VOX LATINA

A GUIDE TO
THE PRONUNCIATION OF
CLASSICAL LATIN

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Second edition
FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

A reprint of this book with minor corrections was issued in 1970. Now that a further printing is called for, I have taken the opportunity to incorporate some major revisions, in order to take account of further studies which have appeared or come to my notice since 1965, as well as any changes or developments in my own ideas. I have also added a number of references for the reader interested in following up some of the more crucial or controversial points. In the meantime there have also appeared my Vox Graeca (C.U.P., 1968; second edition 1974; third edition 1987) and Accent and Rhythm (C.U.P., 1973), to which there are several cross-references (abbreviated as VG and AR respectively).

In order to save expense and at the same time to avoid changes in pagination from the first edition, the new material has (as in the second edition of VG) been added as a supplement rather than worked into the main text (which contains only minor revisions). An obelus in the margin indicates the existence of a relevant supplementary note.

In addition I have now included a Select Bibliography and have appended a short account of the Latin (and English) names of the letters of the alphabet.

Cambridge W. S. A.
July 1977 (revised August 1988)
FOREWORD TO THE
FIRST EDITION

In discussions on the subject of Latin pronunciation two questions are commonly encountered; they tend to be of a rhetorical nature, and are not entirely confined to non-classical disputants. First, why should we concern ourselves with the pronunciation of a dead language? And second, how in any case can we know how the language was originally pronounced?

In answer to the first question, it may reasonably be held that it is desirable to seek an appreciation of Latin literature, and that such literature was based on a living language. Moreover, much of early literature, and poetry in particular, was orally composed and was intended to be spoken and heard rather than written and seen. If, therefore, we are to try and appreciate an author's full intentions, including the phonetic texture of his work, we must put ourselves as nearly as possible in the position of the native speaker and hearer of his day. Otherwise, however full our grammatical and lexical understanding of the work, we shall still be missing an important element of the contemporary experience. It is true that we can have a lively appreciation of, say, Shakespeare, whilst reading or hearing his work in a modern pronunciation—but in this case the two languages are not far removed from one another, and whilst individual sounds may have changed to some extent, the relations between them have been largely preserved; the situation is already very different, even within English, if we go back only as far as Chaucer. It is said that Burke used to read French poetry as if it were English; when one considers the vowel harmonies of a line like Hugo's 'Un frais parfum sortait des touffes d'asphodèle', one can only conclude that his appreciation must have been minimal!

We are here concerned primarily to reconstruct the educated
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pronunciation of Rome in the Golden Age. But it will be necessary to take note of certain variations even within this period, and of interest in some cases to refer to features of more colloquial speech, and of preceding or following periods.

The degree of accuracy with which we can reconstruct the ancient pronunciation varies from sound to sound, but for the most part can be determined within quite narrow limits. In some favourable cases it is possible to reconstruct such niceties of pronunciation as it would be unreasonable to demand in normal reading; and the present book is not so unpractical as to suggest that more than a reasonable approximation should then be made. But the knowledge should nevertheless be available to the reader, so that, whatever pronunciation he in fact adopts, he may know to what degree and in what respects \( \text{\textit{ij}} \) differs from the probable original. For many of us, already well set in our ways, it will inevitably continue to be a case of ‘\text{\textit{ideo meliora proboque; deterriora sequor}}’; but scholarship surely requires that we should at least know what is known or at any rate probable.

It is claims such as those of the preceding paragraph that commonly evoke the second question ‘How do we know?’ And there is no one simple answer to it. The kinds of evidence and argument are various, and will become familiar in the course of the pages that follow; but the principal types of data invoked in phonetic reconstruction may be summarized as follows: (1) specific statements of Latin grammarians and other authors regarding the pronunciation of the language; (2) puns, plays on words, ancient etymologies, and imitations of natural sounds; (3) the representation of Latin words in other languages; (4) developments in the Romance languages; (5) the spelling conventions of Latin, and particularly scribal or epigraphic variations; and (6) the internal structure of the Latin language itself, including its metrical patterns. Our arguments will seldom rely on one type of evidence alone, and the combinations of evidence will vary from case to case. The grammarians
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are mostly of very late date, but their evidence is important as confirming the continuation of features established for earlier periods by other means; frequently also they quote the views or practice of earlier writers; and it is a characteristic of their profession to preserve earlier traditions long after they have vanished from normal speech.

In view of the prevalence of the second question, it is at least as important that the reader should be equipped with reasons as with results; and particular attention has been paid to setting out ‘how we know what we know’ in language that is, so far as possible, free from technical complications. In the process of reconstruction we are of course dependent on a variety of linguistic theories and techniques, but since the present book is not directed primarily to the linguistic specialist, no technical terms have been used without due explanation. References to the specialist literature have also been kept to a minimum; this must not, however, be taken to minimize the debt that is owed to a large number of books and articles, on every aspect of the subject, over a period of roughly a century; and in particular to such eminent overall studies as Seelmann’s Die Aussprache des Latein nach physiologisch-historischen Grundsätzen (1885), Sommer’s Handbuch der lateinischen Laut- und Formenlehre (1914), and Sturtevant’s The Pronunciation of Greek and Latin (1949). Two particularly useful recent works may also be specially mentioned: Maria Boniol Moschini’s La pronuncia del latino nelle scuole dell’antichità al rinascimento, Parte 1 (Torino, 1962), and Alfonso Traina’s L’alfabeto e la pronuncia del latino (2nd edn., Bologna, 1963).

My thanks are due to several colleagues and students for encouragement and suggestions in the preparation of this work; in particular to Mr A. G. Hunt, of the Department of Education, University of Cambridge; and to Mr W. B. Thompson, of the Department of Education, University of Leeds, who tried

1 The more common phonetic terms are introduced and explained in a preliminary chapter, and an asterisk against the first occurrence of a term in the text indicates that it is there discussed.

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out an early draft on a number of classical school-teachers and
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also grateful for the interest expressed by the Joint Association
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W. S. A.

March 1964
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Video rem operosiorem esse quam putaram, emendate pronuntiare.

(L. E. O, in D. Erasmi De recta Latini Graecique sermonis pronuntiatione Dialogo)
The organs of speech

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<td>B</td>
<td>Back of tongue</td>
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<td>E</td>
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<tr>
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<td>L</td>
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<td>Middle of tongue</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Nasal cavity</td>
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<td>P</td>
<td>Pharynx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Soft palate (velum), in lowered position</td>
</tr>
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<td>T</td>
<td>Tongue-tip</td>
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<td>U</td>
<td>Uvula</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>Vocal cords (glottis)</td>
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[AFTER Ida C. Ward, *The Phonetics of English*]