

Apex Use in the Vindolanda and TPSulp. Tablets in Comparison

As we have seen, the use of *apices* is characteristic of the writing of scribes in both the Vindolanda and TPSulp. tablets, but a fine-grained analysis highlights similarities and differences between the two corpora, and between them and the inscriptions studied by other scholars.

As shown by Table 40, in terms of the distribution of *apices* across all vowels, both the tablets of the Sulpicii and the Vindolanda tablets favour <a> and <o> compared to the inscriptional evidence collected by Flobert (1990) and Rolfe (1922),¹ which show a wide range from 54% (Vienne/Lyon) through 60% (*Laudatio*), 68% (speech of Claudius) to 70% (*Res Gestae*). TPSulp.'s ratio of 78% is not massively higher than that of *Res Gestae*, while Vindolanda's is far greater at 96%. Vindolanda also has a preponderance of <ó> compared to <á>, whereas the *Laudatio*, *Res Gestae*, speech of Claudius, and TPSulp. have more <á> than <ó>, and the two are roughly equal in the Vienne/Lyon corpus.² Unsurprisingly, given the emphasis on <á> and <ó> at Vindolanda, no other corpus has such a restricted range of vowel types which bear an *apex* as Vindolanda.

Presumably, these particular features of the Vindolanda tablets also partly reflect the text type and social context in which the letters were written: as we have already observed (see pp. 235–6), *apices* are particularly common in the address and greetings formulas of letters (33 out of 105 *apices* appear in these places, almost all on names). In these, ablatives and datives of the second declension feature very

¹ All figures are taken from Flobert except those of the speech of Claudius from Lyon (CIL 13.1668), which come from Rolfe (1922: 93). The reliability of the latter is somewhat compromised by the fact that Rolfe enumerates 77 instances of *apices* and 49 of *i-longa*, but gives a total for both of 130; it is unclear where the missing 4 come from.

² The overall tendency of <o> and <a> to have the *apex* more than other vowels across all the corpora may simply be because /a:/ and /ɔ:/ appear more often than the other long vowels and diphthongs across the Latin lexicon.

Table 40 Apices in different corpora

	<i>Laudatio Turiae</i>	<i>Res Gestae</i>	Vienne/Lyon	Speech of Claudius	Tab. Vindol.	TPSulp.
a	52 = 39%	185 = 43%	56 = 25%	32 = 42%	34 = 32%	35 = 46%
e	29 = 22%	66 = 15%	29 = 13%	13 = 17%	1 = 1%	5 = 7%
o	28 = 21%	117 = 27%	65 = 29%	20 = 26%	67 = 64%	24 = 32%
u	23 = 17%	57 = 13%	35 = 16%	12 = 16%	3 = 3%	7 = 9%
y		1 = < 1%				
ae	2 = 1%	1 = < 1%	38 = 17%			
au			1 = < 1%			4 = 5%
eu						1 = 1%
Total	134	427	224	77	105	76

strongly, since most of the letters are sent by men to men; there are only two first declension names with an *apex* in a letter's greeting or address: *Seuerá* (Tab. Vindol. 291), and *-inná* (324).

The proportion of *apices* which are actually on long vowels is smaller in the tablets of the Sulpicii at 72% than all the other corpora, although not far below that of the Vienne/Lyon corpus's 75–77% and Vindolanda's 82%;³ in the official inscriptions practically all *apices* are on long vowels: speech of Claudius 100%; *Laudatio Turiae* 96%; *Res Gestae* 98%. Despite Vindolanda's higher ratio of long vowels, I would suggest that this is an artefact of the scribes' preference for word-final <a> and <o> as a site for the *apex*; this derives in part from generic and textual factors, rather than reflecting a preference for marking long vowels (see pp. 235–6).

At Vindolanda 79/100 = 79% of *apices* on polysyllables fall on the final syllable, while in the tablets of the Sulpicii the figure is much lower at 35/71 (49%). Again, the tablets of the Sulpicii are more similar to the pattern found in inscriptional evidence: in the *Res Gestae* 40% of *apices* are on long vowels or diphthongs at the end of a word, in the *Laudatio* of Turia 49%; in the corpus from Vienne and Lyon 52/203 = 26% of *apices* in polysyllabic words are on final syllables.⁴ There are also notable differences in the type of final syllable which receives the *apex* in the tablets of the Sulpicii compared to those from Vindolanda. At Vindolanda, all but four *apices* in the final syllable are on a word-final vowel (75/79 = 95%; the exceptions are *uoluerás*, *faciás*, *praecipíás*, *censús*), most of which are /ɔ:/. The favouring of word-final /ɔ:/ as the site of the *apex* at Vindolanda may not be completely isolated in this regard. According to Rolfe (1922: 92), the dative and ablative ending in /ɔ:/ is almost never given an *apex* in the *Res Gestae* but is frequent in other inscriptions.⁵ In the tablets of the Sulpicii 27/35 =

³ 82 out of 105 *apices* are on certainly long vowels, but the 2 instances of *ego* and 2 of uncertain length should not be included in the total.

⁴ The figures are taken from Flobert's (1990: 109) table, and were calculated by adding together the figures for vowels and diphthongs in polysyllabic words (not including *i-longa* or monosyllables). His figure, at p. 105, of 23.21% is for long vowels and diphthongs at the end of a word, including *i-longa* with *apices*, and including monosyllables.

⁵ 74 times in CIL 12, apparently, a figure which is not much use without knowing how many instances of this ending there are in total.

77% of *apices* in polysyllables are on a word-final vowel. Assuming that final <am> counts as containing a long vowel, the 3 instances on nominative singulars in *-us* (*Eunús* twice in the same document, and *Cinn[a]/mús*), and *nominé* are the only exception to the rule that the *apex* in a final syllable of a polysyllabic word appears on a long vowel ($31/35 = 89\%$) in TPSulp.

On the basis of these comparisons, in terms of which vowels receive an *apex*, and position in the word, both the Vindolanda tablets and those of the Sulpicii are fairly divergent from the other inscriptional corpora for which figures are available, although this is more pronounced with the Vindolanda tablets than with those of the Sulpicii (there is also an interesting tendency for the Vienne/Lyon inscriptions to differ from the long official inscriptions). The use of the *apex* by the scribes of the Sulpicii arguably comes closer to the advice of Quintilian than that of Vindolanda, in that first declension ablatives in long /a:/, which may receive the *apex*, are carefully distinguished from nominative singulars and neuter plurals ending in /a/, which may not. However, in both corpora (originally) long vowels are frequently given an *apex* even when this would not lead to confusion with any other word which differs only in the vowel length of one of its vowels. In this regard both corpora match with a more general disregard of the grammarians' advice in epigraphic contexts (Rolfe 1922: 88, 92).

Both corpora are also characterised by a higher rate of *apices* being placed on short vowels (although long vowels are still greatly preferred). In the case of the Vindolanda tablets this seems to be the result of a determined placement of the *apex* on word-final <a> and <o> without regard to length. Where *apices* occur in non-final syllables, it is possible but not certain that this is the result of placement on the stressed syllable. In my view this is more likely in the TPSulp. tablets than at Vindolanda, where it is at least as likely that scribes tended simply to mark the vowel in an initial syllable.

Apart from these questions of which vowels, where in the word, receive the *apex*, we can also compare the corpora in terms of questions regarding positioning within larger units of texts. Within the letters they frequently seem to be used to mark out greeting and

address sections from the rest of the letter, in common with letters as a genre from other places. This may interact with a more general feeling that names deserved to be marked out by the presence of an *apex* (as we have also seen in the Isola Sacra inscriptions, and has been suggested for other inscriptions; see p. 211 and Chapter 19). It is notable that a large proportion of the words with *apices* on them in both the Vindolanda and TPSulp. tablets are personal or place names. In the tablets of the Sulpicii, 30/76 (39%) of *apices* are on personal names, including all 5 instances of the apex on a diphthong (one the imperial name *Augustus*), and 9 out of 16 of the *apices* on a short vowel.