

A LITTLE KNOWN PLEA IN DEFENSE OF LATIN:



Gabriel Barrius's *Pro Lingua Latina* *

By Marc Laureys

To date, Gabriel Barrius has been remembered almost exclusively as historian of his native region Calabria. In his De antiquitate et situ Calabriae, published in 1571, he produced the first full-fledged historical-geographical study of this area of Italy, which in Barrius' eyes had received insufficient attention from his great predecessors in the field of historical geography, Biondo Flavio and Leandro Alberti. Barrius, however, also raised his voice in an entirely different discussion, namely the defense of Latin against the growing importance of the volgare in sixteenth-century Italy. After Romolo Amaseo had set the tone in two orations De Latinae linguae usu retinendo, held at Bologna in 1529, many others followed suit and tried to maintain a privileged status for the Latin language against what they perceived as the threat of the vernacular tongue. In his treatise Pro lingua Latina (published first in 1554 and again in 1571), Barrius too develops a long and sustained plea in favor of Latin. Although he does not belong to the most important and best known supporters of Latin, his work merits nonetheless attention on account of the broad range and variety of his arguments, in which not only linguistic and literary, but also historical, educational, and religious facets are taken into consideration.

Today Gabriel Barrius is remembered almost exclusively as historian of his native region of Calabria.¹ In 1571 he published in Rome a large treatise *De antiquitate et situ Calabriae*, the first full-fledged historical-geographical study of this province of Italy, which in his view had received insufficient attention from his predecessors in the domain of historical geography, Biondo Flavio and Leandro Alberti. Along the lines set by the pioneers in this field of scholarship, Barrius provided a detailed account of the political and cultural history as well as the geography of Calabria. His exposition remained for a long time to come a standard work of reference — a status

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¹ For a brief bio-bibliographical introduction see Codazzi 1964.

confirmed by a new edition (Rome, 1737), procured by Thomas Acetus and enlarged with an introduction about the author and his work, additional material and corrections culled from a working copy of the author (now *BAV*, Vat. Lat. 10908), as well as a set of *animadversiones* by Sertorius Quattrimanus (printed from the manuscript, bound in the copy of *De antiquitate et situ Calabriae* now preserved at the *Biblioteca Angelica*, GG.3.35); both Acetus and Quattrimanus were fellow Calabrian *litterati*, who, like Barrius in his time, developed their career to an important extent in Rome.²

In his introduction Thomas Acetus gathers a few biographical data about Barrius, which have not been substantially enriched since then. Barrius was born in the town of Francica in Calabria in the early years of the sixteenth century. A misreading of the adjective denoting his birthplace, *Francicanus*, erroneously made him into a Franciscan friar, *Franciscanus*, in some biographical accounts. Almost nothing is known for certain about his education, but at some point he was ordained as a priest. We do not know when exactly he moved from his native region to Rome, but it is in Rome that he published his writings, first in 1554 his monograph *Pro lingua Latina*, along with two companion pieces *De aeternitate Urbis* and *De laudibus Italiae*, then in 1571 a revised version of these treatises and his already mentioned work about the geography, history and antiquities of Calabria. In Rome Barrius belonged to the entourage of Guglielmo Sirleto, *custos* and later Cardinal Librarian of the Vatican Library. Being a fellow Calabrian, Sirleto may have played a role in bringing Barrius to Rome. Another important humanist, with whom Barrius maintained friendly ties, documented in a number of letters, is Pietro Vettori, who was also associated with Cardinal Sirleto. After the publication of his two books in 1571, Barrius left only a few sporadic traces and probably died within the following decade. All through his life he kept an unassuming profile and never rose to any position of importance. His social status and financial resources always remained quite modest. He clearly struggled to find the funds required to finance his publications and only with some effort found the necessary sponsors, as he reports in the preface to each of his works. In the preface to the first edition of his *Pro lingua Latina*, we even hear that he had difficulties to make ends meet, so much so that he was not able to buy any books and was forced to borrow

² The 1737 edition also includes a division of the text into chapters (with appropriate titles added), a chronological synopsis and several indices. Previously, the work had been reprinted in Schottus 1600, col. 993–1218, Graevius 1704–1723, IX pars 5 [1723], and Jordanus 1735, col. 119–346 (with an interesting assessment of the work by the editor in his preface to the reader).

them.³ In fact, his rank was so inconspicuous that his *opus magnum* on Calabria was for some time attributed to his patron, Cardinal Sirleto, rather than to himself.⁴

What strikes the reader of *De antiquitate et situ Calabriae* immediately, is the glowing passion with which Barrius describes his native region. Exuberant praise for Calabria, its qualities, assets, and achievements permeates the entire treatise and reaches almost lyrical heights in an impressive passage from the introductory book.⁵ Particularly interesting from the viewpoint of literary and intellectual history is the long section towards the end of the work, devoted to the great men of letters from Calabria; one finds included there, e.g., a remarkable appraisal of Pomponio Leto.⁶ Barrius's local patriotism becomes on a least one occasion even quite aggressive, namely when he accuses Paulus Manutius and his son Aldus junior of plagiarism, because they allegedly published a treatise of Janus Parrhasius (from Cosenza in Calabria!) under their own name.⁷ Barrius repeated this accusation in a letter to Pietro Vettori, written from Rome in 1577; there Barrius maintained that he acted also in the name of Cardinal Sirleto, emphasizing that neither of them could tolerate work of Calabrese authors to be stolen and claimed by others. At the same time Barrius asked Vettori to seize the denounced books and send them to Rome, so that Sirleto could store them away in the Vatican Library; Barrius would cover all the costs involved.⁸

Another telling, not to say provocative, passage that has caught the eye of many a reader and has often been quoted to characterize Barrius's cast of mind appears at the opening of book two of *De antiquitate et situ Calabriae*. There he inveighs against earlier authors who have dealt with Calabria and

³ See Barrius 1554, fol. 3^v.

⁴ The matter is clarified once and for all by Thomas Acetus in the introduction to his edition of the work (Barrius 1737, XII–XIII): he condemns the attribution as utter nonsense, since Cardinal Sirleto had no need to publish someone else's work under his name and the *De antiquitate et situ Calabriae* contains several references to Barrius's other writings. Acetus surmises that Sirleto may have provided Barrius with information or material about Calabria; he points out that Sirleto mentioned a study *De rebus Calabris* of his own in his treatise *De emendationibus Breviarum Romani* (I have not been able to verify this indication).

⁵ See Barrius 1737, 42–48 (lib. 1, cap. 20), entitled *De Calabriae ubertate ac felicitate*.

⁶ See Barrius 1737, 410–411 (lib. 5, cap. 19).

⁷ See Barrius 1737, 83–84, in a chapter entitled *De viris Consentinis sanctitate, doctrina ac dignitate conspicuis* (lib. 2, cap. 7).

⁸ Bandinius 1758–1760, II 108–111. Towards the end of his letter Barrius mentions where he lives (111): “Ego in insula Tiberina habito, Cardinalis in palatio” (I live on the Tiber Island, the Cardinal in the Vatican palace). Quattrimanus explained that the whole issue rested on a confusion on the part of Barrius: see Barrius 1737, 99.

targets in particular such authors who composed their writings in the vernacular. In an emotional outburst he even invokes evil upon any person who would dare to translate his (Barrius's) own works into a vernacular tongue. Books written in the vernacular should in his opinion perish along with their authors, because the vernacular is appropriate merely for ordinary folk and by no means a fitting medium for serious discussions; only Latin, conversely, is suited for scholars and able to bring about eternal glory. At the end of his statement he duly refers to his earlier treatment of this matter in his monograph *Pro lingua Latina*.⁹ This cross-reference, however, even if especially apt here, has a larger bearing. In the preface of *De antiquitate et situ Calabriae*, Barrius makes clear that the subject matter and themes of all his works are closely related to each other.¹⁰ In fact, in the dedication letter of the first edition of *Pro lingua Latina* (addressed to the then Bishop Antoine Perrenot) Barrius also speaks about the completion of his monograph on Calabria, which implies that he prepared these two books at the same time:

But I will also publish as soon as possible the book I have written about the history and geography of Calabria, if I can find the support of some reliable benefactor. For I need to go to Calabria, which in my judgment must be praised on many grounds as the part of Italy that is most renowned for all its facts and men, in order to investigate certain locations, whose names have changed, lest I happen to fall into the same errors, into which several more recent historians have fallen, and so that I survey the region, in that I describe all details in orderly and painstaking fashion, and may convey its beauty.¹¹

Praise is the constant leitmotiv: the praise of the Latin language, the praise of Rome, the praise of Italy, and the praise of Calabria are each developed from the same perspective, according to the same method, and out of the same motivation. Barrius's ultimate incentive on every occasion is the "communis omnium studiosorum utilitas et delectatio, non tantum patriae charitas et amor" (common benefit and pleasure of all scholars, not merely affection and love for my homeland).¹²

⁹ See Barrius 1571a, 81–83 (= Barrius 1737, 50–51), especially 82 (51).

¹⁰ See Barrius 1571a, 1–2 (= Barrius 1737, 1).

¹¹ Barrius 1554, fol. 4^{r-v}: "Librum vero, quem de antiquitate et situ Calabriae conscripsi, si mihi certi cuiuspiam moecenatis non defuerit adiumentum, primo quoque tempore in lucem proferam. Nam necesse est ut me in Calabriam, quam et rebus omnibus et viris clarissimam Italiae partem pluribus nominibus merito laudandam esse censui, conferam, ut loca quaedam, quorum nomina immutata sunt, vestigem, ne forte eosdem in errores incidam, in quos incidere nonnulli recentiores rerum scriptores, utque regionem perlustrem cum vel singula seriatim ac minutatim scribam, eiusque formam impressurus sim."

¹² See Barrius 1571a, 2 (= Barrius 1737, 1).

Barrius certainly presented his views on the Latin language with the same vigour and with an equally strong conviction as his feelings for Calabria. No wonder, then, that Barrius in the dedication letter of the first edition speaks with some bitterness of the criticism and opposition, even hatred and contempt he encountered during the preparation of his work:

Even among those, who seemed to have great affection both for me and the Latin language, there was no lack of people who attempted to deter me from this so honourable undertaking. Yes, they even ridiculed me for pursuing a flying bird, as the saying goes, because I promised to demonstrate that there once existed in ancient Rome both a Latin and vulgar tongue, just as they each occur now. And although these people should have encouraged and helped me with such an outstanding project and such a necessary work, that I have set out to write in favour of the Latin language, particularly in these present times, in which it meets with such disdain, these people – I say – who were considered Latin from the starting-pen to the finish, so to speak, have opposed not so much me, who am frail and mortal, but the Latin language itself, which is eternal and for which I have very willingly undertaken so many wearisome efforts. And with so many inconveniences, so many nightly labours, so many efforts, so much time spent in sweating I earned not fame, which I definitely never strove after, even though it is the reward of true virtue, not financial gain, which I never hoped for, but immense envy and contempt.¹³

In the second, revised edition from 1571, these unpleasant experiences are recalled to memory in an accompanying letter, addressed to a Calabrian nobleman, Dominicus Tramodanus.¹⁴ The front matter of this second edition also includes a letter sent to Barrius by Tramodanus in 1556: Tramodanus compliments Barrius on his work and encourages him to publish a

¹³ Barrius 1554, fol. 3^{r-v}: “Ceterum non defuerunt vel ex iis, qui et me et Latinam linguam multum amare videbantur, qui me ab hoc tam honesto instituto deterrere conati sint. Quinetiam me, quod apud Romanos et Latinum et vulgarem sermonem olim, ut nunc uterque est, extitisse ostensurum fore pollicerer, quasi volantem, ut dicitur, avem sectantem deridebant, cum nihil mihi fuerit potius quam ut id ostenderem. Et cum ipsi ad tam egregium facinus tamve necessarium opus, quod in favorem Latinae linguae his praesertim temporibus, queis adeo negligitur, scribere sim adorsus, cohortari me et adiuvare debuissent, ipsi – inquam – qui Latini habebantur a carcere, ut dicunt, usque ad metam, non quidem mihi, qui caducus et mortalis sum, sed Latinae ipsi linguae, quae aeterna est, pro qua tot sudatos labores obivi non invitus, adversati sunt. Et tot incommodis, tot vigiliis, tot laboribus, tot sudoribus non gloriam, quam certe ambivi nunquam, licet ea sit verae virtutis fructus, non quaestum, quem nunquam speravi, sed ingentem mihi invidiam comparabam et contemptum.”

¹⁴ See Barrius 1571b, fol. +2^v–3^r.

revised version, which he hears is already under way.¹⁵ The fact that Barrius needed fifteen more years to bring out his new edition again points to the various stringencies he had to face throughout his career.

The subject matter itself of his book, namely the status and use of Latin with respect to the vernacular, had given rise to intense debates throughout the Renaissance. In Italy the debate surrounding the origin and rise of the *volgare* and its relationship to Latin started in Dante's times and lasted well into the nineteenth century. In this complex set of problems, which came to be known as the *Questione della Lingua*, three main questions can be distinguished: (1) the status and use of Latin vs. the vernacular, (2) the status of Tuscan within the *volgare*, and (3) the normative value of classical (Trecento) vs. modern (contemporary) *volgare*.¹⁶ After a period of relative neglect, the epoch-making writings of the *Tre Corone*, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, enjoyed a renewed interest around the beginning of the sixteenth century. Pietro Bembo maintained that the rules of literary Italian should be distilled from the works of these three authors and, therefore, needed to be construed according to the principles of literary imitation. Several Florentine scholars radically opposed this theory and insisted that the modern Tuscan idiom should be the basis of literary *volgare*; in the view of, e.g., Giambattista Gelli literary Italian was identical with contemporary Tuscan. In the course of the Cinquecento other positions were adopted as well, questioning Tuscan or any other regional dialect as exclusive norm for the literary *volgare* and variously favoring a Classical linguistic basis, as in the case of Girolamo Muzio, or a modern literary usage, as in the case of Gian Giorgio Trissino or Lodovico Castelvetro, among others.¹⁷

A different reaction came from the side of the Latinists, who objected in general against a supremacy of the *volgare* in whatever form and defended the superiority of the Latin language in its pure, Classical appearance.¹⁸ Romolo Amaseo, Professor of rhetoric at the University of Bologna, set the tone in two famous orations *De Latinae linguae usu retinendo*, held in 1529 at Bologna before Pope Clement VII and Emperor Charles V.¹⁹ In these orations Amaseo launched a direct attack against Pietro Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua*, published four years earlier (although composed in the first years of the sixteenth century!), and exalted the Latin language as the only

¹⁵ See Barrius 1571b, fol. +2^r.

¹⁶ See Hall 1942, 3–7. Even though somewhat dated on specific topics, Hall's discussion of the entire question is still quite valuable on account of its lucid presentation and clear focus on the essential issues. One of the most extensive treatments is Vitale 1978.

¹⁷ See Hall 1942, 13–21.

¹⁸ For a general overview of this position in the sixteenth century see Cian 1911.

¹⁹ They were published posthumously in *Orationum volumen*, Bononiae 1564. On these orations see the remarks of Kristeller 1990, 139–140.

linguistic medium fit for learned communication and able to reach an international cultivated audience. Since only Latin – Amaseo maintained – can claim formal perfection and a universal dimension, only Latin should be adopted for public and official speech and documents as well as in the context of literature and scholarship, whereas the vernacular can at best be drawn upon for daily practical use in the private sphere. Amaseo’s ideas became stock arguments in the defense of the supremacy of Latin throughout the Cinquecento and were rehearsed by several humanist scholars after him, such as Francesco Florido Sabino,²⁰ Carlo Sigonio,²¹ and Uberto Foglietta.²² Genuinely new arguments hardly ever appeared in these later treatises. Foglietta, however, made the interesting point that Latin should be adopted as sole medium of international communication also on commercial grounds: the common use of Latin would favour international trade, so that Latin would take up the role that Arabic already played in the Islamic world.²³

Although Barrius’s *Pro lingua Latina* has scarcely received any attention from modern scholars, it fits perfectly into this general line of reasoning about the status and use of Latin and merits consideration in this context. In the three books of his *Pro lingua Latina*, totalling 428 pages, Barrius discusses all facets of the rise, development, and ensuing prestige of the Latin language. From a historic survey of the ever expanding dominance of Latin he develops a sustained plea for its continued use in the present and the future, especially in the face of the rising influence of the vernacular, and Tuscan in particular, which Barrius perceives as a threat to the pre-eminent position of Latin. The three books are not subdivided into chapters or paragraphs, and neither do they present a clear and systematic structure. It is, therefore, not easy to summarize Barrius’s discussion, because the development of his main arguments is constantly interrupted by observations on minor issues and problems. Some of the central thoughts and ideas, moreover, are picked up, recapitulated and discussed from different angles a number of times throughout the treatise.

²⁰ *Apologia in M. Actii Plauti aliorumque poetarum et Latinae linguae calumniatores*, Lugduni 1537. As the title indicates, this work deals to a large extent with the more specific issue of the status of Plautus (mainly in comparison to Terence).

²¹ *De usu linguae Latinae retinendo*, an oration held in 1556 and published in *Orationes septem*, Venetiis: Zilettus 1560. See especially De Santis 1995.

²² *De linguae Latinae usu et praestantia*, Romae: Josephus de Angelis 1574. See especially Gara 1996. The treatise was reprinted in Hamburg in 1723, along with explanatory notes and an interesting *Dissertatio de linguae Latinae cultura et necessitate* (pp. 1–51), written by Johann Lorenz von Mosheim.

²³ See Gara 1996, 193.

A passage from the preface to the first edition can serve as a useful starting point to capture the tenor and direction of Barrius's defense of Latin. One of the reasons, he says, why he encountered so much opposition and hostility against his work, was his thesis that among the Romans there had always existed a *Latinus sermo* and a *vulgaris sermo*.²⁴ This strict separation between a *Latinus sermo*, i.e. a stable language, bound by grammatical rules, which must be learnt through study, and a *vulgaris sermo*, i.e. a fluctuating language, not regulated by grammatical precepts, but rather assimilated spontaneously, is developed in detail and consistently upheld by Barrius throughout his treatise as the guiding principle of his entire account. With this twofold concept Barrius harks back to the medieval notion of the parallel existence of a *lingua artificialis*, formally structured according to grammatical rules (and for this reason often called *grammatica*), and a *lingua naturalis*, variable and congenital.²⁵ In the course of his treatise he adopts the adjective *Latinus* quite often for both categories, in combination with other qualifying adjectives, so that it appears that Barrius is thinking of two linguistic subsets or registers within one language, namely Latin, rather than two different languages.²⁶ In Barrius's view, now, this situation of *diglossia* (in the sense given to this term by Charles A. Ferguson)²⁷ had continued from ancient Roman times down through his own era. This theory, which had remained unchallenged in the early Renaissance and had been espoused most notably by Dante and Petrarch, was fundamentally criticized for the first time in a famous debate, held in Florence in 1435 by a number of humanists from the entourage of Pope Eugenius IV.²⁸ There Biondo Flavio and Poggio Bracciolini posited that in ancient Rome there existed only one language, namely Latin, used both by educated people and common folk in their oral and written communication. Leonardo Bruni, for his part, maintained the until then traditional viewpoint that the language of ordinary people had always been different from that of the educated class. The theory of the parallel existence of two linguistic varieties was adopted by none other than Lorenzo Valla, but remained nonetheless a minority view among

²⁴ See Barrius 1554b, fol. 3^{r-v}.

²⁵ For various attestations and implications of this theory see Rizzo 2002, 15–27. I would like to underline my particular debt to Silvia Rizzo's research in understanding the context of Barrius's position in the debate about Latin and the vernacular.

²⁶ His terminological difficulty appears in the writings of earlier humanist authors as well. See Rizzo 2002, 91.

²⁷ See Ferguson 1959.

²⁸ This debate has been analyzed many times. For a recent assessment that takes into account all earlier discussions but also provides new insights, see Rizzo 2002, 75–82.

the humanists of the later Quattrocento.²⁹ The opposite assumption of the uniform character of Latin, which implied that Latin, in its form documented in the texts, had been in ancient times the native language of the Romans, was far more successful, in particular also with those scholars, such as Leon Battista Alberti, who defended the use of modern *volgare* and argued that a modern vernacular could be codified in grammatical rules just like the language spoken by the ancient Romans and, consequently, could be raised to the same status as Latin.³⁰ Over the following decades, Tuscan, in particular, would gain increasing prominence with respect to both Latin and the other Italian dialects and would become a major factor in the *Questione della Lingua*.

No wonder, then, that the advocates of the primacy of Latin during the Cinquecento, who witnessed an ever wider use of the vernacular in ever more areas of society as well as a concomitant rise of the prestige of *volgare*, were keen on emphasizing the qualitative difference between Latin and *volgare* and thus generally advanced the concept of a permanent *diglossia* ever since Antiquity. In Barrius's *Pro lingua Latina*, too, this idea provides the basis for the discussion of every specific topic. Of the various implications which this theory entailed, two in particular receive explicit attention from Barrius. First, there is the issue of the corruption of Latin. Those who argued for the uniform character of the Latin language in Antiquity held the view that Latin had been corrupted by the barbarian, especially Gothic, tribes after their invasion and the collapse of the Roman Empire. Among Italian humanists this 'Gothic thesis' enjoyed widespread popularity, not in the least for obvious nationalistic reasons: it fitted perfectly into their whole concept of the decay and subsequent rebirth of civilization.³¹ Barrius, however, draws a different conclusion: in his opinion, the Goths

²⁹ For Valla's position see above all Rizzo 2002, 87–118, where she convincingly corrects earlier interpretations and illustrates his affinity to the medieval tradition.

³⁰ See Rizzo 2002, 78–79.

³¹ It is from this perspective that Valla brings up the 'Gothic thesis' in his *Elegantiae* (Valla 1952, 610): "Nam postquam hae gentes semel iterumque Italiae influentes Romam ceperunt, ut imperium eorum ita linguam quoque, quemadmodum aliqui putant, accepimus et plurimi forsan ex illis oriundi sumus. Argumento sunt codices Gothice scripti, quae magna multitudo est. Quae gens, si scripturam Romanam depravare potuit, quid de lingua, praesertim relicta sobole, putandum est?" (For after these tribes [i.e. the Goths and Vandals] pressed time and again into Italy and conquered Rome, we took both their rule and also, as some think, their language, and very many of us perhaps descend from them. Manuscripts written in Gothic characters, of which large numbers are extant, serve as proof. If this tribe managed to corrupt Roman script, what should we think about the language, especially after the Goths have left offspring?). Valla is clearly not focussing on the relationship between Latin and the vernacular, but blames the Goths and Vandals rather for the breakdown of literary culture in the Late Roman Empire.

corrupted at the most the ancient *vulgaris sermo*, but had no influence whatsoever on the *Latinus sermo*, whose grammatical structure remained unspoiled. The unbridgeable distance that separated the *lingua artificialis* from the *lingua naturalis* saved it from any possible demise.³² The other facet of this interpretation, namely the fact that modern *volgare* finds its origin in the natural language of the ancient Romans, is interestingly enough not pursued in depth by Barrius. This insight appeared for the first time in the writings of Lorenzo Valla, in his case applied to the modern Roman dialect, but was developed in detail and related to modern Italian as a whole only from the sixteenth century onwards.³³ Barrius, for his part, simply denied that Tuscan had evolved out of the ancient Roman vernacular. For him it was unthinkable that such bitter enemies of Latin as the Tuscans would speak a language historically linked to the ancient Roman idiom.³⁴ This statement is one instance among many, scattered throughout his treatise, which reveal a profound aversion on the part of Barrius against everything Tuscan.

A second, and in Barrius's eyes even more important, topic associated with the question what language was spoken in ancient Rome is the relationship between the language of uneducated people and that of the *intelligentsia*. Even the supporters of the uniform character of Latin usually agreed that within the Latin language there were different levels of quality, connected with different social strata in the population using Latin.³⁵ For the adherents of a situation of *diglossia* this qualitative hierarchy was of course plain and self-evident. The *Latinus sermo* was ennobled by grammar and therefore inaccessible to those who lacked education and formal training. Barrius repeatedly evokes the traditional antithesis between the role of nurses, from whom children learn their *vulgaris sermo*, and the teachers, from whom pupils and students acquire the *Latinus sermo*.³⁶ In the discus-

³² See Barrius 1571b, 133–135 and 166–177.

³³ See Rizzo 2002, 104.

³⁴ See Barrius 1571b, 103–104.

³⁵ See Rizzo 2002, 81.

³⁶ Barrius highlights the superior status of the *ars grammatica* already early in the first book of his work; see e.g. p. 11: “Utique Latina lingua, sicut Graeca et Hebraea, ex arte grammatica, ut plenius ostendamus [*immo ostendemus*], constat, et quod arte constat, sine arte sciri non potest” (Surely the Latin language, just like Greek and Hebrew, is based on the theory of grammar, as we will show more fully, and what is based on theory, cannot be learned without theory); p. 12: “Nam grammatica non modo inter nobilissimas ingenuasque disciplinas recensetur, sed etiam primas obtinet atque fundamenta ad alias honestas disciplinas iacit earumque basis est quaedam, qua corruente corruunt et illae” (For grammar is not only reckoned among the most noble and distinguished sciences, but even holds pride of place and lays the foundations for other honourable disciplines and is in a way their cornerstone; when it breaks down, those others break down as well); p. 36: “Quid enim aliud est Latine loqui, quid Latinitas ipsa, nisi grammatica ars formulis praeceptisque

sion of this issue, however, Barrius more than ever reveals that he follows in the footsteps of Lorenzo Valla specifically. For Valla had insisted on the point that in Antiquity no differently than in modern times the *Latinus sermo* could be mastered only by studying the rules of grammar at school.³⁷ The lack of formal training and expertise, incidentally, was in Valla's eyes painfully documented in the writings of Poggio Bracciolini, which Valla castigated in violent invectives, especially his *Apologus*.³⁸ Precisely these notorious analyses of Poggio's Latin by Valla are referred to by Barrius to underscore the requirements of the *Latinus sermo*.³⁹

Systematical study, then, was always necessary to reach a level of cultivation in speech and style that rises above the *vulgaris sermo*. Education and schooling are, therefore, dealt with at some length in *Pro lingua Latina*. In the introductory section of his treatise, Barrius complains about the deterioration of the standards of education in general and of the quality level of Latin style in particular, and provides an analysis of its causes: they range from a lack of parental guidance over a drop in the quality of school training to a lack of motivation and commitment on the part of the students themselves. Here is his opening statement, in an obviously Ciceronian dress:

As I quite often pondered and let go through my mind the question what might be the reason why today, or rather since many years, our young boys despise and loathe Latin and Greek literature, in which not only the liberal arts, but also Roman law, by which humankind is governed, and even divine philosophy itself and all other fields of learning are written and the record of history is handed down to posterity, and why they only pursue vernacular literature, in more correct terms surely a blather and trifle of sorts, thus preferring metal slag over gold, three reasons above all came into my mind, one of which arises from the fault of the parents of the children, another from that of the teachers, and another from that of the pupils.⁴⁰

quibusdam constans? Quare toto errant coelo atque delirant, qui Latinam linguam ex sola auctorum lectione sine grammatica adipisci putant quive Romanos olim Latine natura locutos Gothosque Latinam linguam corrupisse nugantur." (For what else is speaking Latin, what is pure Latinity itself but the theory of grammar based on certain rules and precepts? Those, therefore, who think to master Latin solely through reading authors and without grammatical theory and who babble about the Romans having once spoken Latin by nature and the Goths having corrupted the Latin language, get it all wrong and talk nonsense). Particularly in book two of his treatise he deals at length with the *ars grammatica* and insists that the *Latinus sermo* can only be acquired through study at school.

³⁷ See Rizzo 2002, 91–92.

³⁸ See in particular Rizzo 2004.

³⁹ See Barrius 1571b, 165.

⁴⁰ Barrius 1571b, 6: "Cogitanti persaepe mihi et animo volutanti quaenam esset causa, cur hac tempestate, immo vero abhinc multos annos, nostri adolescentes Latinas Graecas-

In order to corroborate these arguments Barrius draws a parallel with the situation faced and described in similar terms by Lorenzo Valla in the fifteenth century as well as Tacitus and Quintilian in the first century A.D.⁴¹ Large segments of *Pro lingua Latina* consist of observations, rules, and guidelines to improve the oral and written proficiency in Latin, and above all to keep Latin speech and style free from detrimental influences of the *volgare*. The Latin language, however, could also be enriched in a positive, as opposed to a merely defensive, manner, e.g., by introducing new words, as Cicero himself had amply documented. On the issue of neologisms in Latin, a favorite topic of Renaissance humanists, which implied for them both the introduction of new coinages and the use of existing words in a meaning not attested in Classical Latin, Barrius pleads for a cautious innovation in Latin vocabulary and against a severe and utterly restrictive Ciceronianism, which would run against the spirit of Cicero himself.⁴² In this sense, too, then, Barrius follows the lead of Lorenzo Valla, who had authoritatively argued for this approach in a famous exchange with Bartolomeo Facio. A key idea behind this attitude was the recourse to the *usus* or *consuetudo* of Classical authors as a criterion of linguistic purity: the rules and precepts of Latin language and style should be deduced not only from the rigid art of grammar, but also from the variegated literary usage documented in Classical literature. Although this principle, culled from the rhetorical treatises of Cicero and Quintilian, but also known from a famous passage in Horace's *Ars poetica* (70–72), had been clearly articulated by Leonardo Bruni, it was again Valla, who for the first time applied it on a broad and systematic basis, particularly in his *Elegantiae*. The range of authors, whose *usus* is relevant for Valla's analysis, covers the entire era of Classical Antiquity: the quotations in the *Elegantiae* reach from the earliest Roman writers down to Boethius and Priscian, even if evidence from Cicero and Quintilian holds pride of place. With this procedure and perspective Valla set standards that not only determined the mainstream theory of Latin style until the present day but also prove essential for Barrius's evaluation of Latin.⁴³

que litteras, quibus non modo liberales artes, sed etiam Romanum ius, quo humanum genus regitur, atque etiam illa ipsa divina philosophia ceteraque disciplinae omnes sunt scriptae et rerum gestarum memoria posteris prodita, despiciant atque abhorreant et vulgares tantum litteras, verius quidem nugae ac nequias quasdam scoriis auro praeferentes consecrentur, tres potissimum causae succurrerunt in mentem, quarum una ex parentum puerorum, alia ex docentium, alia ex discentium culpa manat.”

⁴¹ See Barrius 1571b, 66–71.

⁴² See Barrius 1571b, 333–334.

⁴³ For a succinct discussion of these central linguistic tenets of Valla's *Elegantiae* see, among others, Ax 2001, 46–54. Some important specifications on the precise understanding of the notion of *usus* in Valla are to be found in Rizzo 2002, 107–118.

Valla's legacy in the restoration of the principles of correct Latin, then, looms large over Barrius's *Pro lingua Latina*. In fact, Valla's authority seems more important than the contribution of any single advocate of Latin from the Cinquecento, of whom Barrius explicitly mentions or directly quotes not a single one. It is, therefore, not easy to define and clarify the precise intellectual context for Barrius's defense of Latin. His argumentation is of course colored in part by the nascent Counter-Reformation, which Barrius witnessed in Rome. This church political background already transpires in the preface to the first edition, where he declares to react with his work against the rise of the vernacular in general, but against translations of the Bible in particular.⁴⁴ In 1554 this observation could not but refer to the ongoing discussions about that issue at the Council of Trent. The problem of a modern translation of the Bible was dealt with at Trent during the sessions of February through April 1546; while the Council fathers never reached a clear-cut and well-defined position, subsequent popes, from Paul IV onwards, handled the possession and use of vernacular Bible texts in a very restrictive manner.⁴⁵

Other notions, as well, that mark the Counter-Reformation perspective of the discussion and evaluation of Latin, are emphasized by Barrius. Already in the opening of his treatise, he calls to mind that Latin is one of the three holy languages, endowed with a divine status and everlasting prestige:

And so those three languages, which surpass all barbarian languages just as the purest gold surpasses metal slag, were established by divine providence on the basis of grammatical theory, penetrated all islands and wandered throughout the entire world. Not only are they useful to men, but even utterly necessary, not only to the extent that human learning and the eminent and brave deeds of history were transmitted in written records but also that through these languages, as if through three suitable witnesses, divine law and the name of God was spread out over the whole world and the true and eternal God was acknowledged and worshipped by all nations. And for this reason even the Roman Empire was without any doubt established by divine providence, as I shall show, so that after the peace of Rome was granted to the entire world the author of that peace would become known to all nations by using the force and service of the Empire. Those who strive to abolish these languages or to cloud and obscure them, seem in a fit of insane madness not only to oppose virtue and work against the

⁴⁴ See Barrius 1554, fol. 3^r.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Smolinsky 1998, 182–183.

common benefit of men with a great mark of a thankless mind, but even to resist the power of God.⁴⁶

This unique characteristic is later on associated particularly with Latin and further elaborated upon especially in sections of the first and third book. Here Barrius develops ideas that will be even more forcefully argued by other authors of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Significantly, Barrius rather avoids addressing the mutual relationships between the three traditional sacred languages and remains entirely silent about earlier Renaissance scholarship concerning the value of Greek and Hebrew letters. Instead, he limits himself to a comparison between Greek and Latin, only to demonstrate the supreme dominance of Latin language and literature throughout the world.⁴⁷ From Antiquity onwards, Latin had progressively exceeded the boundaries of its original territory, Latium, and gradually provided a powerful bond between the most diverse peoples. Barrius adduces testimonies from Cicero and Lorenzo Valla to demonstrate that respect for and mastery of Latin always served as a criterion for inclusion in or exclusion from the world of Roman civilization and its cultural heirs.⁴⁸ But, in addition, he also stresses the spiritual significance of Latin, which grew ever more important in post-Tridentine appraisals of Latin. Again, however, Lorenzo Valla had prepared the way for this particular direction. Departing from the main focus of his *Elegantiae*, Lorenzo Valla had underscored the intimate connections between the Latin language and the Roman Church as guardian of the Christian faith in his academic oration *In principio studii*, held at the Sapienza in 1455, less than two years before his death: the eternity of the Christian faith, watched over by the Roman Church, guaranteed the perpetuity of Latin.⁴⁹ This new dimension in the praise of Latin became a central argument during the Counter-Reformation: just as the holy charac-

⁴⁶ Barrius 1571b, 3: “Itaque istae ipsae tres linguae, quae barbaras omnes haud secus ac purissimum aurum scoriam praecellunt, divinitus ex arte institutae omnes peragrarunt insulas totoque orbe peregrinatae sunt. Quae non modo utiles sunt mortalibus, sed etiam perquam necessariae, nec eas tantum ob res, ut dogmata humana resque egregie fortiterque gestae monumentis traderentur, sed ut per eas tamquam per tres idoneos testes divina lex divinumque nomen per universum orbem diffunderetur et a cunctis nationibus Deus verus et aeternus agnosceretur et coleretur. Qua ratione vel Romanum imperium haud dubie, id quod ostendam, divinitus est institutum, ut universo orbi Romana pace reddita auctor pacis imperii utens opera ac ministerio cunctis gentibus innotesceret. Quas linguas qui tollere aut obnubilare confundereque nituntur, delirantes iam ac desipientes non solum magna cum ingrati animi nota virtuti reluctari et communi mortalium utilitati adversari, sed divino etiam numini resistere videntur.”

⁴⁷ See Barrius 1571b, 74–86. For the status of Greek and the controversies surrounding Greek philology during the Renaissance see Saladin 2005.

⁴⁸ See Barrius 1571b, 93–96.

⁴⁹ See especially Rizzo 1994, 81–82.

ter of Rome as the capital of the Church Triumphant was ever more vigorously expressed and documented, the Latin language, too, was endowed with a sacred dimension that surpassed the confines of temporal history and gave it an inherent and timeless prevalence over all other languages.⁵⁰ Even if this unique distinction of Latin was not officially decreed at the Council of Trent, this tenet gradually acquired a quasi-dogmatic status in Catholic defenses of Latin down to the Apostolic Constitution *De Latinitatis studio provehendo* (*Veterum sapientia*), signed by Pope John XXIII in 1962 on the tomb of Saint Peter and promulgated in the midst of the deliberations at the Second Vatican Council.⁵¹

Barrius, too, firmly believed that Latin is the congenial bearer of the message of the Roman Church, and was convinced, therefore, that the apostle Peter preached to the Romans not in Greek or Hebrew, but in Latin.⁵² Less than a century later, the Jesuit Melchior Inchofer took this notion of Latin as a sacred language to its ultimate consequence: in his *Historia sacrae Latinitatis*, published in Rome in 1634, he considered it most likely that the blessed in heaven and even Christ himself conversed in Latin.⁵³ In this context, Barrius returns to the issue of vernacular translations of the Bible, which he qualifies as “summa dementia et temeritas et haeticorum inventio” (utter nonsense and temerity and an invention of the heretics).⁵⁴ Although debated since the late Middle Ages, the problem had become particularly acute on account of the rise of Protestantism and the success of the Bible translation brought out between 1522 and 1534 by Martin Luther – “Martinus Lutherus, verius luteus” (Martin Luther, but more rightly Martin the ‘mudman’),⁵⁵ in Barrius’s eyes. Along with other strict opponents of any modern versions of the Bible, Barrius considered such versions a continual source of heresy, since ordinary people gained in this way direct and unhindered access to the Bible text and, lacking the guidance of theologians or other scholars, all too easily strayed from orthodoxy in their interpretation of the biblical message.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ For a typical example of the Counter-Reformation perception of the Latin language see Laureys 2000, 135–146.

⁵¹ See Waquet 1998, 92–93, and from a linguistic perspective Schmitt 2000, 1062.

⁵² See Barrius 1571b, 294.

⁵³ See Laureys 2003, 655–656.

⁵⁴ See Barrius 1571b, 384.

⁵⁵ See Barrius 1571b, 384.

⁵⁶ Barrius 1571b, 373–386, especially 384 (partly quoted above): “Divinam autem scripturam in Iudaeae, Atticae et Latii vernaculas vulgares linguas aut in barbaras vertere summa dementia est et temeritas et haeticorum inventio. Nam quotquot huiusmodi profanae novitatis auctores extitere, haesiarchae fuerunt aut certe non recte sensere de fide idque egerunt, quo rudis plebis animos mulcerent et allicerent, ut se sequantur.” (To turn the Holy Scripture into the indigenous vernacular tongues of Judea, Attica and Latium

During the Counter-Reformation the close association of the sacred character of Latin with the image of Rome as a reborn holy city, in which Latin was providentially rooted, was the cornerstone of a comprehensive strategy to oppose the Reformation and reconsolidate the Church firmly on its apostolic foundations. Interestingly enough, this intimate tie between the Latin language and the city of Rome remains a rather marginal point in *Pro lingua Latina*, but is instead the central focus of one of the two companion pieces, published under the same cover, namely *De aeternitate Urbis*.⁵⁷ This protracted glorification of Rome, which incorporates all the topics and facets of the *laudes urbis Romae* that had accrued over the centuries, was composed by Barrius with the express double purpose, firstly, to show everyone, and in particular the Italians, how great a debt of gratitude was owed to the political and cultural heritage of the Roman world, and, secondly, to make clear to those who had rejected orthodox Christianity how vicious and sacrilegious a crime they had committed against the one Holy and Eternal City.⁵⁸

Despite these obvious traces of the intellectual climate of Barrius's own times, the main principles of *Pro lingua Latina* as a whole can certainly not be deduced exclusively from the Counter-Reformation. Barrius conveys in his treatise also a wider perspective of a Christian humanism, ultimately based on the Ciceronian ideal of the intimate connection between wisdom and eloquence. Latin was the prime linguistic medium of learning and culture; the rise and fall of Latin letters thus perfectly mirrored the development of human civilization. In addition, Renaissance humanists had learnt from the Church Fathers that not only human knowledge but also divine wisdom found its perfect expression in Ciceronian Latin. In this sense, the Latin language received long before the Counter-Reformation the aura of a timeless, hallowed, and unassailable idiom, fundamentally different from all others. Lorenzo Valla, too, reconstructed and proposed a linguistic model that was essentially stable and unchangeable over time. In the *Elegantiae* in particular, Valla's acute sense of historical evolution and constant recourse to the *usus* of individual Classical authors is countered by a strong awareness of the historical continuity of Latin as the *lingua artificialis* par excellence.⁵⁹

or into barbarian languages is utter nonsense and temerity and an invention of the heretics. For as manysoever authors of this kind of impious oddity there were, they were all instigators of heresy or at least had false ideas about faith and acted in this way in order to flatter the uncultivated minds of the common folk and lure them over to their side).

⁵⁷ See Barrius 1571b, 428–558.

⁵⁸ See Barrius 1571b, 430–431.

⁵⁹ See Rizzo 2002, 105–106.

To Barrius's mind, it is this matchless quality of Latin that justifies its unique position as an irreplaceable linguistic vehicle of cultured discourse. At the same time, it is Barrius's chief argument in his plea in favor of the continued use and practice of Latin. Other and later authors, who argued more specifically from a Counter-Reformation perspective, claimed that the everlasting stability of Latin, grounded in fixed grammatical rules, provided the ideal basis for a unified, harmonious, and international Catholic community. The educational program of the Jesuits aimed to meet precisely this aspiration. But, interestingly enough, the Jesuits are not even mentioned once in Barrius's *Pro lingua Latina*. His concern is dominated by a wider humanist concept of the Latin language as an instrument not only of communication, but also of the preservation of culture *tout court*. For Barrius it was unimaginable that this role could ever be taken over by any modern language, since the ever changing and fluctuating *vulgaris sermo* could never equal the grammatical solidity of Latin.

In the final analysis, then, it is the genuinely medieval dichotomy of *lingua artificialis*–*lingua naturalis* and the linguistic and ideological implications Lorenzo Valla worked out from it that constitute the intellectual framework of Barrius's plea in defense of Latin. Running against all modern and innovative developments and insights in the field of linguistics, which advanced rapidly in the course of the sixteenth century, Barrius adopted as the foundation of his *Pro lingua Latina* the medieval concept of *diglossia*, which proved perfectly serviceable for safeguarding the unrivalled primacy of Latin.

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