

ΦΑΘ NEWS

SEPTEMBER 2022



A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In the midst of a recent episode of the NPR radio program Marketplace, the host described the origins of the ancient Roman proverb, ‘Fortune favors the bold’. He attributed the motto’s coinage to Pliny the Elder, the scientific writer who boldly set out on his boat to investigate the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 CE—though with tragic consequences for himself. As I listened, I knew that this attribution was incorrect—or at least incomplete. Versions of the proverb can be found in work as early as that of the comic playwright Terence in the 2nd century BCE, and the most famous rendering of it is in Vergil’s Aeneid, a work of the reign of the Augustus at the transition point between BCE and CE (formerly BC and AD) dates.

I thought about sending in my correction, but another professor of classical languages and cultures beat me to it. On the next day’s broadcast, the host quoted from the professor’s letter—I imagine he may have had a few from which to choose, anyway, since we classicists are a prickly and precise bunch—but my mind then turned to the idea of ‘fortune’, at the beginning of a new semester for us teachers, students, and other learners.

My own favorite Latin proverb along these lines is ‘Homo quisque faber ipse fortunae suae’, which is usually rendered in English as something like ‘Man is the architect of his own fate’ or ‘Each person is the maker of his own fortune’. Sadly, this saying also has a murky and complex

history of its own, but I would prefer to explore its meaning and its significance for us as we start a new endeavor. I bought a small rendering of this phrase on a visit to Rome, and it still stands on my desk as a prompt to action when I am in need of some inspiration (another great Latin-derived word, by the way!):

Each new term is an opportunity to meet people who could become treasured colleagues, fellow researchers, and, perhaps, lifelong friends. I tell my students that they can take the tools we offer in our classes, refine, and sharpen them, and then make for themselves an exciting, previously unforeseen life. What skills do you wish to improve over the next several months? What sort of architect do you wish to be, and what does 'fortune' look like to you?



Jonathan S. Perry

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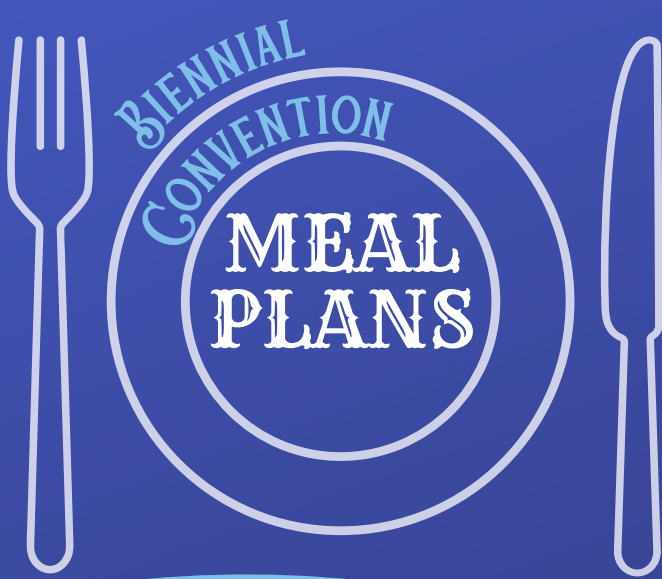
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