

ROMAN FRONTIER STUDIES 2009

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Back cover illustrations: The site of the Roman bridge (*Pons Aelius*) across the river Tyne at Newcastle;
inscription (RIB 1322) found in the Tyne at Newcastle, recording the transfer of legionary detachments
between Britain and Germany, c. 158

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British families in the Roman army: living on the fringes of the Roman world

Tatiana Ivleva

Abstract

This paper illustrates the interpretational potential of a combination of data from archaeology and epigraphy by demonstrating that both sources can be used to study the formation of emigrant families. In the case study for this research, British families formed on the fringes of the Roman Empire within an army milieu, the research questions are if and how we can identify British families on the Continent. The epigraphic data indicated that only 12 families can be detected where one or both partners were of clearly British descent. By contrast, the archaeological data provided more evidence, although there were problems with data interpretation, due to the reason behind the occurrence of British items on the Continent and their use in terms of gender. Because of the use of both epigraphic and archaeological evidence, it proved possible to connect the presence of British-made items, in this case brooches, with the presence of auxiliary units raised or serving in Britain. Further analysis has shown that brooches with female associations can indicate the presence of British women whose partners were either of British descent or had a different cultural background.

Introduction

This paper explores various methods that can be used to trace emigrant families whose origins were in the Roman province of Britannia and who moved overseas in the C1-3rd AD. Most sources available to trace British families come from the military context; therefore, the focus lies on emigrant families formed within the military milieu. More specifically this paper will explore if we can identify British families in the Roman army living overseas and through what means.

The analysis combines epigraphic and material-culture research, because their joint potential frees us from the restrictions imposed by one single evidence type, either epigraphic or archaeological. Whilst demonstrating the potential of this approach, it will also be necessary to address a number of problems associated with data interpretation. Although there is sufficient material to draw some conclusions, difficulties arise when one needs to determine the reason behind the occurrence of British-made items overseas and their use in terms of gender.

Epigraphic data

As can be seen from Figure 1, the number of inscriptions and military diplomas on which women and children are mentioned whose father and/or partner was of British origin, is relatively low: only ten tell us that we are dealing with a family in which one or both partners were of British origin. Some British men and women may be identified by their names, as with two funerary monuments where the origin of the person is not mentioned but assumed to be British (Figure 1, Nos 11, 12). This gives us 12 inscriptions and diplomas.

Women

Allason-Jones (1999, 50) has stated that women living in Roman Britain can be identified through epigraphy, although 'references to names of women are few'. The same holds for British women living overseas. While it is clear when their partners hailed from the indigenous tribes of Roman Britain, there are considerable difficulties in identifying the origins of women.

The ethnic background of Valeria Irene is unknown, since it is not mentioned on the tombstone she erected for her British husband (Figure 1, No. 1). The same applies to Iulia Quinta who was buried together with her partner Titus Flavius Ingenius from Britannia Inferior (Figure 1, No. 2). In both cases there is insufficient information to allow identification of the origin on the basis of their names, since these were very widespread (Moscy 1983, 153, 239, 300). One wife's origin is known: Tutula originated from the Azali tribe in Pannonia, present-day Hungary (Figure 1, No. 7).

The other two women – Lollia Bodicca and Catonia Baudia – both have quite a remarkable cognomen, one which resembles the name of British rebel Queen Boudicca (Figure 1, Nos 6 and 12). Moreover, both of them were *coniunx* –

Nos.	Name of a man	Status	Origin	Name of a woman	Relation to a man	Origin of a women	Name of the children	Epigraphic source
1.	Aurelius Atianus	Unknown	Natione Britto	Valeria Irene	Wife	Unknown	Unknown	CIL XIII 1981
2.	Titus Flavius Ingenuus	Legionary soldier of Sixth legion Victrix	Provincia Britannia Inferior	Iulia Quinta	Partner	Unknown	Unknown	CIL VIII 5180
3.	Nig(...) Marinianus	<i>Eques singularis</i>	Natione Britannicianus				Nig(...) Marinianus	CIL VI 3279
4.	Iulius Victor	Beneficiarius of 20th legion Valeria Victrix	Provincia Britannia Superior	Iulia Thegusa	Sister	Same as brother		ILAlg. 3748
5.	Bollico, son of Icco, Icco	Soldier of <i>ala I Claudia Gallorum Capitoniana</i>	Britto				Aprilis, Iulius, Apronia, Victoria	RMM 20
6.	Flavius Britto	Centurion of 14th legion Gemina		Catonina Baudia	Wife	Unknown	Unknown	CIL VI 3594
7.	Lucco, son of Trenus	Foot soldier of <i>cohors I Britannica</i>	Dobunno	Tutula, daughter of Breucus	Wife	Azala	Similis, Lucca, Pacata	CIL XVI 49
8.	Marcus Ulpus, son of Sacco, Longinus	Foot soldier of <i>cohors I Brittonum Ulpia</i>	Belgus				Vitalis	CIL XVI 163
9.	Marcus Ulpus, son of Adcobrovatus, Novantico	Foot soldier of <i>cohors I Brittonum Ulpia</i>	Ratae				Marcus Ulpus N(...)?	CIL XVI 160
10.	Marcus Ulpus, son of Ulpus, N(...)	Foot soldier of <i>cohors I Brittonum Ulpia</i>	Son or grandson of Marcus Ulpus Novantico?					AE 1994, 1487
11.	Virssuccius	Cavalry man, image bearer of <i>cohors I Britannica</i>	Unknown, but assumed to be British (Birley 1980, 190)				Albanus	CIL III 3256
12.	Titus Flavius Virilis	Centurion of three British legions	Unknown, but assumed to be British (Malone 2006, 117)	Lollia Bodicca	Wife	Unknown	Flavius Victor, Victorinus	CIL VIII 2877

Figure 1. Epigraphic data.

legal wives of legionaries – and both of them erected tombstones for their deceased husbands who died in a foreign land: Virilis at Lambaesis in Numidia, Britto in Rome. Both husbands and wives were probably of British descent.

The origin of Virilis and his wife is considered to be British on the basis of the likeness of the wife's name to Boudicca and the career of Virilis, who served as the centurion in all legions stationed in Britain (Malone 2006, 117).

Flavius Britto, a centurion from 14th legion Gemina, was most likely a 'Briton' by birth, recruited into the legion during the Flavian dynasty. In order to enter the legion he was granted citizenship and probably received a new name: he was no longer called by his British name, but by a Roman name that indicated his origin: Britto. Catonia, his wife, was most likely a 'Briton'. Her nomen Catonia derives from the Celtic element *catu-* and her cognomen Baudia - from *boudi-* (Evans 1967, 156, 171). Although both female and male names with the element *bod-/boudi-* appear 26 times overseas against only once in Britain (Moscy 1983, 51, 53), it seems plausible that she was a British woman who followed her husband to his post overseas. The unpopularity of names starting with *boudi-* in Britain is understandable considering the impact of the suppression of the revolt in AD 61 and probable negative associations with the name.

These two British women have another thing in common: they followed their husbands to their postings, to Rome and Numidia – as did Iulia Thegusa from Britannia Superior, who died at Theveste where her brother Iulius Victor served (Figure 1, No. 4). It is plausible that Iulius Victor and his sister were British. The brother was probably recruited in the late C2nd, when there is evidence of local recruitment into the legions (Malone 2006, 117).

Women, wives, partners or sisters followed their military husbands, partners and brothers to their postings (Allason-Jones 1999, 48). Brandl (2008, 65 – 69) provides three examples of the presence of women living abroad with their partners and two examples of military families living in a foreign province. Allason-Jones (1999, 48) gives examples of sisters who followed their soldier brothers after the death of their fathers. The epigraphic material analyzed here suggests that at least three British women did the same. The questions are: were there more and how can one determine this? The logical place to start is the archaeological material, but it seems reasonable to pause and first discuss another important part of the family: children.

Children

Names of children are rare on funerary monuments, mostly appearing on military diplomas, when the father was discharged and the whole family was granted citizenship. In the case of 12 British families discussed here, children are mentioned on three funerary monuments and four diplomas (Figure 1, Nos 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12). All children were born into military families. The overview of the surviving evidence shows that British-born soldiers preferred to give their children typically Roman names, as can be seen on Figure 1 from the names of 13 children born from seven British fathers. It is interesting to note that fathers with typically 'Celtic'-sounding names gave Roman names to their offspring. It may be that when military families moved away from the province of their birth there was no longer a need to give a child a traditional Celtic name that would mark him or her out as different. Names that at one point were specific ethnic or regional markers may lose this identification role as time passes. It seems reasonable to assume that once families moved out of their province, ethnic markers such as names lost their connotation and the choice, whether deliberate or not, was to follow the mainstream culture, which was Roman.

Can archaeology add to the sparse epigraphic evidence? Can the epigraphic record be supported by the material evidence or does a combination of the two construct a much clearer picture than either of these separately? Unfortunately, the study of the presence of British children cannot as yet be taken further due to a dearth of relevant archaeological data. Hence, the evidence explored below most likely pertains to British women.

Archaeological data

Due to limited space this paper concentrates on one type of object, which may indicate the presence of British women and therefore British families overseas: the relatively well researched British 'import' items of Romano-British brooches that found their way overseas.

Romano-British brooches as indicators of the presence of Britons

Swift, in her study of 4th regional identity in dress accessories, concludes that 4th objects, be they British- or Pannonian-made, arrived at their destination overseas 'with the person wearing the objects' and she also notes that such persons were usually army followers or soldiers themselves (Swift 2000, 208). By the same measure it is possible to assume that in earlier periods, British-made objects, in this case brooches, travelled overseas with individuals who arrived from Britain, be it Britons or veterans returning home (Morris 2009). This section aims to establish the feasibility of this idea.

The types of brooches that are considered to have been produced in Britain are brooches with headloops (Allason-Jones 1995, 24). These can be divided into three major types: trumpet, headstud and umbonate. Each type can be divided into subtypes, but they never lose their major characteristic – a loop at the top, and in some cases at the bottom, of a brooch. Another type of brooch that is considered to be strictly British but without a headloop is the dragoness type (Croom 2004, 290; Johns 1996, 153). It must be noted as well that these types were produced between the late 1st and early 2nd AD and went out of fashion in the late 2nd, neatly bracketing their appearance overseas (Allason-Jones 1995, 24).

Morris (2009) has been able to trace 179 British-made brooches on 77 overseas sites. On ten sites, epigraphy directly attests the presence of British auxiliary units, as can be seen in Figure 2. On another eight sites, where British brooches were found in higher numbers, the presence of Britons and British objects can be connected through epigraphy, although not necessarily through the presence of British auxiliary units (Figure 2, 11 – 18). Four other sites located within the territory belonging to the *civitas Vangionum* are discussed below in connection with British women.

Although the work by Morris covers most of the British-made finds overseas, there are some omissions. The author of this article was able to trace four more sites where epigraphy attests to the presence of British auxiliary units and British-made brooches have been also identified: Xanten, Bumbesti, Obernburg and Brigetio (Figure 2, 19 – 22).

Nos	Place	Type of brooch	Presence of Britons	Additional notes	Relevant literature
1.	Nijmegen, The Netherlands	Seven headtuds, six trumpets, four umbonates and other four of different types	<i>Vexillatio Brittonum</i> (CIL XIII 12553,1; CIL XIII 12558, 1)		Morris 2009, Nos 2-24
2.	Hesselbach, Germany	One dolphin type	Numerus Brittonum Triputiensium (CIL XIII 6502, 6511, 6514, 6517, 6518, 6606)		Morris, 2009, No 96
3.	Köngen, Germany	Knee brooch, type T162 (see Bayley 2004, 170 for the discussion of its 'Britishness')	Most likely Numerus Brittonum Grinarionensium on the basis of the likeness of the names of the fort (Grinario) and the unit		Morris 2009, No 99
4.	Saalburg, Germany	Seven dolphin, five trumpet and one unclassified British type	<i>Contubernium Brittonum</i> (CIL XIII 11954a)		Böhme 1970, 5-7; Morris 2009, Nos 114 – 126
5.	Stockstadt, Germany	One disk-and-trumpet with two headloops	Most likely numerus Brittonum Nemaningensium (CIL XIII 6629, 6642) on the basis of the proximity of the find spot of inscription and the river after which the unit received its name		Morris 2009, No 127
6.	Zugmantel, Germany	Two trumpet		Böhme argues that both Zugmantel and Saalburg were occupied by British unit, which left only one epigraphic record, that of on the millstone, <i>contubernium Brittonum</i>	Böhme 1970, 5-7; Morris 2009, Nos 140 – 141
7.	Zadar, Croatia	A British brooch, headstud form		At Salona (CIL III 2067, 8756, 8762; ILJug 02 -680; 03 -2603, 2610) and Roman fort Bigeste (AE 2000 1177, 1180f; CIL III 14630) inscriptions were found which indicate the presence of <i>cohors Belgarum</i> (Belgii was a tribe from South Britain; not from Gallia Belgica. Other wise the units name would be <i>Belgicarum</i>).	Morris 2009, No 171
8.	Caseiu, Romania	A British brooch, headstud form	Two British cohorts: <i>cohors I Britannica</i> (AE 1929, 1; AE 1983, 862) and <i>cohors II Britannorum</i> (AE 1990, 851).		Morris 2009, No 172
9.	Volubilis, Morocco	One trumpet	<i>Vexillatio Brittonum</i> (IAM 02-02-363; 364)		Morris 2009, Nos 178-179
10.	Gyor, Hungary	Dragonesque		First British ala occupied the nearest fort, ca 40 km from Gyor, called Brigetio (AE 1940, 5)	Morris, 2009, No 174
11.	Bingen, Germany	Colchester type, T90 (see Bayley 2004, 148-150 for discussion of its 'Britishness')	Ninth legion Hispana taken directly from the Agricolan army in Britain and transferred to the Continent to participate in the Chattian wars, AD 83-85		Morris 2009, No 64

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Nos	Place	Type of brooch	Presence of Britons	Additional notes	Relevant literature
12.	Cologne, Germany	14 British-made brooches, including five trumpets, one headstud, one disk-and-trumpet	Three inscriptions attesting members of two British tribes – Dumnoni and Trinovantes (AE 1956, 249; AE 2003, 1218), and one of <i>cives Britto</i> (CIL XIII 8314)		Morris 2009, Nos 69 – 82
13.	Hedderheim, Germany	Eight various types, including three dolphin and one trumpet	Detachment of Ninth legion Hispana taken directly from the Agricola army in Britain and transferred to the Continent to participate in the Chattian wars, AD 83-85		Morris 2009, Nos 86 – 93
14.	Heldenbergen in der Wetterau, Germany	Two headstuds	Detachment of Ninth legion Hispana taken directly from the Agricola army in Britain and transferred to the Continent to participate in the Chattian wars, AD 83-85		Morris, 2009, Nos 94-95
15.	Hofheim, Germany	One trumpet	Detachment of Ninth legion Hispana taken directly from the Agricola army in Britain and transferred to the Continent to participate in the Chattian wars, AD 83-85		Morris 2009, No 97
16.	Mainz, Germany	One T-shaped brooch and one trumpet	Detachment of Ninth legion Hispana taken directly from the Agricola army in Britain and transferred to the Continent to participate in the Chattian wars, AD 83-85		Morris 2009, Nos 101-102
17.	Trier, Germany	Three headstuds and one trumpet	One inscription from a person from Deva (AE 1915, 70)		Morris 2009, Nos 132-135
18.	Wiesbaden, Germany	Two trumpets	Detachment of Ninth legion Hispana taken directly from the Agricola army in Britain and transferred to the Continent to participate in the Chattian wars, AD 83-85		Morris 2009, Nos 138-139
19.	Obernburg, Germany	One dolphin	Most likely numerous Brittonum Nemaningensium (CIL XIII 6622)		Steidl 2008, 162
20.	Xanten, Germany	Two trumpets, one half-disk-and-trumpet and one headstud	Stamps of <i>cohors II Britannorum</i> (CIL XIII 12424, 12425) and two inscriptions to British mothers Goddesses (CIL XIII 8631, 8631)		Bechert 1973, 46; Boelicke 2002, 75-76
21.	Brigetio, Hungary	One British brooch, headstud type	<i>Ala I Britannica</i> (AE 1940, 5)		Böhme 1970, 14
22.	Bumbesti, Romania	Dragonesque	Stamps of <i>cohors I Aurelia Brittonum</i> (CIL III 14485a=AE 1901 46)		Marinoiu 1999

Figure 2. British-made brooches and the presence of Britons and British auxiliary units.

The evidence suggests that these brooches arrived overseas with the clothing worn by British soldiers and there is a strong correlation between the groups originating from Britain and British brooches. Moreover, these brooches were in fashion in the period when the British soldiers arrived overseas. C2nd British-made brooches are rare on the Continent, although they do appear on sites such as Köngen, Stockstadt and Cologne, where epigraphy attests a British presence during this period. Therefore, in some cases it is possible, supported by the epigraphic data, to connect the presence of British brooches with the presence of emigrants.

Brooches associated with women as indicators of the presence of British women

Brooches were worn by both men and women. Therefore, as argued by Johns (1996, 146), it is difficult to make any gender distinctions. Women most likely wore a matching pair of brooches, joined by a chain (Johns 1996, 149). Croom (2004, 294) has argued that brooches with headloops were designed especially for the attachment of strings of beads or chains. Although it is not the aim of this paper to argue which British-made brooches are male and female types, some tentative suggestions can be made.

The three types of Romano-British brooches with headloops – trumpet, headstud and umbonate – are thought to have been worn solely by females (Croom 2004, 294). However, there is an ongoing discussion about whether all fibulae with loops should be regarded as female. Allason-Jones (1995, 24) has argued that brooches with headloops were ‘sexless’ and do not necessarily indicate the gender of a bearer, although she also pointed out that further work is needed in this area. Wearing brooches in pairs appears to be a female custom, since none of the tombstones from the Roman Empire depicts men wearing them in this fashion; however, Danubian funerary stones are full of depictions of women wearing pairs without a chain (Allason-Jones 1995, 24). Moreover, as pointed out by Allason-Jones, headloops are rarely found overseas, which suggests a British modification of Continental styles. When these two assumptions are brought together, the following idea can be suggested for consideration: if headloops are likely to be a British ‘invention’ and wearing brooches in pairs is a female Continental custom, is it possible that British women adopted the idea while modifying it to look ‘local’? In other words: were loops ‘an invention of tradition’?

Bayley (2004, 214) noticed a significant distinction between some brooches with headloops. On some brooches the loop appears too small to be able to support a chain and on many the headtab is solid and so has no function; others had a much bigger headloop, suggesting they were indeed worn with a chain. It is plausible, then, that the latter are female types while the former were worn by males.

In this study only brooches with headloops suitable for a chain and/or found in pairs have been considered. As argued above, some British-made brooches arrived overseas with their owners; therefore it is likely that British women who accompanied their husbands overseas brought with them their brooches as well (Morris 2009). Swift (2000, 210) noticed that for C4th female objects such as bracelets and beads the distributions neatly corresponded with army movements. In Nijmegen a pair joined by a chain was found (Morris 2009, Nos 18 – 19); as indicated in Figure 2, this was a station for the *vexillatio Brittonum*.

On the Continent some British-made brooches with headloops have been found on sites where the epigraphy is silent about the presence of British auxiliary units. Although they can be Continental copies or trade goods worn by the local population, there is a possibility that they did indeed arrive with British women. For instance on sites in Germania Superior such as Alzey, Bad Kreuznach, Flonheim and Worms, four trumpet brooches (one a pair found in a female grave), and a disk and trumpet type with headloop were found (Grünwald 1990, 118 – 120; Morris 2009, Nos 62, 63 and 85). Worms was the capital of the *civitas Vangionum* and Bad Kreuznach, Flonheim and Alzey were part of that *civitas*. Vangiones formed an auxiliary cohort and the first cohort of Vangiones served in Britain in the C2nd (Jarrett 1994, 50). It is plausible that, after 25 years of service, soldiers returning to their homeland may have brought back souvenirs from the province where they served. The question is: were these souvenir brooches or were they worn by accompanying British women who followed their Vangionian partners to their homeland? Here one needs to be careful to make a distinction between types of trumpet brooches: those at Bad Kreuznach and Alzey do not have a headloop, which suggests that they were for men, while those from Flonheim and Worms did have headloops, suggesting female use. Therefore, here we are probably dealing with brooches that arrived both as souvenir items and as accessories for British women’s clothes.

This example is not alone. British-made female brooches have been found on sites overseas that belonged to:

1. Tribal areas of the Nervii who were enrolled into five cohorts serving in Britain (Jarrett 1994, 63 – 64). Two pairs of brooches were found in Blicquy, Schaerbeek near Brussels and Velzeke; one in Destelbergen, Hofstade and Waasmunster in Belgium (Morris 2009, Nos 27 – 29, 32 – 34, 37 and 38).
2. Tribal areas of the Tungri whose first and second cohorts served in Britain (Jarrett 1994, 48 – 50). One headstud brooch was found in Tongeren, Belgium (Morris 2009, No 36) and one umbonate brooch was found in Heerlen, The Netherlands (Morris 2009, No 1).

It seems reasonable to suggest that these British-made brooches arrived in these tribal areas together with British women who followed their partners of different origin. There were mixed marriages in the Roman army, as noted by Allason-Jones (1999, 44), so one might assume the existence of families where one partner was British and the other of a different ethnic background.

Conclusions

Swan's view on pottery imported into Britain applies here, if we modify her conclusion slightly: 'it seems that the occurrence of *British-made brooches imported to the Continent* need not be taken at face value in every case. Their distribution may not always reflect straightforward determinants such as trade, but may stem from more complex circumstances' (Swan 2009, 90; italicized text this author's own modification). In the present study a correlation between the presence of British units and British-made brooches overseas was detected, leading to the suggestion that the jewelry items traveled to the mainland with their owners.

The presence of British women who followed their military partners was supported by the combined epigraphic and archaeological record. In the majority of cases where the supposed female British fibulae were attested overseas, the place was inhabited by soldiers who had previously served in Britain and returned home or by soldiers of British origin serving in British auxiliary units. In the former case the returning soldiers may have taken the brooches as souvenirs, but it is equally possible that they arrived on the clothes of their British wives.

The idea that some of the British-made brooches arrived overseas as trade items is not disputed here. At least half the Romano-British brooches found on the Continent 'might have reached their destinations as an exotic trade in exotic British artifacts' (Morris pers. comment). The number of sites where British-made brooches appeared in connection with British emigrants, be it Britons, veterans or returning soldiers, is 30 against 51 where no connection has yet been detected. However, a distinction should be made between brooches as trade goods and personal possessions. The focus here has been on raising the possibility that British finds overseas did not necessarily arrive there as trade goods, but with natives of the British Isles, whether males or females.

These investigations could usefully be taken a step further by attempting to establish if these brooches can be considered ethnic markers. Swift emphasizes that 'most female inhabitants of Britain would have a strong insular identity in the C4th and to the outsider British material culture would have been readily identifiable' (2000, 211). If in the C4th Britons looked different, did the same apply to the earlier periods? Did wearing a British brooch mark British women or men out as different? To answer these questions with any level of confidence, further research is needed and subsequent publications of my ongoing research will address these issues.

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Abbreviations

AE – *L'Année Epigraphique*

CIL – *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

IAM – *Inscriptions antiques du Maroc 2. Inscriptions latines*

ILAlg – *Inscriptions latines d'Algérie*

ILJug – *Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Iugoslavia repertae et editae sunt*

RMM – Pferdehirt, B. 2004. *Römische Militärdiplome und Entlassungsurkunden in der Sammlung des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums*. Mainz, Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum.

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