

Inscriptions for inscribers: texts on Roman writing equipment*

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ABSTRACT: Inspired by the recent find of an inscribed stylus at London's Bloomberg site, this article provides a survey of Roman styli, inkwells and wax-spatula handles with inscriptions. After a discussion of the geographical and chronological distribution of the three main text categories (owners' marks, makers' marks and longer texts/gifts), those objects that can be considered gifts and that were inscribed with personal or witty sentences are discussed in more detail. They are part of the Roman tradition of gifting inscribed *instrumentum* but very rare compared to other object types such as fibulae or spoons. Their distribution shows a cluster in Germania superior, suggesting that they represent a fashionable trend in this area from the second/third century A.D. onwards. A closer examination of design, material, texts and find contexts reveals that inscribed styli in particular were custom made skilfully and used as gifts amongst a literate civilian «elite».

KEYWORDS: *instrumentum*, writing equipment, literacy, Roman archaeology, Roman epigraphy, stylus

I. A PEN WITH A MESSAGE

*Ab urbe v[e]n[i] munus tibi gratum adf(e)ro / acul[ea]t[um] ut habe[a]s memor[ia]m
nostra(m) / rogo si fortuna dar[e]t quo possem / largius ut longa via ceu sacculus est
(v)acuu[s].*

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I have come from the City. I bring you a welcome gift with a sharp point that you may remember me. I ask, if fortune allowed, that I might be able (to give) as generously as the way is long (and) as my purse is empty. (Text and translation by R.S.O. Tomlin)¹

This message is delivered by an otherwise inconspicuous Roman stylus that was pulled out of the mud at the Bloomberg site in central London (FIG. 12). The area, excavated between 2010 and 2014, yielded around 200 styli but only one with an inscription. The text strikes a chord because we recognise its purpose immediately: who has not seen gimmicky t-shirts and other souvenirs with similar messages? But the object is also remarkable because it is unique. Roman styli, the instruments used to write on wax tablets, can be intricately decorated but styli with inscriptions are rare finds.² What is more, the Bloomberg stylus represents to date the longest and most elaborate inscription on a stylus, and while we do know other Roman-era souvenirs with inscriptions, there is no comparable text.³ As we shall see, this stylus is also different from other inscribed styli in a number of other ways.

The rather personal character of the Bloomberg stylus immediately makes us wonder about the people behind it. Someone decided to turn this stylus into a souvenir. What does the decision to give a stylus as a present tell us about the giver and the recipient of the gift? And what does the decision to put writing on a writing implement imply about their attitude to literacy? The ability to read and write – and hence writing equipment itself as well as its depiction – are connected to prestige and status in the Roman world.⁴ For its owners, inscribed writing equipment could potentially represent prestige and status doubly, through object and text alike. In what follows, I explore what the implications of writing equipment with inscriptions might be for our understanding of ancient literacy and its place in Roman society, and how the Bloomberg stylus fits in. I shall first present an overview of published Roman writing equipment with inscriptions, describing object types and text categories as well as geographical and chronological distribution. In the second part of the paper I shall focus on objects comparable to the Bloomberg stylus and address questions regarding design

¹ See Tomlin 2018; MOLA online blog 28.07.2019: <https://www.mola.org.uk/blog/i-went-rome-and-all-i-got-you-was-stylus-rare-inscribed-roman-writing-implement-discovered> (accessed 28.5.2021); HILTS 2019 and KEYSER 2019, the latter with a slightly different reading, see below, Section III.2.

² SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 66–71.

³ The closest parallel is a fibula from Unterthürheim (Bavaria, Germany) with the inscription *Ab Aquis venio* (Martin-Kilcher 1998). For Roman souvenirs see e.g. KÜNZL, KOEPEL 2002; BREEZE 2012.

⁴ ECKARDT 2018, e.g. 139–153.

and material of the objects as well as content of the texts and find contexts in order to explore social implications and the significance of inscribed writing equipment for those who used it.

II. FROM THE NAME TO THE JOKE: THE CORPUS OF INSCRIBED STYLI, INKWELLS AND SPATULAE

The usage of the term «writing equipment» is somewhat inconsistent and researchers have included a range of objects in it that are associated with the actual activity of writing to varying degrees. For the purpose of this study, «writing equipment» means tools designed and used for the purpose of writing. These are styli and pens, but also clearly identifiable accessories used to make writing with such objects possible such as wax-spatulae and inkwells. Penknives (see Božič 2001) can be considered such accessories but they are difficult to identify as small knives would have been used for various purposes. For the purposes of this study, knives have therefore been excluded.⁵ The survey also excludes objects belonging to the wider context of literacy and numeracy that may but do not necessarily relate to writing (seal-boxes, dividers, brushholders etc.).⁶ All kinds of inscriptions were included, from graffiti to punched, engraved or stamped and all types of text including those of just one letter.

Inscribed writing equipment is rare. Of 314 bone and *c.* 200 iron styli found in the Roman town on the Magdalensberg in Austria, only twelve bone styli (and none of the iron ones) have graffiti on them, and of 42 bone styli from Dangstetten only three.⁷ Of a roughly estimated 1,500 metal styli from Augusta Raurica, only two have inscriptions and of the 440 metal inkwells gathered by Eckardt, 20 have a maker's mark.⁸ I have assembled a corpus of a total of 80 inscribed Roman writing implements (see catalogue).⁹ In this corpus, styli and

⁵ For knives with inscriptions see e.g. Dietrich 1998 and Scholz 2015, 82 (λέγω); PIRLING in PIRLING, SIEPEN 2006, 467 (*utere felix*, Krefeld-Gellep); WAGNER 1932 (Reichling); *AE* 1996, 1178 (*Eroti vivas*, Pfy); TOMLIN, HASSALL 2003, 376 no. 34 (*Ovincus f(ecit)*, Vindolanda).

⁶ For examples of inscribed brushholders see FÜNFSCHILLING 1994, 191; PFAHL 2012 no. 392; for dividers see *CIL* XIII 10027,253; 10027,253a; 10027,253e; THÜRY 1994, 90–92; for seal-boxes DESBAT 2003; OLESTI VILA 2019, 70. Also note a possible stylus sharpener with owner's inscription from Quadring, UK (MOORHEAD 2016; PAS-ID: FASAM-F55282).

⁷ Magdalensberg: GOSTENČNIK 2008, 166; Dangstetten: FINGERLIN 1986; 1998.

⁸ ECKARDT 2018, 61–67; for Augusta Raurica see SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012.

⁹ The dataset was established by systematically searching the indices of all *AE*-volumes up to 2016 (published in 2019) for relevant objects, e.g. under 'estampille/graffite/inscription sur' encrifer, plume,

inkwells are the largest groups with 43 and 31 objects respectively. Of 43 styli, 22 are bone and 21 metal; of 31 inkwells 28 are metal.¹⁰ The remaining objects are six copper-alloy wax-spatula handles, which all appear to be from Asia Minor (nos. 74–79).¹¹ The two biggest object groups in the corpus, styli and inkwells, represent both of the main writing techniques in Roman time: in wax and with ink. At the same time, the other objects most prominently connected to these two ways of writing are almost absent from the list: wax-spatulae with inscriptions only appear as a chronologically and geographically very restricted phenomenon, and no inscribed inkpens have come to my attention – inkpens, however, are generally very rare finds. That styli outweigh the other objects may have something to do with the fact that they must have been the writing instruments most numerous produced, –many writers will have owned more than one–,¹² while also being better preserved than ink pens for example, which would predominantly have been made of reed.

The text types we find on writing implements, unsurprisingly perhaps, are not fundamentally different from those found on other *instrumentum*.¹³ They can be divided into three general groups: owners’/users’ marks (category 1), makers’ marks (category 2) and longer texts/gifts (category 3).¹⁴ The third category, to which the touristic Bloomberg stylus belongs, includes friendly/amorous texts and speaking objects (cat. 3a) and Christian texts (3b). I also included here a group of spatula handles from Asia Minor that may have served to advertise status

spatule, stilet, etc., as well as *RIB* vol. 2 (*instrumentum domesticum*) and those sections in *CIL* dedicated to *instrumentum/supellex*. It was complemented by reading widely about *instrumentum*, writing equipment and «inscriptions mineures» more generally. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic prevented me from searching excavation reports and publications of individual sites, and from a systematic search for greek inscriptions on Roman writing equipment.

¹⁰ Of 21 metal styli, 11 are iron, eight copper alloy, two silver. Of 28 metal inkwells (three are only lids), 27 are copper-alloy, including a silvered bronze inkwell, one is lead (no. 25). One of the three ceramic inkwells is Samian (from Mérida, no. 13). In general, finds of ceramic inkwells, if not necessarily Samian ones, are much more common than metal inkwells, see ECKARDT 2018, 53–59 on inkwell materials.

¹¹ A spatula from London made from a cattle scapula has been thought to be a wax-spatula with owner’s inscription (*CERES EQITIS*, *RIB* 2.3. 2441.4), but it is more likely to be a tool for wax modelling (see GOSTENČNIK 2008, 172). Wax-spatulae used for renewing the wax inside writing tablets were made of metal and presumably heated during the process.

¹² SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 43; ECKARDT 2018, 192.

¹³ PFAHL 2012, 45–49 gives an idea of which objects carry which kinds of inscriptions.

¹⁴ On the surface, owners’ marks and makers’ marks look similar when they contain simple names. The attribution to those two categories is made on the basis of production and content: stamped inscriptions on both pottery and metal are usually makers’ marks as they would have been made when the material was still malleable. Typical makers’ marks can moreover contain hints such as *f(ecit)* «made» or *ex of(ficina)* plus a name, meaning «from the workshop of».

(3c); as will become clear, these form a homogenous and separate group with regard to object type, geography and language of inscription (Greek), but given their function and the fact that they are little known I included them in this study. One difference from other inscribed *instrumentum*, particularly objects such as finger rings or fibulae, is the virtually non-existent role of votive inscriptions on writing equipment. There are two possible votive inscriptions on bone styli, but because their interpretation is uncertain, they are not included here.¹⁵ Both are from the region of the Veneti, where a significant pre-Roman tradition of votive styli existed, and inscribed in Venetic.¹⁶

Amongst the texts in our corpus, the largest group are the makers' marks (cat. 2) with 35 objects (25 inkwells, one of which is ceramic, ten iron styli). They are followed by the owners'/users' marks (cat. 1) with 25 objects (22 bone styli, two ceramic inkwells, one possible lead inkwell lid). There is a lower number of objects with gift character (cat. 3) with 20 objects (11 metal styli, six spatula handles, three metal inkwells). It is striking that there are different distributions of object types in each of the text categories (FIG. 1). The vast majority of owners'/users' marks are on bone styli, in fact, all 22 bone styli in the corpus have them. Makers' marks are mainly found on copper-alloy inkwells (24 out of 35 objects) and on iron styli (10 out of 35). The objects with gift character (cat. 3) vary, but the largest group in this category are styli (11 out of 20 objects), and amongst these copper-alloy styli (eight out of 11 styli).

¹⁵ One was found in the Gurina river (JABLONKA 2001, 164 under «Gerätteile» as «Stäbchen», and pl. 119,3, without reading), one in Pozzuolo del Friuli (CREVATIN 1995) reading *Kaijilui*. An object from Jort (France) was published as a stylus with a votive inscription (*Toutati / Sex(tus) Cos(ius) Vebr(us)*, LAJOYE, LEMAÎTRE 2014). However, as the authors note themselves, the flat shape of the object suggests a different use. They compare it to needles found in the region.

¹⁶ Twenty-five pre-Roman inscribed copper-alloy styli were found in the sanctuary of Reitia in Ateste. They are inscribed in Venetic and were dedicated, exclusively by women, to the goddess, with whom writing seems to have been connected prominently (MCDONALD 2019).

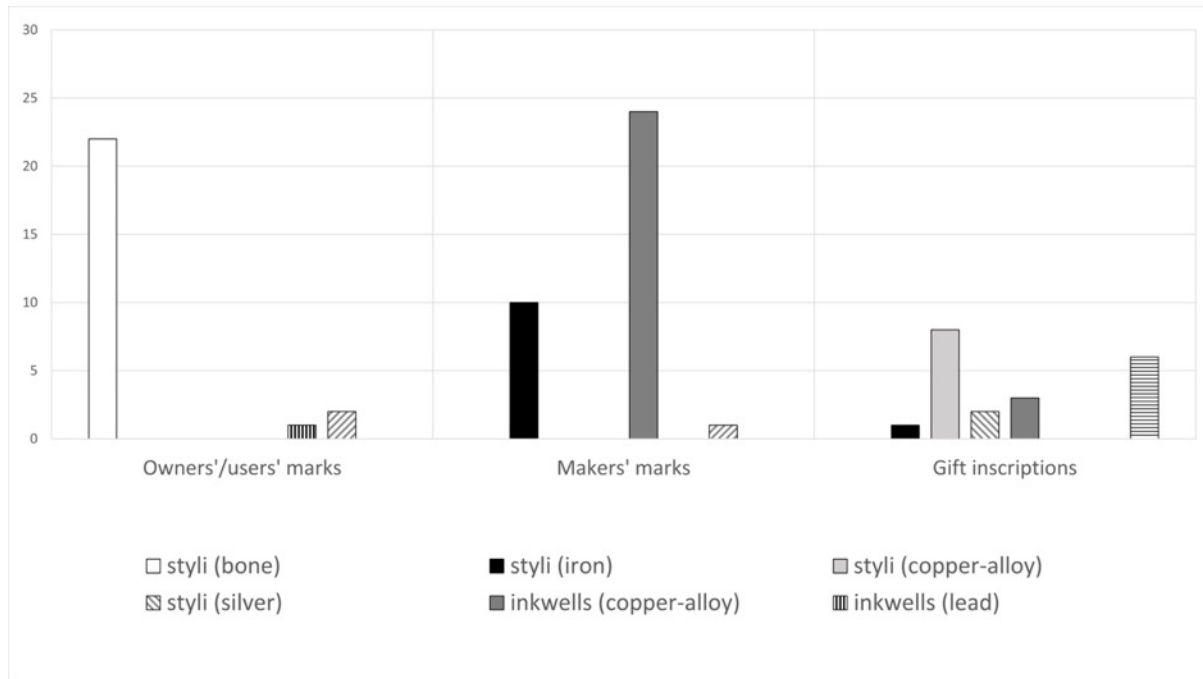


FIG. 1: distribution of inscription categories and object types/materials.

Our sample is small and incomplete, and a pan-provincial analysis of the geographical distribution of our evidence is problematic because of a number of biases such as the varying state of publication and intensity of excavation in different areas. Conclusions must instead be made based on a closer analysis of the texts and objects themselves, their context and chronology. It is worth looking at chronological and geographical patterns and correlations within the sample so that they can in future be confirmed or dismissed. We have dating for 40 of 43 styli, for 29 of 31 inkwells and for the six spatula handles. As a result of the correlation of object type and text type observed above, there seems to be a sequence in the chronological distribution (FIG. 2). Bone styli with their owners' marks generally belong to the first centuries B.C./A.D. This corresponds to the general period in which bone styli were used. With their disappearance, owners' marks disappear as well: from the second half of the first century A.D. and the first half of the second century onwards, iron styli and copper-alloy inkwells take over, and with them makers' inscriptions. Gift inscriptions, many of them on copper-alloy styli, are predominantly found from the second/third centuries A.D. onwards.

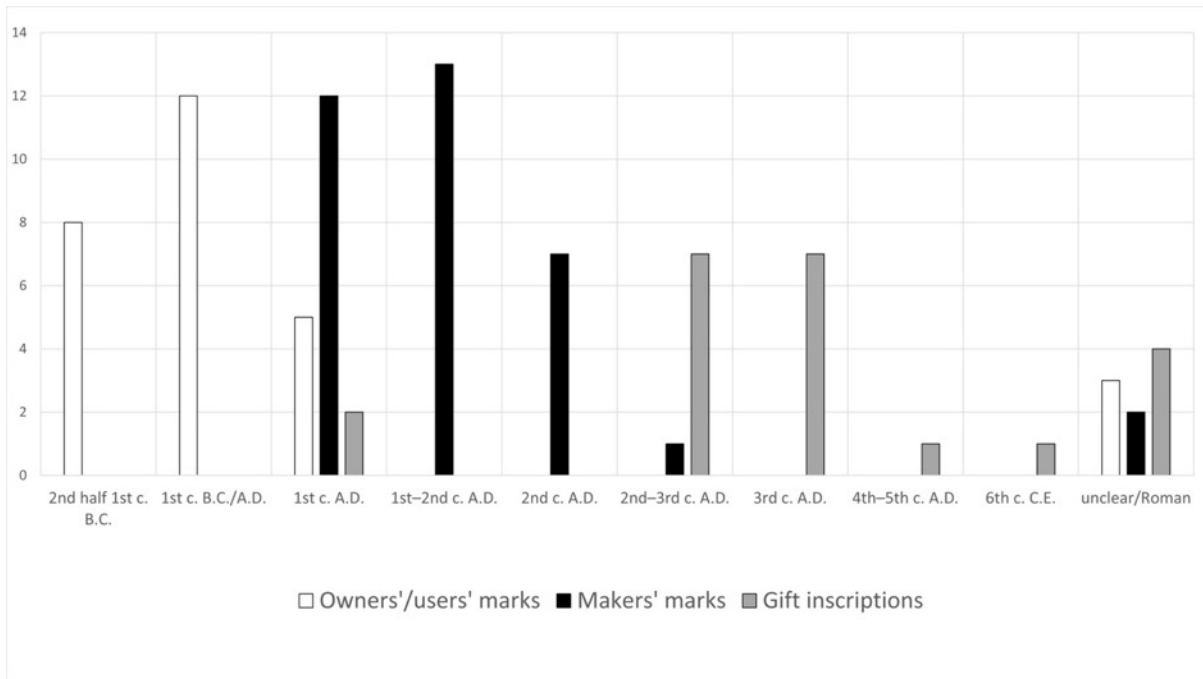


FIG. 2: chronological distribution of inscription categories.

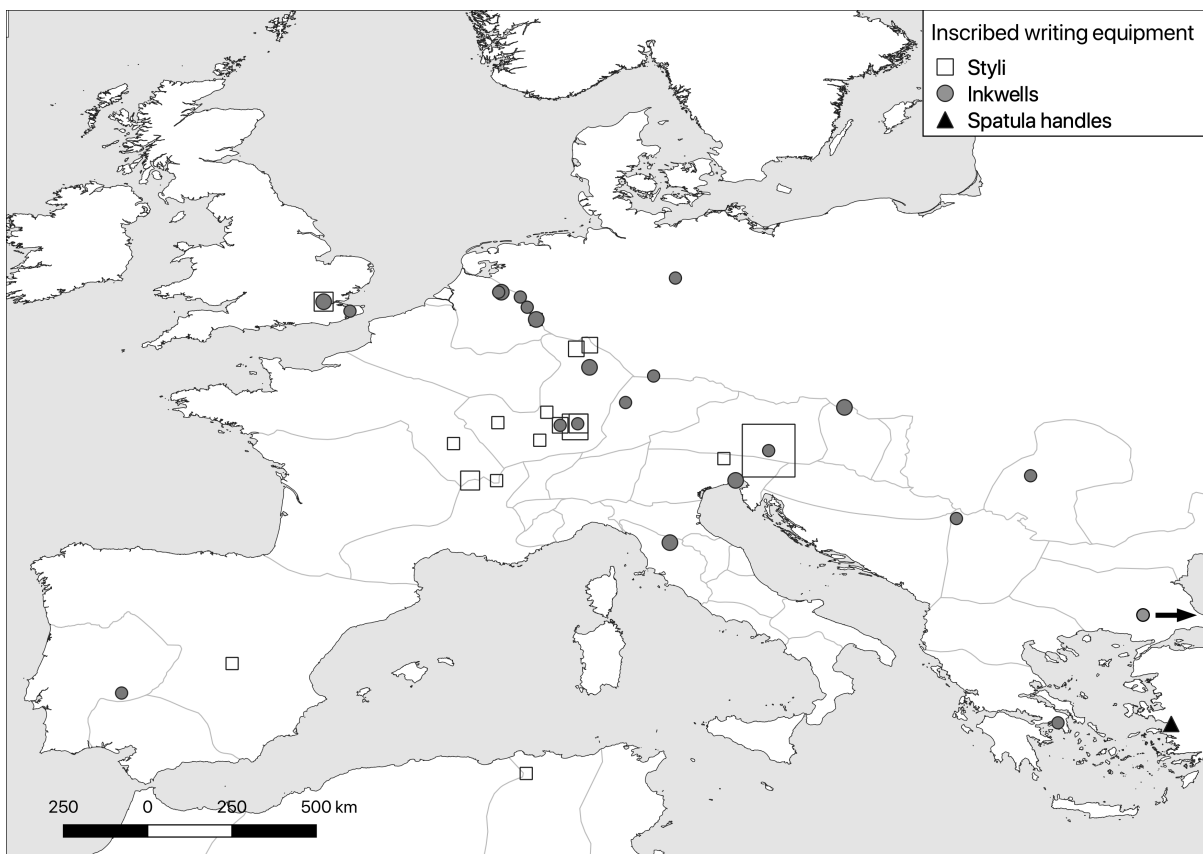


FIG. 3: geographical distribution of inscribed writing equipment. Not on the map are nos. 39 (inkwell) and 75–79 (spatulae) with unknown find spots.

Looking at the geographical distribution of the find spots, there is a clear focus between Britannia and the Danube provinces, with the Germanies particularly well represented (FIG. 3). This distribution is similar to the pattern emerging from other studies on Roman writing equipment (e.g. Eckardt 2018). In our case, it is tempting to read different epigraphic practices into this, but it may to some extent be explained by differences in research and publication. For example, writing equipment from Germania superior is well attested which almost certainly reflects, not a particularly high use of these implements in antiquity, but rather a specific interest amongst the research community in the corresponding areas both historically and more recently. Conversely research in Spain, Portugal, western France and Italy has been less focused on the collection and publication of writing equipment.

If we map object types and materials with inscriptional categories, it becomes clear that there is a pattern in the distribution of text types. Bone styli with their owners' marks seem relatively widely spread, even if there is a large cluster on the Magdalensberg (FIG. 4). There are multiple finds in Lyon and Dangstetten and individual examples in Northern Italy and Hispania. The iron styli with makers' marks, however, are mainly from two sites: Vindonissa and London (FIG. 5). The copper-alloy inkwells with makers' marks are more widely distributed but a certain focus appears along the limes. The copper-alloy styli, which represent the biggest object group with longer/gift inscriptions, focus around eastern Gaul and the Germanies (FIG. 6). Whether or not these results correspond to patterns in the habit of inscribing Roman writing equipment will have to be seen with increasing data. As well as the previously mentioned publication biases, some of the patterns may be traced to a combination of material and preservation conditions. For example, the fact that most iron styli with makers' stamps were found in Vindonissa and London is likely to be at least partly dependent on the soil conditions in Vindonissa's rubbish dump and in places such as the bed of the Walbrook in London which preserve metal well. The hundreds of iron styli found in other places may simply be too corroded for letters to be visible. The dating of stamped iron styli is thus closely linked to those two sites.¹⁷ Similarly, that bone styli with owner's marks are followed by metal styli with makers' marks must be related to the materials of these objects. Bone styli would have lent themselves more to owners' graffiti than metal styli, while it is more efficient to put a makers' mark on malleable materials such as metal rather than bone.

¹⁷ SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 67 and 110 observed that to her knowledge makers' stamps only occurred on one of her «Formgruppen», group C 23, which for Augusta Raurica roughly corresponds to finds from the first to second centuries A.D.

At the same time, it seems logical that users’/owners’ marks on bone styli are geographically more widely spread than gift inscriptions, with the former having a practical purpose and the latter probably representing a fashionable trend. Arguably, our corpus of objects with gift inscriptions may be more complete than that of the two other categories, and their distribution may accordingly be less skewed: these objects are often elaborate and precious and therefore more likely to be recognised and published.

Inscribed writing equipment can generally be put into context with a wider practice of inscribing *instrumentum*. Corresponding to what we observe in the chronological distribution of text types on writing equipment, it appears that a shift from makers’ marks to inscriptions with gift character during the second/third century can also be observed in fibulae.¹⁸ Makers’ stamps on fibulae are generally earlier than those with gift inscriptions, which, as Behrens observed, generally date to the second/third century.¹⁹ These fibulae, then, have a similar chronology to our inscribed writing equipment, and the same holds true for the geographical distribution of fibulae with makers’ marks – often with Celtic names – and gift inscriptions (Behrens 1950), even if some types such as Aucissa-fibulae are found in a much larger area.²⁰ Finger rings from the limes area with gift inscriptions equally mostly date to the second/third century (Pfahl 2012, 46).

¹⁸ See the lists by BEHRENS 1950 and NOLL 1952.

¹⁹ BEHRENS 1950, 10, also see MARTIN KILCHER 1998.

²⁰ On the distribution of Roman fibula-types and examples of inscribed brooches see further RIHA 1979 and MACKRETH 2011.



FIG. 4: distribution of objects with category 1 inscriptions (owners'/users' marks).

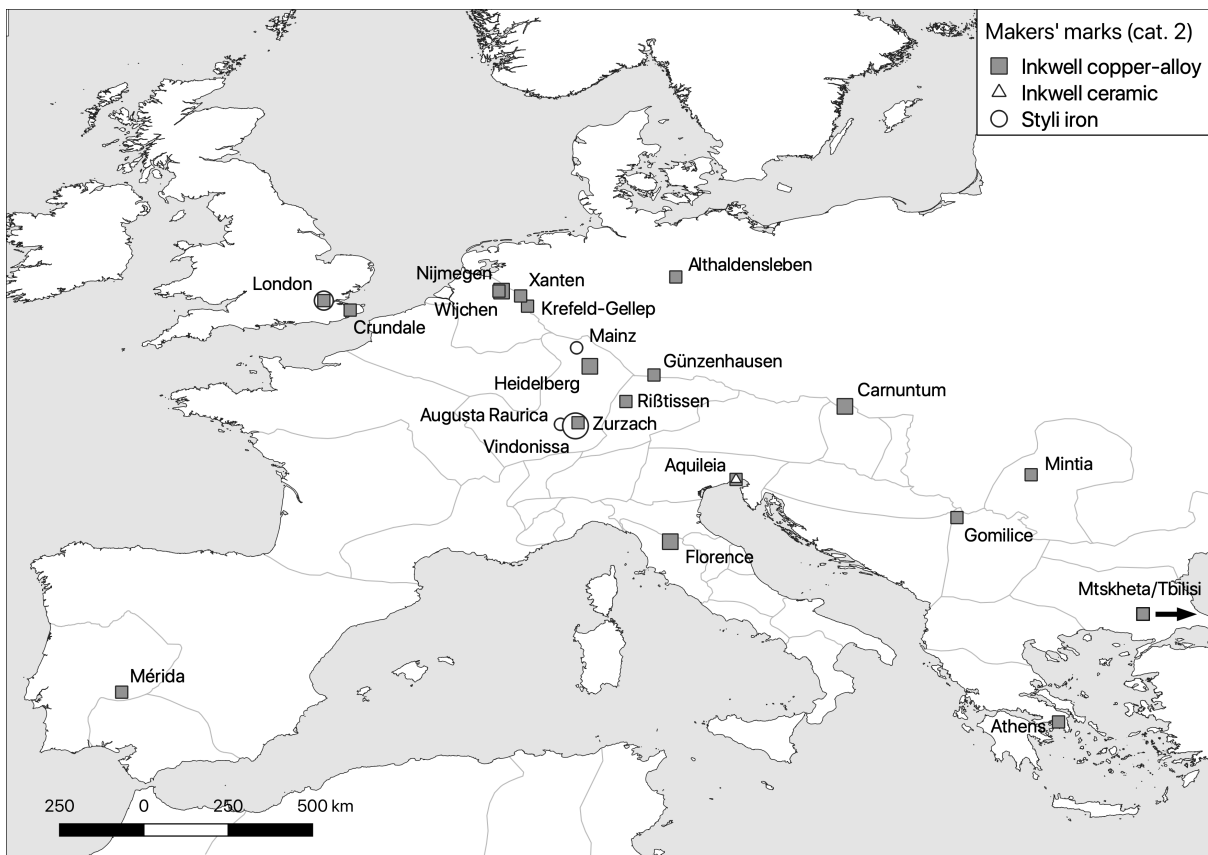


FIG. 5: distribution of objects with category 2 inscriptions (makers' marks).

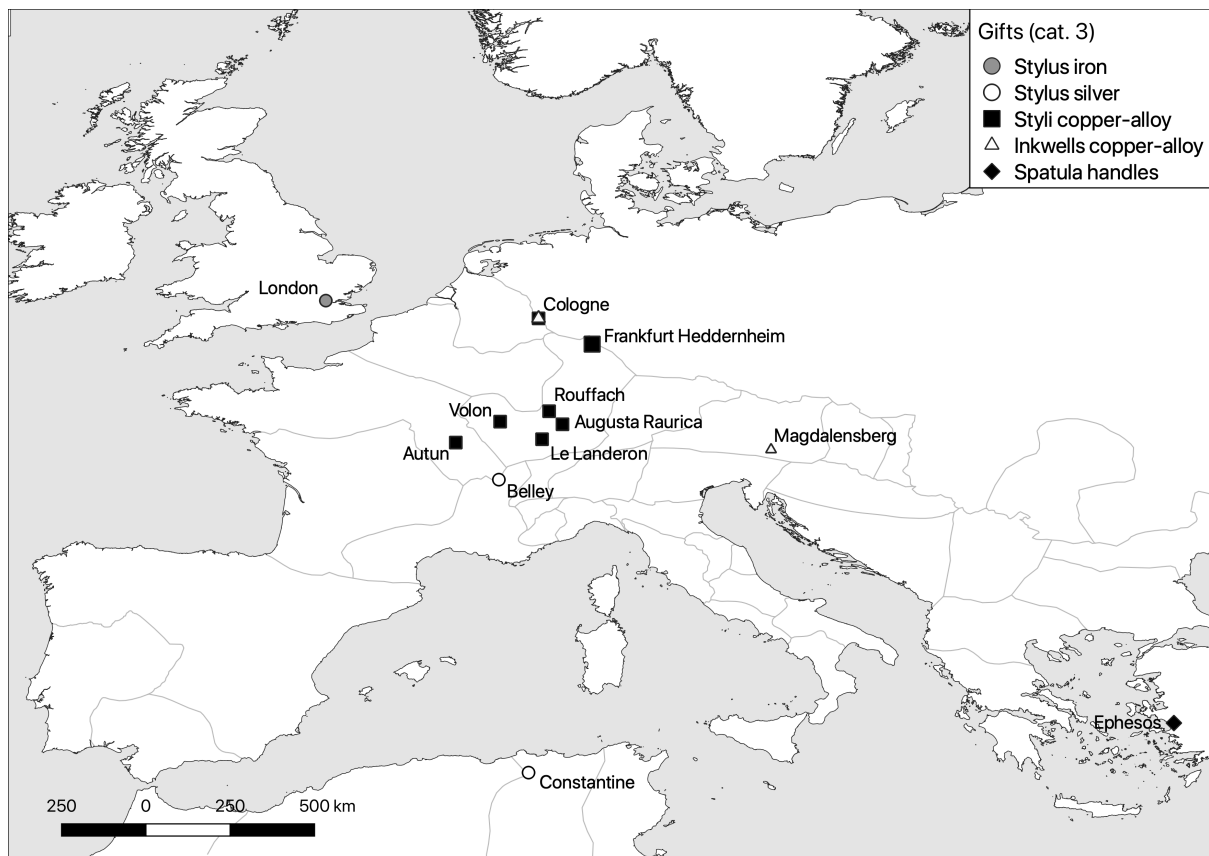


FIG. 6: distribution of objects with category 3 inscriptions (gifts). Not on the map are nos. 75–79 (spatulae) with unknown find spots.

A few remarks on the find spots of inscribed writing equipment will be offered before we attempt a closer analysis of the find contexts of objects with gift inscriptions. Information about the find spot is available for 61 of our 80 objects, including 21 of 25 owners' marks, 25 of 35 makers' marks and 15 of 20 longer/gift inscriptions. While Roman writing equipment more generally is often found in graves, and large numbers of finds are associated with settlements of military character, in the case of inscribed writing equipment these contexts relate to the different text categories in different ways. A clear association with both funerary and military contexts seems to apply only to objects with makers' marks but not those with owners' marks or gift inscriptions. Finds from funerary contexts predominantly have makers' marks (in the following, numbers refer to the catalogue in section V). At least twelve inkwells (but no styli) with makers' marks are from funerary contexts (nos. 37, 40, 42, 47–49, 51, 54–55, 57, possibly 36, 38) and only three other objects can be associated with a funerary context, all are in category 3 (gifts): amongst the ones with Christian inscriptions

two inkwells (nos. 72–73), and one of six spatula handles from Asia Minor (no. 76). The remaining 46 objects with known find spots are from what can vaguely be called «settlement contexts», meaning that they were found in private or public spaces of settlements. In some cases, the find spot can be narrowed down, e.g. to habitations (no. 25 cat. 1, no. 58 cat. 2, nos. 61–62, 64, 74 cat. 3), a theatre (no. 18 cat. 1), baths (no. 10 cat. 1, no. 63 cat. 3), riverbeds (no. 34 cat. 2, nos. 68, 70 cat. 3), a rubbish dump (no. 13 cat. 1, no. 27–29, 31 cat. 2), a shop (no. 67 cat. 3) and sanctuaries (no. 1 cat. 1, possibly no. 75 cat. 3), including an early Christian one (no. 66 cat. 3). These objects are probably more likely to have been dropped, lost or left rather than purposefully deposited as is the case in graves, although in such contexts it would be near impossible to recognise intentionally deposited finds.

Interestingly, the vast majority of these non-funerary finds (38 out of 46) are associated with settlements of predominantly civilian character, including two finds associated with villae (nos. 57 cat. 2, 62 cat. 3). But even if we include funerary finds, settlements with a strong military association account for less than a quarter of the objects in our list (18 of 80).²¹ Out of the 18 finds from sites with a strong military character, 14 have makers' marks and four have owners' marks. More precise find contexts are known for nine of the 18 finds, all with makers' marks: four are from Vindonissa's rubbish dump (nos. 27–29, 31), one from a habitation (no. 58) and four are funerary (nos. 40, 47–49). While the four graves cannot with certainty be attributed to members of the military, it seems that writing equipment with makers' stamps, which we associate with a certain degree of mass production, is more strongly related to a military environment than custom made gifts (cat. 3), and the geographical distribution of writing equipment with makers' marks along the limes corresponds to this observation. The military was a literate environment where letters, reports and tallies were written on a daily basis, including by specialised soldiers.²² It is possible that the writing equipment used in the military was more likely to be supplied by «large-scale» producers that in turn would have been more likely to stamp their goods. Regarding the social

²¹ They are the legionary camps Vindonissa (nos. 27–31 cat. 2), Carnuntum (no. 40 cat. 2, probably no. 41 cat. 2), Dangstetten (nos. 14–16 cat. 1), Mainz (no. 9 cat. 1, this object was found at the Dimesser Ort which was a civilian settlement outside the camp but closely linked with it, 35 cat. 2) and Xanten (no. 58 cat. 2) and the auxiliary camps Heidelberg (nos. 47–48 cat. 2), Krefeld-Gellep (no. 49 cat. 2), Rißtissen (no. 56 cat. 2) and Zurzach (no. 59 cat. 2). The finds from Cologne (nos. 66, 72–73 cat. 3) and Frankfurt-Heddernheim (nos. 65, 78 cat. 3) do not seem to be associated with the predominantly military phases of those settlements.

²² See e.g. HAYNES 2013, 313–336.

dimension of inscribed writing equipment, however, the interesting question is not so much why makers' stamps occur in military environments but why inscribed objects with gift character do not appear in them. Considering the low numbers with which we are dealing, this may be a mere coincidence. But if writing equipment was provided to those writing in the army by their employer, then personalised and precious items may have been less useful or interesting. A closer look at category 3 moreover suggests that styli and other writing implements with friendly or witty inscriptions were used as gifts amongst a civilian «elite», where they may have played a role in establishing or maintaining personal relationships within this group.

III. FRIENDS, LOVERS AND OFFICIALS: CATEGORY 3 INSCRIBED WRITING EQUIPMENT

The three categories of inscriptions described above are quite different in nature and have different implications for interrogating the social aspects of these objects. For example, one might expect owners'/users' marks to be names that tell us something about the people who used writing equipment. However, the few fully preserved names on bone styli do not give away much about their users.²³ A perhaps more promising question raised by owners'/users' marks is that of the practice or necessity of marking writing equipment as one's possession. Very few bone styli in fact have owner's marks and it is interesting to think about what this may mean for the use of bone styli more generally. On the Magdalensberg, only seven of 314 bone styli have graffiti that arguably represent full or abbreviated names (category 1a in the catalogue). The character of the town on the Magdalensberg as a trading and administrative centre means that styli must have been used frequently there, and one might think that this made it more desirable to mark them, but the small number of marked styli contradicts this.

²³ There are six non-abbreviated names, two of which are Greek: *Hygini* (Segóbriga, Spain, no. 10) and *Hymen(is?)* (Magdalensberg, Austria, no. 7), both on bone styli. One might, but need not, be Celtic (*Casti*, no. 9, on a bone stylus from Mainz, Germany), and two appear to be straightforwardly Roman (*Florus*, no. 1, on a bone stylus from Lyon, France, and *Iucundi*, no. 12, on the ceramic inkwell from London). *Plocaf--?*] on the Samian inkwell from Mérida, Spain (no. 13) may be *Plocamus*, a rare *cognomen* otherwise attested in Italy, Gallia Narbonensis, Dalmatia, Noricum and Egypt, also see Plin. *Nat.* 6.24). Based on such little and diverse information it does not seem reasonable to make a statement on the status or origins of these people. We may be inclined to see slaves behind the two Greek names but the fact that our bone styli mostly carry single names does not necessarily mean that they were used by slaves. The use of just one name, often the *cognomen*, corresponds well to names scratched into pottery that are considered to be owner's or proprietor's marks (see e.g. ANDRIEU 2017, 298–300) and it is likely that a short form of the name was used for inscribing a small and personal object – as opposed to a large, say lapidary, monument, where the display of the *tria nomina* would have been more important.

Such styli are usually of a simple design and may have been rather common and cheap, making them interchangeable; perhaps their users did not see the need to personalise them. Another aspect of graffiti on bone styli that deserves more attention is that of the kind of marks used. There is a number of examples with simple marks such as X or individual letters that are traditionally interpreted as owners' or users' marks (cat. 1b in the catalogue). Similar marks are common on other objects such as pottery, and X in particular is often considered to indicate an illiterate owner. If they are indeed owners' marks then the fact that they appear on writing equipment means that we may have to reconsider this interpretation.²⁴

As for category 2, makers' marks are a valuable source of information, and in combination with research on typologies they may at some point be able to tell us more about the production, production sites and trade of writing equipment.²⁵ This, however, is not within the scope of this article and what they can tell us about the social aspects of inscribed writing equipment is currently limited.

The gift inscriptions (cat. 3) are of particular interest for grasping the social dimension of inscribed writing equipment and its significance for its users. The short texts or phrases, sometimes witty, sometimes pragmatic, often contain a wish of some sort or address someone, presumably the user of the object or its recipient. For objects with this kind of interpersonal function we can assume that the content of the inscription and indeed the choice of a writing implement as its carrier had some kind of meaning to those who used them or who gifted them. In order to better define this meaning, we must take a closer look at the design of our objects and its relation to the text, at the content of the inscriptions and at the find contexts as far as possible.

There is a total of 20 items in category 3, 11 styli, six spatula handles and three inkwells, which can be grouped according to the content of their inscriptions. The six inscribed spatula handles from Ephesos/Asia Minor (third century A.D.) represent the best-defined subcategory by text and object, here dubbed «advertising status» (cat. 3c). They may have served to promote the giver of the gift within a sphere of eminent citizens. Another well-defined group

²⁴ I hope to discuss this elsewhere.

²⁵ See ECKARDT 2018, 61–67 on metal inkwells with makers' marks.

consists of three styli and one, possibly two inkwells with Christian inscriptions (cat. 3b).²⁶ Two styli are from Gaul and one from Africa, the inkwells are from Cologne. One of them (no. 73) can roughly be dated to the third century based on the type, the other objects in this category are generally thought to be fourth/fifth century or late antique.

The remaining eight objects are a more motley crew, but can be grouped together because of the witty/poetic/joke nature of their inscriptions.²⁷ They are friendly/amorous texts and speaking objects. This group is dominated by styli (seven items), copper-alloy styli in particular (six items), with the remaining object being a copper-alloy inkwell. Within this group, the copper-alloy styli seem to represent a regional phenomenon. Five of them are from *Germania superior* (Augusta Raurica and Le Landeron, Switzerland; Frankfurt, Germany; Rouffach and Volon, France) and are generally dated to the second to third century A.D. The stylus from Cologne (no. 66) is later, coming from a sixth-century context, but it seems that the copper-alloy styli in category 3a represent a certain fashion or trend in the Germanies.

The Bloomberg stylus is different from the other styli in cat. 3a in that it is made of iron. Dating to around 70 A.D., it is also earlier than the other styli in this set, and it lies somewhat outside the main geographical distribution of finds from this group. That said, the stylus – along with a large portion of the stylus tablets from the Bloomberg site – belongs to a Londinium that had just recovered from the Boudican revolt in 60/61 A.D., and to which new troops had been brought from Germany. With the town turning into a bustling trading centre there would have been a non-negligible number of Continentals in the area of the site, which was adjacent to one of the main roads of Roman London.²⁸ While this means that there could be a topographical connection to the «core» region of inscribed styli, the differences in dating

²⁶ A find from Celje (Slovenia) is described by RIEDL 1900 and in *CIL* III 14375,1 as a stylus with the inscription +*VIVIAM*, but the drawing by RIEDL (p. 107) shows that the object is more likely to be a medical instrument or toilet article such as a ligula. I thank Mike Marshall for pointing this out.

²⁷ One copper-alloy stylus (no. 80) with letters inlaid with niello from Hedderheim (Frankfurt) was added to category 3 because of its characteristics (materials, text types on other metal styli) but the meaning of the inscription (*TCC / LAS*) is unclear.

²⁸ See e.g. TOMLIN 2016, 51–57 on the people mentioned in the tablets and on the historical context, and also see BRYAN *et al.* 2017, 20–27.

and design mean that the Bloomberg stylus cannot readily be linked to the copper-alloy styli in cat. 3a directly.²⁹

III.1 Material and design

Material and design of the objects may be able to tell us to what extent the inscriptions were meant to be part of the object and whether they would have been considered valuable or precious. The similarities of the friendly/amorous and speaking copper-alloy styli (cat. 3a) are also evident in their design. Apart from the fact that they are all made of the same material, they are also mostly dainty and decorated; their original lengths range between c. 8–11 cm. Within this group, nos. 61–64 are clearly similar to each other, with fine tips where preserved and a shaft that is decorated with a number of ornamental segments near the tip and near the eraser end (FIGS. 7–9). The shaft is round or multi-faceted but the part where the inscription was incised (towards the tip of the stylus) is rectangular in section. The text often consists of four words or can easily be distributed onto four surfaces. In the case of the Volon-stylus (no. 64), the more common wish *utere felix* may even have been expanded to four words by adding *digne merito* for this purpose.³⁰

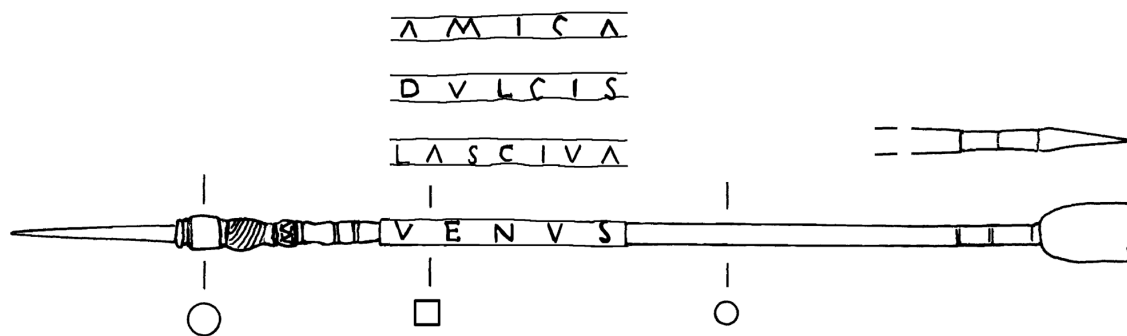


FIG. 7: *amica-stylus* from *Augusta Raurica* (no. 61): *amica / dulcis / lasciva / Venus*. From SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 445, © *Augusta Raurica*.

²⁹ If the souvenir was made in Rome then it is possible that the stylus instead relates to a first-century fashion in that area, but to date no comparable object from Italy has been found or published to my knowledge.

³⁰ HÉRON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLV-XLVI.

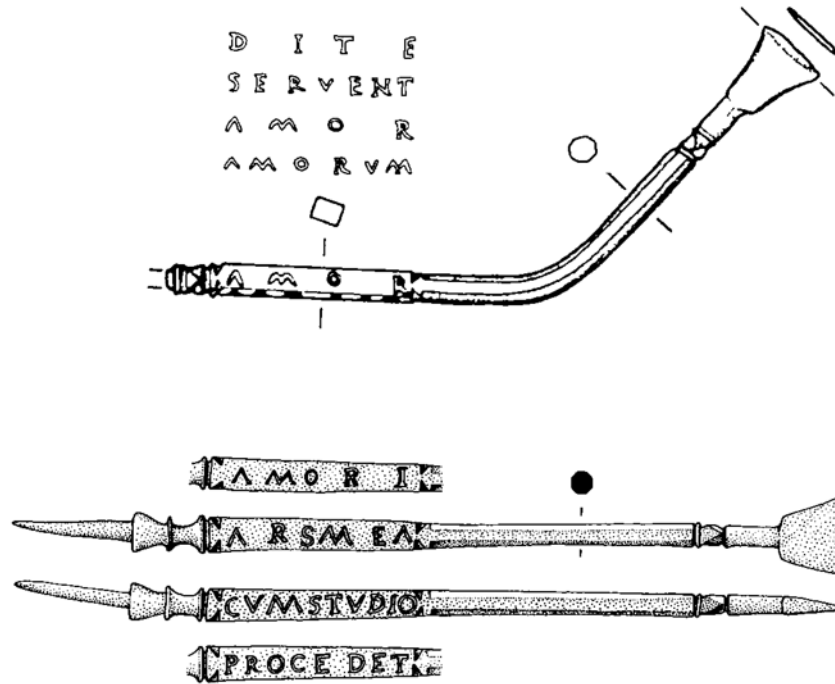


FIG. 8: inscribed styli from Le Landeron (top, no. 62): *Di te / servent / amor / amorum*, and Rouffach (bottom, no. 63): *amori / ars mea / cum studio / procedet*. From SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 70, courtesy of Augusta Raurica.



FIG. 9: inscribed stylus from Volon (no. 64): *utere / felix / digne / merito*. Drawing by A. Willi after HERON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLVI.

It has been suggested that the styli from Le Landeron and Volon are by the same maker.³¹ This suggestion is not unreasonable and considering the relatively restricted distribution area of similar objects may be of some importance. It is interesting to see that the *dicta*-stylus from Heddernheim and the *hego*-stylus from Cologne (nos. 65–6), both speaking objects, have a very similar design.³² Judging from the image published by Pagenstecher (FIG. 11), the *dicta*-stylus seems to be a simpler design at first, but his photo is deceptive. He says that the

³¹ HOFMANN ROGNON 1998, 26.

³² As was already noted by HÉRON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLVI–XLVII (without images).

stylus is broken on one end and flattened on the other.³³ The image thus confusingly shows the stylus «from the side», in such a way that the eraser end looks like a tip. Pagenstecher moreover mentions that it is quite short (7.7 cm) and suggests that it was a child's stylus. However, comparing it to the objects from Le Landeron, Volon and Cologne and further to the stylus from Augusta Raurica (FIGS. 8 top, 9, 7), it is likely that the missing part corresponds to the ornamental elements between the inscription and the tip plus the tip itself in those examples. Adding these elements would take the *dicta*-stylus to a more common length of up to c. 11 cm and make it comparable to the more complete objects in terms of design, particularly to the stylus from Volon where the tip is well preserved. One fact that distinguishes the *dicta*-stylus from those from Le Landeron, Volon and Cologne is that its texts runs the opposite way, legible when held in the left rather than the right hand. This is the only stylus in the whole of category 3 with its inscription running this way, though for two examples (nos. 69, 71) we have no information.

The *hego*-stylus from Cologne (FIG. 10) is the latest amongst our finds, from a sixth-century Christian context, although it may be older. It is also different from the others in category 3a in that it seems to never have had an eraser. The shaft, however, is comparable: it has a hexagonal section in the upper part while the part closer to the tip is rectangular, again with one word of the inscription on each side, each word set into its own little *tabula ansata*. It is followed by a sequence of ornaments similar to the example from Volon and then the tip.

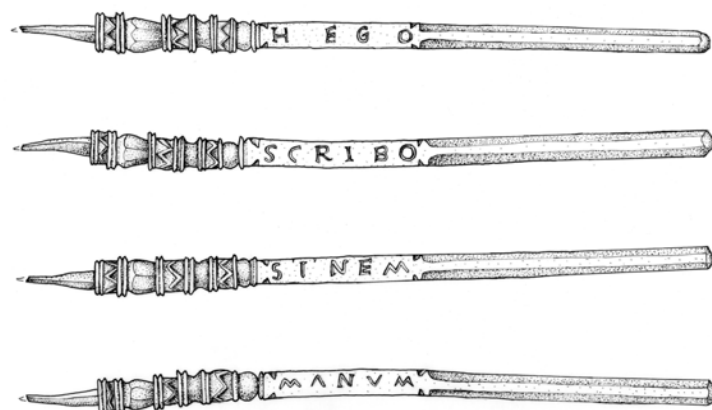


FIG. 10: *hego*-stylus from Cologne (no. 66): *hego* / *scribo* / *sinem* / *manum*. © Römisch-Germanisches Museum der Stadt Köln, Silke Haase.

³³ PAGENSTECHER 1910, 89.

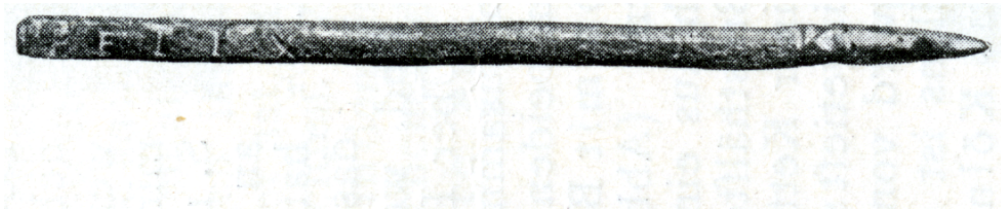


FIG. 11: *dicta-stylus* from Frankfurt-Heddernheim (no. 65): *dicta / Felix / felicior / scribe*.
From PAGENSTECHER 1910, 88, out of copyright.

The *amica-stylus* from Augusta Raurica (no. 61, FIG. 7) is similar to those from Le Landeron and Volon but the ornamental bands are slightly different, and the back half of the shaft is circular in section. The stylus from Rouffach (no. 63, FIG. 8 bottom) has a multi-faceted rear half of the shaft and the surfaces of the rectangular front section have been made to look like tiny *tabulae ansatae* that display the inscription. It differs from the other styli in category 3a in that the tip is articulated differently. The one common feature of all copper-alloy styli in category 3a is the way in which the inscription is displayed, on a part of the shaft with rectangular section. Schaltenbrand Obrecht noted that the stylus from Augusta Raurica (no. 61) is the only one with this feature from that site (2012, 68–69) and a comparison shows that this design feature is not commonly found in copper-alloy styli without inscription, so it appears to have been made to host the inscription.³⁴ While the styli were in use, the inscriptions would in most cases have been covered by the hand and it is possible that the feature with the inscription served as a grip for the stylus.

Unlike the refined and elaborate copper-alloy styli, the touristic stylus from London (no. 68, FIG. 12) is a simple iron design, more similar to the ones stamped with makers' marks. It measures 13.2 cm and its shaft has eight facets with the inscription incised on alternating facets, suggesting that it was planned carefully. The dot punched letters are a mere 2 mm high and would have required great skill and rather good eyesight.³⁵

³⁴ There are uninscribed iron styli with rectangular shaft sections, see e.g. SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, catalogue nos. AR 154, 322, 422, 454, 487, 676, 866, Av 253, MoL 43, 53. These sections are usually shorter compared to those with inscription on copper-alloy styli, and sometimes broaden towards the tip and are slimmer than the rest of the shaft; they can be considered part of the sequence of decorative elements before the actual tip starts, whereas in our cases, the rectangular segment seems to be in addition to the decorative elements, is longer and of consistent width.

³⁵ See TOMLIN 2018.



FIG. 12: Bloomberg stylus (no. 68): *ab urbe v[e]n[i] munus tibi gratum adf(e)ro / acul[eat]um ut habe[a]s memor[ia]m nostra(m) / rogo si fortuna dar[e]t quo possem / largius ut longa via ceu sacculus est (v)acuis. © MOLA.*

For the styli with Christian inscriptions (category 3b) we only have vague information about what they looked like. Out of the three styli with Christian inscriptions, two may have been similar to the design of the copper-alloy styli in category 3a. The copper-alloy stylus from Autun (no. 71) and possibly the silver stylus from Belley (no. 69) have inscriptions that run over more than one line and we know that the one from Autun had four sides over which the text was distributed.³⁶ The inscription on the Belley-stylus is often given as *vivas in Deo*, a very common phrase in Christian inscriptions. However, according to the earliest source it was hexagonal in section and the inscription consisted of three lines that were distributed over three facets.³⁷ The remaining stylus with a Christian inscription, the silver stylus from Constantine (no. 70), reportedly had an inscription on one line along the shaft.

³⁶ HÉRON DE VILLESFOSSE 1918, XLVII.

³⁷ Héron de Villefosse 1918, XLVIII only gives *vivas in Deo*. However, in the second edition of the *Dictionnaire des antiquités chrétiennes* (Paris 1877, 532 and cf. p. 10), J.-A. Martigny mentions the object as a hexagonal 'aiguille à cheveux' with the longer text '+ ROMVLA / VIVAS . IN . DEO / SEMPER'. The object shown in a drawing by Martigny has two pointy ends. It may be incomplete; the shape in combination with the material and the inscription does not seem typical for a (hair)pin either.

The stylus in category 3d (uncertain, no. 80, FIG. 13) is different from all other metal styli in our list, not only because it is a copper-alloy stylus that originally had an iron tip which is now lost but also because it is the only one with an inscription on the eraser, and inlaid in niello. The meaning of the inscription remains unclear. We cannot rule out the possibility that it contains an abbreviated name, but the materials and style of the stylus link it to those with gift inscriptions.

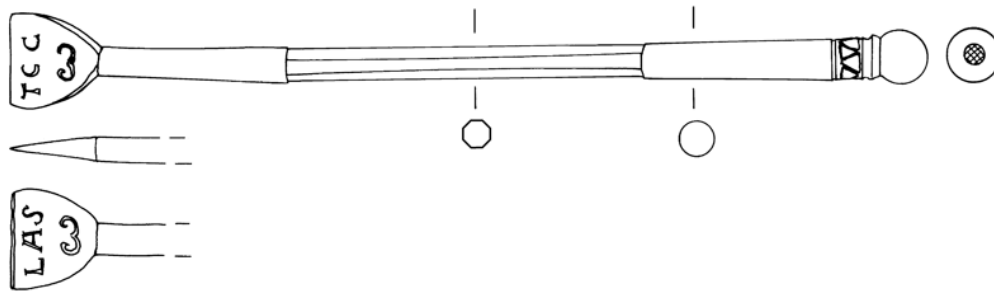


FIG. 13: stylus with niello inlaid inscription on eraser from Frankfurt-Heddernheim (no. 80): TCC / LAS. From SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, WL 20, © Augusta Raurica.

The general impression is that styli with gift inscriptions were designed taking the inscription into account. It is moreover interesting to see that most of the styli in category 3a are made of copper-alloy, a material that was used for styli much less frequently than iron; they were cast so their production was more complex than that of the forged iron styli.³⁸ Befitting a gift, they are elaborate and apparently custom made: despite their similarities they are all slightly different.

The styli made of the most valuable material, silver, all have Christian inscriptions, and the two inkwells with Christian inscriptions in category 3 are equally precious and elaborate. They have an intricate vegetal décor on the lids and the inscriptions are inlaid in niello. Both are from Cologne. No. 73 is one of several similar inkwells («Type Cologne» in Eckardt 2016, nos. 68–71) but the only one with an inscription on the hexagonal lid (FIG. 14). Its inscription has been read as either an owner's name or a Christian phrase (see below, Section III.2) but with the close parallel of no. 75 and with the lack of other highly elaborate objects with certain owners'/users' inscriptions, I am inclined to assign it to category 3b. Inkwell no. 72 (FIG. 15) was made in the same style but has a round lid. In both cases the inscription

³⁸ See MANNING 1985, 85; ÖLLERER 1998, 131–132; SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 51–52.

would have been visible for the user at any time, and both objects were clearly inscribed as part of the design and production process. The non-Christian inkwell from the Magdalensberg (no. 67, category 3a) is different in that it is the only one with a dot punched inscription. It is one half of a copper-alloy double-inkwell of type Biebrich, with a series of mouldings on its body including a central herringbone pattern (FIG. 16). The inscription is on the main body of the vessel and would thus have been visible when the inkwell was in use, albeit not prominently as it runs somewhat hidden between the mouldings. It seems not to have been part of the initial design of the object. The object also dates earlier than the other inkwells in category 3 (first half of the first century A.D.).

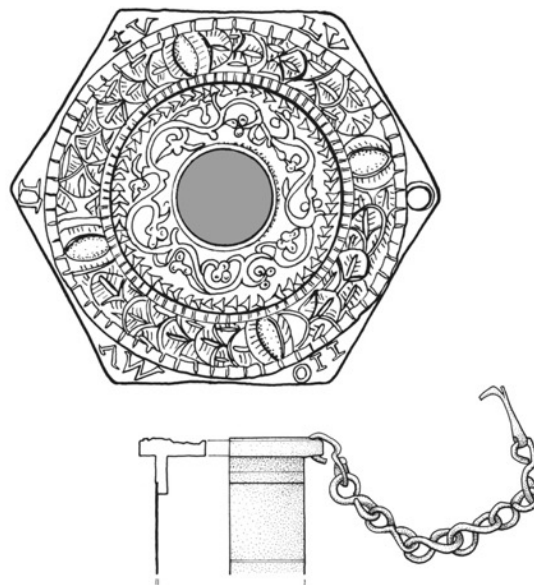


FIG. 14: inkwell from Cologne (no. 73): homul(us?) piulus (?). © Römisch-Germanisches Museum der Stadt Köln, Silke Haase.



FIG. 15: inkwell from Cologne (no. 72): *Servande viv(as)*. © Römisch-Germanisches Museum der Stadt Köln, Silke Haase.

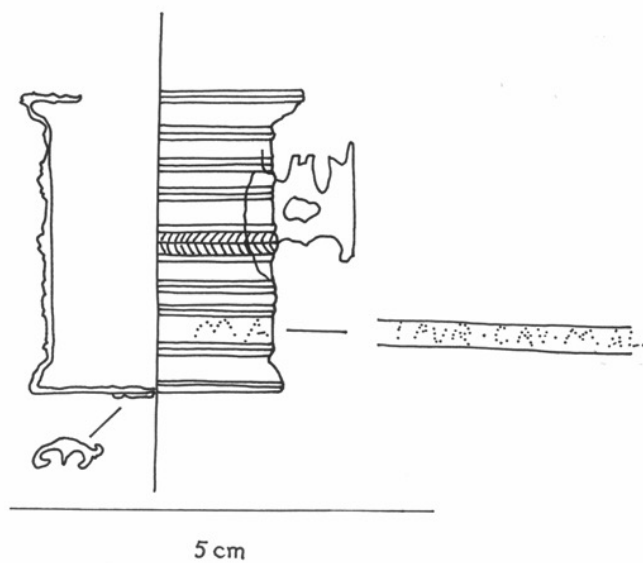


FIG. 16: inkwell from Magdalensberg (no. 67): *pur(puram) cav(e) mal(am)*. Drawing by A. Willi after ÖLLERER 1998, 143 fig. 9.

The six spatula handles from Asia Minor (category 3c), one with a Minerva bust and the others sculpted as a mouse, are also elaborate and custom made. They were cast in copper alloy and would have held an iron blade. Compared to similar objects, where the sculpted handle, e.g. a Minerva bust, «sits» directly on the blade, they have an extended handle in order to create space for the inscription.³⁹ The handle is four sided and the inscription is positioned so that it is on all (Minerva-handle) or three (mouse handles) sides. In all cases but one (no. 79) the inscription is the right way around if the blade points to the right (FIGS. 17–20).⁴⁰ The handles sculpted to look like a mouse were made individually even though four of them bear identical texts.⁴¹ As is the case with the styli, the text would have been covered by the hand/fingers when the object was in use.

³⁹ See RATHMAYR 2014, 649–650. With obvious comparisons missing for this design, we cannot rule out the possibility that these handles held spatulae with a different, for example medical purpose. If our interpretation of these objects as gifts to introduce or propagate a name in the higher social strata more generally is correct (see below, Section III.2), then a less specialised tool such as a writing implement might have been the more logical choice as it would have been a sensible gift for a larger number of people.

⁴⁰ As opposed to the styli it is unclear what this would have meant for the handedness of the users as we can imagine a spatula being held and pushed/pulled in various directions in order to work wax.

⁴¹ See JACKSON 1994, 328–329, who also describes a sculpted clasp knife handle in the shape of a lion and with almost identical inscription (unknown provenance).



FIG. 17: Minerva bust handle from Ephesos (no. 74): Φ(λάουιος) Ἀσίκι(ο)ς ΓΕ/.ΟΣ καὶ Αὐρ(ήλιος) / Εὐτυχιανὸς / ἄρχων. From TAEUBER 2014, Taf. 125. © ÖAW-ÖAI, Niki Gail.

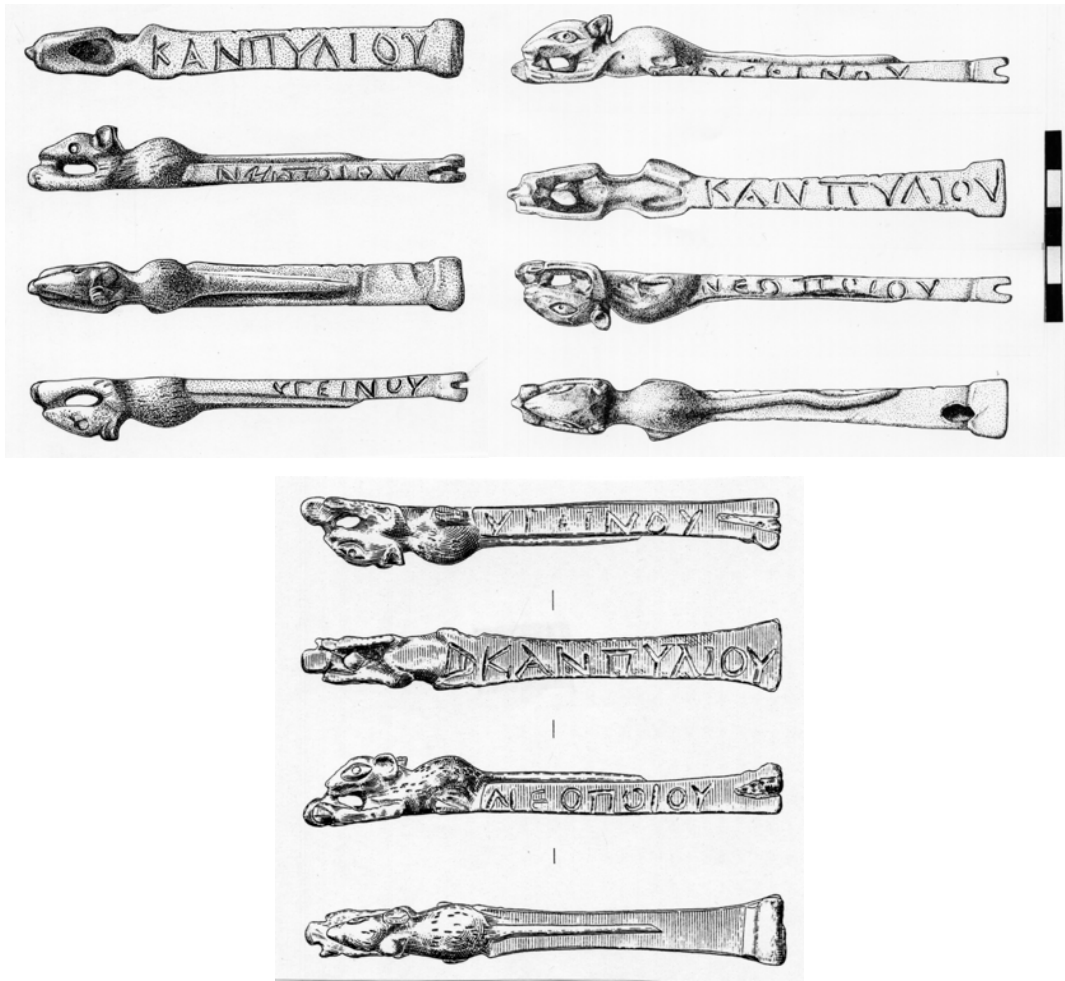


FIG. 18: three of Kanpylios' mouse handles (nos. 75, 76 and 77): ΥΓΕΙΝΟΥ / ΚΑΝΤΥΛΙΟΥ / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟΥ. © RGZM, Julia Ribbeck.



FIG. 19: the fourth of Kanpylios' mouse handles (no. 78): *ΥΓΕΙΝΟΥ / ΚΑΝΠΥΛ[ΙΟΥ] / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟΥ*. Formerly collection Dr Leo Mildenberg, Zürich, © Archäologische Sammlung der Universität Zürich, Silvia Hertig.

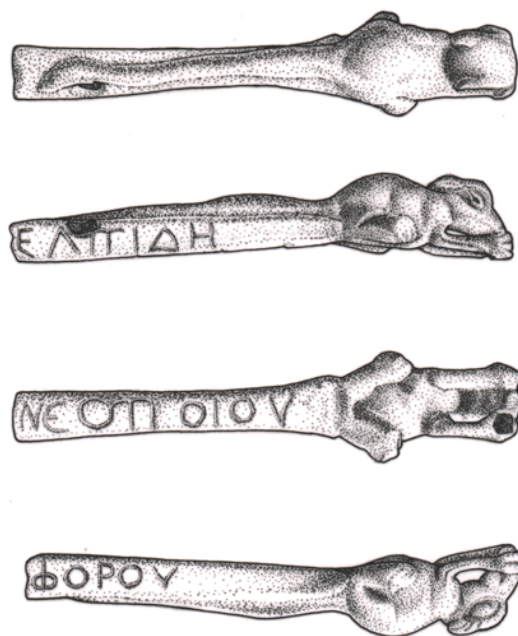


FIG. 20: Elpidophoros' mouse handle (no. 79): *ΕΛΠΙΔΗ / ΦΟΡΟΥ / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟΥ*. © RGZM, Julia Ribbeck.

With the exception of the inkwell from the Magdalensberg it seems that the design of objects with category 3 inscriptions corresponds to their function as gifts. They were custom made, the majority of them of relatively valuable materials and with great skill and effort. Category 3b with Christian inscriptions arguably contains the most precious objects, namely the only two silver styli and two very elaborate inkwells. The Christian objects as well as the styli from eastern Gaul and the Germanies (cat. 3a) and the spatula-handles from Asia Minor (cat. 3c) were clearly designed to include their inscriptions. The touristic Bloomberg stylus, however, may have been a spontaneous creation where the inscription was added to a more common iron stylus.

III.2 The texts

While most of the inscriptions in category 3 have an interpersonal aspect to them, friendship, love and eroticism are clearly in the focus (*table 1*). As far as amorous inscriptions go, the texts on styli are on the tasteful side compared to some other *instrumentum*.⁴² «My/your sweet girlfriend is a playful Venus» (*amica / dulcis / lasciva / Venus*) reads the *amica*-stylus from Augusta Raurica (no. 61);⁴³ even more harmless is the wish on the stylus from Le Landeron (no. 62): «may the gods protect you, dearest» (*di te / servent / amor / amorum*). The stylus from Rouffach (no. 63) also refers to love but here it seems to be the stylus itself that speaks: *amori / ars mea / cum studio / procedet*. The inscription can be interpreted in a number of ways and the ambiguity may be deliberate. It has been interpreted as «my skills eagerly benefit love / my love» («der Liebe nützt mein Können gern» or «meiner Liebe nützt mein Können gern», Thüry 1994, 90) or «love benefits from my skills through my zeal» («mon savoir-faire fait progresser l'amour grâce à mon zèle», Feugère 2000, 228). It can also be read as «my skills with practice will lead to love» and perhaps refers to the writing of love letters. The last inscription in this group (no. 64) does not refer to love but is a wish that is

⁴² THÜRY 1994 (also see PFAHL 2012, 103–105) has examples of erotic inscriptions on various kinds of objects, apart from our no. 63, spindle whorls, fibulae and part of a *circinus*. The latter threatens to penetrate (*pidico*) anyone who tries to take the tool. For the inscribed spindle whorls made in Autun, see DONDIN-PAYRE 2006.

⁴³ Or «Venus is a sweet, playful friend»; the way this inscription was read may have depended on the word that was facing up when the stylus was picked up to be read or used. Due to the eraser, either *Venus* or *dulcis* would have been displayed when the stylus was lying on a table.

often found on inscribed *instrumentum* and that was maybe addressed to a friend: *utere / felix / digne / merito*, meaning «use with good fortune, in a worthy and deserved way».⁴⁴

Table 1: category 3a (amorous/friendly inscriptions)				
61	<i>Amica / dulcis / lasciva / Venus.</i>	Augusta Raurica (Switzerland)	SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 68–69, no. AR 739	FIG. 7
62	<i>Di te / servent / amor / amorum.</i>	Le Landeron (Switzerland)	HOFMANN ROGNON 1998	FIG. 8 (top)
63	<i>Amori / ars mea / cum studio / procedet.</i>	Rouffach (France)	AE 1998, 982; FEUGÈRE 2000, 227–229	FIG. 8 (bottom)
64	<i>Utere / felix / digne / merito.</i>	Volon (France)	HÉRON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLV-XLVI	FIG. 9

These styli were given to people that meant something to the gift givers. We can assume that they wanted the recipient to think of the object as special and personal, and probably useful. The *amica*-stylus is addressed to (or was gifted by) a woman and it is reasonable to assume that the gift givers and recipients of some of the other inscribed writing implements included literate women as well. While one might argue that those who received fibulae and other objects with amorous inscriptions did not necessarily have to be literate in order to enjoy the present, it is fair to assume that whoever was given an inscribed stylus as a present would at least have the aspiration to be literate, and it is likely that a woman gifting an inscribed stylus would have been literate as well.⁴⁵

In addition to the stylus from Rouffach, two more speaking styli address writing itself in one way or another, this time without reference to love (*table 2*): «be happier writing the words, Felix!» (*dicta / Felix / felicior / scribe*) says the *dicta*-stylus from Frankfurt (no. 65), with a play on words with the name Felix and perhaps implying that Felix was unhappy with his old stylus. It could also be read as «dictate happily/as a happy person, write (even) more

⁴⁴ For examples from the Germanies see e.g. AE 1989, 562 (Froitzheim); AE 2006, 878 (Krefeld-Gellep); for Britannia e.g. AE 1956, 117 (East Stoke); AE 2006, 703 (Ponthir).

⁴⁵ On female literacy see e.g. ECKARDT 2018, 155–158.

happily/as an (even) happier person».⁴⁶ The inscription on the stylus from Cologne (no. 66), *hego / scribo / sinem / manum* provides even more linguistic curiosities. It probably means «I write with no hand», for which in Classical Latin one would expect *ego scribo sine manu*. Initial *h-* was not always pronounced and hypercorrect *h-* at the beginning of words is a well-known phenomenon that can be observed, for example, in Pompeii's graffiti as well as through testimonies in Roman literature.⁴⁷ Looking at our stylus-inscription, this is probably the case here and a more likely explanation than *H* being the abbreviation of a name or even a mistake for *ET*.⁴⁸ While Classical Roman authors portray the omitting or adding of initial *h-* as a sign of lacking education,⁴⁹ it is difficult to say what it would have meant in sixth-century Cologne and it does not necessarily mean that the stylus inscription's author – or the craftsman, for that matter –, was uneducated or did not speak Latin very well. The two superfluous *-m* in *sinem* and *manum* can be explained as hypercorrections as well: in pronunciation, final *-m* was nasalised from an early time and *-em* and *-um* may have sounded very similar to *-e* and *-u*, so that it was difficult to know where to put an *-m* in writing.⁵⁰ Such hypercorrections could have been made by the person who commissioned this piece, or by the craftsman if the text was provided orally rather than in writing. Rather than assuming a hypercorrect *-m* twice, however, it may be preferable to read *manum* as an accusative. This would be the «wrong» case with *sine*, but in Latin inscriptions it is common to see prepositions that should take the ablative used with the accusative, particularly in later Latin.⁵¹ If this were the case here, then we would expect a nasalised pronunciation of *manum* and this possibly triggered the hypercorrection of *sine*. Another explanation could be that *sinem* is no preposition at all but the (hypercorrected) imperative of *sino*, which would result in the translation «lend me your hand, I (will) write».⁵² However, considering that the stylus was found in a sixth-century context the use of the wrong case is more likely here. The most logical solution, therefore, is to read «I write with no hand» as a riddle, to which the object

⁴⁶ See CLERMONT-GANNEAU 1918, 258 note 2.

⁴⁷ See ADAMS 2013, 125–127 on omitted and hypercorrect aspirate.

⁴⁸ As was suggested by CLERMONT-GANNEAU 1918, 259 who, however, did not see the object himself. Syntactically, *ego* is not needed but it extends the inscription to four words which meant that it could easily be distributed over the four facets of the shaft.

⁴⁹ ADAMS 2013, 125–126.

⁵⁰ See ADAMS 2013, 128–132.

⁵¹ See CLACKSON, HORROCKS 2007, 277, 290.

⁵² CLERMONT-GANNEAU 1918, 256–257, who also suggested that the extra *M* in *sinem* was a ligature of *mi* (p. 258), but he did not see the object and the drawing and photo rule out this possibility.

itself is the answer. Riddles of this kind were used for entertainment during dinner parties and we can imagine this as an appropriate context for such a gift.⁵³

Table 2: category 3a (speaking objects)				
65	<i>Dicta / felix / felicior / scribe.</i>	Frankfurt (Germany)	PAGENSTECHE 1910, 88; <i>CIL</i> XIII 10027,228	FIG. 11
66	<i>Hego / scribo / sinem / manum.</i>	Cologne (Germany)	HERON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLVI; <i>CIL</i> XIII 10027,229	FIG. 10
67	<i>Pur(puram) cav(e) mal(am).</i>	Magdalensberg (Austria)	ÖLLERER 1998, 142	FIG. 16

The topic of writing is what the styli have in common with the only inkwell in category 3a (no. 67). In line with what we observed about its design, this may not so much be a gift as an object inscribed by its user: *pur(puram) cav(e) mal(am)*, ‘beware of the evil red one’, referring to the red ink the inkwell presumably contained. Is it a reference to the use of red ink for unwelcome texts, perhaps in an educational or accounting environment? Or to the toxic cinnabar (mercury sulfide) that may have given it its colour? In any case, the examples of speaking objects show a close relationship between the content of the texts and the objects. The texts are in a way self-reflective and complement the objects, and with their references to writing the inscriptions can be considered insider jokes for literate people.

The Bloomberg stylus, apart from being a touristic souvenir, was a gift as well, and it also refers to a literate or even intellectual sphere, albeit in a different way. This inscription is unique in its length and content. Other inscribed objects as souvenirs such as the vessels with enamel décor from Hadrian’s Wall, inscribed with the names of the forts along the Wall, or the scabbard plates from Baden (*Aquae Helveticae*) that display the name of the maker,

⁵³ For riddles as entertainment during dinner parties and in particular during the Saturnalia see e.g. LEARY 2014, 8–13 on Symphosius’ *Aenigmata*. Symphosius’ first riddle is in fact the stylus (*graphium*): *De summo planus, sed non ego planus in imo. / Versor utrinque manu, diversa et munera fungor. / Altera pars revocat, quidquid pars altera fecit.* (I am flat at the top but not flat at the bottom, I turn either way in the hand. I have a conflicting task: one part of me undoes whatever the other part did).

Gemellianus, and the place where they were made, have much shorter texts.⁵⁴ As for the content, the closest parallel for at least a small part of the text on the Bloomberg stylus is a fibula from Unterthürheim (Bavaria, Germany) with the inscription *ab Aquis venio*.⁵⁵ But none of these compare to the complexity of the text of the Bloomberg stylus.

After the first publication by Tomlin, whose text is given in the catalogue and in *table 3*, a slightly different reading was proposed by Keyer (2019). Tomlin recognised that the text is metrical and suggested four iambic senarii. Keyer –probably correctly– assumes two iambic senarii followed by an elegiac distich, and therefore proposes *ut[i]* instead of *ut* in line four:

*Ab urbe v[e]n[i]. Munus tibi gratum adf(e)ro / acul[eat?]um. ut habe[a]s memor[ia]m
nostra(m) / rogo. Si fortuna dar[e]t quo possem / largius ut[i]! longa via cen[a?] /
sacculus est [v]acuu.*

I have come from the city. I bring you a welcome gift / with a sharp point (?). I ask you to remember me. / If only Fortune would give me something that I could use more lavishly! / Due to long journey (and) the banquet (?), my purse is empty.

Table 3: category 3a (Bloomberg stylus)				
68	<i>Ab urbe v[e]n[i] munus tibi gratum adf(e)ro / acul[eat]um ut habe[a]s memor[ia]m nostra(m) / rogo si fortuna dar[e]t quo possem / largius ut longa via ceu sacculus est (v)acuu.</i>	London (UK)	TOMLIN 2018	FIG. 12

Neither of the readings are completely satisfactory in the difficult last line but the underlying sense and the wit of the inscription are evident in both: the person giving the gift wants the recipient to remember them by it, and they apologise for not being able to give something more valuable or bigger. An empty purse is blamed and something about the explanation may have made the recipient smile, but its exact sense remains unclear to us. There is also an explicit connection between the text and the object. Whichever reading is accepted, the inscription directly refers to the shape of the stylus, its point to be precise (*munus ... gratum ... acul[eat]um*). The reference is followed immediately by a request to remember the giver

⁵⁴ See BREEZE 2012 on Hadrian's Wall, BERGER 2002, 64–66 on Gemellianus.

⁵⁵ MARTIN-KILCHER 1998.

of the gift, and in lines 3–4 by an apology for the apparently modest gift, implying a personal but light-hearted relationship to its recipient. Was it brought to Londinium for a friend by a visitor from Rome? Or did a traveller from Londinium commission it while in Rome? As seen above, the design of the stylus is simple. Could this have prompted the apology in lines 3–4? In any case, the inscription makes it a special and personal gift – and the inscription itself can hardly be called simple. While the content focuses on the friendly relationship between the giver and the recipient of the gift and the souvenir character of the object, the text has an intellectual quality of a different kind. The fact that the inscription is metrical betrays the educated background of the author that they may have had in common with the gift’s recipient. The contrast between a rather mundane text and its sophisticated rendition may have contributed to the jokey nature of the gift.

With the Christian inscriptions we leave the jokey atmosphere: they are short and usually express the wish that someone may «live» (*vivas*) or «live in God», clearly displaying the user’s faith through the mention of God and/or a *crux* (table 4). Such inscriptions are very common, particularly from the fourth century onwards and particularly on *instrumentum* such as finger rings, spoons and fibulae. They are generally considered to be gifts used in the higher social strata and can therefore be compared to the other objects in category 3.⁵⁶ Unlike the styli in category 3a, the recipient is sometimes named in these inscriptions. The categorization of no. 73 is uncertain. The inscription *HOMVLPVLVS* has been read as *homul(us) piulus* («devoted little man») which could give it a Christian dimension. It has also been read as a name P(ublius) Iul(i)u(s) Homul(lus) (*CIL* XIII 10027, 254; Frei-Stolba and Lieb 2002, 4). The latter interpretation cannot be ruled out but the fact that we lack inkwells with owners’ inscriptions that are comparable in terms of material and design, while there are similar objects with Christian inscriptions, means that it is much more likely to belong to this group.

Table 4: category 3b (Christian inscriptions)
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⁵⁶ They may have been christening gifts but this is not the *communis opinio* now, see PFAHL 2012, 101 with note 2665. *Vivas* is frequent (in various combinations with other words and names) on the fourth-century fibulae gathered by BEHRENS 1950, 10–12 and NOLL 1952, 397–399. Also see e.g. PFAHL 2012 no. 62 (*Pax viva(s)*) and no. 63 (*Posenna vivas*), both spoons, as well as the fingerings no. 172 (*viva/s in d/eo*) and no. 173 (*vivas / in deo*) and the glass vessel no. 1057A (*vivas in [d]eo pie*).

69	<i>Vivas in deo</i> (or + <i>Romula</i> / <i>vivas . in deo</i> / <i>semper</i>).	Belley (France)	HÉRON DE VILLESFOSSE 1918, XLVIII	
70	+ <i>Flavia in d(e)o vivat</i> .	Constantine (Algeria)	HERON DE VILLESFOSSE 1918, XLVII; <i>CIL</i> VIII 22657,3	
71	<i>Vi/ve / de/o</i> .	Autun (France)	HERON DE VILLESFOSSE 1918, XLVII; <i>CIL</i> XIII 10027,233	
72	<i>Servande viv(as)</i> .	Cologne (Germany)	HÖPKEN, LIESEN 2013, 474–475; <i>CIL</i> XIII 10027,262	FIG. 15
73	<i>Homul(us?) piulus (?)</i> .	Cologne (Germany)	LA BAUME 1975, 228–230; <i>CIL</i> XIII 10027,254	FIG. 14

In contrast to the inscriptions seen so far, those on the spatula handles from Asia Minor simply mention names and functions (*table 5*). One of the mouse handles came from a grave with medical equipment and was originally thought to be a medical instrument with the owner's name on it.⁵⁷ However, as more examples with identical texts appeared in collections and on the antiquities market, it seemed more and more unlikely that they all were in the possession of the same person and carried their name. They are now interpreted as wax-spatula handles and more likely to be gifts, given by the named person(s).⁵⁸ This is particularly plausible for the Minerva handle which has two names, an unlikely scenario for an owner's inscription: Fl(avios) Asiki(o)s⁵⁹ and Aur(elios) Eutychianos, followed by the word *archon*, a designation for a public official, in the nominative. Four of the mouse handles have the name of the same individual in the genitive, Hygeinos Kanpylios, a *neopoiios* or «trustee» of a sanctuary, whose name was also inscribed on a sculpted clasp knife handle in

⁵⁷ See KÜNZL 1999, 207–208.

⁵⁸ KÜNZL, KOEPEL 2002, 66–67; RATHMAYR 2014, 650.

⁵⁹ An incomplete and incomprehensible word follows this name, possibly another name or a function.

the shape of a lion.⁶⁰ The fifth mouse handle carries the name of yet another *neopoios*, Elpidephoros, perhaps identical with a teacher (*paideutes*) at the *mouseion* of Ephesos attested in a stone inscription dating roughly to the second half of the second century A.D.⁶¹ While the inscriptions on spatula handles do not contain witty phrases, they share the novelty character many of the bronze styli in category 3 seem to have. For the mouse handles, a connection to Apollo Smintheus, whose cult animal was the mouse, has plausibly been suggested,⁶² and we can assume that the originality of the gift was in its shape. We can imagine that such gifts would have been very useful to establish or maintain relationships amongst those with a high status and public functions.⁶³

Table 5: category 3c (advertising status?)				
74	Φ(λάουιος) Ἀσίκι(ο)ς ΓΕ/.ΟΣ καὶ Αὐρ(ήλιος) / Εὐτυχιανὸς / ἄρχων.	Ephesos (Turkey)	TAEUBER 2014, 341; RATHMAYR 2014, 649, 677, B 82	FIG. 17
75	ΥΓΕΙΝΟΥ / ΚΑΝΠΥΛΙΟΥ / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟΥ.	Ephesos (Turkey)?	JACKSON 2014, no. 61	FIG. 18
76	ΥΓΕΙΝΟΥ / ΚΑΝΠΥΛΙΟΥ / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟΥ.	South-western Asia minor	JACKSON 2014, no. 62	FIG. 18
77	ΥΓΕΙΝΟΥ / ΚΑΝΠΥΛΙΟΥ / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟΥ.	Asia Minor?	JACKSON 2014, no. 63	FIG. 18
78	ΥΓΕΙΝΟΥ / ΚΑΝΠΥΛ[ΙΟΥ] / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟ[Υ].	Asia Minor?	JACKSON 2014, no. 65	FIG. 19
79	ΕΛΠΙΔΗ/ΦΟΡΟΥ / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟΥ.	Asia Minor?	JACKSON 2014, no. 64	FIG. 20

The texts in category 3 can be compared to those on other *instrumentum*, particularly the friendly/amorous and Christian inscriptions. But it is interesting that writing equipment

⁶⁰ JACKSON 1994, 328–329.

⁶¹ *I.Ephesos* 3068, see KÜNZL 2001, 214.

⁶² KÜNZL 1982.

⁶³ For other objects with sculpted, often nibbling, mice with similar novelty character, and for a range of possible symbolisms related to them, see e.g. JACKSON 2014.

inscribed with such messages is much less common than other objects, and that apart from Kanpylios' spatula handles, which appear to represent a geographically and chronologically restricted phenomenon, there are so far no two inscriptions or objects that are identical, as is the case, for example, with fibulae. Whoever decided to give an inscribed stylus, inkwell or spatula as a gift must have chosen this unusual object for a reason; it presumably had some meaning for them, for their relationship with the recipient, and/or in the life of the recipient. This possible meaning is particularly evident for the speaking styli that so clearly refer to the sphere of writing, reinforcing the link with literacy and addressing someone specifically as part of the literate population. Reading and writing must have played a role in the lives of the people giving and receiving these objects, whether in a practical or symbolic way, to the point that they engaged with literacy in a playful and self-reflective way.

III.3 Find contexts

The literate context, the materials and production of the objects themselves, might arguably point towards an elite environment. However, neither this elite connotation, nor the personal and precious character of the objects, is generally reflected in their find contexts. One might expect objects of some material value and with apparent personal character and certain representative function to be used as grave goods, but with regard to category 3 this can only, and only tentatively, be said about the objects with Christian inscriptions. While the precise find contexts are difficult to establish or interpret for many of the objects in category 3, where they are known they suggest that many of them were lost or dropped inside buildings or in the open. The Bloomberg stylus, for example, was found on the bank of the Walbrook, a tributary of the Thames river which used to run across Roman Londinium from North to South and is nowadays underground.⁶⁴

The copper-alloy styli with friendly/amorous inscriptions and the speaking styli (cat. 3a) were found in buildings that range from profane to sacred. The *amica*-stylus from Augusta Raurica

⁶⁴ According to information kindly provided by Mike Marshall (MOLA), the stylus was found in an early layer of material dumped during the process of raising and developing the bank after the Boudican revolt. In the same layer (measuring *c.* 7 x 5 m and *c.* 12 cm thick), around 50 artefacts were found that are likely to be rubbish. Among them was also a small hoard of coins dating to the mid-60s of the first century A.D., which may have been deposited deliberately. This could then also be the case for other finds from this layer but so far there is no convincing argument that our stylus was one of them.

(no. 61) was found in a latrine from the Severan phase of insula 30, without any associated finds. There was a drain from the street feeding into this latrine and it is possible that the stylus was dropped by a passer-by.⁶⁵ The stylus from Le Landeron (no. 62) was found in the *pars urbana* of a *villa* in the fill of a small medieval trench.⁶⁶ The stylus from Rouffach (no. 63) was found amongst the remains of a small Roman bath, apparently in a context poor in finds, and the one from Volon (no. 64) was found in a Roman habitation together with tile and pottery sherds and a medallion of Marcus Aurelius.⁶⁷ The *dicta*-stylus from Frankfurt-Heddernheim (no. 65) is from a private collection, and the *hego*-stylus (no. 66) was found in a room adjacent to the sixth-century baptistery of the late antique incarnation of Cologne Cathedral.⁶⁸

The inkwell from the Magdalensberg that cautions the reader about the red ink (no. 67) is different from the other objects in cat. 3 in that it does not have obvious gift character but also because we know its find context quite well. It is part of an interesting group of objects from the interior of a shop. The other finds include styli, a number of metal and ceramic inkwells and seal-boxes, and graffiti on the wall list items and prices.⁶⁹ It is thus possible that the inkwell was used by the shop owner or by someone in their household.

Amongst the few funerary finds in category 3 is one of the mouse spatula handles from Asia Minor which was reportedly found in a grave along with a number of medical instruments.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, we do not know much more about the deceased, but they may have been an eminent member of society who received the gift from the *neopoiios* Hygeinos Kanpylios. The find spots of the other four mouse handles are uncertain, one of them is said to have been found in the Artemis temple in Ephesos.⁷¹ The Minerva bust handle was found in Ephesos, inside one of the «Hanghäuser», *i.e.* a private habitation,⁷² possibly the home of the recipient of the gift.

⁶⁵ Information provided by Sven Straumann, Augusta Raurica.

⁶⁶ HOFMANN ROGNON 1998.

⁶⁷ Rouffach: PÉTRY 1980, 444; Volon: HÉRON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLV.

⁶⁸ Information kindly provided by Dr M. Euskirchen, cf. VOIGTEL, DÜNTZER 1873, 202.

⁶⁹ ÖLLERER 1998, 147–149.

⁷⁰ KÜNZL 1999, 208.

⁷¹ KÜNZL 1999, 207–208.

⁷² TAEUBER 2014, 341; RATHMAYR 2014, 649, 677.

Apart from the spatula handle from the possible doctor's grave, the only gift objects that can plausibly be associated with a funerary context have Christian inscriptions. The majority of objects in this category are old finds and much of the information about their find contexts is lost or unknown. The silver stylus from Belley (no. 69) is from a private collection and for no. 71 we only know that it was probably found in the area of Autun.⁷³ The other silver stylus, from Constantine (no. 70), was found «in the bed of the Rummel, opposite the rock with the inscription by the martyrs».⁷⁴ The two remaining objects, however, can plausibly be associated with a funerary context. This is certain in the case of inkwell no. 73 from Cologne, which was found inside a sarcophagus along with three coins, one of which was of Gordianus III,⁷⁵ and it is plausible for the other inkwell from Cologne, no. 72.⁷⁶

The information we have about find contexts and associated objects makes it impossible to tell whether these finds can generally be connected to a sphere of prestige and wealth. They do not generally belong to a military context and the lack of funerary contexts for category 3a objects suggests that at the time and place they were in fashion they did not generally have a significance that made them obvious candidates for grave goods, perhaps as opposed to those with Christian inscriptions.

IV. A LITERATE GIFT: WHO NEEDS INSCRIBED WRITING EQUIPMENT?

Inscribed writing implements clearly form part of the wider Roman tradition or habit of inscribing *instrumentum*, and writing equipment more generally seems to have been a common gift.⁷⁷ However, this survey has shown just how rare inscribed writing equipment is. A focus on those inscribed writing implements that appear to have served as gifts has allowed us to further explore the role of inscribed writing equipment within the tradition of inscribed *instrumentum*. Certain trends or clusters of such objects can be observed. The similarity of the design of styli with amorous/friendly inscriptions and speaking objects as well as their

⁷³ HÉRON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLVII.

⁷⁴ HÉRON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLVII.

⁷⁵ ECKARDT 2016, catalogue no. 70.

⁷⁶ HÖPKEN, LIESEN 2013, 474–475.

⁷⁷ Martial for example mentions writing equipment as gifts in his *Apophoreta*, including a stylus case (*graphiarium*) that is to be filled with iron styli (14.21), but he does not mention inkwells: Mart. 14.3–7 (various tablets, also see Mart. 7.53), 14.10–11 (papyrus sheets), 14.20–1 (writing case and stylus case) and 14.38 (ink pens).

geographical and chronological distribution suggests that there was a certain demand for decorated copper-alloy styli with inscriptions in the Germanies from the second/third century onwards. About the same time or slightly later, there seems to have been a locally relatively restricted fashion in south west Asia Minor of giving small tools such as wax-spatulae with the gift giver's name engraved on them, and among the Christian population, styli and inkwells were sometimes chosen to convey good wishes.

While the gifts carry texts of very different character, they all have in common that an elaborate message was written onto the objects, as opposed to a simple mark or name. The text itself – a witty reference to intellect or travel, a declaration of love or desire, a good wish or the introduction or propagation of a name – only represented the message on one level. On another level, the objects must have had symbolic meaning. We can assume that the choice of the object that was going to convey the message to a friend, lover, family member or professional acquaintance was made deliberately, and that it was presumably a rather unusual choice must have added to the novelty of the gift. Interestingly, with the exception of Kanpylios' spatula handles, no two writing implements within the described clusters or focuses are the same. They were all custom made, and in some cases, there is clearly much thought behind them. The choice of object to convey the message is sometimes closely tied to the inscription itself, making use of the double potential to refer to literacy: the speaking objects refer to the sphere of writing, as perhaps does the stylus advertising his skills to further the cause of love (no. 63); the inscription on the Bloomberg stylus expresses an educated background through its metrical form. Even when the inscriptions are part of a more commonly known tradition, such as amorous/erotic or Christian inscriptions on *instrumentum*, the unusual choice of object perhaps had a symbolic dimension on a more personal level: literacy and writing may have been part of the recipient's life, at the very least in an aspirational way. The planned manner and careful design of such gifts, sometimes made of valuable materials, moreover suggest that the objects had a material as well as a personal value. They must have catered to a restricted and small portion of society, presumably a literate and relatively well-off portion, and it is noteworthy that we know that a woman was involved in the gift of at least one inscribed stylus (no. 61).⁷⁸ The environment of the users and the meaning these gifts had for them are elusive, but we can state with some certainty

⁷⁸ Eckardt observed that female graves containing inkwells are often high status burials; in the Germanies they date mainly from the third and fourth centuries (ECKARDT 2018, 158–165).

that we are looking at the civilian population rather than the military, and that within this group gifts that emphasise and display literacy were by some people deemed useful to establish and maintain relationships of various nature.⁷⁹ There is nothing to indicate, however, that their representing literacy might have translated into their use as grave goods. In most cases they will simply have been original and useful presents among the literate population and can be seen in context with the tradition of gifting small items, including writing equipment, for example during the Saturnalia.⁸⁰

The reasons why the use of writing equipment as gifts is rare compared to other *instrumentum* such as fibulae or rings may have something to do with the fact that fewer people would have had a practical use for it, and possibly also with the fact that this trend appears not to have taken hold in the highly literate military environment. But why the observed clusters appear in the regions and at the times they do remains unclear. With the group of copper-alloy styli with gift character we simply seem to see a particular and somewhat niche trend within the more general tradition of gifting inscribed tools, instruments or ornaments. What has become clear is that while the Bloomberg stylus shares –and arguably surpasses– the wit and intellectual sphere of other inscribed styli, its design, find spot and early date mean that it is unique even within the small group of inscribed styli known to us. It may not have been as modest a gift as the inscription implies and its composer may well have been aware of this. It also demonstrates that the playful engagement with literacy evidenced by the copper-alloy styli from the Germanies is not –unlike their specific design– restricted to a certain area and time-period, but spanned the empire and also the centuries.

⁷⁹ See on gift-giving in the Roman world e.g. COFFEE 2013 (engaging with M. Mauss' notion of reciprocity), further the volume edited by CARLÀ, GORI 2014 for the broader context of gift-giving and economy in the ancient world.

⁸⁰ See the gifts of writing equipment suggested by Martial (14.3–7; 14.10–11; 14.20–1; 14.38), and see further LEARY 2014, 8–13 on the connection of gifts, riddles and the Saturnalia.

V. CATALOGUE

Category 1a: owners'/users' marks (names)				
1	<i>Florus</i>	stylus (bone)	Lyon (France)	DESBAT 2005, 157–160
2	<i>AN(---) / Y / X</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 350 no. 7
3	<i>AT(---)</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 350 no. 8
4	<i>CE(---) or GE(---)</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 350 no. 9
5	<i>HE(---) or HG?</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 350 no. 10
6	<i>SVA(---)</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 350 no. 11
7	<i>HYMIIN(IS?)</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 350 no. 12
8	<i>L(ucius) Eg(---)</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 356 no. 16
9	<i>Casti</i>	stylus (bone)	Mainz (Germany)	<i>CIL</i> XIII 10032,15
10	<i>Hygini</i>	stylus (bone)	Segóbriga (Spain)	ABASCAL, CEBRIÁN 2002
11	<i>AV?</i> (Venetic)	stylus (bone)	Zuglio (Italy)	CREVATIN 1995
12	<i>Iucundi/NDI</i>	inkwell (ceramics)	London (UK)	<i>RIB</i> 2.8. 2503.287
13	<i>Ploca[---?]</i>	inkwell (ceramics)	Mérida (Spain)	BUSTAMANTE ÁLVAREZ 2013, lámina 162, no. 11 (1369/32)

Category 1b: owners'/users' marks (marks and individual letters)

14	<i>IX or XI</i>	stylus (bone)	Dangstetten (Germany)	FINGERLIN 1986, 42,3
15	<i>X</i>	stylus (bone)	Dangstetten (Germany)	FINGERLIN 1998, 1014,7
16	<i>M</i>	stylus (bone)	Dangstetten (Germany)	FINGERLIN 1998, 1337,24
17	<i>V VII</i>	stylus (bone)	Lyon (France)	BÉAL 1983, 157
18	<i>X</i>	stylus (bone)	Lyon (France)	BÉAL 1983, 158
19	<i>N</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 350 no. 1
20	<i>V</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 350 no. 2
21	<i>V (or <?)</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 350 no. 3
22	<i>X</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 350 no. 4
23	<i>X (or double A?)</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 350 no. 5
24	<i>X</i>	stylus (bone)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	GOSTENČNIK 2005, 350 no. 6
25	<i>K⁸¹</i>	inkwell lid (?) (lead)	Augusta Raurica (Switzerland)	FÜNFSCHILLING 2012, 222 no. 156

Category 2: makers' marks				
26	illegible stamp	stylus (iron)	Augusta Raurica (Switzerland)	SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 67, catalogue no. AR 115
27	<i>REGNO</i> , read <i>Reg(i)no</i> or <i>Regn(i) o(fficina)</i>	stylus (iron)	Vindonissa (Switzerland)	SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 67, catalogue no. Vi 175

⁸¹ This letter was scratched into the bottom side of the lid and could also be related to the production process.

28	illegible stamp	stylus (iron)	Vindonissa (Switzerland)	SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 67, catalogue no. Vi 151
29	illegible stamp	stylus (iron)	Vindonissa (Switzerland)	SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 67, catalogue no. Vi 152
30	illegible stamp	stylus (iron)	Vindonissa (Switzerland)	SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 67, catalogue no. Vi 179
31	illegible stamp	stylus (iron)	Vindonissa (Switzerland)	SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 67, catalogue no. Vi 186
32	<i>Bonos(us) fe(cit)</i>	stylus (iron)	London (UK)	<i>RIB</i> 2.3. 2428.9 = SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 67, catalogue no. MoL 12
33	illegible stamp	stylus (iron)	London (UK)	SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 67 note 283
34	<i>REGNO</i> , read <i>Reg(i)no</i> or <i>Regn(i) o(fficina)</i>	stylus (iron)	London (UK)	<i>RIB</i> 2.3. 2428.15 = MANNING 1985, pl. 35, N7; SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 67, catalogue no. BMBR 5
35	<i>Eros</i>	stylus (iron)	? (seen in Mainz, Germany)	<i>CIL</i> XIII 11028.3
36	<i>SOCRA</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Althaldensleben, Sachsen-Anhalt (Germany)	<i>CIL</i> XIII 10036.83
37	<i>MRVBBI</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Aquileia (Italy)	MAIONICA 1903, 363– 364
38	<i>CSENT / ANTH</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Athens (Greece)	ZAHN 1916, 17, note 4

39	<i>OATΣM</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy, silvered)	? (now in Budapest, Hungary)	BILKEI 1980, 83, pl. IV, no. 148
40	<i>EX OF COR</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Carnuntum (Austria)	ERKEL <i>et al.</i> 1999, 75, pl. 51, no. 98.9
41	<i>EX OF SOCR</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Carnuntum (Austria)?	NOLL 1988, 92-93, pl. 7.4
42	<i>[E]X OF SOCR[---]</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Crundale, Kent (UK)	<i>RIB</i> II 2415.34
43	<i>EX OF LON SOC</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Florence (Italy)	<i>CIL</i> XI 6720
44	<i>EX OF LON SOCR A</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Florence (Italy)	<i>CIL</i> XI 6720
45	<i>OFSOCR</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Gomilice, Guberevac (Serbia)	CVJETICANIN 2004
46	<i>Ex of(f)i(cina) VM</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Günzenhausen Fuchsberg (Germany)	FASOLD 1987/1988, 199
47	<i>AVCE(?)VS(?)</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Heidelberg (Germany)	HENSEN 2009, 67/45.1
48	<i>Socra(tes)</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Heidelberg (Germany)	HENSEN 2009, 65/88.1
49	<i>TALV</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Krefeld-Gellep (Germany)	PIRLING 1997, 75, pl. 68, 132.4, 154
50	<i>EX OF COR</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	London (UK)	<i>RIB</i> II 2415.33
51	<i>AM.VRSEIVS or A.MVRSEIVS</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Mérida (Spain)	BEJARANO OSORIO 2016, 92–93, fig. 61
52	«stamped by Socrates»	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Mintia near Deva (Romania)	CVJETICANIN 2004, 120, note 16
53	<i>EX O CALPVRNI</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Mtskheta/Tbilisi (Georgia)	KOSTER 2013, note 664

54	<i>[E]X OF SOCR</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Nijmegen (Netherlands)	KOSTER 2013, 157
55	<i>EX OF LON SOCR</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Nijmegen (Netherlands)	KOSTER 2013, 157
56	<i>Gallus</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Rißtissen (Germany)	PFAHL 2012, no. 232, Taf. 34,232
57	<i>[E]X OF SOC</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Wijchen (Netherlands)	KOSTER 1997, 90
58	<i>Calpurn(i)</i>	inkwell lid (copper-alloy)	Xanten (Germany)	SCHALLES <i>et al.</i> 2006, 105
59	<i>C(aius) Scribonius Faustus Rom(ae) fec(it).</i>	inkwell lid (copper-alloy)	Zurzach (Switzerland)	FREI-STOLBA, LIEB 2002
60	<i>A(ulus) Quintius Sp(urii) f(ilius) Plebeius fecit.</i>	inkwell (ceramic)	Aquileia (Italy)	GOMEZEL 1994

Category 3a: amorous/friendly inscriptions and speaking objects					
61	<i>Amica / dulcis / lasciva / Venus.</i>	stylus (copper- alloy)	Augusta Raurica (Switzerland)	SCHALTENBRAN D OBRECHT 2012, 68–69, no. AR 739	FIG. 7
62	<i>Di te / servent / amor / amorum.</i>	stylus (copper- alloy)	Le Landeron (Switzerland)	HOFMANN ROGNON 1998	FIG. 8 (top)
63	<i>Amori / ars mea / cum studio / procedet.</i>	stylus (copper- alloy)	Rouffach (France)	<i>AE</i> 1998, 982; FEUGÈRE 2000, 227–229	FIG. 8 (botto m)
64	<i>Utere / felix / digne / merito.</i>	stylus (copper- alloy)	Volon (France)	HÉRON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLV- XLVI	FIG. 9
65	<i>Dicta / felix / felicior / scribe.</i>	stylus (copper- alloy)	Frankfurt (Germany)	PAGENSTECHE 1910: 88; <i>CIL</i> XIII 10027,228	FIG. 11

66	<i>Hego / scribo / sinem / manum.</i>	stylus (copper-alloy)	Cologne (Germany)	HERON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLVI; <i>CIL</i> XIII 10027,229	FIG. 10
67	<i>Pur(puram) cav(e) mal(am).</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Magdalensberg (Austria)	ÖLLERER 1998, 142	FIG. 16
68	<i>Ab urbe v[e]n[i] munus tibi gratum adf(e)ro / acul[eat]um ut habe[a]s memor[ia]m nostra(m) / rogo si fortuna dar[e]t quo possem / largius ut longa via ceu sacculus est (v)acuu[s].</i>	stylus (iron)	London (UK)	TOMLIN 2018	FIG. 12

Category 3b: Christian					
69	<i>Vivas in deo (or + Romula / vivas . in . deo / semper).</i>	stylus (silver)	? (seen in Belley, France)	HÉRON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLVIII	
70	<i>+ Flavia in d(e)o vivat.</i>	stylus (silver)	Constantine (Algeria)	HERON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLVII; <i>CIL</i> VIII 22657,3	
71	<i>Vi/ve / de/o.</i>	stylus (copper-alloy)	? (probably near Autun, France)	HERON DE VILLEFOSSE 1918, XLVII; <i>CIL</i> XIII 10027,233	
72	<i>Servande viv(as).</i>	inkwell (copper-alloy)	Cologne (Germany)	<i>CIL</i> XIII 10027,262; HÖPKEN, LIESEN 2013, 474–475	FIG. 15

73	<i>Homul(us?) piulus (?)</i> .	inkwell (copper- alloy)	Cologne (Germany)	LA BAUME 1975, 228–30; <i>CIL</i> XIII 10027,254	FIG. 14
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Category 3c: advertising status

74	Φ(λάουιος) Ἀσίκι(ο)ς ΓΕ/.ΟΣ καὶ Αὐρ(ήλιος) / Εὐτυχιανὸς / ἄρχων.	spatula handle (copper- alloy)	Ephesos (Turkey)	TAEUBER 2014, 341; RATHMAYR 2014, 649, 677, B 82	FIG. 17
75	ΥΓΕΙΝΟΥ / ΚΑΝΠΥΛΙΟΥ / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟΥ.	spatula handle (copper- alloy)	Ephesos (Turkey)?	JACKSON 2014, no. 61	FIG. 18
76	ΥΓΕΙΝΟΥ / ΚΑΝΠΥΛΙΟΥ / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟΥ.	spatula handle (copper- alloy)	South-western Asia minor	JACKSON 2014, no. 62	FIG. 18
77	ΥΓΕΙΝΟΥ / ΚΑΝΠΥΛΙΟΥ / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟΥ.	spatula handle (copper- alloy)	Asia Minor?	JACKSON 2014, no. 63	FIG. 18
78	ΥΓΕΙΝΟΥ / ΚΑΝΠΥΛ[ΙΟΥ] / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟ[Υ].	spatula handle (copper- alloy)	Asia Minor?	JACKSON 2014, no. 65	FIG. 19
79	ΕΛΠΙΔΗ/ΦΟΡΟΥ / ΝΕΟΠΟΙΟΥ.	spatula handle (copper- alloy)	Asia Minor?	JACKSON 2014, no. 64	FIG. 20

Category 3d: uncertain

80	<i>TCC / LAS</i>	stylus (copper- alloy)	Heddernheim (Germany)	SCHALTENBRAND OBRECHT 2012, 71, catalogue no. WL 20	FIG. 13
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