

BOOK REVIEW

Classical Latin: An Introductory Course. By J. C. MCKEOWN. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010. Pp. xx + 421. Paper, \$39.95. 978-0-87220-851-3. *Classical Latin: An Introductory Course Workbook*. By J. C. MCKEOWN. Paper, \$19.95. ISBN 978-1-60384-206-8. Two-volume set: Paper, \$53.95. ISBN 978-1-60384-207-5.

Nowadays it is not uncommon to find a fresh iteration of the Wheelock–LaFleur with new gadgetry that some like and others wish never had been added. Like another James Bond film, Wheelock seems to go on and on, with continued box office success but seemingly less satisfied viewers.

Jim McKeown's *Classical Latin* is not new in approach but is rich in fresh material, presenting itself as a competitor to the Wheelock. I say this without having taught out if it, as this reviewer's teaching schedule has not permitted as much. Poring over the book, however, reveals much about McKeown's approach. He does not subscribe to the Oxbridge methodology of reading inference, a method that developed in the nineteenth century, in part borne out of Maximilian Berlitz' success in establishing inductive language schools in New England. Berlitz' approach is, if only indirectly, the forerunner of books such as Robert Ball's *Reading Classical Latin: A Reasonable Approach*, Hans H. Ørberg's *Lingua Latina* or the *Cambridge Latin* and *Oxford Latin* series.

I have appended, below, a slightly abbreviated version of McKeown's table of contents. McKeown's order of presentation seems to me judicious, as each chapter builds nicely upon the previous one, more or less weaving back and forth from verbs to nouns until reaching adjectives. This text also comes to the perfect system slightly quicker than does the Wheelock–LaFleur. McKeown wends his way through numerous pronouns, before moving on to participles and infinitives. His schema of 28 chapters is designed to be done at the rate of one per week for a regularly paced class or double speed for an intensive course, as McKeown explains on p. xiii of the prefatory material. This structure is, in my view, superior to any other textbook on the market.

The book seems to me to achieve basically all that it sets out to do. Grammar is emphasized and reinforced by vigorous exercises designed to strengthen

vocabulary while mastering both parsing and translating. McKeown accomplishes this goal in what he calls *Prolusiones*, or introductory “practice drills,” which are in spirit (but not content) modeled on the practice combat of Roman gladiators. The sentences are generally good and challenging, but not unintelligibly so. Exercises allow students to use some of the details that the book includes, such as a wide range of case usage (e.g. genitive of characteristic, explained on p. 178).

There are also readings drawn from ancient texts in each chapter (*Lege, Intellege*), though these are not for translating per se but rather designed for reading and understanding, which one might regard as a tip of the hat to the inductive approach. Not having taught out of the book puts me at a disadvantage here, for my own inclination would have been to offer shorter passages from the ancient texts and require precise translations with directed parsing. That said, however, I think McKeown’s method could, and probably does, work well, too. Instead of requiring translation, he asks the students questions such as, on p. 241, which has on it Caesar’s *BG* 2.20, “What were the two factors which most impeded preparations for battle?” et sim.

The centerpiece of each chapter contains detailed explanations of grammar, straight-up vocabulary, and various readings such as those described above as well as sections entitled “Ars Poetica” and “Aurea Dicta.” The first set of these quotations from ancient authors includes translations of each, while the second requires the student to render them. Both approaches seem to me good, as such maxims are interesting enough for the student to try to decode and memorable enough to stay in the student’s mind. A useful appendix expands upon these for the eager student or teacher. Except for one encompassing indeclinable words, the other appendices are predictable, offering a review of forms and vocabulary.

Each chapter also includes a section entitled *Lusus*, which essentially serves an extension of the vocabulary and includes words for recognition along with *etymologiae antiquae*. These consist of fascinating explanations of various tidbits of Roman culture, from place names to body parts to family members. To take one example (321), a nepos is explained as a grandchild because he or she is born (*natus, -a*) after (*post*) one’s children. Each chapter also includes a selection, in English, drawn from an ancient author, touching upon the life of the Romans.

I should add that for those who like workbooks there is one that accompanies the text. While I do not like workbooks, I can see that much of what is in this book could be useful—save perhaps the section entitled *Verba Rescribe*, which is a word game requiring the student to rearrange letters to form, for example, a pronoun. I could add that both book and workbook are rather bulky in design, but

that would be nitpicking. In short, the only thing I do not like about the book really lies outside of the text proper, i.e. the workbook; yet even that could prove useful to those who relish extra-textual aids.

For nearly half a century the Wheelock has been center stage in elementary Latin courses in the United States. Its success is palpable, as many students, even those who go on for the Ph.D. in classics, begin Latin in college. It would be an understatement, therefore, to say that the field of Classics owes the Wheelock a great debt. But as in the case of the James Bond series, one has to ask just how many more times it can be revised. Perhaps the time has come for a new secret agent and a new Latin textbook, as well. Based on methodology, order of presentation, and overall design, *Classical Latin* may be that book. The name is McKeown: James McKeown.

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