

The Roman Army : Origins

you are here: [home](#) | [tablets](#) | [Tab. Vindol. II Introductory Chapters](#) | **The Roman Army : Origins**

Search database

View tablet number
(118-573):

 go

[View all Tablets](#)

[Search Tablets](#)

[Browse Tablets](#)

Search Tablets database

Browse Tablets database

Tab. Vindol. II Introductory chapters

[The Archaeological Context](#)

[The Roman Army](#)

[The format of the tablets](#)

[Palaeography](#)

[Appendix](#)

Tab. Vindol. II Category introductions

Tab. Vindol. II Abbreviations and Bibliography

Digitising Vindolanda

Tab. Vindol. II Addenda and Corrigenda

Tab. Vindol. I Introductory Chapters

The print publication and the online edition

Print-friendly Tablet display

Tablets guide

General search

(Excluding Tablets database)

Text:

Images:

[Site map](#)

[Military Units](#)

[Personnel](#)

[Soldiers and Civilians](#)

Origins

[Activities](#)

[List of Persons](#)

From Alan Bowman and David Thomas, *The Vindolanda Writing Tablets (Tabulae Vindolandenses II)*, London: British Museum Press, 1994. pp. 30-32

Some attention has already been devoted to the question of the ethnic identity and origins of the people who appear in the writing-tablets.⁴⁴ In general it is to be emphasised that the firm evidence for the presence of Batavian and Tungrian units at Vindolanda means that we should expect to find a preponderance of personnel, including officers ([Vol. II, Ch. 2](#)), from the area of Gallia Belgica and Germany in which these units were originally recruited.⁴⁵ Beyond that, we assume that origins are likely to lie in the western empire, perhaps with some representation for Italy (obviously so in the case of the high-ranking officials such as the governor and the legionary legates), but the nomenclature of individuals is often too commonplace to allow us to be specific, and only in one case, that of Sabinus from Trier ([182.i.4](#)), do we have clear evidence of a place of origin.⁴⁶

The evidence for the Roman *gentilicia* may be appreciated from a survey of the List of Persons. The frequency with which Flavius and Claudius occur requires no explanation other than the obvious, and these names often indicate citizens of provincial origin. Iulius tends to be held by legionaries rather than auxiliaries in Britain,⁴⁷ but Iulius Verecundus is a prefect of an auxiliary cohort ([154](#), [210-2](#)). Sulpicia ([291](#)) and Cocceius ([352](#)) probably indicate citizenship acquired by the individual or an ancestor in the reigns of Galba and Nerva, but our one example of Aelius ([233](#), [243-248](#)) is certainly pre-Hadrianic. Others such as Vettius, Cassius, Caecilius, Hostilius in themselves indicate very little. We are reluctant to suggest unattested *gentilicia* unless the reading is certain, but there is one clear case in Cessaucius ([312](#)) and another, Celonius ([345](#)), may connect with an inscription from Rovenich. There are some uncommon names and formations which are known elsewhere.⁴⁸

The *cognomina* are in general more informative and, apart from the very common examples which we here omit,⁴⁹ may be considered by type and by the region from which they derive. Celtic and Germanic names and formations are, as we would expect, common. We make no pretence to expertise in the matter of classification or in the very difficult philological and linguistic problems which these names raise, and in view of the generally poor attestation of such names it is not surprising that many examples cannot be precisely paralleled.⁵⁰ We hope, at least, to have presented the evidence with sufficient clarity for the experts in these fields to analyse it.

As fairly typical examples of names of "Celtic" type which are otherwise attested or reasonably closely paralleled we can cite Andecarus and Sautenus ([182](#) back i.5, cf. [188.7](#)), Atto ([308](#), [345](#)), Albiso ([303](#)), Brigio (-nus) ([188](#), [250](#)), Saco ([309](#)), Veldeius or Veldedeius and Velbuteius ([310](#)), Sattua ([346](#)), Metto ([309](#)) and Gavo ([192](#), [207](#)). We note that, as with many other names, the common *cognomina* Buccus ([176](#)) and Exomnius ([182](#).ii.13) are variously regarded by the modern authorities as Celtic or Germanic.⁵¹

The names which seem most obviously Germanic are Chrauttius and Thuttana ([310](#)), both unattested. No doubt there are others which could be Germanic in origin, e.g. the unattested Gannallius ([169](#)) and very rare Uxperus ([182](#).ii.24). Insofar as we have been able to parallel the names (other than those which are universal) or some of the linguistic elements in them, however, we find them turning up in Gallia Belgica, the remainder of Gaul, the Danube lands and Spain, sometimes in more than one of these areas. There is no reason why Vindolanda should not have seen the presence of people from all these places at some point, given the presence of units from Gallia Belgica and Spain, but it is often impossible to be sure in individual cases. Thus, but not exhaustively: for Spain, possibly Valatta ([257](#)), Andle... ([188](#)), either or both of the names beginning with Tag- ([181.14](#), [184.i.3](#)). The Danube lands: Ucen(i)us, Butimas, Gambax ([184](#)), Ircucisso ([182](#).i.5), Huep- (Vep-?, [184](#).ii.27). One point which is to be emphasised is that we have no direct evidence in the tablets for individual native Britons, although some (either military recruits or traders) could in principle be concealed behind Celtic or Germanic names of this type which we would not expect to be able to distinguish from continental examples.⁵²

Finally, there is a certain amount of evidence for Greek names: Elpis ([346](#)), Gleuco ([343](#).iv.44), Paris, Corinthus ([311](#)), Hermes ([487](#)), Trophimus ([341](#)). This is not so surprising as it might at first appear, for Greek names are quite well attested in Gallia Belgica and are even to be found among the German soldiers of the imperial bodyguard.⁵³ Some of the Greek names in the Vindolanda tablets might suggest a servile context but in no case is this clearly demonstrable and it is certainly not a necessary conclusion.

[Previous page](#)

[Top of page](#)

[Next page](#)