

## *Latin—the elegant Tongue*

**by Igor Gazdik**

IN OUR time of automatic factories, long-distance communications, astronautics, computers, and effective education, one may ask whether the study of Latin is still justified. There are a number of arguments discouraging further studies of Latin. It is said to be a dead language, previously spoken by people living under entirely different social, cultural, and economic conditions. A language which was geographically limited and can no longer be creative. However, no language is completely dead as long as there are people who learn and use it.

But why do they? Have the Latin, and the present worlds anything in common? The answer must be sought in the origin of the language and the history of its users.

The only interesting thing about a handful of herdsmen, once living in the estuary of the Tiber was that they were bellicose while having a knack for organization. Thus, they fought their neighbours, even the highly civilized Etruscans, and expanded. After having founded their city, Rome, the expansion went on beyond the limits of Latium, as their area was called. They conquered the Greeks and their possessions went farther into Asia and Africa and finally colonised large parts of the three continents.

However, their expansion was not only a barbarous drive after new colonies. The Romans spread their influence, language, religion, and culture, while respecting their vassals. The Romans learned from them, adopted and adapted their culture and their gods. Remember, that the Greeks knew everything at that time. They systemized science and philosophy, medicine, arts, and carried out research for the sake of knowledge alone, founded cities, trade relations, and legislation. But they had to give up for the Roman strategy and art of organization. The Romans, in turn, absorbed the Greek culture and further developed it. Thanks to this, monuments of architecture, sculpture, and engineering survived up to our era. Successful conquests abroad and events at home gave rise to rich and stylish literature and rhetorics, and required effective legislation.

Comparing this brief outline to our world, we find appalling similarities. As before, there is a strive, although less elegant, to subjugate the world under one, or a few, ruling centres. Hand in hand with this go experiments with introducing very few universal languages. The world grows smaller with the development of science and a need for unification is felt by everybody, at the same time as effective organization is appreciated in all walks of life. Moreover, Latin books, or, for instance, the inscriptions on the walls of Pompeii disclose deeply moving common traces in human character and sentiments which persist until today, only in different disguise and with different cast. The continuity in the development of mankind provides a safe base for learning from the virtues and the mishaps of the past. The elegant Latin language is an important link in the chain of historical development.

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The influence of the language did not follow the decline of the Roman Empire. While, on the one hand, some Latin dialects instituted themselves as separate languages, ranging from Portuguese to Romanian, the classical Latin continued to be used, in a simplified form, by the Church and by the medieval scholars. Thus, it is not only historical studies which require a sound knowledge of Latin nowadays. Everybody studying philology, botany, zoology, biology,

medicine, or philosophy, everybody striving after profound education in humanities, and everybody wishing to acquire a good writing or rhetoric style, finds the knowledge of Latin to be indispensable.

Finally, to meet the demands of the modern world, no matter whether in science, sports, or law, presupposes the use of at least a limited Latin vocabulary. The opening paragraph of this article may serve as an example. So, the 'to be or not to be' of Latin in the curricula of schools can unhesitatingly be answered in affirmative.