



Figure 3-24: A dedication-inscription found in association with the baths at Stanwix that can be attributed to a Severan empress of the early 3rd century, probably Julia Mamaea. Source: R.S.O. Tomlin.

### Sociolinguistics

Alex Mullen

In the last 15 years or so there has been increasing interest in the application of Sociolinguistics (a field that has been growing rapidly since the 1980s) to Classical studies, following, in particular, a series of influential and wide-ranging books by J.N. Adams (2003; 2007; 2013). Sociolinguists study the complex relationships between language and society, culture and identities. Given that epigraphic and other linguistic remains are often an element in our patchy and problematic evidence for attempting to understand aspects of the Roman past, having a new perspective on how we might interpret and use them to understand the identities, cultural interaction, and lived experience has inspired new, sometimes interdisciplinary, work. Part of this has focused on bi- and multilingualism, and has shown that overtly bi- or trilingual texts are not the only way to explore language contact but that clues may be more subtle, as we see below.

Regina from the tribe of the Catuvellauni, buried at South Shields in the 2nd century AD, has attracted interest from the local community, school children reading *Minimus*, and academics (Fig. 3-25). There has been plenty to say



Figure 3-25: A 3D model of the tombstone of Regina found at South Shields (RIB 1065), which bears an inscription in Latin and Pictish. Source: NU Digital Heritage, Newcastle University.

about her iconographic presentation, her relationship with Barates, how she and he made it to the frontier, what her identities and language(s) may have been. A large part of the attraction is the bilingual nature of the inscription: we find Latin and also Palmyrene (the dialect of Aramaic spoken in central Syria). But close linguistic analysis indicates that the epitaph may in fact be, in a sense, quadrilingual. The string of (defective) accusatives in the Latin section are likely to have been produced through interference from Greek and it is possible to argue that the spelling of the tribal name CATVALLAVNA reflects a British Celtic pronunciation (Mullen 2012, 3-4). Based on our understanding of the sociolinguistic make-up of the Roman Empire, a plausible assumption might be that the husband and dedicator, Barates from Palmyra, may have had Palmyrene as his first language, Greek (the lingua franca of the East) his second and (British?) Latin his third. It is also possible that he learnt some British Celtic from Regina or that he picked up some Celtic features from her version of British Latin (both routes could have resulted in the form of the tribal name we see). The monument vividly reminds us of the multiple languages and migrants that inhabited the Wall zone.

The sociolinguistic lens can also be used to explore other aspects of language and identities and their interactions, including gender, geographical associations, occupation, and age (Clackson 2015). Though the Roman army has not to date been subject to extensive sociolinguistic publications, work is underway to explore the multiple identities that may leave traces and to reconstruct the complexity of the speech communities created by the incorporation of groups from across the Empire within a large, mobile, and interconnected institution (Haynes 2013). Whilst there is little doubt that the language of command across Hadrian's Wall would have been Latin, the soundscapes of the military groupings would have been heterogeneous, with linguistic differences based on age and length of service, education, occupation, geographical origin, locations of service, intensity of interaction with local communities, and so on.

One of our most extensive sets of textual evidence from Roman Britain comes from Vindolanda. Generally, the writing tablets contain formulaic and standard language. We do not know how many were written by scribes, though they are clearly involved. Despite the reliance on the standard norms of writing there are features of sociolinguistic interest. It is important to study these in their broader geographical and chronological context. Intricate sociolinguistic work, supported by digital technologies, is allowing us to understand the complexity of varieties of Latin and local languages and their interactions over time and space in more detail than ever before. At Vindolanda, we can trace evidence of the Germanic-Celtic background of the Batavian-Tungrian auxiliaries in loanwords and onomastic practices. For

example, the strikingly large number of spelling variations in the religious dedications to (in the most Latinized form) *Veteres* at Vindolanda and elsewhere along the Wall are probably the result of uncertainty of how to render a spoken Germanic deity name into Latin (Cotugno forthcoming). In the case of Celtic linguistic features in the tablets, it can be difficult to determine whether these were already part of military Latin created through past contact with any one of a number of Celtic-speaking groups, borrowed from the speech of the continental auxiliaries stationed at Vindolanda or borrowed through contact with speakers of British Celtic (a language which is only known through Latin sources, with just a couple of possible exceptions, see Mullen 2007). The loanword *souxutum* (*Tab. Vindol. II, 301*), for example, originally interpreted as a 'Celticized' form of Latin *sumptum*, is in fact a Celtic word for a type of vessel, since it is attested in a 2nd-century potter's account from Vayres (Gironde) and occurs later in Insular Celtic (Early Irish *suacht*, Scottish *suacan*, Old Cornish *seit*) (see, most recently, Jørgensen 2008). The problem arises in trying to work out how and when the loanword entered the Latin used at Vindolanda, whether from continental or local British Celtic (if, indeed, it is a loanword and not a code-switch or interference).

The military contingent in and around the frontier over a substantial period will have had a linguistic impact. Jackson's view (1953, 106) that the Highland zone of *Britannia* was almost 'exclusively British' in language is too reductive: the linguistic realities will never follow closely such invented boundaries, as Jackson himself admits, and the military sites constituted various conduits of exposure to, and reasons to learn, Latin, both for those in them and those in contact with them. Exactly how successfully Latin spread within and without the garrisons in spoken and written form, and the complex nature of that Latin, forms part of a story of the socially variegated and differential process of Latinization across the western provinces ([www.latinnow.eu](http://www.latinnow.eu)).

### Towards a new understanding of Hadrian's Wall?

A number of themes have emerged or been brought closer to fruition over the past decade. This section is not intended to recapitulate the review presented above, or to anticipate the more detailed assessments of individual sites in the following chapter, but to highlight points of interest that have emerged from new evidence or research.

First, there have been a number of examples of bathhouses being discovered or re-examined. In most cases, analysis and evaluation are still being undertaken, but the results will surely deliver impressive advances in our understanding of these structures. Along the Wall, the extramural bathhouse at Chesters has been reassessed by Snape and Stobbs (2016), while