dilution instructions on some *collyrium* stamps also raises the possibility that the stamped sticks or cakes of medication themselves were distributed to patients by the doctor, such that the treatment could be administered without requiring the

[720] *NH* 1.29. Celsus is listed under *ex auctoribus* "from authors" rather than under *medicis* "doctors".

presence of the doctor himself. The doctor, likely having formulated and prepared the medication himself as evinced by the diversity of names and ingredients present in the stamps, would know the dosage and the ingredients, and probably not need to have them stamped onto the medication along with its name. The extraneous instructions could therefore only have been intended for someone who was not the doctor himself, and it is no great leap to assume that they were for the benefit of the patient or for whoever was administering the medication to the patient on the doctor's behalf. Indeed, there was really no need for the doctor to stamp his medications with any text at all; if he possessed the knowledge about what medicine was applicable to what context, and was the sole distributor or dispenser of the remedy, he would have no need to affix his name or other identifying information to the drugs prior to prescribing them. In a similar case to the stamps and graffiti applied to pottery, which are unnecessary to the intended use of the item, the stamps applied to eye medication in Britain were extraneous text added on the assumption that it would mean something to the reader; the only reason for affixing text to them was to convey information through writing, not to affect their intended use or purpose. This would be in keeping with the ease of distribution that the premade, labeled medications made possible, and the addition of extra written information on top of the name of the doctor and the prescription suggests that this was another arena of life in Roman Britain in which at least basic literacy was expected. The distributor of the medication operated on the assumption that the user could read the written stamp and decipher the meaning of the words in order to apply the medication properly. Whether this user was another physician or a patient is impossible to determine, of course, but the possibility of Romano-British peasants being given stamped medication by traveling doctors for use in their own homes still exists. Communicating information at a remove from direct interaction is the purpose of written labels, after all, and a

dearth of practicing physicians who could directly convey the information to the patient in person necessarily demands the development of written labeling to convey the same information to all the people who might require it but cannot obtain it directly from the source. The circulation of these written labels on medication and their connection to a highly specialized and advanced form of material culture connected to the cosmopolitan Roman world and the advanced technology which it fostered further contributed to the immersion of the Romano-British populace in a literate world governed by the judicious application of writing.

Though the majority language for written communication in Britain was Latin, there are a few examples from the province that demonstrate the cosmopolitan nature of the island under Roman rule. These artifacts incorporate writing in other languages, such as Greek and Aramaic, and add further nuance to the exploration of written communication in connection with cultural identity. The next chapter addresses these examples of other languages and scripts, as well as their place in the larger literate landscape of Britain. Comparing these artifacts with those which demonstrate Latin script will reveal how multiple languages interacted on the island and the range of choice that was available for written expression.

Chapter 6: Multilingualism and Regionalism

Britain may have been the least multilingual province in the empire in terms of its written record, with the overwhelming preponderance of written text appearing in Latin, but Latin was not necessarily the only language in which writing in Britain was produced. There are a few rare, though still interesting examples of non-Latin language and script from across Britain, on both personal and public artifacts, that provide a more comprehensive picture of written language in the province and the role of Latin in the literate landscape. Whether the people responsible for the writing were fluent in these alternative languages or merely had enough competence to formulate some basic texts is debatable, though some of the examples seem to suggest advanced familiarity and ability. At any rate, there were at least a few people in Roman Britain who chose to write in languages other than Latin, and comparing these artifacts to the dominance of Latin reveals the presence and participation of other literate language communities in Romano-British literate culture.

The most frequently-used non-Latin language in writing from Roman Britain is Greek, though the numbers are still relatively small compared to the corpus of Latin-language inscriptions. Greek is easily recognizable by virtue of its differing script, and Greek script appears in several places in the epigraphic record of Britain. Leaving aside the numerous examples of Greek names rendered into Latin script, a few examples of Greek-language texts in Greek script exist in the epigraphic corpus of Britain. This in itself is not surprising given that the military centers and trading communities of Britain attracted a fairly diverse and cosmopolitan

population and the relative ubiquity of the Greek language throughout the Roman empire, but the Greek language inscriptions are still interesting sources of information when compared to the Latin ones. Though these texts are comparatively rare—only seven examples out of the whole corpus of monumental stone inscriptions are written in Greek script[721]—these examples still demonstrate both a diversity of approaches to writing and identity and reinforce the cultural use of Latin as the majority language by comparison.

Monumental Greek inscriptions appear in the same usual contexts as Latin ones, and can be similarly classified in general as either personal religious dedications (the majority) or commemorative dedications to the deceased (one exceptional example). The deities mentioned in the religious inscriptions seem to suggest an eastern or at least Greek-speaking origin for their dedicators: *RIB* 808 and *RIB* 3151 are both dedicated to Asclepius, and *RIB* 1129 to Heracles of Tyre (the last one being further notable because its dedicator was a woman). The unambiguously Eastern goddess Astarte is referenced in *RIB* 1124, and the somewhat nebulously-identified Savior Gods are mentioned in *RIB* 461.[722] All these dedications seem to come from places where the military had a strong presence, so their existence is not completely unexpected given the cosmopolitan nature of the army.[723] Two of the dedicators may have been military personnel themselves; Hermogenes (*RIB* 461) and Antiochos (*RIB* 3151) both list themselves as doctors, presumably attached to the military units stationed at their respective locations. This would certainly make sense of their devotion to Asclepius in particular, though it is worth pointing out that Asclepius did receive Latin-language dedications as well.[724] An interesting metal plate example from York also seems to be a dedicatory inscription in this tradition: one Scribonius

[721] *RIB* 461, 758, 808, 1072, 1124, 1129, 3151
[722] Compare to *RIB* 2408.2, a repurposed denarius converted into a Mithraic token, with a corresponding Greek legend.
[723] 461 is from Chester, 808 is from Maryport, 1124 and 1129 are both from Corbridge, and 3151 is from Chester.
[724] *RIB* 609 and 3458. See also *RIB* 445, 1028, and 1052 for the Romanized variant of the name, Aesculapius.

Demetrius dedicated a silver-plated bronze plaque with a Greek text of punched dots to the gods of the praetorium and to Oceanus and Tethys.[725] 'Demetrius' seems to be a name of Greek origin, and the mention of the classical Titans Oceanus and Tethys are a further reference to the Greek-speaking East.[726]

Of particular interest is the bilingual Latin and Greek inscription from Lanchester, a votive dedication by the tribune Titus Flavius Titianus.[727] One side of the altar is carved with the requisite Latin inscription mentioning Titianus's fulfillment of his vow to the deity in question, and the other side is inscribed with similar sentiments in Greek. The Greek version of the inscription, however, is not a direct translation of the Latin, but rather a much shorter treatment, mentioning only the deity, the name of the dedicator, and his rank. The traditional Roman votive formula, VSLM, or *votum solvit libens merito* (here expanded to a common variant VSLLM, *votum solvit laetus libens merito*), is not reproduced in the Greek version, though whether this is an intentional omission, or merely indicative of the fact that Greek did not possess a similar votive formula for inscriptions, or whether the votive formula was considered unnecessary in Greek in the first place is unclear. Titianus himself is known from another inscription found at Lanchester; a military altar dedicated in his capacity as the commander of the First Loyal Cohort of Vardullians.[728] This inscription also supplies the name of the provincial governor at the time, pegging this inscription (and by extension, Titianus's personal dedication) to between roughly 175 and 178 CE, a surprisingly narrow date range for a stone inscription.[729] Both of these inscriptions together place Titianus as the commander of an auxiliary cohort in the late second

[725] *RIB* 662 & 663
[726] The editors of the *RIB* identify this Demetrius as the same one from Plutarch's *De Defectu Oraculorum* (410a), and connect this plaque to Alexander the Great's altars at the River Indus.
[727] *RIB* 1072
[728] *RIB* 1083
[729] *RIB* 1083: "…under Antistius Adventus, the emperor's propraetorian legate…". Q. Antistius Adventus was the provincial governor from c.175-c.178 CE. The editors further suspect that the date of the military altar must be between c. 175 and late 176 CE, owing to the reference to Commodus and Marcus Aurelius as *Augusti*

century CE. The same cohort turns up in inscriptions from Cappuck and Castlecary, (under the command of different individuals) so evidently this unit moved around the frontier of Britain several times.[730] Titianus's own specific origins are of course unknown, and it is thus difficult to speculate about why the inscription is carved in both Latin and Greek.[731] It may be that Titianus was himself bilingual in some way; his rank as a tribune in command of a miliary cavalry unit speaks to a social status at which the education necessary to be bilingually literate would be possible. The fact that the bilingual inscription appears to be a personal dedication made on his own behalf, in comparison to the military altar which was made on behalf of his unit in his role as its commander, might support this notion. The official altar was inscribed only in Latin, because it was a context associated closely with the Roman military system and its attendant preference for Latin above all other written languages. The personal altar, on the other hand, was more closely connected to Titianus as a person rather than as a soldier, and so he may have made a more personal choice to reflect his knowledge of written Greek on this monument. It may also be the case that the altar was carved in Greek because it was appropriate for some other reason. The name of the deity to whom the vow was made is mostly lost, although the editors of the *RIB* supply "Aesculapius"/"Asclepius". This attribution might explain the use of Greek, as Aesculapius/Asclepius was originally a Greek deity, and so the use of Greek script on an altar dedicated to him would make sense. This explanation is extremely tenuous, however. Only the three final letters of what might be "Aesculapio" remain on the Latin side, and only the two final letters on the Greek side, hardly enough of the name to confirm that Aesculapius is indeed the deity to whom the altar is dedicated. These few letters might not even be the name of a deity at

[730] See *RIB* 2118 and *RIB* 2149

[731] Two men by the name of Titus Flavius Titianus served as prefect of Egypt; one from c. 126-c. 133 CE (viz. *CIL* 3.41 & *P. Berol*. 11664) and another from c. 164-c. 167 CE (viz. *IGR* 1273 & *P. Ryl*. 120), but it is impossible to establish whether either of these men had anything to do with the Titianus in question.

all; on the Latin side, the letters seem to occupy their own line in the text, rather than being part of a longer name broken up on multiple lines. Additionally, while the craft of the letters on the Greek side may be somewhat unsteady (suggesting that perhaps the Greek script was rare enough in the region to give the carver pause), the overall quality of the remaining Latin inscription is also such that it seems unlikely that the carver would have failed to space out the letters sufficiently to fit the full name "Aesculapius" on one line and so would have had to split it onto two separate lines. Without knowing how much of the top of the altar has been lost in the interim, it is impossible to know exactly to whom the bilingual altar was dedicated. Ultimately, though, this missing information does not matter much to the interpretation of the text and its significance. Titianus's inscriptions offer tantalizing and rare evidence of the different ways in which writing could be used differently by the same person. Titianus the military commander uses a formulaic, boilerplate Latin inscription in keeping with the hundreds of other military altars dedicated by commanders all over Britain. Titianus the individual, by contrast, uses not only Latin but also Greek to represent his personal vow to the unknown deity and fulfilment thereof. Whether or not the Greek inscription could be read by others is unimportant; what is important is that the presence of the Greek script was significant to Titianus for his own reasons, and, despite the fact that the script is Greek, it shows that writing and literate expression was integrated into Roman ideas about both personal and public identity. In comparison to the official Latin inscription, this personal dedication shows the nuanced range of cultural backgrounds that could attend monumental writing in the Roman system.

The sole Greek-language funerary inscription, from Brough-under-Stainmore, is a long and poetic dedication to sixteen-year-old Hermes of Commagene.[732] This text is notable not only for being the only funerary stele inscribed in Greek from the whole of Britain, but also by virtue of

[732] *RIB* 758

comparison to other funerary dedications of other known Greek-speakers. Hermes's stele bears twelve lines of lyrically-rendered Greek text, exhorting the viewer to greet his tomb and incorporating an oblique mythological allusion to the underworld in the form of a reference to the Cimmerians. This inscription is clearly an exceptional case, however, as a comparison to a few other tombstones reveals. Hermes was almost definitely a Greek-speaker, or at the very least from the Greek-speaking East. Other Greek-speakers also appear in the epigraphic record of Britain: Flavius Helius, a Greek immigrant at Lincoln; and Flavius Antigonus Papias, a Greek citizen at Carlisle, were both memorialized by their respective wives.[733] Where these commemorations differ, though, is that Helius and Papias are both commemorated in Latin, rather than in their presumably native Greek script. These epitaphs also lack the lengthy poetic flourish of Hermes's monument. Not enough information about the women who dedicated Helius's and Papias's monuments remains to inform theories about their origins, and though it did seem important to them to mention their husbands' Greek roots (though not specifically enough to give a city or deme, just a general reference to being from Greece), they did not opt for the corresponding script on the monuments. Whether this is due to simple lack of knowledge on their part (after all, they may not have read or even spoken Greek regardless of their husbands' origins), or to some other more nuanced rationale is unclear. By contrast, Hermes's inscription (though it does not preserve the name of the dedicator) was, if not carved by a Greek-speaking mason, clearly at least drafted by someone with a relatively high level of competence in Greek, given the complexity and length of the phrasing. The composer of the text made a very deliberate choice (and by no means a mandatory one, as seen from other epitaphs for Greek-speakers carved in Latin script) to use Greek in this context, and to compose an effusive and highly-literary text, rather than a simple memorial as presented in other similar epitaphs. The

[733] *RIB* 251 (Helius) & *RIB* 955 (Papias)

unique nature of Hermes's epitaph, combining Greek script, Greek mythological references, and a direct address to a viewer who, given the location, would in all likelihood not have been able to read the text, demonstrate the connection between written language and identity that existed not just in Greek literature, but in Latin as well.

Of course, no discussion of multilingual inscriptions in Britain would be complete without reference to the sole example of Aramaic from the province: the tombstone of Regina from South Shields.[734] Palmyrene soldiers seem to have been the most likely to retain elements of their own culture when integrating with the Roman military, and the tradition of Palmyrene Aramaic on funerary monuments across the empire is comparatively well-established.[735] With the exception of the Greek texts listed above, this is the only inscription in Britain to preserve a script other than Latin, and even that is a slight, short, and shallowly-carved afterthought to the main body of a formulaic Latin inscription. Much like Hermes's epitaph discussed above, this short line of Aramaic exhibits a connection between written language and personal identity, regardless of the actual communicative value of the text itself. Additionally, in a similar fashion to Titianus's dedication, the two different languages relate two different types and amounts of information. The Latin text contains some of the standard elements of Roman funerary epigraphy: Regina's name, age, origin (here notable because she seems to be a native Briton, a member of the Catuvellauni), Barates (the commemorator) and their relationship. The Aramaic text, by contrast, is rather less fulsome even than the relatively short Latin epitaph, containing only her name and her relationship to Barates, though here she is listed only as a freedwoman, rather than freedwoman and wife as in the Latin version. Interestingly, the phrasing of the Aramaic inscription appears to be a traditional formula in Palmyrene funerary monuments for

[734] *RIB* 1065
[735] Adams 2003b, 199

women.[736] The iconography of the monument also draws heavily on Palmyrene antecedents, depicting Regina as an elite, wealthy Palmyrene woman, with a spindle and distaff as well as balls of spun wool.[737] The workmanship of Regina's monument is comparable to another epitaph from South Shields, that of a young African freedman named Victor.[738] This monument similarly uses Palmyrene imagery and motifs relating to the deceased, though it leaves off any accompanying Aramaic text, relying fully on the Latin inscription for the textual component of the monument. In setting up Regina's monument, however, Barates chose not only elite Palmyrene imagery to represent Regina (herself a native Briton and a freed slave, not a wealthy Palmyrene woman of leisure), but also Aramaic text, albeit a short and formulaic line. Much like the long and complex Greek epitaph of Hermes of Commagene, the Aramaic text was not a requirement for Regina's monument, as is evidenced by the sufficiency of Latin text for Victor's similarly styled monument, but rather a personal choice on the part of Barates. Some interesting influences of both Greek and Aramaic epigraphy can be detected in Regina's monument, for example, some case endings for the Latin words that are more usual in Greek, and the rather awkward placement of the Latin lettering that would seem to suggest the carver was not quite as comfortable carving in Latin.[739] Though bilingual in text, the monument would therefore seem to be trilingual in context, making it even more of a unique representation in the province of Britain. The cultural intersections of personal and public identity represented by the image and the text in this one unique monument are remarkable.

Overall, the majority of non-Latin-script inscriptions on stone can be attributed to those who would likely have been native speakers of Greek or, in the case of Barates, Aramaic,

[736] Cussini 2004, 237
[737] Cussini 2004, 236
[738] *RIB* 1064
[739] Beard 2013, 210

perhaps originating in the eastern provinces where Greek was more common than Latin as a language of written communication. Their choice to set up an inscription in a language other than Latin was clearly a significant one, as these foreign languages would doubtless have been highly irregular in the Latinized western provinces. The fact that most of them seem to cluster around the militarized northern frontier would seem to provide an explanation; the military drew from a number of Greek and non-Latin speaking regions throughout the empire.[740] Outside the comparatively small and isolated Greek-speaking communities represented by these texts, however, it would probably have been very difficult to find someone who could carve an inscription in Greek, and next-to-impossible for something as unconventional as Palmyrene Aramaic, as in Barates's postscript (though the presence of a military unit from the Near East at South Shields might have made Aramaic slightly more common than elsewhere in the province).

Evidence of Greek writing in monumental inscriptions may be rare, but Greek script and language in the collections of personal objects, or *instrumentum domesticum* is less so. One collection of objects in which Greek is comparatively well-represented is that of personal adornments, jewelry, and precious metal objects. The majority of these Greek inscriptions are either names, as in the case of a gold ring from Cambridgeshire bearing the inscription ΕΥΤΟΛΜ (probably an abbreviation for the genitive of Eutolmios)[741] and general short wishes of goodwill, either paired with names (like a gold and sapphire ring from Suffolk engraved with ΟΛΥΜΡΕΙ ΖΗΣΑΙΣ)[742] or on their own (as on a gold-plated ring from Corbridge engraved with

[740] E.g., Chester, Maryport, Corbridge, South Shields, Brough-under-Stainmore
[741] *RIB* 2422.6. See also *RIB* 2423.9 for an intaglio with an incised graffito of "ΕΥΣΕΒΙ(ου), and another intaglio of a horse labeled with the name ΗΡΑΚΛΙΔΕΣ (*RIB* 2423.37)
[742] *RIB* 2422.10, "Olympis, may you live (i.e. live long or live well)"

ΦΥΛΑ).[743] These Greek exhortations function as a counterpart to the common Latin inscription *utere felix* ("use and be happy"), which appears on a number of personal objects throughout Britain.[744] The Greek engravings seem to be a bit more flexible in their phrasing, however, rather than using a similar standard phrase. Two gemstones from Avon and Wiltshire have similar, but slightly different inscriptions: one wishes good fortune to the wearer,[745] and the other wishes good fortune and harmony.[746] Another interesting example is that of a Greek sentiment written in a Latin script: a gold filigree ring from Corbridge bears the words "Aemilia zeses" as part of the ring's design rather than an inscription added after the fact.[747] Though written in Latin script, this sentiment is clearly meant to reference the Greek ζησαις, as on the ring presented to Olympis mentioned above. The combination of Greek vocabulary and Latin script is particularly striking, as Greek does have its own script, so transliterating the word into Latin was another step in the process that was not strictly necessary to the ring's manufacture.

Glass artifacts are another useful source for Greek inscriptions, though several examples may have been imported to Britain from elsewhere, rather than made in the province itself. A fragment of a glass cup bearing traces of a possible wish for goodwill is almost certainly an import from Syria, based on the composition and style of the object.[748] The inscriptions are generally simple wishes for goodwill,[749] except for one example that preserves a label for the

[743] *RIB* 2422.43, probably an abbreviation for φυλαξαι, "be well"
[744] See for example *RIB* 2421.56-2421.58 (crossbow brooches)
[745] *RIB* 2423.10, EYTYXI / O ΦOPON, "god fortune to you who wears this"
[746] *RIB* 2423.11, EYTYXΩΣ / OMONOIA "good fortune and harmony". The image of the *dextrarum iunctio*, two clasped hands, suggests that this may be a wedding or betrothal ring.
[747] *RIB* 2422.1. The style of the ring, *opus interassile*, is similar to a number of other examples from Britain, including some of the items from the Hoxne hoard.
[748] *RIB* 2419.38
[749] e.g. *RIB* 2419.46 (ZΕΣΑΙΣ ΚΑΛΩΣ, "live well") and *RIB* 2419.42 (ΟΓΙΕΝΩΝ ΧΡΩ, "use and be well", the Greek counterpart to Latin's *utere felix*)

now-lost scene depicted on the vessel.[750] At least half of these Greek script glass artifacts seem to come (perhaps unsurprisingly) from military sites, the cosmopolitan nature of which would likely account for their presence.[751]

An interesting parallel to the Latin-language lead curse tablets from southern Britain also appears in a small collection of Greek-script magical amulets from various parts of the province. These amulets (two gold-leaf and one lead foil *lamellae* and four engraved gemstones) are difficult to interpret for a number of reasons, though primarily because they, for the most part, eschew conventional vocabulary and spelling in favor of specialized symbols and indecipherable (to us, lacking as we do the necessary magical knowledge of the inscriber) arrangements of letters. A textbook example of this tactic is a gold-leaf *lamella* from York, seemingly preserved in its entirety.[752] The small inscription consists of one line of indecipherable magical symbols, or *charakteres* (possibly inspired by Greek letters), followed by the Greek letters ΦΝΕΒΝΝΟΥΘ.[753] The combination of *charakteres* with proper Greek letters is a common tradition in *lamellae*, especially in instances where the Greek letters give the name of a particular deity or other magical helper.[754] The amulet also uses the same number of *charakteres* as Greek letters (ten of each), which is another common tradition in the composition of amuletic text, addressing the power in question in two different ways: secret, unpronounceable symbols, as well as a more straightforward written name.[755] The exact purpose of this particular amulet is unknown (possibly intentionally, as magical practice was generally intended to be a secret

[750] *RIB* 2419.40, on which the name ΑΚΤΑΙΩΠ has been engraved, likely referring to a scene from the myth represented on the cup.
[751] Binchester (*RIB* 2419.38), Castlesteads (*RIB* 2419.40), and Caerwent (*RIB* 2419.46)
[752] *RIB* 706
[753] Kotansky 1994, 2. This phrase is repeated on other amulets and in magical instruction texts, apparently as an epithet of the Egyptian god Ptah.
[754] Faraone 2018, 181
[755] Faraone 2018, 181

between the practitioner and the supernatural power), but the practice of seeking supernatural intercession through a written charm is still significant.[756]

A longer and more complex amuletic text comes from the military fort at Caernarvon, possibly a cemetery outside the fort dating to roughly the last first to mid-second century CE.[757] The text itself seems to be mostly a transcription of Hebrew recitation into Greek, interspersed with Greek words and other magical *charakteres* and invocations.[758] There are numerous references to Hebrew epithets for God, and to various Aramaic powers as well.[759] The interpolated Greek words seem to be an artifact of copying the transliteration from another source onto the amulet, an unintentional addition of the Greek commentary on the Hebrew ritual into the text of the invocation itself, though the final line exhorting the amulet and its invocations to protect Alphianos (likely the owner) is an independent addition.[760] The parallels to the Orphic *totenpassen*, gold-leaf amulets with protective invocations for the deceased are readily apparent, given the potential connections with the cemetery site. Unfortunately, nothing more is yet known of Alphianos or of the exact origin of the amulet (whether it is in fact attributable to the cemetery or more appropriately belongs to some other context), and so it is difficult to theorize about the reasons for the creation of the text.[761] What is significant, however, is the importance of the written text. The notion that a written version of magical incantations would serve as protection for the wearer is a core principle of Greek magical amulet-making, and the power of written invocations evidently carried over into Britain enough that copyists were willing to prepare the texts in the province.

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[756] Kotansky (1994, 1) suggests that this was a love-spell, deposited in the York bathhouse *caldarium*.
[757] *RIB* 436
[758] See Kotanksy 1994, 5-9. The Greek letters use appear to represent transcriptions of the spoken Hebrew, rather than direct translations.
[759] Kotansky 1994, 7-8
[760] See Kotansky 1994, 9-10
[761] Kotanksy 1994, 3. The original excavators at Caernarvon (c. 1923) acknowledge the lack of certain context for the amulet in their publication, basing the connection to the cemetery on the general location of the find.

The pewter (an alloy of lead and tin, similar to the sheets used for the Bath and Uley curse texts) foil amulet from London is the longest and most elaborate of the Greek protective texts from Britain. This amulet seems to have been one of a small number found in the same deposit, though the other texts (yet unpublished) are composed primarily in Latin or in magical characters rather than Greek letters.[762] This fact that this amulet is written on lead-based foil is itself peculiar, as protective texts are normally reserved for gold or silver rather than more base metals. Pewter, however, is quite common in Britain, since the metals necessary to create the alloy are common on the island, and so the use of pewter here may point to local production of the amulet rather than importation from elsewhere.[763] The amulet invokes protection against plague (described in several grim ways, such as 'flesh-melting'), using a combination of the usual Greek magical invocations and references to the Greek god Apollo as a warden against disease, asking the various names deities or powers to protect Demetrios. The content of the text, at least where it refers to Apollo, his epithets, and his role as a medical deity, would seem to originate well outside Britain, as similar phrases to those found in the amulet appear at oracles of Apollo in the Near East.[764] However the content of the text was known to the inscriber (either directly or indirectly), the apparent multicultural background of this amulet shows the variety of backgrounds that connected the province to writing. The inscriber (whether it was Demetrios himself or someone else) makes a few mistakes in the transcription of the Greek; for example, transposing the Latin R for the Greek P, and in one instance attempts to correct the error.[765] This would seem to suggest that the writer was not an expert in the Greek alphabet, and may have had more experience with the Latin one. Combined with the atypical use of pewter for the protective

[762] Tomlin 2014, 197. For one of the other texts (possibly a list of lost or stolen valuables), see Tomlin, R.S.O & M.W.C. Hassall 1999: "Roman Britain in 1998: Inscriptions". *Britannia* Vol. 30. p. 375-376
[763] Tomlin 2014, 198
[764] Tomlin 2014, 203. Specifically ones that were used as charms against the Antonine Plague of 165/166 CE.
[765] Tomlin 2014, 198

amulet, this text may represent a Greek-language amulet that was produced in Britain itself or in one of the neighboring northwestern provinces. If this were the case, it would be an intriguing example of Greek text being produced in the Latin-speaking west, and of more linguistic diversity in Britain than may be expected.

A third gold *lamella* from Wood Eaton in Oxfordshire appears to be inscribed with a mix of Latin letters and magical symbols.[766] Initially interpreted to be a Greek-script magical text, according to the use of several magical symbols that look similar to the Greek Θ, the amulet is more probably inscribed with a collection of Latin letters arranged according to a similar magical tradition.[767] It is known that the site was that of a Romano-Celtic temple in use from roughly the early first to mid-second centuries CE, and it is possible that the amulet was intended as a religious dedication.[768] Since the existing piece is only a small fragment of what must have been a larger rectangular sheet, a complete interpretation of the text is impossible, although a few other fragments of bronze sheet votives originate from the same site, perhaps suggesting that the dedication of inscribed votives was part of the history and practice of the shrine.[769] Whatever the intended purpose of the Latin *lamella*, it certainly seems to conform to the same tradition as its Greek counterparts, that of the use of literate symbols to ensure magical attention or assistance. Further examples of Latin letters used in magical practice are possibly represented by an odd collection of octagonal bronze rings from various parts of the province.[770] These artifacts preserve a sequence of letters in mainly Latin script, save for the insertion of a X figure taken from the Greek alphabet, in a seemingly random arrangement.[771] These arrangements are clearly

[766] *RIB* 2430.2
[767] Kotanksy 1994, 13
[768] Kotansky 1994, 13
[769] See *RIB* 236 & *RIB* 237.
[770] *RIB* 2422.53-2422.57, a further example was discovered in 1990 (see commentary, *RIB* 2422.53)
[771] The four rings currently known display the letters I, S, A, O, N, and C (and the Greek X) in four different orders on seven of the eight square faces of each ring (the eighth being occupied by an interpunct rather than a letter).

not words, and so their sequence most likely has some ritual or magical significance. That the rings are from various different places in Britain further complicates their interpretation, as it is more difficult to associate any particular site with their potential significance.[772] Even in the arena of the supernatural, it seems, Greek was not the only option, and Latin was equally fit for purpose if it was a more familiar or useful language to the dedicant.

Engraved gems from Britain also preserve amuletic text or magical incantations, in addition to *lamellae* and other metal artifacts.[773] These would appear to have been imported by their owners, rather than made in Britain itself, since their symbolism and text are classically Greek or eastern in origin. For example, a hematite amulet from Welwyn incorporates well-known Greek magical imagery and incantations to protect the wearer from diseases of the womb.[774] The iconography (the Egyptian deities Isis and Bes, the *ouroboros*, and a commonly-used cup-and-key symbol representing the womb) as well as the invocation to ΟΡΩΡΙΟΥΘ, a deity often mentioned by women's amulets, suggest that this particular item may have traveled to Britain from very far afield indeed.[775] Other amulets set into finger rings come from various places across Britain, such as an example from Castlesteads which bears the magical abbreviation ΕΖΣ, (a reference to the god Serapis[776]) one from Thetford depicting a snake-legged deity on one side and the inscription ΑΒΡΑΣΑΞΣΑΒΑΩΘ,[777] another at Silchester showing a similar deity and the invocation ΙΑΩ,[778] and a final example from Colchester depicting the

[772] *RIB* 2422.53 comes from Norfolk, 2422.54 from Somerset, 2422.55 from Hampshire, 2422.57 from Winchester, and the 1990 example from Devizes in Wiltshire.
[773] An *opus interassile* gold ring from near Corbridge may potentially be taken as a magical object in the same vein as these gems. Its inscription reads ΠΟΛΕΜΙΟΥ / ΦΙΛΤΡΟΝ, or "Polemios's lovel-spell" (*RIB* 2422.12)
[774] *RIB* 2423.1
[775] Faraone 2018, 97. Amulets with similar imagery and text have been found in Cairo and Perugia.
[776] See Faraone 2018, 183 for invocations to Serapis
[777] *RIB* 2423.15
[778] *RIB* 2423.16

Egyptian deity Harpocrates and the seven Greek vowels IΩEHAYO.[779] The use of writing on these types of engraved gems, impenetrable though the contents may be without the appropriate magical knowledge, is an intriguing adaptation of magical practice along the lines of the Roman epigraphic habit.[780] The inscriptions render the spoken incantations into a permanent form that the bearer could always have at hand, both extending the protection of the magical ritual and also connecting the writing itself with the power of the ritual. Though these gems may have originated in a more distant part of the Roman world, rather than in Britain itself, they are another example of the pervasiveness of writing in the daily life of the province (whether in Latin or Greek).

In essence, the Greek language magical amulets and the lead curse tablets serve the same purpose in two different ways. Both are intended to entreat the intercession of a supernatural power on behalf of the wearer or writer, and writing appears to be an important component to the use of both. The power of the curse tablets, however, comes from the legibility and comprehensibility of the text, whereas the power of the amulets comes from the illegibility and mystery of the letters and symbols used.

The use of Greek letters as magical, or at least significant, symbols possibly has an extension in the *chi-rho* figures which appear on precious metal objects and jewelry found throughout Britain.[781] The proper *chi-rho*, and its cousin, the later-period *rho*-cross, are both common in the material culture of Roman Britain.[782] Though the symbol also had a strong

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[779] *RIB* 2423.17. The use of independent vowels in a particular order is a common invocation on Greek magical amulets (Faraone 2018, 179)
[780] Faraone 2018, 239
[781] *RIB* 128, consisting of four masonry blocks carves with simple *chi-rho* figures, is the only example of the symbol being used in stone epigraphy, possibly due to the fact that monumental epigraphy in Britain was well into its decline by the time the *chi-rho* began to be a popular and significant symbol.
[782] Petts 2016, 663

association with the Constantinian imperial house,[783] in Britain it seems to have been primarily associated with Christian ritual and religious contexts.[784]

The *chi-rho* occupies a unique position in the study of literacy and writing in Britain, both because its use is limited to a specialized population and time period (Christians and the later period of Roman occupation), and because the symbol is less of a proper word or letter than other examples of written text in Britain, both Latin and Greek. The symbol is more appropriately defined as a logogram, in that it is made up of written characters, but is not necessarily a word in and of itself. The adjoined X and P, and the oft-added A and Ω, are themselves letters (or more appropriately phonograms, as they represent individual sounds), but the combination is a graphical one, meant to evoke an idea without writing words out in full every time.[785] The *chi-rho* is also distinct from simple abbreviations, of which there are many in Latin epigraphy. While the two Greek characters that compose the *chi-rho* are indeed an abbreviation of the word they are meant to represent (Χριστος), they are often the only letters used in the inscription, rather more like a monogram than an abbreviation. Ligaturing the two letters together (by superimposing the X over the P, rather than putting them side by side) is also a tradition inherited from epigraphy, though similarly employed in a different and unique way. Ligaturing in most Latin inscriptions was a method of saving space on the stone and time spent in carving the text,[786] whereas in the case of the *chi-rho*, it is often the only character used in the given space (with the exception of the A and Ω that sometimes appear on either side of the main logogram), so there is clearly no need to save space or time for adding other words. Additionally,

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[783] See Petts 2003, 107-109. The appearance of the *chi-rho* on pewter ingots from London (*RIB* 2406.1-10) and an official lead sealing from Silchester (*RIB* 2441.38) are the most unambiguous examples of the imperial *chi-rho* in Britain.
[784] Aside from a few items of personal adornment, mainly rings, eg. *RIB* 2422.16 & 2422.17
[785] See Squire & Whitton 2017
[786] Rogan 2006, 17

the *chi-rho* figure is used in artistic representations in ways that words are not, especially in decorative artworks. The famous wall paintings from the church conversion at the Lullingstone villa feature large *chi-rho* figures in the center of the designs, these being the only letters that appear in the design, and clearly intended to be a decorative focal point of the painting.[787] Likewise, the so-called Christ mosaic from Hinton St. Mary incorporates the symbol into the design of the mosaic pavement, as a background for the central male figure.[788] This tactic of obscuring part of the written content of the mosaic may be compared with the only example of Greek lettering in mosaic pavements that does not come in the form of a *chi-rho*: a short fragment from Aldborough displaying the phrase ΕΛΗΚΩΝ.[789] The letters in this example occupy their own space in the mosaic design, independent of any interfering imagery, such that they can be read clearly without being obscured by an image. The superposition of the male bust over the *chi-rho* in the Hinton St. Mary mosaic indicates that the legibility of the letters was not the primary purpose of including them, as in the Lullingstone mosaic, but rather that the *chi-rho* in this context was seen more as a decorative symbol than a text meant to be read.

The *chi-rho* is also ubiquitous on many precious metal items originating in southern Britain, likely during the Christianization period of the late 3rd and early 4th centuries CE. Many items from the most spectacular precious metal collections in Britain display the symbol, though whether these pieces were used in public churches or more private contexts is still debated.[790] In these contexts, the *chi-rho* is either the only inscription on the piece (as on several spoons from

[787] *RIB* 2447.6, 2447.7, 2447.8
[788] *RIB* 2448.14
[789] *RIB* 2448.5. Usually taken to be "Helicon", the birthplace of the muses, who were the subject of the rest of the pavement.
[790] Two items from the Mildenhall Treasure, for example, bear scratched graffiti in Greek of the name "Eutherios" (*RIB* 2414.5 & 2414.6), suggesting personal ownership of those two vessels at least, if not the entire hoard; whereas the Water Newton set is almost certainly liturgical plate owned by a church (see Petts 2003, 118-121)

the Mildenhall Treasure[791]) or is accompanied by other text or letters. It appears alongside Latin script rather than more Greek (as with two notable silver vessels from Water Newton, giving the names of the dedicators[792]). Also of note are a small number of large lead vessels bearing molded *chi-rho* symbols in the absence of other text.[793] Though not composed of precious materials like the various hoards, these tanks still seem to have had ritual associations with Christian worship, either for baptism or ritual ablutions, and the use of the *chi-rho* on them appears to be a uniquely British feature.[794] None of these examples have a *chi-rho* accompanied by further Greek words or text, aside from the occasional addition of A and Ω to the logogram. The symbol is separated from the idea of text or script in Greek, and is employed for its own sake as a graphical embellishment rather than a written word or letter.

All these artifacts demonstrate that the *chi-rho* was clearly a unique symbol in Roman Britain. Though it was composed of letters, it was used primarily as a decorative symbol rather than a word or abbreviation, a logogram that suggested the idea of Christianity rather than spelling it out in words.

The portable artifacts that preserve Greek writing are as ambiguous as they are interesting. It is usually impossible to determine the provenance of these artifacts in most cases, and indeed, their precious components and easy portability means they may have traveled considerable distances before their deposition. In some cases, they may have been imported to Britain from elsewhere in the Roman world, perhaps a place where Greek was a more common written language. Aside from the monumental inscriptions discussed above, it is very difficult to reliably

[791] *RIB* 2420.53, 2420.54, & 2420.55.
[792] *RIB* 2414.1 & 2414.2
[793] *RIB* 2416.8 (which also bears the generic Latin exhortation “utere felix”)-RIB 2416.14, variously from Suffolk, West Sussex, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire
[794] Petts 2016, 671

place the production of the Greek texts included on small amulets, jewelry, or other portable personal effects in Britain. However, that does not mean that these Greek texts are not important to the adoption of writing and language in Britain. Those who imported them likely also brought the knowledge about how they were intended to work and the beliefs that surrounded their production and use. These ideas would have reinforced the notion of writing as powerful and significant, and as a means of cultural connection. The fact that those ideas were, in these minor and relatively isolated incidents, connected to Greek rather than Latin does not undermine the magnitude of their presence in the archaeological record.

Uniquely, the inscription corpus does not preserve evidence of practice in writing Greek, as it does with Latin (with the possible exception of one example from Norfolk consisting of the letters οδευcυc; interpreted as a misspelling of the name Odysseus,[795] and just as likely to be evidence of lower literacy skills in Greek than an active attempt to learn Greek script). All examples of Greek found in purposeful inscriptions and in informal graffiti appear to have been intentionally made by those who already had familiarity with the language and script. Compared to the examples of tile graffiti that seem to preserve Latin-script writing practice,[796] the lack of apparent Greek language learning is unusual. Greek seems to have been something one already knew, rather than a language that was studied and improved over time. Greek-speakers in Britain arrived already knowing the language, and no non-Greek speaker on the island seems to have practiced acquiring Greek literacy skills in the same way as Roman literacy skills. This speaks both to the importation of Greek by already-competent Greek speakers, and also to the dominance of Latin. In Britain, evidently, people did not feel as much of a need to practice or

[795] *RIB* 2503.364
[796] See above, pg. 122

improve their Greek in the same way they did with their Latin. Greek was a niche language that could only be useful to a few people in limited situations, as opposed to Latin which was ubiquitous and pervasive.

The Greek language and script in Roman Britain appear to be used more commonly for personal items rather than for official correspondence or dedications. With the exception of the few monumental Greek inscriptions discussed above, the majority of Greek script seems to have been confined to jewelry, glass, and metal tablewares, with the preponderance of the lattermost dating to the late Roman or early Christian period. Greek may have been an official language of the Empire, but clearly Latin was considered more appropriate for a majority of day-to-day tasks. Greek was either a marker of Eastern origin, or a sign of higher education, since those Greek-speakers who inscribed objects in Britain seem to have known Greek already rather than learning it in Britain.

Languages and scripts other than Greek and Latin are woefully lacking in the written evidence from Britain. With the exceptions of two lead curse tablets from Bath[797] (which may be transliterated Celtic, though it is impossible to confirm that without additional supplementary evidence) and Barates's personal addendum to the formulaic funerary inscription for his wife, the dominance of the two official imperial languages in writing seems to have overridden any other pre-existing or imported languages and writing systems that may have been present in Britain. Even Germanic or Gallic writing from Britain's closest ethnic and economic neighbors is invisible. Latin clearly ruled the literate landscape.

[797] Discussed above, pgs. 147-149

Chapter 7: The Legacy of Writing in Sub-Roman Britain

At the end of the fourth century CE and the beginning of the fifth, Rome's hold over the province of Britain was waning. The Empire was struggling on many fronts: economic, social, and military, and distant provinces like Britain were becoming less and less of a priority for the Roman government to protect and administer. By 409 CE, Britain had seen three usurpers to the Imperial throne take over in the province, nominated primarily by soldiers who were dissatisfied with their lack of pay.[798] The first two did not meet the army's expectations, however, and were shortly deposed and killed. The last, Constantine III, withdrew a majority of the troops stationed in Britain to Gaul as part of his campaign for the imperial throne; and, though proclaimed co-emperor with Honorius, was himself deposed and assassinated in 411 CE.[799] Britain had thereby been stripped of most of its military garrison, was sorely lacking in coin shipments to support the taxation and revenue streams of the Roman state, and was being threatened by Germanic incursions onto the island. Depending on which sources one relies on, the response to the situation seems to have been mixed. Zosimus's account has the British taking the initiative to fight off barbarian incursions on their own, without seeking assistance from Rome.[800] The early Christian author Gildas on the other hand, writing in the second half of the sixth century, mentions that Britain had sent emissaries to Rome to ask for soldiers and monetary aid.[801] A rescript from the legitimate emperor Honorius issued in c. 410 CE, may suggest that the inhabitants of Britain appealed to central Roman authority for assistance, but the emperor told

[798] Zosimus, *Hist. Nov.* 6.2.1
[799] Esmonde Cleary 1989, 137
[800] *Hist. Nov.* 6.5.3
[801] *De Ex. Brit.* 15 & 17

them he could not spare any troops or support for the beleaguered islanders and they should look to their own defenses.[802] Whether the departure or expulsion of Roman power in Britain was organized and formal, or patchy and unceremonious, centralized Roman power had ceased to be a factor in the province's existence by c. 410 CE. What had been Roman Britain fragmented into collections of smaller polities, ruled by local leaders often governing from the skeletons of Roman military installations, as at Birdoswald, or from newly-reoccupied Celtic hillforts, as at Crickley Hill in the Cotswolds.[803]

The collapse of the early fifth century seems rather odd and anticlimactic, given that Britain had for much of the fourth century enjoyed a period of relative wealth and prosperity, at least at society's highest levels. Grand hoards of precious metals and jewelry, like that of the early fifth century deposit at Hoxne, attest to the availability of massive wealth and high social privilege in the years preceding the collapse of Roman Britain. The owners of the Hoxne treasures were evidently from the social elite of their area, and had in their possession not only a great deal of ready cash in the form of coins, but also precious metal jewelry and tableware. The deposition of hoards generally seems to be a late fourth and early fifth century phenomenon in Britain. In addition to Hoxne, the Thetford hoard can be dated to the turn of the fifth century, and there is reason to place the Mildenhall deposition in this period as well.[804]

Just as the contents of these hoards show the wealth and material resources available to the British elite of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the burial and subsequent abandonment of the hoards demonstrate concern and even fear for the loss or theft of the items, and suggests that something particularly serious prevented their owners from reclaiming them. Even in Hoxne,

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[802] Zosimus, *Hist. Nov.* 6.10.2. Zosimus's account of this rescript is now considered suspect, as it may refer to a group in southern Italy (Bruttium) rather than the island of Britain.
[803] Mattingly 2006, 534
[804] Esmonde Cleary 1989, 139

evidence of economic uncertainty can be found in the coins themselves. Many of the silver *siliquae* that make up the majority of the cash deposited in the hoard are clipped, a process by which small bits of the precious metal are shaved off the edges of the coin.[805] Clipping of coins may have taken place for a number of reasons. It was a way to maintain the ratio of value between coins of different compositions and generating new bullion resources without taking coins out of circulation, and was also a dishonest method of defrauding coin value or collecting metal with which to make forgeries. The fact that the coins were being clipped at all speaks to the expectation new coins or precious metal bullion might be difficult to come by, and that the existing coins had to be exploited for all they were worth. Numerous coin hoards throughout Britain that date to the turn of the fifth century display clipping of the coins.

Despite the evident material wealth and prosperity of the mid-fourth century CE, by the beginning of the fifth, Britain enters a period of recession and economic stagnation. Gold and silver coins of Constantine III minted in Lyon are some of the last Roman coins to appear in Britain, after which the supply of coins drops off precipitously.[806] The Roman state was evidently no longer supplying bulk shipments of coinage to Britain as it had done when the province was still under central administration.[807] In some instances, Roman coins from decades or even centuries earlier were used as jewelry rather than as money in their own right.[808] That these items had value was still evident, but it had changed from monetary value to status value, and rather than being used as units of economic exchange, the coins became more abstract status symbols. Much of the evidence points to the failure of the cash economy that had backed transactions in the province during the Roman period. In many urban areas, buildings were

[805] Esmonde Cleary 1989, 139
[806] Archibald et al. 1997, 208
[807] Esmonde Cleary 1989, 139
[808] Archibald et al. 1997, 215

abandoned and the maintenance of public amenities declined.[809] Verulamium and Chichester both show evidence of buildings being abandoned and not replaced beginning sometime in the late fourth or early fifth centuries CE, and the basilica/baths building at Wroxeter was demolished in the late fourth century.[810] Londinium itself seems to have been almost completely abandoned in favor of other settlements.[811] Construction was stagnating in the countryside as well; villa construction comes to an abrupt stop in the late fourth century, with no new villa buildings begun and many abandoned, demolished, or taken over by squatters.[812]

Much of what had been the Roman imperial system on the island had disappeared; however, not all traces of what had been Roman culture in Britain were lost. Writing in Latin survived. Though very little in the way of facts are apparent about the nature of formal schooling in Britain in the Roman period, and even less for the post-Roman transition, it is reasonable to suppose that formal education in both secular and religious studies continued to be available in Britain. The fourth-century CE Gallic poet Ausonius describes the continuation of Roman-style education in Gaul during what was a fairly tumultuous period of history for both Roman Gaul and Roman Britain; and St. Patrick's fifth-century CE *Confession* makes reference to the persistence of advanced education in things like rhetoric and literature in Britain in the early post-Roman period.[813] The early Christian church in fact became a repository for literacy in the later Roman period, and continued to fulfill that role as Britain transitioned out of Roman rule. Almost all of the written evidence for the period between the departure of the Romans and the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons depends on early church authors and their advanced education in

[809] Esmonde Cleary 1989, 131
[810] Esmonde Cleary 1989, 132
[811] Mattingly 2006, 533
[812] Esmonde Cleary 1989, 134
[813] Lapidge 1984, 28-29. See also *Conf.* 13. Patrick himself may have received his education in Gaul, but his comments on the state of learning in Britain are still helpful.

literacy.[814] Latin literacy in Late Antiquity was still a necessary part of life even without a preexisting Roman power system that depended on widespread knowledge of the language. Church leaders, for instance, were expected to at least be able to read Mass and other written elements of Christian services, and the church itself often provided basic training in reading Latin religious texts.[815] Many clerics went further than basic reading and writing in their education, as well; the Romano-British churchman Pelagius, according to his contemporary Jerome, displayed advanced skills in both standard Latin literacy and highly developed applications of Latin, like rhetoric, and these skills may have been acquired in Britain itself during the late Roman period.[816] By virtue of its association with the Christian church (itself born of the fact that the church originated under the rule of the Latin-speaking Roman Empire) Latin continued to be maintained as an important language of Britain into the post-Roman period. Gildas himself refers to Latin as "our language".[817]

Despite the precipitous decline in monumental inscriptions observed in the later third century CE, it seems that the post-Roman inhabitants of Britain retained enough familiarity with the epigraphic habit to erect inscribed monuments.[818] Some 242 inscriptions dating to between c. 400 and c. 700 CE testify to the continuation of the Roman-style epigraphic record through the sub-Roman period and into the early Middle Ages, particularly in places like York, and in southwestern and western Britain.[819] The fact that the vast majority of these sub-Roman inscriptions are in Latin further establishes the importance of the language to at least some of the

[814] Fleming 2010, 84
[815] Lapidge 1984, 30
[816] Jerome, *Epis*. 50.2. Faustus of Riez seems to have had a similar Romano-British background (Lapidge 1984, 32)
[817] *De. Ex. Brit*. 23.3, in contrast to the language of the invading Saxons. Gildas's own language also has most of the hallmarks of book-learned Latin, in contrast to St. Patrick's somewhat more vernacular writing (Lapidge 1984, 34)
[818] Fleming 2010, 83
[819] Handley 1998, 339

post-Roman population of Britain.[820] The Christian church seems to have coopted the production of the majority of these tombstones, incorporating elements of Roman-style epigraphic commemoration into the practices of the new religion. Dating these stones is difficult, but many of them provide enough clues in syntax and nomenclature to place them in the later Roman or early post-Roman period.[821] The earliest of these stones are simplistic, often preserving mainly personal names; and they are generally more crudely carved in comparison to their Roman predecessors, consisting of a roughly inscribed irregular slab of stone rather than a carefully shaped and lettered stele.[822]

The purpose of these stones is debated: the use of personal names would seem to suggest that they were intended as tombstones, or at the very least as monuments to particular individuals, but it has also been suggested that they served as land boundary markers or as other references to local living people.[823] Personal names are probably the easiest written text to recognize, even if levels of literacy are low, so it would make sense to use this commonly-relevant information in inscriptions even if the more complex content of Roman-era inscriptions was no longer known or utilized.[824] Early medieval texts from Wales and Ireland, such as the early-ninth century Litchfield Gospels and the twelfth-century Book of Llandaff,[825] make reference to inscribed stones as landmarks, though they are mute as to whether the stones were tombstones or other markers. Early law texts from these two places also refer to inscribed boundary stones as markers of land ownership rather than personal monuments.[826] By

[820] Handley 1998, 340
[821] Petts 2003, 150
[822] Petts 2003, 152
[823] e.g. Fleming 2010, 125 argues for tombstones, whereas Handley 1998, 341-342 makes the connection to charters and gifts of land.
[824] Higgitt 2003, 334
[825] Despite their relatively late publication dates, it is likely that these texts make reference to collections of earlier material, perhaps as far back as the fifth century.
[826] Handley 1998, 345

comparison, Irish and Welsh poetry from the mid-seventh to early ninth centuries refer to standing stones as grave-markers, so it seems that at least some of them were known to be tombstones rather than other types of document.[827] Regardless of their intended purpose (and indeed, one stone could have served multiple purposes, as a well-known inscribed tombstone might also be used as a landmark in delineating boundaries), the inscribed standing stones are clear evidence that the habit of commemorating individuals in writing was retained even after the Roman-style cultural background of such monuments had faded. It was not just the practice of creating inscriptions that was retained, but also the language used in them. Several stones make use of Latin words, most commonly '*filii*' or '*filius*' with accompanying patronymics and the Latin phrase '*hic iacet*' on what are taken to be tombstones; and some early inscribed stones, such as those from the early Christian site of Whithorn in Scotland use comparatively advanced and grammatically correct Latin.[828] Not only is the content of the text advanced, but so are the conventions of creating an epigraphic monument and the skills needed to produce one. The famous Latinus stone from Whithorn, dating to the mid-fifth century, demonstrates that the inscription was carefully laid out according to Roman epigraphic convention, in contrast to some earlier stones that are comparatively poorly arranged and carved.[829] Evidently the use of inscribed monuments in stone was still important and common enough that the skills of a professional inscriber were valuable to maintain.

These inscriptions fit quite well into a general pattern that governs most of post-Roman Europe: a resurgence of epigraphic monuments in the late fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries CE.[830] The dearth of earlier fourth-century CE inscriptions, therefore, may be better attributed to some

[827] See Handley 1998, 344
[828] Handley 1998, 349-350.
[829] Higgit 2003, 329
[830] Petts 2003, 154

general social and economic upheaval in the period (evidenced by the downturn in monumental building, the increased deposition of hoards, and the lack of new coinage) rather than any rejection of Roman culture or of monumental commemoration. The early post-Roman community had evidently internalized the Roman epigraphic habit sufficiently enough to continue committing to it in what must have been a relatively tumultuous time to be erecting complex inscribed monuments, and their commitment clearly helped to carry the tradition forward into the early Middle Ages. The tradition even migrated to areas where Roman-era inscriptions are rare, such as Wales, the Isle of Man, and southern Scotland.[831] The continuity of inscribed stones also demonstrates, to some extent, the continuity of the sociocultural paradigms that influenced their creation. In instances where a title is given in addition to the names of a person, they are high-status titles, such as "king", "prince", "bishop", or "priest", and even in a few isolated cases, "doctor".[832] One late fifth century example from Wales refers to the person commemorated as "a citizen…and cousin of Maglos the magistrate", retaining not only the Roman practice of inscription, but also a Roman civic identification and title, *magistratus*.[833] The continued connection between people of substance and inscribed monuments is probably to be expected; given the costs associated with quarrying, transporting, and carving an inscribed stone, it was likely that in sub-Roman Britain, as in the Roman period, inscribed stones were the purview of the wealthy few with enough money to pay for such specialized goods. That these wealthy individuals continued to invest in permanent written records of themselves shows that these inscribed stones and the written record they represented were still considered a prestige good in post-Roman Britain, and that the paradigms connecting writing and Latin with high status and social importance still persisted after direct Roman influence waned. Written Latin

[831] Fleming 2010, 83
[832] Handley 1998, 358. One notable instance even describes a "holy woman".
[833] Edwards 2001, 25

had been intertwined so successfully with elite status display that the connection took on a life of its own in the transitional period, sustaining the language and script long after the administration and military infrastructures that had established the relationship were gone. The association of some of these inscriptions with Roman roads and ruins, bastions of the perceived glorious past of Roman Britain, further emphasizes their importance to social relations in the post-Roman period.[834]

Further, the lands around the Irish Sea, southern Scotland, and the Welsh interior have yielded some more remarkable inscribed stones. These are inscribed not only in Latin, for the most part, but also in Ogham, an insular Irish script of unclear origin that first appears on the island of Britain in roughly the fourth century CE.[835] In comparison to Ireland itself, where inscribed Ogham stones are written in early Irish using Ogham script alone, the stones found in western England, Wales, and Scotland are either written in Latin only, or written bilingually in Latin and Ogham.[836] This is the first time in the history of the province (so far as is known) that Latin had to contend with another imported script in monumental writing. These texts are mostly short, consisting of personal names and sometimes filial or place designations, roughly comparable to the late Roman and post-Roman inscribed stones from the province.[837] The debate about whether the Latin texts influenced the Ogham ones or *vice versa* is still ongoing, as the thinness of their content leaves much room for interpretation.[838] Some of the Ogham inscriptions appear to have influenced the traditions of Latin texts: in a number of the texts that use Latin lettering, the inscriptions are carved vertically rather that horizontally, mimicking the

[834] Edwards 2001, 23
[835] Edwards 2001, 18
[836] Fleming 2010, 86
[837] Mullen 2016, 588
[838] Mullen 2016, 589

arrangement of Ogham lettering.[839] On the other hand, it also appears that Latin was having an effect on the early languages of Ireland in the form of adopted Latin loanwords that begin to show up in early Irish in the fifth and sixth centuries.[840] It is likely, as with all instances of cultural exchange, that two-way transmission of words, texts, and ideas about writing was the norm. It is difficult to theorize about the identities of the people creating these bilingual inscriptions, whether they were Irish immigrants that learned a bit of Latin epigraphic convention from their neighbors or native Latin-literate Britons that picked up some Ogham, but the crossover between these two scripts is still remarkable, especially for a period in which much unambiguous textual evidence is rare. Latin nevertheless obviously continued to carry some value for inscribed texts, even after the departure of the Roman imperial system that had fostered its development as a language of display. Even though there was another script available for the creation of inscribed stones, Latin continued to be understood as an important component for epigraphic commemoration in Britain. The lasting impact of Latin writing in Britain cannot be understated, and it is clearly borne out by the continued embrace of inscribed stones during the period following the official withdrawal of the Empire from the province. It was one of the few Roman imports to the island to survive the collapse of Roman power, and it continued to be valuable to the post-Roman and early medieval inhabitants of the island.

[839] Handley 1998, 354
[840] See McManus 1983.

Conclusion:

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the cultural implications of writing in Roman Britain in a more comprehensive and holistic way than has been previously attempted. The archaeology of writing in Roman Britain has up to this point been thoroughly documented, as evidenced by the massive compilation of material in the *Roman Inscriptions of Britain* corpus, but not as thoroughly interpreted as the representation of a huge cultural transformation that it was. Previous scholarly focus on the monumental texts and other epigraphic and documentary evidence has dealt primarily with the decipherment and content of the texts, and has addressed these artifacts or groups of artifacts on a case-by-case basis rather than in a more comprehensive analysis. The *RIB* volumes, while they are indispensable compendia of primary source material, are necessarily limited to parsing and translating the Latin of the texts they contain, and indicating the locations of the texts within the province. Work on the Vindolanda texts and the Bath curse tablets has illuminated how the British examples of these types of text fit into wider trends across the Roman Empire, but at the expense of fully exploring the implications of these texts within Britain specifically.[841] Some of the other less intensively studied examples of literacy found in Britain have been the subject of only one or two papers, leaving more avenues of interpretation open to further research.[842] Broader scholarship on Roman language policy and language choice under the Roman Empire is also not immune to a similar isolating focus. Even Adams's comprehensive work on how Latin related to other languages throughout the Empire as Rome expanded misses out on an analysis of Britain specifically.[843]

[841] Bowman 1994, Tomlin 1988
[842] Boon 1983, Wilson 2003
[843] Adams 2003a

Given the unique nature of Roman Britain as a province to which not only the Latin language but also the entire concept of writing was new to the cultural framework of the people, as well as the importance of Latin usage and written communication to the governmental and military progress of the Roman imperial project, the study of the use and impact of writing in the province has much to reveal about the ways in which writing and language were incorporated into Romano-British life and culture. A more holistic approach that takes not only the content of the texts but also the sociocultural milieu in which they were produced is necessary to derive full meaning from these artifacts. The fact that this huge compendium of texts and written documents exists at all is itself remarkable and worthy of study.

In the majority of work concerning cultural identity as expressed in the archaeological material of Britain, physical artifacts such as jewelry, household objects, and other articles have been assessed and identified by scholars as markers of cultural identity and self-identification. For example, studies of personal ornaments and jewelry, particularly various differing styles of brooches, have focused on the ability of these artifacts to illuminate social status and cultural identity. Finger rings and intaglios have been interpreted as expressing Mediterranean Roman cultural identity, and dragonesque brooches have been associated with the pre-Roman Iron Age cultures of northern Britain.[844] The potential of assessing the physical manifestations of abstract concepts such as writing and literacy has not as yet been addressed in a similar way, despite the fact that there is much to be gained by exploring the different ways in which written Latin is used in different social contexts in Roman Britain.

Ultimately, the wide range of evidence available to address the question of reading and writing in Roman Britain has not yet been as thoroughly explored as it might be. Language is culture, and the question of cultural change cannot be fully answered without a consideration of

[844] See Swift 2011.

language use. The analyses of individual artifacts and groups of artifacts are of course invaluable to the study of Roman Britain, but there is still much to be gained by drawing back from the microcosm of a single artifact or group of artifacts and taking a broader view of them and their contexts. These artifacts are individual data points in a much larger spread, single markers of a much more all-encompassing pattern of cultural change that blanketed the province during the Roman occupation. Analyzing how these texts and other artifacts associated with writing were integrated into the sociocultural fabric of Britain reveals how the inhabitants were adapting to and adopting Roman values. It illustrates how and to what extent this provincial community was brought into the fold of the Roman Empire, and how the influences of Roman imperialism shaped the province's future. It is precisely this kind of comprehensive, thematic, inclusive analysis that this paper has undertaken.

The introduction of the Latin language and the written word to Britain was a wholly new development in the history of the province, and a major element of the cultural change brought about by the Roman occupation of Britain. Documents and the necessary documentary mentality to create and value them had not been part of British thought prior to Roman contact. Despite that, however, once the Romans officially took control of the province, Britain became as flooded with documents as the other provinces of the Roman west. The difference in the archaeological record between pre-Roman and Roman Britain is staggering, written Latin of all kinds proliferated across the province, both in monumental and portable versions.

Latin, and the creation of a permanent written record in it, was fundamentally intertwined with Roman ideas of cultural imperialism. *Latinitas* and *Romanitas* were effectively interchangeable, and speaking Latin was a clear sign of being Roman. In the Greek-speaking east, the situation was somewhat more complicated, and the relationship between Greek and

Latin as observed by Roman authors seems fraught with ambiguity and nuance. The Romans clearly accepted the use of Greek as a language of convenience in the East, and of literary sophistication in the West, but there were situations where Rome would take pains to assert the primacy of Latin as the language of central authority and imperial power. Even when official documents like Augustus's *Res Gestae* were translated into Greek, the idioms and thoughts behind the text remained Latin. While there was no concentrated effort to wipe out other languages and replace them with Latin, so too was there no attempt to accommodate languages other than Latin and Greek in the official sphere. It was clear by example that getting ahead in the Roman imperial system required at least some competence in Latin, as well as an awareness of the documentary mentality that went with it. Those who desired to be part of the Roman power structure embraced Latin and writing of their own accord, having grasped the tacit implication that learning it would be of use in multiple ways. Roman language policy may be nebulous and difficult to pinpoint, but that was partly due to the fact that an official policy was unnecessary. The Romans merely established their language as the language of power and allowed people's own desire to be associated with the powerful to take care of the rest.

Prior to the formal conquest of Britain by the Roman Empire, the Late Iron Age rulers of the island were already embracing written Latin and exploiting it for their own purposes. Preexisting paradigms governing the use of luxury goods as displays of status naturally fostered the adoption of writing as a prestige good, a signifier that the user was one of the fortunate few possessed of a new and flashy skill. British rulers issued Roman-style precious metal coinage accompanied by Roman-style coin legends glorifying themselves and their families. While these inscriptions may not have necessarily been complex or particularly innovative, they nevertheless

further established Latin and writing as tools of power. When the official invasion arrived, the groundwork for the adoption of written Latin had already been laid.

The most consistent communicator of Latin and writing in Britain was the Roman military. While Latin might not be said to have been the official language of the army, as it was still perfectly capable of conducting operations in Greek in the East where it was more convenient, Latin was still the language of power and status, especially the power and status of Rome. Roman soldiers lived a highly documented and highly documentary life, and were faced with the Latin language in most aspects of their daily experience as members of the military community in the western provinces where Greek had less of an influence. The military's role in the introduction and proliferation of writing was crucial, and part of the cultural package of military communities was based on displaying literacy, both in the form of public inscriptions and more personal written communication. The army was the most important factor in the spread of the Latin language to other provinces and in the learning of Latin by native speakers of other languages, and this must certainly have been the case in Britain as well. The military community was the quickest to embrace writing as a sign of association with the Roman imperial project, and also the most likely sector of the population to make use of written monuments and other symbols both of wealth and literacy. The movements of the military led to the movement of Latin and written documentation around the province, and the dedication of altars and monumental inscriptions by military units further reinforced the use of writing as a tool for demonstrating one's identity as a member of the commanding classes of Britain. That this sense spread past the actual enlisted men on down the line to their families and descendants is emphasized by the dedication of funerary monuments to soldiers by their relatives. Writing in

Latin was fundamentally embraced by the military community as a link to Roman power and status.

Though somewhat less homogenized than the military community, some of the urban and suburban residents of Britain also adopted writing and the Latin language in their own ways. Writing remained a useful demonstration of status employed by both the Roman central administration and by private individuals in urban areas. Written documents circulated among these high-status readers in much the same way as they did between military establishments, and the tools necessary to create them were evidently readily available. In general, the literate urban populace may not have relied on monumental epigraphy as much as the military, but they still did occasionally resort to it as a tried-and-true statement of benefaction and commemoration. Further, the composition of private curse tablets unified both urbanites and country dwellers in the tradition of literate petitions for justice to powerful deities, perhaps their only resort in a chronically under-policed provincial society. The rich and powerful were so immersed in Roman literary culture that it appeared in the decorative programs of their townhouses and villas, incorporating Roman cultural pretensions into the structures themselves.

Writing in the rural communities of Britain, more disconnected from Romanized military and urban centers and from the Roman imperial project, is perhaps less prominent, but certainly no less relevant. Some people in rural areas were still able to write at least their own names on their possessions, and to recognize the names of neighbors and friends inscribed on theirs. They may even have been able, perhaps with help, to decipher the instructions for taking medicine administered by itinerant doctors with written stamps for their formulae and dosages. Written documents governed the deposition and ownership of rural landscapes, ensuring that even if a British rustic had no inclination to produce documents on his own, they still influenced his

experience of day-to-day life in the countryside. Writing tools were scattered across the rural areas of Roman Britain in great numbers, silently attesting to the presence of writing skills even in areas where documents themselves do not survive.

Writing from Roman Britain in languages other than Latin is notable for its rarity. The number of non-Latin monumental inscriptions can almost be numbered on the fingers of one hand; and while the examples of other languages, such as Greek, are more numerous in the world of small personal effects, these artifacts were probably produced elsewhere and imported to the province rather than being made in Britain itself. There seems to have been no effort to learn how to write any language other than Latin, and there is no British or Celtic writing that can be identified with any certainty. Latin was the default written language.

Writing in Latin even managed to survive the break-up of Roman Britain, and the large-scale sociopolitical change that attended the transition into the early medieval period. Inscriptions in Latin continued to be produced, even in contexts where the inscribers had to option to use another script. The inhabitants of sub-Roman Britain still made use of inscribed monuments in Latin, displaying their knowledge of the language and its script even after the governmental system that had fostered its use had departed. Latin had become intertwined with the social and cultural fabric of the island in a lasting and significant way.

The introduction of the Latin language and writing to Britain, a place which had no previous written language, is one of the most important aspects of the cultural change that took place in the province during the Roman period. This was not just the introduction of a new language, but also a fundamentally new concept in how the population of Roman Britain conceived of its identity and relationship with the world. Writing enabled people that had

previously existed in a solely oral tradition to make a lasting record of themselves. It brought into their worldview the idea of sharing their thoughts and their identities with people many generations in the future or many hundreds of miles away. The world was no longer limited only to the people who could immediately hear a person's speech, or to the few generations of descendants that would remember that person's life. Writing could be, and was, transmitted across long distances, and carved stone monuments have lasted even into our period, where not only are they permanent records of the people they commemorate, but also some of the most intensively and widely studied aspects of life in the Roman world. The introduction of the written record changed the way Britons thought about their world, and brought them more fully than ever before into the fold of an emerging globalized world. Latin introduced the Britons to the idea of belonging to something bigger and broader than a family group or ethnic clan. It opened the ideas of personal and group identity up to larger and more unifying concepts. More even than that, it changed their brains. Learning to read, whether as a child or as an adult, involves the generation of new brain cells and synapses, changing the size of the part of the brain that processes language.[845] Those Roman Britons who learned to read and write Latin were, thereafter, actually anatomically different from their illiterate fellows.

The distant descendants of those literate Roman Britons eventually became imperialists themselves. British imperialism, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, was built on contemporary perceptions of the impression that Rome had made on Britain during its occupation, and as Britain extended its influence across the world, its ideas, language, and writings went with it. The 19th century British Empire built itself on reinterpreted narratives of the glorious innovations brought to Britain by the Roman Empire and how the Romans civilized the non-Roman barbarians of the island, idealizing the beneficent role of the conquerors in

[845] Carreiras et al. 2009, 983

enlightening and educating the natives.[846] English was established as a language of power and control, the language that the colonizers used to express their social and political status alongside their monetary and military might. By virtue of this approach to linguistic imperialism, English now serves many of the functions in our modern world that Latin did in the Roman one. It is a common language with myriad applications, spoken by people in countless different communities the world over, and a unifying element of a diverse yet deeply interconnected world. Roman attitudes toward Latin and writing in Roman Britain instilled the value of writing in the societies that shaped the world we live in now.

Ultimately, the creation of a written record is a fundamental impulse of all people who are familiar with writing. Once we have access to this new skill, we feel the need to employ it whenever possible. From simple monograms or dates traced onto freshly-poured sidewalk cement with a fingertip or convenient stick, to spray-painted graffiti on blank walls, to poetry, to fiction, even to documentations of academic research, the desire of writers to create using writing is universal. It is easier for us now, with the proliferation of both writing materials (physical and digital) and established schooling, but the internal impetus to create writing is something we share with our ancient predecessors. We wish to fit in with the literary culture of our fellows, we wish to communicate and collaborate over great distances, and we wish to leave a permanent record of ourselves and our lives for people to remember us by. The foundations for all of these wishes were laid by the literate societies that have come before us, who have established written language as a signifier both of cultural identity and of humanity. That in itself is the great attraction of the study of history, to find in the plans, aspirations, and actions of the peoples of the past a shared community with the present, and to recognize the long links that reach backward from our present day into the past that shaped it.

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[846] Hingley 2000, 159

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