

Keith Andrew Massey (Leonia/NJ)

A SECOND LOOK AT LATIN SECUNDUS = 'FAVORABLE'

1. Introduction

The Latin adjective *secundus* is a gerundive derivation from the verb *sequi*, 'to follow'.¹ Its predominant meaning is 'second'. Only this meaning of the adjective survived in the extant Romance languages. Ancient etymologists had already identified the logical derivation of the ordinal from the meaning of the verb.² In Classical Latin, however, context not infrequently warrants a rendering of 'favorable' for *secundus*. Within this semantic domain, the adjective generates a denominative verb *secundare*, 'to favor'.

In this article, I will explore the possibility that the adjective *secundus* acquired its secondary meaning of 'favorable' via a semantic extension not previously acknowledged.³ In particular, it will be suggested that uses of the adjective within a divination context originally described the practice of repeating the divination process to confirm the first result.

¹ Risch 1984: 67-70.

² E.g., Paulus Diaconus, "secundae res non a numero dicuntur, se quia, ut velimus, sequantur." (Maltby 1991: 555)

³ This article will not treat the denominative verb *secundare* specifically as it is derivative of the adjective and thus not an independent witness to the semantic development of *secundus* itself.

2. *Secundus* = 'Favorable'

A representative example of *secundus* understood to mean 'favorable' is in the 4th Book of Vergil's Aeneid:

Dis equidem auspicibus reor, et Junone secunda
Hunc cursum Iliacas vento tenuisse carinas.

"Indeed, I suppose that the Trojan ships held course here on a wind with the gods auspicious and Juno favorable."
(Aen. 4.45-46)

The concept of something that 'follows' being therefore 'favorable' certainly explains the development *secundus* = 'favorable' in the context of winds and waters. A representative example of this abundantly attested meaning is found in Julius Caesar:

et secundo flumine ad Lutetiam iter facere coepit.

And he began to make a down-stream journey to Lutetia (lit. with a following [i.e., favorable] river).
(De Bello Gallico 7.58)

Ancient etymologists considered the meaning 'favorable' for *secundus* to be a logical extension from the general favorability of something that would follow or accompany. Thus Marius Servius Honoratus commented on Aen. 1.156:

tractus est sermos a sequentibus servis, id est pedisequis secundis: unde et secundam fortunam dicimus. quod secundum nos est, id est prope nos.

"It is derived from following slaves, that is, from second attendants, whereby we also say 'favorable fortune', because what is in our favor is what is near us."
(Comm. on Aen. 1.156)

More modern commentators have agreed with this assessment.⁴

A similar development can be observed with the Sanskrit (*sacate*) and Avestan (*hacaite*) cognates, which convey the meaning 'to accompany'.⁵

⁴ E.g., "s'est dit d'abord du courant que descend la barque, du vent qui la pousse," Ernout-Meillet 1951: 1074. Also, "secundus, helping and assisting. As applied to things FOLLOWING US, going after us as we go, and coinciding with our wishes," Valpy 1828: 425.

This meaning is attested extensively in the classical period, in Late Latin⁶ and even into the period of Neo-Latin.⁷

3. *Secundus* as a Technical Term

The earliest attested use of *secundus* = 'favorable' comes from the poet Ennius, preserved by quotation in Cicero's *De Divinatione*. It is the famous episode in which Romulus and Remus seek competing omens:

Remus auspicio se devovet atque secundam
solus avem servat; at Romulus pulcher in alto
quaerit Aventino, servat genus altivolantum
"Remus devotes himself to the auspice and alone awaits a favorable bird. But handsome
Romulus inquires on the high Aventine. He awaits the high flying race."
(Div. 1.48.107)

A few isolated incidences of *secundus* meaning favorable in the context of augury could have been coincidental. But in addition to Ennius and to Vergil's use cited above (*diis auspibus ... Junone secunda*), there is a consistent pattern of divination contexts for *secundus* = 'favorable':

negat se tamen eorum auspiorum, quae sibi ad Pompeium proficiscenti secunda evenerint, paenitere.

"[Caesar] denied that he regretted those auspices which had promised favorable things to him when he set out to join Pompey."
(Cicero, Div. 1.15.27)

dum sacra secundus haruspex nuntiet.

"While a favorable soothsayer announces sacrifices."
(Vergil, Aen. 11.739-740)

⁵ Fortson 2004: 219; Brugman et al 1888: 332. The Sakskrit and Avestan could present a parallel development and not be an indication of an original meaning of 'to favor' within the PIE root *sekw.

⁶ E.g., *secundet asperos*, "May [God] support [us] in hardships." Ambrose, *Splendor paternae gloriae*, line 15.

⁷ E.g., *Iter secudent superi, et hunc metum levent*, 'may those above favor the journey and lighten this fear', William Alabaster, *Roxana Act III, Scene II* (though this use is clearly derivative of Vergil).

...cum omnium secundorum adversorumque causas in deos verterent, multa prodigia nuntiabantur.

"When they attribute to the gods every favorable or adverse cause, many prodigies are announced."
(Livy, Epon. 28.11.1)

Camillus laetum militem victoria tribuni, laetum tam praesentibus ac secundis diis ire in proelium iubet.

"Camillus orders into battle soldiers happy with the tribune's victory and that the gods are present and favorable."
(Livy Epon. 7.26)⁸

This use of *secundus* had developed in the period before the language was fully attested literarily. As such, the track of the development of this semantic sense has not been preserved. The predominant meaning 'second' is so widely attested that it would seem to be the probable original meaning of the adjective. The meaning of 'favorable' [omen] somehow evolved from that base.

4. The "Second" Sign

An intriguing possibility is that, in addition to the favorability of following winds and waters, the same secondary meaning of 'favorable' evolved from the practice of repeating an omen to confirm the sign. A "second" sign would have been viewed as corroborating the first, thus establishing a "favorable" interpretation for the issue in question. With an additional and agreeing omen, the prediction would be 'seconded' and was thus considered assured. The semantic development of *secundus*, when describing favorable winds and waters, could even have influenced a similar development when the adjective was used to describe a repeated (and thus favorable) omen.

⁸ Livy implies here that Camillus ordered the battle to go forward after learning the gods were 'favorable', presumably through the divination that would invariably have been performed before commencing hostilities.

Evidence for the practice of repeated divination can be found in the Aeneid, where Aeneas' father Anchises decides on a course of action only after receiving a second sign:

[After seeing an initial omen, a small flame arising from the head of his grandson Ascanius, Anchises prayed:]

Iuppiter omnipotens, precibus si flecteris ullis,
aspice nos; hoc tantum, et, si pietate meremur
da deinde auxilium, pater, atque haec omnia firma.'

"Omnipotent Jupiter, if you may incline to other prayers, look upon us, only this, and, if we are deserving in piety, give help again, Father, and confirm these omens."

[Following which he immediately sees a shooting star]

(Aen. 2.689-691)

Servius, in his commentary on this passage, states that seeking a second omen was a normal practice for the Romans, precisely as a corroboration of the first:

secundum romanum morem petit, ut visa firmentur. non enim unum augurium vidisse sufficit, nisi confirmetur ex simili.

"He seeks according to Roman custom, that what is seen may be assured. For it is not enough to have seen only one augury, unless it is confirmed by a [second] similar one."⁹
(Comm. on Aen. 2.691)

Cicero may also allude to this practice while speaking somewhat disparagingly of divination in general.¹⁰ He suggests that a divination reading was sometimes repeated (and asks why, if divination were valid, there could be an inconsistency:

Quae autem inconstantia deorum est, ut primis minentur extis, bene promittant secundis?

"What inconsistency there is among the gods, that they threaten with the first entrails and then promise good fortune with the second?"
(De Divinatione II.XVII)

⁹ Stearns (1929: 48-59) similarly references Servius' explanation when treating the double sneeze in Catullus 45. He concludes that Cupid's double sneeze was a significant way to describe divine approbation because "two omens are better than one" (59).

¹⁰ For a fuller discussion of Cicero and his *De Divinatione*, see Beard (1986).

This proposed etymology may explain why the secondary meaning was not preserved into the Romance languages. A meaning of *secundus* as 'seconded' (and thus only connoting favorability in certain divination contexts) would have evaporated over time among the speakers of Late Latin who, by the time their dialects began to differentiate regionally, had ceased the practice of divination in its Classical forms.¹¹

The evolution of *secundus* to contain the meaning 'favorable' constitutes an example of the semantic shift Gustaf Stern defined as "permutation."¹² The fact that a second omen implied favorability resulted over time in a shift whereby the adjective, in contexts treating divination or related topics, connoted favorability itself.

A similar evolution involving a divination term occurred with the word *auspicium*. Since an auspice was taken at the beginning of an endeavor, the word acquires the secondary meaning of 'a beginning'.¹³

5. *Secundus* as 'Favorable [Omen]' Extended to Deities, Battles, and Fortune

Influenced by the additional meaning of 'favorable' that *secundus* had acquired with winds and waters, the concept of favorability extended from repeated divination to eventually describe favorability in wider contexts that also implied a prior divination. Thus, *secundus* = 'favorable' extends to deities (whose will would be known only through divination), battles (which invariably followed divination) and ultimately the broader concept of fortune.

¹¹ The Emperor Theodosius effectively banned divination by defining it as high treason (Codex Theodosianus 16.10.12). The legislation had statutory effect first in the Eastern Empire and then went into effect Western Empire before 438 (Schulz 1946: 316).

¹² Stern 1964: 376-377.

¹³ Thus Gulick (1896: 239-240) interprets a line from Plautus:

Mess: Sed meliorest opus auspicio, ut liber perpetuo siem.

But it was necessary from the start that I would be permanently free.

a. Deities

In many cases, ascertaining the disposition of the deity through divination may have been assumed in passages describing them as *secundus* 'favorable'. Even so, the extension of the use to deities was a natural development from an original divination context, since their favorability would not otherwise be known:

Marte secundo
"with Mars favorable"
(Aen. 11.899)
adnuit et motu signa secunda dedit.
"[Venus] approved and with a motion gave favorable signs."
(Ovid, Am. 3.2.58)

The verb *secundare*, a denominative from the adjective, is used exclusively to describe a deity "favoring" something:

di nostra incepta secudent
"May the gods favor what we have begun."
(Aen. 7.259)
ut omnem expediat morbi causam eventusque secundet.
"May [Neptune] reveal every cause of illness and grant a favorable outcome."
(Vergil, G. 4:397)

The derivative verb's focus in the divine realm provides evidence that the meaning of *secundus* = 'favorable' was indeed context bound originally and not a general semantic development.

b. *secundus* = 'successful' in a military context

By another logical extension of the technical term, *secundus* came to mean 'successful' with specific reference to battles. As mentioned above, Livy implies that Camillus ordered a

(Menaechmi 1148)

battle "with the gods favorable" (i.e., having been consulted and giving a favorable omen).¹⁴

Divination and battles are described together frequently:

...deos qui secundis avibus in proelium miserint.

"It is the gods who send [you] into battle with favorable signs."
(Epon.6.1.12)

Maior Neronum mox graue proelium
commisit immanisque Raetos
auspiciis pepulit secundis

"The elder Nero soon engaged the serious battle and, with favorable auspices, pushed back the great Raeti."
(Horace Carm. 4.14.14-16)

By a logical extension, battles and wars themselves, which are generally not commenced by the Romans without corroborative omens for their success, come to be termed "successful" using the adjective *secundus*:

secundiore equitum proelio nostris Caesar suos in castra reduxit

"with a battle of horsemen that proved more successful for us, Caesar led his soldiers back into camp."
(Caesar, B Gall. 2.9)

Fortuna...belli secundos reddidit exitus

"Fortune gave successful outcomes in the war."
(Horace, Carm. 4.14.37-38)

c. Fortune

¹⁴ Indeed, Livy elsewhere states that no great matter was begun without first consulting the omens:

Auspiciis hanc urbem conditam esse, auspiciis bello ac pace, domo militiaeque omnia geri, quis est, qui ignoret?

"Who is there that does not know that this city was only founded after taking auspices and that nothing is done in war and peace, at home or abroad, without taking auspices?"

(Epon. 6.41)

Finally, *secundus* = 'favorable' extends to fortune in general, a concept viewed as occupying the divine realm, outside of human control but ascertainable through divination:

nec te ferre sinam fortunae signa secundae
"Nor will I allow you to bear the tokens of favorable fortune."
(Catullus 63: 222)

6. Conclusion

The adjective *secundus* = 'favorable' developed independently in the context of winds and waters following in a favorable way. But this may then have predisposed the language to shift an originally concrete meaning of "second" with reference to divination toward the more metaphorical concept of 'favorable'.

Outside of references to winds and waters, *secundus* = 'favorable' is attested overwhelmingly in contexts associated with divination or the natural extensions of it. The practice of repeating a divination to corroborate a reading provides a sensible explanation for how the adjective *secundus* 'second' came to connote favorability in those contexts.

In the final analysis, a rendering of the adjective as 'favorable' is still the preferable choice in each of the contexts highlighted here. But grounding the use within its origins as a technical term for divination helps to further our understanding of the vocabulary of an important Roman ritual practice with preliterate origins.

Bibliography

- Beard, Mary (1986): "Cicero and Divination: The Formation of a Latin Discourse" in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 76, pp. 33-46.
- Brugmann, Karl, et al. (1888): *A Comparative Grammar of the Indo-Germanic Languages: A Concise Exposition*, Westermann.
- Ernout, Alfred and Antoine Meillet (1951): *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine: Histoire des mots*. Paris: C. Klincksieck.
- Fortson, Benjamin (2004): *Indo-European Language and Culture: An Introduction*, Blackwell.
- Glare, Peter G. W. (1982): *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford.
- Gulick, Charles Burton (1896): "Omens and Augury in Plautus" in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 7, pp. 235-247.
- Lewis, Charleton and Charles Short (1879): *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Maltby, Robert (1991): *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies*, Leeds: F. Cairnes.
- Risch, Ernest (1984): *Gerundivum und Gerundium*, New York: W. de Gruyter.
- Schulz, Fritz (1946): *History of Roman Legal Science*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Stearns, John Barker (1929): "On the Ambiguity of Catullus XLV.8-9 (=17-18)" in *Classical Philology*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 48-59.
- Stern, Gustaf (1964): *Meaning and change of meaning, with special reference to the English language*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Valpy, Francis Edward Jackson (1828): *An Etymological Dictionary of the Latin Language*, London: Longman and Company.