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July Newsletter

Dear Friends of Lingua Latina,

We won’t pretend otherwise: this has been a summer of relentless heat, and the heatwave that has hung over us for most of the season has slowed everything to a languid crawl. We have two

pieces of news this month rather than our usual three – which, given that even thinking has felt like an effort in this weather, we're inclined to count as a small victory. We must confess we're already longing for the crisp mornings of autumn and that lovely "back to school" feeling: sharpened pencils, fresh notebooks, and the mind ready to work again. Until then, here's what we have managed to bring you.

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New Podcast Episode: *Bestiaria* — Sermons of Fur and Feathers

Episode 4 of *Latin with Marina and Marcus* is now live on Spotify and available directly or through our website – and it tackles a wonderful surprise. What was the most widely read book in medieval Europe after the Bible and the psalter? A book about animals: the *bestiarium*.

Marina and Marcus explore the strange and beautiful world of the medieval bestiary, which only looks like bad zoology. In truth, it isn't zoology at all – it is a collection of moral readings, built on the premise that God wrote two books: Scripture, made of words, and

Creation, made of things. Every creature is a word in a sentence; the world is a text; and the question the bestiary asks is never "what does this animal do?" but "what does it mean?" The lion that sleeps with its eyes open becomes Christ in the tomb; the eagle renewed in the sun becomes baptism. As Marina puts it, these creatures are "sermons made of fur and feathers."

You can find the podcast on Spotify by searching for "Latin with Marina and Marcus" or directly through our website.

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This Month's Guided Reading: Thomas the Archdeacon, *Historia Salonitana*

On the blog this month, we've published a guided reading from Thomas the Archdeacon's *Historia Salonitana*, the great chronicle of Split written by a man who spent almost his whole life inside Diocletian's Palace. Thomas of Split (c. 1200–1268) studied law in Bologna – where he once heard Francis of Assisi preach in the public square – and served as archdeacon of the cathedral chapter for nearly forty years.

The chapter we are reading (cap. XXXIII) is Thomas's account of Gargano de Arscindis, the *podestà* of Split, the salaried foreign magistrate whom Thomas championed as the cure for the city's factional bloodshed. It falls into two strikingly different halves. The first is a portrait of ideal government: Gargano fills the empty treasury without oppressing anyone, settles murderous feuds through intermarriage, and is heeded "like some saint sent by God." Then the light literally goes out – Thomas describes the total solar eclipse of 3 June 1239, with stars appearing at midday and crowds running through the streets crying that the world was ending, followed by a comet over Hungary and the first dismissed rumours of a people called the Tartars. Writing after 1242, Thomas knew exactly what was coming: this is the last calm chapter before the Mongol catastrophe.

The text offers a vivid window into thirteenth-century Dalmatian communal politics, the appeal of imported Italian institutions, and the medieval habit of reading celestial events as portents. You will find the full text, historical context, and detailed analysis in the Readings section of our website.

Thank you, as always, for your patience and your company through this sweltering season. Whether you're listening to the bestiary episode in the shade or puzzling through Thomas's Latin with a cold drink to hand, we are grateful to have you with us. Here is to cooler days ahead – see you in the autumn!

Warm regards,

Marina Schumann

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