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Introduction to Vergil's metre

Intensive Latin 2

Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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Bascis of Latin verse

- Rhythm in Latin metre is different from normal word stress
- It is based instead on the difference between heavy and light syllables (long and short)
- Each word (form of word) has its own set quantities in this regard: we have already seen this influence pronounciation:
 - *habére* versus *dícere*: a heavy (long) antepenultimt syllable pulls the word accent towards the end of the word
- This is what determines how any word can be fitted into a metrical pattern

Hexameter

- We will be reading epic poetry, written in hexameter
- The hexameter line consists of six verse feet (hence the name)
- The first five feet consist of either
 - One heavy + two light syllables, i.e. a dactyl: usually printed as – [˘][˘]
 - One heavy + one heavy, i.e. a spondee: usually printed as – –
- The sixth foot consists of either two heavy syllables, or one heavy and one light syllable:
 - – – or – [˘]

The hexameter line & pauses

- So we can represent the hexameter line and its options like this:
- This rhythm is broken up by word breaks (*caesurae*) that ‘split’ verse feet to help avoid coincidence between word stress and metrical emphasis
- The most clearly felt typical *caesurae* in Vergil are:
 - 3rd foot after the first long
 - 2nd foot after the first long + 4th foot after the first long
- Caesurae help structure the line, supporting the syntax and bringing out content emphasis
- ...and at Vergil’s time, the fifth foot is always dactylic!

Basic rules for quantity

- Ablative singular endings (1st-2nd) are always heavy
- Accusative plural endings are always heavy
 - even though other endings whose final letter is not s are short: mensam
- Diphthongs (*ae*) are always heavy
- Monosyllabic words with e are heavy: *e, de, me, te, se, ne*
- A vowel before another vowel is always light

Basics of Latin verse: words in context II

- Vowels clashing at the beginning and end of words lead to elision of the first vowel
 - *sentio et excrucior* (Cat. 85.2); *saepta armis* (Aen. 1.504)
 - This also applies to words beginning with h
- Certain ‘soft’ endings are also elided:
 - *-um* endings where a vowel follows

Basics of Latin verse: words in context I

- Length by position:
 - if a vowel is followed by two consonants it is normally heavy
 - exceptions for certain consonant combinations:
 - *muta* (b, p, d, t, g, c, f) *cum liquida* (m, n, l, r) (especially within one word) may remain light
 - in verse, this applies even if the consonants belong to different words:
 - monere: the highlighted e is heavy in its own right
 - uisum duxerat: the u becomes heavy through its position

Scansion of Verg. *Aen.* 1.494

haec dum Dardanio Aeneae miranda uidentur
dum stupet, obtutuque haeret defixus in uno,
regina ad templum, forma pulcherrima Dido,

Completed scansion

Hæc dūm Dārdānīo Æneā mīrānda vīdēntur,	SDSS
dūm stupet, obtutuque hāerēt defīxuſ īn uño,	DSSS
rēgīna ād tēmplūm, fōrmā pulcherrīma Dīdo,	SSSS

<http://mizar.unive.it/mqdq/public/>