



DIURNA

NEWSPAPER OF THE 26TH LATIN SUMMER SCHOOL: DIES MERCURII, JANUARIUS XV

- **Abbey's Bookstall will be near the inside fountain in The New Law Building today and tomorrow**
- **The Dates for the 27th Latin Summer School are Monday 18 to Friday January 22 January, 2021**

Prize-winning entry in the Diurna Competition

By Lisa Creffield

Damnatio memoriae: Cicero in Rome

"Do you have a statue of Cicero?"

"Cicero?" The souvenir vendor outside the Pantheon looks blankly at me.

"Marcus Tullius Cicero. Console, oratore." I'm pronouncing it *Cheehero* to help him out.

Light dawns. "Ah! Cicerone!" He produces a statue of a bearded fellow in a toga. "Marcus Aurelio" is engraved at his feet.

I shake my head. "Non è Cicero."

"Sì! Marcus Aurelio Cicerone!"

I went to Rome to meet Cicero. The likeliest location seemed the forum and senate, the very heart of the ancient city, where Cicero railed against Catiline, pleaded for Milo and condemned Anthony. So we set off towards the Palatine in the searing summer heatwave. Ancient Romans strolled about in heavy woollen togas; we're sweltering in light cotton.

On the way we encounter one of Cicero's old associates, "Julio Cesare". We stumbled across the site of his assassination earlier. It's now a sort of sanctuary for feral cats, behind a ruined temple. We pose for a photograph with Julio and continue on our way to the forum.

But there's little trace of Rome's most renowned orator here. Augustus and successive emperors have rebuilt the forum multiple times, obliterating what lay before. There's barely any mention of the late Republic. No echoes of the countless hours of rhetoric declaimed to the Conscript Fathers, no flash of a white toga or step of a senatorial sandal.

The Late Republic was Rome's Golden Age of literature. Not only the era of Cicero, but the era of Vergil, Catullus and Horace. Of Lucretius and Livy. Even of Julio Cesare and his *Bello Gallico*.

Ubi est Cicero?

Marcus Tullius Cicero, born 106 BC, consul in 43 BC, a man who loved Rome so much that exile sent him into nervous breakdown. The last defender of the Roman Republic. A man who adored Rome and believed himself adored in return: *O fortunatam natam me consule Romam!* as he proclaims in his self-penned ode to the glory of his consulship.

During his reluctant governorship of Cilicia, he writes to Atticus that he misses: "*lucem, forum, urbem, domum*" and to Caelius that "*mirum me desiderium tenet urbis*" - "an amazing desire for Rome grips me":

"The city, the city, my Rufus, inhabit it and live in its light! All foreign travel, as I have judged since my youth, is dark and sordid to those whose work could be illustrious at Rome."

It's ironic that Nero, once officially *damnatio memoriae*, is currently back in the spotlight in Rome. His golden pleasure palace (*domus aurea*) - buried by Trajan under millions of tonnes of rubble - is gradually being excavated. You can visit its vast chambers and experience a virtual reality tour of what it once looked like. Archaeologists are even trying to excavate Nero's reputation.

Of the glory of Cicero, little needs excavating. We have a vast amount of his works extant: his speeches, his philosophical writings, his poetry, his letters. Biographies of the world's greatest orator continue to be written and published. Entire conferences are still held about him. People are even naming apps after him: you can download MyCicero or Cicero Concierge on your smartphone.

Why is he so obscure in the very city of his greatness?

Part of the problem is centuries - millennia - of other glories, from art and sculpture to religion. As much as Ancient Rome inspired the Renaissance - according to historian Tadeusz Zielinski, the Renaissance was "*primarily a revival of Cicero, and only after him and thanks to him of the rest of classical antiquity*" - it

has been overtaken and buried by it. You can buy plastic figurines of David, calendars of Michelangelo and Caravaggio and artistic representations of “*Il Pisello*”. There’s even the *Calendario Romano* featuring the Vatican’s twelve hottest priests (also available on eBay). But “twelve hot consuls” or “twelve sexy senators”? We’re out of luck.

We find a few scant traces of Cicero elsewhere. There’s a bus stop named “Cicerone”. Down some steps near the Corso is a “Libreria M.T. Cicerone” that sells “*Libri Scontati - Gadget - Souvenir - T-Shirt*”. Its logo is a portrait of the eponymous orator with an understandably weary frown. The world’s greatest statesman flogging discounted books and trinkets.

O tempora, O mores indeed.

On our last evening, we finally encounter Cicero. He is magnificent: standing outside the Corte Suprema di Cassazione, Italy’s Supreme Court, his right arm outstretched, his toga flowing in elegant drapes of gleaming white marble. *Avvocato, politico, scrittore, oratore e filosofo di pregevole livello* as the Court website describes him: “lawyer, politician, writer, orator and philosopher of remarkable level”

The eternal orator of the Eternal City. But modern Rome, with its traffic, tourists, pizza and gelato, has all but forgotten him.

LATIN AT WEA SYDNEY IN 2020

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Latin Beginners 1



Thursdays from 30/1 to 26/3, 12.30 – 2.30

Text: Oxford Latin Course Book 1, chapter 1

Latin Beginners 4

Tuesdays from 28/1 to 24/3, 12.15 – 2.15

Text: Contact WEA for information.

Classes taught by John Coombs (level 2A):

Latin Advanced

Wednesdays from 29/1 to 25/3, 10.00 – 12.00

Text: Wheelock’s Latin Reader

Latin Advanced

Fridays from 31/1 to 26/3, 10.00 to 12.00

Text: Wheelocks Latin Reader

Latin Advanced

Fridays from 31/1 to 26/3, 2.15 to 4.15

Text: Oxford Latin Reader

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Mondays from 3/2 to 30/3, 2.00 to 4.00

Text: Oxford Latin Course Book 3, chapter 40

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- **Corrigendum:**

For those mystified by the Latin in the last phrase given for the Writing Competition, unfortunately a typo occurred, which was only noticed today. It should be:
7. Voce sonora dicere