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0521584663 - Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds

Teresa Morgan

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Literate education in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds

This book offers a new assessment of the content, structures and significance of education in Greek and Roman society. Drawing on a wide range of evidence, including the first systematic comparison of literary sources with the papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt, Teresa Morgan shows how education developed from a loose repertoire of practices in classical Greece into a coherent, though unregulated, system spanning the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. Four chapters examine the teaching of literature, grammar and rhetoric across a range of social groups. Fresh interpretations of the function of these subjects make possible a new model of how the system was able both to maintain its coherence and to accommodate pupils' widely different backgrounds, needs and expectations. In addition this book explores Hellenistic and Roman theories of cognitive development, showing how educationalists claimed to turn the raw material of humanity into good citizens and leaders of society.

TERESA MORGAN is a British Academy Research Fellow at Cambridge University, and a Research Fellow of Newnham College.

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PREFACE

A historian of education takes a particular interest in her educational environment, and I have been lucky in mine. This study began life as a PhD thesis at Cambridge University, where first Clare College, then St John's College gave me a home and an eminently congenial place to work. The Faculty of Classics at all levels provided stimulus, discussion, criticism, tea and sympathy. Many individuals answered my queries or enabled me to read papyri, in particular Dr Stephanie West and Dr Helen Whitehouse, Dr John Rea and Dr Revel Coles at the Ashmolean Museum. Dr Raffaella Cribiore began work on schooltext papyri, at Columbia University, a few years before I did and allowed me to use the catalogue which she produced in her 1993 PhD thesis as the basis for my own; her book came out just in time for me to compare her new catalogue with mine, and I was glad to see that we now agree even more closely than we did before.

I was outstandingly fortunate in my PhD supervisors, Dr Mary Beard and Dr Dorothy Thompson. They could not have been more challenging or more supportive, reading innumerable drafts of papers and chapters and sharing hours of discussion. I shall go on learning from them for years to come. Dr Paul Cartledge, Professor John Crook, Dr Simon Goldhill, Professor Peter Parsons, Professor Michael Reeve, Dr Malcolm Schofield and Dr Joseph Spooner read parts or the whole of my thesis at various stages, and their many comments were invaluable. My examiners, Professor Keith Hopkins and Professor Herwig Maehler, provided much helpful criticism and continue to be an inspiration as teachers and scholars. Professor Pat Easterling not only read the whole manuscript while I was in the process of recasting it in its present form, but with great generosity spent many

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hours discussing it, and the result owes much to her creative enthusiasm and acumen. All these will find something with which to disagree in the final product, but I hope they will recognize how much it owes to them. Last, but not least, my students have been my teachers. Whether they regarded themselves as collaborators, consumers or conscripts in the process of education, their questions and observations have continually forced me to face the practical dimensions of the subject in all their irreducible complexity.

I have always loved to learn but, like many studious children, found formal education rather a puzzle. At school I wondered why I should do what I was told, then and there, in the way I was told to do it, when there were other things I found more interesting. I found examinations almost ludicrous: why did the opinion of a few teachers or an examination board matter so much in a world so full of things to learn? I have since discovered that there are many possible answers to these questions, none of which can resolve the fundamental tensions between what an individual finds it of value to know, what it is possible to know and what a society requires her or him to know. But I first got to grips with the issue while I was training to be a musician.

In the 1970s and 1980s my education as a violin and viola player ran parallel to my academic training, rarely touching it except in extra-curricular musical activities run by my school. Music differed from what went on in the rest of school, or later at university, in many ways. All lessons were one-to-one. The student progressed at her or his own pace and took examinations whenever they seemed appropriate and only if she or he wished to take them. Students of equivalent abilities played together regardless of age. Study was in no way compulsory: nothing compelled me to continue to learn but my own interest in music. And many of my teachers believed that the way one played depended on the person one was in the widest possible terms; music and life were integrated in a way in which school and life all too often were not. As a teenager and later I was constantly amazed by the difference between this system of education and the one in which I worked at

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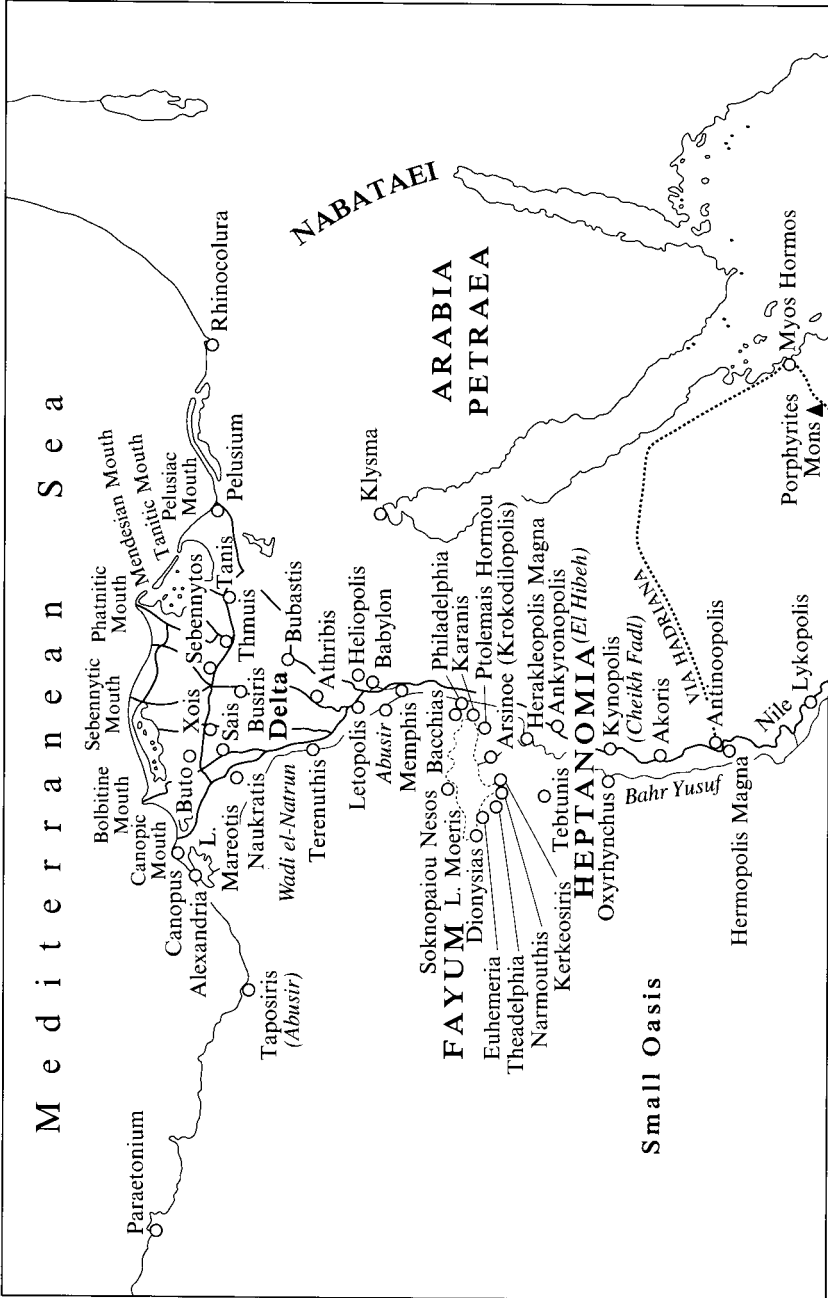
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school and university. My experience took another twist when I became a postgraduate student at the Royal Academy of Music and found myself in an environment more like a school than anything I had hitherto experienced in music. The music profession gave me my first material with which to think about the nature and implications of education systems: what they set out to achieve and how they proceed; how they view the teacher and pupil; how they conceive of their relationship with society. Many of my music teachers were outstanding educationalists, and it is a great pleasure to dedicate this book to them.



Egypt in the Roman period

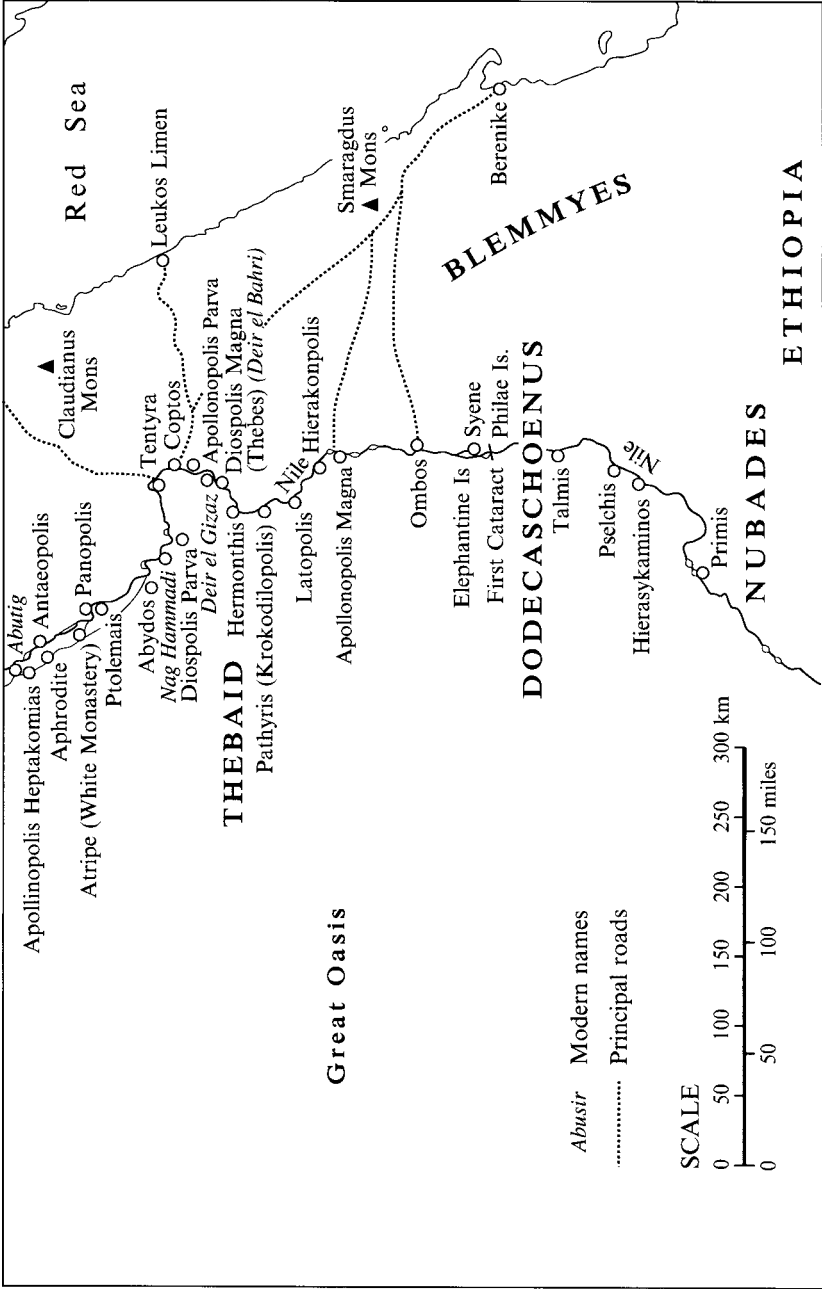
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