

Latein ist tot, es lebe Latein. By WILFRIED STROH. Berlin: List Press, 2007. Pp. 415. Cloth, €18.00. ISBN 978-3-471-78829-5.

A book of some 400 pages on a dead language! Who would ever expect that? Yet the present volume gives an enormous amount of information, presented with the zeal and enthusiasm of an advocate for a good, and by no means yet lost, cause.

Stroh (hereafter S.) is emeritus professor of Klassische Philologie at the University of Munich. He is the author of the entry "Lebendiges Latein" in *Der Neue Pauly*, 15/1 (2001) 92–9, and one of the most renowned advocates of living Latin in Germany, indeed in all Europe, backed by an enormous *Wissen* of the history of the language covering close to 3000 years. This learning is underscored by a delightful, flowing style and a constantly recurring sense of humor. Not every book written in German is easy to read, even for a native, but this one carries the reader along. No chapter is excessively long, and each is broken into sub-sections, so that the reader is never fatigued by a particular subject or argument. But I must add one *caveat*; much that S. says will mean little (or nothing) to a reader who does not know modern Germany well, indeed the Germany of the last several centuries. For more than a century, certainly from the period of Friedrich August Wolf around the beginning of the 19th century until the advent of Nationalsozialism, Germany was at the forefront of classical studies. The reader must have some background in this period to fully appreciate many of S.'s comments.

For ancient times S. focuses above all on Cicero and Vergil. It was Cicero's greatest achievement to show that all Greek philosophical thought could be expressed in Latin, enabling the latter to become a world language. Indeed, after Cicero Latin essentially did not change for centuries. In this sense it died, but it never faded away. The Roman empire kept it alive, even though by no means all its inhabitants spoke the language; the emperor Septimius Severus' sister, for example, spoke Punic. In the almost two millennia that followed, the roster of great men and women who kept Latin alive, who continued to show that it was the language of international importance, is long and illustrious: Lactantius, Augustine, Hieronymus, Charlemagne and Alcuin, Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim and Hildegard of Bingen, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Celtis and Hutten, Luther and Melanchthon, Comenius, Herder and Goethe, von Humboldt and Mommsen. These are only a select few.

Occasionally the reader may disagree, factually or emotionally, with what S. says. On p. 123, he states that Carthage was the third largest city in the empire after Rome and Antioch. Yet Alexandria is usually ranked second behind Rome. On p. 285, he ranks Richard Heinze as the greatest German Latinist of the 20th century. Eduard Norden would certainly get considerable support. And, in a few places, one detects a certain animus towards those on this side of the Atlantic. On p. 244, S. writes: "Wir sollten das Überhandnehmen der Wissenschaftssprache Englisch nicht kampflos hinnehmen, sondern zumindest auf eine Pluralität der Sprachen drängen. Dass nach Französisch nun gerade Englisch an die Stelle des alten Latein gerückt ist, war jedenfalls ein echter Rückschritt."ⁱ Why? English comes much closer to rivaling Latin in its worldwide impact than French ever did. On p. 280, we read "So lernt man in Amerika heute Latein in der Regel erst auf der Universität, dort zum Teil aber mit vorzüglichen Ergebnissen."ⁱⁱ This ignores the many flourishing secondary schools, where often problems arise not from lack of students, but from lack of teachers.

But these are minor points, which by no means detract from the great value and enthusiasm of this book. Latin may by many standards be dead, but it proves to be a lively corpse, and has so proven throughout the centuries. "Denn es gehört auch heute noch zu den grössten geistigen Freuden, in der Sprache der Römer zu kommunizieren, zu sprechen, zu schreiben—und immer wieder auch zu singen" (p. 292).ⁱⁱⁱ This from one of the founders of the LVDI LATINI in Bavaria. "Latein ist seit zweitausend Jahren 'tot' und wurde dennoch zu allen Zeiten wie eine lebendige Sprache gepflegt.... Ich bin überzeugt, dass einmal auch die Stunde kommen wird, wo man Latein nicht mehr als eine 'tote' Sprache, sondern wieder als die Königen der Fremdsprachen unterrichten wird" (pp. 306–7).^{iv}

In recent years S. has continued the good fight. Two fresh articles deserve mention: "Latein als Weltsprache—das Erbe der Grösse," in E. Stein-Hölkeskamp and K.-J. Hölkeskamp, eds., *Erinnerungsorte der Antike. Die römische Welt* (Munich, 2006) 185–201, and "Lateinstadt München," his farewell address on the occasion of his retirement, in *Gymnasium* 113 (2006) 117–50. In the latter, he remarks that Munich was twice the leading Latin city in the world, Rome of course excepted: in 1559, when Herzog Albrecht invited the Jesuits to the city, and in 1900, when the first fascicle of the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* appeared.

But we must conclude with the volume under discussion. "Lector" inquam "plaudere, sententiae nobiles doctaeque tibi cordi sint." Tolle, lege!

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ⁱ We should not accept the advance of the scientific language English without resistance, but at the least should push for a number of languages. That now after French precisely English has moved into the place of old Latin was certainly a real step backwards.

ⁱⁱ Now in America Latin is usually first learned in the university, but there in part with remarkable results.

ⁱⁱⁱ Even today it is one of the greatest intellectual joys to communicate in the language of the Romans, to speak, to write—and again and again even to sing.

^{iv} Latin has been "dead" for two thousand years and nonetheless was at all times cultivated as a living language.... I am convinced that some day the hour will also come, in which Latin will no longer be taught as a "dead" language, but again as the queen of foreign languages.