The vocabulary of wax tablets

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The Vocabulary of Wax Tablets

R. H. Rouse and M. A. Rouse

Until quite late in the Middle Ages, virtually everyone who learned to write did so on a wax tablet; and virtually everyone who made a draft, of letter or lyric, treatise or document, did so on a wax tablet. It is only to be expected, then, that Latin, the written language of the West during most of those centuries, would have a basic set of technical terms dealing with writing on wax tablets—the physical implements and appurtenances, and the processes of their employment. An unusually large proportion of the vocabulary associated with wax tablets is, however, figurative, even fanciful. Therefore, we have attempted here, not always successfully, to distinguish the descriptive, prosaic vocabulary from the metaphorical.

**Descriptive Terms**

**The Tablet**

A wax tablet is a thin hollowed slab, made of wood or sometimes ivory, filled with a layer of beeswax to form a surface for writing. The commonest name is *tabula cerata*, "waxed tablet," an expression used in all times and cultures of the Latin Middle Ages. — For example, the *Life of St. Boniface* records that it was written first on waxed tablets for approval before it was copied on parchment, "primitus in ceratis tabulis ad probationem." One also on occasion sees such variants as *tabula cerata* ("waxed tablet"): The ninth-century *Life* of St. Maclovius, in recording with what precocity he learned, says that his master wrote the alphabet for him "in a waxen tablet," "in tabula cerata." The fifth-century Bishop Hilary of Arles employs a lengthy circumlocution, when he speaks of writing on tablets that have been spread with wax, as the custom is ("in tabulis ut assolet cerata illitie")—an expression still used in the twelfth century, by Ordericus Vitalis (*tabulae cerae illitiae*).

More frequently than phrases, however, a part stands for the whole: *Tabula*, *tabella*, and *tabellula*, "tablet," were and are commonplace. Particularly in ancient

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We are grateful to Rand Johnson who explored this subject with us at an earlier stage and assisted in assembling the quotations cited in the article. An earlier version of this paper appeared in *CVPICMA* Études sur le vocabulaire intellectuel du moyen âge 2: *Vocabulaire du livre et de l’écriture au moyen âge*, ed. Olga Witjes (Turnhout, 1989), pp. 220–236. The following abbreviations will be used: AS for *Acta sanctorum*; CSEL for *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum*, CC for Corpus Christianorum, MGH for *Monumenta Germaniae historica*, and PL for Patrologia latina.

1. MGH *Sorojana*, II, 357.
2. "Et quando sancti magistri videbat quod S. Maclovius poterit litteras aequo sermone intelligere, scriptum ei erat ("the alphabet") in tabula cerata."
and patristic writings, it was also commonplace to use the other “part,” *cera,* or most often the plural *cerae,* “wax,” to mean wax tablet. Thus, Quintilian, saying that wax tablets should not be unduly large: “ne latas quidem ultra modum esse *ceras*”; or Jerome, saying he has filled his tablet: “excipientes iam implevimus *ceras*”; or Isidore, whose chapter on tablets in the *Etymologies* (lib. 6 ca. 9) is called simply *De ceris*; and so on. Even the diminutive is used, *ceraculum,* as in the *Life* of St. Mochtei who was taught his letters by an angel of the Lord who brought a wax tablet, “allato angelus Domini *ceraculo,* eum litterarum docuit elementa.” A special name, *pugillaris* or more frequently the plural *pugillares,* was given to small hand-held tablets in antiquity; and in the Middle Ages one has, for example, the rubric in St. Gall MS 242, *De pugillaribus, id est parvis tabulis.* (Most tablets were not “held in the hand,” but instead they were intended to be balanced on the right thigh while one wrote: “tabellas . . . quibus scholastici dextro femore solent uti,” tablets which students customarily used on the right thigh, says the *Life* of Odo of Cluny.)

A final instance of “part standing for the whole” brings us to the boundary of figurative language. *Buxus* is the box-tree, *buxum* is boxwood. Jerome uses *buxum* in the Vulgate to mean a wooden tablet: “Now go, and write it upon boxwood” (“Nunc ergo ingressus scribe ei super buxum,” Isaiah 30.8), and he explains in his commentary on this passage that boxwood was used to write on because it was more durable, less liable to decay, than other woods. In Roman antiquity, however, writers had used *buxum* to mean wax tablets; Propertius implies that boxwood was in fact the standard backing for wax tablets, when he contrasts fancy tablets decorated with gold to his own which are “made of common boxwood and dirty wax” (“vulgari buxo sordida cera fuit,” 3.23.8). The *scholia* to Horace’s *Satyræ* (1.6.74) explains that a tablet is a *buxum* in which writing is learned. Centuries later, when the Carolingian scholar Rabanus sent a diptych to his aged mentor Samuel, the accompanying verse again closely associates *buxum* with the tablets themselves: “The [pale] boxwood signifies white-headed age, and the fact that it is closed represents the secret counsel of your heart” (“Buxus canitiam signat, claustrumque secretum consilium cordis”). This raises an intriguing possibility concerning the English word “book” which, unlike the various Romance words derived from the Latin *liber,* is said by lexicographers to come—perhaps—from the Anglo-Saxon *bac,* “beech,” because—perhaps—the early Germanic tribes carved runes in beechwood tablets. We should think, rather, that the English “book” (attested before the twelfth century) was in fact reinforced from both language bases, the Latin *buxum* and the Anglo-Saxon *bac,* which—though they mean two different sorts of trees—are trees whose wood is associated with writing, in two different cultures that nurtured the English language.

**Polyptychs**

Although many tablets must have been single sheets of wax-covered wood, it was more convenient to have multiple leaves (most commonly diptychs, but also

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5 Quintilian *Inst.* 10.3.32.
7 AS Aug. 3.743.
8 *Vita sancti Odonis scripta a Joanne monacho,* lib. 1.14; PL 133.49.
9 Jerome’s commentary on Isaiah 30.8: see PL 24.342D.
11 Rabanus Maurus, *Carmina,* no. 30 “Ad Samuelem presbiterum”; MGH *Poetæ aevi carolini,* II (1884), 190.
triptychs, etc., as many as eight or more): the writing surface was increased, and—with the hard surfaces outside and the wax surfaces inside—the writing was protected from accidental damage. The Romans routinely referred to polyptychs as codices, as, for example, Quintilian when he says that the vice of prolixity, encouraged by too-large tablets, can be subdued by changing the tablets, “idque vitium . . . mutatis codicibus esse sublatum.”12 Rather than use specialized nomenclature, codex, diptychon, etc., the Middle Ages usually just described the size of the multiple tablets: for example, a source may use the expression bina tabula, “double tablet”—Charlemagne’s chancellor Erkenwaldd perpetually equipped his hand with a diptych, “armat bina tabella manum.”13 Or sources say duas tabulæ, which normally means “two tablets [fastened together]”; the Life of Odo of Cluny in fact describes a diptych in detail without ever using the word, picturing him as “carrying in his hand two tablets connected by a fastening, able to be opened up without being separated” (“duas . . . tabellas manu baliulam . . . fabrili opere ita connexas, ut possent patetere, non tamen disjungant”).14 Sometimes it is specified that the diptychs are ivory, either survivors from or emulations of Roman consular diptychs: in the twelfth century, Bishop Heinrich of Olmütz sent an ivory diptych to Abbot Gottschalk of Selau as a token of respect, “binas ex ebori tabellulas . . . misit . . . in signum et memoriale sincerissimae amicitiae.”15 The most complex of which we have record is the eight-part tablet, a special gift, celebrated in verse by the eleventh-century French poet Baudry, “you [= his polyptych] contain eight tablets” (“in vobis . . . sunt octo tabellae”).16 Occasionally the specific Greek-Latin term (polyptych, diptych, etc.) was used, with perhaps surprising results. Thus, when the Ps.-Boethian (s. XII-Imed) De disciplina scolarum repeats (ca. 4) the standard recommendation that a student should always keep a wax tablet—in this case, a diptych—close by his side, “dipthicas [sive dicticas] semper lateri suo habeat,” a commentator glosses this by saying that “dictica” is a multiform tablet, so-called because it is suitable for “dictatores” (“dictica est multiformis tabula, dictatoribus apta”)—those who com pose and/or those who dictate.17 The parts of a polyptych are variously folia, “leaves,” and paginulae, “little pages,” by Baudry, who is a useful source of terminology (he addressed two separate poems to his wax tablets, one of 44 verses, one of 62, and wrote a lament for a broken stylus).18 These leaves are held together usually by laces or ties, called corrigiarum (originally, "shoelaces"); thus Baudry to his eight-leaf tablet says: “May your unbroken laces be like chains” (“Sint induritae vincula corrigiae”),19 and he elsewhere uses the expression “the juncture of your laces.” junctura corrigiarum, to describe the hinge.20 As we have seen in the excerpt from Odo’s Life, however, the apparatus could be indicated in general terms without any special vocabulary (fabrili opere connexas, which literally means nothing more specific than “joined by a device”).21

12 Quintilian, Inst. 10.3.32.
14 See note 8 above.
15 In the annals known in the Commentariorum Codicis abbasii Milanensis, entry for the year 1184, MGH Sources, XVII, 697.
19 Baudry, ed. Hübner no. 12 (=ed. Abrahams no. 47), line 34.
20 Ibid. 196 (=234), line 29.
21 See note 8 above.
The Stylus

One writes in, not on, a wax surface, and one erases by rubbing out, hard, the words that have been written. This entails the use of a stylus: an instrument that is sharp on one end, blunt on the other, and very, very sturdy.

The common term used in antiquity was graphium, taken directly from the Greek; it is used with this meaning by Ovid, Seneca, Pliny, Suetonius, and countless others. According to Isidore’s Etymologies, there was also in use a Latin translation of this, scriptorium; but the Middle Ages put the word scriptorium to a different use. Instead, they got along with graphium/grafium at least through Carolingian times if not later. Thus, the fifth-century monk John Cassian writes that, in the common life of the monastery, it is sinful for a monk to claim private property by saying such things as “my tablets, my stylus” (“tabulas meas, grafium meum”). The sixth-century Rule of Benedict says an abbot should provide the monks with stylus and tablets, graphium . . . [et] tabulae. A missionary companion of St. Boniface in the eighth century sent a silver stylus, graphium argentum, to Abbess Eadburga in gratitude for her abbey’s support, and even as late as the twelfth century, Baudry uses this term to write about tough old wax that “spurns the stylus like an insult” (“velut offensum reiciat grafium”), and entitles his mock-solemn lament for his broken stylus “De graphio fracto gravis dolor”.

It is our sense, however—we have no statistics—that by Baudry’s day the word graphium was already a little “quaint” or “poetic diction.” (Its gradual falling out of use was possibly affected by the fact that graphium had come to have a second meaning, “bookland” or land held by written deed, as early as the eighth century in England.) In the vocabulary of writing, graphium was eventually supplanted by another word that came from antiquity, stylus, which meant a stake or pointed stick, hence the pointed stick used for writing on wax tablets. Stylus with this meaning occurs in works of Quintilian and Plautus, for example, and the Vulgate uses stylus exclusively, never graphium, to mean stylus—perhaps another reason why graphium was ultimately supplanted in the Middle Ages. (Because stylus was commonplace even in antiquity, it came to mean the mode of writing—“he has an elegant stylus”—and, in time to mean mode of any kind, “style.”)

The fashioning of a stylus was considered important, no doubt; Baudry, among the list of blessings he wishes upon his tablets, includes, “May you have a stylus made by ‘The Angevin,’ our Lambert, with his own hands” (“Sitque stilus vobis, quem fecerit Andecavensis, / Noster Lambertus, ipse sui manus”). Probably, Baudry had in mind the external appearance: styluses were often made of esthetically pleasing materials including wood, ivory, bone, and even precious metals, and carved in all sorts of curious and fancy shapes. Many of these materials, however, will not readily write in wax, so their points were shod with iron; and in figurative language ferrum can signify “stylus.”

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22 “Graphium autem Graece, Latine scriptorium dicitur”; Etymologiae lib. 6 ca. 9. Dictionaries of classical Latin cite only this passage from Isidore as the authority for such a usage.

23 Orderic Vitalis, in the passage cited in note 4 above, says that Osbern made scriptorium for the boys and the unlettered, which Chishall translates, perhaps correctly, as “[writing] styles” (loc. cit.). We suggest, instead, the translation “writing desks.”

24 John Cassian, De coenobiorum institutis, lib. 4 ca. 13 (PL 49.169).

25 Rule of St. Benedict, ca. 55.


27 Baudry, ed. Hilbert no. 196 (=ed. Abraham no. 234), line 36, and no. 92 (=no. 154), respectively.

Thus, Isidore explains in his capsule history of wax tablets that the Greeks and Romans were "the first to write in wax with iron" ("primus ferro in ceris scripseren"). He goes on to say that the Romans later forbade it (he does not explain why, but presumably because a slender iron-tipped stylus made a readily-accessible and effective weapon), and required styluses to be made of bone, "postea institutum est ut ceram ossibus scriberent"—which is a good story, but virtually every surviving stylus that we have seen, first-hand in pictures, either has or apparently used to have an iron tip. In the verses lamenting that a favorite old stylus has snapped in two, Baudry seems to take it for granted that styluses are made of iron. As he says elsewhere, he wants no blunt stylus, non stylus obsusus.

Other physical terms

Other vocabulary of physical objects includes terms that describe the nature of the wax, comprising words which deal with these facts: (a) that it is beeswax:

Thus, in a riddle, "My first beginnings come from the honey-bearing bees," Melligeris apibus mea primae processit origo; (b) that wax is colored, preferably green for ease on the eyes: "oculos viridis color ad receendas," as Baudry says, and (Baudry elsewhere) "pro nigra viridantem preparo ceram," "I shall prepare green wax to replace the black"; (c) that wax is forever getting soiled through use, a complaint that persists through the ages: This is the reason Baudry's old wax had become black in the previous quotation), and we can see the very same theme twelve centuries earlier in Poppetius's disparaging remarks about the soiled wax (sordida cera) in his tablet. The author of "Life of Christina Markyate plays with this conventional topos, in saying it would "pollute the wax" to record the scandalous behavior of a certain cleric.

Terms for the support or backing for the wax are surprisingly limited. Because such cases are special, one is always told if the tablets are covered with ivory: tabulae eburneae, ivory tablets, is the commonest expression, used by St. Augustine (tablæ eburnæae quæs habæc) in Late Antiquity and still in use in the eleventh century (tablæ eburnææ duæ), and we have noted previously the twelfth-century variant binae ex eboræ tabellææ, small diptychs of ivory. But the commonest support, wood, is seldom specified, save in the cases (noted above) where boxwood, buxum, is mentioned; otherwise, only the rarest notice is taken of the fact that the tablet is made of (unnamed) wood: True, Baudry mentions lignum, wood, several times in the poem about his tiny eight-leaved polyptych—"Eight little pieces of wood are connected to you" (Sic consecutant octo sibi parvula ligna, etc.)—but other examples are hard to come by.

17 Isidore, Etymologies, lib. 6, cap. 9.
18 Baudry's "De graphis fram" (Hilbert no. 92, Abrahams no. 136), cf. lines 7-52 especially, beginning "De ferro gräsentem forensis effigientem."
19 Ibid. no. 196 (=no. 234), line 47.
21 Baudry, ed. Hilbert no. 12 (= ed. Abrahams no. 47), line 33, and no. 196 (= no. 234), line 37, respectively.
22 The author will not report scandalous specifics, "lest I pollute the wax by writing it, or the air itself by saying it" (for nel ostende ceram nel eloquendo averre quern pulber), C. H. Talbot, ed. and tr., The Life of Christina of Markyate, a Twelfth-Century Breviary, rev. ed. (Oxford, 1967), pp. 114-115.
23 Augustinus, ep. 15, PL 33, 488-491; CSEL 24, 25.
24 Abbot Siegfried gave an eboræ eburnæae duæ to the clois- ter of Beige (near Magdeburg) between 1099 and 1017; see: Archiv der Geschichte der älteren deutschen Geschicht- schreibung zur Beförderung einer Gesamtarbeit der Quellen- sicherung deutscher Geschichtler dr. Mathildes (=Peter's Archiv), 9 (1847), 439. FB 37 line note 15 above.
25 Baudry, M. Hilbert no. 22 (ed. Abrahams no. 47), line 7, cf. also lines 8, 9.
Baudry is also a source of words for a satchel to keep one's tablets in. In both poems—to tablets as an abstract concept, and to his eight-leaved polyptych in specific—he mentions a satchel as something that is potentially attractive: "May the maker of your sack be a subtle Arachne" ("Sit quem consuerit saccum subtilis Arachne") 43, and elsewhere, "May your sack be like something made for one of the goddesses, such as Helen, or even Venus" ("Sacculus aptetur, quem fecerit una dearum / Non Helene dispers ut etiam Veneri"). 40

Writing on wax tablets

The variety of verbs for “writing” in this context extends from the mundane to far-reaching metaphors. Naturally, one often said scribere, “to write,” or describere, “to copy,” as when the youthful St. Magloire found more in his tablet than he had copied, “inventa est in tabula eius amplior quam ipse descripsisset.” 41 One said in addition notare and annotare, “to note” or “note down,” as when a secretary “noted these things in a tablet,” “haec . . . notavit in tabula.” 42 Jerome uses the phrase “to direct the stylus” (“manu stilum in cera ducere”) 43—although, since a stylus has opposite ends for opposite purposes, stilum ducere can also mean “erase,” as we shall see below. Jerome also uses the verb implevere, “to fill,” to say he has used all the space on his tablet, “iam implevimus ceras.” 44—just as Juvenal, earlier, has referred to “filling the capacious tablets,” ceras implevere capaces. 45 Perhaps the commonest verb of all (aside from scribere) is imprimere, “to mark or imprint,” especially in the form impressa which is used to mean the marks made into the wax—thus, Guibert of Nogent brags that he can compose in his head without drafting in his tablets, “nullis impressa tabulis” (De vita sua). 46

Figurative Terms

As soon as we accept “to impress” for the meaning “to write,” we have already crossed the line into metaphor. Let us continue into this territory.

The most prevalent metaphors for writing on wax tablets all convey the notion of carving into something, because of the action of stylus on wax. And of this group, none is more commonplace, from antiquity through the Middle Ages, than the image of plowing.

Exarare, to plow up, in ancient Rome and long thereafter was so frequently employed as a metaphor for “to write [in wax]” that it effectively lost its metaphorical impact. The word is frequently used in this sense by Cicero in his epistles (for example, “hoc litterularum exaravi,” “I have plowed out these letters”) 37—as well as Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, Quintilian, and others. And it still appears, for example, in the prologue to a Life of St. Boniface, which has been written with care “lest it appear to be heedlessly or superfluously written” (“ne quid incatae vel superfuzzum exaratum apparat”). 48 Other terms for plowing

40 Baudry 12 (47), line 37.
41 Ibid. 196 (234), lines 49-50.
42 AS Oct. 10.783.
43 See the Cauz S. Gall: Continuatio I autore Ekkhardo IV ca. 16, MGH Scriptores, II, 240, line 1.
44 Jerome, ep. 107 Ad Laetam; CSEL 55.294, lines 9-10; PL 22.871.
45 Pl. 22.372; see note 6 above.
46 Juvenal Satirae 1.63.
47 Ciceron Epistulae ad Atticum 12.1.1
48 AS Oct. 10.783.
abound. Atta (first century BC) refers to the stylus as a plowshare (vomer): “Let us turn the plowshare in the wax” (“Ver tamus vomerem in cerata”). In the seventh century, Aldhelm composed a riddle about the wax tablet; and, while one expects a riddle to speak in figurative terms, it is significant that the imagery alludes almost exclusively to plowing: The stylus “twists in turns and furrows like a plow” (“flexibus et sulcis obliquat ad instar arari”), and the riddle continues the agricultural theme with seed and harvest. Earlier in the same riddle, Aldhelm likens the stylus to “an iron cattle-prod” or “goad,” and uses as a verb proscindere, which originally meant “to rip up the front,” and then “to break up with a plow”—and here, to write in wax: “a goad of iron plows up your pleasant surface” (“ferri stimulus faciem pressindit amoenam”). And in the twelfth century, Baudry uses sulcare, to plow, as his verb, and refers to the surface of the wax as ingera, “acreage”: “No dull stylus shall plow your acreage” (“Non stibus obtusus sulcadit ingera vestra”).

There are, of course, other images, some that are sorts of carving and some that are not. The first-century Columella, writing of a child’s learning to form letters by following an example, uses the verb pungere, to prick, and calls the stylus a sword (muro): “The letter is pricked in the wax by the learned sword of the master” (“littera . . . pungitur in ceram docto magistri”). Jerome, in a letter of advice on the same obviously important problem, says “the alphabet can be carved in a tablet, so that, enclosed by the furrows,” the child’s hand will not stray from the lines (“in tabella sculptantur elementa, ut per cedem sulcos inclusa”). One also uses the verb effigiare, to mold, as in Einhard’s description of Charlemagne’s efforts “to accustom his hand to molding letters” in the wax (“ut . . . manum litteris effigiendi adsuiceret”).

Before concluding this consideration of figurative vocabulary, we should like to consider wax tablets in the context of the Bible. The ancient Israelites did not write on wax tablets, perhaps because the climate made it impractical: if one looks up cera in a biblical concordance, one finds a number of similes about melting (Judith 16.18, petrae sicai cera liquecent; Psalm 21.15, cor meum tanquam cera liqueat; Psalm 57.9, sicat cera quaer fluid, etc.)—no tablets, although in the New Testament Zacharius (Luke 1.63) is said to write on a pupillaris, which may have been wax. The word tabula itself occurs many times in the scriptures, but always the tablets were made of some substance other than wax—buxum, box-wood, for example, is named; or thin sheets of malleable metal like bronze or copper (e.g., in tabulis aereis, 1 Maccabees 8.22). And of course, the most famous of biblical tablets, bearing the Decalogue, were made of stone (tabulae lapideae, Exodus 24.12, 31.18).

However, because the Middle Ages was a wax-tablet culture, most medieval readers of the Bible automatically assumed that tabula meant “wax tablet,” and interpreted the text accordingly—phrases like “erat sculpta in tabulis” (Exodus 32.16), or “scribam in tabulis” (Deuteronomy 10.2), or “et describe in tabulis” (Proverbs 3.3), or any of another dozen examples. We can confirm this from miniatures and sculpture, which, for example, sometimes depict the four evangelists writing on wax tablets (when they are not writing on scrolls or codices)—

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48 This passage survives only as a quotation in Isidore’s Etymologies 6.9.
49 Cited in note 32 above.
50 Baudry, ed. Hilbert no. 196 (= ed. Abraham no. 234), line 47.
51 Einhard, Vita Karoli imperialis ca. 25.
52 Quoted in Isidore’s Etymologies 6.9.
53 Jerome, ep. 107 Ad Laursen, CSEL 55.294 lines 11-12; PL 22.871.
and which even illustrate the phrase *tabulae lapideae* with a picture of Moses holding what is unmistakably a wax diptych.\(^{55}\)

Saint Jerome himself belonged to a Late Antique culture that employed wax tablets as a matter of course, and this fact evidently affected his translation of the Vulgate at one point: At 4 Regum (or 2 Kings) 21.13, the Hebrew scriptures report the words of God through his prophets warning of punishment for Jerusalem: “I shall wipe Jerusalem as a man wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.” Jerome’s Vulgate, however, says this: “I shall wipe Jerusalem just as tablets are wiped smooth, and I shall turn it as I wipe, and shall rub the stylus across its surface repeatedly” (“et delebo Jerusalem sicut deleri solent tabulae; et delens vertam, *et ducam crebris stylum super faciem eius,*” the phrase in italics being an addition).\(^{56}\) This passage has obviously been altered so that it will make sense in terms of wax tablets. Amusingly enough, the Douay-Rheims Bible, a sixteenth-century English translation of the Vulgate, reflects a culture that no longer relies on wax tablets, and, as a result, its rendition of this verse is almost incomprehensible: “I will efface Jerusalem as tables are wont to be effaced, and I will erase and turn it, and draw the pencil often over the face thereof.”

In conclusion, a moral tale: in a prefatory letter addressed to Bishop Gregory of Tours, the sixth-century poet Venantius Fortunatus reports with conventional modesty that he has carried out Gregory’s request that he transform into verse Gregory’s *Life* of St. Martin of Tours, saying that “in unpolished haste, I have *plowed* this work into verse in the space of six months”—“illud opus versu in hoc ter bimensstri spatio . . . cursim inpolite . . . *sulcare*.”\(^{57}\) If one looks up the verb *sulcare* in the venerable Latin-English dictionary of Lewis & Short,\(^{58}\) one will be told that it means (1) “to plow or furrow,” and, unexpectedly, (2) “to elaborate or work out”; the only support for this latter definition is, of course, the passage of Fortunatus just quoted. The lexicographers could have defined much more precisely what Fortunatus meant, if they had recognized the use and the language of wax tablets: Fortunatus, drafting on wax tablets as was customary, used one of the common metaphors to say that it only took him six months to “plow out,” i.e., to draft or compose, the verse *Life.*

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\(^{56}\) In this instance *ducere stylum* does not mean “to write” as we saw previously, but the opposite, “to obliterate.” The Theodulfian Recension of the ninth century (Paris, B.N. lat. 11937) presents in this verse the reading *ampulla* (pot or dish) and lacks the added *et — stilum*; its source here must have been pre-Vulgate. See *Biblia sacra iuxta lati nam vulgatam versionem ad codicum fidem,* VI (Rome, 1945), p. 317 and notes.

\(^{57}\) *MGH Auctores,* IV, pt. 1, p. 293, lines 18-19.