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Laurent Pernot (ed.), *A l'école des anciens: professeurs, élèves et étudiants: précédé d'un entretien avec Jacqueline de Romilly. Signets Belles Lettres 4*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2008. Pp. xxiv, 310. ISBN 9782251030043. €13.00 (pb).

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Although it is conceived for a more general public, the book under review here is interesting and challenging for specialist readers as well. It introduces the reader into the world of ancient learning, through the apparently narrow (but actually broad) perspective of the educational relationship between teacher and learner. In so doing, it also proposes some answers to questions concerning classics and classical scholarship at large: how far our world is indebted to the classical idea(s) and practice(s) of teaching and learning, and what we can still learn from them; in a word: why classics are still worth studying.

The thematic anthology of Greek and Latin texts, which represents the very heart of the book, is preceded -- after a short preface -- by Laurent Pernot's interview with Jacqueline de Romilly about "L'enseignement, du passé au présent". The dialogue focuses first on what we owe to the ancients (mostly to the Greeks, from the Sophists on) in terms of education; second, on the usefulness of the knowledge of classical culture -- and of the Greek and Latin languages -- for our world. De Romilly makes the point that education is not only the acquisition of practical knowledge and skills (vocational education). Teaching should be rather an education of the mind, aiming to shape men and women who are capable first of all of thinking and asking questions, and who are keen to ask themselves about the sense of what they do, people, moreover, who have a common cultural background and who share symbols and images when representing different behaviours and perceptions (p. XIX).

Three maps (the ancient Mediterranean Sea, the Greek Aegean world, ancient Italy) open the second section. The texts are presented in French translation (taken from editions published in the Collection des Universités de France), in thematic order, regardless of chronology; they cover many centuries, from Homer to Augustine and further.

The eight chapters run as follows.

I. "Les professeurs": some famous teachers, both historical (Libanius) and mythological (Prometheus, Chiron, the nymph Egeria); *paidagogoi*, grammarians and rhetors (Stattius' father, Quintilian); *paidotribai*; music teachers.

II. "La vie à l'école": school year and school day; physical punishments; students' disorders; seminar-work at school; *chreiai* and anecdotes concerning education.

III. "Organiser et régler": comparisons between different education systems (from Athens and Sparta to the Gallic Druids); the ethics of teaching (e.g., how to correct pupils); teachers' and pupils' duties; state involvement in school life (esp. laws; institution of public chairs).

IV. "L'école à domicile": family education, fathers and sons; women's education (from Cornelia to Paula, Jerome's pupil, to Chariclea, Heliodorus' heroine).

V. "Portraits d'élèves": good and bad pupils; young people who died prematurely; Greece and Rome; famous people's childhood according to Plutarch (most worth noting is the example of Cato the Younger, who -- as Plutarch remarks -- "obéissait à son pédagogue et faisait tout ce qui lui était prescrit, mais ... il exigeait de savoir la raison de chaque chose et demandait le pourquoi" (*Caton le Jeune* 1 = 760b; here at p. 189); feelings of affection between teachers and learners.

VI. "Leçons d'amour": pederasty and its spiritualization (Plato's and Xenophon's portraits of Socrates and Alcibiades); the immorality of teachers.

VII. "Le dur métier de professeur": the teachers' salaries and economic problems (see Libanius on the lack of economic independence that reduces them to slavery); critics against teachers; Augustine's experiences, both as a learner and as a teacher.¹ I would only remark that some further lines should have been included in the passage quoted from Augustine (*Confessions* I.23; here at p. 237) about the hatred of the Greek language, in order to make clear the reason why Latin was appealing (it was learnt through *libera curiositas*) and Greek was not (it was learnt through *meticulosa necessitas*).²

VIII. "Maîtres de philosophie, maîtres de vie": education should aim to shape the whole person ("c'est un des points le plus saillants de l'héritage antique en matière pédagogique", p. 245); Socrates, who makes people conscious of what they only presume to -- but actually do not-- know; the sophists' revolution; intellectuals and *gurus* (from Pythagoras to Maximus of Ephesus).

The texts are followed by a short but exhaustive glossary of the ancient authors quoted; the non-specialist reader will distinguish Greek from Latin authors just from the glossary, as their names are printed in different ways. Footnotes are reduced to the minimum and are merely explicative. Further bibliography on the subject of education in the ancient world is given under the title "Pour aller plus loin" (pp. 303-304); to this section might be usefully, but not necessarily, added one general work,³ and two other, more specialized works regarding Christian education.⁴

Should we regret the exclusion of any particular passages or works? I am quite sure we should not, as the book does not aim at completeness. But I would suggest two additions, just in order to perform my task as a reviewer. In section IV (or perhaps II?) one might add an anecdote from [Plutarch], *De l'éducation des enfants*, reproaching those fathers who, greedy for money, choose cheaper (in any sense) teachers for their children: the author foreshadows the slavery which man is bound to undergo, if education and culture are not the major focus of parents.⁵ In section II it might have been thought-provoking to

insert some verses of Prudentius, *Le livre de couronnes* 9, where the martyrdom of Cassianus, a quite severe Christian teacher, is described as the revenge of his cruel pagan pupils, perpetrated by means of the *stili* he has taught them to use. [6](#)

Of course, many other texts might have been included, but then the book would have become something different from what it was intended to be -- and is: a short collection, which succeeds in rousing curiosity about the world of ancient education and in pointing out some ways in which it is the ancestor of our modern ideas about education.

Notes:

[1.](#) On this subject one might see also my *Agostino e la scuola. L'utilitas della formazione scolastica e la prosa delle Confessiones*, in *Agostino a scuola. Atti del convegno di Pavia, 13 novembre 2008*, forthcoming.

[2.](#) "Naguère, encore petit enfant, j'ignorais de même les mots latins, et cependant rien qu'à observer je les avais appris sans crainte, sans souffrances, au milieu des caresses de mes nourrices, parmi les plaisanteries et la gaieté de mon entourage, qui me riait et jouait avec moi. Je les ai appris sans la pression des insistances et des punitions; mon esprit, à soi seul, me poussait à produire au dehors ses pensées, ce que je n'aurais su faire, si je n'avais appris un certain nombre des mots, en dehors de tout enseignement didactique, des personnes qui causaient devant moi. Et pour qu'elles m'entendissent, je donnais moi-même le jour à tous mes sentiments. Il ressort de là assez lumineusement que cette libre curiosité est autrement efficace qu'une contrainte toujours armée de menaces" (I 23; transl. P. De Labriolle).

[3.](#) *Aspetti della scuola nel mondo romano. Atti del convegno (Pisa, 5.6 dicembre 2006)*, ed. by F. Bellandi, R. Ferri, Amsterdam: Hakkert 2008.

[4.](#) H.I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, Paris: De Boccard 1958; C.M. Chin, *Grammar and Christianity in the Late Roman World*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

[5.](#) "Beaucoup de pères en arrivent à un tel degré de passion pour l'argent et en même temps d'aversion pour leurs fils que, pour ne pas acquitter un salaire plus fort, ils choisissent des hommes sans valeur, recherchant pour leurs enfants une ignorance à bon marché. Aussi ne manquait-elle pas d'esprit et même était-elle pleine de finesse, cette raillerie qu'Aristippe [the Socratic philosopher] adressait à un père dénué de sens et de raison. Comme quelqu'un voulait savoir quel salaire il demandait pour l'éducation de son enfant, il répondit: 'Mille drachmes'. 'Par Héraklès', fit l'autre, 'tu es trop exigeant! Pour mille drachmes, je puis acheter un esclave.' 'Tu en auras donc deux', dit Aristippe, 'ton fils et celui que tu achèteras' " (7 = 4f; transl. J. Sirinelli).

[6.](#) See at least the pupils' words at vv. 69-74: "Pourquoi te plains-tu, maître? ... c'est toi-même qui nous a donné ce fer et qui as armé nos mains. Voici que nous te rendons autant de milliers de notes que, debout et pleurant, nous en avons pris sous ta dictée; tu ne peux pas te fâcher que nous écrivions: c'est toi-même qui nous ordonnais de ne jamais avoir à la main un stylet inactif" (transl. M. Lavarenne).