Introduction

What Is Classical Latin?

The term "Latin" refers to the language used in Latium, the western central region of Italy, which was dominated by the Romans from the early years of the first millennium BC. Through centuries of warfare, followed by military occupation and integration with native populations, the Romans spread the Latin language over a vast empire that embraced the whole Mediterranean basin and stretched north to southern Scotland and east almost as far as the Caspian Sea.

Classical Latin is the written language of the period roughly 80 BC to 120 AD, two centuries that saw the collapse of the Roman Republic and the establishment of the imperial system of government and also produced most of Rome's greatest literary achievements.

Given that the Roman empire was so vast and endured so long, one might expect that Latin would vary from one region of the empire to another and change over time (as American English differs from British English, and Elizabethan English from modern English). Here we have to distinguish between spoken Latin and written Latin. Such variations and developments were, in fact, always a feature of the spoken language: regional versions of spoken Latin would later evolve into the Romance languages—Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and so on in the west, Romanian in the east. This evolution took place very gradually, as Latin replaced other languages in various parts of the empire. In strong contrast to spoken Latin, however, the written language was never much influenced by the different dialects and was very resistant to change for several reasons.

Roman rule was firmly centralized in Rome itself, which was also the cultural heart of the empire. Not surprisingly, therefore, standards for the correct use of Latin were set by Rome. Even though the majority of the great Roman writers came originally from distant parts of Italy and from the provinces, they conformed to these standards, so that their writing hardly ever included localized idioms and vocabulary that they might have used in speaking.

A further reason why written Latin is so standardized is that the great age of Roman literature was very brief, and it is this period that produced the texts that constitute and define Classical Latin. For more than half a millennium after its founding, Rome was essentially a military state, struggling for survival and expansion. Such a society was not congenial to literary and cultural creativity. Then the second century BC brought Rome greater security through the subjugation of Carthage, the only rival power in the western Mediterranean. It also brought wider intellectual horizons through contact with Greece. The way was therefore open for the flowering of Roman culture over the next two centuries.

Throughout Europe until recent times, the education system was extremely conservative. A very few great prose writers and poets, Cicero and Virgil above all, were adopted as models of Latinity, and the language was codified, restricted, and then transmitted century after century in accordance with these models. Depending on one's point of view, this conservatism either ensured

the purity of Classical Latin or prevented the written language from evolving. As spoken Latin gradually dropped out of use or was transformed into the Romance languages, those who continued to write in Latin still wanted to imitate the great authors of the classical period. This means that once you know Classical Latin you will have the basis for reading texts written at any time from pagan antiquity through to the Renaissance and more modern periods.

The Cultural Context

The influence of the Romans on the modern world is hard to overstate. Without them, our language, our literature, the way we think would have been very different. That said, however, it is important to realize that Roman society was quite alien to ours. Women had almost no role in public life and were generally under the legal control of their fathers, husbands, or brothers. The economy depended on slavery: at the end of the first century BC, perhaps as much as one-third of the population of Italy were slaves. All classes of society enjoyed the bloody spectacle of gladiatorial contests, which were first introduced in the third century BC as a form of human sacrifice in honor of the dead: in AD 107, at the games celebrating his subjugation of the lower Danube, the emperor Trajan had five thousand pairs of gladiators fight each other. Accounts of the empire's expansion, since they were written by the Romans themselves, naturally tended to glorify their military exploits: Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul is an extraordinary achievement, but it was based on what we would probably call genocide, with perhaps more than a million people being exterminated in less than a decade.

For these reasons we may not always sympathize with the Romans, but it would be difficult not to respect their accomplishments. In order to provide some insight into Roman culture, this book uses, as much as possible, Latin texts written by Roman authors themselves.

You Already Know More Latin Than You Think: Using English to Master Latin Vocabulary

English belongs to the Germanic branch of the vast Indo-European family of languages, whereas Latin belongs to the quite separate Italic branch. These two branches lost contact with each other several millennia ago in the great migration westward from the Indo-European homeland. English derives its basic grammatical structure and almost all of its most commonly used words from its Germanic background. Nevertheless, Latin came to have a dominant influence on English, vastly increasing its vocabulary, after the Normans conquered the British Isles in 1066. Latin was the language of both the church and the legal system, and French, a Romance language derived directly from Latin, was the Normans' mother tongue. It is estimated that well over 60 percent of nontechnical modern English vocabulary is Latinate.

To appreciate the extent of the influence of Latin on English vocabulary, study the following paragraph of German for a few minutes. How many of the words are familiar enough for you to guess their meaning?

Nilpferde sind grosse, dicke Tiere, die in Afrika im Nil leben. Zahlreiche afrikanische Tiere sind furchterregend und sehr wild, nämlich Krokodile, Löwen, Leoparden, Nashörner, Hyänen, Skorpione, Aasgeier, Schlangen (z.B. Riesenschlangen, Nattern und Vipern). Ängstlich jedoch sind Nilpferde nicht. Sie haben grosse Körper, grosse Zähne und grosse Füsse, aber ihre Ohren sind klein und ihr Schwanz kurz. Afrika ist ein heisses Land, darum liegen Nilpferde stundenlang im Wasser und dösen. Erst wenn nachts der Mond am Himmel scheint, steigen sie aus dem Fluss und grasen ausgiebig.

Now look at exactly the same paragraph, this time translated into Latin. How many of these words can you guess at?

Hippopotamī sunt animālia magna et obēsa, quae in Africā habitant, in flūmine Nīlō. bestiae numerōsae Africānae sunt terribilēs et ferōcissimae—crocodīlī, leōnēs, pardī, rhīnocerōtēs, hyaenae, scorpiōnēs, vulturēs, serpentēs (exemplī grātiā, pythōnēs, aspidēs, vīperae). sed hippopotamī nōn sunt timidī. corpora magna habent, dentēs magnōs, pedēs magnōs, sed aurēs minūtōs et caudam nōn longam. Africa est terra torrida. ergō hippopotamī hōrās multās in aquā remanent et dormitant. sed, cum nocte lūna in caelō splendet, ē flūmine ēmergunt et herbās abundantēs dēvorant.

Despite the fact that English is a Germanic language, you probably found it much easier to guess at the meaning of the Latin version. In the same way, throughout this book, you will be able to use your knowledge of English to identify the meaning of many Latin words. This Latinate aspect of English will also make it easier for you to remember the Latin vocabulary once you have studied it.

Inflection

Most Latin words change their form according to the particular function they perform in a sentence. This change, which usually involves a modification in the word's ending, while the basic stem remains the same, is known as inflection. Latin uses inflection much more than English does, and this is by far the most significant difference between the two languages. Latin nouns, pronouns, and adjectives all have many different endings, depending on their function in a sentence, while even adverbs can have three different endings. As an example, compare the English adverb "dearly" to its Latin equivalent:

cārē "dearly," *cārius* "more dearly," *cārissimē* "most dearly."

The basic form in English stays exactly the same, using a helping word to define the precise meaning, but in Latin the endings change dramatically, and it is this change that tells you how to translate the form. In general, English nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs change hardly at all, and almost all English verbs keep exactly the same form with only minimal changes. As you will see in the very first chapter of this book, you need to know the various endings in order to understand what a Latin word is doing in its sentence.

Not surprisingly, the concept of inflection takes some getting used to for speakers of English. In particular, English depends heavily on very strict conventions of word order to convey meaning;

for example, the subject of an English sentence will almost always come first. In Latin, by contrast, word order tells you nothing about a word's function; this information comes from the word's ending. At first the order of words in Latin sentences will seem arbitrary. Be patient. By the time you have worked through the first few chapters of this book, you will be used to the structure of Latin sentences.

Adjusting to the different structure of a Latin sentence will be much easier if you learn the paradigms (the examples of how to form the various parts of speech) by heart right away, and don't go on to the next chapter until you can use them confidently and accurately. You can use the exercises in each chapter (and online at www.hackettpublishing.com/classicallatin) to help you gain this confidence and accuracy. Here are some suggested strategies to help you learn the paradigms by heart more easily:

- All the paradigms have been recorded online. Listen to them several times and repeat them to be sure you are familiar with the way they are pronounced. This will make it easier to learn them quickly and correctly, because you will be using three of your language-learning skills: reading, listening, and speaking.

- You will notice many similar patterns in the various systems for verbs, nouns, and so on. This book emphasizes these similarities by putting similar systems together. Again, you can use these patterns to make your learning and memorization much easier.

- Write the paradigms out from memory, and then check that you have written each form correctly. Don't rely solely on repeating them to yourself, since the difference between one ending and another can be quite small, and it's easy to confuse them if you don't write them down. Again, using more than one of your language-learning skills makes it more likely that you will remember what you're studying.

- Don't try to master large amounts of material at any one time.

- Constantly review the material you have already learned.

Almost immediately, you will be able to go from memorizing paradigms to real translation, including translating sentences from actual Latin writers. Enjoy the sense of achievement when you can turn theory into practice. If it sometimes seems that you'll never reach the end of the tables of adjectives, nouns, pronouns, and verbs, you can take comfort in knowing that, after working through this book, there will be practically no more to learn. You will have mastered the essentials needed for reading Latin texts of any period.

The Pronunciation of Latin

There is no universally accepted pronunciation of Latin nowadays. In some countries, particularly those influenced by the Catholic Church, Latin is pronounced in a manner broadly similar to Italian. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, English-speaking countries adopted reforms in an attempt to return more closely to the classical pronunciation. This is the system that will be followed in the rules for pronunciation below, as well as in almost all of the audio files online (at www.hackettpublishing.com/classicallatin). You should realize, however, that any sys-

tem of pronunciation is, to some extent, a modern convention: there are some features of ancient pronunciation about which we are largely or entirely ignorant, and others that almost no one nowadays attempts to reproduce, even though we know they existed.

Listening to the paradigms and texts recorded online will make these general rules about pronunciation easier to understand.

- Latin is easy to read, since spelling is phonetic, and every letter and syllable is pronounced in a largely consistent manner. There are no silent letters. As an example, "facile" is a two-syllable word in English meaning "easy" or "excessively easy"; the final letter *e* is not pronounced. In Latin, however, *facile*, also meaning "easy," has three separate syllables.

- The sounds you will use in pronouncing Latin are much the same as those used in English. There are very few unfamiliar combinations of letters. For example, the Latin for "pig" is *porcus*; by contrast, in German it is *Schwein*, in Hungarian it is *disznó*, in Swahili it is *nguruwe*.

- Every vowel is long or short, a very important distinction in Latin. In many cases, you will simply have to learn this for each individual word. But you will start to see some patterns; that is, you will often be able to predict the length of a particular vowel in a new word based on your knowledge of other words. To help you master this variation in vowel length, in this book long vowels are marked with a macron (-) written above them; you can assume that any vowel without a macron is short. To show you how important vowel length can be, two grammatical forms of the same word may be spelled in exactly the same way but differ in the length of one vowel. This difference will affect the word's meaning. For example, *puella*, with a short *a*, has a different grammatical function from *puellā*, with a long *a*; *legit* means "he reads" (present tense) but *lēgit* means "he read" (past tense).

- The following combinations of vowels, known as diphthongs, are usually run together and pronounced as one sound: *ae* (pronounced to rhyme with "sty"), *au* (pronounced to rhyme with "cow"), *eu* (pronounced like "ewe"), *oe* (pronounced like *oi* in "oink").

- The letters *c* and *g* are always hard, as in English "cat" and "goat," never soft, as in "cider" and "gin."

- The letter *h* is always pronounced when it occurs at the beginning of a word, so it is like the *h* in "hot," not the *h* in "honor." The combinations *ph* and *th*, used in Greek words adopted by the Romans (such as φιλοσοφία [*philosophia*], θέατρον [*theatrum*]), are pronounced as in English, while *ch* (a fairly rare combination) is pronounced like *c*.

- The only letter which needs special attention is *i*. It is usually a vowel, as in English, but sometimes it's a consonant, pronounced like English *y*; this "consonantal *i*" evolved into our *j*. To illustrate the difference, *Iūlius* (or *Jūlius*) and *iambus* both have three syllables. When you see a word in a vocabulary list in this book presented with *j* as an alternative to *i*, for example, *iam* (*jam*), *iubeō* (*jubeō*), you will know that the *i* is a consonantal *i*.

- The letter *v* is pronounced like English *w*.

- The letter *w* was not used by the Romans. The letters *j*, *k*, and *z* are very rare. Otherwise, the alphabet in Classical Latin is exactly like the English alphabet.

The accent always falls on the first syllable of two-syllable words, such as *Róma*. It always falls on the second-to-last or penultimate syllable in words of three or more syllables if that syllable is long, as in *Románus*, but otherwise it falls on the preceding syllable, as in *Itália*.

Punctuation

Since there were few rules for the punctuation of Latin in antiquity, and since in any case we know Classical Latin texts mostly from manuscripts written many centuries later, when new systems of punctuation had evolved, we simply apply modern practices. Nouns and adjectives denoting proper names are capitalized, as in English. Otherwise, capitalization is optional, even at the beginning of sentences. This is a matter of individual choice—just be consistent.