

LATE ANTIQUITY AND EDUCATION

STENGER (J.R.) *Education in Late Antiquity. Challenges, Dynamism, and Reinterpretation, 300–550 CE*. Pp. x + 325. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Cased, £75, US\$100. ISBN: 978-0-19-886978-8.

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The flourishing of studies on late antiquity has concerned various aspects of an era that drew not only intellectual material but its very lifeblood from the systematic examination of the past. However, general – yet not generalising – discussions about the purpose of education, educational practices and the curricula of schools would appear to have remained largely on the sidelines. Studies on late antiquity similar to those of W. Jaeger (*Paideia. Die Formung des griechischen Menschen* [1934]) and H.-I. Marrou (*Histoire de l'éducation dans l'Antiquité* [1948]), which analysed the history of Greek culture through education, have long remained a *desideratum*.

S.'s book finally appears to respond to this demand, after volumes that aim to offer a picture of a highly varied rather than unified educational system (e.g. Y.L. Too [ed.], *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* [2001]) or of specific aspects (e.g. S.L. James, S. Dillon [edd.], *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* [2012] and P. Gemeinhardt, L. Van Hoof, P. Van Nuffelen [edd.], *Education and Religion in Late Antique Christianity* [2016]). The volume consists of six chapters, a useful introduction to the topics and a summarising conclusion: the general idea is that education in the late antique world amounts to something more than the mere 'reusing' of classical materials and discussions. As the ideologies, methods, goals and outcomes of education evolved over time, they are analysed in relation to their explicit and implicit forms of theorisation, school debates, public speeches, letters, biographies, and both pagan and Christian Greek and Roman authors.

In Chapter 1, 'Educational Communities', S. highlights the relationship between education, authoritative texts and membership in a particular community. Through figures such as John Chrysostom, Augustine and Gregory of Nazianzus, S. discusses the hypothesis that, in late antiquity, the process of education acquired new impetus and meaning as it spread throughout society, whose cohesion was ensured by specific religious ideologies, as illustrated by the emperor Julian's and Sidonius Apollinaris' emphasis on *paideia*.

In Chapter 2, 'The Emergence of Religious Education', S. moves on to analyse how Christianity not only inaugurated a new course in the history of education, but also changed the way of thinking about the education of a community. S. does not aim to provide an original re-evaluation of the impact of Christianity, but rather to consider the puzzling absence of a curriculum for the study of the Holy Scriptures, especially in comparison to the elaborate pagan Neoplatonist educational system. While not adding much to the question of the endurance of Neoplatonist schools in the Christianised Empire, this chapter succeeds in demonstrating that, by rejecting, adapting and sometimes embracing what the pagans had achieved, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, Jerome and Cassiodorus initiated Christian humanism, that is, a form of education that incorporated classical content without compromising the religious identity of the Christian community. Particularly influential in this respect – as S. shows – is the figure of Origen, for whom Hellenic teaching could be reused to illuminate the soul's path to God.

In contrast to Jaeger's and Marrou's contributions, which do not go beyond the imperial era, according to S., *paideia* concerns more than just the history of Greek literature; consequently, he does not neglect to deal with the Latin West and its theologians, while nevertheless bringing out the more limited relationship of dependence that Augustine and Jerome weave with classical pagan literature. Nor does S. neglect to change – and indeed broaden – the perspective of analysis, as shown in Chapter 3, 'What Men Could Learn from Women', where he investigates the literary constructions of intellectual women (Melania the Elder and the Younger, Hypatia, Macrina and Marcella) that re-oriented *paideia*. A prominent place in this treatment is assigned to the famous Neoplatonist philosopher Hypatia of Alexandria. S. acutely notes that Synesius manipulated the character of his teacher to spread his own ideal of *paideia*, in which philosophy was defined as the choice to lead a life according to reason. This ideal life was only attainable through a balanced synthesis of rhetoric and philosophy. Tacitly, following in the footsteps of H.-I. Marrou (*Revue Historique* 196 [1946]) – who re-evaluated the figure of Isocrates through a comparison with Plato –, S. emphasises the importance of rhetoric and the Second Sophistic for late antique education: it is also thanks to the tools of rhetoric that teachers succeed in presenting themselves as high priests and hierophants within their circles. What emerges is the thread running through the entire volume, namely that the intertwining of *paideia* and *bios*, if properly pursued, is an all-encompassing force in life.

Chapter 4, 'The Life of *Paideia*', delves into the idea of 'education-as-life', that is to say, the belief that education is meaningless unless it informs every fibre of one's being. To this end, and focusing on Libanius, Themistius, Himerius, Synesius and Macrobius, S. analyses biographical and autobiographical discourses and deduces that true education was essentially a lifestyle, in both the pagan and the Christian contexts. Through this emphasis on the idea that biographies became educational life models and that education was envisaged as an existential experience, the influence of P. Hadot's studies on philosophy as a way of life becomes clearer (e.g. *La philosophie comme manière de vivre* [2001]). This aspect is further explored in Chapter 5, 'Moulding the Self and the World', through the analysis of the form and content of Neoplatonist biographies. Not only Iamblichus and Macrobius, but also Themistius, Gregory of Nyssa and Boethius developed a concept of self-perfection by imitating role models. However, what S. fails to explicitly note in this chapter is the fact that imitating models is also part of the spiritual exercises described by P. Hadot (*Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* [1987]). In both schools of rhetoric and Platonic schools *mimesis* is not the 'trivial imitation' of a classical thinker, but rather the ability to 'follow the example' provided by masters' lives.

Chapter 6, 'The Making of the Late Antique Mind', deals, among other topics, with the authority of the ancients, among whom S. includes Homer and Plato. Learning in the Graeco-Roman world meant encountering the past through the great poets and prose writers of previous centuries. One problem that S. does not address, however, is the fact that Homer's *auctoritas* returned to the centre of education after Plato's banishment, precisely when philosophy became theology. The extensive references to Chrysostom's programme are useful to grasp the differences from Augustine, who instead emphasised the superiority of divine wisdom over pagan intellectualism, but they do not clarify how pagan myths could contribute to the moral education of the Graeco-Roman elite that drew on both Plato and Homer.

Regardless of any possible remarks that might detract from the value of a work of such significance, S.'s book appears to be an essential contribution to the study of education in the Graeco-Roman world: it is not simply a book about schools and didactics, but a book with new ideas and an innovative approach to that constellation of ancient thinkers who

looked at the self as well as an individual's relationship with the divine and society as a resource for self-improvement. These thinkers not only theorised teaching practices, but above all propagated an ideology by making education an eminently public subject capable of pervading literature and society. S.'s book therefore has the merit of highlighting that late antique education did not simply involve schooling but must be understood in much broader terms, namely as linked to the systems of thought of the time and as a lofty pursuit: a process of inner perfecting involving the world of which the individual is a part.

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EARLY CHURCH COUNCILS: ACTS AND SCRIBES

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In Acts 15:1–21 we read about what has become known to posterity as the apostolic council of Jerusalem. There, the disciples of Jesus, now called ‘apostles’ on account of their having been sent (ἀπο-στέλλω) into the world to preach the Gospel, gathered to determine whether or not circumcision – an essential part of the Mosaic covenant for Jews – should be imposed on Gentiles who wished to become Christians. That it was not deemed essential would lead to the further development of the Christian religion as distinct from its Jewish roots, with baptism comprising its foremost initiation ritual (together with the Eucharist). What is important for us here is that this meeting established the precedent for the successors of the apostles, the bishops, to come together in synod or council to decide authoritatively on matters pertaining to Christian faith and practice. Many subsequent local councils of the churches took place thereafter, until in 314 CE a council was called in Arles that was convoked, not by bishops, but by the Roman emperor Constantine the Great, who had converted to Christianity two years previously.

While local councils continued to take place, heretofore major theological disputes would unfold – and be solved – within what were to be called ecumenical councils, coming from the Greek word οἰκουμένη (*oikoumene*), which means ‘inhabited or civilised world’ – in this context solely applying to the Roman empire that encompassed the Mediterranean and most of Western Europe. The first of these, the council of Nicaea, was convoked by the emperor – yet presided over by a bishop of the Church, Ossius of Cordova –, to address the subordinationist heresy of Arianism that posited that Christ was a creature, not equal to the eternal God the Father. The solution, that Jesus, while a distinct person as the Son of God, is ‘of one essence with the Father’ (ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρὶ), was contested for decades until a second council in 381, this time held in the imperial capital Constantinople, reaffirmed the Nicene faith. Two subsequent ecumenical councils, at Ephesus in 431 and at Chalcedon in 451, focused – instead of the relationship between Jesus and his Father – on the unity of Christ’s person as divine and human.