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The role of the non-elite in spreading Latin in Roman Britain

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1. Introduction

This chapter examines the sociocultural environments in which Latin can be seen to have spread in Britain — and more specifically in Londinium (modern London) — during the first half century or so following the province’s conquest by Claudius in AD 43. Given its lack of a pre-Roman literate culture, Roman Britain offers an opportunity for thinking about the role played by social factors in transforming the Roman West via its Latinization. The first section explores what evidence we have for the use of Latin in pre-Roman Britain, in order to illustrate the extent to which the sociocultural contexts in which Latin spread may have shifted in the sixty years or so after the conquest. Evidence for its development in Londinium over this time has increased significantly over the last couple of decades, as intensive development-led archaeological activity has accompanied modern construction works in the City of London. The Bloomberg Tablets are only one highlight among the new finds, enhancing our knowledge of the sociocultural environments in which Latin literacy emerged.

In the past, discussions of Latin literacy in Roman Britain have tended to focus upon the extent of literacy in Britain, in response to William Harris’ *Ancient Literacy*, published in 1989. Although it is clear that Harris’ assessment of literacy in Britain could be qualified in the light of evidence which was published or discovered following publication of his study — notably the Vindolanda Tablets, the Bloomberg Tablets, and the ‘curse tablets’ from Bath and

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1 I am very grateful to the Latin Now team and All Souls College for their hospitality during the workshop. I thank members of the workshop for their comments on the paper and especially the OUP readers, Alex Mullen, and John Pearce for subsequent feedback on written drafts.
2 All dates in this paper are AD, unless otherwise specified.
3 Synthesised (with contrasting conclusions) in Wallace (2014); Hingley (2018); Perring (2022).
4 Tomlin (2016).
— it has become equally clear that attempts to quantify literacy in Britain are too limited in scope for this to be fruitful. Consequently, this paper moves away from asking how widespread Latin literacy was in Roman Britain and instead explores the social factors that encouraged the spread of Latin. Whereas previous scholarship has emphasised the role of the military in introducing Latin into Britain, this paper considers other social contexts beyond the Roman army, exploring the role of incoming traders from the Continent in introducing Latin literate practices and the role of Roman officialdom in encouraging the extension of Latin writing into new contexts, and how this may have led to the imitation of Continental practices, as writing became integrated into various manufacturing processes. This is not to discount the potential impact of the military as one factor stimulating the adoption of Latin, given that it is likely that some of the activities of traders were inspired by the needs of supplying the army in Britain, but to refocus attention upon writing that was produced by civilians. This chapter’s distinctive contribution is to examine non-monumental inscriptions and writing equipment within a study of Londinium during the limited time frame of c.43–c.100, so as to allow us to focus specifically upon the decades immediately after the conquest.

The comparative under-development of monumental epigraphy in the province is more than compensated for by the huge diversity of the non-monumental objects bearing Latin inscriptions which have been published. Analysing non-monumental writing allows us to move away from exploring Latinization in epigraphic culture as a characteristic of the political elite towards an analysis of the spread of Latin among the non-elite. In addition to all the well-

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6 Harris (2018), 154–55, however, dismisses the importance of the ‘curse tablets’ to the debate.
7 Biró (1975); Bowman (1994); Raybould (1999), 172 concludes that the army was perhaps the most significant factor in the spread of literacy in Britain. Cf. Adams (2003), 760–61 on the role of the Roman army in spreading Latin in the empire more widely. See Mullen (2021) for a more nuanced view of the army as a driver of literacy.
8 Compare Cotugno (2018a) and (2018b) for analyses of the geographical origin of writers of Latin in Britain.
9 Compare Perring (2022) 7: ‘Distinctions between military and civilian, administrative and mercantile, or Roman and native were not clear-cut and tend to hinder rather than aid understanding’, with further comment on this issue at 69–70, 87–88.
10 Biró (1975); Blagg (1990), 28 comments on the lack of monumental inscriptions relating to the dedication of public buildings other than temples in Britain; Mann (1985) analyses the scarcity of locally produced stone suitable for inscribing in much of the province, a picture that should be qualified for Londinium, however, whose transport links gave access to sources of stone from the Cotswolds and south-eastern coast of Britain as well as the Continent: Hayward (2015).
known transformative impacts upon society made by the spread of literacy in terms of the fundamental shifts this brings in political, economic, legal, and religious activity, in the case of Britain we are dealing not with a shift towards writing down the language or languages already in use, but with the introduction of the language of empire and conquest, which brought about new forms of social communication and interaction.\(^\text{12}\)

2. Latin in pre-Roman Late Iron Age Britain

First, some analysis of the social contexts where Latin is found in pre-Roman Late Iron Age Britain will help to establish the extent to which the pattern changed after the conquest.\(^\text{13}\) The use of written Latin, going beyond simply repeating a personal name, can be seen on coins minted in some of the territories on either side of the Thames, which came into contact with Rome in the decades from the mid first century BC leading up to the Claudian invasion.\(^\text{14}\) Following on from the earliest examples of Latin on pre-Roman coins, which displayed the name of Commius of the Atrebates in the mid first century BC,\(^\text{15}\) his successor Tincomarus added a statement of filiation alongside his name.\(^\text{16}\) This occurred at the same time as the adoption and adaptation of Augustan imagery on coinage too.\(^\text{17}\) The Latin word ‘REX’ appears on a minority of the coins of Cunobelin of the Trinovantes, and of Eppillus and Verica of the Atrebates,\(^\text{18}\) but more prominence was given to dynastic claims expressed by means of filiation, whether or not this reflected an affiliation rather than actual family relationship. Latin expressions of filiation appear on the coins of a range of rulers, with Verica and Eppillus

\(^{11}\) Goody (1968).

\(^{12}\) Innis (1950) on the stimulus towards effective communication offered by ruling wide geographical areas; contributions in Bowman and Woolf (1994) on the relationship between power and literacy in the ancient world.

\(^{13}\) Mullen (2015), 575–76 on ‘Language in pre-Roman Britain’; Mullen (in press b).

\(^{14}\) Creighton (2000), ch.6; Williams (2002b), 5–7, 9–16.

\(^{15}\) Creighton (2000), 146; Van Arsdell (1989), 128, no.350-1 ‘COMMIOS’.

\(^{16}\) Creighton (2000), 146, 170–72; Van Arsdell (1989), 132, no.362–1 ‘TINC COMMI F’, and further examples on 135–42. For the name as Tincomarus rather than Tincommius, see Cheesman (1998).


identified as sons of Commius, and Cunobelin and Epaticcus as the sons of Tasciovanus. This choice of text shows a concern with establishing the legitimacy of the rulers in question, and illustrates the immediate emergence of a more developed literacy than is found in the use of pseudo-legends on some Gallic coins. Furthermore, as Jonathan Williams has argued, these coins were not simple imitations of Roman practice, but creatively re-presented Latin text on indigenous coins, for example by framing the numismatic legend within a cartouche. These changes in Late Iron Age Britain are thought to have marked the emergence of dynasties in south-eastern Britain and their developing contacts with Augustus and the new political system emerging at Rome. Their use of Roman imagery and Latin text on their coinage may have been intended to help consolidate new power structures, as well as reflecting the spread of Latin via contacts with Latin-users on the Continent. In these first instances of the use of Latin in pre-Roman Britain, therefore, we witness the creative adoption of Latin writing practices by an elite who drew upon the iconographic and textual designs of Roman coins in order to support its claims to power by being both ‘exclusive and excluding’, to adapt John Creighton’s phrase.

Writing equipment is occasionally found in high-status pre-conquest burials. A series of adult cremation burials of members of a Catuvellaunian family was excavated at the site of Stanway near the Iron Age regional capital at Camulodunum (modern Colchester). These included unusual grave goods, such as a spear and shield, and surgical instruments, dating from 40-50, and the so-called ‘inkwell burial’ (BF67). The inkwell burial deposit included a copper-
alloy Hod Hill variant brooch, a pottery flagon, and a wooden box with copper-alloy fittings. The inkwell is unusual in form and fabric, since it is not Samian, but consists of a pale brown-red fabric coated with brown-red slip: it may be of local manufacture, but its origin is unknown.\textsuperscript{25} The burial may date either shortly before the Roman invasion, or during the period 50–60. In either case, its character and context indicate that it is an indigenous burial, so it is striking to see writing equipment being used so early in a burial context, suggesting that the elite here wanted to distinguish itself by associating itself with the rare skill of Latin literacy.\textsuperscript{26}

Writing also appears in the form of graffiti on pottery vessels found in Chamber BF6 at Stanway, which contained an adult cremation.\textsuperscript{27} All twenty-three of the pottery vessels deposited here were imported, and at least half of them can be dated as manufactured before 40. While this suggests that they could have been imported and deposited during the period 35–43, one potter’s pattern mark could support the slightly later date range of \textit{c}.40–50 or 55 for the chamber.\textsuperscript{28} The Stanway burial contains some of the earliest known examples of ownership graffiti in Britain, with the text ‘of Gaius’ (\textit{Gaii}) incised upon both a \textit{terra nigra} plate and upon a Dressel 2–4 amphora.\textsuperscript{29} In the case of imported pottery or amphorae, as in this instance, it is always possible that the graffiti may not have been incised by individuals in Britain. However, the fact that two very different pottery objects (a plate and an amphora) share the same ownership mark argues in favour of the local creation of these graffiti. In support of this hypothesis is the presence of Latin graffiti on vessels from other pre-Roman contexts in southern England which had been locally manufactured, ruling out the possibility of the graffiti having been incised on the Continent before importation. Paul Sealey’s survey of such graffiti in 2007 identified that roughly 25% of the thirty examples of graffiti excavated in such contexts

\textsuperscript{26} Sealey (2007), 313.
\textsuperscript{27} Sealey (2007); Tomlin and Hassall (2003), 372 nos 15–18.
\textsuperscript{29} Sealey (2007), 310.
is found on local vessels, around 50% on Arretine ware, and only 16% on Gallo-Belgic ware.\textsuperscript{30} The most expansive example of a graffito on a locally manufactured pot is represented by a large, Late Iron Age storage jar from Braughing in Hertfordshire, found in a Late Iron Age pit of Augustan date. This has the word ‘CENATIN[--]’ incised upon it, which is not easily identifiable as either a Celtic or a Roman name.\textsuperscript{31} It has been suggested that ownership graffiti are likely to have been produced by incomers to Britain from the Continent, who may have been involved in trade with pre-conquest Britain.\textsuperscript{32} This theory fits the name \textit{Graecus} found in a graffito on the underside of a Gallic-produced \textit{terra rubra} plate stamped ‘ATTISSV’, from a pit dating 15–25 in a pre-Roman settlement at Skeleton Green, Puckeridge in Hertfordshire.\textsuperscript{33} The profile of this settlement supports this theory strongly, as it was an affluent community with extensive trading connections with the Continent in the pre-conquest period.\textsuperscript{34} A similar case has also been made for the name \textit{Communis} found on a \textit{terra nigra} plate in a pre-conquest context at Sandwich.\textsuperscript{35} Names like Graecus and Communis are compatible with identifying the individuals creating the graffiti as incoming traders, so the earliest graffiti on pottery that can be deciphered were probably written by non-indigenous incomers who came into Britain from a Roman-influenced milieu.\textsuperscript{36} As we shall see in the next section, this pattern foreshadows our evidence in the earliest phases of Londinium too. Some of the objects bearing such graffiti, though, were then deposited in burials of members of the local elite, as prestige objects marking them apart from their social inferiors in Britain. Overall, then, we may suggest that Latin graffiti may have been created in south-eastern Britain by traders from the Continent, but that members of the indigenous local elite may have then appropriated objects with writing on them as well.

\textsuperscript{30} Sealey (2007), 310.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{RIB} II.8, 2503.225.
\textsuperscript{32} Sealey (2007), 310; on trading between south-eastern Britain and the Continent in the Late Iron Age, see Cunliffe 2005: 474–83.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{RIB} II.8, 2503.271.
\textsuperscript{34} Trow (1988).
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{AE} 1993, 1074; Sealey (2007), 310.
\textsuperscript{36} Sealey (2007), 312.
as objects for writing with, as a means of raising their own status above that of the vast mass of their contemporaries who had no literate skills. It is thus no surprise to find that the use of writing both in graffiti and on coins tends to gravitate towards sites at the top of the settlement hierarchy in pre-Roman Britain.\textsuperscript{37}

3. Social factors in the spread of Latin in Londinium

3.1 Society in early Londinium

[Insert Fig.1: Map of Londinium, c.47-60]

The case study of Londinium suggests that distinctive social factors existed during the settlement’s first decades of development which lay behind the spread of Latin. There is no evidence for significant settlement during the pre-Roman Late Iron Age on the site where the Roman settlement later developed, but only rare isolated farmsteads.\textsuperscript{38} Instead, it has been viewed as a ‘place of transition, a meeting place and a ritual landscape’.\textsuperscript{39} The River Thames had long been used as a communication route into south-east Britain from the Channel and the Continent beyond, but there is no evidence for anything more than transitory activity along the banks of the River Thames before 47, when the timbers were felled for the revetment and drainage channels which were incorporated into the new main east-west road in the area of 1 Poultry.\textsuperscript{40} Even though the outlines of a defended enclosure on Cornhill have been traced, which may have housed the invading forces led by Aulus Plautius in c.43, this was in place only for a matter of weeks when it was backfilled.\textsuperscript{41}

Debate continues over the extent to which Roman military personnel may have been involved in the building of early Londinium during the 50s, but there is agreement that the

\textsuperscript{37} Sealey (2007), 311.
\textsuperscript{38} Perring (2022) chapter 4, esp. 42–43.
\textsuperscript{39} Hingley (2018), chapter 1, quotation from 24; cf. Wallace (2014), 1–10.
\textsuperscript{40} Rowsome (2000), 17–19; Wallace (2014), 2–6; Hingley (2018), 27–30; Perring 2022: 35–36, 64.
\textsuperscript{41} Perring (2022) 51–59.
settlement had two distinctive characteristics, namely the major role played by immigrants and
the lack of local elites. Traders from abroad were prominent members of Londinium’s society
from its earliest years, on one view taking a leading role in developing the settlement as a
trading hub.\textsuperscript{42} Londinium, in contrast to Camulodunum or Verulamium (modern St Albans),
did not develop on top of pre-existing social structures, but instead was located on the boundary
of territories of the Cantiaci and Trinovantes. This location may well have been an advantage
for traders based at Londinium since it may have given them easier access as outsiders to
different networks in southern England and the chance to develop a settlement on politically
neutral territory. The lack of villas in the area surrounding Londinium may also reflect the lack
of local elites.\textsuperscript{43} Consequently, the possibility of Latin being introduced and encouraged by the
local elite in collaboration with its new Roman rulers, as sketched by Tacitus’ vignette of
Agricola,\textsuperscript{44} did not exist for early Londinium. Instead, as explored in the next section, the role
of spreading Latin during the 50s may have fallen mostly to a non-elite of immigrant traders
from the Continent. Even if the military played a greater and an earlier role in building
Londinium than has previously been suggested,\textsuperscript{45} this does not undermine the clear evidence
for the important role played by immigrant traders in the settlement’s early society.

3.2 The spread of Latin writing in Londinium

Londinium has preserved a remarkable range of objects bearing Latin writing, ranging from
impressive stone monuments to durable everyday objects of pottery, brick, and tile, and even
perishable items, such as leather off-cuts and remnants of timbers, bearing stamped or branded
inscriptions.\textsuperscript{46} By exploring some of the different types of written evidence, we can trace the

\begin{itemize}
\item[]\textsuperscript{42} Wilkes (1996); Wallace (2014), 19; Hingley (2018), 25–35.
\item[]\textsuperscript{43} Millett (1996), 34; Perring (2022) 6, 44, 71.
\item[]\textsuperscript{44} Tac., Agric. 21: \textit{i an uero principum filios liberalibus artibus erudire, et ingenia Britannorum studiis Gallorum anteferre,
at qui modo linguam Romanam ambuebant, eloquentiam concupiscerent.}
\item[]\textsuperscript{45} Perring (2022) Chapters 5–6.
\item[]\textsuperscript{46} \textit{RIB} 1–40, 3001–3011 for inscriptions on stone; \textit{RIB} vol.2, for ‘instrumenta’; Rhodes (1987) for writing on leather off-
cuts.
\end{itemize}
role played by different social factors in spreading Latin during the first decades after
Londinium was founded.

The early date of the 405 stylus tablets excavated at the site of the Bloomberg European
Headquarters in London in the Walbrook valley, with some falling within the first decade of
settlement at Londinium, is significant since their texts indicate that Latin literacy was
introduced to Londinium as a sophisticated pre-existing package rather than gradually
developing over time.47 Whereas typically — for example in archaic Greece — the introduction
of alphabetic writing is characterized at first by fairly straightforward texts, with personal
names being prominent for labelling, marking personal objects, and making religious
dedications,48 what the Bloomberg Tablets demonstrate clearly is not the experimental spread
of basic Latin among the non-elite of Londinium, but the complex implementation of the
Roman legal system that allowed financial agreements to be strengthened via a written
document, and the immediate adoption of sophisticated forms of writing. The earliest dated
document, WT44, from 8 January 57, is a financial document involving two freedmen relating
to the payment of money raised from the sale of merchandise.49 This illustrates that Roman
social structures as well as financial and legal procedures were present very quickly within the
new settlement of Londinium. The very use of wax tablets for this kind of document reflects
the established role of this format for recording important legal agreements.50 There are,
moreover, marked similarities between the types of document and formulaic language used on
the wax tablets of Londinium on the frontiers of the empire and those of contemporary

47 Editio princeps of the Bloomberg Tablets by Tomlin (2016) = AE 2016, 906–72; the sophistication of the tablets already
observed by Harris (2018), 154.
48 Thomas (2009), 349–50.
uac. co(n)s(ulibus) VI idus Ianuarias uac. | Tibullus Venusti libertus scripsi et dico me | debere Grato <S>puri l(iberto)
(denarios) CV ex|s| pretio | mercis quae uendita et tradita (est) | quam pecuniam ei reddere debeo | eie ad quem ea res
pertinet| -----
50 Meyer (2004), 36–43.
Campania at the heart of Italy in the Sulpicii archive and Herculaneum Tablets, including the standard formulae *scripsi me debere*, and *ex pretio*.\(^{51}\)

The writing on the tablets offers insights into the social context of both the writers and the recipients of the documents. Celtic names are not infrequent, with the earliest example, WT4, from 62–65/70, addressed ‘to Luguselvus, son of Iunius’.\(^{52}\) These may, however, equally well record Celtic speakers from the Continent as British Celtic individuals; in a similar way, we cannot be certain whether the use of Celtic in the Bath curse tablets reflects British or Continental Celtic.\(^{53}\) Some individuals mentioned on tablets dating from 67 and 65/70–80 are identified specifically as belonging to military units recruited from among the Vangiones and Nervii, and a slave of an individual identified as a Lingonian is the recipient of one financial document.\(^{54}\) Many of the tablets contain financial or legal documents, or accounts, illustrating that the incentive for adopting literate practices came from the need to record commercial interests.

Eight individuals with military connections are mentioned by name in the Bloomberg tablets, out of a total of ninety-two individuals.\(^{55}\) In addition, four other tablets refer to one further soldier and possibly troop-commanders (*decuriones*), whose names are not preserved.\(^{56}\)

One of these is firmly dated to 67, whilst the rest cluster in the period 65–95. Military personnel do not as yet therefore show up in the earliest evidence for the settlement’s Latinization. Shortly

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\(^{51}\) For example, from the same decade (51) at Puteoli, *Tabulae Pompeianae Sulpiciorum* = Camodeca (1999), no. 69 *scripsi me debere*; and from a few years later (64) at Herculaneum, *Tabulae Herculanenses* = Camodeca (2017), 272 *ex pretio fundi*.

\(^{52}\) WT4: Tomlin (2016), 66–67 = AE 2016, 909 *Luguselvus Iunii filio dabis*.

\(^{53}\) Mullen (2007a).


after the destruction of the settlement by Boudicca in 60/61,57 the Roman army took a prominent role in its redevelopment, as shown by activity at the military-type enclosure complete with ditches and rampart at Plantation Place, and along the waterfront at Regis House.58 Recent excavations at Plantation Place support the theory that the army was instrumental in rebuilding the settlement shortly after its destruction,59 and it is also from around 65 onwards that we start to find evidence of literate practices among the military units working in Londinium.

The Bloomberg Tablets, therefore, show sophisticated uses of literacy by some of the first generation of settlers in London. The earliest tablets that were found in pre-Boudiccan contexts appear to have been dumped there as landfill, having been brought in, perhaps from the Cornhill area.60 Later tablets found within occupation contexts may relate to individuals active in the Walbrook area itself, whilst the impression that writing was produced in the area is strengthened by over two hundred iron styluses also found on the site.61 This picture is complemented by finds made earlier during excavation of 1 Poultry, where pre-Boudiccan finds include three styluses, a lead alloy inkwell, and a writing tablet amongst fire debris, whilst other finds from Flavian layers may also be residual from this earlier period.62 In addition, a collection of forty-three unpublished iron styluses in the Ashmolean Museum (AN1989.86–128) from London Steelyard on the site of Cannon Street railway station only 200m away from the Bloomberg site contributes further evidence for literate practices in this general area of

57 Hingley (2018), chapter 3.
60 Bryan, Hill, Watson (2016), 32.
61 Tomlin (2016), 16.
Londinium. This all suggests that Latin literacy played an important part in the lives of individuals living in the Walbrook area.

A vivid glimpse of literacy imported from abroad emerges from the unusual find of an inscribed stylus. Found at the Bloomberg site in a deposit dated c.62–65/70, the octagonal stylus bears a humorous text punched upon it in tiny letters: ‘I have come from the City. I bring you a pleasing gift with a sharp point so that you may remember me. I ask that I might be able to give more generously, if fortune allowed, but my purse is as empty as the way is long.’

This modest gift appears therefore to have been brought back to Londinium from Rome (‘the City’) by a traveller. The find is remarkable and so far unique for both its early date and elaborateness of its inscription. The level of wordplay in this metrical text shows a different type of sophisticated Latin literacy from that apparent in the Bloomberg financial documents, providing more support for the importance of travel from the Continent in spreading Latin in Londinium.

We may hypothesize, therefore, that incoming traders initially introduced sophisticated Latin literate practices during the 50s, with the Roman army becoming involved only from the 60s. In order to explore further ways in which the use of Latin may have spread in a different social context, we now turn to an analysis of stamped pottery from the first century.

Alongside the sophisticated use of documents written in Latin by the non-elite, we also find formulaic Latin abbreviations stamped on pottery in Britain. As discussed earlier, stamped fineware was already circulating in Late Iron Age Britain so in order to advance our understanding of the spread of the practice of stamping pottery, we need to identify objects manufactured out of local clays bearing similar makers’ marks. This can be done in Londinium.

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63 Pers. comm. from Andrew Wilson, 24/06/20. See also Wilson, this volume.
in the case of Sugar Loaf Court Ware: its manufacture somewhere locally in the south-west part of the Roman city is indicated by the presence in Sugar Loaf Court, Little Trinity Lane, of seconds and wasters. The orange-brown fired coarse wares use local clay, but the range of forms indicate Continental influence. 65 Three amphora sherds have been found in Neronian contexts in Londinium of this type of pottery bearing the stamp C ALBVCI, who appears to be a potter originally from the area of Germania Superior or perhaps southern Burgundy. 66 They illustrate how in the early years of the settlement a migrant potter to Londinium chose to manufacture ceramics imitating Continental forms and also importing the distinctively Roman habit of stamping manufacturer’s marks upon pottery objects. 67 The short period of manufacture, from 50–55, and the small scale of production support the idea that this production was on an individual’s initiative, perhaps inspired by a military market given that his wares have been found on sites with a military connection. 68 This suggests that the earliest use of Latin writing on locally manufactured objects could be as a result of the movement of individual craftsmen from the Continent to Britain. 69

Alongsie the spread of Latin manufacturing stamps, some potters producing wares in Britain imitated the format of stamps without using them to reproduce legible lettering. The presence of repeated patterns within a stamp framework on some locally produced coarseware hints at a desire on the part of potters to make their wares look like Continental products, even if they perhaps did not have the literate skills to stamp their own name. Amongst the pottery found at 1 Poultry <P361> <P362>, for example, repeated motifs are divided into a double-line stamp, whilst in another case a pattern appears within a circular wreath [Fig.2 – <P361>],

65 Compare the manufacturing in Verulamium Region Ware of vessels imitating Dressel 2–4 amphorae: Symonds (2003), 50–51.
66 Symonds (2003), 55–57; Hingley (2018), 36.
68 Symonds (2003), 56; Perring (2022) 83.
69 Compare the picture of mobility among expert potters between La Graufesenque, Lyon, Arezzo, and Pisa as discussed by Mullen (in press a), 144-45, 156.
This may reflect illiteracy or incomplete Latinization among producers of coarseware in Britain, but at the same time may also illustrate the desire to reproduce the idea of writing, even if only via repeated patterns.70 A similar illegible stamp was also found at Plantation Place on a Verulamium Region White Ware mortarium <P4> and <MS25> in a Period 3, phase 1 context from around 63.71

Other types of stamped inscription point towards a role for Roman administrative authorities in promoting the spread of Latin literacy. Slightly later stamps are connected in some way with the procuratorial office based in Londinium. Around 200 tiles stamped with P P BRI LON representing ten individual dies have been found on fifty-five sites in Londinium. Generally accepted as representing the abbreviated text p(rocuratores) p(rovinciae) Bri(tanniae) Lon(dini), ‘the procurators of the province of Britain at London’, the earliest have been dated to the late Flavian period.72 The excavation in the City of London of roofing tile wasters with these procuratorial stamps points to a tile kiln near the centre of Londinium during the period 70–125, whilst others found near Gresham Street suggest kilns to the west of the Flavian town.73 Furthermore, the same die stamp has been found both on tiles and mortaria whose fabric indicates that they were manufactured in the Verulamium area, during the period 80/90–120.74 The use of an official stamp suggests that the locally-produced mortaria were required to be stamped, perhaps because they were destined to be used during official building activities, or perhaps as payment in kind of a tax to the procurator by the potters. At any rate, the stamped tiles are often found associated with public buildings constructed in the late first or early second century. The dating of the stamps, from around 80 to 120, and their absence

70 Hill and Rowsome (2011), 485–86.
71 Dunwoodie, Harward, and Pitt (2016), 40, with Fig. 35.
72 RIB II.5 pp.30–31; Betts (1995); Perring (2022) 139-40.
73 Watson (2015) 69; Perring (2022) 139.
74 RIB II.5, 2485,9 (ii) + 2485,1; Hartley (1996), nos 1–4, 6.
from an earlier period, even though a procurator is known to have been based in London by 60, perhaps reflects the introduction of the practice of stamping as both the demand for tiles increased, with the huge number of buildings constructed during the Flavian era, and perhaps as more varied kiln sources began to be used.\textsuperscript{75} In the case of manufacturing stamps, therefore, we have two explanations for the spread of this practice: first as introduced to Britain by migrant potters, and second perhaps as a requirement by the procuratorial office.

Other types of evidence relating to the Latinization of Britain support the necessity of considering Britain within a wider Continental pattern. This is particularly true of the spread of Latin texts in the form of oculists’ or collyrium stamps, used to make impressions upon sticks of eye ointment. This artefact type is found predominantly in Gaul, Germania, and Britannia. An example from Londinium dates perhaps from the late first or early second century, having been found at 129–130 Upper Thames Street, now in the Museum of London (inv.1931.80). It bears four texts identifying the ointments of Gaius Silvius Tetricus.\textsuperscript{76} The motivation for such collyrium-stamps has been explained in different ways: firstly, as reflecting the activity of peripatetic doctors, travelling around with ointment sticks that had been stamped centrally, which would allow them to be easily identified in transit. Their spread in the north-western provinces may reflect the dependence in those less urbanized areas on pre-prepared ointments issued by itinerant medics.\textsuperscript{77} Secondly, it has been suggested that they may relate somehow to customs control exerted by the Roman state, given the close correspondence between the distribution of the stamps and the extent of the area liable to pay the quadragesima Galliarum, the 2.5% customs duty for the Gallic provinces.\textsuperscript{78} These two different explanations raise interesting implications — either that it was possible for a specific use of Latin to be

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{75} Betts (1995), 222.
\item \textsuperscript{76} RIB II.4, 2446.27, with Jackson (1996), 184–85.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Nutton (1972).
\item \textsuperscript{78} Jackson (1996), 177–78; Künzl (1985), 475: this theory does not, however, account for the distribution of oculists stamps in Britannia.
\end{itemize}
contrived in the north-western provinces, or that the Roman state prompted the necessity for this epigraphic practice to be introduced for taxation purposes.

Much of our evidence, then, points towards the importance of mobility in spreading the use of Latin and writing culture, but it remains a challenge to distinguish between different groups of individuals who can be seen to adopt writing in Latin for a variety of purposes. Given that distinct settlement and burial patterns in Londinium during the first century point towards different groups of settlers being based respectively at the core settlement at Cornhill, on Ludgate Hill, and in Southwark, we might not expect to find an even distribution of evidence for literacy across all areas, and it is also often difficult to judge whether written evidence is to be associated with indigenous individuals or incomers from the Continent. Some glimpse of the value assigned to Latin on the part of the non-immigrant population may, however, be provided by a burial excavated at Harper Road in Southwark. Stable isotope analysis has suggested that the deceased probably grew up in Britain, although of northern European ancestry. Dating from the first generation of settlement in the area, this female burial includes some grave goods that are typically ‘Celtic’ — such as a bronze neck-torc — and others that are distinctively Roman, in the form of two Samian plates. These plates belong to the production of the potter Vitalis I who was active at La Graufesenque between 45 and 65. It is possible that the choice of Samian ware produced by this particular potter, Vitalis, may have reflected a desire to include the word *vita* within the burial goods, given that the stamp has been deliberately pierced through before the plate was deposited. This cannot, of course, indicate that the female buried should be assumed to have been literate, but arguably shows an

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80 Perring (2022) 107–09.  
81 Hingley (2018), 37; Redfern et al. (2017), 257–61.  
82 Cotton (2008).
appreciation of Latin writing on the part of those burying her and represents an exceptional instance in Londinium of writing being associated with a woman.

3.3 The spread of writing-materials in Londinium

The spread of Latin, therefore, can be explored via analysis of surviving written evidence, but another fruitful approach, which has only relatively recently come to the fore, is to take into consideration finds relating to the archaeology of writing, in other words not just writing-tablets but styluses and inkwells (leaving aside wax spatulae and seal boxes). A small number of iron styluses has been found in pre-conquest archaeological contexts in Braughing (Hertfordshire) and its cemetery at Skeleton Green, and Silchester (Hampshire). In the latter case, two styluses from 15 BC–AD 40 have been taken as evidence for very limited literacy during this period, whilst the three styluses from Hertfordshire were considered possible metal-working tools, even though the graffiti discussed earlier in this paper from this same area point to literate practices by Continental incomers. On the whole, therefore, it seems safe to associate metal styluses specifically with Latinization. Whereas the majority of writing-tablets may have been manufactured on the Continent and then imported to Britain, given that they are composed of non-native species such as silver fir, cedar, larch, and spruce, and whereas most inkwells are of imported Samian ware, the production of leaf-tablets from local varieties of wood including alder, birch, and oak and the local manufacture of inkwells illustrates a move away from reliance upon imported writing equipment. By focusing upon archaeological finds associated with the production rather than distribution of writing, we can trace patterns of

85 Note, however, that almost all of the Bloomberg tablets consisted of non-native coniferous species (silver fir, spruce, larch, probably as a result of local recycling of imported barrels for their manufacture: Stewart (2016), 6; Goodburn (2016), 8-9.
86 Eckardt (2014), 181.
87 Distinction made by Hüssler and Pearce (2007), 232.
localized literacy in Londinium. In particular, the distribution of Samian inkwells is suggestive of the ways in which Latin was being used in the first century, in which we can track localized patterns of literacy associated with construction-works, commercial activity, and the presence of the military.

Twenty-seven inkwells have been identified from the pre-Flavian era, roughly 50–69, clustering on the eastern side of the settlement in two areas — to the south of the so-called ‘proto-forum’ and on the waterfront. The ‘proto-forum’ was a gravelled open area in the Cornhill district, which preceded the development of a monumental forum and basilica, and seems likely to have been the focus of civic and commercial activity in the 50s. When the basilica was developed in the second century, it sealed the evidence from the preceding building phase, when the forum-basilica was under construction (95–100). Along with site huts and refuse dumps for the construction workers, the basilica’s construction covered over remains associated with the building works, including styluses, suggesting that the presence of architects and surveyors must have stimulated literate and numerate practices in the planning of the new monumental centre for the town.

A notable cluster of writing implements at 1 Poultry in the Walbrook area, where they make up 9% of identified finds, fits well with the new richness of literate documentation that has emerged from the same vicinity with the Bloomberg Tablets. As discussed earlier, these illustrate the use of Latin writing-tablets by individuals to keep track of their business interests. Finds around Fenchurch Street also belong to an area notable for its commercial activities, in the form of the storage and processing of grain for bread-making. The distribution and number of inkwells then increase during the Flavian-Trajanic period, with fifty-four inkwells coming

88 Eckardt (2014), 203.
90 Hill and Rowsome (2011), 506.
from a wider area, including Southwark, mostly from industrial or commercial contexts. So far, there is a distinct lack of evidence for Samian inkwells associated with domestic contexts, which might point towards literacy being used for specific commercial purposes rather than for a form of literacy that is more widespread across different kinds of documents. This also fits with the observation that the capacity of Samian inkwells tends to be on average much larger than that of metal inkwells, suggesting that they may have been used for the storage of ink that was then decanted into smaller inkwells, something which fits with a non-domestic, professional context. Even more striking evidence for the way in which literacy became embedded in some sections of society, though, is the occasional example of an inkwell manufactured locally. In an early second-century dump in Southwark, for example, an inkwell in Verulamium Region White Ware shows that the impetus to produce writing equipment spread to the local region. It was found along with other types of writing equipment, including an iron stylus, and two writing tablets.

Finds along the waterfront, such as the forty-three unpublished iron styluses from the area of London Steelyard in the Ashmolean Museum (AN1989.86–128) mentioned earlier and an unpublished writing-tablet from the same area (AN2002.40), can be associated with warehouses along Londinium’s river port, focal points for trading and commerce. The assemblage of finds further to the east at Regis House also reflects a military presence, given that leather fragments from tent panels were found in the infill of the quay, along with fragments of *lorica squamata*. In addition, one of the timbers used in the quay bears a branded inscription naming a military unit otherwise unattested in Britain, an Augustan cohort or *ala* of

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91 Monteil (2008), 178.
92 Monteil (2008), 183.
Dendrochronology gives dates of 63/64 for timbers used in the Regis House development, which would be compatible with soldiers from the Plantation Place fort being deployed in this construction work. At Plantation Place itself, the discovery of Samian inkwell sherds from period 3 contexts (c.63–85) is considered as typical of Roman administrative or military activity, providing further indication of literacy and record-keeping practices being stimulated by the presence of military personnel in the settlement. Inkwells in the earliest period from 50–60 are therefore found in association with commercial activities and then from the 60s with a military base too.

4. Conclusions

The case-study of the Latinization of early Londinium therefore provides an alternative model to the idea that either the local elite or the Roman army were the most significant factors in the spread of literacy in Britain. The importance of the army in spreading Latin writing culture finds strong support from the Vindolanda Tablets, which illustrate how the army generated the need for literate documentation, and how literate communication took place between military personnel and civilian traders. But one of the chief characteristics of early Londinium, at least up until the town’s destruction by Boudicca, is the lack of writing equipment or writing itself associated with a military presence. This is not to claim that no soldiers or veterans were present in the early town, nor is it to exclude a role for the military in establishing the settlement. Once a concentration of military personnel appears in the town as a result of the building of the fort at Plantation Place in the 60s, however, writing associated with the army also appears at the same time.

99 Thompson (2016), 156.
100 Bowman (1994); Raybould (1999), 81, 172.
Social factors explaining the spread of Latin in Londinium are, therefore, as diverse as one would expect. Furthermore, we may refine our analysis of Latinization even within this one town into its constituent parts, considering how different social groups might have been using Latin for different types of writing. Models explaining the spread of Latin in the province as primarily the result of its adoption by the local elite are over-simplistic.\footnote{For example, Häussler and Pearce (2007), 224: ‘In the wake of conquest education in Latin is likely to have spread across the western provinces, presumably with the support of local elites.’} The case of Londinium, where the settlement was established away from existing power structures, helps to clarify the role of incoming Latin-speaking or Celtic/Latin bilingual individuals from the Continent who brought with them writing culture, and who used Latin for financial and legal agreements, and this picture of the role of incomers in spreading Latin may be typical of the province more widely.\footnote{Cotugno (2018a).} Our evidence points to the Latinization of Londinium being primarily connected with immigrant traders during the first decade or so of the settlement’s development, with soldiers then becoming involved from around 63 with the construction of the fort at Plantation Place and the deployment of its soldiers for construction work, especially in the area of Regis House on the waterfront.

Although it may be true that the army played an important role in the spread of literacy from the late first century onwards, the possibility of diving deep into the evidence of Roman London in its early years enables us to hypothesise about the role of other social factors in the immediate aftermath of the conquest. Rather than thinking in terms of the spread of Latin literacy as a single phenomenon, it is more helpful to consider how different types of literacy spread, each with its own chronological pattern and reach.\footnote{Häussler and Pearce (2007), 231.} In this sense, Londinium mirrored on a much smaller scale the picture of linguistic diversity that persisted in the landscape of Roman Britain more widely.\footnote{Mullen (2007b), 35.}

\footnote{For example, Häussler and Pearce (2007), 224: ‘In the wake of conquest education in Latin is likely to have spread across the western provinces, presumably with the support of local elites.’}

\footnote{Cotugno (2018a).}

\footnote{Häussler and Pearce (2007), 231.}

\footnote{Mullen (2007b), 35.}
Latinization, with foci in the Cornhill and Walbrook areas where the settlers appear to have been migrant traders from the Continent and military personnel, and a much less dense pattern in the Ludgate Hill area, which may have been inhabited by indigenous Britons. What remains unclear is whether the evidence allows us to go beyond the conclusion that individuals in Londinium in the first seventy years or so of the town’s existence used writing for a specific purpose in a specific location, or whether we can hypothesise that individuals engaged with a variety of literate modes. The diversity of writing-types found in Londinium might seem to support the hypothesis that Latin writing was spreading into different parts of society and culture.\textsuperscript{106} One of the main social contexts in which writing in Latin appears to have been stimulated is in the area of the mass production of pottery, bricks, and tiles. The mobility of individual expert craftsmen between the Continent and Britain and the development of mass production are likely to have been significant factors in the spread of Latin.\textsuperscript{107} Changes in writing culture were stimulated by changes in mass production, especially of pottery. In addition to the evidence discussed above, inscriptions branded and incised upon leather offcuts raise the possibility that tanners too were using writing to organize their work during the late first/early second centuries.\textsuperscript{108} Writing in Latin developed at the same time as control was asserted by the Roman authorities and as the spread took place of economic and commercial transactions which could be complex, part of a network, and geographically far-reaching (see also Wilson, this volume).\textsuperscript{109} From the start, Londinium’s location meant that the settlement was destined to be a hub which facilitated communication with inland Britain via the road-system and with the Continent and coastal areas of England to both north and south via the river Thames. Just as the town played an important role as a hub for distributing Samian

\textsuperscript{106} Oikonomaki (2017), 282.
\textsuperscript{107} Compare Mullen (in press).
\textsuperscript{108} Rhodes (1987).
\textsuperscript{109} Compare Woolf (1994), 94 on the possible connection between the spread of commerce and of the knowledge of writing.
we could also surmise a similar role for the town in spreading Latin, and literacy, to other parts of Britain.

\[110\] Willis (2005), 105.
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Abbreviations

RIB  The Roman Inscriptions of Britain

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