

The New Testament, originally written in Greek (rather than its cognate, Aramaic), records the life and teachings of Jesus and the history and concerns of the early Christian Church. Although Jesus himself left no writings, there was undoubtedly a period of oral transmission or tradition immediately after his death; and some scholars theorize that by ten to twenty years later there was in existence a written document containing selections of his teachings which provided a source for the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke.

Although the first three Gospels--Mark (c. 70), Matthew and Luke (c. 95)--basically agree in their presentation of the life and teachings of Jesus, they differ in their emphasis and intent. Matthew, addressed to the Jews, focuses upon Jesus as their savior and points to those teachings and experiences of Jesus that establish his Davidic lineage and his Messianic role. Mark, addressed to the persecuted Christians in Rome, is intended to sustain them with the moral and spiritual values of Jesus' teachings as recounted by Peter (whom Mark accompanied on his missionary journeys). Luke speaks more broadly to all Gentiles, clothing in the most humanistic terms the person and parables of Jesus (the child in the manger, the Good Shepherd, the prodigal son, etc.). The Fourth Gospel (c. 100), attributed to "John" and addressed to the Greeks, differs radically in its portrayal of Jesus, presenting a philosophical and mystical interpretation of his nature and ministry (see PHILOSOPHY-RELIGION).

The remaining twenty-three books of the New Testament focus upon the early Christian Church. Its history is recounted by Luke in Acts. Moral problems, theological questions, and church administration are dealt with by Paul in his epistles to the local churches of the eastern Mediterranean and in his personal letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Basically the same subjects are treated in varying degrees in the remaining epistles--those to the Hebrews (authorship unknown) and those by James, Peter, John, and Jude. The Book of Revelation completes the New Testament. Written in the last part of the first century, probably at the time of the Domitian persecution, it assures the Christian martyrs that God's final judgment of the world and the vindication of the saints is at hand.

The task of assembling and translating the diverse materials of the Old Testament (including the Apocrypha) and the New Testament was undertaken by one of the greatest of all scholars, St. Jerome (c. A.D. 340-420), a native of Pannonia in what is now Yugoslavia. He was a student of the grammarian Donatus and the rhetorician Victorinus at Rome--whose influence he frequently acknowledged in his writings. In 373 he fell ill while on a journey and studied Greek and scriptural manuscripts during his convalescence. Later he fled to the desert for five years of eremitical life, but eventually returned to Rome to become an advisor to the Pope, Damasus I. At the Pope's request he undertook a revision and translation of the scriptural writings which still remain the foundation of Western Biblical scholarship; what Jerome wrought, thousands of scholars have failed to surpass. His compilation, known for centuries as the Vulgate, established the official canon of scripture for

all Christendom.

Jerome's somewhat younger contemporary--and persistent correspondent--St. Augustine (354-430), was a vital force in shaping the politics of Christendom, defending orthodoxy against the various heresies of the Pelagians, Donatists, and Manichaeans (though he was himself a Manichaean for nine years, according to his own account). After a youthful period of vice and skepticism, Augustine became a lecturer at Milan, where he knew Ambrose, another of the Fathers of early Christianity, and was consecrated a priest at Hippo (now Bone, Algeria), near his birthplace, in 391, becoming a bishop in 395. His militancy against heresy is expressed chiefly through his letters and two major works: *De civitate dei* (*City of God*), completed by 426, and the more or less autobiographical *Confessions*.

Although the authors of the books of the New Testament, Jerome, Augustine, and the other Fathers of the early Church wrote the major works of early Christianity, the new faith adapted a most eclectic range of other writings which were to become the major justification and medium of the faith during the next millennium. Eremitical Christians, particularly in northern Africa, left many biographical and hagiographical short pieces, usually written as didactic prose, while Greek and Latin authors throughout Christendom were writing letters, essays, philosophical treatises, and explications of their faith. Many writers adapted older Oriental literature (especially miraculous tales, saints' lives, and legendary material) which eventually became the staple of all written literature in the Middle Ages. The huge compilations in the *Patrologia Latina* and the *Patrologia Graeca* attest to their prolific, reverent, dedicated efforts.

When the truly Dark Ages of Western Europe begin, about 500, the period is dark because of another temporary eclipse of learning and literature. Manuscripts were preserved in monastic houses, though the anti-intellectualism of the darkest period left much of the older heritage neglected, and the writings of the pre-Christian (pagan) ages were collected by Eastern scholars, those whose concern for literature *qua* literature surpassed their fervency for an ascetic, emotional, non-intellectual transitory life en route to eternity. Another thousand years would pass before the great pagan manuscripts were rediscovered. Meanwhile, the barbarians destroyed Rome, the emperors deserted to Constantinople, and Christianity developed a new synthesis of faith that put learning and literature much lower on the sequential scale of values. Instead of preserving and propagating the written word, the literary tradition of Greece and Rome, the early monastic Christians preferred learning by word of mouth. Latin itself decayed to the language of the common people; it became syntactical, impoverished of its radiance of metaphor, its subtlety of logic and grammatical precision. Though Christendom preserved Latin as its only international medium of communication, it was far less sophisticated than the language of Vergil, Horace, or Cicero. The depredations of barbarians were partly at fault, but the fervency of Christendom hastened the decline of letters and kept literature subordinate to unquestioning faith during the centuries when new languages, new

concepts, and new vernaculars were gestating.

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LANGUAGE

As members of Western civilization, we are deeply indebted to the Latin language, for this language and the civilization it transmitted have helped to shape our cultural destiny in the Western world more decisively than any other factor. For over a thousand years after the fall of the Roman Empire, Latin remained the language of the intelligentsia, the Christian Church, literature, science, and even of civil governments. After the resurgence of the national languages during the Renaissance and Reformation, it still kept its exalted place in science and literature and remained the most important element of humanistic education until the early decades of the twentieth century.

Latin belongs to the Italic branch of the large Indo-European language family. In all probability, during the second millennium B.C. the ancestors of the Latin-speaking people moved into Italy, where people of other racial and linguistic stocks (such as the Celts in the north, the Greeks in the south, and especially the Etruscans in the middle, who lived in beautifully built mountain cities) had already achieved a high level of civilization. The Etruscans taught the Romans much of their architecture and engineering but contributed little to their language and literature.

The earliest beginnings of the Latin language and civilization can be traced to the sixth century B.C. The area in which it was spoken, called Latium, included the city of Rome. Thus it happened that with the spectacular growth of the political power of the city of Rome, the Latin language also spread rapidly all over Italy, overshadowing, by the middle of the third century B.C., the other branches of Italic, such as Umbrian and Oscan, as well as the remnants of Etruscan and Celtic languages. The Greek cities in the south, however, survived both in language and culture and continued to influence the Latin language and Roman civilization for many centuries.

Latin was originally a language of crude farmers and peasant soldiers, which shows very clearly in the language even at its higher level of development. Many of the terms used later in government and the military organization stem from words used in this primitive society. Let us look at some of the examples of this humble origin: *cohors*, "cattle or sheep pen"; *principes*, "men who fought in the front rank"; *pontifex*, "bridge builder"; etc. Many of the famous family names also show their lowly beginnings or their use as nicknames; for example, Cicero, "chickpea"; Naso, "nosey"; Galba, "fat belly." In addition, Roman parents sometimes numbered their children, calling them Tertius ("third"), Quartus, Quintus, etc. Even one of the emperors was called Septimus Severus ("the seventh").

The Romans borrowed heavily from the Greeks in the area of culture and civilization. This brought into Latin a large number of Greek words, especially for crafts and industries, arts and poetry. In fact, most of the early writers were of Greek origin. Livius Andronicus was a Greek slave who created the first Latin version of the *Odyssey* and also translated a number of Greek plays into Latin. Quintus Ennius, the "father of Roman poetry," was a native of Magna Graecia. His mother tongue was probably Greek, but he learned Latin sufficiently well to write tolerable hexameters. Thus, during the early period of Roman civilization, the profession of letters was largely left to foreigners and slaves.

In spite of this "lowly" origin, Latin soon triumphed over all other languages in Italy, and the victorious Roman legions carried it throughout the western Mediterranean. The biggest test for the Roman Empire and also for the Latin language was the Punic Wars, which ended in complete and irreversible victory for the Romans. This military victory not only assured their political hegemony over the western Mediterranean but also stopped the advance of Semitic culture and languages in this part of the world. The next challenge by the Semitic culture occurred only after a thousand years, when the Arabs, spurred by their new religion, Islam, conquered all of North Africa and most of the Iberian Peninsula, seriously challenging the Western Christian civilization.

The Romans, firmly in control in the western islands of the Mediterranean, the Iberian Peninsula, and the North African coast, carried their language and culture with them, and the process of Romanization began. The legions were soon followed by colonists from Italy or men Romanized by their service in the army (veterans of the army and retired soldiers). The newly established towns became the commercial and administrative centers of the newly conquered areas, attracting the indigenous population to the marketplaces, amphitheaters, and other places of amusement. Most importantly, however, they established schools for the youth of the newly conquered nations in which Latin was the language of instruction. Thus in a few generations Latin became the language of the vast areas in the West conquered by the legions. In fact, during the first century B.C. Julius Caesar conquered the land of the Gauls, which comprised the area of present-day France and the Low Countries. Under the early emperors in the first century A.D., the legions also thrust into the territory of present-day Germany and crossed the Channel into Britain. All these vast areas underwent extensive Romanization, and the language of the people gradually became Latin. This was especially true of the areas where the Roman conquest lasted for several centuries, such as Italy, the Iberian Peninsula, Gaul, and the Low Countries. In these places the indigenous languages disappeared almost entirely.

This process, however, was a long one. People, especially in the remote countryside, continued to keep their languages, and, at best, we can see them as bilinguals, speaking both Latin and their native tongues. In fact, there is evidence that even in Italy remnants of the old Italic language Oscan survived until the first century A.D., for some of the graffiti at Pompeii is written in this language. Traces of the old Iberian and Gaul languages can be found until the fourth century A.D. in



written documents. One language, the Basque, a descendent of the old Iberian language, apparently survived all attempts at Romanization since it is still spoken in both Spain and France today. It is interesting to note that in those areas where the process of Romanization was intensive (Italy, the Iberian Peninsula, Gaul), people even today speak a language derived from Latin (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Wallon).

One of the interesting questions raised in the history of languages is when the process of differentiation began. Some historians say, and certainly with some measure of justification, that this process began as soon as an indigenous population "learned" to speak Latin. Undoubtedly they used some of their own vocabulary, carried over some of their habits in the area of pronunciation, and even adapted elements of the syntax of their native language. As a result, Latin spoken in these different areas began to develop distinct features. Others, however, dispute this claim and insist that the diversification of Latin began much later, under the influence of the onslaught of the "barbarians," such as the Germanic tribes, the Huns, the Avars, and the Magyars.

Another matter becomes relevant here. Some historians claim that not even the Roman colonists of Italy spoke a unified, highly literary language. In fact, Latin as we know it from our reading of the classical literature of the Romans was really an artificial language that existed only in written form. People used a colloquial language for conversation that was quite different in vocabulary and much simpler in structure. Furthermore, there was a difference between *sermo urbanus*, the language of the city or educated people, and *sermo rusticus*, the language of the country. It is not at all surprising that such differences existed in Roman times. We have a very similar situation in our own country today, though the lines of diversification run somewhat differently (dialectal, regional, racial, etc.). Consequently, it is very possible that differences presently observable among the languages derived from Latin had their origin way back in the speech habits of the Roman communities. It is also very probable that the spoken form of Latin was carried to the provinces by the soldiers and settlers, thereby making it the form of Latin learned by the overwhelming majority of the conquered people.

#### LANGUAGE IN THE EASTERN HALF OF THE EMPIRE

So far we have examined the western areas of the Roman Empire and the language habits of the people who lived there. The Romans, however, also conquered all the eastern Mediterranean and a large part of the Near East. Here the story of the Latin language takes a completely different form. In the western Mediterranean the Romans conquered people about whom we know very little or practically nothing. The Etruscans in Italy, although a highly developed people, still present an enigma to historians. Their language is probably related to some ancient language in the eastern Mediterranean. As we have seen, the original inhabitants of the Italian and Iberian Peninsulas, the Gauls, the Britons, the Picts, and

other Celtic tribes in the north and west yielded relatively easily to the superior military-political organization of the Romans and found the Latin language and Roman civilization attractive enough to adopt and emulate.

The story in the East, however, was entirely different. In these areas, as we know, highly developed cultures existed long before Rome began its independent existence around 500 B.C. The civilizations of Mesopotamia (Sumer, Akkad, Babylon, etc.), the Valley of the Nile, Crete, etc. antedate Rome by several thousand years. The Greek civilization had also been flourishing for a long time when ancestors of the Romans were still crude herdsmen and peasants. These people had a completely different attitude about the Roman civilization and the Latin language.

At the time the Roman conquest of the eastern Mediterranean began, the successor states of the Hellenistic empire of Alexander the Great were in existence. Greek language and culture permeated the entire eastern Mediterranean world. It represented the highest level of civilization thus far achieved by Western people. The Romans came as military conquerors, civilian administrators, and, to a lesser degree, merchants to the area. However, they were never able to imprint their own cultural image on these people because they never settled in large enough numbers in this region and, more importantly, they were always considered culturally inferior by the Greeks and even by the Hellenized non-Greek population.

There is an interesting and highly important aspect of the Greek language and culture of the late Hellenistic period from the religious point of view. Palestine was Hellenized before the birth of Christ as a part of the Alexandrian empire. Thus, the teachings of Christ, which were done in Aramaic, were soon translated into Koine (common Greek). More importantly, Paul, the greatest apostle of Christianity, was a Hellenized Jew. All of his writings were done in Koine, and many other apostles of the early Christians also wrote in this language.

Not only the epistles and Gospels but also the great Creed of Nicaea, which established the early dogmas of the Church, was written in Greek. Characteristically enough, even the Mass was celebrated in Greek during the first four centuries of Christendom. More importantly, the very fact that the books of the Christians had been translated into Greek and many of the early apostles and organizers of Christianity were true Greeks, Hellenized Jews, or people of other nationalities made their acceptance to the Romans easier. Christianity very well might have remained a Jewish sect had it not been for these Hellenized early Christians, who made the new religion "respectable" to educated Romans, who always had a great admiration for the Greek mind and supported many of the ideas and religions which were transmitted to them through and by the Greeks. Once, however, the Gospels were translated into Latin in the fourth century (the Vulgate), Christianity began its advance also among the Latin-speaking people of the West.

As the Romans came into contact with the Greeks, the superior Greek



culture exercised a strong influence on them and even their language (Latin) received its share of this cultural influence. The Romans were essentially a practical and pragmatic people. They were prudent, disciplined, legalistically minded. In contrast, the Greek mind was highly speculative, enterprising, curious, philosophical, and, above all, artistically inclined. It is no wonder then that once the Greeks were conquered militarily and organized politically into the Roman Empire, they were not only able to hold their own in the area of cultural matters but also became the teachers and school masters of their conquerors. As a consequence, while very few Greeks bothered to learn Latin, practically all educated Romans studied Greek. Furthermore, the literary Latin language was created by closely following the Greek forms. In fact, the Latin masterworks resemble a great deal their Greek models. The Greeks continued their disdainful attitude toward the Romans and their culture even at a time when, finally, in the first century A.D., some of their pupils, the Latin writers and poets, surpassed their Greek masters. The reason for their scorn of all Roman cultural products was that the Greeks, though immensely capable people with highly speculative minds, were vain and jealous of other people's intellectual achievements. As a result, the Greek-speaking people kept their language everywhere within the Roman Empire, even in Italy where, in some isolated areas even today, Greek-speaking colonies exist.

After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, the eastern half existed for another one thousand years (476-1453) during which Latin soon died out and the language of the new Byzantine or East Roman Empire became Greek. The only area in the East where they were able to Romanize the indigenous population was Illyria, the northwestern corner of the Balkan Peninsula. It is very probable that the present-day Rumanians are the descendants of the Romanized people of the Balkan Peninsula.

#### THE ROMAN VIEW OF LANGUAGE

Under these circumstances, it is not at all surprising that the Romans, while speculating about the nature of language (Latin), were influenced by the Greek point of view. The Greeks, as we have seen before, had already developed a body of knowledge about the nature of language. Therefore, the history of Latin linguistic studies shows little originality because the Latin grammarians used Greek as their sample and model. This work was facilitated by the fact that Latin and Greek were related languages with a very similar cultural background. Thus, Latin could easily be modeled on Greek patterns.

Varro, who lived in the first century B.C., was the first great Roman grammarian. This is not to say that there were no grammarians before him. Some Romans had already speculated about their own language. The poet Lucretius included a section on language in his work *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of Things*). He even speculated about the origin of language and came up with surprisingly modern ideas, relating it to the differen-



tiated cries of animals and birds. Still the classic work on language is Varro's *De Lingua Latina*. In this work he advanced a general theory of language. He was aware of the work of the Greek scholars before him, yet he remained an original thinker, having at his disposal the knowledge of both Latin and Greek. In fact, we can consider him one of the earliest contrastive linguists since he was constantly testing the applicability of the rules of the Greek language to his own.

He went even further though. Looking very objectively at the analogy versus the anomaly disputes of the Greek grammarians, he admitted that language was both systematic and irregular, a very modern concept. So the grammarian's job was to describe the regularities and irregularities in a language, but not to prescribe the use of grammatical rules. This became one of the basic principles of structuralist linguistics in the twentieth century. This keen observation led Varro to considerable linguistic insight while speculating about the different strata of natural languages. He argued that speech must be used for daily needs of living since we chop up reality around us according to these very needs. This process naturally leads to the development of an expression system to facilitate communication. For instance, he observed that we have separate names for male and female animals which are important to us, such as the horse, but have no such differentiation for ravens, which are of no use to people. Modern linguists like to speculate about such matters too, and the anthropological linguists have come up with a great deal of surprisingly interesting data. They observed, for instance, that the Eskimos have more than a dozen names for snow; some Indians in Paraguay have over a hundred terms for potatoes, etc. So Varro concluded that only later had language been used for higher level thought processes.

Unfortunately, only about a quarter of Varro's work survives, so it is difficult to judge him accurately. But whatever we have from his work today indicates that he was a very learned man and quite an independent thinker, certainly a very rare example among the early Romans.

The Romans, however, gradually became more cultured as time went on whereas the Greeks lost much of their earlier creativity. In fact, for a few centuries (first century B.C. through second century A.D.) Latin literature surpassed that of the Greeks. This is called the Golden Age of Roman literature. In the wake of this literary upswing, the study of language also progressed quite impressively. Beginning with the third century A.D., a number of excellent Latin linguists produced scholarly treatises on Latin grammar and language that made Latin linguistic scholarship famous. They were very conscious of the great literary past and desired to preserve the pure language of the classical period. The works of two famous grammarians, Donatus and Priscian, were preserved for us from this age. Both books became the favorite textbooks of Latin grammar in the Middle Ages. Priscian's book was especially popular, surviving in over a thousand manuscripts. His book served as a model for many more Latin textbooks of later ages, and in many respects many of the Latin textbooks used even in the twentieth century resemble it quite closely.

We have seen the Latin language rise from its humble origin to its status as one of the most important languages of all history. The Romans, the original speakers of the language, were, in contrast to the Greeks, very pragmatic and practical people. This natural characteristic shows in the use they made of their language. They certainly liked history more than speculative philosophy; they preferred the practical study of the language to the theories about it. Nevertheless, they produced very worthwhile literature and endowed medieval Europe with a language that was developed enough to carry the burden of civilization for another thousand years in the West after the collapse of the empire. In the East, however, neither the Latin language nor Roman civilization became popular, and after the fall of Rome the Greek language and a hybrid Hellenistic civilization flourished for another thousand years within the political boundaries of the Byzantine Empire.

Unfortunately, these two poles of civilization--having no strong common denominators, drifted further and further apart, shaping the souls and minds of the people into different types of humanity. The later split in the Church only aggravated this divergent, schizophrenic move. When we think now about Western civilization in the strict sense of the word, we mean the culture derived from the Western Roman Empire, which resulted from the division in the civilization of the Roman Empire. We here in the West inherited the legacy of Latin language and western Roman civilization but began to receive the benefits of the Greek spirit and intellectual achievements only late in the Middle Ages. We have to consider ourselves fortunate, nevertheless, for we inherited only the intellectual legacy of the Greek world without burdening ourselves with the growing atrophy of the Byzantine civilization.

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