

***Magiovinium, Dropshort Farm, near Fenny Stratford, Buckinghamshire**

Richard Coates
University of the West of England, Bristol

**Magiovinium* was convincingly identified by Rivet (1970) with the major Roman settlement under the buildings and in the fields of Dropshort Farm (National Grid reference SP 888338), a little south-east of Fenny Stratford.¹ The settlement is often stated to be in Little Brickhill parish, but in fact the partly conjectural site straddles Watling Street, which here forms the boundary with Bow Brickhill, and Dropshort Farm's buildings are to be found on the Bow Brickhill side (Roucoux 1984: 18). Pottery from the first to the late fourth centuries, a coin manufacturing hoard (Zeepvat *et al.* 1994) and coins from as late as the reign of Valentinian (364-375 C. E.) have been found there, and there was a fort in use perhaps from Neronian to Flavian times (c.54-96 C. E.). Excavations in 1978-80 revealed probable fourth-century post-hole structures (Neal 1987). This place is registered three times in the Antonine Itinerary, which indicates that it was an inhabited place at least as early as the reign of Diocletian (284-305 C. E.), when the Itinerary is believed to have acquired its final form (Rivet and Smith 1979: 153), and possibly much earlier. It appears in the ablative case-form in itinera II, VI, and VIII as *Magiovinto*, *Magiovinio*, *Magionvinio* respectively.² It is generally accepted, for example on the Ordnance Survey map of Roman Britain, that the second form is the correct one, and that will not be challenged since it seems to me that no plausible case can be made for either of the others. The place-name has not been found in other Roman-period sources, nor after the end of the Roman era.

This name is problematic. The only serious attempt to explain it is that by Jackson (1970: 76). He suggests that the first element is British **magjo-*, paralleled in certain Gaulish personal names (see also e.g. Lambert 1997: 44) but otherwise absent in British person- and place-nomenclature, and probably meaning 'great' (cf. Matasović and Lubotsky 2008: s.v.); and that the second may also be seen in the place-name *Vinovia*, the fort at Binchester, County Durham, but concludes that both it and *Vinovia* (1970: 81) are etymologically obscure. Rivet and Smith (1979: 504) concur that *Vinovia* is obscure. They also adduce *(Cla)vinium* from the Ravenna Cosmography, which they themselves argue is probably a garble of *Glevum* Gloucester (1979: 309); accordingly this will be ignored here. There is therefore no accepted view of what the British form

¹ For the history of the identification, see Roucoux (1984: 40-43).

² The third of these spellings is given by Rivet and Smith (1979: 406), but they print *Magiovinio* in the discussion of iter VIII (1979: 167-168), and the form with the extra <n> on p. 406 appears to be a transcription error by them.

responsible for **-vin(i)-* might have meant. In fact, there is no certainty that it is British, though a similar element appears in the tribal name *Venicones* (with Gaulish analogues), the place-name *Venonis*, and the later *Venedotia*, i.e. Gwynedd (1979: 490-492). There is no compelling reason to associate this **ven-* with our **vin-*, because it seems never to occur as a second element.

The only other conjecturally Celtic place-name that resembles the first element structurally is *Magia* in the Tabula Peutingeriana, possibly denoting Maienfeld in Graubünden, Switzerland (Falileyev, Gohil and Ward 2010: 155). If this is Celtic, the first element may be **magos* 'plain'. However, given that *Magia* is a place-name, presumably with a place-name forming suffix *-ia*, it seems unlikely that it can, in this form, be a candidate for the first element of another place-name, especially if the second is obscure. There was also *Magia Vicus*, an unlocated place in Asia Minor, whose name is judged unlikely to be Celtic by Sims-Williams (2006: 293).³ **Whilst they should not be ignored, then, the relevance to *Magiovinium* of *Magia* and Proto-Celtic **magjo-* cannot be taken for granted.**

Romano-British [RB] names in *-ium* (the normalized Latin nominative-accusative form corresponding to the ablative form which often appears in itineraries) fall into several etymological categories. The etymologies are not discussed fully here, nor are the proposed lemmata (citation-forms); they are taken to be as suggested by Rivet and Smith.⁴

- *-ium* is appended to an unextended root serving as (the stem of) a river-name (*Isurium*)
- *-ium* is appended to an extended root serving as (the stem of) a river-name (*Bremenium*, *Canonium*, *Cataractonium*, *Corinium* (but on the detail of this name see Coates 2013), possibly *Lagentium* (see below), probably *Londinium* (Coates 1999), *Rutunium*, *Segontium*); there are also names in British **-owjo-* such as *Combretovium* which may belong in this category
- *-ium* is appended to an interpretable Celtic non-anthroponymic base to form a place-name (*Bovium*, *Bannoalium*, *Cantium*, *Coccium*, *Pennocrucium*, *Regulbium*,

³ Note also the personal name *Magio* found in an inscription from Gigen, Bulgaria (Falileyev 2013: 88), which could be compared with the Gaulish element mentioned above.

⁴ Many of our most familiar RB place-names are in fact not recorded in ancient times in what is now their most familiar form. Having pedantically made an implicit point above, with my use of the asterisk, about the use of unrecorded nominative forms as lemma ta and citation-forms, I shall fall into line and omit the asterisk used for such a purpose in what follows.

Rerigonium, Trimontium, Tripontium; and perhaps **Durocuccium* Dorchester-on-Thames (discussed in Coates 2006))

- *-ium* forms names meaning ‘place associated with X’ where X is the name of a group of people or a lexical term for one (*(Duro)cornovium, Gobannium, Lagentium* (also discussed in Breeze 2002, where the base is taken to be a river-name, probably correctly), *Longovicium, Vercovicium*)

- *-ium* forms names meaning ‘place associated with X’ where X is a personal name. This is true most obviously of *Blestium* Monmouth, *Branogenium* Leintwardine, *Burrium* Usk, *Luguvalium* Carlisle, *Verulamium* St Albans (also discussed in Coates 2005), possibly *Viroconium* Wroxeter, and probably the unlocated *Bolvellaunium* in the Ravenna Cosmography.

(See Rivet and Smith 1979 under the relevant names in all these categories.)

Other *-ium* names have bases which are not fully understood (*Ariconium, Belerium, Morbium, Tampium, Verubium*), though Andrew Breeze has over recent years offered suggestions about *Morbium* (2001; emending to **Mervium*⁵) and *Verubium* (2004; emending to **Verudium*⁶).

What about *Magiovinium*? The base is apparently not a river-name. The river at Dropshort was formerly known as the *Lovat*. Since this is most likely a Brittonic name (Ekwall 1928: 263-264), it probably did not have a contemporary alternative. There is no Brittonic topographical term that is suitable as the base-word. In the light of the categorization just offered, these facts allow us to propose identifying the first element of the RB name as a group-name or a personal name. In view of what is said above about **vin-*, **Magiovin-* does not appear to be comprehensively analysable as Celtic, though the first element is consistent with the **magjo-* also noted above, and that element may have influenced the form of the name as it appears in the record even if it is not etymologically responsible for it.

An alternative approach to it can be given by analysing it as RB **Māgiovini-* representing (adapting, britticing) a Germanic personal name **Māga-winiz* ‘kinsman’ + ‘friend’, a name whose philological descendant is actually on record from Anglo-Saxon England. This appears as *mequini*, the name of two *clerici* in the early-ninth century

⁵ But why not **Merbium*, if it is as claimed from the ancestor of Welsh *merf* ‘insipid, weak’?

⁶ Though images of the probable *Verubium* (Noss Head in Caithness) that I have seen do not show any of it as having such a remarkable redness as the proposed emendation would suggest, despite its consisting geologically of Old Red Sandstone. It may be redder when viewed *in situ* and in particular weathers.

portion of the *Liber vitae Dunelmensis* (Sweet 1885: 159, l. 202 and 161, l. 293; Searle 1897: 345),⁷ and in the expression *meʒuines paed*, *meʒuuines pæd*, ‘Mægwine’s path’ in a very early charter boundary of Lyminge, Kent (late 7th century (BCS 97, S 19; BCS 98, S 21). For this, see discussion by Wallenberg (1931: 25), Insley (2001: 64; the form is taken by Insley, following Pierre Chaplais, as reflecting Northumbrian influence), and Hough (2001: 110-111). Hough correctly dismisses an unsatisfactory alternative account by Oliver (1998).⁸

It would be an anachronism to call this personal name in the context of this place-name an English one, but it is found in a shape – specifically, with the spelling <gi> – which appears to be ancestral to the English name. Old English [OE] has no medial [g], unlike other Germanic [Gmc] languages, for example Old High German [OHG]; note OHG names containing the same first element, such as *Maghelm* and *Magulf(us)*, which do have [g]. Early OE had a fricative or later a frictionless continuant in the relevant environment. Could the RB form indicate [ɣ] or [j^h] rather than [gj]? The pre-migration coastal dialects of Germanic (following the account of Campbell 1947) show fronting of *[ā] to *[æ̃], which causes a following */g/, phonetically the velar fricative [ɣ], to become a palatal fricative [j^h] and eventually a frictionless continuant [j]. Luick (1914-40: §350) dates this fronting to the third or fourth century, and the consequent palatalization of adjacent original Germanic velar consonants, including [ɣ] to [j], to the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century (§702). Medially, palatalization occurs only between two front vowels or when [j] follows in the next syllable (§637.2). It therefore seems unlikely, on chronological grounds, that the form could be simply Germanic as it stands. The effect which we see might therefore be due to transmission via British in the manner suggested above, i.e. the name would be britticed Germanic; either <gi> might represent pre-palatalization Gmc [ɣ] in a context where British intervocalic lenition was not yet operative, or the analogy of the British element **magjo-* may have been sufficient to justify the spelling. The historical OE spellings of the suggested given name, which have consistent <e> in the first syllable, whilst evidently being interpretable in the Lyminge charters as Kentish reflexes of pre-OE short [æ], might also be taken as non-West-Saxon forms of a long-established name **Mægwine* (from the suggested Gmc **Māga-winiz*) both in the Kentish names and in the names of the *clerici* from Durham.

We might instead take <gi> as a Latin-writer’s way of representing Germanic [ɣ]. There is no phonological difficulty. Indeed, alternation between <gi> and <i> is found in Latin-alphabet renditions of such Gaulish personal names as *Ma(g)iorix*, and (hard to date) evolution of *[gj] to [j] is generally assumed for some Celtic etymologies (Lambert

⁷ In *Liber vitae Dunelmensis*, Old English stressed long [æ:] from Gmc *[ā] is usually written <ae>, but NB the form *reduulf* (Sweet 1885: 186/449 and 461 and 476, 155/70).

⁸ The OHG cognate *māg* probably occurs in such Alamannic name forms as *Maghelm*, *Magulfus*, etc., though these are lemmatized with a short /a/ in Borgolte *et al.*, 606b.

1997: 44).⁹ I have discussed this orthographical point elsewhere (see Coates 1991: 18 and 75, and note references to the relevant literature on Vulgar Latin there). The widespread orthographic phenomenon is typically found in Latin from the fourth century (Väänänen 1971: 95-97), which is consistent with the possible date of the Antonine Itinerary in its final form. <gi> may therefore be for [j], as a (Romano-)British sound-substitution for Gmc [ɣ].

I am encouraged to pursue the complex argument just presented over the formally simpler possibility that *Magio-* represents Continental Celtic *Magio-* or *Mago-*, with intervocalic lenition of [g] to [j] and a Vulgar Latin orthographic interpretation of the lenition product in line with what I have just sketched, partly because the problem of identifying the element **vin-* would remain in that solution, and partly because such a Roman-period lenition seems to be Continental only; British lenition is generally considered to postdate the evidence we are considering from the Antonine Itinerary (Jackson 1953: summary on 560-561; Schrijver 1995: VI.5 calls the insular changes to and contextual loss of [-gj-] late Proto-British).

In the end, our choice comes down to seeing **-vin-* either as an aberrant and unexplained form of an uncertain Celtic element found only in a different structural position elsewhere in RB sources as *ven-*, or to seeing our base-name here as Germanic with a modest Celtic and/or Latin phonological and orthographical adjustment with good parallels.

If we adopt the second option, I do not suggest that the name should be pounced on to support a theory of large-scale proto-English population in the Roman Britain for which there is no other linguistic evidence (contrast e.g. Oppenheimer 2006: esp. ch. 9). It indicates that at least one man whose name, and perhaps his stock, originated beyond the bounds of the empire had achieved a status allowing his name to be incorporated into a place-name fit to be recorded in an imperial document. **He must have been in Britain in an imperial capacity, so the place-name could be argued to be simply Latin rather than latinized British; but the toponymic model suggested by the range of data offered above is clearly local and British.**

Since, as noted above, the original of the Antonine Itinerary is believed to have acquired its present form in the reign of Diocletian, the presence in Britain of this man

⁹ This is a complex and uncertain matter. For some material bearing on it, see for example on British Schrijver (1995: 302-312); Sims-Williams (2003: 51, note 185, and 85, note 425); and on Continental Celtic Ellis Evans (1967: 400); Sims-Williams 2013: 46-47; Eska (2013: §22 (5) b). The issue is complicated in some onomastic material by the uncertainty, for example, about whether certain names with an element *boio-* ‘hitter, fighter’ derive from Proto-Celtic **bojo-* or **bogjo-* (Falileyev *et al.* 2010: 10 and references there).

with a Germanic name probably predates the establishment of units of *foederati*, a mid-to-late fourth-century phenomenon. The presence of troops with Germanic names in Britain is proven epigraphically by the famous inscription commemorating the not precisely datable *numerus Hnaudifridi* from Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall (RIB 1576; other names from Wall inscriptions have been considered Germanic also, including those of the goddesses to whom Hnaudifridus (Gmc **Hnaudifriþuz*) set up an altar).

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to John Insley for an exhilarating correspondence about this name in June 2002, and to Alexander Falileyev for more recent profitable discussion.

References

BCS (followed by a number). A document in Birch, W[alter] de G., ed. (1885-99) *Cartularium saxonicum: a collection of charters relating to Anglo-Saxon history*. London: Whiting and co.

Borgolte, Michael, Dieter Geuenich and Karl Schmid (1986) *Subsidia Sangallensia*, vol. I: *Materialien und Untersuchungen zu den Verbrüderungsbüchern und zu den älteren Urkunden des Stiftsarchivs St. Gallen*. St. Gallen: Staatsarchiv und Stiftsarchiv St. Gallen.

Breeze, Andrew (2001) The British-Latin place-names *Arbeia*, *Corstopitum*, *Dictim*, and *Morbium*, *Durham Archaeological Journal* 16, 21-25.

Breeze, Andrew (2002) *Lagentium*, the Roman name of Castleford. *Transactions of the Yorkshire Dialect Society* 20, cumulative part 102, 59-62.

Breeze, Andrew (2004) Some Celtic place-names of Scotland: Ptolemy's *Verubium Promontorium*, Bede's *Urbs Giudi*, Mendick, Minto, and Panlathy. *Scottish Language* 23, 57-67.

Campbell, A[listair] (1947) West Germanic problems in the light of modern dialects. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 46, 1-14.

Coates, Richard (1991) *The ancient and modern names of the Channel Islands: a linguistic history*. Stamford: Paul Watkins.

Coates, Richard (1998) A new explanation of the name of London. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 96.2, 203-229.

- Coates, Richard (2005) *Verulamium*, the Romano-British name of St Albans. *Studia Celtica* 39, 169-176.
- Coates, Richard (2006) The pre-English name of Dorchester-on-Thames. *Studia Celtica* 40, 51-62.
- Coates, Richard (2013) Rethinking Romano-British **Corinium*. *Antiquaries Journal* 93, 1-11.
- Ekwall, Eilert (1928) *English river-names*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Evans, D. Ellis (1967) *Gaulish personal names*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Eska, Joseph (2013) A salvage grammar of Galatian. *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 60, 51-63.
- Falileyev, Alexander (2013) *The Celtic Balkans*. Aberystwyth: CMCS.
- Falileyev, Alexander, with Ashwin E. Gohil and Naomi Ward (2010) *Dictionary of Continental Celtic place-names. A Celtic companion to the Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman world*. Aberystwyth: CMCS.
- Hough, Carole (2001) The non-Celtic origin of *mequines paed* in Kent. *NOWELE (North-West European Language Evolution)* 38, 109-113.
- Insley, John (2001) Lyminge. In H. Beck *et al.*, eds, [*Hoops*] *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, 2nd edn, vol. XIX. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 58-69.
- Jackson, Kenneth H. (1953) *Language and history in early Britain*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Jackson, Kenneth H. (1970) See Rivet (1970).
- Lambert, Pierre-Yves (1997) *La langue gauloise*. Paris: Éditions Errance.
- Luick, Karl, ed. by Friedrich Wild and Herbert Koziol (1914-40) *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache*, vol. I [no more published]. Strasbourg: Tauchnitz. [Reprinted Oxford: Blackwell (1964).]
- Matasović, Ranko, and Alexander Lubotsky (2008) *Etymological dictionary of Proto-Celtic*. Leiden: Brill.

Neal, David S. (1987) Excavations at Magiovinium, Buckinghamshire, 1978-80. *Records of Buckinghamshire* 29, 1-124.

Oliver, Lisi (1998) Irish influence on orthographic practice in early Kent. *NOWELE (North-West European Language Evolution)* 33, 93-113.

Oppenheimer, Stephen (2006) *The origins of the British*. London: Robinson.

RIB = R[obin] G. Collingwood and R[ichard] P. Wright (1965) *Roman inscriptions of Britain*, vol. I: *Inscriptions on stone*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Rivet, A. L[eo] F. (1970) The British section of the Antonine Itinerary. *Britannia* 1, 34-82 [including appendix on Romano-British names in the Antonine Itinerary by Kenneth Jackson].

Rivet, A. L[eo] F. and Colin Smith (1979) *The place-names of Roman Britain*. London: Batsford.

Roucoux, Omer (1984) *The Roman Watling Street from London to High Cross*. Dunstable: Dunstable Museum Trust.

S (followed by a number). A document in Sawyer, Peter H., ed. (1968) *Anglo-Saxon charters: an annotated list and bibliography*. London: Royal Historical Society (Guides and Handbooks 8).

Schrijver, Peter (1995) *Studies in British Celtic historical phonology*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Searle, W[illiam] G. (1897) *Onomasticon anglo-saxonicum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sims-Williams, Patrick (2003) *The Celtic inscriptions of Britain: phonology and chronology, c. 400-1200*. Oxford: Blackwell for The Philological Society (publication 37).

Sims-Williams, Patrick (2006) *Ancient Celtic place-names in Europe and Asia Minor*. Oxford: Blackwell for The Philological Society (publication 39).

Sims-Williams, Patrick (2013) The Celtic composition-vowels -o- and -io-. In Juan Luis García Alonso, ed., *Continental Celtic word formation: the onomastic data*. Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 37-50.

Sweet, Henry, ed. (1885) *The oldest English texts*. London: Early English Text Society (old series 83).

Väänänen, Veikko (1971) *Introducción al latín vulgar*. Madrid: Gredos.

Wallenberg, J[ohannes] K. (1931) *Kentish place-names*. Uppsala: Lundequistka bokhandeln.

Zeepvat, R. J. [Bob], M[atthew] Ponting, P[auline] T. Marney, J[anet] Lang and M[ike] Cowell (1994) A Roman coin manufacturing hoard from *Magiovinium*, Fenny Stratford, Bucks. *Britannia* 25, 1-19.