

INTRODUCTION

More than fifty texts or extracts are collected in this volume, covering over 1,000 years of the history of Latin. I have tried to select passages that do not simply reflect the classical language associated particularly with Cicero and codified in modern grammars of Latin. The word ‘informal’ in the title is appropriate only up to a point, and has been used for want of a better term. Some of the texts would have been looked on by their writers not as informal, but as their best effort at expressing themselves in formal writing. All, however, have departures from the norms prescribed by some ancient and modern grammarians, and all have something to offer in illustrating changes in the language over time.

The texts fall into various categories.

The first five (or six) texts are early republican, and antedate any standardisation movement that might have occurred (therein lies a question in itself: see the concluding chapter). Most are conversational or informal.

Eight passages belong to the Ciceronian or Augustan periods. Cicero has been excluded, except in the collection numbered 10, which are jokes mainly from the late Republic quoted by Cicero himself and also by others. Jokes tend to be made off-the-cuff, and are often spoken. They may be risqué, and admit language not used in formal writing.

There are eighteen writing tablets from the first century BC to about the eighth century AD (6, 13–15, 19–24, 32–7, 41, 46). These comprise private letters and curse tablets (some of which have been published for the first time in recent decades), and also two legal documents (15, 41) that are linguistically noteworthy; one (15) has two versions, by an educated scribe and by an uneducated freedman. Parts of two imperial literary letters have also been included, one by Seneca (17), the other extant in Augustine’s correspondence, from a certain Publicola to Augustine (31). Augustine’s reply survives, and some comparisons are made between Publicola’s language and that of the reply. These are two texts of the same date and same genre dealing with the same subject.

The Latin Bible translations were influential in the late period, but their Latin is not straightforward. Bible translations were influenced by popular varieties of the language, but are also full of constructions from Greek and even Hebrew. Much surviving late Latin was written by Christians, and Christian writers drew on the Bible as a stylistic model. Some of these constructions

found their way into Christian writings. Could translationese have had an influence on the language in general? I have included two versions of a passage from the Gospel of John (38), eight overtly Christian texts (27, 31, 39, 40, 44, 45, 47, 49), and another with a pagan theme but subject to biblical influence (43). The Latin written in the Christian period on biblical themes cannot without reservation be assumed to represent a stage in the language's development, as it may to some extent be biblical pastiche, remote from the way people spoke. The difficulty of interpreting such material comes up particularly in an assessment of the Latin of the Irish/British writer Patrick (see 39, 40). Does his Latin reflect the Latin spoken in Britain or Ireland (or indeed on the Continent), or is it bookish, i.e. based on Bible translations?

Many technical texts (e.g. medical, veterinary) are extant from different centuries. From the earlier period there are here two passages of Cato's *De agricultura* (4, 5), and a long passage from Vitruvius (11). Vitruvius was almost contemporary with Cicero, and his Latin alongside that of Cicero shows up a lack of standardisation in the classical period. A long Algerian inscription set up by a surveyor (25) has also been included as a specimen of a practical man's way of expressing himself. The one medical text in the collection (42), and one of the two veterinary (30), have different 'versions' (on this phenomenon see further below).

As well as the surveyor's inscription I have quoted a short Pompeian verse inscription (16), and also a text found on a mosaic from North Africa depicting a beast hunt (28). This purports to record acclamations uttered by the crowd attending the show.

There are five texts from very late antiquity or the early medieval period, from Spain, Francia and northern Italy (46–50). All display regional or proto-Romance features that had either been kept at bay in earlier writing, or had not been established at all in the language until very late. Two of these texts have an obligatory definite article (49, 50). One, a text on falcon medicine from northern Italy (50), has been quoted at length because it is so advanced in many respects towards a Romance vernacular.

One of the private letters (21), from Vindolanda, is by a woman, Claudia Severa, who was married to a military officer. A passage (27) from the *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* claims to be a woman's own account of her dream, and it has attracted attention recently as a possible specimen of female writing. The authorship of this narrative will be discussed: is it really in the words of Perpetua herself, or has the redactor attributed words to her?

Many of the passages present 'talk' in one form or another: of characters in a play (2, 3), of mundane persons as depicted condescendingly by a rhetorician

(7, 8), of the sort heard in jokes (10), of slaves in a letter of Seneca in dialogue with their master (17), of an uneducated freedman of Greek origin in a novel by a writer of high education (18), of the crowd at a beast hunt (28), of a character in a late novelistic work (43), of humble characters in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* (45), and of occupants of an early medieval monastery (47). Private letters too, though they have stereotyped formulae, are conversational.

The only narrative texts (44, 48) are very late. The *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini* is heavily Christian and exists in more than one recension. The other, the *Annales regni Francorum*, also has two versions, one of which has regional features.

These are not the only texts in this volume that have more than one version, such as a classicising one and one less correct (see 15, 30, 42, 43; note too the Bible translation, 38). It may be hard to determine whether a scribe or redactor of one version has corrected non-standard Latin, or barbarised correct Latin. This question will be considered in the Commentaries on some of the texts just listed. Sometimes however two versions cannot be reduced to the classification correct versus non-correct: there are many reasons why a scribe or redactor might change the text he had before him. The existence of two versions of a work raises problems for an editor. I stress that I do not have in mind mere spelling variations between manuscripts. A manuscript with phonetic spellings should not be classified as a specimen of 'vulgar Latin', because the spellings in most cases will represent the sounds of educated, or general, as distinct from exclusively uneducated, speech: e.g. *e* for *ae*, omission of initial *h*, omission of final *m* and various vocalic misspellings reflected spoken features widespread in the language across all classes. A scribe might have been a bad speller, but his speech need not have differed from that of a good speller. It is usually impossible to know what the spelling of the original author was like. Even if we knew, we would be the wiser about his level of literacy, but not about any distinctive character of his speech.

The passages are in rough chronological order (as far as that can be determined), though I have not attempted to establish a definitive order of the writing tablets numbered 20–4 and 26, which belong loosely to the second century. I have also put six British curse tablets into a 'late' group (32–7), again without seeking to impose a strict relative chronology. In each case there is usually an introduction giving a few facts about the text. There follow the text, a literal translation, a linguistic commentary, and finally a conclusion. The aim of the conclusions is to highlight general linguistic themes arising from each passage, and to summarise features of the Latin relevant to genre, date of composition, diachronic change and social variation. The volume might serve

as a sort of practical or illustrative history of the Latin language over about 1,000 years. For that reason there is a concluding chapter summarising some of the themes that arise from the selections. Many of the notes in the volume inevitably deal with isolated or miscellaneous usages, but an effort has been made throughout to keep important topics and continuities to the fore. The book might be used by students, but is not intended as an elementary reader. It is wide-ranging in its treatment of many topics, and offers some revisions of standard accounts of the history of the language, and a good deal that is new or little known.

Numbering in the Commentaries

In the Commentaries on verse passages, line numbers from the original text are used. In a few non-literary documents printed here with their original format, the original line numbers are again given. In (literary) prose passages traditional section numbers (if these have been used in standard editions) within chapters are printed in bold in the text and translation. These same numbers are used in the Commentary to mark lemmata. If however a text does not have section numbers in standard editions, I have numbered the lemmata consecutively (NOT in bold), and inserted these numbers in the text in brackets (again not in bold) at the relevant points. Finally, in standard editions of some works traditional section numbers are so widely spaced that they have proved inadequate here for the numbering of lemmata. In passages taken from such editions the section numbers are given (as above) in bold, but in addition the lemmata are numbered consecutively (not in bold), and these numbers are inserted in the text in brackets (not in bold).

A note on cross-referencing

Many of the phenomena discussed in the Commentaries come up more than once. Cross-references are not by page number, but by the number of the text, accompanied by the number of the lemma. Alternatively I have sometimes inserted in the Commentaries at appropriate points references of the type ‘see index, “temporal adverbs, repetitious”’.