Varro and Italy: the *de Lingua Latina* and the Gauls
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I

In the 40sBC, Varro composed and published a grammatical treatise on the Latin language, *de lingua Latina*. Its 25 Books, dedicated to Cicero (or Cicero and Septimius, Varro's quaestor), had a tripartite structure, where two triads of books were joined together to form a hexad.[1] After an introductory book, containing the dedication to Cicero, Varro first considered the origins of names, then their derivations and inflexions, and lastly their combination to make sentences and express a complete thought, i.e., etymology, inflexional morphology, and syntax. Thus, the first three books dealt with the discipline of etymology, one arguing against its existence and utility, one arguing in favour of its existence and utility, and one reconciling the issue, these were then followed by three books of etymologies, which showed these in operation. The second triad of books was concerned with the main criterion of Latinity, analogy, one arguing against its existence in inflexion and against the utility of its study, one arguing in its favour and for its study, and one reconciling these two views, this triad was then followed by three books on analogies in inflexion. Although Varro does not explicitly say so, these two sets on etymology and morphology seem to have been followed by six books arguing about the existence and utility of syntax and six books about actual sentences. Of the whole work, most of the triad devoted to etymologies and most of the triad devoted to the discussion of the validity of analogy have survived; the rest, beside some fragments, has perished.[2]

In this paper, my aim is twofold: first, I shall try to shed light on the way in which Varro represents and assesses the contributions of the peoples of the Italian peninsula to the development of the Latin language; secondly, focusing in particular on Celtic inputs, I shall attempt to show what Varro is actually doing when he is asserting the composite nature of Latin in the way in which he does.

The most conventional, albeit not necessarily incorrect, interpretation of Varro's enterprise in the *de lingua Latina* sees Varro engaged in the composition of a work of grammar that should provide his readers with the essential tools for expressing their thoughts and operating in the world by commanding the use of words. According to Varro, in fact, *grammatica* had four functions: reading, writing, understanding, and evaluating, or alternatively, reading, explaining, emending, and judging.[3] Accordingly, following the extant material, most studies have focused either on Varro's etymological theory and practice, which he discusses in Books 5-7, setting it also within the wider contexts of Hellenistic tradition, or on the history and nature of the controversy between analogy and anomaly

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[1] On Varro's ordering and systematisation see MOATTI 2015, p. 123. Highlighting the presence of 'disorder' alongside his ordered systematisation, VOLK forthcoming. It seems that Books 2-4 had a former dedication to Septimius, but the work as a whole is later referred to as dedicated to Cicero.

[2] See BLANK 2005, p. 210-38, esp. p. 212-4. See also RAWSON 1985, p. 125. TAYLOR 2015, p. 19-32, who describes the structure of the work as bipartite (*ars grammatica* and *ars dialectica*) as opposed to the traditional tripartite structure. For a complete overview of the work and its structure see DE MELO 2019.

[3] VARRO, *GRF* fr. 234, p. 265 and fr. 236, p. 66-7. See RAWSON 1985, p. 117-31, esp. p. 125-9.

(which was a lively debate at the time) that Varro discusses in Books 8-10.[4] Considered as a whole, the predominant scholarly approach to Varro's *de lingua Latina* seems to deem the work the result of the intellectual endeavour of an antiquarian scholar with a keen interest in the nature and development of language, as fashionable at the time, who was elaborating his own linguistic theory on the origin of Latin and how this should be used.

Scholars have only recently begun to address and investigate the wider intellectual vision underlying antiquarian scholarship, interpreting this genre variously as the result of a period of crisis and perceived moral decay,[5] as part of the developments of encyclopaedism indicative as well as imitative of confident imperial expansion,[6] or even as literature of subversion against the constituted political order.[7]

By recognising that this particular way of 'textualising knowledge' was entwined with the social and political practices as well as the cultural developments of the late Republic,[8] scholars have recently come to appreciate the nature of a work such as Varro's *de lingua Latina* as much more than compilatory in form and conservative in aim. Martin Bloomer, for example, has underlined how the technique of etymology privileged in this work is not just a learnt form of knowledge, but rather functions 'as a kind of intervention into the cultural discourse about the role and shape of Latin.'[9] Pushing this argument even further, Emma Dench argues that, much more than a recondite academic study in the tradition of the grammarians, the *de lingua Latina* can be seen as operating within the reality of its time, moving towards a rehabilitation of the Oscan-speaking Italic communities at a time when the effects of the Social War had begun to be felt most acutely.[10]

Building on a reading of Varro's *de lingua Latina* not so much as an *ars grammatica per se,* but rather, in James Zetzel's words, as almost a compendium of Varro's scholarly interests in 'what Latin language is, where it comes from, and how to use it properly,'[11] I investigate the contributions of the peoples in the Italian peninsula to Latin within the wider context of Varro's linguistic theories.

Contrary to the vast majority of his contemporaries, Varro is not interested in establishing a relation of filiation between languages, but rather places them in a relation of independence from one another, explaining their similarities in vocabulary as result of historical contacts and lexical borrowings and their parallels in morphology as similar responses to analogous communicative challenges.[12] By adopting etymology as the privileged path to knowledge, Varro reconstructs the remote and murky past of Rome, and its relations with the other peoples inhabiting the Italian peninsula. By capturing the very essence of that relational past between Rome and other peoples by virtue of this method, which is

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[4] For an interesting survey on these contributions to Varronian studies see BUTTERFIELD 2014.
[5] MOATTI 1991; MOATTI 2015; TARVER 1997.
[6] KÖNIG & WOOLF 2013; SMITH forthcoming.
[7] WALLACE-HADRILL 2008.
[8] KÖNIG & WHITMARSH 2007.
[9] BLOOMER 1997, p. 41.
[10] DENCH 2005, p. 316-8.
[11] ZEZTEL 2018, p. 31-6.
[12] GITNER 2015 focusing on the relation between Latin and Greek.

substantially inductive in nature, moving backwards from the present to the past,[13] Varro establishes a direct connection between his present historical reality and ancient times.

By assessing Varro's representation of the contributions of the other peoples of Italy to Latin language in this way, I hope first to shed light on Varro's assessment of their inputs. Secondly, I hope to show that by doing so in the way in which he does, Varro in *de lingua Latina* engages with the then lively debate concerning the *causa Transpadanorum* (as Cicero calls it) and the extension of Roman citizenship to Cisalpine Gaul.[14] In the process of doing so, Varro puts forward an idea of *Italia*, which, contrary to other contemporary understandings of this notion, encompasses formally or, better, politically, all land south of the Alps, the natural boundary of the Italian peninsula, providing implicitly, but powerfully, an argument for a full juxtaposition of the geographical and the political notion of Italy.[15]

Far from being a work of sterile antiquarian learning, the result of a purely scholarly endeavour, Varro's *de lingua Latina* was an active agent in the political and intellectual reality of its time.

II

At the very beginning of Book 5 Varro clarifies his subject matter, which will consist, he tells his readers, of the study of the things from which words are coined, which the Greeks call *etumologia*, and a study of the things for which they are coined, which the Greeks call *peri sēmainomenōn*, although he then adds that he will not treat them separately, but will focus less on the latter.[16]

He goes on to explain that these matters are rather obscure because not every coinage survives since the passage of time has destroyed some; not every coinage which survives does so without inaccuracy of some kind; not every correct coinage remains as it originally was, for many words have had their letters changed, while others have kept the same forms, but changed their meaning, and, most importantly for the present argument, 'not every word-origin derives from our native language (*neque omnis origo est nostrae linguae e vernaculis verbis*)'.[17]

He then moves on to provide a classification of words into three groups: 'those which are our own, those which are of foreign origin, and those which are obsolete and of forgotten sources (*tripartita verba quae sunt aut nostra aut aliena aut oblivia*), I shall set forth about our own why they are, about those of foreign origin whence they are, and as to the obsolete I shall let them alone: except that concerning some of them I shall none the less write what I have found or myself conjecture.' He then proceeds explaining that in this book he will analyse words denoting places and those things which are in them; in the following book those words denoting times and those things which take place in them; in the third both these as expressed by the poets.[18]

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[13] Piras 2017.
[14] Cic. *off*. 3.88.
[15] F. Carlà-Uhink 2017, 29-95
[16] Varro *LL* 5.2.
[17] Varro *LL* 5.3.
[18] Varro *LL* 5.10.

At the beginning of Book 5, therefore, Varro makes the important statement, which will return in various forms throughout the extant parts of the work, according to which Latin contained a core native vocabulary (*vernaculara verba*), which was distinct from foreign words (*peregrina verba*).[19] This distinction is made explicit in a variety of different clusters of vocabularies: so, for example, those concerning the names of animals (… *partim sunt vernacular, partim peregrina*),[20] or those concerning vegetables that grow in the garden.[21]

As scholars have long noted, in Varro's *de lingua Latina* a significant proportion of the foreign vocabulary derives from Greek.[22] The second largest proportion is constituted by that deriving from Sabine and other Italic languages (which, at the time of Varro's writing, had the status of regional variations of Latin[23]) followed by Etruscan words (roughly 15), and those of Celtic origin, which amounted to roughly half of those of Etruscan origin.[24] In addition, Varro considers a few words that derive (in his opinion) from oriental languages, such as *tigris* from Armenian or *camelus* from Syriac as well as *purpura* from the Carthaginians, and *lacea* from the Spaniards.[25]

This rather approximate summary gains a further dimension when considered alongside a passage from the treatise *de magistratibus* of John Lydus. Here, describing the outfit of a praetorian prefect, John Lydus refers to *balteus* (*cartamera*?) a word of foreign derivation, which prompts a digression on the origins of the Latin lexicon.

This author of the sixth century AD, whose erudition Justinian had rewarded with an academic position, claims that 'this peculiar word [*balteus*, i.e. girdle outfit] is not Roman, the Roman Varro attests in book V of his work *On the Roman language*, in which it is precisely defined what sort of word is Aeolic and what sort is Gallic; and that a word deriving from the Tuscans is of one sort, while that deriving from the Etruscans is of another, from the blending of which was formed the now prevailing language of the Romans.'[26]

Thus, according to John Lydus, in discussing the origin of Latin Varro appears to have put forward the idea that this is the result of the blending of Greek, Gallic, Tuscan, and Etruscan. This passage,

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[19] *Verba peregrina*: VARRO *LL* 5.77; 100; 103; 167; on *verba vernacula* VARRO *LL* 5.3; 77; 104; 6.40; 10.69; on *verba barbara* (?), VARRO *LL* 7.64

[20] VARRO *LL* 5.77-9.

[21] VARRO *LL* 5.104.

[22] COLLART 1954, p. 206-18 and 239 (and specifically on the passage above of John Lydius). DELLA CORTE 1937, p. 114-18; MALTBY 1993, p. 50: according to his calculations the loans from Greek amount to 12-13% of Varro's etymologies and from Sabine and languages other than Greek make up around 4%.

[23] ADAMS 2007 and CONWAY 1897, p. 351-63, who also observes that Varro never cites *lingua Sabina*, but rather refers to the *Sabini*.

[24] See VARRO *LL* 5.167. For *sagum* cf ISID. *orig*. 19. 24. 13. For *reno* see SALL. *hist*. 3. 105, WALDE & HOFMANN 1954, v. 2, p. 429, who instead consider it Germanic. COLLART 1954, 243-6 and 247-8 discusses Varro's Etruscan and Gallic etymologies. For his 'Sabinisme', COLLART 1954, p. 229-43 and PASCUCCI 1979, p. 340-45.

[25] On the accuracy (or lack of) of these etymologies see DE MELO 2019 introduction and comm. ad loc.

[26] JOHN LYDUS, *de mag*. 2.13: ὅτι δὲ οὐ Ῥωμαῖον τουτὶ τὸ ῥημάτιον, μάρτυς ὁ Ῥωμαῖος Βάρρων ἐν βιβλίῳ πέμπτῳ περὶ Ῥωμαϊκῆς διαλέκτου, ἐν ᾧ διαρτθ<ρ>οῦται ποία μέν τις λέξις Αἰολική, ποία δὲ Γαλλική, καὶ ὅτι ἑτέρα [ἡ] Θουσκῶν, ἄλλη δὲ Ἐτρούσκων , ὧν συγχυθεισ̮ῶν ἡ νῦν κρατοῦσα τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀπετελέσθη φωνή (ed. DUBUISSON & SCHAMP 2006, esp. p. 18 and p. 149-150; Engl. transl. BANDY 1983).

whose attribution to the *de lingua Latina* is rather uncertain, presents a variety of complex problems.[27] Alongside the issue of attribution raised by the absence of *balteus* in the discussion of Book 5 of the *de lingua Latina*, the text provides scholars with interesting puzzles: first, the double reference to the language of the Tusci and the language of the Etruscans, that becomes even more striking when considered alongside Varro's statement in Book 5 according to which the two peoples are one and the same.[28] Second, the surprising absence, or so it seems to some scholars, of any reference to the contribution to the language of any Latin people, and in particular of the Sabines, to whom Varro attributes such an important role in the origin of Rome.[29]

Although none of the proposed solutions has so far gained wide consensus amongst scholars, it seems that, taken in its entirety, the text appears to reflect the overall impression of John Lydus, or most likely his source, about the nature of the Latin language in Varro's theory.[30] In other words, it is not completely implausible to postulate that in the eyes of later authors, such as John Lydus or his source, Varro's linguistic studies (as articulated in *de lingua Latina* and/or in *de origine linguae Latinae*) presented the Latin lexicon as the result of the blending of Greek, Gaulish, and Etruscan.[31] Ultimately, this description of the origins of the Latin language, as Adam Gitner has convincingly argued, is broadly in agreement with Varro's etymological practices as attested in the surviving portions of the *de lingua Latina*.[32]

However, there is another intriguing aspect of the assessment of John Lydus, which so far has not exercised much scholarly curiosity, and that is the prominent place assigned there to the Celtic language, which in John Lydus' list follows immediately after Greek, undoubtedly the language recognised by the ancient themselves as the most influential on the development of Latin, and that, although not so overwhelmingly attested in the preserved Varronian texts, is nonetheless present in the *de lingua Latina*.[33]

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[27] In his collection of the fragments of the Roman grammarians Funaioli (VARRO, *GRF* fr. 295-6, p. 311-12) attributes this text (albeit with great caution) to Varro's *de origine linguae Latinae*. The attribution to Varro's *de sermone Latino* is rather improbable, as Varo does not appear to be using geographical categories, but rather adopting *genera* (GELL. 6.14). For discussion on the identification of the original Varronian work, see CAVAZZA 1981, p. 91-95. For a review of issues raised by the text and their possible explanations PASCUCCI 1979, p. 339-363, in part. p. 339-342.

[28] VARRO *LL* 5.32.

[29] In particular, PASCUCCI 1979, p. 340. BRIQUEL 2001, p. 1039 underlines the importance of the Sabine language for Varro, whilst also warning against a 'pansabiniste' reading. More recently, RUSSO 2011 explains the absence of the Sabine language as not one of the foreign elements of Latin, with which, in his view, the text is concerned. De Melo in conversation points out to me that for Varro, as implicitly attested by his etymological practices, the languages spoken at Praeneste or Lavinum are indeed a variety of Latin, now fully integrated in the main stream language and no longer, as in the case of the Praenestine, object of ridicule as in Plautus.

[30] Amongst the most ingenious solutions, PASCUCCI 1979, p. 340 who proposes a correction of Θουσκῶν with Ὀπικῶν or Ὄσκων and, since for the Oscan language derives from the Sabine (*LL* 7.3.3), this would also allow for an inclusion of Sabine. DELLA CORTE 1954, p. 38. According to BRIQUEL 2001, p.1039 by Tusci the text refers to the inhabitants of Etruria of the author's time, while by Etruscans to those of earlier times. DUBUISSON 1984, p. 62 follows Briquel. On the identity of a potential intermediary source see ROCHETTE 1998. On the relation between Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Varro with specific regard to language, see BRIQUEL 2001. In favour of a direct dependency of John Lydus from Varro see DUBUISSON & SCHAMP 2016, p. clxi, following FLINTOFF 1976.

[31] DIMITRIEV2018 rejects suspicions of John Lydus' lack of command of Latin, setting his etymological investigations within his contemporary political context of Byzantium.

[32] GITNER 2015, p. 43-5, following the footsteps of PASCUCCI 1979.

[33] PASCUCCI 1979, p. 352 lessens the role of Celtic language in Latin in Varro. On the presence of Celtic languages/dialects in Latin see ADAMS 2007 and DE MELO 2019.

This Varronian inclusion of Celtic elements in Latin is even more striking when set in the context of contemporary linguistic studies. Since the very beginning of the first century BC, grammarians seem to have focused their attention primarily on the relation between the Latin and the Greek language, favouring the idea of the derivation of Latin from an original Greek language, or, at least, supporting the view of an older lineage of Greek in relation to Latin language.[34] This view, which Maltby sets tentatively within the historical context of the Mithridatic wars and the resultant increase in number of Greek intellectuals in Rome,[35] seems to have been sustained by Hypsicrates of Amisus, probably active in Rome under the patronage of Caesar (who in 47BC had liberated Amisus), and found a strong supporter, if not, as some scholars claim, its originator, in Philoxenus of Alexandria.[36] Philoxenus, active too in Rome in the first century BC, had in fact written a work entitled *On the language of the Romans*, in which, within the context of claiming the descendancy of the Roman people from the Aeolians, he stated that the Roman language was not 'born on its own.'[37]

This opinion was further propelled by the grammarian Tyrannion of Amisus, who, brought to Rome as prisoner of war by Licinius Lucullus, taught in Rome in the first half of the first century BC under the patronage of Pompey.[38] A friend of Cicero, Caesar, and Pomponius Atticus, Tyrannion regarded Latin as a derivation from a Greek dialect. His ideas seem to have been shared by Aurelius Opillus, the (Italic?) freedman who accompanied Rutilius Rufus into exile in Smyrna (where he spent the rest of his life) as well as by Ateius (Pretextatus), self-styled Philologus, who was a friend of the historians Sallust and Asinius Pollio.[39]

The relationship between these two languages continued to be one of the main issues that captivated the imagination of scholars operating in Rome throughout the first century BC.[40] At its turn, Cloatius Verus, following the work of Hypsicrates on words borrowed from the Greeks (*libri super his quae a Graecis accepta sunt*), wrote *Verborum a Graecis tractorum*, in which he advanced Greek etymologies for a number of Latin words, that later authors regarded as completely fanciful.[41] However, it should be borne in mind that these attestations, rather meagre in number as well as in length, do not necessarily

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[34] On a second century attestation of this theory in Rome Cf. CATO, *Orig.* F3 FRHist. DELLA CORTE 1937, p. 114 considers Cato the originator of this theory, which, in his opinion, is then followed up by Varro.

[35] MALTBY 1993, p. 47.

[36] HYPSICRATES, *GRF* fr. 1-3 p. 107-8; PHILOXENUS, *GRF* fr. 1-12, p. 43-46 = fr. 311-29 (ed. THEODORIDIS 1976, p. 234-42). On Hypsicrates as possible proponent of Latin as a variant of Greek see Gabba 1963, p. 189 and RAWSON 1985, p. 55 and DUBUISSON 1984, who underlines how, among the preserved texts, Hypsicrates seems to be the first to explain Latin vocabulary from Greek. On Philoxenus as the first exponent of this theory see Schöpsdau 1992, p. 117-8 where he sets his work within the context of the Alexandrian erudite studies on 'Dialektforschung.' Along similar lines PISANI 1976, p. 199. See also WENDEL 1950.

[37] Fr 323 (ed. THEODORIDIS 1976).

[38] On Tyrannion, SUET. *Gram.* 14.1.3; QUINT. *Inst.* 2.4.2; PLUT. *Luc.* 19.7; *Sull.* 26.

[39] On Ateius see esp. *GRF* fr. 14, p. 141. Cf. SUET. *Gramm.* 10. R. A. KASTER, *Suetonius, De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus* (1995), 138-148. On Aurelius Opillus, see esp. *GRF* fr. 18, p. 92 and fr. 25, p. 93. On the exile see SUET. *Gramm.* 6. See R.A. Kaster (ed.), *C. Suetonius Tranquillus, De grammaticis et rhetoribus (with comm. and transl.)*, 1995, 10f.; 110-116.

[40] See also the other two main statements on the issue DION. HAL. *Ant. Rom.* 1.90 and QUINT. *Inst.* 1.5.55-8 and 1.6.31 with the excellent discussion by GITNER 2015. See also DELLA CORTE 1937, RAWSON 1985, p. 55 and 125, POCCETTI 1999, p. 51-52, LAW 2003, TAYLOR 2011, DE MELO 2019.

[41] On Cloatius Verus see GELL. 16.12.5 and *GRF* fr. 1-5, p. 468-70.

indicate that these grammarians envisaged a direct descent of Latin from Greek, but rather that, at the time when Rome had become an unrivalled imperial power, they were fascinated by the question of how languages (and implicitly, one might add, peoples) related to one another.

Most interestingly for the present argument, Varro's teacher, Aelius Stilo, who in the first half of the first century BC also taught Cicero, seems to have held the view that although in the main Latin derived from Greek, it was enriched by many (far too many, commented Varro) autochthonous words and some loans from other Italic languages.

Of the preserved texts of these late Republican grammarians, those by Aelius Stilo are the only fragments that refer to the contributions of Oscan and Sabine languages as well as the languages from Praeneste and Lavinium to Latin.[42] No one, on the other hand, not even Aelius Stilo, makes an explicit reference to the contributions of the Celtic language to Latin. It seems that it was Varro's own choice to include the consideration of the Gaulish contributions to the Latin language, a choice that, with considerable caution given the state of our evidence, may be considered to be one of his contributions to the theory of the origins and the development of the Latin language.[43]

<center>III</center>

To understand the full significance of Varro's move and grasp what he was doing by claiming that the Celts had contributed to the development of Latin, we need to turn to the means Varro adopted to explore the lexical makeup of Latin: the heuristic tool of etymology.

As Gitner has demonstrated, in the *de lingua Latina* Varro was not interested in reconstructing a relation of language affiliation and descent between Latin and Aeolism, a variant of Greek.[44] Within the context of Aeolism understood as a mélange of Greek dialects, which also included several legendary varieties of Greek allegedly spoken in prehistoric Italy (from the Arcadian of Evander to the Greek of the Pelasgians and of the *Siculi*),[45] Varro does not account for the similarities between an Aeolic Greek dialect and Latin by claiming (very roughly put) that Latin derives from Greek.[46] Rather, Varro's account shows that the similarities between these languages depended on two different factors: first, they are the results of historical contacts between peoples, which gave rise to lexical borrowings and

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[42] For Italic contributions in Aelius' thought see *GRF* fr. 8 p. 60 (Oscan); *GRF* fr. 9, p.60 (Sabine language); *GRF* fr. 40, p. 67 (Praeneste); *GRF* fr. 64, p. 73 (Lanuvium and Praeneste)., DUBUISSON 1984, p. 62 observes that Aelius is responsible for 'occasional' etymologies from Greek into Latin.

[43] Cf. QUINT. *Inst.* 1.4.55-7 who attests how by the time he was writing many Gallic words were current coin: 'foreign words, like our population and institutions, have come to us from practically every nation upon earth. I pass by words of Tuscan, Sabine and Praenestine origin … I may be allowed to regard all such words as of native origin. Many Gallic words have become current coin, such as *raeda* (chariot) and *petorritum* (four-wheeled wagon) of which Cicero uses the former and Horace the latter.'

[44] GITNER 2015. For a different reading, see COLLART 1954, p. 249 who emphasises the focal role of Sabine as the centre of Roman civilization in Varro's construction. DELLA CORTE 1937 and DUBUISSON 1984 make Varro a proponent of Aeolism. In favour of abandoning the unhelpful label of Aeolism, see Stevens 2007.

[45] MALTBY 2001, p. 200 explains that Aeolic for Varro is a Greek dialect that is not Attic, Ionic, or Doric.

[46] For a claim of close affinity between Latin and Greek, although perhaps not of direct descent see D.H. *Rom. Ant.* 1.90 and QUINT. *Inst.* 1.6.31 (on D.H. which seems to state that 'Latin contains a significant Aeolic component, but it has been radically transformed by its encounter with other languages and as a result cannot be classified as Greek.' For some historical considerations of this claim see GABBA 1963 and more recently STEVENS 2007.

similarities in vocabulary; second, they are the products of similar, but independent, linguistic responses to analogous communicative challenges, which led to a convergent, but still unrelated, development of language in morphology (*declinatio*), as attested by the similar case system and verbal categories. By proceeding in this way, as Gitner illustrates, Varro was able to achieve two aims: on the one hand, he was able to acknowledge the debt of Latin to Greek as well as, I would add, to other languages, while, on the other, asserting their mutual independence.[47]

It is revealing that in showing lexical borrowings in Latin from other languages, Varro uses the research tool of etymology, which by its very nature sets the historical contacts between peoples in a mythical past, whose contours are not well defined and were not always easy to grasp even for Varro himself.[48] Although, following the principle that he had stated at the beginning of Book 5, Varro provides the full etymologies only for native words, while simply stating the people of origin for foreign words (*aliena*),[49] by resorting to the ultimate (or at least reachable to him) location of origin of a word, Varro sets these loanwords in a remote past.[50] By a work akin to etymological research of which he presents only one aspect, Varro depicts a picture of contacts of (potentially mutual) exchanges among these peoples, placing the Greeks living in Italy, the Gauls, the Etruscans, and other peoples at the same time and on the same level as the ancient inhabitants of pre-historic Rome.

Within a wider understanding of words as divided into two groups, *primigenia*, words which were first imposed upon things, and *declinata*, words which are derived from the first words either by the good will of an individual (*declinatio uoluntaria*) or by the consensus of the community (*declinatio naturalis*),[51] Varro is most interested in 'from what thing and to what thing the name is applied (*a qua re et in qua re vocabulum sit impositum*).'[52] As David Blank has shown in an illuminating paper, Varro adopted etymology as a heuristic tool to investigate and reconstruct (or at least try to reconstruct) things which were not available for study, as they belonged to the Roman misty past or concerned the nature of the divine, obscure to the human mind.[53] As Varro discusses and exemplifies in Books 5 and 6, his etymological method, informed by the epistemological strategy of his teacher, Antiochus of Ascalon, does not truly concern the words themselves and their origin, but rather the relation between the original *res* from which something derives its name and the *res* to which the name is given, and consequently the relation between their names.[54] Varro illustrates this point with an example: 'when it is asked from what concept *pertinacia* 'obstinacy' comes, it is shown that it comes from *pertendere* 'to persist'; to

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[47] From a morphological point of view see VARRO *LL* 10.62, where Varro qualifies the *casus sextus*, absent from Greek as *proprius linguae Latinae*. From a lexical perspective, see the interesting qualification of CAVAZZA 1981, p. 96, who describes Varro's view of Latin language as one of 'moderate autochthony'.

[48] Cf., for example, VARRO *LL* 5.21. On etymology as methodological tool to investigate the past see PIRAS 2017.

[49] VARRO *LL* 5.10. DE MELO 2019 *comm. ad loc.* observes that this is one of the few principles that Varro enunciates to which he truly adheres.

[50] Many commentators have highlighted the parallel between this linguistic analysis and Rome's foundation myth. See, for example, DENCH 2005, p. 316-20 and ZEZTEL 2018 p. 39-40.

[51] On words *primigenia* VARRO *LL* 5.35 and 37; on *declinata* VARRO *LL* 5. 36-7 and 8.21-3.

[52] VARRO *LL* 5.2.

[53] BLANK 2008. See also TARVER 1997.

[54] Blank 2012, p. 282-3

what concept it has been applied is said when it is shown that *pertinacia* exists in a matter in which one ought not to persist, and yet one does persist, because if one stands one's ground in a matter in which one ought to hold firm, it is *perseuerantia* 'perseverance.''[55] Thus, one shows what thing the word *pertinacia* (obstinacy) is from when one shows that it is from being persistent (*pertendere*), and one shows what thing it is coined for when one shows that this attitude is there where it should not be, because if it should be there, that would be *perseuerantia* (perseverance) rather than *pertinacia*.

It is this relation between things of the world, which is mediated by names, that most interests Varro. As Zetzel puts it, 'for Varro, the Latin language is not some abstraction, but part of the real world. Words are supposed to reflect the things to which they refer; words only exist if their objects both exist and are in current use; and speech is an ethical construction as well as a linguistic one.'[56]

Although Varro is fully aware that he will not be always able to discover the origin of the first ancestor of a word, he asserts that even without knowing the roots of a tree, he will not be prevented from saying that a pear is from a branch, the branch from a tree, and the tree from some roots that he is unable to see. Equally, for the same reason, being able to show that *equitatus* (cavalry) derives from *equites* (cavalrymen), *equites* from *eques* (cavalryman), and *eques* from *equus* (horse), even if one is then unable to find out where *equus* derives from, he still teaches many things.[57] As Blank observes, what Varro is truly stating with this etymological example of *equitatus* is that the study of the transition from *equus* to *equitatus* is sufficient to shed light on some important aspects of the Roman institution of cavalry, which would not be further illuminated by the discovery of the etymology of *equus*.[58]

It follows that the etymological research of Varro, which aimed at investigating the relation between two things through the study of their names rather than necessarily identifying the first *impositio* of a word, was not just a construction of a 'history of words,' as Collart had already noticed long time ago, but rather an ambitious investigation about the truth, a search for superior harmonies, to which it gave access.[59]

Thus, exploring the relation between Rome and other peoples by means of etymological research, Varro achieves two important aims: first, he places these contacts between peoples in a recondite past, at a mythical time that seemed to be closer to *natura* and *ratio*, the criteria of absolute truth; second, he establishes a direct connection between this remote past and the present time, for which the language of the *de lingua Latina* was designed. By doing so, Varro attempts to reach the essence of a world that is now lost or nearly forgotten, where Roman antiquities developed alongside, but independently from, other peoples of Italy and beyond, who by way of exchange had contributed to the development of Rome.

By building up a living language through its history and its interconnections with other people,[60] Varro mapped the make-up of Rome as enriched by contributions of other peoples, who have now

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[55] VARRO *LL* 5.2 (trans. DE MELO 2019).
[56] ZETZEL 2018, p. 58. See also BLANK 2008, p. 61.
[57] VARRO *LL* 7.4.
[58] BLANK 2008, p. 62.
[59] COLLART 1954, p. 278. See also GARCEA 2008 p.7-10.
[60] ZEZTEL 2018, p. 36.

become part of its composition.[61] In observing that some Latin words derive from Gaulish, Varro does not simply say that the Celts had contributed to the development of Latin in a remote and unspecified past, but rather that the results of that fruitful contacts have given birth to a new entity, the Latin of his own time, which combined its autochthonous elements with contributions of its neighbouring people, including the Greeks, the Celts, and Etruscans.

When understood in this philosophical context, the etymological study of Varro becomes much more than a study of the origin of the Latin language and its putative dependency on other languages and even less so a study on an obsolete past of exclusively scholarly interest. Rather, when considered in this wider context, Varro's *de lingua Latina* was a work that made an actual intervention in the public discourse of the time.

<center>IV</center>

In order to understand what kind of public intervention Varro's *de lingua Latina* made, we need to turn to the historical context of the time. The treatise was composed approximately in the first half of the 40sBC,[62] that is between 49BC, the year when the Transpadani received Roman citizenship, and 42BC, the year when Cisalpine Gaul was eventually 'liberated' of its provincial status (gained probably under Sulla) and became part of Roman Italy.[63]

These were years when the *causa Transpadanorum*, as Cicero calls it in the *de officiis*, occupied a central stage in political debate.[64]

The controversy surrounding the enfranchisement of the inhabitants of the Transpadane region had started about the time of the Social war. In 89BC, in fact, while those communities south of the river Po were granted Roman citizenship, those north of this natural demarcation received Latin rights.[65] The area, which the sources often refer to as Gallia Cisalpina, developed around this time (probably under Sulla) into a province and was governed by a proconsul.[66] This, however, was an anomalous status since the area was populated by a large number of Roman citizens, colonists from the Italian peninsula,

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[61] For a different reading of Varro's etymological research see COLEMAN 2001: 'From Plato to Isidore of Seville stretches an unbroken tradition of preposterous etymologies as whimsical in the formal connexions that they assume between words that have as little as one or two letters in common as they are ingenious in manufacturing a semantic relationship.' (p. 61) On Varro's way of doing etymology see DE MELO 2019, p. 34-43.

[62] For discussion on the composition date see Barwick 1957, which dates the composition of the work between 47 and December 43, when Cicero was killed. See also RÖSCH-BINDE 2001: the first triad, dedicated to Septimus, were written during the latter's quaestorship, between 49 and 45, while the second triad, dedicated to Cicero, must have been finished just before 45BC. ZEZTEL 2018, 34 firmly places the dates of composition between 45 and 43BC.

[63] APP. *b.c.* 5.22. Cf. DIO 48.1.2.5.

[64] CIC. *off.* 3.88: dealing with the episode of Curio on the enfranchisement of the Transpadani, which should show that *nihil esse utile, quod non honestum sit*. However, here Cicero shows awareness that what is *utile rei publicae* is not necessarily *aequum*. See DYCK 2004 *comm. ad loc.*, 611.

[65] On Gaul in Caesar's time see ANDO 2016.

[66] ON the provincial status of Cisalpine Gaul see BADIAN 1966, p. 906 and 913; BRUNT 1971, p. 166-72; Laffi 1992. CÀSSOLA 1991 dates the establishment of the province just after the Cimbric War. *Contra* EWINS 1955, p. 75-76 who, following HARDY 1916, favours instead the *lex Pompeia* of 89BC. See also WILLIAMS 2001, p. 16.

spontaneous migrants from central and southern Italy, as well as settlers who had received *viritim* land distribution.[67]

At least since the Social War, the Transpadani's claim to Roman citizenship had been at the centre of a political controversy. It seems, although there is no certainty, that at least some of the Transpadani might have fought alongside the Allies.[68] The reason for this is the subject of a heated debate, which is, at least in part, linked to the question concerning the extent to which Roman citizenship was perceived to be appealing at the time.[69] In addition, it might well have been the case that at least some of the Transpadani had perceived their situation to be aggravated by the exclusion clause of certain treaties that Rome had concluded with the Insubres and Cenomani. According to these treaties which Rome had stipulated with 'the Cenomani, the Insubres, the Helvetii, the Iapudes, and also with some of the barbarians in Gaul,' Cicero tells us, '…none of their people may be received by us as a citizen (*at enim quaedam foedera exstant, ut Cenomanorum, Insubrium, Helvetiorum, Iapudum, non nullorum item ex Gallia barbarorum, quorum in foederibus exceptum est, ne quis eorum a nobis civis recipiatur*).'[70] The twofold function of this clause, which has recently been the subject of a very compelling interpretation by Sanchez, was, on the one hand, the preservation of Roman military manpower, and, on the other, the safeguarding of the internal power structures of the allied communities.[71] The latter would have certainly served the interests of the elite of these communities, without, however, necessarily dispelling the perception by the rest of the society that a barrier to Roman citizenship had been erected for the members of wider communities. These might well not have felt reassured by the passage of the *lex Pompeia* of 89BC, which, according to Asconius, gave Latin status to the Roman and Romanizing communities of Transpadana, to whom, as Ando states, 'non-urbanized, non-Romanizing peoples were administratively and legally subordinated,'[72] and that granted the right to citizenship to those who held a local magistracy.[73] These so-called fictitious Latin colonies, which, according to Bispham, had received proper formal charters,[74] seem to be born not out of responses to local claims, but rather to Roman military necessities to discourage any allied hostility on the north front during the Social War, while the Romans were occupied fighting the allies on the Italian peninsula.[75]

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[67] BROADHEAD 2017 who attempts to quantify the migratory flux.

[68] See, for example, APP. *b.c.* 1.50 refers to the Galatai on the side of the Allies. See also APP. *b.c.* 1.42; PLUT. *Sert.* 4.1. See WILLIAMS 2001, p. 121, n. 58 with discussion of incident reported in FRONTINUS *Strat.* 1.9.3. Sceptical about Gallic involvement in the Social war EWINS 1955 and DART 2014, p. 122-3.

[69] MOURITSEN 1998, contra DART 2014.

[70] CIC. *Balb*. 32. BRUNT 1982 and SCHANCHEZ 2007.

[71] See SANCHEZ 2007, p. 219-31 with also a through overview of the scholarly debate. For the setting of this interpretation in the wider context of geographical mobility see BROADHEAD 2017, p. 181-4.

[72] ASC., *Pis*. 3: 'Cn. Pompeius Strabo… led out Transpadane colonies. For Pompeius did not establish them with new colonists but gave the Latin right to the old inhabitants who remained in the places, with the result that they were able to enjoy the right which the rest of the Latin colonies had, that is that by seeking magistracies they might obtain Roman citizenship (*Transpadanas colonias deduxerit. Pompeius enim non novis colonis eas constituit sed veteribus incolis manentibus ius dedit Latii, ut possent habere ius quod ceterae Latinae coloniae, id est ut petendi magistratus civitatem Romanam adipiscerentur*).' ANDO 2016, p. 283.

[73] MOURITSEN 1998, p. 106-8 argues that Asconius might be mistaken and this right might have been introduced later.

[74] BISPHAM 2007, p. 173-4.

[75] LURASCHI 1979, p. 141-214; LURASCHI 1986, p. 43-65.

The issue of Roman citizenship for the inhabitants of Transpadana remained acute in the following decades, and it may be seen in connection to an increase in migration to the area from south and central Italy due to its renowned fertility.[76]

If in 68BC, according to Suetonius, Caesar is said to have attempted to raise a revolt in the area, in 65BC the censor Crassus put forward the proposal of the extension of Roman citizenship in the area, which was fiercely opposed by his colleague Catulus.[77] A few years later, during his governorship of Transalpine and Cisalpine Gaul, Caesar seems to have enlisted Latin Transpadani and have founded the colony of Novum Comum.[78] Most interestingly, his general support for the cause of the Transpadani and his treating them as Roman citizens generated great opposition in Rome.[79] As Plutarch tells us, 'the inhabitants of Novum Comum, a colony recently established by Caesar in Gaul, were deprived of citizenship by them; and Marcellus, while he was consul, beat with rods a senator of Novum Comum who had come to Rome, telling him besides that he put these marks upon him to prove that he was not a Roman, and bade him go back and show them to Caesar.'[80] The essential point was to make sure that this message was received by Caesar. The *causa Transpadanorum* went far beyond the wishes of the inhabitants of the area and was deeply intertwined with the political struggle for power in Rome. It was not certain, Cicero tells Atticus, how Caesar had received the resolution of the senate, moved by the consul Marcellus, that he should resign his province before standing for the consulship, but there were rumours, which made Cicero fear the worst, that he had ordered the Transpadani to organise themselves as Roman citizens.[81]

A few years before, most likely in 54BC, Caesar had composed his *de analogia*, a linguistic treatise that aimed at instructing his readers about the way in which Latin should be written and spoken. By prescribing a set of rules to simplify inflectional patterns, Caesar, Garcea very convincingly argues, seems to have had in mind, amongst others, the Gauls, who needed to be taught how to speak Latin.[82]

Animated by immediate political concerns and responding to the rather anomalous nature of the province, Caesar now regarded Cisalpine Gaul as part of Italy and so he explicitly referred to it as Italia rather than Gaul or Cisalpine Gaul when talking about his province south of the Alps.[83] But this was

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[76] On the importance of the controversy and its championing by Roman politicians see WILLIAM 2001, p. 121-7, to which I am here indebted. On the fertility of the land see CATO *Orig*. F 46 FRHist; POL. 2.14-6; STRABO 5.1.4; PLIN. *NH* 3.16.117. On the migration in the area see BROADHEAD 2017 and DE LIGT 2012, p. 261. Contra BRUNT 1971, p. 159-203.

[77] SUET. *Caes*. 8; DIO 37.9.3. MEYER 1922, p. 12 connects this event to the pronouncement by Curio reported by CIC. *off*. 3.88.

[78] On Caesar's troops see CAES., *de bell. Gall*. 1. 24; 2. 2; 5. 24; 6. 1. For a minimising reading of Caesar's colonisation in the area see EWINS 1955. See also HARDY 1924, p. 126 ff.

[79] DIO 37. 9; CIC. *Fam*. 8. 1. 2; *Att*. 5. 2. 3; SUET. *Caes*. 9.

[80] PLUT., *Caes*. 29. See also CIC. *Att*. 5.11.2; APP. *b.c*. 2.26. EWINS 1955, p. 75 reads Caesar's foundation of Novum Comum as part of Caesar's wider plan to detach the area from close ties of clientela with Pompeius Strabo and his son (? Pompeius Magnus).

[81] CIC. *Att*. 5.2.3: *eratque rumor de Transpadanis eos iussos iiii viros creare*.

[82] GARCEA 2012, p. -10. See also POCCETTI 1993. On the prescriptive character of caesar's de analogia and its difference with Varro's de lingua Latina see DE MELO 2019.

[83] CAES. *bell. gall*. 1.10.3; 2.35.2; 3.1.1; 5.1.1.; 6.44.3; 7.1.1.

clearly not a universal sentiment, which could find probing support in the less than flattering accounts of the Gallic invasion of Italy circulating at Rome.[84]

In line with his previous attitude, and responding to the arrival of many citizens in the area on discharge from their legions, Caesar, in one of his first acts as dictator, extended Roman citizenship to the Transpadani in 49BC and, when revising the senate roll in 47, 46, and 45BC, even admitted Gauls to the senate.[85] The *causa Transpadanorum* was, however, not yet fully resolved: the area was still a province and was referred to as Gaul. Cicero, in fact, addressing the senate in 44BC, described the province of Gaul as the flower of Italy (*flos Italiae*), the bulwark of the empire of the Roman people, whose municipia and colonies were united together to defend the authority of the senate and the majesty of the Roman people.[86] Their opposition to Anthony deserves even higher praise, he argued a few months later, yet again before the senate, since they have remained loyal despite having being excluded from citizenship for many years and thereby considered alienated from the Republican cause.[87] It was two more years before the final transformative act of the province of Gaul took place: in 42BC, at the instigation of Octavian, Cisalpina Gaul was eventually made a part of Italy.[88]

During these years of tense political debate about the role of the Transpadani, Varro wrote the *de lingua Latina*, and by doing so he took a powerful, albeit implicit, stance on the dispute.

In his etymological analysis of autochthonous and foreign words, not only did Varro provide a rather accurate reflection of the status of the language as spoken throughout the Italian peninsula, but also drew a picture of the whole of Italy, which extended south of the Alps and included the Transpadana region.[89] By investigating the living language of the present via the heuristic tool of etymology, not only did Varro give room to the contributions of the Gauls to Rome (especially in the sphere of military life), but also provided them with the status of true contributors to the current make-up of Rome.[90]

Sharing with Cicero, the dedicatee of the work, an idea of Romaness not exclusively based on birth and military achievements, but inclusive also of a shared culture and language, Varro wrote a work on the Latin language that shaped the notion of what it meant to be Roman in the second half of the first century BC, and by doing so took a very precise stance on the *causa Transpadanorum*.[91]

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[84] For an excellent account of the historiographical variants of this invasion see WILLIAMS 2001 and for the stereotypical image of the Gauls in Roman imagery see GRUEN 2011, p. 141-58.

[85] DIO 41.36.3 explicitly refers to the area 'below the Alps and above the Po'. CIC. *fam*. 9.15.2: *cum in urbem nostram est infusa peregrinitas, nunc vero etiam bracatis et Transalpinis nationibus*. See also see SUET. *Caes*. 76.3; cf. 80.2. On the enrolment in the senate see SYME 1938 who also identify some from Transpadania. See EWINS 1955 for an interesting analysis of Caesar's motives.

[86] CIC. *Phil*. 3.13.

[87] CIC. *Phil*. 12.10. Cf. *Phil*. 5.37.

[88] DIO 48.12.5. Cf. APP. *b.c*. 5.3.22; 20.79-80; 22.86-7.

[89] ADAMS 2007, p. 335-6. Cf. CIC. *Brut*. 171 that refers to Gallic Latin. On Varro's Italia cf. VARRO *de re rust*. 1.2.3-8 and NELSESTUEN 2015, p. 83 ff.

[90] See also BLOOMER 1997, p. 50 for etymology as a model in identity making as well as in false identities. DENCH 2005, p. 320 who emphasises Varro's Romanocentric focus, where 'his investigations of 'foreign' words reveal a curiosity that extends only to their 'consumption' at Rome.'

[91] BLOOMER 1997, p. 55.

Although Varro's positive picture of the Gallic contributions to the development of the Latin language (and culture) was consonant to an approximately contemporary tradition on the Gauls in Greek writings, which integrated them in the history of Greek and Roman civilizations,[92] a crucial point is that, contrary to many of these writers, Varro was a central figure of the political landscape of the time. He had been quaestor, tribune of the plebs, and had even reached the praetorship (most likely in 68BC), having fought alongside Pompey against Sertorius in the 70s and against the pirates in 67BC.[93] If in the civil war he ended up taking the side of Pompey, he was later pardoned by Caesar, who in 47BC assigned him the project of the first public library at Rome. This should not come as a surprise: already in 59 BC Varro, who had been critical of the so-called first triumvirate, had served on Caesar's agrarian commission, dedicated his *Antiquitates divinae* to him, and at the outbreak of the civil war, which he attributed to the intransigent attitude of the consuls rather than Caesar himself, had been portrayed by Caesar as tied by his close bonds to both Pompey and Caesar.[94]

Varro was a general, a politician, and an intellectual in his own right. By writing his *de lingua Latina* in the way he does, Varro ultimately intervened in the political debate of his time – and if his view was in line with Caesar's cause, this is not because he was subservient to the dictator.

Varro contributed to the debate of his time his own cultural and political vision, elaborated in his study of the Latin language, the aim of which was to build a new consensus amongst the members of this wider community, no longer united by a shared experience, but rather by knowledge, *Latinitas sensu lato*.[95]

In the process, he came to endorse and propagate a new conception of Italy, where the geographical coincided with the legal and the political.[96] If earlier on the Appenines might have been, according to some, a significant natural limit of Italy, now the Alps were its legal and political as well as natural boundaries.[97]

Writing at a time when being Gallic or of Gallic descent might still have been an object of derision,[98] in the *de lingua Latina* Varro made an intervention in support of the *causa Transpadanorum*, militating in favour of, or, at least, providing the cultural justifications for their full inclusion in Rome. This was a new world where a treatise on Latin grammar was also a political act.

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[92] WILLIAMS 2001, p. 113-9.

[93] For a full biography see DAHLMANN 1935; DELLA CORTE 1954, and DRUMMOND 2013.

[94] On Varro's politics and its relation with his works, see esp. ARENA & MACGÓRÁIN 2017 and TODISCO 2017 for Varro's political relations and WISEMAN 2009, for whom Varro is a true expression of popularis politics/sentiments.

[95] MOATTI 2015, introduction.

[96] On the conception of Italia see *Atti* 2014, MASSA 1996, DENCH 2005. GABBA 1978; LETTA 1984; LETTA 2008, who distinguishes between an ethical conception of Italy from a geographical idea. Most recently, F. Carlà-Uhink 2017, esp. 35- 58.

[97] Cato's *Origines* F48 *FRHist* and F150 *FRHist* may support the idea of the Appenines as Italian borders. The textual transmission, however, of F48 *FRHist* is rather poor and the evidence cannot be considered conclusive. See the excellent commentary ad loc. by CORNELL 2013, 3.94-5. On Cato see also DENCH 2005, 170. Cf. POL. 1.6.6; 2.14.7; LIV. 39.54.12; APP. *Hann.* 8; *b.c.* 1.86.

[98] See, for example, CIC. *Pis*. Fr. ix-xi Nisbet, and *Q. fr.* 3.1.11.

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