

How to Have a Quiet Campus, Antique Style

Special Announcement: Why no footnotes? Because this article is merely a summing up of what has gone before, including several egregiously pirated quotations from the author's earlier efforts. The various classical sources exploited have already been exposed to public view. The piece was done on short notice to help celebrate the epiphany at the BYU of an authentic Rhetor—Greek, political, ostentatious, and not overly scrupulous. The ecstatic reception of Mr. Agnew by the student body was a moving demonstration of the ageless vitality of the rhetorician's craft.

H. N., 1991

With the collapse of the old sacral kingship all around the Mediterranean in the middle of the first millennium B.C., people were everywhere asking themselves what forever after remained the golden question of the civilized world: "Who's in charge around here?" By way of answer, a breed of ambitious and often capable men, the tyrants, moved in and took over in the name of law and order; the fatal weakness of their position was that their authority, resting neither on birth nor election, could be legitimately challenged at any time by anybody that was strong enough

This article was originally published in Brigham Young University Studies 9 (1969): 440–52.

to stand up to them. So the world shouted paeans of gratitude and joy when hard on the heels of the tyrants another and a very different kind of task-force appeared, a saintly band of prophets, a generation of wandering wisemen, the *Sophoi*, best represented by the immortal Seven Sages. These men of matchless intellect and sublime compassion, after correcting the political and moral disorders of their own societies, wandered through the world free of earthly passions and attachments, seeking only wisdom and imparting freely of their vast knowledge and perception to distraught and disorganized communities throughout the ancient world. It was their selfless activity that put the Greek world on its feet after the Dark Ages, or so it was believed.

Young men everywhere, fascinated by the powerful minds and godlike independence of these great teachers, followed them from city to city in droves, begging to become their disciples and vying for the privilege of serving them and of placing their fortunes (which were often considerable) at their disposal. Great cities and mighty potentates were willing to offer anything for the healing ministrations which the *Sophoi* gave to all free of charge. It was a shame to see such a highly marketable product going for nothing, and it was not long before a new type of wisemen appeared—the *Sophists*, meaning so-called or pseudo-wisemen. They diligently imitated every detail of dress, manner, and speech which had endeared the real Sages to the whole of mankind, by which bait they too gathered disciples in their highly publicized travels and were soon able to settle down and establish expensive and fabulously profitable schools in the big cities.

The special education in which these schools excelled went under the name of rhetoric, which was boldly and unashamedly defined and advertised as the art of giving people exactly what they want in order to get exactly what *you* want out of them. To palliate their sordid commer-

cialism, the Sophist teachers always insisted that they were frank, searching, unsparing crusaders of the Emancipated Mind, and it was Socrates' dangerous calling to expose the fraudulence of that claim. He accused the brotherhood of training their pupils "to appear, in the eyes of the ignorant, to know more than those who really know"; to which they replied that they could see nothing wrong with that since experience showed that such clever sales techniques always paid off. But what is that, Socrates protested, but "a mere knack and a routine—busy work . . . I call it foul, as I do all ugly things." Socrates also foresaw and prophesied that any system of hard and honest education would be forced off the market in short order by a competing system which offered its students fun and games at school and top administrative jobs and big pay afterward. For of course, the Sophists, as would-be successors to the *Sophoi*, specialized in preparing the young for important public office and private fortunes: rhetoric was the manipulation of people, especially in the mass, and its professors promised wealth, fame, and power to those who took their courses, from which it can be readily seen that Socrates was a troublemaker who would have to be removed. And removed he was, by that very class of professors who forever after proclaimed him their patron saint.

Also removed from competition, as Socrates predicted, was any field of serious study that might distract the young from the business of life—the business of making money. This was done neatly and effectively by setting up counter-courses in science, philosophy, mathematics, and so forth, which, while pretending to be the real thing, were much shorter, easier, and spicier than the old courses, promising the student exactly the same results but with the assurance (so said the brochure) that "you can do it all lying down!" Teachers of rhetoric, having thus forced all other teachers out of business, soon began to employ their irresistible weapons with deadly efficiency against each other. The

escalation of competitive simplification, sweetening, and spicing soon brought the schools to that state of total inanity which never ceases to amaze and appall the student of ancient rhetoric, the most astounding phenomenon of all being the endless succession, generation after generation, of world-renowned scholars and students who have absolutely nothing to say but derive their vital nourishment from the mere fact of association with a tradition and institution of learning.

Keeping Out of Trouble

The century before Christ was a time of chronic and mounting social unrest that by the time of Caesar had become quite unbearable—it was a world gone mad. When it began to appear that Augustus Caesar was the man to put an end to the worldwide *acosmia*, all power was put into his hands by a grateful humanity, and whenever he modestly suggested laying down the burden of his absolute and ever-growing powers people simply panicked. By shrewd economics and iron control of the military, Augustus gave a feeling of security to the whole world; his vast construction projects were meant to give his people a pleasing, nay a magnificent, environment; by taking over the supervision and financing of the youth-clubs throughout Italy, the *iuventus*, he brought under control the most dangerous and irresponsible expression of the general social malaise. But the cornerstone of his grand design for preserving peace and order was education.

As a boy, Augustus had been sent by his uncle Julius Caesar to study with the great Apollodorus in Apollonia. Apollodorus was a typical Sophist whose writings have probably done more to wreck the cause of real education (by supplanting the reading of original authors by his own required college survey) than those of any other man. Now the theme song of the Sophists was that education is the solution to all social ills, and Augustus firmly believed what

the secretary of a later emperor wrote, that education alone gives Rome the right to rule the world. Accordingly, he spared no pains in searching out and encouraging any sign of talent in the young. He would agree with Pliny that the education of the poor is the responsibility of the Princesps. Pericles had made Athens "the teacher of Hellas" by bringing together under his hospitable roof the greatest thinkers in every field; the Scipionic circle in Rome had tried the same sort of thing. Augustus, following their example, drew the professors of the East to Rome with fabulous salaries and total indulgence of their vanity: he not only allowed them complete freedom of speech but patiently suffered their outrageous insolence.

After the death of the dull and busy grind *Hyginus*, the presidency of the great palatine academy went to *M. P. Marcellus*, an ex-boxer who told the emperor, "You supply the people, but *we* supply the education" — and he got away with it. So did his successor, *Paelemon*, an ex-slave who announced that real education had begun at his birth and would perish at his death; though two successive emperors, Tiberius and Claudius, both declared Paelemon utterly unfit to teach the youth because of his gross and vicious immorality, his position was never in jeopardy, because he had written a handbook of rules for correct speech. *Timagenes* came to Rome from Alexandria as a cook, got a job as a litter-bearer, took up rhetoric, and ended up as a close friend of Augustus, who tolerated his unbelievable impudence in hopes that there might be real intelligence behind it. There was not. The Egyptian *Apion* was lured to Rome from the presidency of the University of Alexandria; Pliny called him "the drum of his own fame," and the salty Tiberius gave him the title of "the cymbal of the universe" to describe his brash and ceaseless boasting and self-glorification. He produced nothing of value.

Space will not allow us to unfold the long catalogue of men who guided the thinking of the civilized world for a

thousand years. Let it suffice to name *Symmachus*, perhaps the most influential man in scholarship and government the Roman world ever saw, of whose greatest writing Professor Raby wrote: "The ordinary reader . . . seeks in vain some glimmer of reasonableness, some promise of sense." What more compelling testimony could there be than the careers of such men to the miraculous powers of that system of Education for Success inaugurated by the Sophists of old? In time every town in the empire was provided with schoolmasters at government expense: three Sophists for a small town, four Sophists and four grammarians for county-court towns (*agorai dikōn*), and five rhetors and five grammarians for cities. From Vespasian on, the Imperial government paid the salaries of teachers, including, under Severus Alexander, the elementary teacher in every village. Justinian issued his pragmatic sanction "that the youth may be trained in liberal studies throughout the domain."

The student registering in any of the schools was entering a world of make-believe. Indeed, *scholē* and its Latin equivalent, *ludus*, both mean "play" — the school is a little universe of its own where one engages in such "liberal" activities as are not prescribed by the exigencies of real life. The "education for life" idea, Dio Chrysostom noted, really turned the schoolroom into a playroom and rendered the student peculiarly unfit for life. One of the main functions of the school was to keep the young out of trouble by channelling their energies into traditional and accepted areas of expression. The system was originally designed for upper-class youths, brought up by slaves who spoiled them rotten, traditionally permitted to indulge in properly directed political rioting and midnight depredations against the lower classes and their leaders. They were petted and envied by the whole society, which officially prolonged *adulescentia* and its licenses to the age of forty. "Nature itself suggests desires to youth," wrote Cicero, "and if they injure no one else's life, whatever they do is en-

durable and pardonable . . . only a crank would deny youth their amours with courtesans." Philostratus blasts the Romans for their scrupulous attention to harbors and roads while "neither you nor your laws show the slightest interest in the children of your cities, or in the young people or women." St. Augustine bears this out: if a boy was in school his parents could forget about him; if he was not in school *nobody* cared about him.

The hell-fire clubs of Athens and the scandalous rioting of Alcibiades and his crowd were a direct result of the "emancipated" and permissive teachings of the Sophists. Of course, such behavior was disavowed by the professors, who made a special point of insisting that a teacher was never to be held responsible for anything a pupil might do; for that matter, a teacher was not responsible for what *he* might do. Lactantius says that the most immoral and greedy professor he ever knew specialized in courses in virtue and the austere life. And why not? "What good does it do," wrote John Chrysostom, the greatest teacher of his day, "to pay high salaries to teachers and raise up a host of experts when the actions of our society speak so much louder than their safe, conventional platitudes? For discipline of the mind is as far beyond mere lectures on education as doing is from talking."

The schools, designed to please and attract the youth, made no attempt to limit their fun but only to channel it. Quintilian, after some hesitation, decided that the corruption of morals, which was a natural and expected part of life at the bigger schools, was after all a price worth paying for the stimulation, associations, competition, and professional openings they offered. Everywhere, as Rohde puts it, "people of every class became inflamed with a desire to achieve the new 'success.'" Parents pushed their children into it: "Full of ambition for their children," wrote Petronius, "they don't want to see them study the hard way, . . . and of course everybody is going to school in

such numbers that you can't even count them." They all want to begin at the top, says Pliny, "want to know everything at once . . . and are quite satisfied with themselves as they are." Should institutions which cater to adolescent minds, Quintilian wondered, be allowed to set the tone of the whole civilized world? That is the very thing, he decided, which brought about the dire intellectual decline of the times. But still, it was precisely because the students were *not* given to any serious thinking that even their wildest actions were looked upon with indulgence: the students of Carthage, St. Augustine reports, "commit all kinds of outrages with perfect insolence and immunity, things punishable by law, but permitted by custom" to the students.

What kind of "protest" would one expect from such students? The idealism of youth had been harnessed and contained from the beginning in the high-flown and altruistic clichés of standardized speeches to be learned by heart. Lysias's "Twenty-fifth Oration" (his very worst), was the model for the schools because of its stereotyped treatment of the prescribed theme, "No Man is Born an Oligarch or a Democrat." The so-called Pagan Martyrs of Alexandria were a band of professors who collided with a mad emperor on the subject not of human rights but of professional prerogative, and so lost their heads. Real idealism is hard to find — there *were* teachers with great hearts and great minds, like Dyscolus, Eratosthenes, Marcus Porcius Cato, and Aetius, but they all found the doors of the schools closed against them. Only Eratosthenes held his own against the united malice of the faculty of Alexandria.

In Egypt, where priest-led student factions had been rioting for untold centuries, the Romans shrewdly put responsibility for social order in the hands of the *gymnasiarch*, the local schoolteacher, who was made president of the town council or of the assembly of archons in the home capital where he lived. But the rioting went right on, with

the gymnasiarch usually leading one of the factions. "There is the man who stirs up all the trouble!" cried the Jews of Alexandria when the schoolteacher Hierax entered the theater. Like the later *qadi*, the gymnasiarch was out to promote himself and sometimes rose to giddy heights of power.

But everybody was playing the same game. As Dio Chrysostom told his students who hesitated to go the Sophist path: "Do you think you are any wiser than Croesus, who was the richest man in the world and took the advice of Sophists?" "What's wrong with studying to get rich?" the great Isocrates would ask, "why else do we exercise piety, justice, and the other virtues if not to promote ourselves?" If one is sincere, he explains, there is no moral default, and any properly trained rhetor knows how to make himself really sincere. The student, Cicero says quite frankly, "must refer everything to his own ends" and never cease asking, *quid mihi utilius* — what is there in it for me? The program geared to "the naked self-interest (which) ruled in the rhetorical schools" from Isocrates on (Wm. Schmid) was all that any ambitious boy could ask for; they all took to it like ducks to water. "What song is sweeter?" asks Cicero, "than that of the rhetorician, . . . what is fuller, more subtle, intellectual, admirable, fulfilling, satisfying?"

Manus Manum Lavat

Discipline was not severe because the student was in a position to blackmail the teacher, and they both knew it. It was common practice at Rome, according to Augustine, for students to avoid paying a teacher when the fees were due by conspiring together and all of a sudden removing to another teacher in a body. This would mean disaster to the professor, whose name, fame, and fortune naturally depended wholly on the *number* of students he could attract. So professors would pay students to attend

their lectures (a sound investment since the state paid them by the numbers), and every teacher at a great university had to have his "chorus" of supporters among the students, a devoted band who would recruit more students (often by force), applaud their hero hysterically at the end of every sentence, heckle rival professors, and fight rival choruses in the streets and at the games and shows. At first the choruses were made up of students from a single country—like the Syrians at Athens who supported Eupapius because he was a Syrian—but membership soon became general as the gangs would wait at the docks to carry off newly arrived students as pledges (the "foxes") or send their scouts out into the provincial cities to pledge boys intending to come to Athens to school.

So from beginning to end the first principle of rhetoric—that size and number are everything—dominated the schools. In return for their support, the students were spared all discipline. The most famous professor of them all, Libanius, has told how his students would laugh, talk, yawn, catch flies, look out of the window, sleep, draw pictures, and do anything but listen to his celebrated lectures, and then leave the hall for the games, shows, parties, stews, markets—anything but study. Why didn't the most influential teacher of his day make an effort to check this sort of thing? Because the boast and glory of his life was that he had *more* students than anybody else. He was enormously vain of his success as a teacher, and well illustrates how the pact of mutual corruption kept things going: in return for his complete permissiveness he insisted on one thing—that nobody *ever* criticize him; because of his enormous following his shallow letters (1600 of which survive) carried great prestige and his name bore irresistible authority: Libanius could make or break any man's career. And because of his great influence and renown, it was very much in the interest of any student to say he had studied with Libanius. So who held the whip handle after all? A

multitude of students made a Libanius, an Iamblichus, or a Stilpon (at one time he had 30,000 students) great, and the hordes had no choice but to follow the great man whose name alone could give *them* prestige. The astounding thing is that none of the great professors ever produced anything of value—the game is the purest make-believe, and yet it went on and on for centuries as the self-serving giants of education were able to "keep up the appearance of success by mutual praise and admiration." It was the education-government complex that kept things going: the great professors were all related by birth or marriage to each other *and* to the imperial family; everybody knew everybody else, and the school remained, as the Sophists designed it to be, the door to top-level positions in public life. The students knew what they were after and that only the school could give it to them. Why should they ever rock the boat?

The collapse of ancient civilization was marked by the rise, in the words of Fr. Blass, of "despotism, servilism, and scholarship." Note that scholarship does *not* go down with the ship. It torpedoes it. Years ago we wrote that "the very thing that stifled learning was pure oxygen to the schools," namely, that preoccupation with office-work, with classifying and compiling and grading and processing became the whole concern of scholarship in the Dark Ages. Of course there is plenty of learned noise all the time—the one thing that kept professors going, wrote Epicharmus, was their constitutional inability to shut up whether they had anything to say or not. (Indeed, Boethus of Tarsus became the richest man in the empire by guaranteeing to teach anyone to speak on any subject for any length of time.) But aside from that, the well of scholarship could never run dry as long as the art of literary criticism survived; professors took sides in critical debates which endured literally for hundreds of years as a learned pretext for those wonderful academic *feuds* which of course centered around personalities, spread throughout the entire

world, and gave to the careers of the learned an appearance of real emotion and enthusiasm: the smaller the minds, the greater the vigor and dedication they brought to the feuds. The favorite issue for taking sides was not Homer or Vergil but the "New (Asian) Education" versus the "Old (Attic or Classic) Education": they were of equal age and as alike as peas in a pod, but they provided the unfailing topic for discussion that kept generations of professors in congenial and remunerative employment. The busywork of the schools looked impressive from the outside, but as Clement of Alexandria noted, there was really nothing to it, "babbling away in their own special jargon, toiling their whole lifetime about special definitions . . . itching and scratching." It was all as easy as sneezing once one got the knack of it. "It was their own lack of productivity which forced (the professors) to address themselves ever and again to these same threadbare issues," wrote E. Norden.

One theme above all provided the great professor with a subject worthy of his pen, namely the lives of the great professors, beginning with his own. Favorinus, who knew Fronto and Plutarch, was a friend of the Emperor Hadrian, and taught at Ephesus and Rome where the fabulously rich Herodes Atticus attended his lectures, achieved the pinnacle of fame by an oration on the subject of his own greatness and left as his life's work a great chaotic opus in twenty-four volumes—about himself. Illustrious men travelled ceaselessly from library to library gathering material on the lives of illustrious men who had spent their lives travelling from library to library gathering materials, etc., etc. When one entered the school, one automatically ceased to be one of the vulgar—and that is why the vulgar clamored in their thousands, at the invitation of the emperor, to get into the school. And because the door was kept open and the prize was never beyond the hope of even the stupidest boy, provided only he had ambition, the school maintained its marvelous equilibrium and sta-

bility for centuries. The ambitious boys, the kind who lead student riots, were the least inclined of all to protest.

The only real danger was serious thought. This is well illustrated in the career of Apuleius, who was showered with honors and had statues of himself erected in a hundred cities in recognition of his rhetorical compositions in praise of smoke, of dust, of sleep, of indifference, even an oration "In Praise of Nothing"; but he had to face mobs in the streets and prosecution in the courts when it leaked out that he had private opinions of his own—very devout religious opinions, to be sure, but unconventional—and had been up to such sneaky nonconformist tricks as inventing a tooth powder.

Whatever happens to the world, Seneca the Elder assures us, the school is bound to survive because there is nothing left to take its place after (1) the natural law of decay has done its work, (2) the growth of luxury softens and corrodes a civilization, and (3) the centralized government of the principate leaves no issues for public debate. The impression that the schools of every age make on Eduard Meyer is one of "perpetual decline." Actually the ancient school did not decline, for as Dionysius of Halicarnassus says, it was already decadent in the time of Alexander; it was born sick. The trouble is, according to Dio Chrysostom, that there is really nothing significant for young people to do; there is no real demand for their services, and so they all converge on the university, the one place where doing nothing is respectable. He mentions the phenomenal growth of the big new universities, such as that of Celaenae, where countless droves of people flock together, people interested in all sorts of litigation and business deals, rhetoricians, political scientists, promoters, flunkys, pimps, procurers, teamsters (muleteers), hucksters, harlots, dealers, and con-men in every line—the new super-university had become all things to all men.

Dormite Secure, Cives!

In its victorious career the school overcame its two most serious opponents with surprising efficiency and dispatch. They were the church and the barbarians. Christianity offered the world the one good chance it ever had of breaking the vicious cycle of corruption and fraud centering in the schools. But the schools had a monopoly on the Things of This World as well as the Honors of Men, and the voices from another world that might have brought men to their senses were soon silenced. As early as the second century, in the approving words of Dr. R. Milburn, "uplifted eyes . . . turned back to earth to find their assurance in hard facts." St. Augustine's immortal *De Doctrina Christiana* is but a rhetorician's invitation to the church to attain mental maturity by signing up permanently with the university. At the Council of Nicaea when the Christian doctors were displaying themselves as typical vain and wrangling professors, a poor layman, one of the "confessors," arose in the audience and rebuked and abashed them: Which was it to be, the Kingdom of Heaven or the University? When the church went to school and became respectable, and when a bishop had to hold a university degree in rhetoric, then the Christian populace, cheated of their promise of another and a better world, everywhere burst out in appalling demonstrations of helpless rage. The wild monks who attacked the University of Alexandria were acting like hysterical children, but what course was open to them against the entrenched power of the schools? In the end the police power of the state, at the insistent demand of the great orating bishops, mowed the protestors down in hundreds of thousands. They made a desert and they called it a peace, and so, as Raby puts it, "the old life of the schools continued, and men could think of nothing better to aim at than what they had been doing unimaginatively for centuries."

Although the barbarians, Franks, Goths, Visigoths, Vandals, Saxons, Arabs, and others may have destroyed, they were completely captivated by the schools. Their kings and princes, stunned with admiration of what they took to be a flowering civilization, diligently set themselves to composing letters and verse in the learned, tasteless, and trivial manner of the schools, and went all-out in large-scale crash programs of civilizing their followers through the offices of the old established educational system. "The grammatical art is not used by barbarous kings," wrote the unbelievably insipid secretary of the barbarian Theodosius to his master, who took it all in. "It abides uniquely with legitimate sovereigns." And so the warlords of the steppes submitted to the authority of the schoolmen as willingly as the Christian doctors had.

The school year at the University of Athens was opened with prayers, offerings, and a formal oration welcoming the students to the "sanctuary." Every school with its sacred groves, temple, and library was in theory a shrine of the Muses, a place of inspiration and retreat from the world. Not the least important factor in maintaining the marvelous stability of the institutions was the carefully cultivated atmosphere, the image of deep and dedicated study, the look of learning. The aura of sanctity which the Sophists cast about themselves and their schools, with their robes, their titles, and their ceremonies, was the crowning touch of their art, the ultimate answer to the critics and the doubters. However prone to riot in the streets and stews, the shows, baths, and games, the students of the ancient university always seemed to behave themselves pretty well on the campus. The formula for preserving order emerges with striking clarity from an ample mass of documents covering a long period of time. Whoever would avoid serious student protest or dangerous demands has simply to follow the rules of the Sophist schools:

1. Free the student from the necessity of any prolonged or strenuous mental effort.

2. Give him a reasonable assurance that the school is helping him toward a career.

3. Confine moral discipline to the amenities, paying special attention to dress and grooming. The student will have his own sex-life anyway.

4. Keep him busy with fun and games—extracurricular activity is the thing.

5. Allay any subconscious feelings of guilt due to idleness and underachievement by emphasis on the greatness of the institution, which should be frequently dramatized by assemblies and ceremonies; an atmosphere of high purpose and exalted dedication is the best insurance against moments of honest misgiving.

Here, then, was the secret of order and stability in the ancient schools.