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LATIN: Story of a World Language
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Latin as a World Language

A Systematic Approach

OF ALL THE TRACES left by the Romans, the Latin language is probably the most ubiquitous. Latin continued to be the language of record even as the last remnants of the Roman Empire dissolved into new forms of statehood. In this respect it was as if nothing in Europe had changed. Even when, during the early Middle Ages, the various European vernaculars began replacing Latin, for a good thousand years it would have been unthinkable to practice one of the higher professions without a thorough grounding in Latin. In addition, Latin continued to play a crucial role even after the vernacular languages had become well established throughout Europe. Long after people no longer wrote or spoke Latin as a matter of course, learning it was a must because, even during the age of science, Latin continued to be a core subject not only in the schools of central Europe but also in Russia, Scandinavia, North and South America, and Australia. Although Latin ceased to be a core subject in higher education during the twentieth century, it still had a presence. And against all expectations, it has never become a merely exotic subject but continues to be taught in many schools.

No other "dead" language continues to exert such influence throughout the world. Latin word stems form the basis of new scientific terminology. Some of the more sophisticated magazines still allow Latin terms or brief quotations to appear on their pages untranslated. Surprisingly, the active use of Latin has even seen something of a resurgence recently. Latin circles have sprung up in Europe and the United States, as have Latin journals and radio programs. When Finland held

the presidency of the Council of the European Union (in 1999 and 2006), it regularly published reports in the Latin language. In the fall of 2008, a German television station even broadcast a two-hour program about the Roman Empire in Latin, with German subtitles. In addition, in the Catholic Church, the Latin Mass, which had been banned after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), underwent a measured restoration. It seems that Latin is still different from other historical languages. So although ancient Babylonian is the province of Orientalists and hieroglyphics of Egyptologists, Latin remains what it has been for the past two thousand years: a world language.

What is key to understanding the history of Latin as a world language is that it was never restricted to the Latin classroom or to Cicero and classical literature. Rather, like English today, it was a globally accessible language that was required for communications and not merely for educational purposes. Nothing demonstrates the dimensions of this world language more clearly than the sheer quantity of writings in Latin. The mere fact that more Latin texts have been created and archived in libraries around the world since the end of the Roman Empire than were written in Roman antiquity is significant. But an extrapolation—which can be little more than an approximation, given the state of the sources—testifies to the continuing significance of Latin as a world language: the quantity of post-Roman texts is so extensive that it exceeds the total of all extant classical Latin texts by a factor of ten thousand.[1] This means that all of the writings that have come down to us from ancient Rome, including all inscriptions, constitute at most 0.01 percent of the total output. Of this miniscule percentage, Christian texts from late antiquity represent approximately 80 percent. What is generally known as *the* literature of the Romans, as it is taught in school, the works of authors like Plautus, Cicero, and Tacitus, forms little more than an infinitesimal point in the universe that is Latin, albeit one that shines brightly.

The sheer numbers must be illustrated to be fully appreciated. If we assume that the sum total of Latin texts from antiquity may be snugly accommodated in five hundred volumes running an estimated five hundred pages each, we would need about ten thousand times that number, that is, at least five million additional volumes of the same size, to house the total output in Latin texts. A brief overview of the use of Latin shows that our estimates are, if anything, on the conservative side.

Without a doubt, archived manuscripts and documents constitute the largest proportion of these texts. The documents of all cities and seats of government, residences of princes, and private archives throughout Europe were written in Latin well into the high or even late Middle Ages. In some cases, Latin continued to be used for official purposes much later, as in Hungary, where it remained the language of administration into the mid-nineteenth century. To this we must add the Latin documents of the Vatican and of all the dioceses and archdioceses throughout the world up to the present; international diplomatic correspondence into the early modern era (the documents of the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, for example, are in Latin); many of the minutes of European university administrations into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; as well as hundreds of thousands of inscriptions on buildings, paintings, and gravestones. The number of Latin certificates—certifications, doctorates, conferrals of title, and the like—stored in and out of archives is in the millions and continues to grow.

The second largest group involves expository or functional and scientific texts of all kinds. Until the end of the Middle Ages, almost all scholarly literature was written in Latin (the majority into the seventeenth century and a considerable proportion into the early nineteenth century). Theologians, jurists, and physicians used Latin exclusively in their communications; whether these involved the tracts of astronomers and philosophers or theoretical writings about music, rhetoric, and poetry, all were in Latin. We do not yet have a precise overview. Nonetheless, the raw numbers available for a few areas permit a rough estimate of the scope of its use. For example, an older and surely incomplete bibliography of modern astronomical literature contains several thousand Latin titles. An extrapolation from a collection of law dissertations housed in Frankfurt, which is assumed to contain only a small portion of the actual number of such dissertations, suggests that between 1650 and 1750 at least fifty thousand dissertations, perhaps as many as a hundred thousand, were written at universities in Germany and Austria, that is, in the "First German Reich," which came to an end in 1806. Even if each dissertation comprised about twenty-five pages, the total comes to well over one million text pages—and this, it should be noted, is counting only legal dissertations in the German-speaking world between 1650 and 1750, not other European countries. In some subjects,

Latin was a common scientific language into the nineteenth century, as is evident from philological and theological dissertations; so-called *Schulschriften,* academic annuals that were published by German high schools *(Gymnasien);* and scientific journals. Nonacademic expository and functional texts include hundreds of thousands of sermons from the Middle Ages, as well as speeches and poetry for all imaginable occasions such as weddings, baptisms, burials, conferrals of doctoral degrees, jubilee celebrations, which probably run into the millions. The quantity of letters written in Latin is also incalculable. The more than three thousand letters written by Erasmus of Rotterdam alone equal almost half of the total number of letters still extant from classical antiquity. Moreover, Erasmus was only one of several thousand persons from the Middle Ages and early modern period whose Latin letters we still have.

In comparison to Latin scientific and functional texts, which include a high proportion of works of great stylistic sophistication, the quantity of what might be termed "art literature" is surely much smaller. But even here, the preponderance of works written after the end of the Roman Imperium is considerable. It may come as a surprise, but a mere forty Latin dramas have come down to us from antiquity—the number of plays staged in Latin between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries is between five thousand and ten thousand. Only about a dozen Latin-language didactic poems have survived from antiquity; more than four hundred are known from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Even the number of medieval and modern epics exceeds the few classical representatives of that genre by more than a hundredfold. Only about a dozen dialogues, a genre invented by Plato, remain from Roman antiquity; the number of such works from the early modern period runs to four digits.

The public has little appreciation of either the history of Latin as a world language in the modern era or its omnipresence. When people think of Latin, they think of ancient Rome. The Latin taught at universities and in high schools that even have Latin programs deal generally, though not exclusively, with classical Latin literature from its beginnings around 250 BCE to late antiquity. True, people have some awareness that Latin was the sole means of communication for the church and in science in the western half of Europe during the Middle Ages and that it was very important in secular affairs. A solid grounding in Latin is an absolute necessity for any historian whose purview is the Middle Ages.

In reality, however, only the first half of the Middle Ages is ever really researched. For example, there has not been a complete accounting of Latin texts written in the High Middle Ages, and only the most important texts are available in copies or electronic form. Those researching the medieval Latin literature are all too often forced to travel to European libraries and read the actual medieval manuscripts. We have only an inadequate knowledge of Latin text production in the Late Middle Ages. There are relatively few professorships in medieval Latin. The discrepancy is even greater for the modern era. Here, attention is almost exclusively on the burgeoning literatures of modern European languages. All but forgotten is the fact that a considerable percentage of communications within Europe took place in Latin well into the eighteenth century and that most Latin texts stem from the modern era. In neither the nineteenth nor the twenty-first century has an academic discipline developed for Latin literature from this period. At best, with very few exceptions, these writings are the sidelines of specialists in the Germanic or Romance languages, classical philologists, philosophers, or students in other disciplines. Beyond that they might as well not exist.

Although a considerable upswing in neo-Latin studies has occurred in the past several decades, no real paradigm shift has taken place. Except for a few overviews of essay length and several regionally oriented works, no history of neo-Latin literature has as yet been written. What is more, even if some ambitious soul set out to write such a history, it would of necessity be the culmination of decades of preliminary research. Even then, the resulting work would hardly approach the level attained by studies of the European vernacular literatures. The smallest and most marginal European national literatures have been more thoroughly researched than the neo-Latin; this, even though up to 1600 and in some countries as late as 1700 and beyond, more literature was produced in Latin than in each of the national languages. In the Americas there was even a neo-Latin literature, which remains largely unplumbed. As a result, the views offered by literary and linguistic histories and, to a lesser extent by the histories of philosophy and the sciences and of European and premodern literature influenced by Europe, remain unbalanced because the Latin portion is either neglected or completely missing. The situation is paradoxical. Although Latin was part and parcel of a good education in the entire Western world well

into the twentieth century, Latin literature of the modern era is by far the least known body of literature.

Europe's Disremembered Latin History

How is such collective amnesia possible? Superficially, the explanation is rather simple. The exclusion of Latin does not relate to its entire history but rather to the centuries in which Latin was still used alongside the newly developing written languages of Europe, that is, from the High Middle Ages up to about 1800. This was when the newer languages for the first time ceased to be merely marginal in the European written tradition. Although Latin still had a presence during this period, the future belonged to the new national languages, and the proportion of Latin texts went into steady decline. It is understandable that scholars would be more interested in the waxing of literatures in the vernacular than in the waning of Latin. The invention of the automobile in the late nineteenth century provides us with a similar development in that the horse and buggy continued to play an important role alongside the car for more than fifty years. Nonetheless, the wider public tends to be more interested in early cars than late horse-drawn carriages.

However, replacement alone cannot adequately explain the disappearance of neo-Latin literature from modern consciousness. Rather, the neglect of Europe's Latin tradition is more the result of ideology. After the Romans, Latin lived on mainly as a language taught in schools according to the grammatical rules of an age long gone. It was no longer the language of a people, and so it came to be viewed as a "dead" language. And dead languages can hardly be expected to give birth to anything live. Even today, they are viewed as something artificial, as a learned cultural superstructure incapable of unfolding in real life. Even Latin scholars, who should by all rights have been the champions of Latin, adopted this prejudice and took a critical stance toward the "dead" Latin of the post-Roman era. The view expressed a hundred years ago about neo-Latin literature by the classical philologist Franz Skutsch continues to be echoed by some of his colleagues today: "All of these descendents of the Latin muse are of only secondary interest and will, overall, attract only philologists and literary amateurs."[2]

The model undergirding this verdict is the notion of a "natural" language as one that develops randomly. Its core is not in the scholarly

literature but in orality: spontaneous usage unencumbered by schooling or even grammar. Modern linguistics as a whole, including comparative philology, which sprang up around 1800, and the subsequent "neogrammarian" school uncritically adopted the primacy of orality and passed it down. Spoken language was viewed, and to a certain extent still is, as the only legitimate object of linguistic analysis. Written norms and all forms of external influence on language were interpreted as cultural epiphenomena not to be identified with the essence of the language as such. As a result, languages like Latin, which are learned exclusively from books, are no longer a medium of exchange in the real world and are not viewed as languages in the strict sense of the word. Linguists were interested in Latin only insofar as it was a living language that was developing organically. As a result, they carefully studied the development of Latin as reflected in literary texts from its reconstructed Indo-European roots up to its grammatical calcification in the first century BCE. There was thereafter an almost seamless transition from "Vulgar Latin" to the study of the Romance languages. Virtually nothing is to be found in the linguistic literature about textual Latin after the first century CE. The field of sociolinguistics, which has come into prominence over the past several decades, might have been expected to have academic language standards in its sights. Unfortunately, it has to date barely engaged with the role of Latin in European history, in all probability because the field is almost exclusively oriented to the present, and the historical dimension is only now being discovered.

Beginning in the sixteenth century and then more intensively since the eighteenth, the primacy of "natural" language was joined by a second notion, namely, that one's individuality and one's inclusion in a national or social community *(Volksgemeinschaft)* can develop only from within the mother tongue and that the mother tongue alone enables individuals to express their deepest thoughts and yearnings. This basically Romantic notion of the vernacular as the soul of a people and the sole medium of artistic inspiration made Latin look like a stiff corset and the vernacular like a liberating return to nature. The notion of a national language, which developed out of this concept in the nineteenth century, combined an almost mystical primevalism with the modern political concept of the nation. In this view, the national language as mother tongue, safely unfolding from within its living source in the unfettered unconscious, yet secondarily cultivated by literary models and

the act of communication, became the exclusive linguistic model for the development of personality. For the first time in European history, it was assumed that the language one had learned as a child would remain the most important. Although cultivated people were expected to master several languages, this in no way called into question the primacy of the mother tongue. Nonetheless, in the nationalistic nineteenth century, a person who could not be unambiguously assigned to a particular linguistic community became suspect. And because Latin was nobody's mother tongue, it was suspect for that reason alone.

Our alienation from Latin over the past two centuries increased further because of its lack of active use such that today it is encountered almost exclusively in works from the past. Latin is now viewed almost entirely as a historical language, whereas it was largely perceived as a timeless phenomenon during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Until very recently, the usual didactic methods of teaching Latin, which emphasized intellectual analysis of grammatical rules over actual language acquisition, drove home the final nail, relegating it to the status of a research tool for decoding historical texts or a sort of mental gymnastics. Teaching or learning Latin seems to be very different from teaching or learning modern languages. Latin, it seems, is not really a language at all but rather a piece of our cultural heritage. What is more, wherever things are inherited, as a rule death may be presumed.

The End of National Languages and the Rise of English as a World Language

This is where the present book commences. Its goal is not to recall the importance of Europe's Latin tradition or to review the treasures of classical, postclassical, and modern Latin literature. A whole series of books that do just that have been published quite recently. These include works by Joseph Farrell (*Latin Language and Latin Culture from Ancient to Modern Times,* 2001), Françoise Waquet (*Latin, or the Empire of a Sign,* 2001), Tore Janson (*A Natural History of Latin,* 2004), Nicholas Ostler (*Ad infinitum: A Biography of Latin,* 2007), and Wim Verbaal, Yanick Maes, and Jan Papy (*Latinitas perennis,* vol. 1, *The Continuity of Latin Literature,* 2007; vol. 2, *Appropriation and Latin Literature,* 2009). In Germany, Wilfried Stroh's *Latein ist tot, es lebe Latein!* (Latin is dead, long live Latin!) (2007) even became a bestseller in that country. Each of these books in

its own way illuminates the history of the Latin language and culture in Europe and brings to the attention of specialists in other disciplines and to the broader public facts and understandings previously the province of Latin scholars alone. The success of these books heralds renewed interest in the overall history of the Latin language from its early beginnings to the present.

The subject of this book is different. Its brief is the status of Latin as a "dead" language. How did Latin become a language taught only in school? Why did Europe use this language for fifteen hundred years? And what exactly is a "dead" language, especially when it is still used as frequently as Latin? The conventional answers to these questions, that Latin became a world language because the Romans were a world power and that it remained a world language because Rome's cultural heritage and the Catholic Church of late antiquity influenced Europe's development, are simply inadequate and in some respects just plain wrong.

The goal of this book is to investigate the linguistic processes through which Latin developed into a world language—and a "dead" language—and to pay close attention to the principles that govern the development of other world languages throughout history and of languages that are conventionally viewed as "normal" living languages. My purpose is to rescue Latin from the status of "cultural heritage," and to demonstrate the extent to which Latin remained a living language like any other even after it had ceased to be spoken by particular peoples in the ancient world. Unlike some passionate defenders of the classical tradition, I do not adduce evidence by demonstrating how many people wrote or spoke in Latin into modern times or what they produced. There is no denying the difference between Latin and languages that have a living community of speakers. The question is, What do Latin and the "living" languages derived from it have in common? The differences between Latin and "living" languages, I intend to show, are gradual, not categorical.

Such an approach is much easier to take today than it was just a few years ago. The reasons for demoting Latin from the roster of active living languages over the past two centuries have become largely outdated. The exclusive concentration on spoken language in linguistics is giving way to questions about the relationship between culture and language. The questions so central to Latin, such as standardization of language, codification of written language, and the cultivation of language, are

now being discovered by linguists as areas of legitimate research. They are no longer viewed as mere epiphenomena that are foreign to the organism of language as such. A reference work such as Nina Janich and Albrecht Greule's extremely informative and profitable *Sprachkulturen in Europa* (2002) (Language cultures in Europe) would have been unthinkable until recently. A major goal of my book is to show that the history of Latin should have been accorded a place within the tradition of "European language cultures" and should not have been slighted in Janich and Greule's book. In literature, a growing interest in the formation of culture and especially of literary canons, as well as the influence of cultural studies on literary and educational history, is paving the way for a new interpretation of the particularity of Latin.

One of the things that makes Latin especially interesting right now is globalization and the complex ties between different countries and cultures. The processes set in motion as a result, among them the rapid growth of English as the preeminent world language, have fundamentally shaken our notion that human beings develop language best by cultivating their "mother tongue." These processes also give us an opportunity to reflect in a novel way on exactly what transforms a "living" language into a "dead" one.

Let us turn for the moment to the question of mother tongues. Unlike the situation not too many decades ago, when in countries with strongly developed "national" languages only cultural and diplomatic elites faced the daunting prospect of learning several languages, large swaths of the world's population must now meet that challenge. In comparison to the nineteenth century, a much larger proportion of people around the world are forced by necessity to express complex ideas in a second language and to structure their "normal" lives in languages they did not learn at home as children. Multilingualism—and not merely the elementary ability to communicate but also written fluency and the capacity to negotiate in several languages—is the new ideal in the globalized world. It leads to fundamental shifts in the educational system, in which the mother tongue is supplemented and in some cases even supplanted by early bilingual education. Except in the case of English, the mother tongue has lost a piece of its absolute primacy, and English has become the essential global medium of exchange. It is currently the most important second language; so-called native speakers are now a clear minority. English, as we have under-

stood for some time, is the successor to Latin. For the first time, an understanding of the achievement of Latin as a world language is at hand, independent of the apologetics of classical philologists. Moreover, the new role that English has assumed also raises many of the same questions that were once posed of Latin.

This is especially the case in those domains that for centuries had been the province of Latin: the sciences and scholarship, whether secular or religious. Here, the linguistic splitting caused by the various nationalisms in nineteenth-century Europe is striking. Within a small yet largely homogeneous geographical space, at least four languages of science of international significance—French, English, German, and Italian—blossomed, alongside several "smaller" European languages such as Finnish, Polish, and Norwegian, which became the bearers of their own scientific culture. However, when it came to publications meant for an international audience, practitioners all made use of the closest available "larger" language. This guaranteed the larger European countries that, as long as their inhabitants did not cross international boundaries, their mother tongue would suffice for all the usual domestic purposes. The well-schooled elites transcended international boundaries and made use of foreign languages as needed but tended to write in their own.

The establishment of English as the international language of science has fundamentally changed these well-established habits, perhaps most of all in Germany, where the national language developed into a scientific language much later than in most European countries and where the relationship between language and nation became especially problematic after the nationalist adventures that ended in catastrophe with the Third Reich. Alongside a resolute commitment to maintain German as a language of science at all cost, a countertrend demonstrates internationalism by the forced use of English. There are certainly numerous situations in Germany in which all of the participants of a discussion could speak German but prefer English out of the simple belief that it is integral to the enterprise of science. This means that, without knowing it, we now have the same relationship to English that the scientific community had to Latin in the eighteenth century. The question of what will happen with each of the national languages in literary and scientific endeavors has now become an issue that is being openly and publicly debated. In Germany, the former president of the Federal Constitutional Court, Jutta Limbach, even wrote a book about it in 2008.

Its translated title is ominous: *Does German Have a Future?* The large German scientific organizations have also become involved. After the initial euphoria about the internationalism of English, they are now attempting to take a more nuanced stance. Currently, the trend seems to be toward a blend, with much of the discussion centering on situations in which the international language of science or the mother tongue offers the most advantages. Essentially, this was the ongoing debate between Latin and the national languages between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century, and it is now to some extent being played out in reverse. Prior to 1800, the question was, How much should we entrust to national languages? Now the question is, How much of a role should they still be accorded?

The model of the mother tongue, which alone is capable of expressing what comes from the heart, which alone inspires poetry, which is available in every situation from everyday conversation to high literature and science, and which is fully developed, as linguists would say, is increasingly proving to be a peculiarly European path taken during the nationalistic nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Comparison with other cultural spaces and historical eras shows that ever since Latin ceased to be the common language of Europe, very few societies have been as consistently monolingual within large geographical territories such as the European nation-states. A glance at the countries of Africa and Asia and even at the United States makes it clear that the connection between ethnic or national identity and language in the large European nation-states is much more complex than has been the case until recently. The situation in premodern Europe, in which each region had its own language, while important areas such as religion, science, and supraregional communication were bound together by a single language (Latin), seems to have been more of a historical norm than an exception. And it appears that in terms of communication, Europe is now returning to its premodern self. In view of the challenges of the modern world, the categories of the linguistically foreign and the linguistically indigenous, which characterized discussions about language from the time of Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), who demonstrated a preference for Italian over Latin in his programmatic writings, have blurred.[3] The Roman poet Ennius (239–169 BCE) arrived in Rome from southern Italy, and although Latin was a language he had to learn, his contribution to Roman literature was great. He confessed to having

three hearts: Roman, Oscan (the standard Italic language of southern Italy), and Greek. He did not even mention Messapian, the local dialect of his home region. That, in a nutshell, is the essence of multilingualism both in antiquity and in the modern world.

Of course, the hegemonic claims of national languages ended less because of a change in consciousness and more because the idea of the nation-state became increasingly untenable. The modern world not only is linguistically more complex but also has become economically and politically intertwined as never before. Interestingly, no sooner had the Cold War come to an end than a debate about empires developed. In the process, the historical model of the Imperium Romanum has gained unexpected salience in the political sciences. This model of empire entails linguistic organization, and not only for internal communication. Language pervades the cultural and political fabric of a society. The Romans themselves provide an example of how an empire may be multilingual. For long periods of time, Latin did not serve the function that national languages have in modern nation-states, as I show later. Rather, Greek and other cultural languages were allowed to flourish.

Today we see a tendency toward regionalization in almost all of the old nation-states, expressing a need to stake out a place for old regional languages in opposition to the dominant national language, which unites the citizens of a particular country. This is evidence that the national languages are not the "natural" languages of a particular nation but are cultural constructs imposed by intensive schooling and mandated commitments and obligations that, however, have never been completely able to displace loyalty to regional tongues. Examples include the reestablishment of Catalan and Galician, along with Castilian, as official languages in Spain; the linguistic reorganization in the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, such as Lithuania and Georgia; the linguistic provisions regarding minorities in the Italian regions of Friuli and Sardinia; and last but not least the approval of regional variants in the classroom, even in a country as centralized as France. These trends are, in the final analysis, a recognition that premodern European realities were merely lying dormant as nation-states asserted themselves. They are now reawakening.

The exigencies of modern economics also require that languages be organized differently. Until the end of the twentieth century, trade and production were localized in a clear linguistic center even when a

company's reach was international—that is, a French company remained a French company no matter where it conducted its business. Today this center has been replaced by a multiplicity of complex regional and national arrangements that are determined solely by the technological possibilities. In this world, national boundaries constitute little more than obstacles. On the one hand, business requires one or several world languages to ensure communications; on the other hand (and this much more so than in the sciences or politics), it requires connections with local cultures and languages. This is because a considerably larger proportion of society is engaged in economic, trade, and production processes than in politics or science. These processes can no longer be limited to a small elite group with a capacity to communicate internationally.

Our interest in Latin as a historical world language will surely not provide us with the key to solving modern issues. However, history speaks to us more clearly when we understand where it anticipated our problems, and conversely it sharpens historical distance and our view of the present. Here, Latin has something to offer: a two-thousand-year-old history that allows us to study the long-term development of particular constellations. Let me elaborate briefly on two understandings that such a long-term perspective may bring.

First, world languages need not in any way reflect the linguistic application of political or economic power relationships. The enforced spread of a language by a world power does not make it a world language; as soon as that world power collapses, so does the language.[4] But Latin continued even after the end of the Roman Empire. Latin even conquered northern Germany, Scandinavia, the northern parts of England, and large territories in eastern Europe into Poland—regions that were never under Roman sway. The vast majority of all Latin texts were written after the Roman Empire had ceased to exist. The example of Greek is even more extreme. Ancient Greek was one of the most important world languages for about a thousand years even though the political might of Greece, if it ever really existed, reached its height during the twelve-year reign of Alexander the Great. Sanskrit retained and even expanded its importance as a common language in southern Asia long after the political constellations from which it emerged had disappeared. If one examines the matter closely, thousand-year-old empires are hard

to find. A generous view cedes to the Roman Empire only seven hundred years of hegemony. But as a world language, Latin has a history spanning more than twenty-three hundred years. Is English now a world language simply because the United States, Great Britain, and some other countries play a dominant global role in business and politics? Or does English now to some extent already exist in a space that is independent of nations? These questions provide a very interesting focus from which to make comparisons with Latin.

This leads to a second aspect of the particular connection between Latin and world languages in general. Historically, a very evident association exists between "world languages" and "dead" languages. A lifespan of two thousand or three thousand years means more than the mere continuity of a continually unfolding linguistic system as is the case with, say, German, from the first written evidence of Old High German in the eighth century up to the present. Such continuity is part and parcel of all languages, whether world languages or local dialects, and cannot be measured in terms of evolutionary processes over small time periods. It makes sense to speak of a language's lifespan only when describing periods in which the language remains sufficiently stable to give it a firm identity and an ability to facilitate communication over time. For modern Germans, Old High German is a totally different language, despite its name, because no one can now understand it.

As it began its ascent to the status of world language, Latin was already set in its essential characteristics, and this circumstance enabled people to read texts that were hundreds of years old. In fact, one of the major accomplishments of Latin is that it makes available to us not only relatively modern literature, science, and historiography but also writings in these areas that are thousands of years old. This is true of all historical languages that may be termed world languages: ancient Greek, the literary language of neo-Babylonian, Sanskrit, and the written form of classical Chinese. The world empires of language extend beyond space across vast stretches of time. This is perhaps less perceptible now because over the past two centuries most classical world languages have been superseded, and their modern successors—whether English or the modern standardized form of Chinese—are still much too recent to permit historical analysis. On the other hand, present-day High Arabic can still give us some idea of the long-term continuity of world languages.

Historical experience, however, shows that an actual world language comes into existence only when it really belongs to the world at large and is not just an expansion of one linguistic community at the expense of other linguistic communities. One of the core arguments of this book is that Latin, like all other world languages of premodern times, attained this status only after it had detached its standards from those of a concrete linguistic community and had to some extent become a "dead" language. The fact that historical languages then developed that hewed to the norms of bygone times was a secondary factor; anything that does not change and evolve over five hundred years or more becomes historical for that reason alone. This tells us nothing, however, about the future of today's languages. The actual development of languages around the world is not comparable to the history of Latin if only because modern global information networks and our greater capacity for mobility mean that the communications processes that impinge on language are completely different from those in previous millennia. Nevertheless, the histories of all world languages indicate that the origins of "dead" languages point to the problem of standardization, which exists in all languages up to the present but was especially prominent in all great world languages of the past. In this respect, as I explain later, the development of English under the conditions of its world-language status leads to interesting comparisons with the development of Latin, although premature parallels should be avoided.

The history of Latin, as I write it, is based on the connections between the daily realities of life in which a language was used in various epochs and which formed the foundation upon which the well-known milestones of Europe's Latin tradition were built: the writings of the "classic" Roman writers Cicero and Virgil, the medieval collection of poems known as the *Carmina Burana*, the works of Erasmus of Rotterdam, and finally the presence of Latin in modern times. In addition, I examine Latin's relationships with other languages, not only other historical world languages and English, its successor, but also modern European cultural languages, like German, French, and (British) English, which share a common history with Latin that extends over several hundred and in some cases thousands of years. Of course, such a description can make no claims to completeness. All of the observations and hypotheses advanced here require intensive examination and testing against source material. They must also be compared with the re-

sults of research in other disciplines. However, this initial view from a distance is useful and even necessary in spite of its provisional nature because such an overview can, by comparing epochs, allow particular features to come to the fore that might remain hidden if one simply examined the details.

Historical Culture Languages of the World

Extinct, Dead, Fixed: Conceptual Considerations

What we observe with Latin, that a language is handed down only through instruction in school, where, viewed quantitatively, most of the extant texts come from this "afterlife," is not unique. As indicated in the previous section, this is rather the norm than the exception for historical world languages. A review of older and more recent written cultures throughout the world indicates that this also holds true for many regionally more limited languages. In almost all regions of the world in which a written culture maintained itself for centuries, there is often a language that is learned in school and preserves this cultural tradition even after that region has experienced changes in population. Sumerian, classical Chinese, Old Church Slavonic, and Sanskrit are prominent examples.

The emphasis in linguistics on the processes of oral communication and the general lack of interest in historical linguistic research may be to blame for the lack of comparative studies of these languages to date. With the exception of the commendable work by the Romance specialist Helmut Lüdtke,[5] most studies have been content to discover that this or that language has certain similarities to Latin. Nor do I undertake such a comparative study in these pages but largely limit myself to Latin itself and bring in other languages as appropriate. Nonetheless, it seems useful at the outset to consider the basic terms used to describe the phenomenon of historical culture languages and to examine a few languages along with Latin that may contribute to a rudimentary typology.

When people say that Latin is a "dead" language, they usually mean one or several different things and tend not to discriminate. They may mean, that (1) Latin is no longer used as a means of communication (i.e., has become extinct); (2) Latin is no one's mother tongue; it must be learned in school; and/or (3) Latin is a language that has ceased to

develop organically and has remained frozen in its classical form. But these are three very different phenomena. The turning point at which the developmental processes of the language came to a partial standstill occurred around the first century BCE (as Wilfried Stroh has recently stated), that is, at the time of the "classical" Roman authors like Cicero and Virgil. That is not to say, however, that Latin died out as the mother tongue of the Romans or that the language in any way became more limited in its scope of use. No one can doubt that Latin was the mother tongue of Tacitus and Pliny the Younger, who lived 150 years after that turning point. In addition, Latin continued in active use far beyond ancient times, when it had ceased to be anyone's mother tongue, and it has continued in use into the modern era and even into the present. When someone like Stroh declares that Latin "died" during the first century BCE and then claims that the end of Roman antiquity, the end of the Middle Ages, and the end of the eighteenth century should also be viewed as "deaths"—all of which Latin survived—this more than demonstrates the vitality of the language, which no one has yet managed to "kill off" definitively. However, as I demonstrate, these were not deaths but very different turning points in the history of the Latin language; moreover, Stroh has conflated phases of development that have nothing to do with each other.

Let us distinguish conceptually between these three outcomes, the first of which is designation as an "extinct" language. This really does not apply to Latin, which, unlike Etruscan or Hittite, continues to be used as a means of communication. The term *second language* covers the second outcome, that is, a language that is learned only later but is nonetheless indispensable in certain contexts. This correctly describes Latin, which was absolutely indispensable in certain situations during the Middle Ages and the early modern era in Europe. What is special about Latin is the fact that, during those times, it was no one's first language. I later discuss what it means for a language to be a "second language without a people."

But for Latin, the third outcome is the most important. We need to understand that, during most of its long history, the status of Latin corresponded neither to our concepts of a "natural language" nor to the current existence of Latin as a scholarly discipline. Although it is a second language that must be learned based on an immutable grammar, in practical use it is as alive as any other language. There is at present no

generally accepted term to describe this linguistic circumstance, which, as I discuss in detail later, was the status of all premodern world and culture languages from Sanskrit to classical Greek to Arabic. I suggest the term *fixing* for this circumstance, which is used in both the German-language and English-language literature in a less specific sense but has not yet been clearly defined. By fixing, I mean a circumstance in which key features of the language cease to evolve. Fixing in this sense has much in common with the more common term *codification*, but with one important difference. In the usual understanding of the word, codification determines only a standard that all active users of the language agree to collectively. Codification undoubtedly has a very stabilizing effect on language, as is evident in the many countries that have language academies (the role of the French Académie française is preeminent in this regard). However, the intent is not to set a language for all time but to describe the state of the language at a particular time. English words like "thither" and "ere" are considered old fashioned today and are restricted to very particular usages; a hundred years ago they were still in common use. By contrast, certain basic patterns in Latin have not changed in two thousand years, and, if one decided to fiddle around with them, they would immediately trigger a sense that this is no longer "Latin." Virtually by definition, it is inconceivable that the genitive of *amor* should be something other than *amoris* or that the genitive case would be replaced by other constructions. The language in which this actually took place is no longer called Latin but French.

The term *fixed* is more precise in some important respects than the concept of *dead* language. Even more than the term *codification*, it leaves open what part of the language has become unchangeable. A fixed language is therefore not a language that is closed and can no longer develop but a language in which several core components remain unchangeable, while other parts continue to evolve as in any other normal language. Otherwise, Latin could never have continued to be used in active communication because a completely standardized language lacks the flexibility needed for the everyday purposes of speaking and writing. The standardization of Latin and other comparable languages affected mainly the forms and syntactic rules that are the framework of grammar. Still, wherever Latin was in active use, new words were constantly being coined, existing meanings changed, and the phrases and expressions typical of recurrent social relations reinvented. Accordingly, as long

as it is a means of communication, a fixed language is simply a language with a fixed skeleton, within which dynamic linguistic processes may take place according to the same rules as in any other language. The Latin taught today in Latin classes throughout the world, which appears to be a completely standardized language, is merely the result of a rather strange perspective that does not take into account the active use of the language and views the translation of individual sentences or short texts as an exercise in scholarly construction. Wherever Latin is used as a means of communication, either oral or written, it immediately becomes clear that grammar alone is not enough. There is no such thing as completely standardized speech in any language.