

## BOOK REVIEW

*Education in Late Antiquity: Challenges, Dynamism, and Reinterpretation, 300-550 CE.* By JAN R. STENGER. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. x + 325. Hardback, \$102.82. ISBN: 978-0-19-886978-8.

Education in the late antique world has often been equated with what was taught in schools. By rejecting this decades-old view, Stenger boldly steps into a new vision of what education is for a late antique audience: a life-long process of self-formation for those negotiating a world between the classical past and Middle Ages. Through the lens of educational theorization, Stenger re-orientates the discussion and rebuts the oversimplified view of a stagnation of teaching in the late antique empire.

His monograph consists of an introduction, six chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter focuses on an independent theme exemplified by case studies of various individuals. Crucial figures, such as Augustine or Chrysostom, appear in several chapters, allowing the reader to home in on different aspects of their educational theories. This work follows a series of other important scholarly contributions on the issue of the development of *paideia*, such as L. Too's (2001) *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* and A. Damm's (2018) *Religions and Education in Antiquity*, but Stenger's approach foregrounds the social function of education and the importance of educational theorization in a novel way.

In Chapter 1, "Educational Communities," Stenger argues that Augustine, Chrysostom, Julian and Sidonius created educational communities founded on the idea that members could achieve true learning while outsiders could not. We find figures who exemplify opposite stances; Julian argues for a pagan education while Chrysostom and Gregory Naziantius take a hard-line approach against content taught in traditional schools.

In Chapter 2, "The Emergence of Religious Education," Stenger discusses an issue of fundamental importance to early Christian education: pagan learning needed to be mediated or revised, if not outright rejected, but church leaders had not devised any uniform guidance for reading Scripture to replace the pagan systems, especially those of their neo-Platonic predecessors. Two sets of contrasting

views are illustrative. Basil's *Address to Young Men on Greek Literature* argues that Christians could read pagan works so long as they remained a secondary source to the truth of Christian gospel, while Chrysostom's *On Vainglory and the Education of Children* advocates for a paideia devoid of all pagan influence. Likewise, Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, which maintained that some pagan influence could be accepted, is contrasted with John Cassian, Conference 14, which advocates an ascetic approach.

In "What Men Could Learn from Women," Chapter 3, Stenger focuses on unlikely female figures who served as the vehicles for educational ideas and thus broke total male hegemony of paideia. Stenger contrasts the life of Hypatia of Alexandria as recorded in Synesius' letters with her Asian counterpart Sosipatra in Eunapius' *Lives of the Sophists*. Gregory's *Life of Macrina* and Jerome's teaching and mentorship of elite Roman women are also explored.

In Chapter 4, "The Life of Paideia," Stenger argues that late antique thinkers inaugurated a new understanding of education as Christian humanism, focused on learning-as-life. Libanius, Themistius and Himerius are examples of this worldview. Also studied are Synesius' *Dio*, Macrobius' *Saturnalia* and Eusebius' portrait of Origen. Stenger argues that each of these figures believed in a humanistic paideia as a corrective to the shallow pagan system which focused too little on the formation of the human being.

Chapter 5, "Moulding the Self and the World," devotes special attention to neo-Platonic biographies, analysing Themistius' *On the Need to Give Thought Not to Where [We Study] but to the Men [Who Will Teach Us]*, Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* and Macrobius' *Saturnalia*. Of particular originality is Stenger's application of the education lens to Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*; by foregrounding Boethius' discussion with embodied Philosophy as a re-education process, he sheds light on the way Boethius thought of education as foundational to his identity. This is a dynamic approach, as Boethius is typically mined for his coinage of the quadrivium curriculum, while his literary work has been neglected for what insights it may conceal about his educational philosophy.

In his final chapter, "The Making of the Late Antique Mind," Stenger argues that late antique writers knew that they were living in a later period yet were connected to the earlier ones (*Epochenbewusstsein*) and thus attempted to temporalize their respective education programs and philosophies. Stenger believes that Himerius' orations historicize pagan education but still engage with it, whereas Chrysostom's homiletic series on the Gospel of John paints the pagan world as fully conquered by Christian truth. Augustine's demarcation of Christian vs.

pagan is contrasted with Cassiodorus' *Variae* and *Institutes*, which legitimise pagan learning through the anachronistic tact of claiming that it had roots in Christian wisdom.

This book is an invaluable resource, not just for those interested in education in Late Antiquity but to students of the various authors Stenger analyses. I found his reading of Boethius particularly helpful for my personal research. At times the fragmentary nature of the case studies led to an engaging if slightly disjunctive narrative, but he has undoubtedly advanced scholarship both in his fresh approach which foregrounds theorization and in his focus on an understudied period of the history of education.

VICTORIA LANSING

*Balliol College, Oxford, victoria.lansing@balliol.ox.ac.uk*