

GIUSEPPE PEZZINI

Early Latin

Introduction – Part 1: Language and Speakers



Roadmap

- What is Early Latin?
- Who were its users?
- When was it spoken/written?
- Where?

What is Early Latin?

- Diachronic variety of Latin
- Language spoken by people living in ancient Latium, in the centuries before Christ



Ancient Italy

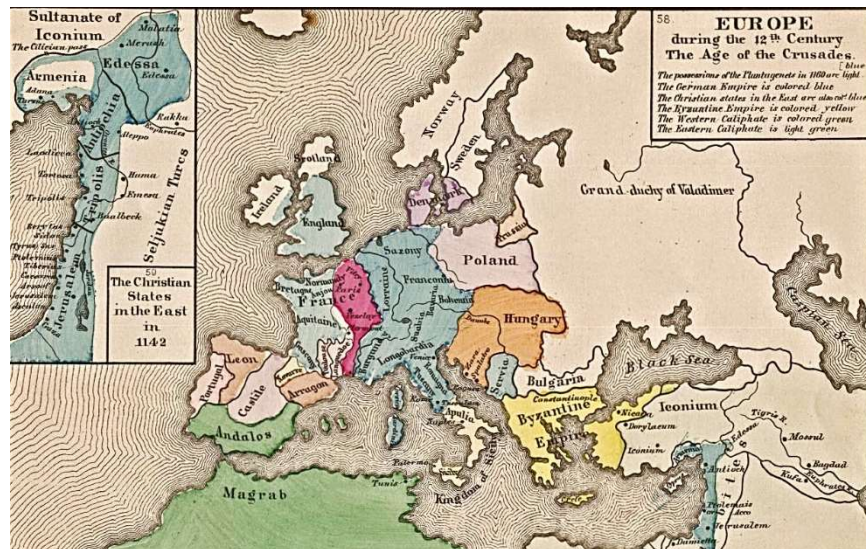


Ancient Latium

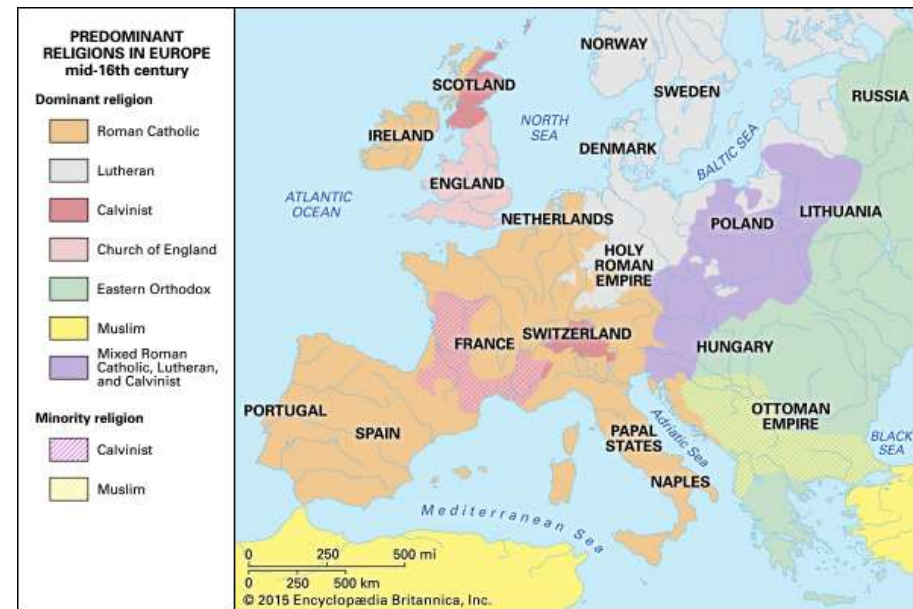
Latin during the Roman Empire



Europe in the Middle Ages

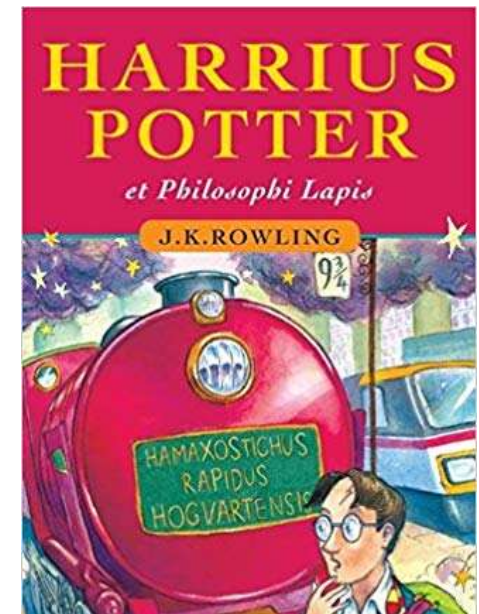
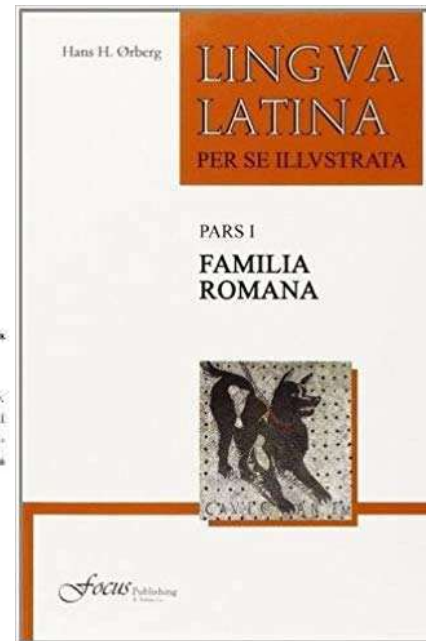
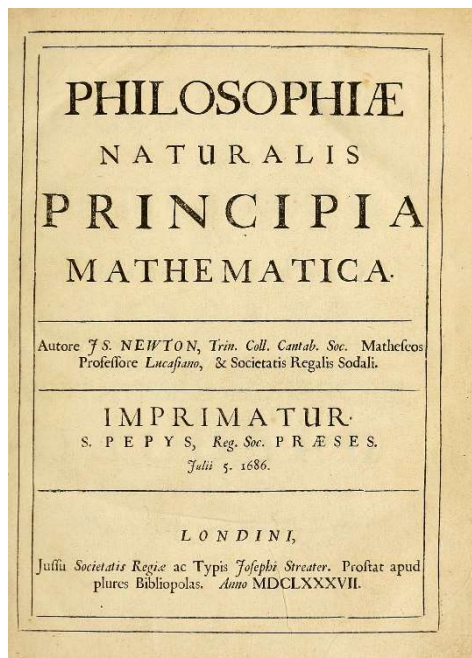


Europe in the 12th century (Latin as the lingua franca of culture)



Europe in the 16th century (Latin as the official language of the Church in the areas marked in orange)

Latin in the (post)modern age



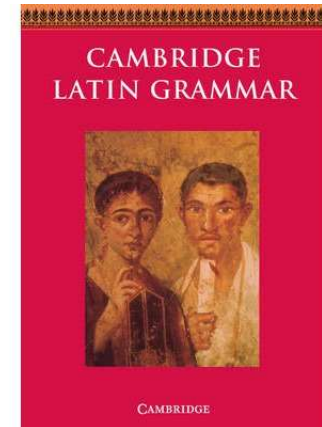
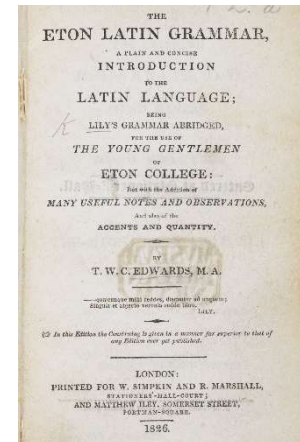
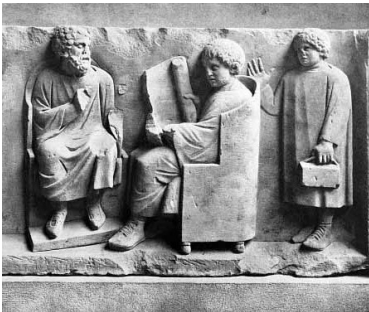
Classical Latin

- Variety codified by grammar(ian)s over the centuries ('correct Latin')
- Based on a selected number of texts produced in the late 1st century BC (mainly Cicero)
- In fact, the text of Cicero printed in modern editions different from the original, having been standardised according to conventions codified only in the following centuries
- Latin at the time of Cicero was not a monolithic entity; huge linguistic variety, at all levels (spelling, phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon), exploited by Cicero himself in different texts



Classical Latin

- Never existed as a ‘real language’
- Not a ‘diachronic variety’ (vs. ‘late republican/imperial Latin’), but rather artificial variety, constrained by standardisation (attested all across the history of Latin, including the ‘early period’)



Early Latin vs. Classical Latin

- A diachronic variety
- Latin used by people living in the territory controlled by the city Rome, between 240 and 84BC
- A period of great political expansion



240 BC

84 BC

- Victory in the First Punic War
- Conquest of Sicily, first Roman province, a Greek cultural hub
- The 'birth date' of Latin literature (Livius Andronicus' first translation)

- Victory in the First Mithridatic war
- Control over Greece and Asia Minor
- Publication of first work by Cicero (*De Inventione*)



Three important *caveat*

1. 'Early Latin' is not substantially different from Ciceronian Latin; many supposedly 'early' features are in fact also well attested in imperial Latin (and beyond), often in low-register or substandard texts
2. 'Early Latin' was not a monolithic entity; not all 'early features' are attested in all 'early authors' and/or have the same (neutral) stylisation; e.g. many linguistic features used by Plautus, but not Terence, and in Plautus used as old-fashioned archaisms and/or metrical variants;
3. Texts preserved from the 'early period' have some particular features, that should not distort our perception: most of the corpus is made up of the comedies of Plautus and Terence, mimetic texts imitating low-register varieties of conversational Latin; also, the old-fashioned Cato and his archaising language.

A concluding example: the archaic genitive ‘-ai’

1. Many occurrences in early Latin (an ‘early’ feature?)
2. In Ennius mainly found at the end of the line (artificial archaism?); in Plautus normally restricted to elevated passages; only used twice by Terence
3. Standard form used by late-republican poet Lucretius (166 of *-ai* vs. 153 *-ae*); also used by Cicero and attested in later poetry (including Virgil, Persius, Prudentius)

Analysis of linguistic features of ‘early Latin language’, many of which however should not be considered as exclusively or typically ‘early’

Thank you!