PAIDEIA IN EGYPT

R. CRIBIORE: *Gymnastics of the Mind. Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*. Pp. xiii + 270, ills. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001. Cased, £27.95. ISBN: 0-691-00264-9.

C.'s title derives from the elaborate analogy constructed by Isocrates in his *Antidosis* between the physical training of the body and the mental training of the mind (pp. 1, 127–8, 250). It is well chosen: the book's dominant theme is the hard and above all repetitive labour at the heart of ancient education. C. imagines the *enkyklios paideia*, the 'standard education' or, more literally, the 'circular education', as a road winding up a conical hill. As one progresses upwards one passes by the same authors and subjects again and again (notably the early books of the *Iliad*, Euripides' *Phoenissae*, the *Fables* of Aesop, and Isocrates' *Cyprian Orations*), ever at a higher level, and ever with fewer companions (pp. 129, 166, 187, 198–203). The teaching culture that Marrou had characterized as subservience to a sclerotic canon is here rather admired for the comforting consistency of its formulas and steps (pp. 247–8).

In the first section chapters are devoted to schools, teachers, women in education, and the rôle of parents in education. In the second section one chapter is devoted to writing materials, and then one each to the three familiar educational levels, that of the elementary teacher (*grammatistês*), that of the secondary teacher (*grammatikos*), and that of the rhetorician (*rhêtôr*).

If the general subject area of the book is a well-trodden one, the emphasis and approach taken to the material are not. C. founds her study not upon the familiar literary sources, but upon the fascinating documentary remains of actual schoolroom practice among the Greek papyri from Egypt. Nonetheless, substantial reference is still made to literary sources from all around the Graeco-Roman world, and her study consequently sheds as much light on this world as a whole as it does upon Egypt itself. In particular, much use is made of the relatively neglected evidence that Libanius, 'the Quintilian of the Eastern world', can offer. The strong weighting of the book towards nuts-and-bolts *realia* means that there is little room for discussion of what might be termed the 'politics' of ancient education, and the work of C.'s fellow Columbian Yun Lee Too does not feature in the bibliography.

This well-illustrated book (there are twenty-four figures) builds on and broadens out from the author's earlier technical study. *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta, 1996) and a host of her articles. Consequently, she is able to write with a simple and winning authority, and a seemingly effortless familiarity with her material. There are lavish quotations from the more significant sources. A particular sensitivity to nuances in the language of the papyri often adds depth to these. A case in point is the discussion of a pupil's application of *esthein* to the people that had 'devoured' the food parcel his parents had sent him, 'a word of epic proportion, which reveals the student's erudition, as well as his indignation' (p. 117).

The writing style is superb, and C. keeps the reader engaged throughout by foregrounding a series of striking set-pieces amongst her evidence: the demotic ostracon petulantly declaring 'I will not write in Greek letters' (p. 23); the father who insists on sitting by his son's side in school (p. 109); the endearing postscript to Thonis' letter home from school, 'remember my pigeons' (p. 112); the classroom riot which culminates in writing tablets being broken over the teacher's head (p. 156); the martyrdom of Cassian, in which his pupils inscribe his body with their styluses (p. 158); the all-too-literate wily courtesan Demo who cons the semi-literate Sosopolis

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into signing a chit to the effect that he had borrowed money from her (p. 164); Herodes Atticus' attempt to teach his idiot son to read by embodying the letters of the Greek alphabet in twenty-four attendant slaves (p. 165); the cheating in an alphabet exercise that may well have escaped the teacher's notice, but which can be detected by the skills of the papyrologist (p. 166); the illiterate kings who have to sign their names through wooden templates (p. 169); the artificial words invented for a pronunciation exercise that end up being used as *voces magicae* in Miletus (p. 179); the Cyreanean graffito parodying the grammarian's teaching-method, 'Who was the father of Priam's children?' (p. 209); and the witty homoerotic letter sent between schoolboys (p. 219).

C. shows that there was a striking contrast in the organization of ancient education. On the one hand, the career of the schoolteacher, particularly for those at the lower levels, was always precarious. Most of them operated as impecunious sole traders; schools tended not to exist separately from the teachers themselves, and seldom enjoyed any established physical dimension (on occasion pupils could even be met in tombs!). Nor, of course, was there anything akin to a national curriculum imposed by any state, against which the performance of individual teachers, let alone their pupils, could be measured (p. 105). On the other hand, and despite this, the papyri demonstrate the enormous systematic uniformity and conservatism of the curricula pursued in practice by the children of antiquity.

C. is a little apologetic about what she sees as the limited evidence for women in education in Graeco-Roman Egypt. None are found being taught or teaching at tertiary level, but there is significant evidence for their involvement in the first two levels and indeed eight women are found among the eighty-seven known teachers in all (p. 46). Classicists more familiar with the dismal evidence for the literacy of women in classical Athens might rather rejoice to find such a high proportion not merely of educated but actually of educating women here. It is intriguing too to find that Origen used female copyists (p. 182).

C. also successfully establishes a hitherto under-recognized element in ancient education, namely training in the writing of (epistolary) letters (pp. 114, 247). This was a self-evidently valuable skill, but one to be particularly encouraged in the case of pupils staying away from home. The letters they wrote back to their parents provided tangible evidence of good lessons learned well, and could promote their teacher's chances of being re-hired.

This book will speak to anyone with a general interest in antiquity, and will be particularly valued by historians of education.

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EGYPTIAN MEDICINE

K. S. Kolta, D. Schwarzmann-Schafhauser: *Die Heilkunde im alte Ägypten. Magie und Ratio in der Krankheitsvorstellung und therapeutischen Praxis*. (Sudhoffs Archiv Beiheft 42.) Pp. 223, ills. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000. Cased, DM 88. ISBN: 3-515-07482-1.

To Herodotus the Egyptians were the healthiest of all peoples, save for the Libyans. So impressed was Diodorus Siculus with the diet he imagined had been legally prescribed for the pharaoh that he fancied it more the creation of skillful physicians

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