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The pronunciation of Latin

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

THESIS

LATIN LANGUAGE--PRONUNCIATION

Submitted by

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The Pronunciation of Latin.

Sufficient interest has been aroused within the past twenty years on the subject of Latin pronunciation to make all teachers of Latin as well as educators in general look into the question and give it a thorough investigation. The important place which Latin holds in all systems of education both in Europe and America, as the foundation for all advanced study is, of itself, sufficient reason to make the pronunciation of Latin a subject of eminent importance. It has not been uncommon for teachers and scholars to say that since the Latin is no longer a living, spoken language, the question of its pronunciation is of minor importance, but of late years, there has been a strong effort made by Philologists and Latinists to determine the actual pronunciation of the Romans themselves, and to introduce this method into our schools and Colleges. True, it is an inquiry into a language which has not been spoken in its pure, classical form for more than seventeen hundred years, and it is a matter of extreme

difficulty to ascertain the true pronunciation, yet we believe there is sufficient material in existence to give a close approximation to the pronunciation of the Romans. Mr. Roby in the introduction to his Grammar, 4th edition 1881, says, "I persuaded myself that the pronunciation which I have given may be taken to be one which would at least have been intelligible to Cicero and Caesar and which would not have differed from their own more than the pronunciation of educated men in one part of England would differ from that heard in other parts."

The pronunciation of Latin differs in different countries. In our own country the methods chiefly used are the Continental, so-called, the English and the Roman or Prætorian. The Continental method is supposed to mean that method of pronouncing Latin which is in use on the continent. But if we look carefully at the methods in use in the different countries of Europe, we shall find they disagree greatly in the consonant sounds, although for the most part they preserve the same vowel

sounds. Strictly speaking, then, there is no such thing as a continental method. Take the single example of the proper name Cicero. The French pronounce it seesayro, the Italians chechayro, the Germans teetsayro, and the Spanish theethayro. The same vowel sounds are preserved throughout, but the consonants are so varied as to make it impossible to recognize the word as the same, in the different languages. One of the arguments, used by the advocates of the Continental method, is that by its use educated travellers could make themselves understood throughout Europe. The fallacy of this argument may readily be seen from the above mentioned example. Mr. Fisher, in his "Three Pronunciations of Latin", quotes the following from Eschenburg's Classical literature: "It is worthy of remark that the Frenchman, German, and Italian, in pronouncing *datui*, each yields to the analogies of his own tongue. Each of them may condemn the others, while each commits the same error, or rather, follows in truth the same general rule.

Erasmus says he was present at a lecture of one of the

German Empire, other part of the European continent
will consent; and it was agreed that the communication
should be carried on in Latin. It was so; but you
would have thought that all that had some business
All of these men were using the continental method.
We have already seen that in time of the method in use
on the continent agree, and other Americans try to
the so-called continental, they do not use the continent
words of any nation of Europe, but combine the word
words of European nations with the English continent
words. We also note the fact that the continental
method we claim to be the original promulgation of the
Romans. The continental method was introduced into
this country by the Roman Catholics, the Roman author-
ity and Reform, and the Mercurians, and is taught
widely in their schools. In most of the public schools
and in the colleges, the continental method is fast
being replaced by the Roman method. In some of the
latest editions of text books, the continental method
is not recognized at all. Mr. Angell in his "Text

It is in Latin, edition of 1850, and only the Roman and
European methods, making no mention of the continental.
The chapter in no reference to Madrigal Latin Latin
man says, the selection of each nation pronounce Latin,
with man, according to the analogy of their own lan-
guage, there is no method which can properly be called
continental.

Mr. Starkes, in his grammar, in a post-note
to the English method of pronunciation says: Selection
in different countries generally pronounce Latin in-
stantly as they pronounce their own languages. He
ordinarily in England and in this country the Eng-
lish method has in general prevailed, though of late
the Roman pronunciation has gained favor in many
quarters. The English method has not usually sprung up
in our own oil. It reminds the analogy of the Eng-
lish language as the rule for pronouncing the Latin and
in showing it does not hesitate to reference to the
Latin words in both sound and quantity, as to alter the
sound of the Latin consonants, in defense of this method.

...can be attributed to the ancient English pronunciation
...in the same way he says the most
...and also. And again in the preliminary
...he had been taught to use at
...the old English habit of Latin
...the statement that
...the preliminary notice & his first on
...the German, French or Italian method is Mr. Alford's
...from the ancient and genuine
...method of pronouncing Latin is unquestionably at
...of the English method, admit the English
...of the College, attempt
...than the German or
...than the Roman; or rather
...the English sound
...of sound, and even if the matter were one of sound,
...not one of aesthetics, but of
...as sound, is not
...than the foreign; but any
...of the Latin

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of Latin is that it serves rather roughly to recall to Englishmen and to no one else, the letters with which the words are written in ordinary printed books. That this same current English pronunciation is positively injurious, even to Englishmen, who wish to understand the nature of Latin, linguistically, its flexional and historical relations, either as descendant or ancestor, and its rhythmical structure, either oratorical or poetical. It is clear to any Latin scholar that the English method can never become universal or indeed be extended outside the domain of our own English speaking peoples; for the vowel sounds of the English are flat and sharp as compared with the rotund and sonorous inflections and intonations. No Italian, French, Spanish or German could ever adopt the English method, nor indeed would it be desired by Philologists. And many of the most learned men of Europe and America have been long desirous of some more rational mode of pronouncing Latin, and a system which might be universal. How. W. E. Gladstone, in his

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preface to "Homer and the Homeric Age", speaking of
classical matters: "We shall gladly see the day when,
under the authority of scholars, and especially of those
who bear rule in places of education, improvement
might be effected, not only in the points above mentioned,
but also in our solitary and barbarous method of pro-
nouncing both the Greek and Latin languages." And this
is true of other eminent scholars who are conversant with
the vowel sounds of the Southern-European nations, and
can form some judgment of what the true Roman
Pronunciation must have been.

But how does it come about that there
are so many pronunciations for the Latin language?
The original orthoepy should not be wholly lost, for
there are Latin grammarians who wrote treatises on
Latin grammar, and described the vowel and consonant
sounds, even giving the position of the vocal organs at
the time of utterance. Within the past twenty years, the
authority of these Latin grammarians has been thoroughly
investigated, and a careful study has been made of the

history of each letter in the Latin alphabet. The result
 of this research, on the part of eminent scholars, has
 been summed up and given to the world in the
 Roman Method of pronouncing Latin. This method, which
 claims to be the original and genuine, seeks to dis-
 tance all others and gain an universal acceptance.
 Before considering the Roman method in detail, let
 us look for a moment at the causes which tended
 to destroy the original pronunciation. It could not
 have been otherwise than through the corrupt teaching
 of instructors from generation to generation, and the
 natural tendency to assimilate it to their native man-
 ner, as introduced into England before the Roman
 conquest, retained its original pronunciation for a
 long time. About the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries,
 an effort was made to corrupt it, which was depicted
 by many of the Latinists of England. Milton says of it
 "that such is to be fashioned to a distinct and clear pro-
 nunciation, as near as possible to the Italian, especially in
 words, for one English man, being far from Italy, do not speak

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our mouths in the cold air wide enough to grace a
Southern tongue, but are observed by all other nations, to
appear exceedingly close and inward; so that to smatter
Latin with an English tongue is as ill a bearing as im-
French. But it is only recently that an effort has been made
to re-introduce the original method. In Germany Lessing,
in England Roby, and in this country Haldeman, stand
as the early advocates of the Roman method. Professor
Lane of Boston, introduced the Roman pronunciation
into ^{the} England; Professor Blair of Hampden, Sidney,
Virginia, and Professor Gildersleeve of Johns Hopkins Uni-
versity, Baltimore, were instrumental in introducing it in
the south. This new system claims to be the genuine
pronunciation as used by Cicero himself, differing
no more than one educated gentleman in England
might differ from another of another part. The sources
of "proof" which are quoted in support of this method
are first, the Latin grammarians, beginning with Varro,
54 B.C., Macrobius, Servius, and coming down to Priscian,
who taught at Constantinople, 573 A.D. second, the

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Latin inscriptions found on old monuments. Third, the traditions of scholars, and the modern Romance languages. Fourth, the Greek mode of rendering Latin sounds into their tongue. The Greeks attempted to understand these sounds as accurately as their language might allow; and vice versa, the transliterating of Greek words into Latin. The last probable proof is "the face of the language itself, as seen in its records which have been preserved to us". The result of these investigations is briefly summed up by Mr. Harkness in his Latin Grammar in the following statements:

- \bar{a} like a in father.
- \bar{e} like e in prey.
- \bar{i} like i in machine.
- \bar{o} like o in old.
- \bar{u} like u in rule.

Each vowel has one sound and one only. The quality is the same. They differ only in quantity, that is, the time occupied in pronouncing a given syllable. A long vowel occupies twice the time that a short vowel must.

In disyllables, each vowel retains its own sound, as
quēr above. The consonants, in general, have the same
sound as in English, but we notice certain differences.
c and g are always hard; j is pronounced like
y in yet, v like w, and s, sharp, like s in son.

In proof of the above statements, the following arguments
are given. C and g are often changed in a word
without any apparent change in sound, as replicatus
for replicatus, malignus for malignus, gignis for
originis, and tegmen for tegmen &c. And in the forms
dic, duc, fac & fer, for dici, ducere, facere and ferre, if
the c had been a sibilant in the position before e,
when the e was dropped it must have become x.

In transcribing Latin into Greek, c is always represented
by κ, and g by γ, and vice-versa, the Greek γ is
represented in Latin by g, and Greek κ by c. There is
no trace in the grammarians of any different sound
of g before the several vowels. There is no evidence of
g having such a sound as English j, before the
fourth or fifth centuries A.D., according to Schuchardt.

That *j* was pronounced like *y* is shown from the fact ^{ist} *jam* (*iam*) was sometimes pronounced as a monosyllable, sometimes as a dissyllable. That *o* had the sound of *ro* is shown from the following: the same letter was used without any distinction for the vowel and the consonant sound. There is no doubt about the vowel sound being oo. By a slight appulse of the lips the vowel oo becomes *ro*: *u* and *o* were frequently passing into one another, as *miluus*, *miluus*, *relicuum*, *relicuum*. Again *o* is vocalized in *soluo* for *soloo*, *siluae* for *silvae*: *o* in Latin ^{never} follows short *i* (except in *nivis*, and in the compounds *birium* and *trivium*). Now there is no difficulty in pronouncing *ir* but *ur* is very far from easy. Of the sound of *s*, as *s* sharp, there is the strongest possible proof: for it maintains its place before sharp consonants in *st*, *sp*, *sq*, *sc*, and it does not retain its place before flat consonants. It changed a flat consonant preceding it to a sharp. Mr. Roby has written a long article on the pronunciation of Latin, published in the introduction to his

excellent Latin grammar. We have given less weight to the accounts of pronunciation given by Roman grammarians, than to the actual history of the letters, aided by a knowledge of their possible and likely sounds. We have made use of the Roman grammarians chiefly as authority on the non-existence of sounds which the letters might on some other grounds have been supposed to possess.

The question, Have we found the true pronunciation of Latin? is immediately followed by the other question, If the new mode is based on substantial evidence, shall we adopt it? Most emphatically we answer in the affirmative. When a theory is known to be right, a little inconvenience to ourselves should not stand in the way of its adoption. On this point Mr. Roby very pertinently says: "I quite admit that a change in our pronunciation of Latin is inconvenient, but the inconvenience is greater in imagination than in reality, and will be soon overcome, whilst the benefit to any student of Pindar,

will be very great. With our English pronunciation of the vowels, of j, c, v, g, r and others, the development of the language becomes an inextricable riddle, and the student naturally gets into the fatal habit of dissociating letters from sounds. No can it be said that we shall not be approaching to the pronunciation of continental nations. We shall approach them considerably at once, and if, as seems to me probable, they change their pronunciation eventually, we shall be coincident with them, in proportion as we and they respectively have succeeded in ascertaining the truth. It is interesting to compare what other writers have said on the same point. Professor Harkness says: "The researches of Cosser and others have revealed laws of phonetic change of great value in tracing the history of Latin words. Accordingly, whatever method of pronunciation may be adopted for actual use in the class-room, the pupil should sooner or later be made familiar with the reading features of the Roman Method, which is, at least, an approximation to the ancient pronunciation of the language."

And Mr. Lighton in a very similar strain says, whatever method of pronouncing Latin may be adopted, the pupil should be made familiar with the leading features of the Roman Method. And again he says, the Roman Method, which is a very near approach to the ancient pronunciation, is now adopted by many of our leading colleges and high schools.

An objection which is often made to the Roman Method by the advocates of other systems is that the Latin language itself was pronounced differently at different times, and the question is asked, what period of Latin pronunciation shall be adopted as a model. We have no hesitation in replying to this question, that period when the language of the Romans, as well as the literature had attained its climax. The history of the Roman language points us to the Classical period of literature, to that pronunciation current among men of eminence as statesmen, philosophers, historians, writers, orators, and poets, during the first century before Christ; the pronunciation

of Julius and Augustus Caesar, of Maecenas, of Cicero, of Vergil and Horace, that is the court and literary, as distinct from the popular and rustic pronunciation. This may be called the Augustan period of the language, and includes Cicero, Caesar, Lucretius, Catullus, Sallust, Vergil, Horace, Augustus, Livy, Tibullus, Propertius. It is thus seen that the Augustan age comprehends the most esteemed Latin authors, and those most commonly read in our schools.

What are the advantages, then, which are claimed for the Roman or Phonetic Method? First, we believe the method by which the Romans pronounced the Latin to be fairly established, and set forth in the Roman Method. It is then the true system, and in perfect harmony with the genius of the language. Second, it is the only system in which the advocates of all other methods are likely to agree, and it can be adopted without compromising any national peculiarities. Third, it distinguishes words of different orthography and signification

in their minds, while the English method is many
indirect and not so clear for example, cases, cases,
sentences, again sentences and sentences, cases and cases;
and what is that? Yes, it is not at all; and what is
sentences and sentences, by the Roman method, there
could be no possibility of confusing cases with sentences
or other with other, and this is a great advantage, which
also in dictating Latin, or in translating by ear, amounts
which has some into the category of late years. Contra,
that system almost much right in Latin Verification,
in the pronunciation of Latin words, no special change
there is not in the notes, but a longer time is now
over in pronouncing the syllable. Latin Verification
depends wholly upon quantity, and is greatly facilitated
by a quantitative pronunciation of Latin. Mr. Ellis
has directed a more mark to the fact of this fact, which
it is a great aid to the study of Comparative Linguistics.
by the Roman method Latin words of such nouns, or nouns
with the Greek, must be pronounced at once, the Greek
method. A few examples will make this much clearer.

to cite the example we have used before

Cicero - Cis - ce-ro	Κικέρων
Scipio - Sip - i-o	Σκιπίων
Caesar - o - she - a - rus	Καίσαρος
Lucia - Sil - u - a - r - i - a	Κυλικία
Coena - see - na	κόρυθος

Let us see how general the use of the Roman Method is becoming in America. More than ten years ago, the Bureau of Education at Washington made inquiries to ascertain the usage in American Universities and Colleges. There were two hundred and thirty seven institutions which responded to the inquiry. The result of the work has been tabulated by Prof. Richardson of Central University, Kentucky (Oct. 1870). The result was as follows. Thirteen institutions used the English, seventy five, the Continental and seventy two the Roman. This was more than ten years ago. The Roman has since then been steadily gaining ground. It is now used in many of our leading Universities and Colleges, among which are Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Boston University, Michigan

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University, Cornell University, Columbia, University of
Wisconsin, Smith, Wellesley, and many others. That
has been the result in the Colleges where the new method
has been introduced. It has given universal satisfac-
tion. As to its adoption in England, Professor Robinson
Ellis of University College, London, says: "On one point
there seems to be a very general agreement: wherever it
has been introduced it has been adopted without diffi-
culty by students of all ages, even by the youngest
Boys, from ten years upwards. It is obvious that if
it is to be really successful, it should be taught
alone; at present the old pronunciation is allowed
to linger on side by side with the new, this would
not happen if Boys were trained at the outset in the
new system, and if it were an understood thing that
no other pronunciation was permitted". And again
he says: "This was at once introduced into several of the
larger schools in England, at least in the higher forms.
I myself adopted it for the use of my classes in Univer-
sity College, and a very similar scheme of pronounciat.

was only last year printed by Professor Key for University
High School. Rev. E. B. Mass, M. A. of Cambridge
University says: "There is, I think, no great difference
of opinion here in regard to the principles of Latin
pronunciation; even the *ro* sound of *o* is secure from
ridicule. If American scholars accept the reform,
we may hope that in the next generation, all English
speaking Latinists will be intelligible to their colleagues
all the world over. Mr. Fisher in his "Three Methods of
Pronouncing Latin" gives as one of the reasons why the
Roman has been adopted as widely as it has - the
aggressiveness of its advocates coupled often with
their celebrity as scholars. This, pray, should be
followed if not those celebrated for their scholar-
ship? It gives below the names of the strongest sup-
porters of the Roman Method. In Germany, Brugmann
Brosen, Curtius, Ritschel, Seiers, Drotff; In England,
Ellis, Kennedy, Munroe, Roby; In America, Blair,
Haldeman, Parkness, Leighton, Richardson, L. Tafel and
R. A. Tafel.

Louisa Holman Richardson.

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