

*“Kicking the Habit:
Learning to Read Greek and Latin”*

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The first Latin book that I ever bought was Moreland and Fliescher's *Latin: An Intensive Course* in my senior year of high school. This was the beginning of an attempt to teach myself the language after being thoroughly frightened by an MSU representative who warned me that I would probably never pass Latin. The only marginalia in this almost brand new book is my confused attempt to decipher the Latin case system on page seven. That was as far as I got.

My next attempt at self-taught language came after completing Latin my freshman year and was to be guided by Peter Jones' *Learn Ancient Greek*. Coincidentally, this came at the warning of my Greek professor for the next year. I didn't even open the book until recently. But this experience produced an interesting situation with far reaching effects. Jones is also the author of an introductory Latin book. I had already taken elementary Latin and still had the book from my failed attempt a year before. Buying this book was like that first cigarette or the first can of beer. I felt odd about it: I didn't really enjoy it, but something told me to do it. This sparked a bona fide addiction. I began buying used introductory Latin textbooks and grammars, Latin composition textbooks, and, when I had completed enough Greek to lose my fear of failing, Greek textbooks as well. (I took a liking to used books because they have lots of marginalia and doodling which only the student of Greek and Latin can fully appreciate, and I like the idea of saving something that someone else didn't want anymore.) Most of these textbooks are cookie-cutter, small, blandly-colored editions from the turn of the last century. I didn't get any particular use out of my collection besides the thrill of a new acquisition, and, as with all addictions, the pleasure began to wane.

I decided to take a break and spend my money on something a little more diverse. So I studied abroad in France. I came back with about 60 pounds of books. I left two pairs of shoes and all of my toiletry items in France in order to fit them all in my suitcase. The books I found in Europe were different in two important aspects: they were primary texts, and they were well-aged. As Professor Tyrell sagely imparted after I had completed first-year Greek, "you only take first year Greek once," then you have to put the textbook down and start reading. I have enjoyed reading Greek and Latin since then, and somewhat sadly have kicked my addiction. I still buy and own many book about Greek and Latin, but they no longer own me.