

WHY YLE SHOULD KEEP THE NUNTII LATINI

The first acquaintance of Belgian academia with the Latin News, the Nuntii Latini, goes back to 1992. At the University of Antwerp, a guest lecture by Professor Tuomo Pekkanen on his Latin translation of the Kalevala also introduced the audience to what was then a brand new project of the Living Latin movement. To both professors and students, Finland appeared as quite an exotic place. This was not only a country in which a university professor took up the task of translating more than 20,000 verses of an epic poem full of gods, heroes and monsters into beautiful rhythmical Latin verses - it was also the cradle of weekly news read in Latin, an enterprise initiated by the same courageous professor.

At first sight, an appeal to exoticism and national pride does not look as the best approach to defend the continuation of the Nuntii Latini. Still, as respectively alumnus and former professor of the University of Antwerp, we use our initial feelings of amazement and admiration to propose the following defense of the Latin News.

1. By broadcasting the Nuntii, YLE goes beyond the vexed question of Latin as a dead or a living language. In fact, it is neither. It is preferably called a language of culture and civilisation. While largely preserving the grammar as it was conceived in the times of Caesar and Cicero, the language has been used for all possible sorts of literary genres and situations. It has done so uninterruptedly, from the fall of the Roman Empire upto nowadays. And just because Latin *is* a language, it remains a sound practice to demonstrate its versatility by even reporting present-day news items. By doing so, Finland perpetuates a venerable tradition, of which it now is still virtually the only representative. News items were a traditional ingredient of international Latin periodicals. By radio, Finland managed to do what only one state had ever done before: Latin radio broadcasts were offered by Radio Vatican in the 1930s.

2. For internationalisation, YLE misses a unique opportunity by cancelling the Latin News. Polls and surveys will never do justice to the very diverse audience reached by the Nuntii. It would be worth looking at handbooks of Latin worldwide, which contain a reference to the Nuntii Latini, not seldom as an encouragement for the students to further explore. Just think of a Latin teacher presenting a fragment to a class of twenty pupils, who will tell about their experience to friends and/or relatives. Surely, the amount of people worldwide with the capability of globally understanding a Latin news item, whether reading it or listening to it, should not be underestimated. "Latin is more known abroad than Finnish", as Professor Pekkanen used to state. Teaching of Latin by language immersion and living approaches

towards the language are getting more popular internationally. By cancelling the Nuntii, YLE misses a unique opportunity to make it possible for a young audience to get to get acquainted with Finland. Indeed, quite a number of news items inform a lot about this country, which for the rest is less known to an international public.

3. On the occasion of Finland's EU Presidency in 2006, the descriptions of meetings on the website were also presented ... in Latin. By doing so, Finland expressed its attachment to the European cultural heritage which is, *inter alia*, closely connected to the Roman heritage and the Latin language. This is a statement which goes beyond the realm of mere national pride or even a sort of European patriotism. In fact, originating from the West of Europa, the use and the study of Latin has gradually connected people from all over the world -- from humanist writers in the wake of Renaissance Europe, missionaries in the New World or the Far East to explorers of Australia in the nineteenth century. They all shared the Latin language as an apt common tool to express themselves, both on a practical level and for ideological/philosophical motives.

By reading, writing, yes even simply enjoying Latin one takes the perspective of a world citizen. The promotion of the use of the Latin language as a scholarly tool of culture and civilisation has always been the main objective of the long-standing international Academia Latinitati Fovendae. Among the fifty members, no less than four are Finnish academics. For decades, Finland has had a tradition in Latin to be proud of. In the Companion to Neo-Latin Studies, the standard work on Neo-Latin literature, the Latin news is especially mentioned as a most praiseworthy enterprise. The printed Nuntii Latini in five volumes (Helsinki, 1992-1999) form a unique archive of Zeitgeschichte in Latin, to be found in many a university library. These are groundbreaking texts, by the way they have shaped the reality of the modern world in a simple but correct and attractive Latin, enriched with many neologisms and new wordings.

This is yet another reason to deplore the disappearance of the Nuntii Latini. But as we hope to have demonstrated, there are far better motives than mere nostalgia to defend the continuation of this internationally unique selling proposition.

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