

LatinNow Latinization of the north-western provinces: sociolinguistics, epigraphy and archaeology

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Overview

Dramatic linguistic changes occurred in the north-western Roman Empire: a patchwork of local languages which existed in the Iron Age had been all but replaced by Latin as the dominant language by the end of the imperial period. Precisely how, when and why this change occurred, and how it relates to other social phenomena, remains an underexplored topic central to the Roman world. It requires investigation which is only possible through an analysis cutting across provincial boundaries, and those between the Iron Age, Roman and early medieval periods, and reaching beyond Classics to modern sociolinguistics and Germanic, Celtic and Palaeo-hispanic studies. LatinNow bridges this gap in our knowledge by employing an approach which exploits both epigraphic and archaeological material (writing *and* writing equipment) and situates the phenomena of Latinization, literacy, bi- and multilingualism within broader social developments. Drawing together the developing strands of sociolinguistics, bilingualism studies, digital epigraphy, and small finds archaeological investigation into an integrated methodology brings a fresh perspective, founded on empirical data and supported by evolving technologies (GIS, EpiDoc, Reflectance Transformation Imaging).

Key information

- Funded by an ERC Starting Grant, 2017–2022
- Principal Investigator: Alex Mullen; Research Fellows: Francesca Cotugno; Noemí Moncunill Martí; Senior Scientists: Alan Bowman; Jane Masségli; Research Affiliate: Michael Loy
- Supported by European Special Advisers
- Hosted by University of Nottingham
- Based at Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents, University of Oxford

Key outputs

- 3 open access volumes published by Oxford University Press
- Cursive Latin manual online and in print
- Peer-reviewed open access articles
- Conference and 2 workshops
- Panel at Roman Archaeology Conference on *instrumenta scriptoria*
- Publicly accessible, free GIS
- Roman Inscriptions of Britain Online completed
- European touring exhibition
- School materials and educational sessions

Participate!

The touring exhibition will stop at museums, archaeological sites etc. across the research area. Outreach activities will be tailored to the audiences and we can offer introductory training in EpiDoc and RTI for interested parties. Please suggest stops for the tour and materials for the exhibition, especially those relevant for local cultural history; costs will be covered by the project. Please also share data for the GIS: we need EpiDoc files, information about *instrumenta scriptoria* and data for a range of social variables which might be correlated with the spread of Latin (e.g. urban centres, military movements, communication networks etc.). Our outputs will be open access and all participation will be acknowledged. Thank you!

Case study: economic contexts for Latinization Older material rethought: La Graufesenque, France

- Large *terra sigillata* pottery at Condatomagus (Millau, Aveyron) 1st to 2nd century AD.
- Stamps and signatures in Latin on vessels for external consumption.
- c. 250 ‘graffiti’ in Latin, Gaulish or mixture, mostly firing lists, mostly Neronian to late Flavian, for internal consumption.
- Close analysis indicates that we should be thinking about functional bilingualism across the site, not separate Latin- and Celtic-speaking ghettoized groups as per Fülle and Strobel.
- Mixtures of languages likely the result of amalgamation of notes and dockets in different languages rather than the direct record of individual’s bilingual speech as per Adams.
- See Mullen 2013 ‘The language of the potteries’ in Fulford and Durham *Seeing Red* (London) 97–110 for discussion and bibliography.

New material: the Bloomberg tablets, London

- c. 400 stylus tablets found in excavations 2010–2014 for Bloomberg’s European HQ, City of London.
- Mostly c. AD 50–80.
- Largely legal and financial documents and personal correspondence generated through economic activities at the site itself, others brought in through rubbish from locations to the east of the site.
- Entirely ‘Roman’ output with very few non-standard features of format, writing or language.
- Are at least some of the writers ‘economic migrants’ from the continent making use of opportunities in the new province? Can onomastics help determine this? Interpretation would fit with archaeological analyses which have suggested that a Gallo-Roman contingent may have been important in the creation of Londinium.
- See Tomlin 2016 *Roman London’s First Voices* (London); Wallace 2014 *The Origin of Roman London* (Cambridge).



Map of project area



Image of an address from the Bloomberg tablets
(source: Tomlin 2016 *Roman London’s First Voices* (London), cover image)

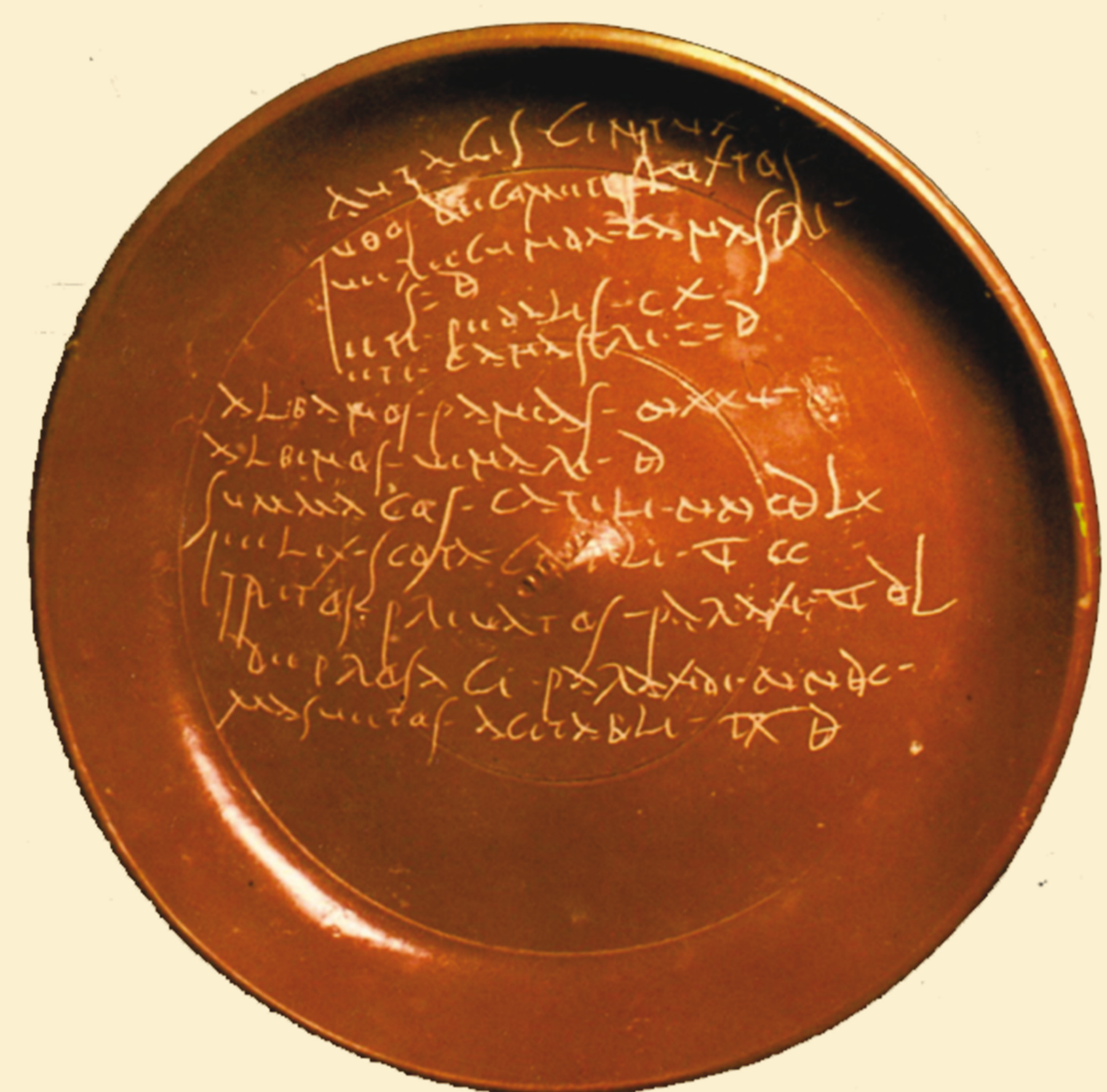


Image of a firing list from La Graufesenque
(source: Marichal 1988 *Les graffites de La Graufesenque* (Paris), cover image)

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