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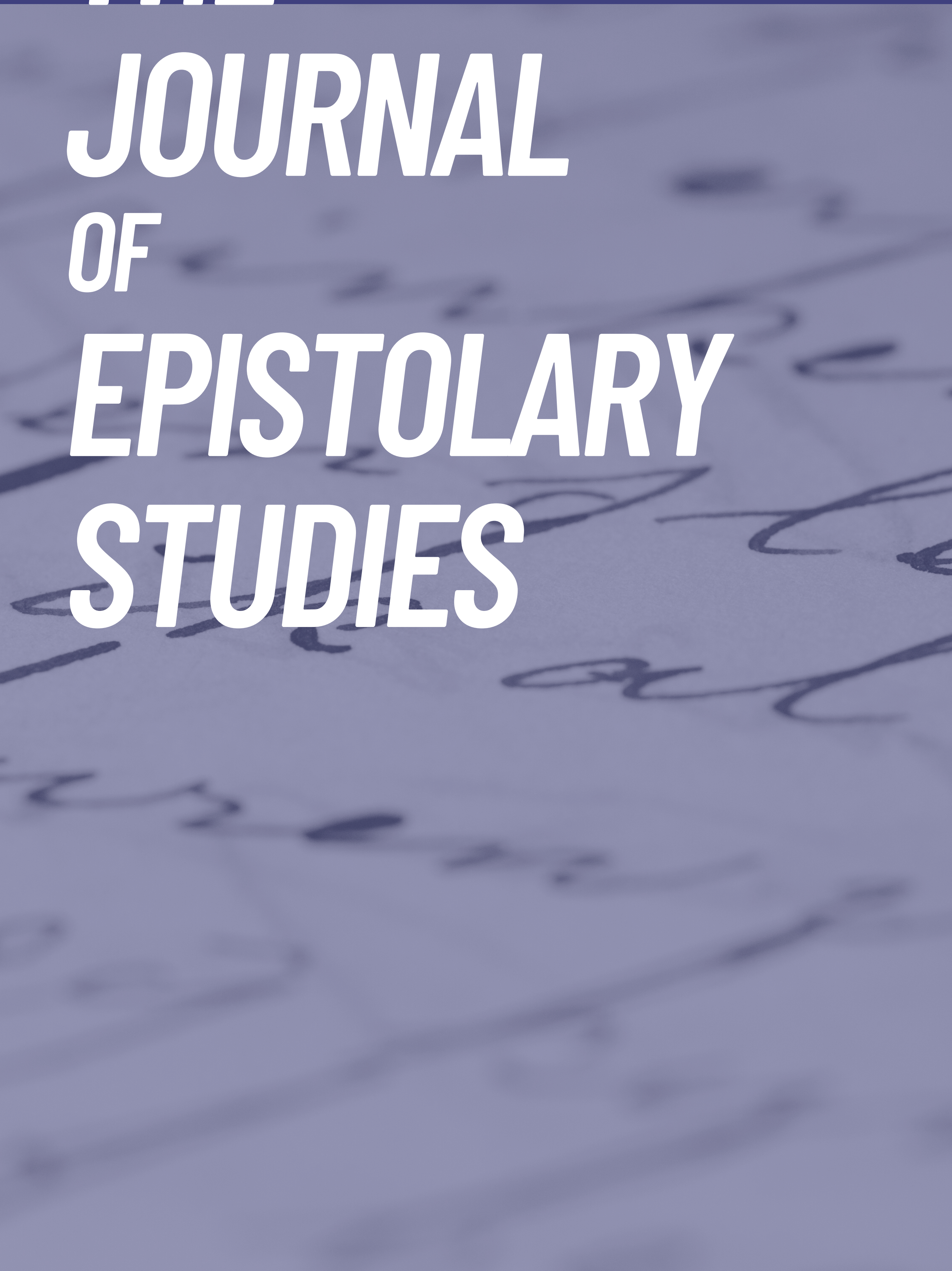

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The Journal of Epistolary Studies (*JES*) is an open-access online journal that offers a publication venue for scholars researching in a major genre hitherto underserved in periodical publication. It is a peer-reviewed, articles-only journal dedicated to publishing quality research in all areas of epistolary study, bringing together scholarship on letters and letter writing from across disciplines, cultures, and historical time periods. Social, historical, literary, linguistic, bibliographical, and material approaches to letters and letter writing are all considered.

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An Empire of Letters: The Vindolanda Tablets, Epistolarity, and Roman Governance

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Abstract: Around 800 Roman *tilia*—writing tablets made from folded slivers of wood veneer and a little over postcard size—have been found in archaeological investigations at Vindolanda, a Roman fort in northern England. Dated to the period 85 CE to 130 CE, their existence is helping revise knowledge of the Roman letter and the part it played in how military governance was organized, the ways in which personal, public, and military aspects were interrelated, as well as informing other relationships existing between the occupying imperial legions and local Britons. Discussion focuses on four connected areas of inquiry. Firstly, it explores the relationship of the several hundred letters to the many other kinds of Vindolanda writings, for this gives perspective on the boundaries of these different genres and the uses to which they were put. Secondly, it analyzes the many overlaps that exist between what are one-to-one letters and what are public documents, and it considers the significance of this for understanding the legion as a form of *familia*. Thirdly, it discusses the role that letters and their cognates, and writing and records generally, played in Roman military occupation and rule. The Vindolanda letters had a particular import because their characteristic mode of expression facilitated and enhanced connections between members of the auxiliary cohorts, in ensuring that the performance of military duties occurred in the context of *familia*-like bonds, and for this to permeate beyond the letters, to the life-and-death activities of soldiering involved. And fourthly, it discusses the importance for epistolary studies of these matters.

Introduction

> (*First hand*) … You ought to decide, my lord, what quantity of wagons you are going to send to carry stone for the century of Vocontius … on one day with wagons … (*Second hand*) Unless you ask Vocontius to sort out the stone, he will not sort it out. I ask you to write back what you want me to do. I pray that you are in good health.[1]

In this letter, now missing some short sections, a man, likely to be a centurion in charge of some building work at a Roman fort, is asking another military officer to make a decision about wagons needed to transport stone being cut by a detachment of auxiliary legionaries commanded by the centurion Vocontius.[2] Unusual to modern eyes, there are two handwritings visible, one for the main text and another for the closure and brief salutation at the letter's end. Implicitly, the decision was tardy because Vocontius would not sort things out unless he was prompted; the writer was annoyed, with the tone of the closing and salutation giving an indication of this; and a written response was anticipated. The letter is all about the work being undertaken and how to do this expeditiously. It was written at Vindolanda in about 97–105 CE, and it was either kept by the

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receiving officer or put in a fort filing system and later discarded when further building work took place. It is one document among many hundreds that together shine a light on a crucial period of British history, not long after its conquest by the Roman Empire, a gradual process that started in 43 CE and culminated with a major battle at Mons Groepius in 83 CE.

Many Roman *tilia*—writing tablets made from folded slivers of wood veneer and a little over postcard size—have been uncovered in successive archaeological investigations at Vindolanda and are dated to the period 85 CE to 130 CE. Vindolanda was situated on the Stangate, a system of linked Roman forts and settlements that preceded Hadrian's Wall in northern England; its location is some miles south of the present border with Scotland, near modern-day Corbridge and Haltwhistle. The large number of tablets found, with new ones discovered on each subsequent dig; the range of documents involved, along with the many different handwritings—hundreds have been identified; and their varied content, covering many aspects of life at the time not previously known, make them unique.[3] Their existence is also helping revise knowledge of the Roman letter, in particular its role in writing and literacy in the Roman army and the part this played in how military governance was organized; the ways in which personal, public, and military spheres were interrelated; and the economic and social relationships existing between the occupying imperial legions and local Britons.[4] As the discussion following indicates, the *tilia* are important for understanding epistolarity at this time and also raise interesting questions about their relationship with modern-day epistolarity.

The Vindolanda fort was occupied by Batavian and Tungrian auxiliary cohorts of Roman troops over five time-periods, dated around successive rebuildings of the originally wood and later stone fort, as one cohort moved to a new posting and was replaced by another.[5] Alterations and extensions to the building fabric occurred up until around 130 CE and so covered the period when Hadrian's Wall was being constructed, which began in 122 CE. The *tilia* are a mixture of things that were thrown out as rubbish, (badly) burned, then covered over with mud, recycled as foundations to walkways and roads, or left on floors and built over during rebuildings; and they have survived largely because of the damp, anaerobic conditions in that area, resulting from peat accumulations.

Just under 800 *tilia* have been made available to date, in photographs and transcriptions, in an online edition called *Vindolanda Tablets*.[6] This builds on print publications,[7] and two now superseded online incarnations.[8] They have been classified by the Vindolanda project paleographers / epigraphers as a mixture of literary texts, military reports, accounts and lists, letters, and fragmentary, unclassifiable pieces of tablets termed *descripta*.[9] Although some wax stylus tablets have been found, the large majority are wood veneer written on in ink with a split nib probably made from quill, and mainly taking the form of linked diptychs, each with a hole, which would have been tied together with cord.[10] This is precisely the case with the letter about cutting stone that opened this discussion.

The Vindolanda *tilia* are fascinating to read, as lively accounts that provide many insights into how their authors saw the world they lived in and represented it to a wide variety of other people, including friends, fellow messmates, craftsmen, slaves, children, commanding officers, civilian traders, and others. Over four hundred named people can be identified together with activities they were involved in.[11]

The *tilia* as a corpus throw light on Britannia as a Roman province in the late first and early second century when it was occupied by the Roman empire as its northern frontier. This is because their existence as well as their content overturns many assumptions about this period concerning writing, about who wrote or read and who did not, about their reach and importance, and also about different forms or genres of writing and the ways in which they were written. They also raise important questions about letters of the past, which this present discussion considers by building on related and much briefer earlier considerations of the Vindolanda letters in the context of theorizing letters and "letterness," that is, epistolary features but those not encompassed by the standard conventions of letters.[12]

The discussion following focuses on four connected areas of inquiry relevant to understanding these letters of the distant past. Firstly, it explores the relationship of the several hundred letters to the other kinds of Vindolanda writings, for this gives perspective on the boundaries of these different genres and the uses to which they were put. Secondly, it analyzes instances of the many overlaps that exist between what are one-to-one letters and what are public documents, and considers the significance of this for understanding the legion as a form of *familia* and the performative character of everyday letter writing within this. Thirdly, it discusses the role that letters and their cognates, and writing and records generally, played in Roman military governance and so in empire as a system of occupation and rule. And fourthly, it considers the relationship between what the Vindolanda tablets indicate about epistolarity at that time and the interesting questions they raise about epistolarity now.

The Tablets: Letters and Other Writings

In a major project involving a range of funding bodies, and building on several decades of both archaeological and palaeographic / epigraphic work, the Vindolanda *tilia* were made available in 2020 in an online edition that provides photographs of the tablets, *variorum* transcriptions of the Latin texts, and—for a sizeable number—English translations as well.[13] There are currently 777 tablets in this online edition, which will be added to over time, with the tablets themselves now in the British Museum. Given the circumstances of their survival, not surprisingly many are damaged or incomplete, and pose problems in reading let alone interpreting the writing. However, a large number are either intact or sufficiently so to make full sense of them. Discussion here concerns the entire corpus, which has been investigated in a long-term research project as each successive wave of archaeological investigation has released its findings in the print publications referenced in my notes.

From when the first inscriptions appeared, Vindolanda paleographers / epigraphers have classified the tablets under headings corresponding to their interpretations of the conventions for the different kinds of writing prevailing over the time the fort was occupied (85–130 CE). While this interpretation of the conventions has been recognized, and in a sense is inescapable because all the texts in both online and print editions are so classified, the tablets have been read instead by suspending the discrete categories they are assigned to, and instead focusing on the text of each one and what it says. This is in fact in keeping with the spirit of the Vindolanda project approach, which recognizes the problems of classification and comments that it is often difficult to see a document as constrained within one particular category.[14] The distribution of the different kinds of writings as classified by the Vindolanda paleographers / epigraphers is shown in summary in Table 1. In this, and as referenced in my note 7, Tab II and Tab III are the key Vindolanda books that first published the tablets in full, and Tab IV concerns the journal articles that will eventually be assembled as another book.

Table 1. Numbers of Different Documents in the Vindolanda Tablets

	Tab II*	Tab III	Tab IV pt 1	Tab IV pt 2	Tab IV pt 3	Total
Literary Texts	9	0	3	0	0	12
Military Reports	51	7	4	1	0	63
Accounts & Lists	32	30 + 16	6	0	0	84
Letters	144	61 + 33	3	11	4	256
Descripta	220	134	0	8	0	362
Total	456	232 + 49	16	20	4	777

*Also incorporating Vindolanda Tablets I.

However, there are also subcategories within various of the classifications in recognition of the problems. Thus "Literary Texts" contains literary texts as well as shorthand documents; "Military Reports" contains troop-strength reports, leave requests, and similar items; "Letters" are subdivided under headings concerned with particular correspondents; and the "*descripta*" heading subcategorizes a large number of its contents as having some characteristics suggestive of letters. One consequence is that the resulting classifications most likely significantly underestimate the numbers of letters involved relative to the rest. Another is that the proliferation of subcategories as a response to classification issues has the effect of masking rather than confronting or resolving the problems; the approach taken here instead brackets classification, and investigates what is written and done in these writings, considering them as a corpus.

The classification issues are brought into relief when considering the standard characteristics of a letter and comparing this with how the writings classified as letters, and those which are not, relate to this. The Vindolanda paleographers / epigraphers define Roman letters around features such as their mode of address—"*ero sum*"—on opening, how they name the addressees and the authors' relationship to them, the text being written in two columns, salutations and how they close, where the address is located, and the script the address is written in.[15] Because many tablets are incomplete, the paleographers / epigraphers have also used an implicit set of related criteria that can be inferred in relation to the *descripta* that are subclassified as having epistolary characteristics. These include any signs of a name used in an addressing a person, an appeal to an addressee, the name of the sender in large letters, the way the first line is written, a blank space on the back, an address on the back, or an address in address script. Tacitly, there is also direct address to someone named, being written by an author who is named, and having an expectation of response of some kind. Examples are letters where the anticipated response was the purchase of radishes, and where it was the cohort vet sending a pair of castration shears to the writer.[16]

Standard letters are often immediately recognizable in Latin because of their *ero sum* opening, as well as other visible features noted above, such as columns, address on the back, and use of address script. However, what is also immediately visible is that understanding the hundreds of Vindolanda letters in terms of today's tacitly personal and private view of letters is challenged by the existence on many tablets of two distinct handwritings, as with the letter concerned with wagons and cutting stone that opened this discussion, with most of the letter and the address in one handwriting, and the closure and sign off in another. The main texts of such letters were dictated to scribes, as the existence of corrected "hearing mistakes" indicates.[17] Nevertheless, this does not mean a lack of literacy on the part of the author, that is, the person who wanted the letter to be written and so authorized it. Rather, the use of scribes was a labor-saving technology, for the handwriting and Latin expression by the persons writing the closure and sign off is often more proficient than that of the scribes.

However, the visible presence of both the person authorizing and the scribe who was writing raises questions for present-day readers—what happens to a personal letter that is from A to B when it is written by a third-party, Z? A well known example from the Vindolanda corpus concerns a party invitation authorized by Claudia Severa, wife of Flavius Cerialis, one of the prefects (who were the commanding officers). This was written via a scribe, signed by her and sent to a friend, Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of Aelius Brocchus, probably also a prefect and in command of the fort at Kirkbride.[18] It thereby becomes a semipublic form of writing and is in today's terms a hybrid. But in the context in which the writers, authors, and addressees were located, it meant something different in terms of what letters were in an ontological sense, which was not a private expression but by definition a public form. This point will be returned to.

It is also notable that while letters conforming to the above standard characteristics can be found, there are surprisingly few of them. Some examples include the above mentioned letter from Claudia Severa to Sulpicia Lepidina.[19] Another example is a letter sending greetings from Sollemnis to a messmate who had failed to keep in touch and that also passes on his good wishes to some other friends.[20] But much more usual than these standard forms are letters containing various features of other kinds or genres of writing, with these other writings also having many epistolary aspects. Putting to one side how things are formally classified and focusing specifically on content and expression, the frequent overlaps of seemingly different forms of writing is striking. Lists and accounts might be seen as ways of recording that are very different from a letter, but in practice these frequently overlap in the Vindolanda corpus, with the overlaps working in both directions, from letter to list or account, and from list or account to letter. Examples include a request to buy radishes, the need for delivery instructions, and using local Britons as carters, some of which include lists within writings that are otherwise clearly letters.[21] Also lists and accounts can contain characteristics usually found in letters, such as direct personal address to someone who is not the author, as well as naming the writer. Examples include an account that invokes the addressee, a detailed list or account that is preceded by an epistolary invocation of the addressee and closed with a polite form, and another that includes "I" as the author.[22]

Vindolanda letters are typically all business and contain little that is personal. Sometimes this is literally business in the sense of a request or supplying or commenting on goods and services rendered, and sometimes it is in the context of military life and its requirements. Examples include the opening letter in which "my lord" is told he ought to decide what quantity of wagons he is going to send and unless he does so things will not happen; an officer called Masclus requesting that a crossroads meeting is arranged and pointing out that the soldiers' beer ration is exhausted; a load of shingles being disposed of; and Martius, a trader, writing that he has made Victor his agent for some listed transactions.[23]

Letters as Public Documents

The parallels between relationships in a legion or auxiliary—to which at this point in time men signed up for a twenty-five-year service period—and those within an extended household or *familia* in Roman society are notable.[24] The *familia* was a hierarchical, highly gendered, and affective set of relationships based on kinship and marriage; and it included a diverse group of linked people, including slaves, servants, freedmen, and often also dependents. The bonds of the *familia* involved questions of honor and proprietary of behavior, of good and appropriate conduct towards others both within and without the *familia*. Shame, or rather the avoidance of shame, along with the pursuit of honor, was consequently an important aspect.

These characteristics can be seen as a backdrop to the extensive letter writing of the Batavian and Tungrian auxiliaries as indicated by the Vindolanda *tilia*. They show the existence of letters as a system of exchanges between people with a strong sense of being connected with each other, and in which the language of family and brotherhood as well as expressions of affection are regularly made. Thus Cerialis writes to Brocchus, “If you love me, brother”; Caecilius September ends his letter to Cerialis, “Farewell my lord and brother”; and a letter to a former messmate begins, “Chrattius to Veldeius his brother and old messmate, very many greetings. And I ask you, brother Veldeius….”[25] Marriage for lower ranks of officers as well as ordinary soldiers was not permitted within the twenty-five-year service term, though proxy relationships to marriage will have occurred, while life and death in the legions depended on the military hierarchy and its close bonds, particularly in volatile frontier contexts. The closest bonds in this sense were with messmates, those intermediate in the military hierarchy, and trusted commanders; and as the Vindolanda tablets confirm, this held as good for auxiliary cohorts recruited from subject-peoples as it did for the regular legions recruited from Roman citizens.

These ideas about close connections and associated customary practices took particular shape in the context of life in a long-term occupation by those legions serving on the frontiers of the empire where quiescent local populations could not be guaranteed. The Vindolanda garrison, as noted earlier, was formed by cohorts from the auxiliary legions of the Batavians and Tungrians, and naming practices indicate they were commanded by officers from their own ethnic groups; and in the case of Flavius Cerialis at Vindolanda this was someone who might have been Batavian royalty.[26] Such things strengthened bonds within a legion or auxiliary, while the practice of deploying different cohorts to different places while on front line duty also guarded against the possibility of mutiny from within, something that could also happen within the *familia* itself of course. The “band of brothers” thinking used by Roman legions and auxiliaries is connected with this, indicating the strong fraternal connections that existed and linked the men of a legion and cohort to each other by more than ordinary bonds.[27]

The evidence of the Vindolanda tablets also indicates that literacy and numeracy among the occupying cohorts of Batavians and Tungrians were widespread.[28] Tablets have been found from many areas of the different incarnations of the fort, and the existence of a small number of tablets that mention literacy issues and other people either writing or reading for the addressee imply that illiteracy was not generally the case. There were practical reasons for this.[29] While not universally literate, nonetheless it is likely that all members of legions including auxiliaries were at the least functionally literate. That is, they could recognize written commands of basic kinds, for these were crucial to the operations of the army and its control of rapid communications, which gave it a distinct advantage over any opposing force, as well as being essential for its bureaucratic system of ubiquitous record keeping and accountability.

Functional literacy and numeracy of this kind appear to have been the bedrock, a supposition supported by the breadth as well as number of writers and addressees within the Vindolanda corpus, including highly literate slaves, children, wives of officers, traders, craftsmen, and lower ranks of soldiers. Moreover, the corpus includes letters uncovered from different parts of the fort, including areas occupied by kitchens, workshops, and ordinary soldier barracks as well as officer accommodations; and, as noted earlier, where people were not literate and needed help to read the document concerned, there are references to this in the document itself.

Thinking about the hundreds of Vindolanda letters in this context, it is striking that a complex interplay between letter and "not-letter," and between private and public, occurs very widely, not just in those documents involving men who were of formally equal status. On one level these documents are private because addressed to a single recipient, but they all have a public face as texts that were very much on the record. Thus leave requests made to officers, while in some other contexts written in an entirely formulaic way, at Vindolanda gave rise to variance of expression and how much personal information was included, and also demonstrate the extensiveness of writing ability.[30] In addition, someone accused of malpractice and beaten argued his case to the commanding officer of the garrison with great detail and passion.[31] Many other examples involve men of more equal status. These include a discussion of military provisioning between coequals that also mentions hunting as a leisure pursuit, a letter in support of a promotion request from a third party, and another requesting a lighter military load for a joint friend, Crispus.[32] In many documents, the transition between what is business and what is an expression of personal affiliation is shown by the change in scribal hands: "… I have sent you … through Atto the decurion. I ask, brother, that you immediately strike them off the list. And no others … have received. I ask that you send the same Atto back to me (*Second hand*) It is my wish that you enjoy good health, my brother and lord. (Back, *First hand*) To … prefect, from Celonius Iustus, his colleague."[33] This letter from Celonius also demonstrates another important aspect, which is the relationship between what is written in a letter or other document and what occurs face to face. Indeed, the conveyance of letters themselves, as in this example, depended upon personal delivery, with it having been sent through Atto the decurion. Lastly, the desired response is both that items are struck off the list mentioned and that Atto should return to where the writer was.

As various of the examples mentioned show, then, most often the desired or anticipated response was not a letter in reply but an official course of action of a range of kinds, including leave granted, workload diminished, men redeployed, punishment withheld, money paid, tools or weaponry returned, troops met, beer supplied, items struck off a list, a decurion returned to base, and so on. While it is now customary to see letters as belonging to the private domain of social life, only rarely are the Vindolanda letters of this kind. What is typical, is that letters are part of a performative dynamic between people concerned with getting business done, with the business involved being of a range of practical kinds within the context of military life in an auxiliary legion in one of the frontier outposts of the Roman Empire.[34] The communicative exchanges hinge on this, with their other content ancillary, as in the following instance: "… to Optatus his lord, greetings. Just as you had written, I requested—as did Flavius … licus—the caducary debt. We have a note of hand concerning the horses … You had scrutinized…."[35] This letter reports to Optatus that his previous request to the author had been carried out and the debt canceled, and that a note about horses has been received. As the *tilia* photograph shows, it is missing just its closing salutation and was intended to be all business, treading the border between being a report and a letter.

The role of letter writing in the Vindolanda and wider Roman legionary and auxiliary contexts relied on, as well as expressed, an existing *familia*-type bond between writer and addressee. It drew on this to request a course of action, thereby confirming the position of the addressee as well as the bond because of the debt incurred should the request be granted.[36] Overwhelmingly, the Vindolanda letters have these performative aspects. In consequence, present-day notions of public and private need to give way to recognition that, in context, all these documents had an actual or potential public face to them. They were all written in the context of the business of ruling a frontier province of the empire, and the existence of the system of writing and recording, as well as individual documents within it, existed for highly performative purposes.

The Band of Brothers and an Empire of Letters

The exact relationship between the authors and the addressees of letters is often not detailed because of the incomplete content of quite a few tablets, but certainly all of them were written, dispatched, and responded to under the sign of empire and of legionary life during key decades of the Roman military occupation of Britannia. In this sense, what the Romans established was a system of rule in which control on the one hand and governance on the other depended on wide functional literacy and numeracy, and thus on the writing and uses of documents of different kinds, the means of sending and receiving these, record keeping, filing and archiving—in the latter instance both locally and sometimes in Rome itself.[37] There was a military iron fist involved, one that was not hidden in a velvet glove but administered within a bureaucratic system that reached down into fairly minute aspects of garrison life as well as to the highest levels of the empire and its senior personnel.

This does not mean that the emergent, interactional, and face-to-face aspects at local levels were unimportant, of course. Another example of how they quite literally interfaced is provided by a letter explaining that Caecilius Secundus would deal with inappropriate outbursts of anger from a centurion, Decuminus, in an informal as well as formal way:

> *Front*
> Caecilius Secundus to his Verecundus, greetings. The tablets which you had written to me I have shown to the centurion Decuminus, that he might know that he … it … not of body … but little outbursts of anger which merit castigation by one's seniors. Concerning which matter, it is more convenient that I discuss it with you in person. For the moment know that all the decurions of this unit …
>
> *Back*
> To Ilius Verecundus …[38]

Before this letter was written, Decuminus had already been called to order by being shown a message from Ilius Verecundus. The letter reiterates the seriousness of the matter to Verecundus, a prefect and commanding officer; it also proposes that something additional is needed and a meeting between Caecilius Secundus and Verecundus would be "more convenient." Perhaps this was to enable things to be said off the record, for the letter implies that the problem might have caused issues with the decurions; perhaps it was to agree on a strategy for bringing Decuminus into line in a way to avoid bringing dishonor on the cohort; or perhaps it was both. What is certain is that the existence of this letter shows the close association between the written and the interactional, between the documentary and the interpersonal, between correspondence, matters of public record, and people's conduct.

Another important aspect concerns what the Vindolanda tablets demonstrate about the ways in which the military and its occupation of the Stangate area of northern Britannia connected with the local civilian population and produced a system of governance ensuring dependencies and rewards, not just punishments and force.[39] Thus, a strict, tablet-defying classification might be a strength report, but it could alternatively be a memo, a hand-over note about recruiting an auxiliary group of Britons, or indeed a part of a longer letter: "The Britons are unprotected by armour. There are very many cavalry. The cavalry do not use swords nor do the wretched Britons mount in order to throw javelins."[40] Whether a strength report, a letter, or a memo, what is clear is that the local population is being assessed here in terms of its fighting capabilities and the perceived strengths and weaknesses of this from the Roman point of view. Whether they were aware of such assessments or not, the Britons had been encompassed within the system of the letter and the written assessments and documentation made for official and, particularly, for military purposes.

However, relationships between garrison soldiers and the civilian population across the Stangate forts were not usually concerned in a direct way with fighting or warfare at this time, but with regulating and administering sustained and mutually beneficial economic exchanges, including the collection of taxes.[41] The men who garrisoned the forts and their smaller outposts were a combination of customs and excisemen, and together constituted a well-oiled military machine should occasion require. One letter tablet gives example to this in specifying the payment due for of grain being delivered by some Britons:

> A
> … to his -nus greetings. You will receive out of the Britons' carts … From Rac … Romancus three hundred and eighty-one *modii* of … grain. Furthermore, they have loaded 53 *modii* into each individual cart. The container which they are conveying … holds 63 *modii*. … From Vindolanda with … and *uelatura*.[42] Furthermore, they have half the carriage-monies, that is one *denarius* each, and all the *uelatura*; and the part of the carriage-money which you will pay them, I shall duly measure out to you as your fee … if you offer Verecundus …, whatever will have been … Farewell …
>
> B (*Inverted*)
> Gavorignus … has loaded… as I wanted.[43]

Was this perhaps compelled labor? Almost certainly not, for the Britons here were paid, having received half on account, being paid the rest of the carriage money when the job was done, when the letter's recipient would also get his fee for making the arrangement. This letter, then, is an indication that economic life was very regulated around and across the border formed by the Stangate forts, including the specification of sums for carting goods of particular sizes and values, and the use of local labor. The tablets contain many similar indications and demonstrate that local economic life was recast around the Roman presence, thereby entering into and becoming a part of its system of regulation and record keeping, as well as provisioning its garrisons with both necessities and luxuries.[44]

The assimilation of Batavian and Tungrian cohorts and particularly their officer class into the status and self-identity of Roman citizens is well attested in the content of the Vindolanda tablets. It certainly also went further than the elite, with an indication being the adoption of Roman-style names throughout the garrison. There are, however, perhaps surprisingly few signs of assimilation by local Britons, although this may be a result of which documents have survived and which have not. The Roman conquest was a gradual process between 43 CE and 83 CE, and it is likely that by this point, some decades on, there would have been examples from local elites around either military or economic activities.

Signs of this would most likely appear first among the various craftsman, merchants, and traders represented across the range of Vindolanda documents, with the Vindolanda paleographers / epigraphers suggesting that the most likely men here are Gavo, a trader who both sold and bought items from members of the garrison; and Brigionus or Brigio, who a fellow-prefect asked Flavius Cerialis to recommend for an appointment.[45] The strongest evidence is the Celtic form of their names, as well as his job in the case of Gavo (although this latter argument could be extended to some others).

Gavo was a very active local trader and Brigionus was seeking preferment, the latter able to call upon a very high level of support at the prefect level. However, beyond them there are no signs of other local people appearing by name. Even so, it is clear that the people glossed as "Britons," and who do not otherwise appear in Vindolanda documents, were fully part of the prevailing system of epistolary communication and of writing more generally: some of them like Gavo had a personal level of literacy beyond the merely functional; and all of them were part of a system of governance predicated not just on the sword, but upon writing, record keeping, filing, and notions of accountability that prevailed from the lower levels of the military and governing hierarchy to the highest. As Alan Bowman puts it, "The effective reduction and domination of large tracts of frontier territory by … no more than a few thousand men depended upon efficiency of communication that enabled the strategic occupation of key points in a complex network of roads and forts, placed to maximize control over large areas of countryside populated by scattered native settlements and to facilitate the introduction of appropriate social and economic habits."[46] It was the efficient communication that was key in enabling the system to work.

Conclusion

The Vindolanda tablets and the complex interrelationships that existed between letters and the other genres of writing~~s~~ clearly demonstrate the important role of writing and literacy in the Roman occupation as well as the key part that writing of all kinds played in how military control and governance were organized and rule was expedited. While the dating of the tablets covers a period of calm in the Roman occupation of Britannia, possible outbreaks of guerrilla or other warfare could not be discounted. However, the signs are of regulation rather than enforcement, with local Britons perhaps coopted into an auxiliary fighting force and certainly into many economic transactions, including being subject to taxation and revenue collection, which were among prevailing military functions. But fighting a war was still within recent memory of many in the army, violence could potentially always erupt, and cohorts and legions might be deployed to fight elsewhere in the empire without much notice. The contents of the tablets demonstrate the very close way that personal and public / military relationships were interrelated, with signs of the "band of brothers" ethos and ensuing *familia*-type bonds present across many. And if such things existed at scale in an auxiliary legion in a rather obscure outpost of empire then it would have existed elsewhere, too.

The meaning and purpose of the letters in the context of the Roman legions and the Roman empire remain varied and intricate. There are many overlaps between the many hundreds of letters and several hundreds of other documents, such that seeing them as exclusively belonging to one classification only has to give way to recognition of the complexities. Unlike the kind of Roman letters usually studied by scholars, which are those of a high elite, overwhelmingly the Vindolanda letters are not standard or literary ones, but rather highly performative pieces of mundane and workaday writing that originated in, addressed, and sought to influence some course of action within a particular context. The idea of a private letter exchanged between two persons only makes little sense and not just because of the widespread use of scribes. This is confirmed by the very few examples of supposedly "standard" letters to be found.

Moreover, it should be recognized that the Roman army was a total institution, as indeed are present-day armies, and in this sense its men were always on duty because tied into the bonds of *familia*—and the letters reflect this. The Vindolanda letters and their cognates, then, are organizational documents intended to be performative in an organizational context, one in which its members depended on each other for matters of life and death, and were very closely connected even where there was no immediate face-to-face or one-to-one link. Modern-day classifications of public and private are simply unsuitable for designating documents that had a distinctive interpersonal as well as administrative purpose.[47]

Most of the Vindolanda tablets were found in caches and not as single *tilia*. That is, they were either part of an archive in the everyday sense of this word, or are likely to have been part of an archive in the formal and bureaucratic sense of a permanent, organized collection including a system of retrieval to facilitate access to past activities and to ensure accountability. The *tilia* could also be tracked upwards in the imperial system, as some important documents were sent to Rome and copies kept locally; and the archive could also work the other way around, with a centralized Roman governance being potentially aware, where military or political circumstances required this, of activities and performance at local levels.

What of letters specifically in this? Letters constitute the majority of documents within the Vindolanda corpus, and not only because there were many people involved who needed to write many times to others, important though that was. As discussion here has shown, most of these writing forms or genres had a porous quality in context, and particularly so the letters, which could contain aspects of all the others while still remaining letters. What was particularly important about these letters as a form of writing was that they not only permitted but also required personal address and the expression of greetings and salutations to a particular person and were signed off by another particular person. In a sense this expression of connection was the fluidity that provided the dynamic that ensured that the performative aspects of letter writing were effective by embodying the bonds involved. That is, their particular contribution was to facilitate, promote, and enhance expression of the connections between the band of brothers in the auxiliary cohorts, thereby ensuring that the performance of military duties had *familia*-like clout behind it. The result bolstered men both in their everyday military activities and in the life-and-death difficulties of soldiering.

What is the other import for epistolary studies? Considering the fairly small size of the Vindolanda garrison even over the fifty-year period that the fort was occupied—just three or four hundred men resident at anyone point—what survives of the tablets suggests that a remarkable level of written communication was occurring. The preponderance of these were letters, but there are also many other kinds of documents, and all them had porous boundaries and could overlap with each other. What this suggests is not just the prevalence of writing, but also its systemic character and epistolary basis. What existed at Vindolanda and across the occupation generally was that governance under Rome was significantly done in a system expedited through and dependent upon not just writing and record keeping but upon letters. Was the porous and flexible character of the ordinary, mundane, and high-volume Roman military letter writing discussed here developed in response to this, or might it have been that the preexisting porous and flexible character of letter writing was a facilitating factor? Whatever, it is clear that letter writing existed at a high volume and was an essential feature of communications; it was a key element in a system that encompassed all members of the garrison and the Britons as well.

While definitional characteristics exist for the Roman letter, these are the product of a somewhat later period and nevertheless concern what is certainly a very different context, that of letters by members of elite groups written within a literary and political frame.[48] The Vindolanda letters are very different, being ordinary and mundane, to the performative point, and in the context. Before the Vindolanda letters were discovered, generalizations about Roman letters, about the legions and auxiliary cohorts in relation to literacy levels and writing, and about the Roman occupation and how it was expedited, were all very different. What their discovery has brought into sight—literally so—is that at Vindolanda and at similar locations what Michel de Certeau refers to as a scriptural economy was busy at work in producing and circulating a high level of different kinds of writing, and through its operations other activities were mediated.[49] What this in turn emphasizes is the importance of context and recognizing that not only did these everyday writing practices add up to being an empire of letters at the heart of governance and rule, but that they also demonstrate that their systemic features were closely connected to the particular social, administrative, and military contexts in which they were situated.

NOTES

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[1] See *Vindolanda Tablets* 316 (hereafter abbreviated to *Tab. Vindol*.). All quotations from the Vindolanda letters are given in full and taken complete and exact, including ellipses, from English translations in the *Vindolanda Tablets* at (https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/tabvindol). Ellipses are as in the online versions and used to indicate now missing parts of the tablets. *First hand* and *Second hand* here indicates the presence of two different handwritings. "My lord" is a politeness between men who were probably equals socially if not necessarily in military terms.

[2] The chain of command in connection with all military matters discussed herein is as follows: the Vindolanda garrison was commanded by a prefect at the head of the occupying troops composed of auxiliaries (successively of Batavians and Tungrians then Batavians again). A *legion* was composed by troops drawn from Roman citizens, while an auxiliary recruited to it men who were noncitizens. A legion consisted of fifty-nine or sixty centuries in ten cohorts, with each cohort having a small cavalry contingent. A *century* was a unit commanded by a centurion, and they were usually eighty men strong. A *cohort* was one of the subunits of a legion, and each cohort would have six centurions in total. Cohorts were a stronger presence in the auxiliary legions composed of non-Roman citizens. *Optiones* were underofficers to a prime centurion, the second in command. A *decurion* was an officer commanding a *turma*, a troop of thirty cavalry, usually attached to each century, with cavalry positions having greater status. Around these principal officer positions there were specialist officers, and beneath them was a large contingent of infantry and smaller one of cavalry, including some noncommissioned officers.

[3] For key discussions, see Andrew Birley, *Garrison Life at Vindolanda: A Band of Brothers* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002); Robin Birley, *Vindolanda: A Roman Frontier Fort on Hadrian's Wall* (Stroud: Amberley, 2009); Alan K. Bowman, "The Roman Imperial Army: Letters and Literacy on the Northern Frontier," in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, eds. Alan K. Bowman and G. D. Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 109–25; and Alan K. Bowman, *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier: Vindolanda and Its People*, 3rd ed. (London: British Museum Press, 2003). A useful short discussion appears in R. S. O. Tomlin, "The Vindolanda Tablets," *Britannia* 27 (1996): 459–63. Helpful general accounts are provided by S. Frere, *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1999); Finley Hooper and Matthew Schwartz, *Roman Letters: History from a Personal Point of View* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991); and Patrick Wyman, "Letters, Mobility, and the Fall of the Roman Empire," PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2016.

[4] The Romans referred to the province they occupied as Britannia and the inhabitants as Britons. The boundaries of Britannia changed over time and were different from those of modern-day Britain.

[5] Batavia and Tungria were in modern-day Netherlands and Belgium respectively.

[6] *Vindolanda Tablets* at https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/tabvindol.

[7] The essential print publications that first provided the Vindolanda tablets in full are Alan K. Bowman and J. D. Thomas, *The Vindolanda Writing Tablets (Tabulae Vindulandenses)*, 3 vols. (London: British Museum Press, 1983–2003); Alan K. Bowman, J. D. Thomas, and R. S. O. Tomlin, "The Vindolanda Writing Tablets (Tabulae

Vindolandenses IV, Part 1)," *Britannia* 41 (2010): 187–224; Alan K. Bowman, J. D. Thomas, and R. S. O. Tomlin, "The Vindolanda Writing Tablets (Tabulae Vindolandenses IV, Part 2)," *Britannia* 42 (2011): 113–44; and Alan K. Bowman, J. D. Thomas, and R. S. O. Tomlin, "The Vindolanda Writing Tablets (Tabulae Vindolandenses IV, Part 3)," *Britannia* 50 (2019): 225–51.

[8] These were *Vindolanda Tablets Online* at http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk, and *Vindolanda Tablets Online 2* at www.vto2.classics.ox.ac.uk. The tablets are numbered continuously, although in a rather unusual way, because the first group of around 117 were later revised and assimilated into the second group but with their numbers starting at *Tab. Vindol*. 118.

[9] *Descripta* is a covering term for fragmentary items that cannot be identified with any certainty, although estimates are made about some as subcategories.

[10] *Vindolanda Tablets* provides photographs of all the *tilia*, many of which show this.

[11] In a popular vote, they were seen as Britain's most precious treasure. This was in a television vote in 2003. Visiting numbers at the Vindolanda site confirm their continuing popularity to date.

[12] The relevant publications include Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley, "Letters As / Not a Genre," *Life Writing* 2 (2005): 75-101; Liz Stanley, "To the Letter: Thomas & Znanicki's *The Polish Peasant…* and Writing a Life, Sociologically Speaking," *Life Writing* 7.2 (2010): 137-51; Liz Stanley, "The Epistolary Gift: The Editorial Third Party, Counter-Epistolaria: Rethinking the Epistolarium," *Life Writing* 8.3 (2011): 137-54; Liz Stanley, "The Death of The Letter? Epistolary Intent, Letterness and the Many Ends of Letter-Writing," *Cultural Sociology* 9.2 (2015): 240-55; Liz Stanley and Margaretta Jolly, "Epistolarity: Life After Death of the Letter?" *a/b: Auto/Biographical Studies* 32.2 (2017): 229-33; Liz Stanley, Andrea Salter, and Helen Dampier, "The Epistolary Pact, Letterness and the Schreiner Epistolarium," *a/b: Auto/Biographical Studies* 27.4 (2012): 262-93.

[13] *Vindolanda Tablets* at https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/tabvindol.

[14] These complexities are usefully considered by the Vindolanda paleographers / epigraphers in relation to *Tab. Vindol*. 164, the text that is discussed later. All tablet references can be accessed at https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/TabVindol and searched by tablet number or else by reading continuously from *Tab. Vindol*. 118 on.

[15] See discussion of the format of the tablets generally and the letters in particular at https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/tabvindol/vol-II/introduction.

[16] For buying radishes, see *Tab. Vindol*. 301; and for returning the shears, see *Tab. Vindol*. 310.

[17] For an example of a hearing mistake, see *Tab. Vindol*. 234.

[18] For the party invitation, see *Tab. Vindol*. 291.

[19] For both letters by Claudia Severa, see *Tab. Vindol*. 291, *Tab. Vindol*. 292.

[20] For Sollemnis's letter, see *Tab. Vindol*. 311.

[21] For the radishes, see *Tab. Vindol*. 301; for instructions, see *Tab. Vindol*. 643; and for the British carters, see *Tab. Vindol*. 649.

[22] For invoking the addressee, see *Tab. Vindol*. 180; for a list with an epistolary opening, see *Tab. Vindol*. 343; and for a list with "I," see *Tab. Vindol*. 586.

[23] For the number of wagons, see *Tab. Vindol*. 316; for the beer ration, see *Tab. Vindol*. 628; for the load of shingles, see *Tab. Vindol*. 642; and for Victor acting as agent, see *Tab. Vindol*. 670.

[24] On women in Roman military communities and at Vindolanda, see Elizabeth Greene, "Female Networks in Military Communities in the Roman West: A View from the Vindolanda Tablets," in *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, eds. Emily Hemelrijk and Greg Woolf (Amsterdam: Brill, 2013), 369–90. On the *familia* concept, see Jane Gardner, *Family and Familia in Roman Law and Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Ramsay MacMullen, "The Legion as a Society," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 4 (1984): 440–56; and Richard Saller, "'Familia, Domus' and the Roman Conception of the Family," *Phoenix* 38.4 (1984): 336–55.

[25] For Cerialis to Brocchus, see *Tab. Vindol*. 233; for Caecilius to Cerialis, see *Tab. Vindol*. 252; and for Chrattius to Veldeius, see *Tab. Vindol*. 310.

[26] As this suggests, part of the process of assimilation was the Romanization of names.

[27] See especially Birley, *Garrison Life*; MacMullen, "The Legion as a Society"; and Michael Speidel, "Soldiers and Documents: Insights from Nubia. The Significance of Written Documents in Roman Soldiers' Everyday Lives," in *Literacy in Ancient Everyday Life*, ed. Anne Kolb (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 179–200.

[28] There has been considerable debate about literacy levels, sparked by Harris's contention that the overall level would be comparable to present-day poor countries with high illiteracy levels. For this, see William Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1991). It has been pointed out, however, that the analogy breaks down. Firstly, the focus should be the Roman legions rather than subject-peoples; secondly, the Roman provinces of the past are not appropriately generalized about using present-day comparisons; and thirdly, a system of writing can encompass people

even though they may not themselves be fully literate. There are good overviewing discussions in Alan K. Bowman and G. D. Woolf, eds., *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). An intermediate position is taken in Alan K. Bowman and G. D. Woolf, "Literacy and Power in the Ancient World," in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World,* eds. Alan K. Bowman & G. D. Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–16. Arguments that focus on the Roman army and communications tend to put the figure higher. See Alan K. Bowman, "Roman imperial army"; J. H. Humphrey, ed., "Literacy in the Roman World," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* (Supplement 4, 1991); Carol Poster, "The Economy of Letter-Writing in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts: Papers from the Lund 2000 Conference*, eds. Tom Olbricht, Walter Übelacker, and Anders Eriksson (Harrisonburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 112–24; Raphael Schwitter, "Letters, Writing Conventions, and Reading Practices in the Late Roman World: Analysing Literary Reception in Late Antiquity and Beyond," *Lingvarvm Varietas* 6 (2017): 61–78; and Michael Sinding, "Letterier: Categories, Genres, and Epistolarity," in *What is a Letter? Essays on Epistolary Theory and Culture / Was ist ein Brief? Aufsätze zu epistolarer Theorie und Kultur*, eds. Marie Isabel Matthews-Schlinzig and Caroline Socha (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2018), 21–37. The argument for the more extensive view is persuasively put by Dominic Ingemark, "Literacy in Roman Britain," *Opuscula Romana* 25/26 (2000): 19–30; and Roger Tomlin, "Literacy in Roman Britain," in *Literacy in Ancient Everyday Life*, ed. Anne Kolb (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 201-21.

[29] See *Tab. Vindol*. 661 for an example of commenting on the addressee's inability to read.

[30] For a number of somewhat different leave requests, see *Tab. Vindol*. 166–76.

[31] For the appeal against punishment, see *Tab. Vindol*. 344.

[32] For the letter mentioning hunting, see *Tab. Vindol*. 233; for support for promotion, see *Tab. Vindol*. 250; and for lighter duties for a friend, see *Tab. Vindol*. 891.

[33] For the letter from Celonius, see *Tab. Vindol*. 345. Roman military organization is indicated in note 2. There are two handwritings on the front of the tablets and one of them appears on the back in writing the address.

[34] The term performative is used here in Austin's sense; see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

[35] For the letter to Optatus, see *Tab. Vindol*. 647.

[36] This sense of indebtedness is commented on explicitly in *Tab. Vindol*. 250.

[37] As discussed in C. M. Kelly, "Later Roman bureaucracy: Going Through the Files," in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World,* eds. Alan K. Bowman and G. D. Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 161–76. See also David Breeze, "The Vindolanda Tablets: Review," *Britannia* 27 (1996): 507–8.

[38] For the letter from Caecilius Secundus to Verecundus, see *Tab. Vindol*. 893. Front indicates what was written on the front of the tablets, and back what was written on the back.

[39] Helpful discussions of both the short-term and long-term economic impact include Brian Campbell, "Economics of the Roman Army," *The Classical Review* 54.1 (2004): 198–200; Andrew Gardner, "Vindolanda Tablets and the Ancient Economy," *Britannia* 45 (2014): 478–79; Ian Haines, "Britain's First Information Revolution: The Roman Army and the Transformation of Economic Life," in *The Roman Army and the Economy,* ed. P. Erdkamp (Amsterdam: Gieben, 2002), 111–26; and Koenraad S. Verboven, "Good for Business: The Roman Army and the Emergence of a 'Business Class' in the Northwestern Provinces of the Roman Empire," in *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 BC–AD 476): Economic, Social, Political, Religious, and Cultural Aspects*, ed. Lukas de Blois (Nijhoff: Brill, 2007), 295–313.

[40] For the "wretched" Britons, see *Tab. Vindol*. 164.

[41] This is discussed in Brian Campbell, "Economics of the Roman Army"; see also contributions in *The Roman Army and the Economy*, ed. P. Erdkamp (Amsterdam: Gieben, 2002); Kasper Grønlund Evers, *The Vindolanda Tablets and the Ancient Economy* (Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2011); Gardner, "Vindolanda tablets and the Ancient Economy"; Haines, "Britain's First Information Revolution"; and Verboven, "Good for Business."

[42] *Modii* is a unit of weight, *denarii* is a unit of money, and *uelatura* is a rarely used word connected with transporting or carrying something and might mean a share.

[43] For the Britons working as carters, see *Tab. Vindol*. 649. A is the main text; B indicates that the last words have been written upside down or inverted.

[44] See especially Haines, "Britain's First Information Revolution"; Verboven, "Good for Business."

[45] For documents that concern Gavo, see *Tab. Vindol*. 192, 207, 218, and 649. For documents that concern Brigio, see *Tab. Vindol*. 188 and 250.

[46] Bowman, *Life and Letters*, 93.

[47] A present-day parallel is organizational email in a context where an organization is an enveloping feature of life of those working for it and whose relationships with coworkers accordingly take on particular importance around close bonds to expedite organizational activities.
[48] As discussed in Schwitter, "Letters, Writing Conventions."
[49] A scriptural economy is constituted by components of a locally prevailing representational order that includes different kinds of writings. Each component situates audience, author, moment of writing, and what can be written about and how, differently from the others; but they overlap each other and there are intertextual references across them. They are about the same thing, but represent this in different terms, with each scriptural form having its own conventions, although these are mediated in context. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 131–64.

Printing Tibetan *Epistolaria*: A Bibliographical Analysis of Epistolary Transformations from Manuscript to Xylograph

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Abstract: In Tibetan tradition, letter writing is a sophisticated art in which the material aspects of a letter—paper format, script style and size, text spacing and layout—are integral to the letter's semantic content. What meaning is lost and gained in the transformation from manuscript original to printed edition? What scribal and editorial decisions are at play in this textual transformation? My aims in this article are twofold: to introduce scholars of global epistolary literatures to the Tibetan epistolary tradition, and to examine the ways in which editing and printing *epistolaria* can thoroughly transform letters' materiality and meaning. This study not only contributes a bibliographical analysis of printed Tibetan *epistolaria*, but also offers a model for investigating how woodblock printing or other printing technologies can change the way epistolary texts both look and function.

Introduction

In Tibetan cultural areas, the practice of collecting and printing an exemplary person's writings has been a prevalent mode of textual production for the past several centuries and remains so today.[1] Tibetan collected works publications function simultaneously to memorialize the deaths of prominent figures, to display their scholastic and creative achievements, and to enhance the prestige of their institutions and patrons.[2] The printing of collected works has also served to preserve rare texts, to create new reading communities, and to circulate model texts for training in literary composition.[3] Among the genres of literature commonly anthologized and printed in Tibetan collected works are epistolary genres: official letters, personal letters, letters of advice, letters replying to questions about scholastic topics, petitions, decrees, and many others. Most of the letters that have been gathered for printing in collected works publications are those prized either for the richness of their literary style, the significance of their content, or the renown of their recipients; they are typically formal epistles rather than intimate messages to family members or everyday administrative communications.

A formal Tibetan epistle is an elegant literary product that draws on expertise in composition, poetic synonyms, and intricate conventions of etiquette, but it is also a well-crafted physical object: a carefully measured leaf of paper inscribed in calligraphy, folded many times, sealed with wax, wrapped in a white offering scarf, accompanied by gifts, delivered into the hands of a courier, and transported by foot, horseback, or yak. When printed for circulation beyond its original recipient (or recipients, for texts such as political edicts or public circulars), a letter becomes a different artifact entirely. Not only is a letter's material and graphic constitution changed from its original manuscript form to a printed text with a new shape, script, and format, but in the process of printing, a letter's readership and social value are thoroughly reinvented. Until the use of the telegraph, typewriter, and computer in Tibetan communities, virtually all letters were written by hand; this means that every woodblock-printed letter is an artful transformation of a manuscript original.[4]

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What might change in our reading of a printed letter or letter collection if we not only read the text, but also read the material history of the text's transformation from manuscript to print?

In the Tibetan cultural context, xylography (printing from engraved woodblocks) has long been the dominant mode of printing technology and continues to be employed widely today, particularly in religious contexts. Xylographic productions of large compendia, such as collected works, are resource- and labor-intensive endeavors that require teams of paper makers, wood workers, engravers, metal workers (to make and maintain the engraving tools), and tailors (to sew the cloth book covers).[5] The editorial labor involved in printing collected works is equally intensive. Editors locate and obtain original texts, cross-check copies for accuracy or best witnesses, oversee scribal production of copies for the engravers, cross-check each woodblock against the scribe's copy, and finally proofread and collate each printed chapter or textual unit.[6] In Tibetan contexts, editing a manuscript for xylographic print production involves a thorough transformation of the text's material and graphic constitution as the author's or scribe's original handwriting, often in a cursive or headless script, is traded for another scribe's rewriting in a uniform headed script and then an engraver's emulation in wood—backward and in relief—of the scribe's paper copy. Sometimes, this editorial transformation from manuscript to print carries with it significant changes in a text's symbolic meaning and social use.

My aims in this article are twofold: to introduce scholars of global epistolary literatures to the Tibetan epistolary tradition, and to examine the ways in which editing and printing *epistolaria* can thoroughly transform letters' materiality and meaning. This study not only contributes a bibliographical analysis of printed Tibetan *epistolaria*, but also offers a model for investigating how woodblock printing or other printing technologies can change the way epistolary texts both look and function. By attending to printed letters as physical objects, we can better understand the social contours of editing, publishing, and circulating *epistolaria* for wider reading communities.

A Brief Note on Historical Context

Tibetan epistolary style, like all arts, is internally diverse and changes shape over time. In order to frame the generalizations that I will make here about formal Tibetan epistolary style in manuscript and xylographic forms, I first offer a short note on the historical development of Tibetan letters and an explanation of why I have chosen the epistolary style that was standardized in the early modern period as a useful representative of Tibetan epistolary tradition for this study.

Tibetan-language written correspondence has circulated since the seventh century CE, when the Tibetan script was invented to serve the administrative needs of the rapidly expanding Tibetan empire. First taking shape as imperial edicts engraved on stone pillars and as material requisitions for military outposts inscribed on wood slips, letters in the Old Tibetan language began to appear on paper in the early eighth century when the empire moved its record keeping from wood slips to paper.[7] A wide variety of Tibetan letters on wood and paper populates the Dunhuang collections: memorials to superiors, letters of passage for pilgrimage and trade, letters of introduction to Buddhist lamas, administrative messages, and practice letters composed as scribal training exercises.[8] Dunhuang documents testify that by the time of the Tibetan empire's fall in the ninth century, letters were deeply embedded in everyday religious, political, and commercial activity along the Silk Road. Tibetan letters from Dunhuang are characterized by a fair degree of consistency in epistolary style within distinctive categories that Takeuchi has classified as formal official, informal official, and personal letters.[9] Much remains to be learned about the multicultural influences that informed the epistolary conventions appearing in these early Tibetan materials, as well as about Old Tibetan epistolography in areas beyond the reach of Dunhuang.

The features of formal Tibetan epistolary style that I introduce in this article began taking shape as early as the time of the Yuan-Mongol administration of Tibet in the thirteenth century, due in no small part to the influence of Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltsen (Tibetan Lama and Imperial Preceptor under Qubilai Khan), who adapted Indian epistolary conventions to craft a new script and lexicon for official imperial communications in the Tibetan language. To Pakpa's pen is also attributed a short epistolary treatise, a formulary in verse that lists the major recipients of official address along with the appropriate phrasing conventions, spacing, and sealing practices that accompany each.[10] Though a watershed moment in the history of Tibetan letters, Pakpa's formulary is short and concise; the basic framework for epistolary style that it outlines is more robustly developed in above a dozen epistolary manuals that were authored from the seventeenth through early twentieth centuries.

These early modern manuals, which span diverse sectarian affiliations and geographical regions of the Tibetan Plateau, take the recognizable forms of both theoretical treatises and formularies (although the titles of these manuals do not always signify these categories). The theoretical treatises are most useful for our purposes here because they describe the material dimensions of Tibetan letters properly composed according to rules of etiquette and custom. They instruct the letter writer not only about word choice and address, but also about paper quality, size, and shape; script size and style; the placement of specific lines of text as well as deliberate empty space on the page; the impression of stamps; the folding of letters; and the application of seals. Each of these factors is attuned to the social register of the letter and to the relationship between the writer and recipient. Tibetan epistolary treatises allow us to understand the meaning behind the forms and features of manuscript letters in a wide variety of epistolary types. More than merely illuminating a historical period of Tibetan letter writing, some of these manuals continue to serve as training textbooks in epistolary composition for Tibetan students today. The enduring authority of these manuals' instructions in Tibetan literary education, as well as their highly detailed treatment of epistolary composition, make them ideal representatives of Tibetan epistolary style for the purposes of this bibliographical study.

In addition to epistolary manuals, I rely upon archival evidence of both manuscript and xylograph letters. Xylograph editions of letters are accessible in abundance thanks to the extensive preservation efforts of Tibetan language archives and publishing houses in China, India, Nepal, and Bhutan as well as digital libraries such as the Buddhist Digital Resource Center and the Tibetan and Himalayan Library.[11] For examples of manuscript letters, I have relied on the Tibetan Historical Documents and Letters collection of Digitized Tibetan Archive Materials at Bonn University as well as on a facsimile publication of historical documents from the Archives of the Tibetan Autonomous Region in Lhasa.[12]

Form and Features of Manuscript Tibetan Letters

Because the Tibetan language contains honorific, humilific, and neutral registers, all direct address in Tibetan is implicitly attuned to social rank. As does Tibetan speech, Tibetan letter writing (as a form of direct address) requires a determination of the writer's own status in relation to one's recipient. Therefore, Tibetan letter-writing manuals typically divide their pedagogical instructions into three broad sections: how superiors write letters to inferiors, how relative equals write to one another, and how inferiors write to superiors. These three sections are usually further subdivided to list various recipients in order of rank and office, ordered from high to low. Hierarchy is not an ancillary concern in this literature but is a structuring principle that infuses every aspect of epistolary instruction.

Despite some interesting variety in their range of intended audiences and concerns (for example, some manuals give instructions for writing to merchants, astrologers, or girlfriends), the Tibetan epistolary manuals I have studied express a general consensus about the components of a formal letter to a relative peer or superior. Edicts or missives issued from political leaders to subordinates have their own distinctive conventions, so here I have chosen to focus on letters of courtesy offered to relative peers or superiors. The following outline is drawn from a twentieth-century article by Tseten Zhapdrung, who synthesized the contents of several of the early modern manuals in a way that represents well the broad contours of Tibetan epistolary culture.[13] Here I introduce the customary components of a formal letter of courtesy, and below I detail how some of these components are graphically expressed on the page in manuscript and xylograph forms.

Components of a Formal Letter of Courtesy

1. Praise of the recipient: This line of praise, which serves as the line of address, identifies the recipient through wordplay or poetic reference to the recipient's office. Naming the recipient plainly is considered too familiar for formal correspondence.
2. Offering of respect, with a bow:[*] This line identifies the sender offering the letter and conveys the sender's posture of deference (Note: this line only includes the language of bowing if the recipient is clearly ranked higher than the sender.)
3. Inquiry after health:[†] Whenever the recipient's body is mentioned, an honorific mark should be used to indicate respect.[‡]
4. One's own circumstances:[§] In this section, the writer relates the narrative background leading to the main point of the letter.
5. Relevant point [of writing]:[**] This component communicates the writer's main question, request, or message. Sometimes this section is as short as one sentence.
6. Well wishes for the future:[††] The writer concludes the body of the letter with words of blessing and goodwill.
7. Concluding section:[‡‡] This section includes the register of accompanying gifts, where applicable, as well as the place and date of dispatch.

These seven components, although parsed somewhat differently, recall a similar general sequence to that found in classical Latin *ars dictaminis:* the *salutatio* addresses the recipient; the *captatio benevolentiae* employs words of praise, humility, or regards to secure the recipient's goodwill; the *narratio* communicates the writer's circumstances or the background to the *petitio*; the *petitio* expresses the letter's main point or request; and the *conclusio* closes the letter.[14] The heart of the

[*] *'dud pa dang bcas pa'i zhe sa*
[†] *khams bde 'dri ba*
[‡] The *che mgo* mark (༸) placed before a word acts as an additional honorific.
[§] *rang gi gnas tshul*
[**] *skabs bab dngos don*
[††] *slad char dge ba'i smon 'dun*
[‡‡] *mjug sdud kyi rim pa*

matter, however, is the manner in which these formal components of Tibetan letters are graphically presented on the page.

Script Size and Style

According to the epistolary manuals, the size and style of the handwriting in a letter indicate the sender's rank relative to the recipient's: small, fine, and compact handwriting indicates the humble attitude of an inferior writing to a superior, while large letters with sweeping tails express the authoritative attitude of a superior writing to an inferior.[15] In Figure 1, which is a letter addressed to a Buddhist monastic assembly, note the fine handwriting and how its scale appears diminutive on the large page of sixty-one centimeters wide by eighty-seven centimeters tall:

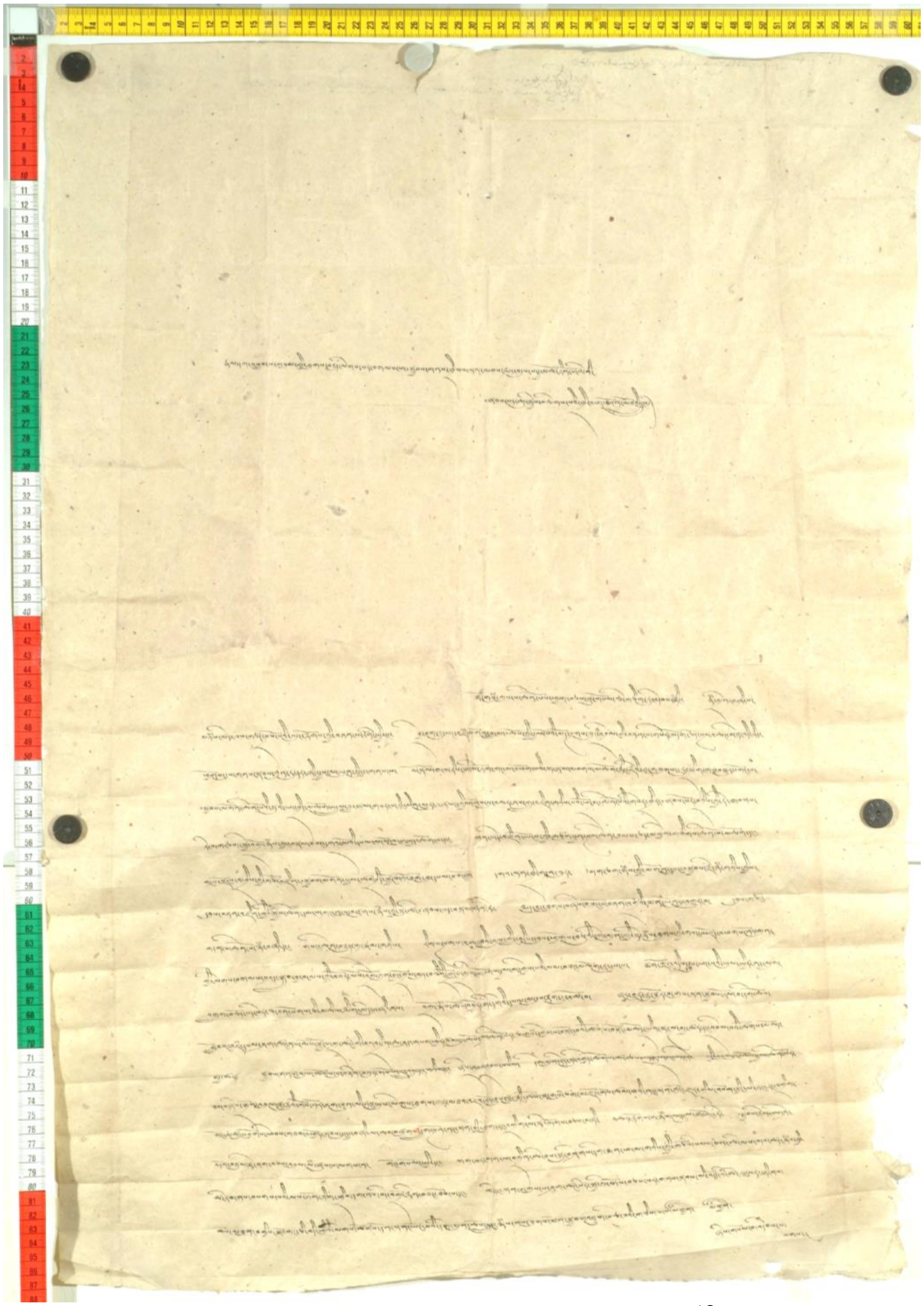

Figure 1: Letter of Courtesy to a Superior[16]

Small handwriting indicates a small or humble voice. In contrast, many political edicts—which are also considered correspondence and are treated in the Tibetan letter-writing manuals—employ the *drutsa* (*'bru tsa*) script in larger scale (see the upper half of Figure 2, which is a bilingual edict issued by the Fifth Dalai Lama) to indicate a large or commanding voice. The Tibetan *drutsa* script is defined in one dictionary as "a script that produces an affect of firmness."[17] Edicts are commands issued from superiors to inferiors, and so they employ a bold, ostentatious script with long tails on the graphs to indicate power and authority.

Figure 2: Political Edict Issued to Lower-Ranking Recipients[18]

Upper Margin, Line of Address, Hierarchy Space, and Line of Offering

In a letter of courtesy, a large upper margin is left blank to demonstrate respect for the office of the recipient. As one manual instructs, to show that "the upper place is made the other's and the lower place one's own, however great the recipient is, so great should the upper [margin] be; and the lower [margin], small."[19] Then the name of the recipient is written, along with words of praise: in Figure 1, a large upper margin of approximately twenty-one centimeters is followed by a highly ornate line of address, which reads, "Before the exalted tiered seat, the water-born lotus feet of the precious oceanic assembly of the wise, upholder of the discipline, object of refuge, fullness of the stream of transmission of the utterly pure three teachings." The Buddhist monastic assembly commands great symbolic respect; even for less exalted recipients, however, lengthy metaphors of praise may ornament the line of address. The words of praise in the line of address provide two important opportunities for the writer: first, the writer can express the desired degree of respect by refraining from naming the recipient directly and by choosing the extent of hyperbole to employ; and second, the writer can imagine the recipient in any capacity by means of metaphor: as a mountain, a sun, an ocean, a king, a goddess, a guide, and so forth. The writer defines the recipient's role in their shared universe.

After the line of address, the manuals prescribe the insertion of an empty space, called a *bep* (*'bebs*) or "dropdown" space, which reflects the hierarchical distance that separates the recipient and the sender. Hanna Schneider has translated *bep* very usefully as "distance of respect."[20] The hierarchy space is measured in units of "fingers" (*sor*) and corresponds to the relative difference in rank between sender and recipient. This space literally maps the social hierarchy inherent in the epistolary relationship, performing it visually on the page. The exact number of *sor* prescribed for different relationships varies somewhat among the letter-writing manuals. For example, Pakpa's thirteenth-century formulary instructs writers to place six *sor* after the name of someone who is "definitely greater than you," two *sor* after the name of someone who is "a little greater than you," and four *sor* after your own name for someone who is "lower than you."[21] Jamyang Zhepa's manual, written in the seventeenth century, prescribes eight *sor* for writing to a high superior such as a lama, lord, or parent.[22] Overall, the manuals and archival examples agree that a hierarchy space functions to indicate respect for rank.

The line of offering to a superior is a respectful line indicating a bow. The line of offering effectively places the letter writer below the recipient, as if the writer is prostrating before the physical person, and it leads directly into the body of the letter. As one epistolary manual describes it,

> When exemplifying your timidity and shy respect, as you do when prostrating before [a great person's] actual body, you speak from the lower-most part of his body, and so write "before the feet of " or "before the lotus feet of "; and leave the rest of that line blank.[23] Then, actually planting yourself beneath the feet of the superior [however many] fingers of space below, write something like "submitted with great respect," and transition into the inquiry after health and the sending of regards.[24]

In Figure 1, the line of address is followed by a dropdown space of approximately twenty centimeters and then the indented line of offering, which reads, "A petitionary prayer single-pointedly planted, with great respect in body, speech, and mind, with a prostration."

Here we can see how the placement of text on the page of a manuscript letter visually displays the hierarchical relationship between sender and recipient: the size and style of the handwriting, the size of the upper margin, the size of the hierarchy space or distance of respect, and the line of offering a bow all serve graphically to re-create the bodily experience of bowing before one's superior.[25] In Tibetan tradition, hierarchy has been physically expressed in several ways, not only through bowing, but also through the height and placement of one's seat in an assembly and through stringent norms of physical contact that prohibit the lower parts of one's body (legs and feet) from touching, or even aiming toward, revered persons or objects. Instead, the upper part of one's body (head) should be used to touch the lower part (feet) of a high-ranking person. The cultural importance of the physical act of a bow is rendered even weightier when coupled with its religious associations, where bowing is rendered as an offering of one's body, speech, and mind before a spiritual teacher, as evoked in the line of offering in Figure 1. Tibetan manuscript epistles perform highly visual "sociologies of presence" that are integral to Tibetan culture and religion as they graphically map the social relationship between writer and recipient as an encounter of bodies on the page.[26]

Seal Impressions

Outer seals impressed in wax or clay serve to ensure security: to guarantee the recipient that the epistolary text has not been opened or seen by anyone else en route. Inner seals stamped with ink are signs of authority and guarantees of a letter's authenticity. Especially for higher-ranking letter writers who hold more than one seal of office, the seal impression on a letter indicates the particular office or mode of authority—whether institutional or personal—that the sender invokes in the letter. With higher authority comes a heightened concern with assuring the letter's security and authenticity. Examples of forged letters and counterfeit seals in Tibetan history are helpful reminders that guaranteeing a letter's authenticity can in some cases mean the difference between life and death, or war and peace. For example, a forged letter attributed to the King of Beri served as the fifth Dalai Lama's justification for waging war against Beri in 1639.[27]

In an edict issued by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in January 1902, the Dalai Lama's seal of office is impressed upon the document twice and, thanks to artful illumination, the seal impressions are depicted as seated upon lotus thrones carried by a part-human, part-*garuḍa* figure in one case, and by a snow lion in the other.[28] The practice of illuminating seal impressions suggests the power of personhood that seals convey: the seal, seated upon a throne, stands in for the person of the Dalai Lama. Sealed letters have often been touched upon the head as a sign of respect in the same way that one might show respect when greeting a superior face to face by bowing, or by touching one's head to the floor or to a superior's feet.

My description of the form and features of Tibetan manuscript letters reveals a rich attention to detail and to the craft of a letter as a physical object. The gestures of social deference and authority that are embedded in seals, script size and style, lines of address and offering, and the upper margin and hierarchy space all replicate aspects of the relationship between the sender and recipient. This revelation alone is significant and should change our way of reading manuscript Tibetan letters—not merely for their content but also for the social postures they assume and the scale at which they do so. When we compare original manuscript letters to letters that have been edited and printed, it becomes even more obvious how much knowledge we miss when reading printed epistles without attention to their compositional history as manuscripts.

Form and Features of Woodblock Printed Letters

While an original letter is handwritten on a large piece of vertically rectangular paper, with enough height to accommodate an upper margin, hierarchy space, and the epistolary text with its carefully chosen script size and style, the edited versions of letters we read in collected works are printed on short, wide pages (*pothi*) whose shape imitates Buddhist palm-leaf texts from India (Figure 3).

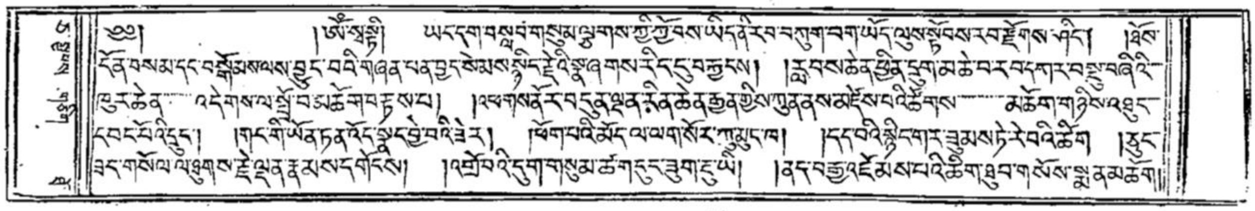

Figure 3: *Pothi*-style Xylograph Edition of a Letter Requesting Refuge (*skyabs tho*)[29]

The *pothi*-style paper used for Tibetan xylographic printing invokes the authority and status of Buddhist scriptures, creating a visual transformation of an epistle from historical document to sacred text. Buddhism's direct role in the adoption of xylography in Tibet has meant that even for works concerning the common arts and sciences, or nonreligious topics, each xylograph text inhabits the shape of a Buddhist scripture and retains symbolic associations with sacred literature: in particular, the format of these texts appeals to the merit of printing, the moral edification of reading, and the auspicious power of books to bless or protect.

For many centuries, xylographic printing in Tibet has almost exclusively employed *pothi*-style paper (with exceptions, such as the printing of cloth prayer flags, which are square shaped). I should clarify here that *pothi*-style paper is not only used in printing; this shape of paper has also been used in Tibetan manuscript production for many centuries. Xylographic printing was not widely adopted in Tibet until the fifteenth century, "becoming an important technology for the multiplication of texts and images, alongside manuscript production, and remaining so until the 20th century."[30] Both before the spread of xylography and alongside its growth, manuscript production of *pothi*-style volumes in Tibet continued to be plentiful. The major distinction that I seek to draw in this paper is between an *original* manuscript letter that is composed for its first audience, with its capacious size and intricate stylistic details, and an *edited* letter that has been transformed and compressed, both textually and materially.[31] While an original letter could well by copied by hand onto *pothi*-style paper, editorial transformation is most marked in printed letter collections, not only because of the formatting constraints that *pothi*-style volumes impose, but also because of the elision of detailed aspects of handwriting (script style, size, and spacing) that occurs when the text is carved onto woodblocks in a simplified and uniform script.

In print editions of epistles, the upper margin and hierarchy space are omitted in favor of a continuous flow of text in a consistent number of lines per folio. Paper is expensive, and so empty space is employed primarily in political edicts or in decorative contexts, such as on a title page or when printing iconographic portraits. In Figure 3, note that the only empty space in the body of the text is an indentation at the upper left of the recto side to mark the beginning of the letter, which is otherwise indistinguishable from the other texts in a variety of genres in this large collected works publication; on the verso, the text of the same letter continues without any indentation. Furthermore, the small size and stylistic flourishes of headless cursive handwriting, each of which reveals an aspect of the social status of the sender relative to the recipient, are replaced in print editions by uniform headed graphs that are blind to gestures of hierarchy. In particular, in print editions the tails of letters (whose length indicates the status of the sender) must be short enough that the lines of text can be stacked economically close to one another, without any letter interrupting the line beneath it; long, fine lines are also harder to engrave and are more fragile, making them relatively impractical for xylography. These editorial changes mean that grand imperial edicts in *drutsa* script (Figure 2) and humble petitions in headless cursive (Figure 1) look virtually identical on the printed page (Figure 3). If the script of a xylographed epistle reveals any social identity, it is the identity of the printing house, where regional or sectarian stylistic preferences shape an institution's particular printing style.[32]

When reading an epistle in print, the dramatic gestures of deference to rank that we see in manuscript letters are rendered invisible. The hierarchical placement of the sender's and recipient's bodies is recalled only in word choice, not in graphic presentation. With this shift, the reader of a printed epistle is no longer an active embodied presence in a dialogical text as is the case in original manuscript letters. Instead, the printed text is a monologue, blind to the status of its anonymous and unranked reader. Paradoxically, this erasure of the reader's body from the constitution of the letter makes room in the text for new readers. In print, any ordinary reader can approach a letter written to the highest ruler in the land and can create an active relationship with the text, whether engaging the letter for historical knowledge, for pleasure, or for a model of epistolary composition to copy.

Finally, the seals that document a letter's life as a material object in a particular institution or ruling family are also absent in edited letters, as are the performative functions of seals to command action or adherence to the contents of the letter. The omission of seals in xylographed letters conveys that in the editorial and printing processes, one type of textual authority is exchanged for another. An original manuscript epistle bearing a seal invokes the authority of the writer's institutional office, while a printed epistle that is part of a laborious and expensive printing project invokes the authority of the institution or patron sponsoring the printing. In the transformation from manuscript to print, the original social meaning of a letter is subsumed by an institutional mission with its own social and symbolic agendas. The printed epistle becomes a different artifact both physically and socially as it comes to represent institutional power rather than individual relationships.

The differences between original manuscript epistles and edited xylograph epistles include paper size and shape, script size and style, the graphic arrangement of text and empty space on the page, and the presence or absence of seals. A distinction in the hermeneutical understanding of a Tibetan epistle is necessary when a scholar considers an epistolary document's history as either an original manuscript or an edited, printed artifact. With careful attention to the transformations that editing entails, whether in Tibetan xylography or in other cultures of printing, we can train our eyes to recover a truer-to-form reading of *epistolaria*—and of the readers that inhabit manuscript and print epistolary worlds, respectively.

The Stewards of Tibetan Epistolaria

The letters from Tibet's past that persist into the present have been handled by generations of stewards: monks, clerks, scholars, and others who have served as scribes, archivists, cataloguers, and editors, sometimes occupying several of these capacities at once. I offer here some reflections on the roles these largely invisible agents have played in transmitting Tibetan epistolary legacies, and in particular, how the social meanings that letters convey are sculpted by the hands that not only compose, but also inscribe, archive, catalogue, and edit them.

Scribes

In Tibet, scribes have often transcribed letters from dictation, especially in administrative contexts; at the end of a letter, the occasional line, "this was written by my own hand," is a reminder that a letter is not necessarily an autograph. An official's handbook composed by the regent Sangyé Gyatso indicates that in the fifth Dalai Lama's government (seventeenth to the twentieth century) scribes not only transcribed letters but also helped compose them by abbreviating or expanding the information that superiors dictated to them, as appropriate.[33] If a letter, at the time of its composition, met a certain threshold of institutional importance, the scribe would produce a duplicate of the letter. Otherwise, because letters were written to be dispatched, the correspondence of a particular individual or office would be scattered throughout all the archives of the recipients and would be virtually impossible to reassemble. Thus, the shaping of the Tibetan epistolary archive begins at the very moment of a letter's composition, when an author or scribe creates the written text of a letter, editing the oral dictation if applicable, and chooses whether to duplicate the letter for preservation.

Archivists

Most of the Tibetan letters that are extant today have been selected to survive. Archivists usually preserved letters because they met one of several criteria: they were connected to important people; they contained valued content, such as religious doctrine or legal material; or they exemplified literary artistry. Most Tibetan letter collections to which international scholars currently have access are not complete *epistolaria* (collections of all the letters a given figure ever wrote) but rather curated anthologies that were designed to showcase institutional knowledge, to document history, or to teach literary skills to writers in training. We rarely see personal notes, such as letters from monastics to their parents, included in collected works editions, even though Tibetan letter-writing manuals almost universally address the practice of familial correspondence and give instructions for its proper execution.

Cataloguers

Those who create catalogues of epistolary collections, whether for preservation purposes or for publication and distribution, hold in their hands the power to shape epistolary concepts and discourse. Some Tibetan letters that are more artistically inclined are headed with a decorative title and an epistolary genre marker, in accordance with the titling conventions for other treatises and texts, but most Tibetan letters are not titled as letters. Instead, they are simply addressed to the recipient, and the cataloguer has the privilege of transmitting assumptions about what type of letter a certain text is (or whether it is a letter at all), granting it a title for the catalogue, and as a result, influencing the growth and decline of various epistolary genre categorizations. For example, in the early modern period the designation *chab shog*, commonly translated as "political letter," was increasingly used in intramonastic correspondence that is not obviously political in nature, such as letters of religious advice from teachers to students. The way that letters are identified (or not identified) and grouped in catalogues influences their future lives in the hands of new readers. As Carol Poster has articulated in her research on ancient *epistolaria* in the Greco-Roman world, "the problem of what can be said to be (or not to be) in the archives is as much an interpretive as a bibliographic one. In particular, because what we find is conditioned by the methods and definitions we bring to our inquiries, things not recognized can be assumed to be not present."[34] This call to be aware of our interpretive blind spots and the organizing structures that they reinforce is as relevant to the many archivists that have curated Tibetan materials through the centuries as it is for contemporary scholars; each interpreter of an archive introduces another layer of conceptual presences and absences arising from our assumptions about genre.

Editors

The role an editor plays in transforming a text (and particularly in transforming an original manuscript text for print production) is vitally significant in shaping the life and legacy of an epistolary document, as the larger part of this article seeks to demonstrate. However, it is helpful to remember that much editorial work on Tibetan letters is already determined before the process of editing for print production begins. Given the prehistory of epistolary transcription, copying, archiving, and cataloguing manuscript originals, the print editor inherits a set of values and attributions that have already been imposed on the letter. The editor then wields an additional responsibility to reflect the interests of the institution or patron sponsoring the printing project, such as omitting texts that may appear irrelevant to, or at odds with, the interests of the institution. For example, the scholar Tukwan Lozang Chökyi Nyima composed a treatise on the "Great Perfection," a contemplative system that was developed in lineages that competed with the author's own. This text, though of great scholarly and religious interest, was censored from the Lhasa Zhol edition of his collected works but thankfully was preserved elsewhere.[35]

Concluding Thoughts and Future Directions

This brief study illuminates several key interpretive changes that textual editing and printing can make in the context of Tibetan epistolary literature and its afterlives. For scholars of Tibetan literature, who tend to rely heavily on xylograph editions of texts, I hope to make the case that a text's material form can be deeply integral to its meaning, and that scholars should be alert to whether and how the meaning of a manuscript original changes when a text is edited and printed. I also hope to appeal to the immense value of Tibetan archival documents, epistolary or otherwise. The bibliographical approach I model here can be applied to the wide variety of Tibetan literary genres, which might yield a variety of distinctive insights into the relationship between manuscript and print, or between original and edited texts.

This study also offers bibliographic questions that can serve the study of epistolary literatures in historical periods and linguistic contexts beyond early modern Tibet: how does material form contribute to the meaning of a letter? How are absent persons rendered present through the materiality of ink and paper? Do editors and archivists preserve the embodied presences and hierarchies inflected in epistolary texts, and if so, how? What might these efforts reveal about diverse cultural orientations toward the value and meaning of epistolary texts—as texts and as physical artifacts? With the tools of analytical bibliography, the new directions that these questions open are fully accessible to the global epistolary studies community.

NOTES

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[1] The Buddhist Digital Resource Center, for example, currently lists 198 volumes tagged with the term *gsung 'bum*, which is typically translated as "collected works." Accessed at www.tbrc.org on July 7, 2020.
[2] For a detailed study of one collected works printing project, see Kurtis Schaeffer, "Printing the Words of the Master," *Acta Orientalia* 60 (1999): 159–77.
[3] Dungkar Lobzang Trinlé and Tsering Dhundup Gonkatsang, "Tibetan Woodblock Printing: An Ancient Art and Craft," *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies* 36.1 (2016): 163–77. See 164.
[4] Schaeffer, "Printing the Words of the Master," 159.
[5] Dungkar, "Tibetan Woodblock Printing," 165–66. After a large initial investment of resources and labor, woodblocks could be stored and used for many reprintings.
[6] Dungkar, "Tibetan Woodblock Printing," 165–66.
[7] Brandon Dotson, *The Old Tibetan Annals: An Annotated Translation of Tibet's First History* (Wien: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 124.
[8] Sam van Schaik and Imre Galambos, *Studies in Manuscript Cultures: Manuscripts and Travelers, The Sino-Tibetan Documents of a Tenth-Century Buddhist Pilgrim* (Munich: de Gruyter, 2011).
[9] Tsuguhito Takeuchi, "A Group of Old Tibetan Letters Written Under Kuei-I-Chun: A Preliminary Study for the Classification of Old Tibetan Letters," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 44 (1990): 175–90.
[10] Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltsen ('phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan), *A Condensed Presentation on Correspondence* (*yig bskur rnam bzhag 'gag sdom*), appended to the *Presentation on Correspondence: A Little Illumination* (*yig bskur rnam bzhag nyung nyu rnam gsal*) in Vol. 4 of the *Collected Works* of Welmang Könchok Gyeltsen (dbal mang dkon mchog rgyal mtshan), (Amchog Monastery Printery, undated xylograph, folios 11b.3–12a.7.).
[11] *Buddhist Digital Resource Center*, accessed at www.tbrc.org on July 6, 2020; *Tibetan and Himalayan Library*, accessed at www.thlib.org on July 6, 2020.
[12] *Tibetan Historical Documents and Letters.* The Digitized Tibetan Archive Materials at Bonn University, Germany. Accessed at http://www.dtab.uni-bonn.de/tibdoc/index1.htm on July 16, 2018 (the collection is currently migrating to a new digital site); Archives of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, *A Collection of Historical Archives of Tibet* (Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1995).
[13] Tseten Zhapdrung (tshe tan zhabs drung 'jigs med rig pa'i blo gros), *How Letters Spread: The Sun that Causes the Lotuses of Supreme Minds to Smile* (*'phrin yig spel tshul lhag bsam pad mo 'dzum pa'i nyin byed*) in Vol. 4 of the *Collected Works* (Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 2007), 459–79.
[14] Martin Camargo, *Ars Dictaminis, Ars Dictandi* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), 22.
[15] Jamyang Zhepa ('jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus), *A Presentation on Correspondence: A Lovely Garland of Sinduwara Flowers, Ear Ornaments that Illuminate the Mind* (*'phrin yig gi rnam par bzhag pa blo gsal rna rgyan sin+du w+A ra'i 'phreng mdzes*), in Vol. 1 of the author's *Collected Works* (Mundgod India: Gomang College, 1997 [undated xylograph]), pp. 363–430. See folio 14a.3.
[16] *Tibetan Historical Documents and Letters*, Bonn University, Germany (61 cm x 87 cm, on paper), Document ID 0616a_AA_1_1_67_11. Accessed at http://www.dtab.uni-bonn.de/tibdoc/index1.htm on November 10, 2019. This document is a manuscript letter of courtesy submitted in the name of *dge chos blo bzang 'jam dpal* and his monk household to the monastic assembly**.**
[17] Yisun Zhang, *Great Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary* (Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 1985), entry 2000.
[18] *Tibetan Historical Documents and Letters*, Bonn University, Germany (62 cm x 123 cm, on silk), Document ID 1579. Accessed at http://www.dtab.uni-bonn.de/tibdoc/index1.htm on November 10, 2019. This document is a bilingual edict of the Fifth Dalai Lama from the seventeenth century. The upper half of the document contains the Tibetan script.
[19] Jü Mipam Gyatso ('ju mi pham 'jam dbyangs rnam rgyal rgya mtsho), *Presentation on Correspondence Expressed in Brief: A Jeweled Garland of Flowers* (*yig bskur gyi rnam bzhag mdo tsam brjod pa me tog nor bu'i phreng ba*), in Vol. 2 of the author's *Collected* Works (Chengdu: Snowland Culture Rare Book Preservation Society, 2007), 677–90. See folio 1a.3.
[20] Hanna Schneider, "Tibetan Epistolary Style," in *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, ed. Martin Brauen (Chicago: Serindia, 2005), 258-61.
[21] Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltsen, *Condensed Presentation*, folio 11a.
[22] Jamyang Zhepa, *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 14a.3ff.
[23] The text in Figure 1 follows this prescription. Although my translation places the phrase "before the exalted tiered seat, the water-born lotus feet of" at the beginning of the line of address, in the Tibetan syntax, this phrase comes at the end of the line of address.

[24] Bipa Mipam Dawa (bis pa mi pham zla ba). *A Presentation on Correspondence, Along with a Formulary: A Beautiful Garland of White Lotuses (phrin yig gi rnam bzhag dper brjod dang bcas pa pad+ma dkar po'i phreng mdzes)* (Xining: Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House, 1986), 14.
[25] For a more detailed study of the bow rendered graphically in Tibetan epistles, see Christina Kilby, "Bowing with Words: Paper, Ink, and Bodies in Tibetan Buddhist Epistles," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 87.1 (2019): 260–81.
[26] Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500–1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 114.
[27] See Alexander Gardner, "The Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso," *Treasury of Lives*. Accessed at https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Fifth-Dalai-Lama/TBRC_P37 on November 9, 2020.
[28] Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Document 958. See Peter Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 206–7.
[29] Tubten Chökyi Nyima (thub bstan chos kyi nyi ma), in Vol. 6 of the author's *Collected Works* (Tashi Lhunpo printery, undated xylograph), 398.
[30] Hildegard Diemberger, Franz-Karl Ehrhard, and Peter Kornicki, *Tibetan Printing: Comparison, Continuities, and Change* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1.
[31] Thanks to my anonymous reviewer for highlighting this nuance.
[32] Benjamin Nourse, "A Question of Style: Regional, Sectarian, and Printing House Styles in Tibetan Language Woodblock Printing" (Conference paper presented at the Symposium on the Tibetan Book, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, November 7, 2014).
[33] Sangyé Gyatso (sangs rgyas rgya mtsho), *The Crystal Clear Mirror: A Straight Line That Clearly Reveals What to Accept and Reject* (*blang dor gsal bar ston pa'i drang thig dwangs shel me long*) (Dolanji, Himachal Pradesh, India: Lhasa New Zhol Printery, 1979), folio 19a.6.
[34] Carol Poster, "The Case of the Purloined Letter-Manuals: Archival Issues in Ancient Epistolary Theory," *Rhetoric Review* 27.1 (2008): 2.
[35] Tukwan Lozang Chökyi Nyima (thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi rni ma), *Refutation: A Cleansing Ketaka Gem* (Sikkim, India: Rumtek Monastery, 1972).

Writing Upwards: Letters to Robert Menzies, Australian Prime Minister, 1949–1966

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Abstract: Robert Gordon Menzies received approximately 22,000 letters during his record-breaking second term of office as Australia's Prime Minister (1949–66). This article examines the corpus as an example of "writing upwards," a distinctive epistolary genre in which the weak wrote to the powerful, to praise them, berate them, abuse them, or perhaps wish them a happy birthday. From this perspective, the Menzies correspondence takes its place alongside the correspondence of other twentieth-century leaders that has already attracted scholarly and popular interest (the Belgian monarchy, Hitler, Mussolini, Mitterrand, Obama). After surveying this literature and establishing the Australian context, I give a brief presentation of the corpus as a whole. I then focus on one fundamental assumption of letter writers engaged in "writing upwards": they believed their leader or superior was directly accessible and that they could establish a personal connection with him. By cutting through bureaucratic red tape and by using the epistolary hotline to the top, they could solve a problem or at least make their grievance heard. I indicate the difficulties and illusions they experienced, and outline the tactics deployed by Menzies's secretariat in responding to their letters.

Writing Upwards

"Writing Upwards" is the term I use to categorize letters from humble citizens to their ruler, employer, or social superior, to petition, abuse, or congratulate them. Many Australians "wrote upwards" to Robert Menzies, their longest-serving prime minister, during his second term of office from 1949 to 1966. I will briefly outline the corpus of private correspondence he received during this record term of office, and then focus on one important assumption shared by all "writing upwards": the accessibility of the leader, and the possibility of establishing a personal connection with him.[1]

Historians of popular writing have found a fruitful source in letters to eminent political leaders. Maarten van Ginderachter, for instance, analyzed thousands of letters sent between 1865 and 1934 to the Belgian royal family. Most asked for some assistance, and normally the monarch obliged by sending a small gift, which showed that the strategy could be productive.[2] Adolph Hitler's Reich Chancellery received thousands of letters addressed to the Führer, and Hitler designated officials to reply to some of them. In Henrik Eberle's published selection, letters of protest to the Führer were initially present but gradually dwindled leaving an unremitting stream of veneration and birthday congratulations.[3] Poems of homage, birthday gifts, and requests to act as godfather to the writer's child poured in during the mid-1930s when Hitler was at the height of his epistolary popularity. In 1934 alone he received 10,000 birthday letters. Benito Mussolini also created a

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special office to deal with such correspondence. Anne Wingenter studied letters sent to Mussolini by surviving families of Italian soldiers killed in Ethiopia, in which desperate pleas for help were mingled with crude imitations of the heroic language of fascist sacrifice, designed to demonstrate the writer's loyalty.[4] The regime manipulated the letters in order to nourish the personal cult of Il Duce and published a carefully edited selection of them to confirm Italians' alleged devotion to their leader.

Scholars have also scrutinized writing to French presidents. Sudhir Hazareesingh interpreted Charles de Gaulle's incoming correspondence from the 1950s onwards as an important component in the cultivation of a personal myth of the national savior and the providential father of the French people.[5] François Mitterrand received about 1,000 letters daily during his presidency of France, and staff replied to almost every one of them in rapid time, although the requests they submitted were not granted. According to Béatrice Fraenkel, 110 standard responses were available to the presidential secretariat.[6] In 1983, the service was computerized and removed from the presidential Élysée Palace to new premises across the river Seine, thus breaking its connection with Mitterrand's private circle. Nevertheless, such cases illustrate the persistence of popular belief in the personal benevolence of the ruler and in the writer's ability to reach him personally, in spite of the inevitable bureaucratization of official correspondence in the cases mentioned. This created paradoxical situations: French subjects wanted a direct, unmediated epistolary connection with their president, but their correspondence was diverted to an impersonal public service department employing a staff of 100, who sorted the letters and selected the appropriate response. In such a situation, the question arises: who actually replied to letters to the president? The same question can be asked of the Menzies correspondence. Replies were a collaborative effort, drafted by staff in the name of the president or prime minister, who remained virtually present on the page. These examples also show the willingness of political authorities to manipulate such correspondence for their own ends. Hence Mitterrand invited people to write to him, while Mussolini published extracts from the most edifying letters.

The selection of letters to US President Barack Obama presented by Jeanne Marie Laskas is the most recent analysis of the genre.[7] Obama received about 10,000 letters daily, and every day he read ten of them, carefully selected by his staff. The Office of Presidential Correspondence employed fifty staff members, thirty-six interns and 300 rotating volunteers. The writers who replied to them, channeling the president's voice, included literature graduates sensitive to his tone and language—which was not the case with replies to the Menzies letters, penned by private secretaries who were not trying to imitate the prime minister's style.[8] Nor were Menzies's secretaries offered counselling, as Obama's staff were, when they had to deal with particularly traumatic letters.[9] Laskas's moving book is sympathetic to Obama, as a man of compassion who cared deeply about ordinary people's problems. I do not seek to emulate Laskas here: my study is not intended as a homage to Menzies.

Unlike Menzies, both Obama and Mitterrand were elected by direct popular vote, which may have strengthened the letter writers' perception that a close personal connection with them was possible. The Menzies letters, however, share important features with the corpuses mentioned above. They are evidence of a persistent belief in the power of the written word; and they are based on common assumptions about the accessibility of the ruler. These assumptions are a defining element of the genre.

Letters to a political leader are only one manifestation of the genre of writing upwards. Pauper letters seeking charitable relief from poverty and hardship are another, and they have been analyzed for the ways in which ordinary people interacted with authorities, sharing and manipulating common “anchoring rhetorics” and developing a dialogue with them based on similar “linguistic platforms.”[10] Petitions to a monarch constitute a further variation on the theme of writing upwards, although they differ in important ways from letters to a prime minister. Petitions are usually collectively organized, and they are often public documents. In some cases, the task of drafting them is entrusted to a delegated writer possessing suitable legal competence. Letters, on the other hand, are private and they have individual authors.[11]

Writing upwards describes all the ways above in which poor, desperate, or indignant people addressed their superiors. “Deference, Demands, Supplication”—this was how Camillo Zadra and Gianluigi Fait summarized their collection of studies on writing to the powerful.[12] Letters to authorities usually adopted a deferential tone that recognized their own inferior status; they often sought some personal advantage and sometimes they did so in begging or groveling language. But this was not always the case, and Zadra and Fait’s title was too short to encompass the wide range of possible attitudes expressed in writing upwards. Writings to the powerful might be abusive or obsequious, or they could denounce neighbors, conspirators, and corrupt officials. Occasionally they demanded nothing but seemed simply to have been a cry for attention or a plea for reassurance. Sometimes the writer assumed a network of reciprocal obligations and reminded a superior authority of the duty to fulfil earlier promises. Writers, I suggest, expected direct access to their leader, even if this expectation was rarely achievable. The underlying condition of all writing upwards was social or political inequality between the correspondents. For poor people addressing powerful forces, it was wise to be deferential and cautious. As James C. Scott has argued, however, expressions of loyalty and obedience should not be taken at face value, because deferential language could disguise a deeper insubordination.[13]

An Alternative History

Potentially, letters of ordinary citizens to any political leader reveal an alternative history that contrasts with political narratives conventionally told from the top down, from the viewpoint of politicians and official institutions. Thus, in spite of the variety of correspondents represented here, the letters from ordinary and even semiliterate writers provide a unique window on the mentality of grass-roots Liberal Party supporters in this period. They can tell us what ordinary people were thinking, in a way that a politician’s best guesses or anonymous election results cannot. I cannot claim that the Menzies letters constitute a representative sample of Australian “public opinion” as a whole. Most of them were penned by Liberal supporters and as a result a large section of the political spectrum is not represented. On the other hand, they were not blandly conformist and, although a majority of their authors were Liberal voters, they were Liberals with a grievance or a warning. Those grievances are themselves indicative of their unspoken beliefs.

James C. Scott distinguished between the public transcript, usually representing a visible and perhaps ritualized expression of conformity to official ideology, and the hidden transcript, referring to the private “offstage” conversations of citizens in which a more subversive discourse may be concealed.[14] When Menzies’s correspondents (or at least most of them) went to the polls to vote Liberal, they were performing a public transcript of support for Menzies and their political cause; in their personal letters, however, they expressed the hidden transcript of their misgivings and demands for change.

History told from the letter writer’s perspective may not coincide with orthodox narratives. Textbook histories of the period may, if their scope embraces international affairs, underline the historical importance of events like the Korean War, the death of Stalin, or the Suez crisis. Authoritative surveys with a more specifically Australian focus would emphasize a different set of landmarks—the Petrov Affair, the disastrous split in the Australian Labor Party, the problem of Indonesian designs on New Guinea.[15] Ordinary writers absorbed and reflected the significance of some of these events but remained completely indifferent to others. They had their own historical perspective and followed an autonomous historical calendar. They were most strongly moved, for example, by the royal visit of 1954, or a parliamentary decision to increase the remuneration of its own members, or the provisions of a forthcoming annual budget. The concerns of their letters did not necessarily mirror conventional or official views of the period. Instead, they offer an alternative history of the Menzies years. For instance, the most persistent issue running through the Menzies correspondence was neither the future of the British Empire nor anti-communism, powerful as these concerns were. The topic that exercised writers most regularly was rather the amount of the old age pension and the difficulty of trying to live on it. Constant cries of distress on this point echo throughout the correspondence.[16]

There were significant lacunae in the letters to Menzies. World events that in hindsight seem of major significance were passed over in almost complete silence by correspondents at the time. When a new prime minister took office in Britain, writers were well aware of it, but similar events elsewhere did not surface in their letters. The death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 went virtually unmentioned, which is a surprise considering the general interest in communism at this stage of the Cold War. Dwight Eisenhower's accession to the US presidency in the same year went similarly unnoticed in the letters. We cannot attribute this to the insular outlook of Australians and their general indifference to foreign affairs because there were clearly occasions when correspondents took a great interest in events abroad. If Australian troops were committed overseas, for instance in Malaya, public interest certainly followed them. The Suez crisis of 1956, together with the debate over apartheid after 1960, generated plenty of discussion in the correspondence, completely defying Menzies's own pronouncements that apartheid was a South African domestic issue that did not concern Australia. African affairs have probably never figured so prominently in the Australian consciousness as they did in this period. Writers' interest in foreign issues, however, remained selective.

The Menzies Correspondence

Menzies was the longest-serving prime minister in Australian history. He served two terms, the first from 1939 to 1941, and the second, with which my study is concerned, between 1949 and 1966. His longevity in office is exceptional and indeed legendary. He presided over significant social, economic, and political change. Some of it, like the mass immigration program, was engineered by the government. Other changes, like the switch to decimal currency, happened in spite of it. The Menzies years were a time of postwar reconstruction and rising prosperity against the background of the Cold War.

Australian politicians have battled for control of the historical memory of the 1950s. John Howard (Liberal prime minister, 1996–2007) recognized Menzies not merely as the founder the Liberal Party but also as the ideological fountain that constantly replenished the deep wells of Australian conservatism. In his eyes, these years were a golden age of calm and prosperity during which the unbroken supremacy of the Liberal Party laid the foundation of modern Australia.[17] Howard selected what he needed in order to construct a Liberal role model and an influential political tradition. For Paul Keating, on the other hand (Labor prime minister, 1991–96), these were years of complacency and cultural stagnation, soon to be shaken by mass immigration and the declining relevance of the White Australia policy. Keating berated Liberal nostalgia for the 1950s as "fogeyism" and condemned in particular its "cultural cringe" towards Britain and its monarchy.[18] Keating was committing the sin of historical anachronism, judging the 1950s against the values of the present. The popular royalism that he ridiculed was a potent force in 1950s Australia and demanded to be taken more seriously.

The letters that ordinary voters sent to Menzies in their thousands suggest a different profile from those advanced by self-interested politicians. For many ordinary people, the Menzies years appear as a time of anxiety and conflict, punctuated by fears of war, a repeat of the Great Depression, or an imminent nuclear Armageddon. Those deep-rooted fears were often exacerbated by Menzies himself for electoral gain. To persuade voters that they need greater security, you must first make them feel unsafe. Politicians' versions of the past, however, do not always correspond to the grass-roots memories of their electorates.

Under Menzies, Australia eventually experienced a growing prosperity introduced by the first mining boom, and Liberals were justifiably confident about holding on to power against an opposition paralyzed by its own divisions. Beyond these comforting developments, however, a deeper malaise surfaced in the correspondence to Menzies. There were concerns, fueled by Menzies himself, that some of the certainties of Australian life were under threat from communist subversion and Asian hostility. The global importance of the British Empire, on which Australia had for so long relied, was shrinking. There were fears that the whiteness of White Australia could not be maintained in all its purity forever. Meanwhile, the persistent level of poverty undermined official complacency about Australia's growing economy. The undeniable achievements of the age were accomplished in a polarized world in which there seemed to be a high risk of confrontation between superpowers. Meanwhile, over and above all those achievements loomed a mushroom-cloud-shaped vision of unparalleled destruction.

The corpus of the Menzies correspondence analyzed here consists of 19,363 letters. I have set aside dozens of boxes of invitations to functions and speaking invitations that Menzies usually declined (if I had included them, they would have brought the total number of letters in his mailbag to about 22,000 items). The correspondence includes letters of all sizes, telegrams, air letters, "with compliments" slips, and cards for different occasions— birthdays, Christmas, Easter, bon voyage cards, welcome home cards, and small calling cards bearing a scribbled message. Ordinary writers did not always obey the standard rules of epistolary etiquette, and they exploited any material that came to hand. In Queensland, Lawrence Johnston received a letter from Menzies about his pension, and used the blank spaces on the page for his reply, writing his own message in purple ink all around the typed text of the ministerial letter.[19] Some correspondents simply tore a page from a ruled exercise book. Bill Newling, a former bus conductor, wrote to Menzies on a piece of brown wrapping paper.[20] The archive is a great leveler: missives like Bill Newling's piece of brown paper sit side by side with the occasional telegram from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

My qualitative commentary on the correspondence is based on the entire corpus of over 19,000 letters. There has been no triage or selection: I have counted and reviewed every item. A few questions, however, demand a statistical answer and for the quantitative part of my analysis some sampling has been necessary. To this end I have conducted a simple statistical survey of three sample years, one at the beginning of the period (1949–50 numbering 863 letters), one in the middle (from 1958 totaling 1,623 letters) and one near the end (from 1964 numbering 1,195 letters). Altogether, these provide a total of 3,681 letters, which is a solid sample of about 19 percent of the main series of correspondence. The figures cited below are based on an analysis of these years, and the chronological span they cover allows a glimpse of one or two significant developments in the correspondence over the sixteen years of Menzies's term.

Who then wrote to Menzies? About 30 percent of the correspondence was sent by collective bodies or institutions—ministries, embassies, government departments, businesses, churches, and other nongovernment organizations. I am more interested in the remaining 70 percent (2,579 letters in the three-year sample). These individual letters are from ordinary writers who expressed their grievances and aspirations, and who embarked on the unfamiliar challenge of writing personally to the prime minister.

Men wrote most of the letters reflecting the historical male domination of politics, public administration, and capitalist enterprise. Even if we only consider letters from private individuals, 71.7 percent were written by men, compared to 28.8 percent by women, with a small residue of cases where the author's gender cannot be determined.[21] This disproportion remained fairly consistent across the years.

There was a strong overseas presence in the Menzies correspondence. The number of overseas correspondents fluctuated, but overall they were responsible for one in five of all letters (21.3 percent). "Londoners love Mr Menzies," reported Norma Norris when she returned home to Warburton (Victoria) after her holiday in England in 1964, and British correspondents regularly addressed Menzies on a range of topics, including the possibility of an assisted passage to Australia.[22] British correspondents dominated the cohort of overseas writers, accounting for 45.4 percent of all letters of foreign origin and rising to over 50 percent of them in two out of the three sampled years. The US produced just 22 percent, and British Commonwealth countries like New Zealand and Canada dominated the rest. In fact, almost two-thirds (64 percent) of overseas letters originated from Britain or the Commonwealth, which is a good indication of Menzies's personal network as well as of his general worldview.

Letters with an Australian postmark outnumbered overseas letters by about three to one, accounting for 76.9 percent of the sample. They originated overwhelmingly from Victoria (35.2 percent of Australian letters) or New South Wales (30.5 percent), although Victoria's share was in slow decline. A rising proportion of letters (14 percent of Australian letters) came from Canberra, Australia's capital and center of government, for example from government departments and parliamentarians. This change illustrates the slow bureaucratization of the correspondence, in the sense that the direct and personal contact with Menzies to which correspondents eagerly aspired in 1949–50 was gradually interrupted and partially superseded in the corpus by epistolary conversations between public servants. Since almost 80 percent of the Australian letters came from Victoria, New South Wales, or the Australian Capital Territory, voices from other states were much more rarely heard. As a result, Menzies was far more likely to receive a letter from England than one from either Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, or the Northern Territory, which between them accounted for 19 percent of Australian letters.

Menzies had a few very persistent correspondents, but the vast majority of ordinary writers (81.9 percent) sent only a single letter each. Their letters were usually short: 59 percent of them were confined to a single page, not counting numerous telegrams and cards carrying very brief messages. Correspondents chose a wide variety of paper sizes, and there were many available, since Australia did not adopt A4 as the standard paper size until 1971. Nevertheless, 64 percent of letters were on medium-sized paper, encompassing A4, US letter and variations on both. A substantial minority of 29.2 percent of letters had a more intimate and smaller size, close to today's

A5. A large paper size, foolscap or US legal, was favored by government departments and accounted for 6.7 percent of letters.

The majority of letters had a formal letterhead, perhaps an individual's address (printed or cheaply embossed), a business address, or occasionally the letterhead of a ship or a hotel. On the whole, however, the correspondence is distinguished by a high degree of informality, especially from untutored hands. Individual and inexperienced writers often used lined paper, which accounted for over 20 percent of all letters in 1949–50, although the proportion fell to 11.5 percent by 1964. Over 6 percent preferred colored paper, almost always blue, although a lighter shade of grey was fashionable in 1964. Neither lined nor colored paper can be considered conventional materials for formal letters. Sometimes they came from cheaply available, small format notepads—the kind of paper one might use to write to anybody.

Although the correspondence certainly illustrates the inexorable rise of the typewriter, handwriting retained an enduring popularity. Some considered a handwritten letter more personal and informal than a letter typed on a machine. G. D. McKinnon of the Victorian Presbyterian Church wanted to send a letter with a personal touch and explained, "Having posted a typewritten letter to you this morning—somewhat hurriedly—second thoughts suggest that it smacked of being too 'official'." He rectified the situation by sending a handwritten letter.[23] Archbishop Eris O'Brien (of Canberra and Goulburn) was under the mistaken impression that a handwritten letter was more likely to receive Menzies's exclusive attention, and he wrote "I have written, rather than typed, this letter, because I want it to be personal and not subject to the observation of others."[24] In the 1949–50 sample, letters composed by hand were even in the majority, but this did not last long and handwriting was generally the preferred method for 43.4 percent of all letters. Within this number, the domination of the biro (a ballpoint pen) over the fountain pen was secure. Biro was used for 62 percent of manuscript letters in 1964.[25]

Many writers showed that they were not entirely familiar with the letter-writing process and its protocols. In other words, their level of epistolary literacy was weak. By far the most common signs of inexperience were the failure to use any margins and a complete lack of paragraph indentation. More than a quarter of all manuscript letters (28.2 percent) showed signs of one or another of these deficiencies, and they usually went hand in hand. A few more writers failed to keep a straight horizontal line, and others wrote either in a very cramped script or a very large one—both signs of unfamiliarity with the medium and poor control of the *mise-en-page*. Several writers had a shaky or scrawled hand, in some cases due to old age and natural frailty. A couple were written entirely in block capitals. Fifteen letters exhibited symptoms of poor epistolary competence to the point of being virtually unintelligible. These included letters penned by inmates of mental institutions; their incomprehensible letters were dutifully forwarded to the prime minister in recognition of every citizen's right to petition parliament. Overall, the combination of a biro and lined paper in small or medium format was a popular choice and this suggested an informal approach to Menzies.

Many letters demonstrated an imperfect grasp of English, and spelling errors were abundant. Capital letters might be distributed throughout the text quite indiscriminately. As with examples of "writing from below" encountered in other contexts, the letter writers were also uncertain about punctuation and sometimes liberated themselves completely from the rules of grammar.[26] G. H. Parry, to take one example, wrote,

> I saw Mr Ryan head of police Parramatta he told me to see my solicitor but he said case
> was to big for him Police and soluitons wont help so I thougt case for bigger man
> This case is long over due it time some one dine about it…

your faifully, GH Parry.[27]

Writers with a grievance wanted to be "compassated," or they complained that the attitudes of "offissialdom" were far from "addiquett." They wrote "leased" for least, "sincear" for sincere, "ledgeslation" for legislation or "hole" for whole. They were frustrated if a request was "refewsed." Staunch Liberal supporters detested Labor "polatishons" and especially denounced the "hipocery" of Menzies's political opponent, Labor leader H. V. "Doc" Evatt. They often had difficulty with names of foreign places and individuals. The correct English spelling of Khrushchev often defeated them, but in fairness it would have challenged any scholar. One writer, however, wrote that Khrushchev's base was in "Mossgow"—which conjured up an imaginary New South Wales town somewhere between Moss Vale and Lithgow. "Mr K" was not all Menzies had to watch out for: there could be trouble from "Chiner" and the "Japanease" as well.

Throughout the correspondence a gradual trend towards greater bureaucratization can be detected. Canberra and the sources of government provided a growing element in the correspondence, thereby reducing the share of letters received from private individuals and from other parts of the country. At the same time, correspondents began to recognize the presence of secretaries and their power to filter communication between the citizen and Menzies. The fiction of personal and direct access to the prime minister was effectively abandoned by an increasing number of writers. In spite of this, the myth of the personal hotline to the top continued to inspire ordinary writers to pick up their biros.

The Personal Hotline

Leaving aside the statistical sample, I now turn to the corpus of over 19,000 letters as a whole to stress one fundamental assumption of writing upwards: that ordinary people had a right to direct personal access to their superiors. Their previous efforts to solve a problem might have run into difficulty with the authorities, or they may have been frustrated by bureaucratic delays and obfuscation. Menzies's local constituents from Kooyong, for example, reported their failures to persuade the Postmaster-General's office to extend a new telephone line to their premises; would-be emigrants had hit a brick wall in their approaches to the Australian High Commission in London to secure approval for an assisted passage; applicants for a war or a disability pension had initially been refused by the relevant ministry. George Reeves, a Lancashire (UK) man trying to get an assisted passage to Australia, described a common situation very succinctly: "After many weary years of waiting," he wrote, "I now attempt to side step red tape and present my case."[28] Writers implicitly believed that if they could reach a higher authority in person, they would receive humane treatment and a sympathetic hearing. Writers writing upwards, then, strove for a personal connection with the leader and assumed it was possible. Correspondents desired an unmediated connection with their leader, without filters or interpreters. One member of Mitterrand's staff labeled this a "monarchist" vision of the world.[29] In such a vision, citizens imagined that if sovereigns could only be made aware of the heartlessness of their subordinate officials, they would right all wrongs, ensure that their subjects were no longer mistreated, and in this way justice would prevail. In the bureaucratized world of the twentieth century, this might have seemed a throwback to a premodern age if political leaders had not themselves seen some advantage in encouraging citizens to write to them.

This assumption that a personal epistolary hotline was available ran counter to the practical realities of government. Writers became exasperated when their requests got lost in red tape at the hands of government officials who stood between themselves and Menzies, but these intermediaries could not always be avoided. In practice, of course, Menzies himself diverted private requests to the appropriate public organization responsible for dealing with them. Even if correspondents knew full well that this would happen, they continued to believe that a word of support from Menzies himself would fix their problems. Menzies had his own private secretariat to deal with the correspondence he received, and the role of the secretary will be considered below.

Menzies, it was assumed, was accessible to all and sundry. "I have been told", wrote Arthur Smellie from London, "that you are great enough as a statesman and a man, for the humblest to seek and obtain your ear."[30] Mrs. E. Radcliffe, writing from South Africa, began with a standard apology before insisting on addressing the highest authority: "Please forgive me writing to you: my father used to say to me as a child 'If you want anything done go to the top' and I don't feel it would be nice if this were picked over by endless people and perhaps never reaching you at all."[31] The personal hotline was activated to secure an understanding and effective response.

The assumption that Menzies was accessible to all was evident in the material signs of intimacy in the letters. The use of decorated or colored paper, together with colored inks, usually purple, green, or red, indicated a close rather than a formal relationship. We even find examples of cross-writing, when a correspondent filled a page portrait-style, then turned it ninety degrees and continued writing the message at right angles over the previous text. In prior centuries, cross-writing was a way of saving paper, but it was something only acceptable between friends. Familiar forms of address like "Dear Bob" also assumed a close relationship between Menzies and the writer. There was a widespread feeling amongst correspondents that Menzies "belonged" to his public, as a letter from Alice Hann indicated: "Please forgive me if I presume too much but I feel my Prime Minister belongs to me as to all his other loyal constituents and I would be so happy to meet you and Mrs Menzies."[32] Writers imagined that they could nullify the status gap between themselves and the prime minister, making even a personal meeting possible.

Correspondents needed to ensure that their letters found their way into Menzies's own hands. They feared that a secretary would intervene and interrupt their personal communication route to him, like John Mason, who wanted to attack compulsory trade unionism and told Menzies, "I am writing this to you hoping that you shall read it yourself and not office staff or screw it up and throw it away in the dust bin, until you have read it yourself."[33] Professor Warren Carey had something to say about the nationality of the next Governor-General, and did not see why the office should be the exclusive preserve of Australians and Britishers. Unable to see Menzies in person, he put his arguments in writing to Menzies's secretary William Heseltine, commenting for his benefit, "It will not suffer by being left unopened for a while, but it is not a matter which should be bandied about in the department before it has gone to the prime minister."[34] Many just did not anticipate the role of a secretary to filter the mail and respond to it, and reacted angrily when they received a message from the secretary telling them he or she would bring the matter to the prime minister's attention. Some naively believed that by marking their letter "Private" they would guarantee its swift passage to the prime minister. Sydney Moss peppered the prime minister's office with letters about pension increases and wrote to Heseltine:

> Whilst I thank you for yours under date the 26th inst., in answer to my 'PRIVATE' letter to Mr Menzies of the 20th … I am at a loss to understand why my letter was not received by Mr Menzies himself, being addressed 'Private' and why you, Sir, should state 'you will bring it under his notice etc'

It is far too important a matter to be shelved, as thousands of poor unfed Pensioners are suffering though [*sic*] lack of the Governments interest or action, on their behalf, and I shall look for some explanation, as to why so urgent a mater [*sic*] <u>was not dealt with by the Prime Minister himself, and opened by him</u>.[35]

A few writers imagined that the secret of direct access was to address the letter appropriately, like John McConville, who sent his letter to Menzies's private residence, because in his words, "I feel if I sent it to parliament house it would just be dealt with by your Secretary and you might never see it."[36] His letter protested against salary increases for members of parliament, and Heseltine sent him a reply. Mr. H. Roberts from Menzies's own Kooyong constituency also hoped to bypass bureaucratic obstruction to make a similar protest, writing, "in the hope that this communication survives the sometimes impenetrable barrier of secretaries our politicians have erected at our expense, I wish to voice an emphatic protest at the shameless salary grab in which you are about to participate."[37] But it was more productive to curry favor with the secretaries rather than to insult them.

This discussion is primarily devoted to writers who made a direct and personal approach to Menzies. For those more aware of the paths their letters actually followed, however, it was politic to address the secretaries themselves, perhaps to ask them to intervene on the writer's behalf. From Wales, Joan Lewis only realized the true mediated nature of the epistolary exchange when she received an unexpected reply from Menzies's office and immediately understood that she owed this as much to the secretary as to Menzies himself. She wrote again, this time to secretary Hazel Craig herself, to express her surprise and gratitude for the reply, referring to "Your letter from the Prime Minister Mr Menzies," which seems an excellent formulation of the collective work of the secretariat. Lewis was amazed that Menzies had taken the time to attend to her questions and wrote, "I don't really know how to start to thank you," referring to Craig.[38]

One Englishman invited Craig to visit him in Devon, promising her a room with a view of the sea,[39] but a better example of epistolary dialogue between a correspondent and a secretary is Mrs. E. M. Thisseu, an elderly woman with restricted mobility. Thisseu explained to Craig that she had not been out of her house in Swansea (New South Wales) for years. She related her life story, and asked for a food parcel and an autograph. She, too, addressed herself to Craig, pleading, "Do you think you could write me a letter sometimes Miss Craig, and help to make my life a little brighter by reading something of what you do, its [*sic*] very lonely sometimes!" Mrs. Thisseu was exceptional in that she clearly would have liked to have struck up a relationship with Craig and establish a hotline with her rather than with Menzies. Her plea illustrates one of the rarely articulated motives for writing to a public figure: the sheer loneliness of the elderly.[40]

For almost everybody, however, access to Menzies himself was the prime objective. One ruse adopted to activate the hotline was to address the letter to Pattie Menzies, Robert's wife. This was predominantly a female strategy: out of eleven correspondents in the corpus who addressed their letters to Dame Pattie in the sampled years of 1949–50, 1958, and 1964, eight were from women, two were from men, and one was from a company selling encyclopedias. Joyce Atkinson wrote inviting Menzies's wife Pattie to have a "back-stage chat" but fully expected her to "pass the information on to hubby for me … please."[41] Adele Vandenberg tried to reach Menzies by this roundabout route with this apologetic and flattering request:

Dear Dame Pattie,
<u>Please forgive me</u> for passing this on to you, but I feel that by doing so, I will genuinely get in touch with (our dear Prime Minister)—your husband.[42]

Another female correspondent also sent a New Year greetings and congratulations to the prime minister via his wife, adding in a postscript,

> I am addressing this to Mrs Menzies as I feel there is more likelihood of your reading it, than if a secretary had to decide an important enough epistle for you to spend your time on.
> But naturally I think it is very important!![43]

Gladys Kennedy wrote about the Moral Re-Armament World Summit and addressed her letter to Mrs. Menzies because "I want to reach the heart of Australia and I thought of no better way than to write to you—the Prime Minister's wife."[44] She received a reply but from Hazel Craig. None of these tactics stood any chance of avoiding the usual secretarial screening.

The Secretariat and the Art of the Evasive Reply

Menzies's private secretaries had to demonstrate a high level of technical competence, and they enjoyed the advantage of being close to the prime minister. In spite of this, they had little power to resolve problems; usually they simply had to know the best person to whom they should *refer* problems. A referral from the prime minister's office was a strong incentive to a minister or official to examine an individual dossier very carefully. The prime minister's secretaries, then, were not administrators with the capacity to make decisions. Referrals to a ministry or a department never pressed for any particular outcome—they just asked for a report. Once the report was received, the secretariat had to relay an administrative decision back to the correspondent, and it was often unfavorable. This required a skillful reply that intermingled bureaucratic explanations with a dose of compassion.

Leaving aside the prime minister's press secretary, who was not directly concerned with his personal correspondence, there were always at least two staff members responsible for receiving and responding to personal letters, and at very busy times more were hired on a casual basis. These public servants formed a small group of hard-working, experienced, and politically neutral secretaries who mediated the epistolary hotline between Menzies and his correspondents.

They gave incoming correspondence three red stamps, as appropriate. Firstly, letters were stamped "Received" with the date of reception added. A selection of letters was stamped "Personal" when the letter was from a personal friend of Menzies and a personal reply was required. A further selection was stamped "Seen by the Prime Minister" when it was considered important enough to be brought to his attention. Menzies, in other words, did not see every letter, although he was virtually present in all replies they received. To this extent, the personal hotline to which correspondents aspired was an illusion.

In most cases, the secretaries would send noncommittal replies thanking the senders, and they would draft these on their own initiative. Some letters bear a typed or handwritten note: "ack.," with the date, indicating when a simple acknowledgement of receipt had been sent. A proportion of letters would be referred to an appropriate ministry or government department. In some of these cases where the original letter has been forwarded, only the reply remains on file. We have to deduce the contents of the original from the prime minister's response.

There were inevitably occasions when the secretary needed to confer with Menzies before drafting a suitable reply, and the correspondence bears the traces of their dialogue. In straightforward cases, the secretary would forward the letter to Menzies and write in pencil in the margin "anything wanted?" and Menzies would write back in pencil: "No, RG [*his initials*]." Sometimes the letter was illegible and incomprehensible, and the secretary would type a transcription for Menzies to read. If a letter arrived in a foreign language, she would find an expert to translate it. She would ask Menzies if he knew the writer personally, because this would influence the nature of the reply. If writers just gave a name and initial without indicating their gender, the secretary would look them up in the telephone directory, so that she would have the correct form of address on hand for her response. On occasions, she would draft a reply in shorthand in pencil on the verso of the letter received. The details of the mechanics of reception and response reveal that the letters were heavily mediated, and that even if responses bore Menzies's name and were issued with his authority, they were a collective and a collaborative enterprise.

A few correspondents caused amusement in the office. Mrs. E. E. Beniams of New Zealand, for example, raised eyebrows when she blamed princess Elizabeth for marrying a descendant of the Battenbergs, the enemies of Great Britain, and for good measure she asserted she was Captain Cook's great-granddaughter. She was not the only person in the British Commonwealth to express misgivings about the royal marriage, but her extravagant genealogical claim did not convince anyone. Craig noted to Menzies: "Although this is from an admirer of yours, I am afraid she is a bit barmy."[45] She warned him against another correspondent as she forwarded her letter: "Be careful here—she is as ga-ga as they are made—completely nuts."[46] Ernest Cooper of Western Australia wrote a twenty-three-page double-spaced letter on the merits of peace and cooperation in preference to interparty feuding, as well as on the telepathic messages that he had been receiving about this. He went on, "I could write much more than all this, on that and allied subjects and <u>may</u> do soon." Secretary William Heseltine, hitherto a patient reader, penciled a marginal note: "Not to me I hope."[47]

There were serial offenders, whose repeated and lengthy correspondence seems to have been a symptom of either dire loneliness or a deep-rooted fixation. Joyce Atkinson wrote often and profusely from her home in Queensland. Her letters arrived every few days in the winter of 1958. Before the secretariat had time to acknowledge one of them, another would arrive, so that the secretaries resorted to responding to them in batches. She had been identified as a problem as early as 1955, as Craig explained at some length to Menzies in a typed comment:

> This woman has a complex, but you are her "hero." As you can see she runs to pages and pages every week.
> We have sent her some of your speeches and now she asks whether she can incorporate (in full) your speech to the Institute of Management in a book she intends to write. Personally I don't think it will ever see the light of day. I think perhaps I should tell her that this is now the property of the Institute of Management. Would this be correct? [*Menzies wrote "Yes" in the margin*].
> I am quite positive she is on your side, and would not do anything to harm you, but is "over eager" or a bit "queer."[48]

As the cases of George Hodge and Oswald Ziegler, mentioned below, will show, Craig's frustration with problem correspondents was not directed exclusively at women. But, however trying the circumstances, the secretariat maintained its tolerance and composure.

At the same time, showing her public face, the secretary assured writers that they had every right to address the prime minister and that they would receive a fair hearing. Victoria Brown wrote a bitter and pessimistic letter that concluded, "I am told you will pass this to the waste paper basket as 'Gutter Topic'." But Craig assured her that this would not be its fate, since "any citizen is always at liberty to write to the Prime Minister and, unless the letter is not signed, or has no address, attention is given to it."[49] When Mrs. R. Powell of Bendigo wrote, "I suppose you will think I have an awful cheek writing to you," Craig told her it was her right as a citizen to do so, in these terms: "It is the right of every citizen to write to the Prime Minister should they desire information, and he is only too happy to do his best for them."[50] Mr. B. Cowling certainly appreciated this. "Frankly, sir," he wrote, "I even like having the knowledge of being able to write to my Prime Minister and state what I believe. Many countries cannot do this."[51] Writing upwards was an essential democratic right.

Not everybody expected a reply from Menzies. Timothy Western of Camberwell (Victoria) wrote to attack the government's general incompetence and especially its failure to allow more Asian immigration, concluding, "What will become of this letter, I am not sure. Will you, as Prime Minister see it? Will it be answered, or will it be treated with contempt? Be this a democracy, I will receive an answer. But is it?"[52] Western did receive a reply from secretary Les Moore, explaining that his previous letters had been ignored because they were abusive.

Expectations notwithstanding, Menzies was very assiduous in replying. Consider the sample of 3,681 letters presented at the beginning of this article. If we exclude from the tally all messages that clearly did not seek a reply, such as thanks-for-your-condolences and other goodwill cards, the net total remaining from the sample is 3,408. Of these, the very high figure of 74.1 percent received a reply from Menzies's secretariat. The secretariat's efficiency in this domain, however, was in decline. In 1949–50, the first year sampled, the reply rate was almost 80 percent. In 1958, it fell to under 73 percent and in 1964 the reply rate had declined further to 71.8 percent. Even this figure represented an extraordinarily high rate of response. It is possible that there were fewer replies because more requests were being dealt with either in person or by telephone.

Delays were inevitable: secretaries constantly apologized to correspondents on Menzies's behalf because he was too busy, overseas or preparing to go overseas, so that he had neglected his personal correspondence. Papers were mislaid as Menzies traveled, and the secretary had to apologize for the oversight later. Most writers got a reply eventually, even if it sometimes took months to arrive, waiting for a parliamentary session to end, or for Menzies to return from an overseas visit. Even when a writer specifically told Menzies not to reply, he or his secretariat still wrote a response. Sometimes where there is no written reply on file, instead there is a note to say that he had phoned the writer, or spoken to him or her in person, in the case of members of parliament. Replies often enclosed a copy of a recent Menzies speech or an extract from Hansard, and sometimes an autographed photograph, although the office was slow to prepare for this kind of fan-mail exchange and for several months in 1950 did not comply with requests for a photo.

Menzies's election win in December 1949 stimulated a deluge of congratulatory messages, which overwhelmed the newly installed secretariat. Profuse apologies were issued for the delay in replying to them all:

> As you will realise, many thousands of messages were received by Mr Menzies, not only from within Australia, but from all over the world. It would have been a physical impossibility for him to reply personally to all of them, and it was for that reason "acknowledgement" cards were sent out, with small typed notes from him which did not necessitate his signature.
> Necessarily, however, it will be a matter of courtesy for him to send personal letters to a number of prominent people.[53]

In other words, and quite counterintuitively, the sender was reliably informed that if he or she had not received any response yet, it could well be a sign of his or her important rank.

There were a few favorite ways of replying, even if the responses were never completely uniform. Walter Henderson had written a supportive letter that included a personal element and an invitation for Mr. and Mrs. Menzies to visit him, and he received this courteous reply that was typical of many:

> Dear Mr Henderson,
>
> Although with the pressure of parliamentary duties the Prime Minister has not had an opportunity to reply personally to your letter of the 28th October he has asked that I will send a message to thank you for the encouraging way in which you have written.
>
> He was interested, too, to know that your daughter is still absorbed in her work.
>
> Mr Menzies sends his best wishes to her and to you and his thanks for your open invitation to him to bring Mrs Menzies to visit you.
>
> Yours sincerely,
>
> E.M. Wilkinson, Private Secretary.[54]

Although this was a typical response, it was not completely standardized, and there was plenty of scope for a tailored, personal reply. Prime ministerial apologies might be phrased typically as follows: "As you will doubtless realise, in the last couple of months he has been hard-pressed with parliamentary matters and, more recently, in preparation for this very hurried visit abroad, and more or less personal matters were neglected."[55] Letters of support and congratulation were acknowledged in this courteous style:

> I am writing to thank you and your wife for the sentiments expressed in your letter of 17th August.
>
> It is very warming to receive such letters of congratulations from my friends and I am deeply appreciative of your thoughtfulness.[56]

When correspondents put forward plans for reform or laid bare grievances, the usual response was to thank them for their "practical interest" in writing. This phrase was used repeatedly to acknowledge but at the same time to deflect the inquiry, but there were very few standard, pre-prepared response formulae. If correspondents raised a thorny problem, the reply would ignore it and just convey good wishes.

Correspondents therefore only rarely succeeded in establishing the direct personal connection with Menzies that they expected would provide the answer to their troubles, but they could usually count on a personalized response that was not merely the equivalent of today's impersonal, pre-recorded message. Of course, there were always a few correspondents who would not be fobbed off by apologies for delays, and who resented the interference of officials whose obstruction they were trying to circumvent. These individuals had higher expectations of the correspondence, and they appeared as troublemakers. Arthur Richardson was one of those who wanted Menzies to dismiss William McKell as Governor-General as soon as he became prime minister, arguing that McKell's appointment had been a party-political measure engineered by the Labor Party. When he failed to get a commitment from Menzies on this score, he exploded. Although Menzies had been ill as well as busy, Richardson wrote: "I must protest strongly against your clear attempt—which in itself arouses suspicion—to avoid the issue until after the election … I do not expect Mr Menzies to have time for letter writing, but I do expect him to find time to dictate a plain and simple answer to this vitally important question. I expect my letter—incidentally a friendly one from a supporter—to be treated seriously." Richardson was not apologetic, and he was particularly impatient with the evasions he received from the secretariat. He added in a post-script, "I and my friends are not interested in the 'very many queries' Mr Menzies is dealing with 'all over Australia'—at any rate not to the point of having this particular query side-stepped." Menzies was shown this letter and made a penciled note: "No—ignore."[57]

Similarly, Edward Wright from the Blue Mountains (New South Wales) was provoked to anger when his attempt to secure a personal appointment did not receive the desired response from the government. He attacked both Menzies and the relevant minister thus: "As the prime inspiration for Australia's most rapidly rising national enterprise—passing the buck—and chief Dalia Lama [*sic*] of Canberra, may I direct your attention to the fact that the word of your Repatriation Minister, Cooper, is worthless; or his health is no longer equal to his present position."[58] Secretary Heseltine penciled in his understandable reaction to this outburst: "I felt that this letter was couched in terms of much rudeness as to require no acknowledgment—WH".

In time the secretariat lost patience and became a little more privately cynical about individual correspondents. In 1964, George Hodge asked Menzies to donate a Bible to his local Presbyterian Church, but Hazel Craig rejected his pleadings with a note dismissing them as "another try-on … Poor struggling little Presbos, I guess." This time Craig had underestimated Menzies, who agreed to make the donation.[59] She similarly lost patience with Oswald Ziegler of Ziegler publications, who sent several letters asking Menzies to write a foreword to a coffee-table book on Australia, to authorize a reproduction of his portrait, and then to let him call it "The House that Bob Built." He got permission for the portrait but not for his other requests. Craig "mistrusted him" and warned Menzies, "The Lord forbid that you should fall for this" because "he is an awful humbug really."[60]

Perhaps the most telling sign of a new and less generous attitude was the creation in 1965 of a "no-reply" file, which mainly includes letters from eccentrics and religious fanatics. Most of the contents of the "no-reply" file were received during Menzies's retirement, but it nevertheless contains several items from 1965 and January 1966 (when he was still in office), including a few complaints about pensions and the means test, which determined who qualified to receive one. Unlike the treatment of the vast majority of correspondents in previous years, these correspondents received no answer. The discourse of the archive is eloquent here: grumbling pensioners were now classified in the same category as cranks.[61]

Correspondents certainly were rude and were often deferential, but they had a common goal. They hoped for a personal epistolary conversation with Menzies, whom they assumed could assist them with a range of problems, some political or administrative and others more personal. When they encountered a wall of secretaries, they had several different reactions. Some were outraged that their message had not reached the prime minister in person and had failed to obtain the desired outcome. Some resorted to ruse to slip their letters through the protective net, sending them to Mrs. Menzies or conspicuously labelling it "Private and Confidential." None of this worked. Some just accepted secretarial intervention and even embraced it as an opportunity to open a conversation with a new correspondent. As already noted, a growing number of letters was addressed directly to one of the secretaries. The initiatives shown by Menzies's secretarial staff even encouraged this. When a woman wrote from Texas offering advice on how to deal with the rabbit problem, which she had been reading about, secretary Everil Wilkinson wrote her a long explanation of the particular problems faced in rural Australia, especially the difficulty of constructing boundary fences in sparsely populated areas.[62] Her generous reply was far longer than the original letter, showing the willingness of secretaries to engage with individual correspondents, at least in these early years.

If we compare Menzies's secretariat with that of François Mitterrand in the 1980s, we find an enormous difference of scale. Mitterrand might have received as many letters in a single day as Menzies received over a whole year, and the French president had a secretariat fifty times larger to deal with them.[63] In both cases, the same notion of a direct, personal exchange with the national leader inspired the correspondence. In the French case, however, the mere size of the corpus inevitably tended to make the exchange more distant and impersonal. Perhaps the continuing illusion of the personal hotline to the top only made sense in a smaller country with a slimmer apparatus of government.

The importance of the letters to Menzies has hitherto been ignored. We should situate them within a specific genre of letter writing—namely, writing upwards. The analysis of writings upwards provides an alternative to conventional political history. It changes the perspective, focusing on the assumptions and concerns of the so-called silent masses and finding them to have been not so silent after all. Today, the New History from Below is making great efforts in various parts of the world to unearth more direct evidence of their existence and their culture in the writings of the poor and the marginal themselves—the writings, in fact, of those who often in the past have not been credited with the ability to write competently at all.[64] This kind of history reevaluates individual experience and searches for the personal voices of common people. Those voices may be mediated, as in this case, through written correspondence; and they may struggle to express themselves because of their unfamiliarity with writing technology or with epistolary literacy in general. But ordinary readers and writers can only be fully understood if we listen to their own voices, however inarticulate they may seem, and regard them as active agents in their own history rather than passive receptacles for official ideologies. The writings of humble people are there if we care to look for them. The letters to Menzies are one small part of a submerged continent of ordinary writings now becoming increasingly accessible to the New History from Below.

NOTES

[1] A book length study of the Menzies letters, provisionally entitled *Writing to Menzies: Letters to an Australian Prime Minister, 1949–1966*, will be published in Sydney by University of New South Wales Press in 2022.
[2] Maarten van Ginderachter, "If your Majesty would only send me a little money to help buy an elephant': Letters to the Belgian Royal Family (1880–1940)," in *Ordinary Writings, Personal Narratives: Writing Practices 19th and Early 20th-Century Europe*, ed. Martyn Lyons (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 69–83.
[3] *Letters to Hitler*, ed. Henrik Eberle. English version edited by Victoria Harris, translated by Steven Randall (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012), 174 and 94.
[4] Anne Wingenter, "*Voices of Sacrifice*: Letters to Mussolini and Ordinary Writing under Fascism," in Lyons, *Ordinary Writings*, 155–72.
[5] Sudhir Hazareesingh, *In the Shadow of the General: Modern France and the Myth of De Gaulle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[6] Béatrice Fraenkel, "'Répondre à tous'? Une enquête sur le service du courrier présidentiel," in *Par écrit: Ethnologie des écritures quotidiennes*, ed. Daniel Fabre (Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1997), 243–71.
[7] Jeanne Marie Laskas, *To Obama, with Love, Joy, Hate and Despair* (London: Bloomsbury Circus, 2018).
[8] Laskas, 65–66 and chap. 14.
[9] Laskas, 71.
[10] Steven King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s–1830s* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2019); *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731–1837*, ed. Thomas Sokoll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Letters of the Catholic Poor: Poverty in Independent Ireland, 1920–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2017). The rhetorical structures of the Menzies letters are fully treated in Lyons, *Writing to Menzies*, forthcoming.
[11] Martyn Lyons, "Writing Upwards: How the Weak Wrote to the Powerful," *Journal of Social History* 49.2 (2015): 317–30. This article takes up examples of workers' letters to an Italian factory owner, letters to the king of Italy during the First World War, petitions to the Russian Tsar, and Australian Aboriginal petitions to the British crown.
[12] Camillo Zadra and Gianluigi Fait, *Deferenza, Revendicazione, Supplica: le lettere ai potenti* (Treviso: Pagus, 1992).
[13] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
[14] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 3–16.
[15] In April 1954, Vladimir Petrov, a colonel in the Soviet intelligence service, defected to Australia. A few days later his wife Evdokia was sensationally "rescued" at Darwin airport from the hands of Russian operatives who intended to escort her back to the USSR.
[16] A full discussion of these topics in the letters is beyond the scope of this article but may be consulted in Lyons's forthcoming *Writing to Menzies.*
[17] John Howard, *The Menzies Era: The Years That Shaped Modern Australia* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2014), 3, 385, 631–65.
[18] Paul Keating, Speech to House of Representatives at question time, February 27, 1992, https://australianpolitics.com/1992/02/27/keating-blasts-liberal-party-fogies.html. Read July 18, 2019.
[19] National Library of Australia MS 4936, Box 47, Folder 98; Lawrence Johnston, September 11, 1953. All citations from the letters are from this collection at the same call number. I normally use correspondents' real names, in the interests of transparency and to enable researchers to locate my sources. If a letter is extremely offensive or racially prejudiced, I withhold the author's name in order not to embarrass his or her descendants. This precaution does not apply to any letter cited in this article.
[20] Box 61, Folder 214, Harbord (NSW), February 15, 1954.
[21] Percentages include letters sent by married couples and jointly by families so they add up to more than 100.
[22] Box 122, Folder 702.
[23] Box 95, Folder 496, November 30, 1960.
[24] Box 69, Folder 281, September 24, 1955.
[25] Given the difficulty of distinguishing writing by superior ballpoint pens from that of fine-nibbed fountain pens, there is some margin of error in this figure.
[26] Martyn Lyons, *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe, c.1860–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) gives many examples from soldiers' letters in the First World War and from the correspondence of Spanish emigrants to the Americas.
[27] Box 43, Folder 59, Merrylands (NSW), March 1, 1950.
[28] Box 126, Folder 737, Bolton (UK), June 20, 1965.
[29] Fraenkel, "'Répondre à tous'," para. 30.
[30] Box 51, Folder 130, June 12, 1953.
[31] Box 66, Folder 257, August 22, 1955.
[32] Box 46A, Folder 92, London, June 6, 1953.
[33] Box 48, Folder 107, Pagewood (NSW), October 22, 1953.
[34] Box 79, Folder 355, Warren Carey, University of Tasmania, February 13, 1958.
[35] Box 69, Folder 278, Beverly Hills (NSW), May 28, 1955.
[36] Box 88, Folder 436, Longueville (NSW), April 22, 1959.
[37] Box 89, Folder 448, H Roberts, Kew (Vic), March 30, 1959.
[38] Box 76, Folder 334, Joan Lewis, Cardiff (Wales), July 17, 1957.
[39] Box 87, Folder 427, John Harris, Paignton (Devon, UK), October 10, 1959.
[40] Box 52, Folder 135, June 2, 1953.
[41] Box 98, Folder 514, Nambour (Qld), October 7, 1961.
[42] Box 90, Folder 457, Potts Point (NSW), September 13, 1958.
[43] Box 47, Folder 102, Dagmar Levy, Armadale (Vic), January 1, 1953.
[44] Box 81, Folder 372, Glen Iris (Vic), July 19, 1958.
[45] Box 55, Folder 160, December 1954.
[46] Box 119, Folder 678, Mrs M Clout, London, March 29 and May 4, 1964.
[47] Box 65, Folder 246, Bunbury (WA), September 1, 1955.
[48] Box 63, Folder 231, Note from Craig, July 27, 1955, on Joyce Atkinson of Nambour (Qld).

[49] Box 64, Folder 239, Ascot Vale (Vic), August 10, 1955.
[50] Box 62, Folder 221, June 30, 1954 and reply of July 5.
[51] Box 92, Folder 473, Tasmania, March 9, 1960.
[52] Box 105, Folder 570, September 20 and reply of September 28, 1961.
[53] Box 44, Folder 67, E. G. Linehan to Mrs. D. M. Rae of the Australian Women's Movement Against Socialisation, January 7, 1950.
[54] Box 42, Folder 48, Walter Henderson, Robertson (NSW), October 28, 1950.
[55] Box 42, Folder 48, Edward Hirst, Sydney, reply of July 20, 1950.
[56] Box 89, Folder 441, reply to Spencer Nall, August 25, 1959.
[57] Box 43, Folder 62, Adelaide, November 29, 1949.
[58] Box 90, Folder 459, Glenbrook (NSW), September 14,1959.
[59] Box 123, Folder 711, Georgetown (Tas), May 9, 1964.
[60] Box 123, Folder 717, several letters from February 10 to September 3, 1964.
[61] Boxes 164-165.
[62] Box 42, Folder 52, Kathleen McCary, Freeport (TX), May 1950. In the early 1950s, myxomatosis ("myxo") effectively reduced the rabbit population.
[63] Fraenkel, "'Répondre à tous'," para. 1.
[64] Tim Hitchcock, "A New History from Below," *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004): 294–99; Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters*; Antonio Gibelli, "C'era una volta la storia del basso…," in *Vite de Carta*, eds. Quinto Antonelli and Anna Iuso (Naples: L'Ancora, 2000), 160–61; Lyons, *Writing Culture of Ordinary People*; Lyons, "A New History from Below? The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe," *History Australia* 7.3 (2010): 60.1–60.9; King, *Writing the Lives*.