djb89@cam.ac.uk
Queens'

An Introduction to Greek and Latin Metre

I: Introduction

"We know full well, that there are many in society (and among them teachers, from whom better things might be expected) who rate the talents of men from their knowledge of the [Classical] languages, and consider all who are unable to scan the metres of Horace or Virgil, or translate Pindar or Homer, as dolts and blockheads, fit only to be made the sport of such marvellously wise beings as themselves."

Anon. on American Classical students (1820)

Two Ways of Making Verse:

I: **Accentual ('stressed' or 'dynamic') syllabic verse:**

- **Typical in English (and most modern European) poetry**

The cúrfew tólls the knéll of párting dáy   Thomas Gray, *Elegy* 1

Hénce! hóme, you ídle creátures gét you hóme!   Wm Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* I i 1

Ín the Acádian lánd, on the shóres of the Básin of Mínas   H.W. Longfellow, *Evangeline* Pt I 1

These lame hexameters the strong-wing'd music of Homer? | No – but a most burlesque barbarous experiment. | When was a harsher sound ever heard, ye Muses, in England? | When did a frog coarser croak upon our Helicon? | Hexameters no worse than daring Germany gave us, | Barbarous experiment, barbarous hexameters.
Tennyson, *On Translations of Homer*

O you chorus of indolent reviewers, | Irresponsible, indolent reviewers, | Look, I come to the test, a tiny poem | All composed in a metre of Catullus.   Tennyson, *Hendecasyllabics* 1-4

I caught this morning morning's minion, king|dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding | Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding | High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing | In his ecstasy!   G.M. Hopkins, *Windhover* 1-6

When is it the academy | Rattling your anatomy | That'll be J 5,* so | kill all your fake flattery. Excerpt from C. Stewart, M. Stuart, C. Henderson, D. Givens, M. Potsic & L. Macfadden (eds.), *Concrete Schoolyard* (Good Life, Los Angeles, 1998) III.32-7. (*I don't know the context, but presume this is a size of paper; or perhaps, given 'rattling', Johnny Five of the *Short circuit* series?)

- **Mediaeval Latin and Byzantine Greek (c. 4th cent. A.D. onwards):**

Díes írae! Díes ílla | sólvet saéclum ín favílla: | Téste Dávid cúm Sibýlla!   *Dies Irae* (13th cent., stz. 1)

Βασίλειος γὰρ βασιλεὺς πρᾷος μέγας   Anon., *Laud. Basil. I*, 93 (late 9th cent.)

ψάλλε τὸν ἄνδρα, θεά, τὸν πολύτροπον, ὅστις τοσούτους | τόπους διῆλθε, πορθήσας τῆς Τροίας τὴν ἔνδοξον πόλιν.   A modernised translation of Homer's *Odyssey*

Commodian's *Carmen Apologeticum* (3rd cent. AD) provides good early evidence for the fading of quantitative principles from Latin verse:

praefatio nostra uiam erranti demonstrat | respectumque bonum, cum uenerit saeculi meta | aeternum fieri, quod discredunt inscia corda. (1-3)

II: <u>Quantitative</u> verse: Ancient Greek and (in turn) Roman poetry:

The patterning of long ('heavy') and short ('light') syllables in larger metrical units.

<div align="center">

⌣ **short**   – **long**   ⌣̄ *or* × **anceps**

</div>

All quantitative metres of Latin were adopted from Greek, and typically adapted / refined over time.

Generally speaking, Latin metre was narrower in its metrical range / variation and more bound by rules.

Some famous openings:

μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος   Dactylic hexameter: *Iliad* 1.1

θεοὺς μὲν αἰτῶ τῶνδ' ἀπαλλαγὴν πόνων   Iambic trimeter, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

Musae, quae pedibus magnum pulsatis Olympum   Dactylic hexameter, Ennius *Annales* 1.1

super alta uectus Attis celeri rate maria   Galliambic, Catullus 63

Maecenas atauis edite regibus | o et praesidium et dulce decus meum   First Asclepiad, Horace *Odes* 1.1

Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis, | *contactum nullis ante cupidinibus*. Elegiac couplet, Propertius 1.1

Only original Latin metre = **Saturnian** verse

- Scholarly uncertainty about nature and history of verse form.

- Probably non-quantitative and free from Greek influence.

- (Very probably) accentual / stressed.

- Divided into two halves (hemistichs), each with a caesura generally before antepenultimate syll.

- Typically two (or three) accents in first half, and two in second.

- Of roughly 13 syllables (but 11 to 17 attested).

- Metre used by first (known) Latin poets, Livius Andronicus and Naevius.

     uirum mihi Camena   insece uersutum   Liv. Andr., *Odyssia* 1

     immolabat auream   uictimam pulchram   Naev., *Bell. Pun.* fr. 3

Accents: *reno**uare**   **om**nium*

- Greek pitch (melodic) accent does not affect Ancient Greek metre.

- Latin word accent has a secondary effect (to be touched upon throughout this course). The Latin stress accent occurred on the penultimate syllable if it scanned long, or, if the penultimate scanned short, on the antepenultimate (regardless of quantity). Words of four or more syllables could have a secondary accent earlier in the word (on the same principle), e.g. *cómmemoráre*.

Ancient sources on Greek and Latin metre:

Greek: Aristoxenus (4th cent. BC; fragmentary), Hephaestion (2nd cent. AD), Aristides Quintilianus (3rd cent. AD).

Latin: Caesius Bassus (1st cent. AD; fragmentary), Terentianus Maurus (2nd cent. AD), Marius Plotius Sacerdos (3rd cent. AD); other minor authors in Heinrich Keil's *Grammatici Latini*, vol. VI.

Prosody: προσ–ῳδία

Measurement of syllables (vowel/diphthong + one or more consonants) based upon time of (spoken) utterance. The full range of times for vocalisation that exists in practice was conceived for the purposes of metre to be a bipartite distinction: *either* long *or* short.

Syllable length:

For the purposes of quantitative metre, syllables are either 'open' (short or long in scansion) or 'closed' (always long). An **open** syllable is pronounced with a vowel/diphthong as its final element; a **closed** syllable ends in one or more consonants (which may begin the following word). Typically, if two consonants begin a syllable (e.g. *sta-*), the first is taken with the preceding syllable, thus closing off the pronunciation of the preceding syllable (*omnis > om-nis* ; ταῦτα στέλλει > *tau-tas tel-lei*). Nevertheless, the general aim is to keep as many syllables open as possible (e.g. *sa-ta* not *sat-a*, and *i d est*, not *id est*).

A short vowel will remain short, unless two or more consonants follow.

Long:

Naturally long syllables are created by long vowels and diphthongs (open/closed) and all closed syllables:

Greek:	Latin:
$\bar{α}, η, \bar{ι}, \bar{υ}, ω$	$\bar{a}, \bar{e}, \bar{i}, \bar{o}, \bar{u}$ ($\bar{y}$)
ᾳ, αι, αυ, ει, ευ, ῃ, ηυ, οι, ου, υι, ῳ	*ae, au, ei, eu, oe*
any vowel following contraction	
any vowel carrying a circumflex⌢	

Short:

Naturally short syllables are created by short, open vowels.

In Greek:	Latin:
α, ε, ι, ο, υ	$\breve{a}, \breve{e}, \breve{i}, \breve{o}, \breve{u}$ (*y*)

'Lengthening':

A syllable containing a short vowel will be treated (but not pronounced) as long 'by position' if it precedes two consonants *or* a double consonant (since the former consonant will 'close' the syllable):[1]

In Greek ζ ξ ψ (and often ῥ at word-beginning)   In Latin: *x*   (*z*)

---

[1] N.B. In Greek, breathings (aspirates) never affect scansion, so θ φ χ are treated as single consonants. In Latin, *h* does not 'make position' (i.e. is ignored), *i* and *u* can operate as consonants, and *qu* is treated as a single consonant.

BUT, the syllable containing the short vowel *may* remain short before two consonants where a mute precedes a liquid/nasal. This is known as the **mute-cum-liquid** rule. The relevant consonant clusters are:

Greek:	Latin:
πλ πρ πν	*pl pr*
τλ τρ τμ τν	*tr*
κλ κρ κμ κν	*cl cr*
φλ φρ φν	*fl fr*
θλ θρ θμ θν	*(thr)*
χλ χρ χν	*(chl chr)*
βρ (βλ)	*bl br*
δρ (δλ)	*dr*
γρ (γλ)	*gl gr*

Cf., e.g.:   ἀλλ' ἐν πέτροισι πέτρον ἐκτρίβων μόλις   Soph. *Phil*. 296

or   *et primo similis uolucri, mox uera uolucris*   Ovid, *Met*. XIII.607

N.B.:

– The possibility of short or long scansion exists within a word (e.g. τεκνα / *patris* = –◡ *or* ◡◡) unless the two consonants belong to different morphological entities, e.g. a prepositional compound and the stem, in which case lengthening must occur (ἐκλέγω / *abluo* = –◡–).

– If the mute-cum-liquid pair ends one word and begins the next (e.g. ἐκ λόγου / *ab litore*) lengthening *must* occur.

– Within words and between words lengthening is regular in Aeolic poetry (Sappho, Alcaeus) and common in Homer.

- By contrast, in Attic dialogue a short vowel is very often not lengthened by a following mute-cum-liquid; when this does occur, it is almost always within words and *extremely rare* between them. This preference for retaining short syllables is known as **Attic correption**.

Some rules for the prosody of final syllables:

General rules for **final vowels** in **Greek**:

Final –α is **short** in verbs and nouns, except: (i) if in a 1st decl. noun/adj. it is preceded by ε / ι / ρ,[2] or occurs in the dual, or (ii) if an adv. in –ρᾱ, or (iii) if it occurs in the Doric dialect in cases where α represents Attic η.

Final –ι is **short** (except for the deictic iota)

Final –υ is **short**, except in verbal forms (e.g. δείκνῡ, ἔδῡ)

General rules for **final vowels** in **Latin**:

Final –a is **short**, except: (i) in the abl. sg. of 1st decl. nouns (*puellā*) and adjj. (*bonā*) etc., (ii) in the 2nd sg. act. imperative of 1st conj. verbs (*amā*), and (iii) in certain prepositions / adverbs (e.g. *iuxtā, circā* etc.).

Final –e is **short**, except: (i) in the abl. sg. of 5th decl. nouns (*diē*), (ii) in the 2nd sg. act. imperative of 2nd conj. verbs (*habē*), and (ii) in adverbs from –us, -a, -um adjj. (e.g. *superbē*).

Final –i is **long**, except: in words that have undergone iambic correption (see below)

Final –o is **long**, except: in words that have undergone iambic correption (see below)

Final –u is **long**, except: in the archaic preposition *indŭ* (~ *endŏ*).

N.B. Every monosyllable ending in a vowel in Latin is long (except *qua*, which cannot stand alone)

N.B. In Latin, a vowel preceding another vowel (with which it does not form a diphthong) will be short, except:

- 5th decl. gen. and dat. sg. –ēī
- archaic genitives in –āī
- gen. sg. in –īus (n.b. also –ĭus)
- forms of *fīo* (without *r* in them)
- if the word is derived from Greek, where no such clear-cut rule applies in Greek.

General rules for vowel length in **final closed** syllables in **Greek**:

Greek words can only end in the consonants ν, ρ and ς (whence also ξ and ψ), with the exception of ἐκ, οὐκ / οὐχ. Any vowel before ξ and ψ must scan long. Before ν, ι will be short, and υ short (except in nouns of the type σῦς and the adv. νῦν); -α in fem. acc. sg. nouns, adjectives and participles will have the length of the nominative (but is long in the adverbs ἄγαν, ἔαν, ἐπείδαν and λίαν). Before ρ, α, ι and υ are short (except in nouns of the type πῦρ). Before ς, α will be long except in the acc. pl. of 3rd decl. nouns / masc. participles, and in certain 3rd decl. nom. nouns (e.g. λαμπάς (f.), κέρας (n.)) and nom. sg. fem. adjectives (in –ας, –αδος); ι will be short (except in the nouns κόνῑς and ὄφῑς), and υ short (except in nouns of the type σῦς or νέκῡς and participles in -νῠς).

General rules for vowel length in **final closed** syllables in **Latin**:

Closed monosyllables are always long, except: (i) if they end in *b, d* or *t*, or (ii) are one of *an, in, fac, nec, fel, mel, hic* (nom.), *fer, per, ter, cor, uir, bis, is, quis, es, os* (n.).

Final closed syllables of polysyllabic words are short, except, (i) if they end in *c*, (ii) if they end in *as, es* or *os* (save for *anas, es, penes, compos, impos, exos*, and 3rd decl. nouns with stem in -*et-*, -*it-*, -*id-* (e.g. *miles*), with the exception of *abiēs, ariēs, pariēs*); (iii) if the termination -*is* represents 1st and 2nd decl. dat. abl. pl., *or* acc. pl. of *i*-stem 3rd decl. nouns/adjj., *or* 2nd sg. pres. act. indic. of 4th conj. verbs, *or* the forms *sis, uelis, nolis, possis, fis*; in other verbal terminations, and in the gen. sg. of 3rd decl. nouns, -*is* is short; (iv) if the termination -*us* occurs in the nominative of 3rd decl. nouns (e.g. *sus, uirtus*).

---

[2] There are several exceptions to this general rule, most notably: participles in –υῖα, nouns in –τρια or -νοια, μία, γαῖα, γέφυρα, μοῖρα, πεῖρα, σωτεῖρα, etc.

The collision of words (and syllables):

(i)   Elision / Synaloepha (synaliphe):

In **Greek**:

When a final short vowel (α, ε, ι, ο, but not υ) precedes an initial vowel (irrespective of smooth/rough breathing) of the next word, the final short vowel is disregarded entirely in the scansion. Elided syllables are conventionally not written in Greek but are replaced by an apostrophe (').

The elision of words ending in –ι does not usually extend to ὅτι, περί, τί, τι, ἄρτι and the dat. sg. in -(σ)ι in Epic.

–οι and –αι can occasionally be elided, but other diphthongs are very rare / unattested in elision.

Certain words in Greek are not elided: τά, ἄ, ὅ, τό.

Thus long final vowels and diphthongs are usually not placed before initial vowels.

In **Latin**:

When a final vowel / *m* precedes an initial vowel (or *h-*), the final vowel (and *m*) is disregarded entirely in the scansion. Elided syllables are conventionally written unmarked in Latin: *punctum amoris* scans −∪−∪ .

Long vowels and diphthongs can be elided, but rarely before short following syllables. In particular, only very rarely in dactylic verse are cretic (−∪−) words elided.

(ii)   Prodelision / Aphaeresis

In **Greek**, long final vowels / diphthongs are not elided when preceding ἐστι, ἐγώ (and its oblique forms), ἐπί, ἐκ, ἐν, the augment (ἐ-) and ἀπό; instead, the long final vowel / diphthong is scanned (and written), and the initial ἐ- of the following word is disregard in scansion (and not written): e.g. ἤδη 'στι, ἤ 'πό.

In **Latin**, final vowel / *m* (or, in Early Latin, final –*is* or –*us*), is retained when preceding *est* or *es* (and possibly also *et* (and *ac* / *atque*). This is usually left unwritten in texts, but you will come across, e.g. *bonumst*.

(iii)   Hiatus:

Hiatus is where vowels/diphthongs collide between words but both remain unaffected.

In **Greek**, the practice originated in Homer after the loss of digamma (Ϝ) from pronunciation (and, in due course, orthography): e.g. καλὰ ἔργα or μελιηδέα οἶνον (more on this and 'epic correption' in next lecture).

In **Latin**, hiatus is rare, usually limited to long final vowels and diphthongs, and can generally be categorised as:

- (i)   A Graecising affectation.
- (ii) Exclamatory hiatus: after *o, heu, a, ei* etc.
- (iii) Prosodic hiatus (usually in first short of biceps ∪∪), i.e. before another short, where a long syllable is rendered short in scansion (e.g. *ita me dĭ ament* or *dŭm abest*).

(iv) Synizesis / Synecphonesis:

Two adjacent syllables ending and beginning with vowels *may* be pronounced together. If within a word (e.g. θεῶν pronounced as one syllable, or *omnia* as two) this is typically termed 'synizesis', if between words (e.g. ἢ οὐ) pronounced and scanned as one syllable, it is typically termed 'synecphonesis'. Synizesis is rare in Classical Latin poetry (and usually limited to instances after *–i*); synecphonesis is not acknowledged in Latin but treated as elision (although the true practice doubtless lies between the two). In Greek synizesis is common in epic and Attic tragedy; synecphonesis is somewhat rarer.

(v) Crasis :

In Greek: definite article / καί + word beginning with initial vowel are often written as a unit: e.g. οὑμός < ὁ ἐμός, or κἀπό < καὶ ἀπό. This orthographic licence is regulated carefully.

Crasis is not a device available to Latin poets.

Two prosodic phenomena specific to Latin:

(i)   Sigmatic ecthlipsis:

In early Latin (up until the time of Lucretius = mid s.i B.C.) the *s* in the termination *–is* or *–us* could be disregarded in scansion before a following *consonant*, e.g. *omnibus prodest* could scan $-\cup\cup$ $--$ (as if *omnibu prodest*) instead of the expected $-\cup-$ $--$. In most printed Latin texts such ecthlipsis is marked with an apostrophe; it should not be, however, and several texts correctly leave the phenomenon unmarked. Cicero dismissed the device as *subrusticum* and not employed by *noui poetae* (in c.45 BC).

(ii)   Iambic correption (a.k.a. *breuis breuians* / iambic shortening):

In early Latin (and certain words that entered common usage in this form), a long syllable could be shortened (i) if it is directly preceded by a short syllable, and (ii) if an accent occurs in the syllable before and/or after. For the most part, this phenomenon was limited to words of original iambic shape ($\cup-$), and was precipitated by the fact that the word accent fell on the short first syllable, which duly took stress (and thus time for pronunciation) from the second. E.g. *cedo, cito, duo, ego, homo, modo, puto, (ne)scio, uolo, ibi, ubi, mihi, tibi, sibi, nisi, quasi* – all either must or can scan as pyrrhics ($\cup\cup$).

Metrical Units (of two-four syllables)

◡ –	**iamb(us)**	◡ ◡ – –	**ionic *a minore***
– ◡	**trochee**	– – ◡ ◡	**ionic *a maiore***
◡ ◡	**pyrrhic***	– ◡ ◡ –	**choriamb**
– –	**spondee***	◡ – – ◡	**antispastus***
◡ ◡ –	**anapaest**	◡ – – –	**1st epitrite***
– ◡ ◡	**dactyl**	– ◡ – –	**2nd epitrite**
– ◡ –	**cretic**	– – ◡ –	**3rd epitrite***
◡ – –	**bacchius**	– – – ◡	**4th epitrite***
– – ◡	**palimbacchius***	– ◡ ◡ ◡	**1st paean***
◡ – ◡	**amphibrach***	◡ – ◡ ◡	**2nd paean***
– – –	**molossus***	◡ ◡ – ◡	**3rd paean***
◡ ◡ ◡	**tribrach***	◡ ◡ ◡ –	**4th paean***
◡ ◡ ◡ ◡	**proceleusmatic***	– – – –	**dispondee/ditrochius***

* Not typically used as a basic unit for a Greek/Roman metre.