

Imagining Luke-Acts in Roman Britain

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to offer a new interpretation of the meanings Luke-Acts conveyed to its first audiences by imagining people from early Roman Britain encountering that text. As the events described in the New Testament were unfolding, the Romans invaded Britain (43 CE). By the time that invasion was complete (c. 83 CE), the earliest books of the New Testament were in circulation. An understanding of early Roman Britain opens a window on to the world of the New Testament and its first audiences. The investigation of three archives from an urban, a military, and a rural community draws on the methodology of archival ethnography. In these writings, traders and merchants, civilians and soldiers, town and country dwellers, slave and free, men and women come alive. People such as these are encountered in the New Testament and are among its first readers. Imagining Luke-Acts through the eyes of the people first of the Bloomberg tablets, takes the reader to passages to do with money and possessions, honour and shame, reciprocity and debt, patrons and clients, slaves and masters, the rich and the destitute, Roman law and literacy; second of the Vindolanda tablets, to passages to do with women of agency, the military and local people, Roman law, travel and identity, festivals and feasting, sickness and healing, honour and shame, patrons and clients, masters and slaves and the reversal of roles; and third of the Uley curse tablets, to passages to do with temples, ritual practice, cursing and praying. The resulting imagined reading of Luke-Acts is justified in the locations and with the writings chosen, informed by careful study of the data available, and warranted by close attention to the biblical text. It contributes to our understanding of the way the first readers of the New Testament negotiated life in the empire and understood Luke-Acts.

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of this thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed:

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The final word must go to my grandchildren. When showing them the book I was writing, one of them asked 'Who is it for?' As I tried to explain as simply as I could that it was for those interested in the New Testament, and for those interested in Roman Britain, their eyes glazed over. 'Yes, but who is it *for*?' came the weary response. 'Each book I read says inside the cover it is *for* someone.' And so I follow Luke's good example and include a personal dedication at the very beginning.

For Lake, Edith, Dilys, Margot and Griff

in the hope that one day Luke-Acts and Roman Britain will catch their imagination

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The Bloomberg Tablets were excavated by the Museum of London Archaeology, with the support of Bloomberg LP. The tablets were photographed by Andy Chopping and drawn, edited and translated by Roger S. O. Tomlin.¹ Photographs, drawings and texts are taken from *Roman Inscriptions of Britain*; these and all other pictures to do with the Bloomberg tablets (Figures 1-7 and Appendix to Chapter 2) are © MOLA [Museum of London Archaeology] and used with permission. The image and text of the 1 Poultry tablet (Appendix) is from *Britannia* and used with the permission of *The Roman Society*. The texts of *RIB* and the TEI XML from which they are derived are published under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



The Vindolanda Tablets have been excavated by the Vindolanda Trust, led by Robin and Patricia Birley, Anthony and Heide Birley, and Andrew and Barbara Birley; they were photographed in infra-red by Alison Rutherford. They have been edited and translated by Alan Bowman and David Thomas with contributions by J. N. Adams (II and III), John Pearce (III), and Roger S. O. Tomlin (IV). The texts and images (Figures 11, 16-22 and Appendix to Chapter 3) are © The Trustees of the British Museum. They are used under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\) License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). All other pictures of Vindolanda (Figures 8-10 and 12-15) are © The Vindolanda Trust and used with permission.



The Uley Curse Tablets were excavated by The Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset, later renamed the Western Archaeological Trust, and subsequently by the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The tablets were conserved and unrolled by Simon Dove of the Department of Pre-historic and Romano British Antiquities of the British Museum. They have been published by Roger S. O. Tomlin in *Britannia* and in *The Uley shrines: excavation of a ritual complex on West Hill, Uley, Gloucestershire 1977-9*;² and brought together in *Sylloge of Defixiones from the Roman West. Volumes I and II: a comprehensive collection of curse tablets from the fourth century BCE to the fifth century CE*.³ Full publication by Tomlin is forthcoming: *The Uley Tablets: Roman Curse Tablets from the Temple of Mercury at Uley (Gloucestershire)*.⁴ The texts and photographs of the curse tablets and the casket are © The Trustees of the British Museum and are used under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\) License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). Images from *The Uley shrines: excavation of a ritual*



¹ Tomlin 2016.

² Tomlin 1993.

³ Sánchez Natalías 2022.

⁴ Tomlin forthcoming.

complex on West Hill, Uley, Gloucestershire 1977-9 (Figures 25-27) are licensed under the [ADS Terms of Use and Access](#): English Heritage (2014) *English Heritage Archaeological Monographs* [data-set]. York: Archaeology Data Service [distributor] <https://doi.org/10.5284/1028203>. Reconstruction drawings were conceived by Ann Woodward and executed by Joanna Richards (Figures 25, 27). The text, translation, comments, and drawings are used with kind permission of Roger S. O. Tomlin (Figures 30, 31 and Appendix to Chapter 4). The drawings are reproduced from *Britannia*, with permission of *The Roman Society*. The texts, edited and translated by Tomlin, are as they appear in *Sylloge of Defixiones from the Roman West*, and are reproduced with permission of BAR Publishing, www.barpublishing.com, and with kind permission of Celia Sánchez Natalías. The numbering follows *Sylloge of Defixiones (SD)*; the original numbering as in *The Uley Shrines* appears in parentheses. Pictures drawn by Steve Smith are © Stroud District Museum, the Museum on the Park, and used with kind permission of Steve Smith and the Stroud District Museum (Figures 23, 24).

The map of Britannia was drawn by Chris Jones-Jenkins (38).

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1 INTRODUCTION: IMAGINING LUKE-ACTS IN ROMAN BRITAIN SEEING INTO THE LIFE OF THINGS

1.1 Accessing the world of the New Testament in the eastern Mediterranean

An understanding of the social, political, and cultural world of the New Testament brings the text to life. That world is, in part, the world of the Roman empire. As the events described in the New Testament were unfolding, the Romans invaded Britain (43 CE). By the time that invasion was complete (c. 83 CE), the earliest books of the New Testament had been written and were in circulation. In writings from early Roman Britain in an urban, a military and a rural context we encounter contemporaries of their first readers. Archival ethnography enables traders and merchants, civilians and soldiers, town and country dwellers, slave and free, men and women to take on flesh and blood through these documents. These were the kind of people we meet in the New Testament; they are the kind of people who first read the New Testament.

They have the potential to help us address a problem that, in the words of George Caird, ‘constantly besets readers of the Bible. We do not live in the world of the ... New Testament, we are unacquainted with what to the contemporaries of ... Paul were familiar, everyday objects or experiences, and it is therefore easy for us to miss the affinities which imposed themselves on the inward eye of the biblical writers’ and, one might add, the New Testament’s first readers.¹ According to John Dominic Crossan and John Reed, it is possible ‘to understand Paul’s world not so much by going where he actually was as by going where, in the vagaries of time and place, his world is still preserved most fully and can still be seen most clearly.’² Much has been written to address that problem on the basis of that principle in the last fifty years. Whether those studies have focused on the *Iudaei* before and after the fall of Jerusalem³ or on the Roman empire,⁴ they have all engaged with the world of the eastern Mediterranean.⁵

In her study of *Papyri and the Social World of the New Testament*,⁶ Sabine Huebner seeks ‘a better understanding of the structural, social, and cultural conditions that the protagonists of the New

¹ Caird 1980, 145.

² Crossan and Reed 2005, 317.

³ Grabbe 1994; Neusner, Green, and Frerichs 1988; Neusner and Chilton 1995; Vermes 2010.

⁴ Carter 2006; Horsley 1997; Crossan and Reed 2005; Crossan and Reed 2001.

⁵ Barclay 1996; Bailey 2011; Elliott 1995; Esler 1994; Esler 2017a; Malina 1993; Neyrey and Stewart 2008; Oakes 2002.

⁶ Huebner 2019.

Testament, as well as its early readers, experienced in their everyday lives' by adopting what she describes as 'micro-approaches' focused on the Egyptian papyri.

Dated official and private letters, tax receipts, census returns, petitions, wills, marriage contracts, and land leases alongside a wealth of other documents ... permit the ordinary people of the ancient world to speak to us just as they spoke to one another.⁷

Entering into the social world of Roman Egypt she encounters contemporaries of the people of the New Testament and its first readers. Immersing herself in the world of the papyri and heeding the voice of 'those who never appear in ancient literature – artisans, peasants, shepherds, and fishermen, their wives and children', Huebner draws on the census system to explore Luke 2:1-3, the place of women in Luke 24:9-11, the family and household of a craftsman in Matthew 13:55, travel by the lower classes in Luke 1:39 and an occupation on the margins of society in the world of the shepherds of Luke 2:8-10.⁸ While focused on specific papyri, Huebner's choice of papyri is necessarily random.

Bruce Longenecker's approach is more focused. Accessing 'the first-century world through the material remains' of Pompeii and Herculaneum *In Stone and Story* brings New Testament texts into conversation with the people responsible for those frescoes, inscriptions, graffiti and other artefacts.⁹ By 'placing early Christian discourse in its historical setting' he hopes its force 'will be more apparent'.¹⁰ His focus on the material culture of Pompeii and Herculaneum is in accord with recent approaches to the history of Rome and of Roman Britain.¹¹ He connects a wide variety of New Testament texts with what he describes as 'protocols' of popular devotion, social prominence and household effectiveness.¹²

In *Reading Romans In Pompeii*, Peter Oakes drills down into one specific location in Pompeii and the people whose lives can be glimpsed there: the block of houses known as the Insula of the Menander, and especially the house of the stoneworkers, the house of the cabinet-maker, a bar, and the house of the Menander itself.¹³ While little more is known of the individuals mentioned in Romans 16 than their names and, occasionally, occupations, much is known about the people associated with the

⁷ Huebner 2019, 2-3.

⁸ Huebner 2019, 3 and chapters 3-7.

⁹ Longenecker 2020, 24.

¹⁰ Longenecker 2020, 7.

¹¹ Woolf 2022a, xi; Millett, Revell, and Moore 2016.

¹² Longenecker 2020, ix-x, 286-90.

¹³ Oakes 2009, 1-45: the Insula of the Menander is in Region I, Block 10; the House of Menander is Region I, Block 10, House 4; the House of the Stoneworker is I.10.6; the House of the Cabinet-maker is I.10.7; the bar is I.10.2-3.

Insula of the Menander. Oakes re-creates a craftworker-led house-church in Pompeii¹⁴ and imagines how they might have read Romans 12;¹⁵ he goes on to consider what a slave bath-stoker, a poor stoneworker, a sexually exploited slave, and a craftworking house-church host might have made of the great themes of Romans: the God of justice, the gospel of survival, the redemption of the body, the Jewish salvation of a holy people.¹⁶ He uses this model craftworker-led house church as ‘a device’ to seek an understanding of the inter-relations of people ‘within first-century Christian groups’ and thereby sense how they might have read specific New Testament texts, not least those to do with economics and empire.¹⁷

This approach involves something akin to ethnography. An ethnographer bases their study of a particular people on fieldwork among them and interaction with anthropological literature and ideas. In *Notes on Not Being There*, Rebecka Lennartsson asks whether ethnography can ‘ever be used to describe and understand a lost world’. She suggests that an ethnographer of the past can work in archives ‘which function as gateways to history’; indeed, it is in the archive that one can ‘experience an almost overwhelming sense of closeness’ and ‘walk through a lost world’.¹⁸

Ethnographic methods enable Lennartsson to study the sex trade in eighteenth century Stockholm by focussing on the documentary record of a notorious ball at the royal palace on 10 April 1768.¹⁹ At a ‘narrative level’ attention to detail gives ‘a feel for the period and people one wishes to approach’, but more is needed. At a ‘communicational level’ she seeks to establish the ‘situational context’ of the time long ago with an awareness of ‘the cultural filter of the modern day researcher’.

Throughout, there needs to be an awareness of what is not said, ‘the less pronounced cultural information that is not immediately disclosed’. This ‘connotational level’ involves ‘two general but interlinked procedures: contextualisation, and the search for clues’.²⁰ In a related study, Lennartsson maintains that ‘analysis and interpretation are the tasks of scholarship, rather than relating as thoroughly and objectively as possible a historical course of events’.²¹

¹⁴ Oakes 2009, 69–97.

¹⁵ Oakes 2009, 98–126.

¹⁶ Oakes 2009, 132–74.

¹⁷ Oakes 2020, 4–5 where he extends this approach to Philippians and I Thessalonians. Oakes and Kent 2019 is an online resource using the same methodology and engaging with 1 Corinthians.

¹⁸ Lennartsson 2011, 109.

¹⁹ Lennartsson 2012.

²⁰ Lennartsson 2011, 110–11.

²¹ Lennartsson 2012, 91.

Philip Esler has developed archival ethnography in a study of Babatha and her family.²² In 1961, Yigael Yadin discovered in a cave by the Dead Sea a 'leather pouch containing thirty-five legal documents dated from 94 CE to 132 CE written in Aramaic and Greek, relating to Babatha and her family.'²³ In *Babatha's Orchard*, Esler offers an imaginative reconstruction of their lives as they drew up four documents around the sale of a date palm orchard on the shores of the Dead Sea in Maoza in Nabatea, across the water from Engedi in Judea. While not based on 'direct observations of living people', it is ethnography in that it is based on giving 'an account of the everyday life of a particular group' which amounts to an 'exploration of a particular world of experience.'²⁴ It is not simply to do with exploring the legal and social systems reflected in a set of legal documents. It 'involves imagining that one was present where and when the document was signed and, like a modern day ethnographer, was able to observe what those present were saying and doing and to ask them to clarify any points of uncertainty.'²⁵ It is *archival* in the sense that it seeks to enter into the lives of those people through the detailed and careful study of an archive of legal documents concealed by a Judean woman fleeing Roman soldiers at the end of the Shim'on ben Kosiba revolt in 135 CE. Subsequently, he draws on another document from the same archive to lead us into the world of that Judean family and their relationship with a centurion who loaned money to Babatha's second husband.²⁶ He then invites us to reflect on the way people living by the Dead Sea who were familiar with that kind of relationship might have read Matt. 8:5-13.²⁷ The context in which four Judean wedding contracts were drawn up enables him to explore how 'a first century Christ-follower would have made sense of the narrative in Matt. 1:18-25'.²⁸ Esler thereby 'reveals the potential of archival ethnography conducted on legal documents to push the understanding of New Testament texts in fresh directions'.²⁹

1.2 Archival ethnography and the world of the New Testament in Roman Britain

Since 2016 three archives of written material from Roman Britain enable us to 'walk through a lost world'³⁰ and glimpse the everyday lives of particular people in the province of Britannia.³¹ They enable us to engage with contemporaries of the first readers of the New Testament, allowing them

²² Esler 2017b.

²³ Esler 2017b, xv.

²⁴ Esler 2017b, 4.

²⁵ Esler 2017b, 22. Cf. Esler 2022, 2.

²⁶ Esler 2017b.

²⁷ Esler 2014.

²⁸ Esler 2022, 2.

²⁹ Esler 2022, 39.

³⁰ Lennartsson 2011, 109.

³¹ Esler 2014; Esler 2022.

‘to speak to us just as they spoke to one another.’³² We can bring Luke-Acts ‘into conversation with’ people responsible for those documents and read the text through their eyes.³³ We can draw on the insights of archival ethnography, engage with particular groups of people and explore their world of experience, alert to those small details that function as clues to an understanding not only of their interactions with each other but of the way they might respond to Luke-Acts.³⁴

Discovered in excavations at the site of the Bloomberg European Headquarters in the City of London from 2010-2014, the Bloomberg tablets are the most ancient writings to have been discovered in Britain and the most recent to have been published. Dating mainly from 40s-80s CE, they are the first documents to be discovered in Britain that are contemporary with the events narrated in the New Testament and its earliest books. Wax tablets, they include financial and legal documents, and the correspondence of traders, merchants, craft-workers, financiers, freedmen, and slaves of mid first-century London.³⁵

Discovered first in 1973 and in excavations ever since, and published in 1983, 1993, 2003, 2010 and 2019, the Vindolanda tablets are ink-on-wood writing tablets from a military community in a frontier fort at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century. They include the administrative documents of auxiliary cohorts, together with the military and personal correspondence of men and women in the fort.³⁶

In excavations at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s many lead curse tablets were discovered in a temple dedicated to Mercury on the Cotswold escarpment at Uley, overlooking the River Severn. Written by people with Roman and Celtic names they emanate from a non-elite, non-military rural community in Roman Britain;³⁷ similar tablets were discovered during the 1970s in the sacred spring of the temple dedicated to Sulis Minerva in Bath and others in non-military settings in the southern half of Britain.³⁸

³² Huebner 2019, 3. Cf. R. Cleaves 2017.

³³ Longenecker 2020, 24.

³⁴ Esler 2017b, 22–25.

³⁵ Tomlin 2016. See Map, 201.

³⁶ ‘Vindolanda Tablets - Home | Roman Inscriptions of Britain’ 2020; Bowman 2003; A. R. Birley 2002a. See Map 301.

³⁷ Originally published in Woodward and Leach 1993, 113–30; subsequently published in *Britannia*; brought together in Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 344–66. Roger Tomlin is currently (2023) working on their full publication: Tomlin forthcoming. They will be included in the online Roman Inscriptions of Britain. See Map 401.

³⁸ *SD 205-SD 460*, Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 265–383; tablets from Bath: *SD 206-SD 335* (267-329); the Bath tablets were originally published in Tomlin 1988 and will, together with the other British curse tablets, be published in the online Roman Inscriptions of Britain. See Map 406.

When Robin Birley unearthed the first of the Vindolanda tablets in 1973, he and the newly formed Vindolanda Trust turned to Alan Bowman and David Thomas, papyrologists with experience of the Greek and Latin papyri of the John Rylands Library, Manchester, who have worked on them ever since. More recently, they have been joined by Roger Tomlin who published the Bath curse tablets in 1988, the first Uley tablets in 1993 (and since in *Britannia*), and the Bloomberg tablets in 2016.

Not only is the cursive script of the Bloomberg tablets, the Vindolanda tablets and the Uley tablets identical to that of the papyri, the form of each set of documents is replicated across the empire. In the *Manual of Everyday Roman Writing*, volume 1, Alex Mullen and Alan Bowman indicate where collections of such scripts can be found across the empire, and go on to introduce the characteristics of Old Roman Cursive (ORC) and New Roman Cursive (NRC), explaining how to read these everyday texts.³⁹ In volume 2, Anna Willi explores the things Romans wrote with, styluses, ink and other accessories; and the things they wrote on, wax tablets, wooden tablets, papyrus, parchment, lead and other metal tablets, and other surfaces.⁴⁰ She reflects on the way interest has shifted from quantifying the extent of literacy in the Roman world, to a focus on the cultural context of different types of literacy.⁴¹ The wax tablets of the archive of Lucundus the banker in Pompeii⁴² are similar to the Bloomberg tablets and their form as financial and legal documents akin to the Babatha papyri with their sealed inner text and open outer text.⁴³ Ink-on-wood tablets from a military context similar to Vindolanda have been found in Egypt and in Vindonissa, Switzerland;⁴⁴ one written and signed by Shim'on ben Kosiba was found in the Cave of Letters by the Dead Sea in the early 1960s.⁴⁵ Lead curse tablets in Greek and in Latin have been found the length and breadth of the empire from the fifth century BCE to the fifth century CE, including more than 60 from the well of the palace at Caesarea Maritima,⁴⁶ fourteen from Syrian Antioch including one against Babylas the grocer,⁴⁷ and one aimed at five people bearing names associated with the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem.⁴⁸ A comprehensive catalogue of Latin curse tablets, *A Sylloge of Defixiones from the Roman West*, was published by Celia Sánchez Natalías in 2022.⁴⁹

³⁹ Mullen and Bowman 2021, 1:23–40, 41–62, 63–71.

⁴⁰ Willi 2021, 2:32–65.

⁴¹ Willi 2021, 2:14. Cf. Woolf 2015, 41.

⁴² Cooley and Cooley 2004, 181ff.

⁴³ Esler 2017b.

⁴⁴ An inventory of wooden writing tablets Bowman and Thomas 1983a, 33–35; available online at Bowman and Thomas 2019a.

⁴⁵ Yadin 1961, 41–43.

⁴⁶ Burrell 1998; Burrell 2009; Burrell 2016. Cf. a curse against a dancer from the theatre Mastrocinque 2019.

⁴⁷ Hollman 2011.

⁴⁸ Daniel and Sulimani 2009.

⁴⁹ Sánchez Natalías 2022a.

Sabine Huebner is quite explicit, 'Papyri and ostraca found outside Egypt, as well as wooden writing tablets such as the Vindolanda tablets from northern Britain, ... or the Bloomberg tablets from London, show many similarities in terminology with the Egyptian papyri, testifying to a common mindset and shared understanding across the Roman provinces.'⁵⁰

None of the three sets of writing from Roman Britain constitutes an 'archive' in the sense used by Esler of the Babatha archive. Speaking of the Vindolanda tablets, Bowman, Thomas and Tomlin 'refrain from using the term "archive" which in its strictest sense should refer to a group of documents written, received or compiled by the same individual(s)'.⁵¹ Esler, however, suggests an archive 'can refer either to a place containing records, documents, or other materials of historical interest or to a collection of such documents.'⁵² It is in this last sense that we can think of each of these sets of writings as an archive. Each is a manageable size and is associated with a particular location and with specific people, many of whom are named. They emanate from an urban, a military and a rural context.

Drawing on the micro-approaches of Sabine Huebner into the everyday lives of the Roman provincial middle and lower classes using the Egyptian papyri, and the archaeological approaches of Bruce Longenecker in the context of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and of Peter Oakes in re-creating a craftworker-led house church in Pompeii's Insula of Menander, I shall adapt the archival ethnography of Rebekka Lennartsson and Philip Esler and imagine how people from each of those communities might have read Luke-Acts. That will involve giving 'an account of the everyday life of' three disparate groups which 'amounts to an exploration of their particular worlds of experience.'⁵³ It will involve more than simply exploring the financial and business world of those traders, merchants and financiers, the world of that military community in Vindolanda, and the world of those engaged in that specific ritual practice in Uley. It will involve imaginatively entering into the lives of the people who were engaged with each other in writing those texts. It requires the cultivation of our imagination. But what place can imagination have in historical study?

⁵⁰ Huebner 2019, 7.

⁵¹ Bowman, Thomas, and Tomlin 2019c, 230.

⁵² Esler 2017b, 13.

⁵³ Esler 2017b, 4.

1.3 Archival ethnography, the New Testament, and the place of the imagination

At its most basic, Mary Warnock suggests, imagination is ‘that which creates mental images’.⁵⁴ Perhaps more helpful is Leslie Stevenson’s observation that ‘the most basic notion of imagination’ involves ‘having an image or concept of something not presently perceived’.⁵⁵ It gives one ‘the ability to think of something that one has never perceived, but which others have perceived and told one about’. Through the study of documents, we can access the people responsible for them as imagination gives us ‘the ability to think about a particular mental state of another person, whose existence one infers from perceived evidence’.⁵⁶

It is important, however, not to limit our understanding of imagination. ‘The imagination,’ argues Graham Ward, ‘admits no boundaries. It infiltrates all human understanding.’⁵⁷ It cannot therefore be pinned down. Trevor Hart maintains it is better thought of ‘as *a way of thinking, responding and acting* across the whole spread of our experience, not some arcane ‘thing’ with a carefully specified and limited remit’.⁵⁸ As such, imagination is ‘the faculty which makes sense of things, locating particular bits and pieces within larger patterns, and in doing so goes beyond what is given, filling gaps, painting bigger pictures’.⁵⁹ As an innate aspect of what it means to be human, it enables us to venture beyond the data with which we are presented and make sense of it. It is through our imagination that we find the words and metaphors we need to make sense of, and talk about, not only ideas and concepts but also emotions and feelings. Imagination is, therefore, ‘our means of interpreting the world’ not only of the present but also the past.⁶⁰

1.3.1 Drawing on a historical imagination

Our imagined reading of Luke-Acts must take history seriously. History has to do with the lives of people who lived, and events that happened, in the past. The historian’s imagination enables them to ‘create mental images’ of that past and to make sense of it. According to R. G. Collingwood, ‘the historian’s picture of his subject, whether that subject be a sequence of events or a past state of things, thus appears as a web of imaginative construction stretched between certain fixed points provided by the statements of his authorities’. There is, however, a danger the historian must guard against lest the picture that emerges becomes a flight of fancy, far removed from the data. Their

⁵⁴ Warnock 1976, 10.

⁵⁵ Stevenson 2003, 238 quoting the first sense given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁵⁶ L. Stevenson 2003, 239–41: Conceptions 1, 1b, 1d.

⁵⁷ Ward 2018, 184.

⁵⁸ Hart 2013, 5.

⁵⁹ Hart 2000, 319.

⁶⁰ Warnock 1976, 194.

imagination must not be arbitrary; it must be informed by the data, by its wider interpretation and by the wider context. 'If these points are frequent enough and the threads spun from each to the next are constructed with due care, always by the *a priori* imagination and never by merely arbitrary fancy, the whole picture is constantly verified by appeal to these data and runs little risk of losing touch with the reality which it represents.'⁶¹

In *The Making of the English Landscape* W. G. Hoskins put those principles into practice: to write the history of a landscape 'requires a combination of documentary research and of fieldwork ... slowly one pieces together from the records, from the archaeological finds in the local museum, and from the evidence of one's own eyes, what has happened.'⁶² That whole process, to use Mary Warnock's definition, depends on 'that which creates mental images' i.e. imagination. Hoskins appeals to Wordsworth to justify his method. In his *Guide through the District of the Lakes* one of the first sections has to do with the 'Aspect of the Country, as affected by its Inhabitants' in which Wordsworth 'begins by asking the reader to envisage what the landscape, finished by the great impersonal forces of Nature and awaiting its first human inhabitants, looked like in its primeval freshness.'⁶³ Wordsworth uses a number of key phrases in establishing what it is the reader must do: 'form to himself an image', 'he may see or hear in fancy', he 'may think' of things that happened 'with no human eye to notice, or human heart to regret or welcome the change.' For Hoskins, such a work of imagination, however, must be supplemented with the careful gathering of data: 'one needs to be a botanist, a physical geographer, and a naturalist, as well as an historian, to be able to feel certain that one has all the facts right before allowing the imagination to play over the small details of a scene.'⁶⁴

Collingwood speaks of 'certain fixed points', and Hoskins of 'facts', which are then supplemented by the imagination so ensuring that what is produced is not 'imaginary' but in a proper sense 'historical'. By drawing on this 'historical imagination' the historian can create a narrative history. However, our imagined reading of Luke-Acts requires us to enter into the everyday lives of the people of Londinium, Vindolanda and the rural area around Uley's temple to Mercury and then to bring them into conversation with Luke-Acts. Something more is needed. To that 'historical imagination' we must add a sociological, an ethnographic and a cultural imagination.

⁶¹ Collingwood 1946, 242.

⁶² Hoskins 1970, 15, 297 originally published in 1955.

⁶³ Hoskins 1970, 17.

⁶⁴ Hoskins 1970, 19.

1.3.2 Drawing on a sociological, an ethnographic, and a cultural imagination

A sociological imagination involves a shift of focus from narrative to people. C. Wright Mills argued that 'the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society.'⁶⁵ It is what helps us to engage with the people responsible for the documents we are studying. A sociological imagination 'enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals.'⁶⁶ In his *Ethnographic Imagination*, Paul Willis argues that as ethnography provides 'the empirical and conceptual discipline' it becomes 'the eye of the needle through which the threads of imagination must pass'.⁶⁷ Adopting an ethnographic imagination in the sense advocated by Willis, Lennartsson suggests that 'to identify or empathise with informants may be seen as an aid to understanding, rather than an obstacle to objectivity and stringency'.⁶⁸

That in turn calls for the exercise of a cultural imagination as we endeavour to address the gap between the cultures of today and the cultures of the world of the New Testament. Culture is embodied in symbols understood instinctively by those who are part of that culture. It is not that the people of a particular culture necessarily have an intellectual understanding of the symbols which give expression to their culture: rather, they emerge from a shared imagination. They live those symbols in their own imaginations as they share with each other. Graham Ward argues that 'exploring the imagination enables us to assess what is going on in a given cultural situation: what is going on beneath and yet through the symbolic'. It is in that sense that imagination 'infiltrates all human understanding'. Such a cultural imagination is intertwined inextricably with cultural values and with a sociological imagination that has to do not only with people as individuals but with 'the way we institutionalise and organise' society.⁶⁹

1.3.3 Drawing on a geographical and an archaeological imagination

It is only possible to imagine Luke-Acts through the eyes of those responsible for the Bloomberg tablets, the Vindolanda tablets and the Uley curse tablets because of the work of those undertaking excavations in each of those locations. Significant developments in archaeology since the 1960s have not only provided a great deal more data based on rigorous scientific analysis, but also drawn on the imagination in innovative ways.

⁶⁵ Mills 1959, 6.

⁶⁶ Mills 1959, 5.

⁶⁷ Willis 2000, viii.

⁶⁸ Lennartsson 2012, 92.

⁶⁹ Ward 2018, 184-185.

Emerging from the work of antiquarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries archaeology had, by the mid twentieth century, become more methodical in the hands of expert practitioners such as Mortimer and Tessa Wheeler and Kathleen Kenyon. The advent of radiocarbon dating in the 1950s led to a more scientific approach in the 1960s.⁷⁰ Drawing on developments in the social sciences and particularly in anthropology, this *new archaeology* combined the rigour of scientific research with an objectivity based on data and statistics. One of its advocates, Lewis Binford, spoke of the way ‘the tremendous quantities of data which the archaeologist controls’⁷¹ can be harnessed, as it were in laboratory conditions, to offer anthropological insights into the ‘processes of cultural change and evolution’.⁷² Talk of the ‘processes of cultural change’ gave rise to the alternative label *processual archaeology*. The move away from an inductive approach to data based on common sense to ‘a consciously deductive philosophy, with the attendant emphasis on the verification of propositions through hypothesis testing’ had ‘far-reaching consequences for archaeology.’⁷³ Significantly, the excavations leading to the discovery of the Vindolanda tablets (since 1973 and continuing),⁷⁴ the curse tablets of the temple to Mercury in Uley (1976-1979),⁷⁵ and of the sacred spring in Bath (1978-83)⁷⁶ and the Bloomberg tablets (2010-2014),⁷⁷ have all been undertaken with this scientific rigour. The combination of dendrochronology with radiocarbon dating by the 1990s makes precise dating of the Bloomberg tablets and the Vindolanda tablets possible.⁷⁸

There was, however, a reaction to *the new archaeology*. Introducing an article by Jacquetta Hawkes on *the Proper Study of Mankind*, the editor of *Antiquity* sounded a note of caution: ‘as more and more scientific aids to archaeology are provided and used, the archaeologist may seem to be concerned with, and seem to be happy to be concerned with, an increasingly detailed study of trees without pausing to look at the wood of which they are a part.’⁷⁹ Jacquetta Hawkes called for the use of the imagination on the interface between the objectivity of the scientific archaeologist and the public: ‘the link between the archaeological artefact and popular accessible writings is the

⁷⁰ Hingley 2016; Millett 2016.

⁷¹ Binford 1962, 224.

⁷² Gamble 2001, 24ff.

⁷³ Binford and Binford 1968, 18.

⁷⁴ Bowman 2003; ‘Roman Inscriptions of Britain’ 2019.

⁷⁵ Woodward and Leach 1993; ‘Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents’ 2015; Sánchez Natalías 2022a *SD* 354-440 (344-366); Tomlin forthcoming.

⁷⁶ Cunliffe 2000; Davenport 2021; Tomlin 1988.

⁷⁷ Tomlin 2016; ‘Roman Inscriptions of Britain’ 2019.

⁷⁸ Gamble 2001, 63–66. NB it is the archaeological context that can be precisely dated, giving the latest date for each tablet: Tomlin 2016, 5, 31–51; <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/tabvindol/vol-II/introduction#arch-context>.

⁷⁹ Hawkes 1968: introduction.

imaginative *personality* trained in the humanities.⁸⁰ For the things of the past to connect with the present, an imaginative but informed populariser is needed to bridge the gap between the scientific archaeologist focused on the minutiae of the past and the person who seeks to connect with that past.

In 1987 Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley published *Re-Constructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice*,⁸¹ questioning whether the natural sciences could provide an adequate model for the social sciences and whether ‘the most certain knowledge is mathematical and deterministic in conception’.⁸² The archaeologist needs to be aware of the way their own experience shapes their understanding. As ‘the particular perspective from which an object or event is viewed is an integral part of the object of study’ it follows that ‘values cannot be eradicated from archaeology’. They need to be made explicit and then subjected to ‘critical scrutiny’.⁸³ ‘Accepting archaeology as practice, truth as constituted in practice, is to accept truth as precarious, written into political relations.’⁸⁴ This emphasis on the importance of a critically reflective archaeology led to what has been described as *interpretive archaeology*, or *post-processual archaeology*.⁸⁵

This approach puts people and their experience centre stage, as Tilley argued in *A Phenomenology of Landscape*: ‘the key issue in any phenomenological approach is the manner in which people experience and understand the world.’⁸⁶ Timothy Darvill speaks of the way Tilley ‘melded anthropology with social theory to create a new application of cultural relativism for the interpretation of spaces and places.’⁸⁷ As Hoskins had transformed the study of the English landscape a generation before, so Tilley had a similar impact on a new generation. ‘To understand a landscape truly it must be felt.... To convey some of this feeling to others it has to be talked about, recounted, or written and depicted.’⁸⁸ That requires the use of what Tilley describes as *the geographical imagination*: ‘people are immersed in a world of places which the geographical imagination aims to understand and recover – places as contexts for human experience, constructed in movement, memory, encounter and association.’⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Hawkes 1968, 261.

⁸¹ Shanks and Tilley 1992 (2nd edition), first published in 1987.

⁸² Shanks and Tilley 1992, 34.

⁸³ Shanks and Tilley 1992, 66–67.

⁸⁴ Shanks and Tilley 1992, 67.

⁸⁵ Gamble 2001, 34ff.

⁸⁶ Tilley 1994, 11.

⁸⁷ Darvill 2009.

⁸⁸ Darvill 2009, 31.

⁸⁹ Tilley 1994, 15.

It is an *archaeological imagination* that brings together these different elements, enabling the historian to engage with people of the past and the way in which they related to each other.

To recreate the world behind the ruin in the land, to reanimate the people behind the sherd of antique pottery, a fragment of the past: this is the work of the archaeological imagination, a creative impulse and faculty at the heart of archaeology, but also embedded in many cultural dispositions, discourses and institutions commonly associated with modernity. The archaeological imagination is rooted in a sensibility, a pervasive set of attitudes towards traces and remains, towards memory, time and temporality, the fabric of history.⁹⁰

Clive Gamble is adamant: 'Archaeology is about excitement. It is about intellectual curiosity and finding ways to turn that curiosity into knowledge about people in the past.' It is an archaeological imagination that 'allows us to go where we can never travel, to the past, and to think about time and objects in very different ways to our everyday experience.'⁹¹ For Tilley and Shanks, a greater interaction with artefacts will draw people into an imaginative engagement with the past that enables them to relate to their own present and future.⁹² The archaeological imagination has to do with our own experience, identity, and future:

There is thus an accompanying exhortation to look beyond the academic discipline of archaeology through memory practices, tradition and innovation to a (modern) human condition and to find ways that the archaeological imagination may enhance and enrich human experience now and for the future.⁹³

It is precisely because 'students can reflectively think, and work to re-enact in their minds the world of the artefact' that they 'gain historical knowledge from artefacts', suggests Clare Jarmy.⁹⁴ When enabled to take an 'imaginative leap' and connect with history in a way that engages them with their own lives and their own future, education becomes transformative.

Seeing artefacts plays its part in this transformation, allowing for the re-enactment of history in the mind of the student, a rare chance for doing so away from the more prescribed curriculum of the classroom. In taking this imaginative leap, she creates historical knowledge. In doing so, she does not simply learn some history: she becomes an historian.⁹⁵

1.3.4 Texts as artefacts that come to life in the imagination

The artefacts we are going to engage with are texts. To look at a Bloomberg wax writing tablet on display at the foot of the Bloomberg tower on the way into the London Mithraeum,⁹⁶ or at an ink-on-

⁹⁰ Shanks 2012, 25.

⁹¹ Gamble 2001, 1.

⁹² Shanks and Tilley 1992, chap. 4.

⁹³ Shanks 2012, 149.

⁹⁴ Jarmy 2019, 425.

⁹⁵ Jarmy 2019, 438.

⁹⁶ Wright 2017; 'London Mithraeum' 2023.

wood Vindolanda tablet on display in Vindolanda⁹⁷ or in the British Museum,⁹⁸ or at a Uley curse tablet in the British Museum⁹⁹ is to be in the position of the one who first wrote that text and, in the case of the first two, of the one who first read it. We truly engage with those tablets not only when we seek an understanding of what is written on them but also when we draw on our multi-faceted imagination and encounter the people responsible for them.

What Richard Gordon said of Tomlin's work on the curse tablets could also be said of his work on the Bloomberg tablets and, with Bowman and Thomas, on the Vindolanda tablets:

In attempting to contextualise 'indigenous' curse-texts in Latin it is important not merely to provide the best text one can manage and take material aspects and provenience into account, as is nowadays standard procedure, but also, in an act of historical imagination, to take seriously the situation of the writers as they represented it to themselves....¹⁰⁰

This is the raw material from which we can develop an archival ethnography that, to adapt Trevor Hart, 'enables the genuine particularity of the other to "come to life" in our own imagination.' It is as if one becomes in his words 'a surrogate member of the relevant human group'. Something happens when one engages imaginatively with such texts:

reading texts always involves some effort to go beyond the level of the words on the page, beyond even the wider 'factual' circumstances to which they relate (insofar as these can be discovered by the methods of careful objective study), and to penetrate into the field of the personal. Only thus can understanding occur as part of a genuine meeting of persons, and our own personhood be modified by it.¹⁰¹

1.4 Luke-Acts then and now: assumptions behind an imagined reading

Drawing on archival ethnography and an imagined engagement with the people of the Bloomberg tablets, the Vindolanda tablets and the Uley curse tablets, we are going to focus on Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Together they form the longest continuous piece of writing by a single author in the New Testament. Luke's Gospel tells of the life and teaching, the death and resurrection of Jesus, taking the readers to Jerusalem; Acts gives an account of the first followers of the Way of Jesus¹⁰² as they witness to Jesus from Jerusalem to Rome and to 'the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). Among the first followers of Jesus we encounter traders and merchants such as we meet in the

⁹⁷ 'Visit Vindolanda & the Roman Army Museum' 2020.

⁹⁸ In the Roman Britain gallery, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/galleries/roman-britain>; Hobbs and Jackson 2010, 58–61, 76–78.

⁹⁹ In the Roman Britain gallery, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/galleries/roman-britain>; Hobbs and Jackson 2010, 78–80.

¹⁰⁰ Gordon 2019, 129.

¹⁰¹ Hart 2000, 325.

¹⁰² I shall use this description of the first followers of Jesus as it is frequently used by Luke to describe them and their communities: Acts 9:2; 18:25, 26; 19:9, 23; 22:4, 14; 24:22.

Bloomberg tablets, the military personnel and their wives and families whom we meet in the Vindolanda tablets, and people from rural settings who made use of practices akin to those involving the curse tablets of Uley.

It has been argued by Larry Hurtado that the first followers of Jesus were ‘distinctively text oriented’,¹⁰³ and that ‘the earliest Christian artefacts’ were papyrus documents of the biblical books read and listened to as the first followers of Jesus gathered to worship.¹⁰⁴ We are therefore justified in imagining a traveller, one of those traders or merchants ‘circulating around the urban networks of the empire’,¹⁰⁵ who follows the Way of Jesus arriving with a codex including Luke and Acts in his baggage to share with groups of followers of the Way. Conversant in Greek and Latin our trader would have been able to give a running translation of the text to the group of Latin speakers, among whom may have been some with knowledge of Greek.¹⁰⁶ The Old Latin texts that lie behind Jerome’s Vulgate stem ‘from a period when Latin and Greek speakers within the Church were in close communication’;¹⁰⁷ the use of the Vulgate alongside the Greek text and NRSV in biblical quotations (a practice adopted throughout this dissertation) gives an approximate indication of how these texts would have been understood in a Latin speaking context.¹⁰⁸

1.4.1 *The unity and authorship of Luke-Acts*

While it is possible to read Luke and Acts separately, similarity of language, length, and structure, together with the shared dedication to Theophilus justify the assumption that they constitute a two-volume work,¹⁰⁹ and that the common name, Luke-Acts, is appropriate.¹¹⁰ The earliest manuscript to include Acts and the four gospels is P. Chester Beatty 1, P. 45 from the third century CE.¹¹¹ Luke is named as a companion of Paul in Philem. 24 and 2 Tim. 4:11; in Col. 4:14 he is identified as ‘the beloved physician’; the ‘we passages’ of Acts may imply that the writer, at least of those passages,

¹⁰³ Hurtado 2016, 141.

¹⁰⁴ Hurtado 2006.

¹⁰⁵ Woolf 2013, 352.

¹⁰⁶ Greek-derived names appear in *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 23, 67; *Tab. Vindol.* II 311, 361, III 581, 610.

¹⁰⁷ Houghton 2016, 155–56: see chapter 6 for an account of the text of the early Latin NT. Jerome’s fifth century *Vulgate* was a revision of earlier Latin texts. The earliest old Latin manuscript from North Africa, *Vetus Latina 1*, pre-dates the 3rd century Cyprian.

¹⁰⁸ Biblical quotations make use of *BibleWorks 07* and the following editions: the Nestle-Aland 27th Edition of the Greek NT, Nestle et al. 1993; the 1983 Stuttgart edition of the Vulgate, Weber et al. 1983; *New Revised Standard Version Bible* 1989.

¹⁰⁹ Keener 2020, 76–77; Witherington III 1998, 4–8; Wolter 2016, 30–35; C. K. Barrett 1998, cxi–cxiv; Green 2011, 101–19; Green 1997, 6–10; Cadbury 1927, 1–11.

¹¹⁰ Cadbury 1927, 10–11.

¹¹¹ Hurtado 2006, 37–38, 220, 234; ‘Manuscript P45 Centre for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts’ 2022.

was a companion of Paul (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). However, within the text itself the author is anonymous.¹¹² For ease of reference we will refer to the author of Luke-Acts as Luke.¹¹³

1.4.2 *The date of Luke-Acts*

While some have dated Luke-Acts in the 60s CE,¹¹⁴ the consensus until recently has dated it in the 70s-80s,¹¹⁵ arguing that Luke-Acts 'shows a remarkable knowledge of the general conditions of life in the eastern Mediterranean at the time of Paul',¹¹⁶ and reflects the world of the Flavian dynasty, not least in its description of legal proceedings.¹¹⁷ While Luke-Acts is in circulation by the second half of the second century there is little evidence of links between Luke-Acts and earlier Christian writers.¹¹⁸ It can be argued that Luke-Acts does not make use of Paul's letters¹¹⁹ or of Josephus.¹²⁰ More recently, the beginning of the second century has been proposed on the grounds that Luke-Acts does draw on the *Antiquities* of Josephus, the corpus of Pauline letters, the separate group of pastoral epistles and the works of Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp,¹²¹ and may constitute a response to the teachings of Marcion.¹²² Others argue that the description of the Roman military in Luke-Acts reflects an early second century context.¹²³ If the message of Trajan reflected in literature, building projects and visual media was that 'victory belongs to Rome, and the world is better off for it',¹²⁴ that offers, it is suggested, the context in which to read Luke-Acts.¹²⁵ As John Knox acknowledged in the work that influenced one of the proponents of a second century date,¹²⁶ while such a date 'has a certain *a priori* probability' 'unfortunately, the evidence is too meagre either to disprove or prove.'¹²⁷ Either of the earlier dates (60s CE or 70s-80s CE) enables us to imagine Luke-Acts through the eyes of the people of the Bloomberg tablets (40s-80s CE) and the Vindolanda tablets (80s-120s

¹¹² Recent commentaries survey the arguments: Wolter 2016, 4ff; Brawley 2020, 5ff; Keener 2020, 48-51, see 383-385 on the 'we passages'.

¹¹³ Wolter 2016, 10; Keener 2020, 50.

¹¹⁴ Robinson 1976, 86-117.

¹¹⁵ Keener 2020, 46-48 prefers 70's; Witherington III 1998, 60-63 late 70's to early 80's; Wolter 2016, 11-12 early 80's; Bruce 1990, 9-18 late 70's to early 80's; Alexander 2001, 1061 80's; Esler 1987, 27-30 mid to late 80's or early 90's.

¹¹⁶ Alexander 2001, 1028.

¹¹⁷ Witherington III 1998, 62; Esler 1987, 28-29.

¹¹⁸ Bruce 1990, 10-12; C. K. Barrett 1998, lxiii-lxxii.

¹¹⁹ Wolter 2016, 9-10; Esler 1987, 28.

¹²⁰ Bruce 1990, 43-44.

¹²¹ Pervo 2006.

¹²² Tyson 2006; Knox 1942.

¹²³ Zeichmann 2018a especially 107-112; Zeichmann 2018b, 49-107.

¹²⁴ Dupertuis and Penner 2013, 11.

¹²⁵ Dupertuis and Penner 2013; Penner and Stichele 2003; Billings 2017.

¹²⁶ Tyson 2006, 11.

¹²⁷ Knox 1942, 166.

CE); any of the possible dates are appropriate for the Uley curse tablets (between the second and fourth centuries CE). For our purposes it is acceptable to leave this question unresolved.

1.4.3 *The genre of Luke-Acts*

Different views have been put forward regarding the genre of Luke-Acts. Is it historical writing akin to Graeco-Roman historical writing,¹²⁸ does it narrate ‘an epoch of the history of Israel’,¹²⁹ or does it take the form of a Graeco-Roman novel?¹³⁰ Is the preface as one would expect in a literary work or in the kind of technical or scientific handbooks familiar to the craftworkers and ‘middle-brow’ readers among the followers of the Way of Jesus?¹³¹ Is it a biography akin to Graeco-Roman biographies?¹³² Richard Burrige argues that it bears comparison with, among others, Tacitus’ life of his father-in-law, Agricola, governor of Britannia c. 77-83 CE. *Agricola* is much the same length as Luke; shows little interest in Agricola’s early life, instead focusing on the six years that are most significant; devotes a disproportionate amount of space to the final battle Agricola was involved in; and throughout has a polemical purpose.¹³³ Given this connection with Britannia our imagined reading will regard Luke and Acts (in that it focuses on Peter, Stephen, Philip and Paul) as historical writing akin to ancient biography. It will take seriously the dedication to Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4).

1.4.4 *The first readership or audience of Luke-Acts*

For whom was Luke-Acts written? Few would now argue, with Caird, that Luke-Acts was written entirely for those outside the Christian community as ‘the first great *apologia* for the Christian faith’.¹³⁴ Witherington III suggests it was written in ‘an apologetic manner’ ‘to a person of some social status to help them in ‘the uphill struggle’ to become or remain a Christian’.¹³⁵ Was it written for a predominantly Gentile community of followers of the Way¹³⁶ or for a community made up of ‘a mixture of Judean and Gentile, in which each group is significant’?¹³⁷ Was it written for an audience of ‘higher education than many others, with a wide knowledge of the north Aegean Greek culture and familiarity with the Septuagint’?¹³⁸ Was Luke-Acts written not so much for a specific community

¹²⁸ Keener 2020; Witherington III 1998, 39.

¹²⁹ Wolter 2016, 30–31.

¹³⁰ Schwartz 2003; Pervo 1987; Pervo 2006; Witherington III 1998, 376–381: a critique of Pervo.

¹³¹ Alexander 1986.

¹³² Burrige 2018; Burrige 2011.

¹³³ Burrige 2018, 151–52, 156–212.

¹³⁴ Caird 1963, 14.

¹³⁵ Witherington III 1998, 379.

¹³⁶ Fitzmyer 1998, 59.

¹³⁷ Esler 1987, 31.

¹³⁸ Keener 2020, 51.

but generally with all Christians in mind?¹³⁹ Was the ‘most excellent Theophilus’ (κράτιστε Θεόφιλε: *optime Theophile*, Luke 1:3) an individual of high standing,¹⁴⁰ perhaps the patron of the work, or any ‘friend of God’?¹⁴¹ Is it possible to be specific? We will assume that it was written for people who had already become followers of the Way of Jesus and accept Wolter’s argument that it is ‘very probable that the Gospel of Luke was written not only *in the knowledge* that there were Christian communities everywhere in the Roman provinces, but also that in the view of its author its content was also relevant to every single ... one of these communities.’¹⁴²

1.4.5 Luke-Acts, Rome and empire

What relationship does Luke-Acts have with the Roman empire? Is it ‘pro’ or ‘anti’? Or is such a distinction too simplistic?¹⁴³ In his survey of Luke-Acts scholarship, Steve Walton suggested in 2002¹⁴⁴ there had been five ways of looking at Luke-Acts and its view of the Roman empire and he went on to suggest a sixth.

Luke-Acts

1. serves as political apologetic, defending the church to would be Gentile converts from the wider Roman world.¹⁴⁵
2. offers a political apologetic that works the other way round, defending the Roman world to those who follow the Way of Jesus, emphasising ‘the positive aspects of Roman involvement in the history of the church’.¹⁴⁶
3. serves to ‘legitimate’ the involvement in a church community of Romans ‘serving the empire in a military or administrative capacity’ and so ‘demonstrate that faith in Jesus Christ and allegiance to Rome were not mutually inconsistent’.¹⁴⁷ What is important for Luke is ‘Roman power exercised in proper fashion’.¹⁴⁸
4. helps followers of the Way of Jesus in the ‘conduct’ of their lives, by giving an account of the writer’s own ‘allegiance’ to that Way. It enables them to live within the realities of the world of the Roman empire and equips them should it be necessary to ‘witness’ to the Way of

¹³⁹ Bauckham 1999.

¹⁴⁰ Witherington III 1998, 63.

¹⁴¹ Keener 2020, 51.

¹⁴² Wolter 2016, 29. Cf. Bauckham 1999, originally published in Bauckham 1998.

¹⁴³ Billings 2017.

¹⁴⁴ Walton 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Caird 1963, 14; Bruce 1990, 23–25; Conzelmann 1987.

¹⁴⁶ Walaskay 2010, 64.

¹⁴⁷ Esler 1987, 210.

¹⁴⁸ D. R. Edwards 1991, 187.

Jesus in Roman legal proceedings.¹⁴⁹ There is, thus, a ‘compatible, symbiotic relationship between Christianity and Rome’ in which ‘synagogues, houses and public places’ serve as ‘workplaces God has selected for Christians to work programmatically from Jerusalem to Rome’.¹⁵⁰

5. has no interest in the politics of the Roman empire and has instead a different focus on Jesus and God.¹⁵¹
6. offers its readers ‘a strategy of critical distance from the empire’. There is a complexity in Luke-Acts, suggesting ‘co-operation and mutual respect’ where that is possible; where there is opposition from Rome, calling ‘the state back to its former ways’ and calling the church ‘to bear faithful witness to Jesus’.¹⁵²

Post-colonial biblical criticism has had its impact in recent years: developments since 2002 have been summarised by Matthew Skinner.¹⁵³ Beneath the surface of what appears to be a pro-Roman work is a subtext that subverts the empire by focusing on Christ’s claims to lordship over against Caesar’s.¹⁵⁴ John Dominic Crossan describes ‘the logic of Jesus’s Kingdom program’ as ‘a mutuality of healing (the basic spiritual power) and eating (the basic physical power) shared freely and openly’. Such a program ‘built a *share*-community from the bottom up as a positive alternative to Antipas’s Roman *greed*-community established from the top down’.¹⁵⁵ In a post-colonial feminist reading, Margaret Aymer suggests Luke-Acts is a ‘reimagination of a divine imperial inbreaking’, ‘written in the rhetoric of an occupied and colonized people imagining an empire stronger and more powerful than that which oppresses them’.¹⁵⁶ Luke-Acts has the potential to destabilise Roman interests and is effectively saying that Rome does not have the last word.¹⁵⁷ Luke-Acts, suggests Gary Gilbert, can be thought of as a counter to the kind of Roman propaganda found in the *Res Gestae* of Augustus.¹⁵⁸

Robert Brawley speaks of the hidden dimensions of hierarchies of dominance which are subverted in Luke’s gospel as ‘major concerns for law and order that belong to the ruling classes ... are likewise subverted’.¹⁵⁹ Drawing on an intertextuality that puts texts from the world of the Roman empire

¹⁴⁹ Cassidy 2001; Cassidy 2015a; Cassidy 2015b.

¹⁵⁰ Robbins 1991a, 221. Cf. Robbins 1991b.

¹⁵¹ Jervell 2008.

¹⁵² Walton 2017, 106.

¹⁵³ Skinner 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Kahl 2008.

¹⁵⁵ Crossan 2007, 118.

¹⁵⁶ Aymer 2012, 544.

¹⁵⁷ Skinner 2017, 116.

¹⁵⁸ Gilbert 2003.

¹⁵⁹ Brawley 2020, 3.

alongside the New Testament, Warren Carter suggests ‘the interactions’ between ‘God’s empire and Rome’s empire’ are ‘complex and multivalent’ ranging across ‘coexistence and accommodation, opposition and conflict, imitation and mimicry’. He sets the Gospels over against the Roman empire as they present us with ‘God who will ‘out-Caesar’ Caesar to become the supreme ruler of the world’.¹⁶⁰

Others suggest that for Luke it is the other way round. Kazuhiko Yamazaki-Ransom argues that Luke has a negative view of Rome not in reaction to Rome’s oppression of the people of God, but rather in affirmation of the sovereignty of God and the Lordship of Christ which is denied by the ‘demonic powers’ of Rome.¹⁶¹ For Kavin Rowe it is not that Jesus challenges the lordship and sovereignty of the emperor but that the emperor challenges the lordship and sovereignty of the God of Israel and Jesus.¹⁶² To follow the Way of Jesus, he argues, involves ‘a different way of life’ in which ‘basic patterns of Graeco-Roman culture are dissolved’ and the world is turned upside down without overthrowing Roman imperial power: ‘new culture, yes – coup, no’.¹⁶³

Aymer again speaks of ‘Luke’s more conciliatory stance toward the Roman occupation and imperialisation on behalf of the ‘kingdom’ or empire of God. Both of these have implications for the growth of the Jesus movement’.¹⁶⁴ Such ‘a pattern of fundamental tension’ can be seen throughout the New Testament, according to Peter Oakes, and is ‘inherent in early Christian attitudes to Rome’,¹⁶⁵ not least in Acts where ‘Luke’s Rome is a mixture of efficiency, openness, justice, cruelty, and corruption’.¹⁶⁶ In Luke-Acts the church balances different identities and refuses to be identified with ‘empire’: at its heart, for Eric Barreto is ‘a radical inclusivity, a profound hospitality for all’ and a gospel that ‘does not simply seek to shape our behaviour’ but ‘to challenge our very assumptions about *identity*’.¹⁶⁷ Loveday Alexander suggests a nuanced approach – while Luke seeks to demonstrate the legality of Christian practice to a Roman readership, ‘Paul’s message embodies an alternative political vision that is profoundly subversive’. Becoming a Christian involves an identity that embodies an alternative political vision.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁰ Carter 2021, chaps. 1 and 5: Kindle edition locations 121 and 1587.

¹⁶¹ Yamazaki-Ransom 2010, 201f.

¹⁶² C. K. Rowe 2009, 103–16.

¹⁶³ C. K. Rowe 2009, 91.

¹⁶⁴ Aymer 2012, 536.

¹⁶⁵ Oakes 2020, 165.

¹⁶⁶ Oakes 2020, 177.

¹⁶⁷ Barreto 2018, 186.

¹⁶⁸ Alexander 2012.

It is as we re-enact in our minds' eye the history of the traders and merchants of Londinium, the military community of Vindolanda and the rural community around the temple dedicated to Mercury at Uley, that we shall be in a position to imagine Luke-Acts through the eyes of such people and understand better the way Luke-Acts interacts with questions of empire.

1.4.6 The complexities of Luke-Acts

Matthew Skinner suggests there is a 'messiness' about current Luke-Acts scholarship. He concludes by suggesting this is no bad thing and that 'the complexities deserve greater attention'. In pointing the way forward he suggests moving away from the attempt to identify Luke's original readers towards a focus on among other things 'the general cultural setting of the broader Roman world'. In Luke-Acts there is a rich diversity of ways in which people who follow the Way of Jesus negotiate their relationship with the Roman empire. It is this very 'multidimensionality' and even 'inconsistency' that, in his view, lends verisimilitude to the narrative of Luke-Acts.¹⁶⁹

Far from being a weakness, it is that very uncertainty about authorship, date and original readership that becomes a strength for Joel Green in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke. He 'proceeds under the assumption that our ability or inability to identify the author of the third Gospel is unimportant to its interpretation'.¹⁷⁰ Instead, he focuses on the narrative itself and argues that modern interpreters need 'to engage as fully as possible in an exploration of the cultural presuppositions Luke shared with his contemporaries'.¹⁷¹

That approach is broadly followed by Robert Brawley in his Social Identity commentary on Luke. In his opinion 'little can be said about the place or time of composition', other than that it reflects the world of the late first century CE: 'what counts is what turns out to be true in the narrative world'.¹⁷² For him the narrative read, as it were, by a first-time reader becomes all important. At the same time, he argues, 'Luke's narrative employs a cultural encyclopaedia that is unavailable to interpreters without substantial familiarity with the history of antiquity'.¹⁷³ Understanding that cultural encyclopaedia 'requires immersion in historical studies', though 'even at their best modern interpreters can never understand the New Testament world as it 'really was'.¹⁷⁴ For Brawley that

¹⁶⁹ Skinner 2017, 125.

¹⁷⁰ Green 1997, 20.

¹⁷¹ Green 1997, 12.

¹⁷² Brawley 2020, 6–7.

¹⁷³ Brawley 2020, 7.

¹⁷⁴ Brawley 2020, 8–9.

involves drawing on social-scientific approaches and focusing on the social identity not so much of the implied reader/hearer of Luke-Acts as of the people 'who appear in Luke's narrative'.¹⁷⁵

1.4.7. An imagined reading of Luke-Acts

Our imagined reading will bring the people who appear in Luke's narrative into conversation with the people responsible for the Bloomberg tablets, the Vindolanda tablets and the Uley curse tablets. It will assume that the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are a single work which we will refer to as Luke-Acts, written by a single author we will refer to, for ease of reference, as Luke. The precise dating and the identity of the intended readership or audience we will regard as open questions. We will assume that Luke-Acts was written in a way that has similarities with ancient biographies; and that it was written not simply for its original readership but for followers of the Way of Jesus wherever they may be found. Focusing on individuals whose lives we momentarily glimpse in their writings and on the way they might have read Luke-Acts will enable us to contribute to current debates about the New Testament and empire.

1.5 From the east to the outermost island of the west: imagining Luke-Acts in Roman Britain

Where can we explore, 'the cultural presuppositions Luke shared with his contemporaries' and immerse ourselves in the history of antiquity? How can we access the 'cultural encyclopaedia' that was available to the first readers of Luke-Acts?

1.5.1 A shared history between the Mediterranean world of Luke-Acts and Roman Britain

For all the differences between east and west, there were many points of contact. A year after establishing the province of Syria, Pompey captured Jerusalem in 63 BCE, put an end to the Hasmonean dynasty and established Roman control of *Iudaea* through the 'friendly' kingdom of the Herodian dynasty.¹⁷⁶ As Rome's power extended eastwards with Pompey's campaigns, so it extended westwards in Julius Caesar's Gallic war campaigns. Although Julius Caesar withdrew his army from Britain following the campaigns of 55 and 54 BCE, it seems as if he established close ties with 'friendly' kingdoms in the south east of Britain. As trade developed over the next century, so too did 'mobility of people between Britain and the Roman world': it is possible that sons of those friendly kings were educated in Rome.¹⁷⁷ John Creighton suggests they may well have met with the sons of the Herodian dynasty in what he describes as 'the Augustan kindergarten'.¹⁷⁸ Similarities

¹⁷⁵ Brawley 2020, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Jagersma 1985, 105–37.

¹⁷⁷ Cunliffe 2012, 363–364.

¹⁷⁸ Creighton 2000, 117–25.

between the iconography of Philip's coins in Caesarea Philippi¹⁷⁹ and the coins of south east Britain, notably of Tincomarus of the Atrebates¹⁸⁰ whose presence in Rome is mentioned by Augustus in *Res Gestae* 32,¹⁸¹ add weight to the view that 'the south east was now, economically at least, part of the Roman world'.¹⁸²

As Paul's travels began, Claudius invaded Britain in 43 CE, initiating a conquest that would be completed by the Flavians forty years later.¹⁸³ The triumph of Claudius, the only one between the triumph of Germanicus, son of Tiberius, in 17 CE and the triumph of Titus over *Iudaea* in 71 CE,¹⁸⁴ was commemorated in places visited by Paul. In Pisidian Antioch, a statue had been dedicated to Claudius c. 45-46 CE, 'for his safety and victory in Britannia' (*pro incolumitate / eius et victoria / Britannica*).¹⁸⁵ Another statue was erected in honour of Publius Anicius Maximus from Pisidian Antioch, c. 45-50 CE; as camp prefect (*praefectus castrorum*) of *legio II Augusta* under the command of Vespasian he had been 'honoured with a mural crown and untipped spear for his service in Britannia' (*honorato / corona murali et / hasta pura ob bellum / Britannic(um)*).¹⁸⁶ In Corinth there is evidence of 'the direct worship of the personified goddess *Victoria Britannica*' in a statue of Tiberius Claudius Dinippus who is described as 'augur, priest of *Victoria Britannica*' (*auguri, sac[er]d[ot]i Victor[iae] Britannic[ae]*), 49 CE.¹⁸⁷ Fragments survive of the triumphal arch erected in Rome c. 51 CE¹⁸⁸ to honour the triumph of Claudius by the Roman Senate and People 'because he had received the surrender of eleven British kings, defeated without the loss of any men, and brought barbarian peoples beyond the Ocean for the first time under the rule of Rome' (*SENATVS. PO[pulusque.] RO[manus]q[ue] VOD | REGES. BRIT[annorum] XI devictos sine | VLLA.IACTVR[a in deditionem acceperit | GENTESQVE.B[arbaras] trans oceanum] | PRIMVS.IN DICI[onem] populi romani redegerit*).¹⁸⁹ Images of the arch appeared on coins throughout the empire.¹⁹⁰

Shortly after the failure of the Boudica revolt in 61 CE, Agrippa II warned the would-be rebels in Jerusalem not to take up the sword: 'consider the defences of the Britons, you who feel so sure of

¹⁷⁹ Hendin 2021, 228–32.

¹⁸⁰ Van Arsdell 2017, plate 17, Atrebates, Regni & Belgae.

¹⁸¹ Cooley 2009, 96–97, 253–54.

¹⁸² Cunliffe 2012, 367; James 2005, 47–48; Leins and Farley 2015, 122–124.

¹⁸³ D. J. Mattingly 2007, 87–127; Salway 2001, 55–126; S. Hill and Ireland 1996, 13–26; Ireland 2008, chaps. 3–7; Todd 1999, 43–115.

¹⁸⁴ Beard 2009, 69–70.

¹⁸⁵ Standing 2003, 281–82.

¹⁸⁶ [CIL III 6809](#) (accessed 20/04/23); A. R. Birley 2002b, 105 including picture; Pollard and Berry 2012, 86.

¹⁸⁷ Standing 2003, 284–87: photo, 285.

¹⁸⁸ Salway 1981, 86; A. A. Barrett 1991, 10–15. Cf. Suetonius, *Div. Claud.* xxi.

¹⁸⁹ As redrawn by G. Gatti in 1942: A. A. Barrett 1991, 12.

¹⁹⁰ South Warwickshire Hoard 1114, 1115; Ireland 2013, 32. Cf. [RIC I \(second edition\) Claudius 34](#).

the defences of Jerusalem. They are surrounded by the Ocean and inhabit an island as big as the land which we inhabit; yet the Romans crossed the sea and enslaved them, and four legions keep that huge island quiet'.¹⁹¹ The Judean revolt of 66 CE was suppressed by Vespasian, who had played a significant part in Claudius's conquest of the south of Britain; to quell the revolt of Shim'on ben Kosiba Hadrian turned to Severus, governor of Britain (130-133/34 CE).¹⁹² That shared history between the Mediterranean world of Luke-Acts and Roman Britain is evident in the following chronological table:

Date	Rome ¹⁹³	E. Mediterranean ¹⁹⁴	Britain / Britannia ¹⁹⁵
60s BCE	60 BCE, Pompey, Crassus and Caesar form triumvirate.	63 BCE, Pompey takes <i>Iudaea</i> .	
50s BCE		55 BCE, Antipater, father of Herod, procurator of <i>Iudaea</i> .	55 BCE, Caesar's first campaign. 54 BCE, Caesar's second campaign. Hostages taken to Rome.
40s BCE	49-48 BCE, civil war between Pompey and Caesar. 44 BCE, Caesar killed. 43 BCE, Mark Antony, Lepidus, Octavian, triumvirate. 42 BCE, Mark Antony and Octavian defeat Brutus and Cassius at Philippi.	Antipater's sons, Phasael and Herod rule in Jerusalem and Galilee respectively. Philippi becomes a <i>colonia</i>	Commios, friendly king of Rome; start of southern dynasty, Atrebates. Growing trade between Rome and south east of Britain.
30s BCE	31 BCE, Octavian defeats Antony and Cleopatra at Actium.	40-37 BCE, Herod campaigns in <i>Iudaea</i> . 37 BCE, Herod appointed king of the <i>Iudaei</i> in Rome. 37-4 BCE reign of Herod, king of the <i>Iudaei</i> .	34 BCE, Octavian considers campaign in Britain, but nothing comes of it.

¹⁹¹ Josephus, *Bellum Iudaicum* II.378: Williamson and Smallwood 1981, 160.

¹⁹² Jagersma 1985, 159.

¹⁹³ Woolf 2022a; Beard 2017.

¹⁹⁴ Jagersma 1985; Grabbe 1994; Josephus 1981; Bruce 1990; Walton and Wenham 2011.

¹⁹⁵ Salway 2001; D. J. Mattingly 2007; B. Jones and Mattingly 1990.

27 BCE – 14 CE	Augustus	<p>Sons of friendly king, Herod, educated in Rome: Alexander; Aristobulus; Philip; Herod; Antipas; and grandson Agrippa.</p> <p>c. 4 BCE, birth of Jesus (Luke 1-2).</p> <p>4 BCE, death of Herod.</p> <p>4 BCE-33/34 CE, Philip, tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis.</p> <p>4 BCE-39 CE, Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee.</p> <p>4 BCE- 6 CE, Archelaus, ethnarch of <i>Iudaea</i>.</p> <p>6 CE: failed rebellion of Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37); direct Roman rule of <i>Iudaea</i>: appointment of governor.</p> <p>c. 8 CE: 12 year old Jesus visits Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-51).</p>	<p>27 BCE, Octavian (Augustus) considers campaign in Britain, but nothing comes of it.</p> <p>Augustus considers campaign in Britain (26 BCE), but nothing comes of it.</p> <p>Sons of friendly kings from south east Britain, including sons of Commius, Tincomarus, Epillus and Verica, educated in Rome as trading links grow.</p>
14-37 CE	Tiberius	<p>26-37 CE, Pontius Pilate, governor of <i>Iudaea</i>.</p> <p>c. 28 CE, Jesus' ministry begins in 15th year of Tiberius.</p> <p>27/28 CE, Agrippa has a son, Agrippa, educated in Rome.</p> <p>31/32 CE, after trial by Pilate and Herod Antipas, death and resurrection of Jesus (Luke 23-24). Pentecost; first communities of followers of the Way established (Acts 1-11).</p> <p>34 CE, death of Philip the tetrarch.</p>	<p>Descendants of Commios and Tincomarus, friendly kings in south east Britain (Atreabates); Cunobelinus, king of eastern dynasty (Trinovantes), followed by Adminius (Cantici).</p> <p>Growing trading links, as sons of friendly kings educated in Rome.</p>
37-41 CE	Gaius Caligula	<p>37/38 CE, Agrippa, son of Herod, given Iturea and Trachonitis.</p> <p>40 CE, Herod Antipas exiled to Gaul. Agrippa and Petronius, governor of Syria, prevent Gaius placing statue of himself in Jerusalem temple.</p>	<p>Admnius exiled from Britain by Cunobelinus.</p> <p>Gaius initiates but abandons campaign against Britain.</p>
41-54 CE	Claudius	<p>Agrippa aids Claudius and is made King over the whole area once ruled by his father, Herod.</p> <p>44 CE, Agrippa dies (Acts 12:20-25). Kingdom becomes a Roman province, ruled by governors.</p> <p>49 CE Agrippa II appointed king of Chalcis and given oversight of Jerusalem temple.</p> <p>49 CE: Claudius expels <i>Iudaei</i> from Rome (Acts 18:2).</p>	<p>40-43 CE, Cunobelinus dies, flight of Verica to Rome.</p> <p>43 CE, conquest of Britain begins.</p> <p>43-46 CE, Vespasian victorious across the south.</p> <p>47 CE, conquest of south and east of Britain complete (see Map, 201-212). Province of Britannia established (Cantiaci, Atreabates, Dumnoni, Durotriges, Trinovantes, Catuvellauni, Iceni, Dobunni, Corieltavi). Campaigning meets resistance from Silures, Demetae, Cornovii, Decangli, Ordovices, Brigantes. See Map.</p>

		<p>c.47-57 CE: Paul and others establish communities of Followers of the Way in eastern Mediterranean. (Acts 13:1-21:26).</p> <p>51-52 CE: Gallio proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12).</p>	<p>Londinium established as a trading port (Map 201). c. 43-53 CE, one Bloomberg tablet. 49 CE, Camulodunum becomes a <i>colonia</i> (Map, 203). c. 50 CE, friendly Rulers: Togidubnus (Atrebatas); Prasutagus (Iceni); Cartimandua (Brigantes). See Map.</p>
54-68 CE	Nero	<p>54/55 CE: Agrippa II given jurisdiction in Galilee. c. 57 CE: Paul arrested and tried in Caesarea by governors, Felix and Festus, and by Agrippa II; appeals to emperor (Acts 23:23-26:32). c. 60 CE: Paul under arrest in Rome (Acts 28:11-31).</p> <p>60s CE, earliest suggested date for Luke-Acts</p> <p>Pre 66 CE Agrippa II warns <i>Iudaei</i> not to rebel, referring to Britannia.</p> <p>66 CE war of the <i>Iudaei</i>.</p>	<p>53-65/70 CE, 15 Bloomberg tablets.</p> <p>60/61 CE, campaign against Ordovices as far as Ynys Môn (Map 218) cut short by death of Prasutagus, precipitating Boudica revolt. Camulodunum (Map 203), Verulamium (Map 202), Londinium (Map 201) destroyed by fire. Boudica defeated at Manduessedum (Map 219). c. 61 CE, cities quickly rebuilt, leading to consolidation of south east Britannia.</p>
68 CE	Year of the four emperors Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius.	Vespasian and son, Titus, campaign against <i>Iudaei</i> .	
69-79CE	Vespasian, Flavian dynasty.	<p>70 CE, fall of Jerusalem and destruction of temple.</p> <p>73 CE capture of Massada, last outpost of <i>Iudaei</i>.</p> <p>70s-80s CE, middle date ...</p>	<p>65/70-80 CE, 28 Bloomberg tablets.</p> <p>71-73 CE, vigorous campaigning resumes under the Flavians. 71-73 CE, Brigantes defeated. 73-77 CE, Silures defeated. Network of small forts and roads secures western frontier of Britannia (see Map, e.g. 314). 76 CE, Agricola appointed governor of Britannia. 77/78 CE, Agricola completes conquest of Decangli and Ordovices. 78/79 CE, Agricola secures hold over Brigantes and Parsi and moves north. See Map.</p>
79-81 CE	Titus, Flavian dynasty	... suggested ...	79/80 CE, Agricola campaigns further north. See Map.

81-96 CE	Domitian, Flavian dynasty	... for Luke-Acts.	80-90/5 CE, 31 Bloomberg tablets. 82/83 CE, battle of Mons Graupius completes conquest of Britain. See Map note. c. 85 CE, monumental arch constructed in Rutupiae (Map, 204). 85-130 CE, Vindolanda Tablets from a sequence of wooden forts at Vindolanda (Map, 301).
96-98 CE	Nerva		Glevum a <i>colonia</i> (Map 212).
98-117 CE	Trajan	Early 2nd century CE, late date suggested for Luke-Acts.	75-125 CE, earliest Uley curse tablet (Map 401).
117-138 CE	Hadrian	134-135 CE, Sextus Julius Severus transferred to <i>Iudaea</i> to suppress the Second rebellion of <i>Iudaei</i> led by Shim'on bar Kosiba. c. 135 CE, Babatha hides family documents in cave by the Dead Sea.	122 CE, Hadrian's Wall. See Map. 130/1-132/3 CE, Sextus Julius Severus, governor of Britannia.
100s-200s CE.			100s-200s CE, Uley curse tablets written in Old Roman Cursive.
200s-300s CE.	306-337 CE, Constantine	313 CE, edict of Toleration, Milan. 314 CE, three from Britannia attend Council of Arles.	End of 3rd century CE, martyrdom of Aaron and Julius as followers of the Way in Isca Silurum (Map, 214), and of Alban in Verulamium (Map, 202). After 296 CE, Britannia becomes a civil diocese of four provinces 300s CE, Uley curse tablets written in New Roman Cursive.
400s CE	410 CE, sack of Rome.		409 CE, end of Roman rule in Britain.

Table 1: key dates connecting Rome, Iudaea and the Eastern Mediterranean, and Britain/Britannia.

1.5.2 Accessing a cultural encyclopaedia of the Roman world of Luke-Acts in Roman Britain

In Britain one is never far from interesting Roman remains and imaginatively curated museum displays.¹⁹⁶ Rarely, if ever, is any connection made with the world of the New Testament, and yet

¹⁹⁶ Although out of print, the best guide to Britain's Roman remains Wilson 2002. Less detailed, but also good is Allen and Bryan 2020.

connections that bring to life the cultural encyclopaedia of the Roman dimension of that world are hidden in plain sight as in the following table (asterisks indicate museums):

Location	Map	Features	Luke-Acts
Roads	See Map: approx. 201-204/205 201-207 201-210 & 106 201-218 201-103 201-307	Evident in the six major trunk roads in England and Wales: London to east coast (A2), to south coast (A3), to west (A4 & A 40), to Ynys Môn (A5), to north west (A6) not shown, to north (A1).	Throughout Luke-Acts. ¹⁹⁹
Richborough* (Rutupiae)	204	Gateway to Britannia, with monumental arch (c. 85 CE) marking completion of the conquest of Britannia. ¹⁹⁷	
Tomen y Môr	314	A network of roads, linking forts, secured occupation. ¹⁹⁸	
Gloucester* (Glevum or Colonia Nervia Glevensis)	212	Life-size, mounted statue of Nerva marked 1900th anniversary of status as a <i>colonia</i> . Roman grid street plan and course of walls evident in city centre. ²⁰⁰	Philippi a <i>colonia</i> : Acts 16:12, 11-40; cf. Phil. 3:20.
Colchester* (Camulodunum, or Colonia Claudia Victricensis)	203	Temple dedicated to divinised Claudius, set within colonnaded plaza, with ceremonial gateway celebrating Claudius' achievements. ²⁰¹	Visiting Antioch in Pisidia, a <i>colonia</i> , Paul would have seen its temple dedicated to divinised Augustus, set within a colonnaded plaza, and its ceremonial gateway celebrating Augustus' achievements with <i>Res Gestae</i> . ²⁰² Acts 13:13-52; 14:21; and possibly 16:6; 19:1.
Bath* (Aquae Sulis)	406	Classical temple dedicated to Sulis Minerva: virtual reality presentations visualise ritual	Classical temples found in cities mentioned in Acts: Lystra (Acts 14:8-18);

¹⁹⁷ Wilmott and Smither 2020, 147-148; Watson 2021, 147-148; Sherwood 2023; Allen and Bryan 2020, 40-41; Wilson 2002, 39-45.

¹⁹⁸ Wilson 2002, 339-43; Allen and Bryan 2020, 160-61; Guest 2022a, 63-79; Hopewell 2013, 38-63.

¹⁹⁹ Kloppenborg 2017. Note: details are more accurate in Luke towards the coast and in Acts.

²⁰⁰ Copeland 2011, 62-64; Wilson 2002, 170-77; Allen and Bryan 2020, 82-84. Crummy and Hurst 1999 was published to commemorate the 1900th anniversary of Gloucester becoming a *colonia*. R. Rowe 2004 imagines followers of the Way meeting outside the walls of second century Glevum in the context of a Libertus detective mystery. 'Museum of Gloucester' 2023.

²⁰¹ Crummy 1997, 59-61 and passim; Wilson 2002, 210-28; Allen and Bryan 2020, 103-7; 'Visit Colchester Castle' 2023.

²⁰² Crossan and Reed 2005, 178-83; Walker 2008, 78-81, 87-90; Cooley 2009, 13-16.

		and sacrifices. ²⁰³	Athens (Acts 17:16-34); Ephesus (Acts 19:21-41).
Caerwent (Venta Siulurm)	215	Walled town with layout of streets in insulae, shops fronting the main street. Foundations of forum, basilica (including tribunal, where magistrates heard civil cases), temple, courtyard houses, craftworker houses, workshops and shops. Artefacts exhibited in Newport Museum and Art Gallery. ²⁰⁴ (Similar interiors re-created in Cirencester, St Albans and Museum of London.) ²⁰⁵ Honorific inscription to Tiberius Claudius Paulinus. ²⁰⁶	The kind of courtyard houses and craftworker houses where early followers of the Way in Acts would have met. ²⁰⁷ Street called Straight in Damascus and city walls (Acts 9:11, 23-25). Tribunal in Philippi (Acts 16:20), ²⁰⁸ Corinth (Acts 18:12-17) and Caesarea (Acts 25:6, 17). Visiting Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:13-52; 14:21-23; and possibly 16:6; 19:1) Paul probably saw the honorific inscription to Publius Anicius Maximus, commended for his part in Claudian invasion of Britain.
Caerleon* (Isca)	214	Fortress of <i>legio II Augusta</i> : amphitheatre, baths, barracks, centurions' quarters, <i>contubernia</i> and bread ovens.	Centurions: Luke 7:1-10; 23:47; Acts 10:1-11:18; 22:25-26; 23:23; 24:23; 27:1-44.
Chichester* (Noviomagus Regnorum)	207	Inscription to Togidubnus, ²⁰⁹ a friendly king of Rome whose palace was possibly at nearby Fishbourne, ²¹⁰ which has features reminiscent of Herodian palaces. ²¹¹	Herodian dynasty educated and at home in Rome: Herod the Great (Luke 1:5); Herod Philip (Luke 3:1); Herod Antipas (Luke 3:1,19; 9:7-9; 13:31-35; 23:6-15; Acts 4:27); Herod Agrippa I
Fishbourne Palace*	208		

²⁰³ Cunliffe 2000; Wilson 2002, 158–70; Allen and Bryan 2020, 74–76; Davenport 2021; ‘The Roman Baths of Bath’ 2022.

²⁰⁴ Brewer 2006, 48–53; Wilson 2002, 359–70; Allen and Bryan 2020, 148–49; Guest 2022b; ‘Newport Museum and Art Gallery: Archaeology’ 2022.

²⁰⁵ ‘Verulamium Museum: The Museum of Everyday Life in Roman Britain, St Albans’ 2022; ‘Roman London Gallery in the Museum of London’ 2022; ‘Corinium Museum’ 2022.

²⁰⁶ [RIB 311](#); Brewer 2006, 11.

²⁰⁷ Pritchard 1987, 174–75; Oakes 2009, 1–97; Oakes 2020, 3–62.

²⁰⁸ Keener 2020, 403.

²⁰⁹ *RIB 91: [N]eptuno et Minervae | templum | [pr]o salute do[mus] divinae | [ex] auctoritat[e] Ti(beri) Claud(i) | [To]gidubni r[eg(is) m]agni Brit(anniae) | [colle]gium fabr(um) et qui in eo | [sun]t d(e) s(uo) d(ederunt) donante aream | [... Pud]ente Pudentini fil(io).* To Neptune and Minerva, for the welfare of the Divine House by the authority of Tiberius Claudius Togidubnus, great king of Britain, the guild of smiths and those therein gave this temple from their own resources, Pudens, son of Pudentinus, presenting the site.

²¹⁰ Cunliffe 1998; Wilson 2002, 68–77; Allen and Bryan 2020, 24–25.

²¹¹ Cunliffe 1998; Wilson 2002, 77.

		Children of friendly kings from Britain educated in Rome. ²¹²	(Acts 12:1-23); Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25:13-26:32).
Manchester* (Mamucium)	103	Some of the earliest evidence of followers of the Way in Britannia: <i>SATOR</i> square cut into the shoulder of an amphora fragment in Manchester ²¹³ and etched on the wall of a house in	
Cirencester* (Corinium)	211	Cirencester; ²¹⁴ <i>Chi Rho</i> symbol etched into slabs around the spring at	
Chedworth*	102	Chedworth, ²¹⁵ and on a pewter bowl deposited in an urn in a Caerwent house, ²¹⁶ a place associated with two of Britannia's three third century Christian martyrs, Julius and Aaron. ²¹⁷ Another Caerwent house has features resembling what might be expected in a house church. ²¹⁸	
Caerwent (Venta Silurum)	215		

Table 2: a select gazetteer of places in Britain that open a window on to the world of the New Testament.

The Roman galleries of the British Museum, London, are a rich source of material not only for Roman Britain²¹⁹ but also for the world of the Bible.²²⁰ The iconography of coins serves as an illustrated cultural encyclopaedia of pre-Roman Britain and imperial Rome. The story of south east Britain in the late Iron Age and of Rome from 194 BCE to 164 CE is told in three coin hoards: the Hallaton Hoard (Harborough Museum, Market Harborough),²²¹ the South Warwickshire Hoard (Market Hall Museum, Warwick)²²² and the Llanvaches Hoard (National Roman Legion Museum, Caerleon).²²³ The

²¹² Creighton 2000, 117–25, cf. Celtic coinage from south east Britain.

²¹³ B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 295, 297.

²¹⁴ Wilkes 2021; Atkinson 1951; Atkinson 1957; Kidd and Stevenson 1965, 7–8.

²¹⁵ Cleary 2013, 97–98; R. Goodburn 1979, 28.

²¹⁶ House IX.7N: Brewer 2006, 23; 'Chi Rho Dish from Caerwent: BBC - A History of the World' 2022; 'Newport Museum and Art Gallery: Archaeology' 2022.

²¹⁷ A. Breeze 2016; Wilson 2002, 359–70; Allen and Bryan 2020, 148–49; B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 295; J. R. Davies 2012, 3, 14–15.

²¹⁸ House V.22N: Brewer 2006, 23.

²¹⁹ Hobbs and Jackson 2010.

²²⁰ T. C. Mitchell 2004; B. H. Edwards and Anderson 2004.

²²¹ Score 2011; Score 2013; 'Harborough Museum – Embracing Our Past' 2023. See Map 108.

²²² Ireland 2013; Dingle 2023. See Map 109.

²²³ 'The Llanvaches Roman Coin Hoard | Museum Wales | Amgueddfa Cymru' 2023. See Map 110.

story is told in the Portable Antiquities Scheme website,²²⁴ in many local museum displays and in major displays in the Ashmolean museum, Oxford,²²⁵ and the British Museum, London.²²⁶

Since 2005, moves to recognise the entire frontier of the Roman empire as a world heritage site are a reminder that rich diversity and at the same time a shared cultural heritage span the whole empire.²²⁷ By 161 CE Aelius Aristides of Smyrna spoke of the way ‘an encamped army, like a rampart, encloses the civilised world in a ring ... from the settled areas of Aethopia to the Phasis, and from the Euphrates in the interior to the great outermost island towards the west’, i.e. to Britain.²²⁸

1.5.3 Beyond narrative history: giving voice to the voiceless in Roman Britain

In the mid twentieth century historians sought to produce a narrative history of Roman Britain by drawing on a historical imagination in the sense understood by R. G. Collingwood.²²⁹ Collingwood speaks of ‘certain fixed points’, and Hoskins of ‘facts’, which are then supplemented by the imagination so ensuring that what is produced is not ‘imaginary’ but in a proper sense ‘historical’. That is precisely what Collingwood had done in his contribution to the first volume of *the Oxford History of England*, weaving together ancient texts and recent archaeological discoveries to create a narrative history of Roman Britain, supplemented by thematic chapters.²³⁰ It became a pattern for subsequent histories of Roman Britain.²³¹ By the time Collingwood’s Oxford History was replaced in 1981 by Peter Salway, scholars had begun ‘to question many of the apparently fixed points in the accepted picture of Roman Britain’;²³² nonetheless, Salway produced a narrative history in the same way,²³³ supplemented by thematic chapters.²³⁴ The narrative of Collingwood, Frere, Salway and many others was influenced by Francis Haverfield’s 1905 lecture, *The Romanization of Roman*

²²⁴ ‘The Portable Antiquities Scheme’ 2019; Moorhead 2013.

²²⁵ ‘Ashmolean Museum, Heberden Coin Room’ 2023.

²²⁶ ‘British Museum, Department of Coins and Medals’ 2023.

²²⁷ D. J. Breeze et al. 2013; D. J. Breeze, Abudanah, et al. 2022; D. J. Breeze and Guest 2022; D. J. Breeze, Ivleva, et al. 2022; D. J. Breeze 2011.

²²⁸ Aristides mid-2nd century 26, 80-84; D. J. Breeze 2011, 20.

²²⁹ Collingwood 1946, 242; see above, 1.3.1: 8.

²³⁰ Collingwood and Myres 1936: the machinery of government; the people; the towns; the countryside; industry and commerce; art; religion.

²³¹ S. Frere 1991, first published, 1967; 3rd edition extensively revised 1987: narrative chapters 1-8, 15-16; thematic chapters 9-14 on administration, towns, countryside, trade and industry and the Romanization of Britain. Todd 1999: first published in 1981; revised in 1997 and 1999, offering a narrative history bringing together ancient texts and the most recent archaeological discoveries and insights.

²³² Salway 1981, vii.

²³³ Salway 1981, 3–501.

²³⁴ Salway 1981, chaps. 17–21: on the assimilation of Britain (505-538); the historical geography of Roman Britain (539-572); town and country (573-614); the economy (615-664); religion and society (665-739). Revised and abridged as Salway 1993; and published without illustrations in abridged form as Salway 1981. The narrative section was further condensed as Salway 2015. Cf. S. Hill and Ireland 1996.

Britain. Drawing on archaeological, linguistic and historical evidence he had argued that ‘the Empire ... Romanized the province, introducing Roman speech and town-life and culture’.²³⁵ Frere spoke of ‘Romano-British culture’ not as ‘a replacement of cultures’ but as a ‘synthesis’ arising from ‘the impact of the civilisation of Rome upon the Celtic people of Britain’.²³⁶ For Salway ‘Romanization’ was not ‘a conscious spreading of Roman amenities at Roman expense’; rather, it entailed ‘appropriation’ as influential individuals and families identified ‘themselves with Roman political and social culture’.²³⁷ A different approach has emerged in the twenty-first century. David Mattingly structured his history of Roman Britain around military, urban and rural communities; rejecting the notion of Romanization he focused on the discrepant identities to be found within those different communities, seeking to give voice to people experiencing the power of empire and its implications for their identity in a Britannia that he describes as *An Imperial Possession*.²³⁸ While he too draws on a historical imagination to weave together the ancient texts and archaeological discoveries, he also makes use of that kind of geographical and archaeological imagination described by Tilley and Shanks.²³⁹

In the study of Roman Britain, the application of a historical imagination as understood by Collingwood is problematic: the ‘fixed points’ and ‘facts’ are few and far between. There are only a few references to Britain in the works of four Roman historians: Caesar,²⁴⁰ Tacitus,²⁴¹ Suetonius,²⁴² Dio Cassius,²⁴³ while Augustus mentions the presence of two friendly kings in Rome.²⁴⁴ Translations of the main texts have been brought together in Stanley Ireland’s *Roman Britain: A Sourcebook*.²⁴⁵ The geography and people of Britain are briefly described by Caesar,²⁴⁶ Tacitus,²⁴⁷ Pliny the Elder,²⁴⁸ and Strabo.²⁴⁹ The British section of the Antonine Itineraries maps the Roman roads that were

²³⁵ Haverfield 1915, 79.

²³⁶ S. Frere 1991, 295.

²³⁷ Salway 2001, 83.

²³⁸ D. J. Mattingly 2007; D. J. Mattingly 2014, 269–76 offers an alternative paradigm to ‘Romanization’.

²³⁹ See above 1.3.3: 10-13.

²⁴⁰ *Bellum Gallicum*: H. J. Edwards 1917; Gallic War in translation: Warner 1960.

²⁴¹ Tacitus, *Agricola*: Ogilvie and Richmond 1967. *Historiae* 1-3: Moore 1925. *Historiae* 4-5; *Annales* 1-3: Moore and Jackson 1931. *Annales* 4-6, 11-12: J. Jackson 1937a. *Annales*: 13-16 J. Jackson 1937b. *Agricola* in translation: H. Mattingly 2009. *The Annals* in translation: Grant 1996. *The Histories* in translation: Fyfe 1999.

²⁴² Gaius Caligula: Rolfe 1914a. Claudius, Nero, Vespasian: Rolfe 1914b. In translation: C. Edwards 2008.

²⁴³ Cassius Dio: *Roman History*, Books 39, 40, 49, 53, 59, 60, 62, 66: Cary and Foster 1914ff.

²⁴⁴ *Res Gestae* 32: Cooley 2009, 96–97, 253–54.

²⁴⁵ Ireland 2008, 3rd edition.

²⁴⁶ *Bellum Gallicum* IV.7, 12, 13; V.12, 13, 14.

²⁴⁷ Tacitus, *Agricola* 15: Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 102.

²⁴⁸ *Natural History* IV.102, 104: Rackham 1945.

²⁴⁹ *Geography*: I.4.1,3; II.5.8; IV.5.5: H. L. Jones 1917ff.

established by the mid second century CE.²⁵⁰ The following table correlates the main primary sources, dates and the early periods of Roman influence and rule in Britannia:

Period	Dates	Author	Works, dated
Invasions of Caesar	55, 54 BCE	Julius Caesar (102-44 BCE) Cassius Dio (c. 150-235 CE)	<i>Bellum Gallicum</i> IV.20-38; V.1-23 (c.51 BCE). <i>Roman History</i> XXXIX.51-53; XL.1-4 (200-222 CE).
Caesar to Claudius	54 BCE – 43 CE	Julius Caesar Aulus Hirtius (one of Caesar's officers) Strabo (c. 64 BCE – 25 CE) Cassius Dio Augustus (63 BCE – 14 CE) Tacitus (c. 56/57 – c. 120 CE) Suetonius (c. 70 – c. 122 CE)	<i>Bellum Gallicum</i> VII.75, 76, 79. Caesar's <i>Bellum Gallicum</i> VIII 6, 7, 10, 21, 23, 47, 48 (c. 43 BCE). Γεωγραφικά, II.5.3 and 8 (c. 7 BCE or 17-18 CE). XLIX.38.2; LIII.22.5; LIII.25.2; LIX.25.1-3. <i>Res Gestae</i> , 32 (c. 14 CE). <i>Annales</i> II.24 (115-120 CE). <i>Caligula</i> 44, 46 (c. 117-127 CE). Inferences can be made from study of late Iron Age or Celtic coins from south east Britain. ²⁵¹
Invasion of Claudius	43 CE	Suetonius Cassius Dio	<i>Claudius</i> 17, 24. LX.19-23.
Claudius to Boudica Revolt	43 CE - 60/61 CE	Suetonius Tacitus Cassius Dio	<i>Vespasian</i> 4, <i>Nero</i> 18 <i>Annales</i> XII.31-40, XIV.29-39; <i>Agricola</i> 15, 16 (98 CE) LXII.1-12.
From Boudica revolt to completion of the occupation	60/61 – c.83 CE	Tacitus Cassius Dio	<i>Agricola</i> , 5, 8, 9-38; <i>Historiae</i> I.9, II.11, 57, 59-60, 65, 66, 86, 97, III.22, 44, 45, IV.68 (from 105 CE). LXVI.20.1-3.

Table 3: the chief primary sources for the history of Roman Britain.

From the departure of Agricola (c. 83 CE) to the building of Hadrian's wall (122 CE) 'there is an almost total dearth of literary evidence'.²⁵² Although there are rich archaeological resources, not

²⁵⁰ B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 23–29: see further chapter 2 on Britain and the Roman Geographers.

²⁵¹ Creighton 2000, 174–215; Van Arsdell 2017; 'Celtic Coin Index' 2022; 'Iron Age Coins in Britain' 2022.

²⁵² Ireland 2008, 92-94.

least in coins and material culture, there are few written texts apart from our three archives.²⁵³ The confidence once shown in writing ‘a history of Roman Britain’ has now been called in question. The focus is not so much on narrative history as on material culture. The editors of *the Oxford Handbook of Roman Britain* (2016) offer a bare chronological outline limited to ancient historical texts:²⁵⁴ after brief surveys of the way the history of Roman Britain has been written and of recent developments in archaeology, the handbook goes on to explore the variety of sources of knowledge, focusing on material culture, and the study of society and people. The aim is not to achieve a narrative history but to encounter those who have left their mark on the landscape and on its archaeology and so give voice to people who have hitherto been voiceless.²⁵⁵

1.6 Seeing into the life of things: imagining Luke-Acts in Roman Britain

Studying texts and inscriptions from the Graeco-Roman and Judean worlds of the eastern Mediterranean while employing anthropological insights and ideas from the social sciences,²⁵⁶ enables us to identify the kind of things to expect in what Robert Brawley describes as a ‘cultural encyclopaedia’:²⁵⁷ first century personality, kinship and social location; gender; honour and shame; reciprocity and patron-client relations; the poor and the rich; economics and debt; table-fellowship; ceremonies; sickness and healing; city and countryside.²⁵⁸

Imagining Luke-Acts through the eyes of the people of the Bloomberg tablets takes us to passages to do with money and possessions, honour and shame, reciprocity and debt, patrons and clients, slaves and masters, the rich and the destitute, Roman law and literacy; of the people of the Vindolanda tablets to passages to do with women of agency, the military and local people, Roman law, travel and identity, festivals and feasting, sickness and healing, honour and shame, patrons and clients, masters and slaves and the reversal of roles; and of the Uley curse tablets to passages to do with temples, ritual practice, cursing and praying.

²⁵³ The intention is ‘to make every published inscription from Roman Britain accessible to all’ in the online Roman Inscriptions of Britain: ‘Roman Inscriptions of Britain’ 2019; ‘The Portable Antiquities Scheme’ 2019; Ireland 2008.

²⁵⁴ Millett, Revell, and Moore 2016, xxvii–xxxvi.

²⁵⁵ Millett, Revell, and Moore 2016: the nature of the evidence (1-13); society and the individual (14-23); forms of knowledge (24-33); and landscape and economy (34-41). This contrasts markedly with the chronological approach of Malcolm Todd 2007.

²⁵⁶ Esler 1987; Neyrey 1991a; Neyrey and Stewart 2008; Malina 1993; Malina 2001; Esler 1994.

²⁵⁷ Brawley 2020, 7-9.

²⁵⁸ Esler 1987; Neyrey 1991a; Neyrey and Stewart 2008.

Each of the three archives will function as a 'gateway to history' as we explore 'a particular world of experience', re-enact a moment of history, take an imaginative leap and get to know named people. Each chapter will begin with a brief introduction to the people concerned, after which we will introduce the tablets, piecing together what is known of that corpus of texts, the location in which they were created and the people who wrote them. We will then draw on the archival ethnography developed by Lennartsson and Esler, taking into account the insights of Huebner, Longenecker and Oakes (1.1) and in our mind's eye imagine, first, the people whose very handwritten words have survived in the texts we are studying; and, second, how people such as these, drawn to follow the Way of Jesus, might have read texts from Luke-Acts, finding some familiar and others challenging. We will then draw some conclusions regarding the way they might have negotiated the world of the Roman empire.

As we draw on the insights of archival ethnography, we must nurture a multi-faceted imagination. It will be an imagination that 'creates mental images'²⁵⁹ and 'allows us both to express and to understand ideas'.²⁶⁰ It will be *a historical imagination* that appeals to data and 'runs little risk of losing touch with the reality which it represents'.²⁶¹ It will be *an ethnographic imagination* that allows us 'to empathise' with the people we encounter²⁶² and *a sociological imagination* that 'enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society'.²⁶³ It will be an imagination that gives us 'the ability to think about' particular people whose existence is inferred from the evidence we have to hand.²⁶⁴ It will be *a geographical imagination* that immerses us 'in a world of places' and 'aims to understand and recover' them in such a way that they become a context for human experience.²⁶⁵ It will be *an archaeological imagination* that seeks 'to recreate the world behind the ruin in the land, to reanimate the people behind the' artefact in a way that is rooted in sensibility and enables us to make sense of our relationship with the past ... and [its] relationship to our sense of self and identity'.²⁶⁶ It will be an imagination which makes sense of things, locating particular bits and pieces within larger patterns, and in doing so goes beyond what is given, filling gaps, painting bigger pictures'.²⁶⁷ It will be an imagination informed by the data

²⁵⁹ Warnock 1976, 10.

²⁶⁰ Warnock 1976, 72.

²⁶¹ Collingwood 1946, 242.

²⁶² Lennartsson 2012, 92.

²⁶³ Mills 1959, 6.

²⁶⁴ L. Stevenson 2003, 239–41: Conceptions 1, 1b, 1d.

²⁶⁵ Tilley 1994, 15.

²⁶⁶ Shanks 2012, 25.

²⁶⁷ Hart 2000, 319.

available and so it will be an imagination that guards against becoming a flight of fancy.²⁶⁸ It will be an imagination that hears with the inward ear and sees with the inward and inner eye.²⁶⁹

Our imagined reading must meet three criteria. It must be justifiable in the locations and with the writings chosen, informed by careful study of the data available, and warranted by close attention to the biblical text.

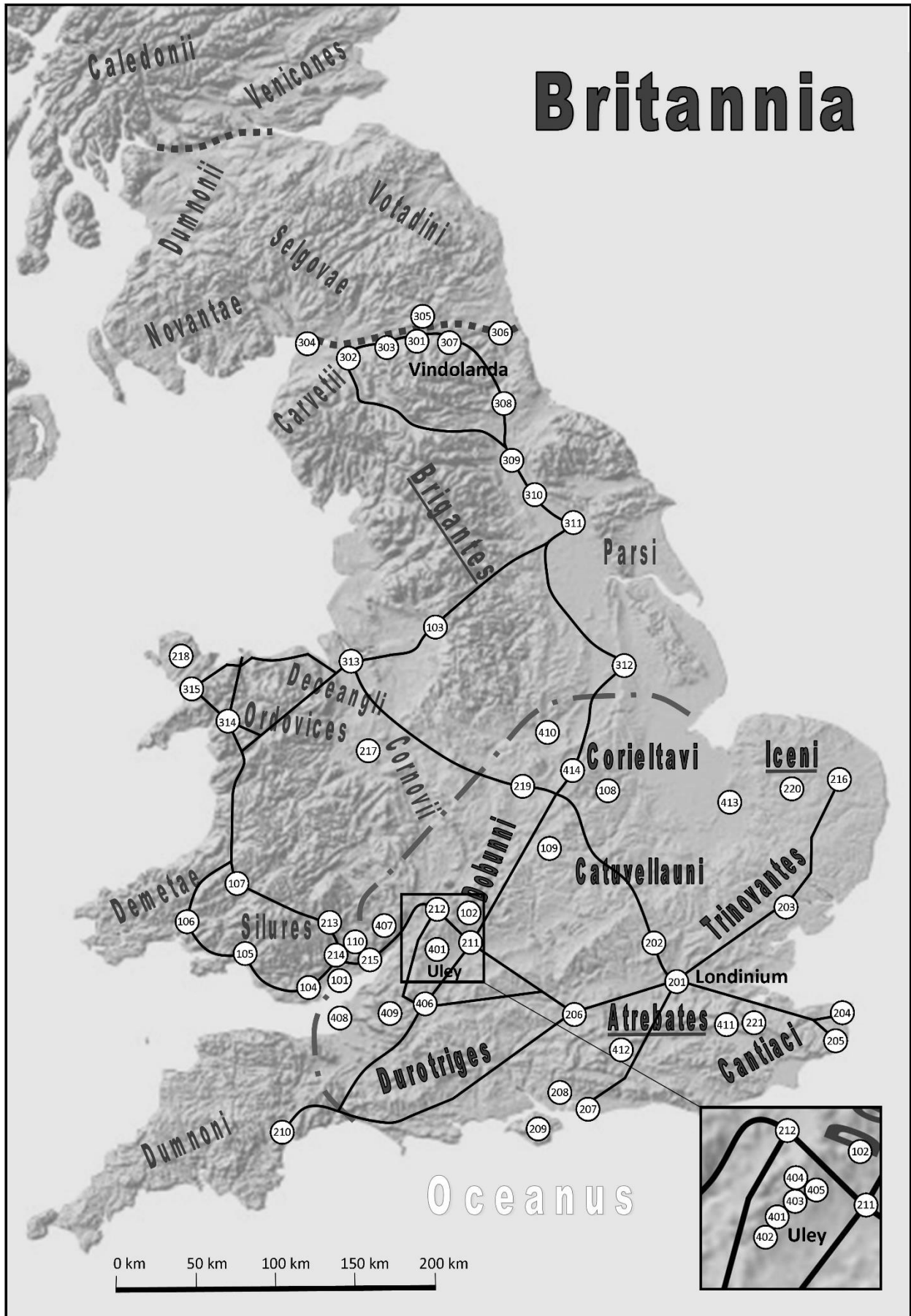
The imagined reading of Luke-Acts I will share will necessarily be my imagined reading. As he came to the end of his celebration of imagination Graham Ward extended an invitation to his readers. It is one I would extend to you: 'the exercise of my imagination as a writer is an invitation to exercise your mind as a reader'.²⁷⁰ Let your imagination take you via these writings from the ancient world to an encounter with the people responsible for them and through their eyes to a fresh encounter with Luke-Acts. The artefacts under consideration may be described as 'things'. They include not only the stylus wax writing tablets of Londinium, the ink on wood writing tablets of Vindolanda and the lead tablets of the rural community around the temple to Mercury at Uley; among those artefacts we must also count a notional codex of Luke-Acts. As we look beyond those 'things' into the lives of those responsible for them, may we have that kind of imagination Wordsworth spoke of in his *Poems of the Imagination* and 'see into the life of things'.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Collingwood 1946, 242; Willis 2000, viii.

²⁶⁹ *Poems of the Imagination* XXVI, Preface to the edition of 1815, *Poems of the Imagination* XXIX, XII, XIX, Wordsworth 1934, 164, 753, 166, 149, 157.

²⁷⁰ Ward 2018, 237.

²⁷¹ Wordsworth 1934, 164: *Poems of the Imagination* XXVI, 'Lines Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey', line 49.



Map of Britannia drawn by Chris Jones-Jenkins showing locations mentioned in the text; Celtic peoples, coin production, and friendly kings; extent of curse tablets; key roads.

Chapter 1: Introduction

201	Londinium	Llundain	London*
301	Vindolanda		Chesterholm*
401	Temple dedicated to Mercury		Uley
101		Casnewydd	Newport*
102	Chedworth Villa		Chedworth
103	Mamucium	Manceinion	Manchester*
104		Caerdydd	Cardiff*
105	Nidum	Castell Nedd	Neath
106	Moridunum	Caerfyrddin	Carmarthen
107	Luventinum	Dolaucothau	Gold Mines*
108	Hallaton Hoard		Market Harborough*
109	South Warwickshire Hoard		Warwick*
110	Llanvaches Hoard		Caerleon*

Chapter 2: the Bloomberg Tablets

201	Londinium	Llundain	London*
202	Verulamium		St Albans*
203	Camulodunum		Colchester*
204	Rutupiae		Richborough*
205	Dubris	Dofr	Dover
206	Calleva Attrebatum		Silchester
207	Noviomagus Regnorum		Chichester*
208			Fishbourne palace*
209	Vectis Insula	Ynys Wyth	Isle of Wight
210	Isca Dumnomniorum	Caerwysg	Exeter*
211	Corinium Dobunorum		Cirencester*
212	Glevum	Caergloyw	Gloucester*
213	Burrium	Brynbuga Usk	
214	Isca	Caerllion ar Wysg	Caerleon*
215	Venta Silurum	Caerwent	Caerwent
216	Venta Icenorum		Caistor St. Edmund Wroxeter
217	Viroconium Cornoviorum		
218	Mona Insula	Ynys Môn	Anglesey
219	Manduessedum		Mancetter
220	?Eporcuria,	unknown location of fort among Icenii	
221	Verlucionium,	unknown location of 5-acre wood in Kent	

Chapter 3: the Vindolanda Tablets

301	Vindolanda		Chesterholm*
302	Luguvalium	Caerliwelydd	Carlisle*
303	Briga, unknown location of fort near Vindolanda		
304	Maia		Bowness
305	Vercovicium		Housesteads*
306	Segedunum		Wallsend*
307	Coria		Corbridge
308	Vinovia		Binchester
309	Cataractonium	Catraeth	Catterick
310	Isurium Brigantum		Aldborough
311	Eboracum	Caerefrog	York*
312	Lindum		Lincoln*

313	Deva	Caer	Chester*
314		Tomen y Mûr	
315	Segontium	Caernarfon	Caernarfon

Chapter 4: the Uley Curse Tablets

401	Temple to Mercury		Uley
402	Uley Bury Hill Fort		Uley
403	Hetty Pegler's Tump		Uley
404	Nympsfield Long Barrow		Nympsfield
405	Woodchester Villa		
406	Aquae Sulis	Caerfaddon	Bath*
	Temple, dedicated to Sulis Minerva		
407	Temple, dedicated to Nodens		Lydney Park*
408	Temple, dedication unknown		Brean Down
409	Temple, dedication unknown		Pagans Hill
410	Temple, dedication unknown		Ratcliffe-on-Soar
411	Temple, dedication unknown		East Farleigh, Kent
412	Temple, dedication unknown		Farley Heath, Surrey
413	Temple, dedication unknown		Hockwold, Norfolk
414	Ratae Corieltavorum	Caerlŷr	Leicester*

The names in large lettering indicate tribal society in Britain in the first century CE (*An Atlas of Roman Britain*).¹ Tribes producing coins are shown in bold (*Celtic Coinage of Britain*, third edition;² *An Atlas of Roman Britain*).³ Those with friendly rulers, c. 50 CE, are underlined: Togidubnus, Atreabates; Prasutagus, Icenii; Cartimandua, Brigantes (*An Atlas of Roman Britain*).⁴

Numbered entries are locations mentioned in the text and found on the Ordnance Survey map of *Roman Britain*, sixth edition.⁵ Welsh place names are listed as they are often closer to the Latin and may sometimes derive from Celtic place names that predate the arrival of the Romans. Those marked with (*) have a good museum or visitor centre.

Roads mentioned in the text are based on the Antonine Itineraries,⁶ and other early roads identified in *An Atlas of Roman Britain*,⁷ and on the Ordnance Survey Map of *Roman Britain*, sixth edition.

Curse tablets have been found to the south and east of the dotted line. Those found in temples are marked; comprehensive maps of Western Latin curse tablets may be found in *Sylloge of Defixiones from the Roman West*⁸ and *Living and Cursing in the Roman West*.⁹

Mons Graupius is 325 kilometres to the north of Vindolanda, near Aberdeen in the Grampian mountains. Hadrian's Wall from Bowness to Wallsend (122 CE) post-dates the Vindolanda tablets. The Antonine Wall, from the Firth of Clyde to the Firth of Forth, marked the northern frontier of the Roman empire for a short period in the middle of the 2nd century CE.

¹ B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 45.

² van Arsdell 2017.

³ B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 55.

⁴ B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 141.

⁵ Cleary 2011.

⁶ B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 23–28.

⁷ B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 94, 98, 100.

⁸ Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 77.

⁹ McKie 2022, 14–15.



Figure 1: Londinium c. 80 CE.

View from south of the Thames, opposite the mouth of the Walbrook; this conjectural reconstruction shows the timber waterfronts along the Thames and boats beached on the foreshore, timber bridges over the stream and the densely built-up town on both sides of the valley; east of the Walbrook is the temple and baths complex (far right foreground), with the forum and basilica in the distance (top right). The first crossing of the Thames would be to the right of this picture, at the location of the modern London Bridge.

Judith Dobie

© Museum of London Archaeology.¹

¹ Wright 2017, 23.

2 IMAGINING LUKE-ACTS IN AN URBAN COMMUNITY: THROUGH THE EYES OF THE PEOPLE OF THE BLOOMBERG TABLETS

2.1 Introducing the people of the Bloomberg tablets

Within thirty years of the Claudian invasion of Britain in 43 CE much had happened.² The one-time legate of *legio II Augusta*, Vespasian, had put down the Judean revolt and subsequently taken power in Rome as emperor. Londinium had grown up around the bridge that spanned the Thames at its first crossing point. A significant port, it attracted traders, merchants and bankers who recorded their transactions on wax tablets. Titus had proved unreliable in his moneylending and was in danger of appearing shameful.³ Gratus, the freedman of Spurius, was in possession of a loan note for 105 denarii; he could realise its cash value by claiming that sum from Tibullus, the freedman of Venustus, or by selling the loan note on to a third party.⁴

One dated tablet makes it clear that traders forced to flee the burning city during the Boudica revolt (60-61 CE) returned and resumed business as soon as the revolt had been quelled. Gaius Valerius Proculus of Londinium contracted on 12 October 62 CE to make twenty deliveries of provisions by 13 November to Marcus Rennius Venustus in Verulamium (St Albans), thirty-five kilometres away, at a charge of one quarter denarius for each load. The full sum would be paid on condition that all twenty loads were delivered.⁵

They brought an economic system recognisable across the empire, built on patronage, honour and shame, reciprocity and debt. Let's imagine that, sometime in the last quarter of the first century CE, a merchant who has been drawn to follow the Way of Jesus arrives with a codex or codices including Luke and Acts in his baggage to share with a group of followers of the Way of Jesus. A mixed group of rich and poor, slave and free, women and men, locals and new arrivals, it includes people such as those we encounter in the Bloomberg tablets. To imagine Luke-Acts through their eyes is to encounter it as its first audience would have done.

To ensure such an imagined reading is justifiable in mid first century Londinium we will follow the process outlined in 1.6 and next introduce the Bloomberg tablets, exploring what exactly they are (2.2). That will then enable us to draw on the adaptation of archival ethnography we have developed

² See below, 24-27, table 1. See Map, locations 201-219.

³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 30, 43-53 CE, Tomlin 2016, 120-23.

⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44, 8 Jan. 57 CE, Tomlin 2016, 152-55.

⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 45, 21 Oct. 62 CE, Tomlin 2016, 156-59. See Map, 202.

in 1.2,3,6 and imagine life among the merchants and traders responsible for the Bloomberg tablets (2.3). We will then be able to imagine how people such as these might have responded to Luke-Acts as they would have encountered much that was familiar and much that would challenge them (2.4). It is finally in those challenges that we shall consider how they might have negotiated the Way of Jesus through their world of finance and trade (2.5,6).

2.2 Introducing the Bloomberg Tablets and other stylus writing tablets of Londinium

2016 saw the publication of 405 stylus writing tablets from the middle of the first century CE, of which more than eighty are legible.⁶ Discovered during excavations (2010-2014) on the site of Bloomberg's European Headquarters in the City of London, they are the earliest pieces of writing to be discovered in Britain: some are contemporary with events in the New Testament.⁷

The fragments of wax tablets were preserved in anaerobic conditions beside the Walbrook, a tributary of the Thames that has long-since disappeared. An early priority of the Romans had been to bridge the Thames, easing communication between the south-east coast and Camulodunum (Colchester), the first Roman capital, and Verulamium (St Albans) to the north and Calleva Atrebatum (Silchester), to the west.⁸ A town quickly grew up on each side of what is now London Bridge.⁹ A grid of north-south and east-west roads developed on both sides of the Walbrook between two hills, Cornhill and Ludgate hill. To alleviate flooding the banks of the Walbrook were shored up with double walls, infilled with rubbish from further east; the land was levelled using similar detritus. Most of the Bloomberg tablets had been destroyed and used in that infill.¹⁰ Wooden shops and workshops fronted the main roads with living accommodation behind: strip houses, they had wattle and daub walls and thatched roofs. By 60 CE the housing was as closely packed as in Herculaneum.¹¹ Excavations at the adjacent 1 Poultry site in the 1990s produced evidence of craftworkers, such as leather workers and tentmakers enabling the Museum of London to recreate wooden dwellings, a pottery shop and a tavern.¹² Advances in dendrochronology since 1983 make it possible to date wooden remains from first century Londinium to within ten years.¹³

⁶ Tomlin 2016.

⁷ See below, 50-51, table 4.

⁸ Camulodunum, see Map, 203; Verulamium, see Map, 202; Calleva Atrebatum, see Map, 206.

⁹ Perring, Roskams, and Allen 1991; Perring 1991; Rowsome 2001; Clark and Sheldon 2008; J. Hill and Rowsome 2011; Wright 2017; Hingley 2018. For a map of Londinium see Rowsome 2011. See figure 1, 40.

¹⁰ Tomlin 2016, 32.

¹¹ Rowsome 2001, 26.

¹² J. Hill and Rowsome 2011; Rowsome 2001.

¹³ Tyers 2008; Tomlin 2016, 5. The dating scheme developed in 1 Poultry was used in the Bloomberg excavations. The decision to use the corporate name 'Bloomberg' in the formal designation of the Bloomberg tablets artificially separates them from the tablets discovered beside the Walbrook, especially at 1 Poultry.



Figure 2: Styluses from the Bloomberg excavations: iron stylus (6889); iron stylus with copper-alloy inlaid bands and plated red mouldings (9039); spatula (6178).¹⁴ Photo: Andy Chopping. © MOLA

Figure 3: Presentation stylus from the Bloomberg excavations.

ab urbe v[e]n[i] munus tibi gratum adf(e)ro | acul[eat]um ut habe[a]s memor[ia]m nostra(m) |
 rogo si fortuna dar[e]t quo possem | largius ut longa via ceu sacculus est (v)acuus (I have come from the City [? Rome]. I bring you a welcome gift | with a sharp point that you may remember me. | I ask, if fortune allowed, that I might be able (to give) | as generously as the way is long (and) as my purse is empty. Photo: Andy Chopping. Inscription highlighted in yellow: Roger S. O. Tomlin. © MOLA.¹⁵

Among the 200 styluses discovered on the Bloomberg site one, inscribed on four faces, seems to have been brought by a trader from Rome (see Figure 3). Of the 300 stylus tablets previously found in London, nineteen have been published:¹⁶ seven were discovered by the Walbrook and four at 1 Poultry.¹⁷ They confirm Tacitus' description of Londinium as a place *copia negotiatorum et com meatuum maxime celebre* (most renowned for its abundance of merchants and of traded goods).¹⁸ Business resumed immediately following the Boudica revolt.¹⁹

Made locally of imported coniferous timber, mostly silver fir that had previously been used in casks and barrels, the stylus writing tablets were on average c. 140 mm wide by c. 110 mm high.²⁰ Type 1 tablets were plain on one side and recessed and filled with blackened beeswax on the other. The text was written in lower cursive letterforms as the stylus disclosed the white of the wood through

¹⁴ Tomlin 2017, 17.

¹⁵ 'I Went to Rome and All I Got You Was This Stylus!' 2019; Willi 2021, 2:33–38.

¹⁶ S. S. Frere and Tomlin 1992, 11–21 and since 1986 published in *Britannia*. Tomlin 2016, 287: a summary of the tablets published prior to 2016.

¹⁷ Tomlin 2011.

¹⁸ Tacitus, *Annales* xiv.33.

¹⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 45 is evidence of that swift rebuilding: Tomlin 2016, 156–59.

²⁰ D. Goodburn and Humphreys 2016.

the blackened wax. It is the resulting scratch marks on the wood that can be deciphered today with the help of photography (see Figure 4).

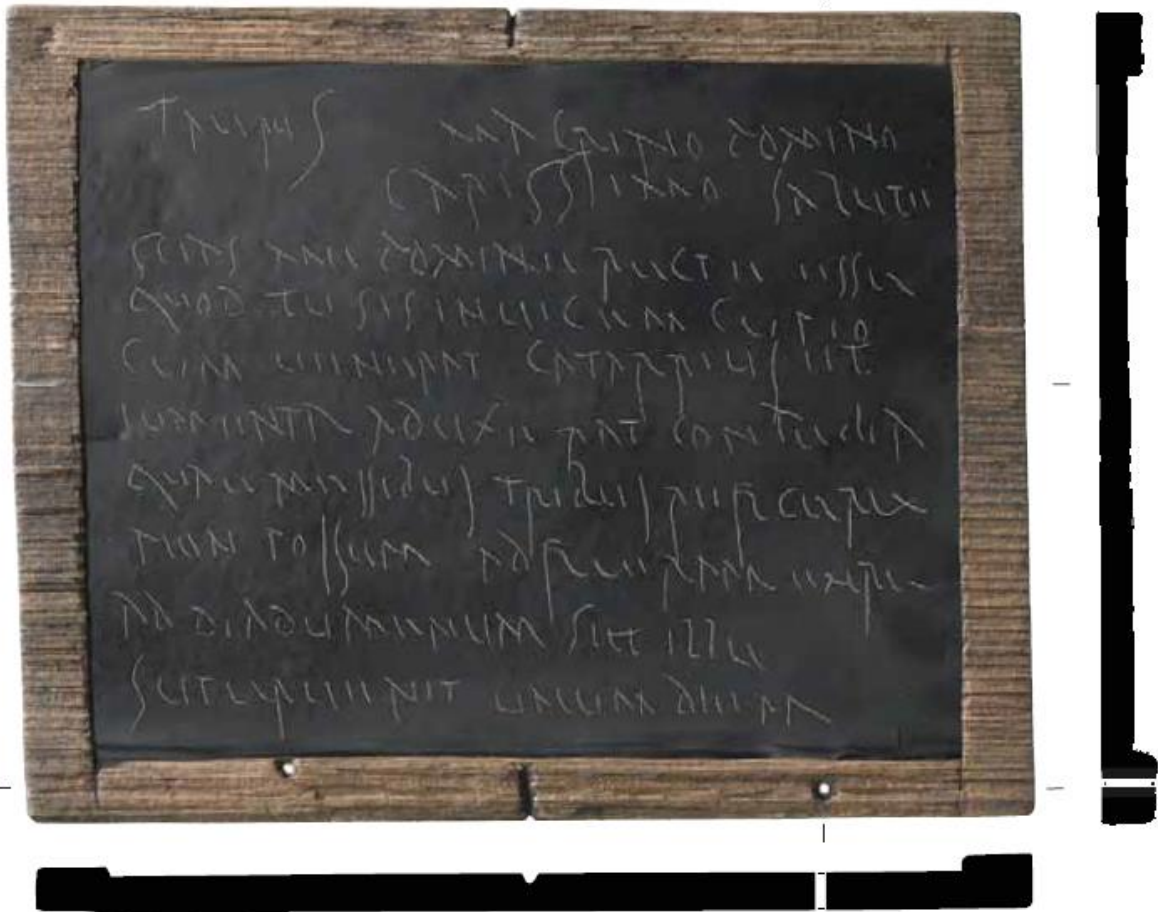


Figure 4: [Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 29](#) as it may have originally appeared; traces of earlier (and/or corrected) text have been removed and lost text conjecturally reconstructed. taurus macrino domino | carissimo salute | scias me domine recte esse | quod tu sis inuicem cupio | cum uenerat catarrus et | iumenta aduxerat conpedia | quae messibus tribus reficere | non possum adfueram ehre | ad diadumenum set ille | superuenit unum diem (Taurus to Macrinus his dearest lord, | greetings. | Know that I am in good health, | which I desire that you are too. | When Catarrus had come and had taken the beasts of burden away, | investments which I cannot | replace in three months, | I was at (the house of) Diadumenus yesterday, | but he (Catarrus arrived unexpectedly for a single day

Photo: Andy Chopping. Text and translation: Roger S. O. Tomlin. © MOLA.²¹ See Appendix, 244.

Type 2 tablets were recessed on both sides, one with a single panel, the other with two panels separated by a space used for the seals of witnesses. In correspondence, two type 1 tablets were hinged using two small holes on one long side to form a diptych; they would be tied together using the two notches in the middle of the long sides with the wax-filled recesses facing each other. On one plain side the addressee's name and sometimes address would be etched in capitals using a

²¹ Tomlin 2016, 16.

pointed stylus.²² In legal and financial documents a type 2 tablet was inserted between two type 1 tablets to form a triptych (see Figure 5).

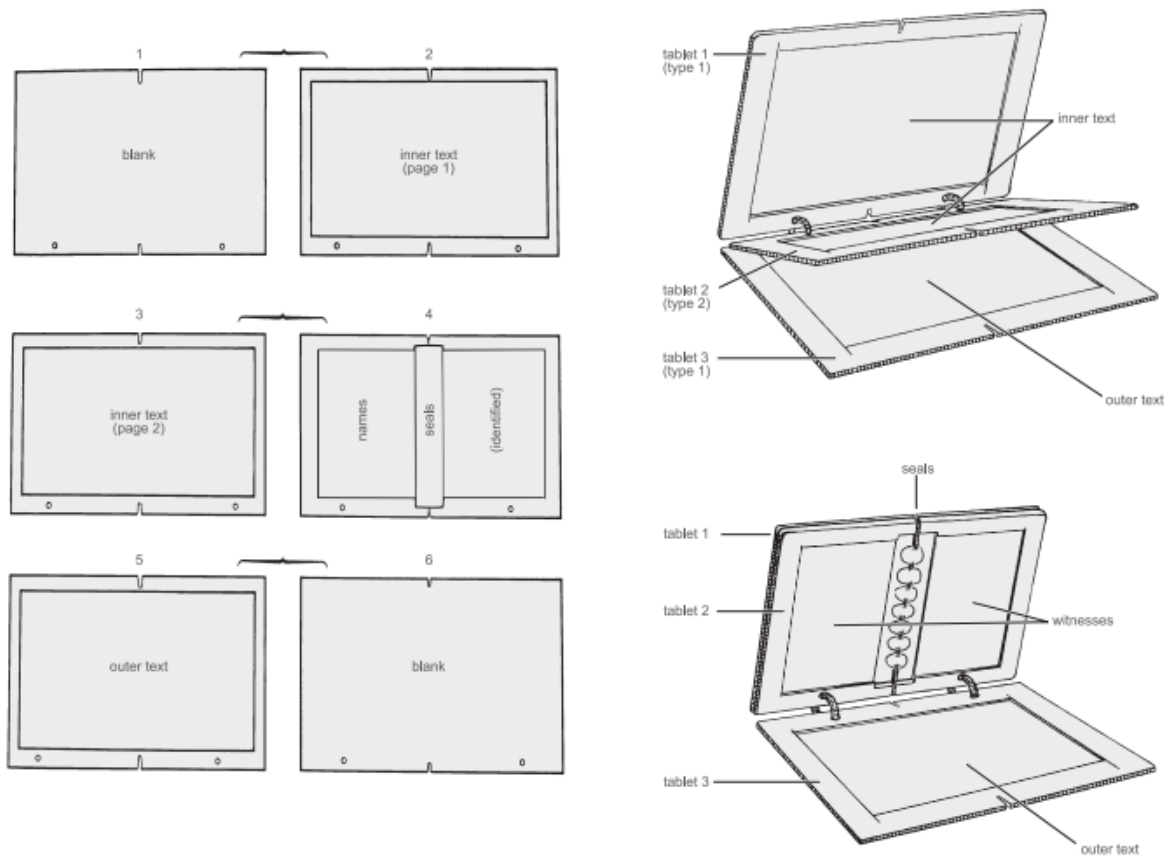


Figure 5: Schematic reconstruction of a triptych used for a legal document – two type 1 tablets enclosing a type 2, hinged together – used for a legal document: left – diagram showing the three tablets; the text was duplicated (inner and outer) and witnesses wrote their names to the left of their seals on the type 2 tablet (on face 4) which enclosed the inner text (faces 2 and 3), their names being identified to the right by patronymic, military subunit, etc (after Tab Vindol 1, 45, fig 9); right – schematic reconstruction (after Speidel 1996, 22, fig 7, adapted for the Bloomberg tablets). © Museum of London Archaeology.²³

The name was in the same way etched on the plain side of tablet one and the start of the document written through the wax on the other side. The rest of the document was written on the single recessed panel of the second (type 2) tablet. The witnesses, often seven in number, would write their names to the left and further identification to the right on the other side of the type 2 tablet, adding their seals once the two tablets had been tied together.²⁴ With the inner text hidden and sealed, a short form of the text would be written on the recessed wax panel of the third tablet. The other plain side would remain blank. All three tablets were hinged and tied together.²⁵

²² Webley 2019; Willi 2021, 49-55.

²³ Tomlin 2016, 24, citing Speidel 1996.

²⁴ The use of a signet ring was a marker of identity and status and indicative of literacy: Marshman 2016, 172, 191.

²⁵ Tomlin 2016, 15–30.

Of the forty-three items of correspondence among the Bloomberg tablets, twenty-five are fragments with an addressee on the plain side. Six use an epistolary formula: e.g. ‘you will give this to Metellus’ (*Metello dabis*);²⁶ sixteen identify the addressee by name.²⁷ Of these two are citizens,²⁸ five are of Celtic origin possibly from Gaul,²⁹ and one possibly has Iberian roots.³⁰ Three people are identified by occupation: Optatus the merchant,³¹ Tertius the ?brewer,³² and Junius the cooper.³³ The specific location of Junius the cooper is identified, opposite (the house of) Catullus.³⁴ Londinium is identified as the destination of three letters,³⁵ of which one is addressed to Mogontius³⁶ and another to [...]inus of tribunician rank.³⁷ Of the remaining eighteen items of correspondence three have little more than the names of the sender, the addressee or a third person³⁸ and two defy classification.³⁹ In one letter Bellus seems to write ‘angrily’,⁴⁰ and in another it appears that ‘Frontinus is able’⁴¹ but nothing else is decipherable. Two have military associations: one refers to Classicus, prefect of the sixth cohort of Nervii. He is probably the Treveran, Julius Classicus who went on to command a cavalry *ara* in the Batavian revolt of 70 CE. A relative of the newly appointed governor of Britain, Julius Classicianus, he was brought in with his auxiliary cohort as reinforcements after the Boudica revolt.⁴² Another names a fort garrisoned in the aftermath of the Boudica revolt, ‘the fort of ?Epocuria’ in ‘(the canton of) the Icenii’, mentioning that Julius Suavis has accepted something for himself.⁴³ The creation of small forts such as this, linked by a network of roads, was the mechanism used to subdue the local peoples.⁴⁴

²⁶ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 1*, Tomlin 2016, 60–61. Cf. 2 (62-63), 4 (66-67), 14 (86-87), 16 (90-91), 24 (106-107).

²⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 1*, Tomlin 2016, 60–61 Metellus. Cf. 2 (62-63) Gratus the son of Junius; 3 (64-65) Tiberius Claudius Danucus, Cornelius S[.]tta ...; 4 (66-67) Luguselus the son of Junius; 5 (68-69) Martialus son of Ambiccus; 6 (70-71) Mogontius; 7 (72-73) Optatus; 8 (74-75) Jucundus son of Flavius; 9 (76-77) Julius; 10 (78-79) Florus; 11 (80-81) Sabinus son of Pirinius; 12 (82-83) Tertius; 13 (84-85) Namatobogius the son of [...][linagius]; 14 (86-87) Junius; 15 (88-89) Atticus; 16 (90-91) Bassus.

²⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 3*, Tomlin 2016, 64–65 Tiberius Claudius Danucus, Cornelius S[.]tta....

²⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 4*, Tomlin 2016, 66–67 Luguselus, Junius (a Latin name concealing a Celtic element). Cf. 5 (68-69) Ambiccus, 6 (70-71) Mogontius, 13 (84-85) Namatobogius.

³⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 11*, Tomlin 2016, 80–81, Pirinius.

³¹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 7*, Tomlin 2016, 72–73: Optato *neg(otiatori)*.

³² *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 12*, Tomlin 2016, 82–83: *Tertio bracea- | uacat rio*. For an explanation of conventions used in transcribing and translating the tablets see Appendix to Chapter 2, 243.

³³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 14*, Tomlin 2016, 86–87: *Iunio cupario*.

³⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 14* Tomlin, 2016, 86–87: *dabes Iunio cupario | contra Catullu*.

³⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 6*, 18, 24, Tomlin 2016, 70–71, 94–95, 106–7.

³⁶ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 6*, Tomlin 2016, 70–71 *Londinio Mogontio*.

³⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 18*, Tomlin 2016, 94–95.

³⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 26*, Tomlin 2016, 110–11, Calventius Ingenuus; 36 (136-137), the Latin Carus, or a Celtic name incorporating *caro-*; 40 (144-145) Nigellio.

³⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 42*, Tomlin 2016, 148–49; 43 (150-151).

⁴⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 28*, Tomlin 2016, 114–15.

⁴¹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 34*, Tomlin 2016, 132–33.

⁴² *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 33*, Tomlin 2016, 130–31.

⁴³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 39*, Tomlin 2016, 142–43. See Map, 220.

⁴⁴ Cf. Guest 2022a, 69.

The remaining five letters have to do with honour and shame in the world of trade and finance: we meet Vialicus, the freedman of Secundio, and hear of the slave of ?Marcus Savius M[...] ... as they negotiate a loan;⁴⁵ Taurus who complains to Macrinus that Catarrus 'had taken the beasts of burden away';⁴⁶ Titus who is in danger of appearing shameful (*turpis*) to his peers;⁴⁷ Atticus who is concerned that someone is slow in paying his debt,⁴⁸ and an unknown person who has concerns about the repayment of a loan.⁴⁹



Figure 6: [Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 44](#): Nerone Claudio Cesare Augusto | Germanico ii L(ucio) Calpurnio Pisone | vacat cō(n)s(ulibus) v̄i Idus Ianuarias vacat | Tibullus Venusti l(ibertus) scripsi et dico me | debere Grato <S>puri l(iberto) (denarios) cu ex{s} pretio | mercis quae uendita et tradita <est> | quam pecuniam ei reddere debeo | eiue⁵⁰ ad quem ea res pertinebit | . . . *In the consulship of Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus for the second time and of Lucius Calpurnius Piso, on the 6th day before the Ides of January (8 January 57 CE). I, Tibullus the freedman of Venustus, have written and say that I owe Gratus the freedman of Spurius 105 denarii from the price of the merchandise which has been sold and delivered. This money I am due to repay him or the person whom the matter will concern ... Site period: 53-60/1 CE. Dated 8 Jan. 57 CE. Photo: Andy Chopping. Drawing: Roger Tomlin, 2016. © MOLA.⁵¹ See Appendix, 247.*

Of the fourteen financial and legal documents, five are loan notes or notes of hand like the *chirographum* of the slave of ?Marcus Savius.⁵² one drawn up by Tibullus, the freedman of Venustus, with Gratus the freedman of Spurius, on 8 January 57 CE;⁵³ another by Atticus addressed to Narcissus (the slave) of Rogatus the Lingonian;⁵⁴ a third promises, in the presence of the bodyguard Rusticus, to act 'in good faith' (*fide*) and refers to 'the principal' and 'the interest' (*sortis siue us{s}urae*),⁵⁵ and a fourth by Communis on 15 March 82 CE;⁵⁶ a fifth retains only the words that

⁴⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 27*, Tomlin 2016, 112–13.

⁴⁶ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 29*, Tomlin 2016, 116–19. Cf. 32 (128-129) for another transaction involving a beast of burden.

⁴⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 30*, Tomlin 2016, 120–23.

⁴⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 31*, Tomlin 2016, 124–27.

⁴⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 35*, Tomlin 2016, 134–35.

⁵⁰ Tomlin identifies this word as *siue*, 'or'.

⁵¹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 44*, Tomlin 2016, 152-155.

⁵² *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 27*, where the note of hand is implied in a letter, Tomlin 2016, 112–13. Cf. 57. In all it seems that 25 tablets have to do with loans.

⁵³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 44*, Tomlin 2016, 152–55.

⁵⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 55*, Tomlin 2016, 178–81.

⁵⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 56*, Tomlin 2016, 182–83. On the reverse of this type 2 document is the name of a witness, Rusticus, the bodyguard.

⁵⁶ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 53*, Tomlin 2016, 174–75.

indicate the loan note can be sold on to a third party, (*a[d] quem ea res | [pertinebit]*).⁵⁷ A contract is drawn up between citizens Marcus Rennis Venustus and Gaius Valerius Proculus on 21 October 62 CE for the delivery of twenty loads of provisions by 13 November from Londinium to Verulamium.⁵⁸ A receipt to do with a farm was drawn up by Florentinus, a slave, on the orders of his master, Sextus Cassius.⁵⁹ Four are fragments with only the date remaining.⁶⁰

Unlike the correspondence, the financial and legal documents would have been tryptichs but only one of the above documents is a type 2 document, naming Rusticus as a witness on the reverse.⁶¹ There are eleven more type 2 tablets which include on the one side lists of witnesses and on the other fragments of the inner text of a legal or financial document. Three appear to have been loan notes,⁶² five have been cancelled, one with a line drawn through the lists of witnesses⁶³ and four with lines drawn through the inner text.⁶⁴ One identifies Attius the son of Optatus at Durobrivae (Rochester, Kent) as a thief and might have been a joke, a parody or ‘even a wooden curse tablet’ against Attius.⁶⁵ Two of the eleven identify witnesses by military rank as cavalrymen: *decuriones* Primus, Billiccus (son) of Vannius,⁶⁶ Longinus, troop of the decurion Mar[...], Agrippa, troop of the decurion Silvanus, Verecundus, troop of the decurion Silvanus.⁶⁷ On the grooved side of one tablet it appears as if an unnamed slave of a named master has been deliberately erased.⁶⁸ Extensive re-use makes it impossible to say what some tablets were for.⁶⁹

⁵⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 54, Tomlin 2016, 176–77. Cf. 44 (152-155) and 55 (178-181).

⁵⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 45, Tomlin 2016, 156–59.

⁵⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 50, Tomlin 2016, 168–69.

⁶⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 46, Tomlin 2016, 160–61; 47 (162-163), 48 (164-165) by someone of the first cohort of Vangiones, 49 (166-167), 52 (172-173).

⁶¹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 56, Tomlin 2016, 182–83.

⁶² *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 61, Tomlin 2016, 194–97; 62 (198-201), use of the word *accepit* ('he has received') suggests a loan note; 64 (204-205); 68 (214-215).

⁶³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 58, Tomlin 2016, 186–89: Vegetus, (son) of Tutor is named on the ungrooved face; Mercator and Reductus are the only names recognised as witnesses.

⁶⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 61, Tomlin 2016, 194–97 'money on loan' is mentioned on the grooved side followed by reference to Primus and Billiccus (son) of Vannius, and to decuriones; 64 (204-205) including (seal) of Audax or Audacius; 65 (206-207), (seal) of Marius, (seal) of Paullus, (seal) of Saccus, (seal) of Verecundus; 68 (214-215), two witnesses are named, Tiberius and ?(son) of Aprilius.

⁶⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 59, Tomlin 2016, 190–91.

⁶⁶ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 61, Tomlin 2016, 194–97.

⁶⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 62, Tomlin 2016, 198–201: the only tablet to follow the usual layout, name to the left of the seal and identification to the right. The word tur(ma) is written differently each time suggesting each witness who was literate wrote their name and identification themselves.

⁶⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 60, Tomlin 2016, 192–93: *ser(u)us*; alternatively Serus might be a rarely found name.

⁶⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 63, Tomlin 2016, 202–3: Abot[...], Iuni[us], Nama[tobogius], Num[...], Surunus are witnesses while the ungrooved face has been extensively re-used; 66 (208-209), Macrinus, Deuillus.

Eight tablets are accounts: on one occasion we see slaves acting as their masters' agents, checking off items as they were paid for, one costing 65 denarii, another 6 denarii;⁷⁰ one is described as 'the account of Crispus' (*ra[t]io Crispi*) and has to do with various items of beer (*ceruesa*), one of which amounts to 7 denarii for 105 units;⁷¹ one speaks either 'of the Romans' or 'of Roman *some things*';⁷² one notes that Ammonicus owed 30 denarii (*(denarius) xxx debet Ammonicus*), mentions 'Pactumeius the son of ?Adenhus', and identifies 106 denarii as the '?total';⁷³ on one tablet all that is left is the numeral 40, *xxxx*;⁷⁴ on another, the barred⁷⁵ numeral 200 (*cc*);⁷⁶ on another unidentifiable barred numbers;⁷⁷ on another it is simply the 'total: 20 denarii' (*acced(unt) (denarii) xx*) that remains.⁷⁸ Such accounts involved correlating the painted labels (*tituli picti*) on containers such as amphorae and barrels used extensively in trade with a written record;⁷⁹ the ubiquity of such trade at this time is indicative of a widespread competence in what might be described as commercial literacy.⁸⁰

Three tablets appear to be writing exercises in literacy and numeracy suggesting the importance of schooling. A type 1 tablet clearly has the letters of the alphabet pricked into the plain side and scratched into the wax surface.⁸¹ Two type 1 tablets were found together, each containing grids and numerals on both the plain recessed sides: it appears they were the two leaves of a diptych.⁸²

Among these tablets are the first writings discovered in Britain that are contemporary with the events narrated in Acts. The following table categorises the tablets in date order and correlates them with passages in Acts.⁸³

⁷⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 70*, Tomlin 2016, 218–19; other items are unchecked; entries follow a standard format: slave's name, master's name, numeral, costing in denarii: ?Catullus the slave of Romanius Faustinus, [name] the slave of Senecio.

⁷¹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 72*, Tomlin 2016, 222–25.

⁷² *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 75*, Tomlin 2016, 230–31.

⁷³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 76*, Tomlin 2016, 232–33.

⁷⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 69*, Tomlin 2016, 216–17.

⁷⁵ *cc* with a line above each *c*. Cf. Cooley 2012, 358.

⁷⁶ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 73*, Tomlin 2016, 226–27.

⁷⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 74*, Tomlin 2016, 228–29.

⁷⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 71*, Tomlin 2016, 220–21.

⁷⁹ Cf. barrel head of wine barrel with markings indicating producer, trader, quantity, and value, Bloomberg, London: with markings: Tomlin 2019, 505–6.

⁸⁰ Woolf 2015, 38–41. Cf. Ferrándiz 2021; Blair et al. 2006, 13 the barrel marked Tiirtius is a possible example.

⁸¹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 79*, Tomlin 2016, 240–43.

⁸² *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 77, 78*, Tomlin 2016, 234–35, 236–39.

⁸³ Tomlin 2016, 5, 288–93. Cf. 31–51; Bruce 1990, 92–95.

1 Poultry/ Bloomberg Period	Date (approx.)	Type	Tab. Lond. Bloomberg Number	Luke-Acts
2 phase 1	43-53 CE	Letters	30	44 CE, Herod Agrippa I dies (Acts 12:23). Paul's travels begin (Acts 13:1-18:28). 51-52 CE, Gallio proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12).
2 phase 2	53-60/61 CE	Letters Financial/Legal	1, 2, 17 44 (57 CE)	Paul's travels continue (Acts 19:1-21:26); Paul taken in Jerusalem (21:27-23:22) and held in Caesarea (Acts 23:23-26:32); 52-59 CE, Felix governor of <i>Iudaea</i> 59-61 CE, Festus governor of <i>Iudaea</i> . Paul taken to Rome (Acts 27:1-28:15).
2 phase 3 (early)	60/61-62 CE	Financial/Legal Alphabet	45 (62 CE) 79	Paul in Rome (Acts 28:16-31).
2 phase 3 (late)	62-65/70 CE	Letters Witnesses list Accounts Numerals	3, 4, 18, 31 58, 59 69 77, 78	60s CE, earliest suggested date for Luke-Acts.
3 phase 1 (early)	65/70-80 CE	Letters Financial/Legal Witnesses list Accounts	5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 46, 47, 54, 55, 56 60, 61, 70, 71, 72	70s-80s CE, middle date
3 phase 1 (late)	80-90/95 CE	Letters Financial/Legal Witnesses list	12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 23, 27, 28, 29, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43 48 (67 CE), 49 (85 CE), 50 (64 CE), 51 (76 CE), 52 (85-95 CE) 62, 63, 64, 65, 66	suggested for Luke-Acts.
3 phase 1 (undifferentiated)	65/70 -90/95 CE	Letters	24	

4 phase 1	90/95 -125 CE	Financial/Legal Witnesses list	53 (82 CE) 67	Early 2nd century CE, late date suggested for Luke- Acts.
Unstratified		Letters Witnesses list	25 68	

Table 4: The Bloomberg tablets compared with Luke-Acts. Note the periods and dates in the first two columns refer to the archaeological context in which the tablets were discovered, offering an approximation of the latest probable date of the tablets themselves.⁸⁴

The Bloomberg tablets are in a similar format to the financial documents of Lucius Caecilius Iucundus in Pompeii, of which 153 are legible,⁸⁵ and of the Sulpicii, the Murecine archive, found outside Pompeii and recording activities in the port of Puteoli.⁸⁶ The financial system we encounter in the Londinium of the Bloomberg tablets would have been familiar to travellers across the empire.⁸⁷

It is impossible to draw a clear distinction between financial and legal documents as many of the former make use of legal terminology. The establishment of Britannia as a province under a consular governor shortly after Claudius' invasion⁸⁸ saw 'the arrival of the codified legal system of Roman law'.⁸⁹ Jurisdiction was the responsibility of the emperor and exercised through the governor who from Vespasian's time acted through a *legatus iuridicus*, of whom five are known and two were legal experts.⁹⁰ While there is no evidence of any code specific to Britannia, the Bloomberg tablets and other stylus tablets from Londinium enable us to glimpse the way Roman provincial law was lived and worked out in practice.⁹¹ According to Paul du Plessis twelve 'have implications for our understanding of the provincial application of Roman law'.⁹² The contract between Venustus and Proculus⁹³ is an instance of *lex locationis*.⁹⁴ The preliminary judgement dated 22 October 76 CE (*praeiudico*) anticipates a full hearing on 9 November to settle a case between Litugenus and Magunus.⁹⁵ One document involves entering into a legal 'undertaking' (*sponsionem / facere*) and

⁸⁴ Tomlin 2016, 5.

⁸⁵ Cooley and Cooley 2004, 181–90.

⁸⁶ Andreau 1999, 71–77.

⁸⁷ Andreau 1999, 50–63.

⁸⁸ Salway 1981, 87–89.

⁸⁹ de la Bédoyère 2016, 66–67.

⁹⁰ C. Salvius Liberalis Nonius Bassus, part of the circle of the younger Pliny, was appointed c. 79 CE; his successor was L. Iavolenus Priscus: S. Frere 1991, 183; for an account of Roman law in Britannia see du Plessis 2020.

⁹¹ du Plessis 2020, 459: there is more evidence in the Vindolanda Tablets and indirectly in the Curse Tablets.

⁹² *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 27, 29, 30, 35, 44, 45, 50, 51, 55, 57, 62, 70: du Plessis 2016.

⁹³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 45, Tomlin 2016, 156–59.

⁹⁴ du Plessis 2006, 80–81.

⁹⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 51, Tomlin 2016, 170–71.

contending in 'judgment' (*iudicio certare*),⁹⁶ while another includes part of a legal formula, *actum* (executed) but nothing more.⁹⁷

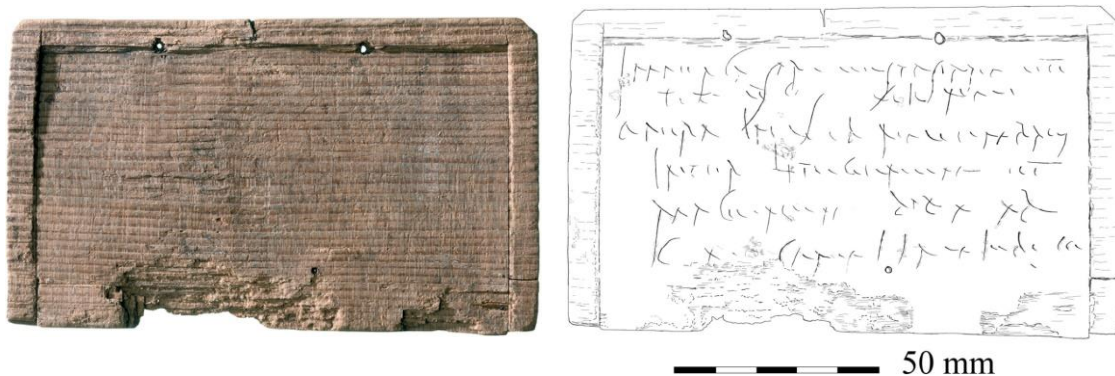


Figure 7: [Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 51](#): imper(atore) Ca[e]sarē Vespasiano uii | Tit[o] u c[o](n)s(ulibus) xi
 K(alendas) Nou(embres) | opera in u Id(us) Nouembres | inter Litugenum et | Magunū data ab | Ca[e]sare
 praeiudico | . . . In the consulship of the Emperor Caesar Vespasian for the seventh time (and) of Titus for the
 fifth time, on the 11th day before the Kalends of November (22 October 76 CE). Responsibility (for the case)
 between Litugenus and Magunus on the 5th day before the Ides of November (9 November) having been given
 by the emperor, my preliminary judgment is [...]. Site period: 80-90/5 CE. Dated 22 Oct. 76 CE.
 Photo: Andy Chopping. Drawing: Roger Tomlin, 2016. © MOLA.⁹⁸ See Appendix, 249.

Stylus writing tablets were important in the execution of Roman law from the period of the republic through to the empire.⁹⁹ Whereas the Greeks had used papyrus, Rome, Italy and then the provinces used stylus writing tablets in the conduct of legal affairs. The triptych, with its inner and outer texts and formulaic language, signed and sealed by around seven witnesses, was characteristic of financial and legal transactions throughout the empire.¹⁰⁰ 'The charge,' for example, 'was generally written down on tablets or mini-tablets (*libelli*); when a case was dismissed, one phrase used was 'tablets shall be destroyed' (*solventur ... tabulae*).'¹⁰¹ Whether in legal or financial documents the written word not only recorded but also effected something real: the loan note, *chirographum*, with its formulaic, *scripsi* (I have written) had actual value and sufficed for payment.

Whether, as Meyer suggests, the use of a similar style of 'inner' and 'outer text' signed by witnesses in so many of the papyri of the Babatha documents from the Cave of Letters by the Dead Sea was a deliberate statement by Babatha and her family, 'adopting the forms she thinks most likely to win

⁹⁶ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 57*, Tomlin 2016, 184–85.

⁹⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 67*, Tomlin 2016, 210–11: a type 2 tablet with identifiers in the second column that could indicate citizenship, or possibly be the patronymics of non-Romans, ... of Mansuetus, ... of Sextus, ... of Neo, ... of Aristus.

⁹⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 51*, Tomlin 2016, 170–71.

⁹⁹ Meyer 2004.

¹⁰⁰ Meyer 2004, 9.

¹⁰¹ *Justinian Digest* II.13.1.1, 'Justinian Digest' 2023.

Roman approval',¹⁰² or as Hannah Cotton argues her practice in a document from 94-99 CE, pre-dating Roman jurisdiction in 106 CE, was simply Nabataean,¹⁰³ the documents have a similar format.¹⁰⁴

In the Bloomberg tablets of first century Londinium we meet 92 persons by name¹⁰⁵ and encounter the legal and financial world that spans the Roman empire. There are Roman and Celtic names, though probably from Gaul rather than Britain; citizens and non-citizens; masters, freedmen, slaves, and slaves of slaves. There are householders, craftworkers, merchants and traders involved in a financial and banking system built on the use of loan notes and dependent on cultural values shared across the empire. There are people involved in transporting goods and at least one person involved in farming; there are officers and troopers from the Roman army and administrators too. All are men. While not an 'archive' in the strictest sense, these letters, financial and legal documents, accounts and writing exercises give a voice to those who lived and did business in Londinium in the second half of the first century CE. They enable us to glimpse their individual lives and the way in which they interacted with each other. People such as these were among the first readers of Luke-Acts.

2.3 Imagining merchants, traders and financiers from first century Londinium

The part slaves and freedmen play in the financial dealings of first century Londinium is glimpsed in what remains of Secundio's letter to his freedman, Vialicus.¹⁰⁶ Secundio asks Vialicus to receive a note of hand, (*chirographum*) of an unnamed slave of a Roman citizen, *M(arci?) S[a]luii M[...].]tandi*. A *chirographum* is, according to the second century Gaius, the hand-written note that serves as a written contract (*litterarum obligatio*) when there is no verbal contract (*stipulatio*) in that person's name.¹⁰⁷ A form of contract appropriate for non-citizens or foreigners (*peregrini*), it serves as a loan or payment for goods or services. In the world of manufacturing, commerce and business slaves could work directly for their master, as their master's agent in a shop or workshop, or for

¹⁰² Meyer 2004, 192–93.

¹⁰³ Cotton 1993; Yadin 2002, pts. 1–4; Esler 2017b, 94–220.

¹⁰⁴ Esler 2017b, 234–53.

¹⁰⁵ Tomlin 2016, 51–57. Another 14 names cannot be recognised, the names of 4 emperors and 8 consuls appear in the dates, and 11 names appear as patronymics.

¹⁰⁶ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 27*, Tomlin 2016, 112–13. Cf. on slavery and the Roman economy: Woolf 2022a, 97–101; on slavery and Roman society: Bradley 1994.

¹⁰⁷ Gaius, *Institutiones* 3.134, '*Institutiones*' 2022: *Praeterea litterarum obligatio fieri uidetur chirografis et syngrafis, id est, si quis debere se aut daturum se scribat, ita scilicet, si eo nomine stipulatio non fiat. quod genus obligationis proprium peregrinorum est* (Furthermore, a liability arisen from a written document is seen to take effect with a document in a person's own handwriting and signed by both parties; that is, if anyone writes that he owes a debt it is thus obvious, even if no verbal contract in his name has taken effect; this type of liability is particularly for foreigners).

themselves managing a *peculium*, an amount of money or property for which they were responsible.¹⁰⁸ Working directly for his master, a slave might have administered the household and its expenses as a steward (*dispensator*), or served as agent, (*servus actor*), perhaps in moneylending.¹⁰⁹

In this instance the unnamed slave is responsible for drawing up the *chirographum* and is acting for Marcus Salvius. The payment of the loan is to be made 'to the freedman Vialicus' (*liberto Vialico*). As a freedman he could act as an agent (*institor*) in his own right. People could lend him money and use him as an intermediary to lend money. The form of address suggests a close relationship with Secundio as former master and now patron.¹¹⁰ Either Vialicus is in partnership with his patron Secundio who asks him to accept the *chirographum* as a loan, perhaps as payment for goods or services; or Vialicus acts as an intermediary for the Roman citizen, Marcus Salvius, who may have been a financier. Andreau suggests that between the aristocracy and those professional men who are 'town dwellers with a specialised trade, such as artisans, traders and bankers', characteristic of pre-industrial societies, there is a third group of entrepreneurs or merchant-financiers involved in money-lending and maritime loans, possibly at high interest. Noting the complexities of Roman financial life and the way money so often passed 'from the wealthy to the slightly less so', Andreau suggests there were deals between professional bankers and between bankers and other kinds of financiers: there were 'various ways lenders and borrowers were brought together sometimes involving professional bankers'.¹¹¹ Amidst all the complexities of this hierarchical world of finance and banking 'usurers and moneylenders must have existed throughout the Empire'.¹¹²

We can imagine Vialicus needing a loan for goods or services he is providing. He turns to Secundio, formerly his master, now his patron, to act as an intermediary with those to whom Vialicus is supplying goods or from whom he is seeking a loan. Secundio has secured a loan from Marcus Salvius who has arranged for his slave to write a *chirographum*, a loan note. Secundio now writes to Vialicus to ascertain whether he is prepared to receive the *chirographum*.

Two other freedmen, Tibullus and Gratus, maintained social and financial links with their former masters now patrons, Venustus and Spurius, perhaps as agents in the world of commerce.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Andreau 1999, chap. 5; Woolf 2022a, 97.

¹⁰⁹ Andreau 1999, 64–67.

¹¹⁰ Andreau 1999, 64. On patronage see Woolf 2022a, 95–97.

¹¹¹ Andreau 1999, 50–60.

¹¹² Andreau 1999, 62–63.

¹¹³ Andreau 1999, 64.

Tibullus had purchased merchandise from Gratus which had now been delivered (*mercis quae uendita et tradita*).¹¹⁴ Having already made a partial payment he completed the transaction and paid the outstanding sum on 8 January 57 CE not in coin but in a note of hand, *chirographum*. In the presence of witnesses he made the legally binding statement, ‘I have written and say that I owe’ (*scripsi et dico me debere*) the sum of 105 denarii ((*denarios*) *cu*), a sizeable amount.¹¹⁵ The signed, witnessed, and sealed document was handed to Gratus in payment. Tibullus was now in debt to Gratus but he allowed for the possibility that the *chirographum* might be sold on or sub-contracted to a third party, using the legal formula, ‘this money I am due to repay him or the person to whom the matter will concern’ (*quam pecuniam ei reddere debeo | eiue*¹¹⁶ *ad quem ea res pertinebit*). Either Gratus or that third party, perhaps one of the ubiquitous moneylenders, would be able to call in the debt at some time in the future.¹¹⁷ It is to be hoped for Tibullus’s sake that they would act fairly and not seek an excessive profit!¹¹⁸

Unlike Tibullus and Gratus, Atticus and Narcissus are both slaves, working directly in the service of their masters or as their master’s agents in a shop or workshop.¹¹⁹ We can imagine the moment Atticus, unable to write himself, has a scribe write out a *chirographum* assuring Narcissus (in his own right or acting for Rogatus), that he will pay the principal of the loan plus any interest (*[et] sor[tem] et eorum u[s]{s}uras*) ‘properly managed’ in ‘good (coin)’ (*probos recte | curare*).¹²⁰ He further emphasises his reliability by stating that he has made this promise ‘properly, truly and faithfully’ (*[rec]tę [p]robę dari fide promis{it}*). The wording implies that the loan may be passed on to someone else (*eiue ad quem ea res pertinebit*). As many as seven witnesses, scrutinise the document, check that the inner text corresponds to the outer text and add their names and seals. The loan note is now ready to be taken to Narcissus as he acts for Rogatus, a Lingonian, perhaps a cavalryman in a recently formed auxiliary cohort of Lingonians, serving alongside cohorts of Nervii and of Vangiones.¹²¹ That Atticus is a man of honour is emphasised throughout: explicit reference to good coin and to proper, true, and faithful dealing is a reminder that shameful conduct is always a

¹¹⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44, Tomlin 2016, 152–55.

¹¹⁵ Approximately £8,753 based on an 8 hour day at a rate of £10.42 per hour, the full UK living wage, April 2023. See Reece 2002, 110. Reece refers to Matt 20:1-16 where a labourer is paid one denarius for a day’s wage, on this basis £83.36.

¹¹⁶ Tomlin’s translation identifies this word as *sive*, ‘or’.

¹¹⁷ The same formula appears in *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 54 and 55: Tomlin 2016, 176–77 and 178–81. It also appears in two other tablets from the Walbrook: *RIB* 2(4) no. 2443.15, S. S. Frere and Tomlin 1992; and Tomlin 2003.

¹¹⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44, Tomlin 2016, 152–55.

¹¹⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 55, Tomlin 2016, 178–81.

¹²⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 55, Tomlin 2016, 178–81. Cf. *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 56, Tomlin 2016, 182–83.

¹²¹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 55, Tomlin 2016, 178–81. Cf. *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 33 (Nervii) and 48 (Vangiones).

possibility. Subsequently, the loan was settled and the *chirographum* cancelled as two lines were scored along the diagonals of the tablet. It is not clear whether such lines effected the cancellation of the loan or were ‘merely a visual representation of the fact that it is no longer in force’ ensuring it will no longer be used.¹²²

Witnesses of a legal or financial transaction, such as the cavalrymen, Longinus, Agrippa and Verecundus,¹²³ Rusticus, the bodyguard (*singu[?laris]*),¹²⁴ Verecundus, Marus, Paullus, and Saccus,¹²⁵ had clearly written in their own hand suggesting that each was expected to write their own name and add their own seal.

In financial documents such as these we can see that the empire-wide system of finance, commerce, and banking, with its comparatively high level of literacy, had arrived as Londinium was being established. Yet within a couple of years of Tibullus handing his *chirographum* to Gratus it seemed in danger. What had become the capital of Claudius and Nero’s Britannia, Camulodunum, together with Verulamium and Londinium, had fallen to Boudica.¹²⁶ The revolt, however, was short-lived: the Bloomberg evidence suggests the reconstruction of Londinium began, and commerce and trade resumed, immediately.¹²⁷

In Marcus Rennis Venustus and Gaius Valerius Proculus we meet two Roman citizens who follow the *lex locationis*¹²⁸ and enter into a contract for the delivery of goods following an earlier part payment.¹²⁹ On 12 October 62 CE Venustus contracts with Proculus that ‘he bring from Verulamium by the ides of November (13 November) twenty loads of provisions at a transport-charge of one quarter denarius for each’ (*uť intra | Idus Nouembres perferret a [Londi] | Verulamio penoris onera uiginti | in singula (denarii) quadrans uecturae*). A condition is attached, though difficult to decipher: an initial part payment will be followed by the full payment once the final load is delivered. While another tablet refers to the use of beasts of burden, *iumenta*,¹³⁰ these loads were probably conveyed in a wagon. This is a vivid cameo of the way business was conducted and transport

¹²² Cotton 1994, 66. On coin production in Claudian Britain, see Box 1999.

¹²³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 62, Tomlin 2016, 198–201.

¹²⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 56, Tomlin 2016, 182–83.

¹²⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 65, Tomlin 2016, 206–7.

¹²⁶ For Iceni, see Map; Camulodunum, see Map, 203; Verulamium, see Map, 202; Londinium, see Map, 201.

¹²⁷ Tomlin 2016, 55–56.

¹²⁸ du Plessis 2006, 80–81.

¹²⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 45, Tomlin 2016, 156–59.

¹³⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 29, Tomlin 2016, 116–19. For reconstruction, see above, 44, figure 4.

arrangements made, not least in the picture it gives of a traveller regularly making the thirty-five kilometre journey between Verulamium and Londinium.¹³¹

If Tertius the brewer (*bracearius*)¹³² was the Domitius Tertius who is the addressee of a Carlisle stylus tablet we glimpse long-distance trade with the military on the northern frontier.¹³³ The appearance of the name Tertius on the base of a barrel dated c. 63 CE¹³⁴ suggests that he was in business with Iunius the cooper (*cupario*), who lived opposite (the house of) Catullus.¹³⁵ Keeping accounts was important in such a business. The account (*ratio*) of Crispus, perhaps a tavern owner, records dealings in beer (*ceruesa*)¹³⁶ involving a named agent, Butus.¹³⁷ Exploring the Celtic roots of *bracearius* and *ceruesa*, Adams suggests this was ‘an activity drawn from the local population’.¹³⁸ That Londinium’s traders were involved with local people is evident from another tablet that relates to trade with a local farm: in September or November, 64 CE Florentinus, slave to the citizen, Sextus Cassius [...]tus, wrote as his agent, at the order of his master (*scrips[i] iussu domini*), acknowledging receipt of two payments of rent (*pensiones*) from a farm (*fundo*).¹³⁹

The people of the Bloomberg tablets are all men. Enslaved women are mentioned in two other Walbrook tablets. A deed of sale on a stylus tablet discovered in nearby 1 Poultry records the purchase of a Gallic slave girl, Fortunata, for 600 denarii by Vegetus, assistant slave of Montanus, the slave of the August Emperor (Domitian or Trajan), and sometime assistant slave of Iucundus (*Vegetus Montani imperatoris Aug(usti) ser(vi) Iucundiani vic(arius)*).¹⁴⁰ This implies the presence in Londinium of slaves and freedmen involved in the administration of the province. He had bought and received Fortunata by means of mancipation (*emit mancipioque accepit*), ‘an archaic Roman survival older than coinage, in which the purchaser asserted his ownership in the presence of the vendor, five witnesses, and a man holding the scales which notionally weighed out the purchase

¹³¹ See Antonine Itinerary, Route II where the mileage is recorded as 21 Roman miles, and the real distance, 22 miles (35 kilometres): B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 25. Verulamium, see Map, 202; Londinium, see Map, 201.

¹³² *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 12, Tomlin 2016, 82–85; *bracearius* seems to derive from a Celtic word that has come down into modern Welsh, *bragdy*, Adams 2003, 562–63.

¹³³ *RIB* 2443.4, found in a late Flavian context addressed to Domitius Tertius, brewer, at Carlisle: S. S. Frere and Tomlin 1992, 14.

¹³⁴ The barrel was re-used at the base of Well 1 discovered at 30 Gresham Street: Blair et al. 2006, 13.

¹³⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 14, Tomlin 2016, 86–87.

¹³⁶ Another Celtic word evident in modern Welsh as *cwrw*. Cf. J. N. Adams 2003, 563; J. N. Adams 1995.

¹³⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 72, Tomlin 2016, 222–25.

¹³⁸ J. N. Adams 2003, 563.

¹³⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 50, Tomlin 2016, 168–69. Cf. on slaves in the context of the agrarian economy: Woolf 2022a, 98–100.

¹⁴⁰ £50,016 in April 2023, see above, 2.3: 55, note 115. Tomlin 2003.

price.¹⁴¹ The ‘girl in question’ was ‘transferred in good health’ (*sanam traditam*) and was ‘warranted not to be liable to wander or run away’ (*esse erronem fugitivam non esse praestari*).¹⁴² In another Walbrook tablet discovered in 1927 ‘the writer gives instructions to ‘turn that girl into cash’ (*diligenter cura(m) agas ut Mam puellam ad nummum redigas*).¹⁴³ This tablet confirms the impression of a stylus writing tablet discovered near the Walbrook at Lothbury in 1927 that there was a trade in slaves, including slave girls, in Britannia.¹⁴⁴

Such a world functions best where honour is upheld, and shame is scorned. In the Bloomberg correspondence there is evidence of frustration and anger at the failings of others. Bell[...]us is provoked to respond ‘angrily ...’ (*rogo irate ...*).¹⁴⁵ Taurus complains to Macrinus whom he greets as ‘his dearest lord’ (*Taurus [[Taurinus]] Macrino domino | vacat [ca]riss[imo] salute<m>*) that Catarrus ‘had taken the beasts of burden away’ (*iumenta aduxerat*). That meant for Taurus the loss of investments that could not be replaced within three months (*conpe<n>dia | quae messibus tribus reficere | non possum [?adf]ueram*). To make matters worse Catarrus had arrived unexpectedly for a single day while Taurus was staying ‘at (the house) of Diadumenus’ (*a[d D]iadumenum se[et] ille | superuenit unum diem*).¹⁴⁶ Someone whose name is lost had given 200 denarii as a deposit (*arram*) when making a purchase and had been prompted to write a letter requesting that the recipient hand over what he owes perhaps because of a late payment.¹⁴⁷ There is an urgency on the part of Atticus in requesting that his correspondent should hand over ‘the 26 denarii in *victoriati*’, a coin of the eastern empire worth half a denarius and no longer minted (*quam primum mit|tas (denarios) uiginti sex in uictoriat(is)*). The correspondence was perhaps between two partners who had stored coins for their value and may indicate trade with Greek cities of the east.¹⁴⁸ The importance of bread and of salt is suggested in the way he introduces his request, ‘I ask you by bread and salt’ (*rogo [te] per panem et sal|em*).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴¹ Tomlin 2003, 47. Cf. du Plessis 2020, 450.

¹⁴² Tomlin 2003.

¹⁴³ *RIB 2443.7*: Tomlin 2003, 49–50.

¹⁴⁴ *RIB 2443.7* S. S. Frere and Tomlin 1992, 15.

¹⁴⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 28*, Tomlin 2016, 114–15.

¹⁴⁶ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 29*, Tomlin 2016, 116–19. For reconstruction, see above, 44, figure 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 35*, Tomlin 2016, 134–35.

¹⁴⁸ One *victoriatus* has been reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme in the St Albans Area: ‘Record [ID: BH-1DD9E4](#) - Victoriatus’ 2022.

¹⁴⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 31*, Tomlin 2016, 124–27. Cf. *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 15*, 55, Tomlin 2016, 88–89, 178–81, where the name Atticus also appears.

In the earliest of the Bloomberg tablets (43-53 CE) we meet Titus, a financier who is in danger of losing his honour.¹⁵⁰ The inner face of the tablet contains part of a letter that is addressed to Titus on the outer (plain) face; it calls him to task as a money lender. The first part speaks of him gaining a reputation in the forum for his money lending (. . . / ¹ *quia per forum totum | gloriantur se te faene/ras<s>ed*). The writer goes on to warn Titus in no uncertain terms: ‘Therefore I ask you in your own interest not to appear *turpis* ... you will not thus favour your own affairs ...’ (*itaque te rogo tua | causa ne tu turpis appar<e> | as in ...cus non sic | res tuas ?ama[bis] | et.pu[?]a[s] traces*). *Turpis* is the antithesis of honour, referring to shameful, disgraceful or dishonourable conduct and to people guilty of disgraceful behaviour.¹⁵¹ It is a word used in the Vulgate in Titus 1:11 and I Peter 5:2 (αἰσχρότης: *turpis*) and translated graphically by William Tyndale as ‘filthy’ and in the NRSV as ‘sordid’. With the world of finance and commerce the Romans have brought to Britain not only the world of literacy and patronage in business affairs but also the world of honour and shame. It is a world we are familiar with from the eastern Mediterranean.¹⁵²

It is a world underpinned by a framework of law. In the record of legal action by someone who has ‘judicial authority’ (*iudicio certare*)¹⁵³ reference to an ‘undertaking’ (*sponsionem*) and the ‘management’ (*procuratorem*) of the case suggest some kind of economic and financial activity¹⁵⁴ that has to do with ‘aspects of legal representation’.¹⁵⁵ According to Justinian’s *Digest* ‘commercial agents’ (*institores*) were ‘often though not always slaves’ and ‘personal agents’ (*procuratores*) were ‘mostly free people of higher standing’.¹⁵⁶ As personal agents they ‘received instructions (*procuratio*) of a more general nature, and ... were given a general remit to manage someone’s affairs’; liability in the event of a dispute depended on the identity of the agent as *institor* or *procurator* and the nature of the contract.¹⁵⁷ That the fragmentary *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 57* has to do with a *procuratio* suggests that it was a key document in such a case establishing the relationship between two parties to a contract. This is an example of a first-century real-life situation codified by Ulpian (third century) and included in Justinian’s *Digest* (sixth century CE).

¹⁵⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 30*, Tomlin 2016, 120–23.

¹⁵¹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 30*, Tomlin 2016, 122, Tomlin’s translation, shabby, does not do justice to the force of the word *turpis*: OLD 1968, 1994: 3, 4.

¹⁵² Malina 2001, chap. 1.

¹⁵³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 57*, Tomlin 2016, 184–85.

¹⁵⁴ Tomlin 2016, 56.

¹⁵⁵ du Plessis 2016.

¹⁵⁶ du Plessis 2012, 55ff.

¹⁵⁷ du Plessis 2012, 58–59.

Another legal document includes the formal introduction to a ‘preliminary judgment’ (*praeiudicium*) by a judge appointed by the provincial governor, Sextus Iulius Frontinus, or by the *legatus iuridicus*, in the name of the emperor Vespasian.¹⁵⁸ Dated 22 October 76 CE, it anticipates litigation between Litugenus and Magenus coming to court on 9 November. It would appear from the reference to delegating ‘responsibility for (hearing a case)’ (*operam dare*) that Londinium did not have the right to appoint magistrates at this time and so ‘jurisdictional competence’¹⁵⁹ lay with the emperor and would have been exercised by his representative, the provincial governor,¹⁶⁰ through his deputy (*legatus iuridicus*) who had responsibility for legal matters.¹⁶¹ That Litugenus and Magenus were non-Romans with Celtic names, probably from Gaul, suggests that non-Romans had access to the Roman legal system.¹⁶²

A stylus tablet discovered beside the Walbrook c. 500 metres to the north, dated 14 March 118 CE¹⁶³ records the resolution of a dispute over ownership of the five acre wood Verlucionium in Kent following a formal visit of the judge and the parties to the dispute (*cum ventum esset in rem praesentem*). It implies the formal registration of land in an earlier period, possibly after its confiscation during the Roman occupation of Britannia.¹⁶⁴ The wood had been acquired by Valerius Silvinus (or an earlier owner) and purchased in good faith by Julius Bellicus whose entitlement to the land was now being challenged in an action that ‘might have been brought by the Procurator asserting the Emperor’s rights’, by another private person or by the ‘*vicus* or *civitas* asserting a claim to land within its boundaries.’¹⁶⁵ In an alternative interpretation, Du Plessis suggests it ‘may have been the field notes of a land surveyor who was assessing the extent of the land for the purposes of land tax in the context of its recent sale.’¹⁶⁶ In either case, the identification of the land with reference to two neighbouring portions of land and an adjacent road, together with the format of the document with its sealed inner and unsealed outer pages, makes this document similar to the property deed of a date orchard belonging to Babatha on the shores of the Dead Sea.¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 51, Tomlin 2016, 170–71; S. Frere 1991, 183; du Plessis 2020, 441–42.

¹⁵⁹ du Plessis 2016.

¹⁶⁰ Tomlin 2016, 170; Hingley 2018, 68ff. de la Bédoyère 2013, 83–91: see 87 for a list of governors.

¹⁶¹ du Plessis 2020, 441–42; S. Frere 1991, 183.

¹⁶² du Plessis 2020, 442.

¹⁶³ [RIB 2443.19](#), 14 March 118 CE. Found in 1986 in a second century Roman embankment east of the Walbrook at Throckmorton Street, c. 500 m to the north of the Bloomberg site.

¹⁶⁴ Tomlin 1996a. See Map, 221.

¹⁶⁵ Tomlin 1996a, 213–14.

¹⁶⁶ du Plessis 2020, 14.

¹⁶⁷ P. Yadin 2: Esler 2017b, chaps. 5–7; Lewis 1989, 65–70. See above, 1.1: 4.

The formality of the legal and financial documents demonstrates the importance of the written word in the world of finance and of law:¹⁶⁸ a written document made real a payment in lieu of coinage, a contract for the purchase of merchandise or services and the decision of a court. Such written documents were authenticated by witnesses who wrote their own names and then sealed them.¹⁶⁹ This was a society built on debt that depended on honour and was established on patronage and slavery with relationships characterised by reciprocity.

Given that life was lived in the public eye, honour has been defined as ‘the value of a person in his or her own eyes *plus* that person’s value in the eyes of his or her social group’: it can be regarded as ‘a commodity accumulated by people in public life to increase their worth’ and as such is ‘a limited good’ that can be ‘ascribed at birth’ and/or ‘achieved (and lost) throughout one’s lifetime’,¹⁷⁰ as Titus knew only too well.¹⁷¹

If honour was the pivotal social value, kinship was the central social institution.¹⁷² Relationships can be described in terms of ‘reciprocity’.¹⁷³ The Bloomberg tablets do not include personal correspondence and so there is no direct evidence of that ‘generalised reciprocity’ which is characteristic of family and other relationships in which the interests of the ‘other’ are paramount. That would have been evident in the households and military communities we glimpse in the Bloomberg tablets and see in the extensive use of *frater* and *soror* in the Vindolanda correspondence.¹⁷⁴

The financial and legal documents among the Bloomberg tablets reflect that ‘balanced reciprocity’ that underpins trade and commerce and looks to an equivalent benefit for both parties to a contract or agreement. The legal proceedings have to do with instances of its breakdown. In one tablet we see two contrasting forms of reciprocity side by side.¹⁷⁵ As they engage in a commercial transaction Tibullus and Gratus appear to be social equals in a relationship of ‘balanced reciprocity’; so too are their former masters, Venustus and Spurius. It would appear, however, that Venustus is in a

¹⁶⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44-57, Tomlin 2016, 152–85; Meyer 2015; Meyer 2004. Another legal document dated to the late second or third century has to do with property ownership: *RIB* 2443.13, S. S. Frere and Tomlin 1992, 18–19.

¹⁶⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 58-68, Tomlin 2016, 186–215.

¹⁷⁰ Crook 2004, 67; citing MacMullen 1974, 62.

¹⁷¹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 30, Tomlin 2016, 120–23.

¹⁷² Crook 2004, 68. Cf. Malina and Neyrey 1991.

¹⁷³ Crook 2004, 54–59; Neyrey 1991b, 371–73.

¹⁷⁴ See below, 3.4.3: 113, notes 195, 196.

¹⁷⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44, Tomlin 2016, 152–55.

relationship of 'negative reciprocity' with his former slave Tibullus, as is Spurius with his former slave Gratus. The implication is that they have exchanged goods that do not share equal value: theirs is a relationship of unequal status whereby one party remains subservient to the other. It is in this sense that Venustus and Spurius may be said to be patrons of Tibullus and Gratus respectively in that they have exchanged goods and services for honour, gratitude, and loyalty.¹⁷⁶

A more extreme form of 'negative reciprocity' forms part of the background to first century Londinium and in many ways is the elephant in the room. It is essentially self-centred, be it on the part of an individual or a group and involves a relationship in which one party seeks to benefit at the expense of the other, cheating them 'out of a balanced exchange'.¹⁷⁷ According to Cassius Dio it was 'the confiscation of the large sums of money that Claudius had given to the foremost Britons' that contributed to the Boudica revolt. Decianius Catus, the procurator of the island, maintained they were loans which 'were to be paid back'. To make matters worse, Seneca 'lent to the islanders 40,000,000 sesterces that they did not want', hoping to receive 'a good rate of interest'; when, however, he demanded repayment of the loan all at once he 'resorted to severe measures in exacting it'.¹⁷⁸ Local peoples had been involved in trade with Rome since the time of Julius Caesar's expeditions to Britain (55 and 54 BCE); many, such as those responsible for the farm we read of in the Bloomberg tablets,¹⁷⁹ were part of the trading arrangements that were built on balanced reciprocity. However, the loans described by Cassius Dio are evidence of a 'negative reciprocity' that implies 'the economic exploitation of Britain and the Britons'.¹⁸⁰ Boudica's rebellion came to nought, the social and economic structures characterised by honour and shame, patronage and slavery and relationships of reciprocity were quickly re-established. The tensions arising from such 'negative reciprocity', however, continued to simmer.

2.4 Imagining Luke-Acts in the familiar world of Londinium

It was in the context of this kind of society, that Luke-Acts would have first circulated. Whether it was written for a particular individual or for a general readership, for a community that had roots among the *Iudaei* or the Romans, for a specific community or for all such communities, Luke-Acts was read by followers of the Way of Jesus from all strata of society.¹⁸¹ They would have counted

¹⁷⁶ Crook 2004, 56–58; citing Stegemann and Stegemann 1999.

¹⁷⁷ Crook 2004, 55–56; citing Sahlins 1972, 195; and Stegemann and Stegemann 1999.

¹⁷⁸ Cassius Dio LXII.2, Cary and Foster 1914ff., Vol. VIII, 83. The equivalent of £830,000,000 today, see above, 55, note 115.

¹⁷⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 50, Tomlin 2016, 168–69.

¹⁸⁰ D. J. Mattingly 2007, 293.

¹⁸¹ See above, 1.4.4: 17-18.

among their number local people as well as craftworkers like Tertius, householders like Catullus, tavern owners like Crispus, transport organisers like Marcus Rennius Venustus, Roman officers like Longinus, slaves like Florentinus and Fortunata, freedmen like Tibullus, patrons like Venustus and others involved in their world of commerce, finance, business and law. Our imagined readers of Luke-Acts would discover that many passages relate directly to the world they were familiar with beside the Walbrook in first century Londinium.

2.4.1 Orientation, location and the role of eyewitnesses

The opening of Luke-Acts serves to orient readers from the outset. Whether or not the people we encounter in the Bloomberg tablets would have recognised a formal preface characteristic of biographical writing¹⁸² or of scientific or technical handbooks,¹⁸³ they would have valued Luke's introductory words dedicated to 'to the most excellent Theophilus' (κράτιστε Θεόφιλε: *optime Theophile* Luke 1:3; cf. Acts 1:1).¹⁸⁴ This is the language of honour and patronage that Taurus knew well as he wrote to 'Macrinus his dearest lord' (*Macrino domino | vacat [ca]riss[imo]*):¹⁸⁵ it would suggest Luke-Acts was written for people such as themselves who were 'not without means' and who 'enjoyed a certain social prestige'.¹⁸⁶ Among those who followed the Way of Jesus it would be reassuring to find centurions in Capernaum, Jerusalem and Caesarea (Luke 7:1-10, 23:47; Acts 10:1-11:18; 22:25-26; 23:23; 24:23; 27:1-44), householders and traders in Joppa, Philippi and Corinth (Acts 9:43; 16:14,40; 18:2,7), and people from their world of finance and trade in the stories of Jesus (Luke 7:41-43; 10:29-37; 12:41-46; 16:1-13; 19:1-10; 19:11-27).

The disputes between Cattarius and Taurus,¹⁸⁷ Litugenus and Magunus,¹⁸⁸ and Lucius Julius Bellicus and Titus Valerius Silvinus¹⁸⁹ would have required the kind of careful investigation Luke alludes to when he describes 'deciding 'after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account' (ἔδοξε κάμοι παρηκολουθηκότι ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι: *visum est et mihi adsecuto a principio omnibus diligenter ex ordine tibi scribere*, Luke 1:3). In the resolution of each of those cases the testimony of witnesses would have been sought: financial and legal

¹⁸² Burrige 2018, 157–58, 189: 'Luke's use of a preface can be paralleled in Lucian and Philo, who have a paragraph each, and in Isocrates, Tacitus and Philostratus, who all have a more extended prologue'.

¹⁸³ Alexander 1986; Wolter 2016, 43.

¹⁸⁴ The use of the Vulgate alongside the Greek text and NRSV in biblical quotations (a practice adopted throughout this dissertation) gives an approximate indication of how these texts would have been understood in a Latin speaking context. See above, 1.4: 15, notes 107, 108.

¹⁸⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 29. Cf. the ink tablet 185: Tomlin 2016, 116–19, 282–83.

¹⁸⁶ Wolter 2016, 52.

¹⁸⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 29, Tomlin 2016, 116–19.

¹⁸⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 51, Tomlin 2016, 170–71.

¹⁸⁹ *RIB* 2443.19, Tomlin 1996a.

documents had legal force as they were witnessed by people such as Marius, Paullus, Saccus and Verecundus.¹⁹⁰ Our imagined readers would have realised the importance of a written account informed by those who had seen for themselves from the beginning, οἱ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται: *qui ab initio ipsi viderunt* (Luke 1:1-4).¹⁹¹ They would have recognised the authority of those Jesus spoke of as ‘my witnesses’ (μου μάρτυρες *mihi testes*) in Jerusalem, Judea and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; cf. Luke 24:48); the part played by ‘witnesses’ as the story of the first followers of the Way was told;¹⁹² and the key part played by those who had been ‘witnesses’ from the very start (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8, 22).¹⁹³

The implication of what Luke writes is that Theophilus had already been instructed in the Way of Jesus but the purpose of Luke’s writing is to establish the ‘truth’ (ἀσφάλεια: *veritas*) of the matter (Luke 1:4) in a way that is convincing, giving a sense of ‘certainty’ to something that has already been grasped.¹⁹⁴ More than historical veracity is at stake.¹⁹⁵ It is as if Theophilus is presented with something that will give him the ‘assurance’¹⁹⁶ that it is possible for him to be part of this movement while at the same time challenging him to live according to Luke’s presentation of its Way. Encountering Luke-Acts as followers of the Way of Jesus, our imagined readers would not only be reassured that people of their standing were part of that movement but also challenged to follow the Way of Jesus as presented by Luke.

We can imagine them noticing things from the world they were familiar with. They were accustomed to using wooden writing tablets in keeping accounts and in correspondence: they would know exactly the kind of thing Zechariah requested when he asked for a writing tablet (πινακίδιον: *pugilaris* Luke 1:63). Luke lays down two markers at the very outset that establish the place and time of his narrative (Luke 1:5 and 3:1). His extended narrative around the birth of Jesus happens ‘in the days of King Herod of Judea’ (ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας: *in diebus Herodis regis Iudaeae* Luke 1:5) and his account of all that Jesus did and taught (cf. Acts 1:1) is dated in a way familiar to Tibullus and Marcus Rennius Venustus:¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 65, Tomlin 2016, 206–7.

¹⁹¹ Bauckham 2006, 116–24.

¹⁹² Bauckham 2006, 271–79.

¹⁹³ Cf. Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39, 43; 13:31; 23:11.

¹⁹⁴ Green 1997, 45.

¹⁹⁵ Wolter 2016, 53.

¹⁹⁶ Fitzmyer 1970, 300; Esler 1987, 222.

¹⁹⁷ See especially: *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44 (8 January 57 CE); 45 (21 October 62 CE); 50 (64 CE); 48 (67 CE); 51 (22 October 76 CE); 53 (15 March 82 CE); 49 (2-6 October 85 CE); 52 (85 CE or later), *RIB* 2443.19 (14 March 118 CE).

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler, tetrarch, of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler, tetrarch, of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler, tetrarch, of Abilene
 Ἐν ἔτει δὲ πεντεκαίδεκάτῳ τῆς ἡγεμονίας Τιβερίου Καίσαρος, ἡγεμονεύοντος Ποντίου Πιλάτου τῆς Ἰουδαίας, καὶ τετρααρχούντος τῆς Γαλιλαίας Ἡρώδου, Φιλίππου δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ τετρααρχούντος τῆς Ἰτουραίας καὶ Τραχωνίτιδος χώρας, καὶ Λυσανίου τῆς Ἀβιληνῆς τετρααρχούντος
anno autem quintodecimo imperii Tiberii Caesaris procurante Pontio Pilato Iudaeam tetrarcha autem Galilaeae Herode Philippo autem fratre eius tetrarcha Itureae et Trachonitidis regionis et Lysania Abilinae tetrarcha (Luke 3:1)

The 67 *IVDAEA CAPTA* coins reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme¹⁹⁸ since 1995¹⁹⁹ suggest our imagined readers would quite possibly have an awareness of *Iudaea* following the defeat of the rebellion in 70 CE. The likes of Rogatus who is described as a Lingonian (*Lingonus*)²⁰⁰ and Classicus, a prefect of the cohort of the Nervians (*Nervii*)²⁰¹ would associate those described in Luke-Acts as Ἰουδαῖοι: *Iudaei* with people rooted in and adopting the customs of *Iudaea*. The use of *Iudaei* (Ἰουδαῖοι) and *Iudaea* (Ἰουδαία) throughout this dissertation is a reminder of the analogous use of terms such as *Lingonus* and *Nervii*.²⁰² Even if they had no further knowledge of the *Iudaei* and their practices, the narrative of Luke-Acts contains within itself sufficient to give some rudimentary understanding of their practices, ritual and sacred texts. Our imagined readers are introduced to the temple, the God (θεός: *deus*) and Lord (κύριος: *dominus*), and rituals of the *Iudaei* at the very outset in Luke 1:6 and in 1-2, and to key moments in their history in Acts 7:2-53.

2.4.2 Honour restored in the cancellation of debts

When a Pharisee was shocked at the way ‘a woman ... who was a sinner’ poured oil from an ‘alabaster jar of ointment’ over the feet of Jesus during a meal, Jesus spoke of a moneylender (δανιστής: *enerator*) and two debtors (χρεοφειλέται: *debitores*), one of whom owed 500 denarii and the other 50 denarii (Luke 7:41-42). This was the world of our imagined readers in which loans for similar sums of money were fully documented.²⁰³ They were all too aware of the need for someone

¹⁹⁸ The Portable Antiquities Scheme is run by the British Museum and Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales to encourage the recording of archaeological objects found by members of the public in England and Wales: ‘The Portable Antiquities Scheme’ 2019.

¹⁹⁹ Vespasian (48), Titus (3), Domitian (1), Galba (1): [IVDAEA CAPTA Coins Reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme](#) accessed 13/04/2023 including two in the Llanvaches Hoard: [2008.19H/19](#); [2008.19H/20](#). Esler 1995, 246–54 includes sketches of all the *IVDAEA CAPTA* coin types in the British Museum.

²⁰⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 55 (c. 65/70-80 CE), Tomlin 2016, 178–81.

²⁰¹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 33 (c. 65/70-80 CE), Tomlin 2016, 130–31.

²⁰² Brawley 2020, 8. Cf. the use of terms such as *cohors viii Batauorum* and *cohors i Tungrorum* in the Vindolanda tablets. See below, 3.5: 117.

²⁰³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 31: 26 and 10 denarii; 35: 200 denarii; 37: 300 denarii; 44: 105 denarii; 70: 16 ¼ denarii, 65 denarii and 6 denarii; 71: 20 denarii; 72: 5 denarii, 7 denarii, half denarius, one quarter denarius, one and a half denarii; 76: 30 denarii, total 106 denarii; two tablets mention figures that might refer to denarii: *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 22: cccc (400); 69: xxxx (40).

engaged in lending (*faenerare*) money to act with honour and to avoid the shameful behaviour of Titus.²⁰⁴ They would think of the formal cancellation of a loan note as lines were struck through the text²⁰⁵ or through the names of the witnesses.²⁰⁶

There is a familiarity for our imagined readers in this parable: they knew that failure to repay a loan not only brought shame on the one responsible but could also provoke an angry response. The actions of the moneylender might have prompted them either to think of someone who would have acted in that way or to think such action impossible.²⁰⁷ They would surely have been struck not only by his remarkable generosity but also by the equally remarkable restoration of the one who had been shamed. The size of the cancelled debt accentuates the scale of the restoration as the shamed woman is to go in peace.²⁰⁸ Her faith has saved her in that her honour is restored. While this narrative may be about the equilibrium of society²⁰⁹ with its hierarchies and subordination,²¹⁰ our imagined readers would be challenged by the question posed by Jesus at the end of the parable as he speaks of the love of the debtor for the moneylender who cancels the debt. It is as if relationships built on love offer an alternative basis for building community among those who follow the Way of Jesus.

2.4.3 A word of honour

It is the central importance of love that prompts the parable of the Samaritan traveller. How one understands the parable depends on the way the 'one who hears the parable identifies with the characters' in the narrative.²¹¹ Our imagined readers might recognise in the Samaritan the kind of person contracted by Gaius Valerius Proculus to transport twenty loads of provisions on as many days from Verulamium to Londinium in the aftermath of the Boudica revolt.²¹² The innkeeper assumes the Samaritan will come back when he returns with his beast of burden (*κτῆνος*: *iumentum*),²¹³ suggesting he was a regular traveller. The Samaritan uses the language of another loan note²¹⁴ when he promises to repay the innkeeper whatever he is owed above the initial

²⁰⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 30, Tomlin 2016, 120–23.

²⁰⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 55. Cf. 61, 64, 65, 68, Tomlin 2016, 178–81, 204–7, 214–15.

²⁰⁶ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 58, Tomlin 2016, 186–89.

²⁰⁷ Wolter 2016, 323 considers it 'an action not completely unthinkable'.

²⁰⁸ Wolter 2016, 323.

²⁰⁹ Green 1997, 312.

²¹⁰ Brawley 2020, 94–97.

²¹¹ Brawley 2020, 118.

²¹² *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 45, Tomlin 2016, 156–59. Fitzmyer 1985, 886: the distance from Jerusalem to Jericho was 29 kilometres; and from Verulamium to Londinium 35 kilometres, see above 2.3: 57, note 131.

²¹³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 29, Tomlin 2016, 116–19.

²¹⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44: *quam pecuniam ei reddere debeo*, Tomlin 2016, 152–55.

payment of two *denarii*: ὅ τι ἂν προσδαπανήσης ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ ἐπανέρχεσθαί με ἀποδώσω σοι: *quodcumque supererogaveris ego cum rediero reddam tibi* (Luke 10:35). There is more to this dimension to the story than is sometimes allowed.²¹⁵ Our imagined readers moved in a world in which transactions were based on a respected person’s word of honour articulated in the form of a loan note. They would see in the actions of the Samaritan an expression of that compassion (σπλάγγνα: *misericordia*) that had moved him on seeing the wounded man. That act of mercy is even more telling in the context of the aftermath of the Boudica revolt and ongoing tensions with the local population. Love is given value here in terms that would be understood by our imagined readers from that world of finance and commerce.

2.4.4 *The slave as faithful and prudent manager*

Imagining Luke-Acts through the eyes of the people of the Bloomberg tablets, we are conscious of the complex role of the slave and the freedman in the world of the Roman empire.²¹⁶ Florentinus, the slave of Sextus Cassius, had a significant responsibility and was in charge of receiving two payments of rent from one or more farms.²¹⁷ Narcissus, the slave of Rogatus, seems to have been in charge of his master’s affairs.²¹⁸ Catullus, the slave of Romanus Faustinus, and the slave of Senecio were acting as agents for their masters in managing their accounts.²¹⁹ Tibullus, the freedman of Venustus and Gratus the freedman of Spurius were working for their former masters now their patrons.²²⁰ They clearly had positions of responsibility and were respected not only by their masters but also by those they traded with. Readers of Luke 12:41-48 from within this world would recognise that the slave who is respected and honoured as ‘blessed’ becomes the agent of his master when he is ‘put in charge of all his possessions’ (ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπάρχουσιν αὐτοῦ καταστήσει αὐτόν: *supra omnia quae possidet constituet illum*). In overall charge is a ‘faithful and prudent manager’ (ὁ πιστὸς οἰκονόμος ὁ φρόνιμος: *fidelis dispensator et prudens*) who might well be understood as himself a slave with responsibility for his master’s affairs. In the sale of the slave girl Fortunata,²²¹ Montanus is identified as the slave of Vegetus, himself a slave. As an imperial slave, like Vegetus, Montanus was possibly a *dispensator*, a steward with responsibility for handling imperial funds in the province. Given the setting of this parable ‘within the metaphorical field of the Roman household (*domus*) or family (*familia*)’,²²² our imagined readers would recognise the honour

²¹⁵ Wolter 2017, 80.

²¹⁶ Harrill 2016, 302–3. Cf. Bradley 1994, 75; Woolf 2022a, 97–101.

²¹⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 50, Tomlin 2016, 168–69.

²¹⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 55, Tomlin 2016, 178–81.

²¹⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 70, Tomlin 2016, 218–19.

²²⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44, Tomlin 2016, 152–55.

²²¹ Tomlin 2003, 41–51.

²²² Green 1997, 498.

accorded to a slave given such a position of responsibility. Equally, they would recognise in the slave who took advantage of his master's absence and beat other slaves, irresponsible actions that brought shame upon him. For our imagined readers 'this parable emphasises fidelity in [their] everyday world'.²²³ The 'cultural realities' of these parables span the empire and can be glimpsed in the world of the Bloomberg tablets. While they would identify with the circumstances envisaged here, not least the elevated role of the slave-manager, the effect of the question Peter asks (Luke 12:41) is to prompt our readers to realise this message is for everyone.²²⁴ They would agree that 'from everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded' (Luke 12:48).

2.4.5 Keeping accounts

Eight of the Bloomberg tablets are accounts,²²⁵ reflecting the kind of detailed record keeping that may have been required of the seven who were chosen to serve in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7). At the prompting of the Apostles, the seven are set apart by 'the whole community of the disciples' to 'wait at tables'²²⁶ (δὲ λακονεῖν τραπεζαίας: ministrare mensis), 'keep accounts' (NRSV footnote) or 'handle finances' (GNB).²²⁷ Crispus²²⁸ would have known what accounts were like and how important it was to keep them accurately in his tavern. So too would Catullus, the slave of Romanus Faustinus,²²⁹ and Ammonicus and Pactumeius the son of Adenus.²³⁰ The people of the Bloomberg tablets may have understood this task to be one of keeping the kind of accounts they too were used to keeping. That would then imply a level of literacy on the part of the seven subsequently borne out in the narrative of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40).

2.4.6 Occupation and location

The narrative in Acts frequently refers to people by their trade and by their house, something Tertius, the brewer and Junius the cooper who lived opposite (the house of) Catullus would have immediately recognised. We encounter the room in Jerusalem where the disciples were staying (Acts 1:13) and later the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), the house of Judas on

²²³ Brawley 2020, 133–34.

²²⁴ Green 1997, 497 and 499.

²²⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 69-76, Tomlin 2016, 216–33.

²²⁶ A translation followed in English from Tyndale to the New Revised Standard Version, New International Version, and English Standard Version.

²²⁷ This interpretation is followed by Bruce 1990, 182. Cf., Silva 2014, 1:703; Keener 2020, 217, 218, 222 speaks of an 'economic ministry' and 'the ministry of resource sharing' and 'economic ministry to the needy'. It is considered an unlikely possibility by C. K. Barrett 1994, 311; and rejected by Fitzmyer 1998, 348–49.

²²⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 72, Tomlin 2016, 222–25.

²²⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 70, Tomlin 2016, 218–19.

²³⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 76, Tomlin 2016, 232–33.

the Street called Straight in Damascus (Acts 9:11), Simon the tanner whose house is by the seaside in Joppa (Acts 10:6) and Cornelius' house in Caesarea (Acts 10:22). Paul visits Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth, in her house in Philippi (Acts 16:40), and stays with Aquila and Priscilla, fellow tentmakers in Corinth (Acts 18:2-3). When Paul visits the house of Titius Justus in Corinth, next door to the synagogue, its location is identified in the way Junius the cooper is located (Acts 18:7).²³¹ His visit to the house of Philip the Evangelist in Caesarea and subsequent stay at the house of Mnason of Cyprus uses a similar form of address (Acts 21:8, 16). Demetrius in Ephesus is known by his trade as a silversmith (Acts 19:24). There is evidence in first century Londinium of leatherworkers, silversmiths and other craftworkers.²³² Early on in Acts there is a shift from Jerusalem to 'political and commercial hubs of the Roman empire'.²³³ The encounter with householders and those engaged in the everyday life of those hubs would be familiar to our imagined readers: Londinium had become such a hub by 60 CE, with an approximate population of 10,000.²³⁴

2.4.7 Trade in grain

There is evidence from the excavations in 1 Poultry that there was some import of grain.²³⁵ Those who had come from Gaul or further afield had had to make a sea crossing to reach Londinium. They would have been familiar with the arrangements made for Paul's final voyages. The last voyage to Phoenicia and Caesarea is on a ship with cargo (γόμων: *onus*) which was to be unloaded at Tyre (Acts 21:3). The first ship on Paul's last voyage to Rome was a ship of Adramyttius (Acts 27:2) that would be trading at ports along the coast of Asia.²³⁶ The second ship found in Myra in Lycia was bound for Italy and probably part of the grain fleet from Alexandria (Acts 27:6).²³⁷ The centurion rejects Paul's caution in sailing when the Mediterranean was about to be closed to shipping, preferring the advice of the pilot and the owner. The kind of financial system reflected in the use of wax tablets as in the Bloomberg site, was also one that was used in shipping. Some of the tablets discovered in the Murecine archive of the Sulpicii, bankers from Puteoli, were to do with credit extended in the shipping of goods.²³⁸ The final amount would not be paid until delivery, but interim amounts needed

²³¹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 14, Tomlin 2016, 86–87.

²³² Gardner 2018, 79–82. Cf. the discovery of uncut panels of tent among the quays of post Boudican Londinium: Perring 2022, 99–100; J. Hill and Rowsome 2011. Cf. below, 120; *Tab. Vindol.* III 656.

²³³ Spencer 2004, 108.

²³⁴ Perring 2015; Rowsome 2008 who argues that 'the spatial and chronological development of Londinium would have been influenced not only by its topography, but by its role as an officially sanctioned entrepôt or privately initiated trading community, complex civil and military inter-relationships and administrative arrangements that may have flowed from its status'. Cf. Rowsome 2001, 18–22; Rowsome 2011.

²³⁵ Hingley 2018, 41.

²³⁶ It can be shown that Luke's knowledge of travel around this coast is accurate: Kloppenborg 2017, 102.

²³⁷ Keener 2020, 596–97.

²³⁸ Jones 2006, 103–17; Andreau 1999, ch. 6.

to be paid through a banker. While there is no evidence of such banking arrangements around shipping in Londinium, the advance payment on the twenty loads being delivered from Verulamium over a period of a little over twenty days by Gaius Valerius Proculus is similar.²³⁹ The ship wrecked on Malta is an Alexandrian ship with a cargo of wheat (Acts 27:38). The traders and merchants of first century Londinium were familiar with the kind of travel undertaken by Paul on land and sea.

2.4.8 The Importance of the written word

Trade in first century Londinium depended on a significant level of literacy which in turn depended on education.²⁴⁰ The written word and the ability to read runs through Luke-Acts from the childhood of John (Luke 1:80) and Jesus (Luke 2:40, 52, 4:16) to the upbringing of Paul (Acts 22:3) and the letter-writing of the first followers of the Way (Acts 15:22-35). At the start and finish of Luke's Gospel writing tablets have a part to play, as Zechariah announces the name of his son John (Luke 1:63) and as an inscription is placed over the crucified Jesus (Luke 23:38). It is as the proceedings against Paul unfold in Caesarea, however, that the written word becomes all important in a legal context (Acts 25:26-27).

When Paul was brought into the audience chamber of Herod's palace in Caesarea to stand before King Agrippa and his sister Bernice it was not only with great pomp. There was a formality to the hearing in the presence of the leading men of the city and the tribunes of the five cohorts stationed there. Festus has brought Paul before them all in the presence of King Agrippa 'so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write - for it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner without indicating the charges against him.' Where commentaries on Luke-Acts maintain that it was, indeed, a formality expected in such cases, they cite the third century jurist, Marcianus and his second book on Appeals quoted in the sixth century *Digest* of Justinian:²⁴¹ *post appellationem interpositam litterae dandae sunt ... ad eum, qui de appellatione cogniturus est, sive principem sive quem alium* (after an appeal has been lodged documents of referral are to be given ... to the one who will hear the appeal, whether the emperor or his representative).²⁴² The need for a written record in legal proceedings would have been self-evident to people such as Litugenus and

²³⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 45, Tomlin 2016, 156–59. Cf. du Plessis 2020, 17 who suggests that a discussion about credit in *Tab. Vindol.* 343 'points to the existence of moneylenders or bankers who are able to credit accounts held in different places'.

²⁴⁰ Cf. writing exercises *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 77-79, Tomlin 2016, 234–43. Hassall 2008, 117–20 suggests Agricola may have been correct in suggesting the sons of leading local people received an education. Tacitus *Agricola* 21, *iam vero principum filios liberalibus artibus erudire*, Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 106; Hingley 2018, 37.

²⁴¹ Gaventa 2003; Parsons 2008; Witherington III 1998; Bruce 1990; Conzelmann 1987; Fitzmyer 1998.

²⁴² *Justinian Digest* XLI.6.1, 'Justinian Digest' 2023.

Magunus. In Londinium, as in Caesarea, responsibility for conducting a case and in delivering a judgment had been ‘given by the emperor’ (*data ab Ca[e]sare*).²⁴³ The formality of legal proceedings²⁴⁴ involved committing a ‘preliminary judgment’ (*praeiudicium*) to writing.²⁴⁵ Our imagined readers would recognise in this text the significance of the written record.

2.5 Negotiating the Way through the world of first century Londinium

As we imagine people such as those responsible for the Bloomberg tablets encountering Luke-Acts it is clear they would have found much they would have been familiar with. They would have the assurance that among those who followed the Way of Jesus were people of similar status to themselves who continued to be involved in the world of trade and commerce. Like them they face a challenge as they seek to negotiate a way through the complexities of that world that is true to the teaching of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel and modelled on the life of the first followers of the Way in Acts. There is throughout Luke a concern for the destitute and a disdain for the rich which finds expression in a commitment to share in Acts. The stratification of the Roman empire that is always in the background in Luke-Acts is evident as much in first century Londinium as in the eastern Mediterranean. That the powerful are brought down by God, and the lowly lifted up, challenges our imagined readers who are part of a financial system built on a balanced reciprocity to adopt a generalised reciprocity²⁴⁶ within the community they now belong to. That gives rise to a radical generosity that involves sharing and the love of enemies. Being true to that Way while at the same time continuing their involvement in the world of trade and commerce is the challenge faced by the likes of Tibullus, Gratus, Narcissus and Titus.

2.5.1 *The powerful brought down: the lowly lifted up*

If, as we have argued above,²⁴⁷ people such as Venustus and Proculus, Litugenus and Magunus would find in Luke-Acts the reassurance they needed that there was room for them among those who followed the Way of Jesus, it is also clear that they would find much to challenge their everyday practices. In the coming of Jesus, anticipated by Mary before his birth, ‘the Lord’ and the ‘God’ of the *Iudaei*

has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly
ἔποιησεν κράτος ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ, διεσκόρπισεν ὑπερηφάνους διανοίᾳ καρδιάς αὐτῶν· καθείλεν δυνάστας ἀπὸ θρόνων καὶ ὑψώσεν ταπεινοὺς

²⁴³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 51, Tomlin 2016, 170–71.

²⁴⁴ Meyer 2004.

²⁴⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 51, Tomlin 2016, 170–71.

²⁴⁶ In the sense defined by Crook 2004, 54, citing Sahlins 1972, 186. See above, 2.3: 61-62.

²⁴⁷ See above, 2.4: 62-71.

fecit potentiam in brachio suo dispersit superbos mente cordis sui deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles (Luke 1:51-53)

Addressing the people of *Iudaea*, Zechariah speaks of being ‘saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us’ and being guided ‘into the way of peace’ (εἰς ὁδὸν εἰρήνης: *in viam pacis* Luke 1:71, 79).

Green suggests followers of the Way would be presented with ‘a break with existing standards’, and a God who is on the side of the weak,²⁴⁸ is opposed to forces of oppression wherever they may be found,²⁴⁹ and ‘against socio-religious, politico-economic forces working in opposition to’ his purposes’.²⁵⁰ Brawley goes further to suggest that following the Way of Jesus amounts to ‘the end of hierarchical systems of domination’ and offers ‘well-being for all’ that cuts through ‘large complexes of such things as social, religious, economic, gender, and political dominance’.²⁵¹ Kuecker maintains that ‘social dislocation’ accompanies followers of the Way of Jesus as they put ‘obedience to the Word of Israel’s God above Roman ... social norms’.²⁵² Would our imagined readers have to break with their world of trade and commerce?

If we imagine Luke-Acts being read by people such as the traders and merchants of Londinium, other elements of the narrative come to the fore. John, the forerunner of Jesus, counsels modified behaviour on the part of the tax-collectors and soldiers of Rome (Luke 3:10-14), and the ‘worthy’ (ἄξιός: *dignus*) centurion of Capernaum is commended by Jesus (Luke 7:9, cf. 4, 10). For our imagined readers, as for ‘the most excellent Theophilus’, there is a challenge in these words to a changed way of life within the world they knew. It is not rebellion that is called for but a radical critique.

Wolter sees in these words of Mary a ‘reversal of the powerful and the powerless’²⁵³ that is ‘an old motif that is widely attested in the environment of the NT’.²⁵⁴ Though unaware of the Septuagintisms of Luke 1-2,²⁵⁵ our imagined readers would perhaps have a heightened awareness of the implications of the words of Zechariah. Addressing the people of *Iudaea*, Zechariah speaks of

²⁴⁸ Green 1997, 100.

²⁴⁹ Green 1997, 114–15.

²⁵⁰ Green 1997, 104.

²⁵¹ Brawley 2020, 48.

²⁵² Kuecker 2020a, 110.

²⁵³ Wolter 2016, 96.

²⁵⁴ Wolter 2016, 96–97, citing OT passages, Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Euripides, Xenophon, Gnomologium Vaticanum, Herodianus Historicus, 1 Clement, and a third century CE papyrus, P. Oxy XXXI 2554, Fragment I.2.

²⁵⁵ Fitzmyer 1970, 312, 359, 377.

being ‘saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us’ and being guided ‘into the way of peace’ (εἰς ὁδὸν εἰρήνης: *in viam pacis* Luke 1:71, 79). For our imagined readers as much as for the *Iudaei* that way of peace would involve ‘acceptance of the proclamation of Jesus’.²⁵⁶

What would our imagined readers in the last quarter of the first century CE make of such words in the wake of the failure of the Boudica rebellion in Britannia (60-61 CE) and of the rebellion of the *Iudaei* in Jerusalem (66–70 CE)? The implied reprimand to Titus (43-53 CE),²⁵⁷ the *chirographum* written by Tibullus (8 January 57 CE),²⁵⁸ and other loan notes,²⁵⁹ show that financial and commercial practices established throughout the empire had been established from the outset in the newly founded Londinium. Whatever the causes of the Boudica revolt,²⁶⁰ that system came under threat with the destruction of Camulodunum, Verulamium and Londinium.²⁶¹ The *chirographum* of Marcus Rennis Venustus (21 October 62)²⁶² indicates that Londinium recovered quickly after the suppression of the revolt. In the wake of these upheavals traders, merchants and bankers depended on continuity and stability. The ability of the powers that be to suppress revolt and keep order amidst the ensuing tensions was all important. The peace had to be enforced, however, as is suggested by the reference, in correspondence involving Julius Suavis, to a fort established in the canton of the Iceni in the aftermath of the revolt.²⁶³ By the time that a preliminary judgment was given in the case between Litugenus and Magunus,²⁶⁴ Vespasian was emperor and campaigning had resumed in the lands of the Silures to the west and the Brigantes to the north. Under the governorship of Petilius Cerialis (71-74 CE) and of Iulius Frontinus (74-78 CE), Tacitus maintains that it was the calibre of the commanders and of the armies that instilled fear into the local people as they lost hope and witnessed the subjugation of their lands.²⁶⁵ He goes on to tell of the campaigns of his father-in-law, Agricola, governor of Britannia (77-83 CE) that brought an end to the conquest of Britannia with the battle of Mons Graupius. He puts into the mouth of Calgacus, a leader of the Britons, a critique of the ensuing peace that reflects contemporary criticism of Rome.²⁶⁶

²⁵⁶ Wolter 2016, 114.

²⁵⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 30, Tomlin 2016, 120–23.

²⁵⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44, Tomlin 2016, 152–55.

²⁵⁹ See above, 2.2: 47-48.

²⁶⁰ see above, 2.3: 62.

²⁶¹ Camulodunum, see Map, 203; Verulamium, see Map, 202; Londinium, see Map, 201.

²⁶² *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 45, Tomlin 2016, 156–59.

²⁶³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 39, Tomlin 2016, 142–43.

²⁶⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 51, Tomlin 2016, 170–71.

²⁶⁵ Tacitus, *Agricola* 17, *magni duces, egregii exercitus, minuta hostium spes. et terrorem statim intulit Petilius Cerialis, Brigantum civitatem.... subiit sustinuitque molem Iulius Frontinus, vir magnus quantum licebat, validamque et pugnacem Silurum gentem armis subegit*: Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 104.

²⁶⁶ Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 258: e.g. Pliny, *Natural History* 6.182, published in 79 CE. See Map note.

If the enemy is rich, they are greedy; if he is poor, they strive for glory.... To pillage, butchery and rape they give spurious names and call it empire (*imperium*); and where they bring about desolation they call it peace (*pax*)
*si locuples hostis est, avari, si pauper, ambitiosi.... auferre trucidare rapere falsis nominibus imperium atque ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.*²⁶⁷

Any who came to follow the Way of Jesus, however, and encounter Luke-Acts would be prompted by these words of Zechariah to seek a different kind of peace from the one described here by Tacitus.

There are elements in the parable of the ten pounds that would be familiar to our imagined readers (Luke 19:11-27). When a nobleman goes to a far country, summons ten of his slaves and gives them ten pounds (δέκα μνᾶς: *decem mnas*) to 'do business' (πραγματεύσασθε: *negotiamini*), Narcissus, the slave, would recognise the role played by slaves in carrying out their master's business;²⁶⁸ Optatus the *negotiator* would recognise the world of merchants.²⁶⁹ Narcissus and Rogatus, slave and master, would also have recognised the part played by bankers and the importance of interest (Luke 19:23).²⁷⁰ they would also have been aware of the custom of storing money in the ground.²⁷¹ There is, however, another element to the story that we can imagine them responding to: as the nobleman goes to a far country to seek royal power, he speaks of enemies who did not want him to be king and of the brutal consequences that follow (Luke 19:12 and 27). Was this the kind of brute force they had been aware of in the defeat of the Boudica revolt? Would they have seen in this would-be king 'an antitype of a follower of Jesus', whose command to slaughter his enemies is 'the utter antithesis of enemy love and mercy' that characterises the follower of the Way of Jesus?²⁷²

2.5.2 Concern for the destitute, disdain for the rich

The people of the Bloomberg tablets lived in a world of business and commerce that dealt in large sums of money and led to the accumulation of wealth. The 105 denarii owed by Tibullus to Gratus²⁷³ is only a portion of the price of the merchandise which had been sold and delivered; Atigniomarus was in receipt of 300 denarii when he arrived in the city.²⁷⁴ In a community of followers of the Way of Jesus our imagined readers, merchants and traders of first century Londinium, would be among

²⁶⁷ Tacitus, *Agricola* 30.5, Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 112.

²⁶⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 55, Tomlin 2016, 178–81.

²⁶⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 7, Tomlin 2016, 72–73.

²⁷⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 55. Cf. *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 56, Tomlin 2016, 178–83.

²⁷¹ Abdy 2002.

²⁷² Brawley 2020, 155.

²⁷³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44, Tomlin 2016, 152–55.

²⁷⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 37, Tomlin 2016, 138–39.

the wealthiest.²⁷⁵ Without any knowledge of the sacred texts of the *Iudaei*, they would recognise in the words read by Jesus in Nazareth at the start of his ministry a concern for the poor.²⁷⁶ Jesus is

to bring good news to the poor, ... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.
εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς, ... κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν,
ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει, κηρύξαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν
evangelizare pauperibus ... praedicare captivis remissionem et caecis visum dimittere
confractos in remissionem praedicare annum Domini acceptum et diem retributionis
(Luke 4:18-19)

Implicit in the use of the word 'poor' (πτωχός: *pauper*) is reference to 'those reduced to total destitution', those who were 'beggars, weak, powerless, landless, diseased, naked, hungry and destitute'.²⁷⁷

By the time our imagined readers had absorbed the teaching of Jesus to his disciples they could have been in no doubt about his concern for the destitute and disdain for the rich. Those who are in extreme poverty and hungry are blessed unlike those who are rich and full now (Luke 6:20,21, 24, 25). The measure of the ministry of Jesus is evident in the difference he makes to those who have nothing, the blind, the leprosy sufferers, the dead; and in the good news he brings to the poverty-stricken beggar (Luke 7:22). As Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and tells stories on the way, this message is pressed home. From the outset Londinium was a significant urban centre of trade which recovered quickly from the devastation of the Boudica revolt. By the second half of the first century it had become a cosmopolitan city with a military presence, home to the provincial administration, with wealthy traders and artisans. There were 'dramatic differences between the inhabitants of Londinium in terms of wealth'.²⁷⁸ It was a place of poverty and feasting,²⁷⁹ of slaves and free, with a trade in slaves involving slaves of some standing.²⁸⁰ There is evidence of people from the indigenous population living in round houses, perhaps craftworkers moving in to take advantage of the new order of things, or enslaved people brought in to support the extensive building works.²⁸¹ As a provincial city the stratification of society evident across the empire would have been to the fore in

²⁷⁵ Esler 1987, 173.

²⁷⁶ Wolter 2016, 200.

²⁷⁷ Paulraj 2021, 95. See further 93-110 where Paulraj has established this meaning. The Vulgate's choice of *pauper* rather than *mendicus* suggests 'the domestication of Luke's meaning began early and is now rampant'. Esler, pers. comm.

²⁷⁸ Hingley 2018, 68.

²⁷⁹ Hingley 2018, 106–8.

²⁸⁰ Hingley 2018, 69; Tomlin 2003; 2443.7: S. S. Frere, Maxfield, and Brian Dobson 1995.

²⁸¹ Hingley 2018, chaps. 2–5; Perring 2015, 23–30.

Londinium: the urban poor of Londinium as of anywhere else ‘suffered extreme forms of economic, social and political deprivation. For them life was a very grim business’.²⁸²

Alongside evidence of grain stored in building 13 on the 1 Poultry site,²⁸³ we have a tantalising glimpse of a trade in grain with the local population as one unnamed correspondent appeals to an equal as ‘lord brother’ regarding a purchase of grain,²⁸⁴ and as Florentinus, the slave of Sextus Cassius, confirms the receipt of two payments from a local farm.²⁸⁵ Dependence on the surrounding countryside for a continuous supply of grain²⁸⁶ made Londinium typical of urban centres across the empire: as elsewhere, ‘the hand of élite social control’ was evident in first century Londinium which remained ‘resolutely alien’ with its residents ‘enjoying lifestyles that were radically different to those of subject populations within the urban hinterland’.²⁸⁷ In such an extractive economy the rich man’s accumulation of large surpluses for his own enjoyment ‘inevitably meant ‘an accumulation of misery’ for others’.²⁸⁸ Our imagined readers would recognise the folly of the rich man who pulled down his barns and built larger ones when his land produced abundantly. Jesus’ warning ‘to be on your guard against all kinds of greed’ (Luke 12:13-21) speaks into a world in which Titus was tempted to work for his own gain at the expense of others.²⁸⁹ With their considerable wealth the people of the Bloomberg tablets would be challenged by the words of Jesus,

So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.
οὕτως οὖν πᾶς ἐξ ὑμῶν ὃς οὐκ ἀποτάσσεται πᾶσιν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ὑπάρχουσιν οὐ δύναται εἶναι μου μαθητής
sic ergo omnis ex vobis qui non renuntiat omnibus quae possidet non potest meus esse discipulus (Luke 14:33)

The invitation of destitute beggars, the maimed, the blind and the lame to the great feast (Luke 14:15-24) and the contrast between the rich man and Lazarus, the destitute, ulcerated, and hungry beggar²⁹⁰ at the gate (Luke 16:19-31) leave our imagined readers in no doubt as to the identity of ‘the poor’ and to the challenge facing them in table fellowship and the sharing of goods. In Luke-Acts God’s power is set over against ‘the proud, the powerful and the rich’,²⁹¹ while his activity is ‘on

²⁸² Esler 1987, 179. Cf. Woolf 2020b, 398-400; Rowsome 2000, 32.

²⁸³ Hingley 2018, 41.

²⁸⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 38: Tomlin 2016, 140 see note on *fussum* and on *a Tincori* suggesting a reference to grain and a hitherto unidentified location possibly associated with Tincomarus, king of the Atrebates. J. N. Adams 2003, 556–57: *fussum*, past participle of *fundo* which ‘could be used of pouring grain’.

²⁸⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 50, Tomlin 2016, 168-169.

²⁸⁶ Perring and Brigham 2000, 151ff.

²⁸⁷ Perring 2015, 21.

²⁸⁸ Brawley 2020, 131.

²⁸⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 30, Tomlin 2016, 120–23.

²⁹⁰ Paulraj 2021, 97.

²⁹¹ Green 1997, 104.

behalf of the lowly and hungry'.²⁹² It is, nevertheless, quite possible to imagine our readers following in the footsteps of people from their world of finance, trade and commerce such as Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), Lydia (Acts 16:14, 40), Aquila, Priscilla and Paul (Acts 18:1-3). In the generosity of sharing and of eating with people 'of varied social strata' they would not so much be abandoning as redefining the 'socio-religious and economic relations' of the world to which they were accustomed.²⁹³ They would be challenged to go into the 'roads and lanes' beyond the comfort of the town with its ribbon development of streets,²⁹⁴ to engage with those reduced to destitution (Luke 14:23).²⁹⁵

2.5.3 Reciprocity, debt and love for enemies

No sooner had Jesus spoken of the way the poor and hungry are blessed in contrast to those who are rich and full now, than he went on to speak of love for enemies. It is telling that he immediately sets that command in the context of a social world of which they are very much a part. The command to love your enemies addresses the world of the people of the Bloomberg tablets at two levels. First, theirs is a volatile world where memories of the initial military campaigns of Claudius's conquest are fresh, a world which is all too conscious of the rebellion led by Boudica and the Iceni peoples, the continued suppression of that revolt and the ensuing campaigns to the west and the north.²⁹⁶ Talk of love for enemies is challenging on the active and contested frontier of the empire. Second, it addresses their world of credit and loan notes. The financial world of first century Londinium is built on lending and credit based on trust. A breakdown of trust and shameful behaviour is condemned. Taurus feels justified in complaining to Macrinus his dearest lord, about the way Caturrius had come and taken away beasts of burden:²⁹⁷ such behaviour is not acceptable. When Titus seeks to profit unjustifiably from his loans, his behaviour is condemned as shameful.²⁹⁸ Atticus is anxious that a payment be made promptly implying some delay.²⁹⁹ Something provoked Bell[...]us to respond angrily.³⁰⁰

Steeped in the pivotal values of honour and shame, conducting business based on balanced reciprocity, and sometimes negative reciprocity, our imagined readers of Luke-Acts would encounter

²⁹² Green 1997, 105.

²⁹³ Paulraj 2021, 232.

²⁹⁴ Perring 2015, 25. Cf. de la Bédoyère 2016, 40–41.

²⁹⁵ Paulraj 2021, 97.

²⁹⁶ See Table 1, 34-37

²⁹⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 29, Tomlin 2016, 116–19.

²⁹⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 30, Tomlin 2016, 120–23.

²⁹⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 31, Tomlin 2016, 124–27

³⁰⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 28, Tomlin 2016, 114–15.

a different kind of community among the followers of the Way of Jesus. Bringing together people of different ethnicities and of different strata in society, sharing possessions and eating at the same table, such a community is rooted in the teaching Jesus shares with his disciples in Luke 6:20-49. That it turns on its head many of the assumptions of first century urban life, not least in Londinium, is apparent in the opening blessings and woes (Luke 6:20-26). An alternative kind of community based on the love of enemies³⁰¹ finds expression in the words, ‘Do to others as you would have them do to you’ (καθὼς θέλετε ἵνα ποιῶσιν ὑμῖν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ποιεῖτε αὐτοῖς ὁμοίως: *prout vultis ut faciant vobis homines et vos facite illis similiter* Luke 6:31). To imagine this passage being read by people who live in the world of Taurus following the loss of his beasts of burden or Atticus concerned at the non-payment of a loan is to realise that ‘the notion of giving with expectation to receive, as in 6:31,’ is as ‘thoroughly at home’ in first century Londinium as in ‘ancient Mediterranean culture.’³⁰² Jesus goes further: he caricatures the ‘balanced reciprocity’ they were used to (Luke 6:32-34) and replaces it with a ‘generalised reciprocity’ that entails a generosity of love that reaches out to enemies too.³⁰³ Such love of enemies amounts to doing good and lending, expecting nothing in return (Luke 6:35). For people of the Bloomberg tablets to belong to a community of followers of the Way of Jesus would be ‘a counter-cultural existence indeed’, for their lives would be ‘based on an inverted understanding of their social world’.³⁰⁴

The enemy love envisaged here by Jesus finds expression in the generosity of a forgiveness and a generous giving that makes for a very different kind of community. Such a community binds its members together as ‘children of the Most High’ and mirrors the merciful Father Jesus discloses (Luke 6:35-49). This is what ‘comprises the ethical identity of Christian communities’.³⁰⁵ If it turns on its head the balanced reciprocity evident in the Bloomberg tablets, it even more clearly rejects the negative reciprocity that according to Cassius Dio contributed to the exploitation of the local population and the Boudica revolt.³⁰⁶ The inability to pay back unreasonably large loans had led to the enslavement of local peoples, their resentment, and their subsequent revolt. Here we glimpse that kind of slavery consequent upon the inability to repay debts characteristic of urban life in the Mediterranean world.³⁰⁷

³⁰¹ Brawley 2020, 84–86.

³⁰² Brawley 2020, 85.

³⁰³ See above, 2.4: 62. Cf. Crook 2004, 54–59; Neyrey 1991b, 371–73.

³⁰⁴ Green 1997, 273.

³⁰⁵ Wolter 2016, 282.

³⁰⁶ Cassius Dio LXII.2, Cary and Foster 1914ff., Vol VIII, 83; see above 2.4: 62.

³⁰⁷ Esler 1987, 174. Cf. Bradley 1994; Woolf 2022a, 97-101.

Such generosity and love of enemies is to the fore in the teaching Jesus shares with his disciples (Luke 6:20-49) and shapes their understanding of community (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37); it is also central to the prayer he invites them to make their own: ‘forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us’ (ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίομεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν: *dimitte nobis peccata nostra siquidem et ipsi dimittimus omni debenti*³⁰⁸ *nobis* Luke 11:4). The forgiveness of those who are in debt and ‘release from the earthly shackles of indebtedness’³⁰⁹ would be a challenge for our imagined readers as they faced the kind of problems experienced by Taurus, Atticus and Bell[...].us.

2.5.4 Patrons and clients, slaves and masters

Patronage involving that kind of ‘general reciprocity’ that amounted to a ‘system of social control’ whereby some were subservient to others,³¹⁰ was as evident in the dealings of merchants and traders in first century Londinium as in the eastern Mediterranean. It had to do with ‘the reciprocal exchange of goods and services’ and involved ‘a relationship that was personal and of some duration’, a relationship that was unequal ‘between parties of differing status’ and so could develop into exploitation.³¹¹ The *chirographum* in which Tibullus promises a part payment of 105 denarii to Gratus may have been simply between the two of them. Tibullus, however, identifies himself as the freedman of Venustus (*Venusti l(ibertus)*) and Gratus as the freedman of Spurius (*Grato <S>puri l(iberto)*) suggesting they were both acting ‘as agents or partners’ for their erstwhile masters who were now their patrons.³¹² While able to engage in activities open to men born free, ‘a freedman had a particular legal status’: maintaining social and financial links between a freedman and his patron was common practice.³¹³ We see here the unequal relationship between the patron and his freedman and at the same time the equal relationship between the two patrons and between the two freedmen.

Slaves had a different status and, as across the empire, were involved in the commerce and business of Londinium in various ways: as *arcarii* simply looking after cash as an assayer or money changer; *actores* acting as agent for their master in managing finances; or *dispensatores* running a business in parallel with their master, possibly advancing interest bearing loans.³¹⁴ It appears that the slave of

³⁰⁸ *Debeo* occurs in *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 35, 44, 53, 55, 76.

³⁰⁹ Oakman 2008, 80.

³¹⁰ Crook 2004, 59–66.

³¹¹ Batten 2008, 50; Crook 2004, 60–66.

³¹² *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44, Tomlin 2016, 154.

³¹³ Andreau 1999, 64. Cf. Bradley 1994, 77.

³¹⁴ Andreau 1999, 64–65. Cf. Harrill 2016, 302–3; Bradley 1994, 75.

?M(arci) S[a]luii M[...] was acting as agent for his master in writing a *chirographum*; a letter enquires whether Vialicus the freedman of Secundio (*Secundionis liberto Vialico*) will accept the loan note.³¹⁵ As a slave, Florentinus was able to write and conduct business on behalf of his master, Sextus Cassius [...]tus.³¹⁶ Narcissus works as a slave on behalf of his master, Rogatus.³¹⁷ Montanus, ‘slave of the august emperor’, in turn had ‘an assistant slave, Vegetus, (*Vegetus Montani imperatoris Aug(usti) ser(vi) lucun | diani vic(arius)*) who was able to purchase Fortunata, the slave girl who was in ‘good health and warranted not to be liable to wander or run away’ (*sanam tradi- | tam esse erronem fugitivam non esse | praestari*) for the large sum of 600 denarii.³¹⁸

The alertness of the slaves who are awaiting their master’s return from a wedding banquet leads to ‘the inversion of normal master-slave hierarchies of dominance’³¹⁹ as the master serves the slaves at the table (Luke 12:35-40). It is, however, a momentary act that does not lead to the abandonment of those hierarchies but instead to a greater alertness. The ensuing parable contrasts the ‘faithful and prudent manager’ (ὁ πιστὸς οἰκονόμος ὁ φρόνιμος: *fidelis dispensator et prudens*) who is put in charge of his master’s slaves with the slave who in such circumstances abuses the slaves set under him (Luke 12:41-48). The challenge to our imagined readers is not so much to invert the hierarchies of their world as to live with fidelity and honour in the everyday world they knew well.³²⁰

There is an assumption in the dealings of those who are involved in such business arrangements that they will act with honour: that assumption gives weight to the parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-13. A rich man has a manager who has to give an ‘accounting’ of his ‘management’ (τὸν λόγον τῆς οἰκονομίας: *rationem vilicationis*). In anticipation of being dismissed as a result of charges that he was ‘squandering’ (διασκορπίζων: *dissipasset*) the rich man’s property, he writes off a portion of what is owed by a number of his master’s debtors, inviting each to take their ‘bill’ (τὰ γράμματα: *cautionem*). Fitzmyer’s suggestion³²¹ that that the manager was not acting dishonestly but rather arranging to repay that part of the excessive interest he had added to the loan, is rejected by Kloppenborg who observes that in contemporary loan documents from Egypt ‘the contract is always framed as an agreement between the lender and the borrower, even when, as is frequently the case, the lender’s agent actually negotiated the contract’.³²² The Bloomberg tablets demonstrate

³¹⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 27, Tomlin 2016, 112–13.

³¹⁶ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 50, Tomlin 2016, 168–69.

³¹⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 55, Tomlin 2016, 178–81.

³¹⁸ Tomlin 2003, discovered in excavations at the adjacent 1 Poultry in 1994.

³¹⁹ Brawley 2020, 133.

³²⁰ Brawley 2020, 134.

³²¹ Fitzmyer 1985, 1097–98.

³²² Kloppenborg 1989, 481.

that those practices had reached the far frontiers of the western empire by the middle of the first century CE, adding weight to Kloppenborg's argument. Our imagined readers would be at home in the world of this parable.

First, the relationship of patron and agent between the rich man (πλούσιος: *dives*) and his manager (οἰκονόμος: *vilicus*), is one that would be familiar to Tibulus, the freedman of Venustus as he promised to pay Gratus, the freedman of Spurius, acknowledging that the loan could be sold on to someone else.³²³ This is precisely the kind of person envisaged in the story with access to 'his master's wealth' who 'acted as his agent in business affairs'.³²⁴

Second, the manager is tasked with giving the rich man 'an accounting (λόγος: *ratio*) of his 'management' (τῆς οἰκονομίας: *vilicationis*). That detailed written records were kept of business dealings was something that Crispus took for granted as he kept an account (*ratio*) of the sale of beer.³²⁵ He was not alone: eight of the Bloomberg tablets are 'accounts'.³²⁶ Traders such as these would know precisely what was entailed in keeping an account of their business dealings.

Third the manager then calls for the bill (τὰ γράμματα: *cautionem*) to be produced. A legal term used in Justinian's *Digest*, a *cautio* was read at a hearing before Aemilius Papinian, praetorian prefect and jurist, using phrases (emboldened) Atticus uses in promising to pay Narcissus, the slave of Rogatus.³²⁷

I, Lucius Titius, have written that I have received (*Lucius Titius scripsi me accepisse*) from Publius Maevius fifteen *aureii* paid to me from his home as a loan for consumption. These fifteen are **to be given in best coin** (*proba recte dari*) on the first of next month; for this, Publius Maevius has stipulated, and **I, Lucius Titius, have promised** (*spondeo ego Lucius Titius*). If on the day above written the sum has not been paid and given to Publius Maevius **or to him to whom the matter shall then belong** (*eive ad quem ea res pertinebit*) or no satisfaction has been made on its account, then, for as long as I thereafter take to pay, for every thirty days one denarius for every hundred shall be paid by way of penalty; for this, Publius Maevius has stipulated, and I, Lucius Titius, have promised.³²⁸

As we imagine people of the Bloomberg tablets reading this parable, we see immediately that 'it has been drawn simply and directly from everyday life, from taken-for-granted suppositions about 'the

³²³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44, Tomlin 2016, 152–55.

³²⁴ Green 1997, 590.

³²⁵ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 72, Tomlin 2016, 222–25.

³²⁶ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 69–76, Tomlin 2016, 216–33.

³²⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 55, Tomlin 2016, 178–81.

³²⁸ *Justinian Digest* XII.1.40, '*Justinian Digest*' 2023; Watson 1998, 363. Wording similar to *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 55 is emboldened, and the Latin included.

way the world works’’.³²⁹ All is not well with their world, however: Taurus had been cheated by Catarrus and was fearful of the loss of a significant investment in beasts of burden,³³⁰ late settlement of an account, possibly by an intermediary, is worrying Atticus;³³¹ and he is not alone in being concerned about possible non-payment of outstanding debts.³³² Most significant is the warning a friend gives Titus not to ‘appear shameful’ lest he damage his own affairs. It seems as if accusations about Titus had been circulating ‘through the whole market’.³³³ Whether they were justified or not, Titus is given the chance to set things right. In the Bloomberg tablets we witness the messiness of a business world where all does not always work to plan, where a manager of injustice (οἰκονόμος τῆς ἀδικίας: *vilicus iniquitatis*) could be singled out and where questions could be raised about the use of wealth arising from injustice (μαμωνᾶς τῆς ἀδικίας: *mamona iniquitatis*). It is in the context of that complexity that our imagined reading can throw light on what is a problematic parable. It neither presents the manager as a straightforward example to be followed,³³⁴ nor simply as a representative of an extractive economic system to be rejected.³³⁵ It is not so much a call for economic redistribution³³⁶ as a guide for those navigating the Way of Jesus while involved in that world of business. Perhaps there is an element of humour in the telling of the story.³³⁷

The sympathies of patrons, such as Venustus and Spurius, might lie with the wealthy man, while the sympathies of agents such as the freedmen, Tibullus and Gratus, might lie with the manager.³³⁸ The manager’s squandering of the rich man’s property was the kind of shameful behaviour Titus had been criticised for.³³⁹ Titus, however, had been warned to change his ways; within the parable the agent is given no such warning. Perhaps the rich man, like other rich men in Luke’s narrative,³⁴⁰ was the one who was acting shamefully.

Our imagined readers would recognise the way the manager was seeking to enter into a reciprocal arrangement with the debtors he was helping in the hope of being received into their ‘homes’

³²⁹ Green 1997, 589. Cf. Kloppenborg 1989, 486.

³³⁰ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 29: Tomlin 2016, 116–19.

³³¹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 31: Tomlin 2016, 124–27.

³³² *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 35: Tomlin 2016, 134–35.

³³³ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 30: Tomlin 2016, 120–23.

³³⁴ Wolter 2017, 260–71.

³³⁵ Brawley 2020, 155–57.

³³⁶ Green 1997, 588–97.

³³⁷ Tannehill 1996, 247.

³³⁸ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44, Tomlin 2016, 152–55.

³³⁹ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 30, Tomlin 2016, 120–23.

³⁴⁰ Luke 12:13-21; 14:12; 16:19-31; 18:18-25; 19:1-10; 20:45-47; 21:1-4.

(δέξωνταί με εἰς τοὺς οἴκους αὐτῶν: *recipiant me in domos suas*). His generosity is predicated on the balanced reciprocity that expects something in return. The likes of Ammonicus, in debt for the sizeable sum of 30 denarii,³⁴¹ might feel sympathy for the way the debtors are treated by the agent. We can imagine our readers attributing to the rich man the observation that the manager had acted ‘shrewdly’ (φρονίμως: *prudenter*) in securing a future for himself based on an anticipated welcome into the homes of those he had helped.³⁴²

Jesus’ teaching, beginning at verse 8b, and not, as some suggest at verse 8a,³⁴³ would speak directly to our imagined readers. It serves as a commendation of the likes of the traders and merchants of Londinium: as children of this age they are indeed more prudent (φρονιμώτεροι: *prudentiores*) in their dealings with their contemporaries than the children of light. Making reciprocal relationships even by means of wealth that comes from injustice will stand them in good stead for the future (ποιήσατε φίλους ἐκ τοῦ μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας, ἵνα ὅταν ἐκλίπη δέξωνται ὑμᾶς εἰς τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς: *facite vobis amicos de mamona iniquitatis ut cum defeceritis recipiant vos in aeterna tabernacula* Luke 16:9). It is the very complexity of these words that gives our imagined readers the reassurance they need. People like them, who struggle to negotiate their way through the complex world of first century Londinium, feature in this parable of Jesus: the rich man, the manager and the three debtors are characteristic of an economic system that spans the empire. There remains a challenge, however, for as followers of the Way they are also ‘children of light’. The teaching of Jesus that follows speaks directly into the world they knew so well: ‘whoever is faithful (πιστός: *fidelis*) in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest (ἄδικος: *iniquus*) in a very little is dishonest also in much’ (Luke 16:10-13). They are to negotiate the often messy world of patronage, honour, and shame of first century Londinium with fidelity and honour.³⁴⁴ There remains, however, a challenge they must face as they follow the Way of Jesus. They would recognise that a slave cannot serve two masters. It is not possible to be a slave to God and to such wealth (οὐ δύνασθε θεῷ δουλεύειν καὶ μαμωνᾶ: *non potestis Deo servire et mamonae*, Luke 16:13b).

The force of this challenge is pressed home as our imagined readers go on to read of people who were ‘lovers of money’ (φιλάργυροι: *avari* Luke 16:14) and of ‘the rich man (πλούσιος: *dives*) who was dressed in purple and fine linen, and who feasted sumptuously every day’ in stark contrast to

³⁴¹ Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 76, Tomlin 2016, 232–33.

³⁴² Green 1997, 588–94; Fitzmyer 1985, 1094–99; Brawley 2020, 151–54.

³⁴³ Wolter 2017, 260–71.

³⁴⁴ Brawley 2020, 151–54; Kuecker 2020a, 148–50; Green 1997, 588–97.

the destitute beggar (πτωχὸς: *mendicus*)³⁴⁵ named Lazarus, ‘covered with sores’, who lay at his gate (Luke 16:19-31). The reversal of roles at death is a reversal of status measured in terms of wealth and the lack of it: during his lifetime the rich man had received his ‘good things’ (τὰ ἀγαθὰ: *bona*) ‘and Lazarus, in like manner, evil things (τὰ κακὰ: *mala*)’. Such wealth could only be accumulated at the expense of the extreme poverty encountered in Lazarus. While Brawley suggests this was nothing less than a reversal of the all too prevalent ‘social hierarchies of dominance’,³⁴⁶ our imagined readers could equally see it as Luke’s challenge not to ignore the beggars they encountered in Londinium but to give them a place at the table in the community of the Way.

In Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) they meet with someone who responds to the challenge of Jesus and yet remains within their world of finance. While there is no mention of taxation in the Bloomberg tablets, the traders and merchants of Londinium would be able to recognise fair and honourable dealing in the world of business. When Zacchaeus promises to give half of his possessions to the destitute, he goes on to say, ‘and if I have defrauded (ἔσυκοφάντησα: *defraudavi*) anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much’ (Luke 19:8). Our imagined readers might see in Zacchaeus’ practice that kind of disgraceful behaviour that was in danger of bringing shame to Titus; they might see in Zacchaeus’ changed behaviour the kind of transformation, leading to restored honour, encouraged by the writer of the letter to Titus.³⁴⁷ The consequence of that change in Zacchaeus’ practice is the salvation (σωτηρία: *salus*) that comes to his house.³⁴⁸ Our imagined readers might envisage such a salvation in the context of their everyday lives. In Zacchaeus they would see someone who became a follower of the Way of Jesus and sought to navigate the world of finance in the light of that commitment.

As followers of the Way involved in the world of reciprocity and patronage, and of slaves and masters, they too might well find themselves arguing ‘as to which one of them was the greatest’ (Luke 9:46-48). This after all was the mindset that shaped the social stratification of their world. Within the community of those following the Way of Jesus, however, things were to be different. Setting a little child (παιδίον: *puerum*) by his side, Jesus says that ‘whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me’. In one of the

³⁴⁵ *mendicus*, meaning ‘a destitute person, beggar: OLD 1968, 1098 used in the Vulgate here and at Luke 16:22 for πτωχὸς. Each other instance of πτωχὸς in Luke (4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 14:13, 21; 18:22; 19:8) is translated by the weaker *pauper*, meaning ‘poor’, OLD 1968, 1314.

³⁴⁶ Brawley 2020, 156. Cf. 111.

³⁴⁷ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 30, Tomlin 2016, 120–23.

³⁴⁸ Wolter 2017, 349.

more fragmentary Bloomberg tablets *puer* is probably used as an informal term for ‘slave’.³⁴⁹ Among the followers of the Way of Jesus ‘the one who possesses the smallest prestige stands at the top’ of the social ladder.³⁵⁰ In Jesus’ ensuing comment a ‘counterworld is constructed, which leads in this case to the ascriptions of social status being turned into their opposite’:³⁵¹ ‘for the least among all of you is the greatest’ (ὁ γὰρ μικρότερος ἐν πᾶσιν ὑμῖν ὑπάρχων οὗτός ἐστιν μέγας: *minor est inter omnes vos hic maior est*).

So imbued are the disciples with the cultural norms that are also evident in first century Londinium, however, that they continue to argue. A dispute arose among them as to who was the greatest at the close of the Passover meal Jesus shared with them (Luke 22:24-30). On this occasion Jesus draws on those cultural norms our imagined readers in Londinium would recognise, explicitly the way ‘patronage offered many models and metaphors for imperial rule’.³⁵² He speaks of the way ‘the kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors’ (ἐὐεργέται: *benefici*). In their ‘patron-client relationships’ benefactors like kings expected something in return, not least a recognition of high status and honour.³⁵³ At this point, Jesus directly addresses the community of disciples around the table as he says, ‘but not so with you; rather the greatest among you (ἐν ὑμῖν: *in vobis*) must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves’. After contrasting the one who serves at table and the one who is served Jesus goes on to say that he is among them as ‘one who serves’ (ὁ διακονῶν: *ministrator*). Jesus identifies with the one of low status, the one who serves, and expects that of his followers too.³⁵⁴

Luke writes in such a way that our imagined readers would recognise that Jesus ‘uses normal social protocols’ from their world ‘in order to insist that standard categories will not do’³⁵⁵ within the community of those who follow the Way. It is within that community that in the context of the arguments over greatness and of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus ‘Jesus turns the social pyramid upside down’.³⁵⁶ At the same time, within the world of trade and commerce our imagined

³⁴⁹ *Tab, Lond. Bloomberg 43*: Tomlin 2016, 150; *OLD* 1968, 1515. In a Leicester curse tablet, listing the names of twenty slaves in a courtyard house, the Greek παιδίον comes into Latin in the word paedagogium referring to the slave quarters: Tomlin 2008b; Savani, Scott, and Morris 2018, 49.

³⁵⁰ Wolter 2016, 405.

³⁵¹ Wolter 2016, 405–6.

³⁵² Woolf 2022a, 96.

³⁵³ Brawley 2020, 188; contrast Batten 2008, 51–54, suggesting the distinction between patronage and benefaction disappeared only in the late Roman empire.

³⁵⁴ Brawley 2020, 189.

³⁵⁵ Green 1997, 767.

³⁵⁶ Green 1997, 391–92.

readers would be challenged to conduct their lives with that fidelity and honour their world expected.

2.5.5 Generosity and sharing

Concern for the destitute and disdain for the rich, the rejection of balanced reciprocity as a response to debt and the inversion of the social pyramids of patronage and of slavery find expression in the lives of the first followers of the Way of Jesus in Acts as they come together and ‘have all things in common’ (εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινὰ: *habebant omnia communia* Acts 2:44). That meant ‘they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.’ (καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ πᾶσιν καθότι ἂν τις χρεία ἐῖχεν: *possessiones et substantias vendebant et dividebant illa omnibus prout cuique opus erat* Acts 2:45). The sharing of possessions to meet the needs of all was something that would challenge our imagined readers of Acts within the community of those followers of the Way. Among these first followers of the Way ‘no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.’ (οὐδὲ εἷς τι τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῶ ἔλεγεν ἴδιον εἶναι ἀλλ’ ἦν αὐτοῖς ἅπαντα κοινὰ: *nec quisquam eorum quae possidebant aliquid suum esse dicebat sed erant illis omnia communia* Acts 4:32). Whether this was an ideal to work towards or an account of the beginnings from which there was inevitable decline, ‘such counter-cultural values continued to pervade ancient Christianity’.³⁵⁷

This exemplifies the ‘radical generosity’ which, together with ‘enemy love’, the followers of the Way of Jesus are challenged to adopt. In his social identity commentary on Luke and Acts,³⁵⁸ Aaron Kuecker suggests that ‘Jesus’ followers are invited to participate in Jesus’ identity, as children of the Most High, particularly as they exercise enemy love and radical generosity’.³⁵⁹ Whereas he suggests that will result in their ‘social dislocation’,³⁶⁰ our imagined readers might see that Acts follows on from Luke in giving them, along with ‘the most excellent Theophilus’, the assurance that this is a practical course of action that they can be justified in following. Nonetheless, we can imagine the scale of the challenge for traders and merchants from Londinium drawn to follow the Way of Jesus. The social implications of ‘the countercultural values’ within the community of the first followers of the Way of Jesus would be immense for the likes of Tibullus, Gratus, Vialicus and the unnamed slave of Marcus Salvius.

³⁵⁷ Keener 2020, 173–77.

³⁵⁸ Kuecker 2020a; Kuecker 2020b.

³⁵⁹ Kuecker 2020b, 211.

³⁶⁰ Kuecker 2020b, 213–14.

There are, however, people within the narrative of Luke-Acts they can look to who had risen to the challenge. Key to a ‘radical generosity’ which meant that ‘there was not a needy person among them’ (ἐνδεής τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς: *quisquam egens erat inter illos*) was the distribution ‘to each as any had need’ (διεδίδετο δὲ ἐκάστῳ καθότι ἂν τις χρεῖαν εἶχεν: *dividebantur autem singulis prout cuique opus erat* Acts 4:35). The attempt of Lucius Julius Bellicus to resolve the ownership of the five acre wood Verlucionium suggests that the ownership of property had been clearly defined in mid first century Londinium, as it was across the empire,³⁶¹ and that it could subsequently be the subject of legal proceedings. It is quite possible that it had been acquired forcibly from the local people.³⁶² The generosity of Joseph of Cyprus might well be an inspiration to them. It was not that he had given all that he possessed: rather, he had ‘sold a field that belonged to him (ὑπάρχοντος αὐτῷ ἀγροῦ πωλήσας: *cum haberet agrum vendidit*) and then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet’ (Acts 4.37). The generosity of Ananias and Sapphira might also have been an inspiration had it not been for their deceit. Ananias too had, with his wife’s knowledge, ‘sold a piece of property’ (ἐπώλησεν κτῆμα: *vendidit agrum*); however, he ‘kept back some of the proceeds and brought only a part and laid it at the feet of the apostles’. What is at stake in the narrative is the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira³⁶³ which, when exposed, prompts a shame our imagined readers would recognise.³⁶⁴ Were it not for that deceit both Joseph of Cyprus and Ananias might have modelled the kind of generosity that would have been possible for them to emulate, even if it would be a challenge.³⁶⁵

The world we glimpse in the Bloomberg tablets is a world of trade and commerce in which property is owned and in which careful records of the sale of property are kept.³⁶⁶ Among the followers of the Way in Jerusalem, there was ‘a daily distribution of food’ to ensure the needs of all were met (ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ τῆ καθημερινῆ: *in ministerio cotidiano*): that called for the kind of effective management of funds (διακονεῖν τραπέζαις: *ministrare mensis*) our imagined readers were used to and could emulate (Acts 6:2-7).³⁶⁷ As in Luke so in Acts, community is established through ministry to the destitute (Luke 4:18; 7:22; 14:13, 21; 16:22-23; 18:22; 19:8), and the needy (Acts 4:35; 6:1-6; 11:29-

³⁶¹ Esler 2017b, 109–75, 241–53.

³⁶² [RIB 2443.19](#), Tomlin 1996a. Cf. du Plessis 2020, 14 who argues it was part of a detailed land survey for tax purposes.

³⁶³ C. K. Barrett 1994, 262; Spencer 2004, 66; Witherington III 1998, 216.

³⁶⁴ *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 28, 29, 30, 35, 44, 55; see above, 2.3: 58.

³⁶⁵ Alexander 2001, 1034; Alexander 2006, 47.

³⁶⁶ [RIB 2443.19](#), Tomlin 1996a.

³⁶⁷ See above, 2.4.5: 68.

30; 14:17). That it was possible to remain within the world with which they were familiar and yet at the same time adopt an identity that was countercultural is suggested as the narrative of Acts unfolds, not least in its reference to householders and artisans.³⁶⁸ These are people of similar social strata to the traders and merchants of first century Londinium and the people they dealt with: as followers of the Way of Jesus they take seriously its countercultural values. Their stories offer assurance to our imagined readers that it was possible for them to follow the Way of Jesus.

This 'radical generosity' found expression in the collection for those followers of the Way adversely affected by famine in *Iudaea*.³⁶⁹ It was 'according to their ability' (καθὼς εὐπορεῖτό τις: *prout quis habebat*) that each 'would send relief' (διακονίαν πέμψαι: *ministerium mittere*) supporting the collection organised by Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:27-30). The delivery of another such collection personally led to Paul's arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17). To give expecting nothing in return was a departure from the balanced reciprocity that characterised the dealings of the people of the Bloomberg tablets and defied 'conventional sociocultural boundaries':³⁷⁰ but it was eminently doable by followers of the Way of Jesus who included in their number people who could be recognised among the traders and merchants of first century Londinium. It was this 'radical generosity' that was in evidence as Publius, the land-owning 'leading man of the island' (τῷ πρώτῳ τῆς νήσου *principis insulae*) of Malta saw to it that as Paul and his companions set sail people 'put on board all the provisions' that were needed (ἀναγομένοις ἐπέθεντο τὰ πρὸς τὰς χρείας: *et navigantibus inposuerunt quae necessaria errant*, Acts 28:7-10). Following the Way of Jesus may have been countercultural, but it was something that could draw people of the standing of Tibullus, Gratus and others of first century Londinium.

2.6 Conclusion: negotiating the Way with a radical generosity

With that 'inward ear' of the imagination we explored in 1.3, and our adaptation of archival ethnography we described in 1.6, we have discovered clues that have enabled us to hear the voices of the people of the Bloomberg tablets. We are now in a position to draw conclusions that are justifiable in the context of mid first century Londinium and the discovery beside the Walbrook of so many wax tablets produced by merchants and traders (2.1,2), informed by a careful study of the tablets themselves (2.3), and warranted by close attention to the text of Luke-Acts (2.4,5).

³⁶⁸ See above, 2.4.6: 68-69

³⁶⁹ Kuecker 2020b, 231.

³⁷⁰ Spencer 2004, 132.

The world of Luke-Acts is recognisable to the people of the Bloomberg tablets. It was a world of honour and shame, of fairness and corruption in trade and commerce, of patronage and slavery, set within a framework of law and of justice. And yet as we imagine Luke-Acts through the eyes of the people of the Bloomberg tablets we cannot help but see the many points at which the teachings of Jesus are countercultural, inverting their understanding of rich and poor, reciprocity and patronage. It is a world in which God brings down the powerful and lifts up the lowly, a world in which concern for the destitute and disdain for the rich find expression among the first followers of the Way of Jesus in sharing, having all things in common and meeting the needs of all. Our imagined readers from Londinium and its world of finance and commerce would find reassurance in Luke-Acts that people of like standing had from the first been counted among the followers of the Way of Jesus. They too would have been challenged to negotiate their everyday world with a radical generosity that was indeed countercultural and yet did not preclude their continued involvement in that world.

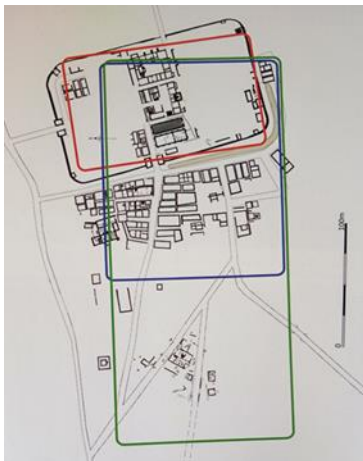


Figure 8: Vindolanda as it is today.¹

The later stone fort towards the top left and the vicus towards the bottom right.

© The Vindolanda Trust.

Figure 9: An outline plan of the positions of the early wooden forts in relation to the later third century stone fort of figure 7 (in black).² Period I is in red; periods II and III in blue, and the probable position of periods IV and V in green. A quarter turn anti-clockwise brings the plan into alignment with Figure 8. © The Vindolanda Trust.

Figure 10: A model of the stone fort at nearby Magna (Carvoran), on the Stanegate Road.³ The layout is similar to the earlier wooden forts at Vindolanda. The praetorium with its courtyard is in the centre; also visible are the barrack blocks and granaries.

© The Vindolanda Trust.

¹ 'The Vindolanda Trust' 2023.

² Birley 2009, fig. 6.

³ 'Magna Roman Fort' 2022.

3 IMAGINING LUKE-ACTS IN A MILITARY COMMUNITY: THROUGH THE EYES OF THE PEOPLE OF THE VINDOLANDA TABLETS

3.1 Introducing the people of the Vindolanda tablets

On 18 May sometime in the late 80s or early 90s CE *cohors I Tungrorum*, based at Vindolanda, was under the command of Iulius Verecundus. Of the 752 men (including 6 centurions), 456 (including 5 centurions) were absent: 46 were serving as guards of the governor; 337 (including 2 centurions) were at the office of Ferox at Coria; there were groups of 6 (including one centurion), 9 (including one centurion), 11, and 45 at unspecified locations; one centurion was in Londinium and an individual soldier elsewhere. Only 296 (including one centurion) were resident in Vindolanda; of those, 31 were not fit for service: 15 were sick, 6 were wounded and 10 were suffering from inflammation of the eyes.¹

They played a key role in what had become the northern frontier zone of the province of Britannia. The decade following the Boudica revolt had seen the consolidation of the Roman presence in the south east. As Vespasian came to power, three governors effectively completed the conquest of Britannia: Cerialis (71-73/4 CE) subdued the Brigantes, Julius Frontinus (73/74-77/78 CE) the Silures of south Wales, and Agricola (77/78-78/79 CE) the Ordovices of North Wales. More than 60 campaigning forts, linked by a network of roads and controlled from the legionary fortresses of Isca (Caerleon) and Deva (Chester) ensured the subjugation of the peoples of Wales² in spite of their valour and the difficult terrain (*super virtutem hostium locorum quoque difficultates*).³ As Vespasian was succeeded by Titus and Domitian, five further seasons of campaigning by Agricola to the north culminated in the battle of Mons Graupius in the north of Scotland,⁴ and the completion of the conquest of Britannia (78/79-83/84 CE).⁵ Some of the most vicious hand to hand fighting had been

¹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 154. Cf. Woolf 2015, 35 Ferox and Verecundus are the only two people named; those submitting and receiving the report would have known 'how to identify the individuals in each category if needed'. Vindolanda, see Map, 301; Coria, see Map, 307.

² Guest 2022a, 60–61. E.g. Tomen y Môr, see Map, 314; Isca, see Map, 214; Deva, see Map, 313.

³ Tacitus, *Agricola* 17.2, Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 104.

⁴ A misspelling of Graupius as Grampius by Francisco dal Pozzo (Puteolanus) in the first printed edition of *Agricola* (Milan, 1475-80? CE), prompted the Scottish historian, Hector Boecce (1465-536) to name the mountains in that locality the Grampian mountains: Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 84, 251–52. Cf. Charlotte Higgins 2014, 139. Proposed sites for the battle include locations near Perth, Dundee, Aberdeen, and Inverness: B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 76. See Map, note.

⁵ D. J. Mattingly 2007, 87–109; Salway 2001, 91–126; Ogilvie and Richmond 1967; Todd 1999, 82–115. The occasion was marked by the construction of a monumental arch c. 85 CE at Rutupiae (Map, 204): Wilmott and Smither 2020, 148; Allen and Bryan 2020, 41; Wilson 2004, 40-41.

undertaken by four cohorts of Batavians⁶ and two cohorts of Tungrians⁷ (*donec Agricola quattuor Batavorum cohortes ac Tungrorum duas cohortatus est, ut rem ad mucrones ac manus adducerent*).⁸ Everywhere, the aftermath of a battle that had been a spectacle on an enormous and savage scale (*grande et atrox spectaculum*), was a desolate silence (*vastum ubique silentium*).⁹ Victory enabled Agricola to hand over to his successor a province that was peaceful and safe (*tradiderat interim Agricola successori suo provinciam quietam tutamque*).¹⁰ He had overseen a building programme, and cultivated a liberal education among the elite which in their naivety they called ‘civilisation’, when, according to Tacitus, it was part and parcel of their enslavement (*Idque apud imperitos humanitas vocabatur, cum pars servitutis esset*).¹¹ The aftermath of the conquest was not without tension, as is suggested by words Tacitus attributed to the British leader Calgacus: ‘To pillage, butchery and rape they give spurious names and call it empire (*imperium*); and where they bring about desolation they call it peace (*pax*)’ (*auferre trucidare rapere falsis nominibus imperium atque ubi solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant*).¹²

As the Roman fleet circumnavigated the northern coast of Britannia, the army consolidated its position and *cohors I Tungrorum* built a wooden fort at Vindolanda (c. 85-92) on the Stanegate, a frontier road linking Coria (Corbridge) on the River Tyne and Luguvalium (Carlisle) on the River Eden.¹³ The fort was rebuilt and enlarged by the part mounted *cohors VIII Batauorum* (c. 92/95-105);¹⁴ when they were sent to join Trajan’s Dacian campaign *cohors I Tungrorum* returned (c. 105-122).¹⁵

The Vindolanda tablets date from that uneasy peace established subsequently under Domitian, Nerva and Trajan. By Hadrian’s time hostilities flared again,¹⁶ prompting his visit c. 122 CE and the erection of the frontier wall.¹⁷ Whether it was built to regulate the movement of people and facilitate economic relations in an extensive border zone, or to prevent the movement of people

⁶ A. R. Birley 2002a, 42–45.

⁷ A. R. Birley 2002a, 45.

⁸ Tacitus, *Agricola* 36.1, Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 115–16.

⁹ Tacitus, *Agricola* 38.2, Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 117.

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Agricola* 40.3, Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 119.

¹¹ Tacitus, *Agricola* 21.2, Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 106–7.

¹² Tacitus, *Agricola* 30.5, Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 112, 257–58.

¹³ B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 100. Vindolanda, see Map, 201; Coria, see Map, 307; Luguvalium, see Map, 302. The Stanegate road is marked on the Map.

¹⁴ ‘*Equitate*’, *Tab. Vindol.* III 628, Bowman, Thomas, and Pearce 2003. See Figure 8,

¹⁵ A. R. Birley 2002a, 57–76.

¹⁶ A tombstone commemorating the centurion, Titus Annius of *I cohors Tungrorum* alludes to his death in the ‘war’ at around the time of Hadrian’s accession: Tomlin 2012, 209.

¹⁷ D. J. Mattingly 2007, 119–21; S. R. Jackson 2020, 143–55; Salway 1981, 173–84.

across a militarised frontier,¹⁸ Hadrian's wall is a reminder of the tensions that prevailed in the world of Vindolanda.¹⁹

Each auxiliary cohort based at Vindolanda kept detailed records of their work, provisions, and equipment. Officers and their families corresponded on matters of professional concern and personal interest.²⁰ In the military documents, accounts, lists and letters of Vindolanda we meet the kind of people we meet in Luke-Acts: women of standing; commanders of auxiliary cohorts; provincial governors; centurions; soldiers and slaves. We glimpse the world in which Luke-Acts began to circulate. Following the approach outlined in the Introduction (1.6), we will begin with a detailed introduction to the Vindolanda tablets (3.2). Given that the corpus of Vindolanda tablets is far greater than that of the Bloomberg tablets or the Uley curse tablets, we will then focus on three groups of people and the tablets associated with each: the women and documents to do with the management of the *praetorium*; centurions and documents to do with their administrative duties; the prefects and documents to do with their professional and personal lives. Drawing on our adaptation of archival ethnography in 1.2,3,6, we will take an imaginative leap to see with our inward eye the women, centurions and prefects of Vindolanda and its neighbouring forts (3.3,5,7). That will enable us to imagine Luke-Acts through the eyes of people such as these drawn to follow the Way of Jesus (3.4,6,8). The world we discover in Vindolanda is very much the world of Luke-Acts and yet at the same time it is a world challenged by Jesus in Luke and by the followers of the Way in Acts. We will finally ask how such people from a military community might have negotiated their relationship with the empire as readers of Luke-Acts (3.9,10). Does Luke imply that 'Jesus and his followers did not contravene Roman law and were therefore not a threat to the empire'?²¹ Did he seek to subvert the 'major concerns for law and order that belong to the ruling classes'?²² Or is the reality we glimpse as we engage in archival ethnography more nuanced?

¹⁸ Bruhn and Hodgson 2022, 134.

¹⁹ D. J. Breeze 2018 suggests possible practical explanations for the wall: defence against invasion; protection against raiding; controlling civilian movement; keeping the peace. He also suggests alternative abstract reasons: for stability; for imperial containment; as a base of operations; as a reflection of the failure to conquer the rest of the world; as a monument to Hadrian. Cf. D. J. Breeze 2019a; D. J. Breeze 2019b; D. J. Breeze 2019c; D. J. Breeze et al. 2013. Bruhn and Hodgson 2022, 153 are adamant, 'rather than being an insignificant bureaucratic border transecting a homogeneous zone, the Wall destroyed pre-existing homogeneity and created a stark division between north and south, with the southern developments shielded by a generally impermeable barrier across which contacts took place at a limited number of supervised places'.

²⁰ Bowman 2003.

²¹ Esler 1987, 205.

²² Brawley 2020, 3.

3.2 Introducing the Vindolanda Tablets

The Vindolanda tablets are thin leaves of wood about postcard size and between 1mm and 3mm thick.²³ The cursive script is written in ink often with a split nib.²⁴ Cheap and easy to make, they sufficed where no papyrus was available. In many cases they were folded with the text preserved on the inner surfaces, sometimes with an address on the outer surface.²⁵ As one auxiliary cohort left Vindolanda and another arrived, documents were broken up, sometimes burned, and discarded on the floors of administrative buildings and barracks only to be covered by layers of clay and turf as buildings were repaired and the wooden forts rebuilt and enlarged.²⁶

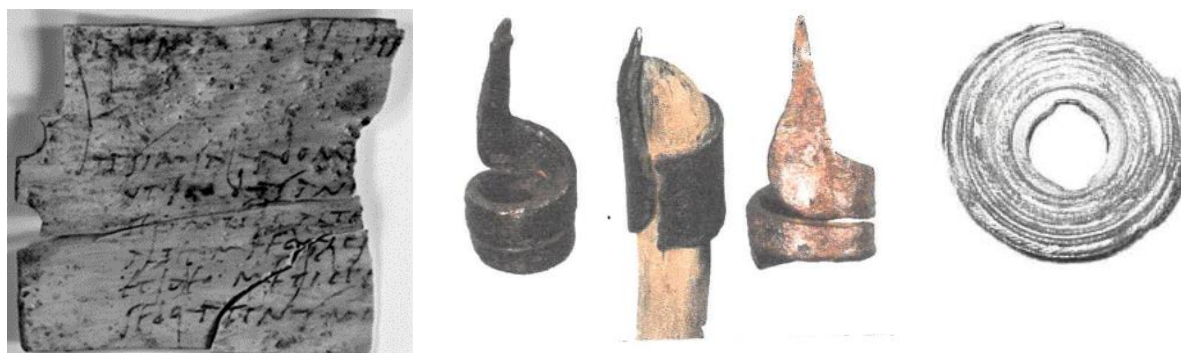


Figure 11: [Tab. Vindol. II 294](#).] a... na(?) Lepidi[ae suae] | ş[alutem | ita sim salua domi[na | ut ego duas an[] | ⁵ feram tibi alter[am | alteram febric[] | et ideo me tibi e[] | sed quatenus m[] | . . . Paterna (?) to her Lepidina, greetings. So help me God, my lady [and sister?], I shall bring (?) you two remedies (?), the one for ..., the other for fever (?) and therefore ... myself to you ... but insofar as ... © *The Trustees of the British Museum: 1986,1001.63*. See Appendix 264. For conventions employed in the presentation of the texts see Appendix, 253.

Figure 12: Ink nibs from Vindolanda: [3460](#), [3613](#), [1603](#).²⁷ © The Vindolanda Trust.

Figure 13: Ink pot lid from Vindolanda, [5858](#).²⁸ © The Vindolanda Trust.

By the mid second century the last of the wooden forts was replaced with a stone fort that remained in use until the departure of the Romans c. 410 CE. The stone fort and its accompanying civilian settlement (*vicus*) remained the focus of excavation through the 19th century and from 1929 under the direction of Eric and Margaret Birley and their sons Anthony and Robin, until a sequence of earlier wooden forts was discovered by Robin Birley in 1972.²⁹ Thirteen feet below ground level he unearthed the first wooden writing tablet in March 1973.³⁰ In the excavations of 1973 and 1974 many more wooden writing tablets were discovered, perfectly preserved in the anaerobic conditions

²³ Willi 2021, 45-49. See Figure 11.

²⁴ Willi 2021, 38-41. See Figures 12 and 13.

²⁵ Bowman 2003, 8-9; Bowman and Thomas 1983b.

²⁶ R. Birley 2009, 44.

²⁷ R. Birley 1999, 29.

²⁸ R. Birley 1999, 32.

²⁹ See above, 90, figures 8, 9, 10.

³⁰ A. R. Birley 2002a, 22; *Tab. Vindol. II 346*, Bowman and Thomas 1983a, 132-35.

that had resulted from the manner of their disposal. With the help of Alison Rutherford’s infrared photography and papyrologists, Alan Bowman and David Thomas, 117 were transcribed, translated and published in 1983. Excavations by the Vindolanda Trust under the direction of Robin and Patricia Birley, with Anthony and Heide Birley, and in the next generation, Andrew and Barbara Birley, have led to the publication of 776 tablets.

Excavations	Publication	Date	Numbering
1973-1974	Tabulae Vindolandensis I	1983 ³¹	I 1-117
1985-1993	Tabulae Vindolandensis II	1994 ³²	II 118-572
1991-1994	Tabulae Vindolandensis III	2003 ³³	III 573-853
2001-2003	<i>Tabulae Vindolandensis IV part 1</i>	2010 ³⁴	IV 854-869
	<i>Tabulae Vindolandensis IV part 2</i>	2011 ³⁵	IV 870-889
2017	<i>Tabulae Vindolandensis IV part 3</i>	2019 ³⁶	IV 890-893
	Tabulae Vindolandensis IV	2019 ³⁷	IV 854-893
1973-2019	Roman Inscriptions of Britain / Inscriptions / Vindolanda Tablets.	2019 ³⁸	118-893

Table 5: Excavation and publication dates of the Vindolanda Tablets.³⁹

The nature of the deep excavations of the early wooden forts with their anaerobic conditions, together with advances in dendrochronology make it possible to date the finds with a high degree of precision:⁴⁰ most tablets come from periods I – III.⁴¹

³¹ Bowman and Thomas 1983a: 1-117. NB this volume and its numbering is no longer referred to.

³² Bowman, Thomas, and Adams 1994: 118-572. The first 117 tablets were revised and renumbered, starting with 118.

³³ Bowman, Thomas, and Pearce 2003: 573-853. Some earlier texts were revised in an Appendix in the light of the advent of digital photography.

³⁴ Bowman, Thomas, and Tomlin 2010: 854-869.

³⁵ Bowman, Thomas, and Tomlin 2011: 870-889 (including 882-889, *descripta*).

³⁶ Bowman, Thomas, and Tomlin 2019c: 890-893.

³⁷ Bowman, Thomas, and Tomlin 2019a: 854-889.

³⁸ ‘Roman Inscriptions of Britain’ 2019: *Tab. Vindol.* 118-893. All four volumes published online, including introductory matter, digital images, transcriptions, translations, notes and commentary.

³⁹ <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/tabvindo/> accessed 20/4/2023. Excavations are on-going, and finds are published in *Britannia*.

⁴⁰ Hillam 2003.

⁴¹ ‘We remain committed to the view that confidence can be placed in the chronological framework of the periods of occupation and the different phases of fort construction, but that a number of anomalies in the attribution of individual tablets to particular periods or structures means that we should be cautious about basing interpretations of any particular text solely on archaeological data.’ ‘The Tablets and Their Context (2010-11) | Roman Inscriptions of Britain’ 2021; first published in *Britannia*: Bowman, Thomas, and Tomlin 2010, 189–90. See below, 96, table 6.

Period	Fort	Date	Cohort
I	Primary fort, c. 3.5 acres	c. 85-95 CE	<i>cohors I Tungrorum</i>
II	Enlarged fort, c. 5 acres	c. 95-105 CE	<i>cohors VIII Batauorum</i>
III	Renovated fort	c. 100-105 CE	<i>cohors VIII Batauorum</i>
IV	Rebuilt fort	c. 105-120 CE	<i>cohors I Tungrorum</i> and others, with additional and probably legionary establishment to the west.
V	Rebuilt fort	c. 120-130 CE	<i>cohors I Tungrorum</i>

Table 6: Periods of occupation of the Vindolanda wooden forts. See Figure 8.⁴²

While best preserved in Vindolanda, such ink on wood tablets are not limited to Britannia and the north west of the empire.⁴³ The discovery in 1961 of an Aramaic letter in the same format from Shim'on bar Kosiba leader of the second Judean revolt (134-135 CE), prompted Yigael Yadin to observe that 'the practice of writing on wood was widespread throughout the Orient, and is often mentioned even in rabbinical literature'.⁴⁴ Serena Amiratti argues that the presence of wooden wax tablets together with papyri in Pompeii and Egypt suggests that the choice between papyrus and wood may have been to do with the nature of the document.⁴⁵ Similar wooden writing tablets were used in Hittite texts for legal documents, accounts and letters.⁴⁶ That more wooden tablets have not been discovered in the eastern Mediterranean and more papyri in the north western provinces of the empire is due in large measure to climate.⁴⁷

Similar documents are to be found among Egyptian ostraca from auxiliary forts in Wâdi Fawâkhir⁴⁸ and Bu Njem.⁴⁹ daily reports and correspondence indicate that soldiers from the garrison were at work in various locations, arranging the provision of grain. There is a real connection here from one

⁴² A. Birley and Blake 2007, 3; <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/tabvindol/vol-IV/tablets-context> accessed 1/3/2023.

⁴³ Bowman 2003, 9; A. R. Birley 2002a, 33.

⁴⁴ Yadin 1961, 41–42; Haran 1996, 219-222, including photo: figure 5.

⁴⁵ Ammirati 2013.

⁴⁶ Waal 2011.

⁴⁷ Pearce 2019; Pearce 2004, 46.

⁴⁸ Guéraud 1941.

⁴⁹ J. N. Adams 1994, 88.

frontier to another:⁵⁰ ‘at the time pen-and-ink cursive Latin was being written in the same way all over the empire’ albeit with ‘a huge range of individuality.’⁵¹

Through their correspondence and detailed record keeping we glimpse the workings of the Vindolanda cohorts and of the households that occupied the *praetorium* and see a little of their lifestyle.⁵² We get a feel for traders and the relationships they had with the military community as they sought to draw on its legal processes. We can recognise the dependence of the community on the production of great quantities of wheat and barley and of hides for their clothing.⁵³ We see not only the basic foodstuffs and clothing used by the military community,⁵⁴ but also the finer clothing, foodstuffs and furnishings treasured by the family who lived in the *praetorium*.⁵⁵ The domestic arrangements for the *praetorium* were highly developed, well documented and in Alan Bowman’s words fit ‘very well into the context of the well-to-do Roman *familia*’.⁵⁶ The way of life of the Mediterranean world was to be experienced in Britannia. A wide range of activities was dependent on a high level of literacy: ‘the management of men and resources,... the acquisition and redistribution of supplies, ...the processing and exchange of information, ... establishing and sustaining social relationships by officers, soldiers and their dependents’.⁵⁷ Fundamental to trade,⁵⁸ literacy extended, at a basic level, to the lower ranks⁵⁹ and, as in Rome, to women among the elite.⁶⁰ It was, suggests Alan Bowman, ‘the intensive use of the written word that enabled the army to function with coherence in a large geographical area in a way which simply would not have been possible without it.’⁶¹ Ian Haynes argues that ‘the pen was more crucial to the success of the Empire’s armies even than the sword.’⁶²

⁵⁰ Bowman 2003, 32.

⁵¹ Bowman 2003, 86.

⁵² Pearce 2002.

⁵³ For an introduction to food supplies in a Roman fort, quantifying the amount of land required to grow grain and the amount of grain needed to feed men and animals see Dannell and Wild 1987.

⁵⁴ Cf. D. J. Breeze 2016 for a comparison of the diet of officers and men in a later Antonine fort.

⁵⁵ Harlizius-Kluck 2016; Wild 2011.

⁵⁶ Bowman 2003, 62.

⁵⁷ Pearce 2004, 45; Tomlin 2018, 214 suggests ‘some common soldiers could read and write’ albeit at a basic level.

⁵⁸ Woolf 2015, 38–41. Cf. Ferrándiz 2021.

⁵⁹ Tomlin 2018, 214; Ingemark 2000, 25; D. J. Mattingly 2007, 199–204.

⁶⁰ McDonnell 1996.

⁶¹ Bowman 2003, 42; Haynes 2013, 313–36.

⁶² Haynes 2013, 313.

The dispersed nature of the army's presence on the northern frontier of the empire, evident in the Vindolanda tablets, has contributed to a re-evaluation of the Roman army.⁶³ The frontier was not defended by a series of heavily fortified, fully populated, forts. 'The military presence,' suggests Alan Bowman, 'can be made to seem stronger and more pervasive than it actually is, numerically, to the scattered and less organised tribal units which might not perceive that forts were not always fully manned.'⁶⁴ The fort was part of an extended community of people interacting with each other through the written word. Documents such as the Vindolanda tablets and the eastern Mediterranean papyri and ostraca have prompted recent scholarship on the Roman army to move 'beyond organisation, to illuminate soldiers' relationships with one another and with the local community.'⁶⁵ The army is more than a military machine: it is a community of soldiers with disparate identities yet sharing a common identity as *milites* within the Roman empire.⁶⁶

3.3 Imagining Sulpicia Lepidina, Claudia Severa and other women

Life in the *praetorium* of a frontier fort must have been uncomfortable, dangerous and lonely for the wives and families of the prefects.⁶⁷ 'Accompanying their husbands in long distance relocations',⁶⁸ they were, however, more than 'faceless camp followers': they were 'valued within the social structure of the group'.⁶⁹ Shoes, clothing and jewellery discovered within the fort suggest the presence of other women in spite of the non-recognition of marriage for auxiliaries and legionaries. Only officers from the equestrian and senatorial orders were permitted to marry.⁷⁰ The range of shoes from the time of Lepidina and Cerialis suggests their household had five children aged between two and ten.⁷¹

⁶³ Haynes 2013, 10–20; D. J. Breeze 2011. Cf. D. J. Breeze 2019a with reference to changed thinking regarding the later period of Hadrian's Wall.

⁶⁴ Bowman 2003, 18.

⁶⁵ Goldsworthy, Haynes, and Adams 1999, 8. Cf. Zeichmann 2018b, chap. 2; Zeichmann 2018a; Haynes 1999, 8; Alston 1995, 3–5.

⁶⁶ James 2001, 77–78. Cf. D. J. Mattingly 2007, 166–98 and 199.

⁶⁷ Allason-Jones 2005, 46.

⁶⁸ Woolf 2013, 359.

⁶⁹ Greene 2012, 105.

⁷⁰ Scheidel 2007, 417–18 suggests that, because soldiers could co-habit with women and raise children, albeit without their having any legal rights, 'non-recognition' of marriage might be a more precise term than the traditional 'ban'. R. Birley 2015, 21, 26; Bowman 2003, 75. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* III 670.

⁷¹ van Driel-Murray 2003, 54–56.



Figure 14: An expensive slipper found in the praetorium of Cerialis and Lepidina stamped with vine leaves and two cornucopiae interlocked across an ear of corn and also stamped with his maker's mark by Lucius Aebutius Thales of Gaul. © The Vindolanda Trust.⁷²

Figure 15: A baby boot found in the same place and possibly belonging to one of the children of Cerialis and Lepidina. © The Vindolanda Trust.⁷³

Figure 16: [Tab. Vindol. II 291](#) i Cl(audia) ▶ Seuerá Lepidinae [suae] | [sa]||[u]tēm | iii Idus Septembr[e]s soror ad diem ' | sollemnem nātalem meum rogó | libenter faciás ut uenias | ad nos iucundiozem mihi | ii [diem] interuentú tuo facturá si | [.]. [c. 3]s vacat | Cerial[em t]uum salutá Aelius meus. [| et filioꝝ salutant vacat | m² vacat sperabo te soror | uale soror anima | mea ita ualeam | karissima et hae | Back: m¹ Sulpiciae Lepidinae | Ceriali[s] | a S[e]uera Front: Claudia Severa to her Lepidina greetings. On 11 September, sister, for the day of the celebration of my birthday, I give you a warm invitation to make sure that you come to us, to make the day more enjoyable for me by your arrival, if you are present (?). Give my greetings to your Cerialis. My Aelius and my little son send him (?) their greetings. m² I shall expect you, sister. Farewell, sister, my dearest soul, as I hope to prosper, and hail. Back: m¹ To Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of Cerialis, from Severa. © The Trustees of the British Museum [1986,1001.64](#). See Appendix, 263.

For Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of Flavius Cerialis, prefect of *cohors VIII Batauorum*, family celebrations, special days and feasting offered some relief. On 11 September (between 97 and 103) Claudia Severa, wife of Aelius Brocchus the prefect of a neighbouring fort,⁷⁴ sent 'her Lepidina' greetings,

⁷² <https://www.vindolanda.com/blogs/blog/the-curators-favourite-shoes> accessed 3/11/20.

⁷³ <https://www.vindolanda.com/blogs/blog/the-curators-favourite-shoes> accessed 3/11/20.

⁷⁴ Possibly Coria, see Map, 307: *Tab. Vindol. II 292*, cf. III Appendix: Bowman, Thomas, and Tomlin 2011.

anticipating the day of the celebration of her birthday (*ad diem ' | sollemnem natalem meum*).⁷⁵ She fears the day will be dull if her friend cannot come and so she is insistent that she attends, extending a warm invitation (*Libenter faciás ut uenias ad nos iucundiozem mihi [diem] interuentú tuo facturá*). As she comes to the close of the letter she sends greetings not only from her husband, 'my Aelius' but also from her 'little son' (*filiolus*).⁷⁶ The affection she has for Lepidina is apparent in the final greeting in her own hand: 'I shall expect you, sister. Farewell, sister, my dearest soul, as I hope to prosper, and hail' (*vacat sperabo te soror | uale soror anima | mea⁷⁷ ita ualeam | karissima et haue*).

On another occasion Severa looks forward to a celebratory breakfast.⁷⁸ That birthday celebrations were an important part of the calendar at the *praetorium* is implied by the centurion, Clodius Super, addressing 'his' Cerialis as a 'brother' apologising for missing Lepidina's birthday celebration.⁷⁹

Severa and Lepidina were in regular correspondence with each other and accustomed to meeting to deal with important matters.⁸⁰ Writing from Briga⁸¹ where she is staying for the time being (*mansura*), Lepidina wants to discuss an important matter that cannot be broached in a letter. Her husband, Brocchus, appears to have refused her permission to travel to Vindolanda, suggesting they meet at Coria, their home base. Severa is, however, determined to make the journey.⁸² Once again she finishes the letter herself, taking up the pen and speaking of her friend as 'my sister, my dearest and most longed-for soul' (*m. soror | karissima et anijmá | ma desideratissima*).⁸³

Brocchus writes with affection to Cerialis, passing on greetings from his wife, Claudia Severa,⁸⁴ asking that Cerialis greet Lepidina.⁸⁵ That Lepidina has an important part to play in the wider military community of the fort is suggested in letters that refer to her by name⁸⁶ and by the discovery of a letter addressed to her from another woman, Paterna.⁸⁷ This is evidence, suggests Elizabeth Greene,

⁷⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 291, cf. III Appendix.

⁷⁶ Brocchus refers to his *filiolus* in an affectionate letter to Cerialis (*Tab. Vindol.* III 623). *Filiolus* appears in Mark 10:24; John 13:33; Gal. 4:19; 1 John 2:1, 12, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21.

⁷⁷ *Anima mea* appears on the gemstone of a later gold ring found at Vindolanda: Tomlin 2012, 208.

⁷⁸ *Tab. Vindol.* III 639.

⁷⁹ *Tab. Vindol.* III 629. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* II 255.

⁸⁰ *Tab. Vindol.* II 292.

⁸¹ 70 km according to A. R. Birley 2002a, 136; in the vicinity of Vindolanda according to Bowman and Thomas 2019b: *Tab. Vindol.* II 292. Briga, see Map, 303 for a conjectural location.

⁸² *Tab. Vindol.* II 292, cf. III Appendix, Bowman and Thomas 2019b. Coria, see Map, 307.

⁸³ A third letter from Severa to Lepidina has only the final greeting, *Tab. Vindol.* II 293.

⁸⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* III 626. Cf. II 244, III 622.

⁸⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 247.

⁸⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* II 227, 247, 257, 263 (*m²? dominam*), 274, 288, and *Tab. Vindol.* III 622, 627, 629.

⁸⁷ *Tab. Vindol.* II 294.

of 'a distinct female milieu in this military community', lying 'parallel to the otherwise dominant masculine structure inherent to the Roman army'.⁸⁸

The household of the *praetorium* lived in a way that would be recognised in elite households across the empire.⁸⁹ What can be said of such houses where the 'householder had a significant public profile' can be said of the *praetorium*: 'despite variety in their layout, residences were not devised simply to be private spaces for family members to retreat to after a long day in the public arena'.⁹⁰ Living in the *praetorium* a prefect's wife and even children would be an important part of 'the social structure of the community'.⁹¹

An inventory listing items of foodstuff, clothing, jewellery and furnishings hints at the luxury Cerialis and Lepidina enjoyed as they entertained in the *praetorium*:⁹² at 99½ denarii a pair of purple curtains (*uela purp(urea)*) cost eight times as much as a leather saddle (*scordiscum*).⁹³ Inventories of tunic(s) (*tunicae*), two cloaks (*abollae*), Italian capes (*paenulae*), an outfit (*synthesis*) probably of clothing, perhaps of silver or some other fine ware, loose robes, half-belted tunics, underclothes, and vests suggests they dressed well.⁹⁴ The same writer lists valuables including a vase, rings and stones,⁹⁵ shoes and Gallic shoes.⁹⁶ Similar lists of textiles and clothing are found among the Egyptian papyri.⁹⁷ Artefacts discovered at Vindolanda suggest the clothing might have included purple and other bright colours and have been in a predominantly diamond twill pattern.⁹⁸ Their extravagance is evident in a diet that included spices,⁹⁹ roe deer, young pig, ham and venison,¹⁰⁰ and in their tableware comprising two shallow dishes, five side-plates, three vinegar-bowls, a platter, a single shallow dish, four bread-baskets, two cups, two bowls in a box, three egg cups, a strong-box (?) and a bronze lamp.¹⁰¹ Similar luxury egg-cups (*ouaria*), from the dinner service of the wealthy Cornelius Gallus are listed in a Greek inventory in Egypt.¹⁰² Two examples have been found in Pompeii and

⁸⁸ Greene 2013, 372.

⁸⁹ Bowman 2003, 62.

⁹⁰ Longenecker 2020, 212.

⁹¹ Greene 2012, 107.

⁹² *Tab. Vindol.* III 596.

⁹³ de la Bédoyère 2021, 133–34.

⁹⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* II 195, 196.

⁹⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 196.

⁹⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* II 197.

⁹⁷ *Tab. Vindol.* II 197, Bowman and Thomas 2019b. Reference to [P.Oxy 31.2599](#), 31.

⁹⁸ A. R. Birley 2002a, 139; Harlizius-Kluck 2016; Wild 2011.

⁹⁹ A black jar labelled '1,884 coriander seeds' was found nearby: Tomlin 2012, 208.

¹⁰⁰ *Tab. Vindol.* II 191. Cf. Pearce 2002.

¹⁰¹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 194; *Tab. Vindol.* II 191, 194, 195, 196, 197 are by the same hand: Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

¹⁰² Oliver and Shelton 1979, 28.

another in Boscoreale: ‘each has a small cup suitable for holding a boiled egg in the shell, and a geometric base which, when turned upside down, served as a dish rest’.¹⁰³ That some items of homeware, clothing, shoes and textiles were acquired by Cerialis from neighbouring auxiliary prefects, Tranquillus and Brocchus, suggests we glimpse here the lifestyle of those of equestrian rank.¹⁰⁴ This was what helped to reinforce their sense of identity.¹⁰⁵ Lepidina and Severa were women of high status with family connections to their husbands:¹⁰⁶ the *gentilica*, Sulpicia and Claudia, suggest that citizenship in Lepidina’s family goes back to ‘the reign of the emperor Servius Sulpicius Galba (68-69 CE)’,¹⁰⁷ while Severa’s family acquired citizenship in the time of Claudius (41-54 CE), as had the tribune in Jerusalem, Claudius Lysias (Acts 22:28, 23:26).¹⁰⁸

Observance of festivals through the year gave a structure to life in the *praetorium* at Vindolanda and contributed to that sense of shared identity among Roman auxiliaries.¹⁰⁹ Such ritual helped make sense of the power they represented.¹¹⁰ A notebook from the time of Cerialis and Lepidina, records chickens (*pulli*) and geese (*anser*) disbursed on specific dates from 11 (?) April 102 to 16 July 104 CE,¹¹¹ and probably consumed after their use in sacrifices.¹¹² Other disbursements (*expensa*) have to do with special events in the household of Cerialis and Lepidina and the observation of festivals,¹¹³ including the birthday of Minerva on 21 March (*ad [sacrum n(atalem) Miner-/uae*). Onesimus, a Greek name common among slaves and freedmen,¹¹⁴ possibly a standard-bearer, is linked tentatively with the decoration of the standards (*rosalia signorum*).¹¹⁵ Symbolic of ‘the unit’s allegiance to the emperor and the soldier’s allegiance to his unit’,¹¹⁶ they stood in the *aedes principiorum*, the shrine at the heart of the fort that was immediately next to the *praetorium*. Preparations were in hand on 1 May or June for a special lunch (*prandium*) to mark the ‘visit of the

¹⁰³ Oliver and Shelton 1979, 28.

¹⁰⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* II 196, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

¹⁰⁵ Woolf 2022a, 253–54.

¹⁰⁶ Bowman 2003, 50–52.

¹⁰⁷ Bowman 2003, 51.

¹⁰⁸ Greene 2013, 371 suggests that ‘marriages were not always the product of dalliances with locals’, more often, women came from the same tribes as their husbands.

¹⁰⁹ Haynes 2013, 198–206; Allason-Jones 2005, 142; D. J. Mattingly 2007, 166.

¹¹⁰ Woolf 2022a, 137.

¹¹¹ *Tab. Vindol.* III 581 possibly in the same hand as *Tab. Vindol.* II 191, 194, 196, 197, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

¹¹² *Tab. Vindol.* III 581. Cf. 582 and the reference to Chrisso the poultryman, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

¹¹³ *Tab. Vindol.* III 581, Bowman and Thomas 2019c. Another interpretation is offered by A. R. Birley 2002a, 128–35.

¹¹⁴ Bowman and Thomas 2019c: *Tab. Vindol.* 581, c.Back 88. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* III 610 and Philem. 10-21.

¹¹⁵ A. R. Birley 2002a, 132; Goldsworthy 2015, 92.

¹¹⁶ Haynes 2013, 218. On another occasion Masculis, a decurion, wrote to Cerialis and spoke of setting up a standard (*uexillum*) at a shrine beside a crossroads: *Tab. Vindol.* 628.

governor' (*aduentu consu[laris]*)¹¹⁷ and arrangements made for his bodyguards (*singulares*).¹¹⁸ Dinner with Brocchus on 25 December and 1 January may have coincided with *Saturnalia*: on another occasion Brocchus invited his 'dearest brother' (*frater k[ari]ssime*), Cerialis and Lepidina to stay once the *Saturnalia* were over.¹¹⁹ Noting their enthusiasm for hunting, Birley suggests it was an occasion for the hunt.¹²⁰

Beginning on 17 December, the household festival of *Saturnalia* went on for three to five days involving the role reversal of master and slaves.¹²¹ In Vindolanda's *praetorium* slaves would be served by Cerialis and eat in style before the drinking, gaming and revels began.¹²² Lepidina and their children would probably be present as the whole household exchanged presents, withdrawing later. Such role reversal gave slaves the opportunity to let off steam and the master of the household (Cerialis) the opportunity to neutralise potential threats.¹²³ It reinforced the status quo, serving to re-establish the hierarchies of the household and socialise newcomers into it.¹²⁴ A letter written by Severus to Candidus, the slave of a previous prefect, Genialis, arranging for delicacies to be available suggests it was a regular feature on the calendar at Vindolanda.¹²⁵ Remarkably for one of such high standing, Severus, a *cornicularius*,¹²⁶ addressed Candidus, a slave, in an informal and egalitarian way as 'brother' (*frater*).¹²⁷

The *Matronalia* was also significant for Cerialis, Lepidina and their household.¹²⁸ Commemorating 'the founding of the temple of Juno Lucina, goddess of childbirth' on the Kalends of March, it was a feast day particularly for wives or mothers (*erat dies proprie festus matronis*).¹²⁹ Anthony Birley suggests it had connections with the mother goddesses of the lower Rhineland and Batavia.¹³⁰ Celtic

¹¹⁷ *Tab. Vindol.* II 248, cf. III 581, c.Back 96.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *RIB* 1713. The later tomb of a bodyguard of the governor was erected in Vindolanda by his widow. Tomlin 2012, 209.

¹¹⁹ *Tab. Vindol.* III 622.

¹²⁰ A. R. Birley 2002a, 130, 147-151. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* II 233, III 615, IV 861.27.

¹²¹ Beard, North, and Price 1998a, 124-26.

¹²² Dolansky 2011a, 491.

¹²³ Versnel 1993, 115-17.

¹²⁴ Dolansky 2011a, 500.

¹²⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 301.

¹²⁶ A senior staff officer hoping for promotion to the rank of centurion: Goldsworthy 2015, 68. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* II 301, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

¹²⁷ *Tab. Vindol.* II 301, cf. III Appendix, Bowman and Thomas 2019c; Haynes 2013, 16.

¹²⁸ *Tab. Vindol.* II 581, line 72, Bowman and Thomas 2019b. Cf. Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars, Vespasian* 19, C. Edwards 2008, 270, 350.

¹²⁹ Horace, *Carm.* III.8: *Kalendis Martiis Matronalia dicebantur, eo quod mariti pro conseruatione coniugii supplicabant, et erat dies proprie festus matronis*: Keller 1902, 255; A. R. Birley 2002a, 130.

¹³⁰ A. R. Birley 2002a, 130. Anthony Birley offers an alternative chronology which was subsequently rejected by Bowman and Thomas after further scrutiny of the tablets.

mother goddesses played a significant part in rites taken over by the Romans in Britannia too, not least in Vindolanda where five ritual dedications are to mother goddesses.¹³¹ One can imagine the prominent role played by Lepidina among the wives and mothers of the military community in its three main components matching the *Saturnalia*: Cerialis would pray for the well-being of Lepidina and for their marriage; Lepidina, herself, would serve the household slaves with a special feast; Cerialis and Lepidina would then exchange gifts.¹³² Above all the *Matronalia* ‘was a domestic observance that focused on the members of the *domus* [in this instance the *praetorium*] and their well-being’: it underlined the part played by the *domina* as slave mistress in the household.¹³³ As in the *Saturnalia* the feasting with its role reversal served to reinforce the relationships within the household: the slaves had an afternoon of indulgence, the *domina* had a year of compliance. The involvement of Lepidina and Claudia in their respective festivals of *Saturnalia* and *Matronalia* helped secure their role as wives within the *praetorium* and the responsibility they had for the household and its management.¹³⁴

In another informal household account book from the *praetorium* of Cerialis and Lepidina, a slave of the household lists food supplies over a few days in June (c. 100-105 CE) and makes provision on three occasions for a festival (*ad sacrum*).¹³⁵ On 25 June he refers to charitable donations (*stipes*) at a festival dedicated to a goddess (*ad sacrum d<i>uae*), perhaps Fortuna, a deity popular in the army associated with that day.¹³⁶ The provisions include not only Celtic beer (*ceruesae*), a simple wine (*uini*) and a sour wine (*aceti*) associated with lower ranks,¹³⁷ but also Massic wine (*uini.. ssec(?)*), some of which may have been used in the offering to the goddess. Grain and pulses, sourced locally and further afield, were the staple diet of the Vindolanda cohorts; the purchase of pepper, a luxury, by or for Tagarminis, a low-ranking soldier, suggests there was a spirit of *convivium* and access to luxury items not only within the *praetorium*, but also among *milites*.¹³⁸

Lepidina and Cerialis lived with the reality of ill health as soldiers were wounded and sick, many with eye problems.¹³⁹ Once Cerialis excused himself from some commitment referring to his son’s state of

¹³¹ R. Birley 2015, 32.

¹³² Greene 2011, 250–52.

¹³³ Dolansky 2011b, 193.

¹³⁴ Dolansky 2011b, 202.

¹³⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 190.

¹³⁶ A. R. Birley 2002a, 135.

¹³⁷ Cf. Luke 23:36: at the crucifixion the soldiers offer Jesus ‘sour wine’ (ὄξος: *acetum*).

¹³⁸ *Tab. Vindol.* II 184, Pearce 2002, 940–41.

¹³⁹ Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* II 154; A. R. Birley 1992. See above, 3.1: 91.

health (*ualetudinem*).¹⁴⁰ When Lepidina suffered from a fever she sought help from another woman, Paterna, who wrote offering to bring two remedies (*ego duas ant[īdotos (?) | f̄er̄am t̄ibi*):¹⁴¹ either she had access to her own or she brought something recommended by the *seplasarius*¹⁴² or the *medicus*.

A hospital is implied in the strength report of *cohors I Tungrorum*¹⁴³ and mention is made of work on a hospital (*ualetudinarium*) in a day report.¹⁴⁴ Another day report¹⁴⁵ refers to a group of men building a residence (*hospitium*) for Marcus, the doctor (*medicus*):¹⁴⁶ as a *medicus ordinarius* he would probably have had the rank of a centurion.¹⁴⁷ One young *medicus*, 25 year-old Anicius Ingenuus, was honoured by *cohors I Tungrorum* on a tombstone in the nearby Vercovicium (Housesteads) fort.¹⁴⁸ Vivian Nutton argues that medical services were provided by men with specific training, many of whom may have been Greek recruits with experience of medicine and access to Greek text books.¹⁴⁹

When Lepidina arrived with Cerialis and *cohors VIII Bataurorum* they may have had their own *medicus* as Marcus would have moved on with his own cohort.¹⁵⁰ In an account and a letter from the time of Cerialis and Lepidina, Vitalis is identified as a ‘pharmacist’ (*seplasarius*) whose responsibility was either to put together remedies for the soldiers or to put together treatments for doctors to administer.¹⁵¹ A writing tablet in Luguvalium (Carlisle) mentions another *seplasarius*, Albanus, perhaps serving in a military hospital.¹⁵² A rare Latin word originating in Seplasia, north of Naples, a place renowned for its medical ointments, it is sometimes translated ‘dealer in ointments’.¹⁵³ Tomlin draws attention to the way *seplasarii* and *medici* are linked in an early Christian homily from late

¹⁴⁰ *Tab. Vindol.* II 227; alternatively, Lepidina is writing to Cerialis out of concern for his health: Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

¹⁴¹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 294. See above, 94.

¹⁴² See below, 3.4.4: 114-115.

¹⁴³ *Tab. Vindol.* II 154.

¹⁴⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* II 155.

¹⁴⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 156.

¹⁴⁶ Tomlin 1991, Baker translates *medicus* as ‘doctor; Bowman and Thomas as ‘medical orderly’.

¹⁴⁷ R. W. Davies 1969; R. W. Davies 1972.

¹⁴⁸ *RIB* 1618, Nutton 1969, 263. Vercovicium, see Map, 305.

¹⁴⁹ Nutton 1969, 264–65; Goldsworthy 2015, 100–101; A. R. Birley 2002a, 47, 90; Flemming 2006, 503. Cruse 2004 cites evidence for military doctors in Roman Britain and medical practice common across the empire. Cf. Greek inscriptions: [RIB 461](#), [3151](#); Latin inscriptions: [RIB 1618](#), [1028](#).

¹⁵⁰ In Colossians 4:14 Luke is referred to as ὁ ἰατρὸς ὁ ἀγαπητὸς: *medicus carissimus*.

¹⁵¹ *Tab. Vindol.* III 586 and IV 877. Cf. Baker 2016, 563; see Allason-Jones 1999 for a fuller study of health care in the Roman North.

¹⁵² Tomlin 1991, 300. Luguvalium, see Map, 302.

¹⁵³ *OLD* 1968, 1738.

fifth or early sixth century CE, giving rise to the possibility they were associated with each other in medical treatment.¹⁵⁴

Tab. Vindol. III 591 may be ‘an inventory of medical supplies or a list of substances used for medical purposes’ perhaps as an eye salve or in the treatment of wounds. There is also evidence that linen possibly soaked in honey was used in the treatment of eye conditions: *Tab. Vindol. III 592* lists items with medicinal properties, including honey and ointment (*`m'el | beṭa[| ung[]*).¹⁵⁵

Not long before their arrival in Vindolanda, *cohors VIII Batauorum* had been campaigning north into Scotland. There is a tantalising glimpse, albeit indirectly, of the cost of such campaigning and the grief it gave rise to. Among a small number of writing exercises¹⁵⁶ from the time of Lepidina and Cerialis is a quotation in capitals from Virgil, *Aeneid* 9.473: *INTEREA PAVIDAM VOLITANS PİNNA/TA VBEM*:¹⁵⁷ perhaps the children in the *praetorium* were taught by Lepidina.¹⁵⁸ It is suggested that the word *seg(niter)*, ‘slack’, in a different hand is the teacher’s critical comment on the writing exercise.¹⁵⁹

The quotation is apt: written in a literary hand it speaks of a mother who had insisted on accompanying her son, Euryalus, as Aeneas and his followers arrive in Italy. The complete passage in the *Aeneid* (9.473-480) tells of the mother’s devastation at the news of her son’s tragic death.

Interea pavidam volitans pennata per urbem
nuntia Fama ruit matrisque adlabitur auris
Euryali. at subitus miserae calor ossa reliquit,
excussi manibus radii revolutaque pensa.
evolat infelix et femineo ululatu
scissa comam muros amens atque agmina cursu
prima petit, non illa virum, non illa pericli
telorumque memor, caelum dehinc questibus implet.¹⁶⁰

Meanwhile winged Rumour flew in haste through the settlement with her message and flitted right to the ear of Euryalus’ mother. Poor lady, all warmth at once left her. The shuttle

¹⁵⁴ With reference to Mark 5:26 where *seplesarius* (spelled *simplassarios*) is used of the physicians who failed to help the woman with the issue of blood. Cf. Luke 8:43: Tomlin 1991, 300 note 35. See below, 3.4.4: 115, note 203.

¹⁵⁵ *Tab. Vindol. III 592*, Bowman and Thomas 2019c.

¹⁵⁶ *Tab. Vindol. II 118-121*, Bowman and Thomas 2019b; *Tab. Vindol. IV 854-856*, Bowman, Thomas, and Tomlin 2019b.

¹⁵⁷ *Tab. Vindol. II 118*, Bowman and Thomas 2019b list quotations from Virgil in military contexts, not least in Egyptian and Judean papyri.

¹⁵⁸ A. R. Birley 2002a, 144. Cf. Woolf 2022a, 254.

¹⁵⁹ A. R. Birley 1993, 38.

¹⁶⁰ Virgil, *Aeneid* 9: 473-480 Fairclough 1918, 146–49.

leapt from her hands and her skein of wood untwined. She dashed forth in distraction and terrible distress; and, wailing as women do and tearing her hair, she ran with mind deranged to the wall where stood the foremost ranks; she took no thought for the danger from the spears, no thought for the presence of men. And then she filled all the sky with her lament.¹⁶¹

With memories of battles still raw among those based in Vindolanda, perhaps Lepidina found solace in the poetry of Virgil. She may well have known what it was to feel the colour drain from her cheeks and for the skies to be filled with cries of grief as news flew through the streets of such a tragic loss. A number of letters suggest that when *cohors VIII Bataurorum* moved on and *cohors I Tungrorum* returned, Priscinus was their prefect.¹⁶² His wife¹⁶³ had extended to an unknown correspondent ‘comfort just as a mother would do’ (*consolaris | sicut mater faceret*); one reconstruction of the text suggests this was appreciated by the letter writer, ‘indeed, my own heart [welcomed?] this sympathy (of yours)’ (*hunc enim ▶ adfec/tum ▶ animus meus*).¹⁶⁴

These were women with a mind of their own: they were women of agency¹⁶⁵ whose contribution to the wider military community was valued beyond the immediate circle of their husbands and children.¹⁶⁶ In a letter to Cerialis Vitalis, a *decurion* of the Augustan *Ala* later stationed in Deva (Chester), asks to be remembered to his mistress, Lepidina (*dominam tuam a me salu-/ta*), recognising her contribution to the community as a whole.¹⁶⁷ In a letter that confirms that Cerialis and Lepidina had children¹⁶⁸ Valatta, another woman, looks to Lepidina for support as she presents ‘her Cerialis’ with a legal petition¹⁶⁹ or some kind of request to do with a favour or patronage. That would suggest that other women in the fort looked to her to act in their interests.¹⁷⁰

The correspondence of Lepidina and Severa and other women indicates the significant part they played in the *praetorium* and beyond.¹⁷¹ They contributed to the education of their children and had a hand in the management and oversight of the *praetorium* with its round of feasts and festivals. Not

¹⁶¹ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, tr. by W. F. J. Knight 1958, 240.

¹⁶² *Tab. Vindol.* II 295-298, Bowman and Thomas 2019b; *Tab. Vindol.* III 636-638, Bowman and Thomas 2019c; A. R. Birley 2002a, 152–55.

¹⁶³ Her *gentilicium* and *cognomen* appear to be on the back of *Tab. Vindol.* 639, Bowman and Thomas 2019c. A. R. Birley 2002a, 153 suggests the name *Varia*, but this is rejected by Bowman and Thomas.

¹⁶⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* III 663; Bowman and Thomas 2019c.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. references to *Ingenua*, the recipient’s daughter in *Tab. Vindol.* III 643. *Ingenua* is also named in *Tab. Vindol.* III 642.

¹⁶⁶ Greene 2012, 105.

¹⁶⁷ *Tab. Vindol.* II 263; Bowman and Thomas 2019b. Deva, see Map, 313.

¹⁶⁸ *Tab. Vindol.* II 257 (App III), Tomlin 1996b, 462.

¹⁶⁹ Michael Peachin points out that one in six of the petitions discovered among the Egyptian papyri were from women, to do with issues around violence, inheritance and dowry, Peachin 1999, 226.

¹⁷⁰ Greene 2013, 379–80.

¹⁷¹ Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* II 324.

only did they have the affection and support of their husbands and women of similar standing, but they also had the respect of other officers and were a source of comfort and practical support for other women in the military community.

3.4 Imagining Luke-Acts through the eyes of the women associated with Vindolanda

3.4.1 Women of high-standing and women's travels

Were women of the standing of Sulpicia Lepidina and Claudia Severa to become followers of the Way of Jesus, they would discover in Luke-Acts confirmation that it was for them and their peers. Among those who followed Jesus as he 'went on through cities and villages proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God' (Luke 8:1-3) were Joanna, 'the wife of Herod's steward Chuza' and others who were able to 'provide for them out of their resources' (αἴτινες διηκόνουν αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς: *aliae multae quae ministrabant eis de facultatibus suis*). They would recognise these women of means from 'the higher levels of society'¹⁷² and assume they were literate and able to manage resources. We do not hear them, but their near contemporaries at Vindolanda give voice to the things they held dear.

While 'the devout women of high standing' (εὐσχήμονας: *honestas*) along with 'the leading men' of Antioch in Pisidia (πρώτους τῆς πόλεως: *primos civitatis*) were incited by *Iudaei* to turn against Paul and the Way (Acts 13:50), not a few of 'the leading women' (γυναικῶν τε τῶν πρώτων: *mulieres nobiles*) of Thessalonica were among those who sided with Paul and became followers of the Way (Acts 17:4). Though nothing else is said of her, Damaris is named alongside Dionysius the Areopagite as a follower of the Way (Acts 17:34). Elite women had 'an informal, 'private' authority' that was based on their 'birth, rank, family, reputation and social connections'.¹⁷³ Our imagined readers, aware of the presence of women and children in Vindolanda's military community¹⁷⁴ would presume the 'relatives and friends' who made up Cornelius's household (οἶκος: *domus*) and came to follow the Way (Acts 10:2, 24, 48), included women of some standing. When Publius, the leading man of Malta, entertained Paul and his companions for three days, they would imagine his wife would have been involved (Acts 28:7-10).

¹⁷² Wolter 2016, 330–31; Green 1997, 320–21; Witherington III 2002, 138–39; Caird 1963, 116; contrast de Boer 2002, 144.

¹⁷³ Hemelrijk 2004, 234.

¹⁷⁴ A. R. Birley 2002a, 103; R. Birley 2015, 21. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* III 629, II 257, 263.

The first householder to welcome Jesus and the first followers of the Way was Martha who is presented as ‘a patron: prosperous, independent, ready to host this traveller’ (Luke 10:38-42).¹⁷⁵ The first householder to welcome Paul and companions was Lydia ‘from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth’ (πορφυρόπωλις; *purpuraria* Acts 16:14): welcoming them to her Philippi home she became a follower of the Way. In both householders our imagined readers would have recognised women of agency.¹⁷⁶ While not householders themselves, the households of Lepidina and Severa were managed on a lavish scale: they knew those who traded in luxury cloth and the cost of purple curtains.¹⁷⁷ They would have seen in Lydia a householder involved in trading luxury goods.¹⁷⁸

As the wives of prefects of auxiliary cohorts, Lepidina and Severa were used to travelling; their close friendship involved visiting each other with and without their husbands. Women such as these coming to follow the Way would recognise the journeys of Mary and Elizabeth as they shared their friendship with each other (Luke 1:26-56); the journeys Mary made with Joseph (Luke 2:1-7), with her son Jesus (Luke 8:19), and to Jerusalem (Acts 1:14); and the journeys taken with Jesus to his death and beyond by the women who resourced Jesus’ ministry (Luke 8:1-3; 23:49; 24:1-12).

3.4.2 Festivals and feasting

With its festivals and feasting, life in the *praetorium* was organised in a way that would have been recognisable in elite homes across the empire. Lepidina and Severa knew their place and the place of their equals: at those feasts they knew who was invited and who was not. Jesus steps into the world of hospitality Lepidina and Severa were used to when he accepts Levi’s invitation to ‘a great banquet in his house’ (Luke 5:29) and eats with various Pharisees (Luke 7:36; 11:37; 14:1). Noting he was at home in the world of feasting and banqueting (Luke 5:33-39), they would have recognised the extravagance of the woman who honoured Jesus by anointing his feet with ointment from an alabaster jar (Luke 7:36-50). Whether they were drawn to Mary or to Martha, they would have understood the welcome given to Jesus and his followers in their house (Luke 10:38-42). They would have welcomed Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:1-48); theirs was the kind of household Sergius Paulus the proconsul of Cyprus would have kept (Acts 13:7,12); theirs was the kind of hospitality given by Publius, the leading man of Malta, to Paul and his companions (Acts 28:7). In Caesarea as in

¹⁷⁵ Green 1997, 435.

¹⁷⁶ Wolter 2017, 83 notices that the first householders to welcome Jesus and Paul were women.

¹⁷⁷ *Tab. Vindol.* III 596.

¹⁷⁸ This reinforces the view that Luke’s audience would associate purple with wealth: Keener 2020, 391. For a historical account of Lydia as an independent woman of means trading in a luxury good see Ascough 2009, 81. Cf. Hylan 2019, 130. For a differing view of Lydia as a freedwoman engaged in a dirty trade associated with the urban poor see Reimer 1995, 105, 116, 126.

Vindolanda, albeit on a smaller scale, governors come and go, and honoured guests are welcomed (Acts 24-26). The households of Cerialis and Lepidina and of Brocchus and Severa enjoyed each other's hospitality. Hospitality such as they were accustomed to was something Jesus enjoyed at every turn (Luke 11:37). When they entertained, they would invite their friends, brothers, sisters, relatives, or rich neighbours in the expectation of an invitation in return. Theirs was a world of balanced reciprocity.¹⁷⁹

Jesus' reflections on the tendency of guests to choose 'the places of honour' and the dangers of being asked to move should someone 'more distinguished' arrive amounted to the kind of wisdom they as hosts would take for granted (Luke 14:7-10). In Luke-Acts it is supremely at the meal table that the radical difference of the Way of Jesus becomes apparent.¹⁸⁰ Echoing the words of Mary as she had sung of the one who 'has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly' (Luke 1:52), Jesus speaks of the way 'all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted' (Luke 14:11).

Even this was not entirely alien to Lepidina, Severa and their contemporaries. While they probably knew nothing of the yearly cycle of Judean festivals (Luke 2:41; 22:1-38; Acts 2:1; 12:3-4; 20:6,16; 27:9), their year was also shaped by the rhythm of ritual and festival. Twice each year, from 17 December to 22 December and on 1 March they shared in household festivals that momentarily inverted their social norms. The feasts of the *Saturnalia* and the *Matronalia*, and the way in which a *cornicularis* could address his slave as 'brother',¹⁸¹ raised the possibility that slaves might be served by their master just as the master has his slaves 'sit down and eat' as he serves them (Luke 12:37).¹⁸² Accustomed to observing the *Matronalia*, they might see in Luke 1-2 a celebration of the motherhood of Elizabeth and Mary. It would come as no surprise that it is in that context that Mary, the mother of Jesus, articulates a principle that is to become a keynote of the teaching of Jesus (Luke 1:51-53; cf. 4:18-19; 22:24-27) and find expression among those who follow the Way in a community of sharing in the home and at the table (Acts 2:43-47). The God they encounter in her words 'has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty' (Luke 1:51-53).

¹⁷⁹ Neyrey 1991b, 371–73. Cf. Crook 2004, 54 citing Sahlins 1972, 186.

¹⁸⁰ Paulraj 2021, 127; Klinghardt 2019, 111.

¹⁸¹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 301.

¹⁸² Described as an 'outlandish' redefinition of household relations by Green 1997, 499.

There is, however, a major difference in the teaching of Jesus and the description in Acts of the first followers of the Way. The feasts of the *Saturnalia* and the *Matronalia* reinforced the hierarchies of the elite household, serving to provide a safety valve for any tensions and securing an ensuing year of compliance.¹⁸³ By contrast, the teaching of Jesus introduces a Way to follow throughout the year, a Way that finds expression in the new spirit of community established among those who follow the Way of Jesus.¹⁸⁴ The Way of Jesus extends beyond the household and invites those who follow it to become part of a new and differently ordered household. ‘When you give a banquet,’ Jesus goes on to say, ‘invite the destitute, the crippled, the lame and the blind’ (κάλει πτωχούς, ἀναπήρους, χωλούς, τυφλούς: *voca pauperes debiles claudos caecos* Luke 14:13).

In *Food Justice and Hospitality in Luke-Acts: A Historical and Contemporary Interpretation*, Gideon Paulraj has demonstrated that ‘the πτωχοί in the Lucan world were beggars, weak, powerless, landless, diseased, naked, hungry and destitute’.¹⁸⁵ The challenge intensifies as Jesus tells the parable of the great dinner for which those invited have excuses and so cannot attend. Angered, the master of the house sends his slave ‘into the streets and lanes of the town’ to ‘bring in the destitute, the crippled, the blind, and the lame’; once they have been brought in there is still room, prompting the master to command the slave to go beyond the town into the surrounding countryside,¹⁸⁶ ‘Go out into the roads and lanes and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled’ (Luke 14:15-24).

Were the likes of Lepidina and Severa to join a community of those who followed the Way, they would be challenged by the teaching of Jesus in Luke and the example of the first communities in Acts to ensure that at its heart the balanced reciprocity they were accustomed to would be replaced by a generalised reciprocity that extends hospitality without expecting anything in return.¹⁸⁷ The move beyond the town to the surrounding countryside would have resonated with our imagined readers. While within the military community all were provided with food, they would have encountered extremes of destitution in their travels through the *vicus*, the settlement that grew up around the fort and beyond into the roads and lanes they were accustomed to travelling.¹⁸⁸ The community of those who followed the Way is open to all regardless of their social status and their

¹⁸³ Dolansky 2011a, 500; Dolansky 2011b, 202.

¹⁸⁴ Green 1997, 104–5; Brawley 2020, 47; Paulraj 2021, 242–49.

¹⁸⁵ Paulraj 2021, 95.

¹⁸⁶ Wolter 2017, 223.

¹⁸⁷ Neyrey 1991b, 371–73. Cf. Crook 2004, 54 citing Sahlins 1972, 186.

¹⁸⁸ *Tab. Vindol.* II 292. Cf. 291. The women of the *praetorium* also accompanied the cohort when it was on the move.

capacity to reciprocate.¹⁸⁹ Lest there be any doubt about the extent of this challenge, the narrative goes on to speak of feasting and celebrating (Luke 15:6,9,23), and of the rich man ‘dressed in purple and fine linen’ who ‘feasted sumptuously every day’ and the destitute beggar ‘named Lazarus, covered with sores’ who longed for the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table (Luke 16:19-31). The likes of Lepidina and Severa would no doubt recognise the signs of opulence in the rich man’s clothing¹⁹⁰ and in his feasting as they too were challenged to recall the destitute outside the walls of the fort. This teaching makes real the commitment Jesus had made to the destitute, the captives, the blind and the oppressed in Nazareth (Luke 4:18-21) and all he reported to the messengers of John (Luke 7:18-23).

It is in Acts that the followers of the Way live out this kind of generalised reciprocity in their sharing of all things (Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-37) and in their breaking down of ethnic and social barriers (Acts 10:1-11:18)). Paulraj wonders whether Luke’s omission in Acts of any reference to the destitute (πτωχολί: *pauperes*) is deliberate, implying that the followers of the Way lived out the paradigm outlined by Jesus in his Nazareth declaration (Luke 4:18), though he has to concede the problems remain with the plight of the Greek widows (Acts 6:1-6).¹⁹¹ Reading of the first followers of the Way, our imagined readers would quickly become aware that fundamental to it is a table fellowship that is open to all, where all is shared and the needs of each are met. (Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37).¹⁹²

How would our imagined readers respond? They would find in Jesus one who shares their love of feasting but calls into question the values on which the world of their feasting is built. Would this be too great a challenge for them? Such a radically different way of life would seem to preclude their involvement in the Way. And yet, as we have seen, among the followers of the Way were some they would be at home with. Might they give expression to the teaching of Jesus in showing a concern for those they knew to be injured and unwell in the community of the fort? Might they extend their concern to those of a status beneath them within the military community and to those beyond the fort community in the *vicus* and surrounding countryside? The challenge was not simply to give ‘the scraps’ that ‘fall from the table’ but to devote their lives to ‘good works and acts of charity’ as Tabitha had done (Acts 9:36).¹⁹³ There can be no escaping that the proclamation of the ‘good news to the destitute’ is a key to Luke’s meal narrations.¹⁹⁴ Faced with such a challenge they might have

¹⁸⁹ Esler 1987, 194; Green 1997, 550.

¹⁹⁰ Green 1997, 605–10 draws attention to the purple clothing and daily feasting as signs of opulence.

¹⁹¹ Paulraj 2021, 120–25.

¹⁹² Keener 2020, 173–76; 202–3; Spencer 2004, 49–50; 65; Paulraj 2021, 242–49.

¹⁹³ Reimer 1995, 41.

¹⁹⁴ Paulraj 2021, 230.

found in the narrative of the woman with ‘the alabaster jar of ointment’ (ἀλάβαστρον μύρου: *alabastrum unguenti*) reflections on forgiveness that would help them as they struggled with those challenges and sought to follow the Way of Jesus (Luke 7:36-50).

3.4.3 Kinship in turbulent times

The message is reinforced as Jesus goes on to address the large crowds who had been following him, telling them that being a disciple of Jesus involves hating ‘father, mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even life itself’; it involves carrying the cross, counting the cost and giving up all possessions (Luke 14:25-33). The women of Vindolanda belonged to a community in which people addressed each other as *frater*¹⁹⁵ and *soror*:¹⁹⁶ far from home they understood their friendships and the loyalty they had to each other in familial terms. That sense of a broadening of family commitments Jesus espoused may have struck home to them in their context too (Luke 8:19-21).¹⁹⁷ Followers of the Way in their position might find it possible to live the kind of commitment Jesus envisages in their context and at the same time bridge the divides they were all too aware of.

In the calendar of festivals observed at Vindolanda, 25 June also played a significant part in the lives of Lepidina, her household and her friends. It was the day of the festival of the goddess Fortuna and involved the provision of charitable donations. Were the likes of Lepidina or members of her household drawn to become followers of the Way this practice may have prepared them a little not only for that spirit of sharing (Acts 2:43-47) but also for the commitment to share with those most in need (Acts 4:35; 11:29).¹⁹⁸ They would be drawn to the centurion of Capernaum who was commended for his love for and commitment to the local people (Luke 7:4-5), to Cornelius who ‘gave alms generously to the people’ (Acts 10:2) and in particular to Tabitha who ‘was devoted to good works and acts of charity’ (Acts 9:36). Fortuna’s emblem was a *cornucopia* signifying the provision of plenty, and a ship’s rudder on a globe, often associated with *redux* to ‘give the Emperor a safe homecoming from his travels’.¹⁹⁹ They themselves would have experienced the perilous sea-crossing to Britannia and may have heard reports from the fleet dispatched by Agricola around the

¹⁹⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* 210, 233, 236, 243, 247, 248, 250, 252, 255, 256 (App), 259, 260, 265, 289, 295, 297, 300, 301, 306, 309, 310, 311, 331, 343, 345, 347, 349, 352, 363, 364 (App), 370 (App), 417, 420, 451, 456? 508, 611, 612, 614, 622, 623, 629, 630, 632, 642, 643, 646, 648, 664, 667, 669, 670, 693, 713, 730, 750, 756, 790, 844, 848, 868, 869, 875, 877, 888.

¹⁹⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* 291, 292, 293, 310, 335, 389? 635, 639, 661.

¹⁹⁷ For ‘comparable redefinitions’ of familial relationships see Wolter 2016, 345.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Gregson 2017, 77 who suggests the practice of Jewish almsgiving is part of the context for the practice of sharing.

¹⁹⁹ H. Mattingly 1960, 161. ‘The Llanvaches Roman Coin Hoard | Museum Wales | Amgueddfa Cymru’ 2023: Denarii of Nerva, [2008.19H/171](#); [2008.19H/181](#); [2008.19H/182](#); [2008.19H/190](#). Moorhead 2013, 17 fig. 3 a coin of Domitian. ‘The Portable Antiquities Scheme’ 2019: Denarius of Trajan, [NLM-E8B04D](#).

northern coast of Scotland after the Battle of Mons Graupius. ‘Nowhere’, Tacitus comments noting the swirling ebb and flow of the tidal currents, ‘does the sea dominate more widely’ (*nusquam latius dominari mare, multum fluminum huc atque illuc ferre*).²⁰⁰ Encountering Luke-Acts they would be invited to see Jesus as the one who ‘commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him’ (καὶ τοῖς ἀνέμοις ἐπιτάσσει καὶ τῷ ὕδατι, καὶ ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ: *et ventis imperat et mari et oboediunt ei* Luke 8:25). The words of Paul to all on board the ship as it became victim to the storm off the coast of Crete suggest that such was the authority those who follow the Way could call on: ‘I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship’ (παρααινῶ ὑμᾶς εὐθυμεῖν· ἀποβολὴ γὰρ ψυχῆς οὐδεμία ἔσται ἐξ ὑμῶν πλήν τοῦ πλοίου: *suadeo vobis bono animo esse amissio enim nullius animae erit ex vobis praeterquam navis* Acts 27:22).²⁰¹

3.4.4 Sickness and healing

Lepidina and Severa belonged to communities where sickness was common. They had a concern for their sick children as the centurion had for his slave (Luke 7:1-10), the widow for her son (7:11-17) and the parents for their sick daughter (Luke 8:40-56). When afflicted with a fever Lepidina had access at least to a *seplasarius* and possibly a *medicus* and on one occasion was pleased to receive two remedies to help her. The fever of Simon’s mother-in-law and the desire for relief from it were familiar (Luke 4:38-39). Eyesight problems were prevalent among the men of the cohort and played a significant part in Luke’s account of Jesus and his followers as he gave sight to the blind (Luke 4:18; 7:21-23; 14:13,21; 18:35-43), and as Saul’s temporary blindness was healed (Acts 9:8-19; 22:11-13). That they lived with people who were sick or injured would mean that they recognised the significance of the healing Jesus brought. They would have had an empathy with the woman ‘suffering from haemorrhaging for twelve years’ who had ‘spent all she had on physicians’ (ἰατροῖς: *medicos* Luke 8:43-48).²⁰² When a very early tradition identified Luke as ‘the beloved physician’ (ὁ ἰατρὸς ὁ ἀγαπητὸς: *medicus carissimus*), our imagined readers in Vindolanda would recognise the kind of person the writer had in mind (Col. 4:14).

The early Christian homily from late fifth century or early sixth century Africa cited by Tomlin as evidence for the linking of *medici* and *seplasauri* relates to the equivalent narrative in Mark 5:25-34.

²⁰⁰ Tacitus, *Agricola* 10.6: Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 99; cf. 173–74. See Map, note.

²⁰¹ With Parsons 2017, 145; Parsons is critical of Carter 2016 who sees Acts 27 as symbolic of sovereignty over the Roman empire.

²⁰² Note that the reference to physicians is absent from an early third century papyrus of the passage in Luke and other manuscripts too: Metzger 1994, 121.

It speaks of a woman's frustration as 'she said to herself, "Why should I go to the doctors now at such cost and without any benefit? Why should I go to the pharmacist and seek useless prescriptions for juices from plants?" (... *ait intra se 'Vt quid mihi iam medicis egere, cum sumptu, sine fructu? ut quid mihi dictata inaniter quaerere pigmenta, ire per simplasarios?'*).²⁰³

Lepidina and Severa lived in a world that knew the meaning of grief expressed so powerfully in Virgil's lament of a woman for her son lost in battle.²⁰⁴ They would have an empathy with the parents who wept at the death of their daughter (Luke 8:52), with Jesus as he wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44) and with the women of Jerusalem who wept as Jesus went to his execution (Luke 23:27). When they read of the woman with the 'alabaster jar of ointment' (ἀλάβαστρον μύρου: *alabastrum unguenti* Luke 7:37) and the women preparing 'spices and ointments' following the burial of Jesus (ἀρώματα καὶ μύρα: *aromata et unguenta* Luke 23:56),²⁰⁵ Lepidina and Severa may have thought of the ointments available to them through the services of a *seplasarius*.

3.4.5 Women of agency

The women whose writings are preserved in Vindolanda were women of agency. Travelling with auxiliary cohorts experienced in fierce fighting they were not simply fellow travellers. Living in the *praetorium* they played an important part in the social fabric of the military community.²⁰⁶ The likes of Lepidina and Severa offered help to other women,²⁰⁷ and other women could look to them for help in difficult circumstances.²⁰⁸ We can imagine such women noticing in Luke-Acts the way women

²⁰³ A Laon Ms. *Sermo de flvx sanguinis* (cod. 113, fol. 36b) Turner 1920, 4 ll.25-35. The homily goes on to speak of the art of the *medici* but also the iron instruments that arouse fear: ... *ait intra se 'Vt quid mihi iam medicis egere, cum sumptu, sine fructu? ut quid mihi dictata inaniter quaerere pigmenta, ire per simplasarios? sequar tantos sanatos et laetantes angelos, accedo ad simplasarium corporis mei, pulso caelestis medici ianuam, tango fimbriam et accipio medicinam. si purpuram regiam tangit reus et efficitur de crimine mortis securus, ego si tetigero regem caelorum non fortasse insultabo artibus medicorum? si tetigero, inquit, salua ero. fide Christi tango, et finem profluenti sanguini pono: accedo ad limitem fimbriorum prosumpsit et ferramenta non metuum medicorum. hoc fecit quod praesumpsit, hoc inuenit quod credidit, hoc accepit quod petit, hoc aperuit quod pulsavit ...* 'she said to herself, 'Why should I go to the doctors now at such cost and without any benefit? Why should I go to the pharmacist and seek useless prescriptions for juices from plants? I will follow after such angels who heal and bring delight. If a criminal touches the purple robe of a king and his release from a mortal crime is secure, will it not follow that I, if I touch the king of the heavens, will perhaps not have abused the arts of the doctors?' 'When I touch, I will be healed,' she said. 'I touch with faith in Christ and I put an end to the flow of blood: I reached out to the edge of his clothes and it has benefitted me and I do not fear the iron instruments of the doctors.' She did this because she anticipated it. She found this because she believed. She received this because she prayed. She opened this [door] because she knocked.'

²⁰⁴ See above, 3.3: 106-107. Zeichmann 2018b, 83 suggests the healing of Aeneas (Acts 9:34) is symbolic of the healing of the empire.

²⁰⁵ Wolter 2017, 537-38.

²⁰⁶ Greene 2012, 107.

²⁰⁷ *Tab. Vindol.* II 257, Greene 2013, 379-80.

²⁰⁸ *Tab. Vindol.* II 294, Greene 2011, 249-50.

undertake significant tasks that also make a difference. It is Mary who is the first to encapsulate the challenge Jesus brings to the status quo wherever that may be (Luke 1:46-55) and a woman, Anna the prophet, who is the first to 'speak about' Jesus 'to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem' (Luke 2:38). It is a group of women, some of whom are of high standing, who resource Jesus' itinerant mission (Luke 8:1-3). They and other women who had travelled with Jesus and accompanied him through the troubles of his final week are the first to share the message of his resurrection (Luke 24:8-10). Tabitha's life is spent doing good (Acts 9:36). It is not only Philip, one of the seven and 'an evangelist' (Acts 6:1-6; 8:26-40) but also his four unmarried daughters who 'had the gift of prophecy' (Acts 21:8-9). There was a partially literate world in which they saw to it that their children were taught to write: they might have assumed some literacy, not least on the part of the leading women they meet in Luke-Acts (Luke 8:1-3; Acts 13:50; 17:4) and might well assume that just as Zechariah could write (Luke 1:63), so too Mary's responsibility in nurturing her son was to ensure that he too would be able to read and, as Chris Keith argues, write (Luke 2:40, 52; 4:16).²⁰⁹

3.5 Imagining Cassius Felicio, Saecularis and other centurions

In Luke-Acts, we encounter centurions who figure, Esler suggests, 'as a prototype of the government officials who will later show such interest in the Christian message'.²¹⁰ The Vindolanda tablets throw light on the dealings of centurions within the military community and with local people and traders. Centurions in auxiliary cohorts had often come up through the ranks and shared the same ethnic background as their men, though many came from wealthier families and local aristocracy.²¹¹ Finds from Vindolanda suggest that centurions and their cavalry equivalent, decurions, may have had their wives living with them.²¹² In a letter mentioning Equester, a centurion in *cohors III Bataurorum*, the decurion Vitalis of the *ala Augusta* may refer to his mistress (*domina m[ea]*).²¹³

Travel for centurions and other men was commonplace. On the day of the strength report of *cohors I Tungrorum*, five of the six centurions had travelled away from the fort, one as far as Londinium. 456

²⁰⁹ Keith 2009 argues that John 8:6,8 reflects a plausible historical tradition that Jesus could write; Keith 2011 suggests that Jesus' literacy was not to the level of a scribal-teacher. In Codex Bezae the Latin equivalent of καταγράφω in John 8:6,8 is *scribo*: 'Codex Bezae (MS Nn.2.41)' 2023, 238-239 (134v, 135r). To Keith's use of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri to illustrate the use of καταγράφω (in Codex Bezae the equivalent of *scribo*), might be added the use of *scribo* in the Vindolanda tablets and the Bloomberg tablets to refer to everyday writing: *Tab. Vindol.* II 177, 212, 225, 260, 289, 300, 311, 312, 324, 334, 343, 364, 377; *Tab. Vindol.* III 611, 645, 647, 664, 665, 667, 670, 701, 706, 751, 832, 842, *Tab. Vindol.* IV 875, 893. Cf. *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 23, 44, 50, 53, 55.

²¹⁰ Esler 1987, 37.

²¹¹ Goldsworthy 2015, 73.

²¹² A. R. Birley 2002a, 103; R. Birley 2015, 21.

²¹³ *Tab. Vindol.* II 263. See note, line 8.

of the 752 men were also some distance away.²¹⁴ The letter Chrauttius wrote to ‘his brother and old messmate’ (*suó fratri | contubernali antique*) was to be delivered ‘at London’ to Veldedeius, ‘the groom of the governor’ (*Londini | Veldedeio | equisioni co(n)s(ularis)*).²¹⁵ After chastising him for failing to write for such a long time, Chrauttius passes greetings on to other mutual acquaintances, chases up the shears he had bought from Virilis the veterinary doctor and asks to be remembered to ‘our sister Thuttena’. An expenses account²¹⁶ from the *praetorium* of *cohors I Tungrorum* details a route described in the later Antonine itinerary from Eboracum (York) to Coria (Corbridge), passing through Isurium (Aldborough), Cataractonium (Catterick) and Vinovia (Binchester).²¹⁷ This suggests that ‘itineraries were used for official perambulations in which several centres might be visited in a given order.’²¹⁸ The outward journey includes dates and on five occasions ¼ of a denarius is spent on wine. The substantial account for 94 ¾ denarii includes the cost of accommodation, wheat, salt, fodder, and vests together with wagon axles for a carriage.²¹⁹ The network of roads across the province and the empire facilitated the exchange of correspondence, cemented relationships, and established an identity for those centurions, officers and men beyond the cohort they belonged to. It helped build a web whose strands secured power in the empire.²²⁰ It also gave them knowledge of the wider world. Some knowledge of Rome with Domitian’s recently erected arch commemorating the quelling of the Judean revolt by Titus can be assumed, not least because of the circulation of *Iudaea capta* coins.²²¹ With roots in Batavia and Tungria and retaining their ethnic identity and customs,²²² our imagined readers from *cohors I Tungrorum* and *cohors VIII Batauorum* would recognise in the use of the word Ἰουδαῖοι: *Iudaei* people with an ethnic identity rooted in their homeland of *Iudaea* and shared customs and practices. The narrative of Luke-Acts is written enabling those with no direct knowledge of the *Iudaei* to understand something of their background in the law and the prophets.

²¹⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* II 154, a strength report dated 18 May between 92 and 97 CE, see above, 3.1: 91. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* IV 857, a similar strength report. For similar reports from other periods and other parts of the empire see Alston 1995, 22–23.

²¹⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 310: the name Veldedeius appears on a leather off-cut found nearby in association with a horse’s chamfron. Tomlin 2012, 209.

²¹⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* II 185.

²¹⁷ Route I: B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 25; see Map, 311; 310; 309; 308; 307.

²¹⁸ B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 23.

²¹⁹ *Tab. Vindol.* 185, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

²²⁰ Woolf 2020, sec. 25.

²²¹ Vespasian (48), Titus (3), Domitian (1), Galba (1): [IVDAEA CAPTA Coins Reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme](#) accessed 13/04/2023 including two in the Llanvaches Hoard: [2008.19H/19](#); [2008.19H/20](#). Esler 1995, 246–54 includes sketches of all the IVDAEA CAPTA coin types in the British Museum.

²²² A. R. Birley 2002a, 42–45.

Extensive administrative responsibilities demanded a high degree of numeracy and literacy from centurions.²²³ A brief report of the day's duties (*renuntium*)²²⁴ would be submitted by the *optio* in charge of a small group of men.²²⁵ Many have been discovered.²²⁶ The fullest relates to the century of Crescens (see figure 17).

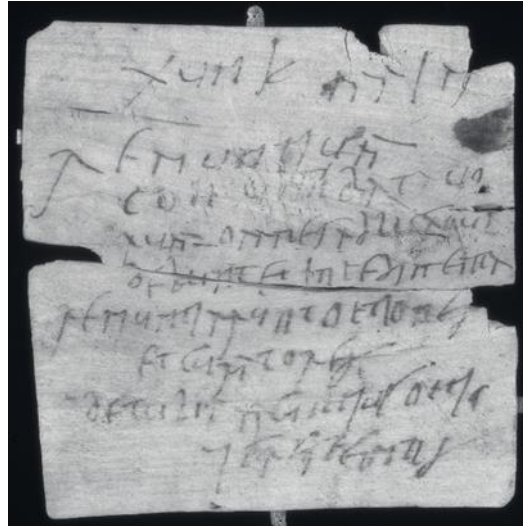


Figure 17: [Tab. Vindol. III 574](#) vii K(alendas) Maias | *renuntium vacat* | *coh(ortis) viiii Batauorum omnes ad loca qui | debent et impedimenta | renuntiarunt optiones | et curatores | detulit Arcuittius optio | (centuriae) Crescentis* 15 April. Report of the Ninth Cohort of Batavians. All who should be are at duty stations, as is the baggage. The *optiones* and *curatores* made the report. Arcuittius, *optio* of the century of Crescens, delivered it. © The Trustees of the British Museum: [1995_0701.211](#). See Appendix, 269.

More detailed reports were made of the work accomplished each day. On one occasion, possibly when units from *cohors VIII Bataurorum* had joined *cohors I Tungrorum*, 343 men were in the workshops (*in officis*), 12 making shoes, 18 building a bath house, others building a hospital; they sawed, plastered, moved rubble, worked with lead and clay, and made tents.²²⁷ Centurions were also involved in commissioning work from skilled craftsmen (*fabri*) in the workshops (*fabricae*): Musurunus ordered a strap or webbing for the underpart of a vehicle, *ocridem ▶ factam ad uetu|ram ▶ iussu Musuruni (centurionis)*.²²⁸

²²³ Goldsworthy 2015, 72; Bowman 2003, 79–94.

²²⁴ A. R. Birley 2002a, 80–85.

²²⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 127: century of Exomnius; 128, century of Crescens; 138, century of Felicio (cf. II 166, 168, 182, 193, III 578, 610); 148, *optio* Candidus of the century of Crescens; *Tab. Vindol.* III 575: century of Exomnius; 576, IV 849: century of Rufus. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* II 129, 137, IV 870.

²²⁶ *renuntio* *Tab. Vindol.* II 127, cf. III Appendix; 128; 129, cf. III Appendix; 130; 135; 137; 138; 139; 146; 148; 152; 153; 458?; III 574, 576, 578; *renuntium* *Tab. Vindol.* II 545, cf. III Appendix; III 574; 575; 577; 579; *renuntius* *Tab. Vindol.* II 127; 130; 131; 133; 134; 135; 136; *renuntium* *Tab. Vindol.* II 140; 141; 143; 147; 149; 151; 545?. Source: *RIB* Index of Latin words.

²²⁷ *Tab. Vindol.* II 155, cf. III Appendix.

²²⁸ *Tab. Vindol.* IV 862. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* II 160, 182.

Centurions were able to make requests on behalf of their men: on one occasion, a decurion, Masclus, wrote to Iulius Verecundus requesting leave for some of his men and the return of a cleaving knife on loan to Talampus of the century of Nobilis.²²⁹ Formal requests for leave (*commeatus*) were addressed to the prefect and emphasised the ‘worthiness’ (*dignum*) of the one making the request.²³⁰ In one of the most complete, Buccus addresses the prefect as ‘my lord’ (*domine*) and commends ‘a worthy person to whom to grant leave’ without specifying the purpose of the leave (*Buccus t[] | rogo domine dignum | me habeas cui des c[o]m[m]eatum p. r. so ut possi[m] | [c. 6...] e. ere fa [,]*).²³¹ Andangius and Vel [...] work closely with the prefect Verecundus asking that Crispus the *mentor* be given lighter military service (*[amicum] nostrum nomi[ne] Crispum mentorem | facias ut possit bene | ficio tuo leuius militare | e[t] genio tuo gratias age [re d]e b e m u s vacat*).²³² Flavius Cerialis wrote to his dearest, fortunate brother (*uale mi felicit[er] frater (?) . [] karissime*), an unnamed centurion based away from the fort, ordering his return to do a head-count of his soldiers or to arrange some kind of payment to other centurions.²³³ The centurion, Clodius Super, wrote in a similarly intimate way to Flavius Cerialis as ‘my dearest lord and brother’ (*domine frater | carissime*), expressing concern for his boys’²³⁴ well-being ahead of their transfer and asking for the provision of appropriate clothing.²³⁵

One of the key strengths of the Roman army was its division into small groups dependent on each other. A century, under a centurion, would be made up of approximately ten *contubernia* of eight men sharing a tent or barrack room.²³⁶ Connectedness is the key and is reflected in the way correspondents address each other. In one tantalisingly fragmented letter spanning three tablets,²³⁷ it looks as if centurions and others shared together in the kind of military association or guild that prior to the discovery of the Vindolanda tablets had been evident only from the time of Septimus

²²⁹ *Tab. Vindol.* IV 892. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* III 586, an account, III 628 a letter from Masclus to Cerialis and an address, II 505.

²³⁰ Six addressed to Cerialis, prefect of *cohors VIII Bataurorum* (*Tab. Vindol.* II 166-171); one to Flavianus, prefect in command at an earlier date, (172); one to Priscinus, prefect of *cohors I Tungrorum* (173); and four which do not include the name of the addressee. Among those asking for leave are someone whose name ends in ... danus of the century of Felicio (166), an unknown person from the century of Felicio (168), Gannalius (169); Expeditus (171); Aventinus (172); Messicus (175); and Buccus (176) each of whom belongs to an unidentified century.

²³¹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 176.

²³² *Tab. Vindol.* IV 891.

²³³ *Tab. Vindol.* II 242, cf. III Appendix.

²³⁴ In the sense of ‘slave’: *OLD* 1968, 1515. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* II 184 where overcoats and other commodities are being traded in the centuries of Ucenius (?) and Tullio.

²³⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 255.

²³⁶ *OLD* 1968, 436. Cf. J. K. Knight 2003, 42–43; Alston 1995, 21.

²³⁷ *Tab. Vindol.* III 655, 656, 657.

Severus (193-211 CE).²³⁸ Addressing someone as ‘most loved’ (*ka]r[is]/]šime*),²³⁹ the writer seems to be making good some problem that has arisen by sending additional denarii in ‘individual wrappings’ (*in cartas inşē[- / ges*). Acknowledging his mistake (*mea erratio*) he appeals for support to preserve his honour, ‘so please believe me ... that I retire thus so that my reputation is intact, which is the chief point’ (*ita rogo credas mihi / m.... emę sic re| cedere ut integer / şim quod eşt p rimu(m)*).²⁴⁰ He goes on to clarify his reasoning: ‘And yet I want it to be clear to you that I am withdrawing neither from the mess nor from the club [/association/guild] unless ...’ (*ac tamen uolo liqueat / tibi me nec a contiber|nio recedere nec a sco| la nişı ç. iuş rationem*).²⁴¹ Sadly, the reason he gives has been lost.²⁴² The writer defends himself to the ‘lord’, *domi / no* referring to an occasion when he was seen at the ‘goldsmiths’ or ‘the silversmiths’ who may well have been based in Londinium (*apud auri]fices aut apud argen| tarios*).²⁴³



Figure 18: [Tab. Vindol. III 656](#). I. . . | ..[.] | *ac tamen uolo liqueat / tibi me nec a contiber|nio recedere nec a sco| la nişı ç. iuş rationem* |. . . ii. . . | *illud in. c... domi|no uidit autem me | potest fieri apud auri]fices aut apud argen]5 tarios et haec est p[. . . Back. . . |] | *şime vacat* And yet I want it to be clear to you that I am withdrawing neither from the mess nor from the club unless ... that ... to the chief. But he saw me, perhaps(?), at the goldsmiths’ or the silversmiths’ and this is ... © The Trustees of the British Museum: [1995,0701.349](#). See Appendix, 275.*

²³⁸ On *scholae* see [Tab. Vindol. III 656](#), Bowman and Thomas 2019c.

²³⁹ [Tab. Vindol. III 656](#), back.

²⁴⁰ [Tab. Vindol. III 655](#).

²⁴¹ [Tab. Vindol. III 656](#).

²⁴² This is a very early reference to *scholae* usually associated with Severan times and later: [Tab. Vindol. III 656](#), Bowman and Thomas 2019c. Guilds (*collegia*) were ‘worshipful associations of private soldiers and lower ranks for welfare and good fellowship’ associated with Severan and later buildings: Richmond 1943, 133–34. In Severan times ‘they were also social clubs, enjoying occasional ‘feasts’, and having a clubhouse, *schola*, within the camp perimeter for relaxation and entertainment’: Smith 1972, 497. Buildings in Lambaesis, North Africa have been ‘tentatively identified as the *scholae* or guild houses associated with particular ranks such as centurions: Goldsworthy 2015, 88.

²⁴³ [Tab. Vindol. III 656](#): Bowman and Thomas 2019c suggest they were perhaps operating in Londinium.

Tab. Vindol. III 657 may be the conclusion to the letter where mention is made again of the mess (*contubernium [sic]*) and the recipient is asked to pass greetings on to, among two others, Felicio, a centurion who is mentioned in a number of tablets.²⁴⁴ We glimpse here that sense of mutual interdependence within a *contubernium* and a *schola* extending to the associations of silversmiths and goldsmiths in far off London; there is a warmth in the final greeting that suggests a sense of connectedness among colleagues set in a framework of honour and shame as the writer seeks to right a wrong. The same sense of connectedness is evident in the other letter by the same writer, in which he counts among his ‘messmates’ (*[c]ontibernales*) someone with the Greek name, Elpis.²⁴⁵

Centurions had responsibility for the purchase of foodstuffs, trading with civilians: in Cerialis’ time Surenus is mentioned in the context of the acquisition of chickens, while decurions are linked with beer.²⁴⁶ The Vindolanda tablets show that coinage was in regular use and the main denomination referenced was the denarius.²⁴⁷ Once, when *cohors I Tungrorum* returned to a much enlarged fort in Vindolanda c. 105-120 CE, sufficient grain was ordered to meet the dietary requirements of 2,000 soldiers for one day; Firmus ordered grain for legionary soldiers who were at the time in the fort,²⁴⁸ Felicio the centurion ordered 45 pounds of bacon, and centurion Exominius is listed handling denarii in records kept by a civilian trader.²⁴⁹

Letters addressed to Cassius Saecularis (a centurion, decurion or *optio*) suggest he had responsibility for the supply of barley²⁵⁰ and of timber;²⁵¹ he was involved with local people as an ‘*interpres*’, an agent or ‘interpreter in some transaction with non-Latin speakers’.²⁵² Saecularis seems to have won the respect of those he dealt with: Curtius Super greets him as ‘his Cassius’ (*Curtius Super Cassio suo | salutem*);²⁵³ Vittius Adiutor, *aquilifer* of *II legio Augusta* based in Caerleon, extends ‘very many [greetings]’ to him as his ‘little brother’ (*fra | terclo suo plurimam*);²⁵⁴ and another writes with

²⁴⁴ Felicio, *centurio Tab Vindol.* II 138, 166, 168, 182, 193, 242, III 578; Felicio 657, 698.

²⁴⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 346: this was the very first tablet to be discovered in 1973 and speaks of socks sent by one Sattua and of four pairs of sandals and two underpants. It finishes with similar superlative greetings: *[o]pto felicissimus uiuas*.

²⁴⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* III 581.

²⁴⁷ Of the 233 references to coinage in the Vindolanda tablets, 194 mention denarii, 1 mentions a dupondius and 38 mention the as: Bland 2016, 72.

²⁴⁸ *Tab. Vindol.* II 180, Bowman and Thomas 2019b: Introduction.

²⁴⁹ *Tab. Vindol.* 182. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* IV 861. For an assessment of the Roman military diet in general see R. W. Davies 1971. For an assessment in the light of the Vindolanda evidence see Pearce 2002; Whittaker 2004.

²⁵⁰ *Tab. Vindol.* II 213.

²⁵¹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 215.

²⁵² *Tab. Vindol.* II 213, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

²⁵³ *Tab. Vindol.* II 213.

²⁵⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* II 214 Pollard and Berry 2012, 92.

cheerful familiarity, ‘I pray that you are enjoying the best of fortune and are in good health’ *opto felicissimus bene ualeas*.²⁵⁵ It was not only the staple diet the centurions were involved with: Felicio, a centurion with *cohors VIII Bataurorum* arranged a loan for the purchase of spices (*condimentorum*), gruel (*halicae*) and eggs (*oua*).²⁵⁶ Such exotic spices suggest involvement with traders from the eastern Mediterranean.²⁵⁷ They also had a part to play in arranging festivals. A letter written in the same hand as *Tab. Vindol.* II 213 and 214 and so associated with Saecularis speaks of arrangements for a priest to be sent to Verecundus, the prefect, about a festival (*sacerdotem quem | rogo ut ad Verecundum praefectum de fes- | . . .*).²⁵⁸

A letter from Octavius, probably a civilian trader, throws light on the trade undertaken by centurions and other officers.²⁵⁹ It was found with two accounts and the appeal of an overseas trader in the barrack block c. 105-120 CE.²⁶⁰ Described as ‘the most impressive and extensive letter found at Vindolanda so far’,²⁶¹ it is a business letter written in haste using technical financial terms and spellings influenced by the sound of words.²⁶² It throws light on the world of honour and shame present on the northern frontier as much as in the eastern Mediterranean.²⁶³ Indeed, Anthony Birley suggests Fatalis (line 22) was a legionary centurion born in Rome who served in Britannia with *legio II Augusta* and *legio XX Victrix* and finished his 23 years of service in *Iudaea* with *legio X Fretensis*. At his death, aged 42, Claudia Ionice, his ‘freedwoman and heiress’ (*lib(erta) et heres*) erected a tomb ‘on account of his merits’ (*ob me- | rita eius*) in Jerusalem.²⁶⁴ Candidus, Spectatus and Firmus, centurions or *optiones*, were trading in large amounts with Octavius: 5,000 modii of cereal and hundreds of hides linked to Catacactonium (Catterick). The letter opens with an urgent plea from Octavius to Candidus: unless 500 denarii in cash is delivered promptly, he will lose his deposit (*arre*)²⁶⁵ of 300 denarii and will ‘be embarrassed’ or ‘blush with shame’ (*erubuscam*). His plea is heartfelt, ‘So, I ask you, send me some cash as soon as possible.’ Transactions referred to in this

²⁵⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 215.

²⁵⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* II 193.

²⁵⁷ Haynes 2013, 184.

²⁵⁸ *Tab. Vindol.* II 313.

²⁵⁹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 343

²⁶⁰ *Tab. Vindol.* II 180, 181, 344.

²⁶¹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 343, ‘Letter to Candidus: Writing-Tablet | British Museum’ 2022; A. R. Birley 1991, 90–93; A. R. Birley 2002a, 114–17; Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

²⁶² *Tab. Vindol.* II 343, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

²⁶³ Cf. above, 56.

²⁶⁴ A. R. Birley 1991, 93; Tiberius Claudius Fatalis: Zeichmann 2018c, sec. 53.

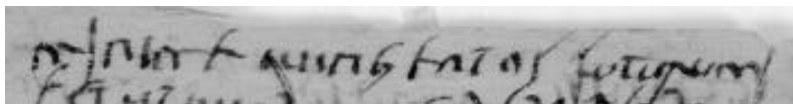
²⁶⁵ A shortened form of *arrabo*, a transliteration of the Greek which also appears in Hebrew: *OLD* 1968, 173. Entering Greek from Phoenician, its variant here is an example of a word that is spelled as it sounds. It occurs in a letter to do with another large deposit of 200 denarii in *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 35, in the Greek of 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14; and in the Hebrew and Greek of Genesis 38:17,18,20. Cf. Cleaves 2017, 340-341.

letter depend on the honour of all involved. According to du Plessis, this is ‘the only example where the Roman legal principle of *bona fides* is explained in concrete terms’. Here we see the fundamental principle on which trade and so much of life depended throughout the empire: ‘much of Roman commerce was based on connections or ‘networks’ in which the parties trusted each other to behave in a trustworthy manner.’²⁶⁶ For Greg Woolf, it was by binding people into ‘networks of obligation and compliance’ that Roman power was established.²⁶⁷ The use of *erubesco*²⁶⁸ is indicative of what du Plessis describes as ‘loss of face’. The seriousness of what has happened financially means that the deposit (*arra*) that has been paid will be lost and Octavian will be shamed; the very use of *arra* depends upon the honour of all involved.²⁶⁹ This is a good example of the Old Roman Cursive script used in the Vindolanda tablets:²⁷⁰

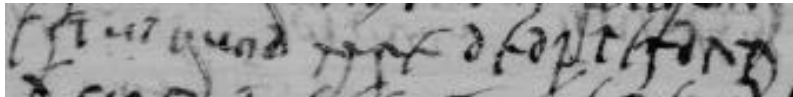


*nisi mittis mi aliquit
(denariorum)*

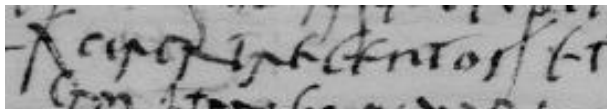
ii



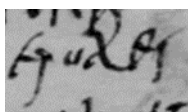
minime quingentos futurum



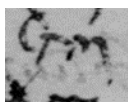
est ut quod arre dedi perdam



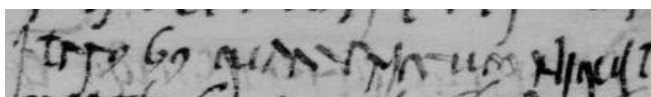
(denarios) circa trecentos et



erubes



cam



ita rogo quam primum aliquit

²⁶⁶ du Plessis 2020, 16.

²⁶⁷ Woolf 2020a, sec. 30. Cf. Woolf 2020b, 358-362.

²⁶⁸ Literally, ‘go red in the face’. Cf. *OLD* 1968, 619: blush for shame, feel ashamed; in general to become red.

²⁶⁹ du Plessis 2020, 17.

²⁷⁰ For an introduction to cursive scripts and how to read them, see Mullen and Bowman 2021, 1:41–83.

(denariorum) mi mitte

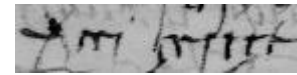


Figure 19: [Tab. Vindol. II 343](#), to illustrate Old Roman Cursive. © The Trustees of the British Museum: [1989,0602.74](#). See Appendix 266.

Later in the letter the honour code is in danger of being broken as Octavius expresses his frustration at the ‘messmate (*contubernalis*) of their friend Frontius’ who had failed to keep an appointment and conclude a cash transaction for a significant number of hides. He has also heard that another acquaintance, Frontinius Iulius had been selling leather ware (?) at what, by implication, Octavius considers an excessive price. The failure of their ‘messmate’ to keep to the honour code means he will no longer be able to do business. To make matters worse, Octavius had to cope with the bad weather of northern Britannia and was unwilling to risk the well-being of his pack animals in adverse conditions.

There is evidence that imperial officials were involved with the grain supply. Trading in grain with his father, Maior writes to Cocceius Maritimus seeking clarification about the arrangements for a transaction Maritimus has undertaken with the *Caesariani*,²⁷¹ ‘members of the *familia Caesaris*’²⁷² who appear to have functioned as imperial officials linked to the grain supply.²⁷³ His *gentilicium*²⁷⁴ suggests Maritimus may have been ‘a freedman of Nerva, perhaps an imperial administrator’,²⁷⁵ linked with another freedman of Nerva, Marcus Cocceius Vegetus,²⁷⁶ perhaps the manumitted slave Vegetus who had purchased the slave girl Fortunata in Londinium.²⁷⁷ The relationship hinges on trust and the honour of those involved but is in jeopardy: more documents are required as any further delay in completing the transaction will result in sanctions that will involve removing grain from the store. In a postscript written between the two columns at right angles to the main text, Maior adds a caveat, requesting that if Maritimus replies sending a slave (*puer*), he should bring with him a *chir(o)grafum*, a note of hand. This may refer to a stylus tablet, a more appropriate form for legal documents.²⁷⁸

²⁷¹ *Tab. Vindol.* III 645.

²⁷² R. Birley and Birley 1994, 443.

²⁷³ Whittaker 2004, 93.

²⁷⁴ Bowman 2003, 50.

²⁷⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* III 645, Bowman and Thomas 2019c.

²⁷⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* II 352.

²⁷⁷ Tomlin 2003; *Tab. Vindol.* II 352, cf. III Appendix: Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

²⁷⁸ A. R. Birley 2002a, 118–20; Meyer 2015, 86. Vindolanda’s stylus tablets, far fewer than the ink tablets, have not yet been published.

The local population are almost invisible in the tablets, and yet they are always there in the background. Probus acknowledges receipt of a large quantity of grain, 381 modii, from carts belonging to local Britons each of which carries 53 modii.²⁷⁹ It seems that ‘the addressee was being promised a fee (or even payment in kind ...) for his services in paying part of the carriage expenses’:²⁸⁰ ‘Furthermore(?), they have half(?) the payments for carriage (*dimi]d̄ias uecturas*), that is one *denarius* each, and the full load for transportation as contracted (*et omnem uelaturam*); and the (part of the) payment for carriage which you will pay them, I(?) shall duly measure out to you as your fee(?)’. That payment of the local population for transport was regulated is suggested in a bilingual Pisidian inscription from the time of Tiberius cited by Bowman and Thomas, stating that ‘no one should make use of carts without payment’ (*ne quis gratuitis vehiculis utatur*).²⁸¹ In publishing the Pisidian inscription, Mitchell compares it with twenty-one papyri documenting similar regulations concerning the requisition of transport and suggests that many of them imply significant abuses of the system.²⁸² It is not clear from this Vindolanda tablet whether or not the payments were paid to local people; while there is no means of knowing how such a system was received by them, it is not unreasonable to suppose there were tensions with its imposition. It would seem some supplies were handled by the army and others contracted out to civilians. They were sourced locally and from further afield to the south and abroad for more exotic commodities.²⁸³ In addition to an account mentioning ‘Brittanian civilian shoes and a Brittanian tunic’ (*gall̄ic[|] os ▶ Britt[anic]- |] . gallicula[|] cam Brit[tanic]- Britt[anic]*),²⁸⁴ a military memorandum describes the way the local Britons (*Brittones*) fight with cavalry before going on to speak of the way the ‘wretched Britons (*Brittunculi*) do not ‘mount in order to throw javelins’.²⁸⁵ It may have been an intelligence report regarding recruitment of locals to the army or (Bowman and Thomas’s preference) an informative memo from a departing commander officer to his successor on the prowess of the Britons on horseback. In that case it may have been a note to Flavius Genialis from Haterius Nepos, a prefect who went on to be census officer for the Britons of the Anaviones (*censito[ri] | Brittonum Anavion[ens]*) and prefect of Egypt.²⁸⁶

²⁷⁹ *Tab. Vindol.* III 649.

²⁸⁰ J. N. Adams 2003, 561.

²⁸¹ S. Mitchell 1976, 107–9; *Tab. Vindol.* III 649, Bowman and Thomas 2019c; Pritchard 1987, 172–73. In Acts Paul frequently travelled through Pisidia: Acts 13:13-52; 14:24; 16:4; 18:23.

²⁸² S. Mitchell 1976, 111–12.

²⁸³ Whittaker 2004, 101.

²⁸⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* III 602.

²⁸⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 164.

²⁸⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* III 611, Bowman and Thomas 2019c. Cf. [Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae 1338](#),

Mention of a census²⁸⁷ supports Tacitus in saying that Britons were conscripted as auxiliaries and involved at Mons Graupius (*expedito exercitu, cui ex Britannis fortissimos et longa pace exploratos addidderat, ad montem Graupium pervenit*)²⁸⁸ and later levied into units that served in Germania.²⁸⁹ The imposition of regulations for transport, the use of the pejorative *Brittunculi* and reference to the census, remind us of the uneasy relationship with the local peoples. Tacitus had shortly before expressed a cynical view of that ‘long peace’ the Britons experienced as they came to like fine buildings, education and Latin: ‘this was what in their naivety they called civilisation, when it was in fact part and parcel of their slavery’ (*Idque apud imperitos humanitas vocabatur, cum pars servitutis esset*).²⁹⁰ The words Tacitus puts into the mouth of Calgacus at Mons Graupius are a reminder that there was a brutality to the *imperium Romanum* they imposed and the *pax Romana* they celebrated: ‘To pillage, butchery and rape they give spurious names and call it empire (*imperium*); and where they bring about desolation they call it peace (*pax*)’ (*auferre trucidare rapere falsis nominibus imperium atque ubi solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant*).²⁹¹ The tensions that were to erupt into an uprising in the north of Britannia as Hadrian became emperor were never far from the surface.²⁹²

One informal account indicates that civilian traders worked with local producers of grain and other foodstuff and with *cohors I Tungrorum* after their return to Vindolanda between 105 and 120 CE. Working in close partnership with his brother and his father, the trader details loans and cash payments and refers to trade in wheat, oxen and pigs, naming centurions, a *beneficarius*, legionary soldiers and others. Wheat is supplied to oxherds in a nearby wood and to Amabilis at a shrine (*fanum*).²⁹³

On the reverse of two of the three sections is the draft of another document written by the same person.²⁹⁴ It suggests something had gone seriously wrong and that, although innocent, the trader had suffered a beating after claiming certain goods were worthless and after pouring others down the drain. He had the confidence to appeal to the military authorities. He sought redress from the prefect only to find him indisposed due to ill health; he turned to the *beneficarius*²⁹⁵ and to other

²⁸⁷ *Tab. Vindol.* II 304.

²⁸⁸ Tacitus, *Agricola* 29.2, Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 110–11. See Map, note.

²⁸⁹ Southern 1989, 94–98.

²⁹⁰ Tacitus, *Agricola* 21.2, Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 107.

²⁹¹ Tacitus, *Agricola* 30.5, Ogilvie and Richmond 1967, 112, 257–58.

²⁹² A. R. Birley 2002a, 95–97; D. J. Mattingly 2007, 119–21; S. R. Jackson 2020, 143–55; Salway 1981, 173–84; Bruhn and Hodgson 2022, 133, 152–64.

²⁹³ *Tab. Vindol.* II 180, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

²⁹⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* II 344.

²⁹⁵ An ‘experienced soldier attached to the staff of a provincial governor, often performing ‘policing functions’: Goldsworthy 2015, 215. Cf. Salway 2001, 372–73.

centurions but to no avail. He therefore appeals to ‘your majesty’ (*tuam maies* / *[t]atem*). The form of address suggests an appeal at least to the provincial governor, possibly Flavius Proculus,²⁹⁶ or even to the emperor Hadrian in anticipation of his visit.²⁹⁷ Protesting his honesty and innocence he maintains that he should not have been beaten and he seeks redress. He repeats his claim to innocence and, addressing himself to ‘your mercifulness’ (*tu]am misericord[ia]m*) he maintains that his good faith is open to full inquiry. Describing himself as ‘a man from overseas and an innocent one’ at that (*hominem trasmarinum* / *et innocentem*) he is certain he should not have been ‘bloodied by rods’ as if he had ‘committed some crime’ (*uirgis cruent[at]u[m] | esse ac si aliquid sceler[i]s | commississem*).

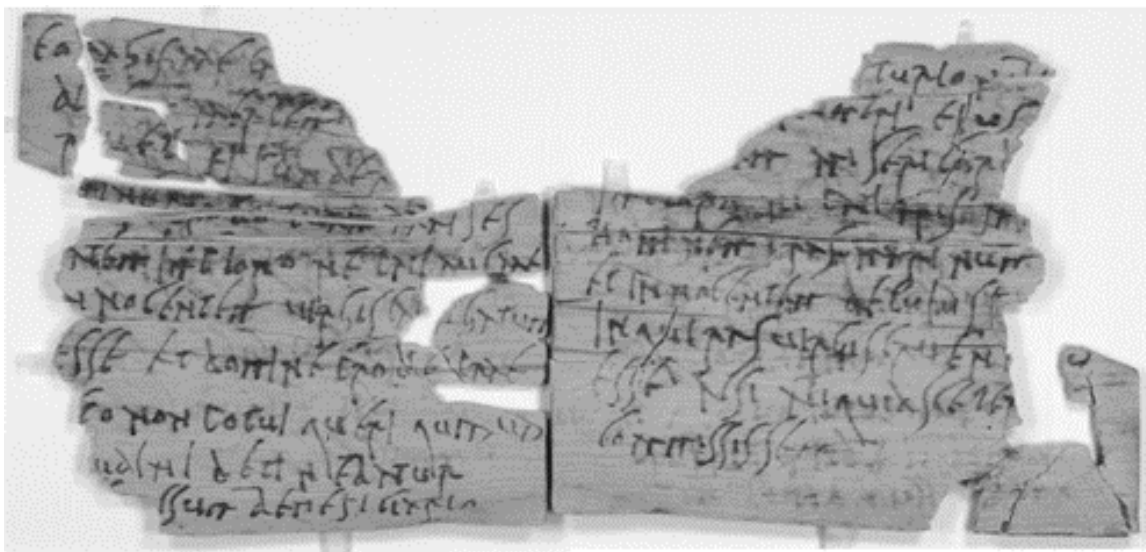


Figure20: [Tab. Vindol. II 344, cf. III Appendix](#). *i eo magis me ca[c. 12] | d.. []em mercem [c. 8] | r[] uel effunder [c. 3] r[] | []mine probo tuam maies]⁵ [t]atem imploro ne patiaris me | [i]nnocentem uirgis caș[t]igatum | esse et domine Proçle, prae|[fe]çto non potui queri quia ua|[let]udini detinebatur | ¹⁰ queș[tu]s sum beneficiario ii [c. 8 cen]turionib[us] | [c. 7] n[um]eri eius [| [c. 3 tu]am misericord[ia]m | imploro ne patiaris me | ¹⁵ hominem trasmarinum | et innocentem de cuius f[ide] | inquiras uirgis cruent[at]u[m] | esse ac si aliquid sceler[i]s | commississem vacat ... he beat (?) me all the more ... goods ... or pour them down the drain (?). As befits an honest man (?) I implore your lord Proculus not to allow me, an innocent man, to have been beaten with rods and, my lord, I was unable to complain to the prefect because he was detained by ill-health I have complained in vain (?) to the *beneficiarius* and the rest (?) of the centurions of his (?) unit. Accordingly (?) I implore your mercifulness not to allow me, a man from overseas and an innocent one, about whose good faith you may inquire, to have been bloodied by rods as if I had committed some crime. © The Trustees of the British Museum: [1989,0602.73](#). See Appendix, 268.*

Centurions themselves could get into trouble. The prefect of a neighbouring fort, Caecilius Secundus, wrote to Iulius Verecundus suggesting that some of his officers had taken affront at ‘little outbursts of anger’ (*iracund’i’olae*) from one of Verecundus’ centurions, Decuminus. Whether Secundus was

²⁹⁶ *Tab. Vindol. II 344, cf. III Appendix*, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

²⁹⁷ A. R. Birley 2002a, 75–76.

trying to put things right or get Decuminus in trouble with his commanding officer will never be known.²⁹⁸ Vocontius had been slow in organising wagons and a delivery of stone and one letter-writer is sure he won't sort it out unless he is asked to.²⁹⁹

Legionary centurions could rise to positions of significant responsibility: 'some were appointed to administer regions of a province where they were the most senior representative of Roman rule'.³⁰⁰ Valerius Maximus was such a regional centurion who corresponded with Flavius Cerialis, though only fragments of one letter remain (*ab Valerio Maximo [-] (centurione) regionario*).³⁰¹ Another was Annus Questor, the centurion who is 'in charge of the region' at Luguvalium (Carlisle); his letters of recommendation supported Brigonius as he sought preferment and the support of his fellow prefect, Cerialis.³⁰²

3.6 Imagining Luke-Acts through the eyes of centurions associated with Vindolanda

3.6.1 Roman law and relationships between the military and civilians

In Philippi, the magistrates ordered Paul and his companions to 'be beaten with rods' ($\rho\alpha\beta\delta\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu$: *uirgis caedi* Acts 16:22).³⁰³ When the trader from overseas who protests his innocence describes the way he was 'beaten with rods' (*uirgis caş[t]igatum | esse*), he might have been referring to a beating by a centurion using his cane.³⁰⁴ Marcus Favonius Facilis was a legionary centurion who died in Camulodunum sometime in the 50s CE: his funerary monument, now in the Colchester museum, shows him holding in his right hand a *vitis*, the cane used by centurions for inflicting punishment.³⁰⁵

Commentators draw on the Valerian and Porcian Laws prohibiting the beating of citizens for the legal context of Acts 16:22.³⁰⁶ Although in a far-flung empire laws could not be centrally enforced,³⁰⁷ *Tab. Vindol.* II 344 is part of a growing body of evidence of the way Roman law worked out in

²⁹⁸ *Tab. Vindol.* IV 893, Bowman, Thomas, and Tomlin 2019b.

²⁹⁹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 316. Two other centurions are mentioned by name: from 97-105 CE, Maximus (*Tab. Vindol.* III 680) and from 104-120 CE, Fortunatus (*Tab. Vindol.* II 351).

³⁰⁰ Goldsworthy 2015, 72; Salway 2001, 384.

³⁰¹ *Tab. Vindol.* III 653.

³⁰² *Tab. Vindol.* II 250, cf. III Appendix. Luguvalium, see Map, 302.

³⁰³ A reference to the six lictors who walked in front of *duoviri* with bundles of six rods, fasces: Keener 2020, 406.

³⁰⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* II 344, Bowman and Thomas 2019b; D. J. Mattingly 2007, 173.

³⁰⁵ Funerary inscription for the centurion Marcus Favonius Facilis, [RIB 200](#). The original and a reconstruction are in Colchester Castle Museum: [the Facilis Tombstone, COLEM:PC.129](#). Cf. Uley Casket, Appendix, 299.

³⁰⁶ Sherwin-White 1963, 144-56; Rapske 1994, 3:123-34; 139-47; Bruce 1990, 366-67; 460-61;

Witherington III 1998, 407-502; 675-84; Keener 2020, 402-8; 413-18; 540-43.

³⁰⁷ Garnsey 1966, 189.

practice within the military community and in its relationship with local traders.³⁰⁸ The picture that emerges would be recognised throughout the empire, not least in the eastern Mediterranean, as would the way in which Roman law adapted to local circumstances.³⁰⁹ Richard Alston's study of 51 petitions presented by villagers in Egypt to centurions, decurions and *beneficarii*, between 20 BCE and 255 CE demonstrates that civilians like this Vindolanda trader, who was the link between local producers and the military community, expected to receive help from such officers³¹⁰ as they were 'people of power who could get things done'.³¹¹

In their relationships with civilians the centurions and other officers of Vindolanda have the capacity to help or to harm. However, this civilian trader is confident of their help, suggesting, as Richard Alston argues on the basis of papyrus evidence of the Roman army in Egypt, that the traditional image of the centurion as bully is mistaken.³¹² Even though the pleas of the civilian trader of Vindolanda are not heeded he can still appeal to the governor or maybe the emperor himself.³¹³ Either way, this tablet bears out the view argued by Esler in the context of the Babatha documents³¹⁴ that there are many instances of good relations between centurions and the local population. There must be one caveat, however. Peachin points out that the discovery of the trader's appeal in the administrative quarters of a centurion gives rise to the possibility that a centurion intercepted the appeal and failed to pass it on.³¹⁵

A centurion following the Way of Jesus would be aware that people could be beaten, that centurions could be turned to for help, and that they could deny help to those who proclaimed their innocence. Reading about Paul in Philippi, they would note the way the authorities stepped back from their punishment of Paul when hearing of his citizenship (Acts 16:35-40). Further they would notice in Jerusalem it is the Roman authorities who stop Paul being beaten by the crowds (Acts 21:32) and a centurion who accepts Paul's plea and prevents a scourging by the Roman authorities (Acts 22:25-26). Luke-Acts is written with the likes of our imagined readers in mind. A centurion drawn to follow the Way of Jesus would not feel obliged to cease being a centurion. Aware of the kind of circumstances that led to the beating of the trader from overseas and to his appeal, he would be

³⁰⁸ Peachin 1999; Korporowicz 2012; du Plessis 2020.

³⁰⁹ Peachin 1999, 231–33.

³¹⁰ Alston 1995, 87–91: more than half had to do with assault. When an Arab archer stumbled across a fraud at a customs post and was beaten, he appealed to the *Beneficiarius* or *Epistrategus* ([P.Amh. II 77](#), 139 CE).

³¹¹ Alston 1995, 95.

³¹² Alston 1995, 53, 67–68.

³¹³ *Tab. Vindol.* II 344.

³¹⁴ Esler 2014, 3–8.

³¹⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 344, Bowman and Thomas 2019b; Peachin 1999, 227–31.

challenged to act fairly with those he met, to enquire about their good faith (*de cuius f[ide] | inquiras*)³¹⁶ and to avoid ‘threats and false accusation’ (*concutiatis neque calumniam faciatis* Luke 3:14).

3.6.2 Inclusive communities of followers of the Way of Jesus in Luke-Acts

On the day the strength report was taken, of *cohors I Tungrorum* 46 were absent serving as ‘guards of the governor’, the emperor’s representative in Britannia. In place of taxes, the Batavians supplied fighting men often under the command of Batavian nobles in different parts of the empire, contributing to ‘a new elite unit which served the Julio-Claudian emperors from Augustus to Nero as mounted bodyguards, stationed in Rome’.³¹⁷ Whatever the historical justification for Cornelius’ Italian cohort³¹⁸ and Julius’ Augustan Cohort,³¹⁹ those designations would suggest to the likes of the Vindolanda centurions a close relationship to Rome and the emperor. The significance of the inclusion of someone of such high status as Cornelius among the followers of the Way would not be lost on our imagined readers.³²⁰ It would demonstrate to them the inclusiveness of the Way and justify to them their decision to become followers. The repetition of the narrative underlines its significance (Acts 10; 11:1-18). Not only is Cornelius the first centurion in Luke-Acts to be named, suggesting he may himself have been the eye-witness source of this narrative,³²¹ but he is also the first non-Judean follower of the Way to be named in Acts. Clearly, for Luke his story is of great significance.

The centurions of Vindolanda were not just cogs in some military machine but part of a community with their own identities and varied responsibilities.³²² They would recognise the craftworkers of Acts: Simon the tanner (Acts 10:6); Aquila and Priscilla who, with Paul, were tentmakers or leatherworkers (Acts 18:1-4); Demetrius and the silversmiths (Acts 19:23-25).³²³ Recognising the skill of the

³¹⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* II 344.

³¹⁷ A. R. Birley 2002a, 43.

³¹⁸ Keener 2020, 295 is positive; Zeichmann 2018b, chap. 3 is doubtful. He maintains the only suggestion to receive substantial support is *cohors II Italica civium Romanorum*. Cf. Zeichmann 2018a, 108–9. Zeichmann 2018c, sec. 147 includes a funerary inscription dedicated to the *optio*, Proculus, dated 69–70 CE referring to that Italian cohort. Cf. Bruce 1990, 252

³¹⁹ Keener 2020, 595 is positive suggesting the name is not unusual and is attested in the region at this time. Zeichmann 2018b, chap. 3 is less confident about its authenticity. Zeichmann 2018a, 109–12 offers epigraphic support for an Augustan cohort under Agrippa II at around this time. Three inscriptions locate an auxiliary cohort of this name in the locality at this time: Zeichmann 2018c. Cf. Bruce 1990, 511.

³²⁰ Witherington III 1998, 340.

³²¹ Cf. on naming in the gospels Bauckham 2006, 39.

³²² James 1999, 14.

³²³ Keener 2020, 456 prefers the patristic ‘leatherworker’ to the medieval ‘tentmaker’. The discovery of a leather tent at Vindolanda makes this distinction redundant: van Driel-Murray 1991. Witherington III 1998

leather-worker in creating leather tents, with which they would have been very familiar on campaigns, would give them respect for Aquila, Priscilla and Paul. Knowing the importance of a good pair of shoes, John's reference to untying the thong of Jesus' sandals (Luke 3:16) would be readily understood by the centurions as an indication of the status accorded by John to Jesus.³²⁴

3.6.3 Literacy and the Way of Jesus

The centurions, their *principales*³²⁵ and their administrative staff were literate. Regular reports ensured the whereabouts and activity of each member of the cohort were known; correspondence enabled officers and their superiors to keep in touch within the cohort and with other cohorts. Trade depended on keeping written accounts; loan notes ensured that debt was traceable. Literacy underpinned not only the work of those who themselves were literate but the work of all those *milites* whose day to day work was described and accounted for in written records. The world of the centurions of Vindolanda was 'essentially defined by writing'.³²⁶ Our imagined readers of Luke-Acts would assume literacy on the part of the centurions and others of higher status. They would notice the use by Zechariah of a small writing tablet that could be held in the hand (πινακίδιον: *pugillaris* Luke 1:63), an inscription (ἐπιγραφή: *superscriptio inscripta* Luke 23:38), a written loan note (γράμματτα : *cautio*, Luke 16:6), ancient texts of the *Iudaei* (Luke 4:16-21; Acts 8:28-35; 13:14-15; 15:21), a letter of similar length to the ones they were used to (Acts 15:23-29)³²⁷ and a legal document (Acts 23:25-30).³²⁸ A distinctive characteristic of the followers of the Way of Jesus was their dependence on the 'reading, writing and dissemination of texts'.³²⁹ Centurions such as we encounter in Vindolanda would recognise not only the importance of written texts to the followers of the Way but also the manner in which they shaped the lives of everyone whether or not they were literate: as long as one in a group of followers of the Way could read, all would be touched by the written word.³³⁰ Just as their world of writing contributed to their sense of Roman identity,³³¹ the

suggests they might have had a shop in front of their house. An example of such a shop can be seen in Caerwent: Brewer 2006, 46–50.

³²⁴ Cf. Wolter 2016, 169.

³²⁵ *Principales* served between the centurions and the soldiers, including the *optio*, *signifer* and *tessararius*: Goldsworthy 2015, 68; Pollard and Berry 2012, 228.

³²⁶ Haynes 2013, 318. Cf. Bowman 2003, 79–80; Woolf 2015, 36–41.

³²⁷ Keener 2020, 372: 'only slightly longer than the average papyrus letter' which 'ranged from 16 to 209 words.

³²⁸ Keener 2020, 553.

³²⁹ Luke 1:1-4; Acts 15:22-30; the letters of Paul et al. especially 1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16, 1 Tim. 4:13: Hurtado 2016, 105. Cf. Haines-Eitzen 2000, 20.

³³⁰ Hurtado 2016, 108.

³³¹ D. J. Mattingly 2007, 199–204; Salway 2001, 360–63; Tomlin 2018; Ingemark 2000, 26–27.

identity of those who followed the Way of Jesus was similarly shaped by the written words they shared.³³²

3.6.4 *Travel and identity among followers of the Way*

The centurions of Vindolanda were not confined to that one location: their duties sometimes took them far from their base. They seem to have made use of itineraries as they travelled the network of roads connecting the newly established towns and forts that had sprung up since the Claudian invasion of 43 CE.³³³ The inter-connectedness of those forts and newly established towns secured the Roman presence in Britannia as it did throughout the empire.³³⁴ It was not only their occupation of a fort, but also their travelling that gave Vindolanda's centurions a sense of their Roman identity. They knew the roads they used connected them with the whole empire. The very same network of roads gave the followers of Jesus an identity beyond the communities they belonged to. There is, especially in Acts, a correlation between the journeys recorded and ancient itineraries, mapping the network of roads connecting the cities of the empire.³³⁵ The very act of travelling characterises the Way of Jesus, and links the autonomous local churches.³³⁶ The use of itineraries contributes to the overall impression in Luke-Acts 'of the Jesus movement as an interconnected and harmonious whole'.³³⁷ Were a centurion such as those we encounter in Vindolanda drawn to the Way of Jesus and to an encounter with Luke-Acts, he would notice that it is in the travels of Jesus, the twelve and the seventy-two that his teaching spreads (Luke 9:1-10; 10:1-20; 9:51-19:44); and in the travels of Philip, Peter, Paul and others (Acts 8:4-40; 10:1-11:18; 13-28) that the Way of Jesus is established.³³⁸ With those journeys leading to Rome (Acts 28:30-31), and to the furthest frontiers of the empire, he would realise the followers of the Way had indeed been 'witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). He would sense he was part of a movement that spanned the empire, linked together such groups of followers, and drew strength from its inter-connectedness.

³³² Kloppenborg 2019a, 335–39.

³³³ *Tab. Vindol.* II 185. See above, 3.5: 116–117.

³³⁴ B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 23. In Wales over 1,000 km of roads connected a web of 40 and more forts to the two legionary fortresses of Isca (Caerleon) and Deva (Chester): Guest 2022a, 72 Cf. Woolf 2020, 25–30.

³³⁵ Kloppenborg 2017; Alexander 2003; Woolf 2022b, 361–362.

³³⁶ Alexander 2003; Alexander 2010.

³³⁷ Kloppenborg 2017, 140.

³³⁸ Spencer 2004, 25–26; Barreto 2018.

3.6.5 Accountability

Accountability within the cohort was important. Daily postings and the completion of set tasks were reported by means of a brief *renuntium*³³⁹ or a fuller account of work accomplished.³⁴⁰ There is a similar accountability expected of those Jesus commissions: both the twelve and the seventy-two report back on all they have accomplished (Luke 9:10, 10:17). The process of sending out and reporting back was key to the consolidation and growth of the Way.³⁴¹

Our imagined readers might recognise moments when Jesus speaks of his mission, and the mission he asks others to undertake, in military terms (Luke 14:31-33). The demands Jesus places upon those who would 'follow' him 'on the way' to Jerusalem (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ: *in via*, Luke 9:57-62), are the demands the military community would be familiar with.³⁴² Involved as they were in construction, they would recognise the value of good foundations (Luke 6:46-49) and the need to cost a building project (Luke 14:28-30). Dependent on the local community for the supply of grain to provide for a great number of soldiers, they would appreciate the cost of purchasing food for 5,000 men (Luke 9:10-17), sitting in dining groups (κλισίας: *convivia*) of 50 and perhaps picture the scene as a fighting force³⁴³ the approximate size of a legion.³⁴⁴ Jesus arrives in Jerusalem to great acclamation in the manner of one leading a triumph which heralds the arrival of peace.³⁴⁵ And yet he enters the city on a colt and proceeds to weep over its failure to 'recognise the things that make for peace' (τὰ πρὸς εἰρήνην: *quae ad pacem*, Luke 19:28-44). In Jerusalem Jesus speaks of the destruction in store for the city, which was to take place in 70 CE and of which the Tungrian and Batavian cohorts would have been aware (Luke 13:31-35; 19:41-44; 21:5-36; 23:27-31).

3.6.6 Honour and shame in association

The writer who passes on his greetings to Felicio the centurion has a strong sense of collegiality and an equally strong sense of honour among the colleagues he is in correspondence with.³⁴⁶ As he sets

³³⁹ E.g. *Tab. Vindol.* II 127-153; *Tab. Vindol.* III 574-579, 816, 849.

³⁴⁰ E.g. *Tab. Vindol.* II 155-157.

³⁴¹ Green 1997, 356, 362.

³⁴² Wolter 2017, 49. Cf. the three comments made by John in Luke 3:10-14 including the command to soldiers.

³⁴³ The suggestion that the 5,000 were a fighting force becomes more evident when comparing the accounts in Matthew, Mark and John. Matthew 14:21 tells us they were 5,000 men 'besides women and children'. Mark 6:39-40 describes the groups of 50 and 100 as *contubernia* (cf. *Tab. Vindol.* III 656, 657, 708; *contubernalis* [*contib-*] *Tab. Vindol.* II 181, 310, 311, 343, 346, 349, III 641, 658, 698). John 6:15 tells us 'they were about to come and take him by force to make him king': Lincoln 2005, 214.

³⁴⁴ Pollard and Berry 2012, 36-41; J. K. Knight 2003.

³⁴⁵ Wolter 2017, 363-64. With coinage featuring many images of the triumph this was 'the age of the triumph': Beard 2009, 295-96. [RIC I \(second edition\) Claudius 34](#), 'Online Coins of the Roman Empire' 2018. South Warwickshire Hoard 1115, 1116; Ireland 2013, 32.

³⁴⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* III 655, 656, 657.

about righting a wrong by wrapping denarii in packages, he fears for his reputation which may lead to his resignation from the *schola*, the military association he belongs to. It is that connectedness that finds expression in the way he addresses his peers and appeals to his 'lord'. We can imagine readers such as these recognising the connectedness of those who follow the Way of Jesus. Like those who follow John (Luke 3:10-14), they are bound together by rules of conduct (Luke 6:20-49). Failure to follow that Way and, worse, causing others to stumble on the Way will lead to the shame of censure and possible exclusion (Luke 17:1-4). The betrayal of Jesus by Judas called Iscariot leads to his downfall and necessitates his replacement (Luke 22:1-6, 47-48; Acts 1:15-26). The small communities that are then set up among those who follow the Way are characterised by a commitment to each other that involves sharing and meeting the needs of one another (Acts 2:44-47, 4:32-37). Failure to abide by the ethos of that shared Way results in worse than expulsion, as Ananias and Sapphira find to their cost (Acts 5:1-11). John Kloppenborg argues that the sense of connectedness and belonging characteristic of associations in the cities of the Mediterranean is analogous to 'the complexion and organization of various Christ groups',³⁴⁷ not least the community meeting in the house of Lydia the dealer in purple at Philippi (Acts 16:11-40; cf. Philippians), the group that included Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth (Acts 18:1-17; cf. 1 and 2 Corinthians) and the assembly in Thessalonica that included the leading women of the city (Acts 17:1-9; cf. 1 and 2 Thessalonians). The auxiliary soldier was 'essentially an urban creature'³⁴⁸ and so we can imagine such passages through the eyes of Felicio's colleague and see how the connectedness and the sense of belonging they shared in their *schola* and *contubernium* had echoes in the communities of those following the Way of Jesus. Theirs too was a world where people came together in associations as did the silversmiths of Ephesus under the leadership of Demetrius (Acts 19:21-41).³⁴⁹

3.6.7 Honour and shame in relationships with local people

The centurions of Vindolanda were often engaged away from the fort in work that involved the local peoples. The 'clear and unequivocal reference to the organisation of a census' in the frontier region,³⁵⁰ suggests that our imagined reader would have an understanding of the implications of a census such as the one they would encounter in Luke 2:1-7 and the pressures it put on local people.³⁵¹ They would notice the way in which the centurion working in Capernaum (Luke 7:1-10)

³⁴⁷ Kloppenborg 2019a, 55.

³⁴⁸ Haynes 2013, 145. Cf. chapter 6, 'Military Service and the Urban Experience'.

³⁴⁹ Kloppenborg 2019a, 55–96. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* III 656; see above, 119-121.

³⁵⁰ *Tab. Vindol.* II 304, Bowman and Thomas 2019b. Cf. an earlier list of provincial censuses in Brunt 1981, 171–72.

³⁵¹ Wolter 2016, 116–17; Brunt 1981.

had earned the respect of the community as he built a synagogue for them (ἄξιός ἐστιν... ἀγαπᾷ γὰρ τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν: *dignus est ... diligit enim gentem nostram*).³⁵² He counts the local people as friends and is very conscious that he is a man with authority over others who is himself under authority. At the heart of the narrative is concern for a much valued slave (δοῦλος ... ἔντιμος: *servus ... pretiosus*) who is not well.³⁵³ So too, Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, has a close relationship with the local people and is described as ‘a devout man who feared God, with all his household’ (εὐσεβῆς καὶ φοβούμενος τὸν θεὸν σὺν παντὶ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ: *religiosus et timens Deum cum omni domo sua*) who ‘gave alms to the people and prayed constantly to God’ (ποιῶν ἐλεημοσύνας πολλὰς τῷ λαῷ καὶ δεόμενος τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ παντός: *faciens elemosynas multas plebi et deprecans Deum semper*, Acts 10:2). Centurions such as those at Vindolanda, lived in a context that involved them with the local peoples; they were under the authority of the prefect and over their *principales* and *milites*;³⁵⁴ they lived with sickness in a context where slaves also served among their administrative staff.³⁵⁵ The presence of dedications to Celtic mother goddesses in Vindolanda as in many other locations in Britannia, suggests a willingness to adopt local practices as the centurion of Capernaum and Cornelius had done. They knew the need to give alms.³⁵⁶ Just as the centurion of Capernaum was commended for his faith (Luke 7:9), so too Cornelius, together with his household, is drawn to follow the Way of Jesus (Acts 10:44-48).³⁵⁷ Both are shaped not only by the web of Roman power of which they are a part, but also by the relationships they have with local people.³⁵⁸

Fresh from the campaigns under Agricola and his successors, the centurions of Vindolanda, would be only too conscious of a hostility among the vanquished Britons that would manifest itself in the rebellion that precipitated the building of the frontier wall around the time of Hadrian’s visit (122 CE). At times, disparaging of the local peoples, the *Brittunculi*,³⁵⁹ they would understand the role played by the centurion in the execution of Jesus. The ‘sour wine’ (ὄξος: *acetum*) the soldiers at

³⁵² The centurion of Capernaum and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2) ‘give financial expression to their connection to the Jewish communities’: Wolter 2016, 295.

³⁵³ Wolter 2016, 293.

³⁵⁴ *Principales* are the principal officers below a centurion: *optio* (second in command), *signifer* (standard bearer) and *tessarius* (junior officer): the name derives from the *tessara* tablet bearing the watchword for the day: Goldsworthy 2015, 68, 73, 215, 216.

³⁵⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 255.

³⁵⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* II 190, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

³⁵⁷ He is ‘in the good company of those who had responded positively to the good news (Luke 3:10-14)’: Green 1997, 285. ‘Even Roman soldiers found this new movement appealing and worth joining’: Witherington III 1998, 347.

³⁵⁸ Cf. Woolf 2020, sec. 26.

³⁵⁹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 164.

the foot of the cross offered Jesus was not the fine wine associated with the banquets of Vindolanda but the ordinary every day wine used by the *militēs*.³⁶⁰ The way they mocked this would-be *rex Iudaeorum* as they offered their own *acetum* makes all the more stark the response of the centurion as he declares the innocence of Jesus (ὄντως ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος δίκαιος ἦν: *vere hic homo iustus erat*, Luke 23:47).³⁶¹ They would recognise in Jesus that kind of justice for which Verecundus was, according to Andangius, very well known.³⁶²

Good standing and the respect of the local community was not something to be taken for granted; it was something to be worked at. When it was achieved it was something to be commended. The lengthy letter of Octavius to his brother Candidus, involving trade among civilians and centurions responsible for food supplies, enables us to see exactly how important honour was in securing good relations with the wider community.³⁶³ Should Candidus fail again to come up with at least some of the payment he has promised, Octavius will lose face and will blush with shame (*erubescam*). In the same letter, the failure of Frontinius Iulius to attend a pre-arranged meeting and to conclude a cash transaction amounts to a break in that honour code and the destruction of the very trust on which relations with ‘messmates’ and with the local community depend. In the same way in another context, Vocontius the centurion, has clearly got a reputation for letting people down.³⁶⁴

Centurions have a part to play in the treatment of Paul following his arrest in Jerusalem. The centurions of Vindolanda would understand the reluctance of the centurion in Jerusalem to beat Paul, a Roman citizen, and the wisdom of his turning to the tribune of the cohort for advice (Acts 22:25-26). They would appreciate the instructions Felix gave to one of his centurions to keep Paul in custody ‘but to let him have some liberty and not to prevent any of his friends from taking care of his needs’. (Acts 24:23).

The only other centurion in Luke-Acts to be named is Julius who, with the soldiers under his command, was to escort Paul and other prisoners on their journey to Rome. That kind of duty would have been familiar to the centurions of Vindolanda who occasionally had to make long journeys.³⁶⁵ Sometimes, someone making a journey from Vindolanda would be asked to take letters.³⁶⁶ Might it

³⁶⁰ *Tab. Vindol.* II 190, 202; III 589, 673.

³⁶¹ ‘It is the social connotation of this drink that lets it become an instrument of the mocking of Jesus’: Wolter 2017, 527.

³⁶² *Tab. Vindol.* IV 891, *rogamus te domin[e] | Verecunde per notis[simam] iustitiam tuam*.

³⁶³ *Tab. Vindol.* II 343.

³⁶⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* II 316.

³⁶⁵ Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* II 154, 310.

³⁶⁶ Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* II 263, III 670. Cf. A. R. Birley 2002a, 36.

be that Julius was going to Rome anyway and his escorting duties were given him in addition? The centurions of Vindolanda would recognise the way he negotiated passage in different ships dealing with ship owners and pilots (Acts 27:2,6,11; 28:11). They would have noticed once again how Julius ‘treated Paul kindly and’ when in port ‘allowed him to go to his friends to be cared for’ (Acts 27:3). Indeed, in the context of the storm at sea they would understand his initial response to the owner and captain of the ship but would have noticed the way Julius deferred to Paul’s later advice (Acts 27:9-12, 31-38, 42-44). Having delivered Paul to Rome, Julius disappears to be replaced by an anonymous soldier who guards Paul in a house in Rome where followers of the Way are free to come and go (Acts 28:16, 30). Just as the seas had not stopped the advance of the Vindolanda cohorts through Britannia, so too the seas could not stop the advance of the Way of Jesus.³⁶⁷

Centurions such as those we encounter here and elsewhere in Vindolanda would be aware of the full import of the character assessments given in honour of the centurion of Capernaum (Luke 7:4,5),³⁶⁸ Cornelius (Acts 10:2)³⁶⁹ and Julius (Acts 27:3).³⁷⁰ They would also be aware of the kind of shame the dishonest manager felt (Luke 16:3).³⁷¹ Luke makes it clear to our imagined readers not only that military personnel are ‘among those who hear the good news’,³⁷² but also that they are among those who follow the Way.³⁷³

3.7 Imagining Cerialis, Brocchus and other prefects

The correspondence of Flavius Cerialis, Lepidina’s husband, prefect of *cohors VIII Bataurorum* (c. 95-105 CE) constitutes the largest collection of Vindolanda Tablets. Set alongside the letters of Iulius Verecundus, prefect of *cohors I Tungrorum* (c. 85 – 95 CE) and other prefects it helps us understand the kindness of the tribune, Claudius Lysias, and his relationship with the tribunes of the other cohorts based in Caesarea, the provincial governors, Felix and Festus, and King Agrippa and Bernice (Acts 21:27-26:32). Unlike Paul, Claudius Lysias had purchased his citizenship, taking the *gentilicum* Claudius after Claudius had encouraged the sale of citizenship (Acts 22:27-28).³⁷⁴ Claudius had formalised the military service of those of equestrian rank enabling them to advance from the command of an auxiliary cohort to a cavalry *ala* and on to a legion (*Equestris militias ita ordinavit, ut*

³⁶⁷ Witherington III 1998, 757.

³⁶⁸ As an honoured benefactor: Green 1997, 285–87.

³⁶⁹ ‘A person of some status and rank’, a man of piety and devout: Witherington III 1998, 347.

³⁷⁰ ‘Positive’ and respectful: Keener 2020, 594.

³⁷¹ Who ‘would have enjoyed enviable status’ for whom ‘loss of position as manager entails a forfeiture of social status’: Green 1997, 590.

³⁷² Green 1997, 566.

³⁷³ Witherington III 1998, 347.

³⁷⁴ Keener 2020, 542 citing Dio Cassius 60.17.5-6.

post cohortem alam, post alam tribunatum legionis daret).³⁷⁵ The tribunes who accompanied Agrippa II were, in all likelihood, drawn from the equestrian order, as were the prefects of the cohorts we meet in Vindolanda.³⁷⁶ With a *gentilicum* going back to Augustus or even Julius Caesar, Iulius Verecundus was prefect of *cohors I Tungrorum* (circa early 90s CE); Flavius Genialis, possibly prefect of *cohors VIII Batauorum* soon after their arrival in Vindolanda (c. early 90s CE), has a more recent *gentilicum* indicating ‘swifter success and mobility’ during the Flavian dynasty.³⁷⁷ He was succeeded by Flavius Cerialis (c. 97-104), perhaps a Batavian noble with a *cognomen* linking him to Petillius Cerialis who put down the first Batavian revolt (69-70 CE).³⁷⁸ Emanating from a *praetorium* modelled on elite Mediterranean households the correspondence of Cerialis and other prefects enables us to glimpse high-status people such as Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:7-12) and Dionysius the Areopagite (Acts 17:34),³⁷⁹ as followers of the Way. Whether or not this is historically accurate (with Keener³⁸⁰) or questionable (with Kloppenborg³⁸¹), Luke conveys to his readers that people of such standing were followers of the Way.

Letters play a key part at two moments in Acts (15:23-29 and 23:26-30): the first is 112 words and the second 74 words in the Vulgate, ‘only slightly longer than the average papyrus letter’ which ranged from 16-209 words’.³⁸² Many of the Vindolanda letters are a similar length or shorter; the length of one of the fullest letters from Vindolanda is 216 words.³⁸³ Claudius Lysias writes a letter to the governor, Felix, explaining why he was handing Paul over to his charge (Acts 23:23-35). The prefect at Vindolanda was likewise part of a military network that extended to the governor of the province: letter writing enabled that network to be maintained and developed as much in Vindolanda as in Caesarea.

In their correspondence, honour and deference are shown to superiors and an intimacy maintained with peers. Using the formulaic greeting *salve, salute*,³⁸⁴ Flavius Cerialis is addressed as *Ceriali suo* (his Cerialis),³⁸⁵ and frequently as *domine me* (my lord),³⁸⁶ on one occasion he is addressed by

³⁷⁵ Suetonius, *Claudius* 25, Rolfe 1914b, 48–49.

³⁷⁶ Keener 2020, 580 citing Josephus, *Ant.* 19.364; Haynes 2013, 52; A. R. Birley 2002a, 46. Cf. Woolf 2022a, 195.

³⁷⁷ Bowman 2003, 50.

³⁷⁸ J. N. Adams 1995, 129.

³⁷⁹ ‘A member of the town’s highest aristocratic court’ and ‘a municipal decurion’: Keener 2020, 449.

³⁸⁰ Keener 2020, 334–35, 448–49.

³⁸¹ Kloppenborg 2019a, 186–89.

³⁸² Keener 2020, 372.

³⁸³ *Tab. Vindol.* II 343.

³⁸⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* II 248, 249, 261, 270, 287, *Tab. Vindol.* III 622, 623, 625, 631.

³⁸⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* II 250, 256, 259, 262, 263, 265, 270, 278, *Tab. Vindol.* III 625, 629, 631.

³⁸⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* II 247, 252, 255, 256, 260, 264, 289, 306, *Tab. Vindol.* III 628, 631.

Valatta, a woman, as ‘her Cerialis’ and ‘my lord’.³⁸⁷ The prefect of a neighbouring cohort, Brocchus, addressed Cerialis as *frater* (brother);³⁸⁸ *frater karissime* (dearest brother);³⁸⁹ *mi frater | k[ari]ssime* (my dearest brother);³⁹⁰ and *karissime domine* (dearest lord).³⁹¹ Iustinus and Brocchus write to Cerialis as to a ‘colleague’ (*collega*).³⁹² Chrauttius expresses concern for his fellow prefect in a ‘prayer’ for Cerialis that he should have ‘the best of fortune of which you are most worthy’ (*opto domine sis | felicissimus quo | es dignissimus*).³⁹³

T. Haperius Nepos seems to have taken the pen into his own hand to conclude a letter to Genialis, regarding financial problems in a neat, left-justified greeting.

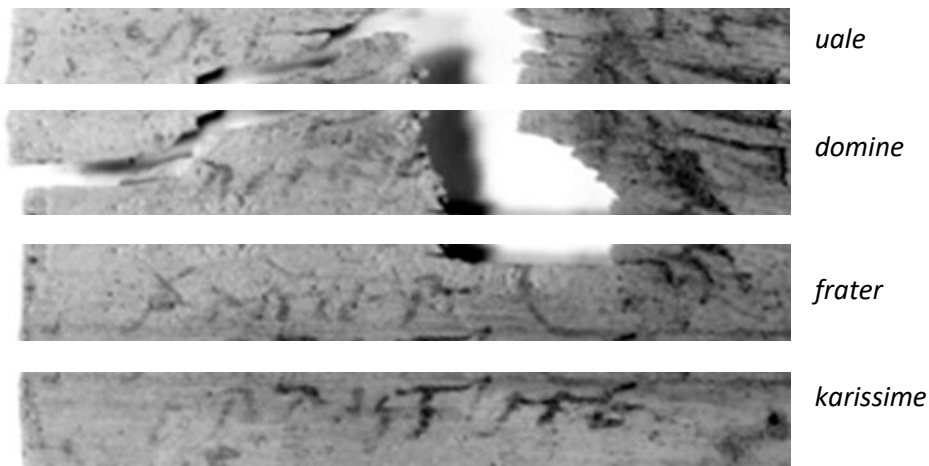


Figure 21: [Tab. Vindol. III 611](#) to illustrate Old Roman Cursive © The Trustees of the British Museum: [1995.0701.183](#). See Appendix, 273.

Evidence suggesting Nepos commanded the *ala Petriana*, a cavalry cohort, in Coria (Corbridge) in the mid-90s and that he went on to become prefect of Egypt in the 120s, means that this document is one of the very few to contain the handwriting of a prefect of such standing.³⁹⁴

³⁸⁷ *Tab. Vindol.* II 257.

³⁸⁸ *Tab. Vindol.* II 252, 255, 259, 260, 165, 189.

³⁸⁹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 306.

³⁹⁰ *Tab. Vindol.* III 622, 632, 306.

³⁹¹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 285; *Tab. Vindol.* III 623.

³⁹² *Tab. Vindol.* II 260; *Tab. Vindol.* III 623.

³⁹³ *Tab. Vindol.* II 264. Cf. 248, 260.

³⁹⁴ *Tab. Vindol.* III 611, Bowman and Thomas 2019c; A. R. Birley 2002a, 95; Bowman 2003, 49. See Map, 307.

In one letter Masclus, a decurion, writes to Cerialis and addresses him as ‘his king’ (*regi suo*).³⁹⁵ Citing the occurrence of this form of address in an early second century Egyptian papyrus, a letter from Claudius Tiberianus to Longinus Priscus, Bowman and Thomas suggest it simply means ‘his patron’.³⁹⁶ Anthony Birley, on the other hand, raises the possibility it implies Flavius Cerialis is ‘of royal stock’.³⁹⁷ David Cuff suggests the use of this form of address indicates a strong sense of Batavian identity with echoes of the time they were ruled by client kings.³⁹⁸

Observing that the most common forms of address in the Vindolanda tablets, *domine / domina, frater / soror and carissime/a*, are also the three most common forms of address in the Greek papyri of this period: κύριε / κυρία, ἀδελφέ / ἀδελφή, φίλτατε / φίλτατη, Eleanor Dickey maintains that ‘similarities like this can hardly be coincidental: ... the two address systems are related.’³⁹⁹ Dickey goes on to argue for the influence of Latin on Greek in the period of imperial Rome, not least on the *koine* Greek of the New Testament where the forms of address in the parables and the letters are indebted to the Greek of the papyri and so have much in common with the Latin of the Vindolanda tablets.⁴⁰⁰

In all these forms of address we encounter the world of honour. Another who signed in his own hand was Brocchus as he joined Valerius Niger writing to Cerialis of an anticipated visit of the then governor.⁴⁰¹ Addressing Cerialis as ‘brother’, they pray for success in a venture he is about to undertake (*óptamus frater it quot | acturus es felicis*), sure their prayers will bear fruit given that Cerialis is ‘most worthy’ (*dignissimus*). Taking pen in hand Brocchus prays Cerialis would enjoy good health (*op<t>amus frater | bene υαλερε τε | domine*). Brocchus and Niger affirm the good standing and honour of their fellow-prefect Cerialis in anticipation of a visit from the governor.

According to the rough notebook listing significant events in the *praetorium* of Cerialis between 2 April 102 and 103 CE, preparations were being made on 1 May 103 CE for a lunch to greet the arrival of the governor (*aduentu*⁴⁰² *consu[laris]*), perhaps Lucius Neratius Marcellus, and his

³⁹⁵ *Tab. Vindol.* III 628.

³⁹⁶ ‘P. Mich.inv. 5392: Letter from Claudius Tiberianus to Longinus Priscus’ 2020. See Bowman and Thomas 2003, *Tab. Vindol.* III 628.

³⁹⁷ A. R. Birley 2002a, 80.

³⁹⁸ Cuff 2011, 154–55; Roymans 2004, 251.

³⁹⁹ Dickey 2004, 502.

⁴⁰⁰ Dickey 2004, 524.

⁴⁰¹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 248, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

⁴⁰² *Adventus* is used in the Vulgate N.T. to translate παρουσία on each occasion it refers to Jesus: Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; Jas. 5:7, 8; 2 Pet. 1:16; 3:4; 1 Jn. 2:28. In

bodyguards (*si(ngulares)*).⁴⁰³ Within 12 years Hadrian was to become emperor and commemorate his extensive visitations around the empire in coins using the term *adventus*.⁴⁰⁴ At around this time Cerialis draws on his formal training in ‘upper-class literary culture’⁴⁰⁵ and drafts a letter to ‘his Crispinus’ with great care, requesting his support as he approaches Marcellus seeking advancement, perhaps a transfer or a promotion.⁴⁰⁶ It may be that he is trying his hand at his own patronage, seeking support as he anticipated recommending friends to higher posts.⁴⁰⁷ It may be an instance of someone of equestrian rank at the centre of a web of power, exercising influence through his own network.⁴⁰⁸ Conscious of status and honour, he speaks of ‘his Crispinus’ (*Crispino suo*) and addresses him in a fulsome way as ‘my lord’ (*[d]ominum meum*), ‘the man whom it is my very special wish to be in good health and master of all your hopes.’ (*quem saluom | [h]abere] esse et omnis spei | [suae] comptem*). He speaks of Marcellus as ‘the most distinguished of men’ (*clariss[um ui] | [rum]*) and refers to him as ‘my governor’ (*consularem meum*). Cerialis appeals to Crispinus, whom he holds in high esteem, to advance himself by building on the contacts he has with the circle of friends around the governor.

Prefects draw on one another seeking advancement. The prefect of another fort, (...) Brigonius, has approached ...ius Karus wanting letters of recommendation as he seeks advancement from Annius Questor, the centurion who is ‘in charge of the region’ at Luguvalium.⁴⁰⁹ He writes to Cerialis addressing his fellow prefect as ‘my lord’ and praying that he is enjoying ‘the best of fortune’ and that he is in ‘good health.’⁴¹⁰ Karus recognises that this will place an obligation on him and says to Cerialis, by doing this ‘you will place me in debt to you both in his name (?) and my own (?)’ (*digneris. [...] | [...] que nom[ine] | debetorem m[etibi] | obligaturus*). Here we glimpse a balanced reciprocity expecting a like return for a favour granted.⁴¹¹

When Clodius Super addresses Cerialis in familiar terms as ‘my dearest lord and brother’ and says, ‘you know that I am smart in getting hold of this since I am the commissariat officer and am now on

the Vulgate N.T. it is used in Acts 7:52 of the coming Righteous One for ἔλευσις and in Acts 13:24 of Jesus for the phrase πρὸ προσώπου τῆς εἰσόδου αὐτοῦ.

⁴⁰³ *Tab. Vindol.* III 581 Bowman and Thomas 2019c. See above 3.3: 102-103.

⁴⁰⁴ Kreitzer 1996 Appendix. Cf. [Llanvaches Hoard 2008.19H/514](#); and [RIC II Hadrian 225c \(denarius\)](#).

⁴⁰⁵ J. N. Adams 1995, 129.

⁴⁰⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* II 225.

⁴⁰⁷ A. R. Birley 2002a, 128.

⁴⁰⁸ Woolf 2020, sec. 17.

⁴⁰⁹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 250, Bowman and Thomas 2019b; Goldsworthy 2015, 72. The Greek equivalent of *centurio regionarius*, ἐπὶ τῶν τόπων, occurs in five Egyptian petitions to centurions and *Beneficiarii*: Alston 1995, 88, 89, 93.

⁴¹⁰ *Tab. Vindol.* II 250.

⁴¹¹ Neyrey 1991b, 371–73. Cf. Crook 2004, 54, citing Sahlins 1972, 186; cf. Paulraj 2023, 100.

the point of acquiring transport' (*scis certe hoc me uxor-/sute impetrare cum sim an-/nonarius et iam adepturus / translationem*),⁴¹² that suggests to Bowman and Thomas that he is of similar social standing, perhaps a legionary centurion *ex equite Romano*.⁴¹³

As *cohors I Tungrorum* returned to Vindolanda, one letter of commendation lauds the virtues of the person commended in fine language, speaking of 'a good man' (*uiri boni*) who has made 'moral progress through love of liberal pursuits' (*accedit etiam libera/litium studiorum amore | profectus morum*) and is commended for his 'moderation' (*denique | te[m]peramentum*).⁴¹⁴ A request for lodging adjacent to the fort appeals to 'the goodness' of the recipient of the letter' (*peto domine de bon[itate] | tua ut mihi con[] hospitium*).⁴¹⁵

With honour goes the potential for shame. Wrongdoing is a serious matter: Flavius Genialis writes to Cerialis, 'indicting ... seven men'⁴¹⁶ and a colleague, Successor, writes to Cerialis concerning fighting.⁴¹⁷ That those who deserted brought shame upon themselves is suggested by the letter Celonius Iustus sends to his colleague, another prefect, requesting they be 'immediately struck off the list (*te ▶ rogo ▶ fra/ter ▶ continuo ▶ illqs ▶ expun/ gas*).⁴¹⁸

As honour is accorded to others, so shame can be willed on others too. Following a formulaic greeting to 'his Fadius' the unnamed writer of *Tab. Vindol. II 321* goes on to wish ill on the one to whom he is writing:

opto male tibi

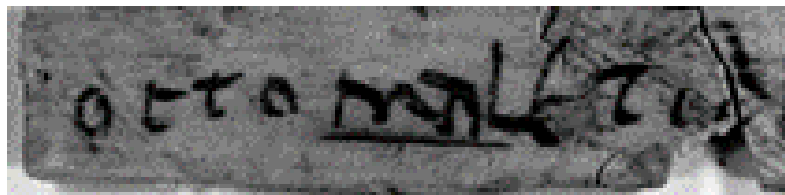


Figure 22: [Tab. Vindol. II 321](#) to illustrate Old Roman Cursive. © The Trustees of the British Museum: [1988,1005.90](#).

⁴¹² *Tab. Vindol. II 255*, cf. III Appendix, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

⁴¹³ *Tab. Vindol. 255*, note line 20. Cf. Pollard and Berry 2012, 39–40: many legionary centurions 'were recruited directly from the municipal landowning class and a few from the equestrian order in Rome'.

⁴¹⁴ *Tab. Vindol. III 660*, A. R. Birley 2002a, 156.

⁴¹⁵ *Tab. Vindol. IV 880*.

⁴¹⁶ *Tab. Vindol. II 256*, cf. III Appendix.

⁴¹⁷ *Tab. Vindol. II 306*, cf. III Appendix.

⁴¹⁸ *Tab. Vindol. 345*. Cf. *Tab Vindol. II 226, 320* for other possible references to deserters.

While courteousness (*civilitas*),⁴¹⁹ goodness (*bonitas*),⁴²⁰ and justice (*iustitia*)⁴²¹ are celebrated, drunkenness (*ebriacum*) brings shame (*rumpantur inuidi[a]*).⁴²² When wages are paid it was important that a 'suitable' (*idoneus*) person should bring the money.⁴²³ There is an expectation that letters will be answered and a sense of frustration when they are not:⁴²⁴ Sollemnis chastises his brother Paris as 'a neglectful man' who has sent him 'not even one letter' (*homo inpietissi|me qui mihi ne unam e|pistulam misisti*), while commending his own 'more considerate behaviour' in writing to his brother, his messmate (*putó me humanius | facere qui tibi scribe*).⁴²⁵

Arraigned by Ingenus (*coñuenit me Ingeñus*), Suolcenus writes to Flavius Gentilis, maintaining he has not been neglectful (*non desum*); at issue is a problem concerning transport which he hopes Ingenus will 'quickly sort out' (*uidit Ingeñus me non dese | de roñulis quas spero cito ex|[pl]içabiñ*), together with an outstanding debt he hopes Flavius Gentilis will collect.⁴²⁶ That the prefect could be called upon to settle disputes arising from breaches of the honour code is evident in another fragmentary letter (Tab. Vindol. II 297). Writing to 'his Priscinus', prefect after 105, Firminius defends himself against accusations of malpractice and is adamant that he has done nothing with evil intent (*nihil malo animo feci*): indeed, all he has done has been with the 'decency [of an honest man]' (*pudor[hominis modesti]*).⁴²⁷

Words we encounter in these tablets go to the heart of the honour code: *sordide*, in a niggardly fashion; *opto male tibi eueniañ uale*, it is my wish that it might turn out badly for you; *civilitas* and *bonitas*, politeness and goodness, are contrasted with one who was *ebriacum*, drunk; *homo inpietissime*, a neglectful man, in contrast to *putó me humanius | facere qui tibi scribe*, I think that I am behaving in a more considerate fashion in writing to you; *desum*, neglectful; *nihil malo animo feci*, I have done nothing with evil intent, contrasted with doing everything with *pudor [hominis modesti]*, with the decency [of an honest man].

In Vindolanda we glimpse people appealing to someone of higher authority when an injustice has been done or when they have been mistreated. When *cohors I Tungrorum* were first in Vindolanda a

⁴¹⁹ Tab. Vindol. II 323.

⁴²⁰ Tab. Vindol. IV 880.

⁴²¹ Tab. Vindol. IV 891.

⁴²² Tab. Vindol. III 662.

⁴²³ Tab. Vindol. IV 876.

⁴²⁴ Tab. Vindol. II 310.

⁴²⁵ Tab. Vindol. II 311.

⁴²⁶ Tab. Vindol. III 648.

⁴²⁷ Tab. Vindol. II 297, Bowman and Thomas 2019b. See note, a.9.

formal complaint (*accusatio*) was lodged although the details have been lost.⁴²⁸ Following the theft from the baths of a military belt (*balteus*) and its subsequent discovery the person concerned sought justice from Cerialis in the hope of settling the matter.⁴²⁹ Another writer, possibly Cerialis, informs ‘a higher official that he has sent a miscreant to be dealt with’.⁴³⁰ Ill health prevented the prefect from responding himself when the civilian trader sought help from him.⁴³¹

3.8 Imagining Luke-Acts through the eyes of the prefects associated with Vindolanda

3.8.1 To the most excellent Theophilus

Whether or not Luke’s opening dedication is characteristic of literary works appealing to those who were well read or technical works appealing to the kind of craftworkers who made up a significant number of those who followed the Way of Jesus, cannot be conclusively decided.⁴³² Whether the addressee, Theophilus was a specific individual, Luke’s patron perhaps, or symbolic of every ‘friend of God’, is again not possible to determine. At its simplest the dedication can be described as ‘a label with an address’.⁴³³ Wolter points out that Roman procurators are addressed as ‘most excellent’ (*κράτιστε*, *optime*) in Acts 23:26; 24:3 and 26:25 and allows ‘the speculation that Theophilus was not without means and that he enjoyed a certain social prestige’.⁴³⁴ Were a prefect from Vindolanda or someone of such standing to be a follower of the Way of Jesus and read Luke-Acts, they would, perhaps, sense that it was addressed to someone of their standing. Were they to discover the background to Luke 4:27, they would realise it was a commander of the Syrian army who is singled out by Jesus in his programmatic address in Nazareth.⁴³⁵ Indeed, it is one of their peers, Claudius Lysias, who addresses the governor, Felix, in a letter structured in a way they would recognise (Acts 23:26). The other letter in Acts is structured in a similar way with greetings familiar to the Vindolanda correspondents (Acts 15:23-29).⁴³⁶

⁴²⁸ *Tab. Vindol.* II 307.

⁴²⁹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 322, Bowman and Thomas 2019b; Peachin 1999, 227.

⁴³⁰ *Tab. Vindol.* II 317, Bowman and Thomas 2019b.

⁴³¹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 344.

⁴³² Alexander 1986; Green 1997, 34; Fitzmyer 1970, 288; Tannehill 1996, 33; Wolter 2016, 43.

⁴³³ Alexander 1986, 54.

⁴³⁴ Wolter 2016, 52. Cf. Green 1997, 44; Fitzmyer 1970, 299–300.

⁴³⁵ Cf. 2 Kings 5:1-19, where Naaman acknowledges Yahweh but remains uncircumcised. Esler 1987, 35.

⁴³⁶ Alexander 2001, 1056; Keener 2020, 553.

3.8.2 Honour and shame

They would recognise in the frequent use of κύριε⁴³⁷ (*domine*) in addressing Jesus and ἀδελφός⁴³⁸ (*frater*) in addressing fellow followers of the Way, the formality of addressing one's superiors as 'lord' and one's equals as 'brother'. Would there also be a challenge here? Were the friends of the centurion right to honour Jesus with the designation κύριε (*domine*)? Implicit in its use is the notion of obedience, prompting Jesus to ask the question, 'Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord', and do not do what I tell you?' (Luke 6:46). For people of the status of the prefects of Vindolanda use of this form of address accords to Jesus the honour they owe to their superiors and with its use goes a willingness to obey and a mark of belonging.⁴³⁹

The obverse of honour is shame. The prefects of Vindolanda were aware of shameful behaviour and of occasions when things were done 'with evil intent'.⁴⁴⁰ They would recognise the teaching of Jesus countering such shameful behaviour, in the hypocrisy of those who judge others and in lives that bear bad fruit (Luke 6:37, 43-45). They would also recognise the way in which opponents of Jesus sought ill of him (Luke 4:28-29). They too would associate drunkenness with shame (Acts 2:15). They would have understood the shame brought on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and the sense of disappointment attached to Mark's desertion (Acts 15:36-41).

In the teaching of Jesus, lives touched by shame are blessed: the destitute, the hungry, those who weep, those who are hated. Lives honoured in the world of the prefects are shamed by Jesus: the rich, the full, those who laugh, those who are spoken well of (Luke 6:20-26). The term 'legion', honoured in the world of Vindolanda is used as a term of shame (Luke 8:30). Indeed, Jesus changed the lives of those who had been shamed through circumstances beyond their control: the leprosy sufferer (Luke 5:12-16), the paralysed man (Luke 5:17-26), the sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50), Legion himself (Luke 8:26-39).

⁴³⁷ In addressing Jesus: Luke. 5:8, 12; 6:46; 7:6; 9:54, 59, 61; 10:17, 40; 11:1; 12:41; 13:23; 17:37; 18:41; 19:8; 22:33, 38, 49; Acts 1:6, 24; 7:59, 60; 9:5, 10, 13; 22:8, 10, 19; 26:15.

⁴³⁸ Other than in a familial context: Luke. 6:41, 42; 8:21; 17:3; 22:32; of fellow followers of the Way: Acts 1:15, 16; 6:3; 9:17, 30; 10:23; 11:1, 12, 29; 12:17; 14:2; 15:1, 3, 7, 13, 22, 23, 32, 33, 36, 40; 16:2, 40; 17:6, 10, 14; 18:18, 27; 21:7, 17, 20; 22:5, 13; 28:14, 15, 17, 21; of fellow Iudaei: Acts 2:29; 2:37; 3:17; 3:22; 7:2, 37; 13:15, 26, 38; 22:1; 23:1, 5, 6.

⁴³⁹ Brawley 2020, 87–88 suggests this 'is clearly an appeal to ingroup norms as an external pole of identity for those who have Jesus as their lord, and having Jesus as their lord is tantamount to a name for the ingroup.'

⁴⁴⁰ *Tab. Vindol.* II 297, 321, III 648.

3.8.3 Patron and Client

When Masclus, the decurion, addresses Cerialis as *rex* it may simply be a term of respect. If in some way, however, it comes from deep within the Batavian cultural identity and a time when they were a client kingdom of Rome, it may be that Cerialis would have some understanding of the rivalry between Herod and Pilate and the accord they eventually reached (Luke 23:12).⁴⁴¹

In the hierarchical world of the military community of Vindolanda, Cerialis and his fellow prefects were fully aware of the deference due to them and the deference they owed to their superiors. Addressed once as *rex*, frequently as *domine*, Cerialis has authority over those beneath him, is at ease with his peers, and seeks advancement through a patronage that ‘ran through the Roman system from top to bottom’.⁴⁴² The relationship of patron and client they were accustomed to, is explored and challenged in the teaching and storytelling of Jesus. One can imagine those responsible for the provision of grain to a military community being drawn to the rich man whose land ‘produced abundantly’; the story is told, however, to challenge people to be on their guard ‘against all kinds of greed’ (Luke 12:13-21). Our imagined readers are presented with a choice between ‘self-interest devoted to possessions’ and ‘commitment to God’.⁴⁴³ The kind of household the prefects of Vindolanda would be familiar with is redefined by Jesus (Luke 12:32-40) as he urges those who belong to the household of faith to identify themselves with the slaves at the wedding banquet. In place of their possessions, they are to give alms. What Jesus advocates, however, is not a reversal of the hierarchies of the household but instead, a relationship of mutuality.⁴⁴⁴ In the dealings of the ‘faithful and prudent manager’ who is put in charge of his master’s slaves pending his return (Luke 12:41-48), the status and privilege they were accustomed to is challenged by Jesus who uses apocalyptic language ‘to exhort disciples to live appropriately in the present’.⁴⁴⁵ One can imagine the parable of ‘the rich man who was dressed in purple’ and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) and the encounter with the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-30) resonating with our imagined readers accustomed to the luxuries of the *praetorium*. Theirs was, however, not a life of idleness: they presided over a military community whose structures were designed to ensure that every individual belonged to a supportive group right down to the eight-man *contubernium*, the smallest unit within the century. The Vindolanda tablets reflect the busy life of such a community not only within their fort but in the wider locality.

⁴⁴¹ Wolter 2017, 509 sees this as ‘an integral part of [Luke’s] story of Jesus’.

⁴⁴² Salway 2001, 371. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* II 225.

⁴⁴³ Brawley 2020, 131.

⁴⁴⁴ Green 1997, 498–502; Brawley 2020, 133.

⁴⁴⁵ Brawley 2020, 134.

On the eve of his execution, Jesus meets with his disciples to observe ‘the festival of Unleavened bread, which is called the Passover’. It is at this meal that he instructs those who would follow his Way to stand apart from ‘the kings of the Gentiles’ who ‘lord it over them’ and from ‘those in authority over them’ who ‘are called benefactors’ (Luke 22:25). What marks out those who follow the Way of Jesus is that ‘the greatest’ among them ‘must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves’ (Luke 22:26). A highlight of the calendar at Vindolanda was the festival of *Saturnalia*.⁴⁴⁶ The role reversal of slave and master it entailed lasted only for the duration of the feast and served to reinforce the status quo, leaving them in no doubt ‘who is greater, the one who is at table or the one who serves’. It was most certainly ‘the one at the table’. But for Jesus the role reversal is fundamental not only to his own self-awareness but to every community of those who follow his way. ‘I am among you,’ he says, ‘as one who serves,’ not for a season, but the year round. It is through such service that the greatest honour comes at his table in his kingdom (Luke 22:24-30).⁴⁴⁷ Not only is this a reference to some future kingdom but in Acts it is made visible in the community life of those who follow the Way of Jesus. The movement that is to develop in Acts ‘will have its own institutions for a new identity that goes beyond established systems’.⁴⁴⁸ In similar vein Green argues this teaching is not concerned with removing abuses from the system but ‘with the nature of the system itself’.⁴⁴⁹ The whole system of private benefaction on which so much depended in the world to which the equestrian prefects of Vindolanda belonged is called in question. On the surface of it that would make it impossible for people of the standing of Cerialis to become followers of the Way. Herein lies the paradox of Luke-Acts for it is evident in Acts that people of such standing were among those followers. Perhaps the challenge for our imagined reader would entail modifying his behaviour.⁴⁵⁰

3.8.4 Roman law

Were someone of the standing of a prefect to encounter Luke-Acts as a follower of the Way, they would recognise the respect shown by Luke to legal processes with which they were familiar. When he and his companions were given a severe flogging in Philippi and later when Claudius Lysias, the tribune of an auxiliary cohort in Jerusalem ordered his flogging, Paul sought redress as the proper judicial process had not been followed (Acts 16:22-24, 35-39; 22:22-29). Frustrated by the lack of progress of his case, his subsequent appeal to the emperor’s tribunal (Acts 25:10) is reminiscent of

⁴⁴⁶ *Tab. Vindol.* II 301, III 622.

⁴⁴⁷ Green 1997, 767 suggests that ‘Jesus uses normal social protocols from the Greco-Roman world [evident here in Vindolanda] in order to insist that standard categories will not do’.

⁴⁴⁸ Brawley 2020, 189.

⁴⁴⁹ Green 1997, 768.

⁴⁵⁰ Green 1997, 767–69.

the appeal the trader from overseas made to the emperor's representative, to the 'majesty' of the governor in Vindolanda.⁴⁵¹

The trials of Jesus (Luke 22:63-23:25) and of Paul (Acts 21:37-26:32) followed processes familiar to people of the standing of prefects.⁴⁵² There is a tension between the Roman authorities and the local peoples. Even though in the course of proceedings, the erstwhile enemies, Pilate (governor of *Iudaea*) and Herod (ruler of Galilee, a fourth part of the kingdom of Herod the Great) 'became friends with each other' (Luke 23:12), a very real tension remains between Pilate and the representatives of the *Iudaei* (Luke 23:13-25). While Pilate is depicted negatively as one who 'mingled' the blood of Galileans 'with their sacrifices' (Luke 13:1-5), he is also presented as one who, when Jesus is on trial, declares his innocence three times: he found 'no basis for an accusation against this man'; declared to the *Iudaei* and their leaders that he had 'not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him'; and subsequently 'found no ground for the sentence of death' (Luke 23:4,14,22). They would perhaps notice that it was not the empire itself but the weakness of its representative at fault when Pilate 'gave his verdict that their demand should be granted' (Luke 23:24), though later he granted permission for the body's burial (Luke 23:52). A similar tension simmers beneath the surface as Paul is arrested and brought before the authorities of the *Iudaei* and of Rome (Acts 21:27-26:32). It nears resolution as Felix hands over to Festus who works more closely as governor of *Iudaea* with King Agrippa and Bernice (Acts 25:23-26:32). The prefects at Vindolanda were used to occasional visits from different governors: one can imagine them being unsurprised at the different approach of the governors of *Iudaea* to Paul. They would notice the way Felix was 'rather well informed of the Way' (Acts 24:22) and be concerned at his seeking a bribe (Acts 24:26). As had been the case with Jesus, the governor, Festus, declares Paul's innocence three times (Acts 25:18, 25; 26:31), agreeing with Agrippa that Paul had done 'nothing to deserve death or imprisonment' and that he could have been freed had he not appealed to Rome (Acts 26:30-32).

3.8.5 People of standing among the followers of the Way

While the good news of Jesus is presented by Paul in Acts as an alternative to the practices of the empire in places such as Lystra (Acts 14:8-18), Athens (Acts 17:22-31) and Ephesus (Acts 19:21-40),

⁴⁵¹ *Tab. Vindol.* II 344.

⁴⁵² Sherwin-White 1963, 32, 68: Luke's account is 'technically correct'. Fitzmyer 1985, 1474: the hearing before Pilate is 'of real political character'. Green 1997, 798: 'the picture Luke paints is ... historically believable'. Wolter 2017, 503, 511, 514: Luke's account is 'common in judicial proceedings'. Cf. Bruce 1990, 473-507, *passim*. Witherington III 1998, 679-84: speaks of the 'general plausibility of this account'. Keener 2020, 556-59: describes elements of Paul's trials as 'customary' and 'standard' and speaks of what 'normally', 'commonly' happened.

readers such as those of standing in Vindolanda would notice among followers of the Way the court official in charge of the entire treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians (Acts 8:26-40), Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12), Lydia, the 'dealer in purple cloth' in Philippi (Acts 16:11-15, 40), not a few of the leading women in Thessalonica (Acts 17:4), Aquila and Priscilla 'by trade ... tentmakers' in Corinth (18:1-3), and Publius, the leading man of the island of Malta (Acts 28:7-10). As Acts comes to its climax with the arrival of Paul in Rome, it is as if Luke-Acts is written in such a way as to enable people of the standing of the prefects of Vindolanda to count themselves among the followers of the Way of Jesus.

3.9 Negotiating the Way through the world of a military community

3.9.1 A world turned upside down

When we imagine one or more from the military community in Vindolanda becoming followers of the Way of Jesus and encountering Luke-Acts, there is much in the early chapters of Luke that they would find challenging. Mary speaks of 'the Mighty One' who 'has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly', who 'has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty' (Luke 1:52-53). John explicitly exhorts soldiers not 'to extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation' and to 'be satisfied' with their wages (Luke 3:14). Jesus at the very outset speaks of himself as bringing 'good news to the destitute, ... release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind'; he has come 'to let the oppressed go free', and yet he commends Naaman, the Syrian army commander (Luke 4:18-19, 27).

An authoritative teacher, Jesus quickly draws many followers who are keen to be regarded as his disciples; by the time he chooses twelve from among them to be apostles, his travels have enabled him to attract people from all *Iudaea*, Jerusalem and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. It is as he addresses his disciples in Luke 6:17-49 that we read a résumé of the teaching that had made such an impact.

At the very outset there are things that would unsettle and disturb any readers in Vindolanda, the more so the higher up the hierarchy they are. Blessings for the destitute, the hungry, those who weep now and those who are hated and excluded because of their support for Jesus are matched by a declaration of woe on the rich, those who are full now, those who laugh and those who are highly regarded (Luke 6:20-26). This was teaching that reversed the things they held dear. And it went further. Fresh from a long period of campaigning, presiding over a peace that had been bitterly fought over and precariously held, the words of Jesus would come as a deeply unsettling challenge:

But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27-31)

It was not just their campaigning and the relationship they had with the local people that was called in question, but the very fabric of their social world built as it was on the cultivation of friendship among peers.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:32-36).

What remains of Jesus' teaching has a wisdom they might recognise about not judging, about forgiving and the need for a genuineness that springs from the heart. There could be no doubt that Jesus expected these words to be acted on (Luke 6:37-49). Jesus expected the obedience they were accustomed to.

Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord', and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. (Luke 6:46).

Surely it would be impossible for them to remain as followers of the Way. How could they follow the teaching of Jesus that so reversed the values they held dear?

3.9.2 A Way that's open to those from a military community

It is precisely at this moment that they would be taken aback. Of all the people they should encounter 'after Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people' our imagined readers would have least expected to see one of their own. And yet it is at this moment that a centurion is introduced (Luke 7:1-10). It is telling that the centurion does not meet Jesus himself but instead sends friends: is that because he is unsure how he could be accepted by Jesus? He is presented as a model to be looked up to, as one who is concerned for the health of his slave, as one who is honoured by the local population for the practical help he has given them and ultimately by Jesus himself for the faith he has shown.

At the very point at which readers such as we find in Vindolanda might have called in question their decision to follow Jesus, they find reassurance in the person of a centurion whose faith is commended so highly by Jesus. It is not long before they encounter women of high standing who provided for Jesus as they travelled with him (Luke 8:1-3); 'not a few of the leading women' of

Thessalonica ‘were persuaded’ and became followers of the Way (Acts 17:4), as did people of the standing of Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Cyprus and Publius, the leading man of Malta (Acts 13:12, 28:7-10). Of the eight centurions who play a significant part in the narrative of Jesus in Luke and of the followers of the Way in Acts one is commended by Jesus for his faith (Luke 7:9); another, as Jesus is crucified, recognised that he was ‘innocent’ (δίκαιος: *iustus*, Luke 23:47); and another, Cornelius of the Italian cohort, is baptized, becomes a follower of the Way and instrumental in initiating mixed table-fellowship (Acts 10:1-11:18). Two more centurions act properly in a way that is helpful to Paul (Acts 22:25-26, 23:16-22), two guard him effectively (Acts 23:23-35), and Julius of the Augustan cohort, with whom Paul travels under arrest to Rome, treats Paul ‘kindly’ (φιλιανθρώπως: *humane*, Acts 27:3). Whatever the historical background, Luke draws attention to Cornelius by repeating his story, by making him the first non-Judean convert to be named and by implication suggesting that he belongs to an elite Italian cohort.⁴⁵³ He is emphatic that among the followers of the Way are people of such standing. However great the challenge of Jesus’ words to his disciples (Luke 6:20-49), there is no expectation that they will overthrow the institutions of Rome to which such people belong.

3.10 Conclusion: negotiating the Way with a radical inclusivity

Within the corpus of Vindolanda tablets we have focused on three archives, relating to the women, the centurions and the prefects of Vindolanda. Drawing on the multi-faceted imagination we explored in 1.3, and the process described in 1.6 our adaptation of archival ethnography enables us to draw some conclusions. They are justifiable in the context of Vindolanda and the discovery there of so many ink writing tablets (3.1,2). Our conclusions are informed by a careful study of the tablets themselves (3.3,5,7) and warranted by close attention to the text of Luke-Acts (3.4,6,8,9). As it is written, Luke-Acts is amply able to demonstrate that people in the military community, women as well as men, can become followers of the Way of Jesus. They will find their peers among the followers of the Way whose story is told in Luke-Acts. Women such as Lepidina and Severa would find in Luke-Acts a familiar world where women of high-standing had a place and where women of agency travelled to accomplish their aims, took part in festivals and feasting, valued kinship in turbulent times, and had a part to play in responding to sickness. Centurions such as Felicio and Saecularis would find a world they knew well in the world of Luke-Acts, where the practice of Roman law impacted on their relationships with civilians, where literacy was all-important, where a sense of identity came through travel, and issues of honour and shame were all important within the

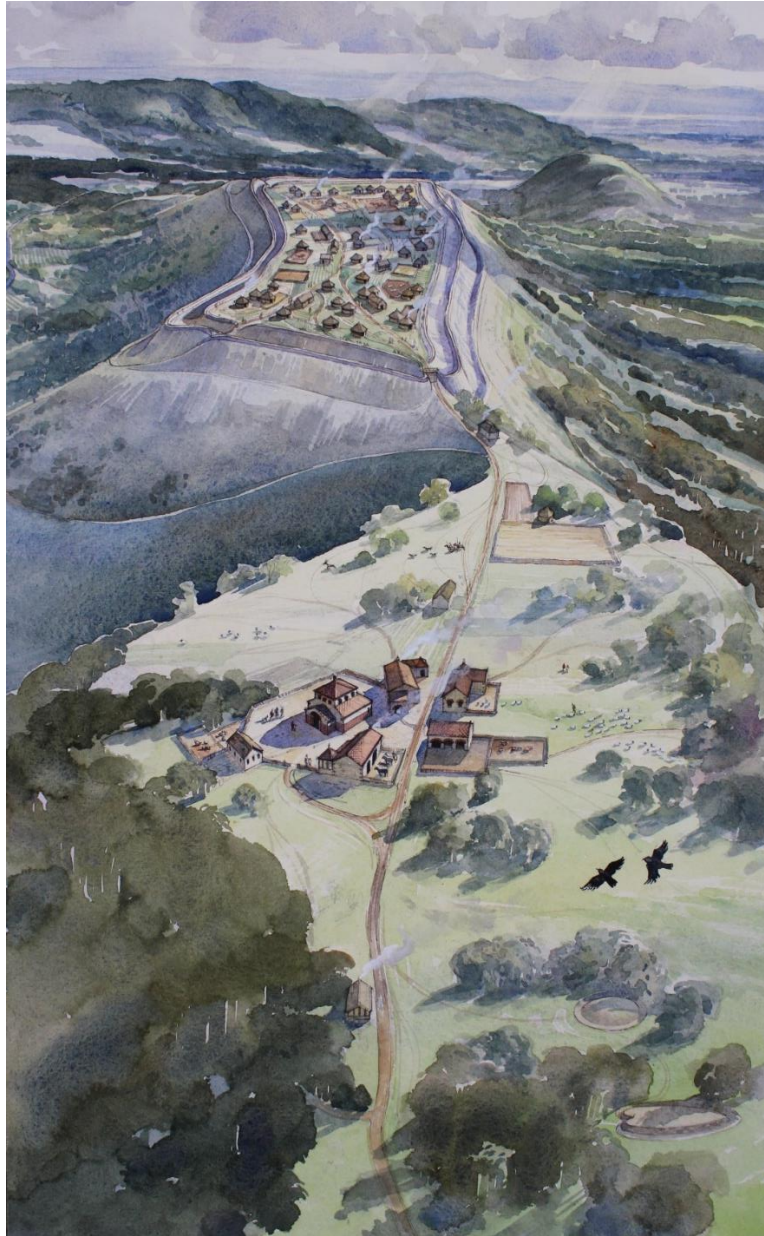
⁴⁵³ See above, 3.6.2: 130, note 318. For the significance of names in the Gospel tradition see above, 3.6.2: 130, note 321, Bauckham 2006, 39–66.

collegiality of associations such as the *contubernium* and *schola* and in their relationships with local people. The world of honour and shame, patrons and clients, literacy and law, evident in Luke-Acts would also be familiar to such as Verecundus and Cerialis.

There would at the same time be no escaping the challenge brought by Luke-Acts. Luke addresses 'the most excellent Theophilus' directly at the outset to explain why he has written his 'orderly account': it is 'so that you may know the truth (τὴν ἀσφάλειαν: *veritatem*) concerning the things about which you have been instructed' (Luke 1:4).⁴⁵⁴ Towards the end Luke describes Paul seeking to persuade the 'most excellent' Festus that he is speaking words of 'sober truth' (ἀληθείας καὶ σωφροσύνης ῥήματα: *veritatis et sobrietatis verba*, Acts 26:25).⁴⁵⁵ That 'truth' on the one hand carries with it the assurance that people from a military community can become followers of the Way and on the other the challenge that following the Way will impact on their conduct, their relationships with each other and the relationships they share with local people. That challenge, however, does not amount to an invitation from Jesus and his followers to contravene Roman law; to follow the Way is not a threat to the empire itself. For such as Lepidina and Severa, Cerialis and Brocchus the upside down world of the Saturnalia and Matronolia which secured the place of master, mistress and slave for the remainder of the year, would be encountered in the table-fellowship of followers of the Way where the balanced reciprocity they were accustomed to gives way to a generalised reciprocity that extends hospitality without expecting anything in return. They would be challenged to engage with the destitute beyond the fort differently. The collegiality enjoyed by centurion and prefect alike in the context of the *contubernium* and *schola* within the military community would extend to the followers of the Way as they met in association with each other. Here was a different web of power they were now part of, whose relationships could transform their lives. They would be challenged to build bridges not only with civilians engaged with the military community, but also with local peoples. For people from a military community, belonging to the Way of Jesus would involve a radical inclusivity that seems at times to turn the world upside down.

⁴⁵⁴ The Greek supports the view of Wolter 2016, 53 that Luke's intention is 'to give certainty to that which is generally accepted and recognised'. Cf. Esler 1987, 67. The Latin suggests the appropriateness of the NRSV translation 'truth', followed by Green 1997, 33,45.

⁴⁵⁵ Keener 2020, 591; Witherington III 1998, 749,751.



*Figure 23: The Uley temple dedicated to Mercury with ancillary buildings.¹
A view from the north with the Cotswold escarpment to the right, and the river Severn in the distance.
In the foreground is a Neolithic burial chamber reused in Roman times, Hetty Pegler's Tump,
and a possible Bronze Age round barrow.
In the distance is Uley Bury Hill fort, possibly occupied into Roman times.
Steve Smith.
© Stroud District Museum, the Museum in the Park.*

¹ Image of original painting by Steve Smith kindly supplied by Stroud District Museum.

4. IMAGINING LUKE-ACTS IN A RURAL COMMUNITY: THROUGH THE EYES OF THE PEOPLE OF THE ULEY CURSE TABLETS

4.1 Introducing the people of the Uley curse tablets

Honoratus had been the victim of a significant theft, losing two wheels, four cows and many small belongings from his house. He sought help at the nearby temple by presenting the god Mercury with a carefully worded message seeking the return of his property and reconciliation with the thief or, failing that, the physical punishment of whoever was responsible. The message was written in a practised Old Roman Cursive hand with a sharp stylus on a lead sheet either by Honoratus himself or someone who helped him.²

Docilinus suspected that Varianus, Peregrina and Sabinianus had brought evil harm on a beast of his: he sought a horrible death for them unless they recompensed him and redeemed from Mercury the harm they had done to his beast. On another occasion he appealed to Sulis Minerva in a tablet he deposited at the sacred well in Aquae Sulis (Bath) for the return of a hooded cloak or, failing that, he sought sleepless nights, death and worse for whoever was responsible.³

It is not only men who seek redress in this way. In a memorandum (*commonitorium*) to the god Mercury, Saturnina asks that whoever has stolen a piece of linen should not rest unless they return it to the temple, at which point she will give a third part its value to ‘the aforesaid god’.⁴

Unlike the Bloomberg tablets and the Vindolanda tablets, some of which are dated, all of which come from a dateable archaeological context, the Uley curse tablets span a period of about two hundred years. Originally deposited in the temple dedicated to Mercury,⁵ they were scattered around the site during demolition and re-building.⁶ In one sense they are even less like an archive, and yet they are a distinct corpus of texts, produced by individuals living in a rural community within reach of the temple to Mercury. As we follow the process set out in 1.6 we shall discover they too enable us to re-enact a moment in history as we get to know individual people facing a time of crisis in their lives. In introducing the Uley curse tablets we will first look at Uley and its shrines, comparing

² *SD* 365 (Uley 72), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 354–55; Tomlin 1992b, 310–11.

³ The only two tablets from Bath and Uley written in the same hand in the name of Docilinus (Uley) and Docilianus (Bath): *SD* 361 (Uley 43), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 350–51; Tomlin 1989, 329–31; *SD* 215 (*Tab. Sulis* 10), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 274–75; Tomlin 1988. Aquae Sulis, see Map, 406.

⁴ *SD* 356 (Uley 2), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 346–47; Tomlin 1993, 120–22.

⁵ Uley, temple dedicated to Mercury, see Map, 401.

⁶ See below, 4.2.1: 158.

other locations in Britain where curse tablets have been found (4.2.1). We will then go on to consider what curse tablets are and what is going on in writing such messages, asking whether they are curses or prayers for justice (4.2.2). It will then be possible to draw on our adaptation of archival ethnography in 1.2,3,6 and imagine the circumstances of the named people we encounter in the Uley curse tablets. While drawing on the various types of imagination explored in 1.3, we will find that Tilley's geographical imagination (1.3.3) will help us to immerse ourselves at a particular moment in their lives, seeing with our inner eye something of their world (4.3). We will then be in a position to imagine what people such as these would have made of texts in Luke-Acts that have to do with temples (4.4.1), cursing (4.4.2), and praying (4.4.3).

4.2 Introducing the Uley curse tablets

4.2.1 Introducing Uley and its Shrines, Bath and other curse tablet locations

The Uley curse tablets were among 140 found in a Romano-Celtic temple discovered in 1976 when a water pipe was being laid near the Gloucestershire village of Uley.⁷ A sacred place long before the arrival of the Romans (43 CE), it remained so after their departure (410 CE).⁸ Neolithic standing stones in an oval enclosure were replaced in the late Iron Age with a wooden shrine encircled by ditches and banks and later rebuilt. Early in the second century CE a stone Romano-Celtic temple was built on the same spot and with the same alignment.⁹ It was extended in the early fourth century within a complex of other buildings providing accommodation for those serving, visiting and trading in the temple.¹⁰ An inner sanctuary (*cella*), surrounded by an ambulatory, contained a slightly more than life-size statue of Mercury sculpted with great skill in local oolitic limestone.¹¹ Votive remains including three figurines of Mercury¹² and two altars with carvings showing Mercury flanked by a ram and cockerel¹³ enable the sculpture to be visualised.¹⁴

⁷ The site was excavated using modern scientific techniques in 1977, 1978 and 1979. The finds including five of the curse tablets were published in Woodward and Leach 1993 and subsequently in *Britannia*. Uley, see Map, 401.

⁸ Woodward and Leach 1993, xiii, 303–35.

⁹ Woodward and Leach 1993, 13–32.

¹⁰ Woodward and Leach 1993, 33–62.

¹¹ Henig, Hassall, and Bayley 1993, 88–94.

¹² Henig, Hassall, and Bayley 1993, 98–101.

¹³ Henig, Hassall, and Bayley 1993, 94–98.

¹⁴ Henig, Hassall, and Bayley 1993, 92–93.



Figure 24: The temple dedicated to Mercury, together with ancillary buildings. Artist's impression by Steve Smith. © Stroud District Museum, Museum on the Park, Stroud.

Figure 25: The temple interior, a reconstruction by Joanna Richards: c. 200 CE: the cult statue is in the distance, a petitioner is about to deposit a curse tablet in the central pool. Licensed under ADS terms of use: doi.org/10.5284/1028203.¹⁵

Figure 26: The head of a high quality oolitic limestone cult statue of Mercury, carefully buried after the temple fell out of use. Two stubs near the front of the head may be the remains of wings. © The Trustees of the British Museum, [1978,0102.1](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108810102)

Figure 27: A conjectural reconstruction of the cult statue, H 185 cm, drawn by Joanna Richards. Licensed under ADS terms of use: doi.org/10.5284/1028203.¹⁶

¹⁵ Woodward and Leach 1993, 313.

¹⁶ Woodward and Leach 1993, 93.

A quarter of a million animal bones, mainly sheep, goats and domestic fowl provide evidence of extensive ritual sacrifice.¹⁷ Towards the end of the fourth century CE the stone temple was demolished to be replaced by a smaller shrine in use for a short time. Early in the fifth century all signs of such a temple disappeared to be replaced first by a timber and then by a stone hall or basilican church on the same alignment.¹⁸ It was during the late fourth or early fifth century demolition that the head of Mercury was carefully buried.¹⁹ Artefacts from that last period, including a lead tablet with biblical scenes²⁰ and red-streaked window glass,²¹ suggest it was Christian. That building was finally demolished in the seventh or eighth century CE and nothing of later date was discovered.

There is nothing to see, yet everything to experience at West Hill, the site of the Uley shrines. Approaching on foot one cannot help but feel the significance of its location.²² Walk the kilometre from Nympsfield long barrow²³ along the edge of the Cotswold escarpment to Hetty Pegler's Tump, another Neolithic long barrow,²⁴ and within another hundred metres or so is the location of the Uley shrines, including the Roman temple. To the west is a breath-taking view across the River Severn, with its tidal bore, to the Welsh mountains. On the far side of the Severn and just about visible is the Romano-Celtic temple at Lydney Park dedicated to the healing god Nodens.²⁵ Walking from a kilometre in the other direction, one skirts round Uley Bury, a large, multi-vallate Iron Age hill fort occupied from approximately 300 BCE to 100 CE and beyond²⁶ before arriving at the temple site. Walk from the rich agricultural land at the foot of the escarpment, past the spring line and the temple site comes into view as one reaches the top of the escarpment. There is evidence of a metalled Roman road at the foot of the escarpment that goes to the *colonia*, Glevum (Gloucester) 23 kilometres to the north.²⁷ East and then north on the Fosse Way is the major town of Corinium

¹⁷ Levitan 1993.

¹⁸ Woodward and Leach 1993, 63–79.

¹⁹ Woodward and Leach 1993, xiii, 71–75.

²⁰ Part of the sheeting from a casket on which four figured scenes remain: top left, Christ and the centurion (Matt. 8:5-13; cf. Luke 7:1-10); top right Christ healing a blind man (Mark 8:22-26, cf. Luke 18:35-43; John 9); bottom left, Jonah under the bush (Jonah 4:6-8); bottom right, sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22:1-14): Henig, Hassall, and Bayley 1993, 107–10; Bebbington 2003, 24–25. See Appendix, 299,

²¹ Price 1993.

²² Tilley 1994, 78ff. See picture, 154 and Map, Inset.

²³ 'Nympsfield Long Barrow' 2021. See Map, 404.

²⁴ 'Uley Long Barrow, Also Known as Hetty Pegler's Tump' 2016. See Map, 403.

²⁵ Copeland 2011, 150–52; Lydney Park Estate 2000, 14–19; Wilson 2002, 202–6; Allen and Bryan 2020, 87–89. See Map, 407.

²⁶ Lock and Ralson: EN0752 Uley Bury Camp, Gloucestershire; 'Uley Bury Camp, Uley - 1004866 | Historic England' 2015. Some suggest into the late third century CE: Evans 2005. See Map, 402.

²⁷ Copeland 2011, 48. Glevum, see Map, 212; Corinium, see Map, 211; Aquae Sulis, see Map, 406; Woodchester villa, see Map, 405; Fosse Way, see Map, from Isca Dumnomniorum (210), through Corinium (211), and Ratae Corieltavorum (414) to Lindum (312).

(Cirencester) in 26 kilometres; south, Aquae Sulis (Bath) with its sacred spring and temple dedicated to Sulis Minerva in 42 kilometres. Within 6 kilometres is the palatial villa of Woodchester with its enormous Orpheus mosaic.²⁸ In the time of Honoratus, Docilinus, Saturnina and the others who presented their curse tablets to Mercury, this was an area of considerable agricultural activity where fertile land was being reclaimed from the tidal River Severn. It would appear that people lived not so much in villages as in substantial farmsteads:²⁹ in the vicinity there were many villas and other settlements.³⁰ From the grazing uplands of the escarpment to the lush pastures and arable lands below the spring-line, this was a rural community where Celtic and Roman worlds met and shaped the ritual practice of the local people.³¹

Many of the curse tablets are addressed to the god Mercury, although variations in the form of address, together with references to Mars and Silvanus in three tablets, suggest links with the Celtic god associated with the earlier Iron Age shrine.³² A title applied to Mars in two tablets³³ and to Mercury in four unpublished ones,³⁴ also appears as part of a place name with Celtic etymology by which the temple at Uley was known.³⁵ Mercury is connected with Mars and Silvanus elsewhere in Britannia suggesting to Tomlin that the Celtic god associated with the shrine may have had attributes linked with Mercury, Mars and Silvanus.³⁶ The Celtic interest in Mercury had been observed by Julius Caesar. Following the account of his two incursions into Britain and the quelling of revolts in Gaul, Caesar links the religious practices of the Britons with those of the Gauls and speaks of their high regard for Mercury.

Deum maxime Mercurium colunt. Huius sunt plurima simulacra: hunc omnium inventorem artium ferunt, hunc viarum atque itinerum ducem, hunc ad quaestus pecuniae mercaturasque habere vim maximam arbitrantur.

They especially honour the god Mercury. There are very many images of him: they describe him as the source of all knowledge, the guide on all roads and journeys; they consider he has the greatest power when it comes to the acquisition of wealth and the pursuit of commerce.³⁷

²⁸ Copeland 2011, 128–29.

²⁹ Copeland 2011, 100–103.

³⁰ Cleary 2011.

³¹ Drinkwater 1993, 3.

³² *SD* 356 (Uley 2), Sánchez Natalías 2022a; Tomlin 1993, 120–22; *SD* 373 (Uley 24), Sánchez Natalías 2022a; Tomlin 2017b, 462–64; *SD* 431 (Uley 84), Sánchez Natalías 2022a; Tomlin 1993, 130.

³³ *SD* 373 (Uley 24); *SD* 431 Uley (84).

³⁴ *SD* 370 (Uley 78); *SD* 405 (Uley 28); *SD* 410 (Uley 40); *SD* 419 (Uley 62).

³⁵ *SD* 386 (Uley 75), Sánchez Natalías 2022a; Tomlin 1993, 130.

³⁶ Tomlin 1993, 115. Cf. Woolf 1998, 212, 226.

³⁷ Caesar, *Bellum Gallicum* VI.17: H. J. Edwards 1917, 340.

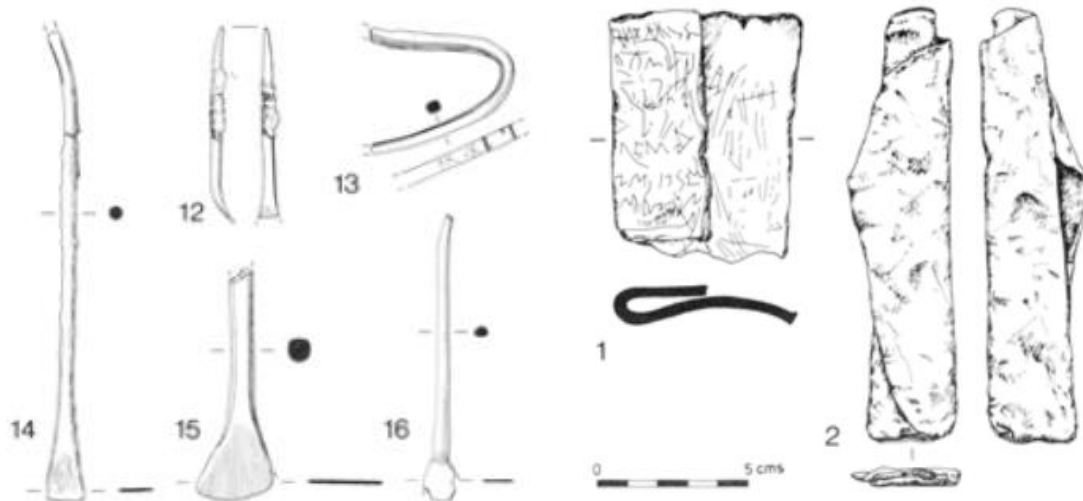


Figure 28: Copper and alloy styluses found at Uley temple dedicated to Mercury.³⁸
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Figure 29: Examples of typical folded and rolled lead tablets.³⁹
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Of the 140 lead tablets, 109 (76%) were rolled and flattened, 5 (3.6%) rolled but not flattened, 9 (6.4%) not rolled at all, 17 (14%) were indeterminate. 87 are legible and were written using a pointed stylus in a hand familiar from the Latin papyri of the eastern Mediterranean: 23 (26%) were written in capitals, 55 (63%) in Old Roman Cursive (second and third centuries CE), 8 (9%) in New Roman Cursive (c. fourth century CE).⁴⁰ 50 of the tablets were blank: perhaps because the writing had disappeared, they had yet to be used, or they had accompanied the verbal messages of people who were illiterate. In the initial report five were published in full by Roger Tomlin and the remainder described; since then 17 more have been published in *Britannia*, of which 14 are included in Celia Sanchez Natalías' comprehensive catalogue, *Sylloge of Defixiones from the Roman West*.⁴¹ Tomlin is now working on publication of the remainder.⁴² None was discovered at the point at which it had been deposited. All had probably been scattered during the demolition process at the end of the fourth century CE and so cannot be dated other than palaeographically. How they were deposited and where they remained until that point is not clear: the fact that they were folded or rolled up after being inscribed indicates they were not intended for human eyes.⁴³

³⁸ Woodward and Leach 1993, 191; Willi 2021, 33-38.

³⁹ Woodward and Leach 1993, 113; Willi 2021, 62-64.

⁴⁰ Tomlin 1993, 117. For an introduction to cursive scripts and how to read them, see Mullen and Bowman 2021, 1:41-83.

⁴¹ SD 355-373, Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 344-66; SD 387 (Uley 83), *Britannia* 52 (2021), 471-472; SD 390 (Uley 9), *Britannia* 51 (2020), 480-482; SD 411 (Uley 41), *Britannia* 51 (2020), 481-483; see Appendix 4.

⁴² Tomlin 2018; Tomlin 2021, 471; Tomlin forthcoming.

⁴³ Tomlin 2017a, 73.

When Docilinus visited the temple to Sulis Minerva in Aquae Sulis he would have found a temple with marked differences, set in a very different location.⁴⁴ Classical in design, possibly built by Togidubnus, a friendly king of Rome, the temple may well have included imperial iconography.⁴⁵ It was dedicated to the Roman goddess Minerva and the Celtic goddess Sulis who had already gained a reputation for healing powers from the adjacent hot springs. Aquae Sulis itself was a cosmopolitan centre that drew tourists as well as local people of every level in society.⁴⁶ Not only were there *sacerdotes* (priests) in attendance, but a *haruspex* (soothsayer)⁴⁷ as well; inscriptions on tombstones and altars indicate the presence in Aquae Sulis of the military, officers of state and the elite of the local society. Initially the spring was open but as the temple developed it was enclosed in its own shrine.⁴⁸ In 1978, as Uley was being excavated, tragedy struck in Bath when a young girl died after bathing in the hot spring waters. When the sacred spring was subsequently drained a significant number of curse tablets were discovered alongside an enormous number of low-value coins and other deposits.⁴⁹ The language, handwriting and content of the tablets were similar to the Uley tablets and likewise can only be dated by their handwriting: of the 114 legible tablets 29 (25%) were in capitals, 62 (54%) in ORC, 18 (16%) in NRC.⁵⁰

Forty-six other tablets have been discovered east of Caerleon and the Severn and south of Ratcliffe on Soar.⁵¹ They are from a mix of town and rural locations and, with only four exceptions, are not associated with military communities. Twelve tablets have been found in seven temples, five of which were near rivers,⁵² and one in a shrine associated with the gods of the days of the week, a *septisonium*;⁵³ four have been found in or near rivers;⁵⁴ two were associated with burial sites;⁵⁵ two

⁴⁴ Aldhouse-Green 2018, 111–15; Cunliffe 2000; Allen and Bryan 2020, 74–76; Davenport 2021; Wilson 2002, 158–70.

⁴⁵ Henig 1999.

⁴⁶ Cunliffe 2000, 128–42; Davenport 2021, 148–165.

⁴⁷ Lucius Marcius Memor: Cunliffe 2000, 128; Davenport 2021, 155.

⁴⁸ Cunliffe 2000, 51–66; Davenport, 56–69.

⁴⁹ Cunliffe 2000, 36–38, 51–69; Davenport 2021, 69–81, 157–162.

⁵⁰ Tomlin 1993, 117.

⁵¹ McKie 2022, 14–15; Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 77; D. J. Mattingly 2007, 310–15. See Map, dotted line.

⁵² Brean Down, Weston-super-Mare (*SD* 447; see Map, 408); Lydney (*SD* 205; see Map, 407); Pagans Hill, Chew Stoke, Somerset (*SD* 443, 444, 445; see Map, 409); Ratcliffe-on-Soar (*SD* 349, 350, 351; see Map, 410); East Farleigh, Kent (*SD* 458; see Map, 411); Farley Heath, Surrey (*SD* 455; see Map, 412); Hockwold-cum-Wilton / Weeting-with-Broomhill, Norfolk (*SD* 450; see Map, 413).

⁵³ Ratae Corieltavorum / Leicester (*SD* 457; see Map, 414).

⁵⁴ Little Ouse at Brandon (*SD* 449); River Tas at Venta Icenorum / Caistor St Edmund (*SD* 441; see Map, 216); Hamble Estuary (*SD* 451); Thames at London Bridge (*SD* 340).

⁵⁵ Clothall east of Baldock (*SD* 345); Towcester (Britannia (2007), 361.

with amphitheatres near forts;⁵⁶ two with forts;⁵⁷ two were found in a house⁵⁸ or villa⁵⁹; fourteen were found in unspecific locations in various Roman settlements.⁶⁰

Whereas one third of the names inscribed on stone in Bath are Roman citizens, one third are soldiers and of the remainder there is a priest of Sulis and his wife, a *haruspex* and three civic dignitaries, none of the names inscribed on the tablets in Bath is a Roman citizen.⁶¹ 80 names are of Celtic etymology and 70 are 'colourless' Roman *cognomina*. Likewise, there are no Roman citizens at Uley and a preponderance of the names are Celtic.⁶² That does not mean to say that those with Celtic names were Celtic and different from those with Roman names who were Roman.⁶³ It perhaps indicates that as Roman and Celtic traditions mixed, not least in temples associated with Celtic and Roman gods, Celtic traditions coloured newer Roman ones. Most of the items mentioned on the Bath tablets are the kind of belongings that might go missing in the baths and are of small value; two exceptions are a ploughshare stolen from *Civilis*⁶⁴ and items stolen from *Deomiorix's* house.⁶⁵ The Uley tablets mention animals, property and money stolen from people involved in the farming economy. That suggests that among those responsible for the curse tablets we meet townspeople and rural workers of low status,⁶⁶ shopkeepers, craftsmen, labourers, agricultural workers, their families and a small number of slaves.⁶⁷ We encounter two or three women: *Basilia* petitioning Sulis *Minerva* in Bath;⁶⁸ *Saturnina*,⁶⁹ and possibly *Cunovina*,⁷⁰ petitioning Mercury in Uley.

The language of the curse tablets is one of the richest known sources of spoken or vulgar Latin and offers in microcosm an insight into the speech habits of Roman Britain.⁷¹ However, such language is

⁵⁶ *Isca Silurum* / *Caerleon* (*SD* 337); *Londinium* / *London* (*SD* 343; see Map, 214).

⁵⁷ *Bravonium* / *Leintwardine* (*SD* 347, 348).

⁵⁸ *Ratae Corieltavorum* / *Leicester* (*SD* 456; see Map, 414).

⁵⁹ *Eccles*, Kent, *Lidgate* (*SD* 446).

⁶⁰ *Puckeridge Braughing* (*SD* 448); *Dodford* (*SD* 453); *Old Harlow* (*SD* 353); *Canonium* / *Kelvedon* (*SD* 346); *Londinium* / *London* (*SD* 338, 339, 341, 342); *Marlborough Downs* (*SD* 452); *Rothwell* (Willis 2014, 284-288); *Calleva Atrebatum* / *Silchester* (*SD* 454, see Map, 206); *Thetford* (*SD* 442); *Wanborough* (*SD* 352); *Weeting with Broomhill* (*SD* 450). For many of these, the find-spots were not precisely identified.

⁶¹ Tomlin 1988, 95ff.

⁶² Tomlin 2002, 170.

⁶³ Tomlin 1988, 95ff.

⁶⁴ *SD* 236 (*Tab. Sulis* 31), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 285.

⁶⁵ *SD* 304 (*Tab. Sulis* 99), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 321.

⁶⁶ Henig 1984, 188; Versnel 2012, 31; Ingemark 2000; Mullen 2007, 46; Cunliffe 2000, 64-65, 128, 134-135; Davenport, 157; D. J. Mattingly 2007, 315.

⁶⁷ Tomlin 1988, 74; Cunliffe 2000, 134-135; Davenport, 160-161.

⁶⁸ *SD* 302 (*Tab. Sulis* 97), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 318-19.

⁶⁹ *SD* 356 (Uley 2), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 346-47.

⁷⁰ *SD* 399 (Uley 20), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 363.

⁷¹ Tomlin 1988, 79.

not indicative of low social status; phonetic misspellings and simple errors are evident across the empire and across all levels of society: writers who use ‘a vulgar spelling need not’ themselves ‘be vulgar’.⁷² The use of formulaic phrases and, occasionally, legalistic language does not necessarily imply the use of professional scribes: with the exception of two tablets in Uley and Bath which appear to have been written by the same person, Docilinus⁷³ or Docilianus,⁷⁴ each tablet is written by a different person. Any similarity of wording may be due to the petitioners seeking advice from the priests of Sulis or Mercury.⁷⁵ As he turned to the Uley tablets in 1993 Tomlin acknowledged that it was difficult to tell whether the tablets were written by professional scribes.⁷⁶ He went on in 2002 to suggest a working hypothesis for Uley as for Bath, ‘that many petitioners took advice and then wrote their own texts’,⁷⁷ a view he has retained in 2018 as he has returned to the Uley tablets in readiness for their full publication.⁷⁸

That suggests that literacy goes further and deeper than had hitherto been supposed,⁷⁹ and is not confined to the military,⁸⁰ to the urban or rural elite⁸¹ but ‘extends to a moderately prosperous peasant community’.⁸² Not only is there a prevalence of Celtic names at Bath and at Uley, but there is also evidence of the influence of the Celtic language on the Latin used in Bath⁸³ and later in Uley.⁸⁴ Alex Mullen has gone further to argue that there is evidence of bilingualism as two of the Bath tablets seem to be written in Celtic.⁸⁵ Similar evidence is apparent in as yet unpublished tablets from Uley.⁸⁶ East meets west in one hitherto unpublished Uley tablet written in Latin but in Greek lettering.⁸⁷ There were in this rural area people whose roots were among the Celtic peoples who had long lived there and those who had settled in the area as a result of the expansion of the Roman empire. We witness in the use of the curse tablets, in the presence of temples in locations that had

⁷² J. N. Adams 1992, 24.

⁷³ *SD* 361 (Uley 43), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 350–51.

⁷⁴ *SD* 215 (*Tab. Sulis* 10), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 274–75.

⁷⁵ Tomlin 1988, 100; Tomlin 1993, 114.

⁷⁶ Tomlin 1993, 117.

⁷⁷ Tomlin 2002, 170.

⁷⁸ Tomlin 2018, 216.

⁷⁹ Mullen 2007, 31.

⁸⁰ Tomlin 2010, 269.

⁸¹ Tomlin 1993, 116; Mullen 2013, 271; J. Stevenson 1989, 136.

⁸² Tomlin 1993, 116; Davenport, 161–162.

⁸³ J. N. Adams 1992.

⁸⁴ Tomlin 1993, 115.

⁸⁵ *SD* 219 (*Tab. Sulis* 14); *SD* 223 (*Tab. Sulis* 18), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 277–78; Mullen 2007.

⁸⁶ *SD* 382 (Uley 59); *SD* 407 (Uley 35). Cf. *SD* 453 (Dodford, Northamptonshire), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 362, 364, 376; Tomlin 1993, 116.

⁸⁷ *SD* 436 (Uley 52), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 365; Tomlin 2002, 175.

previously been used and in the mix of names the way in which there was a constant process of negotiation going on as people with different roots lived side by side.

4.2.2 What are curse tablets?

The people of Bath, Uley and so many other sites in Britain east of the Severn and south of the Soar, were not alone in what they were doing and yet what each did was an individualised response to a personal crisis.⁸⁸ Curse tablets first appeared in the Greek world in the fifth century BCE and in the Latin world in the second century BCE; they continue to appear until the fifth century CE. By 2019 over 1600 Greek and Latin curse tablets had been published, two thirds in Greek and one third in Latin, of which 200 are from Britain.⁸⁹ They have a shared language that spans a thousand years and the entire Roman empire,⁹⁰ draw on ideas current for ‘hundreds of miles and hundreds of years’,⁹¹ are ‘a universal feature of Mediterranean culture in antiquity’⁹² and ‘a part of everyday life even in the western provinces’.⁹³ While the Latin tablets are widely distributed across the west in single finds or small groups, larger collections are limited to a few locations: Bath and Uley in Britannia, Mainz in Germania, Trier in Gallia, Rome in Italia and Carthage in North Africa.⁹⁴ It is important, argues Sánchez Natalías, to be wary of sweeping generalisations as if they represented a common phenomenon that spread through the Greek and then the Roman world: ‘these texts need to be seen in a more organic light and analysed within particular social, historical, and cultural contexts’.⁹⁵ They were, observes Woolf, ‘used in a matrix formed by personal relationships between humans’ and ‘operated within a human social network’.⁹⁶

4.2.3 What’s going on in writing such messages? Are they curses or prayers for justice?

A definition proposed by D. R. Jordan has been widely accepted:⁹⁷ ‘*defixiones*, more commonly known as curse tablets, are inscribed pieces of lead, usually in the form of small, thin sheets, intended to influence, by supernatural means, the actions or welfare of persons or animals against

⁸⁸ McKie 2022, 3.

⁸⁹ Franek and Urbanová 2019a, 29; Eidinow 2019, 353–55.

⁹⁰ Faraone 1991, 3; Faraone 1985, 151; Revell 2007, 222; Scholz 2019, 39.

⁹¹ Tomlin 1988, 62ff.

⁹² Gager 2006, 72. Cf. Woolf 2022b, 123.

⁹³ Scholz 2019, 39.

⁹⁴ McKie 2022, 12–18 including a distribution map of the 126 locations where curse tablets have been discovered in the western provinces. Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 69–79 including maps identifying the location of *defixiones* in the Republican period, the High Empire and Late Antiquity.

⁹⁵ Sánchez Natalías 2022b, 103. Cf. Woolf 2022b.

⁹⁶ Woolf 2022b, 133.

⁹⁷ Franek and Urbanová 2019a, 28; Franek and Urbanová 2019b, 205; Eidinow 2019, 351; Tomlin 1988, 59; Tomlin 2002; McKie 2022, 12; Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 5.

their will'.⁹⁸ That is further refined by Celia Sánchez Natalías who stresses that 'the true essence of a *defixio* is found neither in the material used nor in the inscribed message, but rather in its harmful nature and desire to manipulate'.⁹⁹ Woolf argues that it is 'the simple utility and versatility of the curse tablet form' that is important for any study of the curse tablets.¹⁰⁰ Originating with the binding spells of ancient Greece there were three different styles according to C. A. Faraone: a direct binding formula in the first person singular amounting to a performative utterance accompanied by a significant ritual act; a prayer formula addressed to the chthonic underworld deities using the second person imperative and a *similia similibus* formula often expressed as a wish that the victim should, for example, become as cold as this lead.¹⁰¹ In this way *defixiones* were a means of binding or restraining enemies without killing them and were used in the context of 'agonistic relationships between rival tradesmen, lovers, litigants or athletes concerned with the outcome of some future event'.¹⁰² Gager modified this classification suggesting three types: a direct binding formula, a prayer formula for supernatural assistance and persuasive analogies.¹⁰³

Faraone suggests that the use of *defixiones* can be traced 'from the Levant to the Greek world and on to the Roman west'.¹⁰⁴ He suggests Micah's mother's curse in Judges 17:1-4 is an ancient example of such a practice. One of thirteen Greek curse tablets from third or fourth century CE Antioch invokes $\text{I}\alpha\omega$ ¹⁰⁵ to fill Babylas the greengrocer with evil fortune;¹⁰⁶ one of two from the fourth century CE found in the theatre at Caesarea Maritima calls on the Egyptian Thoth and Isis to hinder the dance of Manna, a rival dancer; more than 60 were found in a well at Herod's palace in Caesarea Maritima;¹⁰⁷ in another fourth century CE example from a bath house in Jerusalem an unnamed person invokes $\text{I}\alpha\omega$ to [bind] the mind and otherwise harm five men with names that suggest a Christian milieu: Petros, Ioannes, ?Theodora, ?Anastasios.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁸ Jordan 1985, 151.

⁹⁹ Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Woolf 2022b, 133–34.

¹⁰¹ Faraone 1991, 9–10.

¹⁰² Faraone 1991, 11.

¹⁰³ Gager 1992, 13-14.

¹⁰⁴ Faraone 2011, 31.

¹⁰⁵ Hollman 2011; Skehan 1980, 28 referencing a Qumran text of Leviticus 1-4 using *lao* to translate the tetragrammaton; Tov 2008 with a discussion of the Qumran text, 4QpapLXXLevb.

¹⁰⁶ Hollman 2011: reference to the destruction of Pharaoh's chariots during the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea, and to the cutting down of the first born of Egypt suggests acquaintance with the Judean YHWH and possible origin in a Judean community in Antioch.

¹⁰⁷ Burrell 1998.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel and Sulimani 2009.

A handful of such agonistic curses against rivals, using the word, *defigo*, have been found in Britain. Tacita was accursed (*deficta*) and labelled old like putrid gore;¹⁰⁹ two Roman citizens, T(itus) Egnatius Tyran(n)nus and P(ublius) Cicereius Felix were accursed (*defictus*);¹¹⁰ and someone wrote with feeling, 'I curse (*defico*) Tretia Maria and her life and mind and memory and liver and lungs mixed up together, and her words, thoughts, and memory; thus may she be unable to speak what things are concealed, nor be able ... nor ...'.¹¹¹ In each of these instances, *defigo* has been used and the lead tablets have been pierced with five, one and seven nails respectively, as if they had been nailed figuratively and literally.

Up until the late 1970s three of the ten curse tablets found in Britain were explicit curses, another four had to do with theft. With the discoveries at Uley and Bath that changed significantly. In publishing the Bath tablets Tomlin noticed that something subtly different was going on: in their concern for justice, the punishment of thieves, and the return of stolen property, almost all the tablets were in part prayers and in part legal documents.¹¹² Tomlin emphasises the juridical nature of some of the language of the British tablets, with parallels to the *Digest* of Justinian,¹¹³ a point taken up by Adams who draws parallels with German and Frankish law-codes.¹¹⁴ Concerned with correcting the status quo rather than confronting an opponent,¹¹⁵ prayers for justice gave people who did not have access to the legal system the opportunity to set matters right:¹¹⁶ that may well be the reason why, in Britain, they are associated with neither the military nor the elite.¹¹⁷ As a strategy for obtaining individual justice curse tablets enabled those who used them to seek redress for a wrong which could not be achieved in any other way 'due to lack of knowledge, power or economic/legal resources'.¹¹⁸

At the same time Henk Versnel suggested that some Greek and Latin curse tablets to do with the theft of items were not so much *defixiones* as judicial prayers.¹¹⁹ The anonymity of a *defixio* which often seeks harm for no specific reason by manipulating the chthonic gods of the underworld is

¹⁰⁹ SD 345 ([RIB 221](#)), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 336–37.

¹¹⁰ SD 338 ([RIB 6](#)), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 331.

¹¹¹ SD 339 ([RIB 7](#)), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 332. See Appendix, 298.

¹¹² Tomlin 1988, 60ff.

¹¹³ Tomlin 1993, 116: a list of 17 legal formulae. *Justinian Digest* XLVII.2.19, Ulpian, *On Sabinus* XL, relating to the way property is described in an action for theft, '*Justinian Digest*' 2023. Tomlin 1988, 63–68: the legal formulae used in the Bath tablets.

¹¹⁴ J. N. Adams 1992, 2ff.

¹¹⁵ G. W. Adams 2006, 13.

¹¹⁶ Versnel 1991, 68; Veale 2017, 299–300.

¹¹⁷ D. J. Mattingly 2007, 315.

¹¹⁸ Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 5.

¹¹⁹ Versnel 1991.

contrasted with judicial prayers in which the petitioner often identifies themselves by name and addresses the god or goddess respectfully. Such judicial prayers use formulaic language like that used in courts of law, are directed to the recognised gods or goddesses of Rome and identified with local deities, Mercury, (occasionally linked with Mars and Silvanus) in Uley and Sulis Minerva in Bath. They were folded and so unreadable by anyone else and deposited in a sacred place, such as a temple or a watery location. It is possible that the injured person mentioned the name of the suspect to make them aware of their indictment.¹²⁰ Versnel emphasised that he was using the minimal criteria of a prayer and that the distinction between a *defixio* and a judicial prayer is not always clear-cut. He spoke of a border area between the two and stressed that any such categorisation is modern.¹²¹ In 2005 Versnel reviewed the curse tablets discovered since 1991: modifying his terminology he spoke of eight of the fourteen as prayers for justice and suggested the other six fell into the border area, containing features characteristic both of prayers for justice and straight *defixiones*.¹²² He defined prayers for justice as markedly emotional ‘pleas addressed to a god or gods to punish a (mostly unknown) person who has wronged the author (by theft, slander, false accusations or magical action), often with the additional request to redress the harm suffered by the author (e.g. by forcing a thief to return a stolen object, or to publicly confess guilt).’¹²³

Martin Dreher rejected Versnel’s categorisation, suggesting such tablets should be thought of as ‘criminal curses’; that prompted a detailed rebuttal by Versnel who re-emphasised a border area between at one extreme binding spells and at the other prayers for justice.¹²⁴ The publication of curse tablets from Rome,¹²⁵ Mainz,¹²⁶ Bologna and Kempraten,¹²⁷ has confirmed the value of speaking of prayers for justice, although in her study of the Mainz tablets Sarah Veale emphasises that it is not possible to draw neat boundaries between religious oriented prayers for justice and *defixiones*.¹²⁸ That is also stressed by Eidinow who speaks of prayers for justice as ‘personal expressions in the context of temple-religion.’¹²⁹ Some prefer ‘requests’ rather than ‘prayers’ as the latter implies a hierarchical relationship between ‘the orant and the addressee’.¹³⁰

¹²⁰ Versnel 1991, 90, cf. 68.

¹²¹ Versnel 1991, 63.

¹²² Versnel 2010, 322.

¹²³ Versnel 2010, 278; cf. 279–81.

¹²⁴ Versnel 2012, 28.

¹²⁵ Blansdorf 2010a.

¹²⁶ Blansdorf 2010b.

¹²⁷ Kellova 2019.

¹²⁸ Veale 2017, 49.

¹²⁹ Eidinow 2019, 352.

¹³⁰ Kropp 2010, 365; Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 29. Cf. Urbanová 2018, 180-205.

That calls in question what is understood by 'religion' in the Roman world, a subject too vast to cover here but one that must be touched on. At one time there was a willingness to systematise 'Roman Religion' and differentiate religion and magic. In *Religion in Roman Britain* (1984), Mark Henig speaks of 'the native religion of Britain', of Celtic and Roman religion as 'separate though related systems' and of 'compromise and fusion between the two systems'.¹³¹ Such an approach invites us to fit the practices we encounter into the systems of Roman religion that are primarily civic based and cult based. As the Uley and Bath tablets began to be published, Henig explored them in the context of 'vows, requests and prayers'. He regarded them as two considerable archives of 'messages to the gods' that can be understood on analogy with the *nuncupatio* of a dedication in which the god addressed is named and a request is made. They have to do with redress for theft, with a stress on punishment, with gods enforcing moral behaviour, and with piety. That distinguishes them significantly from 'magic' which he suggests is 'not religion but rather a debased offshoot from it which assumes that the gods can be controlled by man'.¹³² Whereas 'religion was linked to morality, magic could be used to disturb society'.¹³³ That means for Henig 'the tablets help us to unify our view of religion in Britain'.¹³⁴

That approach has been called in question on two counts. First, instead of focusing on civic-centred state religion, Sarah Veale advocates a more 'open-system' model: there is a constant process of negotiation going on, she suggests, as people draw on different traditions to engage in religious practices.¹³⁵ With its roots in a Celtic shrine, Uley enables us to glimpse the encounter between Roman practices and 'the religious dimensions of iron age culture'. What was important, suggests Woolf, was not so much 'the propagation of a particular cosmology or theology, but rather of a particular ritual tradition and its associated sensibilities'.¹³⁶ As more becomes known of the name of the Uley shrine and its roots in a Celtic sacred place, Miranda Aldhouse-Green draws on that observation and maintains in the context of Britannia that 'religion was not simply a matter of belief in and honour of the gods but was a highly complex affair involving negotiative power-relationships between groups and individuals and between Britain and Rome'.¹³⁷ Second, It applies to the ancient world an understanding of magic and religion formed in the modern world. In 1998 Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price shifted the focus on to 'the complex pattern of Rome's religious

¹³¹ Henig 1984, 24, 36.

¹³² Henig 1984, 32.

¹³³ Henig 1984, 165.

¹³⁴ Henig 1984, 145.

¹³⁵ Veale 2017, 294. Cf. Rives 2010, 284.

¹³⁶ Woolf 1998, 208, 215.

¹³⁷ Aldhouse-Green 2004, 194; Woolf 1998.

influence on its empire'¹³⁸ in a book with a tellingly different title, *Religions of Rome*.¹³⁹ In that volume and its companion source book,¹⁴⁰ they explore the changing perspectives on religious matters of different people in different places at different times. They consider the curse tablets to be on the boundaries of Roman religion. It is not true to say that in Roman religion there were no boundaries, and anything was permissible. There were boundaries but with regard to the construction and transgression of religious boundaries things are very much more complex than at first appears.¹⁴¹ The boundary between religion and superstition was not so much about 'truth' and 'falsehood': rather, it had to do with the relationship between people and the gods. *Religio*, they suggest, was 'an aspect of a Roman's *self*-description'; *superstitio*, on the other hand, 'was always a slur against others'. But, and this is the crucial thing as far as they are concerned, 'they do not denote simple or easily definable opposites'.¹⁴² These terms must be understood in the context of contemporary Roman writers not of modern thinkers and Christian writers.¹⁴³ The same applies to the boundary between religion and magic. While there is an antipathy towards magic from writers such as Pliny the elder and Lucian, in official pronouncements and in early Christian writers, the reality of magical practice is more complex.¹⁴⁴ 'So, for example, the surviving Latin curses (often scratched on lead tablets, and so preserved) increase greatly in number under the empire, and the Greek magical papyri from Egypt are most common in the third and fourth centuries' CE.¹⁴⁵

It may not be helpful to think in such cut and dried categories when considering the curse tablets. In his introduction to the Greek magical papyri in translation Hans Dieter Betz suggests they are of particular value in helping us to understand 'what people are really thinking and doing in a particular time, geographical area, or cultural context'.¹⁴⁶ The magical practices reflected in those papyri were so much a part of people's everyday lives that it is not possible to differentiate magical and religious practices: 'the neat distinctions we make today between approved and disapproved forms of religion - calling the former 'religion' and 'church' and the latter 'magic' and 'cult' - did not exist in antiquity except among a few intellectuals'.¹⁴⁷ In the context of *defixiones*, Faraone¹⁴⁸ and Gager¹⁴⁹ suggest

¹³⁸ Beard, North, and Price 1998b, 314.

¹³⁹ Beard, North, and Price 1998b.

¹⁴⁰ Beard, North, and Price 1998a.

¹⁴¹ Beard, North, and Price 1998b, 211–44.

¹⁴² Beard, North, and Price 1998b, 215.

¹⁴³ Beard, North, and Price 1998b, 219.

¹⁴⁴ Beard, North, and Price 1998b, 218–21.

¹⁴⁵ Beard, North, and Price 1998b, 220.

¹⁴⁶ Betz 1986, xli.

¹⁴⁷ Betz 1986, xli; Jeffers 1996.

¹⁴⁸ Faraone 1991, 20.

¹⁴⁹ Gager 1992, 25.

that it is not correct to think in terms of a specific category of magic or of a clear-cut distinction between magic and religion.¹⁵⁰

Richard Gordon in the last ten years has been part of a movement that rejects the approach of Henig and wants to go further than Beard, North and Price to focus on what has been called 'Lived Ancient Religion', 'a new approach to the religious practices, ideas and institutions of the distant past' that 'emphasises the social context of religious action'.¹⁵¹ Reflecting on the curse tablets he advocates abandoning 'the abstract categories 'religion' and 'magic', with their inescapable moral packaging': instead he suggests we should think 'in terms of optional, semi-institutionalised strategies open to individuals in predicaments that for them were crisis-situations that threatened their social, economic, moral or emotional existence'.¹⁵² In so doing we must not overlook the efficacy of the supernatural power appealed to in the ritual of depositing a curse tablet. It was not only the personal circumstances of those who had cause to use curse tablets that prompted their use: it was also the fact that that was what was done in that particular locality that prompted them to do so. Jörg Rüpke sees 'Roman religion not as a set of cults, one of many localised 'religions', but as a regional and temporal segment of lived religion in antiquity, serving individuals who employed religion as a resource for many a purpose'.¹⁵³

Stuart McKie has pursued this approach in his comprehensive study of 607 curse tablets from the Roman west.¹⁵⁴ Thinking in terms of Lived Ancient Religion, he advocates a shift from attention to the wording on the tablets to what was going on. Questioning the value of generalisations about the use of curse tablets throughout the Roman empire, he focuses on the individual whose action is shaped by their own community, by friends and family, and by what they know is done locally. While it is helpful to glean from the text of the tablets itself the motives of the one using a curse tablet,¹⁵⁵ there is 'more to be gained from a fine-grained approach that sees cursing within the contexts of the lives of the individuals who made' the curse tablets.¹⁵⁶ McKie suggests there are six steps in creating a curse tablet.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ Woolf 2022b, 127.

¹⁵¹ Gasparini et al. 2020, 1, 3.

¹⁵² Gordon 2013, 255.

¹⁵³ Rüpke 2016, 7.

¹⁵⁴ McKie 2022 including a select catalogue of curses, 133-244.

¹⁵⁵ McKie 2022, 61. Of the 607 curse tablets from the Roman west: 161 are not sufficiently legible to indicate a motive; 141 do not specify a motive; 145 are prayers for justice (of which 101 are from Britannia); 84 involve competition, e.g. in the amphitheatre or on the chariot racing track; 43 are juridical to do with law cases; 30 are to do with love; and there are three others.

¹⁵⁶ McKie 2022, 18.

¹⁵⁷ McKie 2022, 29-58.

1. An initial trigger prompts the decision to compose a curse tablet.
2. Acquisition of the physical materials needed (sheet of lead, stylus, in some cases one or more nails for piercing) and of advice regarding how to set about the process (circulating in the community, passed on by family and friends or from specialists based in a temple).
3. The act of writing transforms the tablet into an object with power.
4. That power is enhanced by folding, rolling, or nailing the tablet.
5. A prayer is spoken.
6. The tablet is deposited in a significant place, and in Britannia that is often a temple or a place near water.

People engaging in that process wanted something to happen and their world to be changed. There was power in the ritual itself: for themselves something cathartic in all that needed to be done; for the culprit the potential of a psychosomatic effect related to the community's awareness of what was being done. There was power in gaining the knowledge to undertake the ritual. There was the supernatural power of the god appealed to in the temple context. In a situation of conflict or crisis the ritual restored their sense of agency; it enabled them to redefine their relationships with others and to regain control following the crisis they had experienced. It enabled them to preserve their own reputation and damage that of those they perceived as responsible.¹⁵⁸ In this ritual, for the most part, single names were used without identifying social status: there was 'a subversion of normal power structures here, as curses worked to flatten the hierarchies of Roman society, bringing everyone down to the same level'.¹⁵⁹

It is noticeable that throughout, McKie puts to one side the terminology of 'prayer' and instead speaks of 'curses' and the act of depositing a curse tablet as a 'cursing ritual'. While acknowledging that the validity of categorising some as 'prayers for justice' remains an open question, Sánchez Natalías prefers the Latin phrase coined by Audollent, *defixiones in fures*, or *defixiones* against thieves.¹⁶⁰ The exclusive use of 'curse' and the insistence on retaining the Latin *defixiones* obscures the association of many of the tablets, especially those at Uley and in Britannia, with the notion of prayer as a means of addressing a deity. In imagining Luke-Acts we will explore what happens when we think of them first as 'curses' and then as 'prayers for justice'.

In the light of this discussion, we should avoid being too quick to categorise curse tablets, far less to fit them into some pre-conceived notion of Roman religion or a specific Roman 'cult'. Instead we

¹⁵⁸ McKie 2022, 83–103, 111–20.

¹⁵⁹ McKie 2022, 128.

¹⁶⁰ Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 60–61.

should draw on a historical and archaeological imagination and allow the tablets to speak for themselves, giving voice to the people who wrote them. In so doing we will be drawing on the insights of Nancy Ammerman who speaks of ‘everyday religion’¹⁶¹ and of Jeff Astley who speaks of ‘ordinary theology.’¹⁶² Roger Tomlin speaks of the Uley tablets as ‘petitions from the victims of theft and anti-social behaviour in an under-policed world addressed to a superhuman patron’¹⁶³ and of the British tablets in general as ‘petitions to the gods inscribed on sheets of lead deposited in temples or running water’.¹⁶⁴ Adopting ‘the Lived Ancient Religion approach’, they offer ‘a privileged insight into individual appropriations of religious resources and lived religion in antiquity’.¹⁶⁵ Fundamentally, suggests Sánchez Natalías, they are ‘a private and direct means of communicating with the divine’.¹⁶⁶

4.3 Imagining Honoratus, Docilinus, Saturnina and many more.

Whereas, in the limestone Cotswolds, the later ‘Saxons preferred to site their settlements on dry land above the springs, ... the Romans constructed their villas below so that the water would run through their baths and wash-houses’.¹⁶⁷ We can, therefore, imagine Honoratus farming the rich arable land watered by the springs that emerge from the slopes of the escarpment near Uley.¹⁶⁸ The theft of two wheels, four cows and belongings from his house or stable¹⁶⁹ has been a significant loss. He depended on the use of the two wheeled cart or the two wheeled plough and the team of four that hauled them. He had no idea who had stolen them. Family, friends and neighbours in the local community were fully aware of what had happened and knew exactly what course of action Honoratus should take. He made his way up the steep slope to the temple overlooking the River Severn. It had been a sacred place from time immemorial and was now known for its association with the god Mercury and by its Romanized name of Celtic etymology.¹⁷⁰ The ramparts of the old settlement were visible to the south and an age-old burial mound had been re-used a little to the north.¹⁷¹

¹⁶¹ Ammerman 2007; Ammerman 2014, 189.

¹⁶² Astley 2002.

¹⁶³ Tomlin 2017a, 73.

¹⁶⁴ Tomlin 2018, 214.

¹⁶⁵ Albrecht et al. 2018, 576.

¹⁶⁶ Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 60.

¹⁶⁷ Dreghorn 1967, 123. See Map, 401 and Inset. Chedworth Roman Villa is a good example of this (Map, 102).

¹⁶⁸ *SD* 365 (Uley 72), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 354–55.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* III 362: J. N. Adams 2016, chap. 37.

¹⁷⁰ *SD* 386 (Uley 75), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 363; Tomlin 1993, 130. This tablet is yet to be published in full.

¹⁷¹ See above, 154, figure 23.

The temple complex included living accommodation, guest accommodation and shops selling miniature copies of the statue to Mercury and other votive objects; it was a place where sheep, goats and fowl were sacrificed. Perhaps he had purchased something before, made an offering, provided animals for a sacrifice, or shared in an ensuing meal. On this occasion he had a fixed purpose in mind. He knew it was a place to come to when something had gone wrong, and help was needed; it was a place to resolve conflicts and punish transgressions which would be hard to bring to court.¹⁷² Knowing what it was that people did in similar circumstances he approached one of the stalls and purchased a blank sheet of lead. One side was patterned, the other ready to be inscribed with the stylus he chose to use. He needed help to get the wording right and perhaps with the writing itself.

The choice of lead was deliberate. It was what was used for the purposes Honoratus had in mind and was readily available not too far away.¹⁷³ It was heavy and cold, soft and malleable, easy to write on and it produced a silvery text that was easy to read. 'The stylus point cut through the grey surface patina of lead oxide and left a bright trace of pure metal; it would have been like writing on a waxed tablet, using a stylus to scratch through the black wax to the pale wood underneath.'¹⁷⁴

Once he had completed writing the tablet, he was ready to enter the *cella* of the temple itself. Inside it was dark, lit by a few windows high up and perhaps candles near the life-size statue of Mercury, the focal point of the sanctuary.¹⁷⁵ Looking towards Mercury he spoke the words he had so carefully written before entering the shrine.

Honoratus addresses 'the holy god Mercury' *deo sanc'to Mercurio* and 'complains' to his 'divinity' (*conqueror numini tuo*) about the loss of 'two wheels and four cows and many small belongings' (*me perdidisse rotas duas et vaccas quattuor et resculas plurimas*) from his humble 'house' or 'stable'¹⁷⁶ (*de hospitio meo*). He has something to 'ask' of 'the genius' of his 'divinity' and makes his request with an air of politeness, 'I would ask' (*rogaverim genium numinis 'tu{u}i*); it is, however, retribution that he seeks, that the genius of the divinity of Mercury would not allow 'health to the person' who

¹⁷² Gager 1992, 102, citing Henig 1984, 38.

¹⁷³ Charterhouse-on-Mendip and Draethen (Lower Machen, Gwent), lead mines, were nearby: B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 179–81, 184–90. Cf. Allen and Bryan 2020, 49–50; Wilson 2002, 154–58.

¹⁷⁴ Tomlin 1992a, 13. In a workshop Hunt demonstrated the ease with which the tablet could be written and read: Hunt 2014. McKie experimented by writing on lead and then folding and manipulating the tablets to gain insights into 'the experience of conducting a cursing ritual in the Roman world': McKie 2022, 30. On styluses and lead tablets: Willi 2021, 2:33–38, 62–64.

¹⁷⁵ See above, 157: figures 24, 25, 26, 27.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* III 362: J. N. Adams 2016, chap. 37. For explanation of diacritical signs see Appendix, 280.

has wronged him or ‘allow him to lie or sit or drink or eat’, (*ut ei qui mihi fraudem fecerit sanitatem ei non permittas nec iacere nec sedere nec bibere nec manducare*); not knowing the identity of the culprit or suspecting anyone in particular he uses a series of catch-all phrases, ‘whether he is man or woman, whether boy or girl, whether slave or free’ (*si baro¹⁷⁷ si mulier¹⁷⁸ si puer si puella si servus si liber*). Such punishment will only be avoided if the property is returned and there is a reconciliation between Honoratus and the culprit, (*nis(s)l meam rem ad me pertulerit et meam concordiam habuerit*). He spoke of his requests as ‘renewed prayers’ (*iteratis pr(a)ecibus*) and as a ‘petition’ (*petitio*). One senses the significance of the loss in the urgency of his final appeal to ‘your divinity’ (*numen tuum*) as he seeks an immediate response (*ut petitio mea statim pareat*). He hopes it will be obvious to all that he has been avenged ‘by your majesty’ (*me vindicatum esse a maiestate tua*).¹⁷⁹

He folded the tablet six times, stepped forward and deposited it in the pool in front of the statue.¹⁸⁰ He left feeling he had accomplished something in the face of his loss and regained the initiative. He had high hopes that something would happen soon.

Such an imagined reconstruction poses many questions to which there are ultimately no answers. Did others know of the content of the tablet, reading it or hearing it being read out? What happened next? Was it simply that Honoratus went away feeling that he had at least done something about the damaging theft that had left him a victim, feeling a cathartic release of intolerable tension?¹⁸¹ Did he expect his prayers to be heard?¹⁸² Had he been trying to find out the identity of the thief? Was it public knowledge that he was going to the temple and would be making his request for restitution and failing that for retribution? Might that prompt such fear in the culprit as to take action to restore the stolen goods?¹⁸³ In the event of their falling ill might they associate it with the visit Honoratus made to the temple and the prayer he made to Mercury and so be shamed into

¹⁷⁷ *SD 249 (Tab. Sulis 44)*, Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 294. Adams differentiates between the Germanic term ‘*baro*’ used positively of a man, and the classical term of abuse, *baro* = fool. He argues that *baro* ‘presumably meant ‘warrior, fighting man’, and then in weakened senses, either ‘valorous man’ or ‘man’ (in general) ... *Baro* (opposed to *mulier*) will have been brought to Britain either by soleiers or by other travellers’. It develops into the old French word ‘*baron*’: J. N. Adams 1992, 15–17.

¹⁷⁸ *Mulier* is used opposite *baro* in *SD 250 (Tab. Sulis 44)*, *SD 262 (Tab. Sulis 57)*, *SD 270 (Tab. Sulis 65)*, *SD 359 (Uley 5)*, *SD 365 (Uley 72)*, 57, 65, *SD 386 (Uley 75)*: J. N. Adams 1992, 15.

¹⁷⁹ *SD 365 (Uley 72)*, Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 354–55; Tomlin 1992b, 310–11; J. N. Adams 2016, chap. 37; Cooley 2012, 179–81.

¹⁸⁰ Woodward and Leach 1993, 311–12.

¹⁸¹ Gager 1992, 101; Gordon 2013, 269–72.

¹⁸² Veale 2017, 309.

¹⁸³ Gordon 2013, 269–72.

taking action?¹⁸⁴ Did the power lie in the words¹⁸⁵ or in the ritual itself?¹⁸⁶ Were those words performative, bringing about change themselves, or transformative, precipitating the desired change?¹⁸⁷ Are we under-estimating the belief that prompted Honoratus to go to the temple to Mercury and deposit his petition?¹⁸⁸

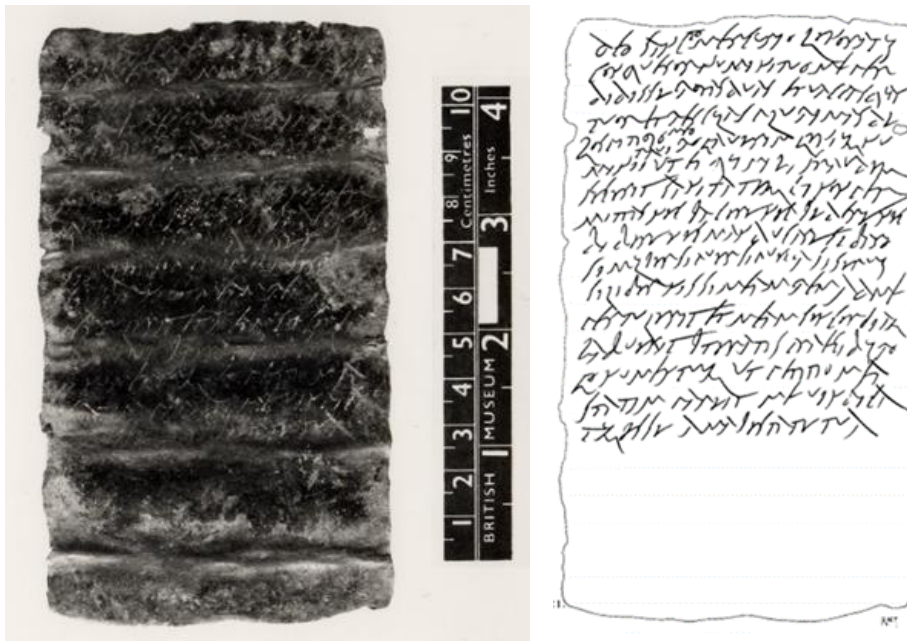


Figure 30: SD 365 (Uley 72), Honoratus. *Deo sanc'to' Mercurio Honoratus. | conqueror numini tuo me per- | didisse rotas duas et vaccas quat- | tuor et resculas plurimas de | hospitiolo meo. | rogaverim genium nu- | minis 'tu{u}i' ut ei qui mihi fraudem | fecerit sanitatem ei non per- | mittas nec iacere nec sedere nec | bibere nec manducare si baro | si mulier si puer si puella si servus | si liber nis{s}i meam rem ad me | pertulerit et meam concordiam | habuerit iteratis pr{a}jecibus ro- | go numen tuum ut petitio mea | statim pareat me vindica- | tum esse a maiestate tua. Honoratus to the holy god Mercury. I complain to your divinity that I have lost two wheels and four cows and many small belongings from my house. I would ask the genius of your divinity that you do not allow health to the person who has done me wrong, nor allow him to lie or sit or drink or eat, whether he is man or woman, whether boy or girl, whether slave or free, unless he brings my property to me and is reconciled with me. With renewed prayers I ask your divinity that my petition may be immediately fulfilled (and that it become obvious) that I have been avenged by your majesty.¹⁸⁹ Drawing: R.S.O.Tomlin: [Britannia 1992, 310-311](#) (Paywall). Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.148](#). See Appendix, 288. For explanation of conventions used in the text of the curse tablets see Appendix, 280.*

In many ways we know next to nothing about Honoratus. There can be no answers to those questions. In other ways, however, we know an immense amount. We can in our imagining stand with him as he speaks of what has happened to him and seeks guidance in formulating this message to Mercury; we know enough from the wording of his plea to be sure that he was engaged in some

¹⁸⁴ Kiernan 2003, 132f; Tomlin 1988, 93f; 101f; Tomlin 1992a, 22; Cunliffe 2000, 65.

¹⁸⁵ Versnel 2002, 3,47.

¹⁸⁶ McKie 2022, 111–12.

¹⁸⁷ Kropp 2010, 357; Eidinow 2019, 369.

¹⁸⁸ Tomlin 2010, 252-253.

¹⁸⁹ SD 365 (Uley 72), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 354–55; original translation in Tomlin 1992b, 310–11; translation modified by Sánchez Natalías in the light of comments in J. N. Adams 2016, 314–15.

way in a farming community not far from the temple itself; we sense his desire for the return of his property and the restitution of *concordia* with the one who has taken it; that the *concordia* that usually characterises his community has been broken by the actions of a person or persons unknown; we sense his thirst for retribution should there be no restitution, no restored *concordia*. We can share in our imagination with Honoratus in that moment.

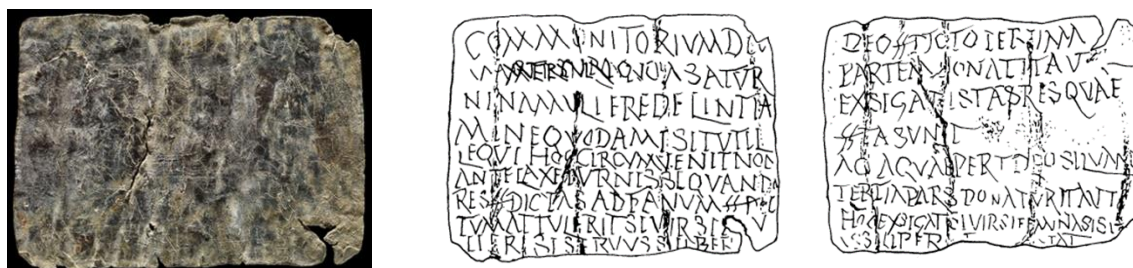


Figure 31: SD 356 (Uley 2) A: *commonitorium deo* | <<Mercurio>> [written over Marti Silvano] a Satur- | nina muliere de lintia- | mine quod amisit ut il- | le qui hoc circumvenit non | ante laxetur nisi quando | res s(upra)dictas ad fanum s(upra)d[ic-] | tum attulerit si vir si mu- | lier si servus si liber. B: deo s(upra)dicto tertiam | partem donat ita ut (vacat) | exsigat istas res quae (vacat) | s(upra)s(crip)ta sunt (vacat) | ACA quae per<didi>t deo Silvano | tertia pars donatur ita ut | hoc exsigat si vir si femina si ser[v-] | us si liber [-c.2-] + [-c.7-] + at A: A memorandum to the god Mercury (over Mars Silvanus) from Saturnina a woman, concerning the linen cloth which she has lost. (She asks) that he who has stolen it should not have rest before/unless/until he brings the aforesaid property to the aforesaid temple, whether man or woman, whether slave or free. B: She gives a third part to the aforesaid god on condition that he exact this property which has been written above. A third part... what she has lost is given to the god Silvanus on condition that he exact it, whether man or woman, whether slave or free... Drawing: M. W. C. Hassall: [Britannia 1979, 344](#) (Paywall). © The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.78](#). See Appendix, 281.

Though their circumstances were different, we can imagine Saturnina¹⁹⁰ and Docilinus¹⁹¹ doing something very similar. Women can also bring such complaints to the god. Saturnina has also been the victim of theft, losing a piece of linen. In choosing to come to the temple herself she takes back the initiative and asserts herself explicitly as ‘a woman’, (*mulier*). Acquiring a sheet of lead and a stylus she possibly sought help in getting the wording right. To describe what she is handing over in the temple she uses a technical, quasi-legal term, used of petitions to one’s superior, to administrative officials or army officers.¹⁹² She writes a ‘memorandum to the god’, (*commonitorium deo*) as she names herself Saturnina and identifies herself as a woman, (*a Saturnina muliere*). Initially she addresses the god as Mars Silvanus, (*Marti Silvano*) before correcting herself and addressing Mercury, (*Mercurio*). Asking that the person responsible should themselves ‘not have rest before/unless/until’ returning it to the temple. Saturnina uses legal language as she asks that whoever it was who has stolen the linen cloth, be they man or woman, slave or free (*si vir si femina si ser[vus si liber]*) should bring ‘the aforesaid property to the aforesaid temple’ (*non ante laxetur nisi*

¹⁹⁰ SD 356 (Uley 2), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 346–47.

¹⁹¹ SD 361 (Uley 43), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 350–51.

¹⁹² Tomlin 1993, 121.

quando res s(upra)dictas ad fanum s(upra)d[ic]tum attulerit). Writing on the other side of the tablet she anticipates its return and ‘gives’ a third part of its value to ‘the aforesaid god’ (*deo s(upra)dicto*), as if she were wanting the god’s success.¹⁹³ She repeats that statement addressing the god as ‘Silvanus’. Her apparent confusion over names may have to do with a Celtic god associated with Mercury at the sanctuary: the Celtic god Cocidius has been linked with Mars and with Silvanus.¹⁹⁴ She then enters the shrine, approaches the pit in front of the statue, folds the tablet twice and with a spoken prayer deposits her memorandum. No longer simply the victim she can leave the temple feeling she has done something about the loss she has suffered. Saturnina is not the only woman to re-claim that sense of agency: another woman with a Celtic name, Cunovina, comes up to the temple having lost some property,¹⁹⁵ while two others are named on another occasion, Lucilla (daughter) of Mellossus and Senebellena, mother of Minu(v)assus, Lucilla’s husband.¹⁹⁶

Docilinus has had trouble with the animals he keeps. With Celtic roots indicated by his name, he too knows what to do and the help he needs at the temple from the god Mercury. He accuses three people, Varianus, Peregrina and Sabinianus, of bringing ‘evil harm’ (*dolum ma[li]um*) on his beast (*pecori*, possibly sheep, goat, pig or bovine): their actions have damaged his livelihood and he determines to do something about it. He approaches the temple, acquires a lead tablet and a stylus and possibly with guidance appeals to the god Mercury (*deo Mercurio*) to permit them neither health nor sleep (*nec eis sanita[t]e[m] n[on] e[st] somnum perm[itt]as*), seeking nothing less than ‘the greatest death’ (*rogo te ut eos | maximo leto adigas*). There is one caveat, however: ‘unless they redeem from you what they have administered to me’ (*ni[si] a te quod m[i]hi ad[m]i[n]i[st]ra[ver]int redem[er]int*).¹⁹⁷ We glimpse divisions in the community living around the escarpment as Docilinus is at odds with those he names.

On another occasion we can imagine him arriving at the temple in Aquae Sulis with its cosmopolitan mix of locals and visitors from near and far.¹⁹⁸ He had lost his hooded cloak and knew that he could approach Sulis Minerva as he approached Mercury at Uley.

¹⁹³ Sánchez Natalías 2022b, 102.

¹⁹⁴ With Mars: *RIB* 602, 993, 2015, 2024; with Silvanus: *RIB* 1578; Tomlin 1993, 121. Cf. *SD* 357 (Uley 3) which is addressed to the god Mercury / Mars, 122-123.

¹⁹⁵ *SD* 399 (Uley 20), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 363; Tomlin 1993, 120 as yet unpublished. Other examples of the use of matronymics in British curse tablets: *SD* 235 (*Tab. Sulis* 30); *SD* 303 (*Tab. Sulis* 98); *SD* 454 (Calleva Atrebatum, Silchester). See Map, 206.

¹⁹⁶ *SD* 360 (Uley 33), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 350; Tomlin 1995, 378–79.

¹⁹⁷ *SD* 361 (Uley 43), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 350–51; Tomlin 1989, 329–31; J. N. Adams 1992; Henig 1984, 228. Cf. *Tab. Vindol.* II 321: see above, 142.

¹⁹⁸ *SD* 215 (*Tab. Sulis* 10), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 274–75; Tomlin 1993, 115. See Map, 406.

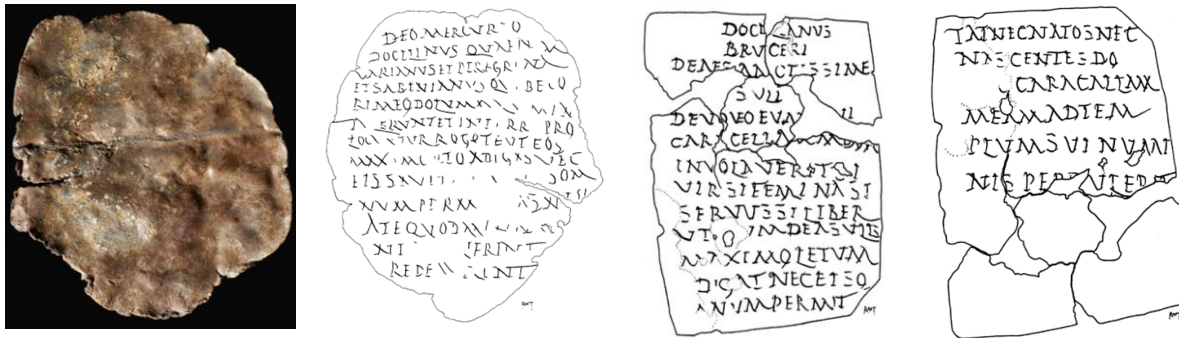


Figure 32: SD 361 (Uley 43), deo Mercurio | Docilinus QVAENM | Varianus et Peregrina | et Sabinianus qui peco- | ri meo dolum maļum in- | tuļerunt et INT+RR[-c.1-] pro- | locuntur rogo te ut eos | maximo leto adigas nec | eis sanita[t]e[m] n[e]c] som- | num perm[itt]as nisi | a te quod mi[hi] adm[i-] | nis[tr]averint | redem[e]rint. *To the god Mercury (from) Docilinus. Varianus and Peregrina and Sabinianus who have brought evil harm on my beast and are (...) I ask that you drive them to the greatest death, and do not allow them health or sleep unless they redeem from you what they have administered to me.* Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin, *Britannia* 1989, 329-331. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum: 1978,0102.119. See Appendix, 285.

SD 215 (Tab. Sulis 10), A: Docilianus | Bruceri | deae sanctissim(a)e | Suli | devoveo eum [q]ui | caracellam meam | inolaverit si | vir si femina si | servus si liber | ut [-c.1-2-] VM dea Sulis | maximo letum | [a]digat nec ei so | mnum permit- B: tat nec natos nec | nascentes do | [ne]c caracallam | meam ad tem | plum sui numi | nis per[t]ulerit. *Docilianus son of Brucetus to the most holy goddess Sulis. I devote him who has stolen my hooded cloak, whether man or woman, whether slave or free. May the goddess Sulis inflict him with the greatest death, and not allow him sleep or children now nor in the future, until he has brought my hooded cloak to the temple of her divinity.* Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin, *Britannia* 1981, 372-377. See Appendix, 297.

A bustling place with a special atmosphere, it was quite different from the remote location of the temple to Mercury overlooking the River Severn: it too had been a sacred location from time immemorial. He sought out the tablet he needed, pewter rather than the lead he used in Uley but with much the same properties. The spring supplied a pool housed in a shrine dedicated to the goddess who bore the Celtic name Sulis and the Roman name Minerva. The stench of the sacrifices that went on there would be hard to imagine. Conscious, perhaps, of the grandeur of the temple with its fine sacred spring and its magnificent altar in the precinct outside, serviced by a *haruspex* as well as *sacerdotes*, Docilianus, (son) of Brucerus [Brucetus?], arranged the writing on his tablet more neatly, almost in the shape of an altar. It is just possible that his father was connected with a sculptor, Sulinus son of Brucetus. He felt he was writing a letter: omitting the conventional greetings he addressed the goddess directly, ‘Docilianus son of Brucetus to the most holy goddess Sulis’ (*Docilianus Bruceri deae sanctissim(a)e Suli*). Drawing on the language of the votive offering,¹⁹⁹ he offered up the thief: ‘I devote him who has stolen my hooded cloak’ (*devoveo eum [q]ui | caracellam meam | inolaverit*). Not knowing the identity of the thief, the catch-all phrases are typical of many of the Bath and Uley curse tablets and are found in Roman prayers and legal texts:²⁰⁰ ‘whether man

¹⁹⁹ Sánchez Natalías 2022b, 103.

²⁰⁰ Tomlin 1988; Tomlin 1992a.

or woman, whether slave or free' (*si vir si femina si servus si liber*); there then follows a vindictive prayer seeking 'the greatest death' and, for the thief, no 'children now or in the future', (*ut [-c.1-2-] VM dea Sulis maximo letum [a]digat nec ei somnum permit-* and on the reverse *tat nec natos nec nascentes*); finally with the hope of restitution comes the promise of the gift of the hooded cloak to the goddess: 'until he has brought my hooded cloak to the temple of her divinity' (*do[ne]c caracallam meam ad templum sui numinus per[t]ulerit*). Piercing the tablet with a nail Docilianus tossed it into the sacred spring, with its hot, bubbling water, 'the door to communication with the deity'.²⁰¹

We could in our mind's eye stand with other people from that rural, agricultural community as they approach the god to complain about some theft or other harm and to ask for his help. Cenacus complains (*queritur*) about Vitalinus and his son, Natalinus, concerning 'the draught animal' (*iumentum*) which has been stolen from him; he asks for himself the immediate return of the animal or its value and for Mercury the devotion he has demanded for himself (*deo devotio[n]e[m] qua[m] ipse ab his expostulaverit*): it is not only theft they are guilty of but sacrilege as well.²⁰² Failing the return of the beast, he asks that they should be deprived of their health.²⁰³

In the first recorded instance of bee-keeping in Britain, the name of the bee-keeper whose hive had been stolen by someone, whether slave or free, is not known; as he approaches the temple, he prepares to deposit his tablet in much the same way as everyone else.²⁰⁴ This is, after all, what you do here. Addressing first Mars and then Mercury, he seems to be confused about the identity of the god, suggesting it is the act of what he is doing that is all important, not the identity of the one he is addressing. He addresses his message formally in capitals on one side of the tablet 'to the god Mars the Propitious', using *devo* which 'could be borrowed from Celtic *deivo* meaning god'²⁰⁵ (*[D] J E V O M A R T I V (O T U M) S (O L V I T) P R O P I T I O*). On the other side he 'complains' (*qu{a}eritur*) to the god Mars about whoever it was, slave or free, who has stolen his beehive (*vas apium*), in the hope that they will not be permitted to drink or eat, nor to have sleep or health unless 'the said hive be returned to its proper place' (*nesi ipsum vas ad locum suum reverteretur*). There is an expectation that the thief

²⁰¹ Davenport 2021, 73.

²⁰² Sánchez Natalías 2022b, 97.

²⁰³ SD 355 (Uley 1), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 344–46; Tomlin 1993, 118–20. Versnel makes a link here with the Cnidian tablets in the use of the actual legal term 'queri' ('to make a complaint before a court'): H. S. Versnel 1991, 88.

²⁰⁴ SD 373 (Uley 24), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 361–62; Tomlin 2017b, 462–64.

²⁰⁵ SD 373 (Uley 24), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 361; Tomlin 2017b, 462. Cf. SD 205 (Lydney); SD 390 (Uley 9), Tomlin 2020, 481–483.

will make some gift that will ‘gain the good will of Mercury’ and repay the owner of the hive in some way.

One petitioner uses Greek letters to write his message in Latin.²⁰⁶ Another opens his request, speaking of ‘the sheet (of lead) which is given to Mercury’ (*carta qu(a)e Mercurio dōnatur*).²⁰⁷ Divisions extend beyond the individual to the family as Carin[us] names Primanus as thief and seeks vengeance with his blood (*san(g)uine suo conpliat vendica[ti]onem?*) not only on him but on his child too (*infans*).²⁰⁸ Redress is sought for the theft of a gold ring and an iron fetter.²⁰⁹ In addressing Mercury, the Celtic-named Biccus thinks of himself as ‘giving’ whatever he has lost to the god in the hope that it will be returned to the temple or Mercury; failing that he looks to the thief (whether man or male (sic)) not being able to ‘urinate, defecate, speak, sleep, stay awake, or [have] well-being or health’.²¹⁰ Fraught with signs of a spoken Latin that departs from conventional grammar and orthography he does not want the thief to receive a pardon unless he himself intercedes or intervenes on his behalf (*ne co(n)scientiam²¹¹ de perferat nessi me intercedente²¹²*). Someone else makes the journey to the temple to seek redress for ‘one piece of (silver) plate and four rings’.²¹³ An unnamed petitioner addresses the god as Mars and registers a ‘complaint’ at the theft of ‘two pewter plates’. ‘The thief is to suffer ill health while ‘half’ the plates are given to the god, for him to exact the stolen property’.²¹⁴ On another occasion it is the name of the thief who has stolen the petitioner’s bridle (whether slave or free, man or woman) that is ‘given’ to the god; once again a proportion, one third, of the value of the items stolen is to be handed to the god, although as it stands the tablet makes little sense, the writer having conflated standard formulae.²¹⁵ Mention of his wife suggests the wider impact of this kind of theft on the families of those concerned.²¹⁶ Someone else has suffered the loss of his sheep and so has given (*donavi*) ‘the god Mercury’

²⁰⁶ SD 436 (Uley 52), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 365; Tomlin 1993, 129.

²⁰⁷ SD 367 (Uley 80), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 356–57; Tomlin 1996c, 439–41.

²⁰⁸ SD 371 (Uley 68), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 358–59; Tomlin 2015, 398–99.

²⁰⁹ SD 357 (Uley 3), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 347; Tomlin 1993, 122–23.

²¹⁰ SD 358 (Uley 4), Sánchez Natalías 2022a; Tomlin 1993, 124–26.

²¹¹ ‘*Co(n)scientiam*: the context demands the sense ‘forgiveness’ or ‘pardon’, which is not found in Latin *conscientia*.... The writer may have been groping for the very rare and post-classical *ignoscentia* (forgiveness), a synonym of the Classical *venia* or *indulgentia*.’ Tomlin 1993, 126.

²¹² ‘*Intercedente*: the sense of ‘intercede’, although familiar in English, seems to have been introduced by Christian writers; here it is probably being used in a more strictly legal sense, to ‘intervene’ or ‘interpose’.’ Tomlin 1993, 126.

²¹³ SD 363 (Uley 50), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 352–53; Tomlin 1998, 433–34.

²¹⁴ SD 431 (Uley 84) unpublished, Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 365; Tomlin 1993, 130.

²¹⁵ SD 359 (Uley 5), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 349; Tomlin 1993, 122–23.

²¹⁶ Tomlin takes *AFIMA sua* to be a copying error representing *a femina sua* (from his wife), though this is not certain. SD 359 (Uley 5): Tomlin 2002, 127.

(*diu[o]*²¹⁷ *Mercurio*) (the man) who of evil intent (*ma[li] consili*) has robbed him.²¹⁸ Virilis has also had trouble with stolen sheep: perhaps some had been intended for sacrifice in the temple. As he approached the *cella* and acquired his tablet ready to write, his concern was the return of the animals and failing that vengeance in the hope that whoever it was, slave [or free], man or woman, would not be permitted to eat or drink; indeed, he sought their blood.²¹⁹ Another person approached Mercury (*Mercurio*) having had wool stolen from their property (*res id est lanam*).²²⁰

Recourse is made to Mercury not only when belongings are stolen or damaged but also when division and enmity find expression in less tangible, but no less hurtful ways. On one occasion someone complains ‘to the holy god Mercury’ because people have thought ill of him and have behaved badly towards him (*q[ue]r[er] tibi de illis qui mihi male cogitant et male faciunt*): whoever they are, slave or free, male or female, they are not to be allowed to stand or sit, drink or eat or pay off these ‘provocations’ or acts of anger (*neq[ue] h[ab]e[re] | i[r]as redemere*), unless they do so with their own blood.²²¹ Another has been cheated of denarii he is owed: using six synonyms for ‘give’ (*commendo, dono, obdo, of(f)ero, destino, deputo*) he offers the presumably exaggerated sum of 100,000 denarii to the god Mercury, in the hope that the thief would bring the stolen denarii ‘to the temple and treasury of the most mighty god’. Vengeance reaches beyond the victim’s ‘lack of sleep, with unknown diseases and adverse ailments’ (*morbis, valitudinibus*) to the whole family who are to be ‘half-naked, toothless, tremulous, gouty, beyond human pity’ (*seminudi, edentuli, tremuli, podagrici*).²²² These ‘prayers for justice’ were couched in the vindictive language of many a curse: a reminder that it is impossible to draw hard and fast distinctions.²²³

4.4 Imagining Luke-Acts through the eyes of the people of the curse tablets

Imagining Luke-Acts through the eyes of a group of followers of the Way of Jesus from that rural community around the temple dedicated to Mercury at Uley, three important themes come to the fore. The first has to do with temples, what you do in them and what their significance is; the second

²¹⁷ Once again this may reflect the Celtic word for ‘god’ (*deiuos*): Tomlin 2020, 480. Cf. above, *SD* 373 (Uley 24), *SD* 205 (Lydney).

²¹⁸ *SD* 390 (Uley 9), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 363 not included; Tomlin 2020, 480–82.

²¹⁹ *SD* 411 (Uley 41), Sánchez Natalías 2022a not included; Tomlin 2020, 481–83.

²²⁰ *SD* 369 (Uley 58), as yet unpublished, Sánchez Natalías 2022a; Woodward and Leach 1993, 129: the style of lettering suggests this is the earliest tablet 75-125 CE.

²²¹ *SD* 366 (Uley 76), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 355–56; Tomlin 1995, 373–76.

²²² *SD* 370 (Uley 78), Sánchez Natalías 2022a not yet fully published; Tomlin 2002, 169; Tomlin 1993, 130 described as the only instance in British inscribed tablets of a denied deposit.

²²³ Sánchez Natalías 2022b, 92.

with cursing and with what some would describe as magical practices; the third with praying and prayer.

4.4.1 In the temple

However different the temple in Jerusalem from the temple to Mercury in Uley, there were some practices that would have resonated with the likes of Honoratus, Docilinus, Saturnina, our imagined readers. Prior to entering the *cella* they sought help in formulating the messages they had for the god Mercury; once inside they may have had help from a priest in depositing the tablet. The scent of incense mingled with the smell of sacrifices. They would have been familiar with the practice of sacrifice so prevalent there, and may have been called on to provide animals for sacrifice.²²⁴ Some were concerned at the theft of sheep.²²⁵ Zechariah brings to the Lord God of the Jerusalem temple the longing he and his wife Elizabeth have for a child (Luke 1:8-23); subsequently sacrifices are offered as the infant Jesus is brought to the temple (Luke 2:22-24) and on the day of Unleavened Bread (Luke 22:7). Concerns around pregnancy and childbirth were brought to the temple of Nodens the other side of the river where a small bone plaque representing a woman with her hands on her waist would have been purchased and pinned within the shrine as an offering to the god before or after childbirth.²²⁶ Not far to the east a small gold tablet with wording in Greek familiar from the Greek magical papyri, expressing the hope and prayer that 'Fabia whom Terentia her mother bore, being in full fitness and health, shall master the unborn child and bring it to birth; the name of the Lord and Great God being everlasting.'²²⁷ That the Jerusalem temple was a place of healing (Acts 3:1-10) would be familiar to people from this community who sought healing at the temple to Nodens at Lydney²²⁸ and in the curative waters of *Aquae Sulis*, adjacent to the temple to *Sulis Minerva*.²²⁹

On entering the temple Jesus 'drives out those who were selling things there' (Luke 19:45); later he sits opposite the treasury and contrasts the rich people who make their gifts and the poor, needy widow (χήρα *πενιχράν* : *viduam pauperulam*) who puts in 'two small copper coins' that amounted to 'all she had to live on' and so becomes poverty-stricken, destitute and a beggar (πτωχή: *pauper* Luke 21:1-4).²³⁰ That a temple should have a treasury and expect payment is implicit

²²⁴ Woodward and Leach 1993, 257, 258, 266.

²²⁵ *SD* 369 (Uley 58); *SD* 390 (Uley 9); *SD* 411 (Uley 41).

²²⁶ Lydney Park Estate 2000, 19.

²²⁷ Gold charm: Tomlin 2008a, 222, 219–24.

²²⁸ Aldhouse-Green 2018, 94–96; Lydney Park Estate 2000. See Map, 407.

²²⁹ Cunliffe 2000, 103. See Map, 406.

²³⁰ 'She moves from being *πενιχρά* [meaning very poor] to *πτωχή* [meaning utterly destitute with nothing] by giving away all that she has': Paulraj 2021, 102 see 99-102. Paulraj argues that the *Πτωχοί* are the expendables, those who live in abject poverty and are forced to beg: 94-104. Cf. Wolter 2016, 269.

in so many of the messages to Mercury as people dedicate to Mercury all or part of what has been stolen. In a tablet that refers to the theft of money, there is explicit reference to the treasury of the Uley temple as 100,000 denarii are pledged to the god Mercury by an unknown petitioner. The enormous sum involved perhaps reflects the loss of value of the denarius in the third century CE.²³¹

Just as Peter healed the lame man at the Jerusalem temple (Acts 3:1-10), so Paul healed the lame man at Lystra (Acts 14:8-10). The reaction of the crowds was to shout with cries of adulation, hailing Paul and his companion Barnabas as ‘gods come down to us in human form’: ‘Barnabas they called *Iovis* and Paul, *Mercurius*’ (Acts 14:12),²³² bringing to our imagined readers’ ‘inner eye’ the sculpture of Mercury in the temple sanctuary. Julius Caesar’s observations about the predilection of Celtic peoples in Gaul to ‘worship Mercury’, together with Saturnina’s use of alternative names for the god of the shrine suggests that there was some association in the minds of the people of Uley between Mercury and local Celtic divinities. They might well have understood the response of the people of Lystra and seen Paul as ‘the guide for every road and journey’ as Julius Caesar suggests.²³³ They could perhaps imagine the priests coming from the temple to Zeus outside the gate with garlands and oxen to sacrifice. They would know only too well the importance of such sacrifice, using beasts from their nearby farms.

The temple to Mercury played its part in the local economy, not least in the provision of animals and other offerings from the rural neighbourhood. There was also considerable trade in the complex of buildings surrounding the shrine of the temple itself. The discovery of fifty blank tablets suggests that they were on sale at the temple location itself; miniature statuettes of the god Mercury and other votive objects were also on sale. Miniatures of the god Nodens and of a fine, bronze, young wolfhound were on sale in the Lydney temple on the far side of the River Severn.²³⁴ In Uley, as in Lydney, Honoratus and others would understand why Demetrius and the silversmiths of Ephesus objected to anything that threatened their livelihoods (Acts 19:21-41).

The lived religious experience of the people of Uley is in some ways a world apart from the people whose stories are told in Luke-Acts and yet elements of that experience are shared. Both in Luke-

²³¹ *SD 370* (Uley 78), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 358; Tomlin 2002, 169.

²³² Keener 2020, 352: Zeus and Hermes were key and often paired deities in the region. Hermes is the messenger of the gods (Homer) and god of orators (Lucian).

²³³ Caesar *Bellum Gallicum*. vi.17 H. J. Edwards 1917, 340–41 *hunc viarum atque itinerum ducem*. See above, 4.2.1: 159.

²³⁴ Lydney Park Estate 2000, 19; Copeland 2011, 150–52; Wilson 2002, 202–6. See Map, 407.

Acts and in Uley, people have a connection with the temple in their locality that contributes to their sense of identity and provides them with a place to which they can turn in time of need.

At the very beginning of Luke, Zechariah is introduced as a priest who thereby can enter ‘the sanctuary of the Lord’ (Luke 1:5-10) in the temple which we later learn is in Jerusalem (Luke 2:22-38, 41-51); he lives in the days of King Herod of *Iudaea* (Luke 1:5), whose jurisdiction is under the authority of the emperor Augustus and the governorship of Syria (Luke 2:1-2); his home, however, is in a town in the Judean hill country (Luke 1:23, 39-40). He shares a house with Elizabeth, his wife, in a tight-knit, supportive community, made up of neighbours and family (Luke 1:40, 58, 65). As a result of his prayers at the time of the incense offering (Luke 1:10) his wife, Elizabeth, gives birth to a son, John (Luke 1:57), who in adulthood heralds the coming of his relative Jesus in the fifteenth year of the emperor Tiberius when *Iudaea* is governed by Pontius Pilate and Galilee and neighbouring regions by the brothers Herod and Philip, together with Lysanias while the Jerusalem temple is in the control of high priests, Annas and Caiaphas (Luke 3:1-2).

What is immediately apparent is that Zechariah’s identity is found within a web of inter-connected relationships. Brawley draws on the insights of Harvey²³⁵ and suggests that people have constantly to ‘negotiate where they belong’ within the ‘nested hierarchy of spatial scales’ and that for Zechariah those places include ‘at least the empire, nation, temple, local community and household, each of which puts constraints on him’.²³⁶

A similar mapping exercise could be carried out with regard to each of the people we encounter in Luke-Acts who has to do with the Jerusalem temple. From Simeon and Anna to the Pharisee and tax collector of Jesus’ parable; to its hierarchy of priests, police, moneychangers, benefactors, and authorities who sustain its system of sacrifices and ritual; to the rich and the poor who are expected to finance it; to the sick who seek help there; to Peter and John and Paul and his companions; each has to ‘negotiate where they belong’. The same can be said of those we encounter in the temple of Zeus-outside-the gate in Lystra, the many temples of Athens and the temple to Diana in Ephesus.

Honoratus’ identity is found within a similar web of inter-connected relationships.²³⁷ A householder, he lives in the rural community near the temple dedicated to the holy god Mercury from the genius of whose divinity he asks for help. He farms the land and is in possession of a number of cows,

²³⁵ Harvey 2000, 75.

²³⁶ Brawley 2020, 41.

²³⁷ McKie 2022, 59–60; Woolf 2020, secs. 25–30.

farming equipment and personal belongings. He lives in a locality where there are large villas, not far from the network of roads leading to Glevum (Gloucester), Aquae Sulis (Bath), Corinium (Cirencester) and beyond. Across the river the network of roads connects him with the temple to Nodens at Lydney, Venta Silurum (Caerwent), and the legionary fortress of Isca (Caerleon).²³⁸ An unknown thief has stolen two wheels and four cows, perhaps a wheeled plough and its team, together with some of his personal belongings. He could have turned for help to one of those nearby towns. Second in size only to Londinium, Corinium was a *civitas* centre where the complex web of Roman power interconnected with the local Dobunni peoples and their elite to such an extent that by the fourth century CE it probably became the capital of *Britannia prima*.²³⁹ The *colonia*, Glevum, was by the third and fourth centuries CE declining and as far away, and the more remote Venta Silurum was the *civites* capital of the Siluri, over the river and possibly unattractive to Honoratus. Some have supposed that recourse to the Roman legal system was not available to those who sought help using lead tablets;²⁴⁰ it may have been simply a choice they made, their way of negotiating the complex web of power they were caught up in.²⁴¹ We may see here an example of the web of Roman power thinning towards the provinces and their hinterland.

For whatever reason, Honoratus turns instead to the nearby temple, connecting with traders, priests and others from his community. Restitution of his stolen property will lead to a reconciliation in relationships that have been fractured by the theft; failing that, he seeks retribution. The temple with its sacrifices and its associated buildings is closely connected to the agricultural community of which he is a part. Mercury links it to the Roman empire as does the Latin language in everyday use there: Mercury has an association with Mars, Silvanus and a Celtic god and its Romanized name has a Celtic etymology connecting it with the Celtic peoples who for many generations had revered that sacred site.²⁴² His Latin name connects Honoratus with the empire, but Celtic names are common among those in his community.²⁴³ Whether or not divisions were evident before the theft, Honoratus now lives in a fractured world in need of reconciliation (*concordia*). He hopes the awareness of family and friends and even those responsible for the theft will lead to a speedy resolution of his problem as things come into the open and people can see that he has been vindicated. Honoratus seeks to ‘negotiate’ where he belongs within the ‘nested hierarchy of spatial

²³⁸ Glevum, see Map, 212; Aquae Sulis, see Map, 406; Corinium, see Map, 211; Lydney, see Map, 407; Venta Silurum, see Map, 215; Isca, see Map, 214.

²³⁹ Salway 2001, 419–21; D. J. Mattingly 2007, 262–63.

²⁴⁰ D. J. Mattingly 2007, 315.

²⁴¹ McKie 2022, 60; Woolf 2020, 25–30.

²⁴² Tomlin 1993, 130.

²⁴³ Celtic names are narrowly in the majority in Bath and Uley: D. J. Mattingly 2007, 463.

scales': for him those places also include 'the empire, [province], temple, local community and household, each of which puts constraints on him'.²⁴⁴

We meet Honoratus and others seeking help from the 'holy god Mercury' when the temple takes centre stage because of some undesired action that has upset the equilibrium of their lives. It is one place that has the potential to restore the broken web of their relationships at best, and at worst to bring some kind of justice in the form of retribution. What they present in the temple gives them 'the ability to define and alter their place in the world',²⁴⁵ it restores that agency that had been taken away by the theft. The temple is that kind of cultural centre that can provide the focal point for the creation, preservation and restoration of social order. It can be said to perform for the likes of Honoratus a world-ordering function.

This is the role, Joel Green argues, that the Jerusalem temple is perceived to perform for the *Iudaei* in Luke-Acts. It is 'the divinely legitimated hub that mirrors as well as communicates and sustains the boundaries of social relations': as a cultural centre it has a 'world-ordering' function.²⁴⁶ Likewise, for the priest of Zeus-outside-the-gate in Lystra, for Demetrius in Ephesus and for so many in Athens, the temples they knew well carried out for each of them a similar function as a 'world-ordering' 'cultural centre'. In each context Luke-Acts offers a critique of the place of the temple, so much so that it is possible to maintain with John Elliott that 'in the Lukan narrative the temple gradually emerges as an institution whose managers, interests, and ideology stand diametrically opposed to the ministry and mission of Jesus and his community'.²⁴⁷ That becomes evident in our imagined reading of Luke-Acts.

Not only does Luke itself begin and end in the Jerusalem temple, the last part of the opening section and the first part of the closing section of Luke also focuses on the identity of Jesus in relation to the temple. As a twelve year old he speaks of the temple as his 'Father's house' (Luke 2:49), suggesting his identity relates not only to the temple as a cultural centre but to the god of the temple. As he reaches his long-awaited destination in Jerusalem he makes for the temple, expecting to enter 'his Father's house' as a house of prayer only to find it desecrated as a 'den of robbers' by 'those who were selling things there' (Luke 19:46). It then becomes a place of controversy and tension (Luke 19:47-20:44), where Jesus witnesses the financial ruin of a poor widow who becomes destitute at

²⁴⁴ Brawley 2020, 41.

²⁴⁵ McKie 2022, 104–5.

²⁴⁶ Green 1997, 509-510, referencing Geertz 1983, 122-123.

²⁴⁷ Elliott 1993, 223.

the hands of the temple authorities (Luke 20:45-21:4). He tells of its forthcoming destruction (Luke 21:5-38, especially 5-6, 20-24), presaged at his death when ‘the sun’s light failed, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two’ (Luke 23:45).

As Luke concludes and Acts opens the Jerusalem temple is seen to be a place of praise, prayer and healing (Luke 24:53; Acts 3:1-26; 5:12-16), but also of tension and conflict (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-42; 6:8-15). That conflict comes to a head as Stephen is dragged out of the city and stoned to death after addressing the council (Acts 7:54-8:1). *Iudaei* reading Luke-Acts as followers of the Way of Jesus would recognise numerous allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures and writing in the style of those scriptures in translation. It may be that Honoratus, Docilinus, Saturnina and their contemporaries had some scant knowledge of the *Iudaei*: Aquae Sulis (Bath), visited by Docilinus, drew travellers from far across the empire;²⁴⁸ *Iudaea Capta* coins minted by Vespasian were in circulation in the vicinity of the River Severn into the later second century CE and beyond;²⁴⁹ Aaron, a Judean name, and Iulius, two of the three Christian martyrs from second century CE Britannia are associated with Venta Silurum (Caerwent) and Isca (Caerleon), on the other side of the River Severn;²⁵⁰ a gold amulet in Greek lettering, using the divine name associated with the *Iudaei* was found in Segontium (Caernarfon)²⁵¹ suggesting the possible presence or influence of diaspora *Iudaei*.²⁵²

It is equally possible that they had no awareness of the *Iudaei*, in which case background information within the text itself enables such readers to appreciate the significance of what is going on. In Stephen’s speech (Acts 7:2-53) they would find an account of the origins of the *Iudaei* with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, how they came to be in Egypt and were led by Moses and Joshua into the land of *Iudaea*, where David’s idea of building a temple, a house for the God of Jacob, was realised by Solomon. We can imagine the people of the rural community around Uley for whom the temple was their ‘cultural centre’ reading this speech as an account of the origin of the Jerusalem temple. At its climax, however, the speech is critical of the temple:

Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?' ἀλλ' οὐχ ὁ ὑψιστος ἐν χειροποιήτοις κατοικεῖ, καθὼς ὁ προφήτης λέγει· ὁ οὐρανός μοι θρόνος, ἢ δὲ γῆ ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν μου· ποῖον οἶκον οἰκοδομήσετέ μοι, λέγει κύριος, ἢ τίς τόπος τῆς καταπαύσεώς μου; οὐχὶ ἡ χεὶρ μου ἐποίησεν ταῦτα πάντα

²⁴⁸ Cunliffe 2000, 128-142; Davenport 2021, 148-165. See Map, 406.

²⁴⁹ 'Llanvaches Hoard: Collections Online' 2019.

²⁵⁰ Seaman 2015; J. R. Davies 2012. Venta Silurum, see Map, 215; Isca, see Map, 214.

²⁵¹ *RIB* 436. Cf. Tomlin 2008a, 219; Tomlin 2004. Segontium, see Map, 315.

²⁵² J. N. Adams 1992, 12, note 41.

sed non Excelsus in manufactis habitat sicut propheta dicit caelum mihi sedis est terra autem scabillum pedum meorum quam domum aedificabitis mihi dicit Dominus aut quis locus requietionis meae est nonne manus mea fecit haec omnia (Acts 7:48-50)

Stephen then turns to address the Council in particular. The ensuing death of Stephen results in 'a severe persecution ... against the church in Jerusalem' as a result of which 'all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of *Iudaea* and Samaria' (Acts 8:1).

From this point on the Jerusalem temple ceases to play a significant role in the narrative in Acts. There is no mention of the temple: when Saul visits Jerusalem following his conversion (Acts 9:26-29); when Peter reports to the church in Jerusalem following the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 11:1-18); when James is executed and Peter imprisoned at the time of the Passover (Acts 12:1-19); when the apostles and elders meet together in Jerusalem to consider the question of the circumcision of Gentile followers of the way (Acts 15:1-29); or when Paul visits fleetingly, returning from Athens and Corinth (Acts 18:22-23). It is on his last visit to Jerusalem that Paul is seen visiting the temple on seven consecutive days, sharing in its sacrifices and other rituals. It becomes for him a scene of tension and conflict as '*Iudaei* from Asia, who had seen him in the temple stirred up the whole crowd' who 'seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple' where the Tribune and soldiers and centurions intervene (Acts 21:17-36). Recalling his own experience of conversion Paul mentions returning from Damascus to Jerusalem where he 'was praying in the temple' (Acts 22:17).

It is telling that the very last glimpse we have of the Jerusalem temple in Luke-Acts is as Paul is seized and dragged out of the temple: 'and immediately the doors were shut' (Acts 21:30).²⁵³ We can imagine the people of Uley registering that for all its positive value to the followers of the Way of Jesus who continued to pray and sacrifice in the temple, ultimately its doors were shut to them. Whether or not they knew of the destruction of the temple, they could be in no doubt of the likelihood of it happening. More than that, they were confronted with the stark message that the God at the heart of the narrative of Luke-Acts was the God of heaven and earth who could not be contained in a house made with human hands.

That is precisely the critique made of the three other settings in which reference is made to a temple. When in Lystra Paul healed the man who could not use his feet and had never walked, the crowds shouted in the Lycaonian language, 'The gods have come down to us in human form' identifying Barnabas as *Iovis* and Paul as Mercury. The priest of the temple dedicated to *Iovis* outside

²⁵³ Bruce 1990, 450; Witherington III 1998, 655.

the city wall 'brought oxen and garlands to the gates and ... wanted to offer sacrifice'. Paul would have none of it:

Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

καὶ λέγοντες· ἄνδρες, τί ταῦτα ποιεῖτε; καὶ ἡμεῖς ὁμοιοπαθεῖς ἐσμεν ὑμῖν ἄνθρωποι εὐαγγελιζόμενοι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τούτων τῶν ματαίων ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ θεὸν ζῶντα, ὃς ἐποίησεν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς

et dicentes viri quid haec facitis et nos mortales sumus similes vobis homines adnuntiantes vobis ab his vanis converti ad Deum vivum qui fecit caelum et terram et mare et omnia quae in eis sunt (Acts 14:15)

As Paul arrives in Athens with its many temples he was 'deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols', finding 'an altar with the inscription to an unknown god' (Acts 17:16, 22-23). He then makes a comment very similar to the comments made by Stephen of the Jerusalem temple and by Paul of the temple in Lystra:

The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.

ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται προσδεόμενός τινος, αὐτὸς διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα *Deus qui fecit mundum et omnia quae in eo sunt hic caeli et terrae cum sit Dominus non in manufactis templis inhabitat nec manibus humanis colitur indigens aliquo cum ipse det omnibus vitam et inspirationem et omnia (Acts 17:24-25)*

This is the very accusation levelled at Paul by Demetrius on behalf of the silversmiths of the temple to Diana in Ephesus:

You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods.

καὶ θεωρεῖτε καὶ ἀκούετε ὅτι οὐ μόνον Ἐφέσου ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν πάσης τῆς Ἀσίας ὁ Παῦλος οὗτος πείσας μετέστησεν ἱκανὸν ὄχλον λέγων ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν θεοὶ οἱ διὰ χειρῶν γινόμενοι

et videtis et auditis quia non solum Ephesi sed paene totius Asiae Paulus hic suadens avertit multam turbam dicens quoniam non sunt dii qui manibus fiunt (Acts 19:26)

As we imagine reading Luke-Acts through the eyes of those who went up to the imposing temple to Mercury on the edge of the Cotswold escarpment looking west over the River Severn towards the Welsh mountains, the point made in Luke-Acts with reference to each location associated with temples becomes even more powerful. It is in a temple's location that one can appreciate so much more of the religious experience of those who frequented it.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Aldhouse-Green 2004, 208–10; Aldhouse-Green 2018, 95; Tilley 1994, 74.

Luke-Acts challenges people from a community such as this, drawn to follow the Way of Jesus, to call in question the temple they are so much a part of and to think further about the God of heaven and earth at the heart of the Luke-Acts narrative. But that gives rise to the question, is there an alternative? Whether in the parables and Jesus' teaching or on his journey to Jerusalem, the household is an alternative focus for the ministry of Jesus in Luke and comes to the fore among the first followers of the Way of Jesus in Acts. Indeed, Acts opens in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem, takes the reader to the homes where the first followers of Jesus met in Jerusalem and throughout the travels that eventually take the reader with Paul to Rome. As Acts begins in a house, so it ends in the house Paul occupies in Rome. As Elliott argues, 'temple and household represent distinctly different and contrasted types of social institutions with conflicting sets of structures, interests, values, beliefs and behaviours'.²⁵⁵ Honoratus, Docilinus and Saturnina would be presented with an alternative focal point for their religious experience, not in the temple but in the home. Their source of strength would be in their meeting together in one another's homes or other locations which facilitated meeting together.²⁵⁶ The God of heaven and earth who could not be contained in buildings or worshipped with things made with the hand was with them in a shared household setting as they looked to him as 'Father'.²⁵⁷ More significantly, he was able to offer the help they sought, though in quite a different way: in prayers addressed to the Father (Luke 11:1-12); and in prayers shared as they met together (Acts 4:23-31).²⁵⁸

4.4.2 Cursing?

When people of the rural community around Uley approached the temple, they knew they had been wronged and needed help; knowing what needed to be done, they were confident help would be forthcoming from the temple and the god Mercury. If, with McKie, we think of their actions as a 'cursing ritual',²⁵⁹ involving 'theft curses',²⁶⁰ and with Sánchez Natalías categorise them as *Defixiones in fures* (*defixiones* against thieves) that reveal with all *defixiones* or curse tablets emotions such as 'anger, wrath and desperation',²⁶¹ then we can reflect on texts in Luke-Acts that have to do with cursing.

²⁵⁵ Elliott 1993, 230.

²⁵⁶ E. Adams 2013.

²⁵⁷ Elliott 1993, 229.

²⁵⁸ See below on prayer 4.4.3: 197-203.

²⁵⁹ McKie 2022, 26.

²⁶⁰ McKie 2022, 67.

²⁶¹ Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 61.

While at Uley there is nothing of the simplicity of the curse or *defixio* proper found in Londinium against Titus Egnatius Tyranus and Publius Cicereius Felix,²⁶² there are echoes of the directness of another London curse: ‘I curse (*defico*) Tretia Martia and her life and mind and memory and liver and lungs mixed up together, and her words, thoughts, and memory; so may she be unable to speak’.²⁶³ The victim of a theft, as so many of the community around Uley are, Biccus asks that the one responsible ‘may not urinate nor defecate nor speak nor sleep nor stay awake nor [have] well-bring or health’,²⁶⁴ while Honoratus addresses the holy god Mercury and asks ‘the genius of your divinity that you do not allow health to the person who has done me wrong, nor allow him to lie or sit or drink or eat’.²⁶⁵ Another unnamed person, whose sheep have been stolen by someone ‘of evil intent’ asks that ‘the god himself kill (him) with his vile blood’.²⁶⁶ In the world of the people of Uley there was an expectation that failure to comply with the god of the temple to whom they appealed for help would result in personal distress and extreme suffering. This is the language of cursing.

As we imagine the likes of Honoratus, Docilinus and Saturnina becoming followers of the Way of Jesus and encountering Luke-Acts they would feel very much at home with some of the language used by Jesus in Luke and by his followers in Acts. Their ritual vests them with a power and an agency they had been denied because of what had happened to them; they expect their words to make a difference and result in something happening. When Jesus utters the word ‘woe’ (ὠαί: *nae*) to those who are rich, full, laughing and honoured (Luke 6:24-26), to those who do not welcome him (Luke 10:13-16), to those who neglect justice and the love of God, seek honour, load people with burdens too hard to bear, and have denied others knowledge (Luke 11:37-52), to those who cause people to stumble (Luke 17:1), and to the one who was to betray him (Luke 22:22), our imagined readers would expect such declarations to make a difference and to effect change. The hunger, mourning, weeping (Luke 6:25), the destruction (Luke 10:13-15), the death (Luke 11:44,47), the drowning (Luke 17:2), the distress and destruction (Luke 21:23-24), are not simply far off in the future but have to do with what will happen in the world as it is. Followers of the Way are not simply to rejoice at the welcome they receive but when they are rejected, they are to ‘shake the dust from their feet’ (Luke 9:5 and 10:11). For our imagined readers the utterance of a woe is not about matters eschatological as some suggest,²⁶⁷ neither does it amount to ‘ethical exhortation’: instead it

²⁶² SD 338 (*RIB* 6), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 331.

²⁶³ SD 339 (*RIB* 7), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 332.

²⁶⁴ SD 358 (Uley 4), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 348–49; Tomlin 1993, 124–26.

²⁶⁵ SD 365 (Uley 72), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 354–55; Tomlin 1992b, 310–11.

²⁶⁶ SD 390 (Uley 9), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 363 not included; Tomlin 2020, 480–82.

²⁶⁷ Fitzmyer 1970, 637.

is performative and effects change.²⁶⁸ These are the things our imagined readers would expect to happen.

Honoratus, Docilinus, Saturnina and the others who sought help from Mercury and engaged in what has been described as ‘a cursing ritual’ were not only aware of the harm they had experienced individually, but they were also all too conscious of the divisions those actions had caused within their community. Where suspects are named, we glimpse real and identifiable divisions that are all too evident in this fractured community.²⁶⁹ The use of catch-all formulae when the names of the perpetrators are not known indicates divisions that are no less real and as disturbing despite their anonymity.²⁷⁰ The vehemence of the language reflects the depth of those divisions. While these texts from Luke-Acts do not have to do with theft or damage to property, there is a similar vehemence which reflects divisions between those who follow the Way and those who do not. Divisions, however, would also have been evident to such imagined readers within the community of those who followed the Way.

Followers of the Way of Jesus in Uley would see early in Acts how that community was built on principles of sharing that involved mutual commitment to one another:

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.
πάντες δὲ οἱ πιστεύοντες ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινὰ καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ πᾶσιν καθότι ἂν τις χρεῖαν εἶχεν
omnes etiam qui credebant erant pariter et habebant omnia communia possessiones et substantias vendebant et dividebant illa omnibus prout cuique opus erat Acts 2:44-45

That was given concrete expression in the example of Joseph of Cyprus, named Barnabas by the Apostles (Acts 4:32-37). It is when Ananias and Sapphira fail to share the proceeds of the sale of a piece of property that dire consequences follow for Ananias and subsequently Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). In a sequence of four rhetorical questions Peter confronts Ananias with what he has done, and ‘when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died’. Three hours later, Peter asks Sapphira to confirm the payment; when she repeats Ananias’ lie Peter declares,

Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.
ἰδοὺ οἱ πόδες τῶν θαψάντων τὸν ἄνδρα σου ἐπὶ τῇ θύρᾳ καὶ ἐξοίσουσίν σε
ecce pedes eorum qui sepelierunt virum tuum ad ostium et efferent te (Acts 5:9)

²⁶⁸ Brawley 2020, 82.

²⁶⁹ SD 355 (Uley 1); 361 (Uley 43); 362 (Uley 49); 371 (Uley 68).

²⁷⁰ SD 356 (Uley 2); 358 (Uley 4); 359 (Uley 5); 364 (Uley 55); 365 (Uley 72); 366 (Uley 76); 372 (Uley 34); 373 (Uley 24); 386 (Uley 75); 390 (Uley 9); 411 (Uley 41); 431 (Uley 84); 436 (52).

Keener cites anthropological literature that ‘documents suffering and death caused by curses’ but goes on to suggest that Peter’s words are ‘more like a prophecy or pronouncement of a divine verdict’.²⁷¹ Likewise Witherington III maintains that Peter’s words are ‘not a curse formula, but rather a prophetic word’.²⁷² That Peter predicts Sapphira’s death is evident, ‘whether he causes it is not expressly stated’ according to Barrett.²⁷³ Benedict Kent has argued that it is helpful to read Peter’s words to Sapphira, together with his words to Simon Magus (Acts 8:4-25), and to Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:4-12) from the perspective of ‘a selection of Greek and Coptic ‘magical’ texts’.²⁷⁴ In a careful analysis of the wording of Peter’s questions to Ananias and his confrontation with Sapphira, Kent argues that there is the suggestion within the text that the words Peter uses effect the outcome that results. There is, he suggests, a ‘relation between the [apostle’s] pronouncements and the subsequent afflictions’ suffered first by Ananias and then by Sapphira.²⁷⁵ Were people from the Uley community to encounter this text they would bring to it the assumption that words uttered could result in adverse effects in the people concerned. What is at stake here, however, is not a theft from Peter, to which he responds with words of power, but an action that has broken the spirit of community that binds together those who follow the Way of Jesus.²⁷⁶ That too connects with the fractured community life that has prompted the likes of Honoratus to engage in their cursing ritual. One of those drawn to the Way of Jesus as Philip ‘went down to the city of Samaria, proclaiming the Messiah to them’ was Simon who ‘had previously practised magic in the city: προῦπηρχεν ἐν τῇ πόλει μαγέων: *qui ante fuerat in civitate magus*’ (Acts 8:9). However, when he offered Peter and John money after seeing ‘that the Spirit was given through the laying of the apostles’ hands’ Peter responded with words which according to Kent, following Barrett,²⁷⁷ are akin to the language of cursing in that they start and finish with a ferocity that penetrates to Simon’s heart,

May your silver perish with you ... your heart is not right before God ... For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness.
τὸ ἀργύριόν σου σὺν σοὶ εἶη εἰς ἀπώλειαν ... καρδία σου οὐκ ἔστιν εὐθεία ἔναντι τοῦ θεοῦ. ... εἰς γὰρ χολὴν πικρίας καὶ σύνδεσμον ἀδικίας ὁρῶ σε ὄντα
pecunia tua tecum sit in perditionem ... cor enim tuum non est rectum coram Deo ... in felle enim amaritudinis et obligatione iniquitatis video te esse (Acts 8:20-23)

The opportunity Peter gives to Simon to repent and make confession (Acts 8:22) is, Kent argues, most characteristic of that category of cursing that is associated with prayers for justice.²⁷⁸ Peter’s

²⁷¹ Keener 2020, 206.

²⁷² Witherington III 1998, 218.

²⁷³ C. K. Barrett 1994, 270 cf. 262–64.

²⁷⁴ Kent 2017, 413.

²⁷⁵ Kent 2017, 434.

²⁷⁶ Witherington III 1998, 215 who is clear that ‘it is not said that Peter ... uttered a curse that killed him’, 216.

²⁷⁷ C. K. Barrett 1994, 617.

²⁷⁸ Kent 2017, 427.

words here are not in response to anything that has been done against him: he seeks rather to demonstrate that God's Spirit cannot be 'bought' but is a gift of God. These words suggest 'a marked dislike for those who make money out of their dealings with the supernatural'.²⁷⁹

In this instance there is no indication of the effect Peter's words had on Simon either for good²⁸⁰ or ill.²⁸¹ The fate of Herod, on the other hand, is reminiscent of the fate sought for the perpetrators of ill by the people of Uley and would suggest to them that he had been subject to a curse and the consequent retribution:

an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.
ἐπάταξεν αὐτὸν ἄγγελος κυρίου ... καὶ γενόμενος σκωληκόβρωτος ἐξέψυξεν
percussit eum angelus Domini ... et consumptus a vermibus exspiravit (Acts 12:23)

Accustomed to the kind of petition contained in the curse tablets they might sense that he had done something to deserve such divine retribution.²⁸²

In seeking to 'place the curses of Acts in the context of cursing traditions in the wider ancient Mediterranean world', Kent gives priority to the narrative of the encounter Saul and Barnabas had with 'a Judean false prophet, named Bar-Jesus', 'the magician Elymas' (Acts 13:4-12). Drawing especially on the work of Faraone, Gager and Versnel, he suggests that for all the differences between the words attributed here to Saul and the variety of binding spells, *defixiones* proper and so-called prayers for justice they are nonetheless useful for comparison.²⁸³ Laura Nasrallah argues they are 'an underutilised source for investigation of philosophical, theological ideas about the agency, the will, and the efficacy of human and nonhuman actors, whether gods or the materiality of the lead on which a *defixio* is incised'.²⁸⁴ She has developed Kent's work further and drawn on curse tablets classified by Versnel as prayers for justice from the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore to throw light on the world of the first Christ-followers in Corinth and on Paul's use of curse language in 1 Cor. 5:1-5.²⁸⁵

Saul has a sense of being wronged by Elymas (Acts 13:8) which prompts him to respond in the way he does. He addresses his words directly to Elymas and then declares,

And now listen-- the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun.

²⁷⁹ C. K. Barrett 1994, 413.

²⁸⁰ Bruce 1990, 219.

²⁸¹ Witherington III 1998, 287.

²⁸² Bruce 1990, 289.

²⁸³ Kent 2017, 419.

²⁸⁴ Nasrallah 2021, 355.

²⁸⁵ Nasrallah 2021, 350–62. Cf. 1 Cor. 16:22 and possibly 12:3.

καὶ νῦν ἰδοὺ χεῖρ κυρίου ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ ἔση τυφλὸς μὴ βλέπων τὸν ἥλιον ἄχρι
καιροῦ
et nunc ecce manus Domini super te et eris caecus non videns solem usque ad tempus
(Acts 13:11a)

According to Barrett ‘the magus is roundly cursed’.²⁸⁶ This declaration is very similar to the ill health sought from those who had wronged the petitioners at the temple to Mercury, indeed ‘blindness’ is wished on one perpetrator at the nearby temple to Sulis Minerva in Bath.²⁸⁷ What would be striking for readers from the Uley community would be the immediate consequence:

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he went about groping for someone to lead him by the hand.
παραχρημά τε ἔπεσεν ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἀχλὺς καὶ σκότος καὶ περιάγων ἐζήτει
χειραγωγούς
et confestim cecidit in eum caligo et tenebrae et circumiens quaerebat qui ei manum daret
(Acts 13:11b)

The wrong that has been perpetrated, unlike the wrongs experienced by the people of Uley, was not personal to Saul, but to the message he was sharing with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, who ‘when he saw what had happened, ... believed, for he was astonished at the teaching about the Lord’ (Acts 13:12). What matters here is that, as in each of the other narratives that would resonate with the people of Uley, the purpose of the curse for the apostles is not so much to punish as to ‘demonstrate God’s power and the authority of their message’.²⁸⁸ For those living in the vicinity of the temple to Mercury at Uley, one can imagine this narrative confirming the decision they had taken to become followers of the Way of Jesus.

Defixiones proper were often found in an agonistic context where adversaries were pitched against each other.²⁸⁹ There is a strong sense here of a perceived opposition between Saul and the other apostles and those who practise ‘magic’. This comes to a head in Ephesus when Paul’s encounter with ‘some itinerant Jewish exorcists’ prompts ‘a number of those who practised magic’ (ἱκανοὶ δὲ τῶν τὰ περίεργα πραξάντων: *multi autem ex his qui fuerant curiosi*) to collect their books and burn them publicly (Acts 19:19). That the texts of the curse tablets of Uley and indeed of Bath and elsewhere are formulaic and resemble the text of curse tablets across the empire has suggested to some that the wording was passed on not just by word of mouth but also by the use of books.²⁹⁰ At this point might our imagined readers of Luke-Acts have been challenged to call in question the language of cursing they were accustomed to?

²⁸⁶ C. K. Barrett 1994, 617.

²⁸⁷ *SD 250 (Tab. Sulis 45)*, Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 294–95; Tomlin 1988.

²⁸⁸ Kent 2017, 423.

²⁸⁹ Faraone 1991; Kent 2017, 423; see above, 4.2.3: 165.

²⁹⁰ Tomlin 1988, 62ff.

As our imagined readers from the community around Uley encounter Luke-Acts it is not long before they arrive at words of Jesus that go to the heart of what it takes to be a follower of the Way, words that speak into the world they know so well. Hearing Jesus pronounce a blessing on those who are poor, those who are hungry now, those who laugh and declaring a woe on those who are rich, those who are full now and those who are laughing now, they would be immediately aware of a 'way' that challenged the world they knew (Luke 6:20-26). They were neither among the elite nor among the poor: they farmed and had possessions. When we encounter them, they had become the victim of wrongs that had the potential to threaten their livelihood as beasts, farm implements, beehives and clothing were stolen. They had come to the temple dedicated to Mercury to redress the injustice they had experienced. They sought punishment on those who had wronged them in the hope that Mercury would be able to redeem their losses for them. They know full well that they have been wronged; in some instances they know the names of those they suspect of having wronged them and they know exactly what should befall them. It is the next words of Jesus that challenge the very basis on which they have written their 'curses'.

But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

Ἄλλὰ ὑμῖν λέγω τοῖς ἀκούουσιν· ἀγαπάτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν, καλῶς ποιεῖτε τοῖς μισοῦσιν ὑμᾶς, εὐλογεῖτε τοὺς καταρωμένους ὑμᾶς, προσεύχεσθε περὶ τῶν ἐπηρεαζόντων ὑμᾶς

sed vobis dico qui auditis diligite inimicos vestros benefacite his qui vos oderunt benedicite maledicentibus vobis orate pro calumniantibus vos (Luke 6:27-28)

The very reaction they have in seeking redress is what is called in question by Jesus here. It is even more explicit in the words that follow:

If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

τῷ τύποντί σε ἐπὶ τὴν σιαγόνα πάρεχε καὶ τὴν ἄλλην, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵροντός σου τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ τὸν χιτῶνα μὴ κωλύσης. παντὶ αἰτοῦντί σε δίδου, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵροντος τὰ σὰ μὴ ἀπαίτει

ei qui te percutit in maxillam praebe et alteram et ab eo qui aufert tibi vestimentum etiam tunicam noli prohibere omni autem petenti te tribue et qui aufert quae tua sunt ne repetas (Luke 6:29-30)

This very different approach that no longer seeks retribution and vengeance is then encapsulated in the words of Jesus:

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Καὶ καθὼς θέλετε ἵνα ποιῶσιν ὑμῖν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ποιεῖτε αὐτοῖς ὁμοίως
et prout vultis ut faciant vobis homines et vos facite illis similiter (Luke 6:31)

This is a major departure from what they are accustomed to. Here under the escarpment at Uley as much as anywhere in the world of the Roman empire something different is happening for those

who seek to follow the Way of Jesus. Wolter's comment on this verse is as applicable in Uley as anywhere. To follow the Way of Jesus and belong to those some call 'Christians' involves a fundamental reorientation of their values: 'Christians receive their ethically unique position through the fact that in their interpersonal actions they do not orient themselves towards the principle of reciprocity, but one-sidedly do what all humans wish from one another'.²⁹¹ It involves belonging to a community whose norms are different, giving to others without expecting anything in return, what could be described as a 'generalised reciprocity'.²⁹² What this does, suggests Robert Brawley, in the Eastern Mediterranean context can also be imagined in the Uley community: there is 'an inversion of the hidden hierarchies of dominance formed by enmity, hate and conflict' that applies even to violence and force. It is not, he suggests, a submissive acceptance of wrongdoing, but an alternative way of responding to it that has the potential to take the initiative from the offender and shape an alternative kind of community.²⁹³

4.4.3 *Praying?*

If we think of our imagined readers as approaching Mercury with a prayer, then we can imagine another set of passages catching their eye. Characteristic of Luke's account of Jesus and of the first followers of the Way of Jesus is a focus on prayer.²⁹⁴ For the priest, Zechariah (Luke 1:10), for the righteous and devout Simeon (Luke 2:25-35), for the prophet Anna (Luke 2:36-38), for the Pharisee and the tax collector of the parable (Luke 18:10), for the first followers of the Way of Jesus, Peter, John (Acts 2:46; 3:1) and Paul (Acts 21:26; 22:17), the Jerusalem temple was a place of prayer; for Jesus it was his father's house (Luke 2:49), a house of prayer (Luke 19:46). The temple, however, was not the only location for prayer: Jesus prays on the mountain (Luke 6:12; 9:28; 22:39-46) and in deserted places (Luke 5:16); his followers pray in their houses (Acts 1:13-14; 2:42,46; 4:23-21; 9:11, 36-43; 10:1-3, 9; 12:5, 12). Jesus prays at significant moments in his life: at his baptism (Luke 3:21); prior to his first clash with the scribes and Pharisees (Luke 5:16); prior to his choice of the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-16); prior to Peter's confession of faith (Luke 9:18); at the transfiguration (Luke 9:28); in anticipation of Peter's denial (Luke 22:31-34); on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39-46); on the cross (Luke 23:34, 46); and at the resurrection (Luke 24:30). It is in the context of prayer that the

²⁹¹ Wolter 2016, 282.

²⁹² Green 1997, 271; Crook 2004, 56–59 calls in question such altruism.

²⁹³ Brawley 2020, 84; Wink 1992, 127, 185–93.

²⁹⁴ Wolter 2016, 176. Cf. Wolter 2017, 86–101. Works on Prayer in Luke-Acts: Crump 1988; Kloppenborg 2019b; O'Brien 1973; Trites 1978; Walton 2011, 197. On prayer in Luke commentaries: Brawley 2020, 81, 120–23; Fitzmyer 1970, 244–47; Fitzmyer 1985, 896–916; Green 1997, 439–50; Kuecker 2020a, 139. On prayer in Acts commentaries: Alexander 2006, 17, 44–45; Alexander 2001, 1031, 1033, 1034; C. K. Barrett 1994, 88–89, 166, 245–50; C. K. Barrett 1998, 781; Bruce 1990, 106; Fitzmyer 1998, 215; Keener 2020, 114–15; Kuecker 2020b, 218.

Spirit is given (Luke 3:21-22; 11:2, 13). Such is the impression made on the disciples by Jesus' practice of prayer that they ask him to teach them how to pray just as John had taught his disciples: Jesus offers them a pattern prayer and draws on two analogies from the home, (Luke 11:1-13), later followed by one from the judicial process and one from the temple (Luke 18:1-14). Prayer became a 'characteristic element' of the first followers of the Way of Jesus as they followed his example and 'engaged in this same petitionary activity'.²⁹⁵ They receive the Spirit in the context of prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:1-4; 8:15-17); it is with prayer that Matthias is appointed an apostle (Acts 1:24); Stephen's prayers at the point of death echo the prayers of Jesus (Acts 7:59, 60); prayer accompanies the appointment of the seven (Acts 6:1-6), the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1-3), and their appointment of elders in the churches (Acts 14:23). The followers of the Way are constantly at prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:41-42, 47; 6:4); the hours of prayer at the temple are observed (Acts 3:1; cf. 10:3, 30), while Peter prays at noon (Acts 10:9), the Jerusalem church at night (Acts 12:5,6) and Paul and Silas at midnight (Acts 16:25). Cornelius and Lydia are drawn to prayer before becoming followers of the Way (Acts 10:1-4; 16:13, 16).

In his survey of prayer in Luke-Acts, O'Brien suggests that it is not simply that Jesus is repeatedly seen at prayer but that this becomes an example for those who follow his Way: as they too are continuously at prayer it becomes clear that prayer is the means by which God guides his people.²⁹⁶ That, Trites argues, is Luke's primary concern: not simply to cultivate prayer on the part of his readers but 'to show that prayer is the instrument by which God has directed the course of holy history'.²⁹⁷ It is Jesus' habit of withdrawing for prayer that empowers all he does²⁹⁸ and becomes the model for the life of discipleship in the church.²⁹⁹ It is such prayer that galvanises the church together into a new community of disciples looking to God as Father.³⁰⁰ Just as they share things in common, so they pray with one mind (Acts 1:14; 4:24). While there is an inference that prayer is answered,³⁰¹ not least in Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving (Luke 10:21-22) prompted by his perception that 'his earlier prayers have been answered by his Father',³⁰² the text of Luke-Acts is more nuanced. Crump³⁰³ differentiates between the many occasions when there is no reference to the content of

²⁹⁵ O'Brien 1973, 122-123.

²⁹⁶ O'Brien 1973, 120-21, 126-27.

²⁹⁷ Trites 1978, 169.

²⁹⁸ Green 1997, 238.

²⁹⁹ Green 1997, 439.

³⁰⁰ Green 1997, 440.

³⁰¹ Trites 1978; O'Brien 1973.

³⁰² Crump 1988, 132.

³⁰³ Crump 1988, 223-29.

the prayer,³⁰⁴ and the far fewer occasions when the wording of a prayer is recorded.³⁰⁵ In Luke it is not that prayers receive answers, it is rather that praying binds the pray-er and God together.³⁰⁶ It also binds the pray-er and God's people together in community. As people pray there is a closer alignment with the will of God. Crump concludes that it is 'better to speak of prayer as an activity in and of itself',³⁰⁷ quoting G. W. H. Lampe: 'prayer is ... the point at which the communication of divine influence becomes effective for its recipients'.³⁰⁸ There is no correlation between specific prayers and specific answers to prayer: instead, as Fitzmyer argues, prayer is the setting in which things happen.³⁰⁹ As Wolter observes, 'time and again important events take place while Jesus prays or after he has just stopped praying'.³¹⁰ For Luke, according to Crump, 'prayer is not a guaranteed means of acquiring whatever one asks for, it is the means by which God gives what he determines to be good'.³¹¹ There is no hint in Luke-Acts of the pray-er seeking 'to control or compel divine forces to operate in a desired fashion through the careful use of specific techniques'.³¹² Rather, prayer is 'for Luke one of the most important marks of an existence oriented toward God'.³¹³

What would our imagined readers make of the prayers and the praying of Luke-Acts? They had the confidence to approach the god Mercury in the temple on the Uley escarpment and seek help. In the opening chapters of Luke they would not only recognise the temple in Jerusalem as a place of prayer but also sense the sacredness of the mountain top as a location for prayer. By the time they arrived at the words of Jesus' prayer in Luke 10:21-22, they could not but notice the place of answered prayer in the story of Jesus. They knew the importance of seeking guidance as they arrived at the temple: they needed to follow the correct process, acquiring a tablet to write on, a stylus to write with, and the correct wording for their prayer. They were willing to learn of those more experienced than themselves. It is telling that in the narrative of Luke-Acts it is only once prayer has been established as a central part of the life of Jesus that one of the disciples asks him to teach them to

³⁰⁴ Luke. 1:10-13; 2:37; 3:21-22; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4,6; 9:11,40; 10:2,9 30-31; 11:5; 12:5,12; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8, although it may be possible to infer the content in some of these examples: Luke 1:10-13; 9:18,28-29; Acts 9:40; 12:5,12; 14:23; 20:36.

³⁰⁵ Verbatim: Luke. 2:28-32; 10:21-22; 11:2-4; 22:42; 23:34, 46; Acts 1:24-25; 4:24-30; 7:59,60; implicitly: Luke 22:40; Acts 8:15; 26:29; 27:29; 28:15.

³⁰⁶ Cf. R. W. Cleaves 1980, 12: 'the nature of prayer is not the pragmatics of production, not a matter of putting a coin in the slot and pulling out the drawer, it is not a computer card or a silicon chip. It is the practice of the communion of the soul with the soul of God'.

³⁰⁷ Crump 1988, 227.

³⁰⁸ Lampe 1955, 169.

³⁰⁹ Fitzmyer 1970, 244-47.

³¹⁰ Wolter 2016, 176.

³¹¹ Crump 1988, 264.

³¹² Crump 1988, 268.

³¹³ Wolter 2016, 176: Luke 1:10; 2:37; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28-29; 11:1; 18:1; 22:41,44,46.

pray. As part of a community of those following the Way of Jesus, our imagined readers would be open to being taught. There is something familiar and at the same time radically different in the pattern prayer Jesus offers his disciples and Luke passes on to his readers (Luke 11:2-4).

The prayer opens by directly addressing God as ‘father’ (Πάτερ: *Pater*), goes on to hallow his name (ἀγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου: *sanctificetur nomen tuum*) and speak of his coming kingdom (ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου: *adveniat regnum tuum*). This would be familiar to Honoratus who addresses Mercury as ‘holy god’ (*Deo sanc'to Mercurio*), ‘your divinity’ (*numini tuo*), the ‘genius of your divinity’ (*genium numinis 'tu{u}i'*), ‘your divinity’ (*numen tuum*) and ‘your majesty’ (*maiestate tua*).³¹⁴ This use of *maiestas* bears close comparison with the use of kingdom language in this prayer and elsewhere in the teaching of Jesus.

The prayer of Jesus then includes three petitions: ‘give us’ (δίδου ἡμῖν: *da nobis*), ‘forgive us’ (ἄφες ἡμῖν: *dimitte nobis*), ‘do not bring us’ (μὴ εἰσενέγκης ἡμᾶς: *ne nos inducas*). Honoratus petitions the holy Mercury, using the language of complaint, request, prayer, and petition: ‘I complain’ (*conqueror*), ‘I would ask’ (*rogaverim*), ‘with renewed prayers I ask’ (*iteratis pr{a}ecibus ro- | go*); finally speaking of ‘my petition’ (*petitio mea*). Whereas the petition Honoratus makes is specifically related to the loss of ‘two wheels and four cows and many small belongings from my house’ (*rotas duas et vaccas quattuor et resculas plurimas de hospitio meo*), and asks for their return (*meam rem ad me pertulerit*), the petition in the prayer of Jesus relates to the provision of daily needs (τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν: *panem nostrum cotidianum da nobis cotidie*). Honoratus is aware of the divisions that have occurred in his community because of the actions of the thief and so he also asks that there be reconciliation with the thief (*et meam concordiam habuerit*). In the same way, the second petition of the prayer of Jesus seeking the forgiveness of sins reflects the need to restore a community divided not by theft but by debt: (καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίομεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν: *et dimitte nobis peccata nostra siquidem et ipsi dimittimus omni debenti nobis*). The sense of urgency in the petition of Honoratus, asking that it ‘be immediately fulfilled’ (*ut petitio mea statim pareat*) is in accord with the final petition of the prayer of Jesus that seeks to avoid temptation, the time of testing or trial (καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκης ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν: *et ne nos inducas in temptationem*).

Honoratus expects an answer to his prayer: either the return of the goods and a reconciliation with the one responsible for the theft, or the severe sickness of the thief. Drawing on two analogies that

³¹⁴ SD 365 (Uley 72), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 354–55.

would be familiar to Honoratus, the householder and the father, the teaching of Jesus goes on to speak of needs that are met because of persistence in prayer (Luke 11:5-8). While ‘everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened’ there is not a direct, quantifiable answer to each petition. Instead, the Spirit is given as people engage in prayer (Luke 11:11-13).

At the heart of the prayer of Jesus, however, is something radically different from the main thrust of the prayer of Honoratus. Failing the granting of his requests, Honoratus spells out what he wants to happen to the one who has wronged him, whether they be ‘man or woman, boy or girl, slave or free’ (*si baro si mulier si puer si puella si servus si liber*): ‘I would ask the genius of your divinity that you do not allow health to the person who has done me wrong, nor allow him to lie or sit or drink or eat’ (*rogaverim genium numinis ‘tu{u}i’ ut ei qui mihi fraudem fecerit sanitatem ei non permittas nec iacere nec sedere nec bibere nec manducare*). In seeking the forgiveness of sins in the context of the forgiveness of ‘those indebted to us’, the prayer of Jesus turns on its head the vindictiveness or negative reciprocity that becomes even more explicit as Honoratus not only prays that his ‘petition may be immediately fulfilled’ but also ‘(that it become obvious) that I have been avenged by your majesty’ (*me vindicatum esse a maiestate tua*). Here we have an example of that kind of negative reciprocity we encountered in the context of the Bloomberg tablets.³¹⁵ In place of the retribution sought by the people of the rural community around Uley who had been wronged, there is to be a spirit of forgiveness that breaks the cycle of indebtedness implicit in the retribution sought in their petitions.³¹⁶ ‘The experience of forgiveness by God is inseparably bound up with the granting of forgiveness in relation to other human beings.’³¹⁷

The vindictiveness or negative reciprocity characteristic of the prayers for justice is absent from the prayers and the praying of Luke-Acts. Docilinus holds Varianus, Peregrina and Sabinianus responsible for bringing ‘evil harm’ on his beast and asks that the god Mercury ‘drive them to the greatest death and do not allow them health or sleep’;³¹⁸ in the same way he asks ‘the most holy goddess Sulis’ to inflict whoever it is who has stolen his hooded cloak ‘with the greatest death and not allow him sleep or children now nor in the future’.³¹⁹ Likewise, in her ‘memorandum’ to the god Mercury, otherwise known as Silvanus or even Mars Silvanus, Saturnina asks that whoever has stolen her linen

³¹⁵ See above, 2.3: 61-62.

³¹⁶ Brawley 2020, 120f; Green 1997, 439–44.

³¹⁷ Wolter 2017, 94.

³¹⁸ SD 361 (Uley 43), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 350–51.

³¹⁹ SD 215 (*Tab. Sulis* 10), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 274–75.

cloth ‘should not have rest’.³²⁰ Behind the prayers of Docilinus and Saturnina there is a strong element that seeks some kind of restoration of the relationships that have been broken by the wrong that has been done. In his prayer Docilinus allows for the possibility that the perpetrator acknowledges their offence and at Uley reimburses the value of the damage done in the blood of a wounded animal as ‘they redeem from you what they have administered to me’ (*(a te quod m[ihi] qđm[i-] | niş[tr]qverint redem[e]rint)*) and at Aquae Sulis returns ‘the hooded cloak to the temple of her [Sulis’] divinity’. In Saturnina’s prayer there is a strong element of the kind of bargaining that is absent from the prayers of Luke-Acts, but a central tenet of Roman prayer: *do ut des* (I give so that you might give).³²¹ Saturnina makes an offering to Mercury of one third of the value of the linen cloth that has been stolen to prompt the god to help recover the stolen property: ‘she gives a third part to the aforesaid god on condition that he exact this property which has been written above. A third part... what she has lost is given to the god Silvanus on condition that he exact it, whether man or woman, whether slave or free...’ (*deo s(upra)dicto tertiam partem donat ita ut (vacat) exigat istas res quae (vacat) s(upra)s(crip)ta sunt (vacat) ACA quae per<diti>t deo Silvano tertia pars donatur ita ut hoc exigat si vir si femina si ser[v]us si liber*).

Prayers that seek the harsh punishment of the perpetrator,³²² the restoration of the loss³²³ and some element of persuasion³²⁴ are characteristic of the prayers to the god Mercury at Uley. Our imagined readers would be challenged by the very different response advocated by Jesus to the kind of crisis they experienced. He had challenged his followers to love those one considers enemies by doing good to those who hate you, blessing those who curse you and praying for those who abuse you (Luke 6:27-28). One specific instance he gives speaks directly to those accustomed to addressing their god with prayers for justice:

from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt...: if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵροντός σου τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ τὸν χιτῶνα μὴ κωλύσης. ... καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵροντος τὰ σὰ μὴ ἀπαίτει

³²⁰ SD 356 (Uley 2), Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 346–47.

³²¹ Esler, pers. comm. Cf. Davenport 2021, 73. Beard, North, and Price 1998b, 32. Beard, North, and Price 1998a: 5.5a, Pliny, *Natural History* XXVIII.10-11 (129); 5.7b, stone inscription regarding The Saecular Games, ILS 5050, CIL VI.32323 lines 90-168 (139-140); 6.3a, Cato, *On Agriculture* 141 (152-153); but contrast 13.5e, Marcus Aurelius, *Communings with Himself* IX.40 (358-359).

³²² Cf. SD 355 (Uley 1); SD 356 (Uley 2); SD 358 (Uley 4); SD 359 (Uley 5); SD 361 (Uley 43); SD 365 (Uley 72); SD 366 (Uley 76); SD 367 (Uley 80); SD 371 (Uley 68); SD 372 (Uley 34); SD 373 (Uley 24); SD 411 (Uley 41); SD 431 (Uley 84); SD 436 (Uley 52).

³²³ Cf. SD 355 (Uley 1); SD 356 (Uley 2); SD 358 (Uley 4); SD 365 (Uley 72); SD 370 (Uley 78); SD 372 (Uley 34); SD 373 (Uley 24); SD 387 (Uley 83); SD 431 (Uley 84); SD 436 (Uley 52).

³²⁴ Cf. SD 355 (Uley 1); SD 356 (Uley 2); SD 358 (Uley 4); SD 359 (Uley 5); SD 364 (Uley 55); SD 366 (Uley 76); SD 366 (Uley 79); SD 367 (Uley 80); SD 370 (Uley 78); SD 387 (Uley 83); SD 431 (Uley 84); SD 436 (Uley 52).

ab eo qui aufert tibi vestimentum etiam tunicam noli prohibere ... et qui aufert quae tua sunt ne repetas (Luke 6:29-30)

Instead of seeking retribution against those perpetrating wrong against them, followers of Jesus are to follow a very different path which shapes their identity as followers of the Way. This spirit of forgiveness in the face of adversity expressed in this prayer is actualised in two further passages one can imagine catching the attention of people from the rural community around Uley drawn to follow the Way of Jesus, Jesus' prayer on the cross echoed in the words of Stephen as he is stoned to death:

Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.

πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἶδασιν τί ποιοῦσιν

Pater dimitte illis non enim sciunt quid faciunt Luke 23:34

Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

κύριε, μὴ στήσης αὐτοῖς ταύτην τὴν ἁμαρτίαν

Domine ne statuas illis hoc peccatum Acts 7:60

For our imagined readers the spirit of the prayer Jesus taught, with its focus on forgiveness, went to the heart of the Way they sought to follow. In the context of their rural community, it would become a type of boundary marker and 'engrave itself into the life of the community' in a way that differentiated them as followers of the Way of Jesus.³²⁵

4.5 Negotiating the Way through the world of a rural community

In an archive of written petitions addressed to Mercury in the Uley temple we glimpse the circumstances of named people from a rural community, their response to adversity and their relationship to the temple shrine in the vicinity of their homes. Whether we regard those petitions as curses, prayers for justice or somewhere in the grey area between, we witness people engaged in a practice that spanned the empire in space and time. Should people such as these have been drawn to follow the Way of Jesus, we can imagine how they might have responded to passages in Luke-Acts that touch on what you do when you go to a temple, on cursing, and on the practice of prayer. While some aspects of Luke-Acts would resonate with them, others would significantly challenge them.

We can test that conclusion in two ways. First, we can bring together the Lived Ancient Religion approach to such a practice with the discipline of Ordinary Theology. Second, we can draw on archaeological evidence that shows Christians engaging in this practice.

³²⁵ Green 1997, 440.

4.5.1 Ordinary Theology and an analytic framework

In his study of the Bath tablets, Tomlin makes a connection between those petitions to Sulis Minerva and ‘the naively written and touching requests for prayer that can sometimes be seen in an English parish church’;³²⁶ Versnel makes a similar link to what he describes as ‘letters to heaven’ encountered in churches today,³²⁷ as does Guy de la Bédoyère.³²⁸ Taking seriously the contemporary Christian practice of leaving written prayer requests in a church context offers us a point of comparison with the practice found at Uley, Bath and elsewhere. The study of those prayer requests gives us a direct insight into the thinking of ordinary people as they engage in an ordinary, everyday religious practice.

In his seminal work *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology*, Jeff Astley defines Ordinary Theology as ‘the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education’.³²⁹ Ordinary Theology takes seriously the thinking and reflection that ‘ordinary people’ undertake with reference to what they believe: it is a term that can be used of the study of that thinking.³³⁰

Adapting the methodology of Ordinary Theology, several studies have been made of prayer requests left in local churches today.³³¹ Alec Brown and Lewis Burton examined 58 prayer requests on the prayer board, and 419 entries in the visitors’ book, in a large medieval church popular with visitors in a small village in the north of England. They drew three conclusions. First, the location, the setting and the ambience of the church itself is important: 72% of the recorded entries in the visitors’ book referred to the beauty, peace and tranquillity of the church.³³² There is a pronounced connection here with the location of temples where curse tablets have been found: the breath-taking experience of seeing the sun setting over the Welsh mountains from the site of the Uley temple on the Cotswold escarpment has not changed since Honoratus deposited his prayer text long ago.³³³ Second, it is important to respect the semi-articulate and semi-formed God-talk of those whose

³²⁶ Tomlin 1988, 100.

³²⁷ Versnel 1991, 81.

³²⁸ de la Bédoyère 2007, 239. Accompanying a photograph of prayer requests on a noticeboard in Exeter Cathedral in 2002, he writes, ‘At this stand, visitors to the church can write and post prayers, messages and requests to the Christian God recalling how, in similar ways, the men and women of Roman Britain sought pagan divine intervention in their lives’.

³²⁹ Astley 2002, 1.

³³⁰ Astley 2002, 97.

³³¹ A. Brown and Burton 2007; Burton 2010; ap Siôn 2009.

³³² A. Brown and Burton 2007, 50.

³³³ Tilley 1994, 74; Aldhouse-Green 2004, 208–10: other temples where curse tablets have been found are also in breathtaking locations, especially those in the vicinity of the River Severn: Uley (see Map, 401), Lydney (see Map, 407) and Brean Down (see Map, 408).

perception of the divine has not been informed by the formal theological training of the academy or seminary. It is important not to be disparaging of those around Uley, Bath and elsewhere who petitioned the gods, but to take seriously their writings as a glimpse of their ordinary practice. This accords with the Lived Ancient Religion approach. Third, the God profiled by the ordinary theology of the prayers pinned to the prayer board is a personal God who cares about the vicissitudes of life experienced by the individual; shows love towards the sick, the disturbed, the dying and the bereaved; listens to human requests; and may influence significant events, even by intervening on the stage of human history.³³⁴ Those who petitioned the gods using curse tablets sought their intervention when they had been wronged in their everyday lives.

Tania ap Siôn has come to similar conclusions in a variety of different settings, rural and urban, using an analytic framework she has devised for intercessory prayer. First, ‘the prayer intention’ identifies what the prayer request is about; second, ‘the prayer reference’ identifies who the prayer is focused on; third, ‘the prayer objective’ differentiates prayer requests that are explicit about the desired outcome from those that are unspecific.³³⁵ In an initial study of a rural church the prayer intention of 29% of 917 prayer cards studied were non-specific, 21% had to do with illness and 16% with death. The prayer reference of 90% of the prayer requests was for people known personally to the prayer author or for global issues and only 4% were for the authors themselves. The prayer objective of 57% of the prayer authors placed the outcome in the hands of another and 43% indicated their desired outcome.³³⁶ Studies in other rural settings³³⁷ and in three urban settings³³⁸ produced interestingly nuanced variations, but much the same kind of result.

While it is not possible to make a direct comparison between these studies of intercessory prayers and the prayer requests of the Uley community that arise from a crisis in the life of each prayer author, interesting things emerge when ap Siôn’s framework is applied to the Uley tablets:

Tablet	Prayer Intention	Prayer Reference	Prayer Objective
SD 354 (Uley 6) – not clear enough			
SD 355 (Uley 1)	Theft of draught animal.	Author himself, Cenacus, complains to, and asks, the god Mercury.	Return of draught animal; failing that deprivation of health of

³³⁴ A. Brown and Burton 2007, 51.

³³⁵ ap Siôn 2009, 21.

³³⁶ ap Siôn 2009, 20.

³³⁷ ap Siôn 2009, 22–29; ap Siôn 2020.

³³⁸ ap Siôn 2015.

			thieves, Vitalinus and Natalinus, father and son.
SD 356 (Uley 2)	Theft of cloth.	Author herself, Saturnina, memorandum to the god Mercury (<i>written over Mars Silvanus</i>), the god Silvanus.	Return of cloth; failing that deprivation of rest of thief, whether man or woman, slave or free. Conditional gift to the god of a third part of the value – seeking exaction of the property.
SD 357 (Uley 3)	Theft of gold ring from [house] and iron fetter.	Author themselves to the god Mars/Mercury.	Who did wrong – let the god discover - reference gold ring and iron fetter.
SD 358 (Uley 4)	Theft of property.	Author himself, Biccus, gives Mercury whatever he has lost.	Return of the property to the temple; failing that, that the thief, whether man or male (sic) not urinate nor defecate nor speak nor sleep nor stay away nor [have] well being or health.
SD 359 (Uley 5)	Theft of bridle.	Author himself, gives to the god.	Return of property to god – the name of the thief, whether free or slave, man or woman, given to the god – two parts from his wife, a third to his health.
SD 360 (Uley 33) only names			
SD 361 (Uley 43)	Evil harm brought to animal.	Author himself, Docilinus, to the god Mercury; I ask that you drive them ...	Redemption of what Varianus and Peregrina and Sabinianus have done from god; failing that deprivation of health of sleep and drive them to greatest death.
SD 362 (Uley 49) only names			
SD 363 (Uley 50)	Probably to do with theft of one piece of (silver) plate and four rings.	Very fragmented – [probably author].	[No indication – but probably return; failing that retribution.]
SD 364 (Uley 55)	Probably to do with theft of material of a cloak.	Author, Mintla Rufus, to the god Mercury.	No indication – but probably return of the material of a cloak –

			whether woman or [man] given to the god.
SD 365 (Uley 72)	Theft of two wheels, four cows and many small belongings from my house.	Author, Honoratus, to the holy god Mercury, I complain to your divinity; I would ask the genius of your divinity; with renewed prayers I ask your divinity; my petition.	Return of property, reconciliation with Honoratus; failing that for man or woman, boy or girl, slave or free, deprivation of health, not allowing them to lie or sit or drink or eat. Seeks immediate fulfilment of prayer request.
SD 366 (Uley 76)	Those who are badly disposed towards me (and) who are acting badly over (?...).	Author to the holy god Mercury, I complain.	Do not allow those responsible, whether slave or free, male or female, to stand or sit, to drink or eat, or to buy off these angry acts/ provocations (?) unless with their own blood.
SD 367 (Uley 80)	Theft of gloves.	Author, the sheet (of lead) given to Mercury; asks the god Mercury.	Exact vengeance, take blood and health from thief as quickly as possible.
SD 368 (Uley 86) single name			
SD 369 (Uley 58) unpublished	Theft, perhaps of wool.		
SD 370 (Uley 78)	Cheated of denarii owed.	Author to the god Mercury.	That thief return denarii to temple; I give, offer, destine, depute 100,000 denarii to the god Mercury.
SD 371 (Uley 68)	Theft	Author, Carinus, implores the holy god Mercury	Mercury to permit Primanus the thief neither sun, nor moon, neither (...) of an infant; fulfil vengeance with his blood.
SD 372 (Uley 34)	Theft of ring.	Author, Genitus (or Cunitus?) to Mercury the <i>genius</i> , holy <i>genius</i> .	Do not permit the thief, whether (free woman(?)) or slave-girl, whether free man (...) of a woman, whether boy or girl (...) shame (...) with his foot (...) nor to eat nor to sit (at stool(?)) nor

			to (?) urinate unless he pay (...) at your temple.
SD 373 (Uley 24)	Theft of beehive.	Author to the god Mars the Propitious, complains to the god Mars.	Return of said hive to proper place; thief gains the goodwill of Mercury; failing that, not to permit the thief, whether slave or free, to drink or eat, nor (to have) sleep or health.
SD 387 (Uley 83) not in Sylloge	Theft of wethers (neutered rams).	Author, Pectillus, to the god.	That thief return them without bloodshed.
SD 390 (Uley 9) not in Sylloge	Theft of sheep, with evil intent.	Author, to the god Mercury.	Seeks their return; failing that, let the god kill the thief, whether slave or free, boy or girl, with his vile blood.
SD 431 (Uley 84) unpublished summary	Theft of two pewter plates.	Author, complaint to Mars (bearing title also used at Uley).	Half given to god for him to exact the property; failing that thief to suffer ill health.
SD 436 (Uley 52) not in Sylloge	Theft of linen, cloak and two silver coins.	Author	Return of property to temple; failing that, take from the thief, whether boy or girl, male slave or female, man or woman, soldier or civilian their marrow, blood, soul.

Table 7: Tania ap Siôn's analytic framework for intercessory prayer adapted for the Uley tablets.

First, of 20 prayer requests detailed enough to study, all have a clear prayer intention: 1 has to do with harm done to the pray-er; 1 has to do with animals that have been harmed; 18 have to do with theft (5 of animals, 1 of wool, 3 of farm implements, 5 of cloth and clothing, 3 of rings, 2 of plates, 2 of denarii, 3 of unidentified property). Second, the prayer reference is in each case to the prayer author themselves as they address the god of the temple: 9 name themselves; 12 address Mercury explicitly (of which 1 is written over Mars Silvanus and also addressed to Silvanus); 1 addresses Mars/Mercury; 1 addresses Mars; 2 address the god. Third, the prayer objective is explicit in all prayers: 3 name the perpetrators; 10 use catch-all phrases of the suspects; 13 seek the return of the property; 1 seeks reconciliation with the perpetrator; 6 seek return of the item stolen or payment to the temple; 16 seek physical suffering or death of the perpetrator.

That analytic framework brings into stark relief the observations we have made. Our imagined readers would be challenged to respond to theft in a different way and to have different concerns in prayer. They would find themselves questioning their emphasis on retribution and would be turned from manipulating the god they address in their praying.

4.5.2 Archaeological evidence of the first followers of the Way in Britannia

Secondly, we can turn to archaeological evidence. The petitions to Mercury were deposited at the temple in Uley over a long period of time. The nature of their deposition makes it impossible to date them precisely.³³⁹ As at Bath, they can only be dated palaeographically: the use of Old Roman Cursive script and New Roman Cursive suggests a range of dates from second to fourth centuries CE. By the end of this period there is evidence of the formation of groups of followers of the Way of Jesus in the vicinity of the River Severn. The *ROTAS SATOR* word square etched into the plaster of a house in Corinium, Cirencester, could possibly indicate the presence of followers of the Way of Jesus who valued the words of the prayer Jesus taught: the palindromic word square can be rearranged to spell out *PATER NOSTER* with Latin transliterations of the alpha and omega associated with Christ.³⁴⁰ The *Chi Rho* symbol has been found etched on paving slabs around the sacred spring at the Chedworth Roman villa suggesting the presence of followers of the Way of Jesus.³⁴¹ A pewter bowl with a rough *Chi Rho* monogram on the base was discovered in a house within the walled town of Venta Silurium (Caerwent); a nearby house may have been re-fashioned as a church.³⁴² Tradition going back to Gildas (c. sixth century) *martyrium* has it that nearby Isca (Caerleon) had witnessed the execution of Julius and Aaron, followers of the Way of Jesus, in the third century CE.³⁴³ In the fifth century CE the temple to Mercury was demolished and replaced with first a wooden, and later a stone basilica, possibly a Christian church. During that demolition and re-building, fragments of the statue to Mercury were used in the stone walls and its head carefully buried in a pit outside the south-eastern corner.³⁴⁴ Perhaps that community of followers of the Way of Jesus were asserting their identity and at the same time honouring what had gone before.

³³⁹ See above, 4.1: 155.

³⁴⁰ Atkinson 1951; Atkinson 1957; 'Acrostic, Corinium Museum' 2021; Kidd and Stevenson 1965, 7–8. Cf. the same inscription on the shoulder of a late second century CE amphora found in Manchester (Mamucium): B. Jones and Mattingly 1990, 295, 297.

³⁴¹ Cleary 2013, 97.

³⁴² Brewer 2006, 23; Manning 2001, 94.

³⁴³ So Seaman 2015 referencing Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, circa 535 CE; A. Breeze 2016 suggests a stronger case can be made for York (Map, 311) and stronger still for Leicester (Map, 414). The only other Christian martyr tradition from Roman Britain is Alban of Verulamium, St Albans (Map, 202).

³⁴⁴ Woodward and Leach 1993, 71, 73, 75; Aldhouse-Green 2018, 192–93.

It may well be that followers of Jesus at nearby Aquae Sulis (Bath) continued to present petitions to Sulis Minerva.³⁴⁵ Dated c. 275-400 CE, *SD 303 (Tab. Sulis 98)* contains the first extant use of the word *Christianus* (albeit mis-spelled) in Roman Britain. It appears as the first of a sequence of catch-all phrases, *seu gen[tili]s seu Ch(r)istianus*.

(vacat) seu gen[tili]s seu C- | h(r)istianus quaecumque utrum vir | utrum mulier utrum puer utrum puella | utrum s[er]vus utrum liber mihi Annia[n] | o Mantu[?]n(a)e de bursa mea s(e)x argente[o]s | furaverit tu d[o]mina dea ab ipso perexi[g]- | e[-c.1- eo]s si mihi pe[?] [f]raudem aliquam in DEP- | RE[?] [-c.1-]STVM dederit nec sic ipsi dona sed ut sangu- | inem suum (r)epu[?]tes qui mihi hoc inrogaverit.

Whether pagan or Christian, whether man or woman, whether boy or girl, whether slave or free, whoever has stolen from me, Annianus (son of) Matutina (?), six silver coins from my purse, you, lady Goddess, are to exact (them) from him. If through some deceit he has given me ... and do not give thus to him but reckon as (?) the blood of him who has invoked this upon me.³⁴⁶

Tomlin suggests this text is important for ‘its casual reference to Christianity’. Henig presumes the tablet was written by a pagan and suggests the use of this word implies an ordinary person as opposed to the specially designated *Christianus*.³⁴⁷ However, the use of the word *gentilis* by Christians to designate pagans,³⁴⁸ makes it far more likely that Annianus, the author of this text, belonged to a group of Christians and was still prepared to use a prayer for justice so like the many other prayers from Britannia.³⁴⁹ He was not alone, the use of the repeated phrase ‘in the house of god’ (*in d[omi]n[us] | [mo dei (?)]*) suggests the prayer for justice discovered in the Eccles Roman villa was also written by a Christian.³⁵⁰

J. N. Adams calls in question Tomlin’s reconstruction *gen[tili]s* and suggests *gens* is more probable, though unusual as a generic term. Drawing on evidence on its use by Pelagius and Theodore of Mopsuestia (who in a comment on Colossians 3:11 uses it to differentiate ‘gentile’ from *Iudaeus*) and on its use in an old Latin manuscript of Matthew 18:17, he explores the possibility there may be a usage represented in this tablet that can be traced back to the Greek Bible and the Hebrew Scriptures. In making this argument he refers to a gold phylactery discovered in Caernarfon from the Roman period with Hebrew written in Greek characters.³⁵¹

³⁴⁵ Aquae Sulis, see Map, 406.

³⁴⁶ *SD 303 (Tab. Sulis 98)*, Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 319–21; Tomlin 1988: this is the only tablet to be reversed; it contains other misspellings.

³⁴⁷ Henig 1984, 71.

³⁴⁸ *Tab. Sulis 98*: Tomlin 1988.

³⁴⁹ *SD 303 (Tab. Sulis 98)*, Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 320.

³⁵⁰ *SD 446 (Eccles)*, Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 370–71; Tomlin 1986, 428–31.

³⁵¹ J. N. Adams 1992, 11 and footnote 41. See *RIB* 436.

It can be argued that such a practice made more urgent the need for the kind of imagined reading of Luke-Acts we have been envisaging. In the second and third centuries CE followers of the Way had been developing the use of the codex to facilitate the reading of books such as Luke-Acts.³⁵² With the circulation of codices including Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts in the third century CE³⁵³ the followers of the Way of Jesus were becoming a ‘bookish’ people.³⁵⁴ On the one hand followers of the Way of Jesus who described themselves as *christianus* would notice the first use of the word to identify the disciples of Jesus in Antioch-on-the Orontes (Acts 11:26). It was perhaps because they continued to use prayers for justice that they needed to heed the challenge of Luke-Acts. We can imagine Luke-Acts serving as a corrective for communities such as the one Annianus belonged to: it was written

so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed

ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν

ut cognoscas eorum verborum de quibus eruditus es veritatem (Luke 1:4)

Their community was to be shaped by the spirit of prayer seen in the life of Jesus and among the first followers of the Way and narrated in Luke-Acts: it was to be characterised by a rejection of retribution and manipulation. Theirs was to be a community in which the kind of fracturing experienced under the escarpment at Uley was replaced with a sharing (Acts 2:44; 4:32-37) in which God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34-35; 15:7-8).

It is just possible they might have encountered a codex containing letters of Paul addressed to churches whose roots were described in Acts³⁵⁵ that spoke of being baptized into one body and drinking of one Spirit whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free (εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνες εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι: *sive Iudaei sive gentiles sive servi sive liberi* 1 Cor. 12:13) where all are one in Christ Jesus since

there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female.

οὐκ ἔστι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληνας, οὐκ ἔστι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔστι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ

non est Iudaeus neque Graecus non est servus neque liber non est masculus neque femina (Gal. 3:28)

where

³⁵² Hurtado 2006, 88.

³⁵³ Chester Beatty Papyrus 45: Hurtado 2006, 218.

³⁵⁴ Hurtado 2016.

³⁵⁵ E.g. Chester Beatty Papyrus 45: Hurtado 2006, 221; *Tab. Sulis* 98 (SD 303), Tomlin 1988: Tomlin suggests ‘it is tempting to think that a novel *gentilis/Christianus* pair was added as a tribute to the universal power of Sulis by someone who knew both the traditional formulae and the words of St Paul’.

there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!
ὅπου οὐκ ἔνι Ἕλληνα καὶ Ἰουδαῖος, περιτομὴ καὶ ἀκροβυστία, βάρβαρος, Σκύθη, δούλος, ἐλεύθερος, ἀλλὰ [τὰ] πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός
ubi non est gentilis et iudaeus circumcisio et praeputium barbarus et Scythia servus et liber sed omnia et in omnibus Christus (Col. 3:11)

Drawing on insights from 'Ordinary Theology' and from archaeological discoveries in the vicinity, there is evidence to suggest that followers of the Way of Jesus in and around the River Severn had an identity that differentiated them from others. We can imagine such followers encountering Luke-Acts and being challenged to strengthen that sense of identity as they are confronted with 'the truth concerning the things about which' they 'had been instructed' (Luke 1:4).

4.6 Conclusion: negotiating the Way with a radical spirituality

Though smaller in number and from a much longer period of time, the curse tablets of the Uley temple to Mercury can, in the looser sense, be described as an archive. Drawing on each aspect of the imagination we explored in 1.3 and the process we outlined in 1.6, our adaptation of archival ethnography has helped us to imagine not simply the individuals we encounter in the curse tablets, but also the network of relationships of which they were part (4.3). What we have seen with the mind's eye has been informed by attention to the location of the temple shrine and the nature of the tablets themselves (4.2). Our imagined reading of passages from Luke-Acts to do with temples, cursing and prayer has been warranted by close attention to the biblical text (4.4). We have been able to test those conclusions with reference to the discipline of Ordinary Theology and to the archaeological evidence of early followers of the Way who were contemporary with some of those responsible for the curse tablets (4.5). That there is evidence of the use of curse tablets by some Christians reinforces our imagined reading of Luke-Acts and takes us back to Luke 1:1-4. Luke-Acts is written so that such as these 'may know the truth concerning the things about which' they 'have been instructed'.

In moments of crisis Honoratus, Docilinus, Saturnina and others from that rural community around the temple to Mercury on the Cotswold escarpment turned not to the law for redress, but to the local temple. Were such as these to become followers of the Way and encounter Luke-Acts they would recognise the significance of the temple to the *iudaei* and of other temples in the context of Paul's travels. However, experiencing a sunset over the Severn and the Welsh mountains, we can imagine the words of Acts 7:48-50; 14:15; and 17:24-25 having the power to challenge them profoundly. A new and radically different source of help was to be found in the God of creation and

in a new network of relationships centred not on the local temple, but on a house meeting of followers of the Way and reaching far beyond.

They would expect the words of Jesus in declaring woe upon certain people to effect change and to make a difference. The wrong they experienced had caused divisions in their community for which they sought redress: they would recognise the reaction of Peter to the divisions caused by the actions of Ananias and Sapphira. They would particularly have been struck by the effect the words of the first followers of the Way of Jesus had. However, they would be challenged by the words of Jesus teaching his followers to bless those who curse them: heeding such words had the potential to shape an alternative kind of community. While at home with the emphasis in Luke-Acts on prayer they would be challenged to turn away from the transactional nature of the prayers for justice they brought to Mercury. Prayer for those following the Way of Jesus was very different. It had at its heart not the longing for retribution, but the challenge of forgiveness. This is nothing less than a radical spirituality, rooted in the teaching and practice of Jesus in Luke's Gospel and of the first followers of the Way in Acts.

5. CONCLUSION: IMAGINING LUKE-ACTS IN ROMAN BRITAIN TO LIVE AND ACT AND SERVE THE FUTURE HOUR

Imagining Luke-Acts in Roman Britain has demonstrated in general that the archaeology and history of Roman Britain opens windows on to the world of the New Testament, and specifically, that the Bloomberg tablets, the Vindolanda tablets, and the Uley curse tablets from an urban, a military and a rural context function as 'gateways into a lost world', giving us that sense of 'overwhelming closeness',¹ that enables us to engage with real people from the past and give an account of their everyday lives.² Though not archives in the strict sense, they lend themselves to the disciplines of archival ethnography and enable us to construct a new interpretation of the meanings Luke-Acts conveyed to its first audiences.

Key to our adaptation of archival ethnography has been the use of a multi-faceted imagination that in Wordsworth's words, sees 'into the life of things', is 'formed by patient observation', hears with 'the inward ear', and sees with 'that inward' and 'inner eye'.³ Understanding imagination as 'that which creates images'⁴ and 'the faculty which makes sense of things',⁵ we have guarded against flights of fancy by careful study of each corpus of texts. We have glimpsed the story of their discovery, outlined their historical context and studied the words written in each of them. With imagination's 'inward ear' we have heard Roman London's first voices in the Bloomberg tablets; with its 'inward eye' we have seen the people of a military community engaging with each other and with local people, happily and under duress, in the Vindolanda tablets; with its 'inner eye' we have seen the anguish of people from a rural community seeking help in time of crisis from a temple dedicated to Mercury in the Uley curse tablets.

Among the first followers of the Way of Jesus we meet within Luke-Acts itself, we encounter people from the world of commerce and trade we glimpse in the Bloomberg tablets, from the military world we see in the Vindolanda tablets and from the kind of rural community we meet in the Uley curse tablets. We have argued, therefore, that it is appropriate to imagine how people from these communities, were they to become followers of the Way of Jesus, would have responded to a reading of Luke-Acts. Our imagined readings are justifiable in the locations and with the writings

¹ Lennartsson 2011, 109.

² Esler 2017b, 4.

³ Poems of the Imagination XXVI, Preface to the edition of 1815, *Poems of the Imagination* XXIX, XII, XIX, Wordsworth 1934, 164, 753, 166, 149, 157.

⁴ Warnock 1976, 10.

⁵ Warnock 1976, 10.

chosen, informed by careful study of the data available, and warranted by close attention to the biblical text.

We can imagine a trader or merchant from first century Londinium, drawn to follow the Way of Jesus, recognising in Luke-Acts a familiar world of commerce and trade, of wealth and poverty, of honour and shame. In the teachings of Jesus and in the community life shared by his first followers they would be challenged to a radical generosity that reaches out to the poor, addresses the issue of debt and builds community in a spirit of general reciprocity.

A centurion, a woman of standing, or a prefect from the military community of Vindolanda drawn to follow the Way would also discover a familiar world in Luke-Acts, where centurions engaged with the local community far from their base, where women of agency had a part to play, where identity was found, and power asserted through a network of relationships that bound communities together and extended to Rome and the emperor. Encountering Luke-Acts they would be challenged to a radical inclusivity within a community of followers of the Way that would involve a year-round reversal of roles that includes others at the table, reaches out to the destitute, builds bridges with local peoples, and seeks justice for all.

Were someone from the rural community in the vicinity of the temple to Mercury at Uley to become a follower of the Way of Jesus and encounter Luke-Acts we can imagine them also finding a new identity in the new network of relationships they became part of. The breath-taking views from the escarpment over the Severn as the sun sets over the Welsh mountains may still be experienced. In that location the challenge of Luke-Acts to a Way rooted in the practice and teaching of Jesus and in the community spirit of the first followers of the Way would entail a radical spirituality: communicating with God in the community of the Way; blessing those who curse; and replacing the spirit of vindictive retribution that sought to manipulate the god of the local temple, with a spirit of forgiveness that was neither vindictive nor manipulative.

The challenge we imagine in all three contexts would be radical in the sense that it takes seriously the introductory words of Luke-Acts. Our imagined reading makes clear that Luke's Gospel functions as a book that is intended to be read or heard in its entirety. Whether or not it was intended for an individual of standing who is addressed as the 'most excellent Theophilus', a generic 'friend of God', or a specific community of followers of the Way, our imagined reading makes it clear that it is entirely plausible to maintain that Luke-Acts was written for communities of the Way anywhere in

the Roman empire, and to see it functioning as a corrective to guide people in the Way. As such Luke-Acts is written so that those who already follow the Way 'may know the truth about which' they had been instructed (Luke 1:4).

People such as we encounter in mid-first century Londinium, in late first and early second century Vindolanda, and in the later Uley shrine, would, on becoming followers of the Way, find their world turned upside down with a radical generosity, a radical inclusivity and a radical spirituality. They would not, however, be prompted to engage in revolution against Rome. It is as one imagines them reading or hearing the narrative of Luke-Acts unfold that this paradox becomes apparent. It is precisely at the point at which he has encountered Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55), Jesus' programmatic sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30), and his teaching to his disciples (Luke 6:20-49), that our imagined centurion of Vindolanda would encounter the centurion of Capernaum (Luke 7:1-10). Our imagined traders of Londinium would have encountered the bleak parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21) and the narrative of the ruler challenged to sell all that he has (Luke 18:18-30) only to find that the wealthy Zacchaeus is able to retain half his possessions (Luke 19:1-10). They would go on to read of a community where all is shared (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-5:11), only to find that there was room for Lydia, Aquilla, Priscilla, and Paul himself, all of whom continue to be involved in the world of trade (Acts 16:11-40; 18:1-4).

Within the community of followers of the Way they would find an upside down world, where it was the norm for the exalted to be humbled, the destitute welcomed to the table (Luke 14:7-24) and everything shared (Acts 2:44-45); where a spirit of forgiveness replaced the longing for retribution (Luke 11:1-13).

I finish as I started, by extending to the reader the invitation Graham Ward shared as he came to the end of his celebration of imagination: 'the exercise of my imagination as a writer is an invitation to exercise your mind as a reader'.⁶ It must, however, be an informed imagination. That invites further research. I have offered a broad-brush approach that has taken in three disparate archives and a range of passages from Luke-Acts. The same approach could be used of other gospels, letters and the book of Revelation. With the Bloomberg tablets only published in 2016 and the publication of the full corpus of Uley tablets imminent, a full ethnographic study of the people responsible for those tablets has yet to be undertaken; there is always more to be done as more Vindolanda tablets are discovered and published. The inter-connectedness apparent among many of the people

⁶ Ward 2018, 237.

responsible for the Vindolanda tablets and implied among the people responsible for the Bloomberg tablets, and in a different way in the rural community around Uley, suggests that the kind of Social Network Analysis of archival material developed by Lena Tambs and others for studying socio-economic realities could contribute much.⁷ More detailed study of each archive would lend itself to more detailed study of specific themes or passages within Luke-Acts and other New Testament books. This adaptation of archival ethnography making use of one or all of these corpora lends itself to the narrative approach of Jeannine Brown, producing an imagined reading of Luke-Acts from beginning to end.⁸

Recent research suggests it most unlikely that Claudius marched with elephants into Camulodunum in 43 CE as Cassius Dio seems to imply.⁹ There has, however, been throughout our imagined reading an elephant in the room. There is scarcely any mention of local peoples in any of the three archives. It would be useful to draw on research that seeks to give them a voice in developing our imagined reading further.¹⁰

To re-enact in our minds the world of the Bloomberg tablets, the Vindolanda tablets and the Uley curse tablets has enabled us to connect with people from an urban, a military and a rural community in Roman Britain. Little did they imagine that something from their hands would still 'have power to live and act and serve the future hour'.¹¹ It is that service that has enabled us to imagine Luke-Acts through the eyes of those who were contemporaries of its first readers and see afresh its challenge to a radical generosity, a radical inclusivity and a radical spirituality.

⁷ Tambs 2021; Tambs 2022.

⁸ J. K. Brown 2022; J. K. Brown 2020.

⁹ Charles and Singleton 2022; Cassius Dio LX.21.2, Cary and Foster 1914ff., Vol. VIII, 420-421. See Map, 203.

¹⁰ The Map, 42, is based in part on the *Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain* which is criticised by David Mattingly for being a map of Roman Britain and not a map of Britain in the Roman empire as it limits itself primarily 'to the features of government and domination, and of elite society'. D. J. Mattingly 2007, 356–69.

¹¹ *The River Duddon* XXXIV 'After-thought': Wordsworth 1934, 303.

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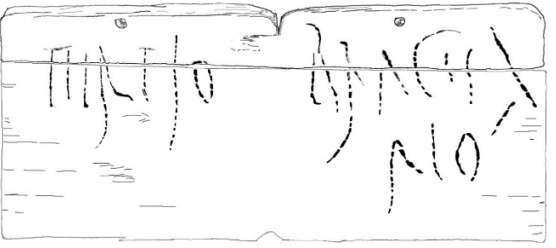


APPENDIX: THE TABLETS

Appendix to Chapter 2: The Bloomberg Tablets

Key conventions used in the transcriptions:¹

(i), (ii)	separate columns of text (type 2 tablets; ink tablets)
. . .	the text is broken or incomplete at the top or bottom
<i>uacat</i>	space left by the scribe on the tablet
[[abc]]	letter(s) erased by the scribe
'abc'	letter(s) added by the scribe above or below the line
(abc)	letter(s) omitted by abbreviation, or a symbol explained
(...)	abbreviation of uncertain length
<abc>	lost or damaged letter(s) restored
[...]	lacuna in the text of uncertain length
{s}	superfluous letter
ⱭⱮ	doubtful or partially preserved letter(s)
.	trace of one letter
..	trace of two letters
...	trace of at least three letters
<i>traces</i>	illegible letters
?	precedes a word whose reading is not certain, and an uncertain translation.
*	(in the catalogue commentary) conjectured word or form not known to exist.
	line break
Hyperlink	connects to the permalink in the appropriate entry in <i>Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i>

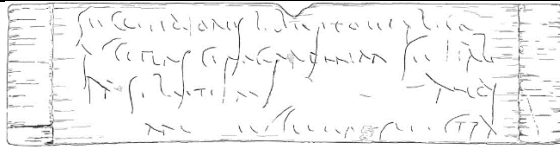
Note the site period date range represents the context in which the tablet was found. Explicit dates and other internal evidence sometimes indicate that tablets are older.

No.	<i>Tab. Lond. Bloomberg</i>	Texts, Context and Details
12	  	<p>Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 12² W 135.0 × H (58.4) × Th R: 8.0 × Th F: 6.1 mm Date of site period: 80-90/5 CE Correspondence: address with name of recipient. Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin</p> <p><i>Tertio bracea vacat rio</i></p> <p>To Tertius, the ?brewer.</p>
27		<p>Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 27³ W 142.9 × H (35.7) × Th R: 5.0 × Th F: 4.9 mm Date of site period: 80-90/5 CE Correspondence: Letter-text with first line</p>

¹ Tomlin 2016, 7. Different conventions are used for the Vindolanda Tablets and the Uley Curse Tablets. 'There is still no absolute standardization in presentation', Cooley 2012, 351; see 350–60 for a fuller listing of editorial conventions and a discussion of their importance. Cooley comments that 'it is crucial not to mislead the reader into thinking that letters in a text are more legible than they really are' (351).

² Tomlin 2016, 82–83.

³ Tomlin 2016, 112–13.



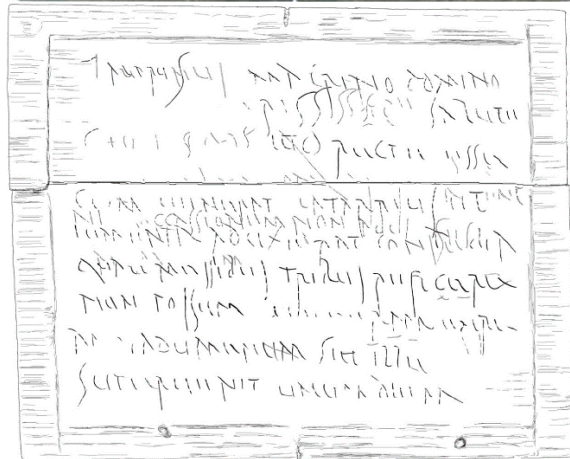
50 mm

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

¹ *Secundionis liberto Vialico | vacat sal(utem) | accipias
c<h>irographum seru[i] | M(arci?) S[a]luii M[... ..]tandi
| ⁵ traces | . . .*

To Vialicus, the freedman of Secundio, greetings.
Would you receive the note of hand of the slave of
?Marcus Saluius M[... ..]

29



50 mm

[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 29⁴](#)

W 139.4 × H 113.7 × Th R: 5.9 × Th F: 4.5 mm

Date of site period: 80-90/5 CE

Correspondence: letter-text with first line

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin.

For reconstruction see above, 44, figure 4.

¹ *Taurus [Taurinus] Macrino domino
| vacat [ca]riss[imo] salute<m> | traces recte esse
| traces | ⁵ cum uenerat Çatarrius et | [ni
[o]ccas[s]ionem non adii[s]ses] | iumenta aduxerat,
conpe<n>dia | quae messibus tribus reficere | non
possum [?ad]fueram [?he]re | ¹⁰ a[d D]iadumenum set
ille | superuenit unum diem*

Taurus (written over Taurinus) to Macrinus his dearest
lord, greetings. ... in good health ... when Catarrus had
come and had taken the beasts of burden away,
investments which I cannot replace in three months.
?Yesterday I was at (the house of) Diadumenus, but he
(Catarrus) arrived unexpectedly for a single day ...

30



[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 30⁵](#)

W 127.4 × H (58.7) × Th R: 7.4 × Th F: 6.0 mm

Date of site period: 43-53 CE

Correspondence: letter-text, first line lost

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

outer

¹ *dabis Tito auia|rius*

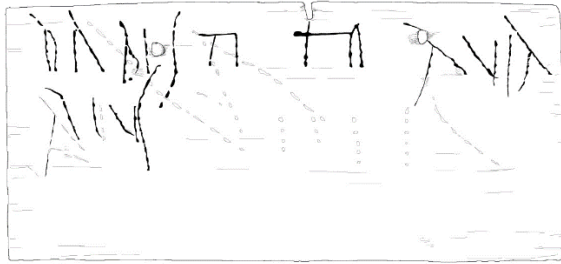
inner

. . . | ¹ *quia per forum totum | gloriantur se te
faene|ras<s>e itaque te rogo tua | causa ne tu turpis
appar<e>|⁵ as in ...cus non sic | res tuas ?ama[bis] |
et.put[a]s traces*

outer

⁴ Tomlin 2016, 116–19.

⁵ Tomlin 2016, 120–23.

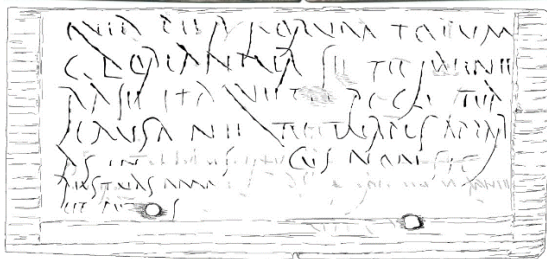


You will give (this) to Titus ...

inner

... because they are boasting through the whole market that you have lent them money. Therefore I ask you in your own interest not to appear shabby ... you will not thus favour your own affairs ...

50 mm



50 mm

31



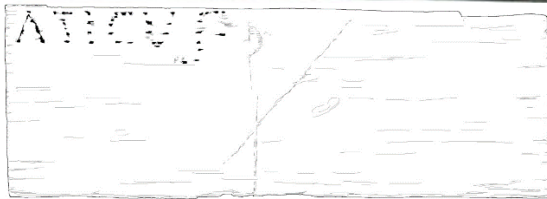
[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 31](#)⁶

W 127.0 × H (44.0) × Th R: 7.1 × Th F: 6.1 mm

Date of site period: 62-65/70CE

Correspondence: letter-text, first line lost

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin



outer

. . . / ¹ At<t>icus vacat

inner

. . . / ¹ traces | rogo [te] per panem et sal|em ut quam primum mit|tas (denarios) uiginti sex in uictoriat(is) | ⁵ et (denarios) decem Paterionis | . . .

50 mm



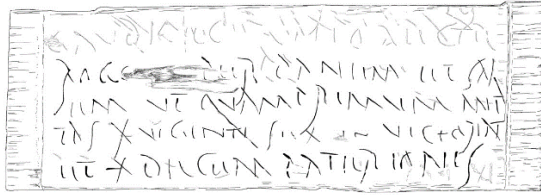
outer

... (from) Atticus.

inner

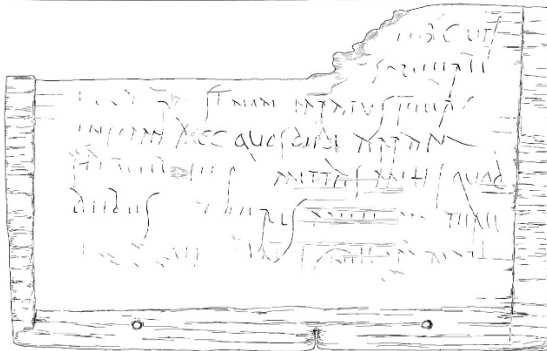
... I ask you by bread and salt that you send as soon as possible the 26 denarii in victoriati and the 10 denarii of Paterio ...

⁶ Tomlin 2016, 124–27.



50 mm

35



50 mm

[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 35](#)⁷

W 140.7 × H (90.3) × Th R: 9.3 × Th F: 5.2 × W seal-groove: 25.0 mm

Date of site period: 65/70-80 CE

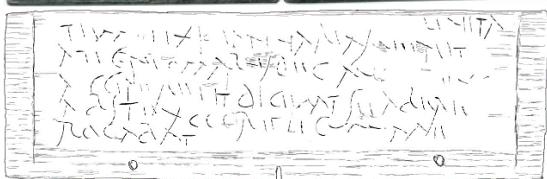
Correspondence: letter-text, first line lost

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

. . . | ¹ [...] traces | [...] *solvere* | traces [e]st non
 ?m<i>ra>tus tueri | in eam (denarios) cc quoş dedi
 arram | ⁵ traces mittas mihi quod | debes [...]eris ...tere
 | traces

... to pay ... ?he was not surprised to watch over ... for it
 200 denarii which I have given (as) deposit ... would
 you send me what you owe ... you will ...

37



50 mm

[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 37](#)⁸

W 145.0 × H (45.7) × Th R: 6.7 × Th F: 5.7 mm

Date of site period: 65/70-80 CE

Correspondence: Letter-text, first line lost

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

. . . | ¹ [... ad (or in)] *çijita* | tem iix *ç(alendas) Iqnuarias*
uenit | *Atigniomas* *decau* traces | *accipere et dicebat*
se <h>abere | ⁵ *abs te (denarios) ccc riçe cum me* |
rogabat vacat

... Atigniomas came to the city on the 8th day before
 the Kalends of January (25 December) ... he was saying
 that he is in receipt and has from you the 300 denarii
 properly. When he was asking me ...

38



[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 38](#)⁹

W 147.0 × H (46.0) mm

Date of site period: 80-90/5 CE

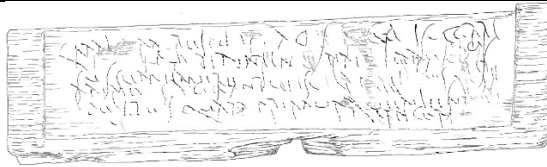
Correspondence: letter-text, first line lost

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

⁷ Tomlin 2016, 134–35.

⁸ Tomlin 2016, 138–39.

⁹ Tomlin 2016, 140–41.

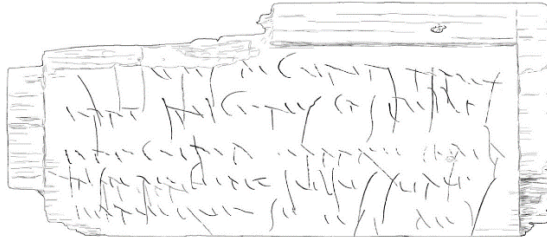


50 mm

. . . | ¹ mal[.]m res id est ad[s.]cer[.]i succurri
| traces | fussum emerent ues traces [do] | mine
f(rater), cum vacat | ⁵ quibus quam primum uenient
| vacat a Tincori[.]

... property, that is ... to be helped ... that they buy
the *fussum* ... lord brother, with which
[or whom, plural] they will come as soon as possible
from Tincori[...]

39



50 mm

[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 39](#)¹⁰

W 136.7 × H (58.0) × Th R: 11.5 × Th F: 7.9 mm

Date of site period: 80-90/5

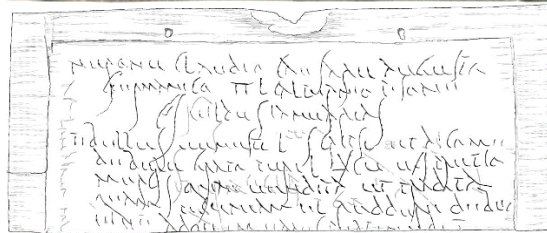
Correspondence: letter-text, first line lost

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

¹ traces | erat in Icenis castellō | ?Eḡpocuria
ḡamque traces | in se recepit Iulius Suavis | ⁵ ... neque
se ... | . . .

... was in (the canton of) the Icenii at the fort of
?Eḡpocuria, and Julius Suavis has accepted it for himself
... nor he ...

44



50 mm

[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 44](#)¹¹

W 137.3 × H (56.2) × Th R: 7.6 × Th F: 4.6 mm

Date of site period: 53-60/1

Date: 8 January 57 CE

Financial or legal document, dated

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

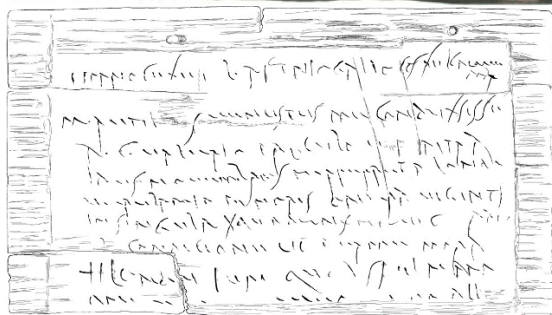
¹ Nerone Claudio Cesare Augusto | Germanico ii
L(ucio) Calpurnio Pisone | vacat co(n)s(ulibus) uī Idus
Ianuarias vacat | Tibullus Venusti l(ibertus) scripsi et
dico me | ⁵ debere Grato <S>puri l(iberto) (denarios) cu
ex{s} pretio | mercis quae uendita et tradita <est> |
quam pecuniam ei reddere debeo | eiue ad quem ea
res pertinebit | . . .

In the consulship of Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus
Germanicus for the second time and of Lucius
Calpurnius Piso, on the 6th day before the Ides of
January (8 January 57 CE). I, Tibullus the freedman of
Venustus, have written and say that I owe Gratus the
freedman of Spurius 105 denarii from the price of the
merchandise which has been sold and delivered. This
money I am due to repay him or the person whom the
matter will concern ...

¹⁰ Tomlin 2016, 142-143.

¹¹ Tomlin 2016, 152-55.

45



50 mm

[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 45](#)¹²

W 142.0 × H (81.0) × Th R: 7.4 × Th F: 4.2 mm

Date of site period: 60/1-62 CE

Date: 21 October 62 CE

Correspondence: letter-text, first line lost

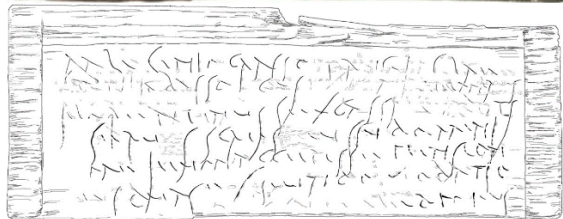
Financial or legal document, dated

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

¹ P(ublio) Mario Ce<Iso> L(ucio) Afinio Gallo
co(n)s(ulibus) xii Kal(endas) Nove`mbr(es) | M(arcus)
Renn[iu]s Venustus me condux[s]isse | a C(aio) Valerio
Proculo ut intra | Idus Nouembres perferret a [Londi]
| ⁵ Verulamio penoris onera uiginti | in singula (denarii)
quadrans uecturae | ea condicione ut per me mora |
(asses) i Londinium quod si ulnam | om[n]e[m] traces |
...

In the consulship of Publius Marius Celsus and Lucius Afinius Gallus, on the 12th day before the Kalends of November (21 October 62 CE). I, Marcus Rennaius Venustus, (have written and say that) I have contracted with Gaius Valerius Proculus that he bring from Verulamium by the Ides of November (13 November) 20 loads of provisions at a transport-charge of one-quarter denarius for each, on condition that ... one as ... to London; but if ... the whole ...

50



50 mm

[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 50](#)¹³

W 147.0 × H (61.0) × Th R: 7.1 × Th F: 6.9 mm

Date of site period: 80-90/5 CE

Date: 64 CE

Financial or legal document, dated

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

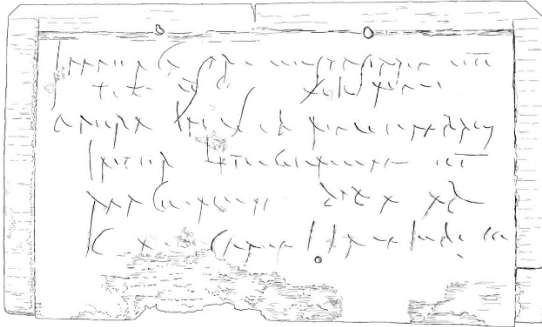
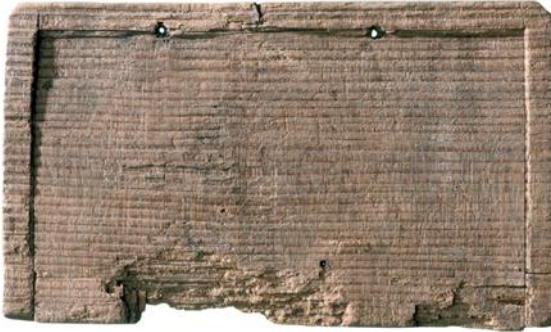
¹ M(arco) Licinio Crasso [F]r[ui]gi et C(aio) Lae|[c]ani[o]
Basso co(n)s(ulibus) [...]embr[es]. | Florentinus Sex(ti)
Cassi [...]ti | seru[us] scrips[i] iussu domini | ⁵ mei eum
accepisse pension[es] duas ex fundo uodatio | traces

In the consulship of Marcus Licinius Crassus Frugi and Gaius Laecanius Bassus (ad 64), on the [... day before the ...] of [...]ember. I, Florentinus, the slave of Sextus Cassius [...]tus, have written by order of my master that he has received the two payments from the ... farm ...

¹² Tomlin 2016, 156–59.

¹³ Tomlin 2016, 168–69.

51



50 mm

[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 51](#)¹⁴

W 133.7 × H (77.7) × Th R: 8.3 × Th F: 5.4 mm

Date of site period: 80-90/5 CE

Date: 22 October 76 CE

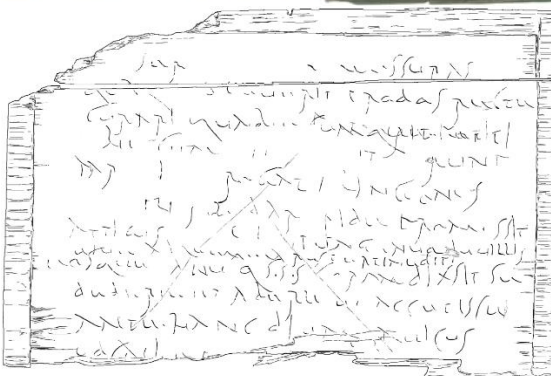
Financial or legal document, dated

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

¹ *imper(atore) Ca[e]sarē Vespasiano uii | Tit[o] u
c[o](n)s(ulibus) xi K(alendas) Nou(embres) | opera in u
Id(us) Nouembres | inter Litugenum et | ⁵ Magunum
data ab | Ca[e]sarē pra(i)udico | . . .*

In the consulship of the Emperor Caesar Vespasian for the seventh time (and) of Titus for the fifth time, on the 11th day before the Kalends of November (22 October 76 CE). Responsibility (for the case) between Litugenus and Magunus on the 5th day before the Ides of November (9 November) having been given by the emperor, my preliminary judgement is [...]

55



50 mm

[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 55](#)¹⁵

W 146.0 × H (77.8) × Th R: 8.2 × Th F: 5.8 mm

Date of site period: 65/70-80 CE

Financial or legal documents, date lost

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

¹ *[et] sor[tem et eorum u]s[s]uras | qu[is] de[be]uerit
probos recte | curari qua(n)do[m]que peti[er]it
| traces [...]runt | ⁵ Nar[cisso] Rogati Lingonis | [rec]te
[p]ro[be] dari fide promis[s]it |
Atticus traces ?[I]ng[e]nuo ... illis | eiue ad quem ea res
pertinebit | eosque [m]anu q(ui) s(upra) s(cripti) s(unt)
çoram dix[s]it se | ¹⁰ debere et <h>abere et accepisse |
ante hanc diem Atticus | traces | . . .*

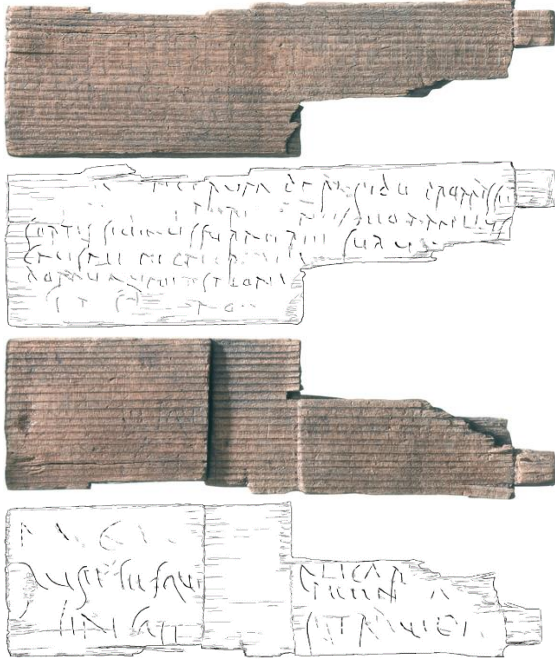
... and the principal and the interest on them which he shall have owed ... to be properly managed in good (coin) whenever he shall have requested ...

To Narcissus (the slave) of Rogatus the Lingonian, Atticus ... has properly, truly, faithfully promised (it is) to be given, to Ingenuus ... or to him to whom the matter will pertain. And in the presence of those who have been written in (their own) hand above, Atticus has said that he owes and holds and has received before this day ...

¹⁴ Tomlin 2016, 170–71.

¹⁵ Tomlin 2016, 178–81.

56



50 mm

[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 56](#)¹⁶

W (131.6) × H (35.5) × Th R: 7.7 × Th F: 5.7 × W seal-groove: 20.8 mm

Date of site period: 65/70-80 CE

Financial or legal documents, date lost

Image © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

ungrooved

. . . | ¹ traces *rum dari fide promis{s}it* | traces *us* | *sortis siue us{s}urae sub u[...]* | *causae* traces | ⁵ *đomu qu...stioni[...]* | traces | . . .

grooved.i

. . . | ¹ traces | *Rusticus qui* | *singu|[?laris]* | . . .

grooved.ii

. . . | ¹ *peçar[...]* | traces | *...uici* | . . .

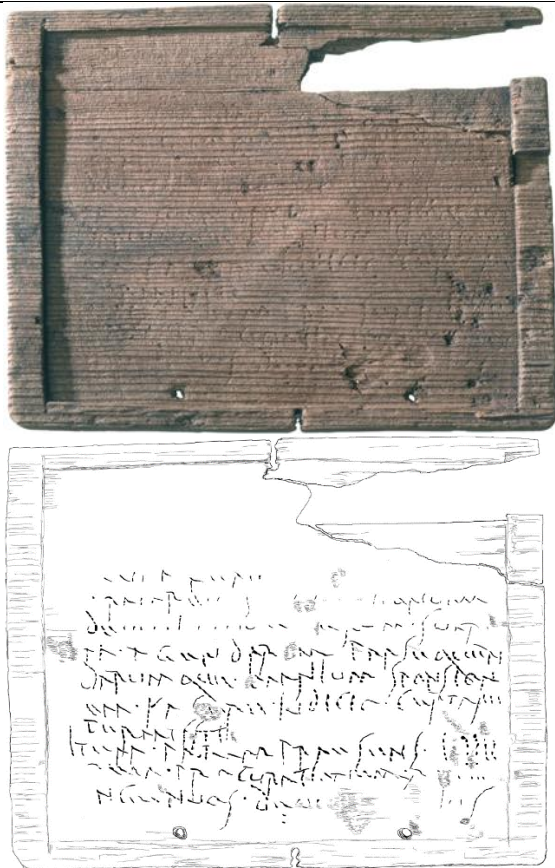
ungrooved

... (he) promised in good faith would be given ... of the principal or of the interest ...

grooved

... Rusticus who ... ?bodyguard ...

57



50 mm

[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 57](#)¹⁷

W 142.3 × H 112.0 × Th R: 7.0 × Th F: 6.3 mm

Date of site period: 80-90/5 CE

Financial or legal document, date lost

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

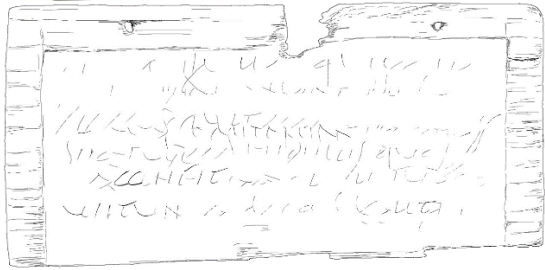
¹ traces | traces | *de... [r]erum suar[u]|m agendarum persequen* | ⁵ *darumque omnium sponson* | *em façere iudicio certare* | *permis(i)sti vacat* | *item aqtem praesens ille* | *rem procuratiqem r...* | ¹⁰ *[i]ngenuos d... ius*

... you have permitted [name] to enter into an undertaking of doing and pursuing all his business (and) to contend in judgement. But likewise, he (being) present ... the matter, the management ... free-born (persons) ...

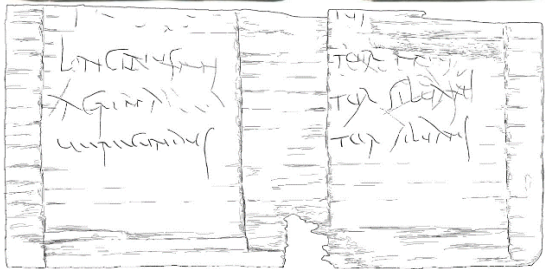
¹⁶ Tomlin 2016, 182-183.

¹⁷ Tomlin 2016, 184-85.

62



50 mm



50 mm

[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 62](#)¹⁸

W 146.3 × H (70.8) × Th R: 9.5 × Th F: 6.4 × Th F at band: 6.0 mm

Date of site period: 80-90/5 CE

Financial or legal document, list of witnesses

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

ungrooved

1 traces | traces | traces [...] *britorum* traces | ? *sed* traces | 5 *accepit* traces | *uetun*[...] traces

grooved

(i)		(ii)

1	traces	<i>tur</i> (<i>ma</i>) [...]
	<i>Longinus</i>	<i>tur</i> (<i>ma</i>) <i>Mar</i> [...]
	<i>Agrippa</i>	<i>tur</i> (<i>ma</i>) <i>Silvani</i>
	<i>Verecundus</i>	<i>tur</i> (<i>ma</i>) <i>Silvani</i>
5	<i>vacat</i>	<i>vacat</i>

	[...],	troop of [...];
	<i>Longinus</i> ,	troop of <i>Mar</i> [...];
	<i>Agrippa</i> ,	troop of <i>Silvanus</i> ;
	<i>Verecundus</i> ,	troop of <i>Silvanus</i> .

65



[Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 65](#)

W 137.5 × H 114.6 × Th R: 9.0 × Th F: 5.7 × W seal-groove: 22.2 mm

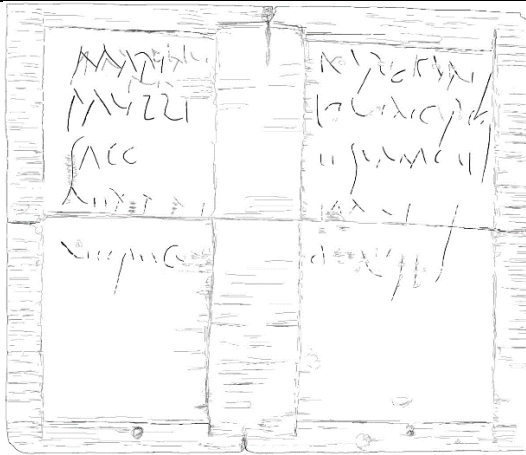
Date of site period: 80-90/5 CE

Financial or legal document, list of witnesses

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

(i)	(ii)
<i>Mari</i>	traces
<i>Paulli</i>	traces
<i>Sacc[i]</i>	traces
traces	traces
<i>Verecu[n] d[i...]</i>	
<i>vacat</i>	<i>vacat</i>

¹⁸ Tomlin 2016, 198–201.



(Seal) of Marius (*perhaps* Marus) ...
 (seal) of Paullus ...
 (seal) of Saccus ...
 (seal) of ...
 (seal) of Verecundus.

50 mm



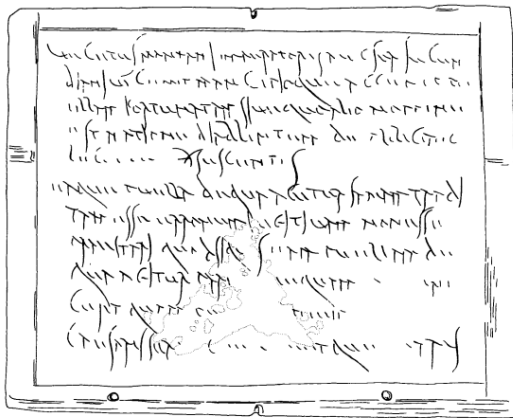
[‘The Girl in Question’: a New Text from Roman London: 1 Poultry](#)¹⁹

W 140 × H 114 × Th 6 mm

Approx. Date: 75-125 CE

Image: © MOLA, drawn by Roger S. O. Tomlin

*Vegetus Montani imperatoris Aug(usti) ser(vi) lucun |
 diani vic(arius) emit mancipioque accepit pu | ellam
 Fortunatam sive quo alio nomine | est natione
 Diablintem de Albiciano | LEG[...] (denariis) sescentis |
 ea(m)que puella(m)que de qua agitur sanam tradi- |
 tam esse erronem fugitivam non esse | praestari quod
 si qu[i]s earn puellam de | qua agitur par[tem]ve quam
 [evicerit] | cera quam pe[r geni]um [imperatoris] |
 Caesaris scrifpsit iuravitque [...]ARIS*



'Vegetus, assistant slave of Montanus the slave of the August Emperor and sometime assistant slave of lucundus, has bought and received by mancipium the girl Fortunata, or by whatever name she is known, by nationality a Diablintian, from Albicianus [...] for six hundred denarii. And that the girl in question is transferred in good health, that she is warranted not to be liable to wander or run away, but that if anyone lays claim to the girl in question or to any share in her, [...] in the wax tablet which he has written and sworn by the genius of the Emperor Caesar [...]


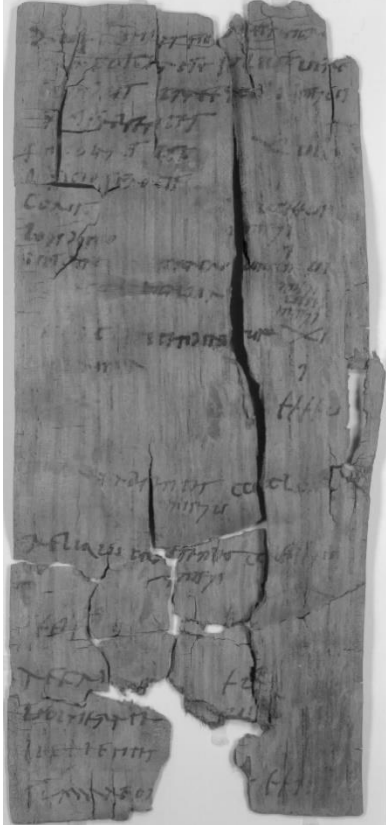
¹⁹ Tomlin 2003 (Paywall).

Appendix to Chapter 3: The Vindolanda Tablets

Conventions employed in the presentation of the texts:²⁰

i, ii	designate separate columns of text following the original layout.
. . .	indicates that the text is broken or incomplete at the top or bottom
<i>m</i> ¹ , <i>m</i> ²	distinguish different hands in the text.
[]	indicates a lacuna in the text.
[c.4]	estimate of the number of letters missing in a lacuna.
<i>uacat</i>	a space left by the scribe on the tablet.
[[abc]]	letters crossed out or erased by the scribe.
'abc'	letters or words added by the scribe above the line.
<abc>	letters erroneously omitted by the scribe.
{abc}	superfluous letters written by the scribe.
ⱭⱮⱯ	doubtful or partially preserved letters.
praef(ecto), (centurio)	expansion or resolution of an abbreviation or symbol.
▶	interpunct, a medial point between words
	line break
<i>Italics</i>	<i>amendments by R. C. in the light of III Appendix</i>
Hyperlinks	connect to the permalink in the appropriate entry in <i>Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i> and to the entry in the British Museum, Collections Online.

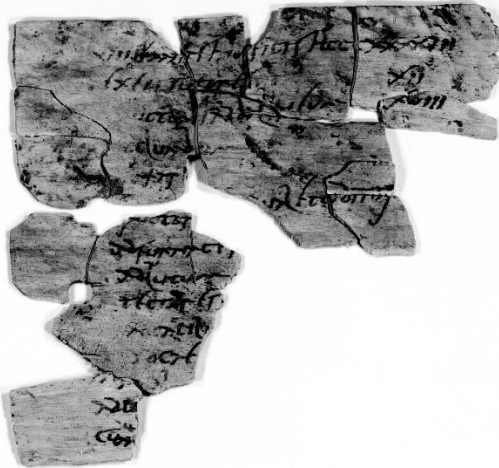
²⁰ Bowman 2003, 100; Bowman and Thomas 2019b, Introduction IV, Palaeography. Different conventions are used for the Bloomberg Tablets and the Uley Curse Tablets. 'There is still no absolute standardization in presentation', Cooley 2012, 351; see 350–60 for a fuller listing of editorial conventions and a discussion of their importance. Cooley comments that 'it is crucial not to mislead the reader into thinking that letters in a text are more legible than they really are' (351).

No	Tab. Vindol.	Text, Context and Details																																		
II 118		<p>Tab. Vindol. II 118 Literary and sub-literary text; writing practice, verse W 100 × H 15 Date: 97-105 CE © The Trustees of the British Museum: 1986,1001.128</p> <p>. . . INTEREA PAVIDAM VOLITANS P!NNA TA. VBEM m² seq. vacat . . .</p> <p>Meanwhile winged Rumour flew in haste through the settlement (in a different hand) ? slack (see above, 3.3: 106)</p>																																		
II 154		<p>Tab. Vindol. II 154 Military document Strength report of <i>I cohors Tungrorum</i> W 86 × H 394 Date: 92-97 CE © The Trustees of the British Museum: 1989,0602.21</p> <p><i>xv K(alendas) Iunias n(umerus) p(urus) [co]h(ortis) i Tungror[um] cui prae<e>st Iulius Vere cundus praef(ectus) d[omi]ni in is (centuriones) vi ex eis absentes ⁵ singulares leg(ati) xvi officio Ferox Coris cccxxxvij in is (centuriones) ij Londinio vacat (centurio) [i] ¹⁰ uq[ue] ad[] c. 4 [. . .] ap[er]t[ur]a . . . vi in is (centurio) i] q[ue] allia viiii in is (centurio) i . . . c. . . ip[er]d[er]at[ur]um xi ¹⁵ in a xxxv summa absentes cccclvj in is (centuriones) v reliqui praesentes cclxxxvi ²⁰ in is (centurio) i ex eis aegri xv uolnerati vi] p[er]p[er]ientes [x] ²⁵ summa eor[um] xxxi reliqui ualent[es] cc]lxv in [is (centurio) i]</i></p> <p>18 May, net number of the First Cohort of Tungrians, of which the commander is Iulius Verecundus the prefect 752</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">including centurions</td> <td style="text-align: right;">6</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">of whom there are absent:</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">guards of the governor</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">at the office of Ferox</td> <td style="text-align: right;">46</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">at Coria</td> <td style="text-align: right;">337</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">including centurions</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2 (?)</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">at London</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1 (?)</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">centurion</td> <td style="text-align: right;">6</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">including centurion</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">including centurion</td> <td style="text-align: right;">9</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">including centurion</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">at (?) ...</td> <td style="text-align: right;">11</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: right;">1 (?)</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: right;">45</td> </tr> <tr> <td>total absentees</td> <td style="text-align: right;">456</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">including centurions</td> <td style="text-align: right;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>remainder, present</td> <td style="text-align: right;">296</td> </tr> </table>	including centurions	6	of whom there are absent:		guards of the governor		at the office of Ferox	46	at Coria	337	including centurions	2 (?)	at London	1 (?)	centurion	6	including centurion	1	including centurion	9	including centurion	1	at (?) ...	11		1 (?)		45	total absentees	456	including centurions	5	remainder, present	296
including centurions	6																																			
of whom there are absent:																																				
guards of the governor																																				
at the office of Ferox	46																																			
at Coria	337																																			
including centurions	2 (?)																																			
at London	1 (?)																																			
centurion	6																																			
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including centurion	9																																			
including centurion	1																																			
at (?) ...	11																																			
	1 (?)																																			
	45																																			
total absentees	456																																			
including centurions	5																																			
remainder, present	296																																			



including centurion	1
from these:	
sick	15
wounded	6
suffering from inflammation of the eyes	10
total of these	31
remainder, fit for active service	265
including centurion	1

II 155



[Tab. Vindol. II 155](#)

Military document
 dimensions unrecorded
 Date: 97-105 CE
 © The Trustees of the British Museum: [1980,0303.1](#)

*vii K(alendas) Maias fab̄ricis h(omines) cccxxxiii | ex
 eiş sutores vacat xii | ş[tr]uctoşes ad balneum xviii |
 [a]d plumbum vacat [| ⁵ [a]d. ar. [| [..]. a[...]
 ualetudinar[| ad furnaces [| ad lutum [| tectores [|
 | ¹⁰ ... apil. [| ad cae[| [..]. b[| ad p. [| cum[| . . .*

25 April, in the workshops,	343 men.
of these: shoemakers,	12
builders to the bath-house,	18
for lead ...	
for ... wagons (?) ...	
... hospital ...	
to the kilns ...	
for clay ...	
plasterers ...	
for ... tents (?) ...	
for rubble ...	
...	

II 156



[Tab. Vindol. II 156](#)

Military document
 W 96 × H 30
 Date: 97-105 CE
 © The Trustees of the British Museum:
[1986,1001.223](#)



*Nonis Martij[s] vacat | missi ad hospitij[u]m çum
 Marco medico | faciendum ştructores η(umero) xxx |
 [a]d lapidem flammañdum η(umero) xviii | ⁵ [a]d
 lutum uim[ini]bus castrorum
 facien|[dum] traces | . . .*

7 March
 sent with Marcus, the medical orderly, to build
 the residence, builders, number 30
 to burn stone, number 19 (?)
 to produce clay for the wattle fences of the
 camp ...

II 164



[Tab. Vindol. II 164](#)

W 78 × H 186

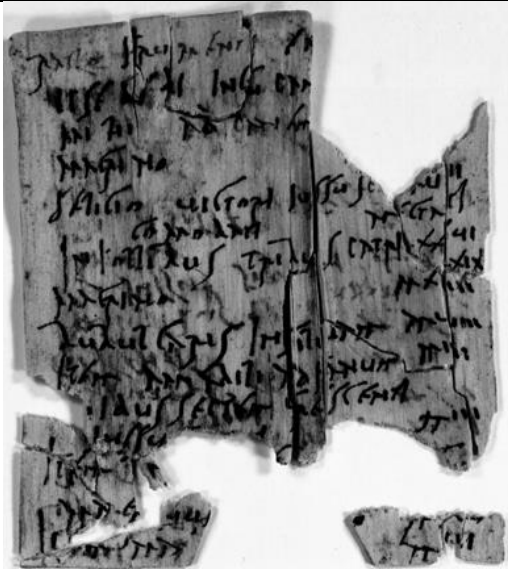
Date: 97-105 CE?

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1986,1001.34](#)

*. . . | nenū... []n. Brittones | nimium multi ▶ equites |
 gladis ▶ non utuntur equi|tes ▶ nec resident
 | ⁵ Brittunculi ▶ ut ▶ iaculos | mittant*

... the Britons are unprotected by armour (?). There
 are very many cavalry. The cavalry do not use swords
 nor do the wretched Britons mount in order to throw
 javelins.

II 180



[Tab. Vindol. II 180](#)

Military document: accounts and lists

The back of II 344

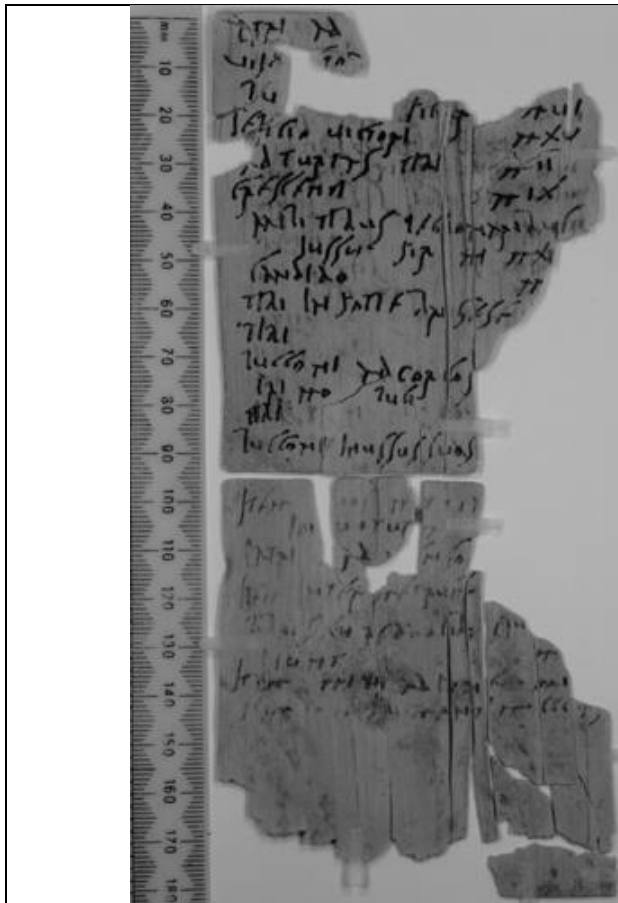
180, 181, 344 written by the same hand

W 77 × H 264

Date: 104-120 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1989,0602.73](#)

*ratio frumenti em[ensi] ex quo | ipse dedi in cupam []
 | mihi ad panem [] Macrino m(odii) vii | ⁵ Felicio
 Victori iussu Spçtati | comodati m(odii) xxvi | in
 follibus tribus patri m(odii) xix | Macrino m(odii) xiii |
 bubulcaris in siluam m(odii) viii | ¹⁰ item Amabili ad
 fanum m(odii) iii | [..] Idus Septem(bres) Crescenti |
 iussu. [..] m(odii) iii | item. [c. 6] e[...]. |
 Macr(?) [..] uş[...] (?) m(odii) xv | ¹⁵ item ma. [c. 6]
 m(odii) [] iii | patri ad [c. 6] as m(odii) ii | vi
 Kal(endas) [O]çtoþr[es] | Lu[...]. ben]eficiar[io]
 m(odii) vi | Felicio Victori m(odii) xv | ²⁰ ad turtaş tibi
 m(odii) ii | Crescenti m(odii) ix | militibus
 legionaribus | iussu Firmi m(odii) xi | Candido
 m(odii) [] ²⁵ tibi in folle br. geşe(?) [] tibi [] Luconii
 ad porcōs [] Primo Luci [] tibi [] ³⁰ Luconii in ussus
 suos [] item [] uş m[...]. i [] in [] uştur[...]. | patri [a]d
 i[u]çnos [] item inter metrum [] ³⁵ libr. s xv redd.
 libræ xv | fiunt m(odii) [] item mihi ad panem
 m(odii) i | summa frumentij m(odii) cccxx ş(emis)*



Account of wheat measured out from that which I myself have put into the barrel: | to myself, for bread ... | to Macrinus, *modii* 7 | to Felicius Victor on the order of Spectatus | provided as a loan (?), *modii* 26 in three sacks, to father, *modii* 19 | to Macrinus, *modii* 13 | to the oxherds at the wood, *modii* 8 likewise to Amabilis at the shrine, *modii* 3 | ... September, to Crescens | on the order of Firmus (?), *modii* 3 | likewise ..., *modii* .. | to Macr... | ..., *modii*(?) 15 | likewise to Ma... (?), *modii* .. to father ..., *modii* 2 | 26 September | to Lu... the *beneficiarius*, *modii* 6 | to Felicius Victor, *modii* 15 for twisted loaves (?), to you, *modii* 2 | to Crescens, *modii* 9 | to the legionary soldiers | on the order of Firmus, *modii* 11+ | to Candidus, *modii* .. to you, in a sack from Briga (?), ... | to you, ... | to Lucco, in charge of the pigs ... | to Primus, slave (?) of Lucius ... | to you ... | to Lucco for his own use ... | likewise that which I have sent ... *modii* .. (?) | in the century of Voturius (?) | to father, in charge of the oxen ... | likewise, within the measure ... (?) | 15 pounds yield 15+ pounds (?) ... | total, *modii* ... | likewise to myself, for bread, *modii* .. | total of wheat, *modii* 320½.

II 185



[Tab. Vindol. II 185](#)

Military document: accounts and lists

W 60 × H 171

Date: 92-97

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1989,0602.79](#)

[.] a... aș [c. 4] i |] uis | [c. 3] traces (quadrantem) | [c. 3]] a. așdum | ⁵ faęci (denarii) s(emissem) |.] I] dus Iulias i... i] o | faęci (denarii) (quadrantem) | [I] dus Iulias traces | faęci (denarii) (quadrantem) | ¹⁰ [.] Iduș Iulias a[| traces of 6 lines | [[c. 12]]] c. 3] traces viii[| faęci (denarii) (quadrantem) | hordei m(odium) i (denarii) s(emissem) (assem i) | ²⁰ axes carrarios | duos ad raeđam (denarios) iii s(emissem) | sal auę am (denarium) i | Isurio faęci (denarii) (quadrantem) | Çataractonio locari] o (denarii) s(emissem) | ²⁵ faęci (denarii) (quadrantem) | Vinouis subunc lon s (denarii) (quadrantem) | frumenti traces |] iunt (denarii) lxxiix s(emis) (quadrans) | summa omnis (denarii) lxxxiiii s(emis) (quadrans) | ³⁰ [c. 12]. [c. 3]] u] i

For lees of wine (?), denarii ½ | July (8-13), at Isurium (?) | for lees of wine (?), denarii ¼ | July (9-14), ... | for lees of wine (?), denarii ¼ | July (10-14), ... | (lines 17-29) ... 8 .. | for lees of wine (?), denarii ¼, | of barley, modius 1, denarii ½, as 1 | wagon-axles, two, for a carriage, denarii 3½ | salt and fodder (?) ... , denarius 1 | at Isurium, for lees of wine (?), denarii ¼ | at Cataractonium, for accommodation (?), denarii ½ | for lees of wine (?), denarii ¼ | at Vinovia, for vests (?), denarii ¼ | of wheat, ... total, denarii 78¾ | grand total, denarii 94¾. | ...



Tab. Vindol. II 190

Military document: accounts and lists

2 of 34 fragments, of which there are 3 main pieces

Date: 97-105 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1980.0303.4](https://www.britishmuseum.org/press-releases/2017/07/20170720-vindolanda)

a

. . . |] (denarios) iii s(emissem) |] |] e | . . .

b

. . . |] s |] m(odios) [] ii (denarii) s(emissem) |] i. m
(denarii) s(emissem) | vacat

c

. . . | a] d sacrum (denarios) [|] m̄ a] d sacrum
(denarios) [|] q̄ tam ad sacrum [|] vacat | m²? xiii
K(alendas) Iulias | ⁵ horde] i | ceruesae [e | x] ii
K(alendas) Iulias | hordei m(odios) iii [|] ceruesae
m(odios) ii | ¹⁰ [xi K(alendas) Iulias hordei [|] m ad
hor[|] tum |] m̄ (odios) ii | x K(alendas) Iulias
| ¹⁵ hordei m(odios) v s(emissem) | allatus(?)
uini .. ssec(?) [|] viii K(alendas) Iulias | hordei m(odios)
v s(emissem) | uini m(odium) i (sextarios) xiii
| ²⁰ ceruesae m(odios) iii | viii K(alendas) Iulias |
hordei m(odios) vi [|] çerueşae m(odios) iii
(sextarios) ... | uini m(odium) i (sextarios) xii | ²⁵ aceti
(sextarios) ii | per Priuatum | muriae (sextarium) i
s(emissem) | per Priuatum | axungiae (şextarios) x
mut[(uo) | ³⁰ domino ad stipes | per Priuatum | uini
m(odium) i ad saçum | d<i>uae | uini (sextarios) xii
| ³⁵ per Priuatum | vii K(alendas) Iulias | hordei
(sextarios) i | domini Brigae m̄ an[se] | runt | ⁴⁰ vacat

d

. . . |] ias |] |] i |] ur | . . .

e

. . . |] s i [|] iis | . . .



f

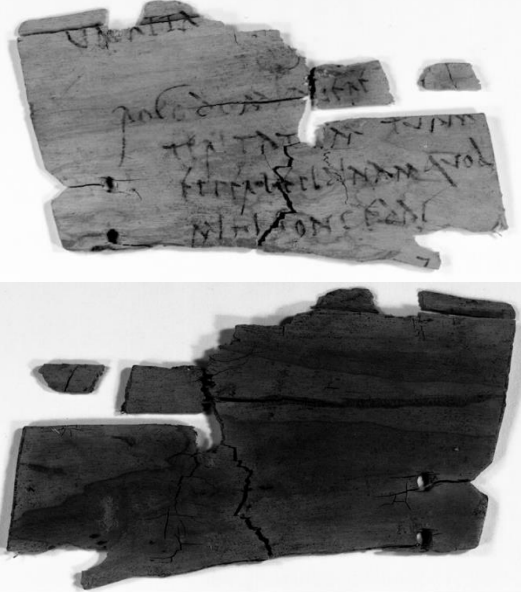

. . . |] .. | (sextarios) v s(emis) |] ii | . . .

g

. . . |] s i s | . . .

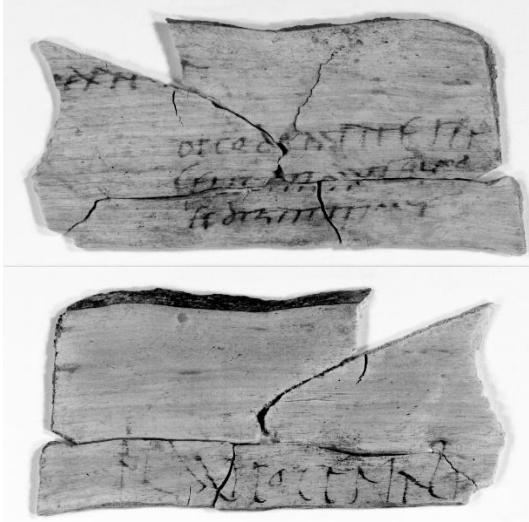
b) ... modii 3 (?), denarii ½ ... denarii ½" (c) "... for the festival, denarii ... for the festival, denarii ... for the festival ... 19 June of barley ... of Celtic beer ... 20 June of barley, modii 4(plus) (?) of Celtic beer, modii 2 21 June, of barley ... to the granary (?) ... modii 2 22 June of barley, modii 5½ (?) Allatus (?), of Massic wine (?) ... 23 June of barley, modii 5½ of wine, modius 1 sextarii 14 of Celtic beer, modii 3 24 June of barley, modii 6(plus) of Celtic beer, modii 3 sextarii .. of wine, modius 1 sextarii 12 of sour wine, sextarii 2 through Privatus of fish-sauce, sextarii 1½ through Privatus of pork-fat, sextarii 10 as a loan (?) to the lord for charitable donations through Privatus of wine, modius 1 for the festival of the goddess (?) of wine, sextarii 12 through Privatus 25 June of barley, sextarii 11½ (?) the lords have remained at Briga.

	<p>Vittius Adiutor, eagle-bearer of the Second Augustan Legion, to Cassius Saecularis, his little brother, very many [greetings] ...</p>
<p>II 242</p> 	<p>Tab. Vindol. II 242 Correspondence of Flavius Cerialis Private document: letter W 225 × H 51 Date: 97-105 CE © The Trustees of the British Museum: 1986,1001.145</p> <p>i . . . çraş ▶ bene mane Vindo landam ueni ▶ ut numerationi ▶ cen-</p> <p>ii . . . traces m²? uale mi Felici(?). [kařışıme vacat Şeştembreş Back . . . m¹? viiii Baş(aurum) [a] Flauio Ceriale traces</p> <p>Front Come to Vindolanda tomorrow, early in the morning in order to ... the payment (?) of the century (?) ... (m²?) Farewell, my dearest Felicio (?) ... September. Back m¹ ... of the 9th Cohort of Batavians, from Flavius Cerialis, prefect (?).</p>
<p>II 250</p> 	<p>Tab. Vindol. II 250 Correspondence of Flavius Cerialis Private document: letter, amended in III App. Date: 97-105 CE © The Trustees of the British Museum: 1980,0303.22</p> <p>i [c. 4] jus Karuş Ç[e]r[ial]i [] o vacat ş[alutem] [c. 4] brigionus petiř a me [domi]ne ut eum tibi com] ⁵ mendarem rogo ergo do miņe ři quod a te petierit [u]el]iř ei subscribere Anniř Questori (centurioni) regi onar]o Luguualio ro] ¹⁰ go ut eum commen </p> <p>ii [c. 4] digneriř. [...] [...] que nom[in]e debetorem m[e tibi] obligaturus o[pt]o] ¹⁵ te felicissimum bene [f] uale[re] vacat m² uale frater Back m¹ [C]eriali praef[ecto]</p> <p>Front ...ius Karus to his Cerialis, greetings. ... Brigionus (?) has requested me, my lord, to recommend him to you. I therefore ask, my lord, if you would be willing to support him in what he has requested of you. I ask that you think fit to commend him to Annius Questor, centurion in charge of the region, at Luguualium, [by doing which] you will place me in debt to you both in his name (?) and my own (?). I</p>

	<p>pray that you are enjoying the best of fortune and are in good health. <i>m</i>² Farewell, brother. <i>Back</i> <i>m</i>¹ To Cerialis, prefect.</p>
<p>II 257</p> 	<p>Tab. Vindol. II 257 Correspondence of Flavius Cerialis Private document: letter, amended in III App. W 96 × H 52 Date: 97-105 CE © The Trustees of the British Museum: 1986,1001.111</p> <p><i>Valatta [Ceriali suo] ş[alutem] rogo domi[n]e per pos- teritat[e]m tuam. [⁵ et per Lepidinam quod [mihi çonçedas vacat] [. . .</i></p> <p>Valatta to her Cerialis, greetings. I ask you, my lord, by your posterity and by your (wife) Lepidina that you grant me what I ask (?) ...²¹</p>
<p>II 263</p> 	<p>Tab. Vindol. II 263 Correspondence of Flavius Cerialis Private document: letter, amended in III App. Date 97-105 CE © The Trustees of the British Museum: 1980,0303.23</p> <p><i>[Ceriali su]o 3? lines lost ⁵] .]si]m . . .</i> <i>ii</i> <i>ç [c. 9...] etuó çom-/m[iliton]e. []e[epistu]las. [] s ▶</i> <i>quas açceperas ab Equestre centurione</i> <i> ⁵ coh(ortis) ▶ iij ▶ Ba[ta]uorum. [re]mi-/si a[d] te</i> <i>pr(idie) K(alendas) Ma... nos .. e. []bene. [c. 4</i> <i>çam[us] m²? dominam (tuam a me salu-) ta o(pto te</i> <i>bene ualere). ¹⁰ u[]tali[].....</i> <i>Back</i> <i>m</i>¹ Flaujo Çerjali praef(ecto) coh(ortis) viiiij Ba[ta]uorum) a Vitale deçurione a Vitale dec(urione) a[]ae / Aug(ustae)</p> <p><i>Front</i> ... to his Cerialis ... and those letters which you (?) had received from fellow-soldier Perpetuus and from Equester, centurion of the 3rd Cohort of Batavians, I sent back (?) to you on 30 April (?) ... (2nd hand?) (greetings from me to your) mistress (?) (I wish you good health) <i>Back</i> <i>m</i>¹ To Flavius Cerialis, prefect of the 9th Cohort of Batavians, from Vitalis, decurion of the Augustan cavalry.</p>

²¹ Tomlin 1996, 462

II 264



[Tab. Vindol. II 264](#)

Correspondence of Flavius Cerialis

Private document: letter

W 78 × H 47

Date: 97-105

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1986,1001.86](#)

Front

. . . |]. vacat |]. rān[] vacat | m² opto domine sis | felicissimus quod | ⁵ es dignissimus

Back

m¹ Flauio Ceriali | . . .

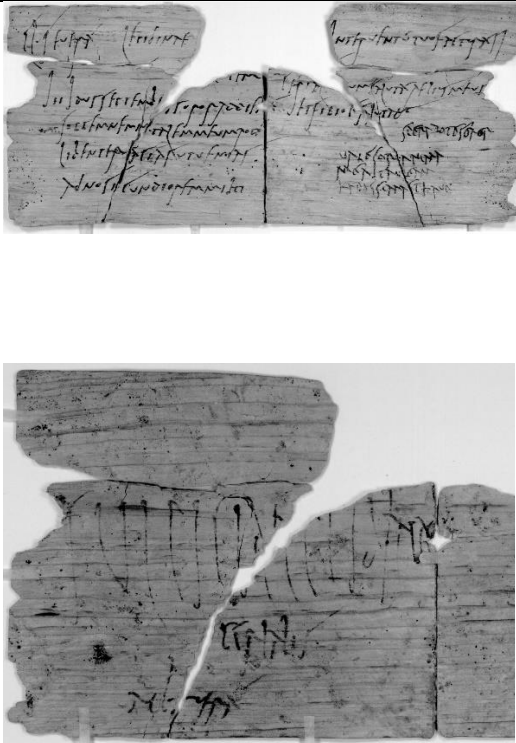
Front

... m² I pray, my lord, that you enjoy the best of fortune, because you are most worthy.

Back

m¹ To Flavius Cerialis.

II 291



[Tab. Vindol. 291](#)

Birthday invitation of Sulpicia Lepidina

Private document: letter, amended in III App.

W 223 × H 96

Date: 97-105 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1986,1001.64](#)

i

Cl(audia) ▶ Seuerá Lepidinae [suae] | [sa][u]tē | iii Idus Septembr[e]s soror ad diē ' | sollemnem nq̄talem meum rogó | ⁵ libenter faciás ut uenias | ad nos iucundiozem mihi

ii

[diem] interuentú tuo facturá si | [] [c. 3]s vacat | Cerial[em t]uū salutá Aelius meus. [te] | ¹⁰ et filio[us] salutant vacat | m² vacat sperabo te soror | uale soror anima | mea ita uq̄leam | karissima et haue

Back

¹⁵ m¹ Sulpiciae Lepidinae | Cerialis | a Cl(audia) ▶ Seuerá.

Front

Claudia Severa to her Lepidina greetings. On 11 September, sister, for the day of the celebration of my birthday, I give you a warm invitation to make sure that you come to us, to make the day more enjoyable for me by your arrival, if you are present (?). Give my greetings to your Cerialis. My Aelius and my little son send you (?) their greetings. m² I shall expect you, sister. Farewell, sister, my dearest soul, as I hope to prosper, and hail.

Back

m¹ To Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of Cerialis, from Claudia Severa.

II 292



[Tab. Vindol. II 292](#)

Correspondence of Sulpicia Lepidina

Private document: letter, amended III App.

a) W 190 × H 31; (b) W 193 × H 36; (c) W 96 × H 32

Date: 97-105 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1986,1001.46](#)

a

col. i | . . . | şalışem | ego soror sicut tecum locuta
 fueram et promiseram | ut peterem a Brocchó et
 uenirem at te peti | et reş[po]ndit mihi <i>tā corie
 semp[er li]çitum unā

b

col. ii | . . . | traces | quomodocumque possim | at
 te peruenire sunt enim | necessariā quaedam qua[e]
 | col. iii | . . . | traces? | rem meum epistulas meas |
 accipies quibus scies quid | sim actura haec tibi.

c

col. v | . . . | traces | .ra eram et Brigae mansura |
 Cerialem tuum a me saluta | vacat

b.Back

m² ual[e] mī soror | kırissima et anıma | ma
 desideratissima | vacat traces

c.Back

m¹ Sulpiciae Lepidinae Cerialis traces? | a Seuera
 B[rocchi]

Front

... greetings. Just as I had spoken with you, sister, and
 promised that I would ask Brocchus and would come
 to you, I asked him and he gave me the following
 reply, that it was always permitted to me *to meet at
 Coria*, together with to come to you in whatever
 way I can. For there are certain essential things
 which you will receive my letters by which you will
 know what I am going to do I was ... and will
 remain at Briga. Greet your Cerialis from me.

Back

m² Farewell my sister, my dearest and most longed-
 for soul. m¹ To Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of Cerialis,
 from Seuera, wife of Brocchus (?).

II 294



[Tab. Vindol. II 294](#)

Correspondence of Sulpicia Lepidina

Private documents: letter

W 65 × H 65

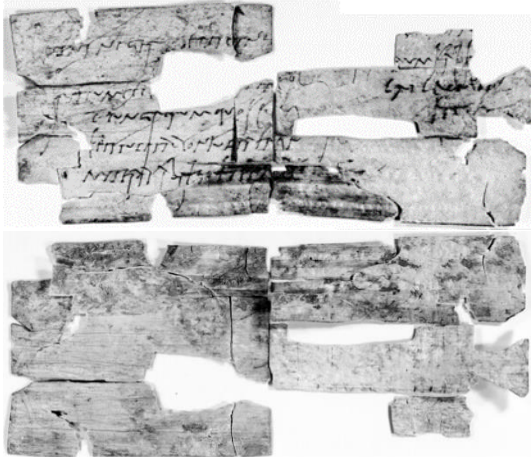
Date: 97-105 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1986,1001.63](#)

[a.. na(?) Lepidin[ae suae] | şalutem | ita sim salua
 domi[na] | ut ego duas an[] | ⁵ feram tibi alter[am] |
 alteram febric[] | et ideo me tibi e[] | sed quatenus
 m[] | . . .

... Paterna (?) to her Lepidina, greetings. So help me
 God, my lady [and sister?], I shall bring (?) you two
 remedies (?), the one for ..., the other for fever (?)
 and therefore ... myself to you ... but insofar as ...

II 295



[Tab. Vindol. II 295](#)

Correspondence of Priscinus

Private document: letter, amended III App.

Date: 104-120? CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1980,0303.28](#)

i

Oppius Niger Priscino [suo] | ş[alutem | Crispum et Pe[... mili]teş coh(ortis). | ▶ i ▶ Tungrorum quos cum | ⁵ epistulis ad consularem n(ostrum) | miseras a Bremetennaco

ii

[.]. [.]. [.]. [c. 3] | . [.]. [.]. um Kal(endis) F[eb]r[] | m² uale dōmīnē | ¹⁰ frater

Back

traces of 2 lines

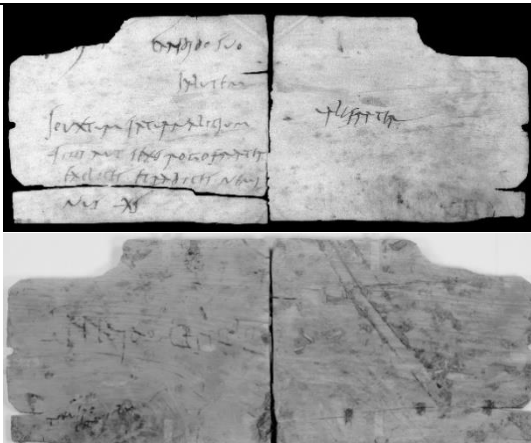
Front

Oppius Niger to his Priscinus, greetings. Crispus and Pe[... soldiers of the 1st cohort of Tungrians, whom you had sent with letters to our governor, [I have straightaway sent on (?)] from Bremetennacum to ... on 1 February.

Back

m² Farewell, my lord and brother.

II 301



[Tab. Vindol. II 301](#)

Private document: miscellaneous, amended III App.

W 182 × H 76

Date: 92-97 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum:

[1988,1005.237](#)

i

Ş[eu]r[u]ş Candido suo | salutem | şouxum saturnalicium | (asses) iiii aut sexs rogo frater | ⁵ explices et radices ne mi|nus (denarii) s(emissem)

ii

vacat | uale frater | vacat

Back

Candido Genialis / a Severo / corniclarjō.

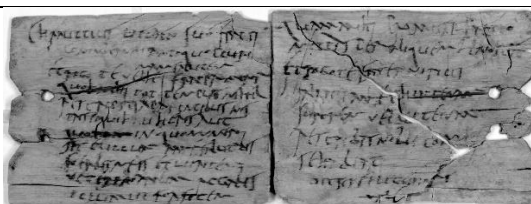
Front

Severus to his Candidus, greetings. Regarding the ... for the Saturnalia, I ask you, brother, to see to them at a price of 4 or six asses and radishes to the value of not less than ½ denarius. Farewell, brother.

Back

To Candidus, (slave) of Genialis, from Severus, corniclarjūs ...

II 310



[Tab. Vindol. II 310](#)

Private document: miscellaneous, amended III App.

W 189 × H 70

Date: 97-105 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1988,1005.66](#)



i
*Chrauttius Veldeio suó fratri | contubernali antiquo
 pluri|mam salutem | et rogo te Veldei frater miror
 | ⁵ quod mihi tot tempus nihil | rescripsi a
 parentibus nos|tris si quid audieris aut | Quoꝛ m in
 quo numero | sit et illum a me salutabis | ¹⁰ [s]*
*uerbis meis et Virilem | ueterinarium rogabis | illum
 ut forficem*

ii
*quam mihi promissit pretio | mittas per aliquem de
 nostris | ¹⁵ et rogo te frater Virilis | salutem a me
 Thuttenam | sororem Velbutenam | rescribas nobis
 cum... | se habeat vacat | ²⁰ m²? opt<o> sis
 felicissimus | uale*

Back

*m¹ Londini | Veldedeio | equisioni co(n)s(ularis) | ²⁵ a
 Chrauttio | fratre*

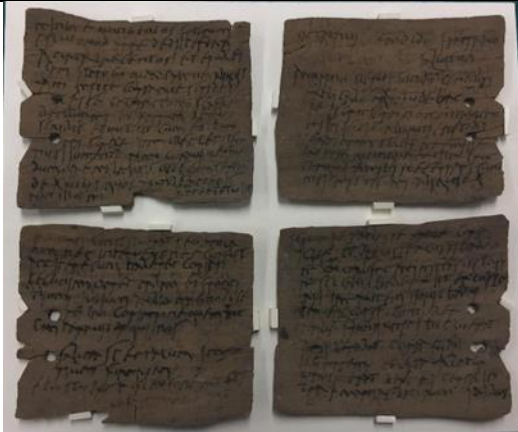
Back

Chrauttius to Veldeius his brother and old messmate, very many greetings. And I ask you, brother Veldeius - I am surprised that you have written nothing back to me for such a long time - whether you have heard anything from our elders, or about ... in which unit he is; and greet him from me in my words and Virilis the veterinary doctor. Ask him (sc. Virilis) whether you may send through one of our friends the pair of shears which he promised me in exchange for money. And I ask you, brother Virilis, to greet from me our sister Thuttena. Write back to us how Velbutena is (?). *m*²? It is my wish that you enjoy the best of fortune. Farewell.

Back

m¹ (Deliver) at London. To Veldedeius, groom of the governor, from his brother Chrauttius.

II 343



[Tab. Vindol. II 343](#)

Private document: miscellaneous,
 amended III App.

a) W 182 × H 79

(b) W 179 × H 79

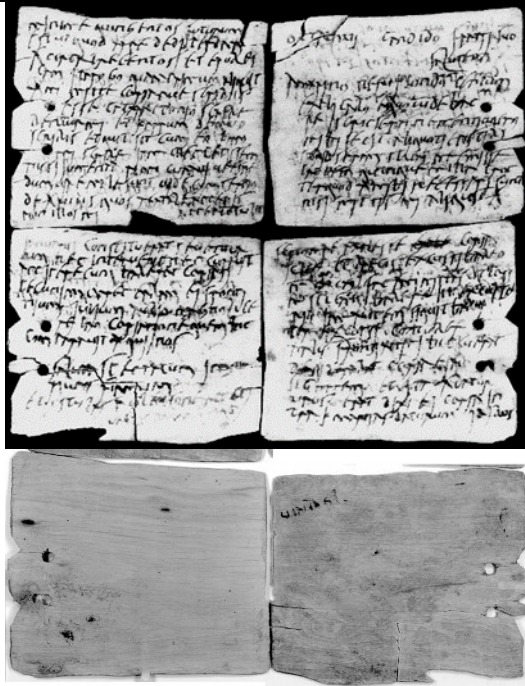
104-120 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1989_0602.74](#)

i
*Octavius Candido fratri suo | salutem | a Marino
 nerui pondo centum | explicabo e quo tu de hac | ⁵ re
 scripseras ne mentionem | mihi fecit aliquotiens tibi |
 scripseram spicas me emisse | prope m(odios)
 quinque milia prop|ter quod (denarii) mihi necessari
 sunt | ¹⁰ nisi mittis mi aliquid (denariorum)*

ii

*minime quingentos futurum | est ut quod arre dedi
 perdam | (denarios) circa trecentos et erubescam
 ita rogo quam primum aliquid | ¹⁵ (denariorum) mi
 mitte coria que scribis | esse Cataractonio scribe |
 dentur mi et karrum de quo | scribis et quit sit cum
 eo karrum | mi scribe iam illec petissem | ²⁰ nissi*



*umenta non curavi uexare | dum uiae male sunt
 uide cum Tertio | de (denariis) viii s(emisse) quos a
 Fatale accepit | non illos mi vacat accepto tulit
 iii
 sciço mae explesse //exple// coria | ²⁵ clxx et bracis
 excussi habeo | m (odios) cxix fac (denarios) mi
 mittas ut possi|m spicam habere in excusso | rio iam
 autem si quit habui | perexcussi contuber|³⁰ nalis
 Fronti amici hic fuerat | desiderabat coria ei
 ad |signarem et ita (denarios) datur|{ur}us erat dixi ei
 coria in |tra K(alendas) Martias daturum Idibus
 iv
³⁵ Ianuarii constituerat se uentur|um nec interuenit
 nec curauit | accipere cum haberet coria si |
 pecuniam daret dabam ei Fronti |nium Iulium audio
 magno lice|⁴⁰ re pro coriacione que[m] hic |
 comparauit (denarios) quinos | saluta Spectatum
 l.. |rium Firmum | epistulas a Gleuçone accepi
 | ⁴⁵ uq!(e)
 Back
 Vindol(anda)*

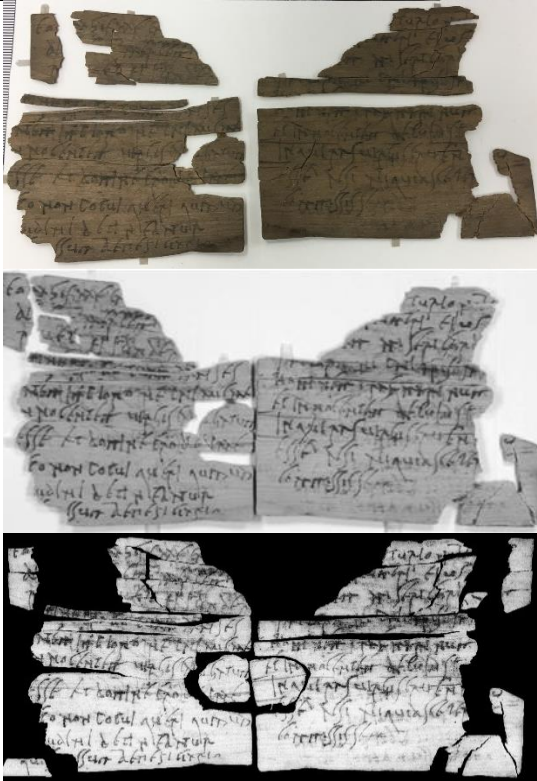
Front
 Octavius to his brother Candidus, greetings. The hundred pounds of sinew from Marinus - I will settle up. From the time when you wrote about this matter, he has not even mentioned it to me. I have several times written to you that I have bought about five thousand *modii* of ears of grain, on account of which I need cash. Unless you send me some cash, at least five hundred *denarii*, the result will be that I shall lose what I have laid out as a deposit, about three hundred *denarii*, and I shall be embarrassed. So, I ask you, send me some cash as soon as possible. The hides which you write are at Cataractonium - write that they be given to me and the wagon about which you write. And write to me what is with that wagon. I would have already been to collect them except that I did not care to injure the animals while the roads are bad. See with Tertius about the 8½ *denarii* which he received from Fatalis. He has not credited them to my account. Know that I have completed the 170 hides and I have 119 *modii* of threshed *bracis*. Make sure that you send me cash so that I may have ears of grain on the threshing-floor. Moreover, I have already finished threshing all that I had. A messmate of our friend Frontius has been here. He was wanting me to allocate (?) him hides and that being so, was ready to give cash. I told him I would give him the hides by 1 March. He decided that he would come on 13 January. He did not turn up nor did he take any trouble to obtain them since he had hides. If he had given the cash, I would have given him them. I hear that Frontinius Iulius has for sale at a high price I hear that F.I. has for sale at a high price for leather-making (the things) which he

bought here for 5 denarii apiece²². Greet Spectatus and ... and Firmus. I have received letters from Gleuco. Farewell.

Back

(Deliver) at Vindolanda.

II 344



[Tab. Vindol. II 344](#)

Image: British Museum [1989,0602.73](#)

The back of II 180

180, 181, 344 written by the same hand

Private document: miscellaneous, amended III App.

W 77 × H 264

Date: 104-120

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1989,0602.73](#)

i

*eo magis me ca[c. 12] | d... []em mercem [c. 8] |
r[] uel effunder [c. 3]r[] | []mine probo tuam
maies]⁵ [t]atem imploro ne patiaris me |
[]innocentem uirgis ca[]t]igatum | esse et domine
Procle prae|[fe]cto non potui queri quia ua|[let]udini
detinebatur | ¹⁰ que[]tu]s sum beneficiario*

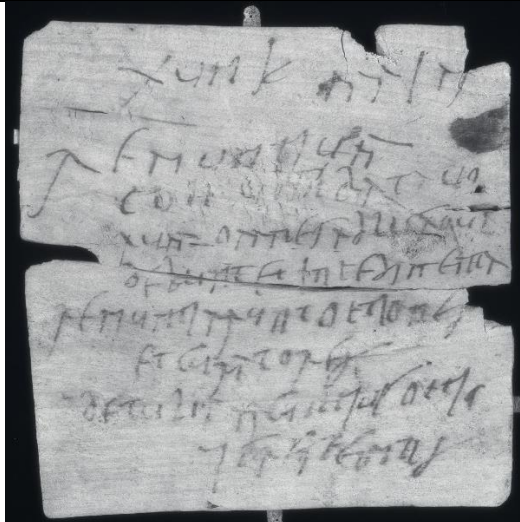
ii

*[c. 8 cen]turionibu[s] | [c. 7] numeri eius [| [c. 3
tu]am misericord[ia]m | imploro ne patiaris me
| ¹⁵ hominem trasmarinum | et innocentem de cuius
f[ide] | inquiras uirgis cruent[at]u[m] | esse ac si
aliquid sceler[i]s | commississem vacat*

... he beat (?) me all the more ... goods ... or pour them down the drain (?). As befits an honest man (?) I implore your majesty not to allow me, an innocent man, to have been beaten with rods and, my lord, *Proculus*, I was unable to complain to the prefect because he was detained by ill-health I have complained in vain (?) to the *beneficiarius* and the rest (?) of the centurions of his (?) unit. Accordingly (?) I implore your mercifulness not to allow me, a man from overseas and an innocent one, about whose good faith you may inquire, to have been bloodied by rods as if I had committed some crime.

²² Following Adams 1995

III 574



[Tab. Vindol. III 574](#)

Renuntium of cohorts VIII Batavorum

Renuntium: military document

W 83 × H 82

Date: 97-105 CE

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[1995,0701.211](#)

xvii K(alendas) Maias | renuntium vacat | coh(ortis) viii Batauo|rum omnes ad loqa qui | ⁵ debunt et impedimenta | renuntiarunt optiones | et curatores | detulit Arcuittius optio | (centuriae) Crescentis

15 April. Report of the Ninth Cohort of Batavians. All who should be are at duty stations, as is the baggage. The *optiones* and *curatores* made the report. Arcuittius, *optio* of the century of Crescens, delivered it.

III 581



[Tab. Vindol. III 581](#)

Military document: accounts and lists

(a) W 40 × H 93; (b) W 40 × H 93; (c) W 37 × H 93; (d)

W 38 × H 93; (e) W 41 × H 93

Date: 97-105 CE

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[1995,0701.267](#)

a. [| iiii Idus April[es] | decurio[n] [| ▶ i ▶ ceru[] ⁵ xvii K(alendas) lunia[s] | ceruesari[o] | xv K(alendas) lunias a[] pulli. [| Traiano V[] ¹⁰ vi K(alendas) Maias. [| ab Crescent[e] | vacat | eodem die ab. [| anser[

b

Nonis lun[is] | ¹⁵ Suetio adiu[] iiii Idus lunias [| ceruesario [| iiii Idus lunias [| Vattonē... [| ²⁰ {K I} Sex(to) Attio Subur[ano] | K(alendis) Ianuari[s] ab. [| ueterano pul[li]- | eodem die ab Sau[] | ab Chnisson[e] | ²⁵ iiii Nonas Ianuari[s] | pulli [] [

c

K(alendis) Martis ab Ma. [| eodem die ab Çan(?) [| iiii K(alendas) Apriles ab Mar[] ³⁰ pr(idie) K(alendas) Apriles ab Exs. [| [k... s]] vacat | viii K(alendas) Maias ab V[] iumentario Br. ç[] summa an[ser]- | ³⁵ item anser[es] | pulli adempt[us] | item adempti a[] pulli [| pr(idie) K(alendas) Maias vacat(?) [| ⁴⁰ item pulli a[] per Çomm. [| summa pul[li]-

d

traces [| traces [| ⁴⁵ expensa[] xv K(alendas) lunias m[] nas pullus [| eodem die cena. [| absumptus p[ullus] | ⁵⁰ viii K(alendas) lunias [| nio pullu[s] [| Idibus lunis. [| legati [| xviii K(alendas) Iul[i]as [| ⁵⁵ Çori[s] iussu [| [traces s]] | eodem die in. [| perierunt [| vacat

e. Back

iiii Idus lunias [| ⁶⁰ missio Flau[] iii K(alendas) Septembres ç[] Nigro Broccho [| viii K(alendas) [Maia[s]] Ian[uaris] | cenant[us] Brocch[o]



| ⁶⁵ K(alendis) Ianuaris per [| ... [| xvi K(alendas)
Febur[arias] | Brocch[o] | viiii K(alendas) Mar[t]ia[s]
| ⁷⁰ a stabulo [| K(alendis) Martis dom[| matronar[
d.Back

Idibus Martis. [| Nigro et Læe. [| ⁷⁵ xii K(alendas)
Apriles a [| uae vacat [| pr(idie) Nonas Apriles [|
Broccho [| iii K(alendas) Maias pr.. [| ⁸⁰ Septembris... [|
| iii Nonas Maias [| apud Sautenum [| summa
expen[sorum] | vacat(?) | reliqu.. [| ⁸⁵ et anseres
n(umero) [| ex. [] [

c.Back

vii Idus Maias [| Onesimo ad sig[| eodem die
Sauten[o] | ⁹⁰ in stabulo. [| iii K(alendas) Iunias
pranden[| et Flauino ab[| eodem die mor[| apud
Sauten[um] | ⁹⁵ K(alendis) Maiarum si[| aduentu
consul[aris] | in prandio ab.. [| item foris my.. (?) [|
viii Idus Iunias a[| ¹⁰⁰ pulli n(umero) iiii[

b.Back

xvii K(alendas) Augustas [| per Surenum
(çenturionem) [| ne n(umero) xii [| eodem die.. [|
| ¹⁰⁵ no pulli. [| penes Sautenum [| ribus pulli [|
s(umma) pulli n(umero) xx[| ex eis ta a... [|
| ¹¹⁰ r[el]iqui s. er. [| s(umma) pulli n(umero) vii[|
| vacat

a front

Consumed (?) 11 (?) April ... the decurion(s) of the
1st ... beer(?) ... 16 May, (by?) ... the brewer ... 18
May, by(?) ... chickens ... In the 5th consulship of
Trajan 26 April ... by Crescens ... on the same day, by
... a goose ...

b front

5 June, (by?) ... Suetius (?) ... 10 June, (by?) ... the
brewer ... 11 June, (by?) ... Vato ... In the consulship
of Sex. Attius Suburanus 1 January, by ... veteran,
chickens ... on the same day, by Sautenus (?)... by
Chnisso ... 2 January ... chickens ...

c front

1 March, by Ma... on the same day, by Candidus (?)
30 March, by MAR... 31 March, by Exsomnius (?) ... 23
April, by V... in charge of the draft animals of
Brocchus (?) total, geese... likewise, geese ... nursling
chicks (?) ... likewise, nurslings (?) ... chickens ... 30
April likewise chickens ... through Comm...(?) total,
chickens ...

d front

... disbursed ... 18 May ... a chicken on the same day,
for ...'s dinner (?) ... chicken (?) consumed, 1 (?) 25
May a chicken ... 13 June... of (?) the legate ...
14 June at Coria, on the instructions of ... on the
same day in ... there have died

e back

10 June ... discharge of Flavinus (?) ... 30 August ... for
Niger and Brocchus ... 25 December for Brocchus'
dinner (?) 1 January, through (?)... ... 17 January ...
for Brocchus ... 21 February ... from the pen ... 1
March, for the lord(s) (?) ... of the Matronalia ...

d back

5 March... for Niger and Lae... 21 March 4 April
... for Brocchus ... 29 April, ... for September ... 4 May
... with Sautenus ... total disbursed ... remainder ...
and geese, number ... from these (?) ...

c back

9 May ... for (?) Onesimus with the standards (?) ...
on the same day, for Sautenus ... in the pen ... 29
May as lunch for ... and Flavinus, consumed (?) ... on
the same day ... with Sautenus ... 1 May, for the
singulares (?) on the visit of the governor ...
consumed (?) at lunch ... likewise outside for
Myr....(?) 6 June ... chickens, number 4 (?) ...

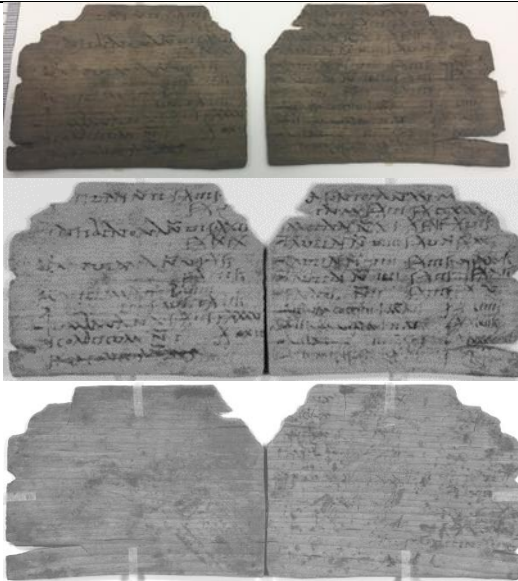
b back

9 May ... for (?) Onesimus with the standards (?) ...
on the same day, for Sautenus ... in the pen ... 29
May as lunch for ... and Flavinus, consumed (?) ... on
the same day ... with Sautenus ... 1 May, for the
singulares (?) on the visit of the governor ...
consumed (?) at lunch ... likewise outside for
Myr....(?) 6 June ... chickens, number 4 (?) ...

c back

16 July ... through Surenus the centurion (?),
number 12 on the same day ... for ...nus(?) chickens
... in the hands of Sautenus, chickens ... total,
chickens, number 20+ ... from these, Tangrian (?) ...
remainder, sterile (?) ... total (?), chickens, number
7+

III 596



[Tab. Vindol. III 596](#)

Military document: accounts and lists

W 182 × H 66

Date: 97-105 CE

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[1995,0701.196](#)

i. Front

¹ .. [] *suras n(umero) ii ▶ s(ingularis) ▶ (denarios) iii*
*s(emissem) (oçtañtem) [| ² f(iunt) (denarii) v[*ii**
(quadrans)] | ³ infiblatoria n(umero) vi ▶ s(ingulare) ▶
(denarios) xi s(emissem) | ⁴ f(iunt) (denarii) lxix
| ⁵ capitularia n(umero) v ▶ s(ingulare) ▶ (denarii)
s(emissem) (quadrantem) | ⁶ f(iunt) (denarii) iii
s(emis) (quadrans) | ⁷ capillamentj ▶ p(ondo) ▶ viiii
| ⁸ lib(ras) ▶ s(ingularem) ▶ (denarios) v s(emissem)
(quadrantem) f(iunt) (denarii) li s(emis) (quadrans)
| ⁹ lumbaria n(umero) x ▶ s(ingulare) ▶ (denarios) ii
s(emissem) f(iunt) (denarii) xxv | ¹⁰ scordiscum
n(umero) i vacat (denarios) [v] xii | ¹¹ [saga corticia
n(umero) xv s]

ii. Front

¹² [sa]ga corticia n(umero) xv ▶ m[| ¹³] in ▶ m(...) ▶
s(ingularem) ▶ (denarios) iii f(iunt) (denarii) ccxxvi[
| ¹⁴ sarcinas n(umero) x ▶ s(ingularem) ▶ (denarii)
s(emissem) (octantem) (assem i) f(iunt) (denarii) vi
s(emis) (quadrans) [(octans)] | ¹⁵ trullas n(umero) ▶
[v] iii ▶ s(ingularem) ▶ (denarios) v (assem i) f(iunt)

(denarii) xx (quadrans) | ¹⁶ trullas n(umero) iiii ▶
s(ingularem) ▶ (denarios) iii s(emissem) (quadrantem)
(octantem) (assem) i f(iunt) (denarii) xv s(emis)
(quadrans) | ¹⁷ trullas n(umero) iiii ▶ s(ingularem) ▶
(denarios) ii s(emissem) (octantem) (assem) i f(iunt)
(denarii) x s(emis) (quadrans) | ¹⁸ frenos n(umero) ii ▶
s(ingularem) ▶ (denarios) iii s(emissem) f(iunt)
(denarii) vij | ¹⁹ uelum coccini(um) ▶ i ▶ m(...) xi
s(emis) f(iunt) (denarii) liiii s(emis) (octans) | ²⁰ uelum
uirdem ▶ i ▶ m(...) xi s(emis) f(iunt) (denarii) xlvi
s(emis) (quadrans) | ²¹ uela purp(urea) ▶ ii ▶ m(...) xi
s(emis) f(iunt) (denarii) lxxxix s(emis) (oçtans)
| ²² uelum ▶ i ▶ m(...) x s(emis) f(iunt) (denarii) lv
(oçtans)

Back

¹]lum (denarios) xiix. (denarios) [| ²] riclum
(denarios) xx. . (denarios) viii [| ³ .. riclum traces | ⁴ . arin. (denarios)
xxi traces | ⁵ . ar... (denarios) xxx traces | ⁶ (denarios)
lxiii [| ⁷⁻⁸ traces of 2 lines (?) | ⁹ traces co.....
| ¹⁰ traces

I front

Necklace-locks (?), number 2, 3½ denarii each, total
7¼ denarii. Cloaks, number 6, 11½ denarii each, total
69 denarii. Headbands, number 5, ¼ denarius each,
total 3¼ denarii. Hair, 9 pounds in weight, 5¾ denarii
per pound, total 51¾ denarii. Drawers, number 10,
2½ denarii each, total 25 denarii. Saddle (?), number
1, 12 denarii. [[Cloaks made of bark (?), number 15
(?), ...]]

Last line crossed out or erased by the scribe.

ii front

Cloaks made of bark (?), number 15, measure(s) (?) ..,
3 denarii per measure (?), total 236+ denarii. Bags,
number 10, ⅝ denarius and 1 as each, total 6⅞
denarii. Bowls, number 4, 5 denarii 1 as each, total
20¼ denarii. Bowls, number 4, 3⅞ denarii and 1 as
each, total 15¾ denarii. Bowls, number 4, 2⅝ denarii
and 1 as each, total 10¾ denarii. Reins, number 2, 3½
denarii each, total 7 denarii. Scarlet curtain (?), 1,
measuring 11½, total 54⅝ denarii. Greenish-yellow
curtain (?), 1, measuring 11½, total 46¾ denarii.
Purple curtains (?), 2, measuring 11½, total 99⅝
denarii. ...curtain (?), 1, measuring 10½, total 55⅝
denarii.

III 602



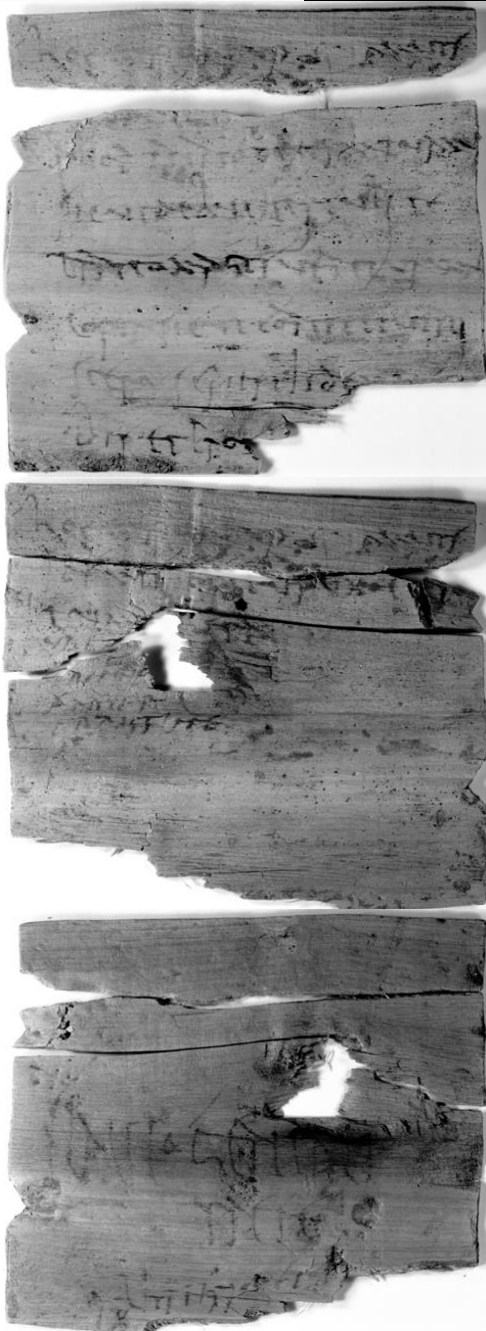
[Tab. Vindol. III 602](#)

Military document: accounts and lists
W 20 × H 32
Date: 97-105 CE
© The Trustees of the British Museum:
[1995,0701.118](#)

. . . |]ola[|]s galliç[|]os ▶ Britt[anic]- |].
gallicula[| ⁵]cam Brit[anic]-

Paliola, civilian, nailed shoes, Britannic nailed shoes,
Britannic tunic.

III 611



[Tab. Vindol. III 611](#)

Correspondence of Genialis
Private document: letters
W 202 × H 78
Date: 97-120 CE
© The Trustees of the British Museum:
[1995,0701.183](#)

a

(Col. i) | de. s. debitoribus suis

b

quod in notitiam tuam | sicut debui perçtuli te | tanto
magis uenturum | ⁵ Coria sicut ▶ constituisti | spero ▶
scripsi isdem uer[]bis ▶ et Proç[ulo]

c

(Col. ii) | hoc traces of c.7 letters quamuis

d

idem te.... rum çer[]tum [..]fra. | m² uale [| ⁵ domine [|
| frater | çarissime

Back

m³? Flauio Geniali | praef(ecto) coh(ortis) | ab
Haterio Nepote

Front

... his debtors, which I have brought to your attention
just as I ought. So much the more do I hope that you
will come to Coria, just as you decided. I have written
in the same words also to Proculus (?)...m² Farewell,
my dearest lord and brother.

Back

m³ To Flavius Genialis, prefect of the cohort, from
Haterius Nepos.

III 626



[Tab. Vindol. III 626](#)

Correspondence of Flavius Cerialis

Private document: letter

W 46 × H 18

Date: 97-105 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum:

[1995,0701.101](#)

. . . | traces |]s Claudia meq [|]. [| . . .

... my Claudia ...

III 628



[Tab. Vindol. III 628](#)

Correspondence of Flavius Cerialis

Private document: letter

W 175 × H 78

Date: 97-105

© The Trustees of the British Museum:

[1995,0701.373](#)

i

Masclus Ceriali regi suo | salutem | cras quid uelis
nos fecisse | rogó dómine prae]⁵ çipias utrumne |
cum uexilló ▶ omnes | rediemus an alter | ni
comptum ▶ aequē

ii

. . . | felicissim[u]s [| et sis mihi propitius | uale |
ceruesam commilitones | ⁵ non habunt quam | rogó
iubeas mitti

Back

F[]aiq̄ Çera]i | praef(ecto) | space of one line | a
Masclo dec(urione)

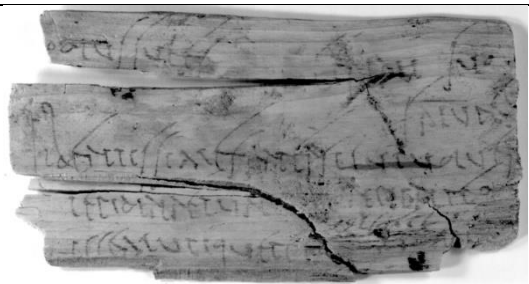
Front

Masclus to Cerialis his king, greeting. Please, my lord,
give instructions as to what you want us to have
done tomorrow. Are we to return with the standard
to (the shrine at?) the crossroads all together or
every other one (i.e. half) of us(?) ... most fortunate
and be well-disposed towards me. Farewell. My
fellow-soldiers have no beer. Please order some to
be sent.

Back

To Flavius Cerialis, prefect, from Masclus, decurion.

III 629



[Tab. Vindol. III 629](#)

Correspondence of Flavius Cerialis

Private document: letter

W 204 × H 50

Date: 97-105 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum:

[1995,0701.313](#) / [1995,0701.316](#)

i

[Cl]odius Super Ceriali suo | salutem | libentissime
frater sicut uoluer[as] | Lepidinae tuae [...]q̄.
interf[u]]⁵ issem utique te [traces] m² .. le te ' m² .. [



ii
*reddere, utique enim scis | iucundissime mihi esse
 quo | [ti]ens pari[ter] sumus ši[mi]- | [...]. iam non putavi
 mi[hi]⁵ [.....] m ne antequam u[] | . . .*
 Back
m³? Flauio Ceria[li] | . . .

Front
 Clodius Super to his Cerialis greetings. Most willingly,
 brother, just as you had wanted, I would have been
 present for your Lepidina's birthday(?). At any rate ...
 For you surely know that it pleases me most
 whenever we are together. If(?)... I did not think ...
 lest before ...

Back
m³? To Flavius Cerialis ...

III 655



[Tab. Vindol. III 655](#)
 Private document: letter
 W 99 × H 45
 Date: 97-105 CE
 © The Trustees of the British Museum: [1995,0701.91](#)

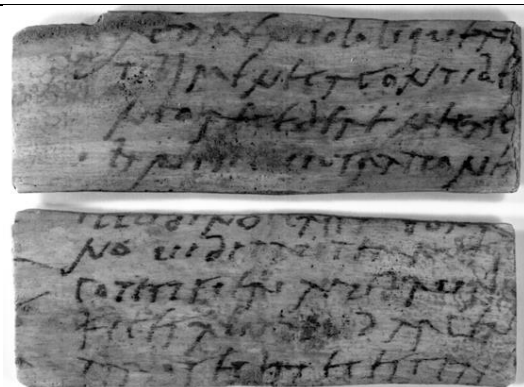
A
*apsistas misi tibi se[un] [...]] | liorum(?) denariorum
 du[- | quae sigulas in cartas in[se]- | ges det[.]r[.]... s
 mihi s[]⁵ tanquam utique mihi [| non sit
 gratum. [] [] . . .*

B
*q[ui] m mea erratio quem [.] | optestor inutiliter | ita
 rogo credas mihi | m.... em[er] sic re[]⁵ cedere ut integer
 | ši[m] quod est p[er] rimu(m) | . . .*

A
 ... you may stop(?) I have sent you separately(?)...
 additional(?) *denarii*, which ... into individual
 wrappings ... as if at any rate ... were not pleasing to
 me ...

B
 ... my mistake(?) ... , whose help I am also(?) asking
 for(?) to no purpose. So please believe me ... that I
 retire thus so that my reputation is intact, which is
 the chief point ...


III 656




[Tab. Vindol. III 656](#)
 Private document: letter
 W 184 × H 33
 Date: 97-105 CE
 © The Trustees of the British Museum:
[1995,0701.349](#)

i
 . . . | ... [] [] | ac tamen uolo liqueat | tibi me nec a
 contiber[nio] recedere nec a sco[]⁵ la ni[] c. ius
 rationem | . . .

ii
 . . . | illud in. c. ... domi | no uidit autem me | potest
 fieri apud auri | fices aut apud argen[]⁵ tarios et haec
 est pr. | . . .

	<p><i>Back</i></p> <p>. . .] [<i>şime vacat</i></p> <p>And yet I want it to be clear to you that I am withdrawing neither from the mess nor from the club unless ... that ... to the chief. But he saw me, perhaps(?), at the goldsmiths' or the silversmiths' and this is ...</p>
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<p>III 660</p> 	<p>Tab. Vindol. III 660 Private document: letter (a) W 89 × H 54; (b) W 89 × H 35; (c) W 29 × H 18 Date: 104-120 CE © The Trustees of the British Museum: 1995,0701.427</p> <p><i>a</i></p> <p>. . .] [<i>te diligam ne.</i> [. . . <i>legatus trib[unatu]m sed tamquam i [] tro li- ⁵] collegam am- [plissimu]m existimo</i></p> <p><i>b</i></p> <p>. . . traces? <i>uiri boni accedit etiam libera lium studiorum amore profectus morum denique ⁵ te[m]peramentum et cu- . . .</i></p> <p><i>c</i></p> <p>. . . traces] <i>ndis ani [] re. ime. [</i></p> <p><i>a</i></p> <p>(... I might esteem you highly lest ... legate tribuneship but just as ... I esteem the greatest colleague ...)</p> <p><i>b</i></p> <p>(to the components)... of a good man there is added also moral progress through love of liberal pursuits, and finally moderation and ...</p>
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<p>III 662</p> 	<p>Tab. Vindol. III 662 Private document: letter W 87 × H 32 Date: 97-105 CE © The Trustees of the British Museum: 1995,0701.107</p> <p><i>A</i></p> <p>. . . [c. 9] <i>bes hom. [] [c. 8] <i>ş constat esse [] non factum et illum magis esse ebriacum ⁵ [] maxsimum et hoc . . .</i></i></p> <p><i>B</i></p> <p>. . . [.] <i>res nobis benefic[] . [] .. e. rumpantur inuidi[a] [] ! bna bona esse []] vacat</i></p> <p><i>A</i></p> <p>(generous to us they burst with suppressed ill-will)</p>
--	--

ill-will/spite/envy/jealousy ... good lamp-stand/bowls ...)

B

... is agreed to have not been done and that he was more(?) inebriated ...

III 663



[Tab. Vindol. III 663](#)

Private document: letter

W 180 × H 50

Date: 97-105 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum:

[1995,0701.301](#)

i

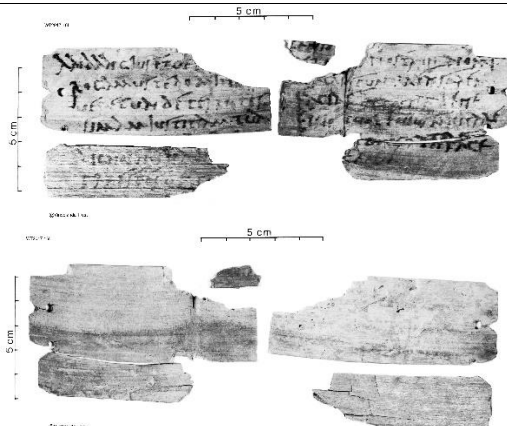
. . . |] [[] ē ina fecit qua ▶ me | [] cunde ▶
consolaris | sicut mater faceret | ⁵ hunc enim ▶
adfec | tum ▶ animus meus | . . .

ii

. . . | diebus ▶ am [c. 5] | ram et comm[ode] |
conu[ales]cebam ▶ tu[] | quid agas cum Pris[] ⁵ cinó tuo
quam | . . .

... has made(?), with which you agreeably(?) comfort me just as a mother would do. For my mind ... this sympathy(?)... within [a few(?) days I had ... and I was beginning to recover nicely. As to you(?), ... what you are doing with your Priscinus ...

IV 891



[Tab. Vindol. IV 891](#)

Letter of Andangius and Vel[...] to Verecundus

Private document: letter

W 185 × H 56

Date: c. 85-92 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [2019,8012.51](#)

i

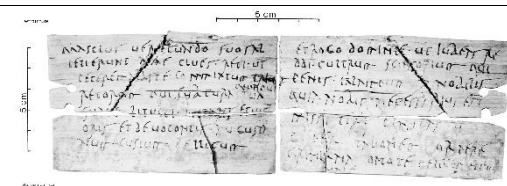
Andangius et Vel[] | rogamus te domin[e] | Verecunde
per notis | simam iustitiam tuam | ⁵ dignos nos
hab[et] [et] | praestes ut ç[uem et]

ii

[amicum] nostrum nomi[] [ne] Crispum mensorem |
facias ut possit bene | ¹⁰ ficio tuo leuius militare | et[]
genio tuo gratias age | [re d] e[] h[] e[] m[] u[] s vacat

Andangius and Vel[...] (we) ask you, lord Verecundus, by your very well known justice, to consider us worthy and to undertake that you make it that our [fellow-countryman and friend], by name Crispus the *ensor*, may be able by your kindness to have a lighter military service; and we (will) owe thanks to your *genius*.

IV 892



[Tab. Vindol. IV 892](#)

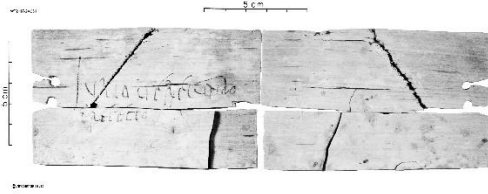
Letter of Masculus to Iulius Verecundus

Private document: letter

W 222 × H 66

Date: c. 85-92 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [2019,8012.59](#)



Front.i

Masclus Verecundo suo sal(utem) | petierunt a me
ciues ▶ Reti ▶ ut | peterem abs te ▶ commiatum
[[trium]] `quinque´ | Retorum qui sub cura tua | ⁵ sunt
Litucci ▶ [[Vitalis]] et Vict|oris ▶ et de Vocontis ▶
Augusta|num ▶ Cusium ▶ Bellicum

Front.ii

et rogo domine ▶ ut iubeas re|ddi ▶ cultrum
scissorium qui | ¹⁰ penis ▶ Talampum (centuriae)
Nobilis | quia nobis necessarius est | missi tibi ▶
plantas ii | . per Talionem tur(ma) Pere|griniana ▶
opto te ▶ felicem et tuos | ¹⁵ vacat m²? uale vacat
Back
Iulio Verecundo | prefecto | ab Masclo dec(urione)

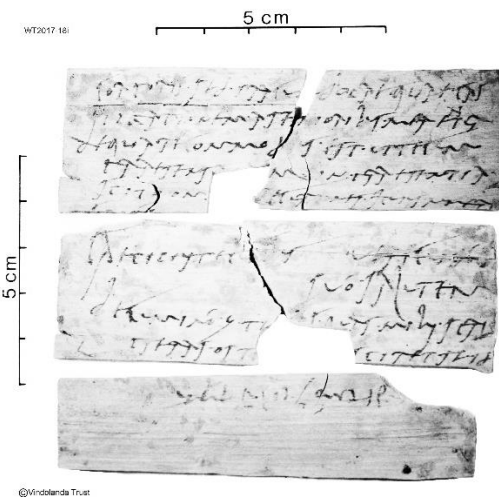
Front

Masclus to his Verecundus, greetings. The Raetian (tribes)men have asked me to request from you leave for [[three]] five (men); of the Raetians who are under your charge, Lituccus [[Vitalis]] and Victor, and from the Vocontii, Augustanus, Cusius, Bellicus. And I ask, my lord, that you order the return of the cleaving-knife which is in the possession of Talampus, of the century of Nobilis, because it is needed by us. I have sent you the plants, 2 ... through Talio, of the *Peregriniana* troop. I hope that you and yours enjoy good fortune. (m²?) Farewell.

Back

To Iulius Verecundus, prefect, from Masclus, decurion.

IV 893



Tab. Vindol. IV 893

Letter of Caecilius Secundus to Iulius Verecundus
Private document: letter

W 192 × H 32

Date c. 85-92 CE

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [2019.8012.53](https://www.britishmuseum.org/objects/2019-8012-53)

Front.i

Caecilius Secunđus ▶ Verecunđo | suo ▶ salutem |
Decuminó ▶ (centurioni) ▶ ti[[li]qas ▶ quas ▶ mihi ▶
scri|pseras ▶ oste[ndi ut] sciret se id | . . .

Front.ii

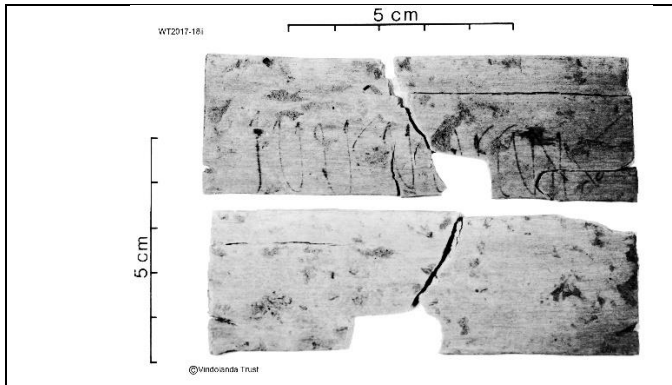
corporis ▶ sed ▶ iracunđ`i`olae ▶ quae ▶
cas|tigatiqem ▶ a seņioribus ▶ mere`n`tur | de qua
re commod[i]us ▶ est ▶ ut tecum | praesens ▶ a[ga]m
▶ in ▶ praesentia ▶ | ⁵ scito ▶ om[ne]s] decuriones ▶
huius ▶ numeri | traces [| . . .

Back

Iulio Verecundó | . . .

Back

Caecilius Secundus to his Verecundus, greetings. The tablets which you had written to me I have shown to the centurion Decuminus, that he might know that he ... it [...] | | [...] ?not] of body [...] but little outbursts of anger which merit castigation by one's seniors.



Concerning which matter, it is more convenient that I discuss it with you in person. For the moment know that all the decurions of this unit ...


Back

To Iulius Verecundus [...]

Appendix to Chapter 4: The Uley Curse Tablets

Diacritical signs (according to *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* II) as in *Sylloge of Defixiones from the Roman West*.²³

abc	clear letters
ABC	clear letters of uncertain interpretation
ⱭⱮ	ambiguous letters, identifiable by their context
+++	traces of illegible letters
<u>abc</u>	letters read by previous editors and now lost
[-c.1-]	lost letters (known quantity/number)
[---]	lost letters (unknown quantity/number)
[-----]	lost line
-----	lost lines (unknown quantity/number)
âb	ligatures
'ab'	letters added in Antiquity to correct or complete a text
[abc]	lost letters (because of damage), restored by the editor
{abc}	superfluous letters, struck by the editor
<abc>	omitted letters, restored by the editor
(a)bc	omitted letters (due to phonetic or grammatical reasons), restored by the editor
ˆabcˆ	letters corrected by the editor
a(bc)	abbreviation expanded by the editor
[[abc]]	erased by legible text
<<abc>>	text struck over erasure
(crux)	image (described in commentary by the editor)
(?)	uncertain reading
.	interpunctuation
(vacat)	blank space
	line break

No.	Curse Tablets: Uley, Aquae Sulis, Londinium	Text, Context, and Details
SD 355 (Uley 1)		<p>Petitioner: Cenacus²⁴ Old Roman Cursive: 2nd-3rd centuries CE 18 lines, left to right, two-sided, folded twice 135 x 85 Britannia 1979, 340-341 (Paywall) © The Trustees of the British Museum: 1978,0102.77 The Uley Shrines Excavation Report, 118-120 Drawing: M. W. C. Hassall</p> <p>A <i>deo Mercurio Cenacus quęritur de Vitalino et Nata- lino filio ipsius d(e) iument[o?] quod ej rap- tum est eę rogat deum Mercurium ut nec ante sa- nitatem</i></p> <p>B <i>habeant nissi [[nissi]] repraese[n]- taverint mihi [iu]- mentum quod rā- puerunt et deo devotionem quā[m] ipse ab his ex postulaverit</i></p>

²³ Natalías 2022, 84. Different conventions are used for the Vindolanda Tablets and the Uley Curse Tablets. 'There is still no absolute standardization in presentation', Cooley 2012, 351; see 350–60 for a fuller listing of editorial conventions and a discussion of their importance. Cooley comments that 'it is crucial not to mislead the reader into thinking that letters in a text are more legible than they really are' (351).

²⁴ SD 355 (Uley 1): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 344–46; Tomlin 1993, 118–20.

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COMMUNITORIVMDEM
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 NINMMULLEREDE LINTIA
 MINEOYODAMISITVLL
 LEQVIHOC CIRCUMSIENTNOD
 ANTEAXEVRNIS SLOVANDA
 RES DICTA SADFANVM #P#C
 IVNATI VLRIT SVR SIV V
 LIERISI SERVVS SIBER

DEO SITO IERTINA
 PARTEM DONATAV
 EXSIGAT ISTAS RES QVAE
 STASVNI
 AQVA PERT DEO SILVNO
 IERIPARS DONATVR ITNT
 HOC EXSIGAT VIRSI FEMNAN SIV
 VSSILIPER

B
 deo s(upra)dicto tertiam | partem donat ita ut (vacat)
 | exsigat istas res quae (vacat) | s(upra)scrip(ta) sunt
 (vacat) | ACA quae per<didi>t deo Silvano | tertia pars
 donatur ita ut | hoc exsigat si vir si femina si ser[v-] |
 us si liber [-c.2-] + [-c.7-] + at

A
 A memorandum to the god Mercury (over Mars
 Silvanus) from Saturnina a woman, concerning the
 linen cloth which she has lost. (She asks) that he who
 has stolen it should not have rest before/unless/until
 he brings the aforesaid property to the aforesaid
 temple, whether man or woman, whether slave or
 free.

B
 She gives a third part to the aforesaid god on
 condition that he exact this property which has been
 written above. A third part... what she has lost is given
 to the god Silvanus on condition that he exact it,
 whether man or woman, whether slave or free...

SD 357
 (Uley 3)



DEO M<a>rti Mercuri[o---] | anulus aureus de
 hos[pitiolo?---] | erit+(?)et pedica ferre[a---] | S+ qui
 fraudem feci[t---] | R[-c.2-] deus inveniãt

Petitioner: no name²⁶
 Capitals: 2nd century CE
 5 lines, left to right, one sided, folded
 54 x 98
 © The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.79](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X1900079)
[Britannia 1979, 344-345](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X1900079) (Paywall)
[The Uley Shrines Excavation Report, 122-123](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X1900079)
 Drawing: M. W. C. Hassall

deo M<a>rti Mercuri[o---] | anulus aureus de
 hos[pitiolo?---] | erit+(?)et pedica ferre[a---] | S+ qui
 fraudem feci[t---] | R[-c.2-] deus inveniãt

Translation
 To the god Mars/Mercury (...) gold ring from (...) [house] (...) and iron fetter (...) who did wrong (...) let the god discover.

²⁶ SD 357 (Uley 3): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 347; Tomlin 1993, 122–23.

SD 358
(Uley 4)



Petitioner: Biccus²⁷

Capitals, 2nd century CE

16 lines, left to right, folded

124 x 66 x 1

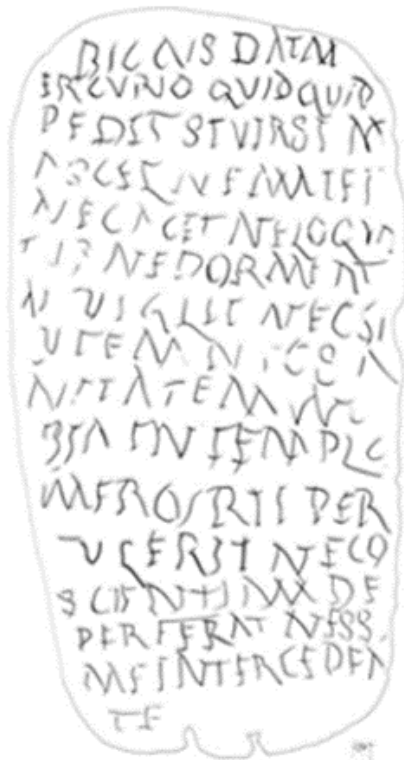
© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.80](https://doi.org/10.1017/S000725261978010280)
[Britannia 1993, 124-126](#)

[The Uley Shrines Excavation Report, 124](#)

Drawing: Roger. S. O. Tomlin

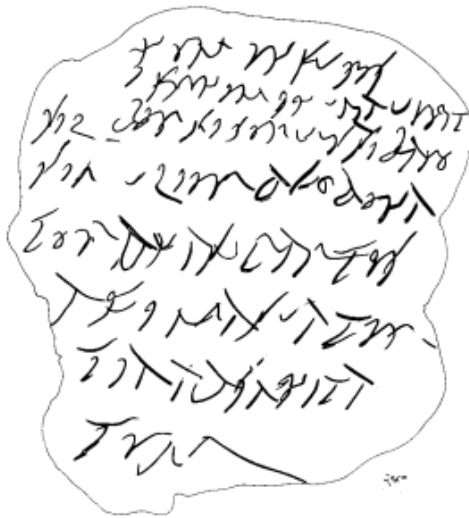
*Biccus dat M- | ercurio quiddid | pe(r)d(id)it si vir si
m- | ascel ne m^eia^t | ne cacet ne loqua- | tur ne
dormiat | ne vigilet nec sa- | lutem nec sa- | nitatem
ne- | ssa in templo | Mercurii per- | tulerit ne co(n)- |
scientiam de | perferat nessi | me interceden- | te*

Biccus gives Mercury whatever he has lost (that the thief), whether man or male (*sic*), may not urinate nor defecate nor speak nor sleep nor stay awake nor [have] well-being or health, unless he bring (it) in the temple of Mercury; nor gain consciousness (*sic*) of (it) unless with my intervention.



²⁷ SD 358 (Uley 4): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 348–49; Tomlin 1993, 124–26.

SD 359
(Uley 5)



Petitioner: unnamed²⁸

Old Roman Cursive: 2nd-3rd centuries CE

8 lines, left to right, not folded, hammered out before being inscribed

72 x 70

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.81](#)

[Britannia 1989, 327-328](#) (Paywall)

[The Uley Shrines Excavation Report, 126-127](#)

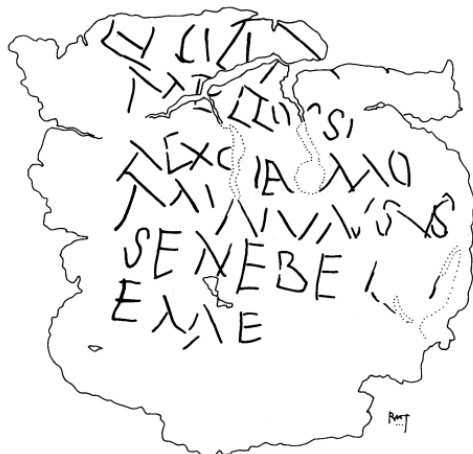
Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

*nomen furis (vacat) | [qu]i frenem inyolaverit | si
liber si servus si baro | si mulier deo dona- | <<tor
duas>> partes | AFIMA sua ter- | tia ad sanita- | tem*

The name of the thief who has stolen (my) bridle, whether free or slave, whether man or woman, is given to the god (...) two parts from his wife(?), a third to (his) health.

²⁸ SD 359 (Uley 5): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 349; Tomlin 1993, 126–27.

SD 360
(Uley 33)



Petitioner: unnamed
Capitals: 4th century CE
6 lines, left to right, folded twice
76 x 70
© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.109](https://doi.org/10.1093/britannia/1989/327-328)
[Britannia 1989, 327-328](https://doi.org/10.1093/britannia/1989/327-328) (Paywall)
Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

Lucilia | Mellossi | AEXSIEVMO | Minu(v)assus | Senebel[]- | e[]nae

Lucilia (daughter) of Mellossus (...) Minu(v)assus (son) of Senebellena.

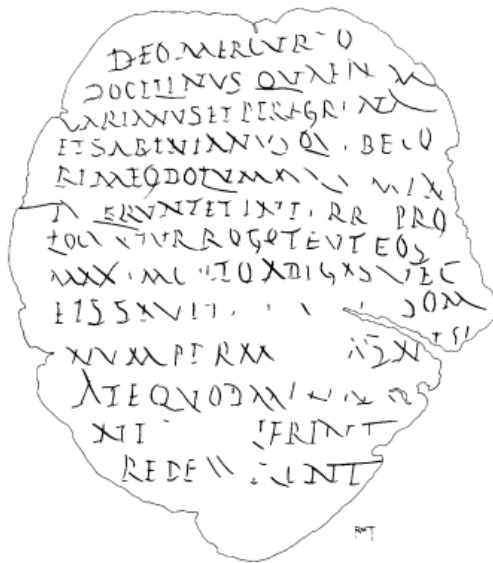
SD 361
(Uley 43)



Petitioner: Docilinus²⁹
Capitals: 2nd century CE
13 lines, left to right, hammered flat before being inscribed, folded
98 x 84 x 1
© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.119](https://doi.org/10.1093/britannia/1989/329-331)
[Britannia 1989, 329-331](https://doi.org/10.1093/britannia/1989/329-331) (Paywall)
Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

*deo Mercurio | Docilinus QVAENM | Varianus et Peregrina | et Sabinianus qui peco- | 5 ri meo dolum
ma[]lum in- | tu[]erunt et INT+RR[-c.1-] pro- | locu[]tur
rogo te ut eos | maximo[] leto adigas nec | eis
sanita[]t[e]m n[]e[c] som- | num per[]mitt[]as nisi | a te
quod mi[]hi ad[]m[]i- | nisi[] tr[]averint | redem[]e[]rint*

²⁹ SD 361 (Uley 43): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 350–51; Tomlin 1989, 329–31.



To the god Mercury (from) Docilinus. Varianus and Peregrina and Sabinianus who have brought evil harm on my beast and are (...) I ask that you drive them to the greatest death, and do not allow them health or sleep unless they redeem from you what they have administered to me.

SD 362
(Uley 49)



Petitioner: unnamed³⁰
Capitals (lines 1-7), hard to categorise lettering (8-9):
4th century CE
9 lines, left to right along previously traced lines,
folded twice
66 x 42
[Britannia 1995, 376-377](#)
Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

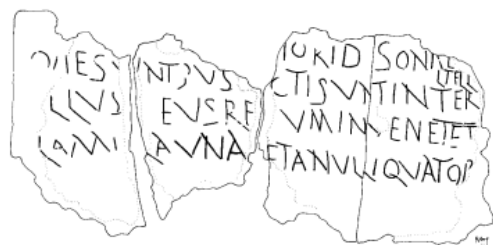
*Aunillus | Viç[a]riana | Covitius | Mini dona<n> |
Varicillum | Minura<m?> | Atavacum | (traces) |
(traces)*

Aunillus, Vicariana, Covitius (son) of Minus give
Varicillus; Minura and Atavacus ...

SD 363
(Uley 50)



Petitioner unnamed³¹
Capitals: 4th century CE
4 lines, left to right, folded at least twice
30 x 91
© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978.0102.126](#)
[Britannia, 1998, 433-434](#) (Paywall)
Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin



*[-c.6- Mercur]io RID [-c.1-]SONAE[---]'LTELL[---]' |
[---]ESVNT sus[pe]cti sunt inter [---] | [-c.1-]LLVS[-c.2-
]EVSRE[-c.1-]VMINVENETET[---] | lami[!]la una et anulli
quator[---]*

r

³⁰ SD 362 (Uley 49): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 351–52; Tomlin 1995, 376–77.

³¹ SD 363 (Uley 50): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 352; Tomlin 1993, 433–34.

SD 364
(Uley 55)



Petitioner: Mintla Rufus³²

Old Roman Cursive: 2nd-3rd centuries CE

6 lines, left to right, folded five times

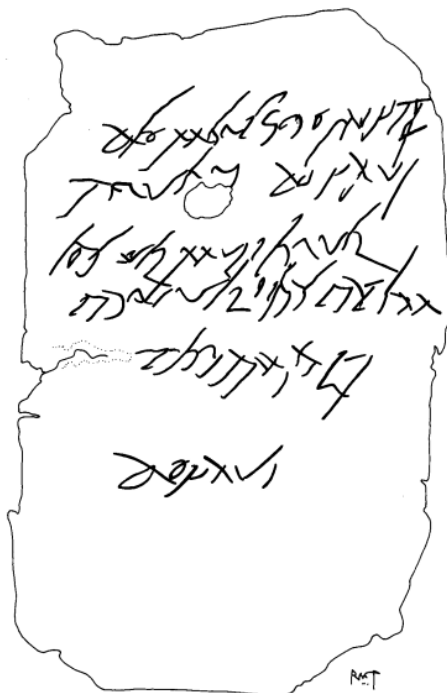
95 x 60

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.131](#)
[Britannia 1995, 371-373](#) (Paywall)

Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

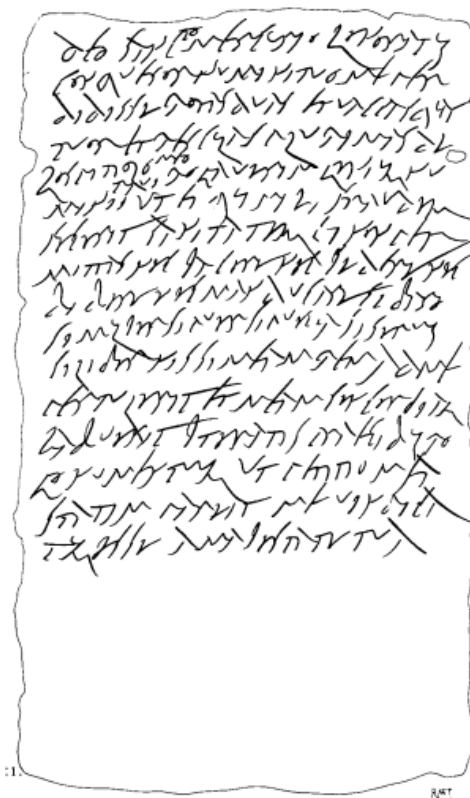
*deo Mercurio Mint<<l>>- | a Rufus donavi | eos vel
mulier vel | PARIVSLIIFASPATEM | [ma]teriam sagi |
(vacat) | donavi*

Mintla Rufus to the god Mercury. I have given them,
whether woman or [man], (...) the material of a cloak.
I have given (them).



³² SD 364 (Uley 55): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 353; Tomlin 1995, 371–73.

SD 365
(Uley 72)



Petitioner: Honoratus³³

Old Roman Cursive: 2nd–3rd centuries CE

17 lines, left to right, folded 6 times

131 x 76 x 1

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.148](https://www.britishmuseum.org/press-releases/2018/01/2018-01-18)
[Britannia 1992, 310-311](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X19000311) (Paywall)

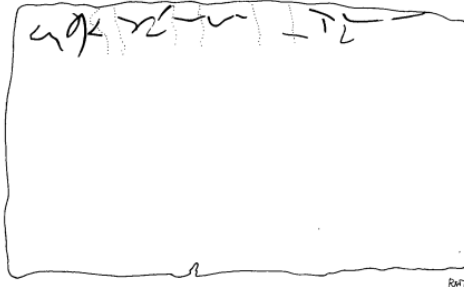
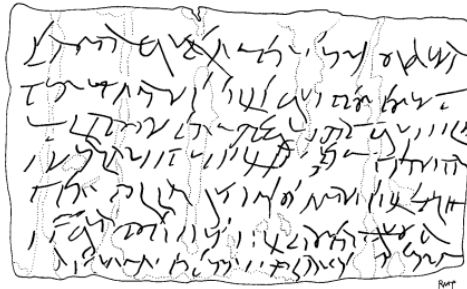
Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

*Deo sanc'to' Mercurio Honoratus | conqueror numini
tuo me per- | didisse rotas duas et vaccas quat- | tuor
et resculas plurimas de | hospitolo meo | rogaverim
genium nu- | minis `tu{u}i' ut ei qui mihi fraudem |
fecerit sanitatem ei non per- | mittas nec iacere nec
sedere nec | bibere nec manducare si baro | si mulier
si puer si puella si servus | si liber nis{s}i meam rem ad
me | pertulerit et meam concordiam | habuerit iteratis
pr{a}ecibus ro- | go numen tuum ut petitio mea |
statim pareat me vindica- | tum esse a maiestate tua*

Honoratus to the holy god Mercury. I complain to your divinity that I have lost two wheels and four cows and many small belongings from my house. I would ask the genius of your divinity that you do not allow health to the person who has done me wrong, nor allow him to lie or sit or drink or eat, whether he is man or woman, whether boy or girl, whether slave or free, unless he brings my property to me and is reconciled with me. With renewed prayers I ask your divinity that my petition may be immediately fulfilled (and that it become obvious) that I have been avenged by your majesty.

³³ SD 365 (Uley 72): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 354–55, translation modified following; Adams 2016, chap. 37; Tomlin 1992, 310–11.

SD 367
(Uley 80)



Petitioner: unknown³⁵

Old Roman Cursive: 3rd century CE

8 lines, left to right, two-sided, folded 5 times

42 x 72

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.156](#)
[Britannia 1996, 439-441](#) (Paywall)

Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

A

*carta | qu(a)e Mercurio dona- | tur ut mançilis qui
per[i]erunt | ultionem requirat qui illoş | invalavi{i}t uť
illi sangu(in)em [e]t sanita- | tem tolle[t] qui ipsos
manicili[o]s tulit | [u]ť quantoci{ç}i}us illi pareat quod |
deum Mercurium r[o]gamus [-c.2-]++ VRA*

B

Q[-c.1-]OS+NC+V [-c.2-3-]LAT | (vacat)

The sheet (of lead) which is given to Mercury, that he exact vengeance for the gloves which have been lost; that he take blood and health from the person who has stolen them; that he provide what we ask the god Mercury [...] as quickly as possible for the person who has taken these gloves.

SD 368
(Uley 86)



Petitioner: ? Petronius³⁶

Capitals: 4th century CE

1 line, left to right, pierced with a nail after being
inscribed (hole next to the E)

(105) x 85 x 15

British Museum: [1978,0102.162](#)
[Britannia 1993, 310-311](#) (Paywall)

Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

PETRONIUS

³⁵ SD 367 (Uley 80): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 356–57; Tomlin 1996, 439–41.

³⁶ SD 368 (Uley 86) Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 357; Tomlin 1993b, 310-311.



SD 369
(Uley 58)



All but two lines unpublished³⁷

Petitioner: unknown

Old Roman Cursive: 75-125 CE

9 lines

120 x 71

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.134](https://www.britishmuseum.org/1978,0102.134)

Mercurio

res id est lanam

To Mercury

(relates to the theft of some wool)

SD 370
(Uley 78)



Unpublished³⁸

Petitioner: unknown

Old Roman Cursive: 3rd century CE

30 lines, left to right, folded

63 x 144

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.154](https://www.britishmuseum.org/1978,0102.154)

A

tibi commendo [---] qui mihi fraudem fecit de
denar(ii)s ill<i>s quos [mih]l debeat

B

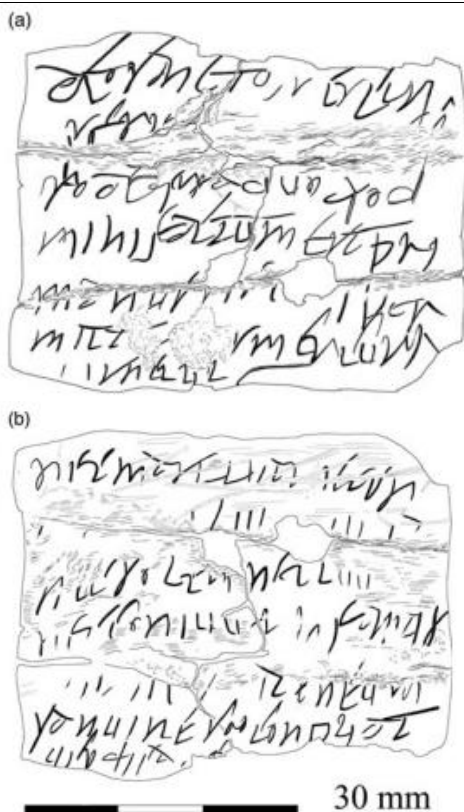
*seminudi edentuli tremuli podagrici sine cuiusque
hominis mis{s}ericordia | in fanum et thesaurum
poten{ten}tiss[imi] dei*

... the man who has cheated me of the *denarii* he owed me. I give, I offer, I destine, I depute one hundred thousand *denarii* to the god Mercury, that he may bring them to the temple and treasury of the most mighty god.

³⁷ SD 369 (Uley 129): Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 357–58 not fully published; Tomlin 1993a, 129.

³⁸ SD 370 (Uley 78): Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 358; Tomlin 2002, 169.

SD 371
(Uley 68)



Petitioner: ? Carinus³⁹

New Roman Cursive: 4th century CE

15 lines, left to right, two-sided, folded twice
38 x 47

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.144](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X15000144)
[Britannia 2015, 398-399](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X15000144) (Paywall)

Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

A

*deo sancto Mercurio | Carin[us? tibi ex?]eç- | ro de
furto {VO} quod | mihi factum est Pri- | manus neç ei
per- | mitt[at -c.3-4-]S Mercurius | {uç} nec (traces)*

B

*nec mas [[+++++++]] | | (traces) | neç solem nec
lun[am] | nec CONIVV++ infantis | (traces) neum |
san(g)uine suo conpliat | vendica[tionem?]*

To the holy god Mercury. I (?), Carinus (?), implore you concerning the theft which has been done to me (by) Primanus. And Mercury is neither to permit him (...) nor (...) nor (...) neither sun nor moon, neither (...) of an infant (...) fulfil vengeance with his blood.

SD 372
(Uley 34)



Petitioner: Genitus (or: Cunitus?)⁴⁰

Old Roman Cursive: 2nd-3rd centuries CE

18 lines, left to right, folded four times
88 x 53

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.110](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X16000110)
[Britannia 2016, 396-397](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X16000110) (Paywall)

Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

*Genitus | Mercurio | [g]enio qui mihi | [fru]dum
fecerit an- | ulu m involaverit | sa[nct(um)?] genium si
[-c.2-] + [-c.1-] + [-c.1-] + | a[n]cilla si liber [---] |
[mu]lieris si puer si [pue]ll[us] | +[---] +permitt<e> (?)
eum [-c.2-] ++ | [---] ++ ERNAT pudorem [-c.3-] | [---] +
[-c.2-] IAT pede (traces) | [---]amb<u>{l}lat (traces) |
neç manducat nec | sedit nec magiat n[i-] | si ad
templum | tuum repraese|ntaverit OP | TIBEIVS*

Genitus (or: Cunitus?) to Mercury the *genius*. (He) who has done me (?) wrong, has stolen (my (?)) ring (...) holy *genius* that whether (free woman (?)) or slave-girl, whether free man (...) of a woman, whether boy or girl (...) you do not permit him (...) shame (...) with his foot (...) nor to eat nor to sit (at stool (?)) nor to (?) urinate, unless he pay (...) at your temple.

³⁹ SD 371 (Uley 68): Tomlin 2015, 398f.

⁴⁰ SD 372 (Uley 34): Sánchez Natalías 2022 modified; Tomlin 2016, 396–97.



30 mm

SD 373
(Uley 24)



Petitioner: unknown⁴¹

Old Roman Cursive: 2nd-3rd centuries CE

A: one line of capitals followed by 10 of ORC, left to right; B: two lines of capitals; two-sided, folded four times

92 x 125

[Britannia 2017, 462-464](#) (Paywall)

Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

A

DEVO MARTI [...]LIRUS | qu(a)eritur, si ser(v)us si liber
| qui vas apium invalavit [v]ere | si COMODIA erat ne
illi permittatur | nec bib[er]e nec mandu<ca>re nec |
{nec} somnum nec sanitate<m> nesi ipsum | vas ad
locum suum reversetur | et congortiam Mercuri agat |
SEPET deum V++ illi qui [---] | feci<t> ut illi s<i> me
pariat | qui +++

B

DEVO MAR-|TI VS PROPITIO
(Tomlin suggests V(OTUM) S(OLVIT))

To the god Mars the Propitious
(Tomlin: (...) paid his vow)

(...) complains to the god Mars: whether slave or free, (he) who has stolen (my) beehive (...) if it was (...) let him not be permitted to drink or eat, nor (to have) sleep or health, unless the said hive be returned to its proper place and (he) gain the goodwill of Mercury (...) the god (...) to him who did (this), that to him if he furnishes me (...)

⁴¹ SD 373 (Uley 24): Sánchez Natalías 2022 modified; Tomlin 2017b, 462–64.

SD 386
(Uley 75)



Unpublished⁴²

Petitioner: unknown

Capitals: 2nd-4th centuries CE

10 lines, folded four times

59 x 110

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.151](https://www.britishmuseum.org/objects/1978_0102_151)

...d[e]arca ...frumenta...s(i) b(aro) s(i) m(ulier)

'Gift' of stolen property, apparently cash (*d[e] acra*) and standing grain (*frumenta*), with the request that the thief be made to return it to the temple of Mercury at Uley. It uses an abbreviated all-inclusive formula *sbsmssp* (*s(i) b(aro) s(i) m(ulier)*). The place name is romanized but of Celtic etymology.

SD 387
(Uley 83)



Petitioner: Pectillus⁴³

Irregular capitals: 2nd-4th centuries CE

9 lines of irregular capitals and traces of a tenth, folded three times

111x54

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.159](https://www.britishmuseum.org/objects/1978_0102_159)

[Britannia 2021, 471-472](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022268921000472) (Paywall)

Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

[.]O PECTI[...] | .S QVI VE[...] | CES PERD[...] | DITIT
DON[...] | .VT ILLVM .[...] | [...]MBIS [...] |
VOLAUERVNT [...] | VERBECES VT ILLQS [...] | .INE
SANGV[.]N [...] | ...

The text can be partly restored:

[de]o Pecti[ll] | u]s qui ue[rbe]]ces perd[idit] | {ditit}
don[at] | . ut illum .[...] | [...]MBIS [in]|uolauerunt |
uerbeces ut illos | [s]ine sangu[i]n[e] | ...

To the god, Pectillus who has lost (his) wethers, gives that (he) ... him ... (they) have stolen the wethers, that [he / they return] them without bloodshed.

⁴² SD 386 (Uley 75): Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 363; Tomlin 1993a, 130; Tomlin 2002, 170.

⁴³ SD 387 (Uley 83): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 363 not included; Tomlin 2021, 471–72.



SD 390
(Uley 9)



Petitioner: unknown⁴⁴

Old Roman Cursive: 2nd-3rd centuries CE

12 lines inscribed on hammered lead sheet, two-sided, folded twice

92 x 79

British Museum: [1978.0102.85](https://www.britishmuseum.org/objects/roman-lead-sheet-SD-390)

[Britannia 2020, 480-482](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X20000482) (Paywall)

Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

A

diu[o] Merçurio dõnau[i] | qui me ma[li] cõsil |
desputauerit ouem | inuolauerit ipse | deus
interscia(t) sangu(i)n[e]. | ùili si ser(u)us si liber si |
puer si pue!(l)a |

B

licet qu[o]d [n]eşcioo | aput .e[...].mũiçañ | diui
ipse[us] ... me | inp[.]opè..[...].nessi | ips[.]seu[.]s[...].

To the god Mercury I have given (the man) who of evil intent has ?robbed me (and) has stolen (my) sheep. Let the god himself ?kill (him) with his vile blood, whether (he is) slave or free, whether boy or girl, even if, which I do not know, at the ... of the god himself ... me ... unless ...

⁴⁴ SD 390 (Uley 9): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 363 not included; Tomlin 2020, 480–82.

SD 411
(Uley 41)



Petitioner: Virilis⁴⁵

Old Roman Cursive (first two letters capitals): 2nd-3rd centuries CE

10 lines (a7, b3), left to right, two-sided, folded twice
89 x 61

British Museum: [1978,0102.117](#)

[Britannia 2020, 481-483](#)

Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

A

Si quis <h>ouem su[um de pro]prio tulerit Virilis, si ser(u)s [si liber] | si baro si mulier, si se[r](u)s [si liber ?ut] | non [i]llis permittas nec [... ?nec] | bib(e)re (nec m)anducare n[ec ante dies] | nouem san(g)uinem suum [... ni] | si uindictam meam u.[...]

B

[...] ... qui ... [...] | [...]san.ep.[...]uit | [...]s[an](g)uine.

If anyone ... has stolen his sheep ... from the property of Virilis, whether slave [or free], whether man or woman, whether slave [or free], may you not permit them [...] nor to drink nor to eat [...] nor [before] nine [days] ... his blood unless ... my vengeance ... who ... has ... with (his) blood.

SD 431
(Uley 84)



Unpublished⁴⁶

Petitioner: unknown

Capitals and Old Roman Cursive: 2nd-3rd centuries CE
22 lines

134 x 84

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.160](#)

A

ten lines of capitals. Anonymous complaint to Mars (bearing a title also borne by Mercury at Uley) of the theft of property defined as 'two pewter plates'.

B

twelve lines of Old Roman Cursive, continuing (A). The thief is to suffer ill health; 'half' the plates are given to the god, for him to exact the stolen property: i.e. 'half the value of the stolen items in exchange for their return' (Sánchez Natalías)

⁴⁵ SD 411 (Uley 41): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 364 not included; Tomlin 2020, 481–83.

⁴⁶ SD 431 (Uley 84): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 365; Tomlin 1993, 130.

SD 436
(Uley 52)



Unpublished⁴⁷

Petitioner: unknown

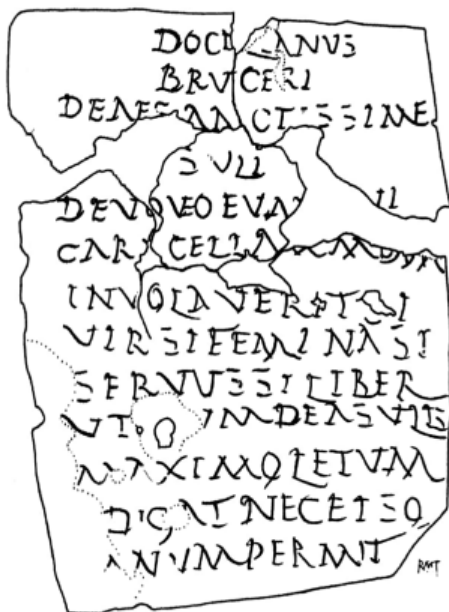
Latin text written in Greek letters in a clumsy New Roman Cursive: 4th century CE

86 x 95

© The Trustees of the British Museum: [1978,0102.128](https://www.britishmuseum.org/objects/1978_0102_128)

I have given the man who stole my linen and my cloak and my two silver coins, whether boy or girl, whether male slave or female, whether man or woman, whether soldier or civilian. Take away his marrow, his blood, his soul, unless he brings them to your temple.

SD 215
(Tab.
Sulis 10)



Petitioner: Docilianus⁴⁸

Elegant capitals: 2nd century CE

19 lines, left to right, two-sided, after being inscribed pierced by a nail at A, line 10.

98 x 81 x .8

Roman Bath Museum: Inv. No.: 638

[Britannia 1981, 372-377](https://www.britannia.com/roman-bath-museum/roman-bath-museum-638)

Tabellae Sulis 10

Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

A

Docilianus | Bruceri | deae sanctissim(a)e | Suli | devoveo eum [q]ui | caracellam meam | inolaverit si | vir si femina si | servus si liber | ut [-c.1-2-] VM dea Sulis | maximo letum | [a]digat nec ei so | mnum permit-

B

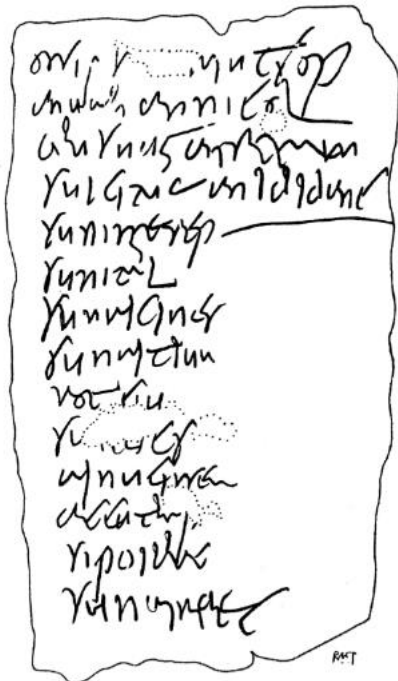
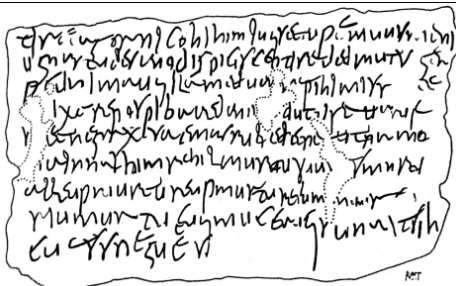
tat nec natos nec | nascentes do | [ne]c caracallam | meam ad tem | plum sui numi | nis per[t]ulerit

Docilianus son of Brucetus to the most holy goddess Sulis. I devote him who has stolen my hooded cloak, whether man or woman, whether slave or free. May the goddess Sulis inflict him with the greatest death, and not allow him sleep or children now nor in the future, until he has brought my hooded cloak to the temple of her divinity.

⁴⁷ SD 436 (Uley 52): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 365; Tomlin 1993, 129; Tomlin 2002, 175; Tomlin 2017a, 73.

⁴⁸ SD 215 (Tab. Sulis 10): Sánchez Natalías 2022, 274–75; Tomlin 1988.

SD 303
(Tab.
Sulis 98)



Petitioner: Annianus, son of Mantutina (?)⁴⁹
23 lines of text, right to left, bottom to top
60 x 105
New Roman Cursive: 4th century CE
left to right
Roman Bath Museum, Inv. No.: 622
[Britannia 1982, 404-407](#) (Paywall)
Tabellae Sulis 98
Drawing: Roger S. O. Tomlin

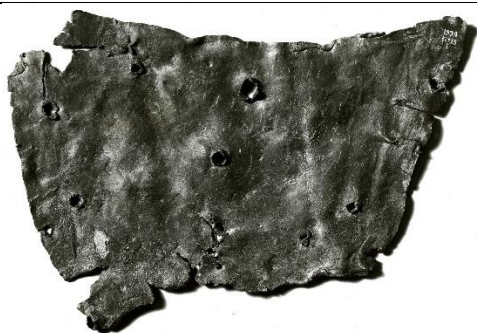
A
(vacat) seu gen[tilli]s seu C- | h(r)istianus quaecumque
utrum vir | utrum mulier utrum puer utrum puella |
utrum s[er]vus utrum liber mihi Annia[n]- | o
Mantu[er]i n(a)e de bursa mea s(e)x argente[o]s |
furaverit tu d[omi]na dea ab ipso perexi[g]- | e[-c.1-
]Jeo[s] si mihi per [f]raudem aliquam in DEP- | REG[-c.1-
] STVM dederit nec sic ipsi dona sed ut sangu- | inem
suum (r)eputes qui mihi hoc inrogaverit

B
Postum[inu]s Pisso | Locinna [A]launa | Materna
Gunsula | Candidina Euticius | Peregrinus | Latinus |
Senicianus | Avitianus | Victor | Scot[us] | Aessicunia
| Paltucca | Calliopis | Celerianus

Whether pagan or Christian, whether man or woman, whether boy or girl, whether slave or free, whoever has stolen from me, Annianus (son of) Matutina (?), six silver coins from my purse, you, lady Goddess, are to exact (them) from him. If through some deceit he has given me ... and do not give thus to him but reckon as (?) the blood of him who has invoked this upon me.

Postumianus, Pisso, Locinna, Alauna, Materna, Gunsula, Candidina, Euticius, Peregrinus, Latinus, Senicianus, Avitiannus, Victor, Scotius, Aessicunia, Paltucca, Calliopis, Celerianus.⁵⁰

SD 339
(RIB 7)



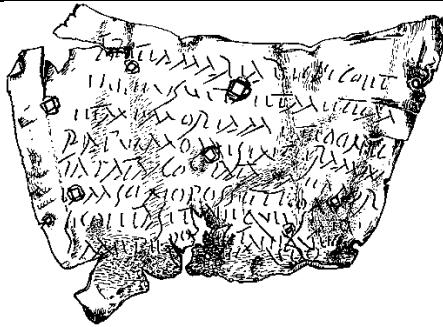
Defigens: unnamed⁵¹
Old Roman Cursive: 2nd century CE
9 lines, left to right, tablet's surface hammered flat before being inscribed, after being inscribed pierced nine times from reverse. The largest of the preserved holes happens to coincide with the victim's name.
[RIB 7](#)
© The Trustees of the British Museum [1934,1105.1](#)
Drawing: R. G. Collingwood, checked and slightly amended by R. P. Wright

Tretia(m) Martia(m) defico et | illeus vita(m) et
me(n)tem | et memoriam et iocine-|ra pulmones
interm{x}ix{i}- | ta fata cogitata memor- | iam s'ic'

⁴⁹ SD 303 (Tab. Sulis 98): Sánchez Natalías 2022a; Tomlin 1988a; J. N. Adams 1992, 10ff.

⁵⁰ SD 303 (Tab. Sulis 98): Sánchez Natalías 2022a; Tomlin 1988a; J. N. Adams 1992, 10ff.

⁵¹ SD 345 (RIB 7): Sánchez Natalías 2022a, 336–37.



*no(n) possitt loqui | (quae) sicreta si(n)t neque SINITA
| MERE possit neque [---] | [---] CLVDO*

I curse Tertia Martia and her life and mind and memory and liver and lungs mixed up together, and her words, thoughts, and memory; so may she be unable to speak what things are concealed, nor be able ... nor ... (modified by Sánchez Natalías).

Uley casket



Copper alloy sheet from a casket, embossed with four Christian scenes. Part of a larger sheet, with only the bottom having its original edging. Scenes on the left divided from those on the right by two bands of beading, while a single beaded line divides the upper and lower registers.

- i. Top left, Christ and the centurion who came to seek healing for his servant. (Matthew 8:5-13): ['a large figure wearing a *himation* and ?boots. In front of him a smaller figure in a military tunic, flourishes a knobbed stick in his left hand and a sword in his right hand. The stick is to be identified as the centurion's *vitis*'].⁵²
- ii. Top right, Christ healing the blind man (Mark 8:22-25 and John 9). ['the same large figure touches the eyes of an approaching nude figure, evidently with a wrinkled and deformed visage, perhaps to emphasise that he is blind'].⁵³
- iii. Bottom left, Jonah reclines under the gourd. In its branches at least one bird can be seen. By his side is the ketos or sea-monster which in early Christian art swallows and later disgorges him.
- iv. Bottom right, 'Sacrifice of Isaac' (Genesis 22), Abraham stands to the front and looks right. In his right hand he holds a sword or knife. Below is a tree or bush, on his left is an altar with fire burning upon it, and below is a ram caught in a thicket.

© The Trustees of the British Museum, [1978,0102.70](https://www.britishmuseum.org/1978_0102_70)

⁵² Henig, Hassall, and Bayley 1993, 109.

⁵³ Henig, Hassall, and Bayley 1993, 109.