Ad Fontes

Back to the Sources



The humanists went back to the spring to purify Latin, and found that Latin was no longer the source. This sheet collects the Latin from the episode, adds the vocabulary of books, printing and philology, and offers short texts by Petrarch and Lorenzo Valla with a handful of exercises. No translations are given for the texts: the notes are there to help you read them yourself. An answer key for the exercises is on the last page.

1 Words from the episode

Latin	Meaning	Note
ad fontes	to the sources	*ad* + accusative; *fons*, fontis *m.* 'spring'
salvete · **valete**	hello · goodbye	plural imperatives of *salvere* and *valere*; to one person *salve*, *vale*
elegantia, -ae *f.*	refinement, correct usage	Valla's *Elegantiae linguae Latinae*
lingua, -ae *f.*	tongue; language	*lingua Latina*, *Graeca*, *Hebraica*
donatio, -onis *f.*	gift, donation	*De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione*
(**editio**) **vulgata**	the common version	from *vulgare* 'to make common'; Jerome's Latin Bible
instrumentum, -i *n.*	instrument; legal document	Erasmus's title of 1516: *Novum Instrumentum*
testamentum, -i *n.*	will; covenant	*Novum Testamentum*
principium, -ii *n.*	beginning	*in principio* 'in the beginning'
verbum, -i *n.*	word	the Vulgate's rendering of Greek *logos*
sermo, -onis *m.*	speech, conversation	Erasmus's rendering of *logos* from 1519
collegium trilingue	college of three languages	*tri-* + *lingua*; founded at Louvain in 1517
festina lente	make haste slowly	imperative of *festinare*; *lente* 'slowly'
adagium, -ii *n.*	proverb	plural *adagia*; Erasmus's *Adagia*
scarabaeus, -i *m.*	beetle	*Scarabaeus aquilam quaerit*
Ciceronianus, -i *m.*	a Ciceronian	one who writes only as Cicero wrote; Erasmus's dialogue of 1528
clavis, -is *f.*	key	*Clavis Scripturae Sacrae*, Flacius's handbook of 1567
obscurus, -a, -um	dark; unknown	*Epistolae obscurorum virorum* 'Letters of Obscure Men'

Say it aloud

The acute accent marks the stressed syllable; it is a reading aid and not part of the spelling.

ad fóntes · salvéte · valéte · elegántiae · donátio, donatióne · vulgáta · instruméntum · in princípio érat vérbum · sérmo, sermónis · collégium trilíngue · festína lénte · adágia · scarabáeus áquilam quáerit · Ciceroniánus · clávis Scriptúrae Sácrae · epístolae obscurórum virórum

2 More humanist Latin

These words are not all in the episode, but they are the ones you meet most often in prefaces, title pages and scholars' letters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Book and press

liber, libri *m.*	book
codex, -icis *m.*	manuscript book
exemplar, -aris *n.*	copy, exemplar
folium, -ii *n.*	leaf
pagina, -ae *f.*	page
charta, -ae *f.*	paper
membrana, -ae *f.*	parchment
atramentum, -i *n.*	ink
calamus, -i *m.*	pen
typus, -i *m.*	type
prelum, -i *n.*	press
typographus, -i *m.*	printer
officina, -ae *f.*	workshop
bibliotheca, -ae *f.*	library

The philologist's work

legere	to read
scribere	to write
describere	to copy out
conferre	to compare, collate
emendare	to correct a text
vertere	to translate
interpretari	to explain; to translate
adnotare	to annotate
edere	to publish
excudere	to print
mendum, -i *n.*	error in a text
lectio, -onis *f.*	a reading
interpres, -etis *m.*	translator, interpreter
fides, -ei *f.*	reliability, trust

Language

vocabulum, -i *n.*	word, term
littera, -ae *f.*	letter; plural: literature
grammatica, -ae *f.*	grammar
Latinitas, -atis *f.*	good Latin style
eloquentia, -ae *f.*	eloquence
barbarus, -a, -um	barbarous, un-Latin
Latine, **Graece**, **Hebraice**	in Latin, Greek, Hebrew

School and learning

studium, -ii *n.*	study, zeal
schola, -ae *f.*	school
academia, -ae *f.*	academy
magister, -tri *m.*	teacher, master
discipulus, -i *m.*	pupil
doctus, -a, -um	learned
eruditio, -onis *f.*	learning
humanitas, -atis *f.*	culture, humane learning

Scripture

Scriptura, -ae *f.* Scripture · **Biblia**, -orum *n. pl.* the Bible (later -ae *f.*) · **Evangelium**, -ii *n.* Gospel · **psalmus**, -i *m.* psalm · **translatio**, -onis *f.* translation · **interpretatio**, -onis *f.* interpretation

3 What the texts say

One word and two mottoes

> *In principio erat verbum.* — John 1:1, Vulgate
> *In principio erat sermo.* — John 1:1, Erasmus (1519)
> *Festina lente.* — motto of Aldus Manutius
> *Scarabaeus aquilam quaerit.* — Erasmus, Adagia

Notes. *erat*: imperfect of *esse* · *festina*: imperative · *lente*: adverb of *lentus* 'slow' · *aquila*, -ae *f.* 'eagle' · *quaerere* 'to seek, to go after'.

Questions. (a) *Verbum* and *sermo* differ in gender. What else changes in the next verses if *sermo* replaces *verbum*? (b) What case is *aquilam*, and who is hunting whom?

Text 1 · Petrarch to Cicero, *Familiares* XXIV.3 (Verona, 1345)

The opening and the close of a letter to a man dead for fourteen centuries.

> *Franciscus Ciceroni suo salutem. Epistolas tuas diu multumque perquisitas atque ubi minime rebar inventas, avidissime perlegi. Audivi multa te dicentem, multa deplorantem, multa variantem, Marce Tulli* […].
>
> *Aeternum vale, mi Cicero.*
>
> *Apud superos, ad dexteram Athesis ripam, in civitate Verona Transpadanae Italiae, XVI Kalendas Quintiles, anno ab ortu Dei illius quem tu non noveras, MCCCXLV.*

Notes. *Franciscus Ciceroni suo salutem*: supply *dicit*; the standard opening of a Latin letter · *perquisitas … inventas*: participles agreeing with *epistolas* · *diu multumque* 'long and hard' · *ubi minime rebar* 'where I least expected'; *reri* 'to think' · *avidissime*: superlative adverb · *perlegere* 'to read through' · *te dicentem*: accusative with present participle after *audivi* · *deplorare* 'to lament' · *variare* 'to change (one's mind)' · *Marce Tulli*: vocative · *aeternum vale* 'farewell for ever' · *apud superos* 'among the living' · *Athesis*: the river Adige · *ripa* 'bank' · *XVI Kalendas Quintiles*: 16 June; *Quintilis* is the old name of July · *ortus*, -us *m.* 'birth' · *noveras*: pluperfect of *novisse* 'to know'.

Questions. (a) Which three things did Petrarch 'hear' Cicero doing? (b) Why does he write *apud superos*? (c) Whose birth dates the letter, and what does the relative clause say about Cicero? (d) What does it tell us that he uses Cicero's own letter formulas?

Text 2 · Lorenzo Valla, *Elegantiae linguae Latinae*, preface (c. 1441)

Valla on what survived the fall of Rome.

> *Magnum ergo Latini sermonis sacramentum est, magnum profecto numen* […]. *Nostra est Italia, nostra Gallia, nostra Hispania, Germania, Pannonia, Dalmatia, Illyricum, multaeque aliae nationes. Ibi namque Romanum imperium est ubicumque Romana lingua dominatur.*

Notes. *ergo* 'therefore' · *Latini sermonis*: genitive with *sacramentum* · *sacramentum* 'sacred bond, mystery' · *profecto* 'truly' · *numen*, -inis *n.* 'divine power' · *nostra est*: 'ours is' · *natio*, -onis *f.* 'people, nation' · *ibi … ubicumque* 'there … wherever' · *namque* 'for' · *dominari* 'to rule' (deponent).

Questions. (a) Which two nouns does Valla use for what the Latin language is? (b) *Nostra* is repeated three times. Who are 'we'? (c) Where, according to the last sentence, is the Roman empire? (d) Which of the names in the list lie on the eastern Adriatic?

4 Exercises

A · New names for old

Humanists translated their surnames into Latin or Greek. Match the scholar to the name he was born with.

1 Melanchthon	2 Faber Stapulensis	3 Georgius Agricola
4 Oecolampadius	5 Mercator	6 Flacius Illyricus

a de Kremer	b Vlačić	c Schwarzerd
d Lefèvre d'Étaples	e Bauer	f Huszgen

B · Would Cicero know the word?

Erasmus's Ciceronian refuses every word Cicero did not use. Sort these into words Cicero used and words that came later.

1 res publica	2 ecclesia	3 consul	4 episcopus	5 orator
6 monachus	7 senatus	8 typographus	9 amicitia	10 missa

C · Read the title

Five titles from the episode.

> *Elegantiae linguae Latinae*
> *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione*
> *Novum Instrumentum omne*
> *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*
> *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae*

1. Find the genitives in the first, fourth and fifth titles.
2. In Valla's second title, which noun do *credita* and *ementita* agree with, and why is it in the ablative?
3. *ementiri* means 'to fabricate'. What does the title claim about the Donation?
4. What do *novum* and *omne* agree with?

D · Ad fontes

Each preposition wants its case. Put the word in brackets into the right form.

1. *ad* _____ (fons, singular)
2. *ex* _____ (fons, plural)
3. *in* _____ (principium)
4. *de* _____ (lingua Latina)
5. *cum* _____ (amici)
6. *sine* _____ (libri)

E · A letter to the dead

Write to an ancient author as Petrarch did: a greeting on the model of *Franciscus Ciceroni suo salutem*, two sentences of your own, *vale*, and a line giving your place and date, beginning *Apud superos* …

5 Further reading

Alastair Hamilton, "Humanists and the Bible," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* · Luka Ilić, *Theologian of Sin and Grace: The Process of Radicalization in the Theology of Matthias Flacius Illyricus* · Peter Mack, *Renaissance Argument: Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic* (1993) · James D. Tracy, "Ad Fontes: The Humanist Understanding of Scripture as Nourishment for the Soul". The full list of sources is in the episode description.

Answer key

A 1c · 2d · 3e · 4f · 5a · 6b.

B Cicero: *res publica*, *consul*, *orator*, *senatus*, *amicitia* · later: *ecclesia*, *episcopus*, *monachus*, *typographus*, *missa*.

C 1 *linguae Latinae*; *obscurorum virorum*; *Scripturae Sacrae* · 2 *donatione*; it depends on *de* · 3 that it was wrongly believed and forged · 4 *instrumentum*.

D 1 fontem · 2 fontibus · 3 principio · 4 lingua Latina · 5 amicis · 6 libris.

One word and two mottoes (a) the pronouns and participles referring to it become masculine · (b) accusative; the beetle hunts the eagle.

Text 1 (a) saying, lamenting and changing his mind · (b) he is among the living and Cicero among the dead · (c) the birth of Christ, the God 'whom you did not know' · (d) he treats Cicero as a correspondent, not as an authority.

Text 2 (a) *sacramentum* and *numen* · (b) the Romans, meaning all who use Latin · (c) wherever the Roman language rules · (d) Dalmatia and Illyricum.