

Chapter 1

Life and Learning in Classical Greece

Socrates' (469–399 B.C.) rejoinder to Protagoras' (481–411 B.C.) assertion that the Sophists were teaching virtue (“I never thought that human ingenuity could make men good.”)¹ is an illustration of dialectic: from the time of Homer (ca. 800 B.C.) the Greeks had commissioned education to inculcate moral virtue.

The Homeric Ideal

Dating the settlement of Greece by outsiders, or certitude about where they came from, is veiled in mystery. Upon their arrival, the outsiders met a hostile native population. But the invaders, versatile, courageous and strong, and more advanced in the way of conquest than the people being subdued were skilled in defense, made the land their home.

Allowing time for adjustment to new surroundings, these immigrant tribes capitalized the assets of a friendly physical environment. The benevolence of the land can help to explain their later achievement, for human progress and geography are related, but it is hard to believe that climate and terrain can account for the genius of the Greeks. It was evident first in Homer's poetry. Existing in oral tradition, this artistic recounting of great deeds, heroic action, a compact between men and deities, and ideals of altruism and cooperation toward desirable social ends was intended to amuse a comfortable Greek aristocracy. Their abundant leisure was made entertaining by myth turned into art in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Ancient feudalism opened avenues only for those who could afford to travel them, so archaic Greece should not be burdened with any premature disposition to democracy or by attributing to it ideals of equity and justice. This disposition and those ideals were illustrated best in philoso-

phers' books. Men who must toil to make a living have few interludes for amusement and intellectual refinement, but these architects of Western civilization exploited the assets of their economic life and used the leisure they afforded to aim toward supremely human goals. Their motivation, however, despite our curiosity about it, is shrouded in mystery, but it was strong enough to turn them away from myth and superstition toward civility, reason, erudition, and eloquence. Their accomplishment was a literature abundant in artistic intention. Commanding though it is, motive alone is incapable of reconstructing social life or reaping the full power of the human spirit, so native precocity and motive needed help from social regularity and order.

The Origin of City-States. In early days, Greece was always close to anarchy, and neither person nor property was secure and safe. Later, tribal chiefs imposed a precarious stability on small groups, but anarchy was hard to suppress. With the appearance of monarchy, Greek kings were able to secure a more orderly society; but, being susceptible to frailty, incapacity, and misconduct, the kings' power waned and their authority over the nobles (at best always fragile) atrophied. Except in Sparta, where a limited form of monarchy lingered on, monarchy was abolished, and political power was grasped by the noble families.

The sharp separation of the nobles from lesser people is a fact to recognize. The noble class was the nerve and sinew of the state. Birth was the best test of excellence, and the rule of the nobles was a true aristocracy: government by the most talented. When these aristocracies became oppressive, they were amended or superseded by constitutions and codes of law. The rise of the Greek republics—the city-states—introduced a new historical epoch, one idealized in centuries of European political science as an innovation of immense significance. For the first time, care, ingenuity, and reason shaped and stabilized the machinery of government. Greek city-states, especially Athens, represented a model of government where law became evident, and tradition and custom that heretofore had guided social and political activity were transformed into a legal code.

The Influence of Myth. Reason was applied to government, but another side to the Greek character seems paradoxical: As the cultural ship sailed the mainstream of life, it often altered course to follow tributaries of myth, and sometimes these tributaries were deep enough to blur a route leading more directly to a port of true intellectual culture. Without legend, tale, myth, and historical fantasy, Greek life would have lacked charm and verve; but charm and verve (for all their worth in social settings), when nourished by irrational belief, were bound to be incompatible with right opinion and truth. The traditional investment the Greek legacy made in myth prompted Plato (429– or 427–347 B.C.), later, to

take his famous stand on censorship,² and it is easy to miss his point. Almost as much fancy as fact formed the intellectual diet of the young. And this was a paradox: How could reason stand on an irrational foundation? With might and main the Greeks tried to make this unlikely formula work.

It all started with their perception of history. Reconstruction of legend was important, and ideas about the past affected their judgment about the present. They allowed legend to influence diplomatic accord and to adjudicate territorial claim. To some extent, day-to-day decision was based on supposed conquest or the fictional opinion of ancient heroes of divine birth. Spared the extreme of self-delusion, they all the same took myth seriously.

A little more may illustrate the point: Before the maturity of authentic history (that is, before it was turned into an art for recording the past),³ noble families tried to find their origin in a god. Failing this, they tried to trace their pedigree to heroic ancestors, to Heracles, for example, or to a warrior who had fought at Troy. Later, with a refinement of historical sense, although interest in family genealogy seldom relaxed, they tried to discover the relationships of the various branches of the Greek race. And then they solved the problem with a wonderful skill of invention. Artfully and persuasively, but hardly ever factually, they made all the Greek branches derivative of Hellen, an eponymous ancestor who, tradition said, lived in Thessaly.⁴

The Victory of Reason. The medal, though, has another side where the Greeks, while refusing to expurgate myth from tradition, were amenable to downgrading it. Although myth always had some influence on culture, it turned out to be an unsatisfactory substitute for what the trained reason could produce. Standing alone, incoherent myth could have been a divisive cultural force, but submitted to the arbitrament of reason, without itself being a product of reason, it could be made reasonable. And this was the bridge the intellect crossed before the Greek mind embraced myth. Putting confidence in the power of reason, Greeks redressed an earlier tyranny of mysticism and rescued themselves and their beneficiaries from the swamp of superstition. Rejecting the god of Luck they invested in the power and worth of reason; acknowledged virtue, although hard to win, as superior to strength; and, through their most influential poets, philosophers, scientists, and artists, elected to find human ideals by cultivating intellectual talent.

Athenian Educational Ideals

This combination of mind and motive was illustrated in Athens, the city-state where Greek genius was afforded its best chance to thrive. Yet conditions for its development did not appear suddenly. They evolved from centuries of cultivation and reached maturity around the middle of the fifth century B.C. Schools accompanied this evolutionary process but, according to the code of ancient life, schools were commissioned to instruct more than to educate and to teach what could be taught without assuming responsibility for the preparation of persons for life in society.⁵

To fulfill this expectation, amendment to archaic and heroic way was essential. If Athenians were to have an ideal state, habits of civic virtue (citizenship) were imperative, and this conviction was ratified in political reality. It was easy to persuade aristocratic Athenian youth that nothing took precedence over the duties of a citizen. Unyielding patriotism was at once the greatest virtue and education's most authentic objective. A condition for the achievement of this grand and reasonable social ideal was the cultivation of reason and an embracing of intellectual virtue.

Acknowledging reason as man's supreme talent, Athenians could not then insulate myth from reason's searching scrutiny. In consequence, some of Homer and Hesiod (ca. 700 B.C.), those great poets whose names are inextricably linked with the Heroic Age, needed reinterpretation, and some was jettisoned. Homeric epic put human destiny in fate's hand. Hesiod, in *Works and Days*, venerated heroic myth and, speaking mainly to common folk, asserted (for example, in *Theogony*) that the muses taught truth as well as beautiful fiction. Intelligent Athenians were now ready to assume responsibility for their destiny. Despite a sentimental attachment to a glorious past faithfully reflected in Homer, uncritically accepting Homeric tradition was only substituting the tyranny of tradition for the tyranny of superstition. Still, it was impossible to expurgate Homer from Greek culture, for so much of his epic formed a common, unbroken thread woven into the fabric of Greek life. Athenians, therefore, chose the tactic of paying Homer allegiance, quoting him with approval, but ascribing to his work ethical and metaphysical doctrines of their own invention.

Homer: Educator of the Greeks. Although never a schoolmaster, Homer's reputation as the 'educator' of Greece was earned in Athens. His epics were read, recited, and memorized after schools were organized, probably sometime in the seventh century B.C., but outside the schoolhouse they were the core of an oral tradition that gave succeeding generations an ideal vision of life.⁶ This informal design for education worked almost flawlessly, so long as Athenian life remained relatively simple.

Aristocrats held the reins of social and political life, and stability was preserved because citizens had common cultural backgrounds and values. They knew what the heroes had done and how they would react to contemporary life.

Still, however high Homer's ideals and however appealing his art, his poetry was not a moral philosophy in disguise. It neither told the Greeks how to live nor authorized the gods to dictate a course of right action. If any moral lessons were buried in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, extraordinary effort was required to excavate them. Although Homer was neither a moral philosopher nor a textbook writer of ethics, the tradition he perpetuated, qualifying him as the 'educator' of Greece, was a tradition of Greek pride and greatness: Athenian citizens, primed for glory, heroism, and success, were always eager to do the great deed.⁷

The Education of a Citizen-Soldier. Recalling that only children of Athenian citizens could aspire to this inheritance, the simple and un-systematic educational plan was effective. Learning and life, moreover, were closely linked, and the objectives of both were clear and easy to recognize: an Athenian boy was expected to become a citizen, a soldier, and a credit to the class from which he sprang. But those skills so essential to the person who must work for a living were neglected—being servile, they were inappropriate, almost demeaning, for the young aristocrat—and literary ability lacked any clear utility. A fully accredited citizen, judged by the standard of, say, the sixth century B.C., was probably illiterate; he could count, but elementary calculation was a mystery.

From the time of Homer to the middle of the sixth century B.C., an Athenian citizen's primary occupation was military. In the allegiance paid to military objective Athens and Sparta were similar, although Sparta gained her end by regimentation, whereas Athenians were motivated by an urge to duty and a dedication to ideals vividly portrayed in Homer.⁸ Athens thrived on her tradition of honor, valor, and praiseworthy conduct, and the influence of this tradition was virile enough to obviate the prescriptiveness of Spartan rule. It cast the mold for Athenian life so long as Athens conducted her affairs according to archaic plan and limited citizenship to an aristocracy.

Education gradually drifted away from military objectives because of a change in military tactics. The soldier in the chivalric age—versatile and resourceful as a horseman and fighter, self-reliant and courageous as he waged his private wars—became an anachronism with the advent of a heavy infantry.⁹ Although effective on the battlefield, an infantry battalion was formed by men who substituted routine for romance, the hard discipline of the corps for personal courage and flair, and technical qualification for the wide repertoire of an Athenian knight. No wonder Athe-

nian youth wanted to know why being an infantryman was recommended as a worthy novitiate to civic duty. An old order was passing; a new one was on the distant horizon; but the appurtenances of war were not alone in stimulating change.

Aristocratic Education. The agrarian, rustic economy of Athens had something besides being pleasant and gratifying to recommend it, but now new economic rules were introduced. Persons of means and position searched for economic opportunity, and Athens, rather than standing still in its agrarian tracks, became an important commercial center in the ancient world. Henceforth the perquisites that rank and position had provided were put in jeopardy, and the possibility of preserving them by fleeing to the redoubt of ancient ideal and skill lacked promise. In the wake of this new economic era, a number of democratic tendencies were fused to the most durable of aristocratic traditions, and as Athens changed, her social institutions changed too. The educational program thought for centuries to be adequate was subjected to revision and amendment.

Aristocrats took their entitlement seriously and refused to surrender either power or influence. Ready to fight foreign and domestic foe alike in order to preserve their inheritance, their weapons were both military and intellectual. So, despite appearances, the conventional preoccupation with military excellence persisted. Whatever else a citizen might become, he was first a soldier; as a cavalryman or an infantryman, strength, stamina, courage, skill in the use of weapons, and dedication and devotion to the state's ideals were essential. Technical skill and strength could be developed, courage and devotion could be inculcated, but these excellences could suffer from neglect.

The Sporting Tradition. Maintaining military efficiency at a high peak was a political necessity. And while military and educational issues were clearly related to politics, both were logically subordinate to politics. This may explain why educational theory was always wedded to political philosophy in Greek literature. In any case, keeping citizens ready to meet the requirement of military foray at home and abroad was always more than mere theory. Ready and waiting to do its duty, sport occupied an essential place in Athenian life. The Olympian games attest to sport's notoriety, but in giving these games too much attention, sport's place in everyday life can be missed. It was used to hone military skill, so its first justification was practical. Besides, being fun, it gave the citizen a chance to fill his many leisure hours.¹⁰

Flirtation with sport could be testimony to frivolity, but the record would impeach it. Sport was attacked and abused by some eccentrics, but it was neither rejected nor discounted by the average Athenian. Even

when its military worth became hard to certify, appeals to bodily excellence and beauty, to its consumption of leisure time, and to the sheer fun of it were persuasive and, in the end, convincing. Besides, clever men whose only fault was common birth had time and again succeeded in accumulating considerable wealth. Now they engaged in athletic competition, so sport, once reserved for an elite, became a popular pastime. Direct participation was best, of course, but sport could be enjoyed vicariously: to the dismay and disgust of Athenian blue-bloods, professional athletes soon appeared on the scene.¹¹

This pleasant, comfortable society suited the taste of Athenian aristocrats, but it began to show signs of wear. The old gymnasias—the exclusive sporting clubs for citizens—restricted their membership, but new gymnasias opened their doors to anyone who could afford them. When this happened, sport lost its exclusive character, so the old-line aristocrat—the man who opposed change on principle—looked for an alternative, for the elite had no intention of abandoning sport. They wanted something to identify them as elite, so they turned to intellectual cultivation. Attending to things of the mind would not put the state's welfare in jeopardy, because military tactics no longer depended upon the selfless service and sacrifice of individual soldiers. But how could rich merchants and artisans of common origin afford to pursue learning for its own sake? If the luxury of liberal learning were open to them—as perhaps it was—their practical minds and economic instincts refused to countenance it.

Organization of Athenian Schools

Athenians who stood in Homer's cultural shadow were seldom ignorant and illiterate, but they neglected mental development. Now, however, with the aristocracy's status threatened, they became impatient with rusticity. Naturally precocious, versatile, and energetic, they blazed a new trail through an intellectual wilderness full of mystery and superstition. As they did, the significance of schools for instructing succeeding generations became apparent.¹²

Before schools were properly organized (the date of their origin cannot be set), this new attitude toward education recommended that families engage tutors for their children. Such arrangements, however, while not exactly subversive of social solidarity, clearly do nothing to promote it, so without abandoning their affection for individual tuition, Athenians recommended the opening of schools for the children of freemen. Greek dramatic writers Aristophanes¹³ (448–385 B.C.) and Euripides¹⁴ (480–406 B.C.), for example, dealt with current social themes, and their objections

to the new education, as well as those of conservative aristocrats, were recited in the theater.¹⁵ In the face of these objections, however, schools prospered, and boys left home, usually accompanied by a pedagogue, to obtain instruction in them.¹⁶

Uncertainty surrounds the nature of early Athenian schools. Before the fifth century B.C., they changed too often to leave a clear historical picture. Undoubtedly, they taught what society said was important and beneficial. Lacking any urgent need for literary and commercial skill, the curriculum was physical and musical with oral literature added for good measure. Freed from responsibility for anything but instruction, schools left the more important objective of educating citizens to the home and the community. School instruction was a humble auxiliary.

But this changed. With the end of the Persian Wars (ca. 479 B.C.) Athenians were ready for another leap forward. Change was still maligned by critics who were often Athens' best and most articulate artists. Their objection to change was not simple nostalgia: In *The Clouds*, where Aristophanes takes social and educational innovators to task, he condemns a weakening of society's fabric by an abandonment of conventional education and the introduction of untested instructional practice.¹⁷ Old-time schools heeded music and sport and did their best to harmonize them. New schools emphasized literature and gave some attention to music, but their promotion of mental formation threatened the status of physical development. Despite vigorous thrust and artistic appeal, the critics expressed a minority opinion that lacked the vigor to impede educational change. Citizens thought only about their own education, and toward the close of the fourth century B.C., the population of Athens was about twenty-one thousand citizens, ten thousand resident aliens, and 120,000 slaves.

Educational Support and Control. For a long time, Athens allowed families almost total freedom in the care and education of children. There is no sign in Athens, as there was in Sparta, of an exigent state watchfully waiting to intrude on a child's life and direct the course of his training and education. Still, it would be wrong to assume that Athens had neither the will nor the means to keep a public eye on youth.

Evidence is ample to show an absence of state support for schooling, except for five public gymnasia—the Academy, Lyceum, Kynosarges, Diogeneion, and Ptolemeion—built and maintained by the city.¹⁸ These, along with private gymnasia, account for what historians are tempted to call Athenian secondary education. But tradition and, perhaps, law made families responsible for their children's education. So apart from allowing teachers and their students to use gymnasia, theaters, and temples as places for instruction, public resources were not used. Add to this the

custom of city educational support for sons whose fathers had been killed in battle, and the exceptions to the general principle that in Athens educational support was entirely private have been named.

Support is one side of the educational pendant; control is the other. Here Athens tried to steer a careful course between control and voluntarism. Surely Athenians had substantial theoretical justification for state educational control, and it would be hard to believe that a state so dependent upon the character, ability, and devotion of its citizens could have been indifferent to it; yet Athenian tradition consistently recommended restraint. Following tradition to the letter, Athens never went beyond a general supervision of some of the appurtenances to learning.

The laws of Solon, we are told, prescribed the length of a school day, restricted visits to schools (under pain of capital punishment) to those who had business there, set rules for athletic competition, and published decrees relative to the age of teachers.¹⁹ In addition, an ancient, supposedly inflexible, custom told fathers to educate their sons if they expected support from them in their old age. Although Athens possessed authority over education, it was rarely and discriminatingly used.

The field of state educational control lay fallow because tradition was a competent substitute for law in preserving educational orthodoxy. During the two centuries before the Persian Wars, a plan for schooling was ratified in practice. It remained as an ideal and, infrequently amended, was durable enough to last. This was the conventional Greek education so much admired and so ineffectively imitated by pedagogic practitioners in the centuries following; and it was the plan Plato adopted with only minor revisions as a foundation to the educational utopia he described in the *Republic*.

Conventional Athenian Schools

Athenians knew that schooling is only a small part of education, so the prescription tradition wrote for the care of children before they were sent to the schoolmasters should be read. It was limited to boys. If girls had a place in regular schooling, historians are silent about it. Women who made history's record must always be judged extraordinary, but any tilling of their talent took place outside the circle of conventional schooling.²⁰ Plato left the schoolhouse door ajar for women, but this was no confirmation of common practice, and, in any case, Plato's confreres refused to take him seriously.²¹

The Pedagogue. Boys were cared for at home in ways intended to form their character. They were taught stories filled with moral lessons,

and strict supervision was given to their choice of companions. In addition, home's example was expected to instill good manners and habits. At age seven, a boy was assigned a pedagogue who was a companion, guide, philosopher, and friend. Seldom citizens, these pedagogues, often educated foreigners held in bondage as prizes of war, had credentials of dependability and soundness of character recommending them for the important duty as masters of manners and morals. Wealthy families had a pedagogue for every boy, but even poor families managed to have at least one.²²

Not schoolmasters, and absolved from teaching letters, although they sometimes heard recitations, pedagogues were constant companions. They kept boys honest and upright and saw to it that no harm befell them. Walking respectfully to the rear and carrying reading material, musical instruments, writing tablets, or slates, they accompanied boys to school, remained nearby while the boys were taught, and returned home with them. Pedagogues were responsible for boys' conduct: they watched manners, saw that the left hand was used for bread and the right hand, for other food; ensured that boys were silent before elders, dressed correctly, walked straight, and sat erect. They were, moreover, allowed to chastise their charges, but were restricted by a rule enjoining them to punish in a way befitting freeborn youth.²³

A complete school plan takes time to develop, so one must be careful about declaring when any school level, or any part of a school level—for Athenian elementary education in its final form had three schools: primary, palaestra, and music—made its first appearance. The priorities of ancient life discouraged the quick founding of primary schools, and it is possible that they appeared last.²⁴ Discounting the basic tools of literacy has a strange sound to a contemporary ear, but no great value was put on literary accomplishment which could have been obtained easily without the help of schools.

The Primary School. The first Athenian primary schools seem to have appeared in the late sixth century B.C. Reading and writing stood alone in the syllabus; counting was added later. Versatile and able masters might have taught drawing and painting also, although Aristotle's (384–322 B.C.) recommendation for drawing and painting implies their neglect in the schools rather than their cultivation.²⁵

The primary schoolmaster was an academic entrepreneur. If his reputation was good, the class was large and the fees were high. In all cases, the quality and character of a school depended solely on the master's ability. This should warn us to be careful of generalization about the standard and nature of instruction in Athenian primary schools. Yet common features stand out. Primary teaching was unattractive to

citizens, so most primary masters were aliens or freed slaves who had enough literary ability to instruct boys in the rudiments. The minimum qualification for a primary master must have been reading ability, for the story that anyone who could read could teach has been repeated too often to lack the ring of truth. And if these masters lacked literary ornament, they appear also to have been morally deficient. Athenian parents, noting this, supplied pedagogues for their sons to insulate them from moral contagion.

A boy's trip to school, accompanied by a pedagogue, ended in a vacant shop, an unused corner of a public building or park, or, if the master were successful, in a schoolhouse with two rooms: one for instruction and the other a vestibule for pedagogues. With primitive instructional materials and crude pedagogic technique, masters began their teaching with the alphabet. Letters were first taught by sound only, followed by practice in combining consonants and vowels, and then the pronunciation of words. Thereafter, students saw the letters and traced them on wax tablets. Next came sentences taught, without the help of formal grammar, by a rule of thumb guide to correct speech distilled from common usage.

This simple approach represents something less than a bold assault on the citadel of literary accomplishment, but books were rare, and their scarcity discounted the worth of reading. Public placards, commercial notices, and documents could be read and understood after such instruction. Yet oral tradition was still virile and, among citizens, universal. Boys harvested this tradition by memorizing passages from Homer, Hesiod, Simonides and the gnomic poets recited to them by their teachers. When the reading course was over, after about three years or whenever the skill was mastered, accomplishment was humble. All the same, the literary legacy remained alive in strong and cultivated memories.

Reading, Writing, and Counting. Masters usually taught reading one day and writing the next. Instruction in writing, as in reading, was routine. Students practiced on wax-coated wooden tablets that had a central panel bordered by a flat, raised edge designed to protect the wax coating. Boys used the pointed end of a stylus to make marks on the wax and the flat end to erase their mistakes. Toward the end of the classical period, ink and reed pens were invented, and, almost at once, the wax tablet and stylus disappeared.

Writing began with boys tracing letters outlined by the teacher,²⁶ and they traced until they could make letters with help from parallel lines ruled by the teacher. Letters were written in horizontal and vertical lines falling beneath one another, without stops or accents and without spaces between words. Later, teachers dictated simple words and then whole

passages. Practice, incessant practice, conspired to make perfect various elaborations of speed and legibility.

Writing instruction must have occupied about half of a boy's time. Instruction stopped with mastery, but mastery of what? Three writing styles were customary in Athens, although hardly any freeborn youth mastered all of them: the formal hand of separate capital letters, the cursive hand, and the short hand. Formal and cursive script were almost certainly taught in primary schools, but the short hand, more appropriate for clerks and scribes, was seldom part of the literary repertoire of a citizen.

This primary school instruction has much in common with contemporary pedagogy, but where today's schooling includes arithmetic, Athenian boys learned only to count. This, though, was harder than it sounds: using their fingers and hands and putting them in different positions, they learned an elaborate sign language enabling them to indicate numbers from one to a million.²⁷ Counting occupied a place in the school because arithmetic was too complex. Greek letters were used to signify number and lacked the flexibility the arabic notation affords for calculation. What the Greeks called "arithmetic," we call "number theory," and in the ancient order of study was a science, a discipline few schoolboys wanted to sample.

Physical Education. Wanting to be true to their cultural heritage, Athenians enlisted literary masters to transmit it. But wanting to be true to themselves, they sought physical dexterity, grace, and harmony. In earlier years, physical education had been left to chance—at least to personal preference—but with the advent of the fifth century B.C., regular provision was made for it in a special school, the palaestra. Either following the primary school and preceding the music school or operating in concert with them, the palaestra limited its course to physical conditioning, dancing, and games.

This simple school conducted by a paidotribe, a private teacher, needed only an open space or a playground where boys could exercise and play.²⁸ Yet the simplicity of the school course disguises the status of its teacher. Paidotribes were engaged in work acknowledged by custom to be important, so their compensation was better than their counterparts in primary schools. Besides, teaching in the palaestra was a steppingstone: paidotribes with a good reputation could be promoted to the gymnasium as athletic trainers, and from there, with luck and skill, become osteopathic physicians. Seldom citizens, paidotribes were almost never slaves and, all things considered, were likely the ornaments in a corps of ancient elementary teachers.

The Music School. After about three years in the primary school, boys were promoted to the music school,²⁹ where at first the only subjects were vocal and instrumental music. Social progress, however, recommended the addition of literature, so fully staffed music schools had teachers of music (*citharists*) and letters (*grammatists*). Understaffed music schools got along with one teacher who gave instruction in the oboe, lyre, and song and added just enough literature to supply students with lyrics for their songs. Better students were supposed to compose their own lyrics. Reverence for tradition and myth was so great that whether songs were composed or borrowed, they recapitulated Athens' glorious history.

The curriculum of the music school was more sensitive to fluctuation in educational mood and need than the palaestra and primary school, so, before long, literature's role was changed from being a handmaiden to music: it was given the status of a staple. Throughout most of the classical period, music schools gave about equal attention to music and literature, and this arrangement seems to have paid dividends. Singing and playing an instrument were social ornaments; the citizen who could do neither was scorned. Similar social pressure popularized poetry, and poetic reservoirs from Homer, Hesiod, Solon, Alcam, Tyrtaeus, Pindar, Aeschylus, and Euripides were stored in the memory. Aesop's fables were popular scholastic literature, too.

Contemporary commentators seldom found fault with music schools; there is, moreover, the vague implication that music-school teachers were accorded more respect and received larger emoluments than teachers in the primary schools. Yet even music teachers were suspected of being engaged in neither a trade nor a profession and, additionally, of lacking any special qualification. This suspicion had a basis in fact, but whatever its currency, the reputation of music schools was left largely unsullied. Even Plato's reservation about them was redressed when mathematics were added to their curricula.

Benevolent disposition, however, was unable to insulate the music school from the shocks of sophistry and the pretensions of ancient science. Before the classical age was over, Athenian confidence in music schools waned, and oratory, trumpeted by the Sophists as the ideal education for citizens, began its persistent aggression on music and literature. But still in its infancy, oratory was too weak to overrun the music school and, in any case, heralds for oratory were by no means sure that their ornamental discipline should be studied in an elementary school. Oratory's assault on music, however, left the school uncertain about its purpose and undermined its resolve, although both were restored in the post-classical age when music, wedded to acoustics, became a science. The

music school's course, conventionally lasting five years, was over when students were around the age of fifteen.³⁰

Athenian Secondary Education. Students today leave elementary schools and go to high schools, but Athenian boys went to gymnasia. The most ancient of these places—the Academy, the Lyceum, and the Kynosarges—began as sporting clubs for aristocrats, and so they remained, but they were also places where boys trained for citizenship.

The gymnasium's curriculum—if "curriculum" is the right word—consisted of physical training and sport. Entering the gymnasium, boys closed their schoolbooks, although private reading might continue, and left their musical instruments at home to pursue a traditional regimen intended to produce nobility and grace. Continuity between the palaestra and the gymnasium is apparent, so it is safe to call the latter an advanced course in sport. Athletic events with clear links to military excellence were promoted: running, jumping, wrestling, and throwing the discus and javelin. Horsemanship and swimming might have been included, too, although evidence about them is slender. Precise in purpose and well-organized, this was civic education.

Tempted to look for something in the gymnasium indicating an investment in literary culture, we look in vain. Before the fourth century B.C. was over, however, sport's prominence declined sharply, but for most of the classical age, what (for want of a better phrase) is called "secondary education" was only sport. But sport attracted a vast and various clientele, and old gymnasia became so crowded that new ones—some public, but most private—had to be built. Now it was possible for places like the Academy, the Lyceum, and the Kynosarges to remain exclusive, for Athenian boys could attend the newer, more democratic places like the Diogeneion and Ptolemeion.

Athenian boys were not required to go to any school, but social pressure and tradition were worthy substitutes for compulsory attendance laws. Still, obstacles sometimes stood in the way of school attendance. First, despite the public face of Athenian gymnasia, physical training and coaching incurred some expense, and students had to bear it. Those who could not forfeited their chance for citizenship unless, having lost their fathers in battle, they qualified for public aid or their athletic prowess was promising enough to recommend them for scholarships gymnasiarchs were authorized to grant. An unpaid public official, a gymnasiarch was the gymnasium's headmaster who directed a staff of about ten paidotribes (trainers) and ten gymnasts (coaches).

Gymnasiarchs were always respected citizens;³¹ trainers and coaches may have been citizens, too, although history lacks assurance on this

point. In any case, trainers and coaches were well paid and, because their work was prized, had the status of important persons.

The cost of gymnastic training was substantial and sometimes turned out to be an obstacle, but another obstacle was more ominous. According to Aristotle's eye-witness account of the rite of citizenship, a test of parentage could be made when a boy was ready to enter the gymnasium.³² Affirmation of parentage, or an oath that a boy's parents were Athenians, was an admission requirement, and if this affirmation were uncontested, a boy simply entered the gymnasium. If the oath were contested, however, parentage had to be proved. If proof was made the matter was settled; if it was not made the boy was sold as a slave. A challenge to parentage could be ignored if, at the same time, gymnastic training and the prospect of citizenship were abandoned. Following this course of action, a boy was allowed to live in Athens as a noncitizen freeman. Considering the erratic nature of Athenian judicial practice, prudence might have dictated that a challenge to parentage go unanswered.

The Gymnasium. The gymnasium, an enclosed stadium with a large playground (called a "palaestra") about twice the size of an American football field, might interest us. A track circled the playground and, in turn, was circled by stands for spectators. Rooms under the stands were used for rest, exercise, and conversation. These athletic clubs also had facilities for bathing, massaging, dusting, eating, swimming, and praying. Gardens and groves invited leisurely walks. Servants and attendants, provided with living accommodations on the premises, were abundant. The gymnasium, then, a huge multipurpose athletic plant of about 360,000 square feet,³³ offered prospective citizens a three-year gymnastic course. When young men completed the course, they were about eighteen or nineteen years old.

Ephebic Training. Aristotle's account of ephebic training, a description based on direct knowledge (although not personal participation, since Aristotle was not an Athenian citizen),³⁴ is crisp and clear. Aristotle is a credible witness and the program he described was current when he was in Athens, but ephebic training was susceptible to evolution and change. Aristotle's version must be read with this proviso in mind.

An *ephebos* started with a training that was subordinated, naturally enough, to the requirements of current military tactics; as tactics changed, training was amended. According to Aristotle's account, military training lasted a year and was followed by the ephebic oath and then two years of active military service. Despite the ceremony of the oath and a presumption that therewith the last hurdle to citizenship had been leaped, ephebi owed Athens flawless soldierly performance during the period of active duty. Surviving this interlude in the profession of arms without

blemish to honor, courage, and martial skill, they were certified as citizens.³⁵ War was the best test of a man's motive and merit, but without war the regimen and discipline of a soldier's life were severe enough to separate the worthy from the unworthy. All in all, Athens was satisfied with her educational program.

But even satisfactory systems are subject to variation: before Aristotle, ephebi followed a three-year program, including basic training and active duty, before taking the ephebic oath. The oath-taking ceremony was, then, an award of citizenship. After Aristotle, the oath was administered prior to a three-year period of training and duty, so young men in the ephebic program were already citizens.

Decades after Aristotle, the ephebic program was altered so sharply that he would not have recognized it. But this happened after Athens had suffered military decline and had lost political supremacy in Greece. The attention given to physical excellence and military skill, characteristic of better days, was shifted to literary formation and intellectual development, but without any direct intention to subvert sport. Athenian temper and character dictated the preservation of the sporting tradition, but priorities changed and ephebic training changed with them. Ephebi collected books, read them in the *ephebeium*, and argued about the novelties they contained. Ideas honed the intellect and conspired to make young men forget the battlefield and remember the courts, the arena (the place where public affairs were transacted), the schools, and the libraries. When Athens went to war after cultural and political change had taken its toll, she depended upon mercenaries and noncitizen conscripts. The vigor and nobility of civic education for duty belonged to the past, but only a few citizens seemed to realize what had been lost.

Life and Education in Sparta

If all the city-states had imitated Athens, life in ancient Greece would have been more pleasant. As it was, only some states thought Athens a good model; others, noticing Sparta's strength and stability, were tempted to follow in her footsteps, but this was not easy to do, for in no ancient land was education given more solicitous attention.

Preoccupied with war and conquest, Spartans, the master class, dominated their city-state and tried to cast their spell over all of Greece. For a while, their formula of regimentation and social paralysis worked, but in the end, as Aristotle said, when other states became accomplished at warfare, Sparta's dominance evaporated.³⁶ For a long time, however, the Spartans, who came to Greece as invaders, maintained mastery over

two subject classes: *perioeci* (freeborn persons whose ancestry antedated the Dorian conquest (ca. 1104 B.C.)) and *helots* (slaves or serfs permanently bound to the land). Spartan education was commissioned to preserve this social system, so it was always severely practical and absolutely unamendable.³⁷

Now and then engaging in the dangerous enterprise of conspiracy, Sparta's subordinate classes incited insurrection to shed their yoke of servitude, but the citizens were too vigilant to be caught off guard and too skillful as warriors to be overthrown. Personal, intellectual, and moral autonomy capitulated to an exigent state, and boys and girls alike were nurtured for state service. Citizenship implied subservience, and severe penalty—death, ostracism, or at least disgrace—was the guerdon for persons failing in patriotic duty and dedication to the fatherland. In this armed camp, personal thought, interest, and aspiration were subordinate to the state's good. Neither an enemy nor an innovation penetrated the city's borders.

Education for Patriotism. Dispensed from economic care (because slaves tilled the soil to support them) and without distraction from trade or profession, citizens sacrificed all their time and talent to the state. Patriotism and obedience, although in different measure, were exacted from men and women. Women lacked equal status with men, although they enjoyed more freedom than Athenian women, but were respected nevertheless for the contribution they made in bearing strong, healthy children. Spared military training and the ordeal of combat, their moral strength and resolute patriotism sustained their soldier husbands and sons and urged them to the battlefield with the admonition to return home with their shields or on them.

Education for Women. Spartan girls played and exercised (probably with boys) until they were about eleven, under the supervision of mothers and nurses. Ignoring reading and writing, their tutelage overlooked domestic art and household chores as well, for slaves were plentiful for handling all menial tasks. Even Xenophon (430–355 B.C.), whose admiration for Spartan education was unconcealed, could not brighten this bleak picture of the education of Spartan women.³⁸

Education for Men. Boys, too, were excused from literary instruction to follow a regimen aimed directly at military excellence. Sparta needed warriors, not scholars, to ensure her survival, and their training was too important to be left to personal discretion or chance. To this end, boys went through a rigid educational program leading to both citizenship and military proficiency.

Whether Spartans were literate and knew Homer, music, art, and literature is a topic on which authorities disagree.³⁹ The truth may be

missed in harsh judgment, yet convincing evidence of intellectual discipline is lacking. Boys spent years in physical and military training; if now and then they read books or used writing tablets, they kept secret such excursions into literacy. Tradition, however, attributes mental keenness and laconic speech to Lacedaemonians; their diplomats and generals are represented in various accounts as impressive men whose skill, wit, and knowledge made them formidable adversaries at the council table and on the battlefield. But music, art, and literature were poor ammunition for war and must have found few patrons or, some say, thought weakening of moral vigor and martial spirit, were outlawed. Culturally chilly, suspicious of the novel and complex, Spartans ostracized diplomats (and members of their families) who returned from a foreign assignment with unhidden literary or rhetorical skill. Plain language used sparingly was good enough.

Total literary aridity might have been repudiated by an oral transmission of law, sketchy recitations of Homer, and tales about heroes, genealogies, and military encounters. In spite of general neglect of literary skill, boys were well instructed in the social and ethical code that made an indelible imprint on Spartan life. This code, it is said, along with a legacy of law and proper learning, was bequeathed by Lycurgus and preserved in *Eunomia*, but Lycurgus may have been a legendary character. Whatever the truth on Lycurgus, his law, once settled in oral tradition, withstood repeal, had the same permanence as the city-state itself, and contained the prescription for civic education.⁴⁰

Training for Citizenship. Ancient educational practice operated on the assumption that age seven was the right time for instruction to begin. Without debate or doubt Spartans listened to the voice of custom. But before training started, some preliminaries had to be settled. Soon after birth, a male infant was bathed in wine—a ceremony of endurance—and inspected by a state council. Healthy, sturdy boys were restored to their parents' households; weak children, judged unfit, were sentenced to exposure. Left helpless and hungry on Mount Taügetos or elsewhere in the city-state, they died unless rescued by helots or perioeci who could raise them as their own.

From age seven (when systematic training for citizenship began) to eleven, boys, though wards of the state, were allowed to live at home. Thereafter, and until death, they were on active or inactive military duty. Primary training, under the direction of old soldiers assigned to instruct and govern the boys, consisted mainly of games for physical conditioning. The details of the early stages of training need not delay us, but as boys matured, their lives and training became harder. Leaving home for good at age eleven, they spent the next six or seven years in basic military

training. Sorted into packs or classes of about sixty boys each, called either *ilai* or *agelai*, these battalions roamed the countryside as foragers and apprentice warriors to steal food or whatever they wanted (although law forbade stealing from citizens), to exercise, and to practice their craft of ambush and homicide.⁴¹

With basic training over at seventeen or eighteen, young men became *ephebi*. Leaving their pack schools behind and taking the oath of allegiance to the state, they joined a warrior band under the captaincy of a young chief. These private squadrons fought among themselves to sharpen their skill at arms, to test their courage and endurance, and to illustrate their devotion to Spartan values. This critical test lasted about three years. Men who passed it were promoted to the regular army; those who shirked their duty or lacked courage were drummed from the ranks and the portals to citizenship were closed to them.

Survivors could look forward to an apprenticeship of another ten years. By this time, young men were eager for warfare, and Sparta seldom disappointed them. If they lived through this decade of probation, they were enrolled as Spartan citizens. Their lives, though, were largely unchanged: they would always be soldiers, but custom recommended marriage.⁴²

Paralyzed by tradition, nothing in Sparta was allowed to redirect this expenditure of human energy from a fanatical allegiance to the state, not, at least, until Sparta's military supremacy vanished—due probably to a depletion of citizen ranks, for Sparta enlisted only citizens in her army—and her superiority in Greece disappeared.

Educational Change in Athens

The face of Athenian society changed after the Persian Wars. Athenians prized the values of their ancestors but interpreted them to meet different social and economic conditions. The state was paid allegiance but with a different coin, and the ideal of citizenship was unconsciously deflated even while it was eloquently affirmed. Besides, the rolls of citizenship were opened to persons who, according to traditional standard, were unqualified. Wealth, moreover, was more easily obtained by clever and enterprising men, and the dedication heretofore reserved for the common good was now spent for personal advantage and financial gain.

Secure politically and comfortable economically, Athens became less vigilant about enforcing qualifications for citizenship. Out of necessity she had created a navy by enlisting merchant mariners to meet and, tem-

porarily, to defeat the Persians. This rupture of ancient custom—allowing noncitizens to bear arms in the city's defense—resulted in the sailors petitioning for citizenship. Their petition, authenticated by a logic hard to refute, was granted. They and all free men were enfranchised almost overnight, and Athens had a new citizen class, one hardly ready for full civic duty. Their civic deficiency needed redressing quickly, for state policy was framed by all citizens. Issues of justice and equity were debated and voted in the assembly, and citizens were expected to understand them.

Traditionally, civic education had taken a long time, so it is easy to see why a dependable substitute was hard to find. Athenian schoolmasters could have amended school practice to meet this novel situation, but, mesmerized by intuition about scholastic propriety and arrogant advice from conservative aristocrats, they blocked innovation at the schoolhouse door. At worst they were negligent, at best, blind, about the problem of educating the new citizens. When traditional schoolmasters refused to budge, others not petrified by convention saw and did what needed to be done. They were the Sophists.

The Sophists. Over the centuries the Sophists have been both praised and blamed: now, we think, they deserve some of each. Putting Athenian pedagogy in convulsion, they tried, without much help from old-fashioned agencies of moral education—the theater, the assembly, the gymnasium, and the aristocratic home—to teach good citizenship effectively and quickly. So Socrates' question to Protagoras ("Can men be taught to be good?") was a central issue in Athenian life and not just a dramatic device for introducing the dialogue.⁴³ The new citizens wanted educational decency, but old avenues leading to it were blocked by the intractability of the schools. To suppose that mature men would pursue a course of instruction designed for schoolboys was sheer folly.

Scholastic Innovation. History's lesson that necessity is the mother of invention was recalled again, and Sophists practiced invention, even while Socrates, Plato, Isocrates, and Xenophon excoriated them, by shortening the school course as a temporary measure to accommodate adults and by centering instruction on literature and rhetoric. For the first (but not the last) time, these studies were called upon to teach virtue. Rejecting customary school practice, the Sophists appeared to discount tradition when oratory was idealized as their educational goal and, never diffident about accepting free publicity, they rose to pedagogic distinction by promoting the assumption that eloquence, at least enough to win an argument, is only another name for civic virtue. The curriculum's foundation was shaken by this turbulence, yet traditional schools tried to ignore sophistic assault and pretend that nothing had changed.