

## SCS/NEH Thesaurus Linguae Latinae Fellowship report

Charles Kuper, 2018–19, 2019–20

My arrival in Munich fortuitously coincided with the beginning of the inaugural TLL Summer School in Latin Lexicography, whose founding was largely spearheaded by one of my predecessors in this fellowship. It was a particularly hot August day, and young scholars from all corners of the world gathered in the library for an introduction to the Thesaurus. My new colleagues took turns explaining the daily work of a lexicographer, and each reflected on the satisfaction and the challenges of contributing to this monumental work of classical scholarship. I could not imagine them making a better first impression. I will also never forget one of the lemmata assigned to the students that week, *repuerasco* (“to become a child again”). In many ways, this beautiful word captures the profoundly transformative experience of growth that this fellowship was for me, both intellectually and personally.

Part of this transformation was more literal than I might like to admit. My first day at the Thesaurus happened to be the first time that I had ever set foot in Europe, and I was embarrassed by the child-like wonder that I had for the new world around me. My early efforts at speaking a language that I was only used to reading might also be described as infantile. Yet I pushed through my growing pains, and I benefitted immensely from the opportunity to immerse myself in the international community of classics, both in Germany and more widely. I was invited, for example, to present at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, where I met new interlocutors, and several publications had their beginning. The Thesaurus is also where I met my current colleagues at Sapienza University of Rome, where I am now a postdoctoral fellow for an ERC project on Priscian's *Ars Grammatica*. It is no exaggeration to say that this fellowship drastically shifted my place in the world.

How I grew as a classicist is somewhat more difficult to articulate. This fellowship, like the Thesaurus itself, is simply unlike anything else in our field. Without a doubt, I gained the proficiency to contribute to the field of Latin lexicography, and this tangible benefit has enriched my work in many exciting ways. For example, my favorite assigned lemma, the adjective *reptilis* (“crawling, creeping”), complemented my interest in late antique biblical commentary. It is perhaps most well-known from its use as a substantive at the beginning of the Hebrew Bible: “God created ... every *creeping thing* upon the ground” (Gen. 1:25). My research on this word provided invaluable experience navigating the dizzyingly complex tradition of the Old Latin Bible, often known as the *Vetus Latina*. The exegetical afterlife of this passage also meant that I had to reexamine many authors central to my area of specialty—Tertullian, Jerome, and Augustine—from an entirely new perspective.

But much of what I consider to be my scholarly maturation is less tangible. I think about language, especially Latin, differently. My conception of Latin literature is not only more expansive, but it has also taken on a spatial quality. Whenever I want, I can stroll through my personal memory palace of Latin. And of course, this mental library is based upon the physical layout of the Thesaurus Bibliothek itself, which is arranged chronologically to aid researchers trace the biographies of words through time. I could go on, but I think the difficulty of pointing to particular aspects of change is because working at the Thesaurus has pervaded nearly everything that I now do. I have been fundamentally altered, and I am a better scholar and teacher for it.

The fellowship's greatest source of joy, however, was the group of scholars who comprise the Thesaurus, my wonderful colleagues. I cannot overstate my respect for their philological expertise or my gratitude for their friendship and hospitality. A moment of reflection brings back many cherished memories of shared activities: freezing (which is allegedly swimming) in the Eisbach, tennis in Olympiapark, playing Go, celebrating birthdays, reading the Targum, hiking in Bavaria, attending lectures, and, of course, the daily communal lunches at various cafeterias and restaurants near the academy—and always with an intense discussion about where we should go. People make the place, and they are the Thesaurus' true treasure.

Finally, it is impossible for me to avoid mentioning the arrival of COVID-19 and the global disruption that occurred during the end of my fellowship. What were supposed to be the final few months of my time in Munich turned into almost another full year because the NEH generously extended my funding through the end of December in case I could not return to the States. This was also due, in no small part, to the personal efforts of the Executive Director of the SCS and the Chairperson of the TLL Selection Committee. I am so grateful for the support of both institutions throughout my fellowship, and especially during that trying time.