

# 1 | Introduction

When we think of Latin learning in antiquity, we tend to picture little Roman children learning the language from their parents (or, more likely, their nurses and *paedagogi*). Such a vision makes the gap between the ancient Latin-learning experience and the modern one seem unbridgeable, for there is bound to be a vast difference between the experience of a language’s native speakers and that of people who learn it as a foreign language. But learners of Latin as a foreign language also existed in the ancient world, and their experience is in some ways very close to our own: they learned declensions and conjugations, memorized vocabulary, used dictionaries and commentaries, and read Cicero’s *Catilinarians* and Virgil’s *Aeneid*, for example. In other ways, however, the experience of ancient Latin students was very different from ours, and in order to understand the differences it is crucial to know who the ancient Latin learners were: for example, since many of them were native speakers of Greek, they often struggled with the Roman alphabet but had no trouble with concepts like gender and declension.

## 1.1 Who learned Latin in antiquity?

The Roman empire had two main parts: the Western empire, where the main language was Latin, and the Eastern empire, where the main language was Greek. In both halves numerous other languages were also spoken at the time the Romans arrived, but as the centuries passed those other languages often died out. In the West, for example, the original languages of Italy, Gaul, and Spain had largely disappeared by the end of the Roman empire, as the inhabitants of those regions shifted to using Latin; that is why people in those countries now speak Romance languages descended from Latin. Such a language shift implies some foreign-language learning, but not necessarily sustained foreign-language learning: as soon as the inhabitants of the Western empire started speaking to their children in Latin rather than (or even in addition to) Gaulish, Etruscan, etc., those children grew up as native speakers of Latin and had no need to learn it as a foreign language. The fact that we have no Latin-learning materials from the West could be due to a relatively short period of foreign-language Latin learning, but it could also be an accident of preservation, since comparatively few non-literary texts survive from the ancient West in any case.

In the East the situation was different: although the native languages had a tendency to die out there too, their speakers shifted to Greek rather than to Latin. Indeed, although Westerners living temporarily in the East no doubt taught their children Latin,

2 *Introduction*

we have no evidence that native speakers of Greek or other Eastern languages ever thought it sensible to raise their children as Latin speakers. The result was that whenever Easterners learned Latin, they learned it as a foreign language.

Much of the Greek-speaking world was under the domination of Latin speakers from the second century BC until the late sixth century AD, when contact with the West was largely cut off and the highest levels of administration in the East shifted completely to Greek. That is a very long period of contact, and the relationship between Latin and Greek changed considerably during those centuries. In the early centuries of this period the linguistic relationship was also different in different parts of the East, some of which were conquered by the Romans earlier than others. Greeks, that is people who lived in Greece itself and whose ancestors had lived there during the Classical period, were confident in their linguistic and cultural superiority and remained uninterested in learning Latin for several centuries after the Roman conquest. Greek speakers in other parts of the East, however, had a different attitude: often their ancestors had learned Greek relatively recently because of the social and economic benefits attached to doing so, and they in turn were perfectly happy to learn Latin if it would benefit them. As time went on and the position of the Greek language was strengthened in the East, these Greek speakers outside Greece came to greatly outnumber the Greek speakers in Greece, and their attitudes predominated; eventually even the Greek speakers in Greece wanted to learn Latin when it was in their interests to do so.

One of the benefits of learning Latin was improved interaction with the Roman army. Officially the language of the army was Latin; though in practice members of Eastern units normally spoke Greek to one another, knowledge of Latin was still useful in the army. Latin was also useful for people who had dealings with the army, for example merchants wanting to sell produce to an army base: such transactions could be performed in Greek and no doubt often were, but knowledge of Latin could give a merchant a valuable competitive edge. We have some Latin-learning materials clearly connected with the army (e.g. passage 7.3) and others, such as manuals designed to impart basic Latin conversation skills (e.g. 8.10), that may have been intended for dealing with the army but would also have been useful for interacting with other Latin-speaking travelers in the East.

Another reason for learning Latin was a desire to practice Roman law. In theory all aspects of Roman law were conducted entirely in Latin, both in writing (the will of a Roman citizen was not valid unless it was written in Latin) and in speech (court cases were supposed to be conducted in Latin). In practice the adherence to Latin was less rigid in parts of the empire where the main language was Greek; we have transcripts of court proceedings in which Latin was used only for set procedural formulae and Greek was used for the actual arguments, and the wills of Greek-speaking Roman citizens might be written in Greek and then provided with a Latin translation (which might

never be used by anyone, if neither the testator nor the heirs knew Latin) to make them valid. Even taking this flexibility into account, however, knowledge of Latin was highly desirable for aspiring lawyers, and law schools were obliged to provide instruction in it if they wanted to keep their students; we have a lament of Libanius complaining that people were no longer interested in studying traditional rhetoric at his school because they wanted to learn Latin.<sup>1</sup> Some Latin-learning texts are likely to have been designed specifically for law students (see passages 2.1.14–15).

Travel to the West must have been another reason for learning Latin, but we have surprisingly little hard evidence of this motivation. The surviving Latin-learning materials offer very little in the way of targeted help for the traveler. Staying in inns, eating out, and seafaring (or indeed any type of travel more complicated than riding a horse) are all conspicuously absent from the extant materials. Since many Westerners knew Greek, Greek speakers may have felt that there was no need to learn Latin before traveling to the West.

Greek speakers' Latin learning was largely a utilitarian enterprise; there is little evidence of Latin learning for the sake of experiencing Latin literature at first hand, and (until a very late period) knowledge of Latin conveyed no social cachet in the East. For this reason Greek speakers who learned Latin did not do so as schoolchildren, the way Latin speakers learned Greek. The parents of Roman children could be confident that knowing Greek would be beneficial to them whatever their future professions, because knowledge of Greek was part of the definition of an educated, civilized Roman; therefore it made sense for Roman parents to ensure that their children learned Greek at the earliest opportunity. But since the parents of Greek-speaking children had no such assurances about the value of learning Latin, Greek speakers who learned Latin normally did so as young adults, when they were training for specific professions and recognized that they needed the language.

At the very end of antiquity Latin lost its utility in Byzantium; with the fall of the Western empire the Latin-speaking army ceased to exist and the flow of merchants and travelers between East and West largely dried up. In the sixth century the immensely complex body of texts on which Roman law was based were codified into finite works on which Greek commentaries (and, in some cases, translations) were immediately produced, and knowledge of Latin became less useful for lawyers. Ultimately, of course, this loss of utility meant the loss of the language; the Byzantine court was entirely Greek-speaking, and none of the Latin-learning texts that must have existed in sixth-century Byzantium were copied enough to survive via the Byzantine manuscript tradition. But at the same time Latin suddenly developed the social cachet that it had lacked for so many centuries, and the imperial court used fossilized Latin phrases (often written

<sup>1</sup> *Oration* 43.4–5; cf. Rochette (1997: 133–4).

4 *Introduction*

out in Greek script, as knowledge of the Latin alphabet had been lost) for its grand ceremonials.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 How did ancient students learn Latin?

The educational environment in which Latin learning took place is difficult to recover, because most Latin learning did not take place in the one educational setting about which we are reasonably well informed, the ancient school.<sup>3</sup> Some evidently took place in law schools and some in army camps, but almost certainly some Latin learning occurred outside any formal educational context. What we know, therefore, comes from the materials themselves. Most Latin learners started by learning the alphabet (see section 6), with which they appear to have had considerable difficulty. They then read easy-reader texts designed for beginners (see section 2), in which the Latin was divided into narrow columns one to three words wide and accompanied by a Greek translation that matched line for line.<sup>4</sup> Such a translation enabled the ancient learner to understand both what the individual words meant (as with our interlinear translations) and what the sentence as a whole meant (as with our facing-page translations). Of course, once such a translation was provided the students could not be asked to engage with the Latin by translating it; rather they memorized the Latin, using the translation to make sure they understood it. This procedure is not dissimilar to that sometimes used in modern-language teaching today, where students memorize a dialogue concerning some activity that they are likely to participate in once they start using the language. Thus a modern student learning French might memorize a dialogue in which a character goes to a café in Paris and orders a sandwich, and the ancient student learning Latin would memorize one in which a character goes to the baths in Rome and gets someone to watch his clothes while he swims. Many bilingual texts were written specifically for language learners; these are known as “colloquia,” because much of their content (though not all of it) is in dialogue form (see sections 2.1, 7.1, 8.1–2, and 8.10).

This bilingual format was used not only for the colloquia, but also for any other works that students read early in their studies. These included stories about the Trojan War (passages 2.2, 8.3, and 9.2), Aesop’s fables (2.3 and 8.4), philosophical maxims,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the knowledge and use of Latin in the Eastern empire see Rochette (1997), Adams (2003a), and Dickey (2012–15: 1.4–15).

<sup>3</sup> For ancient education see e.g. Cribiore (1996, 2001), Morgan (1998), Bonner (1977), Russell (2001), Joyal *et al.* (2009), Derda *et al.* (2007), and Bloomer (2011).

<sup>4</sup> For more information on this translation system and its history, see Dickey (2015b).

<sup>5</sup> These are not included in this book because they are now too mutilated to make good reading material; for an overview of what survives see Dickey (2012–15: 1.25–7).

mythography (9.1), legal texts (2.4, 2.5, 8.5, 8.6), early books of Virgil's *Aeneid* (2.6 and 8.8) and Cicero's *Catilinarians* (8.7).

Latin students also learned grammatical paradigms and read explanations of syntax (see sections 3, 7.2, 8.11–13, and 9.3). The ancient world had a convention that grammatical works were composed in the language under discussion; therefore grammars of Greek were written in Greek and grammars of Latin in Latin, regardless of who the intended audience was. Some Latin grammatical texts, such as that of Charisius, were clearly aimed at learners with little knowledge of Latin, and yet it would have required considerable knowledge of Latin to read them. Exactly how Charisius expected his work to be used is a debated point, but I think it likely that teachers provided an oral Greek translation for their students (who probably also memorized Charisius' original Latin). One grammarian, Dositheus, appears to have become exasperated by the inevitable failure of students to understand the Latin grammars, for he provided part of his work with a running Greek translation in the same format as the colloquia.

Once students had learned enough Latin to read texts without a translation, they were presented with monolingual Latin texts and a dictionary; sometimes they also had a commentary and/or a running word-list in the order of the text. Students prepared their texts by writing translations of the hard words in the margins or over the words concerned, by adding word dividers and/or punctuation, and by adding macrons to long vowels, particularly *e* and *o*. The addition of macrons shows that students were expected to read the Latin aloud with correct pronunciation, and the presence of the glosses on the hard words indicates that they were expected to translate and/or paraphrase it. Literature read at this level included Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*, Terence's *Andria*, and Seneca's *Medea* as well as works by Cicero, Virgil, and Juvenal.

The dictionaries used by these Latin students were varied (see sections 4, 7.3–4, and 8.14–16). Some were general collections of words in alphabetical order, like modern dictionaries; these ranged from the really very small up to about 30,000 entries (i.e. about the size of an intermediate dictionary today; there was no ancient equivalent of the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* or Lewis and Short). Often, however, learners' dictionaries were arranged by topic; they were what is now known as classified glossaries, with a list of words on a topic such as parts of the body followed by a list of words on a different topic such as kinship terms. Such dictionaries are very space-efficient, for whereas an alphabetically arranged dictionary for learners who need both active and passive competence in a language needs to list every pair of words twice, once alphabetized in each language, a classified dictionary need list each pair only once. But classified glossaries are difficult to use if you are faced with an unknown word in a foreign language and do not know which section to look it up in, so they were not the dictionary form of choice when reading texts; for that the ideal work was a running word-list in the order of the text. One of the main uses of the classified dictionaries was vocabulary learning:

6 *Introduction*

students went through them one section at a time and learned by heart the words they contained.

We also have some evidence for prose composition, in the form of a set of Greek fables that have been translated into Latin by someone who was clearly an advanced learner (see passage 5). Interestingly we have no evidence for the translation of individual sentences into Latin; perhaps all the evidence has been lost, but perhaps that skill was not practiced in antiquity.

There was also a group of ancient Latin learners who did not start with the alphabet and therefore learned Latin in transliteration. Clearly these people were aiming only for oral proficiency and did not feel a need to read and write Latin, but nevertheless the skills they aimed for were not negligible. A considerable quantity of transliterated material survives and includes not only glossaries but also colloquia and grammatical paradigms (see section 7). The use of transliterated materials seems to have declined over time, for they make up the majority of Latin-learning papyri in the early centuries of the empire but are outnumbered by other materials in the third century and become rare from the fourth century onwards.

### 1.3 How do their textbooks survive?

The ancient Latin-learning materials have reached us in two different ways. Many are preserved on papyri found in Egypt; these texts have the advantage of being securely datable to antiquity and do not contain post-antique corruptions (though they may contain corruptions that arose in antiquity). Most of the papyri are too fragmentary to be individually usable today, but collectively they allow us to build up a picture of what ancient students did and how common each type of language-learning activity was in comparison to others. The papyri also provide evidence of some types of activity, such as alphabet learning and the use of transliterated texts, that are not attested in other sources. For reasons of climate papyri survive primarily from Egypt, and therefore our knowledge of certain aspects of ancient Latin learning is heavily biased toward what took place in Egypt. A few papyri are well enough preserved to be usable by modern students; these have been included in this volume whenever possible,<sup>6</sup> and a complete list of all Latin-learning papyri known to me is given in section 10.1.

Despite the large number of surviving papyri the number of actual words on each is small, and therefore the bulk of extant Latin-learning materials comes to us in the same way that most ancient texts have come: via the medieval manuscript tradition. The tradition concerned is strictly the Western one, as no Latin-learning materials were preserved in Byzantium. The conventional wisdom is that medieval Westerners knew

<sup>6</sup> The texts in sections 2.6–8, 3.3, 4.4, 5, 6, 7, 8.7–10, 8.13, and 8.15–16 come from papyri.

no Greek, so it is somewhat surprising to find that the bilingual materials were copied by Latin speakers who wanted to learn Greek. The reason seems to be that although actual knowledge of Greek was indeed rare in the medieval West, attempts to learn it were considerably more common.<sup>7</sup> These learners were responsible for the preservation of the bilingual materials – which were, of course, just as useful for learning Greek as for learning Latin.<sup>8</sup> Generally speaking the only adjustment made to change the texts from Latin-learning to Greek-learning materials was reversing the order of the columns so that the Greek rather than the Latin appeared on the left. But other changes could be made, and sometimes were made: classified glossaries and even texts could be rearranged into alphabetical order, Greek could be transliterated, pagan references could be replaced by Christian ones, etc. Some of these changes render surviving materials difficult or even impossible to use, but mercifully many of the texts seem to have escaped them.<sup>9</sup>

The main collection of bilingual materials that survives via this route is known by the unfortunate name of *Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana* (*hermeneumata* “translations” is the title given to several of these works in the manuscripts, and *pseudo-Dositheana* indicates that they were once thought to have been written by Dositheus but are now believed to have no connection with him). The *Hermeneumata* consist of nine different versions of a language textbook containing an alphabetical glossary, a classified glossary, a colloquium, and some other bilingual texts; one of their distinctive features is that everything they contain is bilingual. Originally the *Hermeneumata* did not include any grammatical material, and perhaps for this reason they were grouped with Dositheus’ grammar in some manuscripts, leading to the modern name *Pseudodositheana*. The main *Hermeneumata* versions from which material in this book has been drawn are the *Hermeneumata Leidensia*, *Hermeneumata Monacensia*, *Hermeneumata Montepessulana*, *Hermeneumata Stephani*, and *Hermeneumata Celtis*.<sup>10</sup>

The survival of the monolingual Latin grammars had a different cause: they too come via the Western manuscript tradition, but because of their value for

<sup>7</sup> For the learning of Greek in the medieval West see Herren (1988), Kaczynski (1988), Berschin (1988), Dionisotti (1982b), and Bischoff (1951).  
<sup>8</sup> How important these medieval copyists considered their Greek studies can be gauged by the way the monks of Heiligenkreuz Abbey in Austria valued their Greek-learning materials. In AD 1133 these monks came from Morimond in Burgundy to the remote Austrian mountains, carrying with them everything they would need to found a new monastery: those essentials included a copy of a long, difficult, and highly corrupt set of bilingual language-learning materials (the *Hermeneumata Monacensia*), and there is evidence that within five years, long before they had finished building their monastery, the monks of Heiligenkreuz had made a complete copy of those materials. (See Dickey: 2012–15: 1.60 and Rössl 1974: 49–51, 96–8.)  
<sup>9</sup> The texts in sections 2.1–5, 3.1–2, 4.1–3, 8.1–6, 8.11–12, 8.14, and 9 come from medieval manuscripts.  
<sup>10</sup> For more information on the *Hermeneumata* and their different versions see Dickey (2012–15: 1.16–44) and Dionisotti (1982a).



8 *Introduction*

understanding Latin, for in the Middle Ages Westerners had to learn Latin as a foreign language. Works about Latin designed for native speakers also existed (for example Varro's *De lingua Latina*), but because non-native speakers have different needs from those of native speakers the Latin grammars designed for Greek speakers were actually more useful in the Middle Ages. Dositheus' grammar could in theory have been useful both for Latin (the language it describes) and for Greek (the language into which part of it was translated), but in practice it seems to have been copied only by people interested in Greek. In fact they appear to have wanted to use it as a grammar of Greek, a purpose for which it is woefully unsuited – but mercifully the copyists did not realize that unsuitability.

**1.4 What is in this book?**

This book contains examples of all the main types of ancient Latin-learning materials, in order to give readers an overview of what the range of materials was, and multiple examples of the materials most usable today. The goal is to make it possible for those who wish to do so to recreate the ancient Latin-learning experience, by presenting the ancient materials in a format that enables modern students to use them as the ancient students did. This goal does not, however, result in simply presenting the ancient materials exactly as they appeared in antiquity, for modern students have very different backgrounds from their predecessors. Most significantly, the ancient learners for whom the surviving texts were designed knew Greek, whereas modern learners very often do not. The provision of a running Greek translation would therefore not have the same effect for a modern student as it had for an ancient one, and as a result I have usually replaced the Greek translation with an English one. Of course, provision of an English translation renders the texts difficult to use in the way that modern students most often use Latin texts, namely translating them. This barrier could act as a salutary reminder that the authentic way to use these texts is to memorize and recite them, not to translate them – but those whose affection for authenticity has limits will find a selection of texts without English translation in section 8, where the original Greek has been retained.

Another major change is the presentation of the texts in modern format, with word division, capitalization, punctuation, standardized spelling, supplements of missing words, and correction of corruptions. This is justified on the grounds that modern students need to be given reading material in the format they are used to, just as ancient students were given reading material in the format they were used to; a modern student faced with an original papyrus roll would have an experience completely different from that of an ancient student. At the same time the fact that the modern format makes texts vastly easier to read than they were in antiquity does raise issues of authenticity; in my view the main reason why ancient language students were given translations is



that without modern aids such as word division beginners would have found a Latin text simply impossible to translate (see section 9). For this reason a selection of texts is given without word division in section 9, and photographs of manuscripts are also provided to enable students to experience this aspect of ancient reading.

What is not provided is a scholarly framework: there are no brackets, no dotted letters, no *apparatus criticus*, and in general no specific information on how the texts presented here have been reconstructed from manuscripts and papyri. Likewise there are no alternatives in the presentation of individual texts: either the original Greek is preserved or it is replaced by a translation, so there is never a translation in addition to both the original languages. Provision of such information would have been authentic in one way but inauthentic in another and arguably more important way: the trappings of modern scholarship would have obscured the simplicity and immediacy of the originals. The ancient student was faced simply with a text, and his or her interaction with that text was not mediated by brackets, dots, apparatus, or any such details; I believe that the simplicity and immediacy of that interaction was a key part of the ancient experience and needs to be preserved here. Therefore I have included only what a modern student absolutely needs, and that around the text rather than in it: introductions explaining essential background and notes to clarify things that will not be understood without clarification.

For those who want proper scholarly editions the notes explain where these can be found; about half the passages included come from works of which I myself have recently produced a scholarly edition, and many of the other half come from works of which someone else has produced one. Unfortunately, a few texts worth including have never received real editions; in those cases the text presented here is my own silent correction of a manuscript, but reference is given to published transcripts of the manuscript that can be consulted to determine what the original readings were. I have attempted to make clear in the introductions to the individual passages what the situation is with each so that at least the overall level of editorial interference can be determined.

2 | Texts

2.1 Colloquia

Colloquia are bilingual dialogues and narratives designed to be used at an early stage of language learning. The text is arranged in two narrow columns, with the language the students already know on the right and the one they are learning on the left; the two languages match line for line, so that whenever students get stuck they can easily find the translation of the word or phrase that confuses them. This line-for-line or “columnar” translation system is more flexible than a word-for-word interlinear translation, and therefore it allows the creation of a text in which both languages are idiomatic – that is, as long as the text is bilingual from the start and so can be composed with the restrictions of both languages in mind. Columnar translation is more awkward when English, a language with fairly rigid word order rules, is fitted to a pre-existing Latin text – and yet it is possible to make an English translation work in this system more often than one might expect. The English translation that replaces the original Greek in the extracts below, therefore, adheres to the original columnar system most of the time but cannot be relied upon to do so with complete consistency.

Many colloquia passages are vignettes about daily life in the Roman world; like their modern equivalents in French and German textbooks today, they contain cultural as well as linguistic information. The numerous scenes in which characters eat, bathe, shop, or engage in other daily activities were written in the Eastern empire but are set in Rome and have characters with Latin names – just as French textbooks used in England today typically depict characters with French names and are set in France. These passages were probably composed by a variety of authors (most of them no doubt Latin teachers) in the second, third, and fourth centuries AD.

The most famous portions of the colloquia, however, come from the West rather than the East and were originally designed to teach Greek to Roman children. These are the “schoolbooks,” which depict the day of a Roman child from dawn until lunchtime. They are older than the Eastern material, dating back at least as far as the first century AD and perhaps considerably earlier; it is possible that Cicero and Atticus used a version of these texts as children. We do not, however, have these schoolbooks in their original Western version, but rather in a set of revised versions made in the Greek East after the Western materials were borrowed by Easterners and adapted for learning Latin (probably in the second century AD). In theory such adaptation need not have involved significant alteration; it was only necessary to move the Greek from the left-hand column to