

The Unity of Roman Italy: Some Anomalies

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I. Patavinitas

The vice of Patavinity was laid at Livy's door by Asinius Pollio,¹ and the accusation has received a good deal of comment, much of it conflicting, uncertain and unhelpful.² Quintilian's citations of Pollio, however, leave almost no room for real doubt, and I hope here to offer a fuller attempt at clarifying Pollio's meaning in the context of contemporary thinking about regional anomalies of language.³ Curiously enough, the relevant citations of Pollio turn out upon examination to be inconsistent in meaning:⁴

On *elocutio*: *et in Tito Livio...putat inesse Pollio Asinius quandam Patavinitatem* (8.1.3).

Quintilian therefore recommends an entirely urban, urbane, Roman choice of *uerba and uox*.

uerba aut Latina aut peregrina sunt...taceo de Tuscis et Sabinis et Praenestinis quoque (nam ut eorum sermone utentem Vettium Lucilius insectatur, quem ad modum

¹ Ap. Quint. 1.5.5 and 8.1.3 = Pollio *fr.*10 (*Gramm. Rom. Frag.* p. 500 Malc.).

² R. Syme, *Roman Revolution*, Oxford 1939, 485f. (cf. *HSCP* 64, 1959, 54 = *RP* 1, Oxford 1979, 450) lent his authority (and epigrammatic formulation) to an interpretation which, though entirely valid in itself, took no account of the line of argument in Quintilian. Hence some indecision or confusion. P.G. Walsh *Livy*, Cambridge 1961, 267-70. Even the notably judicious C.S. Kraus, ed., *Livy* 6, Cambridge 1994, 1, n.2 seems seduced from the text of Quintilian by some echo of Sir Ronald's siren song. K. Latte *CP* 35, 1940, 56-60 = *idem*, *Kl. Schr.*, München 1968, 896-9 applies (cf. below, n.9) great erudition to a problem not envisaged by Quintilian's text.

³ As has been done in part before, though the issue can hardly be said to have been clarified decisively: J. Whatmough, *HSCP* 44, 1933, 95-130 (cf. *id.*, *ib.* 42, 1931, 152); L. Adams Holland, *Lucretius and the Traspadanians*, Princeton 1979, 7f.; E.S. Ramage, *Urbanitas*, Norman 1973, 109f.; A.H. Travis *CP* 48, 1953, 174f.; J. André, *La vie et l'oeuvre d'Asinius Pollion*, Paris 1949, 89-93, with the admirable tradition of French writing on Latin prose style (cf. n. 9) behind him, predictably grasps the point.

⁴ G.M.A. Grube, *The Greek and Roman critics*, London 1965, 295, n. 1.

Pollio reprehendit in Livio Patavinitatem): licet omnia Italica pro Romanis habeam (1.5.55).

This passage looks to represent a decidedly more generous (and anti-Ciceronian; cf. n. 13) view, later on corrected or modified. If any Italian origin counts as “Roman”, then even Padua will do. Or will it?

There is a third passage in Quintilian which, though it does not mention *Patavinitas* specifically, has in all probability some bearing on the question under discussion: at 1.7.24, according to Asconius, Livy wrote *sibe* and *quase* for *sibi* and *quasi*, as did Asconius himself, who was interestingly enough another Paduan, as he himself makes clear, writing as he does of *Liuius noster*, p. 77.4f. Clark. Let us be clear: *sibe* and *quase* are not spellings that occur in our texts of Livy and Asconius, but that means nothing, for scribal and editorial usage, ancient, medieval and modern, tends unswervingly towards the normalisation of such oddities.⁵

So is Quintilian (or Pollio) talking about spelling, pronunciation, idiom, or even style or grammar? That is a good deal less certain, but it will be as well to clarify just what did vary linguistically between town and town (or region and region) in Roman Italy. Let us leave the published (or printed) editions of literary works out of the discussion, just as Quintilian himself already did (12.10.43). That still leaves an ample range of possibilities.

The spelling of Latin was not fixed and uniform among educated Romans of the classical period:⁶ that was only to be expected, and Suetonius, or Quintilian, noted individual variations with dispassionate curiosity: thus Augustus wrote *ixi* when we should have ‘expected’ *ipsi* (Suet. *Aug.* 88), the elder Cato *dice* and *facie* for *dicam* and *faciam* (Quint. 1.7.23) and Cicero and Virgil *caussa* and *cassus* where we should have ‘expected’ *–s–*. Quintilian collects an interesting range of examples (1.7.20-7), not all simply a matter of archaism. Standardised spelling is a child of systematic lexicography,⁷ and we live in a fools’ paradise of uniformity when we open our printed texts. Regional variation, manifested in both lexical usage and pronunciation, is no less unremarkable. Just as Greek grammarians collected both γλωσσαι (“rare and obsolete words”) and λέξεις (“words peculiar in form and significance”),⁸ so Roman scholars noted with eager curiosity local variations of idiom, where the area distinct in usage may vary in scale from ‘Oscan’ to ‘Lanuvium’; Festus does after all say that the

⁵ Cf. the remarks of A. Traina, *L’alfabeto e la pronunzia del latino*⁴, Bologna 1973, 18.

⁶ M. Leumann, *Lat. Laut- und Formenlehre*, München 1977, 15; M. Durry, *Éloge funèbre d’une matrone romaine*, Paris 1950, lxxxiii-vii; cf. L. Gamberale in *Atti del convegno virgiliano sul bimillenario delle Georgiche*, Napoli 1977, 360.

⁷ R. Burchfield, *The English language*, Oxford 1985, 145f.; B. Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana*, Milano 1994, index s.v. *grafia*.

⁸ R. Pfeiffer, *History of classical scholarship*, Oxford 1968, 309.

Lanuvines had a peculiar word for 'good' (Macr. *Sat.* 1.3.13) and a particular form for 'testicles' (p. 156.34L).⁹ Geography — and not just that of Alps and Appennines — encourages such diversification.¹⁰ At that point, it would be extraordinary if local varieties of sound or accent had not existed as well: they did indeed, in Roman Italy,¹¹ as they still do, and not only among the uneducated.¹² A good deal of work has been done recently on the conceptual nexus *urbanitas-rusticitas-peregrinitas*, particularly in respect of Cicero's remarks about non-Roman orators, and that dispenses me from further investigation here,¹³ but the terminology deserves some attention. You could tell a non-Roman the minute he opened his mouth, and both the sound and the language might give you a good idea of the speaker's place of origin,¹⁴ but it is worth dwelling briefly on the words used by Roman critics to express those aspects of a non-Roman's spoken utterance that 'gave him away', for that in turn should shed some light on the field of meaning to which *Patavinitas* must (in all probability) belong, and on the terms in which Roman critics took over and adapted the notion of ἐλληρισμός.¹⁵

⁹ Note the convenient index, Festus, ed. W.M. Lindsay, 564; for discussion of such regional variants, cf. A. Ernout, *Les éléments dialectaux du vocabulaire latin*², Paris 1928, 305; J. Marouzeau, in *Mél. J. Vendryes*, Paris 1925, 251-64; idem, *Quelques aspects de la formation du Latin littéraire*, Paris 1949, 13f.; idem, *Traité de stylistique latine*, Paris 1946, 170. A. Meillet, *Esquisse d'une histoire de la langue latine*, Paris 1928, 99. Latte (n. 2) identifies some cases in the Greek grammarians of clearly improbable, even absurd local anomalies, which may conceal an element of scholarly prejudice or polemic. Not so here, clearly.

¹⁰ Well put by Holland (n. 3), 4; cf. Migliorini (n. 7), index s.v. *dialettalismo*, Burchfield (n. 7), 124.

¹¹ Holland (n. 3), 3-14; for Vespasian, cf. Suet. *Vesp.* 22. Anecdotal evidence is particularly valuable in such questions: cf. e.g. Cic. *Brut.* 171, 172, Plin. *Ep.* 9.23.2, *SHA, Hadr.* 3.1.

¹² Migliorini (n.7); G. Devoto and G. Giacomelli, *I dialetti delle regioni d'Italia*, Firenze 1972; T. De Mauro *Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita*, Bari 1986, index s.v. *dialetti*; for English, cf. Burchfield (n. 7), 123-30; J. Honey, *Does accent matter?* London 1989; for American, H.L. Mencken, *The American Language*, New York 1974, 354-78.

¹³ Ramage (n. 3); id. *AJP* 81, 1960, 65-72, *AJP* 84, 1963, 390-414, *TAPA* 92, 1961, 481-94; I. Opelt, *Die lateinische Schimpfwörter*, Heidelberg 1965, 149-51; J.-M. David in *Les bourgeois municipales*, Paris 1983, 309-23; J.-P. Cèbe, *La caricature et la parodie*, Paris 1966, 129-31, 139f.

¹⁴ J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Romans and aliens*, London 1979, 128-31; O. Ribbeck, *Agroikos*, Leipzig 1885, 38f.; Ernout (n. 9), 30-5, Marouzeau 1949 (n. 9), 7-25, id. 1946 (n. 9), 4f.

¹⁵ On this vast topic, cf. most fully E. Siebenborn, *Die Lehre von der Sprachrichtigkeit*, Amsterdam 1976, a reference for which I am grateful to Roberto

Domitius Marsus, *de urbanitate*, ap. Quint. 6.3.107: *illa est urbanitas, in qua nihil absonum, nihil agreste, nihil inconditum, nihil peregrinum neque sensu neque verbis neque ore gestuue possit deprendi, ut non tam sit in singulis dictis quam in toto colore dicendi.*

Cic. De Orat. 3.43: *lenitate vocis atque ipso oris pressu et sono.*

Nep. Att.1.3: *summa suavitas oris atque vocis.*

Cic. Arch. 26: *pingue quiddam sonantibus atque peregrinum.*

Quint. 11.3.30: *vitio carebit (sc. pronuntiatio) si fuerit os facile, explanatum, iucundum urbanum, id est in quo nulla neque rusticitas neque peregrinitas resonet.*

Cic. Brut. 171: *illud est maius, quod in vocibus nostrorum oratorum retinnit quiddam et resonat urbanus.*

Plin. Ep. 2.13.6: *mira in sermone, mira etiam in ore ipso vultuque suavitas.*

In restating Pollio's criticism of Livy, Quintilian spoke, it will be recalled, in terms of *verba*, *vox*, and *sermo*; the wider context has by now become clear; even if we cannot tell whether Livy sounded Paduan, or was Paduan in morphology and lexicon, or whether the criticism applied to his conversation, his declamation, or the readings of his history (and indeed we cannot, I think, be more precise within these parameters), there is nothing to be gained from continuing to accuse Livy of provincialism of the soul!

II. Prejudice

Given the variations in ethnic origin, economic development, geographical environment, history, Romanisation,¹⁶ and, as we have seen, way of speech, it would be altogether extraordinary if the inhabitants of ancient Italy, like those of ancient Greece, or indeed like mediaeval or modern Europeans,¹⁷ had not on

Nicolai. See now the interesting remarks in E. Hall, *Inventing the barbarian*, Oxford 1989, 118, and index s.v. *Language*.

¹⁶ Cf. J. Kaimio, in *Studies in the Romanization of Etruria*, *Acta Inst.Rom.Fin.* 5, Roma 1975, 85-245; W.V. Harris, *Rome in Etruria and Umbria*, Oxford 1971, 147-201; E. T. Salmon, *The making of Roman Italy*, London 1982, ch.1; A. J. Toynbee, *Hannibal's Legacy* 1, London 1965, 93-105.

¹⁷ For Greece, start from the (spurious) pref. to Thphr. *Char.*, with the comm. of R. G. Ussher, x.; R. Strömberg, *Greek proverbs* (Göteborg 1954), index s.v. Nationalities; A. Otto, *Sprichwörter der Römer*, repr. Hildesheim 1965, index s.v. Kulturgeschichte, and now R. Tosi, *Dizionario delle sentenze latine e greche*, Milano 1991, nos. 133, 272, 287, 417, 477, 959, 961, 1243, 1790 (for a start!). For the middle ages, P. Meyvaert, 'Voicing national antipathy in the Middle Ages', *Speculum* 66, 1991, 743-63. For modern Europe, cf. E. Partridge, *Words, words, words!* London 1933, 3-9 ('Offensive nationality'). For Italy itself, cf. E. Ferrero, *Dizionario storico dei gerghi italiani*, Milano 1991, 385-424 (index, s.v. names of towns).

occasion expressed dislike, disgust, or surprise at the way 'others' behaved, or were alleged to behave. I do not claim to have undertaken any sort of prolonged and systematic study of the topic, but offer the results of several years' interest, curiosity, and sporadic research, in the hope of showing that *tota Italia* was a slogan – then as now – if not invalidated, then at least weakened and impugned by numerous inconvenient exceptions and anomalies.

(1) *aut pinguis Umber aut obesus Etruscus* (Cat. 39.11) is not merely repetition (Quinn, *ad loc.*), but *Steigerung*: *obesus* is fatter than *pinguis* (Isid. *Diff.* 1.114). It is curious that *parcus* replaced *pinguis* in the ms. tradition of Catullus (until corrected by Lindsay, *ex glossario*), but presumably it did so at a time when the distinction between *pinguis* and *obesus* had been lost. Persius 3.94 echoes the judgement on the Umbrians; Verg.*G.* 2.194 *pinguis ... Tyrrhenus* refers to the same view of the Etruscans.

(2) *Tuscum iurgium* where, oddly, this whole enquiry began:¹⁸ the expression is used of a question answered not by a reply, but by another question.

(3) *Sabini quod volunt somniant*. Festus p. 434.14L, Otto (n.17), 304. Such credulity was also attributed to the Gauls (Otto, 152).

(4) The Sabines (Sabini) and Samnites (Sabelli) were also of legendary hardness and moral rectitude;¹⁹ Virgil has no difficulty in applying the same description to the Aequiculi (*Aen.* 7.746-7), and we may compare the warlike character attributed to the Marsi,²⁰ but these literary and ethnographic commonplaces take us too far from the popular prejudices here under examination.

(5) The inhabitants of Praeneste and Lanuvium were primitive in their fare (Naev. *com.* 21 Ribbeck).²¹ The Praenestines were also boastful.²² Cora, Praeneste, Frusino, Signia and Alataium are called *barbaricas urbes* (their names are given in Greek!) at Plautus, *Capt.* 884.²³ The Lanuvini were dark-skinned and had fine teeth but Catullus (39.12) presumably draws on some far older characterisation dating from a time when Rome was little if at all her neighbours' superior and the towns of central Latium were marked by distinct.

(6) The Ligurians on the one hand were accustomed to hardship (Verg. *G.* 2.168, Tosi (n.17), no. 1662). But Nigidius Figulus, *de terris*, called them

¹⁸ See M. Erler in *Strukturen der Mündlichkeit in der römischen Literatur*, ed. G. Vogt-Spira (Tübingen 1990), 289, citing Aug. *C. Acad.* 3.4.9, who in turn cites Verg. *Buc.* 3.104-7. See too H. Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin classics* 1 Göteborg 1967, 366.

¹⁹ I have discussed this ethnographic commonplace at *Lat.* 30, 1971, 1109 and at *Enc. Virg.* 4, Roma 1988, 627. Cf. Otto (n. 17), 304.

²⁰ Cf. Skutsch on Enn. *Ann.* 229, Nisbet-Hubbard on Hor. *C.* 1.2.39, Mayor on Juv. 3.168; note in particular App. *Civ.* 1.203.

²¹ Cf. Ramage 1960 (n. 13), 68, *idem* (n. 3), 33.

²² Plaut. *Bacch.* 24, Otto (n. 17), 286.

²³ Cf. Ramage (n. 3), 32.

latrones, insidiosi, fallaces, mendaces (ap. Serv. Dan., *ad Aen.* 11.715). That outburst owes something to Cato, *Orig.* fr. 32P (quoted in the same note of Serv. Dan.): they are *inlitterati mendacesque ... et vera minus meminere*, because they do not keep proper records.²⁴

(7) The *superbia* and *luxuria* of Capua were proverbial,²⁵ while the Campanians in general were famed not only for *arrogantia* and *superbia*²⁶ but for luxury²⁷ and immorality.²⁸ Whence the easy etymological link of Osci and obscenity.²⁹ But Osci/Opici could also stand for uncouth barbarism (ignorance of Greek on the part of the Italic tribes of the Campanian hinterland, to start with): thus in Greek usage at Rome's expense as early as the elder Cato.³⁰

(8) Apulia: rustic, Plaut. *Mil.* 648.³¹

(9) Sardinians: corrupt, one worse than the other.³² And proverbial for their inferior, short-lasting cheese.³³

The above list does not pretend to be comprehensive, nor the annotation exhaustive, but it should be sufficient to indicate the existence of an issue for fuller enquiry. It will not have escaped notice that the instances cited include comical trivialities and the echoes of ancient historical rivalries; the same range of seriousness emerges from the parallel modern material (n.17). The topic may appear at the outset amusing, but it should not be thought that the author views lightly the consequences of inter-regional hostility,³⁴ unchecked, and, almost worse, not understood historically.

Rome

²⁴ Cf. G. Traina, *Rend. Linc.* 9.4, 1993, 596.

²⁵ Otto (n. 17), 74, Tosi (n. 17), no. 960.

²⁶ Otto (n. 17), 68, s.v. *Campania*, 2.

²⁷ Otto, (n. 17) s. v.: Campania (1) more *unguentum* than other people had oil, *uulgo dictum*, according to Plin. *Nat.* 18.111.

²⁸ Cf. the whores of Cumae, Fur. Bib. fr. 4 Courtney (along with the boy prostitutes of Catania).

²⁹ Cf. Courtney's note on Fur. Bib. cit.; E. T. Salmon, *Samnium and the Samnites*, Cambridge 1967, 59.

³⁰ Otto (n. 17), 256f.; Cato, *Ad Marcum filium* fr. 1 Jordan = Plin. *Nat.* 29.14; cf. too Mayor on Juv. 3.207.

³¹ The relevance of Naev. *com.* 18f. Ribbeck is quite theoretical, pace Ramage (n. 3), 32.

³² Cic. *Fam.* 7.24.2, Otto (n. 3), 308f.; cf. Balsdon (n. 14), 64.

³³ Otto (n. 3), 309, citing Novius 45 Ribbeck (*CRF*).

³⁴ For some parallel material for the Roman empire at large, cf. Courtney on Juv. 15.2-12; Gwyn Griffiths on Plut. *Is. Osir.* p. 232.16; R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman order*, Cambridge, Mass. 1975, 185f., 338f., 348f.