

# *De Lingua Latina: A History and Prehistory of Latin*

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Roadmap, three topics: I, change; II, language change; III, what did Romans think of language change?

## I. *cuncta fluunt*

Ovid *Met.* (15.178)

*cuncta fluunt, omnisque uagans formatur imago*

'all things flow, and every image takes visible form as it wanders.'

Ovid has Pythagoras assert the continuity of transmigration grounded against the concrete changes in bodily forms; he affirms the vital energy of the *animus* within the negating destruction of mutability (15.165 *omnia mutantur, nihil interit*). Each form withers and dies: context alone is eternal. Of course, he's Ovid, so even this phrase is a *mutata forma in novum corpus* (Gk. πάντα ῥεῖ)

Mutability is the governing law, i.e., Metamorphosis, singular and majuscule; the particular instantiations are the metamorphoses, plural and miniscule.

His celebrated prologue reads (Ov.*Met.*1.1-4):

*INNOVA fert animus mutatas dicere formas  
corpora, di, coeptis (nam uos mutastis et illa)  
aspirate meis primaque ab origine mundi  
ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen*

'My mind leads me to something new, to tell of forms changed to other bodies. Gods, inspire this poem I've begun (for you changed it, too), and from the first origin of the world spin my song's fine thread unbroken down to my own time.'

(Ovid *Met.* 1.1-4, text of Tarrant, *OCT* and Anderson, *Teubner*; tr. Simpson 2001)

To cavil: Simpson translates "other" bodies for what are *noua*, a critical word in this work (the Opifex Daedalus turned his mind to unknown arts *naturamque nouat*, 8.189); Humphries had "bodies changed to different forms", which is backwards.

More significantly, Simpson (2001:4) errs when he locates the first metamorphosis in the creation of the world out of Chaos. I count up to four metamorphoses first.

1. *In nova*. Classical epic begins with a noun (μῆτιν, ἄνδρα, *arma*), Ovid's with a prepositional phrase and an adjective that, at first blush, appears substantivized 'the new' until we get the enjambed *corpora*; first change, adjective to noun to adjective. Forms changed to new bodies, the instability of form, what defines identities, occupies Ovid.
2. *mutatas ...formas* transforms Greek *Metamorphoses* (or *Metamorphoseon libri*). Language change via cultural contact, the Greek term *metamorphose(i)s* is the former *corpus*, Latin the new; language is the site of metamorphoses; and the trace that runs, metaphysically, from Greek semantics to Latin meaning, is the overarching law, Mutability or Metamorphosis.
3. *nam uos mutastis et illa* [sc. *coepta*], pronoun *illa* refers to "the witty change that seems to be transforming the expected elegiac meter into hexameter" (Anderson 1998 *ad loc.*).
4. *perpetuum deducite...carmen* Changed forms produce a continuous song; he alludes to Vergil's creed (*deductum carmen*, at *Ecl.* 6.5) but combines Callimachus (*Aetia* fr.1.3) in a new body.

Further Ovidian complications (with thanks to Angeline/Dennis Feeney): simultaneous composition of *Met* and *Fasti*. Feeney (2007) finds the two poems explore time and change from twinned (complementary) perspectives: (1) "the onward linear progress of time's arrow" in Ovid's hexametric continuity (intertwined *ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen*) in equilibrium with (2), "time's cycle", the calendrical *fasti* (*anni*), whose first word is, crucially, *tempora*. Ovid is a dialectical poet: the one position implies and balances the other: arrow and cycle are united (see esp. Feeney *Calendar* 168-9).

So that's the broadest perspective: all things change (πάντα ῥεῖ, *cuncta fluunt*). From it we propose a linguistic syllogism: Romans know that all things change; language is a thing; therefore, Latin changes. What does this syllogism look like in practice?

## II. Language Change

Polybius, details the συνθήκαι (treaty made between Rome and Carthage in 508/7 BCE)

- γίνονται τοιγαροῦν συνθήκαι Ῥωμαίοις καὶ Καρχηδονίοις πρώται... [3] ἄς καθ' ὅσον ἦν δυνατὸν ἀκριβέστατα διερμηνεύσαντες ἡμεῖς ὑπογεγράφαμεν. τηλικαύτη γὰρ ἡ διαφορὰ γέγονε τῆς διαλέκτου καὶ παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις τῆς νῦν πρὸς τὴν ἀρχαίαν ὥστε τοὺς συνετωτάτους ἔνια μόλις ἐξ ἐπιστάσεως διευκρινεῖν. εἰσὶ δ' αἱ συνθήκαι τοιαῖδε τινές·

‘[there are students of history who need accurate information if they are to avoid being misled by the ignorance and bias of the authors they read...] The first treaty, then, between the Romans and Carthaginians came about [in 508/507]... [3] What I report below is the most accurate rendering possible of this treaty. **For so great is the difference between the language of present Romans in regard to the archaic, that even the most learned experts understand some parts of it, and those only after considerable study.** Anyway, the treaty goes more or less as follows: ...’

(Plb. *Hist.* 3.22.1-4; ca. 200-118 BCE)

Notice not only the difficulties, the difference of language (διαφορά της διαλέκτου), though these most vex the experts, but notice that such experts existed at all!

Very Old Latin (6th-3rd cent. BCE) vs. Old/Classical Latin (2nd/1st cent. BCE). Text sample.

- Forum Inscription, Rome, Forum Romanum, Comitium ca. 550; *CIL* 1.1, *ILLRP* 3



1. QVOI HO[...] | [...] SAKROS: ES|ED SOR ...]1-3
2. [...]PACIAS | RECEI : IO [...] | [...] EVAM | QVOS : RE [...] 4-7
- 3 [...]M : KALATO | REM : HA [...] \ | [...] OD : IOVXMEN \ TA : KAPIA : DOTAV[...] 8-11
- 4 MITE : RI[...] \ [...]M : QVOI HA \ VELOD : NEQV[...] \ [...]I/TOD IOVESTOD 12-15
5. LOIVQVIOD QO[...] 16

**Commentary** (based on Weiss *fthcm*.)

**Context.** Upon a stone cippus, inscribed quadrilateral, found under the Lapis Niger (black volcanic pavement) near the comitium in the Forum Romanum. A u-shaped altar and a pillar were discovered along with the cippus bearing this inscription; the site looks to have been hallowed (devoted to Vulcan? or tomb of Romulus?). Written boustrophedon, as the oxen plow, archaic alphabet, with dividers.

**QVOI** relative pronoun, nom.pl.masc., elsewhere *QOI*; -oi was original to the pronouns (>> nouns)

**SAKROS** > \**sakr<sub>2</sub>s* > \**sakerr* > *sacer* (cf. *ager* to Gk. ἀγρός); Italic formation (U. **sakru**, Osc. *sakoro*, Pael. *sacaracirix* 'priestess'), \**sak-ró*- 'consecrated to a god' (Hitt. *sāklāi*- [c.] 'custom, rites')

**ES|ED** prob. CL *erit* < \**es-e-d* (Ved. *ás-a-t*), or *essēd* (impf. sjv.)? 'He's decreed that whoever does X be accursed'. Weiss's theoretical restoration:

*VOL QVOI HONCE LOUCOM VIOLASED REX DECREVED UTAI SAKROS ESED DEIVOIS SLOKI*

CL *Rex decreuit ut qui hunc lucum uiolasset, sacer esset dis loci*)

**RECEI** dat.sg. *rēgī* (Ved. *rāj-*, Ir. *rí, rīg* --> Goth. *reiks*, OE *ric*), either a Roman *rex* or a *rex sacrificulus*, august *rex sacrorum* (representing the state at festivals and as regulator of calendrical time). Note, the letter < g > isn't yet invented.

**KALATOREM** acc.sg. of an agent noun *kalator* < \**kal-ā-* (Gk. καλέω), a herald associated with *flamines*, *augures* and other priestly classes. Acc.sg. -em < \*-ṃ.

**IOUXMENTA** 'yoking' < \**yeug-(s)mṇta* (CL *iūmenta*, neut.pl. 'beasts of burden' with loss of -ks-)

**KAPIA** ancestor of CL *capiat*, 3sg.sjv. derived from the present stem \**kapi-*, not the root as <sup>x</sup>*kap-ā-t*, cp. *ēuenat* (Plaut.) to *ēueniō*. Big question (oft-cited Italo-Celtic isogloss): origin of -ā-? Preterite of *er-ā-t*? Unlikely \*-oyh,- (C&H 2007:24); see (inconclusively) Weiss (2020:445).

**CONCLUSION** on VOL: A *lex sacra* telling something about kings, beasts of burden, and a herald. You may sympathize with Polybius's poor experts!

### III. Rhotacism: Did Romans do historical linguistics?

- *R pro S littera saepe antiqui posuerunt, ut maiosibus, meliosibus, lasibus, fesiis; pro maioribus, melioribus, laribus, feriis*

'The ancient usually put R in place of the letter S, as *maiosibus*, *meliosibus*, *lasibus*, *fesiis*, for *maioribus* 'greater' (dat./abl.pl.), *melioribus* 'better' (dat./abl.pl.), *Laribus* 'household gods, Lares' (dat./abl.pl.), *feriis* 'holidays' (dat./abl.pl.)'

(Paul. Fest. 323,5-7, s.v. R)

In some passages grammarians use "before-and-after" forms that are hard to interpret as anything but the modern linguist's reconstructed words (Zair 2019). Consider first from the polymath Varro, first-cent. BC, e.g.,

- *cerui*, quod magna cornua gerunt, *gerui*, G in C mutauit ut in multis

'*Ceruī*, "stags" got their name because they *gerunt* "carry" big horns, as *geruī*; G changed to C, as in many words.'

(Varro de LL 5.101, tr. de Melo)

The verb, *mutare* (Ovid's *nam uos mutastis et illa*), hardly admits of another meaning. Similarly, in a longer stretch,

- Musas quas memorant nosce<s> nos esse <Camenas>. Ca<s>menarum priscum uocabulum ita natum ac scriptum est alibi. Carmenae ab eadem origine sunt declinatae. In multis uerbis in quo[d] antiqui dicebant S, postea dictum R, ut in Carmine Saliorum sunt haec: Cozeui oborieso. Omnia uero ad Patulcium commissei. Ianeus iam es, duonus Cerus es, du<o> nus Ianus. Venies po<tissimu>m melios eum recum ...

You will get to know that we, the *Camēnae*, are the ones they call the Muses [= Enn.*Ann.* 487 Sk]. The old word, *Casmēnae*, arose and was written like this elsewhere. The *Carmēnae* were derived from the same origin. In many words, in the place where the ancients used to say S, R was said afterwards; for example, the following words are in the hymn of the Salians: Planter-God, *oborieso* 'arise.' I have indeed committed everything to the Opener. Now you are the Gate-Keeper, you are the good Creator, the good Janus. You will come especially, the *meliōs* 'superior' of these kings ...'

After a gap of circa ten lines, the passage (now chapter 27) continues,

- ... f<o>edesum foederum, plusima plurima, meliosem meliorem, asenam arenam, ianitos ianitor. Quare e Casmena Carmena, <e> Carmena [carmen] R extrito Camena factum

... *foedesum foederum* 'of treaties,' *plūsima plūrima* (neut. pl.) 'most,' *meliōsem meliōrem* (masc./fem. acc.) 'better,' *asēnam arēnam* (acc.) 'sand,' *ianitōs ianitor* 'doorkeeper.' Therefore, *Carmēna* was derived from *Casmēna*, and *Camēna* from *Carmēna*, with loss of the R [lit., 'the r worn away']

(Varro *LL* 7.26–28, tr. de Melo).

Varro claims the *Camenae* come from *Carmenae*. Who are they? Possibly a Roman equal to the Muses — but cp. Liv.And. (fr.21 Bl.), Demodocus singing at court, *nam diua Monetas filia docuit* 'Μοῦσ' ἐδίδαξε'.

Anyway, the *Camenae*, says Varro, derive their name from *Casmenae*, whence *Carmenae*, finally *Camenae*.

He cites support from the *Carmen Saliare*, prayer of Salii brotherhood, the leaping priests, a crabbily obscured text in his day, impossibly corrupted in ours. Chapter 27 continues by listing words in which an earlier *s* appears as a classical *r*. Varro goes on to attribute the form *Casmenae* to an otherwise unknown work entitled the *Carmen Priami* 'The Song (or Prayer) of Priam'; there he links *Casmenae* with *cascus* 'old' (*veteres Casmenas cascām rem uolo profari*, 'I want the ancient Casmenae to speak the ancient affair').

[Note Paul. ex Fest. p.59L,

*antiqui enim interserebant s litteram et dicebant 'cosmittere' pro committere et 'Casmenae' pro Camenae*

"For the old-timers used to insert the letter *s* and say *cosmittere* for *committere*, *Casemenae* for *Camenae*"]

*Casmenae* is attested twice, here and in Festus, while *Carmenae* aren't found elsewhere. On the basis of regular sound change, we posit that neither form existed (they'd be a grammarian's concoction): an original *\*kasmenā* would become not *<sup>x</sup>Carmena*, nor attested *Cămena*, but to *<sup>x</sup>Cāmena*.

Moreover, Varro's source for the *s* to *r* change itself includes further historically incorrect forms: *<sup>x</sup>ianitos* doesn't underlie *ianitor*, which belongs to the ancient category of agent nouns in *\*-tor-* (Lat. *kalator*).

With suitably rich philological records, we may date a change. Consider the following items:

- I. *ESED* (Forum Inscription, ca. 500 BCE) if with CL *erit* (Ved. *as-a-t*, 3sg.sjv.)
- II. Cicero (*Fam.* 9.21.2) mentions that L. Papirius Crassus in 312 BC became first of his gens to modernize the spelling of his gentilic from *Papisius* to *Papirius*. According to Sextus Pomponius (*Dig.* 1.2.2.36), Appius Claudius Caecus (cos. 307-296 BC) replaced the spellings *Valesii* to *Valerii*, *Fusii* to *Furii*. So we can date to ca. 350 BC.
- III. Non-rhotic in Italy: Oscan *fluusaí aasaí* 'to Flora (spring-goddess) at the altar (*āra*)'



Another thing Romans pondered: neighboring languages in Italy. Consider Livy on the ancient king Numa Pompilius; Livy refutes the synchronism that would align Numa (715-673 BC, traditionally) and Pythagoras of Samos (who lived in the reign of Servius Tullius, 578-535 BC traditionally) — how could Greek learning, how could a Greek teacher move through so many peoples so dissonant in speech and custom (*per tot gentes dissonas sermone*)? (*cuncta fluunt*, we can't escape Pythagoras!)

*ex quibus locis, etsi eiusdem aetatis fuisset, quae fama in Sabinos? aut quo linguae commercio quemquam ad cupiditatem discendi excivisset? quove praesidio unus per tot gentes dissonas sermone moribusque pervenisset?*

'From that area [Greek colonies], even if Pythagoras had belonged to that time, how could his fame have reached the Sabines? With what common language would he have fired anyone to a desire for learning? Under what protection could a solitary man have made his through peoples so dissonant in speech and customs?

(Livy *Ab urbe condita* 1.18.3)

Next time: *Laudes italicae*, language in ancient Italy; some major Latin sound changes; more very old inscriptions in Very Old Latin

## HW

**Read:** ch. 14 "Archaic and Old Latin" by John Penney in *Companion to the Latin Language* (ed. J. Clackson), and ch. 2, "Chapter II: The Languages of Italy" by Clackson and Horrocks (2007).

**Optional:** worksheet on Latin sound change; peruse Weiss and Wallace

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