

Event Nouns in Action: Intercontinental Supply and Value Chains in a
Frontier Town (*Londinium*) according to Caesar and Tacitus

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Source: *Phasis. Greek and Roman Studies* 28 (2025): 39–80

ISSN: 1512-1046

E-ISSN: 2346-8459

Published by: The Institute of Classical, Byzantine and Modern
Greek Studies of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60131/phasis.28.2025.11735>

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Received: 03.09.2025 Accepted: 02.02.2026

EVENT NOUNS IN ACTION INTERCONTINENTAL SUPPLY AND VALUE CHAINS IN A FRONTIER TOWN (*LONDINIUM*) ACCORDING TO CAESAR AND TACITUS

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Abstract. While London did not secure a prominent place in the history books early on, in fact one of the few early mentions calls it a titleless (*cognomento coloniae non insigne*) settlement (Tac. *Ann.* 14.33.1), the archaeological and epigraphic evidence paints the picture of a diverse frontier town full of commerce and hustle and bustle (*commeatus*) (Tac. *Ann.* 14.33.1). This may well explain Caesar's worries about intercontinental supply and value chains (*auxilia subministrare*) (Caes. *BGall.* 4.20). This article offers a sociopragmatically grounded translation of Caesar's support-verb construction *auxilia subministrare* and Tacitus' re-etymologised event noun *commeatus* against this backdrop.

1. INTRODUCTION

In A.D. 43, Claudius succeeded where Caesar had failed and London, then *Londinium*, became part of the Roman empire.¹ The Romans would only stay for about 400 years, be it due to some raucous Gauls, not being able to cope with the geography and weather (in truth, the constant mud and rain), or because strategically it was the edge of the empire and thus

¹ All the translations are my own unless specified otherwise.

rather exposed. Over the 400 years of Roman occupation, *Londinium* would be(come) a multilingual² and multicultural³ hub for trade, commerce, society, and culture emerging as the winner from the disruption to the established trade networks caused by Caesar's campaigns.⁴

Londinium while strategically important and advantageous (e.g., Cass. Dio 60.20.5–60.21.1 (2nd–3rd centuries A.D.) on Plautius' difficulties crossing the Thames in A.D. 43)⁵ does not seem to have secured a prominent place in the history books early on. Yet its epigraphic and archaeological sources tell the story of a frontier town at the heart of intercontinental supply and possibly value chains. Based on this, the article reassesses the translations of Caesar's justification for invading Britain, i.e. that the Britons had supported Gaulish rebellions (Caes. *BGall.* 4.20–21; Strabo 4.4.1; 1st century A.D.–1st century B.C.), and Tacitus' description of *Londinium* as a hustle and bustle of commerce (Tac. *Ann.* 14.33; 1st–2nd centuries A.D.) with the following three questions at its heart:

² Multilingualism can take many forms with regard to who is involved, e.g., multilingual individuals, communities, regions, or areas (Muysken 2010, 268) and what makes someone (or something in the case of a text) bilingual (Grosjean 2024; Leiwo 2002). E.g., is it enough to be capable to handle everyday situations in two languages or does one have to be able to lecture in two languages? Is it enough if a formulaic aspect of an inscription is in a second language?

³ Hines (1996, 269) believes that "true (i.e., perfect) multiculturalism ought to be the concurrent and stable presence of genuinely alternative cultural strategies within a single area."

⁴ Cunliffe 2004, 6.

⁵ See Wallace 2014, 8 (with further references). Wallace (2014, 9) sums up the situation as follows: "The ambiguity of the word γέφυρα [*gephura* in Cass. Dio 60.20.6], the impossibility of demonstrating that the crossing points of either Caesar or Plautius were at the site of the later town of *Londinium* ... the likelihood that Plautius built his own bridge or raft to cross the Thames, that a pre-Roman bridge presupposes pre-Roman roads leading to and from it, for which there are no evidence, and the total lack of evidence for a substantial LPRIA [Late Pre-Roman Iron Age] settlement at London disproves these hypotheses [sc. those of a pre-Roman bridge at the site of London]."

- (1) What does Caesar's *auxilia subministrare* tell us about intercontinental supply and value chains?
- (2) How does Tacitus' *commeatus* characterise titleless *Londinium* as a lively frontier town?
- (3) Why did *Londinium* not secure a prominent place in the history books early on?

Mapping the archaeological and epigraphic remains from *Londinium* onto the historiographical accounts and reassessing the phrasing of the latter linguistically, it appears that Caesar was faced with the phenomenon of inter-continental supply and value chains and Tacitus with that of an inter-regional frontier town. Neither situation was specific to the Roman period; both would ensure *Londinium*'s long-term survival.

After this introductory section, the article falls into four sections. Section 2 provides a brief introduction to *Londinium*'s townscape on the material side and event nouns, such as *commeatus* and *auxilia*, on the linguistic side of things; Section 3 considers Caesar's account of Gaulish people receiving aid from the Britons from the perspective of intercontinental supply and value chains; Section 4 considers Tacitus' description of *Londinium* as a titleless hustle and bustle of commerce against the archaeological and epigraphic record and from the perspective of border studies; Section 5 uses the archaeological and epigraphic evidence to suggest a sociopragmatically⁶ grounded reading of Caesar's *auxilia subministrare* and Tacitus' *commeatus* thus explaining why *Londinium* did not secure a prominent place in the history books early on.

⁶ "Historical sociopragmatics concerns itself with any interaction between specific aspects of social context and particular historical language use that leads to pragmatic meanings" (Culpeper 2011, 4). Pragmatic meanings are meanings that are context-dependent.

2. MATERIAL AND LINGUISTIC SURROUNDINGS

2.1. LONDINIUM'S TOWNSCAPE

Londinium's townscape expanded and transformed over the 400 years of Roman occupation. A brief overview of its geographical features, defensive structures, infrastructural nodes, and social spaces is provided below.

The area of *Londinium* was crossed by the rivers Fleet (to the west), Walbrook, and Lorteburn (to the east). Modern-day Southwark was a marshy jigsaw puzzle of islands.⁷ After the successful Roman invasion under Claudius in A.D. 43 and before the revolt initiated by the local queen Boudica in A.D. 60/61, which brought large-scale destruction by fire to *Londinium* as archaeologically visible, "occupation was focussed on the eastern hill (Cornhill), but with some occupation on the western hill and in Southwark."⁸ In the second half of the 1st century A.D., when *Londinium* was being rebuilt, building activity was concentrated between the Walbrook and Lorteburn rivers.⁹ In the 2nd century A.D., building activity expanded westwards towards the river Fleet und Southwark was not extensively occupied.¹⁰ By this time, *Londinium* was structured around an amphitheatre in the north-western part, a forum between the rivers Walbrook and Lorteburn, and a river crossing over the Thames.

The first perimeter wall was constructed around A.D. 200 in order to cope with attacks from incoming local populations,¹¹ perhaps the Picts, a people then living in Britain all the way up to Scotland. However, given *Londinium's* strategically important position with access to the river Thames, a river-crossing, and an extensive road network, the site would have been the target for any local population with ambitions.¹²

⁷ Rowsome 2008, 26 and 28 for helpful maps; Wallace 2014, 34–35.

⁸ Swain and William 2008, 34.

⁹ Rowsome 2008, 28.

¹⁰ Rowsome 2008, 29; Swain and Williams 2008, 34.

¹¹ When Britain became a Roman province, the local population rebelled on several occasions. In the later period, the Hadrianic fire destroyed most of the site in the early 2nd century A.D. See Perring 2022, 235–247.

¹² See esp. Trubetskoy 2017; Hingley and Unwin 2018, 23.

The perimeter wall introduced a visible, defensive demarcation of inside-outside and thus interfered with the natural growth of the site. Yet, Roman *Londinium* does not seem to have been confined to the inside of the wall; lively suburbs existed outside the wall, one of them Southwark (e.g., the mosaic at the Liberty of Southwark site, possibly originally in a travel inn, and the Bathhouse on Borough High Street).¹³ The wall allowed access to *Londinium* only through one of the seven city gates.¹⁴

The gates became bottlenecks for the movement of people and goods and could be kept closed for security and safety reasons. In the 1st–2nd centuries A.D., a quayside seems to have existed, possibly with a crane base structure, and reflects *Londinium* acquiring importance as a trade harbour.¹⁵ In the 3rd century A.D., the riverside wall aligns with the general situation of crisis which saw *Londinium* prioritise defence over commercial openness.¹⁶ The defences were further strengthened in the late 4th century A.D., especially towards the east.¹⁷ However, suburban areas outside the walled area seem to have kept flourishing, on the southern and northern river banks. For example, at the site of the church of St-Martin-in-the-fields, a later Roman sarcophagus with a headless skeleton was found.¹⁸

The forum is a central space of any Roman city for social, cultural, political, and economic life. In the imperial period, fora were developed in such a way as to integrate images of the ruling emperor.¹⁹ The forum

¹³ On the Liberty of Southwark site, see Section 3 below. On the Bathhouse on Borough High Street, see Ridgeway, Taylor, and Biddulph 2019.

¹⁴ From west to east, these are Newgate (on the road to Middlesex), Aldersgate (perhaps added secondarily) (Merrifield 1965, 319), Cripplegate (on the *via praetoria* to Cripplegate fort, in use A.D. 120–200) (Marsden 2018), Moorgate (bordering the marshes) (Wheeler 1928), Bishopsgate (on Ermine Street (modern A10) towards York), Aldgate (on the road to Colchester).

¹⁵ Brigham 1990, 101.

¹⁶ Perring 2022, 326.

¹⁷ Rowsome 2008, 31.

¹⁸ Burton 2007.

¹⁹ See Perring 2022, 159–168 on the forum built in the later 1st and early 2nd centuries. See also Perring and Brigham 2000; Marsden 2019; Wallace 2014, 47–63.

would have been a place for trade and markets, business meetings, cultural events, and daily chats, possibly even with the first tavern of London in close proximity.²⁰

Bathhouses were important to maintain hygiene standards, by access to fresh, clean water, but also developed into centres of commerce and social life in the imperial period. Bathhouses combined technological advances—such as running water (relying on systems of pipes, cisterns, and aqueducts), heated water (by means of hypocausts), and the availability of bathing facilities to a large part of society (in urban centres)—with social advances, e.g., vendors had stalls, people from all walks of life gathered (whether they mingled is unclear; for example, consider when people frequent facilities, what facilities charge, etc.). Mosaic floors, frescoes, and statues in bathhouses served as conversation starters amongst bathers.²¹ As a public bathhouse with all the facilities (a so-called *therma*), only Huggin Hill (built in the Flavian period, A.D. 69–96, and demolished in the late 2nd century A.D.) would qualify.²² Cheapside bathhouse (built in the 1st century A.D. and demolished in the 3rd century A.D.) was smaller and likely reserved for military use, possibly for those stationed at Cripplegate fort in the north-west of the town area (built in the 1st century A.D. and demolished in the 3rd century A.D.).²³ The bathhouses on Pudding Lane (built in the 2nd century A.D. and in use until after A.D. 370) and Billingsgate (built in the mid-2nd century A.D.) were likely part of residential properties.²⁴

²⁰ See Perring and Brigham 2000, 137: "A late 1st- or early 2nd-century buttressed aisled hall, close to the forum at 5–12 Fenchurch Street (Gz CT45) ... In later phases there is evidence of metalworking in some rooms, and others were decorated, with one containing a store of amphorae, prompting the suggestion that it was used as a tavern." See also Hammer 1987.

²¹ Eliav 2023, 21–43.

²² Rowsome 1996; Marsden 1969.

²³ Rowsome 1996; Marsden 1976, 32 and 37; Perring and Brigham 2000, 129.

²⁴ Rowsome 1996, 421. For the site at 152 Upper Thames St., see Cowan and Hinton 2008, 76, with further references, and Tomlin 2006, 50, for discussion and further references.

Londinium's amphitheatre, initially constructed in the late 1st century A.D., was originally made of timber but was replaced by a more permanent stone structure in the 2nd century A.D.²⁵ Amphitheatres in general provided public entertainment in the form of, e.g., gladiatorial fights – either gladiator versus gladiator or gladiator versus animal. Gladiators could be slaves, freeborn people, or freedmen, some having undergone professional training, others working out a contract.²⁶ Several were buried or deposited outside the walled area in the 1st–2nd centuries.²⁷

The epigraphic evidence paints the picture of a multicultural and multilingual trading hub.²⁸ For example, *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg 44*,²⁹ dated to 8 January A.D. 57, is the “first dated financial document” from the City of London.³⁰ It was likely written by a non-Roman citizen at the time.³¹ A stylus found amongst the Bloomberg tablets, dated to the latter half of the 1st century A.D. may have travelled from Rome to *Londinium* or at

²⁵ Bateman 1997.

²⁶ Fagan 2016.

²⁷ Redfern and Bonney 2014.

²⁸ For a detailed discussion, see Tomlin 2016.

²⁹ *Nerone Claudio Caesare Augusto | Germanico ii L(ucio) Calpurnio Pisone | [vacat] co(n)s(ulibus) ui Idus Ianuarias | Tibullus Venusti l(ibertus) scripsi et dico me | debere Grato <S>puri l(iberto) (denarios) cu ex(s) pretio | mercis quae uendita et tradita <est> | quam pecuniam ei reddere debeo | eiue ad quem ea res pertinebit* (“In the consulship of Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus for the second time and of Lucius Calpurnius Piso, on the 6th day before the Ides of January (8 January A.D. 57). I, Tibullus, the freedman of Venustus, have written and say that I owe Gratus, the freedman of Spurius, 105 denarii from the price of the merchandise which has been sold and delivered. This money I am due to repay him or the person whom the matter will concern ...” Trans. Tomlin 2016, 152).

³⁰ Tomlin 2018a, 204.

³¹ Tomlin (2016, 154) observes that Tibullus is not a common Roman onomastic, but the only character that comes to mind is the poet Tibullus, yet slaves were often given “a fanciful name” which they kept when becoming freedmen (as the writer of the tablet!), and as the writer is identified by the cognomen *Venustus*, he was probably not a Roman citizen at the time.

least from the Germanies.³² Gaius Asicius Probus apparently sent his “best young tunny” fish from Spain, as a label on an amphora makes clear.³³ In the early 2nd century, “Vegetus, himself a slave but also a Roman official in London in c. A.D. 75–125” sold the Gallic slave girl Fortunata for 600 denarii in what is the “first Roman deed of sale of a slave to have been found in Britain.”³⁴

Thus, the archaeological record paints the picture of a fully equipped, defence- and trade-focused settlement, whereas the epigraphic evidence highlights the international clientele that frequented it, for commerce, tourism, and trade.³⁵

2.2. EVENT NOUNS

Event nouns refer to an ongoing process (complex event nouns), a completed event (simple event noun), or the outcome of an event (result nouns) by Grimshaw’s classical distinction:³⁶

Complex event noun, e.g., *examination*

L’examination des dossiers par le conseil a eu lieu hier.

“The examination of the files by the board took place yesterday.”

³² Keyer 2019, 342; Tomlin 2018b; Willi 2022. *Ab urbe v[e]n[i] munus tibi gratum adf(e)ro | acull[eat]um ut habe[a]s memor[ia]m nostra(m) | rogo si fortuna dar[e]t quo possem | largius ut longa via ceu sacculus est (v)acuu*s (“I have come from the city. I bring you a welcome gift with a sharp point that you may remember me. I ask, if fortune allowed, that I might be able (to give) as generously as the way is long (and) as my purse is empty.” Trans. Tomlin 2018b, 5).

³³ Burnham et al. 2000, 440, n. 32. Neck sherd of a Spanish amphora, text: [...] *I SVMAVR | AIAA | LXXX | C ASICI PROBI, [cor(r)d]ula ... SVMAVR | a(n)norum II | LXXX | G(ai) Asici Probi* (“Best young tunny, (matured) two years, 80, (the product) of Gaius Asicius Probus.” Trans. Burnham et al. 2000, 441). There is a second painted inscription at right-angles with this one but only two letters (D and I) are preserved, it seems to be by another hand.

³⁴ Tomlin 2003, 49.

³⁵ It may have been initially similar to Cunliffe’s (2004, 8) enclaves of traders. Army movements certainly also affected *Londinium* and further aided this situation.

³⁶ Grimshaw 1990; Meinschaefer 2016, 393.

Simple event noun, e.g., *examen*

Plusieurs examens ont eu lieu hier.

“Various exams took place yesterday.”

Object/result noun, e.g., *examen*

Tous ces examens sur la table ont eu lieu hier.

“All these exams on the table took place yesterday.”

They are commonly ambiguous between different types of event nouns and between eventive and non-eventive readings, i.e., the context of an instance will determine whether the instance acts as an event noun and if so, what kind.³⁷

Event nouns can be deverbal formations but do not have to be.³⁸ They have their own argument structures. Complex event nouns have a subject and an object (e.g., *les dossier* and *le conseil* in the example), along with optional adjuncts, and simplex event nouns have a subject.³⁹ The subject does not have to be spelled out. Event nouns may, over the course of time, move from eventive semantics towards non-eventive semantics: *nomen actionis* → *nomen acti* → *nomen rei* → *nomen instrumenti* → *nomen loci* → *nomen agentis*.⁴⁰ However, most nouns are polysemous, i.e., they have meanings at multiple stages on this pathway in their lexical entry.

Why then *commeatus* and *auxilia* (*subministrare*) in the Roman historians Caesar and Tacitus? Because event nouns can change the storyline in historiography exactly due to their polysemy and resulting ambiguity. One such example is discussed by Rusten. He argued that τὴν ἐκβολὴν τοῦ λόγου ἐποιησάμην (Thuc. 1.97.2) is to be read as “I discarded the plan” (with ἐκβολή as a complex event noun) rather than “I made a digression in the narrative” (with ἐκβολή as a simplex event noun) based on co-textual (especially, by comparison to Thuc.

³⁷ Cf. Erbach 2025; Huyghe et al. 2017, 120.

³⁸ E.g., Bel, Coll, and Resnik 2010; Huyghe et al. 2017; Radimský 2011; Fendel 2025b (on Classical Greek); Fendel 2024a (on Classical and Post-Classical Latin).

³⁹ Garzón Fontalvo and Tur 2022, 220; Spevak 2014, 25; Hoffmann 2015.

⁴⁰ Panagl 2019, 394.

5.25–116 and the Athenians’ transformation from friend to foe) and contextual (especially, of λόγος in Thucydides) analysis.⁴¹ This re-interpretation alters the reading of the first book of the *Histories*.⁴² Similarly, *commeatus* and *auxilia* (*subministrare*) appear in contexts that have generated extensive comment and debate, can be linked to material realities, and come from authors whose agenda and discourse we know a reasonable amount of.

3. CAESAR’S INTERCONTINENTAL AUXILIA SUBMINISTRARE

3.1. CAESAR’S RECONNAISSANCE MISSION

Caesar, writing in the 1st century B.C., describes his first exhibition to Britain in 55 B.C. as a reconnaissance mission (*perspexisset* and *cognovisset*) which he was keen on carrying out “despite the summer almost being over” (*exigua parte aestatis reliqua*) and the season for military campaigns thus coming to an end. He cites as the reason for his interest in Britain the fact that “in almost all the wars in Gaul, aid had been supplied to our enemy from there (sc. Britain)” (*omnibus fere Gallicis bellis hostibus nostris inde subministrata auxilia*).⁴³

Exigua parte aestatis reliqua Caesar, etsi in his locis, quod omnis Gallia ad septentriones vergit, maturae sunt hiemes, tamen in Britanniam proficisci contendit, quod omnibus fere Gallicis bellis hostibus nostris inde subministrata auxilia intellegebat, et si tempus anni ad bellum gerendum deficeret, tamen magno sibi usui fore arbitrabatur, si modo insulam adiisset, genus hominum perspexisset, loca, portus, aditus cognovisset; quae omnia fere Gallis erant incognita (Caes. BGall. 4.20).

Despite the summer almost being over, Caesar—even though in these areas the winters are early because all of Gaul is oriented north—nonetheless was eager to set out for Britain because he had heard that in almost all the wars in Gaul aid had been supplied to our enemy from there, and if the (remaining) time of the year was not enough to wage

⁴¹ Rusten 2020.

⁴² For similar situations of the ambiguity of event nouns having a far-reaching impact, see, e.g., Latin *poenas dare* “to get punished; to pay the price for one’s actions” rather than “to punish; to give a penalty” (Martín Rodríguez 1996; 2018).

⁴³ See also Hingley 2022, 18.

war, he nevertheless believed that it would be of great use to him even if he had only set foot on the island, had got a glance at the character of the population, (and) had discovered the localities, the harbours, (and) the landing sites. Almost all of these things were unknown to the Gauls.

Caesar does not proffer further details of the kind of aid that was supplied. While *auxilia* could refer to auxiliary troops, i.e., the Britons would have sent manpower to support Gaulish rebellions against Caesar's campaigns, *auxilia* could equally relate to other forms of aid for the Gaulish people, e.g., in the form of supplies. In fact, Schönberger translates *Hilfe* "help," Edwards *succours*, and Nisard *secours* "aid."⁴⁴ Caesar's army movements will have made getting supplies difficult for them. Furthermore, an increased amount of metal (including iron, tin, and lead) will have been needed for weapons. The raw materials were widely available in Britain.⁴⁵

3.2. CAESAR'S *AUXILIA*

Auxilium, the singular form of the noun, may be "a back-formation to *auxilia*," the plural form of the noun, which seems to have been "built on the *s*-variant of the verb" *augeo* "to increase."⁴⁶ The noun has a broad meaning, "assistance, aid, help" and can act as a simplex or complex event noun and as a result noun. In Caes. *BGall.* 4.20, it appears in its plural form, thus possibly (1) referring to different entities, (2) having an iteration meaning, (3) having a "sorts of" meaning, or (4) expressing intensification, of which options two to four apply to event nouns. In Caes. *BGall.* 4.20, the noun appears in combination with the verb *subministrare*.⁴⁷

The combination with *subministrare* "to supply" seems a conscious choice. The combinations *auxilium dare*, *auxilium ferre*, and *auxilium praeberere* "to provide help" are widely attested as so-called support-verb constructions, i.e., as combinations of a verb and a noun that together

⁴⁴ Schönberger 2013, 169; Edwards 1917, 205; Nisard 1865.

⁴⁵ See Cunliffe 2004, 1–2. For context, see Gardiner 2001; Sim and Ridge 2002; Schrüfer-Kolb 2004; Williams et al. 2025.

⁴⁶ de Vaan 2008, 62.

⁴⁷ Garzón Fontalvo 2020.

form the predicate of a clause or sentence.⁴⁸ In the LatinISE Sketch Engine corpus, a collocation search for the lemma “auxilium” reveals that the most commonly collocating verbal lemmata which act as support verbs in a distance of ± 5 items are *fero* “to bring, to carry” (logDice 8.72) and *praebeo* “to give, to provide” (logDice 8.31).⁴⁹ *Ministro* “to supply” (logDice 6.78), the simplex related to *subministro*, and *do* “to give” (logDice 6.22), the canonical support verb, are less commonly attested.⁵⁰ The logDice is a measure of lexical affinity with a maximum score of 14 which would mean that the items for which the score has been calculated always co-occur.⁵¹

While the simplex verb *ministrare* is current throughout Classical literature, including in its function as a support verb, the compound *subministrare* seems more limited.⁵² In the LatinISE Sketch Engine corpus, the lemma appears twice in the 1st century B.C. (the period *Romana*

⁴⁸ See further Martín Rodríguez 1996; 2018; Fendel 2024a; Bodelot and Spevak 2018; Rosén 2020; Baños 2014, 2016, 2018; Mendózar Cruz 2020; Pinkster 2015, 74–77.

⁴⁹ For the LatinISE Corpus, see McGillivray and Kilgariff 2013. For the combinations with *indigeo* (logDice 7.73) and *egeo* (logDice 7.26) “to lack, to be without,” see Fendel 2024a.

An anonymous reviewer suggested using treebanked corpora in order to identify multi-word expressions. The issue is that treebanking usually treats multi-word expressions as compositional units. Work is ongoing, most prominently in the UniDive COST initiative (CA21167), to remedy this situation but current systems cannot identify, let alone discover, multi-word expressions without some deterministic element, such as a lexeme to search around.

⁵⁰ See Smith 2022, 73–74; Brown et al. 2012, 237 on canonical (theoretical) vs. prototypical (usage-based) forms.

⁵¹ Rychlý 2008, 9. Note that the collocation tool operates on distances rather than syntactic dependencies and that manual filtering is required to distinguish between combinations that form support-verb constructions and those that form verb-object structures (e.g., *imploro* “to beg” or possibly also *mitto* “to send” in the sense of sending physical items or auxiliary troops). This ambiguity is inherent in support-verb constructions and variably exploited by authors (Savary et al. 2018, 123; Fendel 2024c, 118–125).

⁵² Lexical verbs and support verbs are form-identical. See Vincent and Wheeler 2022, 94–96; Butt 2010, 65.

classica in the LatinISE corpus): once referring to the supplying of weapons and once to the supplying of funds.⁵³ It seems that *subministrare* refers specifically to the supplying of something, possibly in secret as in Cic. *Cael.* 20, rather than to the general provision of something, including help. As *auxilia subministrare* is a support-verb construction, one may think of *subministrare* as a verb of realisation, i.e., these “sont des verbes collocationnels qui ont le comportement syntaxique des V_{supp} , mais qui, à la différence de ceux-ci, sont sémantiquement pleins: ils sont sélectionnés par le locuteur pour leur signifié et apportent une contribution sémantique.”⁵⁴ This would also suit its seemingly more specific meaning as compared to the canonical and prototypical support verbs.⁵⁵

Furthermore, in Caesar’s own writings, we find the following:⁵⁶ *BGall.* 1.40 (*frumentum* “food, grain”); *BGall.* 3.25 (*lapidibus telisque* “stones and weapons,” verb in the gerundive). In writings from his immediate surroundings, we find the following:⁵⁷ *BAfr.* 19 (*multitudinem auxiliorum* “a multitude of aid”); *BAfr.* 33 (*et frumentum et quaecumque res* “both food and anything else”); *BAfr.* 78 (*equites* “cavalry”). *Subministrare* seems to

⁵³ Cic. *Deiot.* 25: *Quo tum rex animo fuit? Qui auctionatus sit seseque spoliare maluerit quam tibi pecuniam non subministrare* (“In what mindset was the king? He apparently had put up for sale (a lot of his belongings) and preferred depriving himself (of property) to not supplying you with funding”); *Cael.* 20: ... *palam in eum tela iaciuntur, clam subministrantur* (“... Weapons are being thrown at him openly; they are being supplied in secret”).

⁵⁴ Mel’čuk 2004, 208. Support verbs and verbs of realisation can be historically related. See, e.g., Fendel 2024a.

⁵⁵ Cf. Fendel 2024c.

⁵⁶ While both the *Civil War* and the *Gallic War* are part of the LatinISE corpus, having been collected from <https://www.intratext.com/IXT/LAT0535/>, the searches for *subministrare* did not return any hits from Caesar. This may be due to the lemmatisation relying on dictionaries that do not lemmatise *ministrare* and *subministrare* separately. Caesar’s writings were therefore manually searched for the string “subm” via the Latin Library and the hits were corrected for the lemma “subministro.”

⁵⁷ Cf. Pelling 2015.

be used with the specific meaning of “supplying” primarily goods rather than people (i.e., troops).

3.3. SUPPLY AND VALUE CHAINS

Caesar may not have been worried about the sending of troops but rather about supply chains which ensured that the Gaulish people were prepared for his attacks and could fight back more efficiently than if depleted of resources. Strabo’s (4.4.1) comment on the Veneti, a people living near the ocean coast, who were determined to hinder Caesar’s journey across the channel due to being worried about their use of the *emporium* in Britain is indicative here.⁵⁸ Intercontinental supply chains existed long before Caesar’s and Claudius’ conquests of Britain, yet Caesar’s campaigns seem to have shifted the focal point of cross-channel trade in Britain away from Hengistbury, and eventually towards the Thames estuary and the site of *Londinium*.⁵⁹ The site itself, although not an established settlement, seems to have been “a significant meeting place” of strategic importance before the Romans arrived as material finds corroborate.⁶⁰ Material and epigraphic witnesses indicate that these supply chains remained intact into the 2nd–3rd centuries A.D., when

⁵⁸ Strabo 4.4.1: μετὰ δὲ τὰ λεχθέντα ἔθνη τὰ λοιπὰ Βελγῶν ἐστὶν ἔθνη τῶν παρωκεανιῶν, ὧν Ὀυένετοι μὲν εἰσιν οἱ ναυμαχῆσαντες πρὸς Καίσαρα· ἔτοιμοι γὰρ ἦσαν κωλύειν τὸν εἰς τὴν Βρεττανικὴν πλοῦν χρώμενοι τῷ ἐμπορίῳ. “After the people mentioned, the remaining ones are people of the Belgians who live by the ocean. Of these, the Veneti are the ones that fought a naval battle against Caesar. For they were ready to prevent his voyage into Britain because they were using the emporium (there).”

⁵⁹ Cunliffe 2004, 6–7.

⁶⁰ Hingley and Unwin (2018, 23) find that “...the finds from the Thames indicate that the site of Londinium formed a significant meeting place, although activity at this location was not accompanied by any substantial settlement or the construction of linear earthworks or buildings. Although there is no evidence either in or around London during the Late Iron Age for high-status burials, nucleated settlement or coin production, the items of metalwork from the river emphasize the ritual significance of this waterscape.”

Britain had become a Roman province.⁶¹ Trade and commerce did not stop at the frontier but crossed it, i.e., it crossed into non-Roman territories in the known world.⁶²

For comparison, consider a modern situation where an otherwise “title-less” small town at a border has become a buzzing centre due to commerce and trade. Weil am Rhein, at the German-Swiss border, attracts much cross-border traffic from Basel across the Weil-Friedlingen crossing (Weil is also close to the Port of Switzerland, where freight is repacked as the Rhine further south is not passable for large ships). Technically, it is an international border, yet with the Schengen Agreement allowing for free movement of people (since 2008). The language, currency, availability of and restrictions on goods, and jurisdiction differ between the two sides of the border. However, commerce keeps the border lively, i.e., border officials process tax reclaims, the mall welcomes masses, cross-border transport links facilitate movement,⁶³ and before cashless payments, ATMs and the offer to pay in both currencies solved payment issues. Similar facilities do not exist at other nearby border crossings, e.g., Weil-Otterbach or Weil-Ost/Basel-Riehen. Our modern example shows how commerce and trade forge permeability in a frontier area.

We can imagine *Londinium* in a similar way, i.e., an area that gained importance due to its strategic location. The area surrounding *Londinium* is not rich in natural resources (even ragstone had to be imported from Kent⁶⁴) nor was it densely populated before the arrival of the Romans, most likely due to it being marshland with a tidal river.⁶⁵ However, its

⁶¹ See Suharoschi, Dumitrache, and Curca 2020, 59; Spickermann 2010, 130 on the 2nd–3rd century Dea Nehalennia sanctuary and inscriptions, at the northern tip of the Rhine; Kropff 2016 on the 2nd-century merchants of the sea harbour near the sanctuary; Dumitrache 2009 on the 3rd-century *negotiatores Britannici*; Rule and Monaghan 1993 on a 3rd-century freight ship that travelled from Gaul to Britain.

⁶² There has been extensive work on trade beyond the frontiers since Wheeler 1954, see, e.g., Wilson and Bowman 2017, 443–624.

⁶³ These links are better than those in areas where there is no national border; see e.g., Britain 2013 on the Fenlands.

⁶⁴ Elliott 2018.

⁶⁵ Wallace 2014, 9.

location on a shippable river, even with sea access, made it an interesting location from an infrastructure perspective. In Roman times, not only goods (as we will see with the range of items from the temple site on Tabard Square, Southwark in Section 4) but also people—like in our modern example—and crucially their expertise seems to have come to or passed through *Londinium*.

For example, the mosaic at the Liberty of Southwark site, possibly part of a dining room, was situated on the opposite riverbank as compared to the core features of the Roman town and transport network.⁶⁶ The site may have been reachable by ferry or by bridge from the northern bank. It may have been a stopping point for travellers who approached *Londinium* from the south and had to cross the river Thames. The top layer mosaic can be dated to the 2nd–3rd centuries A.D., yet it seems that an older mosaic existed previously (with the building dated to between A.D. 43 and 150). Henig links the mosaics to the *Acanthus officina*, whose masters were likely from *Augusta Treverorum* (modern Trier, Germany).⁶⁷ The *Acanthus officina* was a workshop of artists whose products “are distinguished by elaborate plant forms, especially of the stylised acanthus, with barbed stalks, and leaves that terminate in roundels with lateral shading.”⁶⁸ However, the London branch of it seems to have been short-lived and their work seems to have been limited to the area of *Londinium* with incoming artists taking over in the mid-4th century A.D.⁶⁹

The mosaic from the Liberty of Southwark site in fact combines regional materials with interregional, or even intercontinental, expertise—given the group’s connection with *Augusta Treverorum*. Rather than this being merely a supply chain, i.e., a finished product is shipped to a destination

⁶⁶ For images, see <https://thelibertyofsouthwark.com/uncategorized/roman-mosaic-uncovered-liberty-of-southwark/>. For the word *fecit* “he made,” i.e., part of an inscription scheme used to convey the artist’s name, on fragments found at the site, see Hawker-Yates 2025; Humphreys 2023, 381–382. For the mausoleum that has been discovered nearby, see Newton 2023.

⁶⁷ Henig 2023, 318.

⁶⁸ Neal and Cosh 2009, 129.

⁶⁹ Neal and Cosh 2009, 129.

(cf. Section 4 below on the small finds from Tabard Square), it is a value chain, i.e., value in the form of materials or expertise is added stepwise in different locations until the finished product is created.⁷⁰ Such value chains seem to have existed also on the other side of the channel with metals from Britain (tin, lead, and iron) as an imported material.⁷¹ While the focus here is on the evidence from *Londinium*, trade was reciprocal.

The diversity of groups of people passing through and perhaps settling in *Londinium* (which we infer from them having died in *Londinium* but they could equally have been passing through) has also been shown through “lead and strontium isotope analyses [applied] to dental enamel samples from twenty individuals excavated from *Londinium*” and dated to the 1st–5th centuries A.D., and by means of stable isotope analysis and analysis of bioarchaeological data of 29 individuals buried in the 3rd–4th centuries A.D. in the western cemetery (24–30 West Smithfield, 18–20 Cock Lane and 1–4 Giltspur Street).⁷² It appears that “from the outset, *Londinium* was inhabited by people from the region and elsewhere in Britain, as well as those from Continental Europe and the Mediterranean, including migrants from North Africa.”⁷³

Apparently, regular transfer of goods and people—and their expertise—i.e., global supply and value chains, existed before Caesar’s campaigns and were kept intact throughout the Roman period. Caesar’s campaigns, however, seem to have changed the exact routes and focal points which is unlikely to have happened without Caesar knowing or actively trying to interfere, which would explain his coinage of a specific support-verb construction to describe the reality he was confronted with.

⁷⁰ Cf. Los, Timmer, and de Vries 2015 on the concept in the context of modern global value chains, e.g., in car manufacturing.

⁷¹ Cunliffe 2004, 10.

⁷² Shaw et al. 2016; Ledger, Redfern, and Mitchell 2024.

⁷³ Ledger, Redfern, and Mitchell 2024, 101. Thus, the successive buildings on 15–17 King street (from the 1st century A.D. onwards), where no imported wares were found (apart from Samian ones), seem almost an anomaly; see Blair 2005, 315.

4. TACITUS' COMMEATUS AT THE FRONTIER

4.1. TACITUS' COGNOMENTO NON INSIGNE

Tacitus, writing in the 1st–2nd centuries A.D., describes *Londinium* as “which did not have the title *colonia*” (*cognomento quidem coloniae non insigne*) at the time of Gaius Suetonius Paulinus, the Roman general who would eventually defeat queen Boudica in A.D. 61 at the battle of Watling Street, a major Roman transport link. Tacitus notes however that *Londinium* was “outstandingly famous” (*maxime celebre*) for two things in particular.

At Suetonius mira constantia medios inter hostes Londinium perrexit, cognomento quidem coloniae non insigne, sed copia negotiatorum et commeatuum maxime celebre. ibi ambiguus, an illam sedem bello deligeret, circumspecta infrequentia militis, satisque magnis documentis temeritatem Petil[[i]i coercitam, unius oppidi damno servare universa statuit (Tac. Ann. 14.33.1).

However, Suetonius with noticeable perseverance, marched through the enemy on London, which did not have the title *colonia*, but was outstandingly famous for its crowds of merchants and its hustle and bustle. There, he was in two minds as to whether he should choose it [*sc.* the city] as his headquarters for the war, but after appreciating the small number of soldiers and with sufficient evidence that Petilius' rashness had been restrained, he decided to save everything [*sc.* the whole country and all the people] at the cost of one single *oppidum*.

At the time, *Londinium* was not one of the *coloniae* in the province of *Britannia*.⁷⁴ A *colonia* was a high-ranking city usually formed by allotting land to army veterans, including *Camulodunum* (modern Colchester), *Lindum* (modern Lincoln), and *Glevum* (modern Gloucester).⁷⁵ In the 1st

⁷⁴ Wallace (2014, 1) notes: “*Londinium* does not fit any simple foundation model as there is no evidence of a pre-existing *oppidum* or other significant LPRIA [Late Pre-Roman Iron Age] settlement, the administration founded no *colonia* there, and the town that did develop was not granted *municipium* status—at least not before the Boudican Revolt of A.D. 60–61 (Tac. Ann. 14.33).”

⁷⁵ The lower levels are the *municipium* (e.g., *Verulamium*, modern St. Albans), which pre-dated the Roman era, were self-governing, and where inhabitants enjoyed “Latin rights,” and the *civitas capitals*, which were administrative centres for local governments often founded for this purpose in Britain (e.g., *Isca*

century A.D., *Londinium* was not even a *municipium*, i.e., a lower ranking city which was self-governing and may be a converted early settlement.⁷⁶ Rather, it was “unlike any other in the province (i.e., not a fort, not a *municipium*, not a *colonia*, not an *oppidum*, not a *civitas capital*, etc.).”⁷⁷ *Londinium* may have gained the status of a *colonia* in the 2nd century A.D.⁷⁸

One may infer that *Londinium* was at least a reasonably large settlement from Suetonius’ decision to “to save everyone and everything (*sc.* the province) at the cost of one single town” (*unius oppidi damno servare universa statuit*) (Tac. *Ann.* 14.33.1).⁷⁹ It may have been exactly because *Londinium* was not one of the higher-ranking towns and/or settlements that this decision seemed best to Suetonius. Suetonius’ decision may however also have resulted from the fact that *Londinium* was the most difficult town to defend due to its location. We know that *Londinium* was attacked in the 1st century A.D. (Boudica), again during the Hadrianic fires in the 2nd century A.D., the waterfront defences were increased in the 3rd century A.D., and the eastern defences in the 4th century A.D.⁸⁰ All of this indicates a location that was rather exposed. So what was *Londinium* like?

(*Dumniourum*), modern Exeter) (Darvill 2008; Rogers 2011, 3). See Hingley and Unwin (2018, 10) for a map of *oppida* in the Late Iron Age, i.e., preceding the period of Roman occupation.

⁷⁶ Wallace 2014, 19.

⁷⁷ Wallace 2014, 21.

⁷⁸ Tomlin 2006.

⁷⁹ The use of *oppidum* is likely not in the sense of a technical term, i.e., a rank of settlement (Tomlin 2006, 49–50).

⁸⁰ The site seems to have maintained its character beyond the Roman period. While settlement seems to have concentrated increasingly around the area of modern-day Westminster, which may indicate that the eastern end of the site became increasingly difficult to defend or maintain (Wheeler 1928 on the culverts to the north; Perring 2022, 391–398; Hingley and Unwin 2018, 210–241), the road system, which fanned out from London, would remain in use and the location at a sea harbour and major waterway ensured that the general character of the site did not change (see also Killock et al. 2015 on the temple on Tabard Square).

4.2. EVENTS AT THE FRONTIER

Tacitus describes *Londinium* in the mid-1st century as heavily frequented by crowds of merchants and traffic. *Commeatus*⁸¹ refers generally speaking to people passing through and this almost gives the impression of a transit centre. The Roman road network which was *Londinium*-centric would support this hypothesis, as it seems to have been constructed in order to distribute traffic that came into *Londinium* as the main entrance point across the *provincia*.⁸² *Negotiatores* (rather than *mercatores*) may have been those who were in charge of large quantities of goods in transit rather than a more selected range.⁸³ Findings like the Roman river barge support this hypothesis. The barge, now under Guy's hospital in Southwark, was abandoned around A.D. 200, as pottery finds indicate, and seems to have been used to carry goods land inwards from *Londinium*, i.e., it may point to a transit point where goods came in and were redistributed across waterways.⁸⁴ Thus, *Londinium* seems to have been a frontier settlement in a border zone.⁸⁵

The permeability of border zones and the constant osmosis of goods, people, and culture have been studied for two well-known, visibly demarcated frontiers. The first is the *Limes Germanicus*, where Caesar crosses the Rhine (near *Confluentes* (modern Koblenz) in *Caes. BGall.* 4.15 and 4.17⁸⁶) before setting out for Britain. North of his crossing point, the border between the Roman province and the non-Roman Germanic areas is the Rhine, south of the crossing point, the *Limes Germanicus* is set further east than the Rhine.⁸⁷ Building work began in the latter half of the 1st century A.D. The second well-known structure is Hadrian's wall about

⁸¹ *TLL*, s.v. *commeatus*, *us*, m. I.A. *iter, itineris usus, commercium*.

⁸² This may have been as a result of the major restructuring of cross-channel trade networks in the aftermath of Caesar's campaigns (Cunliffe 2004, 6).

⁸³ Suharoschi, Dumitrache, and Curca 2020, 58; *DarSag* III, 1904, pp. 1731–1743, s.v. *Mercator* (R. Cagnat); Bounegru 2006.

⁸⁴ Sidell and Panter 2016.

⁸⁵ Killock et al. 2015.

⁸⁶ A base for the *classis Germanica* (Suharoschi, Dumitrache, and Curca 2020, 62, with reference to Munteanu 2015, 123).

⁸⁷ UNESCO 2015; Bauer and Klafke 2014; see also Guédon 2024.

250 miles north of *Londinium*. Hadrian's wall stretches from the east to the west coasts of northern England. Building work commenced in the first half of the 2nd century A.D. after Hadrian's visit to the province.

Like *Confluentes*, *Londinium* was built on a natural boundary that was difficult to cross, the river Thames. There is no evidence of an actual bridge, it may have been a wooden bridge, i.e., made of a perishable material (like in *Confluentes*), or simply a crossing point like a ford and we know that erosion has affected the riverbanks such that traces may have been lost.⁸⁸ Also like *Confluentes*, the location on a major river and at the entrance point into the traffic network, waterways and roads, made *Londinium* a strategically important point. However, the area of *Londinium* was marshland. The Romans managed to drain the area of the walled area, yet this still meant that building materials such as clay and stone had to be brought in.⁸⁹ Most noticeably, this was done with ragstone from Kent.⁹⁰ Marshland also meant that the local population would have been well-versed as to how to cross it but the Romans were not.⁹¹ This left *Londinium* exposed especially to the east as the repeated reinforcements of defences show.

Neither the *Limes Germanicus* nor Hadrian's wall were sealed defensive lines.⁹² Especially traders seem to have crossed these constantly.⁹³ Both areas seem to have attracted a diverse range of people, as, e.g., the bilingual funerary inscription *RIB* 1065 by a man from Palmyrene found in South Shields shows.⁹⁴ This aligns with Gardner's comments on "bordering as practice," i.e., "more important than any physical structures are

⁸⁸ Merrifield and Sheldon 1974; Dawson 1969; Dawson 1971; Milne 1982; see also Wallace 2014, 8.

⁸⁹ See also Wheeler 1928.

⁹⁰ Elliott 2018.

⁹¹ Hingley and Unwin (2018, 23) comment on Cass. Dio 60.20.1–3 on Claudius' conquest in A.D. 43 to this effect, i.e., the Romans struggled with the landscape of the marshland around the Thames, whereas the local population knew exactly how to cross it.

⁹² Hingley 2022, 239–244 on *vici*, *civitates*, etc., beyond Hadrian's Wall.

⁹³ Suharoschi, Dumitrache, and Curca 2020; Gardner 2022.

⁹⁴ For images, see <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/1065>.

the things that people do along, across and around them [sc. borders], as part of their everyday lives in a borderland.”⁹⁵ He sees a “fundamental duality—or paradox—of borders, as always connecting as well as dividing, and thus facilitating complex juxtapositions of boundary-maintenance practices with boundary-crossing practices.”⁹⁶ Thus, rather than posing a dividing line, border areas allow for interaction and negotiation of “identity, difference[,], and otherness.”⁹⁷ They are places of creativity and innovation—in *Londinium* possibly driven by “crowds of merchants and hustle and bustle” (*copia negotiatorum et commeatum*).

The duality of the border zone becomes amply apparent when we consider locations such as the Romano-Celtic temple on Tabard place in Southwark.⁹⁸ This is close to where Stane Street and Watling Street converged, two major transport routes.⁹⁹ The earliest Roman activity may date to the time of Claudius’ invasion in A.D. 43. There are postholes which indicate a built structure as well as ditches to manage drainage.¹⁰⁰ In the 2nd century A.D., the earlier structures seem to have been replaced by two Romano-Celtic temples, which were expanded in the 3rd century A.D. In the 4th century A.D., the southern temple seems to have been demolished and replaced by a large building, and in the 5th century A.D., the large building may have been used as a shelter.¹⁰¹

Thus, the temple does not seem to have been located in a marginal area but seems to have been well-connected with the settlement centre. Its well-connectedness with areas of the empire is reflected in the range of artefacts (specifically coins and pottery which usually give us an idea of origin based on an inscription or design on them) that were discovered

See Broekaert (2013, 24–149) on the 47 inscriptions from the northern *limes* in the Germanies mentioning *negotiationes* or *negotiantes*.

⁹⁵ Gardner 2022, 164.

⁹⁶ Gardner 2022, 164.

⁹⁷ Gardner 2022, 164.

⁹⁸ Killock et al. 2015.

⁹⁹ For a map, see <https://www.pre-construct.com/portfolio/tabard-square-london-borough-of-southwark/>.

¹⁰⁰ Killock 2009.

¹⁰¹ Killock 2009.

at the site. They came from Gaul (modern France), *Germania* (modern Germany), Spain, North Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean as well as other parts of Britain.¹⁰² This reflects that the temple must have been located on a busy commuting route (to Dover in the south).

Two finds show the creative nature of such a place. A burial plaque (RIB 3014) dedicated to Mars Camulus was buried in a 4th-century A.D. pit or shaft, indicating that belief systems had changed.¹⁰³ Mars Camulus was a Romano-Celtic deity, Roman Mars was the god of war, Celtic Camulus was identified with Mars in Roman times by means of the *interpretatio Romana*.¹⁰⁴ The inscription was written by a sea trader (*moritex*) from Bellovacus (*c(ivis) Bell(ovacus)*) (near modern-day Beauvais, Belgium).¹⁰⁵

RIB 3014
num(inibus) Aug(ustorum)
deo Marti Ca-
mulo Tiberini-
us Celerianus
c(ivis) Bell(ovacus)
moritix
Londiniensi-
um
primus [...]
[...]V̄A[...]
[...].

To the Divinities of the Emperors (and) to the god Mars Camulus. Tiberinius Celerianus, a citizen of the Bellovaci, *moritix*, of Londoners the first [...] (Trans. Tomlin 2018c, 336).

Thus, we see the interaction and negotiation of “identity, difference[,] and otherness” in material and epigraphic evidence from the site.¹⁰⁶ This suggests that “the temple was likely used as an important stopping off

¹⁰² Killock et al. 2015.

¹⁰³ Killock et al. 2015.

¹⁰⁴ See also Aldhouse-Green 2004; Young 2023.

¹⁰⁵ For images, see <https://romaninscriptionssofbritain.org/inscriptions/3014>.

¹⁰⁶ Gardner 2022, 164.

point for people travelling between London and northern France.”¹⁰⁷ Lively trade routes with northern France had existed long before the Roman period but with Caesar’s campaigns in the 1st century B.C. the focal points of these trade networks shifted—in favour of *Londinium*.¹⁰⁸

Thus, rather than being an established administrative centre (e.g., a *colonia* or a *municipium*), *Londinium* was primarily a frontier town built in an area that was not only difficult to build on but also poor in resources, yet at the entrance to the transport network by water or by land across the province, a place that attracted large numbers of diverse people and a significant amount of traffic, with one driving force being commerce and trade. This is what *commeatus* seems to capture, i.e., in the sense of “encounter” or “hustle and bustle,” as the back and forth of people, goods, ideas, etc. in more or less orderly and reciprocal ways. The often used translation “provisions” suggests the opposite, i.e., *commeatus* as describing a static situation rather than a constantly evolving event.

4.3. TACITUS’ *COMMEATUS*

The deverbal noun formation in *-tus* was likely no longer generally productive, i.e., used to produce new deverbal nouns, in the classical period, but became limited to formations from motion verbs in particular, e.g., *adventus* “arrival.”¹⁰⁹ This may be why *commeatus* is commonly translated as “goods, provisions” or even “stores.”¹¹⁰ This would suggest that the deverbal noun had passed from *nomen actionis* to *nomen rei* or indeed further to *nomen loci*.¹¹¹ The productive counterpart was formations in *-tio*.

¹⁰⁷ Gerrard 2016; see also Hingley and Unwin 2018, 130 on Cripplegate fort, in the north-western corner of the city, as a frontier fortress.

¹⁰⁸ Cunliffe 2004, 6, 8, and 10.

¹⁰⁹ Fruyt 2011, 159.

¹¹⁰ E.g., Jackson 1937, 163: “stores”; Kline 2017: “goods”; Burnouf 1863: “commerce”; TLL, s.v. *commeatus*, *us*, m I.A *actio sive potestas commeandi* & II.B *subest etiam actio ad commeatum adducendum pertinens*. Yet, Heller (2011, 667) translates *Handelsverkehr* “trade-related traffic.”

¹¹¹ Panagl 2019, 394.

The lexeme *commeatus* appears 31 times in Tacitus' writings (in the LatinISE corpus), including the passage of interest. Co-textual analysis reveals that in 18 of these, the lexeme refers to "goods, supplies" (*nomen rei*); in eight (including the passage of interest), it refers to "traffic, movement of people" (*nomen actionis*); in one passage, it seems to refer to a physical location (*nomen loci*). Thus, while all three meanings seem to be available, the *nomen rei* meaning dominates numerically.¹¹²

Against this background, it is worth considering the underlying verb *meo* "to go, to pass" and its compound *commeo* in which the prefix *con-* (assimilated to *com-*) could either be read as referential in the sense of "together" or intensifying.¹¹³ In either case, if *commeatus* was still linked to the underlying verb in contemporary language users' perception—or possibly re-linked to the verb by means of re-etymologising the noun, if we assume that the original *nomen actionis* (i.e., "gathering; traffic") had indeed become a *nomen rei* (i.e., "goods") or *nomen loci* (i.e., "stores") already—this would explain the eventive semantics that Tacitus draws on in his account of London.¹¹⁴

Finally, it is noticeable that *commeatus* appears in the plural. Garzón Fontalvo has shown that Latin deverbal nouns in the plural can be interpreted as (1) referring to different entities, (2) having an iteration

¹¹² The annotated dataset is available here: doi: [10.5287/ora-mnr2ex4jw](https://doi.org/10.5287/ora-mnr2ex4jw).

¹¹³ Puigdollers 2015; Inglese 2024.

¹¹⁴ Re-etymologising falls under what has been termed folk etymology: "Folk etymology is a process by which a synchronically isolated and unmotivated word, or a word constituent, is—in an etymologically and diachronically incorrect way—newly or secondarily motivated, interpreted and de-isolated by following a phonetically similar or (partially) identical, non-isolated, well-known word (word family) without considering phonetic-phonological and morphological regularities. The lexeme, which is the product of this process, acquires a new morphological, morpho-semantic or semantic interpretation or interpretability" (Olschansky 1996, 107). For *commeatus*, this would mean that there was a secondary motivation to recover an eventive meaning that had otherwise been superseded, i.e., the lexeme had come to be a *nomen rei* or *nomen loci* (see also Michel 2015; Ledgeway and Vincent 2022, 51–52; Rundblad and Kronenfeld 2003).

meaning, (3) having a “sorts of” meaning, and (4) expressing intensification, of which options two to four apply to event nouns.¹¹⁵ Both suggestions put forward above, “encounter” or “hustle and bustle,” reflect both iteration and intensity and thus capture not only the eventive semantics but also the plural semantics of *commeatus*.

5. A SOCIOPRAGMATIC READING OF TACITUS’ *COMMEATUS* AND CAESAR’S *AUXILIA* (*SUBMINISTRARE*)

When considering Tacitus’ *commeatus* and Caesar’s *auxilia* (*subministrare*) in their co-text, i.e., the textual surroundings of an item or phrase, and context, i.e., the discursive surroundings of an item or phrase, ambiguity as regards the event noun *commeatus* (state vs. event) and the support-verb construction *auxilia subministrare* (people vs. goods) remains.¹¹⁶ When embedding them into the social settings that these were referring to as evident in the epigraphic and archaeological record from *Londinium*, things become clearer. The archaeological record paints the picture of a fully equipped, defence- and trade-focused settlement, whereas the epigraphic evidence highlights the intercontinental clientele that frequented it, for commerce, tourism, and trade. The image of a frontier town full of hustle and bustle (*commeatus*) at the heart of intercontinental cross-border supply and value chains (*auxilia subministrare*) emerges.

This approach to the two passages combines a functional approach to translation, i.e., the focus on the functional equivalence of the text in the source and target settings and discourses, with a sociopragmatic approach to translation, i.e., the focus on the social, cultural, material, etc. embedding of the source text and the interaction with its surrounding settings and discourse(s).¹¹⁷ It captures the “discursive readjustments” of the words’ and phrases’ default values.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Garzón Fontalvo 2020.

¹¹⁶ On the concept of a co-text, see Crystal 2008, 119; on that of a context, see Crystal 2008, 109.

¹¹⁷ On the functional approach, see Vermeer 1989; Nord 2003; on the sociopragmatic approach, see Culpeper 2021, 27.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Leitner and Jucker 2021, 705.

Support-verb constructions, like *auxilia subministrare*, are known to differ from a simplex verb related to the predicative noun in the structure (here *auxilia*, hence *auxiliare*) semantically and discursively.¹¹⁹ Moreover, they differ as regards their social meaning, i.e., to what extent a structure is associated with a social or societal attribute, sociolinguistically speaking, to what extent it indexes this attribute.¹²⁰ For example, during the height of the Athenian democracy, Lysias was actively involved in the tweaking of oratorical and Thucydides in that of historiographical language.¹²¹ The resulting support-verb constructions index these spheres of life. Caesar's variation of more established *auxilium dare, ferre, or praebere* may be linked not only to his desire for specificity of expression, i.e., it is about supplies not about help in general, but also to his intent on creating a phrase that signposts the specific circumstances of long-distance cross-border trade he was observing. Using the association of *subministrare* with supply chains and the fundamental ambiguity of *auxilia*, he created a structure that seems uniquely coined for the setting he was confronted with.¹²²

Conversely, Tacitus' choice of *commeatus* embraces ambiguity possibly in order to convey the full range of "hustle and bustle." *Commeatus* is established both with an event meaning "traffic, commerce" and with a result meaning "supplies, provisions" across Roman historiography. However, Tacitus uses the noun in a re-etymologising way, in that the

¹¹⁹ Cf. Fendel and Ireland 2023; Fendel 2025a, 337–497.

¹²⁰ Bentein 2019.

¹²¹ For oratorical language, see Fendel 2024b on χάριν ἀπολαμβάνω vs. χάριν λαμβάνω "to receive thanks"; on historiographical language, see Fendel 2025b, 103–104 on ἐν ἀπόρῳ ἔχομαι "to be clueless."

¹²² Similarly on Isocrates in Greek oratory of the classical period, see Fendel 2025b, 108. Caesar's support-verb construction is picked up later by Ael. NA 12.32 (2nd–3rd centuries A.D.): *simul et ne acerrima veneni vis celerrime per corpus manet, ne id ipsum conficiat, praesens sibi mutuo ferunt auxilium, quod necessarium regio ipsa abunde subministrat.* "Concurrently, in order that as soon as possible the harshest force of the poison does not remain throughout the body, in order that it may not achieve exactly this while present, they provide support to each other, (and) the region itself provides such support, if necessary." The passage is about a snake's poison and antidotes available in the region. Note the singular form of the noun.

reciprocity and the eventiveness of said “traffic,” in the sense of “encounters” or indeed “hustle and bustle” is the key to understanding the passage. *Londinium* was a transit point that welcomed a large and diverse crowd of people, it was thus home to a multitude of encounters on a daily basis, never asleep with the hustle and bustle a constant challenge and opportunity.

As language is one tool used to construe settings and discourses, the language-related considerations involved in the composition of the source text need decoding and mapping in order to achieve a purposeful translation.¹²³ Caesar’s and Tacitus’ accounts were not written as eyewitness reports. Caesar was perhaps closer to the events he described than Tacitus was but like Tacitus he had an underlying agenda when writing his account. Caesar’s objectives were certainly multifactorial, i.e., there may have been short-term financial gain from the senate in the form of further funding for his campaigns and longer-term immaterial gain for his own reputation and legacy.¹²⁴ However, there was possibly also a very practical awareness that trade routes were running intercontinentally without Roman involvement (i.e., Rome did not control the destination).¹²⁵ Tacitus is usually a master of shifting responsibility and hedging claims.¹²⁶ He was fond of experimenting with his medium, i.e., his use of language.¹²⁷ However, he is very matter of fact when describing *Londinium*. It may have been that the reason for their accounts aligning so well

¹²³ See Vieregge 2025, 2–71; Castro 2025, 317. Of course, the target audience(s), settings, discourse(s), etc. (primary and secondary) also play a role, see, e.g., Holmes’ (1988) seminal work.

¹²⁴ Morstein-Marx 2021, 215 on *sempiterna gloria*; Hingley 2022, 41–42, on the adventure across Ocean.

¹²⁵ Noticeably, the emperor placed an interdiction on the selling of grain, iron, salt, and whetstones at the *Limes Germanicus* during the 3rd century A.D., which shows that Rome was keenly interested in controlling cross-*limes* trade and the availability of resources (Suharoschi, Dumitrache, and Curca 2020, 60–61).

¹²⁶ E.g., Autin 2015.

¹²⁷ Owen and Gildenhard 2013, 26; O’Gorman 2000, 1: “If we decode these sentences and translate Tacitus into clear prose, therefore, we lose the historical representation and analysis of which Tacitus’ writing is the vehicle.”

and being so matter of fact was that *Londinium* was not relevant enough to create much in terms of narrative.

It may well be that at the time of Caesar's account the site of later *Londinium*, while already strategically important, was not yet on Rome's radar as the trade routes (and enclaves) Caesar's armies encountered were not yet focused on the Thames estuary. Even after the Roman conquest, *Londinium* existed as a site "unlike any other in the province (i.e., not a fort, not a municipium, not a colonia, not an oppidum, not a civitas capital, etc.)."¹²⁸ It was, on the one hand, without a political centre which would have made it interesting for Tacitus and, on the other hand, a lively frontier in constant flux, which may have been difficult to press into any *topos* or frame even for Tacitus. Thus, *Londinium's* lack of early prominence in the history books may be exactly because of its character as a frontier town at the heart of intercontinental supply and value chains full of hustle and bustle. It was not the big names of history that made London into what it is but the constant flux of people, from all ways of life, from all over the (known) world, full of ambitions and dreams.

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¹²⁸ Wallace 2014, 21.

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