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978-1-107-09360-7 - Learning Latin the Ancient Way: Latin Textbooks from the Ancient World

Eleanor Dickey

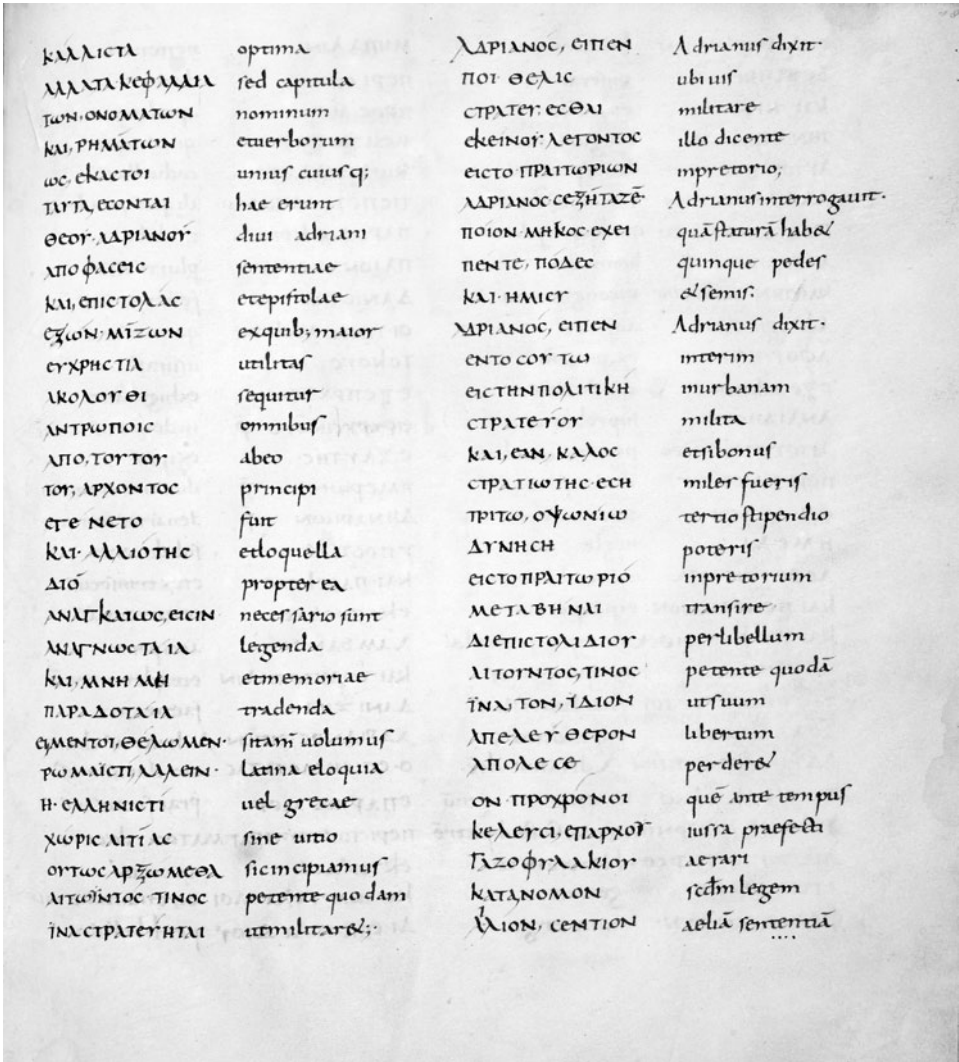
Frontmatter

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Learning Latin the Ancient Way

What did Greek speakers in the Roman empire do when they wanted to learn Latin? They used Latin-learning materials containing authentic, enjoyable vignettes about daily life in the ancient world – shopping, banking, going to the baths, having fights, being scolded, making excuses – very much like the dialogues in some of today’s foreign-language textbooks. These stories provide priceless insight into daily life in the Roman empire, as well as into how Latin was learned at that period, and they were all written by Romans in Latin that was designed to be easy for beginners to understand. Learners also used special beginners’ versions of great Latin authors including Virgil and Cicero, and dictionaries, grammars, texts in Greek transliteration, etc. All these materials are now available for the first time to today’s students, in a book designed to complement modern textbooks and enrich the Latin-learning experience.

ELEANOR DICKEY has taught in Canada and the United States, and is currently Professor of Classics at the University of Reading. She is a Fellow of the British Academy and of the Academia Europaea and has published widely on the Latin and Greek languages and how they were studied in antiquity, including *Greek Forms of Address* (1996), *Latin Forms of Address* (2002), *Ancient Greek Scholarship* (2007), and *The Colloquia of the Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana* (2012–15). She is a dedicated and passionate language teacher with extensive experience of teaching both Latin and Greek at all levels, in French as well as in English, and has brought this experience to bear on her adaptations of the ancient Latin-learning materials for modern students.



Frontispiece Judgements of Hadrian (see passage 2.4) in the ninth-century manuscript Vossianus Gr. Q. 7, folio 18r. Printed by kind permission of Leiden University Library.

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This book is dedicated to all the people who originally created the ancient Latin-learning materials, hundreds of individual language teachers most of whose names have long been forgotten but whose work has lasted far longer than they ever expected.

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[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Who learned Latin in antiquity?	1
1.2 How did ancient students learn Latin?	4
1.3 How do their textbooks survive?	6
1.4 What is in this book?	8
2 Texts	10
2.1 Colloquia	10
2.1.1 The preface	12
2.1.2 A child gets up in the morning	12
2.1.3 A good child goes to school	14
2.1.4 The start of school	15
2.1.5 Doing schoolwork	16
2.1.6 A model schoolboy in a model school	18
2.1.7 The children argue	22
2.1.8 Tuition payments	23
2.1.9 An accusation of truancy	24
2.1.10 The child goes home	25
2.1.11 A trip to the bank	27
2.1.12 A trip to the clothes market	28
2.1.13 A visit to a sick friend	29
2.1.14 Two criminal trials	31
2.1.15 A lawsuit	33
2.1.16 A dispute resolution procedure	38
2.1.17 An attempt at debt recovery	39
2.1.18 A message from a friend in need	40
2.1.19 Preparations for having a guest to lunch	42
2.1.20 A visit to the baths	45
2.1.21 A dinner party	49
2.1.22 Getting a scolding	52
2.1.23 Bedtime	54

viii Contents

2.1.24	A phrasebook section on insults	54
2.1.25	A phrasebook section on excuses	57
2.1.26	A phrasebook section on complaints about absence	57
2.1.27	The conclusion	58
2.2	Stories about the Trojan War	58
2.3	Aesop’s fables	61
2.4	Judgements of Hadrian	64
2.5	Treatise on manumission	69
2.6	Virgil’s <i>Aeneid</i>	74
2.7	Model letters	75
2.8	A marked copy of Sallust	80
3	Grammatical works	82
3.1	Dositheus’ grammar	83
3.1.1	Introduction to grammar	84
3.1.2	The case system	88
3.2	Charisius’ grammar	92
3.2.1	Introduction to the verb	92
3.2.2	Introduction to Latin conjugation	93
3.3	A set of noun paradigms	95
4	Glossaries	100
4.1	A glossary section for words beginning with H	101
4.2	A glossary section on sacrifices	103
4.3	Glossary sections on entertainment	104
4.4	A glossary of homonyms	109
5	Prose composition	116
6	Alphabets	119
6.1	A learner’s alphabet with line of verse	119
6.2	A learner’s alphabet with letter names	119
7	Transliterated texts	121
7.1	A transliterated colloquium	121
7.2	A transliterated list of verb conjugations	123
7.3	A transliterated glossary of military terminology	124
7.4	A transliterated glossary of vegetable and fish names	125
8	Texts with the original Greek	128
8.1	A colloquium morning scene	128
8.2	A colloquium school scene	129

8.3	Stories about the Trojan War	133
8.4	Aesop’s fables	135
8.5	Judgements of Hadrian	138
8.6	Treatise on manumission	139
8.7	Cicero’s first Catilinarian oration	144
8.8	Virgil’s <i>Aeneid</i>	146
8.9	Model letters	148
8.10	A transliterated colloquium	151
8.11	Dositheus’ explanation of accents	153
8.12	Dositheus’ explanation of the alphabet	156
8.13	A transliterated list of verb conjugations	161
8.14	A glossary section on family relationships	163
8.15	A transliterated glossary of goddesses	164
8.16	A transliterated glossary of spices	165
9	Texts without word division	167
9.1	The preface to the “Genealogy of Hyginus”	169
9.2	Stories about the Trojan War	170
9.3	Charisius on the participle	176
10	Overview of the ancient Latin-learning materials	178
10.1	Papyri	178
10.2	Texts surviving via the medieval manuscript tradition	182
	<i>Bibliography</i>	183

Figures

Frontispiece Judgements of Hadrian (see passage 2.4) in the ninth-century manuscript Vossianus Gr. Q. 7, folio 18r. Printed by kind permission of Leiden University Library.

- 1. First part of colloquium lawsuit scene in the twelfth-century manuscript Zwettl 1, folio 11r (bottom of columns 1 and 2). Printed by kind permission of Zisterzienerstift Zwettl. page 36
- 2. Second part of colloquium lawsuit scene in manuscript Zwettl 1, folio 11r (top of columns 3 and 4). Printed by kind permission of Zisterzienerstift Zwettl. 37
- 3. Beginning of Dositheus' grammar in the ninth-century manuscript St. Gall 902, p. 8. Printed by kind permission of the Abbey of St. Gall. 87
- 4. Noun paradigms in P.Louvre inv. E 7332, recto. © Musée du Louvre, Paris/ Documentation AE. 99

Preface

Learning Latin is one of the key experiences of the modern Classicist; nearly all of us have done it ourselves, and many of us spend much of our time helping the next generation do it. Yet most of us know almost nothing about how our experience of this crucial activity relates to the ancient one; indeed many Classicists are unaware that Latin learning was common in antiquity and that many of the materials used for that purpose have survived. This lack of awareness limits opportunities not only to compare our experience with the ancient one, but also to exploit the ancient Latin-learning materials, many of which are still useful and enjoyable today.

This book aims to show modern Latin teachers and Latin students how ancient Latin learning was conducted, by making the ancient materials accessible to modern readers in a format that allows them to be used as they were originally intended to be used. It is not a Latin textbook and cannot be used by itself to learn Latin (among other reasons, because it includes only a selection of the ancient materials and so omits a significant amount of vital information); rather it is designed to complement a textbook and/or to be used by those who have already mastered the basics. It is not cumulative: the pieces it contains can be read in any order.

Since some aspects of ancient education are alien to modern practice, teachers may actually prefer to use the ancient materials in ways that no ancient teacher ever used them, for example by asking students to translate texts that in antiquity would have been memorized rather than translated. In doing so they will have my blessing; I myself use the ancient materials inauthentically in teaching, because there are good reasons why we no longer use certain ancient methods. But inauthentic use of the ancient materials is best carried out in full awareness of how those materials were originally designed to be used, and for that reason every effort has been made to make clear what the original function of the various materials was. I hope this book will be a tool usable in a wide variety of different ways by people whose own creativity is limited neither by my intentions nor by those of the ancient authors of these texts.

Many people have helped with the creation of this book. Philomen Probert, Martin West, CUP's sharp-eyed anonymous readers, Holly Eckhardt, Mark Pitter, Cathy Bothwell, and pupils at Manchester Grammar School provided valuable feedback on a draft of the book. Rolando Ferri introduced me to these texts in the first place and helped me to understand them, Philomen Probert offered constant support and encouragement,

xii *Preface*

Maria Chiara Scappaticcio shared her forthcoming work with me, and Jane Gardner helped me understand the treatise on manumission. Generous funding from the Leverhulme Trust provided time to write the book. Iveta Adams, Christina Sarigiannidou, Fran Hiller, and Michael Sharp ran the fastest and least painful publication process I have ever experienced. Any mistakes that remain are my own.