



Latin



Latin is an Italic language, historically spoken in Latium and Ancient Rome. Through the Roman conquest, Latin spread throughout the Mediterranean and a large part of Europe. Languages such as Italian, French, Romanian, Spanish, and Portuguese are descended from Latin, while many others, including English, have inherited and acquired much of their vocabulary from Latin. It was the international language of science and scholarship in central and Western Europe until the 17th century. There are two varieties of Latin: Classical Latin, the literary dialect used in poetry and prose, and Vulgar Latin, the form of the language spoken by ordinary people. Vulgar Latin was preserved as a spoken language in much of Europe after the decline of the Roman Empire and by the 9th century diverged into the various Romance languages.

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Latin survived as the *lingua franca* of educated classes in the West, and this survival was reinforced by the adoption of Latin by the Catholic Church. In this milieu, it survived as a mother tongue at least into the second millennium A.D. and is referred to as Medieval Latin. The Renaissance had the paradoxical effect of briefly reinforcing the position of Latin as a spoken language, through its adoption by the Renaissance Humanists. After the 16th century, the popularity of Medieval Latin began to decline.

Today, Latin lives on in the form of Ecclesiastical Latin used for edicts and papal bulls issued by the Catholic Church. Much Latin vocabulary is used to study philological, linguistic, legal, historical, philosophical, literary, and religious topics, among others. Latin is also used in scientific terminology, especially in biological taxonomy, or the science of classifying organisms. In the Catholic Church it is used for official documents. Latin is the official language of the State of Vatican City, in addition to the Italian language.

Classical Latin, the literary language of the late Republic and early Empire, is still taught in many primary, grammar, and secondary schools, often combined with Greek in the study of Classics. The Latin alphabet, together with its modern variants such as the English, Spanish and French alphabets, is the most widely used alphabet in the world. Although Latin is no longer spoken in everyday speech it is by no means an endangered language or an extinct language.

