

Although you may never have thought about this before, people from around the Roman Empire whose native language was not Latin had to *learn Latin* as adults in the ancient world, just as we are doing now. This was true in particular if they did business in Rome or if they needed to interact with Roman government officials, for instance in order to make a will to manage inheritance of goods after their deaths. *Dositheus Magister* was a Greek grammarian who lived in Rome in the 4th century CE and taught Latin to Greek speakers. The following interesting sentences are taken from his discussion of the cases in Latin in a surviving “textbook” he authored. To interpret the following, it helps to know that there is *no ablative case in Greek* and the uses of that case in Latin are essentially distributed between the Greek dative and genitive cases. Dositheus (or the sources on which he was drawing) invents a “seventh case” to show how Latin matches up with Greek.

Casus sunt VI: nominativus, genetivus, dativus, accusativus, vocativus, ablativus. Adicitur¹ ā diligentioribus² etiam septimus casus. Semper ablativus unō modō profertur³, cum ā persona aut ā locō aut ā rē ablatum quid⁴ – *ab urbe in Africam redit*⁵ ... Septimus vērō casus modis IIII profertur. Primo, cum in persōnā aut in locō aut in rē intelligitur – *in statuā Ciceronis victoria ... inscribitur*. Et interpretatur talis figura per dativum⁶. Quae regula etiam in nominibus secundae declinationis, quōrum ablativus et dativus idem est, observatur et in nominibus tertiae declinationis, quōrum item ablativus et dativus idem est.

Dositheus then goes on to discuss the three other uses of the ablative in Latin that correspond to either uses of the genitive or the dative in Greek.

¹from: adiciō, adicere, adiēcī, adiectum, 3rd conjugation, -io group, “to add”

²diligentior is a comparative adjective used as a substantive = “a more diligent person”

³this verb is a present passive form: “is used in one way”

⁴“something is taken away”

⁵from the irregular verb redeō, redīre, redī, reditum, “to go back”

⁶That is, in Greek it would be a dative and Dositheus gives a Greek version

Translation (JL): There are six cases: the nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, vocative, and ablative. But a seventh case is also added by more diligent people. The ablative is always used in one way when something is taken away from a person, or a place, or a thing. For instance as in the phrase, *ab urbe in Africam redit* (“he returned from the city into Africa”). But the seventh case is used in four ways. First, when it is understood in or on a person, place, or thing: *in statuā Ciceronis victoria ... inscribitur* (“on the statue of Cicero, the victory was inscribed”). And such a figure (of speech) is translated with the dative (in Greek). Which rule is even observed in the nouns of the second declension, whose ablative and dative are identical, and in nouns of the third declension whose ablative and dative are also identical.