

Teresa Morgan. *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds.* New York and Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998. xv + 364 pp. \$64.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-58466-1.



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Published on H-Ideas (February, 2000)

Teresa Morgan, a British Academy Research Fellow at Cambridge University and a Research Fellow of Newnham College, has written a useful and insightful study of the ways in which literate education was conducted in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, especially as these ways compare to the educational theories of the time. Drawing on the evidence available from papyri, Morgan delineates the *enkyklios paideia* -- or educational curricula, as they seem actually to have existed -- from the primary stages, when pupils wrote out lists of syllables and names, through middle stages, when *gnomi* were copied, to advanced stages, when summaries of fables and other literary works were written and grammar was studied. The examination and assessment of the available papyri, especially as these compare to theory as outlined in literature of the time, constitute the most innovative sections of Morgan's study. She does a thorough job of evaluating the evidence, always being careful to separate what we actually know is happening in the papyri from what we assume or what we speculate might be happening. This examination of the papyri would in itself

make the book useful for graduate and post-graduate students working in the area.

Very few pupils, Morgan notes, reached the "advanced" stage in which grammar was studied and summaries were written, and even fewer went on to the study of rhetoric, at which literate education of the time was, theoretically, aimed. Morgan deals with the question of why, if so few reach the "goal" (the study of rhetoric), so many others enter into the course of study; she shows that social and political benefits would have accrued at various levels of education for various strata of ancient society. That is, those who, for instance, did not get beyond the word list or *gnomi* stage of literacy nevertheless would have gained some skills and cultural knowledge that would have increased their status in their strata of society. "[T]hey had been taught a certain amount of usable and culturally unmistakable information....which would doubtless been useful in some, if not very exalted, circles" (p. 110). A further function was to give non-Greeks a "channel of assimilation into (cultural, not legal) greekness" (p. 23). These students, Greek and non-Greek, would

also have been more suited for certain jobs, such as "taking census, keeping accounts, collecting taxes, and so on" (p. 215).

The *enkyklios paideia*, as Morgan explains, was not uniform throughout the Hellenistic and Roman world: pupils did not copy the same gnomic or study the same excerpts from texts everywhere. Rather, there existed what Morgan calls the "core" and the "periphery." The "core" was what "most people learned, what they learned first, and...what they went on practising longest" (p. 71). This includes reading and writing, the copying of gnomic sayings, and the reading of Homer. The "periphery" would include not only other writers not universally read, such as Menander, but also studies of grammar and rhetoric, simply because so few people reached that level. Looking at the core and periphery of what was being learned, Morgan argues convincingly that a function of the *enkyklios paideia*, from its primary stages on, was to reinforce Greek cultural beliefs, that even the ways in which grammar was studied served to further this end, and that these beliefs were often in marked contrast to the Egyptian cultures from which many of the pupils writing the papyri came. Thus, the educational curricula of the time instilled "Greekness" in its pupils, giving them entry into, if not necessarily a high status within, the dominant culture.

Further, at the same time that the curricula was "providing for the admission of non-Greeks or non-Romans into the Greek and Roman cultural groups," it was "simultaneously controlling the numbers admitted" and placing those that had been admitted "in a hierarchy according to their cultural achievements" (p. 74). It was a system designed to make people behave and think Greek, while keeping most of them at the bottom of the cultural and political ladder. Drawing on parallels ranging from modern business practices through elementary educational curricula in Brazil, Morgan shows how every stage of the educational

process reinforces the acceptance of this hierarchy. Since some of the practices being used by the Hellenistic and Roman worlds are educational practices still being used today, this is interesting reading, and the second most striking section of the book, after the study of the papyri.

Interestingly, as Morgan points out, all the educational theorists of the time assume that the pupil will continue his education (the pronoun, as Morgan stresses, is deliberate) through rhetoric. In a thorough examination of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, among others, Morgan illustrates how theorists considered their pupils raw material, something like farmland, to be plowed and worked into orators: and how the theorists considered these orators and only these orators human. Only completing the rhetorical education qualified a man as fully human; attaining other levels of education would give a man some skills, some power, a kind of half-humanity, but he would still be imperfect, unable to wholly control himself and others, without complete virtue, and thus not truly human. Those who could not enter into the educational course at all, whether because of mental defect or due to being the wrong sex, were not considered human at all.

One of Morgan's main aims is to separate the theory of the time from the practice of the time: the primacy of the rhetor is theory, she is careful to make clear, and not indubitably practice. "Nor did *enkyklios paideia* hold quite the unchallenged eminence in society that some of its apologists like to claim. It competed everywhere with other forms of education-numerate, physical, military, professional and social education, to name a few-which had...values of their own" (p. 272). Further, she makes clear, the rhetoric of the theorists is so strong, and our own knowledge is so attached to the written text, that we "may be persuaded into taking their ideology for fact" (pp. 272-273): that is, we may believe Quintilian and his fellows when they say that learning to be literate and learning rhetoric are the essential elements that

qualify one to be a dominant member, a ruler, of society, and that this position may be attained no other way. In fact, there may have been a number of ways to gain power in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. Nonetheless, Morgan concludes, "the influence of the written word, and so literate education, on Hellenistic and Roman society and culture were out of all proportion to the number of people who could read and write" (p. 273), and so these claims, and the subject of literate education, are worthy of our attention.

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Citation: Kelly Jennings. Review of Morgan, Teresa. *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*. H-Ideas, H-Net Reviews. February, 2000.

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