

Undying voices: the poetry of Roman Britain

Book

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UNDYING VOICES

The Poetry of Roman Britain

Latin – Greek – English

Reading (UK)

2015

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Avant-propos

The period of Roman occupation (A. D. 43–410) has had a lasting, all-pervading impact on Britain. From the bulwarks that are Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall to place names that readily disclose their Roman heritage, from a vast number of English words whose roots are firmly embedded in the Latin language to the innumerable heritage sites that preserve the ruins of Roman and Romano-British civic and military life: more than 2,000 years after the first Roman set foot into Britain, Roman culture in Britain is as present and popular as ever.

The Romans imported many aspects of culture and civilisation to Britain when they arrived (alongside the death and destruction, ironically, that they brought to the native tribes – a cost of Roman expansionism that one must not forget): urbanism and grand architecture, road networks and trade, bathhouses and general sanitation, as well as the taste for a refined style of life, at least for those who could afford it.

An aspect that is often ignored or downplayed is that of literacy and written culture: while we may be struck by the immediacy of the content of the famous Vindolanda writing tablets, military and private correspondence from Hadrian's Wall, and while we get to admire many an impressive Roman tombstone in our museums, we are still likely to assume that literacy and general engagement with written culture was low. The truth is, however, that the use of writing (as well as the competency to read) was widespread and available to members of all classes, male and female.

With the arrival of the Latin and Greek languages, in the wake of the Roman army's invasion of Britain, and in conjunction with the introduction of the Roman desire to leave monumental traces of their writing in the shape of inscriptions, comes the arrival of written verbal artistry – inscribed poetry in Latin and Greek, the earliest surviving traces of poetry from Britain.

Unlike the poetry of Rome's great poets, such as Catullus, Vergil, or Ovid, inscribed poetry truly is the people's poetry: those who commissioned or produced it came from all segments of the Romano-British society

(including its many migrants and the soldiers that were deployed here from all parts of the Roman empire): it is the poetry of the local elite who decorated their houses with lavish mosaics just as much as it is the poetry of simple soldiers, struggling merchants, craftsmen, and mourning parents. Their desire to create verbal artistry (however successful or competitive one may think it has been) is an expression of fundamental acceptance of the magical power of song and poetry – and our appreciation of that takes us closer to the culture and the minds of those who inhabited this island over 1,600 years ago.

The presentation of texts in this little anthology of ancient Roman poetry has greatly benefitted from the works of other scholars, whose input must be gratefully acknowledged. In addition to the monumental volumes of *Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, I have learnt a great deal about the inscribed poetry of Roman Britain from the learned works of Paolo Cugusi, Valentina Ascutti, and, most of all, my dear friend Matthias Schumacher. Without their meticulous research, duly acknowledged in the bibliography at the end, this collection would not have materialised. I also owe a great deal to Jane F. Gardner, whose delightfully ruthless candour and guidance prevented me from many a grave mistake, here and elsewhere, unless my regrettable stubbornness prevailed. I gladly admit to be standing on the shoulders of giants.

I was immensely fortunate to benefit from a British Academy for a Mid-Career Fellowship (2014-5), which allowed me to produce this humble anthology as a light-hearted by-product of a much larger research project on the Latin verse inscriptions (on which I regularly write on my blog thepetrifiedmuse.wordpress.com), free from my administrative duties at the University of Reading: for that, as well as the possibility to see the majority of the inscriptions collected here in person, I wish to express my gratitude.

Last but certainly not least, I wish to thank Emma Holding for her lasting support and advice.

P. K.

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Articulate Stones and the Petrified Muse

Poetry is an art that invites those who are ready to listen or to read, to feel and to indulge in a world made of, and re-invented in, words, syllables, and sounds. It is a visual and acoustic art, creating its unique artefacts from the elementary constituents of human language, abandoning the need for life-like representation of what has been perceived by the poet together with any requirement for factuality or probability. It is unsettling or even offputting to those who like their words simple, unminced, and in a simple order: such may choose to dismiss it as nonsense or too difficult or uninteresting, just like any other work of art that does not immediately resonate with them. Yet, just as sculptors or painters are free to give shape and colour to their imagined worlds (and thus allowing them to become real), poets are free to, and must, dream of worlds past, present, and future. Unlike sculptors and painters, however, poets express themselves and their imaginations in a malleable material that is available to all humankind: our language.

Poetry to us, in the twenty-first century, may seem ever so elusive – a song soon forgotten, a memorable rhyme, a memory of something great that we were forced to learn, but no longer truly remember. We may feel haunted by a bad conscience that we should read the works of the great poets – works of those who have shaped our language, our thought, and our cultural heritage.

Poetry seems ever so vulnerable. Unlike works of performative art, poems do not regularly end up as ‘classics’ on a stage in front of an audience. Unlike the works of creative arts, poems do not ever seem to end up in a museum. Poetry expressed through popular songs may end up on the radio, CD compilations, iTunes, or YouTube. How do poems even survive? As a liability, in dust-covered tomes, on a library shelf? What do we even know about the poems and songs of those who lived before us, the poems and songs of those, whose other material culture we celebrate in our museums – those buildings whose very name suggests that they, in actual fact, ought to

be temples dedicated to the Muses, the very patron deities of poetry, music, and the arts at large?

Sometimes, however, museums and collections really are for the works of the Muses – often unnoticed by their visitors: language can take many shapes, and it thus blends in seamlessly with behaviours that do not immediately stand out to us. Such is the case with the remains of past generations' material culture – from their buildings that carry inscriptions in big letters, to be noticed, yet overlooked on a daily basis, to inconspicuous household items, that may bear a maker's mark or a little scratched note of ownership. Poetry may hide in both the most and the least surprising places.

For the ancient Romans, who during their extended occupation of Britain – from A. D. 43 to approximately A. D. 410 – substantially and lastingly transformed the cultural and linguistic landscape of the island and its inhabitants, writing was a constant feature of their everyday lives in Britain. From impressive monumental dedication slabs to the most remarkable collection of private letters and official documents that have come to light in Vindolanda, from mile stones along the Roman road network to the phenomenally spiteful curse tablets from Bath: the Romans lived in a lettered world, and they transplanted this world to Britain, where it then began a life of its own – not only in Latin, but also in Greek, the language of the eastern half of the Roman Empire, from where many a soldier (and merchant?) in Roman Britain hailed.

With their language and culture, the Romans brought their epigraphic habit, their specific way of leaving writing on monuments and objects that serve specific purposes (other than being really awkward stationery). Over two thousand monumental inscriptions on stone and metal attest to this practice, as do an equally staggering number of surviving inscribed small, portable objects, coins, tools, utensils of everyday life. Scholars have long begun to take stock of these, and they have entered the collections of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (usually abbreviated as *CIL*; volume VII comprises the inscriptions from Roman Britain) and, more importantly, the volumes of the *Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, regularly supplemented by annual reports of findings in the journal *Britannia*.

Encountering an inscription, especially one that relates to a 'regular person' (as opposed to a representative of the imperial elite), is both a humbling and an exceptionally immediate experience. Unlike literary texts,

these inscriptions usually have not changed format or appearance since they were produced (unless they suffered physical damage, like some of the texts included here), and they put us in touch in the most direct way possible with the very people who *were* the Roman Empire, in all its colourful variety. Their tombstones tell of their successes and failures, of their values and their losses. Their letters tell of everyday concerns and worries, of their family background and the hardship of life at the empire's northernmost frontier. At the same time, inscribed mosaics and household utensils reveal the luxury and refinements of life that the Romans enjoyed, and they allow us to listen and to understand individuals who lived in this country over 1,600 years ago.

Historians and archaeologists often consider inscriptions as the raw material for their studies – a practice that has not changed much since the times of Herodotus and Thucydides, the fathers of Greek historiography. But inscriptions are both much more and much less than that. They are no neutral, factual record of anything. They are not more reliable than writing on paper, only because they were engraved in a rather more labour-intensive manner. They are not historical accounts. They are voices from the past, as trustworthy as any other voice that cannot independently be verified. Monuments in particular are prime means of self-representation, designed to impress and to shape public opinion for a specific purpose – they will include what is deemed useful and they will omit what does not fit in, exploiting the fact that their impressive appearance misleads their beholders to infer, by proxy, accuracy and information of lasting value.

Inscribed poetry then, in a way, drives such impression management (or plain fiction) to an extreme, as it combines the common practice of the epigraphic habit with the limitless narrative and artistic potential of poetry that was outlined before. And it is this type of poetry – inscribed poetry – that has found its way from Roman Britain into our museums and collections, displaying, celebrating, and eternalising the earliest surviving poetic voices from Britain among other, more mundane objects that belong to the same context: tombstones, votives, dedications, clay tiles, wall paintings, and mosaics.

Roman Britain is by no means unique, of course, with its production of poetry on stone or metal (or other lasting materials). From across the Roman Empire, approximately 4,000 Latin inscription in verse survive – a practice that becomes visible to us in the early third century B. C. and that

can pride itself on an unbroken tradition, in all parts of the Roman Empire, to the end of antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages. In the late 19th century, over 2,000 of these texts were collected by the German scholar Franz Bücheler, supplemented posthumously by his colleague Ernst Lommatzsch, and edited in three volumes of the *Anthologia Latina* ('Latin florilegium') called *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* ('inscribed Latin verse'). Interestingly enough, not all parts of the Empire, even within the Latinate west, engaged with this practice equally: Rome, Italy, the Iberian peninsula, and Roman North Africa each have yielded many hundreds of such inscribed poems. Britain, by comparison, does not appear to have been equally fertile in that regard. At the same time, some of the texts from Roman Britain are virtually unique in what they have to say within the framework of the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* – from their mysterious religious allusions to deeply moving farewells to beloved family members, from their highly peculiar graffiti on clay tiles to appropriations of high literature.

Inscriptions, poetic or not, have their place, and they derive meaning from it. References to monuments, sculpture, or other features of the immediate vicinity become unrecognisable once the texts are removed from their original setting – in that regard inscriptions are fundamentally different from literature. At the same time, an inscription's interaction with its vicinity and its beholder is a two-way street: not only does the context often provide important clues to an appropriate understanding of the text, but the text will lend meaning to, and define, its surroundings: as a label on a mosaic, as a comment on a painting, as an individualising feature on a tombstone. Presenting inscribed texts stripped of their context (as in the main part of this little collection) reduces these texts to the very essence of their artifice: the very words. But just like a thoughtfully selected canvas, a wooden frame, light, and wallpaper may add to an impression of a painting, the context adds to an appreciation of inscribed poems: this context will be provided in the form of notes, which will, wherever possible, provide references to easily accessible images, give descriptions, and elucidate the content to a certain extent.

When looking at art, one occasionally wonders: but is it art? (And why? And how?) The same applies to the inscriptions of the collection at hand: some texts are so short, so inconspicuous – can we be certain that the writer meant it to be verbal artistry? Sometimes it is impossible to judge.

Often the underlying rhythm of the Latin text or peculiarities of its wording will help to make a judgement. A number of cases where previously scholars felt that they might be examples of poetry were excluded from the present selection: a matter of personal judgement and experience rather than infallible scientific method. The latter reaches its limits in the case of inscribed poetry, as inscribed poetry does not adhere to the same almost mechanical rhythmical principles that are commonly (and probably falsely) assumed for the greats of literary poetry: the boundaries between poetry, poeticising language, rhythmical prose, and affective prose are ill-defined – and what may be a glitch in one case could be intentional in another. This is the true beauty of art, verbal and otherwise, of course: it is designed to challenge our accustomed boundaries, to find forms of expressions that have not existed before.

Certainly, many of the texts among the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, of course, may not be regarded as particularly challenging high-end pieces of avantgarde art, but as the product of an unskilled wannabe poet. That, however, is the Roman Empire, too: poetry and song culture were not a prerogative of the ruling elite, but extended to all segments of its society, therefore representing the aesthetic abilities and aspirations of those who can just as much as of those who merely did. Some of them might be quite embarrassed to learn that after more than 1,600 years people still read what they had to say. Most of them would be rather pleased, however: inscriptions, to the Romans, were about achieving a lasting *memoria*, 'memory', and *that* these texts – expressions of undying voices that have come to us through the interfaces of articulate monuments and objects – most definitely achieved. They deserve our listening to them, mindful of the fact that we enter the realm of poetic fabrication, not a record office.

Reading the Signs

The following diacritical signs were used in the transcription of the inscriptions:

<i>abc</i>	Regular letters, as visible in the inscription.
<i>a(bc)</i>	The inscription only gives the letter <i>a</i> . What is given in parenthesis has been supplied by the editor to expand an abbreviation, or expand writing that has otherwise been deliberately shortened.
[<i>abc</i>]	Letters that originally must have been in the inscription, but are now lost due to a mechanical disturbance of the text (e.g. physical damage).
[- - -]	Text loss within a line that cannot be restored
< <i>abc</i> >	Letters accidentally omitted by the writer of the inscription, which were supplied by the editor in order to render the text meaningful.
+	Trace of a letter whose actual shape or nature can no longer be determined.
- - - - -	Inscription broken off, definitive (or at least very likely) text loss
	Change of layout (e. g. in cases in which an inscription continues on another side of a monument, etc.).

THE POETRY
OF ROMAN BRITAIN

– I –

Corellia Optata*[D(is)] M(anibus).**Corellia Optata an(norum) XIII.**Secreti Manes, qui regna**Acherusia Ditis incolit-**tis, quos parua petunt post**lumina uit(a)e exiguus cinis**et simulacrum, corpo<r>is um-**bra: insontis gnat(a)e geni-**tor spe captus iniqua**supremum hunc nat(a)e**miserandus defleo finem.**Q(uintus) Core(lius) Fortis pat(er) f(aciendum) c(urauit).*

5

10

– 1 –

Belied Hope

To the Spirits of the Departed.

Corellia Optata, aged 13.

Reclusive Manes, inhabiting the Acherusian realm of Hades,
 whom a little pile of ashes and the spirit do seek
 after but a short light of life – the body's shade:
 I, the begetter of an innocent daughter,
 trapped by wrongful hope, wretched,
 wail this, my daughter's ultimate destiny.

Quintus Corellius Fortis, the father, had this made.

– II –

Inuida Iuno

*Inuida si t[a]uri uidisset Iuno natatus,
iustius Aeolias isset ad usque domos.*

– 2 –

Jealous Juno

Had jealous Juno seen the bull's swimming attempts,
More rightfully still would she have approached the halls of Aeolus.

– III –

Felices ... plus minus

5 *[T(itus) Fl]aminius T(iti filius) Pol(lia tribu) Fa[u(entia)]*
[an]norum XXXXV stip(endiorum) XXII mil(es) leg(ionis)
[XII]II Gem(inae) militauit aq(uilifer), nunc hic s[u]m.
[Haec?] legite et felices uita plus min[us] e[ste]:
[d]i uua(m) uini et aqua(m) prohibent, ubi
Tartar(a) aditis; uiuite, dum si[dus]
uitae dat tempus, honeste!

– 3 –

Happy, More or Less

Titus Flaminius, son of Titus, of the tribus Pollia, from Faventia, aged 45: With 22 years of service as soldier of the 14th legion ‘Gemina’ I was bearer of the eagle: now I am here.
 Read these words, and be happy in your life, more or less:
 as you approach the underworld, the gods deny you the wine’s grape
 and water.
 Live life honestly, while the star of life permits.

– V –

Do ut des

*[Ant?]onianus dedico.
[s]ed date, ut fetura quaestus
suppleat uotis fidem:
aureis sacrabo carmen
mox uiritim litteris.*

5

– 5 –

A Golden Deal

... I, Antonianus, dedicate this.

But grant my requests, so that the proceeds of my business may lend
credence to my promises:

I will consecrate a poem, in due course – – –

– – – with golden letters, every single one of them!

– VI –

Vergilius Britannicus

*Pertacus, Perfidus,
Campester, Lucilianus,
Campanus: conticuere omnes.*

Bina manu l[at]o crispans hastilia ferro ?]

Aurea per caelum uolitat Victoria pennis

– 6 –

Vergil in Britain

On a tile from Silchester –

Pertacus, Perfidus,
Campester, Lucilianus,
Campanus: they all fell silent.

On fragment of a painted plaster wall from Otford –

[Brandishing] two [spears with] b[road heads] in his hand...

On a Roman quarry's rockface near Hadrian's Wall –

Golden Victory flutters through the sky with her wings.

– VII –

Ἀστάρτης βωμός

5 Ἀστ[άρ]της
 βωμόν μ'
 ἔσορᾷς·
 Πούλχερ μ'
 ἀνέθηκεν.

– 7 –

An Altar for Astarte

You behold me –
 Astarte's
 altar:
 Pulcher
 consecrated me.

– VIII –

Prisca religio

*I(oui) O(ptimo) [M(aximo)]
 L(ucius) Sept(imius)
 u(ir) p(erfectissimus) pr(aeses) B[rit(anniae) pr(imae)]
 resti[tuit]
 5 ciuis R[- - -]. ||*

*[si]gnum et
 [e]rectam
 [p]risca re-
 [li]gione co-
 10 [l]umnam*

*Septimius
 renouat
 primae
 prouinciae
 15 rector. ||*

– 8 –

Back to the roots

To Jupiter, the Best and Greatest:
 Lucius Septimius,
 of equestrian rank, governor of Britannia Prima,
 had this restored,
 a citizen of R . . .

The statue and
 the column that
 was erected by
 religious worship
 of olden times

Are renewed by
 Septimius,
 the First
 Province's
 master.

– IX –

Ἑρμῆς Κομμαγηνός

Ἐκκαίδεκέτη τις
 ἰδῶν τύμβω(ι) σκεφθέντ'
 ὑπὸ μοίρης Ἑρμῆ(ν)
 Κομμαγηνὸν ἔπος
 5 φρασάτω τόδ' ὀδείτης· χαῖρε σὺ,
 παῖ, παρ' ἑμοῦ,
 κῆνπερ θνητὸν βίω(ν)
 ἔρπη(ι)ς, ὠκύτατ' ἔπ-
 της γὰρ μερόπων ἐπὶ
 10 Κιμμερίων γῆ(ν). κοὺ ψεύ-
 σει, ἀγ[αθός] γὰρ ὁ παῖς, ῥέξεις
 δὲ σὺ [καλὸν].

– 9 –

Hermes of Commagene

May the wayfarer who
 sees sixteen years-old
 Hermes of Commagene,
 hurled into this tomb
 by fate, say: 'Greetings, you,
 boy, from me:
 though you crept not far ahead
 in your mortal life, you hastened
 as quickly as possible to
 the land of the Cimmerian people.'
 Neither will you lie, for the boy was good,
 and you will do him a good service.

– X –

Neptunus et Cupido

*Neptuni uertex, reg(i)men
 sortiti mobile uentis, //
 scul(p)tu<ra> cui c(a)erulea es[t]
 delfinis cincta duob[us].*

*[- - -]
 [- - -] //
 [mu]nus perficis ullum,
 [i]gnare, Cupido.*

– 10 –

Identifying Neptune and Cupid

The head of Neptune: a kingdom,
 driven by the winds, he has been assigned.
 His appearance is blue,
 surrounded by two dolphins.

...
 ...
 you achieve any task,
 silly Cupid!

– XI –

Alterum Vergilianum

 INTIRIAPAVIDAMVOLITANSPINNA-
 TAPVBIM SEG

*Interea pauidam uolitans pinna-
 ta p(er) u(r)bem . . . seg(niter).*

*Interea pauidam uolitans pinna-
 ta pubem . . . seg(niter)*

– 11 –

More Vergil ... or Vergil Altered?

‘Meanwhile [Rumour], the winged [messenger, rushes ahead],
 fluttering across the trembling town. . .’ – ‘Remiss!’

... *or* ...

‘Meanwhile, the winged, fluttering, a trembling pubes . . .’ – ‘Lame!’

– XII –

Austalis uagatur

*Austalis
dibus XIII
uagatur sib(i)
cotidim.*

– 12 –

Wayward Austalis

Austalis
for 13 days
has been wandering off by himself
every day.

– XIII –

Ἀρχιέρεια

Ἡρακλεῖ
 Τυρίω(ι)
 Διοδώρα
 ἀρχιέρεια.

– 13 –

The Archpriestess

For Hercules
 of Tyre:
 Diodora,
 archpriestess.

– XIV –

Iulia Fortunata

*Iul(iae) Fortunat(a)e, domo
Sardinia. Verec(undio) Diogeni
fida coniuncta
marito.*

– 14 –

Julia Fortunata

For Julia Fortunata, whose homeland was
Sardinia. To Verecundius Diogenes
devotedly coupled,
who was her husband.

– XV –

*Armea**Armea me docuit.**Armea me docuit 'recte
tibi' dicere cunctis.*

– 15 –

Armea*On a tile from Binchester –*

Armea taught me.

*On another tile from Binchester –*Armea taught me to say
'you're right' to everyone (*or*: everything).

– XVI –

Deo qui...

*Deo qui uias
et semitas commentus
est. T(itus) Irdas
s(ingularis) c(onsularis) f(ecit) u(otum) l(aetus) l(ibens) m(erito).*

*Q(intus) Varius Vitalis
b(ene)ficiarius co(n)s(ularis) aram
sacram restituit
Aproniano et Bradua
co(n)s(ulibus).*

– 16 –

To the God Who...

To the god who conceived
roads and paths:
Titus Irdas,
guard of the governor fulfilled his promise happily, gladly, deservedly.

Quintus Varius Vitalis,
adjutant of the governor has restored
this sacred altar
under the consulship of
Apronianus and Bradua.

– XVII –

Nymphis uenerandis

Somnio prae-
monitus
miles hanc
ponere ius-
 5 *sit*
aram quae
Fabio nup-
ta est Nym-
phis uene-
 10 *randis.*

– 17 –

To the Venerable Nymphs

Forewarned
 in a dream
 the soldier commanded
 to have
 this
 altar erected
 by her who
 is married to Fabius,
 to the venerable
 Nymphs.

– XIX –

Πόλεμος πάντων πατήρ

[- - -] πτολέμοισιν [- - -]
[- - -] ++ ΤΣ (?) [- - -]

– 19 –

War is the Father of All Things

. . . in battles . . .
.....

– XX –

Frag[/ - -]

[- - - Flam]inii ++nsae
 [- - -]ae dominar-
 [- - - se]mper geli-
 [dis - - -]te pruinis
 5 [- - -]++ qui sib[i]
 [- - -]++++AS
 [- - -]+FICTNI
 [- - -]+ue frag-
 [- - -]+E tibi pro
 10 [- - -]rce pro
 [- - -] Flaminius o-
 [- - -]e profund-
 [- - - l]ucem uolu-
 [it - - -]dere uitae.

– 20 –

Frag[ment- -]

. . . of Flaminius . . . nsa
 . . . dominate
 . . . always in cold
 . . . frost
 . . . who himself
 . . .
 . . . broken
 . . . to you for
 . . . (spare?) for
 . . . Flaminius . . .
 . . . shed
 . . . light . . . he want-
 ed . . . of life.

– XXI –

Ἄντιοχος εἰητρός

Πανυπέροχα-
 ς ἀνθρώπων
 σωτήρας ἐν ἀθα-
 νάτοισιν
 5 Ἄσκληπιὸν ἡ-
 πίοχειρά (?) <θ'> Ὑγείη-
 ν <καὶ> Πανάκει-
 αν εἰητρός (?)
 Ἄντιοχος

– 21 –

Antiochus the Doctor

Those mortals'
 pre-eminent
 healers among the
 immortals,
 Asklepios, healing-
 handed, and Hygieia
 and Panakeia:
 the doctor
 Antiochus

– XXII –

Antigonus Papias

*D(is) M(anibus).
 Fla(uiu)s Antigonus Papias
 ciuis Gr(a)ecus uixit annos
 plus minus LX. quem ad
 modum accom(m)odatam
 fatis animam reuocauit.
 Septimia domina [- -]
 -----*

5

– 22 –

Antigonus Papias

To the Spirits of the Departed.
 Flavius Antigonus Papias,
 Greek citizen, lived
 60 years, give or take a few:
 he made his soul return to the Fates,
 having harboured it thus far.
 Septimia ... mistress ...

Notes

1. *CIL* VII 250; *CLE* 395; *RIB* 684 ([with drawing](#)). – Tombstone (sandstone, 94 x 61 cm), slightly damaged, dating to the early second rather than the late first century A. D. Discovered 1861 in Eboracum / York (in conjunction with a glass urn, believed to contain the remains of Corellia Optata). Now in the Yorkshire Museum (York).

The text of this inscription, enclosed by a sizeable winged tablet (a so-called *tabula ansata*) with a number of awkward spellings and ligatures, has been engraved below a (now mostly lost) sculpture of a standing figure, which in turn was depicted between the letters *D* (for *Dis*, now lost) and *M* (for *Manibus*), giving a common dedicatory formula for Roman tombstones, *Dis Manibus*, ‘to the Spirits of the Departed’.

With its dedication to the Manes, the Spirits of the Departed, as well as through expressions in its subsequent text, the poem draws heavily on funereal imagery and commonplaces that reveal Roman notions of afterlife. The Spirits of the Departed recur in the poetic part of the inscription (written in dactylic hexameters, one of the most common rhythms in the Roman verse inscriptions). Here, they feature among other names related to Roman underworld symbolism, in particular *Acherusia*, the swamps of the underworld’s river Acheron (signifying the underworld by proxy), as well as *Ditis*, denoting Dis, the god of the underworld (cf. also item 18). In addition to that, the poem invokes the very common (binary) imagery of afterlife that separates ashes and shades, with the mortal remains (ashes, bones, usually following cremation) left behind on earth, while the ‘spirits of the departed’ are imagined to continue to exist in the underworld.

The inscription honours one Corellia Optata, daughter of a Roman soldier named Corellius Fortis; the name of the mother remains unknown. Corellia’s second name *Optata* literally means ‘She Who Was Hoped For’, and the inscription itself appears to return to the ‘hope’ motif subsequently, rendering the poem of this father for his deceased daughter of thirteen years particularly personal and touching. The piece gives the impression that the father, a simple soldier, was not able to spend substantial amounts of money

on the memorial for his daughter. It is entirely possible that, in order to allow for a dignified burial, he acquired a pre-manufactured stone and simply had the stonemason 'fill in the blanks', personalising the monument through the addition of the personal names, the deceased's age, and a befitting poem, which may have been composed on the basis of existing patterns and phrases (the existence of such manuals is, however, subject to debate).

Bibliography: Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 203–4 no. 2; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 32–51 no. 1. – For a personal response to this inscription after autopsy of the monument see thepetrifiedmuse.wordpress.com/2013/08/10/hope-and-despair-in-roman-britain/. For an introductory discussion of the question as to whether there were epigraphical manuals for the composition of funerary poetry cf. thepetrifiedmuse.wordpress.com/2015/03/28/here-lies-insert-name-here-or-why-reading-beyond-a-quotations-is-a-really-good-idea/.

2. RIB II 2448.6 (with drawing and [photo](#)). – Polychromic mosaic, laid out as a semi-circle, dating to the first half of the fourth century A. D. Discovered in Lullingstone (Kent), as part of a Roman villa complex, where it is still preserved and accessible.

The central area of the mosaic exhibits a scene in which the mythical figure of Europa is riding on Zeus / Jupiter in the guise of a bull. Her garment is flying in the air, and the bull is guided by two winged amorini, one at the front to lead the way, the other one holding the bull's tail.

Above that scene, at the wide end of the semi-circle, one reads the inscription. The text, laid out in tall letters, has been composed in the rhythmical form of an elegiac couplet. It offers a surprising stance on the Europa myth, according to which Jupiter abducted the Phoenician noblewoman in the guise of a bull. Instead of adopting the view point of Jupiter or that of Europa, the immediate victim of the god's escapades, the text introduces the perspective of Juno, Jupiter's wife, confirming that her anger towards her unfaithful husband is entirely justified and would, in fact, warrant drastic action. An enraged Juno is depicted as approaching the halls of Aeolus, the wind-god, in Vergil's *Aeneid* (cf. below on item **6**) in an attempt to destroy the fleet of Aeneas – a famous scene, to which this inscription alludes.

The context of the mosaic in the Lullingstone Roman villa offers clear and unambiguous traces of an Early Christian occupation, which appears to be contemporary to the Europa mosaic. This has led some researchers to believe that signs of Christianity should also exist within the

mosaic (if in a needlessly convoluted and cryptic manner). Such attempts at explanation have remained altogether unconvincing, however: neither the poem nor the mosaic reveal any element that would hint towards a specifically Christian nature of the display; much rather, the mosaic is firmly based within the tradition of pagan Roman literature and mythology, a compelling testament to the productive contradictions and intellectual tensions in the Roman world during the period of transition from pagan to Christian beliefs.

Bibliography: M Henig, 'The Secret of the Lullingstone Mosaic', *Kent Archaeological Review*, 139 (2000) 196–7; Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 218 no. 17; Ling, *Inscriptions* 78–9 (with photo); Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 208–218 no. 22 (with photo).

3. EE IX p. 534; CIL VII 154; CLE 806; RIB 292 (cf. p. 76) ([with drawing](#)). – Fragment (base) of a sandstone tombstone (64 x 60 x 30 cm) with inscription and partly preserved sculpture (originally displaying a foot soldier as standard bearer; only the sculpture's feet and part of a standard survive due to the damage to the monument), dating to the first century A. D. Discovered 1861 in the Roman cemetery of Wroxeter (Shropshire). Previously in Rowley's House Museum, now in the Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery (inv. no. SHYMS A/94/001/005).

Three lines of prose are followed by three dactylic hexameters (spread out over four lines, with a number of metrical irregularities), which, as M. Schumacher has carefully established, exhibit rhythmical resonances and rhyming features between the first and third verse (*legite ~ uiuite; este ~ honeste*). The poem itself appears to advocate a life on the middle grounds between the pleasurable (referring to the absence of wine from the afterlife) and the honourable, a life that is sometimes more, sometimes less happy, as the poem itself puts it. Note the remarkable reference to a 'star of life', indicative of astrological beliefs.

The honorand, as the inscription states, had a prominent position within the Legio XIV Gemina, namely that of an *aquilifer*, bearer of the eagle standard. He himself, according to the inscription, hailed from Faventia (modern Faenza) in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region (near Ravenna). (For similar references to someone's foreign origin see texts **9**, **14**, and **22**.) The 14th legion was one of the units involved in Emperor Claudius' incursions of Roman Britain of A. D. 43, and it also played a role in Rome's

response to Boudicca's revolt of A. D. 61. As M. Schumacher rightly points out, the inscription does not yet display the legion's later honorific names of *Martia Victrix*, suggesting that the inscription was erected some time before the revolt of Boudicca.

Bibliography: Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 202–3 no. 1; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 54–72 no. 2 (with photo).

4. *CIL* VII 759; *CLE* 24; *RIB* 1791 ([with drawing](#)). – Sandstone panel (100 x 65 x 10 cm), tentatively dated to the second or early third century A. D. Discovered 1816 in Magnae Carvetiorum / Carvoran (Northumberland) by Hadrian's Wall. Previously in the Museum of Antiquaries of the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (inv. no. 1826.1), now in the Great North Museum: Hancock.

This comparatively long poem, comprising ten iambic senarii, celebrates the religious syncretism of the Roman Empire: Caecilius Donatianus, the dedicant, appears to have hailed from North Africa, as both his name and the mention of worship in Libya allow us to infer. He dedicated this monument to a deity he prefers to call *uirgo Caelesti / situ*, 'heavenly virgin', which is identified with the constellation of Virgo. In the region of Donatianus' origin, this deity would have been called Tanit.

The inscription shows that the dedicant is well aware of other manifestations of the same deity across the empire, as he likens her to the Mother of the Gods (i. e. Cybele), Ceres (Demeter), the abstract deified concepts of Pax (Peace) and Virtus (Virtue), and the Syrian Goddess (Dea Syria) – that latter name being incised in letters noticeably taller than (most of) the remainder of the text. This religious syncretism, resulting in what, at first glance, would seem like something of a mix-and-match of divine features and nomenclature, reflects the reality of the Roman Empire in general as well as that at Hadrian's wall: it seems plausible, as M. Schumacher has argued, that Donatianus, the North African dedicant, was in charge of a Syrian auxiliary unit stationed at Hadrian's Wall (a similar case is to be seen in item 7): with this expression of religious worship, involving references to astronomical knowledge, it would appear, Donatianus intended to reach out to the soldiers he commanded as well as to assert the unity of Roman rule in an empire of widespread religious and ethnical diversity.

Interestingly enough, however, it is precisely through the elements of

astrological (and astronomical) wisdom, when seen in conjunction with the iconography of the deities mentioned, that allows for Donatianus' religious syncretism to succeed: Virgo, as a constellation, is sometimes equated with the Greek goddess Astraea (representing Justice – hence the reference to the scales of her neighbouring constellation Libra, which has been alluded to in line 7 of the poem). At the same time, Virgo, close to the constellation of Leo in the sky, is typically represented as a female holding a stalk of grain, thus allowing an equation with Ceres, the Roman deity of agriculture and fertility. Proximity to Leo, in turn, is an important element to reach out to those who worship Dea Syria (also known as Atargatis), who, in turn, has occasionally been represented in proximity to a lion (= Leo).

In short: even though entirely textual in nature, the poem derives its remarkable unifying power from its creatively combined, vivid references to the detailed iconography of the Roman pantheon.

Bibliography: Courtney, *Musa lapidaria* 156–7, 364–6 no. 164; Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 211–4 no. 12; J. Velaza, *Interpretatio y sincretismo religioso en los CLE: algunos casos singulares*, in: X. Gómez Font – C. Fernández Martínez – J. Gómez Pallarès (edd.), *Literatura epigráfica. Estudios dedicados a Gabriel Sanders*, Zaragoza 2009, 331–351; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 115–34 no. 8 (with photo).

5. *EE* III p. 136; *EE* VIII 1086; *CIL* VII 952; *CLE* 229; *RIB* 2059 ([with drawing](#)). – Sandstone dedication slab, damaged at the top (27 x 34 x 5 cm), perhaps of the third century. Discovered around 1790 in Maia / Bowness-on-Solway (Cumbria) by Hadrian's Wall. Now in the Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle (inv. no. CALMG 2000.250).

A dedication, composed in trochaic septenarii (largely following the stricter rules of a rhythmisation in trochaic tetrameters catalectic), to unknown deities. It has been ascribed to the Deae Matres, a group of Mother Goddesses, whose cult was wide-spread in the Celtic parts of the Roman Empire.

Inspection of the inscription reveals, however, that the surviving text is far too heavily mutilated as to allow for any restoration of the wording of the first line; an ascription to the Deae Matres thus remains entirely speculative. In fact, one must even wonder why this tradesman, whose name does not reveal any local background, should have desired to invoke these deities to look favourably on his trade: Mercury, for example, would have been a rather more plausible choice.

The poem elucidates a typical element of Roman religion: the *uotum* ('vow'). This type of interaction with divinity involves someone vowing a reward to deity for their proven support – in this case a poem with golden letters, should Antonianus' business prosper. Neither does this inscription reveal any traces of gold, nor has another poem with golden (or any other kind of) letters of Antonianus' been discovered. Thus one may only speculate about the success of this promise. (For a post-transaction dedication that follows the same principle see item 16.)

Bibliography: Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 215–6 no. 14; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 135–45 no. 9 (with photo).

6. Three instances of quotations from, or allusions to, Publius Vergilius Maro (70–19 B. C.; more commonly known in English as Vergil or Virgil), Rome's famous poet of the age of Augustus and author of bucolic poems (*Eclogae*), a didactic poem on farming (*Georgics*), and, most notably, Rome's national epic, the *Aeneid*. Vergil's poetry features particularly prominently in the context of inscribed Latin poetry in all parts of the Roman Empire, as a referential framework for learned or playful allusions (see above, on item 2), as a mine of witty quotations, or merely as producer of memorable lines (e. g. through school teaching) for graffiti and the like (see also below, on item 11) All three instances collected here constitute dactylic hexameters and were executed in handwriting (rather than carved by a stonecutter or professional engraver).

a. *EE* IX 1293; *RIB* 2491.148 (with drawing). – Graffito on a hollow clay tile (12 x 17 cm), perhaps of the second century A. D.? Discovered around 1850, allegedly in Silchester (Hampshire). Now in Reading Museum (inv. no. REDMG: 1995.1.26).

This inscription has commonly been explained as a string of several names (min. 2, max. 5), followed by a reference to the first two words of *Aeneid* 2.1: or so it would appear: *conticuere omnes intentique ora tenebant*, 'they all fell silent and attentively looked at him', introducing a narrative of the epic's eponymous hero, Aeneas.

Confusion arises over the number of people mentioned here. Pertacus is unattested as personal name otherwise, but can be explained as a Celtic coinage. Subsequent Perfidus stands out, however, as the adjective *perfidus* means 'treacherous, perfidious', and is virtually unthinkable as an

actual personal name. Campester may be a name, but could also simply mean 'plain-dweller'. Similarly, Campanus may just mean 'from Campania'. A definitive solution to this conundrum is impossible.

What is clear, however, is that the Vergilian phrase *conticuere omnes*, one of the best attested quotes from Vergil across the Roman Empire, clearly used intentionally here, seems to function as a concluding clause to this list of name. Why would those who are mentioned on this list have fallen silent? As the tile was used as building material and thus, hidden away, permanently integrated into a built structure, one may be tempted to regard it as a manifestation of magic of sorts, transforming the whole graffito into a list of people the anonymous writer had cursed (or at least had intended to curse with this, despite the form *conticuere* 'they fell silent', mandated by the Vergilian text, rather than an expression of 'may they all fall silent').

b. *RIB* 2447.9 (with drawing). – Fragments of wall plaster with a carefully painted inscription (*dipinto*), dating to the second century A. D. Discovered 1926 in the context of a Roman villa at Otford (Kent), where an additional piece contained remains of a painting of a male figure throwing a spear (thus likely to provide a contextual framework for the Vergilian line within a room's decoration. Now on display in the British Museum ([inv. no. 1928.1011.1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/inv-no/1928.1011.1)).

A quote from Vergil's *Aeneid*, either book 1, line 313 or book 12, line 165, as Vergil repeats this line (also, with variation, at book 7, line 688). While the decorative context allows one to conclude that the room presented scenes that deserved textual comments from the *Aeneid*, it is impossible to say, due to the level of fragmentation, just which one of the relevant attestations the artist had in mind (if any one in particular). Unlike the previous item, *Aeneid* 2.1, this line is not one that has received any attention in the inscriptions otherwise, as far as the evidence allows to conclude.

c. *CIL* VII 844a; *RIB* 1954. – Carved inscription on the rock face of the Roman quarry at Lodge Crag by Low Row (Cumbria). Deemed lost.

A puzzle, as reports suggest that there was an altar as well as a text scratched into the rock face, which may have led to some confusion. The most plausible explanation is that those who reported the finding in 1694 saw graffiti (writing *and* drawing), and their report, due to its somewhat muddled nature, did not allow others to re-discover this text; the exposed

rock face at Lodge Crag is heavily worn, and the texts may be lost forever without proper documentation.

The text in question is not so much a direct quote as a line that recalls a number of passages from the poets of the Augustan age, including Vergil, *Aeneid* 4.700 (further parallels collected by M. Schumacher).

Bibliography: a. Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 215–6 no. 14; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 135–45 no. 9 (with photo). – b. Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 219 no. 18; Ling, *Inscriptions* 76–8 (with photos); Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 235–9 no. 24 (with photo). – c. Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 211 no. 11; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 93–97 no. 5. For a description of the present author's hunt for this inscription read thepetrifiedmuse.wordpress.com/2014/12/08/hadrians-wall-rocks/.

7. *CIL* VII p. 97; *IG* XIV 2553; *RIB* 1124 ([with drawing](#)). – Slightly damaged sandstone altar (124 x 58 cm), of uncertain date. Discovered 1754 in Corbridge (Northumberland) near Hadrian's Wall, presumably in the same context as item 13, below. Now in the Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle (inv. no. CALMG 1889.130.1892.27).

Astarte (which is the Greek name for this originally Semitic deity Ishtar, whose worship was propagated across the Mediterranean by the Phoenicians) was considered a goddess of love, similar to Venus / Aphrodite.

The most likely origin for its (singular) mention in Roman Britain is from a Syrian background, related to military units serving in this area (a similar case is to be seen in item 4, on which see above). The name of the dedicant is perfectly Latinate.

One might be tempted to speculate that Pulcher held a position of responsibility of sorts, which led to his leading role in the dedication of an altar sacred to Astarte. Whether Pulcher himself was from the Greek-speaking East of the Empire, cannot be said for certain: the choice of the Greek language for this single hexameter line (which would appear to be intentional) would seem related to the language of a target audience rather than that of the dedicant: if Pulcher was indeed, as tentatively suggested above, in a leading position, then Greek may have been the language of the men under his command rather than (necessarily) his own.

The monument itself is introduced as a first-person speaker: a fairly common motif in Greek and Latin inscriptions.

Bibliography: Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 17 no. 3gr.

8. *EE* IX 997; *ILS* 5435; *CLE* 277; *RIB* 103 ([with drawing](#)). – Damaged limestone pedestal, designed to carry a column dedicated to Jupiter, dating to the mid-fourth century A. D. Discovered 1891 in Cirencester (Gloucestershire). Now in the Corinium Museum (inv. no. B 952).

The inscription is spread out over three out of four sides of the pedestal. The fourth side is heavily damaged and does not exhibit any traces of writing (though it may originally have been inscribed, e. g. with an original dedicatory inscription restored). Taking the prose part (lines 1–5) as the (putative) front (which is likely, as it crucially contains the name of the divinity, to whom this was offered), the damaged part is to the right from that, whereas the other two inscribed panels are opposite (i. e. at the putative rear of the pedestal: lines 6–10) and to the left (lines 11–15). The view that lines 6–10 form the first and lines 11–15 the second hexameter, as presented here in keeping with established practice, presupposes that movement around the object took place from the front to the (now damaged) right and onwards from there. This is possible, but not at all cogent: anyone moving the opposite direction, would have read lines 11–15 first and lines 6–10 second. Due to the flexible and inflectional nature of Latin (morpho-)syntax, the meaning would have been the same and the grammar would have remained intact.

Lucius Septimius, according to this text, was the governor of one of the four regional districts (Britannia Prima, Britannia Secunda, Maxima Caesariensis, Flavia Caesariensis) that made up the province of Britannia in the wake of wide-spread territorial reforms under Emperor Diocletian (A. D. 284–305). The text gives Septimius the rank of *uir perfectissimus* (literally: 'most perfect man' ~ 'His Excellency'), thus characterising him as a high-ranking member of the equestrian order (with the *ordo equester*, the knights, being the lower of the two aristocratic classes of ancient Rome), to whom a significant administrative function had been entrusted.

The need to restore derelict and dilapidated monuments is a common motif in Roman inscriptions – a welcome opportunity for self-advertising of a benefactor (a similar case is the second half of item 16). What stands out here, however, is the express reference to a *prisca religio* ('religious worship of olden times') and its renewal (*renouat*). This has commonly been taken as a reference to pagan practice – as opposed to the Christian belief, which under Emperor Constantine (A. D. 306–337) had become the Romans' state

religion. During the short reign of Emperor Julian the Apostate (A. D. 360–3), however, the general trend towards Christianity was briefly suspended and, in fact, reverted: it would seem that this monument, a pedestal and a column in the honour of Jupiter, was restored during this brief period. The inscription is thus testimony to the profound (and not at all linear) changes of Roman worship and religion during the later Empire.

The date of the original dedication is unknown, but might belong to a period between A. D. 150 and A. D. 250, as E. Courtney and P. Cugusi have suggested.

Bibliography: Courtney, *Musa lapidaria* 152–3, 361–2 no. 161; Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 217–8 no. 16; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 73–86 no. 3 (with photos).

9. *EE* VII 952; *IG* XIV 2550; *RIB* 758 ([with drawing](#)). – Tombstone, slightly damaged, dating to the third century A. D. Discovered 1879 in Brough-under-Stainmore (Cumbria / Westmorland). Now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (inv. no. GR.1.1884); Replicas of this stone exist in the Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle, and the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

A remarkable little poem, consisting of five dactylic hexameters, for a boy called Hermes, who died sixteen years of age. Hermes is said to be from Commagene, one of Rome's easternmost provinces (located north of ancient Syria), which only as late as A. D. 72, under Emperor Vespasian, became a permanent, fully dependent part of the Roman Empire. The dedicant of this poem, and thus the explanation for Hermes' presence in Roman Britain, remain unknown (for further references to someone's foreign origin see texts **3**, **14**, and **22**): considering his age, the address of him as 'boy' (παῖς), and the praise of his 'being good' may allow to infer that he had come to serve as a slave to e. g. a military commander, albeit only for a short time, as he died early.

The reference to the Cimmerians is somewhat stilted: the Cimmerians were a people that originally inhabited parts of the Crimea and the Caucasus, but later moved further south towards Phrygia and Lydia. In the *Odyssey*, however, the Cimmerians are said to inhabit a mysterious landscape of eternal night and fog, closest to the entrance to the underworld (cf. *Odyssey* 11.12–9). In that regard the wording is a roundabout way of expressing that

Hermes, after not getting very far in his mortal life, now had hurried to the far away underworld.

Bibliography: Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 16–7 no. 2gr.

10. *EE* III p. 311; *CIL* VII 2; *CLE* 1524; *RIB* 2448.8. – Mosaic, dating to the late fourth century A. D.? Discovered 1794 in a central room of a Roman villa by Frampton (Dorset). Now lost.

An elaborate mosaic with Christian elements (such as a christogram) as well as depictions of scenes from traditional Graeco-Roman mythology, most notably a head of Neptune and a figure of Cupid. The two poems (each originally consisting of a couplet of not somewhat irregular hexameters, one hexameter on each side of each image) pertain to these elements and thus offer an explanatory, interpretative legend to the context (similar to what can be observed in the case of item **2** from Lullingstone).

The meaning of the poem for Cupid is troublesome. In its current state, it seems contradictory, and one would have to assume a negation in the bit that is lost (giving a meaning along the lines of 'you cannot achieve anything'. Others have tried other supplements: R. Ling, for example, tried [*si di*]gnare Cupido, 'you achieve any task, if you deign to, Cupid', which is possible, but less likely due to the available space to fill at this particular point. M. Schumacher has sensibly considered the wider context of the mosaic and its relation to the structure in which it was found: the Cupid inscription was closest to the exit. If read out aloud (according to the ancient practice), this could have been an explicit farewell to Cupid in an Early Christian villa – thus combining Classical decoration and myth with a deeper engagement and personal agenda. (Similarly, one may attempt a more metaphysical reading of the Neptune inscription.) Due to the fragmentary state, however, a definitive answer can hardly be achieved.

Bibliography: Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 220–221 no. 20; Ling, *Inscriptions* 79–82 (with engraving); Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 219–34 no. 23.

11. *T. Vindol.* II 118 (image at http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk/4DLink2/tablet-images/tablet_layout/118-front.jpg). – Adjoining fragments of a thin wooden writing tablet (ca. 1 x 10 cm), dating to the late first or early second century A. D. Discovered in Vindolanda at Hadrian's Wall (inv. no. 85.137).

The text was written on the back of a tablet that was also (and originally) used for a draft letter (*T. Vindol.* 331). The text is written in a Roman cursive script, in which the letter *E* is often represented by two vertical lines (*II*).

Its text has credibly been explained as a communication between two writers – a first hand, who wrote the (hexametric) opening of a passage from Vergil's *Aeneid* (9.473–5): *Interea pauidam uolitans pennata per urbem / nuntia Fama ruit matrisque adlabitur auris / Euryali.* (...) ('Meanwhile Rumour, the winged messenger, rushes ahead, fluttering across the trembling town, and reaches the ears of Euryalus' mother.'). and a second hand who commented on its faulty rendering by adding the (abbreviated) comment *seg(niter)*, 'slack' or 'remiss'. One must note, however, that the text, as rendered by the first writer (who has been claimed to have written *PVBEM* for *p(er) u(r)bem*), might also be understood as somewhat of an obscenity – hence the alternative translation proposed above (with a modified rendering of the second writer's comment).

A most remarkable piece of evidence for the presence of Vergil's epic at Rome's northernmost frontier in a military setting (cf. also above item **6.c**).

Bibliography: A. K. Bowman – J. D. Thomas, *The Vindolanda Writing Tablets (Tabulae Vindolandenses II)*, London 1994, 65–67 (also available at <http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk>); M. C. Scappaticcio, *Papyri Vergilianae: l'apporto della Papirologia alla Storia della Tradizione virgiliana (I–VI d. C.)*, Liège 2013, 141–142 no. 23; A. K. Bowman, *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier. Vindolanda and Its People*, London ³2003, 11, 88–89; P. Kruschwitz, *T. Vindol. II 118: An Obscene Joke from Vindolanda?*, *Tyche* 29 (2014) 271–2.

12. *EE* VII 1141; *RIB* II 2491.147 (with drawing). – Graffito on a sizeable, heavy clay tile (31 x 42.5 x 4.5 cm), possibly dating to the late first or early second century A. D. Discovered 1886 in Warwick Lane (near St. Paul's Cathedral), London as part of the Roman city wall. Now on display in the Museum of London (inv. no. 2175).

The tile was inscribed twice before it was baked, first by Austalis, a tiler, who merely wrote his own name in the surface (presumably to mark his lot of the tile production) and then by a second, anonymous writer who added the incriminating statement of lines 2–4. The two hands are easily distinguished by variations in the respective handwriting as well as by a change of writing implement.

The Latin text, illustrating the literacy skills of Roman London's workforce, has an accentual iambic flow with an alternation of unstressed and stressed syllables. Occasional claims that there is also a rhyme to be found (*XIII* [Latin: *trédecim*] ~ *cotídim*) are unlikely due to the varying accentuation of those two words.

Bibliography: Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 208–9 no. 7; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 192–8 no. 19 (with photo). – On the distinction of two writing hands in this text see P. Kruschwitz, *Going Out On the Tiles. RIB 2491.147 Revisited*, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* (with photos) [in press, to be published in 2015 or 2016].

13. *CIL* VII p. 97; *IG* XIV 2554; *RIB* 1129 (with drawing). – Sandstone altar (1.01 x 53 cm), dating to the third century A. D. Discovered in the 17th century in Corbridge (Northumberland) near Hadrian's Wall. Now on display in the British Museum (inv. no. 1774.0715.1).

A minimalist dedicatory inscription for Hercules of Tyre – the Romanised version of Melqart, tutelary deity of the Phoenician city of Tyre, widely worshipped across the Mediterranean, including in Syria (which fits the picture created in the context of item **7**, above, a text that appears to have been discovered in the same place).

The wording, which reveals no further elements of artifice, results in a somewhat unwieldy dactylic hexameter, which may or may not have been accidental. (Item **16** is a similar case, in which one cannot be entirely sure about whether the rhythmical nature is accidental or whether it was, in fact, intended.)

Bibliography: Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 17–8 no. 4gr.

14. *EE* III 183 p. 313–4; *RIB* 687 (with drawing). – Sandstone sarcophagus (76 x 216 x 76 cm, including the lid), dating to the second century A. D. (?). Discovered 1877 in Eboracum / York. Now in the Yorkshire Museum (York) (inv. no. YORYM 2001.6171).

Sparing with words, the epitaph for Julia Fortunata (who was from Sardinia rather than being native to Britain; similar references to foreign origin in texts **3**, **9**, and **22**) represents a common type of inscription that commemorates women by means of a list of positive characteristics.

The final three words, *fida coniuncta marito*, 'devotedly coupled ... her husband', give a dactylic rhythm, which is likely to have been intentional. The text does not develop into any fully-fledged metrical lines,

but rather represents affective, rhythmical, and poeticising prose (a type of text that sometimes is referred to as *commaticum* [‘text consisting of rhythmical segments’]).

Bibliography: Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 204–5 no. 3; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 151–6 no. 11 (with photo).

15. Graffiti, inscribed before baking, on two (now slightly damaged) clay tiles, both of which were discovered in the context of the Roman army camp of Vinovia / Binchester (County Durham), dating to either the late first or the third century (these options emerge from the periods of occupation of the camp).

a. *EE* VII 1146; *EE* IX 1290; *CLE* 1939; *RIB* 2491.146 (ii) (with drawing and photo: plate VII a). – 29 x 24 x 3.8 cm. Discovered 1878–9. Now in the Museum of Archaeology, Durham.

b. *RIB* 2491.146 (i) (with drawing). – 17 x 18 x 3.5 cm. Excavated at the same time as item **a**, but not identified until 1977. Now in the Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle (inv. no. 1977.121).

Text **b** amounts to a dactylic hexameter, which is clearly intentional; text **a** offers the opening of the same line.

The meaning word *Armea* (which does not constitute a plausible name based on the common principles of Roman name-giving) is unknown and inexplicable. Thus the meaning of the entire text remains obscure to some extent. The words that follow *Armea*, now largely intelligible, were subject to substantial controversy, before an improved reading was established by M. Schumacher, who first noticed that the text reads *recte / tibi dicere* (rather than anything else).

Bizarrely, the final *-s* of *cunctis* in text **b** is retrograde in direction, with additional lines added to it, for no apparent reason.

Bibliography: Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 207–8 no. 5–6; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 185–91 no. 18 (with photo of item **b**).

16. *CIL* VII 271; *CLE* 25; *ILS* 3929; *RIB* 725 (with a [reproduction of an earlier transcript](#)). – Altar, dated A. D. 191 on the basis of the consular dates provided in the inscription itself. Discovered 1620 near Cataractonium / Catterick (North Yorkshire). Now lost.

Like item **8**, this is an inscription for a religious monument, that was subsequently restored. The first half of the inscription appears to record its original dedication, the second half its restoration. Whether the two inscriptions were engraved at the same time (re-inscribing an original dedication) or with some distance from one another, cannot be established on the basis of the surviving records.

The dedication ‘to the god who conceived ways and paths’ is vague in its avoidance of naming this deity (which ought to be Mercury). It also constitutes an iambic senarius (with an instance of iambic shortening in *deo*), which may or may not be accidental in its formation (cf. item **13** for a similar case).

The name of the original dedicant (for an explanation of the *uotum*, ‘promise’ or ‘vow’, see above on item **5**), Titus Irdas has been preserved in the record that preserves this now lost inscription. The name Irdas is unknown otherwise and may have been misread. An inscription from Becherbach (Germania Superior) records one Irdutus (*CIL* XIII 6156), and there also is an Irdus (?) attested at Haltern (*Graff. Haltern* 136).

Bibliography: Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 209 no. 8; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 146–50 no. 10.

17. *CIL* VII 998; *CLE* 263; *RIB* 1228 ([with drawing](#)). – Gabled sandstone altar with volutes (76 x 28 cm), dating to the second or third century A. D. Discovered 1825 in Habitancum / Risingham (Northumberland). Now in the Great North Museum, Hancock (inv. no. 1958.18.N).

The altar and its poem (in two dactylic hexameters) reports a response to a premonition in a dream – a not altogether uncommon theme in Roman votive inscriptions. The convoluted wording ‘by her who is married to Fabius’ tells of the dedicant’s effort to render his words rhythmically: clearly Fabius was the name of the soldier, and his dream advised him to let his wife erect this altar for the Nymphs: a costly response to a vivid dream, in which the poem may well serve a religious or magical purpose (rather than being a mere expression of artistic ambition).

Bibliography: Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 210–1 no. 10; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 87–93 no. 4.

18. *EE* IX 1113; *CLE* 2267; *RIB* 265 (with drawing). – Fragment of a limestone tombstone (66 x 43 x 17 cm), possibly dating to the third or fourth century A. D. Discovered around 1905 in Lindum / Lincoln. Now in Lincoln Museum (inv. no. LCNCC 1906.10898).

A poem for a girl who died young: its poetic nature is established by its wording as well as an overall dactylic rhythm of the words that remain. – For *Dis*, a Roman god of the underworld cf. also above, on item **1**.

The few remaining phrases of this fragment create a hauntingly beautiful, if entirely unintentional, atmosphere.

Bibliography: Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 216–7 no. 15; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 108–14 no. 7 (with photo).

19. *EE* IX 1003; *RIB* 241 (with drawing). – Fragment of a copper plate (11.5 x 10 cm). Discovered 1892 in Wilcote (near Oxford). Lost.

A rare case where even the preservation of a single word suggests that the original context of this fragment was a poetic one: the form *πτολέμοισιν* (*ptolémois*; ‘in battles’) exhibits an ending that is typical for epic poetry (the more common prosaic form would be *πολέμοις*, *polémois*). The reading of the letters in the second line is uncertain, and their meaning is lost to the text’s overall fragmentation.

20. *CIL* VII 1020 (cf. p. 312); *RIB* 1253 (with drawing). – Right half of a sandstone tombstone in the shape of a funerary altar (123 x 27 x 44 cm), resected (to serve as a gatepost), heavily damaged and worn, dating to the second or third century A. D. Discovered 1826 near Habitancum / Risingham (Northumberland), north of Hadrian’s Wall. Previously in the Museum of Antiquities of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne and of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne (inv. no. 1826.1), now in the Great North Museum: Hancock.

The text of this inscription is almost entirely lost, and its fragmentary state begins to develop an aesthetic of its own. (The left half of the stone has never been found.)

Even in its now deplorable state, the text still allows its readers to recognise the rhythm of dactylic hexameters. In fact, one may even tease out a little information about the text’s original content: dedicated to one Flaminius ...nsa (‘Pansa’ is the most likely supplement), the text from one of

the northernmost outposts of the Roman Empire appears to mention the freezing conditions that the Roman occupants endured, before it then moves on to mention the honorand’s ‘light of life’, which he must have lost in that once particularly forbidding part of the Roman world.

Bibliography: *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani, Great Britain* 1.8: *Roman Sculpture from England* (Oxford 1994) 98 (with photo pl. 72 no. 265). Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 209–10 no. 9; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 98–107 no. 6 (with photos).

21. *SEG* XXXVII (1987) 260 no. 840. – Sandstone (votive?) altar (61 x 40 x 18 cm), dating to the late second century A. D. Discovered 1968 in Chester (Cheshire). Now in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester.

Hexametrical votive of a doctor named Antiochus (a name in and of itself suggestive of an origin in the Greek-speaking sphere of the Empire) in honour of three pre-eminent divine agents of the medical profession: Asklepios–Aesculapius, Hygieia–Salus (the goddess of Good Health), and Panakeia–Panacea (the goddess of Universal Remedy).

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22. *EE* IX 1222; *CLE* 1597; *RIB* 955 (with drawing). – Sandstone tombstone, ineptly resected for secondary use (55 x 81 x 14 cm), dating to the fourth or fifth century A. D. Discovered 1892 in Luguvalium / Carlisle (Cumbria). Now in the Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle.

Like item **9**, the inscription contains elements of rhythmical, affective prose rather than verse in a strict sense (and so by sequence of accentuated and unaccentuated syllables rather than in terms of syllabic quantity).

Due to the phrase *plus minus*, lending vagueness to the indication of age, the inscription has sometimes been explained as Christian (where this device is very common), a view that is ultimately unfounded and in contradiction to the inscription’s express reference to the (pagan concept of the) Fates.

Similar references to a deceased’s foreign origin can be found in texts **3**, **9**, and **14**. What brought Antigonus to Britain remains unknown.

Bibliography: Cugusi, *Carmi epigrafici* 223 no. 23; Schumacher, *Die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 163–8 no. 13 (with photo); P. Kruschwitz, ‘Three Short Notes on *RIB* 955 = *CLE* 1597’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* (2015) (with photo) (in press).

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