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.....  
**MEDIEVAL LATIN**  
**LITERATURE**  
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## CHAPTER 4

LATIN AS A LANGUAGE  
OF AUTHORITY  
TRADITION

RYAN SZPIECH

In his work on language and signs, *De doctrina Christiana* (2.11), Augustine explains that the best remedy for uncertainty about literal meaning ("ignota signa propria") is knowledge of languages, and to resolve confusion in reading Scripture, one must turn to Hebrew and especially Greek rather than rely on the "latinorum interpretum infinita uarietas," [the endless diversity of the Latin translators] (Augustine 1962, 42). Augustine's unwavering support for the Greek Septuagint derived from his faith that it reflected the miraculous product of seventy men writing in unison—a union that stood in stark contrast to the *infinita uarietas* of Latin translations. Because of this support, Augustine maintained a strident epistolary debate with Jerome over the latter's project to translate directly from Hebrew. He gave his Parthian shot against Jerome's translation in this debate in his late opus *De ciuitate Dei* (18.43), stating, "Ecclesiae Christi tot hominum auctoritati...neminem iudicant praefereendum" [The churches of Christ judge that no one is to be preferred to the authority of so many] (Augustine 1955, 2: 639).

In taking this position on the Septuagint, Augustine recalls the two foundational aspects of the concept of *auctoritas* that would persist throughout the Middle Ages. First, it is the power to initiate or create, the power of an *actor*, a source or maker, ultimately ascribed to God; second, by extension, it is the imitability devolved by that maker to his heirs, the power given to God's vicar through prophecy or miracles to *authorize* through word and example. What was "authoritative" culled its power from both a legitimizing appeal to originality and a secondary appeal to

the inheritance of that originality. Thus, authority could pertain, albeit unequally, to both the maker and the made, the originator and his epigone, the *actor* whom all trusted and the authorized commentator whose authority depended on the *actor's* source.

It was in this double sense that Latin existed as a language of authoritative tradition in Augustine's time, and it was also in this sense that it faced repeated challenges over the long course of its medieval development. Although Latin *per se* was not the vehicle of original revelation, those who wrote it in the Church garnered authority for it by claiming that it represented an inheritance of God's law, just as the Septuagint, for Augustine, both followed the Hebrew Bible in prestige and was elevated in subsequent use to stand on equal prophetic footing with it. Similarly, through prescriptive and descriptive grammar in the works of Donatus and Servius (fourth century), Macrobius (fifth), and Priscian (sixth), among many other late-antique and early medieval grammarians, Latin's authority was established as a source of tradition by positing the unity of past expression and present understanding in terms of an unchanging grammatical code (Irvine 1994, 86). The authority of the Latin language in the Middle Ages stemmed from its own status as the inheritor of originality in three distinct but intersecting senses: as the language of Rome and its empire (implying also the authority of apostolic succession from the Church of Rome); as the language of learning and wisdom, first as embodied in a standard canon of trusted *autores* and later, as a rival to Arabic, inherited from Greece; and, finally, as one of God's three holy languages, the companion of Hebrew and Greek. Authoritative as both a source and a derivative, the tongue of Rome and of its heirs, it became in the Middle Ages—in most cases, through deliberate and willful measures by its users to elevate and preserve its status—the language of science, learning, rhetoric, poetry, and imperium, but also of supersession, the language of the Church triumphant.

These aspects of Latin's authority emerged at different times roughly according to the evolution of medieval educational norms from monastery to cathedral school to university. This growth followed the pattern, established before the pre-dominance of Christianity, of Latin as a language of *opposition* within a wider world of competing language communities. Classical Latin's competition against the prestige of Greek as a language of culture and philosophy was repeated in the early Middle Ages by ecclesiastical Latin's competition with the prestige of Hebrew as a holy language. This later gave way to a clerical competition against the status of Arabic as a language of learning and science and against the encroaching of written vernaculars as languages of poetry. Over the millennium following Augustine's defense of the authority of the Greek Septuagint, when Latin became *de facto* a Western, Christian language, the authority of Latin as a language of worship, poetry, and learning would be challenged both through multiple stages of vernacularization and through direct competition with Arabic, which came to be a dominant language of learning and cultural prestige across the Mediterranean after the ninth century.

## THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST: LATIN AND THE THREE LANGUAGES OF THE CROSS

The thirteenth-century canonist and Bishop of Mende, Guillaume Durand (d. 1296), nicknamed "Speculator" for his encyclopedic treatment of canon law in the *Speculum iudiciale*, described the following familiar liturgical scene in his *Rationale divinarum officiorum*: "Post orationes, sacerdos crucem uelatam batulat ad dextram cornu altaris ... Cantat autem sacerdos quasi hebraice in persona Saluatoris; acoliti cantant grece: 'Agios o Theos,' quasi in persona grecorum; chorus respondet: 'Sanctus, sanctus' etc., in persona latinorum." [After prayers, the priest carries the veiled cross to the right corner of the altar ... The priest then sings in Hebrew, as if in the role of the Savior; the acolytes sing "Agios o Theos" [Holy is God] in Greek, as if in the role of the Greeks; the Choir responds, "Sanctus, sanctus" [Holy, holy], etc., in the role of the Latins]. Just as each language is represented by the individual voices of the priest, acolytes, and chorus, respectively, so each language represents a figure in human history: "Sicque tribus linguis laudatur Deus, uidelicet hebraica, que propter legem omnium linguarum est mater; greca, que doctrix est; et latina, que imperatrix est propter Romani dominium imperii, et papatus" [Thus God is praised in three languages, namely Hebrew, which by law is the mother of all languages; Greek, which is the teacher; and Latin, which is the empress, on account of the dominion of the Roman Empire and of the Papacy] (Durand 1995, 2: 375). Latin, like Hebrew and Greek, is one of the holy languages of Christian worship, but it also plays a specific role in the history of the Church. Just as Hebrew is the mother and Greek the teacher, so Latin is the empress of all by virtue of the hegemony of the Roman Empire and of its heir, the papacy.

The connection of Latin with Hebrew and Greek hearkens back to the patristic notion of the three languages of the cross in which Jesus was mocked as "King of the Jews" (Jn 19:20). Although first elaborated in the writing of Hilary of Poitiers, this notion was quickly taken up by Augustine, for whom Latin appeared on the cross "propter Romanos multis ac paene omnibus iam tunc gentibus imperantes," [on account of the Romans, ruling many and, at that time, virtually all nations] (PL 35: 1946). In the patristic tradition to which Augustine gives voice, Latin is the newest and least prestigious of the three holy languages, yet it is also the rightful heir and keeper of its more illustrious forebears. On the basis of his formulation, Latin would be seen throughout the Middle Ages as the *imperatrix*, both worldly and spiritual, of all other tongues and nations.

The tradition of Latin as one of the three languages of the cross was an effective countermeasure to the very low place conceded to all languages but Hebrew by the Genesis accounts of the fall of man and the confusion of Babel (Gn 11:1-9). Latin, along with virtually all other languages, could not compete with the preeminent prestige of Hebrew as *omnium linguarum mater*, the only language uncorrupted by original sin. As God created things, says Petrus Comestor (d. 1178)—repeating an

extremely widespread tradition that included Jerome, Cassiodorus, Bede, Remigius of Auxerre, Rupert of Deutz, and others—"impositus eis nomina Adam hebraica lingua que sola fuit ab initio" [Adam gave them names in the Hebrew language, which was the only one at first] (Petrus 2005, 35). It was only after the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel that other languages were born, and the tradition dating back at least to Irenaeus (*Adversus haereses* 3.22-3) specifies that seventy-two languages (seventy in some sources) resulted from the chaos (PG 7: 958). From this the diversity of nations was also born. Saint Isidore (d. 636) sums up in the *Etymologies* what was already a well-established tradition: "Linguarum diversitas exorta est in aedificatione turris post diluuium. Nam priusquam superbia turris illius in diuersos signorum sonos humanam diuideret societatem, una omnium nationum lingua fuit, quae Hebraea uocatur.... ex una lingua multae sunt gentes exortae" [The diversity of languages arose with the building of the tower [of Babel] after the flood. Before the pride of that tower divided human society into the different sounds of signs, there was one language of all nations, which was called Hebrew... many nations arose from one language] (Isidore 1911, 9.1.1, 1:343). The division of languages was thus connected with the population of the world by the three sons of Noah (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) who came to occupy the Near East, Africa, and Europe, respectively, in the medieval T-and-O map.

This idea was repeated almost verbatim by the Frankish monk Rhabanus Maurus, and developed by many later writers such as Andrew of Saint Victor, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, and Lucas of Tuy (Grondeux 2005, 49-50; Richter 2006, 16). Such theories place Latin in an undistinguished position relative to Hebrew as a language of revelation. As Durand concluded, "hebraea lingua mater et nobilissima est omnium linguarum propter auctoritatem diuine Scripturae; latina uero inferior quasi filia" [The Hebrew language is mother and noblest of all languages on account of the authority of divine Scripture, but Latin is inferior like a daughter] (Durand 1995, 2: 437). Based on this early patristic tradition, the idea persisted up until the late thirteenth century that Latin, like all languages except Hebrew, was the product of God confounding man's hubris and did not share in the supreme authority of Adam's language. Scholastic writers extended this idea by praising Hebrew as not only the original, prelapsarian language, but also as a more precise and perfect language of concrete realism. Thomas Aquinas (*De veritate* 18.4.5) thus praised Adam because, in giving Hebrew names to all things (Gn 2:9), "plene naturam rerum cognouit" [He recognized fully the nature of things] (Thomas Aquinas 1972, 541).

To trump Hebrew's prerogative as the only language to precede man's fall, ecclesiastical writers invoked the comprehension of tongues at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) to be the counterpoint to the chaos of Babel just as Christ was the counterpoint to Adam (Borst 1957-63, 224-26, 1989-92). Augustine, in his insatiable appetite for historical typology, would later extend this in his Psalms commentary (54.7) to see Pentecost as both a fulfillment of what began at Babel and a prefiguration of the future unity of the Church, which represents the unity of a perfect language of the spirit: "Volunt unam linguam, veniant ad ecclesiam; quia et in diversitate linguarum carnis una est lingua in fide cordis" (PL 36: 636) [Those who

want a single language, let them come to the Church, since even in the diversity of the languages of the flesh, there is one language in the faith of the heart]. At the same time, although earthly Latin was more often relegated to the status of a distant epigone compared with Hebrew—much as it was repeatedly characterized in antiquity as an impoverished language next to Greek—the topos of Latin's inferiority, in both cases, contains within it a claim to inherit and even superiority. Just as Lucretius could praise Greek as having a more varied vocabulary but also imply that, for that reason, it was more confused and obscure, so medieval writers who invoked the status of Latin as a belated language of revelation could invert that idea to Latin's benefit by invoking the final supersession of Greek wisdom and Hebrew truth within the Latin tradition of the Western Church (Rubin 1998, 319).

The unity claimed by the Church, moreover, was also an adaptation of a familiar Roman topos of imperial unity out of linguistic diversity, such as in Martial's comments in his *Libri spectaculorum* praising Titus's dedication of the Coliseum: "Vox diuersa sonat populorum, tum tamen una est, cum uerus patriae diceris esse pater" [There sounds a diverse voice of the people, but nevertheless it is one when you are called the true father of the fatherland] (Farrell 2001, 3). This model of imperial unity transferred easily into patristic characterizations of Latin's prestige as the language of reunification, personified as an *imperatrix* under whose dominion the Church rules both Jews and Gentiles. This theme was particularly popular in Ireland. As Augustine Eriugena (fl. ca. 655) explains in *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, "In eis crucis Christi titulus litteris hebraicis, graecis et latinis scriptus, euangelica auctoritate perhibetur" (PL 35: 2161) [The title written on the cross of Christ in those Hebrew, Greek, and Latin letters is asserted by evangelical authority]. Latin's ability to imperiously absorb the prestige of other, rival languages found apt expression in metaphors of war and conquest. As the abbot Baudri of Bourgueil (d. 1130) wrote in his "Ad dominam Constantiam," evoking the perennial topos of the beautiful captive woman of Deuteronomy 21:10-14, a prize of conquest "shorn" of her alterity by a Christian reading:

Totus mundus uelut unica lingua loquatur...  
Hostili preda ditetur lingua Latina,  
graecus et hebreus seruiat edomitus...

[The whole world speaks as if with one tongue...  
Let the Latin tongue be enriched by enemy booty;  
Let the vanquished Greek and Hebrew serve...]  
(Baudri 1979, 269-70; cf. Lubac 1959-64, 1.1: 298)

The attempt to claim for Latin the status of both a universal and revelatory language of reunification did not go unchallenged. In the late-antique rabbinical work of halakic (legal) exegesis, *Sifre Devarim* (§ 343), Deuteronomy 33:2 is interpreted to mean that God "revealed Himself not in one language but in four... in Hebrew... Latin (*leshon romi*)... Arabic... [and] Aramaic." Yet all the nations are like dogs that cannot

carry a burden, while Israel is like a sturdy ass that carries her own load plus that of the dogs (Neusner 2001, 161–62). Medieval Jewish texts attacked Christian views of authority close to the root by characterizing the Latin language itself as unfit to be a vehicle of revelation. The southern French philosopher Joseph Ibn Caspi (d. 1340) recounts a debate with a bishop over the relative merits of Hebrew and Latin:

Once a bishop honored in our country, who was versed in the Holy Scriptures, asked me... what superiority and sanctity have the Hebrew language and writing over the Latin language (*leshon romi*) and writing, since the meaning intended in [both Hebrew and Latin] remains the same? My answer was... the writing of our books written in [Hebrew] is the Script of God and it is in this tongue that they were given. If a king gives us a letter of freedom and if he writes it with his own hand and in our own tongue, it will be more precious to us than anything else... Our books are written in the language of the King... [Secondly], the meaning intended by the metaphors has been changed [in Latin] and has so deteriorated in a number of passages that they cannot be understood even by the One who made them, God. The Book of Moses translated into another language and written in another writing is not at all the Book given to us by God. (Joseph 1996, 58–59; trans. in Sirat 1990, 326)

Ibn Caspi even quotes the opening of Genesis in Latin (but in Hebrew characters) to show that “the language of the Christians” lacks the “double sense” intended by God in the Hebrew original. Even if it serves as a language of translation, it lacks the capacity for the plenitude of God’s original revelation. In Hebrew, Latin thus often goes unnamed and is referred to simply as *leshon romi* (“the language of Rome”) or *la’az* (“a foreign language,” which could include both Latin and Latinate vernaculars). (This usage is evident in medieval Hebrew exegesis in Christian lands [Banitt 2007] and also appeared in multilingual Hebrew pharmacological texts [Bos and Mensching 2005]. On the phenomenon of “Judeo-Latin” and Latin in Hebrew characters, see Wexler 1988 and Banitt 2007.) Arguments like Ibn Caspi’s can be understood as responses to the persistent attempts to construct the authority of Latin as a supersessionist language of reunification within which are gathered the scattered fragments of truth left over from the loss of an edenic *Hébraica vertitas*.

## BETWEEN OUR FATHERS’ LATINA AND OUR MOTHER’S LADINO

In the opening section of his Latin treatise, *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante defines the spoken vernacular—a word meaning “of a *verna*, i.e., a home-born slave”—as implicitly domestic and female, a language “quam sine omni regula nutricem imitantes accipimus” [that we learn without any formal instruction, by imitating our

nurses] (Dante 1996, 2). This common vernacular—as distinct from Dante’s “illustrious vernacular,” a learned and high register of (male) poetic expression not spoken natively by anyone—is contrasted with a “secondary,” factitious but logical language, which the Romans call *grammatica*. Of these two, spoken vernacular and written *grammatica*, vernacular is more original, more universal, and more natural. Even so, this *materna locutio* is not to be confused with Hebrew, the proverbial “mother” of all languages that (as he later argued in *Paradiso* 26.124–38) was lost even before the chaos of Babel. (Dante changed his thinking on the question of Adam’s Hebrew between the *De vulgari eloquentia* and *Paradiso*; Mazzocco 1993, 159–81.) Despite their nobility, the spoken vernaculars descend from the chaos of Babel each as “ydiomate in vindice confusione recepto” [a language received in vengeful confusion] (Dante 1996, 17), and are thus all among the wages of Eve’s sin and subject to variation, development, and corruption. By contrast, *grammatica*—a Greek term that refers plainly to *writing*—“nichil aliud est quam quedam inalterabilis locutionis ydemptitas diversibus temporibus atque locis” [is nothing less than a certain immutable identity of speech in different times and places] (*ibid.*, 20). As a grapholect, a language spoken by none but standardized through writing and rationalization, it is an artificial invention of men made to attenuate the fragmentation of Babel that is manifest in the permutations of spoken language. Latin is a man’s language, learned only through long and arduous study, while the common vernacular is the natural language of all, taught by mothers and nurses and used by poets only to speak about love to women, who, as he says in the *Vita Nuova* (§ 25), might find “Latin verses difficult to comprehend.” (Dante 1973, 55).

Dante here rehearses what was already a familiar distinction between the spoken vernacular as a *materna locutio* and written Latin as a *patrius sermo* (the language not of one’s father, but of patriarchal tradition). Although he praises the former as “more noble,” he unquestionably sees the latter as more authoritative. The origins of this topos, which fully emerged in the twelfth century, stretch back to Roman characterizations of Latin as the tongue of the Fathers, often in contrast with the effeminacy of Greek—and Horace’s characterization of *Graecia capta* who retakes her Latin captor provides a felicitous parallel with the fair captive of Christian exegesis (Farrell 2001, 53). Such constructed gendering of language registers is obviously not unique to Latin or to Western Europe. As Walter Ong has pointed out, the learning of patriarchal languages including Latin and any other classical language (classical Arabic or Chinese, rabbinical Hebrew, and Sanskrit), involves in virtually all cases a distinction of prestige between the language of common currency and other “linguistic economies far removed from the hearth and from the entire world of infancy” (Ong 1977, 28). In the western Mediterranean, the precise relationship of natural and learned languages, of Hebrew as the exalted “mother of languages” alongside ignoble mother tongues, and of the place of Latin in these hierarchies, was a persistent topic of reflection in the later Middle Ages. The thirteenth-century Franciscan Salimbene de Adam (d. 1290) records among the “excesses” of Frederick II of Sicily his experiment to determine if children were born with innate ability in any language. Frederick had various newborns fed and cared for but isolated them

from all language because "volebat enim cognoscere utrum Hebreum linguam haberent, que prima fuerat, an Grecam vel Latinam vel Arabicam aut certe linguam parentum suorum ex quibus nati fuissent. Sed laborabat incassum, quia pueri sive infantes moriebantur omnes" [He wanted to know if they spoke Hebrew, which was the first language, or Greek or Latin or Arabic or some language of their parents from whom they were born. But he labored in vain, because the children—all infants, rather—all died] (Salimbene 1998, 535).

In Latin's case the division between dialect and grapholect gradually took on a new, increasingly gendered connotation over the course of the Middle Ages. In his ninth-century encomium of Charlemagne, Einhard (d. 840) stated that "Latinam ita didicit, ut aequae illa ac patria lingua orare sit solitus" [He learned Latin so [well] that he used to speak it just as he would his native tongue] (Einhard 1947 74, my emphasis). Here, his "native tongue" is a *patria lingua*, the spoken dialect of his fatherland against which his knowledge in Latin is measured. By the twelfth century, this "native tongue" appears as specifically feminized, as is evident in Guibert of Nogent's (d. 1124) description of Pope Urban II: "Non enim minor ei videbatur in Latinae prosecutione locutionis ubertas quam forensi cui libet potest esse in materno sermone pernicitas" [The richness in his production of Latin speech did not seem any less than the fluency can be for any public speaker in his mother tongue] (Guibert 1996, 111, my emphasis). The evolving prestige of Latin in the Middle Ages is tied directly to the perpetuation and accentuation of this gendered contrast between, in Dante's words, the "natural" and the "artificial."

This contrast paralleled the widening gap between registers within Latin, slowly leading to a distinction, first in practice then in name, between different Latinate languages (Banniard 1992, 506–7; Grotans 2006, 16–17). Before the decisive moments, which varied by location, when written Latin began to acquire metalinguistic status as a language apart from its dialects (rather than remaining a high register on a single spectrum of *diglossia*), a systematic terminology to distinguish the unlettered spoken form from the learned written form emerged only very gradually, if at all. As the work of Roger Wright has proposed (1982, 112 and 2002, 138), and as Carin Ruff observes at length in the previous essay, it is not surprising that the attempt to reform norms of pronunciation and grammar patronized by Charlemagne at the turn of the ninth century was spearheaded by someone whose native tongue was not Latinate, Alcuin (d. 804), a Northumbrian for whom grammar was "custos recte loquendi et scribendi" [the guardian of correct speaking and writing] (PL 101: 857). The case of Iberia is especially instructive, where words distinguishing spoken and written forms in Ibero-Romance first appear around 1100 when written Latin came to be called "latin" while "latino" and "ladino" continued as variants meaning "Romance." A parallel double usage exists in Occitan and Old French, in which the phrase "en son latin" (often attributed to the warbling of birds) appears widely to mean "in his vernacular" (or jargon) even as it can be found to mean "in Latin" as well (Borst 1957–65, 713–14). In Ibero-Romance, we even see the survival of the word "ladino" as a multi-use term for both Latin and Romance as late as 1492, as in the

Latin-Castilian dictionary of Antonio Nebrija (Kramer 1998, 123–24), a usage that would partly survive even later among Sephardic Jews exiled from Spain (Wright 2002, 274).

A similar mixed use of the same word to mean both Romance and Latin persisted in Andalusī Arabic, in which *al-lafīnī*, or *al-lafīnīyah* could refer to spoken and written forms of Latinate language, although most references are to spoken Ibero-Romance. Eleventh-century writer Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) mentions an enclave of the ancient Arabian Bali tribe living north of Cordoba, and notes, "they cannot speak *lafīnīyah* well, but only Arabic; [this is true both of] their women and of their menfolk" (Ibn Ḥazm 1962, 443; Wasserstein 1991, 9). While the term *lafīnīyah* (or *lafīnīyah*) was common to denote spoken Ibero-Romance, Ibn Ḥazm uses the same term elsewhere to mean Latin (Thomas 2001, 98 n. 39).

The lack of distinction between written and spoken Latin among non-Christians—implying a lack of authoritative prestige of written Latin—is especially apparent in an anecdote recounted a century after Ibn Ḥazm by the Jewish poet Moses Ibn 'Ezra' (d. after 1138) in which the linguistic rivalry between Hebrew and Arabic is turned into a common opposition to Christian *lafīnī*.

When I was a young man in my native land (Granada), I was once asked by a great Islamic Scholar of law (*fiqh*), who was well versed in the religious disciplines of Islam and most kind towards me, to recite the Ten Commandments for him in Arabic. I realized his intention: he, in fact, wanted to belittle the quality of their language. So I asked him to recite to me the first *sūrah*—the *Fāṭihah*—of his Qur'ān in *al-lafīnī*, a language he could speak and understood very well. When he tried to render the *Fāṭihah* in the above-mentioned language, it sounded ugly and was completely distorted. He noticed what was in my mind and did not press me further to fulfill his request. (Moses 1975, 43–45; translated in Rosenthal 1975, 19, with my changes)

Although the author clearly refers to some form of spoken Ibero-Romance, he puts it in contention with the classical languages of Scripture, a role logically played by Latin. Other twelfth-century Arabic sources, by both Jews and Muslims, make little conceptual distinction between spoken Romance and written Latin as separate languages, and if such a distinction is recognized (as in multilingual lists of plants), it is never maintained in a systematic way (Barceló 1997, 270–75; Dietrich 1988, 2: 67–70).

Among non-Christian intellectuals, Latin was, until very late, considered to be a commonly spoken (and thus "maternal") language, and it began to slough off this accrued infamy only after the twelfth century. Although recognized both by Christians and by non-Christians as a vehicle of authoritative Christian tradition, a language of vetted and venerated *auctores*, Latin defended its inveterate identity as a language of learning and acquired a broadly recognized status as a language of science after the twelfth century only by being distinguished as a predominantly written medium set apart from any spoken vernacular. Thus, Roger Bacon (d. 1294), who characterized Latin as his "mother tongue" along with English, affirmed that knowledge of *linguae sapientiae* depended not on speaking ability but only on

knowledge of grammar: "Multi vero inveniuntur, qui sciunt loqui graecum, et arabicum, et hebraeum inter Latinos, sed paucissimi sunt qui sciunt rationem grammaticae ipsius, nec sciunt docere eam" [Among the Latins there are many who know how to speak Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew, but very few who know the structure of their grammar and are capable of teaching it] (Bacon 1859, 33–34; Bourgain 1989, 328). This emphasis on grammar in contrast to speech underscores the centrality of writing as the ongoing lodestone of authority throughout the Middle Ages. Martin Irvine's words, written about the early Middle Ages, hold true throughout: "The transition to medieval *grammatica* reveals that *autoritas*, textual precedent or written authority, became the dominant criterion for *latinitas*" (Irvine 1996, 74). By the twelfth century, however, both *autoritas* and *latinitas* came under substantial pressure from a rising vernacular and from competing written languages of learning, above all Arabic.

### THE SPECTER OF ARABIC

By the time Dante had formulated his theories of vernacular language, a willful blow had already been dealt to Latin's authority in the Iberian Peninsula with the ambitious projects of Castilian King Alfonso X, The Wise (d. 1284). He not only took steps to elevate the status of Castilian above other Romance dialects, but also explicitly worked to edge out Latin as the official language of his kingdom through use of Castilian for legal and historiographical writing and as the language of his chancery (Wright 1996). The ramifications of such policies on the construction of imperium in Alfonso's reign are nowhere more evident than on the tomb that Alfonso X had erected for his father, Fernando III, within the conquered mosque of Seville. The monument, now in the rebuilt cathedral, bears on each of its four sides an inscription in one of the languages of the kingdom—Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, and Castilian, respectively—that praise Fernando as the one "who conquered all of Spain" (Flores 1754, 5–11). Physically as well as symbolically, Latin is made to share a crowded stage next to the vernacular as one of the official (i.e., written, *inscribed*) languages of the kingdom.

This monument, however, not only evinces the erosion of Latin as a language of empire in Alfonso's reign, but also signals the competition of both Latin and its vernaculars with Hebrew and Arabic. Alfonso patronized numerous translations from Arabic to Castilian, and the choice to bypass Latin was a deliberate attempt to stand apart from the first Arabic-to-Latin translation work of the preceding century (Márquez Villanueva 1994, 35–42). In contrast with the ambitious translating endeavor of the twelfth century, which infused the Latin language with new vitality as a viable language of learning, Alfonso's thirteenth-century translations into Castilian, along with his lyric production in Galician-Portuguese, enacted a double-pronged challenge

to Latin's authority both as the language of learning in Western Christendom and also as the language of poetic and literary expression.

Alfonso's policies signal the ongoing standing of Arabic over Latin as the pre-eminent language of thought, science, and technology across the entire Mediterranean, but also intimate the inherent valence of Arabic as a language of empire and political prowess, one that had unified a continuous region of peoples and cultures stretching from Iberia to India since the eighth century. The sophistication and size of centers of learning across the Islamic world derived from the syncretism of a wealth of both ancient Greek sources and traditional Persian material along with some Sanskrit texts that had been absorbed into Middle Persian (Sassanian Pahlavi; Gutas 1998, 24–27). Such pooling of multiple traditions in Arabic dwarfed in quantity and variety even the greatest resources available to the monasteries and cathedral schools that peppered Western Latinity before the twelfth century. The rise of Latin into an authoritative language of scholasticism and science in the later Middle Ages depended greatly on the infusion into Latin through translation of this concentration of wealth in Arabic sources.

The fear within Latin cultures provoked by the Muslim conquest of North Africa and most of Iberia at the dawn of the eighth century slowly evolved into a marked ambivalence over Arabic learning and technology by the tenth. The specter of Arabic that hovered perpetually across the entire southern border of Latinity and occasionally wafted into it became a source of both polemical attack and fantasy and a reference point of self-evaluation. The famous and oft-touted remark of the Saxon nun Hrotsvit of Gandersham (fl. ca. 965) that "Partibus occiduis fulsit clarum decus orbis. . . Corduba famoso locuples de nomine dicta" [In the western regions of the world there shone a dazzling jewel. . . called by the illustrious name of Córdoba the rich], often taken as a paean to the celebrated Caliphal city in the ninth-century, in fact describes a pre-Islamic city of wealth and learning, a mythic conflation of Roman and Visigothic settlements whose Latin riches were arrogated by "Perfidia. . . Saracenorum gens indomitiorum" [the perfidious race of untamed Saracens] (Hrotsvit 2001, 64). This evocation of physical and linguistic conquest was built on a long tradition. The famous, though often mistranslated, lament of Paul Alvarus (d. 861) casts the threat of Arabic in terms of a seduction away from Latin proficiency:

Quis, rogo, odie sollers in nostris fidelibus laycis inuenitur, qui scripturis sanctis intentus volumina quorumcumque doctorum Latine conscripta respiciat? . . . Heu pro dolor, legem suam nesciunt Xpiani et linguam propriam non aduertunt Latini, ita ut omni Xpi collegio uix inueniatur unus in milleno hominum numero qui salutaris fratri possit rationauiliter dirigere litteras, et reperitur absque numero multiplices turbas [sic] qui erudite Caldaicas uerborum explicit pompas.

[Who, I ask, is found among our faithful laymen who is skilful enough to understand the book of Holy Scripture or anything written in Latin by any of [our] doctors? . . . Alas, what pain! The Christians no longer know their law, the Latins no longer pay attention to their own language, so that in the whole college



of Christ hardly one in a thousand can be found who reasonably is able to write a letter of greeting to his brother, while one finds uncountable throngs of those who explain with erudition Arabic displays of words.] (Gil 1973, 1: 314–15)

Alvarus wrote this lament in response to a situation particular to the Christian Mozarabs living in al-Andalus, but it is paradigmatic of a broader, albeit less articulated, Christian anxiety about Islam and Arabic that spread far beyond Iberia. Although, except in places like ninth- and tenth-century Cordoba, eleventh-century Palermo, or twelfth-century Toledo, Arabic wielded little immediate threat as a temptation away from Latin, it still remained an ineluctable, unsettling presence of foreignness on the horizon of Latinity. In the process of internalizing and domesticating this foreignness through translation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, Latinity acquired an awareness of both its own limitations and also of its place within a wider world of competing notions of authority.

One very telling example of the internalization of a sense of foreignness that accompanied an increased awareness of the authoritative prestige of Arabic can be found in a detail within the twelfth-century Latin translation of the Qur'an undertaken by Robert of Ketton at the behest of Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny (d. 1156). In verse 41:44, which addresses the importance of the Arabic language as the medium for God's words, God asks, "If we sent down a Qur'an in a foreign language, they would have said, [how can there be] foreign language and an Arab [speaker]?" The word for "foreign language," *'aġamiyāh*, is translated as *Latin* by Ketton, who adapts the whole verse slightly: "si *Latine* notaretur, fieret quaestio, cur Latinis et Arabicis litteris non distinguerentur" [If we had written it in *Latin*, he would ask why *Latin* and Arabic letters are not distinguished] (Bibliander 1543, 149; Ketton's Surah 51). This word choice was made again in the early thirteenth by Mark of Toledo in a different translation of the Qur'an into Latin (Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine Ms. 708, 86vb; Daniel 1993, 366 n. 32), and was quoted in the fourteenth century by John Wycliffe (d. 1384) in his *De veritate sacrae scripturae* (12) (Wycliffe 1905–7, 1: 269).

The choice to translate *'aġamiyāh* as "Latin" followed a tradition that was evident as far back as the tenth-century translation of the Psalms into Arabic among Mozarab Christians of al-Andalus, characterizing speakers of Romance as non-Arab "foreigners" (*a ġām*) (Kassis 2006, 74; Versteegh 1997, 227). (In addition to being treated very often—but not always—as a synonym of *laḡmiyāh*, both usually to mean spoken Romance, the term *'aġamiyāh*, "a non-Arabic/foreign language," had similarly functioned as a parallel term among Arabized Jews for the Hebrew term *la'az*, as we see in the statement by Maimonides in his Arabic commentary on *Pirkei Avot* that, because of Hebrew's holy status, it is more reprehensible to recite profane strophic poetry in Hebrew than in "Arabic or *aġam*." In translating this text into Hebrew, Samuel Ibn Tibbon renders *'aġam* as *la'az* [Monroe 1988–89, 23, 29 n. 16].) The rendering of "*'aġamiyāh*" as "Latin" by Iberian Christians in the twelfth century reflects an internalization on the part of both translators, working in different moments, of the relative conceptual place of Latin from the perspective

of revelation in Arabic. Even as they criticized the Qur'an, both translators recognized the formidable concept of authority concomitant with the Arabic language itself, and as Thomas Burman has shown, Robert took steps to evoke "a particularly elevated Latin style" in order to render the solemn eloquence of the Qur'an's language (Burman 2007, 34). The basis of this authority in Arabic, as both translators knew, rested principally on the Qur'an itself, which was and is still considered among Muslims to be not simply a vehicle for divine expression but a miracle in itself, an exalted language that no man could equal or outdo. The status of Arabic within Islam is inseparable from the belief that God, the God of Abraham worshipped by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, repeatedly handed down his will to men through the prophets, including Moses and Jesus. The subsequent corruption and confusion of his message by both Jews and Christians necessitated the final revelation of Islam in "a clear Qur'an" (15:1) given "in the clear Arabic language" (26:195). The Arabic language thus laid claim to an unparalleled uniqueness as being in itself a sort of theophany, a worldly manifestation of divine power and will preserved in a pure, transparent state.

The view in Islam of the Qur'an as the very words of God existed among believers from the very beginning of its revelation in 610, and quickly became a universal belief among Muslims. This contrasts sharply with the slow development within Jewish belief of Hebrew as *Leshon ha-Qodesh*, "the holy language," a doctrine that is not evident within the biblical canon itself and that only seems to have emerged gradually within Hellenistic Jewish culture. The second-century BCE book of *Jubilees* contains the earliest references to Hebrew as a divine language, the original language of creation taught to Adam by God. Only in the rabbinical and medieval periods was Hebrew recognized widely as a holy language of creation, revelation, and mystical reflection, in addition to a language of ritual and liturgy (Aaron 2000, 270–72; Aaron 1999, 72–4). In contrast to Hebrew, Greek, and Latin which, despite their usage, were only gradually and belatedly *defined* by their users as holy languages, Arabic laid claim to a prestige within Islamic society as the preeminent holy language that was virtually synonymous with universal belief in Muhammad and his prophecy from the very emergence of Islam (Kassis 2006, 62–63). Arabic's prestige can also be contrasted with Sanskrit, which originated as a language of sacred ritual and sacrifice restricted to an elite Brahman class and only later burst spontaneously across south Asia as a language of literary culture and then government (Pollock 2006, 28–29, 44–45). As the spread of Islam was as much, if not more, a political process as it was a religious one, this prestige naturally established Arabic as the most suitable imperial language as well (Gutas 2005, 104). Antonio de Nebrija's famous assertion in his *Grammar of the Castilian Language* (the first grammar of any Romance vernacular, published, not insignificantly, in 1492) that "language has always been the companion of power" (*compañera del imperio*, Nebrija 1980, 97), is nowhere more true in the Middle Ages than in the case of Arabic.

Even as the use of Arabic quickly permeated other spheres such as government and literature, the Qur'an was always esteemed among Muslims as the standard



(El Cheikh 2004, 104–8). While a few rare exceptions can be found in western Arabic sources, such as in the writing of Toledan jurist Šā'id al-Andalusī (d. 1070)—and such exceptions became more frequent after the twelfth century—Latin culture in general and Latin language in particular were so unimportant as to seem non-existent in eastern Arabic sources (Šā'id 1991, 32; Lewis 1982, 76–77).

The relative unimportance and total lack of authority of Latin in virtually any Arabophone worldview, whether Muslim or Jewish, east or west, was not lost on Latin scholars of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Roger Bacon saw Latin's low place in the world of learning as a call to learn the languages "a quibus tota Latinorum sapientia translata est, cujusmodi sunt Graecum, Hebraeum, Arabicum, et Chaldaicum" [from which all knowledge of the Latins is in some way translated, which are Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic] (Bacon 1859, 433; Bourgain 1989, 323–24). This need was all the more pressing because Latin was also comparatively poor in vocabulary and "translatores non invenerunt in lingua Latina vocabula sufficientia" [Translators do not find enough vocabulary in the Latin language] (Bacon 1859, 90). Moreover, "Latini nullum textum composuerunt, scilicet neque theologiae neque philosophiae" [The Latins have not composed a single text, that is, neither of theology nor of philosophy] (Bacon 1859, 465). Bacon's views resemble the opinion of twelfth-century Jewish poet and astronomer Abraham Ibn 'Ezra' (d. ca. 1164), who saw Hebrew as the primary language not only of creation and revelation, but of science as well. Although he wrote (or translated) a treatise on the Astrolabe in Latin, Ibn 'Ezra's reflections on language express his hope that Hebrew be seen the first and richest language of science, certainly above Latin and even above Arabic (Sela 2003, 104–6, 140–43). A century after him, Bacon argued that Hebrew, along with Arabic, was the "primitivum vas" from which Latin scholars must draw the elixir of learning, if they are to compete with non-Latin traditions of science (Bacon 1859, 466).

At the same time, he affirmed that knowledge of language is useful for converting "infidels and schismatics" (Bacon 1859, 95), a view shared by his younger contemporary, the Mallorcan polymath Raymond Lull (d. 1315), who wrote, among his nearly three-hundred works in Catalan and Latin, polemical works in Arabic. Lull was one of numerous writers who took steps to adapt his use of Latin in order to incorporate characteristic expressions in Arabic, coining numerous Latin neologisms in an attempt to convey a "modum loquendi arabicum" [an Arabic mode of speaking]. In a telling passage from his *Compendium artis demonstrativae*, Lull even apologizes because "declinare nunc terminos figurarum dicendo sub conditionibus bonitatis, bonificatum, bonificabile, bonificare bonificatum... non est multum apud Latinos sermo consuetus..." [To decline the terms of the figures, saying on the basis of "goodness" [the terms] "good-ifying," "good-ifyable," "good-ified," ... is not a way of speaking that is normal among the Latins...] (Lull 1721–40, 3:6:160; Haimes 2003, 53). Despite Lull's conflicts of methodology with his contemporary, the Dominican Raymond Martini (d. after 1284), their approach to the adaptation of Latin into the form of their polemical enemies was not dissimilar. Martini had boasted that in his attack on Jews, "nec tolerabilem lingue Latine vitabo improprietatem" [I will not avoid the improper use, within tolerable limits, of the

benchmark of linguistic authority. The simultaneous spread of Arabic culture and Islam quickly produced a natural division between the many spoken Arabic dialects (*'ammīyāt*) of each region and the single standard language of writing and formal expression (*fushḥā*) modeled according to these sources of authority. This classic *diglossia*, which still persists today, characterizes *fushḥā* as the natural heir of the combined prestige of Qur'anic revelation and the purportedly "natural" language of the nomadic Bedouins. The definition and preservation of a pure Classical Arabic—not entirely separable from the standardization of a single written text of the Qur'an after the death of Muḥammad under the third Caliph 'Uthmān—was one of the major endeavors of early Islamic civilization, producing the names of some 4,000 Arabic grammarians between 750–1500 CE (Versteegh 1997, 74). Most importantly, it represented the fulfillment of the mandate handed down in holy revelation itself.

In the context of this elevated sense of Arabic as the supreme language of creation, the language in which God chose finally to speak directly to all people, other languages could hardly figure within Arabic culture as valuable, let alone prestigious. In the ninth century, the Cordoban jurist Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 852) claimed that the three prophetic languages were Hebrew, Arabic, and Syriac, making no mention of Greek or Latin (Wilde 2007, 61–62, 86). His argument is all the more cutting because it is proffered by an Iberian Muslim for whom *laḥnīyah* was a proximate reality. Among eastern Muslims, ignorance of Latin and Latinate Romance was a matter of course. The only direct reference to Latin as a written language found in medieval Arabic sources in the East is by the tenth-century bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm, who set out in his *Fihrist* ("Catalogue") to classify the most important writers of his day, both Arabic and non-Arabic. He names a total of sixteen languages, three of which seem to refer to Western Christendom: Greek, the "writing of the Lombards and Saxons," and the language of the "Franks" (*ifrangī*), which he claims to have seen on Frankish swords (Ibn al-Nadīm 1970, 28–30, 38). "Frankish," by which he probably means Latin, is not discussed in detail, but he does tell an anecdote, taken from an earlier source, about the arrival of an emissary from Queen Bertha of Rome to Baghdad in 906, bearing a letter whose "writing resembled the Greek [script] but was more straight." When none at the court were found to know the language, they found a Frank working in a clothing store who could translate it into Greek (Hamidullah 1953, 279–80).

Until the start of the Crusades in the eleventh century, what little was known in the 'Abbasid East about the people of Western Latinity (the *ifrangī*, or "Franks") or their language (*ifrangī* or *al-luḡa al-ifrangīya*, "Frankish language," a name connected with the later expression *lingua franca*) was often confused with Byzantium (Kassis 1999, 10–13). Western and Eastern Christians were regularly lumped together under the title *al-Rūm* (the "Romans"), a generic term used in the East to refer to Christians in general and Byzantines in particular (and in the West, sometimes also Iberian Christians). Arabic sources display a general disdain for the language and learning of the *ifrangī* and the *Rūm*, often in contradistinction to the more illustrious *Yūnānī*, (the "Ionians"), the traditional Arabic term for ancient Greeks

Latin language] (Martini 1687, 4). This statement is similar to the claims of polemicist Juan de Segovia in the fifteenth century that in his translation of the Qur'an, "minime dubitavi uerberare Priscianum, admodum incongrua persepe usus Latinitate" [I hesitated little to rough-up Priscian, [making] frequent use of incongruous Latin] (Martínez Gázquez 2003, 406; Burman 2007, 185).

As texts of Arabic learning, literature, and revelation began to be translated into Latin in the twelfth century, Latin scholars were faced not only with Arabic's unanswerable claims to divine authority but also with the reality of the vast wealth that had been absorbed into Arabic over the first centuries of Islam under the Abbasid Caliphate. Moreover, such translations came at a time in the twelfth century when the very concept of *auctoritas* was in flux, not only in response to the increased attention to dialectic and rational argument, but also, in polemical writing, in response to the use of non-Christian sources as proof-texts. The tension between *ratio* and *auctoritas* that went back at least to John Scotus Eriugena seems to burst to the surface in the pointed remarks of Adelard of Bath (d. ca. 1152), in his *Questions naturales* when, claiming he follows "ratione duce" [reason as a guide] he upbraids his nephew for following the "capistrum" [halter] of authority (Adelard 1998, 102–3). This sharp comparison between rational thought—learned, moreover, "a magistris arabicis" [from Arab masters]—was an opening salvo in what would become a much more pitched battle in the twelfth century, epitomized in the wry remark of Alan of Lille in his polemic against heretics, Jews, and Muslims [*paganos*] that "auctoritas cereum habet nasum" [authority has a nose of wax] (PL 210: 333). The impact of Arabic's monolithic prestige on Latin intellectual culture was all the deeper within the context of this internal uncertainty about the limits of *auctoritas*.

The ascendancy of Latin as a language of learning, science, and wisdom depended on the usurpation of Arabic's prestige through translation and imitation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The nature of the change can be gauged *in rursus* by the increasing respect commanded by Latin among non-Christian intellectuals. The fourteenth-century sociologist Ibn Khaldūn, in updating Ibn al-Nadīm's summary of scripts and languages, now names Latin (*al-Latīnī*), calling it the language of the *Rūm*, and even claims that it is one of the few languages (along with Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac) even worth discussing (Ibn Khaldūn 1956, 3: 283–84). Latin makes his list because although "the intellectual sciences were shunned by" Romans when they became Christians, Latin has again in his time become a language of learning and wisdom: "We further hear now that the philosophical sciences are greatly cultivated in the land of Rome and along the adjacent northern shore of the country of the European Christians. They are said to be studied there again and taught in numerous classes" (*ibid.*, 3: 115 and 118). A similar rise in Latin's status can be seen among Jewish intellectuals. By the fifteenth century, Jews living under Christian rule in Castile and Aragon no longer regarded Arabic as the exclusive and *de facto* language of thought. The Hebrew poet Solomon ben Reuben Bonafed (d. after 1448), praised and recommended the "straight path" of "the art of logic... in the Latin language," even as he harshly criticized Christian belief as a "path of death" (Sáenz-Badillos 2003, 17).

Despite this final flourishing of Latin as an authoritative language of wisdom and science, Arabic continued to hold a lingering prestige among Latin speakers long after it was eclipsed in Western Europe through translation. In the middle of the fourteenth century, the Dominican Alphonsus Bonihominis (d. 1353) proffered a pair of pro-Christian apologetic texts, the *Epistola Rabbi Samuelis* and the *Disputatio Abūtalīb*, the former of which was destined to become one of the most widely circulated anti-Jewish texts of the later Middle Ages. In a statement found in the prologue to both texts, Alphonsus claims (dubiously, if we are to judge from the content) that he did not write the texts himself, but merely translated "libellum antiquissimum, qui nuper casu fortuito devenit in manus nostras, et fuit antea tot temporibus occultatus, nova translatione de Arabico in Latinum per me interpretatum" [a very old little book, which recently quite by chance came into my hands, and was hidden for so long in the past, interpreted by me in a new translation from Arabic to Latin] (PL 149: 335). Although already by his time, Arabic had ceased being the preeminent language of learning in the western Mediterranean, it still could be evoked as a framing device for his Latin text, providing a whiff of venerability and authority by virtue of its symbolic currency with past learning. Examples of such framing appear as late as the memorable rendition of Cervantes in 1605, claiming *Don Quixote* was the Arabic work of a Muslim author. Such tropes attest to the enduring prestige of Arabic in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when it enjoyed a rich afterlife as an imagined language of knowledge and authority at a time when Medieval Latin was increasingly derided as a foil of early modern humanism.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

A popular and very accessible overview of the social history of Latin in all periods is Ostler (2007), who also offers a readable survey of notions of authority across multiple periods and languages (2005). A fine introduction to various concepts pertaining to Latin as a language of authoritative tradition is provided by Ziolkowski (2009). Chenu (1927) is still the starting point for all discussions of medieval concepts of *auctoritas* and Minnis (1988) offers the most in-depth and up-to-date analysis. Resnick (1990) and Richter (2006) are good starting points for exploring concepts of Latin as a holy language. Borst (1957–63) is the definitive source for the evolution of linguistic theories of authority and decadence connected with the myth of Babel. Irvine (1994) presents the important link between *latinitas*, *grammatica*, and *auctoritas* for the early medieval period through the eleventh century. On the notion of maternal and paternal language in medieval Latin, two short overviews are Grondeux (2008) and Spitzer (1948). There are numerous good studies of the relation between oral and written registers in Latin, including Farrell (2001), chapters 2 and 3, Banniard (1992), and Wright (1982). On various aspects of the intersection of Latin with Romance vernaculars, see Wright (1982), Lusignan (1986) and (1994), and Copeland (1991). For a survey of concepts of Latin as a

language of learning and philosophy, see Bourgain (2005). There are numerous studies relating Latin in a context of multilingualism, including Adams (2003) for the late-antique period, Bishoff (1961), Grondeux (2005), Wright (2002), chapter 1, and Grotans (2006). Waquet (2001) offers a fascinating survey of the rise and persistence of Latin as a language of authority beyond the medieval period. For an overview of concepts of linguistic authority in Arabic, see Versteegh (1997), and for a general overview of such concepts in Hebrew, see Rubin (1998) and Aaron (2000). Wasserstein (1991) offers a short and lucid introduction to language use in al-Andalus, and Alfonso (2007) considers the competition of models of prestige between Hebrew and Arabic. Kassis (1999) gives a useful summary of the representation of Europeans in some medieval Arabic sources. Pollock (2006) provides both an in-depth analysis of such concepts in classical Sanskrit and a fruitful, if opaque, comparison with both classical and medieval theories of Latin (chapters 7 and 11). For a discussion of the authority of Greek within medieval Latinity, see Berschün (1988) and Lubac (1959–64, 2.1: 238–262). For studies comparing concepts of authoritative language in Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, and/or Greek, see Versteegh (1987) and Dahan et al. (1995).

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