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SECTION I

The Strange World of Education in the Roman Empire

WHO LANGUISHES in perplexity about the force of education in the affairs of men may find it pleasant to ponder the empire of the Romans. The formal education of young men of the ruling strata was long, narrow, and strange to us, and so its sway over the ancient mind should be easy to discern: the contrast to our own education provides perspective.[1] From the first century BC at the latest this education was also so similar from place to place—within the Latin-speaking West and the Greek-speaking East and also shared between them—and so similar too over many centuries, that investigating its force is little hindered by regional eccentricity or by the need to trace changes over time in the mechanism of that influence, education in rhetoric and its prerequisites.[2]

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Education in the Roman Empire

EDUCATION IN THE ERA of Rome's rule consisted of three main stages: first, for young children, the learning of letters and basic arithmetic in a primary school, the *ludus* in Latin.[1] Then, childish things—such as mathematics—having been laid aside, from the age of seven or thereabouts came language under the "grammarian," language taught primarily through analysis of poetry, chiefly the *Iliad* in the East and (when it became available) the *Aeneid* in the West.[2] After the grammarian (at age fourteen or fifteen, perhaps) came several years of instruction under the *rhetor*, the rhetorician, who taught rhetoric and its theory.[3] This was accomplished primarily by "declamation," giving and listening to speeches on imagined topics—topics that were similar or identical East and West and over many centuries.[4] In the West at least, deliberative topics—*suasoriae* or speeches of advice, often given to or in the character of a famous historical or mythic personage—tended to be taught first, and then *controversiae*, imaginary court-cases.[5] By the late second century BC, but likely even earlier, an intermediate curriculum, a sequence of *progymnasmata* or *praeexercitamina*, "preliminary exercises" (preliminary to declamation, that is) had evolved between grammar and rhetoric.[6]

Although the curriculum was static, where it was taught and the people who taught it varied considerably.[7] The children of the rich might take the first, and some the second, stages at home with private tutors; if only the first stage was provided at home they might start at the school of the grammarian at a younger age.[8] In grand families in the

Latin West much of early education might be given in Greek and through Greek texts, to promote the bilingualism hoped for in young men of rank; the Greek East did not return the compliment by learning Latin, except under the late empire and at a later stage of education.[9] Whether the *rhetor* or grammarian taught the *progymnasmata*, or how they were divided between those worthies, varied, as did the number and order of those exercises.[10] Slaves and the children of the poor stayed on at the (very cheap) *ludus* until they had the words and numbers necessary for the futures their parents or masters envisioned for them, or until the money ran out (free education being unknown), never advancing to the far more expensive grammarian and *rhetor*—the privilege of the rich and socially ambitious—who taught nothing useful for business, unless it was the business of language itself.[11] If their trade needed computational skills beyond those of the *ludus*, poor children and slaves might attend the no less modest school of the *calculator*, the teacher of arithmetic; after that, if there was money left, came apprenticeship.[12]

Rich young men who pursued the course of education under grammarian and *rhetor* to its end would learn much poetry, read much oratory (especially Demosthenes if Greek-speaking or Cicero if Latin-), and incidentally consume some unsystematic history and philosophy if the authors were regarded as good models of style (as Plato and Xenophon were).[13] Education at the level of grammarian and *rhetor* might be expected to be available in any major town.[14] But systematic instruction in, say, philosophy, was yet a further stage of education beyond the instruction of the *rhetor*, and in most periods was undertaken only by a tiny number of enthusiasts and often required a long and expensive stay in a city far away, ideally violet-crowned Athens. How education in what we anachronistically call the "professions," architecture and especially medicine, fit in, we must honestly confess that we do not see clearly (for law see section iv).[15] In the case of medicine we know both of schools that taught theory—that at Alexandria being the most famous—and of learning by apprenticeship. A guess is that lower-status aspirants became apprentices, and the sons of the wealthy (medicine being a profession that took in both) had at least some rhetoric before they moved to

medical school and subsequently (we devoutly hope) attached themselves for a period to a practicing doctor.[16] In the education of the doctor we know best, Galen, we see ghostly traces of a parallel course of education, where philosophy replaced rhetoric after grammar.[17] How common this was, other than that it appears to have been far less common than education in rhetoric, we cannot say.

Education through the level of declamation under the *rhetor* was general among the sons of the ruling class of the empire: those of Roman senators, equestrians, and the far more numerous sons of the prosperous class who made up the city councils, the *curiae* or *boulai,* that governed the cities of the empire—and thus, in practice, governed the empire, whose administration was for the most part divided among its cities.[18] These were the boys who would grow up to make the great decisions of town and empire; and, if inclined, they might also read and write literary works, the ruling and writing classes of the empire being for the most part indistinguishable.

The Evolution of Rhetorical Education

The tale of the ascendency of rhetoric begins in epic Greece, with the predilection even of heroes for taking great decisions after public debate and deliberation.[19] In Homer, among whose bloody-handed barons little trace of democracy can be found, public assemblies are held and the heroes compete in, and admire, eloquence in council.[20] In one of Homer's most striking similes we meet Odysseus, standing with his eyes cast down and his staff still, uttering "words like unto the snowflakes of winter, and then no mortal man could vie with him."[21]

About the ultimate origins of formal rhetorical instruction in Greece there is inscrutable controversy; good fortune that it matters little to us.[22] But whether they presided over classrooms or not, by the late fifth century BC there were men in Greece—"sophists"—who would teach you public speaking, if you could afford it, of whom the best-known is Gorgias of Leontini, who arrived in Athens—subsequently the center of such instruction—in 427 BC, when the Peloponnesian War was raging.[23] It is natural to associate the demand for training in speaking

with the mass assemblies and lawyerless law courts of the Athenian democracy, and this temptation should not be too much resisted. But every Greek state of which we have knowledge, even where local ways limited the franchise, knew both public deliberation by debate and cases at law decided by weighing the competing speeches of litigants: Gorgias was a success even in rude Thessaly, and such habits existed at Sparta as well, even if Spartan men practiced their famous "laconic" speech, in which they competed in brevity and pith.[24] We may perhaps trace this Spartan idiosyncrasy to the same passage of the *Iliad* in which Odysseus's eloquence was praised: Menelaus, Homer's king of Sparta, "spoke fluently, in few words but clear, for he was not verbose nor did he speak at random," and so, in the same way, did his countrymen the Spartans speak for centuries after him.[25]

Suffice to say that by the second half of the fourth century BC—by the period of the anonymous *Rhetoric to Alexander* and Aristotle's *Rhetoric*—rhetoric was a mature intellectual discipline divided into three sorts—forensic, for the courts; deliberative, for the assemblies and councils and to give advice to potentates; and finally, demonstrative or display, mostly panegyric, the oratory of praise. There was a teaching curriculum, and one of the two main later theoretical arms of rhetoric, *idea* theory (which taxonomized style and delivery) was already quite developed.[26] The period after the death of Alexander is a dark place in our evidence. Very little educational material survives. But it is generally agreed—at least for cities with significant Greek populations—that in this period classroom instruction in rhetoric became generally available, was mostly standardized, and that by the second century BC at the latest, the name we associate with this is Hermagoras, the second great arm of rhetorical theory, *stasis* theory (*status* in Latin, which investigated the fundamental issue at stake in a speech) had also become mature.[27] Declamation, the method by which advanced rhetoric was taught, also developed in this period, although it had earlier roots.[28] And it is likely that, lost to us in the Captain-Nemo murk of the era, there was fought the titanic battle that by the first century BC left the science of the grammarian—the rule-bound manner of writing and speech at some distance from everyday usage that was taught by

microscopic analysis of poetry, in no way an inevitable preliminary to the study in rhetoric—triumphantly in charge of education at the intermediate stage.[29]

What we really want to know, of course, is how much time in any era the average Greek or Roman boy from a wealthy family spent learning rhetoric. The traditional education of upper-class Athenians was split between letters, music, and athletics.[30] Education in "music" (which included poetry, and its composition, not merely recitation), continued strong in the Greek-speaking Hellenistic world.[31] So too did athletics thrive: the gymnasium was one of the characteristic institutions of the Hellenistic city, as was the *ephebeia*, a one-to-three year course of military training found in many cities.[32] It may, however, be significant that while grave reliefs from Classical Athens had shown departed youths naked, as athletes, by the late second century BC the grave reliefs of young men from Smyrna represent the departed clothed and grasping book-rolls—emphasizing, in other words, their literary education.[33] What of intellectual subjects other than grammar and rhetoric? Plato advocated that boys be taught mathematics beyond the calculations necessary in the vegetable market, to include number theory, geometry, astronomy, and the theory of music.[34] After the death of Alexander we come to hear of the *enkyklios paideia*, the "encyclic" or "complete" or "general" education. This included grammar and rhetoric, and also dialectic, arithmetic, music theory, geometry, and astronomy.[35] But Ilsetraut Hadot showed as early as 1984 that if this broader education existed at all, it was limited to Athens and to those preparing for further study in philosophy, which most young men had no ambitions to pursue, while the term *enkyklios paideia* (*artes liberales* in Latin) itself was so vague that it could apply to nearly any formal education undertaken by persons of superior social standing, and was frequently applied to the overwhelmingly common narrow education in language and public speaking.[36] Reality was apparently more like the *Clouds*, where Aristophanes presents as available a paid education in Socrates's *phrontisterion*, or "thinking shop," concerning the nature of the universe, astronomy, geometry, theoretical geography, the theory of grammar, meteorology, biology, and musical theory, but his prospective student

wishes to learn nothing but rhetoric, to help him in court and to allow him to evade his creditors.

When Greek education spread to Rome, there was nothing left but grammar and rhetoric. Two routes to that end were possible. The disinclination of Romans to exercise naked and the social stigma attaching to theatrical or musical performance at Rome may account for the loss of Greek athletics and music, and the fact that there was no regular training for Roman soldiers until the reign of Augustus, and then only for the lower ranks—the Romans preferring their warriors to learn by experience—may have rendered superfluous organized military training such as the Greek *ephebeia*.[37] Alternatively, there may have been little to change. For reasons unclear, inscriptions attesting Greek educational institutions—fees for teachers, honors for visiting lecturers, contests in athletics and poetry—become rarer in the course of the first century BC.[38] This might be no more than a matter of epigraphical fashion, and the Hellenistic education system might still have been lively, although less visible to us. Or it could be that Greek education was itself narrowing, and that the Roman curriculum mostly limited to grammar and rhetoric was not the result of Roman philistinism and prudishness, but was the curriculum that contemporary Greek boys were already, for the most part, following.[39]

When we consider Rome, the question is not when rhetorical training became available—we can see it from 161 BC, when Greek teachers of rhetoric were ordered expelled, and it was probably a good deal older—but, again, how intensively it was pursued in earlier times.[40] Among the lofty class of which we can see something, military service, potentially starting at seventeen, was obligatory until the late second century BC (and it was best undertaken as early as possible by those intending a political career, ten campaigns being required before election to *quaestor*), while many young men continued to go to war long after such service had ceased to be compulsory.[41] The teaching of rhetoric in the classroom had also to fight for time with what scholars traditionally call the *tirocinium fori*, an apprenticeship in public life of a year or more that involved following a great man around, a practice that was still very much alive in the late 60s BC, probably into the 40s, and

perhaps later as well.[42] The facts that teachers of Latin rhetoric endured the formal disapproval of the censors in 92 BC and that the 80s saw the first rhetorical treatises in Latin that survive to us (with the same declamatory themes—situations or scenarios—that would be used centuries later) illustrates, again, that such training was available, but not how prevalent it was; nor is there any other direct evidence.[43] But perhaps there is a hint. Members of the generation of Roman politicians born around 85 BC (the generation of Brutus and Cassius, about which we know a great deal) and those older than they, were very apt to go to Greece as adults to polish up their rhetorical educations.[44] But of those born in the 60s, it was mostly teenagers who were sent. Cicero's own experience, going to Greece as an adult, and that of his son and nephew, going as teenagers, stand for many.[45] The implication of the belated second educations of the older generation is that the rhetorical instruction they had received in Rome before or in the 60s was somehow unsatisfactory, that they felt that they were falling behind younger men, that they felt that their eloquence needed its tires rotated.[46] Perhaps the most economical interpretation is that in the 50s BC for Romans of the highest classes an education involving much rhetoric but many other calls upon a young man's time as well passed to an education consisting mostly of language and rhetoric, including an early sojourn in Athens.

It might be thought that when in the 40s and 30s BC the Roman Republic was ruled by embattled magnates, rent by civil war, and when peace finally achieved took the form—however well concealed—of the autocratic regime of Augustus, oratory, as far less useful amidst the thud of swords on shields and decisions made privily in the overlord's court than it had been in the free Republic, would have been less valued, and that its decline would be reflected in change and decline in rhetorical education. Not so. Contemporaries certainly complained about the decline of oratory (and would long continue to do so), but they still sent their sons to learn it, and if anything the 40s and 30s, we guess, was a period when rhetorical education strengthened and was further formalized.[47] For once we arrive in the Roman Empire, a standard set and sequence of primary, grammatical, and rhetorical education is clearly occupying all or almost all of the educational time of most upper-class

boys, and change in education practice—never fast—thereafter becomes even slower. And between the 40s and the reign of Augustus a battle over style in Latin oratory—a group of purists who called themselves "Atticists" accused the more ornamented speeches of some of their contemporaries of "Asianism"—was fought to exhaustion.[48] Students in the rhetorical schools of that period would presumably have had to tread as carefully through that battlefield as they did through the contemporary battlefields of war and politics. And regardless of how picayune the controversy appears to us, it assures us of the intellectual liveliness of the field of rhetoric in that epoch.

On the Greek side, the late second or early third century AD saw the development of the Hermogenic corpus of three—eventually five—guidebooks for teachers (modern scholars think only two of them are really by Hermogenes; no matter), and the use of these became standard in late antiquity once the rival system of Minucianus had been put to flight.[49] The role of epideictic (demonstrative) oratory—the display oratory of praise (mostly) and blame—in the curriculum remains a puzzle.[50] Encomium was certainly taught among the *progymnasmata*, before declamation, but while one author of a work on *progymnasmata* strongly implies that the topic would be returned to later, presumably at a more advanced level, a second insists that it was taught only there.[51] Evidence for epideictic school declamations (at the highest level of teaching, in contrast to the more basic *progymnasmata*), is, moreover, lacking, in both Greek and Latin, although declamations in the other two genres might naturally contain encomiastic passages.[52] The best solution may be that, under the Empire, over time the progymnasmatic exercise of encomium was simply given a larger and larger proportion of the time at that stage of teaching.[53] Perhaps the culmination of this trend is the fourth-century AD sophist Athanasius of Alexandria, who thought encomium should be taught first and that most of the other progymnasmatic exercises should be taught as parts of it.[54]

Still, at its highest levels, and in both Greek and Latin, the curriculum remained dominated by deliberative declamation (*suasoriae*) and especially forensic declamation (*controversiae*).[55] In the former, the teacher proposed a theme such as "Agamememnon considers whether or not

to sacrifice Iphigenia," or "Advise Sulla, in a public meeting, whether to resign his dictatorship."[56] Here the speaker had both to adjust his tone to the figure he was addressing and the figure he, as speaker, was impersonating (it being difficult for a boy to represent an elder of great deeds and dignity). And he must also master *stasis*, especially whether this was a matter of honor, expediency, or necessity, and know the subcategories of each. Finally, he must also be prepared to arouse the full range of emotions in his listeners.[57]

In a forensic declamation the teacher chose one or several from a set of laws traditional to the practice.[58] Perhaps, "An action at law shall lie against him who violates a tomb." The teacher then created a scenario that set this law against another, or against apparent justice: "A hero lost his weapons in combat, so he borrowed a set from the tomb of a dead hero. After fighting valiantly for his city, he returned the weapons. He is charged with violating the tomb."[59] The declaimer must then either prosecute or defend the hero. In variations the rules might be implicit (stating the illegality of crimes such as murder being superfluous) and the scenarios posited wonderfully intricate:

> A man had a blind son whom he had made his heir. He then married a stepmother [the Roman reader would know that stepmothers are almost invariably wicked] and removed the boy to the secluded part of the house. In the night, when he lay in his bedroom with the stepmother, he was murdered, and the next day his son's sword was found affixed in the wound, and the wall between his room and that of his son bloodied with palm prints. The blind son and the stepmother accuse each other.[60]

There were rules. The cases were supposed to be balanced enough to allow compelling speeches on both sides. The facts laid down as the basis of the declamation could not be altered: the declaimer could not produce a homicide victim alive. Laws from the real world could not be introduced (although other rhetorical laws could, and many real laws had rhetorical analogues); legal technicalities were usually avoided. "Inartificial" proofs—calling (imaginary) witnesses or proclaiming the existence of a document that settled the case—were not approved. The

contest was in developing a persuasive backstory that set the stated facts in a favorable context (*color* in Latin), in maintaining a verbal style consistent with the nature of the litigant the declaimer was pretending to be (*idea* theory), in grasping the issue or issues at stake (*stasis* theory), in the persuasive argument of plausibilities, in evoking emotion in the hearer, in inventing *sententiae*, or catchy, pithy, memorable phrases. Revolting tortures could be described, but sex, never. Regional accents were scorned, voice and diction were closely watched, and only a confined lexicon of words was allowed: nothing that clanged vulgarly of the new. In the Greek world this patrol of the lexicon would eventually take the form of Atticism—not to be confused with "Atticism" in Latin, mentioned above—trying to use no word that could not be found in Athenian writers before the death of Alexander, or the early poets who were considered Attic by courtesy. Gestures too must be just so.[61]

There is a much-loved body of ancient complaint about declamation as a mode of teaching—a body to which Quintilian himself, by far our best known teacher of Latin rhetoric, was happy to contribute—complaining of the fancifulness of the themes, their impracticality as training for actual pleading in the courts, and the overwrought style sometimes encouraged in the schools.[62] But these are all internal critiques: suggestions about how the teaching of rhetoric could achieve its agreed-upon aims better, rather than proposals for significantly different educational aims—math perhaps? home economics?—or different institutional arrangements. The triviality of traceable changes over time in this education—astonishing to us, given the complete lack of central or official regulation, legal requirements to send children to school, or a system of public examinations that would tend to hold teachers to the same material and methods—also suggests that parents were quite content with it, it being in their power to move or remove their sons at an instant.[63] The third and fourth centuries AD did bring in new institutions and courses of study: now it was possible to take formal instruction in Roman law (at Beirut, Rome, and eventually elsewhere), to learn Latin (if one was a speaker of Greek), or to take instruction in shorthand writing, which last seemed for a short period to promise high preferment in imperial service. Libanius of Antioch, the

fourth-century teacher of Greek rhetoric, naturally inveighed against such newfangled teaching, which is why we know about it. But careful examination of his writings reveals that he does not fear primarily that students might abandon the *rhetor* for such education, merely that they might curtail their time in his school or, more likely, undertake these studies—as they would philosophy—after their rhetorical training was done, and his writings suggest that only a small minority even did that.[64] In other words, despite the contemporary carping, and despite our own wonderment, education in grammar and rhetoric appears to have been, judging by its longevity, the most successful form of education in the history of the West.

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