



## Teaching Latin for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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Latin-speaking Australian animals including Lucius the Lorikeet, Gaia the Goanna and Publius the Platypus will be characters in a new Latin primer to be created by Australian Catholic University (ACU).

The primer is part of a project which will bring Latin education into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and move it away from its traditional focus on Roman emperors and the poetry of Virgil and Ovid.

The Kudos Foundation will fund the innovative project which will develop both a Latin Primer and a new Latin Reader, focusing on the use of Latin after the end of Imperial Rome.

The resources will be used in ACU's course on post-classical Latin, the only university course of its kind in Australia.

The lecturer-in-charge of the course Dr Miles Pattenden said in other Australian universities and all Australian high schools that teach Latin the focus is exclusively on the language as a classics subject.

“Latin has a long history, much longer than just the classical period. It was the main language of the Church from the 4<sup>th</sup> Century until the present day. Like any language, it changed according to who spoke it. Reading Medieval Latin texts is very different from reading a text by Cicero.”

The decision to use Australian animals in the primer was inspired by a true story: a sulphur-crested cockatoo given to the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, who ruled much of Europe in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. The bird is featured in a painting of the Madonna painted by Andrea Mantegna in 1496.

Latin was the language of the academy of that period and a degree of Latin literacy was expected of any educated European well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The language was compulsory for academically oriented secondary school students, and for medical and law students at university.

There was a sharp drop in Latin education in the mid-20th Century, but there are still university students keen to learn Latin.

Dr Pattenden said students were attracted by the intellectual challenge of a language with strict rules as well as the long history of Latin as the language of the Church, academia and European culture. Students of theology and anyone with an interest in Church, Medieval, or early Modern history still need the language to understand original sources from antiquity to the 16th Century.

“Latin came to be seen as fusty and outdated and not relevant, especially not relevant to Australia. But just as everything comes back into fashion people are realising that there’s something interesting and challenging about this language and they are attracted to the deeper history and the sense that there’s continuity with where we are now in Australia and the past 2000 years,” said Dr Pattenden.

Research Fellow Dr Michael Hanaghan said the post-classical Latin reader would combine ecclesiastical and secular sources, which have frequently been seen as anathema to one another.

“At ACU, there’s a real awareness that the classical and Christian are interconnected. We are creating a reader that is more expansive and takes in the range of literature and culture.”

He said religious and secular culture needed to be taught not as warring factions but as ideas that developed in relation to one another.

“You can think of it like a musical group that has the opportunity to rework the music of bands who have gone before. Classical literature influences the religious literature of this period. Church writers had the opportunity to play with classical literature in new and exciting ways.”

**Dr Miles Pattenden and Dr Michael Hanaghan are available for interview.**  
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