

When did the phrase "data Romae" first appear

The phrase "data Romae" (literally "**given at Rome**") first appeared during the Roman Republic, with documented usage tracing back to the **1st century BC**.

The formulation was standard in classical Latin correspondence to indicate the place and date a letter was signed and handed over to a courier.

Historical Background and Evolution

- **Original Function:** Roman writers used the phrase to conclude correspondence. For example, Marcus Tullius Cicero used variations such as "*data xiiii K. Maias de Tarentino*" ("**given on April 18th from Tarentum**") in his [Letters to Atticus](#) dating to **58–56 BC**.
- **Linguistic Impact:** The first word of the phrase, "**data**" (the feminine past participle of *dare*, meaning "to give"), was eventually isolated by scribes. It transitioned into Late Latin and Old French as a standalone noun to mean the time a document was written.
- **English Adoption:** This specific epistolary custom is the direct etymological root of the modern English word "**date**" (calendar time), which entered the language via Anglo-French in the early 14th century. It is completely distinct from the word "data" used in modern computing, which derives from the neuter plural *datum* ("something granted").

If you are researching Roman correspondence or language evolution, I can provide:

- The exact **Latin calendar formulas** (Kalends, Nones, Ides) that followed this phrase.
- A deeper look into how the **ancient Roman postal system** (*cursus publicus*) operated.
- The explicit timeline of how *data* evolved into modern **Romance languages**.

Ancient Roman postal system

Apparently, this was unavailable however to the early apostles e.g. Paul in mailing his epistles.

No, the early Christian apostles like Paul **did not use the *cursus publicus***. Because the imperial postal network was strictly a state monopoly, unauthorized civilians who attempted to use it faced the death penalty.

Instead, Paul and other early leaders relied on a **private network of trusted Christian couriers, friends, and traveling companions** to deliver the New Testament epistles.

Why the Apostles Were Barred

- **Lack of Imperial Permits:** To access the horses or waystations of the *cursus publicus*, a traveller had to present a *diploma* (an official passport) signed directly by the Emperor or a provincial governor. A religious minority leader like Paul could not obtain one.
- **Illegal Status:** During the 1st century AD, early Christianity was not a recognized religion (*religio licita*) under Roman law. Handing sensitive Christian letters to official government couriers would have invited immediate imperial scrutiny and arrest.

How the Epistles Were Actually Delivered

Without a public post office, Paul utilized a distinct [private communication strategy](#):

- **Named Letter Carriers:** Many New Testament letters explicitly name the specific associates tasked with carrying them. For example, Paul notes that **Phoebe** carried the Epistle to the Romans (Romans 16:1–2), **Tychicus** carried Ephesians and Colossians (Ephesians 6:21–22), and **Epaphroditus** delivered the letter to the Philippians.
- **The Role of the Messenger:** These couriers did not simply drop off a letter and leave. Because ancient manuscripts had no punctuation or spacing, the messenger was expected to **read the letter aloud** to the congregation, perform the emphasis correctly, answer questions about Paul's theological intent, and report back on how the church responded.
- **Commercial Merchant Ships:** When traveling associates were unavailable, early Christians took advantage of Rome's bustling trade economy. They would go to local docks and pay **independent traveling merchants** or ship captains who were already heading toward the destination city to carry their papyrus scrolls.

Part 1: How the Private Delivery Networks Functioned

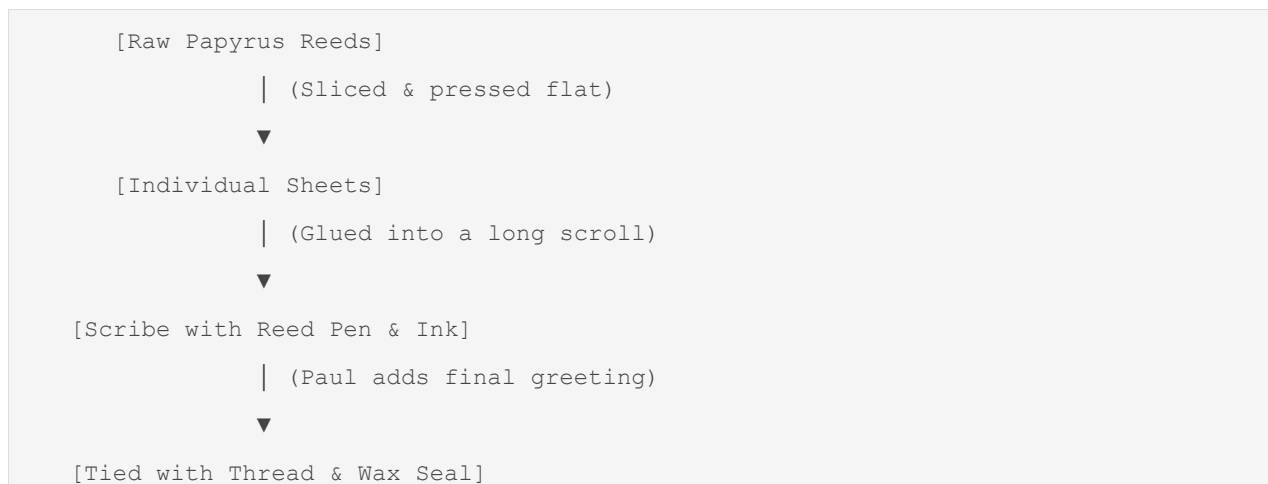
Because early Christians lacked access to the imperial infrastructure, their private networks relied on meticulous planning, community hospitality, and strategic geography.

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[Paul Dictates Letter] → [Courier Travels via Trade Routes] → [Local Church Hosts Courier] → [Courier Reads Aloud & Explains Text]
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- **Strategic Mapping along the Via Egnatia:** Paul purposefully planned his missionary journeys and letter routing along major Roman highways like the **Via Egnatia** and busiest maritime trade corridors. This maximized the probability of his messengers finding passing merchant caravans or ships heading toward specific churches.
- **The Underground Hospitality Network:** Messengers could not stay at official *mansiones* (state lodgings). Instead, letters functioned as **letters of introduction**. When a courier like Phoebe arrived in Rome, the letter itself served as her credential, commanding the local house-church network to provide her with free food, housing, and protection.
- **Security Through Anonymity:** To prevent interception by local Roman authorities or hostile factions, letters were rarely addressed with public titles on the outside. Couriers memorised the exact locations of private homes where congregations met secretly, avoiding public scrutiny.
- **The "Circular Letter" System:** Messengers frequently carried a single letter to multiple destinations. A courier would deliver a letter to one house-church, wait for the congregation to **manually copy the entire scroll by hand**, and then carry the original piece of parchment to the next city on the route.

Part 2: How Physical Letters Were Constructed and Protected

Writing and sending a long-form letter in the 1st century AD was a highly expensive, physically demanding technical process.



- **The Production Materials:** Letters were written on **papyrus**, made by slicing the pith of Egyptian river reeds into thin strips, layering them crosswise, and pressing them flat. Individual sheets were glued together edge-to-edge to create a long scroll.
- **The Writing Process (Amanuenses):** Paul rarely physically wrote his own long letters; he dictated them to a professional scribe called an **amanuensis**. For example, a Christian named **Tertius** explicitly steps out of the background in Romans 16:22 to write: *"I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord."*
- **The Autograph Authentication:** Because forged letters under Paul's name were an active threat, Paul would personally grab the reed pen from the scribe at the very end of dictation to sign the letter in his own handwriting. He highlights this security practice in 2 Thessalonians 3:17: *"I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters."*
- **The Physical Seals:** Once completed, the papyrus scroll was rolled tight, bound with linen thread, and sealed with **beeswax or clay**. The sender pressed a signet ring into the warm wax. The courier's primary job during transit was ensuring this physical seal remained completely unbroken until they stood directly in front of the target congregation.

What would have been the cost of production and delivery along, say one of the vias used,

In the 1st century AD, composing and delivering a major letter was a significant economic undertaking. Based on historical data compiled by New Testament scholars like E. Randolph Richards in his seminal study on [Pauline letter writing](#), a substantial text like the Epistle to the Romans would cost over 20 denarii to produce, equating to roughly US\$2,000–\$3,000 today in modern labour/purchasing power value.

The financial dynamics break down into two distinct phases: production and physical transport along the highways.

1. Cost of Production (The Material and Labor)

A regular Roman letter was very short—typically under 100 words. By contrast, Paul's letters were monumental literary projects. The cost scaled heavily by length:

- **The Scribe's Fee:** A professional scribe (*amanuensis*) charged by the line. The Roman Edict of Diocletian later formalised this rate at roughly 20–25 denarii per 100 lines for high-quality work. Composing a text like Romans (approx. 9,400 words) required days of professional dictation, editing, and layout.
- **The Papyrus:** Imported from Egypt, a single blank roll of premium papyrus (*scapus*) cost roughly **two days' wages for an ordinary laborer**. While a short letter like Philemon required only a single sheet (about \$100 equivalent today), the sheer length of Romans or 1 Corinthians required multiple glued rolls.

2. Cost of Delivery Along the Roman Vias

Because there was no government postage stamp or public mail service, delivery costs depended heavily on who carried the scroll down major routes like the Via Egnatia or the Via Appia

[Via Appia / Egnatia Delivery Costs]

└─ Trusted Companion (Phoebe / Tychicus)	→ Free labor, but Church pays travel upkeep
└─ Commercial Merchant / Carrier	→ Baseline freight tip + expected "arrival bounty"

- **The Travel Upkeep (Trusted Companions):** When Paul used close associates like Phoebe or Tychicus, he did not pay them a commercial fee. However, the local sending church had to finance their **food, lodging at commercial inns, and clothing** for journeys that could span hundreds of kilometres.
- **The Commercial "Tip" System:** If the church utilized an independent traveling merchant, they paid an upfront freight fee. More importantly, the system relied on an **"arrival bounty."** It was customary for the recipient of the letter to give the courier a financial tip or a warm meal upon safe delivery to guarantee the messenger didn't simply discard the scroll in a ditch along the highway.

Economic Impact on the Early Church

These high price tags explain why New Testament epistles were treated as **precious corporate assets**. A single house-church could not afford a private library of scriptures. When a letter arrived, the massive financial and logistical investment made it a major community event, prompting congregations to immediately make hand-written copies to circulate to neighbouring cities.

Could you map out graphically the Via Appia and Via Egnata

The Via Appia **and the** Via Egnatia functioned effectively as a single continuous imperial superhighway. They connected the Western capital of Rome directly to the Eastern frontiers of Greece, Asia Minor, and Jerusalem.

The Strategic Route and Connection

Together, these two highways served as the vital lifeline for early Christian couriers moving correspondence between Italy and Greece:

1. **The Western Leg (Via Appia):** Travelled southeast from Rome to the Adriatic port city of Brundisium.
2. **The Sea Crossing:** Couriers took commercial ships across the Adriatic Sea to Dyrrachium.
3. **The Eastern Leg (Via Egnatia):** Picked up immediately at the coast and cut through the Balkans to Byzantium (later Constantinople), passing directly through key New Testament locations like Philippi and Thessalonica.

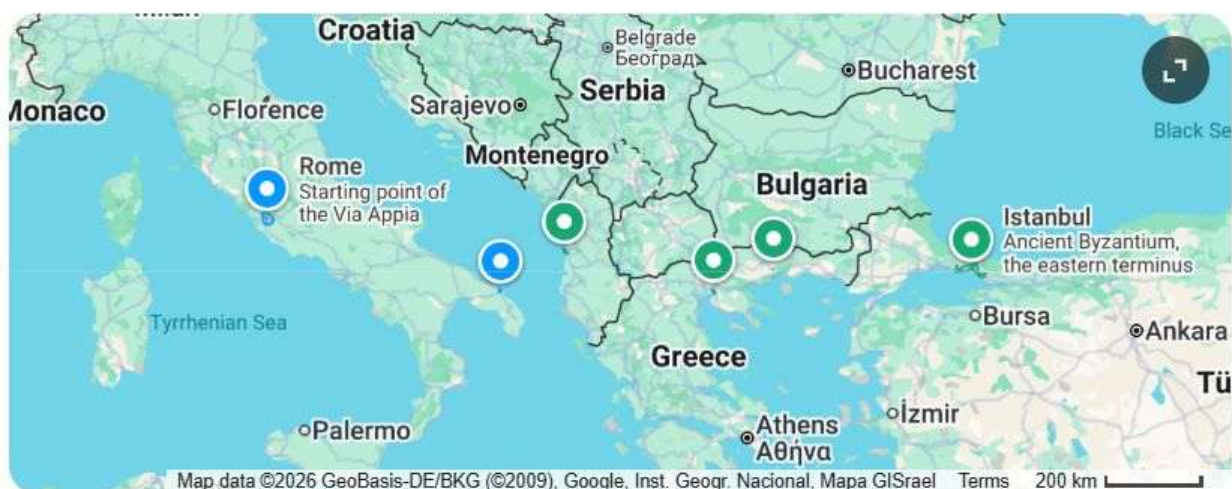


Comparison of the Two Imperial Highways

Feature	The Via Appia ("The Appian Way")	The Via Egnatia
Primary Region	Mainland Italy (Rome to Apulia)	The Balkans (Albania, North Macedonia, Greece, Turkey)
Key Stops	Rome, Capua, Beneventum, Tarentum, Brundisium	Dyrrachium, Thessalonica, Philippi, Byzantium
Pauline Context	Paul travelled up this road under armed guard to reach Rome in Acts 28	Paul and Silas walked this road to plant churches in Philippi and Thessalonica.

The Mapping of the Routes

Below is the geographic visualization tracing the path from the Roman capital, down through the Italian peninsula, and across the Balkan peninsula where Paul's earliest congregations were founded.



● Via Appia (Western Leg) ● Via Egnatia (Eastern Leg)

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