

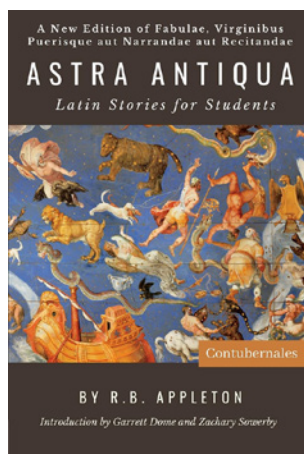
## Book Review

### R.B. Appleton: *Astra Antiqua: Latin Stories for Students. A New Edition of Fabulae, Virginibus Puerisque aut Narrandae aut Recitandae*

Dome (G.), Sowerby (Z.) (edd.) Pp. ii + 110, ills. Contubernales Publishing, 2023. Paper, US\$19.99, £14.53. ISBN: 979-8-9876456-1-1.

Ashley Brewer

Senior Instructor of Latin and Ancient Mediterranean Cultures, Culver Academies, Culver, IN, USA  
Ashley.Brewer@culver.org



*Astra Antiqua* is a new edition of R.B. Appleton's 1914 publication entitled *Fabulae Virginibus Puerisque aut Narrandae aut Recitandae* that now includes some illustrations. Appleton was a proponent of the Direct Method to teach Latin. 'Proponents of the Direct Method believe that Latin should be understood as a language, not a complex code. The Direct Method is an immersion method. It is sometimes called the Nature Method. Students learn Latin in Latin without the interference of their native

language. Grammar is taught in the target language. Speaking, listening, writing and reading (not translating) Latin are important components of the Direct Method.<sup>1</sup> Another Latin text that is akin to the Direct Method would be Hans Ørberg's *Familia Romana* series, which were first published in the 1950s. The Direct Method advocates for a language to be learned in and of itself without the use of the first language to aid understanding. The idea that Latin would be a 'living language' through this method assumed that the outcome would be that students became more proficient in Latin by learning only in Latin. Appleton was clear in his 1914 preface to *Fabulae* when he said, 'the stories should be told and not read' – the implication here being that the teacher, or a sufficiently studious upper-level Latin student, should take on the role of story-teller and create vivid images in students' heads through vocal intonation, physical illustration, and performance while presenting these *fābellae*. It would seem that this is a text that is to be used as one tool of many in a Latin classroom that utilises the Direct Method of instruction.

The title given to this edition, *Astra Antiqua*, conveys to the interested reader that these 70 stories are all connected through

astronomy and astrology. The mythological and historical stories that explain the stars and planets are a wealth of information for any Latin student seeking to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the ancient Roman and Greek worlds. The stories are arranged in no particular order and most span no more than a paragraph, ranging from six to ten sentences in length. However, there are six longer stories broken up into smaller paragraphs for continuity. The collection of stories in Appleton's *Fabulae* seems to mimic that of Richie's *Fabulae Faciles*, with Latin used to tell stories in bite-sized paragraphs intended for student consumption. To further add meaning to the title of this edition, Dome and Sowerby have included illustrations from the *Uranometria*, published in 1603 by Johann Bayer. At the time, the *Uranometria* was the authority on star-mapping and included 51 illustrations. The *Uranometria* illustrations that have been included are correlated to a story on the same page.

Dome and Sowerby have not compromised the original intention behind Appleton's *Fabulae* to be used as part of the Direct Method. The pages contain only the Latin stories and perhaps a newly added image from the *Uranometria*. There are no footnotes with vocabulary notes and the Latin sentence structure mimics that of classical Latin. If an image is present, it serves to reinforce the Latin, but the understanding of the correlation between the illustration and the story depends entirely on the ability of the reader to understand the Latin presented on the page. There is a very deep glossary in the back of the book which, again, adheres to the Direct Method by using Latin to define the Latin vocabulary listed, à la Ørberg's *marginalia*. Dome and Sowerby frame this approach by stating in this edition's preface that, 'following Appleton's own outlook on Latin learning, however, students are encouraged to read the stories without becoming impeded by the intricacies of each construction'. It may not be that students feel impeded by grammatical constructions, but rather the sheer amount of unknown vocabulary. Prior to using a text from *Astra Antiqua*, it would be incumbent upon the teacher or facilitator to present newer vocabulary and target it extensively through varying activities and tasks in order for students to confidently glean understanding of a story from *Astra Antiqua* as it is told to them.

When it comes to grammar instruction via the Direct Method, *Astra Antiqua* offers many opportunities to use the stories as vehicles for discussion around, and direct teaching of, Latin grammar constructions of all sorts. If operating independently of a teacher, students are advised to 'have a grammar available for more difficult passages'. The intended audience for these *fābellae* are intermediate students who have a strong understanding of foundational grammatical constructions – indeed, the assumed understanding of what would be meant by 'intermediate student' in 1914 is surely different from that in 2024. Nevertheless, the fact that each story is rather short lends itself nicely to being one in a series of readings to practise identifying new constructions as well as reinforcing any foundational grammatical knowledge without becoming too arduous and tiresome.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631024000515

#### Note

1 <https://latinteach.blogspot.com/2006/11/how-to-teach-latin-over-years-study-of.html>