

## BOOK REVIEW

*The School of Rome: Latin Studies and the Origins of Liberal Education.* By W. Martin BLOOMER. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2011. Pp. vii + 199. Hardcover, \$49.95/£37.95. ISBN 978-0-520-23376-0.

To Marrou and Bonner on Roman education now add Bloomer.<sup>1</sup> This is a fine book: erudite, concise, well organized. It will appeal to students and scholars interested in ancient Roman education, social culture, rhetoric and oratory, Quintilian, Pseudo-Plutarch's *de liberis educandis*, and Western liberal education. Bonner adroitly exploits source material to outline what we (though perhaps not the Romans themselves) would call a *curriculum*. It concerns the *realia* of teaching and learning: schools as physical places, materials and methods used, yes; but it also explores the ethical onus of ancient Roman education: the hard work of learning, necessary to earn respect and dignity as a free adult Roman man, able—no, obligated—to speak for others who often lacked the power to speak for themselves. Bloomer applies gender theory, judiciously. For we are examining ways by which a Roman boy became a Roman man: education set him apart from women, slaves, and lower social orders. Classical education's power to establish and confirm one's rightfully-deserved superior social status is therefore the core of this story.

Bloomer distinguishes Roman education from Hellenistic *paideia* in its reverence for ancestral traditions. Modern educators will be struck by certain features: near-total fixation on literary texts; imitation; and memorization. This may be a rejoinder to our own "critical thinking" enthusiasts. Present pedagogues will also be interested to find that the Romans took what we now call a "goals backward" approach: they knew the kind of man a Roman orator should be and from that ideal, step by step, built his educational progress to that end.

<sup>1</sup> H. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, transl. G. Lamb (London: Sheed and Ward, 1956); orig. *Histoire de l'Éducation dans l'Antiquité* (Paris, 1948), and S. F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome* (London: Methuen, and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

Bloomer outlines for us, I think more clearly than Marrou, the ordinary (if never uniform) sequence of elementary education or *progymnasmata*: maxim (or sententia), chreia, fable.

These conditioned the young man, degree by degree, to an ethical culture, one in which some strife must be mediated and resolved, not by violence but by wit and words. For it is just this mediation of conflict that the adult man will be called upon as advocate or patron to engage in on behalf of others. The stakes are high: schooling was, as Bloomer repeatedly illustrates, fiercely competitive but in the interest of common social goods. This is especially apparent in the content and practice of Cato's *Distichs*. Grammar, literature, and finally declamation, *controversia*, and rhetoric become the "authoritative discourse of the cultured." Bloomer demonstrates that such a culture rested squarely on the school-developed character of the young man, through his *ponophilia*, his postponed gratification, his endurance of powerlessness now for the sake of real power to come in his manhood.

There is fascinating treatment here of known teachers and their methods, choices of texts, the physical locale of the school, and other daily *realia* which any practicing teacher will appreciate. His treatment of the teacher's manuals, so to speak, of Quintilian and Pseudo-Plutarch make valuable comparisons to the highly bureaucratic and detailed expectations of today's classroom teacher.

Finally, a quibble. The presentation of Greek text seems to this reviewer inconsistent. Within the text proper, Greek passages are at times translated outright with original (sometimes) given in a footnote; at other times translated with transliteration in brackets. Those who can read Greek will not need the transliteration and would prefer to see the original; those who can't read Greek will get nothing more from a transliteration.

The index is full and detailed, followed by a thorough bibliography. Editing is very good, with only a handful of slight misprints.

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