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Making Latin Concrete: Strategies for Teaching Latin Through Material Culture

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Making Latin Concrete

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We decided to address the issue of incorporating archaeology and material culture into classes devoted to Latin literature last spring, while Patrick was teaching Latin and Lynne was teaching Roman Civilization. Both of us were confronted with the danger of losing the interest of students who once had a burning desire to learn about the ancient world. Our aim is to offer up some suggestions for ways that, through collaboration between specialists in philology, history, and archaeology, we can keep the Classical world dynamic and relevant.

With this goal in mind, we have prepared four different lesson plans, three of which have been included in the pages following this article. Two of the lessons, on Cicero's *pro Caelio* and Caesar's *de Bello Gallico*, use material culture to breathe life back into texts whose practical value is often lost precisely because they have been standards in the educational canon for so long. The other lessons are meant to demonstrate how two textual media, inscriptions and manuscripts, can be used to demonstrate the connections between the material world of the Romans while highlighting the Latin language.

We will begin with Cicero. The *pro Caelio* is a standard text in the AP Latin program and is often required reading for Latin Lit-

erature courses. It stands as a deftly crafted work of rhetoric and persuasion, written in language that lends itself to introductory studies of prose rhythm and style. Despite the obvious value of such a text, reading a rhetorical speech is often considered a chore by students who struggle to grasp Cicero's argument or struggle to stay awake. In these cases, a look at the social and archaeological aspects of Cicero's speech can be helpful, encouraging students to take a step back and look at the bigger picture of the lifestyles of rich and famous Romans during the Late Republic.

In fact, Caelius' relation to the world of elite Roman society is an integral part of Cicero's speech. Much of the first half of the speech is Cicero's *argumentum e victu* or argument drawn from one's way of life. He addresses one of the informal charges the prosecutors raised against Caelius – that of an overly-sumptuous lifestyle. The society that Cicero describes will sound familiar to anyone who has ever perused a tabloid or caught an episode of *Entertainment Tonight*. It is one of wealthy celebrities and jet-set socialites who inhabited the same sought-after neighborhood on the Palatine Hill, frequented the same pleasure-gardens, and traveled south to the resort at Baiae whenever the mood struck them. Cicero vividly describes this world

in his speech, but there are also a number of archaeological finds that help to bring this description to life.

The lesson is designed to give students a visual background to the world of the *pro Caelio*. The format of the lesson has been designed so that it can be completed in a single class period followed by an optional writing assignment which can be completed outside of class. The first section is a short presentation introducing some of the material culture associated with the elite lifestyle of the Late Republican period, which Cicero presents in his defense.

Cicero emphasizes that Caelius moved into the Palatine neighborhood to be near his mentor and his clients, but this also threw him in the path of the seductive widow Clodia who was living in the ancestral house of Quintus Metellus. Early reconstructions of the neighborhood relied on textual evidence alone. However excavations on the Palatine have uncovered traces of Late Republican residences which have helped to flesh out our knowledge of this area. The houses of Cicero and Clodia are thought to have been located on the Germalus part of the hill crowded in with temples and commemorative monuments. Caelius' rented apartment would have been part of the Clodian insula or apartment block. Many of the houses shared party walls, a fact of which Cicero reminds us when he reminisces on hearing the cries of a dying Metellus through the walls of his own house. And, although some of these houses were known to have been luxurious precursors to the Palatine's imperial palaces, many were somewhat mod-

est, mostly due to the lack of available space on the hill.

One type of elite yet spatially efficient adornment of these houses was colorful interior wall paintings. In fact, wall-paintings provide the best visual evidence for another sign of luxurious living described by Cicero – the pleasure garden. Clodia had pleasure gardens along the Tiber River, which she later refused to sell to Cicero – perhaps there were some lingering hard feelings after this speech. Cicero also refers a number of times to the resort at Baiae. The remains of lakeside villas and spa-style thermal baths, long covered by the waters of the Bay of Naples, have recently been rediscovered through geophysical prospection. Finally, two pleasure barges from the reign of the emperor Caligula, were uncovered in Lake Nemi. These carefully excavated ancient yachts reveal just how sumptuous the life of a wealthy Roman could be.

After a short introduction, students can relate the presented material culture to the content of the *pro Caelio*. Small and large group discussions can result in short synthetic papers or branch out into research projects on various aspects of Roman material culture like houses, resorts, baths, and gardens.

Now for a less standard type of text – inscriptions. Latin inscriptions include the carving of texts on stone, metal, bricks, tiles and even glass. Hundreds of thousands of such texts are known with hundreds of new texts discovered every year. It is easy to forget that the written word was prolifically displayed all over the

Roman world. Inscriptions adorned tombstones, monuments, and mile-markers. Walls were covered with graffiti, advertisements, and political propaganda. Even building materials like bricks and lead pipes proudly displayed makers-marks or donor's names.

These stone documents can seem intimidating due to their specialized use of the Latin language, frequent abbreviations, and unfamiliar formulae. However, there are a number of inscriptions that can be made approachable with a little assistance. Any student can easily be introduced to the epigraphist's art, and, through the marriage of text and object, they will gain a grander view of the ancient world.

This lesson is designed to introduce students to the world of Latin epigraphy. The first part of the lesson involves a background presentation by the instructor. Here students can learn about what sorts of objects were inscribed, the sculptor's craft, the types of inscriptions like dedications, decrees, and epitaphs as well as idiosyncrasies like numerals, titles and the 21 letter alphabet – remember: there is no J in the Latin alphabet.

Students can then read their own inscription as an epigraphist would, making sure to remember that only after the primary object is examined, should a transliteration and a working text of the inscription be attempted. We have provided transliterations for five easy inscriptions – these include dedications from the Arch of Titus and thermal baths from Pompeii, a mile-marker from the Via Domitia in France, the dedication from the Temple of Antoninus

Pius and Faustina and the grave marker of a Roman soldier in Britain.

The final product of this activity can range from a creative story for students at the Middle School level, to a researched history of the object for upper level students. Another optional result of this lesson is for the student to create his or her own inscription. They could compose their own dedication or commemoration or, something suitable for this time of year (i.e. Halloween), design a Roman-style gravestone complete with epitaph in Latin. This may be the easiest Latin composition assignment a student will ever encounter! The lesson as a whole provides a good opportunity to discuss the importance of the context of monuments as well as the perspectives of the sculptor, the dedicator, and the viewer. It is also a good time to talk about the difference between a carved text and a written text.

Catullus is one of the most frequently studied Latin authors at all levels, whether for AP Latin or the collegiate classroom. The textual history of Catullus being what it is, an interesting new possibility is opened for the teacher of Catullus: supplementing the study of the author with the study of paleography and the manuscript tradition.

Why does Catullus particularly lend himself to study through the lens of paleography? Remembering the tale of Benvenuto Campaneani and his discovery of the lone manuscript of Catullus “under a bushel” and the prompt disappearance of this manuscript serves as

a prime example of the tenuousness of the transmission of ancient texts to the modern reader. Had Campesani not discovered that manuscript under the bushel (whether he actually did or not is irrelevant), it is quite likely that Catullus, that widely read AP Latin author, would have disappeared entirely, save a few passing references. No Clodia, no *passer*, no *odi et amo*.

So fragile is the tradition that one of the two original copies of Campesani's manuscript preserves a complaint of an earlier copyist: it is better to have copied a poor copy than to have no copy at all. Such is all too frequently the case with ancient authors. Here we present a sample of the ways in which the textual tradition can be used to connect students to the Latin they are reading by presenting it concretely in the form of paper, quill and ink.

At least three potential projects present themselves to the new student of the manuscript tradition. First, one can provide students with examples of the various scripts of the ancient and medieval worlds, and then charge them with fashioning their own quill or reed pen with the final objective of creating their own manuscript in one of these scripts. Secondly, one can add to the above by having their students attempt to transcribe an ancient text from a photograph of a manuscript, whether from the Internet or another source. Finally, as another level of complexity to the basic premise of copying an ancient text, the student could create their own manuscript of a text and then introduce a level of damage to the text; the damaged manuscript would then be passed

on to a peer who would attempt to transcribe and identify the text, and, depending on the level of the class in question, create their own "edition" from the manuscript. To ground the project in the study of Catullus, it is possible to use a problematic text from that author, such as *carmen* 107 (especially lines 7-8), as an exemplar text for the students' "edition". Such projects lend themselves to completion over the course of a term, whether a semester or quarter, and can easily form the backbone of an extended class project.

Having provided some suggestions for the study of Catullus via paleography, we will now pass to another of the great Latin authors frequently read at the intermediate level. Caesar's *Gallic War*, once the food on which generations of students of Latin were nourished, has undergone a decline in popularity as a school text for beginning to intermediate students of Latin. Although the reasons for Caesar's decline as a school text are manifold, perhaps the most prominent and oft cited is that he is "boring".

What then can the instructor do to help alleviate the admitted monotony of the text? By approaching selections of the *Gallic War* via material culture, it is hoped that the students will be able to connect with the text on a level beyond the repetition of ablative absolutes and result clauses. Moreover, rather than attempting to tackle large tracts of the text in an unbroken sequence, the selection of excerpts of a few chapters on specific topics can also help alleviate the boredom some might say is inherent in the work's nature as memoir. Happily,

Caesar's is a text which lends itself quite well to such an approach in select passages such as the various "ethnographies" of the barbarian tribes, passing mentions of Caesar's army and its great battles or his engineering exploits.

Admittedly, many of these various approaches to the materiality of the *Gallic War* do not necessarily lend themselves to hands-on projects for younger students (it is quite difficult to build one's own *ballista*, for example!), but they do lend themselves toward the researching of the material aspects of the text, and many of the resources for such an investigation are available online. Further, some of the passages for suggested reading will likely pique the interest of even those disinterested in the text, for example the discussion of human sacrifice at Book 6, chapter 16.

For this particular subject, the "lesson plans" provided are more ideas for directed readings in the *Gallic War* that lend themselves to study via material culture and methods of engaging specific selections from the text through projects or research papers. Exemplary of such an approach is Book 4, chapter 17, Caesar's famous description of the bridging of the Rhine. Much scholarly ink of the 19th century has been spilled and many models built in the search for understanding what Caesar's bridge actually looked like. Because of the relative brevity of the passage (about a page in length) and its straightforward syntax, the general thrust of the description should be easily understood. The project would be, however, for the student to engage with the text's description of the physical object and modern scholar-

ship's various interpretations of the text. Said project could be accomplished by a simple research paper, or by the building of a model or drawing of a plan of the student's interpretation of Caesar's description, or a combination of both.

Similar projects can be undertaken for other passages like the siege of Alesia or Avaricum, which lend themselves particularly well to the creation by the student of scale models, or poster presentations. Students could also undertake to research and report on the equipment of the Roman legionary of Caesar's army. This project is aided by numerous, easily accessible images of reconstructions of the equipment of the Roman legionary, as well as many introductory-level books on the subject.

We have seen thus far how teachers at all levels might supplement the reading of Latin texts by the application of aspects of material culture to the text at hand. By approaching the study of Latin with an eye towards material culture at least two goals can be reached: reminding the student of the reality and physicality of the Roman world they view through the lens of Latin texts, and, perhaps even more importantly, providing some renewed sense of relevance for a discipline that can easily seem disconnected from the modern world.

All too often students at an introductory or intermediate level fall prey to viewing the study of Latin as a simple mechanical process of translation, divorced from any context or any thought of the people who wrote the texts found on their page. But these texts were

written by real men who were participating in real events; they did not just spring up on the student's page at the urging of a publisher bent on causing mental anguish.

The highlighting of material culture pertaining to a given text can serve to create a link between the student and that text. Cicero, Caecilius, Clodia and Catullus, too will seem far less distant and aloof to the student who can draw a parallel between their ancient cosmopolitan lifestyle and the jet-set lives of Paris Hilton or George Clooney. It is also important that students not forget that for the average Roman on the streets of Rome, the city was alive with text: with advertisements, with pictures, with slogans, just like Times Square is alive with neon and billboards. The journey of Catullus' *Carmina* across two millennia from his wax tablets to the printed page of an AP Latin textbook can be made more understandable, if the student has an idea of the labor invested in the publication of the written word in an era

before the printing press. The lives and experiences of Caesar's legionaries on the march are little different than those of the modern soldier, save a few creature comforts.

By approaching the study of Latin at all levels with an eye towards the reality and physicality of the lives and events contained within the dusty texts of the classics, it is hoped that students of our ever more modern world will come to a deeper understanding of what they read in Latin and see some relevance for their own lives in the study of people and events so distant in time from themselves. We hope that the ideas provided in this presentation can help teachers at all levels make Latin concrete.

[We would like to thank Prof. Holt Parker, in whose paleography seminar many of the ideas contained within this paper found root and who provided a large number of the electronic resources found on your handout.]

The new Ohio Classical Conference website <http://www.xavier.edu/OCC>

Thanks to Ed Cueva and Xavier University, the Ohio Classical Conference now has a new website at <http://www.xavier.edu/OCC>. This site includes information regarding upcoming annual meetings, OCC scholarships, and an archive of prior issues of *Humanitas* in PDF format. Please consult the membership and email directories and add or correct your information as appropriate. Thanks!

Making Latin Concrete Handout

Roman Jet-Set Society in Cicero's Pro Caelio

Project Goal: to explore what the elite society described in the *Pro Caelio* looked like and how Cicero uses it in his defense of Caelius.

Directions:

Part I (in class)

Short power-point presentation introducing students to displays of wealth by the elite Romans like Clodia in the 1st C BC like the neighborhood on the Palatine Hill, pleasure-gardens, pleasure-barges, and Baiae.

Part II (in class)

Small group or large group discussion. (These questions can also be discussed in small groups as a lead-in to large group discussion.) Students should have their textbook at hand in order to be able to cite the text in their discussion. It may also be useful for them to have a printout of the power-point presentation so that they can refer to specific images. Address the following questions (or questions like them):

1. In chapter 18, Cicero states that was important for Caelius to live on the Palatine Hill. What reasons does he give? According to Cicero what are the positive and negative outcomes of his move? Considering the location of the neighborhood, the reality of its crowded and cramped spaces, and the location of the Palatine hill in Rome, what are some possible unstated advantages or disadvantages to living there?
2. How does Caelius' elite status bear on Cicero's defense? After getting a picture of what that life looked like, do you think that Cicero's argument is sound? What is Cicero's opinion of Clodia's lifestyle? How does he justify Caelius' participation in similar types of activities? Why does he treat the two differently?
3. Keeping in mind that Cicero also lived on the Palatine Hill, that he tried (and failed) to purchase Clodia's gardens by the Tiber, and that he was a novus homo, how do you think he really felt about wealthy society?
4. In chapters 33-34, Cicero addresses Clodia in the guise of her ancestor Caecus. At the end of chapter 34, he mentions two examples of famous Claudian architectural projects. What are they? How do they exemplify the difference between how the two generations publicly displayed their wealth?
5. Can you think of any modern examples of high profile legal cases where an elite lifestyle and conspicuous displays of wealth affected the defense, prosecution, and outcome of the case?

Part III - (optional) Take Home Assignment

Any of the above questions can be turned into a short (1-2 page) paper assignment.

Other related topics could be more research oriented, perhaps leading to papers with in-class presentations on topics like Roman houses in and out of the city, Roman resorts and baths (like those that are discussed in the poison section of the defense), and Roman gardens, etc...

Reading Latin Inscriptions

Project Goal: To show that many Latin inscriptions can be easily read and to explore how they can illuminate various aspects of Roman culture.

Part I: Background presentation on Inscriptions

An in-class presentation giving background on Latin inscriptions, what kinds of inscriptions there are, how an epigraphist approaches a text, and what kind of information we can learn about Roman culture from inscriptions.

Part II: Learn to be an Epigraphist

Step 1: Describe the stone and the inscriptions

Is the inscription on an object or a monument? What do the letters look like? How are the words separated? How much other decoration is there and what does it look like?

Step 2: Transcribe the letters

Write out the letters of the inscription. Write out any abbreviated words or phrases completely.

Step 3: Guess at the date.

Look at the style of lettering or use of particular phrases (the cheat sheet will be helpful here!) Is a political figure mentioned? Can you guess? Describe how you arrived at your conclusion.

Step 4: Translate your inscription!

Most Latin inscriptions are rather formulaic. They usually begin in the nominative or dative case. Names, especially of prominent political figures, are often followed by a list of honorary titles. Use the cheat sheet to help with abbreviations or unfamiliar words.

Step 5: Present your inscription to the rest of the class.

Part III: Take-Home Assignment

Option 1: Write a history of the monument.

Answer any of the following questions that apply:

What kind of inscription is it? [Epitaph, Dedicatory, Public Works, Honorary, etc...]

Who dedicated it? To whom was it dedicated?

What does the monument commemorate? What was the purpose of the inscription?

Who would have seen the inscription? Who could have read it?

Why do you think they abbreviated more in some inscriptions than others?

or

Option 2: Write your own inscription using the cheat sheet. Choose any of the types of monuments that were presented in class. Make your inscription personal to you.

Sample Inscriptions for Class Activity

Inscription 1: The arch of Titus

SENATUS | POPULUSQUE ROMANUS | DIVO TITO DIVI VESPANIANI F | VESPAN-
IANO AUGUSTO

Inscription 2: Baths of Marcus Crassus Frugi from Pompeii
(*CIL* X.1063)

THERMAE | M CRASSI FRUGI | AQUA MARINA ET BALN | AQUA DULCI IANUARI-
US L

Inscription 3: Milestone from Via Domitia. [This road the first Roman road built in Gaul ca. 118 BC by Gn. Domitius Ahenobarbus, and it ran from Toulouse to Bordeaux.]
(*CIL* XVII.223)

IMP CAESAR | DIVI HADRIAN F | T AELIUS HADRIAN | ANTONIN AUG PIUS | PONT
MAX TRIB POES | VIII IMP II COS IIII | P P RESTITUIT | VII

Inscription 4: Dedication on the temple of Antoninus Pius and Faustina

DIVO ANTONINO ET | DIVAE FAUSTINAE EX S C

Inscription 5: Tombstone of Marcus Favonius Facilis, a soldier from Colchester

M FAVON M F POL FACIL|LIS LEG XX VERECUND|US ET NOVICIUS LIB
POSU|ERUNT H S E

Some Helpful Websites

The American Society of Greek and Latin Epigraphy

<http://asgle.classics.unc.edu>

Introduction to Greek and Latin Epigraphy: A Beginner's Guide

<http://odur.let.rug.nl/~vannijf/epigraphy1.htm>

Pyrrha's Roman Pages

<http://www.pyrrha.demon.co.uk/>

Inscription Cheat Sheet

Some Roman Pranomina

G	Gaius
M	Marcus
P	Publius
Q	Quintus
T	Titus

Abbreviations

BALN	balneum	bath
COS	consul	yearly Roman magistrate
D M	dis manibus	to the sprits of the dead
D S P	de sua pecunia	at their own expense
F	filius / filia	son / daughter
H S E	hic situs / sita est	he / she lies here
IMP	imperator	imperial title or acclaimed victor
L	libertus / liberta	freedman / freedwoman
P P	pater patriae	father of his country
PONT MAX	pontifex maximus	chief Roman priest
S C	senatus consulto	by decree of the Senate
S T T L	sic tibi terra levis	may the earth lie lightly upon you
TRIB POTES	tribunicia potestas	held tribunician power
V S L M	votum solvit libens merito	fulfilled his vow willingly and deservedly

Common Words and Phrases

annorum	of years
ex testamento	according to the provisions of the will
fecit	made
senatus populusque romanus	The Senate and the Roman People
restituit	restored
thermae	hot baths
vivus sibi fecit	had it made for him/herself while still living
vixit annis / annos plus minus	lived ____ years more or less

Catullus Taught Through Paleography

1. Concept:

- I. For any Latin class above the intermediate level, especially those whose text is Catullus.
- II. Because of the tenuous nature of the Catullan manuscript tradition, he provides a good starting point from which to introduce paleography.
- III. The teaching of paleography and the manuscript tradition reminds students of the fact that a text is (or was) a physical object and that the text of an author that appears in a textbook did not magically appear on the page, and further, for more advanced classes, serves as an illustration of the reasons why critical texts are supplied with *apparatus critici*.

2. Lesson Plan

IV. Introduction to paleography.

- a. Definition of paleography.
- b. Definition of relevant terminology (e.g. minuscule/majuscule, serif, ligature, textura/formata, codex, folio, recto/verso, Tironian notes, etc.).

V. (Chronological) Introduction to various Latin scripts (rustic capitals, uncial, insular, Merovingian, Carolingian, Beneventan, Gothic, etc.).

- a. Depending on the level of students, this can be introduced simply by images of the various scripts or supplemented with a more intensive introduction to the script (e.g. with descriptions of distinctive letters within that script and their ductus).

VI. Introduction to textual analysis (for more advanced classes only).

- a. Recension, examination, conjecture.
- b. Genealogical approach of Lachmann.

VII. The physical text.

- a. Look at photographs (digital or otherwise) of MSS of various ancient authors.
 - i. A rustic capital text or uncial text is a good starting point for ease of reading.
 1. The Vergilius Romanus (Vat. lat. 3225 and 3867), digital images of which can easily be found by doing a Google image search for “Vergilius Romanus” (results, e.g. <http://vergil.classics.upenn.edu/images/images.html>) .
 - b. Draw attention to illumination.
 - c. If resources permit, have students interact with a facsimile of a MS; particularly good way to avoid the tendency inherent in the digital world to attempt to “zoom in” electronically and forces students to look at a text in nearly the same format as a scribe copying the text would have seen it.

VIII. Application via project(s).

- a. Students transcribe a text from an image and create a diplomatic text.
 - i. Using Catullus 107 if an image of a MS can be found.

- b. Students make their own quills or reed pens and transcribe a modern printed text into an script of their choice.
- c. Above, with students passing their manuscripts to other students for transcription.
- d. As a short exercise for advanced students, provide them with a copy of a poem from a critical edition (e.g. OCT or Teubner) and then provide them with photographs of MSS of the passage in question and see if they can place the various unknown MSS into the tradition by variant readings offered (and identified by the apparatus criticus of the critical edition).

3. Annotated collection of Internet resources for the teaching of paleography:

- a. <http://medievalwriting.50megs.com/writing.htm>
- b. <http://www.unigre.urbe.it/pubblicazioni/lasala/WEB/INDICE.HTM>
- c. <http://image.ox.ac.uk/list?collection=bodleian>
- d. <http://www.ualberta.ca/~sreimer/ms-course.htm>
- e. <http://www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/subjects/mss/paleobib.html>
- i. a bibliography of paleography and codicology
- f. <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Scriptorium/>
- g. <http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/5615/quill/english.html>
- h. <http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk/index.shtml>
- i. <http://www.nd.edu/~medvllib/scripts.html>

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