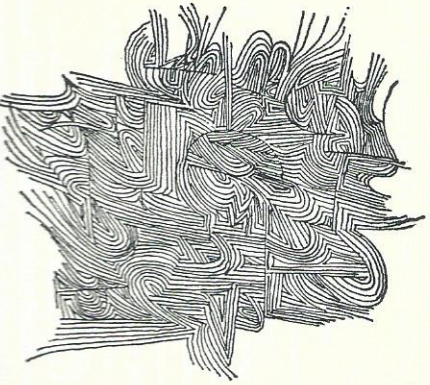


The implication of this justification is that the great classical authors should be made accessible to pupils who take up Latin. There have been three obstacles to this: (1) excessive emphasis on philology (2) the conception of Latin as a mental exercise (3) the conception of Latin as a preparation for the study of modern languages.

Awareness of the need to enable pupils to read more deeply in the classical authors has led to an interest, especially among the younger generation of Latin teachers, in the movement known as *Latin Vivant*: a movement which embraces a variety of trends but whose essential aim is to restore the ease and fluency in Latin once to be found in an Erasmus and now in a Paoli. The third International Congress of *Latin Vivant* is arranged for the 2nd-4th September 1963 at Strasbourg and the theme is: The Future of Latin. This future is still a matter for conjecture but one thing is certain: the campaign for the abolition of Latin teaching has failed, and the majority of educationists have realized the degree of disaster which would ensue from a lowering of the level of culture. The essential task today is to find an equilibrium between culture and technology.



## Some Observations on the Pronunciation of Latin

W. SIDNEY ALLEN

It is not always sufficiently recognized that much of early literature, and poetry in particular, was orally composed and intended for the ear rather than the eye; and although a text may be grammatically and lexically understood from a purely visual reading, we cannot adequately re-create the author's or his contemporary readers' experience without due attention to the phonetic texture of his work. Such re-creation can only be achieved if, in reading aloud, we reproduce as accurately as possible the sounds that the author intended; and when reading silently (a habit of comparatively recent origin), we should at least be able to envisage for ourselves the sounds represented by the letters on the page. Even to take the case of a modern language, we could hardly claim, for example, to have appreciated the work of a French poet if we assumed it to be pronounced as English (consider the vowel-harmonies of a line such as Hugo's 'Un frais parfum sortait des touffes d'asphodèle'). It is true that we can still appreciate the poetry of, say, Shakespeare in a modern pronunciation; but here, although the individual sounds have in some respects changed considerably, the general system of interrelations between them is still largely preserved — the difference is in fact much the same as that between two modern English dialects. Even in this case, however, it would be arrogant to claim a *full* appreciation, and the difficulties are enormously increased if we go back as far as Chaucer. And quite

apart from aesthetic appreciation, it is surely unscholarly to aim at less than the truth when the truth of the matter is well known.

The phonetic facts of classical Latin are by now, with few exceptions, well established; the margins of uncertainty are in any case narrower than the discriminatory powers of the average scholar's ear or tongue. Our knowledge, in this field has been gradually built up over recent centuries, and is based on a variety of evidence, of which the following are the principal types: 1 the specific statements of ancient authors regarding the pronunciation of their language; 2 puns, plays on words, ancient etymologies and imitations of natural sounds; 3 the representation of Latin words in other contemporary languages; 4 developments in the Romance languages; 5 the orthographic system of Latin, and particularly scribal and epigraphic departures from it; 6 the internal structure of the Latin language itself (including its metrical patterns). A full discussion of these methods and their results cannot be given in a short article; by far the best technical account is that of E. H. Sturtevant in his *Pronunciation of Greek and Latin* (2nd edn., Philadelphia, 1940—now unfortunately out of print: the present writer is preparing a handbook of the subject for schools and universities).

We seldom rely upon one type of evidence alone, but the following may exemplify the kind of contribution that each may make. Under 1, we learn from a statement of Cicero (*Or.* 48, 159) that all vowels were long before *ns* or *nf*: hence *insanus*, *infelix*, *conscienti*, *confecti*, etc. 2 The fact that the word '*Canneas*' could be heard as similar to '*caue ne eas*' (*Cic.*, *Dir.* ii, 84) suggests at least that the consonantal *u* of *caue* was not pronounced as English *v*.

3 The fact that a Latin name such as *Cicero* is regularly written in Greek with *k=c* (and never e.g. with  $\tau\sigma$  or  $\sigma$ ) indicates that *c* represented a 'hard' (velar stop) consonant even before *i* and *e*.

4 The fact that in every Romance language except Sardinian the accented long  $\bar{e}$  and short *i* of Latin have merged (e.g. French *vivre*, *poire* from Latin *vīvĕre*, *pirā*), whereas short *e* and long *i* have remained distinct (e.g. French *miel*, *vivre* from Latin

*mel*, *vīvere*), suggests that, in late Latin at least, short *i* was more similar in quality to  $\bar{e}$  than to  $\bar{i}$ , and  $\bar{e}$  was more similar to short *i* than to *e*. 5 The fact that in a word such as *sancta* inscriptions frequently mark an apex over the first vowel indicates that the vowel was here long. 6 The fact that elision occurs before *huic* (as in Verg., *Aen.* 5, 849) proves that *ui* here represents a combination of vowel+consonant, i.e. [uy], and not the reverse [wi], since elision does not occur before words such as *uis* in which the first element is a consonant.

It should be emphasized that the statements made in each of the above examples are supported by one or more of the other types of evidence. The Romance evidence for the different qualities of short and long *i* and *e*, for instance, is fully corroborated by the statements of various Roman grammarians; and the relatively open quality of the short *i* before consonants is further indicated for the republic and early empire by its common transcription in Greek as  $\epsilon$  (e.g. Κομμετιον = comitium, 170 B.C.).

The first comprehensive attempt at reconstructing the classical pronunciation of Latin (as well as Greek) is due to the great Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus (b. 1466), in his dialogue *De recta Latini Graecique sermonis pronuntiatione*, which was published in 1528 and reprinted no less than thirteen times during the next thirty years. During one of his visits to England, in 1509-14, Erasmus had spent some time in Cambridge, and it was here that his ideas were later most vigorously developed. In 1540 two young scholars, John Cheke and Thomas Smith, were appointed respectively to the Regius Chairs of Greek and of Civil Law, both at the age of 26. Both were good phoneticians and enthusiastic advocates of the 'Erasmian', reformed pronunciation of Greek and Latin, which they set out to establish in the university; Cheke in fact gave a series of six inaugural lectures '*de litterarum emendatione sono*'. But the reforms were for some time driven underground by the violent opposition of the Chancellor, Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, who was particularly disturbed about their ecclesiastical implications, and whose powers under Mary became virtually absolute. (Another of his

complaints was that undergraduates were becoming insolent, by using 'an exotic pronunciation' and delighting in the fact that their elders could not understand it.)

Even when freedom of academic thought was re-established under Elizabeth, reformers had still to reckon with the vested interests of the 'traditional' English pronunciation of Latin. This remarkable system was the product of a series of linguistic accidents. Already in the Old English period it appears to have undergone various changes in conformity with native speech-habits. From the Norman conquest until the mid 14th century Latin was taught by French schoolmasters, and some peculiarities of the traditional pronunciation probably date from this time (e.g. the pronunciation of consonantal *i* as English *j*, or of *c* before *i* and *e* as English *s*). In the Middle English period Latin suffered further changes which were typical of the English then current – e.g. the lengthening of short vowels in the first of two syllables before a single consonant (thus *manus*, *tenet*, etc. became *mānus*, *tēnet*, in the same way as early M.E. *name*, *met* became late M.F. *namē*, *mētē*): or the shortening of stressed antepenultimate, unless the last two vowels were in hiatus (thus *stāmina*, *cōpula* etc. became *stāmina*, *cōpula* as O.E. *hātingdæg* became *haldæg*); Aeschylus and Oedipus were pronounced with a short initial *E*; *genius* on the other hand became *gēnius*). Further havoc was wrought by the vowel changes which marked the transition to Modern English (and even the Erasmusian reforms came sufficiently early to suffer from some of the consequences of these changes); so that e.g. long *ā*, *ī*, *ē* resulted in the modern diphthongs [ey], [ay], [iy] (as in *name*, *wine*, *seen*). Since English spelling is largely historical, the traditional pronunciation of Latin is of course often equivalent to a reading in terms of English spelling conventions.

Even in the early 17th century a great continental scholar had found the English pronunciation of Latin 'just about as intelligible as Turkish', and we may be sure that in its ultimate form it would have been quite unrecognizable as Latin to a Roman of the classical period.

A new movement of reform began around 1870, and to-day the traditional pronunciation is scarcely heard except in the case of naturalized loan-words, legal and other stereotyped phrases – where it is entirely proper – and to some extent, e.g. at grace in college halls – where it is a quaint but harmless custom; in a modified form it also survived until recently in the Westminster Play. Elsewhere it has been supplanted by reforms in the direction of a classical pronunciation, though the approximation generally falls short of the standards of exact scholarship.

One particularly common shortcoming in fact reflects a peculiarity of our traditional education. Our students are impressed from an early age with the importance of knowing the length of vowels in 'open' syllables (i.e. when followed by not more than one consonant); the reason is that such knowledge is required in order to scan verse, and particularly in order to write it. In the case of 'closed' syllables, however (i.e. when followed by more than one consonant), ignorance mostly prevails – and the reason clearly is that here, with well-known exceptions, the *syllables* are inevitably long (or, more precisely, 'heavy'), so that for purposes of scansion the length of the vowel is irrelevant. Thus the condition of knowledge or ignorance is dictated by the needs of one particular pedagogical exercise; and carelessness is conveniently concealed by the inadequacies of the Latin orthography, which has no means of indicating vowel-length (though native speakers of course were well aware of it). The result is that most students, and even some teachers, will pronounce the first vowel of *actus* as though it were the same as that of *factus*, whereas in fact it is long in the former and short in the latter. The lengthening in *actus* and certain other words (e.g. under the conditions of 'Lachmann's Law') is well attested by the Latin grammarians, by epigraphic writings, by developments in the Romance languages, and by the internal evidence of Latin itself. Thus in compounds there is no 'weakening' of the vowel as there would be if it were short: the past participle of *redigo* (*red + ago*) is *redactus* and not *redectus*, whereas the past participle of *reficio* (*re + facio*) is *refectus*. To

pronounce *redactus*, then, with a short *a* is not simply a phonetic solecism but also a grammatical one, since such a form is aberrant in terms of Latin word-structure – just as aberrant as a form *refactus*. A helpful list of ‘hidden quantities’ may be found in Appx. I of *The Teaching of Classics* (2nd edn, 1961)<sup>1</sup>; for a recent discussion of ‘Lachmann’s Law’ see A. Maniet in *Hommages à M. Niedermann*, pp. 230 ff.

Two other particularly common errors deserve notice. Most English speakers pronounce the Latin group *gn* (in e.g. *magnus*) just as written, i.e., as in English *magnet* etc. But there is clear evidence that the *g* here was nasalized, i.e. pronounced like the *ng* in English *sing* (phonetic symbol [ŋ]). The general phonological tendencies of Latin would lead us to expect this, and it is in fact indicated by epigraphic writings such as *ignes* for *ignes*, as also in the official orthography by the spellings *ignarus*, *cognosco* for *in+gnarus*, *con+gnosco*, etc. There is also clear internal linguistic evidence; if *g* in *gn* were simply pronounced as [g], the adjective derived from the root of *deceit*, for example, should be *degnus*; in fact it is *dignus*, and the change of vowel can be explained if, and only if, the *g* here had a nasal [ŋ] value – for before such a sound there is a regular Latin change of short *e* to *i* (just as in the English word *English*): compared with the related Greek *τέτυγος* (= *teŋgō*), for example, Latin has *tinguo*, and we know from the Latin grammarians that before *g* and *c* the letter *n* also represented [ŋ]. To summarize, then, Latin *gn* should be pronounced like the *gn* in English *hangnail* (N.B. not like the *gn* of French or Italian).

Secondly, words such as *aiō*, *maior*, *peior*, *cuius* are commonly pronounced as if the first vowel were long. This practice presumably arises from reasoning that the first syllable in such words is of heavy quantity in verse, and that since there is only a single following consonant (*i*) the quantity must be due to vowel-length. But here again it is the orthography that has mis-

<sup>1</sup>This list needs some revision as regards individual words, and a few uncertainties will always remain; but these do not affect the main classes of forms, which are covered by general rules.

led. In fact Latin never has a single *i*-consonant between vowels (where it did originally occur, it was lost in prehistoric times – thus e.g. *treies* became *trēs*); wherever we find an *i* written between vowels it stands for a *double i*-consonant. Since there could be no contrast of single and double, it was natural enough for the orthography to economize by writing only a single letter. In such words, then, the vowel is short and the consonant is long (double)<sup>2</sup>. This is fully supported by the writing of inscriptions, papyri and manuscripts, by developments in the Romance languages (cf. Italian *maggiore*, *peggiore*), and by the statements of Latin writers – who incidentally mention that Cicero and Caesar did in fact write such words as *aiio* etc.

A general source of error, which affects the pronunciation of the majority of English scholars, is our national phobia of non-English sounds. The result is that even where they know the correct value, they tend to go no further than the supposedly nearest English sound. Thus the short *a* of Latin is commonly replaced by the [æ] of English *ash* (whereas the [ʌ] of *up* would be acoustically nearer), the long *ē* and *ō* by the diphthongs [ey] and [ow], as in *bait* and *boat*; many unstressed vowels are reduced to the English ‘neutral’ vowel [ə], so that the last two syllables of Latin *aspera* sound as in English *murderer*; final short *e* (as in *ante*) is often replaced by short *i* – because English has the latter but not the former in this position; *r* is dropped, as in standard southern English, at the end of a word or before a consonant, with compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel – so that no distinction is made between *parcis* and *plācis*; double consonants are pronounced single – because (except in compounds) they do not occur in English speech – so that *annus* is confused with *annus*; and so on. In fact in the common pronunciation of a word such as *agger* it is not too much to say that not one single element even approaches correctness – the *a* is mispronounced as [æ], the double *g* is pronounced single, the *e* is mispronounced as [ə], and the *r* is completely ignored. It is

<sup>2</sup>The name is incidentally true of the neuter *haec*, which = *haec* (not *hae*) before a vowel; similarly *haec* when scanned heavy (as e.g. *Ann.* iv. 591, ‘*haec* ill. . .’).

slovenliness of this kind, rather than actual ignorance, which accounts for a majority of English mispronunciations.

Finally, one common misconception may be mentioned, although it does not directly affect pronunciation – namely the confusion of vowel length and syllabic quantity. Vowels are either long or short, and syllables are either heavy or light. A heavy syllable is one which contains a long vowel or diphthong or a short vowel followed by more than one consonant (with certain exceptions); a light syllable is one which contains a short vowel followed by not more than one consonant. The use of the terms 'long' and 'short' for syllabic quantity as well as vowel length (for which the Greeks are ultimately to blame) is liable to lead to confusion; and in the middle ages, or perhaps earlier, it led to the ridiculous doctrine (which survived even into this century) that before a consonant-group a *short vowel* actually *becomes long*<sup>3</sup>. The truth is, of course, simply that a syllable containing a short vowel before a consonant-group is *heavy*. The terms 'heavy' and 'light' for syllabic quantity have been increasingly adopted by linguists in recent years from the more sophisticated tradition of the early Indian grammarians.

This misconception may in fact have practical consequences. It may, for example, underlie the statement which is sometimes heard that in Latin verse final long vowels and diphthongs (and vowel + *m*) are generally elided only before initial long vowels and diphthongs. This is actually quite untrue; in Virgil, for example, such elisions are about three times as common before short vowels as before long vowels or diphthongs. What is true is only that they are rare before *light syllables*.

The above discussion has been concerned with school and university practice. It has taken no account of ecclesiastical traditions, for which the reader may be referred to F. Britain's

<sup>3</sup>In 1906, for example, the Classical Association's committee on the spelling and printing of Latin texts laid it down that 'in texts of Latin authors for the use of beginners the quantity of long vowels should be marked, except in syllables where they would also be long by position'.

Most recently this error has been introduced by H. Lloyd-Jones into his translation of P. Maas' *Greek Metro* (Oxford, 1962), p. 77; similarly D. S. Raven, *Greek Metro* (London, 1962), p. 23.

excellent little book, *Latin in Church* (2nd rev. edn., 1955). It should perhaps be pointed out, however, that the Italianate pronunciation of the Roman Catholic church, whilst it is probably less far removed from classical Latin than any other 'national' pronunciation, has no special status as evidence; and in connexion with the recent *Constitutio Apostolica de Latinialis studio provehendo* (22 Feb. 1962) it is interesting to read an article by the Vice-Rector of the Biblical Institute in Rome (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 14 March 1962) which advocates 'a return to the pronunciation of the ancient Fathers of the Church' in the light of current linguistic research.

W. SIDNEY ALLEN

is Professor of Comparative Philology  
in the University of Cambridge