

## BELLARIA XXXII



### DERIVATIONS (5)

This last derivational Bellaria abandons the thematic approach and ranges randomly over words whose roots lie in Latin and Greek, and were taken into English.

#### Decisions!

In 1546, after fierce debate, the Council of Trent decided that Latin *alone* was to be used for the mass and the sacraments, whatever language was spoken by the church congregation. The reason was that sacred acts required time-honoured ritual, couched in time-honoured language, however meaningless it might be to participants. Note 'decide', from Latin *decido* 'I detach by cutting': it is the cut-off point.



Roman decision-making

### Handy 'and'y

It is not just in its vocabulary that Latin had a powerful effect on English. It often affected the very structure of the language. In 1384 John Wycliffe produced his controversial translation of Jerome's Vulgate Bible from Latin into English. Part of the Christmas story read as follows:

Forsooth they, seeing the star, joyed with a full great joy. And they, entering the house, found the child with Mary his mother; and they falling down worshipped him. And, their treasures opened, they offered to him gifts, gold, incense and myrrh.

This is as literal a translation as one could find. In particular, note the underlined participles and the final participial phrase – all pure Latin.

The Latinate style did not appeal to the great William Tyndale. His version of the above passage in his 1534 translation of the Bible reads as follows:

When they saw the star, they were marvellously glad: and went into the house and found the child with Mary his mother, and kneeled down and worshipped him, and opened their treasures and offered unto him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Farewell participles, and welcome 'when' clauses and sequences of main verbs strung together with 'and'. That is English as she ortabe wrote. *The Authorised Version* (1611) got the message:

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

## Italy

It was only under the first emperor Augustus (27 BC-AD 14), that the whole country began to be called *Italia*. The derivation is not certain, but one possibility is that Greeks arriving in the deep south in the 8th C BC were impressed by the area's fertility, particularly its calves—for which we are told the Greek name was *witalos* (→ Oscan dialect *viteliu* and Latin *vitulus*). That, we are told, became *Italia*.



*Diva Angerona* (Schönbrunn palace in Vienna)

## The secret name of Rome

Romulus and Remus were sons of the war-god Mars. So when Romans learned that Greeks associated *Rôma* with the Greek word for 'strength', *rhômê* (ῥώμη), they were happy to accept the connection.

However, Pliny the Elder said that Rome 'had another name, which it is sinful to mention except in ceremonies of sacred mysteries.' Later Romans tried to guess what this name might be. The Greek *Erôs* ("Ἔρως, 'Love') was one suggestion, because in Latin that was *amor*, i.e. *Roma*, reversed; *Flora*, a goddess of flowers, was another; and *Diva Angerona* another: she was a goddess whose statue in Rome had her mouth bound, or her finger to her lips.

But why should Romans need a secret name for their protective deity? The theory was that, before one attacked a city, one would invite its guardian gods to leave, assuring them that they would be given an honoured welcome by the conquering army. This process was called *evocation* (Latin *evocatio*, 'I summon out'). But a deity whose name was not known could not be evoked and would presumably stay and defend his/her city to the last.

## Discrimination

*Discrimen*, the source of our ‘discrimination’, was originally a spatial and temporal term. It meant a separating line, or structure, partition; parting in the hair (!); an interval in time. It then came to mean ‘point in which things differ’ and so the ‘power of making distinctions’.



Telemachus with Penelope, her loom behind her

## Order, order

Our word ‘order’ derives from Latin *ordior* ‘I place in rows, put [threads] in order’ (used of weaving); the noun *ordo* (*ordin-*) originally meant a thread on a loom, and then a row of something, e.g. seats at the games. It went on to cover ‘a rank, standing, position, an assigned position, class, spatial arrangement; connected sequence, order of succession, professional body’. All these were words suggestive of ordered rules and structures.

## Protocol

Nowadays, a protocol is usually a record of an original diplomatic agreement, or a document forming the basis of a legal treaty, or a set of official procedures. It derives from Greek *prôtokollon* (πρωτόκολλον)—the *first* of the glued sheets of a scroll (*prôtos*, ‘first’, *kollaô* [κολλάω], ‘I glue’, cf. collagen). In the ancient world, it listed and authenticated the content of the scroll.

## Posthumous

*Postumus* meant ‘last born’. But thanks to a Roman misunderstanding, it came to mean ‘born after a father’s death’. This came about because Romans imagined *postumus* arose from *post*+ *humus* ‘after [the father’s] burial’ → our ‘posthumous’. Note *humus* ‘ground’ → ‘inhume’ → ‘exhume’.

## Communities

The Latin *munia* meant ‘duties, functions’; and *communis* (*com/cum* = ‘with’) meant basically ‘shared, joint, belonging to or affecting everyone, sociable, obliging’ (→ our ‘communal’).

When the historian Tacitus described the Roman takeover of Britain in the first century AD, he said something about the *Britanni* (Celts at the time) that seems to have become part of the DNA of our ancestors the Anglo- Saxons:

‘The Britons themselves actively accept enrolment into the army, taxes and other *munia* [e.g. road-building, grain collection] associated with imperial rule, provided that there is no injustice. That they will not put up with, being habituated to obey but not to be treated like slaves.’



Roman marriage

### Doing favours

The great and good in any society like nothing better than mingling with other great and good. It creates relationships, back-scratching (or knifing) and, with luck, *bonds* of friendship and obligation that can be useful to both sides. ‘Bonds’ indeed: Latin *obligo* (*obligat-*) meant basically ‘I tie up, bind’. In the Roman world, this was the way to get on, helping your friends with e.g. financial aid, jobs, business deals, courts cases, even marriage prospects.

### Prestige

A Roman would not have been pleased, however, if you had congratulated him on his *praestigia*, source of our ‘prestige’: it meant ‘an action intended to deceive or hoodwink, a trick, deceit’. Its meaning in English derives from conjuring. ‘The prestige’ is the conjuror’s final and most baffling trick. The term was extended to any outstanding performance of any sort. The French used it to describe Napoleon’s incredible escape from Elba in 1815 to start his war against England all over again.

### Prejudice

‘Prejudice’ originally had a quite innocent meaning. It derived from *prae* ‘before, in advance’ + *iudicium* ‘judgement’, and referred to the preliminary

action that had to be taken before a case could be heard, or to a previous ruling that could act as a precedent. For example, Cicero discussed the case of an *eques* who lost a hand in an attack by armed robbers. He brought an action for 'injury', but the defendant asked that any *praeiudicium* should not turn that into a capital charge, i.e. that the main trial should not be prejudiced by an earlier judgement in a lesser court.

### Allegations

In the course of his prosecution of Verres, the corrupt governor of Sicily, Cicero uncovered a plan of Verres' to make big money out of an act of blatant theft from a minor. The boy's guardians did all they could to stop this outrage, making endless *allegationes* to (note: not 'against') Verres and his various sidekicks, but to no avail. But that was the original meaning of an *allegatio*: acting as an intermediary, making an intercession or representation *on behalf of* someone else.



'It's here somewhere'

### Stipulation

*Stipulatio* was the general word for 'binding promise'. Its origin may possibly be found in *stipula* 'straw, stubble'. The seventh century encyclopedist Isidore said: 'The ancients, when they promised each other something, would break a straw that they were holding. In joining this straw together again, they would acknowledge their pledge.'



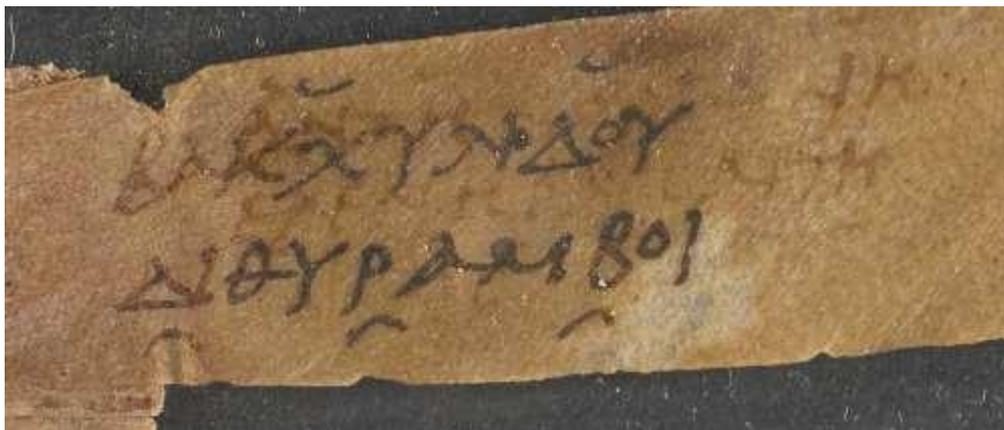
Assorted coinage

### Hard coin

There was a temple to **Moneta** in Rome where money was coined, whence our 'money'. Our 'coin' derives from Latin *cuneus*, 'wedge': the die which stamped the coins was wedge-shaped. We keep coins in **purses**. This derives, via late Latin, from Greek *bursa* (βύρσα), 'ox hide', and gives us 'bursar', 'purser', and the French *bourse*, 'stock-exchange'.

### Dosh (etym. dub.)

The Latin for 'money' was *pecunia* (→ 'pecuniary', 'impecunious'), based on *pecu*, 'flock, herd, farm-animals'. Basically, it meant 'wealth, possessions', and only in time came to mean **cash** (from Latin *capsa* 'box, container', where cash should be kept). Filthy **lucre** derives from Latin *lucrum*, 'material gain', and the slang **spondulicks** possibly from Greek *sphondulos* (σφόνδυλος), 'vertebrae', slang (apparently) for a stock of coins.



'Syllabus' attached to Bacchylides' *Dithuramboi*

## Syllabus

A roll of papyrus clearly does not have a spine on which the title of the book can be written. So the roll had a 'label' attached to identify it: Greek *sillubos* (σίλλυβος). The church Latinised this to *syllabus*, meaning 'a list', whence our 'syllabus', a list of school subjects. The Greek plural would be *silluboi* (σίλλυβοι), the Latin *syllabi*, the English—whatever we want to make it.

## Text and context

Latin *textus*, from which 'text' derives, meant a pattern or style of weaving; a method of putting things together, a structure; and so the 'fabric' made by joining words together. The Latin *textum* meant 'woven fabric'. The verb *texo*, from which both words came, meant 'I weave, embroider, plait', and was related to the Greek *tektôn* (τέκτων), 'carpenter, craftsman', and *tekhne* (τέχνη), 'skill, craft'. Meanwhile, Latin *contextus*, our 'context', meant 'a whole, woven together from numerous parts'. Quintilian said that one way of praising a man was to go into chronological detail, covering 'the *contextus* of all his words and deeds'.

## Prose and verse

Latin *versus*, from which our word derives, meant 'furrow, row, line', whether a line of writing or a line of poetry. It derives from Latin *verto*, 'I turn', and referred to the plough turning from one line to the other. Our 'prose' derives from Latin *pro(r)sus*, 'following a straight line, moving straight ahead', i.e. without any of the 'turning', ornamentation or metrical structure of verse.



Note the wavy-line effect around the edge of the assorted marine life

### Worm-ridden mosaics

Floors were regularly decorated with mosaics, derived via Italian from *Musa*, the work of the Muse. Tiny-cubed mosaics allowed for very fine, delicate work, almost resembling painting. Such work was called *vermiculatum*, 'producing a wavy line effect', from *vermiculus*, 'larva of a grub or maggot' (from which we get 'vermin').



Lentils

### Lens

Our 'lens', a shape convex on both sides, derives from Latin for a 'lentil, lentil seed': *lens* (*lent-*), a crop domesticated perhaps as long as 13,000 years ago.

### A villa's crusty wall panels

Latin *crusta* had nothing to do with pies. It referred to the hard covering of a shell-fish (→ 'crustacea') or insect or scab, and then to the thin marble panels that the wealthy used to cover floors with or overlay walls in their villas.

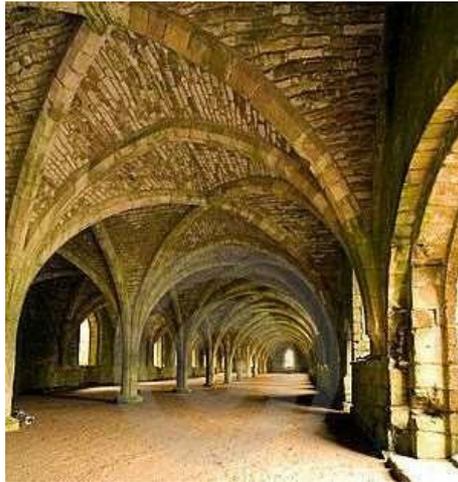
*Crusta* also gives us 'custard', via French *c(r)oustade*. Crusty custard! Yum yum. Meanwhile, *villa*, the Roman's luxury country house complete with estate and farm, gives us 'villain'. Late Latin produced *villanus*, a worker in a villa, i.e. a serf, a term which (via French) degraded into a scoundrel, a villain.

### Two-edged excrement

Our 'excrement' derives from Latin *excrementum*, 'bodily waste products' (including urine and spit → our 'excreta'); but *excrementum* also derived from a quite different Latin root, meaning 'outgrowth', e.g. a beard. One can imagine the endless hilarity that wordplay evoked among Roman school children.

### Monument

*Moneo* is at the root of *monumentum*. In fact *moneo* is linked to *memini*, 'I remember', and the basic meaning is 'I bring to the notice of, remind, tell of'— exactly what a *monumentum* does. Horace said, hopefully, of his poetry: 'I have put up a *monumentum* more lasting than bronze'.



Vaulted *camera* (minus comrades)

### Carpenters on wheels

What job does the Latin *carpentarius* do? It derives from Latin *carpentum*, which meant a horse-drawn two-wheeled carriage, used especially by women in Rome. So a *carpentarius* was a carriage maker, or cartwright.

The *carpentum* had an arched covering to protect against rain and sun and guard female modesty. This covering was a *camara* or *camera* (Greek *kamara* [καμάρα]). Over time it came to mean an arched or vaulted room, source of our 'chamber', 'comrade' (one who shares the same room, → 'camaraderie') and of 'camera' in the sense of a chamber where private meetings are held, *in camera* as we say.



'This is a disaster - we're all wearing the same hat'

### Canopies, gnats and hors d'oeuvres

What have canopies got to do with gnats? Greek for a 'gnat' was *kônôps* (κώνωψ), and a *kônôpion* (κωνώπιον) was a couch with a mosquito-net

Romans turned this into *conopium*, whence (via French, *conope* 'bed-curtain', picking up the mosquito-net element) our 'canopy'.

What on earth have bed-curtains got to do with our delicious *canapés*? Nothing at all. In French, *canapé* now means 'couch, sofa', picking up the other element in *conopium*. Our canapé is so called because the garnish on top of the base is supposed to resemble people sitting on a sofa.

## Arts and crafts

Today, 'artists' are treated by many with an almost awed reverence. But the Latin *ars* (*art-*) meant basically 'craftsmanship', a learned skill, developed by practice, applied to anything requiring technical skill. *Ars* comes from a root meaning 'fit together, join' and also provides Latin with *artus*, 'limb'.

## Sculpture

Latin *scalpo* meant 'I draw the nails across, scratch'. Possibly because no Great Sculptor would want to be known as a scratcher, *sculpo* (*sculpt-*) was formed as if it were a completely unconnected verb. *Sculpo* meant 'I work on any material by carving or engraving', whether a statue, ornament or inscription.



Spot the difference

## Iconic

The Greek *eikôn* (εἰκών) meant 'likeness, image; statue; phantom'. Romans produced an adjective based on the Greek, *iconicus*. It meant 'giving an exact image', used of a work of art. To a Greek or Roman, therefore, 'an iconic building' would be a building which looked exactly like another building. Today it seems to mean 'famous, popular, very significant': the original meaning is usually more accurate.

## Plasma

It may not be absolutely clear what a 'plasma TV screen' actually is, but in Latin *plasma*, from the same stem as *plasticus*, 'to do with modelling', meant 'fancy, affected singing'. What?

*Plasma* (πλάσμα) in Greek meant ‘anything formed or moulded’, and is used today (from 1928) as a general term for anything that is not gas, solid or liquid. The sun and stars are forms of plasma. So too are neon lights. But Greeks associated the word with anything made up or invented; so it came to mean ‘counterfeit, forgery’, and in music ‘fancy, affected singing’, with trills, falsetto and so on.

### Prevarication

Latin *varus* ‘bandy-legged’ gives *praevaricor* (*praevaricat-*), ‘I straddle, have my feet in both camps’ and ‘I act or speak evasively’.



An early printing press

### From pressing to the printing and the press

The Latin *premo* (*press-*) was the term used to describe the relentless pressurising, driving and harassing that was at the heart of all ancient battle, the aim being to turn the enemy to flight and slaughter them as they fled. ‘Press’ originally referred to a throng of people (c. 1300). It was this word, via old French *preinte*, ‘impression’, that gave us ‘printing’—Caxton uses ‘emprint’ in 1474—to describe the pressure exerted by the printing *press* and the freedom it gave to publish, then extended to journalism and journalists (hence ‘freedom of the “press”’).



Watch out, lads: here comes the Romans

## Rollover

The first Roman army, built up from the seventh century BC, imitated the Greek *phalanx* (φάλαγξ). *Phalanx* was also Greek for 'round log, roller', designed for moving heavy loads.

## Bombs away!

Whatever the damage a bomb may wreak, it is its noise that is so initially terrifying. That is in fact the origin of its name. Greek *bombos* (βόμβος), Latin *bombus* meant a deep, rumbling, booming sound, anything from (in Greek) the roar of the sea and the roll of thunder to (in Latin) the buzzing of bees and even applause.

Nero, we are told, was greatly impressed by the applause his operatic performance was granted by some Egyptian visitors to Naples. So he ordered over 5,000 young men to learn how to do it. It came in three varieties: the *bombus* (buzzing like bees), 'roof-tiles' (clapping with hollowed hands) and 'bricks' (clapping with flat hands).

Note: Most of this stuff was adapted from *Quid Pro Quo* (Atlantic 2016).

Next week in *Bellaria*: Medieval Latin!



This is an extract selected for you as part of Classics for All's 'Bellaria' series to cheer us up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The full series of weekly instalments may be found on our website [classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/](https://classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/)