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Orthography and Pronunciation

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Orthography

In comparison with medieval vernacular languages, the spelling of Medieval Latin was relatively stable and conservative. Divergences from Classical Latin practice cause few problems, once the main points are understood.

Until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the letter forms *i/j* and *u/v* were not used, as now, to distinguish vowels and consonants: *u* was normal for both the vowel /u/ and the consonant /v/; *v,* if used at all, is in initial place for both /u/ and /v/, e.g. *vnde.* Two *u's* are sometimes written as a *w,* as in *wlt* (= *uult* [*vult*]). Similarly, *j* is simply a positional variant of *i* (which may be both the vowel and the consonant): it is sometimes used initially (*juuenis* = *iuvenis*) and as the second element of *ii* (*filij* = *filii; vij* = *vii* [seven]).

Some phonetic changes were almost universal across Europe and were reflected in the orthography. Classical Latin *ae* (*æ*) and *oe* (ę), in which the hook is a vestigial *a,* e.g. *letus* = *laetus, puelle* = *puellae, celum* = *coelum.* Before a vowel, -*ti*- is usually spelled -*ci*-, e.g. *racio* = *ratio,* except after *s* and *x*, e.g. *mixtio.* Often Classical Latin *y* appears as *i,* e.g. *lira* = *lyra.*

Other common spelling oddities (by classical standards) reflect local pronunciations and traditions. Single consonants for double ones, especially in Italian-Latin, are frequent (*asumpti* = *assumpti*), and vice versa (*stillus* = *stilus* = *stylus*). In England, following Middle English practice, a double consonant may indicate a preceding short vowel, e.g. *commitor* = *comitor.* In French-Latin, *x* sometimes appears for *s* (*melox* = *melos*), and vice versa (*iusta* = *iuxta*). Loss of initial *h*- is common (*ac* = *hac, abet* = *habet*), and *h* is added where it is not present in Classical Latin (*honus* = *onus, hostium* = *ostium*), sometimes to indicate diaeresis (*trahicio* = *traicio*). Confusion in pretonic and posttonic vowels is common (*discendo* = *descendo, sepero* = *separo*), though scribes are usually careful with inflected endings. In languages in which *m* was a plosive, it is sometimes followed by *p* before another consonant (thus *ympnus* = *hymnus, yemps* = *hiems, dampnum* = damnum). Pronunciation of -*gn*-varied and the spellings reflected this; thus *ignis* appears as *innis* in an Italian manuscript, but as *ingnis* in English ones.

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In many countries, especially the Romance-speaking ones and England, *c* before *e* or *i* was assibilated to /s/, and this is frequently reflected in spellings, e.g. *cessio = sessio, cilicium = silicium; sc* was similarly assibilated, giving rise to such spellings as *silicet* (= *scilicet*), *sedula/cedula* (= *schedula*). One also finds z for *di* in words like *zabulus* (= *diabolus*) and *zeta* (= *dieta* = *diaeta*). The unvoicing of final *-d* is seen in many common forms: *haut* (= *haud*), set (= *sed*), and *nequit* (= *nequid,* and conversely *nequid* = *nequit*). In some languages, especially Spanish, there was little or no distinction between /v/ and /b/, with a resulting confusion in spelling between, for example, the perfect and future tenses (-*auit* [= -*avit*] and -*abit*).

There was also sometimes a tendency to interchange *ph* and *f* (*fisis* = *physis, phisiculare* = *fissiculare*), and before a back vowel (*a, o, u*) *c* often appears as *ch* or *k,* e.g. *charus* = *carus,* either after the model of French *charité* (charity) or by assimilation to Greek *charis* (hence *karissimi*). As *ct* was often simplified to *t,* we see *autor* (= *auctor*) and conversely *arctus* (= *artus*). Similar simplification accounts for *st* and *xt* for *xst* (*esto/exto* = *exsto*), and vice versa. We also commonly find *qu* for *quu* (*equs* = *equus,* which may also = *aequus*).

Some spelling variations arise from lexical associations or confusions. Thus *redditus* "income" (from *reddere*) is often spelled *reditus* (as if from *redire* and in our sense of "return on capital"). The spelling *actor* for *auctor* suggests a role for an author that is not simply that of "amplifier." The place-name element *Jer-* is often spelled *Hiero-* by association with the Greek prefix for "holy." The *Ih-* in *Ihesus* (*Jhesus*), however, arises from the spelling of *Jesus* in Greek capital letters (ΙΗΣΟΥΣ). Proper names are naturally liable to variation, e.g. *Hadrianus/Adrianus,* and biblical names usually appear in the form used in the Vulgate, e.g. *Dalida, Nabugodonosor, Salamon* for Delilah, Nebuchadnezzar, Solomon. Variants of classical names include *Jubiter* (= Juppiter), *Adriane* (= Ariadne), *Occianus* (= Oceanus).

Pronunciation

In 1528 Erasmus lamented that the divergence of Latin pronunciations across Europe was so wide that this once universal language was no longer mutually intelligible among nations. This situation points back to a growing divergence in pronunciations throughout the Middle Ages. The reconstruction of these pronunciations is difficult, and we can never be sure of more than a set of broad phonemic contrasts. We can be sure only that two common pronunciations are inappropriate: that of Classical Latin, and the practice outlined for ecclesiastical Latin in the *Liber usualis* of 1896.

The principal division is between those countries whose native languages were derived from Latin (Italy, Spain, Portugal, France) and the Germanic countries (Germany, Austria, England, and the Flemish area of the Netherlands). In the former, the Romance countries, there was a strong tendency to regard Latin as merely the "correct" formal spelling of the vernacular (just as we accept the spelling "night," despite its phonetic irrelevance); in this case the spelling would not be the basis for pronunciation. This has been argued for Spain before the reforms of Charlemagne in the late eighth century, but a series of French-Latin puns, first published in 1583, suggests that much the same was true for later France. Against this view, however, is the fact that from the fourth to the fourteenth century Latin verse was composed according to classical rules, which required the observation of long and short vowels and the ar-

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ticulation of all syllables; a knowledge of classical or quasi-classical pronunciation was necessary for the scansion of verse. We must accept that in schools, after the Carolingian reforms, more careful pronunciation must have been taught, running alongside a more informal style in spoken and sung Latin.

In Germanic countries, there was no question of perceiving Latin as the formal equivalent of the vernacular, and pronunciation was probably learned letter by letter. Much would depend, therefore, on the perception of the value of the letter, just as in modern English *i* may be perceived as the sound in "pin" or in "pine," or *gh* may be understood as it is pronounced in "tough" or in "through." In the Middle Ages, an English speaker would perceive *g* before a front vowel (e.g. *gero*) as /j/ or /dz/ (as in "judge"), but a German would see /g/ (as in "good"). An English speaker would see *gn* as /ɲ/ (as in "bunion"), and an Italian as /n/. An English speaker would see an /s/ in *bestia,* but a French speaker would, after French loss of *s* between *e* and *t* (as in *bête*), ignore it. Perceptions would also vary according to date, and thus, in England, lengthening in open syllables would mean that before 1200 the first *e* of *bene* would be short, but long after 1200. (A further puzzle in the pronunciation of Anglo-Latin is that from the Norman Conquest to the later fourteenth century instruction in school was frequently given in French, with the result that Latin may have been given a French flavor, though of course we do not know the quality of the French accents employed in the task. It is quite likely that Anglo-Latin /s/ for c and /dz/ for *g* before front vowels was the result of French influence.)

It would be impossible here to provide a chart of the value of all Latin vowels and consonants for the whole of Western Europe from the fourth to the fourteenth century. The reader is referred to the bibliography below. The types of evidence used in the reconstruction of pronunciation are as follows:

1. Disyllabic rhymes are very frequent in both quantitative and rhythmical verse from the eleventh century (see ch. CE) and are very useful for the pronunciation of consonants. They are less useful for vowels, as poets (often deliberately) rhymed long and short vowels.

2. Puns between Latin and English and French are found in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and can be used (with great caution) as evidence for earlier periods.

3. Loanwords from Latin in the vernacular reveal the way in which a Latin word was pronounced at the time of the borrowing, e.g. English *judicial* from *iudicialis.*

4. Frequent deviations from classical spelling, such as those listed above, provide good evidence; apparent spelling errors, unless mere slips of the pen, are also a good guide.

5. A knowledge of sound changes in the relevant vernaculars is useful. It is certain, for example, that the long vowels in fourteenth-century Anglo-Latin shared in the "Great Vowel Shift" of the fifteenth century, producing the sounds heard in modern legal Latin. Against this, one must always allow for the possibility of a reformed "classical" pronunciation.

6. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars frequently wrote about the pronunciation of Latin, often to criticize it. Their evidence can be used to reconstruct pronunciations of earlier times.

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N.B.: The present writer's remarks on pronunciation in "Latin Language," in *DMA* 7:350–95 **[CB10],** are very general, based mainly on England and France; he has also changed his mind on some points, particularly *gn* and *qu.*

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