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### The Beginnings of the Latin World

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[See table of contents](#)

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## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE LATIN WORLD

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The quest for the beginnings of the Latin world, and by Latin world I mean those regions of the globe where Latin in one of its various forms serves as the common speech, is or ought to be a matter of unusual interest in a country, one third of whose inhabitants use latter-day Latin as their mother tongue. Of course, in a way, the search is easy and can soon reach its goal. One could say, quite baldly, that it all started with Rome without adding anything further. And it is true that the earliest historical records for the use of Latin occur in a relatively small and compact area about half way down the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy, from where it set out on the triumphant march which was to carry it into all the non-Germanic portions of western Europe and thence across the seven seas into all the continents save only Australia. (And, even there, it was [in the Duke of Wellington's words] a damn near-run thing: La Perouse reached Botany Bay just a few hours after Governor Phillip).

But while Rome is the beginning of the Latin world, the historian will hardly be content to let the matter rest there. He remembers that Rome was not always great and that there was nothing necessarily inevitable about the triumph of her language. Rome was not the only ancient city to attain more than local significance and to acquire a large dependent empire. Yet whereas the languages of Babylon and Susa played their part and then, as the poet says, became one with Nineveh and Tyre, passing into limbo until resurrected by Grotefend and Rawlinson in the nineteenth century, the language of Rome never ceased to be spoken and continually made fresh conquests. The phenomenon deserves more than passing notice.

Obviously it was the spread of Latin over Italy that paved the way for the wider dissemination. Had Latin not succeeded in penetrating into every corner of Vergil's Saturnian land, it would have remained at most a regional language, possibly even a non-literary patois; it might even have died out altogether. Essentially our task is to account for the Latinisation of Italy.

But this is a task more simple to enunciate than to discharge. The process by which a language is submerged or survives in a given area is often far from easy to explain and may even be quite complicated. How are we to account for the rapid and virtually total eclipse of Latin itself in Roman Britain after the year 400 A.D.? What reasons explain the amazing tenacity with which Basque has maintained

itself (against the encroachments of Latin, be it noted) throughout the centuries?

In ancient Italy Latin had no easy royal road to supremacy. Its rivals were many, and they were powerful and firmly rooted. They included Greek and Etruscan, Oscan and Umbrian, Messapic and Ligurian: and sooner or later Latin absorbed them all. No simple "frontier hypothesis" à la Turner will explain this astonishing outcome; for Latin had to make its way amongst peoples who were neither backward nor primitive. Curiously enough, its most stubborn opponent was neither Greek, the world language, nor Etruscan, the vehicle of an unquestionably higher *Kultur*. It was Oscan, a language whose stamina and greater power to resist may be due to its wide geographical extension. Oscan was spoken throughout Southern Italy (except in the "heel" and in the Greek coastal settlements) and even in a part of Sicily as well; moreover the dialects of Central Italy were closely related to it. So far as is known, it had no literature to speak of; yet, even so, its system of orthography was exact, not to say meticulous. Evidently Oscan was a vehicle for diplomatic and commercial intercourse. True, it is related to Latin, and, although this is disputed, it may even belong to the same sub-group of Indo-European. But the philologists are agreed that the two languages had parted company before ever they entered Italy; and certainly, after their arrival in the peninsula, they had gone their separate ways. Hence outward resemblances between the two languages are neither obvious nor numerous, so that it may well be doubted whether their respective speakers were aware of the relationship. For that matter, even if they had been aware of it, it does not follow that thereby assimilation of the one by the other would have been eased; the knowledge that English and German are related does not promote the absorption of one by the other today. All things considered, the ultimate triumph of Latin against such languages as Greek, Etruscan and Oscan may well be reckoned surprising.

The usual view is that it was a combination of Roman military capacity and Roman political sagacity that won the primacy for Latin. And, broadly speaking, this is true. Nevertheless, as thus formulated, the statement is perhaps a little misleading insofar as it implies that the spread of Latin was a direct and immediate consequence of victories won on the field of battle or of treaties imposed upon Rome's allies in Italy.

It is obvious that success in war does not automatically entail denationalisation of the defeated. It is no more true of language than it is of trade that it invariably follows the flag. Russia does not use a Scandinavian, nor Bulgaria a Mongolian tongue, and in Britain the English language survived 1066 and all that. Nevertheless it is true that arms can produce victories elsewhere than on the battlefield.

Of Rome's military activities in Italy I would stress two whose contribution to the propagation of Latin was both great and direct. First, there was her despatch of Latin colonies to various strategic points throughout the peninsula, and secondly, there was her draconic subjugation in 211 B.C. of Capua, the spiritual capital of the Oscan-speaking world.

The Latin colonies were urban settlements which Rome brought into being after successful warfaring and usually linked with herself by means of arterial highways, peopling them with soldier-settlers. Their primary purpose, as Machiavelli quite properly emphasized, was to consolidate territory that had been brought within Rome's sphere of influence, protecting it against hostile neighbours and policing it against internal uprisings. Yet concurrently they must also have served as romanizing agents. For, although the Latin colonies, technically, were independent urban commonwealths, each of them having been established as a sovereign associate of Rome with a citizen body which was not entirely Roman in origin and which did not possess the Roman citizenship, they must nevertheless have maintained always close, and sometimes intimate, associations with Rome, since it was she who ultimately guaranteed their survival in the midst of a resentful and possibly hostile indigenous population. Of particular importance was their use of Latin; inevitably they used it, partly because the bulk of their settlers had originally come from Rome and knew it as their mother tongue, and partly because their remaining settlers had need of it as a *lingua franca*. Clearly the role of the Latin colonies in the latinisation of Italy must have been both immediate and marked. But no less clearly it was a role that was limited by the number of these settlements that Rome was either able or willing to found. She might not always be able herself to find the necessary manpower; or she might be reluctant to exacerbate Italian feelings by planting an excessive number. Then, too, not all of the colonies were equally good as latinizing agents since some of them had difficulty in maintaining themselves: the evidence suggests that (in Oscan-speaking districts particularly) colonies, so far from latinizing the nearby natives, tended rather to lose their own Latin character. Within these limitations, however, it is true that colonisation promoted latinisation.

The defection and subsequent recovery and punishment of Capua at the end of the third century B.C. had something to do with the decline of Oscan. Capua was the big urban centre, the municipal metropolis from which Oscan influences radiated: the suppression of its civic institutions and its reduction to a very despised and dependent status after its short-lived attempt to support Hannibal dealt Oscan a blow whose effects were swift in coming. Less than a quarter of a century after Hannibal's defeat neighbouring Cumae, possibly with the intention of emphasizing her complete dissociation from her dis-

graced sister city, petitioned Rome for permission to substitute Latin for Oscan as her official language. Exaggeration, however, should be avoided. Although Capua's misfortune may have weakened, it certainly did not extinguish Oscan. The overwhelming majority of the surviving documents in Oscan come from Campania, many of them actually from Capua, and most of them are later than 211 B.C. Clearly Oscan survived in Campania right down to the Christian era; at Pompeii, in fact, it had not quite died out when Vesuvius buried the town on 24 August, A.D. 79.

If it is right to direct attention to the military, it is no less apposite to mention the political factors that contributed to the spread of Latin. Many historians, needless to say, have studied and stressed them, and the part Rome's organization of Italy played in romanizing the peninsula has often received its due and even more than its due.

Clearly the application of the *divide et impera* principle, the shrewd gradation of privileges accorded by Rome throughout Italy, the incorporation, during the two centuries between 381 B.C. and 188 B.C., of whole communities (or of certain classes within communities) into the Roman state (with either the full or the partial citizenship), the growing tendency after 188 B.C. for Rome to interfere in the local internal affairs of the "independent" Italian allies, the distribution of Roman state domain in allotments to individual Romans in various parts of Italy, — all of these things can fairly be described as political practices and they all helped to spread the knowledge, and use, of Latin. Not that, therefore, we should uncritically accept the picture, drawn by some scholars, of an Italy accepting, more or less contentedly, Roman political leadership. Unless human nature was very different then from what it is today, Roman supremacy must have irked the Italians profoundly from the very outset: that it irked them from the second century B.C. on, when Rome's wars tended to be wars for the conquest of a Mediterranean empire rather than wars for the defence of Italy, is of course universally admitted. Apologists of Rome emphasize the fact that the Italian allies of Rome were, juristically speaking, sovereign states from whom Rome demanded no tribute or taxes. But the Italian allies themselves must have viewed the matter very differently. They must have been acutely conscious of the mortifying fact that, whatever the legal technicality, they were really much more like subjects than allies. A state that cannot decide its own foreign policy can hardly be regarded as sovereign; and a state that is obliged to supply troops for campaigns not of its own choosing and then pay the costs of their maintenance can only doubtfully be regarded as non-tributary. Nor could the Italians have acquiesced cheerfully in the Roman claim to interfere anywhere at all in Italy in order to preserve the *maiestas populi Romani*, since otherwise (so

the cool, but specious, argument ran) the security of Italy as a whole might be undermined.

Italian resentment of Rome's hegemony may not have taken the form of bitter and determined opposition to Rome's language, possibly because Rome was wise enough to refrain from trying to force the issue: she did not seek to impose Latin contrary to the wishes of the locals. That is very far from saying, however, that the Italians were resigned, much less predisposed to its adoption. Nevertheless one can readily admit that Rome's political methods in Italy did contribute, effectively and directly, to the emergence of Latin as the sole language of the peninsula.

But the military and political activities of Rome are not the whole story. There were still other factors, not illegal it is true but at least extra legal even though it may not be very easy to identify, particularize and appraise them. If Latin did ultimately replace the motley variety of languages and dialects spoken in the Italian peninsula, an important reason for it was that Rome and the divers peoples of Italy, in Sir Winston Churchill's wartime phrase, got more and more mixed up together, — and by no means merely at the official and governmental level. The intermingling of Romans and Italians was going on at the personal and private level too. That is why, even before the year 300 B.C., prefects with plenipotentiary powers had had to be sent to Capua, Cumae, Antium and elsewhere to serve as international arbitrators for settling the difficulties which could so easily arise between individuals belonging to different states and living under different systems of law.

There must, of course, have been mutual contacts between the Italians themselves, as well as between Italians and Romans. Inter-course between the speakers of Greek, Etruscan and the other languages was widespread and continuous, and yet not one of these languages managed to assert its supremacy: it was only Latin that succeeded in doing so. The explanation is that the interpenetration of Italians with other Italians was on a smaller scale than the interpenetration of Italians with Romans. If the Italians tended to get more involved with the Romans than with one another, then it was due in part to something recently emphasized by a Danish scholar: viz. the populousness and the ubiquitousness of the Romans; in part to the effect that Rome's military and political predominance had in directing and channelling Italian minds and thoughts towards herself; and in part to official discouragement by Rome of intra-Italian activities. The Italians became accustomed to look to Rome and to behave accordingly. We find them, for example, asking Rome to arbitrate in quarrels between themselves. Rome was not the capital of Italy, but she did become the social, and even the economic focus of Italy.

What happened in literature is suggestive in this connection. Before the year 200 B.C. or thereabouts, apparently none of the languages of Italy, with the notable exception of Greek, could boast of a literature. When at the very end of the third century B.C. the Muse with winged tread made her way amongst Romulus' warlike breed, Rome already bestrode the peninsula like a colossus, and it was her language that was used for fledgeling literary endeavours. Yet her own eminent sons showed little aptitude for letters: Roman aristocrats wielded the sword far more effectively than the pen. Actually it was Italians not Romans who brought Latin literature into being. Ennius, the father of Latin poetry, apparently had Messapic for his mother tongue, and he could also speak Greek and Oscan: yet, so far as we know, Latin was the only language he wrote in. The first dramas of any consequence in Latin came from the pen of a man whose native tongue was probably Umbrian. Lucilius, the creator of satire, came from a Latin colony and hence was probably Latin-speaking from birth, but the district he came from spoke Oscan. The father of Latin prose, Cato, was also Latin-speaking from birth (he came from Tusculum), but it is significant that his most important, although unfortunately not his surviving, work dealt with the peoples of Italy and the people of Rome and their mutual interaction, without any mention of great Roman heroes.

It may be that it had taken the Italians many long years to realize that their destiny was tied up irrevocably and ineluctably with that of Rome. The Romans themselves had probably had extremely limited horizons until about 300 B.C., by which time their wars with the Samnites had set them thinking in pan-Italic terms. But finally the conviction had grown that an Italy without Rome was as unthinkable as a Rome without Italy, and the conviction gradually strengthened and took hold. Hannibal was in large measure responsible. For although, even before his day, the contemporary evidence of Fabius Pictor (as preserved in Polybius' roster of Italy's fighting forces in 225 B.C.) indicates a feeling of solidarity amongst the Italians when faced with an external threat, such a tendency on their part to unite could conceivably have been very short-lived had the impulse to it been nothing more than ephemeral and usually local Gallic raids. It was the action of Hannibal in spreading alarm and despondency throughout the Italian peninsula for fifteen gruelling years that caused Italian opinion to crystallize. Henceforth the Italians might not like Rome, they might even be sullenly jealous of her domination, but they could never forget that she and they were tied to one another. For weal or woe they were involved with her and she with them.

In the military sphere, Italy's inseparability from Rome resulted in the Italians participating, no matter how reluctantly, in the wars which won Rome her Mediterranean empire. Admittedly they served

in their own formations, and Livy's off-hand remarks about Oscan-speaking units opposing Hannibal proves what could confidently have been expected: viz. that throughout the Mediterranean campaigns of the second century B.C. the various Italian contingents no more used Latin than the Turkish units in Korea used English. Nevertheless, when we read of a Paelignian outfit distinguishing itself in the fighting in Macedonia, we immediately get a vivid sense of battlefield camaraderie: and the free and easy association of the soldiers in the polyglot army must have accelerated the spread of Latin, since it was the language of the high command and the only language of universal application.

In the civilian sphere, a similar situation obtained. Italians who were not Roman citizens presumably did not share, in any official capacity, in the life and administration of Rome's Mediterranean empire. But in unofficial capacities they went to the provinces in large numbers. Between them, Hatzfeld, Frank and Gabba have demonstrated that a considerable proportion of the business men and traders (or should one say carpet-baggers?) who crowded into the provinces in the second century B.C. came from the Oscan-speaking and other districts of Italy: by the provincials, and even by Greek-using ancient writers, they were all alike described, indiscriminately if inaccurately, as Romans. Naturally, for Italians thus setting out to make their fortunes in Rome's provinces, a knowledge of Latin was just as essential as is, for example, a knowledge of English for a Welshman migrating overseas today. No doubt for their day-to-day business contacts these Italian merchants also picked up the language of the provincials among whom they traded; and it is likely that, wherever there was a group of them from the same district of Italy, they used their original mother-tongue among themselves, just as highlanders on Cape Breton Island might use the Gaelic when *en famille* so to speak. The significant thing, however, is that for matters directly affecting their livelihood these Italians had accepted Latin as their language.

Naturally it was, above all, in Italy itself that the affairs of Italians and Romans became more and more inextricably intermingled.

From prehistoric times traffic had been going on amongst them. Besides the archaeological evidence, which Ryberg and others have assembled, one can mention the *Via Salaria* which carried the trade in salt from the mouth of the Tiber by way of Rome to the other side of the peninsula. There are likewise allusions in Livy and elsewhere to exchanges of goods and services between Campania and Rome in very early times, and I am not thinking merely of the book-peddling Sibyl from Cumae. Campania, along with industrialized Etruria, must have been a major factor in Rome's war effort against



Hannibal. It was to facilitate trade with the Italians that Rome issued the silver *denarius*, her most celebrated coin, for the first time (in 187 B.C. or thereabouts).

Commerce flourished also, as well as trade: we get a glimpse of it in Livy's picture of Roman financiers using Latin and Italian agents in order to circumvent Roman laws against usury. In this matter of trade and commerce one should not overlook the role of the great roads. True, as has already been suggested, these highways were constructed primarily to serve military ends. But simultaneously they could and did serve other purposes as well. And all roads led to Rome.

Social relationships likewise played their part. Inter-marriage had certainly been going on from a very early period: Livy can describe Romans and Italians as *adfinitatibus iuncti*. There was, for instance, the wealthy Samnite, Otacilius, who sent his daughter to Rome to marry into the Roman governing class, well before the year 354 B.C. (the year of the earliest recorded official contact between Samnites and Romans).

In the heyday of the Roman Republic in the second century B.C. limits on the extension of the Roman *ius commercii* and *ius conubii* may have placed some obstacles in the way of complete freedom of trade and inter-marriage. And such exclusiveness may not have been entirely one-sided: we are told that endogamy was the normal rule of at least one of the Italian tribes right down to the days of the Empire. On the other hand we are also told that some Italian communities were allowed to intermarry, just as they were allowed to trade, with Rome rather than with other Italian peoples.

The Roman institution of *clientela* was especially important in bringing Italians into close and intimate relations with Romans. For the great aristocratic Roman houses did not serve as patrons only to Romans: their clients also included large numbers of Italians. In fact the Italians became themselves quite adept in the practice of *clientela*. Allusion has already been made to the disposition of Rome to incorporate a whole class of local bigwigs from some Italian community into her own citizen body: the so-called Campanian Knights are perhaps the best known instance, but they are not the only one. The well-to-do Italian bourgeoisie, once it received Roman citizenship, showed a tendency to take up residence in Rome, especially after the tribute from the new Mediterranean provinces began to transform it into an opulent and monumental city. Simultaneously, however, they maintained estates in, and very close and constant connections with, their districts of origin, where they counted numerous clients: the family of Pompey the Great, with its extensive holdings in Picenum, will immediately spring to mind. The effect of all this in blending Italians and Romans may well be imagined.

Nor were trade and social connections the only things to bring Italians and Romans into close contact. Charity, and even crime, contributed to the fusion. Livy records occasions when the Romans helped Italian communities sorely stricken by natural calamities, such as floods or epidemics. As for crime, one thinks of the brigandage which had increased enormously with the growth in the second century B.C. of absentee-owned, slave-operated *latifundia*: clearly its control and suppression was a collective problem of public order throughout the peninsula as a whole.

Then again there was the tendency for the Italians simply to take things for granted. A casual allusion in Appian reveals that they, no less than Roman citizens, enjoyed the usufruct of the Roman state domain. Possibly it was a right that they had simply assumed, just as they seem to have assumed the right of migrating freely from one part of peninsular Italy to another. But they certainly seem to have enjoyed it.

They even seem to have become actively involved in Rome's domestic politics: more than once we hear of Roman political leaders bringing their Italian *clientes*, friends and supporters into the city, manifestly with a view to influencing proceedings in the assembly (precisely how is not certain. The Italians assuredly did not have the legal right to vote in a Roman assembly).

The ultimate common origin of the Romans and most Italians had bequeathed unto them all some sort of common heritage. At all times their respective ways of life showed similarities. Italians in general and not just the Romans alone had the habit of sending out colonies. Oscan nomenclature strongly resembled Roman. Documents such as those from Gubbio in Umbria and Agnone in Samnium show that the religious attitudes of at least some of the Italians were basically not unlike those of the Romans in the days before all Italy became permeated with Hellenic conceptions of deity.

This sharing of some common practices no doubt conditioned the various peoples of Italy, including the Romans, for the ultimate merging of their identities. It is, however, improbable that we ought to attach undue importance to it, at any rate for the period before the second century B.C. It is obvious that even in the early period the Romans were very conscious of their kinship with the Latins (as well they might be seeing that they all spoke Latin), and it is no less obvious that they regarded the Sabines as somehow connected with themselves, even though they had at one time had their own non-Latin language. But it seems unlikely that the Romans from the outset entertained similar feelings for the other inhabitants of Italy: in the case of the Etruscans, at least, for all their borrowings from them in both material and spiritual spheres, they surely must have

been acutely aware of differences, and it would not be surprising if they found certain features of the Etruscan civilisation positively repugnant, its demon-filled eschatology for instance.

By the second century B.C., however, the inhabitants of the peninsula had apparently come to feel some sense of ethnic relationship. According to Polybius the Oscan-speaking Mamertines of Sicily were already claiming kinship with the Romans in the third century. Velleius Paterculus, who may of course be merely reflecting an opinion which had become fashionable by A.D. 30, makes the Italians say that they are men of the same race and blood as the Romans; and according to Appian, writing about a century after Velleius, Tiberius Gracchus agreed that the Italians were kinsmen of the Romans. Certainly it is reasonable to believe that by the second century B.C. the Romans must have felt much more closely akin to the Italian who was not a Roman citizen than to, say, a Levantine freedman who was. But, even in the second century B.C. and indeed in the first as well, the force of local patriotism remained very strong everywhere in Italy; and we might be justified in thinking that any feeling of relationship that existed by then was due not so much to a knowledge of common origins as to the revelation of common practices and common outlook, a revelation which the increasingly close association of Romans and Italians helped spread. On the whole it is probably true to say that what was chiefly responsible for the way that the whole, everyday existence of the Italians became, as it were, blurred and muddled with that of the Romans was geographical proximity: constant and enduring physical contact led to progressive assimilation. This may be not only the simplest, but also the truest, explanation.

In any case, whatever the reason or reasons, it is certain that a kind of interfusion was continually in process, and as time went on this made it more and more difficult to render unto the Italians the things that were Italian and unto the Romans the things that were Roman. By the beginning of the last century B.C. the convergence had proceeded so far that although Roman legal ingenuity was still capable of unravelling and disentangling the Roman and Italian strains in the amalgam that made up the population of Italy, it had become difficult in some ways to distinguish many Italians from Romans except in law. By then the latinisation of the whole peninsula had made great strides: the language was even making inroads on small and remote communities near the very heart and centre of Oscan-speaking Italy, to judge from the long inscription found at Lucanian Bantia.

And it was precisely at this juncture that the Romans, either through arrogance or selfishness or both, attempted to draw clear-cut distinctions and to differentiate sharply between themselves and their fellow-inhabitants of Italy. The immediate consequence was the out-

break, late in the year 91 B.C., of the Social War, in which the Italian allies, or more accurately those from Oscan districts, were not so much seeking to cut the shackles that bound them to Rome, but on the contrary were rather demanding that the process of their own assimilation, instead of having a halt called to it, should be carried through to its logical conclusion. It is noteworthy that so many of them had by now adopted Latin that many of the coins issued by the insurgents bore Latin legends rather than Oscan. It took less than twelve months of fighting for the Romans to realize how misguided they had been in trying to put back the clock. Already in 90 B.C. they began enacting that series of measures which were to make all inhabitants of peninsular Italy legally indistinguishable from Roman citizens. Therewith they sounded the death-knell of the non-Latin languages of Italy. After the Social War Latin became the official tongue of all the Italian tribes and communities: as a consequence Oscan and Umbrian, Etruscan and Messapic and the rest soon died out. The native languages must have lingered on for a while in the more remote country districts, just as Wendish lingers on amongst the Lusatian Sorbs of Germany. But such survivals were freaks, the Greek of Naples being the exception to prove the rule. And even these remaining non-Latin pockets of Italian population, no matter how diversified and variegated they were in some respects (e.g. in municipal constitutions), became quickly and thoroughly Roman in outlook, even if not for the time being in language. How quickly and how thoroughly is revealed by the famous remark of Cicero, who as a youth had himself fought in the Social War: he avers that every Italian has two *patriae*, the one local, — the place where he was born; and the other legal, — Rome, the *communis patria* of all. A few years later Caesar Augustus made himself master of the Roman state: his claim that he did so with the support of *tota Italia* suggests that by then Rome and Italy had really become one.

Thus Rome had unified the peninsula linguistically and sentimentally as well as militarily and politically; and the stage was set for that transplantation of Latin that was to take it eventually from the banks of the Tiber to the banks of the Rhine and the Danube, the Amazon and the Plata, the Congo and the Mississippi, — and last but not least to the banks of our own mighty St. Lawrence.