



Seminar

## NICHOLAS ZAIR

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Lecturer in Classics (Classical Linguistics and Comparative Philology),  
University of Cambridge

### *Orthographic Conservatism and Education in the Roman Empire*

Tuesday, 17 November 2020, 2:15 p.m.

Due to the precautions imposed by the current Corona pandemic,  
the Thunberg Hall will be closed to the public until further notice.

You are therefore invited to join the seminar via Zoom instead:  
<https://uu-se.zoom.us/j/62385256347>

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## ABOUT NICHOLAS ZAIR

Nicholas Zair read Literae Humaniores (Classics) as an undergraduate, followed by an MPhil and DPhil in Comparative Philology and General Linguistics at Merton and Jesus Colleges, University of Oxford. In 2010 he was appointed a Research Fellow at Peterhouse, University of Cambridge, subsequently worked on the AHRC-funded 'Greek in Italy' project at Cambridge and became a lecturer in 2016.

His DPhil thesis on *The Reflexes of the Proto-Indo-European Laryngeals in Celtic* was awarded the Johann Kaspar Zeuß Prize of the Societas Celtologica Europaea and was published by Brill in 2012. His second monograph, on *Oscan in the Greek Alphabet*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2016. This book examined how speakers of Oscan, a language related to Latin and spoken in southern Italy c. 400–50 BC, wrote their language when using the Greek alphabet. The book provided new evidence for the sound system of Oscan and argued that the spelling rules were primarily decided on an individual basis by writers, rather than reflecting a centralised tradition.

Zair has written a number of articles and book chapters about the historical morphology, phonology and writing systems of the Celtic and Italic language families. As a Pro Futura Fellow, he is working on the use of conservative spelling in Latin texts from the Imperial period of Roman history (c. first– fifth century AD), with particular reference to what this can tell us about the education of sub-elite speakers of Latin.

## ABSTRACT

Roman writers on education provide very little information on members of society below the elite; our evidence for these readers and writers is consequently indirect. A previously ignored way of looking at sub-elite education is through the use and prevalence of non-intuitive features of orthography such as old-fashioned spellings (which no longer reflect how Latin was spoken) and other conventions. In this seminar I will discuss what this approach can tell us about how people learned to write in the Roman empire.