

BOOK REVIEW

Wiley's Real Latin: Learning Latin from the Source, by ROBERT MALTBY and KENNETH BELCHER. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014. Pp. 317. ISBN#978-0-470-65507-8.

“I suppose the first question one may ask is, ‘Why another Latin textbook?’” This is the first sentence in the preface to *Wiley's Real Latin*, and it's a legitimate question. The authors respond by explaining that “students have constantly requested a Latin text that sets out the material in a clear, concise, and accessible way” (xxiii). Also, they state that they are aiming to avoid the difficulty that frequently arises when students make the transition from textbook sentences and stories to unadapted (“real”) Latin.

In its overall philosophy, it resembles *Wheelock's Latin* rather than the reading-based approaches in the Cambridge and Oxford series or the “mixed” approaches (reading passages followed by grammar-focused exercises) found in *Ecce Romani*, *Latin via Ovid*, and *Latin for Americans*. It is even more rapidly paced than Wheelock; it has twenty-one chapters (plus appendices) to Wheelock's forty. The first two chapters alone cover the concept of an inflected language; the first and second declensions (both the masculine and the neuter of the latter); the present and imperfect of the first and second conjugations; adjectives of the first and second declensions; the present and imperfect of the irregular verbs *sum* and *possum*; and the demonstrative pronoun/adjectives *hic*, *haec*, *hoc* and *is*, *ea*, *id*. The interrogative pronouns, first and second person pronouns, and *ille*, *illa*, *illud* appear in Chapter 3. Introducing these pronouns early is a good idea, since they occur frequently. Other topics follow in rapid succession.

By Chapter 6, the student has seen all five declensions and all six tenses of active verbs. Only Moreland and Fleischer's *Latin: An Intensive Course*, with eighteen chapters (or “units”), encompasses more material in fewer chapters. The authors (both from the University of Leeds) have taught the book over two eleven-week semesters, although there is a clear break at Chapter 12 before the subjunctive is introduced.

In keeping with its mission, this book uses authentic classical Latin beginning with Chapter 2. There are two kinds of exercises, translation from Latin and translation into Latin. The former sentences initially contain some ellipses, but otherwise retain the original text. The translations into Latin are more abundant than they are in most other books. There are two things that make these a challenge. First, many of the words are not supplied in the chapter vocabulary, so that the student needs to hunt through the glossary in the back. Second, the sentences are taken directly from classical authors (mostly Cicero and Caesar), so that the student is expected not only to write accurate Latin but the exact same Latin that those authors wrote. This seems unnecessarily restrictive, although teachers could conceivably discuss alternate ways to express the same thing—i.e. “although” as *quamquam* with an indicative verb or as a concessive *cum* clause.

The authors advise against attempting to do all of the exercises in class, and suggest four each per chapter. There is abundant vocabulary; and in Chapters 1-12, the words are divided into “Vocabulary to Learn” and vocabulary specifically for the chapter passages. This distinction is so helpful that it is disappointing to see it discontinued after Chapter 12, so that the student is left with unwieldy lists of approximately 100 words per chapter. Curiously, derivatives are scanty—only four per chapter!

I showed this book to my second year students (mature eleventh graders) who were using Wheelock. They found the layouts more attractive, the charts clearer, and the explanations less verbose than those in their current textbook. Yet I would not recommend it for most secondary school students, or even for casual adult learners. The approach seems designed to weed out all but the most dedicated. Those seeking to teach Latin in the way of modern languages, or to look beyond the classical canon, will not find this book appealing. There are no entertaining stories until the later chapters, which present some “Extra Passages” from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Apart from a running feature titled “The Bigger Picture” (generally a few brief facts about Cicero’s writings) and the photographs and captions, there is no cultural information until the appendix, which gives an explanation of Roman nomenclature and biographies of the authors featured in the book. On the other hand, this book would work well for an intensive course, such as a summer program. If instructors are looking for an alternative to Wheelock or Moreland and Fleischer to give students Latin proficiency in a short time, they may wish to give this book a try.

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