

The Evolution of the Modern Classical Language Textbook

The importance of studying the history of pedagogy lies in the fact that the salient features of today's teaching techniques can best be appreciated by contrasting them with the outdated (or in some instance, potentially still useful) ones of the past. Since learning depends in large part on textbooks, the development of textbooks is a key component of the history of pedagogy.

All Classicists by necessity are intimately familiar with introductory textbooks of Greek and Latin, both due to the experience of initially having learned from them and because of the necessity of teaching elementary courses on the subjects to university and high school students. Debate continues today about the relative virtues of the grammar-translation approach vis-à-vis the reading method, and about which individual textbook or series is most conducive toward learning. Today's abundance of introductory Greek and Latin textbooks and the occasional passion with which some are defended and others castigated mask the fundamental similarities that unite all these books and which separate them from earlier generations of textbooks. Although the change is largely forgotten today, a radical transformation in Greek and Latin textbooks took place during the course of the 19th century.

At the beginning of that period introductory textbooks differed little from ones that had been produced by the earliest printing presses of Europe, or even from the ones penned by Donatus and Priscian. William Lily's *Short Introduction of Grammar / Brevisissima Institutio* remained in print from the reign of Henry VIII (who mandated its use throughout England) to the 19th century. Such books today would generally be called grammars but they were then utilized as textbooks, which is to say that students learned the rudiments of Greek and Latin from them largely by memorizing paradigms. Endowed with this rote memorization they immediately

moved on to translation of ancient literary works with only the help of dictionaries. Little attempt was made to present Greek and Latin grammar in a more easily digestible format.

By the turn of the 20th century, however, Greek and Latin textbooks had assumed a form that is virtually indistinguishable from that which prevails today. The criteria that define the modern introductory textbook of Greek or Latin (and set it at such a remove from the textbooks of modern languages) are the following:

- 1) Chapters organized around a grammar lesson and including vocabulary and translation exercises
- 2) Standardized orthography for Latin featuring macrons to mark all long vowels (but no other diacritical marks) and the use of the letter v but not j
- 3) A dictionary toward the end of the book
- 4) A pronunciation guide based on the restored classical system, with considerable divergence on certain points
- 5) Possible orientation toward later translation of a certain work, usually Caesar or Cicero

Changes in textbook design occurred simultaneously with new insights into the particulars of the ancient pronunciation of Latin and Greek. Whereas earlier textbooks had largely ignored pronunciation, textbooks now began to offer extensive advice about the correct way to orally produce words. Erasmus, of course, had written about these matters much earlier, but his advice was ignored until supplemented by the linguistic research of the mid-19th century. The focus of this paper is on English-medium textbooks of Greek and Latin, but comparison to textbooks written in other European tongues reveals that the general trends transcend language differences.

Greek and Latin textbooks were far from scarce commodities even in times when book ownership and production were much lower than today. The creation of numerous textbooks on the same subject was prompted by the successive authors' claim (as often revealed in the preface) that their new book was an antidote to the stale, frustrating textbooks of the prior generation.

Combing through old textbooks not only reveals the progress that has been made (or rather, was made during the 19th century) in pedagogical tools, but also reveals potentially useful resources for today's classroom, including Charles François Lhomond's (1727-94) *De Viris Illustribus Urbis Romae a Romulo ad Augustum*, an adaption of Roman historians and one of the first examples of ancient texts adapted for beginners, once used extensively not only in France but also in the United States.

Analysis of myriad textbooks ranging in date from the late 18th to the early 20th century reveals the gradual evolution of the modern Classical language textbook on both sides of the Atlantic, including such details as when women begin to appear as authors. The changes were not instantaneous, nor were all of them unopposed, but the end result has endured to this day relatively unchanged.