

A Little Latin for Genealogists

By Doug Ayer

Latin is the root language of the Romance languages including French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Romanian. Since many words in English are also derived from Latin it might be possible to recognize the similarity between the Latin word and its English derivative.

Take a basic approach to translating the following records by looking up each word in a Latin word list or dictionary and try to make some sense of the result. Remember you only need to know the words with which you are working at the time. The baptism below, recorded in 1717, was transcribed from the Catholic church records of Süggerath near the city of Aachen, Germany.

Baptism

octava marty

baptizata est Eva filia nicolai Kamp et et catharinae deckers conjugum susceptores gerhardus gostin et barbara pernel.

Using a basic approach, here is what we find for the caption, “**octava marty**” as the words appear in the GENEALOGICAL WORD LIST, Latin (see list of references). The WORD LIST explains some characteristics of Latin which will be a great help in understanding the language.

octavus = eighth

Martius = March

One might question why the word “**octava**” in the record is found as “**octavus**” and the word “**marty**” appears as “**Martius**” in the WORD LIST. The reason is that Latin is an inflected language in which the words have endings or suffixes indicating the use of each word in the sentence. Nouns and adjectives have suffixes to indicate gender, number, and case, and verbs have endings to show person and tense. Adjectives take the gender, number, and case of the word being modified. Let’s look at the Latin word “**legitimus**” meaning “legitimate” in English. Here are the suffixes of the word “**legitimus**” according to gender, number, and case.

Adjective Suffixes

	<u>Singular</u>			<u>Plural</u>		
	<u>Masc.</u>	<u>Fem.</u>	<u>Neut.</u>	<u>Masc.</u>	<u>Fem.</u>	<u>Neut.</u>
Nominative	legitim- us	legitim- a	legitim- um	legitim- i	legitim- ae	legitim- a
Genitive	legitim- i	legitim- ae	legitim- i	legitim- orum	legitim- arum	legitim- orum
Dative	legitim- o	legitim- ae	legitim- o	legitim- is	legitim- is	legitim- is
Accusative	legitim- um	legitim- am	legitim- um	legitim- os	legitim- as	legitim- a
Ablative	legitim- o	legitim- a	legitim- o	legitim- is	legitim- is	legitim- is

The nominative case is used for the subject of a sentence, the genitive case is used for possession, the dative case is used for the indirect object, the accusative case is for the direct object and may follow certain prepositions, and the ablative case is used after certain

prepositions.

In the example baptism above, “**octava**” appears to be a feminine adjective in the ablative case meaning “on the eighth” because it ends in “-a”, and “**marty**” (also spelled “**martii**”) is in the genitive case meaning “of March,” because it ends in “-y” (or “-i”). “**Octava**” probably modifies the word “**dies**” (pronounced dee-ace) meaning “day” which is understood here, and which can be either masculine or feminine but is probably feminine in this instance. Therefore, “**Octava marty**” means “(on) the eighth of March.”

The next group of words we find is “**baptizata est.**” Turning to the WORD LIST we see the meaning “he was baptized or has been baptized” for “**baptizatus est.**” Since this verb refers to Eva, it has a feminine ending “-a” rather than the masculine suffix “-us.”

The meaning of “**Eva**” should be no problem since it is the child’s name and is the same as in English. The next word “**filia**” means “daughter” just as it is found in the WORD LIST.

“**Nicolai Kamp**” is the father’s name. It is in the genitive case meaning “(of) Nicolaus Kamp.” Note how the name “Nicolaus” has the ending “-i. Thus Eva is the daughter “of Nicolaus Kamp.” This is the same situation as “**marty**” above meaning “of March.”

The word “**et**” in the WORD LIST means both “and” and “even.” In the example record above it is mistakenly repeated.

The mother’s name is “**catharinae deckers**” and again as with the father’s name it is in the genitive case. Therefore “Catharina” is the mother’s name in the nominative case. Also her surname is probably “Decker” without an “-s” which is often added to a surname.

Returning to the WORD LIST we find “**conjugum**” means “of/from the married couple.” The word “**conjuges**” means married couple. In the genitive plural the word becomes “**conjugum.**” It is probably in the genitive case to agree with the names of the parents which are in the genitive case.

“**Susceptores**” in the WORD LIST means “godparents.” The final words “**gerhardus gostin et barbara pernel**” are the godparents “Gerhardus Gostin and Barbara Pernel.”

The whole record now reads:

On the eighth of March [1717]

Eva, daughter of the married couple Nicolaus Kamp and Catharina Decker, was baptized. Godparents [were] Gerhard[us] Gostin and Barbara Pernel.

Baptism

The second baptism comes from Bickendorf, Germany, and reads as follows:

October 1811

trigesima prima octobris natus et prima Novembris renatus est, Michael, filius legitimus Joannis Gierends murarii et Luciae Leh[nen?]bach conjugum ex Kilburg. Levantibus Michael Gierends ex Hettingen et Elisabetha Erdorf ex Kilburg.

There is only one word “**murarii**” which cannot be found in the WORD LIST. The word “**legitimus**” is probably an alternate form of “**legitimatus**” found in the WORD LIST, however, the latter cannot be found in two dictionaries.

murarii = (of) stone mason, bricklayer (masculine singular genitive case of the word “**murarius**” found in Thode (see references).

The translation of this baptism is as follows. The wording has been rearranged to make some sense in English.

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October 1811

Michael, legitimate son of Joannes Gierends, stone mason, and Lucia Leh[nen?]bach, married couple from Kilburg, was born the 31st of October and baptized the first of November. Godparents [were] Michael Gierends from Hettingen and Elisabetha Erdorf from Kilburg.

Death and Burial

The first examples of death and burial are short but provide additional vocabulary.

1773

Die 1ma Januarii obiit et 3tia in coemeterio Sepulta est Maria Elisabetha Draven vidua.

Die 12ma Junii obiit et 14ta in coemeterio Sepulta fuit Eva Goffin uxor Xtiani Valentin.

Looking up the new words in the WORD LIST we find the following meanings:

die = on the day (ablative case for the word “dies”)

1ma = (pri)ma = first (feminine ablative case of “primus”)

Januarii = January (genitive case of Januarius)

obiit = he/she died

3tia = (ter)tia = third (feminine ablative case of “tertius”)

in = in (followed by the ablative case)

coemeterio = cemetery (ablative case of “coemeterium” after preposition in)

sepulta est = (she) was buried (feminine of “sepultus est.” Compare with baptizata est)

vidua = widow (feminine)(the word for widower is “viduus”)

12ma = (duodeci)ma = 12th (feminine adjective in the ablative case)

Junii = June (genitive of “Junius”)

14ta = decima(quar)ta = 14th (feminine adjective in the ablative case)

sepulta fuit = was buried

uxor = wife

Xtiani = (Chris)tiani (genitive of Christianus. “Xt” portion stands for “Christ” in this context)

The translations of the above examples are as follows:

On the first of January 1773, Maria Elisabetha Draven, widow, died, and on the third was buried in the cemetery.

On the 12th of June 1773, Eva Goffin, widow of Christian Valentin, died, and on the 14th was buried in the cemetery.

Death and Burial

The second example record is a death and burial from Luxemburg from the year 1788.

#34

Hac trigesima prima julii anni Millesimi Septingentesimi octogesimi octavi circa sextam matutinam pie in domino obiit omnibus Ecclesiae sacramentis munita Susanna Beringer filia legitima viginti quinque annorum nata, Petri Beringer et Margarethae Schneider conjugum ex Heisdorf altera die in Coemeterio nostro sepulta fuit.

The best way to present this record is by dividing it into groups of words.

1. **Hac trigesima prima julii**
2. **anni Millesimi Septingentesimi octogesimi octavi**
3. **circa sextam matutinam**
4. **pie in domino obiit**
5. **omnibus Ecclesiae sacramentis munita**
6. **Susanna Beringer filia legitima viginti quinque annorum nata, Petri Beringer et Margarethae Schneider conjugum ex Heisdorf**
7. **altera die in Coemeterio nostro sepulta fuit.**

Again using the basic approach, let's begin by looking up each word in the WORD LIST.

1. **Hac** = (on) this (feminine ablative case of the adjective “hic”)
trigesima = thirtieth (feminine ablative of “tricesimus,” note the “g” in place of “c.”)
prima = first (feminine ablative form of “primus”)
julii = (of) July (genitive case of “julius”)

The first statement above reads “**on this thirty first of July.**”

2. **anni** = (of) the year (genitive of “annus”)
Millesimi = thousandth (genitive of “millesimus”)
Septingentesimi = seven hundredth (genitive of “septingentesimus”)
octogesimi = eightieth (genitive of “octogesimus”)
octavi = genitive of octavus = eighth

The second statement above reads “(of the) one thousand seven hundred eighty eighth year.”

3. **circa** = about (followed by the accusative case)
sextam = six (accusative of “sextus”)
matutinam* = in the morning (accusative of “matutinus”)(*see Thode)

The third statement above reads “**about six in the morning.**”

4. **pie** = piously
in = in
domino = (in) the Lord (ablative of “dominus”)
obiit = he/she died (third person singular of the verb “obire,” to die)

The fourth statement above reads “**died piously in the Lord.**”

5. **omnibus** = (of) all (ablative plural of “omnis”)
Ecclesiae = (of) the church (genitive of “ecclesia”)
sacramentis = sacrament (ablative plural of “sacramentum”)
munita = feminine of munitus = provided/fortified with all the sacraments of the church (In the WORD LIST under “**sacramentum**” is found the meaning for “**omnibus sacramentis provisus**” as “he/she was provided with all the last rites,” and for “**sacramentis totius munitis**” the meaning “being fortified by all the last rites.” Thode gives “**omnibus sacramentis instructis**” the meaning “provided with all sacraments.” One could conclude therefore that the words “**omnibus Ecclesiae sacramentis munita**” mean “provided with all the sacraments of the church” which sacraments would be the last rites in this case.)

6. **Susanna Beringer** = Susanna Beringer
filia = daughter
legitima = legitimate
viginti quinque = twenty five
annorum = (of) years
nata = born, age
Petri Beringer et Margarethae Schneider = (of) Peter Beringer and Margaretha Schneider
conjugum = of/from a married couple
ex Heisdorf = from Heisdorf (a town in Luxemburg)

The sixth statement reads “**Susanna Beringer, age twenty five years, legitimate daughter of Peter Beringer and Margaretha Schneider.**”

7. **altera** = (on the) next (ablative case)
die = (on the) day (ablative case)
in Coemeterio nostro = in our cemetery (ablative case follows the preposition “in.”)
sepulta fuit = was buried

The seventh statement reads “**on the next day was buried in our cemetery.**” The whole

record translates as follows:

On the thirty first of July 1788 about six in the morning Susanna Beringer died piously in the Lord and was provided with all the sacraments of the church. She was buried the next day in our cemetery. The twenty five year old was the legitimate daughter of Peter Beringer and Margaretha Schneider a married couple from Heisdorf.

Notice the wording was rearranged in order to make the reading smoother. Otherwise the translation would become quite cumbersome.

Marriage

The following are two marriage records taken from the church register in Waldenrath, Germany.

Aô 1762

31ma Jany. sacram'taliter juncti Henricus Pelzer Agnes Jansen test adh Wilhelmus Jansen Leonardus Pelzer.

1708 die 8va febr Sacerto matrimony iuncti sunt andreas pelsers et Cornelia dousenberg testes oculares nicolaus dousenberg et agnes pelsers ex straeten.

Aô = (in the) year (abbreviation of “anno,” ablative case of “annus”)

31ma = 31st (feminine ablative case of “tricesimus primus”)

Jany = (of) January (abbreviation of masculine genitive case of “Januarii”)

sacram[en]taliter = by or under oath (Latham¹)

iuncti = juncti [sunt] = (they) were joined in marriage

test adh = These two abbreviated words were written in another context as “testitus adhibitis.” “Testitus” is probably a form of “testis” meaning witness and adhibitis found as “adhibeo” means to employ or call in a person for a purpose; to invite (Cassel’s).

1708 die 8va feb. = on the 8th day of February 1708

Sacerto = probably an abbreviation of “sacramento,” ablative case of “sacramentum” which means that which binds or obliges a person; an oath or solemn promise (Cassel’s); sacraments, sacred rites (internet).

matrimony = (of) matrimony (genitive of “matrimonium”)

iuncti sunt = they were joined in marriage (notice the “i” for “j”)

testes = witnesses

oculares = eyes from “oculus.” “Testes oculares” probably means eye witnesses.

The two records translate as follows:

¹Latham, R. E., *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources*, published for the British Academy by the Oxford University Press, and is published in the United States by Oxford University Press, New York, reprinted with supplement 2004.

The 31st of January 1762 Henricus Pelzer and Agnes Jansen were united in the sacrament [of matrimony], brought as witnesses [were] Wilhelmus Jansen [and] Leonardus Pelzer.

The 8th of Feb. 1708 Andreas Pelser and Cornelia Dousenberg were joined in the sacrament of matrimony, eyewitnesses? Nicolaus Dousenberg and Agnes Pelsers from Straeten.

Marriage

The last marriage is from Bickendorf, Germany.

(84.)

1849

Bickendorf Anno millesimo octingentesimo quadragesimo nono intra missarum solemnna
128. Matrimonio juncti sunt Michael Girrens, filius legitimus defuncti Joannis
Girrens et Luicae Leimbach olim conjugum ex Kilburg et Catharina Goettinger ex
Bickendorf, filia legitima Joannis Goettinger et Margarethae Scheer defunctorum
conjugum ex Kilburg, dia tertia Maji.

[signature] parochus
in Bickendorf

Of the above words, the following are not in the WORD LIST, Latin: **missarum**, **solemnna**, **legitimus**, and **defuncti**. The first word “**missarum**” can be found on the referenced website as “missa” (see list of references). The second word “**solemnna**” can be found in several places where the appropriate meaning can be selected, and the last words “**legitimus**” and “**defuncti**” in some form can be found in the WORD LIST.

missarum = holy mass (feminine genitive plural of “missa”)(on website)

solemnna = festive (appears as “**solemnis**” on the website)(found in Cassel’s as **solemnis**,
solemnitas = **sollemnis**, the latter of which in the form of **sollemne** is given the
meaning solemn feast, sacrifice, and religious rite)(Latham translates **solemnna**
[plural] **missarum** as “solemn service/mass”)

legitimus = legitimate (alternate spelling for “legitimatus” found in the WORD LIST)

defuncti = (of the) deceased (masculine genitive singular of “defunctorum” found in the
WORD LIST)

You can see that translation becomes a little difficult at times and most of us are not Latin scholars so we must use our best effort to render a reasonable meaning. A reasonable translation of the above baptism would be as follows:

Married at Bickendorf on the third of May in the year 1849 during a solemn wedding mass: Michael Girrens, legitimate son of the deceased Joannes Girrens and Luica Leimbach formerly a married couple from Kilburg, and Catharine Goettinger from Bickendorf, legitimate daughter of Joannes Goettinger and Margaretha Scheer deceased couple from Kilburg.

[signature of] the parish priest in Bickendorf

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